

ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA-BRESTO 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Excavation of the apsidal building of Bresto Phase 2 (12th/11th century BCE)

Our project explores the Late Bronze Age fortified site of Bresto, located in the mountains of southwestern Bulgaria, some 80 miles to the north of the Mediterranean Sea. Bresto was founded in the time of the biggest heyday of the Mycenaean polities in the Eastern Mediterranean (13th cent. BCE). The site was abandoned in the 12th or early 11th cent. BCE, after the destruction of most of the Aegean palatial centers.

The main questions of the international team - consisting of scholars from Germany, Bulgaria and the USA - are related to issues of connectivity (both regional and long-distance networks), mountain economy, social uses of built space and object biographies.

The Bresto project started with a short trench excavation in 2012 and became part of the Institute for Field Research-Balkan Heritage Foundation Program for the Balkans in 2015 with a first field-school campaign in 2016. It had a strong educational profile even before 2016 since it is directed by two university professors who aim to educate students during fieldwork.

In 2017, we had the chance to find our first undisturbed house from the early construction phase (13-12th cent. BC). This building is interesting because it stands on the outer side of the terrace wall, in a lower area endangered by river flooding. The choice of this place for dwelling could be an indication of demographic growth of the settlement and lack of space. In this house, which could be only partially excavated due to the fact that it continues under the latter fortification wall of Bresto Phase 2, we found a large concentration of burned cereal seeds, various ceramic vessels and fragments of worked boar tusks. This find is of special interest because it shows that plates for Aegean-type helmets were likely produced in Bresto. The house was destroyed by a massive conflagration. In the next, second phase of Bresto this part of the settlement was redesigned as a gateway between the two-faced fortification wall and a terrace wall.

In 2017, we finished the excavation of the large apsidal house of Phase 2 (12th cent. BCE) and had the rare chance to parallel excavate burned architectural material (wall plaster) from Phase 1 and Phase 2 simultaneously. The scientific and educational profits of this situation were considerable.

During the excavation campaign, we managed to digitalize all the field documentation and photograph our small finds, ceramics and wall plaster.

Our students actively took part in all the steps of the fieldwork and evaluation: excavation, description of sediments and features in special forms, labeling of finds, orthophotographic documentation, and photographing of finds (mostly ceramics and wall plasters).

The results of our work in Bresto will be presented at the annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists in Maastricht, in the Netherlands in Sept 2018, at conferences in Leuven, Belgium and Tulcea in Romania in November 2018, as well as on the annual meeting of the Bulgarian Archaeological institute in February 2018. and a series of public lectures in Germany and Bulgaria. At least two publications are envisaged for the winter-fall 2017/2018.