

ANCIENT TOMBS FROM ABRITUS AND DUROSTORUM

Abstract: In the autumn of 2004, during digging of canal for laying down of phone cable in the area of the Eastern necropolis of the late ancient town of Abrittus, the workers found a stone sarcophagus, which led to its urgent study. The eastern tumulus necropolis of Abrittus is located about 1 km away from the castle of Abrittus in the area of “Mezarata”, on the western bank of Beli Lom River and on the both sides of the road Razgrad-Varna. The open funeral complex is located in the south-western part of the necropolis, 10 metres away from the road Razgrad-Varna and 800 metres away south of the castle of Abrittus. The ground is a private property and is processed constantly. Within a hypothetical reconstruction it can be admitted that the earliest rites refer to the primary burial in Sarcophagus № 1. This burial can be referred chronologically to the second half of 3rd century. Later on, the tomb and the sacralising crypt around the tomb have been constructed on the same time, and sarcophagus № 1 has been included in the crypt. Probably the buried people were family-related. The built-in coin of the Emperor Aurelian (270-275) in the eastern part of the crypt – an antoninianus, minted in 274-275 – would be considered as terminus ante quem for the construction of the complex – the last quarter of 3rd century. The stock, found in the northern part of the tomb chamber, provides the opportunity to admit that it belonged to the first man or the first people, buried there. After these burials the tomb has been closed with vertically dropping stone gate. Coins of the Emperors Constantius the Second (337-361) and Theodosius the Second (402-450) were discovered on the both sides of the tomb’s entrance, indicating the removal of the skeletons – probably twice for this long period of time – to the sarcophagus № 2, situated in front of the crypt. The tomb has been used for a long period of time, as we can see from the number of the buried people. New people have been buried in the tomb chamber in the middle of 5th century, probably after the invasion of the Huns in 447. After this act the tomb has been built-in with hewn stones, soldered with mortar. The remnants of skeletons and the funeral stock from sarcophagus № 2 are from the initial burials in the tomb. The fragmented bronze mirror, found here, is a widespread type, made in the workshops of the province Germania Inferior. We have analogues in the mirrors from Nijmegen (the Netherlands), dated the whole 3rd century, which is an evidence for terminus ante quem for the construction of the complex.

Keywords: tombs, necropolis, sarcophag, rites, coins.

The ruins of the late ancient town of Abrittus are located in the area of “Hisarlaka” on the eastern suburbs of the present-day town of Razgrad in North-Eastern Bulgaria. Abrittus is known in the historical written documents as the place of fight between the Goths and the Romans (250-251 A.D.), when the Roman Emperor Trajan Decius and his son Herennius have found their death. At the end of 3rd century, after the administrative and military reforms of Diocletianus (286-305),

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Abrittus is in the province Moesia Secunda within dioecesis Thraciae, with administrative centre of Marcianopolis, part of Praefectura per Orientem. The late ancient town of Abritus is constructed during the rule of Constantine the Great at the beginning of 4th century and destructed by the Slavic tribes and the Avars at the end of 6th century (586 A.D.). (Радославова, Дзанев 2003).

In the autumn of 2004, during digging of canal for laying down of phone cable in the area of the Eastern necropolis of the late ancient town of Abrittus, the workers found a stone sarcophagus, which led to its urgent study. The eastern tumulus necropolis of Abrittus is located about 1 km away from the castle of Abrittus in the area of "Mezarata", on the western bank of Beli Lom River and on the both sides of the road Razgrad-Varna. In the 30s of 20th century, the necropolis consisted of 13 tumuli, while by the moment they are just 4 with average height of about 2 metres (Явашов 1930, с.58).

The open funeral complex is located in the south-western part of the necropolis, 10 metres away from the road Razgrad-Varna and 800 metres away south of the castle of Abrittus. The ground is a private property and is processed constantly.

The site is rather interesting with its architectural design. It consists of the following appurtenances, connected with the dead people cult rituals:

1. A dug-in bricked tomb with semi-cylindrical arch, orientated with its long axis north-south and with total size 5,60 metres x 2,80 metres.
2. The fundament of a premise with total size 6,10 metres x 6,80 metres, surrounding the tomb and constructed over it, while the tomb itself is located at its eastern underground part.
3. A limestone sarcophagus with two-slope roof, located with its long axis east-west and built-in at the western external wall of the tomb on the level of its fundament (2,85 metres).
4. A lower part of limestone sarcophagus, situated in front of the eastern wall of the premise, on the level of the tomb's arch and located longwise northeast-southwest.

The tomb is dug-in completely in the solid ground on depth of 2,85 metres. An entrance as a small dromos – 1,12 metres long, 0,60 metres wide and 0,70 metres high – is constructed at the southern part of the tomb. The tomb chamber is orthogonal with size of 4,20 metres north-south, 2,25 metres east-west and height of 2,20 metres. The entrance – vertically laid limestone stones, pressed down by monolith cross-piece stone block over it – is on the southern wall of the premise, and this wall is in fact a joint in front of the tomb's avant-corps. A heap of hewn stones were cleaned in front of it. At its lower part the premise is built-in with different-sized hewn stones on four layers on total height of 0,50 metres, soldered with grey and white mortar. Several huge hewn stones with different size are drawn up over this building-in, without solder, and some smaller stones are drawn up over the other stones. The height of the entrance, including the building-in, is 1,30 metres. The sides step on a cross-piece stone, with the masonry of the tomb's fundament under it. On the internal side a longitudinal groove is carved, 7

centimetres wide and 4 centimetres deep, for closing the entrance with vertically dropping gate. Through a step on the internal side of the dromos, 20 centimetres high, can be entered into the tomb chamber.

The tomb chamber is covered with semi-cylindrical arch and constructed by average huge hewn stones, soldered with grey and white mortar. The top of the arch is constructed with seven rows of cross-piece red bricks with size 0,30 metres long and 0,05 metres thick. Traces from the shuttering – planks with different length (1,00 – 1,10 metres) and 0,08 metres wide – can be seen on the arch of the tomb chamber, plastered with grey and white mortar. On the cross-piece walls of the tomb chamber, at height of 1,00 metre, there are five niches at distance of 0,70 – 0,90 metres each other and with size on average 0,14 x 0,17 metres, serving as support of the joists, used for the shuttering of the arch. The walls of the tomb chamber are plastered with grey and white mortar in a way that part of the stone masonry can be seen. The floor is a mortar plastering, mixed with small stones, while at its northern side it is covered by huge plane stones. On this stone support-platform - 1,40 metres x 2,25 metres – a wooden coffin has been laid, as can be guessed from the big number of iron nails with wooden remnants on them. Scattered human bones have been found – six skulls of adult people and parts of their skeletons. Two of the skeletons were laid on the stone base with heads laying to the west. There were two skulls along the western and eastern cross-piece walls of the tomb chamber, between the stones, with heads laying to the north.

The tomb has been plundered even during the Antiquity. Besides the following artefacts were found in front of the tomb's entrance: clay bowl, fragment from glass vessel's orifice, iron nail and a bronze coin of the Emperor Constantius the Second (337-361). In the tomb chamber itself, just near the entrance, two bronze coins were found (resp. from the ruling of Constantius the Second /337-361/ and Theodosius the Second /402-450/), as well as several iron nails. Many iron nails with wooden remnants on them, a bronze belt clasp, three cylindrical golden beads, bronze loop, part of bronze necklace, golden and silver ring and bronze ear-ring were found on the platform between the stones at the northern part of the tomb chamber. At the north-western part of the tomb chamber we found part of another clasp with threaded glass bead. Along the eastern wall of the tomb chamber, 0,50 metres away of its southern wall, a half of clay bowl was found. Several ceramic fragments from vessels, dated 3rd – 6th century, were found also in the ground inside the tomb chamber.

The tomb is situated in the eastern part of the fundaments of almost square premise with size 6,10 x 6,80 metres, constructed by hewn stones soldered with mortar and mud. The eastern wall of the premise is connected architecturally with the tomb and has the function of eastern wall of the tomb, as can be seen from their simultaneous construction. The southern wall is put on a joint in front of the tomb's facade and the dromos is hollowed out in it. The thickness of the walls is 0,60 metres. A part of layer of front construction – worked up stone quadric, soldered with mortar – is preserved on the northern and southern part of the eastern wall. In the middle a space appeared, leading to an entrance 1,90 metres wide. A bronze

coin of the Emperor Aurelianus (270-275), minted in the period 274-275, was found in the mortar plastering on the eastern wall.

The space between the tomb's arch and the eastern wall of the premise is filled-in by small stones, soldered with mortar for levelling the floor during the construction of the premise.

The flanked perimeter between the western wall of the tomb and the western wall of the premise is 2,70 metres north-south and 4,60 metres east-west.

A stone sarcophagus with two-slope roof and akroteria is built-in on the tomb's floor level, 0,40 metres to the north from the southern fence wall along the western wall of the tomb. The two short sides of the sarcophagus were pressed by blocks of not too big rough stones without soldering. The tomb chamber was completely filled with soil. We found a heap of human bones from initial burial on depth of 0,60 metres in its eastern corner. On the bottom of the sarcophagus the secondary burial in anatomical order appeared, as it was carried out through a funeral of the corps, buried on their back with head laid to the west. The hands were along the body, the legs were on the same line. The ribs were intact, the pelvis was broken on the right. We found several not too big stones near the pelvis. The phalanges of the extremities were scattered. The length of the skeleton without the leg fingers was 1,54 metres. Small fragments of two thin glass vessels were discovered near the right shoulder – spherical bottles with cut orifices, a fragment from the top of glass cup and a miniature mother-of-pearl plate.

Two bronze coins were discovered during the cleaning up of the ground around the sarcophagus – from the time of Septimius Severus (193-211) and Arcadius (383-408).

Second limestone sarcophagus was laid down with preserved lower part of the sarcophagus on the east next to the tomb, on the level of the arch. The sarcophagus lies obliquely on the eastern wall of the tomb on two monolith blocks. Around the sarcophagus coins from the period of ruling between the Emperors Constantius the Second (337-361) and Theodosius the Second (402-450) were found, as well as an astragalus, plumbic weight, fragment of clay lamp, fragment of orifice of glass etc. In the sarcophagus itself were discovered the scattered skulls of 15 people and many jumbled bones of their skeletons. The bones were squeezed by fallen fragments of tegulae and imbrices from the destroyed roof of the premise and small stones. Nearby coins of Constantius the Second (337-361), Iulianus the Second (360-363) and Honorius (393-423) were discovered, as well as fragmented bronze mirror, iron nails and shoe tacks.

0,40 metres to the south from the south-western corner of the southern facade wall of the premise, on the level of funding of the tomb (2,85 metres) was discovered heaping of destroyed clay altar with size 1,00 x 1,70 metres. Fragments of every-day ceramics, elaborated during the Hellenic age (4th – 3rd century B.C.) were discovered too.

The established archaeological situation put many questions. It is obvious that we face a long-existed complex for funeral practices and cult rites of the local population, inhabited the late ancient town of Abrittus.

Within a hypothetical reconstruction it can be admitted that the earliest rites refer to the primary burial in Sarcophagus № 1. The lack of burial offers cannot allow its precise dating. The sarcophagus is Minor Asian type with austere architectonic design and a cover in the shape of two-slope roof with acroteria – one-fourth of a sphere. Probably it is made in a local workshop and can be dated not precisely in the wide range of 2nd and 3rd century (Иванов, 2002, с.264). The sarcophagus has been found on the spot and re-used for new burial. The fragments from glass vessels, discovered near the right shoulder of the skeleton from the secondary burial, represent two glass bottles with spherical shape, conical neck and cut orifice. These vessels have been disseminated in the ancient age and have been used for different kind of liquids. They are dated mainly in the second half of 3rd century (Минчев 1990, с.67, таб. III, 24). This burial can be referred chronologically also to the second half of 3rd century. Later on, the tomb and the sacralising crypt around the tomb have been constructed on the same time, and sarcophagus № 1 has been included in the crypt. Probably the buried people were family-related. The built-in coin of the Emperor Aurelian (270-275) in the eastern part of the crypt – an antoninianus, minted in 274-275 – would be considered as terminus ante quem for the construction of the complex – the last quarter of 3rd century. The stock, found in the northern part of the tomb chamber, provides the opportunity to admit that it belonged to the first man or the first people, buried there. After these burials the tomb has been closed with vertically dropping stone gate.

Coins of the Emperors Constantius the Second (337-361) and Theodosius the Second (402-450) were discovered on the both sides of the tomb's entrance, indicating the removal of the skeletons – probably twice for this long period of time – to the sarcophagus № 2, situated in front of the crypt. The tomb has been used for a long period of time, as we can see from the number of the buried people. New people have been buried in the tomb chamber in the middle of 5th century, probably after the invasion of the Huns in 447. After this act the tomb has been built-in with hewn stones, soldered with mortar. The remnants of skeletons and the funeral stock from sarcophagus № 2 are from the initial burials in the tomb. The fragmented bronze mirror, found here, is a widespread type, made in the workshops of the province Germania Inferior. We have analogues in the mirrors from Nijmegen (the Netherlands), dated the whole 3rd century, which is an evidence for terminus ante quem for the construction of the complex (Lloyd-Morgan 1981, p.95, fig. 98). The last entering has occurred in 6th century, having in mind the discovered inside the tomb chamber fragments of amphora's sides with comb-alike decoration. The entrance has been broken and built again with dry masonry, while in front of the entrance block of rough stones has been heaped.

The discovered destructions of the Thracian altar are evidence for a millennial continuity in the places, connected with the cult to the dead people.

No doubt we face an exceptional funeral complex - interesting with its architectural design and functional use - constructed during the Roman Empire Age

and referring to the ceremonial practices and the rituals of the population, inhabited the castle of Abrittus and its adjoining territory during this period.

The funeral complex, discovered in 2007 in the town of Silistra, is similar to the one near Abrittus (Атанасов, Бъчваров, Денев, 2008, с.351-352). A late ancient arch tomb was discovered, dug-in into the solid loam at 7,60 metres and expanded eastside with a premise. The total length of the complex eastside-westside is 8,65 metres and current height of 3,26 metres. The tomb itself is 3,76 metres wide, while the equipment adhered to the eastern side is 4,80 metres long. The arch is revealed at 3,70 metres from the present area and is constructed by bricks with size 34x30x5 centimetres. The lunette is 1,20 metres high and 2,34 metres wide. It is constructed by semi-treated stones of robust white mortar and broken bricks. The interior of the tomb was studied partially through a drilling. A bricked arch niche – 68 centimetres high, 28 centimetres wide and 22 centimetres deep - is shaped at the southern inside wall at 0,45 metres. The interior of the arch is plastered with mortar and at some places the visible stones are decorated with thin engraved lines. There are no artefacts and pottery found around the site. By its plan, size and type of construction, the tomb is identical with other tombs in Durostorum, dated within 4th century. By its plan, size and type of construction, the tomb is identical with other tombs, discovered in Durostorum (Иванов, Атанасов, Донеvски 2006).

The both monuments are without analogues in funeral architecture practices in Lower Danube. In the same time the tombs are similar in details.

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Fig. 1:Abritus. Panorama view.



Fig. 2:Abritus. The complex.



Fig.3:.Abritus. The burial camera.



Fig. 4:.Abritus. The entrance.

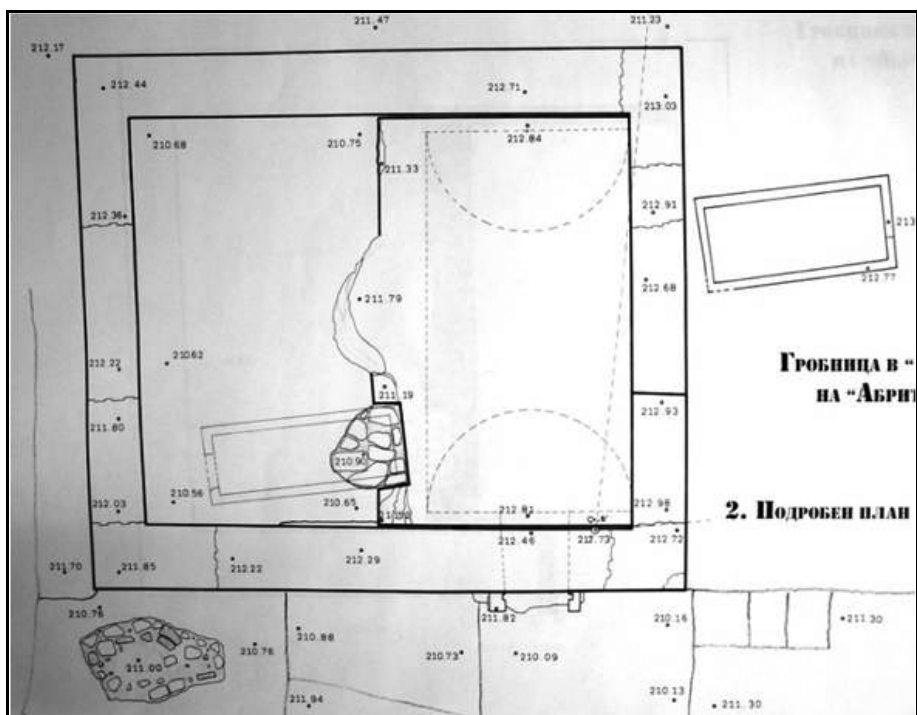


Fig. 5: Abritus. Plan of the complex.

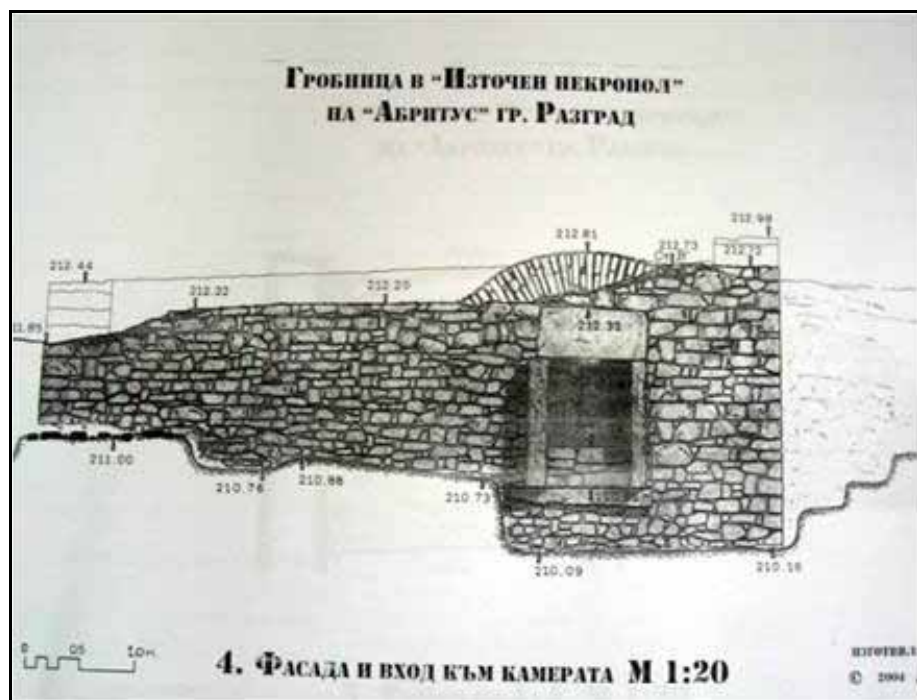


Fig. 6: Abritus. The tomb-Longitudinal section.

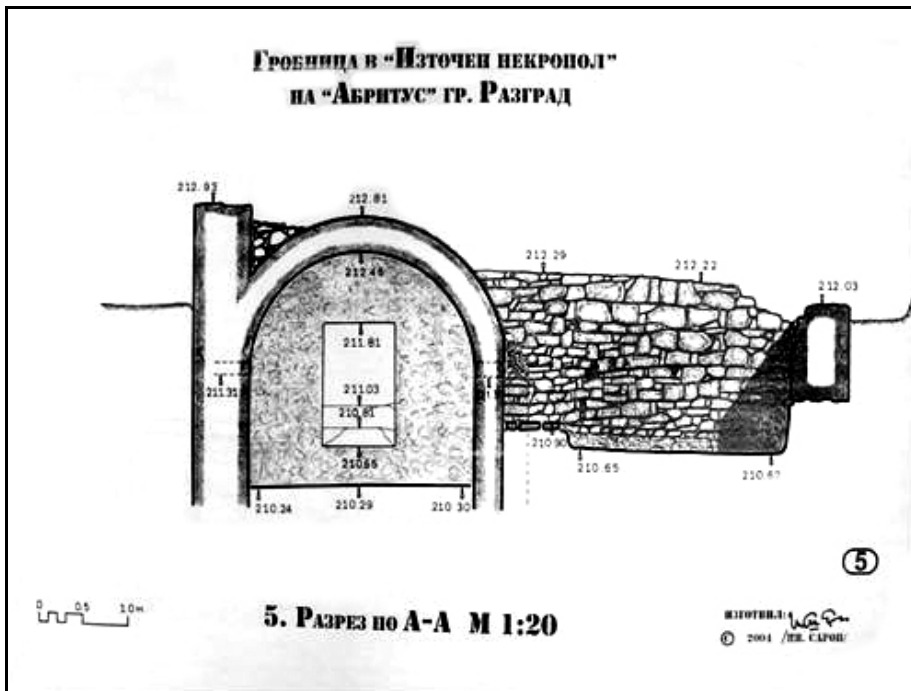


Fig. 7: Abritus. Transverse section.



Fig. 8: Abritus. Finds from tomb.

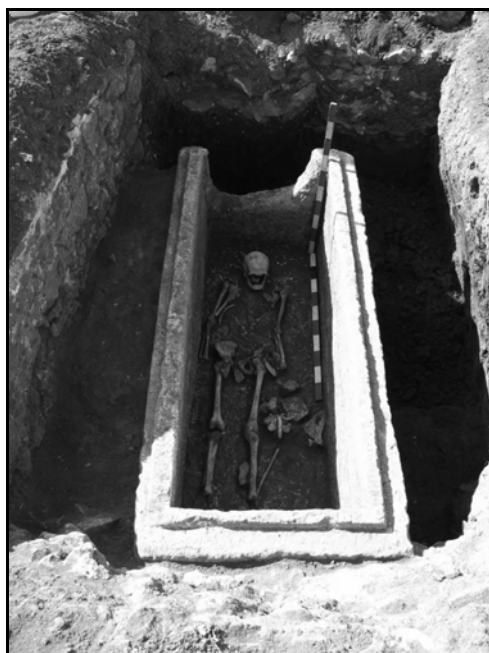


Fig. 9: Abritus.Sarcophagus 1. The second burial.

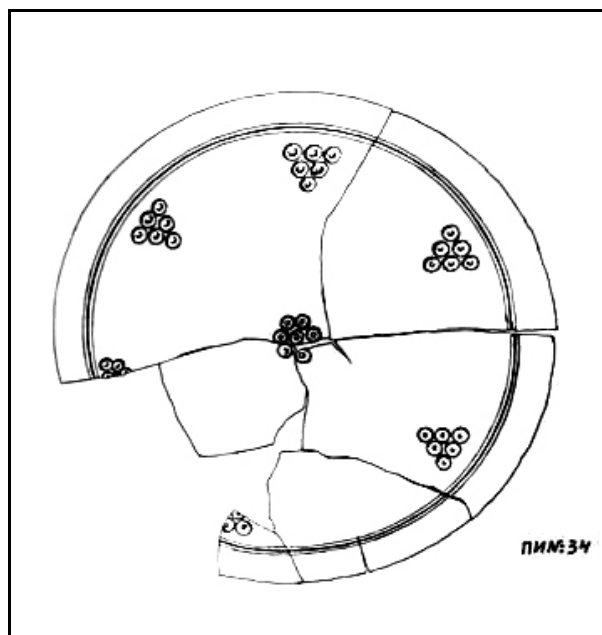


Fig. 10: Abritus. The mirror from sarcophagus 2.



Fig. 11: The tomb from Durostorum.

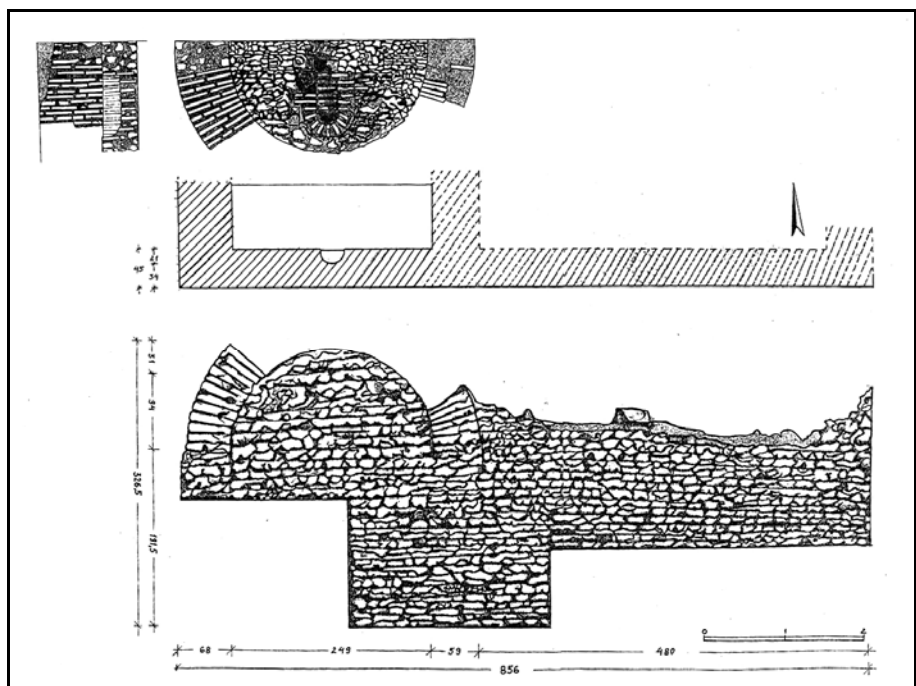


Fig. 12: Plan of the tomb from Durostorum.

