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## TAKING CARE OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE: THE STOBI EXPERIENCE

**ABSTRACT:** *Stobi is one of the largest and best-preserved archaeological sites from the Roman and Late Antique period in Macedonia. In the 1st cent. AD the city was raised to a rank of municipium. In the 4th cent. AD, Stobi developed again as an important Early Christian center, an Episcopal seat and later capital city of the roman province of Macedonia Secunda. The town was abandoned during the last decade of the 6th cent. AD. In 2008 the National Institution for management of the archaeological site Stobi was created with a goal to take care of the site from every possible aspect: excavation, conservation, tourist and scientific presentation etc. Here we present the experience and the results of our work on the site so far.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Stobi, Excavation, Conservation, Maintenance, Presentation*

Stobi is one of the largest and best-preserved archaeological sites from the Roman and Late Antique period in the Republic of Macedonia. The archaeological data showed long habitation in this area since late Bronze Age, although urban development is recorded much later, in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC. The earliest mentioning of the city comes from Livy who informs us about the military activities of the Macedonian king Phillip V near Stobi in 197 B.C.<sup>1</sup> and also describing it as an old city (*vetere urbe*) in Paeonia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Livius “The history of rome”, Book 33, Chapter 19, Translation in English by Ed. Evan T. Sage, Ph.D., available by Perseus Digital Library  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Liv.+33.19&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0166> [accessed 03.05.2014]

<sup>2</sup> T. Livius “The history of rome”, Book 39, Chapter 53, Translation in English by Ed. Evan T. Sage, Ph.D., available by Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Liv.+39.53>



Fig. 1 - Map of the region during the 4th - 6th centuries AD  
(according to R. F. Hoddinott)

Its development is obviously due to its position on the crossroad of two major roads (north-south: Singidunum - Scupi - Stobi - Thessalonica; and west-east: Heraclea Lyncestis - Stobi - Pautalia - Serdica) (Fig. 1) In the late 1<sup>st</sup> cent. B.C. the city was raised to a rank of municipium and its citizens had *ius italicum*.<sup>3</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. AD, Stobi developed again as an important Early Christian center, an Episcopal seat and capital of Macedonia Secunda.<sup>4</sup> The town was abandoned during the last decade of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD. The French archaeologist Leon Heuzey located Stobi in 1861.<sup>5</sup> German officers undertook the first excavations during the First World War and excavations

xt?doc=Liv.+39.53&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0164 [accessed 03.05.2014]

<sup>3</sup> J. Wiseman, *Archaeology and History at Stobi, Macedonia, Rome and the provinces*, In Charles B. McClendon ed., *New Haven Society of the Archaeological Institute of America*, 1986, 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> L. Heuzey et H. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine*, Paris, 1876.

have been going on ever since.<sup>6</sup> Different teams worked at Stobi during nearly 100 years, until finally in 2008 a separate institution was formed to help the site develop further.

By a government decision the new National Institution for management of the archeological site Stobi was created with a main goal to take care of the site from every aspect: excavation, conservation, scientific and tourist presentation, popularization and rehabilitation, thus presenting a different and unique form of institutional organization in Macedonia. According to the law for protection of the monuments of culture, the state can establish national institution for management of the cultural heritage of national importance, and NI Stobi is the first of its kind. It is an institution responsible for all aspects: investigation, preservation and presentation and management, the final goal being securing of self-sustainable development. The experience so far has proved that this is an excellent model when one site is in question.

NI Stobi is sub-divided in three departments (Museum and research department, conservation department and administrative department), closely connected and coherent in the planned activities, which gave excellent results in the preservation and presentation of Stobi.

### **The museum and research department:**

In this department there are seven employees at the moment, of which three archeologists responsible for different collections (Pre-Roman, Roman and Late Antique), one archeologist in charge of architectural and decoration elements, one numismatist, and two archeologists-documentators responsible for the digital data base in the Institution, as well as organizing and labeling of all other documentation. This team is directly involved in Archaeological investigations and organizing annual exhibitions and scientific work for publishing the results of the excavations.

Starting from 2009/10, NI Stobi carried out large-scale excavations, which were part of the so-called capital project sponsored by the Government. These excavations were undertaken on an area of 15000 m<sup>2</sup>; some of the older buildings were being excavated, and new ones were revealed. Excavation were conducted in the Theatre, the Building with arches, the 6<sup>th</sup> century residential complex, the Western necropolis, the northwestern fortification wall, the inner fortification wall, the Episcopal basilica and at the newly discovered Temple of Isis. (Fig.4)

In 2011, 2012 and 2013 the excavations continued on a smaller scale, mainly focusing on buildings where in the close future a conservational project needed to be launched. The priorities during these years were the Tem-

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Hald, *Auf den Trümmern Stobis*, Stuttgart, 1917.

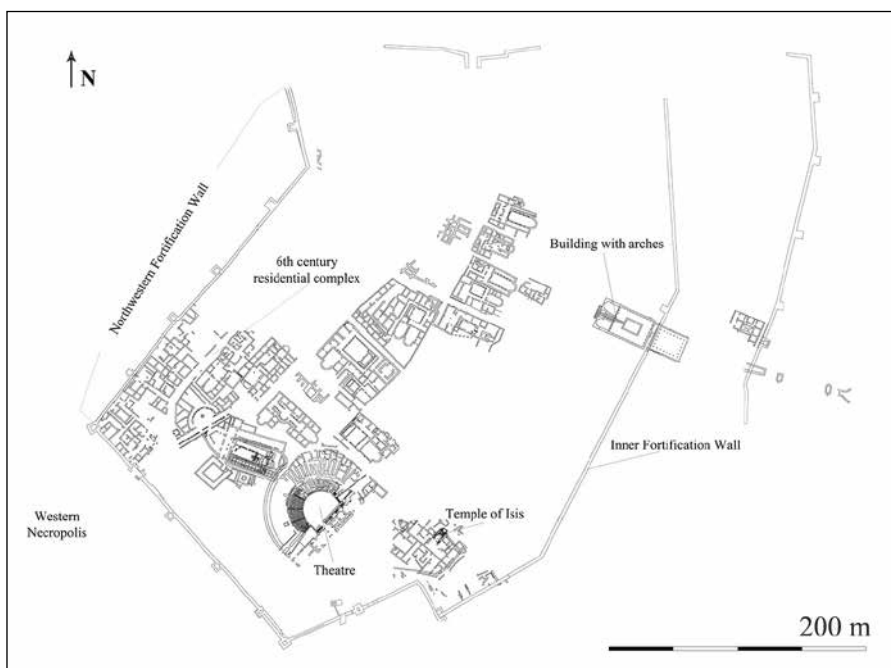


Fig. 4 - Map of Stobi and the excavations during the period 2008-2013

ple of Isis, the Theatre, the Episcopal Basilica and the large residential segment of the 6<sup>th</sup> century urban phase.

Since 2010, NI Stobi organizes international field school excavations in which students participate from everywhere around the world. Besides training in basics of excavation methodology and creating field documentation, the project includes lectures, finds processing and excursions to ancient sites and landmarks in Macedonia. The same principle is used to organize schools for mosaic, pottery and glass conservation on a yearly basis. The aim is to provide education and invaluable experience in archaeology and conservation, and in the process, in any way possible, to help develop Stobi further. The financial gain from these schools also benefits the site immensely, since all of the funds are reinvested in Stobi itself. (Fig. 2, 3)

At the end of every year an exhibition is prepared in the National museum of Macedonia presenting the results of the latest excavations. Also in the following years the results of the new excavations should be published in the fourth volume of *Studies in Antiquities of Stobi*, which is an international archaeological journal with three volumes published until 1981.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> J. Wiseman, Ed., *Studies in the antiquities of Stobi I*. Beograd, 1973; J. Wiseman, Ed., *Stud-*



Fig. 2 - Archaeological field school

national institution Stobi already published the first volume of the Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi monograph series, titled *Inscriptiones Stoborum*, which is a corpus of all published and new inscriptions from the site, except the inscriptions on the Theater seats which will be published in a separate monograph.

### **The conservation department**

The department was functioning with qualified staff hired by NI Stobi with temporary contracts until the end of 2013, when three permanent employments were granted to the institution: metal, stone and pottery conservators.

Until now, this department of NI Stobi carried out 5 different projects. Four of them which are conservations of the mosaic floor of the house of Peristeria, conservation of the house with Triclinum, conservation work on *cavea ima* of the Theatre, conservation of the temple of Isis were financed by the annual program of the ministry of culture for preservation of cul-

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ies in the antiquities of Stobi II. Beograd, 1975; B. Aleksova and J. Wiseman, Eds., *Studies in the antiquities of Stobi III*, Skopje 1981.



Fig. 3 - School for documenting and conserving mosaics

tural heritage. The fifth and maybe most interesting project is the conservation of the 4<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings from the Old Episcopal Basilica. The oldest Christian frescoes in the Republic of Macedonia were conserved with a financial support of the US Ambassador's Grant for Cultural Preservation. After the conservation an exhibition at the National Bank in Skopje with a printed catalogue about the frescoes and the conservation process, presented the project results in front of the wider audience (E. Dimitrova, S Blaževska and M. Tutkovski, *Early Christian Wall Paintings from the Episcopal Basilica in Stobi*, NI Stobi, 2012)

Very similar with the field school excavations are the conservation school projects

managed by this department. NI Stobi, along with Balkan heritage foundation and new Bulgarian University organize conservation schools of pottery, glass, mosaics and mural paintings. These schools provide a lot of new conserved movable finds and also financial benefit.

### **The administrative department**

It includes employees that deal with the legal and financial sides of the institution, maintenance and presentation of the site. At this department one accountant, one lawyer, and 6 guards that provide 24 hours security are employed.

During 6-month season at the site 5 tour guides are also present; during the winter season there are 2 guides; all of them are fluent in at least one foreign language. There is promotional material, and a souvenir shop. An-

other way of promotion is the web site. The Stobi website was made as a donation for the archaeological site by a software company based in Macedonia. On the website there is information about the history of the town, history of past excavations and conservations, needed donations, updates of the new activities etc. Simultaneously with the web site a Stobi Facebook page is active, making it easier to redirect traffic towards our website.

Other activities that NI Stobi had undertaken in the last years are:

In 2011 NI Stobi applied at the World Monuments Fund. Soon after Stobi was placed on the World Monuments Watch List for 2012 and 2013 with 67 other sites around the world which are at risk and need WMF advocacy. The WMF helps sites around the globe by raising the awareness among public, government agencies, community organizations and potential donors about the importance of heritage preservations.

In 2013 Stobi was the host of the conservation seminar “Consolidation of stone and stone buildings”, as one of the biggest events that involved conservators from different institutions in the Republic of Macedonia. The seminar was organized by a Macedonian specialized company for conservation and restoration, in collaboration with CTS - the biggest manufacturer of conservation and restoration materials in Europe - and the National Conservation Centre from Skopje. The Cultural Heritage Protection Office and the National Institution Stobi supported the event.

This big of an archaeological site has its positives and its negatives. 5 years' time is enough to locate the difficult areas and to foresee where the problems will appear in the future. In our 5 years of experience in working at Stobi these are the pros and cons that working at the site bring with it (not all of them, just the more important ones):

Pros:

- The site covers a surface of 26.5 ha, of which one third is excavated. There are 17 buildings, and three extra muros presented to the public. The path for visitors is determined; there are information panels and night illumination which adds to the sites' mystique.

- There are 1600 m<sup>2</sup> of mosaic floors presented, and 20 000 movable finds stored at the depots and waiting to be exhibited in the future museum (if we manage to fund its construction)

- The site is under 24-hour surveillance, with 6 hired guards.

- Free guided tours for groups.

- Stobi is situated close to the Highway E-75 which is part of the international corridor 10, with transit of ca. 3.5 million tourists per year. There is a train stop at Stobi from the railways line Skopje-Gevgelija-Thessaloniki that passes right next to the site.

- It is in a region where the wine tourism is on the rise.

- It has developed infrastructure for accommodation of a lot of staff members during multiple projects. For instance every June in the past three years there are three simultaneous projects: schools for conservation of pottery, school for conservation of mosaics and archeological excavations. It has many storage areas, field labs and working area. Even then, the size of the site dictates that we are still lacking, especially in storage areas.

#### Cons

- Lack of national strategy for protection and presentation of archaeological sites or better to say, no adherence to the existing national strategy.

- Inconsistent funding (government) resulting in difficulties in completing conservational projects.

- Lack of human resources, trained conservators, marketing manager(s) and architects.

- The influences of climate change are felt in Stobi mainly because of its position between two rivers. Due to its position Stobi is susceptible to floods. During winter frost threatens the buildings, and especially mosaics and frescoes. The difference in temperature during 24 hours can sometimes exceed 15 degrees Celsius, which influences the porous sandstone, which is the main building material in Stobi in general.

- Low level of awareness for the importance of cultural heritage protection among population.

- Inactivity of local government and communities in cultural heritage protection

- Difficulties regarding site maintenance (everyday unexpected expenses).

- Contemporary influences: The pollution from the biggest Ferro-Nickel factory in close-by Kavadarci, only 6-7 km distance. The exhausts from the vehicles passing by the site on the highway contribute towards disintegrating of the mortar in the buildings, creating vibrations that “shake” the buildings etc.

- Lack of marketing

NI Stobi wouldn't be where it is today without contributions from experts in all fields. Although experts in conservation in Macedonia are not many, at NI Stobi is working with a cohesive team of individuals that were on the same wavelength as us. The results speak for themselves, and here are some of the results which the institution has achieved in the past 5 years:

- Excavation of 15 000 m<sup>2</sup> of the city and its necropolises
- Conservation of around 500 m<sup>2</sup> of mosaic floors
- Conservation of the house with Triclinium
- Conservation of the newly discovered Temple of Isis
- Conservation of 110 m<sup>2</sup> of frescoes



- Conservation of 270 worked bone objects
- Conservation of 1200 coins and 200 metal objects
- Conservation of 450 pottery vessels
- Participating at various regional and international, symposiums and conferences, presenting the excavation, research and conservation results.
  - Conducting research regarding climate change and its influences in Stobi in the future. The research was made in a collaboration work between UNDP, GIZ and Institute for Heritage Management from Germany.
  - Organizing the depot and storage facilities with movable finds
  - Promotional material: flyers in 5 different languages
  - Signed a four year sponsorship agreement with Stobi winery and a significant amount donated per year for better maintenance of the site
  - A fully functional tour guide team, with tickets and souvenirs (before 2008 nothing was available at Stobi)
  - A themed exhibition regarding the earliest Christian frescoes in Macedonia and 5 annual exhibitions

The idea of a self-sustainable archaeological site is one that we hold in highest regard. But for this to be even remotely possible, we need to take everything one-step at a time. Our short term and long term plans all contribute towards making Stobi a friendlier environment not only for tourists, but also for scientists, local communities, educational programs, conference organizers etc. The possibilities that site offers are limitless and we intend on exploiting it to the fullest. Some of our future plans are as follows:

- Re-evaluation of the site, determination of the contact zones and level of protection
  - Conservation - restoration works
  - Maintenance of the site
  - Marketing development and tourist promotion
  - A new administrative-museum complex
  - Program for interactive educational programs for kids and adult visitors
- A new fence around the site
- Improvement of the informational panels
- Audio guides
- Video surveillance
- Tourist and visitors center
- Printed publications

The experience so far has led us to a conclusion that there are no previously determined ways for maintaining and popularization of a site. Every site has its own problems, and its own solutions. Every model of work should not be taken literally, and should be adapted to the circumstances that sur-

round it. Continuous work and investment, with a team situated at the spot can notify the weak points at their beginning and immediately affect them. Thus providing a solid ground for development and preserving the cultural heritage for the future generations.

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### TAKING CARE OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE: THE STOBI EXPERIENCE

#### *Summary*

Stobi is the largest and best preserved site in the R. of Macedonia, being excavated by different teams for nearly 100 years. In 2008 a separate institution (NI Stobi) was formed to take care of the site from every aspect: excavation, conservation, scientific and tourist presentation, popularization and rehabilitation. NI Stobi is subdivided in three departments: Museum and research department, conservation department and administrative department.

The museums department is in charge for the excavations, exhibitions, and publication of the results. In the period between 2009 and 2013 we have conducted large scale excavations in an area of 15 000 m<sup>2</sup>, as part of the capital projects sponsored by the Government.

The conservation department has carried out five different projects focused on conserving mosaic, frescoes and the buildings themselves at Stobi. The team organizes conservation schools for pottery, glass, mosaics and frescoes which provides a lot of new conserved movable finds and also financial benefit for the site.

The administrative department has one lawyer, one accountant and 6 guards permanently employed. For a more adequate maintenance and presentation of the site during the six month season 5 tour guides are also present. There is promotional material, and a souvenir shop. Another way of promotion is the web site, and the Facebook page.

Working at the site has brought us at a point where we can identify the problems that occur continuously, and to react quickly. Since there are no previously determined ways for maintaining and popularization of an archaeological site, simply because every site has its own problems and solutions, we think that upgrading this model further will bring great benefit for the site, and the cultural heritage as a whole in our country.