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## **LATE ANTIQUE MAUSOLEUMS AND TOMBS ALONG THE UPPER AND MIDDLE STRUMA RIVER**

*Abstract:* Early Christian tombs have been studied, as well as several pagan tombs adapted in the early Christian period for Christian burials, which were discovered along the Upper and Middle reaches of the Struma River. Several types with subtypes of tombs have been distinguished: tombs-mausoleums; vaulted single and twin tombs; multi-chamber tombs, rectangular and square tombs. Three types of vaults have been identified – semicircular vault, elliptical and cross vault. According to their functionality, they are for single use – Bistritsa, Vladaya, Germanea, Parthicopolis and for multiple use – Lozenets, Stefan Karadzha, Krupnik, Parthicopolis.

*Key words:* tombs, mausoleums, semi-cylindrical, elliptical, cross vault, Upper and Middle Struma.

### *Introduction*

The changes that occurred along the Upper and Middle Struma River in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries are related to the new form of imperial government and the administrative reform of Diocletian; the wide spread of Christianity and its persecution by the Tetrarchs; the first two official edicts of toleration towards Christianity, by Galerius (311) and by Constantine the Great and Licinius (313); the founding and construction of Constantinople and the division of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western; the adoption of Christianity at first as one of the official religions, and then as the only one; the long battle with heresies began with the Council of Nicaea (325), which ended with the so-called Symbol of Faith; with the decision that all major religious issues should be resolved at Ecumenical Councils. The change from paganism to Christianity brought with it new beliefs and customs. An important change with the adoption of Christianity was burial, where cremation disappeared. It was replaced by inhumation, with the head to the west, facing the east wall and the arms extended at the side of the body, or crossed on the chest.

Along the Upper and Middle Struma rivers, the discovered tombs-mausoleums and independent tombs in plan belong to several types: single-

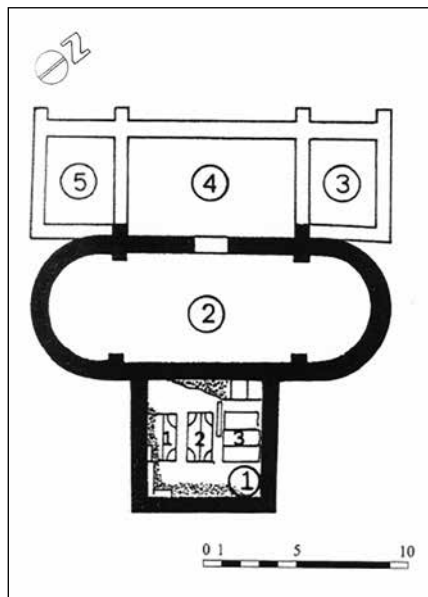


Fig. 1. Plan of the mausoleum in Lozenets (Serdika) (Шалганов, Иванов 2006, обр. 3а)

Сл. 1. План маузолеја у Лозенецу (Сердика) (Шалганов, Иванов 2006, сл. 3а)

chamber – Bistritsa, Vladaya and Germanea, (present-day Sapareva Banya), Parthicopolis (present-day Sandanski); twin tombs – Parthicopolis and multi-chamber – Germanea<sup>1</sup>, Krupnik and Parthicopolis. The vaulting of the tombs is with a semi-cylindrical vault, with the exception of three tombs from the necropolis of Germanea – one with a gable vault, one with an elliptical vault, which is badly damaged; one with a cross vault; and the twin tomb from Parthicopolis – with cross vaults<sup>2</sup>.

So far, seven mausoleums have been discovered along the Upper and Middle Struma river. These are the mausoleums in the ‘Lozenets’ and ‘Stefan Karadzha’ neighborhoods in Sofia; two in Germanea (today’s Sapareva Banya); in Krupnik and two tomb-mausoleums in Parthicopolis (today’s Sandanski). They continue the Roman tradition of impressive mausoleums – imperia and of the Roman nobility, where the lower level

was intended for burial, and the upper – for commemorative rituals and feasts on certain dates<sup>3</sup>, but as smaller, local mausoleums. They were erected mainly before, or at the beginning of the transitional 4<sup>th</sup> century, or were modified from pagan to Christian. They were used once or by family at least until the middle-last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. Only one of the tomb-mausoleums is single-chamber, and the rest are multi-chamber.

<sup>1</sup> With three interconnected single-chamber tombs discovered. In our opinion, this is a multi-chamber tomb-mausoleum, evident from the discovered single-chamber tombs, united by a common ceiling, which served as the floor of the mausoleum. Unpublished; research by D. Pavlova and S. Filipova from the Kyustendil Regional History Museum in 2024.

<sup>2</sup> In this review of the mausoleums and tombs along the Upper and Middle Struma, we will not dwell on the numerous tombs discovered in the necropolis of Serdica, due to the fact that they have been published and are very popular in the literature. Here we will consider mausoleums and tombs that are not so often cited, some discovered relatively recently and not yet published in detail, others discovered long ago, but not receiving the deserved scientific interest. However, when summarizing the tomb architecture and its decoration, we will also include emblematic tombs from the necropolis of Serdica.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Parentalia in February, by covering the grave or burial with flowers and garlands, performing a special sacrifice, and preparing a feast of permitted foods.

<sup>4</sup> Eight new mausoleums, probably from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries, have been discovered at Perperikon, but have not yet been published. <https://impressio.dir.bg/lyubopitno/grandiozen-pogrebalen-kompleks-ot-osem-rotondi-e-otkrit-na-perperikon> (visited on 22.12.2025).

Multi-chamber tombs have been known since the pre-Roman era and are often found in the Balkans. Multi-chamber tombs are attested even in the pre-Hellenistic era: the tomb in Pella<sup>5</sup>; in Viminacium<sup>6</sup>, the Roman tomb in Brestovik, near Belgrade<sup>7</sup> and others. Along the Upper Struma, tomb-mausoleums are in Sofia and in Germanea.

### *The Mausoleums along the Upper Struma River*

*The mausoleum in the Lozenets district, Sofia* is of the multi-chamber tomb-mausoleum type. It is located approx. 3 km from the southern fortress wall of Serdica. It probably belonged to a prominent city magistrate with an estate around Serdica (**fig. 1**). The mausoleum is a one-story massive structure measuring 19x21 m and five rooms, built during two construction phases<sup>8</sup>. The first belongs to the beginning of the second – the end of the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The second phase is at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – the end of the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century; or more precisely, the date of construction of the mausoleum and the end of its use is between the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (330-474). In the first phase, the burial chamber (room No. 1) and the elliptical memorial room with an entrance to the underground level were built. In the second phase, in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> - early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, three new rooms were added for the new burials in front of the antechamber (room No. 2), reinforced on the outside by buttresses (rooms No. 3-5), due to the beginning of the twisting of the walls, and the antechamber was reinforced with buttresses on the inside. According to a later publication by M. Ivanov, the mausoleum had only one construction phase – in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the final date of its functioning is around the 40s of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the Hunnic invasions<sup>9</sup>.

The mausoleum has a north-south orientation, with small deviations. In the main square room (No. 1) three smooth sarcophagi were found, two of which

<sup>5</sup> M. Lilibaki-Akamati, I. M. Akamatis, A. Chrysostomou and P. Chrysostomou, *The Archaeological Museum of Pella*. John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation and EFG Eurobank Ergasias S.A. 2011, 185-191. A seven-chamber tomb with a semi-cylindrical vault, carved into a rock and used for the burial of members of a noble family in Pella from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

<sup>6</sup> G. Milošević-Jevtić 'Architecture of 'the family mausoleums' in Danube limes between Singidunum and Pontes'л – *International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM, Albena, Bulgaria I*, Sofia STEF technology Ltd., 2014, 323-330.

<sup>7</sup> Г. Милошевић, *Породични маузолеј у селу Брестовик код Београда*, Саопштења 49, Београд 2017, 7–23 and cit. lit.

<sup>8</sup> К. Шалганов, М. Иванов, *Новооткрит късноантичен мавзолей в кв. Лозенец*, София, през 2001 г. – *Spartacus II, 2075 години от въстанието на Спартак. Трако-римско наследство. 2000 години християнство*, Велико Търново 2006, 314-324. According to researchers, the date of construction of the mausoleum and the end of its use is between the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (330-474).

<sup>9</sup> М. Иванов, *Elephantum et musca! За хронологията, периодизацията и функцията на късноантичния мавзолей в кв. Лозенец на София*, *Археология*, кн. 1-4, 2008, 149-160 and cit. lit.



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Fig. 2-1. The Mausoleum.  
View from the west  
(Шалганов, Иванов 2006,  
обр. 3)

Сл. 2-1. Маузолеј. Поглед  
са запада (Шалганов,  
Иванов 2006, обр. 3)

Fig. 2-2. Room No. 1,  
view from the southwest  
(Шалганов, Иванов 2006,  
обр. 4)

Сл. 2-2. Соба бр. 1,  
поглед са југозапада  
(Шалганов, Иванов 2006,  
обр. 4)

were covered with lids with acroteria, but without other reliefs, and the third was covered with three slabs. This room was designed in its underground part as a burial chamber (**fig. 2**). The three sarcophagi were fixed approx. 15 cm from the level of the troughs with lime-sand mortar and broken stones. According to the architectural fragments, the entrance to the room with the sarcophagi was decorated with monumental decoration. The mausoleum was built in the *opus mixtum* technique, with stone slabs included in the façade, in two construction phases.

It was looted in antiquity, but some important finds have been found. From the first construction phase, in sarcophagus No. 3, a 4<sup>th</sup>-century *diatreta* vase was found, a gold end of a leather men's belt from late antiquity, a solidus of Theodosius II, minted in 423/424, and numerous bronze coins from the Roman and late antiquity periods<sup>10</sup>. The luxurious *diatreta* vase is an argument for the great financial opportunities and the highest status of the owner of the estate.

<sup>10</sup> К. Шалганов, М. Иванов 2006, 321, обр. 6-8. М. Иванов, *Elephantum et musca!* За хронологијата, периодизацијата и функцијата на кьсноантичкиот мавзолеј во кв. Лозенец на Софија, *Археологија*, кн. 1-4, 2008, 151.

Fig. 3. The Mausoleum of Stefan Karadzha (Станчева 1970)  
Сл. 3. Маузолеј Стефана Караџе (Станчева 1970)

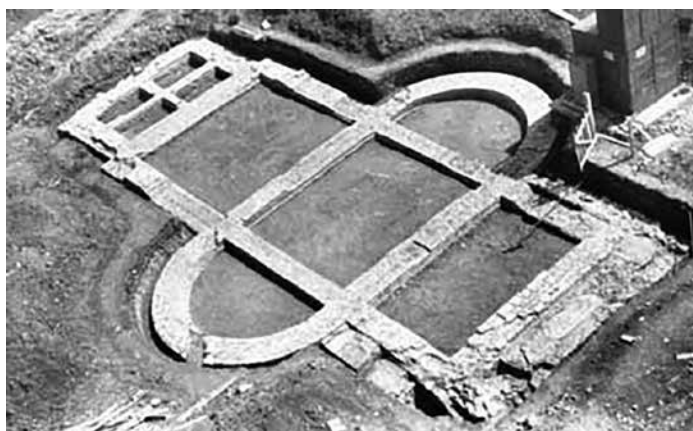


Fig. 4-1. Mausoleum plan (Станчева 1970)

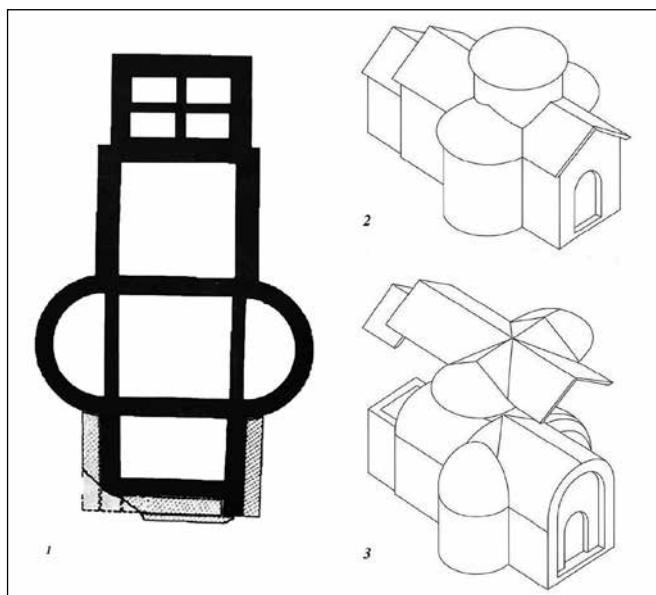
Сл. 4-1. План маузолеја (Станчева 1970)

Fig. 4-2. Reconstruction according to M. Stancheva

Сл. 4-2. Реконструкција према М. Станчевој

Fig. 4-3. Reconstruction by architect D. Georgieva with a team

Сл. 4-3. Реконструкција архитекте Д. Георгијеве са тимом



Based on another similar find, a diatreta from Kabile<sup>11</sup>, he was probably a high magistrate in Serdica, or a military (praetor?) in the service of the Constantinian dynasty or of Constantine before he became sole emperor in 324. This family mausoleum was used until the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, housing the remains of three men, three women and two children. The mausoleum has a close plan with that of Brestovik, Serbia and with another mausoleum discovered relatively nearby, in the 'Stefan Karadzha' district, Sofia.

*The mausoleum in the 'Stefan Karadzha' district, Sofia* belongs to the owners of a villa rustica in the vicinity of Roman Serdica<sup>12</sup>. Its orientation is

<sup>11</sup> A. Dimitrova, *A Vas Diatretum* from Thrace, *Journal of Glass Studies* 16, 1974, 14-17.

<sup>12</sup> This is the largest rural estate with a villa rustica in the vicinity of Roman Serdica,

also north-south. Its plan develops along a long axis, with an entrance from the south (**fig. 3, 4-1**). The tomb is *multi-chambered in type*, similar to the one in the Lozenets district, intended for family burials. The beautiful capital found during the excavations and the remains of other architectural elements discovered from the south suggest that the mausoleum had rich architectural decoration and a monumental entrance of a stone monumental arch, supported by massive pilasters. Three successive rooms follow, the middle of which is an oval antechamber with two side conches, extending beyond the width of the other chambers, similar to the oval antechamber of the mausoleum in Lozenets. The first of these is covered with a high hemispherical dome, while the conches of the oval antechamber – with lower and small arches-arcosolie (?) (**fig. 4-2**). Arch. D. Georgieva and the team she led, who developed a project for the conservation and restoration of the mausoleum, believe that from an architectural point of view it is more likely that the mausoleum had two vaults, forming a cross vault at their intersection (**fig. 4-3**).

From the north, to the north wall of the mausoleum, four identical graves (measuring 2.30x1.25 m) were built. These four burials date back to a later period, probably as a consequence of the Gothic invasions in 376-378. The estate and the mausoleum ended their existence with a *terminus ante quem* in 447, with the invasions of the Huns, similar to the mausoleum in the Lozenets district.

Despite the fact that the 3<sup>rd</sup> century dating proposed by M. Stancheva was changed in the later publication of M. Ivanov<sup>13</sup>, the 250 silver coins from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century found in a pot and the pagan orientation of the mausoleum, as well as some other finds, allow the construction of the estate and the mausoleum to be attributed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the estate possibly even earlier. The plan of the mausoleum in the Stefan Karadzha quarter is reminiscent of that of Lozenets, but is simpler. Both mausoleums were created for pagan burials, but were also used for the subsequent Christian ones from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. This means that the date of construction of only the mausoleum of the estate in the St. Karadzha quarter can be attributed to the period after the Gothic invasions in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the second quarter – almost the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Christianity spread not only officially, but also more widely among the wealthy inhabitants of Serdica and its surroundings.

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found and studied so far. The complex occupies 5 decares and consists of 6 buildings with different functions (three of them are warehouses, horrea). Their length is about 50 m and they are connected to each other by a gravel path. There was also a dwelling for slaves, a rich rural villa for the owner, destroyed nowadays, and a family mausoleum. Unfortunately, the building – the owner's home has not been discovered, due to modern buildings on the terrain. See: М. Станчева, *За тракийското население в Софийско IV-V в.*, Известия на българското историческо дружество, 27, 1970, 255-267; М. Станчева, *Семеен мавзолей от IV в. София: художествено обществено-политическо месечно издание на СНС.* София: СНС, 1983, год. XXVI(8), 40.

<sup>13</sup> М. Ivanov believes that the mausoleum was built at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. See: М. Иванов, *Elephantum et musca! За хронологията ...*, 156; V. Dinchev is also skeptical about the date of construction of the mausoleum in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. See: В. Динчев, *Римските вили в днешната българска територия*, София 1997, 51-52.

*The Mausoleum in Germanea (Germania)*<sup>14</sup>, the military camp, has been created at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD by the Second cohort of the Lukenzii, a Celtic tribe that lived in the Roman province of Gaelesia. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the camp had become a famous early Byzantine castle in the province of Inner (Mediterranean) Dacia. The Christian affiliation of this mausoleum and the military profession of the buried person are clear, as well as its connection with Sirmium in the late 50s of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and specifically with Emperor Constantius II.

*In type – this is a single-chamber, rectangular tomb*, above which there was a room built for memorial practices, which turned the tomb into a tomb-mausoleum<sup>15</sup>. It was intended only for a single burial. It was built in a hurry, after the unexpected death of a high-ranking officer. In all likelihood, the soldiers of his unit dug a deep pit for the future tomb-mausoleum. The lower level of the mausoleum (the burial chamber) was completely underground. The upper level was visible and visited for memorial practices, although time and subsequent construction and activities on the terrain destroyed it. The plan and method of construction of the tomb are found for the first time in Bulgaria, but are known from the tombs in Yagodin Mala in Niš and from Sirmium<sup>16</sup>. In plan, the tomb is single-chamber, rectangular, oriented with the long sides southeast-northwest, with external dimensions of 235/163 cm and a height of 115 cm (**fig. 5-1**). The floor is paved with bricks. On the outside, the tomb was abundantly poured with mortar. On the inside, there is a gable vault built of bricks. A hidden semi-cylindrical vault was built on the gable roof thus formed, after which the corners of the vault were filled until the upper outer surface of the tomb was level. A floor covering of square Roman bricks was placed on the flat upper outer surface of the tomb, which formed the floor of the memorial building built above the tomb on the upper level.

The atypical design of the tomb-mausoleum from Germanea, the two-chambered inside, a hidden semi-cylinder, a flat upper outer edge, forming the floor of a memorial room, is so far the only one on the territory of Bulgaria (**fig. 5-2**). It was used for only one burial – a solemn one and with numerous grave goods, which indicate the military affiliation of the buried. Analysis of the objects shows that a senior military officer, close to Emperor Constantius II, was buried. The arrival of this soldier in Germania presumably occurred

<sup>14</sup> About 30 m. east of it, a second mausoleum was discovered in 2024 with three single-chamber tombs examined. See note 1 in this text.

<sup>15</sup> S. Petrova, E. Sevdin, *An Early Christian tomb from Germanea (Sapareva banya)*, Bulgaria, Niš and Byzantium XX, 2022, 95-110.

<sup>16</sup> С. Дрча, Г. Јеремич, В. Црноглавац, *Јагодин мала, касноантичка некропола. Каталог*, 2012, Ниш; G. Jeremić, Burials in *Naissus* in Late Antiquity – case study of the necropolis in Jagodin Mala, *Constantine the Great and the Edict of Milan 313. The Birth of Christianity in the Roman Provinces on the Soil of Serbia* (eds. I. Popović and B. Borić-Brešković), National Museum in Belgrade, Belgrade, 2013 128-130; I. Popović, Survey of Early Christianity in Sirmium/Sremska Mitrovica (fourth to fifth c. AD). – *GrenzÜbergänge. Forschungen zu Spätantike und Mittelalter Bd. 4, Akten des 27. Internationalen Symposiums der Grundprobleme der frühgeschichtlichen Entwicklung im mittleren Donauraum, Ruma, 4.–7.11.2015* (herausgegeben von Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska, Niklot Krohn und Sebastian Ristow). Verlag Bernhard Albert Greiner, Remshalden, 2016, 179-193, figs. 12 and 14.

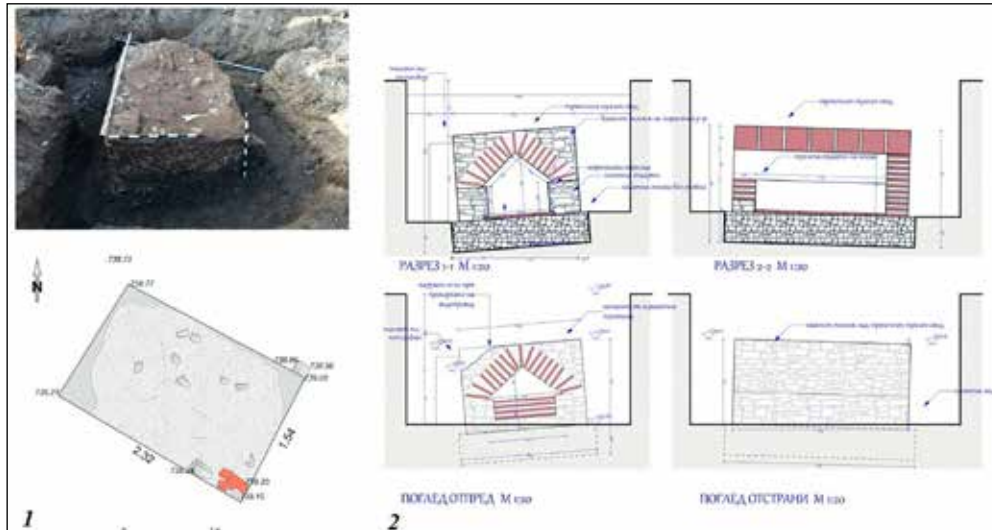


Fig. 5. Tomb-mausoleum in Germanea (by architect V. Petkova, photo S. Petrova)

Сл. 5. Гробница-маузолеј у Германији (арх. В. Петкова, фото С. Петрова)

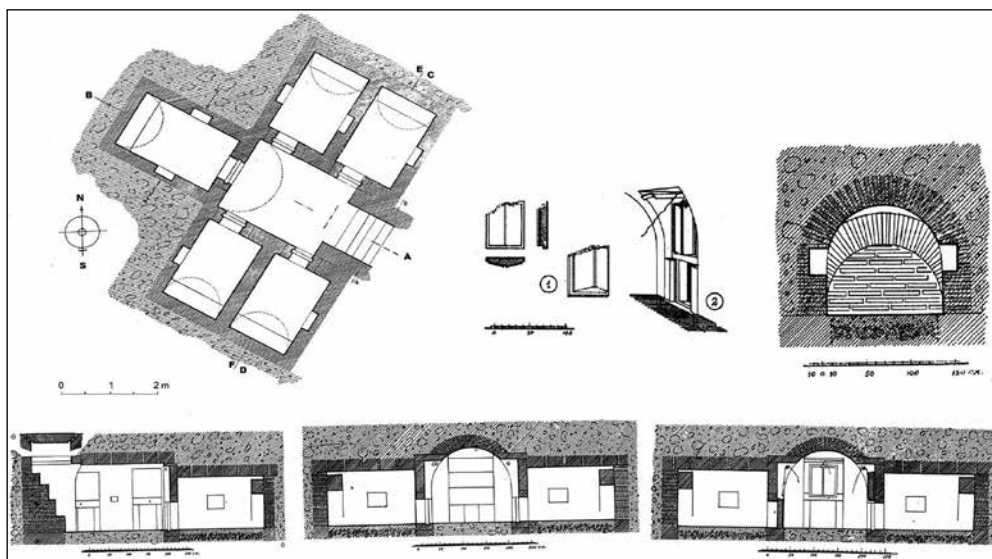


Fig. 6. The tomb-mausoleum in Krupnik. Plan and sections (Rashenov 1934)

Сл. 6. Гробница-маузолеј у Крупнику. План и пресеци (Рашенов 1934)

after 359, when the emperor left Sirmium for Constantinople, and the burial should be dated to the time of the Gothic invasion in 377-378, when the buried man died in battle. Until the discovery of the tomb-mausoleum in 2020, it had not been opened. What is special about this case is the absence of the head of

the person buried in the tomb-mausoleum. According to us, he was killed and beheaded in a battle with the Goths in 377-378. His military insignia – his ring, sword and shield – were probably looted by the victor, along with his head. The soldiers returned his body to Germania and hastily built a mausoleum tomb, burying him with a small knife instead of the sword and weapons available at home.

Along the Middle Struma, tomb-mausoleums have been discovered in Krupnik and Parthicopolis. They belong to the multi-chamber tombs, and have a second floor intended for memorial practices.

#### *The Mausoleums along the Middle Struma River*

*The tomb-mausoleum in Krupnik*<sup>17</sup> is also a family tomb, intended to house the remains of a wealthy landowning late Roman family, possibly related to the Anci family, information about which we have from an inscription from the village of Poletto near Krupnik<sup>18</sup>. Opened and robbed back in time. The walls and vaults are built of bricks, bonded with mortar mixed with crushed small pieces of brick and coarse sand<sup>19</sup>. The slab covering the entrance and the slabs that closed the entrances to the burial chambers are made of stone; together with the adjacent stone frames with chutes for lowering and closing the entrances. It belongs to the **type of multi-chamber tombs**. Around a common room are five chamber tombs, rectangular in plan (**fig. 6**). They do not follow the geographical directions, and the entire facility is located in the northeast-southwest direction. If we assume that the tomb housed the remains of the first Christians, then the burial ritual was not observed – head to the west. Given the thick layer of mortar that has been poured over the entire tomb, it should be assumed that a memorial room was built on this tomb, which would turn it into a tomb-mausoleum. Due to the possible surviving structures on the tomb, from time immemorial, the local population has turned the place into a votive offering of St. George.

In **plan**, the tomb consists of a central room (2.30 x 1.75 m), around which are arranged five rooms – burial chambers; with almost the same dimensions. All the chambers are connected to the central room through openings closed with stone slabs (**fig. 6, top left**). Each chamber is covered with a semi-cylindrical vault. The antechamber to the tomb is reached by five steps, of varying width and height, built of bricks (**fig. 5, bottom**). In the space under the steps, it is assumed that there are two more rooms, but their shape and dimensions cannot

<sup>17</sup> The tomb in the village of Krupnik was discovered in May 1934. It is located in the Sveti Georgi locality, about 1.5 km from the village of Krupnik, then in the Melnik area, and currently in the Simitli municipality, Blagoevgrad region. See: Ал. Рашенов, Гробницата при с. Крупник, *Известия на Археологическия Институт*, VIII, 1934, 434-438.

<sup>18</sup> [https://blitz.bg/obshtestvo/kakvo-otkriha-v-grobishteto-na-selo-poletto-horata-podminavat-ot-godini-golyama-senzaciya\\_news436243.html](https://blitz.bg/obshtestvo/kakvo-otkriha-v-grobishteto-na-selo-poletto-horata-podminavat-ot-godini-golyama-senzaciya_news436243.html) (visited on 28.12.2025). The inscription is in ancient Greek and indicates an estate of the Ancii family of Pautalia; with a sanctuary protected by them. The inscription was translated by N. Sharankov. It is dated to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> The fugue is width between 4 and cm. The bricks have dimensions of 33x35x4 cm.

be determined until the steps to the antechamber are broken<sup>20</sup>. The entrance to the tomb is from the southeast. The floors of the burial chambers are covered with a thick layer of mortar (approx. 10 cm), the same as that of the building. Under it, a layer of small gravel, 15 cm thick, was discovered. The rooms under the steps are paved with bricks<sup>21</sup>. The central room does not have a mortar floor. It is left only on soil. The walls are plastered with white lime plaster, without traces of frescoes. According to the researcher of the tomb, the slab on the entrance to the tomb, presumably as well as the terrain on the entire surface of the tomb, was covered with a mortar layer with a thickness of approx. 30 cm. The entrance to the tomb was closed with a horizontally placed slab. The entrances to the burial chambers were closed with slabs that descended along vertical chutes - a feature unknown to us for other tombs discovered along the Struma. The funeral ritual, given the discovered scattered bones, is by burial, similar to the discovered tombs and mausoleums along the Upper and Middle reaches of the Struma.

A peculiarity of the tombs is the construction of an arcosolium at the back of the side compartments and the presence of several square niches on the walls, similar to the niches in the tomb discovered under the church in the monastery of „St. Joachim and Anna“ in the village of Bistritsa and in the tomb-mausoleum from Parthicopolis at 9 Gorno Brodi Street (**fig. 6, top middle and right**). Another peculiarity is the closing of the burial chambers. This was done by a complex system of levers and ropes, which lowered the slabs that closed the entrances to the burial chambers along vertical stone channels<sup>22</sup>.

Only one coin was found in the tomb, minted by Emperor Procopius (365-366 AD), which is why Arch. Rashenov dates it to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Given its orientation and plan, it is evident that the tomb was built earlier, in pagan times. For several centuries, it served the wealthy landowning family, who probably had a villa estate nearby, who adapted the tomb-mausoleum in the early Christian era for the needs of the Christian funeral ritual.

*The Mausoleums in Parthicopolis (Sandanski).* So far, two tomb-mausoleums have been discovered in the ancient and early Christian city. The first tomb-mausoleum was discovered in 1995 in a private plot at 119 Pirin Street<sup>23</sup>. The mausoleum is part of the western necropolis of the city. It existed from the Roman to the late antique era. By type, it belongs to the *multi-chamber tombs*.

The mausoleum is a two-story domed structure with a complex plan<sup>24</sup>, used in the period 2-4 centuries AD. It is located in the western, highest part of the slope on which the ancient and early Byzantine city is located. It is oriented in the northeast-southwest direction. It consists of an upper vaulted chamber with

<sup>20</sup> Ал. Рашенов, *Гробницата ...*, 1934, 435.

<sup>21</sup> Ал. Рашенов, *Гробницата ...*, 1934, 435.

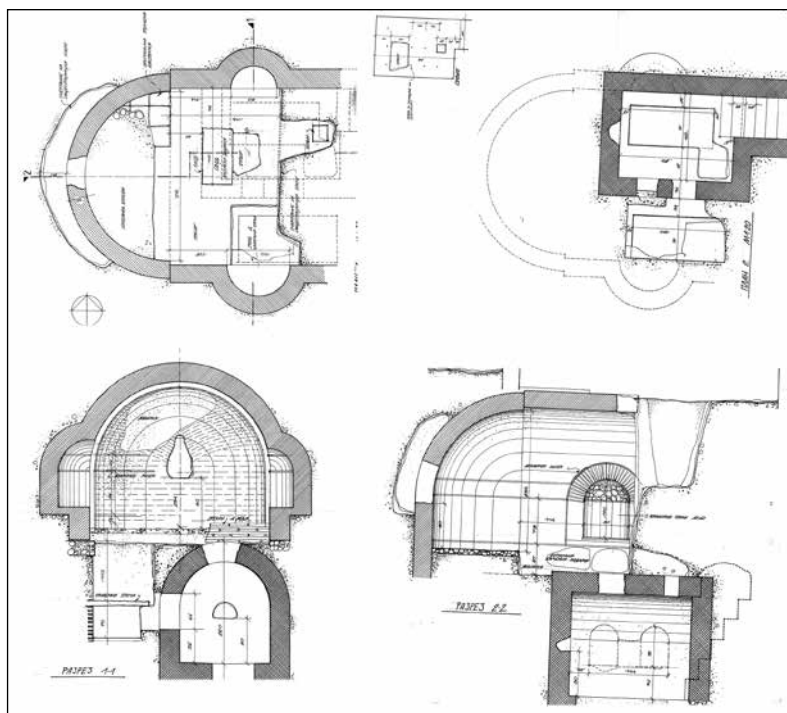
<sup>22</sup> With 6-8 cm wide.

<sup>23</sup> С. Пищалов, В. Петков, Късноантична гробница-мавзолей от Сандански, *Археологически открития и разкопки*, Сандански, 1996, 79-81

<sup>24</sup> S. Petrova, V. Petkov, Παρθικοπολις/Парθикополиς, *Roman cities in Bulgaria, vol. II – Thracian, Greek, Roman and Medieval cities, residences and fortresses in Bulgaria* (ed. R. Ivanov), Sofia 2015, 462-465, figs. 90-91.

Fig. 7. The Mausoleum in Parthicopolis – 119 Pirin Street. Plan and sections (S. Petrova, V. Petkov 2015)

Сл. 7. Маузолеј у Партикополису – Пирин 119. План и пресеци (S. Petrova, V. Petkov 2015)



a square shape<sup>25</sup>. To the west, the room is open entirely to a large semicircular niche<sup>26</sup>, covered with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  dome – arcosolium. The floor of the niche, paved with bricks, is 0.40 m higher than that of the room. On the north and south sides of the room, a small semicircular vaulted niche is built<sup>27</sup>. The entrance to the mausoleum must have been from the east; with an architecturally designed façade<sup>28</sup>, currently remaining under the existing residential building (**fig. 7**).

The mausoleum is built of bricks, bonded with white mortar. Only the walls under the two niches, given their greater thickness, are built with stone masonry. Two periods of the tomb's design have been established and a third, referring to the period of the burials themselves, before the construction of the mausoleum building. During the first period of construction, only the vault and the semi-dome of the niche were plastered, while the walls were left in masonry with emphasized face joints applied to the fresh plaster. During the second stage, the walls and the lower part of the vault were lined with marble slabs in five horizontal belts, separated by relief edges. The side niches were also lined with marble. The rest of the vault and the semi-dome in the niche were plastered with three-layer plaster, and lime-marble stucco was applied on top.

<sup>25</sup> 3.5x3.5 m and height to the zenith of the vault 3.10 m.

<sup>26</sup> Width 3.20 m; depth 1.60 m and height to zenith 2.60 m.

<sup>27</sup> Width 0, 80 m; depth 0, 45 m; height 1 m.

<sup>28</sup> Similar to the mausoleums in Sofia, Brestovik and elsewhere.



Fig. 8. Niche with arcosolia; part of the finds (S. Petrova, V. Petkov 2015)

Сл. 8. Ниша са аркосолијама; део налаза (S. Petrova, V. Petkov 2015)

Under the brick floor of the room are two burial structures with different structures, adjacent to each other, built before the construction of the mausoleum above them. On the north side is a rectangular tomb with a vaulted ceiling. The interior of the tomb was reached by a narrow corridor-staircase with six steps through an entrance occupying the northern half of the eastern wall. The tomb is built of bricks, bonded with yellowish mortar. Its interior is plastered with hydrophobic mortar of pink color. The walls of this tomb were also lined with marble slabs, partially preserved.

Under the floor of the tomb was a brick grave pit No. 1 (1.80x0.80x1 m). On the ridge of the vault, at its eastern end, there was a square opening. The wedge of a marble male bust, discovered without a head, was installed in it. When the tomb was robbed in antiquity, the bust was probably moved. Its location when discovered should not have been the original one, and it was probably moved after the head was removed or broken. Traditionally, the busts of the deceased are placed in the arcosolia and loculi of the tombs. Placing a bust of the deceased in his tomb is not an isolated phenomenon. We observe it in Anemurium in Asia Minor, which, both in terms of location and urban planning scheme, is very close to that of Parthicopolis. A common practice of placing the busts of the deceased in their tombs is also observed in Palestine, Rome, Continental Greece, etc.<sup>29</sup>. From the south, a brick-built grave pit No. 2 (1.80x0.80x0.70 m) is adjacent to the tomb, in which the grave is covered with marble slabs and three rows of bricks

<sup>29</sup> For more details, see: I. Skupinska-Lovset, *Funerary portraiture of Roman Palestine: an analysis of the production in its culture-historical context*. Aström; J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*. Johns Hopkins University Press (sec. ed.); I. B. Romano, *Classical Sculpture: Catalogue of the Cyptiot, Greek and Roman Stone Sculpture*. University of Pennsylvania. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2006; Cl. Lewis, *Imperial Autobiography, Augustus to Hadrian, ANRW*, II, 1995, 34. 1; J. Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity*. New York: Routledge, 1999, 218 sqq.

with greased joints. Both burial structures were robbed in antiquity. The bones of five skeletons were discovered, among them one of a child and one of a teenager.

Although looted in antiquity, a large amount of grave goods remained: 49 coins: single specimens from the emperors Aurelian (270-275) to Constantine (306-337). The most numerous, 15, are the coins of Emperor Licinius (308-324), and one of Constantine's coins is gilded; marble architectural and sculptural fragments, parts of gold jewelry, remains of a gold-woven garment, bone objects, glass vessels and ceramics: a table amphora, a marble bust without a head, as well as several fragments of the Hercules's crook (**fig. 8**).

The complex architectural plan and the storey structure of the facility indicate not only its funerary (the two burial structures), but also its memorial character (the rectangular above-ground structure with the niche). Judging by the coin material, it was built around or after the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, after the first burials in graves No. 1 and No. 2, and later the construction of the memorial part – the mausoleum – was also started.

In terms of plan, the tomb-mausoleum differs from the plans of the imperial tomb-mausoleums in Rome, which are mostly circular in shape, such as those of Augustus, Hadrian, Maxentius and Constantius. Examples of Parthicopolis-like construction of mausoleums and funerary structures can be found in the Danubian and eastern provinces, where a similar plan is attested, as well as family mausoleums: in modern Serbia, in Viminacium<sup>30</sup>, in Brestovik<sup>31</sup>; in Asia Minor – Sardis, similar tombs have been found (with niches, with a length of about 1.90 m, as well as with three conches, but with the same dimensions of the niches); with one niche each were found in Ephesus and Termes, (dated from the first half/end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – the first quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>32</sup>).

In the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, judging by the coinage, finds and changes in decoration, further burials and reconstructions were carried out, such as the lining of the walls with marble slabs. In all likelihood, the mausoleum was also used after the middle of the century. The mausoleum, the rich gifts and the complex architecture indicate that it belonged to a wealthy and prominent family in the city.

*The mausoleum at 9 Gorno Brodi Street.* The second tomb-mausoleum was discovered in 2008-2009 in the southwestern necropolis of the city, among numerous other burials (burial pits, a single tomb decorated with crosses and a twin tomb covered with cross vaults). The mausoleum is located immediately next to; and west of the tomb with the crosses<sup>33</sup>. Its building is oriented in the south-north direction, with the entrance to the burial chambers from the south; in contrast to the tombs discovered east and southeast of it, whose entrances are from the east (**fig. 9**). In plan, the tomb-mausoleum has a north-south

<sup>30</sup> G. Milošević-Jevtić, 2014, fig. 4.

<sup>31</sup> G. Milošević-Jevtić, 2014, fig 3; G. Milošević 2009, 741-751

<sup>32</sup> S. Cormack, *The space of death in Roman Asia Minor*. Wien, 2004, 285, fig. 176 a; 221, fig. 91; 317, fig. 213.

<sup>33</sup> В. Петков, С. Петрова, Г. Гошев, Раннохристијански некропол и Гробница-мавзолей от Партикополис, *Паметници, Реставрација, Музеи*, № 1–2, 2010, 3–10; S. Petrova, V. Petkov, *Партикополис ...*, 2015, 467-471, figs. 94-98

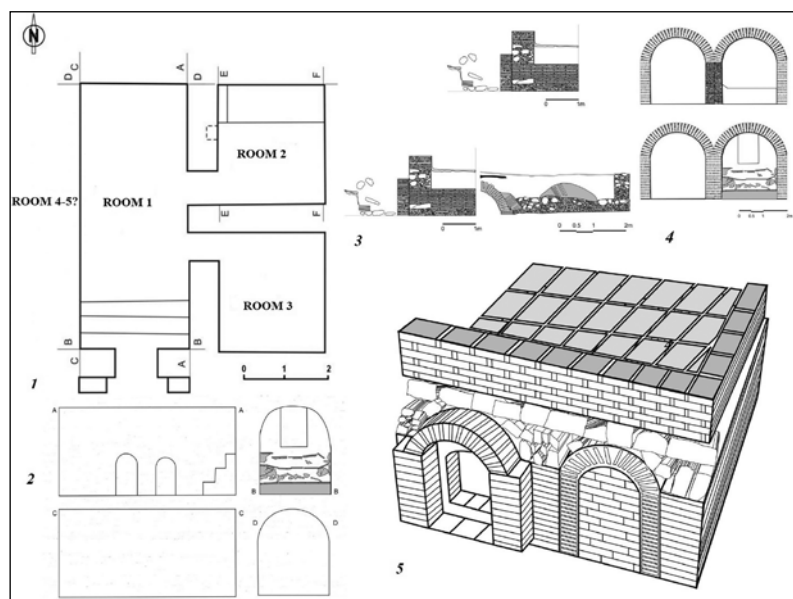


Fig. 9. Plan, sections and reconstruction of the mausoleum from 9 Gorno Brodi Street, Parthicopolis (G. Goshev, archive of AM Sandanski)

Сл. 9. План, пресеци и реконструкција маузолеја из улице Горно Броди 9, Партикополис (Г. Гошев, архива Археолошког музеја Санданског)

orientation and shows that it was built in the pagan period of the development of the settlement, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. It belongs to the type of multi-chamber tombs. Two main periods of its use have been identified: the early one is pagan, and the later one is early Christian.

The construction technique is *opus mixtum*; from boulders and belts of 3 rows of bricks. The shaped arched entrance is located on the southern side of the facility. It is lower than 1 meter and through three steps leads to the underground level of the tombs, consisting of three rooms – an antechamber (room 1) and two chambers (rooms 2 and 3) in the east direction from the antechamber, with the same dimensions (fig. 9-1,2). Room 1 initially served as an antechamber, and later, in the early Christian period, it was converted into a burial chamber. From the antechamber, the two chambers were entered through low vaulted entrances, which were not closed with slabs, but remained open (fig. 10-1). In room (No. 2), along the northern wall, a 0.80 m high bed was built and plastered. The western side of the bed is raised at a 45° angle, forming a “pillow.” A small square niche is formed on the western wall, near the bed (fig. 10-2).

The arrangement of the chambers suggests the possibility that in the western direction there were one or more chambers (rooms 4, 5?), similar to Krupnik, which were walled up together with the remains of the pagan ancestors, left under the eastern sidewalk of the modern Gorno Brody street. The georadar survey carried out in 2024 to the west, on the eastern sidewalk and the street surface, did not show any rooms in this direction. In plan, the tomb-mausoleum is similar to that of Krupnik, but there the burial chambers are axially located on both sides of the antechamber. In this case, we have only one half here. All three rooms are smooth plastered with mortar, without decoration on the walls. The antechamber and both chambers have a semi-cylindrical vault, on which the mausoleum building was built (fig. 9-5). Its roof was most likely gable, covered



Fig. 10-1. Parthicopolis. The antechamber of the tomb (room 1) (photo: Archive of the AM Sandanski)

Сл. 10-1. Партикополис. Предсобље гробнице (Просторија 1) (фотографија: Архива АМ у Санданском)

Fig. 10-2. Parthicopolis. Room 2 – part of the burial bed and niche on the western wall (photo: Archive of AM Sandanski)

Сл. 10-2. Партикополис. Просторија 2 – део гробног кревета и ниша на западном зиду (фото: Архива АМ Санданског)

with ceramic tiles. The upper chamber/mausoleum rose nearly 3.50 m above the natural terrain of the necropolis, and the total height of the two levels together with the foundations must have been approx. 7 m.

According to the original pagan idea, the large (western) chamber was intended as an antechamber, with possible commemorative functions, but in reality, at a certain period in late antiquity, it also became a funerary chamber and its floor was covered with over 20 corpses buried according to Christian custom (**fig. 10-1**). The current appearance of the tomb is the result of the reconstruction that took place after Christianity was accepted as equal to paganism. After the reign of Julian the Apostate (360-363), the rulers in Constantinople and, respectively, in the province of Macedonia took radical steps to impose the Christian religion. According to archaeological research to date, Christianity in Parthicopolis became widespread in the first quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is likely that at the same time, a prominent family from the ancient city, which had converted to Christianity, decided to reuse its family tomb – a mausoleum, turning it into a Christian one. The huge number of skeletons found in the tomb is disturbing – over 50. It is evident that the burial facilities were not planned for such a large number of burials. It is likely that during the early Christian period these burial facilities were also family and it is natural that only the two eastern chambers of the tomb-mausoleum were intended for those who died normally in one family. The presence of the huge number of corpses is probably the result of either diseases or mass physical violence against the local inhabitants during the barbarian invasions in the 5<sup>th</sup> and in the second half – the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that this mass burial during the early Christian period is

also related to the plague epidemic that broke out at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, which Zosimus tells us about<sup>34</sup>. Another mass burial can also be assumed to have taken place during the Slavic-Avar invasion in the 70s of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *The tombs along the Upper and Middle Struma*

*The single-chamber late antique/early Christian tombs* discovered along the Upper and Middle Struma are in Serdica, in Bistritsa and Vladaya, now districts of Sofia, in Germanea and in Parthicopolis.

The eastern necropolis of Serdica provides us with numerous examples of single-chamber tombs, some of them with rich fresco decoration and inscriptions<sup>35</sup>. The tomb in Bistritsa was discovered in 1947 under the narthex; facing east, towards the nave of the single-nave church of the Bistritsa Monastery „St. Joachim and Anna“ (**fig. 11**).

The entrance to the tomb is formed on the western wall and is a rectangular shaft with a height of 1.04 m and a width of 0.70 m, vaulted at its upper part. There are two steps built of stones and leveled with bricks in two and three rows (**fig. 11-3b**). The wall of the entrance shaft is built of stones and bricks, attached to the western wall of the tomb, but is not structurally connected to it. Under the opening of the entrance at the western wall there is an attached step with a height of 0.25 m above the floor of the tomb. The walls of the entrance are plastered with mortar. Three niches of different shapes and sizes are made in the eastern wall of the burial chamber (**fig. 11-3c**).

The tomb is closed from the west with two large slabs placed horizontally, thus covering the entrance to the underground<sup>36</sup>. Its floor is paved with stone slabs. The almost square burial chamber is built with a stone plinth with a height of 0.55 m. Above the plinth, the side walls continue with brickwork, which

<sup>34</sup> *Гръцки извори за българската история*, София 1954, 155

<sup>35</sup> The tombs discovered during the research of the basilica of St. Sophia, carried out by V. Filov (see: Б. Филов, *Софийската църква Св. София*, Материали за историята на София IV, София 1913, 61-108), as well as recent research presented to us in studies and monographs. See: К. Шалганов, Стратиграфски наблюдения върху участък от Сердикийския некропол“, *Сердика. Археологически материали и проучвания*, т. 2, София 1989, 59-65; Д. Димитрова, К. Шалганов, Д. Бобева, К. Иванов. Античен и средновековен некропол около черквата „Св. София“. Проучване на две гробници северозападно от черквата, *Археологически открития и разкопки* Кюстендил, 1990, 105; К. Шалганов. Гробницата на Хонорий и надгробната плоча на Паладий – две нови свидетелства за раннохристиянска Сердика, *Studia in honorem Aleksandrae Dimitrova-Milcheva. Юго-източна Европа през античността VI в. пр.н.е. – VII в.* София, 2008, 439 – 454; П. Стоянова, Ю. Мешков, Спасителни археологически проучвания в Източния некропол на Сердика, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2017г.*, София 2018, 423-426; Й. Николова, Източният некропол на Сердика. История на проучванията и гробни съоръжения, *KIN Journal*, vol. 9, issue 1, 2023, 79-89; Й. Николова, Гробове и гробни съоръжения (II–IV век) от площад „9 септември“ (дн. „Александър I“) в София, *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology Supplements* vol. 11, 2024, 79-91 and cit. lit.

<sup>36</sup> С. Станчев, Старохристиянска гробница при с. Бистица, *Известия на Археологическия Институт*, XVII, 1950, 281-284. The tomb is 3.40 m long and 3 m wide.

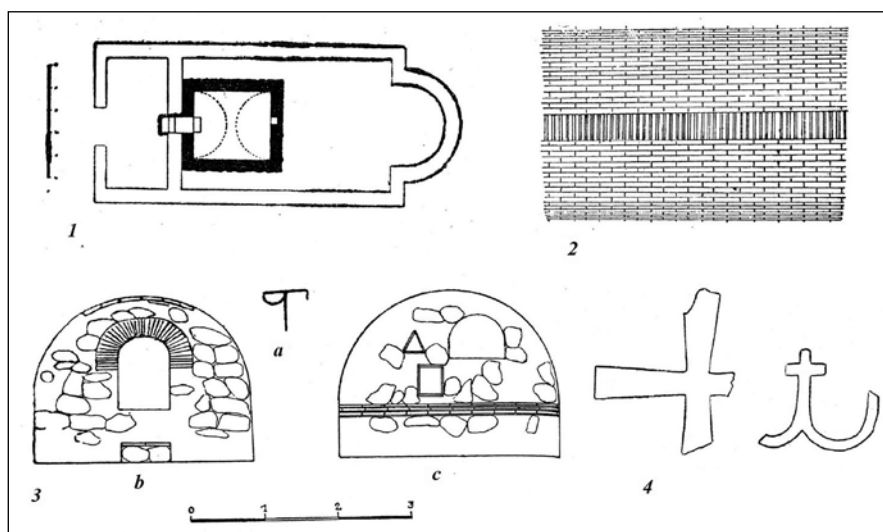


Fig. 11. Tomb in Bistritsa – plan, vault and sections. Monogram, image of a cross and anchor (Станчев 1950)

Сл. 11. Гробница у Бистрици – план, свод и пресеци. Монограм, слика крста и сидра (Станчев 1950)

passes into a semi-cylindrical vault. The keystone of the vault is again filled with bricks placed across the bricks of the arch of the vault (**fig. 11-2**). An incised monogram was discovered on one of the bricks (**fig. 11-3a**)

The entire inner surface of the walls and the vault is plastered with mortar, on which a second thin layer of reddish-colored mortar plaster, obtained from the mixture with ground brick, has been applied. The tomb was frescoed, and from the fresco only part of the central part of a cross with expanding edges has survived, painted on the eastern wall, at the beginning of the vaulting. It was painted in the *al fresco* technique with dark red paint on an ochre background. Above the entrance, part of an anchor is visible, the upper part of which is shaped like a cross. It is painted in red, on an ochre background. According to St. Stanchev, it can also be defined as a “contamination of a cross with branching branches from its lower arm”<sup>37</sup>. The spikes of the anchor are curved and elongated in height, and at first glance it can also be defined as the letter “ω” whose middle handle is shaped like a cross sign (**fig. 11-4**). Two Christian burials, in wooden coffins, were found in the tomb. It is assumed that the tomb was opened and possible funerary gifts were taken out of it, of which an unornamented clay lamp with a broken handle and a small copper coin, heavily corroded, dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> century were found on site.

<sup>37</sup> С. Станчев, *Ibid.*, 1950, 283.

The tomb at the village of Bistritsa belongs to the *single-chamber vaulted tombs with an antechamber*<sup>38</sup>, a variant of the 'square-plan burial chamber'<sup>39</sup>, also common in the necropolis of Serdica<sup>40</sup>. A square-plan early Christian tomb was also discovered in Germanea<sup>41</sup>.

It is an early Christian tomb with structural features, such as the lack of a constructive connection between the long walls and the vault with those of the short walls. This led to the collapse of the northern and southern walls, forming a visible joint, which was plastered with mortar during the construction of the tomb. The independent construction of the long walls, without a constructive connection with the short ones, is a feature also found in other Serdika tombs. Proximity to the same tombs is also noted in the construction of the vault<sup>42</sup>; in the painting and the type of the cross. The image of an anchor is so far unique for the region. The anchor as a pictogram symbol represents Jesus, a symbol of the salvation of the human soul. It is a common symbol, hope for eternal life with the Savior, in the Roman catacombs<sup>43</sup>. It is rare in late antique tombs in the Balkans – from a tomb in Odessos<sup>44</sup>, and the closest depiction of an anchor is from a crypt in Niš<sup>45</sup>. The construction of the tomb and its decoration are associated with the tombs from the eastern necropolis of Serdika and the basilica of St. Sophia.

*The tomb in Vladaya*<sup>46</sup> was discovered under the narthex of a single-nave church of the St. Petka Monastery. It has been established that the single-nave church was built on a three-nave early Christian basilica, probably part of a monastery complex that continued to exist in the Middle Ages. The tomb was built directly under the floor of the early Christian basilica, which was partially destroyed in plan during the construction of the single-nave church. The tomb

<sup>38</sup> Д. Овчаров, Архитектура и декорация на старохристиянските гробници в нашите земи, *Археология* 1977, 4, 20-29.

<sup>39</sup> Due to the small difference between length and width, which can also be attributed to a construction error.

<sup>40</sup> И. Велков, Християнска гробница в София, *Известия на Българския Археологически Институт* XII, 2, 1938, 414-415; К. Шалганов, *Стратиграфски наблюдения...*, 1989, 59-65.

<sup>41</sup> A recently discovered tomb, heavily damaged but showing signs of having been vaulted and with an almost square plan; from the southwestern necropolis of Germanea. Author's research in 2021; in print.

<sup>42</sup> Tomb LVII-eastern necropolis of Serdica. See: С. Станчев 1950, *Ibid*, 284 and cit. lit.

<sup>43</sup> Catacomb of St. Callistus; of St. Domitilla; Catacomb of Priscilla – Via Salaria Nova; Catacombs of St. Sebastian – Via Appia. See: Ch. A. Kennedy, Early Christians and the Anchor. – *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4 (Sep. - Dec. ), 1975, 115-124.

<sup>44</sup> An anchor is depicted in a tomb from the Akchilar area near Varna, (currently Primorski region), dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (М. Мирчев, Паметници на гробната архитектура в Одесос и неговата околност. – *Сборник изследвания в чест на акад. Д. Дечев по случай 80-годищината му*. София, 1958, 579-582.)

<sup>45</sup> М. Rakocija, Painting in the crypt with an anchor in Niš, Niš and Byzantium (ed. М. Rakocija), VII (Niš), 2009, 87-105.

<sup>46</sup> I thank my colleague Vasil Mutafov (Ministry of Culture), who provided me with information about this tomb, from a protocol of the Ministry of Culture created by him, photographs and sketches, and with permission to publish it.

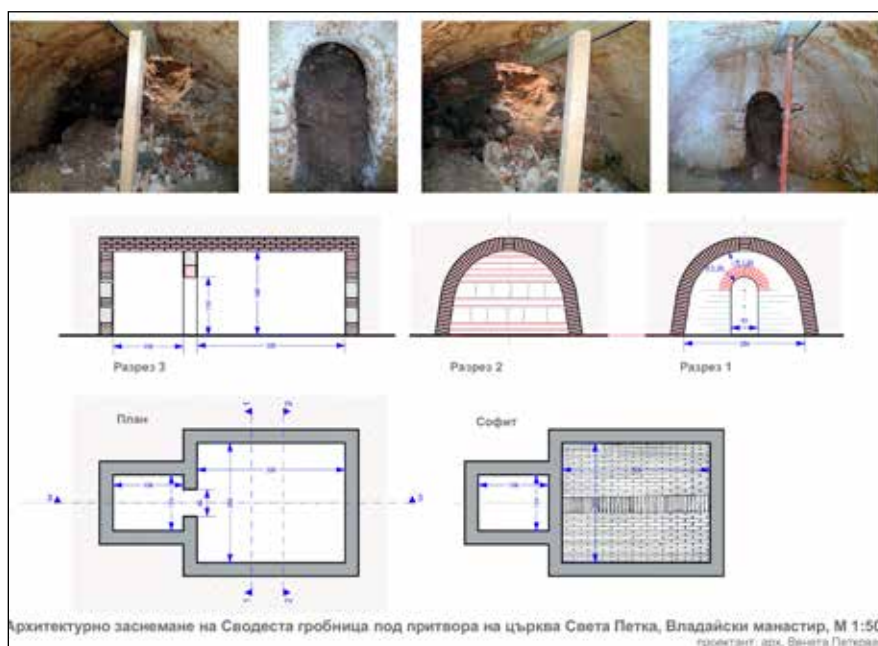


Fig. 12. Architectural photography of a vaulted tomb under the narthex of the church of St. Petka, Vladya (architect V. Petkova, photo V. Mutafov)

Сл. 12. Архитектонска фотографија сводне гробнице испод нартекса цркве Свете Петке, Владаја (архитекта В. Петкова, фотограф В. Мутафов)

facility falls under the floor of the narthex of today's church, with the slab covering the vestibule being about 0.30 m below the floor, in the northeastern part of the room, north of the entrance to the nave of the modern temple. Currently, the tomb is quite collapsed, threatened with destruction (**fig. 12**).

In terms of **plan**, it belongs to the *single-chamber rectangular tombs with an antechamber*. After the antechamber follows the vaulted burial chamber. The antechamber of the tomb is covered entirely with a horizontally placed monolithic granite slab, on which the floor of the basilica rests. The antechamber, especially in its northern part, is filled with earth up to the level of the covering slab. But almost certainly its northern wall is shaped like steps that lead from the level of the basilica floor to the floor of the antechamber. The entrance to the antechamber is rectangular in shape, the upper threshold is arched, the zenith of the arch is located 0.51 m below the zenith of the vault. The height of the entrance is 0.93 m, the width at the lower threshold – 0.57 m. The thickness of the wall between the entrance and the vestibule is one brick – about 0.36-0.37 m with mortar coating. The western and eastern walls of the vestibule are inclined inward. In this way, the vestibule acquires a slightly trapezoidal cross-section, with its width at the base of the entrance threshold being about 0.77 m, and its east-west length 1.10 m.

The vault of the tomb, built only with bricks, is immediately below the floor level of the basilica. The vaulting system is similar to that of the tomb in



Fig. 13. Germanea, a tomb with a semi-cylindrical vault (Хаджиангелов, Христов 2015, geodetic surveying engineer A. Kamenarov)

Сл. 13. Германеја, гробница са полуцилиндричним сводом (Хаджиангелов, Христов 2015, геодетско снимање инжењер А. Каменаров)

Bistritsa. The floor of the chamber is filled with a mound of earth, stones, bricks and mortar, the maximum height from the lowest part of the mound to the zenith is about 2.28 m, with the actual height of the burial chamber probably being about 2.60-2.70 m. The tomb is a rectangular room measuring 2.66x3.29 m, covered with a semi-cylindrical vault. The orientation is north-south, with a rectangular vestibule to the north. The walls of the chamber and the vestibule are made in the „opus mixtum“ technique, built of boulders and belts of bricks with a mortar joint of gray-white mortar with coarsely crushed brick. The walls and the vault of the chamber are plastered with the same gray-white mortar, the joints are no thicker than 0.02 cm, which is one of the arguments for an earlier dating. The eastern half of the southern lunette of the chamber was demolished in the past, along with part of the southern wall below it<sup>47</sup>.

The tomb was probably built in the second half - the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when several monasteries were founded along the Struma<sup>48</sup>. It

is possible that a martyr for the faith was buried in it, turning the basilica into a martyrium, or one of the monks – the Father Superior/abbot (?), or one of the bishops. We do not know how many burials were performed in it, but it was evidently not hidden under the floor, and there was access to it through the floor of the basilica.

From the necropolises of the Roman camp, late antique and early Christian city of *Germanea*, six single-chamber tombs are currently known, which are part of the southern and southwestern necropolis. Data for the first two tombs

<sup>47</sup> The tomb was probably discovered during the construction of the modern church, as the wall is reinforced from the inside with a formwork of boards and is roughly built up with reused stones from the ancient construction of the basilica.

<sup>48</sup> The relatively nearby monastery in the Arbanas neighborhood, in Radomir. See: S. Petrova, The one-aisle Early Christian churches from Southwestern Bulgaria, Niš & Byzantium (ed. M. Rakocija), XXI, 2023, 131-135, figs. 11, 12 and cit. lit.; including the monastery in Vlodaya.

are from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>49</sup>. The tombs are *rectangular in plan*, with an entrance from the west, closed with a stone slab; opened and robbed back in time. Scattered bones and remains of grave goods were found. Their orientation – east-west with an entrance from the west suggests that their construction took place in the early Christian era, probably the first half-mid 4<sup>th</sup> century.

At the beginning of our century, four more single-chamber tombs were discovered. In 2005, excavations partially revealed a single-chamber rectangular tomb, which has not been made public. Another tomb, discovered in 2014, was used repeatedly in the pagan and early Christian periods (**fig. 13**). It is single-chamber, rectangular in plan; built of brick and vaulted with a semi-cylindrical vault<sup>50</sup>. Its orientation is west-east with a 20° deviation to the south. The walls of the tomb are built of medium-sized stones smaller river boulders with a pink mortar joint. The semi-cylindrical vault is formed of Roman bricks, placed in a single row, so that the vaulting is visible both from the inside and from the outside. The interior of the tomb is plastered with dark red mortar. The floor is paved with whole and fragments of double bricks. The entrance to the burial chamber is on its eastern side. The tomb was closed with a large stone slab; sealed with pink mortar.

It has been established that several burials were carried out sequentially. The skeletons of five individuals were discovered, and a ceramic urn-pot was probably placed at the last reburial. Two iron cinths were found on the floor of the tomb, and an iron bulbous fibula was found in the embankment. The discovered materials date its use to between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It served as a family tomb and members of a military man's family were successively buried in it.

The *fifth tomb* was discovered approx. 20-25 m. north of the tomb-mausoleum, under the street surface of Zlaten Vek Street in 2021. It has impressive dimensions<sup>51</sup> and a possible semi-elliptical vaulting, as shown by the remains of the vault. The discovered tomb represents the transitional variant between the rectangular and square tombs, typical of the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup>-first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (**fig. 14**). The tomb structure is built entirely of stone, even the elliptical vault, which is currently destroyed, but the beginning of the elliptical vaulting is clearly visible in the corners. An entrance was built on the eastern wall, in its northern half, closed with a wooden door, according to the destruction of the eastern wall and the several metal nails with a short body and large round heads from the hardware of the wooden door, found on site.

<sup>49</sup> Б. Филов, *Новооткрити старини*, Известия на Българското Археологическо Дружество, т. 3, 1912-1913, 331.; И. Велков, Антични паметници из България, *Годишник на Народния Музей* (за 1921) III, София 1922, 198.

<sup>50</sup> В. Хаджиангелов, М. Христов, Спасително археологическо проучване в гр. Сапарева баня, парцел УПИИ X-2641, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2014 г.*, София 2015, 489-492. It has dimensions: 2.95 m long, 1.90 m wide; height to the zenith of the vault from the inside – 1.90 m.

<sup>51</sup> С. Петрова, Е. Севдин, Общинска улична водопроводно-канална мрежа, първи етап, гр. Сапарева баня, *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2021 г.*; under printing.

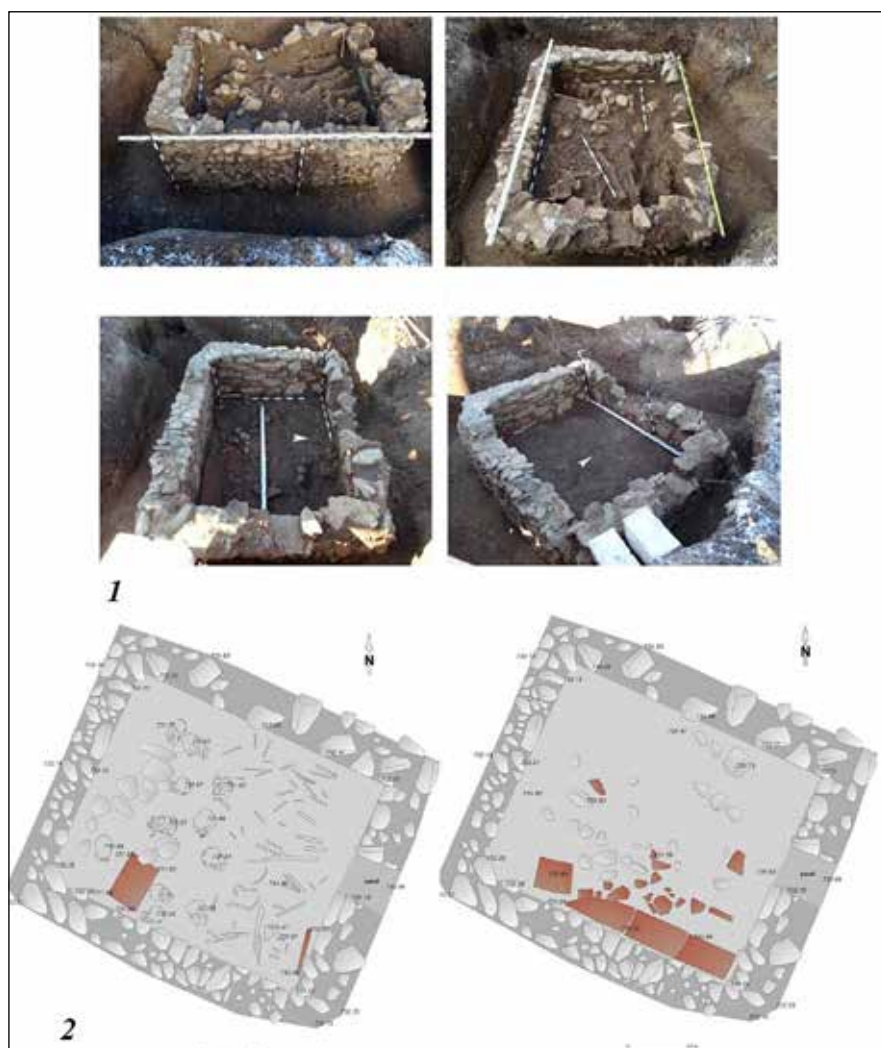


Fig. 14. Germanea, a tomb with a square plan (photo E. Sevdin, geodetic surveying engineer A. Kamenarov)

Сл. 14. Германеја, гробница квадратне основе (фотографија Е. Севдин, геодетско снимање инжењер А. Каменаров)

The burials in the tomb were carried out on tegulae, with the bodies arranged in three levels or 15 bodies per level. Each level had five bodies in a north-south direction and three bodies in an east-west direction; a total of about 45 bodies. The uppermost level was heavily damaged by the road that passed over the tomb (**fig. 14-2**). This suggests that the burial facility served more as a common grave, shaped like a tomb with an almost square shape. The coin material shows that the burials were carried out in the period after 388-395 until



Fig. 15. Germanea, tomb with a cross vault (photo E. Sevdin)

Сл. 15. Германеја, гробница са крстастим сводом (фотографија Е. Севдин)

the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the emperors Theodosius I the Great (379-395) and Arcadius (395-408), according to the two coins found – one, in level 1 (the topmost), heavily corroded, dated to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the second, dated to 388-395, found in the second level of the burials carried out in the tomb. The burials were carried out in a short period of time, as shown by the two discovered coins, but also by the ceramic fragments, especially from pots, and fragments of glass lamps, dated to the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The short time in which the burials were carried out, as well as the apparently hastily built tomb, suggests that the common grave is connected with the Visigothic uprising, of the Visigothic federates, and the looting of Thrace by Alaric I in 395-400.

*The sixth tomb* was discovered in 2022; nearby and north of the two tombs discovered at the Relaxa Hotel (**fig. 15**). It is built of stone and covered with a brick cross vault. It is oriented north-south along its long sides. It was built as an ancient pagan single-chamber tomb with a possible semi-cylindrical vault. The found alterations show that in the early Christian era it was expanded (in the east-west direction) and covered with a brick cross vault. A rectangular-shaped entrance was drilled in the southeast long wall, near the southeast corner of the tomb, and the original entrance from the northeast was bricked up. The sides of the new entrance were bricked up. Thus, the tomb turned from pagan to Christian, and the deceased were placed along its width. During the medieval era, part of its vault was destroyed in order to level the level, and the tomb was adapted for a dwelling. Walls of stones, cemented with mud, were built on it. The destroyed vault became the floor of the medieval dwelling, and the burial chamber itself became the ground floor. Late antique coins and ceramics, medieval coins – 12-13 centuries, medieval kitchen and gold-engraved ceramics, as well as fragments of glass bracelets and ceramics, taken in the period 4-6 centuries, were found inside the tomb.

In *Parthicopolis*, over 10 tombs have been discovered in the northeastern, southern, southwestern and western necropolis of the late antique and early



Fig. 16. Parthicopolis, double tomb with cross vaults. On the right – northern burial chamber, view from the inside. Necropolis at 9 Gorno Brody Street (Archives of the AM Sandanski)

Сл. 16. Партикополис, двострука гробница са крстастим сводовима. Десно – северна гробница, поглед изнутра. Некропола улица Горно Броди 9 (Архива АМ Сандански)

Christian city. They are characterized mainly as rectangular single-chamber tombs with a semicircular vault. There is also a twin tomb – uncharacteristic for our lands, as well as tombs with a trapezoidal vault.

Single-chamber tombs were discovered in the yard of the Yane Sandanski High School, part of the southern necropolis of the late antique and early Christian city<sup>52</sup>, in the necropolis in the Loven Dom area<sup>53</sup>; in the necropolis at 9 Gorno Brodi Street<sup>54</sup>. All of them have a different orientation, with the west-east direction prevailing; with semi-cylindrical vaulting. The exception is the tombs from the necropolis in the Loven Dom area, where the vaulting is trapezoidal, and the only complete preserved tomb has an antechamber.

In a private plot of land at 9 Gorno Brodi Street, part of the western necropolis has been explored. A tomb-mausoleum, *a single-chamber tomb and a twin tomb*, the only one in the country so far, were discovered. *Twin vaulted tombs* are rare. So far, the twin tomb is the only one in Parthicopolis, but such, although rare, have been found in the eastern necropolis of Thessaloniki<sup>55</sup>,

<sup>52</sup> В. Велков, Един античен град в долината на Средна Струма, *Известия на археологическия институт*, XXVI, София 1963, 141–156.

<sup>53</sup> Т. Герасимов, Раннохристиянска гробница при гр. Сандански (Св. Врач), *Известия на археологическия институт*, София, XXIX, 1966, 222-225.

<sup>54</sup> В. Петков, С. Петрова, Г. Гошев, 2010, 3-10; S. Petrova, V. Petkov, *Партикополис/Parthicopolis...*, 2015, 468, figs. 94-96.

<sup>55</sup> T. Stefanidou-Tiveriou, *The local sarcophagi of Thessaloniki*, Field, House, Garden, Grave (ed. P. Adam-Veleni, D. Terzopoulou), Thessaloniki 2012, 132, fig. 10 and cit. lit.



Fig. 17. Parthicopolis. Necropolis at 9 Gorno Brodi Street. Vaulted tomb with crosses (Archive of the AM Sandanski)

Сл. 17. Партикополис. Некропола у улици Горно Броди 9. Сводна гробница са крстовима (Архива АМ Сандански)

Macedonia; in Dalmatia – Salona<sup>56</sup>, Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>57</sup>, Krupište<sup>58</sup>, province of Inner Dacia, near the border with the diocese of Macedonia. Inside, the tombs are plastered along the fugues of the stones and the rows of bricks that make up the walls and vaults. The twin tomb in Parthicopolis has a vaulted ceiling using a cross vault (**fig. 16**), similar to the tomb in Germanea. The *cross vault* technique was applied by the Romans between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. They were mainly used in areas with frequent earthquakes, given their resistance to linear and horizontal loads. Cross vaults are obtained by drawing lines along the diagonals of the rectangular room. Then, along the

<sup>56</sup> Not only twin tombs were found here, but also four vaulted tombs joined together. See: A. Kurilić, Z. Serventi, Late roman tombs and burial places in the province of Dalmatia, *Сердика Средиц София*, т. 7, (Международна научна конференция „Базиликата Св. София на прелома меѓу езичество и христијанство”, София 11-13 март 2014г.), София 2018, 453 and cit. lit.

<sup>57</sup> About Bosnia and Herzegovina – Međubrđe; Crkvine (Cim); Doci 2 (Vitina – Doci). See: *Arheološki leksikon Bosne i Hercegovine*. (Ed. B. Čović), Sarajevo, 1988, 21.241; 24.45; 25.55.

<sup>58</sup> Discovered in 2020 during the study of the five-apse cathedral basilica; by archaeologists from the museum in the town of Shtip. I thank my colleagues from the Republic of North Macedonia for the information provided to me.

short sides, a vaulted triangle is built, the sides of which touch, creating static resistance, along the triangle with a base on the long sides. The short and long sides are the bases of the triangles, the sides of which meet at the top in a kind of 'keystone', and the brickwork is made following the bases of the triangles. The cross vault thus obtained is extremely resistant to natural cataclysms and other loads. The twin tomb was entered from the east, with the entrances closed with large marble slabs. In front of the entrances was placed a long granite block – a threshold, at the northern end of which, near the eastern wall of the northern tomb, a small *oinochoe* was discovered, covered with black varnish and a relatively short, smooth silver votive stick decorated with a bird with folded wings. The stick ends with a pointed end, similar to a hairpin. These two objects were probably part of the memorial practices performed in front of the tomb to honor the deceased relatives of the family.

The single-chamber vaulted tomb from Gorno Brodi is currently the only vaulted tomb with mural decoration in the Parthicopolis necropolis (**fig. 17**). It is plastered on the inside and decorated on the long sides and the vault/ceiling with Latin crosses painted in red paint, with pearls on both sides of each end of the shoulders, in the *al fresco* technique. The orientation of the tomb is west-east, with an entrance from the east closed with a marble slab. The burial chamber is devoid of grave goods, only the bones of one individual. His head was placed on a Roman brick instead of a pillow, and on the floor in the southern part of the tomb a marble slab with a fragmented three-line inscription was discovered, where the second line is written in mirror image: Κύριε, βοήθη[ει τῶ]; [δούλω] σου Ἡρακ[λ--]; [- - -]ηθ[- - -]<sup>59</sup>. Translated: „Lord, help your servant Heracl--- ...“ The remains in the tomb, its inscription and location, in the immediate vicinity and east of the tomb-mausoleum, suggest that the deceased Heracl--- was part of the high clergy of Parthicopolis, with a possible family connection to the family that owned the mausoleum.

In the necropolis in the Loven Dom area, where, in addition to a completely preserved tomb<sup>60</sup>, other similar tombs were found destroyed to varying degrees; it shows us an exceptionally decorative design (**fig. 18**). Unique in its architecture<sup>61</sup>, the tomb is not plastered entirely from the inside, but only in those places where the mural decoration was applied. The cross, Latin in shape, is similar in image to the crosses from the tomb on Gorno Brodi Street, with drops/pearls at the ends. They are also the same in color – in a red range. The difference in the two decors is the lack of other decoration in the tomb on Gorno

<sup>59</sup> I owe the reading of the inscription and its translation to my colleague N. Sharankov from Sofia University, to whom I express my heartfelt gratitude.

<sup>60</sup> Т. Герасимов, *Раннохристиянска гробница...*, 1966, 222-225.

<sup>61</sup> Similar vaulting is found in Viminacium. See: J. Anđelković Grašar, E. Nikolić, D. Rogić, *Tomb with Cupids from Viminacium: a contribution to research of construction, iconography and style*, *Starinar*, LXIII/2013, 73-100 and cit. lit.; M. Korać, *The Paintings in the Late Classical Tombs in Viminacium*, *The Age of Tetrarchs*, (ed. D. Srejšević), Belgrade 1995, 172–173; M. Korać, *Slikarstvo Viminacijuma*, Beograd 2007, 33–43; D. Spasić-Đurić, *Grad Viminacijum*, Požarevac 2015, 115; A. Raičković, B. Milovanović, *Development and Changes in Roman Fashion-showcase Viminacium*, *Arheologija i prirodne nauke* 6, Beograd 2011, 77-106.

Fig. 18. Parthicopolis, tomb in the Loven Dom area (Archive of the AM Sandanski)

Сл. 18. Партикополис, гробница у области Ловен дом (Архива АМ Сандански)



Brodi Street, while the tomb from the Loven Dom area has additional decoration around the cross – a fictitious main line and plant ornaments – leaves, similar to palm leaves. The shape of the vaulting, uncharacteristic and unique so far in the region, suggests that the individual buried in it is a pilgrim in Parthicopolis, and T. Gerasimov linked it to the eastern Roman provinces. It is possible that this is the heir of a veteran who settled in the ancient city and adopted the tomb construction tradition of his ancestors, a question that remains to be resolved.

### *Conclusion*

The late antique mausoleums and tombs discovered so far along the Upper and Middle Struma river show us some similarities and differences in the time of their construction, in plan and decoration; some construction and technological features. The review of the mausoleums from late antiquity shows several cases. In the first case, they were built in pagan times, according to the orientation of the building, as family mausoleums; the two levels and

their different purpose, consistent with pagan funerary ideas and traditions, as well as the finds, which also include a sculptural bust. It is a rare phenomenon in the sepulchral art of Parthicopolis, at least for now, in which relief steles and urns dominate. This mausoleum does not have an ordinary banal plan for the province of Macedonia, but is unique and demonstrates an extremely rich interior of niches, plaster, marble cladding and stucco. Some of the mausoleums have a rich architectural articulation of the façade – Lozenets, St. Karadzha, Parthicopolis (119 Pirin Street, possibly also on 9 Gorno Brodi Street); and their continued use even in the time of early Christianity, when they still preserved the tradition of placing rich grave goods, gold objects and rare works of art made of glass (Lozenets); glass and ceramic vessels, silver gilded elements of clothing, ivory dice and others (the mausoleum in Germanea); glass cups, ceramic vessels, gold-woven clothing, along with buttons and other ivory accessories (Parthicopolis, the mausoleum on 119 Pirin Street). The tradition of placing “Charon’s obol” – gold, silver and bronze coins – also remains. In the case of the second mausoleum from Parthicopolis at 9 Gorno Brodi Street, a number of peculiarities are noted: the large number of skeletons, which suggests an epidemic, military events, or natural disasters that led to an unusual number of deaths in a noble family from the city.

In the second and only case so far of a non-family mausoleum, it is that of Germanea. It was intended for military use and was Christian from the very beginning, with both levels still present in it. With the advent of Christianity as a mass official religion, the rituals changed, the lower level was eliminated, including under the influence of the new imperial mausoleum; it was built close to a cemetery basilica, as in Lozenets, Germanea and Parthicopolis, with only the upper level remaining functional, but already completely subordinated to Christian funerary ideas. But even under Constantius II, a two-level mausoleum was built in Germanea, probably a construction subordinated to tradition and the ethnic origin of the deceased officer. In general, the small and medium-sized mausoleum predominates, with a large apse with arcosolium and niches/loculi, and a mixed construction technique, emphasized in the plan and interior. However, sometimes it has peculiarities, as in Germanea, which attribute the mausoleum to the traditions of Pannonia-Sirmium, rather than Thrace and Macedonia, due to the origin of the deceased.

The same features are also found in the single tombs, where, although sometimes grave goods are missing, connections with Viminacium, possibly Asia Minor, are established. The few tombs discovered so far show the diversity of this type of burial facility used here: a tomb covered with a semi-cylindrical vault; a tomb of the transitional variant, between the type of rectangular and square tombs, characteristic of the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries; a tomb with a cross vault and a twin tomb, with niches of different shapes being found in some of the tombs. Some of the single-chamber tombs (Parthicopolis-Lovene Dom) and both on the Upper Struma (Bistritsa and Vlodaya) have an antechamber. The last two tombs were built under early Christian basilicas and presumably preserve the remains of persons with priestly or monastic rank. There are also very few frescoed tombs, unlike the tombs from the necropolis of Serdica.

Changes in the murals of the tombs from the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century are visible with those from the beginning of the Theodosian era (379-450), the time from the accession of Theodosius I the Great to the death of Pulcheria, the last representative of the dynasty. General changes in the overall art are observed in connection with the emperor's desire to establish Orthodoxy as the only state religion. Above all, human images disappear and only plant and early Christian symbols remain (Bistritsa, Parthicopolis – Loven dom (Hunting House) and 9 Gorno Brodi street). In the early Theodosian period, figurative images are completely absent from funerary fine art, which is very indicative of the processes of development of late antique art, when epochal late antique/early Christian monuments were created in both empires ruled by Theodosius, his two sons, and their successors. The new scenes with the sacred figures had to find a definite, fixed place in the cosmological picture of the walls and the vault, and these tasks were successfully solved, leaving the floors and walls of the tombs of this era in the background. We also establish this in the numerous tombs of the necropolis of Serdica from this period. In the decoration of the tombs along the Upper and Middle Struma from the end of the reign of Theodosius I, under Theodosius II to Pulcheria, formalism and a loss of elegance and wealth are visible, in contrast to the time of the beginning to the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Human figures are eliminated, plants, animals, birds and vessels are depicted as symbols of Christian sacraments and beliefs about salvation and eternal life in Paradise. The vine and chrisam, symbolizing Christ and the resurrection, are very often represented, as well as the communion vessels, the souls of Christians as birds, etc. The top of the cosmogonic, although unique for now, tomb is from Gurko Street in Serdica with the radiant flowering cross, the heavens and the four archangels, probably influenced by a certain monumental monument with them, which has not survived to this day. It is seen that from Theodosius II to Pulcheria, a formalism begins in art and the loss of grace and richness of motif. The decorative scheme of the tombs, although purely Christian, becomes impoverished. The cross/crosses (Particopolis) becomes the main motif, around which two flanking images of plants are sometimes grouped.

The late antique mausoleums and tombs along the Upper and Middle reaches of the Struma, along with their diversity of architecture, forms and decoration, are part of the Balkan late antique-early Christian tomb architecture, which shaped the appearance of the era, with its peculiarities related to the commemorative practices in the Eastern (Constantinople) and Western (Roman) churches, albeit during the reign of emperors who ruled both empires simultaneously – the Eastern and the Western. The traditions of Roman mausoleums and late antique mausoleums, respectively single-chamber tombs, had a certain influence on the design and decoration of martyriae, churches and basilicas, especially in the creation and design of crypts and kyklions; the tombs of the clergy in the churches themselves on the underground level. In addition, they were adopted by the Gothic, Frankish and other foreign leaders of late antiquity, as can be seen from the mausoleum of Alaric in Rome and some burials in Western and Central Europe, in which barbarian funerary traditions are combined with late antique ones. During the Justinian era, the revival of the mausoleum type can be clearly traced in the plan and decoration of San Vitale in Ravenna, along

with typical Christian features. The question still remains open. Nevertheless, the late antique mausoleums and tombs along the Upper and Middle Struma show a variety and richness in the tomb architecture and decoration characteristic of early Christian funerary and memorial practices.

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КАСНОАНТИЧКИ МАУЗОЛЕЈИ И ГРОБНИЦЕ ДУЖ ГОРЊЕГ  
И СРЕДЊЕГ ТОКА РЕКЕ СТРУМЕ

У чланку се анализирају маузолеји и гробнице откривени у горњем и средњем току реке Струме. Дуж Горње и Средње Струме, гробнице-маузолеји откривени у Сердици, са богатом архитектонском фасадом (Лозенец и Стефан Караца), као и они у Германеји, Крупнику и Партикополису показују неколико случајева. У првом случају, изграђени су у паганско доба као породични према оријентацији грађевине, два нивоа и њиховим различитим наменама, у складу са паганским погребним идејама и традицијама. Наставили су да се користе у касноантичкој и ранохришћанској ери. Други је маузолеј у Германеји, такође двоспратни, али посебно изграђен за једну особу - високог официра. Утврђени су утицаји - из Паноније-Сирмијума и из римске праксе - царски маузолеји.

Једнокоморне гробнице у основи припадају неколико типова: једнокоморне – Бистрица, Владаја и Германеја (данашња Сапарева Бања), Партикополис (данашњи Сандански). Неке од њих имају претпростор – Бистрица, Владаја, Партикополис. Утицај Виминацијума и Мале Азије утврђен је у обликовању свода гробнице из Ловен дома, Партикополис. Неке од гробница су изграђене испод ранохришћанских базилика и могу се повезати са сахрањивањем особа са свештеничким или монашким чином; ретке двоструке гробнице – Партикополис и вишекоморне гробнице – Германеја, Крупник и Партикополис. Свод гробница је полуцилиндричним сводом, са изузетком три гробнице из некрополе Германеја – једна са забатним сводом, једна са елиптичним сводом, јако уништена; једна са крстастим сводом. Двострука гробница из некрополе у улици Горно Броди 9, Партикополис, такође има крстасти свод. Традиција сахрањивања чланова породице у маузолејима и гробницама наставила се и у 6. веку, поред обичних гробних јама.

Касноантички маузолеји и гробнице дуж горњег и средњег тока Струме, заједно са својом разноликошћу архитектуре, облика и декорације, део су балканске касноантичко-ранохришћанске гробничке архитектуре, која обликује изглед епохе, са својим особеностима везаним за комеморативне праксе у источним (Цариградским) и западним (римским) црквама, мада током владавине царева који су истовремено владали оба царства – Источним и Западним. Традиције римских маузолеја и касноантичких маузолеја, респективно једнокоморних/двокоморних/вишекоморних гробница, имају одређени утицај на дизајн и декорације мартиријума, цркава и базилика, посебно у стварању и дизајну крипти и киклиона; гробница свештенства у самим црквама на подземном нивоу.