A Matter of Life and Death: The Rise of the Tumulus, the Eternal Living Monument of Bronze and Iron Age Albania

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"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". (John 3:16, The Holy Bible. NIV)

I thank God for his love and mercy in my life and for being my hope in life, death and the afterlife.

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I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my Mother, Engjëllushe Hoxhaj, for instilling

in me a lifelong love of learning. I am profoundly thankful for my wonderful husband,

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Lastly, I hope that one day, our four children, who have faced challenges and made

sacrifices during this doctoral journey, will come to truly appreciate it.

Abstract

Tumulus cemeteries served as the cornerstone of archaeological research during the communist regime in Albania, sparking a vibrant and proactive interest in their identification, excavation, study and publication. However, this investigation into tumuli was largely shaped by the socio-economic and political dynamics of the nationalistic agendas of the totalitarian communist regime. As a result, certain aspects of tumuli data were often misused to promote the ethnogenesis of Illyrians. Consequently, data remained fragmented, and there was no comprehensive or detailed catalogue of each individual tumulus. This approach ultimately impeded a thorough understanding of the significance of tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments and their role in addressing the central themes of death, burial and bereavement. By employing a mixed methods approach that integrates both thematic and statistical analyses, this research re-evaluates published data from tumuli excavated during the communist era and presents a framework that addresses the challenges inherent in tumuli research while emphasising the rigour, scientific integrity and quality of the data.

This study illustrates how re-assessing published tumuli data from a communist regime, in light of recent advancements in understanding sensory experiences, emotions and memory, facilitates a deeper exploration of issues related to death, burial and bereavement, ultimately yielding a more comprehensive understanding of tumuli. In doing so, it highlights the key factors that transformed tumulus cemeteries from mere burial sites into Eternal Living Monuments of the Bronze and Iron Age in Albania. By showcasing the wealth of insights that can be derived from re-assessing the published data of a totalitarian regime and examining the significant role of tumulus cemeteries – both as matters of life and death and as Eternal Living Monuments – this research paves the way for future studies on tumuli and burial practices conducted

within restrictive and totalitarian regimes.

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Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1   Introduction

Tumulus cemeteries, also known as burial mounds, barrows or kurgan, were visually prominent funerary monuments that dominated the landscape of the Bronze and Iron Age (Ballmer, 2018; Mecking *et al.,* 2021).   Whilst some tumuli contained one or hundreds of individuals, others did not contain human remains or graves.   Although primarily associated with the Bronze and Iron Ages, tumuli have also been constructed and repurposed in later periods.   This worldwide funerary phenomenon can be found in regions including China, Japan, North America, Africa and Europe (Alcock, 2016; Lim and Matás, 2023).   In Europe, tumuli have attracted the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists since the 19th century (Greenwell, 1877; Harding, 2021). Thousands of tumuli have been excavated, recorded, analysed and published, and numerous international research projects have been undertaken to explore their architectural structures, funerary practices and rituals.   Their meaning and significance continue to be explored, debated, challenged and re-evaluated (Harding, 2012; Nykamp *et al.,* 2022; Matás, 2023; Bradley, 2024).

Tumulus cemeteries in Albania first appeared in the 3rd millennium BC and continued in use until approximately 500-450 BC (Table 1.1). Many tumuli were used and reused at later stages (Bejko, 2014; Amore, 2016).[1] In Albania, only rounded-shaped tumuli have been identified, constructed primarily from earth, stone or a combination of both

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[1] I am a native Albanian with an Albanian degree in History and Archaeology and an experienced archaeologist, including tumulus cemeteries. Tumuli data from the communist period were published primarily in Albanian. As a qualified and certified Albanian English interpreter, I have translated, analysed and interpreted all the Albanian data utilised in this research. Every attempt has been made to include English research whenever possible.

materials, resembling the shape of an artificial hill (Korkuti, 2016). Tumuli served as an almost exclusive form of burial, with only a limited number of shaft cemeteries documented. Albanian archaeology was largely unexplored during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike neighbouring countries such as Italy and Greece, antiquarians scarcely visited the country, and few archaeological projects were undertaken. Before WWII, the Catholic priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi carried out sporadic tumuli research in Albania, comprising a small-scale excavation and a single publication (Prendi and Bunguri, 2014; Korkuti, 2016; Galaty and Bejko, 2023).

Period	Century
Bronze Age	
Early Bronze Age	2,500 – 1,900 BC
Middle Bronze Age	1,900 – 1,450 BC
Late Bronze Age	1,450 – 1,200/1,100 BC
Iron Age	
Early Iron Age	1,200/1,100 – 800 BC
Middle Iron Age	800 – 600 BC
Late Iron Age	600 – 500/450 BC

Table 1.1   Chronology of Bronze and Iron Age in Albania

Copyright: Prendi 1998; Agolli 2014

Albania endured an extreme form of communist dictatorship under a totalitarian regime from 1944 to 1991.[2]   The historical, social, and political context of this regime had a profound impact – both directly and indirectly – on the excavation, interpretation and publication of tumuli.   Systematic archaeological research started in 1948 (Korkuti, 1998; Hoxha, G., 2013).   During the communist era, Albanian archaeological research became entangled in historical, political and nationalistic debates aimed at demonstrating the Illyrian ancestry of Albanians (Agolli, 2017a; Bejko, 2020).   Tumuli data were often used to support and reinforce these theories in archaeological and political spheres.   As a result, tumulus cemeteries became the 'symbol of archaeological studies in the country' during communism, with more than 300 sites being recorded and over 150 tumuli excavated (Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos, 2012; 185).   The *Iliria* Journal was the only platform for systematic archaeological research in Albania.

Despite the considerable interest in tumulus cemeteries, there is still no comprehensive catalogue documenting excavated sites, along with their unique characteristics and chronological contexts.   The significant influence of nationalism and ethnogenesis often results in tumuli being presented primarily through a narrow lens, framing them as monuments representative of specific ethnic groups.   Critical issues surrounding death, burial practices and bereavement – as well as the ideological constructs related to life, death and the afterlife – have not been sufficiently analysed or interpreted.   Furthermore, the essential role of tumuli as funerary monuments within the landscape remains underexplored.   This oversight has hindered a more thorough

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[2] I use lowercase when referring to 'communism', 'communist' and similar expressions. This approach is widely used in Albanian research conducted in English to reflect opposition to the humanitarian crimes and abuses committed during the communist totalitarian regime (Kasmi, 2024).

understanding of tumuli as complex funerary monuments of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

1.2   Aims, objectives and research questions

In contrast, this research focuses on the significance of belief, mentality, ideology and funerary practices in relation to tumulus cemeteries, shifting the focus toward living and surviving communities and their ideological frameworks. Its principal aim is to explore the role of tumuli cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments of Bronze and Iron Age Albania by utilising and re-evaluating the published data on tumuli excavated during the totalitarian communist regime. I propose the theory that these funerary structures, closely tied to death, enabled communities to develop coping mechanisms for dealing with death, burial and bereavement through the enactment of embodied emotional, sensory and mnemonic architectural, funerary and ritual practices. By centring the discussion on the living, I suggest that tumuli represented these communities' efforts to impart meaning to death and the afterlife, bridging the natural and supernatural realms. To explore this theory, a thorough understanding of three key aspects is essential: the architectural structure of tumuli and its evolution over time, the factors that contributed to the rise and proliferation of these monuments, and the funerary and ritual practices associated with them.

In this research, I examine and re-evaluate 123 tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist regime (Figure 1.1), utilising published data from the *Iliria* Journal (1971-2019) and nine monographs. To enhance the understanding of tumuli data and offer a comprehensive and holistic perspective on tumuli as Eternal Living Monuments, this research will incorporate theories of sensory archaeology, emotions, memory, and recent advancements in interpreting tumuli and funerary and ritual practices.
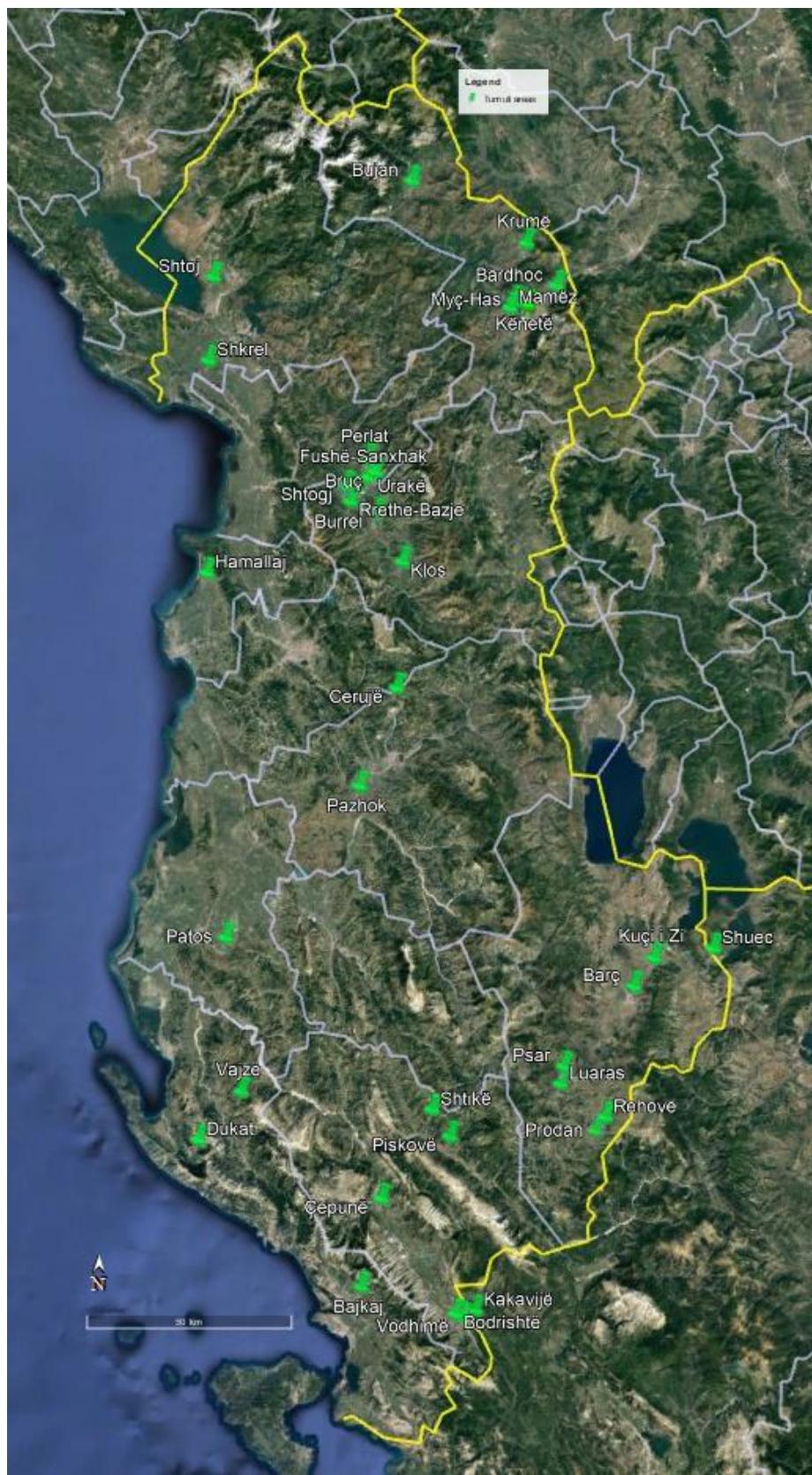
Figure 1.1   Distribution of tumuli areas in Albania

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

The following objectives will be undertaken to achieve the research's aim and to explore, analyse and interpret the three research questions below:

Objective 1

Identify, record and collect the published data of tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist regime derived from published data in the *Iliria* Journal and monographs

Objective 2

Collect and collate the published data and the characteristic features of each tumulus in Tumuli Repository

Objective 3

Provide a detailed chronology of each tumulus

Objective 4

Identify the factors contributing to tumulus cemeteries becoming Eternal Living Monuments by drawing upon the theories of sensory archaeology, emotions and memory

Principally, three research questions will be explored:

Research Question 1

What was the architectural structure of tumulus cemeteries, how did they change over time, and what practices were involved in their protection?

Research Question 2

What was behind the rise of tumulus cemeteries, and what led to their proliferation and continuation over two millennia?

Research Question 3

What funerary practices and rituals were performed?

1.3   Basis of study: sensory, emotions and memory

The study of senses, emotions and memory encompasses a broad area of research that has applications across various fields, including anthropological and archaeological research (Howes, 2021). I will adopt Hamilakis' (2013) approach, which posits that the archaeology of the senses is inseparable from the archaeology of memory. The senses serve as the material foundation for the act of remembering, and through sensory experiences, mnemonic experiences are created (Hamilakis, 2013). Consequently, senses, emotions and memories are intricately intertwined, functioning individually and as integral components of a larger process. As these approaches are central to the approach taken in this research, a review of sensory approaches is provided here. This overview serves as justification for research that moves beyond traditional interpretations of funerary monuments.

1.3.1 The case for sensory archaeology

Sensory archaeology gained momentum during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, significantly enhancing our understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and societies across diverse cultures and historical periods, from the Neolithic era to modern times. Tilley (1994) is considered a pioneer of sensory archaeology. His book, 'A Phenomenology of the Landscape: Places, Paths and Landscapes', revolutionised the interpretation of landscapes, spaces and prehistoric monuments, emphasising the role of human senses. His early research has faced criticism for prioritising the sense of sight over others, suggesting a uniform and comparable bodily experience between past and present societies, and being overly subjective (Hamilakis, 2013; Skeates and Day, 2020). In subsequent research, Tilley (2020) highlights the benefits of adopting a personal and reflexive approach to understanding both past and present sensory perceptions, which could have influenced how communities interacted with their landscapes and material culture.

The successful anthropological research led primarily by Howes and Classen exemplifies the wealth of data obtainable through a sensory approach (Howes and Classen, 2013). Fahlander and Kjellström (2010; 1) provide a comprehensive description of sensory archaeology as a 'means to broaden the scope of archaeological study', discussing and evaluating how a wider range of human sensory experiences can be understood through the material remnants of the past. Skeates (2010) published a notable book, 'An archaeology of the Senses; Prehistoric Malta', offering an innovative perspective for examining and comprehending historical contexts. This was followed by Hamilakis in 2013 with 'Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect'. Since then, numerous studies have expanded sensory knowledge regarding various historical periods across the globe,

including several significant works and many articles that have been utilised to analyse and interpret the 123 tumulus cemeteries discussed in this research (Day, 2013; Betts, 2017; Sounders and Cornish, 2017; Skeates and Day, 2020; Neumann and Thomason, 2022).

According to Harding (2021), European archaeology of the 19th and the majority of the 20th century focused exclusively on artefacts and how material culture could be studied, analysed and interpreted to create typologies and chronologies. Likewise, Albanian archaeology and the study of tumulus cemeteries have focused primarily on the study, typologies and chronologies of artefacts (Agolli, 2017a). This approach was based on the fact that only physical and material culture could be considered, analysed and interpreted to provide knowledge and archaeological context. Hamilakis (2013; 48) describes how research from the 20th century was 'hostile towards the idea of multi-sensorial, embedded experience'. Subsequently, archaeological studies rarely considered how the human senses shaped, influenced and transformed prehistoric societies and their decisions (Price, 2018). According to Day (2013; 5), 'material culture was read as a text, and the physicality of objects and human experiences were still missing from interpretations'. This has resulted in a materialistic, sterilised interpretation of the past (Hamilakis, 2013).

Taking a holistic approach to the senses does not diminish the significance of material culture, particularly in tumulus cemeteries. On the contrary, this perspective offers valuable insights into how material culture can illuminate the observed and lived experiences of individuals who crafted, used and placed these objects in graves as offerings or who utilised them during funerary and ritual practices. Schiendt (2020) contends that it is through the senses that individuals interact with tangible and

physical objects, suggesting that the application of human senses enhances our understanding of how people engage, interact with and perceive material culture. As this research prioritises individuals' experiences, perceptions and beliefs, analysing the material culture and the architectural features of tumulus cemeteries will further enrich our comprehension of 'people through things' (Fernández-Götz, Maschek and Roymans, 2020; 2). By incorporating the role of the senses into archaeological research, we can foster discussions that aim to grasp, albeit incompletely, the experiences of individuals and communities across different periods (Pinnock, 2022).

All humans possess common sensory organs and systems: sensory neurons receive and convey environmental stimuli, converting them into electrochemical signals that travel to the brain. Humans interpret these signals within the neural networks of the body and brain, translating them into meaningful memories, experiences and responses (Neumann and Thomason, 2022; 1). Lorenzon (2024) sheds light on how neuroscience enhances our understanding of brain function concerning sensory stimuli and its effects on participants' physical and emotional experiences during earthen construction. Scholars concur that sensory stimuli and responses shape, transform and provide meaning to how individuals perceive themselves, their environment and their notions of the afterlife (Cradic, 2022; Efrati, 2024). Cornish, Saunders and Smith (2017) illustrate that the senses are fundamental to human existence, intertwined with basic needs such as eating, drinking, moving and touching, while expressing their astonishment that the role of the senses has often been overlooked in our understanding of the past. Some scholars have been more sceptical of this approach concerning prehistoric populations. For example, Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2023) question how contemporary researchers can effectively investigate the senses and emotional experiences of Bronze and Iron Age individuals,

particularly those interred under tumuli, given the cultural and temporal differences. Likewise, Moilanen and Sahramaa (2024) argue that it is not possible to interpret past experiences through modern understanding; rather, it requires a sensorial approach that aims to examine and understand how sensorial experiences could have impacted people of the past. However, time differences do not mean that people from the Bronze and Iron Ages were devoid of sensory experiences. Archaeological research indicates that scholarly consensus acknowledges that sensory responses and experiences are shaped by various factors, including biological, social, political and ethnic differences (Skeates and Day, 2020). Of course, the senses of individuals from the past, whether from a hundred or four thousand years ago, differ significantly from those of contemporary researchers. The objective of sensory archaeology is not to replicate or fully recapture past experiences but rather to offer an analytical approach that examines and interprets how sensory perceptions influenced and transformed individuals, societies, values, beliefs and the significance of material culture and spaces that serve as mnemonic records (Hamilakis, 2013; Thum, 2022; Moilanen and Sahramaa, 2024). Hamilakis (2013) and Price (2018) discuss how adopting a sensorial perspective in studying history can humanise the past and deepen researchers' understanding and interpretation of historical contexts. Furthermore, Winter (2022), in an analysis of ritual and religious practices in Mesopotamia, contends that exploring the five senses offers a 'direct pathway to describing and understanding' the meaning and significance of these rituals, thereby providing comprehensive insight into the experiences of people. Nyland (2020) acknowledges the subjective limitations inherent in sensorial studies but argues that overlooking the significance of sensory affects in understanding past societies results in a significant loss of insight and knowledge. Nyland emphasises that although the sensory attributes of artefacts cannot be quantitatively assessed, they are crucial to a comprehensive understanding

of archaeological phenomena and their contexts. Many authors have advocated for a multisensorial approach (either exclusively or alongside the study of individual senses) to shift the paradigm of archaeological studies and provide new and transformative interpretative models (Hamilakis 2013; Nilsson Stutz 2020; Sauvage 2020; Fieldman 2022).

Sensory archaeology has been applied to a wide range of studies. Examples directly relevant to this thesis include the preparation of the cadaver (Nilsson Stutz, 2003; 2020); ritualised eating and drinking, and preparation of animal sacrifices (Hamilakis and Sherratt, 2012); creating communal memories and identities (Inomata, 2020); and political power (Thomason, 2016). Sensory archaeology has enabled us to explore existing and new questions, enhancing and improving our knowledge of material culture and helping us better understand societies in the past (Betts, 2017; Skeates and Day, 2020). Day (2013) and Schmidt (2022) describe how sensory archaeology helps make sense of various issues, from everyday activities to ritual performances. Sensory experiences also altered the meaning and significance of sites, places and monuments (Castello, 2022).

1.3.2   Emotions

Sensorial affects evoke strong emotional responses, and they are closely linked and intertwined (Sauvage, 2022). The importance of emotions in archaeological studies gained prominence in the early 2000s. Tarlow (2000; 2012) argues that studying human emotions in the past is essential and achievable in archaeological studies. She illustrated how emotions shaped and transformed the meaning of artefacts, events and places. Whilst Tarlow describes how emotions were a medium through which societies expressed themselves and created identities, they need to be understood

within their context rather than the researcher's emotional perceptions. Tarlow warns that not considering or understanding the importance of emotions in past societies could result in insufficient and incomplete archaeological studies.   Harris and Sørensen (2010), building on the work of Tarlow, illustrate how analysing emotions can enhance the understanding of past people and their archaeological material culture during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Ages.   They recognise that funerary practices were highly emotive events and acknowledge the significance of emotions regarding death, grief and bereavement. Their research extends beyond the funerary context and examines the role of emotions in a broader range of archaeological events, such as the construction of Mount Pleasant Henge.   Harris and Sørensen illustrate the crucial role emotions played in constructing and changing the architecture and the meaning of the monument.   Pongratz-Leisten (2022) explores how the construction of monuments evoked strong sensorial and emotional affects that shaped people's perceptions and meanings of the place.

Semple and Brookes (2020) expand the idea of identifying and analysing the role of emotions through material culture and describe how archaeological artefacts within the funerary context can enrich the understanding of emotions and identity. According to Nilsson Stutz (2003; 2020), emotions played a central role and gave meaning to funerary practices.   Additionally, Nilsson Stutz (2020; 161) argues that 'sensory experiences of death and burial have left tangible archaeological traces for us to reconstruct, or at least reconnect, with the lived experience in the past of scent, sound, touch, view and taste of death, loss, grief and mourning'. Emotions are often a result of sensorial affects, and this connection has already been explored. Nugent (2020) and Verduci (2022) illustrate how senses impacted mourners, and Nyland (2020) demonstrates how burial practices, whilst being a natural way of dealing with

cadavers, had a social meaning and evoked strong emotions and sensorial affects. Artefacts, monuments and built environments have evoked sensorial and emotional effects (Day, 2020; Harris, S., 2020).

Hamilakis (2013) advocates that sensorial and emotional affects were often communal and collective. He describes the importance of collective and communal sensorial affects, emotions and memories generated through ritualised eating and drinking ceremonies and how they were manipulated as a means of political power by social elites in Bronze Age Crete. Thomason (2016) and Inomata (2020) illustrate how social elites exploited collective sensory stimuli generated from a wide range of funerary processes to impact and influence the emotions and memories of their society. Hamilakis (2013; 125) also 'links emotions to individual and psychological states, whereas affects entail collective entanglement and relationships' and he distinguishes between emotions and affects. Skeates and Day (2020) argue that this clear separation is not widely accepted, and the terms emotions and affects are often used interchangeably.

1.3.3 Grief

Studying the process of death necessitates an acknowledgement of the inevitable presence of grief. Tarlow (2000; 2012) highlights the critical role of emotions and grief during the burial process. Newby and Toulson (2018) question whether archaeologists can fully grasp the concept of death without considering grief. In their book 'The Materiality of Mourning', they recognise the reticence many archaeologists feel when addressing grief and bereavement. Croucher (2018; 1) argues that while it is indeed challenging, understanding bereavement through archaeological remains from the Neolithic and other periods is not beyond reach. Furthermore, this archaeological

perspective may aid counsellors, end-of-life practitioners and other professionals in confronting contemporary bereavement-related issues. Newby and Toulson further illustrate that while emotions of grief are not tangible and do not leave behind archaeological traces, material culture can help us comprehend the complex and often intertwined process of death, from biological death to interment and memorialisation.

The treatment, adornment and handling of the corpse before, during and after interment, as well as the associated funerary rituals, serve as profound expressions of grief and bereavement, serving as a coping mechanism for dealing with death (Lipkin *et al.,* 2022). The display of the adorned body during these rituals reinforces the connection between the living and the deceased while also playing a crucial role in addressing grief and conveying the deep emotions associated with mourning (Verduci, 2022). Consequently, the archaeological artefacts discovered within and around the grave, alongside the remains of the body, are imbued with sorrow and signify mourning. They hold the potential to illuminate the emotional dimensions of grief throughout the mourning process (Middleton, 2017; Benkel and Meitzler,2021; Baitzel, 2023; Knight, 2023). In addition to the physical display of the body, the absence of it and the symbolic graves – referred to as invisible burials in this research – demonstrate how grief remained central to funerary rituals, regardless of the physical presence of a body (Hegedűs, 2021). In exploring the complexities of grief, loss and mourning, Cannon and Cook (2015) highlight the significance of emotional responses as a foundational aspect of understanding death and burial practices. Their archaeological investigation into Victorian infant burials reveals that gravestones served as both a testament to grief and bereavement and a means of coping with death. Similarly, Baitzel (2018) emphasises that the findings related to infant remains reflect a mother's profound sense of bereavement and her struggle to navigate the

experience of loss.

Grief and mourning encompass more than just the physical handling of the body and the act of interment; they also involve ritualistic and cultic practices. Harrington (2022) illustrates how feasting was a communal expression for confronting and sharing the pain of loss and grief. Breaking pottery during feasts and other funerary rituals symbolised mourning and bereavement, forming an integral part of the formal mourning process. Smashing a pot before burial represented the profound loss associated with death and played a vital role in commemorating the event and its emotional impact. In essence, pottery fragments and other remnants identified during feasting and offerings reflect the grieving journey experienced by mourners. Furthermore, funerary rituals provided vital support to the bereaved, assisting them in their search for consolation and offering a structured avenue for expressing their grief. However, these rituals were not exclusively sombre or tearful occasions. Instead, the combination of ritualistic practices and feasting enabled mourners to navigate their grief through enjoyable bodily experiences. Brandt (2020) notes that once 'the liminal phase had come to an end, which happened at the moment when the corpse of the deceased was buried, and his soul had reached safely the Underworld, the mourners could with a great relief turn their grief, despair, anxiety, fear, confusion, and amusement into joy and gratitude'.

Funerary rituals were deeply sensorial events, profoundly influencing how grief and mourning were experienced by participants while also shaping the activities associated with these rituals. Hope (2017; 86) highlights the intricate interplay between material culture, the senses and grief within the funerary context, which plays a crucial role in defining the mourning experience. Clancy (2019; 89) explores 'the smell of grief

during funerary practices', while Cradic (2022) demonstrates how mourners engaged their senses, emotions and memories to imbue the burial process with meaning, facilitate connections with the divine and cope with their loss. Although capturing the sounds of weeping and lamentation during these rituals poses a challenge, such expressions of sorrow were likely a customary practice, enabling bereaved families to share their pain and foster a sense of solidarity among mourners in a communal setting (Harrington, 2022).

1.3.4   Memory

Memory is a multifaceted concept that spans various fields of research. In the realm of archaeology, the exploration of memory in relation to funerary and ritual monuments – alongside aspects like sensory archaeology and emotions – began to gain traction in the early 21st century. Alcock (2002), in her book 'Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments, and Memories,' demonstrates how social memory in Ancient Greece became embedded in material culture. She highlights how the physical landscape served as a medium and a powerful tool for Roman elites to assert their power and derive meaning and identity from collective social memories of the past. Alcock highlights how, during the Late Iron Age and the Roman period, social memory significantly influenced the construction of monuments, shaped the understanding of the landscape and contributed to the formation of communal identities. Papadopoulos (2006) expands this interpretation of social memory in the study of Lofkënd Tumulus in Albania. Social memory is described as the process in which societies assemble and forge their shared ideas, meanings and identities (Van Dyke, 2019).

Memory, according to Williams (2013; 195), 'can be considered a creative process constituted by performance, material culture, place, and landscape'. Williams (2003;

2013; 2014) has illustrated how the role of memory can be interpreted through material culture and how funerary processes were a medium for remembering, with forgetting being an integral part of this process. Likewise, Hamilakis (2013) advocates for a close connection between material culture, sensorial experiences, emotions and memory. He describes the mirror effect on memory shaping multi-sensorial experiences, whilst sensory effects and emotions shape memory and how memories were created, reinforced and reshaped through repetitions of events.

The role of memory has been widely studied in the context of funerary practices and monuments (Van Dyke, 2019). However, the way in which memories affected these processes and societies continues to be debated. Whilst Rob (2013; 7) recognises the role of memory, he argues that burial practices and the construction of funerary monuments were 'an active part of dying as a social transition'. This perspective emphasises that the primary focus of burial and funerary activities centred on the deceased's body and its transition to a new social status, that of the dead. On the other hand, Wessman and Williams (2017) and Akar and Kara (2020) argue that funerary processes and the creation of monuments function as avenues for mourners to forge social memories and identities. In this study of tumulus cemeteries in Albania, I aim to explore, implement and integrate both perspectives to investigate how the death of the deceased is addressed and how the social memories of the mourners are shaped through the performance of funerary practices and the construction of tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 7). By doing so, I will illustrate that the memories created from the death of individuals interred in tumulus cemeteries – with the focus on the corpse, as well as those forged during the funerary and construction practices, are not contradictory processes. Rather, they complement each other and contributed to the comprehensive and rich experience of the practices associated with tumulus

cemeteries, which began with the death of an individual and continued through the related funerary activities and the construction of tumuli for the deceased.

Embedded memory through bodily participation and performance was an important aspect of remembering (Peterson, 2018). Barber et al. (2021) describe how memory was embedded in constructing monuments that shaped memory and identity. Lai (2021) states that the location of burial sites and activities performed on the sites were the communal loci in shaping ideology, relations and power dynamics. Hamilakis (2013; 84) advocates for the approach that treats 'memory as a social, collective process, as opposed to an individual and psychological trait'. However, Laneri (2007; 2022) and Peterson (2018) suggest that burial structures, rituals and materiality impacted individual and collective emotions, memories and identities. Wells (2021) illustrates that whilst the construction of tumulus cemeteries and their funerary practices were designed to create communal memories, they also impacted individuals and members of communities. Wells also describes how the role of individual and communal mnemonic ceremonies, alongside tumuli as mounds of memory, was complex and changed over time.

Hamilakis argues that social elites exploited communal memories to legitimise their power and authority. Fernandez-Götz (2016) supports the idea that tumuli as mnemonic funerary monuments of the landscape were central in shaping and maintaining relationships between and within different groups. However, Mixter and Henry (2017) question how the role of social memories has been analysed and interpreted as a means for elites to control their social power. They suggest that memories result from social interactions where numerous factors interact and are intertwined. Furthermore, Philippa-Touchais (2019) shifts the focus away from social

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elites, proposing that the construction of tumuli and the enactment of funerary practices were collective efforts that contributed to the creation of social memories, thereby influencing the societal order. In Chapter 7, I will examine the interplay of influences among elites and community groups, as well as how polytheistic ideological constructs impacted the development of tumulus cemeteries and the performance of funerary and ritual practices.

Schmidt (2022) and Verduci (2022) illustrate how sensorial stimuli generated through material culture during funerary practices triggered and reinforced remembering while simultaneously creating communal identities. Sensorial effects created during the construction of monuments evoked strong emotions and 'generated shared and collective memories, resulting in shared identity, community and a sense of belonging' (Feldman, 2022; 18). Additionally, Costello (2022) describes the construction of communal monuments and their ceremonial feast as a platform for creating, reinforcing and displaying memories and identities. Implementing the role of memory and its relationship with senses and emotions has enriched the understanding of archaeological processes, which otherwise would have been difficult and could have provided an inadequate and incomplete view of the past (Betts, 2017). These experiences, however, need to be interpreted within their specific social and cultural context (Garcia-Ventura and López-Bertran, 2022).

1.4   Methodology

To date, publications regarding tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist period in Albania have focused primarily on recording, organising and presenting primary data gathered during excavations. This research aims to offer an alternative methodological framework for the utilisation and evaluation of published data, drawing

upon the sensorial, emotional and memory approaches described above.   It will provide a thorough analysis of 123 tumuli cemeteries across Albania, tracing the complete lifecycle of tumuli from their initial emergence in the Early Bronze Age, around the third millennium BC, to the Late Iron Age, approximately 450 BC.   It integrates reflexive thematic analysis with descriptive statistical analysis to comprehensively examine the data from both thematic and quantitative perspectives.   Reflexive thematic analysis recognises and enhances the academic and personal insights of the researcher, influencing all phases of research from data collection to the writing stage (Chapter 3).

This method will extract themes from articles presented in the *Iliria* Journal – the main source of publications about Albanian archaeology – and nine monographs using NVivo software. A Tumuli Repository will present the key characteristics of each of the 123 tumuli, providing detailed dating and categorising them into four chronological phases.   Descriptive statistical analysis will complement and clarify the identified themes. By combining these two methodologies, this approach aims to enhance the transparency, reliability and trustworthiness of the research while delving into the richness and depth of the tumuli findings. Although this methodological framework is specifically designed for this research, it has the potential to lay the groundwork for future studies utilising published data.

1.5   Thesis structure

This chapter highlights the importance of utilising and re-evaluating tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist era, drawing upon new methodological approaches. The following chapters will present, analyse and discuss the tumuli findings to help explore their role as Eternal Living Monuments. Chapter 2 outlines and presents a synopsis of the historical context of tumuli studies and the literature review. Chapter 3 details the methodological approach involved in collecting, analysing and interpreting the 123 tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist period and published in the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs. The mixed methods of reflective thematic analysis and explanatory descriptive statistics are also described and illustrated. Chapter 4 presents a detailed description and analysis of tumuli as architectural monuments based on their chronological construction period. Chapter 5 presents the factors that contributed to the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries, while Chapter 6 presents their funerary and ritual practices. Chapter 7 describes the factors contributing to transforming tumulus cemeteries into Eternal Living Monuments. I will highlight the significance of these tumulus cemeteries as enduring markers within the physical, living landscape, reflecting the essence and beliefs associated with life while intertwining with the eternal and immortal realm of the afterlife. During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Albania, tumulus cemeteries were transformed from burial grounds into timeless monuments, solidifying their role as Eternal Living Monuments. This will be followed by the final remarks, problems, opportunities and future research in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2 Historical context of tumuli studies and literature review

2.1   Introduction

Archaeological research in Albania during the communist era was significantly influenced by the prevailing ideology of the regime.[3] Although tumuli have been excavated for over 70 years, their analysis and interpretation were intricately related to political, economic and social factors unique to Albanian history and cultural sentiments (Bejko 1998; 2020). This chapter will address, illustrate and provide a critical analysis and interpretation of the factors influencing tumuli research. By doing so, it will present a coherent narrative that aids in understanding the unique and complex elements that shaped tumuli research before World War II, during a totalitarian regime and following the fall of communism to the present day. Additionally, it will outline the significance of comprehending the meaning, importance and central role of Illyrian ethnogenesis as a crucial factor for analysing and interpreting both the tumuli research conducted during the communist era and the ongoing studies in the post-communist context. This section will also discuss the challenges and limitations inherent in traditional approaches to tumulus studies while acknowledging the quality and rigour of scientific archaeological research in this field. Ultimately, it combines a critical perspective on tumuli studies with historical and archaeological evidence, drawing on both the professional and personal insights of the researcher.

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[3] Tumulus cemeteries are common features in neighbouring countries, particularly in the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo. Various approaches have been taken before, during, and after the communist era in these regions. Given the complexity and the diverse interpretations surrounding tumuli, and their ethnogenesis – especially in Kosovo – I have chosen to focus exclusively on those located within the modern territory of Albania.

2.2   Formation of the Albanian state

Modern-day Albania is a relatively new independent state. Since the first invasion circa 1337, Albania was occupied by and formed part of the Ottoman Empire for over 500 years. The Albanian-speaking territory was divided into four districts known as Vilayet (Rrapaj and Kolasi, 2013).[4] The country had minimal economic, social and political freedom. Although Albanian was the primary spoken language, the official use of the language was strictly forbidden, resulting in Turkish being the only official language for over five centuries (Kola, 2020). The first Albanian-speaking school was opened in 1887, and the official alphabet with Latin letters was only unified in 1908. Motivated by the absence of an official unified ethnic, religious and national identity, a group of intellectuals started a movement called Rilindja, The Great Awakening (1878- 1912). Their primary aim was to educate and equip Albanians with a sense of unified belonging, national pride and a heritage connection. Through their literature, Rilindja promoted the idea of unified ethnic Albanians as the only direct descendants of ancient Pelagius and Illyrians (Fischer, 2014; Brackob, 2022).

In 1912, Albania became one of the last countries to declare independence from the Ottoman Empire. The six Great Powers (Austro-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Russia) held the Conference of Ambassadors, also known as the Peace Conference, in London in 1912-13. Its primary aims were to deal with the Ottoman Empire and to reconcile the political crisis in the Balkans. According to McKinney (2018; 947), the conference was a 'failure, and its choices directly impacted the start of WWI'. The decisions made by the Great Powers dramatically influenced

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[4] The country is called 'Shqipëria', the people 'shqiptar' and the language 'shqip'. The terms Albania and Albanians are only applied when utilised in foreign languages.

the future of the Albanian state. In 1913, the Great Powers rejected the 1912 Declaration of Independence from the Ottoman Empire and the request proposed by Albanian delegates for a state that included the four vilayets. Only partial independence was recognised, and Albania was declared an autonomous principality.

Not regarded as suitable or trustworthy to rule their country, a German prince, Wilhelm von Wied, was appointed governor and representative ruler of the Great Powers. Whilst the Great Powers rejected the proposal of Serbia and Greece, which suggested the complete division of Albanian territory between them, the Great Powers partially 'divided and truncated the territory of Albania in favour of Serbia and Greece' (Milo, 2014; 183). Over 40% of Albanian-speaking territory remained outside the borders of a new independent principality. Kosovo was gifted to Serbia, and parts of the southern part of the country, Chameria (Çamëria), were awarded to Greece (Rakipi, 2019; Bugajski, 2020; Dušan, 2021). Cultural diversities were utilised as the main factor for justifying the division. However, they did not consider the language and ethnic identity of the territories divided from Albania (Rakipi, 2019; Hille, 2020; Haxhiu and Alidemaj, 2023). Albanians felt like 'the orphans of Europe' who were discriminatorily and unfairly treated (Peza-Perriu and Stafa, 2023; 705). For over 100 years, these choices have affected, shaped and influenced Albania's national identity, political events and relationship with its neighbouring countries. These choices directly impacted the future study, interpretation and publication of tumuli research.

2.3   Archaeology in Albania before WWII

The genesis of archaeological research in the country was inherently interwoven with nationalistic and political agendas. In 1926, the first self-declared King, Ahmed Zog, agreed to commission two foreign missions, French and Italian, to conduct

archaeological research in the country. The French mission's research and methodology have been portrayed as positive factors that enhanced scientific research in the country. By contrast, the legacy of the Italian mission has been attributed to the promotion of nationalistic and political misuse of archaeology. Luigi Maria Ugolini directed the Italian mission, which was financially supported by the fascist party and its leader, Benito Mussolini. It aimed to promote the Illyrian ancestry of Albanians as a way of proving the ancient link between Illyrians and Romans and to demonstrate that the fascist government was interested in and supportive of Albanian culture and politics. The Italian mission and fascist government later abused the archaeological findings and the interpretation of Ugolini to support the Italian military occupation of Albania in 1939 (Cella, Gori and Pintucci, 2016; Gjipali, 2023). Many artefacts and statues found in Butrint were sent to Italy. For example, the statue known as the Head of Apollo or the Goddess of Butrint, with the approval of King Zog, was 'gifted' to Mussolini. This act stimulated a political controversy between the two countries, which was solved with its repatriation in 1982 (Islami, 1982; Buzi, 2018). During this time, the Catholic priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi was regarded as the pioneer of Albanian archaeological scientific research. Gëzim Hoxha (2013) claims that Gjeçovi's archaeological work was conducted independently, free from any influence or promotion of nationalistic or other political agendas, especially as he pursued archaeological research in his spare time, alongside his duties as a priest. While it remains uncertain whether Gjeçovi was influenced by any political or nationalistic agendas, there is no direct reference in scholarly archaeological research to suggest that his work on tumulus cemeteries was affected by such influences.

2.4 Archaeology during the communist era

Given that this research focuses on tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist era, this section offers a detailed analysis of the establishment of the totalitarian regime and its impact on Albanian archaeological research, specifically the study of tumuli. Historical and political factors are closely intertwined with social, cultural, and national fervour for patriotic archaeology and a love for the country. These elements significantly influenced the initiation and progression of tumuli studies during the communist era and their subsequent research and publication in the post-communist era.

2.4.1 State formation and archaeology

Albania experienced an extreme form of communist dictatorship under the totalitarian regime (1944-1991). The dictator, Enver Hoxha (1908-85), came to power in 1944 after the liberation from the Nazi occupation. He manipulated the results of WWII and persecuted and assassinated almost all the prominent communist and non-communist figures of the Partizan Resistance. He imposed and promoted the idea of himself as being 'the most important historical leader of the anti-fascist and anti-Nazi movement' (Pandelejmoni, 2017; 138). Also known as The Comrade – Shoku – Hoxha oversaw a reign of terror through which he controlled every aspect of life and death, denied any form of freedom, and imprisoned and executed anyone who threatened or opposed the totalitarian regime (Mehmetaj, 2014; Kërbizi and Macaj, 2020). Critically analysing, questioning or providing alternative interpretations from the Party-approved narrative was forbidden during the totalitarian regime, often resulting in imprisonment and punishment (Tarifa, 1996; Idrizi, 2020).[5]

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[5] A famous singer, Sherif Merdani (1940-2021), was imprisoned in 1973 for 16 years in two notorious forced-labour camps for being influenced by dangerous, immoral, capitalist music, i.e. The Beatles.

The communist state was formed, established and consolidated on the nationalistic agendas of the glorious ancestry and ethnogenesis of Illyrians (Hernandez, 2017; Bejko, 2020). Bowden and Hodges (2017) suggest that the dictator Hoxha instigated archaeological research in 1948 to promote the ethnogenesis of Illyrians after the former Yugoslavian president Josip Broz Tito refused to reunite Kosovo with Albania. However, I have not been able to locate any scholarly articles, grey literature or social media statements authored by Albanian archaeologists or other scholars that either support or refute this interpretation. Regardless of the primary reason, the dictator drove a top-down, totalitarian approach requiring archaeological research to scientifically prove and promote the ethnogenesis of Illyrians and their uninterrupted continuity to modern-day communist, re-born Albanians (Korkuti, 1988; Hodges, 2013). The chronology of tumuli construction and use, along with excavated artefacts and the narrative that could be gained from their interpretation, had the potential to scientifically prove, illustrate and support the ethnogenesis of Illyrians (Jubani, 1983; Andrea, 1985b; Kurti, D., 1985; Bela, 2012; Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos, 2012). In doing so, tumulus cemeteries could contribute to and give credence to establishing and promoting the nationalistic agendas of the communist ideology and state (Bejko, 1998; 2020; Hoxha, G., 2013). This resulted in the Illyrian ethnogenesis becoming the overarching theme of tumuli studies, the central theoretical interpretation of tumuli data, and the rationale for further excavations and publications (Ceka, 1974; Koka, 1985; Kurti, D., 1987). Agolli (2014; 2017a) describes how it is almost impossible to find a tumulus publication from the totalitarian regime that did not aim to identify and prove Illyrian ethnicity. Nearly all publications concluded with the same unified statement on how findings further supported the pre-existing theory of the uniformity and uninterrupted continuity of Illyrians to modern-day Albanians (Bejko, 1998).

Highly influenced by the ideology of marxism, where religion is considered the opium of the masses and a nightmare in the brain of the living (Stepputat, 2016), religion was officially abolished and outlawed in 1967 in Albania. Being declared an atheist country, the Party decreed a systematic destruction of the significant religious heritage buildings, with only selected, communist-approved ones being rescued but not allowed to be used for religious activities (Giakoumis and Premović, 2023). The communist regime religiously defended and preached marxist propaganda (Iseni and Jakupi 2021). According to Lafe (2006; 31), the effects of marxist theory in archaeological interpretation 'were strong and compelling', whilst Bejko (1998) advocates that Albanian archaeology was not strictly limited by marxist theory. Under the communist regime, marxist theories and interpretations served as foundational principles, evident in the numerous statues of Marx and Engels erected in towns and cities, along with the widespread dissemination of their ideas throughout the country.[6] Based on my academic background and personal experiences, as well as the analysis of tumulus cemeteries discussed in this research, I believe that during the communist period, the Albanian archaeologist and their interpretation of tumulus cemeteries were strongly influenced and shaped by the Marxist theories. Leninist-marxist ideologies contradict the positive role of rituals and religious beliefs and activities (Hiorth, 1989). Subsequently, as illustrated by Islami (1985), this marxist approach significantly influenced and shaped the ritual interpretation of tumuli cemeteries, artefacts and funerary practices in Albania.

The systematic and organised worship of God was substituted with the cult of the dictator.[7] People were made to worship the dictator, and his statues were placed in

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[6] My cousin is called Maringlen – a combination of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

[7] Lower case is used for cults in this research.

many towns and cities, displayed in government institutions and family homes (Kondi, 2020). This religious-like approach to the dictator was applied in archaeological publications throughout the communist period (Korkuti, 1981b; Buda, 1982). Within archaeological research, like all aspects of life and research in Albania, the dictator was addressed and portrayed as the 'inspiration and protector of Albanian archaeology', and he was deemed as the figurehead of all archaeological research in the country (Islami, 1985; 5). For example, the dictator died in 1985, and two archaeologists published articles in *Iliria* in 1985 and 1988 praising Hoxha's magnificent role and exceptional contribution to Albanian archaeology. In these articles, the Christian approach of applying capital letters when referring to God was adopted when mentioning the pronouns of the dictator, such as 'His' work or 'His' significant role (Islami, 1985; Korkuti, 1988). One monograph was dedicated to and was inspired by the dictator's work (Andrea, 1985a). The worship and the cult of the dictator directly and indirectly shaped and transformed tumuli studies, analysis and interpretation. It is worth noting that the cult of the communist leader and citing the dictator's manifestos within the research was a common feature of archaeology conducted during communism across the Eastern Bloc (Apor *et al.,* 2004; 11).

The relationship between archaeology and nationalism is predominantly evident during totalitarian dictatorships, primarily where the dictator supports and aims to legitimise one form of nationalistic ideology (Galaty and Watkinson, 2004; Galaty, 2018). This was common in many Eastern communist countries (Lozny, 2017). It was especially evident in Albania, where selected aspects of archaeological findings were exploited to fit nationalistic ideologies, promote marxist theories and legitimise the oppression of the totalitarian regime (Miraj and Zeqo, 1993). Therefore, the study of tumulus cemeteries and the unified identity of Illyrians became central to

archaeological research in the country (Lera *et al.,* 2009; Lera *et al.,* 2017).

Additionally, Hoxha, inspired by his idol Joseph Stalin, aimed to transform the country into a pure communist beacon of light for the rest of the world. As part of this propaganda, he demanded that citizens sacrifice and contribute to his higher nationalistic call (Hoxha, E., 1979; 1980). This included the national campaign for promoting education in a country with 80% illiteracy (Idrizi, 2020). The dictator encouraged and supported academic, high-quality scientific research, including archaeological studies, that could compete with and excel in the wider region (Mullahi and Dhimitri, 2015; Gjoci, 2023). The first University of Tirana was established in 1957, and while it comprised a History Department, it did not incorporate any designated archaeological courses. Several archaeologists delivered lessons in the history courses, and history students were selected to attend archaeological excavations to gain practical experience and theoretical training (Aliu, 2020).[8]

2.4.2   Patriotic archaeology

These historical accounts may give the impression that the excavation, interpretation and publication of tumuli were driven only by nationalistic and communist agendas, portraying scholars as passive and submissive participants. However, it is crucial to recognise that the study and interpretation of tumulus cemeteries were not entirely imposed by the totalitarian regime. Through an analysis of 123 tumuli publications and an understanding of historical contexts, further supported by my lived experience, I propose that the study of tumulus cemeteries, Illyrian narratives and patriotic

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[8] Attending university required membership of the communist Party and the so-called 'clean history background'. The Party decided which universities and subjects could be studied with minimal individual choice.

archaeology were complex and sensitive issues unique to the Albanian context and reflective of national, social and cultural sentiments. Understanding these dynamic sheds light on the historical framework and enriches the interpretation of tumuli data, emphasising the methodological significance of acknowledging the researcher's knowledge and experience in enhancing data comprehension and interpretation.

The communist regime propagated the notion of a small country that consistently fell victim to oppression and endured economic, social and political injustices at the hands of foreign adversaries (Hodges, 2013). This narrative resonated with the prevailing national sentiments and beliefs across various aspects of society, including academia. The high calling of doing your duty or sacrifices for the country was initially influenced and promoted by Rilindja, and this sentiment persisted before and during the communist era. Like all facets of society during communism, this ethos was widely embraced within archaeological research (Prendi, 1988). In 1940, Professor Ceka, who was involved with the French Archaeological Mission, advocated for an Albanian-focused archaeology conducted by Albanians to prove the Illyrian ancestry and promote the country's values. His advocacy in archaeological research and publications was highly esteemed and promoted during the communist era. It was utilised to promote the idea of Albanians paying their duty to their country through systematic and thorough archaeological research (Korkuti, 1998; Hoxha, G., 2013).

Within the country existed a complex interplay between love for the Motherland, patriotic pride and the duty to serve one's country (Aliu, 2004; 2012; 2020). Bejko (1998) describes how archaeologists felt a personal obligation to identify, prove and demonstrate the ethnogenesis of Illyrians. Engaging in excavations and subsequent research was viewed as a labour of love for both the country and the field of

archaeology. Many archaeologists even volunteered to teach in rural areas as part of this pursuit (Prendi, 2008; Prendi and Bunguri, 2014; Agolli, 2017a).[9] During a visit to Albania in 2022, I met with Professor Aliu and learnt from a frail archaeologist about his experience publishing three monographs. His latest work was prepared with the assistance of his retired wife, funded by their retirement savings, to shed light on the wealth of the tumuli that Aliu had the privilege to excavate and to present the archaeological finding that tells the story of Illyrians to the new generation, both within and outside Albania. This was his and his family's way of contributing to the country. This sentiment is echoed in the nature of the monographs used in this research, where Professor Bodinaku similarly used his retirement funds for his tumuli publication. Similarly, young Albanian or Kosovo scholars have financially and academically supported the work of older or deceased archaeologists (Prendi, 2008; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). Such actions are regarded as acts of patriotism and love for one's Mëmëdheu (Motherland). This approach highlights the complex relationship between the confined top-down framework of the dictator and the bottom-up approach driven by the love and commitment of archaeologists. Scholarly publications have emphasised their commitment to producing high-standard, reliable and rigorous scientific research that evidenced and promoted the values of the Motherland. Ethnogenesis was considered a natural result based primarily on analysing and interpreting tumuli data (Buda, 1982; Prendi, 1985b; 2008). The intricate relationship between nationalism and patriotism was not unique to Albania but was a common aspect of communism in many countries of the Eastern Bloc (Gomberg, 2020; Spencer, 2020).

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[9] From personal conversations with numerous archaeologists during my studies and work as an archaeologist, I learned that their salary was similar to that of primary school teachers, and archaeologists did not receive any additional benefits or financial support for excavations. They often slept in tents and lived and worked in rugged rural terrains.

This knowledge, derived from published data and personal experiences, offers valuable insights into archaeologists' motivations in excavating, researching, and publishing the 123 tumulus cemeteries utilised in this research, as well as the nature of *Iliria* Journal (1971-2019) and nine monographs. Additional historical, social, political, and personal influences are considered throughout this research as they may have affected the overall approach to analysing and interpreting tumuli data.

2.4.3 The rise, shine and shadows of tumuli studies

The significant role of tumuli in Albanian archaeology, along with their historical context, has generated considerable interest in the analysis, documentation, and publication of tumuli, surpassing other archaeological facets. Over 300 tumuli were recorded, and over 150 were excavated (Bejko, 2014). The uniformity of the communist regime in publishing practices fostered a systematic and comprehensive approach to presenting findings related to these tumuli (Agolli, 2017a). This encompassed details regarding the tumuli's location, architectural structure, building materials, burial rites, body positioning, and the associated funerary and ritual practices. This information, however, was often limited to one or a small number of tumuli and was fragmented and dispersed across *Iliria* and nine monographs (Chapters 3-6).

Like many areas of Europe during the 19th and large parts of the 20th century, archaeological research in Albania was primarily focused on artefacts extracted from excavations and their typology (Agolli, 2017b; Harding, 2021). Influenced by the theories of Gustaf Kossinna and Gordon Childe, the interpretation of material culture has been consistently employed to demonstrate and illustrate the consolidation of Illyrian ethnicity (Gori and Ivanova, 2017). Material culture was the primary source for

dating tumuli, providing a chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages (Bejko, 2014). According to Bejko (2020; 289), the dedication and professionalism of a generation of scholars produced 'impressive achievement in research', and 'unprecedented progress was made in understanding the prehistoric and historic pasts'. Although somewhat limited, the analysis of material culture has inspired further exploration into various aspects, such as social dynamics, networking, mobility, migration and the exchange of ideas (Agolli, 2017a). It has provided valuable insights – directly and indirectly – into the ideological constructs surrounding tumuli, cultic beliefs and cult objects alongside beliefs in life, death and the afterlife (Aliu, 2020).

Albania became one of the most isolated countries in the world during communism, impacting the archaeological interpretations (Gjergji and Gani, 2024). Scholarly exchanges of ideas and knowledge were minimal and strictly censored. A few foreign scholars, like Nicholas G. Hammond and Anthony Harding, were allowed to visit and present their research. Similarly, Albanians' international visits were minimal and state-controlled (Hoxha, G., 2013). Before the 1960s, the prominent figures of Albanian archaeology and tumuli studies, such as Dhimosten Budina, Selim Islami, Bep Jubani and Frano Prendi, were educated in Eastern Bloc universities, and their excavation techniques, methods of conducting research, and theoretical interpretations of the data continued to be influenced by Soviet archaeological schools of interpretations (Korkuti, 1998; Prendi, 2008; Prendi and Bunguri, 2014). Subsequently, tumuli studies were seldom influenced by European theoretical interpretations of the second part of the 20th century. It was predominantly self-reliant research based primarily on Albanian scholars' understandings and knowledge, with minimal external influence (Galaty and Watkinson, 2004). Therefore, international tumuli interpretations were seldom applied in the analysis of death, burial, and the role

of the relationship between the living and the dead.

Previous studies of tumuli in Albania, while providing a wealth of valuable information, have been limited by their restricted and confined theoretical rigours of ethnic interpretations. Thus, they imply that tumuli are sterile prehistoric monuments whose principal aim was to reflect the ethnicity of people buried therein. In many ways, tumuli and nationalistic agendas are inseparable, resulting in a one- dimensional approach to both tumuli and understanding the Bronze and Iron Age in the literature (Prendi, 1988). The dominance of this approach eclipsed the comprehensive understanding of tumuli, and their significant role as funerary monuments was seldom analysed or interpreted (Korkuti, 1981a; Aliu, 2004; Prendi, 2008). Of course, that is not to say that the primary purpose of tumuli as a burial and funerary grounds linked to death has not been acknowledged within the literature (Korkuti, 1981a; Prendi, 1985b). However, much of the research on death has primarily focused on individuals and the artefacts discovered in tumuli, emphasising ethnic affiliation. The fundamentals of death, mortuary-related aspects, emotions, mourning practices, and the relationship between the dead and the living were often disregarded and frequently not perceived as crucial for consideration. When described or analysed, funerary aspects were presented in a materialistic and clinical approach, like material culture, detached from and unaffected by human senses and emotions (Korkuti, 1981a; Prendi, 1988; Bodinaku, 1982; 2018). This has resulted in what Nilsson Stutz (2020; 152) describes as 'sterile affairs with artefacts'. The role of individuals, families or communities who were dealing with loss, grief and bereavement remains largely unaddressed. Similarly, the emotional and sensory dimensions of death, as well as the treatment of corpses, have not been adequately addressed. Beliefs surrounding death, life and the afterlife – along with the ideological construct of tumuli – have often been insufficiently

represented, typically intertwined with the ethnic identities of those interred within them.

2.4.4 The fall of communism and beyond

The collapse of the communist regime led to significant and transformative changes in all areas affected by the regime. It marked a pivotal period for tumuli research while the topic of ethnogenesis continued to resonate and evolve. After the fall of communism in 1991, the country entered a period of economic, social, political and ideological unrest, followed by a civil war in 1997 (Mehmetaj, 2014). Tumuli excavations were reduced dramatically (Bejko, 2014). Between 1991 and 2000, only one tumulus was excavated in the Apollonia area by an Albanian French team. A short preliminary report was written in French *for Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique* (Amore *et al.,* 1995). After 2000, only five significant tumuli projects have been undertaken – Kamenica (2000-2003), Apollonia 9, 10 and 11 (2002-2006), Lofkënd (2004-2008), Archaeological Project of Shkodër (PASH) (2010-2014), and Himara tumuli (2018-2023) (Amore and Bejko, 2001; Bejko, 2004; 2019; Lafe, 2005; Amore, Dimo and Aliu, 2010; Papadopoulos *et al.,* 2014; Galaty and Bejko, 2023). The study of tumulus cemeteries expanded significantly, becoming more rigorous and scientific. These five projects significantly shifted the focus towards higher quality excavations, interpretation, conservation and promotion of tumuli cemeteries. Findings from Apollonia, Lofkënd and PASH tumuli have been published in various national and international journals and monographs (Amore *et al.,* 2010; Papadopoulos *et al.,* 2014; Galaty and Bejko, 2023). Findings from Kamenica are insufficiently published, and a future monograph may be forthcoming (Agolli, 2017a). The data for the Himara tumuli are in the early stages of publication and may be forthcoming (Çipa and Tota, 2020).

Although the results of these projects are not utilised in this research due to their excavation during the post-communist era, a limited number of themes explored will enrich the analysis and interpretation of the tumuli excavated during the communist era. For example, Papadopoulos (2006; 75) demonstrated how the architectural design and strategic placement of tumuli in Albania transformed them into 'foci of memory', aiding local communities in navigating their experiences of loss while providing a conceptual framework for engaging with the future.

Within the context of the Lofkënd Project, Martin-McAuliffe (2014; 551- 553) presents an innovative and comprehensive interpretation of tumuli as monument that shaped and defined both the physical and social landscapes, seamlessly integrating into the living environment. Martin-McAuliffe also draws attention to the funerary landscape, emphasising the significant role of tumuli as a 'container for the dead' within the living space. The form and visibility of tumuli are intricately linked to their religious and ritual significance, serving as a vital connection between the realm of the living and the divine. Tumuli are conceptualised as 'defying structures' that enable builders to confront mortality and cope with grief. This idea of the tumulus as a living monument resonates with Hammond's description of the Albanian tumulus (Hammond, 1967). In a subsequent study, Martin-McAuliffe (2016) further examines the complex relationship between tumuli as links connecting the living and the deceased and the sacred and profane landscapes, practices and rituals. Her pioneering perspective characterises tumuli as 'eternal' and 'living monuments' that signify the passage to the underworld and the afterlife. This interpretation of the Lofkënd tumulus by Martin-McAuliffe will serve as a foundation for the further exploration of the 123 tumuli examined in this research.

Within the framework of the PASH Project, anthropological and archaeological research by Deskaj (2017) in the Shkodër area provides a novel and insightful interpretation of the region's tumuli. Deskaj demonstrates that these structures were crucial in shaping the physical and mortuary landscape, which, in turn, influenced the social dynamics of local communities and determined how various groups interacted and formed relationships through their funerary and ritual practices linked to the tumuli and their strategic locations. Additionally, Deskaj argues that these tumuli served as religious monuments with significant ritual importance. As a result, from the Early Bronze Age onward, tumuli have played a pivotal role in developing, creating and reconfiguring the region's 'religiouscape' (Deskaj, 2017; 89). Within the PASH Project Galaty and Bejko (2023) offer a comprehensive examination of an empty ritual tumulus, designated in this research as a ritual-only tumulus, where animal and bird offerings, ritualised feasting, and various religious or cult activities took place. They describe Tumulus 088 as a 'shrine or temple' intended for these activities. Additionally, the PASH study acknowledges that the ideological framework surrounding tumuli in relation to death and the afterlife played a significant role in their proliferation during the Early Bronze Age in the Shkodër area (Galaty *et al.,* 2023; 282).

Research on tumuli excavated in the post-communist era has emerged as a product of the new socio-political context, fostering multidisciplinary collaborations and encouraging innovative excavation techniques. This involved international collaboration with specialists from various fields, including aDNA, genetics, bioarchaeology and environmental studies, emphasising the importance of methodology in data collection, analysis, and publication (Murray, 2006; Bejko, Fenton and Foran, 2006; Damiata, 2007; Schepartz, 2010; McIlvaine and Schepartz, 2015; Muros and Zacharias, 2019). The historical context and methodological interpretations

have shifted dramatically compared to those during the totalitarian regime. By embracing the latest international technological advancements and theoretical frameworks, contemporary tumuli research from these five projects has provided scientific legitimacy to the field nationally and internationally. However, traditional interpretations continue to endure despite the innovation and scientific breakthroughs of these new tumuli projects. Discussions surrounding death, mortuary practices, and the treatment of the body primarily focus on burial rites, such as inhumation and alternative body positioning, often reflecting the legacy of communist-era interpretations. Funerary and ritual practices, offerings, cults and the ideological constructs of life, death, and the afterlife remain underexplored and minimally developed (Stapleton *et al.,* 2014).

Although the ethnogenesis of the Illyrians was not the primary focus of this research and its publications, the notion of Illyrian uniformity was nevertheless woven into the presentation and interpretation of the newly excavated tumuli. Papadopoulos et al. (2014; 3-5) assert that the 'Illyrian past is displayed through the most evocative images of memory', emphasising that 'the Illyrian tribes marked their territory with tumuli'. Throughout the Lofkënd monograph, the emphasis was on highlighting the prehistoric Illyrian tribal clans, their social context, material culture and skeletal remains. This approach was similarly applied when analysing other Illyrian tumuli excavated and published during the communist period, such as the Patos tumulus. Likewise, in the PASH project, Galaty and Bejko (2023) adopted a similar approach when describing and analysing tumuli identified and excavated during both the communist and post-communist eras. While the Illyrian ethnogenesis was touched upon in the Apollonia projects, it did not dominate the overarching theme.

Subsequently, the innovative techniques developed during the post-communist era have provided scientific support for promoting Illyrian ethnogenesis. These advancements have led to a widely accepted and uncontested interpretation of the tumuli excavated during both the communist and post-communist eras. This interpretation adhered to the narrative of the uniformity of Illyrians and their uninterrupted continuity to modern-day Albanians, with little questioning of the results or interpretations of the data. Furthermore, the constraints imposed by nationalistic agendas surrounding tumuli excavated during the communist era have seldom been described or critically examined in these monographs. Consequently, these projects have hindered the vital process of re-evaluating and reconsidering the tumuli excavated during that time.

Tumuli excavations undertaken during communism continued to be published in the *Iliria* Journal in the post-communist era. They also maintained a consistent style of presentation and interpretation from the previous era. Eight monographs detailing findings from tumuli excavated during this time were released after the 2000s (Chapter 3). These manuscripts, prepared during the communist regime, were published either unabridged or with minimal editing and often posthumously (Prendi, 2008; Islami, 2013). As during the communist era, interpretations were based primarily on the author's experience, training and knowledge and upon a limited number of Albanian scholars. International scholarly research was used mainly to support the chronology and typology of artefacts and was often outdated. These monographs infrequently embraced or implemented any of the new methodologies and interpretations of international tumuli research, and their interpretations often mirrored those of research conducted during the communist era. The monographs largely maintained the same one-dimensional data presentation and interpretative approach characteristic of *Iliria*

under communism. Their primary objective often revolved around emphasising the urgent need to illustrate further the glorious ethnogenesis of Illyrians and their uninterrupted continuity to Albanians. The similarities between communist and post-communist publications have reinforced the continuity of these interpretations of tumuli across these two periods. The challenges, limitations and constraining factors that influenced tumuli research during the communist era were neither acknowledged nor examined (Prendi, 2008; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). Such factors have obstructed the re-evaluation of research conducted during the totalitarian regime, ultimately overlooking the significance of adopting new multidimensional interpretations of tumuli excavated during that time.

In addition to the monographs and *Iliria*, several other Albanian and international scholars have begun to reassess and reinterpret findings from tumuli excavated during the communist era (Aliu and Bejko, 2005; Agolli, 2014; 2017a; Bejko, 1993; 1999; 2009; 2016; 2019; Kurti, R., 2012; 2017; 2015; 2020; Bunguri, 2015; Kurti, R. *et al.,* 2021; Lera *et al.,* 2009; Lera *et al.,* 2017; Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos, 2012). Utilising data published during that time offered new and more comprehensive insights into tumuli studies, examining aspects such as their locations and relationships to the surrounding landscape, the significance of memory, and the dynamics of social and ritual identity. Among the most notable approaches to re-evaluating the tumuli from this era – on which the 123 tumuli excavated during that time are based – are the works of Lera et al. (2009; 2017) and Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos (2012). These scholars contend that the labour and organisational skills necessary for constructing these highly visible and enduring monuments reflect the builders' intentions to convey the tumuli's significance as sites for both the dead and the living within their landscape. They highlight the function of

tumuli as a medium for transmitting generational memory due to their visibility and architectural design. In this way, tumuli delineated the physical and social landscapes of the surviving communities. Although indirectly related to tumuli in Albania, Lera et al. (2017) are the first to highlight the significance of the sensory and emotional experiences evoked during ritual practices performed on tumuli, which contributed to the creation of social memories.

Re-evaluating published data from tumuli excavated during communism, although limited in numbers, lays the foundation for providing new and alternative interpretations of tumuli excavated under a restrictive regime. This approach seeks to move beyond the potential biases associated with ethnogenesis. These studies highlight the wealth of data, insights and interpretations that can be gained by revisiting the tumuli findings from the communist era. However, this pioneering methodology is still nascent and concentrated on a limited number of tumuli. The present research aims to expand this scope to include all tumuli excavated during the communist period, covering from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age.

2.4.5   The ghost of the communist past

Beyond the realm of archaeology, the fall of communism resulted in dramatic social, economic and political changes. In times of insecurity and crises, national identities and nationalism rise and provide a sense of stability and identity (McAndrew, 2019). Albania is still struggling to deal with the legacy of its communist past. Only recently have several scholars acknowledged, but not critically analysed, the limitations of the one-dimensional approach to research conducted during the communist period (Idrizi, 2020; Kasmi, 2024). The figure of King Zog and his monarchy, once declared an enemy, has been re-established. Likewise, the role of the Italian Mission and Luigi

Maria Ugolini have been re-evaluated and promoted (Gilkes and Miraj, 2000; De Maria and Rambaldi, 2002; Austin, 2024). The persona of the dictator and the role of the communist regime continue to incite heated debates (Kuligowski, 2022). However, the restrictive context of the communist period and its influence on archaeological research remain largely unexamined in critical discussions. Within education, starting from primary school, scholarly history books continue to promote nationalist agendas and illustrate how 'we Albanians are the only descendants of Illyrians, we are the only country in the region that has a glorious ancestry, and this is illustrated through our Illyrian tumuli' (Xhemalaj, 2022; 9). It is worth noting that within the social context and scholarly research, there is little difference between criticising and critically analysing other scholar's work or study. Only recently has the importance of applying critical analysis started to be promoted in university education and curriculums (Qatipi, 2011; Agolli, 2021; Evis, 2023).[10]

In the last twenty years, nationalistic agendas have resurged in the Balkans. Politicians have often seized upon these agendas to further their own political goals, thereby exacerbating the situation (Silva and O'Brochta, 2024; 2). This is also evident in Albania, where the ethnogenesis of Illyrians has become central to scholarly research and political debates more generally. The examples below of the UNESCO site of Butrint and the Himara Tumuli Project represent these current approaches in Albania.[11]

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[10] Albania is a small country with less than four million inhabitants and has a relatively small number of scholars. Several archaeologists from the communist era are still actively participating in or leading major new archaeological projects. Within the country, scholarly critical analysis of published data, either during communism or post-communism, could easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted as personal criticism and an attack. Therefore, within tumuli publications, scholars seldom have challenged or critically analysed the work of other scholars and colleagues.

[11] It is not the scope of this research to analyse these two sites' social and economic aspects nor to become involved in internal political debates.

Located in southern Albania and bordering Greece, the UNESCO site of Butrint is one of the most recognised, celebrated and visited sites in Albania. During the communist era, dictator Hoxha considered Butrint to be one of the central pillars that proved the Illyrian origin of this southern archaeological site (Hodges, 2013). In 1999, the Butrint Foundation, led by British Professor Richard Hodges OBE, contributed to this site becoming the first UNESCO site in Albania (Bego and Malltezi, 2011; Hodges, 2020). Following its successful development and management over the years, in 2020, the Albanian government proposed a new management plan for Butrint.[12] This included the site being managed by experts involving Albanian and international scholars. The proposed idea of including Professor Hodges on the management board caused a political and scholarly uproar (Baçe, 2022; CNA, 2023). The reasons behind this heated debate were twofold: first, Hodges critically analysed how the communist dictatorship had impacted archaeological research from the period and how such research had subsequently promoted the ethnogenesis of Illyrians; second, Hodges was portrayed as not promoting the Illyrian origins of Butrint by claiming the site was a Greek and Roman colony (Hodges, 2013; Bowden and Hodges, 2017; Hodges and Hansen, 2022). These two interpretations led to several Albanian politicians calling for Hodges to be immediately removed from the Butrint management board, to be made persona non grata, to be denied entry to the country, and not to be allowed to conduct, present or publish research about Butrint and other Albanian archaeological sites. Likewise, several leading Albanian archaeologists, including researchers in tumuli studies, questioned the professional integrity of Professor Hodges. They declared that anyone, both Albanian but particularly foreigners, who does not support our Illyrian ethnicity, hence, our current identity, is not professionally fit to conduct or lead any

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[12] Due to the absence of scholarly research, the data gathered for this section is sourced from various forms of media.

archaeological research or manage our heritage sites, regardless of their professional qualifications (Mema, 2023).

Between 2018 and 2023, three tumuli were excavated in the Himara area of southern Albania. Whilst the Himara tumuli were the most important excavations undertaken during the last decade, the high-quality academic results from these rescue excavations, whilst well-received within scholarly research, received little media attention (Ballmer and Fernández-Götz, 2022). What grabbed the attention of politicians, some scholars and the media was the importance of Himara in potentially further informing and proving the ethnogenesis of Illyrians, whilst simultaneously contradicting the claims of Greece for Himara being part of the so-called Northern Epirus. Through media engagement, selected leading Albanian scholars of tumuli studies declared how the soil composition of tumulus cemeteries and the presence of a ringstone undoubtedly proved the uniformity of Himara with the majority of other Illyrian tumuli excavated during communism (Mema, 2020). However, this interpretation was based on cherry-picking data segments that supported the pre-existing theory. This approach further highlights the importance of a comprehensive methodological approach utilised in this research. The Prime Minister, Edi Rama, actively promoted the 'Illyrian passport of the Himara tumuli' and described how the material culture found in Himara was uniquely the same as the rest of all the Illyrian tumuli in the country (Gazetatema, 2023)

The examples of Butrint and Himara illustrate three crucial issues in understanding tumuli studies: first, critical analysis of how the communist dictatorship impacted archaeological research can potentially lead to experienced archaeologists being attacked, discredited and discriminated against; second, the ethnogenesis of Illyrians

continues to remain an untouchable and unquestionable topic of political, scholarly and public debates; third, tumuli excavated during the communist era are frequently interpreted through a narrow lens which often fails to recognise and acknowledge the diversity and depth of tumuli data. This underscores the urgent need to reassess the significant role of tumuli as funerary monuments within the landscape.[13] This perspective emphasises the importance of conducting comprehensive research on all tumuli excavated during communism rather than highlighting and selecting only a few prominent examples that reinforce the pre-existing theories about the uniformity and the uninterrupted continuity of Illyrians.

2.5 The Illyrian quest

Who are the Illyrians?[14] Numerous research studies, books, and articles on this subject have been published since the 19th century, both within and outside the Balkans (Kaljanac, 2023). Notwithstanding, the answer to this question is extraordinarily complex and sensitive, often leading to heated and contradictory scholarly and political debates. The answer often depends on the nationality and ethnicity of scholars and authors or the period when the research was conducted (Lomonosov, 2012). A simplistic response describes Illyrians as a pre-Roman population during the Bronze and Iron Ages that inhabited the Balkan peninsula, including Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, parts of Serbia and Macedonia and the wider region (Wilkes, 1995; Dzino, 2014; Išpanović, 2022; Savić and Ligorio, 2022). Historically, most Balkan countries have claimed, in one way

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[13] Whilst writing this research, I was often 'advised' by several archaeologists not to criticise or critically analyse the work of 'our' Albanian scholars. I was also discouraged from presenting tumuli interpretations which could upset scholars, undermine their work or cause controversy within the country.

[14] It is not within the scope of this research to provide an analysis of Illyrian's origins or their material culture.

or another, to have Illyrian ancestry and, to some degree, have supported the formation of their nation and state on the Illyrian hypothesis (Kaljanac, 2023). Albanian scholars point to archaeological evidence, such as tumulus cemeteries, to assert their status as the sole direct and uninterrupted descendants of the Illyrians. This claim remains a subject of contention (Prendi, 1985a; 1985b; Korkuti, 2016; Bodinaku, 2018).

The ethnogenesis of Illyrians has and continues to drive archaeological research and the nationalistic political agendas of Albania and many Balkan countries, especially from the former Yugoslavia (Prusac-Lindhagen, 2021). Scholarly research illustrates how, in Albania and neighbouring countries, tumuli research and interpretation were more than just detached archaeological research of the past. The Illyrian quest has often been misused and exploited to fit nationalistic agendas and to justify aggressive political decisions. The archaeological research conducted during the communist era reflects a palpable fear of invasion and annexation from neighbouring countries – both real and imagined – which likely fuelled the heightened focus on Illyrian ethnicity (Andrea, 1985a; Jubani, 2022). Although no historical evidence supports these political threats, scholarly research from neighbouring countries was frequently employed to exacerbate nationalistic tensions. The withdrawal of Albania from the Economic Treaty with the former Yugoslavia in 1948 and the ongoing 'state of war' with Greece during communism likely intensified these nationalistic conflicts (Felsen, 2023; Darques, 2024).

The example below represents the classical approach harnessed against Albanians. It illustrates the traditional and historical context of conducting tumuli research during the communist and, to a lesser degree, post-communist eras. For instance, a Serbian scholar, Sotirović (2013; 5), asks, 'Are the Albanians really the indigenous people of

the Balkans as they claim or just the newcomers to their present-day ethnical territories?' He responds to this question with the following statement: 'Albanians are the newcomers to the Balkan Peninsula who came later in comparison to all Albanian neighbours'. Tumuli data and migrations of the Early Bronze Age were utilised to support his claim. Furthermore, Sotirović (2018; 9) also claims that Albanians came to present-day Albania either from present-day Romania or from the territory of Serbia that is close to Romania, and they 'snatched the land of current-day Albanians from Slavic living population'. This scholar also used these arguments to support the political right of Serbia to own Kosovo, which, according to him, is the heart of Serbia and criticised NATO for intervening in Serbian internal issues. Sotirović also advocates that Albanians have no right to own the current geographical borders, and their claims to Illyrian ancestry are neither scientific nor based on any archaeological research. These selected extracts illustrate the mainstream ideas that have been presented in various forms of media even to the present day. Išpanović (2022) describes how the manipulation of Illyrian ownership continues to be exploited for political ideology against Albanians, creating an antagonist approach between Serbia, Albania and Kosovo. It is within this context that archaeologists, during communism, aimed to undertake exceptional high-quality scientific research to counter-attack Illyrian claims. The findings and narratives from tumulus cemeteries were central to this debate (Galaty, 2002; Winnifrith, 2021).

Additionally, in the south, Albania faced the Northern Epirus issue, which has become a myth within Greece. According to some Greek politicians and scholars, southern modern-day Albania should be reintegrated into Greek borders as part of their Northern Epirus theory (Rakipi, 2019). For Albanians, the architectural structure of tumulus cemeteries and the burial rite of inhumation were crucial factors in proving the

uniformity between the north and south of Illyrians and, hence, their continuity with Albanians. In this way, Albanian archaeologists could claim ownership over modern-day borders (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 1985; 2018).

These territory-offensive approaches are not just innocent and harmless political interrogatories between friendly neighbours. Within the Balkans, nationalistic agendas have directly impacted historical political relationships between countries.   As discussed in Section 2.2, the territory of modern Kosovo, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Albanians, was excluded from the contemporary borders of Albania.   After World War II, Kosovo became part of the former Yugoslavia. The Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha even engaged in discussions with Stalin about the potential reunification of Kosovo with Albania, although these discussions never materialised (Bowden and Hodges, 2017).   Sotirović (2018) illustrates that scholars and politicians in Serbia continue to assert that Kosovo is the heart of Serbia, claiming it is ethnically Slavic, specifically Serbian. They argue that they have a legitimate claim to both the territory and the population of Kosovo. This narrative, which posits that the people of Kosovo are not descendants of the Illyrians (i.e., ethnically Albanian) but rather of the Slavic-Serbian ethnic group, was exploited by Serbia to justify acts of genocide in the late 1990s. Despite Kosovo declaring its independence from Serbia in 2008, a status recognised by many nations, Serbia continues to refuse acknowledgement of this independence based on Slavic ethnicity. They persist in their claims that Kosovans are Slavic rather than Illyrian (Albanian), insisting that Kosovo should not exist as an independent state but rather be reintegrated into Serbia (Ronayne, 2017; Vukočić and Milpsavjević, 2023).

Albanian scholars during the communist era adopted a defensive and protective approach to tumuli research, illustrated in archaeological research, interpretations and publications (Andrea, 1985b). This could explain, to some extent, the one-dimensional approach of tumuli cemeteries within Albania during the communist era, where the aim was primarily to conduct scientific tumuli research, which evidenced the origin and continuity of Illyrians to modern Albanians.

2.6   International approaches to archaeology

The exploitation of archaeological narratives as a method for political and nationalistic agendas has not been limited to Albania. It was prevalent in many Balkan and European countries, such as neighbouring Greece and Macedonia. The ethnicity of Alexander the Great played a central role in the 25-year political conflict over the name of Macedonia, resulting in 2019 the country being renamed Northern Macedonia (Nimetz, 2020). Olympias, Alexander's mother, was born in Molossia in Epirus (Carney, 2006), which Albanians claim to be in Albania; hence, Albanians and several foreign scholars claim that Alexander is half Illyrian-Albanian (Cabanes, 1981).

The use of archaeological research, artefacts, interpretations and narratives have often played a significant role in constructing, supporting and promoting the national identity of modern societies, the formation of states and the political agendas of many countries across Europe and other parts of the world (Dietler, 1994; Jones, 2002; Laužikas *et al.,* 2022; Clark, 2023). This has been particularly evident in, but not limited to, countries that struggle with their past and present national and ethnic identities (Rowlands, 2020). Nonetheless, it is not just a story from a distant past but is an international and contemporary problem (Hamilakis and Duke, 2007). Greenberg and Hamilakis (2022) describe and illustrate the contemporary nationalistic and political

exploitation of archaeology in modern-day Greece and Israel. Similarly, Bonacchi (2022) demonstrates how the legacy of the Roman Empire was manipulated during the general election in Italy in 2013 and 2018 to promote nationalistic agendas. In her book, Bonacchi also illustrates how, within the UK, Celtic and Viking archaeology were utilised during the Brexit campaign in 2017 to highlight the country's glorious past. The historical and recent issues of the Elgin Marbles in 2023 further demonstrated how archaeological artefacts and their narratives continue to stimulate nationalistic and political disputes between the UK and Greece (Titi, 2023).

2.7   Significance of this research

In Albania, the issue of the relationship between archaeological research, particularly concerning tumuli, and nationalistic agendas during the communist regime remains taboo. I have identified only three scholars who have acknowledged nationalistic agendas in archaeology from the communist era. However, these matters have not been critically examined, and there is a notable lack of proposed solutions for re-evaluating tumuli excavated during the communist era (Bejko, 1998; Hoxha, G., 2013; Agolli, 2017a). The prevailing approach tends to be denial or avoidance, making it challenging to engage with complex matters or fully explore the tumuli findings. Based on the results of this research and my academic and personal knowledge, I propose that this reluctance may stem from the sensitive nature of glorifying ancestral ties to the Illyrian forefathers, often leading to debates that hinder meaningful archaeological inquiry.

Additionally, historical context and analysis of ethnogenesis may lead to the perception that research, analysis and interpretation of tumuli are inherently biased and, therefore, unreliable for further study. However, this chapter has illustrated the

importance of understanding the key factors influencing tumuli research to comprehend how external and internal factors have shaped perceptions of ethnogenesis. This perspective does not imply that the research findings were biased or lacked a systematic and scientific foundation. Instead, it highlights that certain aspects of the tumuli data have been emphasised to foster a one-dimensional interpretation of ethnogenesis. In contrast, a rich array of findings from tumuli cemeteries encompassing various themes has been presented, analysed, and, at times, interpreted.

I suggest that the complexity of this issue has led to an insufficient examination of tumuli data, with ethnogenesis as a distracting factor. As I have demonstrated throughout this research, a deeper understanding of the factors that have fuelled the preoccupation with ethnogenesis provides a framework for a more nuanced interpretation of tumuli data. Despite tumuli being excavated since 1948, the available information remains limited, fragmented and dispersed throughout the literature. This situation has impeded critical analysis and, at times, creates an impression that the approach has compromised the transparency of claims, as interpretations frequently depend on a narrow selection of tumuli rather than considering the entirety of the dataset. Moreover, the presentation of results often tends to be general and ambiguous, frequently lacking thorough statistical analysis. For example, assertions about Illyrian ethnicity, inferred from the presence of the architectural structure of the ringstones, discovered in various tumuli, often selectively highlight a few well-known sites without offering a comprehensive statistical breakdown of the total number of examples within the entire dataset (see Chapter 4 for the definition, purpose and distribution of the architectural structure of ringstones). Additionally, both thematic and statistical analyses of the data, particularly regarding their chronology, are often

insufficient or entirely missing.

I do not suggest that the issue of ethnic identity should not be considered in archaeological research, either in new tumuli studies or when exploring published data from the communist regime. However, I advocate for exploring the role of tumuli as Eternal monuments of lived experiences of the perceptions and beliefs in life, death and the afterlife, moving beyond narrow and distracting interpretations. This interpretation presents a holistic framework incorporating emotional, sensory and mnemonic dimensions to deepen our understanding of themes surrounding death, burial, rituals and the ideological significance of tumuli. Findings from the extensive body of work within *Iliria* Journal and monographs will demonstrate that tumuli were complex structures imbued with multiple meanings across different chronological periods and geographical contexts (Chapters 3-6). This research provides a foundation for further and more comprehensive examinations of tumuli excavated during a restrictive communist regime. The contribution of this research will expand the study of tumulus cemeteries across Albania.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1   Introduction

Tumulus cemeteries were complex and significant funerary monuments of Bronze and Iron Age Albania worthy of further analysis in terms of their architectural structure, the factors that contributed to their rise and proliferation, and funerary and ritual practices associated with them. As demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, in this research, I aim to explore the significant role of tumuli in helping societies deal with death, burial and bereavement. To understand the complex nature of these issues, I adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods for collecting, analysing and interpreting published data from tumuli excavated and researched during the communist era. The qualitative method of reflexive thematic analysis provided the methodological framework for generating themes from articles in *Iliria* and nine monographs that captured the depth and breadth of tumuli data (derived from archaeological investigations over the last 70 years). Quantitative methods involved collecting, analysing and interpreting the quantifiable aspects of the 123 tumuli collated within the Tumuli Repository. The combination of these two methods provided a comprehensive insight into the significant role of tumuli. It helped answer the three research questions presented in Chapter 1 and addressed in Chapters 4-6 and illustrated the considerable role of tumuli as Eternal Living Monuments (Chapter 7).

This chapter commences by providing the historical background of the methodology of tumuli excavated during communism and published during both the communist and post- communist eras. The research and methods of published data from *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs must be grounded, understood and analysed within their unique

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and specific historical context (Section 3.2). This background provides the rationale for the publication, selection and accessibility of tumuli data from *Iliria* articles and monographs (Section 3.3). The mixed methods approach provides the methodological framework for analysing, interpreting and understanding tumuli data, which is presented in Section 3.4. The qualitative method of reflexive thematic analysis is presented in Section 3.5, and the quantitative method in Section 3.6.

3.2 Publication, selection and accessibility of tumuli research

The initial stage of data collection involved identifying, selecting and documenting published data on tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist period. In the following sections, I will provide an analytical overview of the factors that influenced the publication of tumuli during both the communist and post-communist eras. Additionally, I will discuss how these factors impacted the selection and accessibility of *Iliria* Journals and monographs.

3.2.1 *Iliria* Journal

The history of systematic archaeological research in Albania started in 1948 (Chapter 1). Early research covered the whole geographical area of the country and included all periods from the Neolithic to the Late Medieval period (Përzhita, 2013). Surveys and excavations of tumulus cemeteries started during the early 1950s, and their findings were published in various periodicals such as *Bulletin of the Social Science Institute (BUSH)* and *Historical Studies*. Increasing numbers of excavations during this time helped to encourage a vivid interest in archaeology, leading to *Iliria* becoming the first periodical specialising in archaeology. *Iliria* was first published in 1971 to present a collection of Illyrian studies that promoted the nationalist theory of indigenous

Illyrians and to celebrate the First Congress of Illyrian Studies (Hoxha, G., 2013; Bejko, 2014). *Iliria* became the 'flagship of archaeological journals in the country', with interest peaking in the 1980s when it was published twice a year (Agolli, 2017; 29). As a result of communist and state-controlled ideology, where archaeological research was published on a single, unchallenged platform of publication, *Iliria* remained the only archaeological journal in the country. In 2004, the journal *Candavia* was published; its scope focuses on the Late Antiquity and Medieval periods, therefore, it has not been included in this research. Similarly, the *Monumentet* Journal, first published in 1971, focuses on heritage sites and monuments and has not been included.

Although over 300 tumuli were identified and over 150 excavated, only a small selection of tumuli or archaeological data was published in *Iliria*, whilst the rest remained unpublished. Although incomplete, the high number of excavated tumuli and their published data illustrate the 'substantial investment by Albanian archaeology in the exploration of tumuli' (Bejko, 2014; 518). Publications included distinctive tumuli features, end-of-year reports, detailed presentations of tumulus cemeteries or tumuli areas, archaeological finds and thematic discussions. Within *Iliria*, there appears to be a sense of ownership of the data, as research was published exclusively by the leading archaeologist who conducted the excavation. The published data from other authors was only incorporated to further illustrate and chronologically date certain aspects of tumuli findings. I have identified only two scholars, Prendi and Korkuti, who provided a chronological summary of the tumuli results, their interpretations and narratives (Prendi, 1974, 1977, 1985a; Korkuti, 1989). The research during communism was focused primarily on producing a typology and chronology of the artefacts (Korkuti, 1985; Bodinaku, 1984; 1989; 1990; Përzhita and Bela, 1987; Bejko, 1993; Aliu and Bejko, 2005; Kurti, R., 2012; 2015).

The Albanian archaeologist Gëzim Hoxha, whilst acknowledging the socio-political and nationalistic limitations of research conducted during the communist era, emphasised the distinguished and superior quality of research published within *Iliria*. According to Hoxha, this was illustrated through the *Iliria* Journal receiving the Golden Medal for Archaeological Research in 1983 from the International Academy of Lutèce (Académie Internationale de Lutèce (https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100028827) in France, and by the positive appraisal of international scholars of the journal (Figure 3.1). Hoxha also highlighted the high standard of research published during the post-communist era, describing *Iliria* as an 'epitome and the embodiment of the success of all archaeological research in the country' (Hoxha, G., 2013; 34). Following the collapse of communism in 1991, the number of excavated and published tumuli declined significantly. Nonetheless, the results from tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist era continued to be disseminated in the journal *Iliria* (Hoxha, G., 2013). For instance, the Cerujë tumulus, excavated in 1979, was published in *Iliria* in 1997 (Andrea, 1997). Despite the limitations of the communist framework, in this research, I will illustrate how *Iliria* contains valuable information about tumuli locations, their architectural structures, burials and ritual practices (Bejko, 2014).
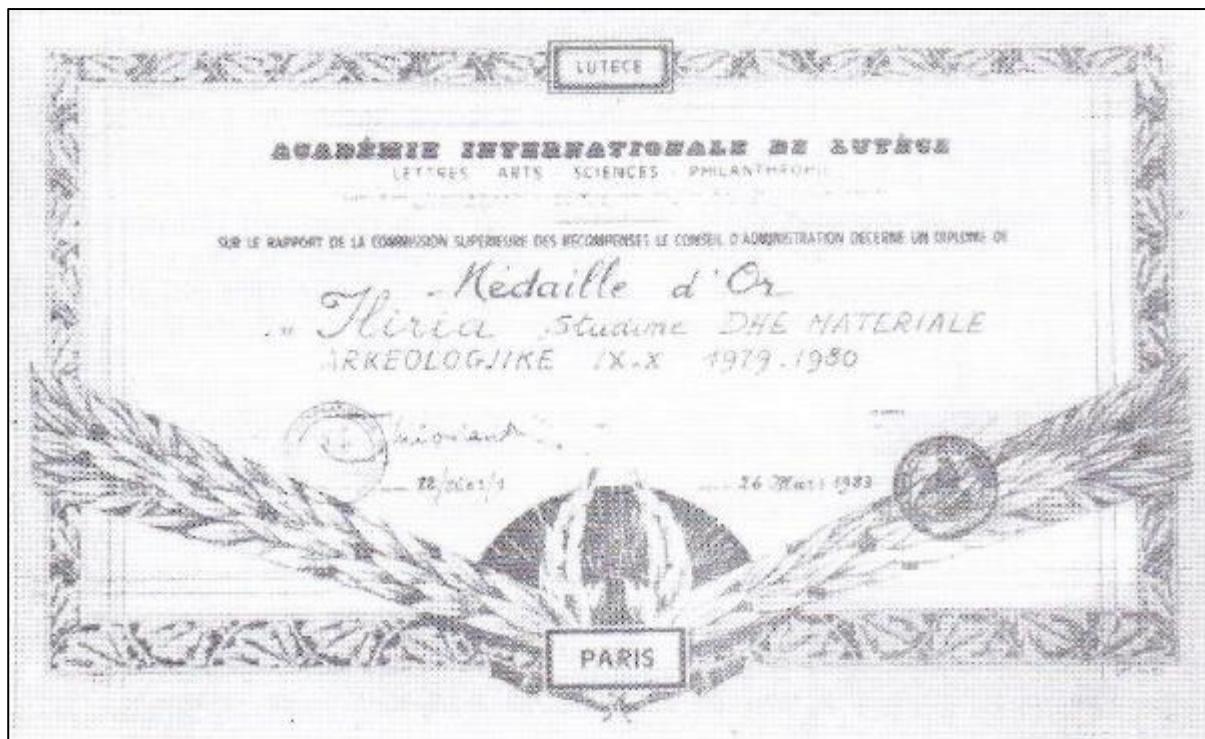
Figure 3.1   The gold medal for *Iliria* Journal

Persée is a Support and Research Unit attached to ENS De Lyon, the CRN, and the University of Lyon supported by the Ministry of Higher Education in France. Its mission is to promote a global documentary heritage to benefit research (Our Missions – UMS Persée (persee.fr). The complete collection of *Iliria* (1971-2017) is published online in Persée (https://www.persee.fr/collection/iliri). While this initiative marks a positive step towards providing open access to the *Iliria* Journal, it underscores that the effort was implemented by external, foreign organisations rather than originating from an internal Albanian approach to publishing or making the data publicly accessible. In the paper version, the last volume of *Iliria* was published in 2019; I assessed both the online and paper versions of *Iliria* up to 2019. The latest article, which compiled data on tumulus cemeteries excavated during communism, was published in 2015. Therefore, in this research, I utilised *Iliria* data from 1971 to 2015.

I started the data collection from *Iliria* by systematically evaluating every article within the 39 volumes to identify any relevant information on tumulus cemeteries and the socio-historical context of the Bronze and Iron Ages (Table 3.1). In total, I identified 86 articles from *Iliria*. Some of these articles included detailed descriptions of tumuli sites or themes, spanning around 50-70 pages, while others were brief and contained minimal information, such as a few sentences, one paragraph or a single page.

During the communist era from 1971 to 1990, a total of 66 journal articles were published, all adhering to a consistent and uniform style of presentation and interpretation. Following the collapse of the communist period, 19 articles were published in *Iliria* Journal, where I identified two distinct approaches emerging in the *Iliria* publications. The first approach, evident in 14 articles, adhered to the presentation and interpretation style prevalent during the communist era,

characterised by a uniform perspective that lacked challenging discourse. These findings were primarily authored by scholars who had been active in research and publication during the communist era and did not incorporate many of the new international methodologies concerning tumuli (Aliu, 1995; 1996; Aliu and Bejko, 2005; Bodinaku, 2001; Hoti, 1993; Jubani, 1992; 1995; Korkuti, 1998; Prendi, 1998). The second approach, identified in five articles, involved the re-evaluation of published tumuli data, employing new methodologies and innovative interpretations of findings from excavations conducted during the communist era. This shift enabled these studies to move beyond nationalistic frameworks, as the authors began to critically analyse and challenge the socio-political and nationalistic interpretations that were common during the communist era (Bejko, 1993; 1998; 1999; Kurti, R., 2012; Bunguri, 2015).

The presentation and comprehensive analysis of the architectural structures of tumuli, graves, funerary practices and the typology of material culture, derived from *Iliria* – from the communist and post-communist eras – demonstrate a rigorous and systematic approach to data collection, presentation and interpretation. The distinctive and pivotal role of *Iliria*, combined with the richness and depth of the tumuli data featured in the journals, was an essential factor in deciding to select and utilise *Iliria* in this research.

Year	Volume	Issue	Tumuli articles	Authors
1971	1	N/A	3	Andrea; Budina; Kurti, D
1972	2	N/A	2	Islami; Korkuti
1974	3	N/A	7	Aliu; Andrea; Bodinaku; Budina; Ceka; Jubani; Prendi
1976	4-6	N/A	3	Andrea; Hammond; Kurti, D
1977	7-8	N/A	4	Ceka; Kurti, D (2 articles); Prendi
1979	9-10	N/A	1	Andrea
1981	11	11.1-11.2	4	Anamali and Ceka; Bodinaku; Hoti; Korkuti
1982	12	1-2	4	Bodinaku; Hoti; Jubani; Korkuti
1983	13	1-2	2	Jubani; Kurti, D
1984	14	1-2	4	Aliu; Bodinaku; Kilian-Dirlmajer; Koka
1985	15	1-2	10	Andrea; Bodinaku; Buda; Jubani; Kilian; Koka; Kurti, D; Korkuti; Prendi (2 articles)
1986	16	1-2	4	Andrea; Koka; Vokotopoulou; Hoti
1987	17	1-2	1	Kurti, D
1988	18		4	Aliu; Bela; Korkuti; Prendi
1989	19	1-2	4	Aliu; Bela; Korkuti; Sueref
1990	20	1-2	9	Anamali; Andrea; Bela; Bela and Përzhita; Bodinaku (2 articles); Jubani; Koka (2 articles)

1991	21	N/A	0	No tumuli data
1992	22	N/A	1	Jubani
1993	23	N/A	2	Bejko; Hoti
1994	24	N/A	0	No tumuli data
1995	25	N/A	3	Aliu; Andrea; Jubani
1996	26	N/A	1	Aliu
1997	27	N/A	1	Andrea
1998	28	N/A	4	Bejko; Islami; Korkuti; Prendi
1999	29	N/A	2	Andrea; Bejko
2001	30	N/A	1	Bodinaku
2003	31	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2005	32	N/A	1	Aliu and Bejko
2007	33	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2009	34	N/A	1	Andrea
2011	35	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2012	36	N/A	1	Kurti, R
2013	37	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2014	38	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2015	39	N/A	1	Bunguri
2016	40	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2017	41	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2018	42	N/A	0	No tumuli data
2019	43	N/A	0	No tumuli data

Table 3.1 *Iliria* **Journal, volume, number of articles and authors**

3.2.2   Monographs

To explore the three research questions and enhance the understanding of the 123, in conjunction with *Iliria* Journal, I examined nine monographs that provided information on tumuli excavated during the communist era (Table 3.2). During communism, only one monograph was published, providing a detailed presentation of four tumulus cemeteries that had already been published in *Iliria* (Andrea, 1985a). An additional eight monographs were published later by retired scholars or posthumously between 2004 and 2020. These delays in publication in *Iliria* and monographs were a consequence of various political, social and economic reasons. The lack of and delay in publications continue to remain a significant concern, and it is common and acceptable practice in Albanian archaeology for results to be published many decades after the initial excavation (Agolli, 2017a). Piskovë tumulus, for example, was excavated in 1978 and partially published in *Iliria* in 1981. A detailed publication is likely to be forthcoming (Bodinaku, 2018).

Author	Title	Description
Zhaneta Andrea, 1985	Kultura e tumave Ilire në Pellgun e Korçës (The Illyrian Tumulus Culture in Korça area)	Includes four tumuli distributed in Barç and Kuç i Zi areas, representing a small regional area in Korçë. A shorter version has already been published in *Iliria*.
Skënder Aliu, 2004	Tuma e Luarasit (Luaras Tumulus)	Detailed and comprehensive information on one site only. A shorter version has already been published in *Iliria*. It provides additional information about the geographical location and other prehistoric sites, such as caves and open and fortified settlements. It also provides maps and a detailed list of all the identified unexcavated and excavated tumuli in Luaras and the broader region of Kolonja.
Frano Prendi, 2008 (posthumously)	Studime Arkeologjike (Archaeological Studies)	The complete published work of the author includes both prehistory and other periods. It comprises both articles already published and expanding on tumuli partially published in *Iliria*. Includes early tumuli research published in pre-*Iliria* Journal (*BUSH*, *Historical Studies*) and articles that describe Bronze and Iron Age Albania.

Skënder Aliu, 2012	Tuma e Rehovës (Rehova Tumulus)	Detailed and comprehensive information on one site had already been presented in *Iliria*. Provides general information on tumuli and other sites in the area.
Muhamet Bela, 2012	Kërkime prehistorike në bashkimin e Drinit (Prehistoric research in Drin Valley)	Complete work on tumuli, settlements, and caves within the Drin Valley. It covers a large geographical area of Albania and Kosovo and includes work from other scholars. Collates published data from *Iliria* and new unpublished tumuli data.
Aristotel Koka, 2012	Kultura Ilire e tumave të Shtojit (The Illyrian Tumulus Culture in Shtoj)	Complete data on the Shtoj necropolis area with 11 tumuli where only three sites were published. Collates work of two tumuli excavated and published by Jubani. Presents new unpublished data and provides a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the Shtoj area.
Skënder Islami, 2013 (posthumously)	Kultura Ilire e tumave të Matit (The Illyrian Tumulus Culture in Mat)	It covers a large area of Mat with 35 tumuli and presents a complete collection of excavated sites mainly published in the 1950s-1960s. Only a small selection of tumuli findings were published in *Iliria* – mainly unpublished data.

Namik Bodinaku, 2018	Kultura tumulare ilire e Shqipërisë Jugperëndimore (Illyrian Tumuli Culture in South-West Albania)	Covers the complete work of all tumuli of a large geographical area in southwest Albania. Expands on tumuli data already published in pre-*Iliria* journals (*BUSH*), includes articles already published in *Iliria*, and provides new unpublished data. Collates work from other scholars.
Skënder Aliu, 2020	Kolonja. Studime Arkeologjike. Jeta, Kultura dhe Identiteti (Kolonja, Archaeological Studies. Life, Culture, and Identity)	It focused primarily on the Kolonja area in southeast Albania and included all the archaeological sites from the Early Neolithic to Late Antiquity. A comprehensive presentation of excavated tumuli has already been published in *Iliria*. Provides a detailed list of unexcavated tumuli. Includes shaft cemeteries and settlements of the Kolonja area. Analyses and interprets life, material and ritual culture, beliefs, and identity of tumuli and other sites in Kolonja.

Table 3.2   List of selected monographs

Whilst the complete collection of *Iliria* was available online, this was not the case for the monographs, which required a different approach to data collection. Accessing monographs in Albania remains exceptionally difficult due to the lack of a list of recent publications and difficulties accessing information online or in person. Subsequently, collecting, assessing and evaluating monographs for this research was challenging

and complicated. I started the data collection by screening for new book announcements in *Iliria*. This involved examining references and bibliographies from the latest archaeological articles and books. I then proceeded to search online for authors who had presented findings on tumulus cemeteries. I explored official websites, such as those of the Institute of Archaeology and the Academy of Science. Major publishing houses in the country were also searched, and I contacted them and asked whether they had a list of archaeological books. Social media provided information on conferences, activities and book promotions. Furthermore, I contacted Albanian archaeologists to compare and assess whether there were any notable gaps in the literature. Following these steps, I compiled a list of monographs that provided information on tumulus cemeteries. Accessing monographs was challenging, as most were not readily available to purchase online or in major bookstores in Albania or internationally. This was particularly challenging, as the research commenced in the first week of the UK's COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. This illustrates what Agolli (2017) describes – it is easier to start a new excavation rather than accessing old published or unpublished data.[15]

The nine monographs utilised in this research complement *Iliria* Journal by providing a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of tumuli, tumuli areas or larger geographical areas. The newly published data in these monographs helped to overcome the insufficient publication of *Iliria*. Together, the 86 *Iliria* articles and the nine monographs provided the foundation for the themes.

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[15] During personal contacts with Albanian archaeologists working in Albania, one stated in a corresponding email: 'No one knows the exact number, and no one has a complete list of all the published books. They might only be in the library, which is always closed and inaccessible'. Whilst this personal statement might not reflect the actual situation, it illustrates the challenges of accessing published literature in Albania

3.3   Methodological framework

Mixed methods research is a research design that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, enabling researchers to employ different methodological approaches to collecting, analysing, interpreting and presenting the characteristic features of data (Creswell and Creswell, 2005; Harrison, Reilly and Creswell, 2020; Hirose and Creswell, 2023). In this research, I employed the exploratory design of mixed methods, where the research started by exploring the qualitative data and was then followed by analysing, describing and interpreting the quantitative data. Exploratory research designs can be used predominantly with research that does not start with pre-existing theories but aims to explore new topics and interpretations – as was the case in this research (Toyon, 2021; Garcia and Garcia, 2023; Hesstvedt and Christensen, 2023). I chose this approach for its inherent flexibility, which allows for the adaptation and modification of research methods based on the results of the data.

This research aligned with the qualitative paradigm and was initially designed to help understand the 'what and how' various themes contributed to tumuli construction, their rise and proliferation, and funerary and ritual practices (Liamputtong, 2009; Ritchie *et al.,* 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2022). However, analysis and interpretation of themes required a thorough and deep-rooted understanding of the main characteristic features of each tumulus, as well as to numerically illustrate the 'what, where and when' of the themes. Subsequently, additional statistical quantitative data was required, and the methodological framework 'evolved to a mixed methods study with the qualitative data remaining as primary and the quantitative portion being nested within the design' (Gurenlian, 2023; 71). The qualitative themes remained the dominant part of the analysis, while the quantitative data complemented, enriched and aided a more

detailed understanding, analysis and interpretation of themes (Hafsa, 2019; Hesstvedt and Christensen, 2023). Combining these two methods in this research provided a comprehensive and valuable insight into the role of tumuli and the phenomena of death, burial and bereavement (Chapter 7).

3.4 Qualitative research methodology

3.4.1 Reflexive thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is one of the most recognised and widely used research methods for analysing qualitative data in the social sciences. It is frequently used for analysing people's experiences, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs regarding specific topics through systematically identifying, organising and providing insights into patterns of meaning within data (Terry *et al.,* 2017; Finlay, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2012; 2020; 2022). There are three main approaches to analysing data within thematic analysis: coding reliability, codebook and reflexive thematic analysis. Coding reliability involves early theme development, where researchers conduct coding to identify evidence for themes that summarise the most frequent themes within the data. This approach is structured around a code frame and involves different researchers working independently to apply the code frame to data. The role of researchers and their subjectivity is considered a source of bias and hindrance within coding reliability. Codebook approaches utilise codebooks to chart or map developing analysis. It is primarily used to facilitate teamwork where each team member codes different parts of the data. In reflexive thematic analysis, themes are generated from the data and are created around a central idea, concept or meaning. In contrast to other TA approaches, reflexive thematic analysis embraces and promotes the active role of the researcher 'as not just valid but as a resource in the knowledge production process'.

Themes present a consistent and convincing story of the data, whilst the researcher is the 'storyteller actively engaged in interpreting the data through the lens of their cultural membership, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitment, as well as their scholarly knowledge' (Braun *et al.,* 2019; 845). The researcher's insight into and articulation of their generative role in the research is the key to good quality analysis and successful reflexive TA' (Braun and Clarke, 2022; 15).

TA continues to be used predominantly within health and social studies, such as psychology, physical health and nursing, where research is focused primarily on interviews, and reflexive approaches are crucial (Braun *et al.,* 2023). In the last 20 years, however, TA has begun to be adopted in archaeological and cultural heritage studies (Manning, 2014; Dolcetti *et al.,* 2021; Bonacchi *et al.,* 2023; Claassen, 2023). Research has started to highlight the importance of the active role of the researcher in identifying, analysing and interpreting 'researcher-generated themes' (Lochmiller, 2021; 2,029). It has also become an integral part of all stages of archaeological research (Larsson, 2014; Manning, 2014; Morgan *et al.,* 2021; Panagiotidou *et al.,* 2021). The necessity for reflexivity and reflexive approaches has been imperative in dealing with the archaeological research of sites where interpretation can influence and impact nationalistic, political and religious identities. Hodder (2000) and his team applied a reflexive approach during the excavation of Çatalhöyük in Turkey, where team members reflected on different aspects of the research. This approach illustrated the application of reflexivity in archaeological data collection, analysis, and interpretation of a complex and sensitive site where many identities are interwoven. Likewise, Brady (2020) illustrates the importance of reflexivity in archaeological fieldwork and how the reflexive approach enhanced the interpretation of the Yanyuwa rock art culture of Aboriginal Australians. Furthermore, Warren (2021) encourages

critical reflection in the terminology used in archaeology when dealing with sensitive sites that continue to symbolise a national identity. As part of reflexivity in dealing with sensitive issues of nationalistic archaeological interpretation of sites in Malta, Burkette and Skeates (2022) encourage archaeologists to be aware of and reflect on the significance of the language and the terminology they use in their writings. Frieman and Hofmann (2019; 537) also advocate that reflection should be a 'fundamental concern of each stage of archaeological research', especially in dealing with sensitive and problematic issues such as migration, which can be used to fuel and exploit nationalistic agendas. They remind archaeologists to be aware of and reflect on their active role in the analyses, interpretation and publication of their research.

Additionally, exploring sensory archaeology, emotions and the role of memory in this research required a thorough engagement with the data. Guided by the work of Hamilakis (2013) and Tringham and Danis (2020), I employed reflective practice in exploring, understanding and interpreting the findings from *Iliria* Journal and monographs. This approach to reflective practice and writing enriched and deepened the interpretation of tumulus cemeteries discussed in Chapters 4-7. The intricate nature of the tumulus cemeteries excavated and studied during the dictatorial regime, along with the specific context of their publication in *Iliria* and monographs, as well as the sensitivity surrounding the ethnogenesis of the Illyrians, underscores the need for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the historical, cultural and linguistic contexts involved. Therefore, a reflexive interpretation and writing approach was essential (Bekteshi, 2016). These factors serve as key determinants in my decision to select and use reflexive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke, in this archaeological research.

Unlike other methodologies, such as grounded theory, reflexive thematic analysis does not come with built-in methods for conducting research (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2020). This does not mean it is not theoretical or detached from any theory or epistemology. I applied reflexive thematic analysis in this research due to its capacity to select a methodological framework that aligns with theoretical beliefs suited for tumuli data and analysis, while also addressing the three research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2020). Furthermore, this approach empowered me as a researcher to make deliberate choices regarding my qualitative paradigm, coding and theming strategies, as well as the balance between inductive and deductive analysis, the differentiation between semantic and latent coding, and sample size.

To promote flexibility and reflexivity whilst maintaining the integrity of reflexive thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2012; 69) suggest six phases of analysis to scaffold research for producing a 'good thematic analysis that is thorough, plausible and sophisticated'. The six phases include: 1) familiarisation with the data; 2) generating codes; 3) generating initial themes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) writing up the themes. I adhered to these six phases; however, I approached them not in a linear fashion but rather as a recursive and iterative process, moving back and forth through the different phases (Braun and Clarke, 2020; Byrne, 2021; Finlay, 2021).

(The architectural structure of tumuli has been presented as an example of these phases to highlight the complexity of coding, theming and the six phases).

3.4.1.1   Phase 1 – familiarisation with the data

I initiated the process of familiarising myself with the data, which started during collection and involved an immersive engagement to understand its depth, breadth and complexity.   While I was already familiar with various aspects of literature, I approached the entire dataset inductively, giving equal attention and consideration to every detail.   This approach ensured that I thoroughly familiarised myself with the entire dataset in a comprehensive and appropriate manner.

3.4.1.2   Phase 2 – generating codes

Coding refers to the process of searching for, identifying and capturing a singular idea from the data, followed by selecting specific words or sentences to articulate its content (Saldaña, 2021).   In this research, I adopted an interpretative paradigm, often called the Big Q, and embraced an evolving and inductive approach to coding, where the data itself served as the starting point for analysis, rather than relying on pre-existing themes (Byrne, 2021; Campbell *et al.,* 2021).   In contrast, a deductive approach is data-driven, focusing on specific parts of the data to address pre-established questions.

Semantic coding aims to identify and summarise the content of the data while capturing its explicit meaning at a superficial level, rather than delving into hidden meanings.   Conversely, latent coding goes beyond the surface, exploring implicit meanings, ideas and concepts concealed within the data.   This approach is both interpretative and analytical, encouraging me to engage creatively and effectively in the coding process (Terry *et al.,* 2017; Byrne, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The 86 articles from *Iliria* and the nine monographs were imported into NVivo. I started the coding process with *Iliria* in chronological order, followed by the nine monographs. The initial coding process was both inductive and latent, where I aimed to identify various distinctive features of the data that conveyed the underlying significance and role of tumuli, as well as their associated funerary and ritual practices. Within the existing literature, scholars have often interpreted different aspects of tumulus cemeteries. This approach necessitated the application of latent coding in order to capture the analytical presentation of tumuli data through the perspectives of researchers who initially excavated and published their findings. Addressing the three research questions often required me to employ a deductive approach, which involved examining the data closely to identify additional codes. I used a deductive, semantic coding strategy for the descriptive elements of the tumuli's architectural features, including measurements, dimensions, materials used in construction, and key architectural structures such as muranë, ringstones, cupolas and dromos. For instance, the presence of ringstones, along with their measurements and the materials used for their construction, was coded individually.

I employed semantic coding to explain and capture the original descriptions of tumuli data as presented in the literature. However, through an interpretative and analytical examination of the data provided by various scholars, it became evident that the architectural structures were imbued with ritual significance. This required an inductive and latent approach to coding, which formed part of the analytical coding process. I integrated and combined inductive, latent and interpretative codes with deductive, semantic and descriptive coding methods to generate a robust set of codes. During this phase, I developed more than 120 distinct codes.

3.4.1.3 Phase 3 – generating initial themes

The process of thematic analysis involved identifying and gathering patterns and meanings across coded data, ultimately leading to the development of themes that shared meanings around a central idea or concept (Braun and Clarke, 2012; 2019; 2022). I began the theme generation in NVivo through a comprehensive review and analysis of the codes (Byrne, 2021). Codes that conveyed similar meanings or contributed to an understanding of the data were organised into groups. According to Braun and Clarke (2020), researchers need to interpret themes, as they do not simply emerge from the data. Therefore, the theme generation phase involved a personal and comprehensive understanding and analysis of the data.

During this stage, I categorised the codes into sub-themes representing specific meanings, which I subsequently organised under broader themes that encapsulated their overall significance. For instance, codes related to architectural structures were grouped under the sub-theme of 'monumental features,' which was ultimately placed within the overarching theme of 'material and construction of tumuli'. Meanwhile, codes addressing ritual meanings were classified under the sub-themes of 'architectural structure as ritual meaning' and 'cults,' both of which were subsequently included in the theme of 'ritual practices'. Throughout this process, I remained focused on the research questions, aiming for the initial theming to present a coherent narrative of the tumuli data derived from *Iliria* and the nine monographs. In total, I created 26 themes, each containing between two and eight sub-themes.

3.4.1.4　Phase 4 – reviewing potential themes

This phase entailed a thorough review, assessment and evaluation of how the initial themes related to the coded data, dataset and research questions. I employed two levels of review to validate the initial themes (Braun and Clarke, 2020; Byrne, 2021). The first level involved examining the codes and their corresponding extracted data within NVivo to ensure that each theme adequately captured its intended meaning. Each theme was carefully assessed to ensure its distinctive meaning was represented in the data. The second level focused on evaluating how well the themes encapsulated the overall meaning of the dataset. I organised the themes into broad categories corresponding to the three research questions: 1) the architectural structure of tumuli; 2) the rise and proliferation of tumuli; and 3) funerary practices and rituals. I re-read the entire dataset to verify that the themes presented coherent narratives that addressed the research questions.

3.4.1.5　Phase 5 – defining and naming themes

This phase involved defining, analysing and interpreting themes to identify what was distinct and unique about each one, how they addressed the research questions and their relationship to the overall dataset. I reviewed earlier reflective memos that documented the creation and evolution of initial codes and themes. Additionally, relevant Albanian and international literature concerning the research questions – particularly those related to sensory experiences, emotions and memory – offered valuable insights for the analytical description of the themes. The process of defining and analysing themes was meticulously recorded in memos. Reviewing, defining and naming themes was an iterative endeavour that required an extensive analytical shaping and reshaping of both the data and the themes, including further coding. This process involved merging themes with similar meanings and eliminating codes that

failed to capture the essence of sub-themes or overarching themes adequately. I applied this methodology to the three themes and their sub-themes for each research question (Table 3.3).

For example, I joined the sub-themes of 'architectural features of tumuli' under the main theme of 'architectural structure'. Codes that shared multiple meanings were coded in more than one sub-theme. Several codes, such as 'material used', 'location', 'measurements' and 'sourcing building materials', were joined with the theme of 'methods, materials and phases of construction'. The analytical presentation of this architectural data was included in the sub-theme of 'imitating and defining funerary monuments of the landscape'. The six sub-themes of cults emerged in one sub-theme. Due to cults sharing similarities with ritual offerings, they have emerged in the sub-theme of the 'offerings and cults', which more effectively captured the meaning of this sub-theme and was one of the three sub-themes of the theme of the 'funerary, offering and cults'.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Architectural structure of tumuli	**Rise and proliferation of tumuli**	**Funerary practices and rituals**
1. Architectural structures	1. Migration and absorption	1. Burial rites
	1.1 Kurgan migration	1.1 Inhumation
	1.2 Migration integrated with locals	1.2 Cremation
	1.3 Socio-economic and ritual transformation	1.3 Invisible graves
2. First phase of tumuli construction	2. Role of the landscape	2. Funerary practices, offerings and cults
	2.1 Landscape features	2.1 Ceremonies and fire structures
	2.2 Imitating and defining funerary monuments of the landscape	2.2 Commemoration and feasting
		2.3 Offerings and cults
3. Methods, materials and phases of construction	3. Social dynamics	3. Pottery and metal fragmentation
	3.1 Social context, patriarchy and elites	3.1 Pottery fragmentation
	3.2 Network, mobility and production	3.2 Metal fragmentation

Table 3.3   Final themes from *Iliria* and monographs

Defining themes necessitated a comprehensive understanding of the historical context surrounding tumuli research and related publications. Some authors have opted to delve into specific aspects of the data with greater detail. For instance, Jubani conducted thorough analytical work on funerary and ritual practices, offering insights into the long process of ritualised scratching and fragmenting of pottery. In contrast, many other scholars did not engage in such depth of interpretation. This disparity was particularly evident in the Kënetë area, where Jubani excavated four tumulus cemeteries and provided detailed analyses of pottery fragmentation. Meanwhile, Hoti, who excavated the remaining two tumuli in Kënetë, recognised the occurrence of pottery fragmentation but refrained from offering any interpretation (Jubani, 1983; Hoti, 1986). Throughout this research, I observed that these differences extended beyond mere stylistic preferences or personal approaches. In 1969, Jubani sparked a political controversy by highlighting the architectural variations in tumuli between southern and northern Albania (Chapter 2). The dictator Hoxha subsequently became involved in the discussion, permitting archaeologists a degree of freedom in their interpretations (Bejko, 1998; Agolli, 2017a). Drawing on the findings of this research and integrating my academic and personal insights, I propose that this encounter might have served as a 'rite of passage' for Jubani, instilling him with greater confidence in analysing ritual meanings within a legally atheistic society.

3.4.1.6   Phase 6 – writing up the thesis

The final phase involved analysing, interpreting and presenting themes within their research questions. The themes were reflected and grounded in 86 articles from *Iliria* and nine monographs. This process included integrating relevant international scholarly research for context, conducting a detailed analysis and interpretation of the themes and supporting these interpretations with quantitative data to enhance the

understanding of the themes. Additionally, I provided alternative analytical perspectives on the meanings derived from the data. These different aspects were combined to convey a coherent story of the themes, to explore the research questions (Chapters 4-6) and to examine the significant role of tumuli (Chapter 7).

Given the intricate role of tumuli as funerary monuments within the landscape, I adopted two distinct approaches in addressing the themes. The first approach focused on the architectural structure of tumuli (Research Question 1), drawing from a combination of descriptive and analytical information gathered from *Iliria* and various monographs. This process necessitated additional analytical work and interpretation of the data to achieve a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the themes. For instance, the presentation of findings concerning the architectural structure entailed analysing and interpreting themes related to the construction of tumuli, as well as integrating results from the statistical data of the 123 tumulus cemeteries documented in the Tumuli Repository (Chapter 4).

The themes and sub-themes concerning the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries (Research Question 2) and the associated funerary practices and rituals (Research Question 3) necessitated a deeper contextual understanding. This represents the second approach. In the context of *Iliria* and nine monographs, while findings were often presented in detail, they frequently lacked broader context and interpretation regarding their significance for tumuli in Albania. I propose that this omission reflects the methodological approaches of the communist era and the specialised audience targeted by *Iliria* and the monographs. For instance, the emergence of tumuli across Europe has been linked to Kurgan migrations, which introduced distinct burial and ritual practices. In *Iliria* and the monographs, I observed

that certain elements of these burial practices – such as the application of red ochre on skulls in primary graves, the presence of a bull and the architectural features of the graves – were described with considerable detail. However, the significance of these practices in identifying and interpreting Kurgan migration and its influence on the rise and spread of tumuli in Albania was rarely addressed or elucidated.

To counter this limitation, I employed international scholarly research to enhance the understanding of the context, meaning and interpretation of the data, offering innovative insights and illuminating both sub-themes and overarching themes (Chapters 4-6). Additionally, I engaged with relevant scholarly discourse surrounding sensory experiences, emotions, memory, ideological constructs and related fields to enrich the understanding and interpretation of the themes explored within the 123 tumulus cemeteries featured in this research.

Integrating qualitative insights with quantitative statistical analyses was a crucial aspect of how I developed, interpreted and presented the themes in this research. Effectively presenting the mixed methods results necessitated a thorough analytical and interpretative approach to the quantitative data, evaluating how the combination of both methodologies captured the depth and breadth of themes related to the research questions and their connection within the overall tumuli data. Given that thematic interpretation was the central focus of the mixed methods, I organised the results thematically. Additionally, the descriptive statistical analysis enriched the interpretation and significance of the findings, providing a chronological context for various aspects of the themes. The detailed level derived from the quantitative results varied across themes and their sub-themes, further illuminating and analysing the meaning of both the themes and sub-themes.

3.4.2   Reflective memos

Reflexivity was at the heart of this research; memo writing was one of the critical processes of the reflexive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Barrett, Kajamaa and Johnston, 2020). Memos served as a conversation between me – as a researcher – and the data, engaging in a process of thinking, reflecting, and questioning the choices and decisions I had made throughout all stages of analysis (Saldaña, 2021). The reflexive methodological framework encouraged me to recognise and understand the sensitivity and complexity of the historical, cultural and political factors that contributed to how tumuli data were collected, analysed, interpreted and published during the communist and post-communist eras. I began the memo writing by reflecting on the findings and making a deliberate and reflective effort to extract meaning from the data. This process also involved formulating questions and striving to grasp the nature of the publications and their contributing factors. Certain aspects of the publications utilised in this research, such as the uniformity and lack of challenging debates, can only be understood within their socio-political context and require a researcher who has attained academic and personal knowledge of these issues. Subsequently, I adopted a critical, ethical and sensitive approach to their understanding and interpretation. Memo writing proved to be a complex, evolving and often messy endeavour involving various dimensions throughout the research process.

The excerpt below serves as an example of my memo writing. It highlights my concerns about potential unconscious biases toward different elements of the data or the scholars themselves.

"My insightful knowledge and awareness of the specific context of Albania enhanced my understanding of how and why various aspects of the data were presented, analysed and interpreted in particular ways.[16] This was also applicable to understanding parts of the data that highlighted or overlooked some aspects of tumuli, such as the burial rite of inhumation and cremation, which played a central role in further supporting the uniformity of the ethnogenesis of Illyrians.[17] This may have contributed to the limited interest in cremation research by Albanian scholars both within and outside the context of tumuli. Nevertheless, I meticulously reviewed both Albanian and international research on these potentially 'problematic' themes to ensure that the findings and interpretations presented in this research are firmly rooted in scholarly research, rather than solely reflective of my personal or academic perspectives and interpretations".

"In this research, I draw upon my lived experiences and academic background from the communist and post-communist eras. Memo writing has facilitated ongoing reflection on my pre-existing assumptions, knowledge and expertise regarding tumuli research and the potential influence these factors may have on interpreting tumuli data from *Iliria* and nine monographs. Having been born and raised during the communist era and

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[16] Writing a memo requires a personal and reflexive approach, employing personal pronouns. Consequently, this section is articulated in a personal voice to demonstrate the complexity and the nature of the reflexive approach employed in this research.

[17] In contemporary Albanian culture, cremation remains a taboo, and as of 2025, not a single cremation has taken place despite its legalisation in 2014 (Kuvendi i Republikës së Shqipërisë, 2014).

having lived in Albania during the post-communist period, I completed my undergraduate studies in history and archaeology. My educational experience, particularly in university archaeology courses, instilled in me the concept that 'Illyrian tumuli prove our glorious ancestry and continuity as Albanians'. It was often assumed that only 'Illyrian, hence, Albanian tumuli' could be considered authentic tumuli sites".

"Throughout my academic journey and professional work as an archaeologist and researcher, I participated in several archaeological projects in Albania. Notably, I was involved in the Kamenica tumulus project from 2001 to 2004, where I participated in excavations, record-keeping and processing of post-excavation data. During this and other projects, I was fortunate to learn from and collaborate with numerous archaeologists who had directed, excavated and published various tumuli integral to this research. Consequently, it presented a cultural challenge to critically analyse (or, in the spirit of my Albanian background, critique) their work within the context of my own research".

"Instead of establishing a detached separation between the researcher and the research, this study has embraced reflexive approaches to thematic analysis, in which I actively engaged in the interpretation and analysis of tumuli data. This method has improved the quality of the themes and the relevance of RTA (Campbell *et al.,* 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2021; 2022; Braun *et al.,* 2023). However, the process of reflexivity and memo writing does not imply that the interpretation of the data was purely subjective or solely a matter of personal interpretation. Throughout this research, I consistently reflected on the potential for subjectivity, emotional bias and preconceived notions regarding various elements of the tumuli data and the scholars involved. My role as a reflexive researcher was to ensure that all data, as well as the ensuing themes

and sub-themes were constructed, analysed and interpreted based firmly on evidence derived from *Iliria* and nine monographs. I actively contributed to the creation, analysis and presentation of nine themes that illustrated the significant role of tumuli and effectively addressed the three research questions, further supplemented by Albanian and international scholarly research. The reflective process of memo writing was instrumental in enhancing the transparency, quality, trustworthiness and credibility of this research (Korstjens and Moser, 2018; Barrett, Kajamaa, and Johnston, 2020)".

3.4.3 NVivo

NVivo facilitated the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program designed for managing, coding, and analysing qualitative data (Maher *et al.,* 2018; Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). It is widely used in qualitative studies and facilitates multiple types of analyses (Chapman, A. L., Hadfield and Chapman, 2015; Edhlund and McDougall, 2019). Whilst NVivo provides an orderly and structured framework for deep, complex, and insightful analysis to scaffold research, it is 'a method with software' (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019; 5). It relies on the analytical and interpretative skills of the researcher throughout the entire process (O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2014; Rivera-Trigueros, 2017; Lynden, Ogden and Hollands, 2018; Edhlund and McDougall, 2019). NVivo provided various tools that helped construct and support my research journey from conception through to complex analysis, results, visual presentation of data and the writing of the thesis (Zamawe, 2015; Rivera-Trigueros, 2017; Lynden, Ogden and Hollands, 2018).

3.4.4   Case Units

In Albania, there is currently no comprehensive list, database or map detailing all individual tumulus cemeteries, whether in publication or digital format. A few articles provide general lists and maps of tumuli areas (Prendi, 1988; Agolli, 2017a; Kurti, R., 2020).   There are considerable uncertainty and confusion regarding the precise number of tumulus cemeteries, both excavated and published; results are often conveyed in vague terms, such as 'over 150 tumuli were excavated' (Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos, 2012). Bejko (2014) offers a list of 156 excavated tumuli as of 1987; however, this list is incomplete, as it does not account for 19 tumuli excavated after that year. Consequently, in this research, I employed a novel approach to data collection, focusing on identifying and selecting tumuli documented in *Iliria* and nine monographs through thematic analysis.   My objective was to identify, select and compile all pertinent information on each tumulus.   Tumuli data were frequently dispersed across multiple publications, requiring the creation of Case Units in NVivo by cross-referencing *Iliria* and monographs to gather relevant information. Throughout this process, I meticulously searched 86 *Iliria* articles line-by-line and reviewed 3,526 pages of monographs (including images and tables) to extract various characteristics of tumulus cemeteries, such as location, architectural structures, chronology, ritual practices and artefacts.

I began the Case Units development with the compilation of a comprehensive list detailing individual tumulus cemeteries and tumuli areas, establishing a distinct Case Unit for each of the 123 tumulus cemeteries spread across 36 areas. While 16 of these tumuli were standalone, the remaining 107 were grouped into 19 tumuli areas, each containing between two and twelve tumuli. To better understand these structures within their broader context, I organised Case Units for individual tumulus cemeteries

within their respective areas. For instance, in the Kënetë area, which comprises six tumuli, a Case Unit titled Kënetë was created to encapsulate all relevant information found in the literature regarding this area.

Within the Kënetë area Case Unit, six nested Case Units were named Kënetë 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, and 06 (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Case Units for each tumulus within an area

The literature exhibits a diversity in the depth of information recorded for each tumulus cemetery. For instance, tumuli such as Barç 01 and Rehovë have been thoroughly documented in *Iliria* and monographs authored by prominent archaeologists involved in the excavations. These publications offer detailed and comprehensive insights regarding their architectural structures, social contexts, funerary practices, rituals and chronology. Notably, the Case Unit for Barç 01 includes data from 25 sources, while Rehovë draws from 18.

In contrast, the data for other tumulus cemeteries are more dispersed throughout various publications. For example, Budina (1971) provided a brief overview of the Bajkaj tumulus over a single page in *Iliria*, while eight additional scholars contributed insights across 15 *Iliria* articles and five monographs. The amalgamation of these varied sources allowed for a thorough understanding of Bajkaj, which facilitated the exploration of the research questions. I systematically coded the published data within each Case Unit, which allowed for a clearer understanding of the relationships among sub-themes, overarching themes and the tumuli themselves. Ultimately, the Case Units supplied complete qualitative information for each tumulus cemetery.

I identified 137 tumulus cemeteries dating from the Bronze Age and Iron Age that were excavated during the communist era and published in *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs. However, 14 tumuli were excluded from the study due to insufficient information to address the research questions or a lack of chronological dating. Consequently, I examined a total of 123 tumulus cemeteries, along with their corresponding Case Units.

3.5   Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted in two stages. The first involved creating a Tumuli Repository (Section 3.5.1), and the second involved utilising descriptive statistics to enhance the meanings and understanding of themes (Section 3.5.2).

3.5.1　Tumuli Repository

The analysis and interpretation of qualitative themes required a quantitative analysis of the main characteristic features of tumulus cemeteries and their chronology. The Tumuli Repository was conducted in three stages and included: 1) uniform terminology; 2) detailed chronology of each tumulus cemetery; 3) comprehensive data collection.

3.5.1.1　Uniform terminology

Data collection commenced by gathering information about tumulus cemeteries architectural features and structures. *Iliria* and the monographs followed a standard form of presentation, starting with a description of the tumuli's architectural features and then providing more detailed descriptions of their location, materials used in construction and measurements. I observed inconsistencies in the terminology used to describe these architectural features, often articulated in vague rather than specific terms. For example, the architectural structure of a cupola was described 'as the stones covering the top of the tumulus', 'upper stone cobble structure', and 'as tumulus was blanketed', often by the same authors using different terminologies (Andrea, 1995; 1997; Bela, 1990; 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). Aliu (2012) describes this structure as 'the hood – kësulë', and Jubani (1995) provides a detailed description of the structure and a definition as a cupola. I have chosen to adopt the term 'cupola' because it more accurately conveys the intended meaning and purpose. Consequently, whenever a stone feature was identified atop a tumulus, I recorded it as a cupola; the same criteria were applied to other architectural structures such as muranë, ringstone and dromos. Furthermore, the definitions and purposes of these architectural structures were often presented in vague terms or omitted altogether.

For the first time in Albanian archaeology, I established a unified terminology encompassing the architectural structures, their locations, meanings, and purposes.

The issue of inconsistent terminology also extended to burial and ritual practices. For instance, various terms were used for cremation, including 'the burning practice' and 'cremation'. However, the cremation process itself was referred to as cremation in situ' or 'burning on the tumulus'. To address these inconsistencies, I chose to standardise the terminology, consistently using 'cremation' and 'cremation in situ' whenever referencing cremation burials. A similar approach was applied for inhumation, body positioning and invisible burial, where the literature employed differing terminologies. I meticulously compiled data related to each burial and ritual practice, cross-referenced the sources, and selected the most precise terminology found in the literature to accurately reflect the meaning of each practice. This process culminated in the provision of clear definitions and terminology for various burial and ritual practices outlined in Chapters 5 and 6. In some cases, I employed international terminology that more effectively conveyed the significance of these practices, such as 'ritual- only' and 'invisible burial tumuli'.

3.5.1.2 Chronology

A comprehensive chronology of the 123 tumulus cemeteries was essential for understanding, analysing and interpreting their role as funerary monuments within the landscape. As outlined in Chapter 1, the prevailing chronological method for dating these tumuli predominantly involved dating artefacts discovered within or around graves. Due to the socio-economic and political context of the communist era, as described in Chapter 2, the dating of tumulus cemeteries relied exclusively on the typology and chronology of artefacts, without incorporating any scientific approaches

such as radiocarbon dating (C-14), absolute chronology or other techniques. Consequently, I developed a chronology that outlines the periods during which the tumuli were constructed, utilised and reused, relying solely on the artefacts. Furthermore, the pottery found within the fill of the tumuli proved to be one of the most significant tools I employed in dating the 12 ritual-only tumuli, which did not contain any graves

The chronology of tumulus cemeteries was frequently presented in general terms; for instance, the construction dates for 40 tumulus cemeteries were categorised into chronological phases, such as the Early Iron Age or Late Iron Age. In contrast, a more concise and detailed chronology was provided for the remaining 83 tumuli; for example, Pazhok 01 was dated between the 18th and 17th centuries BC. I developed a unified periodic method that converts the dates into their corresponding periods whenever centuries are mentioned. For instance, the 11 graves in Psar were dated from the 6th to the 5th century BC, aligning with the Late Iron Age. While both approaches were acknowledged, the chronology of Psar was analysed specifically through the periodic phase of the Late Iron Age. In six tumuli (Barç 01-02, Cerujë, Dukat 01, Luaras, and Shuec), a total of 278 graves (out of 504) were dated within the overlapping timeframe from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, corresponding to the 11th – 9th century BC (Prendi, 1977). I recorded these graves as Early Iron Age in the general information, while also documenting their associated detailed information in a separate column within the Tumuli Repository for future reference if necessary.

In *Iliria* and monographs, chronology was established for all 123 tumulus cemeteries, although this record is often incomplete and sometimes readily discernible. To date, literature has rarely utilised the characteristic features of architectural structures or

burial rites for dating these tumuli. Instead, the typology and chronology of artefacts discovered within the graves have served as the primary basis for dating, which, in turn, helps determine the phases of tumuli construction, usage and reuse. Scientific dating techniques of artefacts, skeleton, soil or any other material have seldom been employed (Jubani 1982, Galaty 2004, Bejko 2014). As a result, the chronological accounts of tumulus cemeteries and their construction phases are often interwoven with detailed and extensive descriptions of artefacts. Throughout *Iliria* and monographs, the level of detail in the descriptions of tumulus cemeteries varies based on several factors, including the number of graves, the chronology of artefacts, the number of construction and usage phases involved, and, most importantly, the significance of each tumulus cemeteries.

There was a noted inconsistency in the chronology presented for the tumuli areas, which was organised by different phases of construction rather than providing a distinct chronology for each tumulus. This often involved summarising the main phases of the tumulus area, with each phase outlining the number of tumuli and the graves dated within that timeframe. Frequently, the chronology was integrated into descriptions of artefacts that supported the dating of the graves. For instance, the Shtoj area comprised 11 tumulus cemeteries. A detailed chronology was provided in *Iliria* specifically for Shtoj 02, 03, and 06. Notably, Bela's (2012) monograph was the first to consolidate both the data and the chronology for all 11 tumuli. The chronology of the Shtoj area was categorised into six phases of tumuli construction and usage, with artefacts dated within each phase described in detail over 83 pages, often correlating with the number of graves and their respective tumulus. I thoroughly evaluated all available information pertaining to Shtoj, resulting in a detailed chronology for each of the 11 tumulus cemeteries, including their number of graves throughout various

construction phases.

Several individual tumulus cemeteries and tumulus areas, including Barç 01-02, Kuç i Zi 01-02, Luaras, and Rehovë, have provided comprehensive chronological data regarding the construction phases and the corresponding number of graves within each phase, as detailed in the monographs by Andrea (1985a) and Aliu (2004; 2012). To address the three research questions, I adopted the approach of Andrea and Aliu, presenting a thorough examination of the various construction phases and the associated number of graves.

A comprehensive chronology of the 123 tumulus cemeteries, covering all phases of tumuli usage and the associated number of graves, required an in-depth evaluation of the relevant publications within the tumuli Case Units in NVivo. This process involved a meticulous analysis of grave inventories and detailed descriptions of artefacts. Despite efforts to date all graves, there remained a selection of 265 graves across 27 tumuli – classified in the literature as belonging to the Bronze Age or Iron Age periods – that could not be accurately dated. Moreover, tumulus cemeteries continued to be used or reused during the Roman and Late Medieval periods; however, the dates of these graves were often unspecified and merely categorised as reused. Additionally, I recorded in this fashion the 171 graves dated after the 4th century BC, which were also noted in the literature as reused. While these graves were included in the overall count, I excluded them from the Bronze Age and Iron Age classifications and were not incorporated into the analysis presented in Chapters 3-6.

The provision of a detailed chronology for the construction phase of tumulus cemeteries has allowed for a clear differentiation between those from the Bronze Age

and the Iron Age. I identified a total of thirty-one tumuli that were used and reused, either continuously or intermittently, during both the Bronze and Iron Age, making it challenging to distinctly categorise them within each age. Consequently, I organised the 123 tumulus cemeteries into four chronological phases: Bronze Age Only (BA-Only), Bronze Age Continuum (BA-C), Bronze Age Reused (BA-R), and Iron Age only (IA-only) (Chapter 4).

3.5.1.3 Comprehensive data collection

The establishment of the Tumuli Repository necessitated from the lack of a detailed inventory of tumuli. My primary objective was to create a comprehensive list outlining the main characteristic features of each of the 123 tumulus cemeteries. I selected Microsoft Excel due to its strengths in data collection, analysis and visualisation (Schwabish, 2023). In the Tumuli Repository, the key characteristics of tumulus cemeteries, sourced from *Iliria* and nine monographs, were documented in a worksheet titled 'Tumuli Data'. Each of the 123 tumulus cemeteries was organised in alphabetical order of the Case Units, with each tumulus assigned a unique identification number. The Tumuli Repository contains 28 columns detailing the most distinctive features of the tumuli, including geographical location, type of tumuli, and key architectural structures. It also summarises the primary themes examined within this research, such as fire structures and pottery fragmentation.

The information within the Tumuli Repository, specifically in the Tumuli Data, is categorised into three main groups: 1) architectural features, 2) chronology, and 3) burial practices (Table 3.4).

Architecture features	Chronology	Burial practices
Geographical location	Chronological phases	Primary grave
Height	Total number of graves	Burial rite of primary grave
Diameter	Bronze Age	Fire Structure
Tumulus structure	Iron Age	Pottery fragmentation
Tumuli composition	Bronze and Iron Age	Metal fragmentation
Ringstone	Reused	
Number of ringstones	N/A	
Ringstone measurement	The first phase of construction	
Muranë	Overall phases	
Muranë measurements		
Cupola		
Dromos		

Table 3.4   Main features of tumuli data

I conducted the data collection simultaneously with the analysis, interpretation and visual representation of sub-themes and themes. This process required a thorough examination of the 123 tumulus cemeteries. Furthermore, 25 additional worksheets were developed within the Tumuli Repository, providing detailed and comprehensive information on themes, sub-themes and data analysis based on these themes across four chronological phases. This was imperative for enhancing the understanding, analysis and statistical interpretation of the three themes and their sub-themes. Out of these, twelve worksheets offered a chronological and thematic analysis of data compiled from the 'Tumuli Data' worksheet, seven worksheets provided additional detailed information summarised in the 'Tumuli Data' worksheet, and six worksheets presented new data that enriched the analysis of the sub-themes and themes (Table 3.5).

The comprehensive data collection of Case Units and the Tumuli Repository can significantly advance the study of tumuli in Albania and the surrounding region, laying the groundwork for a dedicated tumuli database. Upon the conclusion of this research, a copy of the Tumuli Repository will be made available as open access. This initiative will support future research on tumulus cemeteries both within Albania and beyond.

Chronological and thematic analysis	Additional and detailed data	Data to enhance analysis of sub-themes and themes
Invisible burial	Chronology	Cremation in situ
Architectural structures	Geographical location	Cremation outside
Distribution of tumuli	Inhumation body positioning	Urns
Bronze Age tumuli	Primary grave cremation	Children
Bronze Age stone tumuli	Pottery fragmentation	Multiple individuals
Bronze Age earthen tumuli	Metal fragmentation	Animal and bird offering
Iron Age tumuli	Fire structures	
Bronze Age-only tumuli		
Bronze and Iron Age continuum analysis		
Bronze and Iron Age reused tumuli analysis		
Iron Age-only tumuli analysis		
Ritual-only tumuli analysis		
12 worksheets	**7 worksheets**	**6 worksheets**

Table 3.5   Additional worksheets of the Tumuli Repository

3.5.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics is the process of 'the numerical procedures or graphical techniques used to organise and describe the characteristics or factors of a given example' (Fisher and Marshall, 2009; 93). This process entails the visual representation of data results through numerical summaries, tables and graphs, which aid in the interpretation, meaning and presentation of the data. The primary objective is to provide a general overview of the dataset, serving as the foundational stage of statistical analysis (Sarmento and Costa, 2017; Cooksey, 2020). Descriptive statistics have been applied in archaeological research to analyse, interpret, and understand, as well as to discover new and valuable insights from material culture, archaeological sites and the communities that constructed or utilised them (Drennan, 2008; Carlson, 2017; Peeples, 2019).

As discussed in this chapter, descriptive statistics were employed to enhance the understanding, analysis and interpretation of the nine main themes related to the three research questions. This evolving process included creating a statistical distribution of themes and sub-themes, often summarising and presenting results through charts, tables and percentages. The integration of the qualitative themes generated through reflexive thematic analysis with the quantitative data from the Tumulus Repository will be presented in Chapters 3-6.

3.6   Conclusion

This research emphasises the importance of identifying and selecting an appropriate methodological framework that aligns with its aims, objectives and research questions. This consideration was particularly vital when examining published data on tumulus cemeteries excavated during a totalitarian regime set against a unique and intricate social, political and cultural backdrop. The inductive approach of reflexive thematic analysis facilitated the development of inclusive themes derived from *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs. This methodology effectively captured the depth and breadth of the tumuli data while acknowledging my active role in creating, analysing and interpreting these themes. Ultimately, this process enhanced the understanding and interpretation of the entire dataset.

The mixed methods approach, which combines reflexive thematic analysis with descriptive statistical analysis, provided a solid methodological foundation for collecting, recording and analysing tumuli data from 86 *Iliria* articles and nine monographs.   This research shifted its focus from broader, sensitive themes surrounding the ethnogenesis of the Illyrians to a more nuanced investigation of the architectural significance of tumuli, the factors contributing to their emergence and proliferation, the associated funerary practices and rituals, and their ultimate role as Eternal Living Monuments. The quantitative data obtained from the Tumuli Repository offered a statistical context that enriched the interpretation and presentation of the themes.   This methodological combination enhances the trustworthiness of the research through transparent data collection, analysis, and interpretation, while also addressing the issue of cherry-picking data that aligns with pre-existing theories or lacks support in both thematic and statistical interpretations.

Chapter 4   Architectural structures of tumulus cemeteries

4.1   Introduction

Tumuli were funerary monuments of the landscape and a 'geotechnical work of antiquity' (Egglezos, 2022; 172). The processes involved in constructing tumuli and their architectural structures have started to be explored more rigorously in Europe. One of the key factors driving this increased rigour is to shed new light on the technical construction of tumuli and to emphasise the effort, resources, labour and organisational skills involved in tumuli construction (Lorenzon and Iacovou, 2019; Kyriakou and Panoskaltsis, 2019; Gkouma, Karkanas and Iacovou, 2021; Mecking *et al.,* 2021; Avgitas *et al.,* 2022). These processes have helped emphasise the crucial role of tumulus cemeteries as monuments and their relationship with the communities who built them (Scarre *et al.,* 2018). It also aids the understanding of the sensory and emotional impact on tumuli builders, and how these mnemonic activities aided tumuli builders in strengthening their social bond (Inomata, 2020). Furthermore, the understanding of tumuli construction and their architectural structures can also enhance our understanding of communities' perceptions of life, death and memory (Murray, M. L. and Arnold,2019; Minkevičius, 2022).

In Albania, *Iliria* Journal and monographs frequently presented and described the architectural structure of tumulus cemeteries, including detailed information about their measurements and the material used for their construction. However, this information was frequently limited to a tumulus or a small number of tumuli within a geographical area. There is a notable absence of detailed or comprehensive description, analysis or classifications of the architectural features across the 123 tumulus cemeteries. The significant role and meaning of tumulus cemeteries as a geotechnical architectural

monument – categorised by distinctive, diverse and sophisticated monumental architectural features – as well as the processes involved in their construction, have seldom been examined, analysed or interpreted (Korkuti 1981a; Aliu 2004; Prendi 2008). When the architectural structures of tumuli were described, the information remained superficial and were seldom interpreted beyond the uniformity and continuity of the ethnogenesis of Illyrians (Ceka, 1974; Kurti, D., 1985; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). Aspects of the architectural structures that supported the pre-existing theory of the uniformity and continuity of Illyrians were often chosen and emphasised in the analysis and interpretation of tumuli's architectural structures within publications. Research from tumuli excavated during the communist era lacks detailed chronology, their architectural structures and the stages involved in their construction, which hinders the understanding of tumuli construction and their chronological development. To this day, there is neither published data nor a database that presents, analyses and interprets the architectural structures of the 123 tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist period (Bejko, 2014). This absence of information constrains our understanding of tumuli as monuments and how their architectural features may have varied or developed over time and across different regions.

The innovative approach of this research lies in collecting and collating all the relevant information presented in the *Iliria* Journal and monographs regarding tumulus cemeteries as architectural monuments, as well as their main architectural features. By providing a detailed chronology of each tumulus, I was able to categorise these monuments into four chronological phases: BA-only, BI-C, BI-R, and IA-only. To enhance the understanding of tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments, to examine their evolution over time, and the practices employed by local communities to maintain and protect these distinctive monumental structures during the Bronze and

Iron Ages, I will provide a descriptive statistical analysis of the 123 tumulus cemeteries.

In this chapter, I will present the geographical location of tumuli (Section 4.2) and detail the main stages of tumuli construction along with their distinct architectural structures (Section 4.3). A detailed statistical description of tumuli and their architectural structures based on their four construction phases is presented in Section 4.4. This is followed by an analysis of how the main structures changed from their initial construction in the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age (Section 4.5). Throughout this detailed statistical analysis, I will highlight the significant role of tumulus cemeteries as architectural funerary monuments of the landscape.

4.2   Location of tumulus cemeteries

The 123 tumulus cemeteries were identified in 36 different areas spread across Albania. Tumuli tended to be close to one another, between 2 and 100 metres apart (Figure 4.1), and the term 'a cluster of tumuli' refers to a small geographical area with more than one tumulus (Koka, 2012; Islami, 2013). A cluster of tumuli with between 2 and 12 was recorded for 19 areas, whilst the remaining 17 areas contained a single tumulus (Table 4.1 and Figure 4.2). The deliberate location of tumuli and how they imitated and defined the landscape will be described in Chapter 5.
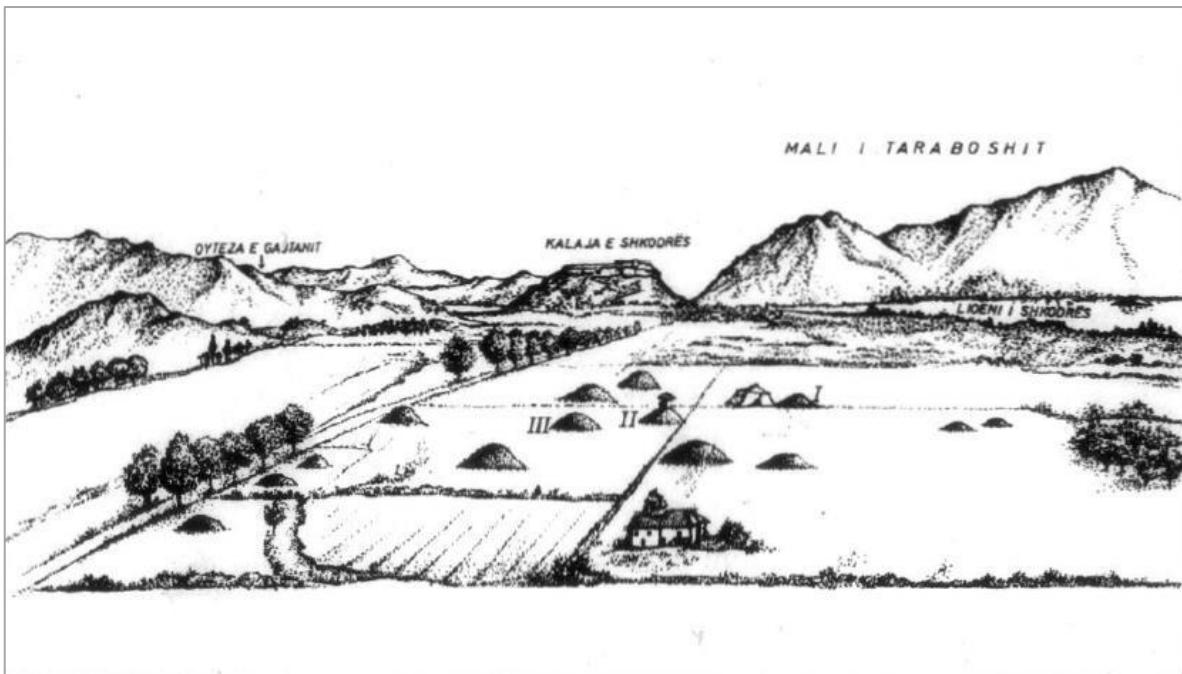
Figure 4.1   Location of the 12 tumuli in the Shtoj area

Copyright: Jubani 1992

Area number	Area	Tumuli number	Number of tumuli	Site
1	Bajkaj	N/A	1	Single
2	Barç	01, 02	2	Cluster
3	Bardhocë	01, 02	2	Cluster
4	Bodrishtë	01, 02	2	Cluster
5	Bruç	N/A	1	Single
6	Bujan	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09	9	Cluster
7	Burrel	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07	7	Cluster
8	Cerujë	N/A	1	Single
9	Dukat	01, 02	2	Cluster
10	Fushë-Sanxhak	01, 02, 03, 04, 05	5	Cluster
11	Hamallaj	N/A	1	Single
12	Kakavijë	N/A	1	Single
13	Kënetë	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06	6	Cluster
14	Klos	N/A	1	Single
15	Krumë	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08	8	Cluster
16	Kuç i Zi	01, 02	2	Cluster
17	Luaras	N/A	1	Single
18	Mamëz	N/A	1	Single
19	Myç-Has	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06	6	Cluster
20	Patos	N/A	1	Single

21	Pazhok	01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 07	7	Cluster
22	Perlat	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08	8	Cluster
23	Piskovë	N/A	1	Single
24	Prodan	N/A	1	Single
25	Psar	N/A	1	Single
26	Rehovë	N/A	1	Cluster
27	Rrethe-Bazje	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12	12	Cluster
28	Shkrel	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10	10	Cluster
29	Shtikë	N/A	1	Single
30	Shtogj	01, 02	2	Cluster
31	Shtoj	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11	11	Cluster
32	Shuec	N/A	1	Single
33	Urakë	01, 02	2	Cluster
34	Vajzë	01, 02, 03, 04	4	Cluster
35	Vodhimë	N/A	1	Single
36	Çepunë	N/A	1	Single

Table 4.1   Location of 36 tumuli areas across Albania

4.3   Main stages of tumuli construction

The word tumulus is derived from the Latin word for a barrow or small hill (Harding, 2012; Kyriakou and Panoskaltsis, 2019). The 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research tended to have the rounded shape of an artificial hill constructed with soil, stones or a combination of both. Tumuli varied from not containing any graves or human remains to being raised over one or multiple graves. Their size, measurement and the amount of building materials indicate that their construction involved sophisticated and technical architectural structures, thus creating a symbiotic relationship between the material, technology and the effort used in their construction. Exploring this symbiosis is crucial for understanding the significance of tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments and their dynamic relationship with the communities that constructed them.

For the first time in the study of tumulus cemeteries in Albania, I have identified eight distinctive stages of tumuli construction. I utilised these stages as key indicators to analyse and interpret the architectural structures of tumuli (Section 4.4) and to examine how they evolved over time (Section 4.5). Each of these eight stages held ritual significance and was associated with funerary practices and rituals that varied by both tumulus cemetery area and construction period (Chapter 6, Section 6.3). These insights will serve as the foundation for exploring how tumulus cemeteries were transformed into Eternal Living Monuments (Chapter 7).

The description, purpose and meaning of the eight stages of tumuli construction and their architectural structures are presented in Figure 4.2 and will be described below.

These stages included: preparation of the ground; primary grave; muranë; ringstone; secondary graves; filling and heightening; cupola; dromos.[18]
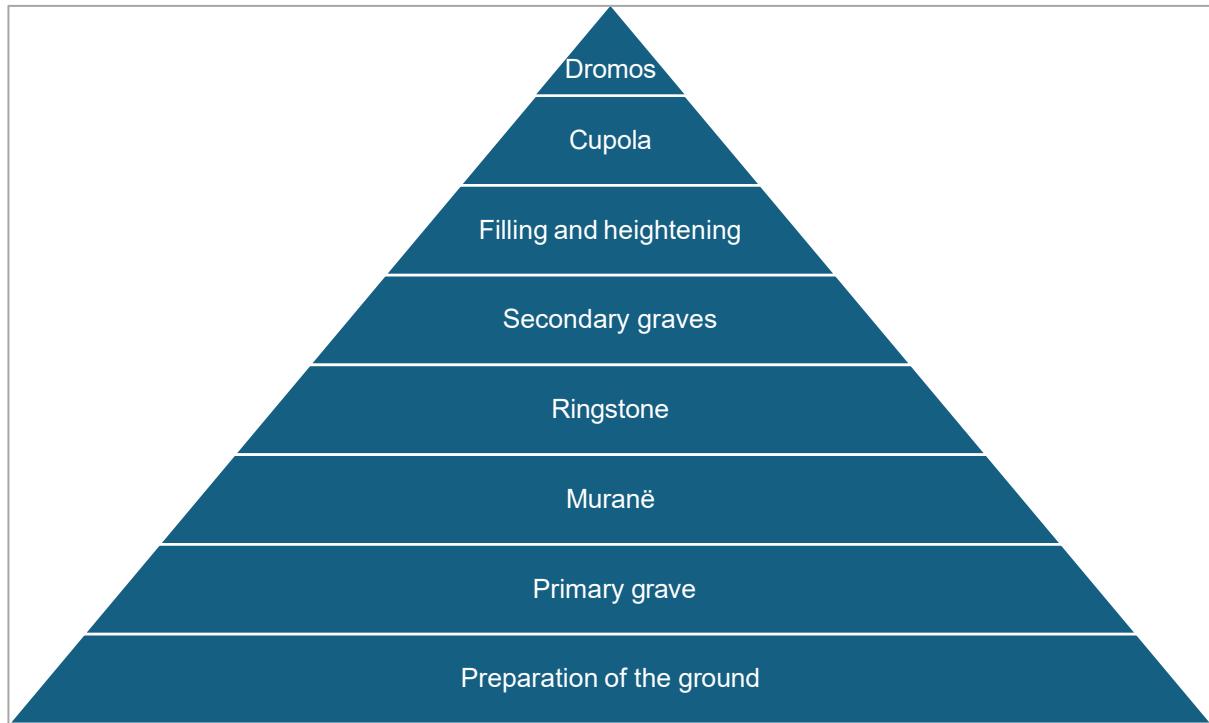
Figure 4.2   Main stages of tumuli construction in Albania

4.3.1   Preparation of the ground

The processes, labour and planning required for ground preparation and the construction of tumuli have been acknowledged across *Ilira* Jornal and monographs; however, it has not been directly presented in the literature and lacks a comprehensive analysis or interpretation of the practices involved.   Explicit information has been sparse and often embedded within the presentation and analysis of stone or earth structures associated with the primary grave, muranë or other architectural features (Bodinaku, 2018). Consequently, the insights regarding this phase are derived from my extensive, detailed and comprehensive analysis of the architectural structures

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[18] Throughout this research, architectural features such as muranë, cupola and dromos will be presented in their singular forms to effectively convey their meaning and significance.

identified across the 123 tumulus cemeteries.

My data analysis suggests that ground preparation instigated the construction of a tumulus cemetery. This phase likely involved levelling the ground or filling it with soil mixed with pebbles from a local area or settlements or even constructing a stone structure as a base for the tumulus. The location of these cemeteries, along with the characteristics of the terrain, could have influenced the extent of physical labour and the processes required for their construction. It is reasonable to suggest that the construction of the primary grave, the muranë, the ringstone, and the tumulus itself did not require extensive preparatory work. Based on my analysis of tumuli containing primary graves, I propose that these graves were likely excavated directly into the natural terrain, such as turf, with surrounding activities concentrated on the primary grave rather than covering the entire area of the tumulus. The examples of Barç 01 and Shtoj 06 illustrate how a stone ritual structure was constructed at the centre of the tumulus before the interment and the establishment of the primary graves (Andrea, 1985a; Koka, 2012). Thus, the location of tumulus cemeteries and the terrain's characteristics could have impacted the amount of labour and processes involved in their construction.

An analysis of the stratigraphy of these two tumuli, along with the relationship between the structures and the primary grave, indicates that the construction of ritual practices closely followed ground preparation. The performance of funerary practices and rituals, such as fire ceremonies (Chapter 6, Section 6.3), implicitly sheds light on and complements the practices performed before and during ground preparation and tumuli construction (Andrea, 1985a; Prendi, 2008). The architectural features of tumulus cemeteries combined with funerary and ritual practices imply that ground preparation marked a

significant phase in the establishment of a new funerary and ritual monument (Chapter 7).

4.3.2   Primary grave

The term 'primary grave', also known as the central grave, refers to the grave located distinctively in the centre of the tumulus (Bela, 1990; Galaty and Bejko, 2023). Throughout the literature, the central positioning of the primary grave has been consistently used to differentiate and identify it (Islami 2013). Similarly, I have employed this same principle of centrality as a key criterion for evaluating whether tumulus cemeteries included any primary graves. The interment and the construction of the primary grave signified and symbolised the rise and establishment of a new funerary monument and have been considered the principal reason for constructing a tumulus cemetery (Figure 4.3). Albanian scholars, such as Prendi (1985b) and Bejko (2016), interpret the deceased interred in the central primary grave as a forefather or the head of a family clan. The significant role of the primary grave has been illustrated through its elaborate and complex grave structures, which varied from simple pits to complex stone structures. Soil, stones, pebbles, slabs, wood and perishable materials were the main sources of building materials (Andrea, 1985a; Jubani, 1995). Their architectural structure and artefacts have been richly presented and interpreted within the literature, providing the foundation for identifying their chronology and social context.

I have identified a primary grave in 69 tumulus cemeteries; the information was not provided for 22 tumuli; 12 tumuli were ritual-only, which did not contain any graves. Throughout the literature, the absence of a centrally positioned grave was recorded and interpreted as tumuli with no primary grave, and the oldest, and possibly the first, grave

within the tumulus was identified through the chronology of the artefacts found within graves. Therefore, 20 tumulus cemeteries were recorded as tumuli with no primary grave, but they had one or more first burials, instigating tumuli construction as funerary monuments. The significance, meaning and role of these first burials have seldom been analysed (Koka, 1985; 2012).

Figure 4.3   Primary grave in Pazhok 01

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Results from *Iliria* Journal and monographs, and the international research on tumuli suggest that the burial rite of the primary grave determined their architectural structure (Heyd, 2012). Throughout the 123 tumulus cemeteries, I have identified three main burial rites: cremation, inhumation and invisible burials (Chapter 6). The grave structures and the material used for their construction were complex and varied from one tumulus to another, and the burial rite often impacted the construction choices. Therefore, due to their complexity, interplay, and close connection between burial rites and grave structures, information about the architectural structures of primary graves

will be represented through their burial rites within this research. The wealth of data gathered from the architectural structure, rituals and artefacts of the primary grave is the most significant criterion for understanding the social dynamics and ritual meanings of local communities (Chapter 5).

4.3.3 Muranë

Muranë is a stone structure in the shape of a mound, which was centrally located and formed the core of the tumulus (Figure 4.4). Muranë was constructed using stones and slabs of different sizes, carefully and systematically placed on top of one another to create a wall-type structure. Its main function was to cover the primary grave (Figure 4.5). Hammond (1967; 81) describes muranë in Albanian tumuli as 'a dome of shingles added on top of the primary grave before the soil of the outer tumulus was considered'. Terms such as pile or mound of rocks have often been used within the *Iliria* and monographs alongside muranë. I adopted the Albanian terminology of muranë, described by Aliu (2004), which translates as a 'wall', to better present its architectural structure. My analysis of tumuli with muranë suggests that once the muranë was constructed, the tumulus was covered with soil, stones or a combination of both, and this process symbolised the construction of the tumulus cemetery (Bodinaku, 2018). Jubani (1995) advocates that the presence of muranë is a crucial indicator for understanding the stages and processes involved in tumuli construction. Reusing tumuli often involved building graves or additional architectural structures on earthen or stone structures covering the muranë and often included digging or destroying the muranë and the primary grave (Kurti, D., 1983).

Aliu (2004; 2020), Bodinaku (2018) and Prendi (2008) associate muranë with cult and ritual meaning, but they fail to provide information and interpretation about ritual finds or practices associated with its construction and use. Bodinaku (2018) asserts that muranë was always associated with a primary grave and indicates that the muranë in Bodrishtë 01 could have covered a cenotaph grave or contained unidentified decomposed human remains. However, I have identified nine tumulus cemeteries where muranë did not cover any visible primary grave. Considering the ritual significance of the muranë, and my analysis of data from both ritual-only and invisible tumuli, I propose that the construction of muranë played an integral role in the processes and practices related to beliefs surrounding tumulus cemeteries as ritual and cult monuments (Chapter 7).

Figure 4.4   Muranë in Bujan 01

Copyright: Andrea 1995
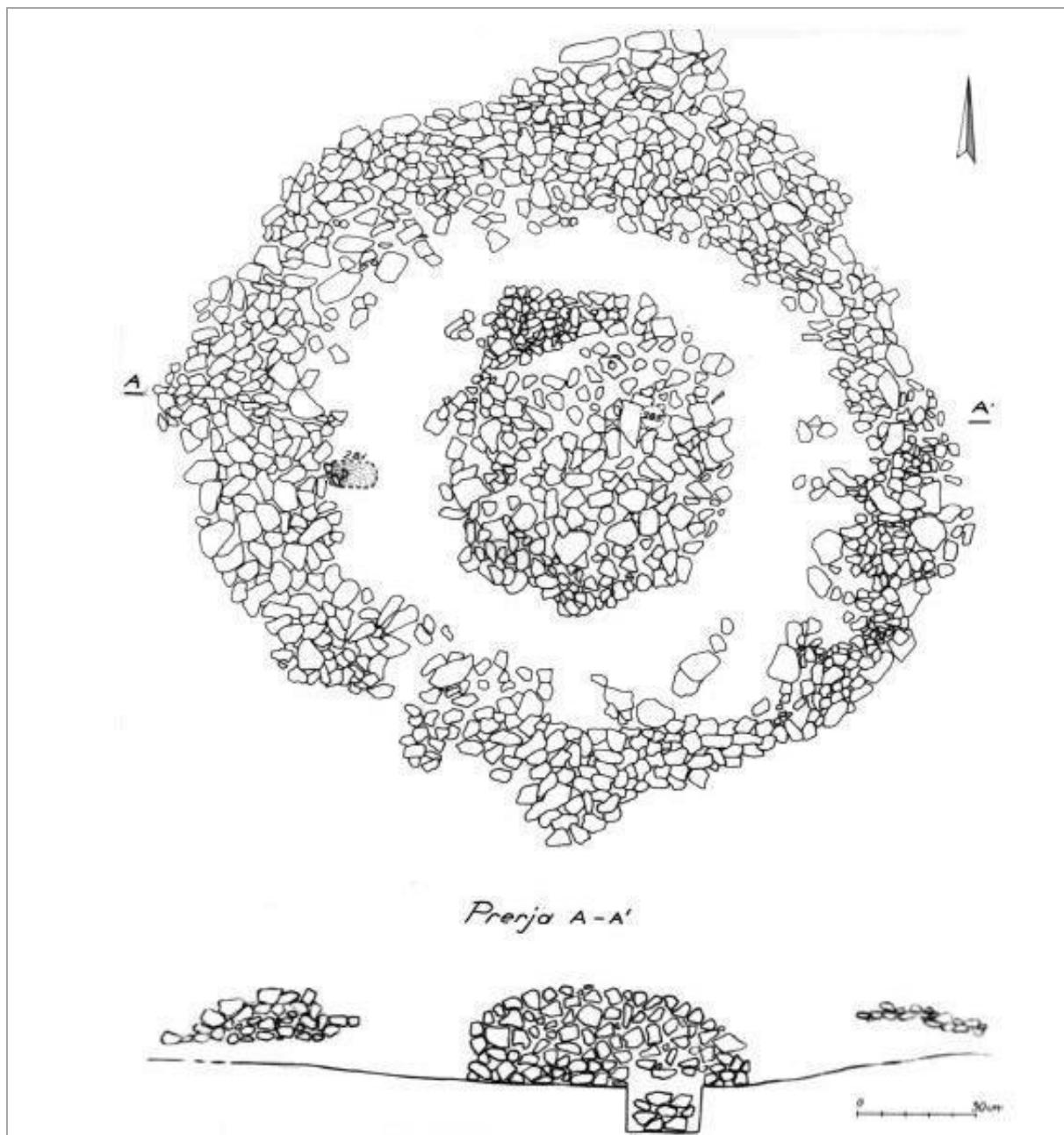
Figure 4.5   Primary grave, muranë and ringstone in Rehovë

Copyright: Aliu 2012

4.3.4 Ringstone

A ringstone was a circle of stones built around the tumulus (Hammond, 1967; Aliu, 2004). The ringstone marked the tumulus's construction, size and measurements as a newly distinctive funerary monument (Andrea, 1985a; Bodinaku, 2018). I have identified 32 tumulus cemeteries featuring the architectural structure of a ringstone (Table 4.8). A ringstone was predominantly constructed with one or more lines of stones or slabs and built in the shape of a wall with 3-4 rows of stones up to 0.60 metres high. The diameter of ringstones varied from 2.00 to 32.00 metres; single, double and triple ringstones have been identified (Figure 4.6). Ringstones were often a complete circle and were associated with the cult of the sun (Chapter 6). However, incomplete and partial ringstones have also been recorded; likewise, they have been interpreted to have symbolised a ritual purpose (Bodinaku, 2018). According to Aliu (2004, 2012), ringstones have been associated with primary graves and muranë, and they were often constructed concurrently with the primary grave, muranë or shortly afterwards (Figure 4.7) (Aliu, 2004, 2012). However, I identified ten tumulus cemeteries with a ringstone which did not contain a primary grave, which illustrates how ringstones were constructed independently from the primary grave.

Figure 4.6   Primary grave, muranë and the first ringstone in Barç 01

Copyright: Papadopoulos et al. 2014
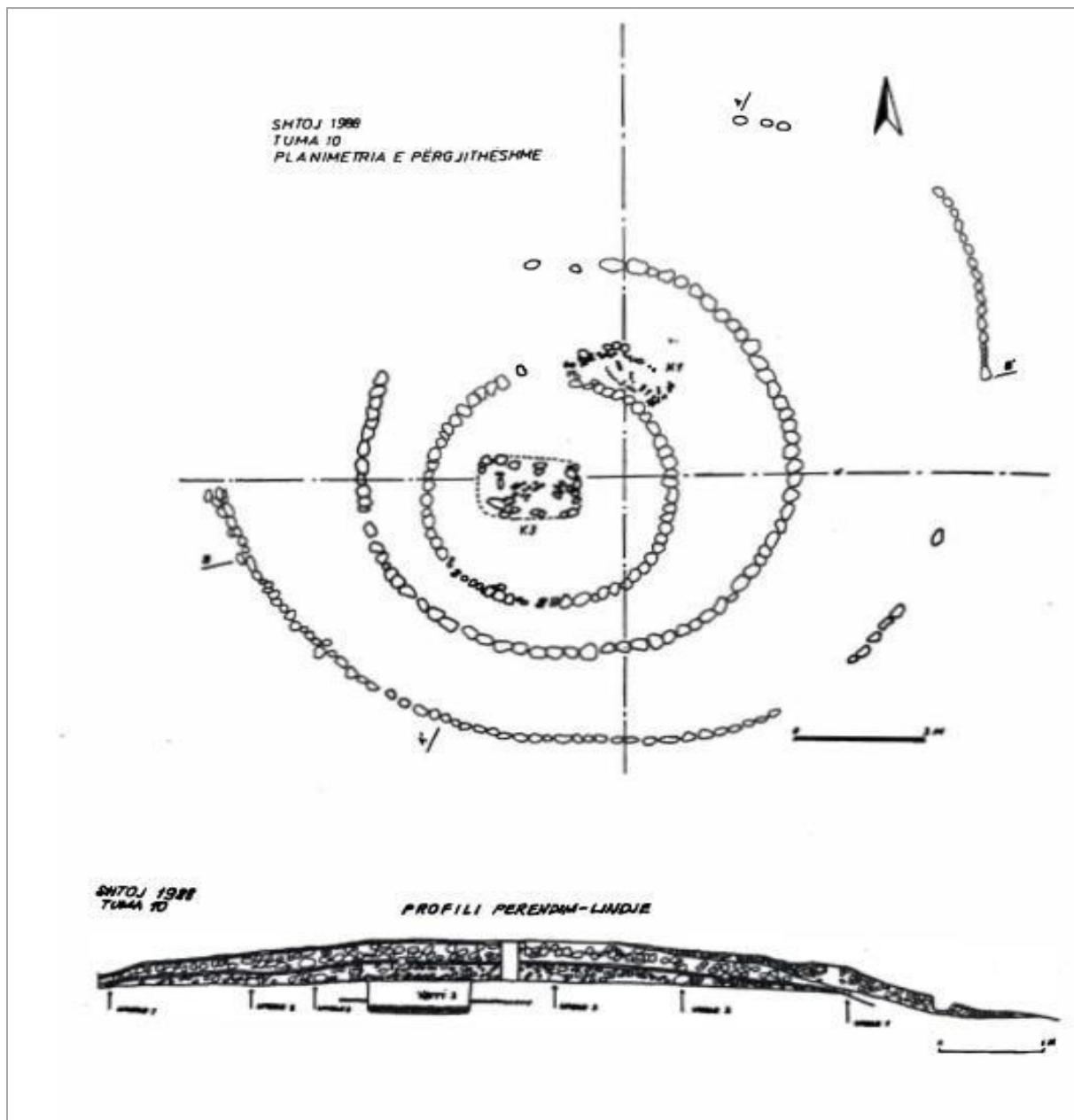
Figure 4.7   Three ringstones in Shtoj 10

Copyright: Koka 2012

4.3.5   Secondary graves

Secondary graves were constructed concurrently with, shortly after or a considerable period after the primary grave or first burial. They were often located either on the same ground layer as the primary grave or surrounding the primary grave or the first burial. Additional graves were added on top of the primary grave, muranë or constructed on the earthen or stone that covered the first phase of tumuli use. This process was undertaken either shortly after the first phase of the life of the tumulus or after a considerable amount of time, between 13 and 17 centuries (Islami, 2013). Within this research, I separated the secondary grave into two categories: first, the additional graves interred after the primary grave; second, all the graves where no primary grave was identified or recorded. This choice was impacted by the nature of the tumuli publication in *Iliria* and monographs (Bela 1990; 2012).[19] Like the primary grave, the architectural structures of secondary graves were diverse and varied from simple pits to more complex stone materials (Ceka, 1974; Jubani, 1982; 1995; Prendi, 2008). The practical processes involved in constructing additional new graves to the tumulus were complex and varied from one tumulus to another.

Due to the complex relationship between primary and secondary graves, and the lack of information on whether a primary grave existed in some tumuli, it is not feasible to separate the exact number of secondary from primary graves. Therefore, the traditional approach of presenting tumuli based on their total number of graves is applied to this research. The data will be based on the total number of graves rather than separating primary and secondary graves.

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[19] Within *Iliria* and monographs, the term secondary graves is also utilised for graves added during a late re-use of tumuli, starting from Late Roman to modern times. The graves included at a later stage have not been included in this research; however, they have been recorded in the Tumuli Repository.

4.3.6 Filling and heightening

Following the construction of the primary grave or the first burial and its architectural features, tumulus cemeteries were filled with soil, stones or a combination of both. This provided the mound shape of the artificial hill (Aliu, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). My analysis of the 123 tumulus cemeteries suggests that the filling and heightening of tumuli was a complex process and was often undertaken in several phases, depending on the purpose and longevity of tumuli use. The explicit information about this process is sparse, limited, and seldom analysed or interpreted in the literature. The information about different construction phases has only been provided for 58 tumulus cemeteries, and there is insufficient information about the practices involved in filling and heightening tumuli. However, tumuli size and measurements could help understand some processes involved in filling, heightening, and constructing tumuli and the physical labour, human resources and organisation required.

4.3.7 Cupola

Once the tumulus was constructed, it was sealed with a stone structure called a cupola (Jubani, 1974; 1995). According to Andrea (1995), the construction of a cupola marked the completion of the tumulus as a funerary monument and is therefore associated, and dated, with the final stage of tumuli construction. I have identified a cupola in 37 tumulus cemeteries. My analysis of their descriptions, along with a limited number of images, reveals that stones were used in their construction and were often carefully arranged together, creating a distinctive architectural structure shaped like a cobbled pavement (Figure 4.8). Whilst often covering the whole tumulus, the cupola was frequently constructed on top of the tumulus itself, creating the rounded feature of a 'cupola' or a dome (Jubani,1974). In Albanian literature, the term cupola is used interchangeably with the 'hood' – kësulë' (Aliu, 2012).
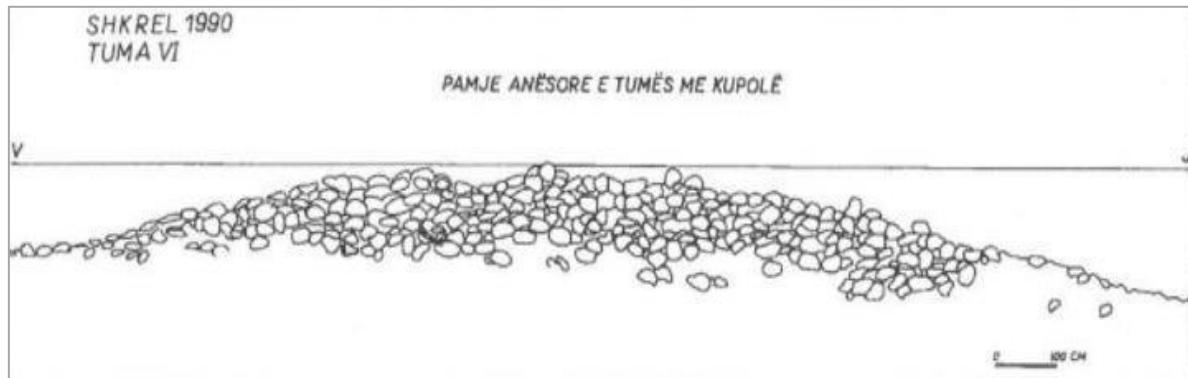
Figure 4.8   Illustration of cupola in Shkrel 06

Copyright: Jubani 1995

4.3.8   Dromos

A dromos was added after the tumulus construction was finished and sealed off as a monument, symbolising the final phase of tumuli construction (Jubani, 1982; 1995). Dromos is a wide path of stones that started on the side of the tumulus and created an extension to the hilly shape of the tumulus. A dromos was built with stones and slabs of different sizes (Figure 4.9). According to Jubani (1995) and Andrea (2009), the primary function of a dromos was to create a bridge-like stone structure or pathway that connects one tumulus to another. Jubani (1974) suggests that the dromos held ritual meaning and its bridge-like shape symbolised a passage and voyage to the afterlife. I identified a dromos in 12 tumulus cemeteries. Based on their analysis of their dimensions, materials and construction techniques, I propose that one purpose of this architectural feature was to protect tumulus cemeteries from erosive and destructive natural elements while helping to preserve and maintain their hill-like appearance. Aliu (2004) notes that many tumulus cemeteries have not retained their original shape due to natural factors and destructive farming practices. Consequently, I propose that these factors may have influenced their preservation and contributed to the limited number of identified dromos.
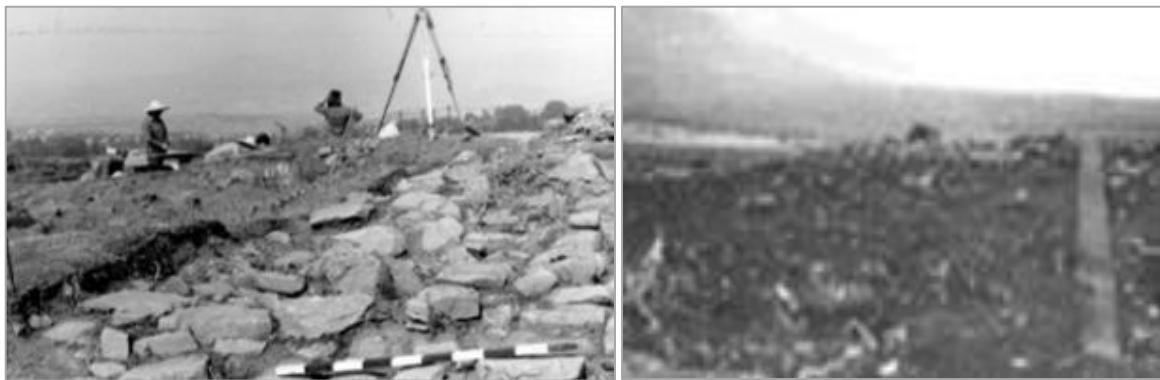
Figure 4.9   Dromos in Rehovë before excavation

4.4   Four phases of tumuli construction

In this research, I examined 123 tumulus cemeteries, all dated exclusively through artefact typology, spanning from the Early Bronze Age to Late Iron Age. After establishing a detailed chronology for each tumulus and recording them in Tumulus Repository, I identified that 54 tumulus cemeteries were first constructed during the Bronze Age and 69 in the Iron Age. The findings of my research demonstrate that tumuli construction was a complex, non-linear process. The eight stages of tumuli construction were undertaken either during a short period, such as the Early Bronze Age only, or over two thousand years from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. This often resulted in different architectural structures within the same tumulus being constructed during different phases - I observed this phenomenon in 31 tumulus cemeteries that were originally established in the Bronze Age but were both used and reused during the Iron Age. Of these 31 tumulus cemeteries, 20 were used continuously from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age, whilst 11 tumulus cemeteries, first constructed in the Bronze Age, ceased to be used for centuries and were later reused at different phases of the Iron Age. The continuity, discontinuity and overlapping phases of tumuli construction meant it was not always possible to chronologically separate the architectural structures of the Bronze Age from those of the Iron Age.

To help understand the architectural structure of tumuli and how they changed over time. I established distinct chronological phases. This approach allowed me to categorise the data from the 123 tumulus cemeteries into four chronological phases: Bronze Age only (BA-only); Bronze and Iron Age continuum (BI-C); Bronze and Iron Age reused (BI-R); Iron Age only (IA-only). I will present the statistical results and analysis of each of the four phases, highlighting the main characteristic features of each phase. Following this, I will present the findings related to their architectural structures (Table 4.2).

Phase	Phase summary	Number of tumuli
Bronze Age only	BA-only	23
Bronze and Iron Age continuum	BI-C	20
Bronze and Iron Age reused	BI-R	11
Iron Age only	IA-only	69
Total		**123**

Table 4.2 Four phases of tumuli construction during the Bronze and Iron Age

4.4.1   Bronze Age-only tumuli

The 23 BA-only tumulus cemeteries were constructed during the Early Bronze Age to Late Bronze Age and used only during the Bronze Age. They represented some of the earliest tumuli in the country, with 13 out of the 23 dated in the Early Bronze Age. Two tumuli were dated in the Middle Bronze Age, and the remaining eight in the Late Bronze Age. For 22 tumuli, the eight stages of tumuli construction were likely to have been undertaken within a short period during the Bronze Age. Pazhok 01 was the only tumulus constructed and used from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age. They were located in five different areas of Albania and formed part of larger clusters of tumuli. The five areas were: Bujan 04, 07, 08, 09; Pazhok 01, 02, 03, 06; Rrethe-Bazje 03, 05, 11; Shkrel 01-10; Shtoj 01, 09 (Figure 4.10). I have identified the materials used for the outer construction of these tumuli as the primary distinguishing feature of this phase. In the *Iliria* Journal and monographs, the choice of materials has been linked to the factors that contributed to the emergence of tumulus cemeteries in Albania. Stone tumuli were associated with Cetina culture, while the earthen tumuli, often mixed with stones, reflect a Kurgan influence (Chapter 5) (Jubani, 1995; Bodinaku, 2018). Of the BA-only tumuli, 14 were constructed with stones, whereas nine were primarily built using soil.
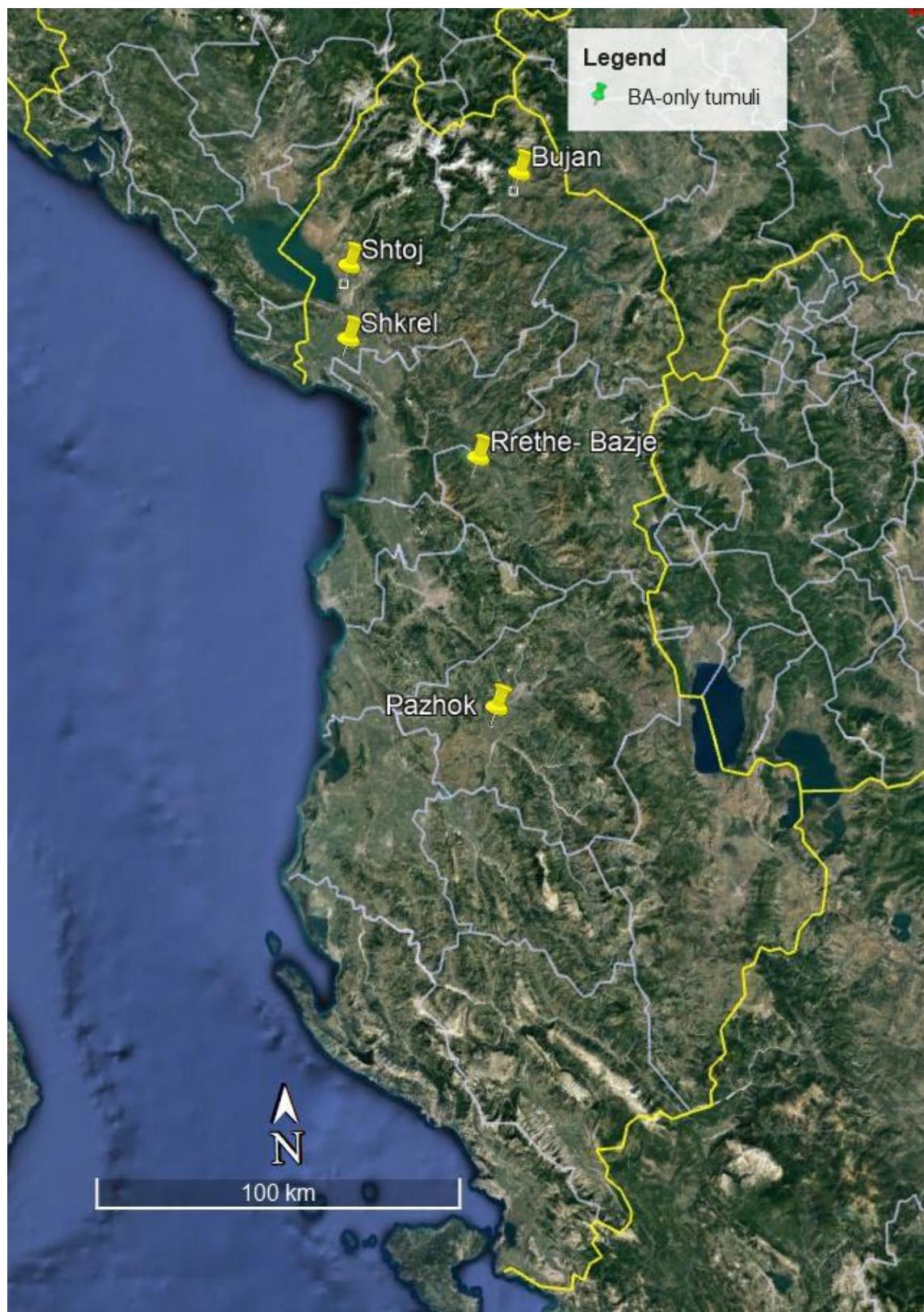
Figure 4.10   Distribution of Bronze Age-only tumuli

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

4.4.1.1　Stone tumuli

I have identified fourteen stone tumuli that were constructed in the Bujan (04, 07, 08, 09) and Shkrel areas (01-10). According to Jubani (1995), stone tumulus cemeteries were associated with Cetina culture (Chapter 5).

The four tumuli in Bujan were ritual-only, contained no graves, and were built predominantly with stones. Their height varied from 0.70 to 0.90 metres, with a diameter of 11.20 to 14.15 metres. None of the four tumuli had any ringstones or muranë. The four stone tumuli contained a cupola; a dromos was identified only in Bujan 07. Each of the tumuli was constructed and used for a short period: Bujan 07 (Early Bronze Age only); Bujan 04, 08 (Middle Bronze Age only); Bujan 09 (Late Bronze Age only).

The ten Shkrel tumuli (01-10), dated in the Early Bronze Age, were also built primarily with stones. The measurements of the six muranë in Shkrel varied from 0.50 to 0.80 metres high and 2.50 to 13.40 metres in diameter. Cremation was the common burial rite identified in nine of the ten tumuli. Cremation was performed outside the tumulus; cremated remains were scattered in the centre and accompanied by animal offerings. Five of the cremated remains were covered with muranë (Shkrel 01, 02, 03, 04, 06), and Shkrel 04 also had a ringstone (Shkrel 06 is likely an invisible cremation, Chapter 6). Inhumation was practised in Shkrel 05, where remains placed in a cist grave were covered with a muranë and surrounded by a ringstone. At the last construction phase, five tumulus cemeteries were sealed with a cupola (Shkrel 01, 02, 04, 05, 06), and a dromos connected Shkrel 01 with Shkrel 02 and Shkrel 07 with Shkrel 08.

4.4.1.2   Earthen tumuli

I have identified nine tumulus cemeteries constructed predominantly with soil, where stone was used for architectural structures (Figure 4.11). They were located in three areas: Pazhok (01, 02, 03, 06), Rrethe-Bazje (03, 05, 11), and Shtoj (01, 09), and were situated along river valleys (Chapter 5).

The two tumuli in the Shtoj area (Shtoj 01, 09) were dated in the Early Bronze Age (Shtoj 01) and the Late Bronze Age (Shtoj 09) and contained only the primary grave, which was of an inhumation burial rite. The size of Shtoj 01 (0.56 metres high and 12.30 metres in diameter) was smaller than that of Shtoj 09 (0.75 metres high and 21.00 metres in diameter). Their architectural structures, such as the lack of a ringstone, cupola and dromos, shared similarities. Muranë was identified only in Shtoj 01, where stones were sourced from the nearby field.

Figure 4.11   Pazhok 01 before excavation

Copyright: Bodinaku 2018

The four tumuli in Pazhok (01, 02, 03, 06) were built primarily with soil, and stones were used for architectural features only. Pazhok 06 was severely destroyed before the excavation, and it was difficult to determine whether it contained a ringstone, muranë, cupola or dromos (Bodinaku, 2018). Pazhok 01 is one of the country's earliest tumulus cemeteries, dated in the 18th – 17th century BC, and was used until the Late Bronze Age. Its architectural features and primary grave are attributed to Kurgan migrations. The other three tumuli in Pazhok were dated in the Late Bronze Age. The size of the four tumuli was between 1.20 and 2.00 metres high, with a diameter of between 15.00 and 32.00 metres. Pazhok 02, 03 and 06 contained fewer graves constructed and used within the LBA. Pazhok 01, on the other hand, contained 17 graves: three were dated in the Early Bronze Age and 14 in the Late Bronze Age. A ringstone was identified only in Pazhok 01, which had a diameter of 22.00 metres.

Cremation was practised in the primary grave of Pazhok 06, where the cremated remains were buried in a simple pit under the base layer of the tumulus. Inhumation was practised in Pazhok 01, 02, and 03, where individuals were buried in a simple pit below the ground-based layer of the tumulus. In Pazhok 01 and 02, primary graves were covered with a muranë. The three tumuli in Rrethe-Bazje (03, 05, 11) were dated in the 15th – 12th century BC (Late Bronze Age). Their size varied between 0.35 to 0.70 metres high and 10.00 to 18.00 metres in diameter. The three tumuli in the Rrethe-Bazje area were invisible burial tumuli (Chapter 6). Rrethe-Bazje 03 had two graves, but no information was provided on whether it contained a primary grave. However, one of the graves in Rrethe-Bazje 03 was covered with a muranë (1.00 high and 3.00 metres in diameter) and was encircled with a 7.30 metre ringstone. Rrethe-Bazje 05 and 11 had only one invisible grave, considered the primary grave.

4.4.1.3   Bronze Age-only architectural structures

The size of the 23 BA-only tumulus cemeteries varied between 0.30 to 4.00 metres in height and from 5.65 to 32.00 metres in diameter (Table 4.3). Ritual-only tumuli in Bujan (04, 07, 08, 09) tended to be smaller, with a maximum height of 0.90 metres and a diameter of up to 14.15 metres. Early Bronze Age tumuli tended to be larger than those of the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age. The largest Early Bronze Age tumuli were 4.30 metres high, with a diameter of 32.00 metres, whilst the respective measurements for Middle Bronze Age were 0.70 and 11.20 metres and 2.10 and 25.00 metres for Late Bronze Age.

Feature	Stone	Earthen	BA-only
Areas	2	3	5
Tumuli	14	9	23
Ritual-only	4	0	4
EBA	11	2	13
MBA	2	0	2
LBA	1	7	8
Total graves	0-1	1-17	0-17
Measurements	Height 0.30-2.20m Diameter 5.65-24.00m	Height 0.35-4.00m Diameter 10.00-32.00m	Height 0.30-4.00m Diameter 5.65-32.00m
Primary grave (PG) total	10	8	18
PG cremation	9	1	10
PG inhumation	1	5	6
PG invisible burial	0	2	2
PG not provided	0	1	1
Muranë	6	5	11
Ringstone	2	2	4
Cupola	9	0	9
Dromos	5	0	5
Number of graves	10	34	44

Table 4.3   BA-only tumuli architectural structures

A primary grave was identified in 18 tumuli; 12 primary graves are dated in the Early Bronze Age, and six are in the Late Bronze Age. Cremation was practised in 10 tumuli, where nine were in the Shkrel area and one in Pazhok 06. Inhumation was practised in six tumuli. Two primary graves inhumations were dated in the Early Bronze Age (Pazhok 01; Shkrel 05) and four in the Late Bronze Age (Pazhok 02, 03; Shtoj 01, 09). Two primary graves in Rrethe-Bazje 05 and 11 (Late Bronze Age) were invisible burials.

A muranë was the central architectural feature of 11 BA-only tumulus cemeteries. Eight were dated in the Early Bronze Age and three in the Late Bronze Age. They were located in Pazhok, Rrethe-Bazje, Shkrel and Shtoj. Their size was between 0.50 to 1.00 metres in height and 2.50 to 9.00 metres in diameter. A muranë covered five primary graves cremations, four inhumations and one invisible burial. The information about one primary grave was not provided. Four tumuli with muranë were surrounded by one ringstone (Pazhok 01; Rrethe-Bazje 03; Shkrel 04, 05) – ringtones measured between 7.30 to 14.00 metres in diameter.

Nine BA-only tumuli were sealed with a cupola and were located in Bujan and Shkrel. Six tumuli were dated in the Early Bronze Age, two in the Middle Bronze Age, and one in the Late Bronze Age. Four Shkrel tumuli with a cupola had a primary grave cremation, and one (Shkrel 05) had inhumation in a cist grave. A dromos was identified in five BA-only tumuli (Bujan 07; Shkrel 01, 02, 07, 08). Bujan 07 was a ritual-only tumulus (Chapter 4). They dated in the Early Bronze Age. The dromos bridge path that connected one tumulus with another was visible in Shkrel 01, 02 and Shkrel 07 and 08. All four Shkrel tumuli were cremation. The 23 BA- only tumuli contained 44 graves; 22 had between 0 and 3 graves, while Pazhok 01, 02, and 03 had 17, 5 and 4 graves.

4.4.2 Bronze and Iron Age tumuli continuum

The 20 BI-C tumuli were located in 17 areas (Figure 4.12). Seven were individual tumulus, and the remaining 13 formed initially part of larger clusters. Within the Pazhok area, for example, although there were eight tumuli within the group, only Pazhok 04 was used continuously during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. The longevity of tumuli impacted their architectural structures, and BI-C tumulus cemeteries combined features of both the Bronze Age and Iron Age (Figures 4.13). Based on the analysis of the 20 tumulus cemeteries, I propose that the architectural structures associated with the first phase of construction, such as the primary grave, muranë and ringstone, were constructed during the Bronze Age. In contrast, features related to later stages, such as cupola, dromos and tumuli measurements, were likely built during the Iron Age, reflecting the characteristics of that period.
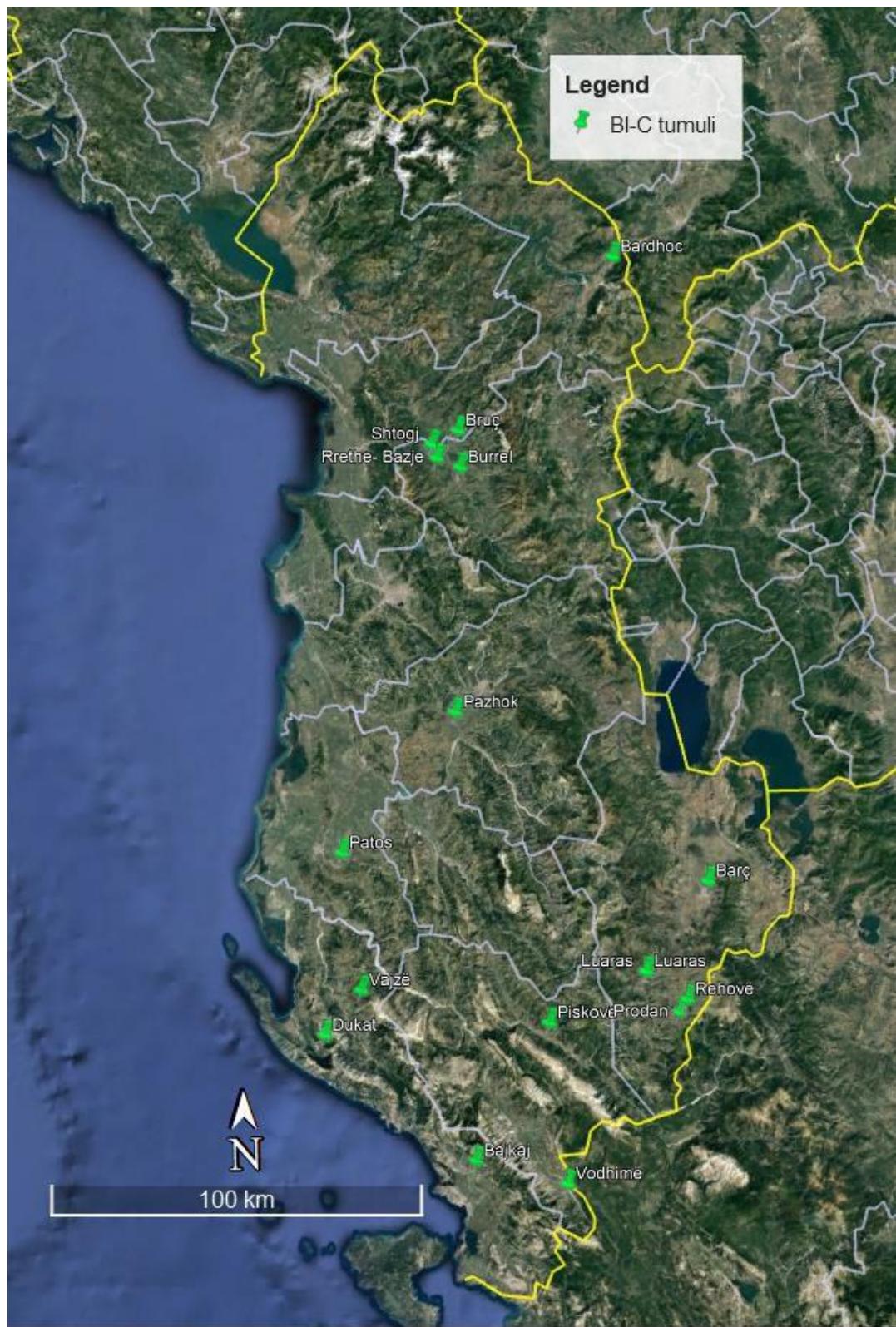
Figure 4.12   Distribution of Bronze and Iron Age continuum tumuli

Author's image on Google Earth Pro
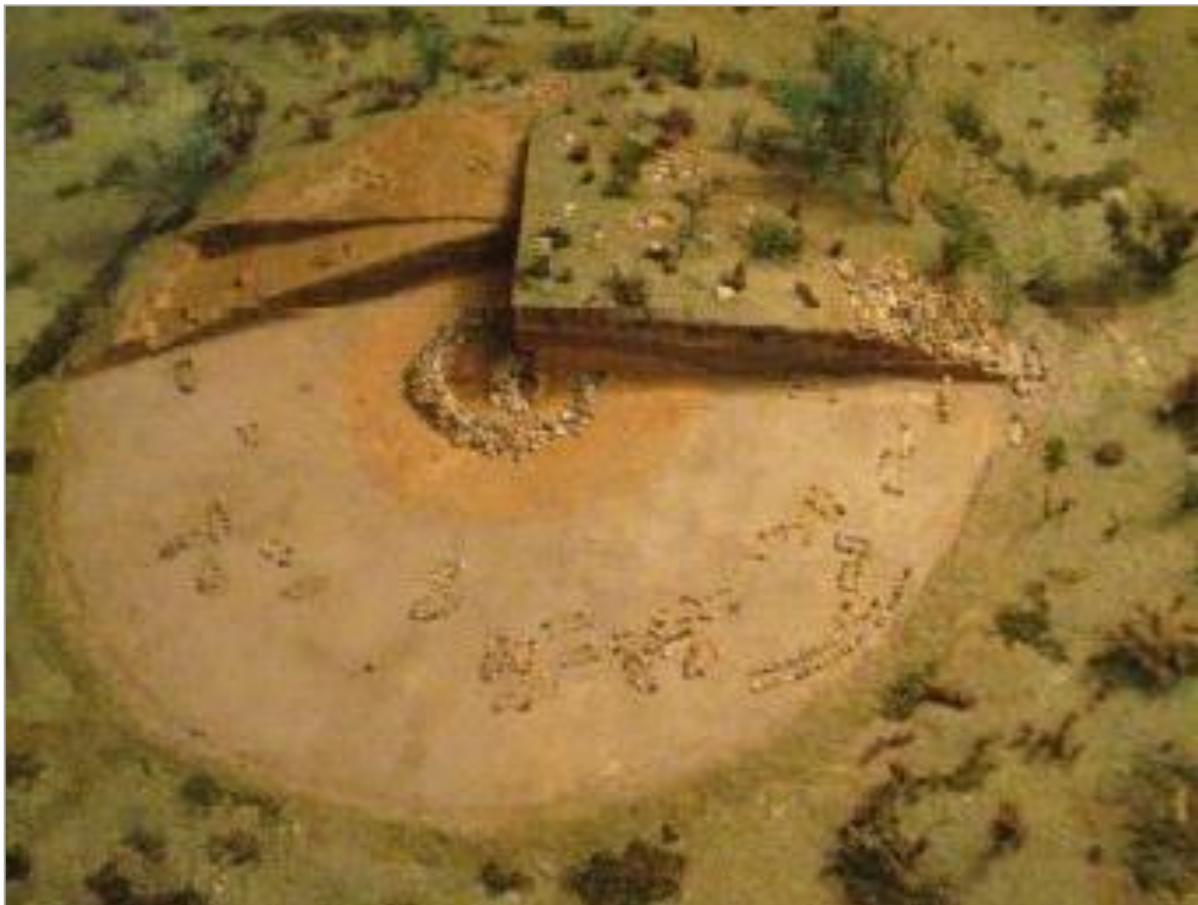
Figure 4.13   Rehovë graphic reconstruction

Copyright: Aliu 2012

Three BI-C tumulus cemeteries were first constructed during the Early Bronze Age (Barç 01; Dukat 01; Piskovë), and continued to be used throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age. They varied in size from 2.37 to 3.40 metres in height, with diameters ranging from 20.00 to 43.00 metres. Their architectural structures were complex and reflected both periods of development. The three tumuli were built with soil and stones, where stones were used for architectural features and grave structures. Each tumulus had a primary grave inhumation covered with a muranë. Ringstones were initially built in Barç 01 and Piskovë during the Early Bronze Age, whilst an additional ringstone was added in Barç 01 and two more in Piskovë during the Iron Age. Dukat 01 did not have a ringstone. Primary graves, muranë and ringstones were the only features dated in the EBA. The three tumuli contained many graves (181, 53, 116),

and Barç 01 was the only tumulus with a cupola, which was used until the Late Iron Age. No dromos was identified in any of the three tumuli.

Three BI-C tumuli first constructed during the Middle Bronze Age (Bajkaj; Vajzë 01; Vodhimë) continued to be used during the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Their measurements varied from 2.10 to 3.10 metres in height, with 17.00 to 24.00 metres in diameter. Only one grave was added in Vajzë 01 during the Late Iron Age. The three tumuli were constructed with soil and stone. Each tumulus had a primary grave cremation; Bajkaj and Vodhimë were covered with a muranë and circled with a ringstone. They contained 43, 24 and 18 graves. No cupola or dromos were identified in any of the three tumuli.

An additional 14 BI-C tumuli, first constructed in the Late Bronze Age, continued to be used in the Iron Age (Bardhocë 02; Bruç; Burrel 03; Dukat 01; Luaras; Myç-Has 03; Patos; Pazhok; Prodan; Rehovë; Rrethe-Bazje 01; Shtogj 01, 02; Vajzë 02). Six were used only between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age; two were used until the Middle Iron Age; six were used until the Late Iron Age. Five tumuli did not have a primary grave (Bardhocë 02; Burrel 03; Patos; Shtogj 01; Vajzë 02). Seven had a primary grave, one was cremated, four inhumations, one was an invisible burial, and one had no remains. No information about primary graves was provided for two tumuli. Muranë was identified in three tumuli; two covered primary grave inhumations, and one had no primary grave. Six tumuli had a ringstone: two circled a primary grave cremation, one with inhumation, and one was an invisible burial. As explained in Section 43.4, the presence of a ringstone was not always associated with a primary grave. Therefore, two tumuli that contained a ringstone did not include a central primary grave but rather featured secondary graves. The 20 BI-C tumuli contained

between 4 and 76 graves, except for Rehovë with 202 and Luaras with 203. Four BI-C tumuli had a cupola, and no dromos was identified.

4.4.2.1 Bronze and Iron Age continuum architectural structure

The size of the 20 BI-C tumuli varied from 0.55 to 5.60 metres in height with a diameter of between 9.80 to 50.00 metres (Table 4.4). Fourteen tumuli had a diameter greater than 20.00 metres. Six tumuli were constructed primarily with soil, and 14 were built with a combination of earth and stones. No tumuli built exclusively with stones were made during this phase.

A primary grave was identified in 13 tumuli. Four primary graves were cremations, with three primary grave cremations dated in the Middle Bronze Age (Vajzë; Bajkaj; Vodhimë) and one in the Late Bronze Age (Rrethe-Bazje 01). Inhumation was identified in seven tumuli; out of the seven primary grave cremations, three were dated in the Early Bronze Age (Barç 01; Dukat 02; Piskovë) and four in the Late Bronze Age (Dukat 01; Luaras; Pazhok 04; Rehovë). Two primary graves, dated in the Late Bronze Age, Myç-Has 03 was an invisible burial, and Shtogj 02 had no remains. Five of the remaining seven BI-C tumuli had no primary graves and were dated in the Late Bronze Age (Bardhocë; Burrel 03; Patos; Shtogj 01; Vajzë 02), and information about two tumuli (Bruç; Prodan) was not provided.

Muranë was identified in ten tumuli: their measurements varied from 0.40 to 1.20 metres high with a diameter of 3.20 to 8.00 metres. Muranë covered eight primary graves (Bajkaj; Barç 01; Dukat 02; Luaras; Piskovë; Rehovë; Rrethe-Bazje 01; Vajzë 01; Vodhimë), where three were cremations, and five were inhumations. Muranë was

also identified in Burrel 01, which did not contain a primary grave

Architectural structure	BI-C
Tumuli	20
Areas	17
Height	0.55 – 5.60 metres
Diameter	9.80 – 50.00 metres
Primary grave total	13
Primary grave – cremation	4
Primary grave – inhumation	7
Primary grave – invisible burial	1
Primary grave – no remains	1
Primary grave – not provided	2
No primary grave	5
Muranë	10
Ringstone	10
Cupola	5
Dromos	0
Number of graves	1,218

Table 4.4   BI-C tumuli architectural structures

Ringstones were identified in ten BI-C tumuli. Barç 01 and Vajzë 02 contained double

ringstones, and Piskovë had triple, resulting in fourteen ringstones being constructed

in ten BI-C tumuli. Ten were constructed in the Bronze Age and four in the Iron Age.

Three ringstones were built in the Early Bronze Age (Barç 01; Dukat 01; Piskovë); two

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in the Middle Bronze Age (Bajkaj; Vodhimë); five in the Late Bronze Age (Burrel 03; Rehovë; Rrethe-Bazje 01; Shtogj 02; Vajzë 02).   Bronze Age ringstone measurements varied from 2.00 to 20.00 metres in diameter. During the Iron Age, a second ringstone was added to Barç 01 and Vajzë 02, and two more ringstones were added to Piskovë. The Iron Age ringstone measurements varied from 13.00 to 30.00 metres in diameter.

A cupola was identified in five tumuli. Two were used until the Middle Bronze Age (Dukat 01; Prodan) and three until the Late Iron Age (Barç; Luaras; Rehovë). No dromos was identified in any of the 20 BI-C tumuli.

A total of 1,218 graves were constructed during the BI-C: 197 were dated in the Bronze Age, 798 in the Iron Age, 58 were reused after the Late Iron Age, and 165 were not dated clearly. Sixteen tumuli had between 4 and 76 graves, and four had between 116 and 203 graves.

Special attention was paid to constructing primary graves. Secondary grave structures varied from simple pits to more complex and well-designed graves. Cremation on secondary graves was predominantly performed outside, and the remains were often scattered in the tumulus or placed in urns, whether complete or fragmented. BI-C tumuli contained more graves than BA-only tumuli. Tumuli, which had over 100 graves and had been used over a long period, tended to be higher and had a greater diameter.

4.4.3   Bronze and Iron Age Reused tumuli

Eleven BI-R tumulus cemeteries first constructed during the Bronze Age were reused after a long period in Bardhocë 01; Cerujë; Kënetë 04, 05; Rrethe-Bazje 10; Shtikë; Shtoj 02, 06, 07, 10, 11 (Figure 4.14). They were spread across six areas and formed part of a large cluster of tumuli, except Shtikë (Table 4.5).
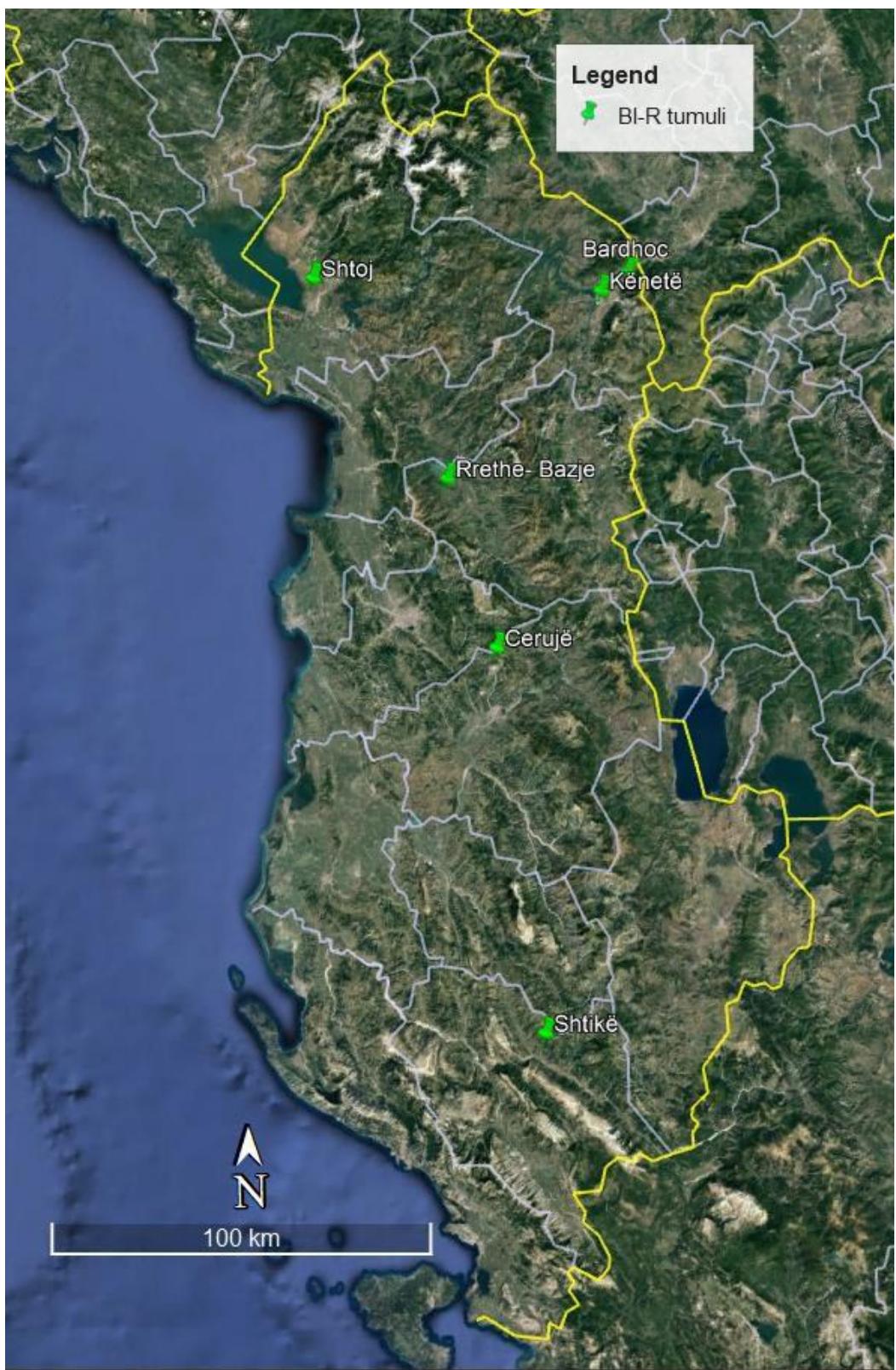
Figure 4.14   Distribution of Bronze and Iron Age Reused tumuli

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

Architectural structure	BI-R
Tumuli	11
Areas	6
Height	0.45 – 3.00 metres
Diameter	10.00 – 30.00 metres
Primary grave total	7
Primary grave – cremation	1
Primary grave – inhumation	5
Primary grave – invisible burial	1
Primary grave – no remains	0
Primary grave – not provided	0
No primary grave	4
Muranë	5
Ringstone	7
Cupola	5
Dromos	3
Number of graves	138

Table 4.5   Bronze and Iron Age Reused tumuli architectural structures

Six of the 11 BI-R tumulus cemeteries were initially constructed in the Early Bronze Age, with one in the Middle Bronze Age and four in the Late Bronze Age.   The chronological gap between the first Bronze Age tumuli construction and their reuse in the Iron Age often involved many centuries, where tumuli were reused after one, two, or more periods. Shtoj 02, for example, was first built in the Early Bronze Age (18th – 17th century BC) and reused in the Early Iron Age (11th – 9th century BC), with one

grave, it was then reused in the Middle Iron Age (8th – 7th century BC) with one grave, and it was reused once more with eight more graves in the Late Iron Age (6th – 5th century BC).

The use and reuse of BI-R tumuli transformed and shaped them into monuments, and architectural features associated with the sealing of the monument, such as a cupola and a dromos, reflect the Iron Age. Like BI-C tumulus cemeteries, architectural features related to the initial construction and primary graves reflect the Bronze Age, whilst the cupola, dromos and the final size were likely completed in the Iron Age.

Their measurements varied from 0.45 to 3.00 metres high, with a diameter of 10.00 to 30.00 metres. Four BI-R tumuli had a diameter larger than 20.00 metres. They were constructed with a combination of soil and stone (ten), and one was constructed predominantly with earth. Stone continued to be the primary material for architectural structures.

Seven BI-R tumuli had a primary grave: one was cremation (Early Bronze Age), five were inhumation, and one was an invisible burial. Another four BI-R tumuli did not contain primary graves, including Shtoj 07 and 11, which were first constructed as ritual-only tumuli.

Muranë was constructed in five tumuli located in four areas (Cerujë; Kënetë 04; Rrethe-Bazje 10; Shtoj 06, 11). Four tumuli with a muranë were dated in the Early Bronze Age and one in the Late Bronze Age. A muranë covered three primary grave inhumations, one invisible burial, and one ritual-only tumulus. They had a height of 0.40 metres and a diameter of 1.50 to 6.00 metres.

A ringstone was constructed in seven tumuli in two areas (Kënetë 04, 05; Shtoj 02, 06, 07, 10, 11), including two ritual-only tumuli in Shtoj 07 and 11. Six tumuli had one ringstone, while Shtoj 10 had three, two of which were likely to have been added during Early Iron Age reuse. The measurements for the nine ringstones varied from 6.00 to 19.00 metres in diameter.

A cupola was identified in five of the eleven BI-R tumuli (Bardhocë 01; Cerujë; Kënetë 05; Shtoj 07, 10). The final phase for the three tumuli was the Late Iron Age; this included Bardhocë 01, which continued to be used after the Late Iron Age. One tumulus with a cupola was dated in Early Iron Age, whilst the final tumulus had a generic dating of Iron Age. Cupola was identified in one ritual-only tumulus (Shtoj 07). A dromos was recorded in three BI-R tumuli (Cerujë, Kënetë 04, Shtoj 11).

Although BI-R tumuli were reused during different phases of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, they contained a small number of graves. Nine tumuli had between 2 and 15 graves, and the other two had 22 (Bardhocë) and 28 (Kënetë 05). A total of 138 graves were constructed during BI-R: 15 were dated in the Bronze Age, 112 in the Iron Age, eight were reused, and three were not dated clearly.

4.4.4 Iron Age-only tumuli

There are 69 tumulus cemeteries newly constructed during the Iron Age, located in 22 areas (Figure 4.15). New IA-only tumuli were built alongside existing BA-only, BI-C or BI-R tumuli within specific areas. In the Shtoj area, for example, four new tumuli (Shtoj 03, 04, 05, 08) were added to the existing cluster of seven tumuli. In other areas, which contained no previously constructed tumuli, several new tumuli were built in groups of between two and eight. In the Krumë area, for example, eight new tumuli were constructed.
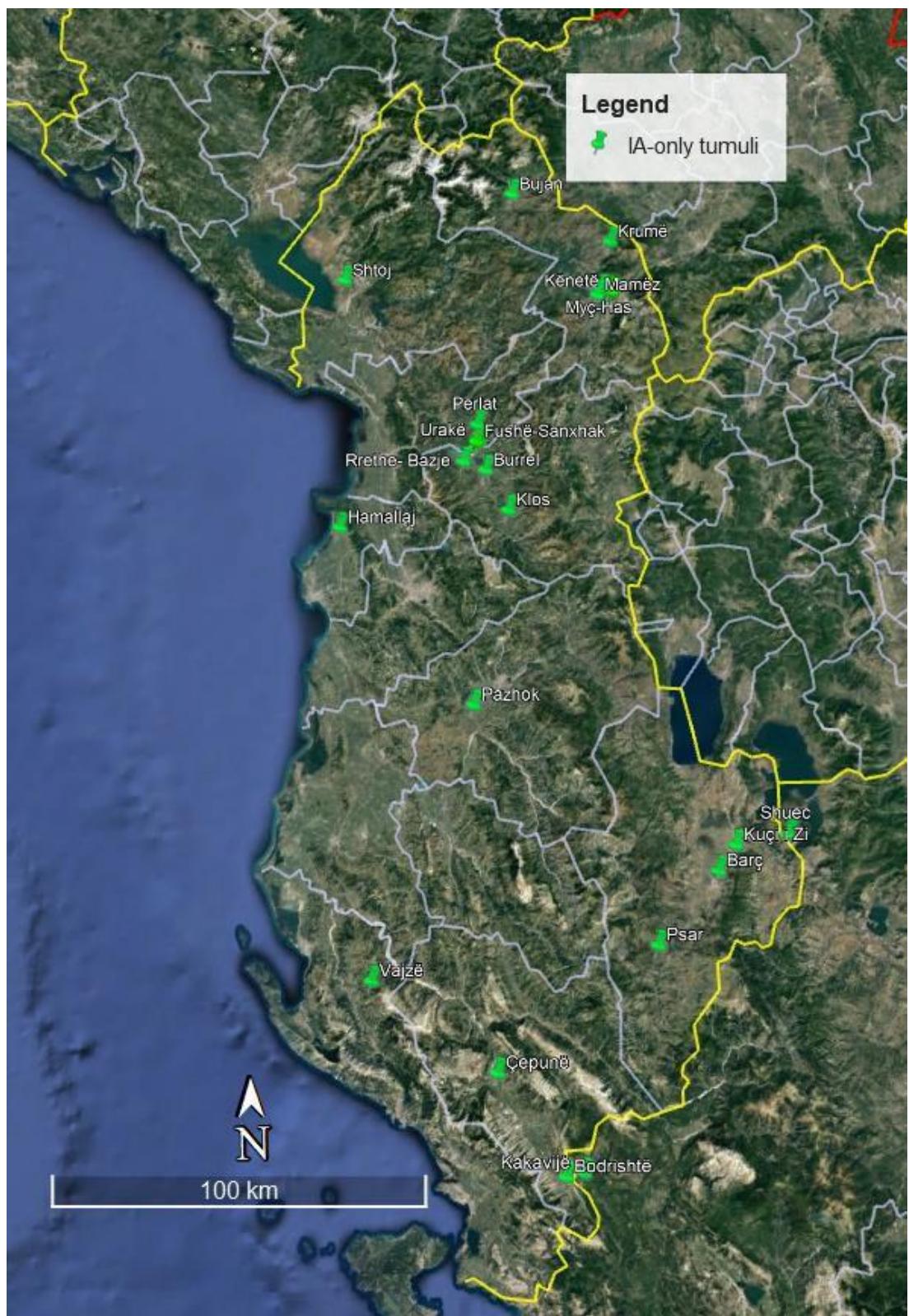
Figure 4.15   Distribution of Iron Age-only tumuli

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

Their characteristic features have been presented chronologically to help explore the complexity and diversity of IA-only tumulus cemeteries for the Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age.

4.4.4.1 Early Iron Age tumuli

During the Early Iron Age, 42 new tumulus cemeteries were constructed. They were located in 16 areas, where 23 tumuli were built in pre-existing clusters, and 19 were constructed in new areas. Early Iron Age tumuli are dated from the 12th to the 8th century BC. Their measurements varied in diameter from 6.00 to 34.00 metres. The diameter for five tumuli was between 6.00 to 10.00 metres; 33 had a diameter of between 11.00 and 24.00 metres; two were between 30.00 and 34.00 metres; the diameter for two tumuli was not provided due to their poor state of preservation. Their height varied from 0.50 to 2.80 metres.

A primary grave was identified in 20 of the 42 tumuli. Six primary graves were cremation, seven inhumations, and seven had no remains (Burrel 06, Krumë 03, 08 had no remains, whilst Burrel 07, Fushë-Sanxhak 02 and Perlat 05, 08 had invisible burial). Eleven Early Iron Age tumuli, including four ritual-only, did not contain a primary grave, whilst information about the presence of a primary grave was not provided for the remaining 11 tumuli.

Muranë was constructed in ten Early Iron Age tumuli (Bodrishtë 02; Bujan 01; Burrel 01, 02, 06; Fushë-Sanxhak 01, 05; Krumë 06; Rrethe-Bazje 06; Çepunë). Three muranë did not contain a primary grave; two were cremation, two were inhumation, and one was an invisible burial. No information about the presence of a primary grave was provided in two tumuli. The measurements of muranë varied from 0.50 to 1.10

metres in height and between 2.60 and 16.00 metres in diameter.

Ringstones were constructed in six tumuli located in five areas (Barç 02; Kakavijë; Kënetë 01; Rrethe-Bazje 04; Vajzë 03, 04). Five tumuli had one ringstone, and Barç 02 had two ringstones, resulting in a total of seven ringstones. Their measurements varied from 0.20 to 0.40 metres high, with a diameter of 11.00 to 17.50 metres. Measurements for two ringstones were not provided.

A cupola was identified in 13 tumuli in four areas (Bujan 02, 03, 05, 06; Krumë 01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 07, 08; Pazhok 07; Shuec). Early Iron Age tumuli with a cupola were often located alongside other tumuli from previous phases, which also had a cupola. Ten tumuli with a cupola were only used during the Early Iron Age, and three were used during longer Iron Age phases. Shuec is also the only Early Iron Age tumulus cemeteries with a dromos.

Eight of the 42 tumulus cemeteries were used only during the Early Iron Age, 28 were either reused or used continuously until the Late Iron Age, and six were reused after the Late Iron Age. Despite their long periods of use, the Early Iron Age tumuli contained a small number of graves. Four were ritual-only; 37 had between 1 and 68 graves, and one had 80 graves (Burrel 01). However, 22 of these tumuli contained invisible burials. A total of 429 graves were identified in the 42 Early Iron Age tumuli.

4.4.4.2   Middle Iron Age tumuli

Ten tumulus cemeteries were newly constructed in the Middle Iron Age (Hamallaj; Kuç i Zi 01; Myç-Has 01, 06; Rrethe-Bazje 02; Shtoj 03, 04, 08; Urakë 01, 02) and were located in six areas. Middle Iron Age tumuli were dated between the 8th and 6th

century BC. The measurements of the nine tumuli varied from 0.25 to 2.72 metres in height and 6.50 to 28.00 metres in diameter. Four tumuli were used only during the Middle Iron Age, five continued to be used until the Late Iron Age, and for Shtoj 04, the last phase of its use was not provided.

A primary grave was identified in four tumuli. Two were inhumations (Shtoj 04; Urakë 02), Myç-Has 06 had no remains, and Myç-Has 01 was an invisible burial. Three tumuli did not have a primary grave, including Shtoj 08 (ritual-only). The information about the presence of a primary grave has not been provided for three tumuli.

Muranë was identified in two Middle Iron Age tumuli. The muranë in Urakë 02 covered a primary grave inhumation, and the information about the existence of a primary grave was not provided for Rrethe-Bazje 02. The measurements of muranë were not provided.

A ringstone was constructed in three tumuli within the Shtoj area (Shtoj 03, 04, 08). The ringstones were relatively small and had a diameter of 3.60 metres, 5.60 metres and 12.00 metres. The ringstone in Shtoj 03 circled a primary grave inhumation, Shtoj 04 had no primary grave, and Shtoj 08 was ritual-only. A cupola was identified only in Shtoj 4, and a dromos was recorded in Shtoj 03 and 04. The Middle Iron Age tumuli contained a small number of graves, between 1 and 17. A total of 190 graves were constructed in Middle Iron Age.

4.4.4.3   Late Iron Age tumuli

Seventeen tumulus cemeteries were newly constructed during the Late Iron Age (Burrel 05; Fushë-Sanxhak 03, 04; Kënetë 02, 03, 06; Klos; Krumë 05; Kuç i Zi 02;

Mamëz; Myç-Has 02, 04, 05; Psar; Rrethe-Bazje 08, 09; Shtoj 05). They were located in 11 areas and were constructed alongside tumuli built from previous periods, or new areas were established. Nine tumuli were used solely in the Late Iron Age; six were reused after the Late Iron Age, and detailed information about the last stage of the two tumuli was not provided. Late Iron Age tumuli were dated between 600 and 450 BC. The height of the 17 Late Iron Age tumuli was 0.52 to2.30, with a diameter of 9.80 to 32.00 metres. Eight of the tumuli had a diameter of 20.00 to 24.00 metres, and one had a diameter of 32.00 metres.

The primary grave was identified in seven Late Iron Age tumuli: one was cremation (Mamëz); four were inhumations (Kënetë 02, 03; Krumë 04; Myç-Has 04); two primary graves had no remains (Myç-Has 02, 05). Information regarding the primary grave was not provided for five tumuli (Fushë-Sanzhak 03, 04; Psar; Rrethe-Bazje 08, 09). Whilst Shtoj 05 was ritual-only, four tumuli did not have a primary grave (Burrel 05; Kënetë 06; Klos; Kuç i Zi 02).

Muranë was identified in two Late Iron Age tumuli (Psar; Mamëz). These covered the primary grave cremation in Mamëz, whilst information about the primary grave in Psar was not provided. The measurements of these two muranë were not provided for either tumulus.

Two ringstones were constructed in the Late Iron Age: one was in Shtoj 05 (ritual-only), and Krumë 05 had a primary grave inhumation. They had diameters of 10.00 and 11.50 metres.

A cupola was identified in four tumuli. Three of them (Kënetë; Mamëz; Myç-Has 05)

were dated in the 6th – 5th century BC, and Krumë 05 was used until the 4th century BC. No dromos was identified in this period. Tumuli contained a small number of graves, between 0 to 24, totalling 178.

4.4.4.4   The IA-only tumuli architectural structure

The measurements of the 69 IA-only tumulus cemeteries varied from 6.00 to 34.00 metres in diameter (Table 4.6). Nine had a diameter of 6.00 to 10.00 metres; 37 were between 10.30 and 20.00 metres; 21 were between 21.00 and 34.00 metres; measurements were unavailable for two tumuli. Their height varied from 0.25 to 2.80 metres, whereas 31 tumuli had a height greater than 1.00 metres.

Six ritual-only tumuli were constructed during the IA-only in the Bujan (01, 02, 03, 05) and Shtoj (05, 08) areas. Shtoj 05 and 08 had ringstones with diameters of 3.60 and 10.00 metres, respectively. Three Bujan tumuli had a cupola, and no dromos was identified.

Architectural structure	IA-only
Tumuli	69
Areas	22
Height	0.25 – 2.80 metres
Diameter	6.00 – 34.00 metres
Primary grave total	31
Primary grave – cremation	7
Primary grave – inhumation	13
Primary grave – no remains	6
Primary grave – invisible burial	5
Primary grave – not provided	19
No primary grave	19
Muranë	14
Ringstone	11
Cupola	18
Dromos	4
Number of graves	797

Table 4.6   Iron Age-only tumuli architectural structures

Muranë was constructed in 14 tumuli (Bodrishtë 02; Bujan 01; Burrel 01, 02, 06; Fushë-Sanzhak 01, 05; Krumë 06, Mamëz; Psar; Rrethe-Bazje 02, 06; Urakë 02; Çepunë). Whilst muranë has been associated with primary graves, one tumulus with muranë (Bodrishtë 02) did not contain any primary grave, and Bujan 01 was a ritual-only with no graves. Burrel 06 had no remains, and the information about a primary grave was not provided for Psar. Only eleven tumuli with a muranë covered a primary

grave, three were inhumation, three were cremations, four had an invisible burial, and an additional primary grave covered with muranë did not contain any human remains.

Ringstones were constructed in 11 IA-only tumuli (Barç 02; Kakavijë; Kënetë 01; Krumë 05; Rrethe-Bazje 04, Shtoj 03, 04, 05, 08; Vajzë 03, 04). Barç 02 had two ringstones, therefore, resulting in a total of 12 ringstones being constructed during this phase. Five tumuli with ringstones had a primary grave inhumation; four tumuli, including two ritual-only, did not have a primary grave; information about the primary grave was not provided for the remaining two tumuli. No ringstones were found in tumuli with primary grave cremation. Ringstone measurements varied from 3.60 to 17.50 metres.

A cupola was identified in 18 tumuli (Bujan 02, 03, 05, 06; Kënetë 02; Krumë 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08; Mamëz; Myç-Has 05; Pazhok 07; Shtoj 04, Shuec). They were located in eight areas. In the Krumë area, for example, all eight tumuli had a cupola. A dromos had survived in four IA-only tumuli located in three areas (Burrel 07; Shtoj 03, 04; Shuec). Burrel 07 contained invisible burials.

The 69 IA-only tumuli had a small number of graves: 48 tumuli had between 0 and 10 graves; 17 had between 11 and 26; four tumuli had more than 62 graves. A total of 797 graves were constructed during the IA-only.

4.5　The architectural changes of tumuli over four phases

The main architectural structures of tumuli cemeteries have been utilised within this research as key indicators in examining, understanding and analysing the architectural structure of tumuli within each of the four phases of construction (Table 4.7). To help understand how the architectural structure changed over time, in this section, I will present, compare and analyse the development of individual architectural structures across the four phases. A summary of the ritual-only tumuli will enhance the understanding of tumuli construction.

Architectural structure	Total	BA-only	BI-C	BI-R	IA-only
Tumuli	123	23	20	11	69
Areas	36*	5	17	6	22
Height	0.30-5.60m	0.30-4.00m	0.55-5.60m	0.45-3.00m	0.25-2.80m
Diameter	6.00-50.00m	5.65-32.00m	9.80-50.00m	10.00-30.00m	6.00-34.00m
PG** total	69	18	13	7	31
PG – cremation	22	10	4	1	7
PG – inhumation	31	6	7	5	13
PG – no remains	7	0	1	0	6
PG – invisible burial	9	2	1	1	5
PG – not provided	22	1	2	0	19
No primary grave	32	4	5	4	19
Muranë	40	11	10	5	14
Ringstone	32	4	10	7	11
Cupola	37	9	5	5	18
Dromos	12	5	0	3	4
Number of graves	2,197	44	1,218	138	797

Table 4.7 Architectural structures by phase of construction

* There are a total of 36 tumuli areas. Within the same area, several tumuli were dated in different phases of construction, resulting in an overlap of tumuli areas; ** PG = primary grave.

4.5.1   Tumuli measurements

The measurements of the 123 tumulus cemeteries varied from 5.65 to 50.00 metres in diameter, with a height of 0.25 to 5.60 metres (Figures 4.16 and 4.17). The 23 BI-only tumuli had diameters ranging from 5.65 to 32.00 metres. Three tumuli (13.0%) had a diameter smaller than 10 metres, and six (26.1%) tumuli had a diameter greater than 20.00 metres. The 20 BI-C tumuli had a diameter of between 9.80 and 50.00 metres. One tumulus (5.0%) had a diameter smaller than 10.00 metres, and 14 (70.0%) had a diameter of 20.00 metres or more. The diameter of the 11 BI-R tumuli varied between 10.00 and 30.00 metres. No tumuli had a diameter under 10.00 metres, and four (36.4%) had a diameter of more than 20.00 metres. Due to their prolonged use, the BI-C tumuli tended to have larger diameters. The 69 IA-only tumuli had a variety of measurements: nine (13.0%) tumuli had a diameter smaller than 10.00 metres, and 28 (40.6%) had a diameter greater than 20.00 metres.

The height and diameter of the 123 tumulus cemeteries shared similarities and differences across the four chronological phases. It is not possible to identify a distinct measurement across four phases or within the same phase. BA-only, BI-R and IA-only tumuli showed a broad similarity. BI-C tumuli tended to be larger, likely reflecting their larger number of graves and longevity. Within the *Iliria* Journal and monographs, there is a notable absence of data or analysis that interprets the factors influencing the size of the tumuli. In Chapter 7, I will explore how the criteria used by tumuli builders for their measurements were significantly shaped by the Winter solstice, the Equinox, and celestial alignments, which were integral to the sun cult and the broader ideological framework surrounding the tumuli. Additionally, I will examine how the size and measurements of the tumuli represented an effort by the builders to create and integrate a ritual and sacred landscape.
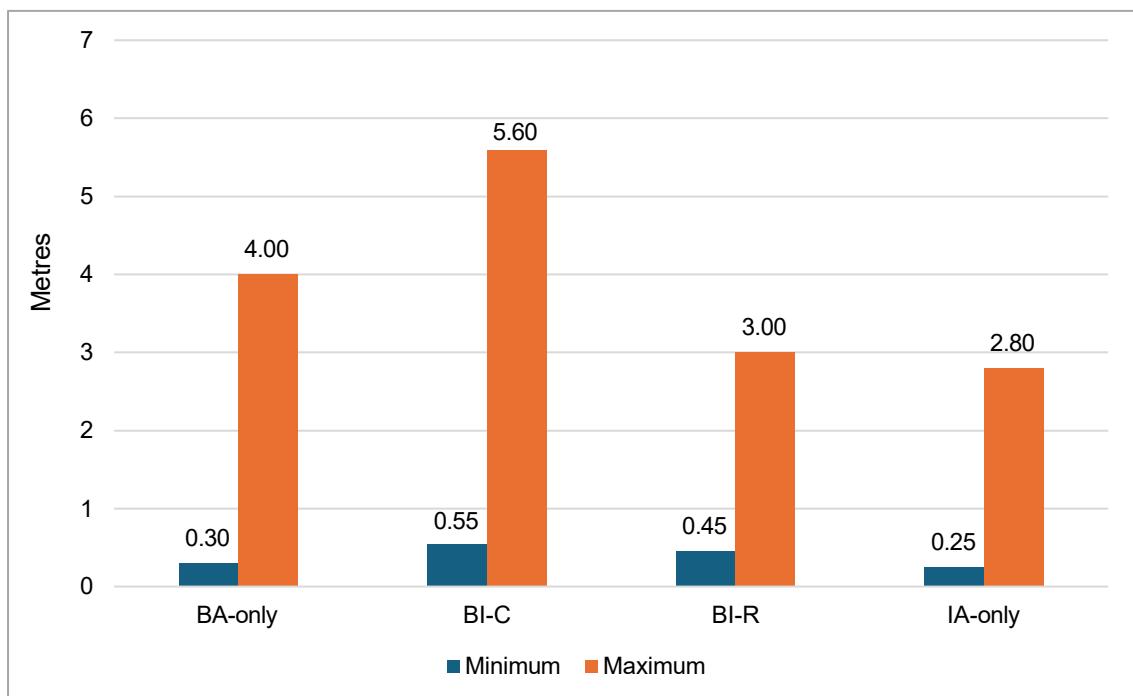
Figure 4.16   Tumuli height by phase of construction
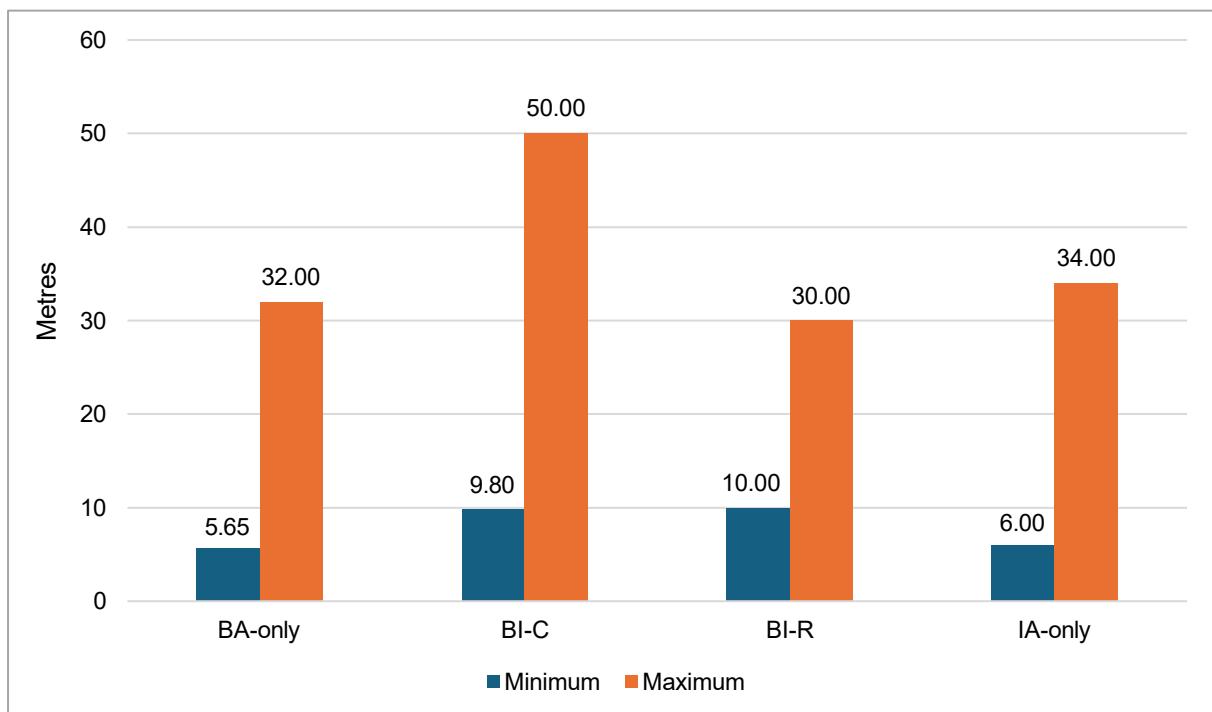
Figure 4.17   Diameter of tumuli by phase of construction

4.5.2   Primary grave

The primary grave was identified in 69 of the 123 tumulus cemeteries (56.1%). The primary grave was constructed in 18 of the 23 BA-only tumuli (78.3%) (Figure 4.18). In ten primary graves (43.5%), cremations were performed outside and scattered on the tumulus with no grave structures. Six primary graves (26.1%) were inhumations with various grave structures. Two BA-only primary graves (8.7%) were invisible burials.

Regarding the 69 IA-only tumuli, 31 had a primary grave (44.9%). Cremation was practised in seven primary graves (10.1%), and inhumation, with various grave structures, was practised in 13 (18.8%). Eleven primary graves (15.9%) had no human remains (six had no remains, and five were invisible burials). No primary grave was identified in 19 tumuli (27.5%), and no information was provided for the remaining 19 (27.5%).

BA-only (78.3%), BI-C (65.0%) and BI-R (63.6%) tumuli had a higher proportion of primary graves compared to IA-only (44.9%). BA-only had the highest proportion of cremation (43.5%), BI-R had the highest proportion of inhumation (45.5%), and IA-only had the highest proportion of no remains and invisible burial (15.9%). Due to the intricate relationship between primary graves with no remains and invisible burials, they are presented together in Figure 4.18. A summary of invisible burial by phase of construction is presented in Table 4.8.
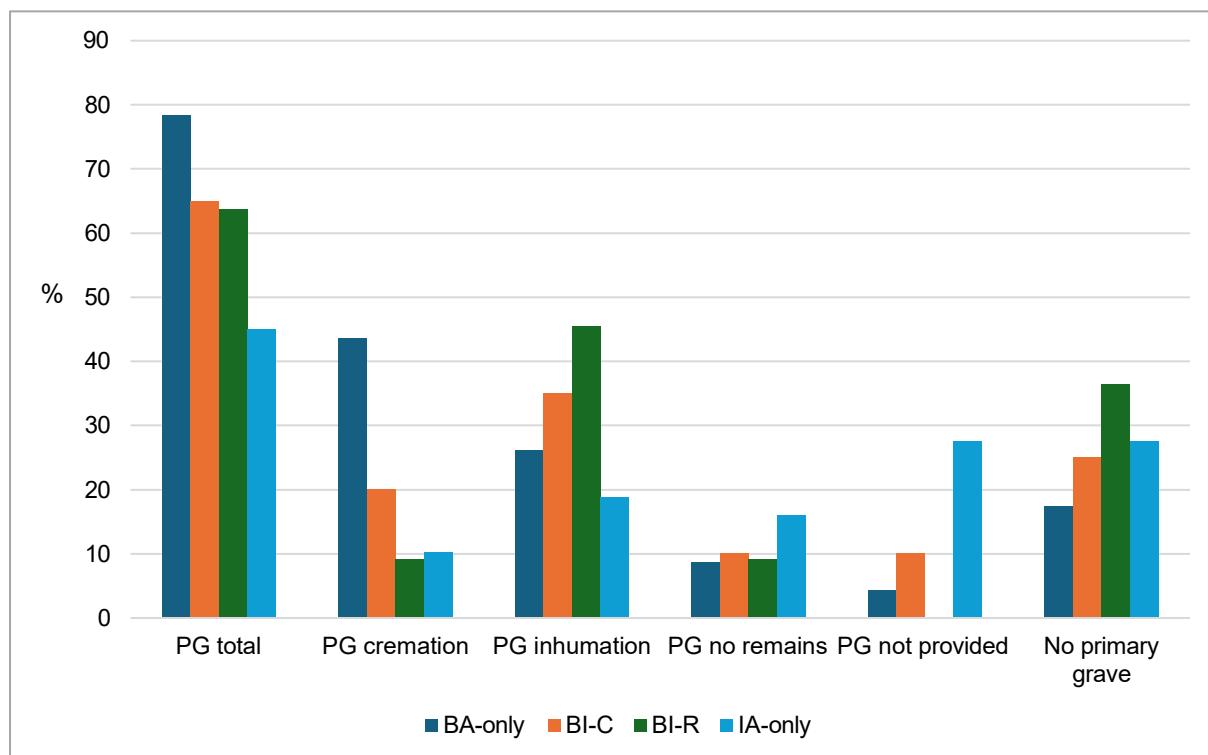
Figure 4.18   Proportion of primary graves by phase of construction

Phase	BA-only	BI-C	BI-R	IA-only	Total
Number of tumuli	3	2	1	22	28
Ringstone	1	0	0	1	2
Muranë	2	0	1	4	7
Cupola	0	0	1	0	1
Dromos	0	0	1	1	2
No PG	0	1	0	3	4
Primary grave not provided	1	0	0	14	15
Primary grave	2	1	1	5	8

Table 4.8   Summary of invisible burial tumuli

4.5.3   Muranë

A muranë was constructed in 40 tumuli (32.5%), dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age; 11 in BA-only tumuli; 10 in BI-C; 5 in BI-R; 14 in the IA-only. During the BA (BA-only, BI-C, BI-R), 26 tumuli contained a muranë, compared to 14 in the Iron Age. The proportion of tumuli with a muranë was similar in BA-only (47.8%), BI-C (50.0%) and BI-R (45.5%) (Figure 4.19). There was a reduction in muranë construction in the IA-only (20.3%). The shift in muranë could reflect the proportion of primary graves across the four phases.
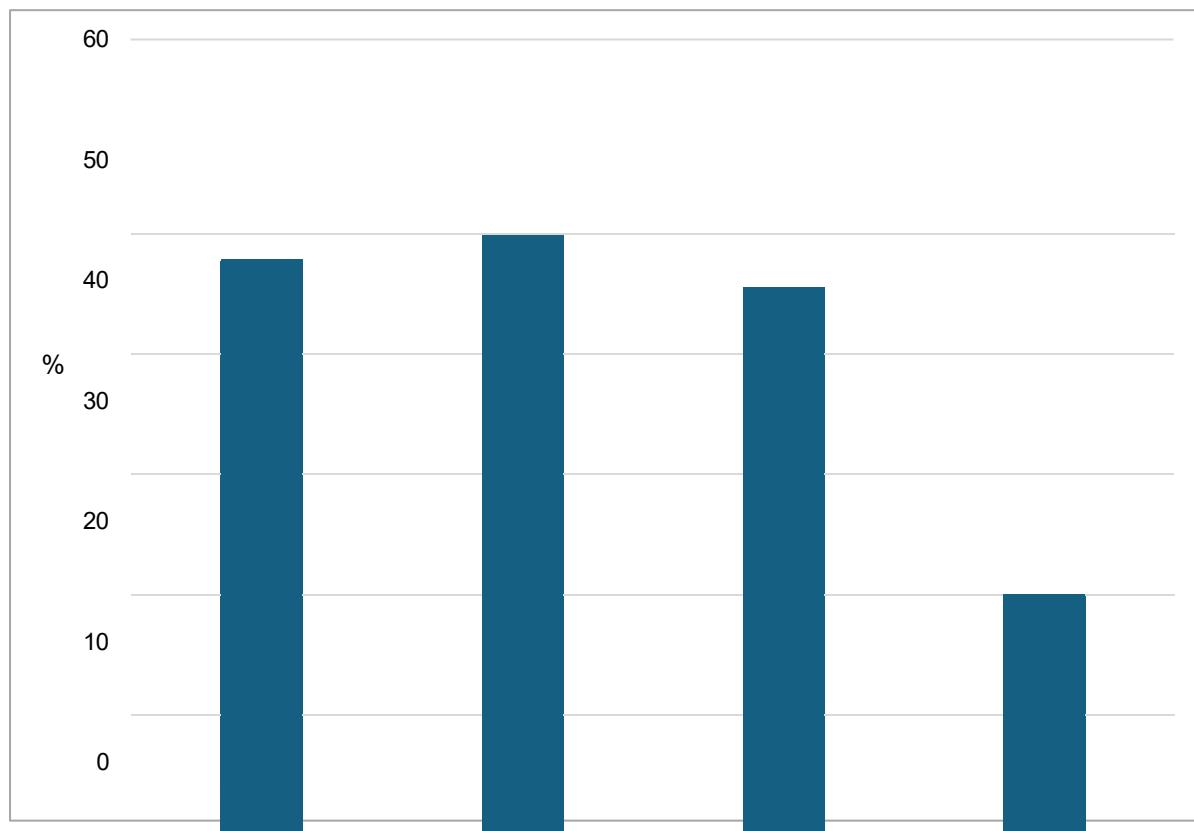
Figure 4.19   Proportion of muranë by phase of construction

4.5.4   Ringstone

Ringstones were constructed in 32 tumulus cemeteries (26.0%) dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age; 4 in BA-only tumuli, 10 in BI-C, 7 in BI-R, and 11 in IA-only. The four BA-only ringstones had a diameter of between 7.30 and 22.00 metres; the diameter of the ten BI-C ringstones varied between 10.00 and 30.00 metres; the seven BI-R ringstones had diameters of between 10.00 to 19.00 metres. The ringstones in the IA-only tumuli tended to be smaller, with diameters between 3.50 and 17.00 metres.

BA-only and IA-only tumuli had similar proportions of ringstones (17.4% compared with 15.9%) (Figure 4.20). However, BI-C (50.0%) and BI-R (63.6%) tumuli had a higher proportion of ringstones, and although the data do not clearly explain this, four tumuli from these two phases contained double and triple ringstones added during Iron Age.
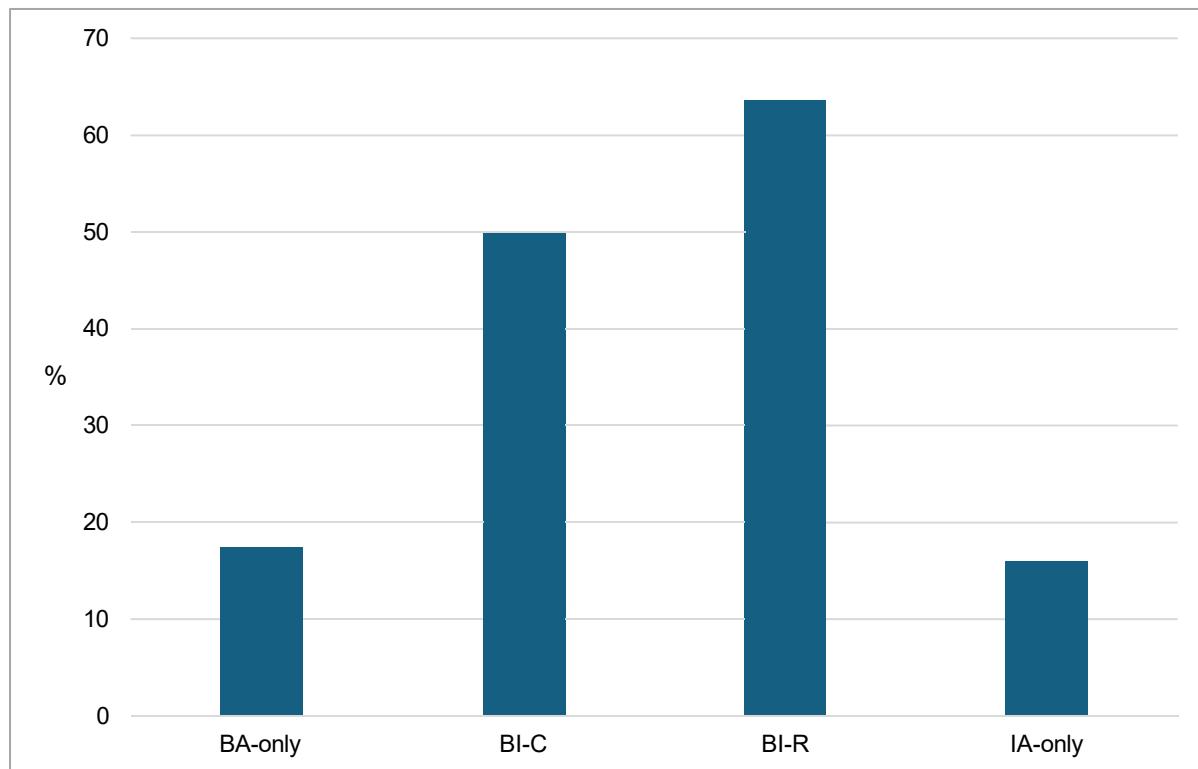
Figure 4.20   Proportion of ringstones by phase of construction

4.5.5   Cupola

A cupola was identified in 37 tumulus cemetries (30.1%). Nine were constructed in BI-only, five in BI-C, five in BI-R, and 18 in IA-only. The proportion of tumuli with a cupola varied across the four construction phases, with 39.1% in BA-only, 25.0% in BI-C, 45.5% in BI-R and 26.1% in IA-only (Figure 4.21).
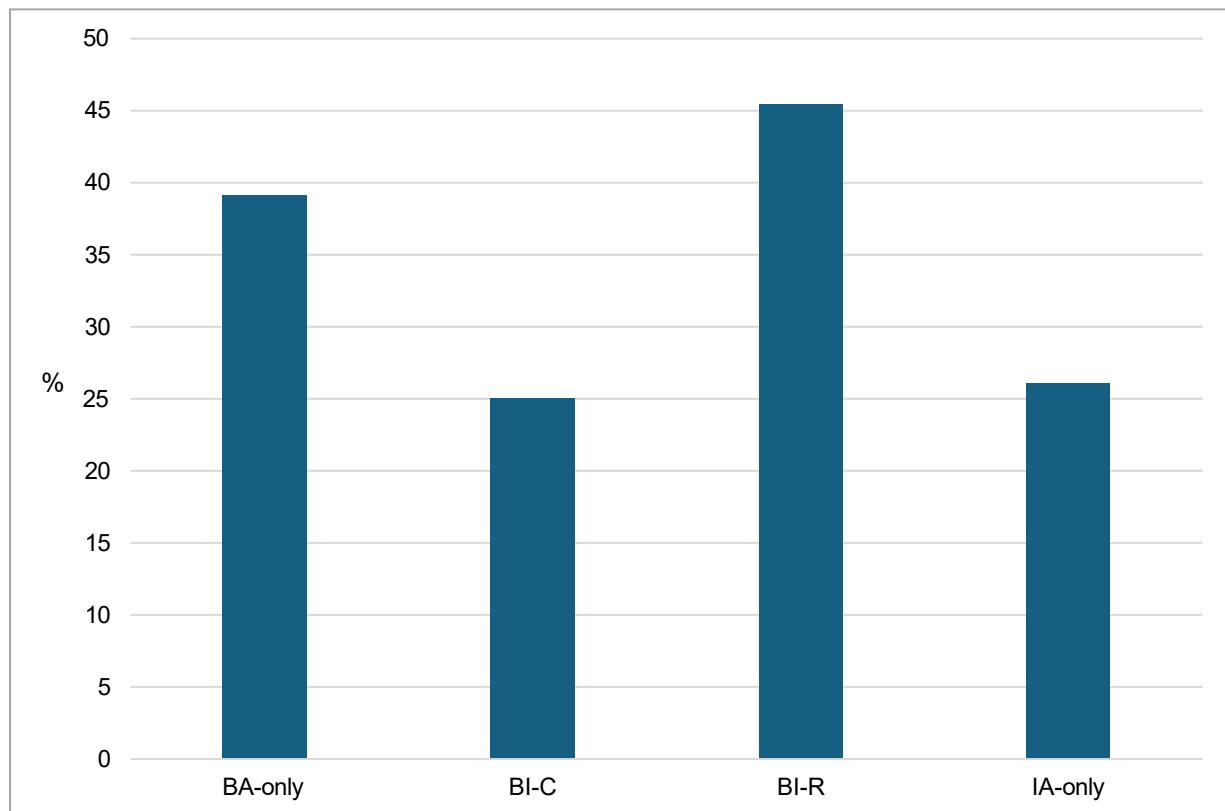
Figure 4.21   Proportion of cupola by phase of construction

4.5.6   Dromos

A dromos was identified in 12 tumulus cemeteries (9.8%). Five tumuli with a dromos were constructed in BA-only; no dromos was identified in BI-C tumuli; three tumuli with a dromos were dated in BI-R; and four were in the IA- only. The five BA-only tumuli with a dromos were dated in the Early Bronze Age, whilst the three BI- R tumuli were reused in the Iron Age, during which the dromos was constructed. It is unclear whether the dromos was built during the first phase of BI-C and BI-R tumuli construction. The four IA-only tumuli with a dromos were used until the end of and after the Late Iron Age. The proportion of tumuli with a cupola varied from 21.7% in BA-only; 0.0% in BI-C; 27.3% in BI-R; 5.8% in IA-only (Figure 4.22).
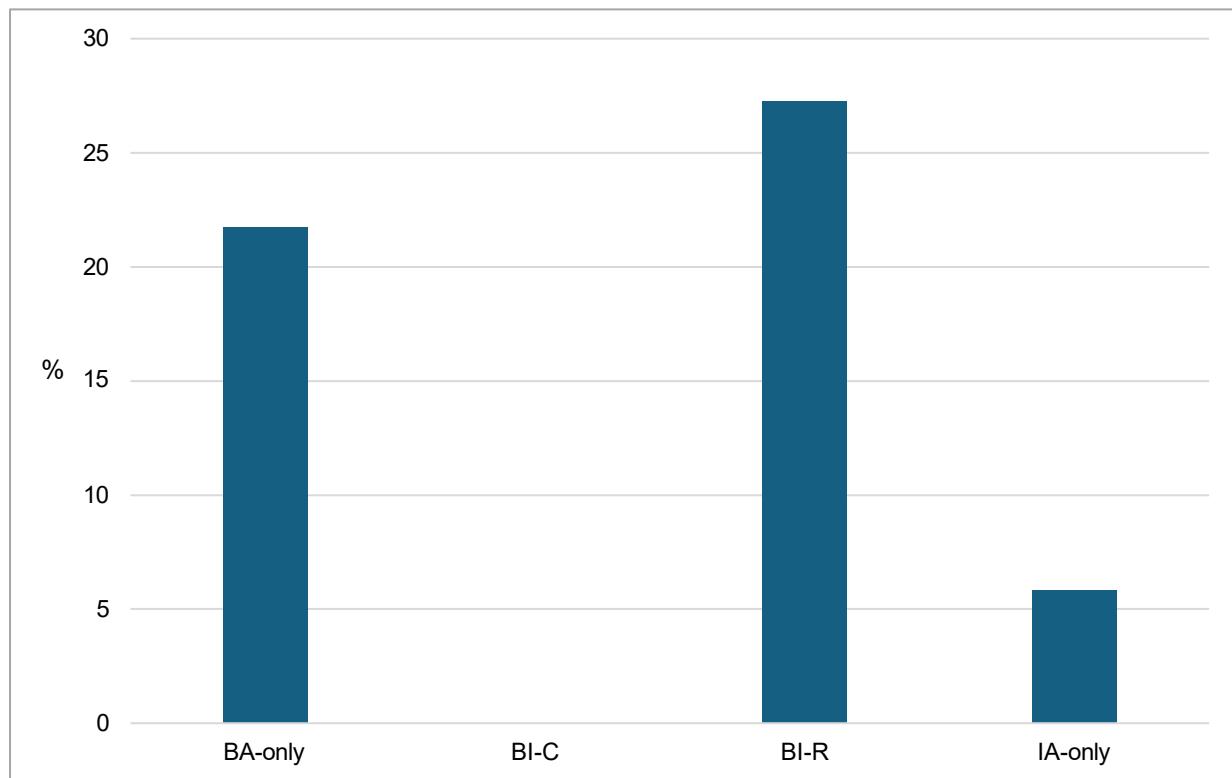
Figure 4.22   Proportion of dromos by phase of construction

4.5.7   Number of graves

The 23 BA-only tumulus cemeteries contained 44 graves; 19 tumuli had between 1 and 17 graves, where three tumuli had invisible burials, and four were ritual-only. Due to their longevity, the number of graves in the 20 BI-C tumulus cemeteries increased over time and varied from 4 to 203, totalling 1,218 graves. The 11 BI-R tumulus cemeteries contained between 3 and 30 graves, totalling 138. The 69 IA-only tumulus cemeteries had between 2 and 80, although one tumulus contained 126 graves; in five tumuli, while there were graves, they were invisible burials. A total of 797 graves were constructed during IA-only. The 123 tumulus cemeteries contained between 0 and 203 graves, totalling 2,197; however, 202 graves were invisible burials (Figure 4.23).
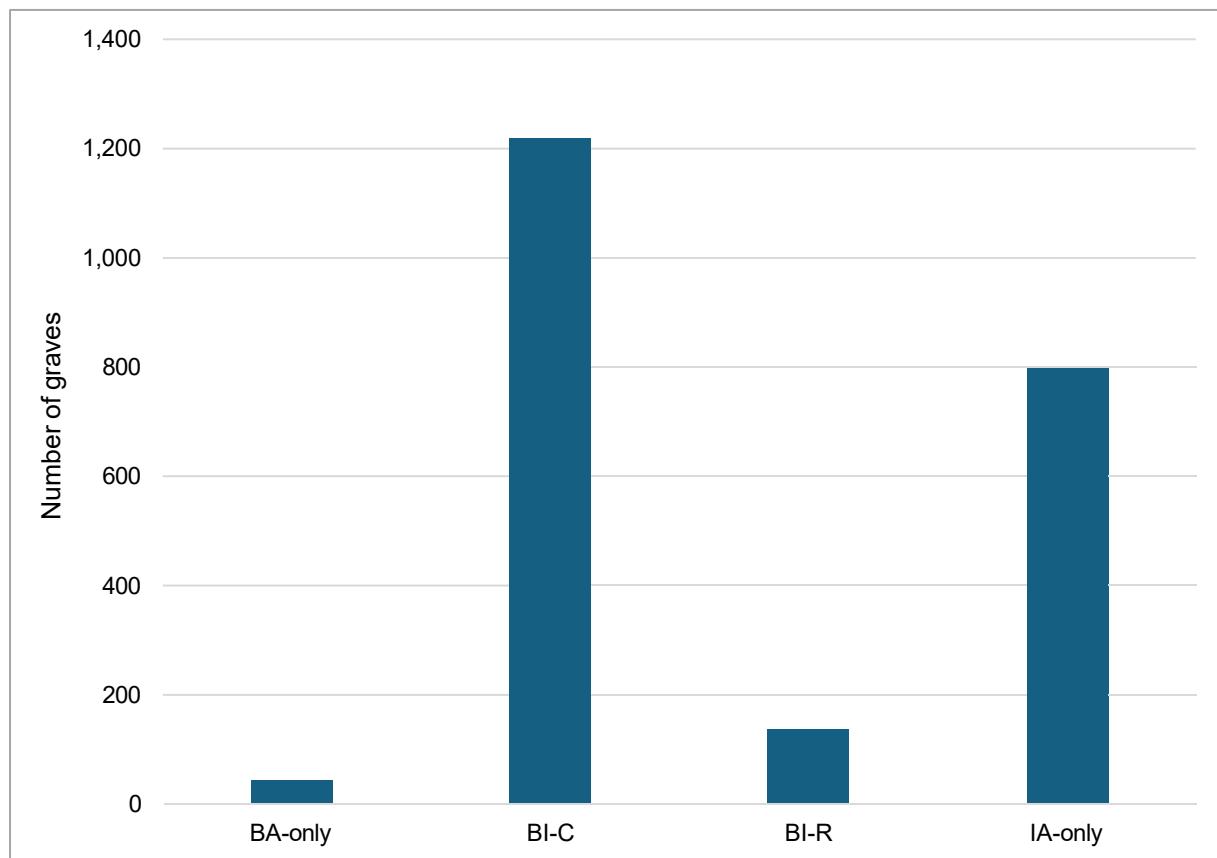
Figure 4.23   Number of graves by phase of construction

4.5.8   Ritual-only tumuli

Twelve ritual-only tumuli (9.8% of the 123) were designed and constructed between the Early Bronze Age and Late Iron Age (Table 4.9). They were located in two areas: Bujan (01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09) and Shtoj (05, 07, 08, 11). Shtoj 07 and 11 were initially constructed as ritual-only in the Early Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age, and additional graves and architectural structures were added in the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age. The remaining ten tumuli, which had no graves, were likely to have been constructed and used for only a short period. Six tumuli were built during the Bronze Age and six in the Iron Age.

There were four ritual-only tumuli in BA-only, none in BI-C, two in BI-R and six in IA-only. Two ringstones were constructed in BI-R and two in IA-only. BI-R tumuli tended to have more extensive measurements. Whilst the ritual-only tumuli had no primary grave, one BI-R and one IA-only tumulus had a muranë. A cupola was identified in four BA-only, one BI-R and three IA-only, whilst one BA-only and one BI-R tumulus had a dromos. Two BI-R tumuli, Shtoj 07 and 11, were initially designed and constructed as ritual-only in the Early Bronze Age and Late Iron Age. Secondary graves and architectural structures were added during the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age, altering their ritual-only architectural structures whilst transforming their purpose and meaning to burial tumuli in the Iron Age.

Phase	Areas	Number of tumuli	Height	Diameter	Ringstone	Muranë	Cupola	Dromos
BA-only	1	4	0.60-0.90m	11.20-14.14m	0	0	4	1
BI-C	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0
BI-R	1	2	1.57-2.19m	17.00-24.00m	2	1	1	1
IA-only	2	6	0.70-1.46m	11.00-16.00m	2	1	3	0

Table 4.9   Architectural structures of ritual-only tumuli by phase of construction

4.6 Practices involved in protecting tumulus cemeteries

Within *Iliria* Journal and monographs, the practices involved in protecting and preserving tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments of the landscape have seldom been considered. I have been unable to find any direct information detailing the methods involved in preserving the architectural features of a tumulus, particularly concerning its form as an artificial hill, as well as its internal architectural elements, including the primary grave, muranë and ringstone, along with external features such as the cupola and dromos. The data reviewed does not reveal any external elements – whether perishable or imperishable – that might have been incorporated into the protective designs established by the builders of these tumuli. It is noteworthy that the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this study were excavated during the communist era, a time when scientific research, including soil analysis, was minimal and many excavations were conducted as rescue archaeology (Chapter 2). I have identified only two indirect sources of information that may provide insight into the practices involved in protecting tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments.

The first one is the use of wattle-and-daub. The study of soil composition from the Lofkënd tumulus provided evidence that the use of wattle-and-daub was one of the main preservation features of the tumulus. The multidisciplinary research conducted in Lofkënd in 2006 proved that 'fine-textured sediment obtained off-site was added periodically during the Iron Age to help prevent erosion of the tumulus' (Papadopoulos, Bejko and Morris, 2008; 692). Whilst the Lofkënd tumulus is not included in this research, it illustrates the wealth of data that could have been missed during the communist period, when soil composition analysis was seldom undertaken (Chapter 2). Papadopoulos et al. (2014) recount a discussion between Professor Papadopoulos and Professor Korkuti, who excavated the Patos tumulus in 1979.

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Korkuti acknowledged the presence of wattle-and-daub but deemed it insignificant enough not to document or include in the Patos publication. This raises the possibility that many other perishable materials may have similarly gone unpreserved, unrecognised, unrecorded or unreported in the *Iliria* Journal and the nine monographs.

The second material is the use of sand within graves and the construction of tumuli. Koka (2012) and Bodinaku (2018) propose that the sand found within grave structures may have been deliberately included to aid in the preservation of both human remains and the architectural structure of the grave. Koka (2012) details how the base of the primary grave at Shtoj 06 was laid with sand, which contributed to the preservation of the skeleton. Furthermore, Koka compared the state of preservation in graves with sand to those without it. Similarly, Bodinaku (2018) argues that sand functioned as a protective measure for human remains in Pazhok 04. He also attributes ritual significance to the use of sand within the tumulus at Pazhok 04. I have also noted the prominent use of sand as a primary material in the construction of tumuli in Bujan 07 (ritual-only), Patos, and Kuç i Zi 01, which are situated significantly far from the nearest river or sea. This is particularly evident in Kuç i Zi 01 (Andrea, 1976a; 1985a), where the ground preparation for the tumulus involved levelling the tumulus' ground and filling it with sand during the construction phase; the second phase incorporated soil, while the final phase was capped with soil and stones. Moreover, the construction of many tumulus cemeteries, often using river pebble stones, suggests that sand was frequently combined with these materials, as observed in the Shtoj area. I propose that sand may have held both ritual significance and served as one of the many options for constructing tumuli, likely used to enhance and protect the structural composition of tumulus cemeteries. However, further research is necessary to explore these issues in greater depth.

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that the architectural structure, shape and size of tumulus cemeteries were not always static; rather, they were often subject to change, evolution and reshaping. Furthermore, considering the absence of a visible protection system, and the results from Chapters 5 and 6, alongside the discussion in Chapter 7, I propose that the absence of such a protective and preserving system was a deliberate choice made by tumuli builders. This choice appears to have been aimed at creating and crafting a funerary and ritual landscape – both on a micro and macro level – that not only imitated but also defined the living environment, thereby exerting control over the natural and supernatural landscape as well as life and death (Chapter 7).

4.7   Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter underscore the significant role of tumulus cemeteries as distinctive geomorphological monuments. A thorough analysis of the eight phases of tumuli construction, their geographical distribution, and an in-depth examination of the tumuli and their key architectural features across four chronological phases reveal the intricacies and complexities inherent in their design. This analysis demonstrates that tumuli served purposes extending beyond merely functioning as burial sites or managing the aftermath of biological death. The elaborate external architectural structures – characterised by factors such as size, dimensions, and shape – combined with internal elements like the primary grave, muranë, ringstone, cupola, and dromos indicate that tumuli were purposefully designed and constructed as prominent, tangible funerary monuments within the landscape. They were perceived, treated, and built as unique architectural funerary landmarks.

As sophisticated funerary monuments, tumuli exhibit diameters ranging from 6 to 50 metres and can reach heights of up to 5 metres. Their construction necessitates substantial quantities of building materials, including soil, stone and slabs. This task becomes particularly challenging when sourcing large amounts of material, such as soil from the settlement, from considerable distances. Additionally, the creation of these architectural structures involves careful design, planning, craftsmanship and material procurement. A detailed examination of the architectural characteristics of tumuli across four chronological phases highlights their significance as monumental cemeteries and underscores the relationship between the tumuli and their builders. The ritualistic significance of these structures further enhances this symbiotic connection.

Tumulus cemeteries were the exclusive form of burial for over two thousand years (2500 – 450 BC). This research examined 123 tumuli distributed across 36 regions that encompass the entirety of modern Albania. The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the architectural structure of tumulus cemeteries was both complex and sophisticated. While there is a general adherence to a standard design across many tumuli, the variations in architectural structures, sizes and measurements highlight a rich diversity in their combinations. It is reasonable to propose that, over the course of these two millennia, from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age, the builders of tumuli did not consistently adhere to strict design, construction methodologies or material choices. This diversity is evident both within each of the four chronological phases and among tumulus cemeteries situated within the same geographical area. Noteworthy patterns and trends, particularly regarding BI-C tumuli, emerged, as these structures tended to be larger and housed a greater number of

graves. Moreover, the dimensions of these tumuli seem to have been intentionally enlarged to signify their enduring significance. This interplay between similarities and differences likely reflects the local, regional, cultural and ritual variances among the builders of tumuli.

Tumuli construction and their existence as architectural entities were deeply intertwined with their ritual purposes. The process of building these structures – from ground preparation to the construction of the dromos – was imbued with ritual significance and fulfilled specific ceremonial functions. More importantly, this chapter illustrates the deliberate efforts of the surviving communities to create a monument that not only addressed the death of an individual but also engaged with broader concepts of mortality. This is primarily demonstrated by the relationship between the burial rites, number of graves and grave structures and their distribution across the four chronological phases. The twelve ritual-only tumuli, along with their architectural features, further underscore the complexity of these structures and their significance as funerary monuments. Thus, the function of tumuli as monuments in the landscape does not contradict their role as funerary and ritual sites. On the contrary, this emphasises their intricate and multifaceted meanings, which varied across different regions and historical contexts.

Additionally, the findings of this chapter demonstrate that tumulus cemeteries were dedicated to one or multiple individuals. Their construction and lifespan were not a linear pathway that followed distinctive phases and architectural construction. In the case of multiple grave tumuli, and based on their chronology, it is feasible to suggest that they were constructions that were shaped and reshaped at various times, often across a long period of time. This was particularly evident in, but not limited to, the BI-

R and BI-C and often involved adding additional features such as a second or a third ringstone or sealing the tumulus with a dromos. This would have involved different communities constructing and reshaping the size and measurements of tumuli and, subsequently, their architectural features. It is important, therefore, to consider their architectural structures and meaning as living monuments going through a metamorphism of evolving, changing or remaining static whilst influencing and being influenced by the tumuli builders and many other factors described in the following two chapters (5 and 6).

Chapter 5   The rise and proliferation of tumuli

5.1   Introduction

The third millennium BC in Europe can be characterised as a 'chessboard of archaeological entities representing diverse cultural traditions. On one side, various regional cultural groups exist; on the other, expansive, superregional cultural phenomena' (Heyd, 2013; 47). According to Furholt (2019; 2021), the proliferation of tumuli practices may have been fostered by regional and inter-regional mobility and social transformation. Furholt contends that the practice of tumuli should not be viewed as a singular archaeological culture but rather as a collection of burial practices and funerary ideologies shared among multiple communities during this period. Furthermore, social elites and various other groups likely played a role in the rise and proliferation of tumuli, thereby highlighting their significance within their local communities (Nykamp *et al.,* 2022).

Throughout Europe, various regional communities adopted tumuli practices during the third millennium BC, integrating this novel form of burial into their traditional rituals and material culture. This adaptation continued to evolve over an extended period (Preda-Bălănică and Diekmann, 2023). A notable interpretation of tumuli, which shares architectural and funerary features with those found in Albania, suggests that their emergence was influenced by the Kurgan migrations, which introduced steppe-derived burial customs acrossf Europe (Ahola, 2020).

Tumulus cemeteries first emerged in Albania during the third millennium BC, and their introduction is recognised as having been significantly influenced by Kurgan migration (Bodinaku, 2018). Concurrently, the proliferation of these structures is frequently

associated with the rise and consolidation of Illyrian ethnogenesis. The pursuit of demonstrating the development and affirmation of Illyrian ethnogenesis has driven excavation, research and publication efforts related to tumulus cemeteries Chapter 1). As a result, insights gained from the architectural features of tumuli, burial practices and material culture have primarily been utilised to support or contest the notion of migration and reinforce the idea of ethnic continuity dating back to the Neolithic period. The ongoing tension between migration and ethnogenesis has primarily shaped the interpretation of tumuli (Chapter 2). Albanian scholars, such as Andrea (1985b), Prendi (2008), and Bunguri (2015), have expanded this interpretation by examining additional factors contributing to the emergence and expansion of tumuli. However, this information has often been fragmented, limited in scope and dispersed throughout the literature, frequently overlooked or embedded to support the narrative of Illyrian-Albanian ethnogenesis. In this research, I move beyond a strictly ethnic interpretation of tumuli, focusing on identifying, analysing and re-evaluating the various factors presented in *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs.

In this chapter, I will present the findings from the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs that contribute to the exploration of Research Question 2: What was behind the rise of tumulus cemeteries, and what led to their proliferation and continuation over two millennia? This chapter provides an overview of three main themes, supported by descriptive statistical analysis (Table 5.1). The findings on migration and absorption will be presented in Section 5.2, and the role of the landscape will be explored in Section 5.3. The findings from the social dynamics will be discussed in Section 5.4.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Migration and absorption	The role of the landscape	Social dynamics
Kurgan migration	Landscape features	Social context
Migration and integration	i) River location	i) Patriarchal society
i) Continuity from Neolithic to Bronze Age	ii) Hills and mountains	ii) Social elites
ii) Cetina culture	ii) Fields	iii) Army elites
iii) Regional and inter-regional connections	Imitating and defining the landscape	Networks and mobility
Socio-economic and ritual transformation	Funerary monuments of the landscape	i) Routes of trade and communication
		ii) Import, export and local productions

Table 5.1   Themes and sub-themes for the rise and proliferation of tumuli

5.2   Migration and absorption

The rise of tumuli in Europe has traditionally been and continues to be interpreted by international scholars through the lens of Kurgan migrations (Haak *et al.,* 2015). Within Albania, the origins and proliferation of tumulus practices were considered essential in supporting the emergence and establishment of the ethnogenesis of Illyrians, and therefore, were central to the study of tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 2). For the first time, this theme will explore findings that illustrate the multifaceted interpretations of the factors contributing to the rise and proliferation of tumuli in Albania.

This theme will explore the role of Kurgan migration (Section 5.2.1) alongside the results from the sub-themes of the migration and integration, including continuity from Neolithic to Bronze Age, Cetina Culture, and Regional and Inter-regional connection (Section 5.2.2-5.2.5). It will conclude by considering the socio-economic and ritual transformations that contributed to embracing and absorbing tumuli practices and ideology (Section 5.2.6).

5.2.1 Kurgan migration

The Kurgan hypothesis was first introduced by Marija Gimbutas in 1956 and has become the most recognised interpretation of the origin and reason behind the rise of tumuli cemeteries. Due to this connection, tumuli are often called *kurgan* (Marler, 2006; Haarmann, 2021). According to this hypothesis, the Kurgans originated from the South Russian Steppes and migrated to most Central and Eastern Europe in three waves between the 7th – 3rd millennia BC. Kurgans were described as warrior groups that killed, exterminated and impacted the populations they occupied, transforming the civilisation of most of Europe. Scholars from Albania, such as Bunguri (2015) and Bodinaku (2018), argue that the emergence and spread of Indo-European and tumuli culture in many parts of Europe, especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans stemmed directly from these aggressive migrations from the Steppes. Similarly, international scholars continue to support the idea of migration, whilst providing alternative interpretations to the nature of the migrants (Anthony, 2020; Preda-Bălănică, 2021). Although the concept of aggressive or organised migration from the Steppes has faced criticism, it has gained popularity over the last two decades due to genetic analysis (Haak *et al.,* 2015; Horvath, 2019).

Within *Iliria* Journal and monographs, the rise of tumulus cemeteries in Albania has been interpreted as a result of the third wave of Kurgan migration from Southern Ukraine through the Danube and the Balkans around 2,500-2,000 BC (Hammond, 1976; Bodinaku, 2018). Hammond (1976), analysing the distribution of Early Bronze Age tumuli in Albania, described how Kurgan people infiltrated Albania from the north to the south by sea and land. However, the processes involved in the rise of tumuli and how the newcomers brutally forced their types of burial on local people in Albania have seldom been archaeologically explored, analysed or interpreted.

Kurgan tumuli, within the international research, are also recognised as 'Yamnaya Culture or Pit Grave Culture'. Their architectural structure was mainly a single primary grave in a rectangular pit dug into the ground before the construction of tumuli, and additional graves were added in the tumulus filling, often accompanied by a further tumulus heightening (Heyd, 2012; 535). Subsequently, the active role of Kurgan migration in instigating a new religious form of tumuli burial during the Early Bronze Age in Albania has been illustrated through the role of primary graves inhumation in simple pits, their artefacts and some aspects of architectural structures. In this research, across *Iliria* Journal and monographs, I have identified five tumuli where the primary grave, their artefacts and architectural structures are connected directly to Kurgan migrations. They are Barç 01 (BI-C), Dukat 02 (BI-C), Pazhok 01 (BA-only); Piskovë (BI-C), Shtoj 06 (BI-R), dated in Early Bronze Age (Figure 5.1). Bodinaku (2018) suggests that the primary grave in Cerujë displayed some Kurgan traditions but has not been interpreted as a direct result of Kurgan migrations. Primary graves in Pazhok 01 and Piskovë represented characteristic features of Kurgan pit graves dug into the ground of the tumulus. Pazhok 01 is the only known example of the ochre placed on the head of the individual within the primary grave, which is recognised as

one of the main distinctive features of Kurgan tumuli (Bodinaku, 2018). Likewise, the body position and animal offerings supported the Kurgan influence. The primary graves in Barç 01 and Dukat 02 also suggest the adaptation of Kurgan practices. Additionally, anthropological research on skeletons in Pazhok 01 suggests the individual was of a Steppe origin, whilst the individual in Dukat 02 had Indo-European genetics (Andrea, 1985a; Bela, 2012; Bunguri, 2015; Bodinaku, 2018). The ways in which Kurgan features were present within tumuli were not fully analysed or interpreted. The geographical location of these five tumuli in south and southeast Albania does not support Hamond's (1967) interpretation of Kurgan migration from the north. Shtoj 06 presents the influence of the Cetina culture.

Apart from the physical movement of people due to migration, alternative interpretations of how the Kurgan burials infiltrated and impacted the local population were seldom provided during the communist and post-communist periods. Bunguri (2015) is the only scholar who has challenged the traditional interpretation of Kurgans as aggressive colonisers who displaced and killed the local population. According to Bunguri, the limited evidence of Kurgan influence within tumuli contradicts the traditional migration interpretation. Bunguri suggests that the presence of Kurgan culture and the tumuli practice was brought to Albania through social networks and exchanging ideas and materials. This scholar offers an alternative peaceful Anatolian migration through personal contact between various groups, resulting in the ideological construct of tumuli being embraced by social elites.

Furthermore, one distinctive feature of the five tumuli associated with Kurgan migration is their reuse during a later stage of the Bronze Age, with Pazhok 01 being exclusively from this period. Barç 01, Dukat 02, and Piskovë are classified as belonging to the BI-

C phase, while Shtoj 06 is categorised as a BI-R tumulus. Secondary graves and architectural structures were regionally adapted and significantly modified across the four chronological phases while incorporating certain elements of Kurgan burial practices (Andrea, 1985a; Bodinaku, 1981; 1982; 1985; 2018). This variation contradicts the idea of a disrupted Kurgan population that rigidly adhered to a specific burial tradition. Currently, there is insufficient data to support the emergence of a new burial practice exclusively for brutal migrants who purportedly exterminated the local populace and imposed their burial customs (Figure 5.1). Additionally, recent findings from the PASH project reveal the presence of Kurgan aDNA in specific individuals. Bejko and Galaty (2023) argue that small-scale migration is linked to the exchange of ideas, and a significant degree of mobility occurred during the Early Bronze Age. They contend that the ideological dimension of death associated with tumuli was a key factor in their proliferation. Consequently, the term 'Kurgan influence' is utilised throughout this research. This study expands upon Ahola's (2020) interpretation, which posits that the ideological significance of tumuli and beliefs in the afterlife were fundamental drivers behind the rise and spread of these structures (Chapter 7).

This study expands upon Ahola's (2020) interpretation, which posits that the ideological significance of tumuli and beliefs in the afterlife were fundamental drivers behind the rise and spread of tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 7). My interpretation focuses on the sensorial and emotional experiences of the Kurgan form of burial influenced by their ritual ideological beliefs about life, death and afterlife. It is noteworthy that the five tumuli associated with Kurgan were complex funerary monuments. As detailed in Chapter 4, all five tumuli featured a ringstone, and with the exception of Dukat 01, the other four also included a muranë. Each of the primary graves involved inhumation, which likely indicates that the burials were conducted in a relatively short timeframe,

necessitating efficient organisational skills. The construction of architectural and ritual fire structures in Shtoj 06 would have required more than one individual to gather and transport the necessary building materials. The crafting and building of these architectural structures followed an architectural structure that was imbued with ritual and cult meaning (Chapter 7). This collaborative effort would have had a profound embodied and sensorial impact on the builders of the tumuli (Inomata, 2020). Similarly, the act of killing a bull and placing it inside Pazhok 01, or the offerings of animals and birds in Shtoj 01, would have drawn community members together to plan, organise and execute these funerary and ritual practices. In Chapter 7, I will explore the significance of the sensorial and emotional experiences of the mourners starting from the preparation of the body to the burial process.

The use of published data alone does not provide enough information to investigate the genetic origins of individuals buried in tumuli. Furthermore, the lack of a direct connection between these tumuli and surrounding settlements complicates our understanding of the communities that constructed them and engaged in associated funerary and ritual practices. However, based on the findings of this research, I would argue that the ideological framework of Kurgan tumulus cemeteries – with their emotive, sensory and mnemonic activities – played a significant role in the development of tumulus cemeteries within the modern borders of Albania. These practices would have left a lasting impression on mourners, tumuli builders and the local communities who participated, whether directly or indirectly. The distinctive size of these remarkable landscape monuments would have served as mounds of memory, shaping and transforming the surrounding environment. Additionally, they influenced how the inhabitants around the tumuli perceived and experienced the landscape, emphasising its sensory and emotional resonance (Chapter 7)
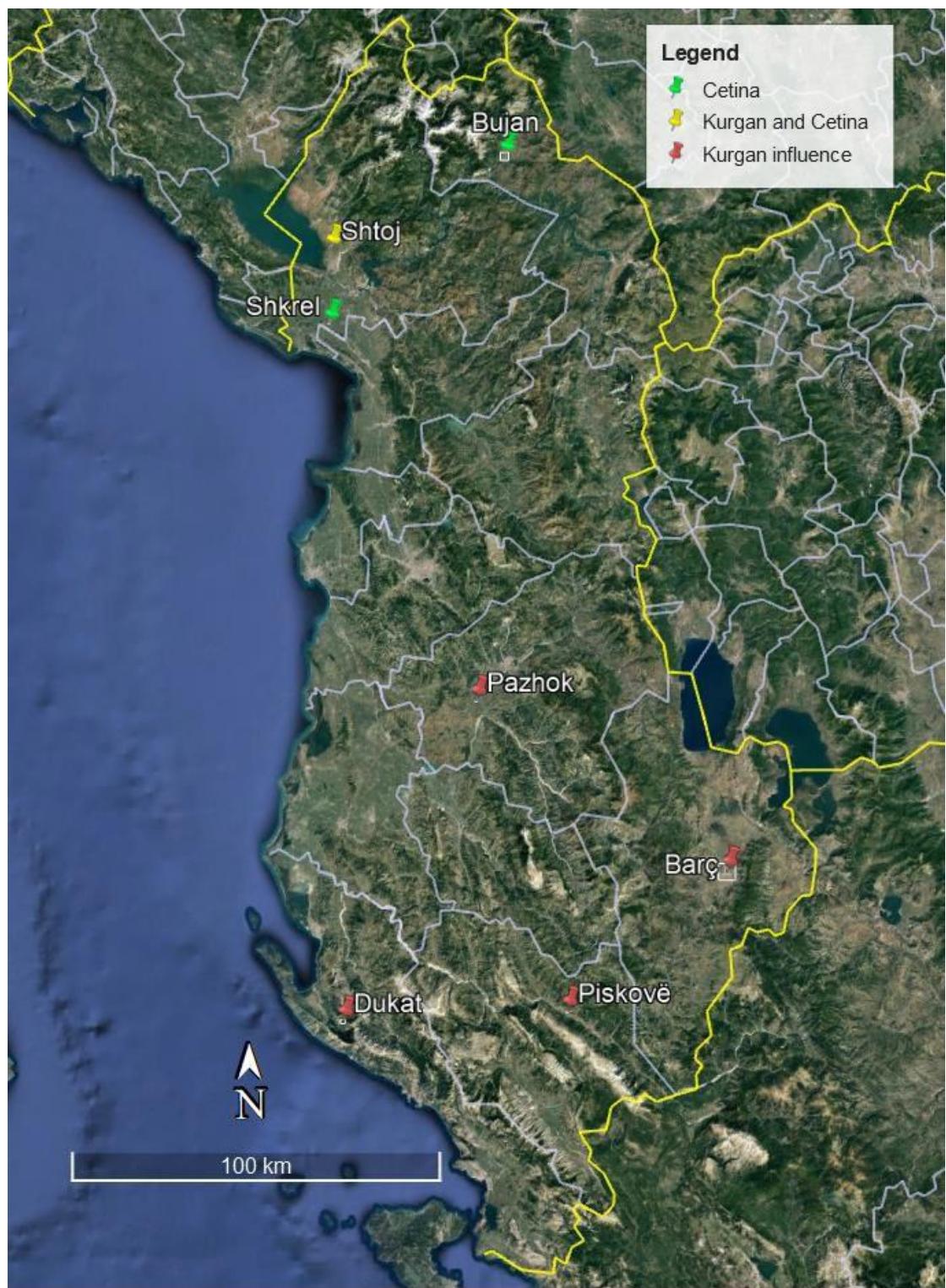
Figure 5.1   Kurgan and Cetina influence tumuli

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

5.2.2   Migration and integration

Whilst recognising Kurgan migrations, Albanian archaeologists proclaim that these migrations neither resulted in the displacement nor killing of local populations (Korkuti, 1989). However, they fail to provide evidence on how these migrations or absorptions occurred, and the origins of the Illyrian ethnic groups – along with how they emerged, evolved and spread throughout the region – are seldom presented with clarity and specificity. Although some additional information has been provided in the literature, it often remains fragmented and dispersed among various publications. I have identified and collected for the first time these additional factors, and I will illustrate how the new tumuli culture was shaped by a conglomerate of factors such as migrating groups integrating with local societies, interactions with Cetina culture, and additional regional and inter-regional influences prompted by internal socio-economic and ritual transformations (Jubani, 1995; Koka, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018).

5.2.3   Continuity from Neolithic to Bronze Age

Providing evidence for the continuity of material culture and burial rites from indigenous people of the Neolithic period to the Bronze Age was considered 'pivotal to the formation of the ethnogenesis of Illyrians'; its role remains 'unquestionable and unchallengeable' (Andrea, 1985a; 206). The integration of Kurgan migrators with indigenous people has been described as a long and gradual process. According to Bodinaku (2018), and supported by many other scholars, whilst local societies embraced the new form of tumuli burial, the local Neolithic tradition remained the dominating factor in the formation of tumuli culture in the Early Bronze Age. Therefore, the active role of Neolithic culture has been appraised as principal in shaping the ethnogenesis of Illyrians (Andrea, 1985a; Bodinaku, 1985; 2018).

The pottery found in the Neolithic site of the Maliq settlement, in particular, played a pivotal role in identifying, dating and interpreting this significance and continuity of Neolithic tradition (Andrea, 1985a; Prendi, 2008). However, a Neolithic practice in tumuli was identified only on a selected number of tumuli artefacts that shared some similarities with objects found in Neolithic sites located in the southeast of the country. Within the literature, Shtoj 06, dated in the Early Bronze Age and BI-R tumulus, has been presented as the primary evidence to archaeologically prove the significance, interaction and continuity of Neolithic material culture with a new form of burial. According to this interpretation, the primary grave and architectural structures of Shtoj 06 have been associated with some Kurgan influence, whilst the figurines found in the ritual structure and pottery within the grave, alongside many other artefacts, are interpreted as products of local Neolithic culture similar to Maliq III A in southeast Albania (Korkuti, 1989; Koka, 2012). It is worth noting, however, that figurines had ritual, social and artistic meanings (Koka, 1985). I propose that they could have been adapted and reused as ritual presentations for a new burial concept. My analysis of the findings demonstrate that Shtoj 06 is a complex tumulus – sharing numerous similarities with the Cetina Culture and the broader region – and cannot be understood solely through the lens of Kurgan migration or local integration. Ritual practices, such as ritual and fire structures, pottery fragmentation, animal and bird offerings, and possible ritualised feasting (Chapter 6 and 7), which were adopted and adapted by other tumuli cultures, illustrate the complexity of burial practices.

The continuity from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age has only been identified and interpreted within the literature by the presence of material culture rather than burial practices. Information about Neolithic burial practices is limited and fragmented and only covers a small geographical area. Although this information is insufficient and

does not cover the whole country, the archaeological research does not support the aggressive destruction of Neolithic sites or communities (Prendi and Bunguri, 2014; Bunguri, 2015). As described in Section 5.2.1, tracing an aggressive migration that wiped out local communities is impossible. Tumuli were an entirely new form of burial which spread for the first time in the Early Bronze Age and became the exclusive form of burial in subsequent periods (Andrea, 1985a; Bodinaku, 1981; 1985; 2018; Korkuti, 1989). According to Andrea (1985a), the material culture of many tumuli supports the idea of local communities embracing tumuli burial while maintaining aspects of their traditional material culture. Within the data, it is impossible to trace the methods and the practices in which tumuli as a new form of burial were either infiltrated or enforced within the country. Neolithic communities likely continued to live, and their level of mobility and connectivity has seldom been explored or interpreted in the publication. Therefore, I suggest that it is probable that local communities embraced and adapted a new form of burial. I argue that the ideological construct of tumuli as a form of dealing with death, burial and bereavement, either forced or influenced by the Kurgan phenomena, was one of the main factors that contributed to some local communities adopting and adapting tumuli as a form of ideological construct (Chapter 7).

5.2.4   Cetina culture

Cetina culture has been recognised as a tumuli group around the Cetina River in Dalmatia. Its distinctive burial and funerary practices consist of inhumation in a stone cist or cremation scattered without an urn. Cetina tumuli were predominately stone structures containing a single burial, multi-burials or no graves. Sherds of pottery fragmentation associated with deliberate breaking were also common (Gori, Recchia and Tomas, 2018; Cazzella *et al.,* 2020). Cetina culture was spread through peaceful

migration, movement and interconnections of small groups from Dalmatia to the Peloponnese and Central Mediterranean during the second part of the third millennium BC. This interconnection involved the exchange of ideas and material and the spreading of tumuli practices (Cazzella *et al.,* 2020). However, within the literature, the rise of tumuli, which reflected Cetina culture, has been interpreted as a result of human interactions rather than migrations (Jubani, 1995).

This research has identified 21 tumulus cemeteries whose rise has been attributed to Cetina interactions (Figure 5.1). They were located in three areas in Northern Albania: Shkrel, Shtoj and Bujan (Andrea, 1995; Jubani, 1995; Bela, 2012; Gori, Recchia and Tomas, 2018). In addition, the influence of Cetina culture is identified and reflected in architectural structures of stone tumuli, primarily in cremation burial rites, pottery fragmentation, animal and bird offerings and artefacts (Prendi, 1985b). A detailed description of the three areas and their architectural structures gathered in this research helps shed light on the factors that contributed to the rise, spread and establishment of tumulus cemeteries that represented ritual architectural features adopted from Cetina culture.

The Shkrel area is one of the prominent examples illustrating the rise and spread of tumulus cemeteries as a direct influence of interconnections with Cetina culture. Within the Shkrel area, ten tumuli were grouped in a cluster, all dated in the Early Bronze Age (BA-Only). Shkrel 05 is the only burial with an inhumation in a cist stone, whilst the remaining nine were cremation scattered in the centre of the tumulus alongside animal and bird offerings (Jubani, 1995). Primary graves were covered with numerous pottery fragmentations without a single complete pot (Chapter 6). Tumuli were built mainly with stones, materials sourced from the local field and mountains,

whilst river pebble stones were sourced from a long distance, although the distance has not been provided within the literature. Dromos, a distinctive feature which was associated with Cetina culture, were identified in four tumuli (Shkrel 01, 02, 07, 08), two had a ringstone (Shkrel 04, 05), and six had a muranë (Shkrel 01-06) (Jubani, 1995). The burial, funerary practices and the construction of Shkrel tumuli are likely to have been undertaken within a short period of the Early Bronze Age and remained dormant thereafter. Jubani (1995) illustrates how tumuli in the Shkrel area do not follow the exact pattern of the Cetina Culture. The complexity of the architectural structures, funerary and ritual practices and burial rites suggests that Shkrel communities in the Early Bronze Age embraced, adopted and adapted the multi-faced ritual meaning of tumuli within their community.

The influence of Cetina culture is also attributed to the Shtoj area. The primary grave in Shtoj 06 (BI-R) was an inhumation in a cist, constructed on top of stone ritual structures with bird offerings, and it was dated in the Early Bronze Age (Koka, 2012; Gori, Recchia and Tomas, 2018). Likewise, Shtoj 07 (BI-R) was dated in the Late Bronze Age and is interpreted as a Cetina tumulus. Several Shtoj tumuli, dated in different phases, contained Cetina pottery attributed to inter-regional connections. Shtoj 06 is one of the six tumuli constructed during the Early Bronze Age, including three tumuli (Shtoj 05, 07, 11) which were initially constructed as ritual-only tumuli (Chapter 4). Within the Shtoj area, two tumuli ceased to be used in Bronze Age, five were reused later, and four were newly built in the Iron Age. Therefore, not all tumuli within the Shtoj have been associated with Cetina's influence and interactions. It further highlights the idea of the local communities selecting, combining, and embracing various regional and inter-regional ritual practices by adapting and providing local originality to their version of tumuli meaning and practices (Chapter 7).

Bujan area is located northeast of Albania and contains a cluster of nine tumuli. Eight tumuli were ritual-only, Bujan 06 (IA-only) had a primary grave cremation and five graves where inhumation was practised. Their architectural structure presents similarities with Cetina tumuli, they were constructed predominately with stones sourced from the local mountain; eight had a cupola (Bujan 02-09), one had a muranë (Bujan 01), and one had a dromos (Bujan 07) (Andrea, 1995; Bela, 2012). The ritual ceremonies of pottery fragmentation have been identified throughout the Bujan area. The nine Bujan tumuli were constructed and used within a short period; four were used only within a period of the Bronze Age (Bujan 04, 07-09 were BA-only), and the remaining five were newly constructed within the Early Iron Age (Bujan 01-03, 05-06 were IA-only). Andrea (1995) attributes the spread of Cetina culture in Bujan to originating from human and material connections and exchange with the Shkrel area. However, while all Shkrel areas were dated in the Early Bronze Age, in Bujan, only one tumulus was constructed in the Early Bronze Age, two were in the Middle Bronze Age, and the remaining five were dated in the Early Iron Age. The cohabitation of Cetina with Kurgan-influenced tumuli illustrates how the societies embraced the ideological construct of tumuli despite their architectural and ritual variations (Chapter 7).

The influence of Cetina culture illustrates how local communities embraced tumuli as a new form of burial and ideological construct whilst believing and practising different forms of the treatment of the body, funerary practices and rituals, and the material used for their construction. The co-existence of commemorative ritual-only with burial tumuli alongside the co-existence between cremation, inhumation and no remains illustrate the complexity and the diversity of tumuli practices, which varied from one community to another, and often within the same community, like in Bujan, Shtoj and

Shkrel. It also illustrates how different bereaved families or groups within the same community embraced, adopted and practised diverse and complex ideological constructs and beliefs in the afterlife expressed within the wider meaning and significance of tumuli as a funerary monument of the landscape. This interpretation moves away from the burial practice as a sole ethnic representative to highlighting the crucial role of tumuli as an ideological and ritual construct which helped communities deal with death, burial and bereavement (Chapter 7).

5.2.5 Regional and inter-regional connections

The Balkans and the Mediterranean experienced and developed extensive regional and inter-regional connections of networks during the third millennium BC and throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages (Bulatović, Vander Linden and Gori, 2018; Iacono *et al.,* 2022). During this time, societies experienced internal and external changes, resulting in communities requiring new materials, exploring new ways of building their social environments and embracing new approaches to expressing their identities in life and death (Bailey, 2002). The results from this subtheme, and across the theme, illustrate how communities within Albania began to connect with several regional and inter-regional tumuli cultures, such as those of Glasinac-Mati, Mycenaean and Aegean.

The Glasinac culture was first identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. However, similarities in architectural structures, rituals and material culture between the Glasinac and Mati areas in Albania have resulted in archaeologists 'supplementing the notion of the Glasinac-Mati cultural complex, which was spread in eastern Bosnia, southwestern Serbia, Montenegro and northern Albania' (Babić, 2002; 73). Within Albania, the significant role in the rise and proliferation of

Glasinac-Mati tumuli culture (or Mat-Glasinac as described within Albania) has been widely identified in tumuli structures and their material cultures in more than 14 tumuli areas utilised in this research (Andrea, 1995; Kurti, D., 1985; Prendi, 1998; Bela, 2012).

Scholars in Albania agree that inter-regional connections with Mycenaean and Aegean cultures had a significant impact on Bronze Age tumuli, particularly in the south and southeast of the country. The interconnection is illustrated primarily through the material culture found within graves (Andrea, 1976b). In addition, artefacts found in primary graves in Pazhok 01 (BA-only), Piskovë (BI-C), Vajzë 01 (BI-C) and Vodhimë (BI-C), and artefacts found in several other tumuli across Albania, provide further evidence to support the Mycenaean interaction (Prendi, 1998; Aliu, 2004; Bodinaku, 2018). Bejko (2002) argues that there is insufficient data to understand the full impact of the Mycenaean influence. The pit grave in the base layer of tumuli, the architectural structure, and the body positioning of inhumed individuals in the primary graves in Pazhok 01 and Piskovë tumuli have also been interpreted and associated with Kurgan influence. This illustrates the combination and adaptation of various tumuli architectural and ritual cultures with material cultures from different areas, further highlighting the complexity, diversity and evolution of tumuli culture in different areas and chronological periods.

Inter-connections with Aegean cultures impacted the artefacts found within Bronze Age tumuli. For example, the funerary practices of ritualised eating and drinking ceremonies performed during the cremation process of the Middle Bronze Age primary grave in Vajzë 01 were attributed to ritualised practices in Thasos and Skiathos in the Aegean (Prendi, 2008). In addition, numerous Mycenaean and Aegean pottery,

jewellery and weapons found in Barç 01 and 02, Kakavijë, and Vodhimë highlight the significant role of interconnections and exchange of ideas and materials (Harding, 1976).

Regional and inter-regional connections played a central role in creating and transforming the tumuli culture in Albania. However, the processes required for the interactions and their role in impacting and transforming communities to adopt artefacts and tumuli burials have not been analysed and interpreted. It is impossible to reconstruct the nature of interactions from the data, whether they involved the movement of people, resulted from the exchange of ideas and materials, or a combination of both. Bejko (1999), in his analysis of Late Bronze Age tumuli in southwestern Albania, dismisses the notion that Mycenaean individuals resided in the area and possessed these artefacts. Instead, he views their presence in grave assemblages as grave goods that were imported and subsequently adopted by local inhabitants.

The architectural structures, funerary practices and tumuli rituals were adapted and shaped by local environmental, cultural, socio-economic and ideological factors. This has been reflected in several tumuli and is particularly evident in Bujan and Shkrel areas (Andrea, 1995; Jubani, 1995). The regional and inter-regional connections have impacted on the material culture, funerary practices, rituals and architectural structures of tumuli, resulting in many communities embracing different ideological constructs and practices from other local and inter-regional communities. I propose that the exchange of ideas and materials further contributed to the proliferation and the spread of the ideological construction of tumuli and their practices.

5.2.6   Socio-economic and ritual transformation

Economic growth and the exchange of copper and bronze during the Early Bronze Age and throughout the Bronze Age have been interpreted within the Albanian literature to have encouraged communities to explore and embrace a new form of burial that enabled them to express their identities in life and death in more monumental ways (Anamali and Ceka, 1981). These social changes, the role of the patriarchal society, and how they impacted the rise and proliferation of tumuli are presented in Section 5.4.2.

The monumentality of tumuli as a visible monuments of the landscape illustrates how the ideological constructs and ritual meanings of tumuli provided communities, especially the newly emerging social elites, with various rituals, beliefs and practices that more fully encompassed their new, changing and developing identities. Tumuli served as a visual representation of the social changes occurring during the Bronze and Iron Age (Bunguri, 2015). The diversity of architectural structures in BA-only, BI-C, BI-R, and IA-only tumuli reflects the socioeconomic development, transformation, and the role of social elites and different groups within the community. It is likely that tumuli, as a symbol of power, were also adopted and displayed by many members of the community who started to gain economic and political privileges in their local communities and beyond.

Alongside the role of tumuli as a medium for displaying an individual's role in life, tumuli also were a better presentation of their beliefs and ritual practices in the afterlife. Tumuli tended to comprise different ritual meanings and significance. For example, Bodinaku (1981; 1985) suggests that body positioning reflects the communities'

perception of death and represents ritual meanings, and the diversity of body positioning in Piskovë tumulus illustrates the diversity of ritual meanings within the area practised within the same tumulus. This diversity of rituals also sheds light on the complexity and diversity of beliefs and rituals of the Piskovë (BI-C) communities from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age.

5.3   The role of the landscape

The role of the landscape in the study of tumulus cemeteries during communist Albania has rarely been analysed or interpreted. Research was primarily focused on locating tumuli within their geographical and environmental contexts. However, the information regarding the geographical placement of tumulus cemeteries was often presented vaguely, typically indicating only that the tumulus was located near the river without offering more precise details. For instance, Andrea (1985a; 9) describes the locations of Barç 01 and 02 tumuli as follows: 'The village of Barç is situated to the southeast of the city of Korçë, approximately 2 kilometres away, alongside the main road leading to the area of Bilisht. The two tumuli, locally referred to as 'Thumba,' are positioned in the village's primary field known as 'Bregu i Merasë'. Similarly, geographical references such as rivers or mountains were provided in general terms, lacking both detailed descriptions and exact distances between these features and the tumuli. Moreover, there is a notable absence of geographical coordinates or detailed mapping. I have managed to identify only a limited number of images of tumuli; unfortunately, the poor quality of these prints has further complicated the understanding of the tumuli and their relationship with the surrounding landscape.

The geographical location of the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research, while limited and descriptive, was carefully documented. These tumuli were situated

in relation to significant landscape features such as rivers, mountains and fields, which helped contextualise their placement within the region (Jubani 1995; Aliu 2004). The data utilised in this research are derived solely from the tumuli locations provided in the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs. Additionally, some investigation was conducted to identify the characteristic features and sources of building materials used in the architectural elements, grave constructions, and the elevation of the tumuli (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018). However, this information often appeared fragmented and was infrequently analysed or interpreted. The innovative aspect of this research lies in its comprehensive collection, analysis and interpretation of the geographical locations of the 123 tumulus cemeteries. This approach facilitates an exploration of the relationship between the landscape and the tumuli, highlighting how the landscape influenced their construction and, conversely, how tumulus cemeteries affected the community's sensorial and emotional perception, experience and interaction with the landscape.

An analysis of the rise and proliferation of tumuli requires an interpretation of the role of the landscape, its relationship to tumuli and how these dynamics transformed the meaning and perceptions of tumuli and the physical landscape. Subtheme two commences by exploring the deliberate location of tumuli alongside landscape features such as rivers, hills and mountains and by demonstrating how these choices impacted tumuli architectural structure and building materials (Section 5.3.1-5.3.4). The shape, location, characteristics of building materials, and the role of tumuli as landmarks have been presented to illustrate the processes involved in tumuli imitating and defining the physical and funerary landscape (Section 5.3.5). The visibility of tumuli and their location has been presented to describe tumuli as funerary monuments of the landscape (Section 5.3.6).

5.3.1   Landscape features

The characteristic geomorphology of Albania includes rivers, mountains, and fields often intertwined (Hoxha, A., 2021). Within the literature, the geographical location of tumuli has been presented predominately within the micro landscape, such as near a river, and also within the macro landscape features, such as within the mountainous region. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish and separate one landscape feature from another. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 illustrate the complexity and diversity of the geographical location of tumuli. The relationship between tumuli and the landscape cannot fully be understood in isolation with only one landscape feature and needs to be interpreted within the macro landscape.

This research identified 77 tumuli alongside rivers, 38 on mountains and hills, and 8 in fields (Table 5.2).

| Location | Architectural structure | | | | | Total |
	Primary grave	Muranë	Ringstone	Cupola	Dromos	
Rivers	41	29	26	10	6	**77**
Hills & mountains	28	9	4	25	5	**38**
Fields	1	2	2	2	1	**8**

Table 5.2   Main architectural structures of tumuli based on their location

5.3.2 River locations

The special connection between tumulus cemeteries and rivers is illustrated through the placement of the 77 tumuli close to rivers and brooks (Figure 5.4).[20]   The deliberate location of tumuli by rivers could have been determined by the necessity of sourcing building materials (Aliu, 2004). As described in Chapter 4, the complexity of their architectural structures and the construction of the 123 tumulus as monumental features, including the construction of enormous landscape monuments with heights of up to 5.00 metres and diameters of 50.00 metres, required extensive building materials and transportation. River stones, pebbles, and gravel were used throughout the eight phases of tumuli construction, starting with the initial phase of ground preparation and ending with the sealing of the monument with a cupola and dromos. *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs fail to provide insight into how these materials were converted and transported into tumuli. Given my familiarity with the landscape, I propose that rivers likely served as conduits for transporting these building materials, although further research is needed to substantiate this.. The river location of tumuli varied chronologically from 9 in BA-only, 16 in BI-C, 9 in BI-R and 43 in IA-only. Due to Albania's geography, rivers, hills, and mountains are often intertwined. The distance of a tumulus from the river varied from one tumulus to another. Tumuli in the Kënetë area were located on the riverbank, while Bruç was situated less than 100 metres away, near the slope of the hills (Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

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[20] Due to the methods used for data recording and the period when the sites were documented, geographical locations were often described in general terms, such as 'on the left side of the river near the village centre'. Detailed geographical coordinates or national reference grids were rarely provided. Consequently, the map was created based on these general descriptions rather than exact locations. Aerial photography, Google Earth, and various other images, along with contemporary archaeological surveys, were utilised in this process.

Figure 5.2   Bruç tumulus on the bank of the Urakë river

Copyright: Islami 2013
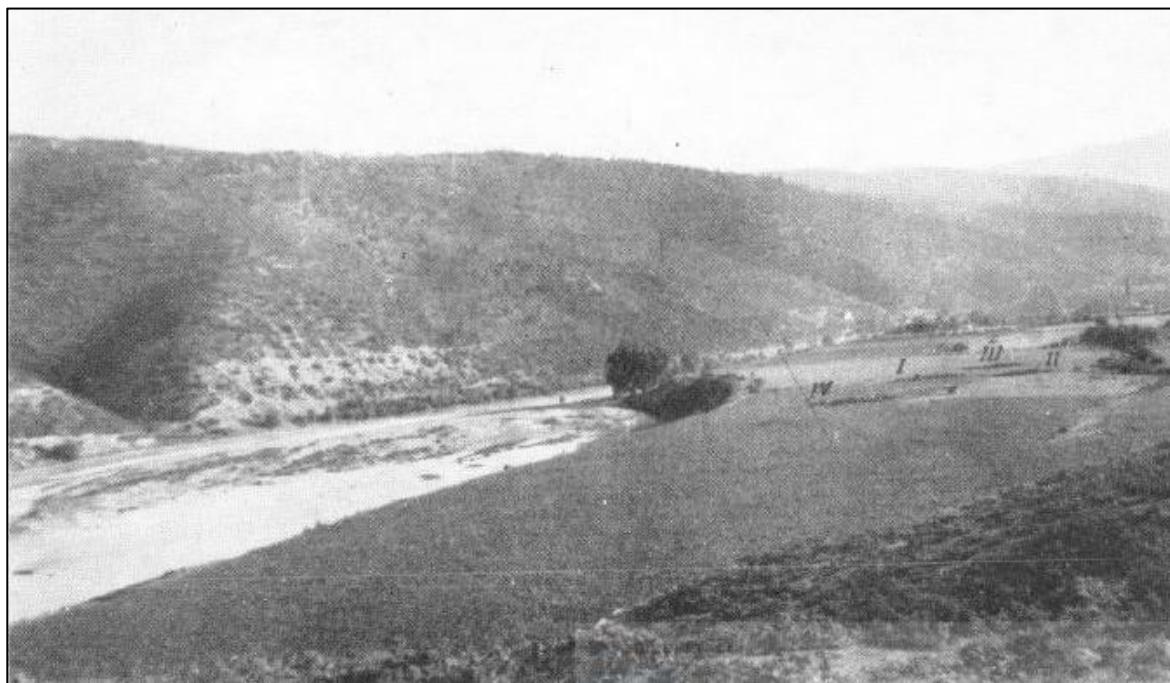
Figure 5.3 Kënetë area in the bank of Drin i Zi river

Copyright: Jubani 1983
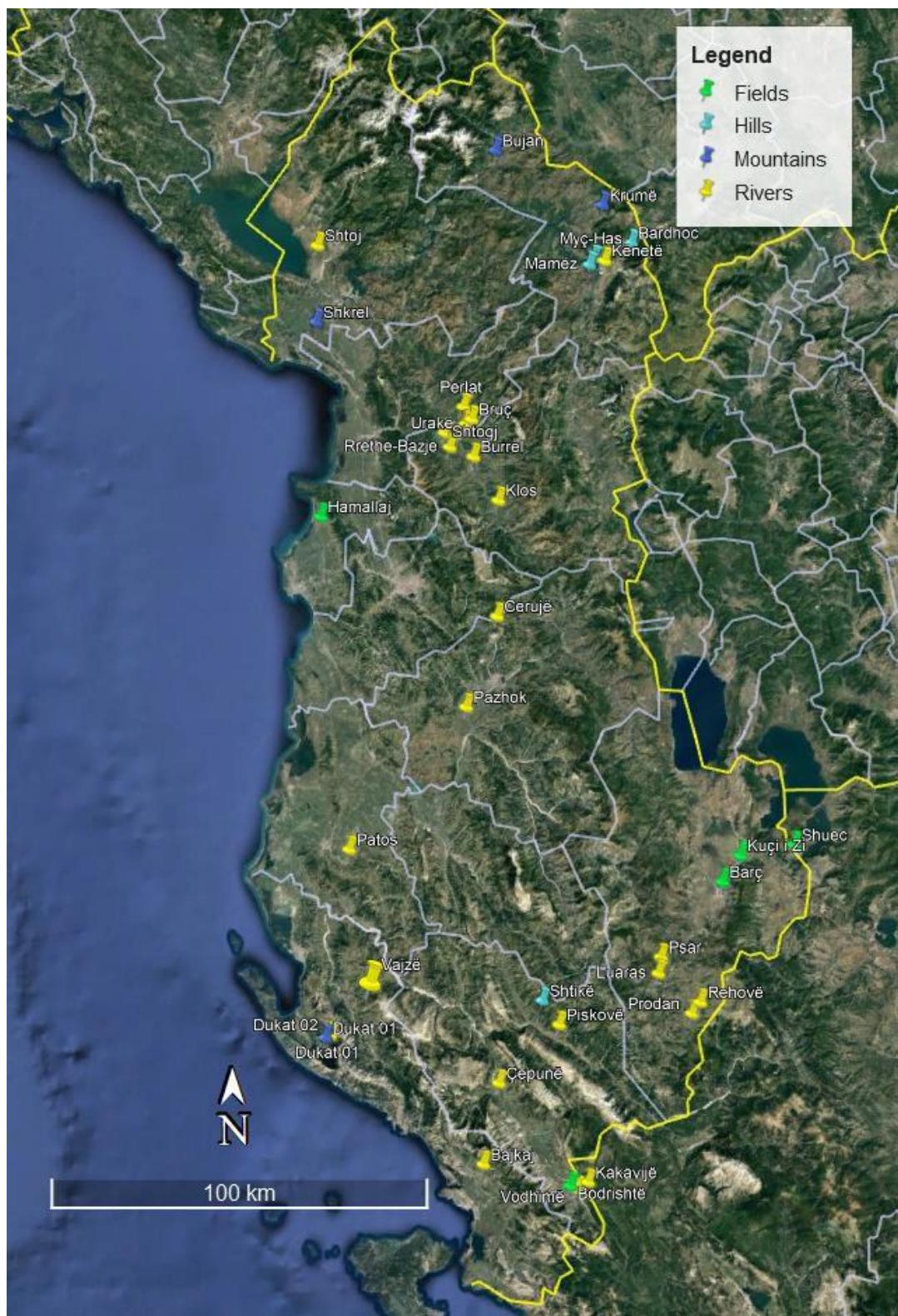
Figure 5.4   Geographical location of tumuli areas

Author's image on Google Earth Pro

The architectural structures of river tumuli identified within this research consisted of 41 primary graves with various grave structures: 29 had a muranë, 26 had between 1 and 3 ringstones, 10 had a cupola and 6 had a dromos. The results from the data highlight the complexity and variety of architectural structures and their building materials. These differences were frequently noticeable within the same tumuli area. For example, within Rrethe-Bazje, located by the Mat River, 10 of the 12 tumuli were constructed with a combination of soil and river pebble stones. They contained several stone grave structures, whilst two tumuli were solely built with stones and contained simple pit graves. Rrethe-Bazje 02 (IA-only) contained a central stone structure on the ground-based layer of the tumulus; Rrethe-Bazje 01-05 (BI-C; IA-only; BA-only; IA-only; BA-only) and 10 (BI-R) had a muranë; Rrethe-Bazje 01 and 03, alongside the muranë, had ringstones also built with river stones (Islami, 2013).

Although used extensively in all phases of tumuli construction, there is no evidence of a tumulus being built exclusively with river materials. This could illustrate the importance of integrating different aspects of landscape within a tumulus. Alongside river stones, pebbles and gravel, tumuli were frequently constructed with various materials sourced from multiple locations. The complex relationship between tumuli and the landscape within the literature is illustrated in Shtoj 10 (BI-R). Located on a flat field by the river Kirk, Shtoj 10 was constructed with a combination of river, mountain and field stones, with soil sourced from the local field (Figure 5.5). The base of the primary grave was constructed with river materials, two ringstones were built with stones from local fields, whilst the outer ringstone was constructed with two different types of mountain stones and slabs (Koka, 2012).

Figure 5.5   Architectural structures of Shtoj 10

Copyright: Bela 2012

River and mountain materials were interpreted within the literature to contain and represent ritual meanings. This was particularly evident for small river pebble stones used to base grave structures in Shkrel during the Early Bronze Age and Kënetë tumuli during the IA (Jubani, 1982; 1995). The meaning behind the practice of sourcing, transporting and using river and mountain materials was to incorporate and extend their ritual and cult meaning into tumuli. It also reflected how the communities attempted to bring the landscape, river and mountains into tumuli and transform them into natural monuments (Jubani, 1995; Aliu, 2004).

5.3.3 Hills and mountains

Due to the geomorphology of Albania, where the fields, hills and fields are intertwined, it can be challenging to clearly distinguish one geographical feature from another. Within the dataset, the tumuli location was described on a micro scale, such as the field or the river valley, often located near hills or mountains. For example, within the Dukat area, the location of Dukat 01 (BI-C) was recorded on a mountain, whilst the location of Dukat 02 (BI-C), located a short distance, away was recorded by the river. The hill and mountain location was recorded when it was provided as the major landscape feature within the literature.

The 38 mountain and hill tumuli identified in this research were spread over eight areas located in mountains and hills: 28 tumuli in four areas were in the mountains, and 10 tumuli in four areas were situated in hills. The choice of tumuli location could have been determined by the necessity to access building materials (Andrea, 1995). However, the results from this research illustrate how the mountain and hill tumuli construction was complex and diverse, and there is no clear pattern between tumuli locations and the materials used in their construction. The hills and mountains location of tumuli varied chronologically from 14 in the BA-only, 3 in BI-C, 2 in BI-R and 19 in IA-only (Figure 5.6).
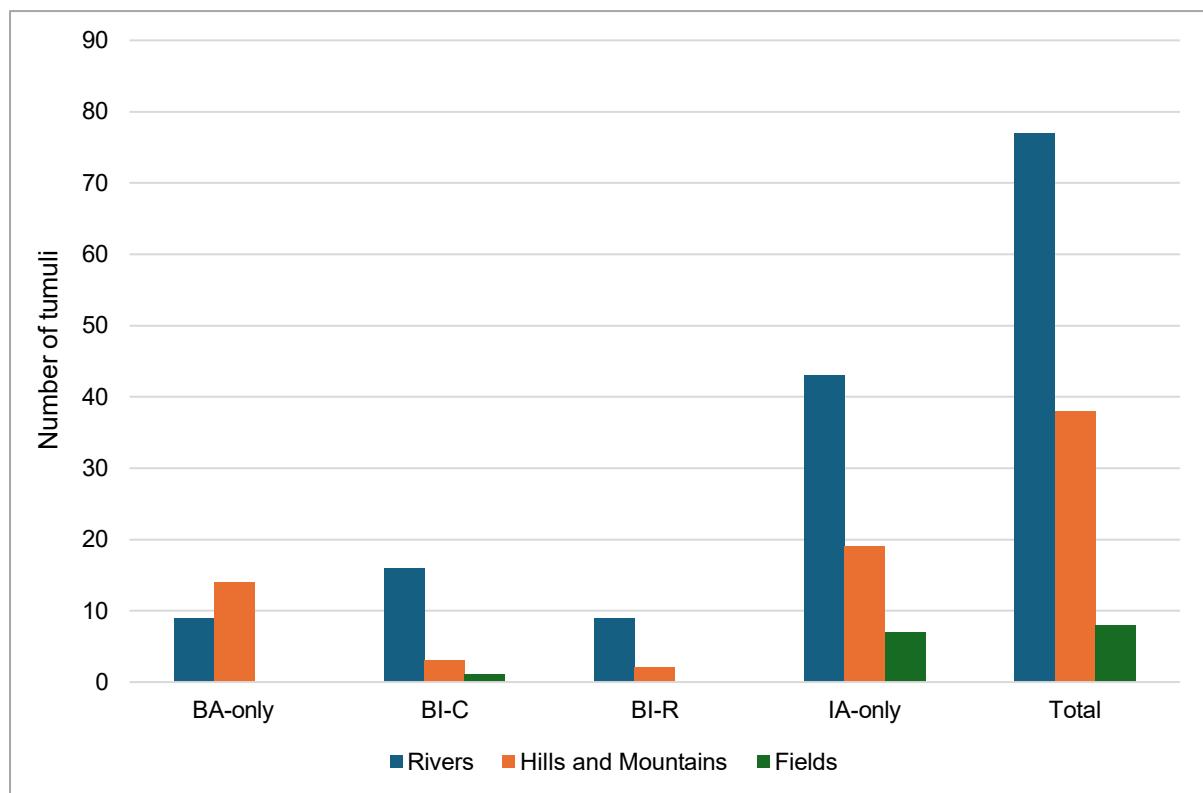
Figure 5.6   Geographical location across the four phases

The 28 tumuli identified in this research as mountain tumuli were located in the four mountain areas of Bujan, Dukat, Krumë and Shkrel. Although situated on mountains, tumuli were seldom built exclusively with mountain materials. For example, the nine tumuli of the Bujan area were likely to have been built with mountain stones and slabs, but their ritual-only characteristics could have influenced it (Andrea, 1995; Bela, 2012). Likewise, the cist graves in Dukat 01 were likely sourced from mountains, but specific information about stone architectural structures and the soil used to construct tumuli were not provided (Ceka, 1974; Bodinaku, 2018). The material used in the construction of the remaining 18 tumuli varied considerably. For example, Krumë and Shkrel tumuli utilised a combination of mountains with river materials, even though Krumë was located over five kilometres from the nearest river and Shkrel was a long distance away from rivers (Jubani, 1982; 1995).

Ten hill tumuli were located in the four areas in Bardhocë, Mamëz, Myç-Has and Shtikë and were located close to rivers and brook valleys. The construction of tumuli and the material used for architectural and grave structures varied considerably. Hill tumuli were built predominately with soil mixed with few stones, whilst mountain or river stones were reserved for different architectural, ritual and grave structures. Bardhocë 01 (BI-R) and 02 (BI-C) tumuli, whilst located in the hills on the slope of mountain Koritnik, were constructed with a combination of soil and stone materials, whilst grave structures were built solely with river materials sourced from Drin i Bardhë River (Hoti, 1982). Mamëz (IA-only) was located on a hill near the Drin i Zi River valley but was built with soil and stones. The cremated remains of the primary grave were buried on top of a ritual structure constructed with soil sourced from a nearby brook. The source of stones used for grave structures was not provided (Bela, 2012). The Shtikë tumulus (BI-R) was built exclusively with soil where stones sourced from the Bezhan brook were utilised for grave structures, and river stones were placed on each side of the individual's head in grave number four (Figure 5.7) (Aliu, 1996; 2020). Stone and mountain slabs were used to build one of the three types of grave structures within the six Myç-Has tumuli (1 BI-C and 5 IA-only). Information about the source of stones used for the other two types of grave structures was not provided (Bela, 1990). I propose that combining different materials within a tumulus could have been a deliberate attempt by communities to define the landscape and create a macro-landscape.
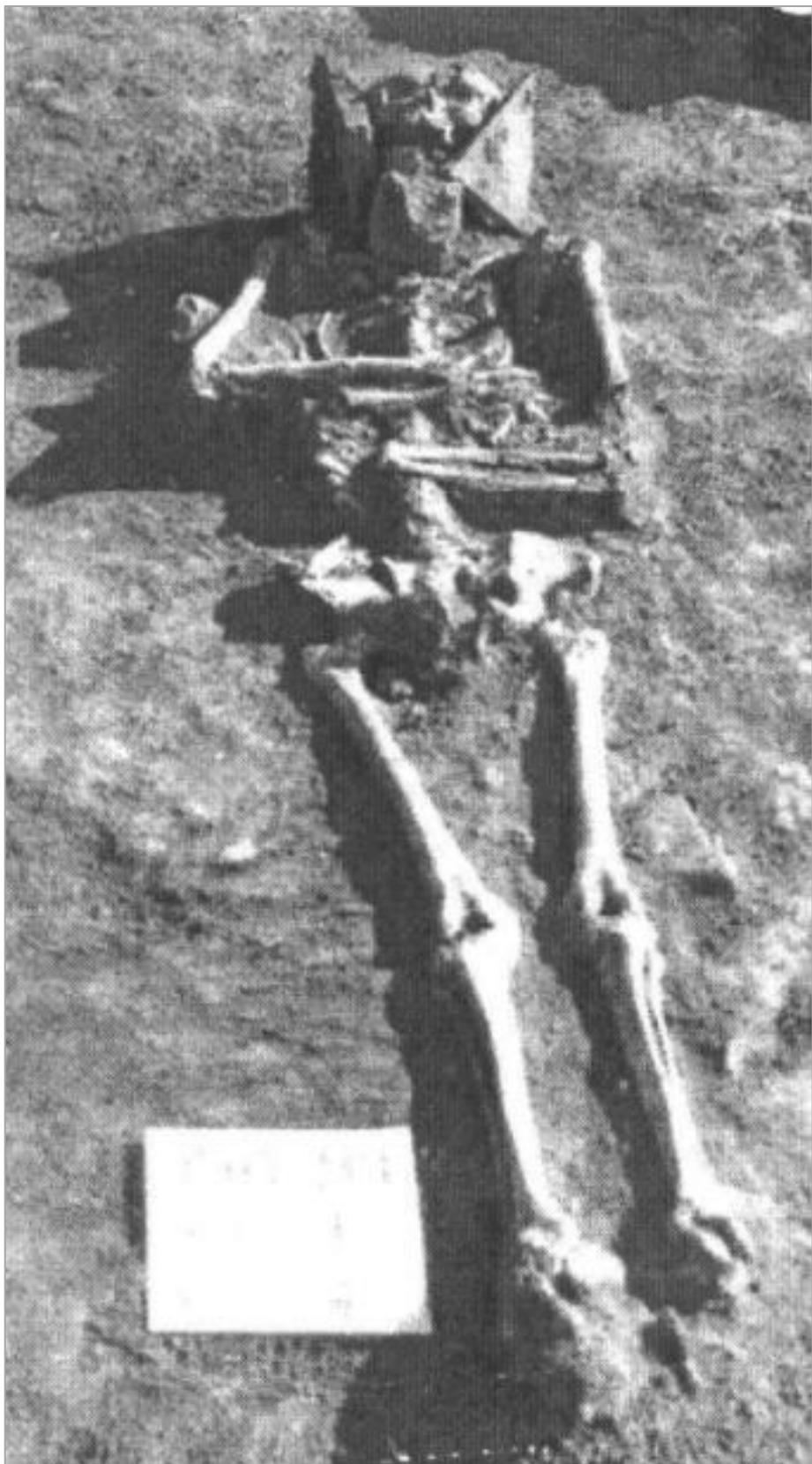
Figure 5.7   River materials in grave 4, Shtikë

The choices of tumuli locations in mountains and hills and the diversity of the materials used for their construction were likely reflections of the socio-economic context of the communities that built them. The location, architectural structures and material culture of Dukat 01 (BI-C) and Mamëz (IA-only) were attributed to seasonal shepherds grazing their flocks on hills and rich valleys during summer seasons (Ceka, 1974; Bela, 2012).

Although mountain and hill tumuli locations provided accessibility to sourcing building materials, only a few tumuli contained stone architectural structures associated with the initial phase of tumuli construction. Whilst 28 tumuli had a primary grave, only nine had a muranë, and four had a ringstone. This choice could have been impacted by the burial rite of the primary grave, where 12 were cremations, and three tumuli had no human remains. These burial rites were less likely to be associated with a muranë or ringstone (Chapter 4). I propose that these choices were determined by the perception of death and the afterlife, primarily as the ringstone is associated with the cult of the sun (Chapter 6).

On the other hand, there is an increase in architectural structures related to the final phase of tumuli construction: 25 tumuli had a cupola, and five had a dromos (out of the 12 identified across all tumuli). This high number of tumuli with a cupola and a dromos could reflect the preservation state of mountain terrains less likely to have been destroyed by farming and human activities (Aliu, 2020). Additionally, the presence of a dromos could have been influenced by their practical and ritual uses as the bridge to the afterlife (Jubani, 1974; Andrea, 1995). Likewise, it illustrates how implementing different architectural structures was more than a practical choice; it also contained and reflected ritual meaning, which could shed light on their perception of death and the afterlife.

5.3.4 Fields

Eight tumuli constructed in fields were located in the five areas of Barç, Bodrishtë, Hamallaj, Kuç i Zi and Shuec. No tumuli were identified as located in fields during the BA-only and BI-R. Barç 01 was a BI-C tumulus, and the remaining seven were newly constructed in IA-only.

In the Barç area, two were located in fields on the edge of the mountain Morava. Barç 01 (BI-C) and 02 (IA-only) were built with a combination of soil and stones, and each of them contained two ringstones. The primary grave and muranë in Barç 01 were constructed on top of a stone ritual structure. Out of the 181 grave structures in Barç 01, 31 were built with one or two lines of stones, and several graves contained a cobble-like base grave structure. Wood and perishable materials were used within stone grave structures. Like Rehovë (BI-C) and Shtikë (BI-R), a stone, probably from a river, played the cushioning role and was placed under the head of the individual. In Barç 02, only one of the 22 graves had a stone grave structure. While detailed information was provided about the tumuli and architectural and grave structures, no information was provided about the type of soil or stones or the origin of their source (Andrea, 1985a).

Bodrishtë 01 (IA-only) was constructed exclusively with soil sourced from a field, and a ritual pebble river stone structure was created in the centre of the tumulus and was likely to have had a muranë. Bodrishtë 02 (IA-only) was constructed with soil and stone materials. The information about the type of material used in the tumuli and architectural and grave structures was insufficient (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018). Hamallaj (IA-only) was located in a flat field near the Tarini brook and was built solely with soil on top of a settlement. The soil for its construction was sourced and brought

from a distance, probably from a settlement. The proximity to the brook contributed to the flooding of Hamallaj (Hoti, 1993). The construction of the two tumuli in Kuç i Zi, on the other hand, started with preparing the ground and filling the base layer of the tumulus with sand, gravel and stone. Kuç i Zi 01 (IA-only) was constructed solely with soil sourced from a field, and Kuç i Zi 02 (IA-only) with a combination of soil and stones sourced from a local field. As a result, the graves often contained a cobble-like stone base structure (Andrea, 1985a). Shuec (IA-only) was located in a field close to Prespa e Vogël lake, and consequently, the tumulus was regularly flooded (Figure 5. 8). The tumulus and architectural structures were constructed predominately with stones sourced from the lake (Andrea, 2009).[21]

The architectural structure of the eight field tumuli consisted of one stone primary grave, two muranë, two ringstones, two cupolas and one dromos. Apart from Shuec, where a cupola and dromos were built with stones from a lake, information about the materials used to construct the remaining structure was not provided. The small number of tumuli located in fields could be due to the likelihood of tumuli being destroyed due to farming and other human activities.

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[21] According to Andrea (2009), it is likely that the flooding was a recent event caused by geomorphological and environmental changes in the lake.

Figure 5.8   Shuec tumulus by Prespa e Vogël lake

Copyright: Andrea 2009

5.3.5   Imitating and defining the landscape

The physical landscape was integral in tumuli placement, shape and architectural structures. The architectural shape of the tumuli was likely to have been designed to imitate the shape of a natural hill.   The Albanian terminology 'kodër varrez', which translates as 'hill cemetery', captures the meaning of tumuli as a funerary hill into the broader landscape (Kurti, D., 1974). Modern-day Albanians name tumuli as hills and use the same terminology for small natural hills (Kurti, D., 1977; Bodinaku, 2001).

The Albanian data was seldom concerned with the processes involved in constructing the tumuli and how the spherical hill shape of the tumuli was created and maintained (Budina, 1971; Bodinaku, 2018). Borisov et al. (2019; 123) describe how tumuli in Russia 'were created by loosening the soil and filling baskets with soil that was poured over the burial' in order to maintain the hill shape. Although direct information about

the creation of the hill shape was not provided, the data gathered from the description of the 123 tumuli indicates that tumuli builders were interested in creating and maintaining the hill shape of tumuli. It appears that well-designed and planned practices were put in place; the hill-shaped pattern was followed across tumuli construction throughout two millennia, irrespective of whether they were built solely with stone or soil or utilising a combination of stones and soil. I suggest that the shape and the appearance of the tumuli were designed and maintained to imitate and become part of the landscape.

Most of the 123 tumuli, dated across the four phases, were constructed in flat locations. However, many tumuli were built on elevated terrain of hillslopes, which were shaped to mirror the natural contours of the surrounding hills (Table 5.3). This was particularly evident in Rehovë, where the tumulus had a height of up to 5 metres and a diameter of 50 metres. Built on a slight slope and blended within the landscape, Rehovë gave the impression of being a natural hill integrated within the broader landscape (Aliu, 2012). However, the BI-C tumulus of Rehovë was used over a long time, and the final shape is likely to have undergone different construction phases. Many tumuli, such as Luaras and Patos, were constructed on top of natural hills to further magnify the role of tumuli as a natural monument of the landscape (Korkuti, 1981b; Aliu, 2004). Rehovë, Luaras and Patos were all BI-C tumuli and had many graves (202; 203; 76). Furthermore, shaft cemeteries, such as Gajtan and Borovë, were often placed on natural hills to replicate the symbolic meaning of tumuli as monumental hills (Korkuti, 1972; Aliu, 2012, 2020).

Number of tumuli	Phases of Construction
33	1
24	2-5
62	Not provided
3	Destroyed

Table 5.3   Phases of tumuli construction

Additionally, as vertical monuments with heights of up to 5.00 metres, tumuli were often constructed throughout different phases and over extended periods. These vertical monuments were built to create and maintain the hill shape of tumuli. This was particularly evident for the 20 BI-C and the 11 BI-R tumuli. Detailed stratigraphic information about different construction phases was recorded for 24 tumuli constructed with 2 to 5 vertical layers . Figure 5.6-7 demonstrates the graphic illustration of the two phases of construction and the excavation of Cerujë tumulus Whilst different layers of construction have been identified and presented within the data, the processes involved in these constructions have yet to be analysed or interpreted. This interpretation, however, is based on the preservation state of the tumuli before the excavation, and the environmental and erosive factors could have altered the original shape and architectural forms (Aliu, 1984).
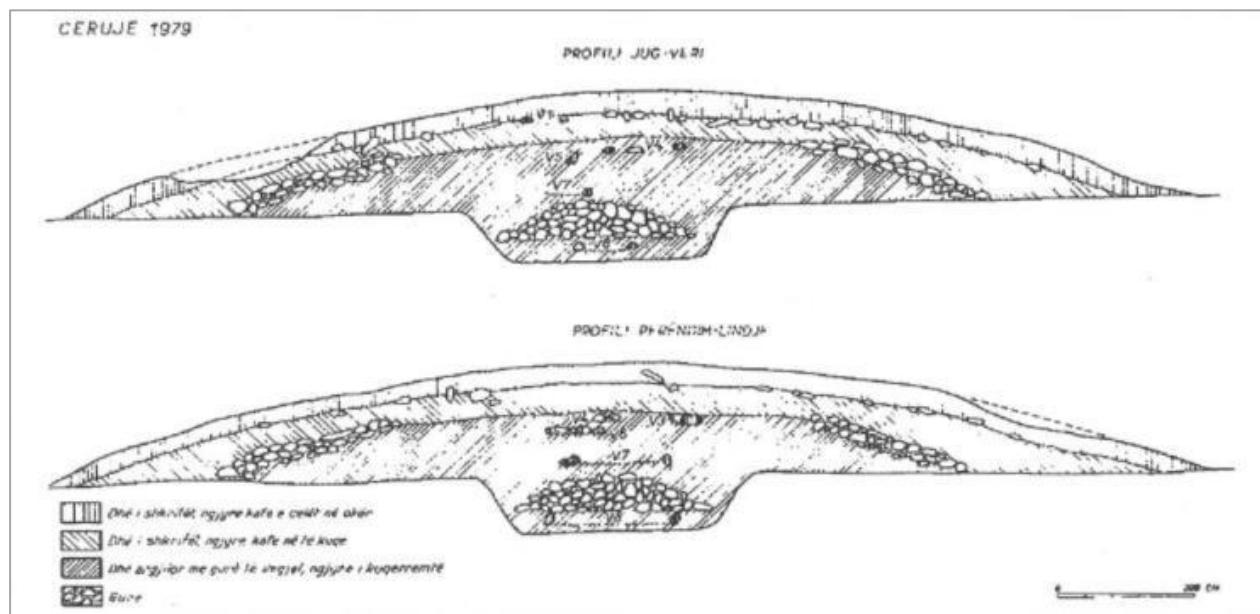
Figure 5.9   Two phases of construction and cupola in Cerujë

Copyright: Andrea 1997

Figure 5.10 Excavation of Cerujë tumulus

Copyright: Andrea 1997

Stones used to construct tumuli and their architectural structures were often left in their natural raw condition, such as in Barç 01 (BI-C), Cerujë (BI-R), Kuç i Zi 01 and 02 (IA-only) and Prodan (BI-C). The stones were not carved or sculptured even when used in unique grave structures, like the one in Cerujë (BI-R), Pazhok 04 (BI-C) and Shuec (IA-only), when stones of different colours were made to look like a mosaic floor (Bodinaku, 1974; Andrea, 1995; 1997). Notwithstanding practical reasons, this could have been a deliberate choice in helping tumuli blend in with and imitate the physical landscape.

Furthermore, the absence of a protective system in tumuli construction could indicate their role as natural monuments of landscape that did not require different protection from the natural landscape (Chapter 4).

5.3.6   Funerary monuments of the landscape

The process of sourcing, transporting and utilising different building materials from various locations transformed and defined the meaning of the physical landscape. Whilst tumuli became hills of the landscape, they also contained aspects of landscape features such as rivers, mountains and fields. This could have been a community attempt to design, define and re-shape the meaning of the landscape by creating a macro-landscape within the micro-landscape of a single tumulus. In the Shtoj area, different building materials were utilised within the same tumulus, creating a macro-landscape. Most of the 123 tumuli were located in clusters between 2 and 14. I suggest that their placement within a small area could have been a further attempt to define the landscape. In Shtoj, for example, 12 excavated tumuli were close to one another and used in different phases from the Early Bronze Age to Late Iron Age. The

positioning of tumuli in Shtoj could have been a deliberate attempt to create a micro-landscape within the broader geographical landscape. Shtoj illustrates the dual effort to define the landscape by simultaneously creating a micro and macro-landscape within the same area. However, the original number of tumuli clusters in the wider Shtoj area was more significant than the excavated tumuli utilised in this research. In 2010-2014, the PASH Project identified 175 new tumuli clustered around Shtoj and Shkrel areas (Galaty, Bejko and Deskaj, 2015). This further highlights communities' attempts to define the micro and macro-landscapes and design funerary living monuments of the landscape.

The deliberate placement of tumuli in fields and valleys, often used for agricultural purposes, could have signified the role of tumuli as landmarks of the landscape. Bejko (1999) utilised the location of two tumuli in Barç to support this idea. I propose an alternative interpretation. Barç 01 (BI-C), which was first constructed in the Early Bronze Age, was used continually to the Late Iron Age and had a final measurement of 43.00 metres in diameter. Barç 02 (IA-only), first constructed between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, was placed 100 metres away from the other tumulus and had a diameter of 22.00 metres. Andrea (1985a) advocates that there were more than two tumuli in the Barç area initially. The construction of two or more tumuli in Barç would have reduced the availability of grounds that could have been used for agricultural or farming purposes. Used continually for over 2,000 years, tumuli in Barç and many other areas helped transform and define the meaning and the purpose of the physical landscape into a funerary landscape. They were also a visual reminder of the significant role of tumuli as loci of memory where social identities were created, shaped and transformed (Chapter 7).

The deliberate placement of tumulus cemeteries on river valleys, mountains, hills and fields promoted their visibility within the landscape. Consequently, several Albanian scholars, directly and indirectly, described in general terms the geographical and topographical location of tumulus cemeteries (Aliu, 2012; 2020; Bunguri, 2015). A few scholars, however, move beyond the physical description of tumuli locations and have provided an interpretation of how the visibility of tumuli defined the landscape whilst transforming tumuli into funerary monuments of the landscape. Tumuli were infrequently described as 'sepulchral monuments' and 'kodër lapidar' (obelisk hill). These terms started to be used for the first time in the 1980s and became a substitute for describing tumuli as funerary monuments. Bodrishtë, Kakavijë, Vodhimë and Çepunë tumuli areas were described as sepulchral monuments (Prendi, 2008). However, I noted that it was only applied by Prendi in research published during the late 1950s and 1960s before the abolition of religion in 1967 when Albania was declared an atheist country (Karataş, 2020). The deliberate placement of Patos tumulus on a visible hill that dominated the river valley has been interpreted by Korkuti as an intentional choice for tumuli to define and dominate the surrounding landscape (Figure 5.11). It was also to transform tumuli into a funerary monument of the landscape or 'a *lapidar* of its time' (Korkuti, 1981b; 7). Piskovë and Luaras tumuli were also interpreted as kodër lapidar (Bodinaku, 1981; Aliu, 2004). The interpretation of tumuli as monuments that defined the landscape has been applied primarily to BI-C tumuli (Luaras, Patos, Piskovë, Vodhimë) and IA-only (Bodrishtë, Kakavijë, Çepunë). It is worth noting that within Albanian culture, the term lapidar is associated with memorial monuments, such as memorials from WWII where regular commemorative ceremonies were performed. Their role was utilised for political propaganda during communism to establish the role of communal memory and to transform the meaning of the landscape (Bickert, 2015). It is likely, that the term lapidar has a strong

connection with memorial and commemorative obelisks.

Figure 5.11 Patos tumulus

Copyright: Papadopoulos, Morris and Bejko 2014

5.4   Social dynamics

The study of tumulus cemeteries within Europe continues to provide multi-dimensional interpretations of the social dynamics resulting from their construction. The social changes and the political role of patriarchal tribes, as well as social and army elites, continue to be attributed by international scholars to the rise and proliferation of tumuli. The findings from these two factors simultaneously help to shed light on the social context of communities that constructed and used tumuli (Marler, 2005; Bejko, 2016; Arnold and Fernández-Götz, 2017; Turek, 2021). The relationship between top-down and bottom-up approaches to tumuli construction will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Albanian scholars have described and, at times, analysed the social context, networks and mobility of individuals traveling to and from various regions, which are linked to the emergence and the expansion of tumulus cemeteries as funerary monuments during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Although the information was limited, fragmented and primarily on the material culture – often emphasing the architectural aspects of tumulus cemeteries – I have gathered and examined this data within the framework of social dynamics. This approach has enabled me to understand and analyse the social dynamics of local communities, as well as gain insights into the rituals, beliefs, and funerary practices of the deceased. Furthermore, it facilitates an exploration of how these elements were shaped by both micro and macro levels of networks and mobility.

For the first time, this theme brings together how social dynamics and the characteristics of networks and mobility influenced the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries over two millennia across 123 sites.

The social dynamics theme aims to understand the social context and characteristics of networks and mobility of Bronze Age and Iron Age societies. The social context of communities that used and constructed tumuli will be explored and considered through the role of patriarchal society, social elites and army elites (Section 5.4.2-5.4.4)[22]. In addition, routes of trade and communication, imports and exports, and local production and imitations (Section 5.2.5-5.4.7) are examined to help understand the impact and importance of networks and mobility.

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[22] In the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs, the term 'army elite' is specifically applied to the land combat forces and military organisation of the Bronze and Iron Ages. In this research, I adopt the term 'army elite' to align with the interpretations put forth by Albanian scholars.

5.4.1   The social context

The social context of Bronze Age and Iron Age societies that constructed tumuli has been interpreted by Albanian scholars primarily through material culture. Korkuti (1981a) describes how the dichotomy between wealthy and poor artefacts played a central role in distinguishing between the social groups that influenced the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries. Within *Iliria* and monographs, patriarchal societies and elites have been considered as two of the driving forces behind the continued use and decline of tumuli over time (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018).

5.4.2   Patriarchal society

During the Late Neolithic Period and Early Bronze Age, peaceful communities experienced economic growth and prosperity. The production, exchange, and trade of copper and bronze resulted in the accumulation of wealth by a small group (Prendi, 1988; 2008; Bunguri, 2015). According to this theory, Albanian scholars describe how men started participating in agriculture and farming and gained power and authority within the family and broader society (Prendi, 1977). This socio-economic growth instigated a social change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society (Bodinaku, 1985; Prendi, 1985a). Patriarchal transformations were prompted by Kurgan migrations, which were believed to have been a male-dominated, hierarchical and patriarchal society (Furholt, 2021). The literature, however, does not provide any information on how and why peaceful matriarchal communities adopted the social order of aggressive migrators. I suggest that the ideological construct of tumuli, whilst helping societies embrace the tumuli practice, is likely to have contributed to some social transformations during the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Scholars agree that the new social order of the patriarchal society was one of the main contributing factors to the rise of tumuli in Albania (Andrea, 1985a; Bunguri, 2015). The construction of a central primary grave, muranë and ringstone have been linked to the leading patriarch of the society. Likewise, constructing a new tumulus displayed the establishment of a new head of the family tribe (Bodinaku, 2018). However, the results from this chapter illustrate that IA-only tumuli had a smaller proportion of primary graves than the other three chronological phases where the primary grave was constructed during the Bronze Age (Chapter 4). For example, the construction of the primary grave, muranë and ringstone in the Vajzë 02 (BI-C) during the Late Bronze Age was attributed to the patriarch of the family. The status of the patriarchal society is believed to have been established during the Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age (Bodinaku, 2018). The proliferation of tumuli practices during the Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age has been presented as evidence to support the consolidation of the patriarchal society. Likewise, the diversity of artefacts, grave structures and various rituals in tumuli has also been used further to support the patriarchal interpretation (Prendi, 1985a). Nonetheless, the available data does not provide direct information concerning the nature and structure of the patriarchal society and its influence on tumuli culture. Moreover, there is no consensus among scholars in Albania regarding a precise definition of what constitutes a patriarchal society. In this research, I use the term 'patriarchal' as a reflection of the data findings, rather than as an indication of a distinct social organisation.

However, the archaeological evidence within the data about patriarchal societies is sparse, implicit and generalised and seldom provides explicit examples from tumuli or artefacts. The Late Bronze Age Mycenaean artefacts found in many tumuli have been interpreted to support the presence of patriarchs or leaders of similar social groups

with the resources and privileges to access luxurious Mycenaean artefacts (Bejko, 1993). The results from Barç 01, 02, Prodan, Rehovë and Shtikë tumuli portray the Late Bronze Age societies in southeastern Albania as independent patriarchal families that shared similar rituals, burial practices and concepts of death (Bejko, 1999). While these examples provide evidence for the presence of patriarchal societies, it is impossible to distinguish and clearly understand the direct involvement of patriarchs or patriarchal societies in constructing tumuli and their architectural structures.

The expansion of tumuli with numerous additional graves has also been attributed to the role of the patriarchal society during the Iron Age, where members of the same clan were buried under the tumulus (Andrea, 1985b). Based on traditional artefact analysis, most of the primary graves were males, but further genetic research is required. This interpretation also raises questions for tumuli with no primary graves, whether they indicate the transformation of a patriarchal society or provide alternative interpretations for different social dynamics. Whilst Iron Age tumuli could have been used for members of the same patriarchal society, they were likely to have represented a selection of a small family unit. The results of architectural structures demonstrate that 59 out of 69 IA-only tumuli contained less than 20 graves each. Kuç i Zi 01 (IA-only) is the only tumulus from the whole of the Iron Age with a large number of graves (114 dated in Iron Age) and did not contain a primary grave considered a symbol of the patriarchal society.

Socio-economic growth as a driving force in triggering internal social transformations has been used both for the rise and the dissolution of the patriarchal society and tumuli practices (Korkuti, 1972; 1989; Andrea, 1985a; Anamali, 1990). The increase in demand for wealthy and imported artefacts in numerous tumuli during the Middle Iron

Age and Late Iron Age, in tumuli such as Barç 01, 02 and Kuç i Zi 01, provides evidence, within the literature, for the dramatic transformations experienced by patriarchal societies. The social order of the patriarchal society has been associated with both the rise and decay of tumuli practice in Albania. According to this interpretation, new social and army elites required a different mode for displaying their newly found, unique identities. This resulted in social transformations during the Late Iron Age from patriarchal societies towards the emergence of the socio-political structures of the polis. Tumuli constructed with a primary grave in the Early Iron Age, Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age do not present significant differences and transformations to support this interpretation. Therefore, it is impossible to interpret tumuli's decay solely to the social changes and the transformative role of patriarchal societies (Chapter 4). The transformation of burial practices around the 6th – 5th century BC from tumuli to shaft cemeteries and the multiple burial practices and beliefs of the period have been attributed to the decay of tumuli practices (Anamali and Ceka, 1981; Aliu, 2012). The decay of tumuli practice, like their rise, is a complex process which could not be associated solely with one factor. I build on Aliu's (1985) interpretation, where new ideological and ritual beliefs embraced and promoted by local communities around the 4th century BC were some of the main contributing factors in the dissolution of tumuli practices.

5.4.3 Social elites

Economic growth and wealth accumulation during the Bronze Age facilitated certain patriarchal groups gaining power and authority within their tribal clan. The rise of tumuli during the Early Bronze Age was considered a 'direct consequence of this new economic and social development and the rise of the social elites' (Bunguri, 2015; 72). The Pazhok area has been utilised to illustrate the presence and role of social elites

in the Bronze Age. The wealthy assemblage of the Early Bronze Age primary grave in Pazhok 01, along with golden spiralled-hair decorations found in additional graves in Pazhok 01 (BA-only) and 07 (IA-only), have been attributed to a clan leader or a member of a local social elite (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018). According to Hammond (1976), the architectural structure of tumuli and the material culture found within them illustrated that these tumuli in the Pazhok area represented an expensive form of burial and monumentality, thus providing evidence of the wealthy social elites who ruled in Pazhok for several centuries.

The emergence and establishment of social elites varied from one tumulus to another and were not a linear process across the four chronological phases. The study of Barç 01 (BI-C) and 02 (IA-only), Prodan (BI-C), Rehovë (BI-C) and Shtikë (BI-R) suggests societies had started to display variations in their social status regarding concepts of death. The presence of wealthy artefacts suggests that early signs of social elites had begun to appear in the Late Bronze Age in southeastern Albania (Bejko, 1999). Within the context of the *Iliria* journal and monographs, the term 'wealthy artifacts' conveys more than just financial value or the materials used; it directly links these items to the social status they represented for their owners. The study of wealthy artefacts in Rehovë has been presented as evidence for tracing social elites' emergence, establishment and transformation from Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age (Aliu, 2012). Information from Vajzë and Vodhimë tumuli, located in southern Albania, further suggests the presence of social elites in this area during Late Bronze Age (Prendi, 2008).

Wealthy artefacts in tumuli have been used as evidence to highlight both the existence of social inequalities as well as the presence of social elites who had the resources to

access rare and precious materials often traded from a long distance (Bejko, 1993; Aliu, 2012; Kurti, R., 2015). Amber necklaces and fibula brooches found in many graves in IA-only tumuli of Kënetë, Krumë and Myç-Has areas, which have been attributed to elite women with a high social standing during the Late Iron Age (Kurti, R., 2015). Bronze and golden diadems, often imported from the Danube area and broader regions, were frequently found in female graves dated during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in BI- C tumuli such as Barç 01 (BI-C), Dukat 02 (BI-C), Luaras (BI-C), Patos (BI-C) and Rehovë (BI-C) (Andrea, 1985a; Aliu, 2004; 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). Whilst used for decorative purposes, diadems could also symbolise the high social standing of elite women. Golden spiralled-hair decorations have been found in male and female graves dated from the Late Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. When found in male graves, these objects have been interpreted as symbolising the elite social status of men (Bodinaku, 2001; 2018). This interpretation could also be expanded and applied to elite women. Diadems and golden spiralled-hair decorations are often found within the same BI-C tumulus, such as Barç 01, Dukat 02, Vajzë 01 and Rehovë.

The role and significance of elites have been presented through social elites and army elites. These two terms, however, were often used interchangeably within the data, where the same artefacts and arguments were employed to highlight both types of elites (Bodinaku, 2018).

5.4.4   Army elites

The emergence of a distinguished army elite in the Middle Bronze Age has been illustrated in Vajzë 01 (BI-C). The construction of a tumulus with a diameter of 24.00 metres and a primary grave was dedicated to a member of an army elite who had the

financial resources to access a wealthy Mycenaean armoury. Alongside artefacts, Prendi (2008) proposes that the primary grave, which was the sole cremation in the whole of the tumuli in the Vajzë area, was an expensive form of burial and reserved for a high-ranking army official. The expansion and demand for war-related artefacts have been utilised to illustrate the emergence and consolidation of the army elites and privileged groups during the Early Iron Age in Bodrishtë (IA-only), Kakavijë (IA-only), and Vodhimë (BI-C) in southern Albania (Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018). In northern Albania, shields, spearheads and arrows identified in the primary grave in two IA-only in Urakë 02 (and a secondary grave in Urakë 01, dated in the Middle Iron Age) further illustrate the emergence and the establishment of army elites (Islami, 2013). The army elite tumuli were IA-only, first constructed in the Iron Age, except Vajzë 01, first built in the Middle Bronze Age and was reused in the IA (BI- C). Scholars in Albania agree that army elites were established by the end of the 8th – 6th century BC. This was illustrated through the numerous war-related artefacts from tumuli such as Luaras, Psar, Rehovë, Shtoj 02, 03 and the Myç-Has area. However, whilst army elites were established in the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age, apart from Urakë 02, there is no evidence of any tumuli being dedicated to members of army elites, with all army artefacts found in secondary graves which were interred and added to existing tumuli, rather than newly building tumuli. Albanian scholars state that the establishment of army elites within the patriarchal society contributed to the decay and decomposition of the patriarchal society (Andrea, 1985b). However, the processes involved in army elites triggering these social transformations have neither been described nor analysed.

5.4.5   Network and mobility

The increase in networks and mobility during the Bronze Age and Iron Age has been

attributed to communication routes, the importing and exporting of material culture, and local production and imitations of materials. The results from this sub-theme illustrate how the networks and mobility of humans and material resources encouraged the rise and proliferation of tumuli.

5.4.6   Routes of communication

The Balkans and Mediterranean world experienced and developed extensive interconnections and networking during the third millennium BC and throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages (Bulatović, Gori and Vander Linden, 2020; Iacono *et al.,* 2022). This expansion of trading and mobility influenced both the wider region and Albania. Starting from the Early Bronze Age, regional and inter-regional sea and land communication routes passed through Albania. The main Balkan trade route ran from the Adriatic Sea to Macedonia and central Albania, and a second route ran from the Drin Valley to Kosovo, where copper has been mined since Neolithic times (Hammond, 1976; 126). Likewise, the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age were characterised by extensive regional and inter-regional trade and exchange. This is illustrated through the quantity and wealth of imported artefacts in almost all tumuli (Kurti, R., 2012).

The importance of networking and mobility across tumuli areas has been widely accepted within the data. Several tumuli areas, such as Bardhocë (BI-R and BI-C), Luaras (BI-C), Pazhok (4 were BA-only, 1 BI-R, 1 IA-only) and Piskovë (BI-C), were located alongside leading regional and inter-regional communications routes (Andrea, 1997; Aliu, 2004). The deliberate location of tumuli alongside rivers, which were often part of major communication routes, highlights the networking characteristics of Bronze Age and Iron Age communities. Cerujë (BI-R) tumulus, for example, located alongside the Devoll River, has been interpreted as a contributing factor in shaping

networking characteristics during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Andrea 1997).

The distribution of imported material culture has been utilised as evidence of inter-regional networking and mobility. For example, the origin and distribution of bronze, iron, amber and gold artefacts, alongside pottery, have helped shed light on networking and mobility characteristics during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (Aliu, 2004). This is illustrated through the sourcing, distribution, and use of amber found in many BI-C tumuli such as Luaras, Rehovë, and Shtogj 01 and 02 from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, whilst amber in Barç 01 was transported from Italy through the Adriatic Sea routes (Prendi, 1977; Kurti, R., 2012). Likewise, pins and fibulas found in Albanian tumuli such as Luaras, Prodan, Rehovë (all BI-C) and Psar (IA-only), as well as many other tumuli in the Balkans, illustrate the multifaceted nature of inter-regional trade and connections between the Middle Danube area with the Balkans and Albania, whilst those in Dukat 02 (BI-C) and Patos (BI-C) were transported from Adriatic Sea routes (Prendi, 1977; Aliu, 2004; Aliu and Bejko, 2005). The high level of networking and mobility is identified predominately in BI-C and IA-only tumuli and is likely to have impacted the exchange of beliefs of the afterlife and their associated ritual practices.

The distribution of painted mat pottery known as 'Devoll pottery', produced locally in southeastern Albania around the Devoll river, has been presented by many Albanian scholars, such as Andrea (1985) and evidence for regional networking and mobility between tumuli during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. Furthermore, the unification of the cultural and ethnic identity of Illyrians during the Iron Age has been attributed, alongside other reasons, to the use and distribution of Devoll pottery (Andrea, 1985a;

Prendi, 1998).

5.4.7   Import, export and local production

The presence, variation and spatial distribution of imported artefacts played a pivotal role in dating artefacts and tumuli; consequently, they have been widely described. Results from the data illustrate the use of imported artefacts as a gradual process that emerged during the Middle Bronze Age, developed in the Late Bronze Age, was consolidated in the Early Iron Age and became the predominant feature during the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age. The increasing number of imported artefacts from different regions and cultural groups reflected the broader social developments within local communities from the Middle Bronze Age to Late Iron Age, illustrating how they adopted and adapted various aspects of material cultures and practices related to life and afterlife (Chater 7).

The 22 earliest tumuli in the country, dated in the Early Bronze Age, tended to have pottery and metal artefacts which were likely produced outside modern-day Albania. They shared similarities with several objects from other inter-regional areas. However, their origin and the ways in which they reached Albania have seldom been analysed or interpreted. For example, the pottery found in the Shkrel area is interpreted as typical pottery of the Cetina Culture. Nevertheless, the ways in which it reached the Shkrel area have not been described. Jubani (1995) asserts that these artefacts were imported from the northern areas of Shrel, potentially from Croatia, and were part of the Cetina Culture package, including their architectural structures and funerary pottery, often linked to the ritual practice of pottery fragmentation.

During the Middle Bronze Age, imported artefacts from Greece, such as the Mycenaean sword in Vajzë 01, Corinthian sword and Aegean spearheads in Pazhok 01 (BA-only), and Mycenae pottery in Rehovë (BI-R), shed light on the social context of local communities (Prendi, 1977). These imported artefacts, whilst providing evidence of wealthy social groups with financial recourses, help shed light on communities' social dynamics and perceptions of death (Chapter 7). The Late Bronze Age experienced an expansion of the variety of products imported from different parts of Europe, such as the amber in Barç 01, a BI-C tumulus used for an extended period, which was imported from Italy and pins and other jewellery from the Urnfield in Central Europe (Prendi, 1977). The iron knives in Bardhocë tumulus highlight the issue of whether these objects were imported or exchanged between individuals from different areas (Hoti, 1982).

During the Iron Age, imported artefacts increased in number and location across tumuli, likely to have been aided by regional and inter-regional connections and trade (Aliu, 2004). During this time, imported artefacts appeared to be widely accessible and frequently used by local communities over a long period. For example, the distribution of 50 fibulas in BI-C tumuli in Luaras, Prodan, Rehovë and Psar (IA-only) present various materials and styles. Originating from the Sava River region, these fibulas formed part of women's jewellery throughout the Balkans and became a common feature of local communities from the 10th-6th century BC (Aliu and Bejko, 2005).

The significant presence of imported artefacts found in almost all of the BI-C, BI-R and IA-only tumulus cemeteries highlights the socio-economic transformations experienced by the IA communities. According to Aliu (2004), there was a notable increase in the quantity and distribution of imported artefacts across tumuli during the

IA, facilitated by regional and inter-regional connections and trade. During this time, imported artefacts appeared to be widely accessible and frequently used by local communities over a long period. For example, the distribution of 50 fibulas in BI-C tumuli in Luaras, Prodan, Rehovë and Psar (IA-only) present various materials and styles. Originating from the Sava River region, these fibulas formed part of women's jewellery throughout the Balkans and became a common feature of local communities from the 10th to the 6th century BC (Aliu and Bejko, 2005).

The information on trading and exporting artefacts or raw materials to neighbouring countries is sparse and implicit. The presence of imported artefacts in the 17th and 16th centuries BC could indicate the existence of trading markets (Prendi, 1977). No sufficient information about the export from Albania to neighbouring areas has been provided. Local communities in southern Albania likely exported small amounts of wood, grains, leather, and dairy products during the Late Bronze Age (Costantino, 1989). During the 11th – 8th century BC, materials were regularly exchanged between the western coastal areas of Albania and southern Italy. These are believed to have been transported through different sea and land routes. The exchange of materials, however, was interpreted primarily as human mobility that influenced the Illyrian culture in southern Italy (Korkuti, 1985). The exchange of raw materials from Krumë and Kënetë could have been traded and exchanged with imported materials in coastal areas around the 7th – 6th century BC.

Results from the data do not provide sufficient information to fully understand the processes involved in importing, exporting and distributing artefacts. However, this data can facilitate understanding the nature and significance of networking and mobility during the Bronze Age and Iron Age and their distribution across the four

chronological phases. The exchange of material and the presence of imported artefacts, whilst providing evidence for the exchange of material culture, indirectly helps to understand the exchange of ideas, beliefs and practices between regional and inter-regional communities.

Socio-economic transformations during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age encouraged the emergence of local production and imitations to accommodate the increased demand for imported artefacts (Aliu, 2004; 2012). Trained craftsmen within the patriarchal society started to specialise in metalwork productions, forming distinct groups of artisans (Andrea, 1976a). The introduction of wheel pottery during the Middle Iron Age further encouraged pottery production and imitations of many shapes, forms and designs from different cultural regional and inter-regional groups, (Andrea, 1978; Koka, 2012). Aliu (2004) and Bodinaku (2018) demonstrate how the proliferation of metalwork found in tumulus cemeteries across the southeastern, southwestern and southern Albania presented local stylistic and display variations. According to these scholars, this reflect how local communities developed new material culture that imitated or was inspired by imported products. I suggest that this illustrates how these communities adopted, adapted and created new material culture by integrating traditional and innovative styles, shapes and objects. The abundance of wealthy artefacts in Luaras, Prodan, Rehovë (BI-C) and Psar (IA- only), whilst highlighting the importance of imported artefacts, suggests the presence of local workshops (Aliu, 1995). They have been identified in Dukat 01 (BI-C), Patos (BI-C), Kuç i Zi 02 (IA-only), and Shuec (IA-only) (Andrea, 1978; 2009; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). The results from this research illustrate how local production and imitation artefacts have been found primarily within BI-C and IA-only tumuli. They shed light on the social context and mentality of local communities, which tended to imitate artefacts, fashion

and ways of dressing in burial. It could have also been applied to the practice of adopting and adapting different forms of ideological beliefs and funerary practices that better suited their individual and regional identities.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how within *Iliria* Journal and monographs, the emergence of tumulus cemeteries as a distinct form of burial has primarily been attributed to the consolidation of Illyrian ethnicity, which has remained the focal point of tumuli research throughout both the communist and post-communist periods. This chapter highlights the complexity and diversity of tumulus cemeteries, revealing that their emergence and proliferation cannot be attributed to a single factor. The findings indicate a need to shift the focus away from a narrative of Kurgan migration, which purportedly assimilated and devastated local communities while imposing their burial practices. The limited presence of tumuli and graves exhibiting Kurgan influence does not support this interpretation. Instead, attention should be directed toward understanding what transpired, how it occurred, and why.

The chapter demonstrates the significance of networking and mobility, illustrating how the exchange of materials, ideas and beliefs was intricately linked to both small and large-scale human migration and travelling communities. This exchange played a crucial role in the ideological evolution of tumuli, contributing to their rise and widespread adoption. A detailed analysis of the earliest tumuli, particularly those attributed to the BA-only, reveals a diversity of architectural styles and material cultures. This is particularly observable in the earliest tumuli that emerged in Albania, which drew influences from Kurgan and Cetina cultures. Tumuli builders and mourning communities integrated various cultural elements, adapting these influences to align

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with their local customs and beliefs. The incorporation of Kurgan or Cetina influences into these tumuli – which were not as distinctly observable in later phases or were reconfigured – further emphasises how communities reshaped and adapted diverse burial and funerary practices. These examples underscore that a new ideological framework surrounding burial traditions, as represented by tumuli, became the prevailing practice. Additionally, the socio-economic and ritual transformations taking place in Albania and the broader region enabled Bronze and Iron Age societies to adopt this novel tradition of constructing monumental tumulus cemeteries while also integrating older Neolithic burial customs and artefacts. This resulted in various local communities reshaping and embracing tumulus practices inspired by groups that had previously adopted the tumuli ideology.

Within the framework of networking and mobility, we can gain a deeper understanding of the emergence and spread of tumuli culture. These structures served as funerary ritual monuments, playing a significant role in the widespread adoption, absorption and integration of tumulus practices among various communities. These groups not only embraced this new ideological construct but also devoted their time, energy and material resources to the construction of monumental burial sites. This commitment likely arose from the ritual significance of these locations, leading to a transformation in societal rituals. Additionally, the sub-theme of social dynamics illustrates how both the individuals interred within the tumuli and their builders were often influenced by a wide array of regional and inter-regional ideas, beliefs, and practices that shaped their beliefs and practices of life, death and the afterlife.

Tumuli culture and their monumental ritual dimensions significantly impacted the daily lives and activities of local communities. This influence extended to the construction

of monumental funerary sites (Chapter 4) and shaped how these communities interacted with both their micro and macro landscapes. The emergence and proliferation of tumuli were closely associated with the intentional placement of these structures near prominent landscape features such as rivers, hills, mountains and fields. This deliberate positioning fostered a more practical and ritual relationship between the tumuli, as funerary monuments, and the surrounding landscape. As visible and enduring structures, tumuli defined the landscape and reinforced their prominence as funerary monuments within it. Consequently, influential figures in society, including social and military elites, adopted tumuli practices. These mounds of memory became powerful symbols of social status, wealth, and ritual beliefs, expressed through various funerary and ceremonial activities. The involvement of these elites within the tumuli, along with the material culture associated with them, reflects the social and economic contexts of their users, indicating that tumuli practices were designated for select members of society. However, findings related to social dynamics across the data challenge the notion that tumuli practices were exclusively the domain of privileged groups. The presence of artefacts suggests complexity beyond mere representations of wealth, indicating that these practices may have been shaped by various factors, including the pursuit of ritual significance.

The emergence and widespread establishment of tumulus cemeteries represent a complex phenomenon shaped by both external and internal factors, as well as the interplay between tumuli and the natural and ritual perceptions of the landscape. However, the findings presented in this chapter should not be viewed in isolation; they must be considered in conjunction with the results concerning the architectural structure of tumuli discussed in Chapter 4. Additionally, Chapter 6 will emphasise the significance of funerary and ritual ceremonies along with their associated beliefs.

Chapter 6   Funerary practices and rituals

6.1   Introduction

Funerals were the physical and social actions undertaken during the disposal of the corpse and throughout the burial processes, whilst rituals provided the avenue for expressing grief and commemoration to the deceased before, during and after the funerary process. They were emotional and physical expressions of dealing with death and bereavement. The importance of funerary practices and rituals was emphasised and reinforced by the mourning and commemorative practices involved before, during and after burials (Martínez, Flensborg and Bayala, 2012). They were social events and practices that 'provided the communities with the opportunity to make public statements about the role of the dead' and reflected mourners' beliefs and concepts of death and the afterlife (Quinn, Ciugudean and Beck, 2020; 1; Zavodny, 2020; Oestigaard, 2022). Beliefs were the ideological framework for the funerary practices and rituals (Brandt, Ingvaldsen and Prusac, 2014; Baitzel, 2022). Whilst being a mortuary monument, tumuli signified, contained and encouraged cult meanings, where different funerary practices were accompanied by and were part of ritual and cult ceremonies (Mörner and Lind, 2018; Silvestri *et al.,* 2019; Cristofaro, 2020; Oestigaard, 2022).

Albanian archaeology was strongly influenced by marxist theory, where religion was considered the opium of the masses (Lafe, 2005; Stepputat, 2016). This secular approach impacted the presentation of the ritual meaning of tumuli and funerary practices. However, the role of rituals has been acknowledged, and several scholars as Andrea (1985a), Aliu (2004; 2012), Prendi (1985; 2008) and Jubani (1974; 1982;

1995) have analysed and interpreted their meanings. This information was often fragmented and limited to a small number of tumulus cemeteries. The innovative approach of this chapter lies in collecting the information and presenting for the first time several rituals, cults, offerings and feastings performed from the preparation of tumuli ground to commemorative ceremonies.

Fragmentation of pottery and metal objects and their role and significance have been acknowledged within Albanian archaeology. However, the practices and activities involved in fragmentation were described in general terms as 'ritual practice performed in many Illyrian tumuli' (Bela, 2012; 60). Several scholars provide in-depth interpretations regarding pottery fragmentation, while metal fragmentation has seldom been analysed or interpreted (Jubani 1982; 1983; 1992; Aliu, 2012). The innovative approach of this research lies in collecting all the information about fragmented artefacts inside and outside graves across the four chronological phases and illustrating the practices and rituals performed during fragmentation.

In this chapter, I will present the findings from the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs that contribute to the exploration of Research Question 3: What funerary and ritual practices were performed at the 123 tumulus cemeteries? This chapter provides an overview of three main themes, supported by descriptive statistical analysis. The findings of the burial rites will be detailed in Section 6.2, while funerary practices, offerings, and cults will be discussed in Section 6.3. Additionally, Section 6.4 will focus on pottery and metal fragmentation. Through this examination, I aim to illustrate the significant funerary and ritual roles of tumuli and their importance in helping communities confront death, burial and bereavement.

6.2 Burial rites

Once an individual died, mourning families and other members of the community had to decide whether to bury the body in the ground, cremate or find different ways of discarding the body in a way that was meaningful, respectful, and symbolic for the deceased and the community (Nilsson Stutz, 2003; Nilsson Stutz and Stutz,2022; Oestigaard, 2022). During the 20th century, burial rites or the treatment of the body were associated with ethnic and cultural groups (Frînculeasa, Mirea and Trohani, 2017; Gori and Ivanova, 2017). Across *Iliria* Journal and monographs, Albanian scholars have unanimously considered the burial rite of inhumation as the most crucial and unchallenging factor in identifying the emergence and consolidation of Illyrian ethnicity (Andrea, 1985a; Korkuti, 1989; 2016; Prendi, 1985a; 1998; 2008). Cremation was presented as an insignificant and limited alternative form of burial used throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age (Korkuti, 1981; Prendi, 2008). Consequently, its role and significance were seldom analysed and interpreted (Andrea 1985a; Prendi, 2008). The burial rites of inhumation and cremation were presented as opposing and contradictory burials associated with different groups that shared different beliefs and potentially different ethnicities (Bodinaku, 1974; Andrea, 1985a; Prendi, 1974; 1977; 1985a). The absence of the body where no skeletal remains were identified or preserved was often attributed to soil acidity, which impacted the preservation of the skeleton. It was frequently interpreted as inhumed individuals whose human remains had not been preserved (Jubani, 1982; Koka, 2012). Subsequently, these cases were repeatedly included, presented and interpreted within the inhumation burial. Islami (2013) introduced alternative interpretations, suggesting that alongside inhumation, these graves could also be viewed as cenotaphs or commemorative graves. Tumuli with neither human remains nor grave structures were interpreted as ritual-only tumuli (Andrea 1995, Bela 2012). Whilst the connection between ethnicity and burial rites has been

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challenged within European archaeology, these challenges have not been considered or explored in the study of tumuli in Albania utilised in this research (Knapp, 2021) (Chapter 2).

This chapter offers a thorough presentation and interpretation of various burial practices, including inhumation, cremation and invisible burials, along with an examination of funerary rituals and customs. It will also present the child burials and their burial rites. Its purpose is to illustrate how these burial rites reflect societal attitudes towards the body and beliefs about death and the afterlife.

In the 123 tumuli cemeteries in Albania, I have identified three burial rites: inhumation, cremation, and invisible burials.

6.2.1   Inhumation

Inhumation was the flagship of burial rites in tumuli studies (Prendi, 1985a). However, due to the poor condition or complete absence of skeletal remains, along with a lack of detailed information, I am unable to provide a comprehensive or general analysis of the number of graves where inhumation was practised among the 123 tumuli, nor can I evaluate their distribution across the four chronological phases. Similarly, I could not determine or analyse the grave orientation due to insufficient data. In this sub-theme, I aim to highlight the information gathered regarding body preparation, the burial process and the position of the remains within the grave.

An analysis of the tumuli data utilised in this research indicates that inhumation in tumulus cemeteries during the Bronze and Iron Ages involved the interment of a human body in a pit dug into the ground, with the body being interred intact and in a

complete preservation state (Prendi, 2008). The treatment and preparation of the corpse and their associated burial practices have not been considered important enough to be explored within Albanian literature, and minimal direct information has been provided about corpse preparation in the settlement before being buried in tumuli. Jubani (1982) suggests that objects found in the Krumë area could have been part of the cleaning process of the corpse. Jubani describes how the funerary pottery used for this cleansing was subsequently broken and fragmented within the tumulus cemetery, possibly during the internment itself. This practice formed part of the ceremony of the ritualised pottery fragmentation, wherein selected pottery fragments were placed on top of the grave (Section 6.4.1).

Bodies were dressed and adorned for burial, as evidenced in Barç 01, Bruç 01, Klos, and Kënetë 03 (Jubani, 1983; Andrea, 1985a; Kilian, 1985; Aliu, 2004; Bodinaku, 2018).[23] Based on the analysis of grave findings, evaluating their description and assessing their images, I suggest that dressing and adorning bodies for burial was likely a standard feature; however, I have only managed to identify a few specific examples. Likewise, based on the analysis of the findings and an evaluation of the information presented within this research, I suggest that the scarcity of data was due to the methodological approach applied during the communist period (Chapter 3).

Frequently, one individual was buried in a grave. Multiple graves with two or three individuals were practised only in 13 tumuli with 23 secondary graves. Inhumation was the main form of burial in 22 graves, with cremation being in the remaining grave (Table

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[23] Within the literature, the presence of the covering of corpses and artefacts, the perishable materials for grave construction and the number of pottery made for ritual purposes are provided in general terms, and only a few specific examples were provided. Therefore, it is impossible to provide a general or detailed number or chronological distribution of these processes.

6.1). It is likely that the second or third inhumed body was reburied in older graves or was a member of the same family. For example, in Barç 01, in two graves, a child was placed lying on an adult's chest, and in Luaras, two adults and a child were close together as if they were hugging (Andrea, 1985a; Aliu, 2004). These interpretations, however, were not based on isotope or aDNA analysis.

Phase	Tumulus	Number of graves	Number of individuals	Burial rite
BA-only	Pazhok 01	1	2	Inhumation
	Pazhok 02	1	2	Inhumation
BI-C	Bajkaj	1	2	Inhumation
	Barç 01	2	2	Inhumation
	Dukat 01	3	2	Inhumation
	Luaras	1	3	Inhumation
	Patos	4	2	Inhumation 3; Cremation 1
	Prodan	3	2	Inhumation
BI-R	Kënetë 04	1	2	Inhumation
	Shtoj 06	1	2	Inhumation
IA-only	Bujan 06	1	2	Inhumation
	Kakavijë	1	2	Inhumation
	Kuç i Zi 01	3	2	Inhumation
Total	N/A	23	27	N/A

Table 6.1   Graves with two or three individuals

The deceased were often buried accompanied by several objects, such as pottery, weaponry, and ornaments, which were parts of the funerary dress and ritual offerings. Aliu (2004) describes how some artefacts, particularly pottery, were deliberately made for funerary processes, and a similar approach would have been applied across many tumuli. The body and a selection of artefacts were likely to have been covered with textiles, and this was particularly evident in the Shtoj and Kënetë areas (Jubani, 1983; Koka, 2012). I suggest that this could have reflected the social position of the deceased, and it was associated with the cult of the sun, where clothes could lighten the darkness of the afterlife (Harris, S., 2014; Greenberg, 2019; Rødsrud, 2020).

The *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs lack sufficient information that details or analyses the processes involved in biological death, burial, and post-burial practices. Analysing the available data on burial and grave descriptions leads me to propose that burial likely constituted an extended process, initiated with body preparation and transportation to the tumulus. This process probably culminated in the actual placement of the body within the grave. In addition to stone structures, corpses were often positioned directly on the ground or in other perishable materials, such as tree branches, reeds, and wood. These practices have been identified across various tumuli locations, including Bardhocë, Barç, Burrel, Dukat, Krumë, Pazhok, Prodan, and Rehovë (Ceka, 1974; Hoti, 1982; Jubani, 1982; Andrea, 1985a; Aliu, 2012; Bela, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). However, the presentation of tumuli data within the dataset does not provide adequate information to reconstruct the timelines between the burial process and the construction of graves.

The positioning of the body within the grave, often referred to as the skeleton position, pertains to how the deceased was arranged inside the grave. The skeleton position has traditionally been central to the study of tumuli and is synonymous with burial practices. However, research aimed at identifying, analysing and interpreting the characteristic features of various positions and their significance has been limited (Kurti, D., 1983; Aliu, 2012). The term 'skeleton position' signifies a physical and emotional detachment from the individuals buried beneath tumuli. In this research, I employ the terms 'body positioning' or 'individual's position'. There is considerable confusion in the literature regarding the Albanian terminology used to describe body positioning, with different terms sometimes applied to the same position. Additionally, the lack of images further complicates the comprehension of body positioning. Moreover, poor preservation of skeletons has resulted in limited or absent information regarding body positioning across several tumuli. Consequently, due to inadequate data, I cannot provide a detailed presentation or analysis of the various categories of body positioning, nor can it offer a statistical representation of the 123 tumulus cemeteries or their distribution across the four chronological phases.

I have identified three main body positions: the crouch, supine with flexed legs, and extended body position.

In a crouch position, the body was laid on the left or the right side, as if sleeping. Legs were flexed high above the knees in a squatted position, whilst arms were folded on the chest or placed near the face (Figure 6.1). In Albania, this was described as the sleeping position. Frequently, the bent arms and legs dropped lower than the original and characteristic position of this type, like in the primary grave of Shuec (Andrea, 2009). This could have resulted from the pressure of weight and the passage of time.

Damiata et al. (2007) describe how the individual buried in Lofkënd tumulus was tied with a rope around the knees and legs to maintain the high knee position in the crouch style. I have adopted similar techniques in this research. The sleeping position has been identified in the Neolithic settlement of Maliq, and this argument has been used to illustrate the continuity of the local Neolithic tradition to Bronze Age tumuli (Andrea, 1985a; Prendi, 1998; Prendi and Bunguri, 2014) (Chapter 5).

Figure 6.1   Primary grave in Dukat 02 in crouch position

Copyright: Bodinaku 2018

In the supine position, the body was laid on the back, and the head was tilted either to the left or to the right. The arm position varied from being placed near the head to being flexed, crossed on the abdomen, or with one hand straight and the other flexed near the chest. The legs were flexed and turned to the right or the left. For example, during the 12th century BC, in Barç 01, an individual was placed inside the grave on their back, with their head resting on a stone and tilted to the left. Their arms were folded on their abdomen, and their legs were bent on the right (Figure 6.2). According to Andrea (1985a), using stones as a cushion represented the effort made by local communities to ensure the deceased was laid to rest in a proper and peaceful position. I propose that this effort also signify the communities' commitment to preparing the deceased for entry into the afterlife. This position shared similarities with the crouch. This position was used during the Late Bronze Age and throughout the Iron Age.
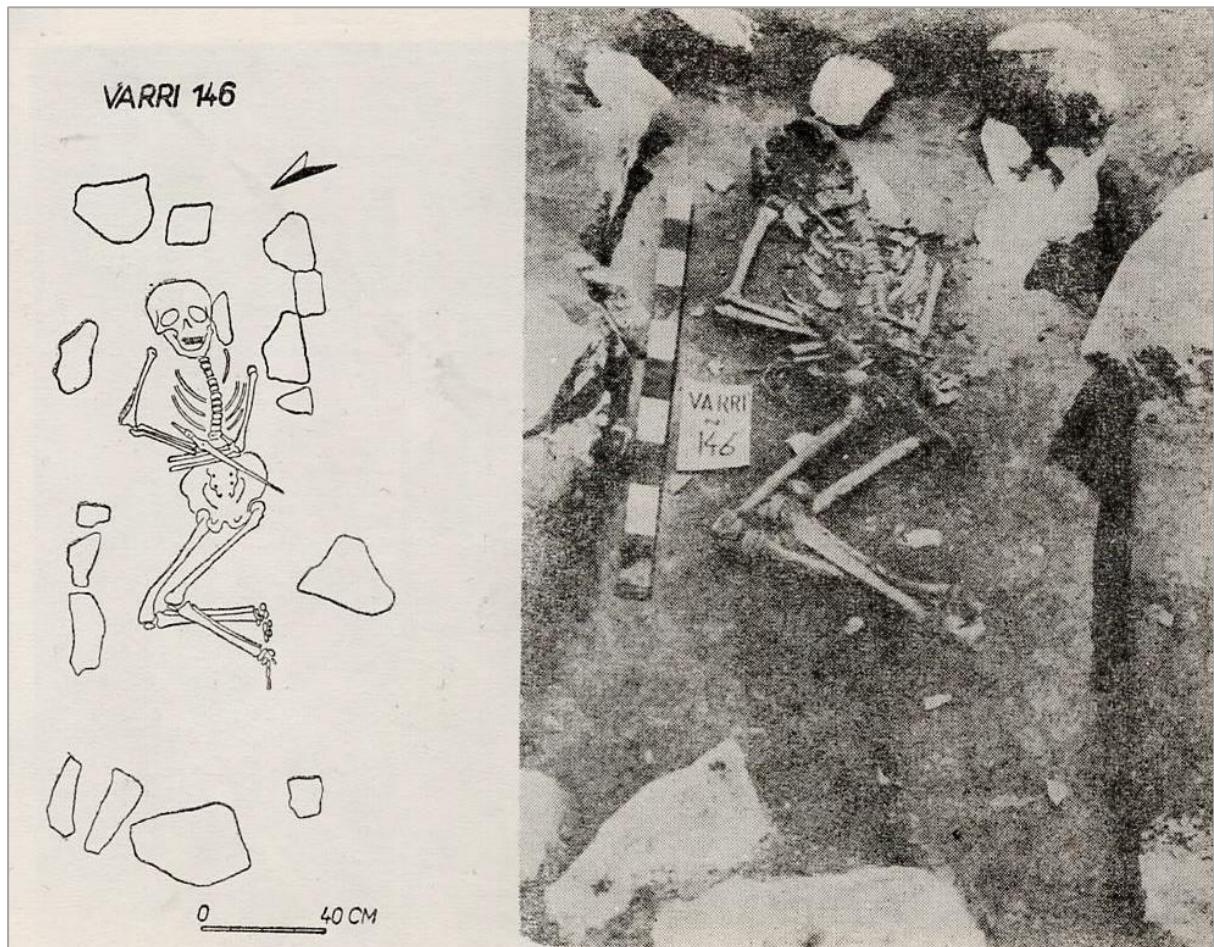
Figure 6.2   Supine position in Barç 01

Copyright: Andrea 1985

In the extended body position, the body is laid on its back with extended straight legs. The head is straight or tilted to the left or right, and the arms and hands are often straight (Aliu, 2004). The positioning of the upper part of the body shares similarities with the supine position, while in the extended position, the legs are straight (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3   Extended body position in Rehovë

Copyright: Aliu 2012

The positioning of bodies within graves was both complex and varied, and I have identified the different practices observed within tumuli. Bodinaku (2018) highlights that the combination of various positions was a common feature in many tumulus cemeteries across southeast Albania. This coexistence is exemplified in grave 43 in Prodan (BI-C), which contained two individuals: one was placed in a sleeping position, while the other lay supine with arms crossed over the chest and legs flexed (Aliu, 1984). I propose that this diversity reflects the range of perceptions of death held within the same community.

The positioning of the body has been interpreted with the ritual meanings of death and the afterlife (Aliu, 2004; 2020). The crouch position symbolised the positioning of an unborn baby inside the womb, reflecting regeneration and rebirth; the flexed position reflected resting and waiting; and the extended position represented resting and waiting for the afterlife (Bodinaku, 2018). Alongside ritual meaning, this research builds on the interpretation of Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2023), which suggest s that the body position of inhumed individuals reflected how communities perceived and treated the human body, with its preservation and completeness being a crucial aspect of burial. It is the physical body in its complete form which provides the relationship between death and life, the dead and the living (Booth and Brück, 2020; Oestigaard, 2022; Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

6.2.2   Cremation

Cremation involved placing one individual on a pyre, where wood and other fuelling materials were used to burn the body (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023). Information about the presence and the distribution of the burial rite of cremation was presented throughout *Iliria* Journal and monographs. However, I observed a notable

distinction in the presentation style and significance attributed to inhumation compared to cremation. As outlined in Section 6.2, cremation was portrayed as a minor and infrequently practiced burial method, evident in only a limited number of tumulus cemeteries. Consequently, its role and importance were rarely analysed or interpreted (Andrea 1985a; Prendi, 2008). Throughout the dataset, there is no definitive count of tumuli where either the primary or secondary grave involved cremation. In stark contrast to inhumation, information about cremation was often buried within lengthy descriptions of general graves. This frequently necessitated that I sift through the details to ascertain the number of primary graves and determine whether they pertained to cremation. The same challenge applied to secondary graves involving cremation, where such information was seldom presented in a clear, organised and statistical manner (Bodinaku, 2018).

Considering my analysis of the data gathered from *Iliria* Journal and various monographs, I propose that the association of cremation with other ethnic groups has hindered and influenced its presentation, analysis, and interpretation (Andrea 1985a, Aliu 2004; 2012; Bodinaku 2018). I have meticulously identified, collected, analysed and interpreted all available information regarding cremation as presented in *Iliria* Journal and its monographs. This represents a groundbreaking approach in Albanian archaeology, as I will integrate thematic and statistical presentations of cremation to achieve a thorough analysis and understanding of this complex and varied burial practice. To address the gap in the interpretation of cremation within *Iliria* Journal and monographs, I have drawn on international scholarly research to provide insights that enhance our understanding of its significance.

Cremation was a new practice in Albania in the Early Bronze Age and continued until the Late Iron Age. Detailed information about primary grave cremation across the four chronological phases was provided in Chapter 4. Drawing on information from the *Iliria* Journal and monographs, I have identified three significant cremation forms: 1) cremation in situ, 2) cremation performed outside, and 3) urns.

The three variations of cremation were practised separately, but they were also practised simultaneously within the same tumulus. For example, within the Prodan tumulus, three graves were cremated in situ, two were cremated outside, and in three graves, the cremated remains were placed in urns (Aliu, 1984; 2020).

6.2.2.1   Cremation in situ

In five primary graves, cremation was performed on the tumulus ground, where an individual was placed and cremated on a pyre. This included one BA-only tumulus (Pazhok 06), two BI-C (Vajzë 01; Vodhimë), and two IA-only (Krumë 04, 06). Four graves were simple pits, with Vodhimë being the only example where cremation was performed inside a stone structure. Cremation in situ involved transporting the deceased, constructing the pyre or a firing platform, and covering cremated remains and or artefacts with either soil or a stone structure. The significant role of the primary grave in creating a new funerary monument and additional architectural structures is presented in Chapter 4.

An analysis of cremated primary graves helps to shed light on the processes involved in the cremation ceremonies and how communities perceived death, the treatment of the body and the significant role of tumuli as funerary monuments. The transportation of the deceased has only been provided for the primary grave in Krumë 04 during the

Early Iron Age. The individual was brought on a wooden stretcher with a 0.80 metre wooden pole still visible, and cremation was performed in situ in the middle of the tumulus. The 3.60 x 2.10 metres soil platform illustrates how the pyre was placed on tumulus ground, and the individual was cremated whilst still on the stretcher. Fragments of a drinking cup broken before burial and thrown on the pyre during cremation indicated that feasting was performed during cremation. The remains were covered with soil. A similar feasting ceremony was performed in Vajzë 01 during the Middle Bronze Age (Prendi, 2008). In the Early Iron Age, a fire was performed in the centre of Krumë 06, and the absence of cremated remains within the grave suggests that the physical body was probably not placed on the pyre.

Following the primary grave or the first burial, cremation was performed in situ for 18 secondary graves in 11 tumuli. One grave was added in the Late Bronze Age in Pazhok 06 (BA- only), thirteen graves were incorporated in seven BI-C tumuli, two in BI-R, and two graves in three IA-only tumuli. The grave in Pazhok 06 was dated to the Late Bronze Age, and the remaining graves were dated to the Iron Age, indicating that cremation in situ became more widespread during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. In Bajkaj, three of the forty-two secondary graves were cremated in situ, which illustrates both the continuity of cremation from the primary grave and the co-existence with inhumation, although it is limited in number. In 14 graves, remains were covered with soil, and a stone structure was constructed before or after cremation for two graves.

Artefacts were often placed with the deceased before cremation, and they were absent only in three graves in two BI-C tumuli (Pazhok 04, Prodan). The body positioning of the individuals before cremation was adopted from that of inhumations. This was

particularly evident in Patos (BI-C) tumulus, where almost all individuals were laid in a distinctively supine or extended position. The charcoal remains identified inside the graves suggest that a wooden structure, probably a pyre, was used to cremate individuals inside the graves. Additionally, in Patos during the 11th to the 9th century BC, a stone structure was constructed during the Early Iron Age at the centre of the tumulus to facilitate partial cremation (Figure 6.4). In 29 graves, lower limbs were fully cremated whilst the upper body was unaffected, and soil was thrown on top of the deceased to control the burning process (Korkuti, 1981b; Aliu, 1984; Islami, 2013). This would have required knowledge and experience in controlling fire and burning processes (Wright, E., 2021). Korkuti (1981) and Bodinaku (2018), while detailing the partial cremation at Patos tumulus, do not offer any rationale, explanation, or significance regarding partial cremation and the placement of a pyre within graves, particularly in light of the fire structure constructed at the tumulus's centre. This practice has not been explicitly detailed in the 123 tumulus cemeteries explored in this research. However, implicit details from the descriptions of cremation in the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs suggest that partial cremation may have also occurred in other tumuli. Further research is needed to explore this phenomenon. Likewise, in Shtogj 02 (BI-C), during the 15th – 12th century BC, in graves 9 and 12, cremation was performed inside a stone grave structure, and a fire structure positioned near the graves was possibly a pyre which aided the cremation process (Figure 6.5).
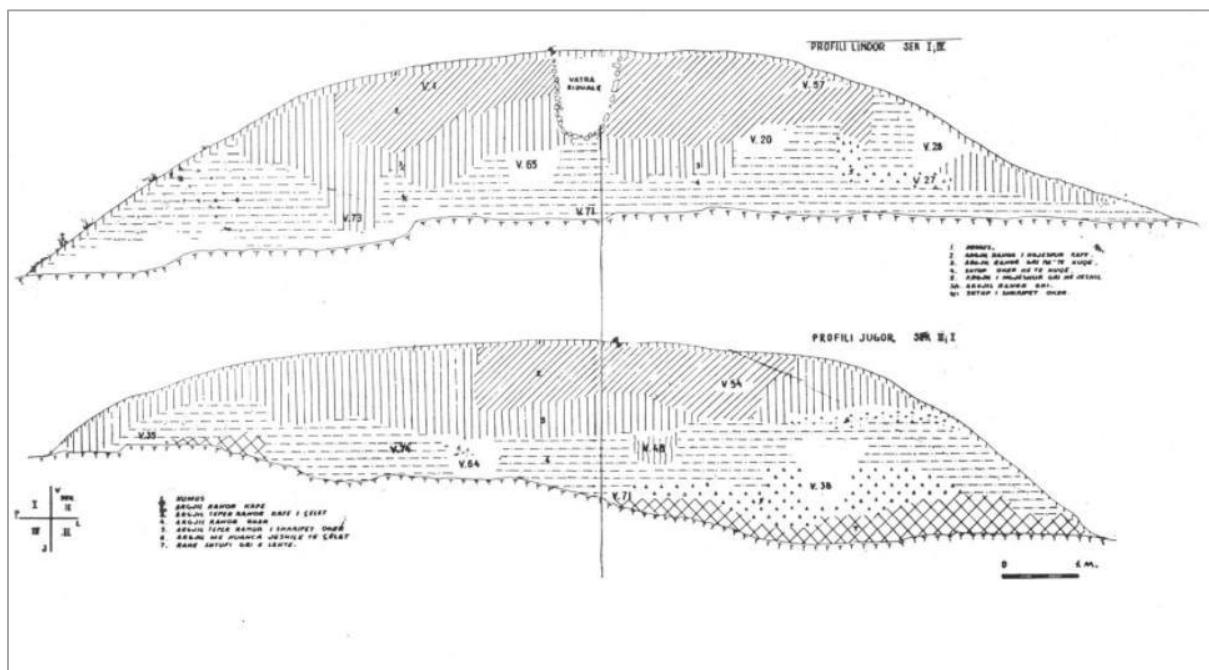
Figure 6.4   Cremation and fire structure in the centre of Patos tumulus

Copyright: Korkuti 1981

Figure 6.5   Shtogj 02 tumulus during excavation

Copyright: Islami 2013

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6.2.2.2   Cremation outside

Cremation outside involves the performance of cremation away from the tumuli. It is not possible to identify the cremation location, practices, and timeframe for death, cremation, and burial. Cremation outside was practised for primary graves in 16 tumuli. Eight tumuli were BA-only, two BI-C, one BI-R, and five IA-only. The BA-only tumuli were in the Shkrel area, where in seven of them (Shkrel 01-04, 07,08 10), cremation was performed outside, and remains were scattered in the tumuli ground. In Shkrel 09, cremated remains were buried inside a stone structure. In two BI-C tumuli, Rrethe-Bazje 09 and Bajkaj, cremated remains were buried inside grave stone structures; in Shtoj 02 (BI-R), cremated remains were buried inside a pit grave, and in the five primary grave IA-only, cremated remains were buried inside a simple pit in Krumë 01, 06, whilst in Bujan 07, Mamëz and Çepunë cremated remains were buried inside a stone grave structure.

The burial of cremated remains outside was observed in 36 secondary graves across 13 tumuli (Table 6.2). Specifically, there were four tumuli classified as BI-C (Bajkaj; Luaras; Prodan; Rehovë), one identified as BI-R (Shtoj 02), and eight designated as IA-only (Krumë 01, 06-07; Kuç i Zi 01; Myç-Has 02; Rrethe-Bazje 09; Shuec; Çepunë). Of these secondary graves, 24 contained cremated remains interred within a stone structure, while 14 featured remains placed in simple pits. Although utilised across three phases, graves with cremated remains were primarily dated to the Iron Age, indicating that cremation outside became a prevalent burial rite during this time. The cremated remains interred in the graves exhibited similarities to the inhumed remains found within the same tumulus. Notably, the arrangement of remains in these graves mirrored the practices of inhumation (Bodinaku, 2018). For instance, in Rehovë, the cremated remains – particularly the skull and spine – were likely purposefully

positioned within the stone structure to reflect a flexed posture (Aliu, 2012; 2020). Artefacts discovered in these graves suggest that rituals involving feasting, as well as pottery and metal fragmentation, were conducted during or prior to the interment of the cremated remains (Aliu, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). Similar practices are presumed to have taken place in Mamëz, as evidenced by the discovery of a cooking pot. I propose that the fire structures could have served as pyres or structures to facilitate cremation, specifically in the primary grave at Bujan 06 and two secondary graves in Kuç i Zi 01, contributing to a deeper understanding of funerary practices and rituals.

Phase	In situ	Simple pit	Stone structure	Outside	Simple pit	Stone structure	Urns
BA-only							
Primary grave	1	1	0	8	6*	2	0
Secondary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BI-C							
Primary grave	2	1	1	2	0	2	0
Secondary	13	12	1	11	7	2	25
BI-R							
Primary grave	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Secondary	0	0	0	2	2	0	2
IA-only							
Primary grave	2	2	0	5	2	3	0
Secondary	3	2	1	25	3	22	6

Table 6.2   The distribution of cremation across the four phases

*Based on cremation scattered on the ground in the Shkrel area

I suggest that cremation was a transformative process whereby the body was transformed through fire into a different physical form, which could be fragmented, transported and distributed between different areas or members of the community. It is the fragmentation and transformation of the cremated body that helped create new relationships between the dead and the living (Williams, 2004; Cooney, 2014; Wessman and Williams, 2017; Monetti, Gafner and Thompson, 2021; Aprile and Fiorentino, 2021; Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

6.2.2.3 Urn cremations

The fragmentation of the body through cremation was expanded by placing selected remains in a cinerary urn. Placing cremated remains, with or without artefacts, in one or more pots used as urns was practised in 33 secondary graves in six tumuli. Three tumuli were BI-C (Barç 01; Prodan; Rehovë), two BI-R (Kënetë 04, 05), and one IA-only (Kuç i Zi 01). There are no examples of a primary grave or a tumulus dedicated to an urn. Urns and their artefacts were dated predominantly between the 12th and the 6th century BC. It has traditionally been interpreted as foreign influences of the urnfields by the Pannonian migrations around the 12th – 9th century BC (Andrea, 1985a; Prendi, 1998). Whether the practice of urns was an influence or result of mobility and movement, it reflected a change in how local communities perceived the treatment of the body, death, burial and funerary practices. Frequently, pots used for everyday use in the domestic area were converted into urns, and in other cases, like in Rehovë, the cinerary urns were specially made for funerary purposes (Aliu, 2012). Whilst limited in number, this burial practice was diverse and complex, with each grave and urn presenting individual characteristics. An individual pot was often used as an urn, but two (Barç 01; Kuç i Zi 01) or three (Rehovë) urns were also used. Their measurements varied from 10 to 55 centimetres high.

In alignment with Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury's (2023) interpretation, I propose that placing remains in urns was an extension of the fragmentation of the body through cremation and further fragmenting the body through the process of putting a selection of remains within a container. Urns did not present the end of death and dying; they provided the rite of passage to the realm of the afterlife (Møller, Harvig and Grundvad, 2020). This is illustrated through the fragmentation process of urns. Only 18 complete urns were identified in Barç 01, Kuç i Zi 01 and Prodan. In 15 graves in six tumuli,

cremated remains were placed inside an incomplete urn, on the fragmented base or inside a large fragment of an urn, or buried in a pit and covered with fragments of urns. Within four tumuli, there was a combination of complete and fragmented urns. For example, in Barç 01, in three graves alongside complete urns, cremated remains were scattered around the urns and were covered with fragments from another urn. A combination of a complete urn and the covering of the remains with fragments was practised in Barç 01, grave 114. Pottery fragments were also placed inside urns, further highlighting the role of fragmentation.

Limited information was provided on how the urns were distinctively marked and what practices involved their protection, mainly where the remains were scattered outside urns. In Barç 01, grave 69, the cremated remains were covered with broken fragments of urns and placed near a white stone. In three graves in Prodan, slabs were placed on top of the urns (Figure 6.6) (Aliu, 1984). River stones surrounded the three incomplete fragmented urns in grave 8 in Kënetë 04, and a mountain slab was placed on the urn as a lid (Jubani, 1983; Andrea, 1985a; Aliu, 1984; 2020). These combinations could reflect mountain and river cults (Chapter 7).
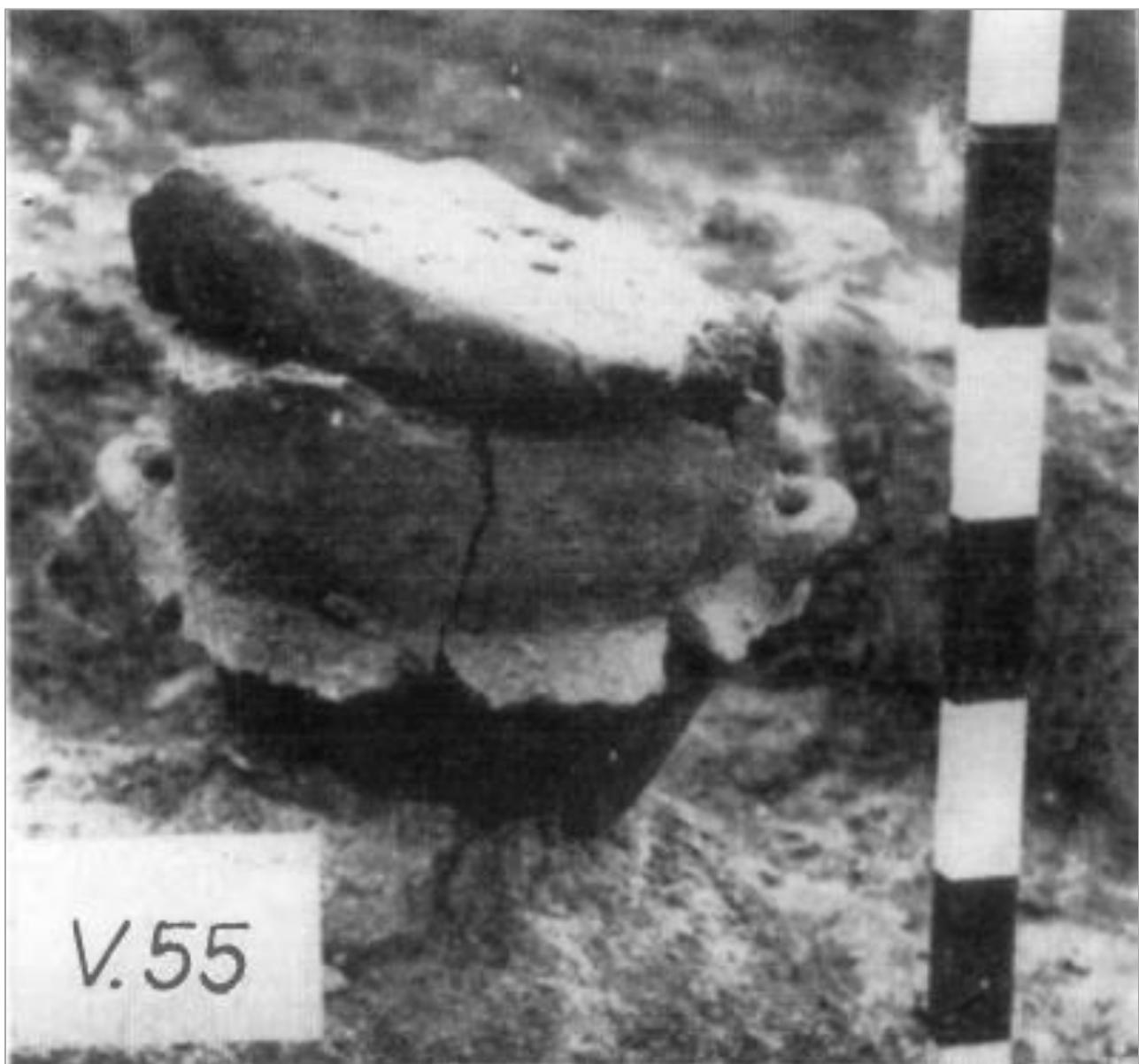
Figure 6.6   Fragmented urn covered with a river stone in Rehovë

Copyright: Aliu 1984

6.2.3   Invisible burials

In this research, I employ the term 'invisible burials', as described by Torres-Martínez et al. (2021; 410-411). In their groundbreaking study, they propose an alternative framework for understanding the significance of the absence of the body within tumuli. Building upon their interpretation, I suggest that 'what was perhaps important was not so much the body itself, but the perpetuation of a tangible impression and memory of

the deceased and their funerary'. Similar to the findings in Monte Bernario Area 7, I suggest alternative practices for handling and treating the body – probably those that did not leave behind any archaeological remains or were performed in different areas – were likely performed prior to the commemorative funerary rites in tumuli. I define invisible burial as the process of excluding human remains entirely, or including only small fragments, whether inhumed or cremated, that are not discernible to the naked eye.

The preservation state of skeletons was a significant concern throughout the four chronological phases. The absence of a body in many tumuli graves was a notable characteristic, often attributed to high soil acidity levels that hindered the detection of preserved remains. Furthermore, the lack of human remains was sometimes interpreted as indicative of symbolic or cenotaph graves dedicated to warriors who had fallen in battle (Jubani, 1982; Bela, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). Overall, in cases where skeletal remains were entirely absent, Albanian scholars tended to categorise and document these graves within the framework of inhumation. This was particularly evident in tumuli, where inhumation practices were prevalent, alongside a few graves lacking remains, such as those found in Krumë and Kënetë (Jubani, 1982; 1983; Bela, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018).

However, in the River Mat area and the northern part of Albania, the issue of missing skeletal remains became particularly perplexing, raising questions regarding the treatment of the body. Notably, the 25 tumulus cemeteries in the Mat region were part of a rescue excavation conducted in the 1950s, coinciding with the construction of the Koman reservoir (Agolli, 2017). This period marked the beginning of archaeological research in the country (Chapter 2). However, no soil analysis or other study was

conducted during the Mat excavation, making it impossible to determine whether the absence of skeletal remains was due to the high acidity of the soil or other contributing factors. Scholars such as Jubani (1982; 1983; 1992; 1995) and Islami (2013) began to explore alternative explanations beyond mere preservation issues, delving into different methods of body treatment. Jubani, specifically, employed the dual terminology of 'complete absence of the body' and 'body missing'. He has proposed an alternative to traditional inhumation and cremation practices. In his 1983 study, while documenting the primary grave in Krumë 07, Jubani noted that cremation occurred outside the grave and offered an alternative interpretation for the deliberate exclusion of cremated remains. Similarly, in 1995, he noted that in the primary grave in Shkrel 07, the cremated remains were likely intentionally not placed within the cist grave, which aligns with my interpretation of the 'invisible cremation'. Furthermore, in Rrethe-Bazje 09 (BI-R), dated to the Late Iron Age, the presence of burnt soil suggested that fires were conducted within 13 graves, yet no cremated remains were discovered in them. Islami (2013) classified these occurrences as cremation in situ while expressing concerns about the preservation of remains. Islami suggested that the poor preservation conditions in the area may have contributed to this phenomenon. Although the idea of the absence of the body as an alternative form of burial has begun to be investigated, these concepts have yet to be thoroughly explored within existing literature.

In my examination of 28 tumuli distributed across eight different areas: Burrel 07; Fushë-Sanxhak 01-05; Klos; Myç-Has 01, 03; Perlat 01-08; Rrethe-Bazje 02-08, 10-12; Shtogj 01; Urakë 01 (Figure 6.7), I noted a complete absence of human remains. The distribution of these tumuli, along with their distinctive features, is detailed in Chapter 4. The presence of these graves was identified primarily through the grave

structures, such as simple pit or stone structures, and grave offerings. Each tumulus contained between 1 and 27 graves, totalling 199 graves. Three tumuli were used in BA-only, two in BI-C, one in BI-R and 22 were newly constructed in IA-only. This illustrates how this practice became a more standard form of burial during the Iron Age.

Figure 6.7   Location of Rrethe-Bazje with nine invisible burial tumuli

Copyright: Islami 2013

Only tumuli where the absence of a body was explicitly noted by the authors, or interpreted as possible cenotaphs or commemorative graves, were recorded as invisible burial tumulus cemeteries. Such practices were likely more widespread. For instance, in areas such as Burrel, Kënetë, Krumë, and Myç-Has, there are an additional 19 tumuli containing 165 graves that also lacked human remains; however, these were excluded from this category as they were interpreted to reflect possible inhumation practices. Therefore, within the same areas, tumuli featuring no remains but containing graves with minimal inhumed remains were not included in this classification. A minimum of 42 tumuli, in which all or a significant number of graves contained no human remains, have been identified and recorded in the Tumuli Repository. This excludes graves that did not contain cremated remains, even though offerings showing signs of burning were present, as these were documented in the literature as cremation.

My analysis focuses predominantly on the primary grave; however, a record of both the primary grave and the total number of graves for each tumulus is noted separately in the Tumuli Repository.   It is important to acknowledge that these sites were excavated from the early 1950s to the 1980s, a period when scientific methods for soil analysis were still developing.   Therefore, it is conceivable that some bodies might have been present, or that certain information gleaned through recent scientific methods – such as those employed in the Lofkënd and PASH projects – was not detected. Additionally, it is possible that some skeletal remains may have originally interred in a grave and were removed or looted at a later period(Kroll, 2000).

Building on the work of Jubani (1982; 1993; 1995), which suggests that the complete absence of human bodies can represent an alternative form of burial rite, I propose

that such practices were part of a different approach to treating the body, reflecting how communities perceived death, the dead body and the afterlife. This perspective implies that the presence of a complete, intact body was not a prerequisite for burial in tumuli and for embarking on the journey to the afterlife. Furthermore, I argue that this may be viewed as an extension of the fragmentation of the body, as evidenced by the practice of cremation (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023).

It is reasonable to suggest that the tumuli in Albania were also 'places where collective memories were constructed and maintained, primarily through the worship of the memory of the deceased and the commemoration of their funerary rituals as social ceremonies, often going beyond the mere treatment of their bodies' (Torres-Martínez *et al.,* 2021; 408). The invisible burial tumuli were closely associated with ritual activities and ceremonies. A significant number of pottery fragments, resulting from the ritualised practice of pottery fragmentation, were discovered in 23 tumuli, while metal fragments were found in 11. It is probable that the treatment of the body, whether akin to or distinct from the burial rites of inhumation and cremation, was accompanied by a broader spectrum of ritualistic fragmentation customs and ceremonies. The remnants of pottery and other grave goods were offered in tumuli during commemorative funerary performances. Furthermore, the presence of three fire structures points to the occurrence of ritualised feasting ceremonies, along with various ritualistic activities, such as the shields associated with the cult of the sun in Urakë 01. Architectural features associated with ritual meaning, including seven ringstones, two muranë, and one dromos, indicate that these tumuli served purposes beyond merely functioning as burial sites for corpses. They had significant ritualistic meaning and acted as focal points for various ceremonial activities.

6.2.4 Children

Tumuli were primarily dedicated to adults. Although children were not commonly buried under tumuli, eight tumuli containing a total of 27 graves have been identified (Table 6.3). It is likely that the primary grave within Dukat 01, dating to the Late Bronze Age, included two individuals, one of whom was a child approximately seven years old (Ceka, 1974; Bodinaku, 2018). The remaining 26 secondary graves were incorporated into seven BI-C and one IA-only tumuli. Inhumation was practised in 17 graves, cremation in 8, while two graves in Rrethe-Bazje 01 featured invisible burials with no remains. The children's graves date from the 12th to the 6th century BC, likely reflecting the ritualistic and cultural practices adopted and adapted throughout this period. This evidence demonstrates the coexistence of inhumation, cremation and invisible graves during this time.

Phase	Tumulus	Number of graves	Burial rite
BI-C	Barç 01	2	Inhumation
	Bardhocë 01	1	Inhumation
	Burrel 03	1	Inhumation
	Dukat 01	3	Inhumation
	Luaras	4	Inhumation
	Patos	13	Inhumation 5; Cremation 8
	Rrethe-Bazje 01	2	No remains
IA-only	Kuç i Zi 02	1	Inhumation
Total	N/A	27	N/A

Table 6.3   Distribution of child graves and their burial rites

6.3   Funerary practices, cults, offerings and feasting

This theme highlights the key ritual practices observed in tumuli studies in Albania. These practices took place at various stages of tumuli construction as well as throughout the burial and commemorative processes. These ceremonies could have been conducted individually or as part of collective activities and were often integrated into larger funerary and ritual practices. The results are presented both individually and in combination, illuminating the intricate relationship between funerary and ritual activities. Section 6.3.1 covers commemorative and fire ceremonies, while Section 6.3.2 discusses cults, animal and bird offerings and feasting.

6.3.1   Commemorative and fire ceremonies

Commemorative ceremonies for the dead were performed on the third and ninth day after burial. This was illustrated through the amount of metal and pottery artefacts found outside graves and tumuli soil fill. They were often presented in general terms, whilst Aliu (1984; 2004; 2012; 2020) and Jubani (1992) are the only two scholars who describe and interpret commemorative ceremonies. During the commemoration, complete or fragmented pottery, metal artefacts, and perishable materials were placed outside graves or across tumuli fill. This was particularly evident in the BI-C tumuli of Prodan, Rehovë, Luaras and Shtoj 03. Commemorative practices were predominately performed for inhumated individuals. Still, the presence of artefacts outside graves with cremation and invisible graves suggests that commemoration was common across the three burial rites. The number of artefacts indicates that commemorative ceremonies were likely to have been performed repeatedly as a remembrance practice over a long period (Aliu, 1984; 2004). It is likely that within the same tumulus, different members of communities performed commemorative practices at different times.

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Artefacts, like the iron spearhead on top of grave 10 in Shtoj 03, could have been part of the offerings to the deceased or commemorative ceremonies (Jubani, 1992).

A fire ceremony was performed before, during and throughout the construction and use of tumuli. They were identified in 20 tumuli in 12 areas and by charcoal remains and burnt clay areas (Table 6.4). Their number is likely to have been greater.[24] Andrea (1985a) advocates for fire ceremonies being a common feature of many tumuli across Albania throughout all phases. However, no specific details were provided. Fire ceremonies were performed to express the communities' beliefs in the afterlife, as evidenced in Prodan and Vajzë 02-04 (Prendi, 1985a; 2008; Aliu, 2012; 2020). They were practised across the four chronological phases but were used more predominately in the Iron Age. The fire ceremonies of the BA-only have been identified in some of the earliest tumuli in Albania. They were practised in ritual-only tumuli (Bujan 07), tumuli with inhumation (Shkrel 05) and cremation performed outside (Shkrel 01- 02; 04). In Bujan 07, the fire structure combined with burnt soil and wood (2.40 x 1.80 metres) illustrates how the fire ceremony was performed on tumuli ground before the tumulus' construction. The structure was covered with clay and pottery fragments, which illustrates how the two ceremonies were performed either at the same time or within a short period before the tumulus was constructed and sealed with a cupola (Andrea, 1995). In the Shkrel area, fire ceremonies and remains were part of broader funerary practices such as pottery fragmentation, animal and bird offerings, feasting, bringing settlement remains to tumuli and sourcing a combination of river and mountain materials for architectural structures (Jubani, 1995). To further highlight the

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[24] I have only recorded tumuli where the authors have specifically interpreted the remains and structures as fire structures. It is likely that the remains of many fire structures during the first phase of tumuli construction and the primary graves would have been destroyed by the construction of secondary graves and architectural structures added at a later stage.

ritual role of tumuli and their beliefs, a dromos signified the passage to the afterlife was constructed on top of Bujan 07, Shkrel 01 and 02 (Chapter 4) (Andrea, 1995; Jubani, 1995).

Phase	Tumuli
BA-only	Bujan 07
	Shkrel 01, 02, 04, 05
BI-C	Patos
	Rehovë
	Shtogj 02
	Vajzë 02
BI-R	Shtoj 06
IA-only	Hamallaj
	Kënetë 01, 02
	Krumë 01
	Myç-Has 02, 04, 05
	Rrethe-Bazje 09
	Vajzë 03, 04

Table 6.4   Fire structures across the four chronological phases

In two BI-C tumuli, fire ceremonies continued to be performed during the first phase of tumuli construction and were associated with inhumation. This was evident in Rehovë, where a fire structure (1.00 x 0.60 metres) was placed on top of the muranë, and in Vajzë 02, the fire ceremony was performed to commemorate the construction of the ringstone (Prendi, 2008; Aliu, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). In the other two BI-C tumuli, fire ceremonies were associated with secondary grave cremation. In Shtoj 02, the fire structure was related to secondary graves' cremation dated in the Late Bronze Age. In Patos, the fire structure was constructed during the Early Iron Age to facilitate the cremation of secondary graves. In Shtoj 06 (BI-R), fire ceremonies were performed during the Early Bronze Age within the stone ritual structure (with measurements of 1.00 x 0.60 metres) with bird offerings, six figurines and fragmented pottery (Figure 6.6) (Koka, 1990; 2012).
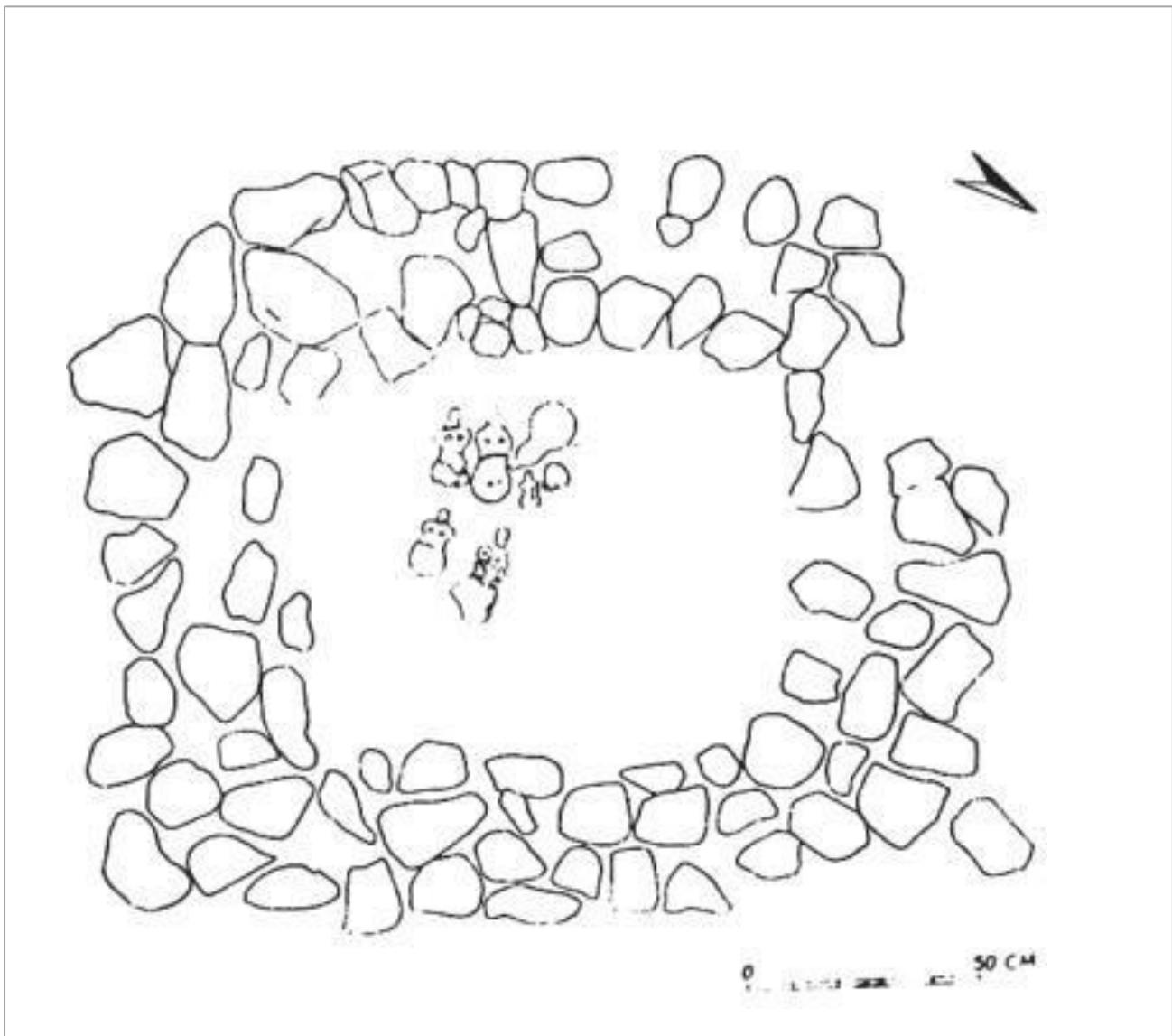
Figure 6.8   The ritual and fire structure in Shtoj 06

Copyright: Koka 2012

During the Iron Age, fire ceremonies became more widely spread and practised. They

continued to be performed before constructing the primary grave and tumuli in the Early

Iron Age in Krumë 01 and Kënetë 01 (Jubani 1982; 1983). Fire practices tended to be

performed during funerary practices for secondary burials and throughout the different

phases of tumuli construction as part of commemorative ceremonies (Bela, 2012;

Koka, 2012; Bodinaku, 2018). This was particularly evident for Myç-Has 02, 05 and

Shtoj 03, Vajzë 03 and 04, where the fire structures tended to be located in the

periphery of tumuli. A combination of inhumation and cremation was practised in the IA-only tumuli, and fire ceremonies were likely performed for both burial rites. In the Middle Iron Age, the fire structure in Hamallaj (1.50 x 2.50 metres) consisted of burnt clay, charcoal, and pottery fragments (Hoti, 1993), which could have been both a fire structure for ritual purposes and a cremation platform for the only cremated grave.

Fire was necessary for both cremation and fire ceremonies, and it is not always easy to separate one from the other. Fire was an essential aspect of life during the Bronze Age and Iron Age and was used for cooking, feasting, metalwork and many domestic practices (Giles, 2007; Außerlechner, 2021; Ekroth, 2021). It had the power to transform the meaning of human bodies and shape the embedded, mnemonic and sensorial experiences (Williams, 2015; Cooney, 2014; Wright, E., 2021). I suggest that the practical and holistic approach of fire was extended to tumuli, where fire ceremonies incorporated mortuary and ritual meanings and became the central component of broader practices, such as cooking for the dead, feasting and cremation.

6.3.2   Cults, animal and bird offerings, and feasting

The architectural structures of tumuli represented ritual meaning and were often associated with beliefs in cults (Aliu, 2012; 2020). This ritual meaning started from the first to the last phase of tumuli construction and use. The preparation of the ground and the construction of the primary grave were often accompanied by the construction of a stone ritual platform, like in Barç 01, Bodrishtë and Shtoj 06, which were used to perform ritual practices for primary graves (Andrea, 1985a; 1995; Bodinaku, 2018). Dromos, such as those in Bujan and Shkrel areas, contained ritual meanings as a bridge to the afterlife and were used for performing funerary, ritual and commemorative activities (Jubani, 1974; Andrea, 1995). Jubani (1982, 1983, 1992, 1995) interpreted

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the sourcing materials from different locations as indicative of the expansion of cult meanings of rivers and mountains. Jubani also asserts that the intentional choice of combining and blending river with mountain materials for graves, architectural and tumuli construction, such as in Kënetë, Shtoj and Shkrel areas, was a deliberate attempt to extend the cults of rivers and mountains to the construction of tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 4). In Chapter 7, I will explore the significance of tumuli as both funerary and cult monuments, and how they encapsulated and encompassed different cults and ritual meanings.

Aliu (2012; 2020) suggests that, alongside the building material, the circular shape of the tumuli and the circle shape of ringstones reflect the cult of the sun and beliefs in the afterlife (Chapter 7). According to Prendi (1977), Aliu (2012) and Koka (2012), as the sun goes down in the darkness and rises again in the morning, the bodies which are buried under the tumulus will rise again in the afterlife. The cosmological symbolism of the sun was extended to decorative aspects of the circles and spiral decorations and shapes of artefacts across the four chronological phases (Prendi, 1985a). For example, the decorations of the bronze shield in the primary grave in Urakë 01 in the Middle Iron Age have been interpreted as a symbolic way of worshipping the sun and stars (Islami, 2013). This meaning was extended to several Iron Age artefacts. For example, bell decorations found in BI-C tumuli, like in Burrel 03 and Dukat 01, and IA-only tumuli of Burrel 01, 02; Rrethe-Bazje 01, 02 and Klos represented the cult of mother nature and fertility. The Iron Age figurine in Rrethe-Bazje 02 also highlight the importance of Mother Nature and fertility (Kurti, D., 1985; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018).

Starting from the Early Bronze Age, several artefacts were deliberately made for cult purposes. This was particularly evident in fragmented pottery and figurines in the ritual and fire structure in Shtoj 06 (BI-R) (Koka, 2012). Pins associated with rituals and cults, dated in the Early Bronze Age, were commonly found in two BI-C tumuli, Barç 01 and Luaras and many other tumuli across the country. In two BI-C tumuli (Rrethe-Bazje 01, Shtogj 02), a small vessel was purposely made for ritual and cult purposes (Islami, 2013). The Early Iron Age twin pottery found in two BI-C tumuli (Vajzë 02, Vodhimë) and three IA-only (Vajzë 03, 04; Çepunë) had ritual and cultic meanings. The twin pottery, which features two similar pots combined into one, is one of the most distinctive Iron Age features of many tumuli across the country and was likely associated with ritual meaning (Prendi, 2008). The bracelets found in Kuç i Zi 01 and many bronze jewellery artefacts were used as offerings in temples in Greece and were used for ritual meaning in many IA-only tumuli (Andrea, 1985a). Amber, as a wealthy material, was used as decoration from the Late Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age and has been identified in the BI-C (Barç 02; Luaras; Rehovë; Shtogj 02) and IA-only (Barç 02; Perlat 02; Pazhok 07). Kurti (2012) states that amber has healing and magic powers. Likewise, the object found inside a pot in Krumë 05 had a ritual and magical purpose (Jubani, 1982). Bronze jewellery such as pins, bracelets, bells and iron knives were often covered with textile or woollen materials whilst placed within the grave. This was evident in Barç 01, Kënetë 03, Shtoj 03, and 04 and represented ritual meaning (Jubani, 1983; Koka, 2012).

Animal and bird offerings have been identified in 12 tumuli in six areas. They were in eight BA-only tumuli (Pazhok 01; Shkrel 01-07), two BI-C (Patos; Dukat 02), two BI-R (Shtikë; Shtoj 06) and in one IA-only tumuli (Shtoj 03). Jubani (1995) and Koka (2012) interpret the bird offerings on Shkrel and Shtoj 06 as having ritual meaning, whereas

their presence in other tumuli was interpreted as an offering or part of cults. The bull inside the primary grave in Pazhok 01 (BA-only), dated in the 18th and 17th century BC, represents the cult of bulls (Hammond, 1976; Prendi, 2008; Bodinaku, 2018). Bull remains, charcoal and burnt pottery in the centre of Shkrel 07 suggest that the ceremony was performed before the construction of the tumulus and was possibly dedicated to bull offerings or cults. I propose that bull remains could have also been remains of feasting performed on the pyre during cremation, which has also been practised in many tumuli in neighbouring countries, such as Halos tumulus in Greece (Georganas, 2002). During the Late Bronze Age in Pazhok 01, the remains of a sheep formed part of the offerings of the secondary grave 10 (Bodinaku, 2018). Based on the grave location and distribution of remains, I suggest the sheep remains were part of the feast, and bones were buried in a pit inside the grave. The presence of charcoal and fire structures in four Shkrel tumuli, alongside the vast amount of pottery fragments, suggests a feasting ceremony with animal and bird sacrifices was performed during the burial and the construction of tumuli. Bird offerings were identified in the Early Bronze Age in the two BA-only tumuli of Shkrel 03 (cremation) and 05 (inhumation) and inside the ritual and fire structure in Shtoj 06 (inhumation).

Wolf remains, Canis Lupus, were placed as offerings inside three secondary graves in the Shtikë tumulus (BI-R) in the 15th and 14th century BC in the Middle Bronze Age. Fragments of wolves were placed on the hip or the right side of the head of inhumed individuals either before or during the burial ceremony (Aliu, 1996). I suggest that they could have been associated with the werewolf practices identified in many tumuli in Scandinavian and European tumuli during the Bronze Age and Iron Age, where men were buried with their wolves to represent their association with animals and Mother Nature. It could have also symbolised the rite of passage in transforming men into

ancestors (Kaliff and Oestigaard, 2022). The animal offering in the Middle Bronze Age in Dukat 02 was placed on top of the primary grave and muranë, indicating that an animal was offered during the first phase of tumuli construction. In the Iron Age, animal offerings and cults have only been identified in Patos (BI-C), where the presence of three turtles inside an inhumed grave during the Early Iron Age has been associated with the cult of turtles (Korkuti, 1981a). This is the only example of turtles in tumuli in Albania. Korkuti does not provide any imagery, and the terminology used for the turtles lacks sufficient detail regarding their species, leaving it unclear whether they were land or aquatic species. Bodinaku (2018) challenges the notion of a cult of turtles, arguing that a single example is inadequate to substantiate such a claim. Interestingly, Bodinaku himself describes, within the same monograph, the cult of bulls based solely on the primary grave at Pazhok 01.

The findings from the post-communist excavations of tumulus cemeteries such as Apollonia, Lofkënd, and PASH have revealed a significant number of animal remains identified through soil analysis (Papadopoulos *et al.,* 2014; Galaty and Bejko (2023). This leads me to suggest that numerous animal remains may not have been fully recognised in tumuli excavated during the communist era due to the absence of the requisite scientific methods. I align with Korkuti's interpretation that turtles likely played a role in cult beliefs or offerings, particularly given their arrangement in a triangular formation, precisely one meter apart. Additionally, I propose that these turtles may have been part of a feast associated with funerary practices, with their shells being placed within graves as a ritualised offering – a practice commonly observed in Mesopotamia and Turkey during the Iron Age (Berthon *et al.,* 2016). Galaty and Bejko (2023) interpret the turtle remains found in newly identified tumuli in the Shtoj area as elements of ritualised feasting. Therefore, I suggest that it could represent a

combination of both interpretations.

Shtoj 02 represents the only example of an offering being associated with both inhumation and cremation within the same tumulus. Alongside cremated remains inside the primary grave during the Early Bronze Age, there were remains of unburnt bones placed inside the inhumed grave. It is unclear from the data whether they were human or animal bones, but the language used indicates they were likely human. They could have been remains of food offerings and feasting. Drawing on the research by Kaliff and Oestigaard (2022), I propose that these remains could also be indicative of human sacrifices. The small number of animal offerings could have resulted from the technology used in excavation during the communist period. The bio-archaeological research in Lofkënd tumuli illustrates the diversity of animal remains in tumuli soil and graves (Papadopoulos *et al.,* 2014).

Feasting during the cremation of the primary grave in Vajzë 01 during the Middle Bronze Age is the only direct and detailed interpretation provided within the data. The burial process of Vajzë 01 started with the preparation of the pyre, placing the individual on the pyre and performing cremation in situ. The presence of cooking and drinking pottery inside and around the primary grave was utilised by Prendi (2008) to reconstruct the feasting process performed during and after cremation. Based on the work of Prendi and the results from the metal fragmentation, I suggest that the Mycenaean bronze sword, which was deliberately broken into six parts, was likely to have been part of the metal fragmentation (Section 6.4.2). Prendi describes how the ceremony proceeded by covering the cremated remains and fragmented metal and pottery with muranë. He also explained how the cremated individual was a man from an army elite who held a privileged position within the community, where cremation,

feasting, fragmentation and the construction of muranë and tumuli illustrated his powerful role in the community. Feasting was a common practice in Mycenaean and Aegean funerary practices during the Bronze Age, where feasting was often performed to reinforce social and political ties and relationships between members of different elite groups (Bendall, 2004; Wright, J. C., 2004; Hamilakis, 2008; Nakassis, 2012). The presence of Mycenaean artefacts illustrates the exchange of materials, ideas, practices and beliefs, as well as helps to shed light on the interconnection and mobility during the Bronze Age.

Pottery was the most prevalent grave good, and across the four chronological phases, evidence of cooking and drinking pottery was found both inside and outside graves, surrounding architectural structures, and throughout various layers of tumuli fill. Drawing on the distribution and characteristics of pottery fragments, particularly broken pieces, I have adopted Prendi's interpretation of the feasting ceremonies in Vajzë to identify and analyse the potential presence of ritualised feasting conducted on tumuli. Similarly, I build upon Hansen's work (2017), which illustrates how pottery fragments accompanying animal and bird offerings were integral to feasting rituals, a practice that was widespread during the Bronze Age and Iron Age across many European tumuli. I propose that the fragmented cooking pottery found mixed with animal remains around the inhumed primary grave and muranë in Dukat 02 during the Early Bronze Age, as well as in the cremated primary grave in Krumë 04 from the Early Iron Age, represents the remnants of comparable feasting ceremonies conducted at the initial stages of tumuli construction and during the interment of primary graves within these tumuli (Bodinaku, 2018). The fragmented cooking potteries found in the soil fill of Bodrishtë 01 and Rrethe-Bazje 12, Krumë 08 and Shtoj 03 were likely to have been part of feasting ceremonies where they were fragmented and thrown on tumuli

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(Jubani, 1992; Koka, 2012; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). The numerous pottery fragments further support the feasting inside fire structures such as Bujan 07, Krumë 01, Myç-Has 04, Patos and Shkrel 01-09. This research builds on Bela's (2012) interpretation of fire structures as a ritual platform for preparing food and feeding the dead.

6.4 Fragmentation

This theme outlines the fragmentation of pottery and metal objects. It presents the processes and practices involved in pottery fragmentation inside graves and tumuli fill. A detailed presentation of three tumuli areas is provided to better understand the complexity and diversity of pottery fragmentation and its connection with various funerary and ritual practices (Section 6.4.1). Metal fragmentation describes the processes and practices involved in metal fragmentation inside graves and its relationship with pottery fragmentation (Section 6.4.2).

6.4.1 Pottery fragmentation

In this research, I define pottery fragmentation as the deliberate act of breaking pottery by destroying or throwing it against hard objects, like a pyre or stone structure, resulting in incomplete or fragmented pots. Pottery fragmentation was a diverse process displayed in many forms rather than a unified practice. Fragmentation started with the preparation of bodies in the settlement, where a selection of pottery fragments was placed in the inhumed, cremated or invisible burial graves or scattered in the centre of the tumulus (Jubani, 1982; 1983). Andrea (1985a) describes how individuals or different members of the family of the deceased fragmented and threw different vessels on top of graves during or shortly after the burial process in Barç and Kuç i Zi areas. It continued with funerary, ritual and commemorative practices

performed around the graves and on many parts of the tumuli (Jubani, 1982; 1983).

Fragmentation was a crucial part of ritual-only tumuli, fire ceremonies, feasting, and

accompanying practices for the first burial, tumuli construction and commemorative

practices (Section 6.3). Pottery fragmentation has been presented within the literature

as a ritual practice performed across many tumuli (Andrea, 1985a; Aliu, 1989; 2004;

Jubani, 1982; 1983; Prendi, 1977; 2008). I have identified two main fragmentation

categories: a) inside the graves where fragments of pottery or incomplete pots were

placed inside graves as grave goods, identified in 194 graves, in 56 tumuli across 26

areas, b) fragmentation in tumuli, which covers all ritual practices, identified in 77

graves across 21 tumuli (Table 6.5).

Phase	Pottery fragmentation inside		PF outside
Fragmentation	Tumuli	Graves	Tumuli
BA-only	6	6	17
BI-C	10	46	10
BI-R	6	36	7
IA-only	34	106	43
Total	**56**	**194**	**77**

Table 6.5   Pottery fragmentation across the four phases

There is a wealth of information about pottery fragmentation in *Iliria* and monographs. However, their meanings, significance and practices involved in fragmentation have only been presented for a limited number of tumuli. To illustrate the complexity of pottery fragmentation, this research has selected three tumuli areas, Kënetë, Krumë and Shtoj, where the practices of pottery fragmentations have been described and analysed by the authors of the excavation (Jubani, 1974; 1982; 1983; 1992; Koka, 1985; 1990; 2012). These three areas were also chosen because they helped shed light on the inter-relationship of pottery fragmentation with broader funerary and ritual practices.

There were 25 tumuli total in the three areas: Kënetë 01-06; Krumë 01-8; Shtoj 01-11 (Table 6.6). Two were BA-only tumuli with inhumation (Shtoj 01, 09); there were no BI-C tumuli; seven were BI-R (Kënetë 04-05; Shtoj 02, 06-07, 10-11), and 16 were IA-only (Kënetë 01-03, 06; Krumë 01-08; Shtoj 03-05, 08). Pottery fragmentation inside and outside graves was practised from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age and throughout the Iron Age. The burial rite consisted of inhumation and cremation, and the absence of human remains suggests invisible burial was practised (Section 6.2). Shtoj 07 and 11 were constructed initially as ritual-only but were converted into burial tumuli in the Iron Age, and two more ritual-only tumuli were newly built in the Iron Age in Shtoj.

Indicator	Kënetë	Krumë	Shtoj
Tumuli	6	8	11
BA-only	0	0	2
BI-C	0	0	0
BI-R	2	0	5
IA-only	4	8	4
Ritual-only	0	0	4
Total number of graves	83	32	46
Pottery inside tumuli	5	6	8
PF inside number of graves	23	11	34
Pottery fragmentation outside	6	7	9
Metal fragmentation	15	6	27

Table 6.6   Presentation of Kënetë, Krumë and Shtoj areas

Pottery fragmentation was identified inside 19 tumuli: Kënetë 01-03, 05-06, with 23 graves; Krumë 01-04, 06-07 with 11 graves; Shtoj 01-04, 06-07, 09, 11 with 34 graves. The practice of fragmentation started in the settlement, continued on the tumulus with a second fragmentation, and was practiced throughout the use of tumuli as a burial place. A selection of the pottery fragmented during the preparation of the body was placed inside the graves and was transported into tumuli. Jubani (1983) suggests that the transportation of fragmented pottery into tumuli was an attempt to bring the world of the living to the world of the dead (Chapter 7).

Six tumuli had no primary graves, 12 primary graves were inhumations, five were cremations, and two had no human remains. Pottery fragmentation was not practiced inside the primary graves of Kënetë 01-03, 05 and Krumë 04-06. Fragmentation was

performed inside six primary graves, four were inhumation (Shtoj 01, 04, 06, 09), one cremation (Shtoj 02), and one in Krumë 08 was likely an invisible grave. Fragmentation was performed outside in four tumuli (Kënetë 04; Krumë 01-03; Shtoj 10), and fragments were thrown around or on top of primary graves with an inhumation burial rite. A second pottery fragmentation was performed during the funerary practices associated with primary graves, where pottery was placed inside and around graves. In Krumë 02, for example, 76 pieces of pottery were thrown outside the primary grave inhumation. The pieces of pottery fragments found on tumuli grounds in Kënetë 04 suggest a fragmentation process was performed to construct the tumulus and the first burial. It is likely that pottery fragments found in tumuli fill could indicate that fragmentation of these primary graves was performed after the funeral.

In 60 secondary graves, pottery fragmentation was likely first performed in the settlement, and a second fragmentation was performed on tumuli during cremation or the burial of cremated and inhumed individuals. For example, Jubani (1983) asserts that in Krumë 01, the first fragmentation was performed in the settlement, and a selection of fragmented pottery was transported to the tumuli, where a second fragmentation was performed during the funerary practices. Fragments were placed as offerings inside 11 graves. It is probable that several pottery fragments discovered within the tumulus were remnants of ritualised fragmentation associated with the secondary graves. Similar to the primary graves, fragmentation inside the secondary graves was not practised in all of the secondary graves across the three areas. The distribution of the primary and secondary graves suggests there was a selection criterion for the pottery fragmentation.

Pottery sherds on tumuli fill were identified in 23 tumuli, illustrating how fragmentation was crucial in the funerary and ritual aspects of tumuli. In the ritual-only tumuli of Shtoj 05, 08, and 11, fragments were placed together or scattered around the tumulus, and the fragmentation ceremony was performed in tumuli soil during the construction of the tumuli and was part of a ritualised ceremony, similar to the ritual-only tumuli in the Bujan area (Andrea, 1995). In the ritual-only tumulus of Shtoj 09, a complete pot was placed as an offering in the centre of the tumulus, whilst fragmentation was practised during the re-use of the tumuli as a burial ground, which illustrates how fragmentation became an essential aspect of funerary rituals during the IA.

Jubani (1974; 1982; 1983; 1992) is the leading scholar who interprets the practices and performance of fragmentation. He describes how pottery fragmentation was practiced from the first phase of tumuli construction and the first burial to secondary burials and commemorative practices. The ritualised fragmentation was part of a long ritualised practice attended by several people during and after burial. According to Jubani (1974), during the funerary process performed on tumulus cemeteries, pots were held in the hands of the mourners, were continuously pressed with thumbs and fragments were scratched with a metal object. Jubani's (1974) observations suggest that this ritual may have lasted several hours, particularly as he notes that mourners utilised wet clay during the funeral. The act of scratching likely occurred during the ceremony and may have been scattered over the inhumed deceased, indicating that pottery and scratching were integral to the same ritual practice. This is exemplified in Shtoj 02, where Jubani (1992) reports that 59 small fragments from a single pot were scratched with a metal object – discovered within one of the fragments – during the funeral and subsequently placed as grave goods in grave 9.

A similar approach was applied in the five secondary graves in the Kënetë 01 and 03. Scratching fragmented pottery was predominantly performed outside graves during or after the funeral. This is evidenced by the presence of scratched pottery in the soil of tumuli across the three areas. For example, 30 fragments of a pot with measurements of 3.5 cm each were all scratched. Koka (2012) also supports the practice of scratching pottery in the Shtoj area.

Fragmentation practices in the Kënetë, Krumë and Shtoj areas were likely to have been performed by several mourners, and they formed part of a wide range of funerary and ritual practices and activities. They were both part of the funerary context and additional commemorative practices. While pottery fragmentation was performed as a single event, it was closely connected with and accompanied by different funerary and ritual practices. The six fire structures (Kënetë 01-03; Krumë 06; Shtoj 03, 06) highlight the relationship between pottery fragmentation and the ritual of fire, the cult of the sun, mountain and settlements, rivers, animal and bird offerings, settlement remains, and feasting (Section 6.3). The Kënetë, Krumë and Shtoj areas illustrate the importance of pottery fragmentation in helping societies deal with death, burial and bereavement (Chapter 7). Jubani (1982) argues that these characteristics of pottery fragmentation were practised across many tumuli in the Bronze Age and Iron Age, where pottery fragmentation was identified. The example of Kënetë, Krumë and Shtoj areas illustrates the wealth and complexity of pottery fragmentation. Similar approaches were likely adopted and adapted across the other tumuli areas where fragmentation was practised or sherds of pottery were identified.

Across all tumuli with pottery fragmentation inside and outside graves, a number of pottery fragments were likely brought from settlements to tumuli during the

transportation of the soil materials for the graves and tumuli fill. This argument has been supported by several scholars (Korkuti, 1981b; Islami, 2013; Bodinaku, 2018). The sourcing of materials from settlements or long distances has been acknowledged as a process that contains ritual meaning (Chapter 5). Remains from the floor or walls of settlements and animal sheds formed part of broader funerary and ritual practices and were accompanied by pottery fragmentation. This has been practised since the Early Bronze Age in the Shkrel area (Jubani, 1995). In the Late Bronze Age, the primary grave in Rehovë (BI- C) was covered with a combination of pottery and settlement remains. Likewise, in the Prodan (BI-C) tumulus, over 3,500 fragments of pottery and 200 settlement remains were carefully arranged in a space of 15.00 x 9.00 metres (Aliu, 1984; 2020). Hamallaj tumulus was constructed on top of a settlement, highlighting the importance of the relationship between settlements and tumuli (Hoti, 1993). A combination of pottery and settlement remains was placed inside secondary graves Myç-Has 05 (BI-C) and in Krumë 03, 04; Myç-Has 03; Shtoj 03, 06 (IA-only).

Building upon the research of Cerezo-Román (2014), who asserts that the destruction of settlements symbolised an advanced form of body fragmentation as a means of reshaping their memories and providing a new role in death, I propose that the remains of settlements could indicate the deliberate destruction of the deceased's settlement during the preparation of the corpse. It is plausible that selected fragments were subsequently placed both inside and outside of graves. Furthermore, the combination of pottery fragments and settlement remains illustrates how the fragmented pottery within the tumuli could have been remains of the fragmentation performed in the settlement. The transport of pottery fragments together with soil and other settlement remains was a complementary alternative to the broader funerary and ritual practices of pottery fragmentation. This research builds on Jubani (1974; 1982; 1983; 1992)

and Koka (1990; 2012), where bringing aspects of settlement to tumulus cemeteries, like sourcing soil mixed with settlement remains and fragmented pottery from the settlement, was an attempt to provide an eternal settlement in the afterlife and extend the meaning of the settlement from the realm of the living to one of the dead. Bejko (2014) contradicts Jubani's interpretation of pottery fragmentation. However, no rationale was provided for this approach, explaining why it is not the case. Bejko (2014, 2023) interprets the pottery fragments from the Lofkënd and Shkodra areas exclusively as linked to the process of transferring them, attributing a living significance to the site of the dead.

6.4.2 Metal fragmentation

Fragmentation and destruction are the processes of deliberately breaking, bending, damaging, and removing parts of metal objects. This process was predominantly performed on bronze and iron weaponry such as swords, daggers, axes, spearheads and knives, as well as on jewellery such as pins, fibulas, bracelets and diadems (Andrea, 1985a; Islami, 2013). The fragmentation and the destruction transformed the physicality and purpose of metal objects into fragmented, damaged or incomplete objects. As the bending and damage of bronze and iron objects often resulted in their fragmentation, it was not always possible to distinguish between the two practices. The term metal fragmentation is used to describe both practices.

Metal fragmentation has been identified in 49 tumuli in 23 areas.[25] Information about their presence in tumuli fill has seldom been presented in the literature, and

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[25] In this research, I have only recorded cases where the authors highlighted the presence of fragmented and incomplete metal objects. The description of many other objects and illustrations provided within the literature indicates that fragmentation and destruction were more widely practiced.

subsequently, this research has only included metal artefacts inside graves. They were placed as grave offerings inside graves as either individual offerings or alongside grave goods. Within the same area, metal fragmentation was practiced in only a selection of tumuli. For example, fragmentation was only practiced in one of eight tumuli in the Pazhok area and two of the twelve tumuli in the Rrethe-Bazje area. Likewise, fragmentation was practiced only in a selection of graves within the same tumulus. For example, only three tumuli (Shtoj 06, Urakë 01, Kuç i Zi 01) contained more than ten graves with metal fragmentation.

Metal fragmentation was not practised in BA-only tumuli. The fragmented Mycenaean sword in the primary grave cremation in the MBA in Vajzë 01 (BI-C) provides the only metal fragmentation in the BA. In the IA, fragmentation was practised across the three phases: in 11 BI-C tumuli in 49 graves; in 6 BI-R in 24 graves; in 29 IA-only tumuli in 122 graves. It was identified in eight primary graves and 195 secondary graves. Alongside the primary grave in Vajzë 01 (BI-C), the remaining seven primary graves were IA-only, where three new tumuli and primary graves were construed in the Early Iron Age (Kënetë 01; Krumë 01, 07), two in the Middle Iron Age (Myç-Has 01; Urakë 02) and two in the Late Bronze Age (Myç-Has 02; Krumë 05). Four of the IA-only primary graves were inhumation (Kënetë 01; Krumë 05; Myç-Has 01, Urakë 02) and three were cremations (Krumë 01, 07; Myç- Has 01). These new tumuli were added into the existing tumuli areas where pottery fragmentation was practised. The eight primary graves contained mainly war-related artefacts. The primary grave in Urakë 02 contained one bronze shield, one breastplate, one greave, one pin and one iron spearhead, while the remaining seven graves had one bronze sword, two knives and four bracelets alongside two iron pins, one spearhead, nine axes and two daggers.

In the Iron Age, metal fragmentation was practised in 49 secondary graves in the BI-C, 24 in the BI-R and 195 in IA-only. Frequently, a single fragmented metal was found within a grave, for example, one iron pin in Kuç i Zi 02 or an iron spearhead in Fushë-Sanxhak 05. In other graves, more than two artefacts were placed inside a grave, for example, in Myç-Has 02, where one grave contained two iron daggers and one iron spearhead. I have divided metal fragmentation into two broad categories: war-related and personal-related. Their practice and meanings, however, were often interwoven. There were 170 war-related fragmented objects in secondary graves such as swords, shields, daggers and axes (Table 6.7). Andrea (2009) advocates for a special connection between the death of an individual and his or her valuable war-related items. Andrea describes how the deliberate bending and fragmentation of the iron sword in the Early Iron Age in Shuec tumulus symbolised the loss of the original purpose and meaning of the sword as an object used in wars, thereby reflecting the loss of life and the transformation of its barrier to the world of the dead. It is likely that the fragmentation of bronze and iron swords in the BI-C tumuli of Bruç, Prodan, and Vajzë 01, and IA-only tumuli in Hamallaj and Shtoj 03, could have symbolised the killing and the burial of swords alongside their owners. However, it is possible that war-related objects were not always used for combat, and some of them, like knives, could have been used for various practical activities (Knight, 2019).

There were 101 bronze and iron objects grouped within the dress category. This included pins, fibulas, bracelets, bells, and hair decorations, which were part of the clothes the deceased was buried in. Whilst the war-related objects tended to be found fragmented and incomplete, this was not the case for personal-related objects, which were frequently found in a pristine and complete condition. For example, in Luaras, only one of the 37 bronze pins was deliberately fragmented, whilst, in Myç-Has 01-

03, all the metal artefacts (ten iron spearheads, seven iron knives and two iron daggers) were fragmented and incomplete. The connection between the preservation of dress artefacts, personal- related and fragmentation is illustrated in Rehovë tumulus. Four stone-structure graves with inhumed individuals (graves 160, 222, 242, 246) contained complete objects such as 15 bronze necklaces, 12 bronze and four iron bracelets, and six bronze and two iron fibulas dated in the 8th and 7th century BC. Iron knives were deliberately bent and damaged before burial, and during the funeral ceremony, they were thrown or placed on top of the deceased. In grave 160, the bronze, iron and amber jewellery were in complete condition, whilst three fragments of an iron knife were deliberately bent and damaged before burial and placed on the woman's chest (Figure 6.7) (Aliu, 2004; 2012; 2020). The two categories of war-related and personal-related were often combined and formed part of the grave goods. For example, grave 6 in Kënetë 03 contained fragmented and scratched pottery, one iron bell, spear, spearhead and knife, and grave 9 contained a fragmented iron pin and iron knife.

Typology	BI-C	BI-R	IA-only	Total
War-related				
Bronze Sword	2	0	0	**2**
Iron Sword	0	0	7	**7**
Bronze Shield	0	0	1	**1**
Iron Shield	1	0	0	**1**
Bronze Breastplate	0	0	2	**2**
Bronze Spearhead	3	1	4	**8**
Iron Spearhead	13	11	52	**76**
Iron Spear	0	0	7	**7**
Iron Axe	0	0	2	**2**
Bronze Knife	3	2	2	**7**
Iron Knife	9	7	27	**43**
Iron Dagger	4	1	9	**14**
Total	**35**	**22**	**113**	**170**
Personal-related				
Bronze Pin	5	0	5	**9**
Iron Pin	2	2	4	**29**
Bronze Fibula	6	0	6	**10**
Iron Fibula	0	0	0	**2**
Bronze Bracelet	0	0	0	**2**
Bronze Bells	1	17	18	**21**
Bronze Diadem	2	1	3	**4**

Bronze Hair decoration	1	1	2	**3**
Iron Hair decoration	0	1	1	**2**
Bronze Plates	6	0	6	**7**
Iron Plates	0	1	1	**1**
Bronze Object	2	1	1	**4**
Iron Object	1	1	2	**7**
Total	**26**	**25**	**49**	**101**

Table 6.7   Metal fragmentation in secondary graves
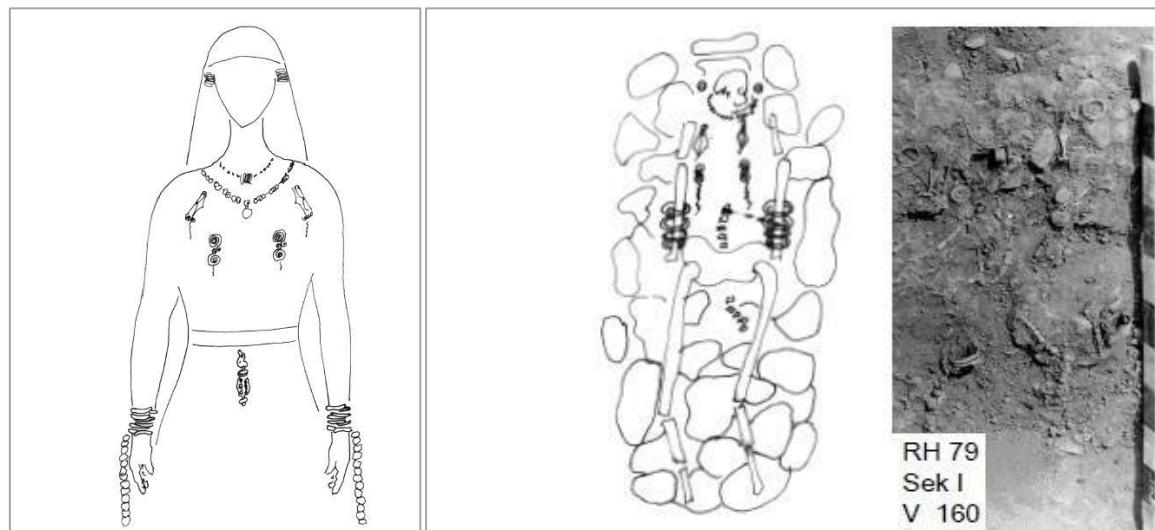
Figure 6.9   Reconstruction and presentation of grave 160 in Rehovë

Copyright: Aliu 2012

Metal fragmentation was practised mainly with inhumation burial rites in 149 graves across the three phases. In two BI-C tumuli with 12 graves and 11 IA-only tumuli with 35 graves, fragmented objects were placed inside graves with invisible remains. Cremation was only practised in four primary graves, in three secondary graves in Myç-Has 01 and one in Kuç i Zi 01, and there is only one example of metal fragmentation being placed inside a cinerary urn in Kuç i Zi 01.

Likely, corrosion or environmental factors such as the pressure of the grave and the pressure of the earth on tumuli could have resulted in objects being accidentally fragmented or damaged (Koka, 2012).[26] However, in many graves, such as the iron pins in Barç 01, iron fibulas in Dukat 02 and Rrethe-Bazje 02, and iron spearheads in Klos, within the same grave, one of the objects was complete, whereas the other was fragmented (Andrea, 1985a; Bodinaku, 1982).

The experimental archaeology on bronze hoards in Scotland illustrates how different methods and techniques could have been used to undertake fragmentation. Some forms of fragmentation required special knowledge of heat control whilst bending, and small-impact fragmentation could have been performed in other sites by people without any expertise or knowledge in metal manipulation (Knight, 2019; 2022). The iron spearhead in Rrethe-Bazje 07 shows signs of damage. According to Islami (2013), these deliberate destructions were likely executed by a professional smithsman or craftsman. In Kënetë 01 and across the Shtoj area, metal fragmentation was completed before burial, and it was likely that fragmentation was performed outside the tumulus, probably in the settlement or a workshop (Jubani, 1983; Koka,

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[26] There were no skeletal remains in many graves, but the authors of the original articles have included them within the inhumation category. Therefore, providing a clear distinction between inhumation and possible invisible remains is not always possible.

2012). This could have been the case with bronze and iron objects placed as grave goods before or during the burial practice on tumulus. Jubani (1983) suggests that fragmentation was performed in the settlement where several fragments were distributed among mourners whilst the incomplete object was placed as a grave offering during the burial. Whilst this example was provided solely for the Kënetë area, a similar approach was likely applied in many tumuli with metal fragmentation. It is likely a second fragmentation, bending and deliberate destruction was performed on tumuli as part of ritualised fragmentation. Although the information regarding metal fragmentation practices is limited and direct links between the fragmentation on tumuli and metal workshops are absent, it is reasonable to propose that such fragmentation was indeed conducted in metal workshops or by professional craftsmen. I suggest that metal fragmentation carried a ritual significance. In Chapter 7, I will further explore the potential dual ritual role of the craftsman.

Metal fragmentation appears to be closely linked to pottery fragmentation, and I propose that it was an integral part of the overall fragmentation process. It is plausible that metal fragmentation either originated from or was adapted from practices related to pottery fragmentation. This is illustrated by the eight Iron Age primary graves in Kënetë, Krumë and Myç-Has areas where pottery fragmentation was a distinctive practice. In the Iron Age, in 31 tumuli, a combination of pottery and metal fragmentation was practised across BI-C, BI-R and IA-only tumuli (Figure 6.10). Likewise, a combination of both fragmentations was placed within the same grave. For example, in Kënetë 01, alongside a vessel that was fragmented into 60 pieces and scratched with a metal object, a spearhead was fragmented into eight pieces, and the incomplete iron knives had clear signs of deliberate bending before burial (Jubani, 1983). Whilst sharing similarities and being performed concurrently, these two fragmentations were

performed individually; for example, metal was the only fragmentation practised in 17 tumuli, while pottery was in 25 tumuli. This pattern highlights how different communities perceived, adopted and adapted fragmentation practices at various stages throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Jubani (1982; 1983) and Koka (1990; 2012) describe how the same or similar practices were performed on both pottery and metal fragmentation before, during or after burial. I suggest that pottery and metal fragmentation share similarities in meaning and purpose, and possibly in the practices performed for their fragmentation. Pieces of fragmented metal were likely distributed among different mourners. Whilst fragmentation was practised with the three burial rites, it formed part of the different practices. It was closely connected with the fragmentation of the body through cremation and urns and, in some ways, with invisible burial.
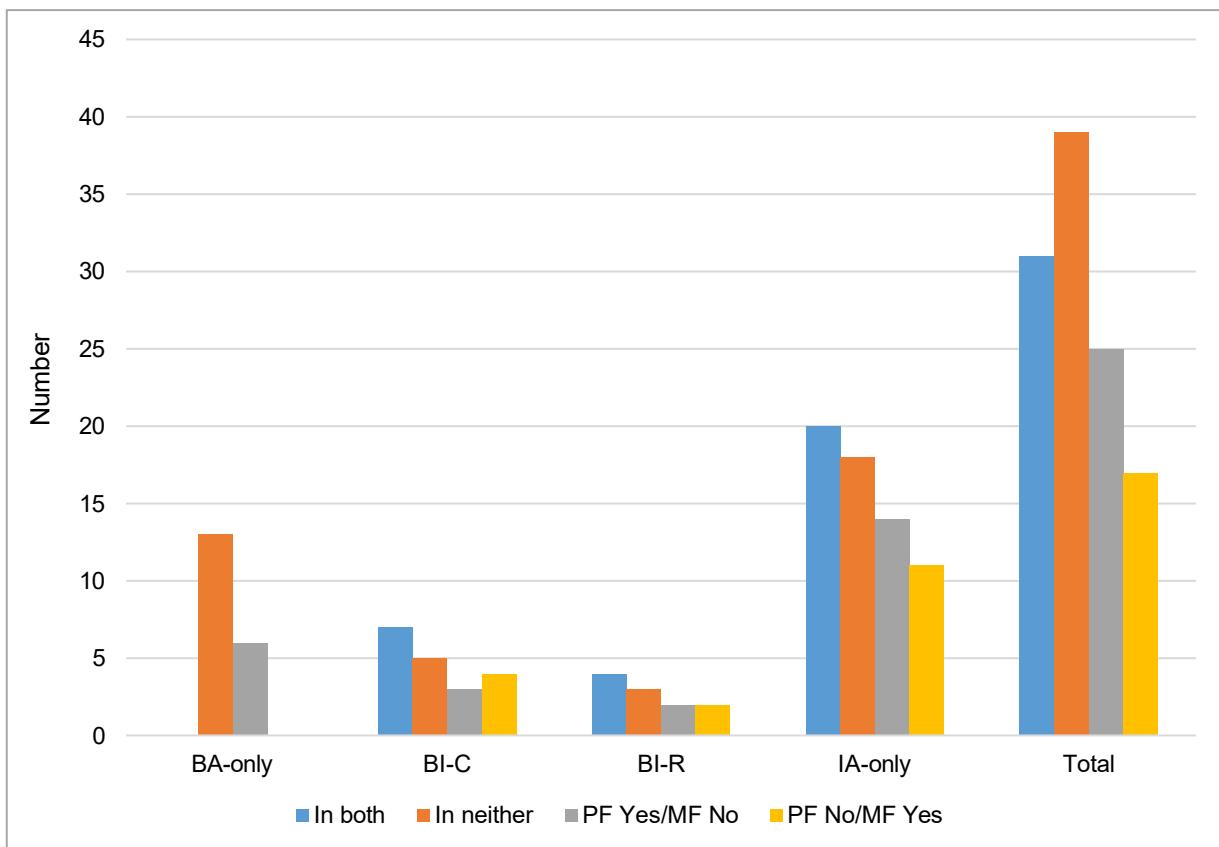
Figure 6.10 Pottery and metal fragmentation in tumuli across the four phases

6.5   Conclusion

Dealing with death was a central aspect of tumuli cemeteries. This chapter has emphasised how funerary practices served as a means for surviving communities to confront the biological death of the deceased and the status of their corpses. These practices encompassed various methods of treating the body, resulting in three main burial rites: inhumation, cremation, and invisible burials. Ritual beliefs, along with their associated practices, formed a framework through which communities expressed their understanding of death, their treatment of the body, and their ways of finding meaning and coping with the loss of an individual. These beliefs – particularly those concerning life, death and the afterlife – constituted the ideological foundations that organised the nature and order of funerary and ritual practices. Tumulus cemeteries served as a platform for living communities to intertwine these practices, thereby creating,

maintaining and reshaping the relationships between life and death and between the living and the deceased. The theme of burial rites illustrated that these activities extended beyond tumulus practices alone; instead, various activities across the three burial rites strengthened the role and significance of tumulus cemeteries as funerary and ritual monuments of the landscape.

While this chapter treats funerary and ritual practices as three distinct themes, it is essential to recognise their interconnectedness, as they often formed part of the same overarching process. This relationship significantly impacted, influenced and shaped the meanings and importance of these three practices. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, funerary and ritual practices are intricately linked to the construction of tumuli and have influenced the factors leading to their rise and proliferation.

Traditionally, the burial practices of inhumation and cremation have been viewed as opposing methods linked to the distinct ethnic identities of individuals interred in tumuli. I do not aim to identify the ethnic identities of those who practice inhumation, cremation or invisible burial. However, the findings reveal notable similarities and interconnected relationships among these three burial rites, often occurring within the same tumulus. The insights gained from the theme of burial rites suggest that the choice of burial practice was influenced by the perceptions, treatment and interactions of the deceased and the surviving communities regarding the biological body.

While distinct processes are associated with each of the three burial rites, the findings indicate that the overarching practice is tied to the relationship between the completeness and the fragmentation of the body. In the case of inhumation, the complete, intact and adorned body was essential and was the central focus of funerary

and ritual practices. This burial rite fostered a significant and inclusive relationship with the tumulus, positioning the body at the heart of the ritualistic process. Following the preparation, adornment and transportation of the body during the pre-interment phase, the funerary and ritual practices primarily took place at the tumulus, further illustrating the interconnectedness of the body with this funerary monument within the landscape. The emphasis was on the funerals and associated rituals, including fire ceremonies, offerings of animals and birds, and pottery fragmentation, which provided a means for mourners to bid a final farewell to the deceased. At the same time, the position of the body carried ritual significance, and the individual was interred in a grave and became a natural part of the tumulus. Additionally, acts such as grave construction, the addition of architectural elements – muranë, ringstone, cupola – and commemorative ceremonies likely served to underscore further the importance of the tumulus in maintaining the relationship between the living and the dead.

The decision to cremate a body encompassed a complex and varied process. This involved preparing the pyre and conducting the incineration outside of the tumulus. The cremated remains could be scattered within the tumulus or placed in an urn. Similarly, the cremation process took place at the tumulus, either on the grounds of the tumuli or within a grave. While these methods may suggest differing perceptions regarding the treatment of the body and its relationship with the tumulus, they share significant similarities and likely form part of the same ideological framework surrounding cremation. The findings from this chapter demonstrate that cremation was regarded as an alternative method of handling the body, transforming the physical form of the adorned corpse through fire. This process not only extended the treatment of the body but also altered its appearance, shifting from a whole body of flesh and bones to fragmented cremated remains. This transformation affected not only the

practical aspects of body handling but also the connection between the living and the deceased. Cremation conducted in situ fostered a more personal relationship with the tumulus. However, the examination of cremation processes conducted outside, in situ, or in urns reveals that the emphasis of these burial rites was less on the body itself and more on the funerary and ritual practices associated with cremation, their interment within tumuli and the construction of graves or accompanying architectural structures.

Invisible burial represents an alternative approach to body treatment, viewed through the lens of bodily fragmentation. The findings discussed in this chapter indicate that a visible, complete and adorned body was not essential for interment within the tumulus. While reconstructing the precise treatment of the body is challenging, evidence suggests that it may have undergone processes such as cremation and inhumation, possibly even disarticulation. The nature of the artefacts, alongside the presence of ritual practices – such as fire ceremonies, feasting, and the fragmentation of pottery and metal – highlights that the performance of these funerary and ritual acts was paramount and acted as a substitute for a physical or visible body. A similar process likely took place in graves and tumuli containing minimal human remains. Through tumulus cemeteries, which serve as connective structures, these funerary and ritual practices, along with the accompanying grave or architectural formations, provided a medium for expressing the relationship between the living and the dead.

The findings from the sub-themes of funerary practices, offerings, feasting and fragmentation highlight that tumuli served a purpose beyond being mere burial sites for the deceased's body or memory. The processes of interment and funerary practices were not isolated events occurring solely at the time of biological death;

rather, they required organisational skills, collective efforts and contributions from multiple individuals. This indicates that the handling of death was an ongoing and public affair. Ceremonies commenced with the moment of biological death and extended through commemorative rituals and pottery fragmentation following the burial. Additionally, rituals such as fire ceremonies, offerings of animals and birds, and the fragmentation of pottery and metal were conducted, spanning from the preparation of the site to the sealing of the monument with a cupola. These practices demonstrate that tumuli were not silent entities but vibrant platforms for ritual and cult activities, often involving the intentional crafting or offering of cult objects within the tumuli. The practice of offering birds and animals further emphasises that tumuli acted as a connection between the dead, the living and the non-human realm. The ritualised feasting, frequently linked to pottery fragmentation, illustrates how death intertwined elements of daily life and agricultural practices within a mortuary context. A detailed analysis of these activities – examined thematically across the entire dataset and their distribution throughout four chronological phases – reveals the complexity of these practices, their evolution, and their regional and chronological variations. This examination underscores the fluid and dynamic character of tumulus cemeteries as organic and living funerary and ritual monuments within the landscape.

Funerary and ritual practices were frequently linked to the construction of tumuli and the factors that contributed to their rise and proliferation (Chapters 4 and 6). Chapter 7 will explore how the combination of the nine themes led to tumuli becoming Eternal Living Monuments.

Chapter 7   Discussion

7.1   Introduction

Death is a natural process of life (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023). Humanity has always had to face the choices of how to deal with the corpse and provide an acceptable form of burial for the dead. While dealing with the body, surviving communities had to address the problems of the spirit and the afterlife. Throughout civilisations, communities have explored and practised various ideological beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife, providing a set of social structures to the lives of the living (Insoll, 2011; Swenson, 2015). Beliefs provided communities with a system for dealing with death and performing funerary and ritual practices (Brandt, Ingvaldsen and Prusac, 2014; Nilsson Stutz, 2016).

From the Neolithic period, communities in Albania sought meaningful ways to bury the deceased and preserve their memories. Initially, single inhumation within settlements was the norm, keeping the dead within the realm of the living (Bunguri and Prendi, 2014). The emergence of tumuli in the third millennium BC was a novel and groundbreaking form of burial practice. It marked a significant shift in societal beliefs and practices surrounding death and the afterlife. This transition from burying individuals within settlements to constructing visible architectural monuments away from the realm of the living (Deskaj 2017; Galaty and Bejko, 2023) not only transformed the physical landscape but also shaped the lives of the living, potentially contributing to the development of sedentary life by providing communities with roots, connections and claims to the physical land where their forefathers were buried (Bejko, 2016; Quinn, Ciugudean and Beck, 2020).

7.2 The ideological construct of tumuli

The ideological construct of tumulus cemeteries was established upon the relationship between the celestial and terrestrial cult beliefs of death and the afterlife. In this research, I have documented, analysed and interpreted the key themes present in the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs, as detailed in Chapters 4-6. I will offer a comprehensive interpretation of how this ideological construct influenced and reshaped the role of tumuli, as well as how communities understood, experienced, and practised their beliefs, ultimately transforming tumulus cemeteries into Eternal Living Monuments.

7.2.1 Celestial cults

The sun played a central role in the ideological constructs of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Europe (Pásztor, 2020; Pesce, 2024). Oestigaard (2022; 6) illustrates how the cult of the sun was one of the significant factors that 'contributed to Indo-European beliefs and religious activities being spread and embraced in many parts of European cultures'. Aliu (2012) explains that the circular shape of tumuli and ringstones symbolised the sun, representing the cult of the sun. Only rounded tumuli have been identified in Albania; the sun-like circular shape was the universal feature followed in all 123 tumuli across the four chronological phases (Chapter 4). Building on Aliu's interpretation of the sun cult and the architectural findings of the 123 tumulus cemeteries, I propose that the sun cult played a central role in the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries in Albania. The beliefs and ritualistic significance associated with the sun cult, along with its celestial connotations, are also expressed through a wide range of artefacts and decorative motifs. The bronze shields found inside primary graves in Urakë 01 and 02, according to Islami (2013), illustrate the worship of the cult of the sun; likely reveal the beliefs of the warrior leaders to whom the tumuli were dedicated (Chapter 6). It is reasonable to suggest that these two individuals, whom Islami

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identifies as male based on the grave goods, were likely believers, worshippers or leaders of the ideological beliefs of the cult of the sun. I propose that placing the shield on the chest of the deceased may have served as a public display of the beliefs held by both the deceased and the bereaved community.

The importance of the sun and its cult beliefs shaped the meaning and significance of the physical and funerary landscape. The current geographical borders of Albania are a modern concept that did not apply to prehistoric societies; Bronze and Iron Age landscapes contained different meanings and boundaries. In Albania, as in many communities during the Bronze and Iron Ages, the sun's location was probably used to navigate the landscape and provide social and physical boundaries (Tebes, 2020). Since the Neolithic period, solar and lunar calendars have been employed to determine the placement of various ritual and burial sites across Europe and other regions (Rodríguez-Antón, Urrutia-Aparicio and Perera Betancor, 2023). A similar approach likely influenced the location of 123 tumuli in Albania, which appears to be strategically positioned based on solar orientation and lunar cycles. These tumuli were often constructed in elevated and prominent areas closer to the sun (Chapter 5). However, further research is required to clarify this alignment. It is plausible to suggest that tumulus cemeteries in Albania represented the sun on Earth and provided the bridge between the celestial and terrestrial domains; they became the bridge between the realm of the living and the afterlife (Mörner and Lind, 2018a; Gómez, García and de Torres Rodríguez, 2022; Olaru, 2023).

Summer and Winter solstices, Equinox and the celestial rotation have often been utilised to determine the 'dimensionality and the positioning of ritual monuments' (Zavalii, 2024; 275). An analysis of the diameters of 123 tumuli reveals that their size

varied across the four chronological phases, and there was no distinguishable pattern between the size and the number of graves, burial rites or grave structures (Chapter 4). Bodinaku (2018) asserts that the celestial rotation influenced the location and orientation of grave and tumulus cemeteries. Based on the analysis of the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research, I propose that their location, size and measurements were influenced by the Winter solstices, the Equinox and the celestial rotation (Chapter 4).

The solar and lunar alignment of tumuli has been central to the cult and ritual beliefs and practices of agricultural activities during the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age periods in many parts of the world (Olaru, 2023). A similar approach could have been adopted in the 123 tumuli of this research, where the sun played a central role in the lives and beliefs of Bronze and Iron Age communities in Albania. The sun produced light and warmth and gave life to the Earth (Oestigaard, 2022; Horn, 2024). Its influence likely extended to seasonal changes and agricultural activities in Mediterranean Albania. It is plausible to suggest that, akin to many countries, the ideological construct of tumuli in Albania was centred on worshipping the sun and the agricultural cults (Ataev and Akhundov, 2021). Chapter 5 demonstrates how the cult of Mother Nature and its association with agricultural productivity and fertility have deep traditional roots in the Neolithic period (Andrea 1985a; Koka 2012). Fertility objects and figurines linked to the cult of Mother Nature, such as the anthropomorphic figurine found in the primary grave at Shtoj 06, were identified in Neolithic settlements and continued to be offered in many Bronze Age tumuli (Amore *et al.,* 2010; Aliu, 2020). I propose that these tumulus cemeteries represented the ideologies held by Bronze and Iron Age communities, who constructed and used them for both burial and cultic practices. Consequently, embracing and engaging in tumuli practices within the country may

have required an acceptance and conversion to the broad spectrum of meanings that these structures represented.

The cult of the sun encompassed beliefs about death and the afterlife. The sun's journey began with the sunrise, bringing light, and ended with the sunset, ushering in darkness, only for the sun to rise again the following day. Aliu (2012; 2020) illustrates how the darkness of the sunset symbolised the renewal of life, reflecting communities' beliefs in death and the afterlife. Building on this interpretation, it is reasonable to assert that the darkness and the sun's disappearance represented the deceased, who entered the tumulus as the realm of the dead and became part of the earthly underworld (Cristofaro, 2020). I propose that the deceased and the memories associated with them, interred within the tumulus, became intertwined with Mother Nature. The mourners left behind in the world of the living continued to reside in the earthly realm, illuminated by the celestial sun. The morning's renewal signified the rebirth and rejuvenation of the departed spirits who 'were reborn and joined the sun in its journey' (Horn, 2024; 4). The significance of tumuli as a burial ground where the body or the soul and the memories of the deceased were interred was intertwined with beliefs in death and the afterlife, where the deceased's soul was reborn. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the ritual practice of covering corpses and their grave goods with artefacts, as described in Chapter 6, was integral to the cult of the sun and served to dispel darkness for the deceased in the afterlife.

The 123 tumulus cemeteries were monuments that covered the body and the memory of the deceased; they represented 'the house for the still-present spirit, or the soul, of the predecessors of the living' (Harding, 2012; 29). I propose that the act of burying the dead, or their memories, transcended mere physical burial and disposal of the

corpse. Placing an individual in a tumulus symbolised the beginning of the journey towards the afterlife and the celestial sun; thus, tumulus cemeteries became the bridge between the realm of the living and the afterlife. The architectural structures of tumulus cemeteries as monuments that imitated and defined the landscape manifested the relationship between these two worlds. Twelve dromos were built as a stone structure in the shape of a bridge connecting one tumulus with another; they contained ritual and cult meaning and symbolised the bridge connecting the living with the afterlife (Chapters 4-5). As previously mentioned, the worship of the sun cult played a crucial role in shaping the architectural features of tumulus cemeteries. The findings from the architectural structures, along with the diverse cult beliefs, lead me to propose that the mourning communities in Albania, during the construction of funerary monuments, also established dedicated structures for cult rituals and platforms for religious ceremonies. Additionally, while there is no direct evidence linking the twelve ritual-only tumuli – specifically designated for ritual purposes – it is reasonable to suggest that these monuments may have been primarily constructed for the sun worship cult, as well as for commemorative funerary functions (Section 6.3).

7.2.2   Terrestrial cults

The Mountains held great significance during the Bronze and Iron Ages, representing power and strength, serving as the abode of deities and forming a vital part of the sacred landscape (Tully and Crooks, 2019; Bemmann *et al.,* 2024; Criado-Boado *et al.,* 2024). Their majestic presence and towering heights symbolised the link between the celestial realm of the sun and the earthly world (Gazizova, 2021). Czebreszuk and Szmyt (2012; 322) describe how tumulus cemeteries in North European Lowland were perceived as the holy mountain through which the spirits of the departed could ascend to heaven. My assertion, based on the tumuli examined in this research, is that this

belief profoundly influenced the importance of tumuli as funerary monuments in Albania during the Bronze and Iron Age, providing a passage to the afterlife and shaping both the treatment of the deceased and the selection of burial practices. The findings related to the burial rite of cremation and the construction of ritual-only tumuli illustrate their prevalence in mountainous and hilly regions, where they were predominantly built with stones (Chapter 4). It is plausible to suggest a connection between these practices and the ideological conception of tumulus cemeteries as cultic mountains.

The shape of the 123 tumuli reflected the artificial hill and mountain and could have been an attempt to establish a connection between the realms of the living and the celestial. In *Iliria* Journal and monographs, the term 'hill cemetery' (kodër varrezë) has been used as a substitute for tumuli, emphasising the perception of tumuli as elevated cemeteries (Prendi 1985a; 2008; Aliu 2020). Tumuli's location in high places or hills further emphasised their role as landmarks that defined and dominated the landscape (Martin-McAuliffe, 2014; 2016) (Chapter 5). Jubani (1995) illustrates the significant role of the cult of mountains and its close relationship with tumuli construction. The endeavour to acquire mountain materials from a distant location and incorporate them into the architectural structures of tumulus cemeteries, as illustrated in Chapter 6, was a crucial part of aligning the mountain cult with tumuli, which were already perceived and celebrated as an embodiment of the cult of the sun.

Rivers and other water-related features, such as brooks and lakes, held significant cult and ritualistic importance as they were believed to be connected to both the celestial realm and the physical land (Bourdeaux, 2023). Horne (2024; 17) explains that 'the physical underwater was considered the realm of the dead'. Jubani (1995) and Aliu

(2012) argue that rivers were imbued with deep cult meanings and played a central role in the beliefs and practices of local communities from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. Consequently, the construction of tumuli along riverbanks symbolised a belief in death and the afterlife. Bronze and Iron Age communities living near communication routes likely interacted with other cultures practicing tumuli rituals (Andrea, 1995; Duffy, 2020), thereby adopting such ideologies. The fact that 77 out of 123 tumuli were constructed near rivers and brooks (Chapter 5) illustrates how communities living near rivers embraced and promoted tumuli ideology and beliefs related to death and the afterlife.

Using river materials in constructing architectural features such as muranë, ringstone and cupola was a common practice across the four chronological phases (Chapter 5). These materials were often transported over long distances to be used in tumuli, showcasing the organisation and logistics skills of tumuli builders. Incorporating pebbles of varying colours and other river-building materials into tumuli was integral to their formation as funerary and cult monuments within the landscape. This infusion of river materials in tumuli was deeply connected to cult and ritual practices, potentially serving as conduits to guide the deceased into the afterlife (Horne, 2024). Combining materials from rivers and mountains within a tumulus, like in Shkrel and Shtoj areas, was a public demonstration of integrating the worship and cult practices associated with rivers and mountains within the sun cult (Jubani 1982; 1995). It further enhanced the polytheistic meaning of tumuli as a funerary, commemorative and cult monument of the landscape. In contemporary Albanian culture, the sun, moon, mountains and rivers are significant anthropomorphic and cult entities. Names such as Diella (sun) and Hëna (moon) continue to be used for women; men are often named after mountains (Tomorr); rivers tend to be used both for males and females (Drin and

Valbona).[27]

Earthen soil from nearby and distant fields had frequently been used to cover graves and construct tumuli. In many tumuli, earthen materials were often sourced and transported from distant settlements or hillforts rather than nearby fields. Chapter 6 illustrates how the soil was frequently mixed with pottery fragments and settlement remains, aiming to provide an eternal settlement in the afterlife for the deceased. Building on the research of Jubani (1982; 1995), Aliu (2002; 2012), and Galaty and Bejko (2023), I propose that this practice also symbolised the act of bringing of the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. It could have been part of the cult of Mother Nature, extending the Neolithic burial practice of keeping the dead within the home. This practice further highlights the importance of the perception of death and the afterlife and the cult meaning of tumulus cemeteries.

The economy, diet and social structure of Bronze and Iron Age communities in Albania were centred around animal husbandry and agricultural practices (Galaty and Bejko, 2023). Chapter 6 has illustrated how the excavations of tumuli revealed remains of bulls, cattle, turtles, sheep, wolves and birds, which have been interpreted with cultic significance (Korkuti, 1981a; Jubani, 1995; Bodinaku, 2018). The intentional sacrifice of valuable domesticated animals for burial in 12 tumuli likely formed a part of agricultural and terrestrial cults. In the context of international research, the animals interred with the deceased were believed to accompany them into the afterlife while enhancing the fertility and productivity of the community's agricultural endeavours (Johnston, 2020; Kaliff and Oestigaard, 2022). Animals held a significant status in the

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[27] My auntie is called Hëna, my sister Valbona and my cousin is called Tomorr.

lives of the living, and their inclusion in burial practices likely held cult, sensory and emotional symbolism (Laffranchi *et al.,* 2024). In Albania, the connection between animals and the agricultural world in tumuli reinforces the notion that these animals represented agricultural beliefs and practices. I propose that the interment of individuals with wolves in three graves in Shtikë tumulus was likely linked to winter sacrifices and formed an integral part of broader agricultural cult beliefs (Oestigaard, 2022). Similarly, international research highlights that birds were traditionally associated with life, fertility, and health, and their ritual significance likely facilitated the establishment of a connection between living and animals and ritual practices (Moreman, 2014; Frie, 2019). It is reasonable to suggest that similar meaning was attributed to animal and bird offerings identified in tumulus cemeteries in Albania, where they played a role in funerary and ritual activities, and were integral to various practices, including sacrifices and feasting.

7.2.3 Polytheistic cult monuments

I propose that tumulus cemeteries were polytheistic cult monuments that combined and represented a plurality of celestial and terrestrial beliefs regarding death and the afterlife. The findings regarding ritual practices and activities, discussed in Chapter 5, indicate that the perceptions and cult beliefs in the afterlife were unlikely to have been based on an omnipotent deity in a human or non-human form. Instead, they originated from, shaped, transformed and were influenced by human experiences and the physical world. The sun, moon, rivers, mountains, fields and earth represented the tangible and natural physical landscape; they formed part of the world of the living where communities resided and performed their everyday activities. The same building materials were probably used to construct the earthly homes; the same landscape was used for agricultural activities; the same animals were used to prepare

their everyday or special meals. The findings from the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research support the notion that ascribing cult meaning and beliefs to the physical and natural world was an attempt to extend their meaning and significance to the unnatural and unseen world of the afterlife.

Within *Iliria* Journal and monographs, tumulus cemeteries excavated during the communist period were portrayed as sterile prehistoric monuments primarily aimed at reflecting the Illyrian ethnicity of those interred within. The fundamentals of death, mortuary-related aspects, emotions, mourning practices, and the relationship between life and death, as well as the dead and the living, were often disregarded and deemed unimportant. (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3). In contrast, drawing from the insights of the nine themes detailed in Chapters 3-6, I contend that tumulus cemeteries were more than a one-dimensional monument representing ethnic identities. I aim to reframe the discussion around tumulus cemeteries as complex monuments intricately linked to beliefs surrounding life, death and the afterlife. I propose that death and dying were perceived and believed to be a natural process of life; death was not the end; it was a journey from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Dying transformed individuals from the status of the living who indwelt the physical landscape to being spiritual inhabitants of the sacred landscape of the afterlife (Gallou, 2004).

I propose that the interment of an individual in a tumulus, physically or spiritually, symbolised the rite of passage from the world of the living to the afterlife (Robb, 2013; Kuzmanović, 2021). The construction of a funerary hill cemetery provided a designated architectural home for housing the dead within the natural landscape and that of the afterlife. Tumulus cemeteries acted as gateways to the eternal home, representing a bridge between the natural and supernatural landscapes and realms

(Jonuks, 2005). The polytheistic ideological cult construct of tumulus cemeteries played a crucial role in transforming the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research from mere burial and commemorative grounds to Eternal Living Monuments, ensuring the continuity of tumuli practices in Albania for over two millennia. It offered communities a structured system of beliefs, creeds and practices concerning tumuli location, architectural structures, burial rites, and funerary and ritual practices. While not universally strict, this structured framework was both organised and adaptable, giving bereaved communities a range of cults and ritual beliefs and practices to choose from.

The findings on the 123 tumulus cemeteries challenge the conventional understanding of a homogeneous tumuli culture in Albania. They reveal a complex interplay between differences and similarities, often within the same area or tumulus. I argue that tumulus cemeteries served as living monuments, with their structures, customs and beliefs frequently embraced, modified and configured by distinct local communities based on their unique perceptions and beliefs about their natural and unnatural surroundings and their specific socio-economic circumstances. This diversity and variation were reflected in the architectural designs, treatment of the body, and funerary and ritual practices outlined in Chapters 4-6. While commonalities, such as the rounded shape of the tumuli, exist, I have not identified any distinctive features either within individual tumulus or across the four chronological phases. I propose that this observation demonstrates how communities selectively adopted specific symbolic cultic meanings of tumuli rather than adhering to the entire range of associated practices. For instance, the cult of the sun, represented by the ringstone, was found in only 33 out of 123 tumuli. Double and triple ringstones were constructed in different periods, and adding extra ringstones in five tumuli may have been an effort by grieving communities to reaffirm

the significance of the sun cult. The distribution of the ringstones indicates that the cult practice was widespread across various regions, offering insights into both similarities and differences (Chapter 4). In this research, I deliberately refrain from discussing the uniformity of Illyrian ethnogenesis. The presence of a ringstone has often been cited as a key factor in supporting the notion of Illyrian uniformity (Korkuti, 1998); however, my statistical analysis of ringstones does not support this assertion.

Furthermore, the social structures of Bronze and Iron Age communities in family and nuclear clans further influenced the diversity and plurality of ideological constructs, beliefs and practices associated with tumulus cemeteries (Galaty and Bejko, 2023). My analysis from the *Iliria* Journal and monographs demonstrate how the diversity in architectural structures, funerary practices and the significance of polytheistic cults led to variations in the role and meaning of tumuli across the four chronological phases. It is probable that certain tumuli were dedicated to esteemed individuals such as elite members and war heroes or symbolised the ascension of a new family clan leader, as illustrated in Chapter 5 (Hammond, 1967; Bunguri, 2015; Bejko, 2016). Tumuli were a selective form of burial and did not encompass all members of society from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age (around 2,800- 450 BC). I have recorded a total of 2,197 graves across 123 tumulus cemeteries, with most used for a limited number of individuals; 112 tumuli contained fewer than 30 graves (Chapter 4). Despite the restricted use of shaft cemeteries, their presence suggests the existence of alternative burial customs (Aliu, 2020). The limited number of individuals interred in tumuli leads me to propose that alternative burial practices, which either do not leave visible archaeological evidence or have yet to be discovered, were also in use. The findings from the 123 tumuli indicate that tumuli were dedicated to influential members of their cults, with 12 ritual-only tumuli serving a ritual purpose and closely connected with

funerary tumuli (Chapter 4). These individuals were primarily male and female adults, with only a small number of children interred in eight tumuli between the 11th and 8th centuries BC (Chapter 6).

Tumulus cemeteries reflected the collective beliefs and practices of the community, with the mourners actively involved in conducting funerary rites and constructing tumuli, thus influencing decisions related to burial rites and practices (Barrett, J. C, 1990; Brownlee, 2020; Williams, K. D., 2024). It is plausible to suggest that the local bereaved communities in Albania shared, believed in and practised celestial and terrestrial cults extending to death, culminating in the construction of tumuli as monuments for both the living and the dead (de Lugo Enrich *et al.,* 2020). Tumuli served as the primary cult monument of the Bronze and Iron Ages, with few identified religious monuments, shrines or places of worship (Galaty and Bejko, 2023). For nearly two thousand years, tumulus cemeteries provided local communities with a dedicated space for funerary and cult practices, and a means for publicly expressing their beliefs about life, death and the afterlife. The construction of new tumuli declined around the 5th century BC as alternative religious practices emerged (Korkuti, 2016; Deskaj, 2017). The cultic and religious significance of tumuli persisted in later periods, with tumuli continuing to be used as ceremonial shrines. This tradition endures in modern-day Albania, where tumulus cemeteries are still revered as sacred places (Aliu, 2020). Further research is necessary to comprehend communities' beliefs from a non-funerary context.

7.3   A Matter of Life and Death

7.3.1   The emotional and sensory impact of funerary rituals

The study of tumulus cemeteries in Albania has traditionally taken a clinical and detached approach to interpreting death. The emotional and sensory impact of death and burial, as well as their influence on burial practices, have not been adequately investigated (Chapter 1). By overlooking the emotional aspect of death, the understanding of burial rites, funerary practices and the significance of tumuli has been limited. This approach has led to a portrayal of individuals from the Bronze and Iron Ages as sterile entities rather than recognising them as human beings who were profoundly affected by death (Hamilakis, 2013; Day, 2013; 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of the archaeological remains from the Bronze and Iron Ages, it is imperative to consider the role of emotions in coping with death, burial and bereavement (Chapter 1). It is important to note that this does not imply that Bronze and Iron Age communities experienced grief in the same way as contemporary individuals. Historical, social and cultural factors often shape emotions and grief, resulting in unique and varied experiences across different groups (Berggren and Nilsson Stutz, 2010).

The concept of death extends beyond the biological process, representing a 'life crisis that involves loss, adjustment and the performance of ritualised social practices' (Hallam and Hockey, 2001; 1). The death of an individual could have inflicted emotional trauma upon the family and emotionally connected individuals. Furthermore, it disrupted the social fabric of the community, creating instability and shock for the survivors (Nilsson Stutz, 2010; 35). While the primary mourners were the family and those closely connected, the broader community members also

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experienced a secondary level of mourning (Calabrese, 2021; 163). The nature of funerary and ritual practices identified in the 123 tumulus cemeteries suggests that in response to the trauma and crisis of death, the bereaved families and communities had to come together to restore order, bring social stability and fortify communal identity. It is reasonable to assert that this process encompassed managing the emotional aspects of death and bereavement (Galanakis, 2019; Inall and Lillie, 2020; Hegedűs, 2021; Demina, 2023). Through the treatment of the body, burial rituals, funerary practices and other rituals, mourners were provided with a strategy to cope with the changes and challenges posed by death, adversity and trauma, considerably influencing how communities handled the crises of death (Nilsson Stutz and Stutz, 2022; 23). Funerary practices and rituals shed light on how communities navigated death and are pivotal in understanding the bereavement process and how communities coped with death (Price, 2018; Cooper, 2016). These practices may illuminate the role of grief and mourning in tumulus cemeteries and how they fostered a shared coping mechanism and communal identity (Nilsson Stutz, 2010; Hegedűs, 2021).

Funerary and ritual activities incorporated physical and sensory experiences and everyday human practices. They influenced the sacred and ritual significance of death, the treatment of the body and the importance of tumulus cemeteries (Price, 2018). It is reasonable to propose that rituals and daily beliefs and practices were viewed as closely intertwined, and engaging in funerary and ritual practices involved blending the ritualistic cultural significance with human experiences and activities. The findings from this research demonstrate a blending and merging of sacred and secular activities (Berggren and Nilsson Stutz, 2010), which Cooper (2016; 294) describes as 'the mingling of ritual and non-ritual everyday practices'.

The ideological cult construct of tumuli provided mourners with a structured ritual framework to express their beliefs in the afterlife. Funerary and ritual practices, as described in Chapter 6, were the crucial platform through which mourners could publicly express, perform and practice their cult beliefs (Lazăr, 2022). The emotional and sensory effects provided embodied experiences as a coping mechanism for dealing with death, strengthening cult beliefs and constructing a communal identity for the living (Chesson, 2001). When tending to the body and spirit of the deceased, community members involved in funeral and ritual practices in tumuli were both active participants and beneficiaries of these ceremonies (Calabrese, 2021). The BA-only, BI-R, BI-C and IA-only tumuli in Albania were a crucial link between the deceased's future state in the afterlife and providing communal emotional support for the living, both in the present and future (Zena, 2021).

7.3.2 Death, burial and bereavement

The funerary, ritual and cult practices were primarily influenced by beliefs about the treatment of the body and the choices made for burial rites. In Chapter 4, I illustrated the diversity and co-existence of burial rites, often within the same tumulus, demonstrating that burial rites were not restricted to specific ethnicities, as unanimously stated across *Iliria* Journal and monographs. Building on the work of Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury (2023), I propose that the three burial rites reflected diverse beliefs about the body's journey to the afterlife within the adaptable and polytheistic cultic framework. I suggest that beliefs surrounding inhumation required that the entire body must remain intact to transition to the afterlife, emphasising the importance of the deceased body both in the pre-burial and burial processes. The complete body would rest inside a tumulus cemetery, becoming an integral part of the funerary and cult monument. In the case of cremation, it was not deemed necessary for the complete

physical body to enter the afterlife. Instead, the body would be transformed through fire (Wright, E., 2021) before the incinerated remains were interred in graves, scattered in tumuli or placed in urns. The absence of the physical body for invisible burial would have symbolised the community's cult beliefs and the approach in which the spirit transitioned into the afterlife through funerary and ritual practices. The presence of a physical body was not deemed necessary for burial. The rituals and practices performed in tumulus cemetery and the construction of graves and architectural structures were the central focus of invisible burial (Torres-Martínez *et al.,* 2021). Despite differences in beliefs in the physical body across the three burial rites, the soul and memory of the deceased were encapsulated within and integrated into the tumuli, which served as the gate to the afterlife (Chapter 6). It further highlighted the role of tumuli as funerary and cult monuments for ritual purposes and their role as eternal monuments.

The treatment of the body and the associated funeral and ritual practices before and during interment will be discussed in the following section.

7.3.2.1 Before interment

As previously noted, tumulus cemeteries represent a selective approach to burial practices (Section 7.2.3). While no isotopic or alternative analyses have been conducted to determine the sex of the individuals interred within these tumuli, scholars who have excavated and published findings on these sites assert, based on artefact typology, that the burials included men, women and children. Typically, the primary grave is associated with a male, presumably serving in a role as a social, political, or ritual leader or as the head of a family clan (Prendi, 2008; Bejko, 2016). Drawing on the findings from the 123 tumulus cemeteries examined in this research, I propose that

those interred in tumuli, among various social statuses, were followers, practising believers or leaders of celestial or terrestrial cults.

The death of an individual required the transition from a living body to a prepared soul and body ready to embark on the afterlife. In response to the emotional trauma of death, mourners engaged in a variety of funerary and ritual practices to care for the physical body and ready the soul (Robb, 2013; Oliveira and Silva, 2021). Chapter 6 has demonstrated how this process likely commenced with the cleansing and purification of the deceased's body (Jubani, 1982), instigating an initial proactive approach to the challenges presented by death.   Tending to the biological decomposition would have presented mourners with odour challenges and changes in the colour associated with death, eliciting strong emotional and sensory responses linked to the initial stage of death and mourning (Harris, S., 2020; Nilsson Stutz, 2020). Given the absence of the body in invisible burial, the body's preparation can only be presented for inhumation and cremation burial processes.

The inhumed individuals were probably interred relatively soon after death, and the pre-burial process was immediate, intense and associated with profound and raw emotions related to coming to terms with the crisis of death (Rebay-Salisbury, 2012). The results from the *Iliria* Journal and nine monographs reveal careful attention to adorning the complete and intact body of inhumation, including objects affixed to clothing or head coverings (Chapter 6). Building on Aliu's research (2012; 2020), which suggests that the clothing and adornments may have been either everyday attire or specially designed for burial and ritualistic purposes, I propose that these items carried symbolic ceremonial and cultic significance.   The visual transformation achieved through dressing and adorning the body likely symbolised the body's readiness to

embark on the afterlife journey. This transformation would have evoked powerful sensory and emotional responses, alleviating the emotional pain caused by trauma and loss (Lipkin *et al.,* 2022).

Artefacts discovered in primary and secondary grave inhumation, such as bracelets, bronze and iron pins, musical ankle bells, amber brooches and bronze belts, held practical, decorative and cult meanings (Chapter 6). It is reasonable to suggest that these items were integral to everyday activities as well as cult ceremonies, reflecting the integration of polytheistic beliefs into daily life. I propose that wearing these ornamental cultic items during life and death may have been a public display of an individual's and the community's cult beliefs. The visual appearance and sounds, especially the chiming of bells, served as powerful sensory stimuli and mnemonic devices for reinforcing individuals' and communities' cult beliefs, during both everyday life and funerary practices (Cifarelli, 2022). The physical act of touching during the placing of cult objects on the bodies or clothes of the deceased had a profound sensory and emotional impact on mourners, strengthening communal beliefs about life, death and the afterlife (Verduci, 2022). Moreover, adorning the deceased with bronze bracelets, often offered in temples (Andrea, 1985a), may have signified the dedication of these offerings to esteemed cult members. By interring the purified and adorned body with the cult offering, the soul became consecrated to the tumulus as both a cult monument and a gateway to the underworld, highlighting the dual significance of tumuli as funerary and cult monuments.

The presence of burnt grave goods with the cremated remains indicates that the deceased was adorned before cremation. Bodinaku (2018) and Aliu (2020) assert that cult objects were also affixed to the deceased before cremation. This practice marked

the initial stage in preparing the body for the transformative process of cremation while simultaneously serving as the final stage in treating the corpse as a complete human entity, akin to its state during life, before being transformed by fire into ashes. This stage highlights the importance of creating a lasting visual, sensory and memorable image of the deceased (Nilsson Stutz, 2020). Preparing the body for a transitional phase could have evoked intense sensory and emotional reactions, helping mourners gradually come to terms with loss and navigate the grieving process (Cradic, 2022). The knowledge that the body would be incinerated likely triggered powerful emotional responses from those mourners involved in preparing the body and selecting the funerary adornment (William, 2014).

Among the 123 examined tumuli, 12 were ritual-only tumuli without graves, and 28 were invisible burials with no human remains. The remaining 85 tumuli comprised 1,602 graves, with most graves containing a single individual, except 27 graves which held two or three individuals (Chapter 4). According to Jubani (1982), the body's preparation before burial occurred within the community (Chapter 6). It is probable that across the four chronological phases, various mourners within the community prepared and treated the bodies, including eight children for inhumation and an additional thirteen for cremation (Chapter 5). The deceased were likely prepared for burial through ritual and practical means, which involved cleaning, dressing and adorning. The sensory encounter with the deceased – seeing, smelling, touching and sound – may have left a strong emotional impression, creating lasting memories of the physical presence of death (Lipkin *et al.,* 2022). This would have been more evident for the five multiple graves where a child was likely buried with one or two adults (Chapter 5); the preparation would have likely been performed simultaneously. The emotional and sensory experiences may have assisted mourners in coming to terms

with the immediate impact of death and provided a communal approach to dealing with the emotional suffering and anguish of loss (Skeates and Day, 2020; Laneri, 2022). These activities may have been accompanied by intense expressions of sorrow, such as mourning cries, wails or other strong emotional sonic displays elicited by the experience of grief and loss (Hope, 2017).

The process surrounding death and burial was a 'social and dynamic affair' (Galanakis, 2019; 349). It is reasonable to propose that, before interment, various ritual and practical activities were organised and undertaken, with many community members participating in physical tasks. For example, the inhumation rite involved constructing wooden coffins, selecting branches or providing textiles for covering the deceased (Chapter 4). Cremation rites required significant physical labour to collect appropriate wood for burning, as well as the preparation of the pyre and fire (O'Donnell, 2016). Cremation in situ and partial cremation in graves involved bringing building materials for grave construction and preparing for cremation (Chapter 6). While there is no direct account of the specific processes involved, it is plausible to deduce that the transportation of the body was necessary for both inhumation and cremation, especially cremation in situ. Details about the stretcher found in Krumë 04, described in Chapter 6, indicate that multiple individuals were likely involved in transporting the body into tumulus.

Grave construction for inhumation, cremation and invisible burials required planning, organising and sourcing the necessary building materials. These and numerous other activities likely evoked strong emotional and sensory responses while fostering communal memories, which may have helped create a shared sense of identity (Inomata, 2020; 2021).

The burial rite of invisible burials in 28 tumuli often mirrored traditional inhumation, with grave goods interred within the grave. This was also evident in children's graves in Rrethe-Bazje 01. This suggests that various ceremonial activities likely took place in the community, probably in the settlement, to ceremonially prepare the soul for the afterlife through funerary and ritual practices conducted in tumuli. The preparation and organisation for funerary and ritual practices and the excavation and construction of 207 graves, ritual structures and architectural structures, such as muranë and ringstone, likely began during the pre-burial phase (Chapter 6). Although there was no physical body to carry, the findings from invisible burials suggest that a group of mourners would have transported grave offerings to the tumulus, along with memories of the deceased, possibly communicated through oral and visual representations. This was particularly significant as the sensorial impact of the sound shapes and transforms not just the experience of the activity but also how the surviving communities perceived and experienced their landscape, resulting in the creation of lasting embodied recollections associated with the dead and the landscape (Hughes, Elliott and Edmonds, 2020). These activities were likely to evoke intense emotional and embedded sensorial responses, functioning as a coping mechanism for dealing with death in the absence of a physical body (Nugent, 2020).

The pre-burial and burial preparations for inhumation, cremation and invisible burial entailed various ritual activities, starting before burial and continuing during burial in tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 6). In the following section, I will outline a selection of ritual practices – identified across the three burial rites which occurred during the pre-burial phase. For example, choosing settlement remains as grave offerings may have required destroying an existing house, which was a labour-intensive physical and sensory task. Similarly, mixing pottery fragments with settlement remains and their

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transportation to tumuli would have necessitated extensive physical labour from numerous mourners, evoking cognitive recollections. Sensorial impacts, particularly of smell, play a significant role during funerary activities, shaping the perceptions and recollection of the event (Dixon, 2022; Cantisani, 2024). The capture of birds and animals for sacrifice and ritual feasting would have involved the sounds of wailing animals as they were likely slaughtered, and the visual impact of cutting and preparing the offerings (Hamilakis and Sherratt, 2012). This would have been particularly evident in hunting, skinning and cutting wolves. These rituals and practical tasks would have contributed to the emotional and sensory experience of death, aiding the trauma of loss and preparing the body and the soul of the deceased to enter the underworld. It also illustrates how wild animals were particularly hunted and offered for special ritual practices (Torres-Martínez *et al.,* 2021).

The ceremonial breaking of pottery and metal described in Chapter 6 began before burial. Jubani (1974; 1982;1983) asserts that pottery was intentionally broken, scratched and destroyed. Drawing on the international research conducted by Brück (2006; 2016) and Chapman (2013; 2016), along with the analysis of pottery fragments identified in this research, I propose that these fragments were likely distributed among mourners to create shared memories and identities. Within the context of international research, pottery fragmentation is often linked to ritual significance and may have functioned as a funerary and ritual practice to enhance ideological beliefs of tumuli (Januszek, Cetwińska, and Manasterski, 2022). Within this framework, the sound of pottery breaking before the burial on tumulus cemeteries in Albania, the physical act of shattering it, and the sensation of touching the fragments may have served to commence processing the anger associated with death while collectively mourning, fostering communal memories and identities and facilitating the grieving process

(Giles, 2007).

Furthermore, the deliberate fragmentation and destruction of bronze and iron objects required specialised metallurgical skills, and blacksmiths likely held a significant social and ceremonial role (Jørgensen, 2012; Tormey, 2017). This could have resulted in 'maintaining and manipulating meaning' among participants, especially the ritual and cult meaning of the ceremony and tumuli (Adams, 2016; 217). Andrea (1985a) proposes that the destruction of valuable and personal items, such as bronze swords and iron knives, symbolised a form of death for these objects, reflecting the death of their owners and the process of corpse fragmentation through decay. I propose that the sight, touch and feel of breaking metal would have evoked strong feelings and affect among mourners and the blacksmiths and may have contributed to providing emotional resilience in coping with the crisis of death, facilitated the shared experience of pain and grief and initiated the healing process for the bereaved (Calabrese, 2021). Ultimately, I assert that this practice contributed to creating a special ritual relationship between the dead and the living, heightening the importance of the funerary ceremonies (Budka, 2014).

7.3.2.2   The interment

The burial process was a complex and intricate funerary and ritual practice influenced by cult beliefs, body treatment and the intensity of the embedded emotional and sensory effects.

The interment of 69 primary graves (inhumation, cremation, invisible burial) carried significant importance, signifying the commencement of constructing a new tumulus that served as a funerary cult monument. It involved conducting cult and ritual

ceremonies and constructing ritual architectural structures like muranë and ringstone.

Chapter 4 provided a thorough description and analysis of primary graves based on their burial rite and their correlation with the construction of architectural features across the four chronological phases. Similarly, Chapters 5 and 6 illustrated the elaborate and extensive funerary and ritual practices linked with primary graves, commencing with ground preparation. These processes also entailed performing ritual practices during interment, such as fire ceremonies, ritualised eating and drinking and animal sacrifices. These profoundly emotional and sensory activities triggered strong embodied responses, creating impactful memories associated with death, burial and grief, thus easing the pain of loss. They also enabled mourners to publicly confront, articulate and express the anguish of loss and channel their emotions, facilitating the development of communal coping mechanisms for grief and bereavement (Harrington, 2022). The central location of the primary grave, its architectural construction, its associated architectural features, and the thorough examination of artefacts to establish a timeline for tumulus construction have highlighted the significance of primary graves. Within the *Iliria* and monographs, the findings from primary graves were utilised to support the ethnogenesis of Illyrians. As discussed in Chapter 2, the one-dimensional perspective on the ethnogenesis of the Illyrians resulted in interpreting all ritual aspects strictly through the lens of ethnicity, thereby hindering a deeper understanding of funerary and ritual practices as they relate to death, burial and bereavement. This narrow perspective also led to the view that the primary grave, particularly inhumation, represented the most significant burial within a tumulus, resulting in a fragmented understanding rather than appreciating the tumulus in its full complexity and entirety. By providing a thorough analysis of the three burial rites and incorporating both primary and secondary graves, I aim to present the complexity of the embodied experiences, as well as the ritual beliefs and practices that underlie the significant role of

tumulus cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments. During the Bronze and Iron Age, tumulus cemeteries served as a bridge between the dead and the living, life and death, and merged the natural with the supernatural realms inhabited by the deceased and the bereaved communities.

The findings from Chapters 4-6 demonstrate that the 2,028 secondary graves and the first non-central grave were imbued with ritual and cult significance throughout the funerary process. The presence of fire and ritual structures, pottery and metal fragments, and animal and artefact offerings illustrates that cult ceremonies were a common feature of secondary graves across many tumuli. I propose that these ritual activities were highly emotive and sensorial activities which continued to contribute to the expression of sorrow and grief while fostering the creation of communal coping mechanisms for dealing with death and bereavement (Palmer, 2020). Additionally, the construction of ritual architectural structures, such as a cupola and dromos, signified the establishment and sealing of tumuli as funerary cult monuments. It is reasonable to suggest that these structures were likely dedicated to revered cult believers interred in secondary graves and were built during or shortly after the burial practices. They may have also functioned as spaces for extended ceremonial and commemorative activities, allowing mourners to express their emotions in coping with death through physical movements or auditory expressions (Borgna *et al.,* 2020). It can be suggested that these ceremonies invoked memories of both current and past events associated with burial rites conducted for both primary and secondary graves within the tumulus. I argue that ongoing interments and performance of several consecutive funerary and ritual activities in tumuli further underscored their significance as traditional sites where communities expressed the anguish of death, strengthened coping mechanisms, and formed, reinforced and reshaped memories

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related to dealing with death (Dixon, 2022; Laneri, 2022). While differences existed between primary and secondary graves, the interment of each grave played a pivotal role in creating and solidifying tumuli as funerary cultic monuments. The importance of combining the results from the primary and secondary graves and thematically presenting the burial process and practices, along with their broader ritual significance, has been demonstrated in Chapters 4-6.

Tumulus cemeteries were initially dedicated to a single individual; therefore, funerary and ritual activities centred around one individual. Out of the 113 burial tumuli examined, I have identified only 22 that were exclusively used for one individual, encapsulating that moment's emotional and sensory experiences. The remaining 91 tumuli, including the invisible burial, contained between 2 and 203 graves, indicating multiple funerary and ritual practices conducted over various periods, with 31 BI-C and BI-R tumuli used during the Bronze and Iron Ages. This pattern suggests the burial process was an ongoing and organic development, drawing from established customs. Expanding upon the research of Hamilakis (2013), which highlights the intricate relationship between memory and forgetting, I propose that within the 113 burial tumulus cemeteries, there was a complex relationship between forgetting various practices and cognitive recollections, whilst embracing other practices to create new memories.

7.3.2.3   Inhumation

Starting with the emergence of tumuli in the Early Bronze Age, inhumation was the primary form of burial in 76 tumulus cemeteries, continuing through four chronological phases until the Late Iron Age, when the use of tumuli began to decline. As described in Chapter 5, the complete and adorned body highlighted the importance of body

preservation (Sørensen and Rebay-Salisbury, 2023). The body was not a passive entity but rather the focal and central point of the burial process, likely exhibited on tumuli during the interment (Joyce, 2005; Harvey, 2023). It existed in an intermediate phase between natural and social death, representing the physical body and personality of the deceased (Brownlee, 2020), who was being prepared to journey to the underworld and undergo transformation through decomposition (Robb, 2013). Funerary and ritual practices express and perform social actions and ritual beliefs (Bautista and Rosenfeld, 2017). Funerary rituals performed around and for the body could have facilitated the deceased's passage to the afterlife and centred around the body, symbolising the connection between the living and the dead. This emphasis on the body in the burial process underscores the centrality and significance of the deceased in rituals, making them feel more involved and connected to the practices (Fahlander, 2020). While mourners may have influenced the funerary and ritual practices performed on tumulus cemeteries, these choices not only reflected the beliefs of the deceased and mourners but were primarily focused on preparing the body and soul of the deceased (Brownlee, 2020). That could have been impacted by the smell associated with the body and all the other death-related and ritual activities (Nilsson Stutz, 2020).

Prendi (2008) suggests that the positioning and orientation of new graves may have been influenced by celestial, lunar calendars or sun rotation. Building on international research combined with the results from this research, I propose that this deliberate choice could have reinforced cult beliefs and intensified the emotional impact of the event (Türler, 2020; Parracho Silva, Pimenta and Tirapicos, 2021). Primary graves were located on tumuli ground, while secondary graves were placed on the base or top layers of tumuli, often disturbing older graves (Bodinaku, 2018). This arrangement and

the visibility of other older graves would have heightened the emotional impact on mourners. Tumulus cemeteries were frequently grouped, surrounded by two or more tumuli within the funerary and sacred landscape, which would have left a lasting visual impression on mourners. The significance of visual elements and their impact on the surviving communities could have influenced their experiences of death and shaped their perceptions of their living and funerary landscapes (Hoaen, 2020; Tilley, 2020).

The comprehensive analysis of *Iliria* Journal and monographs, as detailed in Chapters 4-6, suggests that burial and funerary practices were profoundly embodied emotional and sensory experiences.   I propose that the burial practices performed on tumulus cemeteries provided a dramatic stage for enacting death, evoking profound emotional and sensory responses in the participants (Laneri, 2007). The transportation of the body into tumuli, likely carried by multiple individuals and placed within a wooden coffin or other perishable materials, would undoubtedly have elicited intense emotional and sensory reactions, affecting the carriers and mourners involved (Chapter 5). The size, type and materials used in constructing the graves indicate that digging, preparing and building them were physically demanding, likely carried out during funeral and ceremonial activities. It is feasible to suggest they were sensorial events predominated by the sense of smell and sweat, contributing to the funerary smell and simultaneously to the smell of eternity (Dixon, 2022; 429). These graves were the final resting places for the deceased, and their construction helped mourners tend to the body and spirit of the departed while reinforcing communal beliefs and coping mechanisms for dealing with loss (Cannon and Cook, 2015).

The burial process on tumulus cemeteries likely involved multiple mourners placing the deceased in the grave, adorning and touching the body, and placing items on and around the deceased within the graves. These sensory components were significant, fostering a connection between the deceased and the living (Cradic, 2017; 2022). The ceremonial positioning of the body within the grave played a crucial role, reflecting a wide range of variations within polytheistic beliefs (Chapter 6). In the Lofkënd tumulus, as described by Damiata et al. (2007), the buried individual was carefully secured with ropes to achieve a crouched position. Similar practices for arranging the body within the grave likely elicited profound emotional, sensory and mnemonic effects and responses in the mourners. The visual impact of the body's positioning was profound, as it represented more than just a cadaver. I suggest that the body of the deceased held symbolic meaning and played a vital role in maintaining group identity within a cultural context experiencing significant organisational changes (Martínez, Flensborg, and Bayala, 2011; 215).

Funerary and ritual practices likely occurred before, during and after the inhumed deceased was buried and covered. Chapter 6 illustrates how ritualised eating and drinking, fire ceremonies, cult offerings and other activities were conducted for both primary and secondary graves, eliciting emotional and sensory responses in the mourners. According to Jubani (1974), pottery fragmentation on the tumulus was carried out in several stages around the deceased. This process began with depicting the pain of death through scratching pottery with a metal object and thumbnails and culminated in breaking, sharing and placing the fragments on top of the interred individual inside and atop the grave. Based on the analysis of the pottery and metal fragmentation detailed in Chapter 6, it is reasonable to conclude that metal fragmentation was also performed during this time. Various animals and birds were sacrificed as part

of ritual and cultic ceremonies. While there is no direct connection between these activities and burial practices, a comprehensive analysis of the subtheme of animal and bird offerings – drawn from *Iliria* Journal and monographs – suggests that such sacrifices were likely performed during funerary and ritual activities surrounding the body, which was probably displayed on a tumulus before interment. Furthermore, complete or fragmented remains of animals or birds were placed as offerings either inside the grave, on top of the deceased or around the grave. For example, this was observed with the bull in the primary grave in Pazhok 01, with turtles in Patos and wolves in Shtikë identified in secondary graves. The animals' sight, smell, sound and touch would have elicited strong emotional reactions among mourners who were already dealing with the trauma of loss (Rowan, 2020). Placing the deceased in the grave and covering the body with soil or stone prevented physical interaction with the body and removed it from the sight of the living. I deduce that this act symbolised a distinct moment when the deceased became part of the realm of the dead and possibly transitioned to the status of an ancestor (Cradic, 2017).

7.3.2.4   Cremation

The practice of cremation as a new burial rite began with the appearance of tumuli in Albania during the Early Bronze Age. Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of the cremation practices observed in 22 primary graves, spanning four chronological periods. This account showcases the diverse and intricate nature of cremation as a burial rite, encompassing varied methods such as cremation performed outside and within the tumulus ground or grave, complete or partial cremation, potentially invisible cremation, and the use of urns. Notably, apart from nine tumuli in the Shkrel area dedicated to a single individual, I have not identified any tumulus that was exclusively used for cremation. The presence of 13 tumuli, where the primary grave involved

cremation and the secondary graves featured a combination of cremation and inhumation, underscores the co-existence of diverse burial practices.

The wide-ranging diversity, complexity, tumulus locations and distribution across the four chronological phases indicate that, within the framework of the polytheistic ideological construct – where beliefs could be adopted and adapted – various believers or practitioners of these polytheist cults exhibited a distinct preference for cremation. I propose that the adoption, adaptation and practice of the cremation burial rite served as an effort by these communities to incorporate and modify an alternative method of preparing, transforming and handling the body. This transition allowed for the integration of ritual practices into burial rites (Monetti, Gafner and Thompson, 2021). Such a ritual connection could have been an attempt for the body to be prepared and purified for the afterlife by fire within the context of their polytheist beliefs (Bettencourt, 2010). Furthermore, the process of fragmentation of the body through cremation was a sensorial way of creating memories and strengthening the relationship between the living and the dead (Laneri, 2022). Moilanen and Sahramaa (2024) assert that senses are culturally constructed, and I suggest that the emotional and sensorial responses elicited by cremation likely influenced the choice of specific communities to favour this process, thereby embracing aspects of the polytheistic cult beliefs associated with tumulus ideology that resonated more deeply with their emotional and sensory experiences.

The use of fire in cremation carried rich symbolic and profound significance, likely connected to the cult of fire within polytheist meanings (Falchetti and Ottini, 2013). Fire ceremonies, performed during tumuli construction, were intertwined with cremation processes, such as in Patos and Shtogj 02 (Chapter 5). I propose that fire served to

transform the physical body of the deceased. The sight, sound and smell of the incinerating body would have deeply affected mourners, adding to the grieving process (Williams, 2007; Rebay-Salisbury, 2010; Gramsch, 2013). In some cases, cremation was incomplete and partial cremation was practised. For instance, in the Patos tumulus, individuals were placed in an inhumation position, with only the lower part of the body undergoing cremation, where mourners interrupted the cremation by throwing soil to halt the burning process, which would have elicited strong emotional, mnemonic and sensory impact (Williams, H., 2014). It is feasible to suggest that the presence of minimal cremated remains in graves was part of the cremated remains and was distributed among mourners to serve as a coping mechanism for dealing with loss, thus preserving the physical presence and memories of the deceased (Brück, 2016). This practice probably contributed to further body fragmentation, aligning with the broader practice of fragmenting pottery and metal. These highly emotional sensorial events impacted how mourners handled death, navigated bereavement and forged coping mechanisms (Nilsson Stutz, 2020).

Cremation, from biological death to the interment of incinerated remains in tumuli, was a laborious and complex process. It required significant logistical and labour efforts and may have involved multiple individuals (Aprile and Fiorentino, 2021). Building on Gheorghiu' (2007) research, I propose that beliefs about the afterlife may have influenced it due to the ritual meaning of the fire. Participating in cremation activities could have had a profound impact on mourners, affecting their emotions, senses and memories, shaping how they coped with death, burial and bereavement. The process involved constructing the pyre, tending the fire, controlling temperatures and placing the deceased, which would have evoked intense emotional and sensory experiences for the mourners. After the cremation, the task was to handle, select, and arrange the

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remains. Carefully cooling and selecting the remains for scattering or storage allowed mourners time to process their grief and offer a personal, intimate and mnemonic farewell, possibly accompanied by additional ritual practices. It could have reflected the lasting and mnemonic relationship between the living and the dead (Williams, H., 2004).

The practices outlined in Chapter 6 illustrate the various methods for customising and personalising the cremation process, including body treatment, ceremonial procedures and multi-stage rituals. Oestigaard and Goldhahn (2006) and Kaliff and Oestigaard (2008) indicate that in Scandinavian countries during the Bronze and Iron Ages, cremation was typically performed immediately following death; however, it may have also occurred days or even years later. While specific data is not presented in the *Iliria* Journal and the nine monographs, an analysis of the information regarding cremation prompts me to suggest that an extended interval between death and cremation could have been observed in the rituals associated with the tumuli examined in this research. It is conceivable that celestial and lunar calendars influenced the timing of cremation in tumuli to underscore the funerary and ritual significance of tumuli, with funeral and ritual practices being integral parts of ceremonial activities (Squires, 2017).

The practice of cremation in situ was accompanied by profound emotional and sensory experiences, often intense. In instances such as Vajzë 01 and possibly Krumë 01, the ritualised consumption of food and drink and the breaking of pottery on the funeral pyre exemplify the range of extreme and intense emotional and sensory effects. While the incinerated corpse emitted an unpleasant smell, the act of eating and drinking provided touch, smell, taste and comfort. Furthermore, the emotional and sensory release experienced through the physical act of breaking pottery offered an outlet for

the grief and anger associated with death and loss. Additionally, the fragrant aroma emanating from animal and bird offerings, as described in Shkrel 01-07, likely elicited profound emotional and sensory reactions, influencing the overall cremation experience (Aprile and Fiorentino, 2021). Conducting cremation within secondary graves necessitated meticulous planning, organisation and management of the fire within a confined space (Chapter 6). Cremation occurred near secondary graves and architectural features, such as in Bajkaj and Vodhimë tumuli. This method would have elicited strong, profound cognitive and bodily responses among the mourners, shedding light on the correlation between inhumation and cremation, and possibly with invisible graves, highlighting the importance of their ritual meanings and beliefs in life, death, and the afterlife (Bettencourt, 2010; Rebay-Salisbury, 2012).

The practice of placing cremated remains in urns and interring them in tumulus cemeteries has been documented in 33 secondary graves across six tumulus sites. Analysis of the urn typologies and associated artefacts dates these burials to between the 12th and 6th centuries BC. Chapter 6 provides a detailed examination of the various shapes and sizes of the pots used as urns, which were frequently found both complete and incomplete. Cremated remains were often contained within a single fragment or distributed across one or multiple pots designated as urns, sometimes covered with fragments, or a combination of being placed in an urn and scattered around one or two pots. The limited number of identified cremated remains implies that only a small fraction was chosen for interment in the tumulus. It is reasonable to propose that the act of placing the urns and accompanying objects on the tumulus was part of an extended ceremony that commenced with the cremation process and continued with the cooling of the remains. The final act of placing urns on the tumuli and constructing grave structures symbolised the concluding stage of the farewell

ceremony. This extended period likely illustrates how bereaved communities gradually coped with the trauma of death, while also reflecting the relationship between the deceased – transformed by fire and contained in an urn – and the mourning individuals (Williams, 2014).

A comprehensive analysis of the description of the 33 graves used as urns indicates that the final act of placing them on the tumulus was carried out by a small number of mourners, making it a personal way of dealing with death. The use of urns, frequently broken, fragmented or incomplete, may have been part of embedded sensory ritualistic ceremonies and served as a coping mechanism for mourners to process death and bereavement (Oestigaard and Goldhahn, 2006). Handling the base of an urn containing cremated remains and the embedded sensorial experience of the broken and incomplete urn could have provided mourners with a tangible outlet for their emotions and grief (Howes, 2020; Semple and Brookes, 2020). I suggest that this practice was likely part of broader rituals symbolising the offering of the soul, remains and memories of the deceased in the tumulus, which served as funerary monuments leading to the afterlife. Furthermore, I propose that the diversity of urns and the various ways in which associated artefacts were dispersed within the tumuli reflect how bereaved communities explored and adopted different methods for handling the body and preparing it for the afterlife. This diversity also highlights the range of emotional and sensory experiences embedded within their funerary and ritual practices (Nugent, 2020).

7.3.2.5   Invisible burial

The area around Mat region has revealed evidence of 28 invisible burials within eight tumuli where no physical body was placed inside the grave. The number may have

been even higher (Chapter 5). These burials are dated to the Late Bronze Age, when other communities were simultaneously exploring urn burial and interment of children through inhumation or cremation. This indicates that invisible burial was a common practice among many communities as they sought alternative methods for treating the deceased and their commemorative and funerary rituals (Torres-Martínez *et al.,* 2021).

In Chapter 4, Section 4.5.8, I described how twelve ritual-only tumuli were constructed and used from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. Of these, during the Iron Age, two tumuli were converted into burial tumuli. The architectural designs and ritual practices shared by ten ritual-only and 28 invisible burial tumuli indicate that local communities adopted and adapted commemorative and ritual practices while also exploring alternative approaches to treating the body. The ritual-only and invisible burials were discovered near or within the same cluster as burial tumuli, where both inhumation and cremation were practised. They exhibited similarities in architectural structures and funerary rituals, indicating that invisible burials were comparable to inhumation and cremation. These findings suggest that ritual-only tumuli and invisible burial tumuli provided an alternative method for handling the deceased and reflecting beliefs in the afterlife within the context of polytheistic cultic beliefs.

While burying the deceased, even though their body was physically not present, 'the power of the deceased was omnipresent, influencing the funerary rituals and the architectural features of the graves (Kroll *et al.,* 2000; 216). I suggest that these rituals were carried out to guide the soul and memory of the departed to the afterlife within the context of polytheistic beliefs. Consequently, they involved emotionally intense ceremonies in the burial mounds, providing a platform for the mourners to come to terms with death and bereavement. Likewise, Cannell (2021) advocates that tumuli

with no grave were 'never empty or were ever viewed as empty'. They contained the emotional and sensory impacts and memories created by performing funerary and ritual practices and constructing tumuli, giving them meaning and significance to the mourners and communities. In doing so, tumuli as visible and mnemonic monuments became part of the sacred funerary landscape and impacted the lives of the living (Ahola, 2020; Ahola, Lassila and Mannermaa, 2024). These funerary ritual activities contained symbolic ritual significance, helping to reinforce the social identity, perception and beliefs of communities (Laffranchi *et al.,* 2024), either as primary or secondary mourners during and long after ceremonies were performed and tumuli were constructed and ceased to be used as invisible burials.

The excavation, construction, and covering of the graves and the placement of objects within them would have held significant symbolic meaning, evoking sentiments and sensory experiences for the mourners. The presence of pottery and fragmented metal, as described in Chapter 6, suggests that the burial process involved using objects to express the emotional impact and sorrow of death publicly. The discovery of artefacts within invisible burial tumuli reveals the elaborate ceremonial practices associated with burial ceremonies. Chiming bronze bells and other objects with cultic significance, such as amber and war-related artefacts, were found. The deliberate placement of these offerings within the graves, along with the practice of pottery fragmentation and the intentional destruction of valuable items like bronze swords and diadems and bracelets would have evoked a profound emotional and sensory experience for mourners (Verduci, 2022). This impact is particularly evident in the bronze bracelets, which, according to Andrea (1985a), were used as temple offerings in Greece and likely held similar significance when placed within graves in Barç 01. Furthermore, amber, as noted by Kurti (2017), was imbued with ritual meaning and was associated

with ritual and social elite women (Chapter 6).

Evidence of three fire structures and fire remnants in 13 graves at Rrethe-Bazje 09 suggests the intentional use of sensory experiences related to fire to cultivate an environment that would evoke emotions in mourners and leave a lasting, embedded impression. This practice could also be connected to the worship of fire or the cult of fire. Notably, materials sourced from rivers were used to construct graves and structures, likely associated with the river cult (Jubani, 1995). The evidence of the above factors suggests that invisible burials were probably reserved for revered cult followers or leaders.

7.4   Eternal Living Monuments

7.4.1   Connecting realms and worlds

Death is closely intertwined with and is an unavoidable part of life. It is a profoundly personal experience that can be comprehended through observing the death experiences of other people and participating in funerary and ritual practices (Nilsson Stutz, 2010; Tarlow and Nilsson Stutz, 2013; Clifford, 2023). The architectural structure of tumuli, their placement in the landscape, and the associated funerary and ritual practices (Chapters 4-6) demonstrate the central role of death in tumuli practices. This perspective transcends a limited, one-dimensional interpretation of the ethnicity of the Illyrian individuals interred in tumulus cemeteries. My novel approach to this research suggests that tumulus cemeteries functioned as complex funerary and ritual monuments, primarily associated with death, and served as a link between the deceased, deities, and the living (Jedan *et al.,* 2020).

The construction of tumuli and associated funerary and ritual practices allowed the living to express their grief for the deceased and foster communal coping mechanisms for dealing with loss. These practices, detailed in Section 7.3, had a highly emotional and sensory nature that evoked strong responses in mourners, leading them to contemplate their death and mortality. Mourners could relate to the experience of the deceased and consider their eventual passing (Clifford, 2023), whether through inhumation, cremation or invisible burial. These practices served as visual reminders of the potential funerary and ritual practices that might await the mourners, prompting reflection on what might occur before and during their interments and their passing into the afterlife. These triggered profound embodied and affective experiences in the mourners, creating lasting memories that could be evoked by the physical presence of tumuli, which served as mnemonic mounds within the landscape (Müller, 2021). Tumuli functioned as repositories for the lives and memories of the deceased, serving as a bridge between life and the afterlife and as symbols of mortality for the living. They held profound significance, embodying a complex intertwining of emotions, perceptions and beliefs about life, death and the afterlife, thus highlighting their role as enduring and eternal monuments of life, death and the afterlife. This framework provides insight into how people interacted with tumuli to cope with the death of the deceased, strengthen cultic beliefs and possibly ensure their place and transition into the afterlife.

7.4.2   Constructing eternity

Tumuli architectural structures exemplify the careful planning and skill of building a geomorphological monuments that have endured for thousands of years (Chapter 4). This suggests that tumuli served purposes beyond simply being practical repositories for the deceased (Martin-McAuliffe, 2014; Scarre *et al.,* 2018). Their role as funerary

monuments for the deceased was intricately intertwined with the lives of the living. In a practical sense, it would have been simpler to bury the dead in a shaft cemetery, where the grave construction, the interment and funerary practices would have been focused primarily on one or a small number of individuals and carried out in an intimate ceremony performed by a small number of people, and the graves would have been visually distinct within a short geographical area (Aliu, 2020). I have already demonstrated that the burial choice was often influenced by cultic beliefs, indicating that it was more than a practical decision.

The findings from the 123 tumuli, across the four chronological phases, demonstrate the complexity of tumuli as monuments deliberately created to define and influence the lives of communities (Chapter 5). The architectural complexity of tumuli suggests that their construction was a collective effort, facilitating community involvement in addressing both individual and communal experiences with death (McFadyen, 2016). A small group or family clan might have constructed smaller tumuli within a short or extended period. In comparison, the larger tumuli, especially those used over an extended period or across different phases, may have been built and rebuilt by different families or social groups (Papadimitriou, 2016). Designing, crafting and sourcing building materials for the construction of 123 tumuli with diameters of up to 50 metres and heights of 5 metres, as well as architectural structures such as muranë, ringstone, cupolas and dromos, demanded significant building resources and physical labour (Voutsaki, van den Beld and de Raaff, 2018). It also required coordinating and mobilising various community groups (Zena, 2021). Construction processes evoked strong sentiments and feelings, shaping the perceptions and meaning of the construction event and the landscape (Pongratz-Leisten, 2022). It is conceivable that certain tumuli were designed, planned and prepared in accordance with celestial and

lunar calendars even before the physical death of individuals. However, as mortuary monuments, the construction of tumulus cemeteries was influenced by the unpredictable nature of death. Therefore, building new tumuli or adding architectural and grave structures may have necessitated swift organisation and the contribution of many individuals and community members before or during interment.

According to Bunguri (2015), the social and army elites in Albania actively exchanged materials and ideas with various European groups, showing a strong inclination towards embracing tumuli ideologies. This new form of memorial burial was better suited to their elevated status, and a specific number of tumuli were likely reserved for the elites (Cerezo- Román, 2015). However, whilst acknowledging the influence of social and army elites, the limited evidence regarding the socio-economic context and political organisations within the community does not fully support the idea that elites primarily endorsed tumuli to perpetuate their political standing (Chapter 5). According to Korkuti (1985), the presence or absence of artefacts in the graves held a ritual significance and reflected the deceased's beliefs rather than simply indicating their social status. Meanwhile, Islami (2013) and Kurti, R. (2017) argue that social elites upheld a dual ritual meaning and significance. This research unveils a nuanced relationship between the standardised architectural design, generally adhered to across the four chronological phases and in the 123 tumuli, and the diverse architectural structures often found within the same area (Chapter 4). These results suggest that influential local ritual elites or prominent cult leaders played a crucial role in their sphere of influence in advancing and reinforcing the ideological significance of tumuli within polytheistic cult beliefs (Kuzmanović, 2021; Whitehouse, 2024). It is likely that ritual elites also had political power and control as 'politics, religion and the building of collective identities would go hand in hand' (Fernández-Götz and Roymans,

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2015; 18). They likely contributed to tumuli construction by funding and organising labour and materials, performing funerary and ritual practices, and serving as places for creating and maintaining social memories (Lim and Matás, 2023; Matás, 2023).

Building tumulus cemeteries required central organisation and the participation, involvement and willing collaboration of many groups whose practices and beliefs aligned with the tumuli's ideological beliefs (Fontijn, 2002; Van de Moortel, 2016). I propose that tumuli practices were perpetuated, strengthened and promoted through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, guided and interconnected by the beliefs and customs related to life, death and the afterlife.

The findings from the 123 tumuli, detailed in Chapter 4, reveal that their construction was a sophisticated, multi-stage process that extended beyond simply building a tumulus on the site. The concept of 'architectural energetics', as defined by Sioumpara (2018; 141), considers the comprehensive cost of all construction elements, from initial ground preparation to the sealing of the monument (Chapter 4). This encompasses the physical tasks and energy expended in construction, including sourcing soil, stone, earth and turf, and the time taken away from daily activities and other practices. The efforts of tumuli builders were not just laborious tasks; I propose that they were undertaken willingly as a form of offering aimed at creating an enduring and eternal funerary and cultic establishments of the natural and supernatural realms (Cannell, 2021). This engagement likely helped builders shape the meaning and significance of tumuli cemeteries as eternal and living monuments for their family or community, instilling a sense of belonging and participating in the funerary cultic monuments, likely located in their landscape and close to home. This involvement likely instilled a sense of pride in contributing to the construction of these important monuments, helping the bereaved

to process the trauma of death while simultaneously reinforcing the ritual beliefs of their communities.

Contributing to the construction of tumuli was also an emotional response to death, grief and bereavement. The grave and architectural structures were often built before, during or shortly after the funerary process, providing a constructed outlet for individuals to deal with the crises of death and the pain of loss (Cannon and Cook, 2015; Zena, 2021). The building process was frequently associated with ritual practices such as fire ceremonies, feasting, pottery fragmentation, cultic offerings, and ritual structures, likely performed by the same individuals. These activities evoked strong emotive, embodied and mnemonic experience of tumuli, thus enriching the sense of communal identity (Inomata, 2020). Through engaging in a variety of activities, those builders involved in tumuli construction shared the emotional and sensory impacts of the physical act of building and performing ceremonies, strengthened their cult beliefs and crafted coping mechanisms for dealing with death while continuing to live their lives. These facets imbued tumuli with a duality, representing both the sacred and the secular, transcending them from mere burial sites to eternal and living monuments, encapsulating the essence of life and death within both the natural and supernatural realms. Concurrently, the building activities instilled mourners with confidence in their construction abilities and expertise.

7.4.3   Curating life, crafting landscape and governing death

During the third millennium BC, significant exploration and remarkable technological advancements occurred in the European and Mediterranean worlds. People were experimenting with different ways to create material culture, handle the deceased, establish and preserve social and ritual significance, and build funerary monuments

within the landscape (Iacono *et al.,* 2022). In Albania specifically, communities began to develop new ways of living, improved their farming techniques and settled into more permanent lifestyles. This period and the following two millennia saw the emergence of new organisational structures within these communities, leading to the construction of hillforts, settlements and cities (Galaty and Bejko, 2023). Artefacts found across many tumulus cemeteries reveal advanced craftsmanship and the acquisition of sophisticated items from distant locations such as Italy, Greece, the Baltic regions and the Danube River (Chapter 5). This suggests a high level of mobility and networking, showing that both men and women embraced different styles and fashions that suited their evolving way of life and social and ritual status (Kurti, R., 2017). The regional workshops generated replicas or comparable artefacts, showcasing how communities embraced, modified and reimagined new styles, objects and material culture. The rise and proliferation of tumuli reflected communities' embrace of alternative approaches to handling death more thoroughly than in previous periods while preserving and reshaping traditional burial practices and integrating them with new ones (Chapter 5).

The progression of human experience greatly influenced the development and use of tumuli structures, expertise in crafting and shaping material culture and the environment, and regional and inter-regional networking and mobility.   The architectural design and burial customs associated with the 123 tumulus cemeteries illustrate how builders embraced, adapted and innovated new construction forms and ceremonial practices, demonstrating remarkable human skill and ingenuity in constructing and reshaping architectural structures and funeral and ritual traditions. I propose that while serving as funerary and cultic monuments, tumuli were man-made structures, providing visual testimony of humanity's skills, social organisations and expertise in creating sophisticated, complex and enduring monuments (Johansen,

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Laursen and Holst, 2004).

Tumuli were designed to define the landscape (Chapter 5), allowing humans to establish their dominance and influence over the surrounding terrain. Furthermore, the idea of crafting and creating monuments within the landscape and building them with landscape material extended to the role of the living landscape around tumuli. This allowed humans to emulate the power-creating role of the deities of Mother Nature. The intentional resemblance of tumuli to natural hills and their lack of visible protective systems indicate that they were intentionally designed to mimic and redefine the living, tangible landscape (Chapter 5). The strategic positioning of tumuli within the landscape, their grouping in clusters, as well as their size, measurements and the materials used in their construction, all serve as evidence of the meticulous thought and consideration that went into asserting the ability of tumuli builders to shape, reconfigure and create both micro and macro landscapes, thus giving rise to a merging ritual and profane landscape. Tumuli were not just isolated burial sites; they were an integral part of the surrounding landscape; both influencing and being influenced by it. These monuments marked specific locations within the landscape where the emotional and embodied experiences and perceptions of the surrounding environment shaped their architectural structures as well as their funerary and ritual practices (Bourgeois, 2013). The presence of the funerary landscape, defined by one or more tumuli, affected the emotional and sensory perceptions of the communities as they interacted with and navigated the living landscape. This demonstrates how humans could assert control and influence over their inhabited environment, shaping and controlling the living landscape as well as the human experiences with the landscape (Papantoniou, 2019).

The concept of death as a powerful force extending beyond the realm of the living has been evident in various cultures throughout history. The Holy Bible portrays death as the ultimate adversary to be conquered. While it is impossible to govern the biological process of dying, tumulus cemeteries provided mourners and the broader community with a structured framework that guided and regulated the treatment of the body and associated funeral customs. This led to tumulus cemeteries becoming the platform for addressing the needs of the deceased and their place in the afterlife, as well as for the living to cope with the emotional and sensory impacts of death. In this research, I have demonstrated how these experiences were connected to specific, especially man-made monument located within the landscape, where memories of the event and their effect on the lives and identities of the living could be visually evoked by these 'mounds of memory' (Papadopoulos, 2006; 75). The cult beliefs were the driving force behind shaping the practices related to death. It is within this structured framework that death could be understood, managed and controlled, contributing to promoting the role of tumuli as eternal monuments for over two millennia.

The concept of controlling death has historically been associated with deities or superhuman entities. However, an analysis of 123 tumulus cemeteries demonstrates the challenge of differentiating the practical aspects of life from their ritual significance and does not yield specific evidence for the existence of one or multiple deities. The celestial and terrestrial rituals likely originated from Neolithic traditions, and new beliefs were adopted from other tumuli cultures, adapting them to local contexts. The presence of polytheistic beliefs, influenced by the natural landscape, implies that various members of communities attached cult significance to tumuli as enduring and eternal symbols of life, death and the afterlife. I propose that certain groups within the community ascribed cult beliefs to the surrounding and living landscape to explain and

derive meaning from the mysteries of death and the afterlife. These groups likely consisted of adherents and worshipers of cult beliefs or ritual elites, whose primary aim was to promote these beliefs within the context of human abilities and understanding. They may have acted as the intermediaries of death, or the agents of death, advocating and propagating polytheistic cult beliefs that were adaptable to local communities' perceptions and experiences with the natural landscape. Conversely, these beliefs were embraced and upheld by local communities who practiced them to mourn the death of family or community members by constructing tumuli and performing ceremonies. As I have previously stated, these practices may have reflected the deceased's beliefs and practices with the surviving members, following their wishes and testaments. The concept of controlling death probably involved an interactive process between different levels of society.

I have demonstrated how tumulus cemeteries embody the concept of Eternal Living Monuments, symbolising the interconnectedness of the natural and supernatural worlds. The significance of tumuli as eternal is reflected in their role as enduring monuments that have survived for over four thousand years, embodying the eternal and mortal essence of life while also being intertwined with the eternal and immortal realm of the afterlife. Tumulus cemeteries functioned as living monuments, evolving over time and encapsulating the experience related to death, the human body and the memories of the departed. They wielded significant influence over the lives of the surviving communities, remaining an integral part of both the living and sacred landscape. During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Albania, tumuli transformed into timeless monuments, their enduring connections ensuring their everlasting importance. This transformation solidified tumulus cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments.

7.5   Conclusion

The nine themes derived from *Iliria* Journal and the nine monographs provide a comprehensive overview of the architectural structure of tumuli, as well as the reasons behind their emergence and proliferation, alongside the funerary and ritual practices associated with them.   The detailed results of these findings were presented thematically and statistically in Chapters 3-6, focusing on the actions undertaken during these activities, exploring what transpired and how it occurred, along with detailed descriptions and distributions across four chronological phases. Building on these findings, this chapter delved into some key overarching questions regarding the motivations behind these practices. It presents the rationale and explains why the 123 tumulus cemeteries utilised in this research were designed, constructed and functioned as Eternal Living Monuments.

The overarching theme of this chapter centres on the notion that death is an intrinsic aspect of life, highlighting the deep interconnection and inseparability of the concepts of life and death.   This chapter illustrates how tumulus cemeteries symbolise the blending of these two realms. On the one hand, tumuli served as monuments that addressed the biological death of an individual, providing an appropriate and respectful resting place for the body, soul or memory of the deceased. On the other hand, the findings presented in Chapters 3-6, along with the key issues explored in this chapter, reveal that tumulus cemeteries represented more than mere burial sites focused solely on the deceased and their funerary practices. They encapsulated the experiences of the surviving communities as they navigated the realities of their own death and mortality. Nilsson Stutz (2010) notes that humans cannot confront their death directly; instead, they encounter it through the loss of others, whether as primary or secondary mourners. Biological death is an inevitable part of life, often beyond

human control. The corpse presented a tangible and immediate challenge for the living.

Preparing the body – through inhumation, cremation, or invisible burial – offered

practical means for the living to cope with the aftermath of death. The entire burial

process, from pre-internment rituals to the final physical interaction with the body and

the accompanying funerary practices, encapsulates the dual purpose of addressing

the biological death of the deceased while also confronting the broader concept of

death itself.

Additionally, the mourning communities dealt with the enigmatic concept of the soul

and the memory of the departed. The polytheistic cultic beliefs offered a structured

framework for understanding and addressing the fate of the soul in the afterlife. This

represented a human endeavour to exert some control over death and the

circumstances surrounding the afterlife, illustrating how the living sought to influence

these profound transitions. Moreover, tumulus cemeteries provided the surviving

communities with visible, tangible and mnemonic funerary monuments that allowed

them to express their beliefs and perform funerary rituals. They also gave grieving

communities power and control over the natural and ritual landscapes and realms.

However, it is essential to recognise that while tumulus cemeteries served as

ideological constructs and funerary monuments rich in ritual and cult significance, they

did not necessarily reflect a human need to worship deities or other individuals.

The themes of the 'ideological construct of tumuli' and 'the Eternal Living Monument'

illustrate the relationship between the living and the dead, representing both the

natural and sacred landscapes while encapsulating the realms of life, death and the

afterlife. In this regard, tumuli functioned as eternal monuments. The theme of the

'matter of life and death' emphasises how emotional, sensorial and memorial aspects

further transformed the meanings and significance of tumuli, serving as platforms for experiencing, managing and expressing the process of dealing with bereavement. They also provided the living with coping mechanisms for navigating their own lives. These intricate relationships between life and death elevated tumulus cemeteries into a profound matter of life and death, establishing them as Eternal Living Monuments of Bronze and Iron Age Albania. Within the framework of tumulus cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments, we can gain a deeper understanding of their architectural significance, the factors that contributed to their rise and proliferation, and the nature of funerary and ritual activities associated with them.

Chapter 8   Concluding remarks

8.1   Research overview

The primary aim of this research was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ideological significance of tumuli and their influence on societal beliefs and practices related to death and the afterlife, shifting the focus towards the mourning communities of the deceased and their ideological construct. It explored the role of tumulus cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments of Bronze and Iron Age Albania by utilising and re-evaluating the published data on tumuli excavated during the communist regime (Chapter 1). To achieve this aim, I collected and documented the published data of tumuli cemeteries excavated during the totalitarian communist regime from *Iliria* Journal (1971-2015) and nine monographs (Objective 1). I identified a total of 123 tumuli (Objective 2), and meticulously recorded detailed information about each tumulus in Tumuli Repository (Objective 3). I provided a thorough chronology of the 123 tumulus cemeteries and their construction phases (Objective 4). Additionally, I identified, recorded, and statistically analysed the factors contributing to tumuli becoming Eternal Living Monuments by drawing upon the theories of sensory archaeology, emotions and memory (Objective 5).

I was guided by three pivotal questions, each crucial in achieving the aim and the objectives. These questions were: What was the architectural structure of tumulus cemeteries, how did it change over time, and what were the practices involved in their protection (RQ1)? What factors led to the rise and proliferation of tumuli cemeteries for over two millennia (RQ2)? What funerary and ritual practices were performed (RQ3)?

Chapter 2 provided a historical context for the study of tumuli. It offered a detailed account of the formation of the Albanian state and the factors that influenced and transformed tumuli research, particularly in relation to the theme of Illyrian ethnogenesis during the communist era and its continuing impact on current scholarship. This discussion underscored the necessity of shifting the focus away from ethnogenesis in favour of a comprehensive and multi-dimensional exploration of tumuli. In doing so, it emphasised the significance and innovative nature of this research.

Reflecting on the current state of tumuli research in Albania, particularly within the unique context of the communist era, I utilised a mixed-methods approach combining reflective thematic analysis with descriptive statistical analysis (Chapter 3). This methodological approach provided a comprehensive framework for identifying and addressing the factors that influenced tumuli studies while emphasising the quality and depth of the collected data. This research reveals the extensive information available from nearly seventy years of published data concerning tumuli excavated during a repressive communist regime. It involved gathering a substantial amount of data from *Iliria* Journal (1971-2015) and nine monographs encompassing over 2,000 years of history across the country. It enabled a thorough quantitative and qualitative exploration, analysis and interpretation of nine themes, thus enriching our understanding of life, death and the afterlife within Bronze and Iron Age communities. Chapters 4-6 provided a meticulous detailing of these findings, offering an in-depth presentation and analysis of each of the three research questions.

The discussion in Chapter (7) presented an analysis and interpretation of the key results and predominant themes drawn from the preceding three chapters, exploring the factors that led to the proliferation of tumulus cemeteries in Albania into Eternal Living Monuments. It illustrated how the ideological framework surrounding tumuli, rooted in celestial and terrestrial beliefs, offered builders a means to navigate concepts of life, death and the afterlife, thereby influencing the architectural structures and funerary rituals associated with them. I emphasised the centrality of tumuli to both life and death, exploring how the emotional and sensory dimensions of funerary rituals shaped the experiences and significance of death, burial and bereavement across the three burial rites: inhumation, cremation, and invisible burial. The chapter concluded by underscoring the role of tumuli as Eternal Living Monuments that bridge realms and worlds, facilitating the construction of eternity, curating life, shaping landscapes and governing the process of death.

This concluding chapter addresses key challenges encountered during this research and discusses how the methodological framework and findings present potential opportunities for future research.

8.2   Problems, opportunities and future research

The inspiration for this research originated in 2001 during the excavation of the Kamenica tumulus in Albania. The nature of the findings – including grave goods, artefacts, architectural structures, and evidence of ritual activities and the role of tumuli within the landscape – combined with a multidisciplinary approach to analysing these discoveries, laid the groundwork for exploring the life, death and afterlife of the Bronze and Iron Age individuals interred at Kamenica. Nearly two decades later, the focus of my doctoral research was to further examine the role of tumulus cemeteries across

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the country through the three research questions, aims and objectives addressed in Chapters 1-7.

Initially, I aimed to avoid altogether addressing the issue of the ethnogenesis of the Illyrians (as described in detail in Chapter 2). However, during the stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, it became apparent that the issue of the Illyrian ethnogenesis had profoundly influenced the nature of archaeological methodology, data collection and interpretation during a totalitarian communist regime when the dictator was personally interested in tumuli studies. This topic has remained contentious and taboo within both scholarly circles and broader discussions from the post-communist era to the present. Consequently, research derived from tumuli excavated during the communist era is often viewed as problematic and sensitive or used to further support current nationalistic and political agendas, leading to a lack of thorough understanding and analysis of the findings related to these sites.

The primary challenge of this research has been to provide a methodological approach that acknowledges and critically analyses the factors influencing tumuli research and deals with the overarching theme of Illyrian ethnogenesis and its uninterrupted continuity to Albanians. This involved distinguishing how these factors may have led to an emphasis on certain aspects of data to align with a nationalistic agenda while remaining ethical in identifying potential biases from rigorous scientific inquiry. Within the realm of scholarly research, particularly in Albania, there exists a pervasive concern that admitting to potential biases and limitations could undermine the perceived quality of the data or render the findings less valuable for future research or publication. This challenge is further amplified by the cultural differences among Western, European and ex-communist countries, which not only impact data

publication but also shape its contemporary interpretation (as described in memo writing in Chapter 4). Such differences are often inadequately addressed or overlooked in intercultural, multilingual research.

The fear of being overly subjective or emotionally invested in various aspects of a country can impede the examination and discussion of research concerning controversial issues, historical periods or specific nations. I advocate for the significance of conducting a thorough analysis that goes beyond the tumuli data to consider the historical factors that have influenced publication methods and interpretations. It necessitates the adoption of a methodological framework that embraces a subjective perspective, where both academic and personal knowledge contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical factors and implicit narratives that affect the data. Simultaneously, this approach ensures that interpretations remain anchored in systematic, comprehensive, and both quantitative and qualitative data, rather than being solely subjective. This methodological approach is not just an innovative way limited to Bronze and Iron Age tumulus cemeteries; it is also applicable to other periods of archaeological research in Albania.

Throughout this research, it has become increasingly evident that the demonstration of Illyrian ethnogenesis remains a primary motivator for past and contemporary investigations into various historical periods. The term applied to 'Illyrian tumuli' is consistently used across almost all archaeological sites excavated during both the communist and post-communist eras. For example, numerous publications from the communist period feature titles such as 'The Illyrian City of Lis', 'Illyrian City of Zgërdhesh', and 'The Illyrian City of Lower Selca' (Prendi and Zheku, 1972; Ceka, 1972). This trend persists in more recent works, including titles such as 'Apollonia of

Illyria', 'The History of the Illyrian City of Apollonia', and 'The Origin of Illyrian Cities' (Cabanes *et al.,* 2001; Vrekaj, 2009; Ceka, 2020). By adopting and applying the comprehensive methodological approach outlined in this research, my future endeavours and other Albanian and international scholars can provide a fresh and transformative narrative for interpreting many archaeological sites.

Only three decades ago, Albania was among the most isolated countries in the world, with little to no contact with the capitalist and communist world. Despite its status as a communist state that portrayed itself as a beacon of light in the communist world, this isolation has led to a distinctive and unique approach to archaeological research. Although there is a substantial body of historical research focused on the communist era, comprehensive studies examining the factors that influenced archaeological research are scarce (see Chapter 2). Developing a methodological framework that acknowledges these challenges while separating potential biases from rigorous research could make future archaeological investigations more accessible and better understood by a broader audience of both Albanian and international scholars. This approach could also facilitate a deeper exploration and understanding of data from the communist era and other oppressive regimes beyond Albania.

Some of the findings from this research have been presented as lectures at the University of Tirana (Albania) and at various national and international conferences, where they received a positive reception and sparked interest in exploring these alternative interpretations of tumuli through the lenses of sensory archaeology, emotions and memory. It is intended to deliver further lectures and presentations throughout various universities in Albania. The results of this research will be published in several Albanian and international journals with dual publications in

Albanian and English. This initiative aims to bridge language barriers and enhance accessibility to the findings. Furthermore, the methodological and holistic approaches to analysing the roles of death, burial and bereavement through the lenses of sensory archaeology, emotions and memory, as well as interpreting tumuli as Eternal Living Monuments, hold significant potential for application in the broader field of archaeology, particularly within tumulus cemeteries and various types of burial archaeology in Albania and in other countries.

In Albanian society, a dichotomy exists surrounding the concept of death, evident in the widespread presence of mural death notices, women dressed in black attire, and various memorials. Concurrently, there is a noticeable stigma associated with discussions of death and the remembrance of those who have passed away. Agolli (2019) has established a foundation for understanding this phenomenon through her research with students at the University of Tirana. The insights derived from her findings could foster further university collaboration to encourage conversations about these societal taboos.

Oikonomidis, Papayiannis and Tsonos (2012) suggest that tumuli convey vital messages that enhance our understanding and appreciation of their historical significance and the role they played within surrounding communities. By utilising tumuli data, we can shift the narrative surrounding tumulus cemeteries away from divisive nationalistic agendas. Instead, this data offers an opportunity to learn from Bronze and Iron Age communities about addressing various issues, including death, burial and bereavement. In line with Croucher's (2018) recommendations and building on various projects in England, these research findings could be used by professionals in bereavement-related fields to facilitate meaningful discussions with grieving

individuals and communities (Williams, 2019; Croucher *et al.,* 2020; Booth, J., Croucher, and Bryant, 2021). These approaches are applicable not only in Albania and England but in many other regions.

The findings from this research have the potential to highlight the significant role of tumuli as architectural monuments within the landscape, as well as the contributions of the tumuli builders and how their construction and the performance of funerary rituals fostered community cohesion and addressed crises. They have the potential to enhance history education at all levels. Such a transformation would aid in mitigating both the conscious and subconscious promotion of nationalistic narratives that assert an exclusive Illyrian ancestry for Albanians, encouraging a focus on the lives and deaths of Bronze and Iron Age communities, providing alternative interpretations and fostering opportunities for open and critical discussions (Chapter 3).

The complexity of tumuli demands a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their meaning and significance. This research has yielded substantial data. However, it was impractical to delve into all the intricate details encompassed within the nine themes and sub-themes. Each sub-theme offers numerous opportunities for analysing and interpreting various aspects of the Bronze and Iron Ages. A more thorough examination of these themes and sub-themes will require leveraging additional published data, as well as utilising primary data available in Albania. Such an approach could facilitate further analyses in bioarchaeology, stratigraphy, and forensic studies. While this research advocates for a holistic perspective incorporating sensory archaeology, emotion and memory, it also highlights the need for more extensive and comprehensive investigations. These efforts could enhance our understanding of the tumuli excavated during the communist era and the life, death and afterlife of Bronze

and Iron Age individuals and communities. Moreover, additional research from this researcher and others could begin to explore the role of tumuli as funerary monuments within the landscape, particularly concerning the daily and agricultural lives of contemporary communities closely interwoven with these historical sites as Eternal Living Monuments.

This research marked the first comprehensive listing of all 123 tumulus cemeteries and their construction phases in Albanian archaeology. Chapter 3 presents the innovative approach of providing uniform terminology, a detailed chronology and a comprehensive data collection. It provided the foundation for analysing the architectural structures of tumuli across the four chronological phases (Chapter 4), the factors that contributed to the rise and proliferation of tumulus cemeteries (Chapter 5), and the funerary and ritual practises performed (Chapter 6). Whilst every attempt was made to complete every aspect of the characteristic features of the 123 tumulus cemeteries, these results were based on published data. They may not be fully exhaustive, as many graves lacked detailed information. Future studies focusing on artefact analysis or alternative dating methods could contribute to establishing a more detailed chronology for each site. To promote tumuli studies in Albania and the findings of this research, the Tumuli Repository will be made available on open access with a link to a website. The data will be presented both in Albanian and English. Future research, in collaboration with other researchers, presents an opportunity to develop a comprehensive database and digital site map of the 123 sites included in this research.

In conclusion, in this research, I have emphasised the significant role of tumulus cemeteries as Eternal Living Monuments that influenced the landscape, ideologies and

lives of communities during the Bronze and Iron Ages, drawing on the concepts of sensory archaeology, emotions and memory. It underscores the richness of the data derived from a totalitarian regime by employing a methodological framework that confronts challenges while appreciating data quality. This innovative approach has paved the way for further exploration of various issues by Albanian and international scholars.

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