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## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF UKOSA AND KUĆIŠTE IN GRAD STALAĆ

### ABSTRACT

*Ever since 2009, the multi-level sites of Ukosa and Kućište have systematically been excavated within the multidisciplinary research project Ukosa, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia. They are situated within the area of Grad Stalać, on the left bank of the South Morava. The site at Ukosa was inhabited during the Early Iron Age as well as in the Late Iron Age. It was also inhabited during the Roman period. It is important to note that 6th century fortified settlements have also been found at Ukosa. Additionally there have been finds from the period from the 8th to the 11th century. At the site of Kućište there is a necropolis.*

**KEYWORDS: UKOSA, KUĆIŠTE, MOJSINJSKO-POSLONSKE MOUNTAINS, FORTIFICATION, EARLY IRON AGE, LATE IRON AGE, ANTIQUITY, EARLY BYZANTINE PERIOD.**

Within the multidisciplinary research project of the Mojsinje-Poslon complex, supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, the National museum in Kruševac has conducted archaeological research of the sites Ukosa and Kućište, in the area of the settlement of Grad Stalać, in the municipality of Čičevac.

The area of the Mojsinje and Poslon ranges consists of mountains situated in the West Morava, South Morava and Velika Morava valleys. It mostly includes the Čičevac municipality, while its smaller parts also include parts of the municipalities of Kruševac and Ražanj. The lower mountain peaks reach heights of 501, 490, 404 and 377 meters a.s.l.

The Mojsinje Mountains reach from Grad Stalać in the north to the Gaglovska river in the south. They extend to the West Morava in the west, while in the east, the border includes the South Morava valley along the Stalać gorge, continuing along the Ribarska river. The Poslon mountain range includes the area from the Ražanjska valley in the west to the Stalać gorge in the east, more precisely between the villages of Mađere in the north and Praskovče in the south. The Stalać gorge is 24 km long, with an average width of 300 metres. Situated between the Niš and Aleksinac basins in the southeast, the Ražanj valley in the east, the Great Morava valley in the north and the Kruševac ter-

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Fig. 1 Remains of the rectangular building (photo: Ljubiša Vasiljević)

tiary basin in the southwest, the Mojsinje-Poslon complex has always represented a crossroad on the routes leading from the north to the south of Europe and is, therefore, often called “the Gates of Serbia” (Трифуновић 2003: 101 – 111).

The strategic importance and natural potential of the complex resulted in the fact that this area was inhabited since prehistory, testified to by numerous archaeological sites, including those of Ukosa and Kućište.

The sites of Ukosa and Kućište are situated in the area of the village of Grad Stalać, some 2 km to the south of the famous mediaeval fort. They are located on a broad mountain ridge of the Mojsinje mountains, on the left bank of the South Morava. The mountain ridge stretches along the river, running steeply down towards it. This side of the ridge is called Vrletija and the opposite side, on which most of the archaeological excavations have been conducted, is called Gloždak.

During the middle of the 1990s, as part of the project “Mediaeval Stalać”, a field prospection and a smaller probe excavation of the site Ukosa were performed by the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade and the Institute for the Protection of cultural Monuments of Kraljevo. During this research, a probe was opened in the northernmost part of the site. The finds from the probe, material found on the surface and other indications showed that there was a fortification from Late Antiquity – the early byzantine period, but there were also finds from prehistory and the Middle Ages (9th to 10th century) (Букадин 1988: 281-282).

In 2009, systematic archaeological research of the sites of Ukosa and Kućište began, conducted by the National Museum in Kruševac. Ever since then, with the exception of 2013, they have been conducted every year.

The results gained after five years of archaeological research showed that the site at Ukosa



Fig. 2 Trap hole number 6 (photo: Ljubiša Vasiljević)

represents a multi level site, inhabited in the Early Iron Age, more precisely in the 8th century B.C. It is most likely that back then a smaller fortification was built at this place. Traces of it have yet to be detected, probably due to the long period of habitation on this same spot. Among the small finds from this period, there is pottery (urns with channelled decoration on their rims and necks, bowls with faceted rims, vessels with strainers..) and stone axes (Чађеновић 2007: 14-15; Рашковић 2011: 2).

Ukosa was used as a refugium until the Roman conquest, at the beginning of the New Era. There have also been finds that give testimony to a Celtic presence at this place; a hearth with an ellipsoidal ground plan, measuring 98 x 50 cm, with Late Iron Age pottery shards discovered in the vicinity and dated to the 1st century B.C. (Tapavički et al. 2015: 33).

The strategic advantages of Ukosa were used

again in Antiquity, during the turbulent times of the 3rd and 4th centuries, when safe havens high in the inaccessible mountains were needed, where it was possible to organise protection and defence. A hoard of 115 bronze Roman coins from the 4th-5th century gives testimony to the Roman presence (Vasiljević, Rutić 2014: 80).

Several other finds indicate Roman habitation in the vicinity of Ukosa. In 1912, M. M. Vasić wrote about the find of “37 pieces of Roman coinage from grad Stalać” (Васић 1912: 200). In the vicinity of the church of the Holy Spirit (Sveti Duh), close to the mediaeval fortification of Stalać, two brick kilns were discovered, while a third one was most likely destroyed during the reparation of the modern road leading to the church (Минић 1988-1990: 312-313). Field surveys, conducted by the National Museum in Kruševac, revealed that next to the kiln, there are skeletal burials with the deceased laid on ancient tegulae. The archaeological





Fig. 3 Roman brick kiln from Stalać (photo: Ljubiša Vasiljević)

material discovered close to the graves (pottery, a fragment of a lead mirror and a round plate fibula) indicates that the necropolis can be dated from the 3rd to the 4th century (Рашковић 2002: 50-51).

A solidus of the Byzantine emperor Romanos (921-927), discovered during conservation works, gives testimony to continued habitation of the area. Inside a tomb, “a gold coin and two earrings made in a special shape of silver” (Ризнић 1891: 86-87) were discovered. A find of a Roman bronze statuette, which, before the Second World War, was kept at the National Museum in Niš, can also be possibly connected to this area, however, it has now been lost. Its appearance is not known, while the only information about it is that it was a find discovered between Stalać and Mrzenica (Гарашанин М., Гарашанин Д. 1951: 201; Рашковић 1998: 181).

There is reason to believe that the original late antique fortification of Ukosa was established in

the 4th century, when the weakening of the central rule led to a decline in security. This, in turn, resulted in an attempt to move a huge number of settlements into the naturally protected hilly places. This fort played its most important role during the 6th century, when it was certainly included into the renovation and additional construction of fortifications conducted by Justinian, who hoped to maintain his rule over these areas.

According to the area it covered, Ukosa represents one of the largest Late Antique/Early Byzantine fortifications in this part of Serbia. The fortification measures almost 300 meters in length, while its width varies between 80 and 100 meters. The whole area is naturally divided into four plateaus. The fortification lines follow the natural terrain configuration. The smaller part of the fortification, which was discovered at the western side of the site, was positioned in a logically chosen position, where the slope becomes very steep. It



Fig. 4 Roman brick kiln from Grad Stalać (photo: Ljubiša Vasiljević)

was constructed of bigger, carved stones secured with mortar. The preserved wall measures 1.10 m in height. Since it enters the western sondage profile, its width could not be determined. This part of the will receive more detailed attention during future of the site excavations.

The building technique applied to the walls was also applied to buildings discovered at the western part of the site, where most of the excavations have so far taken place. Among the objects built of solid materials, there is a rectangular building, orientated east-west, which has not been fully examined. In its vicinity, damaged skeletal

burials were discovered.

During the excavation, seven pits were discovered, originally intended as food storages and then, after that, as rubbish pits. Apart from a huge amount of pottery and animal bones, fragments of glass vessels, metal tools, coins, fibulas etc. were discovered in the pits (Васильевић, Рутић 2014a: 55-56).

Numerous small finds provide evidence of life in Ukosa in the past. It was not only a strategic point, but also an important economic point. Apart from pottery (amphorae, jugs...) typical for the Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods,



Fig. 5 Ukosa – part of town walls (photo: Dušan Rašković)

there have also been finds made of metal, bone and stone, as evidence of different handicrafts (leather working, carpentry, stone cutting, etc.). Among the tools found there were axes, knives (the most interesting of which is a knife used for leather working), a stone cutters tool, shearing scissors, a bell, plough parts etc. A millstone is also worth mentioning, consisting of two stones and discovered in situ, directly on top of a rock. Metal and glass slag indicate the existence of metal and glass production. Finds of spearheads with long flat tops and arrow points of different types indicate a military presence.

A number of finds that can be described as decorative were also found at Ukosa. These include parts of glass vessels with thin walls and glass lamps, bone combs and decorated applications, an exquisitely decorated bone button for a bag, a bone flute, a pottery whistle and jewellery (fibulae and finger-rings). They all indicate the

aesthetic taste of the local inhabitants, tending to follow the trends of their times.

Special attention shall be paid to the find of an “S”-shaped fibula, typical for the Langobards, who were possibly part of a military unit. This is actually an isolated find of this type in the territory of Serbia (Рашковић 2011: 4).

At the southern and south-western part of the site of Ukosa there is a necropolis. Apart from skeletal burials, placed in the Christian manner and orientated west-east, there was a skeleton orientated south-north, with a huge stone placed upon its chest.

The second necropolis is situated at the site of Kućište, positioned on a slope next to Ukosa. Part of the northern slope of Kućište has been archaeologically examined. The motive for this archaeological excavation was the word of the locals, who claimed to have found graves in this area. One skeletal burial was discovered in a rect-





Fig. 6 Ukosa – skeletal graves (photo: Sanja Rutić)

angular pit plastered with stone, without grave-goods. Anthropological analysis revealed that it was a woman aged about 25 years. Her relative height was between 163 and 170 cm. The exact cause of death could not be determined, but it is certain that she suffered from bone tuberculosis, however, it can't be determined whether this was the direct cause of death (Цомба 2011: 281-289).

Archaeological finds give testimony to the habitation of Ukosa in the period from the 7th to the 11th century. Slavic pottery decorated with a typical waved line, bone and metal finds (finger-rings, and a fine carved knife, probably used for cult purposes), traces of fire-places and other finds indicate the strategic importance of Ukosa, which did not cease to exist as a settlement in the period mentioned above. During that period, Serbian, Bulgarian and Byzantine forces fought over this area. A find of a small cross also dates from this period and was discovered in the first excava-

tion layer, at the western part of Ukosa.

The connection between Ukosa and the medieval site of Stalać has not yet been established. Stalać reached its peak of development in the 14th and 15th century. One can not claim with any certainty whether, during this period, Ukosa was used as a final refugium or a watch-point. One of the romantic theories regarding this is mentioned in an epic song named "Smrt vojvode Prijezde" (The death of Duke Prijezda), who, not wanting to be captured alive by the Turks, along with his wife, jumped from the walls of Stalać into the Morava river. Contrary to Stalać, Ukosa lies directly above the bank of the South Morava, and it is therefore possible that this event took place in Ukosa rather than in Stalać.

It is certain that Ukosa and Kućište both conceal many secrets, some of which will be revealed with further archaeological research, set to continue in 2015.



Fig. 7 Kućište – skeletal grave of femal individual (photo: Dušan Rašković)

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Fig. 8 Ceramic whistle (photo: Petar Čeranić)

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Fig. 9 Bone zipper purse (photo: Petar Čeranić)

## REZIME

### ARHEOLOŠKI LOKALITETI UKOSA I KUĆIŠTE U GRAD STALAĆU

**KLJUČNE REČI: UKOSA, KUĆIŠTE, MOJSINJSKO - POSLONKE PLANINE, UTVRĐENJE, RANO GVOZDENO DOBA, KASNO GVOZDENO DOBA, ANTIKA, RANOVIZANTIJSKI PERIOD.**

Lokaliteti Ukosa i Kućište nalaze se u okviru naselja Grad Stalać, u blizini poznatog utvrđenja iz perioda poznog srednjeg veka. Lokaliteti su smešteni na Mojsinjskim planinama, iznad leve obale reke Južne Morave.

Prva manja sondažna iskopavanja na lokalitetu Ukosa izvedena su 1986. godine. Sistematska arheološka istraživanja Narodni muzej Kruševac sprovodi od 2009. godine, u okviru Projekta multidisciplinarnih istraživanja Mojsinjsko-Poslon-

skog kompleksa, podržanog od strane Ministarstva kulture Republike Srbije.

Istraživanja su pokazala da je lokalitet Ukosa prvi put nastanjen tokom perioda starijeg gvozdеног doba. Keramički materijal potvrđuje kontinuitet nastanjivanja i u epohi latena. Arheološki nalazi svedoče da su Rimljani, pogotovo u nemirnim vremenima kasne antike, koristili strateške mogućnosti Ukose. Poseban značaj ima otkriće ostave od 115 komada kasnoantičkog bronзаног novca. Postojanje antičkih ciglarskih peći i nekropole u Grad Stalaću svedoči o burnom životu na ovom prostoru tokom antike.

Utvrđeno je postojanje ostataka ranovizantijskog utvrđenog naselja. Trasa bedema prati konfiguraciju planinskih terasa na kojima je podignuta. Deo bedema otkriven je na zapadnoj strani lokaliteta. U okviru utvrđenja konstatovano je postojanje građevina od tvrdog materijala, otpadnih jama i skeletnih grobova različite orijentacije. Pokretni

materijal zastupljen je nalazima keramike, oruđa, oružja, fibula, nakita, medicinskih instrumenata, dekorisanih koštanih aplikacija itd.

Nastavak života na lokalitetu, nakon avarsko-slovenskih osvajanja, potvrđuju nalazi datovani u period VIII-XI veka. Otkriće srebrnog krsta

sa predstavom razapetog Hrista svedoči o završnoj fazi korišćenja utvrđenja u poznom srednjem veku.

Na lokalitetu Kućište utvrđeno je postojanje nekropole sa skeletnim sahranjivanjem.

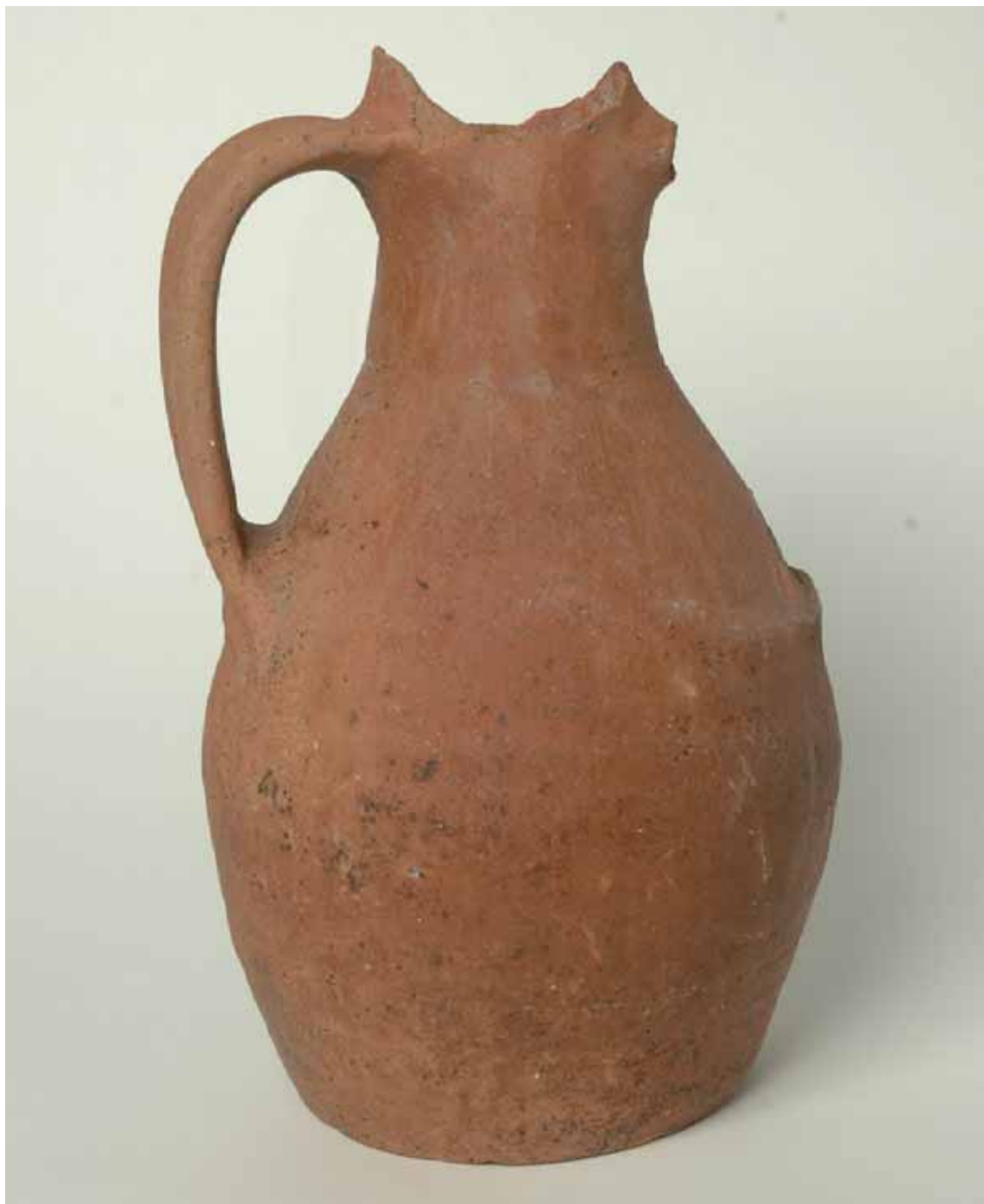


Fig. 10 Pitcher (photo: Petar Čeranić)