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## TWO LATE BRONZE AGE VESSELS WITH INCISED SIGN-LIKE SYMBOLS FROM THE NORTHERN BALKANS\*

Prehistoric research generally mentions two clay finds—beside the few unusually shaped clay objects and incised depictions<sup>1</sup>—in support of as yet unclarified links with the Mycenaean writing system and symbolic representations. One such piece—made of clay—a stray find from Vatin-Vattina<sup>2</sup> (Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, length 14 cm; fig. 2) can probably be compared to finely decorated, gold-mounted or alabaster sword or dagger pommels from the richest Mycenaean burials, i.e., from Mycenae and Dendra.<sup>3</sup> One of the finds with incised symbols is a perforated clay globe (fig.

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\* I shall use the following abbreviated references:

CAH<sup>2</sup>: J. Boardman, I.E.S. Edwards, N.G.L. Hammond and E. Sollberger eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* <sup>2</sup> III.1 (Cambridge 1982);

*Étude*: E. Masson, *Étude de vingt-six boules d'argile inscrites trouvées à Enkomi et Haia Sultan Tekke (Chypre)* = *SIMA* 31.1 (Göteborg 1971);

*The Aegean*: J. Bouzek, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europe: Cultural Interrelations in the Second Millennium B.C.* = *SIMA* 28 (Göteborg 1985);

*Vattina*: B. Milleker, "A vattinai őstelep" ("The Prehistoric Settlement of Vattina"), offprint from the local Annual *A Délmagyarországi Történelmi és Régészeti Értesítő (Historical and Archaeological Review of Southern Hungary)* vol. 1905:1 (Temesvár 1905).

<sup>1</sup> J. Makkay, "Angaben zur Datierung und zu den südlichen Kontakten der mittleren Bronzezeit des Karpatenbeckens," *A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (Annual of the Ferenc Móra Museum)* 1966-1967 (Szeged 1967) 31-41; and "Remarks to the Archaeology of the Relations between Crete-Mycenae and Central Europe," in *Atti Roma* I, 91-98, pls. I-III.

<sup>2</sup> *Vattina* 44, pl. XX.2a-b; Makkay (supra n. 1) pl. III.1.

<sup>3</sup> A.W. Persson, *The Royal Tombs at Dendra near Midea* (Lund 1931) 35, pls. XX-XXII; G. Karo, *Die Schachtgräber von Mykenai* (München 1930) 99, figs. 32, 44, 54, 57, pls. LXXV, LXXVI, LXXXIII; G.E. Mylonas, 'Ο ταφικός κύκλος Β' τῶν Μυκηνηῶν (Athens 1972) pls. 61α, 68β.

5),<sup>4</sup> the other a wheel-like round clay object (diam. 7 cm, height at centre 1.7 cm; fig. 4).<sup>5</sup> Both came to light at Vatin-Vattina (a little north of the Lower Danube; fig. 1) at the beginning of this century. Their find circumstances are entirely unknown. They are usually dated to the end of the local Middle Bronze Age sequence, to the latest, Belegiš-Ilandža group of the Vattina-culture.<sup>6</sup> The incised signs on the magic globe have been likened to Late Mycenaean signs from Cyprus on the one hand, and to Linear A signs on the other.<sup>7</sup> In the following I would like to describe two other contemporary and comparable finds from the same region. One is an old find, the other more recent, and neither of these two items has yet been cited in studies dealing with the problems of imitation of Mycenaean written signs.

A clay lid, 12 cm in diameter, came to light in 1902 at Kličevac, immediately south of the Danube, not far from the Beograd confluence of the Morava River (figs. 1 and 3).<sup>8</sup> I did not have the opportunity to study this vessel personally, nor is a modern publication available. Consequently, I can only quote what Vasić and Wosinsky saw: "a vessel lid...with unintelligible incisions." The incised lines were filled with white chalk. This lid is now assigned to the Dubovac-Žuto Brdo group, which is roughly contemporaneous with the Vattina group.<sup>9</sup> The "unintelligible incisions" are to be seen around the bottom of the lid (fig. 3). Wosinsky most probably considered them unintelligible because these individual signs differ markedly from characteristic ornamental motifs of the group. Only after personal study of the lid would one be able to say more about it. I myself would suggest that these incised motifs could easily be meaningless imitations of

<sup>4</sup> *Vattina* 52, pl. XXII.5a-b; Makkay (supra n. 1) pl. III.3; *The Aegean*, fig. 40.7-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Vattina* 53, pl. XX.5a-c; Makkay (supra n. 1) pl. III.2; *The Aegean*, fig. 40.5 (the incised motifs only).

<sup>6</sup> M. Garašanin, "Vatinska grupa," in A. Benac ed., *Praistorija Jugoslavenskih Zemalja*, Vol. IV: *Bronzano Doba* (Sarajevo 1983) 509.

<sup>7</sup> *Étude* 30-31, pl. III.1-2; *The Aegean*, 69-70 (with further literature on comparison with Linear A) and fig. 40.7-8.

<sup>8</sup> M. Wosinsky, *Az őskor mészbetétes diszítésű agyagművészete (The Prehistoric Incrusted Pottery)*; Budapest 1904) 62, pl. CVII middle left (with further reference to the original publication of M.M. Vasić in *RA* 20 (1902).

<sup>9</sup> M. Garašanin, "The Bronze Age in the Central Balkan Area," in *CAH*<sup>2</sup>, 177.

Mycenaean written signs. A link with the Mycenaean world is supported by M. Garašanin's observation that the

great similarity between the idols of this group and those of Mycenaean art has often been pointed out. Moreover, the link between the Dupljaja cart and the Hyperborean myth of Apollo, as well as the appearance of Greek meanders on pottery...and figurines with similar ornamentation, suggests connexions with the world of Greece. For the present the question remains open whether one sees here a wider spiritual *koine* in the Balkan Peninsula or the participation of the bearers of our group in Aegean migrations farther south.<sup>10</sup>

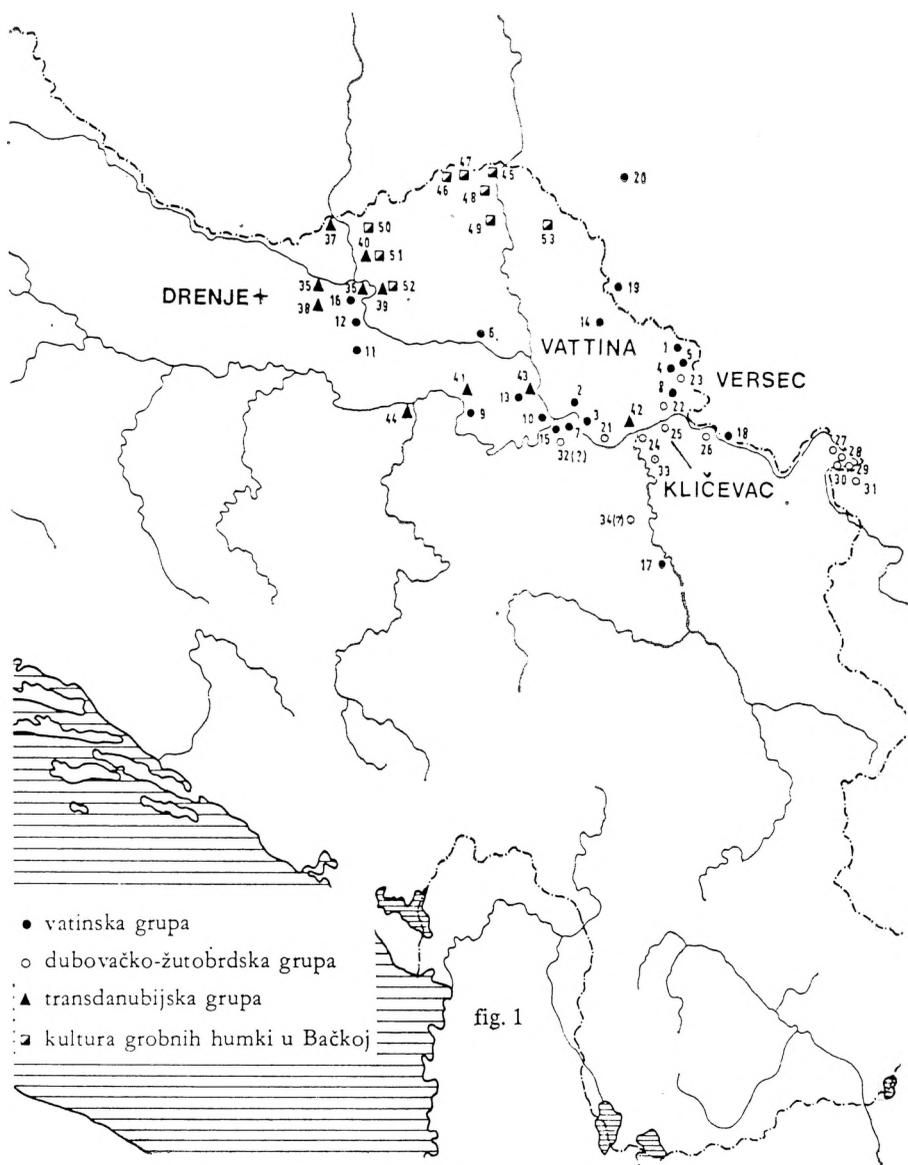
The other item is a prehistoric vessel, six fragments of which were found in Slavonia, in the outskirts of the village of Drenje near Našice, Yugoslavia (figs. 1 and 6). The fragments came to light in a ploughed field, without accompanying finds. Three fragments which I was able to study eventually reached the Našice and Odžaci local museums;<sup>11</sup> the other three are in private collections. The museum fragments (fig. 6) undoubtedly belong to the same vessel even though they do not join. The vessel is of finely levigated clay, and its yellowish-brown surface is carefully smoothed. The shape of the vessel could not be reconstructed on the basis of these three sherds. The signs were incised prior to firing; originally they probably covered the entire surface and had apparently been arranged in vertical columns. Some of the signs occur repeatedly and appear to be standardized forms. The possibility of an archaeological fake can probably be excluded. The dating of the fragments has remained uncertain, but the vessel is undoubtedly prehistoric, and in view of its fabric, colour and temper it can be assigned to the Middle or Late Bronze Age. Consequently, both the Vattin-Vattina and Kličevac finds and probably also the Drenje fragments can be dated to around 1200 B.C. or between 1200 and 1100 B.C. My only aim with this brief

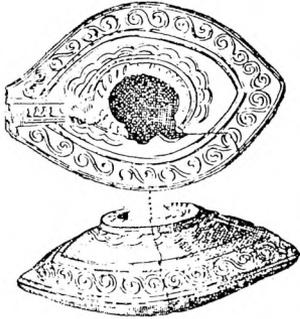
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<sup>10</sup> Garašanin (supra n. 9) 179.

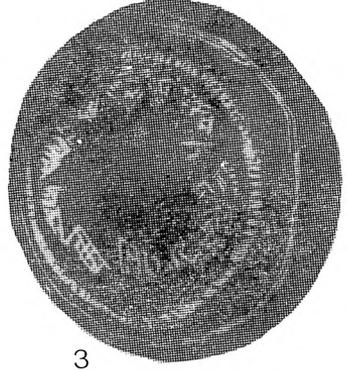
<sup>11</sup> S. Karmanski, *Katalog Bronzanodobne idoloplastike i zaštitno iskopavanje lokaliteta Veliki Atovi kod Sela Pivnice* (Odžaci 1984) 12, pl. X.1-3.

report is to call the specialists' attention to these sign-like symbols in the hope of promoting further studies.

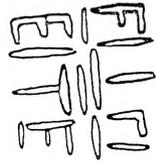




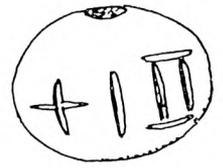
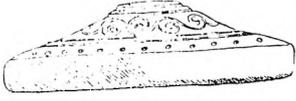
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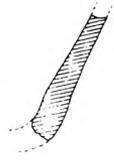
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