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Places that created time in the Danube Gorges and beyond, c. 9000–5500 BC

Dušan Borić
Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, UK
db231@hermes.cam.ac.uk

ABSTRACT – *The history of the region of the central Balkans and south east Pannonia is reviewed over the period of c. 9000–5500 cal BC. The rich and exciting evidence of the Danube Gorges region (the Djerdap) is presented in relation to the ecological setting and Early/Middle Neolithic settlement evidence of the wider region. It is suggested that the nature of these first Neolithic societies itself provides answers to the question of their origins, despite the recurrent invisibility of extensive Mesolithic occupation in Southeast Europe as a whole.*

IZVLEČEK – *V članku pregledamo zgodovino osrednjega Balkana in jugovzhodne Panonije v obdobju med približno 9000 in 5500 kalibrirano BC. Predstavimo bogate in vznemirljive najdbe Djerdapa, jih umestimo v okolje in jih povežemo z zgodnje/srednje-neolitskimi naselbinami v širši regiji. Menimo, da narava teh prvih neolitskih družb že sama po sebi odgovarja na vprašanje o njihovem izvoru, kljub temu da ekstenzivna mezolitska poselitev v jugovzhodni Evropi kot celoti ni vidna.*

KEY WORDS – *Danube Gorges; Mesolithic; Neolithic; settlement; pottery; conceptualisation of death*

Mankind feeds on itself more and more, and if it does not vanish or return to the Stone Age it will eat itself in ever-greater portions. This means that anywhere, in time and space, where people expresses their creativity, this thing that they did would explore more steadily and even emotionally overwhelm as their own all who belong to the human species. This kind of universalisation blurs the difference between cultural centres... and instead of the notion of imitation, introduces the notion of mutual exchange and interdependence.

Czeslaw Milosz, *Kontynenty* (*1986.85*)
(translated by the author)

INTRODUCTION

A step towards writing the local histories of whole regions and particular histories of archaeological sites together with all the 'folklore' accompanying any excavation, subsequent analyses and publication might offer a means for a proper understanding of what motivated the interpretations that have been offered. Without providing here a complete and detailed history, as the title might misleadingly suggest, I would like to offer the possibility of a comprehensive guide to the multidimensional nature of accumulated data and ideas for the case study considered. Thus, deposited layers of thoughts and disputes, long conversations between immediate participants and their listeners, and imaginative loops, along with the striking materiality of dusty boxes and excavated objects, and the specific metaphorical reality of photographs and plans (*Tilley 1999.11*) need a full involvement and a phenomenological exercise (*cf. Tilley 1994.74*).

There are two major issues that I want to raise here. The first is intended to set straight the record of Mesolithic and Neolithic sequences in the Danube Gorges region of Southeast Europe, at least in several aspects. Some of the questions thus posed are eventually directed to answering the question of the nature and reasons for changes in material culture and the introduction of a 'Neolithic package'. A necessary reminder is that all these changes most probably echoed moves in the wider world, with various kinds of communicative route and mechanism. Local his-

tories are inscribed only with the background of these grand narrative moves. In this sense, the variety of expressiveness of the same phenomenon and specificity of any particular case play equal roles in reaching an understanding. Although in what follows I use labelling such as 'Mesolithic' and 'Neolithic' extensively, this practice finds its justification only as a kind of heuristic device necessary to explain how currently formulated conceptual frameworks operate. However, I hope to show that close-up, contextual windows in the presentation of the case study that follows make it impossible to sustain these categories as such, and that at least an awareness of a need for their reconstruction should be anticipated.

Secondly, it seems necessary to integrate the Early Holocene archaeological record in the area of the Danube Gorges and the central Balkans into wider thinking on the specific historical period, on origins and reasons for the creation of features and artefacts, diachronic changes and the creation of landscapes; all these, along with issues of perceptions of time and its 'creation', as a part of fundamental ontological processes of being-in-the-world and dwelling-in-the-world, in Heidegger's words (*Heidegger 1962.78*).

The intertwining of these themes is seen as necessary if a fresh understanding is to be reached, and if the question of the places that created time, as yet another among the 'grand realities' (*Geertz 1973 [1993].21*), is to be approached in a proper way, I feel close to Clifford Geertz when he says, "I grow uncomfortable when I get too far away from the immediacies of social life" (*ibid. vi*). It seems that the immediacies of the archaeological record are often too easily neglected and left to their antiquarian melancholy. Thus, the created tokens of theoretical debates have been models of change that shrink material evidence as necessary; long theoretical exposures with nice, neat presentations of grand realities, or long critical accounts with archaeological case studies merely appended, often complaining and awaiting a better quality of and the resolution of empirical data to support theoretically laid foundations. It remains to be seen how this kind of habit is also reflected in the particular case study discussed here, which shows that this particular kind of politics of intellectual manufacture to a great extent neglects the very raw material of materialised and patterned human action, whose primacy should be vital in our accounts.

THE DANUBE GORGES, C. 8500–5500 BC

We move to the Danube Gorges (Figs. 1, 2) as the point of departure for this account, an areas of Southeast Europe where continuities in the mater-

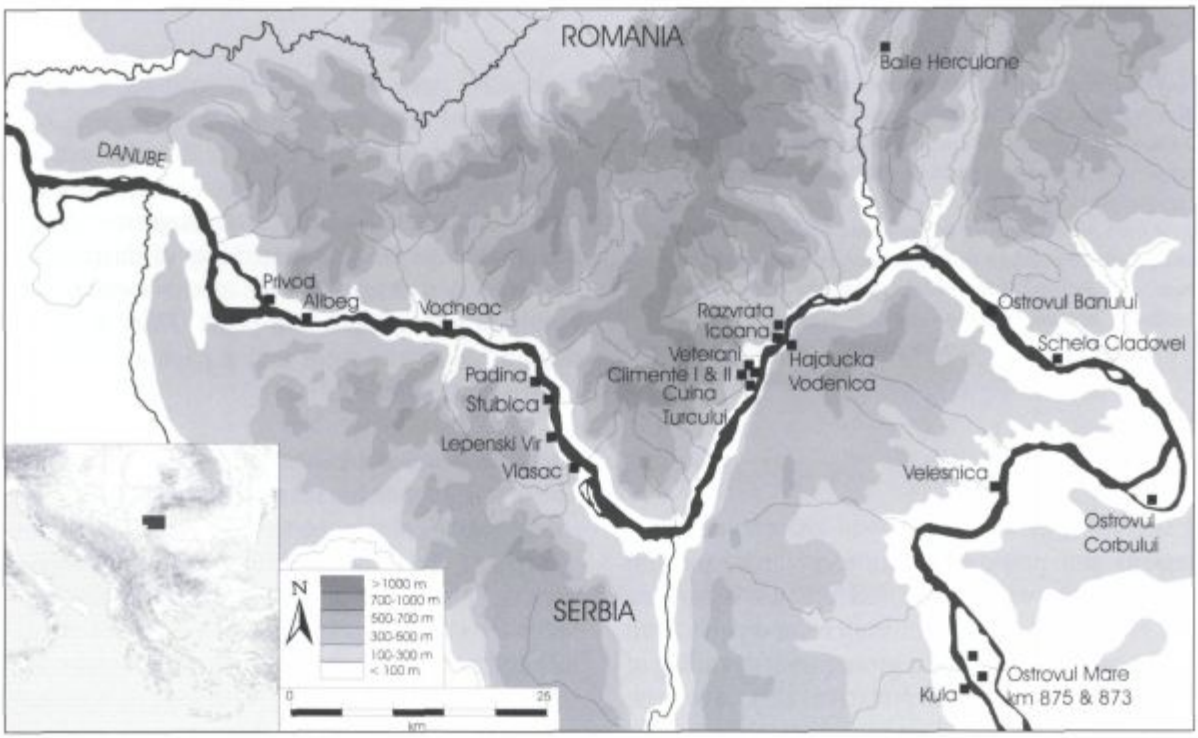


Fig. 1. Map of the Danube Gorges region showing sites with Early Holocene sequences (drawn by D. Borić and V. Novaković).

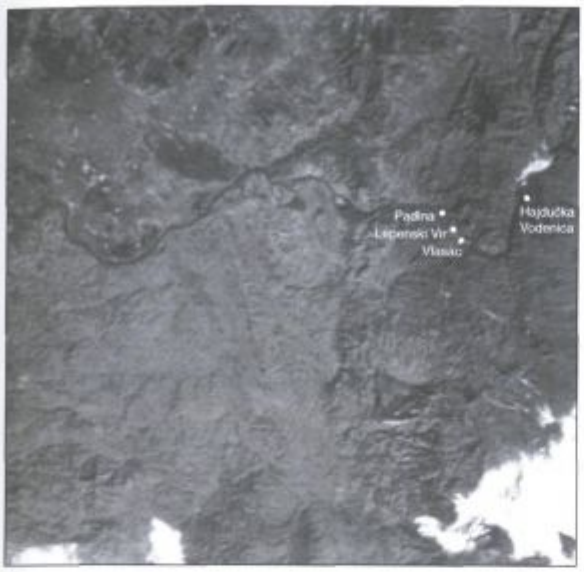


Fig. 2. Satellite image of the Danube Gorges region and eastern Serbia (courtesy of P. Popović).

ial record of Early Holocene sequences are abundant and complex. Specific geological development (*Marković-Marjanović 1978.11 sq.*) created the landscape: the Danube runs through narrow gorges, with steep sides that in many places rise vertically from the river, sometimes reaching a height of 500 m (Fig. 3). The drama of the cliffs and the water, and the mystery of coves and cliffs above, attract the attention. Sites with traces of human occupation were discovered in several gorges where the Danube had cut a narrow and winding route through the southern fringes of the Carpathian Mountains. After its gentle and slow run through the Pannonian Plain, the river speeds up, passing through narrow passages; in the narrowest, there are quartz-porphyry cliffs, and also deposits of greenish slate, Jurassic sandstones and limestones, gabbro, crystalline rocks and other deposits, rising sheer from the waters. In the gorge known as Gospodjin Vir (The Lady's Whirlpool) the river flows between rocks that rise from the riverbed to the surface; the power of the waters has eroded the rocks into the shape of whirlpool cauldrons, sometimes almost 30 m deep. Similar features are observed in the Lower Gorges, especially in one called Kazan (The Cauldron) (Fig. 3). The constant erosion of the banks and constant accumulation, has created several types of fluvial terrace, frequently narrow and rocky, in different periods, from the Pliocene to the Holocene. In the course of the Quaternary, some of the coves sedimented two types of loess-sandy covers of different age, blown by the south-easterly wind. In some places these eolian sediments are deposited in natural pockets protected by rocky ridges, on fluvial terraces or, as in the case of the archaeological site of Padina, in a giant fossil whirlpool at Sector III of this site, making an especially interesting feature (*ibid. 15, Fig. 5*). The older eolian sediments cover scree that eroded in the Pleistocene, and were found on a higher terrace (39/95 m above sea level), being from the Late Pleistocene. The younger sediments (from 1 to 10 m thick), consisting of light yellow sandy loess, cover the lowermost terraces (which in particular demonstrates the low water level of the Danube at the time of their deposition), and their formation falls into the Younger Dryas (*ibid. 14*). Material eroded from the upper mountain slopes – scree of more recent origin and its accumulation (of several metres) in some places – actually protected the archaeological deposits found on this kind of surface from slow, down-slope erosion. At sites without considerable vegetation cover, down-slope movement of scree can be observed even today (*ibid. 13*). On the other hand, concerning the extent of erosion by the river (with fluctuating rates)[1], many of the sites were discovered directly as a consequence profiles being exposed by the river's undercutting, which eroded their lowermost parts.

Some of the features of the landscape have often been cited as pointing to the isolation and refugial character of the region. However, it is here that we immediately we encounter the first unclear and sometimes misleadingly presented point. To what

Fig. 3. Passage through the Lower Gorge today – the narrowest route in the region (photo: D. Borić).

1 It seems that the regime of the Danube's water levels was drastically changing especially during the last two centuries, i.e. since the beginning of melioration works in the Pannonian plains that drained out massive annual accumulation of underground waters all over the Carpathian Basin (see Fig. 25) directing these into the Danube and its tributaries. This probably caused sufficient rise of the water level of the Danube, and as a consequence increased further erosion of its banks.

extent is it possible to speak of the isolation of settlements uncovered in these gorges? Many smaller or larger river valleys and streams of the Danube's tributaries intersect cliffs along around 130 km of the Danube's passage through the gorges (Fig. 4). The region of the 'hinterlands' is thus accessible, and this fact needs to be appreciated. Moreover, a much wider region is represented in the settlement record of the Gorges' sites, as will be more clearly shown below.

Fig. 4. View from Vlasac (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Belgrade).

Previous views and ideas – a selected guide

A number of settlements, linearly aligned along the Danube Gorges' banks and sited in small coves, with Late Palaeolithic, Mesolithic (also referred to as Epi-Palaeolithic) and Early Neolithic layers and features, was excavated in the late 1960's and early 1970's (*for a review of the history of research, see Radovanović 1996a.3–8*). All these were rescue excavations conducted to save sites along the banks of the river from an inevitable rise in water levels (up to 30 m) caused by the building of a hydroelectric dam.

Evidence of houses, burials, and sculptured art was interpreted as representing 'complex' hunter-gatherer groups on the basis of frequent analogies, in terms of settlement pattern, supposed reduced mobility, and one of the subsistence staples being an anadromous species of Acipenseridae fish, found in the ethnographic example of hunter-gatherer groups of the North-West American coast.

There has been a continuous attempt to define a classic version of the phenomenon specific to the sites in the Danube Gorges (primarily known by houses, burials and sculpted boulders) as mainly 'Mesolithic' (*e.g., Srejović 1966; 1967; 1968a; 1968b; 1969a; 1969b; 1969c; 1969d; 1972; 1989; Radovanović 1992; 1996a; 1997; Radovanović and Voytek 1997*) or primarily 'Neolithic' (*Jovanović 1968a; 1968b; 1969a; 1969b; 1971; 1974a; 1974b; 1975; 1987; see also Milisauskas 1978.96*). For over thirty years this argument has divided researchers in the area (*cf. Radovanović 1996a. 8–12*). The two main reasons for this situation are the low level of publishing, not allowing all the evidence to be taken into account and, presumably, a very personal struggle between excavators for the primacies of their own respective interpretations of the evidence encountered. This kind of situation encourages continuing controversy in attempts to explain how trapezoidal floor plans, with elaborate rectangular hearth constructions and the corresponding absolute dating of the two major sites – Lepenski Vir and Padina – have been presented as in the first case (Lepenski Vir) lacking Early Neolithic pottery and other Early Neolithic material culture (such as yellow-spotted 'Balkan' flint and polished stone axes, to mention only two), while at the other site (Padina), associations of this kind of material culture with 'classic' buildings have been unquestionably confirmed.

There also has been little doubt among researchers, with few exceptions (*Chapman 1989; 1992; Nandris 1968; 1971; Whittle 1996; 1998*), that well-known features at these sites clearly represent cases of sedentary settlements of "increasingly complex" hunter-gatherers (*e.g., Srejović 1969; 1972; Srejović and Letica 1979; Whittle 1985; Radovanović 1992; 1996a; Radovanovič and Voytek 1997*), or rather belong to an amalgam of incoming farmers and surviving local fisher folk (*the 'Neolithic' perspective of Jovanović [1975; 1987]*). For some of the authors, these groups, in the later stages of their development, reacted to emergent Early Neolithic food-producing groups, reluctantly accepting some of the Neolithic paraphernalia (*e.g. Radovanović 1992; 1996a; 1996b; Radovanović and Voytek 1997; Voytek and Tringham 1989*). Especially considering the issue of supposedly appearing/increasing sedentism, continuing studies of animal bones associated with a number of different contexts from these sites, involving cementum increment analyses on red deer teeth, will, it is to be hoped, make these issues clear (*Borić in preparation; Dimitrijević and Borić in preparation*).

In a recent synthesis of previous research and analyses in the Danube Gorges by Ivana Radovanović, the emphasis is on the 'Mesolithic' (economic) aspects of these settlements (*e.g., Radovanović 1992; 1996a; 1997*). Radovanović rightly points out the long continuities in the creation of most of the sites. How-

ever, the state of publishing, even in this synthetic account, obscures a final conclusion, and it remains unclear to what extent Early Neolithic material culture should be associated with certain stratigraphic contexts, and especially what role it should play in connection with some of the best-known features, such as sculpted boulders and elaborate houses/shrines. Also, this author sometimes uses an over-functional argument in an interpretation of a large number of uncovered burials, connecting them with a concept of formal disposal areas and assigning to them primarily the function of territorial markers connected with the control of resources in a certain territory, and with the ideological integration of communities in the Danube Gorges, and also in other European Mesolithic contexts (*Radovanović 1992; 1996a.14–15, 295; 1994*). This argument was strongly formulated to underline the conceptual dichotomy between what should be defined as Mesolithic in contrast to Neolithic.

Subsequently, it has been suggested that these 'increasingly complex' societies of hunter-gatherers, with incipient stages of sedentism and storage facilities, faced a new challenge in the appearance of Neolithic material culture through contacts with surrounding (incoming?) Early Neolithic populations, thus engaging in the process of exchange, acquiring/importing new forms of material culture, and also new subsistence staples, such as domesticates (*Voytek and Tringham 1989; Radovanović 1996b; Radovanović and Voytek 1997*). Terms often used in this kind of model are 'dominance', 'resistance', 'control', 'power' and 'prestige', all implying the notion of an ideology which serves to manipulate, restricting human actions by control over knowledge, reproduction, or a landscape (*Radovanović and Voytek 1997.28; also Tilley 1994. 26, 208*). Thus this view sees the existence of organised systems with the domination of experience and knowledge of landscapes (*Tilley 1994.26*) as "harnessed to legitimise patterns of social control and relating to restricting access to knowledge" (*ibid. 208*). Along this line, Radovanović and Voytek suggest (*but see also Srejović 1969*) that in the Danube Gorges "...an ideology which promotes power over a landscape masks control over people by placing it in realms that are further removed from the human actors" (*1997.28*). Thus, power over a landscape is seen only as serving to control people, as mystification by a 'small number of cynical men' (*Althusser 1971.37; cf. Treherne 1995.115*). However, a different conception of ideology should be anticipated here (*see below; also Treherne 1995.113–117*).

Some notions similar to those just mentioned concerning the introduction of Early Neolithic material culture to the Danube Gorges have been expressed by John Chapman (*1989; 1992.111–113*). He introduced the term 'arenas of social power' in order to explain the meaning and reasons for the creation of specific sites and the material record in Southeast Europe (*Chapman 1992.72–75*). In doing this he uses the ideas of Mann (*1986*), suggesting that certain places were chosen on the bases of their 'biographical suitability' for certain activities, where human actors use and manipulate power that originates from these places. However, again through the concept of power over ancestors, landscapes, imagery etc. (*Chapman 1992.116*), it is presented as an abstract force that lies behind human motives and actions. In this sense, the concept suggested by this author also lacks multidimensionality when confronted with the archaeological record. Instead of the possibility of a dense and detailed account of the infinite variations of human behaviour, this is a route towards reducing human reality to a few 'crucial' components. In another account on the beginnings of farming in Southeast Europe he employs the argument of the creation of 'arenas of social power', maintaining that "...the theme of social power in the Iron Gates gorge is central to these reconstruction of forager–farmer interactions" (*Chapman 1992.115; 1994.140*). The theme of interaction and resistance to farming is exploited for the region (*also Chapman 1992 passim*). Also, in his more recent account, Chapman lists the possible reasons for the introduction of farming, such as the accumulation of possessions, increased economic intensification, resource competition, increased family size and place-based world-views (*Chapman 1994.136*). Again the intention is to reduce things to a few 'basic' components, so the whole explanatory process eventually leads only further away from interpretative possibilities, subsuming data under already-knowns. On the other hand, in challenging ideas about established sedentism, especially in connection with the (changing) perception of time (*Chapman 1992.76 sq.*), this author has opened up some interesting interpretative possibilities.

In *The Domestication of Europe*, Ian Hodder (*1990*) claims the existence of common underlying structures in the narrative and 'real' world of the Eastern Mediterranean before and through the adoption of Neolithic material culture, as well as the subsequent configurations that these underlying structures took in different local contexts throughout Europe. He defined the competing structure through the dialec-

tic interplay of *domus* and *agrios* stories (*Hodder 1993.269*), which specify sets of rules and practices with shifting emphases. This scheme was then contrasted with the material evidence of the Eastern Mediterranean and European Neolithic. For Hodder, the case of the Danube Gorges and, in particular, the site of Lepenski Vir (*Hodder 1990.21–31*) stands among points of departure where the stories were most elaborately expressed. His remark that, on the basis of the publications about this site, one has the impression that the excavated houses form a scene for some drama (*ibid. 29*), where material objects and houses, together with graves and carved boulders, deliberately take particular relations, appears strikingly true. He confronts the position of hearths and graves with the house shapes and spatial relations of portable objects inside them, and the use of human bones as active tools in expressing meanings of domestication and control of the wild and death (agrios) by placing the dead beneath house floors, with a strong emphasis on the nurturing aspect (domus) of houses/shrines and hearths. This exciting and inspiring account, however, falls short on important problems concerning the stratigraphic sequencing of houses and graves, lacking the wider contextual picture of Lepenski Vir formed in the context of its local regional history. Also, although very useful for a comprehensive view from the standpoint of large-scale movements, on the theme of the creation/formulation/spread of these two competing narratives across Eurasia, there is almost no mention of the possibilities, mechanisms and ways in which ideas and values spread, in the construction of a new grand narrative or worldview at this time. One of the important assumptions put forward in this account is that "...the agricultural revolution may have been an epiphenomenon of deeper changes" (*ibid. 31*).

Recently, two main models of the neolithisation process in Southeast Europe and Europe have emerged which strongly dominate current debate. The first is motivated by research into the genetic mapping of present-day Europe which, in the opinion of its followers, finds enough evidence in the archaeological record to support the idea of the spread of the 'Neolithic package' as a quick and smooth process in the form of demic diffusion and population infiltration/replacement (*Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza 1973*). A view of the spread of the Indo-European language at this time is one of the most important elements in this model (*Renfrew 1987; for the most up-dated views, with a strong emphasis on the necessity for a consensus on this issue, see the proceedings of the round table The Neolithic Transition in Europe: Looking Back – Looking Forward held in Venice, 29–31 October 1998*). A second model, partially standing in opposition to the first, and mainly promoted by Marek Zvelebil, has become known as the "availability model" (*Zvelebil 1986*). This model allows a certain degree of colonisation for Southeast Europe and the necessity for the adoption of farming, with a high level of materials and information available among foragers and farmers, together with the establishing of new breeding networks (*Zvelebil 1994[1995].116–120*). However, one of the most important points is that local populations, i.e. foragers, took an active part in this process, in contrast to the view of demic diffusionists that the change was largely introduced/diffused by the spread of farming communities. The availability model transposes the idea of existing frontiers between foragers and farmers in other parts of Europe and their coexistence for certain periods of time, and suggests that it is possible to see the same kind of process in the Danube Gorges (*ibid.119–120*). This is also close to the idea suggested by Radovanović (*1996b*). Although this kind of model might work in some other parts of Europe, it is not necessarily applicable to Southeast European contexts. It seems that the scale of the whole process is lost again. Created entities have become foragers and farmers, with clear-cut boundaries between the two. It does not appear so easy to qualify the first Neolithic communities across the Balkans with such a loose designation as 'farmers', as I shall try to show later. On the other hand, it is not clear why we would assume that the foragers of the Danube Gorges, or any other region for that matter, might have viewed themselves or been viewed as "culturally and economically inferior to farmers" (*Zvelebil 1994[1995].116*).

It seems that both predominant models attempt some sort of uniform and often straightforward explanation of changes, probably spending too much time on the grand scale. Hence the recurrent problem of running into the 'senseless side of history' (*Ricoeur 1984.131, following Whitehead*), where large-scale historical phenomena and social processes exist on an abstract scale too distant from the acts of individuals and single events. At the same time, these models clearly show our main metanarrative fascinations here: talk of origins, continuities and identities, with a slightly different emphasis.

Yet another recent view of the beginnings of the Neolithic in Southeast Europe, which also concerns the Danube Gorges region to some extent, is pre-

sented by Alasdair Whittle (*1996; 1998*). In this account there is an important shift from some well-rooted conceptual frameworks towards a deconstruction of the most common assumptions of the Neolithic metanarrative, such as the beginnings of sedentary life and farming, and towards understanding what the whole change was about. Also, Whittle allows a much greater role in the neolithisation process to local forager groups. For the Danube Gorges region he places an important emphasis on the correct sequencing of phases represented in the settlement record of the region (*Whittle 1996. 24–29, 44–46*). Writing of the Mesolithic-Neolithic dichotomy in other European contexts he interestingly advances the assumption that "the difference may be more apparent than real" (*ibid. 196*).

These are only some of the previous perspectives on the Gorges sites that receive some response in the following discussion. My intention now is to go beyond them, inevitably challenging their validity along the way.

There are four points that deserve particular attention here. Firstly, as the problem of architectural phasing and pottery association at Lepenski Vir remains unsolved, it is still unclear how this site should be designated: belonging to 'pure' hunter-gatherers, with no pottery, as suggested by some, or in contrast, there is the possibility that the abundant material culture with Early Neolithic attributes is associated with most of the 'classic' trapezoidal houses. Secondly, the quantities of pottery found at the Padina site are enormous, clearly associated with dugouts, creating the same trapezoidal house floors and hearth constructions as can be seen at Lepenski Vir. This situation greatly obscures the previously mentioned interpretation of the pottery at these sites as originating through an exchange process (*Voytek and Tringham 1989*), or the idea that the first pottery could have been a prestige item (*Radovanović 1996a.43*). Thirdly, these architectural features are often instantly equated and used as proof of the presence of sedentary hunter-gather-fishers, thus completely neglecting the necessity for a clear evaluation of the many phases represented in the long term build-up of these settlements and their features. In fact, older features such as stone and some rectangular hearth constructions and graves were probably used and 'recognised' in various activities during later phases. Lastly, a lack of radiocarbon dates greatly obscures any diachronic resolution of our scale in connection to phasing particular features at these sites.

SETTLEMENT RECORD: STORIES OF LEPENSKI VIR AND PADINA

In several accounts the excavator of Lepenski Vir reported the appearance of pottery in association with Lepenski Vir I and II phase buildings (Fig. 5), interpreting pottery here as intrusions from the upper Early Neolithic layer. Thus, fragments of monochrome pottery were reported between some house floors of superimposed buildings (e.g. buildings 35 and 36 or 23 and 18) (*Srejović 1968c.86; 1969.153*). These floors at Lepenski Vir were made of a special kind of hard limestone plaster, with a thin burnished surface coat, varying from red to white, which exhibited a high degree of hardness and calcification with organic residues such as bones (*cf. Ney 1971*). Although it is may be said that in a few instances some kinds of intrusion might have appeared, it is interesting to note Srejović's opinion that "only" 15 houses of Lepenski Vir phases Ic, Id, Ie and II, representing Mesolithic levels in his division, "contained some sherds of monochrome ware" (*Srejović 1968a.*

Fig. 5. Lepenski Vir I–II, excavated houses (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Belgrade).

24); these are houses 1, 4, 15, 16, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, 32, 35, 37, 46, 47 and 54 (*Srejović 1969a.153*). Also, larger fragments of the bases and walls of semi-globular bowls were found in the front of houses of Lepenski Vir, namely in buildings 19, 24 and 47 (*ibid. 154*). The same kind of pattern of spatial distribution of whole pots appears as found in some of the houses at the Padina site (houses 7, 15 or 18, Sector III) (*Jovanović 1969b.30; 1987*). In Srejović's opinion these whole pots at the rear of houses at Lepenski Vir belong to layer IIIa–b, i.e. Early Neolithic settlement, and are not connected to the trapezoidal houses as at Padina.

To try to clarify this possibly confusing account I shall primarily refer to finds from the site of Padina, which in this context appear strikingly important. Also, at Padina it is possible to better understand how building activity was organised in the first place, i.e. in what way the loess slope of the cove in Sector III was approached in building classic houses. This important site contains four different sectors (i.e. coves created by the Danube's activity) divided only by bedrock ridges. It seems that excavated deposits from these coves, for general orientation, contain very early and also the latest deposits of the Danube Gorges sequence. But I shall return later to a more detailed stratigraphic sequence of different coves at this site. For the moment I shall concentrate on Sector III of Padina (Fig. 6), where the same kind of architecture and similarly organised settlement deposits as at Lepenski Vir were excavated. For the moment, the most importance difference is that the smaller number of houses and floors at Padina are made of a less durable hard coating of burnt earth.

However, a number of features, such as the placement of floors in trapezoidal houses on the same kind of geologically formed loess sandy surface (*Brünnacker 1971; Marković-Marjanović 1979.14, see above*), their proximity (2 hours walking distance along the Danube), the basic shape of the houses, the position of hearths, and elements of hearth constructions, are all overwhelmingly similar to Lepenski Vir. Also, the series of absolute dates from these two sites (*see Radovanović 1996a.359–360; Gob 1990.196–198; Gröningen Database; Bonsall et al. 1996; 1997*) which gave consistently corresponding results in dating the charcoal from hearth constructions and timber found on the floors of the houses (see Fig. 7) confirms the contemporary coexistence of these two sites. It is reasonable to expect that a full publication of stratigraphic contexts and all finds from the site of Lepenski Vir, reportedly including over 200 000 Early Neolithic potsherds (*Srejović 1969a.166*) with their exact location, would surely make the whole issue clearer. However, growing arguments concerning the nature of this important site and the whole phenomenon speak of a need to clarify the problem *now*.

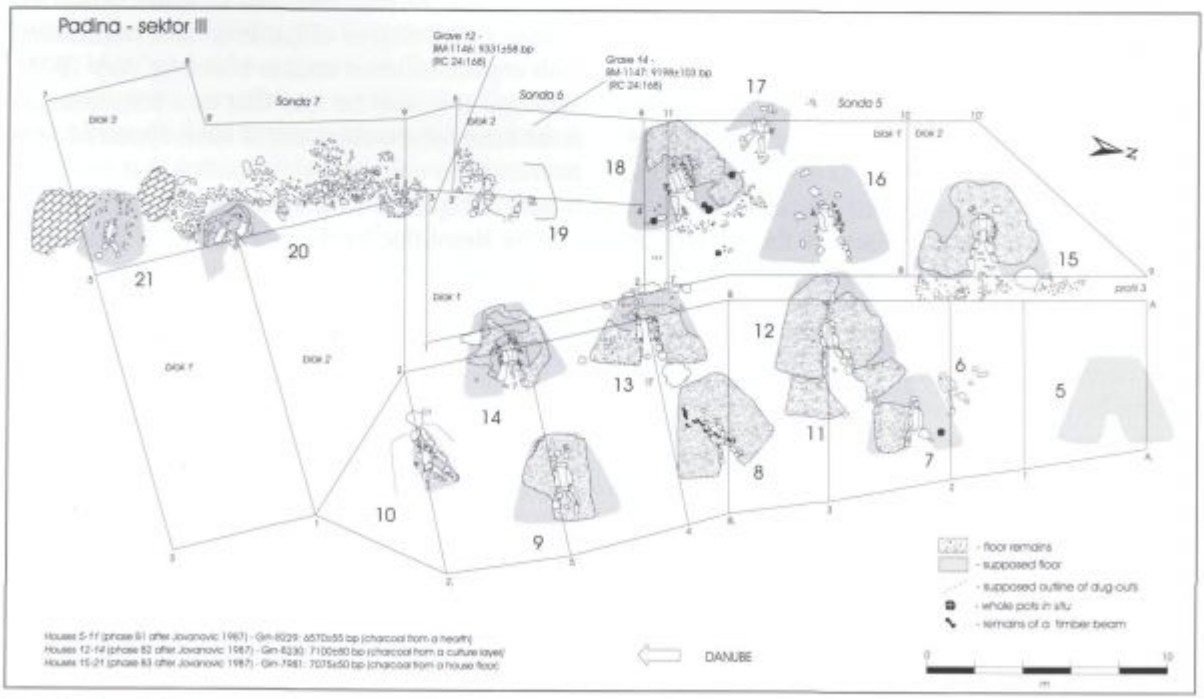


Fig. 6. Plan of settlement at Sector III of Padina – location of the stone construction of the necropolis and trapezoidal houses (redrawn by. D. Borić and V. Novaković according to an original plan courtesy of B. Jovanović).

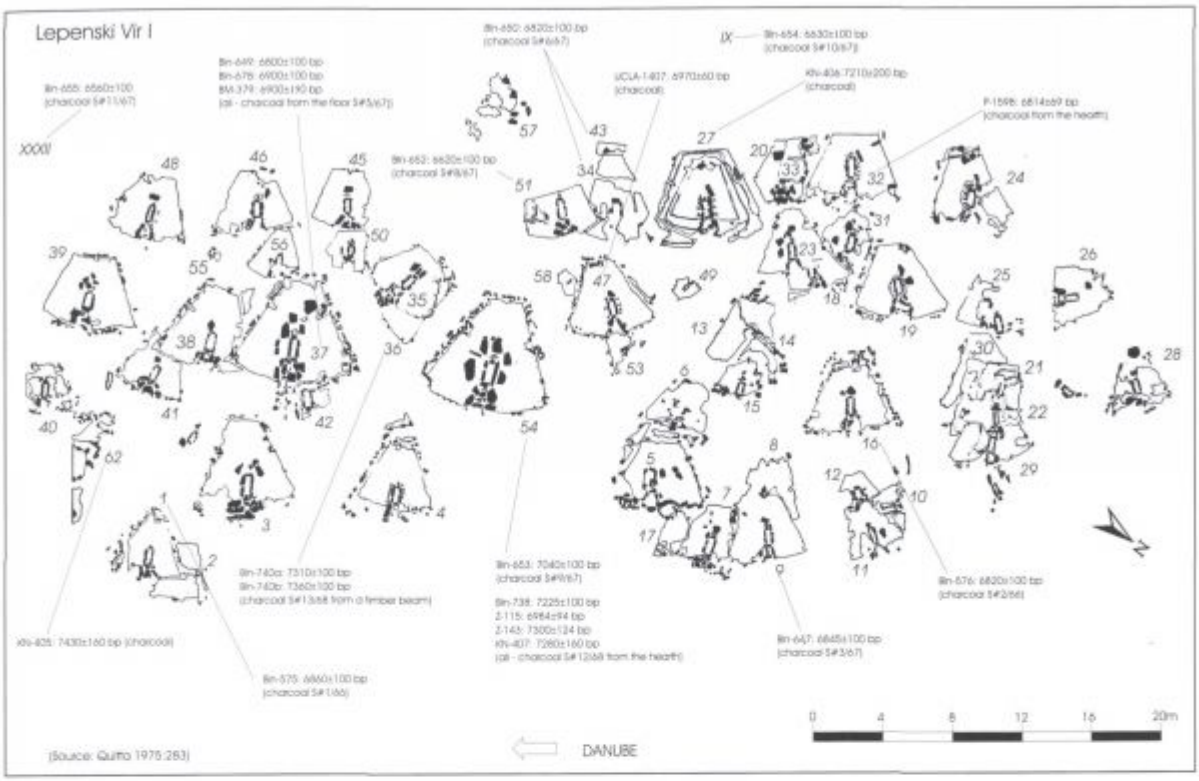


Fig. 7. Lepenski Vir – plan of settlement with locations and provenience of radiocarbon dates from and beneath house floors (adopted after Srejović 1969c.plan).

As I will try to show below, the whole issue can be contextualized through a comparison between similar features at Padina and Lepenski Vir, as well as other sites in the Gorges, that might yield some convincing clues for our reasoning[2]. Despite certain (important) differences created by their respective life stories, these two sites share all the main characteristics of this specific development in the Gorges.

Pottery and architecture

To begin with pottery, most often the key artefactual issue in debates over Mesolithic-Neolithic labeling, I have already indicated that at Padina the excavator reported a stratigraphic connection between classic houses with trapezoidal plans and Early Neolithic pottery. It seems crucial to attend to some of the features reported by the excavator and to attempt an explanation of some of the ambiguities that also appear here in interpreting the stratigraphic sequence.

The phase represented by trapezoidal buildings and elaborate hearth constructions is represented at sectors I and III, which is reported by the excavator to have a clear association of pottery with hearths and house floors (*Jovanović 1968a; 1968b.T. III, Fig. 4; 1969a; 1969b.T. X, Figs. 1–2, XII, Fig. 3; 1971; 1974a; 1974b; 1987.Fig. 6–8*). Complete pots found *in situ* on the floor and inside the hearth construction on the plan and photographs of House 18 (Figs. 8, 9), together with numerous potsherds, are hard to explain as intrusions from an upper "unrecognised"

2 Behind the official scene, preparations for publishing the site of Padina are under way and the current author is also involved in this project. At the same time my insight into some of the finds from Lepenski Vir enable me to talk about it from a perspective that goes closer to very details of things. It is still dynamic issue in deciding how the publication of Padina would look like (even concerning the choice of authors) and in what way and especially who would take over the full publishing of Lepenski Vir. These dynamics and decisions are in the core of arguments of two main factual and inseparably interpretative presentations already mentioned above that have been offered in Serbian archaeology concerning this topic. The core of this long lasting debate are arguments of diffuison i.e. autochthonous developments. But the whole debate is far from straightforward and for the full discussion see Borić in preparation. There is a great interest among archaeologists in Serbia and in the wider context of European archaeological audience for presentation of the data. In this way, publishing of this paper is another intentional programmatic step in trying to overcome the confusing points of the debate to a certain extent. By doing this it is possible that many new rifts in relations of participants in the debate would appear. And it might be one of the reasons that this kind of remark still finds its place only in the footnote of this text.

Fig. 8. House 18, in situ pottery at Padina, sector III (*after Jovanović 1969b.T. X, Fig. 1–2*).

layer (contra *Telenbach 1983*). Also, in the course of a recent analysis of pottery from the Padina site it has become clear that the large number of complete Early Neolithic pots and potsherd fragments is clearly associated with architectural features, and represented in quantities equal to those as at any other Early Neolithic site in the Balkans[3].

To properly understand these associations it is necessary to refer to the stratigraphic relation of houses on this slope of Sector III, as well as to move from a misleading two-dimensional representation of house plans. Thus, from Padina's published sections (*Jovanović 1969.T.VIII, Figs. 1–2*), in contrast to those from Lepenski Vir (*cf. Srejović 1969a; 1972. Fig. 6*), it is possible to see clearly the level from which the houses were dug up to 1.5 m into the slope (*Jovanović 1969b.28*) of a loess sandy deposit which was formed on the bedrock that slopes towards the Danube. In photographs of a cross section of Houses 11/12 (superimposed building floors), 13 and 14 shown here (Fig. 10), as well as in the section drawing of House 12 (Fig. 11) (*ibid. T.VII, Fig. 2; T. VIII, Figs. 1–2*), one can easily follow the line of a cut made into the slope, and distinguish between the culture layer infill of cuts and the sterile soil on

Fig. 9. House 18, in situ pottery inside the hearth construction at Padina, sector III (courtesy of B. Jovanović).

3 During June 1998, pottery from Padina was analysed and drawn and has been currently prepared for publishing by Dr. Borislav Jovanović. My participation in this analysis enables me to get a close insight into the variety of quantities, shapes and ornamentation represented at the site.

Fig. 10. Middle row of Houses at Sector III, Padina with a section running across Houses 11/12, 13 and 14 showing the level from which the houses were dug into the slope **(after Jovanović 1969b. T. VII, Fig. 2).**

each side of the cut. Also, the house floors that were furnished at the bottoms of these cuts with a central hearth construction correspond to the location of the cut visible on the section. Also, the difference in height between the floors of houses, here placed in three different rows, was created as a consequence of digging into the slope at different heights (*ibid. 29*). It is obvious that this kind of digging of levelled areas into the slope could have been one of the main reasons for the formation of trapezoidal shaped house plans in the first place, as has been already indicated (*ibid. 27*). It is possible, however, that this is not the only reason, but there will be more suggestions concerning this later.

Bearing in mind all the similarities between Padina and Lepenski Vir, it is possible to suggest that, although at the moment without adequately published section drawings, and in a way misleadingly presented terraces with house floors of the settlement (Fig. 5) (which was done by stripping off the cuts' sides; the same happened to the lowermost row of houses at the beginning of the Padina excavations, fortunately with well-documented sections), the same kind of building procedure was practised here. This is of crucial importance, since the infillings of houses representing occupational activity debris from the house itself and (probably after the abandonment phase) neighboring contemporary houses appear differently excavated at the two sites and not differently deposited. Also, this might explain the excavator's remark that very few finds were unearthed between the houses at Lepenski Vir (*Srejović 1969a*). On the other hand, the architectural features of the

Fig. 11. House 12, section, Padina, sector III **(after Jovanović 1969b. T. VIII, Fig. 1–2).**

Lepenski Vir III layer have been reported as being very scant, and no plan of this layer, showing the reported pits, has been published to enable an evaluation of the position of Early Neolithic pits in connection with the limestone house floors. So it seems that there are a few indications that the layer termed Lepenski Vir III, with subphases a and b, was at least in part misleadingly created by the excavator from the occupational infillings of the houses in Lepenski Vir I and II. Rather than looking for another explanation and the possibility that the floors of the building were created at this site in a way totally different from at Padina, I would suggest that the same practice of horizontally levelling spaces for floors by digging into the slope, created pit-dwellings at Lepenski Vir, as at Padina, that were subsequently elaborated with subsequently famous limestone plastered floors and hearth constructions.

Suggesting this different understanding of major stratigraphic features at Lepenski Vir, it is necessary to understand in what way the two sites correspond in portable material culture and, more importantly, what the stratigraphic and architectural associations of different classes of artifacts at these two sites are.

The pottery found at Padina has already been described as being associated with the houses, and I have also described the ambiguities concerning Early Neolithic pottery associations at Lepenski Vir. One almost metaphorical piece of evidence appeared in association with the animal bone assemblage at Lepenski Vir[4]. In the context of the floor level of House 28 (*Lepenski Vir Ib–c phase according to Srejović 1969a*), from the floor of this house, a large piece of sediment lying on the floor contained the calcified upper jaw of a red deer whose antlers were also lying on the floor of the house. At the time of the excavation this piece was removed and packed in a bag, ending up in the boxes with sorted animal bones. Between the teeth and the chopped piece of floor was a very firmly embedded fragment of Early Neolithic (Starčevo culture) monochrome pottery. Also, among animal bones from other contextual units (some of them representing "closed" contexts of deposits between superimposed house floors) (Fig. 12), isolated fragments of Early Neolithic monochrome pottery also appear as a product of occasional mistakes in sorting finds from these units, reinforcing the argument about the presence of pottery in these units too.

This find, although presented here as an isolated instance, is significant for proving that the Early Neolithic pottery was directly associated with the floors, i.e. with the buildings of Lepenski Vir I–II and any activities there. For the time being, it is impossible to suggest to what extent and in what variety this pottery was associated with the respective buildings and phases, at least not before the full publication of the pottery assemblage. However, it is almost certain that it resembles the pattern seen at Padina. As to the Padina pottery assemblage (*Jovanović 1968b.T. IV/1–4; 1969b.33, T.XVI/Figs.1–4; 1974a.*

Fig. 12. House 18 – this house was superimposed by House 23 in its rear part, Lepenski Vir (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Beograd).

4 The preserved animal bones from this site will be analyzed by Dr. Vesna Dimitrijević. Reported context was examined during AMS ^{14}C samples' collection in the National Museum of Serbia, Belgrade, July 1999, that was permitted by the curator Mrs. Ljubinka Babović.

Fig.1; 1974b.35–39, T.I–IV; 1987.Figs.8–12; also see note 3), the Early Neolithic pottery assemblage examined appears to consist of a large number of possibly locally made pots, some of which are receptacles with large open mouths, standing on low pedestals (*Jovanović 1974b.T.III*), interpreted so far as preparing/serving dishes for large species of fish, such as catfish or anadromous fish. These forms were also found at Hajdučka Vodenica (*ibid. T.III/1–6*) and some other Early Neolithic sites along the Danube, such as Donja Branjevina (*Karmanski 1968.3, 22, Fig.1*) and also in large numbers at Lepenski Vir, interpreted here as primarily serving sacrificial purposes (*Srejović 1968b.Fig.1, 10; 1969a.Fig.70; 1972. Fig. 72, 86*). Some from the varieties of vessels found at Padina also have traces of intense firing. The quality of pottery varies from very crude with thick walls, to fine pottery of thin walls, frequently burnished with a red slip over the inner and/or outer surface. The temper of most of the potsherds is also full of organic-chaff inclusions, which is the main common characteristic of pottery technology in almost all Early Neolithic assemblages in the central Balkans.

Flint assemblages

But it is not only pottery that is an Early Neolithic feature associated with 'classic' houses. The striking distribution across the Balkans of one kind of flint raw material at this time is of some importance here. So-called 'Balkan' flint, also termed 'yellow-spotted' flint, is the most abundant raw material at all sites with the material culture of the Starčevo-Kőrös-Cris-Karanovo complex of the Early Neolithic in the central and northern Balkans (*cf. Voytek 1987*). The inevitable associations of artefacts with this type of raw material were reported at Padina, associated here with the dug-outs in Sectors I and III. Some major technological and typological characteristics of artefacts made from this kind of raw material include a pronounced trend towards the laminarisation of blades. Although a clear picture of the source of this raw material is still lacking, there are some indications that certain regions of north east Bulgaria (*ibid.*), such as Šumen, are the most probable locations for its origin (*Dinan 1996b.19*). The uniformity of distribution of this kind of raw material across the Balkans at these times is striking at almost all Early Neolithic sites with reported lithic assemblages, and it is possible to envisage several models of its acquisition and distribution.

Regarding the Padina site, one find provides an important clue to the use of this material, i.e. to the participation of the site's inhabitants in wider regional networks. It is a nodule with a large chalk cortex that could be refitted with a retouched piece of blade found together in the same context at Sector I of this site (Fig. 13). Such a large nodule and the possibility of refitting could serve as an example showing that a large number of nodules and cores of this raw material could have been acquired from the primary contexts, perhaps as a river pebble, (which is indicated by the presence of cortex on the surface of this nodule), and brought to the site from a long distance. One site for the production of certain artefacts, such as this retouched blade, was Sector I, next to architectural features such as hearths and houses. Everything indicates that this kind of raw material and the typologically specific artefacts made from it represent an inseparable contextual unity of material culture associations with Early Neolithic Starčevo pottery and features such as dug-in houses with trapezoidal plans.

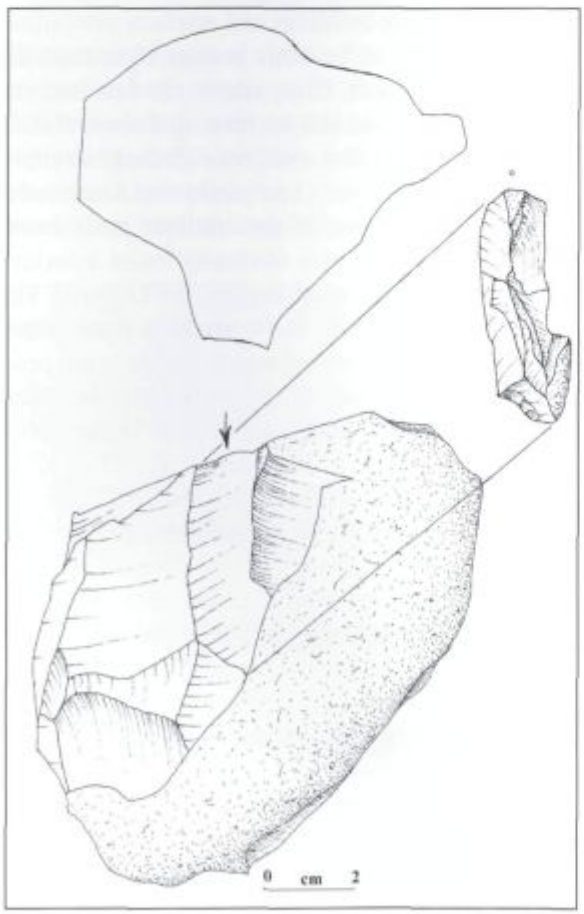
This fact is again important in regard to the lithic assemblage of Lepenski Vir. The published report on the lithic assemblage from this site indicates that the previously mentioned ambiguities of stratigraphic relations of classic buildings and artefacts attributed to the Mesolithic or Neolithic become clear even in the presented report. Thus, among the raw materials there is a considerable increase in the use of Balkan/yellow-spotted flint and grey radiolarite as compared to the Vlasac site (*Kozłowski and Kozłowski 1983.261*). Also, some of the artefacts made from these raw materials were obviously found associated with the architectural features of Lepenski Vir I–II (*ibid. appendix 1*). These artefacts show some of the indicated techno-typological trends in the production sequence, such as the pronounced laminarization of blades, again if compared to Vlasac (*ibid. 265*), and the occurrence of larger retouched artefacts, mainly on the Balkan flint (*ibid. 267, Fig. 1/14–15, Fig. 3/1–3, 7*). In the presented report on the chipped stone industry at this site, the authors studied only well-stratified artefacts, assigning them to major phases (Lepenski Vir I–III). However, in the published form it is impossible to follow their exact stratigraphic location. It is important that a large number of artefacts and debitage, mainly of local flint and with flake-based technological characteristics, are found here too which are also typologically comparable to the earlier sequence (termed Epi-Palaeolithic, Mesolithic) in the Gorges. Presently, it is possible to assume that these finds are mostly connected with the deposits mainly underneath the house floors, or in connection with stone construc-

tions that possibly represent older occupational zones at this site comparable to the lowermost levels of occupation at Sector II of Padina (see *below*). An absence of information on stratigraphic associations of this assemblage hampers clear contextual insights. The reported increase of artifacts made of Balkan flint that come not only from the deposits of Lepenski Vir III layer, but also from Lepenski Vir layers I and II, in view of the above proposed nature of a certain number of these deposits, could favour this explanation. It is worth mentioning that two hoards (Hoards 3 and 4) of blanks and cores made from the Balkan flint at this site were placed in Early Neolithic pots (*Srejović 1969.T. 95; 1972.Fig. 82–83*).

Ground polished axes

Yet another class of artifacts is of interest here: ground polished stone axes and other ground stone artifacts. A number of axes at Padina were found on the floors and inside the hearth constructions, as well as underneath house floors (Padina, field documentation). Some of the designs and raw materials are also found in abundance at Early Neolithic sites in the central Balkans. A large number of finds of this kind are also found in various deposits of Lepenski Vir (*Srejović 1972.Fig.76–77*); however, with scant publishing of the contextual position of stone axes from this site, it is hard to determine the exact context or suggest any particular conclusion.

An inevitable question is how it was possible that this kind of misreading of stratigraphic relations and material culture associations in the case of Lepenski Vir happened. There are probably several explanations; I will try to summarise the main points by contextualizing the excavations at Lepenski Vir (*see Borić in preparation*). The first point is that these rescue excavations were done in a great hurry, immediately before the whole area along the Danube was submerged up to 30 m, and that the sequence of settlement evidence turned out to be surprisingly complex. Secondly, the discovery of sculpted boulders, some with astonishing carved representations of human-fish faces and rich ornamental diversity, together with the discovery of specially built house floors and hearth constructions that had never been reported in European prehistory before, all caused a sensation on a scale never experienced until that time. This inevitably leads to the third point, that of the personality of the excavator himself, and the professional dynamics that appeared in Serbian archaeology between some of the archaeologists involved and between the main archaeological insti-



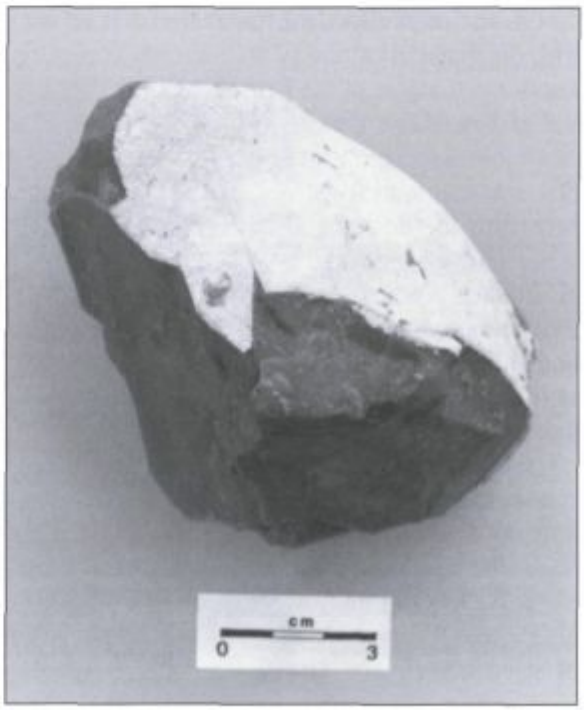


Fig. 13. Nodule refitted with a retouched blade made of Balkan/yellow-spotted flint found at Sector I, Padina (drawing and photo: D. Borić).

tutions. All these factors played certain roles in Lepenski Vir's presentation. However, it is necessary to underline that one of the greatest accomplishments of Srejović was his recognition that the sequence at this site has deep roots in the past which are connected to certain features, as will be shown below. On the other hand, to the excavator of Padina, Jovanović, we owe a debt for the possibility of a detailed understanding of the complex stratigraphic history of the site he excavated, and for the possibility of viewing the Lepenski Vir sequence in retrospect by a comparison of the two sites.

To summarise the stories of the two sites, it is important to underline that amounts of pottery and other described Early Neolithic paraphernalia found at the site of Padina indicate that it might be misleading to understand them as prestige or imported artifacts, for the simple reason that the whole variety of forms are present in amounts similar to any other site of the Early Neolithic in the central Balkans. However, this is not the only reason. In the exposition of the stratigraphic sequences and artifact associations I have tried to argue that it is necessary to fully contextualise all finds in order to make an interpretation (*cf. Hodder 1991; 1999*). Apart from the insights to be achieved on the scale of *longue durèe,* with unquestionable metanarrative importance, it is important to emphasize that a particular awareness of contextual associations should lead to a "thick description" (*Geertz 1973 [1993].6*) of time-specific deposits, with the idea of the singularity and specificity of events.

The kind of immediacies reported here demand an urgent reexamination of probably all the houses/shrines of Lepenski Vir, and of their role, dating, wider context and significance in relation to issues raised in numerous debates. It is also time to reevaluate thinking on the claims that a process of increasing sedentism was initiated by so-called "increasingly complex hunter-gatherer" groups, and that the houses of Lepenski Vir clearly serve as a proof of this, having in mind their elaboration and durable architectural elements. It seems that we should expect nothing to be that straightforward. Primacy of proper phasing has turned out to be of great importance in making a coherent story out of the excavated record. The outline of the sequence that has been proposed could partially indicate a different and new understanding of the upper sequence in the Gorges. But I need to go deeper, beneath the floors of the houses, all the way to the bedrock, to understand the time when these places were created.

THE BEGINNINGS OF DEATH

I have written above of doubts over the models constructed so far to interpret and understand the sequence of the Danube Gorges region. I tried to show that this is inseparable from the necessity of clearing up some of the confusing details intertwined with the way our data have been collected, presented, etc. Also, I put forward the assumption that we must re-read the archaeological reports from the sites discussed. These details appear crucial for understanding the question of the origins of the Neolithic in the central Balkans and Southeast Europe. This means that the sequence and architectural associations suggested above should set the stage for the proper connection of well-known architectural features from Lepenski Vir and portable material culture, contextualising its identity through wider regional connections. However, Lepenski Vir in isolation gives neither a full insight into the complexity of the record in the Gorges, nor into the well-known features of trapezoidal plan dug-out houses, and the boulders placed in connection to the central location of hearths make the only significant features here. Thus far in my discussion I have not gone beneath the house floors much, or entered the space outside the houses at these sites. Still obsessed with the durable character of floors and with the scene set by the placement of features and material forms over them. Now I need to draw closer to the individuals who set this scene and also to their forbears, going deep into time.

Who were these people in the Danube Gorges? Where were their identities anchored? What was their ideological framework, speaking of ideology as of the everyday action of individuals and the creation and realisation of their social reality, as of a system with its own logic and rigor of representation through myths, images etc., inseparable from existence, and a historical role (*Duby 1974 cited by Ricoeur 1984.110*); as a worldview of people involved in practical *habitual* activities (*Bourdieu 1977*) in their own time/space context? Questions about the identity of the men, women and children who dwelt in the Gorges have already been posed primarily to determine if they were immigrants, an outcome of the process of advance, or if they were autochthonous elements surviving in the unapproachable area of the Gorges. An anthropological argument has often been used which frequently refers to so-called 'Cromagnoid-robust' elements vs. 'gracile' Mediterranean types (*cf. Jovanović 1975; Srejović 1969b.17; Živanović 1975; 1976; 1979;*

etc.). An alternative perspective that physical anthropology may offer in this context is connected to the examination of signs of occupational stress left on human bones by people's participation in various everyday activities (*e.g., Bridges 1989*). Thus it is practical, everyday activities that particularly shape the morphology of a human body and have a great impact on what the features of the body, such as bones and teeth are like, assigning to them, crudely speaking, robust or gracile characteristics (*see also Zoffmann 1980.132–133*). But I will not enter into that debate here. First, I need to phase the individual bodies buried at the sites in the Danube Gorges and discuss the possible meanings of their placement. It is also necessary to know how recognizable they were to later inhabitants of these sites.

Although the phasing of the sites has been established for some time (*e.g., Srejović 1969a; 1972; Jovanović 1987*) and has been re-defined recently (*Radovanović 1992; 1996a*), it appears that is necessary to review the stratigraphy and chronological attributions of certain contexts. It seems that insufficient attention has been focused on clearly establishing the older features and zones in the settlements of Padina, Lepenski Vir, or Hajdučka Vodenica (another site further downstream in one of the most dramatic and mysterious parts of the Danube Gorges, even today), representing sites where contrasting interpretations appeared in connection with the presence of Early Neolithic material culture. Given the stratigraphic relation of the classic buildings to older zones in the settlements, lack of careful recognition of older features in correct relation to later contexts could have been the main point of confusion in the attribution of artefacts to particular units. It has often been overlooked that a very considerable time depth should be envisaged in the remains of these settlements. With this in mind, it is important to focus primarily on features that were, in the course of excavations at Padina (Fig. 14) and Hajdučka Vodenica (Fig. 15) dubbed the "stone construction of the necropolis" (*Jovanović 1969b.31–32, T. XIII, Fig. 3, T. XIV, Fig. 1; 1969c.T. XXIX/3–4; 1972.T. I/1, II/1–3; 1974.Fig. 1; 1984*) (these sites were dug by the same excavator). At both sites these features were neatly made in a dry-wall technique (and excavated as) built from stones in a manner that gives an impression of organised architectural intent. There were four levels of stones laid in this way at both sites; every layer of stones was covered with a layer of soil above which followed another level of stones that remarkably followed the exact outline of the first to be laid down (*B. Jovanović, personal communication*). Graves are associated with these stone constructions.

At Hajdučka Vodenica stone constructions are situated beside an area where there was a grave with a number of others in an extended position underneath, and in association with specific rectangular hearths (*Jovanović 1984.307 sq.*). Also in this area were hearths made of circles of stone blocks covered with several levels of stone constructions and placed on different levels. The excavator also notes the remains of burning, and smaller circles of piled stones in this area (Fig. 15). Only in upper parts (horizons I and II) of the constructions, were Early Neolithic

Fig. 14. 'Stone construction of the necropolis', sector III, Padina (after Jovanović 1974.T. V, Fig. 1).

Fig. 15. 'Stone construction of the necropolis', Hajdučka Vodenica (courtesy of B. Jovanović).

(Starčevo culture) pottery fragments detected (*ibid. 309–310*). This might suggest the use of these features in later periods. It is possible to envisage long-term continuity of use of these places, where later inhabitants in their practices – with both profane and ritual associations – find the use of tradition, through its constant changing elaboration, a useful and fruitful exercise in coping with the needs of a new world.

But could we properly envisage the scale of change? The scale on which archaeologists operate varies from capturing single events to reconstructing continuities, etc. However, instances described speak of places where a constant and enduring practice of (re)building stone constructions captures a very long time span, where even the introduction of new material objects, such as pottery, in great amounts, probably only introduces new possibilities for old/new metaphorical and symbolic reference points and their further elaboration.

Some dated graves from Padina give results that put the absolute age of the human remains associated with the stone construction at the end of the 10th millennium cal BC (*Burleigh and Živanović 1980. table 1*). I shall turn later to this point to capture the absolute dates in the context of the mortuary space and individual bodies.

The few chipped stone artifacts found associated with these constructions, especially since local raw materials were used for their manufacture, could also point to an early date for these constructions (*Radovanović 1981.26*). At the same time the first occupation at sector II of Padina clearly belongs to what might be chronologically termed the Mesolithic, in the stratigraphy of this cove, at Padina represented by a black earth layer that covers the bedrock of this sector at Padina, and with no pottery. The chipped stone assemblage from this layer (*Radovanović 1981*) and also bone tools (*Borić in preparation*) (Fig. 16)[5] are akin to the early developments in this region unambiguously seen in the chipped stone and bone industries and stratigraphies of Vlasac (*Kozłowski and Kozłowski 1982*), or in the early levels of Cuina Turcului (*Nalbant 1970; Paunescu 1970; 1978; Dinan 1996b*), Icoana (*Boroneant 1970; 1973*), Schela Cladovei (*Boroneant 1970; 1973; Boronenat et al. 1999*), Ostrovul Corbului (*Mogosanu 1978; Paunescu 1990; 1996*), Baile Herculane (as an important inland cave site) (*Nicolâescu-Plopsor et al. 1957; Dinan 1996a*) and other sites on the Rumanian left bank of the Danube. Also, some bone tools bear traces of a specific incised net design or zigzag continuous lines resembling examples from the Vlasac site (*Srejović and Letica 1979*) and some other sites in the Gorges.

At some of these sites burials are mostly associated with two types of feature. The first are rectangular hearths in the open air made of stone slabs, where burials cluster around a hearth or a hearth was placed over the graves (Fig. 17) (for Vlasac: *Srejović and Letica 1978.passim;* for Hajdučka Vodenica: *Jovanović 1966.Fig.I/2; 1972. T. II/4;* for Schela Cladovei: *Boronenat 1970.Fig.3/1; Boroneant et al. 1999;* for Ostrovul Corbului: *Paunescu 1990; 1996; see also Radovanović 1996a*). The second kind of feature connected to burials are stone constructions found in large numbers and well recognised at Vlasac (*Srejović and Letica 1987*).

That the stone construction of the necropolis is found on Padina at Sector III, where most of the later 'classic' phase buildings also appear, deserves particular attention. A closer examination of the burials that are connected with the stone construction, reveals that the skeletons of the two elderly

5 Most of the tools from Padina were analysed and published by I. Radovanović (*1981*). The artefacts presented here (Fig. 16) were additionally uncovered in the course of (re)analysis of the animal bone assemblage from the site of Padina, done by paleontologist Dr. Vesna Dimitrijević and myself. This contextual unit with lithics, animal bones and bone tools could be presented as a characteristic example of the activity spaces in the lowermost levels at Sector II of the site of Padina generally attributed to the Early Mesolithic sequence for the wider region according to the radiocarbon dates and typological attributes of the studied lithic assemblage (see quotations in the text).

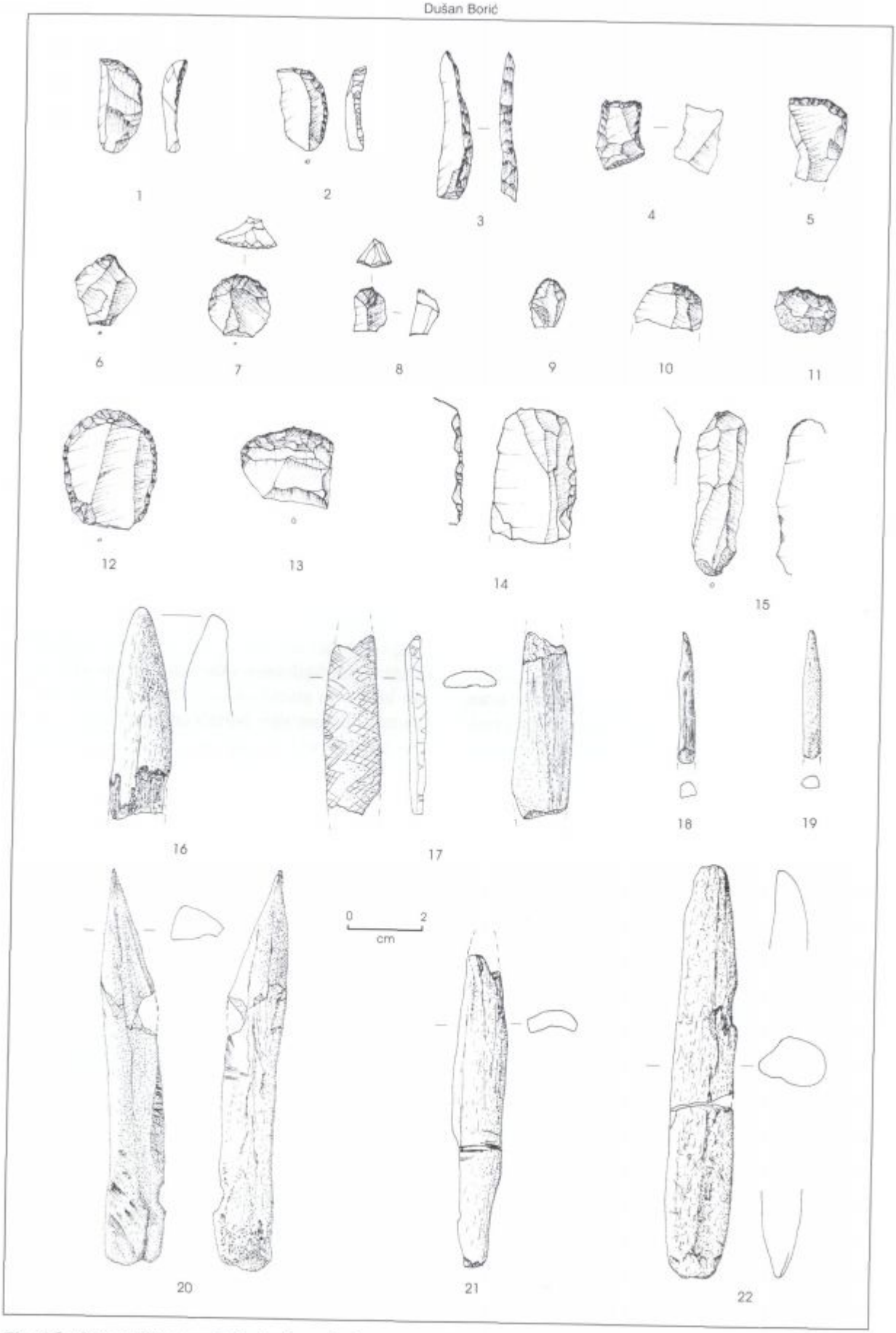


Fig. 16. Flint and bone artefacts from the lowermost levels of Sector II, Padina (drawn by A. Spasojević and D. Borić).

males were placed in a sitting 'a la turque' position, leaning against the bedrock facing the Danube (Fig. 18). Some of the bodies were in this position, with crossed legs encased in a conical stone structure up to the skull (*Jovanović 1971.31–32, T. XIII/1, XIV/1; 1972.53, T. I/1*). Also, more skeletons were uncovered in this sector mainly in the area of the upper row of houses, in the division proposed by the excavator as the latest level of occupation. However, ^{14}C analyses gave to a certain extent results contradicting the proposed division (*Clason 1981; Groningen Database*). One of the reasons for this might be that the stone construction already described and well recognised is not the only older feature here. There are two clearly visible rows of stone in front of Houses 15 and 18 (see Fig. 6). These were also connected to the placement of graves around them, next to the houses, and beneath them. The stratigraphic associations of these burials were not established during the excavation with any certainty. It could be that these graves (as already shown to some extent by ambiguities in the ^{14}C) are also older and existed before the houses were built, since "the floors of these houses (...) do not show any noticeable damage or repairs corresponding to the position of the burial pit" (*Jovanović 1972.53; also Jovanović 1969b.31*). More importantly, they also could be connected to the rows of stone in front of these two houses at Padina that probably existed here before the houses were built. If this is so, the building of these houses would somehow be an extension of the stone constructions. Also, the internal chronology of these rows of houses does not require retrieval of building activity from the river up the slope, as suggested by the excavator (*Jovanović 1969b.30; 1987.2–4*), but could also have a completely opposite sequence. The new ^{14}C dates will clearly help to sort out some of these dilemmas.

Here also, we arrive again at the inevitable question of how to deal with the presumably similar development at Lepenski Vir itself. By analogy to the proposed development at Padina, I would like to suggest that the very close relation of some of the houses and uncovered graves below or beside some of them might be misleading and falsely apparent as represented in some of the published photographs (*Srejović 1969; 1972; Radovanović 1996a.178 sq.*). The term 'condensed stratigraphy', used in geology to describe contexts where layers of different ages lie close to one another, might appear appropriate here. This means that a continuity of use of a certain location over a long period and recognition of older features by later inhabitants could create a

Fig. 17. Burials no. 51, 52 and the hearths 19, 19a at Vlasac (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Belgrade).

situation where there was no massive debris accumulation. I want to suggest that a certain number of graves beneath the floors of houses at Lepenski Vir belong to the early phases of creation of features at this place, as well as at some other locales along the Danube, and just may be as a phenomenon particularly confined to the right bank of the Danube. Large amounts of stones often regularly forming piles, and found in many instances underneath or beside the famous houses next to the graves and hearths at Lepenski Vir (Fig. 19) fit the picture also seen at Hajdučka Vodenica, Vlasac, or Padina. One of the newly acquired AMS dates on skeleton 72 from the site of Vlasac, in two repeated trials, gave a consistent range of 10 482–9043 with 2σ cal BC (*Bonsall et al. 1996; 1997.66, table 6*). Despite possible problems with the absorption of 'old carbon' in human bones thus obscuring the dating and giving an indication of older dates (*Bonsall et al. 1997.84*), it seems that this finding strongly confirms some of the mentioned points.

And to me it appears that these places created time here. Following up on the ontological significance of

Fig. 18. Graves 15 and 16, leaning against the bedrock, facing/watching the Danube, Padina, sector III (after Jovanović 1969b.T.XIII, Fig. 1).

human existence, in relation to the nature of time that through St. Augustine's *aporias* ('doubts of what to do') comes down as a three-fold present – the past present, the present and the future present – and, also building on Paul Ricoeur's exposition of the dialectic connection of time and narrative through a hiearchised mimesis of creation (*Ricoeur 1984. passim*), I propose that in the Danube Gorges our sites materialised the memory of the past through constructed stone piles and the placing of human remains, divorcing the continuum of eternity even further from the present, widening the gap of an already existing *distentio anima* in St. Augustine's words. Significantly, this *distentio*, i.e. extension of time as an extension of mind, is mirrored in language (*see also Thelin 1990*) thus confirming the being nature of time (*Ricoeur 1984.9*), but it is to be emphasised that it equally significantly appears through the materiality created by human action, materiality that is real, that endures and resists. A significant ontological dialectics is created between *eternity* and *time*, between *intentio* and *distentio*.

Support for the significance of this concept is to be found in the recurring ontological theme seen in numerous myths of traditional societies. The theme of the death of humans stands up as marking the beginnings of story telling in the ethnographic record. As if narration became possible along with a comprehension of the concept of death, with facing the *Sein zum Tod* in Heidegger's words (*Heidegger 1972.passim*). The death of humans created landscape for the Australian Kuri. In connection to the mythological base of many peoples, e.g. the Cree: "...in the Distant Time the landscape acquired its present form. Humans died and were transformed into the animals and plants encountered in the environment and features of the earth, such as hills or mountains." (*Tilley 1994.56*). The beginning of death is thus an awareness of death, and subsequently this awareness creates a myth of temporality, creates time in connection to the landscape, and establishes the time before, making possible a grasping expectation of what is to come. It seems that burials serve this purpose in the first place and are unlikely to be territorial markers with the idea of formal disposal areas. The recurrent motif is the death of humans, which was crucial for establishing temporal relations. Therefore, the dead first became sedentary (*Chapman 1992.81*). The bodies of those two elderly males at Padina that were leant against the bed-

Fig. 19. House 26 and burial no. 63, Lepenski Vir (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Belgrade).

Fig. 20. Burial no. 17, Vlasac (photo: Centre for Archaeological Research, Belgrade).

rock facing/watching the Danube are directly engaged with the bedrock, the forest, the Danube, and with the piled stones. The very materiality of their endurance, still strongly underlined by the piled stones, created and emphasised space for the existence of human time which, in St. Augustine's words, enabled expectation, attention and memory as the actions that the mind performs (*Ricoeur 1984.19*).

But nothing is simple again. The burial sequence in the Danube Gorges is rich and varied (*see Radovanović 1996a.164–224*). Radovanović (*1997*) gave a particular meaning to a certain number of burials placed in the extended position, with their heads pointing downstream, parallel to the course of the Danube. In her opinion, this could have symbolised the notion of souls going down the river. The true meaning of this practice is grasped in connection with the existence of the large anadromous beluga (*Huso huso*) in the Danube that swam upstream every spring to spawn. In the eyes of people coming to the Danube's shores in later phases of the use of these sites it might have looked as if ancestors were returning every year (*ibid.*). But some of the places where the major sites are located could have the best 'view' as well, especially of the huge whirlpools. At these places the Danube runs very fast and with strong currents and rapids (*Marković-Marjanović 1978.11, 16*). Also, the route thus created might have been connected with various rites of passage representing ceremonial stages through which an individual has to pass (*cf. Tilley 1999.154–155; also Turner 1967; 1969; 1974*). And this practice could at the same time mark the stages of the passage of time in connection with the practical seasonal activities of fishing and hunting (*cf. Bourdieu 1990*), thus blurring the distinction between the sacred and profane. In this context it is possible to see the sculpted boulders with fish/human-like figural representations as these very ancestors materialised in stone (*Radovanović 1997*). As to how impressive the whole sight could have been: this species of fish could have been up to 5 m long, as estimated from the remains of the largest specimen from Padina (*Brinkhuizen 1986.23, 33, Fig. 8*). So, could this be the reason that the two men at Padina, one at Vlasac (*Srejović and Letica 1978*) (Fig. 20) and one at Lepenski Vir (*Srejović 1969; 1972.Fig. 52*) sit with the crossed legs and watch the Danube, to enjoy the view and follow a rite of passage?

And it is possible that a particular metaphorical relation was established here that, in the course of the long history of these places, changed its paraphernalia and elaboration – its theatrical performance. That the dead is buried with the head pointing downstream might actually represent a materialised practice of allowing some of the dead to flow down the Danube. Equally, it could be connected to diachronic change and/or with the selection of certain individuals, all strongly depending on circumstances in which the death took place. However, it is important that only the site of Lepenski Vir was assigned special importance here, with 'permission' to exhibit the ancestors in sandstone boulders and, again in connection with the burials, some of them are already beneath the floors and have stone blocks piled around them. However, other features of the landscape might have given it this special importance as well.

The famous massive and trapezoidal bare porphyry mountain in front of Lepenski Vir (Fig. 21) is an impressive landmark, even in a photograph. But only a phenomenological experience of this place and its wider landscape could bring out other meanings. This bare mountain, especially in heavy rains, at-

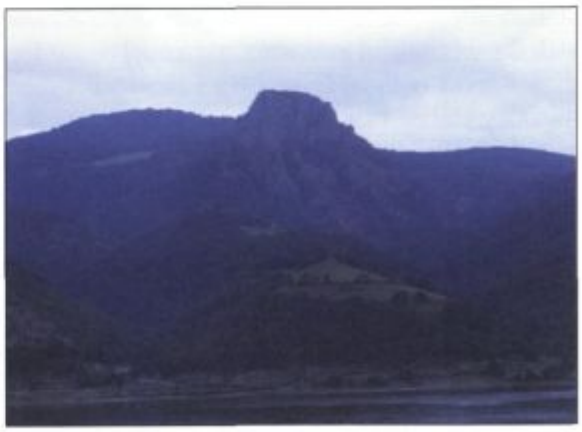


Fig. 21. View of Mt. Treskavac from the terrace above Lepenski Vir (photo: D. Borić).

Fig. 22. Close-up of a piece of floor from House 34, Lepenski Vir (photo: D. Borić).

tracts lightning strikes (experienced during June 1998), bringing enchanting, powerful and mysterious feelings. At the same time, in the upper Gorges of the Danube, where Lepenski Vir, Vlasac and Padina are situated, this landmark might have appeared as almost ever-present, there forever; at least since the time when these places were created. And there is no contradiction in the fact that the houses at Vlasac, Lepenski Vir and Padina were built to trapezoidal plans for the practical reasons of situating these architectural units on the sides of slopes, and the fact that these houses imitated a mental image of the solid and enduring landscape. And as it is for Ye'cuana of Guiana that mountains represent "the only enduring houses...the dwellings of invisible spirit beings" (*Riviére 1995.201*) it seems that at Lepenski Vir there was an arising need to harden the floor, to announce durability. The floors at Lepenski Vir are literally solid proof of this (Fig. 22). Constructed on a base of limestone particles forming a breccia-like feature (*Ney 1971*), it seems that in the later phase of development in the Gorges they metaphorically replaced features of stone constructions with the meaning of indicating referential points for the longevity of time. They also mediate "...between the body and cosmos, between the present and the past; and provide a ritual switch point between microcosm and macrocosm on which continued access to ancestral potency depends" (*Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995. 42*). It seems that besides those ancestors that annually swam upstream, there was a special realm of spiritual beings of even greater ancestry, although possibly more anonymous than those sitting or lying in connection to the Danube. These were the spirits of mountains that marked the beginnings of time and played a continuous role in the lives of people here.

BEYOND THE CLIFFS

Is it possible now to feel the least comfortable with the above given interpretation of our data in discussing the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition of southeast Europe? The questions in mind, such as, what are, in historical terms the contributions of the local population to the creation of varied Neolithic paraphernalia in the material culture, might be answered here with a greater ease in comparison to the other regions. In the Danube Gorges the appreciation of deep time and its recognition strike us everywhere. But it does not confine these people to the past only, rejecting them as some kind of lost cause, defeated in a battle with new technology. And the striking appearance of all the features that the new world brings to the Danube Gorges only shows once again that this area was perhaps never isolated from the rest of the world (Fig. 23). There is no reluctance to take up novelties, as suggested by some authors, only a readiness to participate in yet another New World.

But then, what was actually going on beyond the cliffs of the Gorges? The Early Neolithic of the central Balkans is not without sites where people buried

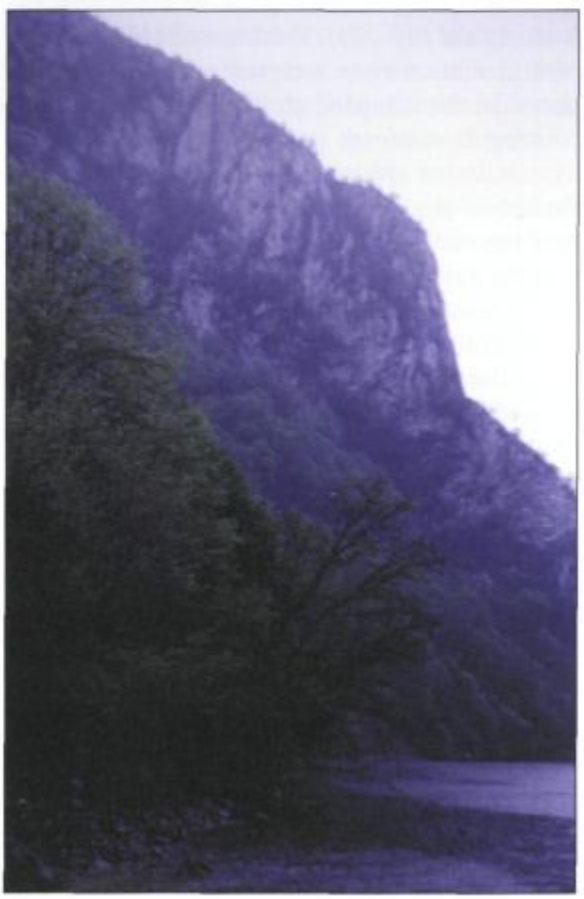


Fig. 23. View of cliffs above Hajdučka Vodenica (photo: D. Borić).

their dead. These are less aggregated, less visible, but present. A map showing only Early Neolithic sites with traces of burials adds to this point (Fig. 24). All these sites share what has been argued for as very uniform traits of purely Neolithic populations who, in the opinion of some, spread in an advancing wave over Southeast Europe. Although clay models of houses appear at some of the sites (*e.g., Garašanin et al. 1971.70, Fig. 81–82, 43, Fig. 116*), it seems that this development does not immediately associate them with increasing sedentism. But in order to get to know these people better, again going

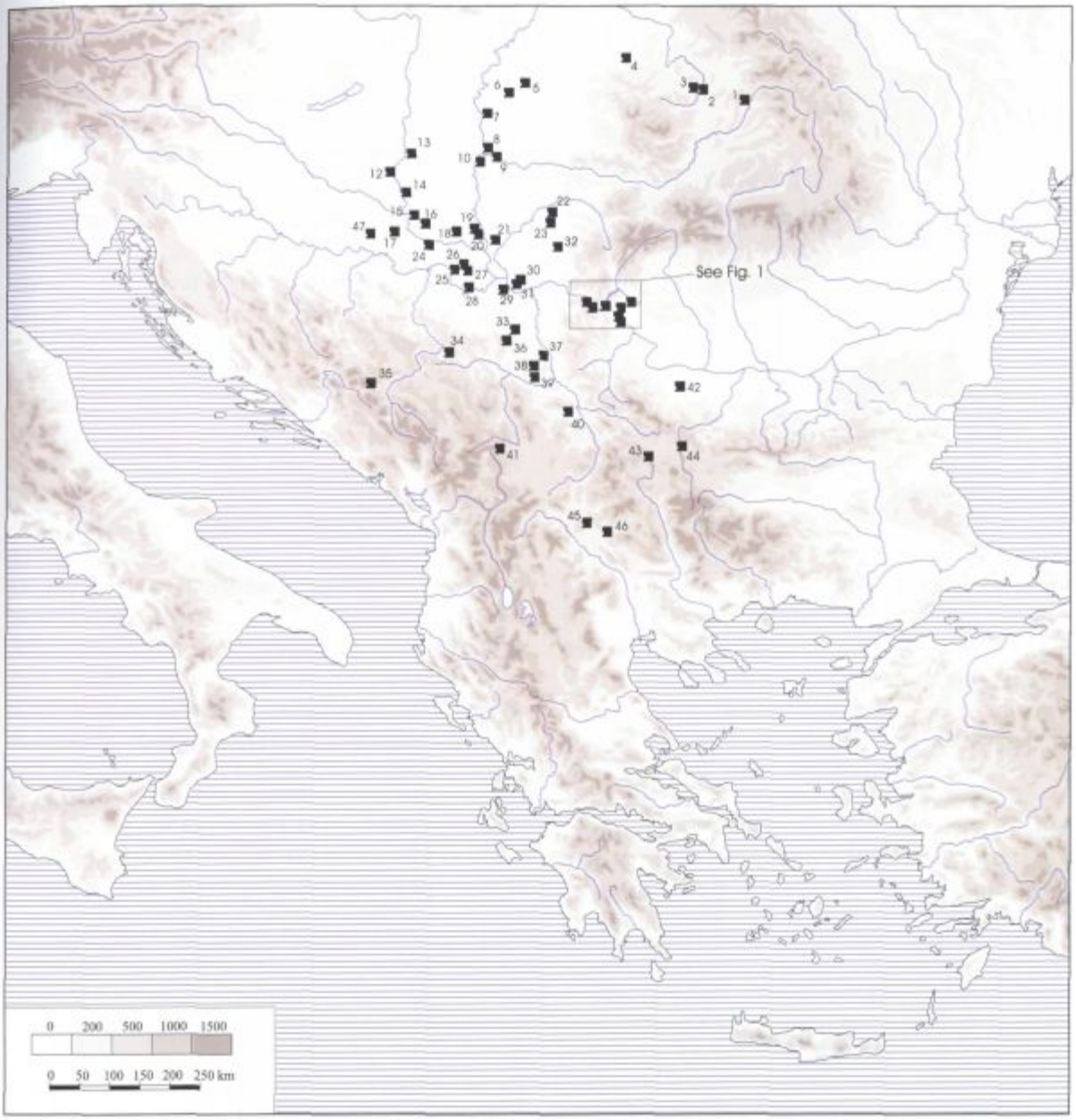


Fig. 24. Early Neolithic sites with traces of burials across the central and northern Balkans (drawn by V. Novaković). Sites: 1. Cipau, 2. Cluj-Str. 30. Decembrie, 3. Gura Baciului, 4. Solca, 5. Endród, 6. Szarvas–Szappanos, 7. Szentes–Jaksorpart, 8 (1–3). Hödmezövásarhely-Gorza, Hödmezövásarhely-Kotacpart-Vatatanya and Hödmezövásarhely-Bodzáspart, 9. Maroslele Pana, 10. Deszk, 11. Balatonendröd, 12. Lanycsók, 13. Vaskt, 14. Bački Monoštor-Opoljenik, 15. Donja Branjevina-Deronje, 16. Bač-Topole, 17. Vinkovci-Tržnica and Nama, 18. Stari Žabalj, 19. Žabalj-Put, 20. Temerin-Klisa, 21. Perlez-Batka, 22. Jaša Tomić, 23. Alibunar-Banatska Dubica, 24. Vizić-Golokut, 25. Šašinci–Kudoš, 26. Ruma-Zlatara, 27. Pečinci-Bara Alicija, 28. Obrež-Baštine, 29. Vinča-Belo Brdo, 30. Pančevo-Nadela 1, 31. Starčevo-Grad, 32. Vršac-Kozluk, 33. Divostin, 34. Višesava-Kremenilo, 35. Obre (I)–Raskršće, 36. Grivac, 37. Jagodina-Bukovačka česma, 38. Rekovac–Tecici, 39. Blagotin-Poljna, 40. Merošina-Kamenjar, 41. Rudnik (Kosmetski), 42. Gradešnica-Malo pole, 43. Vaksevo, 44. Sofia-kv. Slatina, 45. Anzabegovo-Barutnica, 46. Vršnik-Tarinci, 47. Slavonski Brod – Galovo.

Fig. 25. The region of Vojvodina before melioration work (from the larger map of the Carpathian Basin: Museum of Vojvodina).

to the real contexts seems the best point of departure. I shall here try to shed some light on a few contexts through a close-up view of several Early Neolithic burials in the area.

The context of a skeleton found at the site of Golokut in the region of Vojvodina of present-day Serbia does not differ from many others found across the region. It is a crouched burial, with no grave offerings, as shown in the published photo (Figs. 26a, b) (*Petrović 1986–1987.Figs. 7–8*). However, reading the report and close first-hand insight on this find reveals a somewhat different story. There is a mention in the published report of an aurochs' head with horncores being associated with the burial (*ibid. 19, Fig. 9*). However, only later examination of this find provided a clue to the particularities of this association. The lapse of time between the uncovering of the head and the skeleton created the confusion. However, still the calcified palm at the forehead of the aurochs' skull and the calcified knee in the horncore gave two reference points on the skeleton from which to reconstruct the original positions of the skull and skeleton (Fig. 27). So, the picture that emerged was of an auroch skull placed at top of the body, looking down. This position of looking down of red deer and auroch's skulls in association with the dead appears strikingly similar to some cases of burial at Lepenski Vir (*cf. Srejović 1969; 1972.Fig. 61; Srejović and Babović 1983*). Was there the same *Weltanschauung* among contemporaneous people in the Gorges and those across the Balkans? Perhaps.

Similarly, various animal bones were placed in the graves at Zlatara (*Leković 1985*). At Perlez, between two bodies with grave goods, a large pit was uncovered with an enormous number of animal bones, including dogs, wild horses etc. (National Museum, Zrenjanin, unpublished field documentation). This may indicate feasting or the intentional deposition of these animals in the grave. Yet another example, the placement of the two individuals at Topole-Bač (*Trajković 1978; 1988*), was done deliberately to create a binary meaning in the symmetrical arrangement of the two corpses (Fig. 28). Many other burials show this striking diversity. Yet they also have some similarities and, again, a striking uniformity of ceramic styles and used Balkan flint as raw material.

Traces of Early Neolithic occupation have been found at very different locations, ranging from marshes that have been occasionally flooded in the lowlands of the Carpathian basin (Fig. 25) to cave occupations in the central Balkan region. And yet we have not had enough reliable evidence of continuities with the previous period. I believe that this is partly an outcome of specific survey methodologies to date and many other factors connected to the investigation of the whole region. However, that the evi-

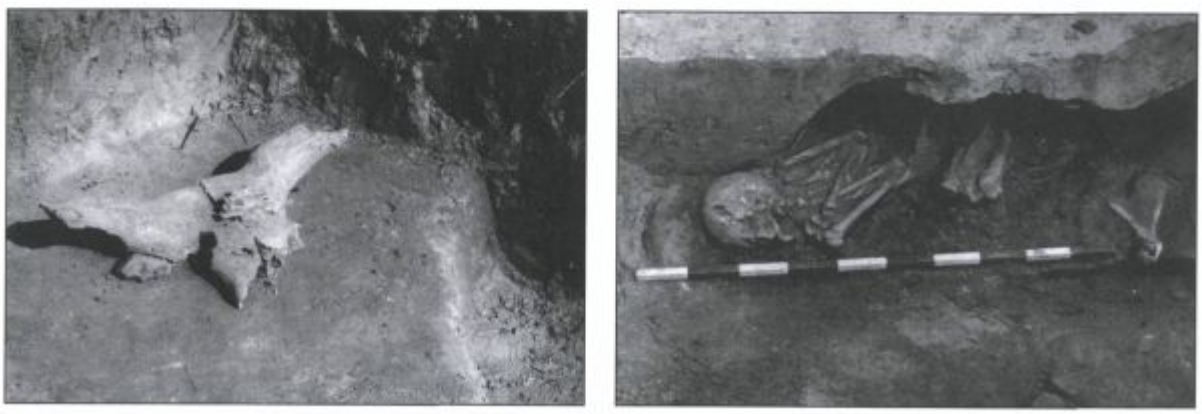


Fig. 26a, b. Grave in pit-dwelling 7, Golokut (photo: courtesy of J. Petrović).

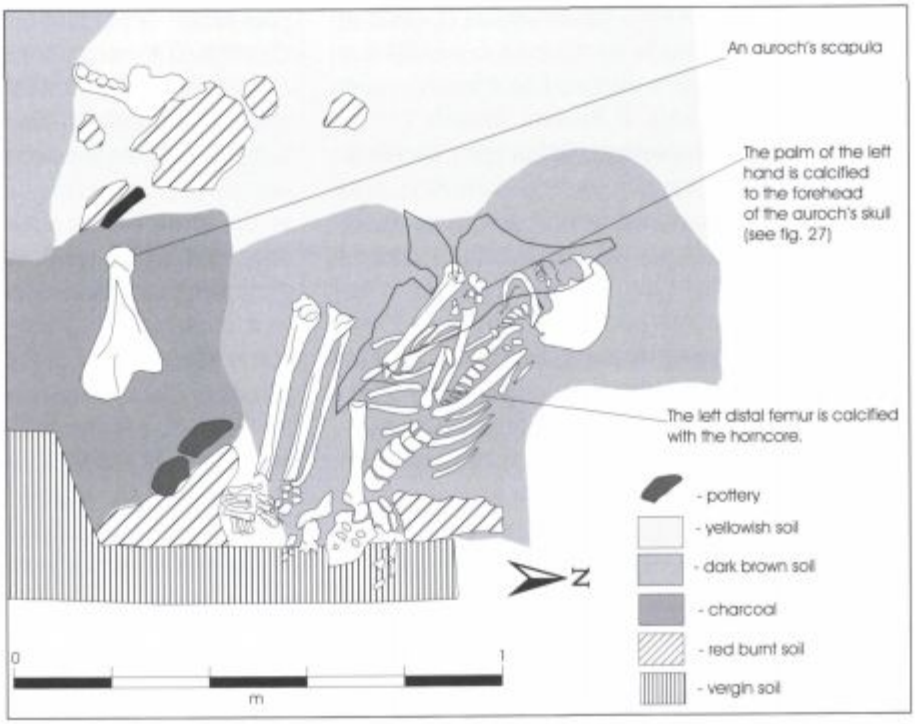


Fig. 27. Drawing of the grave in pit-dwelling 7 with the original position of the auroch skull, Golokut (*modified after Petrović 1986–1987. plan 2*).

dence of a much deeper past is also present in the material record of what in the Balkans is known as Early Neolithic communities, i.e. the Starčevo-Körös-Cris-Karanovo culture complex, has not been very clear. In my opinion even some of the points mentioned concerning their mortuary practices indicate long histories and possibly local roots to these 'new' Neolithic communities. The variety of rituals practiced indicate localised beliefs rather than uniformity. One of the above-mentioned double burials at Topole-Bač (Fig. 28) in Vojvodina, however, has the first strong indications that it is possible to connect the first ceramic users at this site with their local forebears. In the course of a recent AMS ^{14}C dating project[6] one of these two skeletons gave a result that on 2σ gave a range of 7300–6800 cal BC. This is the first such date from this region and it certainly shows that strategic sampling could make of absolute dating a powerful interpretative tool. Even more importantly, the age of this skeleton indicates the same practice of relation to ancestral traces seen at Lepenski Vir, Padina or Vlasac. This is not to claim that all the burials from the Early Neolithic sites in the Balkans indicate the existence of older features in the mortuary domain, but it is certainly to be expected that some contexts and artefacts from some of these sites conceal traces of much older occupation. The point that deserves particular attention, however, is that the recognition of the past is astonishing here, as, for example, was particularly demonstrated in the dating of Vlasac burial no. 72, mentioned above.

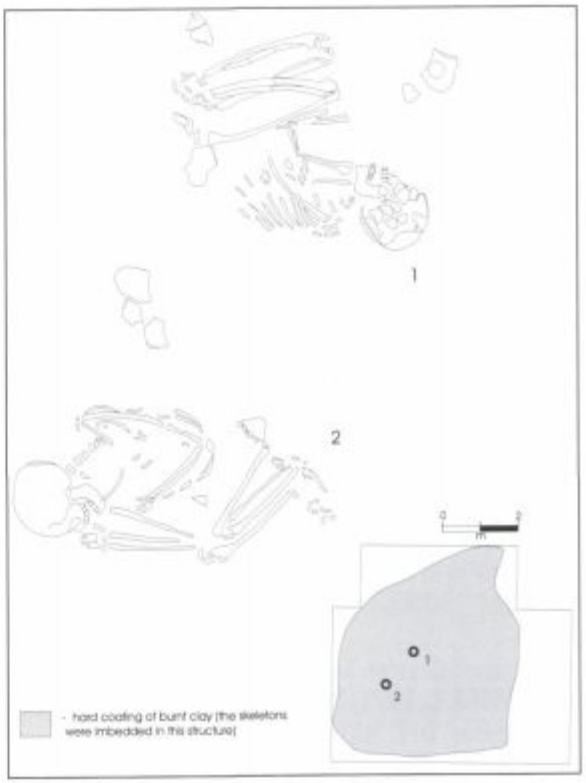


Fig. 28. Double burial, Topole-Bač (*after Trajković 1988.99*).

6 The results came out of the AMS project for dating Early Neolithic sites of the northern Balkans, directed by Prof. Alasdair Whittle (University of Cardiff Wales) and funded by Natural Environmental Research Council, UK.

As have I tried to show in the examples of some of the burials, they could be interpreted as a reflection of myths, religious practices and beliefs with roots in a much deeper past. If Richard Breadly (*1998. 24–25*) is correct in speaking of Mesolithic burials as almost exclusively containing organic materials as offerings, such as animal bones and bone tools, should I consider some of the burials described above as Mesolithic? I do not know. It seems to me that I cannot use terms such as Mesolithic and Neolithic with the absolute meaning ascribed to them. If used at all, they would have to indicate only a certain historical milieu, trajectories of time. But to distinguish between them on the basis of economies and specific cultural stages does not appear easy or possible.

CONCLUSION

As in the epigraph by Czeslaw Milosz, it seems that only in these general terms is it possible to grasp the spread of new ideas, technologies and ways of doing things. But particularities of how the whole historical process happened are hard to envisage. However, looking into the richness of the material record would be the only way to break out from well-routed concepts that freeze the picture and create a static landscape. Instead, everything is moving, and every time one opens the lid of a dusty box, smelling the soil and moisture, creates the opportunity to participate in the game with a new understanding.

I have tried primarily to focus on the correct sequencing of Mesolithic and Neolithic features in the Danube Gorges and Early Neolithic sites across the Balkans. This sequencing is crucial for understanding the process of habitation (*cf. Ingold 1993*) during this period. Only this understanding offers the possibility of a metanarrative understanding of the origins of the death and creation of the temporal dimension. The metaphoric and symbolic are at the core of this understanding. They could be seen as a way back, opposite to *distentio*. Metaphorical thought is inseparably connected to the ontological value of human existence (*Tilley 1999.51*). And dreams and myths bring back a time of wholeness. However, once established, temporal relations acquire ontological weight in connection to places, in connection to a landscape, and layers of materiality at these places pile up proof of the being nature of time. The people of Padina, Lepenski Vir and Vlasac who sit on the bedrock with crossed legs and watch the Danube bring back the idea of a pleasure that once was; they *speak* of the passage of time. At the same time, their corporeal selves here infinitely strongly erase the culture/nature divide.

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