

LATE ANTIQUE TOMB IN DUROSTORUM-SILISTRA AND ITS MASTER

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The Silistra tomb is one of the most popular, most investigated and most discussed monuments of the late antique art in Bulgaria and on the Balkans¹.

It was found by coincidence in 1942 in the South outskirts of Silistra – where the antique necropolis of Durostorum has been developed – it was one of the most significant Roman cities on the Lower Danube in the 2nd - 4th century A.D.². Indeed it is totally reasonable to expect and uncover representative monuments like the tomb with the frescos in a center like Durostorum. From the year 106 until the 6th century here camps without a break the most important military unit in the Empire on the Lower Danube – the XI Claudia legion. Around its camp the ancient city has developed, receiving municipality status in A.D. 167 with all the advantageous consequences, resulting from this. In 2nd – 3rd century A.D. Durostorum suffers a rapid prosperity. A proof for this are the impressive in size city baths, the pagan temples and altars, city and country houses, rich funerals etc. The architectural ornaments, statues, plastic lamps, utensils, finery, coin treasures and other hint to the high culture, in which we find evidence about the antique civilization's supreme achievements.

The history of the city is particularly dynamic and full of events in the 4th century, when it turns out to be a basic fort of the Empire against the barbarian (mostly Gothic) invasions. At the beginning of the 4th century A.D. Durostorum received a special attention from the emperors Diocletian (284-305) who visited the city 2 times in 304 A.D. and Constantine the Great (306-337), when the fortification system was extended by building a castle and a wharf on the Danube water strand. This is also the time of advanced Christianization, preceded by persecutions against the early Christian community in Durostorum and the settlements in the city territory. Between 303 and 307 A.D. consecutively here

¹ ДИМИТРОВ, ЧИЧИКОВА 1986; FROVA 1954; BIANCHI-BANDINELLI 1955; SCHNEIDER 1983; ПОПОВА – МОРОЗ 1991, p. 42 – 50; PILLINGER, РОПОВА, ZIMMERMANN 1999, p. 22-28; АТАНАСОВ 2005, p. 9 – 18.

² DONEVSKI 1990, p. 244; ИВАНОВ, АТАНАСОВ, ДОНЕВСКИ 2006.

come to martyr death St. Dasius, St. Julius, St. Valentinus, St. Pazzicratos, St. Markinianus, St. Nicandros, St. Maximus, St. Dadas, St. Quintillianus and St. Calinicos, and in 362 A.D. the last early Christian martyr in Silistra and Moesia, St. Emilianus of Dorostol was burnt³. The final triumph of Christianity in Durostorum in the second half of the 4th century is marked by the bishopric formation in 380 A.D., which was pursued by the building of martyriums, churches and a bishop's residence⁴. These processes are synchronous in time with ethnic changes, connected with the Gothic invasions, the establishment of foederatae and immigration of citizens from the Near East in the lower Danube lands. Durostorum suffers defeats because of the Empire's wars with the Goths, but at the end of 4th century A.D. it was rebuilt with everything that followed these changes in the city's agglomeration.

The city necropolis, which girdles the Southern suburbs of Durostorum as an arc, developed throughout this whole historical period from the 2nd to the 4th century A.D. (Fig. 1). The Roman tomb with the frescos was found in its central part, 500 m to the South of the consolidated camp⁵. Obviously this is the zone in which the prominent people of the city were buried, because only about 60 m West a high-ranking local magistrate's funeral with a chariot and marvelous gifts and weapons was uncovered (of late 3rd century A.D.)⁶. And at about 100 m in Southern direction, an impressive early Christian brick-built mausoleum – martyrrium was explored. There the relics of three saints martyrs from the beginning of the 4th century A.D. were placed⁷ (Fig. 2).

Silistra tomb is definitely among the most popular late antique monuments, discussed in several monographs, some ten articles and a great number of detailed descriptions in general works. It belongs to the well-known architectural type of tombs from the Balkan and Middle Danube provinces of the Roman Empire. Its analogy by plan and construction from the beginning of the 4th century A.D. was lately found on the Western side of the Durostorum necropolis (Fig. 3).

The tomb with the frescos is unicameral, with orthogonal vaulted structure, which is built of semi-processed stones with pink mortar; the vault arch is filled with bricks (Fig. 4). It is orientated West-East with sizes 3.30 x 2.60 m, height – 2.30 m. The entrance is from the East, consisting of three stone plates, and the floor is covered by big rectangular ceramic plates made in *fresco al secco* technique (Fig. 5). The whole interior is plastered with grave-white lime solution, which is mixed with plaster and over that, before it became dry, the dyes were placed. Unlike most of the tombs from the 3rd - 5th century in Dobrudja and on the Balkans, the tomb's whole interior is covered with paintings. The Southern, Western, Northern walls bear three frames each, shouldered by rectangular frames with sizes about 1.00 - 1.30 x 0.80 – 1.00 m, in which human figures in full-length are portrayed (Fig. 5, 6). They form an original procession of servants, who

³ DELEHAYE 1912, p. 265-268; ATAHACOB 2002, p. 55-65; ATAHACOB 2000, p. 8-16; ATAHACOB 2004 a, p. 6-11; ATAHACOB 2004 b, p. 203-218; ATAHACOB 2007, c. 15-78.

⁴ ZEILLER 1918, p. 166 – 167; ILSKI 1995, p. 16, 28, 32, 36; ATAHACOB 2001-2002, p. 210-217.

⁵ MILOŠEVIĆ, DONEVSKI 1999, p. 245 – 258.

⁶ ATANASOV 2001, p. 130 – 135.

⁷ ATAHACOB 2002, p. 55 – 65.

are running forward to the center of the Western wall, which is taken by the figures of the master's family (Fig. 5 - 7). It is remarkable, that only their figures go out of the work's frame. The master, obviously the tomb's owner, is bareheaded, without a beard, with mat face and expressive masculine features. He is dressed in pale light long-sleeved tunic, ornate with purple circles and rich ornaments on the shoulders and the cuffs. Over the tunic a red-brown mantle (*chlamys*) is thrown, which is joined on the right shoulder with aureate bulbous pin. I especially stress on the tablon pattern rectangular application made of colored bluish material on geometrical figures at the lower part by the edges of the mantle (*chlamys*). The master is wearing open shoes and he holds a short cylindrical roll in both hands with a demonstrative gesture (Fig. 5-7).

The woman's figure is on the right, half-hidden from the man's. Her left hand is placed on his shoulder, and in the right one she holds a red rose or lily. She is dressed in long-sleeved brown tunic, on which a rich decorated in white, green and aureate dalmatic is slipped on. The dame wears ear-rings, and on the gracious neck a marvelous necklace (*patagium*) of pearls and precious gems can be seen. It was saved for the most noble aristocrats in the Empire from the Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantium. The mistress' face is expressive, the hair is dark and covered with a kerchief with ornaments, under which a fine veil can be seen – an Eastern tradition in the clothing of the noble married women, which is well accepted by the noble ladies in the Roman Empire.

All other figures, without exception, are running forward to the master couple and they carry toiletry articles and elements of the master's costume. On the wall panel, on the left, a longhaired young woman in an ochre tunic with *clavas* is portrayed. She holds an ewer with washing water in her right hand and in the other one – a stick (Fig. 5, 6, 8). The woman on the right has a pale gray tunic and plain earrings and wears a big ornamented towel for drying (Fig. 5, 6, 8). The next dame on the left, on the Southern wall, on her part, submits a box with aromas (Fig. 5, 6). There is no doubt, that her beauty exceeds all the others – expressive soft veil of the face, marvelous haircut (Fig. 6). Finally she is the youngest of all dames and she is the only one among the servants, who has the privilege to wear earrings with pearl pendants and bracelets. She is dressed in a red dalmatic with dark ornaments. The fourth servant, the last one, is presented opposite her, on the North wall, dressed in a long ochre-brown dalmatic, directed to the master with a big mirror (Fig. 5, 6, 8). While the ladies hold only accessories, connected with the toiletries, the men have the privilege to submit all the main elements of the aristocratic male suit. The first servant on the right of the master is on the Southern wall of the tomb. He is dressed in a girded blue tunic and he has white trousers and sandals on. He has a necklace around his neck (Fig. 5, 6). He wears trousers, called *anaxirides*, with belt on his shoulder and in his hand – shoes, the same which the master has on. In parallel, but opposite, on the North wall the second servant is portrayed in ochre tunic. He has a necklace with a foliar pendant around the neck (Fig. 5). With both his hands he submits a folded pale yellow tunica with red-brown circles, which is very alike the tunic in which the owner is portrayed. The next servant on the Southern wall is dressed in the same way, but is different from the others with his very long blond hair (all others have short dark hair), which is a reason for him to be considered of a

Gothic origin (Fig. 5, 9). In his left hand he holds a high lifted dark red mantle with a golden fibula and dark purple square figures, in which a red rhombus is added. In this case there is no doubt that this is the same mantle which the master has on. The last servant on the South wall is dressed in a short tunic, trousers and has a necklace with a moon pendant around the neck (Fig. 5, 10). In his hands he submits the master's red belt with a massive buckle and double trapezium gold-plated applications.

The entrance on the East wall is flanked by two big candlesticks and in the lunette above them two doves are pictured parallel and opposite (Fig. 5, 6, 8). Unfortunately, the name of the owner is not legible anymore. Still, on the Western lunette, above the master figures, a magnificent composition is wonderfully saved, with two beautiful peacocks, drinking living water from a high vessel (kantharos) and with a background of pink blossoms (Fig. 6, 8). The place is specially selected, because of the semantics of this scene, perceived to be a symbol of the beauty and aristocratic luxury in the Roman art⁸. On their hand the early Christians in the 3rd-4th century, see in the peacocks and the living water an allusion of the blessed eternal life and immortality⁹. Provided that the Silistra tomb is created in the transitional 4th century – a border between two civilizations and two culture models, I do not except, that the composition with peacocks and living water could present a divided gap between the antique traditions and the palaeochristian symbolism conception of the world. This sense could be an allegory of the luxury and the high position in the society of the master couple hoping for eternal life. Moreover, the rich flora and fauna on the ceiling and the hunt of exotic animals are also associated with the luxury life of the aristocratic master circles (Fig. 11)¹⁰.

The frescos on the vaulted ceiling are distanced from these on the walls with illusionary, but very well molded as perspective trimmer joists. In this way, probably, the author has artistically re-produced the line between the earth life and the dreamt eternal life. There is something beautifully dreamt and divine in the frescos on the vault arch, indeed. The artist reached his summit in the compositional respect. He lined the vault arch in 63 squares, in which – pretty inventive – octagons are added. This is the way to suggest a perspective deepness and the sensation for a cassette ceiling is kept, which was applied in the Roman representative buildings and the rich aristocratic country houses and castles. Each cassette is filled up with plants and animals, which are rarely repeated, and if they are – they are re-produced in different posture and close-up. The variety is impressing – water-floating, exotic and migratory birds, beasts, plants, palms, flowers, fruit (pomegranates, bunches) and four images of a young men – hunter in different attitudes (Fig. 11, 12).

I will specially not extend the discussion about the straight realia and the chronology of the monument, either. Almost all experts of late antique art date it in the limits of the 4th century, but a certain polarization in their opinions can also

⁸ PILLINGER, POPOVA, ZIMMERMANN 1999, p. 25 – 26.

⁹ LOTHER 1929, p. 7 – 23.

¹⁰ PILLINGER, POPOVA, ZIMMERMANN 1999, p. 26.

be noticed. A group of experts remits it to the last decades of the 4th century¹¹, and others¹² - to the first half of the 5th century. Personally, I accept more the arguments of those authors, who date the frescos in the tomb to the time of Theodosius I the Great (379-395). No doubt, all the experts agree, that it is built by a pagan and decorated by the laws of the pagan art. Keeping in mind the sharp anti-pagan laws of Theodosius I (author of the edicts of 388 and 391, which claimed intolerance to paganism, prohibition of the pagan rituals and closing the pagan temples)¹³ it is not very probable that the building and decoration of a pagan tomb and the accomplishment of a pagan funeral in the centre of the necropolis in a city like Durostorum was allowed. Moreover, a bishopric chair already exists here and an impressive early Christian martyrrium, from the first half of the 4th century was uncovered in the tomb's neighborhood, in three niches (*arcosolium*) in which presumably the relics of the local martyrs saint Maximus, Dadas and Quintilianus were placed¹⁴ (Fig. 1, 2). This turns it into a special Christian center, and a late antique necropolis. This reduces even more the possibility of erecting pagan buildings in this area.

Therefore it is most reasonable and historically valid that the frescos in the Silistra tomb are to be dated before 391 and even before the Gothic invasion in 376-378, when Durostorum was conquered and destroyed, some of its inhabitants were killed and some migrated¹⁵. This somehow explains the figure of the Goth-servant (long time before 377 a lot of Goths from Scythia Minor and Moesia Secunda landed up in slavery)¹⁶ and the lack of funerals in the tomb. However its decorative system and simplified architectural spatial composition with architectonic elements of the Roman-Hellenistic order, the mirror symmetry, combined with contrary perspective frame a new, last phase of classic painting in the tomb¹⁷. It is reasonably connected with the government of Constantine the Great and his heirs – an epoch which finalizes the classical period of the pagan art and prepares ideologically and intellectually the stylistics and the expressions of the official early Christian art of painting. Not only the whole composition, but many details and some scenes (for example the pairs of peacocks and the doves on the lunettes) suggest a new thought over beginning. The whole composition is charged with mystics and allegorical symbolism. Finally the shortened figures with heavy proportions (especially the master couple), the haircuts with bangs and the most servants' long falling hairs and especially the marvelous haircut of the beautiful female servant find straight parallels more among the monuments from the first half – the middle of the century, rather than the time of Theodosius the Great, the last quarter of the century. Therefore the closest in style, color and decorative system tomb of Eustorgius from Salonica is dated in the first half of the

¹¹ ДИМИТРОВ, ЧИЧИКОВА 1986; SCHNEIDER 1983, p. 39-55.

¹² FROVA 1954, p. 25-30; BIANCHI-BANDINELLI 1955, p. 98-100; PELIKANIDIS 1965, p. 230 – 235; VALEVA 1979 – 1980, p. 127; ПОПОВА – МОРОЗ 1991, p. 42-49.

¹³ УСПЕНСКИ 1996, p. 101-102.

¹⁴ АТАНАСОВ 2002, p. 55-66.

¹⁵ WOLFARM 1990, p. 127, 138-140; *История на Добруджа*, 1984, p. 161-162.

¹⁶ WOLFARM 1990, p. 125-127, nt. 7.

¹⁷ ПОПОВА-МОРОЗ, 1991, p. 42-49.

4th century¹⁸ (Fig. 13). The similarity in the pose, the expression, the suit and the marks of the society rate of Eustorgius (a high magistrate from Salonica) is remarkable with those of the master in the Silistra tomb¹⁹.

The other significant question that interests the experts is the semantics of the frescos in the tomb, as also the personality, respectively the social rate of its owner. Although all authors refer to these problems, they are still the least clarified. It is usually claimed, that the owner is a noble Roman from Durostorum, and the figures of the servants reproduce a ritual procession of attendants, forwarded to the master couple – the women attend to the mistress, and the men – the master²⁰. There are even hypothetical suppositions that the frescos are related to a wedding ceremony of the marital couple²¹.

It is remarkable, that the four portraits of the hunter are alike. In all four cases he is presented like a big boy (almost adolescent) with a closed yellow tunic, similar size, close anthropological features and the same haircut of the dark brown hair (Fig. 11, 12). All these special features in all ways harmonize with the master's image, presented on the central wall-panel in the tomb. This is why I join the opinion of L. Schneider, that the hunting scenes have some relation to the central character, the owner of the tomb²². Moreover, I am willing to go further with the supposal, that on the vault arch he is shown himself as a young man, hunting a leopard, wild boar, bear and birds. The hunt in late antiquity was a noble aristocrats' priority. Under Sasanid influence the hunt of lions and leopards penetrates even in the imperial iconography by the heirs of Constantine the Great²³. Imitating the emperor, the high dignitaries begin to portray themselves as hunters of exotic beasts. This is why it is explainable for a high aristocrat, and the owner of the Silistra tomb is undoubtedly one, to be shown as a brave man, whose amusements even in his youth were of an aristocrat – an indirect sign for his belonging to the class of the *illustres*.

It is also remarkable, that the majority of the animals the young man is hunting, are not to be found in the Durostorum region and on the Balkans generally. This is undoubtedly true for the leopard (Fig. 12), while the iconography of the wild boar does not harmonize with the wild boars in Europe at all. The body is more alike the African wild boars. The flora and fauna have even more no European origin. The peacocks, herons, geese, palms, pomegranate (Fig. 11, 12) are surely untypical for this region and they definitely direct to North Africa or Syria. If the owner of the Silistra tomb has really portrayed himself as a hunter in his youth, the environment and the background on which his feats are shown, suggest, that he was born or had grown up in North Africa (Egypt) or Front Asia (Syria) (Fig. 11, 12). Hence, in the written sources and on the lapidary monuments such single or group migrations of inhabitants from the East to the

¹⁸ PELIKANIDIS, 1965, p. 230, Taf. 126, 130.

¹⁹ PILLINGER, POPOVA, ZIMMERMANN 1999, p. 26 – 27.

²⁰ SCHNEIDER 1983, p. 39-55; ДИМИТРОВ, ЧИЧИКОВА 1986, p. 47; ПОПОВА – МОРОЗ 1991, p. 42.

²¹ BARBET, BLANC 1999, p.19.

²² SCHNEIDER 1983, p. 39-44.

²³ GRABAR 1971, p. 57-59, pl. XVII-2.

Western Black Sea coast, are often showed²⁴. It is not impossible that the painter himself, who has created the frescos, was also attracted to the nearest provinces of the Empire, i.e. where the master came from.

Finally, the problem of the personality and the social rate of the master, who is portrayed on the central wall-panel on the Western wall of the tomb is more significant. So far there intentional careful studies and suppositions in this direction were not made. It is generally indicated, that he is a wealthy, noble landowner, with high social rank and even with affinity to intellectual occupations. The lack of explanatory text (sometimes found on the Eastern lunettes, but exactly here there are serious damages) makes the thinking in this direction to the highest degree difficult and makes the interpretations more or less hypothetical. Still, let us look again at the frescos and watch the images from a different point of view, while commenting upon the master according to his clothes and their semantic.

Every title in the Empire was attended with a special type of suit and with special signs. In the late antique epoch and more accurate after Constantine the Great, this became a custom²⁵. This is how the clothes and the accessories gain a specific semantic sense and one could judge in a high degree the rank of their owner. Among these and a lot of other innovations, Constantine I introduces the title of *patricius* as one of the most prestigious in the Empire, given to noble citizens, military commanders and members of the Senate²⁶. After he moves the capital (more like he regulates a second capital) from Rome to Constantinople in 330, Constantine forms a new Senate. He fills it up by attracting noblemen from Rome and aristocrats from the big Balkan and Asia Minor cities. Of course, some of them (including those with barbarian origin) are nominated and chosen for patricians, proconsuls, magistrates, strategus and so on. I specially stress on these processes, because I suggest that the master from the Silistra tomb received a high title in the epoch of Constantine, about the middle of the 4th century, but in any case before 378, when Durostorum was conquered and destroyed by the Goths.

Thanks to the description of the chronic writers (mostly those of John Lid, John Malala and Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus) and the studies of the Byzantologists²⁷ we know enough of the highest dignitaries' marks in the Emperor's court, both of the earlier (4th-7th century) and for the later period (9th-10th century). According to the ancient ceremony at the court in Constantinople the patricians, the senators, the magistrates, the proconsuls, the strategus, dressed in special suits, got from the Emperor's hand the mark – the

²⁴ БЕЛКОВ 1959, p. 236 сл.; *История на Добруджа*, 1984, p. 145, 150-151; SUCEVEANU, BARNEA 1991, p. 243 – 245.

²⁵ TWINING 1967, p. 23; PERTUSI 1967; WESSEL, PILTZ, NICOLESCU 1973, col. 370 etc.; АТАНАСОВ 1999, p. 244 sqq.

²⁶ GUILLAND 1967, p. 132-140; ЧЕКАЛОВА 1997, p. 32-34.

²⁷ Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus populi Romani libri tres*, Lipsiae, 1903, I. 4, II. 13 – 17; Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia*, Bonnae, 1831, XVII, p. 412 – 413 (= PGr, t. 97); EBERSOLT 1923, p. 39 – 44; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 212-226; Constantinus Porphyrogenetus, *De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Bonnae, 1829-1830. 56/47, 57/48, p. 710 sq; GUILLAND 1967, p. 132-140; DEER 1972, p. 240-267; DEER 1970, p. 7- 25; HEIL 1966, p. 75, 98, 128-130.

main symbol of their dignity – the *codicillus*²⁸. For its form we judge mostly from the images of the codicils in the hands of the high dignitaries around the Emperor on the Theodosius' Obelisk and the codicil, with which the same Theodosius I nominates a high dignitary scened on a silver dish, kept in Madrid (Fig. 14)²⁹. We notice their most detailed reproduction in the late antique art on statues from the 4th century (Fig. 15). There, high magistrates are carved with codicils in their right hands in shape of little cylindrical rolls³⁰, which are very alike the roll in the hands of the master in the Silistra tomb (Fig. 7). His high rank is illustrated not only by the codicil, but also by the suit. I have already noted, that even in the 4th century the rule was laid, that every distinguished person in the court should wear a suit, which corresponds and illustrates the rank or position which he takes³¹. For instance the candidate for patrician enters the castle, where he puts (usually as an Emperor's gift) a red (if he is a military man) or white (if he is a citizen) mantle with a figure and a golden fibula (with the Emperor's face). If we judge the description of other noble dignitaries' robes it seems that the tunic under the mantle had a light (*aureata*) color³². After the preparations, the nominated patrician is walked officially into the chrisotriclinium. There the Emperor himself, in the presence of the court dignities, personally bestows him the most significant patrician mark – the codicil (the diploma), which he is obliged to carry in a prominent place during his public manifestations. It was already mentioned, that not only the patricians received diplomas, but also other highest officials in late Rome, and their circle was limited (senators, magistrates, strategus, consuls). But solely the emperor has the privilege and right to bestow the diploma-codicil to the nominated noblemen from the *illustres*³³ circle.

Another significant problem, concerning our subject is whether the patricians and the other highest officials in early Byzantium received the rich decorated belt, because Constantine VII does not mention it among the marks when describing the patrician signs. But in his work he reproduces the realities from 6th-7th century, when the ritual has received a strong religious touch. On the base of some earlier proofs (basically Casiodor), a lot of the experts on this subject³⁴, with some nuances, accept that the patricians and the highest officials in the 4th-6th century wore those belts. This seems to be happening already in Diocletian's time, when the belt is statuated by a law for the suit of the high military and civilian people, respectively the patricians³⁵. The connection of the belt with the high military aristocracy is confirmed by an authentic text, according

²⁸ PAULY, WISSOWA 1901, col. 179 – 181.

²⁹ EBERSOLT 1923, p. 19, fig. 1; GRABAR 1971, p. 54, 62-64, 89, pl. XI-XII, XVI; PAULY, WISSOWA 1901, Col. 179 – 181.

³⁰ ŠEVČENKO 1968, p. 26 – 58. Fig. 2, 3.

³¹ Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus...*, II. 4 - 13, p. 170 - 179; Constantinus Porphyrogenetus, *De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Bonnae, 1829-1830, II, 47, 48, p. 710 sq; VOGT 1939, II, 56 (47), 57 (48), p. 44-50, 59-69

³² For the light tunicas (λευκοί διόλου) of the patricians writes in the 6th century Joannes Lydos, Вж: *De magistratibus...*, I. 17, p. 134 – 137; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 219.

³³ GUILLAND 1967, p. 23 – 28; VOGT 1939, II, 56 (47), 57 (48), p. 44 – 50, 59 – 68; PAULY, WISSOWA 1901, col. 179 – 181.

³⁴ DEER 1972, p. 278-279; HEIL 1966, p. 75-77

³⁵ SOMMER 1984, p. 83-86.

to which emperor Julian (361-363) deprives a group of dignities of their military status and along with this of their right to wear belts. With their rehabilitation by Valentine "they received their belt back, which they had lost before"³⁶. In this regard Libanius announces that a high magistrate, who was fired by emperor Julian, continued to show up in front of the court in his role of a defendant with a belt. He aimed with this to make the judges respect him, because: "it was the belt, which makes the streets, the fortresses and cities tremble"³⁷. There is also another document from 382, which prohibits to the senators in Rome to wear belts and military suits³⁸. This means that we speak of a widely spread practice at the end of the 4th century. But it is not overcome, because on the Madrid dish from the end of the 4th century the emperor belts of Arcadius and Honorius are clearly engraved, as well as the belt with the tunic of the high dignitary (patrician ?)³⁹. Obviously, the tradition continues, because we see emperor Justinian I (527-565), the patricians and senators, who accompany him, with wide belts under the mantles with golden fibulas and *tablons* on the mosaic wall-panel in San Vitale in Ravenna⁴⁰. Finally, according to John Lid, the pale (white) tunics of the patricians and the red tunics of the eparches and the consuls are tightened up with belts of red leather⁴¹. So, in conclusion it can be claimed that the belt is an important sign in the costume of the high magistrates in the Roman Empire in the 4th century⁴².

Now let us look more carefully at the frescos in the Silistra tomb and mostly at the master's clothes and compare them to the descriptions of John Lid and Constantine Porphyrogenetus. It is also perceived that this is not an usual tunic, but a pale long-sleeved tunic (white with golden nuances), which is decorated with pieces - *paragudii* of purple cloth at the bottom half, the shoulders and the sleeves. According to authentic images and written sources the *paragudii* become an element of the supreme aristocrats' clothes in the 4th C. and according to John Lid specially the white *paragudii* with purple elements are saved for patricians. Investigating the frescos in the Roman catacombs, J. Wilpert stresses on the differences in the clothing from the 3rd-4th century, compared to those from the 1st-2nd. According to him namely in the 3rd-4th century the tunic decorated with pieces begins to accept marks of distinction, which is typical for the high estate⁴³. After the beginning of the 4th century the pieces - *paragudii* penetrate in the clothing of the emperors and high officials, covered by the Roman legislation. In 362 the emperors Valentine and Valent publish a law, confirmed by Theodosius I in 382, which regulates the wearing of golden silk pieces - *paragudii* by the emperor family and banishes their production by private people⁴⁴. At this time namely the tunic with pieces - *paragudii* is transformed into a representative hiton - *paragudii*. According to John Lid, it is a significant element not only for the costume of the emperor, but also for the costumes of the eparches, the council and

³⁶ *Codex Theodosianus*, VIII. 1. 11, p. 365; TOMLIN 1976, p. 191.

³⁷ Libanius, XVIII. 134; TOMLIN 1976, p. 191.

³⁸ *Codex Theodosianus*, XIV. 10. 1-4, p. 397-399, 416.

³⁹ GRABAR 1971, tab. XVI.

⁴⁰ GRABAR 1971, tab. XX. 1.

⁴¹ Joannes Lydos, I, 17, II, 13, p. 134, 179; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 219.

⁴² GRABAR 1971, tab. XX. 1.

⁴³ WILPERT 1902, p. 93 - 96.

⁴⁴ *Codex Theodosianus*, XVI: X.. 21 ; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 217.

the patrician⁴⁵. According to the descriptions, those are chitons with long enough sleeves. I especially endorse on the fact, that the patricians wear white *paragudii*, because the master in the Silistra tomb wears a long white *paragudii*, decorated with segments on the lower lap, the sleeves and the cuffs.

Unlike the mantle, the master's chlamys in the Silistra tomb is presented in much more detailed way and a couple of dark lila (purple) applications is to be seen at the lower end. These applications are called tablion (ταυλιών), and according to John Lid the golden tablions are saved for the Emperor's crimson chlamys while the Caesar's chlamyses are decorated with crimson tablions, as well the eparche's and the officials' (the senators) and the patricians'⁴⁶. They serve for distinctions, that is how the palace watch understood who is to be allowed unobstructed into the castle⁴⁷. There is a discussion about the time when the tablions for the first time begin to decorate the chlamyses of the high dignitaries. On the basis of the statues and mostly on the early frescos, according to J. Wilpert and N. Beliaev this happens after the beginning of the 4th century⁴⁸.

The biggest attention among the suit and the accessories deserves the object with cylinder shape, which is shown in the right hand of the aristocrat in the Silistra tomb (Fig. 7). Almost all the authors, who have touched the subject accept that we talk about a paper roll, wedding contract, sign of the paper work of the master, etc. Having in mind the military aristocrat suit of a high dignitary, I assume that it is actually an emperor's diploma – codicil. And the belt can not be seen, because it is fully covered by the mantle. This is why it is hard to see the senators' and patricians' belts from the encirclement of emperor Justinian I in San Vitale, too. But the belt is definitely part of the Silistra magistrate's suit, because one of the servants of the North wall is submitting it to him with a ritual gesture (Fig. 10). It is made of dark red leather (I have mentioned that according to Joan Lid the partition and senator belts are red) and it is covered with double trapezium applications, which are characteristic for the 4th century. However, analogous silver applications were found in several late antique tombs in Durostorum and dated to the beginning of the 4th century⁴⁹ (Fig. 16).

The belt and the reddish chlamys are a clear indication that the master belongs to the high military aristocracy. And if we trust the descriptions of ancient authors (mostly John Lid and Constantine Porphyrogenetus) and the analyses of A. Beliaev (according to him the white longsleeved tunics – later hitons – *paragudii* and the chlamyses with the colour of dry wine – red-brown and the purple tablions are typical for patricians)⁵⁰, it is more probable that the master of the Silistra tomb was a patrician – a military person, than a consul, magistrate, proconsul or strategus.

Therefore I assume that the master from the Silistra tomb is from a noblemen's family (*illustres*). Most probably he lived around the middle of the 4th

⁴⁵ Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus...*, I. 17, II. 13, p. 134, 179; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 218 - 219.

⁴⁶ Joannes Lydos, *De magistratibus...*, I. 17,32, II. 4,13, p. 134, 144-146; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 225-226.

⁴⁷ Joannes Malalas, I, II (=PGr., 97. col. 101-104).

⁴⁸ WILPERT 1902, p. 95; БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 225-226.

⁴⁹ POPOVIĆ, DONEVSKI 1999, p. 19, 34, 68-69, fig. 8.

⁵⁰ БЕЛЯЕВ 1926, p. 219, 227.

century, like other provincial aristocrats and he was honored with a high title (patrician, magistrate, senator, consul). The only indication for this consists in his suit and the diploma. They are dignified and are fully identical with the suits and the signs of the patricians, senators and the highest magistrates from the early Byzantine epoch. The belt and the reddish mantle are a clear indication that he belongs to the high military aristocracy.

Obviously the nobleman from Durostorum was especially proud with his high title, because the whole artistic composition is a subject to the clothes and accessories, which accompany it. However, I think that the whole procession is an original manifestation of the compound elements of the parade suit, which are brought by the servants. Not only that he's dressed with them, but the master seems to have insisted that they were to be shown especially and separately by the servants, who are submitting them to him with veneration and ritual gestures. I already mentioned, that one of them carries the belt (the last one on the right), the second near him – the bended pale yellowish (*aureata*) tunic (not the mantle, as it is usually claimed, because it is red and it is carried by another servant), the third (the last one on the left) submits the purple tablion with a figure and a golden fibula, and the fourth near him – the trousers. It is true, that trousers can not be seen in the image of the master, but obviously, like the belt, they are fully covered by the long mantle. It is still well known, that in the 4th-5th century the closely tight trousers begin to enter as an element in the suit of the high dignities in the Empire as a barbarian (or may be Sasanid) borrowing⁵¹. However, according to the famous silver dish from the Hermitage even Emperor Constantine himself (337-350)⁵², wears trousers, and he is almost a contemporary to the owner of the Silistra tomb.

It is remarkable that the dignified clothes are brought only by male servants and in the sequence of the dressing. The one closer to the master submits the tunic and the trousers, and the last the belt and the mantle with the fibula. None of the servants submits the diploma and this is understandable. I remind it again, that according to Constantine Porphyrogenetus the clothes and accessories were worn by the nominated patrician, senator, proconsul or strategus (of course with the help of the servants) before he walked into the palace hall, and the belt-codicil, the most important sign, is given by the Emperor himself.

If the frescos in the Silistra tomb have a direct relation with the acceptance of a high military dignity, the presence of the mistress and the female servants seems to be unnatural. However, it has already been marked, that the frame, in which the master is portrayed is equal to the frames, in which the servants are presented (Fig. 6). At the same time they are too tight to accommodate two figures, besides – the central ones. This is why I hold on to the idea, that the original idea should have expected that the central frame would be filled only with the dominating figure of the master⁵³. But something happened inbetween and in a certain stage (it seems that this was in the process of the decoration) the decision was taken, that in the limited surface of the little field to be portrayed

⁵¹ WESSEL, PILTZ, NICOLESCU 1973, col. 444.

⁵² GRABAR 1971, p. 57-59, pl. XVII-2.

⁵³ ДИМИТРОВ, ЧИЧИКОВА 1986, p. 50.

both figures. The space was obviously not enough, which is why the master's figure had to go out of the frame – a case that has no analogy among the other figures and the tomb art from the 4th century generally. This is why the original design, which reproduces the manifestation of the official clothes and accessories, submitted to the master – a high military magistrate – is slightly disturbed and a little insipid with his wife's image that was added later.

As for the female servants, according to the tradition of the time and the opinion of some contemporary experts, they can only serve the mistress. This is why it can be assumed, that their portraying is a result of the decision, that the image of the mistress should find room near the master. But in the same time the concerned female servants do not only carry clothes, jewelry, finery, etc., which can only content the lady's needs. The female servant on the right of the marital couple holds a ewer with a stick (their analogues have been found by archaeological excavations in Silistra) the one on the left – a towel for drying, the last one on the right – a box of perfumes, and the last one on the left – a mirror. These are definitely things and belongings, which can attend the toiletry (mostly the washing) of a nobleman, as well as of a noble lady. This is why I suggest the idea that the female servants submit things and belongings, which are related with the outlook of the nobleman (*illustres*), before he dresses with the elements of the parade dignity suit, which have the connotation of signs. So, the washing has an almost ritual nature and it reminds of the emperors' and bishops' washing before they dress with the ritual clothes and signs.

Finally, it is natural to put the question whether this is the most suitable subject for the decoration of a requiem house, and the Silistra tomb is undoubtedly one. In the beginning it was mentioned, that the four images of the exotic hunter, portrayed on the ceiling, might symbolize the master's youth. This is why, if up above his aristocratic hobby is presented while still living, why should his biggest achievement in his earth existence not be reproduced – the acceptance, the parade suit and signs of a highest dignity (more probable patrician than magistrate, consul or strategus), which were received from the Emperor in Constantinople himself, in the lower register⁵⁴. However, it is totally natural for us to expect for a city like Durostorum the presence of the highest Roman magistrates in 4th-5th century. There were old noble families in the city who took high positions and ranks in the biggest and only XI Claudia legion on the Lower Danube in 4th-5th century. Its fortification permanent camp with a command center was uncovered only at 800 m South from the Silistra tomb (Fig. 2). It is remarkable, that in the time when the tomb was built, Gaudencius, a military commander, was born in about 380, in an aristocratic family. He is definitely one of the most noble and high legitimated men in the Empire, who was also called the last Roman⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ PILLINGER, POPOVA, ZIMMERMANN 1999, p. 26.

⁵⁵ SEECK 1894, Col. 701 – 703; ИВАНОВ, АТАНАСОВ, ДОНЕВСКИ 2006, p. 399-407.

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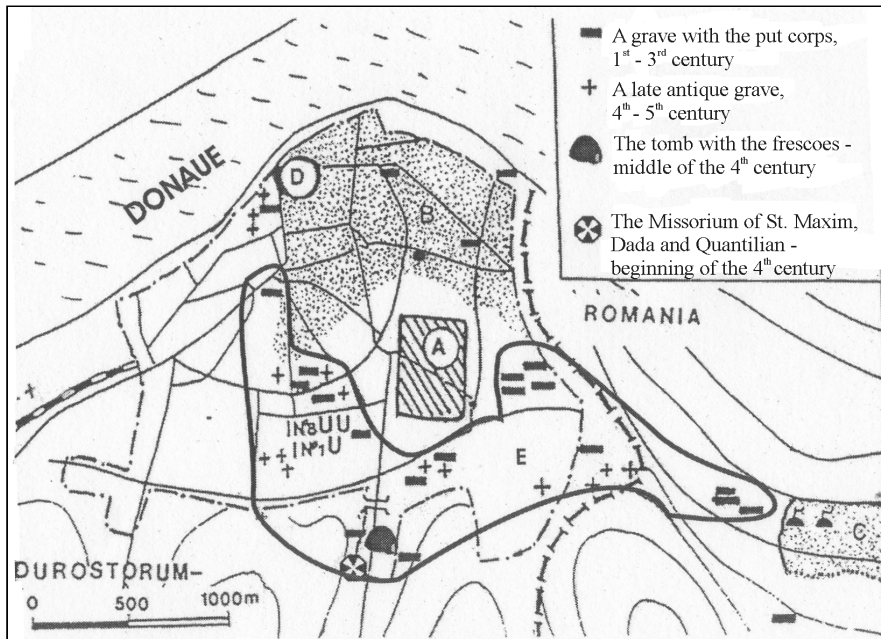
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**Fig. 1 – Plan of the late antique Durostorum ;
A. Camp of the legion; B. Canabae; C. Vicus; D. Castle; E. Necropolis.**

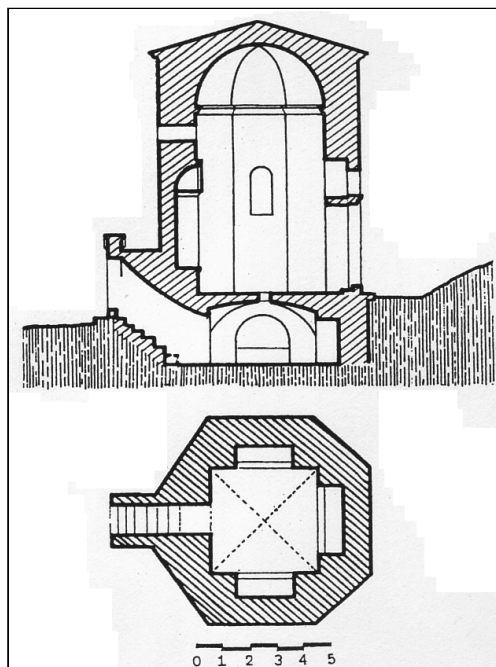


Fig. 2 – An early Christian Martyrium with three coffins of the three martyrs (Saints Maxim, Dada and Quintilian) from Durostorum - Silistra (beginning of the 4th century).



Fig. 3 – Late antique tomb in Durostorum – beginning of 4th century A.D.

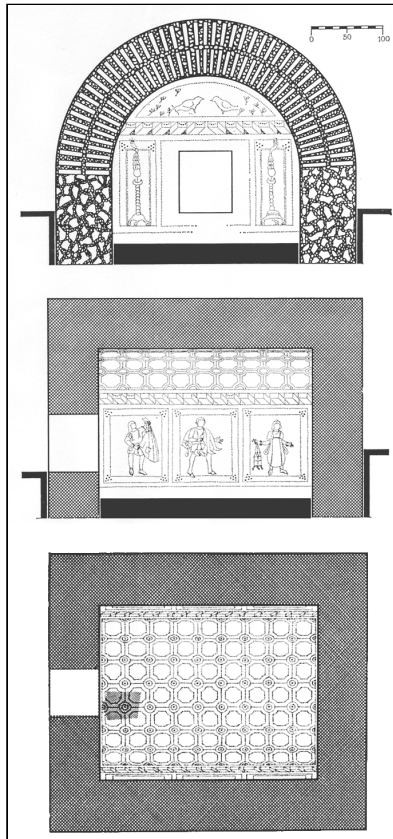


Fig. 4 – A plan and a section of the tomb.



Fig. 5 – The interior of the tomb with the frescos from Durostorum Silistra. Western half.

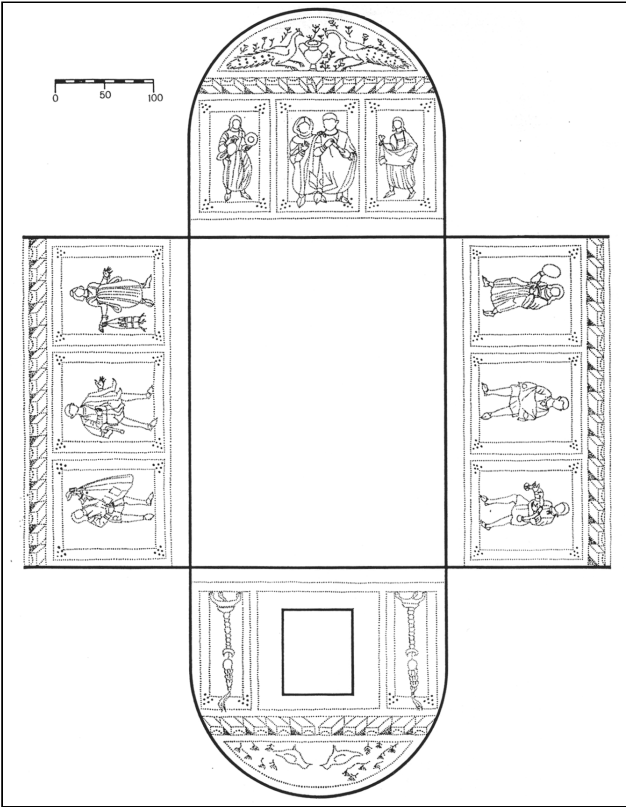


Fig. 6 – The unfold wall decoration.



Fig. 7 – The master with a codicil and the mistress with a flower.



Fig. 8 – A picture of the frescos in the tomb, published from A. Frova in 1943.



Fig. 9 – Male servant with the master’s chlamys and fibula.



Fig. 10 – A male servant with the master’s belt

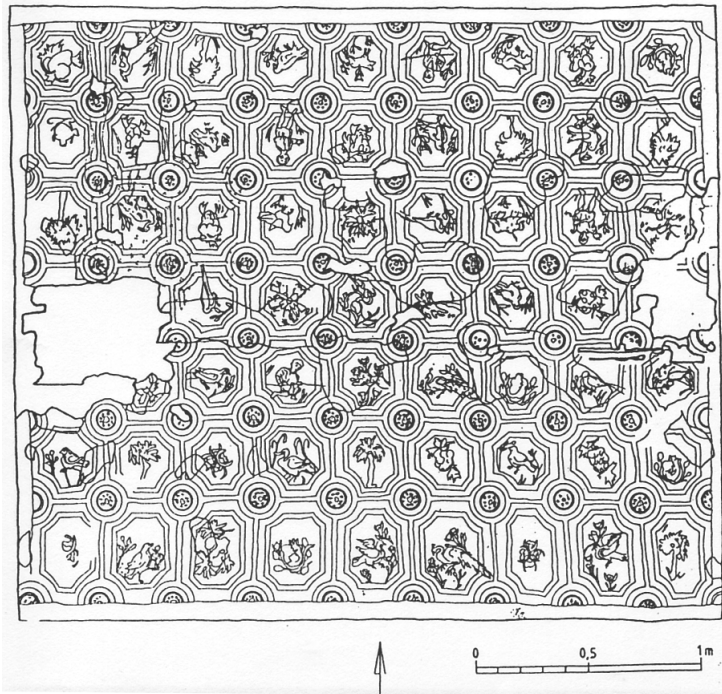


Fig. 11 - A scheme of the frescoes on the tomb ceiling.



Fig. 12 - Frescos on the tomb ceiling.



Fig. 13 - The tomb of Ergastorgius from Salonica. Portrait Ergastorgius.



Fig. 14 - Theodosius' I silver dish, kept in Madrid.



Fig. 15 – A statue of a Roman aristocrat with the emperor’s diploma-codicil.



Fig. 16 – Silver gold-plated applications from a belt of a noble Roman from Durostorum, found in a grave from the 4th century.