

# Tumuli in Dalmatia – Last 2000 Years

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DOI: 10.17234/9789531757232-08

Archaeological sites usually hide under the surface, but there are also the ones easily recognizable and present in the landscape from the time of their formation, regardless of how distant in the past that moment might be. Such numerous tumuli appear as a form of burying a deceased person in many cultures and different times on almost all continents, usually representing both tombs and tombstones. Tumuli are conical mounds made of different materials, depending on availability at the place of erecting, and they were made as a permanent mark of a grave of an individual or a number of community members visible from afar.

Their presence in the landscape had always attracted attention and they were often reused for burials, but also had other functions. Subsequent burials in tumuli are not a phenomenon limited only to Dalmatia since secondary burials of a different character can be found in tumuli across Europe, but let us consider the chronological framework of secondary burials in tumuli in Dalmatia.

Graves were dug into tumuli erected in earlier periods in prehistory, and such burials were also recorded in the first centuries of the historical era, in the Early Antiquity. Judging from the present state of exploration, there was a short hiatus in burials in the Dalmatian tumuli after this period, and these secondary burials reappear in Late Antiquity, continuing throughout the Middle Ages and Modern Period.

Definite conclusions on subsequent burials can be based only on fully investigated tumuli. If we compare the number of excavated tumuli with the number of the ones with recorded secondary burials we can notice big regional differences. In the area near the source of the Cetina river the burials dated from Antiquity to the Modern Period were recorded on 11% of the tumuli, in the regions of Imotski and Vrgorac share of the tumuli with graves from the last two millennia is 63%, and in the hilly region of Plina in the hinterland of Ploče it is 70%.

After studying this subject on over 75 tumuli in the region between the Zrmanja and Neretva rivers, we could date 32 tumuli more precisely. The appearance of subsequent burials was most distinct in the Late Middle Ages (total of 47% of tumuli with subsequent burials), the Early Middle Ages (28%), then the Early Modern Period, High Middle Ages, and graves from the Late Antiquity period (6% respectively). Other tumuli contain graves that belong to transitional periods.

Burials in tumuli in Late Antiquity were recorded in Dalmatia in three tumuli in the region of Ravni Kotari: Škornica in Privlaka, Matakova glavica in Podvršje, and Kašić – Glavčurak, a site interesting because of several burial horizons from different periods.

Early medieval burials in tumuli are present in the entire area between Zrmanja and Neretva. The tumuli from several early medieval sites (Kašić – Glavčurak, Krneza – Jokina glavica and Kozica – Tumul 2) are particularly interesting.

Most of the subsequent burials in tumuli can be dated to the Late Middle Ages, and they are found in the entire area of the study, from the site of Sv. Grgur near Nin to Mišja draga on the right bank of the Neretva delta, but they are most frequent in central Dalmatia. In addition to the fully investigated tumuli, there are also unexplored tumuli with *kamici* tombstones, since these monuments were formed from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but most date to the Late Middle Ages. The Late Middle Ages graves are particularly interesting in the context of recycling, as they were used more often for multiple burials than the graves from earlier periods.

Graves were used in a similar way in the Early Modern Period, which is not unusual since it reflects continuity from the Late Middle Ages, while graves from the Late Modern Period were recorded only at the site of Granica – Tumul 2.

Tumuli were used not only as necropoles but also to control the area, which is understandable if we keep in mind their position that was often dominating the neighbourhood (machine gun nests, bunkers, shelters for shepherds and hunters or for field monitoring).

Position and in particular conspicuousness of tumuli made them important points of orientation in the landscape, which is why they appear in historical sources as landmarks. In the Early Modern Period, tumuli marked the border between the Venetians and the Ottomans. Mostly existing tumuli were used for this purpose, but occasionally new ones were raised.

There is an interesting group of earthen mounds in north Dalmatia on which churches were built (St Nicholas and St Gregory near Nin, St Vitus in Privlaka). The elevated position and probably also the awareness of the cult character of the tumulus played an important role in raising these buildings.

Therefore, tumuli in Dalmatia are not only prehistoric monuments but they are also an inseparable part of the landscape from its formation to the present, and as such, they have attracted human attention as testified by many traces of spiritual and profane activities.

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Translated by: Marija Kostić