

# **Balkan Archaeology as a laboratory: Challenging old paradigms and experimenting with new ones.**

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The present issue of Ex Novo originates from the session *Balkan Archaeology as A Laboratory: Challenging Old Paradigms and Experimenting with New Ones* that the editors (Maja Gori, Daniela Heilmann and Kristina Penezić) organized at the 28<sup>th</sup> European Association of Archaeologists meeting in Budapest (2022), within the theme “A Decade after the Third Science Revolution in Archaeology”.

In archaeology, paradigms not only shape our understanding of the past but also reflect the socio-political contexts in which they are developed and applied. Paradigms in archaeology are dynamic entities, shaped and reshaped by socio-cultural, political, and intellectual contexts. We felt however the need to discuss such issue from a specific Balkan and not a generalist perspective. Indeed, the two main shifts that European (and world) archaeology has experienced and that have challenged traditional explanatory models – the emergence of processual versus traditional archaeology starting from late 1960s, and the emergence of postprocessual archaeology from the early 1980s – have not significantly influenced research in Balkan Late Prehistory. Consequently, a significant portion of Balkan archaeology continued to align with traditional perspectives, leading to the persistence of conventional interpretations of archaeological patterns. This is reflected in the enduring cultural-historical approach to the study of material culture, with a strong focus on typological sequences and relative chronologies to explain ethnogenies. The advent of the so-called third scientific revolution has brought forth a wide array of new methods and techniques to Balkan Prehistory, gaining increasing interest and evolving into a new standard in the discipline. However, relying solely on this approach is inadequate to address the stagnation in the current theoretical debate.

As mentioned, this issue of Ex Novo gathers papers stemming from some of the contributions presented at the EAA (Babić, Milosavljević, Giamakis), which have been complemented with an additional paper (Matić), and two thematically-related book reviews (Heilmann, Gori). A standout article in this collection is Staša Babić's *Plus ça*

*change? Balkan archaeology in search of identity*, which offers crucial insights into the paradigm shifts within Balkan archaeology. Babić's work challenges the notion of a linear progression in archaeological thought, arguing against the conventional view that Balkan archaeology is perpetually lagging behind more 'developed' archaeological traditions.

Monika Milosavljević's paper, *Kuhn Fleck and Archaeological Evidence: An Omnivorous Strategy to Study the History of Archaeology*, critically examines the history of archaeology through the lens of Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts. Her work highlights the post-World War II transformation of Yugoslav archaeology from a collection of individual efforts into a robust, collaborative field driven by a culture-historical approach.

Christos Giamakis's study, *Bridging the Gap(s) between 'European', 'Balkan' and 'Greek' Archaeology(ies)*, offers a profound reflection on the changing paradigms. He critically examines the relationship between 'European' and 'Balkan' archaeology, emphasizing the perceived 'backwardness' of the latter. His analysis reveals which factors contribute to maintaining certain stereotypes and power dynamics within the archaeological community. An emblematic example of how archaeological paradigms are evolving is provided by Uroš Matić's *Queering Serbian Archaeology: Androcentrism, Heteronormativity, Gender and the Writing of (Pre)history*, especially in relation to gender and sexuality studies. Their work challenges the traditional androcentric and heteronormative perspectives that have long dominated archaeological interpretations in the Balkans. The author advocates for a more inclusive, critically informed approach to gender, contrasting this with stereotypical, often biased views that have previously shaped archaeological narratives.

The articles and reviews presented in this issue of *Ex Novo* represent a vibrant cross-section of innovative thought and scholarship in Balkan Archaeology. By challenging entrenched paradigms and experimenting with new perspectives, these works collectively highlight the dynamic nature of our field. They emphasise the need for a constant reassessment of our methodologies and theoretical frameworks, encouraging a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the past. With this thematic issue we hope to contribute to the debate on theoretical development of Balkan Archaeology, with the ultimate goal of deconstructing the entrenched paradigms that are still widespread in archaeological interpretations. We firmly believe that Balkan archaeology and its rich material record provide a unique platform for discussion and can act as a laboratory to build new models, question old paradigms, and test innovative approaches.

### Acknowledgements

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Aleksandra Jovanić is an artist and programmer from Belgrade (Serbia), who holds a Doctorate in Digital Arts and a BSc in Computer Science. In her research and artistic practice, she combines various media, mainly in the field of interactive art, art games, and generative art. Jovanić's recent works focus on the aesthetic of data visualisation and optical illusions, as well as explorations of accepted concepts of truth and reality.

Her work has been exhibited internationally, and she has been included in exhibitions at Unit London, VerticalCrypto Art, FeralFile, Vellum LA / Artsy and ArtBasel with Tezos.

As an assistant professor, she currently teaches at all three levels of study, at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, at master studies of the Faculty of Applied Arts and at art doctoral studies at the University of Arts in Belgrade.

You can find Aleksandra Jovanić's work following this link:

<https://aleksandrajovanic.com/>

Or follow her on Instagram and other social media <https://bio.link/aleksandrajovanic>

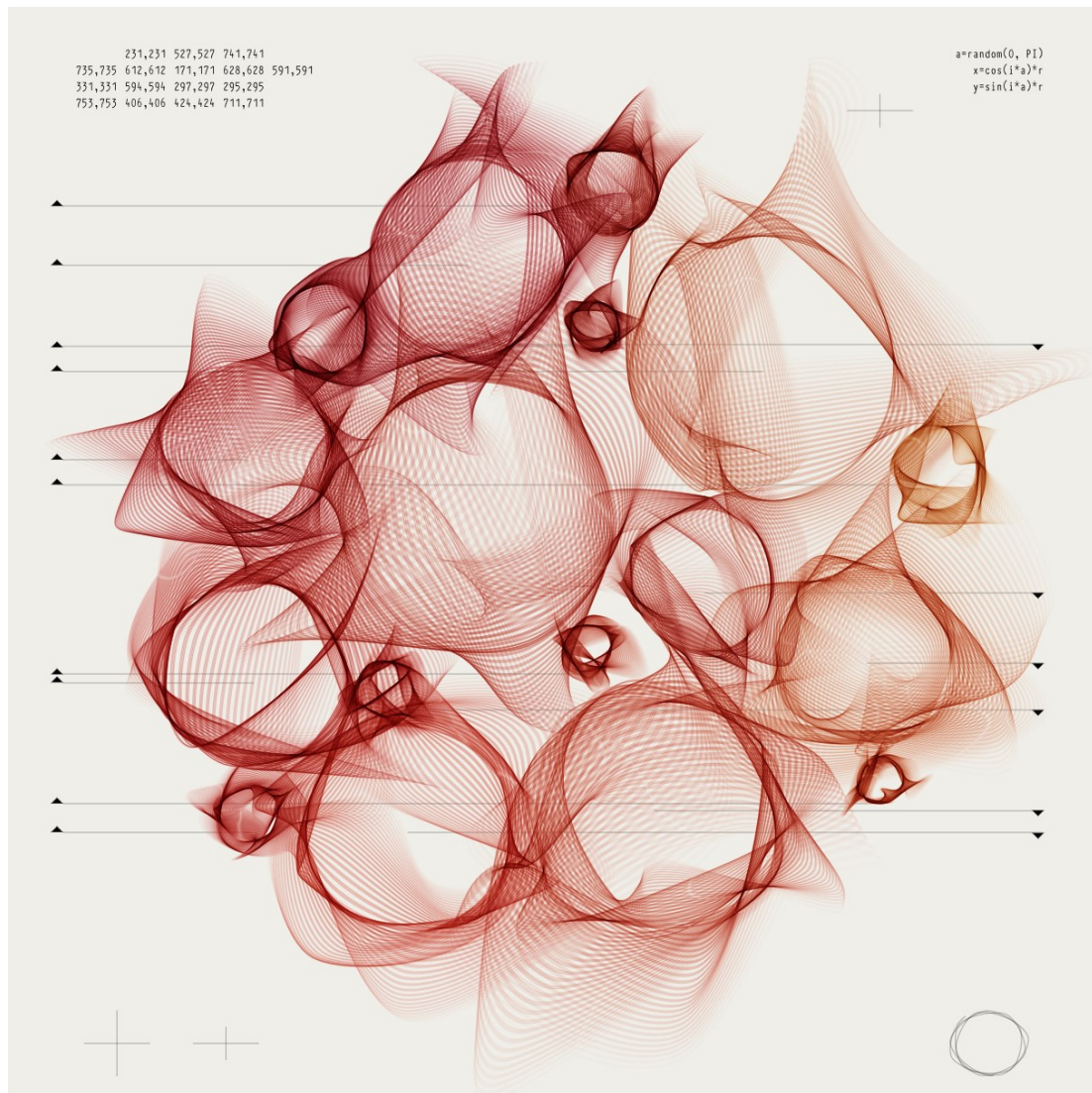


Figure 1. Gm.gen.math, released on the occasion of the Tribute to Herbert W. Franke (by Aleksandra Jovanić, author of this issue's cover).