

# The Late Prehistory in Albania: a Review of Theory, Strategies of Research, and Valorization of Archaeological Heritage

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*In almost eight decades of explorations, the research in the field of prehistory in Albania demonstrated considerable dynamics, a series of seminal efforts to delve into the distant past, effects of external factors to instrumentalize the archaeological interpretations, various research strategies, and, of course, numerous efforts to valorize and preserve the data as a crucial testimony of culture heritage. Many different strategies of data collection, including systematic excavations, regional surveys, test pits and so on, has been extensively applied in a large number of field projects. However, while considering cohesively research agendas, scientific queries that yet remain to be addressed, as well as the potential for further explorations and the value that archaeological sites have gained beyond their discovery, some crucial matters need to be discussed. In this paper, I deal with the character of the archaeological research of prehistory in Albania and to what extent it impacts the understanding of the past, including both, flaws and achievements. In three chapters, in this discussion, I attempt to analyze the conceptual setting of research of the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, focusing on theoretical questions, research design, and valorization of the prehistoric heritage.*

## The Cultural-Historical Tradition and the Prehistoric Studies in Albania

**I**n the cultural and academic context of Albania in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nationalistic ideology has loomed large, and this has had an enormous and often overlooked influence on a broad array of issues such as cultural continuity, historicity, and ethnogenesis.

Indeed, these have become loaded assumptions and have resulted in a particular type of research agenda that still continues to determine and define the archaeological studies. Such an agenda has turned its back on

more anthropological aspects that focus attention on the ways communities lived, built interactions or explored the landscape. In the first chapter, I am focusing on two main issues: the theoretical concepts that have lead archaeological research and reasoning, and subsequent approaches in pottery analysis.-

Formation of the modern Albanian state, especially the vicissitudes of the Second World War, and the establishment of a Communist regime and isolationist doctrine forced a heavily nationalistic agenda on hu-



manities, which led to approaches that did not naturally stem from a scientific background. Indeed, in archaeology, this political and ideological intervention had an immense impact on its conceptual and institutional foundations. Any interpretation and work undertaken regarding the so-called 'reconstruction of the past' was sharply envisaged within limited conceptual agendas with exclusive attention given to the glorious ethnogenesis of the Albanian people and their direct continuity with the Illyrians. The question of ethnogenesis became increasingly popular, to the point that, currently, it is difficult to come across a publication from the totalitarian period that does not emphasize it as a pivotal issue (Aliu 1969; Korkuti 1969; Anamali 1972; 1973; 1980; Stipčević 1973; Buda 1976; Tirtja 1976; Prendi 1985; 1988; 1989; Spahiu 1986; Bodinaku 1990).

What kinds of theoretical approaches are involved, if any, in this research? In Albanian archaeological studies, the theory has rarely if ever been considered an integral part of the research strategy. The discipline was mostly built on the conceptual pillars of culture-history and these have never been challenged or called into question, as was also the case in most of the Balkan archaeologies of that time. This has produced a situation where every archaeological study had similar predefined queries, and this was often the case even before the process of collection of data started. Consequently, the results were arbitrarily attached to a research agenda often created at a considerable distance from the data. In most cases, this conceptual strategy yielded predictably similar interpretations, avoiding altogether any type of more focused discussion or controversy.

In the symposium dedicated to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Albanian archaeology, Lorenc Bejko offered a penetrating overview regarding the general development of the discipline (Bejko 1998: 195-207). Among other remarks, especially those relating to the immense contribution made by the first generation of Albanian archaeologist, which largely started from scratch, Bejko in cogent terms pointed out that three main piers of the theoretical frameworks based on historicism, Marxism, nationalism, empiricism and culture history (Bejko 1998: 195-201). Bejko mentions that perhaps the only debate which emerged within the Albanian community of archaeologists was associated with a few claims of Bep Jubani who, in 1969, suggested notable differences between the northern and southern burial rites of the late prehistoric communities of Albania (i.e. southern Illyria) (Jubani 1969a; Bejko 1998; 2000). The statement created a furor within the community of archaeologists and, according to Bejko, it provoked even

the reaction of Enver Hoxha himself, in order to avoid any future "discrepancies", Hoxha accorded the "right" to Albanian archaeologists to call 'Greek' and 'Roman' anything that was not Illyrian (Hoxha 1969: 74-78, 80-81).

It needs to be stressed however, that this clear relationship between nationalistic agendas and the culture-historical tradition comes as a response to a similar trajectory in research of the southern Balkans. This fashion in discipline had been a *modus operandi* in other European countries like Germany, Italy and France even in the pre-WW2 period and continued more vigorously in large parts of Europe after the WW2 in Poland, Czech, Slovak or Slavic archaeology (Trigger 2006: 248-61). These kinds of politically-charged conclusions not only compromise the overall research mentality but also the possibility of engaging in critical thinking and even incorporating alternative research frameworks. Consequently, in combination with culture-historical tradition, such an approach has hindered research, rather than fostering it.

The analysis of material culture mostly focused on pottery and metal objects, has become one of the crucial tasks in the study of the late prehistory of Albania, the western Balkans, and southeast Europe in general. By approaching such issues, however, through a highly generalist agenda, problematic and often ill-defined conclusions have resulted, which lacked systematic strategy in the analysis of the material record. Pottery research undertaken by the Albanian scholars has occurred in largely isolated circumstances. A 'labor of love', often pursued without much fanfare, and certainly far from the gaze of international academic centers. Consequently, the bulk of the available data is usually confined to the ritual contexts normally encountered in cemeteries, tumulus burials in particular (Prendi 1956; 1957; 1959; Budina 1969; 1971a; 1971b; Ceka 1974; Bodinaku 1981; 1982; 2002; Korkuti 1981; Jubani 1982; 1983; 1995; Aliu 1984; 1994; 1995; 1996; 2004; 2012; Andrea 1985; 1990; 1997; 2010; Bela 1990; Bela and Përzhita 1990; Kurti 1999; Koka 2012), as well as a few shaft cemeteries (Aliu 1994; Andrea 1981; Braka 1987). However, potential sources of data are also present in other contexts, including settlements (e.g., caves or open-air sites) (Prendi 1966; Korkuti 1971; Belli and Starova 1983; Hoxha 1987; Ylli 1988; Andrea 1990; 1996; Prendi et al. 1996; Prendi and Bunguri 2008).

Quantitatively, the work on pottery is well represented in the publication of numerous articles in the *Archaeological Bulletin* (1968-1975), *Studia Albanica*, which largely focused on the so-called "Albanological science"

(1964), and in the journal *Iliria*, which, since 1971, has become the flagship archaeological journal in the country. Studies in *Iliria* were often presented in a standardized format: the presentation is limited to a few pages that focus, in a somewhat uniform fashion, on descriptive commentaries of material findings based on a regional comparative framework. Monographs are a more recent phenomenon (Andrea 1985; Kurti 1999; Aliu 2004, 2012; Koka 2012). Though they are much larger texts, their content follows the standardized model found in *Iliria*.

This general perspective becomes even more evident in the cases when the focus is limited to a particular subject matter. Specifically for material culture, theoretical considerations are not part of the research agenda. The lack of constructive and coherent theoretical underpinnings is apparent. Pottery is essentially considered a key material component that integrates a chain of potentially crucial issues including ethnogenesis, cultural identity, and continuity. Formulations comprising a given hypothesis are uniformly synthesized and thus rather arbitrarily aligned with the predetermined conclusions of the research. The effects of these very limited “pick-and-choose” and “mine” versus “yours” strategies remained widely applied.

There is also a consistent trend of particularization of research agenda; in other words, a discrete focus is given to issues of chronology and even individual qualitative attributes of the archaeological data. The assumption is that the particularistic focus will potentially explain problems previously formulated in the hypothesis, leaving ethnogenesis, cultural identity, and continuity as the main concepts of reasoning. Particularistic treatments are commonly undertaken in a fashion that gives preference to the most salient or most easily observed, attributes. For instance, out of the entire repertoire of the Iron Age pottery, the majority of research and analyses are strictly focused on matt-painted pottery, a derivative of the so-called Devollian Ware. Its fabric is, generally, described as light-fine, highly-fired, and usually mixed with very fine particles of sand and micas. Such identification was initially used by Frano Prendi in his study of the long-term settlement in Maliq in southeastern Albania (Prendi 1966: 255-271).

Prendi showed an exceptional enthusiasm for matt-painted pottery. His discussion is somewhat evasive when he argues that the matt-painted repertoire forms the most distinctive group of the Iron Age pottery in southern Albania (in the Devoll Valley). In the case of Maliq, Prendi offered a somewhat simplistic theory related to the painting technique – the existence of two

techniques for decoration painting: one before, and the other after firing. His distinction was based solely on a simple macroscopic test – by scratching a vessel surface by hand and seeing, whether the decoration remained in place. Prendi’s determinations focus solely on the firing technique, with little emphasis given to the archaeological sequence. He considers both pre- and post-fired decoration as a qualitative attribute which demonstrates advancement in pottery painting and technology through time. Thus, the post-fired version, its paint being more easily erased, Prendi, somewhat dubiously assigned to an earlier period (Late Bronze Age, which corresponds to layers III d2 and d3 at Maliq, dating to the 13<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century BC). According to him, the pottery with decoration painted before firing is of the Early Iron Age date (11<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century BC) and continues through the so-called period of the Developed Iron Age (8<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> BC) (Prendi 1978: 13).

The same kind of particularistic views are consistently stressed by other scholars in research at several Iron Age sites in southern Albania. So, from entire pottery assemblages, only the Devollian ware and matt-painted pottery continued to comprise a significant part of the pottery assemblage and research agendas (Korkuti 1969; Andrea 1985; Bodinaku 1989; 1990). Such a particularizing agenda has left many obscurities regarding the pottery dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages in southern Illyria and northern Epirus/Albania. Not much attention has been paid to various other features that are abundantly present in the late prehistory such as: coarse ware, dark fine ware, incised decoration, the similarities between the incised and matt-painted motifs, the varieties of the plastic applications and vertical and diagonal ribbing, finger impressions, vessel forms, and so on. It is likely that even in the case of matt-painted decoration, most of the above cited authors have rushed to conclusions without conducting a systematic quantitative and qualitative assessment of the data collected at various sites. Comprehensive accounts of a typology of motifs, regional distribution, and quantitative occurrence, relation to fabric and vessel forms are lacking.

The entire discourse unanimously considered the matt-painted pottery, as a local tradition, deeply rooted in the Devoll Valley. Based on this, it is claimed that a cultural identity ‘organically’ arose in this region in the Iron Age (pots = peoples), and have gradually spread over neighboring areas in Macedonia and northwest Greece (Prendi 1974: 121). Upon closer inspection, matt-painted pottery was linked together with the related issue of the so-called “migration waves” on the eve of the Iron Age and served as a crucial material for the arguments



of the emergence of new comers and their continuity. Decoration especially was understood as an innovative element in the pottery and the main indicator of new movements and/or occupations in the southern Balkans.

Already few decades prior to the excavations at Maliq, Walter Heurtley, working in the settlement of Boubousti in north-central Greece (western Thessaly), had come across a similar ware decorated with matt-painted motifs. This ware was dated to the transitional period from the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age (1300–900 BC), and Heurtley hastened to link this new pattern with Dorian migrations (Heurtley 1927: 91-94, 169-79).

Soon, two different agendas came to the fore: 1) strong belief in migration theory. The principal advocates were German scholars seeking, to confirm the emergence and spread of the Aryan race in the Balkans in the Late Bronze Age (Heurtley 1926; Hochstetter 1982; 1984); and 2) observations that presence of matt-painted pottery in the Middle Helladic period in the areas of Lianokladhi points to gradual, penetration to Thessaly and Boiotia (Wace and Maurice 1912; Buck 1964). Ioulia Vokotopoulou subsequently confirmed this observation by admitting that, in the cemetery of Vitsa Zagoriou (northwestern Greece), the matt-painted motifs did not appear until the Late Bronze Age (Vokotopoulou 1986: 364-66). According to her, this material rooted in the Greek lands that subsequently spread toward Epirus, western Macedonia and Albania. The nationalistic tendency about the leading role of the Greeks in the areas of the southern Balkans was thus promoted, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The question of origins has only recently been considered in alternative terms. The phenomenon of matt-painted pottery, as Barbara Horejs defines it, rather than being a migration product of people, either from Anatolia, southern Greece or central Europe, is the result of long-term contacts along a south-north direction (Horejs 2007). Though approached through traditional avenues, her views eschew political and nationalistic agendas. Thomas Tartaron seems to offer so far the most plausible account on the presence of matt-painted pottery in western Macedonia and southeastern Albania. Together with Horejs, Tartaron agrees that this category of material was nothing but the result of constant communications among the Late Bronze and Iron Age communities in the wider regional context region. Furthermore, he emphasizes the geographic configuration as a crucial feature, putting special focus on the routes along the river valleys (Tartaron 2004: 85-87).

Though cultural-historians, mentioned above, never called into question the migration theory, the discourse became controversial when the origins and directions of these putative waves of migration and their representations in the material culture (especially matt-painted pottery) were considered.

Nevertheless, the potential offered by the research of pottery with regard to social aspects, its role in everyday life, the modes of production, transmission in time and space, and especially its reflection in the economic development, have not been comprehensively considered. In many ways, the issue of matt-painted pottery has become something of a scholarly trap in which one can get easily lost in the various narratives. To this day it remains an approach that perceives archaeological data as an element of ownership developed within sharply delineated boundaries framed within an “ours” versus “yours” mentality. It is interesting how such scholarly narratives, rather than accomplishing their stated academic mission, revert to traditional concepts, legends and clichés that have been very popular among different ethnic groups living in the Balkans.

While conducting my research in Albania, I have come across a television documentary entitled “*Whose is this Song?*”, the production of a Bulgarian director named Adela Peeva (Peeva 2003). The plot was interesting: a well-known folk song that Peeva assumed to be Bulgarian turned out to be equally popular in several countries around the Balkans, including Greece, Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even beyond the Balkans, in Turkey. Moreover, in each country, apart from the distinct lyrics, the song had a similar melodic rhythm. Intrigued by this diversity, Peeva undertook a journey in each of the above countries attempting to explore the roots and possibly the identity of the song. I was familiar with the Albanian version of the song and had taken for granted its Albanian origin; after all, the song had always been part of family celebrations in many parts of my country. In Peeva’s exploration, I was expecting the “contest” to favor an Albanian origin. The problem, however, was that others from all over the Balkans had expressed even stronger feelings that the song was ‘theirs’. In her journey through Turkey, Crete, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia, and finally in her native Bulgaria, Peeva came across various versions of the song but also encountered a uniquely similar reaction among different ethnic groups when she asked the question: Whose is this song? To a person, every musician, singer, music expert, composer and local people emphatically claimed the song as belonging to either their country or culture. In the case of two countries—Turkey and Albania—mu-

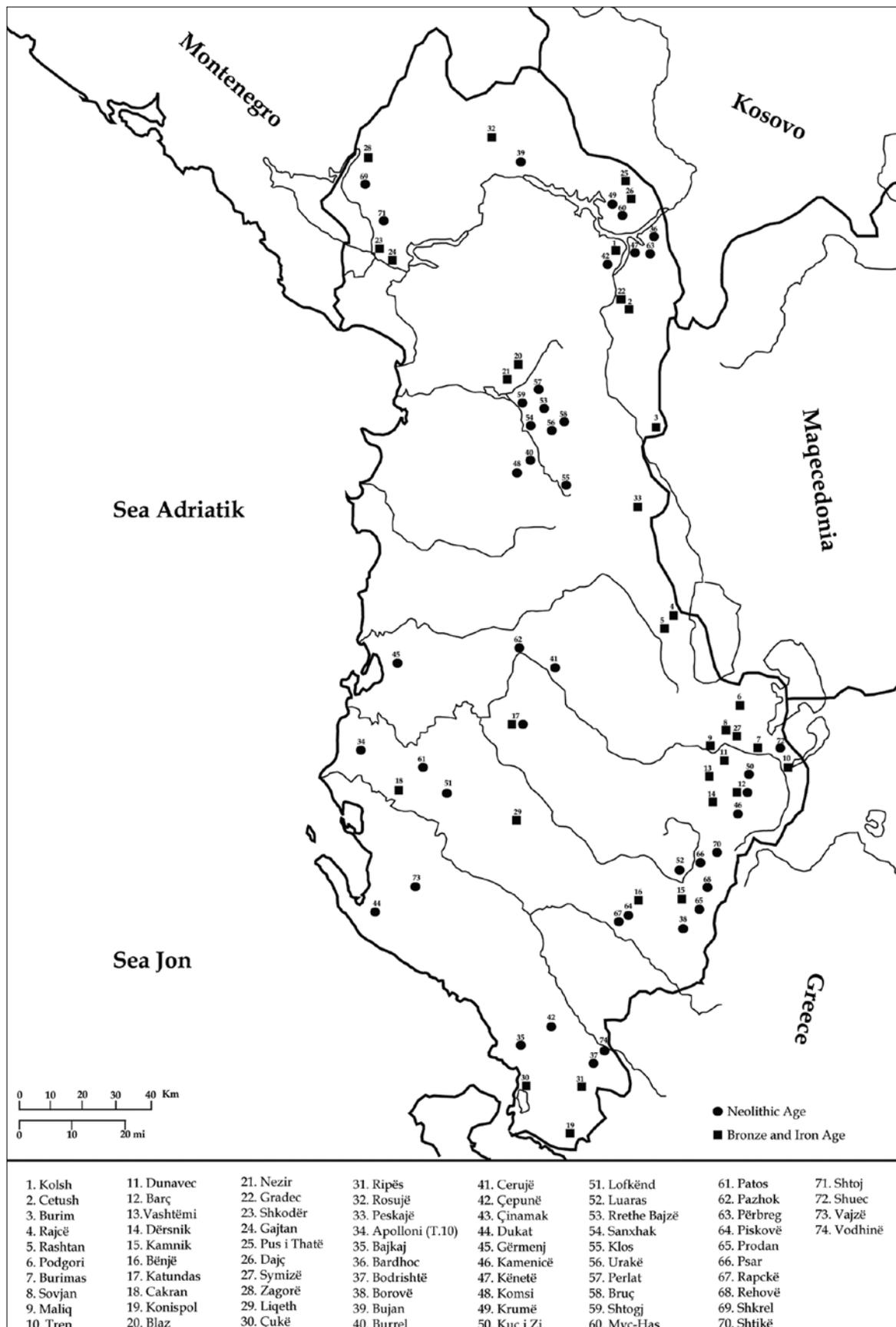


FIGURE 1.  
Map showing  
prehistoric  
sites



Site	Surface area m <sup>2</sup>	Quantitative Data				Research method (excavations)	Publication status
		Pottery	Tools	Rituals	Others		
Bënjë	102 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	Not published
Blaz	13 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	-I-
Burim	17 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	-I-
Burimas	225 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	-I-
Dërsnik	325 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	-I-
Gradec	300 m <sup>2</sup>					-I-	-I-
Cakran	428 m <sup>2</sup>		75	51	2	-I-	Brief reports
Cetush	350 m <sup>2</sup>	Classification based on fabric	--	--	--	-I-	-I-
Dunavec	300 m <sup>2</sup>	--	184	70	--	-I-	-I-
Barç	64 m <sup>2</sup>	1430	9	4		-I-	-I-
Kamnik	150 m <sup>2</sup>	22	64	10	10	-I-	-I-
Katundas	40 m <sup>2</sup>	--	--	--		-I-	-I-
Kolsh	275 m <sup>2</sup>		97	21	4	-I-	-I-
Konispol	19.36 m <sup>2</sup>	--	--	--	--	-I-	-I-
Podgorie	100 m <sup>2</sup>	--	--	--	--	-I-	-I-
Rajcë	265 m <sup>2</sup>	Classification based on fabric	30	6	--	-I-	-I-
Rashtan	18 m <sup>2</sup>	--	30			-I-	-I-
Topojan	428 m <sup>2</sup>	14.997	86	14	1	-I-	-I-
Vashtëmi Phase II	225 m <sup>2</sup> 64 m <sup>2</sup>	---	39			-I-	-I-
<b>Total</b>	3.708.36						

TABLE 1. Explorations in Neolithic sites.

sic specialists offered even more elaborative accounts of the authenticity, indeed ethnicity of the song as, in each respective case, Turkish or Albanian. Elsewhere, Peeva even witnessed fighting among the Roma (Gypsy) communities of southern Serbia who claimed the song even more emphatically as theirs. In the end, she returned to Bulgaria empty-handed, unable to give the song an agreed-upon identity. What she uncovered, however, was more important: an “ours” vs. “yours” mentality throughout the different Balkan nations. The documentary serves as a striking example of the lack of cohesiveness and a dualist attitude toward the “other”, in spite of the fact that these communities have constantly in-

teracted with one another and, above all, experienced many centuries of living under the same rulers, whether the Romans, Byzantines or Ottomans.

A similar attitude is noted in cases of archaeological data that was rarely considered as a record of the past and one not necessarily associated with the present. Moreover, as with the song, the first reaction towards the archaeological record was precisely a similar claim of ‘ownership’, one squarely located in the sharply defined ethnic and religious vicissitudes of the Balkans.

## Research strategy in data collection and site exploration

Systematic explorations of prehistoric sites begun relatively late. Frano Prendi and Adem Bunguri when speaking about the historic development of Albanian archaeology distinguish three main phases: (1) archaeology between the two World Wars (1918-1939), (2) archaeology during the Communist regime (1948-1990) and (3) archaeology in post-Communism (1991 and onward) (Prendi and Bunguri 2014: 16). So far, it was during the second period when the largest quantity of data has been collected. And it was during this phase when the discipline of archaeology was shaped also in institutional and organizational terms. Systematic excavations were the main way of data collection. Other kinds of explorations, including test pits or regional surveys, entered the research agenda only after 1991. By taking into account the very fact that excavation in itself represents a destructive technique which leaves not many possibilities for further investigations in the field, I analyze, below in the text, to what extent the size of excavated areas of prehistoric sites in Albania highlighted the understanding of past, and what is the potential for further examinations of data already collected, archived and stored. First, I deal with the excavations of the Neolithic sites, then with settlements and cemeteries dated to the Bronze and Iron Ages, and finally, I am focusing on the implications of the surface surveys in the research strategies in Albania (Figure 1).

### Neolithic sites

The Neolithic Age caught the attention of Albanian scholars at an early stage. Excavations took place on at least in 19 settlements: Podgorie, Barç (Lera 1983; 1987), Bënjë, Blaz, Burim, Burimas, Dërsnik, Gradec (Korkuti and Prendi 1992; Korkuti 1995; Prendi and Bunguri 2014), Cakran (Korkuti and Andrea 1974), Cetush (Korkuti and Bunguri 1996), Dunavec (Korkuti 1974), Kamnik (Prendi and Aliu 1971), Kolsh, Katundas, (Korkuti 1983a; 1995), Konispol (Korkuti et. al. 1996), Rashtan, Rajcë, (Gjipali 1995; 1997), Topojan (Bunguri 1993), Vashtëmi (Korkuti 1983b). From the data so far collected in publication reports, the area explored is roughly 3,708 m<sup>2</sup> (Table 1). At least 13 out of 19 settlements have an explored area greater than 100 m<sup>2</sup> or 3473 m<sup>2</sup> combined. In spite of systematic excavations, not much attention was given to the examination and assessment of the site extension. Excavations are broadly led by the very intuitive decisions of the archaeologists without employing a concrete strategy on site and data sampling. In many cases,

they were directed using rather intuitive methods and can be considered as 'informal sampling' according to the C. Ortons classification of sampling strategies (Orton 2000: 2-4).

As Table 1 shows, six settlements lack publications what presents significant impediment for further analysis. In the published reports of other sites, qualitative descriptions on material culture and stratigraphic sequence serve as a key reference for analysis and interpretations. Moreover, special attention is given to artefacts in on the good state of preservation and at least from the publications, the presentation and analysis of the quantitative profile of the data is poorly treated. Catalogues on material culture often offer narrative terms and lack comprehensive accounts on individual artefacts at least on macroscopic attributes. Most commonly, the interpretations focused on regional and cross-regional comparisons and offered some narratives on preferable cultural connections. However, this is generally treated and leaves no gap at all for any understanding to what extent and intensity these contacts developed.

Some interesting dynamic is noted in those few excavations that have been carried out after 1990, joint Albanian-American excavations in the cave of Konispol in the early 1990s (Korkuti et. al. 1996), and, a few years later, of the open settlement of Vashtëmi (Allen and Gjipali 2013). The site areas explored were 19.36 m<sup>2</sup> and 64 m<sup>2</sup>, respectively. No complete publications are yet available and in the preliminary reports, not much is said about the sampling strategy (e.g. sampling trenches, limits of the sites). Though the excavated areas are distinctively smaller than any site explored prior the 1990, the research protocol addressed some new questions, including the observation of transition from the Mesolithic to Neolithic by looking at plant remains, climatic data or by radiocarbon absolute dating (AMS C14) (Korkuti et. al. 1996: 220; Hansen 1999; Russell 2000; Ellwood et. al. 2000). In addition to this, the explorations of the Vashtëmi settlement was part of a more comprehensive project aimed at a re-evaluation of other Neolithic sites in the region including those of Podgorie, Progër, Pogradec and Rajcë. Allen and Gjipali reported to have collected samples in each settlement in order to establish subsequent steps of the research program (Allen and Gjipali 2013: 107-109). So far, the analysis of the environmental data have yielded interesting results regarding the economic profile of the Vashtëmi community, together with the earliest absolute radiocarbon C14 AMS date of an Early Neolithic settlement in Albania (cal. 6.400 BC) (Allen and Gjipali 2013: 109-117).



### **Settlements of the Bronze and Iron Age**

The Bronze and Iron Ages represent some salient characteristics, especially regarding the settlement patterns. In the stratigraphic sequence, the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age artefacts are often found in similar layers and as a consequence not easy to distinguish from one another. Several Bronze Age settlements have also yielded earlier evidence from Late Neolithic and Copper Ages: Maliq (Prendi 1966), Tren (Korkuti 1971), Sovjan (Prendi et al. 1996), and Nezir (Andrea 1989; 1990). However there are 14 settlements situated in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age transition: Dajç (Bela 1987), Gajtan (Rebani 1966), Liqeth (Ylli 1988), Maliq (Prendi 1966; Andrea 2006; Prendi and Bunguri 2008; 2014), Nezir (Andrea 1989; 1990), Peskajë (Bunguri 1994), Pus i Thatë (Bela 1992), Rosujë (Ceka and Jubani 1971), Ripës (Budina 1971a), Symizë (Lera 1992), Sovjan (Prendi et al. 1996; Lera et al. 2008a; 2008b) Shkodër (Hoxha 1987), Tren (Korkuti 1971) and Zagorë (Andrea 1996). In total, the excavated areas measure 4.336 m<sup>2</sup> (Table 2). Only in two cases, Pus i Thatë and Shkodër the excavated areas are smaller than 100 m<sup>2</sup>.

More extensive excavations were conducted at Maliq and Tren, 1000 m<sup>2</sup> and 780 m<sup>2</sup>, respectively. Maliq however, represents the quite typical case in Albanian archaeology. The 1000 m<sup>2</sup> were uncovered during 11 field campaigns (1961-1966; 1973-1974 and 1988-1990) (Prendi and Bunguri 2014: 18-19). Since the results were not published it makes it difficult not only to understand the reasoning behind such extensive research strategy but also to get a grasp of a sequence of this multilayer settlement. Even more, because the conventional chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages strongly relies on data collected at Maliq (Prendi 1974: 1978). Some recent studies, again, focus only on conclusive remarks regarding the type of settlement and the characteristics of material culture (Prendi and Bunguri 2008; 2014). However, brief analyses of the organic evidence offer some insights on the transformation of the environment during the Early Iron Age and the potential causes for the abandonment of site (Fuache et al. 2001). Unfortunately, in spite of more than 1000 m<sup>2</sup> large excavations at Maliq, crucial questions remained unanswered. The cave settlement of Tren is the case of another extensive excavations that offers very little. The preliminary excavation report published in 1971 is the main reference for 700 m<sup>2</sup> of the explored area (Korkuti 1971). Recent field campaign (2015) revealed a striking fact about Tren, that in Room 1, inside the cave, there are no intact contexts at all. From the most recent field season, it became obvious that Korkuti completely emptied this area during his first campaign (Agolli 2017).

On the other hand, Sovjan could become the case of the successful excavation-publication process in the near future. However, until now, only some interesting insights derived from pottery analysis regarding the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age, and new data on absolute chronology (Gori and Krapf 2015; Lera et al. 2008a; 2008b). Other sites like Dajç, Liqeth, Peskajë, Pus i Thatë, Rosujë, Ripës and Symizë are just partly explored and only very descriptive and general remarks are published in reports, making any further assessment based on the published evidence a highly complicated enterprise.

### **Cemeteries of Bronze and Iron Age**

The sites which provided principal evidences for social and cultural aspects of the late prehistoric communities are the burial mounds. It needs to be stressed, that most of our understanding of the late prehistory is largely based on finds and data collected from the tumuli which in majority date from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. So far, 156 tumuli have been excavated in total (Bejko 2014: 518). Publications, however, offer evidence only for 129 tumuli and three shaft cemeteries. The total area of the excavated tumuli is approximately 30,300 m<sup>2</sup> (Table 3)<sup>1</sup>. In many cases, these were rescue excavations that would commence after some notification of the local people. Rescue campaign were conducted exploring only the area subject of damage. There are however cases when experienced archaeologists expanded their research beyond simple rescue interventions. For instance, Skënder Aliu in Kolonjë region reports three rescue interventions on heavily damaged tumuli of Shtikë, Psar and Prodan, as well as systematic research of tumuli of Luaras and Rehovë, and shaft cemetery of Borovë. Bep Jubani in his rescue excavations of the tumuli in Kukës region, which are only partly published, still offers some invaluable insights. Due to the

1 Tumulus 10 in the necropolis of Apollonia (Amore 2010), Bajkaj (Budina 1971b), Tumuli 1 and 2 in Barç (Andrea 1985), two tumuli in Bardhoc (Hoti 1982), Bodrishtë (Prendi 1959), six tumuli in Bujan (Andrea 1995), seven tumuli in Burrel (Kurti 1978; 1983; 1987; 1999), Cerujë (Andrea 1997), Çepunë (Budina 1969), four tumuli Çinamak (Jubani 1969b), two tumuli in Dukat (Ceka 1974; Bodinaku 2002), Kamenicë (Bejko forthcoming), six tumuli in Kënetë (Hoti 1982; 1986; Jubani 1983), Komsi (Kurti 1999), eight tumuli in Krumë (Jubani 1982), tumuli 1 and 2 of Kuç i Zi (Andrea 1985), Lofkënd (Papadopoulos et al. 2007; 2014), Luaras (Aliu 2004), the tumuli in Mat region (Islami 2013), nine tumuli in Myç-Has (Bela 1990), Patos (Korkuti 1981), four tumuli in Pazhok (Bodinaku 1982), Përbreg (Përzhitë and Belaj 1987), Piskovë (Bodinaku 1981), Prodan, Psar (Aliu 1984; 1995), Rapckë (Bodinaku 1981), Rehovë (Aliu 2012), ten tumuli in Shkrel (Jubani 1995), Shtikë (Aliu 1996), 11 tumuli in Shtoj (Koka 2012), Shuec (Andrea 2010), four in Vajzë (Prendi 1957), Vodhinë (Prendi 1956). The shaft cemeteries include: Borovë (Aliu 1994), Gërmenj (Andrea 1981), Katundas (Braka 1987).

Site	Surface area m <sup>2</sup>	Quantitative data			Research method (excavation)	Publication status
		Pottery	Tools	Others		
Dajç	270 m <sup>2</sup>	?			Systematic	Article Report
Gajtan	--	23			-I-	-I-
Liqeth	107 m <sup>2</sup>	13			-I-	-I-
Maliq	1000 m <sup>2</sup>	149?			-I-	-I-
Nezir	80 m <sup>2</sup>	38	13	2	-I-	-I-
Peskajë	114 m <sup>2</sup>				-I-	-I-
Pus i Thatë	84 m <sup>2</sup>				-I-	-I-
Rosujë	675 m <sup>2</sup>				-I-	-I-
Ripës	300 m <sup>2</sup>				-I-	-I-
Symizë	370 m <sup>2</sup>	25			-I-	-I-
Sovjan	350 m <sup>2</sup>				-I-	-I-
Shkodër	80 m <sup>2</sup>	650			-I-	-I-
Tren	700 m <sup>2</sup>	43			-I-	-I-
Zagorë	206 m <sup>2</sup>	26	9		-I-	-I-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.336 m<sup>2</sup></b>					

TABLE 2. Explorations in Bronze and Iron Age settlements.

construction of the Fierza power plant the research, today would not be possible. Zhaneta Andrea was able to research tumuli of Barç and Kuç i Zi and publish a considerable amount of evidence which would otherwise perish. The only case where the excavation of a tumulus was followed by a systematic assessment of the surrounding area is that of Lofkënd.

Publications published prior to the 1990's in the journal *Illyria* or as monographs were almost exclusively focused on material culture. However, in contrast with settlements, quantitative data about material culture, tombs and burial rites is better presented and accompanied with descriptions and spatial distribution of individual tombs. Lorenc Bejko sees this as a great desire of the Albanian archaeologists to reconstruct, through tumuli, important aspects of the socio-cultural image of the late prehistoric communities. Bejko also stressed that several issues which burial data could effectively address, including demography, gender, pathology or diet, have not gained any attention in these relatively massive explorations. Some other aspects, e.g. geographic setting of burials, their density or any kind of study of relationships between tumuli and people in the surrounding environment are not mentioned at all (Bejko 2014: 517-525).

With the explorations of the last two decades of the tumuli of Kamenicë, Tumulus 10 at the necropolis in

Apollonia new winds started to blow. For the first time, each tumulus was explored having a comprehensive formal strategy of data collection and a standardized format of documentation. In Kamenicë, after assessing the burial size, one area was left unexcavated for later assessments and possibly the application of more advanced methodologies (Bejko forthcoming). The tumulus 10 of Apollonia and that of Lofkënd which have been published raised emerging issues on bio-archaeology, including the health profile of the buried individuals, gender and age, diet, DNA analysis, human impact on the environment, as well as the analysis of the faunal and floral evidence (Bejko et. al. 2006; Damiata et. al. 2008; Amore 2010; Schepartz 2010; Papadopoulos et. al. 2014; Martson 2014; Schepartz 2014).

### *The surface surveys*

In Albania, the surface survey was extensively applied after 1991. Several regions, including Butrint, Malakastër (Korkuti et. al. 1998; Davis and Korkuti 2004), Shala valley (Galaty et.al. 2013), Korça basin (Bejko forthcoming) and Lofkënd (Aprile 2014), have been subject of systematic surveys. This emerging methodology opened several new queries regarding the settlement patterns, the density of human presence in time and space, consideration of environment and so on. However, here again, the poor state of publications remains



Tumuli	Surface area	Tombs	Finds		Research strategy	Publication
			Pottery	Others		
Apolloni (T. 10)	636 m <sup>2</sup>	77	11	14	Systematic	Monography
Bajkaj	314 m <sup>2</sup>	45	12	3	Partial	Paper/Report
Barç 1	1383 m <sup>2</sup>	181	86	112	Systematic	Monography
Barç 2	694 m <sup>2</sup>	22	13	24	-I-	-I-
Bardhoc (#2)	312.16 m <sup>2</sup>	34	7	47	-I-	Paper/Report
Bodrishtë	153.86 m <sup>2</sup>	6	1	--	-I-	-I-
Borovë	250 m <sup>2</sup>	49	40	282	-I-	-I-
Bujan ( #6)	0.282 m <sup>2</sup>		9	4	-I-	-I-
Burrel (#7)	902.6 m <sup>2</sup>	154	54	184	-I-	-I-
Cerujë	226.8 m <sup>2</sup>	6	3		-I-	-I-
Çepunë	380 m <sup>2</sup>	63	4		-I-	-I-
Çinamak (#4)	175.84m <sup>2</sup>	64	15	14	-I-	-I-
Dukat (#2)	314 m <sup>2</sup>	75	22	57	-I-	-I-
Gërmenj	?	37	13	9	Partial	-I-
Kamenicë	1295.2 m <sup>2</sup>	405	2362	801	Systematic	Not published
Katundas	115 m <sup>2</sup>	12	7	9	-I-	Paper/Report
Kënetë (#6)	1514.9 m <sup>2</sup>	82	36	92	Rescue	-I-
Komsi	314 m <sup>2</sup>	7	5	--	Partial	-I-
Krumë (#8)	1086.2 m <sup>2</sup>	30	15	25	Rescue	-I-
Kuç i Zi 1	754.3 m <sup>2</sup>	126	28	176	-I-	Monography
Kuç i Zi 2	176.6 m <sup>2</sup>	18	16	69	-I-	-I-
Lofkënd	251.2 m <sup>2</sup>	100	20	92??	-I-	-I-
Luaras	706.5 m <sup>2</sup>	203	112	181	-I-	-I-
Mat	Rrethe B #13	3527 m <sup>2</sup>	212	50	-I-	-I-
	Sanxhak #5	1372 m <sup>2</sup>	38	12	-I-	-I-
	Klos #1	254.3 m <sup>2</sup>	22	8	-I-	-I-
	Urakë #2	929 m <sup>2</sup>	18	8	-I-	-I-
	Perlat #8	631 m <sup>2</sup>	31	31	-I-	-I-
	Bruç #2	694 m <sup>2</sup>	9	--	-I-	-I-
	Shtogj #2	628 m <sup>2</sup>	42	58	-I-	-I-
Myç-Has (#9)	60.28 m <sup>2</sup>	37	49	126	-I-	Paper/Report
Patos	153.8 m <sup>2</sup>	62	25	61	-I-	-I-
Pazhok (#4)	967.1 m <sup>2</sup>	52	15	59	-I-	-I-
Përbreg	--	--	4	--	Partial	-I-
Piskovë	706.5 m <sup>2</sup>	116	15	--	Systematic	Not published
Prodan	?	74	37	40	Rescue	Paper/report
Psar	314 m <sup>2</sup>	11	17	45	-I-	-I-
Rapckë	--	--	5	--	Systematic	-I-
Rehovë	1766.25 m <sup>2</sup>	119	156	324	-I-	Monography
Shkrel #10	1965 m <sup>2</sup>	10?	5		-I-	Paper/report
Shtikë	23.55 m <sup>2</sup>	12	13	26	-I-	-I-
Shtoj #11	2175 m <sup>2</sup>	66	61		-I-	Monography
Shuac	827.39 m <sup>2</sup>	68	23	71	Partial	Paper/report
Vajzë #4	1360 m <sup>2</sup>	57	7	49	Systematic	-I-
Vodhinë	226.8 m <sup>2</sup>	18	10		-I-	-I-
<b>Total</b>	<b>30310.612 m<sup>2</sup></b>					

TABLE 3. Explorations in Bronze and Iron Age Cemeteries.

an obstacle for a better understanding of the results of the above endeavors, as well as further analysis. To this day, the Lofkënd tumulus and Shala valley are the only research projects published systematically. The Shala valley project importantly contributed to issues in synchronic and diachronic perspective, by analyzing the settlement density, spatial distribution of finds, environmental context and the ethno-history of the region (Galaty et. al. 2013). On the other hand, the systematic survey of the surroundings of the tumulus of Lofkënd even though did not produce solid data for a potential inhabited area of settlement contemporary to the tumulus, it yielded interesting insights regarding the diachronic development of the region around the tumulus (Aprile 2014).

In addition, in terms of research strategy and methodology, there is a need to point out to some problems that could condition further any kind of research and analysis. *First and foremost*, the research strategy is not oriented towards addressing or answering proper questions. Most generally, any author who carries out excavations vaguely justifies them either as rescue interventions (most frequently in the cases of burial mounds) or as efforts to enlarge the knowledge of a given period. Recent research projects (including those of Lofkënd, Tumulus 10 of Apollonia necropolis, Shala valley) that rely heavily in an inter-disciplinary agenda do make an exception. These projects have shifted the focus towards a coherent strategy that addresses proper queries at the inception of research. *Second*, though large excavations are very frequent, not much attention is given to finding their full spatial extension. In most cases, archaeologists are more willing to enlarge the excavation area, and claiming and enjoying the authorship rights, rather than analyzing thoroughly that amount of data that is already collected. It is sad to say that discussion in Albanian archaeology is dealing more with issues of 'ownership' of data, rather than vivid discussions imposed from the queries that the exploration of this amount of data and space would have yielded. *Third*, publications remain at a very poor state. For example, six important Neolithic settlements are still not published and for others only brief reports are available. Muzafer Korkuti did publish a conclusive summary on the Neolithic sites in German including some previously unpublished evidence (Korkuti 1995), but this is far from enough. Even in cases of new research campaigns taking place after 1990, lack of publishing became a serious impediment for further research. Projects like those of Konispol cave, Sovjan, Vashtëmi, Kallamas, and that of Kamenicë tumulus, which all applied several new methods and innovative research protocols, are still presented very partially

and incomplete. *Fourth*, the documentation and preservation of artefacts is still a crucial issue. The excavation protocol is very simplified and at most times not even standardized. This makes the assessment of data highly complicated. Typical records are still personal logs or diaries which usually contain remarks and comments on the execution of work, and results. Photographs and drawings are done more professionally, however efforts to associate altogether artefacts with their belonging stratigraphic sequence, photographs and drawings is a very complicated enterprise. To put it more ironically, in many cases it would be easier to repeat the excavation and collect new data, rather than attempt analysis of finds and data from older excavations. *Fifth*, from the recent research of tumuli, some positive outcomes could be seen, both in documentation and publication. In a number of new publications, data is correctly and accurately presented, enabling so the possibilities for further assessments, fruitful discussion on new research venues on cultural contacts and networks, socio-economic organization, cultural differences etc. (Bejko 1993; 1994; 2000; Kurti 2006; Aliu and Bejko 2009; Agolli 2009; 2014; Pevnick and Agolli 2014).

### **Culture Heritage Law and valorization of prehistoric heritage in Albania**

Needless to say, beyond strict academic objectives, archaeological research also provides a crucial corpus of evidence for care and protection. For prehistory, lacking written records and accounts on persons, places and events, the evidences testify more about long-term dynamics, and crucial cultural processes and their material consequences of human groups in the past. In this section, I discuss the ramifications of the Culture Heritage Law and focus on how prehistoric sites and material culture are managed and presented in the context of the law.

A new law on Culture Heritage was adopted in 2003 and amended in 2006, 2008, and 2009. Currently, the Ministry of Culture has just passed through Parliament a new law which will supposedly remedy the issues previous law had not covered properly ([http://www.kultura.gov.al/files/userfiles/LIGJ\\_9048\\_Per\\_Trashegimine\\_Kulturore\\_i\\_ndryshuar.pdf](http://www.kultura.gov.al/files/userfiles/LIGJ_9048_Per_Trashegimine_Kulturore_i_ndryshuar.pdf)) (2018).

In the case of academic (i.e. research-oriented) archaeological field research, regarding the permits, the law does not address properly two main issues, it does not require explicit spatial limiting of the individual field project (e.g. excavation), and it does not give any importance to the assessment of the archaeological potential



in the area object of research. The National Council of Archaeology, under the authority of the Ministry of Culture that issues permits, requires more detail description of the proposed projects only in cases of potential property issues, or when the site integrity may be endangered. In all other cases, limitations and penalties are provisioned only in the cases of violation of permission requirements.<sup>2</sup> The law has also transferred the rights of the storage of finds and documentation to the Agency of Archaeology Service (Agjensia e Shërbimit Arkeologjik); a National entity under the authority of the Ministry of Culture.

Conservation and preservation of archaeological sites after completion of fieldwork have been addressed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Stanley-Price 2003: 269-83). Taking into account the Venice charter (Article 15), Stanley-Price argues that the duty of the site conservation and preservation is to be attached to the permit of every archaeologist that approaches a site for research objectives (2003: 269).

Turning to the case of Albania, some matters must be discussed in this respect. During the Communist government, the preservation of sites or any architectural feature was not included in the research agenda. The images of palaffites found in a lake at Maliq became the representative case of the prehistory of Albania, widely published and displayed in museums, and yet, the preservation of this site was never brought to the discussion. In fact, after completing the individual excavation campaigns, the remains were, in the best case scenario, backfilled.

Attention to site preservation and promotion modestly increased after 1990. Lorenc Bejko, director of the excavations of Kamenicë tumulus, after completing his excavations agreed on the expropriation of land, kept intact the architectural structures of tombs, and successfully lobbied for changing the status of tumulus into a monument of culture of the first category. The tumulus was inaugurated in 2007 as an open air museum presenting replicas of artefacts. The museum also presented a general overview on the research of tumuli in Albania. This enterprise has proven highly positive in both domains, promotion and preservation. A different situation was with the tumulus of Lofkënd. Given the lack of any architectural features, after completing the excavations the tumulus was reconstructed to its original shape and

dimensions. This also proved to be an effective strategy which to this day preserved at best the integrity of the monument (Papadopoulos et. al. 2014: 561-568).

On the other hand, several excavation campaigns in Sovjan revealed some architectural remains, but they were only backfilled without any further management strategy (<http://www.sovjan-archeologie.net/sovjan/presentation/synthese.html>).

Some serious problems are noticed also when speaking of preservation and management of artefacts. Two institutions in Albania, the National and Archaeological museums (both in Tirana) have served as the main centers for displaying the most aesthetically attractive artefacts. Among Albanian prehistorians, it was common to hear expressions of pride that artefacts which they had discovered, were displayed in these two most visited venues. However, there are two problems which must be considered here. *First of all*, the displays solely rely on the aesthetic features of objects while context and chronology were only briefly presented. Also, the recent discoveries and interpretations have not made it yet to any museum displays (Agolli 2016: 53-60). *Second*, the very fact that most of the explorations has not yet been published created a serious impediment to any kind of promotion of artifacts. Not to mention the poor conditions of storages, especially outside Tirana.

The preservation and conservation of archaeological sites is far from being resolved. The adoption of the Culture Heritage Law triggered significant improvements in monitoring and the quality assurance in archaeological projects, but, it seems that conservation, preservation and site valorization rather remained a matter of choice of the archaeologist, and not formalized as responsibility stated in the permit. The issues with the preservation and display of artifact are also highly problematic. Collections in the museums are displayed in an in an old fashioned way, while the conditions of storage remain very questionable.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Elio Hobdari, member of the National Council of Archaeology.

## Conclusions

Back in 1964, Lewis Binford addressed some crucial matters regarding the archaeological research design (1964: 425-441) arguing that we are wondering what are we digging for, we all agree that we do that in order to recover facts for the elucidation of the past. In doing this, we are to be highly careful about collecting the totality of data as our main access to past behavior (1964: 426-430). To what extent these ideas are followed-in Albanian archaeology? The conceptualization and reasoning behind research agendas have been heavily influenced by political instrumentalisation and nationalistic perceptions of the past. Not only in Albania, in the Balkans, in general, it was frequently about connecting the dots of past and present, and ignoring a simple fact that prehistory as a time-space phenomenon, and context, did not convey the political borders and cultural divisions we have inherited today. In the last two decades, several joint research projects have much improved the reasoning driving the research, and freed it of a great deal of political or nationalistic agenda. However, we cannot expect that such approaches will come from joint projects only.

Always when achievements in Albanian prehistoric archaeology are mentioned, the quantity of researched sites and data collected are referred to as a matter of success. However, the high disproportion between the total area explored and the knowledge obtained has not been quite discussed, and not even the fact that excavation in itself is a destructive technique which prevents any chance of repetition. For many decades the Albanian archaeology was developed through extensive excavations, lack of proper research agendas and publications and preservation strategies. The joint international projects, taking place after 1990, had considerable impact, especially in terms of new research questions and methods of data collection and artefact assessment. The cases of Konispol, Sovjan, Kamenicë, Vashtëmi, and Lofkënd illustrate this at best. The surface surveys have been quite effective in widening the focus of research on the regional scale and in obtaining interesting results in a diachronic perspective. The regional projects in Mallakastër, Shala valley, Sovjan, Lofkënd, Butrint, Korçë represent seminal and positive efforts in the application of a non-destructive methodology and digital recording. Unfortunately, comprehensive publications are today only available for Lofkënd and Shala valley. However, from these two cases alone, one can easily imagine the amount of knowledge which can be obtained if every kind of data is collected and analyzed cautiously.

The Culture Heritage Law in Albania is definitely a step forward regarding many previous issues associated with research permissions and treatment of the archaeological heritage. However, the relevant public institutions and the National Council of Archaeology still do not address sampling strategy as a crucial matter in research projects. Also, no formal requirements are anticipated for publication or artefacts preservation. Though the preservation and promotion strategies in the cases of tumuli of Lofkënd and Kamenicë have resulted very positive, they were successful because of the personal engagement and choices of researchers and not because of the systemic norms.

Almost eight decades of prehistoric research in Albania have yielded interesting results. The knowledge of distant past has gradually increased, but this has occurred at a considerably high cost especially if is considered the disproportion between the expansive site explorations and the knowledge and research queries they have produced. Future efforts in the field of prehistory must put a strong emphasis on such matters and indeed give to the discipline a formal scientific and legal setting.

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