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Results of maintenance works on selected specimens of stone anthropomorphic sculpture belonging to the collection of the Vielikoanadolskyi Forest Museum

In 2008 polish researchers arrived at Vielikoanadole. The purpose of the excursion was to carry out the required maintenance work on the Polovtsian stelae. The work was divided into stages: photographic and descriptive documentation was created, technical procedures were carried out. Finally, the specimens underwent limited aesthetical improvements.

Key words: *stone sculpture, Polovtsian stelae, anthropomorphic stelae, technical maintenance works, aesthetical reconstruction.*

In July 2008, a group of archaeologists and conservators from Poland and Czech Republic led by mgr A. Gołębiowska-Tobiasz and mgr M. Burzak arrived at Komsomolsky Podsiolok (Volnovakhsykyi District, Donetsk Oblast, East Ukraine). One of the purposes of the excursion was to carry out the required maintenance work on the Polovtsian anthropomorphic steles belonging to the collection of the Vielikoanadolskyi Forest Museum being a unit of the Donetsk Regional Museum. The main goal of the conservators was to halt the processes of degradation of sculptures caused by environmental factors and the destructive influence of mankind, as well as to restore the aesthetics of the statues. The specialists made the decision to proceed technical maintenance works and aesthetical reconstruction of 10 statues that were exhibited on a forest glade and to secure 4 other specimens placed in front of the museum building from further destruction. The selection was affected by the technical condition of stelae, type of raw material, their scientific and artistic value, form of permanent presentation and financial means available to the author.

The work was divided into stages. First, photographic and descriptive documentation was created. Next, technical procedures were carried out. Finally, the specimens underwent limited aesthetical improvements.

The schedule of works was considered in details for each object individually. The general outline included:

1. removal of loose layers,
2. cleaning the surface from dirt,
3. removal of secondary harmful layers,
4. removal of sealing patina chemical or mechanical,
5. desalination,
6. disinfection,
7. injections of cracks,
8. filling cavities that threaten the sculpture structure,
9. color unification of putties,
10. reinforcing impregnation,
11. hydrofobing impregnation.

The reality caused that the programme was extended with:

1. control of the greenery overgrowing the nearest area;
2. execution of preventive draining channels in the vicinity of the exhibition;
3. change of the exhibition assumption – partial dismantling of a wall;
4. wider preventive reconstruction including the aesthetical reconstruction.

The overall dimensions of the items did not change after the conservation works, except for the uncovered parts. Among other physical properties of the items, their weight changed resulting from the filling of cavities and due to the introduced reconstructions and additions. The works that resulted in weight increases were not extending, but only closing the original shapes in aesthetical and sculptural sense. The conservation works were described basing on the examples of stelae, date for the half of the 12th or the 13th century. Some specimens may have been polychromed.

Today, professional actions taken to protect anthropomorphic stelae shall include the professional knowledge of complementary disciplines. In addition to archaeological excavations documenting new objects discovered *in situ*, the petrography studies verifying kinds of the stone and helping locate the original

deposits from which the material was obtained are also of great importance. Works of chemists, biologists and microbiologists constitute the scientific support for conservators. Chemical analysis allow, inter alia, for determining the degree of salinity of stone, types of layers, chemical composition of old mortars, adhesives and pigments. Thanks to microbiological studies, it is possible to establish the optimal line for biocide protection for each object. The analysis of the biological material (residual soil or macro-remains of the characteristic flora, deposited in cracks in stone) enables localisation of the original positioning of objects or its verification. The monumental anthropomorphic sculpture is an excellent research material for historians, ethnographers, culture anthropologist, geologists, art historians, sculptors and niche specialties such as the landscape archaeology or the history of religion.

For some stelae that have been subjected to visual inspections by author, it would be sufficient only to sweep them from dust prophylactically and remove some more intensely bound dirt and overgrowing plants. The release of the stone surface from secondary layers and microorganisms significantly slows process of its degradation. In the case of exhibition inside a building, a cleaned statue can wait for conservatory measures for years. It would be enough to sweep it regularly from dust and protected from the humidity and infestations of its surface by microorganisms. In the case of stelae presented in natural conditions, in addition to preventive measures, during autumn and winter seasons it is required to take care of measures protecting statues against rain, snow and wind. In the case of detection harmful activities of the abovementioned natural phenomena, it is required to commence the conservatory measures as soon as it is possible. The full technical conservation including, inter alia, elimination of microorganisms with special chemical substances, strengthening weakened stone structures, vertical and horizontal insulation – separation lower parts of a statue from the direct contact with a ground and the hydrofobisation allow to exhibit a relic for long years both inside and in nature.

Documentation of new findings of the stone stelae shall combine experiences of the abovementioned disciplines. In addition to field archaeological documentation which shall include photographic, drawing, geodetic and descriptive documentation

and museum documentation the objects shall be provisionally prepared for conservatory activities. After taking the conservation measures related to the documentation, it is also required to perform a photographic session during works, prepare a descriptive register of all measures taken and show in a form of description and photographs the condition of objects after completion of these works. Available modern methods having also virtue of documentation and often disclosing hard to capture details, structure of a surface or plasticity of an object such as 3D scan or development of a digital model of a statue facilitate performance of a comparative analysis, reconstruction, revision of iconography or measures related to designing conservatory and museum actions.

Local educational, cultural or museum centres shall see the phenomena of the monumental anthropomorphic sculpture as a chance for reviving the tourism. Promoting stelae outside the Internet can be done through the press – from the local up to the international level. Objects can be promoted through the organisation of plain-air, artistic contests and at the museum level through making them available for international exhibitions. An initiative to create the “Polovtsian temples trail”, “Polovtsian stelae trail” (but also the “trail of Neolithic monuments of the pastoralism era”, “Kimmerians sculpture trail”, Scythian trail”) would require the cooperation between museum centres and authorities from the local and peripheral level. Each of the abovementioned exemplary touristic trails could connect the most distinctive and spectacular places related to particular archaeological cultures, historic objects or sites. In the case of the “Polovtsian trail”, it could be archaeological reserves, where groups of kurgans, reconstructed and preserved Polovtsian temples, stelae *in situ*, stelae with historical locations, etc. are located, as well as field and museum collections of statues.

The conservatory works conducted on anthropomorphic stelae in the research season 2008 by the international team of archaeologists and conservators are among the first such actions in the Eastern Europe. The purpose of the project was to continue rescuing stone statues from devastation and destruction and proving that with the small, however significant logistical support of the local museum, little

financial contributions from scientific institutions, own resources and thanks to the group of engaged scientists and friends, it is possible to make great steps towards saving treasures of the Black Sea steppes during a single research season.

In the opinion of the author, the monumental art of nomads constitutes a corps of relics that must be included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, before its last exemplars are irreversibly damaged. The art of stelae is a typical example of a “heritage without a successor”. Preservation of relics belonging to that category in good condition should become an objective mobilising scientific society from the whole Europe to undertake actions rescuing them. The exceptional testimony of the spiritual richness of Turkic nomads that evolved into the art of a great aesthetic value and high level of sculptural mastery must be preserved. For further generations of Europeans, as a testimony of rich history of the Black Sea steppes and their impact on cultural changes in the Central and Western Europe countries. For citizens of the Eastern European countries as a symbol of identity and cultural heritage of their countries. For archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, ethnographers, historians with narrow specialties, art historians, geologists, landscape archaeologist as a priceless source of knowledge.

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В 2008 г. польские исследователи прибыли в Великоанадоле. Целью поездки было выполнение работы по поддержанию половецких каменных баб. Работа была разделена на 2 стадии: сделана фотографическая и описательная документация, технические процедуры. Наконец, в исследуемых образцах были обнаружены ограниченные эстетические улучшения.

Ключевые слова: каменная скульптура, половецкие каменные бабы, антропоморфные стеллы, работы по технической сохранности.

У 2008 р. польські дослідники прибули у Великоанадоле. Метою поїздки було виконання роботи по підтримці половецьких кам'яних баб. Робота була розділена на 2 стадії: зроблена фотографічна і описова документація, технічні процедури. Нарешті, в досліджуваних зразках були виявлені ограничені естетичні поліпшення.

Ключові слова: кам'яна скульптура, половецькі кам'яні баби, антропоморфні стели, роботи по технічному збереженню.



P. 1. Stone sculpture before restoration



P. 2. The object after restoration