

long since been levelled, and buried features are visible only in terms of crop marks, though seldom with such clarity as PL. xv**b**, taken in a drought. The faint, widely spaced lines that run from left to right across the photograph mark furrows of medieval ploughing: later agriculture has removed all traces of the familiar humped ridges. The most prominent archaeological feature visible in the photograph is the irregularly shaped enclosure defined by a broad ditch and linked to other ditches: perhaps defining an access-way to the site, or possibly land-boundaries. There are many such enclosures of all degrees of complexity in the Welland valley; what distinguishes this one is the fact that rows of post-pits for two timber buildings may be discerned in the photograph. The larger building is not less than 29 m. by 8 m. in size, but if there were outer walls which crop marks do not reveal, perhaps separated by aisles from the main uprights, the overall dimensions may be greater. The smaller building is less easy to interpret, and Barholm provides a good illustration of how easily such timber structures can be missed amongst a complex group of crop marks. Many more of these settlement sites than usually supposed, whether Iron Age or Roman in date, may have included not inconsiderable timber buildings.

The third example (PL. xv**c**), at Bainton, 1 km. S of the Welland, is the most unusual structure of the three. The crop marks which

define this large circuit of post-pits were not noticed at the time of reconnaissance, but recognized only when the photographs were subsequently examined. A sub-rectangular enclosure, c. 20 m. by 14 m., is marked by closely set small post-pits.* Two larger pits, set further apart than most of the others, about the centre of the east side, may define an entrance. To the enclosure is attached a long narrow compound, if such it be. By examining all available air photographs of the site, many of the post-pits may be distinguished, except for a long gap in the S side. They are set 3 m. to 6 m. apart: if this represents a palisade, or fencing, intermediate posts, perhaps of small size, must be presumed. The compound measures no less than 215 m. by about 18 m., a structure not easily matched elsewhere and conjecture as to age and purpose is best left till more examples come to light. The feature is a remarkable illustration of the fine detail that can, under optimum conditions, be recorded from the air, and poses the question how many such structures may pass unnoticed.

J. K. ST JOSEPH

* This enclosure lies just off the vertical photograph (PL. xv**c**) but is recorded on other cover. The plan (FIG. 1c), shows the complete structure.

KNOWLES, D. and J. K. ST JOSEPH. 1952. *Monastic sites from the air*, plates on p. 271.

SIMPSON, W. G. 1966. Romano-British settlement on the Welland Gravels in (ed.) C. Thomas, *Rural settlement in Roman Britain*, 15-25.

The Tartaria tablets

Mr David Whipp of Queen's University, Belfast, points out that Mr Sinclair Hood, in his two articles on the Tartaria tablets, has based his statements on the find context of the tablets on a misunderstanding of Professor Vlassa's published account. Mr Hood adds a brief comment. The Tartaria tablets were found in Romania in 1961. Their importance lies in the fact that they bear inscriptions which are held to be an early form of writing and are best paralleled in Sumerian contexts where writing is thought to have been invented. Controversy about the tablets has been aroused because if radiocarbon dating evidence is accepted then the

Vinča-Tordos culture, to which Vlassa considers the tablets belong, ended over a millennium before the Sumerian civilization began.

Several explanations have been offered to explain this problem. Some authorities, such as Renfrew (1969), consider that any resemblance between the Tartaria tablets and those from the Near East is simply fortuitous. Others, including Sinclair Hood (1967; 1968), prefer to accept the parallels and shed doubt on the C14 dates from the Vinča-Tordos sites. The reasons for this conclusion are in Mr Hood's words that 'the excavation was evidently a careful one, and the published

photograph showing the pit appears to agree with the drawn section'. The photograph and section concerned are published in the excavator's account of his site in the Romanian journal *Dacia* for 1963 (Vlassa, 1963). Comparison between Vlassa's account and the articles of Mr Hood shows that the latter seems to have misinterpreted Vlassa's section drawings. In his account Vlassa publishes a plate of site photographs (his fig. 3). One of these, number 3, shows a section of a Tordos hut whilst number 4 shows a section of the ritual pit in which the Tartaria tablets were found. Vlassa also gives a sheet of drawn sections together with a key (his fig. 2). One of these, number 1, is reproduced by Mr Hood in his articles where it is described as being a section through the ritual pit and thus corresponds to photograph 4 (Vlassa, fig. 3). Examination of the captions and the key which Vlassa provides to his report shows that section 1 is not meant to be a pit section at all but is a section through a Tordos hut, and is probably meant to correspond to photograph 3. The diagonal hatching which Hood considers to represent pit filling is in fact hut infill and the line of xxxx's on Vlassa's section which Hood seems to assume to be the findspot of the Tartaria tablets is really symbol 'n' in Vlassa's key and is intended to be a hearth.

The importance of this is that Mr Hood's articles are probably more widely read than the excavator's report and so it seems likely that many people have been misled into thinking that the Tartaria tablets come from a pit the surface of which is sealed by subsequent layers. Nowhere in his report does Vlassa offer a section drawing for the pit from which the tablets came and as his photograph is not of high quality it is not possible to say that the pit was not disturbed and indeed it is by no means certain that the pit was dug down from Vinča layers. Neustupný has already pointed out that some finds from the layers in which the tablets were found are much more at home in later contexts but his arguments have been negated to some extent in this country because of Hood's view that section 1 shows that the ritual pit was sealed and undisturbed. As it has

been demonstrated in this short note that no drawn section exists for the ritual pit perhaps Neustupný's and Berciu's views may obtain wider acceptance, and it is hoped that the dangerous tendency to disregard C14 dates which do not fit in with one's preconceived ideas will cease. Perhaps a C14 date derived from the bones in the ritual pit would prove interesting.

- S. HOOD. 1967. The Tartaria tablets, *Antiquity*, XLI, 99-113.
 1968. The Tartaria tablets, *Scientific American*, May, 30-7.
 E. NEUSTUPNÝ. 1968. The Tartaria tablets: a chronological issue, *Antiquity*, XLIII, 32-5.
 C. RENFREW. 1969. Autonomy of the SE European Copper Age, *PPS*, XXV, 12-47.
 N. VLASSA. 1963. Chronology of the Neolithic in Transylvania in the light of the Tartaria settlement's stratigraphy, *Dacia*, VII, 485-94.

Mr Sinclair Hood writes :

Whipp is entirely right about the Tartaria section, and, while others may have been aware of my error, I am ashamed to say that it was not brought home to me until I read and checked his note. At the same time I hope that nobody has been led to accept an early date for the Tartaria tablets on the strength of this section. I did not in fact lay much stress upon it in my paper for *Antiquity* (1967), because, if an excavator has misunderstood the stratigraphy, he will reproduce his error in the drawn section. The drawing of a section may compel an excavator to make sense of the stratigraphy, but the stratigraphy as represented may still be incorrect.

More important as dating evidence for the Tartaria tablets than the opinion of the excavator about the stratigraphy are the objects found with them, a Spondylus shell bracelet, twenty-six burnt clay figurines, and 'two Cycladic alabaster idols' (Vlassa, 1963, 490). So far as I know the association of these objects with the tablets has not been disputed. The slit eyes of the clay figurines illustrated by Vlassa (1963, 489, fig. 6) are reminiscent of those of figurines of the early Vinča (Vinča-Tordos) phase at Vinča itself, and Milošević (1965, 264, 268) claims that they support a

date for the tablets in the earliest part of that phase, Vinča A. Neustupný (1968, 35) noted that an 'idol-shaped pendant' illustrated by Vlassa (1963, 489, fig. 6, No. 5) resembled the 'anchor ornaments' common in the Early Bronze Age of the Aegean area. He also stated that such clay 'anchors' were very characteristic of the Late Chalcolithic Cotofeni culture of Transylvania, but without citing any parallels to back his claim. It would be interesting to have a full publication and detailed analysis by a competent specialist of the objects found with the Tartaria tablets.

As for C14 dates it is necessary to remember that those for the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of the Balkans cannot be weighed effectively as yet against the evidence of archaeological correlations. The archaeological situation is still very fluid, and chronologies for the Balkans some two thousand years or more apart may be constructed without undue violence to the evidence. The Tartaria tablets are only straws in the wind. But excavations still continuing in Thessaly and Macedonia promise to forge much closer archaeological

links between the Balkans and the Aegean, which is itself linked, even if tenuously before the Bronze Age, with Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Calibration has by no means proved a panacea for all the anomalies of C14 dating, and dates calculated by means of calibration for periods where there is no independent check are not necessarily correct. The more that can be done in the way of narrowing the range of archaeological probabilities, whether by new excavations or by assessing the material already available, the better. The archaeological evidence is itself an important part of the scientific data that must be considered in connexion with C14 dating. It is only by checking the C14 results against the archaeological probabilities that any lurking imperfections in the method can be brought to light and eventually, no doubt, eliminated.

- v. MILOJČIĆ, 1965. Die Tontafeln von Tărtăria (Siegenbürgen) und die absolute Chronologie des mitteleuropäischen Neolithikums, *Germania*, XLIII, 261–73.

The First International Congress of Thracology

This conference was held in Sofia in July 1972 under the Chairmanship of Professor V. Georgiev. It was a gathering which included Russian, Greek, Turkish, American and western European scholars, as well as many from the Balkan countries and eastern Europe. The subject for discussion was all aspects of Thracian culture. The Congress was formally divided into three parts: history, language, and art and archaeology; the last was the most comprehensive, both in the quantity of the papers, and in the amount of interest and discussion generated.

Among the large amount of material presented was a newly discovered treasure, which included a large gold bowl of the Hallstatt period, from excavations in Sofia; several new Bronze and Iron Age sites were discussed, and some of the most stimulating argument developed around the relationship between local 'knobbed ware' and Troy VII b2. Some

excellent films were shown of Thracian (*sensu strictu*) mounds and treasures. An exhibition was mounted, for the occasion, of material from museums throughout the country, which ranged from early Neolithic figurines to 3rd-century AD bronze statuettes, but which concentrated mainly on the 1st millennium BC. Highlights included replicas of the Panegurište and Valcitrán treasures, the new Sofia treasure, the bronze grave from Vraca (c. 4th-century BC), 4th-century harness-trappings of silver from Lukovic and Letnica, and of gold from Mezek, and a gold La Tène torc from Tchibar (c. 300 BC) together with casting moulds from an unpublished hoard near Razgrad.

After the conference was formally concluded a two-day expedition was organized to visit sites and museums. All praise must go to the extreme generosity and efficiency of our Bulgarian hosts who provided transport and two nights' accommodation free of charge. The expedition