

THE TURKISH BATH FROM ORYAHOVO – THE FIRST STUDIES

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Rezumat: În acest articol prezentăm rezultatele cercetărilor din anii 2019-2021, pe o suprafață de aproape 85 m². Din planul exterior al băii sunt descoperite zidul estic și o mică parte din zidul sudic. Rămășițele zidului nordic lipsesc cu desăvârșire. În colțul de sud-est al băii este păstrată o parte din podeaua unei încăperi, care a fost tencuită cu mortar impermeabil gri-roz. Sub aceasta sunt dezvelite parțial patru canale de hipocaust. A fost stabilită prezența unei structuri de perete interior de până la 1,15 m înălțime, cu orientare de nord-sud. Fața sa de est este străbătută de alte trei canale de hipocaust cu arcade de cărămidă. La vest și la est de peretele interior sunt dezvelite stâlpi, între care circula aerul cald cu fumul din cuptor. Stâlpii au întreținut podeaua încăperilor. Un alt rezultat important este descoperirea feței interioare a zidului estic cu o nișă adâncă de fum. Conform unui registru otoman, baia a fost construită în secolul al XVI-lea. Probabil că a fost abandonată la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea sau începutul secolului al XIX-lea.

Abstract: In this article we present the results of the researches from 2019-2021, covering an area of almost 85 m². From the exterior plan of the bath, the Eastern wall and a small part of the Southern wall have been revealed. The remains of the Northern wall are completely missing. In the South-Eastern corner of the bathroom a room floor was found which has been rendered with a grey and pink waterproof mortar. Underneath were partially uncovered four hypocaust channels. There is evidence of an internal wall construction up to 1.15 m in height with a North-South orientation. Its Eastern face is crossed by three other hypocaustic channels with brick arches. The floor of the room was sustained by pillars. Another important result of the researches was the discovery on the inner Eastern wall of a deep flue niche. According to an Ottoman register, the bath was built in the XVIth century. Most probably it was abandoned at the end of the XVIIIth century or at the beginning of the XIXth century.

Cuvinte-cheie: baie turcească; hamam; hipocaust; perioada otomană; Oryahovo.

Key-words: Turkish bath; hamam; hypocaust; Ottoman period; Oryahovo.

The public Turkish baths - hamams, built in the XVI-XVIII centuries, represent significant architectural achievements that deserve special attention, study and preservation as part of the cultural and historical heritage. In terms of their layout, they show diversity and individuality, following the general planning patterns. According to the established rules, there are several main rooms in a bath house - a dressing room called *soyunmaluk*, a cold or cool room called *soukluk*, a warm or hot room called *sajakluk*, a water tank and a furnace¹. Their location and combination with the other service rooms depends on the individual architectural solutions.

An Ottoman register testifies the construction of a bath in Oryahovo as early as the XVIth century as part of a vakuf (immovable or movable property given by the State or an individual for religious or charitable purposes)², but there is no information about its functioning and the internal distribution of the rooms in the building. Until 1930, the ruins of the Turkish bath with preserved domes were still visible near the Danube river bank at Oryahovo, but they were not an object of scientific interest. They were removed during the construction of the railway, without a description of the exact location and the type of construction. The foundations of the bath remained hidden for a long period in the accumulated embankment. In 2018, during the field excavations of the Museum of History in Oryahovo, the walls of the South-Eastern corner of a massive building were discovered in the area of the town beach, adjacent to an active restaurant. In the following year, rescue archaeological excavations were undertaken. The exposure of part of the floor of a room with damp-proof mortar and the reaching of a hypocaustic channel in the outline of a breach in front

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¹ Гюлева, 2019, p. 203.

² Цветкова, 1972 (1971), pp. 427, 468.

of it proved that the walls belonged to the bath. Two more consecutive archaeological campaigns followed with the team of scientific supervisor Evgeniya Naydenova, scientific consultant Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valeri Grigorov from the NAIM-BAS and with the participation of Dr. Zhulieta Gyuleva from Veliko Tarnovo Regional Museum of History, Plamen Ivanov - assistant at the Veliko Tarnovo branch of NAIM-BAS and Dragan Iliev, archaeologist from Oryahovo.

We present in this publication the results of these first studies on an area of nearly 85 square meters. They are an important start towards the clarification of the construction of the bath, its internal structure and heating system.

From the exterior plan of the bath, the Eastern wall and a small part of the Southern wall have been revealed. Remains of the Northern wall are completely missing. In its place today there is a park promenade, and to the North of it are situated the river dyke and the town beach. To the West, the situation is unclear.

The Eastern wall has a surviving superstructure only at the South-Eastern corner of the building (**Pl. 1/1 A, 2/1**). Here the superstructure rises to a height of 2.20 m and is 1.40 m thick. At its outer face two stone belts of roughly dressed stones are distinguished, separated by a single course of flat stones. Plaster of yellowish clay covers its lower half. The solder is made of mortar mixed with pebbles. The joints are filled with small stones and pieces of bricks. A levelling mortar layer follows beneath the superstructure. It gradually makes an indentation of 10 cm outwards - a banquette. The maximum retained height of the substructure is 1 m. It treads on sterile yellow clay soil and is traced in a Northern direction up to 9.30 m long. Its outer face is constructed of large and medium sized rough stones (**Pl. 1/3**). The joints between them are filled with small stones, pieces of brick and mortar solder. Medium and small sized rough stones, mortar and rubble were used for the infill. The North-Eastern corner has been completely demolished. The remains of the wall end in large treated stones of almost regular rectangular shape, which mark a width of 1.60 m³. Field observations show a stepped construction of the bathhouse foundations, in keeping with the slope of the ground. The till consists of various clay overlays and limestone rock formations (**Pl. 1/3**).

At this stage of the studies, only a small part of the superstructure, 1.50 m high and 2.70 m long, has been uncovered from the southern wall (**Pl. 1/1 A, 2 a, b**). A brick arch is visible at the Western end. There is no information on its purpose at present. The inner faces of the superstructure of both walls are mainly built of large roughly dressed stones, with only the lower part of the superstructure using medium and small sized stones (**Pl. 1/2 b**).

In the South-Eastern corner of the bathroom a room floor was found which has been rendered with a grey and pink waterproof mortar (**Pl. 1/2 a**). In the remaining work area (**Pl. 2/1**), both North and West, the floor is entirely missing. However, the exposed sub-floor space provides important information. There is evidence of an internal wall construction up to 1.15 m in height with a North-South orientation which continues beneath the site of the restaurant. The wall is 1,60 m thick. It has the same thickness as the substructure of the Eastern wall, from which it stands at a distance of 4.30 m. The inner face of the wall is exposed to the East, with a total length of 4.50 m (**Pl. 2/2**). The construction comprises alternating brick and stone bands from bottom to top, bonded with white mortar. The brick belts consist mainly of two courses of bricks. The stone belts reach a height of up to 0,20 m. They use large treated limestones to form the outer faces and rough medium and small stones for the infill. Pieces of brick fill larger joints. Preserved traces of mortar solder are found in some places (**Pl. 2/2**).

The inner wall separated two rooms with underfloor heating. To the West and East of it, mortar-plastered pillars were uncovered, warm air with the smoke from the furnace circulated between them (**Pl. 2/1, 2**). This is evidenced by accumulated soot and ash at their base. The pillars supported the floor of the rooms. Among the charred destructions removed were many fragments of stone slabs from the floor above them (**Pl. 3/2**). The pillars are irregular rectangular in shape and

³ Найденова, 2020, p. 1323.

measure between 1.15 and 0.75 m. Their surviving height varies from 0.20 m to 0.65 m (Pl. 3/1, 3). They were built of stone belts, bricks in one or two courses and white mortar solder. The pillars step on a mortar level which is covered with the aforementioned soot and ash.

The heating system also includes individual ducts between 0.30 and 0.60 m wide, which, according to building tradition, must be connected to the furnace. Four ducts of this type were partially explored under the floor of the mortared room at the South-Eastern corner of the bathroom (Pl. 3/3). They are enclosed by brick walls nearly 1 m high. The other three channels taper in height and are covered with thick stone slabs and bricks from the floor construction. The walls in between follow a Northeast-Southwest orientation. Three other hypocaustic channels with brick arches at their openings cross the Eastern face of the inner wall (Pl. 2/2). They have a maximum height of 1.18 m. They are filled with debris and shall be explored next year. A brick arch completes the channel to the West of the inner wall.

Another important result is the discovery of the inner face of the Eastern wall and a deep flue recess (niche) with an arch in its construction (Pl. 4/1). The construction technique was the same as for the inner wall - made of bricks and 0.60 m wide. A channel with a diameter of 15 cm runs upwards from the niche, the opening of which is found under the removed embankment above the wall (Pl. 4/2).

During the excavations, ceramic fragments of Ottoman vessels belonging to the period from the XVIth to the XIXth century were found in the layers of embankment and destructions (Pl. 6/4-6). The presence of fragments of ceramic pipes from the second half of XVIIIth century (Pl. 6/1, 2) and the first half of XIXth century (Pl. 6/3) are rather associated with a later human presence after the bath ceased to function. Important finds are two stone kurnas with relief decoration (Pl. 5).

The chronology of the existence of the Turkish bath in Oryahovo from the XVIth century and its abandonment, probably towards the end of the XVIIIth century or early XIXth century, corresponds to the general historical development of this type of buildings. The mass construction of public baths began in XVI-XVII century⁴. They were then a reliable source of income for the vakufs to which they belonged. Deforestation and declining revenues led to their gradual cessation from the second half of the XVIII century⁵. The bath at Oryahovo was located in the area of an active port, which was silted up and moved by 1848⁶.

So far, a small number of baths have been archaeologically explored on the territory of Bulgaria. In this context, the studies near Oryahovo have their significance, and the results convince us of the need to continue them.

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⁴ Миков, 2012, p. 174.

⁵ Миков, 2012, p. 174.

⁶ Коцев, 2004, p. 50.

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

NAIM – BAS	- <i>National Archaeological Institute with Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia.</i>
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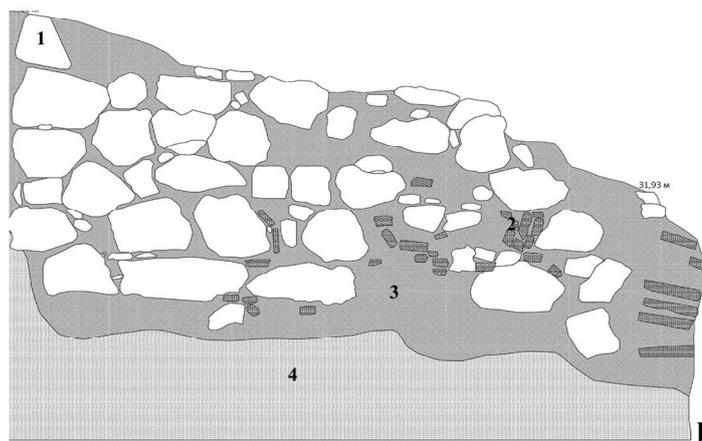


A - Eastern wall, B - Southern wall

1



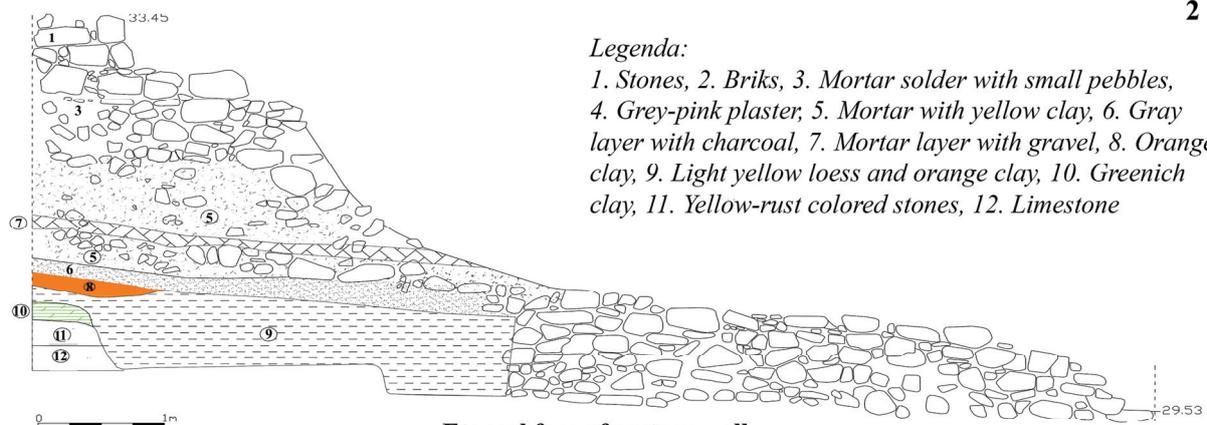
a



b

Inner face of southern wall

2



External face of eastern wall

3

Plate 1



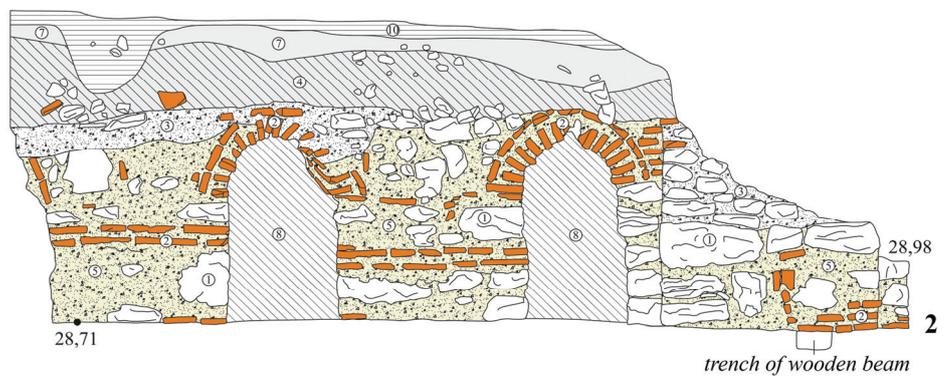
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General view of the surveyed area.



- Legenda:
- 1. - Stones
 - 2. - Briks
 - 3. - Mortar solder
 - 4. - Gray layer
 - 5. - Mortar with clay
 - 7. - Brown layer
 - 8. - Brown-blak earth
 - 10. - Dark gray layer

0 1 m



Eastern face of the wall with openings of channels and brick arches

Plate 2



1

Pillar



2

Stone slab



3

Ducts under the floor of the mortared room

Plate 3



1

Inner face of the Eastern wall and a deep flue recess



2

The Eastern wall and a flue channel in its construction

Plate 4



Plate 5

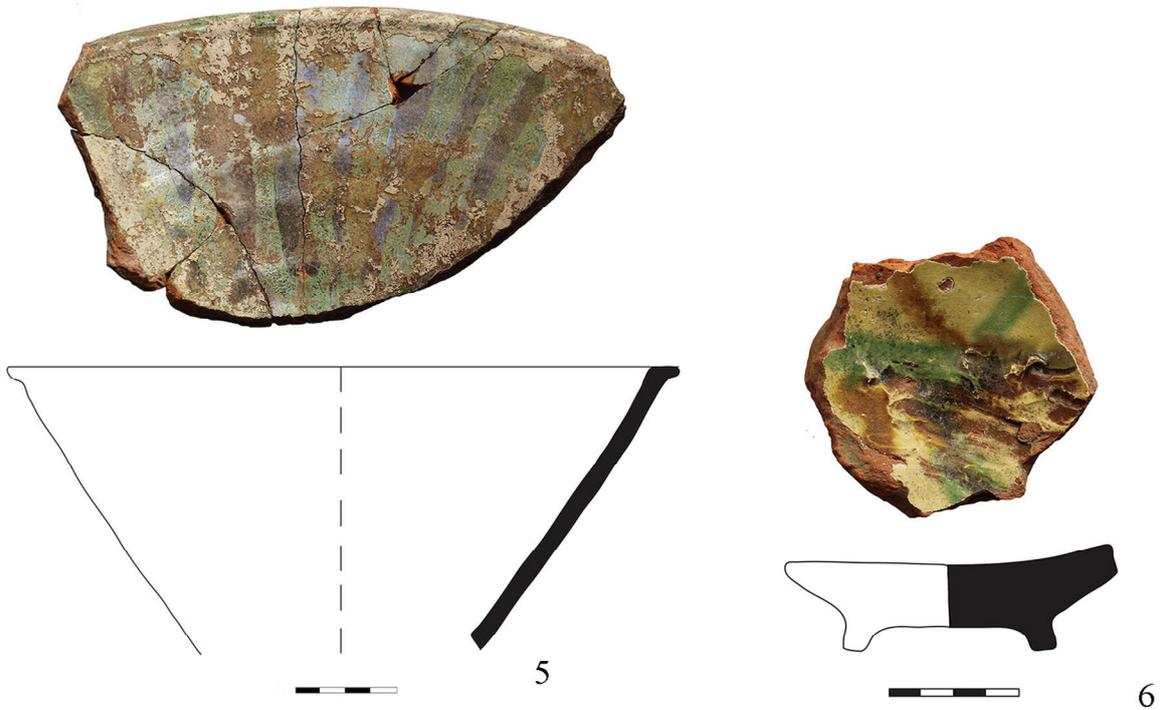
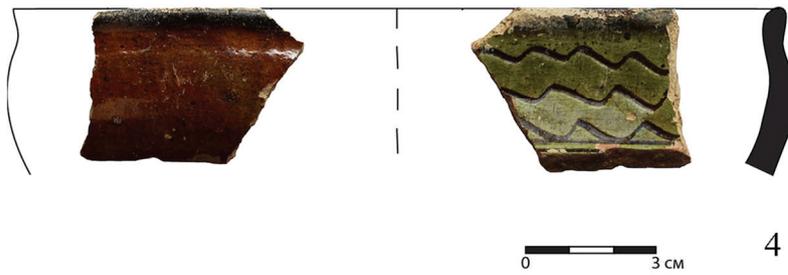
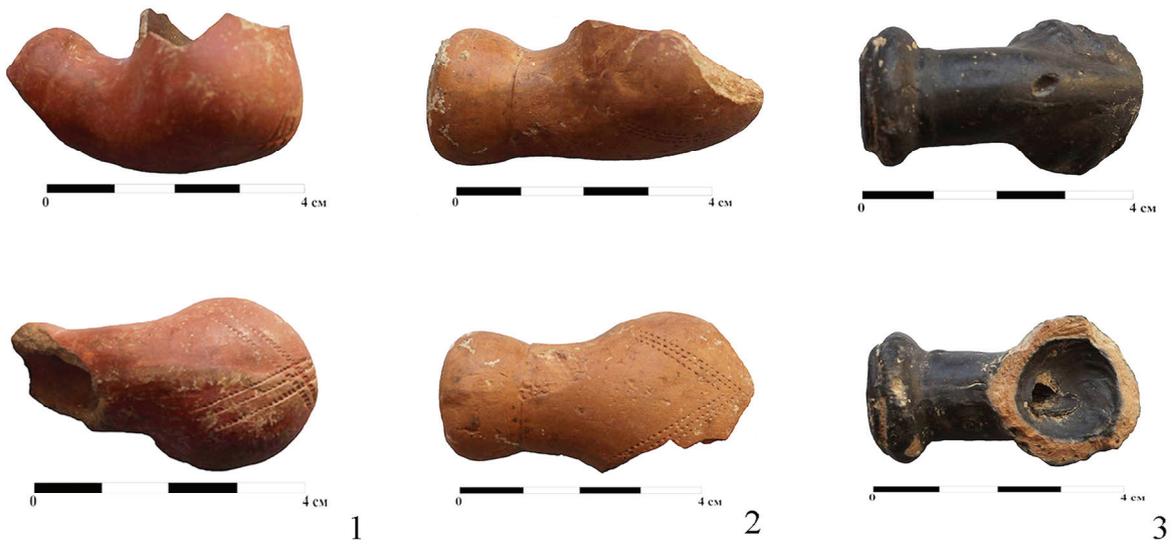


Plate 6