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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE STOBI: DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF POPULARIZATION

ABSTRACT

In 2008, the Government of R. of Macedonia established the National Institution for Management of the Archaeological Site Stobi. The purpose of NI Stobi is permanent presence of educated staff at the site which will conduct the excavations, conservation, presentation and popularization. In the past three years, NI Stobi initiated various projects, as well as many activities which contribute in different ways towards the appropriate management and further development. This article illustrates the efforts and challenges of NI Stobi for effective results in the archaeological work, conservation and general popularization.

Keywords: Stobi, heritage, investigation, conservation, presentation, popularization.

The archaeological site Stobi is located in the centre of the Republic of Macedonia, about 80 km to the south of Skopje along the European Route E75, at the confluence of the two rivers Vardar and Crna (ancient Axios and Erigon) (Fig. 1). The geographical location itself implies that Stobi must have had a long history of habitation which is confirmed archaeologically by the discovery of cultural strata that date back to the Late Bronze Age. During its existence and development Stobi had several major urban phases beginning with Livy's *urbs vetus* of the 2nd century BC,¹ climaxing with the Early Roman *municipium*, as well as the Late Antique capital of Macedonia Secunda and declining with the end of the 6th century as many other old towns (Fig. 2).

It was not hard for Leon Heuzey in 1861, almost a millennium later, to map the position of the once important city with its ruins scattered across

¹ Livius XXXIX. 33.



Fig. 1 Map of the Republic of Macedonia

the field that the locals called “Pusto Gradsko” or literally translated - “deserted town”.² The first ex-

² Heuzey et Daumet 1876



Fig. 2 Aerial view of Stobi in 2009

cavation and the first publication happened during the First World War by the German officers,³ but it was not until the archaeological project of the '20s and the '30s, conducted by the National Museum of Belgrade, that Stobi became a major antiquity site in Macedonia with many excavated public and residential buildings. The puzzle of Stobi continued to be focus number one during the following decades of the century and there is not a year when the excavation or conservation activities halted. During the '70s there was a large Yugoslav - American joint project directed by Djordje Manojčević and James Wiseman which significantly contributed towards the establishment of Stobi as a referent site in Macedonia for the Roman period and the Late Antiquity.⁴ The '70s were the beginning of tourism at Stobi. The maintenance of the site for many years was the responsibility of the Museum Veles and later in 1998 the jurisdiction was transferred to the National Institute for Protection of the Cultural Monument, later renamed in National Conservation Centre. Unfortunately,

these two institutions located 30 and 80 km from the site could not establish a solid model for appropriate care, protection and presentation of the site. Finally in 2008, the Government understood the need of permanent presence of educated staff at the site and founded the National Institution for Management of the Archaeological Site Stobi as a unique model so far.

The basic goals of NI Stobi are the archaeological investigations, conservation, maintenance and presentation of the archaeological site. According to its Statute the institution should have 3 different departments: Museum and research, Protection and Administrative department. In three years only the first is fully developed with permanently employed archaeologists while the other two, thanks to the economic crisis, are functioning with personnel hired on projects and temporary contracts. The departments have clearly defined the areas that they cover but they also have multidisciplinary approach at certain challenges depending on the actual issue.

The Museum and research department is responsible of the archaeological excavations, documentation, storage of artifacts, publications and exhibitions. There are six employed archaeologists who cover the different periods in terms of muse-

³ Hald 1917

⁴ For the full bibliography of Stobi until 1973 see Radošević 1973; For more recent publications see the Bibliography in Mikulčić 2003



Fig. 3 Excavations of the Theatre in 2009

um work, the numismatics and they take care of the documentation as well as the digital data base. Beginning with 2009 and 2010, NI Stobi is conducting two active excavation projects.

The first project is part of the so called “capital projects” of the Government for systematic excavation. In 2009 and 2010 the excavations were applied on a large area of almost 2 hectares with 500 workmen and more than 50 staff members (Fig. 3).⁵ The project continued in 2011 and 2012 on a smaller scale with a smaller budget and it is mainly focused on completing the excavations on several locations in order to understand the full context of the area and allow the beginning of the conservation (Fig. 4).⁶ The priorities of the project are the full investigation, publication and conservation of the Temple of Isis, the Theatre, the Episcopal Basilica and the large residential segment of the 6th century urban phase. These excavations are followed by annual temporary exhibitions at the Museum of Macedonia where besides Stobi the public is able to see the uncovered artifacts from other sites as well. The results of these excavations are about to be published in the *Studies in Antiquities of Stobi*, an



Fig. 4 The Temple of Isis after conservation in 2012

archaeological journal published in three volumes until 1981. NI Stobi intends to publish the fourth volume in 2013 with many new and old results on different aspects of the cultural heritage in Stobi. Apart from the journal, in 2012 NI Stobi published “*Inscriptiones Stoborum*” by Slavica Babamova as the first volume of the *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi Monograph Series*.

The second excavation project is the field-school organized by NI Stobi, the Balkan Heritage Foundation and the New Bulgarian University. Since 2010, every August, Stobi accepts applicants from all around the world, mainly archaeol-

⁵ Blaževska 2011

⁶ Блажевска 2012



Fig. 5 Excavations at the Field school in 2012



Fig. 6 Exhibition of Early Christian frescoes in the National Bank in 2012



Fig. 7 Workshop for Conservation and Documentation of Roman Mosaics in 2012

ogy and history students. The field school has two sessions of 15 days in which the applicants are trained in basic methods of excavation and creating field documentation (Fig. 5). Besides field work, the project includes lectures, finds processing and excursions which allow every participant to be introduced to the history, archaeology and cultural heritage of Stobi and Macedonia. At the end of the project every student receives a certificate and university credits depending on the number of sessions he attended. The excavations are usually conducted in areas which are included in the capital project in order to complete certain excavated sectors. The financial benefit of the field school is great contribution in the maintenance and development of the site and it certainly is one of the main assets of self-financing.

In 2010 the digital data base of Stobi was initiated. It contains the full documentation of the excavations and conservation since the '60s. It is being constantly updated with the new material and it needs to be extended with what is available from the first half of the 20th century. Also much of the documentation of the National Conservation Centre that concerns the Stobi projects of the '90s has to be recovered. Right now the data base is easily ap-

proachable from the computers in the Stobi network and most probably in few years will be available online, similar as the data base of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens.

The Conservation Department of NI Stobi needs to employ an architect and conservators for mosaics, stone and marble, metal and pottery on permanent terms. The pottery and metal conservation are covered by young people who have temporary contract with the NI Stobi. The conservation of architecture, mosaics and frescoes are done with personnel of other institutions and unemployed but qualified staff hired on NI Stobi conservation projects. Until this moment NI Stobi managed to complete 5 different projects. One of the most interesting is the conservation of the 4th century wall paintings from the Old Episcopal Basilica. The oldest Christian frescoes in the R. of Macedonia were conserved with a financial support of the US Ambassador's Grant for Cultural Preservation. The beginning of the project was marked by official signing of the grant at Stobi, an event covered by the media in Macedonia and abroad. The whole process was followed by reports on the Stobi website and the Embassy web page. An exhibition at the National Bank in Sko-



Fig. 8 World Monuments Day at Stobi

pje with a printed booklet about the frescoes and the conservation process, presented the project results in front of the wider audience (Fig. 6)⁷.

Same as the field school, NI Stobi, Balkan Heritage and New Bulgarian University organize international workshops for conservation of pottery, fresco and mosaics. The workshops have the same educational character as the archaeology field school where the participants have active role and contribution in the preservation of the cultural heritage (Fig. 7).

The Administrative Department has two segments which include employees which deal with the legal and financial sides of the institution and personnel hired for the presentation of the site. Besides the four tour guides and the people at the souvenir shop which are involved in the presentation *in situ*, the NI Stobi needs a presentation manager who will develop and control the presentation and the popularization on a much higher level. At the moment, the responsibility for online presentation, the realization of educational programs and most of the graphical design is transferred to the archaeology department and the director.

The Stobi website was constructed by the NI Stobi and designed by the Seavus software company from Skopje as a donation for the archaeological site. After almost a century of different activities Stobi finally got a new, very important window for the world. The website offers a full overview of the history of the town, a map with information on the presented buildings, the history of past excavations, future publications, needed donations and past donors as well as regular update on the new activities. All the potential visitors of Stobi can

easily find information how to reach the archaeological site and they can book their tour online. The traffic to the website is usually directed from the Stobi Facebook page (in Macedonian and English) and through the media in cases of an event with a greater significance. The number of visitors and their interest in the web content is followed by Google Analytics in order to improve the anomalies of the site and establish a general idea what the visitors of different profiles like.

Regarding the worldwide popularization, the NI Stobi applied at the World Monuments Fund which placed Stobi on the World Monuments Watch List for 2012 and 2013. Stobi is listed among 67 sites of 41 countries which needed the WMF advocacy and the global attention in overcoming the challenges of cultural heritage preservation. On September the 22nd, NI Stobi organized a World Monuments Watch Day as the other sites on the WMF list. The open day for visitors involved elementary school students of the local communities and international students of NOVA school in Skopje who participated in an art colony and mosaic workshop inspired by the archaeological treasure of Stobi (Fig 8). It was a nice opportunity to present the site, educate students and exchange ideas in an interactive way.

Publications (scientific and popular), field school, workshops, online presentation, donations, educative programs, cultural events and exhibitions are the road for presentation and popularization of Stobi as an archaeological site. Maybe this approach seems bit conservative but it is certainly an ethical way to make the site available to the public and establish sources for self-financing without vulgarizing the cultural heritage.

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istoriju, arhitekturu, religiju, rituale sahranjivanja itd. što je doprinelo da Stobi postane jedan od najvažnijih lokaliteta na Balkanu tokom rimskog perioda i kasne antike.

Budući da ovaj lokalitet ima najveću površinu za prezentaciju, sa puno sačuvanih spomenika iz različitih perioda, bio je otvoren za turiste još od sedamdesetih godina prošlog veka. Jurisdikcija je ranije bila poverena Muzeju u Velesu, a kasnije prenesena na Nacionalni konzervatorski centar. U 2008. godini, Vlada Republike Makedonije je osnovala Nacionalnu ustanovu za upravljanje arheološkim lokalitetom Stobi. Cilj Nacionalne ustanove Stobi je permanentno prisustvo educiranog personala na lokalitetu koji bi rukovodili iskopavanjima, konzervacijom, prezentacijom i popularizacijom lokaliteta. U protekle tri godine, Nacionalna ustanova Stobi je inicirala niz projekata, kao i znatan broj aktivnosti koji su doprineli na različite načine boljem rukovođenju kao i budućem razvoju arheološkog lokaliteta Stobi.

REZIME

ARHEOLOŠKI LOKALITET STOBI: RAZLIČITI ASPEKTI POPULARIZACIJE

Ključne reči: Stobi, nasleđe, istraživanja, konzervacija, prezentacija, popularizacija.

Duga istorija naseljavanja arheološkog lokaliteta Stobi počinje sa bronzanim dobom i prelaznim periodom. Livije spominje Stobi kao *urbs vetus* u helenističko doba, koji se kasnije, za vreme ranog carstva, razvio u *municipium* i najveći grad na severu provincije Makedonije. U kasnoj antici, Stobi je glavni grad provincije *Macedonia Secunda* i značajni hrišćanski centar. Klimatske promene s početka VI veka, varvarski napadi i verovatni zemljotres, obeležili su poslednje godine istorije Stoba.

Početkom 1861. godine, Stobi je postao predmet interesovanja mnogih naučnika. Prve istraživačke kampanje sprovedene su u vreme Prvog svetskog rata, a neke od najvećih između dva svetska rata. Arheološka istraživanja nastavljena su i u narednim decenijama i traju do danas. Arheolozi, arhitekti, istoričari i drugi naučnici publikovali su veliki broj radova koji razmatraju