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Overview of the Results from the Excavation at the Medieval Necropolis at the Orta-Džamija Location in Strumica

UDK 904:726.821(497.742)“653”

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Abstract: *Archaeological research has been conducted for several years in the urban territory of Strumica, in the Orta-džamija location. Out of the rich stratigraphy of the terrain, this is a brief overview of the Christian necropolis that existed from early Middle Ages to the construction of the mosque in 1613/1614.*

Key words: *Strumica, Orta-džamija, Christian necropolis, jewellery*

The strategic location, the climate and the soil as well as the rich natural resources were some of the reasons that made the town of Strumica a major spiritual and economic centre in the broader region in the Middle Ages.¹

Here we will set aside the issues of its ancient name,² as well as the double name of the town in Medieval Times.³ In fact, it seems that there are quite compelling answers to these questions already.⁴

In Byzantine sources the Strumica toponym is mentioned for the first time in the 1019 sigilion published by Basil II (976-1025). In it, the Episcopacy of Strumica is mentioned as part of the Ohrid Archbishopric⁵. Also, the Brief History by John Skylitzes states that the previously mentioned Basil II, after the victory in Kleidion went toward “... καταστρουμβντζαν...”.⁶

¹ М. Б. Панов, Струмица и Струмичката област во воено-политичката и идеолошката стратегија во Византија (IV-XI век), in Р. Филчески, *Струмица и струмичко, историја, култура и традиција*, Струмица 2008, pp. 49-66.

² Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³ Ibid., pp. 52-57.

⁴ И. Стефоска, *Епископијата на Струмица во средниот век (XI-XIV)*, in Р. Филчески, *Струмица и струмичко, историја, култура и традиција*, Струмица 2008, pp. 77-87.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 81.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 81, n. 21.

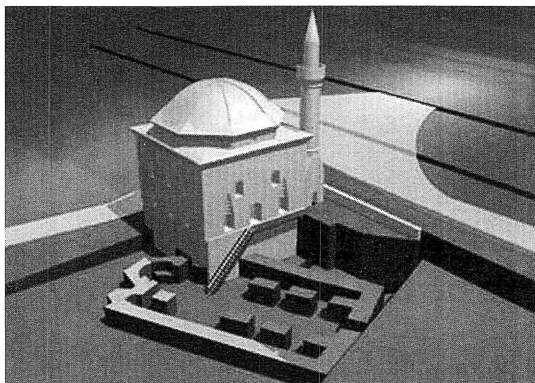


Fig. 1

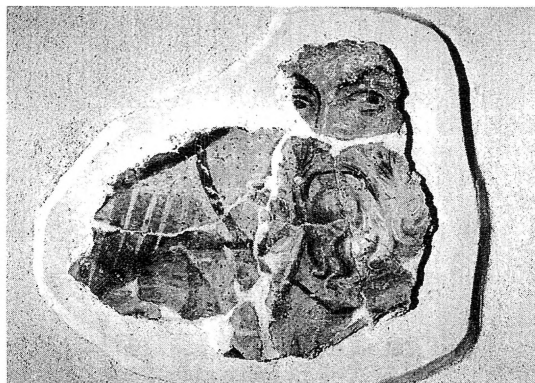


Fig. 2

The exceptional monuments of sacral Christian architecture and painting are also a testament of the town's importance in medievalism. These are: the monastery church of St. Virgin Mary in Veljusa,⁷ the remains of the Ss. Fifteen Tiveriopol Martyrs,⁸ the foundations of Ss. Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (in the region of Bansko)⁹ as well as near the complex of churches of St. Leontius Vodoca,¹⁰ which has been named the Vodoca episcopacy under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric since the time of the Dragas family.¹¹

The excavations at the CareviKuli fortress brought to light another Christian church with a medieval necropolis.¹²

⁷ П. Милковиќ-Пепек, *Велјуса: манастир Св. Богородица Милостива во селото Велјуса крај Струмица*, Скопје 1981.; С. Коруневски, Е. Димитрова, *Византиска Македонија: историја на уметноста на Македонија од IX до XV век*, Скопје 2006, pp. 48-51, fig. 24-27.

⁸ Д. Коцо et al., *Првите резултати од археолошките ископувања на локалитетот „Св. 15 маченици“ во Струмица-1972 год.*, in *Ликовна Уметност* год.1, бр.1 (1973), pp. 43-44.; Д. Коцо, П. Милковиќ-Пепек, *Резултатите од археолошките ископувања во 1973 г. Во црквата „Св. 15 Тивериополски маченици“ – Струмица*, in *Зборник на Археолошкиот музеј на Македонија VIII-IX* (1978), pp. 93-104.

⁹ Д. Коцо, П. Милковиќ-Пепек, *Новооткриената црква на локалитетот „Св. Четириесет“ во селото Банско – Струмичко*, in А. Цидимов (ed.), *Зборник на трудови по повод 35 годишнината од основањето на Музејот во Струмица*, Струмица 1989, pp. 65-99.; А. Цидимов, *Мермерната олтарна преграда во црквата Св. Четириесет севастиски маченици во Банско*, in А. Цидимов (ed.), *Зборник на трудови по повод 35 годишнината од основањето на Музејот во Струмица*, Струмица 1989, pp. 101-103.

¹⁰ П. Милковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча*, Скопје 1975.; Ј. Ананиев, *Vodoča, crkva sv. Leontie, srednovekovna nekropola*, in *Arheološki Pregled* 28 (1989), pp. 185-186, fig. 1-4.; Idem, *Археолошки ископувања на црквата Св. Леонтиј во с. Водоча 1986-1990 година*, in *Културно Наследство* 17-18 (1994), pp. 57-64.; Е. Maneva, *Ancient jewellery from Macedonia: Vodoča Necropolis (from 14th to early 19th century)*, Скопје 2007.; Eadem, *Inventaria Archaeologica Personarum vol. I, Vodoča Necropolis*, Скопје 2013.; С. Коруневски, Е. Димитрова, *Византиска Македонија: историја на уметноста на Македонија од IX до XV век*, Скопје 2006, pp. 45-46.

¹¹ И. Стефоска, *Епископијата на Струмица во средниот век (XI-XIV)*, in Р. Филчески, *Струмица и струмичко, историја, култура и традиција*, Струмица 2008, pp.86.

¹² З. Рујак, *Цареви Кули, На патот на предците*, Струмица 2004, pp. 15.; Ibid., *Цареви Кули – 7000 години култура*, in Р. Филчески, *Струмица и струмичко, историја, култура и традиција*, Струмица 2008.

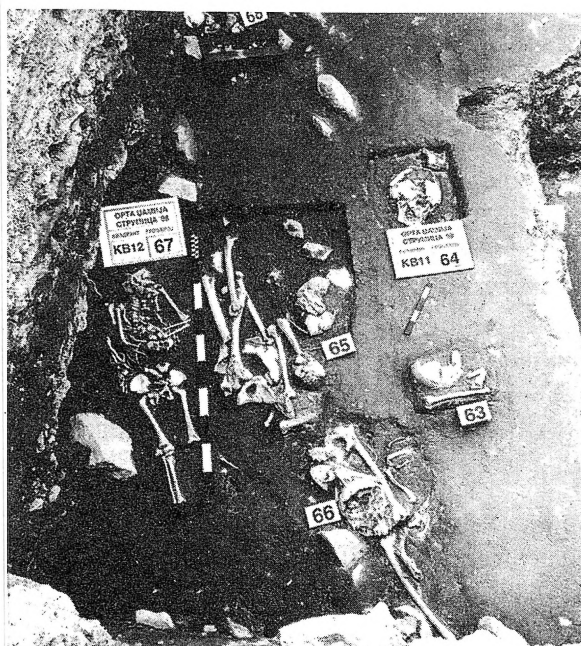


Fig. 3

In this multitude of churches, with medieval graves in their areas, the locality of Orta-dzamiya has a prominent place.¹³ This is primarily due to the fact that an old holy site has been used for the construction of an Islamic monument. It is also very important that in this case there is a reliable terminus ante quem about the older layers in the year 1613/1614, when the mosque was built.

The medieval stratum is especially important because of the discovery of a church with a necropolis. **Fig. 3.** This church was later destroyed in a fire. **Fig. 1, fig. 20.**

Based on the preserved fragments of frescos **Fig. 2**, the church can be dated to XI-early XII Century.

The remains of the early Christian basilica also bear witness of the sacral tradition in this area. The location itself has a rich cultural stratigraphy, with an especially rich Hellenistic layer.

The appearance of the medieval graves is typical for the Christian burial rites; inhumation, W-E aspect, position of the body and the extremities, and lack of a more distinctive grave architecture. **Fig. 3.**

The most dominant finds are jewellery and metal parts of clothing, primarily buttons, which also testify about the burial rituals of the medieval population in these parts.

Of the jewellery, there are various items of *earrings*. They are present in all social, age and gender groups.¹⁴

This overview will focus on several types: hoop earrings, **Fig. 4**, hoops with an S hook clasp **Fig. 5** as well as threaded beads earrings **Fig. 6ab**

All of these have been used for a long time in the Middle Ages, including XV and XVI centuries.¹⁵

¹³ М. Лазаревска, 1987, *Orta dzamiya – Strumica, Srednovekovna crkva so nekropola*, in *Arheološki Pregled* 27 (1987), pp. 143-144; М. Стаменова, *Preliminaren izveštaj od arheoloskoto istrazuvanje na lokalitetot Orta Dzamiya vo Strumica 1984-1987*, in А. Цицимов (ed.), *Зборник на трудови по повод 35 годишнината од основањето на Музејот во Струмица*, Струмица 1989, pp. 351-355.; М. Стаменова-Атанасова, *Духовните традиции на средновековниот Тивериопол*, Струмица 2003, pp. 14-57.

¹⁴ Е. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 41-43..

¹⁵ Е. Манева, *Археологија на Македонија во Турското средновековие (XV-XVIII век) (археологија)*, in П. Кузман (ed.), *Македонија: милениумски културно-историски факти*, Скопје 2013, pp. 2012-2013, fig. 41.

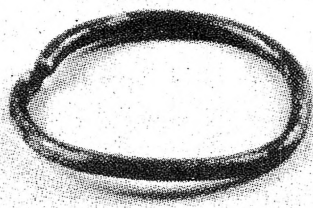


Fig. 4

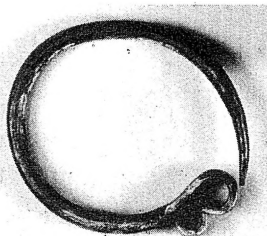


Fig. 5

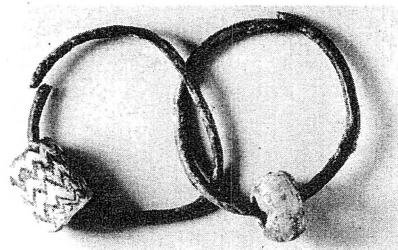


Fig. 6

They are, in fact, pieces of jewellery with a prophylactic, amulet role and are often worn asymmetrically, on one side only. They are found on male children as well, especially only sons, as protection from curses and all evil.

The threading of other accessories, such as beads, **Fig. 6ab** or smaller rings signifies a greater “amulet” function.

An earring with a horizontal guzva from a spirally wound wire dates back to the XII century,¹⁶ **Fig. 8**. The earring with a vertical “guzva” from a filigree wire, also wound in a spiral fashion, belongs to the late Middle Century production.¹⁷ **Fig. 9**

The attractive pair of earrings each decorated with a strawberry dates from the XII Century.¹⁸ **Fig. 7**

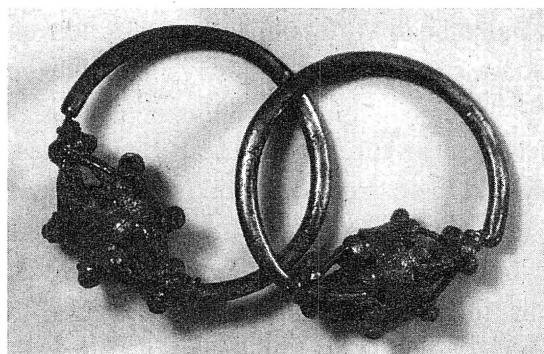


Fig. 7

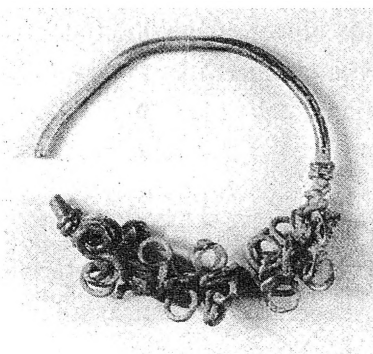


Fig. 8

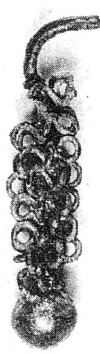


Fig. 9

The circular earring with a triangle-shaped cut in the upper part is a testament to the popularization of the medieval luxurious noble models from the XIV Century. **Fig. 10**.

In the style of Oriental fashion, small leaves are pinned to the outer edge, which is another evidence of the symbiosis of the traditional and the oriental influences. Analogous examples from the XV-XVI centuries come from the Vodoca necropolis.¹⁹

Bracelets in the medieval necropolis at the Orta-dzamiya locality are found as jewellery worn by women and girls. They are made of metal and glass materials.

¹⁶ E. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 54.

¹⁸ E. Maneva, *Ancient jewellery from Macedonia: Middle Ages*, Skopje 2005, cat. no. 17a.

¹⁹ E. Maneva, *Ancient jewellery from Macedonia: Vodoča Necropolis (from 14th to early 19th century)*, Skopje 2007, cat. no. 12-13ab.

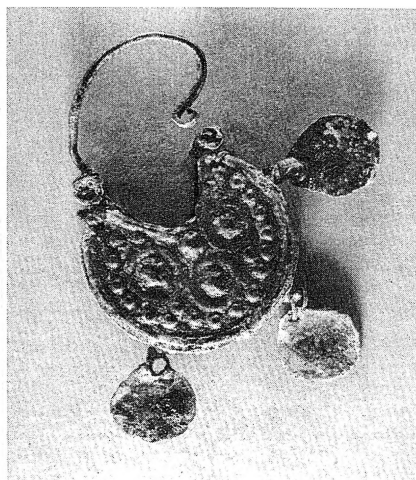


Fig. 10

The bronze, band-like bracelet with open ends and stylised, geometric decoration on the outer surface is a typical representative of this type of jewellery. **Fig. 11.** Band-like bracelets can be found even in the XI century, however they were more widely spread in the XII century and their presence gradually decreased in the XIII century.²⁰

Some of the favourite types of bracelets from that period, as well as the abovementioned example, are those made of two doubly coiled bronze wires and those with open, loop-shaped ends, where both ends of the doubly coiled wire protrude and resemble serpent heads and fangs. **Fig. 12** Thus, this type of jewellery takes on the amuletic, healing and prophylactic powers of the serpent.²¹



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

And while these two types of bracelets are almost without exception found in the repertory of medieval necropolises in Macedonia, the two pairs of glass bracelets are found relatively rarely. **Fig. 13 ab; Fig. 14 ab**

They were worn in pairs on the humerus, one pair on the left, **Fig. 13 ab**, and the other on the right arm. **Fig. 14 ab**²²

This also reveals the specific clothing and the way this jewellery was used. The most apparent chronological evidence of this is found in the frescos in St. Panteleimon in Nerezi – Skopje, dating from 1164.²³

²⁰ Е. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 71-73.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

²² Е. Манева, Ј. Ананиев, *Keramidarka – s. Mokrino kaj Strumica, - iskopuvanje 1988-*, во *Maced. Acta Archaeol.* 11 (1990), pp. 215-226; Е. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 228-229, сл. 29.

²³ Е. Maneva, *Ancient jewellery from Macedonia: Middle Ages*, Skopje 2005, fig. 3.

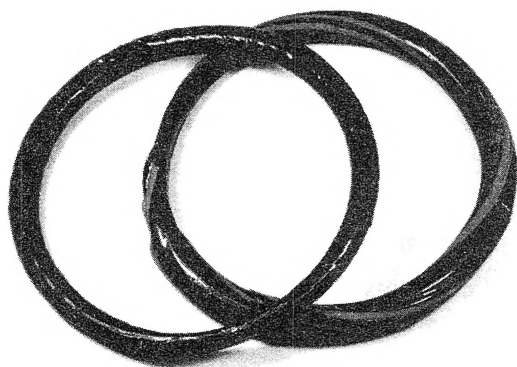


Fig. 13

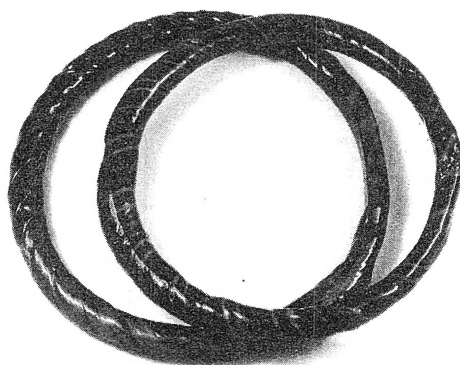


Fig. 14

The rings in this location are represented by three very specific examples.

The ring with a square, flattened head and protruding shoulders is one of the most typical representatives of jewellery from the late XI and early XII centuries. **Fig. 15** It is part of the repertory for widespread use and is an evolved variation of one of the most frequent types, which with certain changes are found in the period between X and early XII centuries.²⁴



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

The perfectly preserved item with a massive hoop, which is fluted on the outer surface, has the basis of a round head with an unusual serrated mounding on the outer edge. The engraved imagery consists of two fully stylised human figures facing each other, one with the arm raised towards the other. **Fig. 16.** This is probably a christening scene, which is often found on XII rings.²⁵

With its morphological features, the massive bronze ring with an elliptical head dates from the XV century. **Fig. 17**

The engraved imagery on the head is an inventive interpretation by a local craftsman. It consists of an oval surface divided in segments with imprinted dotted “decoration”. If we subscribe to B.A. Rybakov’s theory, the hatched surfaces with or without imprinted

²⁴ Е. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp.84-85, n. 514-516.

²⁵ Ibid., T. 84, 75/3, 44/1, 45/10 etc.

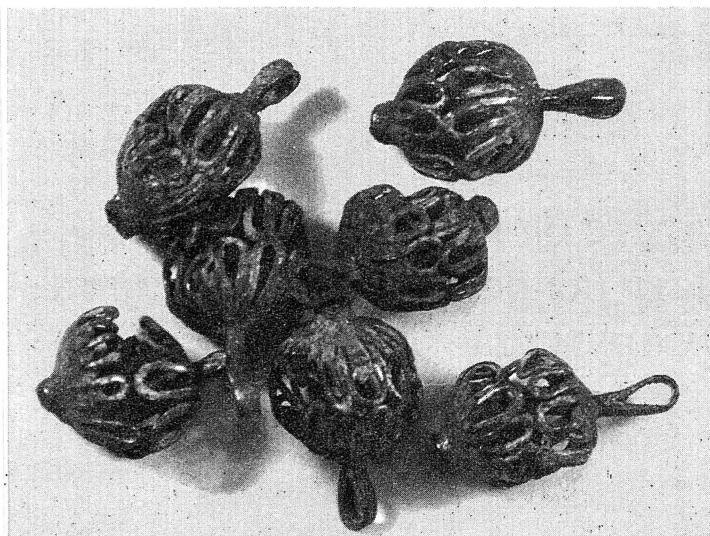


Fig. 18

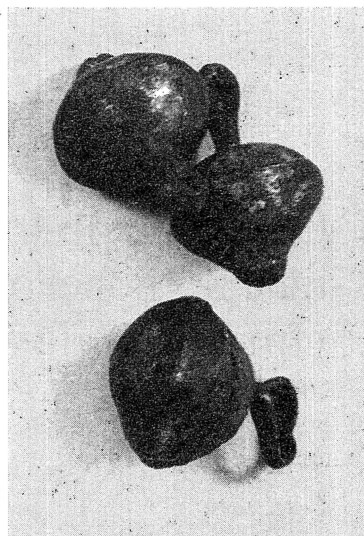


Fig. 19

dots, symbolise planted or unplanted fields.²⁶ This also indicates the role of the ring as a seal that represents the owner's emblem.²⁷

Among the jewellery that was used as accessory for clothes, there are seven filigree **Fig. 18**₍₁₋₇₎ and three calotte buttons. **Fig. 19**₍₁₋₃₎

They were all found in one grave complex, which indicates a relatively rich burial of a woman in late medievalism.²⁸

The detailed processing of medieval necropolises in Strumica and its wider surroundings, which often contain the stratum of the so-called Turkish Middle Ages in Macedonia (XV-XVIII centuries),²⁹ and even the later renaissance period,³⁰ is expected to unveil exceptional demographic, cultural, economic and other parameters about the life and the customs of the population in the region in that period.

This brief overview of the finds at the Orta-dzamiya location is just a small contribution in this respect.

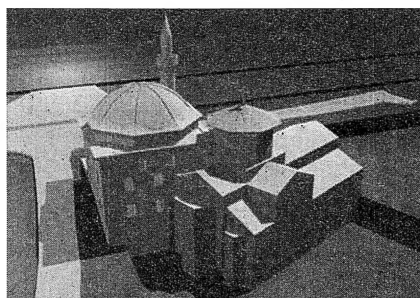


Fig. 20

²⁶ А. Б. Рыбаков, *Язычество Древней Руси*, Москва 1987, pp. 524, 525.

²⁷ Е. Maneva, *Inventaria Archaeologica Personarum vol. I, Vodoča Necropolis*, Skopje 2013, pp. 74, 75, fig. 2ab; 87, fig. 11, 92, fig. 23.

²⁸ Е. Манева, *Средновековен накит од Македонија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 34-36; Ead., 2013, pp. 107, fig. 8; pp. 108, fig. 9-12.

²⁹ А. Стојановски, *Македонија во турското средновековие (од крајот на XIV – почетокот на XVIII век)*, Скопје 1989.; Е. Манева, *Археологија на Македонија во Турското средновековие (XV-XVIII век) (археологија)*, во П. Кузман (ed.) *Македонија: милениумски културно-историски факти*, Скопје 2013.

³⁰ Е. Maneva, *Inventaria Archaeologica Personarum vol. I, Vodoča Necropolis*, Skopje 2013, 149-168.

Осврт на резултатите од ископувањата на средновековната некропола на локацијата Орта-Џамија во Струмица

Резиме

Во Струмица, на локација Орта-Џамија вршени се повеќегодишни археолошки истражувања. Џамијата е изградена во 1613/1614 год. што е сигурен *terminus ante quem* за богатата археолошка стратиграфија покриена под неа. Особено е впечатлив хеленистичкиот слој.

За сакралната традиција сведочат остатоците од ранохристијанска базилика.

Средновековниот стратум е особено значаен заради остатоците од црква од 11. почеток на 12. век која страдала во пожар (сл. 1-3, 20).

Во оваа пригода вниманието е насочено на некрополата која се простира околу црквата и егзистирала сè до изградбата на џамијата.

Наведените гробови по својот изглед се својствени за христијанскиот погребен ритуал: инхумација, ориентација З-И, специфична положба на телото и екстремитетите и непостоење на повпечатлива гробна архитектура. Доминантен археолошки материјал е накитот.

Овде се прикажани најкарактеристичните типови наушници, белезици, прстени и копчиња. Куриозитет претставува наодот на два пара стаклени белезици откриени на двете раце во гроб на девојче (сл. 1). Тоа зборува за специфичната облека и начин на употреба на овој накит потврдени на фрескоживописот од св. Пантелејмон – Нерези, Скопје од 1164 год.

Детелната обработка на некрополата, секако, ќе пружи интересни демографски, културни, економски и друг вид параметри за животот и обичаите на населението од овој регион од наведеното време.