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Burying Greeks in Dalmatia

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UGARKOVIĆ, M. 2019. *Geometrija smrti: isejski pogrebni obredi, identiteti i kulturna interakcija: antička nekropola na Vlaškoj njivi, na otoku Visu dio I/1; dio I/2. The Geometry of Death: Issa's Burial rites, Identities and Cultural Interaction: The Ancient Necropolis at Vlaška njiva on the Island of Vis, Vol. 1, part 1; Vol. 1, part 2*. Split/Zagreb: Arheološki Muzej u Splitu; Institut za arheologiju. (Croatian with abstract in English in Vol. I, part 1: 209–13.)

The city of Issa on the island of Vis in Dalmatia was one of the oldest Greek settlements in the central Adriatic. Strategically located at the crossroads of sea routes linking both

shores of the Adriatic with the Mediterranean, it flourished as an autonomous polity throughout the Hellenistic period and was continuously occupied until Late Antiquity. However, its urban plan and architectural history are still relatively unknown: excavations inside the wall circuit have hitherto been focused on three city blocks.¹ In contrast, Issa's funerary areas have largely been explored, albeit under far from ideal circumstances. After being almost entirely destroyed by the construction of a soccer field between 1948 and 1955, following centuries of looting and opportunistic finds,² the remnants of Issa's southwestern cemetery at Martvilo were not systematically investigated until 1976.³ Much of Issa's eastern cemetery at Vlaška njiva, which was discovered in 1983, was obliterated to make room for the construction of the Hotel Issa that helped to make Vis a tourist destination. Before this hotel was built, rescue excavations by a team from Split's Arheološki muzej (directed by Branko Kirigin) yielded at least 249 Greek and Roman tombs spanning over half a millennium of burial customs. Another cemetery, datable to the Late Antique period, was brought to light by salvage excavations conducted in 2001 in the Mala Banda area of the town of Vis, to the west of the site of Issa.⁴ These three sites are especially noteworthy because no cemeteries have yet been found in other Greek cities in Croatia, particularly on the island of Hvar, home of Issa's closest Greek neighbor.

Ugarković's (U.) *The Geometry of Death*, a revised version of her 2015 doctoral dissertation,⁵ is the study of 94 graves from Vlaška njiva from the 1983 excavations. These funerary assemblages are datable from the mid-4th to the late 1st c. BCE; most of them belong to the heyday of Issa's prosperity as a self-governing city in the Hellenistic period.⁶ Given the fact that conservation of the finds began in earnest only after 2010, and that U. is the monograph's sole author, it is a brilliant achievement. Extensively researched and lavishly illustrated, it is one of the few comprehensive reports on Hellenistic cemeteries from the Adriatic region to become available in the last 20 years.⁷ The first part of volume I discusses the methodological underpinnings of U.'s work and contains both a detailed analysis of the finds and her interpretation; the second part is a catalogue of graves (henceforth referred to

¹ I am very grateful to I. Borzić, B. Čargo, J. Jovanović, B. Kirigin, and B. Nelson for their feedback while writing this review. For the results of the most recent fieldwork in the southeastern area of the city, see Čargo 2022, 454–57 and 468–69, figs. 2–3; see also Čargo 2013; Čargo 2016. Ivčević 2021, Čargo et al. 2022, Čargo 2023a, and Čargo 2023b have showcased the most significant pre-historic, Greek, and Roman finds from the island of Vis.

² Čargo 2010a, 17–31.

³ Excavations of this cemetery between 1976 and 1985 uncovered 53 Hellenistic inhumation graves and 10 Roman cremation graves, datable from the early 3rd c. BCE to the 1st c. CE; see Kirigin 1990. A study of these grave units has been completed by Jovanović (2023). Other graves may yet lie underneath and near to the tennis courts that have replaced the soccer field (preliminary information from G. M. Crothers of the University of Kentucky, who conducted a geophysical survey at Martvilo in 2019 and 2021).

⁴ Čargo 2010b.

⁵ Ugarković 2015 (not listed in her bibliography).

⁶ The 1983 excavations also uncovered 75 Roman cremation graves, 39 Roman inhumation graves, and 39 graves with skeletal remains that could not be dated (part I, 35 n. 237).

⁷ For Ancona, see Colivicchi 2002; for Budva, see Marković 2012, 11–99, 289–337, pl. 1–47, and Medin 2021; for Kopila, see Fadić and Eterović Borzić 2017; for Phoinice, see Lepore and Muka 2018.

as “catalogue”). The scholarly value and visual impact of this work are greatly enhanced by the predominant use of color for photos and diagrams.⁸

After introductory remarks on the intellectual background and objectives of this study, and a list of essential abbreviations, the first two chapters outline the main geomorphological features of the island of Vis, the evidence for prehistoric settlements, and the topography and history of Issa from its foundation in the 4th c. BCE until the city’s loss of political independence under Caesar. Chapter 3 briefly deals with the discovery of the cemetery and the methodology of the 1983 investigations; it includes a schematic plan (31, Plan 1) of the excavated area, which covered 3,528 m², and 13 profiles of the 19 longitudinal trenches that were excavated on the Vlaška njiva hillside after being uncovered with a backhoe.⁹ Each trench was 6 m wide, and the grid was subdivided into quadrants labelled A to G. This plan is one of only two visual sources of information on the placement of the graves in the excavated area, and it is critical for understanding U.’s discussion of the spatial organization and development of the cemetery in Chapter 7. The second source is a foldout plan (Plan 2, between 178 and 179) of the Greek cemetery. However, neither plan shows the location of the graves in relation to the eastern city wall of Issa, which stands less than 90 m from the closest graves, or any topographical feature. According to U., some other tombs were destroyed during the construction of the Hotel Issa; the human remains found at Vlaška njiva were re-buried in a mass grave at Martvilo after being examined by Ž. Mikić.¹⁰

Chapters 4 and 5 comprise the core of this study. They are devoted to a description of the main types and sub-types of funerary architecture used at Vlaška njiva and to eight “functional” categories of grave goods, including ceramic vessels,¹¹ terracottas, *personalia* (e.g., strigils), coins, and miscellaneous items such as lamps, seashells, lithic and metal objects (e.g., 158, a *tabella defixionis*), utensils, weapons, and jewelry. For information about these objects, and any comparanda, a reader will have to consult pp. 58–172 of Chapter 5, since the second part of vol. I only provides references for items that have already been published, such as the coins and select vessels and bronze implements. For instance, even though the unusual presence of five Phoenician amphoriskoi in four different graves is fully dealt with in this chapter (132–33), there are no references to this discussion in the description of each vessel in the catalogue.¹²

Particularly important is U.’s discussion of the numismatic evidence. This consists of 32 coins (out of 94 Greek, Roman, Roman provincial, and modern coins found in the

⁸ Part 1 has 256 illustrations; part 2 has more than 800 illustrations. In contrast, Lepore and Muka’s 2018 study of a Hellenistic and Roman cemetery at Phoenice (not listed in U.’s bibliography) includes 642 black and white figures.

⁹ Only the western profile of trenches 4 and 5 in quadrant G is clearly identified (33, fig. 12). Only two photos of the 1983 excavation area are shown (29, 36).

¹⁰ The results of Mikić’s anthropological analysis have not been published (30 and 173 nn. 1626, 1628).

¹¹ Graffiti have rarely been found on the Greek pottery from this cemetery (86); see Čače et al. 2022, 125–36.

¹² There is no reference in the description of the amphoriskoi in the catalogue to the essay by Ugarković and Šegvić (2019). For these Phoenician imports, see also Ugarković and Waldner 2021.

excavations of the cemetery),¹³ 12 of which could be linked to six grave assemblages (146–49).¹⁴ U. has pointed out that coins are first found in graves of the 3rd c. BCE and that most graves with coins belonged to adults. Their date of issue is generally much earlier than the context in which they have been found, and very few belong to Issa. The earliest funerary coin, which she has attributed to Issa, comes from grave 157, a tomb datable to the first half of the 3rd c. It is poorly legible, however, and may not belong to Issa at all (147 n. 1353).¹⁵ An Issaeian bronze coin comes from a problematic assemblage listed as “grave (?) 28”, that has been dated tentatively to the last third of the 2nd c. based on the pottery.¹⁶ It is one of the earliest civic issues of the late 4th c. with Head of nymph / Star. Since it is in good condition, it could have been an heirloom whose types had special significance for the woman that was buried in this tomb (135–37).¹⁷ Another coin in good condition, in silver, is the first example from a controlled excavation of an issue of an unidentified Illyrian mint. It was found inside grave 220 (datable to the second half of the 3rd c. / first half of the 2nd c.), which contained the remains of a man and a woman and several ceramic vessels that exemplify the drinking set deposited in Vlaška njiva’s tombs throughout the Hellenistic period (191–98). The contextual evidence shows that this coin was in circulation before ca. 150 BCE. U. has proposed that it may have been minted by Ballaios, an unknown Illyrian king (148).¹⁸ Although her attribution is unconvincing, the presence of bronze coins of Ballaios in graves 120 and 169, which have been dated to the late 2nd or 1st c. BCE,¹⁹ does indicate that Illyrian coinage arrived at Issa in some quantity.

Significantly, at least four coins (one-third of the attributable Greek coins from the Hellenistic cemetery) come from southern Italy. Imported pottery also shows that Issa had close trade relations with this region until the late 3rd c. BCE (59–61, 71–82, 90, 103). In addition, the presence of a bronze coin of Miletus in a 3rd-c. burial (grave 22) points to Issa’s contacts with the eastern Mediterranean (146–47).²⁰ What is surprising, though, is the scarcity of coins from Sicily, particularly from Syracuse, given that Issa was described as a Syracusan colony by Ps. Scymnus, a Greek geographer of the 2nd c. BCE (18 n. 97). Only one decontextualized coin of Syracuse (a *litra* of Hieron II) has been found. This is in keeping with the dearth of other Syracusan items among the funerary materials from Vlaška njiva.²¹ Neither the coins nor the pottery thus support the literary account of Issa’s Syracusan origins. On the other hand, the substantial number of Roman

¹³ All the coins from Vlaška njiva were published prior to U.’s study of the contextual evidence: see Bonačić Mandinić 2014.

¹⁴ A bronze coin found in grave 158, which was tentatively attributed to Hadrian by Bonačić Mandinić (2014, 235, no. 87) and has been included among the Hellenistic finds, may be intrusive (148; see catalogue 158.21). A Roman Republican *quinarius* minted in 97 BCE (Bonačić Mandinić 2014, 221, no. 31) has not been taken into consideration.

¹⁵ See catalogue 157.8; cf. Visonà 2017, 210 n. 86, 212.

¹⁶ See catalogue 28.30.

¹⁷ This assemblage also contained two terracotta figurines possibly representing Demeter and Aphrodite Urania or a maenad: see catalogue 28.1–2.

¹⁸ Catalogue 220.9. An attribution to Ballaios was first proposed by Nelson (2002): see also Visonà 2010, 35–36.

¹⁹ See catalogue 120.1.2. and 169.1.

²⁰ See catalogue 22.1.

²¹ See catalogue 310, NOV 7. According to U., “objects in the graves that could be imports from Syracuse are scarcely represented” (207).

Republican silver and bronze coins (16 examples, 12 of which from eight graves) documents the influx of Roman coinage in the eastern Adriatic in the first half of the 2nd c. BCE. U. has suggested that the presence of *denarii* and their fractions in Late Hellenistic burials signals an increase in prosperity for the Issaeans at this time, which is quite plausible (148–49, fig. 194).²²

In contrast to the wealth of information provided by Chapters 4 and 5, Chapters 6 and 7 leave something to be desired. In Chapter 6, U. outlines some biological features of Issa's population based on the results of an unpublished anthropological analysis of the remains of at least 112 individuals (representing 28 children and 84 adults). Only 12% of this osteological material was in good and very good condition, however. Even though U. argues that it has been possible to identify the gender and age of the dead, her statistics cannot now be verified, because this evidence was not preserved (see above). Her distinction of eight age groups raises eyebrows, since it is unclear what criteria were followed to establish each group (174, fig. 237). Her conclusion that "the majority of the deceased" at the time of death were between 20 and 45 years old is also open to question, especially because it is based on such a small sample population, as she admits. Therefore, her comparison with anthropological data from Liburnian sites may not be entirely relevant (174–76).²³ Regrettably, very little bioanthropological information other than the gender and age of the deceased has been provided in the catalogue of graves in part 2 of vol. I, which has not been cross-referenced with Chapter 6.²⁴ For example, there is no mention in the catalogue (44–45, 141) that the female buried in grave 90 had a benign bone tumor, or that the male buried in grave 220 had suffered a broken humerus, as noted in Chapter 6. Since the skeletal remains from Vlaška njiva are lost, thus precluding further analyses that could have yielded additional information (particularly about age at death, diet, health, genetic relationships, and migration patterns), it was crucial to publish all the data about the skeletons' features recorded in 1983 in the description of each grave assemblage.

The spatial organization and development of the Vlaška njiva necropolis is the topic of Chapter 7, one of the most interesting in this monograph. According to U., the cemetery may have originated close to Issa's eastern city wall and steadily extended in a northeasterly direction towards Stonca bay between the 4th and 1st c. BCE.²⁵ Her foldout plan in part 1 (Plan 2) shows that the 94 Hellenistic graves (ca. 70% of which are simple inhumations, while 25% are multiple burials, and 5% are cremations) are also generally oriented to the northeast (177–78, 187).²⁶ Almost one-third of them (including three Late Hellenistic graves) are clustered near the city wall. However, they were not evenly laid out, and their position on the ground does not appear to follow an orderly plan; this

²² For the Roman Republican coins found in the cemetery see catalogue 175a, 29.13, 31.1, 81.24–27, 91.20, 150.37, 169.2, 212.39, NOV 21–22, NOV 27, NOV 29.

²³ A table with pathological information from 13 graves is on page 175. For the results of an analysis of human remains from Liburnian sites mentioned by U., which are based on the skeletal remains of 172 individuals, see Anterić et al. 2011, 78–109.

²⁴ For a model treatment of mortuary evidence, see Stirling et al. 2021.

²⁵ There are no maps showing Stonca bay, which is located ca. 1 km to the east of Vlaška njiva: see Miše and Touloumtzidou 2016, 280.

²⁶ Several graves datable from the late 3rd c. to the 1st c. BCE are oriented differently: see catalogue, graves 184, 31–32, 45, 54, 81a–b, 92–3, 100, 104, 141–42, 142a, 150, 161, 211–12.

would have been impractical if not unfeasible, given the rocky nature of the terrain (28–29, 33, fig. 12, 177–78).²⁷ Nevertheless, the presence of family plots in certain areas of the cemetery does suggest some organization of the funerary landscape (178).²⁸ Unfortunately, Plan 2 shows no topographic landmarks, such as Issa's eastern city wall, or the coastal road at the foot of the hillside, or the space occupied by the Hotel Issa. It is also difficult to follow U.'s discussion of the development of the cemetery, in which she refers to the trenches and quadrants in her schematic plan of the excavations (Plan 1, on p. 31). The exact position of each grave in the landscape is therefore uncertain.²⁹ Moreover, since at least 114 Roman graves were found together with the Hellenistic graves, an opportunity has been missed to present a complete picture of the cemetery and the use of its space until Late Antiquity by showing *all* the graves and color-coding them.³⁰

The most salient conclusion from U.'s analysis is that the Vlaška njiva cemetery was the main burial place of Issa's population. Unlike Issa's southwestern cemetery at Martvilo, where cist graves were used until the 1st c. BCE, family plots were separated by stone walls, and stelae were inscribed with the names of the deceased, the eastern cemetery at Vlaška njiva had less pretentious tombs throughout the Hellenistic period. While the two cemeteries coexisted, Martvilo appears to have been reserved for members of Issa's governing elite.³¹ Stone-built graves similar to those predominant at Martvilo were few and far between at Vlaška njiva; they were built only in the late 2nd and the 1st c. BCE, when this type of upscale funerary architecture was co-opted by some Issaeian families, possibly as a way to assert their wealth and status.³² Thus the evidence from this cemetery has implications for an understanding of socio-economic changes at Issa, particularly in the 2nd c., which witnessed its political ascent as a Roman ally and the foundation of an Issaeian settlement at Resnik in the Bay of Kaštela, on the Illyrian coast.³³

Chapter 8 is a thorough examination of Issaeian burial practices and funerary customs, in which U. discusses, in particular, the disposal of the corpse, the number of people found in multiple burials, the orientation and position of the bodies in the graves, the significance of the grave goods as hallmarks of Issaeian identity, and the evidence for meals as aspects of funerary ritual (179–200). She highlights the affinities between Issa's mortuary practices and those of Greek and indigenous communities on both shores of the Adriatic, and in southern Italy. Although she has successfully placed her analysis of the materials from Vlaška njiva in a Mediterranean context, she has not been able to reconstruct the natural

²⁷ Excavations conducted in the Summer and Fall of 2022 and in the Spring of 2023 to the northeast and north of the Hotel Issa, aimed at locating new graves, have exposed a vast expanse of bedrock 50 to 80 cm beneath the topsoil (*vidi*). Only a few Greek and Roman graves have been found.

²⁸ See Plan 2 and catalogue, graves 26, 48–51, 92–93, 100, 104, 150, 161, 211–12, 141–42, 142a.

²⁹ Since different graves listed in the catalogue come from the same trench and quadrant, their position in relation to each other can only be discerned by consulting the foldout plan.

³⁰ Guzzardi 2022, 201, fig. 2.

³¹ The evidence from late Archaic and Classical cemeteries at Syracuse may provide comparable examples of social differentiation: see Guzzardi 2022, 203, 218–19. I owe this reference to J. Jovanović.

³² Roman Republican silver coins and jewelry were deposited in these graves: see catalogue 150.37, 150.43, 150.44 (grave 150), 212.39, 212.43, 212.44 (grave 212).

³³ See Čargo 2022, 460–62, 471–72; Paškvan and Visonà 2020–2021, 140–43.

environment of the cemetery over time because of the lack of archaeobotanical data.³⁴ Her brief mention of the faunal remains found inside and near the graves is disappointing (198–200 n. 1783).³⁵ An in-depth analysis and quantification of these archaeozoological data would have cast light on the importance of different animal species for the Issaeian economy, and on animal husbandry, food sources, animal-derived implements found in graves, and wild fauna.³⁶

In Chapter 9, which brings part 1 of vol. I to a close, U. draws social and historical inferences from her findings. She concludes that while Issa was a Greek city, the different aspects of Issaeian material culture revealed by the funerary evidence suggest that the Issaeians participated in commercial networks and cultural interactions in both regional and Mediterranean contexts. In her view, this contributed to the creation of their distinctive “fluid and multi-cultural” identities (205–7).

Part 2 of vol. I is a straightforward catalogue of graves. It is preceded by a list of graves and burials in chronological sequence and a color-coded key to the types of funerary architecture and the categories of grave goods that were found. Almost every grave has been drawn and several have also been photographed; many of them have absolute elevations.³⁷ The main problems with this catalogue are editorial. Besides the lack of cross-references to vol. I, part 1, the dark orange color code for animal bones has not been used in any top plan of the graves illustrated in part 2. As a result, animal bones cannot be identified in grave 22, burial (?) 28, graves 45, 81a, 81b, burial (?) 91, or graves 93, 142, 150a, and 226. Furthermore, the yellow color code intended for seashells and molluscs has been used for the bedding and concentrations of sea gravel in graves 70, 71, and 157. Several coins, including the coin of Miletus from grave 22, the early Issaeian coin from burial (?) 28, and the Roman Republican coins from graves 29, 31, and 81, are not shown with the rest of the grave goods in each assemblage. Some items have also been misnumbered on, or omitted from, the top plans of graves 58 and 70, burial (?) 91, and graves 150a and 212. Better editing and an analytical index would have made this catalogue more user-friendly.

These comments do not detract from the high value of this monograph, in which all the materials from Vlaška njiva have been collected, studied, and interpreted for the first time after 40 years. U.’s work has indeed offered new and unprecedented insight into Issaeian funerary customs, social identities, and cultural interaction. She has significantly increased our knowledge of Hellenistic Issa. One looks forward to her planned publication of the Roman graves from this cemetery.

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³⁵ The information provided by U. is based on a 2014 unpublished faunal report by S. Radović.

³⁶ Cf. Bartosiewicz 2010. Both domesticated and wild animals (goats, deer, and a seabird) are featured on Issa’s civic issues: see Visonà 2017, 218; Pamić and Visonà 2019, 63, 65–66, n. 25.

³⁷ U. has not explained how these elevations were obtained. However, a profile of trench 6 (33, fig. 13) shows that point 0.00 was located on the surface of the coastal road running parallel to the Vlaška njiva hillside.

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Exploring Roman emotions

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VON EHRENHEIM, H., and M. PRUSAC-LINDHAGEN, eds. 2020. *Reading Roman Emotions: Visual and Textual Interpretations*. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom 4°, 64. Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom. Pp. 199. ISSN: 0081-993X. ISBN: 978-91-7042-186-0. Hardcover.

Despite the proliferation of publications on the history of emotions in recent years,¹ the expression of emotions in Roman culture is still not as well studied as in Greek culture. This volume is a step in the direction of addressing this imbalance. A collection of studies on the topic of Roman emotions, it is the result of a workshop that took place in Rome on 16–17 April 2014. While the workshop was on emotions in the visual culture of the ancient world, the majority of the papers presented dealt with aspects of emotional displays in Roman culture; therefore, the editors correctly made this the focus of the book. This choice has resulted in a compact and stimulating volume on interpretations of emotions in Roman

¹ See Cairns 2022a and Cairns 2022b for a recent overview.