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# Excavations at Sitagroi

A Prehistoric Village in Northeast Greece

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Edited by

Colin Renfrew, Marija Gimbutas, and Ernestine S. Elster

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## Part 1

# Cultural Sequence and Prehistoric Environment

# 1.

## Northeastern Greece: The Archaeological Problem

Colin Renfrew

The excavations at Sitagroi were conceived in response to two major problems in European prehistory. For many years the rich “copper age” cultures of southeastern Europe—notably of Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, that is, the region termed by Prof. Marija Gimbutas (1974b) “Old Europe”—were a particular focus of study (Gimbutas 1956; Renfrew 1969). It became clear that this region had been the home of prosperous farming cultures whose sedentary villages had, by a process of accretion, formed those conspicuous settlement mounds known in the Near East as *tells* and in Greece as *tombras* or *maghoulas*. Not only did the pottery and other products suggest a measure of craft specialization, but the rich repertoire of figurines indicated a relatively developed cult practice. In addition, it was clear that copper metallurgy had developed early in this region, and its precocious emergence was of interest for the study of metallurgy in general. Yet, other than the systematic excavations of Dr. G. I. Georgiev at the great Bulgarian tell of Karanovo (Georgiev 1961), no major excavation bearing upon this period had been adequately published in recent decades. What was the basis, in terms of subsistence and local production, of this flourishing group of chalcolithic cultures, whose variety and accomplishment seemed more impressive not only than that of their neolithic predecessors but also of their bronze age successors? The first problem, then, was to investigate the nature of the cultures of this period at some suitable site where finds would be sufficiently

abundant and where a coherent context could be established.

The second problem was chronological. Early excavations by Vasić at Vinča and the studies of Gordon Childe had established that the chalcolithic cultures in question—that is, the Vinča-Pločnik culture of Yugoslavia, the Gumelnitsa culture of Romania, and the Karanovo V-VI culture of Bulgaria—could be dated by virtue of their contacts with the Aegean world to the south. The first substantial use of metal in the Aegean was in the Aegean early bronze age, conventionally dated as beginning around 2700-2500 BC. It could therefore be concluded that the chalcolithic cultures in question were to be dated after that time. This was the view of such established authorities as Milošević (1949) and Garašanin (1958) and such, indeed, remains the view of many scholars in central and southeastern Europe (e.g., Makkay 1975) to this day.

But a close examination of the supposed similarities in the pottery and other materials from the two regions did not support this equation (Renfrew 1965). Nor did the results of Georgiev’s excavations at Karanovo, where it was the succeeding early bronze age levels that could be most appositely compared with Aegean early bronze age sites such as Troy. Finally, the emerging radiocarbon evidence from the two areas strengthened these doubts, reinforcing the suspicion that one of the major and basic interconnections sustaining the framework of European prehistory was altogether in error. I had