

## ***Thrace Sepulchre decorated with frescoes***

Country of territory:

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Name of organisation  
compiling the information:

National Institute for Monuments of Culture

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Name and address of building(s) or site:

THRACE SEPULCHRE  
DECORATED WITH FRESCOES.  
Site located near the village of  
Alexandrovo, 18km from the city of  
Haskovo, Municipality and Region of  
Haskovo.

Inventory reference number(s):

Listed as a Cultural Monument in the  
preliminary category "National Value".  
Nomination letter No.  
11056/27.12.2000.

Building type(s) : Archaeological site  
comprising a tumulus, a grave, a  
grave with mural paintings,  
fortifications and remains of houses.

Main date(s):

5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Current use(s):

Archaeological site close to visitors.

Significance:

This archaeological site is of exceptional scientific and cultural value. The sepulchre with frescoes of exceptional iconographic and artistic value, is situated near the Alexandrovo village, 1.2 km north of the "Maritsa" highway, on top of a hill (60 metres in diameter), 15 metres above the sea level. The site was discovered in December 2000 during illegal excavations when a hole 4.2 metres deep was dug. The opening is situated exactly above the axis of the *dromos* where it is possible to penetrate through the space left after the destruction of one of the cover plates.

Constructions are oriented east-west with an entrance on the east side, and include a *dromos* 9 metres long and 4.55 metres high. Two chambers are accessible from the *dromos*. One is rectangular, 1.85 metres large and 1.20 metres long, the other one is circular 3.3 metres high with a diameter of 3.3 m. The constructions are made of stone assembled without mortar. The top of the cupola is covered with a plaque. Up till now, no traces of metal elements have been found.

In the circular chamber, large blocs are dispersed from the bed, which was located in the southern part of the room. The floor of both rooms is covered with clay, and we can suppose that there is another floor covering in stone. The construction is stable.

The walls of the three chambers are decorated with paintings. The frescoes of the *dromos* are partially preserved and represent a knight and a foot soldier. On the walls of the first room situated on the left hand side, traces of an orthostate layer and multi-colored elements of structural style are visible. On the west side, a duel between a knight and a soldier can be seen. A splendid mural decoration can be seen in the circular chamber. It is composed of a figurative frieze including a three-elements cornice, and a second figurative frieze with four hunting scenes. The door also shows traces of paintings. The bottom part of the door is sculpted in a very elaborate and impressive manner. The coat of two plaster layers under the painting is approximately 10 mm thick. The first layer is applied onto the stone, the second, much finer, is polished (*stucco lustro*). The frescoes are of exceptional stylistic, iconographic and artistic quality.

The paintings show signs of deterioration due to the normal weathering of material. Partial salt crystallization (efflorescence) caused the fading of some parts of the paintings. However, considering the age of the frescoes, the general conservation state is satisfactory.

The conservation and presentation works for this site should be similar to those carried out on the Kazanluk Thracian Tomb, an archaeological site of universal value. Archaeologists adopted a restrictive conservation approach limiting visitors' access. A museum, with copies of the frescoes and a reconstruction of the tomb, is situated close to the archaeological remains.

The conservation and presentation plan foresees:

Stopping the degradation process of the frescoes

Elaborating an air conditioning system to slowly reduce the humidity of the frescoes

Isolating the constructions from the soil humidity, installing a drainage system under the tomb

Consolidating the stone structure and the hill

Limiting the visits

Projecting the building for the functioning of the electrical and air-conditioning systems and for the visitors' centre.

The Ministry of Culture finances the activities in conformity with the adopted conservation and presentation plan. The Municipality of Haskovo will be in charge of the necessary infrastructures.

#### Categories of significance:

Of outstanding national importance

Potential universal significance

#### Categories of ownership or interest:

This site has no specific ethnic or religious relevance.

#### Documentation et bibliographic references:

Archives and Inventory of the National institute for the Monuments of Culture

Archives of the Archaeological Institute and Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Science

Complete photographic documentation

Digital, geodetic documentation

Reports on archaeological research

Drawings, surveys.

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There is a project for the air-conditioning system

Condition:

Poor : Recent micro-biological studies demonstrate that, despite the existing air-conditioning system, the mural paintings deteriorate and necessitate urgent restoration and conservation interventions.

Risk:

Risk is related to the deterioration of the mural paintings.

Condition risk:

Immediate risk of continued deterioration or loss of substance. Solution agreed but not begun.

Technical assessment and costing:

Budget estimates:

140 000 leva (70 000 EUR) for the installation of a gallery for the air-conditioning system  
60 000 leva (30 000 EUR) for the restoration works

An international competition will be held in 2004 for the preparation of the conservation, restoration and presentation project.

Ownership:

State property.

Occupation:

The site is not accessible to visitors.

Management:

The Municipality of Haskovo is in charge of the management of the site.

Should the funds become available, the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Haskovo would be managing the funds and supervising the conservation works. The National Institute for Monuments of Culture would be responsible for the control.

Summary:

The tomb and its mural paintings are of exceptional scientific and cultural value. The frescoes require urgent restoration and conservation works. The risk is related to the humidity threatening the constructions and the frescoes.

The potential intervention level is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Arch. Gueorgui Ougrinov

Director of the National Institute for Monuments of Culture

16.01.2004