

# EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXXI  
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# EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXXI

2021

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Any correspondence will be sent to the editor:  
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# A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW DATING OF THE TERRACOTTA RELIEFS FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE VINIČKO KALE

**Antonio Jakimovski<sup>1</sup>, Magdalena Manaskova<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The archeological site Viničko Kale is in the southwest part of Vinica, Macedonia. The site has existed from prehistory to the Middle Ages. The attention of the scientific and general public to the Vinica Fortress is attracted by the accidental discovery of unusual ceramic tiles with relief paintings. Archaeological excavations began in 1985, first as protective research and later as systematic research, which periodically took place to this day. The research determined the stratigraphy of the site, which was more precisely defined during the last research campaigns, from 2008 to 2011.*

**Keywords:** *Viničko Kale, Vinica terracotta reliefs, Late antiquity*

The archeological site Viničko Kale is located in the southwest part of Vinica. The site has existed from prehistory to the Middle Ages. It was first recorded by M. Grbić in 1954 under the toponym Gradište.<sup>3</sup> During the reconnaissances performed by M. and D. Garašanin in 1957, several sites were recorded in Vinica, including the site Viničko Kale, which was registered under the name Kale Bair.<sup>4</sup> In the past texts referring to the Viničko Kale, almost no mention is made of the fact that in 1972 the site was afforested with pine plantation, covering the visible remains of some buildings. In later years this will be a major problem in archaeological research and defining the stratigraphy of the site.

The attention of the scientific and general public to the Viničko Kale is attracted by the accidental discovery of unusual ceramic tiles with relief paintings.<sup>5</sup> In 1978, the Archaeological Museum of Macedonia inspected and the site was noted in the first archaeological map of the Municipality of Vinica.<sup>6</sup> Archaeological excavations began in 1985, first as protective research and later as systematic research, which periodically took place to this day.<sup>7</sup> The research determined the stratigraphy of the site, which was more precisely defined during the last research campaigns, from 2008 to 2011.<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 1)

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje, Institute of Art History and Archaeology, Address: bul. “Goce Delčev” 9A, 1000 Skopje, Macedonia; email: antonio@zf.ukim.edu.mk.

<sup>2</sup> Museum Terracotta, Vinica City Museum, Address: Bel Kamen 13, 2310 Vinica, Macedonia; email: magdamanaskova@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> ГРБИЌ 1956, 115.

<sup>4</sup> ГАРАШАНИН/ГАРАШАНИН 1959, 69.

<sup>5</sup> In 1977, students from Elementary School Vančo Prke – Vinica, send a letter to the curator Cone Krstevski, in which they describe these unusual findings.

<sup>6</sup> КРСТЕВСКИ/БЕЛДЕДОВСКИ 1979, 12–13.

<sup>7</sup> Previous research has been led by Cone Krstevski and Kosta Balabanov, and some of their findings have been published in their papers: КРСТЕВСКИ/БЕЛДЕДОВСКИ 1987, 135–166., BALABANOV 1986, BALABANOV 1987 A., BALABANOV 1987 B., БАЛАБАНОВ/КРСТЕВСКИ 1991., БАЛАБАНОВ 1991., KRSTEVSKI 1993., БАЛАБАНОВ 1995., БАЛАБАНОВ 2006., БАЛАБАНОВ 2011., КРСТЕВСКИ/СОКОЛОВСКА 2011, 245–253.

<sup>8</sup> Archaeological excavations in the period from 2008–2011 took place in 3 sectors under the leadership of Cone Krstevski and Antonio Jakimovski.



Fig. 1. Viničko Kale

The terracotta reliefs from the Viničko Kale, also known as “Vinica icons”, although discovered more than forty years ago, are still treated as one of the greatest archaeological enigmas in the area. Archaeological objects of great national and general civilization value have been exhibited in several world museum centers: Vatican, Rome, Zagreb, Moscow, Ljubljana, Belgrade, Munich, Warsaw, Ankara, Lisbon, Paris, Utrecht, Kiev. There are a large number of unanswered questions related to their functional purpose and significance, and some of the relief representations are not yet deciphered (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Vinica terracotta reliefs

One of the challenges, of course, is their dating. So far, various theories have been put forward and the terracottas are dated, depending on the researchers, to the wide time range from the 4th to the 9th century.<sup>10</sup> Almost all dates so far have been determined on the basis of analysis

<sup>9</sup> For the terminology see: DIMITROVA 2012, 16.

<sup>10</sup> For different dating of the terracotta plaques see: БАЛАБАНОВ 1986, 153; МЕЛОСКИ 1991, 179 – 186; for V-VI c.: КРСТЕВСКИ/БЕЛДЕДОВСКИ 1987, 153–166; БАЛАБАНОВ/КРСТЕВСКИ 1991, 20; ДИМИТРОВА 1993, 207–213; ДИМИТРОВА., 2012, 258–259; ЃОРЃИЕВСКИ 2011–2012, 139–147; ПЕЈИЧ 1987, 315–317; БАЛАБАНОВ/КРСТЕВСКИ 1991, 17; БАЛАБАНОВ 2011, 271 – 309; АЛЕКСОВА 1989, 134; ЗДРАВКОВСКИ 1997, 60–67; АЛЕКСОВА 1999, 293–308; АЛЕКСОВА 2003, 239–254.

of historical circumstances, iconographic analysis of scenes and palaeographic analysis of the inscriptions. The archaeological component as very important in the chronological determination of the origin and use of terracotta, has so far been very little represented, primarily due to the specific archaeological context in which they are found.

The subject of our interest are the terracotta reliefs discovered in two buildings located on the acropolis of the site, in sector II, explored in the period from 2008 to 2011.<sup>11</sup> It was then discovered for the first time in a specific archaeological context that allows more accurate dating. (Fig. 3A and Fig. 3B)

In 2008, an object with the working name Object II was discovered. It is located on the right side

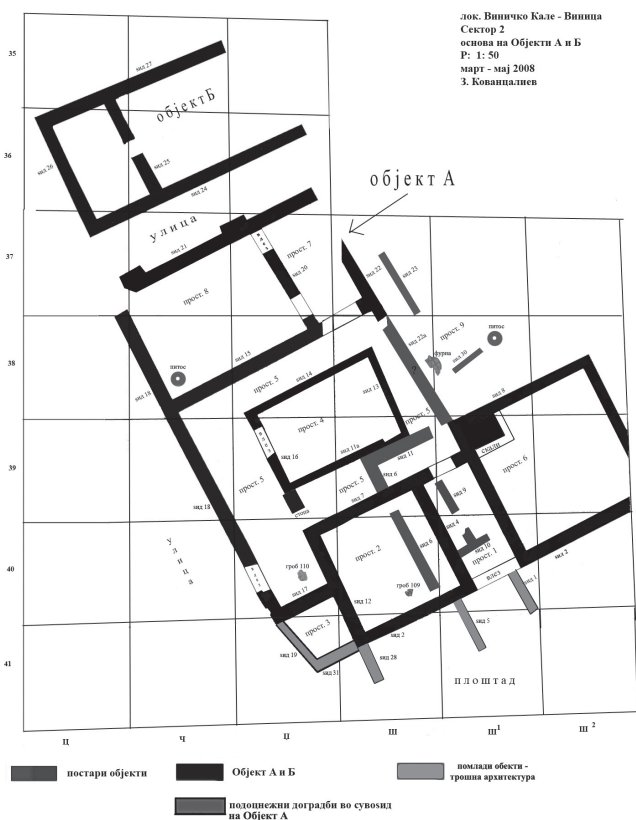


Fig. 3B. Viničko Kale. Technical drawing – sector II

is probably a residential building. At the very entrance between the two rooms, in the ruin layer of the walls of the building, a terracotta relief with a representation of Archangel Michael was discovered, almost completely preserved, and a coin of Justinian I (527 – 565), while in the layer

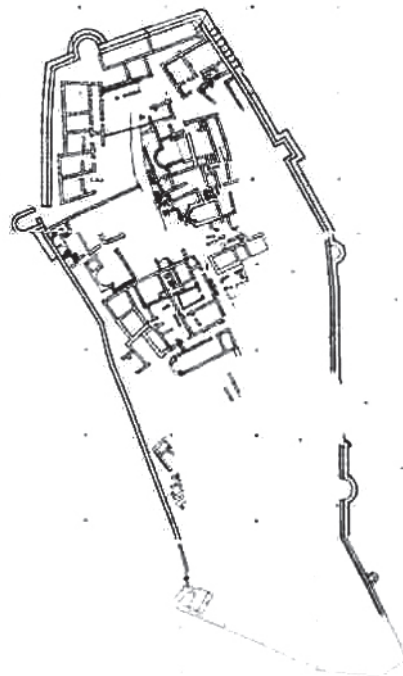


Fig. 3A. Viničko Kale. Technical drawing

of the main communication in the city, called work – Street 1 and has access from the south through another, narrower street. The part of the building where terracotta relief has been discovered is on the east side and two rooms. It is built of processed crushed stone connected with lime mortar. This facility is built on a rain water tank, so during the research of the tank part of the integrity of the facility was violated. The floor of room 2 is plastered, and in the northwest corner it is decorated with a mosaic decoration in the form of a rosette. All these elements, the window glass, as well as the other movable archeological material, allow us to assume that it

<sup>11</sup> The research in Sector 2 to which this text refers was led by Antonio Jakimovski, PhD and SilvanaBlazevska (M.Sc.) (2009–2011), with the participation of archaeologists Magdalena Manaskova, Goce Pavlovski, Zlatko Kovancaliev and Katarina Kasapinova, as well as students from the Department of Archeology at UKIM.

above it, on the ground level, a bronze coin of 20 nummi by Justin II (566–567) was found. (Fig. 4)<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 4. Coin of Justin II (566–567)

During the archeological excavations in 2011, in one of the premises of the building with working name Object III, in the village and part of the fortification, under the ruin layer of the building, more precisely under the foundation of one of the walls of the building, a fragment of a terracotta relief with a representation of Constantine's cross was found<sup>13</sup>, together with a ceramic lamp. (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The discovery of an already out of function terracotta relief together with a lamp, on the rock itself under the foundations of a building that was built in cca530 and functioned until the end of the 6th century.

In the same context, in the northern half of the room, a coin of Tiberius II Constantine (578–582) was found on the ground floor (Fig. 6). According to the other archeological material found in the building, we place its construction in the 30s of the 6th century, during the

<sup>12</sup> For the iconographic analysis of the play see: DIMITROVA 2012, 209–219.

<sup>13</sup> For the iconographic analysis of the play see: DIMITROVA 2012, 189–197.

reign of Justinian I, and its demolition at the very end of the 6th century, certainly after the reign of Tiberius II Constantine (578–582), ie we date the building to the second construction phase of the late antiquity on Vinica Fortress.



Fig. 6. Solidus of Tiberius II Constantine (578–582)

The late antique horizon to which the Vinica reliefs belong is most present on the Vinica Fortress, which means that most of the remains of buildings explored so far belong to the period from the middle of the IV century to the end of the VI century. The late antique castle was built due to the good geostrategic position of the road Astibo-Partikopolis, primarily with a military character around the middle of the IV century, due to the military-political situation in the empire. The wall of castrum originates from this period, which follows the natural configuration of the terrain. Later the rampart was fortified with another rampart built in the time of Justinian I. Exactly in the period of the reign of Justinian I we have the strongest construction activity on the Vinica fortress, more precisely the second construction phase in late antiquity.

Thus, several architectural materials were found, which supplemented the pictures for the elections in the period from the middle of the 4th to the end of the 6th century in Viničko Kale.

According to the previously presented objects, in which fragments were found on the floor levels, ie. fully preserved terracotta reliefs along with chronologically sensitive material – the coin of Justinian I (527–565), a lamp from which we can date it to the IV and V century,<sup>14</sup> and is a well-developed type, known as the North African light bulb,<sup>15</sup> and of course, the coin of Tiberius II Constantine, minted in 578–582, after which the building was destroyed. The dating is allowed by most of the researched objects from the end of the 6th century, and in all of them the extinction of life in this period on Vinica Fortress has been recorded.

Apart from this closed archeological context, which certainly gives us the upper limit, this dating is also confirmed by the layer under the floors and the foundations of the restoration of the architecture in the 6th century. In several places under the floors and foundations have been found already destroyed – fragmented icons in the layer that was leveled for the construction of buildings in the first third of the VI century.

The late antiquity of the Vinica Fortress is represented by two chronologically clearly defined phases. The first is from the middle of the IV century at the latest until the first third

<sup>14</sup> JAKIMOVSKI 2012, type XLIV, 278–288, with listed analogies and presented almost identical lamp with identical disk decoration (catalog number 696) found at the archeological site Crveno Pole – Strumica.

<sup>15</sup> JAKIMOVSKI 2012, 278–288, type XLIV, The shoulder and the disc of these lamps are usually richly decorated with schematic plant or purely geometric motifs, as well as Christian symbols, which is why this type of lamps from some authors have even called it Old Christian.

of the VI century, and the second is after the first third of the VI century, until the end of the VI century. The building in which an already destroyed fragmented icon was found was built around the first third of the 6th century and functioned until 600 AD. 530 is therefore the *terminus post quem*, which means that the reliefs are already losing their primary function. The same is confirmed by the fragments found under the foundations of this building, which also indicates that the reliefs before the second construction phase have already lost their function.

According to the stated archeological context, the Vinica terracotta reliefs can be dated from the end of the IV century, and their existence can be traced back to the early VI century (first third), ie to the time of the early years of the reign of Justinian I.

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Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, București, I-XII (1924–1928); Nouvelle Série: Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne (București)	
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M. M. Roxan, P. Holder, Roman Military Diplomas, London	= RMD
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