

COMPLEXUL RUPESTRU DE LA MURFATLAR-BASARABI LA JUMĂTATE DE SECOL DE LA DESCOPERIRE

Considerații arheologice

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The article is an up-to-date overview of the archaeological research of the rupestrian complex of Murfatlar-Basarabi, gathered with the presentation of the general plan and some considerations about the funerary space and archaeological artifacts (minor objects still unpublished). The archaeological site of Murfatlar-Basarabi is located on the right bank of the former Carasu Valley, nowadays the Danube - Black Sea Canal, at 20 km West from Constanța, on the North-Western slope of the Tibișir Hill. It was discovered in June 1957, as a result of the explosions for enlarging the modern chalk quarry, works which revealed, by the collapse of the waste rock, the entrance to a small church, which will be later named Bl. The archaeological research undertaken between 1957-1962, by the joined efforts of the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest (today the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology), represented by Ion Barnea as site's scientific manager, and of the Direction (today the National Institute) of Historical Monuments, represented by the architects Virgil and Liana Bilciurescu, led to the identification of an ensemble of monuments. In 1960, due to the visible process of erosion of the chalk, there have been initiated protection works consisting in the consolidation and the restoration of the monument through *anastylosis*, under the shelter of a partial protection building. Through its architectonic characteristics, through the variety of its abundant incised decoration, through the presence of numerous inscriptions, whose content and interpretation continue to cause controversies, the site constituted itself in a peculiar example of discovery, with particular problems of investigation, recording, interpretation, conservation and setting on value. The archaeological investigations uncovered an area of 200x50 m, discovering a large number of rooms carved in the chalk massif. Besides the Bl chapel, it has been investigated the „peninsula massif” (a chalk cube with the side of 9.50 m connected with the hill behind it by a strip 3 m wide and 3 m long), in which body three overlaying churches B 2-4 were dug, as well as cells, annexes, the access gallery H, the funerary chambers C 1-2, the funerary galleries G 1-5 and some constructive structures — E 1-6 - among which two chapel (E 3 and E 5), while the rest was used as living and passing space. To these one are to be added the 20 graves arranged in the pavements and walls of certain rooms, as well as in the waste layers formed as a result of exploitation made in the quarry sectors, surrounding the rupestrian rooms. The proposals for the dating of the monastic site of Murfatlar-Basarabi are indicating the 9th-11th centuries, a series of data (the discovered ceramic, the signs and inscriptions incised on the chalk walls, the relationship with the stone vallum, a fortified complex, 59 km long, crossing Dobruja from West to East, continuously doubling the Carasu Valley) allowing to restrain the interval to the 10th century. At Murfatlar-Basarabi had functioned a chalk quarry, both linked to the military works represented by the construction of the stone vallum, as well as to the monastic site, the ones who discovered the place considering that the above mentioned structures would have functioned on the same time. The stone vallum, in fact a stone wall, preserved to a height of 1.5-2 meters, with a variable width between 1.7 and 2.2 meters, plastered on both sides with earth taken from a ditch excavated on its northern

side, while on its southern side were fortifications (camps), was built out of chalk, on the segment between Basarabi and Valea Seacă, its maximum width being 20 m. There are 14 quarry sectors surrounding the monastic structures, the chalk extraction system being similar to the one used in the stone exploitations. The occupants of the quarry and the monastic complex lived in habitation structures built with walls of chalk blocks and simple hearths, where have been found clay vessels, pickaxes, sandstones for sharpening the iron tools used for the work in the quarry, flint steels, grinding mills, bone tools, chalk objects. The monastic complex contains several chapels, grouped, excepting B1, in the „peninsula-massif ' (the overlapped B 2-4), as well as on the South extremity of the ensemble (E 3 and E 5). The chapels have sizes ranging between 4-7 m length, 2-3.5 m width and 2-2.2 m height, the entrance towards North-West and the altar towards South-East, with the ceiling slightly vaulted and the arch-like entrances. They represent imitations of churches with simple plan, rectangular, yet varying as proportions and partition, with one apse to East (B 1) or South-East (B 2-4); the E 3 and E 5 chapels have the plan of an irregular quadrilateral. The interior was divided into the traditional cult chambers: altar, nave and narthex - in the case of B 1-2, B 4 and E 3 only altar and nave - in the case of B 3 and E 5. The chapels have only one opening between the nave and the altar, exception being B 4, the largest, having an altar with three openings. All the complexes contain the Holy Table, in shape of a quadrilateral block cut out from the chalk massif, with the eastern side bond to the arched wall of the apse, excepting B 3, where the altar's table has all the sides free, and B 4, where have been discovered three blocks with such use. A small opening from E 5 led to the five galleries (G 1-5) used as funerary space, the chalk massif sheltering 20 graves, with Christian orientation. The strips on the front of the arcades and the traces on the plastering of certain openings determine the presumption that the interiors were painted with red paint. The chalk in which is carved the site allowed the engraving, on the walls of the six chapels, of the chambers and of the funerary galleries, as well as on certain chiseled blocks from the chalk quarry, of certain Greek and Slavonic inscriptions, along with the Runic ones, which, although the most numerous ones, are yet undeciphered. Beside the incised texts on the chalk walls, the quarry workers, the monks, the pilgrims, the guests of the monastic complex incised various geometric, zoomorphic or anthropomorphic representations, some of them with pronounced and obvious religious meaning, while others with profane content. By its integration into the horizon of the monastic sites characteristic for historic Dobruja, as well as to a phenomenon extended from Spain to Palestine and from Egypt to Crimea, the ensemble from Murfatlar-Basarabi determined, especially after 1990, the interest of a large number of scientific projects, which contributed to the knowledge of the site, together with efforts for ensuring its conservation. The unitary approach of rupestrine monasteries in historic Dobruja phenomenon has been, up to now, not considered, both due to the communist period, as well as to the fact that they are situated on the two sides of the Romanian-Bulgarian border. Since 2004, a new international project aims to study all these sites. Mainly funded by Columbia University and the Tianaderrah Foundation, it also involved the National History Museum of Romania in Bucharest, the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța, the Museum of Archaeology in Silistra and the Institute of Archaeology „Vasile Pârvan” in Bucharest. A joined team (Georgi Atanasov, Stela Donceva, Andra Samson, Mihai Vasile, Silviu Anghel, Alexandra Zbucnea) gathered

field data, between 2004 and 2007, on both sides of the border. An exhibition, dedicated to the largest complex of all known sites of this type, is in part the first scientific outcome of this project. Besides the field work and the appropriation of the already published information, in the case of Murfatlar-Basarabi site is fundamental also the contribution of the archives from the „Vasile Pârvan" Institute of Archeology and from the National Institute of Historical Monuments, as well as of the Bilciurescu archive, an important documentary fund for the history of research.