



## The polished stone implements of the neolithic Starčevo culture in Northern Croatia

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The Starčevo Culture, the first agricultural community in northern Croatia, beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> Millennium B.C., has been archaeologically documented by more than 60 permanent settlements (Minichreiter 1997). They are mostly located in the southern Pannonian basin of the river Sava. Favourable natural conditions of the region enabled high population density during the early and middle neolithic and so far a great number of archaeological traces. Various aspects of the Starčevo Culture have often been discussed in archaeological literature but its stone production has been neglected although the new technology of producing stone artifacts, the techniques of abrading and polishing were usually emphasized as one of the important neolithic features. In the monograph on the Starčevo Culture in Northern Croatia, K. Minichreiter only states that stone products were numerous in the domestic inventory of Starčevo settlements, especially in early and classic phases but declining in the later phases. She considers this logical, given that the late phase was more distant from the Mesolithic basis which she considered to have held a decisive role in the production of stone artifacts in the early Starčevo Culture. This however refers to chipped stone implements, represented at the site of Zadubravljje with over five thousand artifacts. Polished stone implements are not mentioned specifically in the monograph, but the presence of last-shaped wedges, flat axes and chisels has generally been noted by other authors in all areas of the Starčevo Culture distribution. (Dimitrijević 1979, Garašanin 1979). Having a chance to view almost all the stone implements of several Starčevo settlements, such as Vinkovci-Hotel, Zadubravljje, Slavonski Brod-Galovo, Pepelana, we decided to pay more attention to that neglected neolithic production. We shall concentrate to the polished stone axes and related tools although stone querns, grinders, pestles, and various grinding surfaces were also objects that required the knowledge of polishing and abrading techniques. Three main types of polished tools are noted at all the mentioned sites: last-

shaped wedges, flat axes and chisels. The last-shaped wedges are still considered by some authors to be agricultural tools for working the land. But even a deficient petrographic analysis showed that many of them were made of sandstone or siltstone and thus could not have had any practical function of an axe let alone to dig with them. But they could have been used as whetstones for abrading and polishing other types of stones or as tools for polishing and burnishing of pottery vessels. So a thorough petroarchaeological analysis of the Starčevo Culture polished stone artifacts become a necessity not only to solve the problem of their function, but also to investigate and determine the possible sources of the exploited raw material and the way of its circulation among the Starčevo settlements. The most common opinion was that the nearest resources were lying in the mountains of the Northern Bosnia but there are some other solutions to be considered. Many of the Starčevo settlements are situated in the bottom of Mount Dilj and Požeška gora which could also be potential sources. Further, we have to take into account the fact that many artifacts were made of river-pebbles and the most of North-Bosnian rivers join the river Sava, the main economic and cultural artery of the mentioned region.

In the article we shall analyze polished stone artifacts from the Starčevo sites of Vinkovci, Slavonski Brod-Galovo and Zadubravljje because they were properly excavated and the artifacts are accompanied by essential archaeological context. In that sense the most interesting will be the site of Galovo in Slavonski Brod, where systematic excavation is still being carried out. The majority of stone axes e.i. wedges had been found in context of two burial pits. Five of them were placed next to the entrance section of the pit in which a contracted skeleton had been buried. Minichreiter, the leader of the excavation, suggested „the possibility of a ritual placement of stone axes during visitation of the deceased“ (Minichreiter 1999).

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