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NEOLITHIC ECONOMY OF THE EAST SLAVONIJA AND BARANJA - THE FIRST STEPS

NEOLITIČKA EKONOMIJA U ISTOČNOJ SLAVONIJI I BARANJI - PRVI KORACI

ABSTRACT

According to the results of the archeological researches at some neolithic settlements in the eastern part of Slavonija and in Baranja (Čepin, Kneževi Vinogradi, Belišće, Osijek) it is possible to get the insight into the beginning of the prehistoric economy of that region. The first neolithic population of the mentioned region is called Starčevo culture. With its appearance (end of 7th millenium) the economy based on agriculture and breeding of some animal species, fe. cattle, begins. The first trade routes which provided stone of high quality, are established. Neolithic economy of that time was in its very beginnings. Starčevo culture in the east part of Slavonija and Baranja was replaced by Sopot culture (about 5500 BC), which in that region lasted till the end of Neolithic and the first signs which announced the beginning of the next period – the Eneolithic or the Copper Age (about 4300 BC). Population of Sopot culture is represent of the developed neolithic economy, primarily agricultural with the great participation of cattle breeding. At all mentioned sites, some kinds of stone imported from very distinct areas were found. That presumes well organised trade and trade routes. The example is opsidian, volcanic stone that is possible to find only at the region of volcanic activity in the past. It is ascertained that all opsidian found at the sites in the north Croatia, including those in Slavonija and Baranja, comes from the northern Carpathian region, which means several hundreds km distance. Population of Sopot culture in the mid- and late neolithic had sufficient economical power to acquire such highly valued gooods. The second example that prooves the existance of trade routes is spondylus gaederopus, thorny oyster, the marine mollusc which occurs in Adriatic and Aegean sea and at some spots in Mediterranean sea. Jewelry made of its shells have been found at almost every site of Sopot culture. At the very end of Neolithic, that is time of late Sopot culture, appears elementary use of copper – metal that has marked the next prehistoric period.

The purpose of the paper is to present that at the beginning of the Neolithic origins the economy of which some aspects can be followed until today, such as agriculture and cattle breeding, production of various artefacts for everyday's needs or trade, even the earliest beginning of metalurgy. Also, starting with some general facts about neolitihic economy, on some examples from the mentioned excavated sites, its development during the Neolitihic will be presented, as well as some details specific to the region in question.

Key words: Neolithic, Starčevo culture, Sopot culture, neolithic agriculture, neolithic trade

SAŽETAK

Na temelju rezultata arheoloških istraživanja nekoliko naselja mlađega kamenog doba u istočnoj Slavoniji i Baranji: Čepin, Kneževi Vinogradi, Belišće i Osijek, moguće je steći uvid u početke prapovijesne ekonomije na području istočne Slavonije i Baranje. Prvu neolitičku populaciju na spomenutom prostoru nazivamo starčevačkom kulturom. Njezinom pojavom potkraj 7. tisućljeća, otpočinje gospodarstvo utemeljeno na zemljoradnji i počecima uzgoja pojedinih životinjskih vrsta, npr. goveda. Uspostavljaju se i prvi trgovački putevi kojima se nabavlja kvalitetan kamen za izradu različitih potrepština. Neolitička ekonomija u to vrijeme u svojim je začecima. Starčevačku kulturu u istočnoj Slavoniji i Baranji oko polovice 6. tisućljeća naslijedila je sopotska kultura, koja se na spomenutom prostoru zadržala do samoga kraja neolitika i prvih naznaka početka sljedećeg razdoblja – eneolitika ili bakrenog doba, oko 4300. godine. Sopotska populacija reprezent je razvijene neolitičke ekonomije, primarno zemljoradničke i s velikim udjelom stočarstva, prije svega uzgoja goveda. Na svim spomenutim nalazištima pronađene su pojedine vrste kamena importiranoga i s vrlo udaljenih područja, što podrazumijeva dobro organiziranu trgovinu/razmjenu i postojanje stalnih trgovačkih puteva. Primjer tome je opsidijan, vulkanski kamen što ga se može pronaći na mjestima negdašnje vulkanske aktivnosti. Ustanovljeno je da sav opsidijan pronađen na sjevernohrvatskim, pa tako i na spomenutim nalazištima, potječe sa sjevernih Karpata, što znači s udaljenosti od više stotina kilometara. Sopotske zajednice srednjega i kasnog neolitika imale su dovoljnu ekonomsku moć kako bi nabavile tu iznimno cijenjenu i skupu robu. Drugi primjer koji svjedoči o postojanju komunikacijskih i trgovačkih puteva jest spondylus gaederopus ili kopitnjak, vrsta školjkaša koji obitava u Jadranskom i Egejskom moru, te ponegdje u Sredozemnom moru. Nakit izrađen od njegovih ljuštura pronađen je na gotovo svim lokalitetima sopotske kulture. Na samome kraju neolitika, u vrijeme kasne sopotske kulture pojavljuje se već i elementarna uporaba bakra, kovine koja je obilježila sljedeće prapovijesno razdoblje. Cilj rada jest pokazati kako već na početku neolitika na području Slavonije i Baranje nastaje začetak ekonomije čije pojedine aspekte možemo pratiti do danas, kao što su zemljoradnja i stočarstvo, proizvodnja najrazličitijih proizvoda namijenjenih svakodnevnim potrebama ili razmjeni, trgovina (možemo je nazvati unutarnjom i vanjskom) pa čak i najraniji počeci metalurgije. Također, krenuvši od općih činjenica o neolitičkoj ekonomiji, na nekoliko primjera sa spomenutih istraživanih lokaliteta, pokazat će se njezin razvitak tijekom neolitika i neke specifičnosti vezane za područje o kojemu je riječ.

Ključne riječi: *neolitik, starčevačka kultura, sopotska kultura, neolitička zemljoradnja, neolitička trgovina*

During the last few centuries of the 7th millenium, great changes in human life started to occure in the south Panonnian area. These changestake place in the organisation of economical and social life and in the production of material goods. That what makes essential difference from the previous periods – Paleolithic and Mesolithic Ages – is economy based on food production in the first place, which results with the occurance of the permanent settlements, as like as many innovations in social organisation and spiritual conceptions.

Producing of food and the end of necessity to depend only on what can be cought and found in the nature, resulted with the increase of the life quality and permanant stay in the settlements, what enabled the storage of the food and raw materials which could be used as the trade goods. Higher quality of life has led to the population boom, and the surplus of population have migrated, colonised new territories with fertile soil and founded new communities. In search for new areas to cultivate, neolithic populations have migrated in several waves from south-east of Europe towards north and north-west, comming into contact with mesolithic communities that still were hunters and gatherers. The process of gradual transmission and spreading of knowledge and skills which are characteristic to the neolithihic way of life is called neolithisation.

When speaking of neolithic economy, we must have on mind its entirety and mutual impact of its various 'economical branches' such as, beside ones which are directly related to food production, are those which satisfy the needs for various supplies – for example, production of tools and equipment used at the tillage and plant cultivation, from clearing of forests to the storage of harvest and other food. In the close connection to that is the greatest neolithic technological innovation, that is production of ceramics, such as vessels in which the food can be stored, kept and cooked much better than before.

Besides the food overpluses and the stock-breeding products, eventual overpluses of stone, bone, antler and pottery products or materials for their production, enabled trade with other communities and providing materials of special quality, as well as the rare, valuable and prestige goods, mostly imported from distant even very distant regions. As the need for such goods increases during the Neolithic Age, trade becomes more important. Of course, kinds of trade goods changes with time, so in the late Neolithic Age some different products and different materials are circulating than it was at the beginning of that period.

The first neolithic population settled in north-east Croatia, which are Slavonia, west Srijem and Baranja, is called Starčevo Culture. With its appearance at the end of the 7th millenium, the economy based on the agriculture and the very beginnings of the breeding some animal species, such as cattle and pigs, appears, the first permanent settlements are organised and the first pottery is made. It is the time when the earliest permanent, archaeologically documented trade routes are established, by which mainly stone of high quality for various supplies production is provided.

There are about 60 sites of Starčevo Culture known in the north Croatia, from Danube at the east to Bjelovar surrounding at the west. Among the best known are: Vukovar, Vinkovci, Sarvaš, Osijek, Belišće, Kneževi Vinogradi, Kaznica near Đakovo, Galovo and Zadubravlje near Slavonski Brod, Pepelane near Virovitica and Našice, some of which have been excavated. As the sites in Belišće-Staro Valpovo (Old Valpovo) and in Kneževi Vinogradi-Osnovna škola (Elementary School) have been the subjects of our professional interes, we will expose some facts on economy of that early neolithic culture, as far as it is possible to conclude based on the archaeological researches.

In the early neolithic economy of east Slavonia and Baranja, that is the age of Starčevo culture, there are no significant differences at the detached sites. According to archaeological finds in Belišće and in Kneževi Vinogradi too - the similar situation is elsewhere – we can conclude that the primal role in the economy has agriculture, on which the prosperity of human communities depends. Although the rests of carbonised cereals haven't been found yet, we can presume with very high probability that native species: rye, barley and millet were cultivated. During the Neolithic Age the wheat was imported from Anatolia but in the early stages of that period that cereal has not been domesticated in Europe yet.

Archaeological indicators of intensive farming are richly represented in both settlements. Those are stone crumblers for grains, which consists of two stones – the lower one, bigger and flat and the upper one, smaler and round shaped. Between them grains were hashed up by rubbing and pressing. Also, the part of entire lithic chopped finds are parts of sickles; small stone blades, as it is considered, in the row were fixed into curved tool with the handle, made of wood.

In the both settlements mentioned, there is noticeable minority of animal bones. Of course, part of animal bones was used as the material for the production of some artefacts (pins, needles, avils, daggers, spatulae etc.), what decrease the quantity of bones among the archaeological finds. But, on the contrary to the settlements of the late neolithic Sopot Culture, which inhabitants have had great production of bone artefacts, and nevertheless, animal bones are always among the most numerous finds, stock-breeding and hunting seem not to have important role in the early neolithic economy in this region.

In the settlement in Kneževi Vinogradi, however, in the early neolithic layer, extremely great amount of river mussel shells and water snail shells was found in one object, so that it seemed to be a storage room. One can presume that the inhabitants used those molluscs as food and their shells

were probably hashed up and used at the pottery production, as the clay fitting of some kind. Fish bones and scales have been found too, which means that fishing had its place in the economy of that settlement, and the entire Starčevo Culture.¹

In the entirety of the early neolithic economy trade also has its place. The most important trade goods of that time were some kinds of stone that were used as the material for chopped and polished tools production. We can presume with great possibility, that populations of that time the most of stone obtained directly, which means that members of some community took even very long trips inside the territory controlled by that community to acquire the stone of the highest quality. The stone of less quality, such as sandstone for example, sometimes was possible to find not far from the settlement. It is considered that the part of quality materials was acquired indirectly, that is by trade.

The most of the small chopped lithic finds in Starčevo Culture layers of Belišće and Kneževi Vinogradi settlements, were made from chert and radiolarite, solid rocks suitable for working out. The most of the bigger, polished stone artefacts were made from sandstone, softer sedimentary rock of less quality. The closest layers of all three rocks are in Papuk and Fruška gora,² so it is presumable that they were provided there. Besides, sandstone can be found in Banovo brdo, Baranja,³ so it is very much possible that inhabitants of Kneževi Vinogradi settlement, as well as the inhabitants of other Starčevo Culture settlements, acquired it there.

There are two ways of direct acquiring the stone. The first one is gathering creek and river pebbles and stone visible at the ground surface, which mostly could not be done in the east Slavonia, due to siltiness of local rivers and the thickness of Quaternary sediments. It has to be mentioned, however, that on some spots along the right Drava river bank aluvial gravel layers are formed, where the prehistoric inhabitants could supply themselves with the part of stone material, with no great trouble. That, of course, refers mostly to some more western parts of Drava flow, although similar layers exist along its lower flow, too, but they can not be found on the very surface of the ground.

The second way is mining. Although there aren't archaeological proves to that, it is possible that the early- and also the late neolithic inhabitants of Baranja have dig sandstone at the suitable spots on Banovo Brdo. Consequently, inhabitants of the settlement in Kneževi Vinogradi could obtain the part of stone material directly, not far from their village, which perhaps includes elementary mining. The rest, especially the stones of higher quality as radiolarite and chert, they acquired by taking trips to the nearest area in which such stones could be found, or they could buy it from the local populations.

It is presumable that the population of Starčevo Culture settlement in Belišće part of necessary stones could find in the wide surrounding, too, thanks to the position of their village close to Drava river and the possible aluvial pebble layers, not deep from the ground surface. The rest, similar to the Kneževi Vinogradi settlement inhabitants, they probably purchased.

In the context of trade contacts of the early neolithic populations in the east Slavonia with very distant regions, it is important to mention a find from the child grave found within the younger Starčevo Culture layer at Hotel/Tržnica (Market) site in Vinkovci. It is a pendant made from spondylus, the sea mussel that lives in Adriatic and Aegean sea and some spots in the Mediterranean sea. That is the only known evidence of trade connections of Starčevo Culture population in north-east Croatia with the populations at the east Adriatic coast, although that connections, with no doubt, were only indirect.

Into the settlement in Vinkovci that object probably has come via central Bosnia or, maybe, via settlement in Vinča near Belgrade, Serbia, where spondylus of Aegean provenience has been

¹ Šimić, J., 2004., 78.

² Pmić, J., Radonić, G., Pavić, G., http://www.papukgeopark.com/publikacije/geo_vodic1_30.pdf (8.4.2013.).

³ Dukić, Ž., Briški, M., 2010., 22.

found.⁴ Trade with spondylus, as very valuable and prestige trade goods, was very important during the middle- and the late Neolithic Age and the Eneolithic Age, but the pendant from Vinkovci is the witness to the fact that the first trade contacts and trade routes of such kind have been established as early as at the beginning of Neolithic Age.

According to all mentioned, it can be concluded that the early neolithic economy in Baranja and east Slavonia is founded mostly on agriculture with only small share of stock-breeding and hunting, but with relatively well representation of fishing and water molluscs gathering. There are activities which can be called crafts as well, that are producing various artefacts from wood, antler, bone, pottery and mostly from stone. The trade is important part of the economy too - mostly among neighbouring populations - by which some kinds of stones are acquired, but also the other kinds of trade goods. Although it is proved by only one example, for now, the establishing of the indirect trade contacts with the east Adriatic coast, where the precious and luxury goods are imported from, must be taken into consideration. Also, the possibility of mining activities at some suitable spots on Banovo brdo in Baranja, is not excluded.

About the middle of the 6th millenium Starčevo Culture in the east Slavonia and Baranja was replaced by Sopot Culture, which lasted in that region untill the end of Neolithic Age and the beginning of Eneolithic (Copper) Age, what happened about 4.300. Sopot Culture population is the represent of developed neolithic economy, primary agricultural, with the great share of cattle-breeding. It has developed on the late Starčevo Culture basis and the Vinča Culture, whose territory was to the east of Sopot Culture area, has given great contribution to its development. Among the most important Sopot Culture sites in the east Slavonia and in Baranja, some of which has been investigated, are: Bapska, Vinkovci, Sopot near Vinkovci, Sarvaš, Osijek, Čepin, Aljmaš, Belišće, Đakovački Selci, Kneževi Vinogradi.

Although there are middle- and late neolithic Sopot culture layers at Belišće-Old Valpovo and Kneževi Vinogradi-Elementary School sites, at both of them they are mostly destroyed, due to their position directly under the ground surface. Therefore, as the represents of the Sopot Culture, we'll detach two sites: Osijek-Filipovica/Herman's Vineyard and Čepin-Ovčara/Turkish Cemetary, that we have researched at two and ten campaignes.⁵

Both settlements have some common characteristics, the most important of which is very high amount of animal bones among all archaeological finds. That includes not only mammal bones but also the bones of birds, fish and reptiles (water turtles, for example), as well as moluscs and water snail shells. That testifies of the great role that cattle-breeding, hunting and fishing have had in the economy of the middle- and late Neolithic Age in this region.

Based on the animal osteological finds, it can be concluded that animals have had extremely great role at the Sopot culture population, as the food resource and the resource of various materials (bones, antlers, hooves, leather, fur, tendons, feathers, fat, scales) for production of many artefacts which could content the needs of the community and could be used as the trade goods, as well. Although the osteological analysis, unfortunately, is not finished,⁶ we can preliminary say that the bones of big plant-eating mammals predominate, bred ones and caught ones. These are cattle and red deer. The part of cattle bones probably is of bred and the part of caught animals. The same can be related to pig bones.

Among the wild animals are roes, small mammals (hamster, for example) and birds. In that time birds have not been domesticated yet. Domestic birds in Europe are geese and ducks and during the

⁴ Težak Gregl, T., 2001., 28.

⁵ Osijek-Filipovica/Herman's Vineyard was researched the first time in 1897., then in 1998. and 2007., under the leadership of the author of this paper. Čepin-Ovčara/Turkish cemetary was researched continously from 1997. untill 2006., under the same leadership.

⁶ Osteological material was send to The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Zagreb.

late Iron Age, close to the end of prehistory, hen was imported to Europe by the intercession of Scyths.

It is obvious that the importance of hunting and fishing grows during the middle- and the late Neolithic Age in the east Slavonian region. That fact is attested not only by animal bones, but also by hundreds of ceramic and, in much smaller amount, stone balls with diameter mostly between 4 and 5 cm, which were munition for slings. Slings were used for small animals hunting and they have been found in both settlements. It is interesting that such way of hunting hasn't been used by all populations of Sopot Culture. Balls were not found in Sopot, Belišće and Kneževi Vinogradi, while, besides Osijek and Čepin, in Klisa settlement they existed in great amount.

Fishing, important economy branch of that time, too, is attested not only by fish bones and scales, but also by some equipment used for fishing, such as harpoons and fish-hooks made from bone or antler.

Zoogenic finds in the wider sense include objects made from spondylus gaederopus, that are found at the both sites in great quantity, and at numerous other Sopot Culture sites, as well. They are very significant indicators of 'international' trade which flourished during the middle- and especially during the Late Neolithic Age. The origin of spondylus at the north Croatian sites hasn't been analysed yet, but there are two most important trade routes, archaeologically attested, by which row shells and/or final products were transported to the Pannonian-Danube region. One of them starts at the east Adriatic coast and leads along the Neretva river valley to the central Bosnia and further to the north, along the Bosna river valley.⁷ That trade route has connected neolithic populations in the central Bosnia with south Pannonia and the east Adriatic coast, and the southpannonian populations, including these from our sites, were connected with north and central Bosnia and, indirectly, with the Adriatic coast, too.

The second trade route leads from the north Aegean coast along Vardar, Struma, Mesta and Marica rivers valleys to the central Balkan, from where it gets to southeast Pannonia along the Morava river valley.⁸ To the eastslavonian Sopot culture sites objects made from spondylus, consequently, could come by one of these two trade routes, and obviously, Sopot Culture population has had sufficient economical power to obtain them.

Both at Osijek and at Čepin settlements, numerous finds of jewelry made from that moluscs shells have been found. By their texture and colour, these shells are similar to the ivory.⁹ The jewelry include cylindrical beads, slab-like pendants of round, square and curved shape and parts of bracelets. The find of special value is a hoard that consists of 460 pieces of jewelry made from spondylus and dentalium, that is another species of maritime moluscs, which curved shells are suitable for small beads production. The hoard was found at Čepin-Ovčara/Turkish Cemetery site.¹⁰ Dentalium has come to the south Pannonia by the same trade routes as the spondylus, but in significant smaller amount.

When speaking of spondylus, it is necessary to mention a certain opinion, that consider spondylus and objects made from its shells as the means of payment of some kind, that is natural or premonetary money. In some parts of the world that role usually had the maritime moluscs – cowry snail. Impossibility of falsification, standard size and relatively rarity, probably made them objects of very great value.¹¹

⁷ Težak Gregl, T., 2001., 28.

⁸ Balen, J., 2006., 30.

⁹ Šimić, J., 2008., 20.

¹⁰ Šimić, J., 2007., Same, 2009., 12.

¹¹ Goericke Lukić, H., 2011., 137, 138.

The second indication of 'international' trade is obsidian, volcanic rock which can be found at the areas of volcanic activity, recent or ancient. It is black or gray and has glassy structure, so it is sometimes called 'volcanic glass'. Its characteristic that while chopped it splits into very sharp slices, has made it remarkably valuable trade goods during the middle- and late European Neolithic Age, used for small blades production. Large obsidian deposits in Europe can be found on Sardinia, Lipari Islands, Melos (the island in Cyclades archipelago in the southwestern Aegean sea) and in Charpathians.¹² At almost every Sopot culture sites obsidian is found, and at some of them it has been worked out from the raw material. Settlement at Herman's Vineyard in Osijek, according to great quantity of characteristic lithic finds, was one of the obsidian blades production centres.¹³

Analysis done to obsidian from the sites in north Croatia has proved its Charpatian origin,¹⁴ the fact that approves the existence of trade communications from the north towards the south of Panonnia basin. That communications lasted until the end of Neolithic Age and with the beginning of the next period – Copper Age – obsidian loses its importance and is replaced by new materials. Let us also mention already established trade with less expensive but qualitative stone, which has started before the beginning of the Neolithic Age, and the possibility of mining, as the ways to obtain the stone. Such trade was mostly of local character and takes place at the limited area, and the stone was traded to agricultural and stock-breeding products.

At the very end of the Neolithic Age, during the late Sopot Culture, sporadically appears the elementary use of copper, metal that marked the economy of next prehistoric period. In the Sopot culture layers at the sites in Belišće and Kneževi Vinogradi, small and very corroded, unidentifiable copper objects were found,¹⁵ the presence of which indicates the possibility of trade contacts with the Vinča Culture populations, that also have some copper artefacts at their sites. The nearest copper deposits are in east Serbia; archaeological researches have proved the exploitation of copper at Rudna Glava mine (near Majdanpek) during the Eneolithic Age, possibly even during the late Neolithic Age.

Sopot Culture populations in south Panonnia, of course, had not their own copper deposits, so it is evident that some members of the communities at the sites in Kneževi Vinogradi and Belišće have been wealthy enough to obtain such extremely rare and, most probably, very expensive goods. As copper appears exceptionally rarely in the late Neolithic Age in our region, it had not significant economical role, and probably was only another prestige and precious goods. But, although these finds could seem insignificant, they indicate the beginnings of trade communications connected to copper ore mining as well as to the copper artefacts production and distribution. During the next period such activities will reach full development and prosperity.

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¹² Balen, J., 2006., 32.

¹³ Šimić, J., 2008., 19.

¹⁴ We are thankful to our colleague M.Burić, from The Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb for the verbal information .

¹⁵ Šimić, J., 2007.a, 30; Same, 2004., 77.

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