

*Papers in Honour of Rastko Vasić 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday*

*Зборник радова у част 80 г. живота Растка Васића*

АРХЕОЛОШКИ ИНСТИТУТ

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**PAPERS IN HONOUR  
OF RASTKO VASIĆ  
80<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY**

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# CONTENTS

Foreword / Увод.....	7
M. Svilar, Biography of Rastko Vasić / М. Свилар, Биографија Растка Васића .....	11
M. Svilar, Bibliography of Rastko Vasić / М. Свилар, Библиографија Растка Васића....	17
A. Harding, Rastko Vasić: some personal reflections.....	40
С. Мандић, Пут у Миделхарнис.....	41
Notes about life and archaeology / Цртице о животу и археологији.....	42
D. Antonović, S. Vitezović, J. Šarić, The Early Neolithic Settlement at Velesnica:	
Lithic and Osseous Industries.....	63
M. Stojić, Mislilac iz Medvednjaka.....	71
S. Alexandrov, Early Bronze Age Barrow Graves in North-West Bulgaria.....	75
†B. Hänsel, B. Teržan, K. Mihovilić, Konzeptioneller Wandel im früh- bis mittelbronzezeitlichen Befestigungsbau Istriens.....	95
J. Станковски, Планинско светилиште Татићев Камен: три аспекта обредне праксе....	111
M. Ljuština, Rame uz rame: zajednice vatinske kulture u Banatu.....	125
K. Dmitrović, Contribution to the Study of Spectacle-shaped Pendants in Western Serbia.....	137
B. Molloy, A warrior's journey? Some recent taxonomic, trace element and lead isotope analyses of Mediterranean Later Bronze Age metalwork in the Central and West Balkans...	143
M. Blečić Kavur, B. Kavur, Privjesak kao tijelo – tijelo kao poruka.....	155
A. Kapuran, The Find from Medoševac 20 Years Later – an Addition to the Studies of the Tumulus Culture on the Territory of the Central Balkans.....	165
J. Koledin, "Novi" nalazi nanogvica tipa Regelsbrunn u Вачкој.....	177
М. Лазих, Гробови инхумираних покојника у некрополама брњичке културе.....	187
P. Medović, Sečanj IV — ostava metalnih predmeta.....	201
L. Leshtakov, Bronze Spear and Javelin Heads with Polygonal Sockets - A Balkan Phenomenon.....	209
A. Bulatović, Particular Types of Bowls as Heralds of a New Age in the Balkans.....	215
A. Ђорђевић, Нова сазнања о остави бронзаних налаза из Рудника.....	233
J. Bouzek, Some Early Iron Age symbols and their possible interpretations.....	241
D. Ložnjak Dizdar, Notes on several finds from the beginning of the Early Iron Age in the Danube area.....	247

B. Govedarica, Tumul iz Brezja i neka pitanja socio-kulturnog razvoja na Glasincu u starijem željeznom dobu.....	259
T. Bader, Bemerkungen über die chronologische Lage der Hortfundgruppe „Somartin-Vetiš“.....	273
И. Бруяко, Костяной скипетр предскифского типа из городища Каргал в низовьях Дуная.....	289
V. Filipović, Iron Spears of the <i>Balkan Syginnæ</i> Type from the Central Balkans.....	297
Д. Топал, Акинак из Вршаца и проникновение клинкового вооружения скифов в Среднее Подунавье.....	307
M. Dizdar, New Late Hallstatt Finds from the Vinkovci Region (Eastern Croatia): A Contribution to the Study of Impacts from the Balkans to the southeastern Carpathian Basin.....	319
D. Mitrevski, The Ruler's Palace in Bylazora – Capital of “Independent Paeonians”.....	345
O. Mladenović, A New Find of Bronze Hinged Fibula from the Vicinity of Svrljig.....	355
M. Guštin, D. Božič, Eine kleine Sondergruppe der thrakischen Fibeln.....	367
List of authors / Списак аутора.....	372

## Foreword

Since 1990, after practically 30 years and the publication of the volume of the *Starinar* journal dedicated to the academician and professor Milutin Garašanin, the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade publishes a volume dedicated to a doyen of both Serbian and European archaeology, Rasko Vasić. In contrast to university centers, where this kind of publications are usual, due to the position of individuals as professors and teachers (*Festschrift*, *Homage...*), the scientific researchers are usually neglected in that respect, which can be seen in the fact that this volume represents the first of a kind published by the Institute of Archaeology. Bearing in mind the significance and the influence of Vasić's work on ex-Yugoslav and prehistoric archaeology of Europe, as well as the fact that he spent his entire career at the Institute of Archaeology, we consider this volume as a humble act of our gratitude for everything our dear colleague Vasić did for archaeology and the Institute, on occasion of his 80th birthday.

Indeed, Rastko Vasić stands as a great of both Serbian and Yugoslav archaeology, distinctly appreciated and esteemed, which stands in opposition to his humble and unobtrusive nature. Vasić's scientific and artistic educations often intertwined in his papers dealing both with the protohistoric art and the particular problems of the Bronze and Iron Age in southeastern Europe. Years of work and scientific questions led him to various phenomena of our prehistoric archaeology, many of which he had himself defined, but from time to time he used to go back and discover the until then unobserved Iron Age art of the Central Balkans. Only a glimpse of his bibliography at the beginning of this volume reveals the archaeological phenomena he had defined and interpreted, and through his serious and responsible scientific work and afterwards authority introduced to archaeology. His first monographs (*Културне групе старијег гвозденог доба у Југославији* and *The Chronology of the Early Iron Age in Socialist Republic of Serbia*) were created on basis of his doctoral dissertation and more than a couple of decades since the publication represent often cited literature.

## Увод

Након безмало 30 лета и *Старинара* посвећеног академику и професору Милутину Гарашанину из 1990. године, Археолошки институт у Београду објављује једну засебну публикацију посвећену дојену српске, али и европске археологије Растку Васићу. За разлику од универзитетских центара, где је овај тип публикација (*Festschrift*, *Homage...*) уобичајен због позиције појединца као професора и учитеља, научни су радници обично занемарени у томе погледу, што се види и по томе да је ово прва таква засебна публикација наше куће. Но, имајући у виду значај Васићевих дела за бившу југословенску и праисторијску археологију Европе и утицај на њу, као и то што је цео свој радни век провео у Археолошком институту, сматрали смо да је овај зборник поводом 80 година живота један скромни чин наше захвалности за све што је драги колега Васић учинио за археологију и Институт.

Растко Васић доиста представља велика на српске и југословенске археологије, изразито уваженог и цењеног, што је у неку руку у супротности са његовом скромном и ненаметљивом природом. Васићево научно, али и уметничко образовање често се сустицало у његовим првим радовима, када се бавио како уметничким протоисторијским темама, тако и конкретним проблемима гвозденог и бронзаног доба југоисточне Европе. Године рада и стручна питања одвела су га ка многим феноменима наше праисторијске археологије, од којих је неке и сам дефинисао, али се с времена на време враћао, а уједно и откривао до тада незапажену уметност гвозденог доба централног Балкана. Само и летимичан поглед на његову библиографију на почетку овог зборника говори о археолошким појавама које је Васић одредио и интерпретирао, а својим озбиљним и одговорним научним радом и доцнијим ауторитетом увео у домаћу археологију. Његове прве монографије (*Културне групе старијег гвозденог доба у Југославији* и *The Chronology of the Early Iron Age in Socialist Republic of Serbia*), настале на основама док-

A complete affirmation in Yugoslav archaeology for colleague Vasić was the invitation to write no less than 13 chapters for the 5th volume of the distinguished publication *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja*, as one of the youngest authors, dealing with less familiar subjects or subjects with scarce background data, undetermined origin or undefined to a great extent. It can be said that even nowadays, after more than 30 years, Vasić's certain syntheses from the aforementioned publication, remain the postulates for the Iron Age of the Central Balkans. Another significant work of Rastko Vasić, although often not emphasized enough, is the fact that under the invitation of the academician Dragoslav Sreјović, he participated in writing of 150 separate units in the unique domestic archaeological encyclopedia - *Arheološki leksikon – preistorija Evrope, Afrike i Bliskog Istoka, grčka, etrurska i rimska civilizacija*, a paper that Yugoslav and Serbian archaeology lacked for a number of decades. His international reputation was confirmed by five monographs published within the prestigious *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* edition. In parallel with that, through his advice and influence, as well as through his scientific renown, he aided younger colleagues to prepare the volumes for the same edition.

In that context, it is important to mention that defending boards for magister or doctoral thesis on the subject on Bronze and Iron Age could not be imagined without the presence of the colleague Vasić. On such occasions, not a single critique or a bad word could be heard from Vasić, but positive opinion and useful suggestions above all, so that the candidate could properly prepare the thesis for future publication. Rastko Vasić has been a member of the editorial board for the *Starinar* journal for more than 40 years, as well as for many other corpora and journals in the territory of southeastern Europe. As a member of editorial staff or as a reviewer of papers and monographs, he would always point out the qualities of the submitted material, and if the other members of editorial staff or reviewers decided to reject the material, his benevolent suggestions would help in publishing each useful paper after all, even in some other journal. Also, as a long-time director of scientific projects at the Institute of Archaeology, he would always do his best to help

торске дисертације, и даље су, неколико деценија након објављивања, цитирано штиво.

Потпуну афирмацију у југословенској археологији колега Васић доживео је када је позван да, као један од тада најмлађих аутора, напише чак 13 поглавља за том V чувене *Праисторије југославенских земаља*, и то на неке теме о којима се мало знало или у вези с којима су подаци били шури, нејасног порекла и добрим делом недефинисани. Може се рећи да и данас, након 30 и више година, поједине Васићеве синтезе из ове серије и даље остају једини постулати гвозденог доба централног Балкана. Још један значајан допринос овога типа, чини се, није довољно помињан у досадашњем његовом раду, а то је чињеница да је на позив академика Драгослава Срејовића учествовао у изради преко 150 засебних јединица у јединственој домаћој археолошкој енциклопедији – *Археолошки лексикон – преисторија Европе, Африке и Блиског истока, грчка, етрурска и римска цивилизација*, делу које је дуги низ деценија недостајало југословенској и српској археологији. Међународни углед потврдио је са пет монографија у престижној едицији *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, док је паралелно саветима и својим утицајем, као и научним реномеом, помагао млађим колегама да припреме своје свеске за исту едицију.

У томе контексту, важно је поменути да се без колеге Васића није могла замислити комисија за одбрану магистарских или докторских дисертација на тему бронзаног или старијег гвозденог доба. Том приликом од њега се није могла чути покуда или лоша реч, већ надамне позитивно мишљење и корисне сугестије како би кандидат своје дело адекватно припремио за будуће објављивање. Преко 40 година члан је редакције *Старинара*, као и многих зборника и часописа на простору југоисточне Европе. Као чест члан редакција или рецензент радова и монографија, увек је истицао квалитете прилога, а уколико би се остатак редакције или други рецензенти одлучили да одбију аутора, он би сесвојим благонаклоним сугестијама трудио да сваки користан рад ипак буде објављен, па макар у неком другом часопису. Такође, као дугогодишњи руководиоца научних пројеката у Археолошком институту,



young colleagues on each matter, never striking as a boss or a superior.

Plenty of details on the private and professional life of Rastko Vasić, both as an archaeologist and painter and literate, can be found in the continuation of this volume, which was one of the ideas of the editors. Therefore, about 60 pages are dedicated to his life and work, biography and a detailed bibliography, while the interview is illustrated with Vasić's numerous paintings, selected by the celebrant himself. Afterward, there is a collection of papers dedicated to the colleague Vasić, written in English, German, Russian and the ex-Yugoslav languages, assorted chronologically. Unfortunately, certain authors which were invited in agreement with the celebrant did not respond, primarily due to the poor health, so the editors once again point out that they regret the situation, although on the other hand, we are grateful and proud of the content of the volume, on 33 authors of the papers, and the editorial board comprised of prominent names of the word archaeology from nine different countries.

Through this volume, the editorial board and the Institute of Archaeology would like to heartily congratulate the jubilee to our colleague Vasić and to wish him many more years in archaeology.

Vojislav Filipović  
Aleksandar Bulatović  
Aleksandar Kapuran

тудио се да помогне млађим колегама по свим питањима, не постављајући се притом као шеф.

Многи детаљи о приватном и професионалном животу Растка Васића и као археолога, и као сликара и књижевника, могу се наћи у наставку овог зборника, што је била и једна од идеја приређивача. Стога је првих шездесетак страна посвећено његовом животу и раду, биографији и детаљној библиографији, док је интервју илустрован бројним Васићевим сликама, по избору самог слављеника. Након тога уприличени сурадови посвећени колеги Васићу, на енглеском, немачком, руском и језицима бивше Југославије, поређани по хронолошком реду. Нажалост, поједини аутори позвани у консултацијама са слављеником нису се одазвали позиву, поглавито због нарушеног здравственог стања, па уредници и овом приликом напомињу да жале због оваквог развоја ситуације. С друге стране, поносни смо на садржај зборника – како на 33 аутора прилога, тако и на редакцију, у којој су врхунска имена светске археологије из девет земаља.

Колеги Васићу уредници и Археолошки институт овим зборником од срца честитају јубилеј и желе још много година рада у археологији.

Војислав Филиповић  
Александар Булатовић  
Александар Капуран



In the National Museum in Belgrade, 2018 (by Aca Đorđević)  
У Народном музеју, 2018. године (фото Аца Ђорђевић)

# The Early Neolithic Settlement at Velesnica: Lithic and Osseous Industries

Dragana Antonović  
Selena Vitezović  
Josip Šarić

*Abstract:* The site of Donja Strana-Velesnica was one of several prehistoric sites researched within the rescue excavations project “Đerdap II” in the Iron Gates region. It was excavated during the period of 1980–84 by R. Vasić. Remains from the Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and historic periods were discovered, and the most important finds come from the horizons belonging to the Early Neolithic Starčevo culture. The possibility of the presence of a Mesolithic horizon was not confirmed with certainty. The Starčevo culture horizon included settlement remains as well as several graves, and rich portable material. In this paper, lithic and osseous industries from the Neolithic layers will be presented and discussed within the regional context.

*Key words:* Early Neolithic, Iron Gates, chipped stone industry, ground stone industry, osseous industry

## Introduction

The site of Donja Strana is situated on the periphery of the village of Velesnica, some 10 km to the South from the town of Kladovo, in the Ključ region. The site was located on a small plateau, on the right bank of the Danube, where the river takes a turn towards the South.

The large project of rescue excavations, “Đerdap II”, connected with the building of the second power-plant on the Danube (after “Đerdap I”), also included the research of Velesnica. The director of the excavations was Rastko Vasić and the research was conducted in 1980–2 and 1984. Fourteen different trenches were excavated on the surface of cca 920 m<sup>2</sup>. Rich archaeological remains were discovered, belonging to a long span of time, from the Early Neolithic to the Middle Ages (Vasić 1986; 2008, 227). The presence of the Mesolithic layers was not confirmed with certainty, although some of the animal bones discovered below the Starčevo horizon, as well as the older skeleton in the grave 2 (Bonsall et al. 2015, 43–44), may belong to the Mesolithic period.

The Starčevo horizon included two occupation phases; it was the most important part of the site’s stratigraphy and it yielded the largest quantity of archaeological material. It was probably contemporary with the horizons Lepenski Vir IIIa and Padina B2-B3 (Vasić 2008, 238). Recently obtained AMS dates from the skeletons from Velesnica cover the time span from 7530–7185 cal BC to 6020–5845 cal BC (Bonsall et al. 2015, table 2). Grave 2, which contained 7 individuals, is considered to represent an initial phase of the Neolithic activity at the site, predating the main Starčevo occupation phases. The probability ranges for these samples suggest the burials took place between 6100 and 6000 cal BC, and this is particularly important since it represents the strongest evidence to date for Early Neolithic settlement in the Lower Danube valley before 6000 cal BC (Bonsall et al. 2015, 44).

Here, we will present the technologies from the Early Neolithic Velesnica: chipped, ground stones and osseous industries. Since it was not possible to ascribe all the findings into the one of the two horizons and since no considerable differences were noted, each industry is represented as a whole.

### **Chipped stone industry**

The assemblage of chipped stone artefacts (Fig. 1) consists of 104 examples made of different types of chert (19,84%) and 420 examples of quartzite (80,15%). Among the six deliberately broken river pebbles of different varieties of chert, an example stands apart, made of the so-called Balkan flint. This river pebble, being the result of gathering from secondary finding places, could also contribute to the supposition that the primary finding places for this type of chert were also in the wider area of Đerdap, upstream from the site of Donja Strana, and not only on the area of the Pre-Balkan platform, i.e. Pre-Balkan *teran* (Šarić 2002, 11-26; Gurova 2012; Dimitrovska 2012). A significantly larger number of artefacts made of quartzite were probably the consequence of its large availability. To support this supposition, there are quartzite artefacts, on which part of the cortex of the river pebble was preserved, which indicates that the raw material was gathered from alluvial river deposits as secondary finding places in the immediate surroundings of the settlement (Šarić 1997, 177-187).

The typology of chipped stone artefacts are comprised of nodules and pebbles (1,33%), cores (0,38%), flakes and blades for the preparation, i.e. rejuvenating of the core (0,19%), unretouched flakes (86,64%), unretouched blades (2,29%), retouched blades (6,67 %), scrapers (0,57%), endscrapers (0,38%), perforators (0,19%), tools with abrupt retouched fracture (0,38%), geometrical microliths (0,19%), “splintered” tools (0,19%) and combined tools (0,57%). Notably, each of these artefacts’ types is represented with a very small number of artefacts, with the exception of unretouched quartzite flakes. However, when it comes to examples made of chert, we may note additional work on the artefacts, which is perceivable in the precise and fine retouching on most of the examples. The fact that all categories of artefacts pertinent to chipped stone industries were found – including anvils, anvils-percussors and retouchers – is a clear sign that there was a workshop or a workspace within the area of the settlement (Šarić 2014, 151–155).

### **Ground stone industry**

In the analysis of the ground stone industry, material from block A was used, researched in 1982 – the material from Protostarčevo culture layers. A sample of 109 examples was examined.

Tools with a cutting edge (axes, adzes and chisels) make up only 8,26 % of the ground stone material (Fig. 2/7–11). All these types are represented by just one example, though axes are the most numerous, having seven different types. All these tools are usually of small dimensions and there are no massive cylindrical tools, a fact that sets apart the ground stone industry from Velesnica in respect to Early Holocene settlements of Đerdap. They were made of fine grained rocks, grey and green, a raw material typical for ground stone tools in Starčevo and Vinča cultures in Central Serbia.

Significantly more numerous are tools and objects made with minimum work on the pebbles of different sizes (Fig. 2/1–6, 12, 16, 17). These include hammers (17,43%), pounders (4,59%), grindstones (7,34%), whetstones (0,92%), querns (4,59%), mallets (7,34%) and weights, which were the most numerous (40,37%). There are two types of weights represented at Velesnica – massive ones, probably used for catching large fish (Antonović 2006, 25), and smaller ones, which some authors put in the category of amulets (Vasić 1986, 269). For both types of weights pebbles were used, with a groove added (large weights) or a dent on lateral sides (small weights), used to affix the cord from which these objects hung. Especially interesting are weights with two perpendicular grooves, which have been noted so far only at Velesnica (Fig. 2/1–2). Those are the very objects that make the ground stone assemblage from this site so very special. Large weights were often found at other Early Holocene sites of the Đerdap area as well, while small weights were found only at sites with Early Neolithic horizons, to the South from Velesnica (Antonović 2008, 33), but also at sites from that same period in Central Serbia

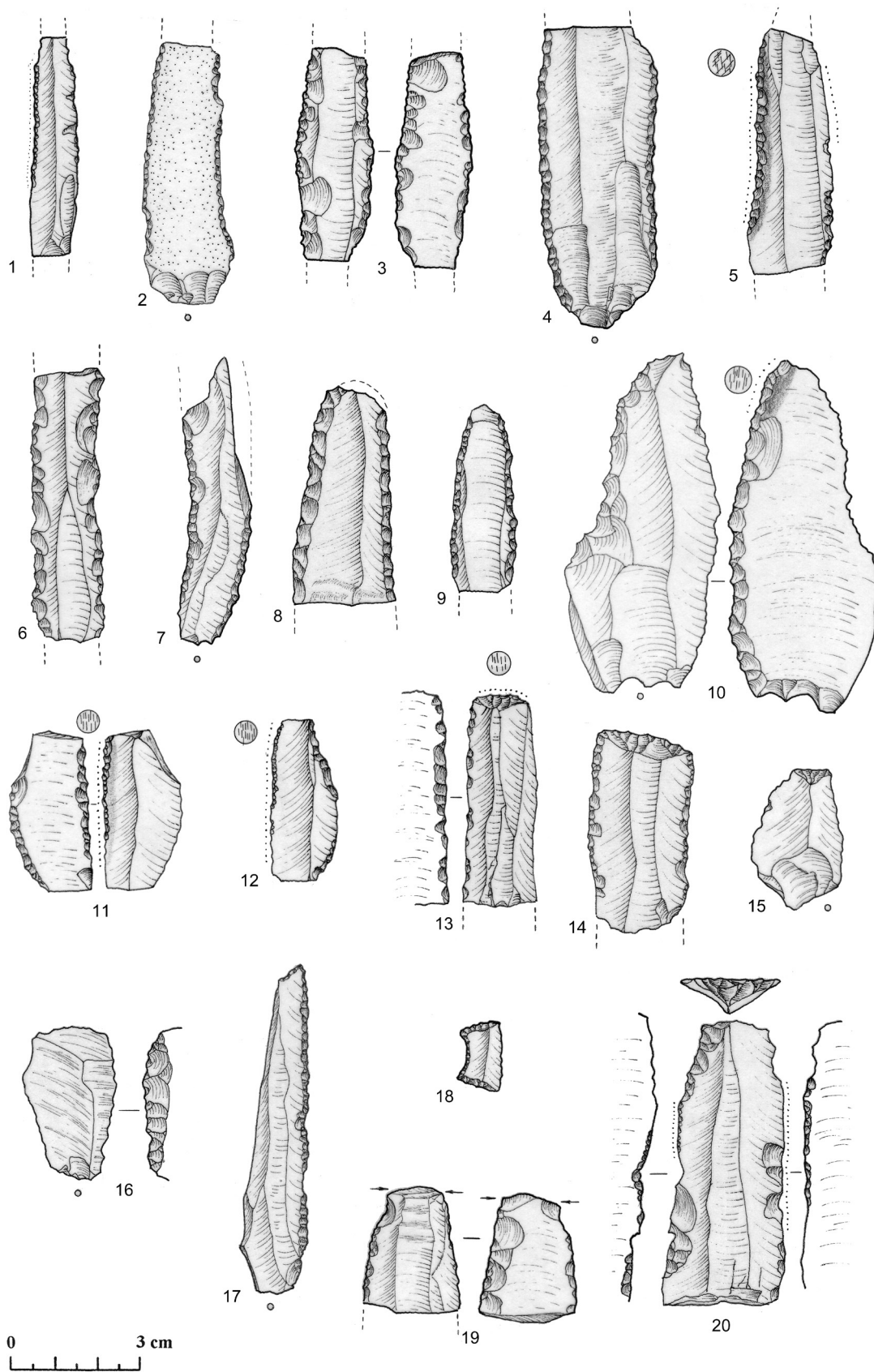


Fig. 1 – Chipped stone tools: 1–12. retouched blades; 13–15. endscrapers; 16. sidescraper; 17. perforator; 18. geometric microlith; 19–20. combined tools.

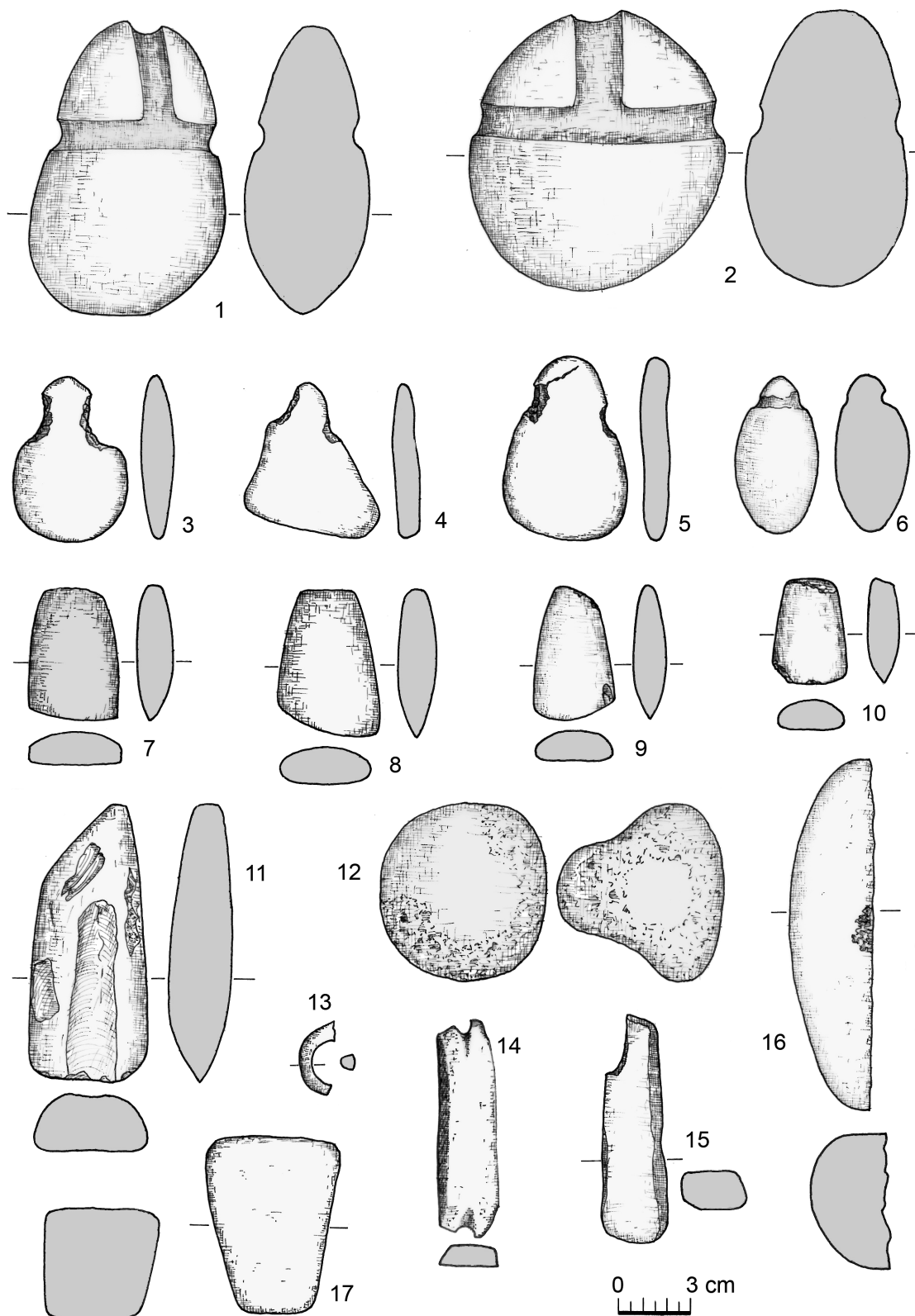


Fig. 2 – Ground stone tools: 1–2. massive weights; 3–6. small weights; 7. axe, type I/4/c; 8. axe, type I/2/b; 9. axe, type I/2/a; 10. chisel, type V/4/a; 11. axe, type I/1/a; 12. hammer; 13. ring; 14. coil; 15. whetstone, type XII/1/a; 16. working plate; 17. grindstone, type XI/6/c.

(Stanković 1988). Two findings made of stone can be determined as belonging to the decorative objects group: a fragment of a hoop similar to a ring, made of nephrite or jadeite, and an object in the shape of a coil, made of sandstone (Fig. 2/13–14).

The small assemblage of material of chipped stone from Velesnica did not yield enough data on the mode of production of this type of finding. Judging from the absence of semi-finished artefacts and debris material from the process of production of stone tools, it may be assumed that they were not made within the living area of the Early Neolithic settlement. However, on most of the tools there are visible traces of additional finishing, so we may assume that the repairing of the tools was performed within those same living places where they were found.

Since pebbles were most commonly used as a raw material at Velesnica, and often with minimal work on them, the raw material choice was very varied, and we may therefore assume that they came from the near-by area of the Neolithic settlement. Different sorts of sandstone, igneous and metamorphic rocks (granite, diabase, gabbro, gneiss, silicified serpentinite, crystalline schists etc.) were used for the making of stone tools.

### Osseous industry

Osseous industry included 39 artefacts from bone (29), antler (9) and boar tusk (1), analysed from technological and typological viewpoint (cf. Vitezović 2007, 2011).

The richest was the group of pointed tools, and it included awls (7), heavy points (5), needles (4) and projectile points (3). The first subtype of awls included those made from long bones: two from longitudinally split diaphysis segments, one from longitudinally split sheep/goat metapodial bone, with proximal epiphysis preserved at the base (fig. 3c), and one from sheep ulna. Traces of cutting by a chipped stone tool are visible on one of them and all were finalized by burnishing. The second subtype included awls made from longitudinally split ribs, all finalized by burnishing and polishing (fig. 3a). All awls were highly polished from use, suggesting they were used in working with soft, organic materials (cf. Peltier 1986, Maigrot 2003).

Two of the heavy points, partially fragmented, were made from long bones, and the remaining three from minimally modified roe deer antler tines. They also display intensive usewear. The needles or fine pointed tools (fig. 3b) were made from small bone fragments by scraping with a retouched chipped stone tool, but were not additionally polished, suggesting perhaps that a certain Mesolithic tradition was preserved in the mode of manufacture. They all have fine, sharp tips, polished from use.

Projectile points were made from bone; they have massive, heavy points at distal ends. They are all fragmented at the base, suggesting they were recovered from the prey. Traces of scraping with a retouched chipped stone tool and traces of burnishing may be observed.

Cutting and burnishing tools included chisels (2), spatulae (2), scrapers (5), an awl-spatula (1) and spatula-chisels (2). Chisels were made from red deer antler beam segments (fig. 4a-b). One has the base damaged and the distal end was obtained by oblique cutting and scraping, while



Fig. 3 – Bone pointed tools: a/awl made from rib, b/ needle from long bone and c/ awl from sheep/goat metapodial bone.



Fig. 4 – Bone and antler cutting and burnishing tools:  
a-b/ antler chisels, c-d/ bone spatula-chisels.



Fig. 5 – Spatula-spoon from *Bos taurus* metapodial bone.

only the distal portion was preserved from the other chisel, also obtained by oblique cutting. They have slightly rounded working edges, heavily damaged from use. Diverse burnishing tools were made from longitudinally split long bones or ribs, they are heavily damaged and worn from use (fig. 4c-d). Only one scraper was made from boar tusk, fragmented, but it had a more-less crescent shape and also displays intense usewear.

Punching tools included just three small punches from red deer antler tines, damaged, with natural tips of tines slightly modified and with intensive usewear. One handle or sleeve, from a completely hollowed red deer antler segment, should also be mentioned.

The most attractive finds are three spatula-spoons of the Early Neolithic type. One is almost complete, made from a cattle metapodial bone; it has an elongated handle with oval cross-section and slightly damaged, triangular spoon-part, with sharp V-shaped base (fig. 5). Fine traces of polishing may be observed on its surfaces, as well as polish and wear from use. Also, two fragmented spoon-parts were discovered, one elongated, leaf-shaped, and the other more rounded, both polished and worn from use as well.

Manufacture debris was not noted.

### Discussion and conclusion

Chipped stone industry from the site of Donja Strana at Velesnica indicates that during the period of Starčevo culture, a certain standardization of forms occurred, which would become the characteristics of Early and Middle, as well as Late Neolithic. At the same time, this Neolithic standardization of the forms of chipped artefacts represents, in a way, an introduction to the final stage of the evolution of this type of tools, which would be no longer used with the beginning of the metal working (Fig. 1/1–20).



Mesolithic traditions in the chipped stone industry are perceived by Vasić in the large number of quartzite examples (Vasić 2008, 235). The majority of quartzite artefacts, however, come from excavation layers IX to XI in trench 8, and from excavation layers 27 to 37 from block A, which have a clear chronological definition due to the presence of Starčevo pottery. A distinct domination of quartzite artefacts found at the site of Blagotin (Starčevo IIa-b) near Poljna, which is from a later period than Velesnica, on which there are no traces of an older settlement horizon, does bring into question this claim by Vasić. Because of this we assume that the dominant use of quartzite is merely the consequence of a rational use of that raw material of low quality but high attainability (Šarić 2014, 171). Indirect evidence of the abandonment of Mesolithic traditions, as far as chipped artefacts are concerned, at least, is also the fact that at the site of Donja Strana the industry of geometrical microliths was almost completely over (Šarić 1997, 182, T.III/17), while they were present on the Mesolithic site of Vlasac, in shapes of triangles, trapezoid and crescent moons (Срејовић и Летица 1978, 96, 97, Т. СХІІІ/27-45). Geometrical microliths are completely substituted by ordinary fragmented blades, with or without a retouch, but with clearly visible usewear traces on zones with gloss, which indicate that such artefacts were parts of composite tools, such as knives and sickles with sleeves made of antler, bone or wood (Шапић 2011, 223–235).

Starčevo cultural layers at Velesnica yielded such an assemblage of artefacts that has not been recorded in any other Early Neolithic site in Serbia. What makes it special is a large number of tools that are known from Mesolithic settlements of Đerdap, which are more numerous in the material from Velesnica than tools that can be directly linked to the Neolithic lifestyle. The production of ground stone objects at Velesnica had marked local characteristics, which set it apart from the image created on the basis of Early Neolithic material from sites in Central Serbia. These local characteristics are shown in the large number of fishing weights, which indicated that a gathering economy was still very much present and strong, dominating in other Early Holocene settlements in Đerdap (Lepenski Vir, Padina, Vlasac). Even though Velesnica is reliably dated as a settlement of the Starčevo culture on the basis of pottery findings (Vasić 2008, 233–234), its ground stone industry with a marked Mesolithic tradition would indicate, along with other findings from this site (graves, stone altars; Vasić 2008, 238), that there were strong bonds with the Lepenski Vir culture of that same time, and even a possible affiliation to it.

The osseous industry from Velesnica is rather small, consisting of small crafting tools, awls, heavy points, spatulae, scrapers, used predominantly on soft, organic materials. This industry contains several techno-types characteristic for the Early Neolithic, in particular spatulae-spoons, but some traits may be considered as Mesolithic traditions – such as typological traits of antler chisels or the manufacture mode by use of chipped stone tools exclusively.

The absence of manufacture debris, conspicuous for both ground lithic and osseous industries, should perhaps suggest that the activity area where these tools were produced was located elsewhere, outside the excavated area.

So far, the Early Neolithic site at Velesnica has shown the best example of parallel existence of Mesolithic traditions and new Neolithic trends in the production of basic goods. The Neolithic component may be seen in the presence of ceramics, in chipped stone industries and some bone artefacts, while a still strong Mesolithic tradition may be observed in the production of massive stone objects and some osseous artefacts.

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