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ABSTRACT

A Forgotten Grave Monument in Apollonia (Albania)

Renald Meta – Jonathan Ritter

In 1988, during the extension of a modern water channel, an ancient monument was discovered in the plain west of Apollonia (Albania). While the excavators described it as an altar, this paper argues that the monument may be better interpreted as a tomb of the aedicula type as it is situated in the necropolis area close to the city wall. The monument is an important indicator of Apollonia's funeral customs and raises questions regarding the funeral assemblies and areas of representation in Apollonia.

KEYWORDS

necropolis, aedicula tomb, aediculae, topography

A Forgotten Grave Monument in Apollonia (Albania)

Introduction

¹ Remains of an ancient monument were found in the plain west of Apollonia in 1988. In this process archaeologists conducted a rescue excavation¹. The monument, which is located in the Roman necropolis area adjacent to the fortification wall, was described by excavators as an altar. This article discusses the preserved documentation and reassigns the interpretation as a Roman aedicula. The monument provides new insight into the local funerary customs and sparks the debate about the funeral assemblies and their spatial arrangements.

Locating the Monument with Archival Data

² The monument can be localised by means of two photos: the first (Fig. 1) gives an overview of the excavated monument situated in the bank of a water canal, next to a Roman brick structure² (Fig. 3) as well as a round bunker dating to the Communist era³. The brick structure with mortar is not well preserved and is overgrown by bushes. The monastery of Saint Mary, the workshop buildings of the modern archaeological park and the acropolis (Hill 104) are visible in the photograph's background. The second photo (Fig. 2) shows the monument and the foundation of a modern bridge. The Roman brick structure (Fig. 3) and traces of the modern bunker were verified in the field. All structures and features that facilitated the localisation of the monument were marked in an orthophoto (Fig. 4). This led to its localisation in the eastern bank of the modern water canal, outside the city fortification wall, approximately 100 m west of Tower no. 8⁴ (Fig. 5).

¹ The results of the investigation remained unpublished. Two drawings of 1988, a plan with a section of the structure – firstly sketched freehand by Guri Pani and later processed by Agim Qyshka – and two pictures are held in a dossier at the Technical Archive of the National Institute for Cultural Heritage. We are grateful for the permission by the Technical Archive of the National Institute for Cultural Heritage to publish the material. We would like to thank Henner von Hesberg (Berlin) and Manuel Fiedler (Berlin) for their help and priceless discussions and Levente Daczó (Cluj-Napoca) for the contribution of an area's bird-eye-picture.

² Measurements of the visible parts: 2.16 m in height, 1.56 m in length, 2.40 m in width. Until now, no research on this structure was conducted, leaving it open for interpretation.

³ The round bunker is now destroyed, although traces of its foundation are still visible.

⁴ The position outside of the wall is based on the city wall documentation generally published in Dimo et al. 2007 and in other previously published works: Dimo 1989, 199–213; Koçi 1990, 257 f.; Grazia 1995, 761–781; Cabanes 1997, 848–870; Cabanes 1999, 569–580; Cabanes 2001, 701–715.



Fig. 1: Apollonia. Photo of the excavated monument

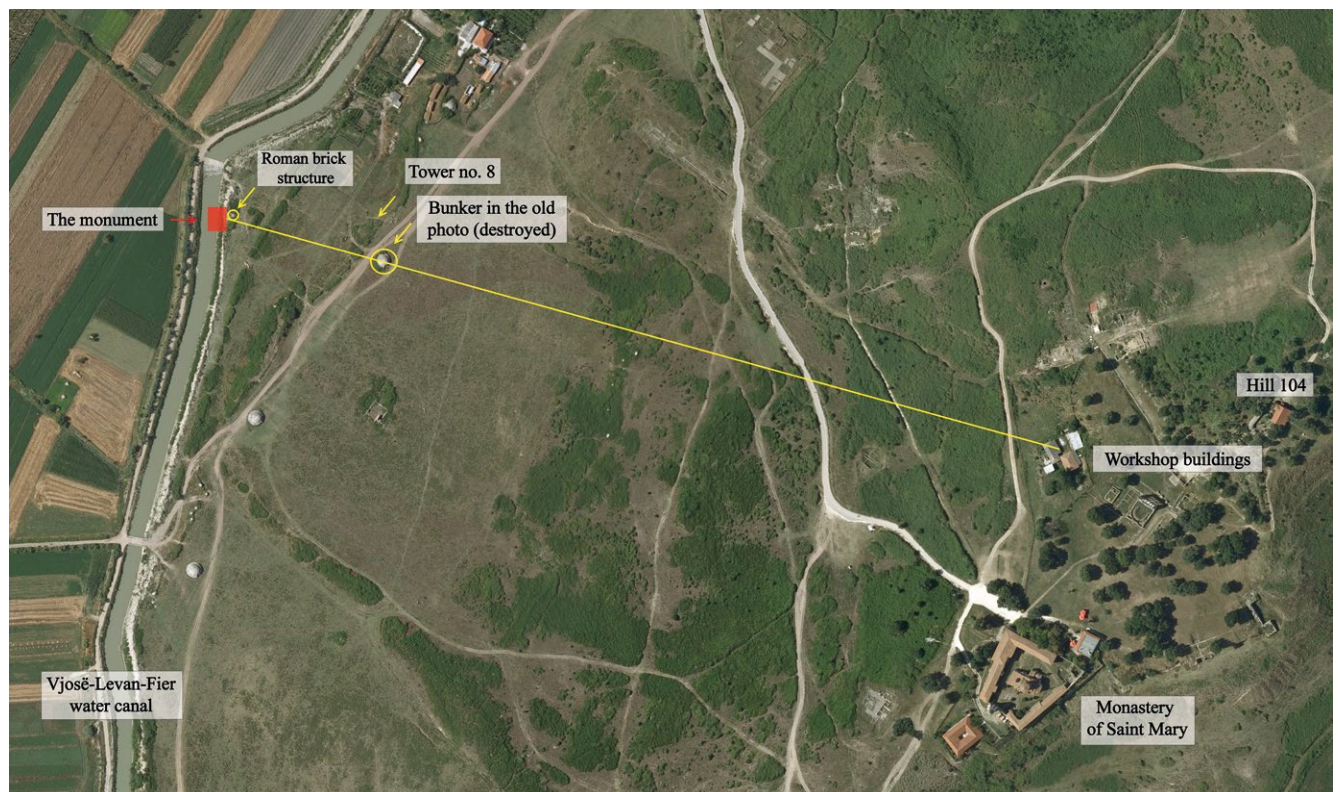


Fig. 2: Apollonia. Photo of the monument near the unfinished bridge

3 In the same area, parts of a Roman *necropolis* were excavated during canalisation works conducted by Aleksandra Mano⁵ in 1962. Other archaeological remains were discovered in the area in 1987⁶. Further, several scholars have situated the necropolis outside the city's fortification walls (Fig. 9)⁷. Recent excavations were conducted next to Tower no. 8 and the modern canal bridge, which will provide additional archaeological data for the area⁸.

Description

4 One corner of the monument is preserved. Its surviving dimensions are 3.16 m in length, 3 m in depth and ca. 0.8 m in height (Fig. 6). It was built by regularly cut, large stone blocks in dry masonry technique. Unfortunately, the building material is not mentioned in the documentation from 1988. The foundation is not visible or recorded, with the exception of the uppermost part of



4

5 See Mano 1974, 153–256. and Mano 1977/1978, 64 for the results of the excavation. The excavated area is situated 400–500 m away from the city wall, where 650 m² were excavated. The author has estimated at least an area of 2–3 ha for the Roman necropolis, which dates to the 1st – 3rd century A.D.

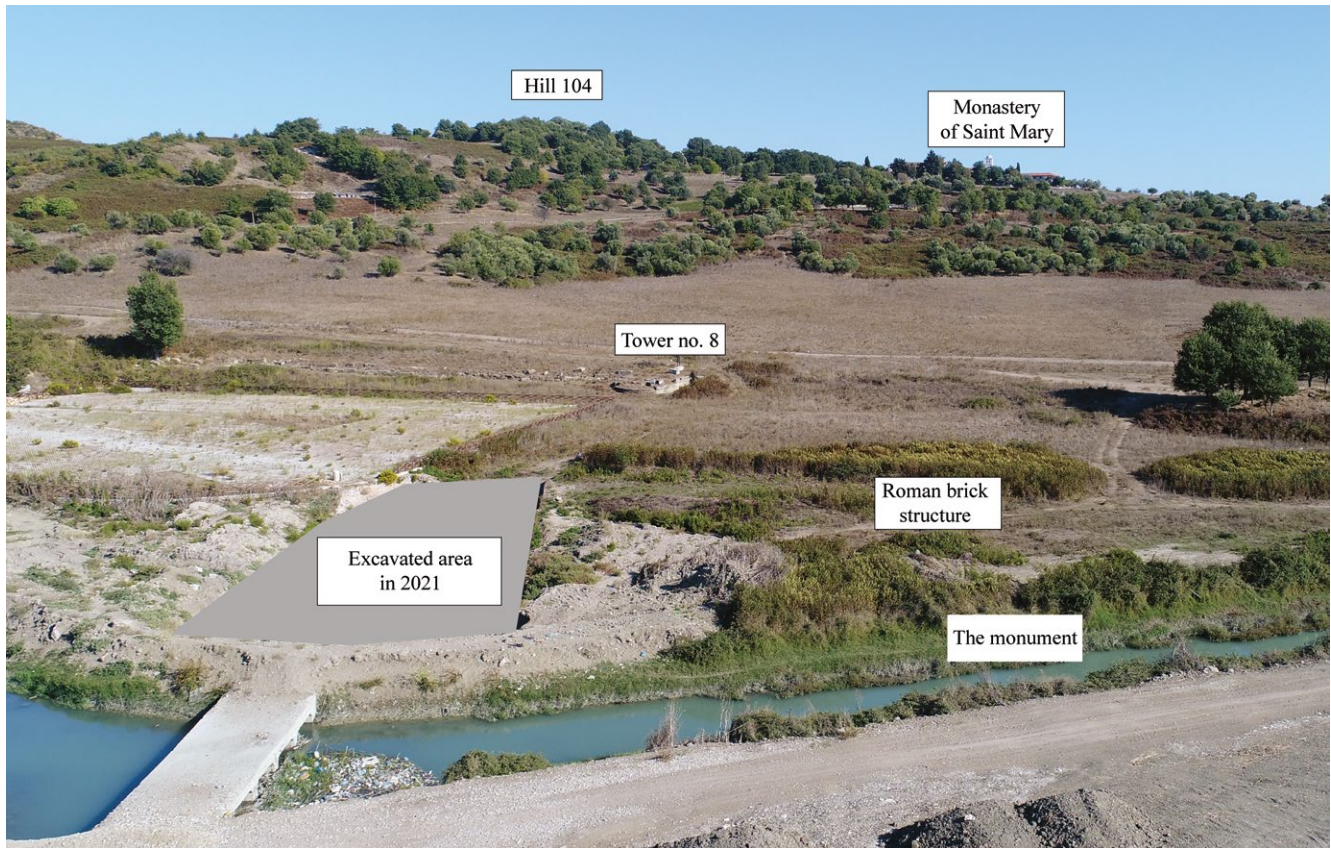
6 Dimo et al. 2007, 334. Due to some restoration works on the canal in 1987, the remains of a colonnade were found, as were two houses and structures, probably funerary monuments due to inhumation and cremation graves discovered nearby. One of these two structures is situated along the eastern slope of the canal, near the bridge. Furthermore, the presence of a colonnade and a square, perhaps a market, and two houses may help identify possible streets that lead to these structures and monuments in the western plain, in front of the city.

7 See Mano 1977/1978, 59–82; Dimo et al. 2007, 300–316; Stocker 2009, 417–562. 622.

8 Due to a road construction toward the Archaeological Park, an archaeological excavation was approved by the National Council of Archaeology, Decision no. 231, on 31 October 2019. The excavation, conducted in 2021, as portrayed in the detailed report delivered to the Technical Archive of NICH and seen in the field, was made near Tower no. 8 at the east side of the water canal and alongside the latter to the west.

Fig. 3: Apollonia. Roman brick structure between the bunker and the monument

Fig. 4: Apollonia. Location of the monument



5

Fig. 5: Apollonia. Bird's-eye view; visible are the water canal, the latest excavated area, the Roman brick structure, Tower no. 8 and the monastery of Apollonia

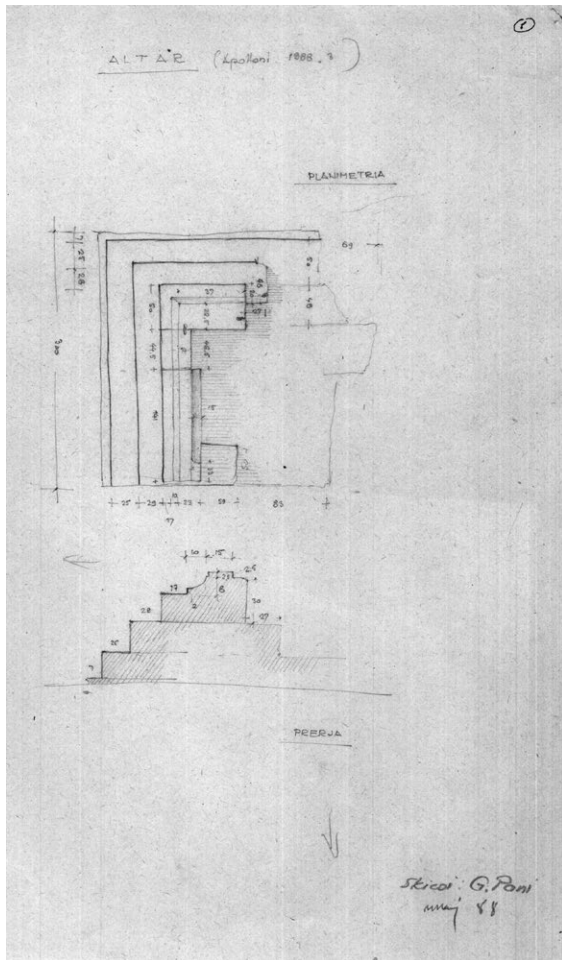
a regular ashlar layer. Above this layer, three further layers of rectangular stone blocks form a *krepis*⁹. The blocks have an *anathyrosis* and lie closely connected to each other. Furthermore, the top layer of the base has a flat profiled plinth base¹⁰. Only three blocks from the upper *krepis* are preserved¹¹. As seen in the drawings, the blocks of the top row have a decorative strip. From bottom to top, this can be described as follows: an end strip is placed 17 cm inwards on the block, then a narrow bar and a *cavetto* follow. Above that, another inwardly displaced end strip completes the decoration. Comparing the drawing and the pictures, certain differences can be observed in the decoration. The reliability of the details depicted in the drawing may therefore be questioned. Particularly, after the 17 cm end strip a vertical bar or a curved part of a *kymation* can be seen on the drawing. Then the *cavetto* follows. Since the upper end strip is not clearly visible in the drawing and is shaded in the pictures, it might be a convex mould or a vertical bar. The precise pattern of the decoration thus remains uncertain. In the drawings and the pictures, a notch is visible on top of the block (15 cm wide and 2.5 cm high). However, this is nothing but a broken surface. Finally, three clamp holes are visible; one in the second step and two in the top layer¹².

9 Dimensions of second step blocks according to the 1988 plan: width of outer block 0.50 m (visible 0.25 m), width of inner blocks 0.48 m and 0.56 m, height from the base 0.22 m; third step: width 0.56 m (visible 0.29 m), height 0.21 m.

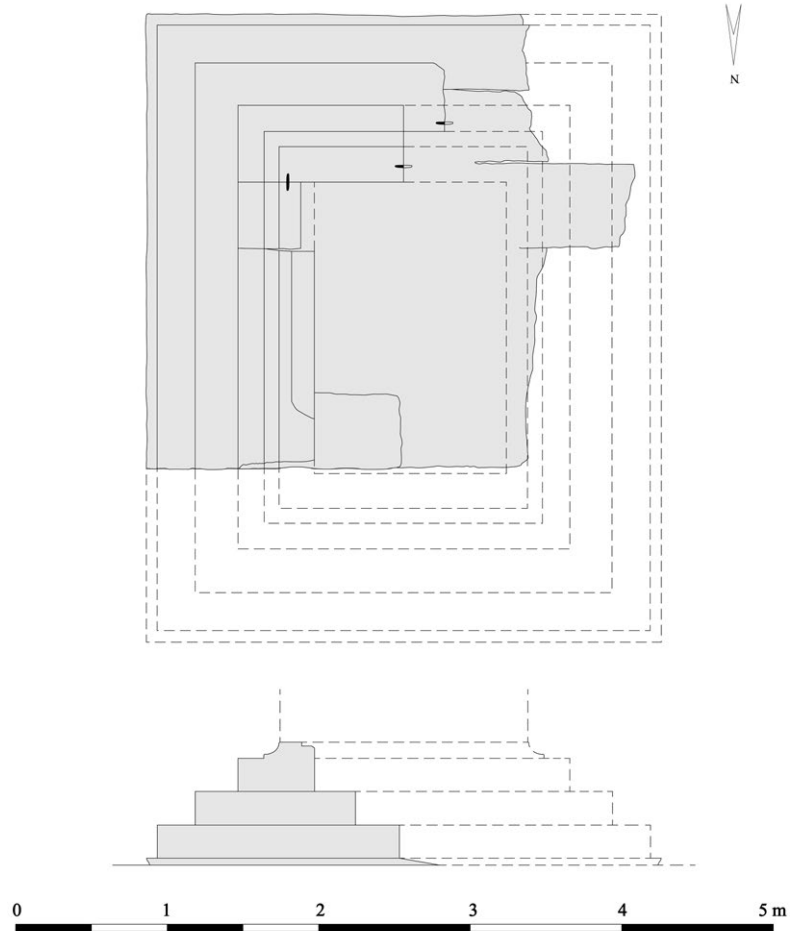
10 The measurements of the blocks vary in length (height: 32.5 cm; length: differing from 44.5 cm to 145.5 cm; width: 50 cm).

11 Dimensions: the complete block with the clamp is 1.09 m long, 0.50 m wide, 0.325 m high; the complete block without clamp is 0.43 m long, 0.445 m wide, 0.325 m high; the incomplete block is 1.455 m long, 0.50 m wide, 0.325 m high.

12 Dimension of the clamp holes: 10 cm × 2 cm.



6



7

Reconstruction and Dating

5 Although the structure is not well preserved, the architectural details give some reasonable options for a reconstruction. The clamp hole on the top layer next to the completely preserved block suggests that (at least) one block once continued on the north-western side.

6 In addition, the partially preserved lower *krepis* indicates that the monument must have extended further to the west and might be larger than expected. The northern side probably extended further as well.

7 Accepting that an additional block follows on the north-western side, a corner block was added to the southwest side for this hypothetical reconstruction (Fig. 7)¹³. The non-preserved side was reconstructed accordingly, resulting in minimum possible measurements of 2.4 m × 1.9 m (north to south × east to west) for the upper part of the structure and 4.1 m × 3.4 m for the lower part. Furthermore, the documented presence of clamps in the preserved top layer indicates that an additional structure followed on top. While the nature of this structure remains unknown, the flat base profile might indicate that it was not particularly high.

8 Step-like pedestal blocks with decorations were common in the region during the Roman period, as two buildings demonstrate¹⁴. In Apollonia, this architectural fea-

Fig. 6: Apollonia. Hand-sketched plan made by Guri Pani in 1988

Fig. 7: Apollonia. Hypothetical reconstruction plan and section of the monument found in 1988 (scale 1 : 50)

13 It is important to consider that the obtained blocks have different dimensions and therefore there is no modularity. Thus, the reconstruction remains hypothetical.

14 Due to the above-mentioned problem with the plinth base profile, no precise comparison is possible.

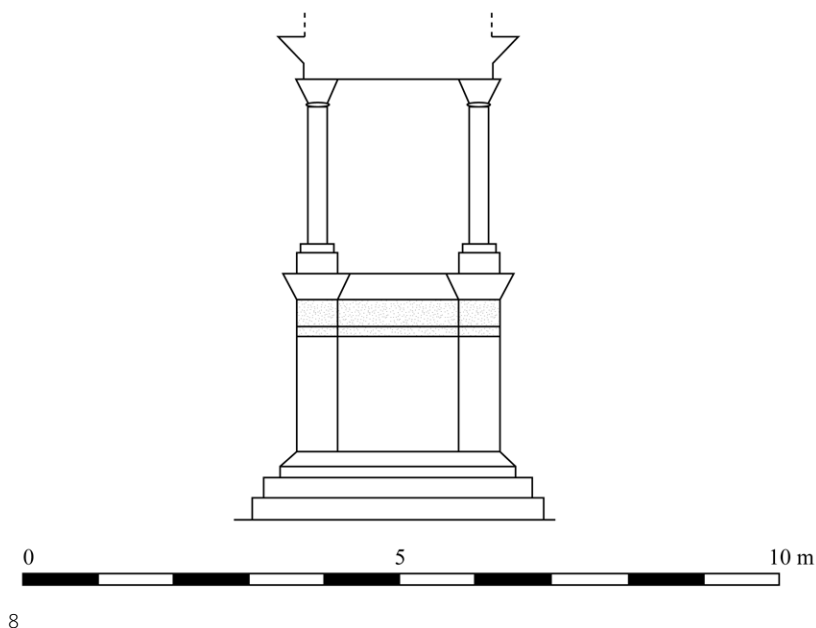


Fig. 8: Apollonia. Reconstruction of a grave monument with Amazonomachy and hunting scenes (scale 1 : 100)

monuments in Albania are rare. Therefore, no clear typological classification is possible and the questionable plinth profile can only provide limited information. Nevertheless, the monument size fits that of the common Roman tomb of the *aedicula* type¹⁹. Furthermore, the widespread use of this monument type and its variations offers the closest similarities²⁰.

Assuming that the monument can in fact be interpreted as a tomb of the *aedicula* type, the best comparable examples come from Italy and Slovenia. For example, a similarly constructed *krepis* can be observed at the *aedicula* of Caius Spectatius Priscianus²¹ in *Celeia* (modern Šempeter, Slovenia), the monument of C. Spectatius Secundianus²² and another *aedicula* type tomb²³. Some other examples of a similarly sized monument also include the pediment tomb grave²⁴ from *Pompeii* (Italy). Earlier examples are the monument of Marcus Obulacus²⁵ and the tomb monument of Aefionius Rufus²⁶ from *Sarsina* (Italy).

Within the area of Apollonia, no other base for a tomb of the *aedicula* type with a similar structure was found *in situ*²⁷. Only one Antonine-period temple tomb was excavated in the *Kryegjata* valley by Pellegrino Claudio Sestieri²⁸. In the same area,

ture can be observed on two boundaries of a sanctuary complex¹⁵ and in *Oricum* on an altar foundation¹⁶. Current research suggests a dating to the Roman period (1st century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.). Other examples for a similar structural solution within the Roman empire can be found on an altar from *Villach St. Agathen*¹⁷ and a grave monument in *Krufft*¹⁸.

The monument's location within the area of the Roman necropolis (1st – 3rd century A.D.) and its partly preserved dimensions allow us to make some interpretative assumptions, and to connect it with Roman funerary architecture: While similar step-like pedestal bases are typical for a wide range of monument types in the Roman Empire, such Roman-period

15 Rey 1939, 13 f. pls. 17. 21; Follian 2015, 182–186. It is to note that Follian did not correctly copy the profile of the base from Rey's documentation. Follian 2015, 185 fig. 187.

16 Budina 1964, 174 f.

17 Kremer 2001a, 136 figs. 90. 91. Dated to the second half of 2nd century A.D.

18 Gabelmann 1979, 24 f. fig. 30. Dated around 100 A.D.

19 Scholz 2012, 135–150; Kremer 2001a, 405–407 tab. 7; 406 tab. 8.

20 For variations of *aediculae* see: Ortalli 1997, 313–388; Scholz 2012, 130; Kremer 2001a, 319. On distributions of the Noricum-Pannonic *aedicula* type variants see: Scholz 2012, 4 tab. 4. On distributions of *aediculae* see: Scholz 2012, 5 tab. 5.

21 Reconstruction height: 8.30 m; dating between 70–200 A.D.; see Kremer 2001b, 35–43.

22 Scholz 2012, 129; Kremer 2001b, 27–52; Priester 1998, 7–41; Kranz 1986, 193–239.

23 Reconstructed measurements: width: 5.80 m, depth: 3.10 m; dating: second half of the 2nd century A.D.; see Maver 2004, 343–414; Scholz 2012, 128.

24 Gabelmann 1979, 35 fig. 4. 5 (reconstruction at page 69, fig. 41.1).

25 Ortalli 1997, 322. 320 fig. 3.

26 Ortalli 1997, 323. 325 fig. 5; 326 fig. 6.

27 In the Roman *necropolis* excavated by Mano, one brick foundation and a brick-built structure were found, but these are not comparable to the monument regarding their building elements and size. See Mano 1974, 189 f. 198.

28 Sestieri 1942, 3–12; Sestieri 1956, 30–49; von Hesberg – Eck 2008, 31–98.

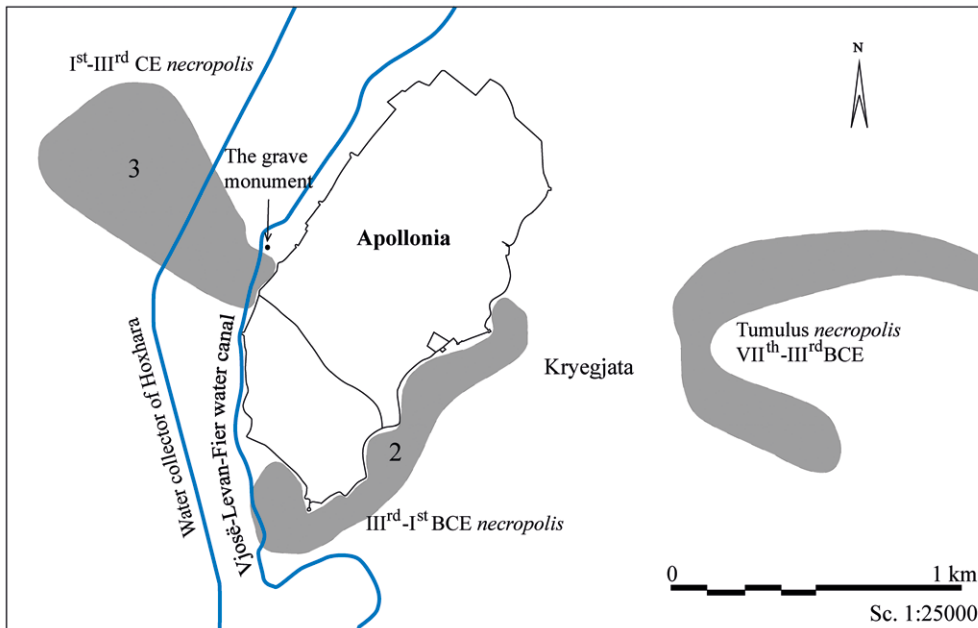


Fig. 9: Apollonia. Location of the monument within the necropolis areas

9

Camillo Praschniker found fragments of a temple tomb²⁹. Furthermore, there is evidence for additional grave monuments as indicated by preserved architectural fragments of the Hellenistic³⁰ and Roman period³¹. Among the published material, a limestone frieze with subdivided hunting scenes³² and an Amazonomachy³³ stands out. Due to its architectural form, the frieze belongs to at least one *aedicula* and closes off the upper part of the base (Fig. 8). The frieze dates to the first half of 3rd century A.D.³⁴ and shows popular themes of *otium* and *pietas*³⁵. Two female figures³⁶ from the 1st or 2nd century A.D. could be the lateral supports for an *aedicula*, as a comparison to the Mausoleum of Armasta in *Termessos*³⁷ shows. Therefore, the architectural fragments suggest that such a tomb type existed in Apollonia as well.

12 Generally, the discussed monument may offer further insights into the context and decorative styles of Apollonian funerary monuments during the Roman period. For the first time, a fixed location for such a representative monument was recorded. The

29 It can be assumed that Sestieri carried out the excavation based on the published finds from Praschniker. Further investigations need to be made to verify if the pieces found by Praschniker and Sestieri belong to the same temple tomb or to two separate monuments. Sestieri 1956, 30–49; Praschniker 1920, 47 f.

30 Dimo – Haxhimihali 2018, 389–400.

31 von Hesberg 2017, 399–407; von Hesberg 2016, 131–176; von Hesberg 2014, 13–22; von Hesberg – Eck 2008, 31–98.

32 The scenes depict the hunt of an antelope, a gazelle, a boar, and a lion. The block with the hunt of a lion: (inv. 4011) and the hunt for a gazelle (inv. 2449) are preserved in the Museum of Apollonia. The frieze blocks of the hunt of an antelope and the hunt of a boar are lost; however, old pictures are available. See: Praschniker 1920, 171–174. Three additional animal depictions are mentioned by Praschniker: Praschniker 1920, 174 nos. a–c.

33 The three blocks with the Amazonomachy are now lost. See: Praschniker 1920, 171 figs. 84 a. b; 86. Already in Hellenistic times, the theme of the Amazonomachy was popular on grave monuments in Apollonia. On this topic see: von Hesberg 2014, 13–22; Pojani 2006, 163.

34 von Hesberg 2017, 399–407.

35 von Hesberg 2017, 404.

36 Both figures were found in the monastery. The first figure mentioned in Praschniker's publication (no. 46) shows a kneeling woman wearing a long-sleeved undergarment, an upper garment with a high girdle and a cape. The material is limestone and the dimensions are: 0.56 m high, 0.35 m wide. The second fragment forms the counterpart to the first figure (no. 47). It is also made of limestone and broken on all sides. The dimensions are 0.23 m in height, 0.35 m in width and 0.5 m in depth. Only a female head with parted hair is recognisable. Praschniker 1920, 177 f. figs. 90, 91; von Hesberg 2017, 405.

37 Praschniker 1920, 177 f.; von Hesberg 2017, 405.

mentioned brick structure might be another grave monument, as these situated along streets leading in and out of the city.

13 Considering the Roman *necropoleis* in Apollonia in general, it is evident that at least two areas existed: one in the western plain and one in the eastern valley of Apollonia (Fig. 9). The presented tomb of the *aedicula* type and the near-by brick structure extend our knowledge of the western necropolis, where Mano also excavated pit graves, roof-tiled graves, a building foundation, and another brick structure³⁸. In comparison to the structures known so far from the western necropolis, the temple tomb in the Krygjata valley stands out in terms of dimensions, monumentality and context³⁹. This may possibly suggest a social distinction in the spatial arrangement of the Apollonian *necropoleis*.

Conclusions

14 Through the study of archival material and observations made in the field, it became clear that the discussed structure may represent an important tomb monument of Apollonia. The presumed tomb of the *aedicula* type is only partially preserved. The superstructures of such tombs could have had prestigious adornments, as comparable architectural fragments suggest. Concerning the dating of the monument, the location and local comparisons point between the 1st – 3rd century A.D. Finally, the preliminary results of this study raise further research questions: What tomb types are generally evident? How are the *necropoleis* areas structured spatially? How are these monuments connected with possible roads leading in and out of the city? These are only few questions that are to be addressed in the future.

Abstrakt

15 Në qytetin antik të Apolonisë doli në dritë në vitin 1988 një strukturë bazamenti me shkallë, e cila u identifikua si »altar«. Për këtë objekt ruhen në Arkivin Teknik të Institutit Kombëtar të Trashëgimisë Kulturore dy skica me autor Guri Panin e të përpunuara nga Agim Qyshka dhe vetëm dy fotografi. Përmes këtij materiali arkivor u bë i mundur lokalizimi në terren i monumentit, i cili gjendet në bankinën lindore të kanalit vaditës Vjosë–Levan–Fier, fare pranë urës së kanalit, rreth 100 m në perëndim të Kullës nr. 8 të murit fortifikues të Apolonisë. Monumenti është i dëmtuar, ndërsa ruan in situ vetëm një kënd të plotë. Ai paraqet një strukturë me tre shkallë, të ndërtuar me blloqe guri drejtkëndore, me lidhje në të thatë. Shkallët formojnë krepisin, ndërsa shtresa e sipërme ka blloqe guri të profiluar, e cila është në vetvete baza për një strukturë tjetër, që ngrihej dikur këtu.

16 Rezultat e studimit për këtë monument tregojnë se nuk kemi të bëjmë me një »altar«, por me një varr monumental. Vetë ky ndërtim ndodhet në hapësirën e nekropolit të periudhës Romake të qytetit. Ndërsa, monumente të ngjashme me të tilla konfigurime ruhen më së miri deri në ditët tona në disa qytete, dikur pjesë e territorit të Perandorisë Romake. Ndër to përmendim varret e tipit me *aedicula* të Caius Spectatius Priscianus, të Caius Spectatius Secundianus, si edhe një tjetër nga Šempeter, Slloveni, një në Faschendorf, Austri, ndërsa një rast vjen nga Sarsina në Itali dhe Pompei, ku në këtë të fundit kemi një shembull të një varri të tipit me pediment. Në aspektin teknik dhe artistik, për radhën e gurëve të profiluar, shembuj të ngjashëm kemi nga Villach St.

38 Mano 1977/1978, 64; Mano 1974, 153–256.

39 von Hesberg – Eck 2008, 268–271; Sestieri 1956, 30–49; Sestieri 1942, 3–12; Praschniker 1920, 47 f.

Agathen në Austri dhe Krufth, Gjermani. Këto monumente janë të datuara respektivisht në shek. II dhe rreth vitit 100. Ndërsa një studim i Henner von Hesberg mbi disa fragmente frizesh në Apoloni supozon praninë e një varri monumental të datuar në gjysmën e parë të shek. III. Përmasat e hipotetizuara të autorit janë të përafërta me ato të sugjeruara nga ne, ndërsa dëshmojnë mundësinë e ekzistencës së një kategorie të tillë varresh monumentale në një qytet si Apolonia. Për sa i përket kohës së ndërtimit, mund t'a datojmë varrin në periudhën Perandorake Romake, në shek. I-III, siç na sugjerojnë shembujt e gjetur dhe vendodhja e tij në hapësirën e nekropolit të datuar në të njëjtën kohë.

¹⁷ Ky monument është një tregues i rëndësishëm për arkitekturën e varreve në Apoloni. Ndërsa nga monumentet funerare ruhen vetëm pjesë të fragmentuara, gjykojmë se nevojitet rishikimi i dokumentacionit të vjetër, që mund të sjellë të dhëna të reja dhe shumë të rëndësishme për studimet e së ardhmes. Për më tepër, është e rëndësishme të hapen diskutime dhe të ngrihen çështje të mëtejshme kërkimore, të lidhura me ansamblet funerare dhe zonën e nekropolit në Apoloni, strukturimin dhe lidhjen e këtij të fundit me qytetin.

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