The period from 6500 to 2500 BC was one of the most dynamic eras of the prehistory of south-eastern Europe, for it saw many fundamental changes in the ways in which people lived their lives. This up-to-date and authoritative synthesis both describes the best excavated relevant Balkan sites and interprets long-term trends in the central themes of settlement, burial, material culture and economy.

Prominence is given to the ways people organized themselves, the houses and landscapes in which they lived and the objects, plants and animals they kept. The key developments are seen as the creation of new social environments through the construction of houses and villages, and a new materiality of life which filled the built environment with a wide variety of objects. Against the prevailing trends in European prehistory, the author argues for a prehistoric past riven with tension and conflict, where hoarding and the exclusion of people was just as frequent as sharing and helping.

*Balkan Prehistory* provides a much-needed guide to a period which has previously been inaccessible to western scholars. It will be an invaluable resource for undergraduates, advanced students and scholars.

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BALKAN PREHISTORY

Exclusion, incorporation and identity

Douglass W. Bailey

London and New York
For my father,
L.SCOTT BAILEY
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This book developed over the past ten years or so as, first as a student and then as young lecturer and excavator, I have tried to grapple with the prehistory of southeastern Europe. As my ignorance of the region and its archaeology has receded I have remained concerned over the absence of a linguistically accessible synthesis and interpretation of what must be one of the world’s most extraordinary periods of prehistory. The classic text, still on course syllabi but long out of print, is Tringham’s *Hunters, Fishers and Farmers of Eastern Europe 6000–3000 BC*, which will be 30 years old when the present volume appears. Since Tringham carried out her early research and wrote her seminal text, the practice of archaeology, the amount of information available and, perhaps not least importantly, the modern geopolitics of eastern Europe have changed fundamentally.

Where once a desire to study east European prehistory required preliminary campaigns of survey merely to find the relevant language courses or textbooks, today a visit to almost any bookstore or website provides a choice of self-taught language courses in every language necessary. Visa requirements are, marginally, less rigorous and travel and accommodation are no longer the romantic expeditions they once were. Politically, for most east European countries membership in western economic, political and military organizations is following the first ten years of financial and socio-economic networking.

The position of archaeology and archaeologists within the Balkans has also changed. However, it is unfortunate (some would say tragic) that, if anything, archaeology and archaeologists in most Balkan countries are worse off than, perhaps, they have been ever before. The assured financial support and ideological primacy available during the decades of marxist socialism collapsed with the Berlin wall in 1989. Current budgets are thin, if provided at all; if the situation is drastic for national institutes and academies, then it is worse for archaeologists and museums in the provinces. The opening of eastern Europe which has followed the political changes of 1989 has not been accompanied by equally significant increases in support to disciplines such as archaeology (Bailey 1998).
The present volume is offered as one step in the path towards a more comprehensive and theoretically informed understanding of the Balkans from the beginning of the Neolithic through the beginning of the early Bronze Age. As such it attempts to take Tringham’s project forward; in many ways it is dwarfed by the scope and achievements of the earlier work. In other ways, I hope the reader will agree, it moves in new directions. Regardless, I hope that it will provide a platform upon which future progress will be made.

D.W.Bailey
Stanton, September 1999
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None of the research or writing which went into this volume would have been possible without the support of my family, especially the understanding of my wife Emma and our son Alexander and daughter Hannah. Apologies for the many lost weekends. Most fundamentally, however, it is my father who has been the constant inspiration for all of my academic work and it is to him with much love and great humility that I dedicate the pages which follow.
INTRODUCTION: BALKAN PREHISTORY (6500–2000 BC)

Fundamental changes in human behaviour

Sometime in the second half of the fifth millennium BC, several people were talking and working together inside a house in a small village in what is now north-eastern Bulgaria. The village was now well established, having grown up over a long period of time, through many generations of people’s births and deaths and many episodes of abandonment of old crumbling houses and replacement with new ones. The village sat next to a thin stream which, having risen in the mountain foothills to the south, wound its way northwards, past the village, eventually joined by other streams before emptying into a larger river which, in turn, swung 100 km or so to the east before it emptied into the Black Sea.

The men and women chatting together in the house were casually sorting out and repairing digging tools; some were made of antler, others had short wooden handles lashed to a thin heavy piece of stone which had been ground into the shape of an adze. The tallest of the men was adding the final red lines to the simple patterns of rhomboids and angles which ran along the freshly replastered walls and the curved roof of the oven. Outside the house a child was playing with a little clay statue left over from an initiation ceremony. Next to her, three older members of the group were arguing about which of the younger cattle should be slaughtered.

Regardless of their decision, any slaughtering would have to wait until they knew when the meat would be required. This of course depended on what the Old Man decided. When did he want the most people in the village? When did he want them to start digging over the soil and sowing the seed corn? In a small, dark room, deep within the house, the Old Man and a younger woman were arguing about just this question of the appropriate timing of the planting. She thought that the ground was already dry enough. He decided. They would wait another week. He told the others to cut the calf’s throat now and hang it so it would be ready in six or seven days’ time.
Up in the hills south of the village, a small group of people sat on the edge of a wooded terrace and talked; they looked out over the plain, watching thin lines of smoke rise through the thatch of three of the buildings in the village. The buildings and the village itself rose out of the flat plain like a small hill. If they had looked out over the plain earlier that morning, they would have seen that the low spring sun had raised a blanket of fog across the cool earth of the valley floor; the fog had been thickest along the stream. They would have seen that the fog hid everything but a few roofs which poked up and marked the presence of the village. Two weeks ago the people had stopped on the hill and had looked out and seen smoke from only one of the buildings. When the time was right, they would come down into the plain and set up camp nearer to the village; they would smell the meat, hear the songs and see the cattle led out along the stream.

While the group on the hill watched, down in the village, in a second house, another group of people were busy cleaning off and inspecting the biggest and finest of their most brightly decorated bowls, pans and dishes; most of the pots had survived the winter, a few were cracked and would be repaired, only one was in a hopeless state. While some sorted out the fancier pots, others were unwrapping parcels they had brought with them from downriver. A girl was making a necklace, threading bright white shell beads onto a leather cord and tying other beads of bone and fired clay onto a large piece of fabric.

In a third house, people were busy mixing a sticky paste of coarse wheat-flour with water and, in a domed oven, cooking little flat loaves which they piled up on a low bench against the wall of the largest room. This house had a weary and lived-in look; under the smell of wood-smoke and the sweet aroma of baking bread ran a dank, remnant stench of stale sweat and sour urine which had strengthened during the winter just ending. When the first frosts had come at the end of the autumn, the rest of the villagers had moved off downstream with a few cows and sheep; in this dank house Bogdan, an elderly man, and two of his young grandsons had stayed behind to overwinter. They had lived in this house and looked after the rest of the animals in the village.

Through the colder months, the pigs had snorted and routed around and through the empty houses, had borne their litters and, basically, annoyed everyone. The cattle and sheep bedded down each night in various buildings and rooms. In the coldest part of the winter, the animals were given fodder, mostly straw kept from last summer’s harvest; some, especially the cows which were with calf, were given barley. By the beginning of spring, two calves and half a dozen lambs had been born and survived; one calf had been stillborn.
It was in the house where the bread was being baked that Bogdan had spent the winter along with the two boys; while the children saw to the animals and kept the fire burning, Bogdan had grown weaker and weaker. First he couldn’t manage to get to the door to take a leak and had had to pee in the corner of one of the smaller rooms. One day he couldn’t get up from bed and, finally, one morning his body was stiff and cold to the boys’ touch. They had wrapped the body in an old blanket and dragged it into the cold, little, outer room where it had lain; it had only started to stink as the warmth had returned to the early spring sun.

Together, the whole village community would bury Bogdan. His age gave him some status but in fact he wasn’t really anyone special, although the boys would have said otherwise. The body needed burying and the village needed a burial both to re-anchor their community for the agricultural year and to refocus young and old minds on whom they relied to make the important decisions. They would bury him just before they started working the soil. The calf would have been slaughtered and hung; the shell necklace would be finished, the copper axe fitted with a wooden shaft and Bogdan’s body wrapped up, properly this time, ready to be carried from the house to the burial area across the stream.

By the time they had started roasting the heavy shank of the calf, the stragglers from the hills had started to come down. The village would soon be full. When the Old Man started singing by the side of the grave, the villagers and travellers came out from the buildings and carried the body to the open hillside where the Old Man sang. Together they would look back at the village and bury Bogdan; his body was tightly wrapped in a new cloth which had a few shiny metal discs tied onto it next to the rows of white and red beads. In the pit, with the body, they would place the new copper axe, a few marvellously long flint blades and a couple of freshly made but poorly fired pots. Later that night they would all eat too much. The meat would be shared out, some to everyone, though the Old Man would make sure that the right pieces made it to the right people. The next day the whole group would break up again into separate households; some would carry antler picks into the plain over the ridge and start to turn the soil and plant the seed; the two boys would start packing Bogdan’s house with branches, twigs and all of the chaff and straw left over from the winter’s fodder. When the house was lit it would burn well, maybe even throughout the night. After the fire the boys would go to live in another household and begin new lives.

So began another spring in the village of Ovcharovo.¹

By the end of the fifth millennium BC, the Balkans was a vibrant place to be; perhaps the most dynamic part of Europe at this time. Monumental villages like
the one at Ovcharovo were increasingly filling many landscapes, marking out and anchoring communities to particular places. Houses and households were increasingly important centres of activities and social interaction. In several regions extramural cemeteries were attached to these villages. The majority of burials in these cemeteries were simple single inhumations of men, women or children; most had very few, if any, grave-goods. Some burials, however, were extraordinarily equipped with jewellery made of exotic shells, copper or gold, or with large, heavy cutting tools, such as axe-adzes, axe-hammers and chisels made of extravagant amounts of copper. Gold was hammered flat and cut into discs or zoomorphic shapes and sewn on to the deceased’s clothing or hair. In the most sensational grave assemblages, found on the Black Sea coast at Varna and Durankulak, gold objects found in individual graves reached more than 1000 in number and weighed many kilograms.

Visually exciting materials and objects were not limited to funerary contexts; in addition to flint, bone, stone and antler tools and ceramic vessels used and stored in houses, small clay figures, fashioned to resemble people or animals, were widespread. By the end of the fifth millennium BC, therefore, the landscapes of the Balkans were extraordinary places full of a wide range of economic activities, social ceremonies and the routines of a daily existence which was centred on long-extant villages.

Three thousand years earlier, the same landscapes would have been unrecognizable. There were no villages, nor any houses, temporary or permanent, and there was no formal disposal of the dead. People went about their lives with a comparatively impoverished inventory of tools or other items. Most objects were made of flaked stone; many were made of bone, wood, antler and other perishable materials. There was no pottery, let alone any objects made of copper or gold. The people of these earlier Balkans lived very mobile existences, relying on their knowledge of the climate, the environment and the patterns of availability of animal and plant communities.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN LIVING

This book is an investigation of the changes in the ways people lived their lives. It is about the changes which separate the earlier Balkans from the material, settlement and burial activity that developed into the dynamism of the late fifth millennium BC. As such it focuses on the period from 6500 BC, when these changes began, through the sixth and fifth millennia BC, when they reached their fullest expression, and into the fourth millennium BC when another sequence of fundamental changes began. Thus, in traditional terms this book is about the Neolithic and Copper ages of south-eastern Europe. While there are chapters on
what came before and what came after, the core of the book investigates a series of principal changes in how people lived their lives within these periods.

In terms of geography I have taken the Balkans to include northern Greece, Bulgaria, southern Romania, Serbia, the eastern Hungarian Plain and north-west Anatolia (Figure I.2). In this region, during the period concerned, there were significant changes in three critical areas of human behaviour: material culture; mobility and the spatial organization of communities; and the expression of individual and group identities. Within each of these areas there are important issues which the following chapters examine.

**Material culture**

Perhaps the most obvious element of the difference in the post-6500 BC Balkans rests in the variety, quantity and material of the things which people made, used and discarded. Critical to a better understanding of the Balkans at this time is a group of the significance of this increase in quantity and the introduction of novel materials and processes of creation. Thus, for example, we need to know what is the significance of the appearance of ceramic pyrotechnology across the Balkans in the middle of the seventh millennium BC. What did the earliest potting consist of, who did it and for what purposes? What was the inspiration and what were the consequences of the adoption of this new technology? Similar questions must be asked about the appearance, usage and patterns of deposition of other materials such as copper and gold or exotic marine molluscs such as *Spondylus*.

Also, important questions revolve around the social significance of geographically broad patterns of similarities in the form and decoration of these new objects. Why did long-term trends in decorating ceramic vessel surfaces reveal moves towards an increase in complexity of pattern and technique? Why did highly decorated pottery disappear from Balkan inventories after the middle of the fourth millennium BC? Why were there broad similarities in forms of early metal objects?

Much of the new material of the post-6500 BC Balkans was well suited to use in the creation of explicitly and intentionally expressive objects. Some, such as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, were clearly representational; others, such as the geometric designs of decoration applied to the surfaces of pottery and tools and onto the walls of buildings, are more enigmatic symbols. How do these visually evocative objects fit into the contemporary developments in Balkan communities? Questions about the role of material culture, both the expressly symbolic and representational and the more routine, but no less significant, mundane materials and objects lead to an examination of the degrees of sedentism and the spatial contexts in which these objects were made, used and deposited.
Figure I.2 Map of key geographic features of the Balkans
INTRODUCTION: BALKAN PREHISTORY (6500–2000 BC)

Mobility and spatial organization

Changes in the scales of mobility and the patterns of the spatial organization of communities make up the second major element that distinguishes the post-6500 BC Balkans from what came before. Some of the most significant issues that need to be examined concern people’s occupations of special places in the region’s varied landscapes. Why did people start to mark out and occupy, with varying degrees of permanence, specific sections of particular landscapes? What was the significance of the different architectural forms, methods and materials used? Why did some people build small huts out of saplings, branches and twigs which they placed over shallow pits? Why did others construct large, multi-roomed buildings out of sun-dried blocks of mud which they stacked on top of stone foundations? How are we to understand the architectural and social significance of these differences?

Equally importantly, what is the significance of loosely defined collections of the short-lived pit-huts and the more ordered and longer-living aggregations of substantial surface-level structures? Can we call one a camp and the other a village? Can we refer to the long-lived large buildings as houses and the flimsier structures as huts? If so, what are the social and, perhaps, political inferences which can be drawn from such distinctions? What do these patterns in the records of architecture and mobility reveal about the people who built these structures and settled down in these places? What can we learn about their interrelationships on both the individual and group levels? These questions about the spatial relationships within and between communities lead on to the investigation of identity.

The expression of identity

Together, the developments in architecture and in material culture suggest that new importances were being placed on people’s desires to create, declare and, undoubtedly, dispute the identities of individuals and of groups of individuals. How did people make statements of identity? What physical equipment and, now invisible, ceremonies were required? Were particular materials, such as gold and copper, better suited for use in ceremonies devoted to the declaration of identities? Why did people declare particular elements of their character which they wished to express in a public manner? Equally, how did they downplay or hide other components of their personae? Similar issues need to be investigated for groups of people, whether they were settled village communities or more mobile hunting and foraging or herding groups.

Issues of identity lead on to issues of social structure, organization and intra- and inter-group politics. What do all of these patterns in building, burial, economy and material culture tell us about the structure of social
relationships? Can we come to any more interesting conclusions than traditional dichotomous claims for egalitarianism or hierarchy, matriarchy or patriarchy?

In this discussion of this book's key issues, there is no mention of shifts in economic strategies, of the change from food-gathering to food-production, which have been the hallmarks of European prehistory since Gordon Childe's monumentally influential work on the Neolithic revolution (Childe 1936). In the present volume, economy is considered but not as a primary determinate of social behaviour. If there are important changes in the patterns of plant and animal exploitation then they are addressed in other ways. The critical economic enquiry asks whether or not the significance of new plants and animals is to be found in terms of nutrition. Are the post-6500 BC changes in the sources of nutrition important in themselves or do they have greater significance in the light of the new ways in which people chose places in which to establish villages and in the social and political consequences of planting new crops and grazing new species of animal? Linked to these issues are questions of how we are to understand apparent changes in the scale of economic activity. For example, what were the different dimensions of cereal-growing which developed after 6500 BC? Can we speak of a shift from small-scale garden horticulture to larger, field-based agriculture? What about similar issues of scale and intensity of the tending, herding and breeding of animals? What would have been the social consequences and the requirements of the different methods, strategies and scales employed?

EXPLANATION

The other main issue addressed, though indirectly, in this book is a consideration of how we, as twentieth-century archaeologists, are to think and write about the days and lives of people who lived and died over 6000 years ago. The introductory narrative at the start of this chapter is an attempt at one possibility. It tried to get down to the level of the individuals who lived in the Balkans and to get a whiff of their daily experiences. Another level of approach will be found in the description and ordering of scientific data which forms the backbone of the chapters which follow. This is a regional approach to the millennia under consideration in which the individual is subsumed, appearing only occasionally. A third level of explanation is full of bigger concepts which try to draw together grander patterns of behaviour over periods of time well beyond the limits of human life, even as extended through ancestral lineages. This last level is met in the book's final chapter where priority is given to proposing higher-level schemes of human behaviour which run through
INTRODUCTION: BALKAN PREHISTORY (6500–2000 BC)

the many millennia at the core of this book. The intention is to work each different level of explanation to equal advantage to extend and refine our understanding of Balkan prehistory.

THE ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

OF THE BOOK

The major task of this book is to investigate the archaeological issues outlined above in light of the evidence available. It does this by examining the better excavated, recorded and published sites which date from between the Balkan late Pleistocene and the early Bronze Age, a span of 40,000 years. In this sense, there is difficulty even before we begin; the number of detailed, well excavated sites where appropriate attention has been given to the spatial relationship of finds and to the study of the reality of stratigraphic relationships, and not to loose conceptions of phases based solely on changes in ceramic typology, is limited. Smaller still is the number of sites where environmental factors have been satisfactorily addressed, if considered at all.

Some regions of the Balkans are better sources of quality information than others. In some cases the task is made easier by recent country-based syntheses such as Andreou, Fotiadis and Kotsakis’ review of the Greek scene (Andreou et al. 1996) or the less recent, but still informative, booklet by Dumitrescu, Bolomey and Mogosanu for the Romanian situation (Dumitrescu et al. 1983). For other regions, such as eastern Hungary, synthetic studies in English and other western languages have a longer history (Kalicz 1970; Bognár-Kutzián 1972; Kosse 1979; Kalicz and Raczyk 1980–1; Sherratt 1983a and b, 1984; Raczyk 1987). In Serbia, major collaborative excavation projects such as Selevac (Tringham and Krštic 1990), Opovo (Tringham et al. 1985, 1992) and Divostin (McPherron and Srejovic 1988) provide important benchmarks of research and initial points of access to the region’s archaeological record; detailed synthetic works are available in local language (e.g., Brukner et al. 1974). Other recent studies, such as Radovanovic’s synthesis of the Danube Gorges site help to refine our understanding of particularly complex parts of larger regions (Radovanovic 1996a).

In almost every case, however, I have attempted to use the original source publications; in some cases this has been linguistically less difficult (as for the Bulgarian publications) than in others (as for the Greek records). For Bulgarian prehistory for example, the classic works are Todorova’s masterful synthesis, Kammeno-mednata Epokha v Bulgariya (1986) and Todorova and Vajsov’s Novo-kammenata Epokha v Bulgariya (1993). The most detailed site reports come from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Razkopki i Prouchvaniya series (Todorova et al. 1975, 1983; Raduncheva 1976; Panayotov and Dergachov 1984; Panayotov 1989;
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Nikolov 1992a); other detailed reports come from international collaborations (Georgiev et al. 1979; Demoule and Lichardus-Itten 1994; Hiller and Nikolov 1997). For each region, however, I have attempted to provide the reader with as complete as possible a bibliography to sources in local publications for the key sites and local period or regional syntheses.

Thus, while I hope to have avoided one potential obstacle to synthesis, the linguistic one, other problems are more difficult to sidestep. The long-engrained protocol of severing archaeological geographies with the modern borders of political nation-states makes pan-Balkan synthesis difficult. Equally disruptive are international differences in research agendas where varying interpretive and explanatory goals and political constraints have contributed to the difficulty of aligning the modern study of what, in many cases, were homogeneous archaeological entities. Further differences between regions is evident in the quality and quantity of publication and in the depths of detail available. It is not surprising, therefore, that it has not been possible to treat each separate region with the same level of precision.

In attempting to synthesize without descending into unnecessary confusion, the chapters which follow make little reference to the traditional names of culture complexes (but see Figure I.3). The trend across Balkan prehistoric archaeology has been to ascribe differences in material culture, burial or settlement to differences in cultural groups, named after one key site which is deemed to represent a distinct group of people; thus one reads of the Krivodol-Salcuta-Bubanj Hum culture group or the Spantov phase of the Boian culture or the Körös culture. While it is impossible to acquire any familiarity with the region without first understanding the geographic or chronological relationships of these cultural constructs, once they are learned it is perhaps best to recognize that much variation exists within any generalized ‘culture’. There is also the fact that many of the existing cultural schemes have little interpretive value beyond bare description. Thus, for the purposes of this book, I have kept references to different culture groups and subgroups to a minimum, preferring to write in terms of modern geography and absolute chronology. Furthermore I have kept to a minimum references to the long-established local sequences of phases such as upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, early Bronze Age; I have done this for the simple reason that each of the different countries of the Balkans uses slight variations on the sequence, especially with respect to end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth millennium BC when late Neolithic, final Neolithic, Eneolithic, Copper Age, and even early Bronze Age may refer to the same period of calendar years. The goal in all of these simplifications is just that—simplification—so that the reader, whether student or more advanced scholar, can move through the text without the distraction of the need for a cultural glossary.
Figure I.3 Key cultural complexes relevant to the following chapters
Chapter topics

The key developments of human behaviour in the Balkans on which this book is focused occurred between 6500 and 2500 BC. These four millennia occupy the attention of Chapters 2–7. Some readers may wish to start straight in with Chapter 2 and skip Chapter 1, which looks, briefly, at the Balkans during the long, local upper Palaeolithic and sets the scene for the major changes which occur after 6500 BC.

Chapter 2 is the first of three chapters which examine the thousand-year period between 6500 and 5500 BC. It considers the different ways in which people marked out particular places in the landscape and established small camps and larger villages. The chapter provides the cornerstone to the book as it distinguishes among three key regions: one to the south, encompassing northern Greece; a second to the north and west consisting of the lower Danube, Serbia and the east Hungarian Plain; and a third, positioned between the first two, in south-central Bulgaria. Additional, brief comment draws parallels with contemporary events in north-west Anatolia.

In Chapter 3 attention is directed to important new elements of material culture which appeared during the thousand years after 6500 BC. Discussion focuses on the early use and subsequent development of ceramics for making vessels and various other objects. The discussion considers the making and use of numerous material novelties such as representational objects like anthropomorphic figurines, sealing stamps and more enigmatic decoration of tools and other objects. Chapter 4 completes the discussion of the 6500–5500 BC period by examining the evidence for continuity or change in the working of flaked stone, the treatment of the deceased and the managed exploitation of plants and animals.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the Balkans from 5500 to 3600 BC. In Chapter 5 attention focuses on the continuities and expansions of building activities (as seen in, among other things, the spread of tell villages) and the acceleration of economic activities. Chapter 6 investigates the developments in mortuary behaviour and the expanding range and character of new elements of material culture which include the early uses of copper and gold.

In Chapter 7 a brief look is taken at the end of the long period which occupies the preceding five chapters. Discussion includes a look at the most dramatic changes in settlement, burial and material culture which distinguish post-4000 BC Balkans from the 2500 years which preceded. In Chapter 8 the reader is invited to step back and consider the long-term changes (and continuities) which run through Balkan prehistory from the seventh to the fourth millennium BC. Suggestions are made as to why developments occurred when and where they did and what might have been their stimuli and consequences.