

ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA VARNA 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

Director: *Dr. Vassil Tenekedjiev*, archaeologist at the Varna Regional Museum of History, Department of Archaeology; Balkan Heritage Foundation – Varna branch manager

Co-Director: *Prof. Alexander Minchev*, archaeologist at the Varna Regional Museum of History, Department of Archaeology; Balkan Heritage Foundation



Students excavating remains of the atrium situated at the southwestern sector of the complex

The Djanavara monastery archaeological field school took place in Varna, Bulgaria (ancient Odessos) on the Black Sea coast from July 24 to August 21. The excavation project was held by the Varna Regional Museum of History, Department of Archaeology. And, for a fourth season, this happened in successful partnership with the Balkan Heritage Foundation: 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2017.

The Early Christian monastic complex is located on the Djanavara hill, 7 km south of the old town of Varna. It consists of a monumental single-nave church with four additional premises, presumably with towers on top of them. The building differs from the traditional Early Christian church architecture in the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire, and some of the characteristics could be explained by Near Eastern influence.

The church was excavated for the first time in the early 20th century. Then it was re-excavated in the late '90s, and on a larger scale since 2007, in order to collect additional and more precise archaeological information about the site.

In the last 10 years, a large complex around the church has been partly uncovered. An atrium with colonnades, a back yard and buildings with several different construction periods have been discovered. The complex dates from the mid-5th century and existed until the early 7th century. With its size, monumentality and luxurious decoration of marble and mosaics, the Djanavara monastery is one of the most representative of its kind in the Balkans. The monastery is famous also for the set of three reliquaries made of marble, silver and gold found in a crypt under the altar.

The area excavated by the 2017 field school was situated at the southwestern sector of the complex. Remains from the atrium were uncovered there along with structures from three other construction periods of the monastery. Especially interesting was the two-story building adjacent to the southern wall of the atrium. The debris of the floor and the roof have been preserved intact through the centuries and as the closed context gave a wonderful opportunity to study the stratigraphy and respectively the chronology of the site. During the excavation, a sewer channel and two water pipes were also discovered showing the quality of lifestyle in the monastery.

A lot of pottery and small artifacts (coins, belt buckles, fibulae, clay lamps etc.) were found during the field school thus giving the students a glimpse into everyday life in the complex. A very special find this year was a fragment of a marble vessel for holy water with an inscription on the rim. More fragments from the same artifact were discovered during the previous seasons. With the new piece it became possible to reconstruct a name from the inscription: [K]APEΛΛOY. This is a rare name but from other inscriptions we know about a certain very prominent citizen of Odessos from the 6th century named Karellos. Realizing the importance of their discovery the students in field school decided to make a donation for the restoration of the marble vessel.

The 2017 season provided all of its participants with valuable field work and finds processing experience. Under the guidance and supervision of their instructors, the students 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).

During 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 Djanavara hill 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 February/March 2018, and an article will be published in the annual edition of the Institute – Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations (in 2017).