

THE LIGHTING AS AN ELEMENT OF THE MODE OF LIVING IN MEDIEVAL PLISKA

Konstantin Konstantinov

(Константин Константинов, Шуменски университет „Епископ Константин Преславски“, България, 9712 Шумен, ул. „Университетска“ 115)

A basic problem in the daily round of the inhabitants of Pliska that seeks for an answer is the one concerning the lighting. The archaeological studies, undertaken on the territory of the first Bulgarian capital, show that the upper-mentioned problem was solved with three types of sources: natural light that comes into the house through the gate, and through the windows in the overground houses; the light from the fireplace; lighting fixtures (illuminants) different in shape and material – candlesticks, clay lamps etc.

Admittedly, the most preferred and the most easily accessible source of light for the ancient people, and for the inhabitants of Pliska in particular, was daylight. It does not require additional efforts and it provides comparatively good lighting. However, daylight has its shortcomings. It could be in use only for overgrounded houses, while daylight entering into underground houses of the ordinary population is almost impossible. Besides, it did not solve the problem with lighting during the night when the population had to look for other source of light. A trouble along these lines is found to be the fact that the residents of Pliska shut up their doors in winter, thus they had their premises, shrouded in impenetrable darkness. These difficulties imposed the using of a second source of light – the fireplace. Due to its abovementioned qualities it was the center of the living-spaces in Pliska. All members of a family used to sit around the fireplace in time for rest or when they did their home work.¹ The fire in the fireplace was not also a widely applicable source of light, because it could not be moved and it had permanently fixed place in the interior of every home. This is a significant problem that affects most the buildings with many parts in the first Bulgarian capital in which the location of the fireplace in one of the premises could not provide light in the entire house. That was probably the reason for lighting kindling wood (pitched wood stick from pine or fir-tree), which was placed high on the walls in the house.² The presence of that source of light in the homes of Pliska residents is proved also by some historical materials, which noted the existence of “wax torches”.³

¹ Georgieva-Stoykova 1956, 27.

² Vakarelsky 1977, 266.

³ Responsa 109–110.

The archaeological studies reveal that the population of Pliska knew and used other sources of light, as well – lamps, candlesticks etc. They were inalterable element of the interior of the living premises, especially in the period after the middle X Century. Presumably, these are the different “candelabrams”,⁴ mentioned in chapter 55 from “The answers of Pope Nicolay I to the request of the Bulgarians”, which serve as proofs for the comparatively high level of culture of life that the local population possessed.

Lamps

The clay lamps were comparatively widely applied as a source of light in Pliska. It has been discovered some similar specimens, which could be differentiated into two basic types. The small lamp with a flat handle, stuck to its body, excavated from the area of the Throne-room, could be referred to the first type (*pattern 4*).⁵ It can be depicted as a low, handmade bowl of light-red clay, which was filled with animal fat or tallow. The fat fed the dipped bottom end of the hemp wick, the kindling of which provided the population of Pliska with light, necessary for their daily round activities. Lamps with similar externals were to be found in other Early Medieval town centers in Bulgaria.⁶ There are close analogies on the territory of Romania, too.⁷

The lamp, found out in the Civil Building, northeastern from the Citadel, has similar structure (*pattern 3*).⁸ It refers to the second type of illuminants in Pliska. It is important to mention that its round bowl with furrow is clamped above hollow stem, which was probably used when the lit lamp had to be moved. It was made on a treadle potter’s wheel, which is the reason for dating it back after the middle X Century. These types of lamps have analogies in the archaeological materials from villages on the territory of the ex-USSR,⁹ which suppose their comparatively wide spreading area. The archaeological studies show that similar clay lamps were used also by the population of Veliki Preslav. The specimens, that were discovered there, are distinguished for their comparatively high exactness of workmanship which turns them into paragons of such manufacture.¹⁰ However, it is worth noting that the changes affect to the greatest extent the externals of these illuminants, while their functional character was preserved.

⁴ Responsa 101.

⁵ Doncheva-Petkova – Stoyanova – Goryanova 1999, 51, pl. XIII, pattern 146.

⁶ Changova 1992, 115. obr. 109₂; Doncheva-Petkova 1999, 75, pl. XXVI, pattern 174.

⁷ Comşa 1967, 188, fig. 119₂; Diaconu – Baraschi 1974, 388, fig. 1.

⁸ Stanchev 1955, 198, pattern 16₅.

⁹ Mongayt 1955, 130, pattern 93.

¹⁰ Mihaylova 1982, 6; Aladjov 1996, 79–80., pattern 2; Goryanova 1992, 194–198.

Two one-wicked lamps, found out during excavations near the Southern gate in Pliska, remain out of the chronological borders of the present research.¹¹ They were totally preserved and in accordance with the analogies they referred to the period of the late antiquity. On that ground, it is thought that they have fallen among the archaeological materials, as they did not have any points of contact with the mode of life of Pliska population during VIII–XI C.¹²

The clay lamps, discovered at the time of studying the first Bulgarian capital, are insufficient to highlight to full extent the question about their role in the daily round of the local capital population. The characteristics of the cultural layers, where the lamps were found out, do not enable them to be associated with the mode of life of a certain stratum. The facts that these lamps are dated back to the late X Century and the beginning of the XI Century, and they have simpler pattern, are the grounds for presuming that they were worked out by the late nomads, who inhabited the Pliska field during that period.

That dating raises a number of questions, relevant to the lighting up of the houses in Pliska in the early period of the existence of the capital. The lack of illuminants, typical of the Antiquity, in the earlier cultural layers in Pliska presumes an interruption of the built-up traditions in this respect. It could be assumed that wood lamps with animal fat were used for illuminating as a consequence of the common tendency of popular using of timber in the construction and architecture of the first Bulgarian capital. Due to the lack of solidity of this material, no evidence to sustain as assertion of this hypothesis could be produced.

Candlesticks

Besides lamps with animal fat, the population of Pliska used clay candlesticks for lighting up their homes and farm buildings. Such objects from the daily round of the population have been partially preserved which hamper the setting of their shape and social origin. The clay candlestick, found out in the living premises in the southeastern part of the Inner town, is the only one that is completely preserved.¹³ It is handmade of brick red clay with sandy dashes. It is noticed marks of smoothing on the candlestick's surface. It is shaped as a tall bowl, put upon a smaller and lower stem. It could clearly be seen a tiny hole in the bottom of the utensil, which has an unknown function so far. The other candlestick, discovered in the area of the capital, has a similar shape.¹⁴ Some single fragments from it, have been preserved, which testify to an object from the daily round of people, with similar construction, but of vaster size. This type of illuminants in Pliska has analo-

¹¹ Milchev 1985, 34, pattern 34.

¹² Georgiev 1985, 224 (review), Georgiev 1986, 49.

¹³ Doncheva-Petkova 1993, 259, pattern 19.

¹⁴ Doncheva-Petkova 1993, 259.

gies in two specimens of candlesticks from Dinogetia – Garvan,¹⁵ which proves the comparatively wide spreading area.

It is worth paying attention to a five-faced candlestick, found out also in the southern sector of the Western fortified wall.¹⁶ It is made of brick red sandy clay. Its height of 0,13 m has been retained, while its shape could not be defined certainly because of its mouth, bottom and handle having been broken off.

The archaeological researches of the first Bulgarian capital have rarely come upon traces of illuminants, made of metal. It has been found out only one fragment of an iron four-legged stand of a candlestick so far. It consists probably of two identical Π-shaped parts, cross-shaped fixed.¹⁷ The find represents the one half of the stand and it is a flat leg, cut at right angles. It measures 0.002 m of thickness and 0.075 m of height. The two flat sides of the fragment from the candlestick were decorated with engraved ornaments of “a bird eye”, placed within small rectangular grounds. This decoration is typical of the period of the Early Medieval. Traces of a rivet opening can be noticed on the horizontal arm of the candlestick’s leg. This opening served for connecting the four parts of the candlestick. A cylindrical cup is fixed between them.¹⁸ Facts about candlesticks with similar construction are to be found out in the archaeological materials from a number of early medieval town centers on and out of the territory of Bulgaria.¹⁹ Such samples of candlesticks were depicted on several frescoes from the XIII Century,²⁰ which proves that they were mainly used by the population of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. The fact that candlesticks made of metal were rarely discovered on the territory of Pliska, could be explained with the decline of life in this town center after the withdrawal of the governing class in Veliki Preslav in the end of the IX Century – the beginning of the X Century. The few utensils of this type followed probably their owners in their new homes. When Pliska was no longer a capital, the population of the town did not have the chance to touch such innovations, which used undoubtedly models from Byzantium.

All sources of light that have been examined had an important place in the mode of life of Pliska population during VIII–XI Centuries. Despite the differences in their appearance and construction that have been shown, all of them had one and the same function – to provide the light necessary for the normal human existence. The divergences are due to people’s striving for perfection, as well as to the gradually forming of the strata among the capital population.

¹⁵ Comşa 1967, 153, fig. 91_{1, 2}.

¹⁶ Doncheva-Petkova 1992, 140, pattern 38.

¹⁷ Dzhingov 1992, 118–119, pattern 22c.

¹⁸ Dzhingov 1992, 118.

¹⁹ Nikolova 1974, 231–234, pattern 50, 51, 52; Totev 1975, 51; Stoyanova 2003, 205–209, pattern 1, 2; Davidson 1952, 127, pl. 62₈₃₈.

²⁰ Grabar 1924, 82, pl. XXXVII.

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ILLUSTRATION

