



The most significant values  
of the cultural and natural heritage

# THE HISTORY OF DISCOVERING THE SITE OF ISAR-MARVINCI



Cone Krstevski







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Cone Krstevski

Skopje 2018

# FOREWORD

## MACEDONIAN CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Throughout the course of history until present days, Macedonian cultural and natural heritage has never been of greater interest to the national and international public as it is today.

Its presentation afore the general public with dedicated promotional publications is one of the tasks of the Directorate for Protection of Cultural Heritage, which deems to showcase the rich treasures of our historical past and the preserved natural landscapes.

Ever since the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, Antiquity and the Medieval period, all of the great achievements of the civilizations which have dwelt in this land, have been researched and presented for the readers in our country and worldwide.

This edition is a continuation of our intention to widen the access to the cultural and natural heritage for all. In this manner, we believe, everyone can come closer to the significant archaeological monuments, the sacral heritage, the old urban ensembles and the specific natural areas.

By presenting its heritage, the Republic of Macedonia offers its contribution towards the heritage of the world, since these publications aim to preserve the important moments of our history for the future generations.

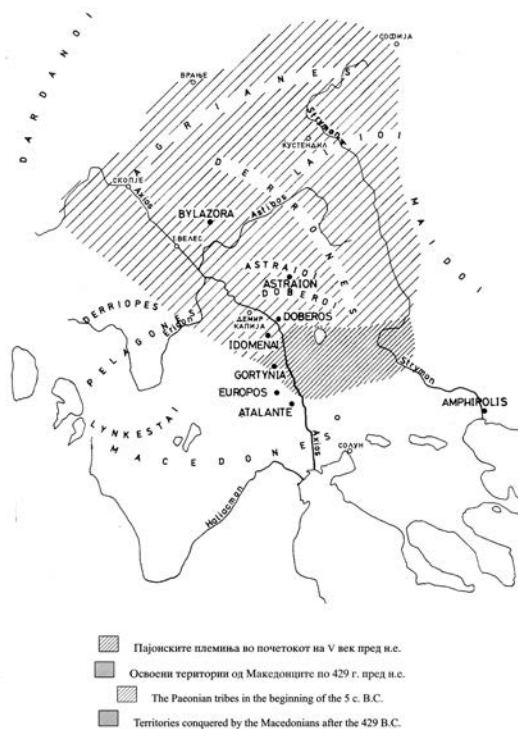
Eleonora Petrova Mitevska, PhD

# THE HISTORY OF DISCOVERING THE SITE OF ISAR-MARVINCI

The Valandovo Valley, known as Bojmija, is a small geomorphological entity extending near the river Vardar in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia. From a geographical standpoint, the site of Isar-Marvinci occupies a central position in the region. It is situated on a hill that rises southwest of the village of Marvinci with an extraordinary view of the Valandovo Valley and the river Vardar. Ever since ancient times, the main road artery that connected the Aegean coast to the interior of the Balkans passed through this area. It was the point of migrations and military marches, as well as bilateral cultural influences

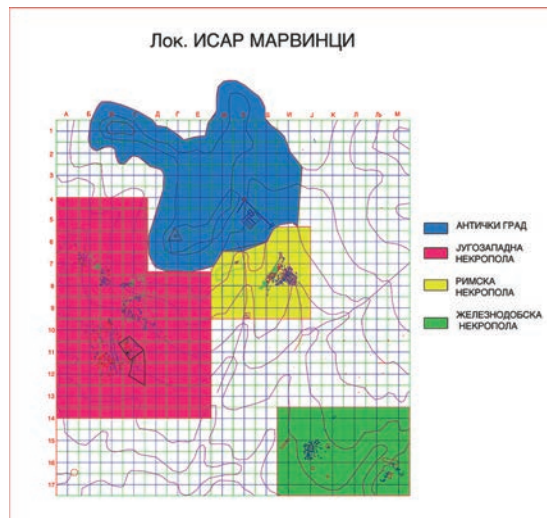
The oldest attested population, which inhabited the larger part of the present-day Republic of Macedonia, are considered to be the Paeonian tribes.

The initial information regarding this region is dated from the time of the First World War, when H. Dragendorf and V. Pingel discovered and published several findings from the Late Iron Age villages of Dedeli and Marvinci. As an archaeological site, Isar-Marvinci was first registered by Mitko Kjornjakov, which drew the attention of Borka Josifovska. After studying and publishing the epigraphic monuments embedded into the houses, in 1961, Josifovska, along with Victorija Sokolovska, began excavations at the point of the site known as Porta (gate). On this occasion was discovered the first stair of the temple mentioned in the text inscribed on the architrave beam, which was built by a Macedoniarch in the year 181. In addition, sections of the wall which flanked the gate that contained embedded stone monuments - inscriptions, sculptures, tombstones and architectural blocks - were also discovered. Acknowledging the significance of this discovery, in 1976/77 the Archaeological Museum of Macedonia began systematic excavations under the expert



A map of the Paeonian tribes throughout the centuries





A square net at the site of Isar-Marvinci

guidance of Victorija Sokolovska and Radmila Pashikj-Vinchikj within the scientific project *The Vardar Valley in the First Millennium BC*. The first results from the field research met the expectations thus prompting further excavation of these sites. In the period from 1977 to 1997, at the site of Isar-Marvinci, were conducted excavations of the pre-Roman acropolis, the Roman temple, the city baths, the sanctuary, the protective walls of the castle and the structure Janova Cheshma at the north-eastern base of Isar. The area of the south necropolis was also excavated in that period.

The area known as Isar, near the village of



Part of a Roman city from the north – west; view of the temple, the rampart and the entrance gate

Marvinci, in the vicinity of Valandovo, is among the most important ancient archaeological sites in the Republic of Macedonia. From a geographical perspective, the site of Isar occupies the central position in the region. It is situated on a hill that rises to the southwest of the village of Marvinci, with an extraordinary view of the Valandovo Valley and the river Vardar. The highest plateau of Isar, where the acropolis of the settlement is located, is easily accessed from the south side, while the other sides are steep and not easily accessed. The city communicated with the

surrounding area from the southern part. The road, in whose vicinity was located the necropolis, was situated here. Over time, the settlement expanded to the surrounding slopes of the site. Throughout its entire existence, the settlement spread at Isar and its terraces, while the burials were conducted in several locations around Isar. However, the largest space is occupied by the necropolis that extends to the south and southwest of the acropolis and east of the subsequently built castrum.

The material finds discovered on site confirmed the continuity of the settlement from the Late Bronze and Late Iron Age to Late Antiquity. With the discovery of a stadium-roadmap in 1984 we learn of the name of the settlement. It is the Paeonian city of Doberus, where, according to Thucydides (II, 98-100) in 429 BC, the Thracian army gathered before entering Lower Macedonia and conquering the cities of Eidomene, Gortynia, Atalante and Europus.

## REMAINS OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE AND THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The oldest archaeological remains at Isar-Marvinci are associated with the Late Bronze Age i.e. the Transitional Period (1200-800 BC), when significant ethnic shifts took place on the Balkans. The pottery finds discovered incidentally indicated the existence of a settlement from this period. The excavations that were conducted as part of the archaeological activities from 2009 clearly suggested the existence of life from the Late Bronze or Early Iron Age, covering the period of the 13<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The movable finds were discovered in the rock, which represented a geological basis for the settlement, as well as the necropolis. Traces of dwellings represented by the presence of clay brick and coarse house pottery of various forms were also discovered.

## THE IRON AGE

The excavations at Isar near Marvinci reveal remnants of a settlement at several locations indicating that the settlement of the Late Iron Age was of the *scattered type*. From the highest plateau of Isar, i.e. the acropolis and the ridge east of the castrum, where the Roman necropolis was located, to the lowest slopes of Isar in the south and south-western direction, were discovered cultural horizons of the Iron Age with remains of houses and house furnishings. The houses were most commonly positioned against rocks, as a protection from the winds which are a common occurrence in these areas. They were built of clay brick and were plastered with mud, with massive beams carved in geological subsoil – rock as carriers. The pottery from this period was handmade, with adequate and recognizable decorations and of a particularly coarse texture. Numerous embedded pithoi for storing grain were discovered in the premises. The findings from the archaeological excavations point to a very modest living as reflected by the contents in the residential premises. In the Late Iron Age, i.e. during the Archaic period was evidenced progress in the architecture. The houses were still built by means of clay bricks, but now there was a refined coating with relief decoration and wall stripes of red, yellow and blue. The arrangement



of the premises in the residential structure also improved. More facilities were established, including warehouses for storing grains.

On this occasion, an Iron Age pottery furnace discovered in the area of the Roman necropolis should be noted. The furnace was dug into the rock at a depth of 1.50 m below the level of the tomb no. 1248 from the Roman period. Numerous fragmented vessels clearly indicate that the furnace was destroyed shortly after the baking process. The vessels were large sized and were intended for storing liquids, as indicated by their size and firmness. They were built by using fine ocher clay and were shaped like large pitchers with one handle, decorated with horizontal lines in dark brown, or were without decorations.

Unlike the modest architecture and pottery, the grave artefacts from the necropolises were extremely rich, numerous and diverse. The presence of weapons, such as swords and iron knives, is evident. The pottery is of a very good quality, made on a potter's wheel with baked ocher, and decorated with painted linear ornaments. The metal grave items are astonishing in terms of their diversity. These objects were made of



An Iron Age furnace with original pottery in situ



1 - a bronze poppy capsule, 2 - A bronze phalera, 3 - a bronze amulet, 4 - a bronze fibula, 5 - a bronze ring, 6 - a bronze pendant, 7 - a bronze ring - 7th - 6th century BC, 8 - ornamental bronze balls, 9 - a bronze pendant



1 - 2 - a bronze bird, 3 - a bronze swamp duck, 4-6 - a bronze poppy capsule, 7 - a bronze vessel - typical of the full Iron Age

native copper, known in science as *Macedonian bronzes*, which include decorative and utilitarian items, such as earrings, fibulae of spirally braided wire in the form of glasses, rings, massive

bracelets of densely braided wire, buckles, buttons and others. A special group of items are the cult objects in the form of various spherical pendants, cups in the form of poppy capsules, birds and jugs. In professional terminology they are known as rings, pendants, cheek-pieces and amulets, but their role and significance have not been sufficiently elaborated yet. One conclusion emerged as quite straightforward. Our ancestors from the Iron Age grew poppy, wherefrom they extracted opium and used it in a certain way, linking it with the cult of the dead, who were considered to be temporarily asleep. We believe that the only explanation for such items from the repertoire of the Macedonian and Paeonian bronzes should be sought in their essential connection to the funeral ritual and the cult toward ancestors. This inference is confirmed by means of the poppy shaped vessels and the stylized representations of the poppy as a decorative jewellery detail.

An exceptional discovery of the necropolis Lisichin Dol-Marvinci is the burial of a young woman with remarkably rare grave items. In addition to the complete set of jewellery and



The most affluent Iron Age grave at the site Lisichin Dol in - situ





1 - a fibula resembling glasses from the full Iron Age, 2 - a bronze object from full Iron Age, 3 - a bronze objects from grave no. 15, 4 - a bronze application from grave no. 15, 5 - a bronze bracelet from grave no. 15, 6 - a bronze pieces of a belt decoration from grave no. 15, 7 - an ornate bronze necklace of the full Iron Age

pottery, which were regular burial items, a series of ritual objects, such as a chain composed of various symmetrically arranged pendants, in whose midst hangs a large vessel in the form of a poppy capsule with a cover shaped like a bird protome, which contained traces of morphine, was also discovered. This find was accompanied by several instruments for performing the cult ritual. The buried woman's attire consists of richly adorned apparel which corresponds to her social status that has now acquired particular importance in the performance of the ritual act - a large circular phalera, belts and an apron adorned with densely arranged calotte buttons, all made of copper. This extraordinary *in situ* discovery proved to be an exceptional source of information for the study of individual pieces of metal objects and their role in the spiritual life of the Paeonians. At the end of this chapter, it is necessary to emphasize that the settlements at Isar-Marvinci and Vardarski Rid were the most developed and advanced settlements in the region during the Iron Age, and in this respect, the Meleznik settlement, near the village of Dedeli, should also be noted. The further existence of the Paeonians at this area was interrupted probably due to lack of an economic base in the immediate surroundings.

## THE PERIOD OF EARLY ANTIQUITY

The Iron Age culture, which largely owes its development to the advanced exploitation of mining resources, suddenly fades. A void occurs, manifested by the absence of objects from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, suggesting stagnation in the development of the settlement at Isar. This circumstance arose due to the turbulent times caused by the Persian invasion of the Balkans and the breakthrough of the Macedonians towards the lower region of Povardarie. The process of stabilization, which brings about new changes in the region, takes place in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. There is a noticeable influx of goods from the southern Hellenic areas, from Corinth and Athens, and the cities of the Aegean Coast. Quality merchandise begins to arrive - red-figure pottery, refined silver and gold jewellery made in filigree and other techniques, as well as other previously unfamiliar objects. On the interior of the Balkans are established colonies whose main purpose



is the exploitation of silver ore deposits, among which the most important site is the mysterious Damastion. This is the period of the unification of the Paeonian tribes on a state level.

The presence of the Greek and monochrome painted pottery, which occurred in exceptionally large quantities during the excavations, has an explanation. It became evident that ancient pottery and similar items were present in the graves where newcomers were buried, whose skeletons belonged to an anthropological element different from the domestic (Paeonian-Macedonian) population. This suggests that in this period i.e. the late 5<sup>th</sup>



1 - black-figure pottery with mythological scenes from the late 5th century BC, 2 - black-figure pottery with mythological scenes - an oinochoe from the end of the 5th century BC, 3 - black-figure pottery with mythological scenes - a pelike from the end of the 5th century BC, 4 - a ceramic oinochoe - end of the 5th century BC

century BC, there was an influx of population, including colonists, mostly Athenians. An example of this is the nearby area of Stenae, at Demir Kapija, where the presence of the white lekythoi inside the graves, which are characteristic grave items of the Athenians, is obvious. These colonists carry the pottery with them, or they purchase it subsequently from their country, thus bringing a new style of living.

A noteworthy novelty in this period is the change in the manner of burial, especially evident at Isar-Marvinci. Under mysterious circumstances, in addition to inhumation, thus begins the practising of cremation as a burial ritual. The burials were performed by means of urns and cremation was executed in pits dug into the rock with a canal carved for air circulation. Most graves contained interesting items - pottery, lamps, jewellery and the like. In grave no. 99 were found bronze oinochoai and a perfume container. In tomb 74 were discovered small monochromatic plates, lekythoi-arrybaloi and an iron strigil. Tomb 84 included a beautiful sample of an oenochoe portraying a painted profile image of a woman's head. In grave 99 was found a skyphos depicting a male figure in full size. Similar finds were registered in graves 211 and 216, where beautiful jewellery items and Greek vases were discovered. In grave 187, in addition to the several pottery items, were found three terracotta representations of Aphrodite with a Dove. Moreover, in the activities from the period 2008 - 2010, during the excavations of the Southwest necropolis, were encountered more representative items of this type of imported pottery: monochrome kantharoi, monochrome and painted skyphoi, beautiful samples of pelikai depicting Amazons in combat with a griffin, executed in white colour, a fragmented crater and older types of cups i.e. luxury pottery which portrayed the welfare of the city in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In addition to the items from the Attic pottery workshops, quality vessels crafted in



Terracotta of a female - end of the 5th century BC

the Macedonian workshops in Pella, Veroia and Amphipolis, were also discovered.

Several rare and important stone monuments originate from Isar-Marvinci. The tomb monument of the so-called *Attic type* is especially prominent. The lower half of a large size stela has been preserved, sizable enough to observe the depiction. The deceased, depicted in high relief, is sitting on an ornate chair – *diphros*. Beside her stands a maid, holding a hand fan and a jewellery box - property of the deceased. The parting scene resembles the famous stela of Hegeso in the Kerameikos in Athens. This rare tombstone was undoubtedly intended for a distinguished lady from the city at Isar.

A highly significant find is a marble base of a female statue which bears the name of the sculptor Adimos, son of Euandros from Veroia,

who created the statue. This valuable discovery enriched the cultural history of Macedonia with an artist, a member of a family of artists, who lived and worked in Hellenic times.

Valuable insight into the religion of the local population was gained by means of the discovery of several marble and terracotta sculptures depicting the goddess Cybele. A small marble icon contains a double



1



2

1 - fragmented stela of the Attic type - end of 5th - 4th century BC,  
2 - a marble statue of the Hellenistic period - 3rd - 2nd century BC



1



2



3

1 - a representation of the goddess Cybele with lions 3rd - 2nd century BC,  
2-3 - the goddess Cybele - 3rd - 2nd century BC

representation of Cybele within a temple - *naiskos*. Depicted in a Hellenistic manner, the goddess is shown in her classic iconographic representation, seated on a throne, accompanied by her constant followers – the lions. On one statue, we see the goddess accompanied by lions, while on another, she is accompanied by acolytes. If



these artworks are considered to be imports, the representations of Cybele in terracotta are, without doubt, a local product. The presence of so many artistic depictions of Cybele clearly attests to the acceptance of this Phrygian deity, whose cult was generally respected in the city at Isar.

A small tombstone includes a representation of a Macedonian soldier depicted in full combat gear, involving a helmet, a spear in his right hand, a shield in his left, and chest armour. The representation is part of a temple - *naiskos*. The inscription carved onto the frame states that it is a monument of Zoilos, the son of Isholaos. In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC the economic



A Marble slab of Zoilos with a Macedonian shield



A ceramic vessel depicting a Macedonian shield

development observed in the previous period starts to increase. The first confirmation of the new era is the emergence of pottery made in the technique of moulding. These were small vessels, hemispherical cups without handles, popular in literature as Megarian bowls. The exterior is decorated with relief representations of floral or figural motifs. The most famous are the cups with motifs from the Greek epics *The*

*Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, based on which they were called *Homeric*. The wider region inhabited by Macedonians is characterised by the Megarian bowls depicting the Macedonian shield. The exceptional refinement in the presentation of the scenes and other motifs indicate that the moulds for crafting the Megarian bowls were made by leading pottery artists. In the



1 - a ceramic terracotta from the Hellenistic period, 2-4 - A ceramic terracotta



same period, there was a fashion for decorating pottery with relief applications, as an addition to the covers of pyxides or jug handles. During the excavations of the acropolis at Isar-Marvinci were discovered moulds, which indicates that such relief cups were made in the city at Isar as well. Throughout this period, in addition to the local production of pottery vessels, the emergence of local coroplasts is also evident. This was a massive occurrence in the settlement of Vardarski Rid, where a series of terracotta items was discovered, oftentimes depicting figures of young women. At the site of Isar-Marvinci, terracotta objects of women in full size were most frequently created, which, regarding style, were equal to the famous production centres in Tanagra and Myrina. An especially significant find from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, is the stadium-roadmap, with the following inscription on each side:

Side A:

ΕΞ ΙΔΟΜΕΝΕΣ ΕΙΣ ΔΟΒΕΡΟΝ ΣΤΑΔΙΟΙ ΕΙΚΟΣΙ

Side B:

ΕΓ ΔΟΒΕΡΟΥ ΕΙΣ ΙΔΟΜΕΝΕΝ ΣΤΑΔΙΟΙ ΕΙΚΟΣΙ



An exclusive and rare find for the entire Mediterranean – a stone slab Stadion (road map), presenting the distance between two ancient cities - Doberus and Eidomene

The stadium was discovered in the Hellenistic stratum of the acropolis. The text reveals that the distance between Doberus and Eidomene i.e. Eidomene and Doberus is 20 stadia, corresponding to approximately 3.5 km. This information is, by no means, intended for the traveller who enters or exits the city. The discovery of this inscription solves the issue for the ubication of the cities of Doberus and Edomene, regarding which, various opinions and interpretations existed in the ancient sources. Moreover, this inscription indicated that this region was part of the road marking system in Macedonia during Hellenistic times. Similar stadium-roadmaps were extremely rare in the ancient world, which gives this city special significance.

The continuity of life in Doberus throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods is attested by the discovery of coins from the cultural strata of the settlement and the tombs. The oldest is considered to be the Archaic coin - a half-stater, from Lete (?), with a representation of Silenus and Nymph, dated around 500-480 BC. Following a chronological order, we see the coins of Alexander I, Perdiccas II (454-413), Archelaus (413-399) and Amyntas III (389-383; 381-360) discovered in a limited quantity. With the discovery of the coins of Philip II (359-336), Alexander III (336-323), Cassander (316-297), Antigonus Gonatas (276-240), Demetrius II (239-229), Philip V (220-

179) and the last Macedonian king, Perseus (178-168), the number of coins increases (Fig. 17). In the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the most distributed coins were the ones from the area of Amphaxitis, Amphipolis, Thessalonica and Pella - cities which were allowed to issue their own money by Philip V.



A coin from the Hellenistic period

## DOBERUS DURING THE EARLY IMPERIAL PERIOD

The excavations at Isar-Marvinci showed that the settlement expanded and occupied the adjacent terraces under the Hellenistic acropolis, but that the acropolis itself remained uninhabited and abandoned. In this period, water is being brought to the city from the heights of Vrezi Dol and the Pogana area. However, the facilities built in this period do not constitute a planned urban entity. Depending on the circumstances imposed by the terrain, buildings were scattered in

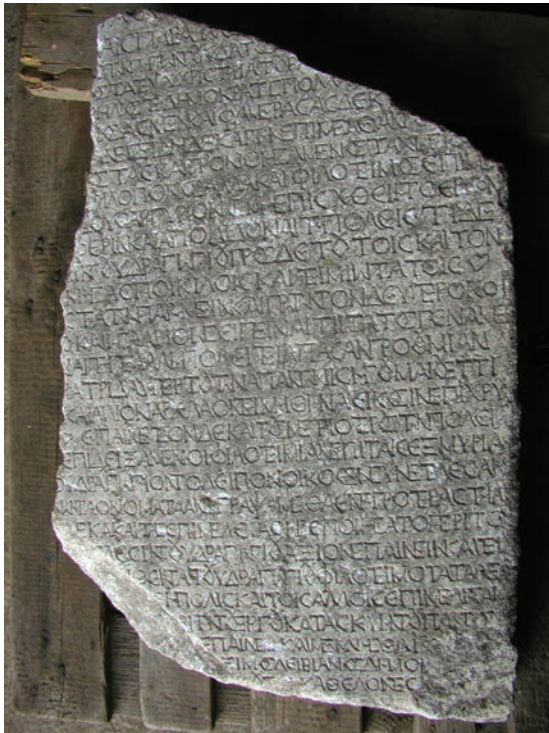


A marble plaque with an inscription by a Roman magistrate

various places at Isar. The limited scope of the archaeological excavations did not allow for the full discovery of these buildings, whose remains - parts of buildings built by means of mortar - were registered on the terraces below the acropolis, and at the base of Isar, at Janova Cheshma, where an apse structure with many fragments of window glass was discovered. A city bath, with a preserved hypocaust suspensura, was located nearby. A marble base with an honorary inscription dedicated to Marcus Aurelius, dated in 161, was also discovered at this place.

Although the Early Imperial period showed insignificant prosperity of the city in an urban and architectural sense, the discovered inscriptions and tombstones indicate a high cultural level of its citizens. Romans, who had their own convent, inhabited the city as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century. This information was included in the inscription carved on the pedestal which held the bust of Publius Memius Regulus, a Roman magistrate. The inscription is dated around the year 41-44. The city of Doberus is completely integrated in the Macedonian-Roman system of public life in





An exclusive and rare epigraphic monument  
- second half of the 2nd century

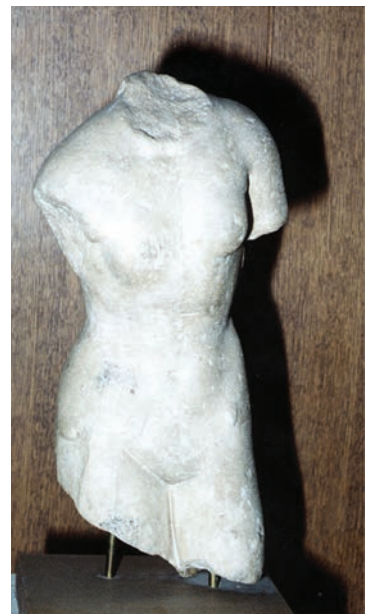
the early Roman Empire, as part of the Roman province of Macedonia. In the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century was built a city bath in a high construction technique, whose preserved sections indicate that this facility is comparable to similar facilities in other cities in Macedonia.

In that period, when the city was at its highest point of development, was built a temple believed to have been established or restored by a Macedoniarch, a member of the Macedonian Koinon, based in Veroia, whose birthplace was believed to be the city at Isar.

Numerous architectural stone blocks - pillars, bases, capitals, floor levels in an expensive technique and more, discovered accidentally, suggest that numerous public facilities were built in Doberus. The civilizational level of its citizens was especially pronounced. Water was brought from the area of Pogana by means of a hydro-system, by implementing a high hydro-installation technique. In one of the supply canals in 2004 was discovered an epigraphic

monument used as a secondary cover, which represents a document of great importance for the history of the area and the Roman imperial administration in the province of Macedonia in the second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, as well as for defining the state and political institutions in this period of the Balkan Peninsula.

Several marble sculptures represent deities worshiped in the city at Isar. A statue of a naked Aphrodite, found in the ruins of the rampart around the temple, belongs to a very frequently depicted goddess in Hellenistic and Early Roman times discovered as the renowned Aphrodite of Knidos. Artemis was worshiped as well, portrayed as a statue covered with a deer-skin cape. She was created at the hands of a quality stone carver, though with a rigid provincial depiction. In the city at Isar, Zeus Hypsistos was venerated, as well. A marble ossuary with an extraordinary depiction also belongs to the Early Roman period. On the exterior, there is a depiction of scenes of two pairs of nude wrestlers in relief, with a standing clothed male figure in-between, unquestionably in the role of a judge - a theme inspired by Hellenic Classical art. The city of Doberus suffered a great devastation by the Goths in 268. As reported by Zosimus (I, 43), the Goths renounced the siege of Thessalonica after learning that the Roman emperor went against them. On their return to the Danube, along the Vardar



A marble statue of Aphrodite of Knidos  
- Early Imperial period



highway, they pillaged and ravaged the city of Doberus and Pelagonia. This event must have had a great impact since it was worthy of being recorded by ancient writers. This army, against which turned the emperor himself, must have created great devastation. From our perspective, this event must have left impressive archaeological traces. The excavations at Isar are not sufficiently detailed to obtain a more complete image of the event. However, we do know that soon after the south-eastern base of the acropolis in the surrounding area was encircled by means of a massive defensive wall. Marble monuments and sculptures, that were once the pride of the city, lost their meaning. They were built in the rampart, which goes to show that large scale destruction took place. In this manner was formed a castle to accommodate a small military detachment. Soon after, the role of these important and representative objects was completely neglected. A transitional facility was built over the temple, in whose foundations were embedded bases, capitals and other architectural blocks. In front of the main facade of the temple was established another facility, in whose foundations were embedded blocks of the cornice and the architrave of the temple, as well as other blocks of buildings that were previously completely ruined. Here was discovered the tomb monument of the Lady of Marvinci. The inscription reads:

(-----)  
Θ Ε Ω Σ Ε Β Α Σ Τ Ω  
(-----) Β Ε Ι Θ Σ  
Α Ν Ε Θ Η Κ Ε Ν

This building used the base of the temple in front of it as its foundation. This base was formed by means of a layer of mortar covered with large floor tiles, where clear imprints could be observed. A few meters away from this building was erected another one, built of river stone and mud, attached to the main building of the castle and the former city bath. Pottery of this quality (various forms of amphorae and kitchen pots in many shapes and sizes, mostly of yellow clay with a distinctive technique, whose body was decorated with a frieze of thick grooves) mark the last phase of life in the city in the 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous pithoi embedded into the subsoil (Fig.



21) and the rock on the slopes of the acropolis, at the area above the temple and the Early Roman bath, in reference to pottery, create an image of a difficult time when the only vital thing was to find refuge within the walls of the city and receive the most basic life necessity - wheat. Thus, life in the city at Isar, Thucydides's city of Doberus, enters well into the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the period when it reaches its end.

Pithoi patched by means of lead over a longer period of time from the Roman period

# ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES

## AN ACROPOLIS



Objects at the acropolis

At the highest plateau at Isar extends the pre-Roman acropolis which covers an area of 2 ha. Having a shape compatible with the terrain configuration, the acropolis was supported by means of defensive ramparts from the earliest days of its existence. For the first time in the history of Macedonian archaeology, during the first probe excavations, was observed a rampart from the Archaic and Early Antique period at the sites in Macedonia. The discovered architectural remains mainly belong to residential buildings. These houses were constructed of wooden poles and clay bricks plastered in various directions. The style of building changes over time into a precisely laid carved stone. The buildings are rectangular in shape. Roofing tiles were used for the roof, whereas the floors were built of pressed earth, and less frequently of ceramic floor tiles. The houses indicate an orientation towards the inner area, implying that they belong to the type *pastas*. The movable archaeological material, as represented by the pottery finds, coins, construction elements and others, discovered during the archaeological excavations in the period 1977-1980, outlined four living horizons:

- Horizon 1 – 6<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Archaic period);
- Horizon 2 – from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Classical period);
- Horizon 3 – from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Hellenic period);
- Horizon 4 – 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Late Hellenistic period).

## CITY BATHS

The south-eastern base of the acropolis in the Early Imperial period was used in the construction of buildings of special interest for the city. In the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, a remarkable bath with a reservoir was built in this area. Though it is still being researched, the elements that have been discovered indicate an exceptionally large and important building in the city of Doberus. Moreover, the existence of a facility of this kind attests to the high cultural and civilizational level of the citizens and their contacts with the Macedonian-Roman world.



The long use of the facility, which went through major reconstructions over time, is evident from the first glance. An especially impressive element is the facade of the building with two entrances with arches. The north-eastern entrance, which was partially preserved, enabled its reconstruction. These were the original parts of the *therma* which were preserved until the end of the use of the facility.



An arched entryway in the command building



Principia (headquarters object)

This remarkable building had a long use. In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the castrum of the city at Isar was built, this building served as the command building (*Principia*) for the army that was situated in this part of the city at Isar - Doberus.

The bath consisted of several premises with different flooring, one in the technique of *opus*

*sectile*, the other with ceramic floor tiles. In the largest room, located in the centre, were preserved traces of a cooling fountain connected by means of a narrow canal. It was rebuilt with regard to its original purpose to serve as a city bath, which proved inevitable after some type of devastation (probably an earthquake or some other sort of destruction). On the south side of the great room, whose floor was executed



Tanker



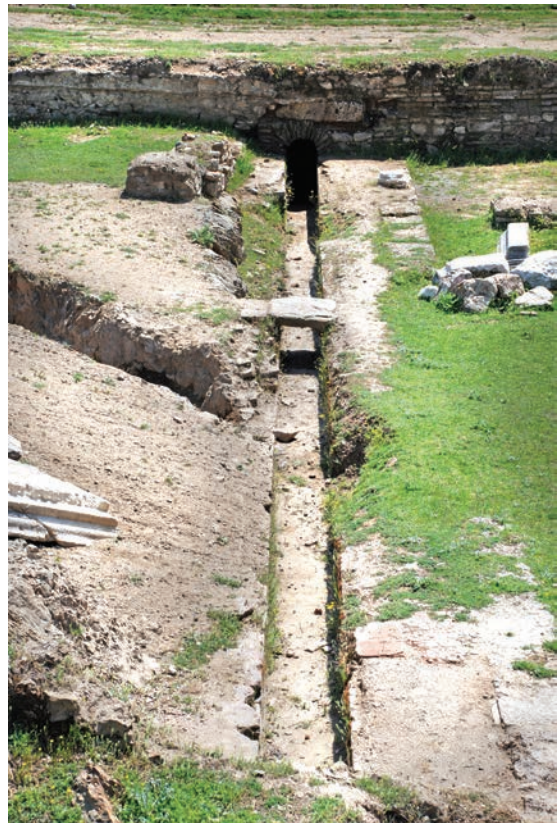
in *opus sectile*, were discovered bathtubs made of smooth white marble tiles in pink water-proof mortar. The bathtubs were connected to the water system from the reservoir on the north-western side behind the bath.

In the largest room were preserved 12 bases, subsequently placed in two rows, which were intended to carry a storey construction. The bases did not belong to the original bathrooms. Here is observed their secondary use, which means that they belonged to other, older buildings, not very far away from this location, and were now needed for erecting the storey structure of the command building - *Principia*.

Next to the bathrooms was built a long vaulted building, preserved to this day. In its construction were used processed blocks of white stone that belonged to an older building or multiple buildings that were, most likely, located near the bathroom. This building presumably served as a water supply reservoir for these large city baths. One such unit, which represents a tombstone, was built into the wall left of the entrance. It is dated in 106/7, and as such represents a valuable source of information for the construction of the facility reservoir - *terminus post quem*.

If an apoditerium and frigidarium were discovered thus far, premises that accompany these facilities, we can safely assume that, with further discovery other premises of the city baths, such as a caldarium with a hypocaust and other facilities, will come to light.

On the area southeast of the entrance gate, opposite the temple, were preserved remains of several buildings with premises that are in a phase of discovery, though still undefined. Their manner of construction reveals that they represent buildings in the last phase of the life in the preserved area of the city. In this regard, especially impressive is a series of foundations of a building which was probably part of the baths, or was used in relation to the baths. Under this building was located a water drainage canal that entered the profile of the undiscovered section and was connected to an empty space located below the ground.



Supply canal for the baths (therma)

## A TEMPLE

The existence of a temple at Isar was observed as early as 1957, when an inscription carved on the architrave beam, located on the area known as Porta, was first published by M. Kjornjakov, and then by B. Dragojevikj-Josifovska. This inscription provided the initial incitement for the start of the archaeological research on this vital archaeological site in 1957, which is one of the most



The original architrave beam from the Greek-Roman temple

remarkable ancient cities in the area of Dolno Povardarie. The inscription reads:

(—————) μακεδονιαρχων τον ναον τε πατριδι  
(———) ν παντι τω κοσμω θ κ τ ε τ ι

The inscription was not preserved completely, but, nevertheless, provides the information that one Macedoniarch erected a temple in honour of his homeland in 181. Especially important for us is that this person, a high authority in the Macedonian Koinon, which was based in Veroia, came from the city at Isar. Unfortunately, the inscription mentions neither the name of this Macedoniarch nor the name of the city where the temple was erected. It also fails to reveal whether this building was a new facility or a reconstruction of an older temple. These data were probably written at the beginning part of the inscription on the architrave, which is missing. According to the date specified on the inscription, namely the year 329, which according to the Macedonian era corresponds to the year 181, it can be inferred that the temple was dedicated to the emperor Commodus. Parts of his above-average sized statue that was located here were discovered.

The temple was located at the south-eastern base of the acropolis. It is a small rectangular structure, 9.70 m wide and 16.60 m long. The main facade faces the southeast. According to the Roman conception for the construction of facilities of this type, the temple was set on a high pedestal, whereby using the natural rocky surface of the ground enabled it to dominate the surrounding area. The corners were formed by means of large carved limestone blocks, while the interior was

filled with unprocessed stone and white mortar as a binding element.

Seven staircases led to the temple and the porch whose corner blocks, with fine profile, represented the ending and the front parts of the side parastis (corners) where the staircase stands, wherefrom over the deep courtyard (pronaos) and a wide entrance, one entered a naos sized 5.40 m x 5.30 m. At the entrance to the naos was preserved a massive threshold 2



A Greek - Roman temple (tetrastilos prostyle) with the entrance and naos preventively conserved



m wide, consisting of two stone blocks bound by connectors. The doorposts, of which were preserved two blocks, were made in the same profile with three fascias on each, of the type observed in the architrave beams.

The walls of the nave and the antae were massive. On the exterior, they were built by means of blocks of limestone, and the interior of a simple unprocessed stone. This data suggests that the interior of the temple was plastered with mortar. Several fragments of

stucco relief with vegetation motifs, complemented by adding gold colour, imply an ornate interior of the temple. When building the naos, the technique *opus mixtum* was applied, by adding a bedding course of four rows of bricks, especially well preserved on the exterior of the north-eastern and north-western wall. This type of construction technique is the oldest of its kind in Macedonia. In the naos were preserved traces of three floor levels that are clearly distinguished. The oldest floor level is 40 cm below the most recent layer and consists of white mortar. The mid-floor level,



The style of building the north-east side of the temple

20 cm higher than the previous one, was formed by means of ceramic tiles, over a layer of fine limestone. The most recently built floor was made of pressed earth.

The roof construction consisting of architrave beams and a cornice decorated with dentils was carried by four columns in ionic order placed over profiled bases at the front facade, which determined the type of the temple known as *tetrastyle prostyle*. The roof, of course, was double-pitched, ending in ceramic antefixes shaped like palmettos, four of which were discovered thus far.

The information at our disposal



A possible variant for a complete reconstruction of the temple



allows us to conclude that the temple at Isar is a classic example of Vitruvius's conception. It can be compared to the Temple of *Fortuna Virilis* in Rome and *Maison Carree* in Nîmes, with the exception that the latter was built in the Corinthian order. Temples of this type can be encountered across the Adriatic Coast. Augustus's temple in Pula and the second phase of the temple in Solin, regarding their structural elements, could be considered equivalent to the temple at Isar. This is the only temple of its kind ever discovered in the Republic of Macedonia.

## A SANCTUARY

In the northern corner of the subsequent castrum, between the northern tower and the temple, was discovered a sacred building (Fig. 26). Its construction is especially impressive at first glance. It was attached to the rock and plastered with lime mortar to a height of about 1.5 m, which shapes the lower sections. The upper parts of the walls were built of stone, with pieces of brick used as a bedding course.



The stairs and the Sanctuary north of the Temple

The ceiling of the building was constructed of brick, as implied by the discovered elements. In the middle of the wall opposite the entrance was carved a small arched niche, which probably served as a place for the sculpture dedicated to the deity of the sanctuary.

The size of the building and the accompanying elements suggest that it was a public facility located near the city bath and the temple it served. This inference is complemented by the discovery of stairs that descend from the level of the temple to the entry level of the sanctuary. It was a place where activities of general interest to the city as a cult place were performed. By erecting the rampart of the castle, this building was divided, thereby totally neglecting its function.

Upon comparing this building with the facilities around the *thermae*, it can be concluded that they were built at the same time. Its long use can be inferred from the three layers of mortar that also point to its renewal.

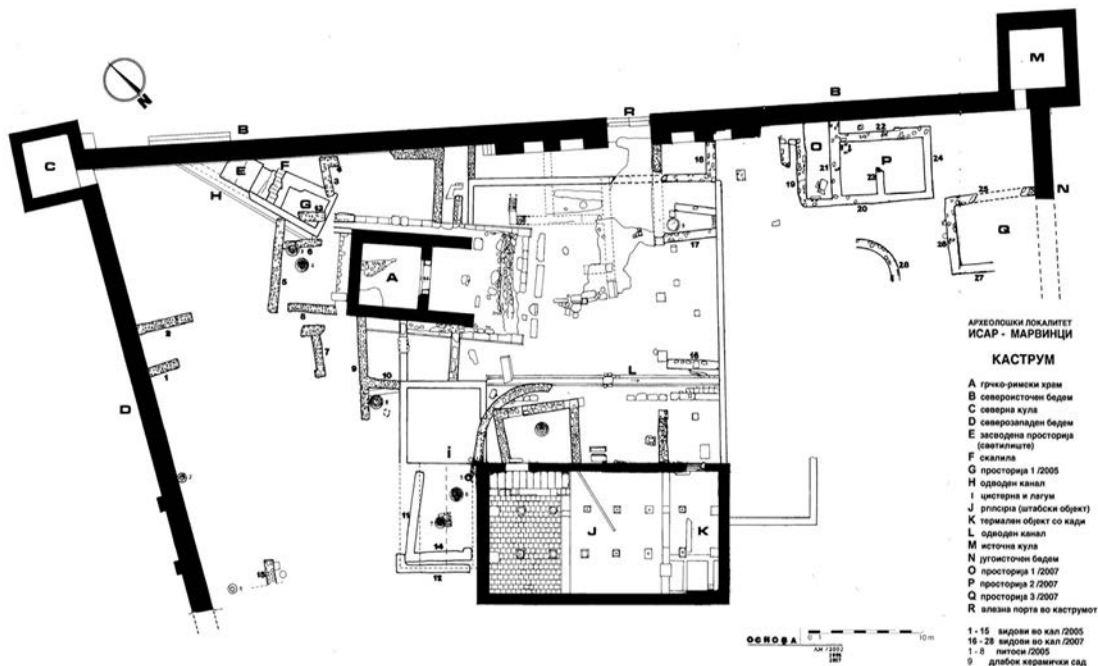
## A CASTLE

After the invasion of the Goths in 268, the southern base of the acropolis was enclosed by means of massive defensive walls, closing an area of 70 m x 80 m. Close to the middle of the north-eastern wall was the gate, of which was preserved a massive threshold. At both ends were discovered traces of the indentations from the beams that carried the gate. The shape of the threshold

suggests that it was two-part and opened to the interior. The wall has a width of 1.70 m, and in the area of the gate it is 2.30 m wide. Niches from both sides of the gate were preserved in the interior. From one of the sides were also preserved stairs for climbing to the top of the rampart. Architecturally, the castle was conceived as a quadriburgium, with four square towers at the corners. Across from the above-described gate



North-eastern gate of the castle with niches



The base of the castle with some of the architectural items

was probably located its equivalent part. In this manner was formed a castrum to accommodate a smaller military detachment. In this event, the function of the buildings in the enclosure was completely neglected. The building of the city baths was converted into the main building of the castle, or the command building - Principia. The temple also loses its function and endures alterations in order to serve as a military castrum.

The period when the castle was erected was likely after the invasion of the Goths, in the time of Diocletian, when major construction works were undertaken in the Empire. However, it remains possible that the castle was built in the time of the confrontation between Constantine I and Licinius (312-324), when other roadside forts and castles of the mid-Balkan region were built.



It is believed that the castle as such did not endure for a long time. It soon accepted the civilian population of the city that needed protection and security.

In Late Antiquity, opposite the temple, were built several buildings. Although still in a stage of research, it may be observed that these buildings were secular. Inside these buildings, similar to the rampart, were embedded parts of architectural elements used secondarily, belonging to public buildings from the Early Imperial period. After their demolition they were converted into quarries for stone used as building material in Late Antiquity.

## NECROPOLISES

With regard to the necropolises of the city at Isar from the Iron Age until the end of Late Antiquity, in this stage of excavation we can conclude that they were located in accordance with the way of life. Specifically, the Iron Age necropolis of Lisichin Dol is approximately 600 m from the acropolis to the southeast. On this occasion it should be emphasized that the Iron Age settlement was of the scattered type and can be encountered under the tombs from Early Antiquity until the end of the Roman period. The



Part of the necropolis Lisichin Dol in the Iron Age



Part of the Roman acropolis before opening

south-western and the southern necropolis were located under the acropolis itself, representing the Early Antiquity necropolises from the 5<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. They were located in the western part of the city at Isar, while the Hellenistic and the Early Roman necropolises are oriented partially more to the southwest of the ordinary necropolis, and the Roman necropolis is southeast of the castrum. Some of the necropolises of the city at Isar could also be found in the village, in one of





Marble tombstones embedded in subsequent Roman graves as covers

the neighbouring hills, east of the acropolis from the Early Roman period. Depending on the period, the types of tombs follow the time and the custom. We can emphasize the Roman necropolis, as it has over ten types of burials and many types of modified variants (floor tombs, tombs embedded in the rock, double-pitched tombs, free burials, built tombs and graves, etc.). Approximately more than 3,000 graves from all periods have been excavated and explored at the city at Isar

thus far. Unfortunately, this quantity does not include the illegal digging of graves. On part of the researched graves were used tombstones from the older period as secondary spolia i.e. covers. Due to the limitations of this study, only some of the grave finds covering several periods are presented.

Subject to further research at the city at Isar remain a significant number of terraces, but the necropolises, as well as the castrum, which, unfortunately, is still not completely excavated, are a priority. Regarding the size and importance of this archaeological site, this publication aimed to draw the attention to this city at Isar by means of presenting outlines and part of the movable cultural heritage, with reservation in respect to its identification, i.e. whether it is Eidomene or Doberus.



A marble tombstone embedded as a cover in subsequent Roman graves



Gold and silver jewellery from necropolis of Isar Marvninci



1-3 - a pyxis from the Hellenistic period, 4 - a ceramic pyxis (jewellery box) from the Hellenistic period – 2nd – 1st century BC



Bronze figurines of Roman gods, ordinary citizens and animals found in a tomb from the Early Roman period – 1st – 3rd century





A terracotta with a representation of Aphrodite from the Roman period



An iron Roman helmet



A rare find of a bronze medicine box with medical instruments – 2nd – 3rd century



A ceramic flask of the Early Imperial - Roman period





1 - a glass cup from Early Roman times, 2 - a glass bowl from Roman times, 3 - a glass unguentarium from Roman times



Grave items - terracotta head of a woman, quadriga with horses and a gladiator



Ceramic lamp (lucerna) with depictions of fish from the Early Christian period – 4th century

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