

## A TALE OF TWO “HELLENISED” SITES IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE: RECENT STUDIES OF KALE-KRŠEVICA AND GRADIŠTE-MLADO NAGORIČANE (5<sup>TH</sup>–3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURIES BC)



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*Abstract.* – This paper examines the social and cultural changes among local Iron Age communities in northeastern North Macedonia and southeastern Serbia during the second half of the 1st millennium BC, often referred to as the “process of Hellenisation.” These communities, like many others in neighbouring territories, engaged in intensive contact with the Mediterranean world. Although these interactions are occasionally mentioned in written sources, archaeological excavations provide more substantial insights. The uncovered local material culture including both objects and structures demonstrates a notable knowledge of the production technologies and stylistic features of Greek Aegean colonies and ancient Macedonian centres. Furthermore, the local communities were regularly supplied with products from the south, including Attic red-figure and other glazed pottery, as well as transport amphorae from various centres (e.g., Thasos, Chios, and Mende). Our aim is to present the latest findings regarding these fascinating connections among the ancient Greeks, Macedonians, and the so-called Paleo-Balkan communities, to examine the factors driving the emergence of Greek-like characteristics in local material culture, as well as the resulting social transformations. As a case study, we present recent excavation results from the two most prominent fortified settlements in this region: Kale-Krševica (Serbia) and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane (North Macedonia).

*Key words.* – “Hellenisation”, Kale-Krševica, Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane, southeastern Europe, Late Iron Age, “Celtic raids”, Bylazora.

## Introduction

Appearing during the 5<sup>th</sup> or sometimes in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, fortified Late Iron Age<sup>1</sup> settlements featuring abundant forms of Greek and locally produced Greek-like material culture were numerous across the continental regions north of the Aegean Sea.<sup>2</sup> The imported material culture primarily included Attic red-figure and black-glazed wares, transport amphorae from various centres (e.g., Thasos, Chios, Mende), coins, metal finds, processed amber beads, weapons, and figurines. More importantly, locally produced materialities – comprising not just objects (pottery, loom weights, the Olynthus- and other types of millstones, etc.), but also defensive structures, monumental burial chambers and occasionally domestic buildings – were crafted with a thorough knowledge of ancient Greek technology and stylistic features. Consequently, the interrelations between the Classical and Hellenistic periods of the Northern Aegean and the pre-Roman Balkan Iron Age hinterland seemed extensive, surpassing simple trade and exchange, and leaving a prominent mark on local cultures and regional dynamics.<sup>3</sup>

This local Iron Age phenomenon, which is not sufficiently known<sup>4</sup> nor adequately addressed in global archaeological discourse, reached not only continental northern Greece but also the entire territory of modern-day North Macedonia, large parts of Bulgaria and Albania, and even the southernmost regions of Serbia, including Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>5</sup> The social changes behind the appearance of these settlements are widely referred to as “Hellenisation”. This paper examines the underlying changes, traditionally explained as a straightforward and unilateral local acceptance of the “more developed” Greek culture.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to this, post-colonial literature argues that non-Greeks were far from passive, and that the consequences of contact were more complex and versatile, affecting both sides.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the “acceptance of Greek influences” in the Late Iron Age Balkans likely represented a conscious, thorough, and highly selective adoption

<sup>1</sup> Different authors have used varying chronological schemes to describe this period. The most notable distinction lies between the approaches of modern-day Bulgarian and Macedonian scholars. Bulgarian researchers generally consider the Late Iron Age to begin in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, or even as early as the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC. They further divide it into the “Classical” and “Hellenistic” periods. In contrast, the periodisation used in North Macedonia assumes that the contexts discovered within its territory represent the “Early Historic Period” (*ranoantički period*). These interpretive differences can be misleading, as the social and historical contexts across these regions exhibit significant similarities, and the material culture is also largely comparable.

<sup>2</sup> Микулчиќ 1982; 1999; Nankov 2008; 2015; Theodosiev 2011; Вранић 2022, 37–60.

<sup>3</sup> Nankov 2011; 2015; Archibald 2013; Vranić 2014a; 2014b; Вранић 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Cohen 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See, n. 2 and 3.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Rostovtzeff 1941; Momigliano 1971; Папазоглу 1980; 1983; 1988.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Gosden 2004; Hodos 2006; Dietler 2010a.

of some Greek materialities, technology, and social traits into a preexisting local culture and habitus. During this cross-cultural translation process – perhaps even cultural appropriation – which superficially might appear as a direct spread of Hellenic culture, the foreign know-how and materialities acquired new meanings that could differ significantly from the originals.<sup>8</sup>

Another prominent theoretical shift related to “Hellenisation” revolves around how researchers comprehend material culture and its role in human society. What has changed since the time of distinguished figures in history and archaeology, such as Fanula Papazoglu and Mikhail Rostovtzeff, extends beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>9</sup> Yet, perhaps the most significant novelty is the current understanding of agency within material culture and landscape, directly participating in the construction of culture and social behaviour.<sup>10</sup> In other words, beginning with post-structuralism and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus,<sup>11</sup> and reaching new prominence in contemporary concepts of ontological turn, actor-network theories, and entanglement,<sup>12</sup> materialities, their shape, size, texture, longevity, appearance, etc. have become increasingly important in any cultural change, possibly even as active as humans themselves. As a result, understanding the consequences of using Greek objects or technology by non-Greeks becomes more complex and goes far beyond simple assimilation. Namely, these materialities would become an independent active force behind perhaps new but still local social practices and habitus emerging around their use. Subsequently, during this long process in which new non-Greek consumers negotiated the proper ways to use Greek materialities, they would acquire complex, culture-specific meanings,<sup>13</sup> and new biographies,

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<sup>8</sup> Вранић 2022, 157–180, with references.

<sup>9</sup> How archaeologists understand the role that material culture had in past societies is a complex issue with numerous and opposing views and theoretical perspectives (See, Harris, Cipolla 2017). During the culture-historical phase, when the concept of “Hellenisation” as a direct spread of Greek culture was formalised, it was understood as a passive and yet very straightforward reflection of cultural norms and, ultimately, ethnic identities. Consequently, the thorough acceptance of Greek material culture by others (sometimes by those living in neighboring regions, or more likely under Hellenistic monarchies) meant slowly but surely becoming Greek (e.g., Rostovtzeff 1941; Momigliano 1971; Папазоглу 1980; 1983; 1988). Processual archaeology, on the other hand, was focused on different questions—mostly on human behavior and cultures as extra-somatic means of adaptation to changing environments. As a result, the contact between ancient Greeks and non-Greeks was comprehended from a neo-classical economic perspective of the world system (center and periphery model), searching for profits, markets, trade, raw materials, and the accumulation of wealth leading to social stratification. In this endeavor, material culture was understood as a reflection of these social and economic changes (See, Wells 1980; Collis 1984).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Appadurai 1986; Thomas 2006; Olsen 2006; 2010; Knappet, Malafouris 2008; Knappet 2011; Vranić 2023.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Dietler, Herbich 1998; Dietler 2010b.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Latour 2005; Hicks 2010; Hodder 2012; 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Вранић 2022, 16–28; 113–156, with references.

which could be very different from the roles the same material culture had in the Greek world.

To further this theoretical debate, this paper presents the results of archaeological excavations at two “Hellenised” sites in the inland Balkans: Kale-Krševica and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane (Map 1). These sites are located in southeastern Serbia and northeastern North Macedonia, respectively, and are approximately 31 km apart in a straight line. Together with more than two dozen similar but less-explored sites between Vranje and Kumanovo,<sup>14</sup> they can be viewed as part of a narrower regional context of Late Iron Age “Hellenisation”. However, there are also notable differences, which we will further scrutinise in an attempt to comprehend the complexity of the social changes labelled under the term “Hellenisation”.



Map 1. Map of the northern Aegean and the most prominent “Hellenised” sites (5<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) (after Vranić 2019)

<sup>14</sup> See, Vukmanović, Popović 1982; Вранић 2012, 51–57, with references; Lilchikj Adams, Lilchikj 2017, 54.

## Kale-Krševica

Positioned south of Vranje, near Ristovac, in southeastern Serbia, Kale-Krševica is an archaeological site with four distinct phases (I–IV), dating from the Late Bronze Age until the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>15</sup> The third phase (IIIa–IIIb), referred to as “Hellenised”, lasted from the final decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, during which Kale-Krševica represented the most prominent settlement with Greek-like material culture discovered in modern-day Serbia. This hilltop fortification sitting on a spur of the Rujan mountain, faced east and north. Although well protected due to its higher elevation and direct access to mountainous terrains, the settlement was surrounded by easily accessible fertile flatlands. The location was carefully chosen to provide defence, food, and good connections with the broader region. Notably, two supposed ancient roads from the south merged here: one along the South Morava (to the north) and the other along the Pčinja River, passing next to the site from the east.<sup>16</sup>

Archaeological excavations have revealed three distinctive sectors: the “acropolis”, the “slopes”, and the “suburbium” (Plan 1). The “acropolis” was the central and oldest part, perched on a plateau named “Kale” (Turkish for ‘fortification’). During subphase IIIa (late 5<sup>th</sup> century, c. 323 BC), mostly the northeastern area was occupied, containing domestic structures – several partially excavated rectangular houses with multiple rooms and inner yards – along with two communication routes/yards merging at a 90-degree angle (Plan 2), and a massive rampart protecting the entire “acropolis” from the north.<sup>17</sup> The drystone walls of these houses were built with broken stone in the lower sections, while the upper segments were made of perishable materials. The rampart was constructed with more robust and partially dressed boulders rather than ashlars (Fig. 1). One of the earliest imports was a fragment of a late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Attic owl-skyphos found within one of the houses, followed by numerous sherds of *Saint-Valentine* class kantharoi and other red-figure Attic wine-related pottery (Fig. 2). The locally produced objects were primarily “Grey Hellenised pottery” – a plentiful corpus of well-fired everyday ceramics produced in furnaces, featuring Greek shapes (e.g., skifoi, kantharoi, hydriai, kraters, pithoi, bowls, and oinochoai), and characterised by their distinctive grey (sometimes also red) body and coating.<sup>18</sup> Another prominent form of local material culture was loom weights.<sup>19</sup>

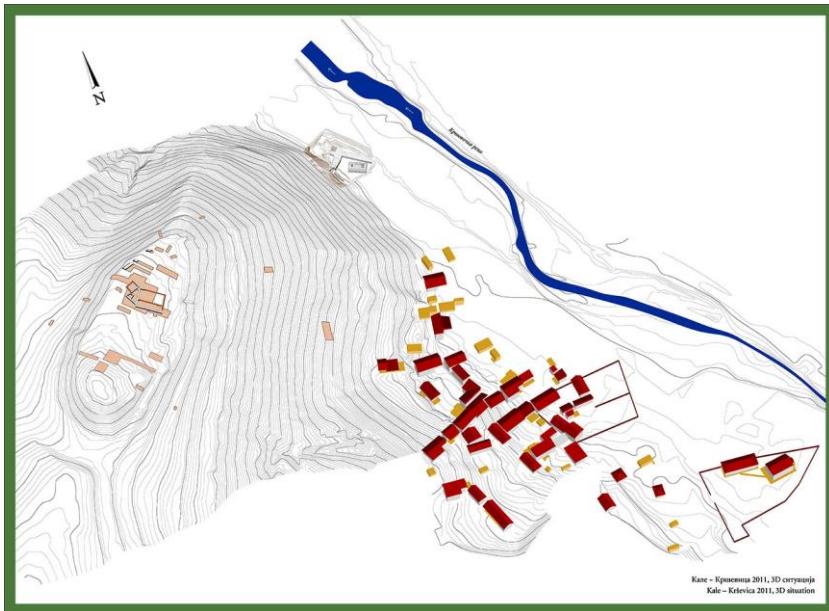
<sup>15</sup> E.g., Popović 2006; 2009a; Поповић 2012; Popović, Vranić 2013; Вранић 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Вранић 2022, 61; Cf., Mitrevski 2016, 9–10.

<sup>17</sup> Vranić, Radojčić 2023

<sup>18</sup> Антић, Бабић 2005; Вранић 2022, 45–46; Cf., Соколовска 1992; Domaradski 2002; Вранић 2009; Bouzek, Domaradska 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Popović, Vranić 2008; Cf., Dimova 2016.



Plan 1. 3D model of the Kale-Krševica site with modern houses in the village of Krševica (after Popović 2012)



Plan 2. Plan of the "acropolis" at Kale-Krševica, excavations between 2001 and 2018, Subphase IIIa in yellow; IIIb in violet



Fig. 1. Photograph of the Kale-Krševica “acropolis” rampart (late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC)

This subphase lasted through the entire first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, possibly even a few decades longer, and can be archaeologically traced by the construction of new earthen floors in the houses and other architectural modifications. During this period, the site continued to receive Greek goods. The most prominent evidence of trade and exchange includes approximately 500 red-figure fragments and numerous Thasian transport amphorae, including some stamped handles.<sup>20</sup>

During the final decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (in subphase IIIb), the “acropolis” underwent extensive architectural modifications. The most distinctive changes took place in the central area, which had previously either been unoccupied or, more likely, had earlier buildings demolished to make room for new structures. These new buildings were produced with the same drystone technique as the earlier ones but they appear to be public: a partly preserved square structure, likely a tower, with several ashlar used to make one of its corners (Fig. 3), and a two-room building interpreted as a collective warehouse.<sup>21</sup> This sector should be understood in conjunction with the contexts at the “suburbium”. Regarding the imported material, glazed tablewares remained Attic in provenance, following the stylistic developments of the late red-figure and increasingly numerous black-glazed pottery of the late Classical and early Hellenistic period. The

<sup>20</sup> Вранић 2022, 131–136; Vranić, Radojčić 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Поповић 2006, 529; Поповић 2012, 18.

distribution of various transport amphorae also continued, and additionally, there were some imported pottery items likely originating somewhere from the northern coast of the Aegean Sea.<sup>22</sup>

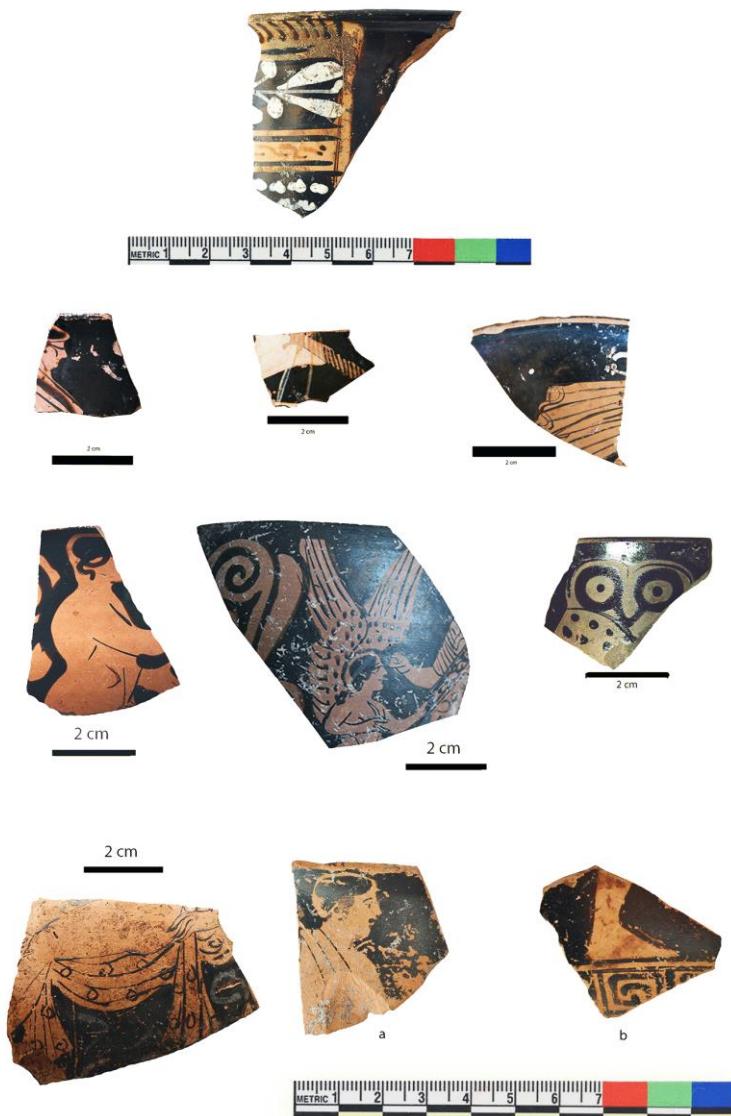


Fig. 2. Some of the imported Attic pottery from subphase IIIa, northeastern sector of the “acropolis” (yellow in Plan 2) at Kale-Krševica (late 5<sup>th</sup>–first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC)

<sup>22</sup> See, Вранић 2022, 123–131.



Fig. 3. Photograph of the tower(?) of the “acropolis” at Kale-Krševica, subphase IIIb, with an ashlar-built corner

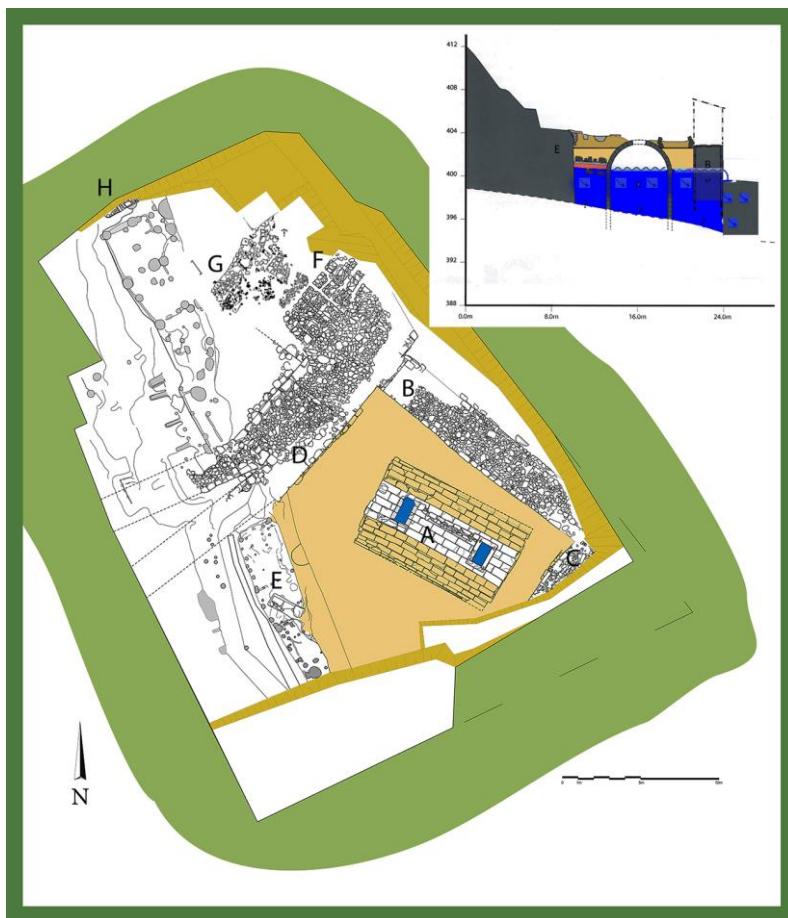
The “slopes” have not yet been excavated extensively, so detailed information is limited. The site’s position on the spur allowed for the use of steep slopes for various activities, but also led to erosion. There is evidence of man-made terraces, perhaps designed for houses on the eastern slope, likely protected by the same late 5<sup>th</sup>-century BC rampart originating from the “acropolis”. Several trenches opened here have revealed numerous objects and mixed layers that washed down from the top.<sup>23</sup>

At the “suburbium”, the situation was even more intriguing.<sup>24</sup> During subphase IIIb, a massive public segment (approx. 1,100 m<sup>2</sup>) built in accordance with contemporary Macedonian military architectural principles in the final years of the 4<sup>th</sup> or at the very beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC emerged (Plan 3). At its centre stood a 3 metre-high and 4.72 metre-wide ashlar masonry platform. The purpose of this platform, featuring two ashlar faces and filled with broken stone, was to catch the water flowing down from the “slopes” through two now-almost lost ashlar masonry walls, directing it into a funnel-like “cleft” and onto the platform (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). Upon reaching the platform, the water poured through its inner segment and was further conducted to the northern sector of the “hydro-technical complex”, with openings (the “slits”) existing only on the northern face (Fig. 6). This water may have originated from a now-lost spring on the higher grounds of the eastern “slope” meant to continuously flow only into the northern sector, or the platform might have been designed in

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 74, with references.

<sup>24</sup> Popović 2009b; Popović, Vukadinović 2011; Vranić 2019; Вранић 2022, 74–76; 144–156.

this way to collect rainfall and to keep it separate from the water in the southern sector.<sup>25</sup>



Plan 3. Plan of the “hydro-technical complex” at Kale-Krševica, subphase IIIb, c. 300 BC  
(after Vranić 2019)

In the northern sector, architecturally connected to the platform, stood another massive structure – probably a large ashlar and mudbrick tower or a bastion (approx. 6×3 m). Yet, this space was used for various activities, most notably food preparation, as there were numerous bread ovens. Another interesting feature is a stone spout in the northern profile, which directed more water into this area from an unknown source. Also, two stone *louteria* stands were discovered here.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Vranić 2019, 146, 154.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 146, with references.



Fig. 4. Photograph of the funnel-like “cleft” and the ashlar-built platform from above, subphase IIIb (c. 300 BC)



Fig. 5. Photograph of the southern face of the ashlar-built platform, subphase IIIb, without “slits” (c. 300 BC)



Fig. 6. Photograph of the northern face of the ashlar-built platform, subphase IIIb, with “slits” (c. 300 BC)

The southern sector of the “hydro-technical” complex consisted of a massive subterranean approx. 6 metre-high barrel-vaulted reservoir (the “capture”) measuring 9.68 m in length by 5.74 m in width externally, and 9.48 m by 5.26 m internally (49.86 m<sup>2</sup>), with two square openings at the top, and surrounding it, a large square space (the “collector basin”, approx. 210 m<sup>2</sup>) – formed by two 2.8 metre-wide ashlar and mudbrick ramparts, to the east and south, while the platform bordered the northern side (Fig. 7). The entire “collector basin” was cut into the side of the Kale Hill to the east; its function was to tap into a subterranean aquifer, filter water through sand and gravel layers strategically placed around the reservoir, and store it inside the barrel-vaulted structure as the lowest segment of the complex. The eastern and southern ramparts featured numerous openings (i.e., the “slits”) that allowed water access from the system out, keeping the levels in check. The southern rampart was also curved inward, probably as an architectural design implemented to increase its strength, which was constantly under pressure by the enormous amount of water in the “collector basin” (Fig. 8). The water in the reservoir was only accessed through the two openings at the top of the vault, which are rare and interesting from an architectural point of view since they could have decreased the strength of the building if built inadequately, either by buckets on ropes leaving visible traces at one of the openings or directly – by

entering the reservoir and standing on a now-lost wooden structure reconstructed from beam sockets left in the walls.<sup>27</sup>

The reservoir was a subterranean building, covered with sand, gravel, and scattered boulders and ashlar almost to the two openings. On top were numerous other buildings and large bread ovens, further indicating large-scale food production. The numerous imported material discovered here consisted of late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC Attic glazed pottery – black-glazed plates, bowls, and kantharoi of the Classical form, with plain or moulded rims bearing early West slope motifs, red-glazed bowl kantharoi with hemispherical receptacles, fragile high-swung handles, and low stems, as well as occasional finds of strap handles with ivy thumb rests. More numerous imported ware is aforementioned coloured and painted pottery, probably originating from the northern Aegean. An absolute majority is the locally produced “Grey Hellenised ware”.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 7. Photograph of the southern sector of the “hydro-technical complex”, with the barrel-vaulted reservoir in the middle (c. 300 BC)

How and why did this water management facility appear at the Kale-Krševica “suburbium”? Barrel-vaulted structures in ashlar and voussoir construction techniques with no mortar are a very specific form of architectural design primarily reserved for the funerary architecture of the most prominent members of Macedonian and some other contemporary societies – initially kings and members of royal families.<sup>29</sup> The earliest examples should be the two burial chambers of this type discovered at Vergina,<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 155–157.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 155–160; Вранић 2022, 144–156

<sup>29</sup> See, Boyd 1978; Chilidis 2008

<sup>30</sup> Andronikos 1989.

followed by others in northern Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Romania, and Turkey.<sup>31</sup> Shortly after their initial introduction during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the same structures were used in civil architecture – mostly in Greek cities conquered by and directly related to Macedonian kings and their subsequent public building activities.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 8. Photograph of the curved southern ashlar-built rampart with “slits” (c. 300 BC)

The appearance of one such early building around the year 300 BC, which is subterranean and highly practical but not easily visible (without entering inside) at Kale-Krševica, was probably also related to Macedonian armies and the same school of high status (perhaps royal) architects who discovered a new use for this design (Fig. 9). Supporting this idea is the appearance of the two openings on the top of the barrel vault, which are, to our knowledge, a unique solution, at least in these early examples. As a result, it could be argued that the construction of the “suburbium” was either directly related to some Macedonian army, perhaps Cassander’s, or it was the result of some local hiring of the most notable army architects to design the source of water for some homegrown Macedonian ally, maybe the Paeonian king Audelon. The purpose of the entire “hydro-technical complex”, besides water management, was probably to produce large quantities of food, most likely for some Macedonian or local allied military unit.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See, Boyd 1978; Fedak 2006; Chilidis 2008; Jakimovski 2012; Štefan, Sîrbu 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Boyd 1978, 88–90; Winter 2006, 110, 115–154.

<sup>33</sup> Vranić 2019; Вранић 2022, 144–156.

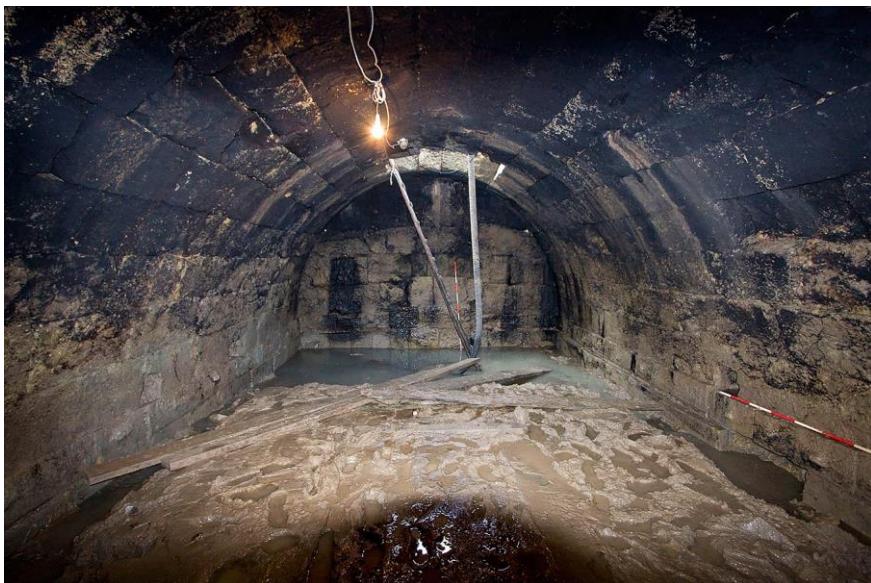


Fig. 9. Photograph of the inside of the reservoir (c. 300 BC)

### Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane

The Gradište site in the village of Mlado Nagoričane is located on the left bank of the Pčinja River, positioned at the top of one of the last hills following the river's northern course and facing a flat area to the south.<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 10) Despite being situated on a relatively low hilltop (383.4 m), it offers excellent visibility on all sides except the east. The site is easily accessible from the current highway leading from Kumanovo to Sofia. After crossing the Pčinja River, a local road leads to the village of Bajlovce, on the slopes of Kozjak. At the very beginning of that road, an old path with remnants of worked stone diverges to the west, reaching the south-western base of the site. Additionally, without crossing the river, this path runs along the left bank of the Pčinja toward the north. At the foot of the site, there appears to be another path leading to the western edge of the hill, from where one could reach the settlement's plateau through several carved rocks. The plateau is divided into several sections: the eastern edge (the “acropolis”) is the highest part, descending to the west where a flat area called the “middle terrace” is located. The largest portion of the ridge's western half is also levelled, referred to as the “lower terrace” (Fig. 11). Since 2014, trenches have been dug in all these areas,<sup>35</sup> producing a

<sup>34</sup> Георгиев 1991, 94–97; Lilčić Adams, Lilchikj 2017, 49–60.

<sup>35</sup> Гjорѓиевски 2019, 17–25; Јованов 2022, 206–210; Ѓорѓиевски 2023, 149–157; Ивановиќ (in print).

more accurate depiction of the settlement, further enhanced by geophysical and LIDAR survey results.

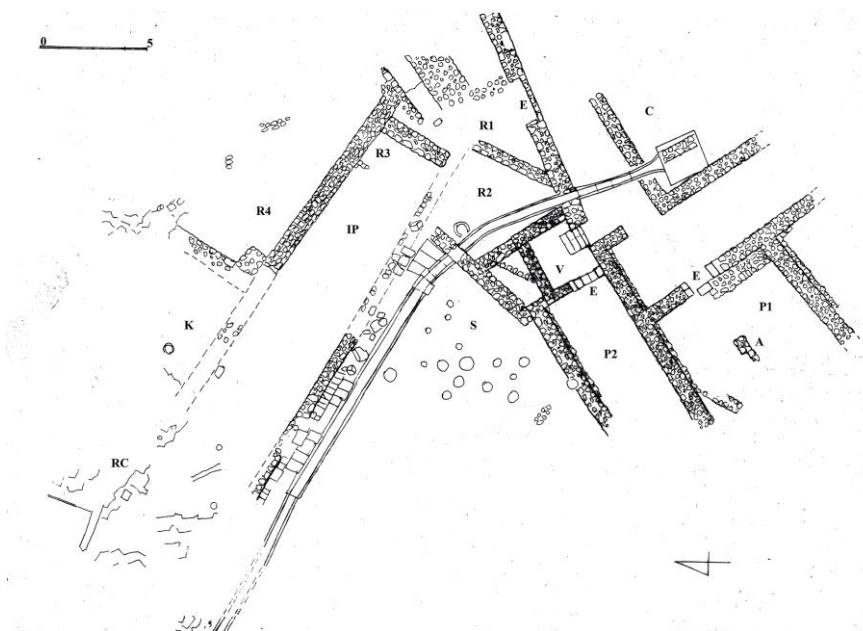


Fig. 10. Aerial photograph of the Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane site



Fig. 11. Photograph of the Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane site: the “acropolis” (left), the “middle terrace” (centre), and the “lower terrace” (right)

A larger complex building of approximately 750 m<sup>2</sup> was discovered on the settlement's highest section – the “acropolis” (Plan 4 and Fig. 12). The lower segments of its outer walls were constructed from dressed stone, while the upper parts were made of mud bricks. In some areas, large ashlar were used, likely from an earlier building phase. The roof was covered with Laconian-type roof tiles. This building had two entrances from the southwest side, flanked by side walls forming two πρόθυρα. In the centre of the larger πρόθυρα, a row of carefully placed stones may have served as an altar. The first entrance was framed by dressed stones and included one preserved staircase leading to a courtyard designed in a peristyle form. There are no remnants of a threshold with a door mechanism, a typical feature in similar structures in the northern Aegean, which are also found at nearby Knežje – Sv. Nikole (Bylazora?) where a similar structure – possibly a royal palace – was also discovered.<sup>36</sup> The second entrance, with its πρόθυρα functioning as a portico, includes two ashlar decorated with *anathyrosis* and a regular square threshold, also without traces of a door mechanism.



Plan 4. Plan of the Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane palace (plan by S. Cvetanovska).  
 Legend: P1, P2 – *Prothiron*; A – Altar(?); E – Entrance; V – Vestibule; C – Courtyard;  
 R1 – Irregularly shaped room; R2 – Room with plaster floor (bath?); R3 – Room with  
 loom weights; R4 – Andron(?); IP – Inner courtyard; S – Storage room;  
 K – Kitchen; RC – Rock-cut auxiliary rooms

<sup>36</sup> Mathews, Neidinger (eds.) 2013, 58; Митревски 2018, 12, Figs. 8–10.



Fig. 12. Aerial photograph of the Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane palace (the “acropolis”)



Fig. 13. Photograph of the vestibule-like room (V in Plan 4), with stone stairs on the right leading to the courtyard (C in Plan 4)

Upon entering through the second entrance, there is a small vestibule-like room, with stone stairs on the right leading to a courtyard (Fig. 13). The courtyard has not been fully excavated, but remains of the northeastern and southwestern stylobates, which supported columns, were discovered.

Most of the discovered columns' elements consisted of anta capitals, though fragments of an Ionic capital and base were excavated (Figs. 14–16). Coloured plaster adorned the peristyle walls in the *secco* technique, with lower zones in Pompeian red, and upper areas painted in ocher, white, and black. Some black fragments also exhibit *al stucco* technique modelling (Figs. 17–19). In the courtyard's centre, a stone open water duct runs through the building, leading to the western part of the site. The courtyard's open section floor was composed of pebbles laid over hardened earth.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 14. Photograph of the anta capital



Fig. 15. Photograph of the lower segment of a column

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<sup>37</sup> Го́рѓиевски 2023, 150–152.



Fig. 16. Photograph of the Ionic capital



Fig. 17. Photograph of the white stucco plaster



Fig. 18. Photograph of the red plaster, *in situ*



Fig. 19. Photograph of the different plaster colours, from the palace

From the northeast wall of the peristyle's central part, an entrance leads to an older building section with multiple modifications over time, parallel to the direction of the water duct. In this phase of research, the function of the irregularly shaped room immediately after the entrance from the peristyle remains unknown, though coloured plaster suggests it was also an important place (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. Photograph of the older building section with multiple modifications, aligned with the direction of the water duct (R1 in Plan 4)

The duct further flows through another room with a plaster floor and a manhole probably connected with the duct, indicating washing or bathing activities. The room's entrance was likely on the now-destroyed northeast wall (Fig. 21). Approximately 7 m from the duct, parallel to its course, there was a long wall preserved at about 1 m in height. This area with a mud-walled room was used for weaving, as indicated by the discovered loom weights.



Fig. 21. Photograph of the room with a plaster floor and a manhole (R2 in Plan 4)

An inner portico with Ionic columns, plaster-coated, followed the duct to the northwest. Opposite, another Ionic-columned portico served as a storage space with numerous underground pithoi and amphorae remnants. The space on the other, northeast side of the wall, parallel to the duct was entered through the peristyle and another door. Although we have not discovered a threshold, the bronze door bosses have been discovered (Fig. 22). Some of them have a typical elongated profile (Fig. 23), which appears on samples from the Macedonian tombs from the tumulus in Langaza<sup>38</sup> and the tomb from Agia Paraskevi,<sup>39</sup> both near Thessaloniki. Both tombs are dated fairly precisely, to the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.

<sup>38</sup> Macridy 1911, 24, Fig. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Σισμανίδης 1986, 85–87, Fig. 21.



Fig. 22. Photograph of bronze door bosses, *in situ* in the andron? (R4 in Plan 4)



Fig. 23. Photograph of the bronze door bosses

This area led to a large, luxurious room, possibly an *andron*, (Fig. 24) decorated with coloured plaster walls: lower sections were in white *al stucco*, while upper ones were in Pompeian red. High-quality plaster fragments featured black fields with white borders, imitating marble (Fig. 25). This room was probably the most opulent, and yet it was almost destroyed, especially on its northern side, which obscures its dimensions and purpose. Another room to the northwest, containing the lower part of a pithos and deer antlers, suggests a kitchen. To the northwest, auxiliary rock-cut rooms with mud walls were found.



Fig. 24. Photograph of the corner of the *andron*(?), decorated with coloured plaster walls (R4 in Plan 4)



Fig. 25. Photograph of high-quality black plaster fragments, imitating marble (R4 in Plan 4)

The entire complex suffered fire damage, with thick ash layers throughout, especially in the peristyle and northeast rooms. Also, lead sling projectiles and iron arrowheads indicate an attack. Although not yet fully ex-

plored, the building follows the typical Hellenistic house plan,<sup>40</sup> with an entrance leading to a peristyle and adjoining rooms. However, usual symmetry was likely avoided due to terrain and previous construction phases. The building’s final character, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, includes coloured plaster imitating marble (*orthomarmarosis*) similar to the First Pompeian style, seen in houses from ancient Macedonia – for example in Pella (House with plaster – end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC)<sup>41</sup> and Petres (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC).<sup>42</sup> Typical door bosses date the structure to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Its location and style indicate it may have been a local ruler’s residence/royal palace(?), occupying almost the entire highest part of the hill. Other parallels exist in Paeonian and Macedonian sites, such as Knežje-St. Nikole (Bylazora?),<sup>43</sup> Teče-Otovica,<sup>44</sup> Vardarski Rid,<sup>45</sup> and further to the south, especially in the decoration of the walls.

Recently obtained C-14 dates from wooden building materials and discovered deer antlers indicate the palace was built late in the 4<sup>th</sup> or early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC<sup>46</sup> and its destruction occurred in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or the 230’s BC.<sup>47</sup> This period was characterised by so-called “Celtic raids”, fierce Macedonian-Dardan hostilities, and the disappearance of the Paeonian kingdom.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, it is rather difficult to determine who used the building and who destroyed it. Furthermore, it is of great importance to comprehend the emergence of the palace and its socio-political character, as well as the context in which it was created. Historically, possible “culprits” could be the Paeonian king Audelon, perhaps with some assistance from the Macedonian king Cassander, or Lysimachus, who was also very active in this region in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. According to the historical narratives and the obtained radiocarbon dates, its destruction should be related to 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC raids and a possible expansion of the Dardanian kingdom, waging continuous wars with Paonian and Macedonian kings in the south.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Winter 2006, 158–165.

<sup>41</sup> Σιγανίδου 1982, 31–36; Λιλιπάτη-Ακαμάτη 2009, 26–35 (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC); Walter-Karydi 1998, 48 (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC); Akamatis in press, (2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC).

<sup>42</sup> Adam-Veleni 2000, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Mitrevski 2019, 345–353.

<sup>44</sup> Георгиев 2017, 91–132.

<sup>45</sup> Slamkov 2005, 159–178. The building is identified as a stoa. However, Room 4 has an open peristyle and Room 2 has a plaster floor and benches with walls decorated with painted plaster. Those elements are not typical for stoas, but are common among the wealthy houses from the Hellenistic period.

<sup>46</sup> The same date for the appearance of the palace was provided by a transport amphora handle, stamped ΘΑΣΙΩ(Ν) ΜΕΓΑΚΛΕΙΔ(ΗΣ), see Гориевски 2023, 153–155; cf. Tzachev 2016, 89–95.

<sup>47</sup> Burned wood: (conventional C14 YRS BP [-1950]+-1σ=2256+-20); Antler: (cal AD/BC 2 σ = 279–230).

<sup>48</sup> See, Папазоглу 1957; Papazoglu 1969; Пановски 2022.

We know less about the other parts of the settlement. What seems indicative is that the discovered contexts in these sections suggest a much longer-lasting occupation, well before the erection of the palace at the “acropolis” – from the Early Bronze Age, through the Early Iron Age, and into an earlier “Hellenised” phase (5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC).<sup>49</sup> For instance, on the “middle terrace”, an inner rampart was uncovered, which had been rebuilt several times to protect the “acropolis”. In the earlier phases, the foundation (stylobate?), preserved approximately 11 meters in length, was constructed with large ashlar, ending at the north with a stone decorated with *anathyrosis*, typically placed near an entrance (Fig. 26). Subsequent phases consisted of amorphous stones, with walls up to two metres thick.



Fig. 26. Photograph of the ashlar-built inner rampart (maybe stylobate?) at the “middle terrace”

The “lower terrace”, though poorly explored, represented an enigmatic part of the settlement and was likely used for ritual activities. Through rock-carved stairs, one reaches a rocky levelled area where a small altar-like rock is found (Fig. 27). To its east, there is a small circular area made of fine river stones with an *echinus* placed on it. North of this, smaller pits contained abundant fragmented “Grey-Hellenised pottery”, a fragment of a seated female figurine (possibly a *herodula*?), and the lower part of a moulded figurine. Several other items were found further east in this excavation area, including a gold earring and a circular mound

<sup>49</sup> Георгиев 1991, 95–97, in this paper, Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane is referred to as the Gradište-Makreš site.

of stones in the form of a small tumulus (Fig. 28), next to which lay a fragmented *louterion* (Fig. 29). The mound contained numerous grey pottery fragments, including larger vessels like kraters. Several smaller, smooth stones were also found, likely serving as bases for placing the vessels. This space was likely sacred and used for rituals, similar to the one found at the Rachi settlement-Isthmia at Corinth, which was used alongside the great temples of Demeter and Persephone.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 27. Photograph of the rock-carved feature at the “lower terrace”



Fig. 28. Photograph of the mound of stones at the “lower terrace”

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<sup>50</sup> Anderson-Stojanovic 2001, 33–47.



Fig. 29. Photograph of the fragmented *louterion* stand

#### Discussion: regional contexts of “Hellenisation” at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> and during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC

The chronology of Kale-Krševica and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane provides a relatively clear timeline of the Late Iron Age “Hellenisation” in the region between Vranje and Kumanovo. During subphase IIIa at Kale-Krševica (c. the last decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century until 323 BC), archaeological finds at Gradište were scarce or remain to be uncovered. Beyond a general understanding of their existence, the current research has not decisively determined what transpired here during the “Classical period”. When compared with other “Hellenised” settlements in the area, this local peculiarity seems more likely a result of limited excavations rather than a significant chronological difference. However, the available data do not yet allow for a thorough comparison between Kale-Krševica and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, leaving open the possibility of a later emergence for Gradište.

More evident parallels between the two sites emerge during subphase IIIb at Kale-Krševica. The “hydro-technical” complex appeared

around 300 BC, and according to recently obtained C-14 dates, the opulent residence at Gradište – potentially the palace of a local ruler built following the contemporary architecture of Macedonian wealthy homes – was constructed around the same time. Establishing direct chronological correspondences becomes more challenging afterwards. When Kale-Krševica ceased to exist at the end of subphase IIIb (either by the end of the first quarter or mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane to the south seemingly continued for several years, or perhaps even decades.

This assertion relies on the established timeline of Greek imports at Kale-Krševica,<sup>51</sup> which ended in the middle of the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and the C-14 dates of the finds within the palace at Gradište indicating its use until the 250's or 230's BC, when it was violently destroyed. However, comparing these sets of archaeological finds can be misleading. For instance, Greek imports at Gradište have not been adequately analysed, and no radiocarbon dates exist for Krševica. Thus, a comprehensive examination of 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC consumption practices at Gradište remains elusive. There are a few sherds of fully developed West Slope fragments (Fig. 30), which are unknown from Kale-Krševica. According to S. Rotroff, the motif of ivy leaves on a wavy stem “was in use by the 270's at the latest”.<sup>52</sup> Hence, our piece should probably be dated to the second quarter or even the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>53</sup> Beyond this, aside from a general understanding in archaeological literature about the scarcity of Greek imports after 279 BC in the region – an idea that will be reassessed once the Gradište material is analysed – there is scant additional information.

More evidence of 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC contexts in the region comes from the site near Sveti Nikole, interpreted as Bylazora.<sup>54</sup> Scholars, however, disagree over its chronology. American researchers excavating between 2008 and 2013 argued that the most prominent structures at the “acropolis” – the stoa and the royal palace – were built after 217 BC, under Philip V, when he conquered this region and restored this preexisting Paeonian town.<sup>55</sup> Dragi Mitrevski, who continued excavations afterwards, published influential works suggesting that the palace's origins date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, with Audoleon overseeing its second architectural phase.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, this latter interpretation argued that the “stoa” was, in fact, a Doric temple.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Вранчић 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Rotroff 1997, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Anderson-Stojanović 2000, 383–384.

<sup>54</sup> E.g., Mitrevski 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Matthews, Neidinger 2012; Matthews, Neidinger (eds.) 2013; Margini 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Mitrevski 2016; 2017; Митревски 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Денковски 2022. The research conducted here uncovered intriguing contexts related to the destruction of this building, including the remains of six unburied individuals, likely soldiers, who perished in the temple during a battle (Mitrevski 2019, 19–20).



Fig. 30. West Slope pottery from Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane: decoration with ivy leaves on a wavy stem

Disagreements also exist concerning this palace's abandonment. The American team attributed it to confrontations with Roman legions during the reign of Perseus (179–168 BC), the last Macedonian king and son of Philip V.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Mitrevski supports the view that it was destroyed in 279 BC during the so-called "Celtic raids", with limited subsequent building activity.<sup>59</sup>

The structural parallels with the Palace of Aigai, built by Philip II (359–336 BC),<sup>60</sup> make dating the first phase of the Knežje palace before the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century highly unlikely. Audoleon's reign seems a more suitable timeframe for its first phase.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, some finds at the Knežje site, such as a Paeonian coin struck by King Leon after 279 BC found in the destruction layers of the palace, along with local emulations of fully developed West Slope ceramics that cannot be dated into the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, indicate the need for other revisions to Mitrevski's chronology.<sup>62</sup> Yet, the discovered material culture does not unambiguously point to Philip V's era or the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC either.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, it appears that the palaces at Knežje and Gradište were contemporaneous, lasting from the late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC until the middle of the century, or perhaps even a few decades longer. This could suggest that the local 3<sup>rd</sup>-

<sup>58</sup> Mathews, Neidinger (eds.) 2013, 75–113.

<sup>59</sup> See, n. 54, 56 and 57.

<sup>60</sup> Kottaridi 2011, 301–304.

<sup>61</sup> Cf., Вранић 2022, 52–53.

<sup>62</sup> In the same group of finds after 279 BC falls a stamped Thasian amphora handle dated between 274 and 259 BC. See, Margini 2013, 46.

<sup>63</sup> See, Mitrevski 2016; 2017; Митревски 2018.

century BC hierarchy in the region traditionally understood as ancient Paeonia was more complex than written sources indicate (see below). Moreover, both sites imply that the “Celtic raids” may have been less catastrophic for the local settlements than previously believed.

Interestingly, the Knežje palace yielded fewer Greek imports<sup>64</sup> than those from subphase IIIb at Kale-Krševica. This discrepancy raises questions as architectural features like plaster walls, capitals, and other elements demonstrate clear signs of Greek/Macedonian architectural know-how. The building’s construction occurred before 279 BC and the so-called Celtic invasion, during a time when trade and exchange were thriving, with Macedonian forces recruiting local units and mercenaries, and Macedonian or allied troops could still be stationed and supplied in this part of the Balkans.<sup>65</sup> Were Greek imports removed afterwards if the building indeed survived post-279 BC? Once analysed, the imported material from Gradište may offer answers to this question.

The collective identity of the residents of Gradište and Knežje remains uncertain. Were they the same local “Hellenised” community, typically identified as Paeonians in literary sources, who simply lost their prominent position in the social and material networks connecting this region with the northern Aegean, either after Lysimachus’s initiatives regarding one of Audelon’s sons in 284 BC or following the events of 279 BC?<sup>66</sup> Or did another group, such as the communities labelled as Celts or Dardanians, take over the settlements? One must be careful here since there is a fundamental issue with the culture-historical nature behind these questions supposing a strong correlation between the style of material culture and collective identity, which was probably not as straightforward during the Balkan Iron Age.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, questions about the collective identity of the inhabitants of Krševica, Gradište and Knežje intersect with broader discussions: did the events of 279 BC merely disrupt the regular supply of goods from the south and the Macedonian army-related social mobility in this area,<sup>68</sup> or did the so-called “Celtic raids” have a more substantial effect on the survival of the local “Hellenised” populations?<sup>69</sup>

Current research at Gradište offers clues but not definitive answers. The destruction occurred after 279 BC, possibly in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century or even as late as the 230’s BC, and no distinctly non-“Hellenised” artefacts suggest a new population. Thus, the palace’s occupation likely continued through the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. If so, Gradište’s persistence challenges the conventional view of “Celtic raids”, suggesting regional dis-

<sup>64</sup> See, Mitrevski 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Nankov 2011; 2015; Вранић 2022.

<sup>66</sup> See, Пановски 2022, with references, for a recent interpretation of Paeonian history.

<sup>67</sup> Vranić 2014a; 2014b; Mihajlović 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Cf., Dzino 2007; Mihajlović 2019: 200–203, 259–268; Вранић 2022, 178–179.

<sup>69</sup> E.g., Papazoglu 1969, 111–112; Mitrevski 2016; Cf., Popović 2009c.

ruptions in economic and social mobility rather than mass migration or a complete population change. Additionally, this could imply that life at Krševica and other regional sites did not end abruptly in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC but persisted without Greek imports, complicating archaeological interpretations of these later phases.

Finally, questions linger about Gradište's abandonment shortly before the region's recovery under Philip V (221–179 BC) after 217 BC. This issue is tied to the aforementioned discrepancies in the literature regarding 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC contexts at Knežje and the fact that the absolute dates from Gradište fall somewhere in between. According to the discovered contexts and these dates, this palace was also built during the reign of the Paeonian King Audoleon, the most prominent king of this "Paleo-Balkan" group and a well-known Macedonian and Athenian ally reigning from around 315 to 285/284 BC. Yet this raises another question: why would the two opulent Paeonian residences be erected so close to each other? Maybe there were more high-status Paeonians, or perhaps Audelon's lands were smaller, and some non-Paeonian "Hellenised" elites existed in the north? Given the sling projectiles, typical of Macedonian and allied armies, discovered in the context of the Gradište palace's destruction by fire, its violent end may be related to some unknown confrontation between two local "Hellenised" armies a few decades after 279 BC rather than the Celts.

However, according to the literary sources, we should be looking for Dardanians as the most probable culprits of this destruction,<sup>70</sup> though the material culture and identity issues regarding this group in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC remain unresolved.<sup>71</sup> If we follow the literary sources, the destruction layers at Gradište and Knežje should be linked to the turbulence of the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The Dardanian raids into Macedonian territory, such as their incursion near Pella in 209 BC, underscore a period of this prolonged conflict.<sup>72</sup>

Following this culture-historical argument, the exact location separating the supposed Paeonia and Dardania lands during the reigns of the last two Paeonian kings, Leon (278/7–c. 250 BC) and Dropion (c. 250–c. 230 BC), becomes an important issue. Traditional interpretations suggest that the region of Kumanovo was part of Paeonia in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>73</sup> However, literary sources mentioning the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC events, such as the ritual significance of the river Astibo (Bregalnica?) for crowning Paeonian kings, and the movement of Ariston (Audoleon's son) to Dardania when threatened by Lysimachus (c. 284 BC), possibly imply a Dardanian presence near this river and consequent control of the Pčinja

<sup>70</sup> See, Papazoglu 1969.

<sup>71</sup> Mihajlović 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 117–118.

<sup>73</sup> Соколовска 1990, 9–34; 2003; 2011; Петрова 1999, 67.

valley (possibly even Ovče Pole) even before the attack of the Celts. One could also argue that the finds of the golden leaf (icon) of Dropion (Leon’s son) from the region of Tikveš,<sup>74</sup> as well as the tile with the monogram of Audoleon from Pilav Tepe,<sup>75</sup> and another tile with a monogram of Dropion from Strumica<sup>76</sup> (and the absence of similar discoveries on the sites north of Bregalnica, such as Knežje and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane), suggest that the Paeonian kingdom, after the so-called Celtic invasion, was located in the regions of Stobi, Tikveš, Štip, Radoviš, Strumica, and Demir Kapija.<sup>77</sup> Of course, these assumptions do not correlate with the location of Bylazora at Knežje,<sup>78</sup> but again, neither is the obvious absence of the coins of Phillip V (the one who rebuilt Bylazora) and Perseus on this site. And, after all, when Polybius talks about Bylazora,<sup>79</sup> he clearly states that the city is located at the entrance from Dardania to Macedonia. Therefore, if the largest part of Paeonia was occupied by Dardanians after the reign of Dropion (c. 230 BC), this entrance (and, therefore, Bylazora itself) may be located somewhere where the border zone of Dropion’s Paeonia and Macedonia previously stood.

On the other hand, the discovered material culture in the destruction layers of the palaces at Gradište and Knežje remained Greek-like. If our proposed chronology of their destruction in the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC is correct, this hypothesis about the Dardanian presence in the south before the 250’s/230’s BC remains uncorroborated unless we suppose that this paleo-Balkan community was already “Hellenised” regarding their material culture. In conclusion, the discovered contexts at the two palaces indicate some local turbulences within the region known as ancient Paeonia after 279 BC. Scarce and usually diachronic literary sources may be somehow transferring later events into the past<sup>80</sup> or describing an unknown social stratification process among the society labelled as ancient Paeonians, where a new local ruling family was ascribed with a later Dardanian ethnonym. After all, why would the two palaces be located only 40 km apart as the crow flies?

Additionally, the C-14 date of the end of the Gradište palace’s biography comes from deer antlers (pointing to the period when the animal was killed), which could have served as a trophy and been kept within the palace for many years. If so, the destruction could even be related to events in 217 BC involving Philip V. Stretching this argument further, it could imply that Philip V was indeed responsible for constructing the pal-

<sup>74</sup> Микулчиќ, Соколовска 1995, 103–110.

<sup>75</sup> Бојаџиев 2022, 141.

<sup>76</sup> Rujak 2020, 250, Fig. 231.

<sup>77</sup> Cf., Pavlovska 2009, 319–329, Pl. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Микулчиќ 1976, 156–164.

<sup>79</sup> Polyb. 5.97.

<sup>80</sup> Cf., Mihajlović 2018.

ce in Knežje after he had destroyed Gradište. This may represent a shift in local hierarchy and landscape following his short-lived conquest. However, we could equally argue that the finds from the destruction level of both Gradište and Knežje indicate that these sites shared the same destiny – they were both destroyed in the same events, and by the same enemy.

Considering the late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup>-century BC contexts at Kale-Krševica, Audoleon and Cassander have already been proposed as possible figures behind the construction of the barrel-vaulted reservoir and the entire “hydro-technical” complex around 300 BC. This development could have taken place within a social setting of “paleo-Balkan” allies and mercenaries returning from service in Alexander’s and subsequent Macedonian armies, bringing with them newly-acquired Greek architectural know-how, or as part of an effort to establish Macedonian garrisons in the north – or both.<sup>81</sup> Regarding the site’s eventual abandonment, there are also some indications that it continued to exist after 279 BC into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, though it lacked Greek imports. The most compelling support for this is the presence of the same local mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC skyphoi, crafted as an attempt to emulate fully developed West Slope Attic pottery decorations, which were also found at Bylazora.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, some La Tène fibulae dating from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC indicate that other regional connections were also significant.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion: a way forward in understanding Late Iron Age “Hellenisation” in the Balkans

The interpretations of Kale-Krševica (Serbia) and Gradište-Mlado Nagoričane (North Macedonia) have shown that the cultural transformations and interactions among Greeks, Macedonians, and “Paleo-Balkan” communities in the region between Vranje and Kumanovo were more complex than previously assumed and that further research is necessary. The site of Kale-Krševica provides crucial insights into the processes of “Hellenisation” from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century until the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (subphase IIIa).

A pivotal aspect of these social and material transformations was the emergence of a more numerous warrior elite<sup>84</sup> as compared to the Early Iron Age, one that became deeply entangled with Greek wine-related objects. This included Attic kantharoi and skyphoi, specifically the *Saint Valentin* class and the “Fat Boy” group. These items, along with transport amphorae, were imported from the northern Aegean coast, originating in

<sup>81</sup> Vranić 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Вранић 2022, 52–53, 150, Cat. No. 635.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 70, n. 46; cf. Popović, Vranić 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Archibald 2013.

Athens, and key wine-producing regions like Thasos, respectively. The presence of these artefacts in early “Hellenised” settlements suggests the development of a notable local warrior aristocracy. Although this group was less extensive than the elites emerging after Philip II’s conquests and Alexander the Great’s eastern campaigns, it played a critical role in constructing new identities through consistent access to imported Greek vessels and wine. Importantly, the Greek materialities in this subphase seem to be “translated” and appropriated into local drinking practices, which likely retained regional characteristics. This newly formed social system can be characterised as a complex chiefdom or a decentralised stratified society.<sup>85</sup>

In subsequent phases, the appropriation of Macedonian military and royal architectural techniques provides further evidence of new aspects of “Hellenisation”. As seen in numerous discovered fortifications, Greek defensive architecture – such as ashlar masonry ramparts with mud-brick upper structures, walkways, and tiled roofs – was implemented throughout the Balkan hinterland since Philip II’s conquest, and even more afterwards.<sup>86</sup> A similar appropriation occurred in funerary architecture, albeit with greater diversity.<sup>87</sup> However, royal palaces were rare, with few examples aside from the now-submerged palace at Seuthopolis, and newly-discovered Thracian hunting lodges/royal residences in the Bulgarian mountains.<sup>88</sup> The appearance of palaces at Gradište and Knežje by the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC suggests that local elites not only engaged with Macedonian military strategies but were also appropriating Macedonian royal architecture, and therefore creating new spaces for elite living and “Hellenised” landscapes. Whether their erection was a result of some locals coming back from Macedonia armies with newly-acquired architectural knowledge or there was a widely used practice of hiring some high-ranking Macedonian architects remains an open question. Regardless, this transition indicates a more stratified social system, with elite individuals asserting their positions as kings, following the contemporary practices of Alexander’s generals.

At Kale-Krševica (subphase IIIb), while a palace structure is absent, the “hydro-technical” complex appears to have been designed for defence, water supply, and large-scale food production, suggesting strategic planning that involved expert Macedonian army architects and possibly even incorporation of Cassander’s garrison into this pre-existing “Hellenised” settlement. This underscores the region’s entanglement with Macedonian military and architectural practices, further contributing to the creation of “Hellenised” landscapes in a different, but equally significant, way.

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<sup>85</sup> Вранић 2022, 105–108, 171–175.

<sup>86</sup> Nankov 2008; 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Stoyanova 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Hristov (ed.) 2011; (ed.) 2012.

Through these findings we have shown the diachronic aspects of “Hellenisation” in the region from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC until the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, initially shaped by trade and exchange networks with the northern Aegean, and later influenced by the local responses to Macedonian imperialism. Additionally, this territory, a periphery within the wider periphery during the Early Hellenistic period, seems to have maintained several key sites even after 279 BC – an important lead for future research.

Finally, while earlier scholarship often perceived “Hellenisation” as a one-sided phenomenon, our research demonstrates that even within the relatively small Vranje-Kumanovo region, varied contexts of cultural contact and local appropriations of Greek materialities and knowledge existed. The presence of Greek imports, along with locally adapted Greek-inspired objects and structures, reveals diverse social and cultural shifts. These should be carefully scrutinised not through an evolutionary or Hellenocentric lens, but by asking how these communities interpreted and integrated Greek imports and technologies and what their consequent roles in creating new local identities were rather than simply asking if and when a “paleo-Balkan tribe” became Greek.

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