

The Appearance of Monumental Tombs in Thrace and Macedonia: a Comparative Perspective

The appearance of monumental tombs in Thrace and Macedonia during the 4th century BC marks a change in the architectural traditions of these regions; it is also a sign of social and political transformation. This paper seeks to explain the introduction of imposing domed and vaulted tombs by changes in the way Thracian and Macedonian elites expressed power and claimed legitimacy through burial customs and monuments. Recent discoveries in Bulgaria help us to reconsider the chronological development of tholos tombs, which now seem to have been introduced by Greek architects around 350–340 BC: at a time when the Odrysian kingdom was falling apart. I suggest that in Thrace, as well in Macedonia, the monumental tombs and the related burial practices were meant to convey a message of power and prosperity; but behind this message is a story of crisis, political struggle, and loss of authority.

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