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ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY CONCERNING MORTUARY PRACTICE IN THE CENTRAL AREA OF BALKAN PENINSULA DURING THE EARLY AND MIDDLE NEOLITHIC

Archaeological studies of Starčevo Culture have up to now focused mostly on ceramics typology, producing four chronological sequences, all of them still in use (Milojčić 1949; Arandjelović-Garašanin 1954; Srejović1969; Dimitrijević 1974). Less attention was payed to other aspects of the culture, and although burials were known from the early thirties[2], mortuary practices have drawn less consideration (Fig.1) (Grbić 1930; Fewkes *et al.* 1933).

In this paper we attempt to present all the data regarding similarities and differences in population and burial practices according to the chronological division between the Early Neolithic (Protostarčevo) and Middle Neolithic (Classical Starčevo) periods of this culture (Srejović 1969). Burial forms, orientation, and position of the skeletons, grave goods, paleodemography and anthropotypology have been treated as separate topics.

Burial Forms

The main characteristic of both Protostarčevo and Classical Starčevo periods is the presence of the burials within the settlements (Grbić 1930; Fewkes *et al.* 1933; Galović 1968; Leković 1985; Garašanin 1956), but, as only a limited number of the inhabitants were buried in that manner, we can neither exclude the possibility of a different ritual for other members of the community, nor the existence of unknown Starčevo necropolae [1].

Pit burials dominate in both periods. The number of individuals buried within one grave differs considerably not only from one site to another, but also within graves on the same site. In Protostarčevo period, 1 to 17 individuals could have been buried in a single grave, while in Classical Starčevo, no more than two (excluding Vinča)(Arandjelović-Garašanin 1954; Vasić 1936; Korošec1950).

Pit burials can be divided in two groups : 1. simple pits of irregular or elliptic shape; and 2. burial constructions, pits with an elaborate shape (Leković 1985).

In Protostarčevo period, all the deceased from Donje Branjevine, Gura Baciului, Velesnica, Ajmana (Karmanski 1968; Brunker 1974; Zsoffman 1983 (for Donje Branjevine); Vlassa *et al.* 1964; Vlassa 1974; Nekraso 1964 (for Gura Baciului); Vasić 1986; Stalio 1986, Lepenski Vir from documentation which was made available for my work by prof. Srejović) have been buried in simple pit graves, as well as nr. 3 from Lepenski Vir.

Most of the middle neolithic burials belong to this group : 4 or 5 from Starčevo, two from Tečić, burial nr. 1 from Gura Baciului, nr. 3 from Donje Branjevine, nrs. 31 and 44 from Lepenski Vir (Fewles *et al.* 1933, for Starčevo; Galović 1968, for Tečić; for Donje Branjevine, Gura Baciului and Lepenski Vir see above). Three deceased on the sites of Donje Branjevine, Starcevo and Obrež (Brukner 1974) have been buried in the mounds formed by "extraction" of the earth from burial pits.

The burial pits from Vinča and Zlatara (Leković 1985; Garašanin 1956; Vasić 1936; Korošec 1950) represent the elaborate constructions of our type 2. According to their other characteristics, Zlatara finds could be dated in Early Neolithic and, as Leković does not give an explicit dating, we considered them as Protostarčevo.

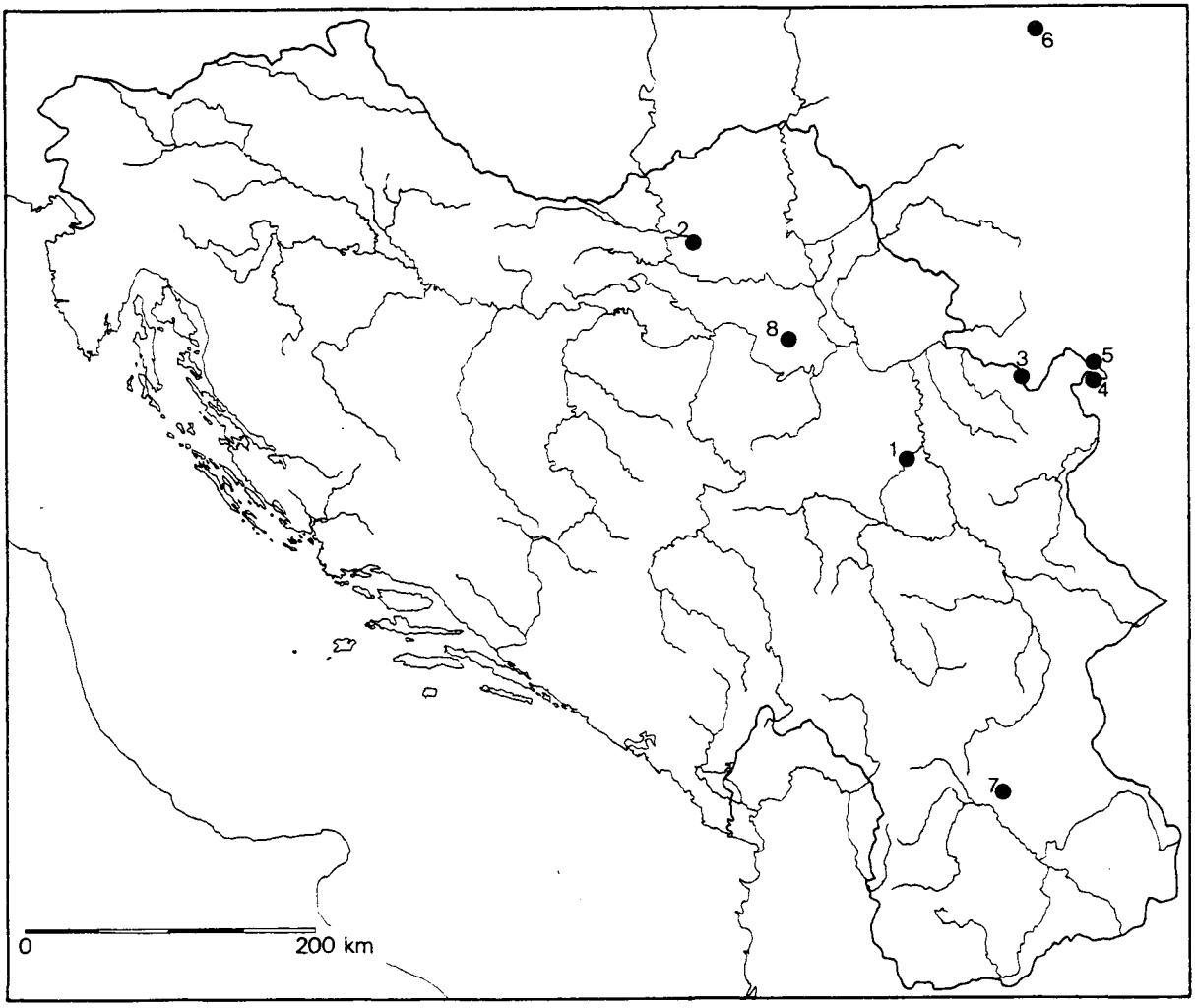
On the other hand, Vinča belongs to the very end of the Starčevo culture, although the number of individuals in a single grave doesn't correspond to the middle neolithic scheme. The chronological differences between Vinča/Zlatara (same type of construction) and Vinča/Ajmana, Velesnica (great number of deceased in a single grave) being important, same or similar rites might be regarded as revival of the earlier traditions, which represent the need to regain the power that Starčevo culture came to lose at the time. This process can be traced in ceramic production as well (desapearance of barbotine, rare painting *etc.*, see Dimitrijević 1974).

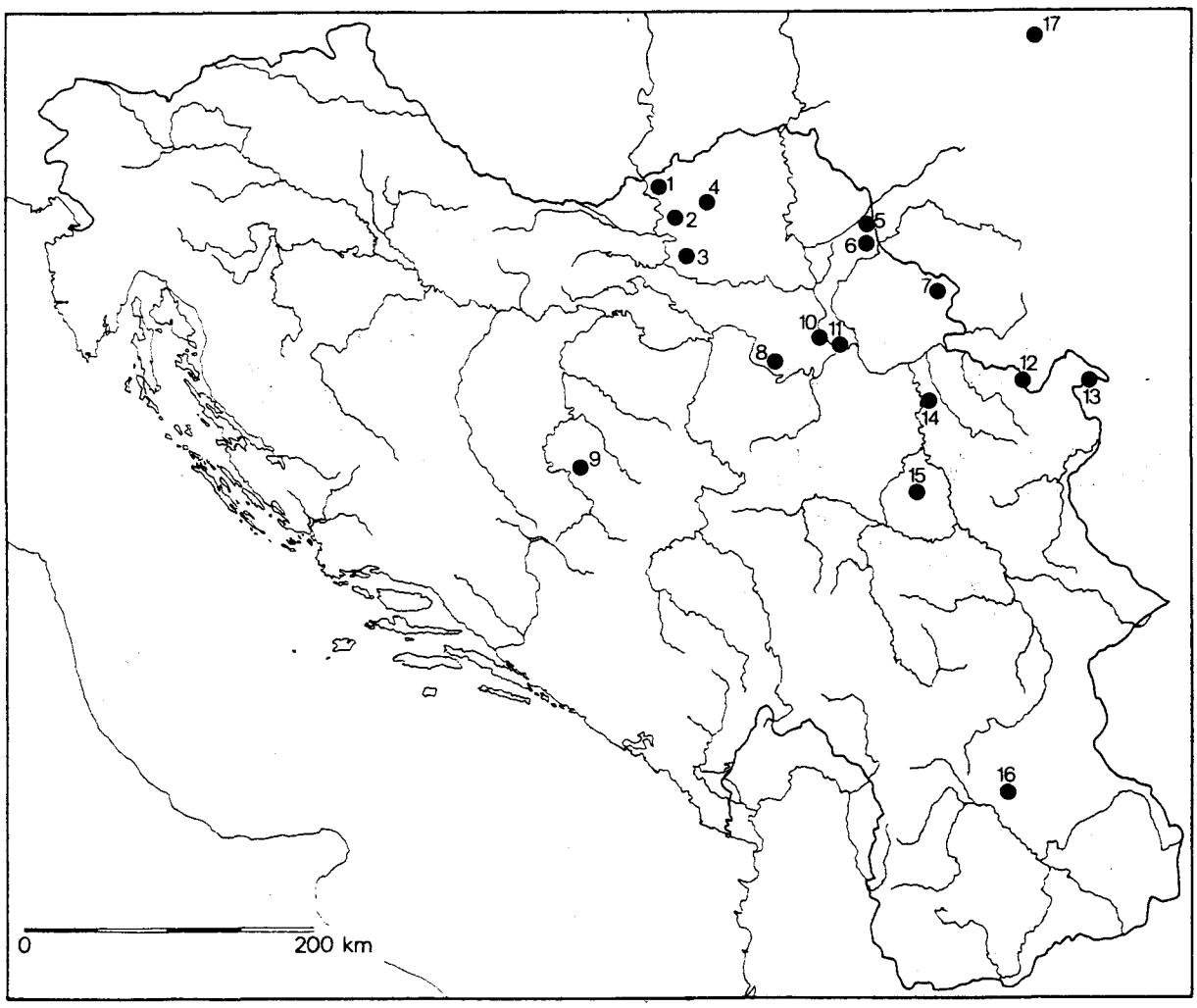
During the Protostarčevo period in Lepenski Vir and Gura Buciului (Vlassa 1974), stone constructions were ascertained both in the pits or independently. In Gura Baciului limestone blocks were found near the head (grave nr. 2) or near the head and the hips (nr. 3). In

Fig. 1: Map of the Early Neolithic and Middle Neolithic sites with anthropological finds.

A
1. Divostin
2. Donje Branjevine
3. Lepenski Vir
4. Velesnica
5. Ajmana
6. Gura Baciului
7. Anzabegovo
8. Zlatara

B
1. Bačkimonostor
2. Bogojevo
3. Donje Branjevine
4. Bač
5. Jašatomić
6. Perlez
7. Kozluk
8. Obrež-Baštine
9. Obre I
10. Starčevo
11. Vinča
12. Lepenski Vir
13. Velesnica
14. Saraorci
15. Tečić
16. Anzabegovo
17. Gura Baciului





Lepenski Vir, the deceased were either partly or completely surrounded by stones (nrs. 73 and 88) or the stones were heaped over them (nrs. 1,4 and 43).

In Classical Starčevo burial nr. 1 of Gura Baciului, the bottom of the pit was covered and the head was surrounded with small stones.

Stone constructions were ascertained in 6 of 8 burials in Obre I, each one having specific characteristics (Benac 1973; Leković 1985).

Therefore, we can conclude that pit burials dominate in both periods, whereas the real or symbolic stone constructions appear in Protostarčevo, in Lepenski Vir and Gura Baciului, which are supposed to have belonged to the same preneolithic complex. Obre I, on the other hand, differs considerably, chronologically and territorially, as well as regarding the stone construction which have rather cultual than burial significance, as they were centred around buried children or parts of their bodies[2].

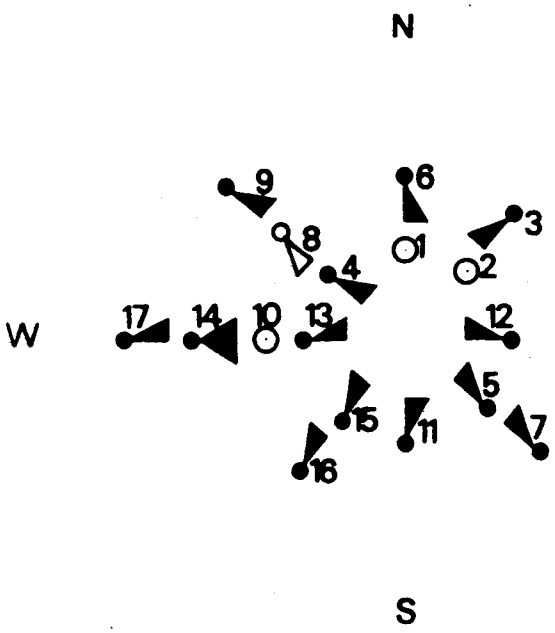
Position and Orientation (Fig.2)

Of 72 skeletons belonging to the Earlier Neolithic, no informations could have been supplied for 24 individuals from Anzabegovo (Nemeskery 1976) (as they mostly belong to the category of scattered human bones) [3], 5 from Lepenski Vir and 2 from Velesnica [4]. No data were published for Ajmana (17 individuals) and two deceased from Donje Branjevine.

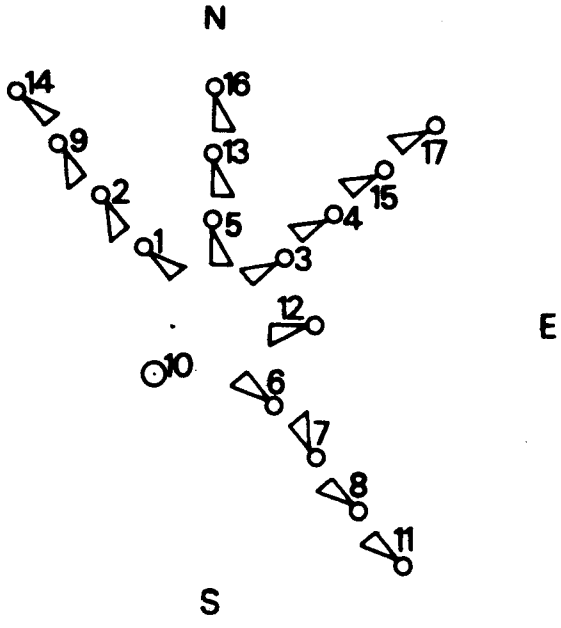
Among the 22 remaining skeletons, the flexed position (Fig.3) predominates, with an equal distribution of laying on the left (9) and right (7) side. Besides this, there exist several other types of position : layed on the back in flexed position (Gura Baciului 2 and Velesnica 2A)[5], layed on the back in "à la turque" position (Velesnica 2G)[6]; stretched/face down position (Divostin 1) or transitional position (between stretched and flexed) with only one leg flexed (Lepenski Vir 1). During this period, the individual from the grave nr. 83 in Lepenski Vir is the only that one have been buried in

Fig. 2: Position and orientation of the deceased.

a) Early Neolithic



b) Middle Neolithic



unindentified or unusual position.....

flexed position .....right side left side

contracted position .....right side left side

position "à la turque".....

1	Gura Baciului	2		1	Bogojevo	1	
2	Lepenski Vir	1		2	Obrež	1	
3	- -	5		3	Tečić	1	
4	- -	6		4	- -	2	
5	- -	9		5	Donje Branjevine	6	
6	- -	68		6	Gura Baciului	1	
7	- -	73		7	Lepenski Vir	8	
8	- -	83	a	8	- -	32	a
9	- -	88		9	- -	32	b
10	Velesnica	2	A	10	- -	32	c
11	- -	2	B	11	- -	42	b
12	- -	2	C	12	Obre I	1	
13	- -	2	D	13	- -	2	
14	- -	2	G	14	- -	3	
15	Zlatara	A1		15	- -	4	
16	- -	A2		16	Velesnica	1	
17	- -	B1		17	- -	3	

Fig. 3: An example of a flexed position : Lepenski Vir n° 73.

Fig. 4: An example of a contracted position : Lepenski Vir n° 4.

Fig. 5 : Distribution of the males, females and children on different sites in Early Neolithic.

	males		females		children		sex not identified		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Divostin							1	100	1	100
Donje Branjevine	1	50					1	50	2	100
Lepenski Vir	6	40	5	33	2	13	2	13	15	100
Velesnica	1	14	4	58	2	28			7	100
Ajmana	4	23	1	7	12	70			17	100
Gura Baciului			2	66	1	33			3	100
Anzabegovo			8	33	14	59	2	7	24	100
Zlatara			2	66	1	33			3	100
Total	12	17	22	30	32	44	6	8	72	100
without Anzabegovo	12	25	14	29	18	37	4	8	48	100

Fig. 6 : Distribution of the males, females and children on different sites in Middle Neolithic.

	males		females		children		sex not identified		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Obrež					1	100			1	100
Vinča	8	86	1	10			1	10	10	100
Saraorci					1	100			1	100
Lepenski Vir	1	12	4	62	1	12	1	12	7	100
Velesnica			1	50	1	50			2	100
Anzabegovo	1	11	4	45	3	33	1	11	9	100
Obre I					8	100			8	100
Gura Baciului			1	100					1	100
Total	10	26	11	28	15	38	3	7	39	100
without Obre I	10	32	11	35	7	23	3	10	31	100

Fig.7 : Cranial measurements and indexes - Early Neolithic.

	Lepenski Vir IIIa				L7 III	Ajmana					Velesnica		Anzabegovo I
	18	48	73	83a	88	6	7	8a	9	11	2A	2D	7
1	172	174	191	185	186	178	189	180	183	175	170	173	175
8	138	145	140	139	129	138	133	127	140	143	136	138	132
9	92	91	104	89	97	95	98	93	108	98	-	-	92
17	144	-	155	-	-	130	131	-	-	-	-	-	-
20	122	101	126	112	115	116	119	116	119	112	-	-	115
45	-	-	132	-	-	128	144	-	134	128	-	-	-
48	-	-	73	-	-	68	-	-	77	68	-	-	-
51	-	-	42	-	-	36	34	-	34	37	-	-	39
52	-	-	36	-	-	31	30	-	32	35	-	-	30
54	-	-	26	-	-	21	20	-	24	22	-	-	-
55	-	-	50	-	-	46	-	-	51	52	-	-	-
66	-	91	95	90	94	95	91	-	95	83	-	-	85
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♀	♂	♂	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀
1:8	80,23	83,33	73,29	75,13	69,13	77,52	70,37	70,50	76,50	81,71	80,00	79,76	75,42
17:1	83,72	-	81,15	-	-	73,03	69,31	-	-	-	-	-	-
17:8	104,34	-	110,71	-	-	94,20	98,49	-	-	-	-	-	-
20:1	70,93	58,04	65,96	65,94	61,82	65,16	62,96	64,44	65,02	64,00	-	-	65,71
9:8	66,66	62,75	74,28	64,02	75,19	68,84	73,60	73,22	77,14	68,53	-	-	69,69
48:45	-	-	55,30	-	-	53,12	-	-	57,46	53,12	-	-	-
52:51	-	-	85,71	-	-	86,11	88,23	-	94,111	94,59	-	-	76,92
54:55	-	-	52,00	-	-	45,65	-	-	47,05	42,30	-	-	-

Fig. 8 : Measurements and indexes for long bones (Early Neolithic).

Martin	Lepenski Vir IIIa			Ajmana					Velesnica	Anza I
N°	18	73	83a	6	7	8a	9	11	2D	7
femur										
1	-	452	400	-	-	426	450	-	-	394
8	-	98	82	-	-	-	93	-	-	-
humerus										
1	290	340	-	314	321	-	331	306	-	285
7	70	80	-	68	70	-	-	64	-	57
Sex	♂	♂	♀	♂	♂	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀
Index femur										
8:1	-	21,7	20,5	-	-	-	20,6	-	-	-
humerus										
7:1	24,1	23,5	-	21,6	22,11	-	-	20,9	-	20,0
height	160	171	159,5	165	168	164	170	156	147	159

contracted position.

The orientation of the skeletons is equally distributed in all directions.

Of 54 middle neolithic skeletons, the position is reported for 20, and both position and orientation for not more than 16[7]. They were all buried in contracted position (Fig.4). As to the orientation, it is striking that the SW segment of the circle is completely neglected. There is no preference in laying the deceased on the left or the right side.

It is evident that the flexed position predominates in Protostarčevo while other positions appear sporadically. Classical Starčevo period, on the other hand, witnesses the establishing of canonized mortuary rites, which is apparent in the exclusive use of the contracted position and less variety in orientation. Sex and age of the deceased have no influence on the choice of the position, side or orientation.

Grave Goods

The fact that during both periods of the Starčevo culture most burials have no grave goods in the strict sense, and that the pits were filled up with earth containing archaeological material, led many of the earlier excavators to conclude that the deceased were thrown into waste ditches instead of being buried (Arandjelović-Garašanin 1954). Recent excavations at Velesnica have shown that neither ceramics, nor animal bones were to be found underneath the first buried skeleton[8]. This is highly significant as enough attention was never paid on that kind of information in earlier excavations. After the first deceased was buried, the pit was filled up with earth mixed with ceramics and animal bones.

Grave goods in the strict sense have been found in 18 graves. Two flint flakes (grave nr.4), bone owls (nrs.5 and 68), dear antler (nr.6) and an amulet in the grave nr.73 belong to the Protostarčevo period in Lepenski Vir; at the same site, there are two flakes near buried individual nr. 42a, which belongs to the middle neolithic period. In Gura Baciului, the early neolithic grave contained a mortar and a pestle, and a middle neolithic grave had a polished stone axe as a grave donation[9]. In both graves of burial construction A in Zlatara, was found a fragment of quartzite, and in one of them there an amulet. More goods were found in grave construction B which was larger in dimensions : a miniature bowl, a few beads of *spondylus* shell, two polished stone axes (one of miniature dimensions), two fragmentary flint blades, two bone awls and a few fragments of quartzite (Lekovic 1985).

The ceramic bowls and the polished axes were found as grave offerings in the middle neolithic graves of Velesnica, Tečić and Kozluk (Galović 1968; Jovanović 1968; Vasić 1986), which is apparently a common practice of the period.

Paleodemography

It was impossible to carry out proper demographical analysis because, as already mentioned, not all the deceased were buried within the settlement. We have tried to compare the data from different sites and establish the possible pattern followed in choosing the individuals to be buried within the settlement. The

Fig.9 : Cranial measurements and indexes - Middle Neolithic

Martin	Lepenski Vir IIIb		Vinča									Gura Baciului
N°.	8	32a	I	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	1
1	186	181	194	(191)	(195)	(173)	193	174	(188)	(210)	187	170
8	134	136	137	(141)	(156)	(149)	124	142	(140)	(134)	140	140
9	92	96	-	(97)	103	-	-	98	93	103	101	98
17	140	133	-	-	-	-	-	133	-	-		138
20	110	116	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	113
45	-	126	-	-	-	-	-	(126)	135	-	(135)	125
48	-	67	-	-	-	-	-	63	69	75	(68)	64
51	37	40	-	-	-	-	-	37	(40)	-	34	42
52	31	33	-	-	-	-	-	31	(29)	-	33	33
54	-	25	-	-	-	-	-	23	(28)	25	24	26
55	-	56	-	-	-	-	-	48	54	54	(50)	48
66	95	91	115	-	93	-	84	87	-	100	-	79
sex	♀	♀	♂	♂	♂	♂	♂	♂	♂	♂	♂	♀
8:1	72,04	75,13	70,61	73,82	80,00	86,12	64,24	81,60	74,46	63,80	74,86	82,36
17:1	75,26	73,48	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	81,17
17:8	104,47	97,79	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	98,57
20:1	59,13	64,08	-	-	-	-	-	64,94	-	57,14	-	66,47
9:8	68,65	70,58	-	68,79	66,02	-	-	69,01	66,42	76,86	72,14	70,00
48:45	-	53,17	-	-	-	-	-	50,00	51,10	-	50,40	51,20
52:51	83,78	82,50	-	-	-	-		85,10	72,50	-	78,80	78,57
54:55	-	44,64	-	-	-	-	-	47,90	51,90	46,30	48,00	54,16

Fig. 10 : Measurments and indexes for long bones-Middle Neolithic.

Martin N°	Lepenski Vir	
	8	32a
femur		
1	430	370
8	83	80
humerus		
1	314	-
8	62	-
sex	♀	♀
index		
femur		
8:1	19,3	21,26
humerus		
7:1	19,7	-
height	168	155

result is negative, as no regularity considering age and sex could be discovered. The sites themselves differ considerably from one another, and there is no apparent alteration in the early-middle neolithic relation (Figs 5 and 6). On the other hand, the number of the individuals buried within the settlement decreases in the Middle Neolithic on all the sites where both periods were present.

Anthropotypology

In his previous works Mikić (1981) has distinguished and described in details four varieties of a Mediterranean type, two of which belong to gracile, while the other two to the robust form.

Robust Mediterranean variety has been ascertained in Lepenski Vir, where it is more commonly met in the Preneolithic IId horizon. The deceased from burial nr.73, a man 171 cm tall, corresponds to this type.

Mediterranean type in the general morphological sense appears at Lepenski Vir (nr.83a) and Velesnica (2 A and 2D)[10]. All three are female. Velesnica finds show an extreme robustness of *arcus supercilialis* and of the mandibular region.

Dolichocran gracile Mediterranean type is represented by the skeleton nr.86 at Lepenski Vir, four males from Ajmana (6,7,8 and 9) (Radosavljević-Krunić 1986) and male individual nr.7 from Anzabegovo (Nemeskery 1976). The postcranial skeletons have bordering robust/gracile characteristics. The height varies from 159 (Anzabegovo) to 170 (Ajmana)[11].

Lepenian Variety of Gracile Mediterranean has brachicran values of length/width index as most prominent feature. The process of brachicranisation begins at Lepenski Vir as early as the IId horizon (Mikić 1981; the IId horizon belongs to the Protoneolithic period of Lepenski Vir, according to Srejović 1969). During Protostarčevo period, it is represented by female skeletons nr.18 from Lepenski Vir and nr.11 from Ajmana, and male nr.48 from Lepenski Vir. While the process of gracilisation has been completed on the Ajmana finds, the traces of robustness are still remarkable on Lepenski Vir specimens (Fig.7 for cranial and fig.8 for postcranial skeleton).

From the total number of middle neolithic Starčevo finds, anthropological measurements have been supplied for 12 specimens. Both skulls from Lepenski Vir (8 and 32a) belong to dolichocran variety of Gracile Mediterranean, in spite of a notable mandibular robustness of specimen 32a, unusual for females. As it can be seen on fig. nr.8, the postcranial skeleton of nr.32a shows greater robustness compared to nr.8 from the same period.

An extremely gracile skull from Gura Baciului (nr.1) (Nekrasov 1964) corresponds to the Lepenian Variety of Gracile Mediterranean (Fig.9 for cranial and fig. 10 for postcranial skeleton).

All Vinča specimens (Schwidetsky 1971) belong to Mediterranean anthropological type. The process of gracilisation has been entirely completed. The values of width/length index vary from hyperbrachicran to ultradolichocran. The postcranial skeletons were not preserved.

Conclusion

The appearance of the same characteristics, as pit burials within the settlements, scarce grave goods and so forth, irrefutably points to the phyletic connection between Protostarčevo and Classical Starčevo period, in spite of many evident differences in mortuary practices and population characteristics.

Population continuity is shown by the existence of both gracile forms in Protostarčevo period, which will persist into Classical Starčevo period as well. Iron Gate series show that this continuity could be traced back to the Preneolithic layers of Lepenski Vir and Padina. The disappearance of robust forms, still present in Protostarčevo, points to a change in the manner of life, particularly in diet.

The direct filiation being apparent, the existing differences enable us to distinguish the two periods of the Starčevo culture. In Early Neolithic, burial forms show greater variety : we find simple pit burials, complex pit burials, as well as stone constructions. The latter, typical for Iron Gate sites, point to the strong influence of the preneolithic substratum.

During the Middle Neolithic, burying is effectuated in pit graves whereas the stone constructions are rare, appearing in Gura Baciului, at the very beginning of the Classical Starčevo period and at Obre I where they represent a brought-in custom.

Greater diversity is shown in the number of individuals buried in a single grave in Protostarčevo period (ranging from 1-17), while in Classical Starčevo, only Vinča grave has more than two deceased. Flexed

position predominates in Protostarčevo while other positions also appear. Classical Starčevo, on the other hand, knows only contracted skeletons.

The variety of the grave goods is greater in the earlier period while offerings typical for Classical Starčevo (ceramic and axes) appear only rarely.

The main characteristic of the Classical Starčevo among all the aspects of its mortuary practices is the establishing of well defined rites that were chosen from a variety of rites already existing in the Protostarčevo period. The decrease of the number of individuals given right to continue their existence in the community by being buried within the settlement points to the greater social division. As neither sex, nor age play the prominent role, some other, rather socio-economical characteristics must be looked for, but the problem lays beyond the frame of this work.

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Notes

1. Which might be suggested by Padina, of which a part belongs to the Early Neolithic. As no data were given in articles published by Jovanović B. nor in preliminary reports given by Zivanović S., it was not included in this paper.

2. Benac 1973 talks of possible child sacrifice.

3. This term, often found in the literature , conserns isolated bones which do not belong to any particular skeleton or grave.

4. Vasić (1986) deceased nr. 2E and 2F.

5. According to the photograph published in Vasić (1986).

6. *Ibid.*

7. No data could be collected for Starčevo, Vinča, Saraorci and Anzabegovo.

8. According to Vasić (1986), there was no material underneath the skeleton 2G.

9. Lepenski Vir from the documentation; Vlassa 1974; Vlassa *et al.* 1964.

10. From the measurements in Zivanović 1986.

11. According to the lists given by Breitinger (1938) for men and Bach (1966) for women.

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