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THE BRONZE AUTHEPSIS FROM GEVGELIJA

The location of the municipality and city of Gevgelija, depending on the historical, political and cultural context in the near and far past has had continuous impact on its development. The regularity of advancement and existence of population from prehistoric ages until today, presents the strategic geographic and climate micro-location and unavoidable road sign regarding the main connection North-South, downstream the river Vardar and Juzna Morava. This permanently actual corridor, with flux of ideas, material goods and different social manifestations coming from east and south with dispersion and side effects to north is felt even today in the life of Gevgelija.

Without any exclusion, the significance of Gevgelija regarding the complex historical and cultural heritage exposed in a Neolithic settlement form, a Paeonian city or a necropolis, old Macedonian or Roman trade center, Byzantium or Turkish point, had a possibility in a certain form and content in the actual moment to transfer the laid information.

All this civilization mark, today epitomized in a numerous archaeological sites with extremely significant material contents are subject of research, studying, and reconstruction of this documented past.

The methodology and itinerary towards this goal has two courses.

The first is the verified legal protection and procedures run by the suitable cultural institutions, museums and institutes and the second, which exists in the frame of the illegal excavations and trade with cultural heritage in the area of the municipality of Gevgelija and Republic of Macedonia.

Today we put the accent on the second point, which beside destruction of material facts, regardless whether they are portable or not should be observed as a problem which means permanent and complete loss of scientific data for the given artifact, epoch or culture. Dislocation of the object from its archaeological, historical and cultural context means destruction also of the scientific thought and data base of the cultural heritage of a city, region or a state.

In the region of the Gevgelija and Valandovo cultural group in frame of the Iron Age, in the same borders of the antic Amfaksitida or the division line of (II and III merida) as part of the 1st Roman province Macedonia, many prehistoric and antic significant points have been discovered and researched, among which are Isar Marvinci, Lisicin Dol, Gradisor-Mramor, Glos-Grciste, Bisov Javor, Vardarski Rid, Suva Reka, Milci, Kofilak, Bolovan-Bogdanci, Manastir-Nov Dojran and others.

All these designated monuments, beside certain degree of research by the verified experts and responsible institutions, are also permanent goal for destruction, overtaking and illegal trade with the portable part of the heritage.

The dynamics and scope of this planned and systematic destruction of the cultural tissue in the region of Gevgelija is much bigger than realized projects on annual level by

the responsible institution – Museum of Gevgelija and other suitable institutions in Macedonia. The status that researching and protection institutions have in frame of the country at the moment is unsuitable in the part of staff, financial means for basic functioning and in particular the low financial support of complex projects in the sphere of research and immediate protection.

As information I will mention the sites Isar-Marvinci, Dedeli, Karakus, Milci and Bolovan, as most typical representatives of the cluster of sites that are under regular attack of the organized groups of illegal excavators and traders with antiquities.

The damage which in the last ten years has been caused is inestimable, regarding the material, scientific and national aspect. Scientific losses can not be compensated because we talk about destruction and total erasure of parts cultural manifestations, burial habits and rituals, architectural objects, elements and plastics, which are actually the spiritual ID of one ethnic group, state or historical epoch.

The overall civilization mark which has in itself the regions of Gevgelija, Valandovo, Dojran and Bogdanci, has so many empty spots so that the stratigraphy of the cultural remains and chronological framework between the 5th millennium BC and 10th century AD is seriously interrupted.

The tendency towards further destruction in this moment is more than actual.

The prevention, which is made in cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Culture, i.e. Institute for protection of cultural heritage and the responsible museum institutions so far are the only defensive mechanism that acts in continuity. Depending on the technical, staff and above all material possibilities, this prevention and protection system in the Gevgelija and Valandovo region has shown concrete results.

The number of retaken objects discovered and prepared for sale was saved exactly by the above mentioned institutions. All this fund of approximately 400 objects, which is no longer subject of judicial observation, is part of the archaeological collection in the museum in Gevgelija.

The long fruitful cooperation enriched the collection of the museum in Gevgelija also with real museum rarities.

One such rarity that can take all epithets and presents a monument of culture with from highest "0" category is the bronze authepsis from Gevgelija.

This authepsis has been presented home and abroad, with presentation on the XVIII Symposium of MAND which took place in Gevgelija in 2004 and in Bucharest in 2003, at the world congress of antic bronze, in the context of its significance and actuality, considered from another aspect.

The vessel is unique as a type among the finds from the Balkan Peninsula. It is 39 cm high and consists of five separate elements: a body-belly, a funnel or cornet of 21.5 cm length inserted into the body, a 19 cm of high tube of 9 cm diameter at the bottom, a 20.4 cm high handle and a 4.7 high pedestal of 14 cm diameter at the bottom. Some pieces of a grating have also been found, that must have been closing the bottom of the tube. The lower edge of the body, the lowered end of the tube and the grating of the holes pierced through (now missing) fit together within the double walls of the pedestal. On the wall of the pedestal there are openings in the form of a pelta. The structure of the vessel speaks of its function. It is known as authepsis or a vessel for warming liquids. Live coals were put in the tube through the openings on the body.

It is obvious that the handle does not fit the body. The outlines and curves of the handle indicate that originally it must have belonged to a bronze amphora. The handle itself is of a very rare type - it imitates a double handle covered by an acanthus leaf with a groove in the middle. Under the leaf there is a relief ring followed by a floral composition – a blossomed flanked by two pairs of oblong leaves with the ends turned upwards. The lower part of the handle depicts a Siren on a flower. Taking into consideration that this is a repaired vessel, the most likely dating seems to be the 3rd century BC.

In the Roman times these vessels were part of the doctor's belongings. Objects of this kind have been discovered in doctor's graves in Thrace together with surgical instruments. An authepsis was found in Augusta Raurica (Kaiseraugst, Aargau).

These remarkable objects preserve complex information, providing a chance for revealing various aspects of the everyday life in the Roman Times, as well as data about the production of bronze objects, the religion and beliefs. They also give us opportunity to simply enjoy them as pieces of art.

This positive example of planning and acting of the responsible institutions in the prevention and prosecution of those who commit this kind of criminal activity, gave unusual material and cultural mark to the existing archaeological exhibition in the museum of Gevgelija and the corps of cultural heritage in the Republic of Macedonia.

In this occasion, in the name of the employed in the National Institution – Museum of Gevgelija, I would like to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Interior, local department Gevgelija, with particular accent on my colleagues, Mr. Jovan Ristov, manager of the former State Institute for protection of monuments of culture and Mr. Ilco Bojcevski, main inspector for protection of cultural heritage who saved this extraordinary cultural mark from our past and returned it – home.

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