



The most significant values
of the cultural and natural heritage

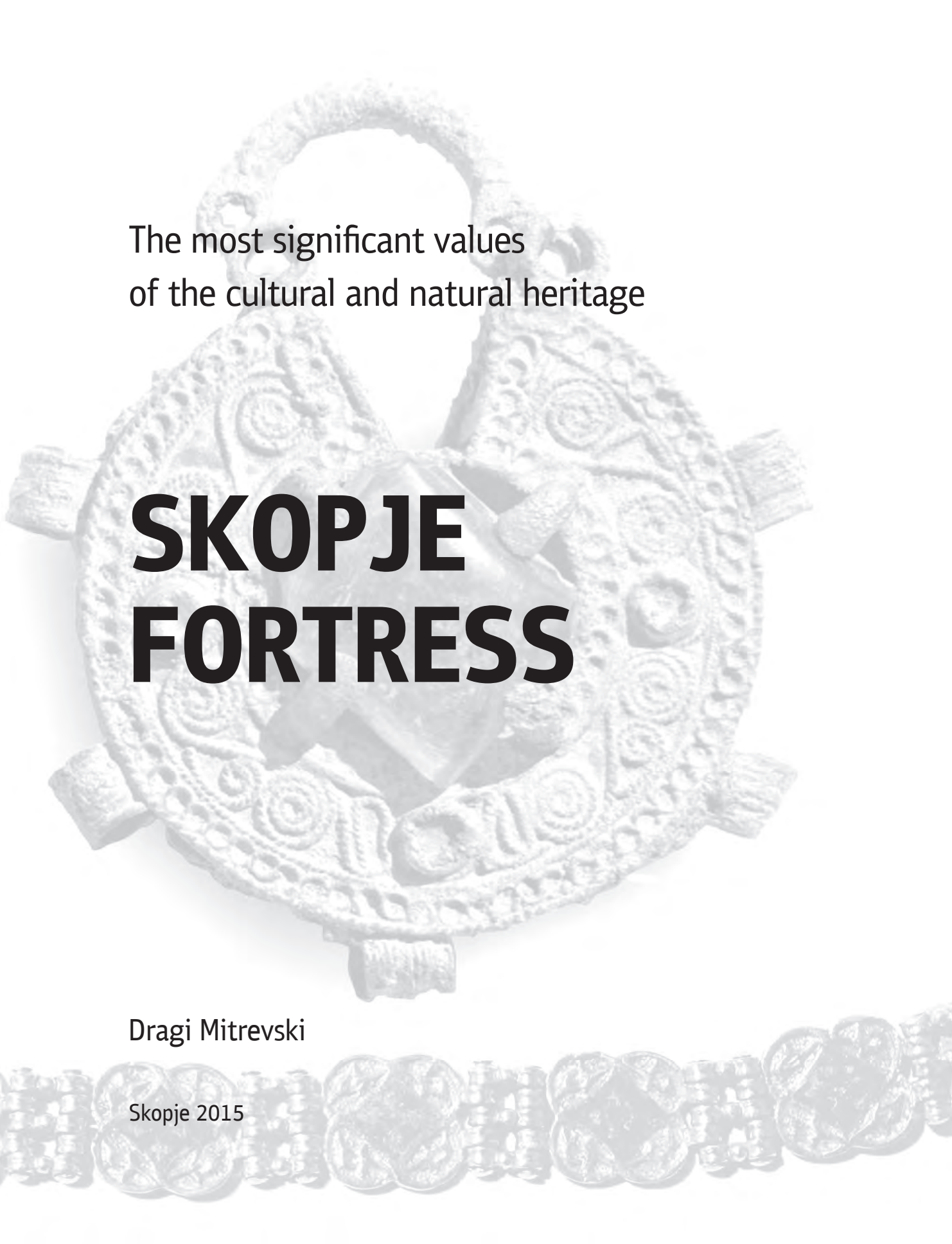
SKOPJE FORTRESS



Dragi Mitrevski

This work has been published
with the financial support of the
Government of the Republic of Macedonia






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Skopje 2015



FOREWORD

MACEDONIAN CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Over the past 4.5 million years since the creation of Earth, the ancestor of the modern man, “the wise man - Homo sapiens”, appearing on the African continent 150,000 years before this day, quickly settled throughout the territories of the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

His cultural evolution is recorded in the Republic of Macedonia, as well.

While travelling through the prehistoric era of the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, as well as the historical epochs of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, man created civilizations on the soil of the Republic of Macedonia by introducing and using the natural resources. He established the magnificent kingdoms of the Agrianians, Paeonia, Pelagonia, Lyncestis, Macedonia, and the principalities of Deuriopus, Dessaretia and the Penestae.

The Roman Empire, Byzantine, the medieval states - all left a powerful civilizational imprint.

The belief in the natural phenomena, followed by the belief in the many gods, to finally worship our only God - all left indelible cultural traces.

All this enormous cultural and natural heritage of the Republic of Macedonia was subject of the capital project of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, “Publications of the most significant values of the cultural and natural heritage,” carried out by the Cultural Heritage Protection Office.

130 monographs featuring the Archaeological Heritage, Sacral heritage, the Treasures of the churches and monasteries in Macedonia and the Natural heritage were created.

Macedonia - the high forest land in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, as the name suggests, furrowed by the deep valleys of the Vardar tributaries and the river Drim, adorned with the blue - green waters of Lake Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran, with the proud giants Kozuv, Shar Mountain, Korab and Jablanica, Selecka Mountain and other mountain ranges, today lights 130 torches of its own, as well as the world's, cultural and natural heritage; a legacy to preserve, use wisely and pass on to future generations of the Macedonian road to eternity.

Prof. Viktor Lilchikj Adams, Ph.D.

SKOPJE FORTRESS

The Skopje Fortress- Kale holds a dominant position over the city centre of present-day Skopje, more precisely, present-day Old Bazaar in the east and the Vardar riverbed on the west. The site is positioned at the southern end of the long ridge of sedimentary sandstone which runs north-south along the east bank of the river Vardar.

According to written historical sources confirmed by the results of previous archaeological research, the entire cultural and political history of Skopje and the Skopje region is associated with this area.



Panoramic view of Kale

On several occasions were conducted individual archaeological probe excavations for the purpose of control and protection (1953, 1954, 1967, 1980) of the Skopje Fortress. However, the largest number of findings and data were generated by systematic excavations from 2007 to 2012. About 90% of the area of the fortress was recorded by means of these excavations.

In the original structure of the inner space of the fortress the long ridge that virtually extended along the entire site in the middle, from north to south, held a dominant position. The slopes to the east and west, although pretty steep, were used extensively, especially those extending eastward. For the purpose of erecting various buildings of different settlements on the same space, the ground was continuously levelled, more precisely, levelled or overlaid, which oftentimes created new horizontal surfaces for the higher levelled settlements.

In this manner was created a complex archaeological site with elaborate stratigraphy established by the millennium- long accumulation of cultural remains from 10 different settlements. All these settlements carry their own specific cultural characteristics, relating to different periods and different levels of urbanization. Moreover, depending on various factors, each settlement was rebuilt numerous times. In this regard, the following settlements can be distinguished as separate stages in the use of the Skopje Fortress:

- **KALE I** - Early Eneolithic settlement from the end of the 5th millennium BC
- **KALE II** - Early Bronze Age settlement from the second half of the 3rd millennium BC
- **KALE III** - Middle Bronze Age settlement from around the mid-2nd millennium BC
- **KALE IV** - Settlement of the transitional period from Bronze to Iron Age 12th – 10th century BC
- **KALE V** - Early ancient activities on the Skopje Fortress- Kale, 5th- 4th century BC
- **KALE VI** - The first Middle Age fortification, from the 10th- 13th century with two stages:
Stage VI A – Samuil's stage (10th- 11th century)
Stage VI B - Komneni stage (12th – 13th century)
- **KALE VII** - Medieval Skopje under Serbian administration 13th – 14th century (1282-1392)
- **KALE VIII** - The Skopje Fortress in the Early Ottoman period from the 15th – 17th century with 2 stages:
Stage VIII A - from 1392 to the great earthquake in 1555.
Stage VIII B - From 1555 to Piccolomini in 1689.
- **KALE IX** - The Skopje Fortress in the Late Ottoman period from the 18th – 19th century (1700-1860)
- **KALE X** - The Skopje Fortress in the 20th century to the earthquake in 1963

СКОПСКО КАЛЕ

ГЕНЕРАЛЕН ПЛАН



Remains of the main periods on Kale

The general stratigraphy shows that the area of the Skopje Fortress - Kale was in use from the 5th millennium BC to the present day. However, its use was not continuous, but rather composed of individual shorter or longer interruptions or periods which did not yield cultural or any other findings. In this respect, there is an evident absence of findings from the Iron Age, as well as virtually the entire period of Antiquity and the Early Byzantine period, i.e. from the 3rd century BC to the 10th century AD.

The forthcoming content will focus on the most important features and findings that determine each of the ten settlements that existed on the territory of the Skopje Fortress.

KALE 1 (SECOND HALF OF THE 5TH MILLENNIUM BC)

Remnants from the oldest settlement can be found all over the Skopje Fortress, burrowed into the archaeological soil of sandy clay. Judging by its arrangement, it can be implied that it developed horizontally, utilizing all surfaces of the thick clay subsoil appropriate for burrowing of various construction structures.



Remnants of the Eneolithic houses 3 and 4, dug into clay subsoil

A total of 13 houses were discovered from this settlement, but due to various amounts of damage, none of them was fully preserved and explored. Most houses were found in the northern part of the site, on the exterior of the medieval monumental rampart, as well as in the north-east corner of the fortress.



View of the remains of the Eneolithic houses to the north of the medieval rampart

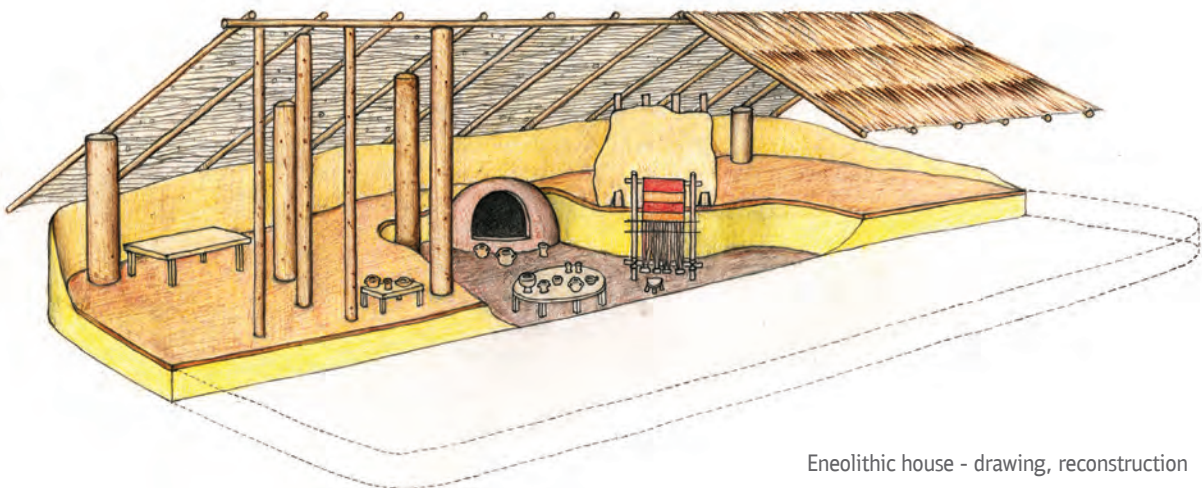
They were semi-mud huts, burrowed into the clay subsoil to varying degrees, often with two interior rooms arranged on an oval base of irregular shape. The movable, as well as the immovable finds, testify to the standard activities in the home, whereby the hearth and the vertical weaving loom are a regular occurrence. The most evident illustration is the house number 8, discovered 8 meters below the present-day surface of the earth. The house was rebuilt three times, and all discovered movable finds from the oldest phase were recorded in their original state. In the central room alone, around the hearth, were discovered a hundred different items representing household furnishings.



Eneolithic house - field photo

In addition to the houses, many other facilities were discovered in the earliest settlement, mostly storage or cult pits, arranged in separate constructions within the so-called cult-storage complex. The pits take different forms, burrowed differently into the clay subsoil, and served for the storage of different types of foods. Two pits are an exception, which according to their form and content can be defined as cult pits. Inside these pits were discovered findings undoubtedly representing remains of certain cult-ritual activities (animal bones, figurines, miniature trays, dish – rhyton, a ceramic recipient - altar etc.)

The cult-storage complex is distinctly separated from the dwelling section of the settlement. It is situated in the opposite, southeast corner of the Fortress as a special organizational entity, which is an indication of a planned use of the dwelling space and an existence of a command economy.



Eneolithic house - drawing, reconstruction

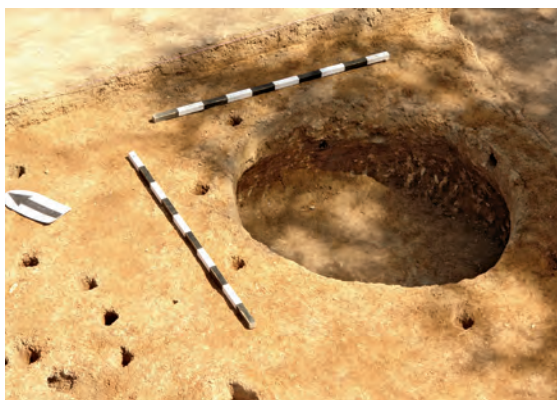


A selection of furnishing items from house 8 of Kale I

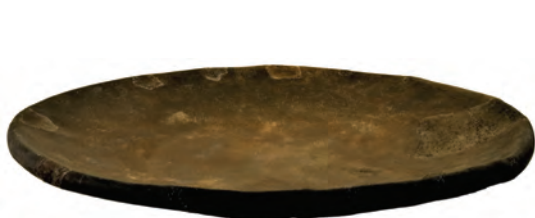
The numerous movable findings of the earliest settlement speak of a specific local occurrence, where a variety of elements from the end of the central Balkan Neolithic period, or the so-called Vinca- Pločnik-culture, are still present. However, all these occurrences appear in a new Eneolithic context with elements typical of the Early Eneolithic culture in the east, mainly in the valley of the Struma, in the late 5th millennium BC. This collection provides special value and specific features of the earliest settlement on Kale, which, thus far, is the best illustration of the beginnings of the Eneolithic not only in Skopje, but the entire central Balkan region, as well.



View of part of the so-called cult storage complex of Kale 1



Cult pit 1 in the so-called cult storage complex of Kale 1



A selection of votive gifts discovered in cult pit 1



A selection of ceramic findings from Kale I



A selection of terracotta figurine finds from Kale I

KALE 2 (SECOND HALF OF THE 3rd MILLENNIUM BC)

The second settlement- Kale II was arranged over the remains of the previous one, but on a much smaller area, mainly in the northern half of the site. It is an entirely new settlement with a new type of residential architecture with houses - overhead structures, built on an elongated rectangle base, often with an apse on the front side.

The houses had a structure of wooden poles and roof rails from organic materials. The floors were made of pressed earth with the hearth as a regular immovable furnishing item in the interior. The best example is House 1 of that settlement.

On the exterior were often encountered other open hearths and stoves (ovens), like the ones discovered in the northeast corner of the Fortress, or immediately to the north of House 1.

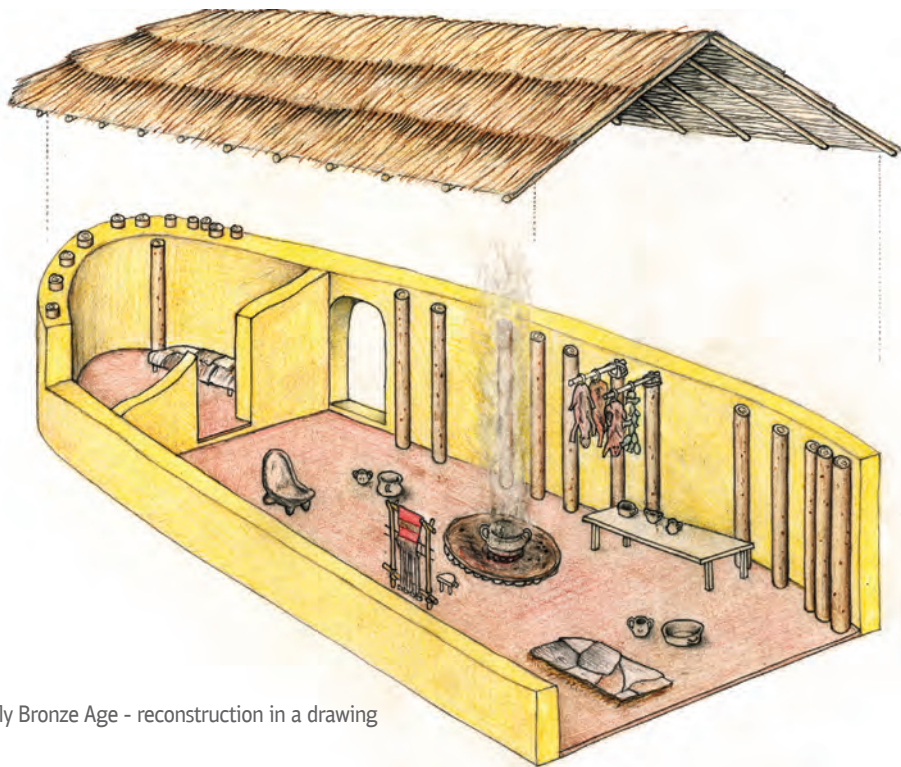


House 1 of the Early Bronze Age-terrain representation at base level

All occurrences from the second settlement were discovered within five consecutive layers or renewals. The cultural finds from the layers of the second settlement represent forms characteristic of the Early Bronze Age in the Skopje- Kumanovo region, but they also reveal the connection with the sites in the region of Povardarie, particularly the Early Bronze Age settlements of the type tells in the lower Vardar region. All this dates the second settlement of Kale to the period of the second half of the 3rd millennium BC.



Open hearths, immediately to the north of the Early Bronze Age house 1



House 1 of the Early Bronze Age - reconstruction in a drawing



A selection of ceramic findings from the Early Bronze Age settlement on Kale

KALE 3 (FIRST HALF OF THE 2nd MILLENNIUM BC)

The third settlement or Kale III is positioned at the same area, but on a more restricted space than the previous settlement i.e. only on the highest parts of the northern half of the Fortress. Consequently, its layers occur at a shallow depth severely damaged or completely destroyed by the more recent levelling and construction interventions on that space. Nevertheless, along the north-eastern outskirts of the settlement were discovered parts of the fencing rampart with a moat, preserved well enough at certain points to enable following of the length for about 100 meters.

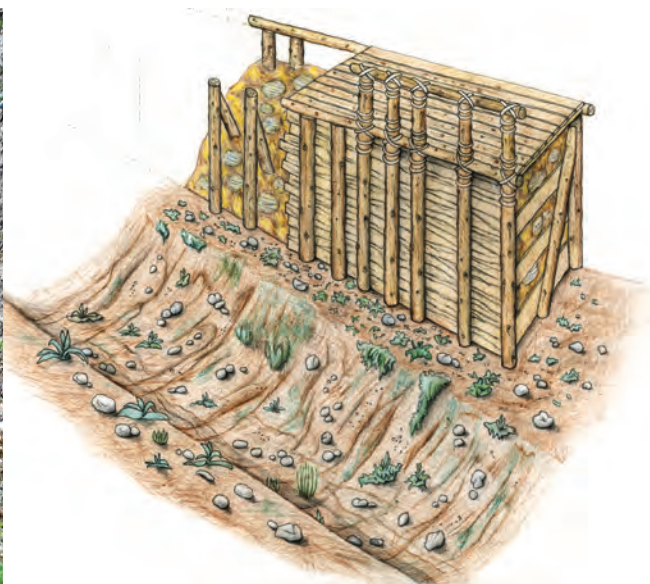


Northern part of the Middle Bronze Age earthen rampart, cross- section

Thus far, it is the only example of a prehistoric rampart of that kind, not only in Macedonia but also on the territory around the central Balkan region.

These were remains of the rampart base built of large marl stones and compacted clay, framed in a wooden construction.

The settlement layers connected to the rampart are visible on the interior, but unfortunately, they were preserved only in northern parts of the last settlement, i.e. on a very small part of the terrain. On this area were distinctly recorded at least three cultural layers that are positioned directly above the five layers of the previous settlement from the Early Bronze Age.



A section of the Middle Bronze Age earthen rampart, a- eastern section of the rampart, b- reconstruction in a drawing

The archaeological finds from third settlement are a strong indication of the period of the Middle Bronze Age. Ceramic findings common for the wider central mountain area or on the territory of Juzna Morava, via Kumanovo, along the valley of the Vardar were mainly discovered. They were dated mainly to the first half of 2nd millennium BC.

KALE 4 (END OF THE 2nd AND BEGINNING OF THE 1st MILLENNIUM BC)

The fourth settlement on Kale was established a certain time after the previous one had been demolished, mostly on the eastern slope of the terrain. The remains of the old Bronze Age rampart were levelled, the protective moat was filled with soil, and the houses of the new settlement expanded above them. It was larger than the previous settlement and expanded mainly on the northern and eastern side of the site.

A total of four dwellings with varying degrees of preservation were discovered. They were built in prehistoric manner with a wooden construction plastered with mud, roofs of organic material and floors of pressed earth covered with a clay layer. The holes of the supporting poles formed a rectangular base with an apse on one side.



The western section of house 2 on Kale 4 of the transitional period



South section of house 4 of the transitional period

The best illustration of this is House 2 of that settlement, whose western half is well preserved, with a floor level and house furnishings in their original position. The situation with House 4 is similar- its southern half with a calotte furnace to the outer wall is well-preserved.

The houses were rebuilt at least three times, thus forming three cultural layers.



Individual large storage or hearth- related containers, mandatory movable items of the houses of the transitional period (from Bronze Age to the Iron Age)



Individual characteristic forms of ceramics of the transitional period (from Bronze Age to the Iron Age)

Among the finds from the houses and layers of the fourth settlement were discovered common hearth, table and storage vessels and small items specific of the local Late Bronze Age culture, best known from the so-called Povardarie or Ulanci group. Certain forms that were developed during the following centuries of the Early Iron Age in Macedonia were also present.

Especially prominent is the painted amphora which, thus far, represents the only sub-Mycenaean proto-geometric import in the Balkans. All this dates the fourth settlement on Kale to the period of the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age (12th – 10th century BC).

KALE 5 (5th AND 4th CENTURY BC)

During the period of Early Antiquity (5th and 4th century BC) on the territory of the Skopje Fortress were exercised certain cult activities rather than settlement activities.

On various positions, throughout the entire site were discovered findings characteristic of the Early Antique culture in the Skopje region, as well as the Kumanovo-Ovcepole region and the entire region of Povardarie. These findings (mainly vessel pottery, bronze jewellery and weights) occur in separate archaeological units, unrelated to specific settlement layers. Most often they represent votive offerings of cult pits or various sacrificial structures or ritual, usually animal burials. The best illustration of such phenomena are the finds discovered on the north of the medieval ramparts. Sacrificial structures and an animal grave with skeletal remains of a dog were found in that area.



Clearing of the covering stones of an Early Antique cult pit and an animal sacrifice immediately next to it

They were all accompanied by gifts or Early Ancient pottery finds, jewellery, even a bronze coin of Alexander III. Parts of similar structures, such as cult pits, were found in the remaining space inside the Fortress. Unfortunately, they were often damaged by various subsequent construction activities on that area.

Apart from the above mentioned finds, the Early Antique findings usually appear as unrelated in the single level layer which separates the layers of prehistoric and medieval life. That layer was artificially created, i.e. by means of levelling the terrain. Namely, by means of displacement of the Early Antiquity remains from the higher to the lower sections the terrain was levelled for the next settlement i.e. the first medieval settlement- Samuil's Fortification.



One of the cult pits of Early Antiquity in the interior of the Fortress

Consequently, it may be concluded that the area of the Skopje Fortress- Kale was used to meet the religious needs of the population of the numerous surrounding villages in Early Antiquity – the small towns in the Skopje region, such as: Gradiste-Brazda, Zajcev Rid, Gradiste-Sredno Nerezi, Gradiste-Bucinci, Isar-Studenicani, Kale-Varvara and others. In relation to them, the Skopje Fortress occupied a central position towards which they gravitated due to which only the Fortress could serve as a common cult space.

Moreover, all findings regarding character, chronological and cultural values confirm these conclusions and link Kale to the other Paeonian settlements in the region of Skopje and along the Povardarie area in the 5th and 4th century BC.



Coins of Alexander III and Antigonus Gonatas, findings of the Early Antique cult pits on Kale



Individual gifts in the Early Antique cult pits (miniature cult vessels and a terracotta head of a dog)

In addition to coins of Alexander III and Antigonos Gonatas, among the movable finds from that period on Kale especially prominent is a terracotta head of a dog, as well as separate miniature containers and a distinctive bronze vessel - phiala. Their cult character is undoubted and they were probably used in certain ritual activities. In the pits and around them were found numerous pieces of imported red-figured Attic vessels, as well as locally painted and grey-baked Early Antique ceramics, along with various forms of bronze jewellery (fibula pins, buttons, weights, a lead projectile etc.



Bronze fibulae and a lead projectile with an inscription, as part of the metal findings related to the cult activities on Kale

The earliest findings emerged in the 5th century BC, while the most recent ones in the first decades of the 3rd century BC. Thus, the earliest period corresponds to the time of the demolition of all previously mentioned towns in the Skopje area. All of them were destroyed during the invasion of the Celts from the north, after which life in the entire Skopje region was not restored until the time of the founding of Roman Scupi and the establishment of Roman culture in Macedonia.

Regarding the Skopje Fortress-Kale, the following occurrences in the vertical stratigraphic sequence are positioned directly over the level layer and of Early Antique material and represent buildings of the first founded medieval settlement.

KALE 6 (10th – 13th CENTURY)

The sixth settlement on the Skopje Fortress- Kale is, in fact, the first medieval fortification. This settlement gradually grew into a genuinely urban political and religious centre, and along with the seventh settlement, represent medieval Skopje, more precisely, its so-called Upper Town.

The sixth settlement occupied the entire available space on the Fortress and was protected by means of a unique fortification system, built according to the highest standards and construction techniques of the time. It was repeatedly occupied, destroyed and rebuilt (rebuilt a total of 11 times) but, nevertheless, provided continuous development in the 11th, 12th and 13th century. The urbanization and cultural values developed through two main stages named as: Samuil's stage (Kale VI-a) and Komneni stage (Kale VI-b).

Numerous remains of various residential buildings, sacred objects, handicraft workshops, waste finds, storage tanks, graves, and a significant number of movable finds (pottery, tools, jewels, weapons, coins, seals, etc.) were found in both stages of the settlement.

The houses of the earlier stage (10th-11th century) mainly consisted of light architecture consisting of wooden constructions, brick walls, roofs of organic material and floors of pressed earth coated with a layer of clay or wooden floors.

During the earlier stage (12th – 13th century) emerge houses, firmer constructions, built with bricks over stone foundations, covered with tiles and wood flooring over clay.

The remnants of the city rampart hold a dominant position in the sixth settlement, with various sufficiently preserved towers and entrances. Their manner of construction, as well as the implemented techniques and building materials most vividly reflect the two stages (Samuil's and Komneni).

The older stage- Samuil's (Kale VI-a) involves brickwork by means of a smaller broken stone cast in mortar, forming a solid core, whose outer surface was covered with select specially arranged larger stones.



Eastern rampart section featuring both construction stages



Southern rampart section of Samuil's fortress, interior

For the interior, in addition to arranged stones were used terracotta bricks for their separation.

Regarding the earlier stage-Komneni, the most prominent feature was the use of large stone blocks- cuboids, carved mostly from travertine. They provide the rampart with additional strength and give the external surface an appearance of a so- called *cyclopean wall*.

Along with this so- called cyclopean style of masonry, a distinctive pink water-proof mortar was also in use, after which this stage came to be known as the *pink stage*.



The structure and masonry of the eastern rampart of the so-called Komneni stage



A section of the entrance to the north- eastern tower featuring the so-called cyclopean masonry and the internal side of the rampart with pink mortar joints

The pink mortar was not only a significant building element, but a chronological benchmark, as well. It was only used for a short period of time, usually for the purpose of binding the brick joints by means of a specific technique, in the buildings attached on the inside of the wall, and the floors of those buildings, as well.

On the floors of these buildings, and in the layers immediately above them, were discovered coins from the first decades of the 12th century, mostly from the period of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) and John II Komnenos (1118-1143). Earlier layers are associated with the so- called Samuil's stage. Among other things were discovered coins from the 11th century. Especially impressive are the coins of Basil II, as well as the so-called *anonymous folles* of the 10th century, as the oldest medieval coins found on Kale.



North-eastern tower of the so-called Cyclopean rampart, view from the exterior

A distinctive feature of the sixth settlement is the north-eastern round tower, which was built in the so-called *cyclopean manner* in its more recent stage by means of large travertine blocks, and the pink mortar as a binding material. On the inner walls of the entrance room was executed a fresco painting of high quality. This room probably served as a chapel, and like the oldest ceramic material discovered in the tower i.e. the 30 Byzantine glazed bowls, dates from the 12th century.

The so-called cyclopean wall of the sixth settlement is the most distinctive landmark of Kale to this day with regard to its level of preservation and grandeur. It maintained its significance and function until the Ottoman period, probably until the time of the great earthquake of 1555. The earthquake caused the collapse of most of the western fortification wall. Its entire external side with the large travertine blocks fell into the Vardar riverbed, including the foundations and the base area of the wall, which is preserved only in the northwest corner of the fortress.



Blocks of collapsed battlement of the eastern rampart

In the same manner collapsed the uppermost blocks of the battlement of the eastern fortification wall discovered in this original position along the interior of the rampart.



A selection of rings, seals and other findings from Kale 6



A selection of Byzantine luxury glazed ceramics

Among the movable findings of the layers of the sixth settlement the most distinctive is the rare collection of the so-called glazed ceramics, as well as a series of findings of bronze jewellery, seals- pendants, weapons, tools, cult objects of bone, crosses- encolpions etc. Among the listed items especially distinctive by their artistic and archaeological features are the bone figure which bears a representation of a medieval ruler, believed to represent a chess piece, and a stone icon dedicated to St. Dimitri. The bone figure was discovered in a waste pit of the 11th century, wherefore, it could be interpreted as a representation of Tsar Samuil due to its manner of execution. In contrast, the stone icon of St. Dimitri was discovered as part of the furnishings of a 12th century house.



Various findings of religious and cult character

All movable finds indicate the extensive economic power of the city and its trade relations as well as relations to craft, cultural and religious centres in the Balkan region. The most vivid examples in this respect are the numerous and diverse coins and lead seals, and as the most extraordinary is considered the collection of a total of 115 silver and gold coins. In a small ceramic bowl, hidden in the wall of a violently demolished house were buried 69 silver Venetian coins and 46 gold Byzantine coins. In addition to its considerable numismatic value, this finding very vividly marks the end of the sixth settlement – the Slavic-Byzantine settlement, more precisely, the time of its conquest by the Serbs in 1282.



A collection of 115 Byzantine and Venetian coins and 5 lead seals of Kale 6

KALE 7 (13th – 14th CENTURY)

The settlement Kale VII had a new arrangement, with new buildings and new content, developing from the 13th- 15th century, as one of the royal settlements of the Serbian state. For this purpose, were undertaken a series of new building interventions in the Fortress and the Upper Town, while on the slopes, especially to the east and west were developed the Lower Towns (suburbium).

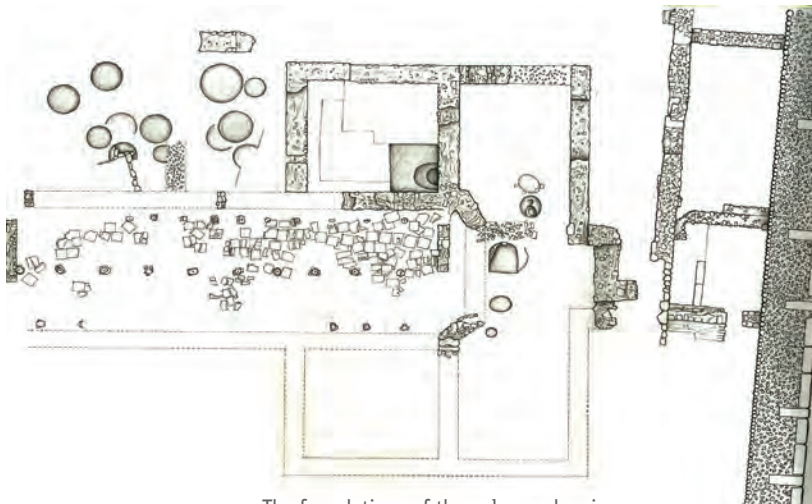


View of the remains of the royal palace



Internal partition wall of Kale VII, intercepted by the subsequent monumental Ottoman rampart

The central part of the Fortress was physically separated and further protected by the newly built interior rampart, which served as its partition wall over the entire west-east width. This provided additional protection of the central part of the fortress. In addition, a special access corridor was built for safe entry through the internal partition wall in the central part of the fortress, where the king's palace stood at the highest and most dominant position. These were, in fact, remains of a monumental building with an array of accompanying objects.



The foundations of the palace - drawing

Although it is considerably damaged, and at certain places even completely destroyed, it is salvaged to a sufficient extent to serve as a testimony of its character and crucial role for the settlement. Without a doubt, this was the most representative building of medieval Kale, more precisely Kale under medieval Serbian administration. The palace had a precise arrangement of the areas aligned around the central hall with pillars, which was restored only in the early Ottoman period.

Before its final defeat and destruction due to the Ottoman conquest of Skopje, the palace was probably emptied of all furnishings and values. Individual items were encountered in the accompanying structures and immediately outside the palace. Among them the most impressive is the gold female jewellery set (a pair of lunar earrings and a brooch) of the 14th century. They probably belonged to a court lady of the palace, hidden in the wall of a building next to the palace prior to the Ottoman invasion. A terracotta figurine of a woman in court attire is also impressive.

The figurine was probably imported from a western centre, but ended as waste in the ruins of the palace after the Ottoman demolition, whereby the surrounding terrain was levelled.



A collection of luxurious jewellery, earrings and a brooch and b-a terracotta figurine of a court lady

Among the other discovered buildings of that city, the most significant is the cross-shaped church with about 200 burials in and around it. It was the most dominant building in the southeast section of Kale VII.

Immediately to the east of the church were discovered buildings that were associated with it in some way, probably the remnants of the church residence. West of the church were discovered other buildings connected to each other as to form a single unit, which as a church complex extended over the entire southeast section of the Fortress.



Remnants of the church in the south- eastern corner of the Fortress



Foundations of the church -drawing

The complex was surrounded, more precisely, protected and separated from the other parts of the Fortress by a single enclosure wall. One entered by means of a separate entrance from the west, wherefrom the church was reached via the main street. The street was accompanied by different installations (drainage and supply canals, water collection systems, fountains etc.).



View from the south of the so-called Church Complex

Outside the city walls, at the space immediately in front of the northeast tower, were discovered the remains of another church. According to the nature of the findings, the architectural remains and their position, it was most likely a church dedicated to St. Nicolas, noted in the sources as a legacy to King Milutin, and was located next to the so-called *round pyrg* (round tower). Unfortunately, its northern half was completely destroyed due to the construction of the extensive subsequent Ottoman rampart.

The ordinary houses in the city under medieval Serbian administration were mostly built of unbaked brick - brick on shallow foundations of stone, wooden floors and most frequently a roof of tiles or straw. Mortar floors were also present, for interior as well as exterior surfaces. The city suffered the Ottoman conquest in 1392, causing considerable pain and destruction as noted by sources, and archaeology confirms and complements the picture of the events associated with the Ottoman conquest in a very vivid manner. Hence, were revealed numerous buildings, apparently forcibly demolished, accompanied by documented groups of skeletons of violently killed and unburied people. Most of them were concentrated along the internal partition wall and in the entrance hall, and were the last protection of the administration section with the king's palace.



The entrance corridor featuring a so-called Serbian level below, and an Ottoman level above

Among the numerous movable finds from the city (ceramics, jewellery, tools, coins, etc.) especially impressive are individual items of religious character, such as several types of crosses, church vessels, a mould for the casting of wooden crosses and a small wood icon.



Individual movable findings of religious character

In addition, among the profane objects are encountered specific forms of jewellery, such as individual rings and a rare type of a gold sectional bracelet. Without doubt, the bracelet represents the peak of medieval goldsmith craft, and like most other items, it was discovered in similar circumstances-among the ruins of an entirely burnt building in the southern area of the Fortress, which probably experienced the Ottoman invasion of the city.

Life in the Skopje Fortress fundamentally changed after these events and already in the 15th century the space on fortress was rearranged for the new Early Ottoman life established directly over the ruins of the previous, seventh settlement.

Individual luxury jewellery items

KALE 8 (15th – 17th CENTURY)

The eighth settlement on Kale developed from the 15th until the end of the 17th century, through two stages- Kale VIII- a and VIII-b.

During the first stage the city had a far more pronounced economic power and military strategic significance. Immediately after the Ottoman conquest were recovered the destroyed parts of the walls, towers and the main southern entrance. The entrance corridor from the central part of the city was repaired and restored. On its eastern, lower half accumulated a thick layer of waste material from the collapsed constructions, creating a higher level of the corridor convenient for the construction of a new entrance or internal gate. At the same level was also built a new cobblestone street that led to the interior of the Fortress.

Along the eastern and southern wall on the interior was built an array of new facilities (workshops, weapon workshops, warehouses, etc.).



The entrance corridor in the Ottoman period featuring cobblestone



Workshops and warehouses along the eastern rampart

Due to all modifications and adaptations the fortress received a more prominent military and craft appearance, while outside the walls, on the first terraces of the so-called Lower Town, an array of new public buildings such as mosques, hammams, inns and the like, were being built.

The finds from the buildings of the earlier phase of the eighth settlement confirmed the great military and strategic importance the fortress had at that time. The most common are the numerous findings of Early Ottoman coins and pottery, which was still designed according to previous Byzantine criteria. In some buildings were discovered furnishings and items as testimonials for the existence of metallurgical workshops, weapon workshops and blacksmiths, thus confirming the strong metallurgical activities on the Fortress in that period.

The waste material of their manufacturing activities was deposited in deep pits dug in the free areas, mostly in the northern part of the fortress, i.e. outside the internal partition wall.



Pottery from the Early Ottoman period



Weaponry and tools from the Early Ottoman period



A selection of imported ceramics and porcelain

The commercial importance and power of the city is best highlighted by the several examples of exclusive ceramics, such as the import of pure Chinese porcelain, purchased from the largest manufacturing centres of the Empire.

All discovered findings, and the arrangement of the internal space of that settlement emphasize Kale as an administrative and military craft centre of the Ottoman Skopje or Uskub.

The urbanization of the eighth settlement, that basically followed the old plan from the Serbian period, was preserved and functioned until the devastating earthquake in 1555.

With the earthquake in 1555 the economic power of the city dropped significantly, as evidenced by all the recorded buildings of that period. The most indicative historical record of the Skopje Fortress- Kale from the period that followed was a military report of the Austrian commander Piccolomini, who conquered and incinerated the city of Skopje in the fall of 1689. In it he noted that the Skopje Fortress was already halfway destroyed, poorly defended by 12 towers and a narrow defensive ditch along the east side. It took only 400 cavalymen to conquer the fortress in a single attack. However, shortly after a major restoration of the fortress was undertaken, noted, among other things, on a stone slab from 1700, which was built into the eastern defensive wall. It precisely marks the end of the 17th century as a period of great building activities featuring the new arrangement of the internal space of the Fortress- the new, more recent Ottoman settlement - Kale IX.

KALE 9 (18th – 19th CENTURY)

The urbanization of the settlement Kale IX features new content within the Skopje Fortress related solely to meet military needs, i.e. consisting entirely of military barracks.

The greatest construction activity was the expansion of the old moat (defensive ditch) by raising a large external rampart as a foundation wall, by means of which the Fortress was protected along its southern, eastern and northern side, and new monumental towers and entrances were placed at the southwest and eastern side of the Fortress. The entrance on the east side was built as the main entrance through the new external wall, where, by means of a wooden ramp one entered the interior of the Fortress from the eastern suburbium.



The great Ottoman foundation wall, view from the south



Main eastern entrance from the outside

As a reinforcement of the internal protection was built a new fortification partition wall. It was built beside, and partly over, the old partition wall from the Serbian period, which had been demolished and out of use for a long time. By means of this new partition wall was divided the interior barracks area of the Fortress, creating further protection of the central part of the fortress.

All major construction works were in compliance with the new, entirely military requirements. In that aspect were built new buildings for that purpose (military bedroom buildings, warehouses, barns and the like.)



Internal partition wall



Individual finds consisting of tools, weaponry and cannonballs of the Late Ottoman Kale



Various tobacco and opium pipes

In addition to the immovable finds of the ninth settlement, significant data for the military activities which took place in that area is given by the numerous movable finds. Among them, the most dominant are various types of iron tools, even more weapons and lead cannonballs for the cannons, as well as various types of ceramic pipes for smoking tobacco and opium. Numerous findings of characteristic ceramic and bronze vessels accompanied by appropriate and extensive epigraphic and numismatic material were also discovered.

KALE 10 (20th CENTURY)

The tenth settlement on Kale is basically a continuation of the same military activities and barrack appearance, but within an entirely new urbanization. The new plan involves the building of a series of new representative buildings, which will be fully used during the 20th century, until the catastrophic earthquake in 1963.

Regarding this settlement, as well as most of its buildings there is a multitude of documents, written and photo material, whereas the discovered finds and remnants only confirm and complement certain details.

The great military building in the northeast corner of the Fortress held a dominant position in that area. It rose high above the Byzantine wall by means of its interior side.

On the opposite side, in the north-western corner of the fortress was positioned the other, equally monumental, construction. Its last purpose was being the location of the old Archaeological Museum before its destruction by the earthquake in 1963. To the south, along the western fortification line was located the building that would eventually become the Historical Museum.

Another building is distinguished by its grandeur and function during the 20th century. It was located in the central part of the Fortress and was built directly over the remains of a large partition wall of the previous settlement.

In addition to the above mentioned monumental buildings, during the 20th century inside the fortress were built other, lighter temporary buildings (barracks, warehouses, etc.) on various occasions and for various purposes.

The large military barracks were in use until 1951, when the army finally abandoned the area of the Fortress. The preserved buildings were repurposed, mainly for museums, but that did not last long.

The strong earthquake in 1963 demolished or severely damaged almost all buildings on Kale, and after removing the ruins, the terrain on the interior of the Fortress was levelled and used as a park area until the beginning of the systematic excavations in 2007.

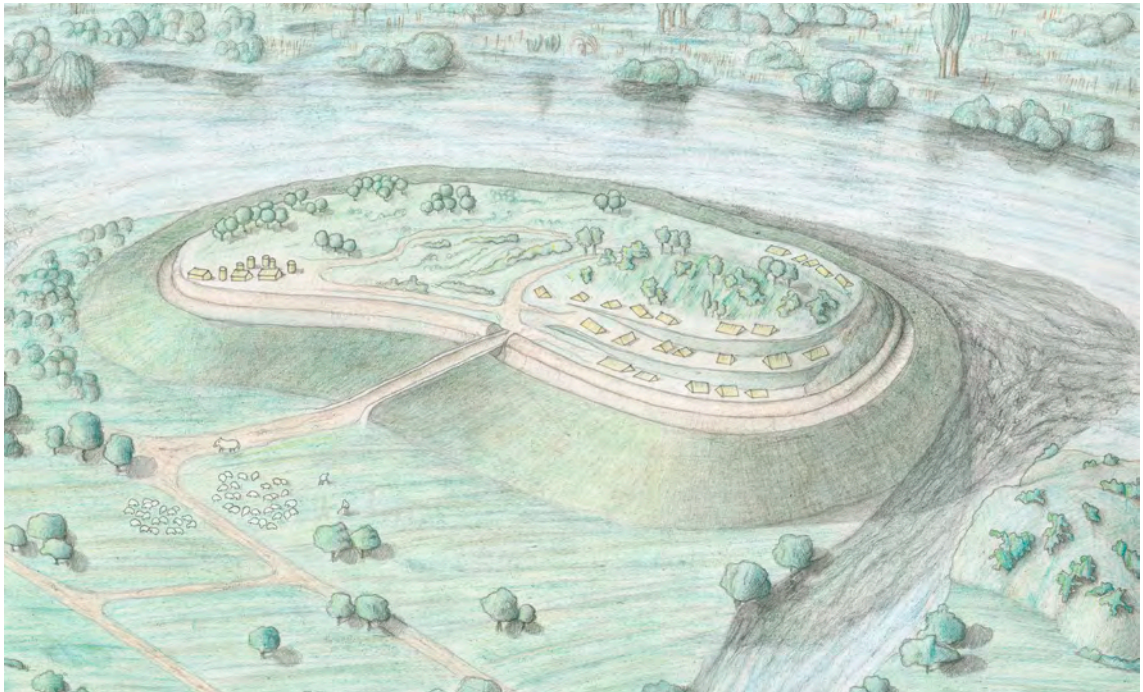


Some numismatic findings along with ceramic containers of the Late Ottoman period

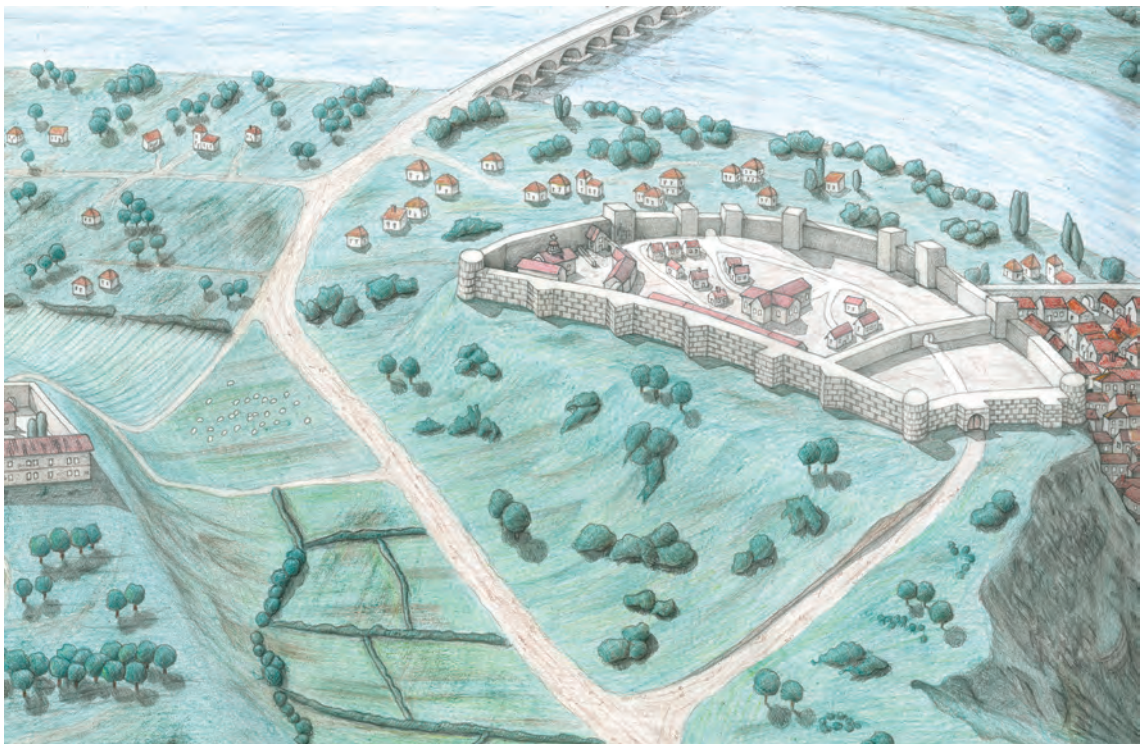


Selection of some epigraphic finds of the Fortress

Reconstructions of individual settlements on the Fortress based on the data from the archaeological examinations



Ideal Reconstruction of the oldest (initial) settlement of the Skopje Fortress or Kale I, a settlement from the Early Eneolithic period or the end of the 5th millennium BC



Reconstruction of medieval Skopje or Kale VII - XIV century BC



Reconstruction of the Skopje Fortress in the Late Ottoman period or Kale IX, from the 18th and 19th century



Reconstruction of the Skopje Fortress in the 20th century or Kale X, from the end of the 19th century to 1963

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Published by
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia
Cultural Heritage Protection Office

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Photos
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Graphic design and printing
PRINT PROJECT

Copies
200



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Cultural Heritage Protection Office

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

940:72(497.711)"653"

MITREVSKI, Dragi
Skopje fortress / Dragi Mitrevski ; [translation from Macedonian
Dance Ristovska Kostadinova ; photos Dragi Mitrevski]. - Skopje :
Cultural Heritage Protection Office, 2015. - 44 стр. : илустр. ; 25 см

Библиографија: стр. [41-42]

ISBN 978-608-4549-18-5

а) Културно историски споменици - Тврдини - Скопје - Среден век б)
Скопско кале
COBISS.MK-ID 99471882

