

Nikola TASIĆ  
Institute for Balkan Studies  
Belgrade

## PREHISTORIC SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE IN THE WORKS OF DRAGOSLAV SREJOVIĆ

*Abstract:* The paper recognizes the most important results in the study of prehistoric cultures and sites in southeastern Europe. The fieldwork and scholarly research of Dragoslav Srejovic covers all epochs of prehistoric archeology, from Paleolithic stations in Montenegro and Mesolithic sites in the Djerdap, through studies of Neolithic art, to the Bronze and Iron ages. His research was not restricted to material cultures alone, but problems pertaining to cultural and chronological relations, art and ethnological determinations of archeological material from the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium BC.

The interest of Dragoslav Srejović in studying the past of southeastern Europe covered a diversity of cultures and problems. An evaluation of his opus, which contains more than 200 works, articles, essays, reports from excavation sites - more than 60 prehistoric settlements - as well as a score of monographs, elaborate studies and catalogues, will be possible only after an elapsed period of time. Here, we can merely point out some of the problems which Srejović brought up, solutions he suggested, many of which are widely accepted today. What we are doing here for studies in prehistory will be done by scholars of antiquity in their field, together with experts in mythologies, cults and religions, areas on which Srejović took particular interest, from magic and primitive beliefs to complex cults and rituals of Greek and Roman mythologies and religions of the Middle East, Mesopotamia, or Egypt.

In prehistoric southeastern Europe, the Danube Basin and central Balkans, there was scarcely an area that did not arouse his investigating,

scientific curiosity: from Paleolithic sites in Montenegro or Šumadija, through the Mesolithic and early Neolithic of Djerdap, Neolithic cultures in Serbia, investigations of Eneolithic steppe tumuli, then necropolises, settlements and hoards of the Bronze Age, to Paleo-Balkan tribes of the central Balkans: Dardanians, Tribalis, Thracians, and Illyrians. Sometimes it was a problem of material culture, prehistoric arts and beliefs, at other times his inquiring mind was attracted by relative and absolute chronology, often by movements of individual cultures, migrations and the ties established during migratory movements on the vast space from Asia Minor and the Aegean to central Europe. There are two points of departure for a systematization of such an extensive and diversified opus: one is a chronological review of the scholar's research, from his earliest papers, dated 1956, to the latest, in 1997 and 1998. The other is an insight into his contribution to the periods and subjects he dealt with. We have decided on the latter approach, our argument being that a date when something was dug up or published is less important (though not entirely without significance) than the stamp it has left on the study of prehistoric southeastern Europe.

Srejović's interest in the Stone Age dates from his university days. He acquired his earliest experiences in excavations of newly discovered sites, the caves near Gradac, not far from Batočina, and the Risovača cave on the outskirts of Arandjelovac. Somewhat later, when the opportunity came up, he began a systematic investigation of caves in Montenegro and southwestern Serbia, where he came across some Paleolithic, Epipaleolithic and Mesolithic strata. Prior to a systematic study of the oldest human settlements in Montenegro, the basins of the rivers Morača, Lim, Ćehotina and Tara, only two sites had been noted in archaeological reference books, as recorded in the *Praistorija jugoslovenskih zemalja* (Vol. I, 383): Crvena Stijena and Odmuť caves near Plužine (Srejović 1977). The former gave a good stratigraphy from the pre-Mousterian horizon to the final Paleolithic (Epipaleolithic), as well as younger layers, whereas the latter cave, Odmuť, is significant for the stratigraphy of younger horizons. Together with his many associates, some of whom continue his researches (Č.Marković, I.Radovanović, O. Žižić, Lj.Djuričić, D.Mihajlović and others), Srejović discovered and studied a number of crucial Paleolithic, Epipaleolithic and Mesolithic sites, the significance of which exceeds the region of Montenegro, extending into the Adriatic zone, on one side, and the central and southern Balkans, on the other. Besides the Odmuť cave, where Č.Marković assisted in the research, Srejović appears to have discovered the most important

Paleolithic stations: the small cave Medena Stijena in the Čehotina canyon, Bioče in the Morača canyon, and the Trebački Krš karst on the banks of the Lim River, near the village of Trebac. The Medena Stijena belongs to the complex of cave settlements, along with Mališina Stijena, Pčelina Stijena and a cave near Gospića Vrh, where excavations began in 1981. Together with Crvena Stijena, these sites complete the picture of Paleolithic development in these parts. The cultural layer of the Medena Stijena consists of eight strata, of which I-II belong to the Eneolithic and early Bronze Age, III to the Mesolithic period, and the rest belong to the Paleolithic, with a tardegravettian and epigravettian flint industry (Srejović D., Marković Č., 1987, 27-38). Srejović explored another important Paleolithic settlement, not far from Podgorica, near the village of Bioče, in the Morača canyon, abundant in flint, osseous and paleontological finds, in 1986. A vast number of artifacts and raw materials (nucleuses, unwrought rock) were discovered in a comparatively confined area, promising to provide important results in the study of the middle Paleolithic in the Morača basin. The research was pursued by his junior associates, who confirmed the prescience Srejović had had about the site (Žižić O., Srejović D., 1987, 36).

The Mesolithic and early Neolithic ages of Djerdap are chronologically the second area to which Srejović devoted most of his attention. Two sites he investigated, and numerous studies (books, papers, essays, catalogues, reports) set this geographical area as highly important for the creation and development of European civilization. Not only because the Lepenski Vir culture was discovered there, but because of other settlements of earlier date, such as Vlasac and Padina (B.Jovanović), which have shown that life along the Danube had evolved since the Paleolithic age, and quite intensely in the Mesolithic and early Neolithic, on the Romanian side (Schela Cladovei, Cuina Turcului, Gura Bacului). Undoubtedly Lepenski Vir is a gem of the numerous sites explored during the construction of Djerdap I and II storage hydro-power plants. The bibliography of Dragoslav Srejović contains 13 books and catalogues, many essays, articles, supplements and reports about it. His critics, in particular critics of Lepenski Vir, were right when they said we had no complete, exhaustive monography of the site, composed by strictly archaeological methods; a book with ample documentation material; profiles, plans, situations and details corroborating Srejović's view of the stratigraphy, organization of settlements in individual stages, and so on. The more so as this is the first site of a culture which is so far unique both in the Middle East and European prehistory. Fellow archae-

ologists and friends know that Srejšović had been working on such a book. He and his associates (Lj.Babović and S.Lazić) had prepared plans, bases and profiles of structures from comprehensive documentation, that would explain many uncertainties related to the complex site. He was impeded financially, as such a monograph would have contained several volumes, and because of the fact that he proceeded from one important discovery to another. Gamzigrad, Šarkamen, commitments for the compilation of a lexicon and dictionary, consumed much of his time, so Lepenski Vir has remained archaeologically understated. However, regardless of these circumstances, the aforementioned works in which Srejšović dealt with Lepenski Vir provide enough data for a satisfactory idea of the biggest and most important discovery of prehistoric Europe in this century. Though there is yet enough work for his associates, even for generations to come. Issues to be resolved are the continuity of the Mesolithic cultures on the one hand, and the early Neolithic, Starčevo complex, on the other.

The Neolithic, in particular the Neolithic of Šumadija, takes up a special place in Srejšović's works. From his university days, and excavations with professor B.Gavela at Grivac, through his PhD thesis on Neolithic plastics of the Vinča culture, to large-scale systematic research of a multi-layered settlement near Divostin, Srejšović investigated many settlements and published a large number of papers. The book *Divostin and the Neolithic of Central Serbia*, published in 1988 (edited with A.McPherron) is a model of how such monographs should be articulated. They should contain, besides archaeological interpretations of artifacts and architectural remains, results by scholars of other disciplines that shed more light on life and "man's environment" in the remote past (anthropology, paleobotany, paleozoology, analysis of lithic material, radiocarbon, thermoluminescence etc.).

In addition to field investigations of Neolithic settlements, which as a rule he carried through publication, Srejšović was working on questions of great consequence movements of and contacts among different cultures. Among these works, besides earlier ones composed with B.Jovanović (stone and flint implements and weapons from Vinča, or osseous material from the same site), the following problem-dealing papers should be singled out: *Versuch einer historischen Wertung der Vinča-Gruppe* (1963) or *Genetski i hronološki odnosi vinčanske i lendjelske kulture* (1969). He returned to the art of Vinča, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic plastics, on several occasions. He devoted part of his thesis to a study of Neolithic plastics in the central Balkans (1968), and published numerous other articles in journals

at home and abroad. He is one of the few archaeologists in these parts who tried to fathom the importance of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic terracottas. He saw them chiefly as cult and magic instruments of contemporary man, attempting to connect them to modern folklore as a relic of by-gone days (*Jelen u našim narodnim običajima*, 1957).

Investigations of Eneolithic southeastern Europe evolved in two directions. One of them was based on the study of Eneolithic sites in the Danube Basin and Šumadija, and the other, of equal consequence, on Eneolithic cultures in the Adriatic cultural circle. The former, besides lesser results on excavation sites in the area of Djerdap (Donja Butorka, e.g.) and the problem-dealing studies *O kritsko-mikenskim religioznim simbolima u badensko-vučedolskoj kulturi* (1957) and *Badenska keramika u Vinči* (1957), pertain to excavations of steppe graves around Bar and Rogojevac. At the time when research of steppe (pit) cultures prevailed, and when all Eneolithic mounds were declared an alien phenomenon, even those of Vučedol (Batajnica, Vojka), Srejović added to this horizon the mounds in Šumadija, near Bar and Rogojevac. It is unlikely, however, that they could for certain be ascribed to the “steppe” tribes. First of all, because they lack the main characteristics of tumuli of the pit (or Okergrab) culture. The burial custom was different, without the central pit construction, and a beige substance was sprinkled on the dead, etc. Moreover, the accessories (gold jewelry) are not typical of steppe tumuli. Srejović was right when he linked them to Asia Minor (1976). He returned to the problem of steppe cultures about ten years later, pointing out the chief passages of migrants to the Balkans (1987). Though with few positive facts, chiefly on the basis of the investigated steppe tumuli, Srejović identified two basic waves of migration of the steppe people to the central and eastern Balkans; the first came in the fourth millennium, and the second in the third. The latter is reliable as there are a great many facts to corroborate it, particularly in Bulgaria (the Danube Basin, along with the Black Sea coast, up to Plovdiv and Pazardzik), whereas the former could be seen as a period of steppe influence on the cultures of the southern Slavic Danube Basin area and central Balkans.

His field work during explorations of caves in Montenegro contributed considerably to the study of Eneolithic southeastern Europe. In most of them Srejović discovered traces of habitation of a vaguely identified Eneolithic culture now connected with the Adriatic Eneolithic, instead of the Vinča culture, to which it had initially been ascribed. In Spila near Perast, the Odmut cave in the Piva canyon, the Beran karst, Vranjan beyond Herceg-

Novi and other places, horizons of habitation from different periods include Eneolithic material. Srejović's hunch of an as yet unknown cultural phenomenon in the Montenegrin littoral and hinterlands proved correct. The publication of preliminary research results of some settlements and caves on the island of Pelješac (Nakovan), confirmed that the area may positively be marked out as a culture referred to by N. Petrić and S. Dimitrijević (1979, 367) as the Nakovan, or, Proto-Nakovan, culture. Srejović's research in Montenegro shows that the culture spread to the hinterlands, to remote caves, forming a contact zone between the Danube Basin Vinča culture, and early Eneolithic cultures of the Adriatic littoral.

Srejović's interest focused on the Bronze period of southeastern Europe in archaeological excavations of many necropolises and sites, and as part of his scientific interpretations. Many of his works deal with the problem of hoards of bronze objects, and the study of necropolises of different cultures and geographical regions. He availed himself of knowledge acquired through excavations, interpreted in some paleoethnic studies. A large number of bibliographical units, some of which are in fact the first syntheses on individual cultural wholes, will remain required references for anyone studying, partially or comprehensively, the area from the Danube River up north down to Kosovo, and the Adriatic coast, in the south.

A census of sites belonging to the Bronze Age that Srejović studied contains a score of necropolises and settlements of different cultures. Several belong to the Djerdap zone (Pesak-Korbovo, Velika Livadica and Mala Livadica), which, along with the publication of hoards of bronze objects discovered near Alun, Urovica and Brza Palanka (1962; 1975), enable scholars to piece together at least a segment of the historical development of these parts in the Bronze Age. Added to these, at least as regards eastern Serbia, are recent discoveries in the vicinity of Gamzigrad, settlements and necropolises (Banjska Stena and Magura) that he and his associates had investigated. Viewed on a broader scale, they belong to the Paraćin culture and with Trnjani near Brestovac, and the most recently discovered sites near Borsko Jezero lake, form a completely new area of this cultural complex. The results of sites from investigations near Gamzigrad, in particular the stratigraphy of Banjska Stena, will show whether the site is a completely original phenomenon of the Bronze Age or merely a regional phenomenon. Srejović succeeded only in raising the question at an international symposium in Vršac, in 1996, and his associates continuing the research will provide a solution.

Another important question of the Bronze Age that Srejović brought up was the Brnjica (Brnjica-Stražava) culture and its relationship to similar or related sites on the Pešter plateau, which he also traced out. Singling out a new cultural phenomenon in Kosovo, after unearthing a necropolis near Brnjica (1958), Srejović raised the question of the ethnic origin of its occupants. After many researchers roamed about in this cultural complex, some realistic deductions might be gathered which Srejović had hinted at forty years ago. That is a new wide-spread culture that evolved from the evolution of the Paraćin style. Bi-ritual burials were performed: in flat necropolises with urns fenced with stone constructions (Brnjica, Klučka near Skopje, Stražava, Toponica, Madjilka) and the burial of urns in tumuli as is the case with necropolises under mounds on the Pešter plateau. Evidently within this cultural complex two ethno-cultural areas came into contact: the northern Daco-Mysian, and the southwestern - Proto-Illyrian, known to have buried their dead in mounds.

While exploring Brnjica and subsequently the necropolises of Glogovik, Dojevici, Delimedje, and Mataruga near Pljevlja, Srejović got to the bottom of the problem of the development of Paleo-Balkan cultures and the Iron Age in these parts. Excavations on Karagač near Kosovska Mitrovica between 1960-1965 were completed with an elaborate synthesis titled *Karagač i problem etnogeneze Dardanaca* (1973). He attempted for the first time to adjust the new archaeological finds to information found in ancient written sources. Determining the material culture of the Dardanians in Kosovo, and obvious differences that existed in respect to the Illyrian culture, mooted a series of questions linked to the problem of ethnogenesis, similarities and differences between tribes, i.e. the Paleo-Balkan peoples. Insisting on differences in the independent development of the Dardanian culture is another significant move in resolving the Paleo-Balkan problem in pre-Roman times.

Another crucial problem in studying Paleo-Balkan peoples pertains to the results of excavations of mounds on the Krčevine necropolis near Ljuljaci (in 1977 and 1979). At first Srejović was unaware that the meager finds uncovered from two low mounds concealed a new culture that belonged to the rather obscure period between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, of which there is barely a trace, except for a few metal objects. He returned to these discoveries about ten years later in his work, *Tribalski grobovi u Ljuljacima* (1991). Thanks to these and some other finds in Šumadija and the Morava Basin, a new culture was identified, the Ljuljaci-Raca culture.

It belongs to the end of the Early Iron Age, just before the appearance of Celts in these parts, and includes, as B.Jovanović has shown, the oldest graves of the Pećina necropolis near Kostolac. The culture has been marked out ethnically as Tribalian, though care should be taken, as ancient written documents place Tribali more to the east at that time.

Among Srejšović's more extensive works is the book *Traci e Iliri* published in Italian by the well-known publishing house Jaca Book (1996). It was composed as two extensive encyclopedic units, synthesizing archaeological facts and written sources, describing in a literary manner two peoples that played an important role in the cultural and political history of south-eastern Europe in pre-Roman times, each in their own way. The Illyrians, warriors who raided and pillaged their southern, more developed neighbours (Macedonians, Greeks), withdrawing to the Balkan highlands, and the Thracians, the closest neighbors of the Aegean states, who, Srejšović says, sacrificed their culture, literacy and, eventually, their state, to elevate and give life to a declining culture.

This brief account of the contribution of Dragoslav Srejšović to the study of prehistoric southeastern Europe has mentioned but a small part of the works he left to posterity. We may or may not agree with some of his postulates, but his work will certainly remain a lasting inspiration to many generations studying prehistoric southeastern Europe.