

## ANNUAL REPORT: BULGARIA ILINDENTSI 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students examining head of a Neolithic anthropomorphic figurine

### SECTION A: PUBLIC PORTION OF THE REPORT

The field school "Birth of Europe: Excavations of the Early Neolithic settlement Ilindentsi-Masovets" has been conducted since 2011 by the Balkan Heritage Foundation (BHF) in cooperation with the Regional Museum of History in Blagoevgrad (RMHB), New Bulgarian University (NBU) and (since 2015) Institute for Field Research (IFR), USA. The research team is directed by Dr. Małgorzata Grębska-Kulow. It includes the excavation project vice-directors: Mr. Peter Zidarov and Mr. Ivan Vasilev and 3 other specialist from Bulgaria and Belgium.

In 2015 the field school took place at Ilindentsi, Bulgaria between 13 June and 12 July. The site is located in the Struma River Valley - an important pathway of spreading the agriculture from the eastern Mediterranean to the Balkans and Central Europe. It has both vertical and horizontal stratigraphy and covers a surface of almost three hectares. Neolithic cultural layer (0,60 to 1,80 m) lies immediately under the topsoil (10 to 20 cm). The field school was attended by 8 students (three of them participated in the joint BHF-IFR Program for the Balkans). Its focus is on Neolithic Archaeology and contributes to the research of the Early Neolithic in this part of Europe, esp. the Neolithic migratory routes, the settlement patterns and social and economic profile of the Europe's earliest farming communities, their contacts with Anatolia, the Middle East and other farming communities in the Balkans.

The site is excavated through 5 m x 5 m trenches. So far the following Neolithic settlement structures and features are unearthed: a ditch (2.00 m wide and 1,80 m deep) and a palisade surrounding the settlement from the North, several dwellings: one with stone foundations, another with elaborate floor construction and under-floor drainage systems. A third structure is

completely burnt with well preserved in situ "kitchen-space" including an oven, grain-store and a Neolithic grave pit and a Neolithic well structure in the South. All artifacts found date to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> millenium BCE.

The task-agenda for 2015 included:

1. further investigation of the trace, shape and content of the ditch in the trench A3 (western part of the settlement);
2. exploration of the area around the burned house in trenches B5 and C4;

All field school students actively participated in the tasks given and contributed to their implementation. **In brief:** in trench A3 was found out that the ditch continues turning South-West. Two walls, one made of stone and another made of clay were unearthed raising additional questions about the purpose and the time of construction of the ditch. In trench C 4 - west of the burned house, a fundament of a heart (clay layer topping a base made of carefully arranged shards and stones) was discovered and excavated. Underneath there was a stratigraphic hiatus (0,25-0,30 cm thick) - another evidence supporting the preliminary conclusion about two Early Neolithic phases in the existence of the settlement. Among the contexts belonging to the earlier phase there are two of wall-foundation trenches belonging to structures extended in the neighboring trenches. 6 pits from the Early and Middle Neolithic as well as remains of a floor and an oven from the Middle Neolithic were excavated in trench B5 - located between the ditch and the burnt house. One of the pits was filled with debris from the burned house and among them students found the head of an Early Neolithic anthropomorphic figurine decorated with white paint. Most common type of decorated earthenware vessels found at the site are colored **white** with motifs characteristic of the second phase of the Early Neolithic in this part of the Balkans. However, fragments with red paint can also be found. Flint tools, tools made of shards and various adornments top with their number the list of finds in 2015.

The field work during workdays (5 a week) was between 6.30 A.M. and to 1 P.M. and had 20-minute break. It consisted of introductory instructions and training on the basic methods of archaeological research and documentation (use of proper excavation tools and techniques, excavation procedures, recognition of artifacts and ecofacts, identification of archaeological contexts, filling context sheets and finds labels, keeping a field journal on daily basis, use of total station, measuring and documentation tools, creating written records, and graphic documentation) and participation in archaeological excavation and documentation of the Neolithic settlement in Ilindentsi. After lunch and siesta-breaks students continued their program with lectures, finds processing and workshops from 4 to 7 P.M.– all these activities took place at the project base, Blagovesta Guest House.

The archaeological material uncovered and documented this summer will be processed completely by February, 2016. The results of the excavations will be presented in public during a archaeological symposium held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in October 2015 and the Annual Archaeological Reporting Conference of the Bulgarian National Institute of Archaeology in March, 2016 and will be published in the annual edition of the Institute – Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations (in 2015). Additionally, the head of the anthropomorphic figurine found this season in Ilindentsi will most likely feature in the exhibition in the National Institute's museum that is dedicated to the most important archaeological discoveries in Bulgaria in 2015, after which it will be published in the exhibition's booklet.