

ANNUAL REPORT: PISTIROS EXCAVATION PROJECT 2019 FIELD SCHOOL

Director: Dr. Angela Pencheva, Balkan Heritage Program Manager; PhD in Classical Archaeology



The Pistiros Excavation Project 2020 took place at the site of Emporion Pistiros, Bulgaria, which is situated between the towns of Vetren and Septemvri, from July 22 to August 19.

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 during which, he and his team found a stone inscription known as the "Vetren inscription". This helped scholars identify the site as the Ancient Greek emporion Pistiros where merchants from the Greek coastal cities of Maroneia, Thasos and Apollonia lived and traded with their Thracian neighbors under the protection of the Odrysian kings, who ruled the most influential and wealthiest Thracian Kingdom at that time. Currently, the site is the only identified emporion dating to the Late Classical and early Hellenistic period in the heart of Thrace.

The area excavated during the field school since the BH project began in 2013, is situated at the southeastern sector of the site, next to the fortification wall where two horizons of buildings indicate two different chronological phases of the emporion's existence. The latest one, dated approx. to the first quarter of 3rd century BCE which can be connected to the last phase of the emporion's existence before the Celtic invasion in the Balkans (in the 270ties BC) which probably caused its devastation and abundance. Underneath a horizon with the so called "negative features", dated around the second half of 4th CBC was investigated over the last 6-7 years. Up to the current moment there are six partly excavated negative features, approx. 1 m

deep. Their fill is very soft soil with grayish color, presumably result of the decayed organic materials. The materials discovered in all the above-mentioned features consist of fragments and entire local handmade, wheel made, as well as imported vessels; big number of loom weights; handmade clay figurines, amphora fragments, animal bones and pieces of wattle and daub. According to parallels with some similar dug in houses, discovered in the Greek apoikias at the Black sea coast, we can suggest that the “negative features” at Pistiros are remains of similar buildings. Unfortunately, the site has been flooded couple of times by the river Maritza. This is the reason what makes the reconstruction attempts of the above ground structures of these buildings very difficult. Presumably the houses used to have mud brick walls which have melted completely. Their compaction and color are almost the same as the natural soil. Remains of fired plaster with imprints of wooden beams suggest wooden roof construction but we still do not have clear evidence for its exact structure. The discovered wattle and daub pieces were probably parts of some dividing walls. Hopefully the samples taken of different construction materials from the site in 2019 will help advancing with the reconstruction attempts of the buildings.

The students were divided in 3-4 groups working in the neighboring squares. Under the guidance and supervision of three supervisors, participants took part in all activities on the field: digging, measuring with dumpy level and total station, field documentation (photography, graphic documentation, context sheets, bag labels, etc.), and initial finds processing of pottery shards and bones.

During the Workshop for Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) in the last week of the project the students captured some finds from the museum collection which gave interesting results e.g. an amphora handle with scratched image of fish and ship which were invisible for naked eye.

The entire results of the excavations will be presented to the 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 2019).