Pottery Technology at the Dawn of the Metal Age: Exploring Dynamics within Vinča Material Culture

POTTERY TECHNOLOGY AT THE DAWN OF THE METAL AGE

Exploring Dynamics within Vinča Material Culture

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Cover: (above) drawing by Elisa Norina Solera; (below) Toplica River along the archaeological site of Pločnik (photo by Julka Kuzmanović-Cvetković). Back cover: Pottery from the archaeological site of Pločnik (photo by Silvia Amicone).

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A mio figlio Francesco, che cresce
mentre cresco anch'io.

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Preface

"*The question of how and why behaviors, beliefs, and ideas are learned and shared among a group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next lies at the heart of our discipline*." With these words, Stark *et al.* (2008) set the stage for a theoretical approach that has profoundly shaped my research. At the core of this work is an exploration of how technological knowledge, particularly in ceramic production, is acquired, practiced, and transmitted. To address these questions, I adopt an interdisciplinary perspective that merges insights from the anthropology of technology, practice theory, and neo-Darwinian models of cultural evolution. Rather than treating these frameworks in isolation, I bring them into dialogue to better understand how pottery traditions reflect both social continuity and innovation. In this view, ceramics become more than functional artefacts: they are vessels of cultural memory, skill, and identity, formed through both material engagement and shared experience.

Pottery Technology at the Dawn of the Metal Age: Exploring Dynamics within Vinča Material Culture is the result of years of research into the technological choices, expertise, and social practices of pottery-making communities during the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic in the central Balkans. The project began with my doctoral research on pottery from the sites of Belovode and Pločnik—two key locations for understanding the emergence of metallurgy in prehistoric Europe—within the framework of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded (AHRC) project *Rise of Metallurgy in Eurasia: Evolution, organisation and consumption of early metal in the Balkans* (AH/J001406/1). It was later expanded through postdoctoral research at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen. Throughout, I aimed to investigate how pottery production evolved over time and how it might be connected with broader technological developments, particularly in pyrotechnology and early metalworking.

The results presented in this book are the product of a multidisciplinary approach that combines macroscopic ceramic analysis with archaeometric techniques, including petrography, WD-XRF, XRPD, and SEM. These analyses are framed within theoretical models drawn from the anthropology of technology and cultural transmission studies, allowing the integration of material science data with social and cognitive interpretations of technological practice. The overarching aim is to understand how knowledge was transmitted within and between communities, how production was organised, and how potters engaged with materials, tools, and traditions in ways that were both technically skilled and socially embedded.

Belovode and Pločnik offer unique insights into these questions. The stratigraphic integrity of the trenches, the rich ceramic assemblages, and the exceptional contextual data from recent excavations allowed a detailed reconstruction of ceramic "recipes" and production strategies over nearly 1,000 years. These findings are discussed within a broader regional framework, highlighting both continuity and innovation across the Vinča cultural sphere.

This project was made possible thanks to the contributions of many institutions and individuals. Foremost among them, I am grateful to Julka Kuzmanović-Cvetković, Gordana Grabež, Duško Sljivar, and the National Museum in Belgrade for securing access to materials. My sincerest gratitude goes to my former supervisors, Miljana Radivojević, Patrick Quinn, and Thilo Rehren, whose guidance and insights were instrumental during the formative years of the research that inspired this book. I am also deeply grateful to my PhD examiners, Evangelia Kiriatzi and Tobias Kienlin, for their valuable feedback and encouragement. I would also like to thank Kate Sharpe for her help with language editing, warm encouragement, and invaluable support throughout this journey.

I am deeply grateful to the teams working at Belovode and Pločnik, whose fieldwork provided the foundation for this research. I am also indebted to the AHRC project team, especially Miroslav Marić, Neda Mircović Marić, and Benjamin Roberts, for their collaboration, intellectual generosity, and crucial help, without which this research would not have been possible.

I wish to express sincere gratitude to the colleagues who supported this work at every stage. In particular Enrica Bonato, Mike Charlton, Marcos Martinón-Torres, Lara Maritan, Sébastien Manem, Giovanni Vezzoli whose guidance helped shape both my analytical approach and broader conceptual thinking, and Christoph Berthold, Enrico Croce, Attila Kreiter, Noemi Müller and Michela Spataro who shared their time, expertise, and encouragement. This book also owes much to the peer reviewers and fellow researchers such as Agnese Benzonelli, Ştefan Cristian Eduard, Nina Drakulović, Vanessa Forte, John Gait, Aleksandar Jablanović, Edyta Marzec, Elisa Perego, Giulia Russo, Paola

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Special thanks go to those who introduced me to archaeometric methods and supported the laboratory phases of this work. The analytical programme was supported by the AHRC project, and by institutional support from the Wolfson Archaeological Science Laboratories (UCL), the Fitch Laboratory at the British School at Athens, and the Competence Center Archaeometry Baden-Württemberg. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support that made this work possible, including grants from the AHRC, Funds for Women Graduates, the UCL Institute of Archaeology, the UCL Graduate School, the UCL the Institute for Archaeo-Metallurgical Studies (IAMS) and the Excellence Initiative at the University of Tübingen.

On a more personal note, this project has shaped not only my academic path but also my understanding of how archaeological research can connect the deep past with present questions about technology, identity, and community. Working on the pottery of the Vinča culture has been both an intellectual journey and a deeply human experience, one that brought me into contact with talented researchers, generous mentors, and enduring friendships. I am grateful for all the conversations, challenges, and shared discoveries that have accompanied this work.

I also wish to thank my family for their patience, support, and belief in this project, especially during the most demanding periods. To Lars Heinze, who has been by my side through it all, thank you for your constant encouragement and presence.

Finally, I hope this book will serve not only as a contribution to the study of Vinča ceramics but also as an invitation to further explore the complex world of prehistoric technologies, and the people behind them.