

Preface

This open access monograph is the fruit of a collaborative Project between Ukrainian specialists from the NAS Institute of Archaeology, Kyiv, specialists in European prehistory from Durham University Department of Archaeology (UK) and many other friends and colleagues who have been working with us on Trypillia archaeology, urbanism and other cognate fields.

The central topic of investigation was whether the Trypillia megasites of the 4th millennium BC could be considered as the first urban settlements in Europe, if not the world. Long before the Project began, Roland Fletcher (1995) had highlighted these megasites as the only known exception to his global model of the limits to agrarian settlement growth. But relatively little had been published on the megasites in English, French and German, with the important exception of Linda Ellis' discussion of these sites in her monograph on Cucuteni-Trypillia pottery (Ellis 1984). In view of their principal publications in Russian and Ukrainian, it is hardly surprising, then, that Trypillia megasites have been excluded from discussions on early urbanism until the late 2000s and that, even in 2011, sentences such as “The first cities in the Near East – Mediterranean Basin appeared in Southern Mesopotamia, or Sumer, the creation of a people we call the Sumerians” (Gates 2011, p. 30) could be published in supposedly serious works on early urban developments. It is also pertinent that the question of megasite urban status has also divided Ukrainian archaeologists, with a distinct minority contemplating a notion that has received regular attacks from their colleagues. However, the high aesthetic levels reached by Trypillia potters in making their fine wares and figurines have led, in the 2000s, to a series of exhibitions in major museums (Royal Ontario Museum, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the National Museum of Archaeology, Kyiv, etc.), which not only prompted wider research questions about Trypillia settlements, pottery production and even megasites but also succeeded in introducing these questions to the general public and a wider archaeological audience.

There was another glaring gap in urban studies that made the Trypillia case interesting: the lack of interpretative archaeological engagement with the urban question and the general lack of theoretical engagement by Ukrainian prehistorians dealing with Trypillia studies. As regards the former, post-processual, interpretative and ontological approaches have often eschewed the big questions of prehistory, feeling more comfortable with the *événement* rather than the *conjoncture*¹ – the quotidian rather than the medium-term, let alone the *longue durée*. With only a few exceptions, such approaches have steered well clear of urban origins, let alone at a Eurasian scale. As regards the latter, again with important exceptions, the dominant approach to Trypillia studies has been founded on the culture history of the Russian

1 The three temporal scales used by the Annales historian Fernand Braudel (1975).

school, with one of the most widespread assumptions about the archaeological record being that it constitutes a direct reflection of past lifeways.

All of these strands of positive and negative thinking came together in a Project designed to take our understanding of the Trypillia megasites beyond the traditional debates on terminology ('was this site a city?') and material culture ('does this ornament hoard represent an elite deposit?'). The AHRC-funded Project which informs the title of this monograph ran from 2012 to 2016. Although our views on Trypillia megasites and urban origins have diverged so strongly from our partners in this Project – Drs. Mykhailo Videiko and Natalia Burdo – that it has regrettably not been possible to publish our results together, we still wish to record our debt of gratitude to our partners for their help in setting up the Project, for their hard work on the field seasons and for their constant supply of provocative materials forcing us to clarify our (alternative) views on Trypillia megasites.

We have reached a point in our investigations of Trypillia megasites which we hope has advanced the debate from its position in the late-2000s. New issues have arisen which have largely replaced the older positions and we are confident that the research of this Project and the Ukrainian - German Project working at Taljanki and Majdanetske has indeed created a second methodological revolution, setting up a new fieldwork agenda that will endure for two decades or more. However, without new theoretical insights into urban megasites, we were never going to be able to convert the methodological revolution into a more profound re-evaluation of the Trypillia megasites. We offer this monograph in the hope that this re-formulation of critical issues will have moved the field further in terms of theory as well as method.

The Project's mode of publication is also novel insofar as we have created a twin-track, open access publication, consisting of the interpretative materials of the Project in this monograph and the basic excavation and fieldwork data in a Project Archive hosted by the University of York's Archaeology Data Service (<https://doi.org/10.5284/1047599>). A similar approach was taken by the Tundzha Regional Archaeology Project (TRAP) in Bulgaria, who have provided basic Project data in an open context Archive entitled the TRAP Digital Archive (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6078/M7TD9VD3>) to support a hard-copy publication (Ross et al. 2018).

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