

ANNUAL REPORT: MONTENEGRO – VRBIČKA CAVE 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Excavations at Vrbička Cave and its environs in July 2017

During the 2017 field season at Vrbička Cave, excavations continued in the area opened in 2016 where significant Late Neolithic deposits were encountered, dating to the mid-5th millennium BCE. The goal of the 2017 field season was to remove entirely the remaining Neolithic levels coming down onto the Mesolithic, Early Holocene occupation deposits, in those parts of the excavation area where this were preserved, as well as onto the Pleistocene/Palaeolithic deposits in those area where Mesolithic layers were removed by later prehistoric use of the cave. This task was mostly accomplished by the end of the season while only small patches of remaining Neolithic deposits must still be removed in the following campaign next year. We were also able to remove some of the Mesolithic levels in those areas where these were encountered. It was established that in the southernmost area of the cave Late Neolithic deposits were of significant thickness reaching ca. 1m in depth. Large amounts of material were particularly concentrated in a niche below the southernmost wall of the cave where, as expected, large amounts of refuse were concentrated in the so-called “toss zone.” In this zone, some of the most interesting finds were discovered: two small polished stone axes, a red deer canine perforated bead and a possible pendant carved from a bone in a zig-zag shape, perhaps resembling a snake. In addition, a *Columbella rustica* marine gastropod bead was found while excavating Mesolithic levels along with a large number of flint artefacts.

Three IFR students who took part in this program were involved in research through a diverse set of activities: by excavating and recording at the cave, washing finds, doing flotation of excavated deposits, undertaking heavy residue sorting of different classes of material, and helping/being trained in zooarchaeological analysis of animal bones. Overall, I believe that students found the work gratifying and that the diversity of activities made them appreciate the complex process of archaeological investigations in collecting primary data, their recording and finds processing. For some of the students it was being in the field and excavating that was the most exciting part of the field season while others were more comfortable working in the lab. Some students discovered that they enjoyed learning about animal osteology and were good at it while others had more patience with finds sorting and recognizing different classes of material. Students also had chance to visit some of the other archaeological and UNESCO

culture heritage sites in Montenegro and Croatia during fieldtrips to Crvena Stijena, Lipci, Risan, Perast, Kotor and Dubrovnik.

Regarding the dissemination of the project results, three papers are being prepared at the moment: (1) a paper focusing on previously excavated Palaeolithic deposits that will be submitted to the *Journal of Human Evolution*; (2) a paper focusing on Mesolithic deposits that will also include our research on other Mesolithic sites in Montenegro to be submitted to *Antiquity*; and (3) a paper focusing on Late Neolithic finds to be submitted to the *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*. Currently, no conference presentations are planned for the near future but it is likely that the project results will be presented in one of the annual conferences in 2018. The aforementioned papers should help in our main goal of preparing a site monograph detailing our investigations at Vrbička Cave to date, especially after the 2018 field season.