

# LATE ANTIQUE RESIDENTIAL OBJECT FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE KALE-VINICA

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## Abstract

The archaeological site Kale is located on a small hill in the south-western part of today's modern Vinica and it is known mostly because of the exclusive finds from the 5-th and the beginning of the 6-th century - the terracotta reliefs with Christian motifs, known by its popular name as terracotta "icons".

A section of the ancient traffic network in the Bregalnica River area reached this fortified city, which name is still unknown. The last elation of the Roman Empire in the time of Justinian I (527-565) can be observed in the architectonic remains on the Kale Fortress. The architectonic complex from the 5-6 century consists of objects build in the spirit of the new living philosophy. Justinian renews the city walls, and from the latest excavations (2008-2011) a few houses were discovered on the north-east terrace of the site, as well as the objects for military purpose by the south-west fortification wall.

This article refers on one residential object, which was eventually used as a church residence.

## Keywords:

Late antique, residential objects, Kale Fortress, Vinica, episcopalia

## Theme/s:

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The archaeological site Kale is located on a small hill (460 meters above sea level), in the south-west suburbs of the modern city of Vinica. With a different living continuity, the settlement existed from Prehistoric period until the Middle Ages. Archaeological excavations started in 1985, and periodically were conducted until 2011.

Under Roman rule, one of the larger settlements within the area was positioned in the present location of the site. Remains of that settlement have so far been found at several locations. However, its expansion throughout Roman time, is without doubt connected to the intensification of trading and the position on one of the main trading roads from that period, a section of the ancient traffic network in the Bregalnica River area, the road Astibos-Pauthalia (Микулчиќ1999). Throughout that period, the need for protection of people and acquired goods was clearly raised, and therefore at the archaeological site Kale, as a convenient strategic point, a fortified city (castle) was erected (Fig.1). The fortified city covered an interior surface of approximately 2.5 hectares (Balabanov 2007).



(Fig. 1)

So far, the most of the archaeological remains on the site belong to the Late Antique living horizon, from the middle of the IV, until the end of the VI century. Approximately from the middle of the IV century is the first fortification which follows the natural configurations of the terrain, incited by the military and the political situation in the Empire. Later, the fortification is extended and renovated in the period of Justinian I. Building activity is very prominent in this period, and it was, to a greater extent, a result of renovation and extension, rather than major building projects (Ellis 2007, 13).

### **Object I (Possible Episcopal Residence)**

#### *Location and orientation*

North from the East Tower, around 2.10 meters, along the *intervallum*, East and near by the Great Basilica. The orientation of the object is n/e-s/w (Fig. 2)



(Fig. 2)

### *Excavation*

The object was first discovered in 1985/6, and the excavations continued in 1993-1995 and in 2008.<sup>1</sup> A part of the object is preserved in the conservation project in 1999, and so far it is not fully discovered.<sup>2</sup> From the archaeological excavations in 2008, it was concluded that the rooms on the north side from the object, previously connected with it, belong to a different object.

### *Space and functional organization*

On the front side of the object there was a *porticum*. The main room, *triclinium*, (7 x 4.85 m.) has an apse on the north/east side, which is incorporated in the wall from the outside. This was an audience room also. It is only in the modern world that houses have become purely, or almost entirely domestic space. In ancient times, at least, the house was always as much a business as a domestic area (Ellis 2005, 7). The entrance in the room was on the south/west through the porch. These apse-rooms were known since the I century AD, but they become common in the provincial houses in the late III century ( Герасимовска 2009, 44). The remarkable thickness of the walls (0.70 m.) and their leveling shows an existence of an upper and a ground floor. The ground floor was used as a grain store, because of the *pithoi* pits which were carved into the rock. A large concentration of *pithoi* sherds have been found in and around the pits (Balabanov 2011, 49).

In a later phase, but still during the course of the VI century, a crypt was built from the south side of the apse. Inside the crypt two beds were discovered, made of long, wooden thick holders, intertwined with boughs and coated with a 3-5 cm thick layer of clay.(foto) Only a scull fragment was discovered on one of the beds. The sepulchre vault, carried out with alternately laid bricks, later was forced in, and the crypt was robbed. (Balabanov 2011, 40). Along the south side of the main room, there is a small piscine and a remaining from a firebox of the hypocaust heating system. It was used for heating the triclinium, as well as the near by small bath.

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<sup>1</sup> The project was conducted by Kosta Balabanov and Cone Krstevski from the National Museum of Macedonia

<sup>2</sup> The lack of information from the previous researchers is one of the reasons about the object's uncertain function.

The small bath consists from the already mentioned hypocaust heating system, a small bath-tub and a fountain. In spite of its small dimension, it is probable that this bath did not only serve the needs of the object's residents, but instead could have been used by others as well.

A food storage rooms were located on the south part of the object, according to the *pithoi* that were excavated in them. Some service functions might have taken place in the courtyard area, as the doors of these rooms opened into this space.

The private rooms were probably located on the second storey as a much more secure location.

#### *Building techniques and architectonic construction*

The walls were built in *opus incertum*, without horizontal layers, from broken and river stones bounded with mortar and a small percentage of whittled stones in the corners. The bricks as a building material were used in the small bath.

#### *Archaeological finds*

In the apse-room a few glass icon lamps were discovered, and a few small bronze crosses (Balabanov 2011, 39). Copper coins from the period of Justinian I (527-565) and Justin II (565-578). Along the south/east wall, near the small bath, the depository of the terracotta plaques, the so called "icons" was discovered in 1985. There were also fragments from another terracotta plague found in 2001 that deffers from the others by dimensions, form and iconography and that was so far known as "unique", because was not connected with these fragments that were discovered earlier.

#### *Dating*

The object has two building phases, one from the IV century, and the second one from the second half of the VI century, the one which is visible and preserved today. It existed until the end of the VI century.

Many scholarship in the past has recognise any large house conected to the church as a possible episcopal residence, but in the light of the new archaeological cases, this is no

longer enough without more definitive evidences based not only on architectural links with the church (Ellis 2007). Besides the above mentioned archaeological evidence discovered in the object that lead to the conclusion that it was a possible episcopal residence, the most strong one is the ceiling decoration made of terracotta plaques of a type already known at Canosa, in a small Early Christian building in the area of the temple of Giove Toro and in the rural site of Santo Staso in the territory of Gravina, that were square in shape and their fields divided into four or six parts, filled with crosses and animal and vegetal elements. They can be broadly dated to the 6th c (Bertelli 2002).

The terracotta plaques from Vinica are found at several other locations at the site, during the archaeological excavations in 2001 and in 2002. The dimensions of the plates are 32 x 32 x 5 cm (fig. 3), and this type differs from the previously excavated plaques, by shape and iconography.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 3

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<sup>3</sup> About the terracotta plaques from Vinica, see Elizabeta Dimitrova, "Vinica Mistery", Vinica 2012.