

## Arrangement of Vinča culture figurines: a study of social structure and organisation

Adam N. Crnobrnja

Belgrade City Museum, Belgrade, RS  
ancrnobrnja@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT** – *In this working paper, I present a unique assemblage of 43 figurines and 11 miniature tool models discovered at the Late Vinča culture site at Crkvine, Stubline in Serbia. The distinctiveness of this find is that it was discovered in its original context, where the figurines were used, and that the objects were found in their original arrangement. I also discuss to what extent it is possible, considering the figurines arrangement, to understand hints of social structure and organisation of communities in the final phase of Vinča culture.*

**IZVLEČEK** – *V članku predstavljam poseben skupek 43 figurin in 11 miniaturnih modelov orodij, ki so bili odkriti na najdišču Crkvine, Stubline v Srbiji, ki datira v obdobje pozne Vinče. Posebnost te najdbe je predvsem ta, da je bila odkrita v originalnem kontekstu, kjer so bile figurine uporabljene, in da so bili predmeti najdeni v prvotni razporeditvi. V članku razpravljam tudi o tem, v kolikšni meri je mogoče glede na razporeditev figurin razumeti sledi o družbeni strukturi in organizaciji skupnosti v končni fazi kulture Vinča.*

**KEY WORDS** – *Vinča culture; Late Neolithic; figurines; settlements; social structure*

### Introduction

The Late Vinča settlement at Crkvine is in the village Stubline, some 40km southwest of Belgrade (Fig. 1). It is situated on an elevated plateau, 500 metres long and 380 metres wide in the west, and 130 metres wide in the east. The streams bordering the north and south and sides of the plateau converge below its narrower end, while there are many springs in the immediate vicinity.

The first small-scale investigations at this site were undertaken by Belgrade City Museum in 1967 in order to establish basic information about the site stratigraphy, whereupon it was already concluded that this site offered unique opportunities for studying the architecture and urbanisation of Vinča settlements (Todorović 1967).

After investigations of limited scope carried out in 2006 (Simić, Crnobrnja 2008), we planned a detailed study of the entire site. A detailed field survey was conducted at the end of the same year, while

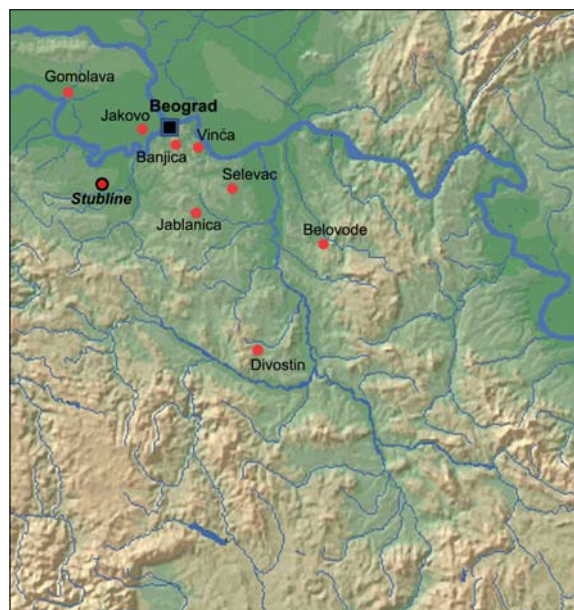
geophysical investigations started in 2007. In the period between 2007 and 2011, the settlement area of 77 600m<sup>2</sup> was explored by geomagnetic mapping (Fig. 2), which established the northern and southern boundaries of the settlement. In the north, where the terrain slopes more gently, the settlement boundary consists of an anomaly indicating a double trench; in the south, where the slope is steeper, the recorded anomaly indicates a single trench. In the central settlement zone, an anomaly was found that indicated a trench from some earlier settlement phase covered with rows of houses from the final horizon of living in the settlement. By comparing the intensity of geomagnetic anomalies (which were checked on three occasions by excavations) and their dimensions, the existence of over 200 houses within the investigated area may be conjectured. The longitudinal axis of most houses is oriented north-north-east-south-southwest. The houses are arranged in many regular rows and at a small distance from each other (the space between the houses in a row is

smaller than the width of the houses). We also encountered a few open areas flanked with houses on all four sides. The results obtained by geomagnetic mapping made it possible to comprehend for the first time an almost complete matrix of a single large open Late Vinča settlement, which was surrounded by trenches, and with densely arranged houses in an almost planned layout. At the end of 2009, we began the geoelectric survey of the profiles, which indicates so far that the anomalies noticed by geomagnetic mapping date from the same building horizon (750 metres of the profile were surveyed).

The archaeological excavations of the project also started in 2008. The results obtained so far (campaigns 2008–2010) have revealed that the geophysical investigations were exceptionally precise and made possible the creation of a reliable key for their interpretation and the planning of future investigations. There are no precise absolute dates for the final building phase, but considering the characteristics of the pottery finds and their analogues from sites already dated, the last horizon of occupation of this site could be dated to phase D-2 of Vinča culture, *c.* 4600 BC (Borić 2009.234–236).

In the course of investigating one of the smallest and, according to the geomagnetic mapping, rather poorly preserved houses in the settlement (house 1/2008; Crnibrnja, Simić and Janković 2010), we were fortunate to discover an exceptional find – an assemblage of 43 figurines, which is the subject of this work.

At the very outset, I would like to emphasise that on this occasion I will not go through some of the standard procedures found in most of the work on figurines; or make a typological classification of the figurines from Stubline, because there are no direct analogues for them. Nor will I make an extensive review of existing theories on the purpose of figurines, as this has been discussed on many occasions (*cf.* Štefan 2005–2006). On the other hand, I must mention that for the basis of my methodological approach, I borrow from the work of Peter Ucko (1962; 1968), and an article by Richard Lesure (2002) in which, despite the critical responses to it (*ibid.* 601–605), there is a very interesting and inspiring suggestion for taking a complex methodological approach to studying figurines. The work of Douglas Bailey (2005) provided not only an important guideline for me, but was also an inspiration for a more universal understanding of the mutual relationship between figurines and the social contexts in which they originate.



**Fig. 1. Site location and the Vinča culture settlement mentioned in the text.**

It is necessary to mention the large number of figurines originating from the Vinča culture in Serbia and the relatively small number of comprehensive works which have treated them in a more complex way (Srejović 1968), or which merely published certain collections of figurines (Vasić 1936; Tasić 1973; Petrović, Katić and Spasić 2009).

Despite a seemingly exceptional opportunity to draw various conclusions about the purpose of this assemblage, I did not want to take any risks. I was of the opinion that their genuine purpose is difficult to grasp, and that to seek that purpose would result only in a set of clever assumptions. On the other hand, this assemblage implies multifarious and multi-layered meanings. The finding context of these figurines, their disposition, and the technique of their manufacture offer a unique possibility to deviate to a certain extent from the study of the usual questions related to figurines about their cultic and religious aspects. I decided to analyse one of the indirect messages which this assemblage could convey, a message about social structure and the organisation of communities in the final phase of Vinča culture, but without pretending to provide conclusive answers.

### Finding circumstances

The house where the figurines were found (Crnibrnja, Simić and Janković 2010) is 9.1 x 4.8m and corresponds to standard patterns of architecture and interior organisation of the Late Vinča houses (Fig. 3). Another two figurines in a form common in that

period, and one clay model of a bucranium (0.2 x 0.3m) were also found in the house. Such objects are usually associated with a cultic or religious purpose. Also discovered in the house was a large quantity of objects, as well as some fixed structures of a mundane character – vessels for cooking, consumption and food storage, an oven and hearth, a fixed grindstone and a large fixed clay receptacle of undetermined purpose (altar?). It is conspicuous that there is an overlapping of spheres, the purpose of which could be roughly distinguished as sacred and profane.

The figurines were placed on a secondary burnt floor of packed earth (the floor in this house had no substructure), in front of the south-west corner of a large domed oven, *i.e.* its horseshoe-shaped firebox (Fig. 4). Most of the figurines (34 out of 43) were found under a rather large section of collapsed wall daub (Fig. 5). Before that, identical figurines had already been found in the same zone: two were found somewhat further from the oven, and another two were found next to the south-west corner, next to its south side, together with 15 loom weights.<sup>1</sup> On the periphery of the assemblage, a fine whetstone with no

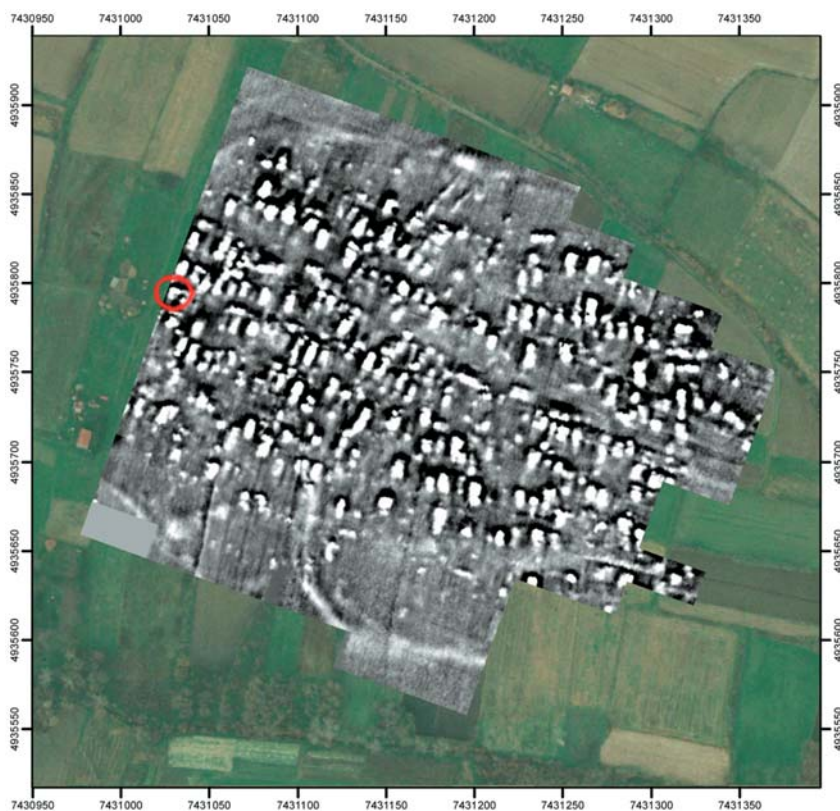
traces of use was found. Eleven whole and fragmented miniature models of tools or weapons (hammer-axes, pickaxes, long tools with blade, mallets or sceptres) were found next to the figurines (Fig. 6). The area with figurines was flanked from the north and south by burial pits of 18<sup>th</sup> century graves, so it could not be claimed with certainty that the original number of figurines was recovered.

The assemblage of the figurines and oven in front of which they were placed were located in the north, better preserved section of the house. It has been concluded on the basis of the microstratigraphic research that above this section of the house (with fixed clay receptacle, group of figurines and oven) there could have been an upper structure which could have been used as additional storage space (*Crnobrnja, Simić and Janković 2010.20*).

### Figurines – appearance and manufacture

The forty-three figurines are of almost identical appearance, except the central one, whose description will be provided later (Pls. 1–3; Tab. 1). All other figurines have a stout cylindrical body with a bird-like head, characteristic of the Late Vinča period, with an oval foot and small hole near the right shoulder for inserting a tool handle. There are no additional anthropomorphic marks (eyes, gender characteristics, dress and the like), nor additional ornament, and – except for the central figure – the surfaces were not additionally treated or coated.

All the figurines are made of poorly refined clay of local origin, with no larger admixtures. In contrast to most vessels found inside the house, neither ground stone nor pulverised pottery was added to the clay. It seems on more close inspection that they were produced in great haste and rather carelessly. In our experimental production of identical figurines, we concluded that they could literally



**Fig. 2.** *Crkvine, Stubline. Magnetometric plan and location of house 1/2008.*

<sup>1</sup> The loom weights show traces of use.

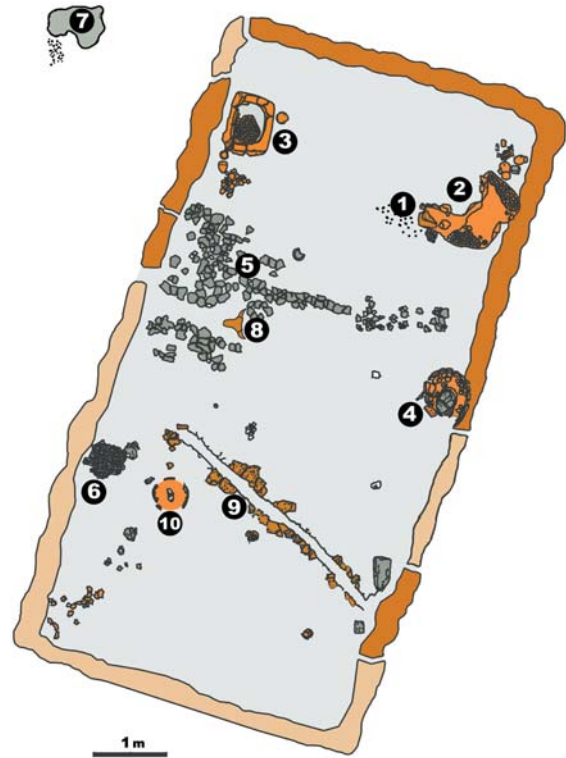


be shaped in five basic moves, and that a mere 60 to 90 seconds were enough to make one specimen. Traces of careless and hasty production are also conspicuous on their surfaces:

- traces of fingers are conspicuous on the body of most specimens;
- two traces of carelessness could be detected on the feet: first, the small hole necessary for stability executed in one stroke; and the other is that the feet are not fully circular due to the palm position in the manufacturing process, and the finishing touch is also lacking;
- the most obvious example of carelessness in execution is that when the perforations were made for the handle of a model tool/weapon, the body of the figurine was sometimes damaged (visible on 24 specimens), and the damage only roughly repaired without additional trimming (Fig. 7).

The only figurine which was somewhat more carefully modelled is the central and largest specimen (Pl. 1.1). Its head is slightly different, and a spherically modelled cranium is discernible; besides the standard bird-like face, the shoulders are also discernible and rounded (the hole for handle is on the right). The cylindrical body resembles the shape of standard Vinča figurines of that time, and the front has contours which resemble stylised dress representation (or perhaps the contour of the standard Vinča figurine?). In contrast to the other figurines, its surface is coated with slip and is more carefully finished. Much greater attention was paid to the production of miniature tool models. The precise execution resulted in the production of exceptionally accurate miniature copies of tools/weapons, but we shall pay more attention to this later. Their surface was smoothed, and the holes for handles carefully perforated. Seven miniature models are completely preserved (Pl. 2.A–F; 3.G–K), and among them we can recognise the following artefacts: two types of hammer-axes (Pl. 2.D, F), three variants of tools resembling pick-axes (Pl. 2.C, E; 3.H) and three spherical objects (Pl. 2.A; 3.I, J; mallets or sceptres?). Three fragmented models have just half of the tool preserved. Two of these are fragments of long implements resembling pick-axes (Pl. 2.B; 3.K), while the forth has a vertical blade on the end of long body (Pl. 3.G).

A figurine which roughly resembles the specimens from Stubline (but does not have the hole for a handle) was discovered at the site at Medjulužje (Petrović, Katić and Spasić 2009.167, no. 231), and a miniature model of an axe was also found at the same site (*ibid.* 164, no. 227). Unfortunately, both objects



**Fig. 3. Ground plan of house 01/2008 (after Crnobrnja, Simić and Janković 2010.13, Fig. 5). 1 platform with figurines. 2 oven no. 2. 3 altar. 4 quern. 5 zone with pottery. 6 oven no. 1. 7 pottery group 1. 8 bucranium. 9 beam impression. 10 pithos.**

are chance finds lacking context. Two miniature models of tools were also found at Kormadin near Jakovo, but photographs have not been published (Jovanović and Glišić 1961.125).

### The grouping of figurines within the context

Perhaps the most important fact for this and any future analysis of the assemblage of figurines from Stubline is that it was found in the original context. It was found at the spot where it was used, and the figurines were in their original positions.

Of the 43 figurines, it is possible to identify the precise positions within the arrangement for 38 of them, while the remaining five were at smaller or greater distances from the arrangement (the farthest is no. 39 at 1.18m), which could be ascribed to their dislocation when the 18<sup>th</sup> century graves were excavated.

It is possible to distinguish eight groups of figurines within the arrangement (Fig. 8). The central and at the same time the largest group (I) consists of 10 figurines. The largest, central figurine was at its centre, surrounded by nine smaller ones of uniform shape. This central group was surrounded by two

circles of figurines. In the first circle, looking clockwise from the south, groups II (six figurines), III (six figurines), IV (six figurines) and V (three figurines) were arranged. The second 'circle' consists of groups VI (three figurines) and VII (three figurines). We must also note the isolated figurine no. 32, which was located to the north of the central group at the same distance as group VII; thus, because it was found at the very edge of the recent burial pit, it could be assumed that it belonged to the destroyed group VIII.

### Sex and gender identification

None of the figurines from the Stubline composition has any sex or gender indicators. Complete and detailed analyses of sex/gender identification of the Vinča figurines have never been performed, but first results indicate that most of the figurines do not have pronounced sex/gender indicators, while some have discernible characteristics of both sexes (*Tasić 2008.145; Milenković, Arsenijević 2010*). What could be said about these figurines regarding sex and gender? I think that a sound answer could be offered on the basis of the miniature models of tools and weapons.

If one asks who could have used these tools/weapons within the traditional division of labour, the first association is with men. However, we will not stop at a first association, but we should check the admittedly rather meagre data from archaeological investigations. So far, only two published Late Neolithic figurines carrying tools (sickle and axe) have been found at Szegvár Tüzköves (*Borić 1996.81; citing Korek 1987. 53, Fig. 14; Trogmayer 1990. 66–69, Abb. 52–84*), and they were also explained as representations of men. At Gomalava, only one excavated and well documented necropolis of Vinča culture (*Borić 1996; Borić 2005.222, Fig. 35*) comprising 27 male skeletons has been discovered (*Stefanović 2008*). The position of axes and flint sickle inserts in the burials indicates that tools were always placed above the right shoulder of the deceased (*Borić 1996.81*).

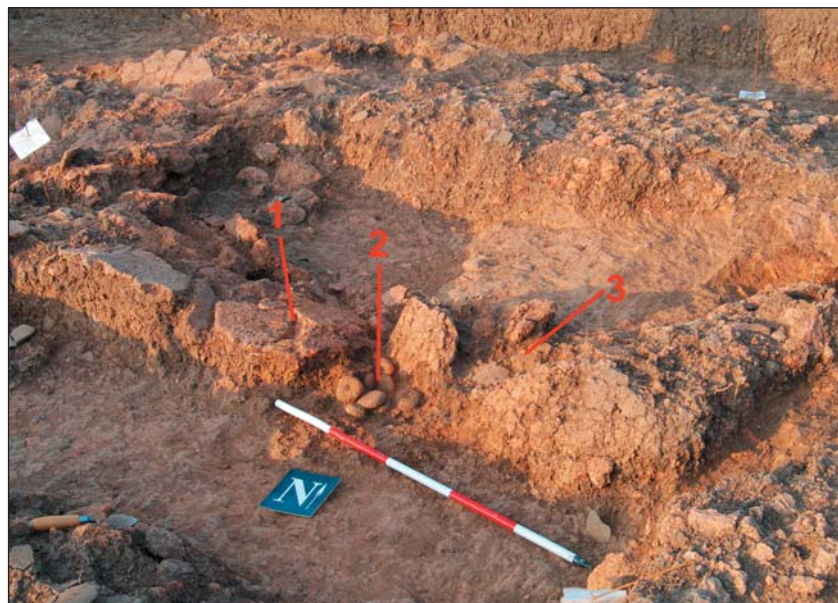
Considering the similarity between the 'iconic form of representation in burial and particular figurine iconography', Dušan Borić has suggested that this position of tools within two contemporary but neighbouring cultures (Vinča and Tisza) could be explained as the representation of gender-specific separation in different media of corporeal display (*Borić on-line*). When Borić was preparing his presentation, the Stubline figurines had not been discovered, and it is important to mention that the necropolis at Gomalava and the settlement at Stubline date from the same period, and that the distance between them is a mere 45km.

Let us recall once again that all the figurines from Stubline have a small hole in the right shoulder for the handle of a tool/weapon (Fig. 9). Could all the above be sufficient to classify with great probability the figurines from Stubline as a group of male individuals?

### The position of the figurines: why were they there?

A comprehensive discussion of all aspects of the three-dimensionality of the figurines and their implications is offered by Douglas Bailey (2005.36–41). I will try on this occasion to examine the importance of understanding the spatial positioning of the figurines.

It is important to note that the platform with the figurines scene arrangement covered an area of



**Fig. 4.** Location of the figurines immediately before discovery. 1 section of collapsed wall under which the figurines were found. 2 loom weights. 3 oven.



around 1.2m<sup>2</sup>; given the internal area of the house (around 44m<sup>2</sup>), this is not insignificant. The disposition of figurines (as they were found) and miniature models of tools indicate that they had been completed and were not in the process of manufacture, and that they were carefully arranged in the position in which they were discovered, *i.e.* that we almost certainly found them in their original position in the place chosen for their disposition and use (Fig. 10). It is almost certain that the person who arranged them had not intended them to remain in that position for long, nor in that position within the house, where everyday life was going on. The dimensions of the figurines, their fragility (additionally increased because of the position of the tools), as well as the space they occupied (around 1.2m<sup>2</sup>) do not allow the possibility that they were to have remained in that location for a long period. Therefore, we may conclude that the house that contained them burnt down immediately after the figurines were arranged in the position recorded in 2008 (hours rather than days after being positioned). Knowing the cause of the fire might help us discover something more about the purpose of the arrangement. Therefore, we should consider how some of the theories on the causes of fires which destroyed houses in the Late Vinča settlement correspond with the context in which the composition of figurines at Stubline were found.

The ritual burning of houses at Late Neolithic sites is a very popular theory (*Stevanović 1997; Chapman 2000.111–112; Gheorghiu in press*). If this had been the cause of the destruction of house 1/2008 at Stubline, one possible explanation for the composition could be related to some kind of memorial, as a marker of the community occupying the settlement before its ritual ‘closing’ (*Chapman 2000.112*). Another possibility could be that the house was destroyed in an accidental local fire. If this were the case, then the question of purpose and meaning of the arrangement would be entirely open and could be related to any aspect of life. It would not be possible to establish any correlation between the cause of house destruction and the arrangement of the figurines.



**Fig. 5. Composition of figurines in situ.**

A third possibility suggested in the literature (*Jovanović 1979; Tasić 1983; Draşovean 2007*) is that the house was destroyed as a consequence of the violent destruction of the settlement by outsiders. In this case, we might suppose that the arrangement of figurines was created as a response to an imminent threat. If we take into account the characteristics noted above (figurines made in great haste and equipped (or armed?) in a hurry with tools/weapons; the disposition of figurines resembling the disposition of structures within the settlement, *i.e.* reminding us of the position of ‘clans’ gathered around a ‘leader’) and the assumption that the approach of a general threat must have been anticipated, it could be asked, although with the utmost caution, whether the creation of the composition could have been connected with some external threat.

### Similarity of conceptual patterns

As I have already mentioned, figurines are an almost regular inventory in the Late Neolithic/Early Eneolithic of the Balkans, as well as of Vinča culture itself. Dragoslav Srejović noticed over four decades ago that broken figurines in the Vinča culture are mostly found outside houses, while complete ones are found inside (*Srejović 1968*). The figurines’ arrange-

ment from Stubline confirms this conclusion, but also raises new questions. Was the arrangement of figurines inside houses exceptional or customary, which we do not recognise due to the low level of investigation, and because the number of Late Vinča houses investigated is very small? Or did the house have a special function? Although the find from Stubline is hitherto unique, attention should be drawn to the fact that a few more groups of figurines have been recorded for Vinča culture. I have in mind seven figurines from house 1 at Selevac (*Milojković 1990.400*), seven figurines from house 23 at Divostin (*Bogdanović 1988.83*) and four zoomorphic figurines (cattle) discovered in front of the oven in the house at Belovode (*Šljivar, Jacanović 2005*). Particularly interesting from our point of view is the group of figurines from Divostin. All the figurines are basically of identical shape, with variations in their decoration, but one (fragmented) was substantially larger than the others (*Tripković 2010.21*). Boban Tripković explains the groups of figurines from Selevac and Divostin in relation to the clay model house with eight figurines from Platia Magoula Zarkou (*Gallis 1985*) and recognises in them symbolic representations of the household (*Tripković 2007.38–39; 2010.21–23*), and the possibility of assuming on the basis of these figurines how large the household was and how its size changed (*Tripković 2007.13, 39*).

How reliable is the adoption of patterns from Platia Magoula Zarkou and the attempt to apply them to the Late Neolithic in Serbia? Could something that functions as a model in Greece – *i.e.* in tell-type settlements – be applied to another, entirely different

environment? Stubline, Selevac and Divostin are large open settlements which, judging by the settlement plan at Stubline (as most comprehensive), have entirely different arrangements. There is no longer a single dominant household (or family, no matter how large) as the basic organisational unit within the settlement; instead, the houses are in clusters, forming the basic settlement matrix. It is possible that both arrangements transfer through time the voiceless imprint of life organisation at these two places.

At Platia Magoula Zarkou, there is a settlement of the tell type, and evidence that for someone in one of the houses, it was very important to represent the nucleus of the community – the family within one household. The situation at Stubline is rather different – in the small house on the periphery of a large and well-organised settlement, there was a group of figurines, which, according to the analogy with Platia Magoula Zarkou, illustrates what was at that time essential in that place, and that was the wider community.

But what could have constituted individual figurines in the composition from Stubline? While considering the answer to this question, the comparison with the group of figurines from Platia Magoula Zarkou came to our attention. On the basis of the individual characteristics of each figurine (size, shape, ornament) these were identified as a few generations of one family (*Gallis 1985.22; Tripković 2007.12*). The figurines from Stubline have no individual characteristics and, as we shall see, their position or role in the group/community was determined by the tool/weapon they were holding.

Thus when comparing the groups of figurines from Platia Magoula Zarkou and Stubline, we notice a few oppositions:

- Platia Magoula Zarkou – Stubline;
- Representation inside the house – representation in open space;
- Individual household – wider community;
- Emphasising individual characteristics – negation of individuality;
- Head of the family – leader of the community;
- Genealogical division – functional division.

The indirect similarity at one level of consideration could be also identified in Vinča



Fig. 6. Detail of composition of figurines *in situ*.



culture itself. When analysing the group of figurines from Divostin, Boban Tripković (2010:22) identifies an indication of a pater familias in the largest figurine, and on an analogy with the central figurine from the Stubline composition concludes that: “*therefore, in future, a detailed contextual analysis of the figurines may actually be an important indicator in the nature of interpersonal relations in the Divostin and other Vinča households*” (ibid. 23).

This conclusion alone may indicate the illogicality that could lead further investigations in the wrong direction. Are relations within a household the most relevant for studying the social processes of Vinča society? Is the household really the basic nucleus of the matrix of large open Late Vinča settlements such as Divostin, Selevac and Stubline?

I think that results obtained to date during investigations of the settlement at Stubline forewarn us that focusing on the household as representative of the social organisation of that time could lead in the wrong direction. The household is quite as important as in any other period, but it is more than evident that it physically does not form the basis of the settlement matrix. The geomagnetic survey from Stubline reveals a relatively high degree of settlement organisation, with an apparent arrangement of houses not only in rows, but also in groupings of so-called ‘blocks’ concentrated around the open spaces between them. In this case, in fact, a group of houses (5–12) comprises the basic module of settlement texture. The organisation of a single household could, no doubt, indicate certain aspects of the social process, but they would primarily concern processes within one family (or extended family). But is it sufficient to think about organisation on the wider community level only this basis? Although their interaction is indubitable, can we generalise social processes within one household to the entire community, or it is more reasonable to assume that processes taking place on a higher level (settlement, group of settlements) would have had much greater

influence on processes on the lower level (household)?<sup>2</sup>

The arrangement of figurines from Stubline suggests a possible answer. A similarity in conception between the groups of figurines from Divostin and Stubline certainly exists, and is discernible in the suggestion of hierarchy on two levels – within one household (Divostin) and the wider community (Stubline). But we must ask ourselves what kind of community could represent the composition of figurines, or perhaps – what group of communities they could represent.

### Purpose of the figurines and messages they convey

When we first published the preliminary results of the investigations at Stubline, including the context of the figurines’ arrangement, we stated that a detailed study of this group of figurines would be the topic of another paper, but it should be mentioned that regardless of whether this was a cultic group or a game set, this exceptional find clearly indicates at least two things:

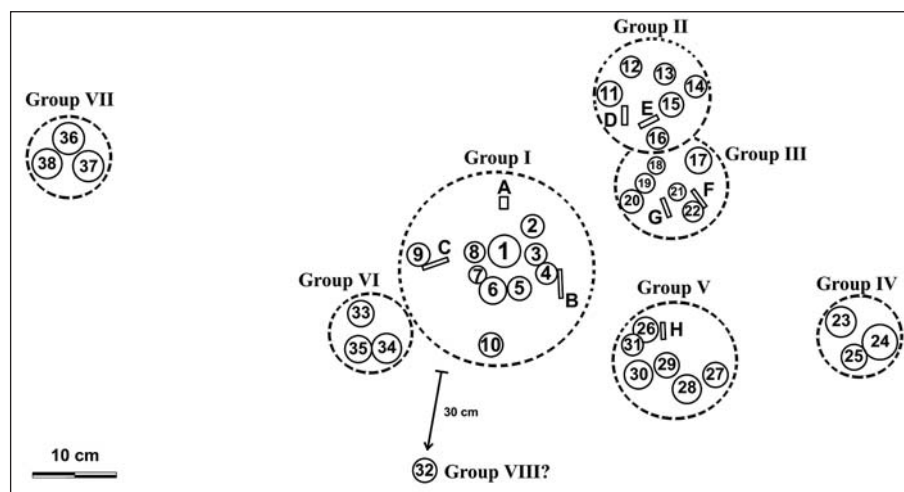
- the transposition of a distinct system of thought or beliefs from the level of community to the level of cultic practice, or a game had preceded the act of production of this composition;
- the presence of 42 figurines of identical shape, and one larger, more elaborately modelled specimen in the centre of the composition, suggests the possible existence of an acknowledged hierarchy in the community, or relates to the religious system of that community (Crnobjrja, Simić and Janković 2009:21).



**Fig. 7. Examples of damage done during the making of holes for tools on the figurines.**

<sup>2</sup> Later could be asked what size of the community was the largest common denominator, i.e. what was possible highest level of organization in the time of Late Vinča. Should we consider the settlements, groups of settlements or regions? To what level of social organization reached mutual recognition of ‘collectiveness’ and at what level started the recognition of ‘otherness’?





**Fig. 8. Plan of disposition of figurines within composition.**

In a review of our article, Lolita Nikolova (*on-line*) offered a series of possible interpretations, including that it was a group of figurines made by craftsmen for exchange, story-tellers, a lineage-genealogical symbolic group, and a cultic or game group. Boban Tripković (2010.22) quoted as our interpretation three suggested possible purposes: the subject of cult, a symbolic procession of warriors or game group. It is interesting that both authors quoted from our work the suggested purposes of figurines as literal interpretations without attending to the more important elements and our reservations concerning the suggested assumptions.

But the point is that this arrangement, regardless of its genuine purpose (any of the assumed purposes or any other which could come to mind) was made by a person or persons on the basis of concepts inherent in their community. In the materialisation of that pattern we could identify a distinct arrangement of figurines and a clear illustration of hierarchy on a level surpassing one household or group of households. I would also like to mention an interesting article by Mihael Budja (1998) about objects usually interpreted as seals, toys, and clay cylinders, which the author identifies as clay tokens – supplementary elements for counting.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps each of our figurines also symbolises a certain number of individuals. The number of figurines in the composition certainly exceeds the number of members of one household, while their uniformity additionally indicates that certain groups of figurines in the composition could not be identified with members of the house-

hold. Did each figurine represent one household, an extended family or a distinct category of people?

The message suggested by the method of production of the figurines is also interesting. Although they are of very simple and reduced shape, the details of their manufacture say much about the symbolism within this composition. As we

have already emphasised, it seems that figurines were rather carelessly made and that their form and appearance were not very important in themselves, for whoever made them or used them. Nevertheless, the tools/weapons were exceptionally meticulously executed. They are true copies of the originals and could even be typologically identified from original tools from other sites. The impression is that these miniature models of tools/weapons are actually crucial to understanding the symbolism of individual figurines within the composition.<sup>4</sup>

The disproportion in the attention and time invested in the production of the figurines in comparison to the production of model tools suggests that for whoever made and used them, it was more important to clearly emphasise the different roles of individuals or groups in the community (through tools/weapons) than the individuals (figurines) themselves.

Their basic human character, devoid of individual personal characteristics, is indicated precisely by the roughly denoted anthropomorphism of the figurines. In fact, the meticulously executed tools/weapons carry information about the distinctiveness of each individual person within this strange composition. This could indicate not only a vertical stratification (hierarchy), but also a distinction of activities known and understood by everyone, given the meaning of certain occupations or roles played by individuals and groups. Whether this could be understood as an indication of horizontal stratification, *i.e.* the exis-

<sup>3</sup> M. Budja states that such finds are lacking within the territory of the Vinča culture (1998.226–227), but more recent finds from Jablanica warn about their existence (Petrović, Katić and Spasić 2009.167–168).

<sup>4</sup> We cannot disregard the possibility that some figurines carried other objects of organic materials, which are not preserved.

tence of a clear division of labour within Vinča communities?

Regardless of its genuine purpose, this arrangement of figurines is an unambiguously symbolic representation of individuals (figurine) within a given community (composition), and each individual role was generally understood at the time.

We may suggest, however, that this was a representation of a hierarchical community with clearly assigned roles. It seems that the personal characteristics of individuals were subordinated to the needs of the community and that individuals found full expression within an already assigned role, *i.e.* in a position and assignment planned for that person that was indispensable to the community.

Analysing the social structure of the Late Neolithic on the Great Hungarian Plain, characterised by large open settlements similar to those of Late Vinča, William Parkinson (1999:5) assumes four-tiered structural models: large, probably multi-family residential groups, integrated into house clusters, which were integrated into large villages, which, in turn, were incorporated into three discrete spheres of intensive interaction, which probably indicate some sort of supra-village level of integration.

After comprehensive studies, Marko Porčić (2010:361) concluded that there are no reasons to classify Vinča societies as highly ranked or stratified, but they could be classified as trans-egalitarian.

Nevertheless, the traces of vertical social stratification within the communities from which a group of figurines from Divostin and the composition from Stubline come are more than evident. And given the figurines, which emphasise the institution of *pater familias* on the family level (Divostin) and on the settlement level or an even higher organisational level (Stubline), could this be simply ignored? The find from Stubline is particularly interesting, because the arrangement of the figurines in groups surrounding



**Fig. 9. Figurines with tools.**

a central group with the largest figurine at the centre indicates a hitherto unrecorded complexity. If the finds from Divostin and Stubline really reflect distinct vertical stratification (hierarchy) on many levels within the community, indicating the complexity of Vinča societies, we must certainly ask whether Vinča settlements could actually be described as 'societies of houses' and whether the absence of communal and ritual structures really suggests the absence of a central authority in the village (Borić 2008)? Or could the conclusions offered by Borić be understood as the interim results of the hitherto low level of investigations of Vinča settlements? Some recently published work indicates the possible social differentiation in Vinča culture. Porčić indicates that there is a possible correlation between house size, amount of inventory and the incidence of copper in Divostin (Porčić 2010:209–213). After analysing in detail many parameters, the same author also suggests that the dimensions of certain Vinča settlements approached the limit, after which the occurrence of social hierarchy could be assumed, *i.e.* that the appearance of simultaneous hierarchy and ranking or the appearance of sequential hierarchy could be assumed at many sites (*ibid.* 355). Also rather interesting are the most recent results on the Late Vinča necropolis at Gomolava. The DNA analysis has revealed that all 25 buried persons are male, and all related, *i.e.* they could have been members of one





**Fig. 10. Reconstruction of the original position of figurines in the composition.**

patrilineal group, which could indicate the kinship structure (Stefanović 2008.97–98).

## Conclusion

The discovery of the composition of figurines from Stubline is unique in the Neolithic of Southeast Europe. Despite the discovery of some other groups of figurines, its uniqueness is evident in many ways:

- so far unrecorded finds of tools/weapons on figurines (only 11 tools were found, but all figurines have holes for inserting tool handles);
- clear context of discovery within the house;
- devised arrangement of figurines within a composition;
- found where they were used (in whatever way).

I think that after analysing the technology and quality of manufacture of the figurines and their arran-

gement in the composition, it could be assumed with considerable certainty that at Stubline, and very probably throughout the territory of Vinča culture, society was vertically stratified, *i.e.* hierarchical.

Such a conclusion – or at least, soundly based assumption – raises a whole series of questions related not to the cult and religious systems that are the most common aims in the study of Neolithic figurines, but to the organisation of the communities where they were created, and whose conceptual system was transposed into this composition and materialised in it.

The evident existence of many levels of organisation, which could be perceived in the arrangement of figurines in many groups surrounding the central group with the largest figurine in its centre, indicates the complexity of social organisation. Complexity of organisation on the settlement level could be assumed also on the basis of the settlement plan at Stubline obtained by

geomagnetic survey. But how far could the borders of, conditionally speaking, the political units of Vinča society have extended? The demonstration of hierarchy on the settlement level is a sufficient condition for assuming greater complexity on a higher, regional level (Porčić 2010.354), and I also suggest a possible similar complexity on the micro-regional level (Crnobrnja, Simić and Janković 2010.22; Crnobrnja 2010). We must bear in mind that the size of the given settlement – *i.e.* its population – depends on the role the settlement has in satisfying its own needs, as well those of the system to which it belongs.

The composition of figurines also poses the question to what extent the horizontal stratification of the Vinča societies was developed. As already mentioned, all figurines except the central one are of uniform highly schematised form, with no ornaments to suggest their individuality except for the miniature

models of tools/weapons they carried. We assumed that this fact could indicate the possibility that in the composition, the functions or roles of figures/individuals and not their personal characteristics were more relevant. Could this fact also be transposed to the community level and understood as an indicator of differentiation within the community on the basis of distinct occupations, *i.e.* roles assigned to individuals?

But, in the end, we should return to the composition itself, its position and the meaning that it could have had within the house where it was found. It is unique to have a complex find in a clear context. The composition was discovered in front of the oven, and the particular symbolism of ovens in Vinča culture is confirmed in the production of their miniature models (see Petrović 2001 for a discussion). I will not discuss here the details of the cultic aspects of ovens and hearths, but I would still like to ask the question – is this simple analogy sufficient evidence for assuming that the Stubline arrangement had a cultic purpose? At this level of investigation, I would rather point to some more reliable evidence. As noted earlier, among other things, the final objective of the production of the figurines was their planned arrangement denoting the roles of certain figurines in the group with the models of the tools/weapons they were carrying. Obviously, a complex pattern and a story was told in the material. These facts raise important questions for the further study of figurines – was this composition a story or segment of a story which was generally known in the community, or was it the result of momentary inspiration? Was this a symbolic representation of the community struc-

ture in the Late Vinča period, or an idealised aspiration for such a structure? If it was really the pattern of thinking in the Vinča society, how we should proceed toward its recognition? Why were messages about stratification in the society suggested by the Stubline composition concealed in the investigations conducted so far?

Considering all the questions raised by the figurines from Stubline, we must also wonder which approach should be taken in future investigations of Vinča culture, at least in Serbia. Investigations in Serbia, for various, mostly financial reasons, have been focused so far on single structures, or at best on a few dozen structures within a single settlement (Vinča, Divostin). The assumed area of most sites has been supposed on the basis of rudimentary site surveys, while the positions of excavated houses within the settlements are not known, as is the case with the settlement matrix. The message which the finds from Stubline convey – the definitive existence of elaborate vertical stratification and possible existence of levels of integration higher than the settlement level – suggest that our energy should perhaps first be directed to understanding settlements in their entirety. The settlement as the clearly discernible highest unity of hierarchy should be the starting point, and we should then continue by planning two subsequent directions of investigation: firstly, to tackle the lower organisational levels within the settlement (house, household, group of houses), and secondly, and much more difficult to understand, the possible higher organisational levels (groups of settlements, micro-regional and regional connections of the settlement).

∴

## REFERENCES

- BAILEY D. W. 2005. *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and Corporeality in the Neolithic*. Routledge. London and New York.
- BOGDANOVIĆ M. 1988. Architectur and Structural Features at Divostin. In A. McPherson and D. Srejović (eds.), *Divostin and the Neolithic of Central Serbia*. Ethnology Monographs 10. University of Pittsburgh – Department of Archaeology, Pittsburgh: 35–142.
- BORIĆ D. 1996. Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices in the Neolithic: A Case Study. *Starinar* 47: 67–83.
2008. First Households and 'House Societies' in European Prehistory. In A. Jones (ed.), *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and Practice*. Blackwell, Oxford: 109–142.
2009. Absolute Dating of Metallurgical Innovations in the Vinča Culture of the Balkans. In T. K. Kienlin and B. W. Roberts (eds.), *Metals and Societies: Studies in honour of Barbara S. Ottaway*. Verlag Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn: 191–245.
- on-line. <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/archaeology/cgi-bin/TAG/drupal/?q=content/figurines-action>



- BUDJA M. 1998. Clay tokens – accounting before writing in Eurasia. In M. Budja (ed.), *5<sup>th</sup> Neolithic Studies. Documenta Praehistorica 25*: 219–235.
- CHAPMAN J. 2000. *Fragmentation in Archaeology. People, Places and Broken Objects in the Prehistory of South Eastern Europe*. Routledge. London.
- CRNOBRNJA A. 2010. Kratki tranzit u poznom neolitu – studija slučaja Drenskog visa. In D. Mihailović and V. Filipović (eds.), *Srpsko arheološko društvo – XXXIII godišnji skup. Prirodne komunikacije I populaciona kretanja u praistoriji, antici I srednjem veku na području centralnog Balkana*. Srpsko arheološko društvo, Niš: 21–22.
- CRNOBRNJA A., SIMIĆ Z. and JANKOVIĆ M. 2010. Late Vinča Culture Settlement at Crkvine in Stubline: Household organization and urbanization in the Late Vinča culture period. *Starinar n.s.* 59: 9–25.
- DRAȘOVEAN F. 2007. The neolithic tells from Parța and Uivar (South-west Romania). Similarities and differences of the organization of the social space. *Analele Banatului* 15: 19–32.
- GALLIS K. 1985. A late Neolithic foundation offering from Thessaly. *Antiquity* 59: 20–24.
- GHEORGHU D. In press. Built to Be Burnt: The Building and Combustion of Chalcolithic Dwellings in the Lower Danube and Eastern Carpathian Areas. In L. Nikolova, J. Marler, M. Merlini and A. Comşa (eds.), *Circumpontica in Prehistory: Western Pontic Studies. Global Gratitude to Eugen Comşa for His 85<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary*. BAR International series. Archaeopress, Oxford: 49–62.
- JOVANOVIĆ B. 1979. Indoevropljani i eneolitski period Jugoslavije. In A. Benac (ed.), *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja 3*. Akademija Nauka i Umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Sarajevo: 397–416.
- JOVANOVIĆ B., GLIŠIĆ J. 1961. Eneolitsko naselje na Kormadinu kod Jakova. *Starinar n.s.* 11: 113–139.
- KOREK J. 1987. Szegvár-Tüzköves: A settlement of the Tisza culture. In L. Tálás (ed.), *The Late Neolithic of the Tisza region. A survey of recent excavations and their findings*. Kassuth Press, Budapest-Szolnok: 47–60.
- LESURE R.G. 2002. The Goddess Diffracted: Thinking about the Figurines of Early Villages. *Current Anthropology* 43 (4): 587–610.
- MILENKOVIĆ M., ARSENIJEVIĆ J. 2010. Figurine kao reprezentacija tela: Analiza vinčanskih figurina gradačke i pločničke faze sa teritorija kosovske, južnomoravske i srbijanske varijante. *Petničke sveske* 67: 327–345.
- MILOJKOVIĆ J. 1990. The anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines. In R. Tringham and D. Krstić (eds.), *Selevac. A Neolithic village in Yugoslavia*. Monumenta Archaeologica 15. Institut of Archaeology, UCLA, Los Angeles: 397–436.
- NIKOLOVA L. on-line. <http://www.examiner.com/world-culture-in-national/the-context-of-stubline-crkvine-group-of-vin-a-figurines-is-published-starinar-serbia>
- PARKINSON W. A. 1999. The Social Organization of Early Copper Age Tribes on the Great Hungarian Plain. Paper presented in a symposium entitled *The Archaeology of Tribal Societies*, W. Parkinson and S. Fowles (organizers). 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in Chicago. Chicago, IL.
- PETROVIĆ B. 2001. Model peći iz Progara. *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 47(48): 11–23.
- PETROVIĆ B., KATIĆ V. and SPASIĆ M. 2009. *Život u glini: neolitska umetnost na tlu Beograda – figuralna plastika iz zbirke Muzeja grada Beograda*. Muzej grada Beograda. Beograd.
- PORČIĆ M. 2010. *Arheologija vinčanskih kuća: teorijsko-metodološki osnovi proučavanja demografije i društvene strukture*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Belgrade.
- SIMIĆ Z., CRNOBRNJA A. 2008. Sondažno iskopavanje lokaliteta Crkvine u selu Stubline. *Arheološki pregled n.s.* 4: 44–46.
- SREJOVIĆ D. 1968. Neolitska plastika centralnobalkanskog područja. In L. Trifunović (ed.), *Neolit centralnog Balkana*. Narodni muzej, Beograd: 177–240.
- STEFANOVIĆ S. 2008. Late Neolithic Boys at the Goločava Cemetery (Serbia). In K. Bacvarov (ed.), *Babies Reborn: Infant/Child Burials in Pre- and Protohistory*. Proceedings of the XV World Congress of the International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences. BAR International series 1832. Archaeopress, Oxford: 95–99.
- ŠTEFAN C. 2005–2006. Several Points of View Regarding the Interpretation of Anthropomorphic Figurines. *Peuce S.N. III–IV*: 71–76.
- STEVANOVIĆ M. 1997. The Age of clay. The Social dynamics of house construction. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 16: 334–395.
- ŠLJIVAR D., JACANOVIĆ D. 2005. Zoomorphic Figurines from Belovode. *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja (Beograd)* 18(1): 69–78.

TASIĆ N. 1973. *Neolitska plastika*. Muzej grada Beograda. Beograd.

1983. *Jugoslovensko Podunavlje od indoevropske seobe do prodora Skita*. Balkanološki institut SANU. Novi Sad – Beograd.

TASIĆ N. N. 2008. Nemi svedoci jednog vremena: figuralna umetnost Vinče. In D. Nikolić (ed.), *Vinča – praistorijska metropola: istraživanja 1908–2008*. Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu, Narodni muzej u Beogradu, Muzej grada Beograda, Galerija SANU, Beograd: 139–179.

TODOROVIĆ J. 1967. Crkvine, Stubline, Obrenovac – naselje vinčanske grupe. *Arheološki pregled* 9: 17–18.

TRIPKOVIĆ B. 2007. *Domaćinstvo i prostor u kasnom neolitu: vinčansko naselje na Banjici*. Srpsko arheološko društvo. Beograd.

2010. House(hold) Continuities in the Central Balkans, 5300–4600 BC. *Opuscula archaeologica* 33: 7–28.

TROGMAYER O. 1990. Der Gott mit Axt. Gedanken zu einem neuen Statuettenfund (Statuette V). In W. Meier-Arendt (ed.), *Alltag und Religion Jungsteinzeit in Ost-Ungarn. Ausgrabungen in Hodmezövasarhely-Gorzsa, Szegvár-Tüzköves, Ócsöd-Kovashalom, Vesző-Magyar, Berettyóújfalú-Herpály und Funde*. Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main: 66–69.

UCKO P. J. 1962. The interpretation of Prehistoric Anthropomorphic Figurines. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 92(1): 38–54.

1968. *Anthropomorphic figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete, with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece*. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Occasional paper no. 24. London.

VASIĆ M. 1936. *Preistoriska Vinča 3: Plastika, terakote*. Državna štamparija Kraljevine Jugoslavije. Beograd.



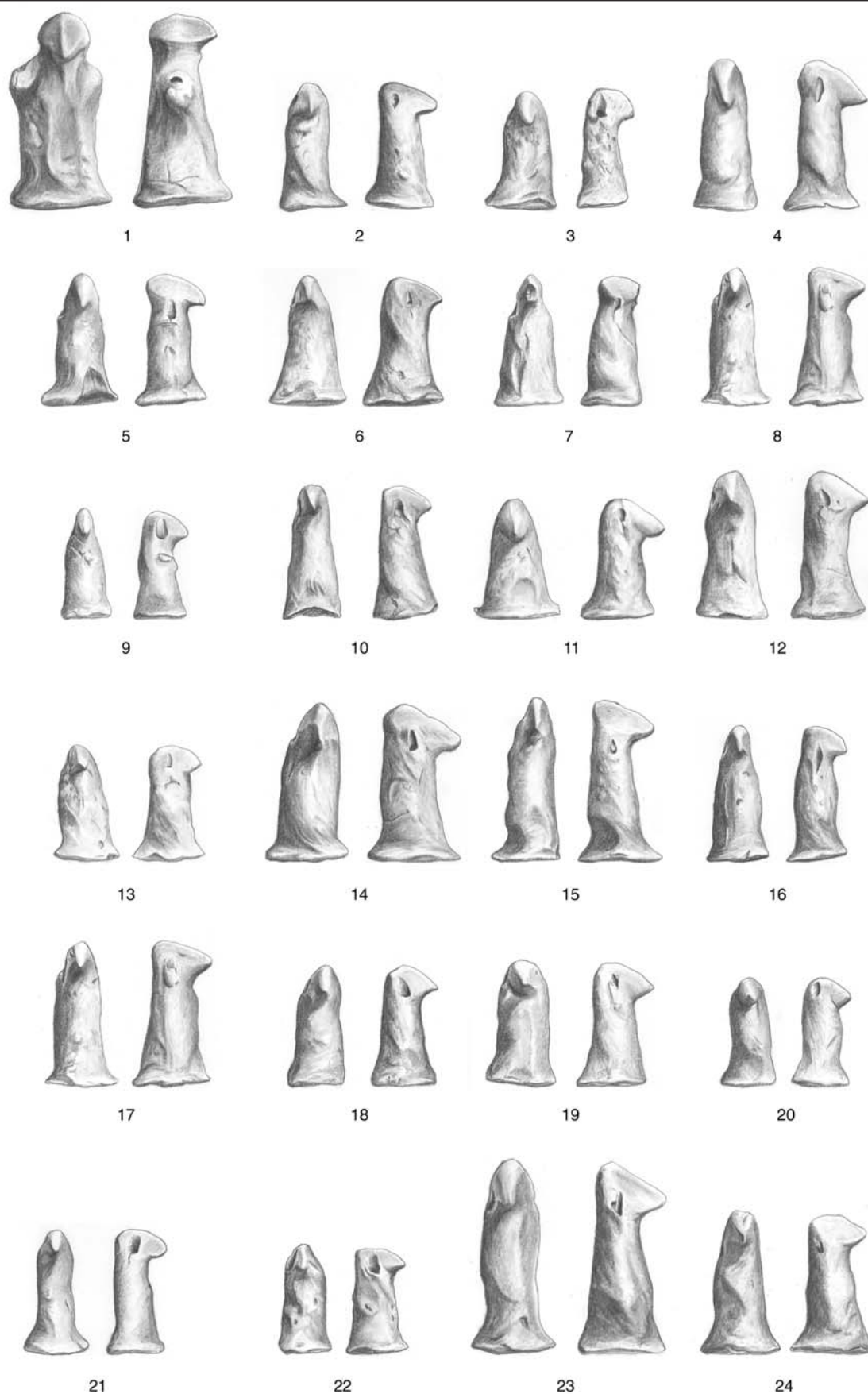
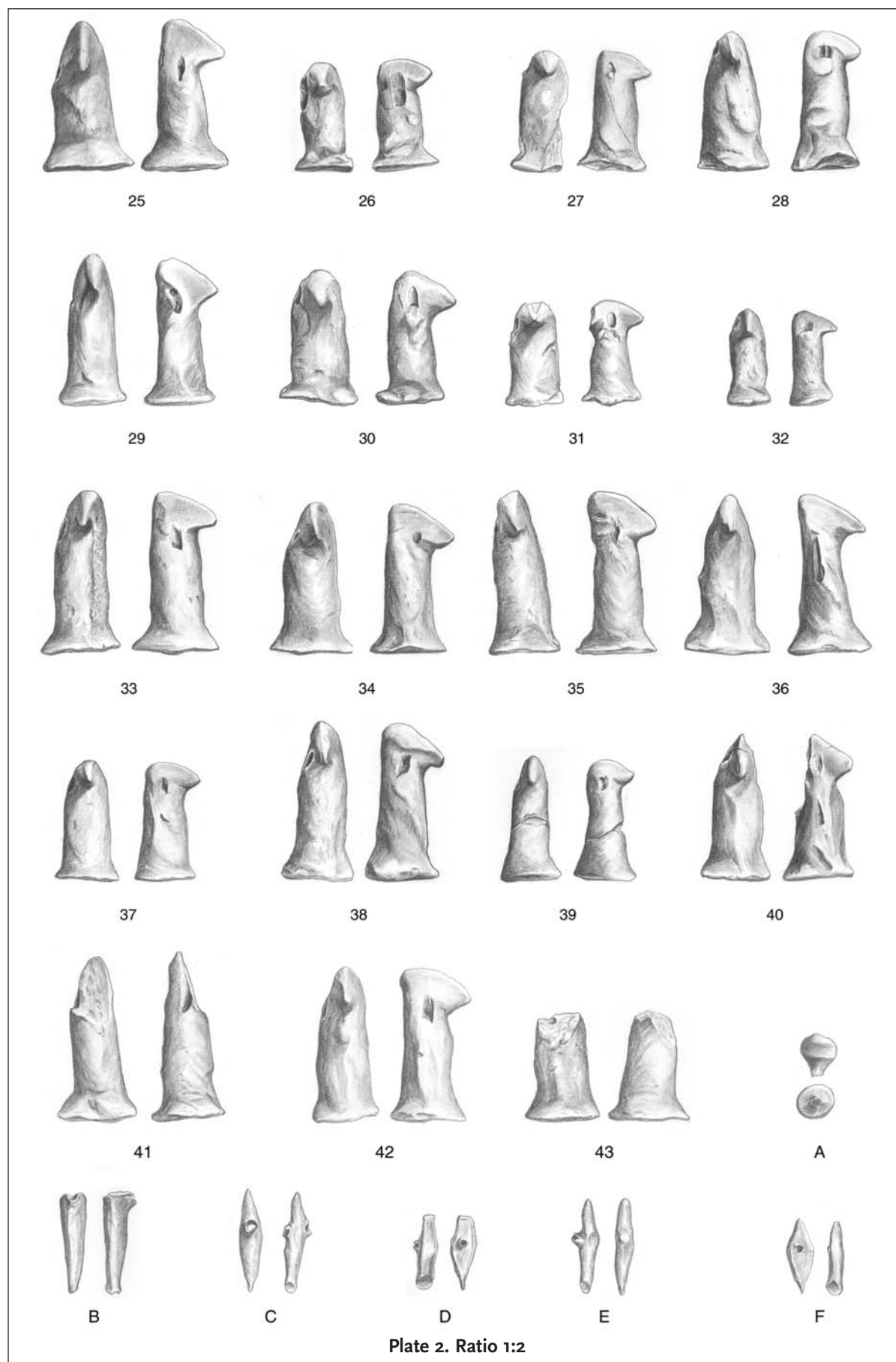
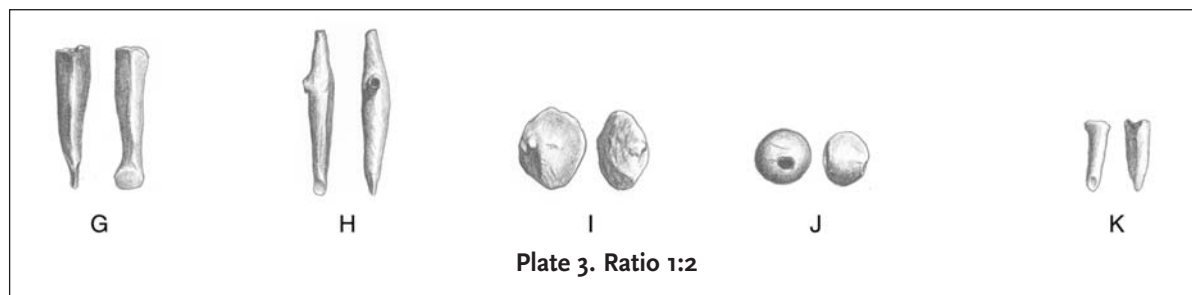


Plate 1. Ratio 1:2





Number in Plates	Group	Height (mm)	Foot diameter (mm)	Damage of handle hole	Registered number	Number in Plates	Group	Height (mm)	Foot diameter (mm)	Damage of handle hole	Registered number
1	I	67	35	—	45-1/2008	23	IV	63	31	—	45-50/2008
2	I	45	25	—	45-16/2008	24	IV	48	28	—	45-51/2008
3	I	41	23	+	45-3/2008	25	IV	55	34	—	45-52/2008
4	I	52	28	—	45-27/2008	26	V	37	23	+	45-6/2008
5	I	46	26	+	45-29/2008	27	V	43	24	+	45-19/2008
6	I	45	28	—	45-15/2008	28	V	49	24	+	45-20/2008
7	I	45	23	+	45-13/2008	29	V	52	25	+	45-25/2008
8	I	49	25	—	45-23/2008	30	V	45	27	+	45-22/2008
9	I	37	19	+	45-2/2008	31	V	36	24	+	45-8/2008
10	I	46	23	+	45-17/2008	32	VIII(?)	33	16	+	78/2008
11	II	41	28	+	45-28/2008	33	VI	57	32	—	45-41/2008
12	II	50	27	+	45-33/2008	34	VI	53	31	—	45-37/2008
13	II	41	24	—	45-10/2008	35	VI	56	28	+	45-30/2008
14	II	56	32	—	45-36/2008	36	VII	55	31	+	45-31/2008
15	II	58	30	+	45-32/2008	37	VII	41	23	—	45-12/2008
16	II	47	22	+	45-4/2008	38	VII	55	26	—	45-35/2008
17	III	47	25	+	45-21/2008	39	—	42	22	—	69/2008
18	III	40	21	—	45-14/2008	40	—	51	26	+	45-18/2008
19	III	40	24	+	45-11/2008	41	—	55	26	—	45-24/2008
20	III	35	18	—	45-9/2008	42	—	51	26	+	45-26/2008
21	III	41	21	+	45-5/2008	43	—	36	29	?	45-34/2008
22	III	36	20	+	45-7/2008						

**Tab. 1. Figurines.**

Letters in Plates 2-3	Group	Length (mm)	Registered number
A	I	14	45-38/2008
B	I	33	45-39/2008
C	I	34	45-40/2008
D	II	25	45-42/2008
E	II	32	45-43/2008
F	III	25	45-44/2008
G	III	33	45-45/2008
H	IV	39	45-46/2008
I	—	19	45-47/2008
J	—	13	45-48/2008
K	—	17	45-49/2008

**Tab. 2. Tools/weapons.**