

# A pot in house 54 at Lepenski Vir I

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*Pottery was found in situ in the Mesolithic layers of the site Lepenski Vir in the Iron Gates gorges of the Danube. This discovery raises issues about Meso–Neolithic contact in the second half of the 7th millennium cal BC. Here discussion of the evidence from Lepenski Vir and Padina explores the Neolithic groups which made contact, opening the debate on the process of neolithization in the Balkans and southeast Europe in general.*

**Key-words:** Lepenski Vir, Iron Gates Mesolithic, Starčevo group, Gura Baciului group, Anzabegovo-Vršnik group, pottery, neolithization, Balkans

The site of Lepenski Vir in eastern Serbia was discovered and explored in the 1960s as part of the project of rescue excavations undertaken due to the creation of an artificial lake upstream of the exit of the Danube from the Iron Gates gorges. Apart from Lepenski Vir, about 20 other sites belonging to the Mesolithic were uncovered in the Iron Gates region, roughly covering a period between the 8th and 6th millennia cal BC.<sup>1</sup>

## Pottery in the Iron Gates Mesolithic

The presence of Early Neolithic pottery within the complex stratigraphy of Lepenski Vir and some other settlements of the Iron Gates Mesolithic have been explained in various ways by many of scholars. Our contribution here is an attempt to clarify that problem beginning with the rather elementary question — is there any pottery recorded *in situ* in the site's Mesolithic settlements? Apart from 'enigmatic' fragments of dark or red pottery in houses mentioned by Srejšović (1968: 86; 1972a: 134) and explained as 'intrusive', there are 'monochrome' potsherds between superimposed floors of houses 36 and 35 (Srejšović 1968: 86) or embedded into the floor of house 28 (Borić 1999: 52). There are also two previously unpublished photographs of Lepenski Vir houses containing pottery. One of the photographs shows the pottery vessel in house 54 (LV I/2) *in situ* (FIGURES 1–3).<sup>2</sup>

1 All <sup>14</sup>C dates in this text are calibrated at 1σ according to OxCal version 3.4 (beta 1) © C. Bronk Ramsey 2000.

2 D. Srejšović explained (pers. comm. to IR) that the deposition process on the site was such that the material from the upper layers simply came to rest directly upon the Lepenski Vir houses, and had a similar opinion on the situation at Padina.

House 54 at Lepenski Vir in the Iron Gates gorges of the Danube is dated by five <sup>14</sup>C dates (Radovanović 1996: 363; Borić 1999: 49, figure 7) (TABLE 1) and is amongst the largest and best preserved (FIGURE 2) (Srejšović & Babović 1983: 119–20, 191–2, cat. 106–107, 109). The shape of the vessel from house 54 is globular, similar to forms recorded in the Balkan–Anatolian Early Neolithic (Garašanin 1979: 104, plate XVI, 2; Tasić 1998: 48ff, 457, figure 26). It is manufactured of red fired, fine-tempered clay, and decorated with two plastic spirals placed on the two opposing sides of its belly.<sup>3</sup> The question arises: did pottery appear in the Mesolithic layers as a result of stratigraphic disturbance or can we consider the Early Neolithic and Mesolithic as contemporaneous in the Iron Gates? D. Srejšović stood firmly by the first assumption. However in one of his later papers he allowed a possibility of contemporaneity of the finds from Padina (Padina B, horizon III) with the Early Neolithic (Srejšović 1969; 1979: 36, figure 3; Jovanović 1987: 1ff). B. Jovanović was of a different opinion based upon the reliable stratigraphic observations at Padina (1987: 12) and we also shared that opin-

3 The plastic decoration on the belly as seen in this photo is in fact the lower part of a spiral, recorded in Srejšović's field journal and inventory list, which became available to us only after this paper's first revision. The spiral is completely preserved on the other side of the pot. The closest analogy for this type of decoration is another small, although quadrangular, pot from the earlier horizon of the site of Banja near Arandjelovac in central Serbia (Bogdanović 1988: 70, see also the cover of Srejšović 1988).

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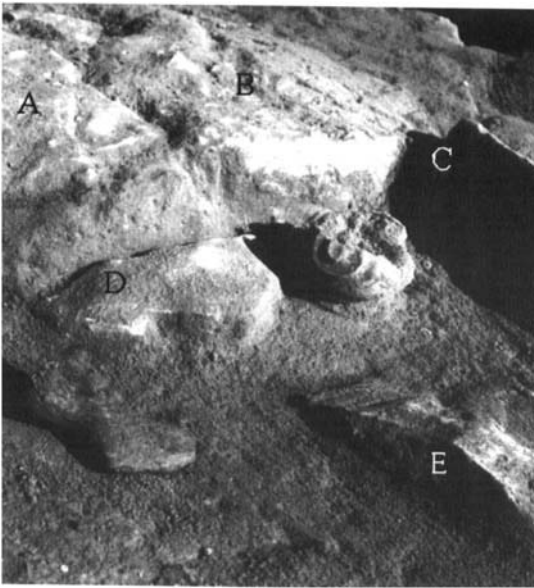


FIGURE 1. A pot in situ, house 54, Lepenski Vir I/2. (Photo Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade.)

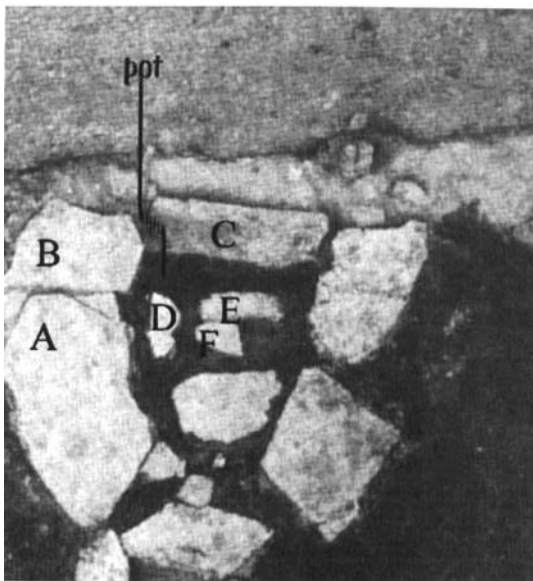


FIGURE 3. Ash-place in house 54, Lepenski Vir I/2. Compare the marked stones with FIGURE 1.

ion (Radovanović 1996: 280ff; Garašanin 1997: 11ff). An interpretation of the process of neolithization also depends on these explanations. According to Srejović it was a gradual, spontaneous transition to the classic Neolithic. A model of the emergence of the Neolithic due



FIGURE 2. House 54, Lepenski Vir I/2 (after Srejović & Babović 1983).

lab. no.	dates BP	calibrated dates BC at 1σ
Z-143	7300±124	6250 BC (65.2%) 6010 BC
KN-407	7280±160	6260 BC (61.2%) 5980 BC
Bln-738	7225±100	6220 BC (68.2%) 5990 BC
Bln-653	7040±100	6010 BC (68.2%) 5800 BC
Z-115	6984±94	5920 BC (55.2%) 5770 BC

All measurements apart from Bln-653 derive from the same sample of charcoal (Borić 1999: 49, figure 7).

TABLE 1.  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates from House 54 at Lepenski Vir.

to the arrival of a new population could also be accepted, followed by gradual assimilation and fusion of the older Mesolithic and the new Neolithic elements (Garašanin 1987).

### Early Neolithic pottery in the central Balkans

Which early Neolithic culture came into contact with the Lepenski Vir Mesolithic community? There were two more or less contemporaneous Neolithic cultures in the Central Balkans: one related to the Balkan-Anatolian complex of the Early Neolithic of the south and southeast of the Balkan peninsula, represented in the Central Balkans and Lower Danube Valley by the Gura Baciului group (present in phase



FIGURE 4. House 4, Lepenski Vir I/3. (Photo Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade.)

I at Circea in Oltenia and in the material from Donja Branjevina). The another culture was related to the Starčevo group in phase I. Srejović introduced the term Proto-Starčevo for the first group (i.e. Gura Baciului), although it actually is related to another group, notably the group Anzabegovo-Vršnik I in Macedonia (Srejović 1969: 161ff; Garašanin 1979: 132ff, 155ff; 1982: 87–107; 1998). This group is marked by the light-coloured and mainly fine monochrome (usually red or buff) pottery, followed by the less fine but also light-coloured (pink pottery especially is typical in Anzabegovo-Vršnik I), together with characteristic triangle-motif white-painted pottery. In the later phases of the Starčevo group, relating to the Carpathian-Danubian complex, the rough pottery is often decorated in the barbotine technique. The earlier impressed decoration is rare, especially in phase I at Starčevo. Scarce examples of this pottery were recorded as early as phase I at Anzabegovo-Vršnik (Garašanin 1998: 34, 36; 1980: 57ff; 1982: 100–106; Pavlu 1989: plate 3).

### Lepenski Vir I–II and Padina B pottery correlations

Establishing a correlation between the main cultural groups is a difficult task because the pottery finds from the Mesolithic layers of the

Lepenski Vir culture are inadequately published and barely described. Identification of their characteristics and their cultural attribution is sometimes problematic. However, more comprehensive, although still preliminary data by B. Jovanović, as well as the pottery traits listed by Radovanović (1996: 280ff, 285ff) may help in establishing a clearer picture.

The finds from Padina B, horizon I are represented by fine tempered monochrome pottery, and belong, according to Radovanović (1996: 287), to phase 4 of the Iron Gates Mesolithic. She believes that phase 2 of LV I, and thus house 54, belong to the same phase, since the finds relate to the Balkan-Anatolian complex of the Early Neolithic. Pottery finds from the later phase of Lepenski Vir (i.e. phase LV I/3) were not mentioned although a photograph of house 4 (LV phase I/3) shows a whole impresso decorated pot placed *in situ* on the floor of that house (FIGURE 4). The very same pot is illustrated in Srejović's publications (1969; 1972a: 142, figure 41 right).<sup>4</sup> Pottery from the succeeding phase of the Iron Gates Mesolithic (so far missing in published reports of the structures of LV I/3) is represented by a few potsherds in Padina B horizon II, especially from house 12. This is reddish monochrome which corresponds to the slipped/unslipped pink pottery from Anzabegovo, and is a diagnostic trait of the Anzabegovo-Vršnik phase Ia — although it may appear, though rarely, in Anzabegovo II and III (Garašanin 1998: 20ff, 30). On account of the presence of the same type of pottery, house 13 at Padina could belong to the same phase. It was ascribed to Padina B, horizon III by Radovanović (1996: 73f, figure 3, 10) and to Padina B, horizon II by Jovanović (1987: 1ff). House 18, however, certainly belongs to Padina B, horizon III. Similar pottery was recorded in house 15 (Jovanović 1987: 4ff, figures 8–11) and it cannot be certainly associated either to the Starčevo group or to the elements of the Balkan-Anatolian complex of the Early Neolithic. This horizon belongs to Lepenski Vir II<sup>5</sup> (Radovanović 1996: 288).

These facts may imply that these pottery finds may be related to the Balkan-Anatolian complex of the Early Neolithic. They are usually

4 Confirmed in Srejović's field journal (see note 3).

5 The two existing dates from LV II (houses IX and XXXIV) are too late and probably taken from samples belonging to LV IIIb (H. Quitta in Srejović 1972a: 206–7).

ascribed to the local Gura Baciului group of the Lower Danube Valley and the northern part of the Central Balkans. However, this group, according to its painted pottery decorated with motifs of white dots, corresponds to the Anzabegovo-Vršnik Ic phase. The Iron Gates material contains elements which are typical for Anzabegovo-Vršnik phases earlier than phase Ic, although their use in later times may not be excluded (Garašanin 1998: 20ff, 30; Lazarovici & Maxim 1995: *passim*, and plates PC I–II, 9–10; PC IV; PC V, 2–3, 11–13).

### Pottery in Lepenski Vir III

The earliest finds of the ceramic Neolithic recorded as LV IIIa–b deserve special attention. Srejšović (1969: 161ff) distinguished two phases in LV IIIa: IIIa1, with pits and the corresponding material, and IIIa2 in the layer directly above it. Phase IIIa1 lacks the painted pottery, while red, sometimes fine, monochrome pottery prevails, with a ratio of fine *versus* ordinary and rough pottery of 3:2.

Impresso decorated pottery is more common in LV IIIa2, which is marked also by the appearance of barbotine together with white and dark painted decoration, but not the white dots typical of Gura Baciului (Srejšović 1969: 169ff). The characteristics of this phase all imply that it must be related above all to Starčevo IIa (according to D. Garašanin), or Starčevo II according to V. Milošević (Garašanin 1979: 115ff; 1982: 101, 105). Therefore, phase IIIa1 and its corresponding pottery could still be correlated to Anzabegovo-Vršnik I (Garašanin 1998). Absence of white-painted pottery in the inventory of Mesolithic layers could probably be explained by local factors. The assumption that one general early red monochrome phase was distributed over the entire eastern and central Balkans has recently been questioned (Pavlu 1989: 217ff; Stojanova 1996: 15ff; 19). In D. Garašanin's view, however, the LV IIIb phase can be related with certainty to the classic Starčevo IIb, i.e. Starčevo III (Milošević).

The finds from LV IIIa2 can be broadly correlated with those from Cuina Turcului III/1-3 (in the Lower Gorges of the Iron Gates), dated by Paunescu to Milošević's Starčevo II-IV. According to D. Garašanin, it is more probable that these finds belong to Starčevo IIa, i.e. Milošević's Starčevo II (Paunescu 1978: 11ff; 37ff; figure 15–20).

Our TABLE 3 illustrates the correlations noted. Comparison of TABLES 2 & 3 clearly shows that pottery recorded *in situ* in houses from LV I/2-3 and Padina B, horizons I–II, together with <sup>14</sup>C dates (TABLE 2), in fact corresponds entirely to the pottery identified as LV IIIa1. As noted above, the pottery from Padina B, horizon III cannot be simply correlated to either the Balkan-Anatolian (Gura Baciului, Anzabegovo) or Carpathian-Danubian (Starčevo) complexes; rather, its dates correspond to Starčevo IIa in the central Balkans.<sup>6</sup> The beginning of Starčevo IIa, which corresponds to LV II, is at least partly synchronous with Anzabegovo Ic, i.e., Gura Baciului. After examining pottery from Grivac in central Serbia, Pavlu (1989: 217f) notes that white-painted pottery with dot-like motifs of the Gura Baciului type appears at Grivac in small quantities, but that it precedes other white painted motifs and dark painted pottery which is typical for Starčevo IIa. These correlations based upon pottery analogies, together with <sup>14</sup>C dates, may further be reinforced by observations as regards the chipped stone, ground stone and bone industries at these sites (Radovanović 1996; 1996a; 1997).<sup>7</sup> Does this mean that the inhabitants of LV I/2-3 and LV II settlements in fact used the pottery otherwise identified as LV IIIa1–a2?

This confusing picture may only be explained by re-examining Srejšović's stratigraphical observations. In the case of the IIIa–b settlements, he explains (1972a: 37, 140) that LV IIIa dwellings (semi-subterranean huts) were 'dug at random in the sand and loess often down to the floors of the houses of LV II or down to the subsoil of hard porphyritic rock'.<sup>8</sup> As regards the pottery from LV IIIa, Srejšović divided it into LV IIIa1 (the lower level of pits and dugouts)

6 The previous date, Grn-7981 (6000–5880 cal BC), is confirmed by a recent measurement (OxA-9052). We wish to thank A. Whittle for that information.

7 The examples of the material typical for the Iron Gates Mesolithic, recorded in Early Neolithic contexts, could also be noted i.e., an ornamented stone 'altar' from Cuina Turcului (with analogy in Padina B hor.I) and aniconic stone 'altars' from Veleznica (Radovanović 1996: 159, 346 with further references).

8 For example hut A from LV IIIa was 'dug down to the floor of house No. 6 (LV Id) and the foundation of that house was adapted in such a way that a stove of horseshoe shape with a clay cover had been built of the slabs found around the hearth of the former house'. Similarly 'In hut B which was dug down to the floor of house 8 (LV Ie) another horseshoe stove was found . . .'. (Srejšović 1972a: 140).

Iron Gates Mesolithic settlements			Early Neolithic Central Balkans		
IGM phases	Lepenski Vir I-II Pottery in situ	Padina B Pottery in situ	Balcano-Anatolian Complex	Carpatho-Danubian Complex/central and northern Serbia	
<i>(phases after Radovanović, 1996)</i>					
4	<b>Lepenski Vir I/2</b> <i>House 36:</i> (Bln-740a) 6250-6020 (Bln-740b) 6380-6080  <i>House 54</i> (Z-143) 6250-6010 (KN-407) 6260-5980 (Bln-738) 6220-5990 (Bln-653) 6010-5800 (Z-115) 5920-5770  <i>House 28</i> No 14C dates	<b>P - B hor. I</b> <i>Houses 5, 6, 7:</i> No 14C dates	↑ ↑ ↑ <b>Anzabegovo Ia</b> (LJ-2181) 6330-5930 (LJ-3032) 6160-6000 (LJ2330/31) 6160-5920 (LJ-3183) 6070-5920 (LJ-3186) 6160-5910 ↑? <b>Anzabegovo Ib</b> (LJ-2339) 6070-5890 (LJ-2342) 6060-5840 ↓?	Starčevo I	<b>Grivac earlier</b> (Bln-869) 6220-6010  <b>Divostin</b> (Bln-899) 6210-5920 (Bln-866a) 6210-5920 (Bln-931) 6010-5800 (Bln-862) 5990-5750 (Bln-824) 5980-5740 (BM-573) 5970-5720 ↓
5	<b>Lepenski Vir I/3</b> <i>House 4 ?</i> No 14C dates	<b>P - B hor. II</b> <i>Houses 2, 3, 12, 17:</i> No 14C dates  Other: (Grn-8230) 6060-5840			<b>Donja Branjevina</b> (GrN-15976) 6160-5890 (GrN-15974) 6070-5920 (GrN-15975) 5880-5740 ↓
6	<b>Lepenski Vir II</b>	<b>P - B hor. III</b> <i>Houses 13, 15, 18*:</i> (OxA-9052) unpubl.  Other: (Grn-7981) 6000-5880	<b>Anzabegovo Ic (Gura Baciului)</b> — — — — <b>Anzabegovo II</b> (LJ-2409) 5780-5660 (LJ-2405) 5890-5720 ↓	Starčevo IIa (D. Garašanin) Starčevo II (Milojević)	<b>Grivac later</b> ↓

TABLE 2. Pottery finds recorded in the IGM houses with calibrated dates of houses and phases, correlated to the Early Neolithic of the Central Balkans with calibrated dates from the listed sites. (On calibration see note 1; radiocarbon dates for central and northern Serbia after Tasić 1997; \* see note 6).

and IIIa2 (a layer above it). However he notes (1972a: 149) that in all layers of LV III (that is IIIa-b) all three types of pottery (coarse, monochrome and painted) which are characteristic of Starčevo culture were found along with the

pottery previously unrecorded in Starčevo complex. Early pottery from the LV I/2-3 and LV II house floors could thus have been collected and recorded as the contents of LV III pits and dwellings dug down to these floors and in this

Early Neolithic Central Balkans and Thessaly				
Carpatho-Danubian Complex			Balcano-Anatolian Complex	
↑ <b>Lepenski Vir IIIa1</b>  <b>Lepenski Vir IIIa2</b> ↓	<b>Starčevo I</b>  <b>Starčevo IIa</b> (D. Garašanin) <b>Starčevo II</b> (Milojčić)	<b>Grivac earlier</b> (Bln-869) 6220-6010  <b>Divostin</b> (Bln-899) 6210-5920 (Bln-862) 5990-5750 (Bln-824) 5980-5740 (Bln-866a) 6210-5920 (Bln-931) 6010-5800 (BM-573) 5970-5720	<b>Anzabegovo Ia</b> (LJ-2181) 6330-5930 (LJ-3032) 6160-6000 (LJ2330/31) 6160-5920 (LJ-3183) 6070-5920 (LJ-3186) 6160-5910 ↑? <b>Anzabegovo Ib</b> (LJ-2339) 6070-5890 (LJ-2342) 6060-5840 ↓? <b>Anzabegovo Ic</b> (Gura Baciului)	↑ <b>Proto-Sesklo</b> ↑ <b>Magulitsa (Presesklo)</b> ↓
		<b>Donja Branjevina</b> (GrN-15974) 6070-5920 (GrN-15975) 5880-5740 (GrN-15976) 6160-5890  <b>Grivac later</b>	<b>Anzabegovo II</b> (LJ-2409) 5780-5660 (LJ-2405) 5890-5720	↓ <b>Sesklo</b> ↓
<b>Lepenski Vir IIIb</b>	<b>Starčevo II b</b> (D. Garašanin) <b>Starčevo III</b> (Milojčić)		<b>Anzabegovo III</b>	

TABLE 3. *Lepenski Vir IIIa1–a2 and IIIb pottery correlated to the Early Neolithic of the Central Balkans and Thessaly with corresponding calibrated dates. (On calibration see note 1; radiocarbon dates for central and northern Serbia after Tasić 1997.)*

way separated from its actual context. The pottery which he described as resting upon the floors of 15 houses of LV I (1972a: 134), and thought to be 'intrusive', was compared to pottery from the pits and dugouts and similarly identified LV III. Thus, pottery from LV I/2–3 houses and the bulk of the LV IIIa pottery from pits, identified as IIIa1, is in fact one and the same, i.e., LV I pottery. The missing pottery in LV II should perhaps be identified as the pottery described as from 'the layer above', i.e. LV IIIa2. But what about the actual LV IIIa pits and dugouts? They are indeed later, and, apart from the earlier pottery recorded at their base, typi-

cal Starčevo pottery is found in and around them (Srejskić 1972a: 149).

### Conclusion

Our proposition here is very similar to Srejskić's very first interpretation of the Lepenski Vir stratigraphy.<sup>9</sup> As our TABLES 2 & 3 show, there is a strong chronological correlation between the last centuries of the Iron Gates Mesolithic and the regional Early Neolithic. The lists of

9 Srejskić (1966: 16–17) reported that LV IIIa and LV IIIb represent Starčevo phases IIa and IIb, while LV I (obviously only on the basis of pottery presence, comment MG & IR) represented phase I of the Starčevo culture.

<sup>14</sup>C dates are sometimes extensive (Tasić 1997) but it must be borne in mind that they may fail to offer reliable dating due to the unknown context of the samples, uncertain measurements or unreliable stratigraphic observations. However, as regards the dates obtained from house 54 at Lepenski Vir, dating to the last centuries of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th millennia cal BC, it could be noted that they generally fit well within the scope of the dates for Anzabegovo I and the beginning of LV I/2 (Radovanović 1996: 359ff). The dates for LV I–II, including the dates for house 54 (see TABLE 1), cover the period 6260–5770 cal BC, and correspond to the dates for Anzabegovo Ia (6330–5910 cal BC). The plastic spiral on the pot in this house corresponds to the finds from central Serbia (earlier horizon at Banja). The dates for Anzabegovo Ib correspond to those from Padina, horizon II (6070–5840 cal BC, and 6060–5840 cal BC) (see TABLES 2 & 3). M. Gimbutas did not distinguish Anzabegovo Ic and hence there are no specific dates for the phase. However, the dates from Donja Branjevina (belonging to the Gura Baciului group) correspond to the dates of Anzabegovo Ib and some of them are even later (until 5740 cal BC). The synchronism of Starčevo II and Karanovo II is established by way of comparative analysis and the <sup>14</sup>C dates also correspond well to the stratigraphic sequence at Lepenski Vir and other sites in the

Iron Gates (Garašanin 1997: 15ff, 30; Boyadziev 1995: 144ff, 179; Todorova & Vajsov 1993: 83f; Garašanin 1997a: 30f).

These chronological and cultural correlations clearly show that the neolithization process at Lepenski Vir did not result from a direct evolution of the local Mesolithic but from contact with Early Neolithic cultures in central Serbia and Macedonia. The main and most likely candidate for contact with Mesolithic communities in the Iron Gates region in the second half of the 7th and first half of the 6th millennium cal BC is in fact the Starčevo group of the Carpathian–Danubian complex. It must be pointed out that the phase I Starčevo pottery (last centuries of the 7th millennium cal BC) is marked by elements of the Balkan-Anatolian complex (correlations with Anzabegovo-Vršnik Ia–b), but that it appeared earlier than the Gura Baciului group. Throughout the end of the 7th and beginning of the 6th millennia BC, the Iron Gates Mesolithic communities maintained intensive contacts with their Early Neolithic (i.e. Starčevo) neighbours. Cultural and social relations between members of the Lepenski Vir community were realized within a network which was firm enough to insulate them from the ‘outside’ Early Neolithic groups (Radovanović 1997: 61, 63; 1996a) but not so strong as to hinder or prevent a variety of contacts which eventually led to their assimilation after several centuries.

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