

COMMUNICATIONS

This year's further excavations at Arkhanes for a palace, and at Phourni for a tholos tomb have been carried out with good results under the direction of John and Effie Sakellarakis with funds from the Greek Archaeological Society.

Jean-Pierre Olivier and John Killen report from Iraklion, with an example, that a postcard of what are identified as Σφραγῖδες, Sceaux, Seals, Siegel, Sigilli shows instead eight tablets from Knossos in their display in the Museum at Iraklion.

Mrs. Effie Sakellarakis is finishing her thesis "Μινωικὸν Ζῶμα. Συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν μελέτην τοῦ Μινωικοῦ ἐνδύματος." at the University of Athens.

Brief notices of the Second Cretological Congress and the Congress held at Brno appear in Ἑλληνικά 19 (1966) 182-183.

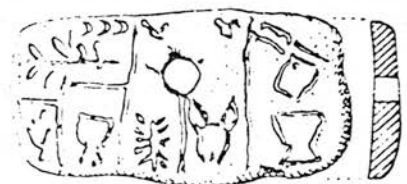
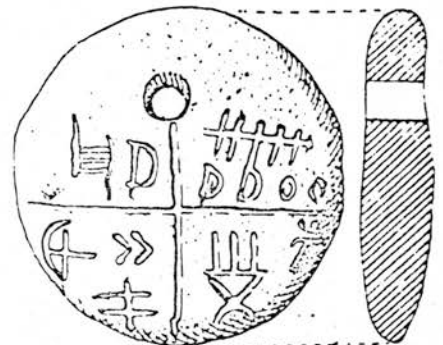
CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:-Three clay tablets with incised signs, from a Neolithic context in Rumania, seem likely to become the next cause célèbre in prehistoric archaeology. Their discovery was announced by N. Vlassa (Dacia 7 [1963] 485f.), the excavator of the site of Tărtăria. He reports that they were found in a level of the Tordoș phase of the Vinča culture.

The exceptional importance of the tablets was at once realised by V. Miložčić. He obtained the opinion of the late A. Falkenstein (Germania 43 [1965]) that the Tărtăria tablets are related to tablets of Protoliterate Sumeria, such as those of Warka IV, and not an independent product. The evidence for a direct Mesopotamian and Aegean connection has been summarised by V. Popovitch (Revue archéologique 1965:2, lf.).

The authenticity of the tablets appears established by their discovery during properly conducted excavations, and is supported by the appearance of similar signs on objects and pottery of the Vinča and Körös cultures (Popovitch op. cit. 35; V. G. Childe, The Danube in Prehistory [1929], 33; J. Todorovič and A. Cermanovič, Banitsa [1961], 42).

Many scholars would consequently date the Tărtăria tablets to around 3,000 B.C. or a little later. This is broadly in conformity with the chronological views of such authorities on the Vinča culture as Miložčić, D. and M. Garašanin and V. Dumitrescu. Already this is a remarkable situation: writing in Rumania earlier than the sealings from the Early Helladic II town of Lerna III, and earlier than the first pottery marks at Phylakopi I, which have often been cited as the first evidence of Aegean writing.



But this dating of the Vinča culture is that of the traditional school of European pre-historians. It is in direct contradiction with the results of radiocarbon dating. All scholars (both pro- and anti- C-14) agree that Vinča-Tordoš is considerably earlier than the Rumanian Gumelnitsa culture. The Gumelnitsa culture, on a C-14 chronology, clearly began early in the IVth millennium (G. Kohl and H. Quitta, Radiocarbon 8 [1966] 27; cf. J. Mellaart, Antiquity 24 [1960] 270 f.). No adjustment of half-lives or of atmospheric C-14 levels will make a radiocarbon dating for Vinča-Tordoš in the Vth millennium B. C. equivalent to a calendar date of c. 3,000 B. C. Indeed such adjustments as have to be made will probably work the other way (P. E. Damon, A. Long, D. C. Grey, Journal of Geophysical Research 71 [1966] 1055 f.). There are very feasible archaeological arguments to support the longer radiocarbon chronology and it seems possible that it will one day supersede the more roundabout culture parallel approach, despite the considerable attraction of the Tărtăria-Warka equation.

If the signs on the tablets and elsewhere indeed constitute writing we shall have to face the possibility that on a C-14 chronology, writing emerged or at least began to emerge, perhaps independently, in Europe late in the Vth millennium B. C. The alternative appears to be to reject radiocarbon completely as worthless, and to accept the presence, or at least influence, of Mesopotamian settlers in Rumania at the beginning of the IIIrd millennium. Either conclusion will be of interest for Greek European pre-history. But the first step must surely be for competent scholars to achieve a consensus that the signs are indeed to be regarded as writing. Is this certain?

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Yours, &c.
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