

ANNUAL REPORT: YUNATSITE 2019 FIELD SCHOOL

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The team in 2019: students and instructors in front of the main cross-section profile of Tell Yunatsite.

The field school "SEEKING EUROPE'S FIRST CIVILIZATION: TELL YUNATSITE, BULGARIA" has been conducted since 2013 by the Balkan Heritage Foundation (BHF) in cooperation with the Yunatsite Excavations Team, the Regional Museum of History in Pazardzhik, New Bulgarian University (NBU) and (since 2016) the Institute for Field Research (IFR), USA. The site is located near the modern village of Yunatsite and close to the town of Pazardzhik in Southern Bulgaria, in the Maritsa River valley. It is among the biggest tells in Europe with a diameter of approximately 110 m/360 ft and height of 12 m/39 ft above the modern surface. It is one of the most important sites for revealing the prehistory of Thrace from the beginning of the Copper age (Chalcolithic, 5th millennium BCE) to the end of the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BCE).

The field school is concentrated in the central part of the excavated area, in the so-called Vasil Mikov's trench and the area just to the south of it. The goal is to further reveal the stratigraphy of the Chalcolithic layer down to the earliest settlement, to investigate settlement architecture and to collect more data on Copper Age everyday life. At least 6 Chalcolithic building levels (consecutive settlements) have been attested so far. Different architectural structures have been revealed; including unburnt wooden floor platform, ovens, parts of walls, etc. The materials from the lowest (earliest) levels excavated so far in this area date to the first half of 5th millennium BCE.

In 2019 the field school task-agenda included:

1. Further investigation of the building from the 3rd Chalcolithic building level (from top to bottom) in squares O6, O7, N6 and N7;

2. Excavation of the lower part of the big negative feature from the 1st Chalcolithic building level, partially destroying the above-mentioned building, in square O6.
3. Finishing the excavation of the burnt building from the 5th Chalcolithic building level in square M5.

Because of the complexity of the site and its stratigraphy and in order to better introduce the students to the specifics of working on a prehistoric tell site, they were divided into five teams, one in each of the squares, each of the teams having one supervisor.

All field school students actively participated in the tasks given and contributed to their implementation.

Together with the field school, excavations were carried out in several neighboring squares by the Bulgarian team. The joint efforts led to important results in clearing out the stratigraphy from the uppermost Chalcolithic building level to the bottom of the Mikov's trench as well as further excavation of the remains of the two large buildings from different levels (the 2nd and the 3rd), with different architecture and specifics.

The archaeological material uncovered in the 2019 season includes pottery vessels with graphite and incised decoration, stone and bone tools, a copper awl, parts of clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, two ornithomorphic figurines, Spondylus shell bracelet fragments and beads, etc. All this material will be processed in the forthcoming months by the Yunatsite 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 the spring of 2020). Additionally, some of the special finds and the pottery vessels will most likely feature in the exhibition in the National Archaeological Institute with Museum in Sofia that is dedicated to the most important archaeological discoveries in Bulgaria in 2019.