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**LIVING WITH A VIEW OF CARPATHIAN BASIN:
VINČA-BELO BRDO, SERBIA, IN THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE**

ABSTRACT

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The focus of the article is the Vatin culture settlement at the site of Vinča-Belo Brdo in Northern Serbia. The general idea is that this settlement, whose existence was relatively short in time, benefited from being established by the Danube — a great connective factor in the world of the Middle Bronze Age. It shares many characteristics with the contemporary settlements in the southernmost part of the Carpathian basin, starting from the position in the vicinity of the Danube, at the places which had already been settled in prehistory, prior to the Middle Bronze Age. Not only do they have pottery style in common, but the wider repertoire of finds illustrating the material culture. What's more, comparison of the material remains from Vinča with the neighbouring sites from the left Danube bank enlightens how the Vatin culture was integrated into a wider space of the Bronze Age cultures of the Carpathian basin, influencing the Balkans hinterland, too.

Key words: Middle Bronze Age; Vatin culture; Vinča-Belo Brdo; pottery; settlement

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I. INTRODUCTION

The site Vinča-Belo Brdo is situated on the right bank of the Danube, some 15 km downstream the city of Belgrade (Fig. 1). It is near the place of confluence with the small river Bolečica, in the heart of the region known as the *Belgrade Confluence* — where the Danube is joined by its tributaries the Tisa, Sava, Tamiš and Morava. Fritz Schachermeyr (1895–1987), Austrian scholar, named this area *Belgrader Konfluenz* because modern Belgrade actually lies at centre of the area of confluence of the Danube and its major tributaries (Garašanin 1984, 6). If the zone of the *Belgrade Confluence* is examined within a wider context of the Balkan Peninsula, the geographical and geological intermediary between Europe and Asia, its importance for various forms of relations and contacts established along the Danube as well as within the Carpathian Basin and the Balkan hinterland, all the way to the Aegean coast and eastern Mediterranean, becomes



Fig. 1. Map of the Belgrade region with the Bronze Age sites mentioned in the text; drawn by M. Ljuština

apparent. A closer inspection of the map of the Balkan Peninsula shows that its northern border is almost fully open towards the Carpathian Basin and that the great rivers forming its boundary all have their sources almost at the very centre of Europe. The northern Balkan border watercourses — the Sava and the Danube — make for an easy access to Central Europe and strengthen the relations, especially of the parts of the peninsula to the west of the Carpathian-Balkan

arc (Garašanin 1984, 6; Cvijić 1991, 22, 25–26). The Danubian route has always been one of Europe's major ways, and its tributaries — the great rivers which create the *Belgrade Confluence* — converge on the Pannonian borders (Ljuština 2013, 87, 89).

The position of this settlement of the *tell* type was always favourable because of fertile soil and convenience for agriculture and cattle breeding, and because of easier communication with neighbouring regions. The soils surrounding the site are high quality fertile soils including river alluvium and chernozems. These were highly cultivable even with the Neolithic technology and continue to support modern grasslands and cultivated crops. Sporadic areas of deciduous forests are also found within the area (Arnold, Greenfield 2006, 62). Despite being best known in archaeological literature as the eponymous site of the late Neolithic Vinča culture, the site of Vinča–Belo Brdo in its cultural layers with more than 10 m of archaeological deposits revealed some very interesting features belonging to the later prehistoric periods. This large artificial mound extends for several hundred meters along the riverbank. It is estimated that over one-third of the site has been eroded by the Danube. The site is believed to have also extended several hundred metres back from the river as well (Arnold, Greenfield 2006, 64).

After the several centuries hiatus, which started when the last Eneolithic inhabitants, recognised as belonging to the Kostolac culture (prior to them, the site had been occupied by the populations of the Bodrogkeresztúr and Baden culture, whose necropolis and settlement, respectively, had been explored), had left their settlement (Jevtić 1987; Spasić 2010), the Vinča site was once more settled at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. The Vatin culture settlers formed their village. No wonder the Bronze Age villagers chose this place — just opposite two very important Banatian settlements of the Vatin culture in Pančevo and Omoljica (Fig. 1; cf. Ljuština 2015) — for settling. Its extraordinary geographical position, in the centre of the Belgrade's confluence region offered them opportunities to make good communication with both neighbouring and remote zones, and at the same time to go successfully into many different economic activities.

The remnants of their settlement, as well as the other settlements together forming the tell, drew attention to explorers as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Pioneer efforts of Serbian archaeology, the work of M. Vasić (excavation campaigns 1908–1913, 1924, 1929–1934) in the first place, are connected with this site. Miloje Vasić (1869–1956) was one of the founders of the 20th century archaeological discipline in Serbia and for better or worse is at the roots of the genealogical tree from which most of the subsequent tendencies and traditions of the Serbian archaeological school arose (Borić 2016, 7, 8). Already the initial phase of exploration provided material defined as the so-called Pannonian pottery, now recognised as belonging to the Vatin culture settlement.

II. SOME GLIMPSES OF THE VATIN CULTURE REMAINS AT VINČA IN THE SCIENTIFIC WORKS OF OUR PREDECESSORS

While publishing the pottery today attributed to the Vatin culture, M. Vasić (Vasić 1936a, 135–138; Tab. 76, 286–289; Tab. 77, 290–292; 1936b, 119–121; 122, 156, 158; 123; 129–133; Tab. 68–76) used the term “Pannonian ware” to mark the beginning of a new civilisation in comparison with the Vinča culture. Stratigraphic position of the pottery was set between the points 3,9 m and 0,2 m in Vinča’s cultural layer (Vasić 1936a, 135; 1936b, 108). The fact that the pottery, often in complete, undamaged form, was usually found in groups led M. Vasić to assume that he had discovered graves with cremation. Namely, he cited a group of Pannonian pottery excavated in 1933, which belonged to a cremation grave in a stone construction. He also mentioned that, according to the field information, a number of similar graves had already been destroyed by agricultural activities (Vasić 1936b, 129). The group of ceramic vessels from the supposed grave came from the depth of 0,8 m and in the monographs on prehistoric Vinča (cf. Vasić 1936a; 1936b) was not published as a unit, in the same location. Most of the unit was published by B. Jovanović (1961, sl. 1). It consisted of: three beakers, an elliptical vessel and a foot-shaped vessel (or a foot of an anthropomorphic figurine). Based on the original description by M. Vasić, the group comprised also a large amphora (with presumed urn function) and three more partially fragmented vases, eight in total.

In the half a century long period from the end of Vasić’s excavations to the recent campaigns which started in 1970s, a number of scholars dealt with the problem of the Vatin culture pottery from Vinča. Most of them treated it only laterally, along with discussion about some other important issues. Their opinions, thoroughly studied by B. Jovanović (1961), despite being different, had as a common denominator the statement that the Vatin pottery had no influence on development of the younger phase of the Vinča culture settlement, and *ipso facto* represented an isolated phenomenon. Another common fact is that none of them treated the questions of origin and archaeological context of the Vatin pottery at the site of Vinča. This makes the contribution by B. Jovanović (1961) even more valuable, since he made an attempt to discuss the question of the Vatin pottery from these perspectives. Not only did he collect the works of his predecessors and consolidate all the available facts, but he seriously approached the issue of causes for appearance of the Vatin culture pottery at the site. In spite of the fact that he supported the erroneous idea of the grave context, already disclosed by M. Vasić, B. Jovanović should be emphasized as the first to have discussed the position of “the Pannonian ware” in Vinča’s vertical stratigraphy. The conclusions B. Jovanović reached in 1960s got their confirmations in the subsequent excavations.

III. THE VATIN CULTURE SETTLEMENT AT THE SITE OF VINČA-BELO BRDO

The recent excavations at Vinča (1978–1986 and from 1998 up to present) have yielded new data which enabled better consideration of the problem of appearance and development of the Vatin culture. During the excavation campaigns 1978–1986 an area of 1170 m² was explored (Fig. 2), on which traces of the Vatin settlement had been heavily damaged by the medieval necropolis with more than 700 graves (Tasić 1984a; 1984b; Jevtić 1987; Ljuština 2010; 2015; Tasić 2011). The position of the remains of the Bronze Age settlement in relation to the medieval necropolis can clearly be seen on the Fig. 3: medieval inhumations were discovered on the same level as the Vatin culture pit No. 1.

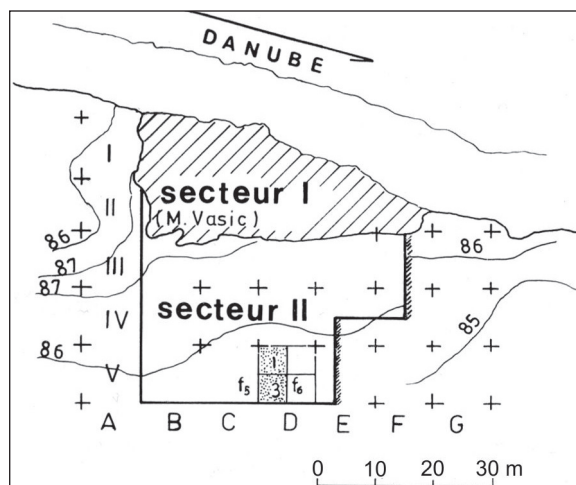


Fig. 2. Vinča-Belo Brdo. Situation plan of the excavated part of the site; after M. Jevtić (1987)

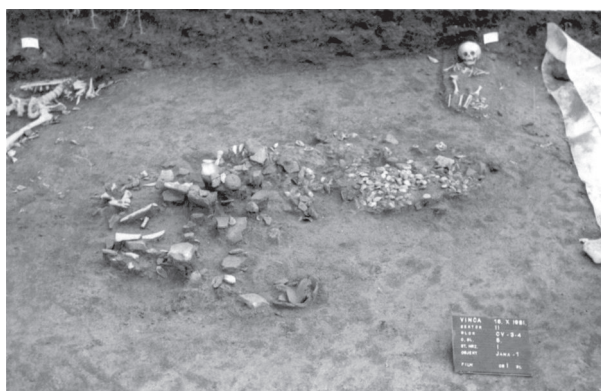


Fig. 3. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Pit no. 1 belonging to the Vatin culture settlement, accompanied by medieval graves; after M. Ljuština (2010)

The remains of the Vatin culture settlement were very modest (Fig. 4). They were recognised as architectural remains of above-ground objects with preserved floorings, open hearths, groups of pottery and pits. Consequently, habitation activities are quite difficult to be reconstructed. The objects with preserved floorings were few in number — seven in total. For most of them dwelling function was presumed by the explorers. Further analysis led us to alternative solutions for some of the objects.

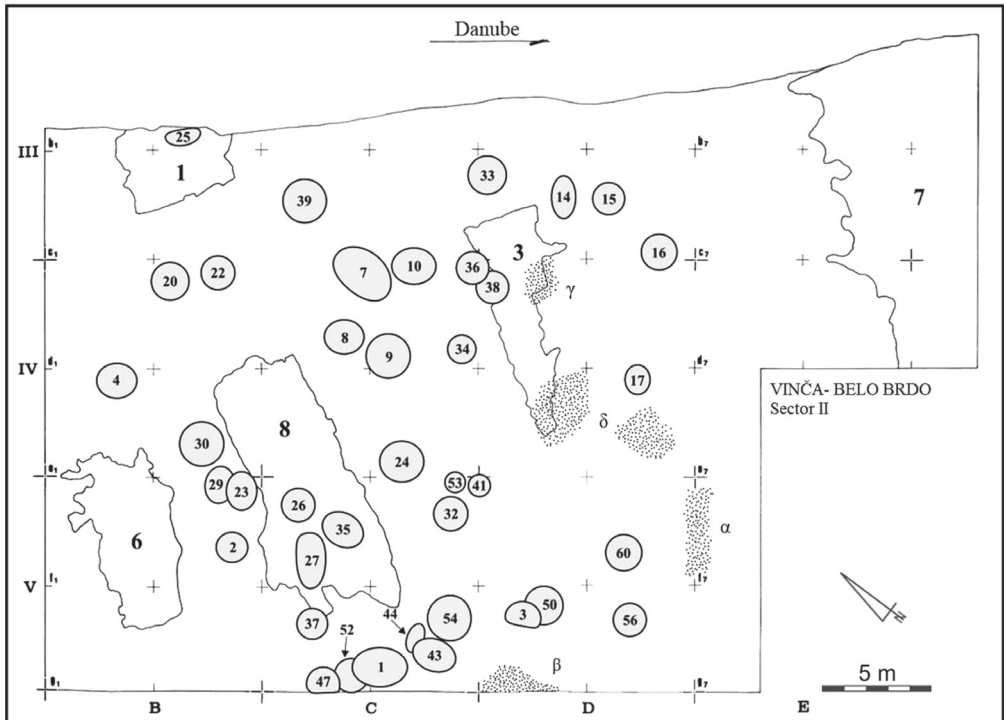


Fig. 4. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Ground plan of the Vinča culture houses and the Vatin culture pits (1–60) and architectural remains (α – δ); drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

Object α

The object is located in sq. D-V/2-E-V/1. The first to indicate existence of a residential object, although considerably damaged by the mediaeval graves, was a small surface under fired clay. Next to it were a zone with sooth and pieces of poorly fired clay and a zone with pale yellowish clay, which could have served as a levelling layer or unfired earthen flooring, as well as some groups of fragmented pottery (two-handled beakers with rhomboidal rim, beakers with incised

volute, beakers with handles of *ansa lunata* type etc.). When the next layer was removed, an area with significant number of river shells was discovered (Fig. 5). On the surface with crumbled daub, i.e. red and brown fired clay, speckled with soot and ashes, Vatin culture pottery was found together with fragmented animal bones. A zone paved with Vinča culture pottery, originating from the stratum of the Vinča culture settlement into which the Vatin culture objects were dug is next to the zone with shells and partially overlapped by it. The preserved part of the object does not provide sufficient information to reconstruct its appearance. The part is slightly arcuate in construction, some 2.65 m long and 0.50 m wide, composed of larger pieces of fired daub and broken stones. On the inner side of the arcuate part of the construction a hearth (some 0.90 m in diameter) was discovered. Parts of the collapsed construction of fired stone slabs presumably belong to the hearth in the zone where they are tangent to it. While removing the remains of the object, a lot of Vatin culture pottery sherds were found. A significant number of the pottery was found after removing the daub and stones, around the hearth. Below the features, there were remains of a Neolithic object which served for levelling in the course of building the Bronze Age object. Some fragments of a Bronze Age *pyraunos*, in the form of fired daub with wattle armature and circular vents, were discovered beneath the hearth.

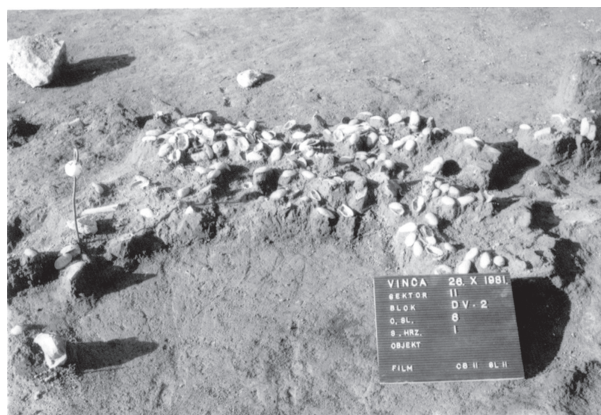


Fig. 5. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture object α ; photo from documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

Object β

The object was detected in the sq. D-V/3 (Fig. 6). It is partially overlapped by an open hearth. Unearthed were parts of an object of light materials, whose bigger share goes beyond the western profile of the sector II. It was recognised as surfaces of fired clay, between which three post holes were set. On the flooring surfaces there were traces of soot and ashes, river shells and animal bones.

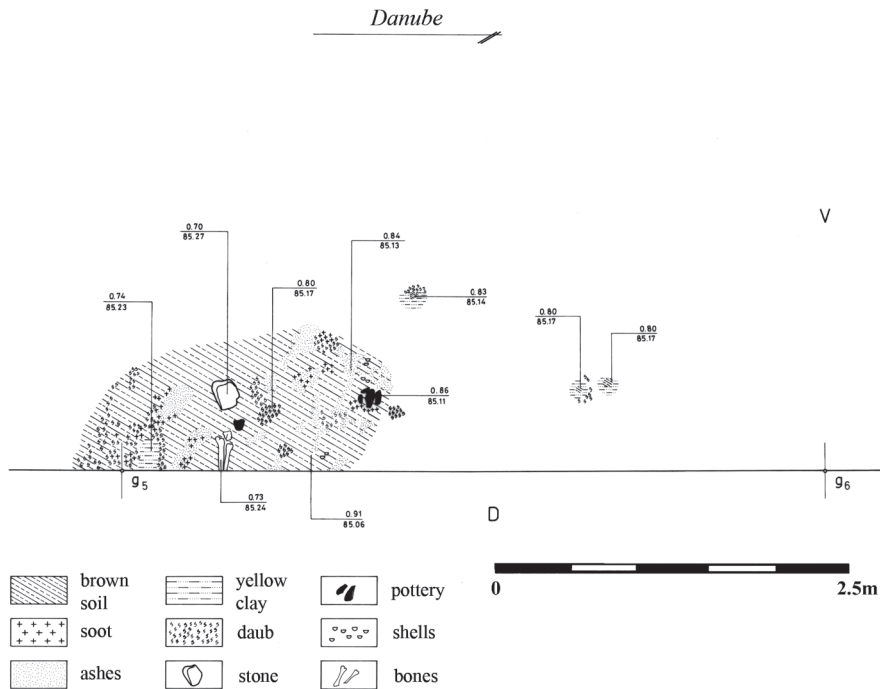


Fig. 6. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture object β ; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

Two posts, 12 cm in diameter, whose holes had a thin loamy lining, were next to each other, while the third one, 20 cm in diameter, was 1.50 m from them. Presence of the Vatin culture pottery indicates that the object was built during the Vatin culture occupation of the site.

A find from the same layer in the same excavation square — a crucible with a narrow, conical recipient (Fig. 12:8) — should be taken into consideration when functional determination of the object is in question. Since the hearth remains were also detected nearby, it is possible to assume that the object was not a dwelling, but a workshop for metal processing, perhaps with a patio.

Object γ

A large Vatin culture object, which damaged the middle and eastern part of Vinča culture house 3, was discovered in sq. D-IV/1. It was recognized as a surface under scattered parts of fired clay, big broken stones and smaller sandstone slabs lying on a yellow clay daub and partially on a layer of soot and fired clay. The object is without recognisable contours, but its attribution to the Vatin culture

is undeniable: it is filled with the Vatin coarse ware. The stones and slabs were used in construction of the supposed Vatin culture house or hut of light material, as in the case of the rest of the objects from the Vatin culture settlement, but the function of the building elements is insufficiently studied. Origin of the big pieces of daub in the constructions is unclear, too. There is a possibility that the daub belonged to the damaged Vinča culture houses.

Southern part of the Vinča culture house 3 also reveals traces of intervention of the Bronze Age population. The first indicator of existence of a Bronze Age object by the southern part of the Vinča culture house 3 was presence of the Vatin culture pottery and smaller sandstone slabs. Much clearer was the situation on the next excavation level, when a surface with scattered pieces of daub, the Vatin ware, stones and boulders followed by a deer antler *in situ* was found.

Object δ

In sq. D-V/2-D-IV/4 a surface under pieces of daub and smaller stones was unearthed (Fig. 7). It was approximately 6m long and 1.50–2 m wide. The pieces of daub and stone lied on a thin layer of brownish soil filled with the Vatin culture pottery, which was also found around the daub and stones. Levelling of the terrain prior to building of the object was ascertained.

The architectural remains of the Vatin culture objects were accompanied by a number of units defined as “groups of pottery”. The group of pottery from sq. C-IV/4 (Fig. 8) comprised nine almost completely preserved vessels (seven coarse pots, a cup and a whole profile of an elliptical boat-shaped vessel) and two large fragments of two pots of different size. In the preliminary opinion stated by the explorers in the field journal, the pottery assemblage probably represented a Vatin grave or cult place, considering presence of daub in the immediate vicinity. However N. Tasić (Tasić 1977, 19), publishing the finds from the most recent campaign, emphasized that no trace of ashes or burnt bones had been found during the excavations. In accordance with it, the hypothesis of the grave context was already implicitly rejected. Consequently, the rest of the pottery groups was analysed as an integral part of the Vatin culture settlement pottery assemblage.

As stated above, the architectural remains of the Vatin culture above-ground objects were identified as surface zones of scattered larger pieces of fired clay and daub, broken stones and small slabs accompanied by fragmented Vatin culture pottery, as well as three hearths. Deficiency of architectural elements for reconstruction is the reason why it cannot be concluded how these objects looked like. One of the possible solutions is light above-ground architecture. On the basis of the position of the defined objects, one can presume that more distinct settlement finds can be expected at the part southwards and south-westwards from the explored zone.

A plentiful supply of material from the Vatin culture settlement at Vinča-Belo Brdo came from the pits, which were discovered at the site in great number —

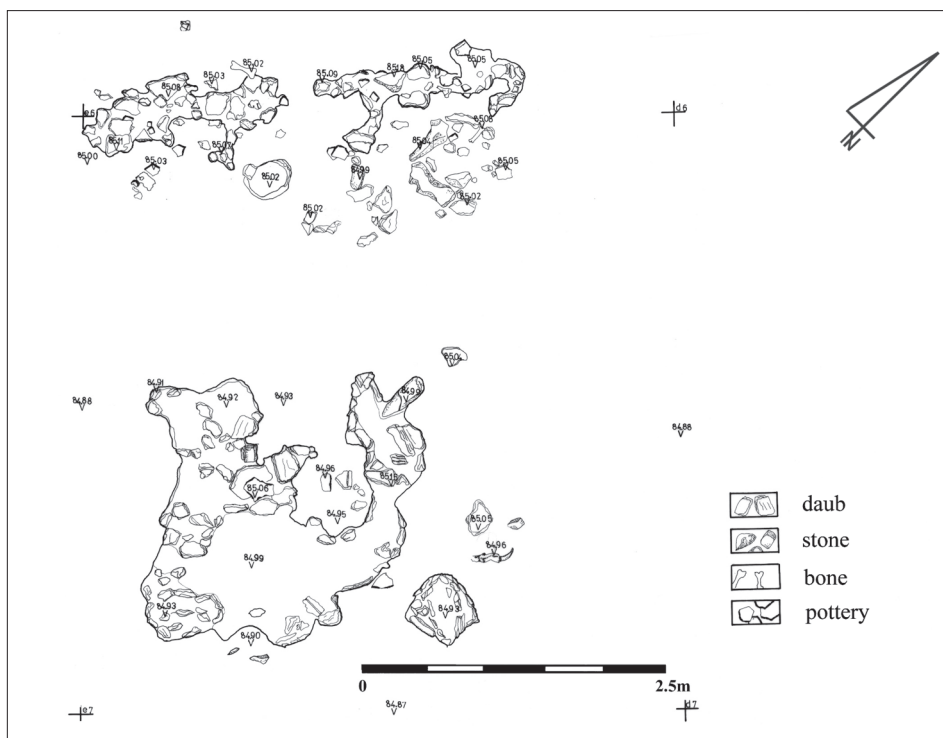


Fig. 7. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture object δ ; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

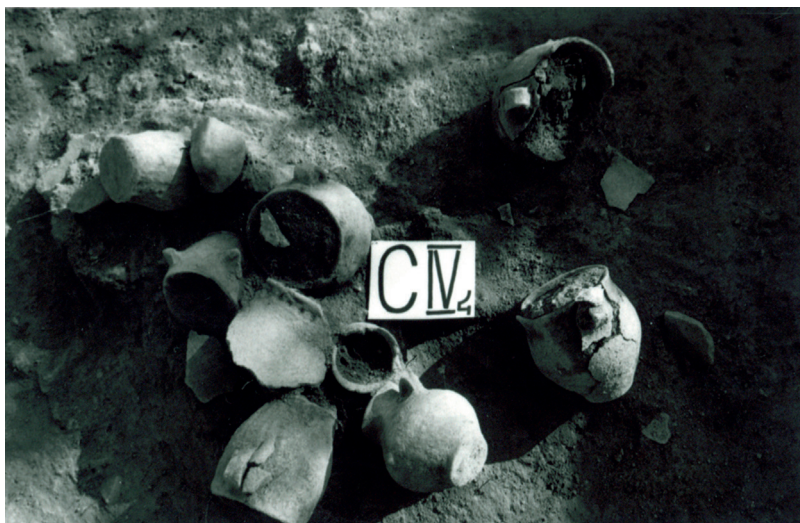


Fig. 8. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The group of Vatin pottery from sq. C-IV/4; photo from documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

44 in total (Fig. 4). The circular or elliptical pits were 1–3 m in diameter, but they were not detected from the level of digging in. Consequently, their depths vary from 0.15 to 0.65 m. There was also a larger dug-out object with presumed dwelling function. As for the pits, their filling comprised material of different cultural attribution, which is the consequence of digging into a rich cultural layer. The fact that the pits were filled with pottery sherds and other small finds attributed to the Vatin culture, animal bones, horns and antlers, river shells, pieces of wattle and daub, pebbles and broken stones, soot and ashes (*cf.* Table 1), led to the definition of the objects as waste pits. Pit No. 26 (Figs. 9, 11) is a good example: being that it was dug into the Vinča culture house 8, it contained Neolithic debris as well as Bronze Age house refuse, including a broken *pyraunos* and a pyramidal weight or firedog. Pit No. 33 (Fig. 10) diverges from the pattern: its filling contained significant number of animal bones, among which there were parts of pig and roe deer skeletons and a complete skeleton of a young red deer, together with remarkably small number of pottery fragments and river shells. In contrast, there were no animal bones in the content of the pit No. 27, so its function should be reconsidered.

Stylistic-typological analysis of the whole pottery corpus revealed that the material was stylistically homogenous, no matter the context. It fits perfectly into the frames provided by the analysis of the pottery from the two neighbouring Banatian sites in Pančevo and Omoljica. Most of the pottery is monochrome, with a horizontal flute at the vessel's belly, followed by warty protuberances as the exclusive decoration. This is the manner of decoration on the slightly profiled, sometimes carinated beakers, with two rounded handles exceeding the level of the rim (Fig. 11:6; 12:2; 13:1). Seldom can the rims be rhombic. Undecorated can be deep bowls (Fig. 13:2), as well as cups with one handle and elliptical boat-shaped vessels (Fig. 14:4). Typical Pančevo-Omoljica incised decoration, comprising spirals, volutes and garlands (Fig. 11:6; 12:7; 14:1, 2) can be found on the beakers, bowls and bowls-kantharoi. In some cases handles are shaped like "rabbit ears" (Fig. 11:5; 12:3; 13:1). Beakers of this type can have rhombic rims and slanting flutes on the belly. The typological repertoire is completed with coarse ware: two-handled pots (Fig. 11:2), *pyraunoi* (Fig. 11:7) and storage vessels — amphorae with horizontal facets on the belly (Fig. 13:3) and large *pythoi* (Fig. 11:3). Significant number of double vessels, easily recognised by the junction between the two recipients (Fig. 14:3), proved that this type of pottery could have been manufactured both as fine and coarse ware, which is the case with elliptical boat-shaped vessels, too. Ceramic production extended also to little tables (Fig. 11:1).

Imported objects are a reliable testimony about contacts of the Bronze Age villagers from Vinča-Belo Brdo with other contemporary cultures. The opulent pottery yielded a few fragments of Cornești-Crvenka type (Fig. 14:4) and a small beaker attributed to the culture of incusted pottery of Southern Transdanubia from the pit No. 4 (Tasić 1984b, 80, sl. 57), as well as some incusted fragments from the pits No. 10 and 48.

Tabele 1

Vinča-Belo Brdo. The Vatin culture pits — general information.

Pit No.	position square	dim. (m)	depth (m)	Filling content									
				Vatin culture pottery	animal bones	horns and antlers	river shells	wattle and daub	pebbles and stones	soot and ashes	other (stone, bone and clay artefacts)		
1	C-V/3-4	2,45 × 1,60	0,35	x	x		x	x		x			x
2	B-V/2	1,50	0,30	x	x		x						
3	D-V/3	1,00	0,45	x	x		x	x				x	x
4	B-IV/1-3	1,90 × 1,65	0,50	x	x							x	x
7	C-III/3-C-IV/1	1,90	0,44	x	x			x		x		x	x
8	C-IV/1	1,80 × 1,55	0,55	x	x			x				x	x
9	C-IV/2	1,85 × 1,80	0,95	x	x			x		x		x	x
10	C-III/4-C-IV/2	2,00	0,20	x	x			x		x		x	x
14	D-III/3	2,05 × 1,50	0,35	x	x					x		x	
15	D-III/4	1,35	0,35	x	x			x		x		x	x
16	D-III/4-D-IV/2	1,65 × 1,55	0,08	x					x	x			
17	D-IV/4	1,15 × 1,23	0,13	x	x			x		x			x
20	B-IV/2	1,98 × 1,75	0,25	x	x			x		x		x	
22	B-IV/2-B-III/4	1,60 × 1,42	0,29	x	x					x		x	
23	B-V/2	1,75 × 1,35	0,80	x	x					x		x	x
24	C-IV/4	1,80 × 1,65	0,80	x									x
25	B-III/2, 4	1,70	0,62	x									
26	C-V/1	1,60 × 1,45	0,40	x	x								x
27	C-V/1	2,65 × 1,60	0,25	x									x
29	B-IV/4 & B-V/2	1,75 × 1,65	0,80	x	x			x					x

NB: No!
Function?

30	B-IV/4 & B-V/2	1,80	0,55	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
32	C-V/2	1,70 x 1,60	0,45	x	x							x
33	C-III/4 & D-III/3	1,95 x 1,70	0,28	x	x	red deer skel.	x					
34	C-IV/2, 4	1,40 x 1,35	0,27	x	x	x						x
35	C-V/1	1,55 x 1,25	0,32	x	x							x
36	C-III/4, C-IV/2 & D-IV/1	1,60	0,20	x	x							x
37	C-V/3	1,40	0,85	x	x	x	x					
38	C-IV/2 & D-IV/1	1,60 x 1,50	0,10	x	x	x	x					x
39	C-III/3	2,10 x 2,00	0,30	x	x	x				x		x
41	D-IV/3-D-V/1, C-IV/4 & C-V/2	1,10 x 1,00	0,65	x	x	x	x					
42	C-V/3, 4		0,15	x	x							
43	C-V/3, 4	1,80	0,40	x	x	x	x					x
44	C-V/4	1,00	0,15	x	x							x
47	C-V/3	1,40	0,35	x	x	x	x					x
48	C-V/4	1,80	0,35	x	x	x	x					x
50	D-V/3	1,85 x 1,65	0,50	x	x	x	x					
51	D-V/3, 4	1,55 x 1,40	0,20	x	x							x
52	C-V/3, 4	1,60	0,30	x	x	x	x					x
53	C-V/2-C-IV/4	1,05 x 0,95	0,55	x	x	x	x					x
54	C-V/4	1,90	0,50	x	x	x	x					x
55	E-V/3	1,40	0,30	x	x	x						x
56	D-V/4	1,50	0,50	x	x							x
57	D-V/3		0,30	x	x							x
60	D-V/2	1,65 x 1,70	0,95	x	x	x	x					x

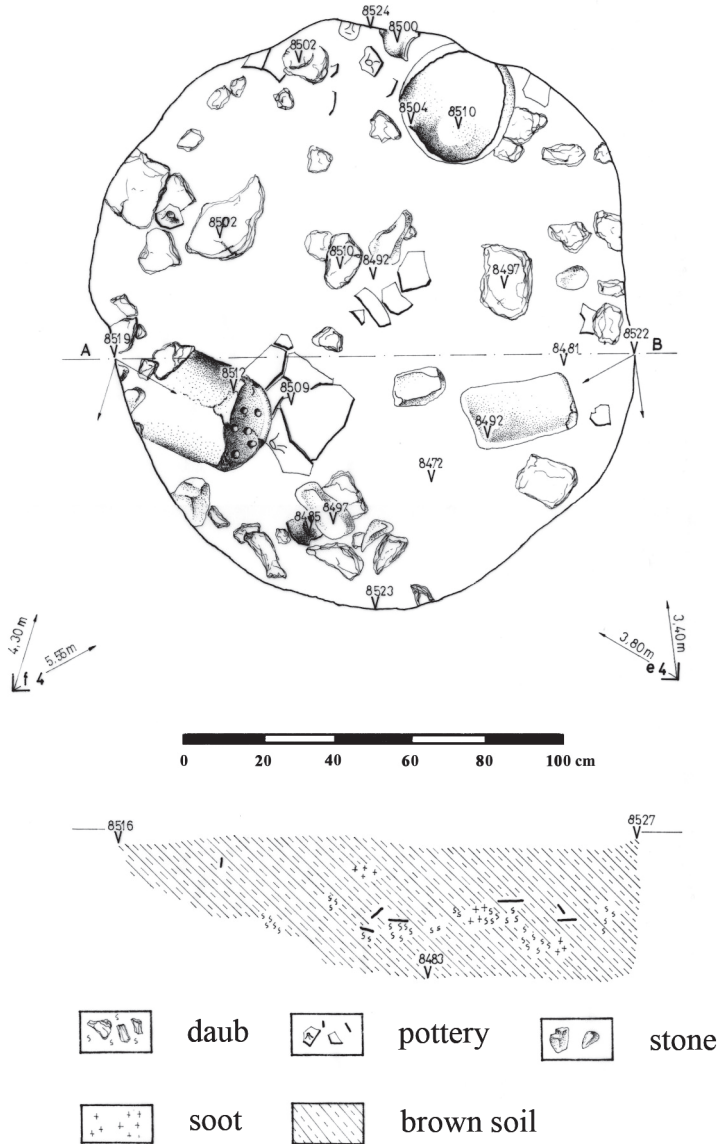


Fig. 9. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Pit no. 26; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

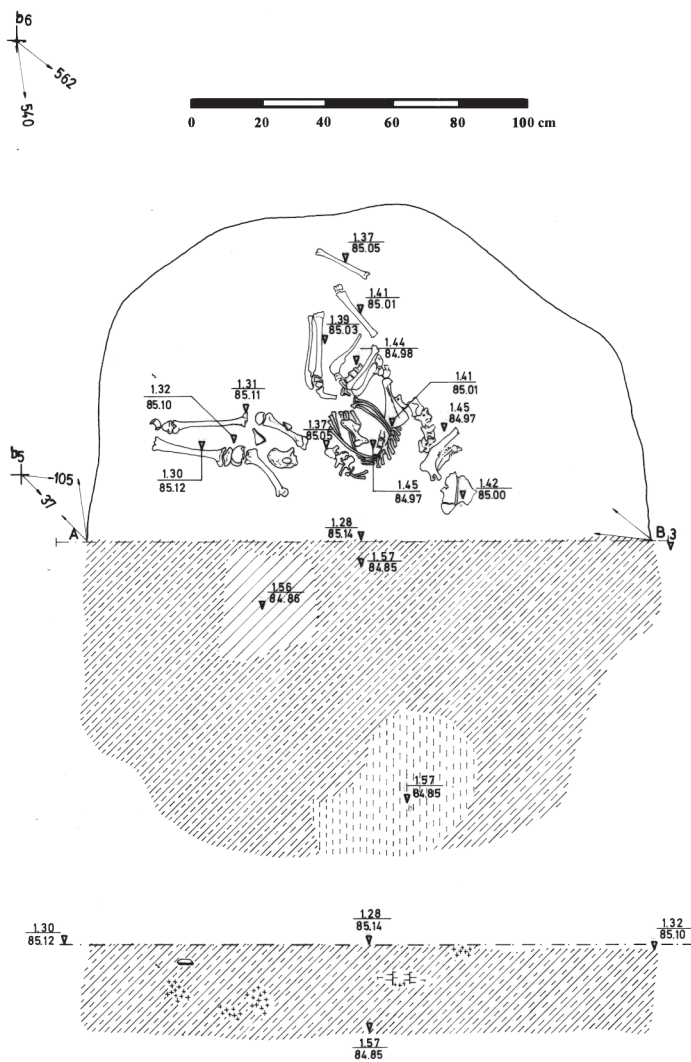


Fig. 10. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Pit no. 33; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

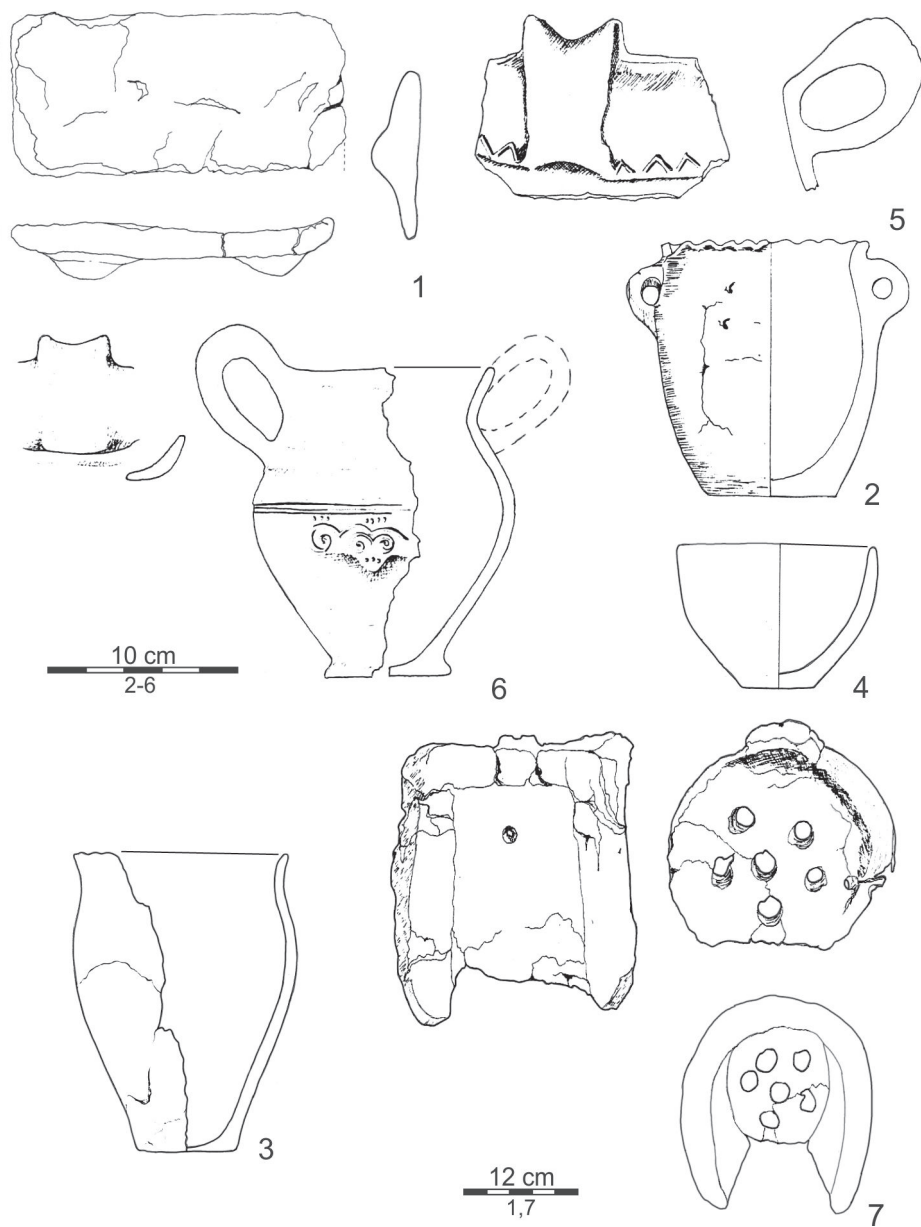


Fig. 11. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Pottery from pit no. 26; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

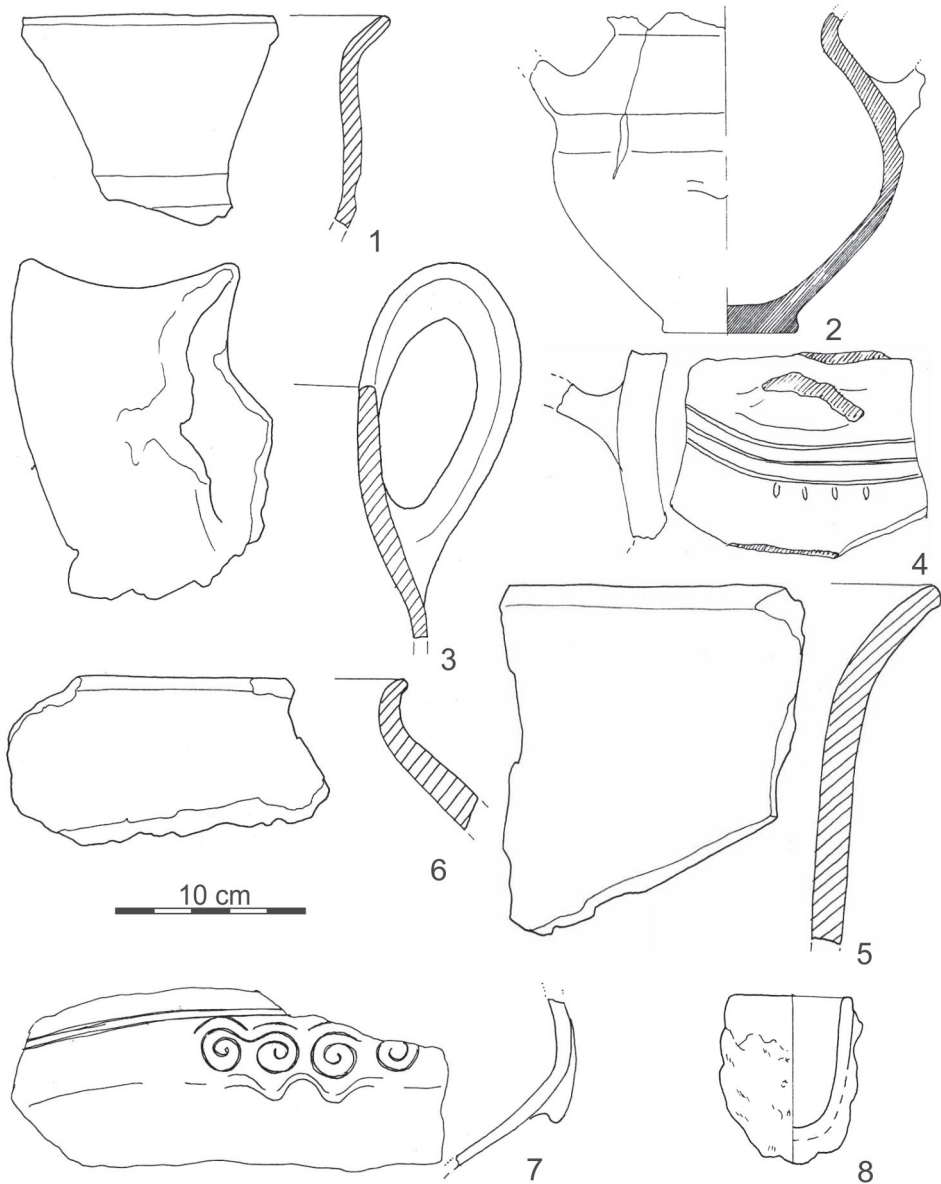


Fig. 12. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture pottery; drawn from the documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

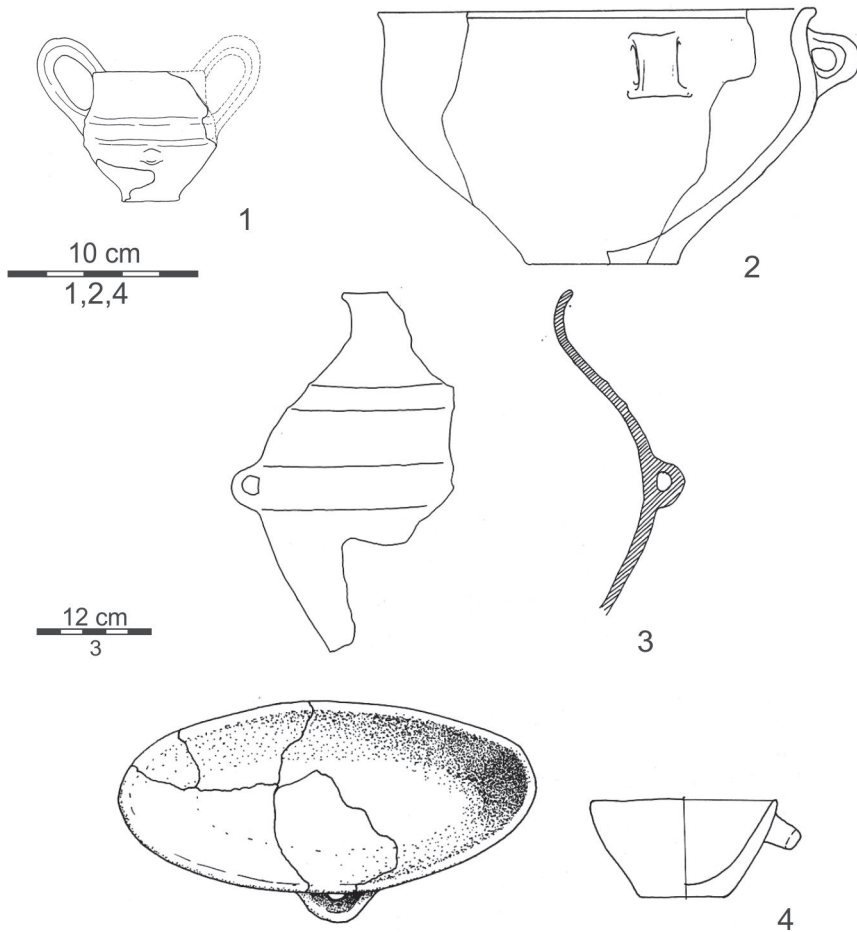


Fig. 13. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture pottery; documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

On the basis of data obtained from the explored area it can be concluded that the site was inhabited intensively during a shorter period (Tasić 1984b, 79; Ljuština 2010, 102). According to these characteristics and its topographic position, the settlement at Vinča is similar to the Vatin culture settlements in Syrmia: Stari aerodrom in Bežanija (Zemun), Gomolava in Hrtkovci, Surčin, Šančine in Belegiš, Stari Slankamen *etc.* (*cf.* Fig. 1).

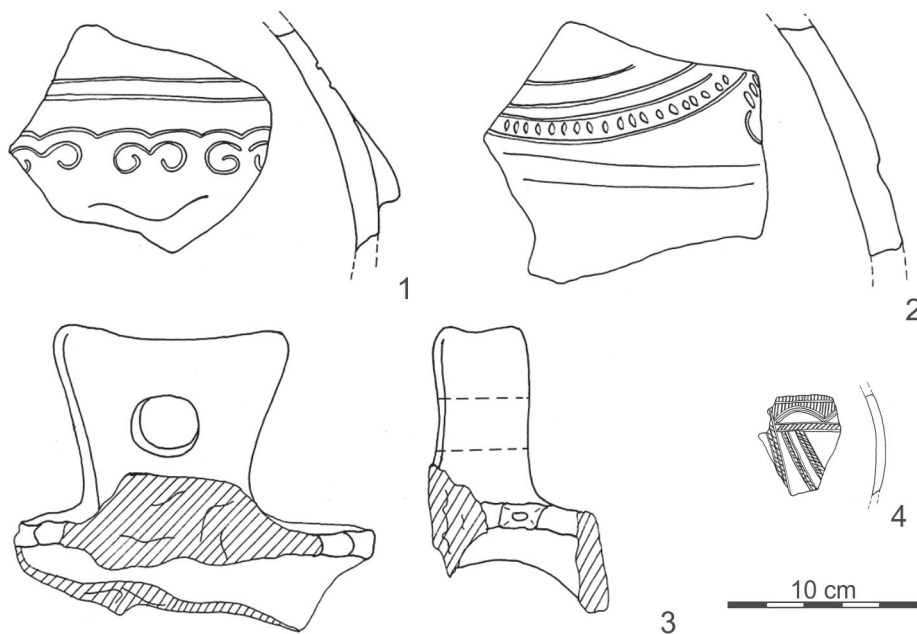


Fig. 14. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. The Vatin culture pottery; documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade



Fig. 15. Vinča-Belo Brdo — sector II. Sandstone mould; photo from documentation of Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

IV. LIVING ON THE BALKANS WITH A VIEW OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

No matter the similarities the Vatin culture settlement at the site of Vinča-Belo Brdo had with the mentioned sites in the zone of south-eastern Sarmia, there are many characteristics it shared with the Banatian neighbours. Strong is the impression that during the Bronze Age the Danube was not the river to divide regions and their communities, but to connect. The Middle Bronze Age communities — bearers of the Vatin culture, obviously lived by and from the river. They chose to establish their south Banatian settlements on the river terraces. In the case of Omoljica-Zlatica, they chose the same space which had previously been settled by the Eneolithic Baden culture, as noticed in vertical stratigraphy by the explorers (Truhović 1968, 95) and confirmed by some fragments of published pottery (*cf.* Radojčić 2013, 30). The site Vinča-Belo Brdo repeated the similar sequence in prehistory: after the settlement of the Kostolac culture (following the Baden culture settlement, whose ceramic repertoire and the published material from Omoljica match perfectly) was abandoned (Spasić 2010), it was only at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age that the site was settled once again. It's only that in the case of Vinča the new settlers chose to build their village on the already formed Neolithic *tell*, right on the right bank of the Danube. However, Vinča itself is not the Bronze Age *tell*: the Vatin culture settlement is only a settlement on a *tell*, completely different in comparison with what a contemporary *tell* (Kienlin 2015) is expected to be. Consequently, neither the south Banatian sites Omoljica-Zlatica and Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana nor the north Balkan site Vinča-Belo Brdo can be found on the map of the Bronze Age *tells*, *tell*-like and mound-like settlements in the Carpathian Basin by F. Gogâltan (Gogâltan 2012, 8, Fig. 1). On one hand, if the stratigraphical observations by V. Truhović (1968) are taken into consideration, with the focus on the notices about changes in the Bronze Age pottery style — from mainly undecorated, to fluted and incised, one should not have any doubts that Zlatica in Omoljica is a multi-layered site, with significant share of the Bronze Age strata in its vertical stratigraphy. On the other hand, Vinča-Belo Brdo did not supply any traces of vertical stratigraphy in the Bronze Age. Problematic is the fact that our insight into the Vatin culture settlement is only partial. Larger part of the settled area remained either unexcavated or permanently destroyed and all of the conclusions should be taken with caution (Ljuština 2015, 85, 86). If we return to the definition of *tells* and if *tells* are considered to be more than just multi-layer settlements — a whole 'package' connecting together central settlement structure, social, economic and certain environmental factors, this expanded definition can be used to classify the territories of all the cultures of the Middle Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin (Molnár, Nagy 2013, 6), including the Vatin culture. Unfortunately, the current state of research of the Vatin culture restricts this approach and its full application postpones for the future.

Ceramic repertoire from Vinča indicates the same tradition in modelling the vessels and manner of decoration as in the cases of the sites in Pančevo and Omoljica. Since physical-chemical analyses of the pottery have not been carried out for any of the sites so far, the basic stylistic-typological analysis is the principal tool to rely on. It indicates that the settlement at Vinča-Belo Brdo was established exactly when the Pančevo-Omoljica style reached its apogee. In a plausible scenario the people from the south Banatian sites were the ones to settle the right bank of the Danube, bringing from the core zone of the Vatin culture not only their pottery tradition but the whole package of subsistence strategies and lifestyle. Due to the limited archaeological exploration, very few material facts are the confirmation for the previous statement. However, these material confirmations, no matter how scanty and unconvincing might seem at first glance, must not be neglected. Diversity of the archaeological material coming from the Vatin culture settlement at Vinča is broadened by the objects made of fired clay, apart from pottery. They can formally be divided into: spindle whorls, spools, firedogs and/or weights, beads, pendants, wheels and figurines (Ljuština 2010), and unfortunately not all of them have their analogies in the published material from the two Banatian sites. It is sure that the current state is not only the result of exploration but also of insufficient publication of the material kept in the museums' collections.

Spindle whorls are a direct proof of textile manufacture at a site. As for Vinča-Belo Brdo, they were found both in the pits and in the cultural layer. They were made with care, their outer surface being polished and in some cases decorated. According to the shape, there are conical (Ljuština 2010, Fig. 4:1, 2, 4, 6) and bi-conical (Ljuština 2010, Fig. 4:7) items. Conical spindle whorls have flat or slightly concave lower part (at the bottom of the cone) and are sometimes decorated with incised geometrical patterns. Bi-conical items are not decorated, their lower cone being much shorter than the upper one. Analogies can be found at the other sites belonging to the Vatin culture and all over the Carpathian basin (Ljuština 2010, 102 with references). It is important that the sites Omoljica-Zlatica and Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana provided good formal analogies, too. The spindle whorls from the sites can be conical with flat or slightly concave lower part (Omoljica-Zlatica: Radojčić 2013, 41–43, kat. 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92; Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana: Radojčić 2013, 66–68, kat. 164–167, 169–172), bi-conical (Omoljica-Zlatica: Radojčić 2013, 41–43, kat. 86, 91, 93; Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana: Radojčić 2013, 67–69, kat. 168, 173–176) and flat (Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana: Radojčić 2013, 69, kat. 177, 178). There are some items decorated with incised and dotted geometrical patterns (Omoljica-Zlatica: Radojčić 2013, 42, kat. 88; Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana: Radojčić 2013, 69, kat. 176).

Big pyramidal firedogs, sometimes defined as weights, at the site Vinča-Belo Brdo (Ljuština 2010, Fig. 5:1–4) can be put in the hearth context with quite a certainty. These clay utensils are intended to hold logs above the hearth (in order to improve air circulation for faster burning), or to hold skewers above the

fire for cooking. In the particular case, one of them (Ljuština 2010, Fig. 5:2) was found inside the hearth in the unit C-V/1. The rest of them came from the mixed cultural layer and the pit 26. They are all characterised by large dimensions, rough surface and a small cylindrical perforation at the narrower part. Pyramidal firedogs of almost the same shape and size were found at numerous Bronze Age sites all over the Carpathian basin, and in some cases, depending upon the context, are interpreted as loom weights (Ljuština 2010, 102, 103 with references). Two analogous items which came from the excavations of the site Pančevo-Najeva Ciglana (Radojčić 2013, 70, kat. 179, 180) complement the collection, but do not provide information about context of finding. For that reason, their functional attribution remains open, giving possibility to be used even as roof weights, tightening the roof cover made of light material, such as reed and straw (Ljuština 2015, 87).

Apart from local pottery production, it is confirmed that the Vatin culture villagers at Vinča had numerous production activities: carpentry, stone processing, textile production, manufacturing bone and antler product of high quality, even metalwork (Ljuština 2010, 103). Indicative of the metalwork activities can be both the architectural remains of the object β in sq. D-V/3, and an exceptional and rare find of a mould for spearheads casting (Fig. 14). The mould was published by R. Vasić (2015, 61, Tab. 16:212). It was discovered in the levelling layer of the part of the site close to the Danube stream (sq. C-III/2). The item is one half of a two-part mould, made of sandstone. The dimensions of the preserved part are $16.2 \times 8.2 \times 3.7$ cm. It was used for casting short spearheads with vertical central ridge and handle socket with frontal perforation. Two arcuate incisions can be noted at the place where the spearhead is connected to the socket. In the same part of the mould there is a channel which could have served for casting of long pins.

Textile production is one of the crafts recognized by the tools used in the process. Most of the items from the collection of the clay objects from Vinča-Belo Brdo (spools, spindle whorls, loom weights) speak in favour of the statement. Unfortunately, most of the tools and utensils made of wood or any other organic material are lost for good, but usage of loom is more than likely. Textile itself was not preserved, either. That is why it is not known what kinds of fibres were in use. There are more proofs for manufacture of textile fibres of animal origin. Spindle whorls were certainly used in wool spinning, and the analysis of the animal bones from Vinča-Belo Brdo confirmed presence of sheep (Arnold, Greenfield 2006, 64). Spools can be connected with the textile manufacture, but they could be used for fibres of both animal and plant origin. Consequently, crop and animal husbandry is under no question mark.

V. CONCLUSION

The strong impression that during the Middle Bronze Age dwelling at the site of Vinča-Belo Brdo was influenced by the Danube and the land across the great river cannot be avoided.

During the Bronze Age the Danube was not the river to divide regions and their communities, but to connect. In the past and up to now, the river has not only been proven to be of great importance of communication and connection, but also an insurmountable barrier, dividing empires and civilisations. The Vatin culture settlements fortunately benefited from being established by the Danube — a great connective factor in the vibrant world of the Middle Bronze Age (Ljuština 2015). The modest remains of the settlement at Vinča provided only a silhouette of former life activities. According to our present knowledge, the settlement, whose existence was presumed to be relatively short in time, was intensively occupied and simply abandoned. Its explorers did not find any trace of violent actions which could have led to an end.

It would be premature and scientifically groundless to promote the Vatin culture settlement at Vinča into an *apoikia* established by the Vatin culture inhabitants of Omoljica and/or Pančevo. Still, the settlements on both of the Danube's banks share so many characteristics, starting from the position in the vicinity of the river, at the places which had already been settled in prehistory, prior to the Bronze Age. The Middle Bronze Age is the time of so-called pottery cultures in the broader region of the Carpathian Basin and the pottery style is always the first impressive part of archaeological material to draw attention. The Vatin culture settlements on both of the Danube banks share the same pottery fashion, but also the wider repertoire of finds illustrating their lifestyle through material culture. What's more, comparison of the settlement at Vinča with the settlements from the core territory enlightens how the Vatin culture was integrated into a wider space of the Bronze Age cultures of the Carpathian basin, influencing the Balkans hinterland, too. Water routes were undoubtedly of primary importance for the contacts. Confirmation of land transport, in which horse played an important role, can be found, too. What remains insufficiently clear is what goods the Bronze Age people traded in. A certain import of northern Cornești-Crvenka pottery was confirmed for Vinča as well as for the south Banatian sites. The import from the zone of the South-Transdanubian incrustated pottery was found at Vinča. Was it just a likable pottery from the neighbouring or more remote regions, or we are faced with the containers whose primary filling, obviously desired by the Vatin culture people, remained unknown to us? Pottery and other sorts of finds bear traces of strong influences from other regions. There are multiple proofs of vivid contacts with near and remote parts of the Bronze Age Europe. The repertoire of the clay objects, with formal analogies from a whole range of the Bronze Age settlements in the Carpathian basin, strongly supports this statement (*cf.* Ljuština 2010). At this point, it should be emphasized that the connectivity among the Middle Bronze Age communities

was tried to be expressed only through visible products. Invisible elements of connectivity, such as knowledge, practices, ideologies, beliefs etc. are hidden behind veils of past millennia.

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