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## THE ROYAL PALACE IN BYLAZORA

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**Abstract:** *Systematic archaeological research has been carried out for ten years at the site Gradište in Knežje, where the largest city of the Paeonians Bylazora is located, mainly in the area of its acropolis. The so-called Governor's palace stands out as the largest and most dominant building of the acropolis, which along with all other moments and discoveries gives the city a character of a capital of the so-called independent Paeonians. The paper presents the basic findings from the previous research of the Governor's palace in Bylazora. Although its discovery has not been fully completed, however, given its great historical and archaeological significance, it is necessary, after five years of continuous excavations, to summarize the results achieved.*

**Key words:** Bylazora, Paionians, Early Antiquity, governor's palace

Among all fortified settlements from early ancient period or from the V-IV century BC in the so called north Paeonian territory, the settlement in Gradište- Knežje, near town of Sveti Nikole, is the most distinguished. It is the largest one, covering an area of 20 hectares and holding a central and very strategic position for whole Ovče Pole region with the valley of Vardar and Bregalnica river.

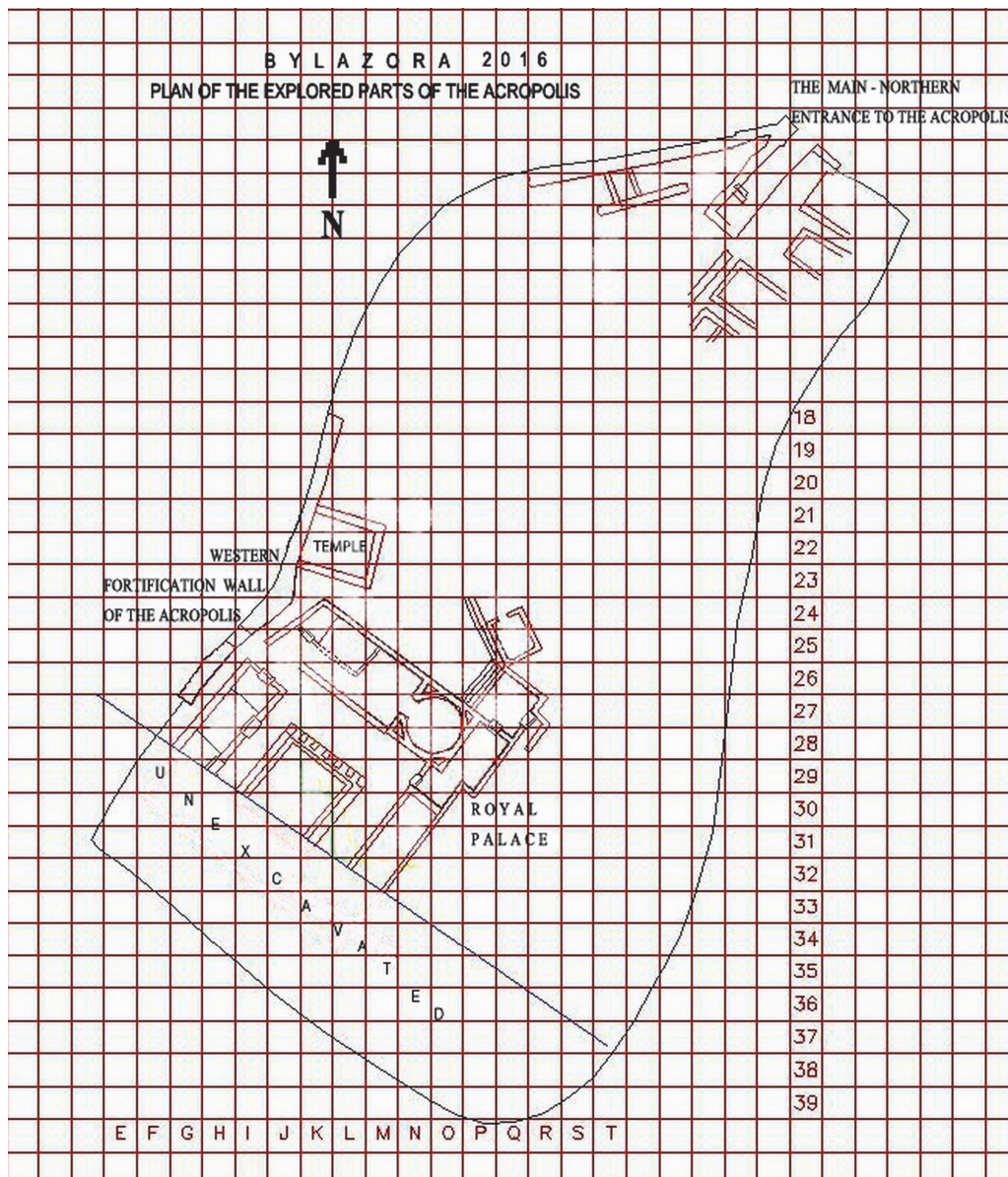
Starting from the existing records of the ancient authors (mainly Polybius, Livius and Diodorus) and based on the size and geography of the site, back in the 1976 I. Mikulčić at Gradište – Knežje located the largest Paeonian city – ancient Bylazora.<sup>1</sup> As the years were passing, this assumption was more and more asserted. Thus, in recent archaeological discoveries, not only these assumptions are confirmed but also they are significantly strengthened and complemented. After the 8 years continuous researches there was not only discovery of the numerous findings made, illustrating the existence of one exact city like Bylazora, but it has also gone a step further. They found that Bylazora was not only the largest city by area, but also in importance. Today it is clear that it is actually Bylazora which was the Paeonian throne.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I. Mikulčić, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> D. Mitrevski, 2016.

By the research of acropolis in Gradište-Knežje, in its central and most dominant part, there are remains from architecture discovered which clearly mark of a Ruler Palace (Fig 1). By it, Bylazora received a new dimension, much bigger and more significant, revealing itself not only as an ordinary, even the largest city in Paeonia, but also as a throne of rulers, meaning by itself a capital.



**Fig. 1.** Plan of the acropolis in Bylazora with the position of the so called Ruler Palace

Following the antique records it is not difficult to answer which capital and which rulers is about. In the historical sources, from the V-III century BC we encounter an independent Paeonian country with its own dynasty and rulers that forged their own coins, accomplished their own politics and were ritually crowned in the waters of Bregalnica River.<sup>3</sup> That country was obviously organized with certain political cause (aim), because it did not use a concrete tribal territory and typical tribal name. They were simply known as Paeonia, organized only in the Paeonian country that enjoyed independence. In that sense, the rulers of Bylazora could have been the emperors of only those Paeonians who Thucydides called “Independent Paeonians” different from the other Paeonians who were not independent but constitutive and essential element of the Ancient Macedonia. Therefore, the Independent Paeonians had a significant historical assignment like defenders, to protect the Macedonian Empire from the north. A few names of the rulers were noted who sequentially ruled with the country of the independent Paeonians (Agis, Licceus, Patraus, Audoleon, Leon and Dropion). They were connected to different historical events, as important political factors on the Balkan, during the IV and III century BC.

The first remains of the palace were discovered 2011 and 2012 when only the central entrance was explored. In that stage of excavation, without enough elements, it was determined as palace of Philip V, just because of the information of Polybius (V: 97) for overtaking Bylazora by the Macedonian King Philip V in 217 BC.<sup>4</sup> However, during the last years' excavation (2013 – 2016) this led almost to its full disclosure, except the last southern parts and also to rich archeological material. Now, it is quite sufficiently for much more complete chronological and cultural determination.

The palace in Bilazora is a complex construction taking up over entire southern half of the Acropolis. According to the position, its architectural, construction and decorative signs, especially according to the open central courtyard, the specific layout and character of the individual rooms around it gives a proof that this was a Ruler Palace, conceptually very similar to the Macedonian Royal Palace in Vergina (Aigai) (Fig.1).<sup>5</sup>

The current stage of excavation still does not allow full valuation of the palace, but its basic architectural and archaeological features are evident.

In spite of the still undiscovered southern part it can be supposed that palace occupied an area of approximately 50 x 50 meters (Fig. 2). The rooms in the palace have different dimensions, purpose, wall decoration and inventory. Among them

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<sup>3</sup> E. Petrova, 1999; V. Sokolovska, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> E. Matthews – W. Neidinger, 2014, 75.

<sup>5</sup> I. Touratsoglou, 1998.

there is a central entrance room with an open representative entrance on the west and a side entrance to the opposite eastern wall (Fig. 3). From that entrance part you can enter in a long room, which stretches along the eastern side of the palace, from where, through a specifically shaped passage, it enters into the central opened atrium. The walls of the room are decorated with fresco decoration performed in horizontal zones in red, black and white (Fig. 4). As an inventory, only a pithoi was discovered in situ position in its north-eastern corner. According to that it is possible to determine this room as a passage or north-east corridor (Fig.1).



**Fig. 2.** The main entrance room with the surrounding premises



**Fig.3.** The main façade destroyed in original position with two unfinished Corinthian capitals, left by the outer wall of the palace



**Fig. 4.** Apithoi with a part of the wall painting in the so called North-east corridor

Among other rooms there is circular room, named as Tholos room, which occupies a prominent position and area of 9 meters in diameter (Fig.5). It had a separate entrance from the west, which probably constitutes an open crossing, because only in that entrance there are not detected the usual stone threshold with the grooves of the door. The most interesting movable findings are found in that room. Different kinds of gifts were left in smaller cult pits, buried in floor of the room (Fig. 6). The presence of certain types of ceramic vessels and small metal objects, a lot of animal bones in the pits and around them, along with the circular shape and position of the premises, determines this place as a cult area. Such a premise, at the same position, is known from the palace of the Macedonian rulers in Vergina.

In the north-west part of the palace there are most probably kitchen – dining rooms distinguished. On their floors there are remains of fireplaces and ovens found out as well as movable findings that confirm this purpose (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup>

In the central part of the palace there is a spacious open courtyard (atrium) which was enclosed by the porches with colonnades (Fig. 7 and 8). Unfortunately, just the northern colonnade with 6 stone bases, most probably for wooden columns has been completely discovered until now. From these porches, the entry into the separate rooms was organized through the massive stone thresholds usually for double wooden doors. Nevertheless, the entry from the northern porch in to the anteroom to the Tholos room was opened passage with two doric columns (Fig. 7).

<sup>6</sup> E. Matthews – W. Neidinger, 2014, 105-107.

Special constructive elements in the atrium are the stone canals for collecting and draining of the rain waters from the roofs of the porches (Fig.7).



**Fig 5.** The position of the tholos room in the process of excavation



**Fig. 6.** Tholos room with the cult pit in the floor



**Fig. 7.** A part of the central open atrium with the basis of colonnade to the northern porch



**Fig. 8.** The central open atrium with the parts of basis eastern and the northern porches

The outer walls of the palace were built in the lower zone by the cut sandy stone blocks up to the one meter in high, and in the upper zone by the bricks. Internal walls were mostly built by mudbricks, but all of them, as same as the internal side of the outer walls, were decorated by fresco (Fig. 4 and 9). The fresco painting was in geometric patterns, in different colors and in very high level of quality (Fig. 9).



**Fig.9.** Some examples of fresco decoration from different walls

According to its stratigraphy and the movable findings, the palace was in use from V to III century BC, through the two successive building phases. Earlier phase is connected with the findings from the late V and first half of the IV century BC and the later phase with the objects characteristic for the second half of the IV and beginning of the III century BC.

The basic plan was implemented in the first phase, when after several renovations the palace was demolished around the middle of IV century BC. The higher, brick parts of the palace including the roof construction were ruined. After the clearing and leveling of the debris, on the same stone blocks in the lower zone, there were new mudbrick walls and new roof construction built.

Many different findings for that phase are connected. Among the ceramic finds typical classical pottery, mainly local gray vessels, local painted pottery and black



furnished and red figurate imported pottery are encountered (Fig.10). Also, some iron tools, bronze pins, fibulas and some other jewelry forms are presented, as same as the typical red painted roof tiles (Fig.11). All of them are characteristic for the second half of V century BC and first half of the IV century BC.<sup>7</sup>



**Fig.10.** Some ceramic findings from the palace

The new construction of the palace implied a new facade, new floors, new wall canvases, decorated inside with new fresco decoration. On clay base and a thin mortar coating a wall painting of geometric patterns with red, black, white, ocher, orange blue and gray color was performed. At the same time, to the northern external wall some new facilities were added, as a special north wing of the new palace

<sup>7</sup> S. Blazhevskaja, 2013; V. Sokolovskaja, 1986.

(Fig.1). This palace was in use through the second half of the IV and the beginning of the III century BC.



**Fig.11.** Some small findings from the palace

Before its final demolition it was prepared for renovation, so that, two new capitals of Corinthian type were edited and were left unfinished at the entrance to the north wall of the palace (Fig. 3). Most likely, they were left there in order to be used in the renovation of the main entrance. However, the capitals remained unfinished and thus unused.

The Palace apparently was suddenly and violently demolished somewhere in the first decades of the III century BC, without being restored again. On the floors from its final use relatively a few movable objects were discovered, including two coins, one silver Alexander III and a bronze coin of the Paeonian ruler Leon (Fig.12). In addition to them, some very indicative objects as a lead seal and a decorative glass pendant, a lead projectile with inscription, several fibulae and numerous ceramic vessels were found (Fig.11). All those findings, in particular a hundred offensive



**Fig.12.** Two coins discovered on the floors from the final use of the palace

iron arrows, which served to attackers to cause a fire, were found in their original position in the rubble and as a part of the burnt floors of the rooms (Fig.13). Their discovery, mainly in the burnt parts of the palace, is documenting in a very picturesque way the moment of the finale destruction of the palace. Because of that, the final period of the palace is commonly correlated with the attacks of the Celts and their military champagne toward the south. After that, the palace was not renewed any more.



**Fig.13.** Fire arrows in original position on the floor of the eastern porch

The city of Bylazora entered in the new and last developing phase, but without the palace. The remains of the palace during the second half of the III and first half of the II century BC have been covered by the thick layer of eroded soil from the higher parts of the terrain. Over such layer an ordinary settlement architecture was built without any connection with the palace under it.

The archaeological situation discovered on the Gradište –Knežje or ancient Bylazora is very similar to the surrounding settlements in Ovče Pole, to the well-known settlements in Skopje region (Brazda, Nerezi, Studeničani, Varvara, Kale and so on) and Kumanovo region (Mlado Nagoričane, Pelince, and so on) up to the Kacipup near Preševo and Krševica near Vranje.<sup>8</sup> All of them have the same topographic, architectural and archaeological marks, existing as the first small towns through V to the beginning of the III century BC. However, Gradište in the village of Knežje stands out of them. With its 20 hectares living area, opposite 2 to 5 hectares to the other mentioned settlements was the largest one. Also it is the only one with the ruler palace. Even today's name of the village of Knežje, meaning the place of the rulers, is actually reference of the former rulers. The village is organized right below the city Gradište even in the middle ages when obviously the ruler's tradition was still alive and connected to that place.

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<sup>8</sup> I. Mikulčić,1982; P. Popovic,2012,11

Драги МИТРЕВСКИ

## ВЛАДЕТЕЛСКАТА ПАЛАТА ВО БИЛАЗОРА

### *Резиме*

Локалитетот Градиште во Кнежје кај Свети Николе по својата позиција, големина и структурираност се издвојува од сите останати населби од раната антика во Овче Поле. Веќе подолго време во науката се идентификува со Билазора - најголемиот град на Пајонците. После системетските истражувања на неговата акропола од 2008-2016 година таквата квалификација не само што се потврди туку значајно се дополни со нови откритија кои јасно зборуваат за тоа дека тој град во, периодот од 5 до 3 век пред Христа не бил само најголемиот пајонски град по површина туку и по значење, како престолнина на т.н. Независни пајонци.

Акрополата на Билазора е веќе околу 70% истражена, а во нејзиниот централен и најдоминантен дел е откриена монументална градба која по својата архитектура и археолошки белези е определена како владетелска палата, по многу елементи блиска на познатата палата на македонските владетри во Вергина. Иако не е во целост откриена, заедно со остатоците од еден мал дорски храм до неа го сочинуваат т.н. владетелски комплекс. Комплексот ја исполнувал целата јужна половина на акрополата и сите останати структури и содржини откриени на акрополата биле во негова служба.

И покрај сè уште неоткриеното јужно крило на палатата, може да се претпостави дека зафакала површина од околу 50 X 50 метри. Просториите во палатата имаат различни димензии, намена, видна декорација и инвентар. Меѓу нив се издвојува една централна влезна просторија со репрезентативна отворена влезна фасата на запад и еден спореден влез од спротивната источна страна. Долгата источната страна е позиционирана една долга просторија - источен коридор кој водел од влезната просторија до централните простории на палатата, каде доминира отворениот атриум со покриени тремови од сите страни. Тремовите се потпирале на колонади од најверојатно дрвени столбови, од кои се сочувани само базите но и системот канали за одведување на дождовната вода што се следала од тремовите во атриумот. Во таа смисла за издвојување е северниот трем преку кој, низ еден отворен премин што го носеле два масивни дорски столбови се влегувало во северното крило на палатата, поточно во вестибулот на единствената кружна т.н. Толос просторија. По својата позиција, градежни елементи

и содржина таа просторија била користена како култен простор во палатата. Во земјениот под биле вкопувани плитки јами исполнати со разновидни движни наоди, животински коски остатоци од храна и слично.

Надворешните ѕидови на палатата биле градени од песочни камени бликови во височина од околу еден метар, додека горните зони биле изведени со тули од непечена глина. Внатрешните ѕидови што ги преградувале поедините простории биле ѕидани целосно од непечени тули. Готово сите ѕидови од внатрешната страна биле покриени со глинест слој и тенока малтерна основа врз кој била нанесена декорација со боене во ал секо техника. Таквата фреско декорација подразбирала широки боени површини во различни бои и елементарни геометриски мотиви.

Според стратиграфијата на палатата и откриените движните наоди, палатата била во употреба од втората половина 5 век до првите децении на 3 век пред Христа, низ две јасно издвоени градежни фази. Како движен инвентар од двете фази се среќаваат различни наоди, кои сепак преставуваат само остатоци од тоа што жителите на палатата не успеале да го склонат пред нејзиното финално и насилно рушење. Така се среќаваат најчесто типична класична садова, складишна и градежна керамика, меѓу која доминираат локални форми и техники но и поедини сликани садови како атички импорт. Исто така откриени се и доста железни алатки и оружје, бронзен накит други форми карактеристични главно за четвртиот век до најмладите предмети кои не влегуваат подлабоко во третиот век пред Христа.

Непосредно пред финалното рушење палатата била припремена за реновирање, најверојатно во нов, коринтски стил, така што два капители од предвидената нова фасада биле оставени недоработени потпрени до надворешниот ѕид кај главниот влез. Како и да е, двата коринтски капители останале недовршени и никогаш не употребени. Палатата била изненадно и насилно срушена во силен пожар некаде во првите децении на третиот век пред Христа. На подовите од нејзината финална употреба, меѓу другото се откриени во изворна положба две монети, еден сребреник на македонскиот цар Александар III и една бронзена монета на пајонскиот владетел Леон. Покрај нив меѓу останатите, како најиндикативни наоди се издвојуваат еден оловен печат, еден оловен проектил со натпис и еден приврзок од сина стаклена паста со релефна претстава на глава на силен, од двете страни. Сите тие наоди се придружувани од неколку стотини железни пирамидални врвови од стрели што им служеле на напаѓачите за предизвикување пожар. Тие се редовно откривани во нивната изворна положба во слојот од пепел, јаглен и гар од опожарените делови на палатата.

Поради сето тоа, конечното рушење на палатата може да се поврзи со историскиот напад на Келтите при нивната инвазија кон југ. После тоа палатата не

била повеќе обновувана, нејзините остатоци во следните децении од третиот век пред Христа биле покриени со дебел слој еродирана земја од повисоките партии на теренот. Преку таквиот слој земја, знатно подоцна, можеби по кампањата на Филип V (217) биле подигнати на целата акропола скромни градби главно од касарнски карактер.

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