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THE SOUTHWEST CEMETERY CHURCH AT GOLEMO GRADIŠTE, VILLAGE OF KONJUH

Key words: *Golemo Gradište, Konjuh, cemetery, cemetery church, Late Antiquity*

Abstract: *In 2014 excavation was carried out to determine whether or not a church or other structure was located on a small hill south of the fortified, anonymous, Late Antique city at Golemo Gradište, village of Konjuh, Kratovo. The results of the brief investigation indicated that a small, one-aisle church had once stood on the hill in question and that a cemetery had been located to the south and east of the church. Although evidence for chronology is sparse, it seems likely that the church and cemetery functioned during the 5th and 6th centuries AD.*

Introduction

During the early 1970s Ivan Mikulčić carried out survey at and around the archaeological site of Golemo Gradište, village of Konjuh, Kratovo.¹ In addition to publishing two articles that dealt specifically with the anonymous city, “Antički gradovi kod Drenova i Konjuha u Makedoniji,” *Arheološki Pregled* 15 (1973) 179-182, and “Два безимени доцноантички града во Источна Македонија,” *Зборник на Археолошкиот Музеј Скопје* 6-7 (1975) 122-130, he included description and discussion of the site in several articles and books, e.g., in *Средновековни градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996. Thus Mikulčić frequently brought the site to the attention of archaeologists in Macedonia.

Svetozar Radojčić first published on archaeology at Konjuh;² he briefly described the site but focused primarily on the Rotunda, located ca. 200 m south of the fortified city, and secondarily on the medieval

church known as Sv. Djordji and the room quarried into the bedrock on the south side of the acropolis. Konstantin Petrov studied the architectural sculpture, mostly from the Rotunda,³ and Borka Josifovska searched for inscriptions.⁴ Mikulčić, in contrast, focused on and provided a detailed description of the entire city site, including the acropolis, the southern sector, the fortification walls and possible gates, the lower town on the northern terrace, and the K’šla cemetery area to the northwest.

Referring briefly to the Rotunda and its significance, Mikulčić mentioned and agreed with Radojčić’s suggestion that the city had been a bishopric, a statement that he repeated in later publications. The only Early Byzantine church at the site that was known in detail in the 1970s was the Rotunda. Radojčić had briefly mentioned a basilica on the northern terrace, and Mikulčić also referred to it, although considerable uncertainty exists whether the basilica was actually visible on the terrain in the 1970s.

In 1995, during salvage excavations carried out by the Republički Zavod along the line of the proposed Skopje-Sofia railroad, a small, three-aisle basilica was found by chance at K’šla and was excavated, but has never been published in detail. A large, two-level vaulted tomb occupied much of the south aisle of the basilica, whose narthex included a staircase, presumably to galleries.

³ Petrov, K., „Ставродекорација од Коњух,“ *Зборник на Археолошки Музеј Скопје* 2 (1957-58) 31-45; *idem*, „Реконструкција на амбонот од Ротондата во Коњух,“ *Годишен Зборник на Филозофски Факултет*, Скопје 22 (1970) 271-302.

⁴ Josifovska, B., „Jedan novi vojnički natpis iz Konjuha,“ *Živa Antika* 13-14 (1964) 166-170; Dragojević-Josifovska, B., *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure VI. Scupi et la région de Kumanovo*, Beograd 1982, 177-180.

¹ I first met Ivan Mikulčić at Stobi in 1971, when we were both working on the Yugoslav-American Excavation Project; American members of the staff have fond memories of him from that Project.

² Radojčić, S., “Crkva u Konjuhu,” *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 1 (1952) 148-167.

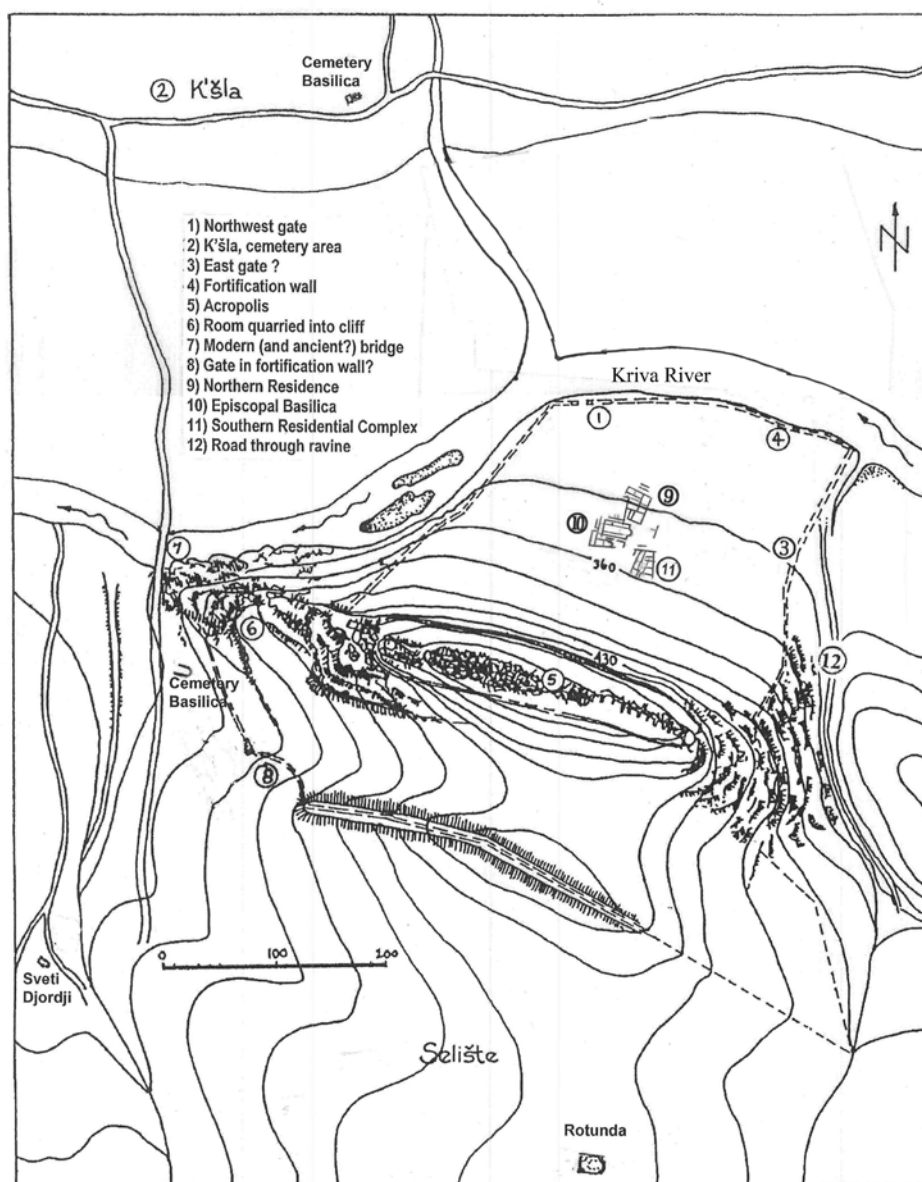


Fig. 1. Plan of Golemo Gradište, Konjuh, 2015. G. C. McArdle, after I. Mikulčić, M. Milojević, and the National Survey Institute; with additions by C. Snively.

In 2008, the basilica on the northern terrace came to light, also by chance, during excavations by the Macedonian-American project, sponsored by the Archaeological Museum in Skopje and Gettysburg College in the United States, which has been working at Golemo Gradište since 2000. This basilica is part of a complex, centrally located on the terrace, that includes a baptistery, numerous western annexes, a large residence, and, on the north side of the basilica, an atrium and monumental entrance to the church. The basilica has a *kyklion* or annular corridor in the apse (as does the Rotunda), a small ambo in the presbyterium and a larger one at the south side of the nave, and an unidentified semi-circular feature in the nave, as well as other unexpected features.⁵

⁵ Snively, C. S., "The New Basilica at Golemo Gradište, Konjuh: a Sixth Century Church in the Province of Darda-

In 2014, in response to a request from a local farmer, we partly excavated a fourth Early Byzantine church at the site, and the third church located outside the walls of the city. It seems fitting to present this new church in a volume dedicated to Ivan Mikulčić, whose publications first included the site of

nia," *Niš & Byzantium* 9 (2011) 187-201; *eadem*, "Spaces for Deposition of Offerings in Early Byzantine Churches: The Possible Sacristies at Golemo Gradište, Konjuh," *Giving Gifts to God. Proceedings of the 1st & 2nd International Archaeological Conference "Kokino", Skopje & Kumanovo, 2016-2017*, Kumanovo, 2018, 175-182; Snively, C., and G. Sanev, "Archaeological Investigations at Golemo Gradište, Konjuh, 2012-2016," *Archaeology of a World of Changes. Late Roman and Early Byzantine architecture, sculpture and landscapes*, BAR International Series 2973, 2020, 57-67.



Fig. 2. The valley of the Kriva River and the cliffs along its left bank. From northeast; from west end of the acropolis. The new church is visible at the left, on the near side of the road

Golemo Gradište among the other Late Antique cities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The new church

Aleksandar Mitevski of the village of Konjuh acquired a field (*katarski parcela* #923) on concession in 2010. It lies between the road leading from the bridge over the Kriva Reka and the west end of the acropolis of Golemo Gradište. (Figs. 1, 2) Local tradition held that a church had once stood on a knoll or low hill in the field, and both bones and pottery had turned up during cultivation, so that Mitevski was reluctant to plow the top of the hill. Because he was expected to cultivate the entire field, he asked our international excavation project, for which he had worked, to investigate the hill and to determine once and for all whether or not a church had been located there. Since this request also offered the opportunity to investigate the area south of the site (Sektor III) and possibly to verify the reports of local farmers about antiquities in that area, the area was included in our request for a permit in 2014. Excavation took place between 2 and 10 July;⁶ a burial was removed on 15 July.⁷

⁶ Because the workers from the village of Konjuh had a personal interest in this investigation and were enthusiastic about what we might find, they were happy to assist with

After vegetation had been cleared and the terrain examined, a 5 x 10 m trench, Trench 2,⁸ oriented north-south, was laid out just below the highest point of the hill. The area had been plowed in the past. Over parts of the trench the first 0.50 m of fill consisted of humus with roots, mixed in places with stone and mortar debris. An east-west wall, Wall 1, came to light, running across the trench. It turned out to be the north wall of a structure. Solidly built of roughly worked stones bonded with white lime mortar, it was ca. 0.70 m wide; a plaster facing was preserved on the inner, southern face. It rested on a shallow foundation of stones without mortar. A patch of floor was associated with the wall; it consisted of several bricks (or ceramic floor tiles) 24 x 32 cm, apparently set into a hard, earthen matrix. The relative elevations of floor and preserved top of the wall indicated that the building was preserved only in foundations.

the logistics and worked eagerly to reveal a church that they saw as belonging to their village.

⁷ Carolyn S. Snively supervised the excavation, assisted by Goran Sanev.

⁸ Trench 1, supervised by Danče Goluboska, was dug in this area just below the acropolis, in the saddle between Malo Gradište and the acropolis, in 2002.

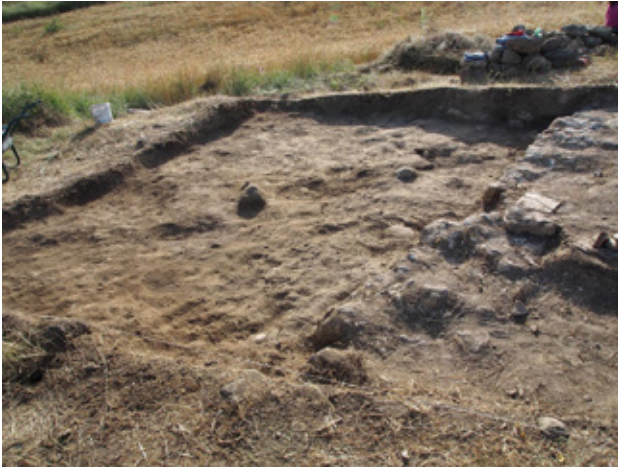


Fig. 3. The north part of Trench 2, from southwest. Wall 1 is at right; north of it is the surface under which was found prehistoric pottery.



Fig. 4. Trench 2, from the north. Excavation into the surface revealed prehistoric pottery beside the shallow foundation of Wall 1, under the meter stick. The stone debris from Wall 1 is visible at left.

Excavation on the north side of Wall 1 revealed heavy stone debris, which had fallen from the wall onto a fairly even surface sloping down to the north. This surface was the one from which the building had been constructed, and it continued to exist during the use of the building. Excavation below that surface into a deposit of yellow brown earth with charcoal flecks brought to light only a large number of dark, burnished potsherds, identified as prehistoric and almost certainly Late Neolithic. (Figs 3, 4)

A fragment of a worked stone block was found among the debris north of the wall (Fig. 5). Very likely it had been used for construction material and should not be associated with the church.

A test trench on the line of Wall 1 located ca. 1.5 m east of Trench 2 revealed the northeast corner of the building. This test and others were expanded into Trench 3, an irregularly shaped trench that was extended several times; located east of Trench 2, it was extended to the south in order to include the apse and the southeast corner of the church.

The wall of the apse, Wall 2, was preserved only in foundation. (Fig. 6) Like Wall 1, it was ca. 0.70 m wide and had been constructed of stones, some brick fragments, and lime mortar. It had been damaged by plowing, as may be seen in Fig. 7.

The south wall, Wall 3, was similar to Walls 1 and 2. It appeared in Trench 3 and in the southwest corner of Trench 2, for a length of ca. 6 m. Wall 3 was not found in a test placed on its line 2 m to the west; the hill slopes down to the west, and probably erosion and/or plowing destroyed the western part of the wall.

Another test was placed 1 m west of the west edge of Trench 2, on the line of Wall 1. The destroyed west



Fig 5. The fragment of worked block found among the debris north of Wall 1.

end of Wall 1 appeared in the test. A hard surface, probably marking the bottom of the foundation of the wall, was noted immediately west of its ragged end. A hard surface at a higher level was observed beside the south, inner face of the wall; it appears too low to represent a floor level, unless the floor sloped down to the west.

The church shows a very simple plan, a single aisle with an eastern apse. Nothing is known about the interior arrangement. The complete preserved length is at least 10 m, the interior width is 5.50 m, and the exterior width 6.90 m. The small patch of preserved floor near the north wall, as well as excavation to the bottom of that wall, indicates that little is preserved above the foundations. Parts of Trenches 2 and 3 were deliberately left unexcavated in hope that those parts at a slightly higher elevation might preserve more of the floor or other indications of the



Fig. 6. The apse of the church, from southeast. Disturbed bones are visible beside the meter stick. One basket holds pottery, the larger one holds bones.



Fig. 7. The north part of the wall of the apse, from southeast, showing damage from plowing.

interior arrangements. At present the complete east-length of the building is unknown and, because the terrain falls steeply to the west, the western part of the church may have been completely destroyed.

No coins were found during investigation of the church. The sparse pottery, except for the prehistoric material found north of the building, was similar to that found elsewhere on the site and could only be dated roughly to the 5th and 6th centuries.

The Cemetery

As noted above, areas within Trenches 2 and 3 were not fully excavated, in part because the approaching end of the season did not permit the slow and careful investigation required. The other reason was the discovery of disturbed burials to the east and south of the church. Although a large number of hu-



Fig. 8. Grave 10, with partly articulated skeleton; from north and above.

man bones were discovered in the southeast part of Trench 3, and were carefully cleaned and lifted, only one partly articulated skeleton was found. (Fig. 8) This burial was identified as Grave 10, on the list of burials excavated by the Macedonian-American project over the years. It lay beside the southern part of the apse wall of the church, with head to the west. The legs were missing, no doubt destroyed by plowing. Grave goods included a bronze ring and three small bronze balls with little rings for attachment.

The discovery of human bones scattered within the deposits outside the southeastern part of the church, Grave 10 beside the church, and several reports of burials disturbed by plowing in the field to the southeast of the hill and church: all these suggest that a cemetery was located on the south and/or east side of the building. The area north of the church showed no indications of graves. No bones were noted in the limited tests toward the west.

Conclusion

The results of this brief investigation show that a small cemetery church was located on the hill in question (Fig. 9), near the ancient road that crossed the Kriva Reka at the same spot as the modern bridge, and probably beside a road that led to a gate into the southern part of the anonymous, Late Antique city at Golemo Gradište. All the evidence points to a church and cemetery of the 5th-6th centuries AD and leaves no doubt that this area, although outside the fortification walls, was part of the territory of the ancient city.



Fig. 9. The southwest cemetery church, from northeast; from the west end of the acropolis.

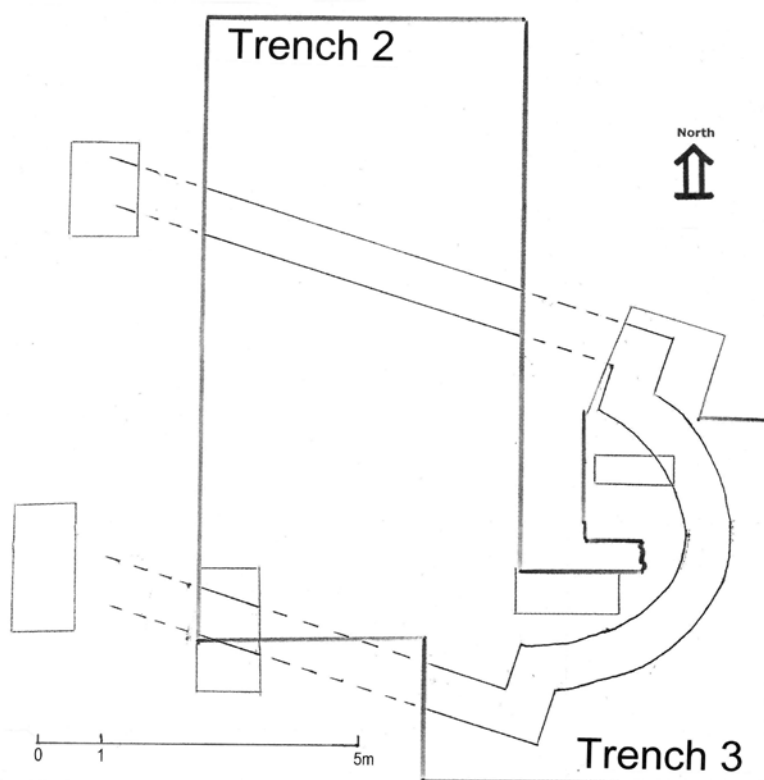


Fig. 10. Plan of the southwest cemetery church.

Каролин С. СНИВЕЛИ

ЈУЖНО - ЗАПАДНАТА ГРОБНА ЦРКВА ВО ГОЛЕМО ГРАДИШТЕ, СЕЛО КОЊУХ

Резиме

Во раните 1970-ти години, Иван Микулчиќ врши рекогносцирање на археолошкиот локалитет Големо Градиште и неговата околина, лоцирани во атарот на селото Коњух, Кратовско. Покрај објавувањето на два труда што се однесуваат конкретно на непознатиот град, тој пишува за локалитетот и во други трудови и книги, истакнувајќи го на тој начин пред македонската археологија. За разлика од останатите истражувачи, како Светозар Радојчиќ, Константин Петров и Борка Јосифовска, кои работеле на црквата Ротонда, на архитектонската пластика и натписите, Микулчиќ прави детален приказ на целата територија на градот.

Осврнувајќи се накусо на Ротондата, Микулчиќ се согласува со претпоставката на Радојчиќ дека градот бил епископско седиште. Во 1970-те, Ротондата е единствената позната ранохристијанска црква на овој локалитет, сè до откривањето на уште две цркви во следните децении. Тогашниот Републички Завод за Заштита на Спомениците на Културата (денес „Национален Конзерваторски Центар“) извршил истражување на мала трикорабна базилика, откриена случајно на просторот на некрополата К'шла, северо-западно од локалитетот; голема гробница со свод на две нивоа зафаќа значителен дел од јужниот брод. Со меѓународните Македонско-американски истражувања на северната тераса на локалитетот, во 2008 година, беше откриена трета базилика. Оваа базилика, карактеристична по невообичаените архитектонски решенија, е дел од црковен комплекс што вклучува крстилница, бројни анекси, резиденција и атриум.

Во 2014 година, по сугестија на Александар Митевски, земјоделец од Коњух, во барањето за дозвола за истражување беше вклучено и мало

возвишение на просторот на неговата нива, која се протега помеѓу современиот пат што води од мостот на Крива Река кон с. Коњух, и подножјето на западниот крај на акрополата на Големо Градиште. На возвишението, според локалната традиција, имало црква, околу која, при орењето на просторот во минатото, се појавувале коски и керамика. Со оглед дека нивата беше доделена како ораница, благодарение на свесноста на Митевски за значењето и археолошката вредност на локалитетот, ова беше одлична прилика да се провери преданието за црквата преку сондажно истражување. Ископувањето, под раководство на Каролин С. Снајвели и Горан Санев, се одвиваше во периодот од 2 до 10 јули; на 15 јули беше истражено и отстрането и едно погребување.

Преку неколку сонди беа откриени три зида - северниот, јужниот и сидот од апсидата на мала еднокорабна црква. Сидовите, зачувани само во основата и со оштетувања од орање, се сидани од грубо обработени камења, фрагменти од тули и бел варов малтер. Парче од подот, од неколку тули со димензии 24 x 32 см, поставени на цврста земјена подлога е откриено зачувано близу северниот сид.

Истражувањето северно до црквата откри големо обрушување од камења, врз косина што се спушта кон север. Истражувањето на косината, што постоела во времето на изградбата и користењето на црквата, откри повеќе парчиња од темна глечана керамика, најверојатно доцно-неолитска.

Црквата е едноставна во основата - еднокорабна е, со апсида на источната страна. Во истражениот простор, освен делот од подот, ништо дру-

го од аранжманот на внатрешните елементи не е зачувано. Западниот дел од објектот најверојатно настрадал при ерозија. Должината на црквата е околу 10 м, ширината од внатрешната страна е 5,50 м, од надворешната - 6,90 м. Монети не се откриени, а ретката керамика, освен праисториската, датира (широко) од V и VI век.

Неколку растурени гробови, или расфрлени коски од истите, беа откриени од источната и јужната страна на црквата. Делумно зачуван е само еден скелет, евидентиран како Гроб 10. Откриен е

веднаш јужно до апсидалниот сид на црквата, со главата свртен кон запад. Меѓу гробните прилози се еден бронзен прстен и три мали бронзени топчиња – приврзоци со мали прстени.

Резултатите од ова кратко истражување потврдија постоење на мала гробјанска црква на ридот, која веројатно се наоѓала близу римскиот пат што водел кон утврдениот локалитет. Наодите сведочат за црква и некропола кои биле во служба на жителите на непознатиот град на Големо Градиште во текот на V и VI век од новата ера.