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PhD DISSERTATION

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**Traces of social inequality during the Late Neolithic
in the Eastern Carpathian Basin**

Summary

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GOALS OF THE DISSERTATION

The Late Neolithic is the first period in the history of the Carpathian Basin from which the quality, the quantity and the variety of available data make possible a complex social archaeological investigation, a comprehensive study of social relations. Apart from the social archaeological analyses of the Late Neolithic burials in Transdanubia and at Polgár-Csőszhalom, the Late Neolithic sites of Eastern Hungary (east from the Danube river) have remained unanalyzed, even though the number of graves in this region is similar to that of Transdanubia.

The main goal of the dissertation was to prepare a comprehensive social archaeological analysis of Late Neolithic Eastern Hungary focusing on the study of social inequality.

METHODS AND THEORY OF THE INVESTIGATION

For devising a complex social archaeological model I considered it necessary to review the terminology of the study of social organization and social inequality used in ethnology, sociology, and archaeology.

Traces of social inequality may appear in numerous segments of life, therefore presence or absence of social inequality can be demonstrated only by a comprehensive study that covers every aspect of life.

Burials provide a good starting point for studying social inequality because the variety of material culture and archaeological phenomena can be connected to the individual or its closer social group, its relatives in a very direct manner. Burial can be associated with social rank only indirectly, through the distorting mirror of ideology and ritual expression. Since burial takes place in social and ritual contexts, it reflects not only the social position of the deceased and/or his or her social group but it also plays an active role in the living society; it affects the use and distribution of power and it mediates socially accepted values, for it is one of the most important rites of passage. Differences in the wealth of graves also may occur because ancestors, gods or other transcendent powers are important media of power legitimization.

Social differences reflected in material culture are closely related to this phenomenon, primarily in prestige and status goods. These items occur particularly in social contexts that have a great significance in the life of the individual and/or the whole community, mostly in the case of rites of passage (e.g. initiation, funeral) or communal feasts. Therefore I studied also those assemblages and artefact types which contained prestige goods (hoards, sacrificial assemblages) or their representation can be seen on them (anthropomorphic statuettes). The results suggest interweaving of social inequality and rituals. Communal feasts and rituals are important scenes of competition for power that may leave traces in the material culture (e.g. remains

of feasts and sacrificial offerings), in the internal structure of settlements (communal buildings, open places) and in the spatial organization of sites (communal and/or ritual places).

Recognition of archaeologically observable potential traces of social inequality is not without problems, therefore I dedicated methodological and theoretical chapters to each subject.

The major part of the dissertation is a detailed social archaeological investigation of Late Neolithic burials of Eastern Hungary based on 591 graves from 18 sites. I studied the burials according to the same point of view: the placement of graves, rite, orientation, the body's position, and the elements of grave offerings. For the analyses I used various statistical methods appropriate for the number of excavated graves of each site. Having studied the characteristic features of burials by one-variable, frequency analysis I examined their correlation to age and sex by cross-tabulation or variance analyses. In the case of Aszód–Papi földek, the only site where the diversity of findings made it necessary and the number of graves made it possible, I conducted multivariate, cluster and correspondence analyses. In order to conduct these analyses, it was necessary to establish a typology of pottery grave-goods. After evaluating burials by site, I studied the Late Neolithic graves of Eastern Hungary in a comprehensive way, then I compared them to the graves of Polgár–Csőszhalom and the Transdanubian Lengyel culture.

Based on criteria established previously and in the dissertation, I investigated the prestige and status goods in a wider chronological and geographical framework, since their social role in the Late Neolithic can be understood in a broader perspective and changes in their characteristics over time can be recognized only in this way.

In terms of social inequality I also analyzed the buildings, the types and layout of settlements as well as the spatial organization of sites in the landscape.

RESULTS

Social archaeological study of burials

The analysis of horizontal social differences and social inequality can be based solely on anthropological data. Distribution of age in Aszód–Papi földek, which provided the largest number of graves (224 graves), shows a demographically representative picture, and the disproportion of sexes can be explained by cultural reasons. At Late Neolithic sites on the Great Hungarian Plain a correlation can be inferred between the demographic composition of graves, their locations, and the types of settlements where they were found. Child and/or male burials are overrepresented on tells, while the proportion of sexes and children are more balanced at the horizontal settlements. The demographic composition and number of excavated graves suggest that only a minor part of the community was buried at the settlements according to such a rite that left archaeologically identifiable traces. The right or opportunity of being buried on a tell was culturally regulated. Three major groups of sites can be distinguished on the basis of practices of grave-good offerings on the Great Hungarian Plain. Graves recovered from tells are mostly poor or completely lack grave-goods; these sites cluster in the Körös and Berettyó regions. The burials at Tápé–Lebő are fundamentally different from those ones, the abundance of

grave-goods appears to be similar to the graves at Polgár–Csőszhalom and Aszód–Papi földek. Approximately 50 percent of the burials that have been excavated at Late Neolithic tell-like and horizontal settlements contained furnishings, and the diversity of items was also greater. The spatial distribution of graves documented at Polgár–Csőszhalom may have been characteristic of the tells and neighbouring horizontal settlements of the Great Hungarian Plain. The burials were associated with houses at the horizontal settlement of Polgár–Csőszhalom, and an identical system can be inferred at Öcsöd–Kováshalom and probably also at Kisköre–Gát. On the contrary, the deceased were buried in the unoccupied parts of the tell or under houses.

Regional and local differences can be observed among the elements of mortuary practices related to age and/or sex. Cremation might have been connected to a particular group of children at Aszód–Papi földek, and the orientation of graves depended partly on age and sex of the deceased. At several sites on the Great Hungarian Plain men were buried on their right side, while women were laid on their left side. Polished and chipped stone tools have been found mostly in male graves, while various ornaments (Spondylus bracelets, Spondylus and limestone beads) occur primarily in female graves. The Glycymeris pendant is the only type of grave-good, the majority of which has been recovered from child graves.

The burials make up groups in those Late Neolithic sites at which large-scale excavations made such observations possible. At the horizontal and tell-like settlements the organizing principle of grave-groups could have been the lineage or the household, but, based on demographic data, different principles prevailed on the tells. At Öcsöd–Kováshalom, the spatial clustering of bone tools and chipped stone artefacts in graves may indicate specialized craft activities. Based on this phenomenon one can infer craft specialization at the household level.

Spondylus and copper ornaments, and red-deer tooth pendants can be considered prestige goods in the Late Neolithic of Eastern Hungary, while wild boar tusk pendants, wild boar mandibles, stone mace heads and certain types of polished axes could have been status goods indicating leading positions.

On the basis of practices of grave-good offerings and the use of prestige and status goods the Southern Great Hungarian Plain and the Upper Tisza Region can be separated. The occurrence of Spondylus ornaments, red-deer tooth pendants, stone mace heads, wild boar tusk pendants and wild boar mandibles tends to cluster in the Upper Tisza Region (e.g. Polgár–Csőszhalom, Bodrogsadány–Akasztószér), and they appear only in small amount and rarely at Late Neolithic sites in the Southern Great Hungarian Plain. These goods, associated with wild animals, could have not played a significant role in the expression and manipulation of social inequality on the Southern Great Hungarian Plain. Since considerable difference in the ecological conditions of these two particular regions cannot be inferred, the recognized variance can probably be explained by different cultural connections and traditions. In the graves of the Southern Great Hungarian Plain copper ornaments have been found more frequently, while polished shaft-hole axes and shoe-last adzes could have been the status goods. Being farther from sources of stone raw materials the polished stone tools could have represented greater value in this region than in Transdanubia or North-Eastern Hungary. The occurrence of copper ornaments might have had chronological backgrounds as well: it became more and more frequent

during the period and gradually replaced the role of *Spondylus*. The regional variance can be probably explained partially by proximity to copper raw material sources, and on the other hand, by different utilization, since copper artefacts were found in greater amount in settlement features and layers than in graves both at Berettyóújfalu–Herpály and Polgár–Csőszhalom. The amount of limestone beads often exceeds the *Spondylus* ones at the Late Neolithic sites on the Southern Great Hungarian Plain, in fact, they occasionally substitute entirely for the *Spondylus* beads.

Data of graves from Polgár–Csőszhalom and from the rest of the Great Hungarian Plain appear to partially harmonize with each other. However, the burials of Polgár–Csőszhalom imply connections towards the Lengyel region as well. This latter relationship could have been the main reason for the difference in grave-good offering practices between the Upper Tisza Region and the Southern Great Hungarian Plain. At the same time, the rarity of pottery grave-goods at Polgár–Csőszhalom resembles that of other sites on the Great Hungarian Plain.

Several grave-groups and cemeteries have been found at settlements in Eastern Transdanubia, while burials are hardly known from Central and Western Transdanubia. Based on these peculiar phenomena one cannot infer the structure or organization of the society in these latter regions. However, since the cemeteries and grave-groups excavated in South-Eastern Transdanubia and Aszód–Papi földek contained large number of graves it is possible that they actually constitute a demographically representative segment of the past society, even if one takes into consideration of the possible destruction of infant graves and the likelihood that a particular portion of graves might have been totally destroyed.

Based on the composition of grave-groups, the location of burials could have played an important role in the expression of community affinity, group identity, and lineage in Eastern Transdanubia. Individuals considered to be members of a particular community were buried at the same place. By contrast, the relationship with ancestors could have been a more significant aspect on the Great Hungarian Plain, and it may have been the basis of the maintenance of social inequality based on lineage.

The most frequent grave-goods are vessels and animal bones in the burials of the Lengyel complex that is fundamentally different from the practice of grave-good offerings on the Great Hungarian Plain, where pots are extremely rare in the graves, and there are no recognizable general patterns in their occurrence.

The spatial concentration of wild boar mandibles and other prestige or status goods within a site, which can be observed in Zengővárkony as well as in Svodín, can suggest the prominent social position of a family, a lineage or other smaller-scale social group. In this context rich child burials can be considered as a sign of hereditary social rank. By contrast, at sites (e.g. Aszód–Papi földek) where these artefacts show a spatially more dispersed pattern, presence of competing families is more probable.

Customs emphasizing the social importance of children can be identified both on the Great Hungarian Plain and in Transdanubia. On the Great Hungarian Plain the custom of placing children burials on tells can be mentioned, while in Transdanubia anthropomorphic, zoom-

orphic vessels, statuettes, altars were often placed into child graves. The appearance of prestige goods in the burials of children is characteristic in both regions, which feature is widely considered as a sure trace of hereditary social rank, however, this possibility is not so unambiguous. In ethnographic records one can often find that men who achieved high social rank communicate their prestige through the costumes of their family members. If rich children burials are combined with the occurrence of status goods and spatial separation, they can be considered as a sign of hereditary social rank with a higher probability. At present there is only one known child burial from Villánykövesd, in which a status good, a stone mace head was found. At those Lengyel sites where graves rich in prestige and/or status goods cluster spatially as well (e.g. Zengővárkony), it is possible that one can reckon with the establishment of hereditary social rank. On the Great Hungarian Plain child graves cluster at those places, namely on tells, that could have had a central significance in the life of the past community in other respects as well. Male and child graves buried on tells may have rather played important role in the expression of connection with ancestors and social continuity. This also represents tendency towards hereditary social inequality. The social significance of children can be extremely important during the competition for power and in the case of political or economical uncertainty, and their burials usually receive a greater emphasis in these periods. Based on suggestions mentioned above it is assumed that, to some degree, there were differences in the measurements of social inequality among inhabitants living at different sites. Comparing Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain it seems that similar social processes took place in these regions during the Late Neolithic, however, they occurred in different forms. Traces of social inequality can be found in both areas but these signs suggest rather competing social groups than the actual establishment of hereditary social rank.

Prestige and status goods

The social role of Spondylus in the expression of prestige changed considerably during the Neolithic and Copper Age. It served its most important purpose in the manifestation of social inequality and prestige in the Middle Neolithic, when the Spondylus items occurred in male, female and child graves alike. Access to these artefacts could have been strongly restricted, and only a narrow social group might have had the right or the opportunity to participate in the exchange of Spondylus ornaments. The shapes and types of these ornaments imply that they were manufactured individually. Treatment of contracted inhumation in settlements was restricted to a distinguished segment of a particular community in this period. Based on these assumptions a network of competing families or lineages can be inferred during the Middle Neolithic that attempted to express and manipulate their prestige, and their social as well as economic influences by wearing and exchanging ornaments made of distant, exotic raw materials.

From the turn of the Middle and Late Neolithic (Sopot and Szakálhát cultures) considerable changes can be documented in the use of Spondylus ornaments. Firstly, changes in costumes can be witnessed: complex, multi-row belts, necklaces, bracelets and anklets of tiny beads replaced the previous heavy, one-row necklaces and belts. Their representations appeared on the

Sé-type figurines. In contrast to the former individual manufacturing of shell ornaments mass production started in this period that is supported by the homogeneous sizes of tiny beads.

During the Late Neolithic Spondylus ornaments became almost exclusively the elements of female and child costumes, and their imitations made of stone occurred in an increasing proportion. Increase in their quantity by the Late Neolithic is contradictory, since the estimated mean amount of raw material used for production in a grave did not increase rather decreased in many cases. At the same time, compared to the Middle Neolithic more social groups could have had access to this prestige raw material, albeit in a smaller amount. Proportionally, shell and stone ornaments occur in more graves than in the Middle Neolithic, but significant differences can be observed in their number among graves. Nevertheless, some burials with Spondylus grave-goods are an order of magnitude above the others also supplied with these items. Compared to the previous period the pattern of prestige representation also changed: men primarily expressed their prestige and wealth through the costumes of their female relatives and descendants.

In the Late Neolithic new raw materials also emerged in the expression and manipulation of prestige that gradually substituted for the Spondylus. It became more and more frequent that limestone beads, as imitations, supplemented the Spondylus beads. On the one hand, it refers to the value and significance of Spondylus, on the other hand, it suggests shifts in exchange networks; short-distance relations became stronger while long-distance networks gradually decreased. This trend persisted in the Copper Age as well when Spondylus was replaced entirely by limestone and marble. The decreasing significance of Spondylus ornaments as prestige goods played a great part not only their easier accessibility, which may have led to the loss of their attraction, but also to the wider-scale emergence of a new raw material, copper.

The interregional distribution of Spondylus gradually shrank during the Neolithic and Copper Age. It occurred in a huge quantity in Central and Western Europe in the Middle Neolithic, but by the Late Neolithic it spread only to the northern and western borderlands of the Carpathian Basin. This process reached its end by the Copper Age by then Spondylus ornaments almost completely disappeared from the material of the Carpathian Basin. However, Spondylus ornaments can be found in the Lower Danube region even in this period, which also supports shifts in exchange systems. At the same time, the continuity of symbolic value is suggested by the fact that Late Neolithic ornament types did not change by the Early Copper Age, and the forms of the Early and Middle Copper Age gold pendants still reflect the traditions of Middle Neolithic Spondylus pendants.

Based on the overview of phases of Balkan copper production it appears to be clear that native copper and malachite sources in the territory of present-day Serbia were already known and used from as early as the Early Neolithic. This period was the initial phase of metallurgy when sporadic finds reflect only individual, isolated production. The conscious copper and malachite processing started at the beginning of the Middle Neolithic, with the Vinča culture. The distribution of copper and malachite artefacts reveals that during this period the occurrence of these findings was limited to sites located close to the copper ore sources. From the turn of the Middle and Late Neolithic copper processing grew to such remarkable scales that copper and

malachite artefacts reached more remote areas like the Great Hungarian Plain, where, in the absence of local sources, they could have arrived only by exchange networks.

Since even the simplest technology of copper smelting has considerable risk of possible error without practice, observation, and oral instructions, it is nearly impossible to hand over the knowledge of processing. Because the hand-over of this knowledge is inevitably (perhaps intentionally) limited, the expertise of metallurgy could always have remained in the hands of a small, selected group of people. This meant not only restricted access to raw materials, since the required knowledge for recognizing good quality raw material and for mining could also have been restricted, but also limited possibility of producing objects.

As a consequence of these restrictions copper objects were perfectly suitable for prestige goods, since access to these products was possible only through contacts maintained with the Balkan communities.

The Late Neolithic copper and malachite ornaments have been found primarily in (mostly female and child) graves in the present-day Eastern Hungary, but they are also known in a greater amount from the settlement layers of Berettyóújfalú–Herpály and Polgár–Csószhalom tells. The access to copper objects was not entirely restricted to tells and tell-like settlements, because a find suggesting local copper processing was also revealed at Kisköre–Gát. The value of copper ornaments is also reflected by anthropomorphic statuettes with representations of multiple copper bracelets on their wrists, in the same position where they were found in burials (e.g. Szegvár–Tűzköves).

Comparing its distribution and way of wearing to another significant prestige good, Spondylus ornaments, one can observe that, on the one hand, the distribution and the way of wearing of copper ornaments were much more restricted, on the other hand, they often occur together, reflecting their similar role and value. The graves furnished with copper ornaments usually belong to those burials that stand out also in terms of other grave-goods, which seems to support the idea that copper was available only for a small group of people, and the new prestige material replaced the gradually less important Spondylus. In a wider temporal context, together with the Middle Neolithic and the Early Copper Age, the changing social role of copper can be documented in the Late Neolithic, similarly to that of Spondylus. After the sporadic occurrence of copper in the Early and Middle Neolithic, the Late Neolithic was the first period when this new, limitedly accessible raw material started to become a prestige good. Following a continuous technological development, from the Early Copper Age the copper artefacts were distributed in larger areas and in greater amounts. From this period, apart from ornaments, they occurred also in forms of utilitarian articles with both practical and prestige functions.

Red-deer tooth pendants emerged in a significant number for the first time during the Late Neolithic in the Carpathian Basin, however, their usage as ornaments had a long tradition dating back to the Upper Paleolithic all over Europe. By the end of the Neolithic they almost completely disappeared from the find materials. The custom of placing wild boar tusk into the graves also occurred first at the beginning of the Late Neolithic both in Transdanubia and North-Eastern Hungary. After the Late Neolithic the tradition of wearing wild boar tusk pendants and placing wild boar mandibles into the graves persisted also in the Copper Age

Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures. The spatial distribution of these artefact types appears to be identical, and both suggest the social significance of hunting. The hoards which, apart from Spondylus ornaments and red-deer tooth pendants, contained wild boar tusks as well (e.g. Čoka/Csóka–Kremenyák, Ariuşd/Erősd) might refer to their value. Since the acquisition of these objects were limited, they were perfectly suitable for expressing the personal skill of hunters. The wild boar and red-deer objects did not play such a significant role in the expression and manipulation of the differences in prestige in the Southern Great Hungarian Plain, which could have been there related to the different social judgement of hunting.

Stone tools had primarily practical functions, therefore several aspects (e.g. raw material type, finding context, elaboration) need to be considered in order to determine those cases when and under what circumstances particular stone tools could have been prestige or status goods.

Compared to the previous periods polished stone tools were much more frequent grave-goods in the Late Neolithic, particularly in the burials of the Lengyel culture. Based on the distribution of the material, custom of placing polished stone tools into the graves varied by site, and they cannot exclusively be connected to the adult men in the Transdanubian Late Neolithic. Similarly to Aszód–Papi földek and the burials of the Lengyel culture polished stone tools were frequent grave-goods at Polgár–Csőszhalom, while they occur rarely in the Southern Great Hungarian Plain. The primary reason for this phenomenon could have been the different geographical conditions of the regions. The polished stone objects might have represented greater value at sites far from the potential raw material sources of the mountains; therefore they were placed infrequently into the graves. Their miniature imitations, occasionally made of clay, recovered from several sites are also indicative of their values. Miniature clay axes found together with anthropomorphic statuettes imply not only the social role of the stone tools but their relations to the ritual life as well.

As it is suggested by the use-wears that occur always on the polished stone tools, these artefacts were (also) surely important utilitarian articles. However, it is interesting to note that use-wears are usually not visible on stone mace heads, which confirms the assumption that they did not have practical purpose. These objects were often made of marble, granite or other rare stone. The significance of stone mace heads as status goods was restricted to Transdanubia and the Upper Tisza Region, while in the Southern Great Hungarian Plain the polished stone axes may have had the symbolic meaning of a leadership position.

The contextual analysis of prestige goods suggests that they tend to appear in the graves of both horizontal and tell-like settlements, while on the tells they occur in settlement features (houses, hoards, sacrificial assemblages) and on representations even at such sites where these artefacts can scarcely be found in graves. This suggests that the use these objects might have been fundamentally different at these sites.

Traces of social inequality in settlements

Various settlement types existed contemporaneously in the Late Neolithic on the Great Hungarian Plain forming a closely related, complex settlement organization. Systems of different kinds of settlements can clearly be demonstrated in several regions, in which tells or tell-like settlements with long traditions were usually the central sites. The focal tells had various functions, they were locations of communal and ritual ceremonies, and their diverse artefact assemblages reflect their extensive long-distance connections.

The internal structure of settlements varied by types, in which their different functions, economy, subsistence, and attitudes to place might have played the most important role. Due to studies on tells in the second half of the 20th century, the research of the Late Neolithic on the Great Hungarian Plain has focused hitherto on these central settlements, ignoring the horizontal settlements adjacent to them as well as the smaller, satellite settlements in their proximity. Consequently, data on the internal settlement structure, and particularly on the characteristics of houses derive almost exclusively from tells or tell-like settlements. There is only one horizontal settlement, Polgár-Csőszhalom, where large-scale excavations have been conducted. The structure, furniture or decoration of the houses recovered from tells do not reflect such considerable differences that could be explained by the expression of social inequality. Each phase of these buildings contained ritual features or finds (foundation offering, bucranium, altars, anthropomorphic statuettes, deliberate destruction by burning) but it would be impetuous to extrapolate these phenomena to the horizontal and satellite settlements. Based on their analogous structures and finds tells might have played the same or at least a very similar role to each other that was essentially different from that of the smaller settlements. From the point of view of social inequality the fundamental difference might not have been within tells but in relation to the different types of settlements. This raises the question of whether a tell had primarily communal and ritual functions or whether it was residential area for a particular group of the given society, or perhaps both. A better understanding of the smaller settlements around tells is needed to answer this question.

The form of tell-type settlement by itself requires longer occupation, since this is one of the essential conditions of its formation. People rebuilt their houses in a regulated system where their ancestors' houses had stood (whatever their functions were), therefore these places were suitable for the expression of long-term social continuity. Every aspect of these settlements emphasizes the significance of relations to the ancestors. Long-term continuity expressed by tells could have been the basis of social hierarchy organized by affinity. In a society where the relationship with the ancestors and the expression of continuity with them were so important, these factors could have been the principle of status-rising and competition for prestige that could have taken place among the families or lineages on tells.

Traces of social inequality and the ritual

Hoard and sacrificial assemblages containing prestige goods such as Spondylus, copper ornaments, red-deer teeth, and wild boar tusks have been found exclusively on tells. Anthropomorphic statuettes and vessels, on which their representations are observable are also known without exception from tells and tell-like settlements. All these suggest that it might have been a strong connection between the type of settlement, its function and these artefact assemblages. If one takes into consideration that Spondylus and copper have been recovered from the settlement material of such tells where they were hardly placed into the graves, it becomes clear that the utilization of these prestige goods were different at these sites. The lack or rarity of Spondylus and copper artefacts in burials on tells surely cannot be explained by the assumption that the deceased buried here did not have access to these objects, rather the way of their use might have differed.

Prestige goods occurred only in a narrow segment of the ritual phenomena, however, at the same time several other kinds of ritual symbolic artefact types might have been utilized, but they did not refer to the relationship between the two areas (e.g. bucrania, altars, particular figurines). Groups that actively used prestige goods did not confine the accessibility of other members of the community to the sacral sphere. However, the statuettes with representations of prestige goods could have played an important role in the expression of continuity with the ancestors, they might have been the canonized, symbolic representations of real or mythical ancestors. Grave-goods, depicted ornaments and tools seem to support this idea. On the other hand, competition for prestige might have taken place in such events as well (e.g. funerals, feasts) where prestige goods practically became inaccessible to further usage supporting the maintenance of their value or preventing accessibility of other members of the society. People with knowledge and ability of keeping contact with the ancestors or the transcendent power might have been appreciated members of the community. They could easily have used their skills for obtaining economic and/or political power or influence.

To sum up, rituals and everyday life, rituals and the expression of social inequality were inseparably interwoven on tells. At the same time, our knowledge about the Late Neolithic on the Great Hungarian Plain is distorted, because it is based almost exclusively on research projects at tells. Reconstruction of the social structure of Late Neolithic communities on the Great Hungarian Plain is strongly limited and our knowledge is deformed by the fact that although we have some information about the existence of smaller settlements around and adjacent to tells, in the lack of their excavations we know hardly anything about them. Settlement integration and the central roles of tells in the settlement organization, assumed by previous small-scale excavations and topographical surveys, have been supported by micro-regional analyses as well. Conclusions drawn by the studies of tells cannot be generalized to the smaller, horizontal settlements. Therefore, a comprehensive picture about the Late Neolithic societies on the Great Hungarian Plain can only be gained if systematic investigations will be conducted at the larger horizontal sites next to the tells as well as at the smaller, satellite settlements. The relationship with the ancestors and the expression of descent may have been extremely important in the life of past communities. The overrepresentation of male graves on tells suggests that men could have had a more significant role in its maintenance, and a patrilineal system

can be inferred. The frequency of child graves on tells might be the sign of the incipient hereditary social inequality, but this phenomenon could rather have been evaluated as the expression of the importance of the next generation of the community. Various grave-goods, remains of feasts and offerings, may indicate competition among families or lineages. Comparing the burials of certain sites it seems that burials of horizontal settlements stand much closer to a demographically stable population, and the major field of competition might have been the funerals. By contrast, only a selected part of the past community was buried on tells, and the custom of grave-good offering may have played a minor role there. Prestige goods appeared to have a different role on tells (hoards, offerings, lost or deliberately deposited pieces), which suggests that tells served as locations for such rituals that provided possibility for competition among families or lineages. In the latter cases, function of rituals in keeping the community together surely had remarkable importance.

All these phenomena clearly indicate social inequality within a given community and settlement, and the competition among smaller-scale social groups (e.g. families, lineages) in the Late Neolithic in Eastern Hungary. However, our data do not have implications of consolidated hereditary social rank, and the establishment of a social elite, which would have restricted the access not only to prestige goods but also to the basic subsistence resources for other members of the community.

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