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TWO COLLECTIONS AND TWO GREEK OBSESSIONS*

Abstract: It has become a truism that museum exhibitions and interpretations are influenced by wider theoretical concepts and the author's personal ideas. Winckelmann's legacy is present in most of the European museums. Sometimes the concepts emphasizing Greece are perpetuated over decades, in spite of the fact that new archaeological interpretations contradict this neo-Classical reading. Two examples will be offered to illustrate this situation. The first is the case of the Neolithic site of Vinča near Belgrade, excavated during several campaigns from 1908 to 1934 by Miloje Vasić. At the time he started researching the site, Vasić was the director of the National Museum in Belgrade and a professor of archaeology at the university. He argued that Vinča was a settlement of the Aegean colonists and an emanation of the Minoan and Mycenaean Bronze Age spirit. From 1934 on, he even identified Vinča as an Ionian colony from the sixth century B.C.E. After the First World War, Vasić ceased being the director of the museum and focused on the work at the university. At the same time, his Vinča interpretation was met with sharp criticism both in the Serbian and international archaeological communities and the site was firmly dated as Neolithic. Faced with criticism, even from the National Museum Belgrade, in 1929 Vasić established the University Archaeological Collection, where he placed material from the post-war excavations at Vinča and continued exhibiting his philhellenic interpretation. The second case to be presented is what is referred to as the princely grave from Novi Pazar, one of the most Iron Age important finds in the Central Balkans. From the middle of the twentieth century almost to the present day, a thesis concerning the Greek-Illyrian treasures has been perpetuated, although the new interpretations have clearly shown that both parts of this title are problematic.

Keywords: museum exhibitions, interpretation, Miloje M. Vasić, Vinča, Miodrag Grbić, princely graves of the Central Balkans, philhellenism.

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1. Museums are not all the Same, and Displays are not Objective

Archaeological data are not objective by themselves, but their meaning is generated from archaeological interpretation, including exhibiting and museum practices as its vital part. Just like there is no complete archaeological record in the sense postulated by Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, there can be no complete and objective representation of the past.¹ Interpretations and museum practices are influenced by dominant ideational and theoretical concepts, and are even susceptible to personal proclivities and obsessions of a particular researcher. Museums and museum exhibitions are always interpretations, and not a neutral exposition of objective facts, since these are the places where many cultural realities are defined and articulated for the first time.² As stressed by Tatjana Cvjetičanin, while discussing the myth of museum neutrality: “From the moment a museum’s inception until to the present, through its development in various types, not a single museum or museum specialist has ever been neutral. But this mask of neutrality – moral and intellectual – enables many museums to distance themselves from the important issues of the present”.³ David Fleming, referred to by Cvjetičanin, further states:

Museums are social constructs, and politics is a cornerstone of social activity – you can’t have one without the other. No matter what type of museum, no matter what it contains, decisions have been made by someone about what to research, what to preserve, what to collect, what to present, how to interpret; and decisions have been made about what *not* to do, what *not* to research, what *not* to preserve, what *not* to collect, what *not* to present, what *not* to interpret.⁴

Museum exhibitions may be founded upon explicitly expressed aesthetic criteria, or upon the ones implicitly accepted as what is considered normal. In this manner, the aesthetic ideal of ancient Greece, as constructed by Winckelmann, heavily influenced the formation and appearance of European museums and the mode of presentation of ancient artefacts, especially sculpture. Winckelmann’s ideas originally shaped the Vatican Museum, but also the exhibitions at the Belvedere in Vienna, the Louvre in Paris, and many other museums. Furthermore, his influence drew attention to the idea that it is “beyond dignity of ancient monuments to act as mere ornaments, they should be a part of public museums and the heritage of the whole mankind”.⁵

The concept of a museum and its exhibitions is decisively influenced by theoretical postulates. For example, General Pitt Rivers, mentioned above, designed his large anthropological collection, which still exists today in Oxford as the Pitt Rivers Museum under the direct influence of the doctrine of unilineal evolutionism and the idea of progress.⁶ His typological concept of a museum stood in contrast to the geographical collections frequent at the time, exhibiting the material according to its place of origin. Although he based his collection on Darwin’s principles, it is interesting to note that Pitt Rivers also took inspiration

¹ Lucas 2012: 46–47.

² Šelton 2014: 100–102.

³ Cvjetičanin 2018: 576.

⁴ Fleming 2013.

⁵ Honour 1988: 85–87.

⁶ Grin 2003: 47–50.

from the ethnographic collection of Edme-François Jomard in Paris, which was organized according to Baron Georges Cuvier's biological principles of comparative anatomy. The baron was a staunch opponent of the idea of evolution: following classes, orders, species and varieties.⁷ However, the idea of progress was the basic thread of Pitt Rivers' collection, and the geographical and even chronological origins of objects were of less importance to him. What mattered was the evolution of forms as an illustration of the presumed phases of the growth of mankind, so he adapted his exhibition to the idea of continuous development of artefacts from the natural form through the process of unconscious selection. Pitt Rivers succeeded in promoting his concept for exhibiting anthropological and prehistoric material as an ideal model for a collection by giving lectures, and his ideas influenced the layout of the exhibition of the Society of Antiquaries of London and even the British Museum.⁸

A kind of a geographical model of museum prevailed in the end precisely because of the conceptual change that came about. Characteristic of this is the struggle of Franz Boas against the "typological evolutionary concept" of the exhibition at the U. S. National Museum, which reflected the ideas of unilineal evolution that were predominant at the time in the powerful institution of the Bureau of American Ethnology. In 1887, Boas, a young anthropologist at the time and a custodian with limited experience, stood up against the exhibition concept of the National Museum designed by Otis T. Mason, one of the leading American anthropologists. Mason displayed ethnographic material from the American nations according to his evolutionary scheme and the universal discoveries of fire, pottery, basketry etc., so the objects from various cultures were exhibited together, according to their presumed typological and technological evolution.⁹ Boas proposed a opposing model based upon the idea of different characteristics of individual groups, tribes, and cultures (*Geistwissenschaft*), following the tradition of the Berlin anthropological school, from which Boas himself originated and which indirectly gave rise to the culture-historical approach in anthropology.¹⁰ According to Boas, "[t]he main object of ethnological collections should be the dissemination of the fact that civilization is not something absolute, but it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes".¹¹ It is interesting to note that the concept of groups was applied in some European museums even before Boas' museological turn in America, especially in Germany and Scandinavia.¹²

2. The First Stratigraphic Exhibition of Vinča and the Aegean Narrative

The legacy of Winckelmann's Greek spirit, present as the exhibiting canon of many world museums, did not omit Serbia. A peculiar obsession with Greek heritage marked the interpretive and exhibition practices for over a century and persisted in spite of changes in theoretical and interpretive paradigms. The examples of the corpus of archaeological material

⁷ Chapman 1985: 24–25.

⁸ *Ibid.* 29–31.

⁹ Jacknis 1985: 77.

¹⁰ Zimmerman 2001: 201–216; Palavestra 2011, 109–111.

¹¹ After Jacknis 1985: 83.

¹² *Ibid.* 77

from Vinča, as well as what was referred to as the Graeco-Illyrian treasures from the princely graves from the Central Balkan Early Iron Age, may well illustrate the way in which the interpretive clichés on Greek heritage have influenced the shaping of museum presentations.

Miloje M. Vasić started his excavations at Vinča in 1908.¹³ At the time, he was not only the university teacher and the director of the Vinča excavations, but also the curator, i.e. the director of the National Museum in Belgrade. Because of this position, he paid great attention to how the Vinča material was presented in the museum. From the beginning of the excavations at Vinča, Vasić explicitly insisted upon the stratigraphic method and overtly criticized the typological approach. He meticulously, even obsessively, recorded the relative depths of artefacts instead of the horizontal position of objects, coordinates, and even the archaeological contexts. Vasić insisted that the archaeological material from Vinča should be exhibited according to his stratigraphic principle and he entrusted the ordering of the collection and the *definitive* drawing of sections and material to his best student, Milan Mitić, who surprisingly was not a member of the Vinča excavation team:¹⁴

In the collection of prehistoric antiquities, Mr Milan Mitić worked on the definitive stratigraphic recordings from the site of Vinča and on the necessary drawings of pottery products from the same site. The recording of the pottery products revealed a great abundance of ceramic forms and their variety from the site of Vinča, and their stratigraphic distribution will represent in chronological order the development of certain types throughout the duration of this settlement (...). Mr Mitić also started sorting the selected finds from Vinča according to their stratigraphic depths, in order to create a small collection aimed at exhibiting, representing by its objects the history of the cultural life during the prehistoric times at Vinča. Our museum will excel over many others due to this collection, and at the same time it will offer to experts the most reliable data for all kinds of research, thus elevating the reputation of the museum even more.¹⁵

Paradoxically, Vasić understood stratigraphy in typological terms based on comparing identical types of objects appearing at same depths, preferably in ideally flat layers. In this way he hoped he would reach an absolute chronology and represent the historic development of individual shapes. Vasić, both as a researcher and as a museum curator, was a consistent proponent of what was referred to as hidden stratigraphy, which was based on the vertical position of finds, common in archaeology by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This typological stratigraphy of artefacts is methodologically different from the much more complex depositional, i.e. formational stratigraphy, soon to become the standard archaeological method.¹⁶

On the other hand, from the very start of his excavations at Vinča, Vasić's interpretation of this site was already fully formed, and he argued that this settlement was under the direct influence of the Aegean Bronze Age, and was not Neolithic at all.¹⁷ He concluded as early as 1911 that the Vinča settlement was continuous, without any interruptions, and that chronologically it should be situated between Troy II and the period

¹³ Vassits 1910; *Id.* 1911.

¹⁴ On Mitić see Mitrović 2016.

¹⁵ Vasić 1910: 176–177.

¹⁶ Wheeler 1956: 70–71.

¹⁷ Vassits 1911: 129–130.

of La Tène.¹⁸ His opinion on the dominant Aegean influences, colonizers and cinnabarite miners, as well as the supposed parallels between the finds from Vinča and the Greek Bronze Age artefacts, remained unchanged until as late as 1932, when, in the first volume of the Vinča monograph, he dated the site as being the period between 1600 B.C.E and 6 C.E.¹⁹ This idea of direct Aegean influences and analogies with the Aegean Bronze Age undoubtedly dominated his choices for the exhibits in the stratigraphic display, which was unfortunately destroyed during World War I.²⁰ Today there is no precise information on this exhibition at the National Museum, but on the grounds of one surviving photograph from 1914 showing the consequences of the Austrian and German bombing during the war, it may be inferred that the pottery and statuette fragments were placed in display cases and in dense rows on wall panels, probably according to stratigraphic principle, i.e. according to Vasić's idea of measured depths (Fig. 1).

2.1. Neolithic Vinča in the Prince Paul Museum

After 1924, Vasić did not excavate Vinča on behalf of the National Museum. From 1919 he was no longer its director due to his disagreement with the plans for the museum's reconstruction. The excavations at Vinča in 1924 were the first and the last project in which he was not in full control, not so much in archaeological terms, but in respect to administrative and executive terms. That year he conducted excavations as a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy on behalf of the museum. The role of director was assigned to Vladimir Petković, and his rapport with Vasić was less than cordial. After a tense correspondence during 1925 and 1926, when Petković stipulated various conditions and even an ultimatum to the Vinča explorer, the collaboration between Vasić and the museum was terminated.²¹ Miloje Vasić concluded the excavations at Vinča and started again in 1929 when he secured funding independently from the museum. However, all the material from the previous campaigns (1908, 1911–1913, 1924), including the major part of the field documentation, remained in the National Museum.²²

Vasić was had an uneasy relationship with the museum management (Vladimir Petković) and with the young curator, Miodrag Grbić (1901–1961), who started a different kind of research into Neolithic in Serbia.²³ Grbić was the key link in the transfer of ideas of the Central European archaeology into Serbia. He completed his doctorate in Prague with Lubor Niederle (1865–1944). He fervently opposed Vasić's interpretation of Vinča and the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Vasić 1932: 96–97; Palavestra, Milosavljević 2016.

²⁰ Mitrović 2015.

²¹ Miloje Vasić's letter to the Director of the National Museum, 6th July 1925. AAZFF No. 102, 1-2; Miloje Vasić's letter to the Director of the National Museum, 29th May 1926. AAZFF No. 101; Vladimir Petković's letter to Miloje Vasić, 5th June 1926; draft of the Miloje Vasić's letter to Vladimir Petković, 7th June 1926. AAZFF, No. 101.

²² Vasić kept his field „journals“, the major part of photographic plates, photographs, and drawings, while the plans remained in the Museum. Ironically, today the „journals“ are also in the Museum, since after his death, Vasić's family sold them to this institution.

²³ One of conditions by Petković was his insistence that Grbić should be a member of the Vinča excavation crew, declined by Vasić in 1926.

idea of an Aegean Vinča, stressing that this was in fact a Neolithic site.²⁴ He excavated other sites of the period, such as Pločnik, and Starčevo, with the American crew from the Peabody Museum, where he identified an even older Neolithic layer. Grbić pointed to the existence of a number of other Neolithic sites contemporaneous to Vinča and to the fact that these settlements corresponded to the wider cultural and chronological pattern of Southeast European prehistory, for which earlier layers preceding the Vinča culture were identified. Grbić thus formed the first cultural and historical framework of prehistory in this region, which was later amended.²⁵ During World War II, Grbić introduced a number of archaeologists and art historians (Milutin and Draga Garašanin, Jovan Kovačević) to the concepts of culture history through the Museum Course.²⁶

Vasić recognized the danger that the material from Vinča would be presented in the museum in a different light through the Neolithic interpretive key, close to the cultural and historical paradigm, instead of his Aegean ideas based upon typological stratigraphy and formal analogies with Minoan and Classical Greek artefacts. Indeed, this is what happened. In the years after World War I, the museum frequently changed its location and restored its damaged collections. However, the archaeological material from Vinča was displayed in 1927, along with other Neolithic sites, as a part of the Department of Prehistory.²⁷ Later on the Neolithic Vinča was prominently displayed in the renovated Prince Paul Museum, created by the merging of the National Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Arts Department of the Ministry of Education, and which opened in 1936 in the building of the New Court.²⁸ It was placed in one of the three rooms on the ground floor, along with other artefacts dated to the Late Stone and Copper Ages, including those from Starčevo, Pločnik and Zok.²⁹ (Fig. 2; Fig. 3)

Miodrag Grbić, the well-respected custodian of an elite Yugoslavian museum, had already gained esteem through his research into Neolithic sites such as Pločnik, Starčevo and Botoš,³⁰ and here he placed Vinča in a wider Balkan Neolithic context. The concept of the Prince Paul Museum, with its new director, Milan Kašanin (1895–1981), was more artistic, had strong national and ideological inclinations, and archaeology was less prominent.³¹ Aleksandar Bandović noted that, due to this, Grbić enjoyed less freedom than under Petković's directorship.³² Be that as it may, in this exhibition, Vinča was presented in an utterly different key than in Vasić's times. Tatjana Mihailović stresses, "In the representative, politically powerful, and well frequented museum, Grbić publicly told another story about Vinča to professionals and the general public alike based on material excavated by Vasić himself".³³ In other words, by placing Vinča in a wider Neolithic context, he chronologically and culturally contextualized it, as opposed to Vasić, who isolated the site.

²⁴ Grbić 1933.

²⁵ Gačić 2005; Bandović 2016; *Id.* 2019.

²⁶ Bandović 2014.

²⁷ Đorđević *et al.* 2005: 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Ninković 2009: 129.

³⁰ Gačić 2005: 30–31.

³¹ Cvjetičanin 2014: 588–591.

³² Bandović 2019: 124–131.

³³ Mihailović 2018: 367.

3. Vinča in Vasić's Archaeological Collection

Vasić salvaged his paradigm by establishing the Archaeological Collection at the Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, where all the material from the new excavations of Vinča from 1929 was stored and where he could freely shape the exhibition according to his ideas.

A rich English newspaper magnate from Birmingham, Sir Charles Hyde (1876–1942) decided in 1929 to finance archaeological research at Vinča, and donated five hundred pounds “for studies in archaeology and excavations”.³⁴ However, Vasić had to secure an institutional framework to administer Hyde's donation. The university, as a large institution with a complex administration, probably seemed to be an insecure option. Therefore, Vasić devised the idea to form his own institution and soon succeeded in obtaining the permission of the Ministry of Education to found the Collection of the Archaeological Seminar at the Faculty of Philosophy. Later on, his aspirations became more ambitious, and in 1932 he planned to enlarge the collection into an archaeological museum at the university, and stored all the material gathered through excavations; but this plan did not come to fruition.³⁵

By establishing the Archaeological Collection at the faculty, Vasić met several aims: He secured the financial and institutional framework to utilise Hyde's donation; separated from the National Museum and the obligation to hand over reports, documentation, and the material itself; and finally, by declaring that the collection was a “teaching facility for training young researchers,” met one of the donor's requirements.

Although established in 1929, the exhibition of the collection was officially presented to the public on 10 February 1938, in the building of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in Bogojavljenjska Street.³⁶ It was surely not a coincidence that this opening followed the presentation of the Prince Paul Museum and the display of Neolithic Vinča designed by Grbić. Thus, especially after 1938, the collection became an alternative space for promotion of Vasić's interpretation of Vinča. At the same time, this interpretation gained even more extreme forms despite new discoveries in Serbian and European archaeology, and it culminated in the proclamation of the Ionian colony at Vinča in the sixth century B.C.E.³⁷ The public was thus presented with two institutional interpretations of Vinča from two opposing sides: the one at the Archaeological Collection, governed by the unchallenged, yet isolated Vasić, and the other designed by Grbić at the Prince Paul Museum. The Archaeological Collection consisted of the material excavated after 1929 and emphasized Vasić's idea of the Ionian colony, while in the National Museum, the Grbić's interpretation exhibited the artefacts found until 1924 and reflected his Neolithic interpretation of the site.³⁸

It is not possible to reconstruct with complete certainty the extent to which the exhibition at the collection explicitly demonstrated Vasić's narrative. Based on the surviving photographs, it is obvious that the artefacts were displayed in cases along closely packed

³⁴ Vasić 1932: X–XI; Nikolić, Vuković 2008, 51–58; Vujović, Vuković 2016: 820–822.

³⁵ AAZFF, Fond MMV br. 028.

³⁶ Lazić 2014: 25; Today the building houses the Embassy of Austria in the street Kneza Sime Markovića.

³⁷ Vasić 1934; Vasić 1936 a; *Id.* 1936b; *Id.* 1936c; Babić 2008: 128–132.

³⁸ Mihailović 2018; Palavestra i Mihailović 2018.

rows, probably due to limited space (Fig. 4). In this respect, the display resembles the stratigraphic one before World War I. However, it may safely be assumed that Vasić did not shy away from emphasizing his interpretation of the Ionian colony. Marko Janković cites somewhat confusing information that a journalist from the *Belgrade Municipality Newspaper* summarized from Vasić's speech at the opening, which at the same time mentioned the Bronze Age settlement at Vinča and "experienced and skilled miners from the Aegean".³⁹ It is not likely that in 1938, on such an important occasion, at the time fully obsessed by the sixth century Ionian colony, that Vasić would revert back to his old idea of the Bronze Age colonists. It is rather more plausible that the journalist consulted the first volume of the monograph *Praehistoric Vinča*,⁴⁰ where the Bronze Age interpretation was still present. In any case, regardless of the details of Vasić's interpretation expressed in the exhibition at the Archaeological Collection, it was undoubtedly fundamentally different from the Neolithic one by Grbić displayed at the Prince Paul Museum.

The visitors of both the museum and the collection must have been somewhat confused by the conflict of two institutional and personal authorities – the museum and Grbić versus the collection and Vasić, and their radically different interpretations of the archaeological material from Vinča. The Archaeological Collection was instrumental for Vasić, not only as safe storage for the material and an exhibition site at which he could promote his interpretation of Vinča, but also to re-establish the lost institutional authority of a custodian and a director of an institution like a museum.

4. Greek-Illyrian Treasures

Let us now turn to another example concerning the finds from the graves in Trebenište and what is referred to as the Novi Pazar princely grave, both of which are among the most important Iron Age finds in the Central Balkans. From the middle of the twentieth century almost to the present day, a hypothesis has been perpetuated about these finds being Greek-Illyrian treasures, although the new interpretations have clearly shown that both parts of this label are problematic.

Even though the Aegean and Greek veil by which Miloje Vasić had covered Vinča was removed at the Prince Paul Museum and the site correctly presented as Neolithic, this does not mean that the spirit of Winckelmann had been banished from this institution. Quite the contrary. Considering the elite character of this institution and the high aesthetic requirements of its orientation, Greek art was much more prominent in the museum than prehistoric finds (Fig. 2). In the Graeco-Illyrian hall, a marble statue of Athena Parthenos, probably from Heracleia Lyncestis and found in 1932 near Bitola was displayed. The other halls contained cases of Greek vases, sculptures, and terracotta statuettes from Stobi, Budva, and other sites researched by the museum. The finds from Trebenište were given special attention. The site was excavated by Professor Nikola Vulić, and the finds were given to the museum in 1935 (Fig. 5).⁴¹

³⁹ Janković (in preparation).

⁴⁰ Vasić 1932.

⁴¹ Đorđević et al, 2005: 17; Ninković 2009: 129; Cvjetičanin 2014: 588–591; Krstić: 2018: 40–41. For the history of research into this necropolis and the work of Nikola Vulić, v. Chukalev 2018: 17–31. and Krstić 2018: 33–41.

The label Graeco-Illyrian, ascribed to part of the museum's collection and especially associated with the finds from Trebenište, was persevered after World War II and warmly embraced by the newly founded National Museum, which was the successor of the Prince Paul Museum. Along with Trebenište, the collection encompassed the finds from the rich princely grave uncovered in 1957 under the foundations of the mediaeval church of Saint Paul near Novi Pazar.⁴² It is probable that Đorđe Mano-Zisi (1901–1995), formerly a custodian of the Prince Paul Museum and one of the researchers at Novi Pazar, was the transmitter of this Graeco-Illyrian discourse. At any rate, the idea remained as an interpretive template in the museum and was often repeated when material from Trebenište, Novi Pazar, Radolište and other similar sites were exhibited. The publication on Novi Pazar is entitled *The Illyrian-Greek Find*, and the material was exhibited soon after the recovery under the title *Illyrians and Greeks* (1959), followed by a symposium of the same name.⁴³ The exhibition *Graeco-Illyrian Treasures*, consisting mainly of the finds from Trebeništa and Novi Pazar, travelled to Great Britain and other countries with 14 events in total.⁴⁴ Numerous similar exhibitions followed, with variations of the original title.⁴⁵ The inversion of the title is not a coincidence, and the reversal from Illyrian-Greek to Graeco-Illyrian was most probably meant to emphasize the importance of the discovery.

Both aspects of the Graeco-Illyrian syntagm are generally problematic from an archaeological point of view, and especially so when applied to the finds from Trebenište and Novi Pazar. Present for centuries, the practice of declaring that all the communities of late prehistory living in the Western and Central Balkans were Illyrian, is derived from the classical written tradition. The discourse was very much present during the nineteenth century in linguistics, historiography, and archaeology, and remaining dominant until the middle of the twentieth century. It is not possible here to discuss in detail this complex problem of ethnogenesis and identity of the palaeo-Balkan communities, including the Illyrians. A reliable and detailed review is offered by Milutin Garašanin (*Nastanak i poreklo Ilira /Formation and origins des Illyriens*),⁴⁶ and the archaeologist himself was not completely immune to this narrative. More recently, Danijel Džino⁴⁷ and Vladimir Mihajlović⁴⁸ offered well-founded critical reviews of the Illyrian issue. In short, in the idea of Graeco-Illyrian treasures, the social structure of the palaeo-Balkan communities, their stratification and very complex relations with the neighbouring regions, including Greece and also the Apennine peninsula, are reduced to the simplified museum interpretation of Trebenište and Novi Pazar, presupposing “Greek penetration among the barbarians”. As Ljubiša Popović, another explorer of Novi Pazar, states:

The problem is to draw a line between the Greeks and the ones that are not Greek in the Balkans over various periods. In those times, the Illyrians and the Thracians might have been treated as real barbarians, while the Macedonians were a bordering line. (...) The first hints of the Greek penetration

⁴² Mano-Zisi, Popović 1969.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 9

⁴⁴ Jevtović 1994: 9.

⁴⁵ Krstić 2018: 40, note 5.

⁴⁶ Garašanin 1988.

⁴⁷ Džino 2008a; *Id.* 2008b.

⁴⁸ Mihajlović 2014.

are testified by the rich grave offerings at Trebenište, more modest ones at Radolište, more opulent at Novi Pazar and Atenica. Only on the grounds of these, it can be concluded to what extent these influences were decisive in the formation of the taste of the tribal leaders of smaller Illyrian communities and tribes. At the times of the primitive exchange of goods, the Greeks offer oils, wine, metal vessels, helmets, *knemidae*, in exchange for ores, wood, hides and fragrant plants. (...) It is obvious that the arts of the Aegean and the Mediterranean, after the illusionism and flourishing figural representations, acted spontaneously and acceptable for the taste of barbarians, the ones the Greeks call *barbaroi*.⁴⁹

The petrified narrative of the Graeco-Illyrian treasures has obstinately persisted, despite the fact that from 1984 until now a whole range of archaeological and anthropological interpretations has been offered that explains the appearance of the princely graves in the Central Balkans, the luxurious objects registered in them, and the relations between the palaeo-Balkan populations and their neighbours. These interpretive models included, among others, the ritual exchange of gifts, communication control, peer polity interaction, princely graves as territorial markers of social cohesion and collective memory of transhumant communities, gateway communities, translation zones, etc.⁵⁰ In short, the main objection to the cliché of “Greek penetration among the barbarians” of the Central Balkans may be summarized in these two sentences:

Among the objections put forward concerning the traditional interpretation of the Greek goods recorded in the *princely graves* (...), the fact has been stressed that the small quantity of these objects does not fit into the pattern of a mighty economic input from the South. Indeed, the full list compiled from all the graves registered in the Central Balkans points to equally low numbers stretched over the period of almost two centuries.⁵¹

5. Greek Legitimacy and Hellenization

Key to the Graeco-Illyrian cliché is undoubtedly the association with ancient Greece, which is itself a concept loaded with controversies,⁵² and whose many connotations will not be discussed here. In short, the Hellenic link has been supposed to ensure a higher civilizational status for displays of archaeological material from the “barbarian” Central Balkans, ranging from the Ionian colony of Vinča to Graeco-Illyrian treasures from Trebenište and Novi Pazar. As Staša Babić writes:

Throughout the history of archaeological research into contacts between the Greeks and other populations, attention has been focused on the artefacts of Greek manufacture registered in the context of other cultures. The quality and the quantity of these artefacts have been seen as indicative of the degree of *Hellenization*, the profound and inevitable influence of Greek culture on the inferior barbarians. The mechanisms of contacts leading to this decisive change within various local cultures have been explained mainly in terms of routes of influence – suitable natural communications along which luxurious goods reached the hinterland. In this framework, one of the assumptions is that

⁴⁹ Popović 1994: 18–19.

⁵⁰ For various interpretations of the princely graves, v. Babić 1990; *Id.* 2002; *Id.* 2007a; *Id.* 2007b; 2018; Babić 2004; *Id.* 2008; Palavestra 1984; Palavestra 1988; *Id.* 1994; *Id.* 1998; Palavestra, Babić 2003; Babić, Palavestra 2018; Palavestra, Krstić 2006.

⁵¹ Babić, Palavestra 2018: 192.

⁵² Babić 2008: 55–64, 75–78.

space is an absolute and definite category, at all times perceived, measured and represented according to the same rules and parameters (...) In dealing with Greek products in the European hinterland, this approach inevitably involves the well-established concept of Hellenization, superior Hellenic culture spreading over the barbarian areas.⁵³

It is precisely this “deeply rooted and yet insufficiently clear concept of Hellenization”⁵⁴ that influenced the exhibitions described here at the National Museum, the Prince Paul Museum, and the Archaeological Collection, not only in the past, but in recent times as well. Although the narrative of the Graeco-Illyrian treasures is not prominent any more in the current permanent display at the National Museum, the web site for the Graeco-Hellenistic Collection at the museum is illustrated by a part of a golden ceremonial cuirass from Novi Pazar. Furthermore, the archaeological material from Trebenište, Novi Pazar, and Radolište forms a part of this collection, reflecting the old administrative structure of the museum.⁵⁵ The idea of Hellenization and “Greek influences on the barbarians in the hinterland” was also abundantly clear and prominent at the exhibition *The Central Balkans between the Greek and Celtic Worlds*, held at the National Museum in 2012 (Fig. 6). The central motive behind the exhibition was the exceptionally interesting and well researched site of Kale-Krševica near Vranje, often labelled as Hellenistic, whether with or without good reason.⁵⁶ Of this exhibition, I wrote:

Instead of important archaeological problems raised by the research of this site (the issues of “hybridization” of cultures, the character of the site itself, the models of contacts between the Balkan hinterland and the Mediterranean, as well as the wider context and comparison with other similar sites in the Balkans), the authors of the exhibition (and/or the authors of the display) suggested to viewers a completely different story: that of Krševica as an isolated island of Greek civilization deep in the barbarian Balkan hinterland. This message to the audience, confusing and erroneous in my opinion, is emphasized by the large painted representations of the Greek way of life, copied from the Greek red-figure pottery, not registered at Krševica and mainly preceding it chronologically.⁵⁷

I concluded then that Miloje Vasić would have been very satisfied with this exhibition. As Tatjana Cvjetičanin stated, the presentation of *The Central Balkans between the Greek and Celtic World*, as an “authorized and institutionalized truth” directed the public’s focus to the settlement’s inhabitants belonging to a higher cultural circle and Greek heritage, following the deeply rooted concept that is hard to critically evaluate and change.⁵⁸

The cases of the collections from Vinča and from the Central Balkan princely graves, and of Krševica as well, vividly illustrate that the museum displays of cultural heritage are not neutral or objective, but fundamentally dependent on wider theoretical interpretive paradigms. It also proves that the spirit of Winckelmann and Vasić obviously still lives on in the Belgrade museums.

⁵³ Babić 2008: 147.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 147.

⁵⁵ Cvjetičanin 2015.

⁵⁶ Vranić 2012.

⁵⁷ Palavestra 2012: 650.

⁵⁸ Cvjetičanin 2015: 578.

ABBREVIATIONS:

AAZFF – Arhiv Arheološke zbirke Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu (Archives of the Archaeological Collection of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade)

Fond MMV – Arhiv Arheološke zbirke Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu, Fond Miloja M. Vasića (Archives of the Archaeological Collection of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, the Repository of Miloje Vasić)

DNM – Dokumentacija Narodnog Muzeja u Beogradu (Records of the National Museum of Belgrade)

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Fig. 1. Photo of the material from Vinča arranged according to the stratigraphic principle in the Museum devastated in 1914 (Mitrović 2015, 409)

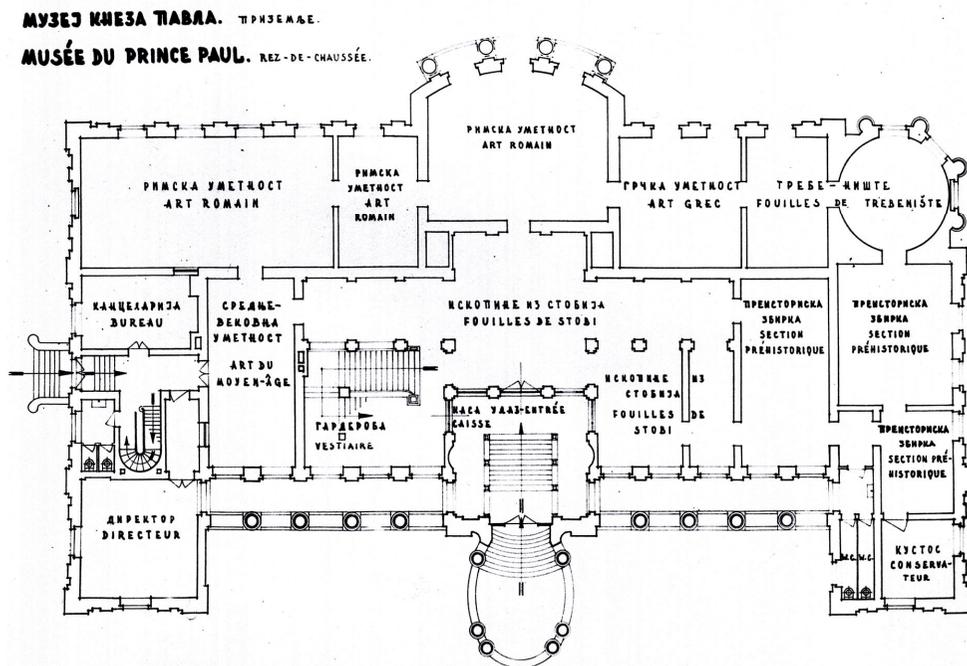


Fig. 2: Plan of the ground floor of the Prince Paul Museum (Ninković 2009, 109, DNM)



Fig. 3. The Neolithic exhibition in the Prince Paul Museum
(Ninković 2009, 139, DNM)



Fig 4. Vinča material exhibited in the Archaeological Collection of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1938 (AAZFF)



Fig. 5. Finds from Trebenište in the archaeological display of the Prince Paul Museum
(Krstić 2018, 41, DNM)



Fig 6. The exhibition of the Iron Age settlement Krševica nad Greek vases (DNM)

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ДВЕ ЗБИРКЕ И ДВЕ ГРЧКЕ ОПСЕСИЈЕ

Резиме

Већ је, до излизаности, понављана тачна тврдња су музејске поставке и интерпретације директно условљене ширим идејним и теоријским концептима који доминирају дисциплином, али и често и ауторовим личним интерпретацијама или опсесијама. Винкелманско наслеђе, класицистичко глорификовање „непревазиђене“ грчке уметности и хумболтовски образовни канон, тешко да су заобишли и један европски музеј. Понекад се се деценијама истрајава на изложбеним концептима „у грчком кључу“, иако нова археолошка интерпретација недвосмислено говори против таквог неокласицистичког читања. Два примера могу добро да илуструју овакву ситуацију. Једно је случај вишеслојног неолитског насеља Винча код Београда, који је од 1908, па до 1934, у неколико кампања ископавао Милоје Васић. У почетку свог истраживања, Васић је био директор Народног музеја у Београду и професор археологије. Од самог почетка истраживања овог важног неолитског локалитета, Васић је инсистирао на томе да је Винча насеље егејских колониста и еманиција минојског и микенског бронзаног доба. Од 1934, Винчу чак проглашава јонском колонијом из 6. века пре наше ере. После II светског рата Васић престаје да буде директор Музеја и посвећује се раду на Факултету. Истовремено у светској и српској науци долази до критика Васићеве неодрживе интерпретације и до препознавања Винче као неолитског локалитета. Суочен с таквим критичарима, чак и из Народног музеја у Београду, Васић 1929. оснива „Археолошку збирку Универзитета“, у коју смешта материјал с нових, послератних ископавања Винче и где неометано наставља своју филхеленску интерпретацију. Други случај је кнежевски гроб из Новог Пазара који је један од важнијих и богатијих налаза гвозденог доба на Западном Балкану. Од половине XX века, па такорећи до данас, на бројним изложбама Народног музеју Београду провлачи се теза о „грчко-илирском благу“ иако су новије интерпретације јасно указале на проблематичност, па и неодрживост оба дела те синтагме.

Кључне речи: музејске изложбе, интерпретација, Милоје М. Васић, Миодраг Грбић, кнежевски гробови централног Балкана, филхеленство.

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