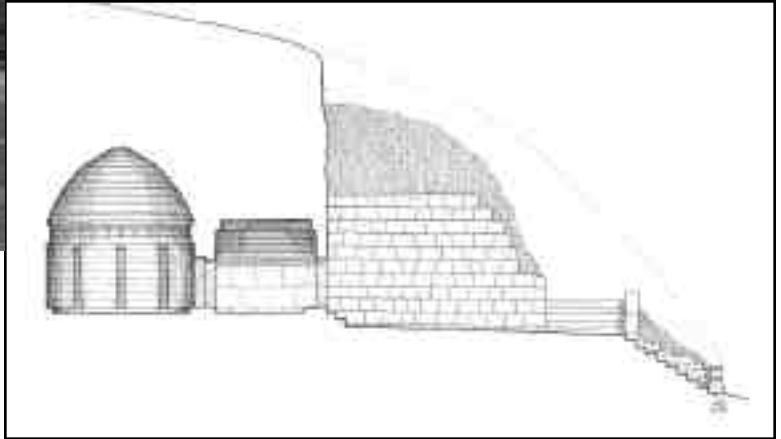


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STONE SLEUTHING IN SLAVIC REALMS

(1 of 2 pages)

By Edward Monroe

CHETINYOVA MOGILA, an impressive Thracian shrine formed in the shape of a hill, sits 100 miles southeast of Sofia outside of the town Starosel, Bulgaria. The mogila has a grand view of the Pyasuchnik River Valley and is clearly the effort of a powerful king. Some suggest it is the final resting place of Sitalkes, who during his brief life of twenty years extended the Thracian empire from the Danube River to the Aegean Sea. The historical details are uncertain, yet the magnificent dry stone construction remains in good shape after 2,400 years of wear.

My intent in visiting the Chetinyova Mogila was to approach its mysteries from a geologic perspective. On first notice, I was impressed with the technical knowledge and workmanship that were required to construct it. Approximately 300 stone blocks of decorative granite were used in the outer wall surrounding the earthen dome, the central staircase, and the hallway leading into the inner chambers. At roughly 250 kilograms each, the total weight of stone for the exterior construction equals 75 metric tons or 165,000 lbs. As I admired the exterior work, one question loomed in my mind: where is the quarry for the granite stone blocks? Local stone seemed to be the obvious answer.

With two colleagues, I identified the stone found along hillside road cuts and in quarries behind the shrine, but it was not the same. The local granites had a visibly light mineral texture, referred to as leucogranites. On the other hand, the mogila granite had a darker mineral texture, a greater content of the mineral plagioclase, and large pink crystals (phenocrysts) of alkali feldspar up to 1.5 inches in length to 0.5 inches in width. Based on these features, the mogila granite is described as a porphyritic granodiorite with large phenocrysts of pink alkali feldspar.

In the stone trade, the mogila stone material is simply referred to as granite. To find its source more field research was required. There

is a saying that if you want to know the local geology - look to the walls of the towns. Working on this assumption, we continued our fieldwork along the outskirts of Starosel. We happened across chunks of the mogila granite haphazardly stacked in a yard, readied for the construction of a fence. Neighbors told us it was from the local quarries, the owner did as well, but it was clearly not so.

When the neighbors had left, we stayed on to talk with the owner. Eventually he told us the stone had been taken from the remains of a farm storage building, not far away. Following his directions down a muddied road, we found the building. Its wall piers had been constructed with the same granite used in the mogila. The building had been raised during the communist period that ended in 1989 AD. The mogila was built in the later half of the 4th century BC and only recently unearthed in 2000 AD.

