

Book review: Jacob Roodenberg, Krassimir Leshtakov, Vanya Petrova (eds.), Yabalkovo, vol. 1 (Maritsa Project, vol. 2), Sofia: ATE – Ars et Technica Explicatus, 2014. Hardcover, 488 pages, 508 images, 26 tables, ISBN 978-619-90348-1-1

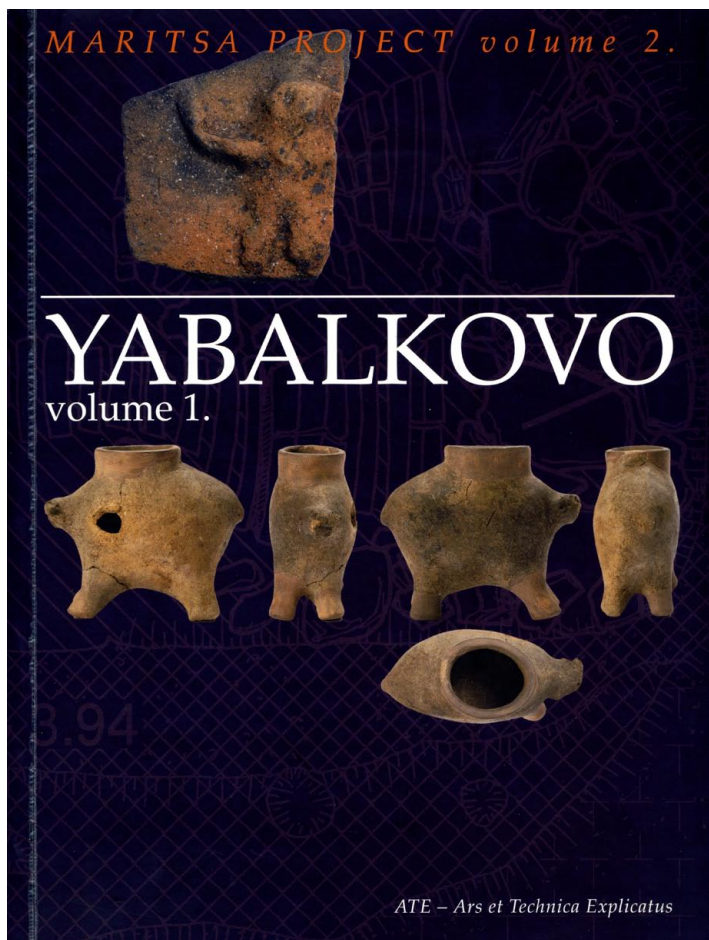
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With the second volume of the Marica Project here under consideration, the important Early Neolithic settlement of Yabalkovo in the Thracian Plain is presented. The site is of great interest due to its fortifications consisting of three concentric defensive ditches. This means of circumscribing settlements connects the site to contexts identified at Aşağı Pınar in Turkish Thrace, as well as Aktopraklık and Ilıpınar in north-western Anatolia. For the Balkan region, this kind of settlement has been singular for some time, notwithstanding indications of such a form of settlement circumscription at Goljamo Delčelvo and Ovčarovo-Gorata (*cf.* Тодорова *et al.* 1975, 14-20; Krauß 2014, 40-43). The excavations at Yabalkovo, initiated to accompany building work, have been carried out in accordance with modern methods; hence, it is very much the only Early Neolithic settlement in Bulgaria to be so expansively excavated with contemporary methodologies.

On a technical level, one can only congratulate the editors for the exemplary fashion in which they have presented the site within its surroundings; the first five chapters devote themselves to the positioning of the site within the Thracian archaeological landscape. Especially helpful here is the description of further Early Neolithic settlements in the broad river valley of the Marica, which remain as of yet scantily published in any form at all. In the following pages, the reader is comprehensively informed of the chronology and excavation work and also of the finds of the post-Neolithic periods. The Neolithic settlement structures and surrounding ditches are especially intensively dealt with: therein lies one of the work's greatest strengths. The triple ditches in particular are until now unique, while the preparation of the excavation results sets the benchmark for every future study of the Early Neolithic settlements of the Balkans.

Considering the quality and quantity of the Early Neolithic finds, the ceramic vessels of Chapter IX are by comparison tersely handled. The appended subtitle "An interim report" presents at least the hope that the pottery will be presented in a more detailed fashion in a future volume. The drawings are consistently excellent, however, any details on the distribution of the material within the archaeological record is lacking. In contrast to the numerous drawings, it becomes particularly apparent in this chapter as to how briefly and, at times, aphoristically the text is composed. For the assessment of the chronological allocation of the finds, the provenance of the purely white painted and the black or bichrome painted vessels is hardly banal. A distinctiveness of the material from Yabalkovo is the ap-



Обр. 1. Корица на първи том
Fig. 1. First volume cover

pearance of fluted beakers in addition to those which are red slipped and white painted. The former, one would traditionally associate with Karanovo II, and thereby the developed Early Neolithic, the latter rather with Karanovo I, and hence the earliest Neolithic in Thrace. Does the material from Yabalkovo in sum represent a transitional horizon between the two phases? Or is it rather the case that the contexts are earlier and later respectively? The radiocarbon dates presented in Chapter XV are correspondingly inconclusive, being taken from various areas of the site and initially ordered according to their ^{14}C age. So as to yield a better precision regarding the absolute dates of the settlement, a correlation between these dates and the corresponding contextual information is urgently advised.

The modern journal-like format of the volume is very appealing and the illustrations are professionally laid out. Moreover, the individual contributions of the various authors to this volume have come very much to fruition. I would have, incidentally, liked to have had the first names of the authors provided in the chapter headings, indeed, not once on the book title do the names of the three editors appear in full. Rather, only in the list of authors at the very end of the book can the full names along with institution and email address be found. Otherwise, the well bound volume is completely user-friendly. A transliteration table prefixed to the list of illustrations aids in the reading of the Bulgarian names, and an index at the end of the book permits the swift accessing of selected contents.

It is not only a great pleasure to hold the first band of the publication of the excava-

tions at Yabalkovo in one's hands, but also one would also hope that the large collective of authors will very soon accomplish the publication of further volumes on this important site in similar quality.

*Translation from German:
Alexander Johannes Edmonds*

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