

Bianca Balducci

PhD thesis in

Methods and Methodology of Archeological and Historical Art Research. Archaeology and territorial systems

Title

Funeral pyres and macedonian funeral rites

The research was devoted entirely to the study of funeral pyres dating from the second half of the 4th century BC and the beginning of II century BC, attested in nine different necropolis selected as a sample area - Verghina, Derveni, Thessaloniki, Aineia, Aghios Athanasios, Pydna, Methone, Lefkadia and Pella - and located along the Thermaic Gulf of Central Macedonia. The purpose of the investigation was to reconstruct the funerary rite of secondary deposition cremation, which in Macedonia is often performed by the sovereigns and the aristocratic class in the so-called "heroic" way described in the Homeric text of the Iliad. This funerary practice, in which pyre and burial do not coincide but constitute two distinct moments of a single complex funeral process, expresses behavior codes that are reflected in a series of clearly recognizable material signs in the archaeological excavation. The reconstruction has been attempted with the exclusive help of the archaeological data retrieved scattered in the bibliography so far published in modern Greek language, consisting of charred layers, outcome of funeral pyres, found rarely *in situ*, most frequently in a secondary deposition, accumulated around or above the corresponding burials. Interest has thus focused on the identification of this particular burial costume's passage, the last ring with a strong ritual value, of a long chain that ends with the erection of the artificial mound. In single context, on the basis of the funeral or sacrificial nature of the investigated charred residue, a reconstructive hypothesis is proposed, of both the funeral pyre, which always goes beyond a simple pile of wood placed on the ground, and the sacrificial act - *enagismòs* - offered with fire in honor of the deceased, after his burial and erection of the mound. From the comparison of individual partial hypotheses, linked to a specific funerary context, facilitated by creating an elaborated *ad hoc* synoptic table, attempts were made to deduce considerations of a general nature which could give the idea of the entire ritual process's carrying out, at least in its most macroscopic passages. The rearrangement of the data obtained from the edited bibliography enabled a comprehensive comparison of the charcoal layers, by listing the different aspects and variants, by highlighting the preferences regarding the location of the piles in relation to the grave, by distinguishing the pyres found in a primary deposition from those found in a secondary deposition, by considering the choices on the funeral setup, by analyzing the various classes of materials found inside them to argue recurrences and constants, linked to the rank, gender and age of the deceased. The archaeological data - the charred stratifications pertinent to funeral pyres - if identified in its distinctive features and interpreted in the correct manner, today renders likelihood to the so-called "homeric" or "heroic" funeral rite, so far considered simply a story produced by literary fiction. Such costume, made for and by royal or equestrian high rank personalities, is an expression of an aristocratic world with a purely warlike character; with the advent to the power of Philip II and then of Alexander the Great, we are witnessing the realization of monumental funeral pyres, the rediscovery and the voluntary imitation of the "homeric" funeral costume, practiced by the royalists and members of the Macedonian court in Aegae (modern Verghina) but also in the rest of the territorial area investigated, strongly marked by the presence of the Macedonians.