The most significant values
of the cultural and natural heritage

THE GREAT BATH OF THE LATE ROMAN THERMAL SPA IN THE VILLAGE OF BANSKO

Slavica Taseva
Vane P. Sekulov

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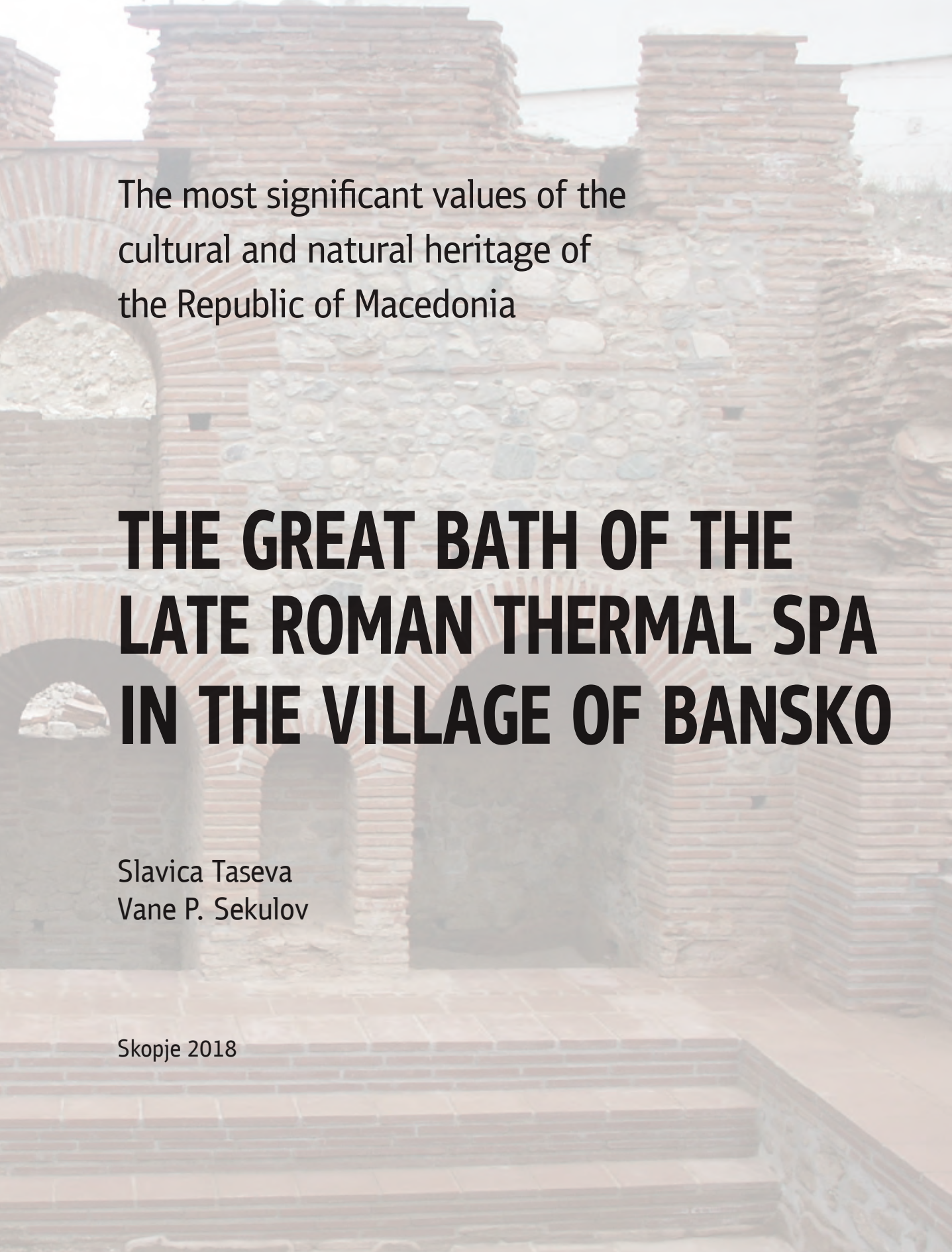

The most significant values of the cultural and natural heritage of the Republic of Macedonia

THE GREAT BATH OF THE LATE ROMAN THERMAL SPA IN THE VILLAGE OF BANSKO

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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 GREAT BATH OF THE LATE ROMAN THERMAL SPA IN THE VILLAGE OF BANSKO

"Baths, wine, love... spoil our bodies, but at the same time, give life."

The history of the Late Roman thermal spa in the village of Bansko in Strumica is very long, but its tradition is exceptionally vivid. The 15-century long slumber in the deep layers of the earth managed to conceal the data for the large thermal spa built near the hottest thermal spring in Macedonia, called Parilo, in the village of Bansko, in Strumica.
The 17th century Turkish geographer Hadji Kalfa kept records of the hot bath in the village of Bansko. In his notes, he states that "the village of Doljani is located in the area of Strumica, near

A monumental whole - Thermal baths

the city of Strumica … here in the cherry season gather all traders from land and sea, of all seven climates of the world … they erected thousands of tents … fowl, human and lion milk was sold … and women sold their secrets publicly." Here, "under the brim of the mountain flow numerous hot springs, and a few cold ones … in the bath under the stone archway, hot water runs from three small springs … with water so hot, you can boil an egg".

In the summer of 1901, this region was also visited by the geographer Peter Jankovich. In his book "Plaush and Strumica" he describes the geologic occurrence, as well as the physical and geographical circumstances of the Strumica Basin: "Here exist all possible natural conditions: an unusual fertility, abundance of water and a mild Mediterranean climate that contributes to the development of all types of crops making the Strumica Basin the most wonderful and enticing Macedonian area. In the crevice under Belasica is located an exceptionally strong and hot thermal bath, near the village of Bansko. Nearby a tekke (holy place), from a large spring (Vrelo), surges a large amount of very hot, and somewhat sulfuric, water with a temperature of 75° C. The spring Vrelo has a length of 2 m, width of 1 m, and is covered by mortar from the top. It spurts in such a large quantity, that it flows out from the spring like a torrent, where only one part leads into the hammam, while most of it spills out into the plain creating puddles and swamps. These indications point to the fact that this thermal bath is more powerful and hotter than all other thermae in Macedonia. The hot spring rushes from the amphibolic slates, rich in biotite, but above it, on the side of the tekke Basha, emerges an aplite wire in the form of a black and heavy rock, much like ore. The wire and the thermal water are connected to the large crevice under this side.

When, in 1978, under the slopes of the picturesque mountain Belasica, commenced the digging for the foundations of the hotel Tsar Samoil, walls of an older building, assumed to be a Turkish bath, built of stone and brick bound by means of lime mortar, appeared unexpectedly. That was the year of the discovery of the oldest and entirely preserved section of the Great bath of the Late Roman thermal spa, which after thirty years of archaeological research, acquired its present appearance.

The terraced descent of the ground in this part of the mountain Belasica is an indication of the existence of volcanic soil, which caused displacement of the terrain in a certain period in time and an occurrence of a landslide that led to an uncontrolled flow of water from the river and thermal water from the spring. For a long period of time, this natural disaster caused the uncontrollable flow of water to form layers of sand, earth and large rocks over the spa, burying it completely. However, the high level of conservation of the wall structures to a height of up to eight meters, the preservation of the thickness of the walls, as well as the method of construction, the roof structures, and the full floor construction in all areas, is accomplished owing to the natural conservation by means of the large deposits of sand. The limescale deposits, created due to the sedimentation of thermal water throughout the building, had "captured" a section of the spa, though their layering testifies to the long period of suffering of this monumental building.

The antique baths represent a remarkable complex from a technical, social, architectural and typological aspect. By visiting the baths every day, especially in the afternoon after work and before dinner, or by spending the whole day swimming, exercising, enjoying music, discussions and debates, citizens were actively involved in the shaping of social life in cities of the Roman Empire. This text will focus on the Great bath as a central facility in the Late Roman thermal spa. The remaining facilities, a total of four, are still in the process of research, which does not allow for

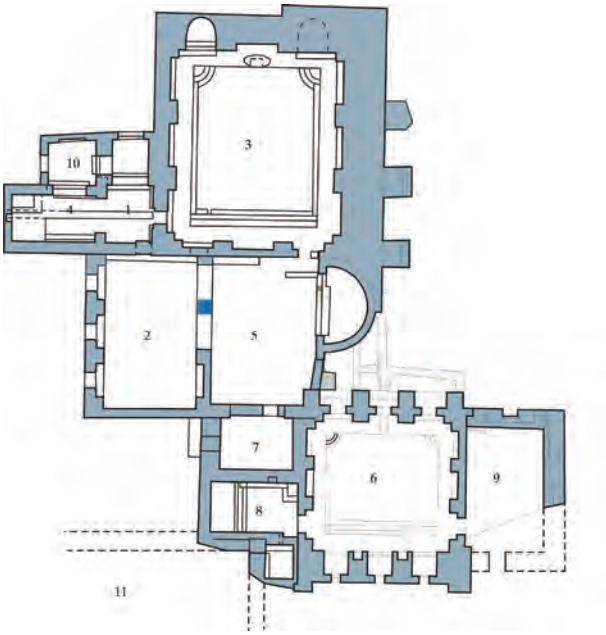
their functional and chronological determination. At the moment, that may only lead to speculation and hypothesis, which is not acceptable.

The Great bath of the Late Roman thermal spa in the village of Bansko, as a complex that was composed of several sections built at different stages, played a major role in social occasions. Citizens visited the spa every day, utilising the benefits of the thermal water and its healing powers and enjoying the ambience of the facilities that served as a place for healing, relaxation and socializing. This was fully confirmed by the detailed analysis of all discovered 11 sections of the Great bath, as well as the floors and the bathing systems. As a result of this analysis, it was concluded that they had been created over a long period of time, thereby changing their appearance, character and purpose.

Foundation of the Late Roman thermal spa

The size of the Bath, especially the level of preservation of its premises, can only be grasped by the use of figures that will demonstrate that. The technical characteristics of the Bath regarding the methods of building, content and functionality of the premises, as well as the archaeological findings, will also be defined, based on which a timeframe of development of the Bath can be given. This view is based on archaeological and architectural research conducted on the Bath in the last few years.

The Late Roman thermal spa in the village of Bansko near Strumica has not been entirely researched yet. Nevertheless, the quantity, and above all, the quality of existing research, by means of relevant information, creates a relatively precise picture of how the bath looked in certain periods of its existence, and how it evolved in space and time. There is a possibility that further research will lead to new information that will supplement, or even change, the current concept of the spa. At the very beginning, it is important to note that the Great bath from the Late Roman thermal spa in the village of Bansko conceptually differs from other spas of that period. The basic factor that makes this difference is the thermal spring located a hundred meters west of the spa which supplies it with water. The capacity and, above all, the high temperature of the water in the spring (72° C), eliminates the necessity for a praefurnium in the bath (a chamber for water heating) – a key element in the existence of other baths. At the same time, the lack of a praefurnium, as well as the direct supply with hot water, considerably changes the conceptual and functional structure of the other components. Some of them, while being inevitable components of baths where water had to be heated, were omitted here. Due to the absence of the praefurnium, the Great bath in Bansko does not follow the classical pattern which requires a hot and a warm area next to the area where the water is heated i.e. a caldarium (hot water premise) and a tepidarium



Foundation of the Great bath

(a premise with lukewarm water). In fact, in the traditional sense, these premises are absent here. Research has neither confirmed the existence of a frigidarium at the beginning (pool with cold water). It appears in the second phase, in addition to the new, larger apoditerium. The sudatorium (sweating premise) is the only present basic component. However, the great and, above all, cheap amount of hot water, contributed to an element absent in other baths – a large swimming pool, i.e. a *natatio*.

The bath observes a terraced descent into the terrain, causing a horizontal expansion in phases and a positioning of the structure in a north /east - south /west direction. The premises, however, which have taken different shapes, vividly illustrate the transition of different volumes that hold the balance of the building and emphasize its monumentality.

The conceptual layout of the premises in the Bath outlines their expansion into three compositional parallel axes. The axes follow the line of expansion of the isohypses in a horizontal direction and the configuration of the terrain in a vertical direction. The axes divide the premises according to the chronology of building: *the first axis* covers the premises numbered 1, 3 and 4 of the first and oldest phase of the Bath; *the second axis* covers the premises numbered 2, 5 and 7 of the second phase of construction and *the third axis,* the premises numbered 6, 8 and 9 of the third phase of construction of the Bath. However, the separation of the premises according to their axes of expansion, such as the warm and hot premises in axes 1 and 3 and the cold premises in the second axis, can also be observed. The warm premises include premises 3 and 6, as well as the sudatorium (premises 1, 4 and 10), while the cold premises include premises 2, 5 and 9.

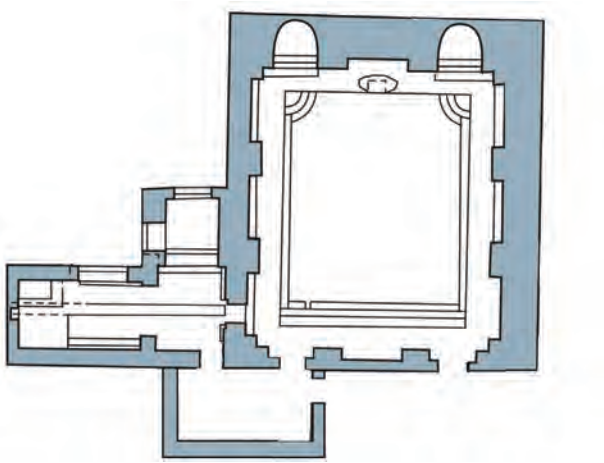
Chronological interpretation in the construction of the Bath

First phase in the construction of the Great bath

The architect of the Bath initially conceived and built a conceptually simple bath, primarily considering the richness of thermal water from the nearby spring. Reduced only to the necessary items, the Bath consisted of only four premises in the first phase: an apoditerium, a large pool and a two-part sweating premise.

The original apoditerium, with a southeast-northwest orientation, was 4.70 m long and 4.30 m wide. Its west wall is the only preserved section, with everything else below the floor level

of the premises from the second phase. The entrance was located on the north-western side and, now, it is located below the floor level, just underneath the south-western arch of the north-western wall, which is between the apoditerium and the frigidarium of the second phase. It is 1.05 m wide, preserved at a height of 0.35 m, which amounts to four rows of bricks. The apoditerium was vaulted by means of a semi-circular arch. Remains from the first section of the arch were observed on the south-western wall, as well as preserved bricks that were used to form the first section of a vault over its entrance. The apoditerium was connected to the other premises by means of two entrances on the south-western wall. The sudatorium was accessed by means of the southern entryway, whereas the western gate was used to directly enter the central premise with a pool - premise no. 3.



First phase

The central premise with a pool (premise no. 3) is the focal point around which, in the first and second phase, the entire complex of the bathpremise was formed. The dimensions of the premise amount to 12.80 x 10.70 m with a northeast-southwest orientation, covering an area of 137 m^2. The pool (natatio) of this premise measures 10.70 x 8.50 m on an area of 90.95 m^2, and a depth ranging from 1.30 to 1.55 m. The pool was accessed by means of two semi-circular stairs located in its southern and western corners. Along the entire length of the north-eastern side there is a staircase with three steps, while along each of the south-eastern and north-western sides, there is a seating bench for the bathers. Around the pool there is a walking track with a width of 1.05 m.

Premise No. 3

The walls in this premise have been preserved to a height of 8 m. They were built of stone and brick in lime mortar by implementing the techniques *opus incertum* and opus *mixtum*, like all the other walls of the Bath. The ones on the interior had a double layer of mortar, with a single layer of masonry mortar on the exterior, and an indentation line in the mortar around the rocks, forming a wall decoration. On the north-western and south-eastern wall there are three arched niches, each with a window

Premise No. 3, north-eastern wall

The southwest wall with two tubs and a pedestal for a fountain between them

opening and benches in the lower sections. On the north-eastern wall there are also three niches with a bench in the central premise and doors to the adjacent premises. Left and right from the south-western wall there are built-in semi-circular bathtubs, each with a niche placed above. Between the two tubs, there is a mortar pedestal with a central niche above it. There was probably a fountain on the pedestal which supplied the pool with water. Hot water was supplied by means of canals from the two tubs, as well as the canal from the southern corner of the premise. The gutter of the pool, which is still active, is located in the south-eastern corner.

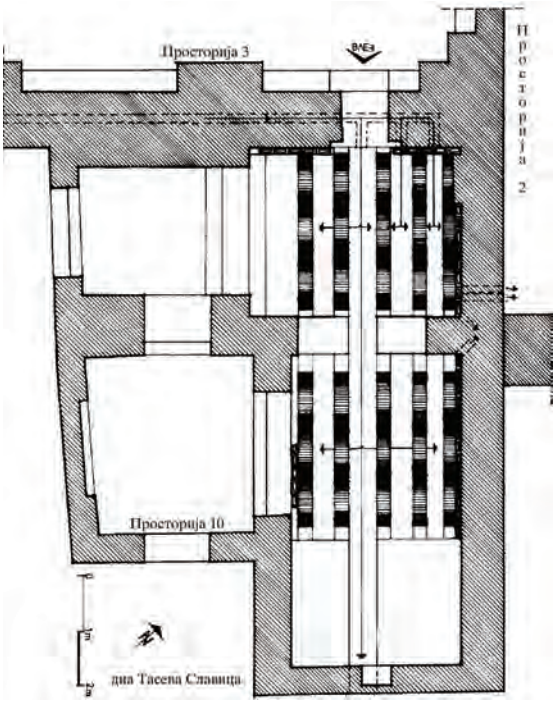
The roof of this premise was a brick vault. The vault extended on the shorter side between the walls of the premise i.e. on the north-eastern and south-western wall.

In the south-eastern corner of this premise there is a door to access the sudatorium.

The sudatorium (premises 1 and 4) is comprised of two premises with an area of 30 m² each, with a southeast-northwest orientation, connected by means of a great arch door. The focal point is the heating system with an arcade construction. The basis of the heating system is a central canal that follows the middle section of the sudatorium. It is 9.50 m long, 0.45 m wide and 0.70 m deep. In the western part of premise 1 there is a pool with an area of 6 m². On the north-eastern side of

Central canal of the heating system in Premises no. 1 and no. 4

Premise 1, bathtub



Foundation of the heating system

Roof construction of the Sudatorium

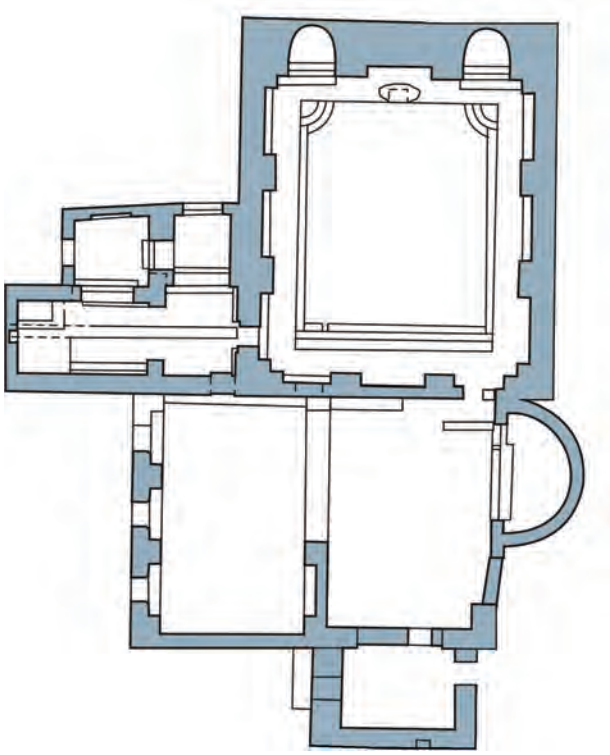
the canal there are two closed canals with three columns of three arches each, while from the south-western side there is one canal with two columns of three arches each. The colonnades beside the walls are at a distance of 10 cm due to the arrangement of the vertical tubules that heated the walls and the benches. The hot steam was administered by means of a continuous flow of a small amount of boiling water, which reached the sudatorium via the canal under the south-eastern wall of the central premise with a pool (premise no. 3). It spread throughout the entire heating system by means of the three openings in the central and north-eastern canal. The sudatorim is vaulted with a semi-circular and a cross-shaped vault, completely preserved over the north-western section to a height of 3.80 m, while only the initial parts of the semi-circular vaulting are preserved in the south-eastern section to a height of 4 m.

The system for heating the walls and benches of the Sudatorium

The roof construction of the sudatorium has been preserved and consists of two types of tegulas – arched on the vault surfaces and flat at the end of the arch, serving as a gutter.

Second phase in the construction of the Great bath

Undoubtedly, soon after building the Bath, the inefficiency of the apoditerium was brought to light. It was, therefore, almost completely demolished, with only its south-western wall saved. The two doors on the wall, used as entrances to the central premise and the sudatorium, were covered by mortar. In its place were built two new, larger premises, which met the new needs of the customers, both in terms of space and concept, in accordance with the period of their construction.



Second phase

The new apoditerium (premise no. 2) was built on the same area as the older one, but it covered a larger area (71.42 m²), measuring 10.35 x 6.90 m with a north-east-southwest orientation. The walls were preserved to a height of 5.70 m. There are three deep niches on the south-eastern wall near the windows. Next to the south-western, the north-eastern and in the niche of the north-western wall, are the seating benches.

Premise no. 2, foundation

Premise no. 2, north-western wall

The premise with a frigidarium was accessed through two large arcade portals on the north-western wall. The third arch, which is in the northern half, represents a niche with a seating bench.

The roof construction in this premise, of which there are only remnants, was a brick vault. The vault extended on the shorter end between the walls of the premises. The floor in this premise was severely damaged, but was paved with properly arranged bricks.

Northwest of the apoditerium was the premise with a frigidarium (premise no. 5). The premise has an area of 70.65 m², with preserved height of the walls of 6.10 m and a floor paved with

Premise no. 5, foundation

Premise no. 5, south-eastern wall

bricks. The main entrance to the Bath was in this very premise, on its north-eastern wall, whereas the entrance in the western corner was used to access the central premise with a pool (premise no. 3). Although there are no remnants of the roof construction, the size of the premise suggests that it was arched. The floor in this premise was paved with bricks, but is severely damaged. Under this level can be noticed another floor level, built of bricks with dimensions identical to those of the floor in premise no. 2.

Premise no. 3, south-western wall

In the north-western wall there is a semi-circular tub – piscina, arched by means of a half-calote. The bathtub has the following dimensions: length of 5.30 m, radius of 3.40 m, and depth of 1.15 m. It was only supplied with cold water by means of the canal on the north wall, which was drained by means of a drain on the south-western corner of the bathtub. Its walls were covered with a triple layer of very smooth masonry mortar, with traces of white paint on it, thus revealing the colouring of the walls. The floor of the tub is completely preserved and is paved by means of properly arranged bricks. The roof construction of the semi-calotte consisted of arched tegulas, whose original features had been preserved.

In addition to these newly built premises, in the second phase of construction of the Bath were added other, smaller buildings that increased and supplemented its functionality. Another premise with a tub for bathing (premise no. 10) was built for the needs of the sudatorium. The new facility covered an area of 9.60 m^2 with a preserved height of the walls of 3 m.

A new facility (premise no. 7), located in front of the central entrance to the bath, was also added.

Premise no. 10

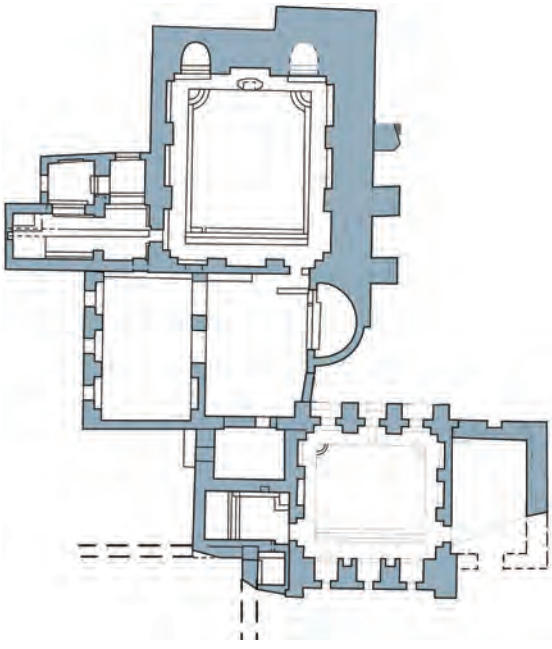
It covers an area of 17.50 m², with a preserved height of the walls of 4.50 m. The floor formed a tub with a drain, covered by means of and a finely smoothed dual-layer of mortar of an intense red colour, which continues along the walls forming an arch. The building phases of this premise follow its renovations and constructions. Judging by the remains of the vaulting construction of the south-eastern and north-western wall, the roof of this premise represented a vault.

Following the extension of the premises in the second phase, probably very soon after, the Bath seems to have entered its own crisis. The spa loses its economic power. The new additions are a far cry from the former glory. The central entrance is sealed, and, instead, moved towards the northwest. The floor level of the entry premise (premise no. 2) is elevated, built in a much harsher fashion, with benches made of stone and earth, placed beside the south-eastern and the north-eastern walls. The new entryway is built on the north-western wall, with a door, much smaller and less prominent than the previous one. In the premise with a frigidarium the entire floor is paved again, but with smaller bricks arranged in no particular order. The damages on the floor in the apoditerium are patched with fragments of bricks.

Problems arise with the statics as well, especially in the central premise with a pool (premise no. 3), where the vault pushes against the walls, causing a pressure they cannot resist. In order to reinforce the walls that hold the arch on the south-western wall, the windows and the bathtub from the western corner were covered by mortar, whereas on the north-western wall was added a new wall along the entire exterior length. When that did not help, four counterforts were built on the outside. The floor in the apoditerium most definitely weakened.

None of these interventions gave the expected results, and the problems with the functioning of the bath became so serious, that a radical decision was made – to close the older part of the building. The front door was closed and next to it new premises were built. A new wing that continued to exist independently was added.

Third phase in the construction of the Great bath



Third phase

In the third phase, the focal point is, again, the premise with a pool - premise no. 6.

The premise measures 9.5 x 8.8 m and on an area

Premise no. 6

Premise no. 6, pool

of 83.6 m ^{2}, with a southeast-northwest orientation, with preserved height of the walls of 6.15 m. The surface of the pool is 56.88 m^2. Its depth ranges from 1.21 to 1.38 m in the north corner, where the water drain is located. The bottom of the pool is paved with bricks, while the side walls of the pool are covered with masonry mortar. In each of the south and west corners there is a half-circle staircase, and over the entire north-east side extends a staircase with four steps.

Components of the pool area were also the tubs in the three niches of the north-eastern wall of the premise. They were 1.40 x 1.67 m., paved with bricks, with an estimated incline toward the north corner, where the water drains were located. The depth is 0.90 m beside the west wall to 0.98 m in the north-eastern corner, where the water drain is located. The tub walls were covered with mortar. On the wall, above the

Premise no. 6, north-eastern wall with bathtubs

Premise no. 6, bathtub

niches, there was a vaulted window, which was half-closed by means of a partition wall. Above the window, there were three other rectangular windows. Their distinctive feature is that each of them was placed at a different angle to enable sunlight throughout the day. On the opposite wall, there were two other windows, also at different angles. The roof construction was a brick vault extending from the north-eastern to the south-western wall. The external appearance of the north-eastern and south-western walls was architecturally and aesthetically created by means of forming blind niches, probably for placing sculptures, as well as by double-vaulted arched niches, with benches to serve as resting places for the visitors of the bath.

Premise no. 6, south-western wall

There were niches on the other three walls, as well. The gate was located in the eastern niche, whereas the seating benches were built in the other two niches. In the niches of the south-western wall were placed windows. In the central niche, under the window, is the water supply canal, whereas in the other two were placed seating benches.

Premise no. 9

Premise no. 9, floor

Northwest of the premise with a pool is the new apoditerium - premise no. 9. The dimensions of the premise are 7.35 x 5.05 m, on an area of 37.12 m². The floor is paved with brick, and throughout the north-western wall is the canal for water supply of the baths and of the main pool in the central premise. This premise is connected with the central premise by means of an entrance from the eastern corner. The entrance to the apoditerium, as well as the entire complex of the third phase, is located on the south-western wall. The floor is completely preserved and is paved with properly arranged bricks. The roof construction of this premise is unknown due to the insufficient preservation of the walls and the lack of data related to vaulting.

Entrance into Premise no. 6 and Premise no. 8

Premise no. 8

Southeast from the premise with a pool (premise no. 6), through the eastern door, was accessed an adjacent premise - premise no. 8. The premise has a southeast-northwest orientation, with a length of 6.60 m, width of 4.60 to the southeast, and 7.05 m to the northwest. In fact, this premise was composed of three smaller, functionally connected, premises. The south-eastern premise represents a tub with a brick and mortar floor, and mortar joints on the edges of the

floor with the walls. The north-western premise is paved with brick, and has a small manhole in the western corner. The northern premise is the smallest and has a mortar floor. In this premise, was drained the waste water from the bath that entered by means of a canal on the western wall. In the northern corner of the premise there is an opening at a floor level by means of which the water continued to drain. The premise had a semi-circular vault with visible remains of vaulting of the south-western wall. Under the archway over the premise / bath there was another vault that arched the bathtub in a direction of its length. The northern premise, which was the smallest, was arched by means of a semi-circular arch toward the remains of the vaulting of its north-western wall.

These premises functioned as a sudatorium, analogous to the sudatorium of the first phase of construction of the bath. The floor substructure in these areas has not been researched, therefore it is unknown whether here existed a floor heating system.

From the northeast side of this premise is attached another premise, probably a lot larger, judging by the width of the discovered walls which amount to 1.40 m. The two walls that form the western corner have only been revealed to a length of two meters, therefore it is difficult to determine the type of facility. But it is certain that the bath continues to move toward the northeast.

The construction experiences technical problems in its third phase as well, especially with the tubs in the three niches on the northeast wall. They stop being used very quickly, and are levelled with the floor of the walking track around the pool. Both of them are suspensuras of fragmented bricks, while the third is simply covered with mortar. Problems probably arise due to the flow of water that reached them by means of the canals from the north-western and north-eastern wall of the apoditerium. At the same time, there was an issue with the water supply of the main pool, so a new canal was opened through the central window in the west wall.

The builders of these types of facilities, i.e. baths had a profound knowledge of the structures made according to the standards and practices of modern science and technology, nearly 2,000 years later.

By analysing the proportions of the walls of premise number 3, were discovered answers pertaining to several features, such as: their design, the height and size of the windows, as well as the line at the beginning section of the vault construction of the premise. When designing, the architect used a modular network with a predefined module measuring 4.40 x 4.40 m.

Roman architects had an incredibly profound knowledge of construction, in general, and a tremendous courage to bridge long distances with arched structures carried by walls where windows were placed. This is confirmed in the Great bath in the village of Bansko.

The thick walls built of stone and brick which carried the vault structures built of brick, the precisely levelled floors of handmade bricks near the drain canals, as well as the hypocaust system for heating the floors and walls designed in accordance with the exact rules of Vitruvius, the layout of the premises in accordance with their function and purpose, and finally, the arrangement of glazed windows on the walls for temperature maintenance and supply of sufficient light in the premises, suggest the use of properly incorporated architectural elements into the architectural edifice, in compliance with its purpose.

The baths of the Roman period, as a space for a man's physical and spiritual relaxation, had to meet the standards for full enjoyment in the thermal water, utilizing its healing powers. It was designed in a way that its atmosphere was experienced by means of the arched pool premises,

decorated with sculptures on the walls, and the misty air of the steam of hot water, breathing it in the dusk of the day. The dimmed light from the lamps set high in the niches of the walls, created an incredible mystery of the space.

Although the Bath from the Roman period in the village of Bansko is not large, or luxurious, it is, nevertheless, unique in its preservation and manner of functioning, having the honour of being the only one of its kind in the Balkans and beyond.

The discovery of this bath commenced from its uppermost wall sections, following them to the floor and the floor substruction. The manner of conservation has been the same for thirty years. Each year, in continuance, are performed conservation and restoration interventions of all architectural elements using identical and suitable materials in order to capture the reliability of its constructive style. By means of the conducted conservation interventions, the appearance of the bath, as well as all the elements, is being preserved, which may serve as indications for the full or partial reconstruction and revitalization of the bath. Given the fact that the bath is still active and represents a tourist attraction of its kind as the only bath of the 3rd century AD with completely preserved premises, it still plays a great role and deserves the respect it had in the past.

Movable archaeological finds

In an attempt to capture the appearance of the Great bath, in accordance with the conservation research, a reconstruction of a three dimensional image that visually represents the Bath with all its grandeur and excellence has been designed.

Analysis of the date, existence and cease of functioning of the Great bath

The movable archaeological finds, which are often an indication of determining the period of existence of a certain construction, do not correspond with the monumentality of the building, especially in the premises from the first two construction phases. Usually, the most commonly encountered items are ceramic items. They represent typical Roman pottery of grey, and less frequently, red colour. Among the most commonly found items are small cups and drinking vessels and containers with twisted handles on the recipient that mimics bronze kettles. All these items

belong to the 3rd and 4th century AD. The most frequently found decorative items are dishes with printed ornamentations. The small bronze statues of Mercury belong to this time frame, and one of them is dated even earlier.

Coins are very common, but, unfortunately very rusted and unintelligible, due to the influence of the thermal water, which is very aggressive. They are mostly found trapped in limescale deposits, oftentimes, in groups of up to thirty pieces together. In the spring, which supplied the Bath with hot water, were found a considerable number of coins dating from a period of the 4th century until the 3rd century AD. After this period, coins or other material from a latter period has not been found. The coins are fascinatingly grouped into facilities and phases. In the pool of the central premise of the first phase were discovered the coins of Alexander Severus of 231-235 AD, Maximinus Thrax (Maximinus I), dated from 235/6 AD, and a memorial coin dedicated to Alexander III, while in the mortar-covered niche was found a coin of Valerian I of 253-260 AD. In the pool of the third phase were found coins of Maximian I of 295/6 AD, Diocletian, from 295-298 AD and Licinius I of 320 AD. An interesting fact is that in the premises of the second phase, were not discovered any coins.

The coin of Maximinus I should be particularly singled out, discovered during the conservation work in the central premise of the first phase under one of the bricks of the walking track around the pool, in a specially created bearing. It is obvious that this coin was intentionally left behind, in order to mark the period and the ruler when the Bath was established. Maximinus I, the first military king and a king who never set foot in Rome, ruled for just a little over two years after his murder in 238 AD. All his coins were re-minted and ceased to be used.

If the occurrence of the coin of Maximinus I is taken as relevant and reliable data, then the Bath was built in the fourth decade of the 3rd century AD. In that period, the Roman Empire went through the so-called "Crisis of the Third Century", also known as the "Military Anarchy" or "Imperial Crisis" that lasted between 235 and 284 AD, caused by invasions of the barbarians, internal civil wars and the fight for the throne. At the beginning of the crisis, in the fourth decade, two emperors, whose coins we find precisely in the first construction phase, lose both the throne and their heads - in 235 AD, Alexander Severus by Maximinus I, to whom the same happens less than 3 years thereafter. Nevertheless, due to the fact that these events took place somewhere in Germany and in completely different parts of the Empire had no significant impact on the area around the Late Roman thermal spa, which still had enough financial power, but also highly developed criteria for the establishment of such a facility with exceptionally high aesthetic and architectural values.

However, this area could not bypass the events that shook the Roman Empire for a long time. It is possible that the crisis which is evident at the end of the second architectural phase of the Bath is a consequence of the overall state that ruled the Empire. It is probable that the economic decline of the Bath, as well as the damages and the improper repairs, can be linked to the barbarian incursions, which were a common affair in the Roman Empire during the entire second half of the 3rd century AD. The Goths, who ravaged Macedonia in 267 AD, most likely travelled near the Late Roman thermal spa. The following year, Emperor Gallienus managed to defeat them near Nish, and in 271 AD Aurelian banishes them across the Danube. The consolidation of the Empire commenced with that date, and, moreover, with the advent of Diocletian on the Roman throne in 285 AD, who extended the lifetime of the Kingdom by means of his complex reforms. The third

construction phase of the Bath probably took place during his great restoration of the Empire, which he administered alongside Galerius.
If the first construction phase is outlined in the fourth decade of the 3rd century AD, and the third phase in the last decade of the 3rd or the transition into the 4th century AD, then it makes sense to place the second phase between these two time intervals. Characteristic of the third quarter of the 3rd century AD, in all Roman provinces in the Balkans and North Africa, is the following: the demolition of the small apoditerium of the first phase and the establishment of a new, much larger one, which is connected to the frigidarium by means of a gate, thus forming a mutual facility; when the apoditerium is increased in size and acquires a special place in the entire compositional pattern of the baths and when the frigidarium expands more toward the apoditerium losing its position as the most prominent facility. The technique of building the corners, edges, windows, doors and all other trouble spots without the use of stone, but by means of a massive use of brick is characteristic of this Late Roman period.

Three-dimensional animation of the Great bath

Lastly, in the southern bathtub, positioned in the centre of the premise of the first phase has been discovered a small deposit of coins ending with Valentinian I (364-375 AD), whereas the most numerous (68%) are the coins from the second half of the 4th century AD. Do these small deposits testify that here, in the immediate vicinity of the Late Roman thermal spa, passed the Huns of Attila in 375 AD, as well as the Goths after them, in their victory at Adrianople in 378 AD?
By means of the archaeological research from 2007, which was conducted outside the Great bath,

among other items, were discovered many coins of which the latest were the coins of Flavius Victor (387-388 AD) and of the early years the rule of Theodosius II (402-450 AD). Consequently, it is very likely that the life of the Bath and the entire spa was extinguished sometime in the first half of the 5th century. It probably suffered again, this time without return, in one of the many barbaric invasions, plundering expeditions and destructions of that period in the Macedonian segment of the Eastern Roman Empire.

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Slavica Taseva
Vane P. Sekulov

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