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THE THINGS WE DID NOT FIND

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In the spring 2001 the site of Čatež - Sredno polje was excavated in Slovenia. The present article presents some further possibilities for research based on the questions formulated on the basis of the archaeological record discovered at the site.

When we would like to focus our attention on the smallest finds on archaeological sites, we have to ask ourselves questions about our own general conceptions of archaeology. One of the most important questions is '*What is archaeology about*?'. According to my personal opinion one of the best definitions has been provided by Clive Gamble in his general and for the broadest audience written introduction to the science of archaeology (Gamble 2001:15):

> "[Archaeology is] ... *basically about three things: objects, landscapes and what we make of them. It is quite simply the study of the past through material remains*".

This is his classical statement in which facts become meaningful when they are contained in a story and every story is an appeal to our archaeological imagination. Stories do not form out of nothing, they are logical consequences of our questions about the past. So archaeology is about the questions we formulate about the past and not about the past itself.

As we acknowledge the importance of questions formulated we are getting increasingly aware about the differences of the intellectual milieu in which research is conducted. Different research traditions are just different traditions of asking questions about the past. With this in mind, the readers should understand that this article is a product of Slovenian archaeology and tries to propose solutions to the problems emerging in current archaeological research in Slovenia.

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If we look back upon whichever period in the Slovenian archaeology, we can realise that, despite the small size of the country, synchronous archaeological overviews are still divided on the bases of individual, but strictly culturally defined characteristics of the discovered material culture. Despite the tradition of the prehistoric archaeology with its conceptual apparatus deeply rooted in the observation of the chronological and spatial dynamics of the cultural phenomena, the regional archaeological studies kept their impetus along with the introduction of the "New archaeology", which was partially transferred in to the Slovenian intellectual milieu at the beginning of the 1980-es. This is exactly the period when the systematic surveys became the key method for collecting archaeological data in the landscape. On the one hand this made us aware of the distribution of the archaeological finds in the landscape and of the processes responsible for it. On the other hand the better understanding of the archaeological space produced a shift of attention away from the dynamics of the existing archaeological record at a single site.

The systems which in the spirit of the new archaeology conceptualised the culture as an adaptive system, were added on to the key features of settlement archaeology and the research derived from it. This was based on the reconstruction of prehistoric subsistence systems and settlement patterns and became promoted as the easiest way to understand and reconstruct prehistoric cultural systems. It was all based on the premise that the observation on synchronous variations of site features and the diachronous variations of site numbers, locations, and structures of sites would "disclose" prehistoric populations and their cultural dynamics.

These trends were running in a specific epistemological context - in an archaeology that comprised synthetic articles presenting itself as a conceptual follower of the ghost of positivism. It understood itself as a "ladder of knowledge" about the past, but in an executive, analytical scientific environment the sceptical notion about the nature of recognition and final knowledge was, and is, still prevailing. At least on a declar-

ative level this meant that several aspects of the past were easier to grasp and consecutively easier to understand - and those were economy, subsistence and settlement patterns.

Slovenian archaeology systematically avoided the first two, but the settlement patterns were used as a system, which M. Conkey named "as if". She showed that archaeologist's tend to interpret the distributions of sites on the maps "as if" they were prehistoric regional systems (Conkey 1987: 66). The truth is that this approach considers site locations that are empirical generalisations about a region and are derived from the knowledge of discovered sites. It is true, that we have to start somewhere with the basics for the documentation of diachronic changes, but it seems that such a methodology produces a creation of models, which instead of cultural changes observe cultural replacements. And despite its sceptical tradition, for which one might assume that it would produce at least a slight doubt in to the nomothetic potential of the points on a map, the Slovenian archaeology never gave an interpretation of an archaeological site which would be based on a spatial synchrony and temporal diachronic variability in the archaeological record. Such a statement is astonishing in combination with the acknowledgement that modern stratigraphic excavations were introduced into the archaeological practice a long time ago and one could assume that especially this kind of excavation and documentation would offer the basis for the evolutionary based conception of the evolution of material culture and changes of activity patterns on a microlocational scale.

Because of the lack of evidence about the variability of archaeological records in the Neolithic sites on a regional level and because of the fact that on the site of Čatež - Sredno polje only a single phase of Neolithic settlement was discovered, we are again forced to return to two traditional approaches which were put into force a long time ago in Slovenian archaeology. Firstly, we are forced to set the site in a referential position and secondly, we are forced to observe and compare with it other sites in the region in that specific period. By doing this we have to be aware of the fact that the site, which was raised to the referential position is not only the largest and consequently the richest site, but also the structuration of its archaeological record enables us to observe synchronous variability in the strategies of stone tool productions and use at the site.

We can solve the problem of the variability of the stone tools discovered in the archaeological record with the documentation of the reduction sequences in individual stratigraphic units and with the comparison of the results between several units. In the past the basic unit for the traditionally typological research was the assemblage of all the stone tools discovered at the site, but in the case of Čatež - Sredno polje a sufficient number of big features was discovered, which can be interpreted as elements of the settlement in which several different activities were taking place.

And since we assume that the location of the settlement is basically determined with the adaptive systems of the subsistence (the provision with raw materials is included into the motion in the space itself), we think that every predictive model of the location of settlements or broadly speaking, every predictive model of regional settlement systems, has to include and to consider predicament models of the subsistence of particular societies. With the analysis of synchronous processes of raw material procurement and the stone tool production at the site Čatež - Sredno polje, and the comparison of these processes with the ones determined at the contemporary sites in the region, we can define the broadest range of economic strategies of stone tool production. And on the bases of all these strategies we can formulate a predictive model of the subsistence activities that are based on that a model of settlement patterns.

If we follow the notion that the productive systems are considered as being dynamic supergroups, which include several series of narrowly determined sequences involved in the production and the maintenance of the stone tools, we can present them as the binding links, which place the social rhythms of the production into the space and over the recognition and reconstruction of individual decisions and deeds at the individual process of production and of the use of stone tools include the individual into the production. In other words, the act of detaching flakes from cores is a specific act in the past, which because of its irreversibility and because of the material remnant has clear 'recognisability' and a high potential for reconstruction that offers the easiest recognition of an act or a deed of an individual in the past. In the "life" of the stone tool there is only a single point where the mental projection of the producer in the past, and the mental template of the researcher in the present correspond and overlap - the decision to produce the flake is linked with the recognition of the flake itself.

When speaking about stone tools, we were forced to confess that the mental templates were nothing more than our analytical tools for the recognition of the stone tools, where we on the bases of the previous knowledge divided intentionally worked stone tools from the natural and further divided them into smaller groups. Further applying the knowledge we have about the mechanics of stone flaking we can reconstruct what happened before with the core and later with the flake. Taking into consideration the reconstruction of the formal transformation we can reconstruct the reduction sequences, but at this moment we cannot have positive knowledge any more that we can reconstruct the acts and decisions of a single person. We can be only sure that we are talking

about a complex of decisions which were influenced by the intentions and the abilities of the temporal manufacturer on the one hand and by the physical characteristics of the raw material on the other. In this case the classical evolutionary pressures are just the dynamic relations between these two factors and because of the greater number of finds in the assemblage we cannot speak about an individual but about the complex of decisions of individuals that are members of the society.

The best example for the reconstruction of such decisions is research on the process of the intentional forming of half-products, their finalising, the process of the use of tools, their maintenance and their final discard. In the moment when we are talking about the complex of decisions of a larger number of individuals, we are into the reconstruction of productive systems, and this means, that instead on the level of the individual decisions, we find ourselves on the level which was described by classical Darwinism as group selection, although we could call it productive systems.

This would mean a radical turn from the classical position which considered archaeological finds, in our case stone tools as historical remnants, which enabled archaeologists to establish chronologies and typologies. If we observe the stone tools as technical remnants we can get further into the reconstruction of human activities that produced them (Sigaut 1993: 383). And since we can conclude that settlements are also material manifestations of social formations in the society, we can, with the observations of the depositions of flaking by-products, observe the patterns of deposition or even of social handling of raw materials in the society.

We have chosen flaking by-products as the observed category of lithics because of the major characteristic of the lithic assemblage at the site - more than 95% of all the lithics are local. In this case local means that the inhabitants gathered pebbles in a river at a distance of approximately 100 meters from the settlement. Unworked pebbles were brought into the site, tested, and if suitable, transformed into cores and further chipped. The site with its approximately 13 000 flakes and 2000 cores represents the only known site in Slovenia which might be described as a quarry site.

Unfortunately the local raw materials are all physically much the same and it is difficult to trace spatially the preparation and transformation of a single core between several archaeological units (interpreted by the excavators as remains of buildings). On the other hand this tracing is possible in the rare cases of exotic raw materials - in our case this means that they are of different appearance and were introduced at the site at a different stage of core reduction. Since after the observation of breakage patterns of fragmented blades and end-scrapers on blades, we were able to conclude that a large proportion of retouched tools was used, fragmented and discarded outside the settlement, we concluded that we should focus our attention on the remains for which we suppose that they were exposed to the smallest degree of intentional final structured deposition. We looked at the structure of rubbish, since we believed that the smallest parts of the flaking process were not structured intentionally. The tracing of small chips and flakes unsuitable for further use of exotic raw material from a single core showed a distribution between several large pits. Since we do not believe that the remains of a single chipping activity were intentionally deposited into several pits on a large area, we have to assume that this core circulated inside the settlement.

This conclusion raises several questions:

- Were the pits discovered at the site remains of houses. If so;
- Were the individual houses domiciles of independent economic units inside the community. If not;
- Are we looking at the remains of a highly egalitarian society where even the exotic raw materials circulated freely between several individuals in the society.

With these questions we go back to the beginning. What is archaeology about? As it was mentioned above archaeology is about our questions about the past, and the answers to the questions posed. Of course we do not discover questions or answers at the excavations, and it is illusionary that new excavations will simply disclose answers about the past. We have to ask ourselves what are we looking for, and later, we can formulate our questions on the bases of observed structures of the remains from the past. Sometimes, when we would like to formulate questions about the social structures of the society, we can also observe remains for which we can assume that they meant the same for the prehistoric people as they mean for us - we can observe rubbish.

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