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TWO SKELETON GRAVES FROM NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENTS IN MORAVIA (CZECH REPUBLIC)

ABSTRACT: *In the region of Moravia, as well as all over central Europe, Neolithic farmers (5700–4500 BC) developed specific cultural behaviours – these are recorded in the earliest history of this territory and reflected also in the burial rite variations. For the first time in early human history, Neolithic people started to systematically bury their dead. This was manifested by the existence of skeleton burial grounds, founded near their settlements, but also by burying the dead in the settlements themselves. Two cases of settlement burials from Moravia (Mašovice – Culture with Linear Pottery, Těšetice – Culture with Moravian Painted Pottery) evidence the existence of burial rites (Rulf 1996), as well as of religious ideas of Neolithic people.*

KEY WORDS: *Central Europe – Czech Republic – Moravia – Neolithic burials – Settlement burial rite – Two Neolithic skeletons – Anthropological characteristics*

INTRODUCTION

In the Upper Paleolithic, a fundamental change occurred with the Early Neolithic populations. The hunter-gatherer way of life, typical of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic, had radically changed in the earliest Neolithic populations and became a settled lifestyle based on agriculture and economy. These changes are related to the beginnings of agriculture and pastoralism, and they caused further changes in the Neolithic populations' alimentation strategy. This process was a consequence of a fundamental turn in evolution, clearly manifested in several biological, ecological and socio-cultural fields. Important changes had to occur gradually on the level of individuals (physiological adaptation, e.g. alimentation stress on teeth), but also on a more general level (evolutionary adaptation, differences in body height in individual populations).

The Neolithic population lived in Moravia for more than 1,500 years (*Figure 1*). It developed a society of skilful and aesthetic makers of material cultures, brought along a new way of subsistence – agriculture, and also the knowledge of pottery and textile manufacture, with gradual development of cult superstructure (the construction of

complexes devoted to cult, manufacture of human and animal sculptures and other objects of cult).

Although the Neolithic settlers' burials originated in various periods of time, they always manifest a large variety of different burial means – the body is mostly in a crouching position with grave goods, in other cases without any grave goods, but with the presence of ochre, mussels, beads and other ornaments, and sometimes with manifestations of ritual practices.



FIGURE 1. Map of the Czech Republic with marked territories of Bohemia (white) and Moravia (grey).

In the Neolithic period (5700–4500 BC), there occurred some extraordinary events related to the Neolithic populations' continuous settlement accompanied with unusual ceramic production. The Neolithic period is characterised by three basic material cultures: with Linear Pottery, with Stroke-Ornamented Pottery and with Moravian Painted Pottery. From the archaeological point of view, the three archaeological cultures considerably differ from each other, showing fundamental differences in manufacturing and decoration technologies.

The two analysed settlement burials from Moravia (Těšetice, Mašovice) are culturally different. The female skeleton from Těšetice is from the period of the Early Neolithic, the Culture with Linear Pottery (5700–5500 BC). The male skeleton from Mašovice is from the Late Neolithic, dated by the Moravian Painted Pottery (4700–4500 BC).

SETTLEMENT BURIALS IN MORAVIA

The first descriptions of graves and burials in settlements were published by Skutil (1941), and their scientific evaluation appeared in the essay of Zápotocká (Steklá 1956). Also individual archaeological reports are available from Džbánice (Horňanský, Skutil 1950), Blučina (Tihelka 1956), Komín (Poulík 1947), Mohelnice (Tichý 1956), and summary reports made by Trnáčková (1962) and Jelínek (1964).

Only two decades later, burial rites and burying in settlements became the object of interest of several researchers analysing finds from various sites in different forms – descriptive, more general or synthetic: Brno–Bystrc (Čižmářová, Rakovský 1988), Dolní Věstonice (Rakovský 1990), Holubice (Geislerová 1985), Mikulov (Unger 1974), Jaroměřice (Koštuřík 1979, 1980), Těšetice (Koštuřík 1972, Lorencová 1975–1976, Kazdová, Lorencová 1985, Kazdová 1988, Koštuřík, Lorencová 1989–1990, Dočkalová, Koštuřík 1992), Vedrovice (Ondruš 1972, 1976), Velešovice (Čižmář, Geisler 1992), Vyškov (Janák, Rakovský 1984), Žadovice (Čižmář, Geislerová 1997). Worthy of interest are comprehensive archaeological works of Kazdová (1992), Podborský *et al.* (1993), Rulík (1996), Čižmář, Geislerová (1997).

During research in recent years, several individual graves and burials have been discovered in the settlements of central Moravia – in Olšany (Šmíd 2002), Kralice na Hané (Fojtík 2004, Šmíd 2004), and in Seloutky (Čižmář 2000). In 2005, a so far unknown settlement of the Culture with Linear Pottery was discovered in Modřice (Brno–venkov district), with the find of two female and one infant skeletons (Čižmář, Přichystal 2006, Drozdová 2006).

GRAVES OF THE CULTURE WITH LINEAR POTTERY

In Moravia, as well as all over Central Europe, Neolithic agriculturalists developed the Culture with Linear Pottery

(LnP). For the first time in early human history, people started to systematically bury their dead. This was manifested by the existence of skeleton burial grounds, founded near their settlements, but also by burying the dead in the settlements themselves.

In the 1870s lay researchers uncovered in Vedrovice (Široká u lesa) some 16 graves with LnP. In 1910, Černý excavated six graves in the former Vinkler's brickfield on the track Za dvorem at Vedrovice (Skutil 1941, Tichý 1962, Koštuřík, Lorencová 1989–1990). An important burial ground with LnP was found, in the area of Vedrovice, in the track U kostela.

In Moravia, continuous burial grounds of the LnP people have been recorded at Moravský Krumlov – sugar factory, at Rybníky–Díla, at Padochov, Blučina–Nivky, and also at Sutny near Těšetice–Kyjovice (Koštuřík, Lorencová 1989–90). Skeleton graves, especially burials of children, were found in settlement structures or in grave pits.

In Vedrovice (Široká u lesa), Ondruš excavated burials of five children, deposited in construction pits (Ondruš 1972) and burials of adult individuals in pits. In the Žadovice site (Hodonín region), Geislerová discovered eight children's skeletons in settlement structures (Geislerová *et al.* 1987). There is further evidence of burials from the settlements of Boskovštejn, Brno–Komín, Brno–Lískovec, Mikulov, Mohelnice, Předmostí u Přerova, Viničné–Lýsek. Several individual graves are known from the sites of Běhařovice, Hluboké Mašůvky (Steklá 1956), Bojanovice, Mistřín, Otaslavice, etc.

The LnP Culture is mostly characterised by individual burials. Finds of several individuals deposited in settlement structures are exceptional. Desort excavated at Blučina altogether three structures with burials of one, two and three individuals (Desort 1963). In Mikulov–Pod Liščí skálou, a burial of three children was found (Unger 1974). In Brno–Komín, Poulík discovered in a settlement structure three adult individuals and one child (Poulík 1947, Čižmář, Geislerová 1997). The latest find has been known from Hluboké Mašůvky, where Čižmář uncovered three individuals (a male, a female and a child) in a settlement pit (Čižmář, Dočkalová 2003).

Until recently, only skeleton burial rite has been known in Moravia of the LnP period; however, in 2005 the Neolithic settlement in Kralice na Hané yielded for the first time 17 cremation burials (Šmíd 2004). This new discovery of cremation burial rite from the Early Neolithic (Linear Pottery Culture) brought a fundamental change of hitherto ideas about the Neolithic population burial rite.

GRAVES OF THE MORAVIAN PAINTED POTTERY (MPP) CULTURE

One of the oldest graves is the burial of a child from Střelice–Bukovina (Vildomec 1928–29). In a pit of the settlement in Brno–Královo Pole, a part of a female skeleton together with animal skeletons have been discovered (Král 1956). In Sněhotice, two individuals were buried together with a



FIGURE 2a. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Adult female, age at death 20–25 years, skeleton with thrown in stones.



FIGURE 2b. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Adult female, age at death 20–25 years, skeleton with thrown in stones. Drawing by Z. Nerudová.

dog's skeleton (Červinka 1908), in Medlov, a double grave of a female with a child has been discovered (Trňáčková 1962), and one grave has been found at Těšetice–Kyjovice (Košťuřík, Dočkalová 1992).

Two ritually deposited burials have been found in the ditch of the rondel at Těšetice–Kyjovice (Podborský 1988). Other graves are from Klobouky u Brna (Ondráček 1968), Velešovice (Čižmář, Geisler 1992) and Telnice (Červinka 1908). A rare evidence of ritual skeleton burial comes from Džbánice, with remains of twelve individuals (Horňanský, Skutil 1950), and a ritual burial of a child from a settlement pit at Mostkovice (Šmíd 1991). Undated burials are known from Čechůvky, Dolní Otaslavice, Hulín and Telnice (Trňáčková 1962). Individual skeletons have been excavated at MPP settlements at Střelice–Bukovina – an adult individual (Vildomec 1928–29), at Těšetice–Kyjovice – a child (Podborský 1969) and a child buried in a corn pit (Podborský 1988).

Discarded human skeletons have been found in settlements at Pavlov (Kundera 1980) and at Hodonice (Rakovská, Stuchlík 1980). Isolated human skulls have been found in settlement pits at Luže u Oslavan (Knies 1896), in pits at Střelice–Bukovina (Vildomec 1928–29), Hluboké Mašůvky and Dobšice (Geisler, Kovárník 1983). Four human skulls have been found in a fireplace in a pit at Cezavy near Blučina (Ondráček, Podborský 1954, Tihelka 1956).

There are two known mass graves. In 1872, Wankel found at Rajhrad five human skeletons in a pit, but the dating of the find to the MPP period is not unequivocal. In 1937, Horňanský discovered at Džbánice a structure with twelve individuals and a dog's skull (Horňanský, Skutil 1950).

There are only few cremation MPP graves – one of the earliest cremations is the burial from Jaroměřice nad Rokytinou, discovered by Palliardi (Košťuřík 1979, 1980).

The main archaeological sources for the study of Moravian Painted Pottery are villages, elevated settlements and other settlement types. No burial grounds have been known so far.

Burials of MPP people have mostly been found in settlement pits right in the settlements, without any obvious system.

The adult female burial – find situation

The burial find was made in the area of the Těšetice Neolithic settlement (Znojmo district) in 2001. The Neolithic female skeleton (Figure 2a) was discovered in section D 4, square 68c of the feature 703. Upon burying the female in the burial pit, large stones had been thrown intentionally on her body (Figure 2b).

The female was lying on her back in a crouching position (Figure 3), her face was facing north and she had three large stones thrown to the right side of her thorax. Her right arm



FIGURE 3. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Adult female, age at death 20–25 years, skeleton after the removal of stones.



FIGURE 4. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. View of the stones thrown on the legs of the adult female.

had probably been broken in the wrist area before the burial or during it. On the left side of the body, two stones were covering a part of the ribs and the left humerus. Her legs were crouched at the knees, with some stones lying below them; three large stones had been thrown straight on the legs (Figure 4).



FIGURE 5. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Adult male, age at death 25–35 years, skeleton with thrown in stones.



FIGURE 6. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Left foot on the right side of the adult male's skull.



FIGURE 7. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Adult male, age at death 25–35 years, skeleton after the removal of stones.

The adult male burial – find situation

The grave was found at the settlement in Mašovice (Pšeničné) in Moravia in 2003 (Čižmář 2006). The Neolithic male skeleton was found in the provisions pit 705. The body had been thrown into the pit; it was lying in an unnatural position (Figure 5). The right arm was stretched, the left one was under the body. The left leg was



FIGURE 8. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. View of the difference in levels – pelvis deposited 40 cm above the bottom of the pit, skull lying near the bottom of the pit (5 cm from the bottom).



FIGURE 9. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Mortally broken skull of the male in the area of the left temporal bone; numerous fragmented fractures can be observed.



FIGURE 10a. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. View of the adult male skeleton with fractured right clavicle.



FIGURE 10b. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Right and left clavicle of the adult male; unhealed double fracture on the right clavicle.



FIGURE 11a. Mašovice 2003 pit No. 705. View of the adult male skeleton with a fracture of the right humerus distal condyle.



FIGURE 11b. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Right humerus of the adult male with a distal fracture.

stretched (towards the pit's wall), the right one was bent in a sharp angle of the knee, with the foot on the right side of the skull (Figure 6). Before the burial, the male had been brutally beaten – the skeleton bears traces of many unhealed fractures and mortal lesions; the lower part of the body was weighted down with stones in the pelvis region (Figure 7). The lower part of the body (pelvis) was lying 40 cm higher than the skull that was 5 cm above the bottom of the pit (Figure 8). The skull was mortally broken,



FIGURE 12. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Left arm of the adult male with fractured humerus and double fracture of the forearm.



FIGURE 13. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. View of the adult male's fractured spine in the area of cervical vertebrae.

numerous fragmented fractures were found in the area of the left temporal bone (Figure 9). The male had probably been drawn to the pit by his right arm, which is evidenced by the find situation in the pit, an unhealed fracture of the right clavicle (Figure 10a, b) and a fracture of the right humerus joint (Figure 11a, b). The left arm lying under the body showed a double fracture of the forearm (Figure 12) that must have caused its complete paralysation before the individual's death. The spine was broken in the area of cervical vertebrae (Figure 13), which occurred either before or during the body being thrown into the pit.



FIGURE 14. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Frontal view of the skull of the 20–25-year-old female.

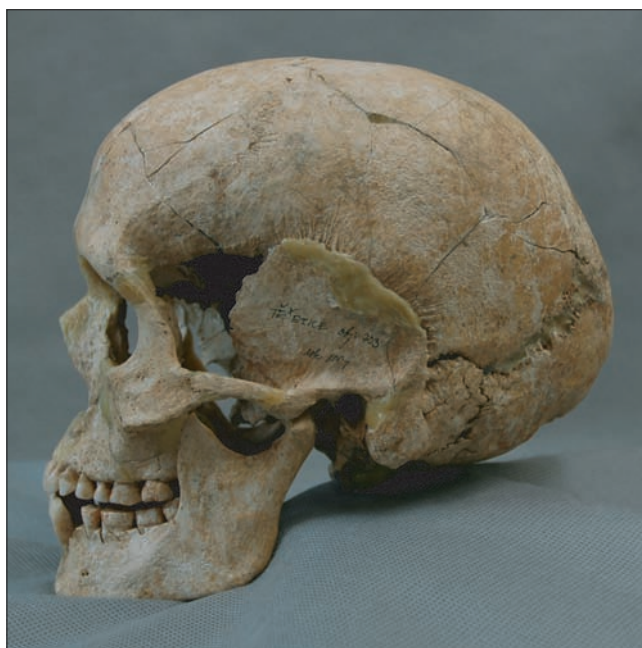


FIGURE 15. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Lateral view of the skull of the 20–25-year-old female.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACH

Five hundred Neolithic sites having been identified in the territory of Moravia so far, it is known that the Neolithic population of the time buried their dead mainly in settlements, and only scarcely in burial grounds. J. Rulf (1996) divided burials in prehistoric settlements in two categories: A) ritual settlement burials, and B) non-ritual settlement burials.

He then proceeded to an analysis of these two basic categories according to the find situations:

A1 – ritual burials in settlement pits with grave goods

A2 – ritual burials in settlement pits without grave goods

A3 – ritual burials with traces of violence

B1 – non-ritual burials

B2 – non-ritual burials with traces of violence

B3 – burials of merely parts of the body, respective of the skeleton

The female burial in a grave pit in Těšetice (Znojmo district), discovered in 2001, can be classified according to Rulf (1996) as a ritual burial in a settlement pit without grave goods – A 2. No lesions due to violence were found on the female's skeleton.

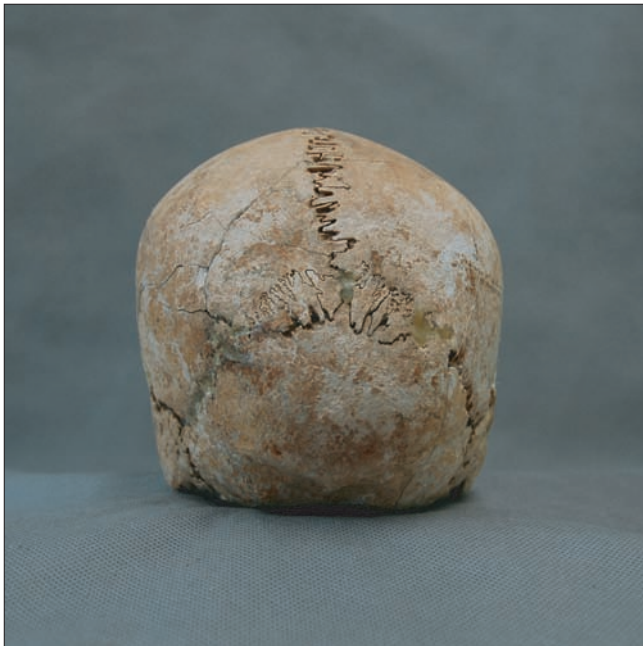


FIGURE 16. Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703. Occipital view of the skull of the 20–25-year-old female.



FIGURE 18. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Lateral view of the skull of the 25–35-year-old male.



FIGURE 17. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Frontal view of the skull of the 25–35-year-old male.



FIGURE 19. Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705. Occipital view of the skull of the 25–35-year-old male.

TABLE 1. Cranial dimensions and indexes.

Measures	Cranial measurements and landmarks	Mašovice	Těšetice
M1	Maximum cranial length g-op	195.0	189.0
M1c	Cranial length m-op	192.0	190.0
M5	Cranial base length n-ba	115.0	109.0
M7	Foramen magnum length ba-o	34.0	36.0
M8	Maximum cranial breadth eu-eu	137.0	130.0
M9	Minimum frontal breadth ft-ft	103.0	101.0
M10	Maximum frontal breadth co-co	126.0	118.0
M11	Biauricular breadth au-au	112.0	118.0
M12	Maximum occiput breadth ast-ast	104.0	101.0
M13	Mastoidal breadth	117.0	124.0
M16	Foramen magnum breadth	31.0	33.0
M17	Basion-bregma height ba-b	150.0	140.0
M23	Horizontal cranial circumference g-op	538.0	524.0
M29	Frontal chord n-b	123.0	109.0
M30	Parietal chord b-l	122.0	115.0
M31	Occipital chord l-o	47.0	67.0
M40	Basion-prosthion length ba-pr	108.0	96.0
M43	Upper facial breadth fmt-fmt	104.0	106.0
M44	Biorbital breadth ec-ec	95.0	95.0
M48	Upper facial height na-pr	67.0	64.0
M51 dx	Orbital breadth mf-ek	42.0	41.0
M52 dx	Orbital height	33.0	33.0
M52 sin	Orbital height	34.0	32.0
M54	Nasal breadth al-al	24.0	24.0
M60	Maxillo-alveolar length pr-alv	6.0	4.0
M61	Maxillo-alveolar breadth ekm-ekm	63.0	57.0
M63	Palatal breadth enm-enm	45.0	35.0
M65	Bicondylar breadth cdl-cdl	131.0	113.0
M66	Bigonial width go-go	102.0	91.0
M68	Mandibular length	71.0	77.0
M69	Chin height id-gn	36.0	26.0
M69(1) dx	Height of the mandibular body	36.0	30.0
M70 dx	Maximum ramus height	60.0	61.0
M71 dx	Ramus breadth	28.0	33.0
M71a dx	Minimum ramus breadth	28.0	33.0
I1(M8/M1)	Cranial Index	70.3	68.8
I2(M17/M1)	Length-height Index	76.9	74.1
I3(M17/M8)	Breadth-height Index	109.5	107.7
I12(M9/M10)	Frontal transversal Index	81.7	85.6
I13(M9/M8)	Fronto-parietal Index	75.2	77.7
I42(M52/M51)	Orbital Index	78.6	80.5
I54(M61/M60)	Maxilloalveolar Index	105.0	142.5
I60(M40/M5)	Alveolar Index	93.9	88.1
I62(M68/M65)	Mandibular Index	54.2	68.1

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Methodology according to the degree of morphoscopic features development in skeletal finds of identified human bones applied given standard anthropological methods recommended by the Group of European anthropologists (Ferembach *et al.* 1979). Identification of finds according to features of the skull and postcranial skeleton was carried out by standard methods according to Olivier (1969), Martin, Knussman (1988). Skulls were analysed according to the degree of morphoscopic features development (Ferembach *et al.* 1979), cranial sutures closing according to Meindell, Lovejoy (1985). In teeth, the degree of mineralization of deciduous and permanent dentition (Ubelaker 1978), the age of adult individuals according to Lovejoy's scheme of teeth abrasion (Lovejoy 1985). Body height was calculated from the length of long bones on the basis of equations elaborated by Sjøvold 1990, realized by standard procedures of Martin, Knussman (1988).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Adult female skeleton, Těšetice 2001, pit No. 703

Skeleton of an adult female with damaged post-cranial skeleton. Body height could not be estimated, since proximal and distal epiphyses have not been preserved on long bones. From the anthropological point of view, the skull may be characterised as hyperdoligocrane, orthocrane, acrocrane, eurytopic, mesoconch, chamaeconch, ortognath, dolichostenomandibular (Table 1).

As to absolute measures, the skull is very long, medium wide and high, with a medium facial height, low orbits and a long and wide mandible (Figures 14–16).

The frontal bone shows a preserved metopic suture, the front is vertical, low and wide (Figure 14). Temporal lines are not distinct, *processi mastoidei* are medium large (Figure 15). The occiput is markedly protuberant, the occipital bone being low and wide (Figure 16). Cranial sutures show two bilaterally inserted ossicles (*ossiculi suturaelambdaideae*), sutures are quite ragged, their obliteration corresponding to the age of 20–25 years. Post-partum changes were observed on the pelvic bone (*sulcus praeauricularis*), the female gave birth to one child.

Adult male skeleton, Mašovice 2003, pit No. 705

A well-preserved skeleton of a robust adult male, 172 cm high. From the anthropological point of view, the skull (Table 1) is dolichocrane, hypsicrane, acrocrane, eurytopic, chamaeprosop, mesoconch, chamaerhine, mesostaphyline, orthoghyline, dolichostenomandibular. In its absolute size the skull is long, narrow, high, with a wide and high face, low orbits and a wide mandible (Figures 17–19).

The skull shows a wide and vaulted front with a marked *arcus superciliaris* and prominent temporal lines (*linea temporales*). A preserved part of the metopic suture is obvious on the lower edge of the frontal bone (Figure 17).

The left side of the frontal bone is fractured, the mortal lesion is of circular shape with 2.3 cm in diameter (Figures 9, 18). There are numerous fragmented fractures on the left temporal bone, and both temporal bones show marked *processi mastoidei*. The occipital bone is high and wide (Figure 19), slightly deformed, the bone surface showing a coarse relief. Cranial sutures are very ragged, according to their obliteration the male died at the age of 25–35 years.

SUMMARY

The two completely different burials from Těšetice and Mašovice are certainly extreme cases of settlement burials from the Neolithic period. Nevertheless, this complicated way of burying people in settlements bears witness about ritual and religious ideas of Neolithic populations, and also about their possible social differentiations. Settlement burials in the Neolithic period are far from being an unknown phenomenon; they occur continually throughout the whole central European prehistory, and the phenomenon is by no means limited to this area and time only (Rulf 1996). The assumption that settlement burials concern individuals buried without any reverence (since they are lying among waste, they had not been buried according to certain identifiable rules, they bear traces of violence, and they do not have grave goods) is not univocal. The rituals accompanying the burial are not necessarily reflected in the archaeological assessment of the individual's "non-reverent" position. In this regard, there may not have been any strict rules, and the position of the dead individual may have played a minor role (Dočkalová 2002). Each transgression of the given ritual could have several different causes for every place and for every time period, which we will probably never get to know (Zápotocká 1998). Finds of settlement burials bring many so far not completely solved questions, and make us face numerous ambiguities and mysteries. Answering the questions of burial rites and burying, especially burying in settlements, is one of the important aspects of Neolithic research on the European scale.

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