

ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA ILINDENTSI 2016 FIELD SCHOOL

This field school is part of the IFR-BHF Program for the Balkans

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A morning hour and the beginning of daily field work at the Neolithic site at Ilindentsi

The excavations at the Neolithic settlement Ilindentsi -“Masovets” have been conducted since 2011 in collaboration with the Balkan Heritage Foundation, the Blagoevgrad Regional History Museum, and the Municipality of Strumyani – this alliance was joined by IFR, USA in 2015. The project aims to study the culture of the first agriculturalists that appeared in the Struma River Valley, in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, during the first half of the 6th millennium BCE.

In 2016, the archaeological excavations were carried out from the 12th of June to the 10th of July. This year, one student from BHF-IFR Program for the Balkans and 8 other students participated in the field school at Ilindentsi-“Masovets”. The site is excavated 5 days per week from 6:30 to 13:00 and our team held lectures and conduct various workshops at the base from 16:00 to 19:00. Field work is accompanied every day by instruction on the methods of archaeological research and the principles of documentation. The afternoon sessions consist of lectures lasting approximately 1 hour as well as practical sessions on the processing, sorting, registration, and graphic documentation of collected archaeological materials.

Students acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge on-site about how to use a total station, how to complete graphic and photographic documentation of excavation sectors and profiles, how to assess and describe archaeological contexts, and on how to keep a detailed field journal.

The task agenda for 2016 continued the study of the Neolithic settlement's space, fortification, architecture and buildings' interior through exploration of: 1.) the system of trenches with unclear use and their possible relation with the fortification ditch; 2.) the space between the burned house in Square C5 (excavated in 2015) and the northern arc of the surrounding trench in Square A5; 3.) the space south of the burned house in C5 by opening Square D5, looking for remains of a neighboring burnt house. The student from IFR actively participated in the implementation of the first and third tasks.

During the current season our team found that the trenches mentioned above are oriented to the cardinal directions. Two of them are absolutely parallel to the main fortification ditch and functionally they might be in relation to it. All pits around them are excavated and hopefully the study of their content will contribute to the definition of trenches' role. Next to them, in trench D5 remains of a fireplace near the burned house in C5 along with an undisturbed archaeological building level were excavated. Fragments of plaster flooring and a considerable amount of artifacts (among them the head of a very large zoomorphic, deer-shaped vessel) suggest the interior of a dwelling. Its relation to the burnt house in C5 remains to be determined in 2017.

In Square B5 students excavated a great number of intersecting pits and a layer of ceramic fragments, bones and grind-stones covered with a layer of pure white clay. There is clear evidence that most of these pits and the layer belong to the burned house excavated in C5.

Overall, the predominant styles of white-on-red painted ceramic sherds as well as many other finds such as flint tools, tools made of ceramic shards, and various ornaments—ceramic beads, beads of shell and marble, marble bracelets, and pendants made of stone discovered this year are characteristic for the second phase of the Early Neolithic in the Struma River Valley. Ceramic fragments of red painted pottery style typical for the central Balkan Neolithic culture of Starčevo were found at the site, which is unusual for this part of the Peninsula and the Struma Valley.

In March 2016 a presentation of the 2015 excavations was made at the annual archaeological reports of the Bulgarian National Institute of Archaeology. Additionally, the anthropomorphic figurines found in 2015 were included in the annual exhibition in the National Institute's museum that is dedicated to the most important archaeological discoveries in Bulgaria for the year (exhibition's booklet is available upon request). The results of the studies conducted in 2016 will be presented before next session of the annual archaeological reports in 2017 and published in the Journal of Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations issued by the National Archaeological Institute and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2017. Furthermore, the team is now preparing both an article for the Balkan Heritage E-Papers (e-magazine) and the first volume of a monograph: The Prehistoric Settlement of Ilindentsi and its Surroundings based

on the excavations and archaeological research carried between 2004 and 2016.