

ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA APOLLONIA PONTICA 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students documenting an Early Byzantine grave (5-6 c. CE)

The Apollonia Pontica Excavation Project 2017 took place in Sozopol, Bulgaria (ancient Apollonia Pontica) on the Black Sea coast from June 24 to July 22, 2017. The excavations were conducted on the small island of St. Kirik, which is connected to Sozopol by an artificial causeway. The Apollonia Pontica Field School began in 2011 and from 2015 is an initiative of the Balkan Heritage Foundation – Institute for Field Research (BHF-IFR) Joint Program. The project contributes to the efforts of the Apollonia Pontica Excavation Team and the Museum of Archaeology – Sozopol to explore this important site, which is threatened by government investment projects.

Excavations on St. Kirik Island over the past decade have revealed that it was the site of a Greek settlement, the sacred precinct (temenos) of Apollonia Pontica with the sanctuary of Apollo from the Archaic to Hellenistic Period (late 7th-4th cent. BCE) and a Christian religious center with a basilica and necropolis in the 5th to 7th centuries CE.

The area excavated by the 2017 field school was situated at the north and northeastern edge of the island where the three previous summers' excavations had discovered Archaic period pit altars (botroi), sizeable limestone foundations, and several 5th-7th century CE graves.

This summer's excavations were successful in continuing some of the previous years' findings. One was a big pit, found in 2016, filled with abundant archaeological material – mostly animal bones and pottery shards. One important discovery was a large number of Roman pottery shards, which is the first clear archaeological evidence from this period on St. Kirik island.

Among the new finds were several 5th-7th century graves. A lot of mass material was collected – mostly pottery from the Archaic, Classical and Late Antiquity period, animal bones, and glass. Among the special finds are bronze arrowheads-coins (two types), in general rare finds, very typical for Apollonia Pontica. They were discovered in a small area where in the previous years another five had been found. Another special find were several coins, which will be cleaned and identified later this year, and a fragmented Late Antiquity oil lamp.

The 2017 season provided its participants with valuable field work and finds processing experience. Under the guidance and supervision of their instructors, participants took part in all activities in the field: digging, measuring, field documentation (photography, graphic documentation, context sheets, bag labels, etc.), and initial finds processing (sorting and cleaning). Another contribution of the students was the results of the Workshop for Conservation and Restoration of Ancient Greek Pottery as it has been found in Apollonia Pontica. In this workshop, students cleaned, desalinated and consolidated fragments from a dozen broken vases, a few of which were partly or completely restored.

After the intensive field work in season 2017, a lot of archaeological material and documentation was collected. It will be processed in the forthcoming months by the Apollonia Pontica excavation team and affiliated specialists. The results of the excavations will be presented to the public during the annual archaeological reports of the Bulgarian National Institute of Archaeology in March, and an article will be published in the annual edition of the Institute – Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations (in 2017).