

BALEY: New Discoveries

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The village of Baley (Balej, Балеј) is in the region of Vidin (NW Bulgaria), at the Timok river, 3 km away from the Danube river. The eponymous prehistoric settlement has been studied from the beginning of the 70s until the end of the 80s by Rumen Katincharov from National institute of archaeology with museum – Bulgarian academy of sciences (NAIM-BAN) and Anna Iotsova, Regional Historic museum in Vidin (RHM–Vidin) and witnessed remains from the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the Early Iron Age (EIA). Together with the necropolis close to the village of Orsoya (in the region of Lom, NW Bulgaria) the two sites became an eponym for the archaeological culture Baley–Orsoya of LBA along the Danube on Bulgarian territory (Панайотов, Вълчева 1989, 7).

In 2009 a worker digging on a private estate in the village of Baley, came upon a concentration of pottery sherds. He collected the fragments carefully, which made possible the restoration of ten vessels and a part of a clay anthropomorphic figurine. This article offers a concise presentation of the collection. The worker who recognized the significance of the find had previously participated in the archaeological excavations on the settlement of Baley.

The team members of the Prehistoric Baley project express their gratitude to Lyubomir Petrov (the person who discovered and recognized the significance of the find) and Rosa Petkova (the owner of the estate), and to the other participants in the excavations, for their help and commitment to the 2010 excavations at the Baley-Site (Александров, Христова, Иванов 2011) and the Baley-Necropolis (Христова, Иванов, Филипова 2011). We would also like to commit our sincere appreciation to our colleagues from RHM–Vidin – Anna Yotsova, Fionera Filipova, Olya Milanova, Ilko Tsvetkov, Nikolai Kazashki; to Aneta Bakam-ska, Bistra Gyaurova, Martin Nikolov and Elena Nacheva who participated in the excavations and supported us; to Petar Zidarov, who accomplished the geo-magnetic survey and to Kitan Kitanov for the skillful restoration of the vessels, discussed in this current review.

Baley-Necropolis. 2010 excavation season (brief overview)

The 2009 chance find led to the localization of the necropolis of the prehistoric settlement. The importance of this discovery prompted the opening of test trenches to collect data on the size and the chronology of the site, as well as to assess the merit of launching an excavation project. The conclusions from our observations are presented briefly below.

Over the years, Yotsova and Katincharov have searched for the necropolis associated

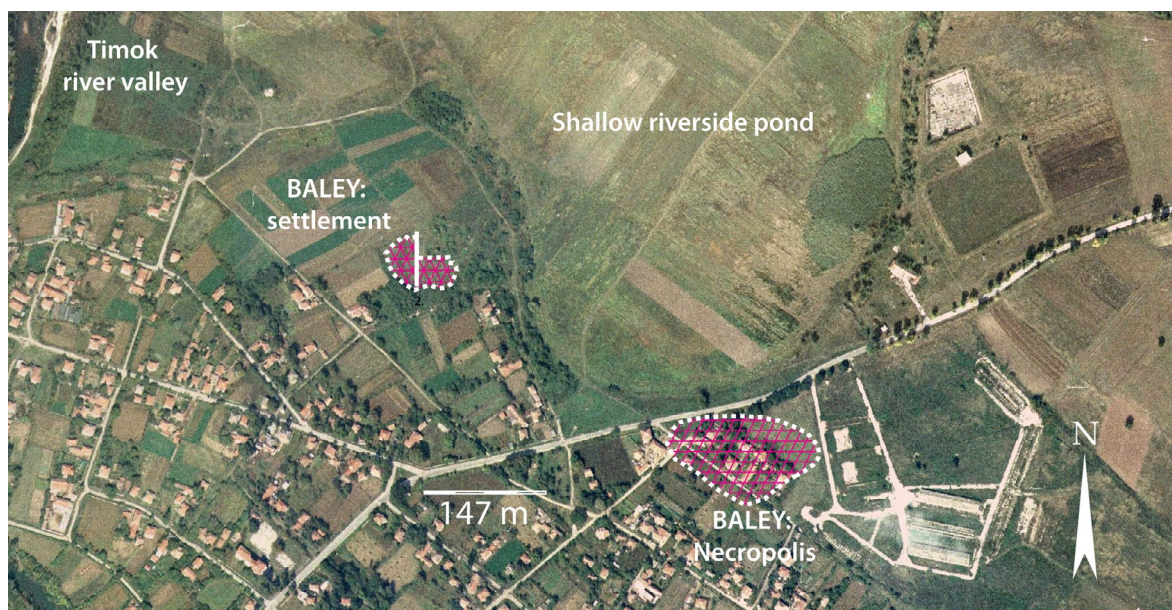


Fig. 1. Baley, the settlement and the necropolis, situated in a high terrace (orthoimage)

with the Baley settlement in the near vicinity; however this exact area was inaccessible to them, since it fell within a fenced garden and other private plots. Today the site sits at the edge of the village of Baley, approximately 400 m southeast of the prehistoric settlement, on

Fig. 2. Excavating structures 4 (below), 6 (left) and 5 (above) in 2010 (photo by the authors)





Fig. 3. The 2009 chance finds. Dishes. a. cat. no. 1; b. cat. no. 2 (photographer Krasimir Georgiev)

the same high terrace. High waters on the nearby Danube and Timok rivers transform this terrace into a shore of a shallow riverside pond (fig. 1).

The brief 2010 excavation season (fig. 2) produced nine archaeological structures (graves) *in situ* and three structures of scattered pottery, stones and burnt bones (possibly destroyed graves). In one area of the necropolis a ditch (50×50 cm) with a fill of burnt plaster fragments and carbons was documented. Another cluster consisted of sherds from several vessels and a vessel base, covered with a fragment of a dish, but lacked in burnt bone fragments. The pottery collected at the necropolis, unlike the sherds gathered at the settlement site, were poorly fired (Христова, Иванов, Филипова 2011, 132). The ceramic material is currently undergoing restoration and analysis, in preparation for publication. Preliminary observations suggest the presence of three chronological stages:

- **Early**, to which undecorated vessels, of Verbicioara (early stage) type are assigned.
- **Middle**, with pottery similar to the finds from the Baley settlement and characteristic of the Baley-Orsoia culture (Dubovac-Žuto Brdo/Cîrna-Gârla Mare) of the LBA.
- **Late**, distinguished by pottery of Bistreț-Ișalnița type, also reported from the settlement site (Христова, Иванов, Филипова 2011, 134).



Fig. 4. The 2009 chance finds. Anthropomorphic figurine, cat. no. 3
(photographer Krasimir Georgiev)

The 2009 chance finds. Comparanda for the shapes and decoration

The ten vessels and the anthropomorphic figurine are here assigned to four groups, according to their shape, and the presence and type of the decorative motives.

Group I. Two large dishes fall in this group (nos. 1, 2), as well as the anthropomorphic figurine (no. 11), bearing identical incised decoration.

Dishes with similar shape and decorative elements (nos. 1, 2) are common to all necropolises of the Dubovac-Žuto Brdo/Cîrna-Gârla Mare archaeological culture. The short straight neck of the Baley samples has rare occurrence in Cîrna and Orsoia, where the tall outturned neck predominates (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LVIII.8, LXX.171). Comparanda in Cîrna is found only for isolated Baley decorative elements or motives but not for the complete decorative scheme applied on the body of the vessels. A band of semicircles under the rim is among the most popular motives in Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LXXIV.202). Spirals on the middle section are also noted there (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LXXVI.236, LXXIX.256), as well as the application of several bands with festoons on the lower part of the body (Dumitrescu 1961, pl. LXIV.77). A dish with rectangular spirals on the body is published from Orsoia (Филипов 1976, pl. XXIV.a). Closer comparanda for the shape and the decoration is found in Glamija-Korbovo, where dishes with straight necks and emphasized middle part and decorated with spirals (rectangular) on the mid body and with festoons on the lower body are recorded (Krstić 2003, pl.I.1, 5, II.2, V.2, VI.3, XIV.2, 9). Dishes with straight necks, and decorated with spirals on the mid body and festoons on the lower body are also present at Vajuga-Pesak (Premk, Popović, Bjelajac 1984, 101.1, 4, 5).

Comparanda for the upper portion of the figurine with incised decoration (no. 3) is so far found in Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, pl. CLVII, CLX.S.9) and Orsoia (Филипов 1976, 20, fig. 21, pl. XXXI.b).

Group II. Here the two vessels decorated with shallow grooves belong (nos. 4, 5).

The shallow grooves are primarily employed in the decoration of Orsoia and Cîrna ceramics (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LXI.50, LXXXVI.349). The vessel shapes and the groove types at Orsoia are closer to vessel no. 1 (Филипов 1976, pl. XXI.a); frequent find are the shallow grooves (Филипов 1976, pl. XXXIX.a, XL.a, LXXII.a) as well as the biconical urn with shallow grooves (Филипов 1976, pl. IX.a, XI.a, pl. XXXI, XLIII.a, LIVa, LV.a).

Bowls shaped like the no. 7 are quite rare in Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, pl. LXXXIV.336). Grooved decoration on large dishes is noted at Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, pl. LXII.57) and Cîrna-Ostrovoșania (Șandor-Chicideanu 2003, pl.17.2). Comparable shapes, but undeco-



*Fig. 5. The 2009 chance finds. a. Four-handled jar, cat. no. 4; b. Bowl cat. no. 5
(photographer Krasimir Georgiev)*

rated, are found at Korbovo–Glamija (Krstić 2003, pl. XXV.2); similar to the bowl no. 7 decoration is of rare occurrence (Krstić 2003, pl. XXV.6).

Group III. Two large undecorated four-handled jars are assigned to this group (nos. 6, 7).



Fig. 6. The 2009 chance finds. a. Four-handled jar, cat. no. 6; b. Four-handled jar, cat. no. 7
(photographer Krasimir Georgiev)

The large undecorated four-handled jar (no. 6) is among the most popular LBA vessel shapes across the Balkans. Comparable jars have been reported from Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. IV.11, LXXVI.231, LXXVII.235, 243, LXXIX.254, LXXXV.345, LXXXVIII.382, LXXX-IX.396), Orsoia (Филипов 1976, pl. XII.a, XXX.a, XXXII.a, XXXIII.a, XXXVII.a, XLI.a, XLVII.a, LXIV.a), Cîrna-Ostrovogania (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, pl. 25.1, 35.1, 60b.1) and Korbovo-Glamija (Krstić 2003, pl. IX.2, X.4, XV.1, XVII.2, XVIII.1, XXIII.6, XXV.1).

More scarce is the shape of the four-handled jar with handles on the body and the neck (no. 7). Published finds include samples from Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LXII.55, LXXXIII.327, XXXV.340) and Cîrna-Ostrovogania (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, pl. 37.1).

Group IV. The small undecorated vessels (nos. 8, 9) and small lids (nos. 10, 11) are combined in this group.



Fig. 7. The 2009 chance finds. a. Two-handled jar, cat. no. 8; b. Bowl, cat. no. 9; c. Lid, cat. no. 10; d. Lid, cat. no. 11 (photographer Krasimir Georgiev)

The small vessels (no. 8) are of a shape common across the Balkans, with analogues in the Plovdiv-Zimnicea-Cherkovna pottery style (Hänsel 1976, 64, 79), but it is infrequent to find the shape rendered in smaller scale objects. A chance find from the vaults of the RHM-Vidin, unearthed during some digging work in the Tsarina locality, by the village of Novo Selo, Vidin District, consisted of similar containers. Urns of minute dimensions (under 20 cm high) are singular in Cîrna (Dumitrescu 1961, Pl. LXV.92, LXXVIII.252, LXXX.269), Cîrna-Ostrovogania (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, pl. 53.1, 60b.2-3) and Plosca-Cabana de metal (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, pl. 84.2). They are recurrently found in the Korbovo-Glamija necropolis (Krstić 2003, pl. VIII.4, IX.4, XI.2, XIV.6, XVIII.6-9, XX.5, XXII.2, XXIII.8-9) and Pesak-Korbovo (Letica 1974, T.IX.I/2.1), though.

It is uncertain which containers did the two small lids (nos. 10 and 11) couple with, but it seems likely they covered the two small vessels (nos. 8 and 9). The practice of covering small containers with lids is reported from Vajuga-Pesak (Премк, Поповић, Бјелajaц 1984, fig. 100.2, 102.1, 2, 4, 5). Lids atop similar vessels have also been found at Korbovo-Glamija (Krstić 2003, pl. III.4-6, IV.8, IX.12, XVI.8-9, XX.7, XXIII.3-4, XXIV.6-7) and Pesak-Korbovo (Letica 1974, T.IX.4.I/1, IV.BI/3.2, X.I/6.2, X.D/1.2). Small lids and vessels have also been found at Vajuga-Korbovo (Krstić 1986, fig. 9.3-5).

The small size bowl with horizontal handle (no. 9) is also noted at Pesak-Korbovo (Letica 1974, T.IV.D/2.2), while at Korbovo-Glamija the small bowls feature predominantly lugs (Krstić 2003, pl. II.7-8, XX.8, XXIII.2).

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Comparanda for groups I, II, III (vessels with incised decoration, with shallow grooves on the body, and undecorated) is found in the two largest necropolises of the archaeological culture, Cîrna and Orsoia. Those groups are representative of the standard pottery of the Baley-Orsoia culture (Dubovac-Žuto Brdo/Cîrna-Gârla Mare). Considered separately, the

undecorated pottery (Group IV) finds analogies across a vast region of the Eastern Balkans, the distribution areal of the *Zimnicea-Plovdiv* pottery style (Панайотов, Вълчева 1989, 14). The Group 4 small vessels also find parallels in the Balkans, but are frequent find in the Northeastern Serbia and Northwestern Bulgarian territories.

The examination of the identified comparanda suggests that the Baley-Necropolis was in use during an extended portion of the LBA (**coinciding with the course of development** of at least three pottery styles) and the transition to the Early Iron Age, i.e. from the mid second millennium BC till its term. Finds from the three chronological stages have been identified in the Iron Gates region on the Danube – the Mala Vrbica-Livade (Vukmanović, Popović 1986, 15) and Obala-Korbovo (Krstić 1984, Sl. 81.4; Jevtić, Vukmanović 1996, 283-285) settlement sites. Pottery executed in the *Bistreţ-Işalniţa* style, the *Dubovac-Žuto Brdo/Cîrna-Gârla Mare* style, as well as small urns (resembling the pottery of Group 4) is found in the Vajuga-Pesak necropolis (Premk, Popović, Bjelajac 1984, 114) and in Vajuga-Korbovo (Krstić 1986, 152). **It is possible to assign the small vessels of Group 4 from the Baley-Necropolis** to a phase later than the *Dubovac-Žuto Brdo/Cîrna-Gârla Mare* pottery group, or to consider them synchronous to its end (Premk, Popović, Bjelajac 1984, 114) but preceding the *Bistreţ-Işalniţa* style at the Baley necropolis.

Catalogue of the 2009 finds

1. Dish. Biconical body, conical neck and straight rim. Four rim-body vertical handles. Height 18 cm, diameter at the rim 35 cm, diameter of the body 45 cm. Ochre surface with some black stains. The vessel base is missing. Decoration of white filled punctured lines tracing standard geometric shapes develops over the entire external surface and is divided into three zones: top zone of parallel vertical short strokes, punctured semicircles, groups of alternating vertical straight and arched lines (floral motive), and punctured crescents; middle zone of single and double spirals of variable width, parallel lines; bottom zone of two simple bands of attached semicircles (festoons), vertically separated. The decoration on the handle consists of shallow horizontal grooves on the upper segment, a triangle and a vertical undulating line (fig. 3.a).
2. Dish. Fragments of a vessel with biconical body, conical neck and straight rim. It probably originally had two vertical rim-to-body handles, and a projecting outwards rim between the handles. Diameter of the rim approximately 41 cm, diameter of the body approximately 46 cm. Dark brown surface. Decoration of white filled punctured lines, tracing standard geometric shapes along the entire external surface, organized in three zones: top zone of **parallel vertical short strokes, festoons, groups of alternating horizontal “ladder”** motives, punctured semicircles, and short stroked lines; middle zone of horizontal S and short stroked lines; bottom zone of two lines of two bands of attached semicircles (festoons), vertically separated, and marked off by short strokes vessel base. The decoration on the handle consists of horizontal stroked lines (fig. 3.b).
3. Anthropomorphic figurine. Fragment of the upper body. Height 5 cm, **width 6.5 cm, thickness at the head 1.8 cm**. Light ochre surface. Marked projecting forward head, straight shoulders. Decoration of white filled punctured lines tracing standard geometric shapes over the entire surface, some resembling features of the human body and dress (double triangles, punctured semicircles, lines and festoons) (fig. 4).
4. Four-handled jar. Globular-conical body, funnel-like neck, outturned rim, four vertical handles attached on the maximum diameter of the body. Height 44 cm, diameter at the

- rim 22 cm, maximum diameter of the body 35 cm. Mottled brownish grey surface. Decoration of shallow vertical and oblique grooves, festoons of grooves between the handles and shallow impressions on the neck (fig. 5.a).
5. Bowl. Globular-conical oval body, conical flaring neck, straight rim. Two vertical neck-body handles, a projecting mouth between the handles. Height 11/13 cm, width at the mouth 22/23 cm, **width of the body 21/24 cm. Mottled dark brown mottled surface. Decoration of shallow vertical grooves on the body** (fig. 5.b).
 6. Four-handled jar. Globular-conical body, **stretched to an oval body, funnel-like neck, flaring rim**, two vertical handles attached to the maximum diameter of the body, two vertical handles on the neck-body transition. Height 36 cm, diameter at the rim 18 cm, diameter of the body 28/31 cm. Dark brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 6.a).
 7. Four-handled jar. Globular-conical body, funnel neck, flaring rim, four vertical handles attached to the maximum diameter of the body. Height 33 cm, diameter at the rim 19.5 cm, diameter of the body 28 cm. Mottled light brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 6.b).
 8. Two-handled jar. Small globular-conical body, funnel neck, flaring rim, two vertical handles attached to the maximum diameter of the body, two bulges between the handles. Height 17 cm, diameter at the rim 11.5 cm, diameter of the body 15 cm. Mottled brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 7.a).
 9. Bowl. Small globular body, inwardly curved neck Two horizontal handles attached to the body. Height 7 cm, width of the body 11.5 cm. Brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 7.b).
 10. Lid. Round shape. Vertical handle. Height 3 cm, diameter 10.5 cm, thickness 0.8 cm. Coarse brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 7.c).
 11. Lid. Round shape. The handle is missing. Diameter 10.5 cm, thickness 0.8 cm. Coarse brown surface. Undecorated (fig. 7.d).

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БАЛЕЙ: Нови открития

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Резюме

Село Балеј, Видинско, се намира на р. Тимок, на 3 км от Дунава. От началото на 70-те до края на 80-те г. Румен Катинчаров (НАИМ-БАН) и Ана Йоцова (РИМ-Видин) проучват в района му праисторическо селище с останки от Късната бронзова и Ранната желязна епохи. През 2009 г. при изкопни дейности в частен имот в селото са открити фрагменти керамика. Те са събрани старателно, благодарение на което са възстановени 10 съда и част от глинена антропоморфна фигурка – предмет на настоящото съобщение. Десетте съда и антропоморфната статуетка са класифицирани в 4 групи в зависимост от формата и украсата им (или липсата на такава).

След преглед на аналозиите на керамиката може да се предположи, че некрополът в Балеј представя хронологично един продължителен период (обхващащ развитието на поне три керамични стила) от Късната бронзова и прехода към Ранножелязната епоха (от средата на 2 хил. пр. Хр. до неговия край). Находки от тези три хронологически етапа се срещат в района на Железни Врата на Дунава.