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THE TOMB OF KAZANLAK RECONSIDERED

(Taf. CXXXVIII–CXXXIX, Abb. 1–3)

Abstract

La decorazione della tomba di Kazanlak mostra influenze dall'architettura greca in combinazione con elementi della vita quotidiana dell'aristocrazia Tracia. Difatti la decorazione architettonica della tomba dà l'illusione di un heroon monumentale come l'*Arsinoeion* di Samothrace (275–270 a.C.). Anche alcuni motivi decorativi come il fregio di bucrani e rosette, e in particolare la galleria aperta nella zona superiore della tomba, appaiono per la prima volta nell'*Arsinoeion*. Perciò una datazione della tomba nel secondo quarto del terzo secolo a.C. sembra probabile. Dobbiamo cercare il committente della tomba fra gli aristocratici locali dopo la rovina della Tracia a causa della morte di Lisimaco nel 281 a.C. In conclusione la tomba di Kazanlak offre un bel esempio di interazione fra l'architettura greca e costumi locali Traci.

The famous Tomb of Kazanlak in Bulgaria, usually dated to the later Classical or early Hellenistic periods, is one of those Thracian tombs of which the decoration illustrates the interest of the Thracian aristocracy in Greek culture¹. The decoration shows a strong relationship with contemporary monumental Greek architecture and therefore it is worthwhile to reconsider it (Abb. 1). In the rectangular anteroom, the *prothamos*, which is 1,96 m long, 1,12 m wide and 2,25 m high, the similarity to contemporary monumental architecture and wall decoration is obvious. In the *tholos*, the *thalamos*, which is 3,25 m high and has a diameter of 2,65 m, this connection seems less clear because of its conical shape through which the length of the decorative zones diminishes and their coherence becomes obscure. On closer observation however, their architectural background and coherence become clear as well. Both the anteroom and the *tholos* have a high socle consisting of large painted imitations of marble slabs in various colors. Above these is a red central zone. In the anteroom a frieze follows with an *acanthus* scroll on a black ground and a somewhat higher white-grounded frieze depicting polychrome battle scenes between warriors on foot, which are surrounded by groups of mounted warriors. Due to the conical cross-section of the upper part of the anteroom, the warrior friezes meet at the top where in real architecture the ceiling of the room would have been. In the *tholos*, the red zone is crowned by an elaborate painted frieze showing an architrave decorated with alternating *bucrania* and rosettes. Above this zone is another one of roughly the same height as the red one. In this second zone an aristocratic couple is depicted partaking in a meal surrounded by servants bringing delicacies and by horses and a chariot. The long slender figures, characteristic of the earlier Hellenistic period, as well as the sitting couple fill the entire height of the frieze². Above this zone runs another elaborate architrave in which there is a gutter with waterspouts in the shape of lion heads. Above this frieze is yet another zone which is lower than the other two. Moreover, because of the conical shape of the *tholos*, this zone is also considerably shorter than the other two. It depicts a race of three *bigae* separated by three Ionic columns. The remaining small round ceiling of the *tholos* is covered by a stone slab.

It can be observed that the artists did not fully understand how the Ionic architraves should have been applied correctly. In the first place, such architraves were more appropriate on the exteriors of buildings than on the inside. This is especially obvious in the case of the gutter with the waterspouts in the upper architrave,

¹ For the Kazanlak tomb in general, see the abbreviations, esp. Mikov 1954, col. pl. 25–35; the bibliography given in Torelli 2004, n. 8; and the extensive descriptions of the figural friezes given by Torelli 2004.

² Dimitrov 1961, 335; EAA V (1963) 841 s.v. Pagasae (L. V. Borrelli).

which illogically are directed to the inside of the tomb. The *bucrania* and the rosettes of the lower architrave should not have been placed on the *fasciae* of an architrave but on a plain frieze above it. The earliest examples of this motif – the rosettes actually are a variation of *phialai* – can be found in a correct position on the frieze of the *Ptolemaion* and in the interior of the *Arsinoeion* at Samothrace from ca. 275–270 BC³.

When we imagine the painted decoration applied to a straight wall, the intentions of the decorators become clearer (Abb. 2). They used architraves of the kind they knew from real architecture to divide the wall above the socle in three zones. In real architecture and in wall decorations, a wall usually consists of a socle and a high main zone, while an upper zone or frieze can occasionally be found as in the outer wall of the *cella* of the *Parthenon*, in Etruscan tombs and in the anteroom of the Kazanlak tomb. The less common combination of two high zones in the central part of the wall in the Kazanlak tomb can be found in high monumental buildings such as the *Arsinoeion* of Samothrace (Abb. 3) and the late Hellenistic Tower of the Winds at Athens⁴. The lower main zone in the tomb is painted plain red as can be found frequently in all kinds of buildings⁵. The banquet scene in the second main zone and the racing scene in the upper zone of the tholos remind us of many similar scenes depicting funerary banquets and games in Etruscan tombs and can also be compared to mythological scenes, megalographies, which in the Greek world often decorated monumental buildings such as sanctuaries and assembly halls⁶.

Finally, narrower figurative friezes at the top of walls were not uncommon in monumental architecture as well as in tombs. In the *tholos* of the Kazanlak tomb we see a rather rare feature, namely three painted Ionic columns, which seemingly support the covering slab of the tomb. Rows of columns in the upper zone of a wall can be found in contemporary architecture as well as in wall decorations. A fine example of a partly open gallery in the upper zone was part of the afore-mentioned *Arsinoeion* at Samothrace (Fig. 3). Piers formed by Doric pilasters on the outside and Corinthian half-columns inside, alternating with window-openings with partly open marble screens, served to give light and air to the interior. The motif of rows of half columns in the upper zone of wall decorations presumably derives from such galleries. The spaces between these columns could be neutral but occasionally, like in a fine example from Delos from ca. 100 BC, the *intercolumnia* were painted light blue and their narrow cassette ceilings were painted in perspective as seen from below⁷. In the Kazanlak tomb the motif of the painted gallery in the upper zone is combined with the painted chariot race. The suggestion of openness which such galleries probably created, may have given the beholder in the tomb the impression that the race took place behind the row of columns, i.e. outside on the plain surrounding the tomb. In this way the artist created an early but refined attempt of illusionism. So, in spite of the somewhat illogical execution of the painted decorations and their distortion by the shape of the tomb, we can recognize the decoration of the tomb as an imitation of a real contemporary monumental Hellenistic building (see Abb. 2).

In Greek culture *tholoi* were designated for public assembly and dining rooms, for sanctuaries, especially for heroized monarchs, as the *Philippeion* at Olympia, and occasionally even for private dining rooms⁸. Apparently the commissioner of the Kazanlak tomb was very conscious of the symbolic meaning of the *tholos* he chose as a model for his tomb, namely to represent a heroon in which a funerary banquet was taking place while the funerary games went on around it.

It appears from Thracian grave gifts and tomb decorations that the characteristic aspects of the life of a Thracian aristocrat were ostentatious banquets, the possession of servants and horses together with chariot races and military exploits⁹. Those are exactly the elements that had been added to the painted architectural

³ For the lion's head waterspouts which also may be found in the *Ptolemaion* and the *Arsinoeion*, see Frazer 1990, 211–215, resp. fig. 166 and 157, 168; for the *bucrania* and the rosettes motif see Dimitrov 1961, 335; Frazer 1990, 198–207, resp. fig. 47–48, 49 B–C.F.G. 161B. 162, pl. 83–85; fig. 157. 161. 161A; for the *Arsinoeion* see also below n. 4.

⁴ See resp. McCredie – Roux 1992, pl. 71 = our fig. 3; Travlos 1971, 281. 283, fig. 364.

⁵ See for example houses and tombs in *Olynthus*, Robinson – Graham 1938, 295–298.

⁶ See EAA IV (1961) 961–962 s. v. Megalografia (R. Bianchi Bandinelli).

⁷ See also the upper gallery as decoration of a closed wall in the Hieron at Samothrace, Lauter 1986, fig. 67a; for the Delos example Ling 1991, fig. 19.

⁸ See in general Lauter 1986, 176–179; Seiler 1986; a sanctuary in the palace of Vergina, Lauter 1986, fig. 43; a circular *andron* in a house at Pella, Salzmann 1982, 108, Inv.-nr. 105, pl. 38,1.

⁹ See in general Zazoff *et al.* 1985, 640–642; Zazoff – Schneider 1986, 17.

decoration of the tomb. In the upper zone of the anteroom military exploits are depicted in the fashion of traditional Greek battle friezes; in the *tholos* a funerary banquet in which the heroized couple, surrounded by their servants and horses, takes part can be seen in the second central zone, resembling a traditional Greek mythological megalography. Seen through the upper gallery, the funerary games seem to be taking place outside the tomb. Therefore, the decoration of the Tomb of Kazanlak presents a fine reflection of Hellenistic architecture in Thrace, but within the Greek frame of the tomb the traditional aspects of Thracian aristocratic life are depicted.

The decorations of the tomb are usually dated sometime around 300 BC. Given the strong Hellenistic character of the decoration, it is tempting to connect it to the strongly Hellenized capital of Odrysia, *Seuthopolis*, of king Seuthes III, who was an ally of Antigonos Gonatas. It was situated only 8 km away from Kazanlak and flourished around the last quarter of the 4th century BC. The aristocratic part of the town consisted of peristyle houses, entirely in the Greek tradition. Moreover, the king's palace had a sanctuary dedicated to the Great Gods of Samothrace¹⁰. However, the fact that the earliest extant parallels for some elements of the tomb's decoration, such as the upper gallery and the row of *bucrania* and rosettes, both found in Samothrace, date from ca. 275–270 BC, rather suggest a date nearer to the middle of the 3rd century BC. Therefore, the tomb seems to be a local aristocratic tomb dating to the second quarter of the 3rd century BC, built in the period of the disintegration of Thrace after the death of Lysimachos in 281 BC.

In summary, the Tomb of Kazanlak is a fine example of the interaction between Greek architecture and local cultural traditions.

Appendix

A note on the possible identity of the couple buried in the Kazanlak tomb

In an article published in 2004, M. TORELLI has attempted to identify the couple that was buried in the tomb. Essentially he based his identification on the following arguments:

- The tomb was covered by a large tumulus with a diameter of 43 m; this is common for tombs of princes.
- The burial of a husband and wife together was not a Thracian custom.
- The decoration of the tomb shows a mixture of Greek and Thracian elements.
- In one of the battle scenes the opponents respectively wear the Macedonian *kausia* and Thracian helmets while in the other one they wear Thracian or Celtic helmets. Therefore the battle scenes reflect historical events which were characteristic for the 3rd century BC in Thrace.
- The man of the banqueting couple wears a (laurel)-wreath on his head, but the woman a royal diadem.

For these reasons, M. TORELLI concludes that the man was a Macedonian warrior who had married a local (Odrysian) princess and had founded one of the small kingdoms in the area of *Seuthopolis*. They were created during the period of disintegration of Thrace caused by the death of Lysimachos in 281 BC – who himself is actually known to have had an Odrysian wife.

So far, I can quite agree with M. TORELLI's argumentation.

Then, however, he suggests identifying the man with a certain Macedonian named Adaios. He is known as a local prince in Thrace who issued his own coins. This character might have been a soldier of Lysimachos and like him might have been married to a local princess.

In my opinion, the Kazanlak tomb does not offer clear evidence for such a supposition. Furthermore, this identification possibly raises some chronological problems. It seems that Adaios issued coins until about 230 BC. If he really had been a soldier of Lysimachos, he must have been very old at the time of his death. Furthermore, his tomb would be dated later than we have assumed. All this is not impossible, but for the lack of real evidence I think it is more prudent to ascribe the Kazanlak tomb to a local aristocrat or perhaps an unknown adventurer-general, who was active in Thrace around the second quarter of the 3rd century BC.¹¹

¹⁰ See EAA Suppl. 1970 (1973) 709 f. s. v. Seuthopolis (M. Cicikova).

¹¹ See extensively Torelli 2004; esp. 151; see for Adaios Danov 1979, 63 f.; for his coinage Hammond – Walbank 1988, 463.

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Abbildungen

- Abb. 1: Schematic picture of the Tomb of Kazanlak (design by the author)
Abb. 2: Reconstruction of the hypothetical architectural model for the Tomb of Kazanlak (design by the author)
Abb. 3: The Arsinoeion of Samothrace, 275–250 BC (after McCredie – Roux 1992, pl. 71)

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