



The most significant values  
of the cultural and natural heritage

# VISOKA AND STARO BONCE

*CENTER OF THE KINGDOM OF PELAGONIA  
AND THE ROYAL TOMB OF PAVLA CUKA*



Viktor Lilchikj Adams

Antonio Jakimovski

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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.

# VISOKA AND STARO BONCE

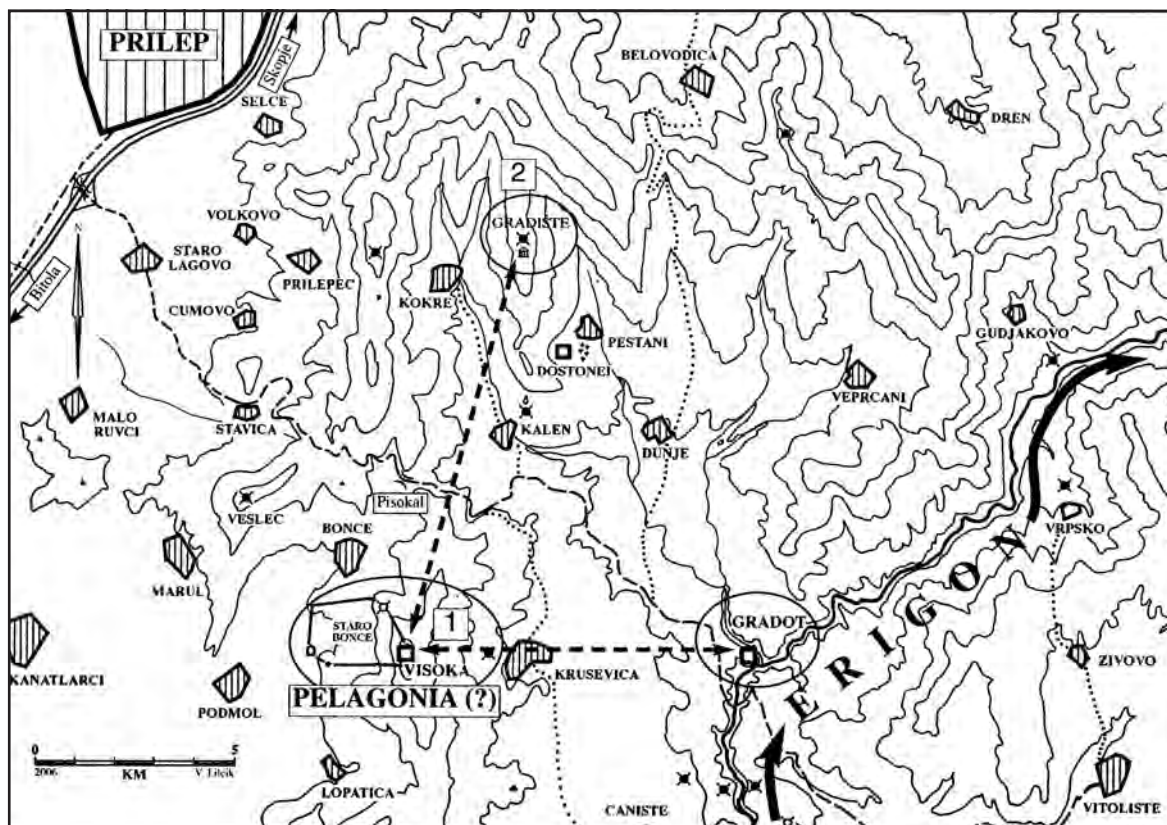
## *CENTER OF THE KINGDOM OF PELAGONIA AND THE ROYAL TOMB OF PAVLA CUKA*

### I. THE CITY OF PELAGONIA IN HISTORICAL SOURCES

The ancient Pelagonians mainly inhabited the area along the left bank of the mid- flow section of the river Erigon (Crna Reka) in Pelagonia and Mariovo. In Early Antiquity they formed about seven local centers in present - day villages of Crnobuki, Brod, Suvodol, Bonce and Krusevica, Prilepec, Varos, Gorno Selo. Which of the royal families of the above mentioned centers acquired the most favourable circumstances to prosper and assert its authority over all Pelagonians?

I assume the family that controlled the ancient road artery, the connection with the Vardar Paionians and the water borderline - Erigon to the Lynkestes. In the Iliad this is depicted by the sentence: "that son of Peleus leapt with his long-shadowed spear on Asteropaeus, Pelegon's son, eager to slay him. Pelegon was the son of Periboea, Acessamenu's eldest daughter, and the broad deep-swirling River Axios". The connection between Pelagonia and Paeonia was undoubtedly the river Erigon. Ever since ancient times, a highway went along its valley, as noted by Arrian. On the other hand, archaeologists documented a concentration of archaeological sites from Iron Age and Antiquity in the wide area of Mariovo, but the Romans established a completely different road connection, known from Peutinger's map, due to the many road turns and the unpredictable Erigon. That road went through the cities of Heraclea - Ceranus - Euristo - Stopis.

The search for the royal center of the ancient Pelagonians gradually narrows. The ancient city of Pelagonia is observed in the historical sources. An epigraphic monument from Athens, dating from 365/4 BC, mentions a Pelagonian king. Another monument, dated two years later, mentions Menelaus of Pelagonia who received the title proxeny and euergetes from Athens because he gave Athens financial and military aid. The 3rd century BC provides no historical information, but after that, referring to the following period, the 2nd century BC, the historian Titus Livy cited the city Pelagonia as the center of Macedonia Fourth (ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΩΝ ΤΕΤΑΡΤΗΣ). According to Livy, this is the place where the Assembly of the citizens of the Fourth Macedonian Merida met.



Map 1

Strabo, who worked at the time of the Roman emperor Augustus, is the first to appoint Pelagonia as a city. According to him "... the river Erigon flows through the countries of the Illyrians, Lynkestes, through Pelagonia and leaving the city to the left side, flows into the Axios." Then, on seven gravestones dating from the 1st and 2nd century AD (found in different places: in Mariovo at the Crna Reka, Scupi, Rome, Salona, Aquincum at Danube, Lambesis in Africa, Mainz), the city Pelagonia is mentioned as the origo for the origin of the war veterans, who after gaining the Roman honour *ius italicum* (Italic law), were enrolled in the Roman tribe Maecia.

Perhaps the information of the geographer Ptolemy of the 2nd century AD for the Pelagonian Audarist, Stobi denotes the three cities: Pelagonia, Audarist, Stobi, because there is no conjunction and between Audarist and Stobi.

Zosimus's information on the great breakthrough of the Goths and Heruli from 268 BC when they devastated the areas around (the cities) Doberus and Pelagonia follows next.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century AD provide no historical information, but in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, more precisely, in 526/7 AD, in his list of cities - Synecdemus, Hierocles mentions Pelagonia within the list of cities of the province Macedonia Secunda.

Medieval sources mention a city by the name of Pelagonia, as well.



This information clearly indicates that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the region of Pelagonia existed a kingdom of the Pelagonians with its own capital ruled by a king. The kingdom extended over the northern plateau of Pelagonia and in Mariovo. Why did the Romans choose precisely Pelagonia as the city center of the westernmost Roman Merida - the region Pelagonia after defeating Macedonia in 168 BC and after its administrative division into four meridas (sections) Probably because the Pelagonians controlled the passages to the valley of the Axios, and perhaps because during the conflict with Antigonid Macedonia the Pelagonians remained reserved. Of course, this view is debatable, but continuously during the following 20 years until 148 BC the city of Pelagonia was the administrative center of the vast expanse of the entire plateau, and even of the entire upper flow of the river Haliacmon (Bistrica). In the following centuries the city image of Pelagonia continues to shimmer until deep in Late Antiquity. A validation of this view is the recruitment of the boys – legionaries in Pelagonia, and also the urban character of the city in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD according to Hierocles.

## **II. HYPOTHESES FOR THE UBICATION OF THE CITY OF PELAGONIA**

The search for the city took place in two phases. The first phase lasted from 1835 to 1954 by the following researchers: W. Leake (1835-1841), L. Heuzey - H. Daumet (1876), A. Wace - A. Woodward (1911), A. Keramopulos (1932), N. Vulic (1938), I. Venedikov (1943).

The second phase took place from F. Papazoglu until today. The historian F. Papazoglu sought for the city of Pelagonia along the Erigon in Mariovo, near Kumanicevo, Belovodica, Prilepec, Cocre and Pestani, relating it to the referral of the *city* on the ara discovered between Cocre and Pestani. The parents of Alexandra from Pella erected this ara in honour of the goddess Artemis and dedicated it to the city. F. Papazoglou thought it was Pelagonia. However, in recent literature a different city was ubicated at this particular area- Dostonei at the site of Pestera, monastery St. Ilija, village of Pestani.

The historian Tomo Tomovski in 1967 located the Early Antique city of Pelagonia near Bukri and the medieval city of Pelagonia on the site of Gradiste near the village of Slivnica.

The archaeologist Tome Janakievski in the period between 1979 -1997 hesitated between the villages of Suvodol and Crnicani.

The archaeologist Ivan Mikulcic laid out four proposals: near Suvodol, Mojno, Prilepec and Varos, to finally point to Mojno.

The archaeologist V. Lilcijk, who started his research regarding this issue in Doliste near Prilepec back in 1996, after familiarizing himself with this region in the last decade, settled for the complex of sites Visoka and Staro Bonce, situated among the villages of Krusevica, Bonce, Podmol and Lopatica, along with the co-author of this paper, A. Jakimovski.

The complex of archaeological sites around Visoka has been known to professional archaeological literature for a long time, but only in fragments. I. Mikulcic regarded the high city acropolis on the peak Visoka (Kjave, Cuculot) in 1976 as a Late Antique refuge (shelter), and later in 2002 as a fortification with an area of 0.2 hectares. In 1996 K. Kepeski, L. Kepeska and B. Kitanoski are first to come forward with information in professional literature stating that there is also an Early Antuque cultural horizon on Visoka.

### III. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE VISOKA

An important element in the quest for the location of the city Pelagonia is the etymology of the name Pela - gonia, which means: πέλαγος - sea view / plain and γωνος - side / angle. According to these interpretations, we can assume that the name Pelagonia does not indicate a capital on a flat space (such as Pella) as much as it does a city on a high hill that dominated or ruled the plain Pelagonia.

This interpretation of the toponym in relation to the complex of sites Visoka – Staro Bonce probably eliminates a significant site in Mariovo at the very beginning - the site Gradot (the city) i.e. the village of Manastir situated over a wide plateau on a hill above the left bank of the Crna Reka. The city area intra muros is 230 by 230 meters on 4 hectares with a notable existence throughout the Iron Age, Early and Late Antiquity, until the Middle Ages.

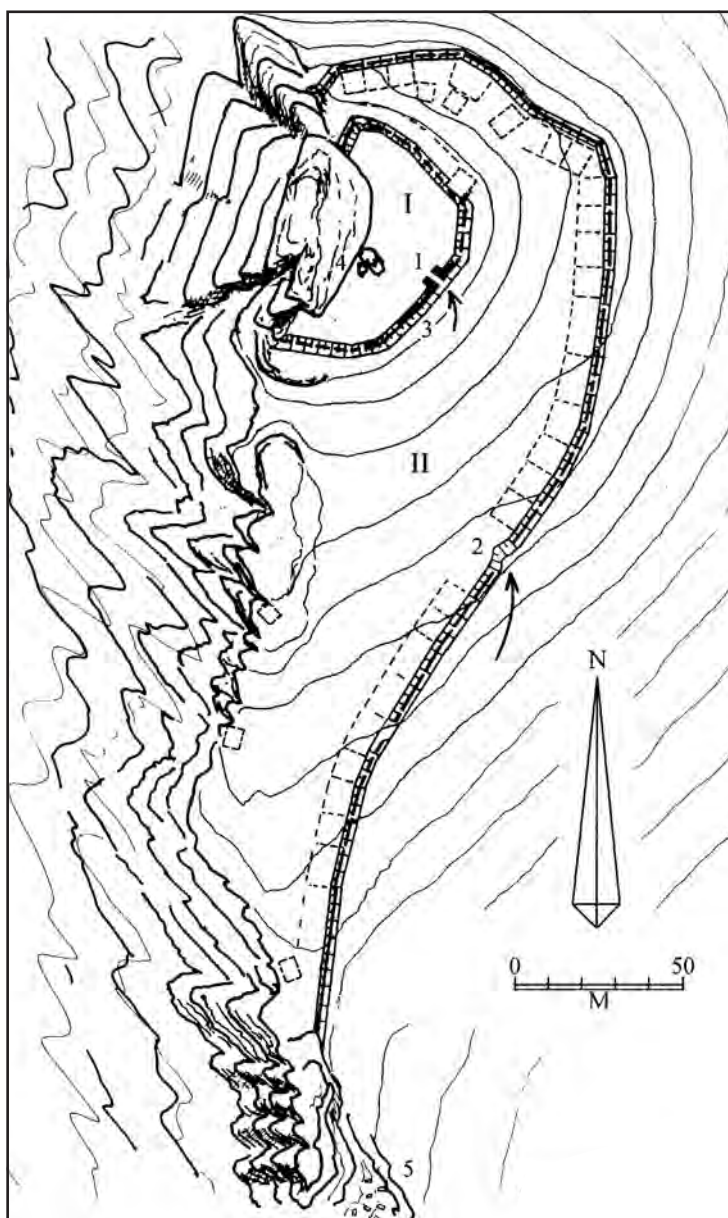
In the quest for the location of the city of Pelagonia our attention was captured by the remains of the monumental tomb on Pavla Cuka at the southwestern corner of Staro Bonce on the borderline with the villages Bonce and Podmol. Among the renowned tombs of the so-called Pelagonian or Macedonian type discovered near the villages of Gorno Selo, Varos, Bonce, Suvodol, Lokveni and others, only the monumental tomb in Staro Bonce was executed by careful construction implementing flat processing of stone blocks. This exclusivity is commented by I. Mikulcic in 1966 as follows: "... it is certainly the strongest period of Pelagonia, a time of still independent local princes (basilei), and the monumentality of the mentioned tomb allows that it could have been erected by the only one such person whose power it was supposed to exalt." Further below he thinks that, perhaps, Menelaus the Pelagonian himself was the one who brought an Athenian (or Amphiopolian) architect to Pelagonia that may have constructed the tomb of Pavla Cuka.



*Visoka - view from the northwest*

A combined archaeological team of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje and the NI Institute and Museum - Prilep, managed by Prof. Victor Lilcickj, PhD, which explored the areas of Pelagonia and Mariovo in the period from 2004 to 2008 in search of the position of city Pelagonia, focused on the archaeological complex of sites around the mountain peak Visoka.

Selecka Planina (Selecka Mountain) enclosed the plateau Pelagonia to the east thus forcing the river Erigon (Crna Reka) to make a wide arc to the south before it starts its long and winding road through Mariovo towards Sredno Povardarje (mid - flow of the Vardar). The crest of Selecka Planina (Selecka Mountain) has many peaks higher than 1,000 meters. It is arranged into three sections. The northern section is also known as Mount Dren with the highest peak Studenica (1663 m). The middle massif has the peak Visoka (1472 m) and the southern - the peak Dzhaula (1434 m). Ever since ancient times there were roads from Pelagonia to Mariovo between the mountain massifs.



Plan of Visoka

The south passage was Preslop (936 m), nowadays between the villages of Dolno Oreovo and Makovo. It is obvious that due to this passage and road line, in the Antique period grew the town that we are exploring at the site of Kale, Dolno Oreovo and certainly the early Christian basilica at the site Slanec near Suvodol.

The north passage between Dren and the central massif Visoka splits into two - to the northwest toward Pelagonia is the higher passage Sliva (1136 m), 1.8 km to the southeast, towards Mariovo is the passage Pisokal / Momirica (960 m). From the higher passage on the west begins the long Topolcani Barrier, on the route from the peak Veslec to the peak Dupen Kamen over the village of Topolcani, which separates Pelagonia. The Topolcani Barrier is an elongated crown of relatively low hills.

The peak Visoka possesses an outstanding strategic position with a single disadvantage. On the west it opens to a distant view towards the middle part of Pelagonia to Bitola (Lyncestis), the strait near Bucin (Alkomena) where the Erigon enters the plateau. At only 8 kilometres east of Visoka, in Mariovo, flows the Erigon. In those times, the one who controlled the ancient road along the Erigon also controlled the oldest communication link between Pelagonia and Axios. The fortress on Veslec was certainly an auxiliary outpost for the city on Visoka.

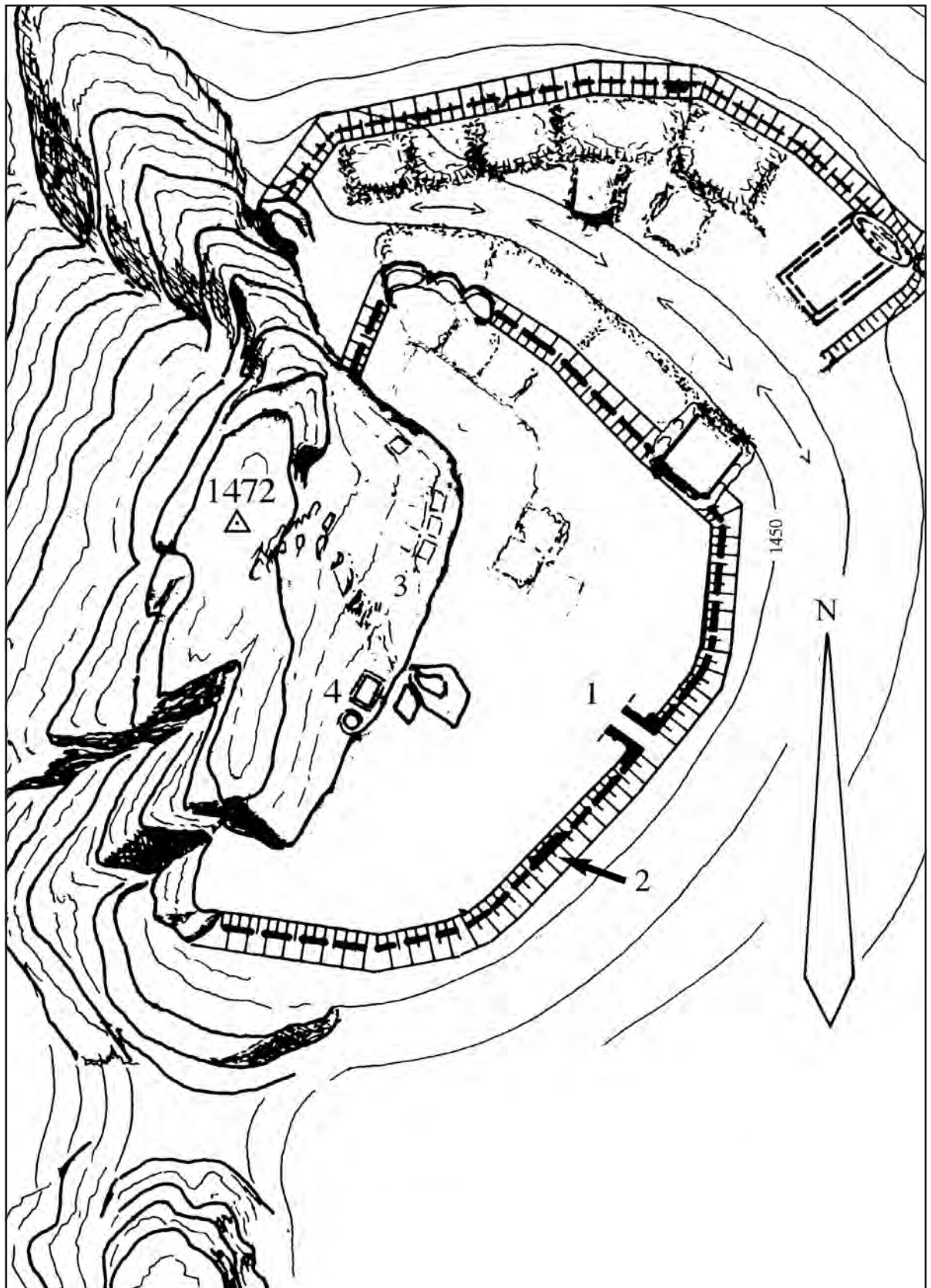
Visoka possesses an interesting landscape configuration. It is an elongated mountain ridge with a high vertical rock on the west that steeply descends for about 2 kilometers to the west foot of the mountain to Staro Bonce (at 790 m). On the east side of Visoka there are mild forest slopes which descend for about 3.5 km to the village Krusevica in Mariovo (749 m). Here, there are several springs of clear and cold mountain water, which of course was an advantage for the oldest inhabitants of this area who intended to build a dominant city acropolis.

Access to Staro Bonce in the past was almost entirely blocked off. On the northwest with the fortification Gradiste - Cvetkovo (elevation 1150 m); on the east the fortification Gradiste - village of Krusevica (935 m). The fortification Kale - Lopatica probably protected the access from the southwest, as well.

The upper town on Visoka consisted of two fortified sections- an acropolis - palace and a city.

**1. The acropolis - palace** was formed around the highest rock on Visoka, known as Cucul or Kjave. It has an almost pentangle form, analogous to the configuration of the terrain. The west side is almost entirely closed off with the rocky peak and is 70 meters long. The northeast is a predominately rocky section with a length of 42 meters. The south side rises above the unnaturally cut defense fossa in the rocks and was shaped by a defensive wall with a length of 27 meters. The eastern side consists of a shorter (12 m) northern section and a longer (25 m) south section of the wall. In the northern part of the last section of the wall ever since Early Antiquity was built an entrance gate in the acropolis section. The acropolis shaped in this manner is 70 meters long and 45 meters wide. It possess a useful living area of 1500 m<sup>2</sup> (0.15 ha), and together with the rock Cucul is 2600 m<sup>2</sup> (0.26 ha). The wall around the acropolis is from Early Antiquity. This is a construction of stone blocks extracted from the highest cliff (Cucul). Namely, in his inclined, eastern slope, one can see the remains of a typically ancient exploitation of rectangular shapes and several circular ones. The blocks intended for the defensive wall were finished on the spot and mounted into the massive early ancient wall. Judging from the opus, as seen on the eastern wall), it is a combination of isodomum and pseudoisodomum. The above two, and possibly three or more rows, were executed in the technique isodomum, but the lower rows and the opus at the entrance corridor were executed in a typical pseudoisodomum. This wall around the acropolis dates from Early Antiquity, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. At this point, without extensive archaeological excavations, it remains unclear if it was rebuilt in Late Antiquity or later. However, on the site, especially in the northern part of the mild slope around the acropolis, on the surface are visible contours of a group of residential buildings with square and rectangular shapes undoubtedly dating from Late Antiquity. We recorded several premises supported directly on the north wall from the inside.





Plan of the palace at Visoka  
13





Visoka, Gate

**2. The city** was formed around the acropolis with an elongated extension on the south side. It comprises of a northern, eastern and a particularly large southern part, shaped at a lower level around the acropolis. It has a north-south orientation with a length of 350 meters. In the north part it is 100 meters wide, while in the south the residential area narrows down to 70 meters in the middle, 45 meters in the southern part and 12 meters on the southern wedge - like front which rises above the farthest southern point on the rock. In the eastern slope of these rocks, in the Middle Ages, inside the rocks were carved about ten rectangular graves of the type cist. They were open and today are completely empty. The total area of the city shaped in this manner is 1700 m<sup>2</sup> (1.7 ha) and the total area of the acropolis amounts to 19,600 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 2 hectares).



Detail of the stairs at the Gate, Visoka



The visible and imposing fortification frame around the city is created by the Late Antique city wall. It was formed, probably, only around the northern and the long eastern side. The vertical rock on the west side did not require a wall. The north wall line, with a length of 90 meters, encloses a long residential terrace under the acropolis consisting of at least 9 premises shaped from the inside, a wall and at least 10 premises in the inner mountain belt, just in front and around the acropolis. The eastern city wall, was built at an angle with the northern at a length of 285 meters to the south, all the way to the southern wedge-like city front. This urban area has an elongated triangular shape. Higher in the north, and lower, for about 10 meters on the south side. Many premises are visible on the site. Some of the premises on the west and north side were partly formed into the rocks, while most were built in opus incertum, presumably in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The defensive wall was also constructed in opus incertum by a modest mortar technique. An older and very fragile wall assumed to be of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and a dominant, more recent wall probably dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD were registered.

The movable archaeological findings discovered in the city and the acropolis speak of a long period of continuous existence in the city, from Early Antiquity to the Middle Ages, with possible short interruptions. Coins of the Macedonian kings Philip II, Alexander III, Antigonus Gonatas and Demetrius II were discovered, as well as a bronze dupondius of Nero, a silver denar of Gordian, small bronze denominations of Constantius and Arcadius, and many coins of Early Byzantine emperors from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. A medieval Byzantine uranisk (scyp-hate) from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD was also discovered.

An abundance of Early Antique building ceramics was discovered, as well as pieces of laconic tegular roofing, vessel ceramics. Of the metal movable finds an Early Antique bow fibula and a Late Antique cross - shaped fibula generate interest. Other discoveries include a piece of bronze scale, bronze laminate application for a leather belt with a specific diamond decoration with a closest correlation to Kale - village of Lera and an unknown site near Resen, then a bronze exagium worth a nomisma, a clear buckle of the type Sucidava from the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

According to T. Dimitroski, a foot of a marble female statue was brought from the site in Krusevica.



It is obvious that on the high mountain plateau Visoka in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC was formed a small, but solid and representative early ancient palace. The coins that were concurrently discovered belong to the Macedonian kings.

Ancient Pelagonians did not have their own monetary currency and it has been proven that they used the Macedonian coins. In addition, the monumental tomb of Pavla Cuka, the necropoli from Early Antiquity on the sites Gramagje pod Tri Kamna (a Mound under Three Stones), Sv. Petka (St. Petka), the Lower Palace and the Lower Town (Dolni Grad) of Staro Bonce, as well as the evident defensive fortification system around Visoka, clearly illustrate a center of power of the local Pelagonians.

There is no reliable evidence that it was the king of the Pelagonians himself (Π [... τον Πε] λαγωνων βασιλεα), who in 365/4 BC received the title Honorary Citizen of Athens, or that it may have been Μενελαος Πελαγων, who in 363/2 BC, probably as a member of the royal Pelagonian house, received the title Benefactor and Honorary Citizen, again from Athens, whom he provided with military and financial support in like manner as the Pelagonian king two years before.







Early Antique coins, *discovered on Visoka*



*Early Antique, finds from Visoka*

The probability that precisely the archaeological complex Visoka and Staro Bonce hide the capital of the kingdom Pelagonia is high and even more realistic considering the above - mentioned single tomb on Pavla Cuka. The central elements of the tomb, the long accessible dromos with the vaulted corridor, the antechamber and the burial chamber indicate to tombs of the Macedonian type. But the perimetral circular wall around the tomb constructed of massive stone blocks with a height of about 1.5 meters that encircled the top of the earth mound on the tomb is unique. It probably reflects our not so distant Iron Age traditions of burial under tumuli in the wide Pelagonian space recorded in close proximity to Visoka as well, near the village of Caniste.

There are many questions surrounding the city of Pelagonia and the archaeological complex of sites Visoka and Staro Bonce. Did the city begin to exist in the Iron Age? Why is the stage of life of the early royal Roman period modest and what are the reasons of the rise of civilian life in the city under Varos in Roman times? Does the city have a medieval stage?





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The fortress of Veslec - *photographed from the south*





Gradiste Cvetkovo, Bonce (*fortification*)



Gradiste Cvetkovo and Visoka





Gradiste Krusevica (*fortification*)



Kale Lopatica (*fortification*)

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Silver Denarius of Gordian obverse / reverse





Late Antique wall of the 6<sup>th</sup> century - Visoka

### **Why would the Romans have chosen this city as the center of Macedonia Fourth?**

The logic of the Roman shrewd diplomacy and strategy leads us to the idea, their plan, to reach the Vardar Valley. We do not know to what extent the ancient Pelagonians were loyal to Antigonid Macedonia, but we do know that Rome destroyed primarily the administrative and economic power of local urban centers. It is hard to imagine, that even today, we still do not know the exact location of the city Link, but we certainly know the exact location of its Roman equivalent Heraclea. The old cities Brianion and Alkomena in Devriop (Demir Hisar) were ranked down as villages by Rome, while the city Stibera was exalted. The destiny of the city of Pelagonia was probably similar. After the year 148 Rome neglected the city on the sites Visoka and Staro Bonce. The old risky route along the Erigon is abandoned and the so-called Diagonal road from Heraclea through Stibera, Keramia, Eurist to Stobi is favored. By doing this, Rome gives its blessing to the development of the city of Varos, while Pelagonia just like Link, is left to oblivion.



## Late Antique finds from Visoka



Cross-shaped fibula



Nomisma



Sucidava



Follis of Justinian - reverse



waist application



Medieval scyphate

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#### **IV. STARO BONCE**

Staro Bonce is a distinctive complex of sites dating from different periods in time within the wider archaeological complex Visoka - Staro Bonce. The area of Staro Bonce extends over the mid - mountain range of Selecka Planina (Selecka Mountain), between the villages of Bonce and Podmol. These villages are located in the northeastern part of Pelagonia. The name originates from the large number of ancient sites - archaeological sites, which locals believe to have been the place of the old village of Bonce.



Staro Bonce

The history of research in this area starts from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when during the First World War French and German armed forces operated here. Although there are no written records, in the collective memory of local residents it has been recorded that the tomb of Pavla Cuka was excavated during the First World War. In that period was probably excavated the central burial chamber.

Later, in 1936, archaeological excavations led by N. Vulic, Professor of Classical Philology in Belgrade, were conducted on Pavla Cuka

In 1985, as part of the archaeological campaign of the Institute and Museum of Prilep, were conducted archaeological excavations at the site Kolkot led by B. Kitanoski.

While conducting the research at the archaeological site Visoka in 2005 led by V. Lilchikj, a professor of archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, came a realization regarding the connection of the two sites in an ancient city complex consisting of Gorni Grad (Upper Town) – an acropolis on the dominant peak Visoka and Dolni Grad

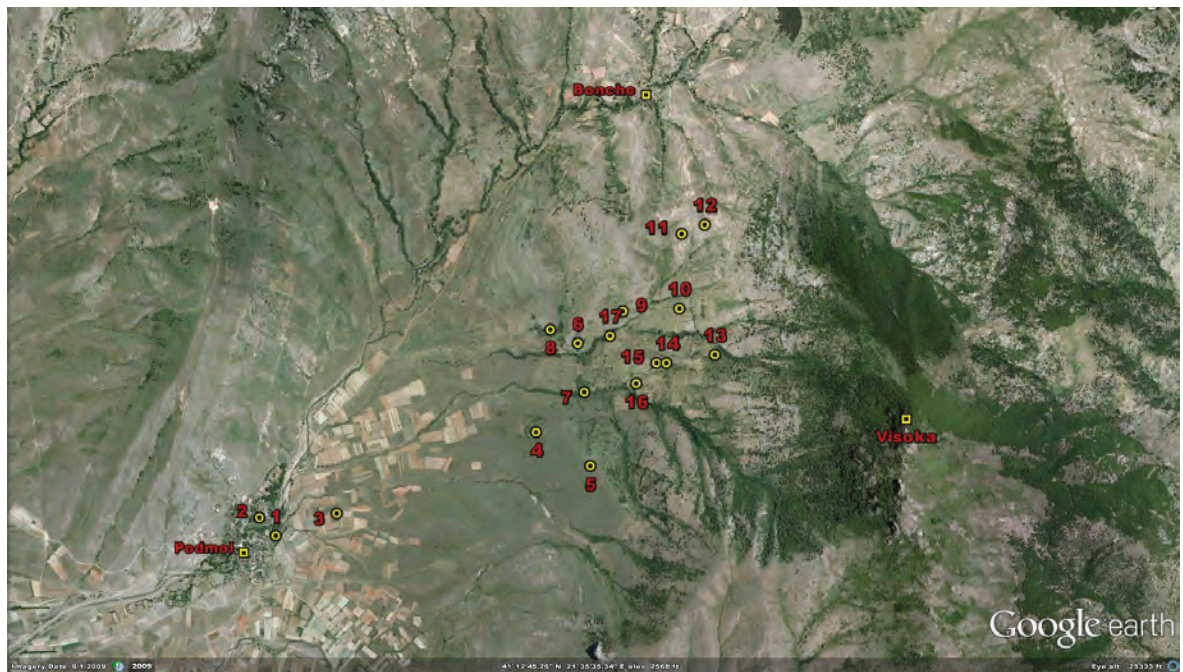
(Lower Town) consisting of a civilian section, a royal section and several necropoli. This realization, in turn, complemented the accidental discovery of parts of several ancient shields in the area of Dolni Grad - in the civilian section, which belonged to the warriors of the personal guard of the Macedonian king Demetrius. By adding this data to previous results and, mainly, the numismatic material located at the Institute and Museum - Prilep, in 2006 began a scientific research project titled A Systematic Archaeological Research of the Complex of Sites Visoka – Staro Bonce coordinated by the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje in cooperation with the Institute and Museum - Prilep. Within this project, research is conducted concurrently on the site of Visoka, as well as on the site Dolni Grad at Staro Bonce.



A photograph of the tomb  
– excavations from 1936

17 archaeological sites were discovered on the area of Staro Bonce. Seven of the sites were known and published in the second volume of the Archaeological Map of the Republic of Macedonia, while others were discovered with extensive research and recognition of the field in the period 2006-2011





Archaeological sites

Within the project began systematic archaeological excavations of the sites: Staro Bonce - Dolni Grad, Gramagje, Gramagje pod Tri Kamna (A Mound under Three Stones) and Pavla Cuka. Other sites have not been excavated but have been documented and mapped. In regard to the sites themselves and the movable archaeological findings, a preliminary chronological framework was established for their existence in the past.

**1.The archaeological site Gramagje** is located in the west foot of Selecka Planina (Selecka Mountain) under the archaeological site of Visoka. Gramagje was an unknown site in the archaeological science. It was discovered as part of the archaeological recognition process in 2009. Archaeological excavations were conducted in 2010 and 2011. At the site was discovered a wall of beautifully carved rectangular front - facing stone blocks oriented towards the west-east with a length of 15 meters and a width of 0.60 meters. At this point it was unclear whether this was the full width of the wall or just part of a broader, massive early ancient wall. According to the dimensions and the manner of processing, these stone blocks are very similar to the monolithic stone blocks used in the construction of the tomb at Pavla Cuka. Analogous to this knowledge, and based on the discovered bronze coins of Philip II and Alexander III of Macedon and several other findings, this wall, which, of course, was part of an important public building, can be dated to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and somewhat later



Archaeological site Gramagje

**2. Gramagje pod Tri Kamna**  
(A Mound under Three Stones)  
is a site previously unknown to  
archaeological science.

It was discovered as part of  
the archaeological recognition  
process in 2008. The necropolis  
is located on a small elevation, a  
natural mound with an elongated  
shape, where 12 graves were  
discovered within two research  
campaigns from 2010 to 2011.  
The graves are rectangular and  
were dug into the rock, and then  
surrounded by semi - processed  
flat stones. After the cremation  
burial the tomb was usually  
closed off with unprocessed  
stones. Among the findings from  
the graves we can emphasize  
the following: a ceramic crater,  
several smaller vessels where  
the ashes of the deceased were  
deposited, as well as pieces of  
jewelry (earrings, bracelets and  
fibulae) and military equipment  
- mainly spears and knives.  
Tomb No. 10 stands out from  
the rest because according  
to its inventory, apart from  
the ceramics, there were also  
discovered two iron spear tips,  
a knife, a bronze ring portraying  
a warrior, a bronze phial with  
superbly decorated outside with  
a palmettos motive and one  
silver fibula from Asia Minor. The  
findings of the burials date from  
the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century  
BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Near  
the necropolis we discovered two  
identically organized necropoli  
which will be the subject of our  
future research.





Probe 5, necropolis on the site Gramagje pod Tri Kamna



Archaeological site Gramagje pod Tri Kamna,  
*finds from tomb No.10*



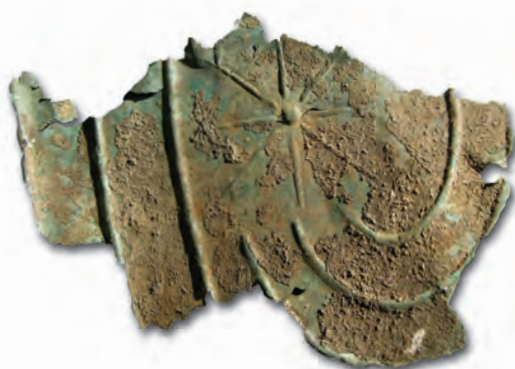
**3. The archeological site Kolkot** is located nearby, southeast of the tomb of Pavla Cuka. The site was researched in 1985 when a circular wall with a diameter of 32 meters was discovered. The wall was built using fine crushed stone with mud as a binding material. Mainly in the eastern part of the circular wall, four precise circular calotte pits were carved in natural rock, which the researchers assumed to be graves. Unfortunately, the full documentation for the excavations was not available, and as a result it is necessary to conduct revisional archaeological research on this site. At this point of research, we can assume that the object on the site Kolkot, which possesses a nearly identical circular perimeter wall, bears, a still uncertain, cult relation with the tomb of Pavla Cuka.

**4. Staro Bonce - Dolni Grad** (the Lower Town) - in 2006, in the central part of the site Staro Bonce, bronze parts of several dress shields that belonged to the soldiers of the personal guard of the Macedonian king Demetrius were accidentally discovered. The Institute and Museum - Prilep managed to conserve 146 fragments, and the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje an additional 6 fragments of shields. The fragments are located in the conservation department of the Institute and Museum - Ohrid. In the meantime they were published by C. Bitrakova-Grozdanova and D. Temelkoski. Protective excavations were conducted at the point of discovery, and an early ancient residential cultural horizon was identified, as well as, ceramic fragments of vessels and pieces of a pithos where the shields were deposited. These were circular type of shields, with a diameter of 0.734 m, decorated on the front raised side by a central episema. In the central circle of the episema there is a large 12- armed star. Around the episema in the narrow circular zone is the inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΥ. In the outer zone around the episema are 7 horseshoe fire strikers with seven 8 - armed stars. The material found in the control probe indicates the connection of the shields to the Macedonian king Demetrius I Poliorcetes (294-288 BC), although according to historical sources Demetrius II (239-229 BC) led the Macedonian army in the defense of Macedonia from the Dardanians on this territory.





Fragments of shields before reconstruction



Reconstruction according to  
V. Bitrakova Grozdanova

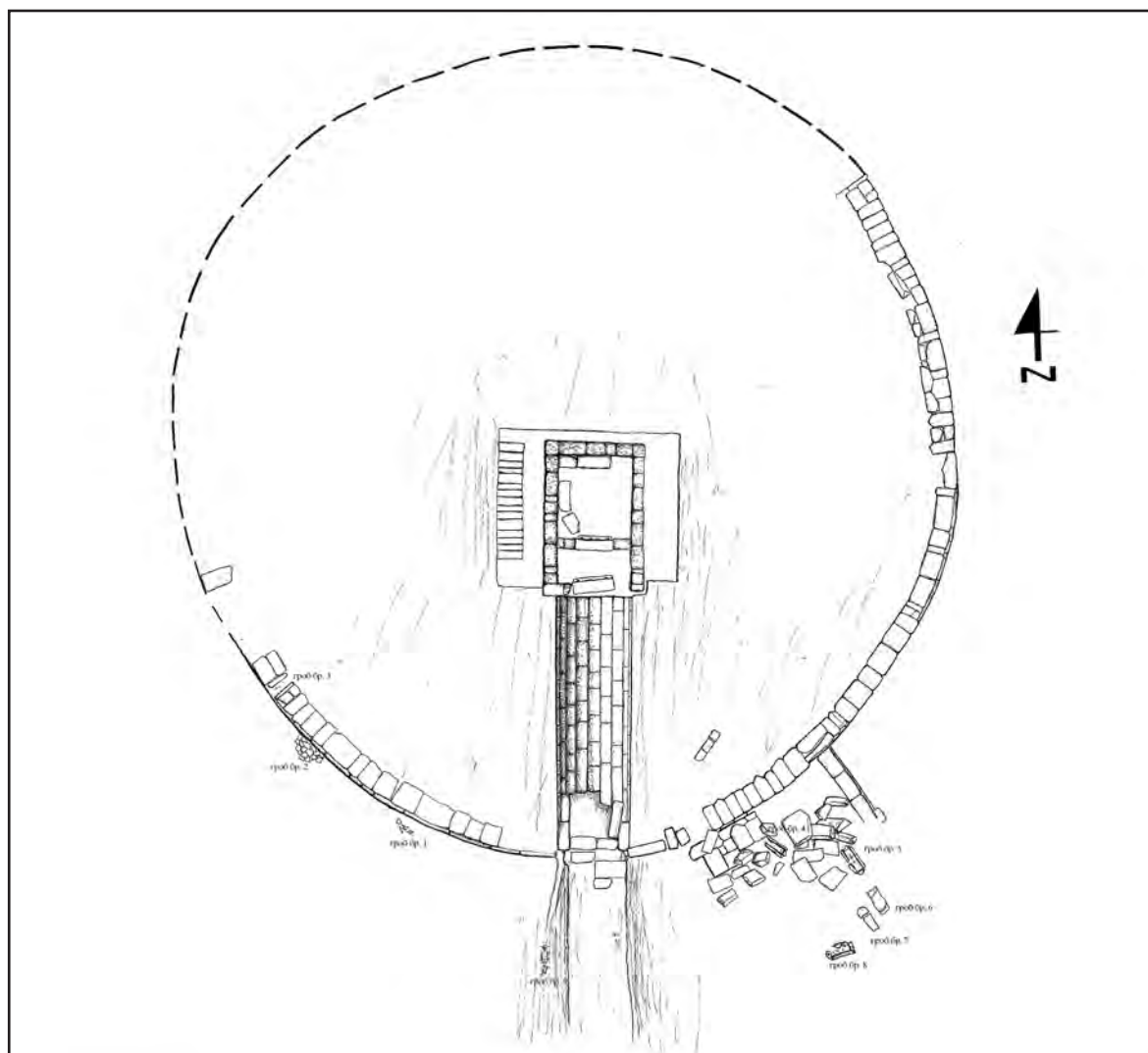


Reconstruction according to D. Temelkoski

## V. PAVLA CUKA- THE ANTIQUE ROYAL TOMB OF STARO BONCE

The archaeological site of Pavla Cuka is located on the southwest corner of the area Staro Bonce. The monumental tomb of Macedonian type was carved in natural rock and built in this area in Early Antiquity. After the burial of the deceased, the tomb was mounded by earth deposits which created a tumulus with a diameter of about 100 meters.

Encouraged by the monumentality of the tomb, archaeological excavations began in 2007 in order to explore and document it. At the very outset of the research was discovered a wall made of precisely carved flat monumental stone blocks, which surrounded the tomb in the shape of a ring. After this discovery, the perception of the tomb completely changed. It unmistakably possessed, a previously unfamiliar, unique architectural concept. The circular wall with a diameter of 32 meters surrounds the vaulted part of the dromos, the antechamber and the chamber which was placed ideally – in the center. Beyond this circular wall remained the open dromos carved into a rock and the object assumed to be a heroon.



(Plan 1) Basis of the tomb at Pavla Cuka



The western part of the circular wall is preserved through two rows of monumental blocks with a length of 18 meters, after which it stops. The eastern part of that same wall is preserved through three rows of monumental stone blocks, the first and the third of which are placed horizontally whereas the second was built of vertically placed stone blocks. This section of the wall is preserved in a length of 37 meters, after which it stops, in the same manner as the western part of the wall. The wall was dug into the natural rock and the missing stone blocks which were removed at a later time were re-used as spolia for other purposes.



Eastern part of a circular wall

East of the vaulted entrance of the tomb were found a number of solid stone blocks attached to the eastern part of the circular wall. These blocks were built by using the same technique and dimensions as the monolithic blocks of the tomb and represent a section of a rectangular object that was violently destroyed. The building had a rectangular shape and two rows of its stone blocks from the western wall remained in situ. The building is still being researched and is assumed to be a heroon.



The vaulted dromos was constructed of monumental stone blocks with dimensions of 2 to 3 meters in length and about 0.60 meters in width and height. The length of the vaulted dromos is 11 meters and its height is 3 meters at the southern end and 3.20 meters at the northern end, at the entrance to the antechamber. The vaulted dromos is well preserved, only missing a few stone blocks. At the southern end, i.e, at the entrance to the open part of the dromos in the vaulted section were found some stone blocks that probably served to block the entrance to the tomb.



A vaulted dromos with a chamber





*A vaulted dromos, photographed from the chamber*

The chamber and the antechamber of the tomb were built of precisely cut limestone blocks with a height of 0.50 meters and a length between 0.60 and 0.90 meters. Limestone is rare in this region and was probably considered a better quality material and this was the reason it was used in the most important part of the tomb. The chamber and the antechamber were separated by a wall.



In the bottom section was discovered a marble threshold with traces of double doors. An almost identical marble block - threshold was discovered at the vaulted entrance of the antechamber. In the chamber were discovered limestone blocks attached to the walls of the chamber in the form of the cyrillic letter G (Г) which served as a wedge (bed) for setting various items from the tomb. The preserved height of the chamber is 2 meters. Unfortunately, the chamber as well as the antechamber are completely empty. Apart from the two discovered marble thresholds, no other items or decorative elements were discovered, which such a monumental tomb, no doubt, possessed, as it had been observed in many analogous examples. The dimensions of the carved rock where the antechamber and the chamber were built is 8 meters from east to west and 7 meters from north to south. The dimensions of the antechamber are 3.5 x 1.5 meters, measured from the inside, while the chamber is 4 meters long and 3.5 meters wide, also measured from the inside.



Antechamber and chamber of the tomb of Pavla Cuka



The chamber of the tomb

During the research, 10 graves were discovered in the vicinity of the tomb. Six burials are of the type cists constructed of coarse stone slabs, and four were dug freehand. The graves are small in size, i.e. children's-size and the osteological material is poorly preserved due to the quality of the soil. The date of the tombs was determined by means of a discovery of a coin of the Roman emperor Julian II the Apostate (361-363 AD). According to the layout of the graves, or more specifically grave number 3, which is placed at the site of a block removed from the circular wall, it is safe to conclude that ever since the period of Antiquity, i.e. before or at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the tomb was partially demolished and already in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD was accepted and respected as a cult place for burial. The same can be confirmed of the graves placed between the demolished stone blocks of the heroon.

As already noted, the tomb of Pavla Cuka was, unfortunately, repeatedly burglarized and looted in the past. Therefore, no movable findings for proper chronological and typological determination could be discovered during the excavations. Therefore, lacking movable findings, we rely primarily on establishing analogous comparison with similar tombs regarding the architectural concepts and construction.

In the Balkan region and Asia Minor were discovered 70 tombs of the Macedonian type. Most of these tombs are located in Lower Macedonia, the land occupied by the ancient Macedonians in period 4<sup>th</sup> - 2nd century BC. About ten Macedonian type of tombs were found outside this area. More specifically, 6 in southern Greece, 2 in Asia Minor and one in Albania. In fact, these are places where the presence of ancient Macedonian population was registered. Thus, this geographical distribution fully justifies their classification as Macedonian.

On the territory of the Republic of Macedonia two Macedonian type tombs have been discovered so far. One is located in the ancient city of Lychnidos and the other is the tomb of Staro Bonce. The tomb of Bonce is located in an area inhabited by ancient Pelagonians and it is the northernmost Macedonian type of tomb found so far.

The ancient Macedonians from Early Antiquity were buried in graves of the type cist. Somewhere around the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the tombs began to take a larger shape. This phenomenon obviously implies class stratification and the appearance of a ruling class among the ancient Macedonians who buried the deceased in monumental buildings. The tomb of Katerini, dating from around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, is the first tomb so far with a dual chamber and a flat roof. The so-called Tomb of Persephone, also dating from the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, is particularly large in size and has a flat roof.

Sometime after the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Macedonian type of tombs begin to be built, which as the eternal home of the aristocracy were lavishly adorned. The facades of these tombs were decorated in Ionic in Doric style and the inner walls were ornately decorated with fresco decorations of plant motifs, scenes of battles, hunting scenes, vehicle races etc.



After the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, more likely in the last quarter of the century, vaulted tombs began to be built. The end of the building of this type of tombs dates from around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC which was obviously related to the weakening of the Macedonian aristocracy and the fall of Macedonia under Roman rule. The arch as an architectural element caused many disagreements in the scientific circles regarding its origin and dating. Namely, the arch of the Macedonian type of tombs, according to some researchers, had its own protogen development in Macedonia and according to other researchers, Macedonian military architects saw it and directly copied it during the conquests of Alexander III of Macedon in the East. Therefore, the tombs with this type of arch were probably built after the death of Alexander III of Macedon.

Analogies to the tomb of Bonce can be found in many discovered tombs. Among them, the most similar and the most closely associated with are the tomb of Amphipolis and the tomb of Pydna. Compared to these tombs, and according to the similarities with other tombs of Macedonian type, the date of our tomb from Staro Bonce can be determined as the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and the early years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The determining of this date is also supported by the fact that this is the period of the highest prosperity and power of the state of the ancient Pelagonians, as reflected in the excavated material findings, while in the periods before and after that a certain stagnation is evident. The tomb was, no doubt, built following the example of the above mentioned tombs, but its novel element which emphasizes its uniqueness and grandeur is the circular perimeter wall. The discovered heroon places it in close relation to the so-called tomb of Philip.

Regarding the identification of the deceased who was buried in the tomb of Pavla Cuka, at this time it can only be assumed that it was a Pelagonian basileus still unknown to us. Bearing in mind the date of the tomb (last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), it can be assumed that the tomb belonged to one of the direct descendants of the Pelagonian basileis, whose name was engraved in the famous inscription of Athens of 365/4 BC where only the first letter P was preserved ... and Menelaus of Pelagonia, also known from another Athenian inscription dating 363/2 BC, and later in 350 BC.



The royal tomb of Staro Bonce



As mentioned above, the archeological complex Staro Bonce was Dolni Grad (the Lower Town) versus Gorni Grad (the Upper Town)- the acropolis at Visoka. It is assumed that this complex of sites was the ancient city of Pelagonia, the capital of the early ancient Pelagonian kingdom and the capital of the Fourth Macedonian Merida between 168 and 148 BC. The arguments in favor of this hypothesis are increasingly supported by the excavations in recent years. In addition to the number of micro and macro archaeological sites in the area of the complex, the movable findings found in this area are support it, as well. Thus, among the earliest items are incidental findings of the site Kutliste which can be dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Then follow the above mentioned items from the necropolis Gramagje pod Tri Kamna (Gramagje under Three Stones), dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, as well as the building on the site of Gramagje from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3rd century BC, still of an unknown character, perhaps a public building, or perhaps a section of the so-called Winter Palace of the ruler. The royal tomb of Staro Bonce (Pavla Cuka) among all previously mentioned buildings and findings, is a special acknowledgment of the existence of a large and important early ancient city. The royal tomb with its grandeur and uniqueness completely justifies this name, given that it was the burial place of a Pelagonian basileus. This object and the movable findings found with the bronze shield of King Demetrius complete the early Hellenistic period, which completes the period of Early Antiquity. This was the period of the greatest rise and power of the ancient city of Pelagonia.

This also completes the movable findings from the Institute and Museum - Prilep, especially the coins originating from Staro Bonce, which were regarded as incidental findings. Based on everything we know, we can confirm the existence of life in the Dolni Grad in continuity in the Roman and Late Roman period and the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it is expected that the knowledge of this exceptional complex of archaeological sites around Dolni Grad and the necropoli of Staro Bonce should be completed and clarified by future archaeological research.

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