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FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY



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PROJECT STARO BONCHE

ABSTRACT: The Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje is the holder of the Staro Bonche Project, which continuously lasts from 2006 to 2020, i.e. 15 archeological field campaigns. It started in 2006 at the site where the three parade bronze shields of the army of the Macedonian King Demetrius 1 were found. In 2007, driven by the uniqueness of the tomb on the site Pavla Chuka, a campaign was launched for its further research and documentation, and with the discovery of the circular wall of the tomb, which becomes unique in its architectural conception among Macedonian-type tombs, these researches turn into systematic archeology excavations. Within this project, from the hitherto known sites in the area between the villages Bonche and Podmol, within the project Staro Bonche, 13 new sites were discovered and researched, hitherto unknown in the archaeological science. The results of these researches are in support of the stated thesis for the location of the ancient city of Pelagonija, the capital of the Pelagonians in early antiquity, and later the capital of the fourth Macedonian meridian in the area of Staro Bonche.

Key words: Antique, Ruler's Tomb, Staro Bonche, Pelagonija



Fig. 1-Staro Bonche, view from from the top Visoka

The Staro Bonche project explores the area of the same name, which we consider to be the ancient city of Pelagonija. Staro Bonche lies on the north-

eastern part of the Pelagonija valley, between the Prilep villages of Bonche and Podmol. So far, 20 archeological sites have been discovered, which date back to the Archaic period, antiquity and the Middle Ages. (Fig. 1)

The project explores several ancient buildings, a large number of tombs from the archaic and early antique period 6-3 century BC. e., which are the most numerous, then Roman, late antique and medieval tombs. A large repertoire of movable archaeological material, ceramic vessels and figurines, bronze shields, spears, bronze statuettes, over 150 silver and bronze coins, silver and bronze fibulae, bracelets, earrings, rings, etc. were found. (Fig. 2) A variety of archaeological material that greatly helps us to complete the picture of life and population of this area.



Slika ? Izbor moneti na Makedonskite Kralevi pronajdeni na Staro Bonche

Fig.2a-Coins of Macedonian kings



Fig. 2b- Ceramic pots



Fig.2c- Terracota figurinest



Fig. 2d- Metal objects

Fig. 2- Selection of items found on Staro Bonche

Within the project, the NI Museum and Institute Prilep is a partner, and several archaeologists participated in it, as well as students from the Institute of History of Art and Archeology and the Institute of History at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. The results of these researches are

presented at several scientific symposia¹ and lectures², at four annual exhibitions at the Archaeological Museum in Skopje from 2013 to 2016, and they are also published.³

The most representative is the facility located at the site Pavla Chuka, where most of the archaeological excavations are concentrated. It is a ruling tomb which is one of the most beautiful early antique buildings on our territory and beyond. We started the excavations in 2007 on the only visible part, the entrance to the vaulted dromos, covered with the erosive sediment. (Fig. 2).

With the beginning of the excavations, several stone blocks were discovered, identical in processing and shape to the blocks from the vaulted dromos. Further research revealed that these blocks were in fact part of a monumental wall, which surrounded the tomb in the form of a ring. After this fascinating discovery, the protogenic unique architectural conception came to

In subsequent research we were able to discover the entire length of the circular wall that completely surrounds the other elements of the tomb, the vaulted corridor-dromos, the atrium and the chamber. Some of the missing blocks were blown up by the locals in the past, and some of the dismantled stone blocks (numbered 11 dislocated blocks) were used as a fence on the adjacent agricultural plot just a few meters north of the tomb.

¹ XX Symposium of MAND, Kicevo 2008; The royal tomb of the village Bonche, XXI Symposium of MAND, Strumica 2010; Archaeological Complex Staro Bonche, XXII Symposium of MAND, Dojran 2012; Early Ancient Necropolis Gramagje- Staro Bonche, "Clash of Cultures, Going south..." Piran 2013, "Macedonian tomb from Staro Bonche".

² Lectures on research and results obtained within the Staro Bonche project were held for archaeology students at Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana 2017, Primorski University 2017, Faculty of Philosophy Sarajevo 2018, and Faculty of Philosophy Zagreb 2019.

³ Jakimovski A., Macedonian Royal Tomb at Staro Bonche, Macedonian Heritage No. 38-39, Skopje 2011.; Jakimovski A., Das königliche makedonische Grab in der Nähe von Bonče, *Folia archaeologica Balkanica* II, Skopje 2012.; Jakimovski A., Das königliche Grab aus Staro Bonče – In: Guštin M., David W. (eds.), *The Clash of Cultures? The Celts and the Macedonian World. Schriften des kelten-römer-museums manching* 9, Manching 2014, 69-77 (in print); Lilchikj Adams V., Jakimovski A., Visoka and Staro Bonche, Skopje 2015.; Лилчиќ Адамс В., Јакимовски А., Висока и Старо Бонче, Скопје 2016; Jakimovski A., *Antique Cult Buildings from Staro Bonče*, Kumanovo 2017, 131 – 136.; Jakimovski A., Temelkoski D., *Complex of the Archaeological Sites of Staro Bonče*, *Folia archaeologica Balkanica* IV, Skopje 2018, 205 – 256.; Јакимовски А., Темелкоски Д., Археолошки истражувања на локалитетот Павла Чука, Археолошки информатор 3, Прилеп 2019, 63 – 74.

A few meters east of the entrance to the tumulus, a number of monolithic stone blocks were registered. Only two rows of stone blocks remain of this type in situ. It is this only preserved wall that suggests that it is an object with an elongated rectangular shape, ie that it is a Heroon.

Part of the access corridor to the inside of the tomb was also discovered. was carved into a rock and in the form of a slightly sloping ramp descends to the entrance to the tumulus, ie to the beginning of the arched corridor-dromos.



Fig 3- The eastern part of the perimetral wall light, after which the archeological excavations of the building became systematic.

The dromos was constructed of monumental rectangular stone blocks, with lengths of 2 to 3 meters, and up to about 0.60 meters in width and height. It is very solidly preserved, only a few blocks are missing (Fig. 4). The length of the dromos is 11 meters, while the height of its southern end (its beginning) is 3 m, and at the northern end in front of the entrance to the atrium it is 3.20 meters high. The approach, ie the entrance from the open corridor to the vaulted dormitory was closed (blocked) with stone blocks, identical in shape and construction to those of the outer circular wall and the dromos itself. In fact, the closed part of the tomb begins from that place.

The chamber and atrium of the tomb were constructed of smaller standardized limestone blocks. This type of stone is rare in the wider area, so

it is assumed that at that time it was considered a more valuable building material. the blocks were very precisely cut, measuring 0.50 m in height and between 0.60 and 0.90 m long. The chamber and the atrium were separated by a double door, from which the marble threshold with noticeable openings for iron connecting rods was revealed. There is an almost identical marble block threshold at the entrance of the arched dromos in the atrium. At the bottom of the chamber are recorded adjoint blocks attached to the walls of the chamber, placed in the shape of the Cyrillic letter G. According to the positioning, they probably served as wedges where the grave gifts were placed. The largest preserved height of the chamber walls is 2 meters. (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, the excavation of the inside of the tomb did not reveal any moving findings. no architectural elements have been discovered that such a monumental building must have possessed. in fact, in most analogous examples of this type of tombs the presence of decorative plastic has been registered.



Fig. 4-Dromos



Fig. 5-Chamber of the tomb

During the excavations, 10 graves were discovered among the scattered remains of the building (Heroon). Six burials are of the cyst type of rough stone slabs, and four are free burials in the rocky terrain. The graves are

without exception small in size, which indicates that it is a burial of children. Due to the negative impact of the chemical properties of the earth, the osteological material in them is very rare. Their dating is based on the findings of coins, one of the Julian 2 Apostate found in 2009, minted between 361-363⁴, and the second coin found during research in 2019, belongs to Theodosius I 379-395. According to these findings, the tombs are dated to the second half of the IV century BC.⁵ Dismantled and probably robbed. From the second half of the 4th century, the monumental building grew into a cult place where burials took place.⁶ Excavations in 2019 on the western part of the dromos of the tomb revealed burials with tombstones from the Middle Ages, which according to analogies with identical objects are dated to the late X and the first quarter of the XI century.⁷ In 2020, we confirmed the burials from the Middle Ages, which means that we can conclude that this tomb as a cult space existed at the beginning of the XI century. As the representative tomb of the Pavla Chuka site was broken into and looted in the distant past, no movable finds were found inside it. It is therefore difficult to determine a precise chronological determination.

In the absence of relevant moving findings, we will rely primarily on establishing analogous comparisons with similar tombs in the relationship between architectural concepts and construction style. So far, about 70 tombs of „Macedonian type” have been discovered in Asia Minor and the Balkans, to which the tomb of Pavla Chuka belongs (Fig. 6).⁸

Two tombs of this type have been discovered on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia so far. One is in the ancient city of Lychnidos⁹, and the other is the tomb of the locality Pavla Chuka, as a segment of the complex of sites Staro Bonche which most probably constituted the ancient city of Pelagonija.¹⁰ The tomb is located in an area that was inhabited by an

⁴ J. W. E. Sutherland 1981, 423, No.228.

⁵ Јаќимовски А., Темелкоски Д., 2019, 71

⁶ Јаќимовски А., 2017, 129 – 135

⁷ Јаќимовски А., Темелкоски Д., 2019, 63-75.

⁸ B. D'Angelo 2010, 57-68.

⁹ V. Bitrakova 1985, 136.; V. Bitrakova Grozdanova - P. Kuzman 1998, 3-16. ; P., Kuzman 2009, <http://www.mav.mk/article.php?lang=en&article=18>.

¹⁰ V. Lilcijk- D. Kebakoski, 2006, 22. Lilchikj Adams V., – Jakimovski A., 2015, 34-41.; A. Jakimovski, 2011, 38-39.; A. Jakimovski, 2012, 165-180.; A. Jakimovski, 2017, 131-136.

indigenous population of the Pelagonians and is the northernmost recorded tomb of „Macedonian type”.



Fig. 6-Tomb of the site Pavla Chuka

The development of this type of tombs began in the second half of the IV century BC when the so-called tombs began to be built. „Macedonian type” of tombs, which was a perpetual home of the aristocracy, were especially decorated.¹¹ The facades of these tombs are shaped in Ionic and Doric styles, and the inner walls were richly decorated with frescoes with plant motifs, lit by battles and hunting, car races and so on.¹² Probably the last quarter of the IV century BC. arched tombs appear.¹³ The end of the construction of this type of tombs is around the middle of the II century BC and this was obviously related to the weakening of the Macedonian aristocracy and the fall of Macedonia under Roman rule.

However, it is the appearance of the vault as an architectural element, its origin and dating, that causes controversy and disagreement in scientific circles. According to some researchers, the vault of the „Macedonian type” tombs actually has its own protogenic development in Macedonia.¹⁴ But according to other researchers, Macedonian military architects who followed King Al-

¹¹ S. G. Miller 1982, 153.

¹² S. G. Miller 1982, 153-171

¹³ S. G. Miller 1993, 1-4.

¹⁴ N. G. L. Hammond 1978, 331-350.; Fredricksmeier, E.A., 1981, 330-334. Andronicos M., 1987, 1-16.

alexander III on his campaign saw the vault as an architectural solution in the East. According to this theory, the vaulted tombs in this area were probably built after the death of Alexander III, after his military architects returned and transferred the skill of building the vault.¹⁵ This chronological connection is used by most researchers to determine the most famous tomb of this type, the so-called Philip's Tomb in Aigai¹⁶, as the tomb in which Philip III Aridej is buried. In support of this hypothesis is the analysis of S. Rotrof for the findings of ceramics in the tomb, which are dated according to the same movable material recorded in a closed context in Athens, which is at the end of the IV century BC.¹⁷ However, even decades after the discovery of this royal tomb, scientific debates are still being held about its dating and affiliation.¹⁸

We find analogies of the tomb of Pavla Chuka in several famous tombs. The closest among them are the relations with the tombs of Amphipolis¹⁹ and the tomb of Pydna²⁰. The discovered heroon brings her closer to the so-called Philip's Tomb. The comparison with the previously mentioned tombs, which according to the architecture are closest to ours, but also with the other tombs of „Macedonian type”, we put the dating of the tomb from Staro Bonche in the last quarter of the IV century BC.²¹ This dating, made in 2007 for the tomb of Staro Bonche, corresponds to the newly discovered tomb of Amphipolis in 2012, also dated to the last quarter of the 4th century. The tomb of Amphipolis is the largest tomb of Macedonian type ever discovered and together with the tomb of Staro Bonche are the only ones that have a round wall (Fig 7).

¹⁵ R. A. Tomlinson 1977, 473-479.; Boyd T. D., 1978, 83-100.

¹⁶ M. Andronicos, 1976, 123- 130.; M. Andronicos, 1977, 40- 72.; M. Andronicos, 1980, 168-178.; M. Andronicos 1987, 1- 16.

¹⁷ S. I. Rotroff 1997.; W. J. D. Gill 2008, 335-358 - With several examples of dating according to the found material

¹⁸ K. Chilidis 2008, 75-103; Only the part from page 75-86 with the cited literature on the problem of vaulted tombs.

¹⁹ D. I. Lazaridis 1997, 65-74 - Of the four tombs of the Macedonian type discovered in Amphipolis, the so-called Macedonian Tomb 1 has an identical arrangement of blocks from the vaulted dromos, but is twice smaller than the ridge in Pavla Chuka

²⁰ G. Miller S. 1993, 1-4; The tomb is dated to the last third of IV BC. This tomb known as «Heuzey's Tomb» has an identically built dromos with the same dimensions, and the difference is that this tomb has two atria and a chamber.

²¹ A. Jakimovski 2009, <http://www.mav.mk/article.php?lang=en&article=20>.



Fig. 7-Tomb of the site Pavla Chuka (view from the top)

This dating is supported by the fact that exactly in this time period is the greatest prosperity and power of the ancient Pelagonians, and the same is confirmed by the material findings discovered so far. In the periods before and after, we notice a certain economic and political stagnation of this ethnicity.

Regarding the question of identification of the deceased who was buried in the tomb of Pavla Chuka, for now we can only assume that it is a Pelagonian basileus, unknown to us. Considering its dating to the last quarter of the 4th century BC, it probably belonged to one of the direct heirs of the two Pelagonian basileus whose names are linked in the three inscriptions found in Athens, dating to 365/4, 363/2²² and 350 BC.²³ In particular, the second of these inscriptions reads the name of the basileus Menelaus of Pelagonija, to whom the city-state of Athens pays tribute for its alliance. In any case, the name of the ruler who was buried in the tomb of Pavla Chuka will remain a mystery for now.

According to the recorded sites so far in the period from 2006 to 2020, it is possible to make a preliminary picture of the archeological complex Staro Bonche, which of course has huge potential. It should be noted that the past 16 archeological campaigns were with very limited resources, and the duration of the archeological excavations from 15 to 30 working days, so with further research we hope, the picture will be supplemented which would provide even more specific information to solve the puzzle. hidden for

²² F. Papazoglu 1957, 199-200.; I. Mikulčić 1966, 72.; V. Lil~i} - D. Kebakoski 2006, 22.

²³ I. Mikulčić 1966, 73.

centuries in this area, ie probably the name of the city, the supposed capital of the fourth Macedonian meridian - Pelagonija. According to the recorded sites, the research of some of them, the analysis of the found movable and immovable archeological material, we can locate an early antique city that existed from the 5th century BC. until the end of the IV century BC. in the area of Staro Bonche, limited by the large number of necropolises we are exploring. Later a hiatus occurs in the area of Staro Bonche, ie we have rare findings from the middle of the III century to the II century BC. In contrast, in the area of today's village Podmol, according to current knowledge, they tell us about the existence of a settlement that has existed since the II century BC. until the end of antiquity. So far no major research has been done in the village of Podmo, but according to random findings and several probes we can safely locate the settlement in the northern part of Podmol.

The character of the described sites determines the chronological framework of the existence of the wider area, starting somewhere at the end of the Iron Age VII century BC. followed by a strong intensification of life, mainly presented through the necropolises where burial took place in the late archaic period and in early antiquity. This is the period when in this northeastern part of the Pelagonija valley a powerful principality of the Pelagonians develops.

The large number of necropolises discovered so far, described above and several buildings, among which certainly stands out the monumental tomb of Macedonian type on the site Pavla Chuka, unique in this area, are remarkable findings that make a very probable assumption for the location of the ancient city of Pelagonija, the main city of the Pelagonians in early antiquity, and later the capital of the fourth Macedonian meridian in the area of Staro Bonche.

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