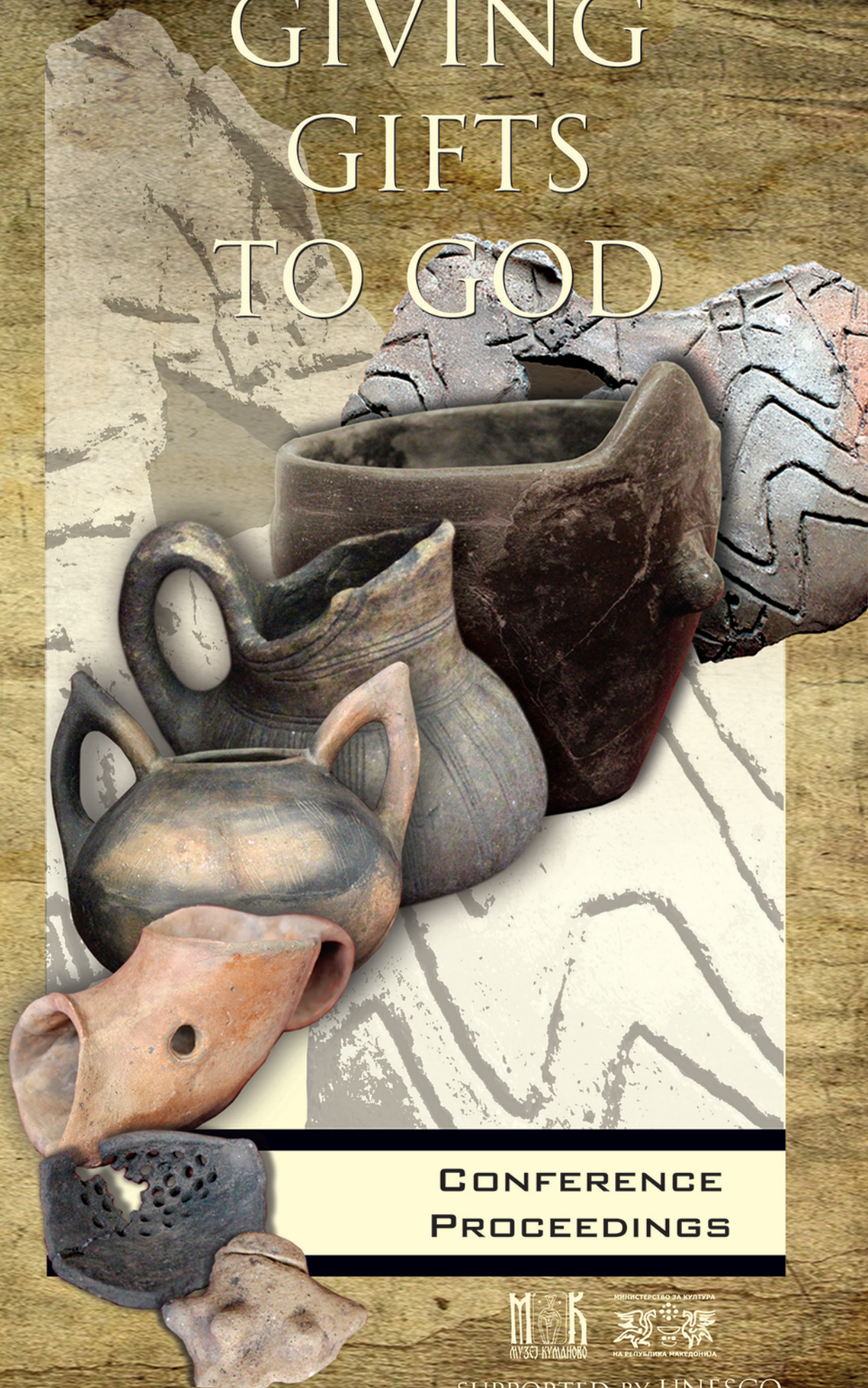
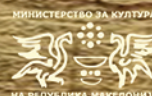


EVIDENCES OF VOTIVE OFFERINGS
IN THE SANCTUARIES,
TEMPLES AND CHURCHES

GIVING GIFTS TO GOD



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GIVING GIFTS TO GOD:

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SANCTUARIES, TEMPLES AND CHURCHES**

*Proceedings of the 1st (Kokino: archaeological and astronomical aspects
- parallels and experience) & 2nd (Kokino: Giving gifts to God)
International Conferences held in Skopje & Kumanovo, 2016-2017*

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ANTIQUÉ CULT BUILDINGS FROM STARO BONČE

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1. Area of Staro Bonce and Visoka

Staro Bonče is an area extending to the North-east edge of the Pelagonia plain between the villages Podmol and Bonče (Fig. 1). In this area there are more than twenty archaeological sites, most of them belonging to early antique period. Prof. Viktor Lilčić and prof. Antonio Jakimovski conducted an extensive archaeological research in the past ten years and suggested that the ancient city of Pelagonia, the capital of the Fourth Macedonian Merid, should be located in the area.

Among the most imposing archaeological features is the tomb of Macedonian type located in the site of Pavla Čuka. The tomb became known in the archeological science since 1936, when archaeological excavations were conducted for the first time un-

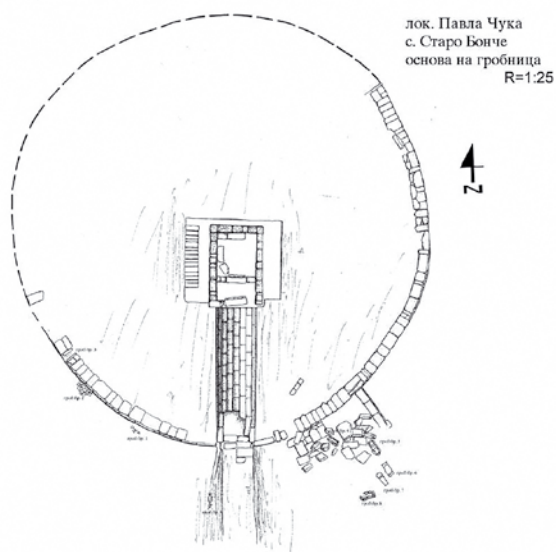
der the leadership of prof. Nikola Vulić.¹ Of course, the tomb was already discovered before this excavation, and according to the large number of stone blocks that are missing, it can be assumed that it was used as a quarry by the local inhabitants of the villages Podmol and Bonče.²

¹ Vulić, N., 1937, 611-612. Despite extremely scarce information in the preliminary report of N. Vulić, we find out that the vaulted dromos and the chamber were first discovered, and because part of the stone blocks and the grave inventory were missing, he assumed that the tomb was unfinished.

² Some of these stone blocks were found in the immediate vicinity of the tomb used as a sub-wall for the boundary between two fields.



2. The Macedonian type of tomb at Staro Bonče



3. Plan of the tomb at Staro Bonče

Later, in his doctoral dissertation, Ivan Mikulčić first publishes the plan for the visible constructional elements of the tomb, for which he presented analogies, as well as a brief overview of the method of construction and its date.³ The description of the tomb was once again published in the monograph,⁴ after which this extremely important monument remained completely forgotten until the archaeological excavations in 2006.

In the framework of the initial archaeological research at the site Visoka in 2005, and the surveys of

³ Mikulčić I., 1966, 62-63,73.

⁴ Kepeski K., 1971, 42.

the wider area of Staro Bonče, after analyzing great number of stray archaeological findings,⁵ it became clear that there was a city located in this area in the early antique period. In 2006, fragments of three shields from the Hellenistic period, which belong to the personal guard of the Macedonian king Demetrius,⁶ were discovered by chance in the area called Staro Bonče.

The obvious importance of the sites, initiated the project of systematic archaeological research on Visoka and Staro Bonče in 2006. In the frames of the project in 2007, stimulated by the monumental appearance of the tomb on the site of Pavla Čuka, archaeological excavations started.⁷

The purpose of this archaeological campaign was to further explore and properly document the tomb, but after the fascinating discovery of the monumental circular wall - an element of the tomb that was then unknown, these excavations became systematic archaeological researches, leading to many new discoveries and findings on the site Pavla Čuka.⁸

Within years of archaeological research, we

⁵ Many of the archaeological artifacts from Staro Bonče are kept in the Museum of Prilep.

⁶ Bitrakova Grozdanova B., 2007, 863-873.; Temelkoski D., Juhel P., 2007.

⁷ The project was implemented by the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje, under the leadership of prof. Viktor Lilcic and prof. Antonio Jakimovski.

⁸ Jakimovski A., 2009.; Jakimovski A., 2011.; Jakimovski A., 2012, 165-180.; Lilcikj Adams V, Jakimovski A., 2015



4. Vaulted dromos of the tomb



5. The grave chamber in the tomb

discovered several more constructional parts of the tomb (Fig. 2,3). Thus, apart from the previously known vaulted dromos and grave chamber (Fig. 4,5), the dromos cut in the rock was discovered that leads to the vaulted dromos, as well as an antechamber marked with a threshold that had a double-leaf door which was coming through the chamber. The greatest surprise was the discovery of a circular wall with a diameter of 32 meters, which surrounded the tomb as a ring, and the cult building attached to this wall - Heroon (Ancient Greek - ἡρώον, Latin heroum). It is a building devoted to the hero, most often placed where the tomb or the kenotaph of the hero was found. An analogy can be found in the Heroon in Vergina next to the so-called Philip's tomb.⁹

During the excavations, a total of 11 children's graves were discovered, all of them concentrated in the front of the tomb – the largest concentration of the tombs is around the Heroon. Here, the gaps between destroyed blocks of the Heroon were used as funerary pits. These burials, as well as grave no.3, which is placed on site of one of the blocks removed from the circular wall, confirms with certainty that the Tomb and the Heroon were discovered and destroyed before the burials, which are dated after the year 362, according to the movable archaeological material and the coin of Julian II Apostate¹⁰

All of the above stated gives us the right to con-

⁹ Andronicos M., 1977, 40-72.

¹⁰ Sutherland J. W. E., 1981.

clude that in the period of the construction of the Tomb/Kenotaf and the Heroon (325 -300 BC), they served as a cult buildings, but their sacral character was preserved much later – even in the second half of the 4th century AD. The site was in use as a place for burial almost 800 years later.

The second cult object is located on a hill Kolkot in the immediate vicinity of about 300 meters south-east of the tomb of Pavla Čuka (Fig. 6).

Archaeological excavations were carried out at this site only in 1985, when a circular wall with dimensions of about 30 meters in diameter and a 1.20 meter preserved height was discovered, built of crushed stone and mud. Four rock – cut rectangular chambers were found inside the circle (the researcher assumed they were graves), as well as some other interventions in the rock for which no explanation was given¹¹

Preliminary and extremely scant information of these researches are given in Archaeological review.¹²

The presented material is defined as late antique, but from the only saved/published photograph it can

¹¹ The archaeological excavations were carried out by the Institute and Museum of Prilep, under the leadership of B. Kitanovski; Kitanovski B., 1984, 128.

¹² Kitanovski B., 1984, 128



6. Aerial photo of the site Kolkot



7. Entry in the site of Visoka

be noted that is very similar to the material found at the tomb of Pavla Čuka.¹³ Knowing that there were burials around the tomb from the late antique period and almost all the material (coins and fragmented pottery ceramics) around it is late antiquity, there were probably two simultaneous objects from the

¹³ Technical documentation of the excavations is missing, as well as the movable archaeological artifacts.

early antiquity, which were reused, that is, respected much later in the late antiquity. Towards this conclusion is also the almost identical diameter of the circular walls of the tomb and Kolkot, as well as the dromos which perceived on the surface and connects these two objects. According to the proximity of Pavla Čuka and the surroundings with a large number of early antique necropolis, in combination with the elements that the object of the archaeological



8. Masonry of the walls at Visoka

site Kolkot possesses, and in the absence of excavation, material and technical documentation, we can only assume that it is a cult object associated with the procession of burials or may be a local variant of a cult of earth and fertility, i.e. –something similar to the Tesmoforion (Tesmophoria) a circular sanctuary-temple, in honor of Demeter and Persephone, especially respected in early antiquity.¹⁴

The third cult object - peak sanctuary - is the site Visoka. It has been known for a long time in archeology, but archaeological excavations were carried out for the first time in 2005.¹⁵ The site, or as it was previously called the sanctuary¹⁶, acropolis or castle, was erected on the highest rock of Visoka known as Kave or Cuculot, at an altitude of 1742 meters. Around the highest part of the natural rock which occupies the western central area, in form of a pentagon, a monumental wall was built in the early antique period (Fig. 7), surrounding it from three sides. The wall has a preserved height of over 2 meters and was built with monumental stone blocks longer than 2.5 meters, by a technique of combination of isodome and pseudoisodome (Fig.8, 9). In a decade of excavation (2005-2015), a large number of movable arche-

ological findings were discovered, and together with stratigraphy of the site tell us that this space was used in the early antiquity (earliest coins of Philip II and Alexander III, but according to the ceramic material we have imports from the 5th and 4th centuries BC), through the entire antique period to the Middle Ages (the latest –skifat is from 13th century).¹⁷ Except as a dominant strategic position that controls a larger area, Visoka also represents a cult building - a peak sanctuary of the city of Staro Bonče, (possibly the ancient city of Pelagonia), and the surrounding area, as well as the wider region of Pelagonia, Mariovo and Tikvesh region.

This conclusion arrives from many factors. The first one is that inhabiting conditions at this height and in this locality (as we felt in the periods of excavations), except in the summer (two to three months), are extremely difficult, or even impossible.¹⁸ Even in the summer there is a great danger from thunderbolt, since Visoka as the highest point attracts thunders. Apart from this, a monumental wall on such an inaccessible location is almost unknown and unnecessary, because even in current conditions, climbing to Visoka lasts from two and a half to three and a half hours, which would certainly be increased with military equipment.

¹⁴ We hope that these questions will be answered with the revisional archeological researches on the site Kolkot and on the places where the land from the previous archaeological excavations has been thrown.

¹⁵ Project director is prof. Viktor Lilcic.

¹⁶ Lilcic V., 2006, 62-67 (he is connecting the site with the cult of Dioscures)

¹⁷ Lilčić V., 2006.; Лилчиќ В., Кебаќоски Д., 2006, 22.; Lilcikj Adams V., Jakimovski A., 2015.

¹⁸ In 2013 and 2014, some 20-30 archaeologists participated in archaeological campus and felt the incredible conditions in the period of July / August.



9. Masonry of the walls at Visoka

The third fact is that in the space inhabited by Macedonians, Paionians and Pelagonians, unlike the areas inhabited by the Hellenes, no early antique temples were found, but there are several peak sanctuaries that are particularly respected, and as analogies on our territory we can point out Klepa,¹⁹ Treskavec,²⁰ Pletvar and many other examples. These high mountain peaks, represented places of ritual activities from the ancient times till present.²¹

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¹⁹ Микулчиќ И., 1983, 193-210.; Лилчиќ В., 2001, 392 – 395.

²⁰ Микулчиќ И., 1999, 89- 90; Лилчиќ 2001, 392 – 395.

²¹ Chausidis N, 2012,263 – 282

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