

Early Neolithic burials of Starčevo culture at Galovo, Slavonski Brod (Northern Croatia)

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ABSTRACT – *At Galovo, near Slavonski Brod (Posavina, northern Croatia), a part of an early phase Starčevo culture settlement was found. Inside the settlement a ritual space was separated from the living area by semicircular wooden fences, which shows the so far unknown dimension of ritual burials and organisation of life in the settlement during this period. In a big burial pit, three individuals were buried: a man (complete skeleton), and a woman and a man, both without heads. In the small burial pit a man without a face was buried. Offerings near the buried individuals and objects in the pits show function and tribal status of these individuals at the settlement. Radiocarbon analyses date the burials to around 5700 and 5300 calBC.*

IZVLEČEK – *Na najdišću Galovo pri Slavonskem Brodu (Posavina, Severna Hrvatska) je bila otkrivena zgodnja faza naselja kulture Starčevo. Polkrožna lesena ograda je ritualni prostor ločevala od bivalnega. V veliki grobni jami so bile pokopane tri osebe: moški (cel skelet) in ženska ter moški, oba brez glave. V majhni grobni jami je bil pokopan moški brez obraznega dela lobanje. Pridatki govorijo o njihovem socialnem položaju in rodovni pripadnosti. Grobovi so datirani med 5700 and 5300 BC.*

KEY WORDS – *ritual burial; Early Neolithic; Linear A; Starčevo culture; Galovo-Slavonski Brod; Croatia*

Introduction

In the Summer of 1997, during the first year of systematic archaeological research at the Galovo site in the eastern part of Slavonski Brod, part of a Starčevo culture settlement was found in which, specially marked and separated by semi-circular fences, a ritual-burial ground was discovered (*Minichreiter 1999b.12–17*). Human burials of the oldest farming and pottery culture of European Neolithic – the Starčevo culture – are seldom found. In the whole region of the Starčevo culture complex, which in its narrower area include northern Croatia, narrow Serbia, Vojvodina, east and central Bosnia, Kosovo and a part of northern Macedonia (*Minichreiter 2010 in press*), about 600 settlements of Starčevo culture

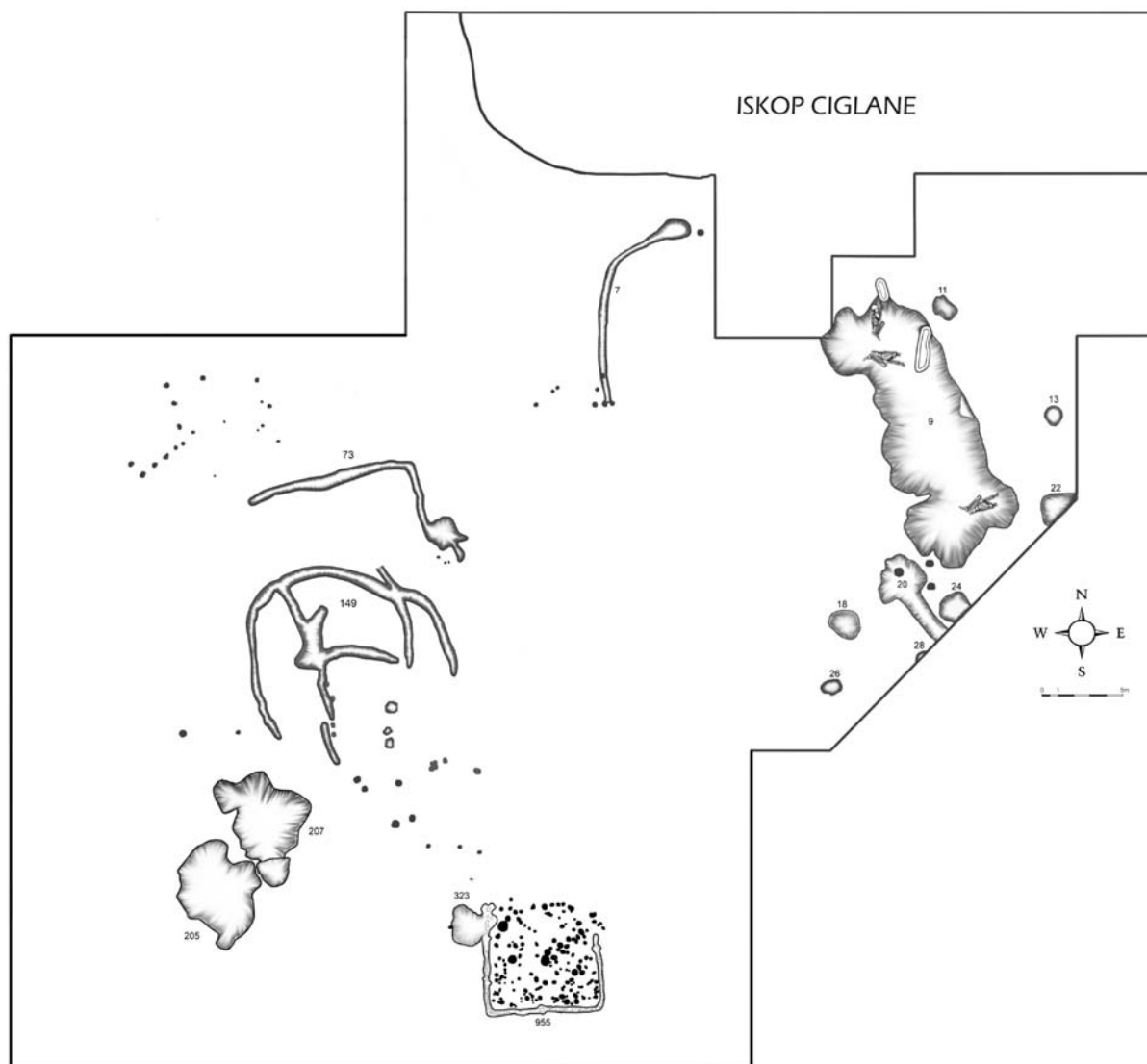
were found, 120 of which in Croatia. Only in 70 settlements have human burials been found, among which five are in Croatia. These five settlements belong to different development stages of Starčevo culture¹: Slavonski Brod – Linear A, Pepelana – Linear C, Vinkovci – Spiraloid, Jaruge and Vukovar probably to the final stage (*Minichreiter 1999b.12–16; 2002a. 63–72*).

Early Neolithic settlement of Starčevo culture

Archaeological research conducted so far on an area of 3000m², has revealed a part of Starčevo culture settlement² in which pit-dwellings and pits for vari-

1 Chronological division after S. Dimitrijević with K. Minichreiter's supplement: Monochrome, Linear A, Linear B, Linear C, Girlandoid, Spiraloid A and Spiraloid B. In the northern Croatia no settlements belonging to the first development stage (Monochrome) were found so far. Linear A settlements are the oldest in this region.

2 Systematic archaeological research of Starčevo culture settlement at Galovo is being conducted from 1997 (12 campaigns) and so far 3000m² were excavated. The work is supervised by Dr. Kornelija Minichreiter, Senior Research Scientist, in cooperation with Dr. Zorko Marković, Assistant Research Scientist, and Katarina Botić, archaeologist, both from Zagreb Institute of Archaeology, as well as archaeologists from Slavonian museums. The students from Philosophical Faculty in Zagreb and Zadar also participated in several campaigns, as a part of their field research program.



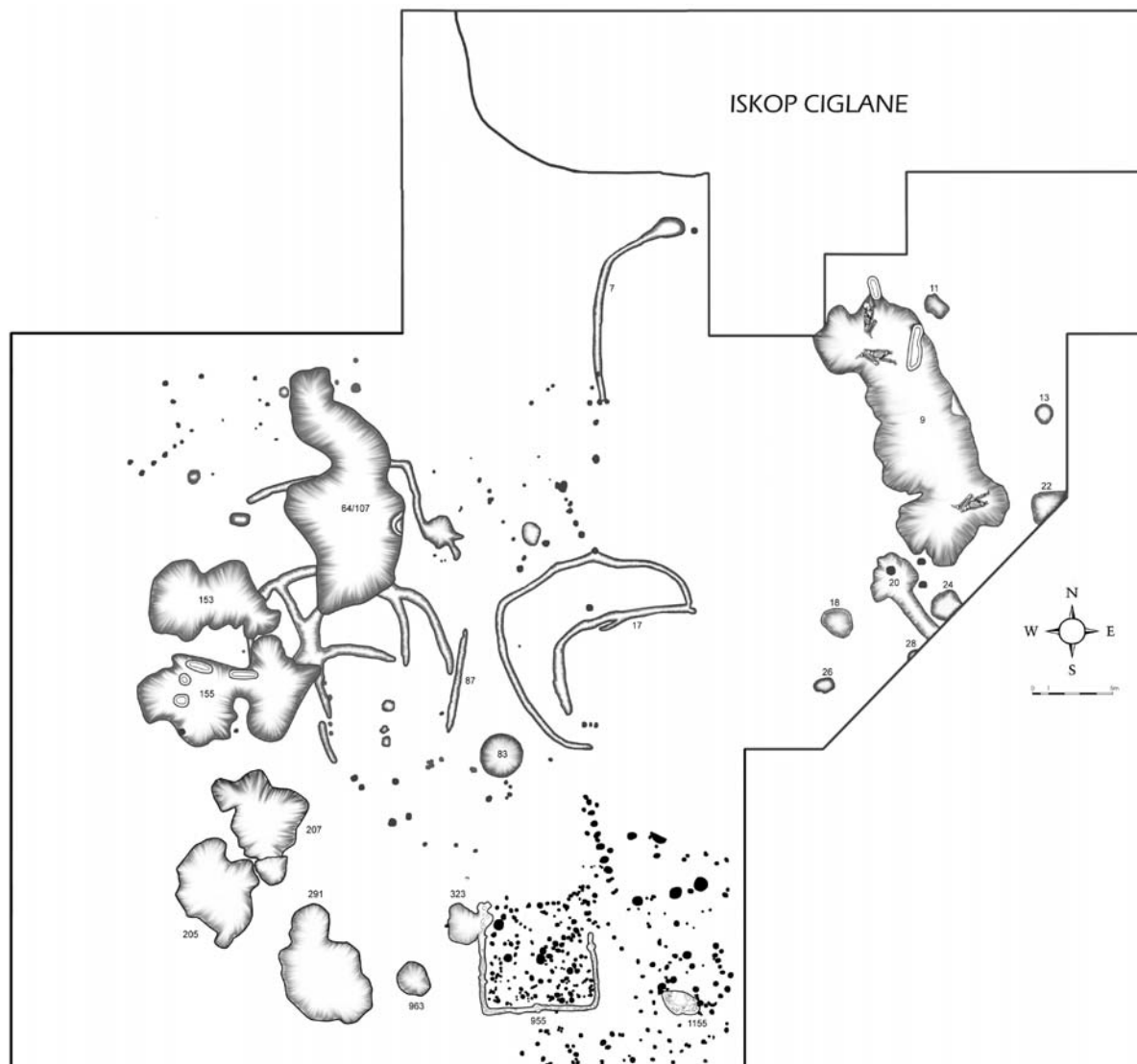
Pl. 1. The 1st phase of the settlement at Galovo (made by M. Gregl).

ous purposes, above ground constructions, cult constructions and a ritual-burial ground separated by wooden fences were built (Minichreiter 2007a).

In the first phase - when structures were built between 6100 and 5700 calBC (Plan 1) - the western part of ritual-burial ground covered a larger area of the settlement ground. This is suggested by two wooden fences (7 and 73) placed between the ritual-burial ground and the residential area of the settlement. Wooden fences, 7 (semi-circular) and 73 (square), surrounded big burial pit 9 containing three burials (Minichreiter 1999b.12-17; 2002b.63-67) and cult structures 149 and 389, which were formed from two double semi-circular fences in the shape of a crescent (Minichreiter and Krajcarić Bronić 2006.Sl. 2; Krajcarić Bronić and Minichreiter 2007). To this oldest group of constructions two working pit-dwellings belong, built somewhat later to the

south of the cult structures. In the working pit-dwelling 205, a large pottery kiln was placed, as well as the remains of a wooden frame and thirty pottery weights for a vertical loom (Minichreiter 2007b.23-25, Figs. 1 and 2). Working pit-dwelling 207 was attached on its north-eastern side to working pit-dwelling 205 and contained a bread oven and an open hearth, while in a separate area in this working pit-dwelling, bone needles for sewing leather were found. In these structures, between fragments of fine pottery, some shards with white painted motifs were discovered, which places this phase of the settlement in the white Linear A stage (Dimitrijević 1974.69; 1979.242; Minichreiter 2007b.25-28; 2007c).

The foundation trenches of above-ground structure/house 955 belong to the group of structures from this settlement's development phase and it repre-



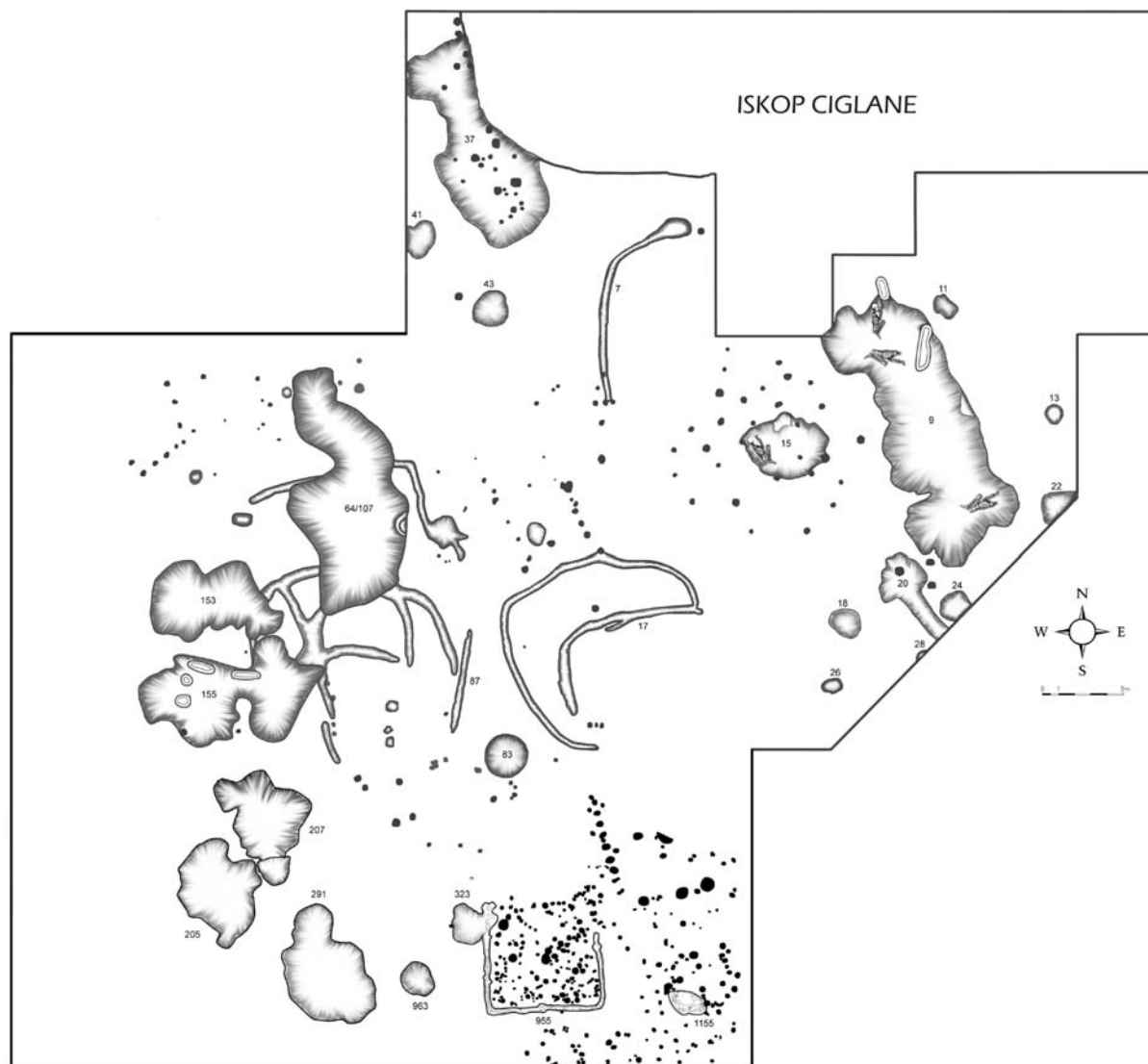
Pl. 2. The 2nd phase of the settlement at Galovo (made by M. Gregl).

sents, according to the present state of research, the oldest above-ground structure of the Starčevo culture settlements in Croatia (*Minichreiter 2010 in press*). The north-western part of the foundation of the house is damaged by a shallow pit 323 whose eastern part was dug over it. The date of this construction could not be directly determined³, so an attempt for its dating was made by dating pit 323 to around 6070–5770 calBC, and it is fair to assume that above-ground structure was built before this time, in the first phase of the settlement.

In the second phase, around 5700 calBC (Plan 2), the settlement spread towards the burial pits, thereby narrowing the area of the burial ground (*Minichreiter and Krajcjar Bronić 2006.9–10, Fig. 3; Krajcjar Bronić and Minichreiter 2007*). Above western cult

structure 149 and its northern square wooden fence 73 which lost its function due to this new construction, three large pit-dwellings were built: 64/107, 153 and 155. Respecting the tradition and meaning of eastern cult structure, these pit-dwellings were constructed in a semi-circle around it, and not on the north-south axes, the rule respected by other pit-dwellings in the settlement. In a younger phase of the settlement, between the eastern cult structure and the pit-dwellings, a new short wooden fence 87 was built in order to separate the burial grounds from the residential area – more symbolically than physically. The Starčevo culture settlement at Galovo can be placed among the oldest examples of the spread of a residential area towards the space reserved for burials, a practice common in many settlements throughout history, including in present day's towns.

³ The remains of charcoal were not found in the foundations or in the post holes in its interior space.



Pl. 3. The 3rd phase of the settlement at Galovo (made by M. Gregl).

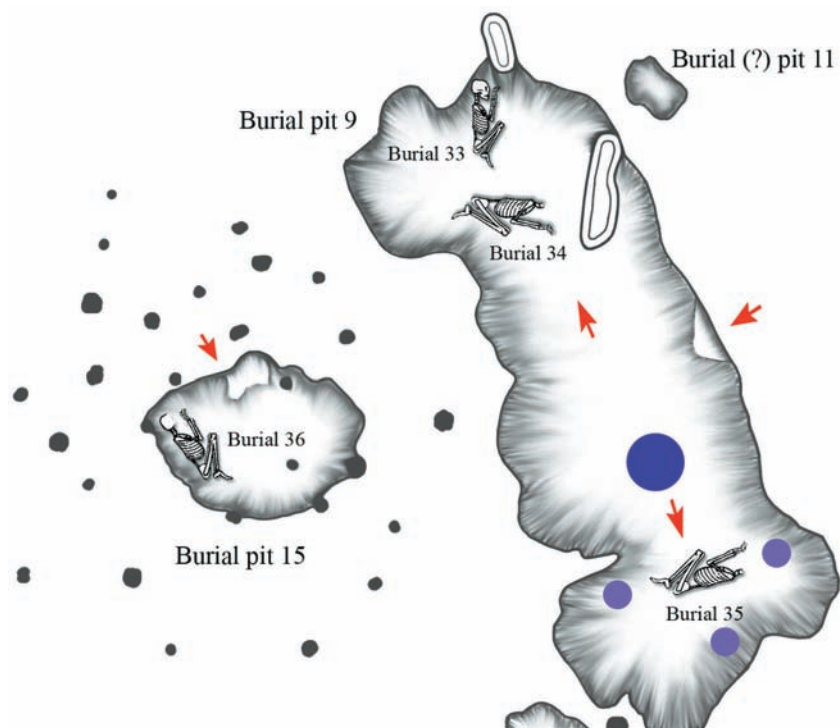
Residential and working pit-dwelling 64/107 is dated between 5635 and 5535 calBC. Its northern space was placed above a part of square wooden fence 73 which confirms its dating to the younger phase of the settlement (Minichreiter 2003, Fig. 2; 2007a, 44). The pit-dwelling consisted of northern and southern spaces of uneven dimensions. The inventory of the northern space contained 715 stone objects from all phases of production (pebbles, cores, flakes, bladelets, blades, whetstones, refuse material *etc.*), which indicates that there could have been a stone tool workshop here. Two different purposes for the northern working area and the southern residential area are underlined by the existence of two entrances to the pit-dwelling at its eastern side. One step led to the northern space and two to the southern.

All the other pit-dwellings in the settlement have only one entrance, on their eastern side⁴, regardless of their function.

Pit-dwelling 153 was situated in its eastern part over the western cult structure, between pit-dwellings 64/107 and 155. Constructed in a younger phase of the settlement, it is dated to 5700–5546 calBC. The absence of ovens, loom and stone objects from early phases of production, as well as the layout and shape of its inner spaces, suggest the residential character of this pit-dwelling (Minichreiter 2007a, 46, Fig. 14).

Working pit-dwelling 155, dated to 5760–5670 calBC, was constructed parallel to pit-dwelling 153 on its southern side and contained two pottery kilns and

⁴ The type of entrance orientation at the east side of the pit-dwellings is direct consequence of climatic conditions. Thick layers of sediment found inside the pit-dwellings, on their western edges, suggest strong western winds at the time of early Neolithic. Identical situation was discovered in pit-dwellings from early Neolithic Starčevo culture settlement at Zadubravlje.



Pl. 4. The composite plan of burial pits and burials (arrows: the entrance paths; circle: a deposition of pottery and bovid horn; small circles: separate groups of pottery deposition).

two bread ovens in its western part. Its eastern working space probably served for the production of clay objects before firing. Near the eastern entrance, in a small separate space, the remains of a wooden frame and ceramic weights were found, suggesting the production of fabric on a vertical loom here (*Minichreiter 2004.5–18; 2007a.46–50, Sl. 15*).

Contemporary to these structures and dated to 5710–5550 calBC is working pit-dwelling 291 situated south-east of pit-dwellings 205 and 207. Formed as an empty working space (without kilns, ovens or looms), it probably served as a workshop for sewing leather clothes and footwear (remains of bone needles) and stone tool production – around 1000 stone artefacts were found there, including fragments of grind stones, 39 cores, parts of 4 polished axes/adzes, one of which is complete (*Minichreiter 2008.5–14, Figs. 1–5*).

To the third, the youngest phase (Plan 3) of construction of this part of the settlement, belong residential pit-dwelling 37 which was dated to 5380–5290 calBC, and a small burial pit 15 dated to 5300–4960 calBC (*Minichreiter and Krajcar Bronić 2006.10–13, Fig. 4; Krajcar Bronić and Minichreiter 2007*). Residential pit-dwelling 37 was built north of the group of six pit-dwellings and north-east of fence 7 (*Minichreiter 2007a.40, Figs. 7–8*) while the con-

temporary small burial pit 15, containing one burial, was built at its opposite side in the burial area, behind fence 7 (*Minichreiter 2007a.70–72, Figs. 25–26*).

Ritual burials in a separate burial area of the settlement

Among 120 Starčevo culture settlements found in Croatia so far, only in five of them (Vinkovci, Pepelana, Vukovar, Jaruge and Slavonski Brod) have human burials been discovered (*Minichreiter 2002a.63–72*). Of all the early Neolithic Starčevo complex settlements, only at Galovo – for the first time – was a ritual-burial area discovered, separated from the rest of the settlement by wooden fences. In

other settlements, individuals were buried in pits inside settlements, between working and residential pit-dwellings.

Archaeological research has uncovered only the western part of the burial area at Galovo so far. This



Fig. 1. Burial pit 9, view to the north.

area, in its 1st phase, occupied large space and consisted of pits for burials and two or three additional cult structures (double wooden fences that close the crescent shaped space) which were separated from the settlement by two long wooden fences (1st phase of the settlement – Plan 1). After some time, because of the increase of population, the settlement spread towards east. Over the west cult structure 149 and its northern wooden fence 73 three big pit-dwellings (64/107, 153 and 155) were constructed. By the expansion of the settlement, the ritual-burial space was shortened by 30m towards the east, and perhaps only the eastern and southern double fences remained in function as cult structures. In that 2nd phase (Plan 2), between pit-dwellings, which belonged to the residential area, and the eastern cult structure, a wooden fence 87 was erected in order to separate the new part of the settlement from cult and burial grounds.

Many small post holes (5–7cm in diameter, 10cm buried in virgin soil) were found north-east of burial pit 9, some of which had been placed in rows, and in some cases buried one next to another, two together⁵. Utility and shape of these structures is not quite clear, but there is a great similarity to the rows of post holes in the eastern part of the Starčevo culture settlement at Zadubravlje, in which those rows of post holes were reconstructed as structures for storage and drying food, one of their possible utilities at the settlement (*Minichreiter 1992a.31*). At a time of research at Zadubravlje, the possibility that the structures were used for ‘drying’ the deceased was not set aside.

The discovery of identical vertical post holes rows at Galovo in Slavonki Brod also leads to the assumption that these structures on high posts could have served for exposing the dead to birds before the final ground burial (*Mellart 1967.167, 169, Fig. 47*). Although the Neolithic shrines at Çatalhöyük contain the wall paintings which show birds in combination with human figures – vultures flying over headless humans, the new research does not confirm this theory.

Burial in a small burial pit 11

In close proximity to the north-eastern part of burial pit 9, where two ritual kilns and two burials of adult individuals were placed, a small shallow pit 11 was found. It was of uneven rectangular shape, U-



Fig. 2. Centre of the burial pit 9. A group of pottery vessels and a horn.

shaped in cross-section and 25cm deep. It contained traces of small bones, probably of a child, and a small pottery fragment.

Burials in a big burial pit 9 (Fig. 1)

The ritual-burial area was dominated by big burial pit formed by three spaces. The central space had, on its eastern side, entrance to this burial pit and in its centre a group of pottery vessels, stone tools and the remains of animal bones (Plans 1 and 4, Figs. 1 and 2). Beneath this group, a big bovid horn was buried, 51cm in length (Fig. 2). The northern and southern spaces were 1m wider than the central space. In the northern one, a skeleton of a man (whole) and a skeleton of a woman (headless) were found, and in the southern space, a skeleton of a headless man. The bottom of the burial pit (U-shaped in cross section) was dug down to the depth of 1m from the upper edge of the structure. The entrance was on the eastern side of the central space, across two steps. Entrances were usually on the eastern or south-eastern side at the Zadubravlje-Dužine and Slavonki Brod-Galovo settlements. The only exception is a small burial pit 15 at Galovo, which required an entrance on the northern side because of its position between the structures. The choice of such a position for the entrance to burial pit 9, especially its central space, had its logical explanation. Upon entering the

⁵ In a space of 150m² around 130 holes from thin wooden posts were found, placed in rows with some rows overlapping but still forming rectangular shapes.



Fig. 3. Centre of the burial pit 9, pottery and lithic finds.

burial pit, visitors stayed only in this central space, where they probably held ritual feasts. Here, a group of fourteen pottery vessels was found; eight pots of coarse structure with different decorations, a bowl of fine structure, three painted bowls on a foot, one pot with white and another with dark painted motifs, altar and a piece of fired clay ('sacrificial table', Fig. 4). Among these objects four stone adzes and three axes were found (Fig. 3).

At the bottom of the northern space in burial pit 9, two human skeletons were found (Plans 1 and 4, Fig. 5.a-b). About half a meter west of the south part of kiln 30, a man was buried (burial 33), 40–50 years of age⁶. He was buried in a contracted position on his left side, with head to the north and facing east. He differed from other two burials in this pit, which were buried in an east-west direction facing the centre of this pit and were headless. The skeleton was covered by dark brown earth mixed with small shards of pottery and flint. On his eastern side, fragments of two fine textured bowls with red polished surface were found (Figs. 5.b; 6.a-b). One was decorated with dark brown painted motifs of hanging triangles filled with oblique lines, while the other had wide vertical stripes painted from the rim to the end of the belly (*Minichreiter 2007a.96–97*). At

many early Neolithic sites, pottery placed in burials was decorated in the same way: at Zadubravlje and Pepelana (*Minichreiter 1992a.T. 9, 14, T. 21, 7–8*), Vučedol and Vinkovci (*Dimitrijević 1974.T. IV.5, T. XVI.1, 2*), Donja Branjevina (*Karmanski 1979.T. XXVIII; 2005.T. XC.1, T. XCIII.1–12, T. XCIV.2, T. XCV.9*), Obrež (*Brukner 1960. T. IV*), Lepenski Vir (*Srejović 1969.167*), Starčevo (*Arandelović-Garašanin 1954.T. XVI.2*) and Lánycsóku-Bácsfapuszta in Hungary (*Kalicz 1978.Sl. 2.1–4; 1990.Taf. 13; 1998.Abb. 2*).

On the south side of the male skeleton, two parallel rows of small post holes (10cm in diameter) were found which ran from the eastern border of

the pit to its centre, 2m in length, and which possibly served to separate this male burial 33 and female burial 34 situated about half meter to the south.

A female body (burial 34), app. 35–40 years of age, was placed on its left side in a contracted position,



Fig. 4. Centre of the burial pit 9, 'sacrificial table'.

⁶ Anthropological analysis was made by Dr. Mario Šlaus and Dr. Mario Novak from the Archaeological department of Croatian Academy of Art and Sciences in Zagreb.



Fig. 5a–b. Burials 33, 34 and kiln 30, view to the north.

orientated toward the centre of the burial pit, in an east-west direction (Fig. 7.a–b). Skull bones were not found, which leads to the conclusion that she was buried headless. In the same way as in the other burials, she was covered by dark brown earth mixed with small shards of pottery and flint. At the east side of the skeleton, in a place where the head should have been, in the layer beneath the skeleton, a large concentration of pottery and burned animal bones was found. Between skeleton 34 and kiln 31 (also in a place where a head should have been but little further to the east) fragments of three fine textured bowls with red polished surface, decorated with white and brown motifs, were found together with three small sacrificial vessels and a lump of fired clay (game-hunting ball) (Fig. 7.b). It is important to stress that almost all specimens of this type of small sacrificial vessels have been found near the deceased – six sacrificial vessels near burial 36 in a small burial pit 15 and three in front of female skeleton 34 in a large burial pit 9. Analogy to this rare type of altar was discovered so far only in horizon III.a in Lepenski Vir (*Srejović 1971.T. 12.6; Stanković 1992.T. LXXXVI.14*).

In the immediate vicinity of these skeletons, along the eastern and western edges of burial pit 9, two elongated kilns were built (Fig. 8). They resembled an elongated pottery kilns in shape only, while the method of construction, position and contents in them indicated a ritual use. The kilns were built at the edge of the burial pit, with a firing opening outside the burial pit. The interior sides of the kilns consisted of a thin layer of burnt-through clay, which suggests their occasional use. Only one leg of a large-sized bowl on a foot, of fine texture and bearing traces of red paint, was found in the interior of the kiln.

A large-sized leg (12.5cm high, base diameter 20.5cm and top diameter 16cm) was symbolically placed in the kiln after it was broken from the bowl, possibly during some kind of ritual (Fig. 6.b). The other parts of this bowl haven't been found in the kiln. Maybe they were very fragmented and mixed with the earth which covered the skeletons. The bowls on the legs are usually of fine texture, of one colour or with painted motifs, and are frequently placed in burials, or if found in residential pits, they do not belong to the household pottery but are intended for cult. The kilns from residential parts of settlements in Slavonski Brod and in Zadubravlje differ in method of construction (*Minichreiter 1992b.37–47*) from these ritual kilns. The kilns in Zadubravlje and in working pit-houses 155 and 205 in Slavonski Brod were built of small clay balls, whereas both kilns in burial pit 9 in Slavonski Brod, had clay floor plastered and then a wicker construction (like a basket) made of 1–2.5cm thick twigs/branches built over it. The exterior of this construction was subsequently coated with clay and fired. On the interior walls of the kiln 30, traces of intertwined branches in negative placed one next to the other and 6 cm thick were preserved. The wicker construction was made of thinner and thicker branches, and at one spot a negative of a knot used to tie five branches together remained clearly visible. On both narrower sides (the northern and the southern) the ground plan of the kiln ends in a semi-circle, and in its southern (posterior) part, a piece of the dome was preserved. The firing opening at the northern part of western kiln 30 was hemispherically vaulted and within it, a charred beam was preserved (5810–5620 calBC), placed on the floor of the kiln. There was no plastered floor in this part of the kiln, whereas in the central and the posterior part the floor was plastered twice and

more intensively fired. In this part of the kiln, a composite geometric figure in relief was impressed 2cm into the floor. The figure consisted of a circle (15cm in diameter) and a rectangle (10x6.5cm) joined together (Fig. 9.a-c). The purpose of this geometric figure could not be established. It is necessary to mention that an identical geometric figure (a 29x25cm circle combined with a 15x10cm rectangle) was impressed 4–8cm deep into the virgin soil along the edge of the burial pit's bottom on the northern (right) side of its entrance. Upon demolition of the kiln, wooden beams (5cm in diameter), dug into the virgin soil, were discovered 30cm beneath the floor. Three beams had been laid horizontally, in various directions and intervals, probably in order to stabilise the soil. The content of the kiln was completely different from one at Zadubravlje. While in the pottery kilns of the same shape at Zadubravlje shards of small painted vessels fired within them were found, the kiln 30 in Slavonski Brod yielded only a few pieces of sacrificial vessels and clay artefacts of indeterminate function.

In the north-eastern space of burial pit 9, along its edge in the form of a step – a 'bench' – another kiln (31) in the shape of an elongated rectangle was built, some 4m to the east of kiln 30, identical to it in its orientation and place of a firing opening. Kiln 31 was built in the same way as the neighbouring kiln 30, but it is somewhat bigger and much less well preserved. Several facts suggest that it had been reconstructed and upgraded several times during its use. The entire length of kiln 31 was 2.70m (N-S) and during its shorter phase, it was only 2m long (on the northern side, the floor is missing 65cm in length). In the shorter kiln, the floor consisted of a layer of

fired clay plastered by another layer of raw clay, and in the southern part, over these two layers, there was another layer of plastered clay (total thickness 9cm). The floor level was not even but sloped 15cm towards south. The kiln was somewhat wider in its southern part and it ended in a dome. Southwest of the southern kiln, a small fireplace was discovered at the bottom of a burial pit (a circle of burnt soil, 50cm in diameter), on which unburnt stakes, 30cm high and 5cm in diameter, were piled in the shape of a tent (Fig. 10.a-b). This small fireplace was probably a symbolic representation of a home hearth, erected in the vicinity of a female skeleton buried in this part of the burial pit. The radiocarbon dating of this fireplace to 5570–5470 calBC together with a sample from its vicinity to 5470–5320 calBC, make this fireplace the youngest object in burial pit 9. It was placed here by descendants, possible ten generations after the burial of the female body.

In the specially formed southern space of burial pit 9, a headless male skeleton (burial 35) was found (Fig. 11.a-b) and to his western, southern and eastern sides, near the edges of the burial pit, three groups of pottery vessels, animal bones and stone tools were found (Plan 4). Each of the groups was covered by large pieces of fired clay (3cm thick), which were smooth on one side and were perhaps a part of some sort of construction. Beneath those pieces of fired clay, a very dark layer of earth was found, beneath which large pottery shards and animal bones had been placed at the bottom of the burial pit. So far, the question of roof construction over these three groups of pottery remains open. On the northern side of the western group, pieces of belly of a large vessel were found, with a female fi-



Fig. 6a–b. Vessels from burial 33 and foot of large dimensions from the kiln 30.



Fig. 7a–b. Burial 34 and burial inventory.

gure holding arms in an upright position modelled in relief stripes, a motif very similar to the find from pit 41 south-west of residential pit-dwelling 37 at Galovo. This type of motif in low relief on the belly of a big vessel is very rare in all stages of Starčevo culture, and this is the second one discovered at the Galovo settlement (*Minichreiter 2000b.5–15*). It is worth stressing that these three groups of pottery offerings were grouped at a regular distance of 2.5 to 3m apart (like the tips of an isosceles triangle – the eastern, southern and western groups), and when combined with a fourth group of pottery and animal bones with a buried horn lying to the north of the others (close to the entrance, in the centre of the burial pit) form an almost perfect square. In their midst a headless male skeleton (25–30 years of age) was found, in a contracted position (E–W orientation), facing the centre of the burial pit (Plan 4). The skeleton was covered with earth mixed with pottery shards and stone tools. In its vicinity, at its northern side, a lump of ochre, a miniature zoomorphic altar (*Minichreiter 1999a.17, T. 2; 2002a.T. 5, 2a–2b; 2007a.131–132*), an altar leg, parts of two coarse vessels with ‘plastic ear’ and other plastered decorations were found. Near these, shards of three fine texture bowls were found: a bowl on a red painted foot, and two bowls with white and dark painted motifs (Fig. 11.b).

The roof construction over the burial pit could partially be reconstructed by using holes from small stakes occasionally found along the burial pit edges on the western rim of its central area. Considering that within the large space of the burial pit no holes from vertical thicker posts were found (as in the residential pit-dwellings in the settlement), a question remains open as to how this large space (15x5m) was roofed, and whether it was roofed at all or only partially, taking into account the neighbouring small

burial pit, which had had large posts both in its interior and exterior, and a porch. In his publication of Gornji Brezovljani, S. Dimitrijević proposed two possible roof constructions over the pit-house (*Dimitrijević 1978.84, Sl. 8–9*), which could likewise serve as an option for a cover for large burial pit 9 at Galovo. It is possible that the northern and southern parts of the burial pit, where the deceased were buried, were roofed by horizontally laid stakes. At the level of the pit rim, these stakes could have been propped on the stair (‘bench’) which was formed along its north-eastern part. Beams laid in such a manner might have been covered by soil, over which straw or reed might have been laid in the shape of a double-slope roof. Several factors indicate that the northern and southern spaces of the burial pit were covered in this way: the firing openings of the kilns are located outside the burial pit, being accessed from outside; within the burial pit, there were two human burials, over which, certainly no-one would have walked; in the northern part, no groups of pottery vessels (ritual sacrifices) were discovered, which further indicates that access to this northern space was forbidden. In the same way, the southern part was completely occupied by a male burial, with three groups of pottery placed around. The central part of the burial pit was probably roofed by a tent-like construction in which smaller groups of people could perform sacrificial rituals.

Burial in a small burial pit 15

The western passage from the residential area to the ritual-burial part of the settlement led directly to burial pit 15. This small burial pit was built in the 3rd phase of the settlement construction (Plans 3 and 4), around 5300–4960 calBC, in the middle of the empty western part of the ritual-burial area. It was enclosed by a large covering, supported by a series of wooden posts, which would have contributed



Fig. 8. Kilns 30 and 31, view to the north-east.

to its solemn character and domination over this area. The burial pit was not covered in the usual way of the others in the settlement, which generally had rows of smaller stakes along the edges. The covering above burial pit 15 was held by large posts of varying thickness (20–40cm in diameter), dug a further 20cm into the virgin soil. Set at regular intervals of 1.5 to 2m, the posts surrounded the burial pit like three concentric circles (wreaths), at a distance of 2.4 to 5 and 6 to 7m from its centre.

Such a ground layout of the posts points to several possibilities for the covering of the burial pit. The most likely is that the thicker posts were roof props, while the thinner vertical posts supported a fence of intertwined wattle of thinner, horizontally laid branches. The drawing (Fig. 12) shows three possible ways of covering burial pit 15. The first variant depicts the tent-like cover of burial pit 15, with the roof covering the walkway around it. At its western side, towards the western passage to the settlement, the posts arrayed in a semi-circle connected two parts of a wooden fence of intertwined wattle. The second variant is a large tent covering burial pit 15 and the surrounding space, while at the western side a wattle

fence is situated. The third variant consists of a covering over burial pit 15 and its northern entrance part, while at the southern and the western sides the posts arrayed in a semi-circle connected the wattle fence; the entrance to this fenced space probably lay at the south-western side. Its layout could have been analogous to the circular pit with antechamber at Parța, the Starčevo-Cris culture settlement

in Romania, which Lazarovici states is a very rare shape among Neolithic structures (*Lazarovici and Lazarovici 2003.371, Fig. 58*).

Little burial pit 15 had an almost regular circular ground plan, 5m in diameter, with an almost flat bottom dug 40–50cm into the virgin soil. The entrance to the burial pit lay on its northern side, over a wide step in the form of a small platform. The burial pit had three interior spaces – the northern, eastern and western – all dug to a more or less even depth with a variance up to 15cm. The western space, which contained a burial, was the largest and dug somewhat deeper, about 20cm into the virgin soil. A male was buried (35–40 years of age) near the western edge of this space. He lay on his left side in a contracted position, head to the north and legs to the south, facing the centre of the pit (*Minichreiter 2000a.Sl. 5*). The man was buried faceless – only the posterior bones of the skull were found. Owing to the poor preservation of the bones, his length ‘in situ’ could not be established. The skeleton was covered by earth mixed with shards of coarse and fine painted pottery, the remains of animal bones and 517 stone remains, among which 61 pieces had

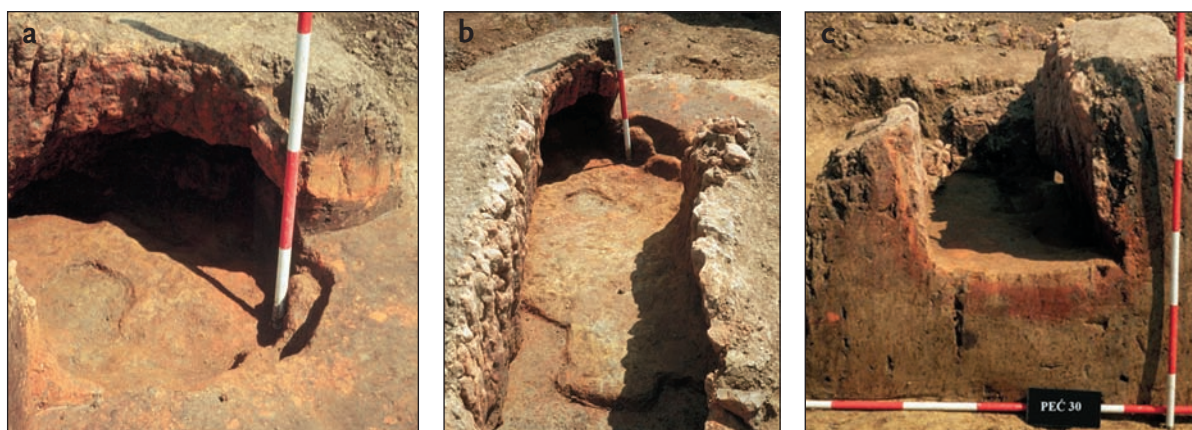


Fig. 9a-c. Kiln 30 and the geometric relief imprint.

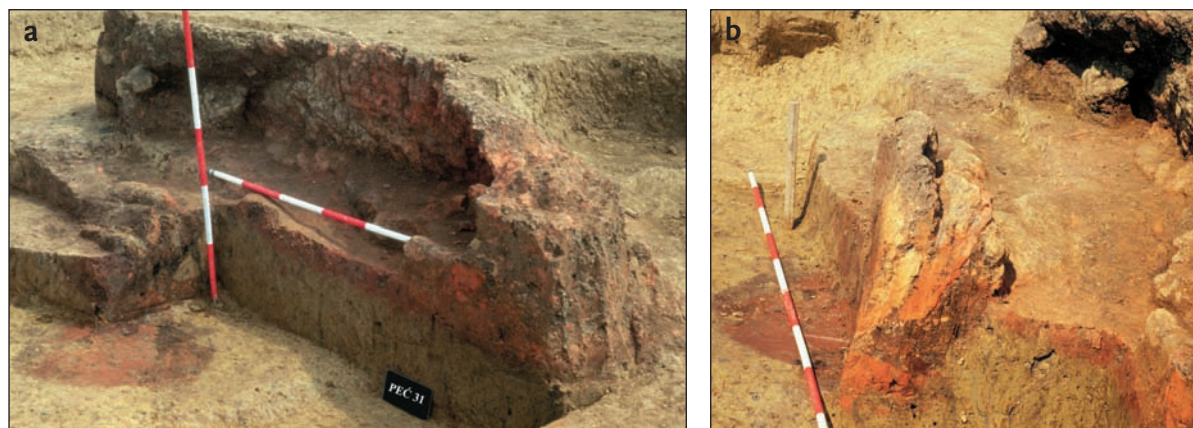


Fig. 10a–b. Kiln 31 and the small round hearth in front of it, view to the north-east.

additionally been formed into tools. According to Rajna Šošić, there were neither raw materials, nor finally shaped tools among the flint remains. Many flakes, blades and bladelets were found, as well as a small amount of cores for flake and blade production (Šošić 2007.176–187, *Tab. 1–4, Sl. 1*). The earth contained a large percentage of soot (black sticky soil), within which, smooth-faced lumps of burnt clay were found showing grooves at one side of indeterminate ornament. Identical pieces were found beneath the centrally placed group of pottery in big burial pit 9, as well as residential pit-dwelling 37 (Minichreiter 2007a.37–38, *Fig. 7*), which points to the possibility that they were used as ‘sacrificial tables’ for holding pottery vessels.

Above the male skeleton (burial 36), which lay in the western part of the burial pit, many contributions were found: in the earth that covered the skeleton larger fragments of coarse and fine pottery were found, among which three vessels had various parts – a vessel with plastered lugs on four opposite sides of the belly and stabbing ornament, a red painted bowl on a foot and a bowl with wide stripes from its rim to the bottom. Above and near the skull, 11 clay objects were found – fragments of four small sacrificial vessels on a foot each, a fragment of rectangular based altar, four perforated pottery fragments (discs), a clay head of a duck and a game-hunting ball (Minichreiter 1999a.16–17, *T. 1. 1a and b; 2007a.142*). Near the feet five clay objects were found – fragments of two small sacrificial vessels on a foot each, fragment of a spindle whorl or weight, a game-hunting ball and an unknown object in the shape of a clay cylinder (*Fig. 13.a–b–c*).

As a special offering to the deceased, ten polished stone tools were found in this burial pit. One axe was found in front of the entrance, on the porch

that gave access to the pit. All of the specimens were found in the northern part of the burial pit, east and west of the entrance steps (*Fig. 13.a–b*). The western group of axes was found together with other offerings in the earth which covered the head of the deceased. Among six polished artefacts, two were axes – one of them whole – two cleaved adzes and a pointed pick. The eastern group was found on a small platform situated on the east side, near the entrance step. It consisted of three wholesome chisels and an axe (Težak Gregl 2007.170–173). Most probably this represents a ritual deposition of the axes (they had not been used) immediately at the entrance to the burial pit. All the axes could have been deposited for the deceased at the same time, during the burial, or deposited one by one during visits to the deceased at certain intervals. This type of offering as well as the large quantity of various stone objects mixed with the earth covering the corpse, indicate his prominent status in the community. This is further stressed by the fact that only one individual had been buried in this pit – normally, various individuals were buried together in Starčevo culture burial pits. Judging from the remains of the post holes, it is visible that this pit had a large covering and especially a covered porch at its entrance, which contributed to its solemn character and domination over this area. The question remains about the faceless burial. This kind of burial was possibly motivated by the belief that, by this means, his power over the community would be suppressed. Radiocarbon analyses from this burial pit date this structure to 5300–4960 calBC (*Fig. 14*), which puts this pit at the same younger phase of this part of the settlement as the residential pit-dwelling 37.

The north-western part of the ritual-burial space was delimited by a wooden semi-circular fence 7 made of densely arrayed vertical stakes, which enclosed the

area from the northeast towards the south in a gentle curve (*Minichreiter 2007a.Sl. 27*). Close to the north-eastern end of the fence a self-standing vertical wooden post 63 was discovered. Unfortunately, this part of the terrain was destroyed in the previous soil exploitation by the brick factory, so the northern part of the ritual-burial space remains indeterminate. However, the apparent similarity with southern end of this fence, and the series of posts next to it, leads to the assumption that there was a passage at the northern part of the burial ground also, leading from the residential part of the settlement into this separate area.

On the south-western side, running from big burial pit 9 to the south and entering unexcavated terrain, part of the big wooden fence (20) was also found.

Conclusion

In the last twelve years of systematic archaeological research of the early Neolithic Starčevo culture settlement at Galovo in Slavonski Brod, part of the settlement was discovered belonging to the early phase of Starčevo culture – the Linear A stage (white and dark linear). At this site, for the first time on the territory of the Starčevo culture complex, a special ritual space was discovered, separated from the rest of the settlement by wooden fences. There were four burials in two burial pits – in the larger burial pit, two men and a woman, and in the smaller, one man. Considering the fact that many offerings were discovered near the deceased, when analysing and comparing them with the inventory of the residential and working pit-dwellings in the excavated part of the settlement (3 residential, 5 working pit-dwellings and 7 smaller pits), we tried to stress some observations which will mark only the beginning of understanding the burial ritual, tribal status of the deceased, beliefs in an afterlife and cognition of a spiritual world among the first Neolithic habitants of the Southern Pannonia.

All of the deceased were placed in a contracted position, on their right or left side, always facing the centre of the burial pit. Coarse vessels were not placed entire near the deceased but were fragmented and mixed with the earth which covered them. Only near the male burial 35 in the big burial pit 9 and the male burial 36 in the small burial pit 15 large fragments of vessels have been found which could be assembled to form a pot. Their absence near male skeleton 33 and the female skeleton 34 in the northern part of pit 9 can perhaps be explained by a group

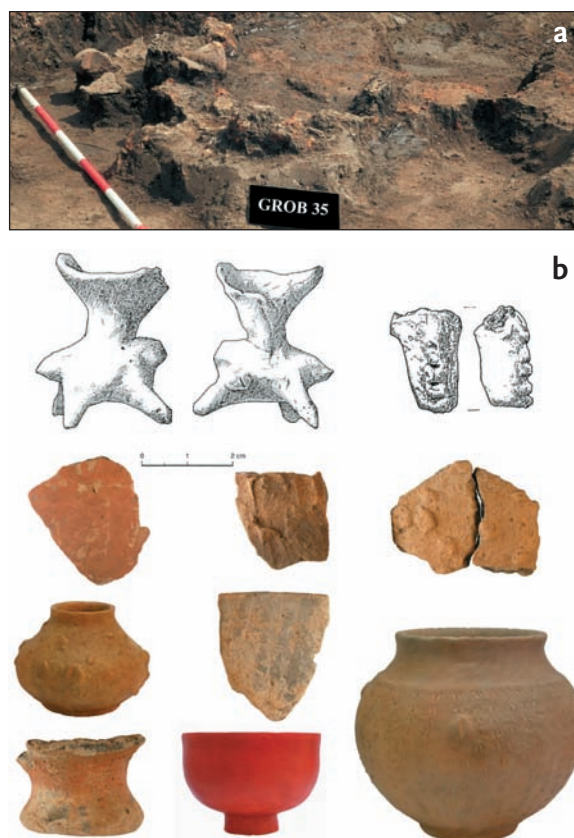


Fig. 11a–b. Burial 35 and burial inventory.

of coarse vessels placed in the centre of this burial pit instead. All the burials had two to three fine texture painted vessels (painted both inside and out) placed near them. Near each deceased, a bowl with dark painted wide vertical stripes running from the rim to the bottom was found. Only the male skeleton 33 and the female skeleton 34, in the north part of burial pit 9, had bowls with hanging triangles near them. Red bowls on a foot painted both inside and out, were placed near the male skeletons 35 and 36. The bowl of the same type, from the central group of vessels in burial pit 9, could have belonged to the skeletons 33 and 34 in the northern part of the pit. Three altars were found only near the male burials: a zoomorphic altar, with a vessel on its back (a unique specimen), and two with a square base on four plug-shaped legs (probably with a vessel on the base). Unlike other rare grave offerings, these altars are common (around 100 specimens) in residential and working pit-dwellings, possibly for domestic rituals. The situation is different with small sacrificial vessels (altars), which were numerous offerings for the deceased: three near female skeleton 34 in burial pit 9, and six near male skeleton 36 in burial pit 15. Only four small sacrificial vessels were found in the settlement. A duck head and perforated clay discs were only found near male skeleton 36

– in the earth covering his faceless skull. Zoomorphic figurines were also found in the settlement. Lumps of fired clay (game-hunting balls) were not found in the settlement, only as offerings near the deceased: each one had a single ball; one which was not near skeleton 33 was found in an elongated kiln 30 near by. Polished stone tools were predominantly found in the burial pits, mainly near male skeleton 36 in the small burial pit 15 and in the central group of vessels above the bovid horn in burial pit 9 (Težak Gregl 2007.160–175). In the settlement, fragments of two adzes were found in working pit-dwelling 37 which according to the radiocarbon date, was contemporaneous with burial 36 in small burial pit 15 and constructed in the 3rd development phase of the settlement (Plan 3). All the offerings in this burial pit confirm the special status of the deceased in his community. Most important are the polished stone tools – axes or similar objects. In the oldest beliefs and myths, the axe is a symbol of a deity (the Thunderer), lightning and destruction. The axe also symbolises fertility and it could be found among grain and seed reserves (Chevalier and Aghebrandt 1994). The find of axes as grave offerings near male skeleton 36 in small burial pit 15 resembles finds from Obre I (Benac 1973.29–35, 39–40). At Obre I, in layer II, in the area surrounding grave 8, six axes were found (five mould-shaped; one flat, almost square in shape; one of the mould-shaped axes shows traces of attempted perforation, but it had broken and the drilling was left unfinished). Alojz Benac determines the axes as grave offerings of cult significance. This shows that already within the Starčevo-Impresso culture, the beginning of an axe cult existed, which would come to the fore at the neighbouring site of Obre II in the context of the Butmir culture (Benac 1971.76–77, Sl. 13a). In this latter settlement, the cult of the stone axe was connected with fire. All the axes were found in a layer of soot and, therefore, probably symbolised the sun or fire. The remaining specimens of polished bladed tools were found in the context of settlement structures and were mostly fragmented or considerably damaged. This is usual

in Neolithic settlements, whereas complete, well-preserved stone axes are found either as grave goods or as parts of hoards.

In the anthropological sense, all the burials at Galovo are interesting in their own way. Although the osteological material was poorly preserved, there was enough to draw certain conclusions regarding the overall health and living conditions of the population in question. Two of the individuals were buried without heads, so it was impossible to detect the most common stress markers (linear enamel hypoplasia, cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperostosis); nevertheless, two of these markers were found on other two individuals⁷. Male burial 33 from burial pit 9 had traces of healed cribra orbitalia visible in his left orbit, and caries on the second right maxillary premolar, covering almost half of the tooth. Male burial 36 in burial pit 15 had traces of healed porotic hyperostosis on the left parietal bone. Probably due to the lack of sufficient number of teeth, the third marker was not found, but it is evident that the population in question suffered severe living conditions and periods of food shortages. It is also inte-

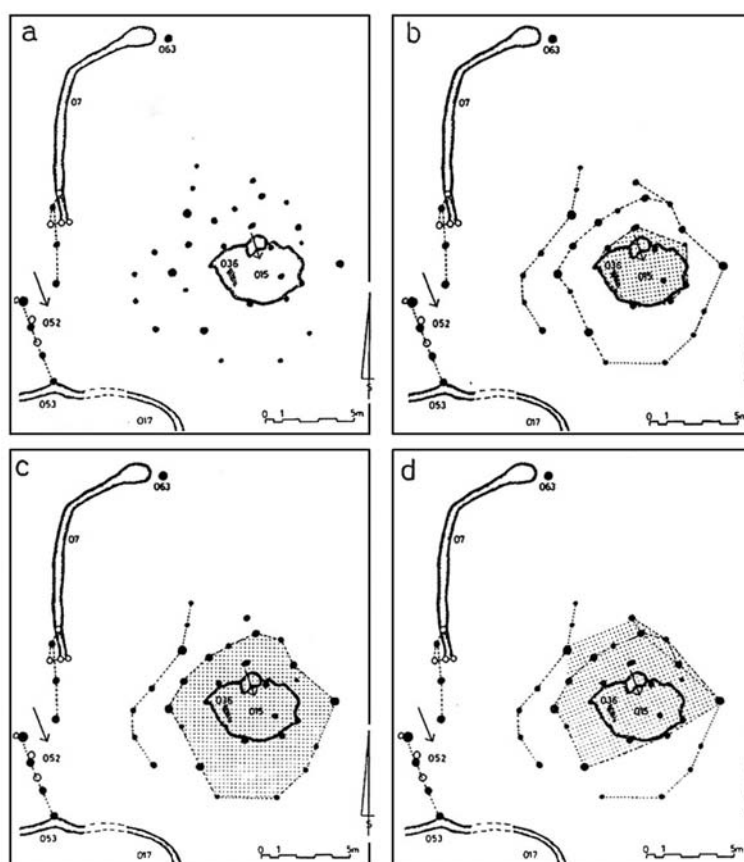


Fig. 12. Three possibilities of roofing of small burial pit 15 (after Minichreiter 2007a).

⁷ See note 6.

resting to note that these two individuals do not belong to the same phase of the settlement, which would indicate the long-term problems that this population faced regarding natural resources. In this light, it is also interesting to note that the male and female burials (33 and 34) from burial pit 9 were of an advanced age (45–50 and 35–40 years, respectively) at the time of death which would probably explain why they were buried in such a special way. The male in burial pit 15 falls into this same age range (35–40 years); only the 2nd male from burial pit 9 was somewhat younger (25–30 years).

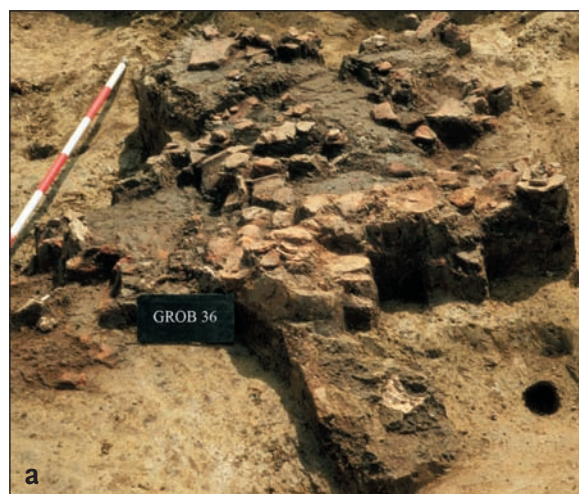


Fig. 13a–b–c. Burial 36, burial inventory.

Regarding the two headless burials from burial pit 9, they fit the widespread burial practices of the Middle East Neolithic times – from PPNB sites such as Jericho, Ain Ghazal, Beidha, Kfar HaHoresh (Goring-Morris 2002; Verhoeven 2002), Atlit-Yam (Galili et al. 2005) to later sites such as Çatalhöyük (Mellart, 1967; see also Çatalhöyük 2004 Archive Report; Hodder 2005), Nevali Çori and Çayönü (Verhoeven 2002), where there is also abundant evidence of secondary skull burials, which are considered to be related to the cult of ancestors or possibly to the cult of fecundity due to the belief skulls represent the life-force (Verhoeven 2002:251; Kuijt 1996). Ian Kuijt shows both primary and secondary mortuary practices as cycles which connect the burial of individuals or the re-burial of skulls with birth and re-birth (Kuijt 2008:Fig. 2). The skulls of the two headless individuals at Galovo were not found, and we can only speculate on whether the ritual of the secondary skull burial has the same meaning here, or if it was present at this site at all, but considering the fact that the brick factory's vast activities in this area destroyed most of this site, especially the area which is considered by the authors to be ritual and burial, we may very well never come to the plausible explanation. However, one thing can be connected to Middle Eastern practices – the effort of preparing the burial grounds and participating in the burials themselves would have united the whole community. Some kind of grave markers must have existed, because it seems that the two burials in burial pit 9, oriented E–W, belong to a somewhat different phase than the one buried along the N–S axes, but nevertheless they did not disturb one another. Near where the head should have been, male burial 35 had a lump of ochre, and one such lump was found near male burial 36, which looks similar to the practices of marking the place of the skull for later extraction (at Ain Ghazal, for example) (Kuijt 2008:Fig. 3). But until evidence of secondary skull burials is found, there is no way of knowing whether this kind of cult even existed at Galovo.

Male burial 36 from burial pit 15 shows a different kind of treatment altogether. He was buried alone, covered with large fragments of burnt daub (sacrificial tables?) and earth that contained several hundred flint fragments. The earth that covered his faceless skull contained various object and over all of it large pieces of pots were placed. Considering all the other grave goods found around him, there is no doubt that he was an important person in his community, but the fact that he had no face is curious. According to Marina Hoti (1994), there is abundant

evidence of covering parts of buried individuals by pots, especially when it comes to heads and middle areas such as the chest and pelvis – graves from Vučedol in Croatia, Gomolava in Serbia, Tiszapolgár-Basatanya in Hungary, Vinica in Bulgaria, Traian in Romania *etc.* There are various graves with similar features from Mórógy-Tűzkődomb in Hungary as well (Zalai-Gaál 2002). Hoti interprets this phenomenon by using later Greek mythological parallels *i.e.* rituals connected to Antesteriae, the days when the souls came to the world of the living through the pots placed right way up. It was believed that an inverted pot prevented spirits, and especially the evil, from appearing (see Hesiod, *Opera et dies*, 90–95). If applied to the burial at Galovo, this interpretation seems plausible. It could have been a very important but very powerful individual who was given a very rich burial, but who was prevented from exercising his powers after death. The curiosities around this burial don't stop here though. Above his skull, he also had a number of animal bones mixed with other finds placed. A final analysis hasn't been done yet, but so far traces of various large herbivores have been found (cattle or deer), a partial bovid scapula, the right half of a small carnivorous mandible (such

as marten) and part of a red deer metacarpal/metatarsal bone belonging to no older than two-year-old animal (Fig. 15). There is a partial bovid mandible showing cut marks – they could have been made during the effort to separate the head from the rest of the body of the animal, a considerable effort considering the concentration of muscles in this area (Fig. 15). The question is why that would have been necessary. It would have been easier to just leave the head connected to the body or smash it to get to the brain, tongue *etc.* The presence of bovid skulls in the burial can be found elsewhere too (ex. Lepenski Vir, grave 7 – Srejović 1969). The presence of the marten mandible and not the entire body/skull is also interesting⁸. So far, it is difficult to understand the exact meaning of the animal remains around this individual.

One other object from this burial is also curious – a clay model of what seems to be a duck head. So far, no bird remains have been found at Galovo site but that can be due to poor bone preservation. There are no other artefacts suggesting any connection to the birds as well. The closest analogy which predates this specimen of zoomorphic plastic is a head of a marsh

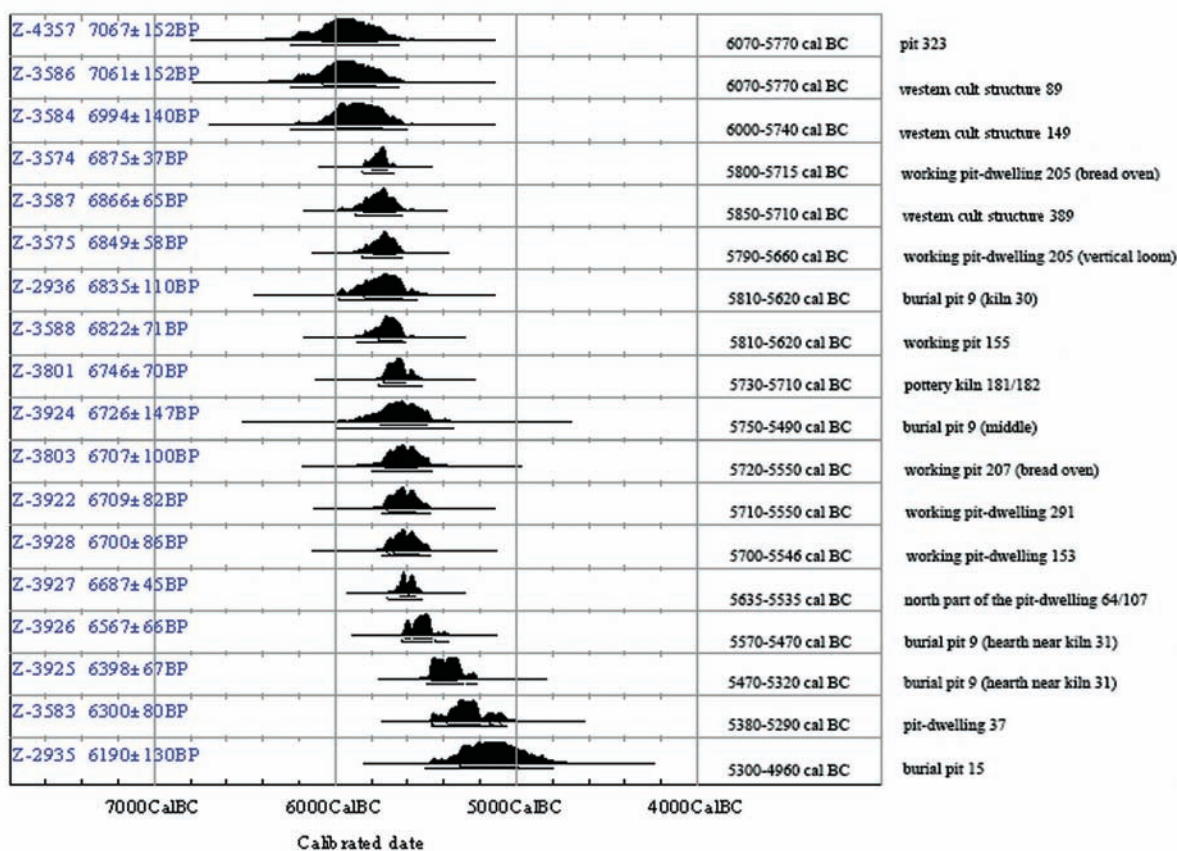


Fig. 14. Distributions of ¹⁴C ranges of charcoal samples from Galovo (after Minichreiter 2010).

⁸ We thank Dr. Tajana Trbojević Vukičević from Zagreb Faculty of Veterinary Medicine for information and help.

bird (duck) made of stone from the level of late Orignacien at Palaeolithic site of Mala Gradina near Kulaš in northern Bosnia (Basler 1979: 347–348). Finds of bird remains and sculptures depicting birds in graves at Ajvide (Gotland, Sweden) and Zvejnieki (Latvia) show how important certain symbols could have been (Mannermaa 2008), even though we cannot fully understand them today. At Ajvide, a clay figurine of what looks like a bird was found near the feet of the woman in burial 62 (Mannermaa 2008:211, 214). At Zvejnieki, a small bird made of wild boar tusk was found above the man's head in burial 74 (Mannermaa 2008:211). At this burial site, common species of duck were also identified (Mannermaa 2008:212). Not only were bird figurines found at these two sites, but the remains of

birds themselves, or their parts, such as wings, in graves next to individuals buried there. Almost all of the bird remains at Ajvide and Zvejnieki were identified as water birds (Mannermaa 2008:212). The presence of the model of bird's head at Galovo is unique, and so far resists a full interpretation.

Given all that was buried in pit 15, one other possible conclusion to the role of the man in question surges. Being obviously respected but feared even after his death, buried without a face and having the rest of the head sealed off by large pot shards, having bone remains of various wild and domesticated animals placed around his head, including bovid scapula, maybe he was occupying a place of a shaman in his community. A burial at Hilazon Tachtit cave (Israel) of a woman placed in a pit together with numerous tortoise shells and various parts of different animals, including marten skulls, represents a distant parallel, both in time (this burial is dated to the late Natufian period, 15 000–11 500 BP) and in context, but nevertheless bares certain similarities (Grosman et al. 2008). At Zvejnieki (Latvia) some burials contained traces of mammals such as elk, fox, marten, badger and seals (Mannermaa 2008:215). Early Neolithic child burial VII at Tamula (Estonia) – 5760±45 BP or about 4600 calBC – had a bird figurine placed near the shoulder and wing bones of a crane in both hands (Jaanits 1954; Kriiska et al. 2007; Mannermaa 2008). According to Mannermaa (Mannermaa 2008:218), it is possible that



Fig. 15. Burial 36, animal bones (photo K. Botić).

“figurines may have depicted animals qualified as helping spirits or they may be impressions of totem animals”. They may have represented the souls of deceased associated with symbolism surrounding the journey to the underworld – one ethnographic parallel can be found in Khanty graves in the Ural area (Mannermaa 2008:218; Zvelebil and Jordan 1999; Vinokurova 2005). Although at Galovo bird remains were not identified yet, it is possible that further analysis will confirm their presence around the burials.

Here, it is worth mentioning how the Masai tradition deals with the corpses of medicine men: “On the death of a Masai medicine-man or rich person the corpse is not thrown away. An ox or a sheep is slaughtered and the fat is taken and rubbed on the body, after which it is put in an ox-hide and carried to a shady spot. A small hole is then dug resembling a trench, into which the body is laid and covered with stones. This is called a grave.” (Hollis 1905:305)

Burials at Galovo show new dimension in public ritual and possibly corporate identity of the dead. Whether they represented a symbolic unity with the living by representing collective ancestors or their personal identity was at the source of the corporate prestige (Chénier 2009:30; Flower 1996), as in the case of Roman funerary wax masks and Christian relics (Chénier 2009:31), or whether their burial crea-

ted bond with the land (arising from the need to care for the dead which only descendants could accomplish) thus making it sacred (*Chénier 2009.33; Fustel de Coulanges 1979[1864].62*), it is difficult to say. Although some efforts have been made towards the understanding of burial ground and its context

at Galovo, much more data and analysis is needed to fully understand it. Unfortunately, a great part of it has definitely been destroyed, and only future excavations may give new important data which would throw light on this specific problem.

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