Tumuli first appeared in Greece probably around the end of the Neolithic. Many more examples of burials with earth mounds are known from the Bronze Age\(^1\). The period of the greatest flourish of tumulus burials on the Greek land is undoubtedly the Middle Bronze Age\(^2\). Around fifty of such foundations are known nowadays, mainly from the Peloponnesus (chiefly from the south-western part), but also from Central Greece (Attica, Boeotia) as well as from the north (Thessaly, Epirus). During the Late Helladic Period a habit of burying the dead under tumulus mounds still survived, but it was undoubtedly considerably less popular.

The tradition of raising tumuli did not vanish even after the fall of the Mycenaean civilization. On the contrary, it spread beyond traditional places tumuli were raised in, such as the Peloponnesus. Generally speaking, the state

---


of research into archaeological sites of the Iron Age is considerably lower than the much advanced research into the Bronze age sites, nevertheless a widely accepted opinion is that graves of the Protogeometric Period were covered with small earth mounds 3.

A so called “cult of heroes”, which spread throughout Greece and which we know in its epic form from the later works of Homer, had a tremendous influence on the continuation of the tradition of raising tumuli over graves. The appearance of cremation, which became a dominant funeral rite for adult males, is a reflection of that cult in burial customs. Small earth mounds crowned with stone stelae or ceramic vessels were raised over cremated bodies. That type of burial rites was reflected in poetic descriptions of the burials of Hector and Patroclus from the Iliad 4.

Burials perfectly reflecting those of Patroclus, as described by Homerus in the Iliad, have been found in Salamis on Cyprus. At the beginning of the Iron Age the Mycenaean refugees from Greece founded a city that became one of the most important on Cyprus. During archaeological research on the necropolis of the city, which were carried out in the 50s of the previous century, a number of burials dating to the Iron Age were discovered 5. Almost all graves had earth mounds above them.

One of the largest - a tumulus raised over the grave no. 3 - had a diameter of 60 meters and was preserved to the height of 10 meters (Fig. 1) 6. A stone grave

---

4 *The Iliad*, 23.249-256; 24.790-801.
built of local limestone and oriented on an east-west axis was discovered below the mound (Fig. 2). The tomb consisted of a dromos 25 meters long and a burial chamber measuring: length 2.9 meters, width 2.4 meters, height 2.8 meters. The walls were 0.75-0.9 meters thick. The tomb has been robbed, probably in the ancient times, however not all has been carried away. Skeletons of four horses were found along the northern and southern walls along with fragments of a chariot and horse harnesses. Alongside a complete equipment of a warrior was discovered: a bronze sword, spear, arrowheads, greaves and amour. Additionally three large amphorae and other ceramic vessels as well as remains of wooden utensils were discovered. Furthermore, remains of a funeral pyre that the deceased had been burned on were excavated in the dromos. The tomb is dated to ca. 600 B.C.\(^7\)

Most of the graves in Salamis were equipped with amphorae that contained olive oil and wine that were placed in dromoses. In some cases burials of slaves that were sacrificed and buried along the deceased were discovered, just like in Homer’s descriptions.\(^8\)

---


\(^8\) Karageorghis V., *Salamis...*, pp. 31-32
A huge chamber tomb preceded by a stair dromos which dates to the middle of the 7th century B.C. was discovered at the Trachonas site on Cyprus. An earth mound measuring around 23 meters in diameter was raised above it (Fig. 3).

Euboean colonists from Pithekoussai (now Ischia) used to bury their dead under tumuli as well. Mounds measuring between 1.5 and 4.5 meters in diameter and raised directly above cremated burials were erected of stone debris, less frequently of earth.

Tumuli dating to the geometric period are also known from the Tsikalario site on the Naxos island. Around 20 mounds were discovered there that formed a necropolis near a small settlement. Tumuli measured around 10 meters in height and the mounds, consisting of sand and stones, were supported by stone periboloi shaped into regular circles. Most of them covered individual or a concentration of cremation places. In one case a tumulus covered a single, rectangular pit grave covered with stone slabs. Burial offerings for the deceased were placed in funeral pyres as well as in intentionally separated places. Except form the tumuli a large number of big, sealed vessels filled with sand was discovered. They were probably used for burials of children, whose bones decomposed.

Two of the most interesting mounds from the Tsikalario necropolis are tumuli nos. 1 and 6. Tumulus marked as number 1 was surrounded by a stone peribolos with a diameter reaching 12 meters (Fig 4). A stone box grave measuring from 2.1 to 0.8 meters was situated in the north-eastern part.

---

below the mound, while a stone circle measuring 3 meters in diameter which surrounded a cremation place was situated in the eastern part. The remaining area below the mound was divided into irregular spaces, but nothing was discovered there except for sand.

Tumulus no. 6 was surrounded by a stone peribolos measuring 10 meters in diameter (Fig. 5). A large stone slab measuring 2,5 meters by 1 meter was discovered under the mound in the south-western part of the tomb. A cremation place measuring 2 meters by 1,5 meter was situated in the centre of the mound, within the boundaries of which fragments of vessels, silver jewellery and weapons, including a fragment of an iron sword, were discovered. Three large clay vessels and a skyphos dating to the Geometric Period were discovered above the pyre. A second funerary pyre was situated in the southern part of the mound. To the south of the tumulus outside the boundaries of the peribolos the above mentioned large vessel filled with sand was found. Approximately 4,5 meters to the east of the tumulus no. 6 a smaller mound was situated that was also surrounded by a stone peribolos measuring 4,5 meters in diameter. The whole cemetery is dated to the Geometric Period except for two burials dating to the 6th century B.C.

During the early Iron Age tumuli are also encountered in Macedonia, Epirus (a few tumuli in the Pogoni region and surrounding territories) as well

---

15 Andreou E., Andreou I., *E koilada tou gormou sto Pogoni tes Epeirou* [in:] E Perifereia
as Phthiotis, where a Submycenaean tumulus necropolis was discovered in Marmara\textsuperscript{16}.

Tumuli from the necropolis in Vergina are dated to early Iron Age – to the years 1000 – 700 B.C.\textsuperscript{17} Around 300 tumuli were situated there, covering an area of approximately one square kilometer. Tumuli measure between 10 and 16 meters in diameter and between 1 and 1,5 meters in height. Red earth brought from outside the necropolis area was used to raise them. In some cases tumuli were surrounded by round periboloi erected from rough stones. Each of the mounds covered from 4 to 25 burials and was part of a group of 4-8 tumuli, which allowed to assume that the tumuli were resting places for entire families or bloodlines and separate tumulus groups belonged to a given clan\textsuperscript{18}.

Various types of burials were discovered below the mounds. Among them shaft graves, burials in stone box graves and burials in pithoi, often equipped with iron weapons and bronze jewellery were discovered (Fig. 6). Shaft graves were the most frequent ones. Among the 220 burials excavated only two of the bodies were cremated, the rest of the bodies were not burnt. M. Andronikos\textsuperscript{19} thinks that the cemetery ceased to be used right before the year 700 B.C., while A.M. Snodgrass\textsuperscript{20} thinks that the mounds from the Vergina necropolis were probably also used later, during the 7\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.

\textsuperscript{17} Andronikos M., \textit{Vergina. The Prehistoric...}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., \textit{Vergina. The Royal...}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{20} Snodgrass A., \textit{The Dark Age of Greece: An archaeological survey of the 11th to the 8th centuries BC}, Edinburgh 1971, p. 139.
Abdera is also a very interesting site. A big cemetery is situated here, which was first used around 650 B.C. Graves of adult individuals, which constitute only around 12% of all burials, are distinguished by earth mounds of various sizes. In area II two big mounds are dated to the 7th century B.C. and contain cremated burials in urns with ceramics as their only burial equipment. It also seems that there was a second period of tumulus raising on the site, dating to the end of the 6th century B.C., accompanied by a more abundant and richer equipment of the burials.

By the end of the Protogeometric Period around 900 B.C. the inhabitants of Thessaly began using cremation in their burial rites. Cremated bodies were buried below tumuli raised above cremation places and the whole area was often encircled by stone circles – periboloi. Small multiburial tumuli had been used here during the entire so called “Dark Ages”. Most of them were used for single burials, although some had been in use for a couple generations, which resulted in an accumulation of many graves and rich equipment, mostly arms.

Tumuli dating to early Iron Age were discovered in Agioi Teodoroi, Chyretiaj and Halos in Thessaly. A number of mounds were discovered in Agioi Teodoroi, however only one of them has been excavated. It measured 27 meters in diameter and 5 meters in height. A tolos grave (diameter 5,5 meters; height 4,1 meter) was situated under the mound together with numerous cremated burials dating to the Protogeometric and Geometric Period. A tumulus in Chyretiaj was raised above 4-5 tolos graves dating to the Geometric Period. Furthermore, tumulus presence was signalled in Valestino and near Volos.

In Thessaly tumuli dating to early Iron Age may be divided into two groups. The first one consists of tumuli raised over tolos graves in the Protogeometric and Geometric Periods. Examples of tumuli from this group are those in Agioi Teodoroi and Chyretiaj. The second group includes tumuli raised by

---

the end of the Protogeometric Period, mainly over funeral pyres. Tumuli from Halos are especially characteristic for this group.

The tumulus necropolis in Halos, Thessaly, is situated about 5 kilometres to the east from Platanos, a modern village. Until now 42 tumuli have been discovered there, of which only 6 have been excavated by archaeologists\(^{25}\). The necropolis was used from the Late Protogeometric to the Archaic Period.

The first tumulus, marked as ‘E’, was excavated in 1899\(^{26}\). It was raised to the height of about 5 meters and was built of river pebbles and earth. Bones of sacrificed animals were excavated on the depth of about 2 meters and remains of a funeral pyre were discovered half a meter below. Further down, on the depth of about 4.5 - 5 meters ceramic fragments, pieces of burnt bronze and two iron spearheads were found. The leader of the excavations dated the tumulus to the 8\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. and declared it a polyandreion, that is a collective warrior grave.\(^{27}\)

The second tumulus, marked as ‘A’, was excavated in 1912 by Wace and Thompson\(^{28}\). It measured 18-20 meters in diameter and was up to 2 meters high (Fig. 7). Similar to the first one, it was built of river pebbles and earth. 16 funeral pyres were discovered below the mould on the depth of about 1 meter, each measuring between 0.6 and 2.4 meters in diameter. Each of them was covered with a layer of large stones, stone slabs and small pebbles. A layer


\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 32.

of about 0,1 - 0,2 meters of ash, fragments of burnt human bones, ceramics, iron weapons, bronze jewellery and other objects was situated directly below the pyres. 10 of the discovered burials were defined as male and 6 as female graves based on the objects discovered. The tumulus was used during the first half of the 8th century B.C.²⁹

Another three tumuli, marked with Greek letters ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘Γ’ were excavated during the 90s of the previous century.³⁰

Tumulus marked as ‘A’ measured between 21,5 and 29 meters in diameter and was up to 2,87 meters high (Fig. 8). It was built of ordinary stones, river pebbles and earth. It raised over a small round stone tolos measuring 1,8 meters in diameter and 0,99 meters in height as well as over remains of 52 funeral pyres. A cremated burial in a grave measuring 0,9 meters in diameter and 0,35 meters in depth filled with remains of a funeral pyre with burnt earth, bones and clay was excavated within the boundaries of the tolos. All the funeral pyres discovered below the tumulus measured between 0,6 and 0,7 meters in diameter and consisted of burnt earth, wood, human bones, ceramic fragments, iron weapons, bronze jewellery and vessels. Some stone slabs were also discovered, which probably served as stelae.³¹

Tumulus B measured around 19-20 meters in diameter and is preserved up to the height of 3,1 meters. It was built in a manner similar to tumulus A. A small peribolos was located under the mound, along with 43 funeral pyres, 2 pitos burials and 25 box and burrowed child burials. The peribolos was situ-

---

²⁹ Ibid., p. 27.
³⁰ Georganas I., Constructing Identities..., p. 292.
³¹ Ibid.
Graves under tumuli A and B are dated to the period between the 9th century B.C. and the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries\(^ {32}\).

Tumulus Γ was one of the largest on the necropolis (Fig 9.) It measured 73.24 meters and covered 5 stone toloses, each measuring between 3 and 6 meters in diameter, 34 funeral pyres and 20 box burials and child burials. Stone toloses were built of limestone and measured between 3 and 6 meters in diameter. An interesting feature of this tumulus was the presence of 14 stone structures situated concentrically between the funeral pyres, located near the middle of the tumulus, with child graves situated on the outer edge of the tumulus. Each of the stone constructs consisted of blocks: a horizontal and vertical one, that touched one another, forming an L-shaped structure. Researchers

interpreted them as stelae and sacrifice altars at the same time\textsuperscript{33}. The tumulus was in use from the Protogeometric Period to the Archaic Period\textsuperscript{34}.

The character of the Halos tumuli (funeral pyre - stone layer - earth mound) is unique not only to Thessaly, but to the entire Greece. In Macedonia, on the above mentioned Vergina site, where a tumulus cemetery from the early Iron Age was excavated and researched, skeletal burials are in majority, while cremated burials are almost nonexistent\textsuperscript{35}. No cremated burials whatsoever were discovered under the tumuli in Chauchitsa\textsuperscript{36}, Dion\textsuperscript{37} and Pogoni\textsuperscript{38}.

Similar tumuli covering both skeletal burials and cremated burials were discovered on the Glasinac plateau in Bosnia, which in turn led to a theory about a migration of the people buried under the tumuli in Halos from the north\textsuperscript{39}. Georganas disagrees\textsuperscript{40} and points to various “anomalies” that were common in Thessaly when it came to funeral rites and to a typical, local character of the burial gifts discovered under the tumuli in Halos.

Tumuli dating to the Iron age are known from two sites in Boeotia. The first one is Vranesi, situated about 5 kilometres to the south-west of Orchomenos, where a small earth mound was discovered, measuring 7 meters in diameter and about 2 meters in height, dating to the beginning of the 9th century B.C.\textsuperscript{41} The tumulus covered both cremated and skeletal burials placed in two box graves and equipped with weapons (including bronze swords) as well as golden items. The second tumulus, raised over a rich female burial, dates to the Late Geometric period and was discovered on a site situated at the banks of the Paralimni Lake\textsuperscript{42}.

A tradition of raising tumuli over the graves of the deceased has been known in almost entire Europe since the Neolithic. The inhabitants of Greece

\textsuperscript{33} Georganas I., \textit{Constructing Identities...}, 292.
\textsuperscript{35} Andronikos M., \textit{Vergina I...}, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{36} Casson S., \textit{Excavations in Macedonia...}, p. 7; Id., \textit{Excavations in Macedonia II...}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{39} Snodgrass A., \textit{The Dark Age of Greece...}, p.162; Hammond 1972, 403-404.
\textsuperscript{40} Georganas I., \textit{Constructing Identities...}, pp. 294-295.
\textsuperscript{41} Coldstream J.N., \textit{Geometric Greece...}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 202.
probably started burying their dead under earth mounds at that time. That custom became especially popular during the Middle Bronze Age.

Despite various political turbulences, migrations and military raids during later periods, the tradition of raising tumuli not only did not diminish, but rather rose in rank. Burials under tumuli were meant for heroes slain in battle or individuals that considerably contributed to the local community. The works of Homer influenced this process greatly and permanently introduced and preserved the tradition of burying heroes beneath earth mounds among the Greeks.

During the Geometric, Archaic and Classic period the Greeks rewarded distinguished citizens with tumulus burials, the most magnificent example of which being obviously the Marathon Soros - a gigantic tumulus covering the remains of virtuous Athenians that defended the independence of their homeland from a Persian raid.