

ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA PISTIROS EXCAVATION PROJECT 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students display a clay figurines recovered during excavations

SECTION A

The Pistiros Excavation Project 2015 took place at the site of Pistiros, Bulgaria which is situated between the towns of Vetren and Septemvri, from July 26 to August 23. The excavations were conducted in the SE part of the site, in an area next to the fortification wall. The field school at Pistiros began in 2013 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 Pistiros Excavation Team and the Archaeological Museum “M. Domaradzki” to continue the exploration of this important site, which have been poorly funded by the state in the last couple of years.

The ruins of the ancient Greek trade center (emporion) Pistiros in the heart of Thrace on the left bank of the Maritsa River (ancient Hebros) were discovered by Prof. M. Domaradzki in 1988. He began regular excavations in 1990, in the process of which he and his team found a stone inscription, known as "Vetren inscription," that helped scholars to identify the site as the Ancient Greek emporion Pistiros. Merchants from Greek coastal cities of Maroneia, Thasos and Apollonia lived and traded there with their Thracian neighbors under the protection of the Odrysian kings, who ruled the most influential and wealthiest Thracian Kingdom at that time. The area excavated by the 2015 field school was situated at the South-Eastern sector, an area next to the fortification wall with higher concentration of cult artifacts and features: pits, clay escharae (cult altars), etc. This summer's excavations were successful in continuing many of the previous years' findings in four earlier excavated squares. New finds included a floor level in a

possible house, on which numerous clay vessels and amphorae were found; a pit was dug that contained a large amount of pottery fragments and bones. A clay eschara next to the pit was excavated 3 seasons ago. Excavations of a new square were started as well, where amphora and pithos fragments and various of small finds were found, such as: coins, a bronze ring, a fibula, and buckle, all of which possibly mark a floor level dated to one of the last phases of site's existence (beginning of the 3rd century BC). In addition to yielding numerous new finds, the 2015 season of the Pistiros Excavation Field School Project also provided all of its participants with valuable field work and finds processing experience. Under the guidance and supervision of their instructors, participants took part in all activities on the field: digging, measuring, field documentation (photography, graphic documentation, context sheets, bag labels, etc.), and initial finds processing (e.g. sorting and cleaning). Another contribution of the students were the results of the Workshop for Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), where dozens of small finds such as amphora stamps, graffiti, and bronze coins were captured and processed. Of special importance was the RTI recording of the Vetren inscription, on which couple of barely visible letters were identified.

After the intensive field work of the 2015 season, a lot of archaeological material and documentation was collected. This material and documentation will be processed in the forthcoming months by the Pistiros excavation team and affiliated specialists. The results of the excavations will be presented in 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 2015).