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Stone quarries of Roman Philippopolis (Abstract)

Zdravko Dimitrov, Kamen Stanev

The article discusses the results of the two-year project, supported by the Young Scholars Program of the Bulgarian Science Fund, aiming to investigate the stone quarries in the Roman city of Philippopolis.

Already in ancient times, the syenite hills of present-day Plovdiv were the source for quarrying of huge amounts of rocky materials. The research identified 20 quarries, located on the six hills (tepes) of Plovdiv – Dzhambaz, Taksim, Nebet, Sahat, Bunardzhik, and Dzhendem. The article discusses also the intensity of quarrying, the location of the quarries regarding the ancient city and their present condition.

The most important part of the project was to trace the chronological development of stone quarrying in Philippopolis. Between the 1st and the 5th c., huge amount of materials were used for the construction of the largest Roman city in Thrace. This was the beginning of the quarrying of Plovdiv's hills. The production of the quarries consisted of large split stones, slabs for paving the streets, ashlars, architectural elements, wine presses, sarcophagi and other funerary monuments.

The largest numbers of stone blocks were used for the construction of the city walls of Philippopolis: the first one built in the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 172 AD, and the second one dated to the 5th-6th c. AD, although we cannot specify further this date. This second, Late Antique wall enclosed the higher parts of the Three Hills and this was the last major commission for the ancient quarries of Philippopolis – despite the fact that numerous spolia and ashlars from the earlier walls were reused in the wall.

The analysis of the available data indicates two periods of intensive quarrying of Plovdiv's hills:

- Ancient: from the late 1st to the late 5th/ early 6th c.;
- Modern: the late 19th and the first half of the 20th c.

This fact allows attributing to the Roman Period all quarries that are not modern. There are several ways to distinguish Roman from modern quarries.

On the first place, one can use archive data and the evidence in the local press from the late 19th and the first half of the 20th c., discussing contemporary quarries.

The second feature that allows positive distinguishing between Roman and modern quarries is the manner of quarrying. In Roman quarries, the rock was hewn gradually, leaving a flat and even front, in some cases of great length and height. In modern quarries, the extraction was chaotic on the surface, often without going deeper; thus, the quarry has no front and the surface remains uneven and severely indented – e.g. the south slope of Sahat Tepe. In other cases, explosives were used for quarrying.

Erosion is the third feature that allows distinguishing between Roman and modern quarries. Although syenite is a very strong and hard rock, Roman quarries demonstrate various degrees of erosion in result of their millennia-long exposure to the elements. The surface of modern quarries is of fresh light gray colour and the rocks have sharper edges.

In the end of the study, all identified quarries (a total of 20) are presented as catalogue with general information about their location, dimensions, and situation regarding the Roman city and its infrastructure, as well as about the current condition of these monuments of Plovdiv's cultural heritage.