

Vinča (Danubian) script

The First Script or just a Proto-Script

Category

Concerns in Display Typography (Academic Research – Poster Presentation)

Issue

Indigenous Scripts in Display Typography

History of the scripts is going deep in the past. It is so deep that we cannot clearly see its beginning today. After so many millenniums, so many wars, we have so little artifacts from the time of the beginning. And how we can be so sure in our understanding and knowledge about that time? And what time at all? Five thousand years ago? Or seven thousand? Or maybe more? More questions than answers.

It is usual understanding that the first script occurred at Middle East, in Mesopotamia, approx. 5.200 years ago. (Sumerian cuneiform was developed about 3.200 BC, with basic origin going deep as 7.000-8.000 BC and with some glyphs started representing sounds approximately 2.800 BC, and Proto-Elamit about 3.100 BC).

Within scientific and scholars' community discussion is going regard so-called Vinča (Danube) script for a century. There is no agreement on whether these symbols are just a decoration, proto-script, or maybe even full writing system.

The paper is discussing different opinions in lights of the newest findings (findings of Prof. Ovcharov at Karanovo and Gracian, Bulgaria 2006. and that of Prof. Ionita at Vada Rau, near Farcasa Neamt town, Romania 2009). These two findings are just a continuity of the Tartaria tablets, find and analyzed by Prof Nicolae Vlassa at Tartaria Alba, Romania, on 1961. All these findings have symbols inscribed on them. Discussion regarding dilemma are these symbols indeed the oldest writing system, proto-scripts or just a decoration, is present from 1908, when Prof M. Vasic found the first artifacts at Vinča, near Belgrade, Serbia. The most elaborated work in this area is by Prof R. Pesic from Belgrade. He recognized symbols as glyphs and even gave a potential way to deciphered them. Further works leded to two independent decoding by Russian archaeologist and linguist B. Perlov and Prof Kifishin.

The Vinča culture is a Neolithic archaeological culture in South-eastern Europe (Carpatho-Danubian area), dated to the period between 7.500 or 5.500–4.500 BC (due to different scholars). It developed from the Starchevo culture, which was prevailing in these area millennia before Vinča (see work of Prof. C. Renfrew, 1961). Named for its type site, Vinča-Belo Brdo, a large tell settlement discovered by Serbian archaeologist Miloje Vasic in 1908, it represents the material remains of a prehistoric society mainly distinguished by its settlement pattern and ritual behavior. According to Marija Gimbutas, the Vinča culture was part of Old Europe – a relatively homogeneous, peaceful and matrifocal culture that occupied Europe during the Neolithic. According to this theory its period of decline was followed by an invasion of warlike, horse-riding Proto-Indo-European tribes from the Pontic-Caspian steppe. Farming technology first introduced to the region during the First Temperate Neolithic was developed further by the Vinča culture, fuelling a population boom and producing some of the largest settlements in prehistoric Europe. These settlements maintained a high degree of cultural uniformity through the long-distance exchange of ritual items, but were probably not politically unified. Various styles of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines are hallmarks of the culture, as are the Vinča symbols, which some conjecture to be an early form of proto-writing. Importance of the findings is in a fact that if we compare them with the oldest Mesopotamian scripts (Djemdet Nasr and Uruk Kish), they are older for more than thousand years, maybe even two thousand years.

As a case study, the paper analyzes the best known example from the Vinča culture (regarding script), the first Tartaria tablet. This is very the first of the Vinča texts which is decoded (independent works of Perlov and Kifishin).

The small artifact, circular with only 60 mm diameter, with hole on the top, it is divided on four parts, each with symbols. It was found at village Tartaria (Tataria, Tartaria) in Romania, 1961. In his work during 1963. Prof N. Vlassa advocated that symbols are glyphs representing the oldest form of writing, the first script. Scientific society was very divided, more opposite than supporting this idea. Only a few archaeologists and linguists supported it. As language of the people from Vinča culture is not known, task to deciphered symbols was looking impossible.

Thanks to pioneer work of the Prof. R. Vasic, from Serbia (he wrote several articles and books regarding this topic between 1965 and 1993), the first two decoding came from archaeologist and linguist B. Perlov and Prof Kifishin. Reading was:

„NUN KA. SHA. UGULA. PI. IDIM KARA 1”

And translation by Perlov is: **“Four queens with face of the God Sha, it was burned one wisdom ruler”.**

Kifishin's translation is slightly different: **“During the fortieth ruling, in the name of the God Sha, one wisdom ruler was burned. He is tenth in the row.”**

Findings (some of the most important)

1908 – Prof. Miloje Vasic – Vinča, near Belgrade, Serbia
1961 – Prof. Dragoslav Srejovic – Lepenski Vir, Serbia
1961 – Prof. Nicolae Vlassa – Tartaria
2006 – Prof. Nikolay Ovcharov – Karanovo and Gracian, Bulgaria
2009 – Prof. Dumitru Ionita - Vadu Rau, near Farcasa Neamt town, Romania

Keywords

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Author:

Zoran Markovic

University of Botswana
Faculty of Engineering and Technology
Department of Industrial Design and Technology

Contacts:

markovicz@mopipi.ub.bw

Tel: (+267) 3-554-320

Cell: (+267) 71-553311

P.O. Box AD 567 ADD, Gaborone, Botswana, Africa



Vinča culture, approximately map



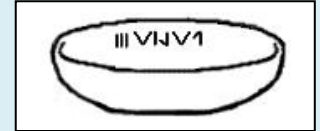
Vinča scripts (one of the lists)



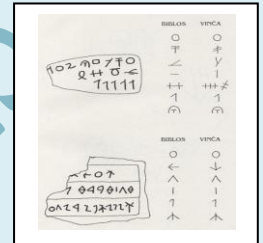
The Tartaria tablets



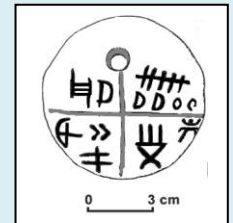
New findings – Vadu Rau, Romania, 2009



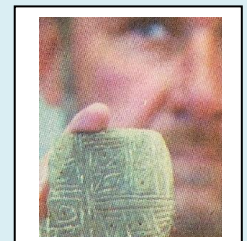
Vinča - Sample



Comparison – Byblos and Vinča



Third Tartaria tablet - Scheme



New findings – Ovcharov with tablet, Bulgaria, 2006

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