

The Ancient ceramic centre is located in the fertile valley of Rositsa River only 6 km northwest of the Pavlikeni town. Discovered by accident in 1971, it became one of the iconic archaeological sites from the Roman era in the Bulgarian lands. It is an agricultural estate (lat. *villa rustica*) and belonged to a veteran of the Roman army who after his retirement, at the end of the 1st century AD, discovered his interest in agriculture and livestock. At the beginning of the next century, the former soldier has noticed another valuable resource - the high quality clay in the area. So around his mansion the veteran founded one of the most significant centres for the production of ceramic wares (mainly decorated with red-slip vessels, cult ceramics, toys, etc.). This centre is one of the largest provinces in Thrace (*Thracia*) and Lower Moesia (*Moesia Inferior*) and respectively on the territory of the recently founded grounds of *Nicopolis ad Istrum* town.

The Roman villa and the production centre experienced two great destructions. During the 170 AD the fire in the kilns is particularly devastating. The house was destroyed in the attack of the tribe *Costoboci*. This forced the owner to hide his savings – 3728 silver coins (*denarii*) into a pot and bury them into the ground. This is a significant amount of money at that time. For comparison, in the period, a ceramic pot can be purchased for 1-2 asses (small bronze coin equal to 1/16 of denars), which means that for one denar a person can get between 16 and 32 pots. Until now are found 52 kilns, and data from geophysical surveys shows that beneath the modern surface are hidden much more. If we suppose that with a single charge just one kiln produces about 50 pots, it means that when working simultaneously, for example about 10 furnaces, the amount of the produced ceramics is equivalent to 500 pots or more than 30 denars.

The ceramic production is seasonal work that can be done about six months a year. So it appears that when loading the kilns every week, the half year gross profit is equal to 780 denars, which means that treasure has been accumulated approximately for a period of 4-5 years. Assuming that through the freelance existence of the Ancient ceramic centre near Pavlikeni, between II-III century, a worker engaged in agricultural work, receives about 2.5 denars per day, this means that the found treasure equals daily wages of 1,500 workers. All these facts, combined with the huge amount of the produced ceramics, tell the story of a significant production complex, equivalent to modern notions of medium-sized factory.

Soon after the fire the life in the house was rebuilt, but it seems the owner did not survive to dug out his earnings. The estate already has a new master. The complex finally dies out after the death of Emperor Severus Alexander in 235 AD, when the tribe *Carpi*, *Gothi* and others, devastated many villages in the area. Several decades later, the ruins were used by others who built their village, which died out in the second half of 4th century AD, and after that life at this place ended forever. The fate of the centre for ceramics production is revealed back thousands of years later, thanks to the archaeologist Bogdan Sultov (1935-1982).

For nine years he not only excavates the complex but builds one of the first open air museums founded in Bulgaria. Part of the furnaces are exhibited in glass coatings, alleys are made and out of the enormous amount of antique bricks and tiles are cleverly constructed modern buildings resembling their ancient predecessors. There was build also a pottery workshop where craftsmen by Troyan, dressed in Roman clothes, are doing reenactments of the ancient ceramic production. In the museum building are exposed to the public artifacts found during the excavations. To this day the Ancient ceramic centre near Pavlikeni is the only site of this kind not only in Bulgaria, but in Southeastern Europe.