

**Archaeological Excavation Stroyno
(BULG 780/20)**

Final Report

on

Activities Carried out in 2020

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Bulgarian Academy of Sciences**

Sofia, March 2021

1. Introduction

The project is a part of a many years research project aiming at complete archaeological study of an archaeological site located on the land of the village of Stroyno, Elhovo municipality – the south-west part of Bulgaria.



Location of the site and a part of necropolises near the village of Stroyno



The excavations of the site began as a rescue in 2014. They were headed by Daniela Agre from the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (NAIM-BAS) with support of the Ethnographic-Archaeological Museum – Elhovo and funded by Bulgarian Ministry of Culture.

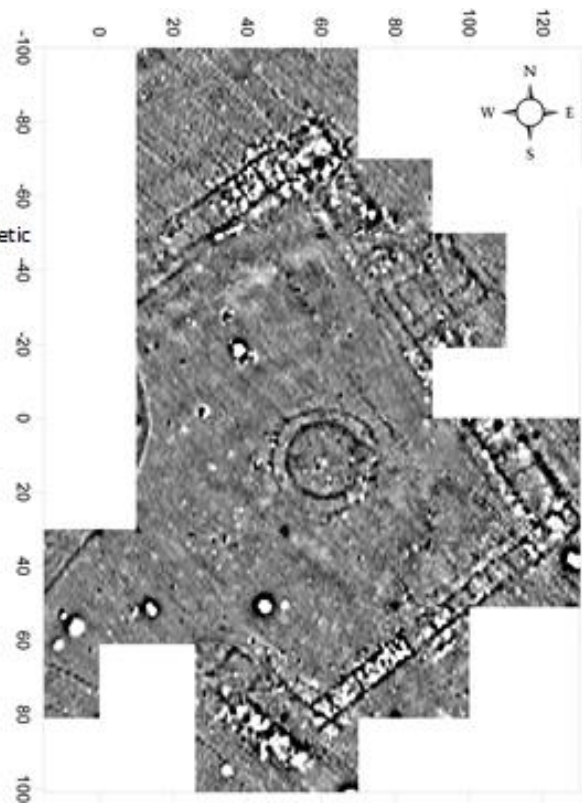


A part of sector A excavated in 2014

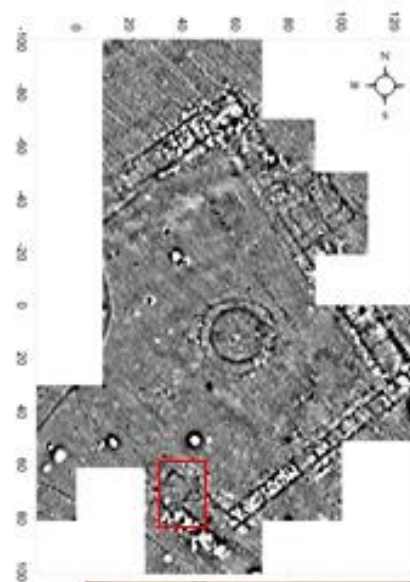
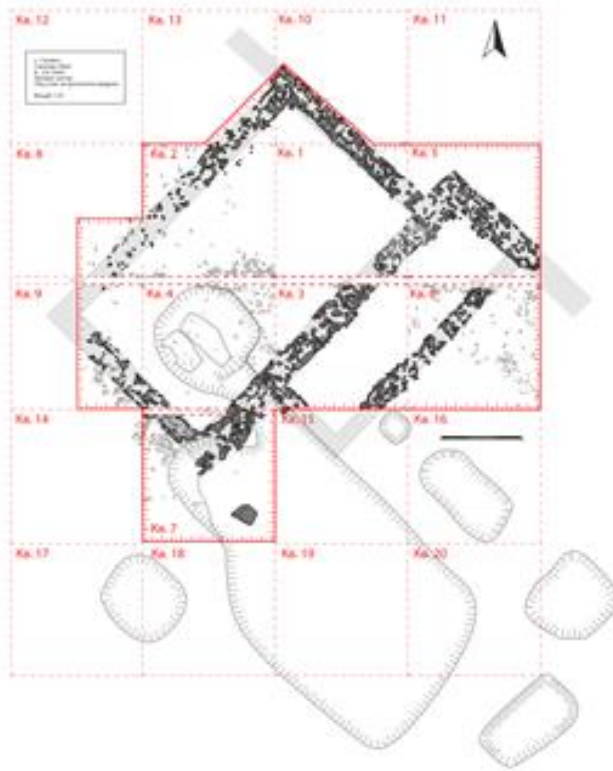


In 2018, a geomagnetic study financially supported by the Ministry of Culture was conducted at the site. The results showed outlines of a large architectural complex located underground on an area of over 35 decares. The complex has a trapezoidal shape, the corners of which are oriented along the directions of the world. It is built as a chain of several rooms, located in front of the inner face of the fence wall, interrupted only from the south, where, probably, there was an entrance (with columns – portico) to the site. In the eastern part of the site the outlines of a peristyle building are clearly visible. A yard with an area of about 15 decares surrounded by a colonnade is located inside the site. An impressive round building made of two walls built as concentric circles are located in the centre of the yard as the area of this building is about 25 decares. The analogues of this building allowed us to interpret it as a round temple - *tolos*. At this stage of the research, a site with a similar plan is not registered at the territory of Bulgaria.

The results of geomagnetic study in 2018



Area investigated in 2014.



In 2020 the regular archaeological excavations of the site have started funded by the STICHTING HORIZON Foundation. They were lasted 3 months are focused on areas outlined by the geomagnetic study. The following section presents the results of excavations carried out in 2020.

The site before starting excavations in 2020



2. Description of work

The site was divided into sectors by a square grid with dimensions of 5 m x 5 m. During this season the excavations were carried out in the sectors Centre, North, East, East-2 and Southwest.

The main objectives of these investigations were:

- Excavating the massive round building - tolos located by the geomagnetic study in the Centre sector.
- Outlining the boundaries of the architectural complex at the north-eastern end of the site
- Excavating the eastern part of the complex

- Localizing and excavating the peristyle building possibly located in the eastern part of the site
- Excavating of the squares in the south-western part of the site

2.1. Sector Centre

The work was focused on the investigation of the circular building outlined by the geomagnetic study - within the area of 8 squares. Two sections of the two circular walls were discovered - external and internal. 21 linear meters of the inner circular wall have been studied and 14 m – of the outer wall. The walls are built from broken limestone with white mortar. The width of the inner wall is 0.80 m, and 0.70 m – of the outer one; the wall are preserved in height up to 0.95 m. The discovered materials found during investigations of the building (bronze fibulae, iron and bronze rings, cult objects, coins, etc.) confirmed our initial hypothesis that the building is a monumental round temple (*tolos*) with an outer diameter of 37 m. Although only 1/5 of the temple has been studied up to now, it becomes clear that the temple consists of two parts - an inner round yard and an outer ring-shape corridor covered by tiles. Most likely, the inner yard had no roof and the rituals in it were performed under the open sky. Despite the relatively small area of the studied space, several working hypotheses related to the deity worshiped in this temple can be expressed. One of them is that the temple belongs to the god Dionysus. The ancient historian Suetonius Tranquill described the temple-sanctuary of Dionysus located in Rhodope Mountains that was visited by Gaius Octavius. The sanctuary was located in a large hall with an oval shape and no roof on top, which was required by the special ritual performed in it.

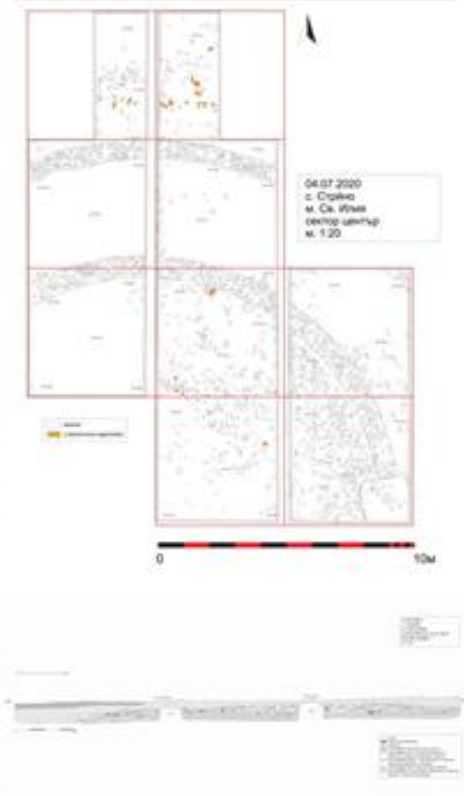
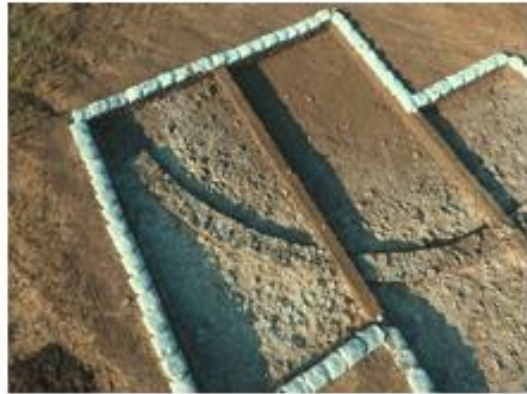


Sector Center





A stage of investigating Sector Centre



In connection with the spread of the cult of Dionysus, it is interesting to mention that in 2006-2008 our expedition excavated one of the largest mounds in this part of Bulgaria - "Raykova mound", which is located just about 300 m south of the site. One of the rare burial rituals from the end of the 1st-2nd century was discovered in the mound - burial in a marble sarcophagus. Several wonderful gold gifts - necklaces, rings, earrings, etc. were found in the sarcophagus. Other gifts were a rich set of bronze vessels that were found on a special place next to the sarcophagus. Some of these bronze vessels - patera and oinochoe, are richly decorated with scenes dedicated to the god Dionysus. It can be assumed that the woman buried in the mound is one of the main priestesses of the temple.

Another possible hypothesis is that the temple is associated with the cult to the emperor - a cult that gained enormous popularity during the period of I-III century AD. Probably, a statue of an emperor or of another deity of the Roman Pantheon honoured in the temple, were placed in the centre of the inner yard. An answer to this question can be given after a thorough study of the temple.



An example of a similar complex with the tolos



2.2. Sector North

The southeast corner of the surrounding wall as well as two premises located south to it was discovered in 8 squares investigated in this sector.



The premises were destroyed by fire and the tile roof covered up the floor so in the next season we hope to find interesting finds into the premises. Based on the destructions discovered in the premises, the building in this section had probably at least 2 floors. In addition to tiles, a large number of ceramic vessels were found in the premises - most of them were imported from workshops in Asia Minor. The found amphora belongs to the type that has discovered at the first time at the territory of Bulgaria and was imported from a Syrian atelier. Several bronze coins, an iron lamp, and several cult ceramic objects were also found.



Finds in situ at the floor level
of premises 3



2.3. Sector East

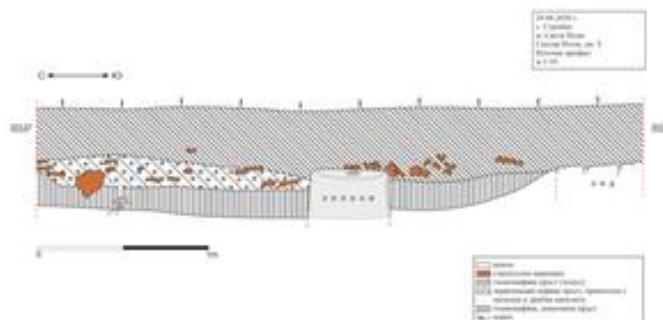
14 squares were investigated in the sector. A part of the eastern fence wall of the complex was discovered in it. The wall is built in the same manner as walls of the circular temple. A part of the colonnade with length of 19 m forming the peristyle yard inside of which the temple is located was also discovered. It is built from marble bases, columns and capitals. The distance between adjacent bases is about 3.30 m and the hypothetical height of the columns is about 3 m so an approximate number of columns in the colonnade is 120.

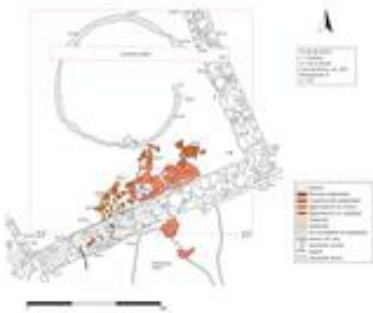


A part of the colonnade in sector East



Fragments of marble columns in sector East

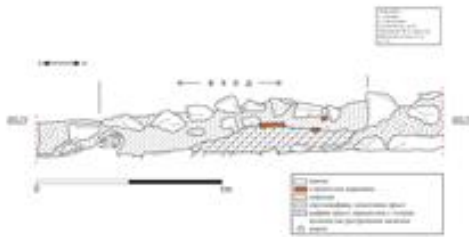




Sector East –
Premises 4



Entrance from south to
premises 4



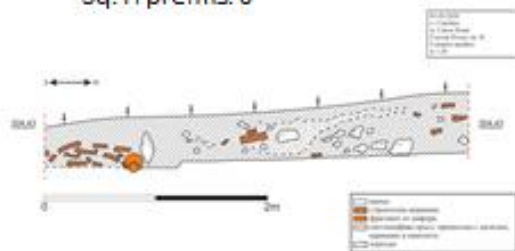


Ceramic vessels in situ in premise 5



6. Cripollari
at. Cca. 200m
nr. 11
strat. V
01.09.2020

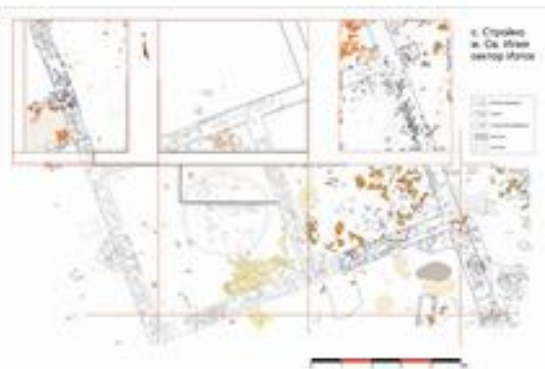
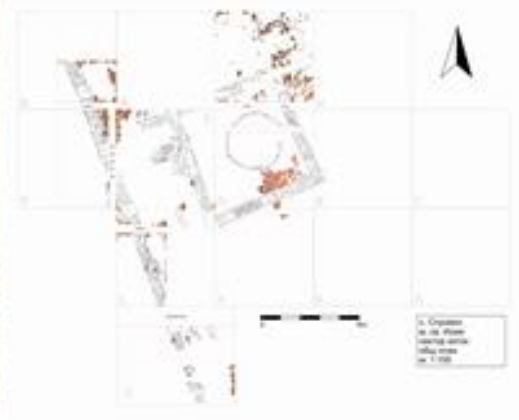
Sq. H premis. 6



Five rectangular premises oriented northwest-southeast were also investigated in the sector. They are located in a chain west to the surrounding wall. Their walls are built of unprocessed stones joined by white plaster and have a preserved height of 1.0 m. The premises contained remains of a water-pipeline system, some marble details (slabs) from the wall's decoration, a big marble vessel, bronze coins, two bronze medical tools, several big storage ceramic vessels and a lot of other finds. In one of the premises 14 ceramics weights for the loom, as well as a bronze and an iron small bell were found *in situ*. Among the finds there are also several imported ceramic vessels, coins, fragmented glass vessels and so on.



Investigated area in sector East



2.4. Sector East 2

The investigated squares are aimed to localize the main residential building of the complex as well as a part of the fence wall. It was discovered that the fence wall in this sector was dug into a grey ashy layer of the soil that is related to the classical age -V-IV century BC. Ceramic material dated to this period was found on both sides of the wall. An element of archaeological decoration – Roman-Dorian capital was discovered in the western part of the sector.

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Architectural structures investigated in sector East 2



A Roman-Dorian capital found
In sector East 2



2.5 Sector Southwest

A part of the southern surrounding wall and a part of a dwelling – probably a workshop – were discovered in the sector. Among the finds discovered in the sector are several very well preserved iron objects (a hammer, knives, clamps, a handle of a situla, etc.) as well as fragments of building and daily ceramics.



Ceramic vessels

ПИН №140



Augst 47 – end of 2-3 c. AD.

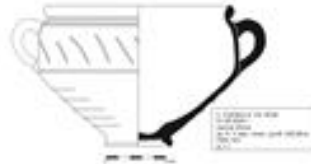
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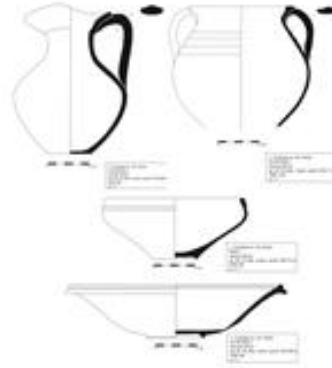
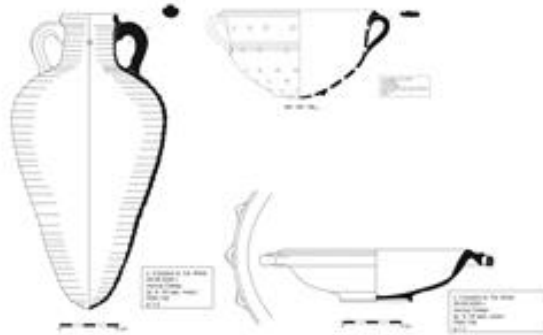
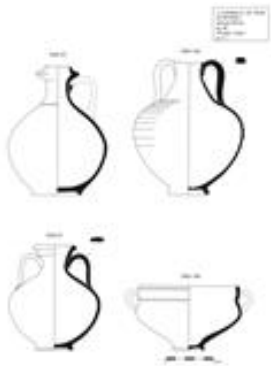
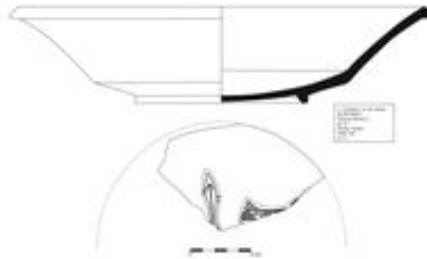
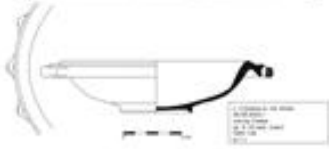


ПИН №96



ПИН №120







Colonialbronze coin (II-III c. AD) Maximus-Caesar (235 - 238 AD) Faustina II (145-170 AD)



Parion - V c. BC



Septimius Severus (193-211 AD)



Phillip II - 359-336 BC



August 12 BC - 14 AD.



Colonialbronze (I-III c. AD)



Alexios I Megas Komnenos 1081-1118



Fibulae



Elbow fibula (VI-V c. BC)



Fibula with two pins
(I c. AD)



Type 9B (E. Генчева)
(2nd half of I c. AD)

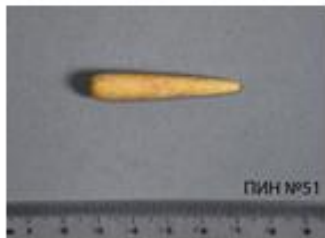


Type 2 (E. Генчева) (the beginning of I c. AD)



Metal finds







3. Main Results

The excavation carried out so far has shown that the place, where the investigated site is now located, was inhabited already at the time of Early Iron Age. The life had become especially intensive during the Classical Age (V-IV century BC) – many imported luxury ceramics and amphorae produced in continental and insular Greece as well as coins dated to that period are evidences to this statement.

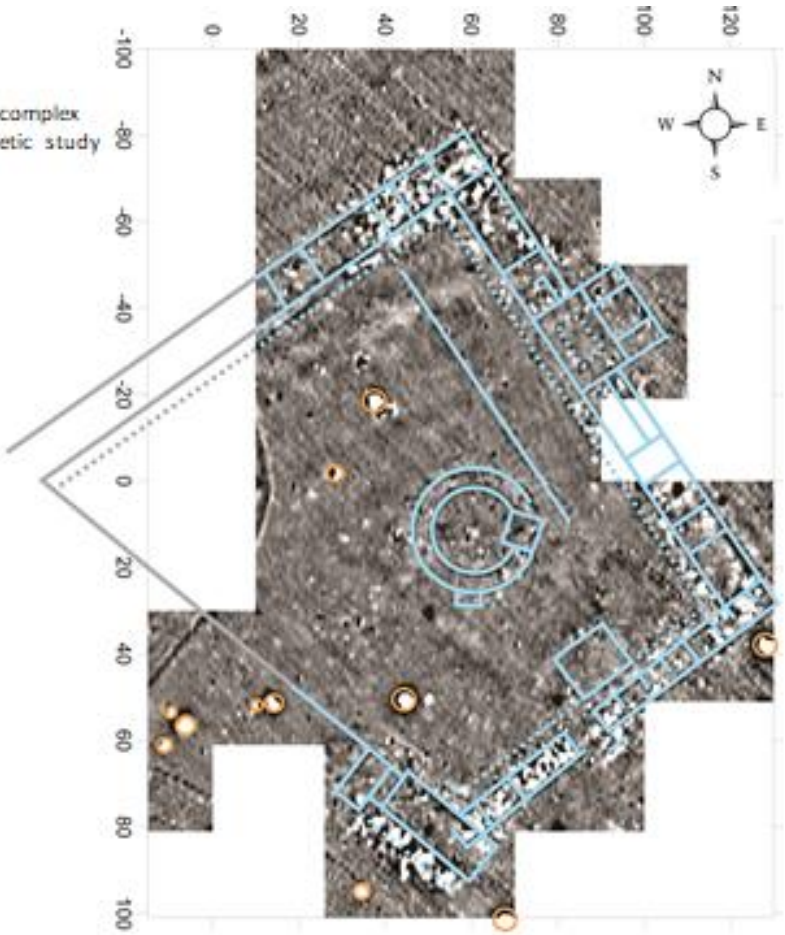
Data obtained from the geomagnetic studies combined with the results of archaeological excavation, as well as the analysis of the archaeological finds along with the parallels found have allowed us to conclude that the construction of the archaeological complex located near the village of Stroyno had been started during the reign of Thracian king Rhoemetaces I (10 BC - 12 AD) as a residence of this king or of some his close relative. The most likely, the residence was situated in the western part of the site while a part of it falls in to the yard of the contemporary monastery located nearby. The temple as well as the whole peristyle complex were built during I century AD.

The construction of the complex had continued during II century – especially intensively during the government of emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161AD). The architectural complex was destroyed by fire in the end of II century AD – probably after the death of Emperor Commodus (180-192 AD) and was never rebuilt again.

The archaeological excavation carried out during 2020 has allowed us to determine the investigated archaeological complex as a residence of last Thracian kings that was then transformed into an emperor domain (*basilea*) – a residence with a temple. Of course, a more precise determination of the complex function will be done during the future investigations. However, it is clear, that the architectural complex of such scale and characteristics has never been found and investigated at the territory of Bulgaria. This unique architectural complex has a huge potential to become a perspective cultural – touristic destination not only for the region but for the whole Southeast Bulgaria.



Plan of the architectural complex outlined by the geomagnetic study



The team



4. 2020 Cost Statement

The project funding for 2020 was 50 000 Euro (about 98 500 BGN) that was used for carrying out the excavations according to the preliminary approved by Foundation Work plan. The detailed financial report on all expenses covering the activities done during this period along with the corresponding original documents confirming them were sent to the REMI Foundation for auditing at the end of 2020.

5. Plan for 2021 Archaeological Season

The main objectives of 2021 archaeological seasons are as follows:

- Continuation of investigations of the monumental circular temple
- Excavation of the southern surrounding wall of the complex
- Investigations of dwellings and buildings that were partially discovered in eastern and western sectors of the site during 2020
- Investigations of the peristyle building
- Continuation of excavation in the northwest part of the site aiming at finding the source of water that supplied the complex
- Excavation in the west periphery of the site where, according to native inhabitants of the village Stroyno, several parts of mosaics were found.

6. Proposed budget for 2021

Type of expenses	Amount
Allowances (team)	12 pers. x 75 days x 20 BGN = 18000 BGN
Lodging (team)	12 pers. x 74 days x 8 BNG. = 7104 BGN.
Team's wages (including technical, graphical and photo documentation)	25 000 BGN
Workers' wages	18 pers x 35 BGN x 65 days = 40950 BGN
Transportation (team and workers)	5 000 BGN
Restoration and conservation	1 000 BGN.
Tools and consumables	1 000 BGN
Geophysical study	1 000 BGN
<i>Machinery</i>	<i>1 000 BGN</i>
<i>All-year guard of the site</i>	<i>6 000 BGN</i>
<i>On site restoration of the architectural remains</i>	<i>10 000 BGN</i>
Total	116 054 BGN

The requested funds from STICHTING HORIZON Foundation are 50,000 Euros (about 98 500 BGN).

It is expected to obtain some additional funds from the municipality of Elhovo (about 10,000 BGN) and from the Ministry of Culture (about 20,000 to 25,000 BGN) on a competitive basis. This money will be used to hire additional workers, to provide the all-year guard of the site (as requested by the Bulgarian law), to pay the machinery for the removal of the examined soil, to restore and conserve the architectural remains on site, etc.