

The enclosures in Chalcolithic tell Hotnitsa (results from the archaeological excavations during 2009-2015)

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ABSTRACT

The Chalcolithic tell Hotnitsa was excavated for the first time in the '50s of the 20th century. Even then remains of a massive fortification were found in its southern periphery. Following a long break the archaeological excavations were renewed and continue to the present day. The current study summarizes the results from the research of the enclosures during the last seasons (the period since 2009 till 2015). Their construction and chronology have been clarified to a large extent. It has been established that the southern part of the tell is protected by a complex fortification representing a rampart and a palisade built on it. A stone build-up was found in some sections. A ditch was very likely dug in front of the rampart. Most probably this enclosure protects the middle chalcolithic layers of the tell. A trench (found during the 2015 season), attesting to the presence of a massive palisade built in the southern periphery of the tell. It is located behind the remains of the rampart. Most probably it was built later than the rampart and it protects the last late chalcolithic layers of the tell. The excavated enclosures are similar to the ones, discovered during the research of a number of chalcolithic settlements, located in Bulgaria. The research of the enclosures in Hotnitsa enriches to a great extent our knowledge of architecture and fortification constructions during the Copper age in the Lower Danube region.

KEYWORDS

Bulgaria, chalcolithic, enclosures, rampart, ditch, palisade, fortification

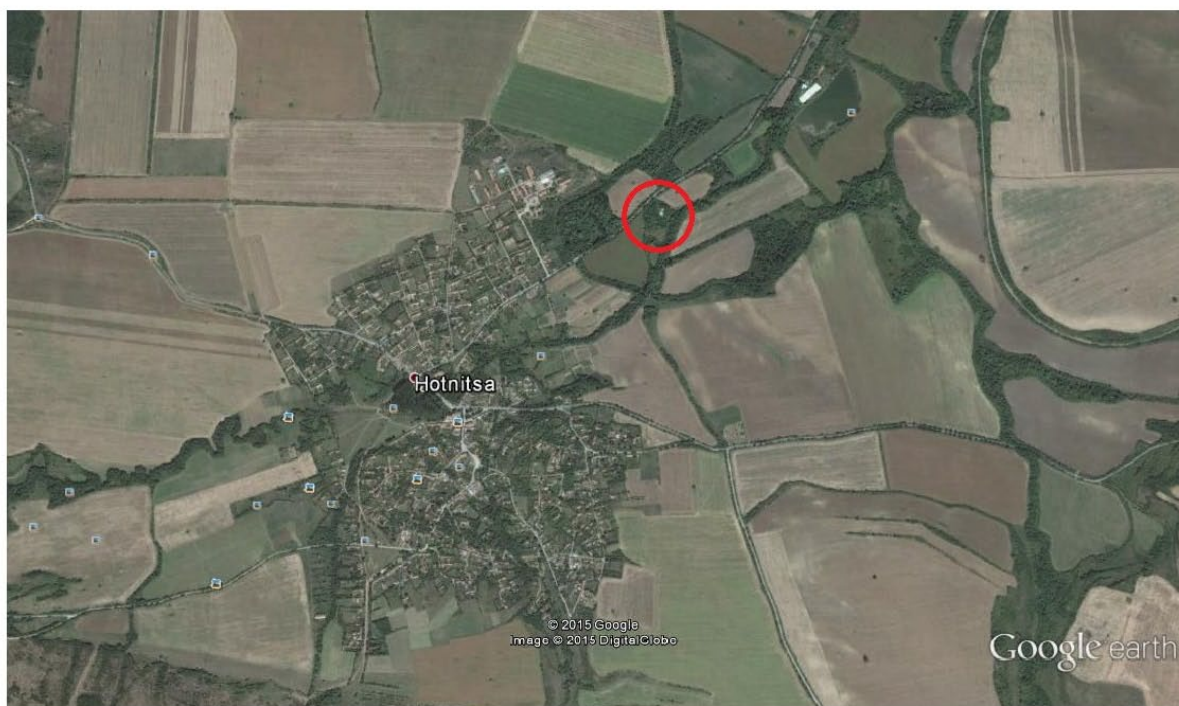
Hotnitsa tell is located approximately 1150 m northeast from the centre of the modern village (fig. 1). The Bohot River runs southeast of it. The diameter of its base is around 110 m. The height of the tell is 5-6 m. Its altitude is 84.2 m. The first excavations were conducted by N. Angelov in 1956-1959, when the topmost layer and the stratigraphic sounding in the southern section were dug (Ангелов 1958, 389-404). Back in 1958 N. Angelov noted in his journal the presence of 2-3 postholes in east-west direction and a „stone wall”. They were revealed in the stratigraphic sounding at a depth of 3.10-3.40 m (fig. 2)¹.

After a long break, the archaeological excavations were renewed in 2000. They were carried out under the direction of S. Chohadzhiev and A. Chohadzhiev². As early as the first seasons of the renewed excavations, the study of a new section in the southern part of the tell was initiated. The aim was to establish the presence of enclosures, their character and chronology. The results from several successive campaigns (during the period 2009-2015) clarify those problems to a great extent.

During the archaeological studies in 2004 an area located east from the stratigraphic-

1 Information about this enclosure is provided by the archive of N. Angelov (Regional Museum of History – Veliko Tarnovo, Inv. № 1540)

2 My thanks to St. Chohadzhiev and Al. Chohadzhiev for the provided unpublished information and shared ideas without which this report would not be possible.



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Fig. 1. Location of Hotnitsa tell (image by Google Earth):

1 – location to the modern village; 2 – zoomed image

Фиг. 1. Местоположение на селищната могила Хотница (изображение от Google Earth):

1 – разположение спрямо съвременното село; 2 – увеличено изображение

ic one of N. Angelov was excavated. A section of the enclosures was found, representing probably a clayish rampart, with a wooden palisade built on it. At certain spots within its base there is a build-up of stones ("stone belt"). A stone structure attached to the palisade was found (fig. 3). Probably it is connected to enclosures. It is possible that it represents a bastion, flanking a nearby entrance or just an element consolidating the palisade. The highest part of a rampart sloping southwards was registered, on which the above-described facilities were placed (Чохаджиев и др. 2005, 54-56; Chohadzhiev 2009, 67-84).

The research of the enclosure system has been particularly intensive during the last couple of years. In 2009 an excavation was performed, located east from the previous two (the stratigraphic one of N. Angelov from 1958 and the one from 2004). The situation in the two new soundings (the ones from 2004 and from 2009) is identical, as obviously the new found sections belong to the same enclosure which was described in the studies by N. Angelov. It consists of a rampart and a palisade located upon it. The remains from the palisade represent 3-4 rows of postholes, in east-west direction. The holes have a diameter of 0.10-0.20 m and are located at a distance of 0.25 m from each other (fig. 4). A trench was not registered for their laying. This is typical for palisades built on ramparts. Between the postholes, as well as on separate sections from the outside wall, the rampart was plastered by 1-2 cm thick layer of light yellow, almost white clay (Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2010, 79-82). The small diameter of the postholes, as well as the lack of a trench for their placement suggests that a short and not particularly massive palisade was erected on this spot. Perhaps it appears more like a simple enclosure than a wall.

The interesting observations that have been shared in relation to this sounding make the study of the enclosures a priority goal of the excavations in Hotnitsa. In the course of several successive seasons (from 2010 to 2012) the construction of the enclosure was clarified. Due to the fact that the external front of the rampart continues southwards, the square was extended in this direction. Its incline is approximately 30°. At a depth of 4.02 m an almost horizontal "step" with a length of around 1 m was registered (fig. 5) (Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2011, 88-90). Following that, in southward direction, the rampart again descends steeply downwards, at an angle of 25-30°. At a depth of 4.52 m a stretch of darker soil was uncovered, with a width of around 1 m (fig. 6). It is likely a trench, but only future excavations can confirm that (Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2012, 78-80). At the base of the rampart, at a depth of 5.88 m, the inclination is greatly reduced – to 5°. A new, identical with the first one (upper) "step" was uncovered, with a length of about 2 m (fig. 7). It is possible that it represents a berm, formed immediately before an alleged ditch, reached at the lowest part of the rampart. Its presence is reasoned by the dig with steep walls, uncovered in front of it (at a depth of 6.15 m). Unfortunately very soon (at a depth of 6.40 m) the excavations were suspended, due to underground waters breaking (Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2013, 74-75). The form (the intersection) and the dimensions (the width and depth) of the registered digging remain unclear. It also cannot be fully confirmed if this is a ditch. The digging is filled with grey-black soil, charcoal, plaster and pottery fragments. Yet another interesting fact is that during the excavations at this considerable depth, several sherds from late Neolithic vessels were found. At this stage, a late Neolithic layer was not established, as structures from this period were not found.

As a result from the conducted research, the approximate dimensions of the rampart were established. It is approximately 3.10-3.20 m high (from a depth of 2.90-3.00 m to a depth of 6.00-6.10 m). Its width was not registered. The length of the outside part of the rampart (from the top to its base) is approximately 10 m. It was built with whitish-green

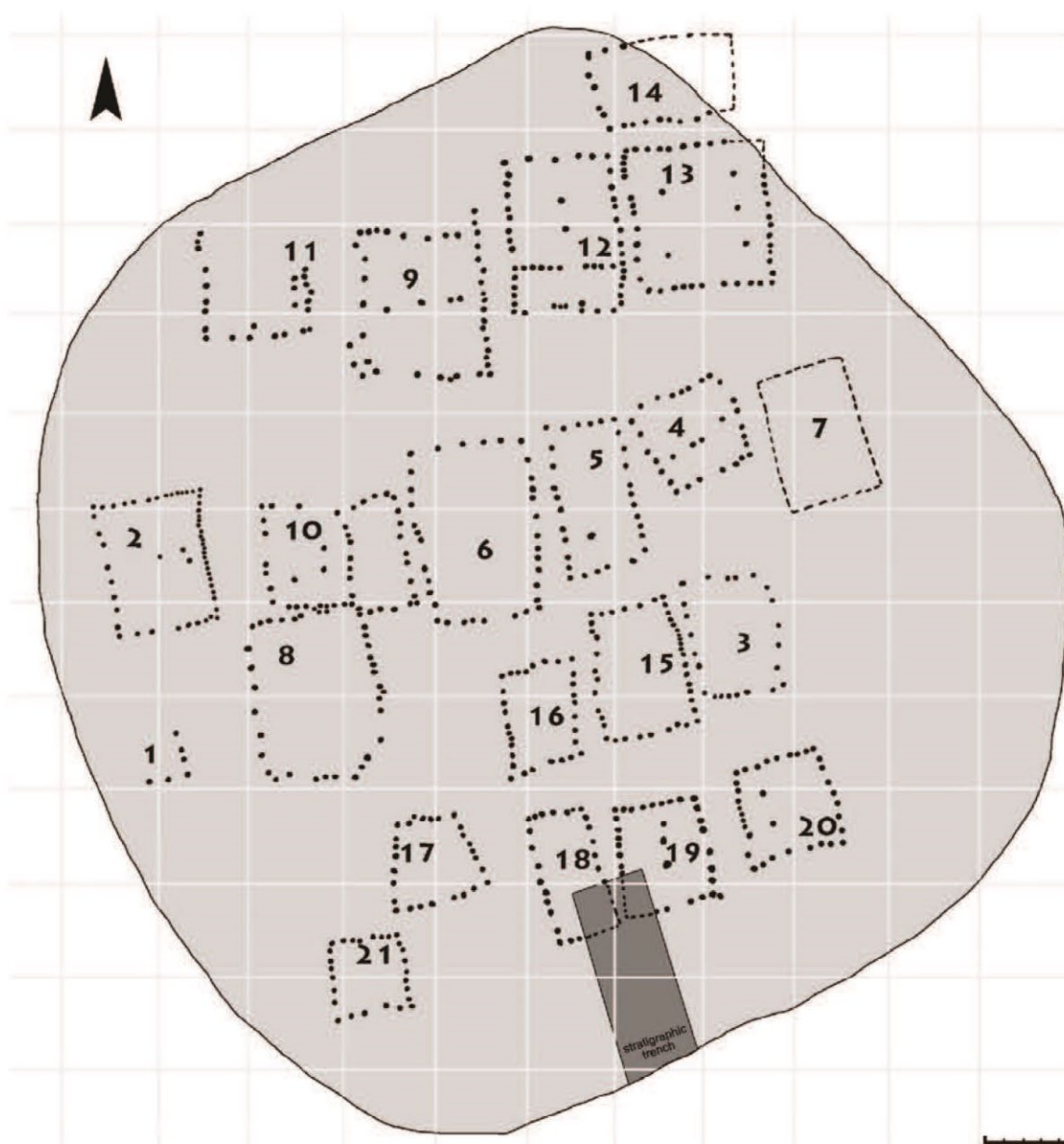


Fig. 2. Plan of I layer of Hotnitsa tell (after Chohadzhiev 2009, 74, fig. 3)

Фиг. 2. План на I хоризонт на селищната могила Хотница (по Chohadzhiev 2009, 74, fig. 3)

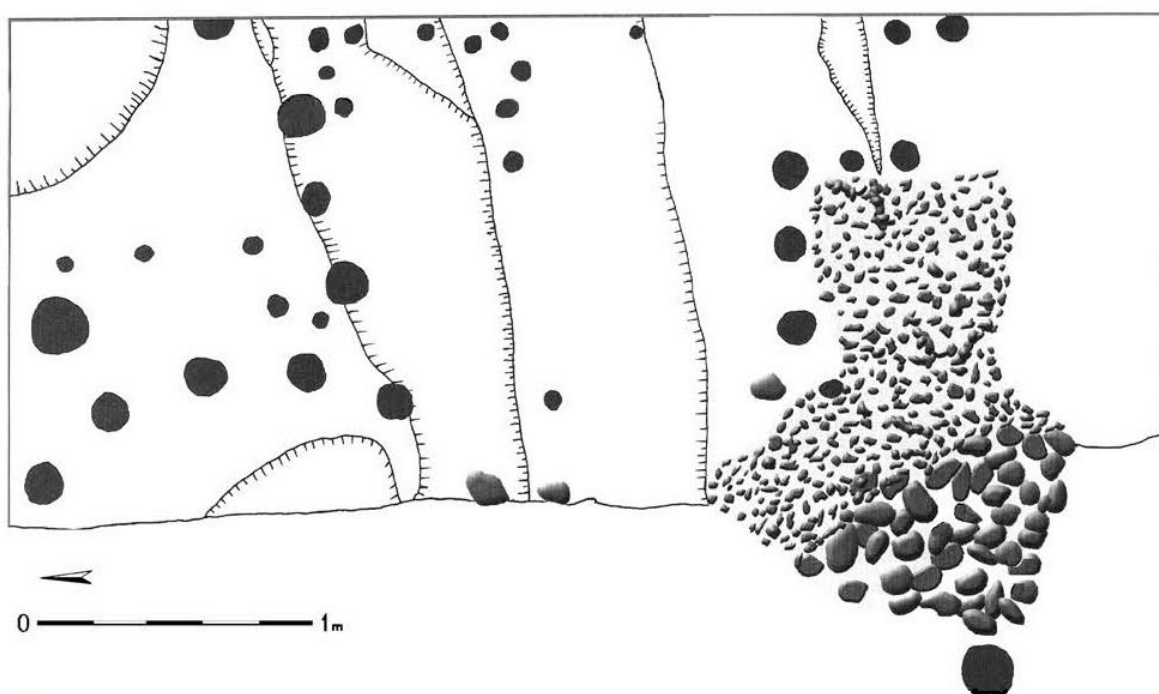
soil with small limestone concretions. Two changes of the slope were established – in the middle and at the base of the rampart. There is probably a dug ditch in front of it³.

The results from the last two archaeological seasons (2014 and 2015) are particularly interesting. They substantially complete the data on enclosures. In 2014 a new square was excavated, set between the soundings from 2004 and 2009. At a depth of 2.90-3.00 m the remains of the rampart were uncovered quite expectedly. What is more interesting is that right behind it two trenches were found. The first one is approximately 0.70-0.80 m wide and about 0.35 m deep (from a depth of 3.10-3.20 m to a depth of 3.54 m). It has an east-west direction, following the direction of the rampart and is located right behind it. Its walls

³ According to Al. Chohadzhiev, it is possible that what we currently acknowledge as a rampart are actually remains from a decomposed clay wall, destructed and consequently rotten over the slope of the tell.



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Fig. 3. Enclosure remains (clayish rampart and postholes) discovered in 2004 (after Chohadzhiev 2009, 81, Fig. 17): 1 – view from west; 2 – graphic documentation/plan
 Фиг. 3. Останки от отбранителното съоръжение (глинобитен вал с дупки от колове) открити през 2004 г. (по Chohadzhiev 2009, 81, Fig. 17): 1 – изглед от запад;
 2 – графична документация/план

are slanting. Its filling consists of brown soil, with charcoal. Postholes were not found in it. It is not clear if it performs functions connected to the enclosure. Within 0.50 m behind it (and about 1.30 m from the rampart) a second trench, located alongside the rampart was uncovered. It was detected at a depth of approximately 3.20 m (3.18-3.23 m). The trench is 0.50-0.80 m wide. Several postholes with big diameter from 0.25-0.30 m to 0.40-0.45 m were registered alongside the trench. They are positioned at about 0.30-0.50 m (up to 0.70 m) from each other (fig. 8). At this stage, the depth of the trench was not established. It is at

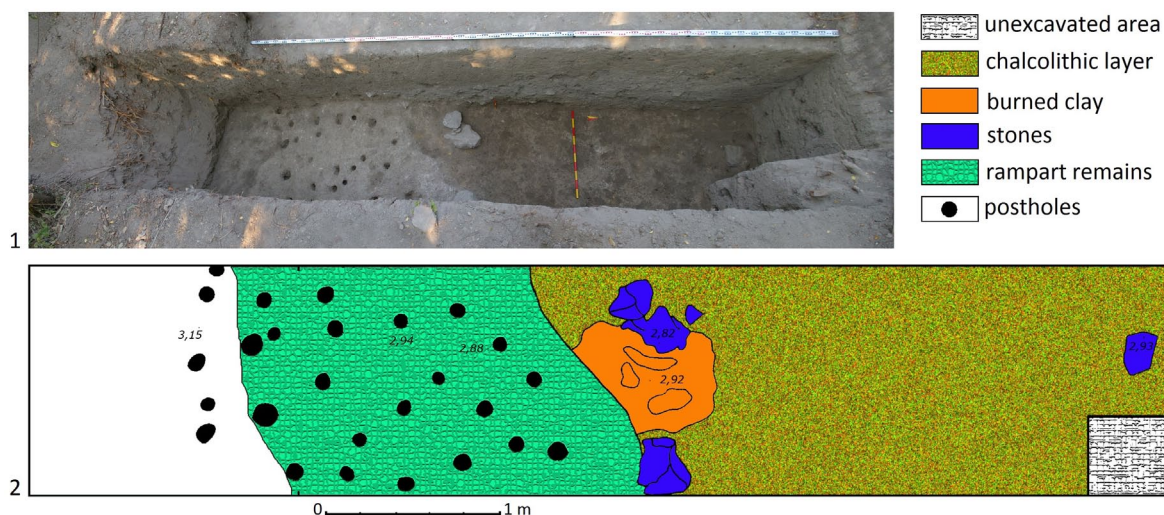


Fig. 4. Enclosure remains (clayish rampart and postholes) discovered in 2009 (after Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2010, 80, обр. 1): 1 – view from east; 2 – graphic documentation/plan

Фиг. 4. Останки от отбранителното съоръжение (глинобитен вал с дупки от колове) открити през 2009 г. (по Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2010, 80, обр. 1): 1 – изглед от изток; 2 – графична документация/план

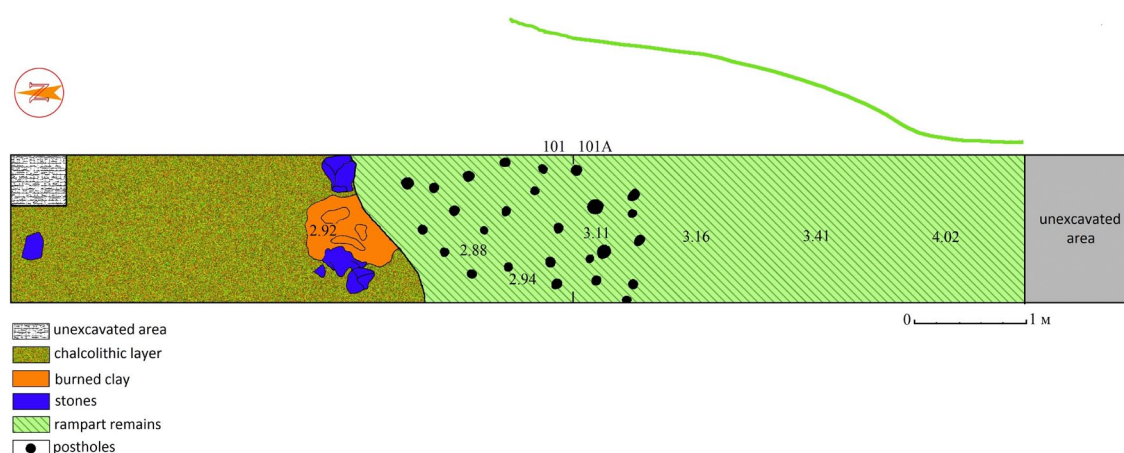


Fig. 5. Graphic documentation/ Plan of the enclosure remains discovered in 2010 (after Chohadzhiev, Chohadzhiev – unpublished)

Фиг. 5. План на останките от отбранителното съоръжение, открити през 2010 г. (по Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев – непубликувани материали)

least 0.30-0.50 m for sure, as at this stage the filling of part of the holes is depleted at such depth (from depth of 3.18-3.22 m to a depth of 3.50-3.70 m). A big quantity of rotten timber was found in it (Chohadzhiev, Chohadzhiev – unpublished). The dimensions of this trench and the big diameter of the postholes suggest the presence of a massive construction in this part of the tell. Probably this is a *wattle-and-daub* palisade, built from wooden pillars. It is probably 3-4 m high.

Despite the meager funding and the limited excavated area, the studies of enclosures in Hotnitsa achieve significant results. It has been established that the southern part of the tell is protected by a complex fortification. It combines in its structure a rampart and a palisade built on it. In some sections the palisade is consolidated by a build-up of stones. Along

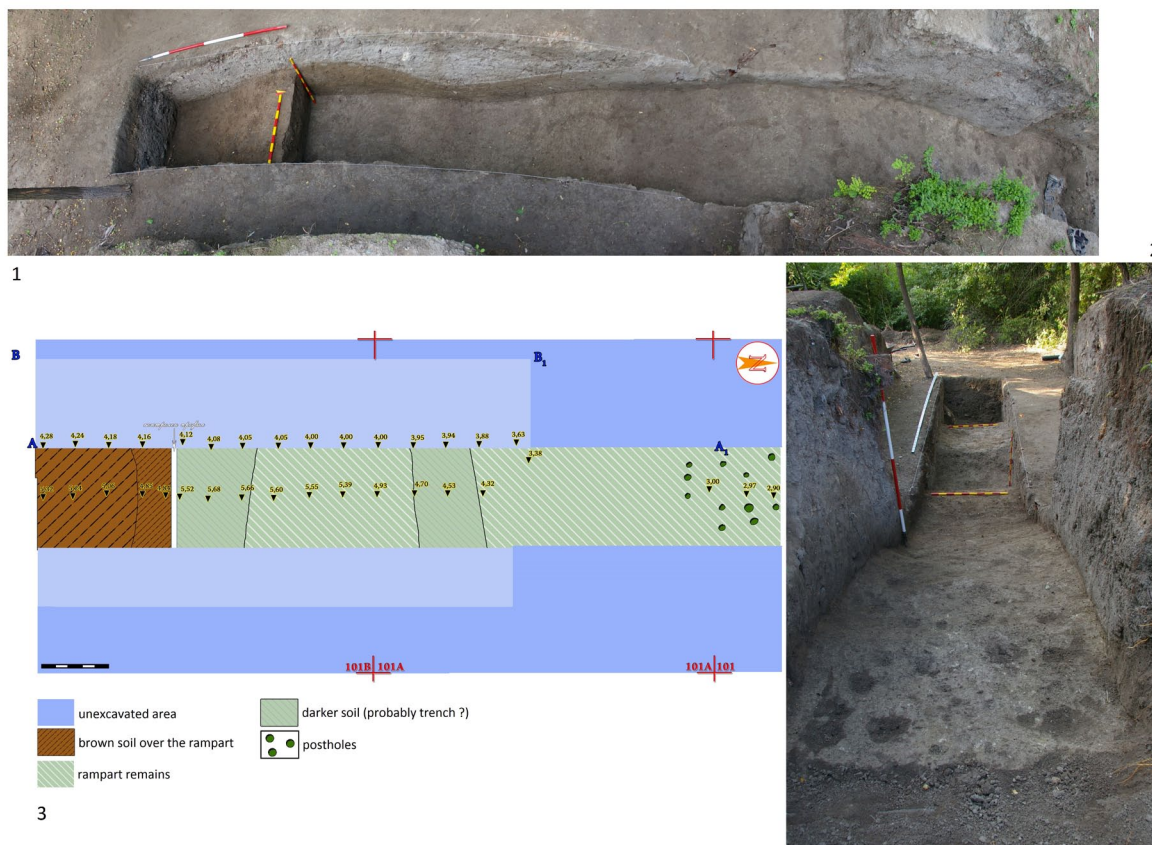


Fig. 6. Enclosure remains (clayish rampart and postholes) discovered in 2011 (after Chohadzhiev, Chohadzhiev – unpublished): 1 – view from east; 2 – view from north; 3 – graphic documentation/plan

Фиг. 6. Останки от отбранителното съоръжение (глинобитен вал с дупки от колове) открити през 2011 г. (по Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев – непубликувани материали): 1 – изглед от изток; 2 – изглед от север; 3 – графична документация/план

with the achieved results the resolution of a number of problems is pending. The form and the dimensions of the rampart are not finally clarified. The presence of a ditch was not fully confirmed. Its boundaries and depth were not established. At this stage, it cannot be argued that the tell is protected on all sides with this fortification. In the other unexplored sections along its periphery other types of enclosures might have been used. The time of the building of the enclosure cannot be specified precisely as well as its original appearance. It is very likely that only the rampart was initially built and subsequently a low enclosure was added. It cannot be established which layers this fortification protects, due to the fact that the greater part of the tell is not excavated and they are still not reached. These are problems which only the future archaeological excavations can resolve.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that enclosures are not something new for the Copper age. A great part of the Chalcolithic settlements in Bulgaria are fortified with various enclosures. Hotnitsa tell is not an exception. The following settlements – Azmashka mogila V (Георгиев 1963, 160; Тодорова и др. 1975, 22), Golyamo Delchevo XIV-XV (Тодорова и др. 1975, 47, 99-100; Todorova 1982, 102-104), Gradeshnitsa (Николов 1974, 18-19), Ovcharovo V (Todorova 1982, 124; Тодорова и др. 1983, 32-33), Polyantsa V (Todorova 1982, 160), Targovishte III (Ангелова 1986, 39; Todorova 1982, 177-178) were forti-

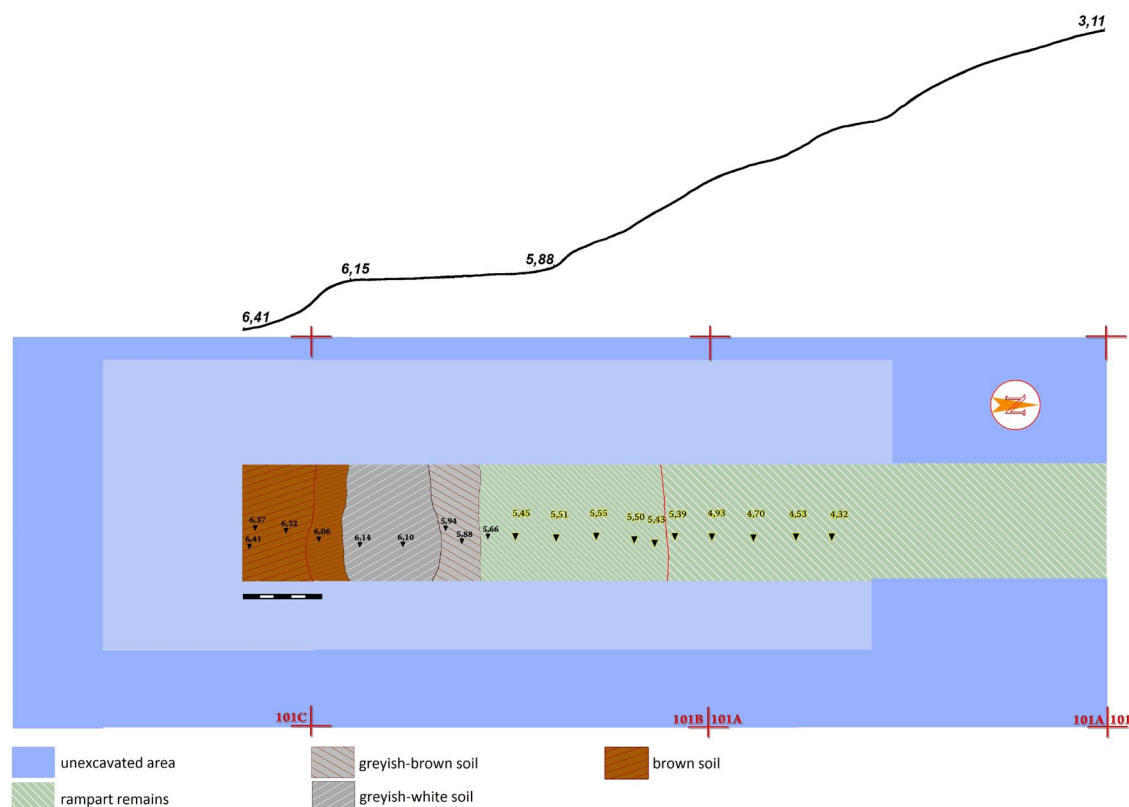


Fig. 7. Graphic documentation/ Plan of the enclosure remains discovered in 2012
(after Chohadzhiev, Chohadzhiev – unpublished)

Фиг. 7. План на останките от отбранителното съоръжение, открити през 2012 г.
(по Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев – непубликувани материали)

fied with combined enclosures, consisting of a rampart and a palisade (or a ditch, a rampart and a palisade), similar to the ones found during the excavations in Hotnitsa. It is notable that the bigger part of the settlements fortified with this type of enclosures are mostly from the Middle Chalcolithic Age and are located in Northeastern Bulgaria (fig. 9). Most probably the fortification found in Hotnitsa was built in this period. In support of this statement is the fact that so far only the topmost building layers have been excavated entirely (I layer) or partially (II-V layer), as the diggings of the interior of the tell do not reach the highest point of the rampart. It is logical that it encloses the next middle chalcolithic layers. Nevertheless, the last assumption is still hypothetical. The lack of middle chalcolithic ceramics and overlapping late and middle chalcolithic enclosures (in clear stratigraphical order) hinder its confirmation. At this stage it is unclear if the trench found during the last season (2015), marking the track of a massive palisade, is part of the already existent fortification. Probably their timing does not overlap. It is possible that it is a separate enclosure, fortifying the last (Late Chalcolithic) layers of the tell. The following Chalcolithic settlements were fortified with similar single palisades: Golyamo Delchevo III-IV (Тодорова и др. 1975, 27; Todorova 1982, 92), Ivanovo I (Венелинова 2009, 80-83; 2011, 158-163; Венелинова и др. 2011, 73-77; Venelinova 2011, 87-90), Ovcharovo XI-XII (Тодорова и др. 1983, 41; Todorova 1982, 142-143), Polyanitsa VI-VIII (Тодорова 1976, 12-18; Тодорова, Вайсов 1986, 72-86; Todorova 1982, 160-163), Radingrad I-III (Иванов 1984, 5-7; Todorova 1982, 166-168), Strumsko (Перничева 1993, 97-99), Topolnitsa IV (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki et al. 2007, 52). Obvi-

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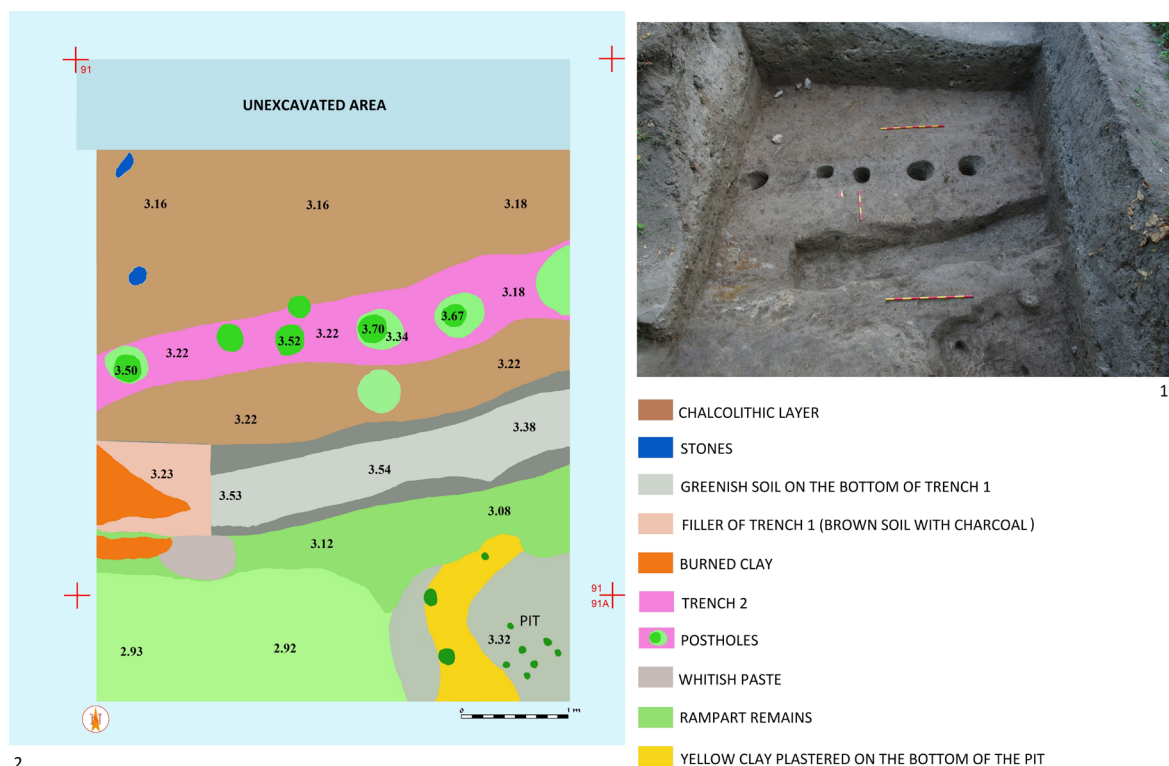


Fig. 8. Enclosure remains (palisade trench) discovered in 2015 (after Chohadzhiev, Chohadzhiev – unpublished): 1 – view from south; 2 – graphic documentation/plan

Фиг. 8. Останки от палисадата, открита през 2015 г. (по Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев – непубликувани материали): 1 – изглед от юг; 2 – графична документация/план

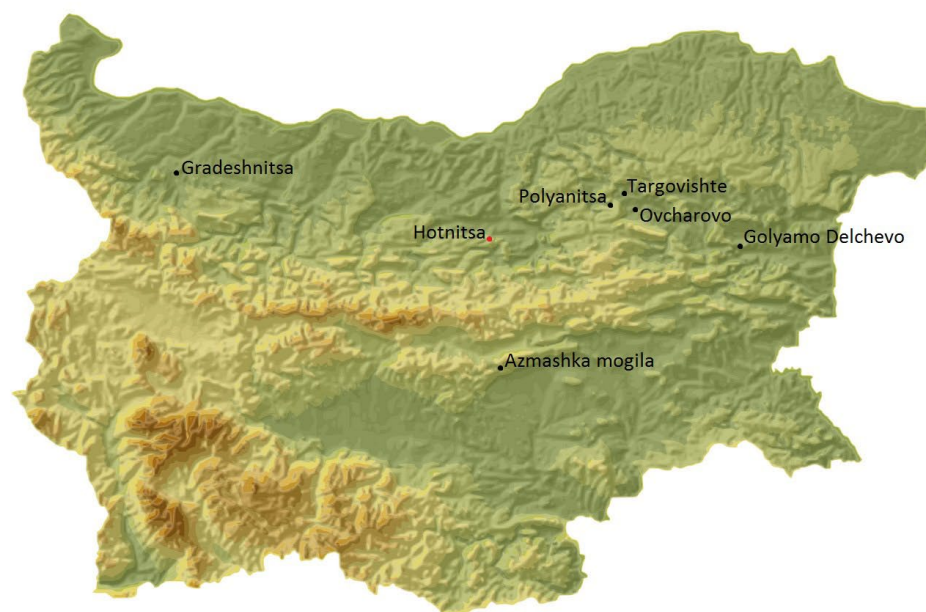


Fig. 9. Map of the Chalcolithic settlements enclosed with a rampart and a palisade or a ditch, a rampart and a palisade (author A. Atanasov)

Фиг. 9. Карта на халколитните селища, оградени с вал и палисада или оградени с вал, ров и палисада (автор А. Атанасов)

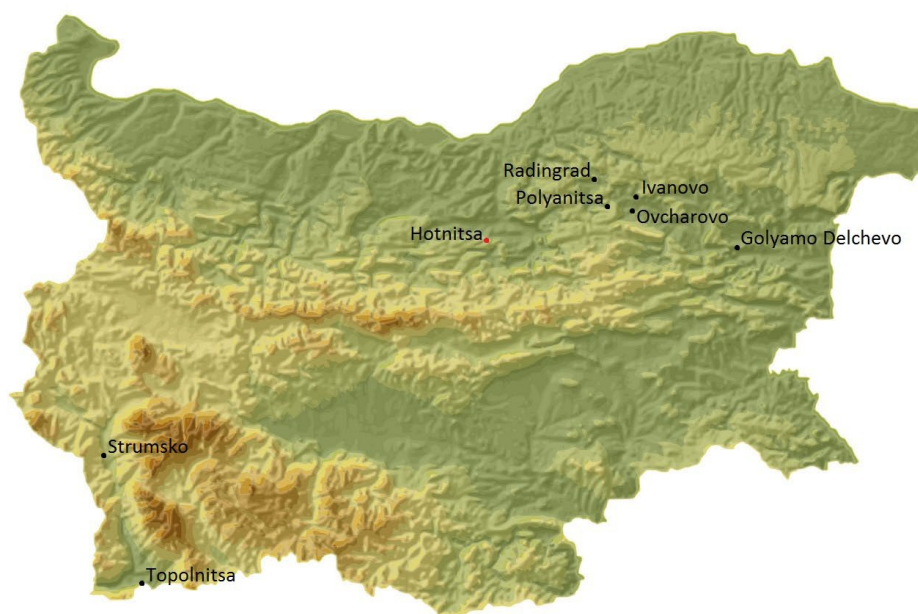


Fig. 10. Map of the Chalcolithic settlements enclosed with single palisades (author A. Atanasov)
 Фиг. 10. Карта на халколитните селища, оградени с единична палисада
 (автор А. Атанасов)

ously the relatively simple construction that does not require using complex technologies and inaccessible materials defines the broad chronological and territorial distribution of the palisades in Bulgaria (fig. 10). Yet another advantage is the investment of significantly less labor in comparison to the ground enclosure (ramparts and ditches). Probably due to those reasons the population from the last Late Chalcolithic layers of Hotnitsa preferred to fortify the southern part of the tell with a palisade.

The conclusions made at this stage result from the observations during the last few archaeological seasons. They can be confirmed, rejected or at least supplemented only by future research. Undoubtedly, enclosures represent a specific part of the architecture of the Chalcolithic settlements in Bulgaria. Their rise during the Neolithic period and their broad distribution during the subsequent Copper age are indicative of their necessity. The research of enclosures in Hotnitsa tell and other prehistoric settlements in the country represent a valuable source of information for the architecture during this period from ancient history.

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Отбранителните съоръжения на селищната могила Хотница (резултати от археологическите проучвания през 2009-2015 г.)

АНТОН АТАНАСОВ

(резюме)

Още през 1958 г., първият проучвател на селищната могила Хотница, Н. Ангелов отбелязва в своя дневник наличието на „2-3 редици от дупки от колове с посока изток-запад“ и „каменна оградна стена“. Те са разкрити в стратиграфския сондаж, на дълбочина 3,10-3,40 м. След продължително прекъсване археологическите разкопки са подновени през 2000 г., под ръководството на С. Чохаджиев и А. Чохаджиев. Една от основните цели на новите проучвания е да бъде установено наличието на отбранителни съоръжения около могилата, техният характер и хронология.

В резултат на интензивните разкопки през последните години, в южната периферия на могилата е разкрито отбранително съоръжение съставено от вал и разположена върху него палисада. Установени са приблизителните размери на вала. Той е с височина около 3,10-3,20 м. Не е установена ширината му. Дължината на външната страна на вала (от върха до основата му) е около 10 м. Издигнат е от белезникаво-зеленикава пръст, сред която често се откриват и малки варовикови бучки/конкреции. Установени са две промени на наклона – в средата и в основата на вала. Пред него вероятно има прокопан ров. Върху вала са открити останки от палисада. Те представляват 3-4 редици дупки от колове, с посока изток-запад. Дупките са с диаметър 0,10-0,20 м и са разположени на разстояние около 0,25 м една от друга. Не е регистрирана траншея, за поставянето им, което е характерно за изградените върху валове палисади. Между дупките от колове, както и в отделни участъци по външната страна, валът е обмазан с дебела 1-2 см замазка от светложълтеникава, почти бяла глина. Малкият диаметър на дупките за колове, както и липсата на траншея за поставянето им предполага, че на това място е издигната ниска и неособено масивна палисада. Вероятно тя по-скоро има вид на ограда, отколкото на стена.

Чрез подобни отбранителни съоръжения, съчетаващи конструктивно вал и палисада (или ров, вал и палисада) са защитени редица халколитни селища от те-

риторията на България – Азмашка могила V, Голямо Делчево XIV-XV, Градешница – Градището, Овчарово V, Поляница V, Търговище III. През последния сезон (2015 г.) непосредствено зад останките от вала са открити две траншеи. Първата е разположена плътно зад него. В нея не са открити дупки от колове. Не е ясно дали изпълнява функции свързани с отбранителното съоръжение. На около 0,50 м зад нея (и на около 1,30 м от вала) е разкрита втора, успоредно разположена на вала траншея. Тя е с ширина 0,50-0,80 м. По протежението ѝ са регистрирани няколко дупки за колове с голям диаметър – от 0,25-0,30 м до 0,40-0,45 м. Те са разположени на около 0,30-0,50 м (до 0,70 м) една от друга. Размерите на тази траншея и големият диаметър на дупките за колове, предполагат наличието на масивна конструкция в тази част на могилата. Вероятно това е палисада, изградена от дървени стълбове. На височина тя може би достига около 3-4 м. Чрез подобни единични палисади са фортифицирани Голямо Делчево III-IV, Иваново I, Овчарово XI-XII, Поляница VI-VIII, Радинград I-III, Струмско, Тополница IV. Без съмнение отбранителните съоръжения представляват специфична част от архитектурата на проучените в българските земи халколитни селища. В това отношение проучванията на отбранителните съоръжения в селищната могила Хотница, както и в други праисторически обекти в страната, се явяват ценен източник на информация за архитектурата през този безписмен период от древната история.