

## 11 VUČEDOL CULTURE

The Vučedol Culture is the most interesting of Late Aeneolithic phenomena, and its recognizable pottery shapes and stylistic expressions clearly reflect the spirit of the time in which it emerged. It originated from the region of Slavonia and Syrmia, and from there it later spread to all four corners of the world. The period of the unique Vučedol Culture finished at the very end of the Aeneolithic, after which its core area slowly lost its importance and opened up space for new cultures which were present in this region during the Early Bronze Age.

Although the Vučedol Culture is an easily recognizable prehistoric culture, the scope of the published results of investigations of its sites indicates that they have been underexplored, and that the living conditions and habits of their populations and the characteristics of its settlements are little known. Unfortunately, with the exception of the systematic excavation of the site of Vučedol, other published data are mostly the results of rescue archaeological excavations, which makes it impossible to obtain a comprehensive stratigraphic picture of the sites of the Vučedol Culture and the characteristics of its settlements. Of 63 registered Vučedol sites only 13 have been investigated (19.11%), while others have been registered on the basis of field survey or chance finds kept in museum collections (Balen 2010). Another problem, equally non-negligible, regards the fact that movable archaeological artefacts have not been published, and those are the best indicators of everyday life and the social and economic changes taking place in Vučedol society at the end of the third millennium BC.

Ever since the first data on the Vučedol Culture were published 140 years ago (Deschman 1875), a number of authors have addressed various aspects of the Vučedol Culture: from its origins, through the general characteristics of its settlements and material culture, and its geographic distribution, to its chronological division into the preclassic, early-classic, classic and late settlement phases (For an overview, see Miloglav 2012). The most important feature of the Vučedol Culture might be that it accepted external influences and innovations as much as it maintained some old traditions, which were adjusted to the new times and ways of life. Its pottery repertoire clearly displays influences of the Kostolac and Baden cultures – and, indirectly through them, also of the Sopot and Vinča cultures. Having accepted influences from its predecessors, the Vučedol Culture would also leave its mark on many cultures of the Early Bronze Age that it came into contact with. At that time, its previous unity broke up into a range of regional variants over a wide geographical region.

An inspection of the topographic maps of some of the most important Vučedol sites already clearly suggests that the Vučedol population, when erecting their settlements, abided by certain rules. Surely, one of the most important factors in selecting locations for settlement were naturally prominent and elevated places, located in the vicinity of rivers or brooks. Such locations were a logical choice: they were important both strategically and in terms of communication, while the need to fortify the settlements, once built, depended primarily on their surroundings and the natural configuration of the land. Loess sediments are porous and non-stratified; water passes through them easily and dilutes lime components along its way. The porous loess, with its dry surface, contributed to the creation of fertile soil suitable for pasture, and for this reason this region has always been attractive for human settlement (Miloglav 2012a).

The high number of fortified settlements indicates that the Vučedol population felt the need to live quietly and more permanently in one spot, and to use locations that had previously been

occupied and then abandoned, and which could easily be fortified. Generally, they positioned their settlements at spots previously occupied by members of the Starčevo, Sopot, Baden and Kostolac cultures (Vučedol, Sarvaš, Gomolava, Borinci, Damića Gradina, Vinkovci). By putting up settlements on high loess plateaus by rivers, especially the Danube, they protected them from flooding. Thus the first prehistoric settlements in the area of Vinkovci were located on the high left bank of the Bosut, whose elevation, at 88 m above sea level, is much higher than that of the right bank, which also made it better protected from frequent flooding and suitable for settlement.

Topographic features played an important role through all the prehistoric periods, in that settlements simply adapted to the environment in terms of both the economy and settlement organization. The strategic aspect became an important factor only in the Late Aeneolithic, when the settlements were additionally fortified with ditches and palisades. In the new uncertain times, it was evidently necessary to provide settlements with additional protection.

Fortified settlements and permanent presence in a single location suggest that the population engaged in farming, which does not make the Vučedol economy much different from those of the Baden and Kostolac cultures. A need to stay in the same place and be connected with an area reflect a way of life that can be followed continuously from the Late Neolithic, when settlements were grouped into small villages, or hamlets. The long-term presence in a location is perhaps best recorded, from an archaeological point of view, by renovated house floors and the existence of several settlement horizons in the same place within a settlement, and this can be seen at Vučedol, too (Dimitrijević 1979: 283; Durman 1988; Forenbaher 1995: 20; Balen 2005a: 31), as well as in Vinkovci, Sarvaš and Borinci (Dimitrijević 1979: 283). The same situation has been ascertained at the sites of Ervenica and Damića Gradina.

Before the emergence of the Vučedol Culture, in the Carpathian Basin elemental copper had already been forged, and it had been known that copper could be melted and then forged into shape. It was cast in single-piece moulds using the lost-wax (or *cire perdue*) technique (which means that, for each cast object, a prototype had to be made in wax). A novelty which appeared in the Late Aeneolithic was the two-piece mould, which made it possible to produce several moulds from a single prototype. This marked the emergence of the serial production of two-piece moulds, and hence the serial production of copper objects (Durman 1983: 23–31). A large quantity of copper axes and moulds discovered in hoards or as individual finds (at Vinkovci, Vučedol, Sarvaš, Borinci), and evidence of metallurgical activity that can be traced at various sites from the earliest phase of the Vučedol Culture onwards, testify to the important role metallurgy played in Vučedol society.

The Aeneolithic period was marked not only by an understanding and use of copper as a raw material, but also by a new outlook and way of life. In terms of the economy, it meant that animal husbandry had prevalence over land cultivation, as it produced surpluses faster and thus enabled more intensive exchange and trade.

In addition to land farming and animal husbandry, in settlements by rivers, fishing must have had an important role. In contrast to the Vučedol region, the Vinkovci area is rich in woods, its geological base consists of loam, and it is located by the Bosut, a river which does not offer, to the population living in its vicinity, nearly as much as the Danube. Given the circumstances, in this region the Vučedol settlements simply adapted to their environment both in terms of their economy and topography. An analysis of fauna in the 'Streim Vineyard' position at the site of Vučedol has shown that, during the Baden and Kostolac cultures, shellfish were present in greater

quantities, while snails were predominant during the Vučedol Culture. The reason for this change is unknown, but there is no doubt that fish, shellfish and snails played a major role in the diet of Aeneolithic cultures living along the banks of the Danube (Paunović & Lajtner 1995). This goes to show that the vicinity of rivers and river courses has always been a natural and logical choice for settlement location, as it ensured subsistence and enabled communication.

The economic strategy of the Vučedol population included land cultivation, animal husbandry, hunting and metallurgy; as a consequence, the society was stratified, with a richer social class standing apart from the remainder of the population. From a social point of view, the formation of strongly-linked patriarchal clan and tribal communities left the Neolithic way of life behind (Težak-Gregl 1998: 111). The social hierarchy is best reflected in burial rituals and indicators present within the concepts of housing and settlement organization. The 'married couple's grave' in the position of Gradac at Vučedol suggests that members of the ruling class of the clan's nobility were buried, and reveals traces of social differentiation, reflected also in the selection of burial location (Dimitrijević 1979).

Burials in graveyards located outside the settlement have not been discovered at any of the Vučedol sites. The sites of Ervenica and Damića Gradina fit perfectly into the general picture of life in the Late Aeneolithic, and the results of analyses carried out in respect of the economic and social facets of those settlements will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.