Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices in the Neolithic: a Case Study[1]

DUŠAN BORIĆ, Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad

Introduction

In 1925 Neolithic graves were accidentally found at the site of Živanićeva dolja in the village of Botoš near Zrenjanin (former Veliki Bečkerek).[2] It was the final proof against the claim "that the custom in our Neolithic was disposing their dead in nature to beasts."[3] However, since that time the results of archaeological investigation have not definitely resolved the noted dilemma. The burial rites that have been noted at the Neolithic sites all over south-east Europe, certainly represent only one part of mortuary customs practised among these communities. But, as various suspicions should not be "announced in public",[4] I will presumably discuss the material remains and also the social dimensions of mortuary practices, to the extent if the methodological frame followed is clear and explicit.

In further analyses a micro region of the southern Pannonia - Srem is captured. The cultural and (pre)historical process that I will try to shed some light on, leaves us, even in this small area, with enough clues for understanding of a much wider regional and diachronic phenomenon. A pattern of mortuary practices in the area consists of particular examples of burials inside settlements of the first Neolithic communities and of the single Late Neolithic/Early Eneolithic necropolis of the Vinča culture, in the temporarily unoccupied zone of the contemporaneous Vinča settlement at Gomolava, near the village of Hrtkovci.

The Srem area, framed by the Sava and Danube rivers, is almost ideally isolated micro zone. The map of Srem (Fig. 1) clearly shows flood zones before melioration work in the Pannonia began. This is actually a part of a larger map of the Carpathian basin, drawn in Budapest in 1938, upon the sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and kept in the Museum of Vojvodina at Novi Sad today. Generally, this map is instructive for understanding the nature of the first Neolithic communities and function of intramural mortuary domain. The specific environment - vicinity of the river flows and many now fossil beds, together with waste flood terrain - is of great potential for future discoveries of Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites.[5] According to our present knowl-

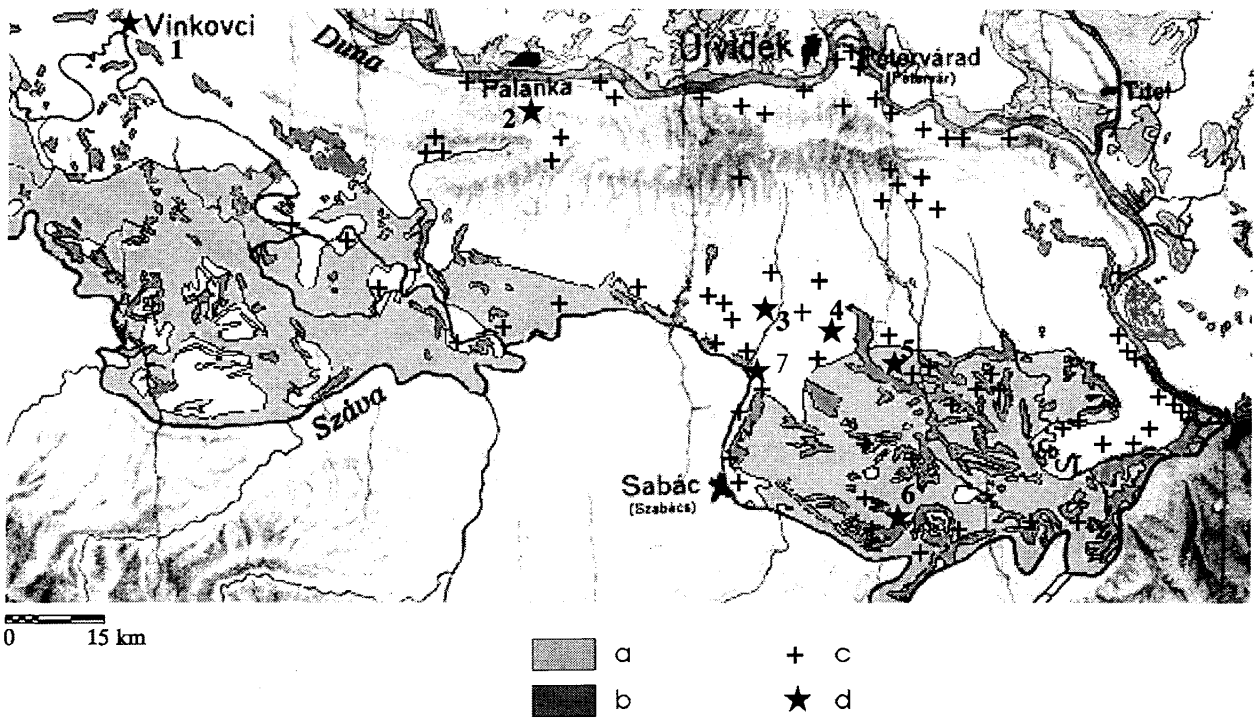
[1] I thank academician Prof. Dr. Bogdan Brukner for his profound comments and advices on this paper. For unselfish willingness to share information, I wish to thank to museum consultant Mrs. Jelka Petrović and senior curator Mrs. Marija Jovanović, both from the Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, as well as to Mr. Vladimir Leković, from the Regional Institute for the Protection of Monuments, Novi Sad.

[2] B. Saria, Izveštaj o stanju i radu u preistorijskoj, klasičnoj zbirci, *Godišnjak Srpske Kraljevske Akademije* XXXIV, Beograd 1925, 315-318.

[3] M. Grbić, Neolitsko groblje u Botošu kod Vel. Bečkereka, *Starinar* s. III VIII-IX, 1933-1934, Beograd 1934, 42.

[4] *Ibid., loc cit.*

[5] J. C. Chapman, *Demographic Trends in Neothermal South-East Europe*, in C. Bonsall (ed.) *The Mesolithic in Europe. Papers Presented at the Third International Symposium Edinburgh 1985*, Edinburgh 1989, 504-506. Some recent discoveries of mesolithic sites in the Jászág area, Hungary (Cf. R. Kertész, Archaeological and Paleoecological Study of an Early Holocene Settlement in the Jászág Area, Jászberény I, *Acta Geographica ac Geologica et Meteorologica Debrecina* XXXII, Debrecen 1994, 5-49), with similar



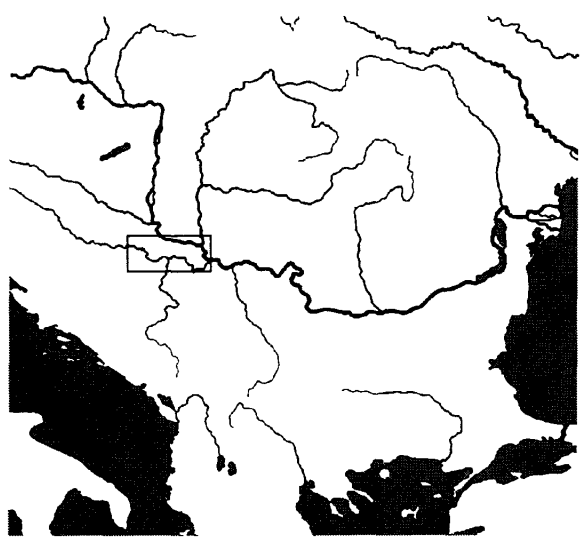


Fig. 1. - Distribution of Neolithic sites in Srem. One part of the map showing the Carpathian basin before the melioration work (Museum of Vojvodina).
a) - Areas that were for shorter or longer period under water during floods.
b) - Areas under water permanently or during the largest part of year.
c) - Neolithic sites.
d) - Neolithic sites with burial remains.
1. Tržnica and Nama-Vinkovci, 2. Golokut-Vizić, 3. Kudoš "521"-Šašinci, 4. Zlatara-Ruma, 5. Budimlja/Bara Alicia-Pećinci, 6. Baštine-Obrež, 7. Gomolava-Hrtkovci.

edge, during the Late Mesolithic[6] and Early Neolithic formal disposal areas appeared in the central Balkans and southern Pannonia for the first time.

Chronology

The first Neolithic communities in Srem are known as a specific material culture named the Starčevo-Körös-Cris cultural complex or Starčevo culture.[7] There is not a single radiocarbon date available from the sites of this period in the area. However, on the basis of existing radiocarbon dates from the sites with the same cultural traits in the neighbouring areas, a time span of 6100 - 5200 Cal BC may also be assumed for these sites.[8]

environment as in the southern Pannonia, suggest that detailed surveys in the noted region would be necessary too.

[6] Cf. I. Radovanović, A Review of Formal Disposal Areas in the Mesolithic of Europe, *Starinar* XLIII-XLIV, 1992-1993, Beograd 1994, 92-103.

[7] D. Arandelović-Garašanin, *Starčevačka kultura*, Ljubljana 1954.

[8] N. N. Tasić, *Apsolutna hronologija neolitskih kultura centralnog Balkana na osnovu fizičko-hemijskih metoda*, M.A. Thesis, University of Belgrade, Belgrade 1989.

The second major phase of the Neolithic development in the area is marked by the Vinča culture.[9] Its final phase represents the final stage of the Neolithic development, but also the earliest signs of the process that would be traditionally called Eneolithic. However, it is clear that certain characteristics of mortuary practices of both periods are related, although these periods were artificially separated in terms of culture history. Neolithic Layer Ib at Gomolava, stratigraphically connected with the necropolis, could fit a time span of 5000 - 4600 Cal BC.[10]

Four main stages of the Neolithic development in the Srem area could be identified.[11] The distribution of Neolithic sites (Fig. 1) could also be instructive for understanding of mortuary practices here, in spite of insufficient research. The only way to confirm and explain distributional differences with certainty would be a systematic study of the region.[12]

State of research

Non-systematic investigation of the area prevents the understanding of actual characteristics and functions of a great number of discovered Neolithic sites. Out of 56 discovered Starčevo sites,[13] extensive excavations were carried out only at four. These sites (excavated in the first place because they were endangered) yielded the evidence of intramural burials, as a main characteristic of the period. The same situation is observed concerning the settlement of Gomolava that is among rare extensively excavated sites of the Vinča culture. Consequently, it is possible to expect similar burial practices at other Vinča sites, previously explored by small-scale sondage only. Similarities are evident if Gomolava is compared with burials in some settlements of the Tisza culture in Hungary. Here, as at Gomolava, one part of population was interred inside a formally articulated area closely connected with the settlement.[14]

Burial of a child found in 1960 at the site Baštine near the village of Obrež, in the vicinity of Obedska Bara, was the first Neolithic burial found in Srem.[15]

In 1973 and 1976 a discovery of the first necropolis of the late Vinča culture at Gomolava, near the village of Hrtkovci, followed.[16]

During the protection works at Vinkovci, eight skeletons were found in the Starčevo culture layer at the sites

[9] M. Garašanin, *Hronologija Vinčanske grupe*, Ljubljana 1951; *idem.*, *Centralnobalkanska zona*, in A. Benac (ed.) *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja* II *(Neolit)*, Sarajevo 1979, 79-212.

[10] N. N. Tasić, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 114-123. I wish to thank to Mr. Nenad N. Tasić for new callibrations of laboratory results from Layer Ib at Gomolava, labelled as Grn-13160, Grn-13094, Grn-7373, Grn-7374, Grn-7375, and Grn-7376.

[11] These four stages would refer to the main trends of the (pre)historical process in the course of the Neolithic in the wider region and not to the particular phases of ceramic styles, since typological analyses have failed to distinguish securely more than these general lines of development (early/late Starčevo/Vinča), that is in part due to insufficient research and publishing. The original version of my B.A. thesis /*Društvene dimenzije sahranjivanja u neolitu: mikroregionalni pristup (Srem)*/ contains four distributional maps of Neolithic sites in Srem by these stages: Maps 4-8.

[12] E.g. M. Plateaux, Approche régionale et différentes échelles d'observation pour l'étude du Néolithique et du Chalcolithique du nord de la France. Exemple de la vallée de l'Aisne, *Archéologie et Espaces* (X[e] Recontres Internationales d'Archéologie et d'Histoire, Antibes, Octobre 1989), Juan-les-Pins 1990, 157-182.

[13] V. Leković and J. Padrov, Rasprostranjenost arheoloških nalazišta starčevačke kulture u Sremu, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* XIV-1 (arheologija), Beograd 1992, 35-51.

[14] N. Kalicz and P. Raczky, *The Late Neolithic of the Tisza region. A survey of recent archaeological research,* in L. Tálas (ed.) *The Late Neolithic of the Tisza Region. A survey of recent excavations and their findings*, Budapest-Szolnok 1987, 23-24.

[15] B. Brukner, Rezultati zaštitnog iskopavanja lokaliteta "Baštine" kod sela Obreža, *Rad vojvođanskih muzeja* 9, Novi Sad 1960, 81-111.

[16] B. Brukner, Gomolava, Hrtkovci - višeslojno nalazište, *Arheološki pregled* 17, Beograd 1975, 11-13; *idem.*, Novi prilozi proučavanju formiranja neolitskih i eneolitskih naselja u jugoslovenskom Podunavlju, *Naseljavanje i naselja u praistoriji* (Materijali XIV), Beograd 1978, 47-51, Pl. 2; *idem.*, Naselje vinčanske grupe na Gomolavi (neolitski i ranoeneolitski sloj). Izveštaj sa iskopavanja 1967-1976. g., *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 26, Novi Sad 1980, 5-55; *idem.*, *Die Siedlung der Vinča-Gruppe auf Gomolava (die Wohnschicht des spätneolithikums und frühäneolithikums -Gomolava Ia, Gomolava Ia-b und Gomolava Ib) und der Wohnhorizont des äneolithischen Humus (Gomolava II)*, in N. Tasić und J. Petrović (hrsg.) *Gomolava - Chronologie und Stratigraphie der vorgeschichtlichen und antiken Kulturen der Donauniederung und Südosteuropas, Interlationales Symposium, Ruma 1986*, Novi Sad 1988, 19-38, Abb. 4; *idem.*, Vinča-Kultur und der Zivilisationskomplex der neolithischen Kulturen des westlichen Teils des Schwarzen Meeres, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 32 (1989-1990), Novi Sad 1990, Abb. 2; B. Brukner and J. Petrović, Gomolava, Hrtkovci - višeslojno nalazište, *Arheološki pregled*, Beograd 1977, 24-27; other information were based on the material that will be published as a final monograph(s) on Neolithic layers from Gomolava (B. Brukner in preparation).

of Tržnice (1977) and Nama (1978).[17]

In the course of protection works at the route of the Europe-70 highway, three sites of the Starčevo culture were discovered. In 1981 and 1982, two burial constructions were excavated at Zlatara near Ruma.[18] One burial in a pit-dwelling appeared at Kudoš "521" near the village of Šašinci in 1986[19] and, also, in Budimlja/Bara Alicia near the village of Pećinci in 1988.[20]

Upon the slopes of Fruška Gora, there is the Starčevo site of Golokut near the village of Vizić. At this site, a burial inside a pit-dwelling was found in 1983.[21] Further excavations in 1988 yielded one more burial in a pit-dwelling, though badly preserved.[22]

To some extent, it is possible to follow a pattern in distribution of six Starčevo sites with traces of burials (Fig. 1). Their apparent clustering in former flooded zone in the first place, calls for a need of detailed environmental reconstruction of the area.[23] Although biased by the state of research, this connection between ecology and social behaviour (in this case reflected through burial domain) may certainly be affirmed.

Archaeology of death - a concept

Recently, a methodological concept termed "the archaeology of death" rooted up in archaeological works.[24] Today, it encompasses some of the methodological advances from the last quarter of the century. Here, I will try to test some of them, with intention of assessing relationships between social structure and mortuary practices qualitatively and quantitatively.[25]

A redundancy calculation is employed as a quantitative technique based upon the information theory.[26]

Also, the ethnoarchaeological studies have established an important connection between spatial and social relations.[27] Organisation of space in either domestic or mortuary context is vital for explaining actual behavioural preferences in a society. Having in mind a cautionary tale on how ethnographic parallels could turn into the worst archaeological nightmare,[28] the significance of ethnoarchaeology in important questions directed toward static archaeological facts is indisputable, depending on critical use of these auxiliary data.

Thus, questions and aims of further analyses will be as

[17] S. Dimitrijević, *Sjeverna zona: Neolit u centralnom i zapadnom dijelu sjeverne Jugoslavije*, in A. Benac (ed.) *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja* II *(Neolit)*, Sarajevo 1979, 241; *idem.*, *Još jednom o problemu završetka ranog neolitika u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj*, in N. Majnarić-Pandžić (ed.) *Arheološka istraživanja u istočnoj Slavoniji i Baranji, Znanstveni skup, Vukovar 6-9. X. 1981*, Zagreb 1984, 9-11; K. Minichreiter, *Stariji neolitik u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Zagreb, Zagreb 1990.

[18] V. Leković, The Starčevo Mortuary Practices - New Perspectives, *Godišnjak* XXIII *(Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja)*, Sarajevo 1985, 157-172; *idem.*, *Zlatara-Ruma*, in D. Srejović (ed.) *Neolithic of Serbia. Archaeological Researche 1948-1988*, Beograd 1988, 108-109; *idem.*, *Neolitska naselja*, in Z. Vapa (ed.) *Arheološka istraživanja duž Autoputa kroz Srem*, Novi Sad 1995, 25-44.

[19] *Idem.*, *Šašinci*, in D. Srejović (ed.) *Neolithic of Serbia. Archaeological Researche 1948-1988*, Beograd 1988, 94-95; *idem.*, *Neolitska naselja* (n. 18).

[20] O. Brukner, Pećinci/Budimlja bara Alicia. Keramička zanatska zona, *Arheološki pregled* 29 (1988), Ljubljana 1990, 147-148; V. Leković and J. Padrov, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 41.

[21] J. Petrović, Zemunica u naselju starčevačke kulture na Golokutu, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 30, Novi Sad 1987, 13-28.

[22] *Idem.*, Istraživanja lokaliteta Golokut u 1988. godini, *Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva* 6, Beograd 1990, 55-58.

[23] E.g. M. Gillings, *Flood dynamics and settlement in the Tisza valley of north-east Hungary: GIS and the Upper Tisza project*, in G. Lock and Z. Stančič (eds.) *Archaeology and Geographical Information Systems*, London 1995, 67-84.

[24] C. Renfrew and P. Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*, London 1991, 363; R. Chapman, I. Kinnes and K. Randsborg (eds.) *The Archaeology of Death*, Cambridge 1981; J. A. Tainter, *Mortuary Practices and the Study of Prehistoric Social Systems*, in M. Schiffer (ed.) *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 1, New York 1978.

[25] According to the ethnoarchaeological studies, there is an important link between control of critical resources and formal disposal areas (A. A. Saxe, *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1970). Also, in the cases when burials functioning in this way are lacking, some other elements of ritualization appear instead (L. Goldstein, *One-dimensional archaeology and multi-dimensional people: spatial organisation and mortuary analysis*, in R. Chapman et al. (eds.)(n. 24), 53-69); L. R. Binford, *Mortuary Practices: Their Study and Their Potential*, in J. A. Brown (ed.) *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices, American Antiquity* 36, New York 1971, 6-29.

[26] A. A. Saxe, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 102-107; J. A. Tainter, *op. cit.* (n. 24).

[27] T. Whitelaw, *Some Dimensions of Variability in the Social Organisation of Community Space Among Foragers*, in C. S. Gamble and W. A. Boismier (eds.) *Ethnoarchaeological Approaches to Mobile Campsites: Hunter-Gatherer and Pastoralist Case Studies*, Ann Arbor 1991, 25-137.

[28] P. J. Ucko, Ethnography and archaeological interpretation of funerary remains, *World Archaeology* 1, London 1969, 262-280.

follows:

- What is the actual quality of existing information about social structure of the first Neolithic communities in the area, based on mortuary as well as on other remains?
- Is there a causal relation between a level of sedentism and territorial behaviour, and what is the direction of diachronic changes in these relations during the Neolithic in the area?
- What is the extent of spatial and/or temporal differentiation among burials and/or sites?
- What could be concluded about social dimensions of mortuary practices, i.e. about horizontal and/or vertical stratification of Neolithic society?
- Where is the place of these data in the long-term process (*longue durèe*), having in mind the ritual, symbolic and ideological characteristics (in material culture) during the Late Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Eneolithic of south-east Europe?

The first Neolithic communities

It has been already mentioned that the environmental constrain reflected in burials' distribution is most probably associated with former presence of areas rich in wild resources, identically suitable for the supposed (but not discovered) Mesolithic communities, and also for the Early Neolithic ones, being mostly semi-sedentary.

All Starčevo sites noted here are determined, by their researchers, to the late phase of the Starčevo culture, i.e. roughly dated to the later or late sixth millennium Cal BC.[29] This would fit the second stage of the Neolithic development in the area.[30] Discovered settlements are not characterised by powerful superimposed layers, and their character was less permanent. Furthermore, clearly elaborated domestic areas are lacking too if compared to later periods. So, the character of these communities should be viewed in relation to a broad use of wild resources. This is evidenced on the bases of zoological remains consisting of substantial amount of edible non-vertebrate remains (*Helix* and *Unio* sp.) and identified bones of valuable wild food resources such as red deer (*Cervus elaphus* Linnaeus) - obviously important in social and ritual sense too.[31]

So, the Starčevo settlements could certainly enter the category of segmentary societies.[32] It is now time to ask what is the actual meaning of existing empirical data on mortuary practices in these societies?

Vertical differentiation ?

A skull of an auroch on the palm of the right hand and a scapula at the knees of a buried woman in a niche of a pit-dwelling at Golokut,[33] as well as red deer antlers buried with a woman in Grave Construction B at Zlatara[34] (Fig. 2) may have had functional and ritual significance.

Fig. 2. - Skeleton of woman in Grave Construction B at Zlatara. Photo: V. Leković.

The grave goods as horns and antlers of auroch or red deer were also found in the later phase of burials at Lepenski Vir (Phase II), as well as at other Late Mesolithic sites in the Iron Gates, accompanying female burials of *adultus* and *maturus* age.[35] Concerning the

[29] A larger number of the late Starčevo sites in the area of distribution of the culture could be explained as a consequence of demographic growth.

[30] See note 11, Map 6.

[31] For Srem, cf. S. Blažić, Prilog poznavanju ostataka faune sa arheološkog lokaliteta "Golokut", *Rad vojvođanskih muzeja* 29, Novi Sad 1984-85, 33-36; *idem.*, *Ostaci životinjskih vrsta sa lokaliteta na Autoputu kroz Srem*, in Z. Vapa (ed.) (n. 18), 331-346.

[32] C. Renfrew and P. Bahn, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 154-156, 174-182.

[33] J. Petrović, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 19, Fig. 7-9.

[34] V. Leković, The Starčevo Mortuary Practices (n. 18), 160-161, P. II; *idem.*, *Neolitska naselja* (n. 18), 30, Fig. 3.

[35] D. Srejović, *Lepenski Vir - Nova praistorijska kultura u*

absolute chronology, it is possible to suggest a temporal overlapping of these similar elements of mortuary practices in a different cultural context. However, the explanation is not to be sought through the term of diffusion,[36] and we should explore other ways for the answer. What would be the function of these old buried individuals in the supposed segmentary society, bearing in mind that in these societies status was primarily gained by personal achievements? Also, a small number of identified bones of auroch (*Bos primigenius* Bojanus) is present at Golokut, if compared to other wild or domestic animals. This kind of grave goods could point to the both directions (vertical and horizontal) of social differentiation. Some ethnographic cases imply that one of possible explanations could be sought in restricted access of part of population to knowledge and certain resources.[37]

It is likely to explain the presence of these animals' remains in the context of their totemic significance (horizontal differentiation), but also as a supposed taboo, that would put the use of these animals in the function of imposing the exclusive rights of elite. The appearance of later ritual areas (with bucranium), inside proposed shrines of the Vinča culture, as at Kormadin[38] or Parta,[39] would speak in favour of the later solution.

In addition, one should not neglect the possibility of communication among the Late Mesolithic and the first Neolithic communities in the Danube basin through a long-scale exchange of valuable resources and objects, as obsidian and *Spondylus*.[40] This could be a precondition for "concomitant increase in information-processing strategies, whether territorial, stylistic, or ritual."[41]

For example, concerning obsidian, a model of exchange and its delivery from the island of Melos to other parts of the Balkan peninsula was suggested.[42] Most probably, this suggests that specialisation was already launched during the Early and Middle Neolithic. This also means that our situation is far from a stereotype about Neolithic egalitarian societies. These societies could have had the potential for producing both the surplus and complex social tensions within a community.[43]

Table 1

Site	N^0 of Burials	Sex	Age	Position
Golokut	1	female	53 - 57	flexed / right side
Vinkovci	8	1 child and adults	0 and ?	flexed and contracted / right and left sides
Šašinci	1	female	up to 40	flexed / right side
Zlatara	3	female, male and child	up to 50 up to 40 and 6	flexed/right side
Pećinci	1	female	ca. 30	flexed / right side
Obrež	1	child	?	contracted / right side

Sex and age

Regarding age and sex structure of buried individuals at Starčevo sites in Srem,[44] the basic anthropological determinations for Vinkovci are unfortunately lacking, although this site represents the largest sample. It is sure that buried individuals were representing just one part of the total population, and that burials personify their social function in the community.

It is worth emphasising that larger number of female individuals was detected (Table 1). Concerning the grave goods, special treatment was warranted for those of *maturus* age.

Podunavlju, Beograd 1969; I. Radovanović, *Mezolit Đerdapa*, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Belgrade, Belgrade 1992, 224-225 *sq.*

[36] L. R. Binford, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 23.

[37] Cf. B. Voytek and R. Tringham, *Rethinking the Mesolitic: the Case of South-East Europe*, in C. Bonsall (ed.) (n. 5), 496.

[38] B. Jovanović and J. Glišić, Eneolitsko naselje na Kormadinu kod Jakova, *Starinar* XI, Beograd 1960, 126 *sq.*

[39] G. Lazarovici, *Das neolitische Heiligtum von Parta*, in S. Bökönyi (ed.) *Neolithic of Southeastern Europe and its Near Eastern Connections. Internationals Conference 1987* (Varia Archaeologia Hungarica II), Szolnok-Szeged 1989, 149-153; G. Lazarovici, F. Drasovean si L. Tulbure, *Sanctuarul neolitic de la Parta*, Timisoara 1990.

[40] E. g. C. Willms, Neolitischer Spodylusschmuck. Hundert Jahre Forschung, *Germania* 63/2, Mainz am Rhein 1985, 331-343.

[41] J. C. Chapman, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 504.

[42] C. Perlès, *From Stone Procurement to Neolithic Society in Greece*, in *The David Skomp Distinguished Lectures in Anthropology*, Bloomington (Indiana University) 1989, 1-29.

[43] *Ibid.*, 27.

[44] Ž. Mikić, Novi starčevački antropološki nalazi jugoslovenskog Podunavlja, *Godišnjak* XXVII (*Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja*), Sarajevo 1989, 157-172; Zs. K. Zoffmann, Antropološka obrada starčevačkog skeleta sa lokaliteta Golokut, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 30, Novi Sad 1987, 29-31.

The child burials under floors and inside houses in the Early and Middle Neolithic of south-east Europe[45] were probably connected with family as a basic social unit, if we assume that certain social rights in these societies were not inherited.[46] One example of burial of this kind, without any grave goods, is probably represented by a child burial at Obrež.

However, the child burials at some of the sites point to other possibilities as well. In the case of a buried child at Zlatara, besides an elaborated grave construction (buried here together with a man of ca. forty years), chunks of quartzite and miscellaneous animal bones were present too.[47] The time and energy spent concerning all three burials at Zlatara would suggest existence of a vertical differentiation and higher social status of those buried. Thus, this fact may indicate possible inheritance rights of the six-year old child.

Something similar was observed at the site of Tržnice in Vinkovci. Out of four individuals buried together (three skeletons were adults), only a buried child was accompanied with a pectoral pendant of *Spondylus gaederopus*[48] and two ceramic vessels of the Vinča type ("biconical bowl in terrina").[49] This kind of grave goods is not an exception. In a pit-dwelling at Nama, four skeletons were discovered.[50] Here, beside the head of the adult deceased, a broken biconical bowl was found.[51] Authors of the reports on other sites also mention biconical form of fine ceramic vessels (Golokut and Zlatara) and some technological changes - the first appearance of the characteristic Vinča temper (Obrež).

It is possible that during the second stage of the Neolithic development in Srem, we may witness significant changes in the social order of these communities. Leadership at the level of an individual or a certain social group, with signs of inherited rights (Zlatara, Vinkovci), would hardly fit a simple model of a Neolithic egalitarian society. Certainly, changes were ongoing continuously, causing oscillations inside the social structure. Insufficient state of research in Srem does not allow a straightforward explanation of the periods with uneven distribution of Neolithic sites as specific for the appearance of burials. However, social crises and oscillations were most probably connected with some of the phases. Some technological changes could be observed in the last phase of the Starčevo culture. In the mortuary area, this is confirmed by the presence of ceramic remains that may have been used by a social subgroup, inside the community, as a powerful mean in the process of vertical differentiation, presenting only one aspect of the profound social change. Besides these changes, it is the development of long-lasting settlements, along with other more complex social aspects, that appear.

Horizontal differentiation - orientation and position

A pattern of orientation and position of the deceased is of great importance for determining horizontal affiliation of the deceased and/or could be used as a chronological indication, based on the ethnographic cases.[52] Small sample and lack of clear clustering in the case of Starčevo sites in Srem does not allow far-reaching conclusions. The orientation, primarily connected to the cardinal points or topography, in these cases is short-listed to the spectrum of those individuals that were buried with the head directed between the west and south-east. It only means that a

[45] Cf. P. Raczky, Origins of the custom of burying the dead inside houses in South-East Europe, *Szolnok Megyei Múzeumi Évkönyv*, Szolnok 1982-83, 5-10.

[46] Cf. L. R. Binford, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 234.

[47] V. Leković, The Starčevo Mortuary Practices (n. 18), 160, P. I.

[48] Although, no photo or drawing of this pendant was published, it is likely that it represents the type frequently found at the sites of the Lengyel culture (cf. S. Dimitrijević, *Sopotsko-lendelska kultura*, Zagreb 1968, 47, T. XVI/1, XX/7; N. Kalicz, *Chronologische und terminologische Probleme im Spätneolithikum des Theißgebietes*, in S. Bökönyi (ed.) (n. 38, Abb. 7-10). It is interesting that finds of jewellery made from *Spondylus* are found primarily in the graves of women and children in the Neolithic necropolis at Durankuluk, Bulgaria (H. Todorova, *Bemerkungen zum frühen Handelsverkehr während des Neolithikums und des Chalkolithikums im westlichen Schwarzmeerraum*, in B. Hensel (hrsg.), *Handel, Tausch und Verkehr im bronze- und früheisenzeitlichen Südosteuropa* (PAS 11), München-Berlin 1995, 58).

[49] S. Dimitrijević, *loc. cit.* (n. 17).

[50] I. Iskra-Janošić, Cibala - Vinkovci. Zaštitni radovi. Nama, *Arheološki pregled* 19, Beograd 1977, T. XLIV/12, grave Nos. 7, 11, 12, i 13; *idem.*, *Arheološka istraživanja na prostoru općine Vinkovci*, in N. Majnarić-Pandžić (ed.) (n. 17), Fig. 1.

[51] I. Iskra-Janošić, Cibala-Vinkovci (n. 50), T. XLIII/10, TXLIV/11; *idem.*, *Arheološka istraživanja*, Fig. 2; K. Minichreiter, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 94-95, Fig. 42-43, 151-152, Fig. 84-85.

[52] J. O'Shea, *Social configurations and the archaeological study of mortuary practices: a case study*, in R. Chapman *et al.* (eds.) (n. 24), 39-52.

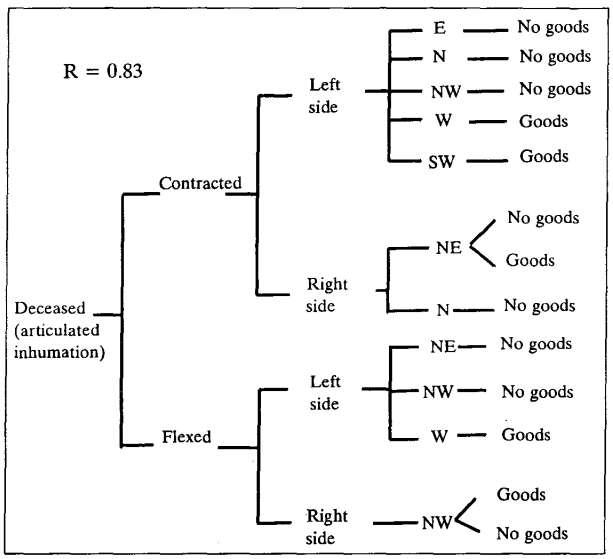


Fig. 3. a - Key-diagram of Starčevo intramural burialis in Srem.

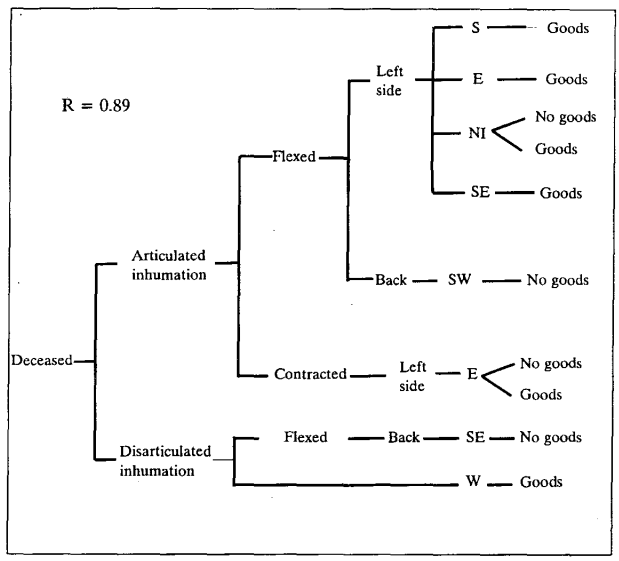


Fig. 3. b - Key-diagram of burials at Gomolava intramural necropolis

formal conscious pattern was respected in burial customs.

Similar situation appears when the positions of the deceased are treated (Table 1). An important terminological distinction concerning positions on the side, *flexed* (legs bent less than 90° regarding corpus) and *crouched* or *contracted* (legs bent more than 90° regarding corpus - position of a "fetus"), has not been regarded systematically in Serbian archaeological literature. An exception is an article of M. Antunović,[53] precisely about Starčevo burials. However, chronological distinction between these two types of burial positions, connecting the flexed position with the earlier (Proto-Starčevo) and contracted with the later phase (classical Starčevo) of the Starčevo culture, proposed by this author,[54] could not be justified whatsoever. It becomes clear if some Starčevo burials in Srem are examined. The site of Zlatara has been wrongly dated in the noted article as belonging to the Early Neolithic (Proto-Starčevo). This made a circular argument in further interpretation of the position of the deceased.[55] The burials at Nama, not mentioned by Antunović, therefore the basic anthropological determinations are still lacking, may confirm this too. At Nama flexed and contracted positions vary at the same place, without visible chronological differences.

Some other differences in the position of the deceased are worth emphasising at Zlatara in Grave Construction A, with a male and a child buried in contracted positions on the left side.[56] The torso and head of the man are bent forward, and his left hand is bent toward the body with extended fingers. His right arm is covering face. Also, the head of the buried child is bent backwards, and the arms are in the standard position. These elements in burials' position could be explained with caution as indicating horizontal differentiation in recalling sex, age, segment, clan, brotherhood or some other subgroup of society. This may be confirmed with separate burial constructions at this site, thus representing exclusive right of a certain social subgroup.[57]

Redundancy of a burial system

The assertion that human societies (as a part of biological evolution) are "moving in opposition to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, i.e. in the direction of negative entropy,"[58] is of relevance for understanding the meaning

[53] M. Antunović, *Anthropological and archaeological survey concerning mortuary practice in the central area of Balkan peninsula during the Early and Middle Neolithic*, dans D. Cahen et M. Otte (éds.) *Rubané et Cardial* (E.R.A.U.L. 39), Liége 1990, 39-50.

[54] *Ibid.*, 41, 46.

[55] *Ibid.*, Fig. 2.

[56] V. Leković, The Starčevo Mortuary Practices (n. 18), P. I; *idem.*, *Neolitska naselja* (n. 18), 29, Fig. 1.

[57] Cf. L. R. Binford, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 22.

[58] A. A. Saxe, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 110-111.

of entropy calculations. Measuring level of entropy in a given burial system takes into account formal elements of mortuary practice (e.g. position of the deceased, direction, etc.) (Fig. 3). After the calculation,[59] given values are organised at scale from 0 to 1. When a system is characterised by freedom of choice, the combinations of selected elements are at minimum and the value of redundancy will be high (approach 1). This would mean that we are dealing with complex social system and controlled access to certain elements. More egalitarian societies allow greater freedom of choice, reflected in lower redundancy values. For the sake of comparison, I have here used formal elements suggested by J. Chapman,[60] employed in the cases of Neolithic cultures in Hungary and Late Neolithic and Early Eneolithic cultures in Romania and Bulgaria. The redundancy value for Starčevo sites in Srem shows relatively high value, R = 0.83 (Fig. 3.a). Its meaning becomes clear only in comparison with the Late Neolithic necropolis at Gomolava, that shows substantially higher value, R = 0.89 (Fig. 3.b). These results are an explicit indication of the level of social change that was ongoing in the course of the Neolithic development. Also, the redundancy values are completely corresponding to the chronological counterparts of the Neolithic in Hungary.[61]

In a database formed by Starčevo burials in Srem some elements can be distinguished, whose meaning is apparent in a wider context, revealing the type of society and separation of social groups. The Starčevo communities were emphasising certain communal rights through burials or some other type of ritualisation, forming a mosaic of permanent or seasonal settlements. In this way, the social equilibrium was formed in wider region. There is a possibility that disposal of the dead was in some way connected with seasons of year.[62] Also, some of these communities show certain signals of willingness for change. This change could have come through a need for cohesion and not with a wave of migration. It seems that, besides other elements of material culture, mortuary practices followed the same trend.

Changes in the Late Neolithic

A representative example of mortuary practices of the Late Neolithic in the central Balkans and the Danube basin was discovered at the site Gomolava near the village of Hrtkovci in Srem, that has been the only necropolis of the late Vinča culture presently known. It is of great importance since this discovery makes it possible to follow the development of mortuary practices at the level of the micro region. However, one should bear in mind the chronological position of the layer Gomolava Ib and its relation to the necropolis. It is probably connected to this layer, dated to the period from the beginning to mid fifth millennium Cal BC. A hiatus in comparison with Starčevo sites is thus apparent, and the changes are considerable.

Gomolava Ia and Ia-b

Some findings from earlier layers at Gomolava are interesting in this context, and they could represent a connection with burials as regards the meaning of these phenomena. In Pit N in Layer Ia (Block III, Quad. 85-86/XX) at Gomolava, two dog skeletons were found in their anatomical position.[63] Also, in a pit at Block I (Quad. 94/XIV), a cattle skull was carefully set.[64] And, the almost complete antlers of red deer were found in Pit Y.[65]

The first layer of the Neolithic settlement at Gomolava is markedly characterised by a large number of pits with varying functions. The cases of two buried dogs, cattle

[59] Maximal entropy for a burial system is expressed as $S_{max} = C_a \times C_b \times ... C\infty$, where C_a represents the number of components on dimension A. The given number is reduced to its binary form, giving the value of maximal entropy (E) of a system, i.e. $E = \log_2 S_{max}$. Actually observed burial modes, expressed as actual entropy (S_{actual}), also reduced to a binary form as $e = \log_2 S_{actual}$, giving actual entropy (e) of a burial system. The relationship of a maximal and an actual entropy is the relative entropy (RE), as RE = e/E, hence, the redundancy (R) is R = 1 - RE. For more details on this approach see also A. A. Saxe, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 103-108 and J. A. Tainter, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 112-113.

[60] J. C. Chapman, *Meaning and Illusion in the Study of Burial in Balkan Prehistory*, in A. G. Poulter (ed.) *Ancient Bulgaria. Papers presented to the international Symposium on the Ancient History and Archaeology of Bulgaria, University of Nottingham, 1981* I, Nottingham 1983, 13, 15, 20-21.

[61] *Ibid.*, 13, 15.

[62] Cf. L. R. Binford, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 11-12.

[63] B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe... (n. 16), 16, Fig. 4.

[64] A. T. Clason, The Farmers of Gomolava in the Vinča and La Tène Period, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 25, Novi Sad 1979, 67. The field documentation kept in the Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, suggests more examples of similar finds.

[65] *Ibid., passim.*

skull and red deer antlers are distinctive. As graves themselves, such a phenomenon may have also served in defining people in the community, establishing the relations between nature and culture[66]; burials, consequently, became just one expression of these needs. It is certainly important that at sites of the Tisza and Herpály cultures in Hungary, such as Berettyóújfalu-Herpály, pits with similar context were discovered too.[67]

Another expression of new social needs was the settlement itself (Layer Ia-b). Through its growth an agricultural community has been formed inside corporate households. Some recent analyses of the meaning of architecture have established the study of social phenomena through typological variations of domestic architectural structures, based on an assumption that architecture is the only element of material culture that reflects cultural identity of any community.[68] Thus, houses in Layers Ia-b and Ib discovered at Gomolava could have had an important role for solving the questions of social structure functioning, which here I try to illuminate by studying mortuary remains. So, it will be shown how important is the potential of an alternative "arena of social power"[69] in expressing actual social tensions.

Gomolava Ib - elements for expressing group/individual prestige

Viewing status relations inside the necropolis, based on grave goods, is to a certain extent possible, in spite of the criticism of non-status character of these.[70] Here, grave goods will be viewed in regard to their function in the mortuary area.[71]

Analysis of archaeological data

Unfortunately, data on grave goods and some other elements of burials at Gomolava have not yet been published to the full extent.[72] With an exception of published detailed anthropological analyses,[73] a complete archaeological description of burials is lacking. Therefore, the analysis of relations of all elements could not be fully performed.

Earth-cut grave pits were detected in the cases of Pit I (skeletons 16 and 17), Graves 1 and 2/73 only. There is no doubt that grave pits had to be dug into the main part of the necropolis. Some of them were certainly deep up to 1.5 m, according to a reconstruction of the living horizon of Layer Ib and comparison to the height ASL of particular skeleton.[74]

The position of the deceased is uniform, in most cases flexed, and they have been laid down on the left side. However, only a detailed plan of the necropolis (incorporated as a panel at the permanent exhibition of the Museum of Vojvodina), provides an insight into some specific positions of the buried individuals (when an appropriate photo is lacking too). A plan of the main part of the necropolis in Block III is shown (Fig. 4),[75] with twenty here discovered skeletons (Fig. 5). Thus one can ascertain that only the positions of skeletons 5 and 18 have been contracted.

There are no published data on dislocated graves, so it has not been possible to establish whether we are dealing with purposely disarticulated skeletons or the layer was devastated by some later intrusion. Partial insight into the documentation from these excavations helped to check out

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66 A. Whittle, *Problems in Neolithic Archaeology*, Cambridge 1988, 146.

67 N. Kalicz and P. Raczky, *Berettyóújfalu-Herpály. A settlement of the Herpály culture*, in L. Tálas (ed.) (n. 14), 121.

68 A. Coudart, *Entre Nouvelle-Guinée et Néolithique européen: de la correspondance entre les variations de l'architecture domestique, la durabilité culturelle et la cohésion sociale du groupe*, dans *Ethnoarchéologie: Justification, Prolémes, Limites* (XII[e] Recontres Internationales d'Archéologie et d'Histoire d'Antibes), Juan-les-Pins 1992, 409-446.

69 J. C. Chapman, Arenas of social power: the case of Serbian Prehistory, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* XIV-1 (arheologija), Beograd 1992, 305-317, *passim*.

70 Out of 93 traditional societies at only 4 societies status distinctions are mediated through grave goods, J. A. Tainter, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 121.

71 Cf. J. C. Chapman, *op. cit.*, (n. 60), 23.

72 See note 16.

73 Zs. K. Zoffmann, Das anthropologische Material das spätneolitischen Gräberfelds von Hrtkovci - Gomolava, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 30, Novi Sad 1987, 43-69.

74 Reconstruction was based on B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe... (n. 16), Fig. 10. For counter and 3D model of Layer Ib see my B.A. thesis (n. 11).

75 This is part of published simplified plan of Layer Ib, B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe ... (n. 16), Fig. 10.

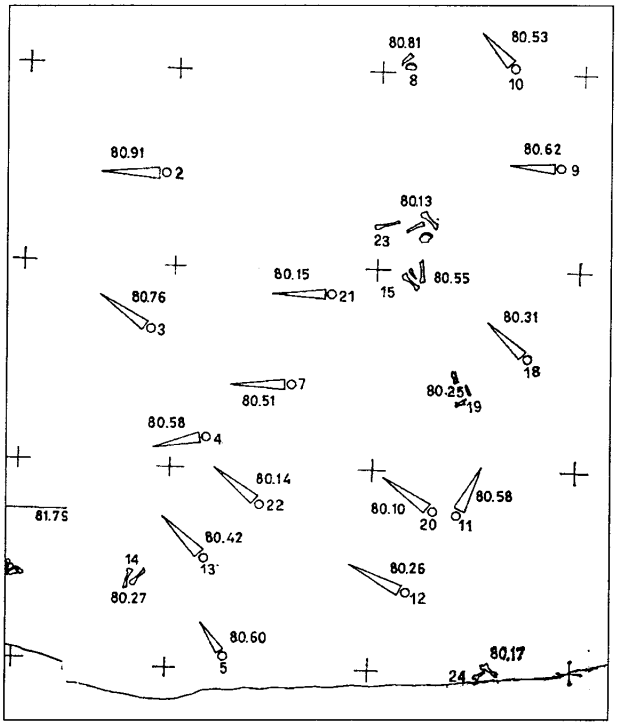

Fig. 4. - Simplified plan of main formal disposal area of necropolis, Block III, Gomolava: after B. Brukner.

some of these inconsistencies. Following the field notes, dislocation in the cases of skeletons 15 and 23 was a result of intrusion of one Hallstatt pit. Skeletons 15 and 23 were separated, although several individuals have been identified through the anthropological analysis.[76]

There is no grave that is cut by some other, indicating that graves were marked in some way and "remembered".

For several burials, whose skeletons are *in situ* in the Museum of Vojvodina in Novi Sad (Nos. 4 and 13) and the National Museum in Belgrade (No. 12), I have used age and sex data published as a part of preliminary analysis performed by S. Živanović,[77] in spite of an obvious disagreement of these results, that came from his inspection of skeletons *in situ*, and those of detailed analyses by Zs. K. Zoffmann. Clear determination of sex in the case of skeleton 4, found with three large vessels laid beside the spine of the buried individual (Fig. 8), has not yet been ascertained. Concerning its age, it is clear that this individual is quite young (may be age group of 15-20 years) with unfused cranium and epiphyses. A skeleton marked as No. 3/75[78] during the anthropological analysis, actually represents the remains of a new-born baby, discovered in the Neolithic layer during the field season in 1975. In the course of this season, skeleton 2/75 was found in the western part of Block III, thus it is reasonable to assume that remains of No. 3/75 were found in the layer in this area too, at the periphery of the main area of the necropolis.

Fig. 5. - Discovered graves in the main formal disposal area of the necropolis at Gomolava. Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

Some obscurities are evident concerning an offering in Grave 10,[79] unique at the necropolis, and labelled in grave goods' list as an "amulet". A field sketch of this grave shows a ceramic figurine-amulet. This amulet is found half a metre away from the buried child (6-7 years old). It probably belongs to the grave as an offering, therefore almost the same heights ASL were recorded, both for the skeleton and pendant. However, this find cannot yet be ascertained.

One more remark is necessary to make concerning the three already mentioned skeletons that have been preserved *in situ* (Nos. 4, 12, 13). At skeletons 12 and 13, traces of greenish colour are still visible on the bones of forearms, probably suggesting use of powdered malachite as body decoration, at least at No. 13. In the case of No.

[76] Zs. K. Zoffmann, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 47, 50.

[77] S. Živanović, Vinča Skeletons studied *in situ* at the Gomolava site, Yugoslavia, *Current Anthropology* 18/3, Chicago 1977, 533-534; B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe...(n. 16), 32-33, T. 8.

[78] Zs. K. Zoffmann, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 46.

[79] B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe...(n. 16), 32, T. 8.

12 copper bracelet at the wrist might produce this greenish colour. Contrarily, skeleton 4 shows no traces. Presently, it is not clear whether other skeletons resemble this practice too.

Spatial relations

It is possible to observe some clustering of graves, especially concerning the age group of 30-40 years. All three men were buried apart from the main area of the necropolis, toward the northern part of the settlement.[80] This could point to some horizontal social affiliation of the deceased, as they may have been together belonging to the same social subgroup.

Generally speaking, it seems that spatial relations have been of great importance in horizontal differentiation of this community, therefore some social groupings may have been expressed exactly through the varying orientation of the deceased. This varying, however, is possible to explain as an indication of chronological differences.

In the main part of the necropolis in Block III (Fig. 4), based on the orientation of the deceased, skeletons 4, 2/75 and 21 could be separated, as the earliest buried; in addition, skeletons 9 and 7 could also to some extent complement this group. Grave 9 represents a buried three-year old child, separated from the group of adults already mentioned. To bury children around the main area of the necropolis, where the adults were primarily buried, seems to be a rule here.

The supposed second phase of burials consists of skeletons 3/76, 12, 10, 13, 18, 20 and 22. Again, a child 6-7 years old (No. 10) was separated from the adults. The already mentioned group of skeletons further north from Block III (Nos. 1, 2/73, 25) is akin to this group as regards their orientation.

The third group form Graves 5, 6, 8, 17 and 19. These are children (Nos. 6, 8 and 19), the only female individual (No. 17), buried far from the main part of the necropolis (Block VI, Pit I), and a male individual (No. 5) of *adultus* age, accompanied with no status distinction (axe) and laid in contracted position (the same as No. 18).

Chronological difference could be employed with more certainty in the case of orientation of skeletons 11 (man 47-51 years old) and 14 (one-year old child), which form a separate group.

[80] *Ibid.*, Fig. 12.

Fig. 6. - Grave 25 at Gomolava, Block II. Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

The attention of some investigators was focused on explanation of two burials (Nos. 16 and 17) in Pit I (Block VI). An explanation for the unusual position of these individuals was that they were purposely "'thrown' into the pit".[81] Thus, the buried man of *maturus* age (No. 16) was with his head directed almost contrary to all other burials (especially those individuals directed toward the south-east) and in a specific position (on the back, almost extended with disarticulated low extremities). Beside him, a young woman was laid down, oriented the same as those buried in Block III, although her position was somewhat different. Anthropological analysis has shown that skeleton 16 was a robust Cromagnoid type, akin to the skeleton 2/1973, so there is a possibility that they were members of

[81] B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe...(n. 16), 31, Fig. 15; J. Petrović, *Gomolava - arheološko nalazište*, Novi Sad 1984, 21.

some other community.[82] Skeleton 16 was separated from the rest of population anthropologically, as well as by its orientation and spatial separation. So, anthropological data

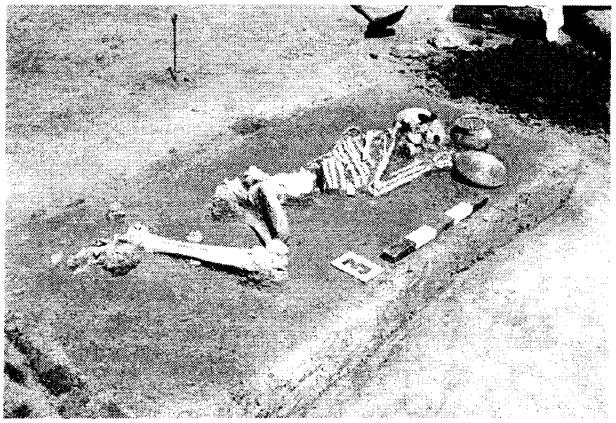

Fig. 7. - Grave 3/76 at Gomolava, Block III. Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

at this point confirm the theoretical postulate based on the ethnographic cases,[83] that members of other communities (or by any criterion "different") are buried out of the main formal disposal area of a community.

Ceramic grave offerings

Some important information that typological analyses of ceramic forms might imply in further differentiation of the necropolis would not be possible to explore much further due to incomplete publishing.[84]

A statement that ceramic forms in the settlement (Layer Ib) and those found in the necropolis are chronologically different,[85] is probably not likely to be valid. More elements point to stratigraphic connection of the necropolis and Layer Ib. Thus, even the existing differences in some of these ceramic forms, that must be repeated still have not been analysed to the full extent, would most likely suggest a different context and, hence, the function of certain ceramic types. However, these conclusions could be justified only after a detailed publishing of all ceramic finds, from both graves and houses.

Graves 2/73 (five vessels) (Fig. 9), 4 (three huge ves-

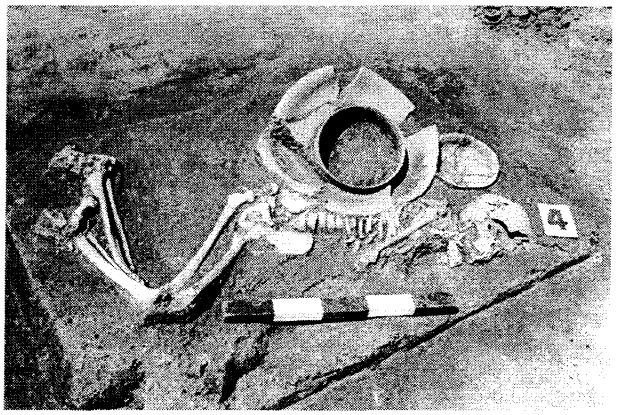

Fig. 8. - Grave 4 at Gomolava, Block III. Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

sels) and 21 (six vessels) are in a quantitative sense particularly "rich" in ceramic vessels.

One can notice that some of the published vessels,[86] as well as some of those exhibited in the Museum of Vojvodina, are richly decorated by pattern-burnish ornament forming various crossed bands, star-like ornaments, chessboard fields and crosses. Channelling, as another technique of decoration, was also employed.

At least two graves have functionally recognisable vessels. These are almost identical sets of ceramic forms found in Graves 3/76 (Fig. 7) and 10, both consisting of a small cup with a horn handle (probably for liquid) and a shallow bowl (probably for food).

In most cases ceramic vessels were placed beside the head of the deceased. Exceptions are Graves 4 and 12. Regarding Grave 12 (Fig. 10), published list of grave goods[87] does not mention two ceramic vessels that have been buried underneath the legs of the deceased.[88] However, these two vessels were published.[89] One of these vessels has four horn handles at its rim, with fairly visible representation of a human face. It must be underlined that this grave is specific by its copper bracelet at the wrist of the deceased, the position of axe, the stone found

[82] Zs. K. Zoffmann, *op cit.* (n. 73), 51-52.

[83] J. O'Shea, *op. cit.* (n. 52), 43.

[84] B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe...(n. 16), T. VII-VIII; J. Petrović, *op. cit.* (n. 81), Fig. 12-14, T. IX; J. Petrović, M. Jovanović and V. Dautova-Ruševljan, *Gomolava od praistorije do srednjeg veka*, Novi Sad 1986, 15, Fig. 32, 34-35.

[85] J. Petrović, *op. cit.* (n. 81), 21.

[86] B. Brukner, Naselje vinčanske grupe...(n. 16), T. VII-VIII.

[87] *Ibid.*, 32-33, T. 8.

[88] J. Petrović, personal communication, Novi Sad 1996.

[89] J. Petrović *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 84), 15, Fig. 34.

Fig. 9. - Grave 2/1973, outside the main formal disposal area of the necropolis, Block IV, Gomolava, Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

under its head, the ceramic offerings, and their placement in relation to the body position.

In Grave 21, the largest number of ceramic vessels was found (6).[90] Two specific curvilinear engravings of the same type were detected on the walls of two vessels from this grave.[91] One of these vessels is a huge conical bowl with a wide mouth. Inside this big one, a small and biconical bowl of roughened surface was found, containing reddish clay (ocher ?) at its bottom.[92] Unfortunately, I am not aware of any results of chemical analysis of this clay.

Axe and sickle - status distinctions ?

Among polished stone axes found in graves, two basic forms could be distinguished: trapezoid (some of them are even half-made products) and narrow oval ones.[93] Unfortunately, contextual data on their distribution by graves, and their petrographic origin have not been published.

In all Neolithic layers at Gomolava, there are almost 1000 polished stone axes,[94] but the greatest number has been recorded in Layer Ib. It could be an important clue for their significance in the mortuary area. It also points to the importance of the axes' accumulation in some households.[95] Hole-shafted axes were discovered in the settlement, and not in the necropolis.

[90] J. Petrović, *op. cit.* (n. 81), Fig. IX.

[91] These engravings fit the XI typological group of specific engravings on Vinča ceramic vessels, established by Š. Joanovič. This typology was established upon the analyses of various engravings on ceramic vessels of the sites Vršac-At and Potporanj-Kremenjak (Š. Joanovič, Urezane oznake na keramici vinčanske grupe u zbirci Narodnog muzeja u Vršcu, *Rad vojvodanskih muzeja* 27, Novi Sad 1981, 131). In some other graves somewhat different engravings were also detected.

[92] J. Petrović, personal communication, Novi Sad 1996.

[93] J. Petrović *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 84), 14-15, 19, 36 and the permanent exhibition of the Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad.

[94] Lj. Babović, personal communication, Beograd 1995.

[95] B. Brukner, *Arheološki pregled* 17 (n. 16), 12.

The axes in graves are presumably made of porous stone, and probably they have been of non-utilitarian nature (clearly visible in Grave 3/76 with one miniature example). This is of some importance, to which I will return later. On the other hand, massive axes were registered upon the floors of the houses in Layer Ib.[96] Some of

Fig. 10. - Grave 12 (Block III), Gomolava, Hrtkovci
Photo: Museum of Vojvodina.

them are exhibited in the Museum of Vojvodina, showing various and "exotic" raw materials.

Certain number of male burials have been accompanied with axes placed beside the back of their heads (Nos. 11, 13, 20, 21, 25).[97] It is hard to give a particular meaning to this element. However, an instructive exception to the rule has been noticed in Grave 12, with other noted differences. Here, the axe is in his right hand (Fig. 10). In the case of skeleton 3/76, an axe was found among ribs (Fig. 7),[98] similar to the flint artefact among the ribs of skeleton 13. It is likely that these objects may have been carried with clothes.

In search for meaning of these finds, one more possibility for explanation remains. It is not unlikely to suppose that as regards the position of axe, we reveal a canonised iconographic pattern, closely related to two male (?) seated figurines, found at the Tisza culture site of Szegvár-Tüzköves, one represented with a sickle and the other with an axe. Both were holding these objects in the right hand, placed on the right shoulder.[99] Thus, specific varying positions of axes (in Graves 2/73, 3/76, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 22 and 25) and flint artefacts (Graves 2/73, 13, 21 and 22) would reinforce a tentative suggestion that these were placed during the burial ceremony in the same manner as represented at the statuettes. Still confirming this point, it has been specified that two retouched truncations found in Graves 21 and 22 (the oldest individuals, see Fig. 11) have a silica sheen on the edge and were probably used as sickles.[100]

Social dimensions of burials at Gomolava and context of the settlement

The association of non-ceramic finds by age and sex structure of the deceased at Gomolava indicates some interesting relations (Fig. 11). The obvious importance of male individuals, with quantitatively and qualitatively "richest" graves, could not be questioned by any of previously mentioned dilemmas. As non-ceramic grave goods, there are axes in nine and flint artefacts (probably as sickle inserts) in four cases. In addition, a copper bracelet (around the wrist of a man ?) was found in Grave 12.

We can be sure that not all members of the community "deserved" a place in the necropolis. Also, not even all buried individuals were accompanied with personal objects (axe, flint artefact), probably reflecting certain status (e.g. "poor" Graves 5 and 18), in contrast to all other graves. On the other hand, some very distinct graves have been distinguished, such as Nos. 12, 2/73 or 21. It is also important to separate several rich graves of children. This is especially pronounced as regards Grave 8, where a child 0.5 - 1 years old was accompanied with seven copper beads and four ceramic vessels. This case could almost certainly imply the child's inherited status, with copper in function of a prestigious raw material and artefact, which was also found in the settlement context.[101] Two more child burials (Nos. 10 and 14), with an amulet (terra-cotta in shape of figurine ? - Grave 10) and bone beads (Grave

[96] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

[97] According to the published plan and photographs (see note 16), as well as the plan of the necropolis at the permanent exhibition of the Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad.

[98] B. Brukner, *Rad vojvođanskih muzeja* 32 (n. 16), Abb. 2.

[99] J. Korek, *Szegvár-Tüzköves. A settlement of the Tisza culture*, in L. Tálas (ed.) (n. 14), 53, Fig. 14; O. Trogmayer, Der Gott mit Axt. Gedanken zu einem neuen Statuettenfund (Statuette V), *Alltag und Religion Jungsteinzeit in Ost-Ungarn*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, 66-69, Abb. 82-84.

[100] M. Kaczanowska and J. K. Kozlowski, *Gomolava - chipped stone industries of Vinča Culture*, Warsawa 1986, 103-104.

[101] B. Brukner, *Arheološki pregled* 17 (n. 16), 12.

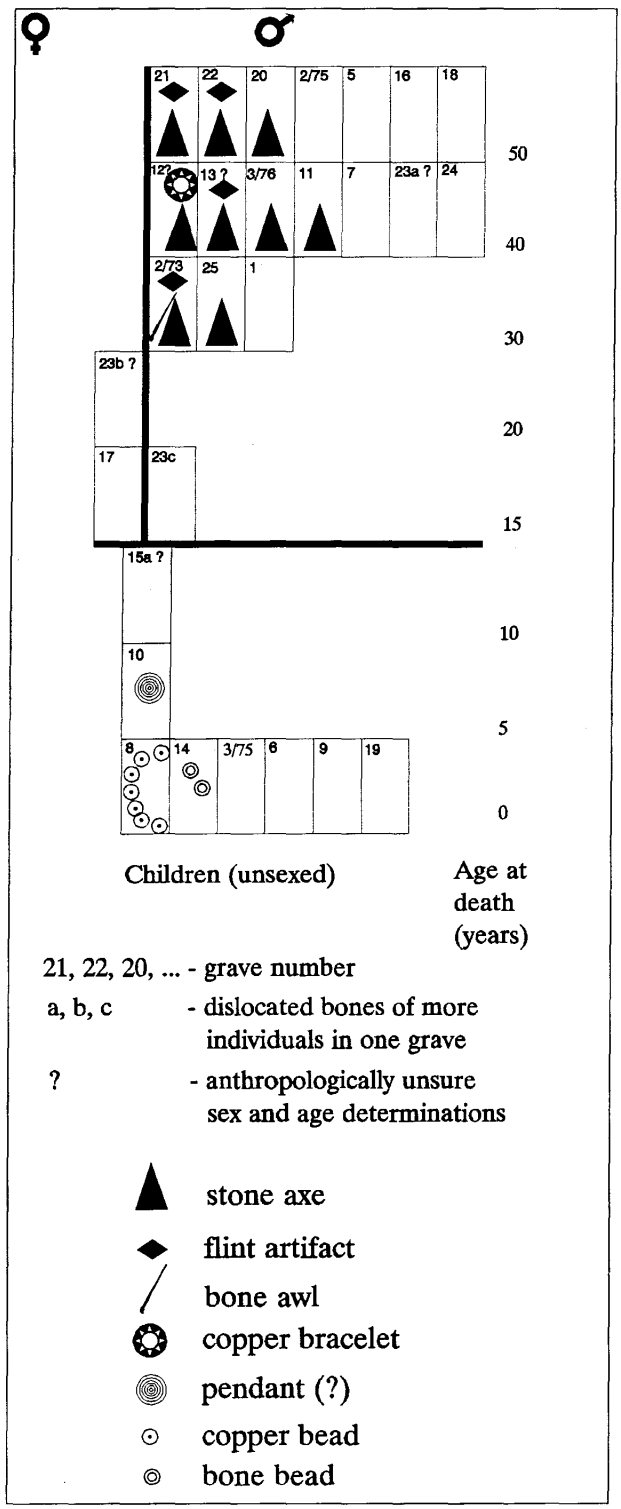

Fig. 11. - Distribution of non-ceramic grave goods by age and sex structure of buried individuals (each field representing an individual) at the Gomolava necropolis.

14), with two ceramic vessels in each, lead to the conclusion of the inherited status. Only in the cases of bone and copper beads (except ceramic vessels), there is more than one artefact of the same kind.

It is also worth noting the existence of malachite traces on the bones of the deceased. Powdered malachite might have been used as body decoration of the deceased in some cases (No. 13 and may be No. 12), however no malachite have been detected on the bones of skeleton 4. In the context of already mentioned use of copper in the necropolis, these cases would strongly emphasise its role, that was primarily prestigious and probably ritual.[102]

There are no figurines in the necropolis at Gomolava (except the uncertain amulet in the grave of a child - No. 10). Their meaning during the Neolithic was presumably formed in domestic context.[103] An important fact is that Layer Ia contains the greatest number of figurines. In a far less number, they have been found in Layer Ib, and it is possible that here burials took over the role of emphasising exclusive rights in the community, possibly now of a single group. This would point to the changeable form through which ideology was emanated, although expressing the same social function. Contrarily, at the single known necropolis of the early Vinča culture at Botoš near Zrenjanin, three figurines were found in mortuary area.[104]

The existing area inside House 4 (but also inside some other houses that have not been published yet) with bucrania fragments,[105] represents one more ritual element that is primarily in association with domestic domain. This is in accordance with similar areas found at other Vinča sites, especially Kormadin or Parta.[106]

A high redundancy value of the Gomolava necropolis (R = 0.89, Fig. 3.b) may indicate the type of social relations that is specific for those societies involved in the process of vertical stratification.

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[102] Cf. J. C. Chapman, *The Vinča Culture of South-East Europe: Studies in Chronology, Economy and Society* (BAR, Int. Ser. 117, i & ii), Oxford 1981, 128.

[103] I. Hodder, *The Domestication of Europe: Structure and Contingency in Neolithic Societies*, Oxford 1990.

[104] M. Garašanin, Sahranjivanje u balkansko-anadolskom kompleksu mlađeg neolita, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine* n.s. XI, Sarajevo 1956, 206-208; J. C. Chapman, *op. cit.* (n. 102), 56.

[105] J. Petrović, Arhitektura kuće 4 na Gomolavi. Naselje mlađe vinčanske kulture, *Rad vojvođanskih muzeja* 34, Novi Sad 1992, 21.

[106] See notes 38 and 39.

To summarise, it is reasonable to suppose that those individuals that have been buried at the Gomolava intramural necropolis, in this way were expressing their exclusive right in the community. They could also represent a kinship group. This is probably true for almost the same orientation of the skeletons at the main area of the necropolis. Quite different traits (even anthropological) could be observed in the mortuary *ritus* of those individuals buried away of the main formal disposal area.

The existing bias toward almost absolute representation of male individuals (the only positively identified female individual is No. 16 in Pit I) is astonishing, indicating strong sexual differentiation. Since no data on sex of the buried children are available, it may only be speculated that they were male individuals too.

Certainly, with the exception of some cases (Graves 2/73, 8, 12 and 21 in contrast to Graves 5 and 18), grave goods do not fully express clear status distinctions among those that have been buried. The actual differentiation inside the community was taking place in connection with the claim that this group accomplished - to be buried close to the living zone. The stone polished axes discovered in the graves are of low quality, as their function was to mask the actual difference between those that have been buried and the others. A strong need for this egalitarian mask is also visible in other traits shared by Vinča communities.[107] It seems that only Grave 12 has distinctive status marks in comparison to all other individuals buried at this necropolis. As we have already seen, all formal elements point exactly toward this direction. Also, strange representations of a human face at the handles of a vessel found in this grave, underneath the legs of the deceased, may be viewed just as an interesting coincidence in this context.

Conclusion

As we could witness, sequential separation of mortuary and domestic area in the symbolic sense, but also spatially, was taking place in the course of the Neolithic development in the Danube basin. The concept of *domus*[108] will soon be replaced, again symbolically and spatially, by a distinctive area of the dead - necropolis. Close connection of burial and house, i.e. domestic area, is obvious in the Starčevo culture. During the late phase of the Vinča culture, at the Gomolava necropolis, a process of sequential separation of the dead from the domestic arena is obvious, notwithstanding their continuing placement among houses, inside the settlement. However, some domestic elements, as figurines, disappear. The dead are still, as in the previous periods, "accessible and recognisable".[109]

The distribution of sites with burials in the central Balkans and Pannonia in the period of development of the first Neolithic communities, in spite insufficient state of research of certain areas, points to some common elements in expressing social needs for burials. Firstly, these are the specific geographical micro zones (vicinity of a river flow and in the past rich reservoirs of plant and animal species in the Pannonia), where the noted burial remains had the function of emphasising territorial rights of certain community. Probably, some of these elements continued their role in the burial practice even in the later phases of the Neolithic development. Appearance of necropolises, as specific areas at first formed in a contemporary unsettled part of settlement, where not all members of a community could have been buried, speaks, however, in favour of intensive social tensions. And some burials of the first Neolithic communities also indicate incipient stages of the later phenomena. These phenomena were common throughout south-east Europe in these periods. They represent the very beginning of the process that would eventually produce a social structure clearly reflected in the extensively excavated Early Eneolithic necropolis in north-east Bulgaria, with extremely rich grave goods. A claim that Varna represents (...) "the final flowering of an internally riven society,"[110] equally could respond another claim, that the necropolis near Botoš and the one inside the settlement at Gomolava represent the first signs of the already mentioned social process in the course of the Neolithic development of south-east Europe.

[107] I. Hodder (*op. cit.*, n. 103, 77-78) puts forward an assumption that symbolically the meaning of the Vinča figurines with a mask could follow the same line of meaning as clay masks in the cenotaphs of the Varna necropolis.

[108] *Ibid., passim.*

[109] A. Whittle, *op. cit.* (n. 64), 164.

[110] J. C. Chapman, *op. cit.* (n. 60), 33.

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