

ANNUAL REPORT: UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY AT NESEBAR, ANCIENT MESAMBRIA (BLACK SEA), BULGARIA 2018

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Students and instructors preparing for the field work

The field school took place in Nesebar, Bulgaria (ancient Mesambria) on the Black Sea coast from May 25 to June 21, 2018. This was the first season of the project, which is an initiative of the Balkan Heritage Foundation in partnership with the Institute for Field Research (BHF-IFR Joint Program) and the Bulgarian Centre for Underwater Archaeology. The goal of the field school was to provide experience and training in underwater and maritime archaeology through participation in three ongoing research and conservation projects.

The major research project was the investigation of the submerged heritage of Nesebar, ancient Mesambria. The settlement was established by Thracian tribes, but at the end of 6th century Dorian colonizers settled here and founded a Greek colony which grew quickly and became one of the most powerful towns along the western Black Sea Coast in the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine era, as well as in the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period.

Underwater studies in the region of Nesebar began in 1960. Sixteen underwater archaeological seasons were conducted in total (1960-1983 and 2017). During these studies, it was found that significant parts of the ancient town today are below the sea level. Ruins of fortification walls, towers, staircases, gates and other structures from the pre-Roman era, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, were traced in various sectors around the peninsula. The tracked layout of the

fortification walls of Mesambria leads us to conclude that due to sea transgression, landslide activity, sea abrasion and a series of earthquakes, Nesebar has lost a significant intramural part of its territory. Today it lays underwater at a depth between 1.5 and 5 meters. Unfortunately, these important discoveries weren't properly published and communicated. In 2017 the Bulgarian Centre for Underwater Archaeology restarted the regular survey in the aquatory of Nesebar with the ultimate goal to (re)explore, document with advanced technologies and to publish the submerged heritage of Nesebar.

The research in 2018 provided the participants with valuable field work experience. It took part in two areas of town's aquatory (northern and south-eastern) and included several components – diving field survey, excavation, cleaning and documenting the discovered fortification walls. The results of the research were rewarding - massive block foundations of Classical or Hellenistic fortification walls were discovered under the carpet of seaweeds. Parts of Early Byzantine walls (in the two sectors of Nesebar's aquatory) as well as column drum were found during the dive surveys and the underwater excavations. These structures were cleaned, measured and recorded with photogrammetry and photography. There were several successfully accomplished field tasks:

- Discovered and mapped Byzantine walls in *opus mixtum* known from the archives of the earlier expeditions.
- Excavated destructions of Byzantine walls in *opus mixtum*. The excavations proved that the visible on the surface fragments of walls most probably aren't *in situ*.
- Discovered and recorded unknown block fortification wall foundations from Classical or Hellenistic period.
- Discovered new parts of a Classical and Hellenistic period tower, known from the previous expeditions.

The second research project was the epigraphic research of ship graffiti in Medieval churches in Nesebar. These important historical monuments weren't entirely studied and properly published which is an important goal and task of the Center for Underwater Archaeology. The field work resulted in discovery of previously unknown graffiti of ships, buildings and inscriptions in St. Todor church (13th century) as well as the documentation of numerous graffiti with RTI technique in St. Spas church (17th century).

The third research project was marine archaeological geophysical and diving survey in the aquatory of Sozopol, ancient Apollonia Pontica. The main goal was to search for and identify probable harbor structures (stone jetties) known from earlier surveys (in 1980s) but poorly published. The task was successfully accomplished, and such structures were identified on the seafloor with geophysical methods (multibeam echosounder and side-scan sonar) and dive survey.

All these research projects and the attributed specific field tasks will be continued in the next season. The achieved results will be presented to the public during the annual archaeological reports of the Bulgarian National Institute of Archaeology in March 2019. Articles covering the research project will be published in the annual edition of the Institute – Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations (in 2018). The documented graffiti will be published in catalog(s) about the epigraphic monuments of the Nesebar's churches prepared by the Centre for Underwater Archaeology (CUA) in collaboration with the Balkan Heritage Foundation. CUA is currently working on publications of the submerged heritage of Nesebar and Sozopol.