

# Creative Conservation: Tell Yunatsite Beyond the Conventional

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**Abstract:** *The study presents the hidden theoretical discourse during the work process on the Tell Yunatsite conservation project<sup>1</sup>. The article questions some traditional understandings of the conservation of cultural heritage based on a case study of one of the rare prehistoric sites in Bulgaria. What do we conserve here? What is authentic? Is reversibility possible or could we accept the loss? Is it possible to overcome gravity? Could (and should) conservation activities also give meaning of the site to the people?*

**Key words:** cultural heritage conservation, authenticity, reversibility, protective shelters, archaeology

**Ключови думи:** съхранение на културното наследство, автентичност, обратимост, предпазни заслони, археология



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## 1. WHAT CONSERVATION?

Tell Yunatsite is located in the Upper Thracian Plain<sup>2</sup> on a low terrace on the banks of the old riverbed of Topolnitsa. That area – a fertile plain surrounded by mountains – has determined the habitation of different ethnic groups here since the Chalcolithic period. The accumulation of the ruins of successive settlements in the same place forms a Tell with imposing dimensions of diameter around 110 meters and height of 12 meters. It is this powerful presence in the landscape that is the first impression, when after the turn on the narrow road the giant earth mass of the Tell Yunatsite literally appears in front of the visitor. This unusual archaeological substance is in its essence a layered accumulation of highly vulnerable bricks, clay, and soil. It has been under systematic archaeological research without interruption since 1976. And on top of that, it is now home for different small animals.

Our acquaintance with the Tell was multifaceted. In addition to the abundant specialized literature, the team was spending a lot of time onsite trying to ‘see’ the values and understand the nature of the site. We were asking the archeologists and the stakeholders what are the potentials, the challenges, and the boldest

visions for the future of the Tell. And expectedly, we ended up with diverse answers.

### **Why is Tell Yunatsite important?**

*Scientifically*, Tell Yunatsite is a rare site-testimony to the lifestyle and culture for more than six millennia with strata from the Middle Ages (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Roman Empire (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Iron (Thracian) Age (1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC), the Bronze Age (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC), and the Copper Age or Chalcolithic (5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC). This is important for the understanding of the habitation, development and stratigraphy of the Neolithic cultures in South East Europe, especially for the Chalcolithic period<sup>3</sup>. The discoveries on Tell Yunatsite provide unique data for the high material and spiritual cultures developed here: e.g. the earliest 'city' in Europe, established as such around 4800-4700 BC; 'prototype' of an acropolis; the earliest dug-in meat storage facilities in Europe; the earliest surgery; one of the earliest gold objects in the world; potential beginning of writing; unique fortification system<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the scale and duration of the archeological excavations<sup>5</sup> defines Tell Yunatsite as one of the most widely studied sites in Bulgaria. In addition to the opportunities for many years of research in various fields (archeology, history, paleobotany, anthropology), the site is also suitable for conservation research projects by delineating test sites for the strategic development of technologies and materials.

*Educationally*, Tell Yunatsite provides unique training opportunities – for professionals and scholars (archaeologists, architects, and conservator-restorers), volunteers<sup>6</sup> and students.

*Representationally*, Tell Yunatsite has many stories to tell and a number of structures preserved *in situ* to show. Amongst the most remarkable are: the so called 'central profile', unique in European scale for its dimensions (length of about 75 meters and height of 6 meters) and rich cultural

strata of successive settlements (nearly 30 clearly distinctive archaeological horizons); a segment of a fortification system; the so called 'great negative structure' – the only one of its kind known from this period with a diameter of 7 meters and a depth (so far) of 8 meters.

**What are the biggest challenges in front of Tell Yunatsite?** These are challenges mostly related to the location and the nature of the site itself. They reflect its high vulnerability (because of the material essence of the cultural strata combined with the living ecosystem of the Tell) and hinder the work of the specialists on site. Hereof, the (almost) regular groups of challenges – threats to archaeological structures, troubles for the archaeological teams, and lack of visitor infrastructure – here, at Tell Yunatsite, were with increased difficulty.

In the vein of challenges, if 'for conservation to make sense itself, it must be orientated to satisfy some social or individual needs'<sup>7</sup>, then what conservation are we talking about in the case of Tell Yunatsite?

## **2. CHANGE AS AUTHENTICITY**

For centuries the notion of authenticity has been a stumbling block for architects and conservators. The nineteenth century classical theories (e.g. of Boito, Viollet-Le-Duc, Ruskin) pursued their own (although differing) understanding on authenticity focused on site's materiality. The significant twentieth century international efforts and debates led to a great expansion of the content of authenticity beyond the tangible, culminating in the Nara Document<sup>8</sup>. However, authenticity remains a slippery concept even in the professional conservation world<sup>9</sup> – it is widely used while being interpreted and reinterpreted in most unexpected directions. Indeed, it is the particular site-based

<sup>1</sup> The project was commissioned by the Regional Historic Museum of Pazardzhik and was funded by the Ministry of Culture in 2020. Project team – architects from Atelier 3: D. Georgieva, M. Velkov, D. Kovacheva; conservator: K. Frangova; consultant: M. Morris (conservator, USA); archeologists: Y. Boyadzhiev, K. Boyadzhiev; engineers from Tanev and Partners Ltd.: V. Tanev, Y. Baychev; surveyor: O. Vasilev, organization of construction: F. Rangelova.

<sup>2</sup> In the locality of Prokara, 9 km northwest of the town of Pazardzhik, Bulgaria.

<sup>3</sup> Some scientists even talk of Yunatsite culture and of the pointed cups Yunatsite type as chronological indicators. Whatever is the case, Tell Yunatsite is regarded as an important benchmark for the periodization.

<sup>4</sup> *Boyadzhiev, Boyadzhiev* 2019.

<sup>5</sup> From 83 years (since 1939) and already 46 years without interruption (since 1976)

<sup>6</sup> Summer archeological schools with volunteers from abroad (organized by Balkan Heritage Foundation), as well as the participation of students in the archeological research, are already proving their effectiveness.

<sup>7</sup> *Viñas* 2020: 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Nara* 1994.

<sup>9</sup> *Stovel* 2008: 15-16.

conservation practice together with the shift from universality to local cultural needs that pushes the understandings forward and proposes new perspectives on the content of authenticity. So does Tell Yunatsite prehistoric site. If the (kind of undisputable) goal of conservation is to preserve the authenticity, what authenticity do we take into account in this case?

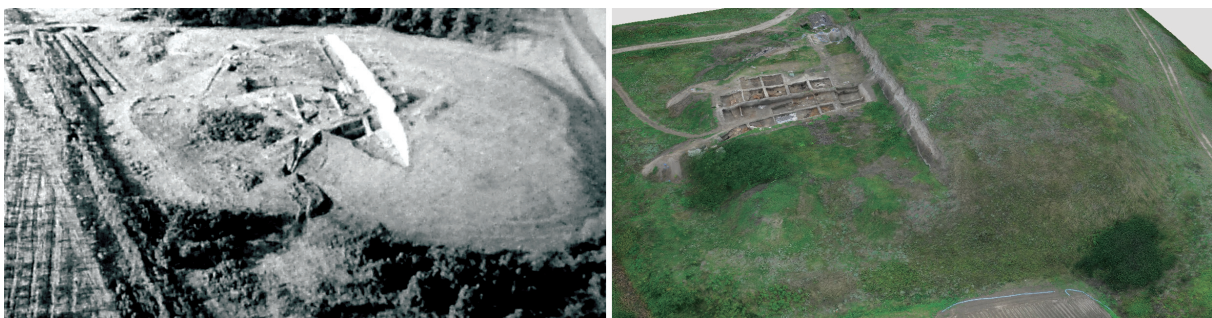
At the dawn of the twentieth century Tell Yunatsite was the tallest hill amidst the rural landscape. With the beginning of the archaeological excavations the hill is gradually dissected – starting with a deep cut (1939), continuing with the widening and deepening of the same cut (1976–1980), going further with removing a huge segment revealing the mighty profile silhouette we know today (1981–2000), and slowing down the pace but continuing stripping stratum after stratum within a limited South East sector (since 2002)<sup>10</sup>. As paradoxically it may seem, each archaeological cut here (vertical or horizontal) is authentic in its materiality and its layering of stratigraphic information about the cultures that have inhabited this place (almost without interruption) for more than six millennia. In other words each state of Tell Yunatsite (either from 1986 or from 2018, (Fig. 1) is authentic or scientifically truthful. This would mean that the authenticity here lies in a landscape of continuous disappearance. Authenticity could also be found in the sense of time the site is giving us. The millennia of artificial shaping of the Tell, followed by the centuries of the overtaking of nature and the last

decades of archaeological setting up, represent the passing of time. They represent history.

As Salvador Viñas observed ‘authenticity [in conservation] is not a feature of the object’ but rather is ‘*de facto* a matter of choice’<sup>11</sup> and a conscious decision to adapt a site to the current expectations of the world<sup>12</sup>, i.e. of ‘the persons for whom the object is meaningful’<sup>13</sup>. So firstly, we accepted the change as authenticity – for the sake of scholars here (not of science in general). And by doing this, we accepted the loss – the loss of shape, of displaced soil, and of studied and removed strata. But secondly, we refused to only directly adapt the Tell to match expectations, but rather decided to foster also the adaptation of the expectations using the site’s true nature – for the sake of time and for the coexistence of the fauna and man, professionals and visitors.

### 3. REVERSIBILITY AND LOSS

Reversibility (along with authenticity) is another criticized concept in the conservation field from different points of view: e.g. ethical, historical, technical, or purely physical. Various insights on the topic are gathered in a British Museum book ‘Reversibility: Does it exist?’<sup>14</sup>. Although focused primarily on museum objects, the ideas are also valid for immovable heritage sites. The bottom line that could be summarized is that reversibility (in its pure and idealistic form) is unachievable in conservation practice and in many cases the removal of a conservation treatment might



**Figure 1.** Tell Yunatsite. (a) Archive airphoto from 1986, source: *Katincharov, Merpert, Titov, Macanova, Abilova* 1995; (b) Photogrammetric model from 2018, model: Brent Whitford (University at Buffalo, USA), Kamen Boyadzhiev, Yavor Boyadzhiev (National Archeological Institute with Museum)

<sup>10</sup> About the stages of the archaeological research of Tell Yunatsite and the stratigraphy see: *Katincharov, Merpert, Titov, Macanova, Abilova* 1995; *Boyadzhiev, Boyadzhiev, Brandtstätter, Krauß* 2021; *Boyadzhiev, Boyadzhiev* 2022.

<sup>11</sup> *Viñas* 2020: 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Viñas* 2020: 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Viñas* 2020: 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Oddy, Carroll* 1999.

cause loss: material, historical, meaningful or other. As an answer to the imperfection of reversibility the principle for 'minimum intervention' emerges. It is in turn criticized for its relativity and unclearness<sup>15</sup>. Notwithstanding, reversibility together with minimum intervention remain useful notions 'if they are properly understood'<sup>16</sup> and if not pursued at any cost.

What was our professional answer to these challenges in the case of Tell Yunatsite? Once we accepted change as authenticity and stopped grieving about some loss (e.g. irreversibility of the continuing archaeological excavation works or the impacts of natural lifecycle of the flora and fauna), we were finally ready to set more precise and achievable main conservation goals. First, to propose resilient conservation measures that suit the prehistoric structures without stopping life – in other words, reversibility and loss under control. And second, to appropriately combine the activities of archeological research, educational practices, and tourist visits.

**The central profile** today is an impressive north-south cut throughout the Tell. However, it is difficult for an untrained eye to discern its significance as a tangible marker (in space and in time). We listened with interest to the stories of the archaeologists. Gradually we began to distinguish the difference in the thickness, color, and density of cultural strata – the material carriers of information about the cultures that inhabited this place from the Chalcolithic to the Middle Ages. But we were far from seeing much. Then the archaeologists showed us a photo from 2007 when a thorough cleaning of the profile had been undertaken. The erosion and collapse of the cultural strata (albeit slowly and in fine particles) for a decade were strong (**Fig. 2**). These various fallen parts of the strata had literally become a fruitful soil for new plants at the foot of the profile. Surely, the direct atmospheric influences had done their part. But we found more influential the mechanical impacts from the small animals and birds that live inside the Tell, as well as the ones from the root system of newly emerging plants.

For the stakeholders, the most obvious (and so to say conventional) direction to follow was to find some kind of a (miraculous) product that, applied all over the profile, would preserve a perfectly stable and visually appealing condition similar to that from 2007. Not only such a product

doesn't exist, but even if it existed, it would entail a number of new questions with unknown answers: how will it react with the different strata? How deep will it penetrate? Will it (and how much) affect scientific information? How will it behave over time? How to shape the ridge? And so on and so forth. We thought over a lot of different possible options. We weighed the pros and cons. We studied different materials. Many limitations and key objectives were also of significance, e.g.: preserving the visibility and legibility of the profile while ensuring the opportunities for further research and minimizing the risk of potential loss of archaeological information. In addition, the large profile area of nearly 500 sq. m required an affordable product that would allow easy application and maintenance. And since there are quite a few archaeological profiles on the site (which will continue to increase), we were looking for a solution with a wider applicability potential.

We ended up with a proposal to use steel wire mesh – an affordable and accessible product used mainly for stabilization of rock surfaces and loose slopes. Its implementation covered the set goals. Further, it stops the entry and nesting of larger birds and animals inside the Tell and offers flexibility in mounting as the nets can be easily adapted to the complex geometry of the profile (**Fig. 7**). **In the central profile case, we denied the conventional and relied on the rational. And actually largely reversible.** Thus, we gave possibilities to combine education and visit while not endangering further research.

The discovered **segments of the Chalcolithic fortification system** – a massive adobe fortification wall (over 4 m wide and preserved at a height of over 2 m) and a moat (4 m deep and 7 m wide) – are among the few spatially recognizable elements of the Tell. They are witnesses to the way of construction from the Chalcolithic period, but are also sites for many hypotheses and probably undisclosed stories. Along with the erosion of cultural strata due to direct atmospheric influences and mechanical impacts of birds, animals and root systems, here we faced the direct entry of atmospheric water into the adobe structure of the fortification wall (**Fig. 3**).

We were looking for options to simultaneously stabilize and show the wall and the moat. The latter we decided to leave a real moat. Only we reinforced the high slopes with the steel wire

<sup>15</sup> Caple 2000: 65.

<sup>16</sup> Viñas 2005: 191.



**Figure 2.** The central profile of Tell Yunatsite. (a) 2007, photo: Yavor Boyadzhiev; (b) 2020, photo: Dessislava Kovacheva



**Figure 3.** The Chalcolithic fortification wall. (a) Archaeological excavations in 2011, photo: Kamen Boyadzhiev; (b) Discussing conservation options, 2020, photo: Donika Georgieva

mesh. For the conservation of the fortification wall, we combined the traditional approach of adding a protective layer with the specific requirements of the material – soil *per se*. We proposed covering the adobe structure (vertically and horizontally) with rammed earth – the real material with the authentic technology (Fig. 3, 10). **In the fortification system case, we adopted the conventional (as a principle), but we added a touch of creativity in terms of materiality and workmanship. Practically (almost) irreversible intervention, but without real losses.** Educational practices and visits could be successfully combined.

Still the optimization of **the twofold nature of Tell Yunatsite** was on the agenda – the one of a living and evolving archaeological site with high scientific potential, and the other of a unique to visit (but currently difficult to understand and digest) tourist site. The more we read and the more we walked around, the more we discovered new perspectives that revealed different aspects of the Tell and the surrounding landscape. This landscape turned out to also have been of great importance in the past – both for the choice of this particular place to live and for the way of life itself. According to archeological research, the settlements stretched to the West in the plain

and the landscape was agricultural – as it is also today.

We tested various options in order to provide safe visits with fascinating stories, supported by specific archaeological structures or landscapes. We toured the site to cover the possibilities. We wandered in the heat and tall grass, and in the rain and burnt vegetation. The biggest challenge were the extreme slopes. The cultural strata we walked on turned out to be especially slippery, even dangerous in wet weather. However, we could not afford to model the terrain, nor to integrate heavy infrastructure, because of the valuable scientific information they bear.

We needed a flexible and adaptable solution. We were looking for something delicate because of the cultural strata and nature, and at the same time for something intriguing enough for visitors (plus easy to maintain). Our proposal – platforms, paths and steps in the terrain – elements that subtly fit into the environment and use already established routes (Fig. 4, 5, 8, 10). **In the pathways case, we relied on the principle of ‘minimum intervention’ but we went beyond the facilitated movement.** The steps in the terrain also provided stabilization of the slopes without vegetation thus reducing the erosion of cultural strata.

All this was not enough – two great holes remained risky. The first – a four meters deep Chalcolithic moat, part of the identified fragment of the chalcolithic fortification system. The second – an eight meters deep mysterious pit<sup>17</sup> (named by the archaeologists ‘the great negative structure’) that according to the studies was purposefully built and used (for something) during the Chalcolithic era. The challenges here were twofold: the retention of water in the deep parts of the moat and the pit; and the serious danger of terrain collapse. The slope protection wire mesh approach (for the moat) and a temporary wooden structure ensuring safe continuation of the archaeological research (for the pit) worked for the latter. While the only possible solution for the first seemed to be a protective shelter.

#### 4. CHALLENGING GRAVITY

Apart from their unquestionable role in the protection of heritage sites, shelters are disputable as they could also become a source for new deterioration risks for the archaeological remains<sup>18,19</sup>. Many prehistoric sites indeed rely on protective shelters<sup>20</sup> both for protection and visitor experience. Under these (usually) huge canopies one finds stone structures or at least relatively distinctive and comprehensible layouts of buildings. Somewhere in between (or best outside) the archaeological structures the terrain is freed from cultural strata and allows for developing foundations for the shelter.

This is not the case with Tell Yunatsite. Although the segment of the fortification system (a wall and a moat), together with the pit are (almost) the only spatially distinctive elements of the Tell, they are still hardly recognizable amongst the similar earthy environment. Plus, Tell Yunatsite is not a place where one can just dig for foundations as it is actually all made of cultural strata.

Firstly, we developed various options in order to find the most appropriate surface from an architectural point of view and the

most robust structural system from a structural point of view. Our research ended up with the dilemma – steel cable mesh or textile membrane, as each one of these two alternatives for a smooth structural surface came with its pros and cons. The advantages of the steel cable mesh are: structural robustness; less maintenance; higher durability in time compared to polyester membranes. The main disadvantages are: difficult assembling and prestressing; the additional need for mesh cover; higher price for steel ropes and assembling details. On the contrary, the advantages of the textile membrane are: easy production, assembling and prestressing; cover and load-bearing are combined in one material; the lower price per sq. m compared to the steel ropes mesh. It also comes with disadvantages: regularly prestressing in time because of relaxation; maintenance at least once a year; shorter exploitation period of about 30 to 40 years. We chose the textile membrane (Fig. 6, 9).

Next, we had to find a way to cover an area of nearly 700 sq.m without endangering any of the cultural layers (Fig. 5). Deep foundations and soil anchors were forbidden! Then, how to overcome gravity? How to withstand the big supporting forces of 250-500kN? On one hand, the cultural strata required a delicate foundation. On the other hand, the overall mighty appearance of the prehistoric site required thoughtful interference in the landscape. The only possible answer was a shallow foundation type. This was the option to ensure minimal penetration deep in the layers preserving the possibilities of archaeological research before placing the foundations (but also someday if needed, after displacing them). This choice also gave us the opportunity to separate the (expectedly) huge foundations into two parts, in search of overcoming the challenges of their presence in the landscape.

We found the answer in ready-made elements – reinforced concrete tetrapods. In combination with retaining blocks they gave the possibility to optimize a large protective cover of textile membrane stretched on boundary steel

<sup>17</sup> The excavations of the pit (7 meters in diameter) started in 2007 and to this day (2020) a depth of about 8 meters has been reached below the level of the existing terrain. The great negative structure is the only one of its kind known from this period and archaeologists are still searching for answers to its significance. It is difficult to predict at what point in the research the cultural strata will be depleted (information from working onsite and from the annual reports of the archeologists – Yavor Boyadzhiev and Kamen Boyadzhiev).

<sup>18</sup> Aslan 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Aslan, Court, Teutonic, Thompson 2018.

<sup>20</sup> One of the most structurally impressive protective shelters are those at the Megalithic Temples of Malta, the Neolithic archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe in Turkey, and the prehistoric village in the Serbian area of Lepenski Vir.



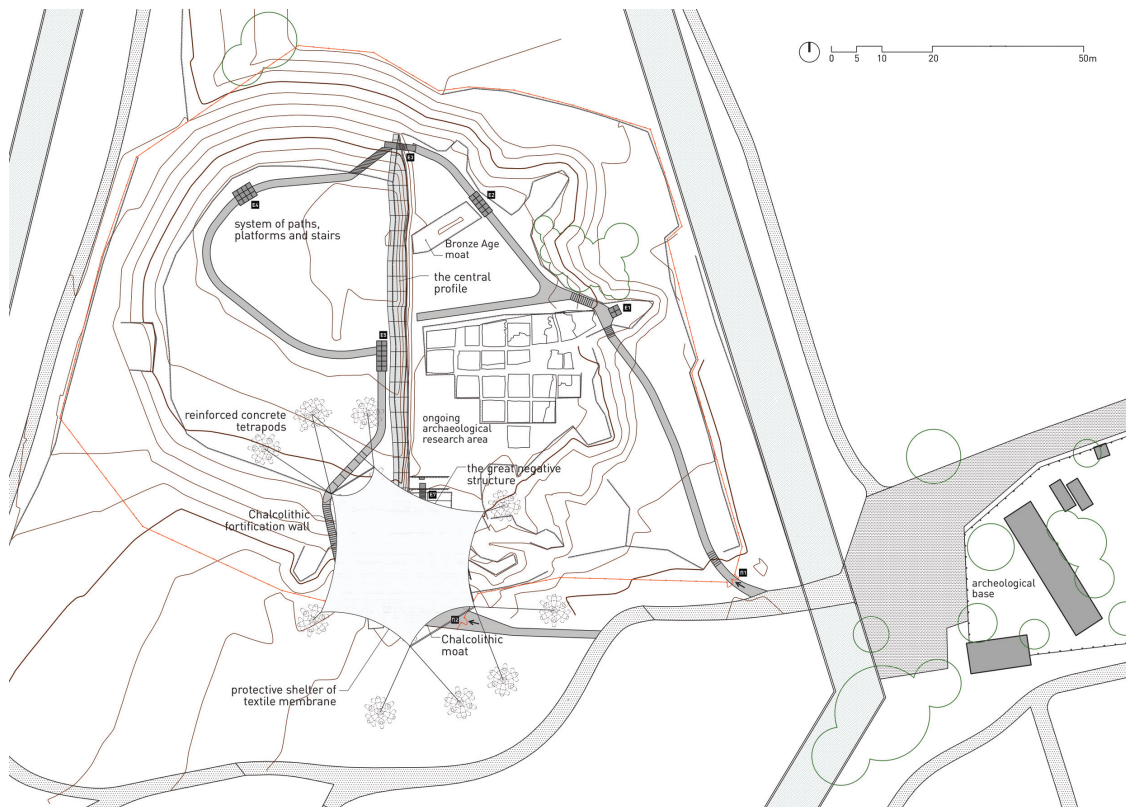
**Figure 4.** Tell Yunatsite. (a) 2020, photo: *Miroslav Velkov*; (b) Project proposal for the main approach, image: *Atelier 3 Architects*

cables. Such tetrapods are widely used for coastal protection. We applied them in a different and creative way, again for protection, but in this case of prehistoric earth structures.

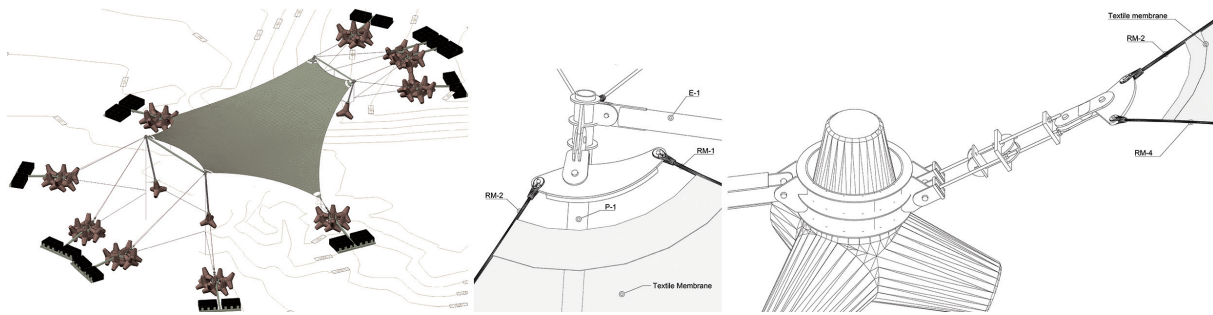
Back to gravity – there is no way to overcome it yet. But we have found a way to outsmart the conventional approach, by splitting components. We split the ‘foundation’ in two: foundations to bear the vertical loads – the tetrapod clusters; and foundations to absorb horizontal forces – the weighted blocks behind the tetrapods, constructed on the principle of gabions (**Fig. 6**). The connection

between the two is by means of a rigid hot-dip galvanized steel structure.

We have made the lightest possible construction, using ready-made and readily available elements, the assembly of which allows flexibility in implementation if required. The connection of the membrane to the steel structure is by means of specific details that allow calculated displacements and rotations without creating additional stresses in the membrane itself (**Fig. 6**). Thus, we managed to cover and protect a large area from direct weathering just by stepping on



**Figure 5.** Tell Yunatsite site plan with the protective shelter, image: *Atelier 3 Architects*



**Figure 6.** Isometric details, images: Tanev and Partners Ltd. (a) and (b) Connection of the textile membrane to the piers; (c) Connection of the textile membrane to the center tetrapod and to the concrete anchor block

cultural layers (without disturbing them). We managed to provide sufficient space for ongoing archaeological research, as well as to avoid any wet processes at the construction site.

## 5. MEANING THROUGH PRAGMATISM

The proposed (and after all highly reversible) conservation approaches are also quite pragmatic – an advantage having in mind the huge scale of Tell Yunatsite and its remote location. The wire mesh and the steel platforms and steps are affordable products that are highly adaptable to the complex terrain geometries. The same is valid for the concrete tetrapods. We also challenged the ability of all these products to give a meaning to the site beyond the pure conservation goals. Thus, the third main goal of the project completed the list – to provide an engaging narrative of the seemingly ordinary earth mass.

Clearly, all the additions are contemporary – steel, concrete, textile. This approach meets the ethical principles of honesty in conservation. As well as contributes to the perception of time and of millennia time gap between the Chalcolithic (the period of active life and the formation of Tell Yunatsite) and the past century (the period of active archaeological research).

Complementary to the protection from erosion, the slope protection wire mesh acts as a clear (yet unobtrusive) and intuitive marker for the archaeological activity. We like to think of it as the graph paper of the site. Applied to many places within the Tell, it helps to distinguish the many archeological profiles from the archaeological structures that are difficult to perceive because of the uniformity of the material. At the huge profile we used this ‘graph paper’ also literally adding

metal interpretive elements to outline the distinct cultural strata and thus emphasizing the concept of time (**Fig. 7**).

The protective layer of rammed earth was the direct ecological answer for the protection of the original Chalcolithic fortification wall (both from weathering and from freezing). Indirectly, but wittingly, it facilitates the perceiving of the wall and its meaning of once a powerful fortification structure.

The primary function of the steel platforms and steps is to delicately cope with the rough slippery terrain of cultural strata. The layout, though, is not random. They help the direct needs of the archaeological team. But in addition, they offer the visitor a safe walk with carefully chosen stops. The location of each stop – a clearly recognizable steel platform or stair – is sought so as to enhance a specific history of the site (**Fig. 8**).

The protective shelter undoubtedly draws attention towards a particular part of Tell Yunatsite. Under it one would expect to discover the most important findings. The design is simple – because of our desire of non-intrusiveness, but also because the Chalcolithic structures are simple. The design relies on the elevation of the Tell thus, highlighting its huge dimensions. The tetrapodes are a playful moment in the landscape (**Fig. 9**).

There are also many other meanings behind the seemingly only pragmatic decisions. Some are hidden in the details. For example, under the textile membrane we proposed to install artificial birds hung from the membrane (**Fig. 10**). These are scarecrows to chase off and discourage birds nesting inside the Tell. During the excavations many clay figures of birds in flight were found. It is believed that these figurines were hung in the homes<sup>21</sup>. Other meanings are hidden in the

<sup>21</sup> Terzijska-Ignatova 2004.



Figure 7. Tell Yunatsite, project proposal for the central profile, image: Atelier 3 Architects



Figure 8. Tell Yunatsite – platforms, pathways and steps project proposal, images: Atelier 3 Architects



Figure 9. Tell Yunatsite – protective shelter project proposal, image: Atelier 3 Architects



**Figure 10.** Tell Yunatsite – the Chalcolithic fortification wall under the protective shelter project proposal, image: Atelier 3 Architects

overall approach. One example is the versatile system of paths, platforms and stairs that is open for changes. It also sends the message that Tell Yunatsite is a site in a process of being discovered and rediscovered with the help of archaeological science.

## 6. CONSERVATION IS A PROCESS

‘Conservation is not a given or a stable intellectual construction’ claims Salvador Viñas<sup>22</sup>. Tell Yunatsite pushes this statement forward towards a site-based multidisciplinary design that requires a creative process, not an application of a proven recipe. Moreover, Yunatsite case study proves that conservation, in addition, needs to be inventive both in terms of theoretical formulations and in their practical interaction with the concrete and situated experience.

It is clear that the ethical application of theoretical principles (respect for authenticity, providing reversibility, minimum intervention, facilitating legibility, etc.) is object driven – it surely depends on the site’s nature but also on the given time and current conditions. But

more importantly, it is subjective and relies on professional judgment that follows (or not) certain conservation philosophies.

All in all, we believe, the proposed interventions will help Tell Yunatsite ‘feel durable, yet pliable’<sup>23</sup> for all its users today. Tomorrow will come with new challenges. Because conservation is a process indeed. It is and it should also be considered a creative process that goes beyond the conventional approaches and rather interprets conservation principles and philosophies. Maybe, as Cosgrove<sup>24</sup> suggests, we do not have to take conservation so seriously but open our minds to the creative potential of each specific site ‘rather than simply to its significance as cultural heritage’. In other words, if conventionally, conservation practice follows established theoretical principles and/or ‘proven’ decisions, we need to admit that sometimes the opposite is also a valid option. There are sites where conservation practice requires such creativity that in turn adds new ideas to the theoretical understandings (including the significance of a site). That was valid for our behind the scenes experience with Tell Yunatsite prehistoric site.

<sup>22</sup> Viñas 2020: 1.

<sup>23</sup> Lowenthal 1996: 171.

<sup>24</sup> Cosgrove 1994: 265.

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## Креативно опазване: Селищна могила „Юнаците“ отвъд конвенционалното

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Очакванията към специалистите по опазване са да имат готов и (по възможност) един категорично валиден истинен отговор за всяка ситуация. Оттук и непипаната увереност в „изпитаните“ конвенционални консервационни подходи. Какво става обаче, когато те не са приложими? Чрез една история от кухнята на професионалния работен процес, статията изтласква границите на конвенционалното опазване към едно креативно опазване, вдъхновено от същността и предизвикателствата на праисторическа Селищна могила „Юнаците“. Разискват се едни поразлични представи за автентичност и промяна, за обратимост и загуба, за прагматизъм и смисъл, дори за предизвикване на гравитацията. Очертана е значимостта на креативността в сферата на опазването. Всичко това в името на едно мотивирано равновесие между допустима намеса, защита, представяне, възприятия и (все пак) физическа реализуемост.

