THE VINČA GROUP - (ALMOST) 40 YEARS ON

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Abstract

My inspiration for an undergraduate dissertation (1972) on the origins of the Vinča group and, then, a PhD on the group as a whole (1976) came from a 1971 trip to the Belo Brdo tell. The PhD was transformed by new analyses to become the 1981 BAR publication - a processually-oriented work which, in an unexpected way, remains the only general synthesis of the Vinča group until this very day.

In this self-critical and -reflexive paper, based upon the keynote speech I was invited to present to the Tübingen 2019 'LBK – Vinča' Conference, I look backwards to those aspects of the synthesis which remain relevant; examine those parts which have been overtaken by more recent research; and consider why it is that the synthesis has yet to be superceded.

It is interesting that landscape studies and especially settlement studies remain some of the most relevant parts of my research. Although new fieldwork has led to incrementally better distribution maps, the basic premises remain true of the changes in settlement structure from Starčevo to Vinča.

The remote sensing revolution, the Bayesian analyses of unimaginably large numbers of AMS dates and the contextual recording of finds have made the greatest impacts on Vinča research. Site planning and site size studies have progressed enormously. The analyses of site densities of figurines still poses important research questions but lacks the current contextual detail of figurine deposition.

Apart from congenital idleness, I cannot imagine why no other specialist has written a new synthesis of the Vinča group. It is not that no new 'cultural syntheses' have appeared in the Balkans - syntheses are not yet a threatened species. Admittedly, a rather large amount of new material has appeared in the last 50 years - together with a tendency to paint pictures on

smaller canvases. Yet my hope for the next 50 years is that **several** new general syntheses will be written on the Vinča group.

Introduction

The Vinča group of the Central Balkans was one of the two principal research foci, together with the Linearbandkeramik, at the Tübingen Conference of March 2019. I was invited to give a keynote speech on the Vinča group, presumably because a synthesis of the group that was published in 1981 (Chapman, 1981) was the most recent synthesis to be produced. In this self-critical, self-reflexive essay, I confront the uncomfortable question why this 1981 account has not been replaced. After an autobiographical introduction covering the years 1969 - 1981 and a summary of the contents of the synthesis and its intellectual context (Section 1), I consider which parts of the synthesis no longer work (Section 2) and which parts remain of research relevance (Section 3) before considering why a new synthesis has not yet been produced (Section 4).

1. Autobiographical notes and the content and context of the Vinča synthesis.

In my grammar school in Plymouth (Devonport High School), I was discouraged from studying archaeology at university on the grounds that there were few or no career opportunities - particularly by Mr. Jack Nicholas , one of my Classics teachers. However, I was not to be discouraged and was accepted as one of some thirty students comprising the second undergraduate cohort at the University of London's Institute of Archaeology. The staff member who made the greatest impression on me was Dr. John Nandris, whose Carpathian shepherd's costume at Institute football matches, miniature looms on which he wove Early Neolithic pottery motifs and (last but not least) entertaining lectures persuaded me that Balkan prehistory was worth my attention. Despite other staff members trying to discourage me from this path (for the same reasons that my Plymouth teachers had used), I accompanied John Nandris on the ill-fated fieldwalking expedition to Yugoslav Macedonia (1971), which ended with a night in Kavadarci gaol and the loss of the expedition's funding as a fine for illegal camping. Instead of putting me off the Balkans, this episode made it more intriguing and I continued my trip that summer to Belgrade, which was hosting the International Conference of the *Union des Sciences Pre- et Proto-historiques*. During this conference, I

heard lectures from some of the most famous Balkan prehistorians of the 20th century, including Vladimir Milojčić, Vladimir Dumitrescu, Marija Gimbutas and Milutin Garašanin. At the time of the conference, John Nandris and I visited the tell of Vinča - Belo Brdo, whose massive Danube-facing section of over 8m made an indelible impression on me. This led to an undergraduate dissertation on Vinča origins (Chapman, n.d.) and the opportunity to study for a PhD on the Vinča group with John Nandris (1972-6). The extended highlight of this time was a one-year Travelling Scholarship to Belgrade (1974-5), where I was officially registered to study with Dr (later Professor) Branko Gavela but, in fact, where I studied with a Vinča scholar of far greater distinction - Professor Milutin Garašanin. Since my 'supervisor' was disinclined, for political reasons, to meet me in the University, we met weekly in the Garašanins' flat in Trg Marksa i Engelsa to drink *crnogorska loza* and discuss Vinča. That year, I travelled around museums and specialist libraries, visiting over 100 Vinča sites with my then wife Maja Martinović, drinking unimaginable quantities of museum coffee and studying vast numbers of Vinča sherds and other objects. The product of this research (Chapman, n.d.a) was a two-volume colossus known to my American friend Greg Johnson as the 'Blue Whale' on account of its size, colour and resistance to outside engagement. Its major merit was to force the University of London to set a maximum word limit on an archaeological thesis of 100,000 words. This was a work of solid empiricism and detailed documentation, for the Vinča group was one of the largest and longest-lived groups in Balkan prehistory (see below, p. xxx). In the four thesis years, I was in fact unable to find the time to analyse these vast data - merely to collect and present them. It was not until I was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, with Professor Martin Harrison, that I found the time for analysis and a social interpretation. This turned into the publication which brought me to Tübingen in 2019 - the two-volume 1981 Vinča synthesis, whose contents are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of contents of Chapman (1981) *The Vinča culture of south east Europe*.

DATA	INTERPRETATIONS
List of 639 Vinča sites, their sizes and available information on stratigraphic depth and site size	An attempt to move away from a Vinča-tell-centred view of the group
Site-based settlement sequences in 36 regions	Identification of the tension between

	ritualized social order and a ranked society
Pottery sequences in 5 provinces based upon analyses of assemblages from 120 sites	Correlations between size/length of occupations, land use potential, distribution of PRF objects and directional trade
Settlement patterns in 9 regional studies, two of which presented in detail	Plough agriculture led to first use of chernozems and smonicas, as well as brown forest soils, to produce a 'ritual surplus'
List of 22 types of 'special' Prestige / Ritual / Fine ('PRF') object classes, with their distributions	Social significance of advances in metallurgy, ornamental stone-carving, fine wares and monumental figurines

The research which led to the 1981 book spanned the ten years from 1972 to 1981. This was a revolutionary decade in prehistoric archaeology, beginning with a high peak of New Archaeology (Clarke, 1972), its transformation into Processualism (Binford, 1972) and the publication of the 'Symbolic and Structural Archaeology' Cambridge Conference (Hodder, 1980) which was to lead to the post-processual reaction. It was a period when Site Catchment Analysis was still in its heyday (Higgs, 1972, 1975) and when a ^{14}C date was still a rare beast, with few dates per site (only two were available at the time from the Vinča - Belo Brdo tell!). During this decade, open area excavation in the Balkans was very rare (here Vinča - Belo Brdo was a positive exception: Vasić, 1932 - 36), when dry-sieving and flotation were very rarely practised on excavations (for early examples, Sitagroi, Greek Macedonia: Payne, 1975; Selevac, Serbia: Tringham & Stevanović 1990, 76) and when contextual recording using single contexts was almost unknown (e. g, at Sitagroi, Northern Greece: Renfrew 1970). This was a time when it was still illegal in Serbia[1] to conduct fieldwalking surveys, with state control over maps and tensions between former Yugoslavia and the Warsaw Pact countries (see my chapter in the Selevac monograph: Chapman, 1990). Lastly, and importantly for the understanding of Central Balkan prehistory, the vast majority of scholars considered Vinča-Belo Brdo as **the** key to the whole Vinča group (Garašanin, 1979; Stalio, 1968; Stevanović & Jovanović 1996). In summary, the 1981 book was a child of late Processualist thinking, free of complicating factors such as sex and gender and with no realistic possibility of writing a context-based narrative about a vibrant prehistoric group. Its

[1] While it was possible to conduct field survey in Hungary and Croatia in the 1980s, restrictions on field survey were still extant at this time in both Bulgaria and Romania.

publication preceded by several years the major excavation reports for Divostin (McPherron & Srejović 1988) and Selevac (Tringham & Krstić 1990a) which were such pioneering statements about contextual prehistory[2].

2. Discard

It is inevitable that many, if not most, of the conclusions of a research monograph will be called into question, if not dismissed out of hand, after a generation of new work. Milutin Garašanin used to tell me that half of a scholar's output would be out-of-date within two decades of publication (pers. comm., 1974 - 5). In the core sections of this chapter, I have sought to evaluate what has survived from the 1981 monograph and what has been superceded. It seems to me that there are five areas where supercession has been most pronounced:- objects and their colour and brilliance; houses as activity areas and in terms of their taphonomy; the tripartite revolution in site context - AMS dates, geophysics and contexts; settlement & subsistence; and exchange networks and directional trade.

2.1 Objects, colour and brilliance

In all of the hundreds of person-days I spent on examining thousands of Vinča dark burnished ware sherds and whole vessels, I managed to ignore the two most striking general properties of Vinča fine wares – their colour (viz., they were dark) and their sheen (i.e., they were burnished) (Fig. 1). There was an overwhelming preference for black-and-white images in field research, finds studies and all but the highest-prestige museum exhibition catalogues (compare the black-and-white images of the 'Arts of the First Farmers' catalogue (Renfrew, 1969a) with the colour images of the 'Goldschätze der Thraker' catalogue of the Vienna exhibition: Fol, 1975). Those old Black-and-White days lasted well into the new millennium (Jones & MacGregor, 2002), with a chapter I wrote on colour and brilliance in Balkan prehistory (Chapman, 2002). It was clear that colour gave us new ways of seeing the past, which formed part of the approach known as the 'New Materiality' (Ingold, 2007; Jones, 2012; Miller, 2005; Pollard, 2008). More recent Balkan research has shown how this approach can deliver subtlety to the interpretation of many kinds of material culture, such as

[2] I did not make any systematic attempt to study unpublished material from either of these excavations: *mea culpa*.

the green and black colours of metal ores and pigments at Belovode and Pločnik (Radivojević & Rehren, 2016).

2.2 Houses as activity areas and in terms of their taphonomy

One striking (and regrettable) characteristic of the 1981 book was my reliance on the reflectionist view of house assemblages - that these were essentially 'living assemblages' which reflected the social practices engaged in by members of a household bin a prehistoric house. This reflectionist view was a central component of the American approach termed 'household archaeology, of whom central proponents were Netting, Wilk (Netting et al., 1984) and Kent (1984, 1987). A similar approach is still used for Vinča house assemblages by Marco Porčić (2012a). The principal methodology for this approach consisted of the search for 'activity areas' based upon the household distribution of furniture, fittings and objects. In the 1981 book, I complemented this approach to the houses at the site of Beograd - Banjica (for a new approach to this site, see Tripković, 2007) with an evaluation of the significance of household ritual in the Neolithic, summarised as "a degree of ritual inter-penetration into the deepest levels of the social fabric" (1981, 83).

A major alternative to the reflectionist view of houses and their assemblages was developed in the 1980s by Ruth Tringham as a result of her excavations at Selevac (Tringham & Krstić, 1990b) and Opovo (Tringham et al., 1992; cf. Russell, 2012) and her contribution to the Gomolava project. This was the view that houses were burnt deliberately and that the resultant 'burnt house assemblages' were comparable to grave goods in the mortuary domain - objects supplied to the house before its burning by the household members but also a range of other households (Tringham, n.d.; Stevanović, 1997). In terms of my 1981 interpretation, if house assemblages were 'house-death assemblages', created to increase the theatricality of deliberate house-burning, does this make them less ritualised? The answer that I formulated was 'not necessarily', since house-death assemblages were structured by the same ritual order (the 'Big Other': see below, pp. xxx - xxx).

I did not advance the explanation of the deliberate burning of houses in the 1981 book since the theory was in its infancy at the time. But this explanation now appears the most likely to answer the problems of all major alternatives – viz., accidental fires, house fumigation, attack by rival communities or even attacks by the *Sturmtruppen* of the Vinča-C- *Schock*

(Lazarovici, 1987). This problem of how to create a burnt clay mass at high temperature was re-defined through the recent Ukrainian Trypillia megasites project experiment at the megasite of Nebelivka. Here, we constructed two 4 x 3m 'Neolithic' houses, burnt one of them and excavated its burnt remains (Johnston et al., 2018, 2019) (Fig. 2). Forming part of a long succession of Cucuteni - Trypillia house experiments (Burdo, 2011), this experiment was only the second to produce a *ploshchadka* (the irregular mass of burnt house clay which forms the main object of house excavation) and the first experiment to produce vitrified daub. The most interesting result was the quantity of timber required to achieve such a convincing burn – $30m^3$ of firewood in comparison with $3.44m^3$ timber to build the house. Other experiments used far less fuel, with the result that they could not produce a *ploshchadka*. The strong inference to be drawn from the Nebelivka experiment is that the reason for burnt houses is most likely and in most cases to be a deliberate practice. This means that house assemblages were more likely to be created for the performance of house-burning rather than to constitute a reflection of everyday household practices. An interesting implication of the deliberate house-burning based upon large quantities of timber was the effect of site environments from house-burning.

2.3 The tripartite revolution in site context - contexts, AMS dates and geophysics

The most dramatic, far-teaching changes in approaches to the excavation of Vinča sites concerns the tripartite revolution in contexts - context-led recording of site features, Bayesian modelling of AMS dates and large-scale, rapid geophysical investigations.

The recognition of contexts not only improved stratigraphic precision, often through the use of Harris matrices (Harris, 1979), but was also essential for a better understanding of objects and where they were discarded. Although a minority of prehistorians continues to deny the significance of context in archaeology (e.g., Bailey, 2005), the majority obtains useful results from the study of the co-variation between depositional context and object form and decoration (e.g., Gaydarska et al., 2007). The bivariate plot of Vinča figurines vs. excavated area (1981, Fig. 95) was derived from site data with no feature contexts! Much original work on figurines has been written in other contexts (see chapters in Insoll 2017) **but** this has rarely been applied to the study of Vinča figurines (for an exception, see Conkey & Tringham 1995). Equally, I proposed an interpretation of ritual centres on the basis of differences in the density of figurines discard but, crucially, with an almost total lack of contextual information.

Most of the research on Prestige, Ritual and Fine Ware (PRF) finds were also developed without contextual information (1981, 69 - 77), undoubtedly weakening the proposed correlations between sites with high PRF densities and the high levels of their arable potential. The main result of the lack of contextual information in 1981 was the restriction of most interpretation to a processualist mode rather than the more sophisticated recent social theorising written on, for example, the Gomolava burials (Borić, 1996), houses (Porčić, 2012b) and the settlements known as *obrovci* (Tripković & Penezić, 2019).

The TOTL Project ('The Times of Their Lives') has made the crucial breakthrough in the establishment of fine-grained, detailed Neolithic chronologies. It is the merit of the TOTL Project to have established precise AMS frameworks for the settlement occupations of two Vinča sites - the Vinča - Belo Brdo and Uivar tells - and two 'hybrid' Vinča - LBK flat sites - Versend and Szederkény (Whittle, 2017; Whittle et al., 2016; Tasić, Nenad et al., 2015, 2016; Drașovean et al., 2017; Jakucs et al., 2016, 2017). To take just one example - the Belo Brdo tell - the Vinča levels lasted from the early 53rd century BC to the late 46th century BC, with a gap of 120 - 200 years from the latest Starčevo occupation, itself dated from the mid-57th to the mid-55th centuries BC. The grand total of 220 AMS dates showed an unbroken Vinča occupation of c. 800 years, at an average stratigraphic build-up of 1m per century, with many burnt house horizons (e.g., Stalio Horizons IV, V and VI) but a gap of 3 - 4 generations of unburnt houses between Horizons III and IV (Fig. 3). The time between horizons varied between 0 and 115 years, with steady development on pottery forms and minor changes every 2 - 3 generations. Three major changes were identified: the change from Vinča-A to Phase B1 at 8m KOTE[3], the Vinča-'*Schock*'[4] at 6m KOTE and the change from the Vinča C/D to Vinča-D phases at 4.1 - 4m KOTE (Tasić, Nenad et al., 2016). It is inconceivable that such a fine-grained chronology could have been created in the 1970s.

There are two points which I emphasised in 1981 which can now be seen to be in error. First, the asymmetry[5] between Phases A – C (Early Vinča) and Phase D (Late Vinča) (1981, 18)

[3] The term 'KOTE' was the term used by M. M. Vasić in his 1929-34 excavations to refer to the site datum from which he measured depths of the structures or objects found in his excavations (Vasić 1932-6).
[4] The term 'Vinča-Schock' has been used by Gh. Lazarovici to refer to what in his view is a profound and sudden change in Vinča pottery, caused in his view by an invasion of Anatolian groups into the Balkans (Lazarovici 1987).
[5] The 'asymmetry' referred to here was the separation of the four Vinča phases 'A' – 'D' into an Early Vinča phase (A – C) and a Late Vinča phase (D), in contradistinction to the more usual division into two symmetrical phases - Early (A + B) and Late (C + D) (for examples, see Fig. 3).

was correctly disputed by Borić before TOTL (2009) and confirmed by TOTL. Secondly, the TOTL dates for Vinča-C shows this phase on the tell was much longer than I proposed (1981, 18). Moreover, the latest Vinča-D material on the tell found in the new Nenad Tasić excavations was later than the latest Vinča-D found on the tell by Vasić (Tasić, Nenad et al. 2015). This suggests but does not prove that the full sequence of Vinča-group material was represented at the tell. Such a claim requires a much wider AMS dating programme from a larger sample of Vinča-D sites than has so far been dated (even more extensive than the programme reported in Whittle et al. 2016), since the far larger number of dates relating to Phases A, B and C in comparison with Phase D biases the Bayesian modelling against a long Phase D duration.

The spatial-contextual revolution took place long after 1981, dating to the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent possibilities in remote sensing. As Otto Braasch (1995, 109) noted: 'Europe is half-blind', meaning that aerial photography was rare in the South-Eastern half of Europe. Two principal developments stemmed from the new methodologies: the identification of enclosures at many Neolithic sites, especially around tells, and the recording of off-tell areas of occupation at many Balkan sites. Both of these developments were reinforced with the introduction of landscape-scale geophysical investigation in the 2000s, seen in the use of traditional gradiometers (e.g., the Magnetometer-gradiometer GSM 19 gw model, used at Stubline-Crkvine: Crnobrnja et al., 2009) but, even more so, in the use of vehicular caesium magnetometry (e.g., the SENSYS MAGNETO® MX V3 Survey System, used at Bordjoš: Hofmann et al., 2019). There was hardly any settlement plan data available to me up to 1981, with the exception of the open area excavations of Vasić at the Vinča tell (Vasić, 1932 - 36), the Beograd - Banjica excavations (Todorović & Cermanović, 1961) and the caesium magnetometer surveys of Divostin and Grivac (McPherron & Ralph, 1970). Now, it is standard practice for even small-scale projects (e.g., Oreškovica: Borić et al., 2018) to generate a geophysical plan for the creation of an excavation sampling strategy. Major projects, such as at Uivar, have used a combination of geophysical investigations and Bayesian modelling of 182 AMS dates to produce a continuous, 500-year sequence for the tell (52nd to 47th centuries BC), a complex series of off-tell occupations and a succession of ditches in use from the start, with the final ditch excavated by the Tiszapolgár community (Draşovean et al., 2017) (Fig. 4). I fully expect the discovery of more pit sites, as was found at Gradac - Zlokućani (Vasić, 1911) but not recognised as such.

2.4 Settlement & subsistence

The three main proposals developed in the 1981 monograph consisted in the territorial and pedological evidence for ard agriculture in the Vinča group at Potporanj, Divostin and Lipovac; the proposal for dairying in Early Vinča phase; and, in the most general sense, the way that variations in regional arable potential became the basis for settlement concentrations for the first time in the Early Vinča phase. Since 1981, there has been a long and generally fruitful debate over what Andrew Sherratt (1981) termed the 'secondary products revolution' - subsequently re-named the 'secondary products scenario' (Sherratt, 1997). While this chapter is not the place for a detailed re-consideration of the date of the introduction of secondary products in the Vinča group (but see Chapman, 2020), it may be useful to highlight the main changes from Sherratt's 1981 model (Table 2).

Table 2 Secondary products – first usage and intensification (source: Chapman, 2020)

Innovation	**First usage**	**Intensification**
Dairying	6200 - 5300 BC	5300- 4500 BC
Ploughing	? Phase 6000 - 5300 BC; more likely, 5300- 4500 BC	???
Wool	5300- 4500 BC	???
Cattle symbolism	5300- 4500 BC	4000 - 3000 BC
Wheeled transport	4700 - 4000 BC	? 4000 - 3000 BC
Equid domestication	4000 - 3000 BC	???

The postulated relationship between regional arable potential and settlement concentrations would probably be revised now in the form of more nuanced proposals. However, I maintain that it is still accurate to claim that “there was no such thing as a unified, homogenous Neolithic economy” (1981, 91).

2.5 Exchange networks and directional trade

The study of trade and exchange was one of the key areas for processual archaeology (Renfrew, 1975; Ericson & Earle 1982). Most of these works made the assumption that the

patterns in the exchange data were directly correlated with the form of the society which engaged in that trade, as in Renfrew's (1975) classic case of 12 modes of exchange relating to 12 different social structures. The more generalised conclusion proposed in the 1981 monograph was that evidence for social ranking could be found in the importance of directional trade in obsidian and *Spondylus* to Vinča-Belo Brdo and the Vršac sites and the creation in these two areas of local Central Places. The notion of Central Places can now be re-formulated in terms of network theory (Chapman, in prep.) but the claim for social ranking on the basis of exchange data is best withdrawn.

One of the strengths of the 1981 volume was the variety of exchange data introduced for 20 different materials / object types. However, the division of exchange into short- and long-distance (greater or lesser than 50 km and related to two forms of transhumance) has now been superceded by Neustupný's (1998) much better scheme for spatial relations - now itself further refined (Chapman, in prep., Fig. 2.3b) (here, Fig. 5).

Almost forty years of additional exchange data has created entirely new patterns in exchange patterns. An exemplary study by Katalin Kovács (2013) identified two exchange routes in the Carpathian Basin – an internal and an external route, with variations in the materials exchanged along each sector. Further South, materials from the latest excavations at the Vinča tell have shown that the Phase D exchange network was stronger than the earlier evidence suggested, especially in the case of *Spondylus* (Dimitrijević & Tripković, 2002).

In summary, it is hardly surprising that many of the proposals advanced in the 1981 research have been overtaken by events. In particular, perspectives on chronological modelling and settlement planning have changed beyond recognition and the marked emphasis on processualist interpretation, with its reflectionist views on house assemblages and exchange patterning, now looks rather dated. However, it appears that there are some facets of the 1981 study which continue to hold some relevance for Vinča research. In the next section, I dissect the research conclusions which may have survived the test of time rather better.

3. Retention

I suggest that there are seven areas of research in which the 1981 proposals may still retain some merit: Vinča origins; regional variability in material culture; network connectivity; site size and subsistence resources; intensification of production; regional settlement narratives; and the integration of the vast Vinča network, based upon the concept of the Vinča 'Big Other'.

3.1 Vinča origins

The question of the origins of the Vinča group was one of the main issues in the debate between diffusionists (e.g., Garašanin 1961; Srejović 1963) and those supporting local, independent development (e.g., Mellaart 1960; Renfrew 1969). In 1981, arguing in favour of the latter, I proposed a centre-periphery hypothesis with an initial development in the North Šumadija spreading to three other areas in the Vinča distribution - the Ovče Polje; South East Hungary & North Bosnia (1981, 38 - 9). The TOTL chronology also supports local, independent invention, but with a spread from North to South (South-West Hungary to North Macedonia) (Whittle et al., 2016). This notion is not so very different from János Makkay's (1990) Proto-Vinča hypothesis, in which dark burnished ware fabrics and carinated vessel shapes were typical of the middle phase of the Körös group and diffused from there further South to create the Vinča A assemblage.

The main mechanism I proposed for the local evolution of the Vinča group focussed on a selection of dark burnished wares with carinated forms and channelled decoration from a wide range of different fine ware decorative styles and motifs, from the Late First Temperate Neolithic, the Earliest Linearbandkeramik and specific Vinča-A motifs. Thirty-five years later, the TOTL Project used the mass of new AMS dates to suggest a rapid establishment of the Vinča-A Phase, with earlier dates in the Northern part of the Vinča distribution. Whittle et al. (2016) defined the early centuries of the Vinča evolution as 'a time of considerable cultural and material fluidity', not only hybridization. Have we really moved on much from the 1981 formulation?|

3.2 Regional variability: against the Vinča-centric view of the Vinča group

The TOTL Potscapes paper uses Bayesian modelling of 490 AMS dates in an attempt to define a rigorous, new chronology for the entire Vinča group (Whittle et al. 2016). It must be said that, despite the large number of dates, there is a long ^{14}C tail wagging the TOTL Bayesian dog. Figure 37 (here reproduced as Fig. 6) shows a series of long overlaps between each pair of Phases for the whole group, with the obvious inference that different ceramic assemblages were in use at the same time in adjacent Vinča regions. This was a major conclusion from the 1981 comparative-stratigraphical analysis (1981, Chapter 3); it is reassuring to find it confirmed with the new AMS dates.

3.3 Network connectivity

Significant advances in the archaeological applications of network analysis have been made since 1981 (e.g., Knappett, 2011, 2013). However, the basic notion of the representation of schematic exchange connectivity by Phase had already been developed (1981, Fig. 165), with schematic diagrams for Phase-by-Phase artifact diffusion (1981, Fig. 166). At that time, the analysis showed that maximum connectivity was reached in the Early Vinča 2 phase (now Phase B). The TOTL version of this narrative was presented in the 'Potscapes' paper (Whittle et al. 2016), showing an “extended social network” in Phases B – D1, with a peak of connectivity in Vinča-B2. This conclusion sounds familiar.

3.4 Site size and subsistence resources

In 1981, I argued on the basis of Site Catchment Analysis of over 60 Vinča settlements that territorial resources within a 5-km radius were sufficient for site sizes of up to 30ha. One of the most comprehensive modelling of settlement size and resources was carried out by Shukurov et al. (2015) with regard to Trypillia settlements. Although the soil resources available to Vinča sites - rarely chernozems, more often brown forest soils and smonicas - were by no means as rich as the Ukranian chernozems, it is interesting that Shukurov's team reached a very similar conclusion for Trypillia sites - settlements of up to 35ha could have been self-sustaining over the long term. This is an important claim given recent claims for larger Vinča settlements such as Stubline - Crkvine, Belovode, Pločnik and Drenovac (Crnobrnja et al., 2009; Belovode; Šljivar & Kuzmanović-Cvetković, 1997; Perić et al., submitted), although the geophysical bases for these claims await full publication. My estimate of the size of the Drenovac multi-period settlement (25ha: 1981, 43 & Fig. 71) has

more recently been revised upwards to 40ha for the Late Vinča phase (Perić et al., submitted). My earlier claim for large Early Vinča sites can also now be disputed at Selevac, where the villages of coeval houses might have covered only 3 to 15 ha, with horizontal displacement of new houses (Tringham, 1990b, 584-5). The geophysical investigations at Turdaş (Mischka et al., 2012) showed a settlement far smaller than the 65-ha originally claimed (1981, 44). The 100-ha area of Potporanj - Kremenjak is clearly an exaggeration, since the site consisted of small areas of intensive ceramic deposition with large gaps between these areas, albeit within an area totalling 100ha (fieldwork visit with Dr. Ivana Pantović, July 2011). The implication continues to be that there is a strong probability that sites of a total size larger than c. 35ha were multi-period sites whose maximum size at any period scarcely exceeded 35ha.

3.5 Intensification of production

The 1981 discussion of intensification of production was careful to distinguish between full-time specialists and productive specialisation, on the one hand, and intensification of production, both for subsistence, house-building and crafts, on the other (1981, 129-30). At the time, I could find little convincing evidence for the former but consistent evidence from many sites for the latter. It is worth noting that Kaiser & Voytek (1983) developed the same argument for Selevac, especially in relation to lithic production and that Tringham used the same evidence for intensification of production more generally as one of the main planks of her Transformational model (Tringham & Krstić 1990b).

I have discussed subsistence intensification above (see p. xxx) in my treatment of Sherratt's secondary products scenario. There are two additional areas in which the notion of non-subsistence intensification is relevant – pottery production and copper metallurgy. The current absence of pottery kilns from Vinča sites may be illusory. I would now re-interpret the object type which I termed 'fired clay braziers' as a separator in a kiln, comparable to those published from Gumelniţa and Cucuteni contexts and also found in a secondary context (Ditch F1053) at Uivar (Whittle et al., 2016) (Fig. 7). This means that pottery kilns would have been widespread in what Sherratt (1976) termed 'metropolitan Vinča sites' in the main lowland valleys - a sign of at least part-time specialisation in pottery production (*contra* Amicone et al. 2020). Nonetheless, in the recent review of the relationship between dark burnished ware production and copper smelting, Amilcone et al. (2020, 120) conclude that while "it is not possible to exclude that a certain degree of specialisation in pottery

production existed among Vinča potters, no convincing arguments have been brought in thus far that demonstrated that this craft was a highly specialised activity carried out by professional figures that had privileged access to resources and technology".

The recent progress in archaeometallurgical studies have revealed that copper smelting at the sites of Belovode and Pločnik represented some of the earliest smelting in the world (Radivojević et al., 2014). However, Radivojević and Rehren (2016) have argued that, during its inception, copper metallurgy was most probably a non-specialised household activity, with craft knowledge passed between households and from metallurgists to potters and back.

3.6 Regional settlement narratives

Given the general lack of regional settlement studies in the 1970s in the Central Balkans (for an exception, see Barker 1975), my 1981 attempt to integrate palaeo-environment, soils, subsistence, site locational and site size data into regional settlement narratives was a pioneering study. In the succeeding four decades, several excellent regional projects have provided updates to the 1981 narratives, without necessarily making fundamental critiques of the 1981 interpretations. I refer to only two examples - the Middle Morava and the Middle Sava regions.

The Middle Morava region comprises two contrasting zones – a lowland basin of gently sloping, highly fertile land near the Morava and well-watered, rolling hill-country on both sides of the catchment. The initial gazetteer by Vetnić (1974) was interpreted as a pattern of increasing population density from the first farmers onwards, culminating in settlement expansion into Morava tributary valleys in the Early Vinča phase and a decline in Late Vinča site numbers (Chapman 1981: 50). Further data collection by Vetnić (1988) confirmed that the broad Middle Morava flood-plain remained the core area but showed a stronger emphasis on small, short-lived, perhaps seasonal Starčevo sites in the foothills West of the Morava and a switch to the foothills East of the Morava, starting in the late Starčevo phase but mostly in the Vinča period (Perić 2004, Map nos. 1 – 4) (here Fig. 8). This means that the pattern of cumulative growth posited in Chapman (1981) can no longer be sustained. Rather, there is a trend towards settlement nucleation in the Vinča period, with a smaller number of larger, longer-lived sites, such as Drenovac (see above, p. xxx), as well as left-bank contraction and

right-bank expansion in the settled areas. This new pattern is more comparable with the Šumadija sequence (Chapman 1990).

A transect across the Middle Sava region shows considerable altitudinal variation from the Sava floodplains to the summit of the Ćer Planina at 689masl. My investigations were based upon the original village-pub-based informants' surveys of Vasiljević and Trbuhović (see 1975 for a sample). My study showed the high degree of seasonal settlement dispersion at all altitudes of the region, with the emergence of large numbers of a hitherto unrecognised site type - the '*obrovac*' - a small, ditched settlement found mostly at medium altitudes in the flood-zone of the Drina tributaries known as '*drinjaci*' (1981, 100-1). Recent research by Boban Tripković (submitted) on *obrovci* confirms the pattern of marked seasonality while demonstrating that some of the *obrovac* ditches were of post-Vinča date.

The key conclusion from the 1981 studies demonstrated that strongly contrasting subsistence practices coexisted with broadly similar pottery usage. Nothing from subsequent regional settlement studies for Vinča sites has challenged this important result.

3.7 Cultural integration

The 1981 study of the spatio-temporal limits of the Vinča group showed that, at 190,000km^2, it was one of largest groups in Old Europe and also one of the longest duration (viz., 800 years). This can be compared with the Criş group (230,000km^2 and 700 years) and the largest group of all - the Cucuteni - Trypillia group (250,000km^2 and over 2,000 years). The first analytical framework for explaining this huge size and temporal duration was David Clarke's distinction between a 'culture' and a 'culture group' (Clarke, 1968: cf, his definition of a 'culture' (p. 285) with that of a culture group (p. 320)). While the former was a closely related, relatively homogenous group covering an area of 200 - 300km diameter, the latter was seen as a series of polythetically related 'transform cultures' covering areas of up to 1,200km. For the Vinča group, the latter definition of a 'culture group' fitted its time-space characteristics. However, this taxonomic distinction did little to explain how people using Vinča pottery maintained a common identity over such a long period of time and such a large area.

My avowedly processualist answer in 1981 focussed on the development of social controls within a highly ritualised social order, with some social ranking, underpinned by a huge number of figurines and an incised sign system. In retrospect, the importance of houses and pottery was underplayed at the time. In several important works, Marija Gimbutas' (1973: 1991) developed the concept of 'Old Europe' as exactly such a ritualised social order based upon the religious meanings of figurines and other ritual paraphernalia in the Balkan Neolithic and Chalcolithic. But Gimbutas was not seeking to explain the social integration of specific cultural groups, such as Vinča but rather the entire inter-regional pattern covering all of Old Europe. Here, I shall make a first attempt at sketching out a model for how the Vinča group in particular developed its own symbolic order.

At this juncture, I shall borrow from research by Bisserka Gaydarska and myself on the Ukrainian Trypillia megasites, in which we developed Slavoj Žižek's (2007) concept of the 'Big Other': an ubiquitous, shared symbolic order which existed only insofar as people believed in it. The two key features of the Big Other are that it is something which is sufficiently general and significant to attract the support of most members of society but, at the same time, something sufficiently ambiguous to allow the kinds of localized alternative interpretations that avoid constant schismatic behaviour. For the Trypillia group, we have outlined the materialization of the Big Other in houses, figurines and decorated pottery (Chapman & Gaydarska 2018) (Fig. 9). How does the concept of the Big Other work in the Vinča group?

While the 1981 study showed the diversity of Vinča material culture, it is clear that the material aspects of a Vinča Big Other must have been a normal part of everyday life, found on every settlement and accessible to every Vinča community. This means that, while the cultural significance of developments such as copper metallurgy and settlement enclosure cannot be overestimated, their relative rarity implies that they could not have been part of a ubiquitous Big Other. In one sense, the Trypillia Big Other provides an excellent comparative basis for working out the details of the Vinča Big Other - with the Trypillia houses, pottery, figurines and painted signs on pottery (Tkachuk 2005). The parallel practice on Vinča sites was the use of incised signs on not only pottery but also figurines, loom-weights and other objects as part of what Merlini (2013) has claimed was an early form of writing - the 'Danube Script'.

The settlement domain dominated the landscapes of the Vinča group, with mortuary remains patchy at best and a very small number of cemeteries. This meant that, as the single most prominent feature in the landscape, large timber-framed houses were, in effect, 'monumental' structures making a visual impression in their flat or rolling terrain. This designation applied particularly to the LBK-style long-house of some of the earliest sites, such as Versend and Szederkény (Jakucs et al., 2016, 2017). However, later Vinča communities built shorter, rectangular, timber-framed, wattle-and-daub houses that developed into a single overall tradition of vernacular architecture. No matter the size of Vinča settlements, people built houses of varying sizes, ranging from smaller (6m x 3m) to medium-sized (12m x 6m) to long houses (20m x 11m) (1981, Fig. 82). It could be argued that the Vinča house was fundamental to the Vinča phenomenon overall, with groups of houses of critical importance, especially in the earliest Vinča-A phase in South-West Hungary. Within the settlement domain, the Vinča house appeared omnipresent, structuring the whole of community life. Wilson (1988) expresses the means by which houses (in this case Vinča houses) dominated social space: "with long-term sedentism, time becomes anchored in space, whether intended to or not; time becomes repetition and recursiveness; hence, through the seasons and other cycles, continuity becomes an explicit feature of domestic life". The Vinča house was repeated again and again, within narrow parameters, each new building indexing past construction and dwelling practices as well as collective agency. The place of the house within the Vinča Big Other can hardly be disputed.

Turning to pottery, most Vinča fine wares were fired to a dark burnished surface, varying within sites between light grey and black in colour and degree of burnish / polish, and, to judge from available ceramic analyses (e.g., Spataro, 2017; Amicone et al., 2019: 2020; Amicone, this issue), fired for the most part to 800 - 900^{0}C by non-specialist potters (but see above, p. xxx). The aesthetic result of the technical achievements of pottery firing was a startingly attractive object that shone like an obsidian core, putting all other ceramics into the shadow. The combination of the new carinated shape with the new colour and the fabulous lustre provided a distinctive symbol of group identity and probably also ritual identity. I suggest that the colour symbolism and aesthetic appeal of dark, and especially black, burnished and polished wares were of major significance for their gradual emergence as the preferred fine ware over wide areas of Anatolia, the Aegean and the Balkans in the late 6^{th} and early 5^{th} millennia Cal BC and that these pleasing and significant effects were

appreciated and accepted locally in a wider process of diffusion. While surface brilliance is associated with ancestral powers and cosmological essences in many small-scale societies (Saunders 1999), the colour black may have symbolised a wide range of persons, states of being or places, varying between regions or even settlements but retaining everywhere its aesthetic attraction. These combinations of colour and brilliance on Vinča fine wares embodied the general and significant aspects of the Vinča Big Other which attracted most members of the communities across the Central Balkans.

In my categorical analysis of the pottery from House 7 at Beograd - Banjica (Chapman, 2006), the categorisation principles show a combination of minimal reinforcement of shape divisions by any decoration with a rarity of exclusive, oppositional rules relating form, surface colour, surface texture and decoration to each other. The broad division into decorated and undecorated wares, the emphasis on a single shape division and the clear opposition between dark and light wares and the emphasis on fine vs. medium and coarse wares – all of these relied on a simple binary principle that lay at the heart of the categorisation of Vinča pottery. Thus, there was a tension between oppositional categories, represented by the fundamental binary divisions in Vinča pottery, and cross-cutting principles, which softened the categorical opposites, suggesting that the oppositional principles were not necessarily supported by all of the society. The tensions between oppositional categories and cross-cutting principles were found in varying degrees in all Vinča pottery assemblages, showing the ambiguities so typical of the ceramic materialisation of the Big Other.

The combination of the massive assemblage of over 2,000 Vinča figurines at the Vinča tell (Srejović 1968; Tasić Nikola 1973) and the Mother Goddess interpretations of Marija Gimbutas (1974) have exerted a disproportionate influence on Vinča figurine studies. While the Mother Goddess framework has generally acted as a deterrence to novel or imaginative interpretations of meaning, investigations of the practice of black magic using figurines shows original potential within this canon (Draşovean, 1998). These twin foci have slowly been displaced by more recent contextual studies (e.g., the Selevac assemblage: Milojković, 1990). The depositional correlates of different stages in figurine biographies have been demonstrated by the association of transversally broken figurine parts with pits and complete figurines with houses at both Selevac and Divostin (Porčić, 2012b; Porčić & Blagojević, 2014). But the meaning of figurines in the Vinča world continues to challenge all specialists.

What was clear, even in 1981 (1981, Fig. 95) (here, Fig. 10), was that figurines were a feature of the vast majority of Vinča communities and played an important role in domestic ritual at a significant number of sites, even though the claims for public shrines ('temples') at Vinča sites such as the Parţa tell, Jakovo-Kormadin or Beograd-Banjica remained less than convincing (Lichter, 2014). We are moving beyond the patterns of regional figurine variation found at the pan-Balkan scale (Hansen, 2007) to an understanding of how figurines played an active role in the ritual performances of daily life. Despite variations in content between sites and across regions, figurines would have contributed to the Vinča Big Other by the repetition of form, gesture, mode of fragmentation and depositional practice - thus creating a widely shared system of ritual action. We are yet to reach an understanding of how formal figurine variations (e.g., the many 'types' of figurine head at sites such as the Vinča tell: Srejović, 1968) contributed to nuanced differences in ritual action, although large, seated, heavily costumed female figurines clearly had a different agency from small, unsexed, undecorated bodies. Whether the figurines represented deities, ancestors, lineage members or living family members - ill or healthy, victims or perpetrators - they embodied a powerful physical presence in many, if not most, households and were selectively drawn upon by one or many household members in domestic ritual. Figurines materialised the twin traits of the Vinča Big Other - significance and ambiguity.

The final aspect of the Vinča Big Other is the most controversial - the interpretation of the large number of objects with incised or painted marks as decoration, symbols or writing signs. The question of the signs had long been entangled with diffusionist models of the spread of writing from the Near East to the Balkans (Hood, 1967; Makkay, 1969; Renfrew, 1973); it is to the credit of Marco Merlini that we can now separate these two issues.

Winn's (1981) initial list of ca. 50 Vinča communities using a total of 210 incised signs was extended to 59 sites and 242 signs in his second inventory (Winn, 2004). However, Merlini's 2013 *DatDas* database shows that, far from being limited to the Vinča group, such incised signs were found all over Old Europe, found at over 200 sites, with 971 inscribed objects, 1,167 inscriptions (many objects have more than one inscription) and 5,421 actual signs (Merlini 2013: 404). This finding makes it complicated to claim that the incised sign system was exclusively part of the Vinča Big Other but it is clear that some of the largest incised sign assemblages were found at Vinča sites such as the Vinča tell, Turdaş and Tărtăria, the Vršac

group of sites and Beograd - Banjica. It is interesting that the strongest concentration of incised signs was in the Late Neolithic (the Vinča period), with far fewer in the Early Neolithic and the Copper Age.

However, one criticism of Merlini's case for an archaic script is the overall distribution of the signs, with only one sign found on over 100 objects, perhaps two other signs found on more than a further 20 objects and the distribution of 85% of incised signs limited to one single site (Altschuler & Christenfeld, 2003). This distribution casts doubt on the communicative success of a script whose readers/writers may never have seen other inscribed objects with similar signs in their entire lives. However, the cultural conventions invoked by the signs were indeed widespread and shared by widely separated communities (Winn, 1981), allowing the signs to act as an inter-group medium of ritual dialogue. Given that Merlini has never claimed that identical signs held the same meaning to readers in Transylvania and Thessaly, it is possible to interpret the signs as part of a widespread ritual communication network to record, protect, withhold or share sacred knowledge, with specific contexts playing an essential role in the attribution of meaning. This interpretation means that the incised sign system was incorporated in the Vinča Big Other but that it functioned as part of an even wider ritual network linking the Vinča group to other groups.

In summary, this first attempt at a characterization of the 'Vinča Big Other' helps us to think through a cognitive framework for the integration of a spatially huge, temporally enduring suite of communities. The Vinča dwelling houses not only created monuments in the landscape but also provided a safe living space for growing the household through newborn children (Gamble, 2007). Moreover, the house was the principal place for the agency of pottery and figurines in their contributions to a wide range of household practices, whether ritual or maintenance. This does not mean that the Vinča group was necessarily a series of 'house societies' (cf. Borić, 2008), since, in contrast to the East Balkan tells, there were few examples of house super-positioning on Vinča settlements. Challenges to the Vinča Big Other through the proliferation of alternative lifeways and ideologies (e.g., in the outer zones of the shrinking Vinča distribution in Oltenia, Transylvania, Southern Hungary and Bosnia in the Vinča-D phase) led to a diminution of the area in which the Vinča Big Other could claim relevant to the lives of open-ended communities in the wider Balkan network.

4. Why has there been no new Vinča synthesis since 1981?

According to the Mirriam-Webster definition, a synthesis represents "the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole." It is self-evident that no new synthesis of the Vinča group has been written since 1981. This conundrum raises two equally important questions: (1) how come the 1981 synthesis has survived so long when so many individual parts have been transcended?; and (2) why is it that no new synthesis has been written? Clearly, these questions are opposite sides of the same coin. I shall divide my answer between a consideration of global and local issues, starting with the former.

The most general reason for the lack of a new Vinča synthesis concerns the changes in political, cultural, scientific and intellectual attitudes to synthetic research from the late 1970s to the late 2010s. Simplifying this discussion for reasons of space, there was a long tradition of synthesis of European, if not world, developments in the United Kingdom, which was founded by Gordon Childe in the 1920s and reached its peak in Graeme Clark's three editions of his 'World prehistory' (Clark, 1961: 1969: 1977). Clark's tenure of the Disney Chair of Archaeology at Cambridge was marked by intellectual self-confidence and an expanded vision of archaeological synthesis, with Britain as the leading country for grand narratives and Cambridge as the British epicentre of archaeological developments. It is not hard to link this ideology with the dominant position of the British Empire, in which the narratives of the Other were skilfully woven together at the imperial centre and disseminated to the rest of the world, whose universities were in any case being colonised by Cambridge graduates. There is a case that many archaeologists of the 1960s and 1970s implicitly or explicitly accepted this ideology and published their doctoral research accordingly (e.g., Ruth Tringham's synthesis of Balkan prehistory: Tringham, 1971). The founding principles of social evolutionism (Sahlins, 1963; Service, 1962) were conducive to a progressivist narrative, being such a fundamental constituent of both 'New' Archaeology and its sibling Processual Archaeology (ref: Lycett & Shennan 2018) that a fresh series of synthetic publications soon emerged integrating systems theory and social evolutionary tenets (e.g., Renfrew, 1972).

The collapse of the British Empire was a long-drawn-out affair, marked by a narrowing of vision and diminishing self-confidence in the old centre, which coincided with a growing clamour of new post-colonial voices in the old peripheries. A post-colonial Britain had difficulties adapting to new world orders, with a long-term tension between Second World

War nostalgia and the active exploitation of European possibilities. The long-term intellectual result in the social and historical sciences was a questioning of the basis of grand narratives and a tendency to focus on more circumscribed issues (Sherratt & Yoffee, 1993). Even though major syntheses of European prehistory appeared well into the 1980s (Whittle, 1985; Champion 1984; Bintliff, 1984), the post-processual reaction against New Archaeology foregrounded smaller-scale questions, a classic case being the integration of all temporal and spatial scales connected to a single object in Janet Spector's story of a Wahpeton Dakota awl (Spector, 1991: 1993). There was a general post-processual avoidance of big questions, such as urbanism or the recounting of broad Continent-wide narratives. The expansion of archaeological science from the 1980s onwards also militated against grand narratives, instead prioritising highly technical reports tightly focussed on key, often global questions (e.g., the origins of copper metallurgy). In the last decade, a turn to Big Data, often theoretically attenuated but seeking to integrate broad spatial and diachronic information, represents a reaction in its turn to interpretative archaeology and varying forms of symmetrical archaeology but without elements of general synthesis (e.g., the Fragile Crescent Project: Galiatsatos et al. 2009; Lawrence, 2012). Another prominent response to the eruption of new archaeological data has been the outpouring of multi-authored handbooks and readers (e.g., Neolithic Europe: Fowler et al., 2015; prehistoric figurines: Insoll, 2017; or gender: Bolger, 2012). While Graeme Clark wrote a single-author World Prehistory' in 1977, a recent version - 'The Human Past', edited by Chris Scarre (2018, 4th edition) - required 24 specialist authors to impose its collective authority.

Many of these social and intellectual changes have militated against the production of single-author syntheses in the 2010s. Nonetheless, the continued appearance of single-author syntheses which, in my view, make exciting reading (e.g., Tilley, 1996; Robb, 2007; Broodbank, 2013) bucked this trend, while Cambridge University Press' *Cambridge World Archaeology* series is an excellent example of single-author syntheses covering a targetted geographical region: up to 2019, 25 volumes in this series have been published (https://www.cambridge.org/core/series/cambridge-world-archaeology). The reason why multi-author handbooks can rarely, if ever, replace a single-author synthesis is the diversity of their contributors' theoretical or methodological backgrounds, which perforce hinders the articulation of a convincing general approach. Instead, authors of general summaries of extensive material practices require a vision of the essence of their synthesis - the key elements of the group in question. So, for Broodbank, "overall, as a place of mobility,

encounter and flux, the early Mediterranean constitutes a good, instructive, even guardedly hopeful place to study the world (2013, 53) or, again, "... without some grasp of the kinds of places in which people lived, Mediterranean history becomes meaningless ..." (2013, p. 54).

If there is a collection of inter-linked global reasons why single-author syntheses have declined in frequency while surviving as a threatened species in some places, it is also clear that there were several important local reasons for the absence of a successor synthesis to the 1981 volume. First, an insuperable difficulty has been the growth in the scale of archaeological fieldwork, with the resultant exponential rise on the quantity of material. To take an example from Hungary, Raczky (2007) has shown how the fieldwork programmes covering the line of the six major motorways constructed in Hungary from 1990 – 2013 – a total length of over 1,000 km - fully utilised the human resources of 250 archaeologists and 500 students of archaeology in excavating an area of over 7 million m^2 on almost 700 sites. This effort resulted in a massive increase in field data, which we are still digesting today, almost a decade later (for a summary of publications, see Ilon 2013). Much of this new material remains to be published, let alone synthesised.

For the Vinča group, in which motorway rescue archaeology has so far played a relatively minor role (but NB Perić & Bulatović, 2016), the increasing scale of projects such as the Selevac, Opovo, Divostin, Vinča tell and Uivar programmes has led to huge ceramic and non-ceramic assemblages comprising hundreds of boxes of sherds, in comparison to which my museum studies in the mid-1970s tended to focus on 20 boxes of pottery from any given site (pers. comm., Wolfram Schier). Modern would-be synthesizers therefore depend for their knowledge of material not on first-hand studies but on full, competent publications, which often takes decades.

The centrality of the Vinča- Belo Brdo tell to studies of the Vinča group may also have militated against the production of a general synthesis. Many authors sought to solve the most significant questions of Vinča research (origins, settlement patterns, symbolism, chronology, etc) on the basis of finds from Vinča - Belo Brdo. The fact that this approach rarely works has complicated the formulation of more general answers to these questions. The example of the TOTL project is salutary. The TOTL researchers realised that, although their modelling of AMS dates from the type-site was important, they needed to model all known dates from a

wide range of Vinča sites to produce their 'Potscape' paper (Whittle et al., 2016; see above, p. xxx).

A more serious issue of recent Balkan history concerns the tragic wars of the 1990s, which had a dramatic negative effect on scholars' abilities even to work – let alone travel in the Central Balkans and outside to collect material and discuss ideas with other colleagues. It was inevitable that the destruction of documentation centres, museums and even actual sites meant that the multiple effects of the wars – physical, economic and psychological - continued to be mourned for many more years. The replacement of the *Yugoslovensko Arheološko Društvo* by the societies of the new nations (*Srpsko Arheološko Društvo*, *Hrvatsko Arheološko Društvo*, etc.) was a sign of these fissiparous tendencies, which could not have made synthesis of a widespread group such as Vinča any easier.

A final question is whether a new synthesis is worth writing anyway[6]. I submit that, exactly because of the explosion of new data, new narratives are vital, so as to provide a balanced overview of all the detail. I further submit that an up-to-date synthesis of any major group is worthwhile for at least seven types of audience: undergraduates seeking a unified introduction to a complex topic; postgraduates who require comparative material for their own specialist research; archaeological generalists (e.g., museum archaeologists) who have neither time nor bibliographical resources to create a background for exhibitions or answer the questions of the general public; Neolithic specialists who require accurate, up-to-date data for comparative studies (e.g., the specialists in the TOTL Project, who suffered from the absence of an up-to-date synthesis of, e.g., the Lengyel group in their modelling of the Alsónyék AMS dates); European prehistorians wishing to understand those parts of the Central Balkan Neolithic sequence which relate to their own period of interest; media communicators, who need general background for the creation of new stories, films or blogs; and members of the general public, who are simply interested enough to wish to know more about a 7,300-year-old group in the Central Balkans.

These reasons why the production of a new Vinča synthesis is anything but a trivial matter have led to the survival of any existing synthesis in a twilight zone in which 30 - 40% of the conclusions are probably outdated and deserve rejection, leaving a battered and unbalanced

[6] I am grateful to Ruth Tringham for stimulating me to answer this question.

text (in an even more battered BAR production) that cannot retain full credibility. Yet the third part of this chapter makes a case for the retention of some of the key conclusions of the 1981 work, including points which have recently been re-iterated using different, more modern theory, methodology or terminology. There appears to be life in the old synthesis yet.

5. Conclusions

The central paradox of this chapter may be simply re-stated: although each part of the 1981 Vinča synthesis can be improved or has already been superceded, the whole has not yet been replaced. Or, to put it another way, rumours of the synthesis' death have been greatly exaggerated. Those topics in which the synthesis lacked interpretative subtlety were precisely those areas in which the processualist direction was followed most strongly - houses as activity areas, reflectionist interpretations of settlement and subsistence data and the use of exchange networks to infer directional trade. The four other areas were developed two decades after the synthesis appeared: the consideration of objects in terms of their colour and brilliance and the tripartite contextual revolution, with the temporal context of AMS dates, the spatial context of geophysical planning and the fieldwork framework of single-context excavations.

Those areas of the synthesis which have survived until now and whose proposals have been confirmed to a greater or lesser degree by recent investigations include the debate over Vinča origins, the pronounced regional variability in material culture, the diachronic changes in network connectivity, the relationship between sustainability and site size, the intensification of production and the clear regional differences in settlement narratives. One area in which I have expanded the argument is the integration of a long-lasting and spatially large ceramic network through the introduction of the concept of the Vinča 'Big Other'.

Is there a new Vinča synthesis on the horizon? I am not aware of any such volume in progress but rumours of a multi-author monograph focussing on the metallurgical innovations at Belovode and Pločnik have been in circulation for several years. My position on the replacement of the 1981 synthesis by newer, better informed studies which incorporate the mass of new data from recent excavations and fieldwork is one of optimism: I hope and

expect at least one new synthesis to appear in the next decade and maybe more than one. Until this happens, I venture to suggest that at least some of the 1981 proposals will retain limited utility.

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List of Figure Captions

1. Black Burnished ware footed bowl, Vinča - Belo Brdo (source: Tasić, Nenad 2008, Slika 6)

2 Nebelivka Experimental Programme, Kirovograd County, Ukraine: (a) the experimental 'Neolithic' house; (b) burning the experimental house; (c) the excavation of the burnt clay mass ('*ploshchadka*') of the experimental burnt house; (d) vitrified daub from the excavation of the experimental house (source: (a) S. Johnston; (b) M. Nebbia; (c) - (d) J. Chapman)

3 Schematic diagram of the chronological development of the Vinča - Belo Brdo tell, showing building and burning horizons and modelled durations of ceramic Phases (source: Tasić, Nenad et al. 2016, Fig. 17)

4 Reconstruction of the Uivar settlement (source: Drașovean et al. 2017, Fig. 9)

5 Spatial framework for social relationships (source: L. Woodard, based on Neustupný 1998, Fig. 1)

6 Bayesian modelling of durations of Vinča phases for the entire Vinča distribution (source: Whittle et al. 2016, Fig. 37)

7 Ceramic kiln separators (upper) with reconstruction of their use in a kiln (lower), Hăbășești (source: Ellis 1984, Figs. 55 - 56)

8 Neolithic settlement in the Middle Morava valley, Serbia: (a) early Starčevo; (b) late Starčevo; (c) Vinča (source: L. Woodard, adapted from Perić, 2004, Maps 1 - 4)

9 The Trypillia Big Other (source: C. Unwin)

10 Scattergram: relationship between excavated area and figurine frequency. Key: circle - excavated sites; square - surface collection. The 'excavated' area of surface sites has been estimated by multiplying the surface area in ha by 20 (source: Chapman 1981, Fig. 95)
