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*Tsonya Drazheva*

**AKVE KHALIDE – THERMA, THE CITY OF THE HOT  
MINERAL BATHS BURGAS, BULGARIA**

*The Thracian sanctuary of the Three nymphs*

15km northwest of Burgas is the home of the most popular mineral baths in Southern Trace. Already by the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, people have been using the unique combination of hot springs with healing mud of the nearby lake Atanasovsko and the salty sea water. The findings indicate that the healing qualities of the hot springs were known already in the Neolithic, when close by were established three settlements from the 6th – 5th millennium BC<sup>1</sup>. Around the 1st millennium BC the Thracians turned this spring into the most celebrated sanctuary of the Three nymph, which attracted many pilgrims along the centuries<sup>2</sup>. The popularity of the Burgas mineral spring's healing powers spread far beyond the Balkans. Best information that our findings provide, come from numerous coins (over 4000 pieces) found during cleaning of the spring's old piping in 1910 and 1994.<sup>3</sup> They had been thrown as a gift from visitors coming from all major centers of ancient Thrace and Greece, the Pontius coast, the Aegean islands, ancient Macedonia and Italy to be healed here. The earliest coin found was minted in Apollonia (Sozopol) in the beginning of the 5th century BC – a silver drachma, type “standing anchor-swastika”. Found were also coins belonging to Thracian rulers from the capital of the Thracian Odris kingdom Seuthopolis, from Kabile, Messambria, Odessos, Istria and Tomi in Romania, Byzantion, Abdera, Maroneia, Lizimahia of the straits, the Sea of Marmara etc.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> М. Класнаков, *Сондажни разкопки на селищна могила от V-IV хил. преди Христа край Бургас*, Сб. Археологически открития и разкопки през 2008 г., НАИМ-БАН, София 2009, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ц. Дражева, *Здравеносната сила на свещения извор на Трите нимфи край Бургас*, Сб. ”Годишни четения по хуманитаристика”, Бургас 2002, 112.

<sup>3</sup> Б. Ангелов, *Хидроложки и археологически бележки за околността на г. Анхило*, сп. Водоснабдяване и канализация, София 1939, 3

<sup>4</sup> Р. Kiachkina, *Les contacts commerciaux des thraces de la region de Burgas avec le monde egeen (IV-II s.av. J.C.)*, Thracia Pontika Varna 1994, p.175.

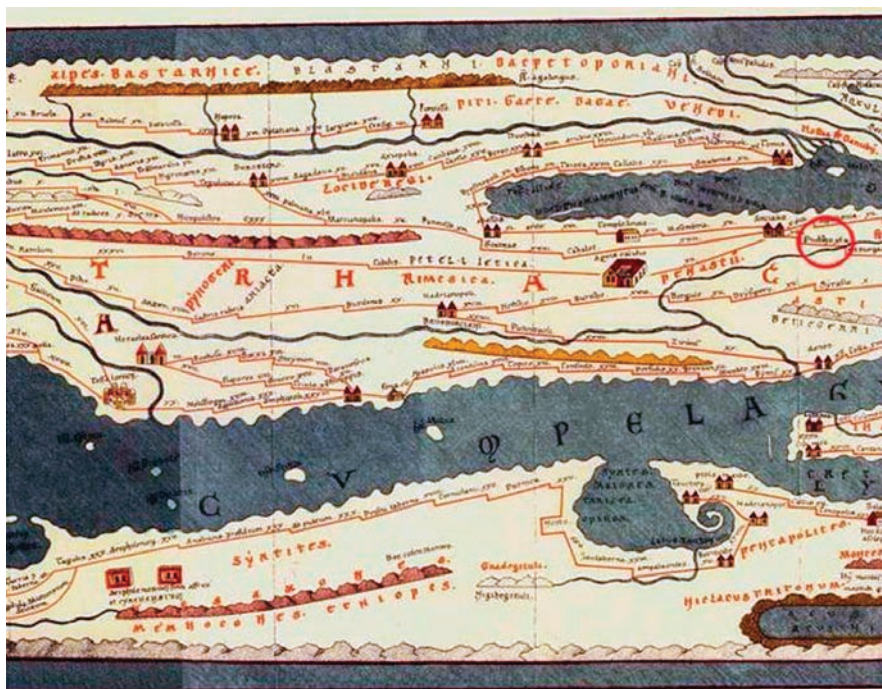


Fig. 1 Akve Khalide found in the old Roman map Tabula Peutingeriana as a road station.  
 Сл. 1 Акве Калиде пронађена на римској мапи Tabula Peutingeriana, као путна станица (Поинтигерова карта са путном станицом Акве Калиде).

### *Roman Baths*

The first bath at the sanctuary of the Three nymph near Burgas was built when the Romans conquered the Thracian lands in the middle of the 1st century AD. This is only natural; namely the Roman public baths provided the new philosophy of the Roman society on a combination of the utilitarian and cultural needs of the Roman citizens. In the baths they were not only indulged in wellness and sport games but also cultural entertainment, poetry, music and political debate.

At the time of Emperor Trajan (98 – 117) the construction of roads and public baths were an act of the Roman state policy in the creation of new urban centres along the provinces of the empire. The Emperor himself was a great fan of mineral springs, which played an important role in the selection of the first centres in the autonomous province of Thrace.

The old Thracian settlements, known for their mineral springs: Serdika (Sofia), Pautalia (Kyustendil), Nicopolis ad Nestrum (near Gotse Delchev) and Anhialo (Pomorie) became autonomous. The choice of Anhialo as an administrative center of the region is strongly influenced by its proximity to the ancient healing wellness resort, which was developed into public baths with two

large pools.<sup>5</sup> At the same time a major Roman road was built in the passageway Dyulevski connecting the new city Martsianopol (Devnya) with Anhialo and Adrianopolis. An important road station called Akve Khalide was situated at the public baths. Its strategic location on the link between the coastal road from the pass Dyulevski crossing with the roadway under the slopes of the Balkan mountains, expanded enormously the popularity of the fortress during the next centuries. This fortress appears on the earliest Roman maps of today Bulgarian lands from the middle of the 2nd century AD, and it is often present in the geographical and historical sources. Akve Khalide was most famous for its sanctuary of the Three nymphs called in the Roman times “The nymph of Anhialo” and the baths were known as “the baths of Anhialo” due to their proximity to the administrative center Anhialo. During the reign of another Roman emperor Septimius Severus (209-211), who was also a fan of the mineral baths, special celebrations and games called “Severia Nymphaea”<sup>6</sup> was held here regularly for more than three years.

The earliest trace of the name “Akve Khalide” was found in the old Roman map Tabula Peutingeriana as a road station situated between Anhialo /Pomorie/ and Kabile /near Yambol/.<sup>7</sup> The first description of the town Akve Khalide is delivered in the writings “Roman history” by the Gothic historian Jordan /5<sup>th</sup> century/, which describes the Gothic raids during 257-270 AD over the cities along the western Black Sea coast, when they were plundered and burnt to the ground. The city Akve Khalide took heavy damage, but the hot mineral baths were saved.<sup>8</sup> During the 257-270



Fig. 2 The north pool in the caldarium of the ancient bath.

Сл. 2 Северни базен у калдаријуму античког купатила.

<sup>5</sup> B. Gerov, *Romische Burgerrechtsverleihung nud Kolonisation in Thrakien ver Trajan*, Studii Clasice III, p.108.

<sup>6</sup> G. Mihajlov, *Septimius Severus in Moesia Inferior and Thrace*, AArch. Studia Historica et Philologica, 116-117; Д. Ботева. *Долна Мизия и Тракия в Римската имперска система /197-217г./*, София 1997, 120-121.

<sup>7</sup> O. Guntz, *Itineraria Romana*, I, Lipsiae 1929, 32-33(= ЛИБИ, I,142-143).

<sup>8</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 108-109 ( ЛИБИ, I,343); В. Велков, *Градът в Тракия и Мизия*



Fig. 3 Ring with intagli found at the bottom of the pool (the 1st-2nd century AD).

Сл. 3 Прстен са гемом пронађен на дну базена (I - II век нове ере).

AD the Gothic tribes terving and carp prey and burnt down Anhialo and stopped at the nearby standing Aqua Khalide. About the attitude of the Goths in relation to the healing baths, the Gothic historian Jordan dedicated a special text: “Here they remain many days and enjoyed the baths with hot water, which is situated at the twelfth billion pillar from the city Anhialo and gush from the depths of fire springs.”

The increasing danger of barbarian attacks induced the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I /527-565/ to protect for the first time the city Akve Khalide and its famous baths with a fortress wall. The historian Procopius of Caesarea reported in his writings *De Aedificiis* (On Buildings) about the construction:<sup>9</sup>

“The Thracians inhabited a coastal city on Pontos Evksinos named Anhialo ... there, not too far away from the city, springs are gushing natural hot water, which form by itself public baths for the local population. But this village from an old times left unprotected, was ignored by the previous emperors, so even next to it settle barbarian tribes and the patients risk their lives to go there and received relief on their pains. But Emperor Justinian I surrounded it with walls and made the medical treatment safe.

Only after 30 years barbaric attacks by the avar tribes started from north, led by cruel Khan Bayan. They shed blood and violence across Thrace and the coast but the warm mineral baths had been saved. Here’s how Byzantine historian Theophylact Simocatta (Greek: Theophylaktos Simokates) described this event:<sup>10</sup>

*през късната античност /IV-VI в./р София 1959, 28.*

<sup>9</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, III, 7(= За строежите, ГИБИ, II, 293-294).

<sup>10</sup> Theophilactus Symocatta, *Historiae*, I, 3( = ГИБИ, II, 293-294).



Fig. 4 Bone shovels for wellness oils.

Сл. 4 Коштане кашичице за уља за масажу.

“In 584 Khan Bayan reached and burned down Anhialo. He was staying at the Anhialo healing baths, which he mercy of destruction at the request of women from his harem. In one of the city churches Avars found crimson robes of the empress Anastasia, wife of the Emperor Mauricius Tiberius, who was treated here and donated the robes as a sign of gratitude. After wearing the clothes, Khan Bayan proclaimed himself Emperor of Romans.”

*Between Bulgaria and Byzantium*

After the creation of the Bulgarian State, the town of the hot springs was named already Thermal and / or Termopolis. The place appears in center of the events at the time of the Bulgarian ruler Tervel, who was a great strategist and statesman. In 708 in the vicinity of Thermal occurred one of the most shattering fights for Byzantium and Emperor Justinian II. In the subsequent expansion of the Bulgarian border to the south, the city of Thermal



Fig. 5 Bronze signet ring from the 12-13th century.

Сл. 5 Бронзани печатни прстен из XII-XIII века.



Fig. 6 Tile presenting the Tree nymphs - patron of the mineral baths Akve Kalide (the 3rd-2nd century BC).

Сл. 6 Плочница са Три нимфе – заштитнице минералних купатила Акве Калиде III- II век пре нове ере.

remained part of Bulgaria.<sup>11</sup> The spa resort continued existing and the city around them expanded during the next centuries. In the medieval sources, this place is called Thermae, Thermopol or Megali Termi. The fortified city stood at the crossroad between North and South and also between the Black Sea coastline and inner Thrace, which designated its participation in all important historical events over the following centuries.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Arab geographer El Idrisi described it as “Megali Termi, a small but beautiful city, rich and well-ordered.”<sup>12</sup> An important role in this definition is certainly assigned to the greatest wealth of the city - the thermo-mineral hot baths that Arabs know how to appreciate best. Its fate was strongly influenced by events related to the establishment of the Latin Empire in 1204 after the Crusaders’ conquest of Constantinople and the following wars with the Bulgarian King Kaloyan. After the captivity and death of the Latin Emperor

Baldwin I of Constantinople (Baldwin IX Count of Flanders) in the Bulgarian capital Tarnovo, Tzarevgrad, his brother Henry II launched punitive military campaign against the Bulgarian towns south of the Balkan Mountains in the winter of 1206. The knights of the new Latin empire prosecuted conquests over Adrianopol (Edirne) and Arkadiopol (Lozengrad), they decided to house in the warm baths of La Farm<sup>13</sup>, as the bath was called by the chronicler Vilarduen. After three months stay and treatment in the hot baths, they were recognized by the Latin knights for “the best in the world”, nevertheless Emperor Henry II commanded that the city together with the baths is to be burned to the ground.

<sup>11</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia* ed. C. de Boor, Lipsiae, 1883, p.382.

<sup>12</sup> Б. Недков, *България и съседните ѝ земи през XII в.* според „Географията на Идриси, С. 1960, с.69,71, 79,99.

<sup>13</sup> J. Villehardouin, *La conquete de Constantinople*, ed. Par E. Bouchet, Paris, 1891, 316-326.

After this devastating fire, the city could not recover and the baths led an unfortunate existence until 1562 when Sultan Suleyman II (1520-1566) arrived. In gratitude for healed gout, he commanded establishment of a new oriental bath over the destroyed Roman pools.<sup>14</sup>

During the renovation of the baths in 1910, Professor Bogdan Filov conducted the first archaeological survey. The old basin and piping of the spring were cleaned. Among the archaeological findings were more than 4000 coins, jewellery and other objects from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>15</sup>

In 2008, in connection with the strengthening and renovation of the new piping of the mineral springs, started a large-scale archaeological research of the ancient and medieval castle, the hot mineral baths and other facilities on the territory of the ancient city Akve Khalide - Thermal.<sup>16</sup>

Цона Дражева  
АКВЕ КАЛИДЕ – ТЕРМЕ, ГРАД СА ТОПЛОМ МИНЕРАЛНИМ КУПАТИЛИМА  
ПОРЕД БУРГАСА

На 15км северозападно од Бургаса налази се једна од најпознатијих минералних бања у југоисточној Тракији, где је, још средином I века пре нове ере, откривено јединствено извориште топлих вода са лековитим блатом оближњег Атанасовског језера, као и са сланом морском водом.

Ту је постојало светилиште посвећено трима нимфама, поред кога су крајем I-II века била изграђена прва топла купатила. Име Акве Калиде се први пут спомиње у Певтингеровој мапи, као путна станица, на путу између Анхиало (садашње Поморје) и Кабиле (близу садашњег Јамбола). Први опис града Акве Калиде дао је готски историчар Јорданес (V век) у „Римској историји“, где описује готске нападе у периоду од 257–270. године на градове у Западно-црноморској области, који су били изложени пљачкању и паљењу. Тешко је страдао и град Акве Калиде, али су топла минерална купатила била сачувана.

Нешто касније, Прокопије Кесаријски у свом трактату „О грађевинама“ извештава о изградњи насеља око минералних купатила, по заповести императора Јустинијана I (527-565г.) Према средњовековним изворима, оно носи назив Терма, Термопол и Мегали Терми. Тадашњи град стоји на раскрсници севера и југа и између Црноморске области и унутрашње Тракије и учествује у свим историјским догађајима кроз следеће векове. За време ратова које је водила бугарска држава са латинском империјом, он бива преузет од Константинопоља 1206. године. Читава три месеца латински ратници боравили су и лечили се у топлим минералним купатилима, које су назвали „најлепшим у целом свету“. При повлачењу, император Хенри II Фландарски наређује им да запале град заједно са бањским купатилима.

<sup>14</sup> Д. Гаджанов, *Пътуванията на Евлия Челеби из българските земи през средата на XVII в.* Превод ПСп., XXI, 1909, 717.

<sup>15</sup> Б. Филов, *Находки в Айтоските бани*, ИБАД, I, 1910, 216-217.

<sup>16</sup> Ц. Дражева, Д. Момчилов, *Сондажни археологически проучвания на късноантичната и средновековната крепост Акве калиде – Терма в Бургаски минерални бани*, кв. Ветрен- Бургас, Сб. „Археологически открития и разкопки през 2008 г.“, НАИМ-БАН, София 2009, 432.

Након овог пожара, град није било могуће поново установити, а полуразрушена купатила једва да су преживљавала све до 1562. године, када је овде дошао на лечење султан Сулејман II (1520-1566.). У знак захвалности, он је саградио оријентално купатило изнад старих римских базена. При обнови овог купатила 1910. године спроведено је прво археолошко истраживање од стране проф. Богдана Филипова, где је приликом чишћења старих базена и изворишних каптажа, откривено више од 5 000 монета, накита и других предмета из периода од V века пре нове ере до XVII века нове ере.

У току 2008. године, а у вези са реновирањем и изградњом нове каптаже минералних купатила, започињу обимнија археолошка истраживања античког и средњовековног насеља, топлих минералних бањских купатила и других објеката на територији древног града Акве Калиде - Терма.