

TO PIT THE PIG: THE CURIOUS CASE OF FEATURE E63 AT TELL PETKO KARAVELOVO

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Abstract

This paper includes a detailed analysis of feature E63 at Tell Petko Karavelovo which is a pit excavated in 2021 measuring 0.83–0.87 m in diameter and 0.45 m in depth. Four different layers were identified in the fill. The deposit could be defined as ‘odd’ and consists of burnt daub pieces, sherds, stone tools, fragments of oven base plaster, unfired loom weights, crow wing bones, and an almost complete skeleton of a piglet which was killed by a heavy blow on the head. Both radiocarbon dates and stratigraphic evidence show that feature E63 belongs to the Petko Karavelovo B phase (middle Chalcolithic), ca. 4700 cal. BC.

There is enough evidence to suggest that the pig was sacrificed. Based on the deposit’s analysis and on various later examples of pig sacrifice we will argue that pit E63 represents the remains of a special social practice performed by women.

Keywords: Balkan Chalcolithic – ritual pits – structured deposition – pig sacrifice – loom-weights – gender roles in prehistory.

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In 2014, a peculiar pit was excavated at Tell Petko Karavelovo which was recorded as feature 103 and published as ‘(Not just) another extraordinary pit’ (Chohadzhiev

2017). At the time, we were confident that its deposit shows a unique combination of elements. Seven years later, the site yielded another pit labeled as feature E63¹ that seems similar to feature 103 (Chohadzhiev et al. in print, fig. 3).

Feature E63 was uncovered in the northern part of trench E (Chohadzhiev et al. 2019, 46f, fig. 1), grid square 79 (fig. 1), in an area that had been completely topped by the well-preserved ruins of a burnt house (feature D3; Chohadzhiev et al. 2020 and 2021). The latter belongs to the PK-B phase of the site and dates to the middle Chalcolithic or the Polyanitsa IV period. The north part of pit E63 was covered by a clayish layer, which had initially been interpreted as the floor of the northern room of an unburnt house (feature E67) but it was later established that this part of the house had been truncated by the builders of the later structure D3; they deposited yellowish clay there, much alike the floor of the earlier house E67 (see the area labeled as '3' in fig. 2), but lacking the wooden platforms of its southern part. It is thus not clear whether the pit is earlier or later than E67. It definitely predates the clay level that preceded the construction of house D3 of the PK-B2 occupational phase while house E67 belongs to the latest stage 4 of the PK-A phase. The pit truncates the burnt debris of house D9, which dates to the second phase of the site (PK-A2), and is thus later than it (fig. 2). No structures of the PK-A3 phase were identified in this part of the site but the poorly preserved remains of house F14 were uncovered 2 m to the west (Chohadzhiev et al. in print), and the pit penetrates the off-house layer. As noted with the case of pit 103, some pits at tell sites are not related to a certain building level but are located between two levels (Chohadzhiev 2017, 11). This is completely valid for E63, too, as this pit represents a very short moment in the settlement's life compared to the time span of a house or a layer. Therefore, in the relative chronology of the site, pit E63 should be positioned between the PK-A3 and PK-B2 phases. Based on the radiocarbon dates (fig. 30.3), it seems more likely that it belongs to the B1 phase rather than to A4 which can be associated with the beginning of what is accepted as middle Chalcolithic (Chohadzhiev 2021, 154).

Pit E63 was first recorded as a hearth because it appeared as an ashy spot of elliptical shape measuring 1.16 x 0.85 m, at an elevation of 1.90 m below datum (BD)². Several rocks were unearthed in its outlines, and some more rocks were found immediately to the south (fig. 3). At first, they were not linked with feature E63 mostly because of the sloping terrain³ (fig. 1) but it later became clear that they seem to have been part of it.

¹ Since 2017, letter indexes have been added to the identifications of all features showing which trench they were uncovered in.

² The main datum point of Tell Petko Karavelovo is 48.20 m AMSL, while the highest preserved point of the mound was 48.60 m AMSL.

³ The big 'depression' in the terrain was first recorded in the ruins of house D3 (Chohadzhiev et al. 2020, 302, fig. 1; 2021, 273). It has recently been argued that this sagging of the ground was due to the decay of the wooden floor platforms in the southern parts of trench E, and the sinking of the upper layers.

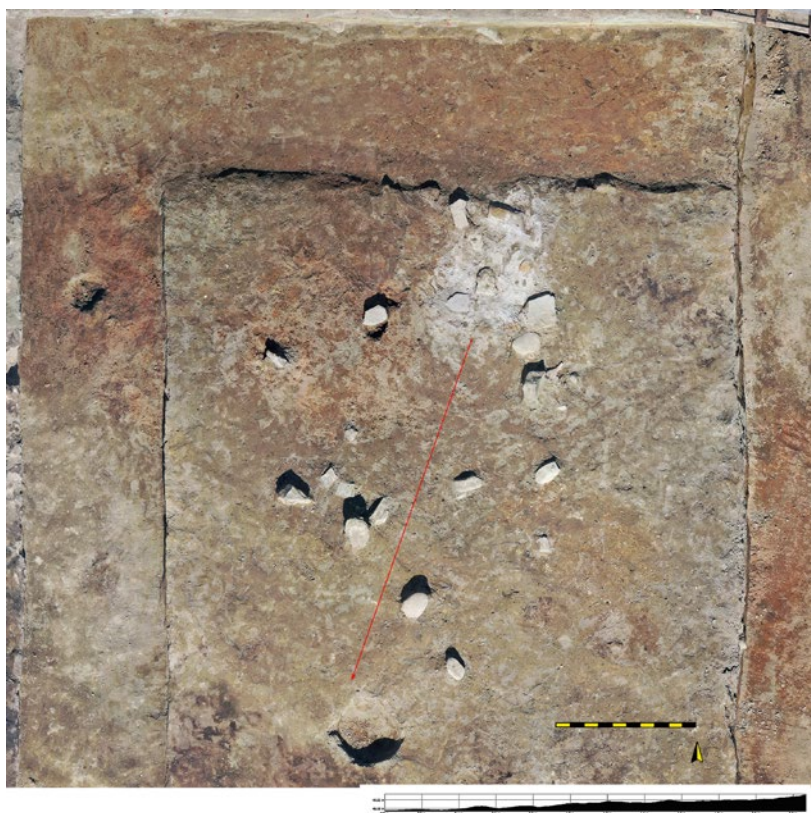


Figure 1. Orthophoto of pit E63 (ash top and rocks) at the initial level of its recording. The slope is shown with a red arrow. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

The abundance of ash and the presence of rocks, animal bones, and burnt pieces of clay plaster were those misleading clues that were the reason for the initial misidentification of this feature. Accordingly, the immediate area was excavated as if it was a part of the burnt debris of house D9 below it (fig. 4). It was only after the removal of the grayish sediments east of the spot (fig. 5) that it became clear it was in fact a pit. The burnt ruins of house D9 were truncated by two other cuts (features E62A and E62B) that dated later than the house and earlier than pit E63 (fig. 5.1). It seems that they were used for the extraction of sintered daub rather than for depositional purposes. The bottoms of both E62A and E62B reach the white layer of house D9 (for the microstratigraphy of the early Chalcolithic houses at Petko Karavelovo, see Chohadzhiev 2021). Thus, pit E63 truncates two different contexts: the ruins of the burnt house D9 to the southwest, and the earlier cuts that had already removed the top layers of D9, to the northeast. The excavation strategy faced a difficult methodological challenge because of these circumstances. The decision to dig the two parts consecutively, using the ‘natural border’ of the earlier cuts as a cross-section, might have not been the best for the photographic records but was the least harmful



Figure 2. Aerial photo of the upper level of pit E63: (1) the pit; (2) the burnt ruins of house D9; (3) clayish cover. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

for the exploration procedures. And to cap it all, a rodent had dug a narrow tunnel to the west and north of the pit penetrating the pit's deposit from the north.

After the excavation of feature E62B, it became obvious that E63 is a not a common pit. Its upper layer (I) contains mostly white ashes, fragments of oven base plaster lying with their face up, pieces of burnt wall daub, and ceramic sherds. There were also objects of unburnt clay, but they were badly preserved and could not be identified (figs. 6a and 7.6). The layer is 5 cm thick at the periphery and about 8 cm in the center of the pit. The diameter of the pit at this level is between 0.83 and 0.87 m, which makes it an almost regular circle. At the bottom of this layer, fragments of oven base plaster were arranged

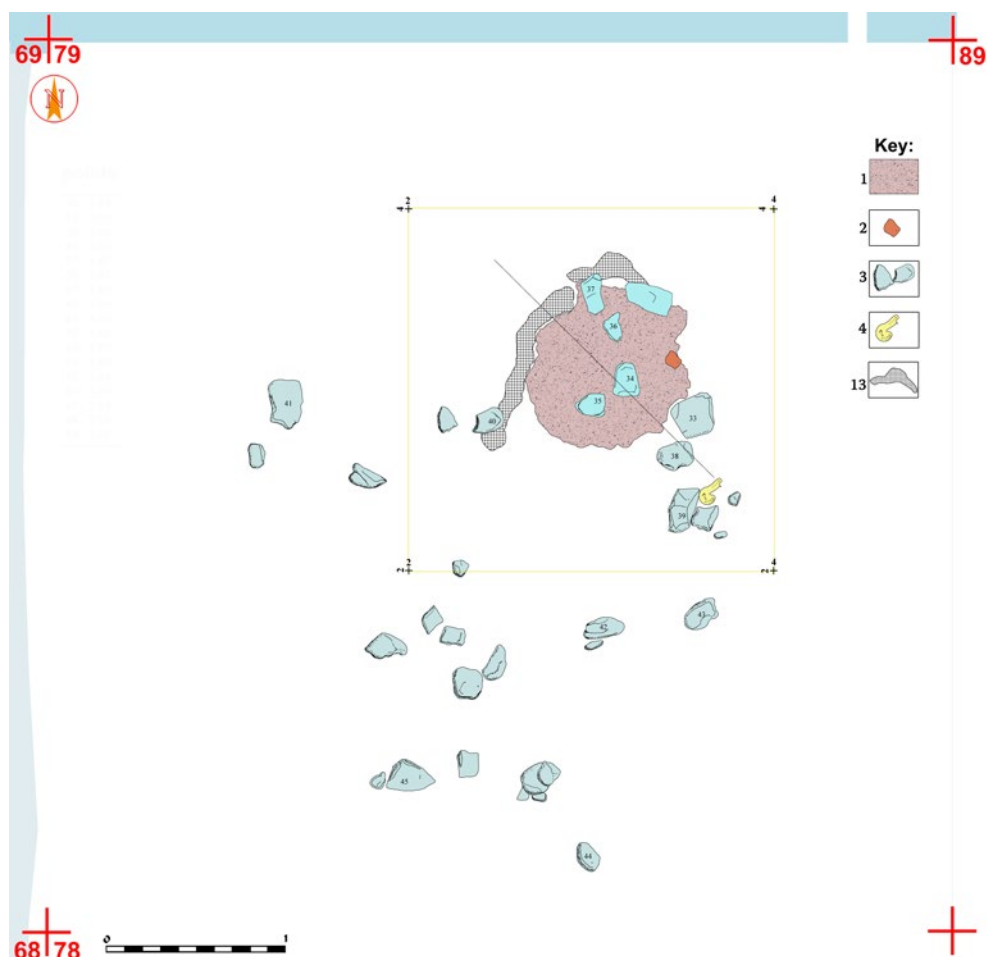


Figure 3. Drawing of pit E63 at the initial level of its recording. The yellow box shows the area shown at the other levels of the deposit in figure 6. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

Elevation points (m below datum): (33) 1.93; (34) 2.00; (35) 1.98; (36) 2.02; (37) 1.97; (38) 1.92; (39) 1.84; (40) 1.90; (41) 1.76; (42) 1.98; (43) 1.98; (44) 1.98; (45) 2.26; (46) 2.08; (47) 2.04; (48) 2.06; (49) 2.06.

Key: (1) ash; (2) piece of burnt daub; (3) rocks; (4) bones; (13) rodent tunnel.

horizontally, as well as some large pieces of burnt daub and sherds (figs. 6b and 7.16). They lay on a thin gray-greenish clay layer that topped the lower layer (No. 17 in fig. 7).

The thickness of layer II varies from 16 to 20 cm as it is thicker in the west part (No. 7 in fig. 7). It consists almost entirely of burnt daub, mostly broken in small pieces or powdered to dust, but there were also some large pieces measuring more than 20 cm across, some of them bearing wood frame or wattle imprints (fig. 29). What is impressive is the relative high compactness of this layer. In primary contexts, burnt debris usually is less compact, and even when it's relocated, such density is rare. This observation seems to



Figure 4. The top of the pit, photographed when E63 was still considered as a hearth. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

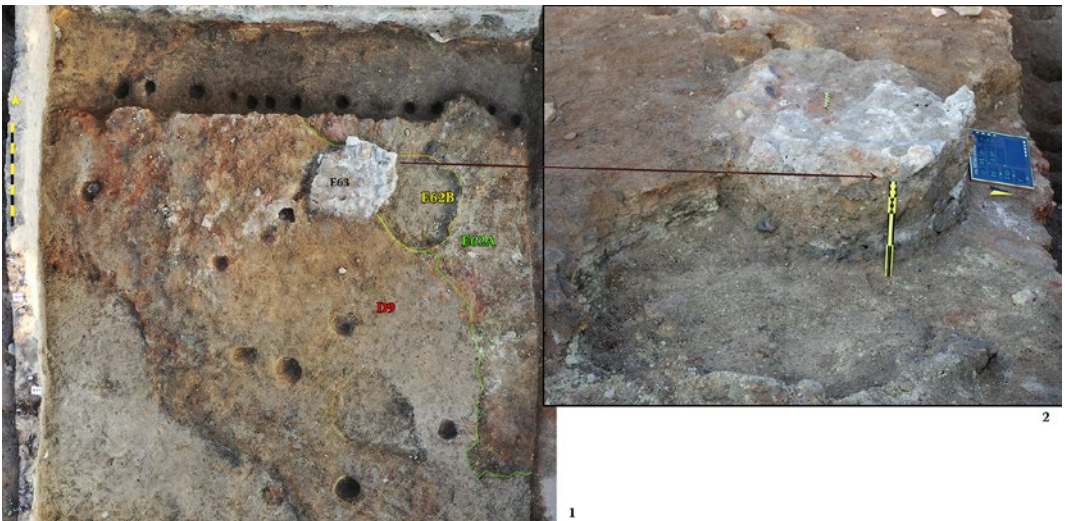


Figure 5. Pit E67 at the level of the burnt debris of house D9, and the other two cuts to the east (E62A and B): (1) orthophoto; (2) view from the east. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

suggest that the compaction of the layer was intentional. The assumption that the daub was excavated from the same burnt house that the pit had truncated seems logical but is not fully proven. On the bottom of this layer, that appears to be at the middle of the pit, a concentration of animal bones was recorded, mostly in the southeastern half (fig. 6c). The bones occur in three major clusters: limbs, ribs, and pelvic bones to the northeast (fig. 8.1–2); skull and cervical vertebrae to the southeast (fig. 8.2–3); and ribs, vertebrae, and some limb bones in the middle. Even before the osteological study was completed, it became obvious that most of the bones belong to a young pig. The position of the skull is quite puzzling (fig. 9) as it seems that the pig was decapitated and the head with the uppermost cervical vertebrae was deposited in the pit with the snout up. Later, when the soft tissues decayed, the mandible fell to the north, while the maxilla and the parietal part

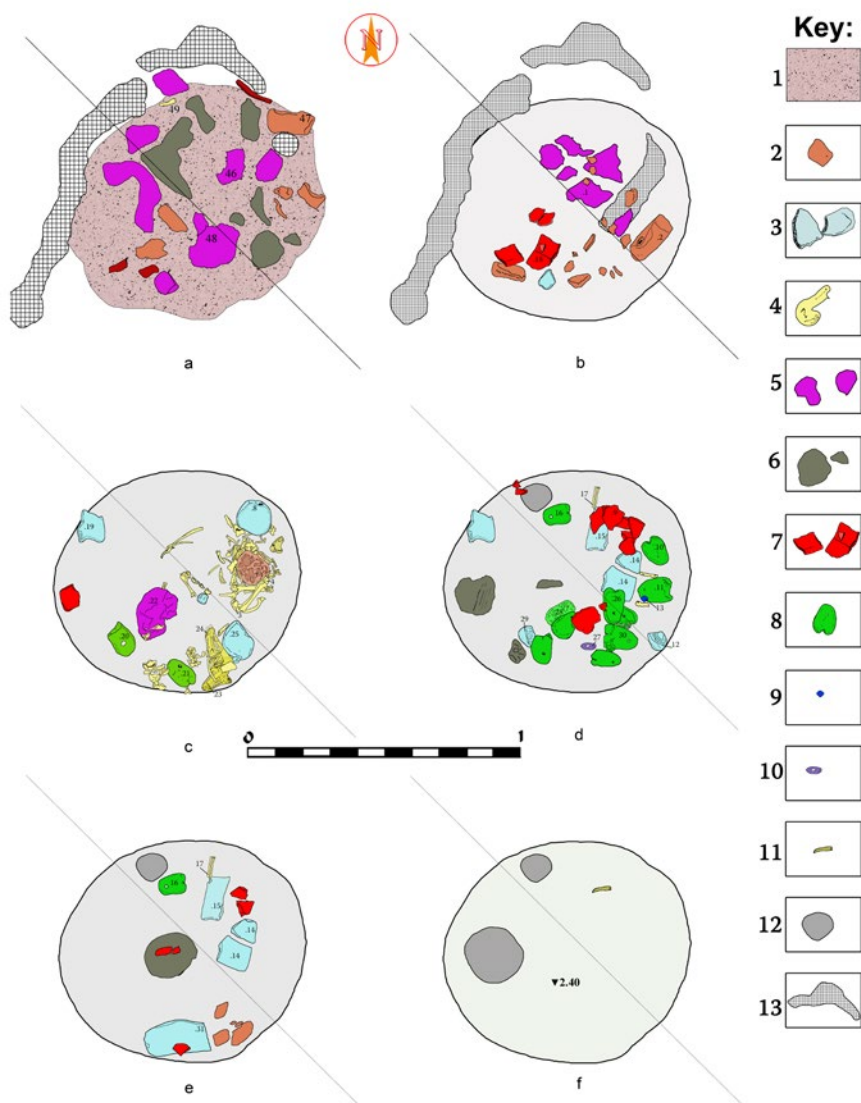


Figure 6. Different levels of the deposit of pit E63. The diagonal line shows the place of the cross-section in figure 7. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

Elevation points (m below datum): (1) 2.10; (2) 2.11; (3) 2.20; (4) 2.21; (5) 2.24; (6) 2.24; (7) 2.26; (8) 2.17; (9) 2.27; (10) 2.29; (11) 2.27; (12) 2.27; (13) 2.28; (14) 2.32; (15) 2.33; (16) 2.30; (17) 2.41; (18) 2.06; (19) 2.08; (20) 2.17; (21) 2.12; (22) 2.21; (23) 2.12; (24) 2.23; (25) 2.21; (26) 2.23; (27) 2.24; (28) 2.27; (29) 2.22; (30) 2.28; (31) 2.30; (32) 2.39; (33) 1.93; (34) 2.00; (35) 1.98; (36) 2.02; (37) 1.97; (38) 1.92; (39) 1.84; (40) 1.90; (41) 1.76; (42) 1.98; (43) 1.98; (44) 1.98; (45) 2.26; (46) 2.08; (47) 2.04; (48) 2.06; (49) 2.06.

Key: (1) ash; (2) piece of burnt daub; (3) rocks; (4) bones; (5) oven plasters; (6) spots of pure gray-greenish clay; (7) ceramics; (8) loom-weight; (9) flint; (10) shell; (11) antler; (12) post negative; (13) rodent tunnel.

slid southwards. To be completely objective, it should be noted that it is also possible that the pig's muzzle was torn deliberately. Between the jaws, several ribs and rib fragments occur. The northeastern cluster consists of an articulated back limb, some ribs, vertebrae, and several scattered broken pieces of other long bones. The middle of this concentration is covered by a big and very compact piece of burnt daub. In the process of excavation, it was impossible to detach the bones that were almost welded to the daub (fig. 10). These were mostly pelvic bones and an articulated part of the back limb joint. In the northern part of this concentration, a large stone pounder was found that had literally smashed the bones directly beneath it (figs. 6c.8, 8.2, and 10). The pounder (fig. 24.5) is a simple rounded rock with traces of very short use. A very similar but somewhat flatter pounder was unearthed next to the skull (figs. 6c.25 and 9). This layer of the fill also yielded two unfired loom weights made of pure, gray-greenish clay (figs. 6c.20–21 and 8.3–4), one

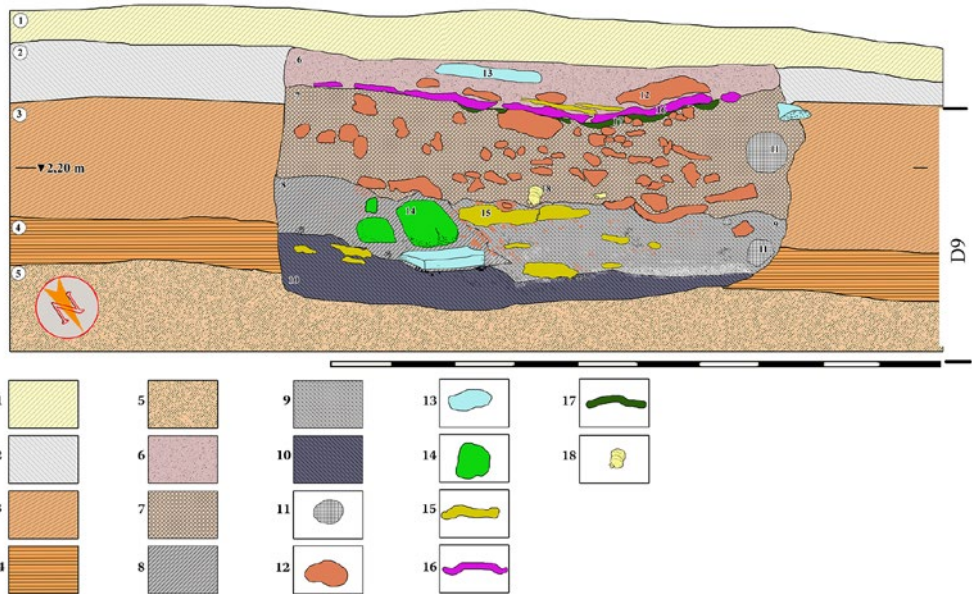


Figure 7. Cross-section of pit E63. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

Key: (1) clayish yellow layer; (2) gray layer under feature E67 (the off-house sediments of feature F14?); (3) the upper burnt daub layer of house D9; (4) the burnt platform of house D9; (5) the white grainy layer of house D9; (6) layer I (mostly ash and small charcoal pieces) of the deposit of pit E63; (7) layer II (mostly burnt daub) of the deposit of pit E63; (8) layer III (gray sediments, small amount of charcoal and ash (but more than 7.9) and burnt daub) of the deposit of pit E63; (9) layer III (gray sediments, small amount of charcoal and burnt daub (but more than 7.8) of the deposit of pit E63; (10) layer IV (dark gray sediments with lot of charcoal) of the deposit of pit E63; (11) rodent tunnel; (12) a large piece of burnt daub; (13) rock; (14) loom weight; (15) yellow clay horizontal plaster; (16) piece of oven base plaster; (17) greenish clay horizontal plaster; (18) pig bones.



Figure 8. The pig bones as being unearthed during the excavation. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



Figure 9. The skull of the pig and some of the loom weights around it. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



Figure 10. A large piece of burnt daub (left); the pig's pelvic bones stuck to it after the daub was removed (right). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



Figure 11. The skull of the pig, the loom weight with a mole jaw on top of it (black arrow), and a piece of oven base plaster (yellow arrow). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

directly west of the skull and another just 20 cm to the west. A large piece of oven base plaster lay just north of the two weights (fig. 11.1; note the yellow arrow). The osteological analysis showed that besides the pig, there are single bones and teeth of cattle, sheep, and a European mole in this layer. The mole's jaw fragment was discovered directly on one of the weights (fig. 11.2; note the black arrow) mixed with some vertebrae of the pig and covered with small charcoal and clay pieces from the pit's fill. They are a clear indication that the mole jaw is part of the deposit rather than being a later inclusion. The bottom of this layer was recorded at ca. 2.25 m BD, the boundary between it and the lower layer having been clearly distinguishable as layer III is much darker, gray, with only small pieces of burnt daub. Between the two layers, there was a thin streak of yellowish clay that didn't cover the entire area of the pit but only an irregular spot in the middle (fig. 12; note the black arrow). Even though this clay doesn't seal off the lower layer, it seems also obvious that it separated the two layers in some way.

Layer III is gray, compact, saturated with small charcoal and burnt daub pieces. It is noteworthy that its western part (No. 9 in fig. 7) contains less burnt daub pieces than the

eastern side (No. 8 in fig. 7), but includes more charcoal and ashes. It measures from 9 to 11 cm thick and yielded numerous objects, the loom weights being the most significant ones. They are of the same type as the two weights found in the upper layer: made of pure, gray to green clay, some of them with a yellow tint (fig. 13). None of them was fired and they were very fragile and difficult to excavate. As they started to disintegrate soon after having been unearthed and exposed to dry air, immediate conservation was required (fig. 14). Most of the weights were clustered in the southeast half of the pit, almost on the same place where the pig bones were found. The single exception was uncovered in the north periphery of the pit (No. 16 in fig. 6d). The detachedness of this weight can be explained by its lowest position of all weights in the pit: 18 cm below the topmost weight (No. 21 in fig. 6c) and 7–9 cm below the main cluster of weights. What is noteworthy in the weights' positions is that some of them lay horizontally, but others are tilted. This clearly shows that they were not arranged separately in the pit, but most likely were placed or even dumped together with other stuff of the deposit, or were somehow packed together. One of the weights (No. 30 in fig. 6d) was seriously deformed by the large pounder that lay directly upon it, just below the pig's mandible (No. 25 in fig. 6d). This deformation (fig. 23.7) seems to suggest that the weight was not only unfired, but was even freshly



Figure 12. The border between layers II and III of the deposit, with the area of yellow clay (black arrow). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

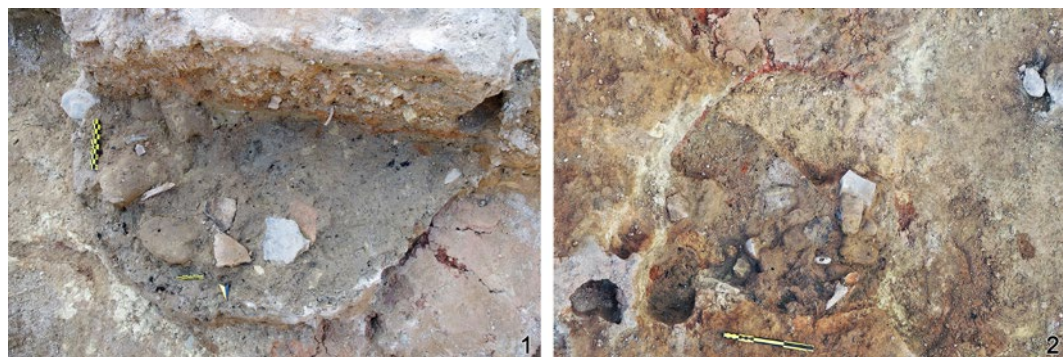


Figure 13. (1) Loom weights in layer III of the deposit. northern half; (2) the southern half of the pit. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



*Figure 14. The state of preservation of a loom weight during the excavation.
Image Credit: A. Yanakieva.*

made just before the deposition (fig. 15; note the yellow arrow). A perforated mussel shell lay very close to this weight (No. 27 in fig. 6d; fig. 15, note the red arrow). Two flat stone slabs were uncovered under the weights. They look like grinding stones but have no traces of such use. The bigger one (No. 14 in fig. 6d and e) is split in two pieces. Traces of some wicker work were identified below it, and even though there is no conclusive evidence that it was a basket, it definitely was made of wicker twigs (fig. 16). The second rock lay just 7 cm to the north (No. 15 in fig. 6d and e). It also looks like a grinding stone and even might have been shaped as such but was never used. It was covered by ceramic sherds. On its north edge, two very fine bones were uncovered (No. 17 in fig. 6d and e; fig. 17). Their position looked strange: they were parallel to each other, as if they had still been kept together by the tissue. The osteological analysis made it clear that these were wing bones (radius+ulna and carpometacarpus) from a hooded crow, and their position shows that the whole severed wing of the bird was deposited in the pit, not just the bones. In the southernmost edge of the pit lay a flat saddle quern measuring 23 x 13 cm (No. 31 in fig. 6e). Its end was touching the pit wall and it was slightly sloping to the inside (fig. 18; note the yellow arrow). On the same level, 18 cm north of the grinding stone, a rounded lump of gray-yellowish clay was recorded (fig. 18; note the red arrow). The bad state of preservation of this object does not allow proper identification. It might be a fully disintegrated loom weight. Such amorphous lumps of pure clay also appeared in the upper layer.

The lowest layer IV of the pit's fill is dark gray in color and contains a lot of small charcoal pieces. Its thickness varies from 10 cm to the east to 3 cm to the west (No. 10 in



Figure 15. Layer III of the deposit. A deformed weight (yellow arrow) and a perforated shell (red arrow). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



Figure 16. The wattle remains on the bottom side of a stone slab (right) and the imprint on the soil after the removal of the slab (left). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



*Figure 17. The bottom part of layer III and the wing bones of a hooded crow.
Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.*



*Figure 18. The border between layers III and IV, with a large saddle quern
(yellow arrow) and a clay lump (red arrow). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.*

fig. 7). It is surrounded entirely by the white grainy layer of the burnt house and is very well distinguishable. It contains a single artifact, an antler pickaxe. The half-broken tool lay in the north part of the pit, almost directly on the bottom (fig. 19; note the red arrow). It is rather tempting to assume that it was this pickaxe that the pit was dug out with or that the pig was killed with this tool, and that later it was the first thing that had been deposited or dumped inside. And while the formal logic supports both scenarios, there is no conclusive evidence for any of them. The two postholes (figs. 6f and 20) identified at the bottom of the pit seem to be later than house D9 and earlier than pit E63, since the two events – the destruction of D9 and the digging of E63 – were divided by at least two occupational phases. No postholes were recorded in the upper levels of the pit.



Figure 19. Layer IV of the deposit, with an antler tool (red arrow). Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.



Figure 20. The excavated pit E63 dug in the burnt debris of house D9. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

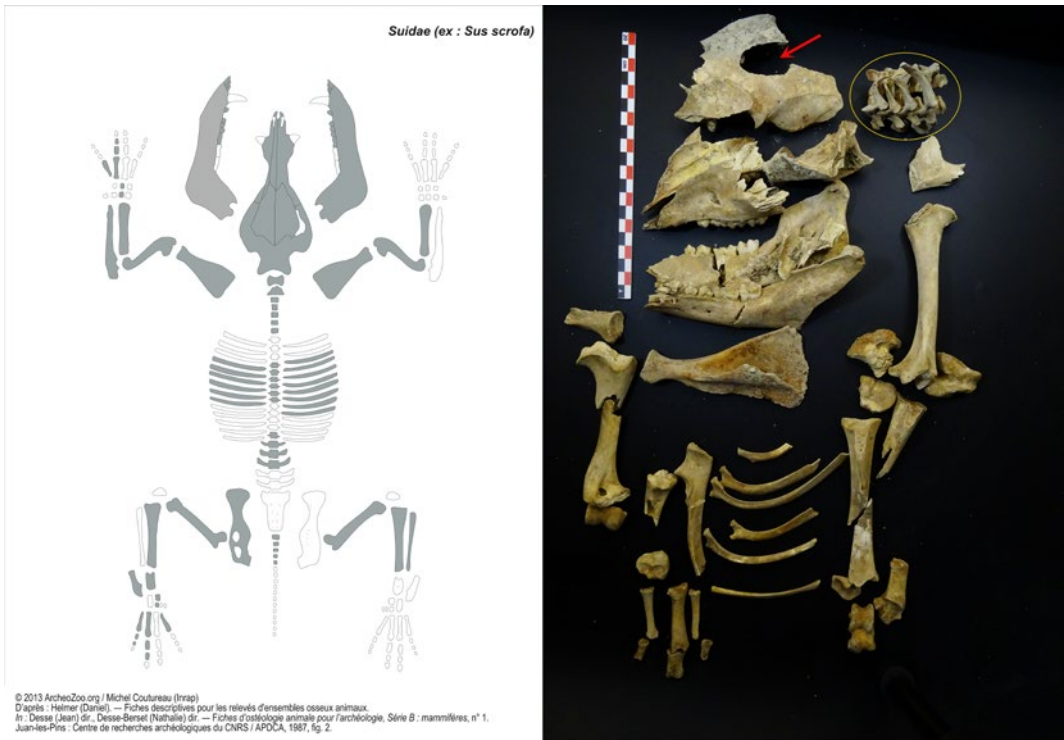


Figure 21. The skeletal remains of the pig. Image Credit: N. Karastoyanova.

It was only after the analysis of the field evidence and especially of the deposit's structure that it became clear that the rocks scattered in and around the ashy spot on the top seem to have sealed the pit; they formed a low mound on it and for a certain period marked the place. The pit measured 0.45 m deep, not counting the rock top. With an average diameter of 0.84 m and with an almost cylindrical shape, it has a volume of about 0.25 m³.

In order to provide deeper insight into the meaning of pit E63 deposit, one should consider its structure. Two key elements immediately attract notice: the pig and the loom weights. The osteological analysis shows that the almost entirely preserved skeleton belongs to a pig; it was probably domestic, even though it's hard to be sure because of the young age of the individual (fig. 21). The bones were in very poor condition and very fragile, again due to the pig's young age. All joints were unfused, and the teeth were deciduous. Only the first molar has erupted, indicating that the individual was less than six months old when killed. No traces were found on the bones except the skull. On the frontal and parietal bones, there was an elliptical hole measuring 22 x 38 mm (fig. 21; note the red arrow) and resembling the cross-section of a small axe. Only some of the phalanges and metapodials were missing; they could easily have decayed, being so fragile. The bones have traces of thermal treatment at low temperature (300°C or 400°C).

The position of the bones in the pit is quite puzzling. On the one hand, they were in an obvious disorder, but on the other hand, many of the skeletal elements were clearly articulated. There are several possible explanations for this circumstance. It is clear that the pig was not consumed in portions, and it cannot be a question of ritual feasting, which is the most common explanation for the presence of the combination of animal remains and the involvement of fire in pit contexts (Chapman 2000a, 81; Nikolov 2011b, 216). It is possible that after it was roasted, the pig was torn into several pieces that were placed in the pit, and maybe some were eaten by the participants in this event. Dismembering a roasted piglet is easy to do with bare hands and this explains the absence of cutting marks. But the simplicity of this explanation is slightly deceptive. There is obvious articulation in some skeletal remains such as the skull and the cervical vertebrae, the pelvic bones, and the rear limbs, as well as several columns of the backbone. So maybe after the pig was killed with a heavy blow on the head and roasted, it was placed in the pit intact. The bone displacements occurred during the post-depositional processes associated with the decomposition of soft tissue and the deposition of abundant amount of burnt daub in this part of the fill. It is even possible that the piglet, the loom weights, and some rocks were deposited in the pit in a basket, the evidence of which has been discussed above. The integrity of the pig's carcass suggests that it was sacrificed and offered. The similar pit 103 yielded 73 faunal remains, all of them belonging to wild animals, a single individual of each species: red deer, roe deer, fox, wisent or aurochs, golden eagle, and three shells of different river mussels (Chohadzhiev 2017, 15f). The inclusion of wild animal remains in the deposit does not imply sacrifice, which requires prior selection of the sacrificial animal. Moreover, there were only bones from different animals, all of them adults. In the case of pit E63, it was obviously a different practice involving a young piglet (most likely intact), a wing of a hooded crow, a mole jaw, single bones and teeth of sheep and cattle, as well as vertebrae from a common chub and a common barbel (fig. 22). It is clear that the pig and the wing of the hooded crow were deliberately chosen to be buried in the pit. The



Figure 22. Fish vertebrae: (1) common chub; (2) common barbel. Image Credit: N. Karastoyanova.

rest of the bones were either part of a feast meal or were included in the deposit by chance during the digging and backfilling of the pit.

Pit E63 yielded an assemblage of at least 15 clay objects, most of which can be identified as loom weights (fig. 23.1–15). All of them were made of pure, untempered clay. Their state of preservation was very poor, and a long process of field consolidation and laboratory restoration was required. Complete restoration was impossible for some of the objects (fig. 23.12 and 15) but they are definitely fragments from loom weights, while during the excavation, three more clay lumps were identified in the pit and their condition was so bad that they were beyond preservation. Two of the preserved items differ from the others. One of them is perforated only from the one side (fig. 23.13), while the other is not perforated at all (fig. 23.14). They also have a different shape, rounded at both ends.



Figure 23. The loom weights from pit E63 (1-15); Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev; (16) carved vulvar image from the Upper Paleolithic, Laussel, France (from Marshack 1972, fig. 169b); (17) Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic sign for 'vulva and pelvis' (from Allen 2010, 430, sign No 280a); (18) a loom weight with an incised triangle from Tell Karanovo (from Nikolov 2002, tabl. 5); (19) an early Sumerian cuneiform sign for woman (from Omiglot. The online encyclopedia of writing system and languages. https://www.omniglot.com/images/writing/sumerian_glyphs.jpg).

Both were uncovered in the topmost layer of the deposit; two more weights were found at the bottom of layer II (fig. 23.11 and 12), while the rest were in layer III. They can be considered as roughouts or unfinished weighs. All completely preserved weights (fig. 23.1–11) are quite similar in size and shape. Their height varies from 11.2 to 13.4 cm; the width, from 7 to 9 cm; and the thicknesses, from 4.2 to 5.4 cm. The weight of the 11 loom weights varies from 470 to 560 g. Their shape is rounded, with a narrower upper and a wider lower part, which in turn is divided into two halves by shallow groove. This type of loom weights dominates in the early phases of Tell Petko Karavelovo. The lower part is visually reminiscent of the female gluteal cleft. The similarity to certain Paleolithic rock art ‘vulvar’ images is obvious (fig. 23.16; Goode 2021). Strangely or not, the Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic sign for ‘vulva and pelvis’ (fig. 23.17) strongly reminds the outlines of the loom weights from pit E63 (Allen 2010, 430, sign No. 280a). The anthropomorphic images on the Chalcolithic loom weights are always female or represent female attributes (Chohadzhiev 2011, 263). The incised signs on some Chalcolithic weights represent the female pubic triangle (fig. 23.18; Nikolov 2002, 320, tabl. 5). Their iconography is exactly the same as what we see later in the early Sumerian cuneiform sign for ‘woman’ (fig. 23.19). This seems to suggest that the loom weights were not just female tools, but that the original idea of the feminine principles was implemented deep in their essence.

None of the weights from pit E63 has a thread groove on the upper side of the hole, which is clear indication that they were never used, unlike the assemblage of 21 unfired loom weights from house 127; they were unearthed in their original order together with a perforated bone that likely served as a shuttle, and all of them have thread grooves (Chohadzhiev & Gurova 2016, 109). One of the weights from the deposit of pit E63 has a bone (most likely from the piglet) stuck in the clay (fig. 23.3), while another has a ceramic sherd driven in it (fig. 23.7). As was mentioned above, the latter had been partially deformed by the stone pounder lying on it (No. 30 in fig. 6d). The cracks that can be seen on the weights’ surfaces could have appeared only if the clay body was still in its plasticity state. The cracks and the objects planted in the clay are conclusive evidence showing that the weights were not simply unfired and unused, but that they were freshly made just before having been deposited in the pit. Based on these observations, a good case can be made for the contention that the weights served as a votive deposit and were not used in real textile production. Some of them have traces of carbonized wattle (fig. 23.2 and 10). The imprints on one of the rocks and one of the weights (fig. 23.10) suggest that they are the remains of a basket or a grid made of wicker twigs. The archaeobotanical analysis showed that it was made from plants of the *Viburnum* genus.

Nine stone objects were uncovered in the pit’s deposit (fig. 24). Only three of them can be defined as tools: the flat saddle quern (fig. 24.1) and the two pounders (fig. 24.4 and 5). All three have traces of short use. One sharp rock resembles a chisel or axe with an obvious proximal edge, but this is its natural form and it was never deliberately shaped (fig. 24.9). This object is broken and only one half is included in the deposit. Similarly, a

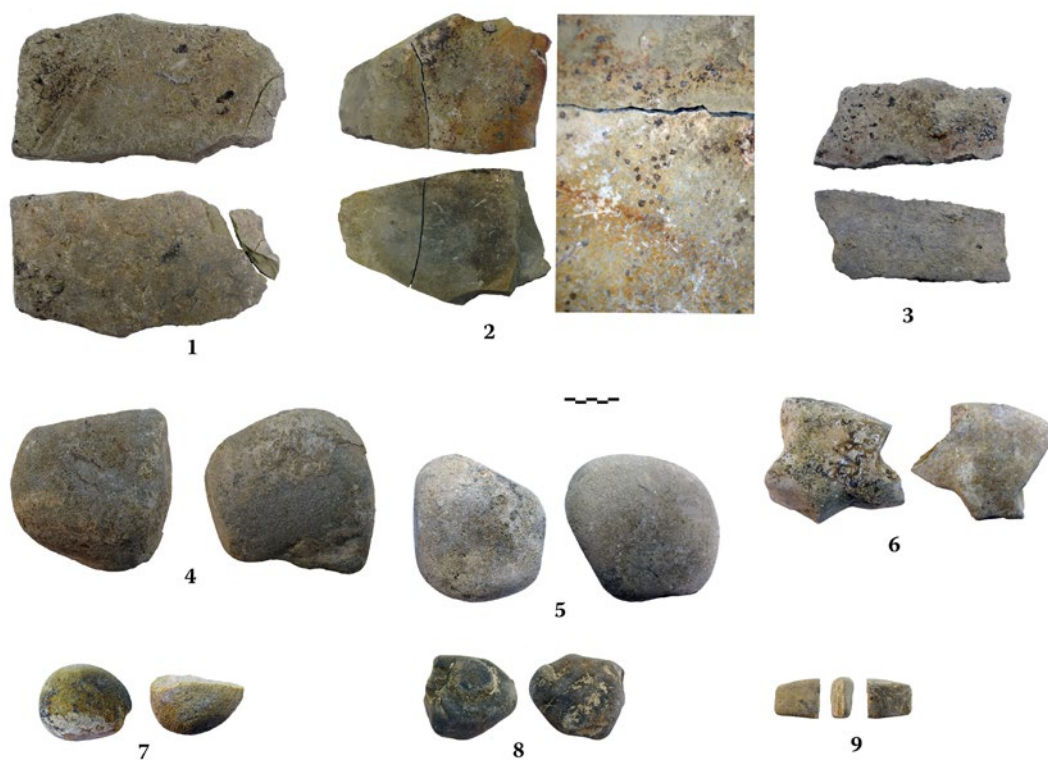


Figure 24. Stone objects from pit E63. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

half of a globular rock that resembles a pounder was found in the pit (fig. 24.7). The three stone slabs (fig. 24.1–3) were uncovered on the bottom of layer III and all bear traces of having been in contact with the wicker twigs.

The chipped stone assemblage from pit E63 is remarkable in respect of raw material and composition (figs. 25 and 26). It consists of 17 artifacts: 2 blades, 9 flakes, and 6 flake fragments (i.e., pieces without proximal parts). Both blades, a proximal and a mesial fragment, were made of flint (fig. 25.1 and 2). The raw material of the smaller blade is of the highest quality: Ludogorie flint, type Ravno. The fracture of the blade suggests that it was submitted to secondary debitage, perhaps because of the quality of the raw material. Among the flakes and fragments, the raw material of lower quality predominates. There are 6 items of light grey, coarse grain material (silicified limestone), and 6 cortical pieces (fig. 26.1). There is another type of raw material within this debitage group: microcrystalline beige-greyish flint with white thin cortex (fig. 26.2). In this small assemblage, no artifacts have utilization traces and what makes it distinguishable are the raw materials that are relatively rare in the chipped stone assemblage from Tell Petko Karavelovo.

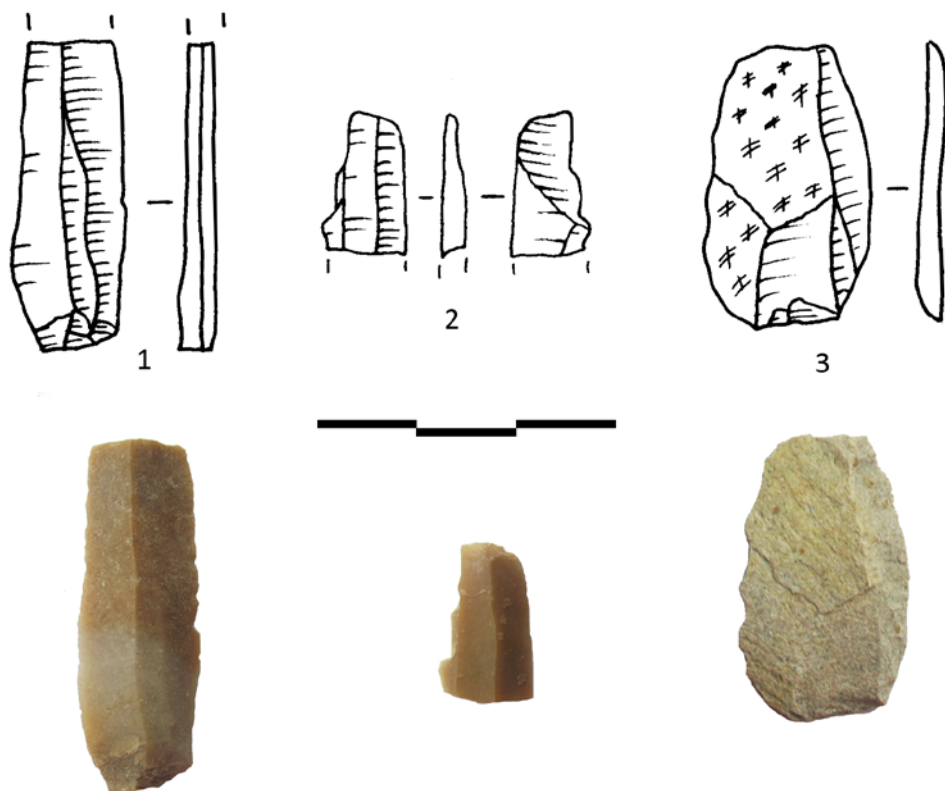


Figure 25. Blades (1–2) and a cortical flake (3) from pit E63. Image Credit: M. Gurova.

Pit E63 wielded three more artifacts: a perforated river mussel shell, a piece of belemnite, and an antler tool. The perforated shell (fig. 27.1) was found in layer III, just under the skull of the pig and among the loom weights. It was made an adornment by a relatively large (2 x 1 cm) elliptical perforation. What is unusual is the perforation technique: chipping rather than sanding which is the usual practice identified for this site.

The belemnite¹ was unearthed in layer III (fig. 27.2). The piece is shaped as a semi-cylinder by detaching the sharp point and splitting the fossil longwise in two. Belemnites are not a rarity at Tell Petko Karavelovo.

The antler shaft-hole tool was found on the very bottom of the pit (fig. 27.3). It is not fully preserved and its rear part is missing, as the fracture is transverse to the hole. The working edge of the tool is shaped asymmetrically like an adze, perpendicularly to

¹ Belemnites are a group of coleoid cephalopods whose fossil remains are common in Jurassic and Cretaceous marine sediments. They originated during the Late Triassic and went extinct at the Cretaceous/Paleogene boundary (Hoffmann & Stevens 2020, 95). Belemnite deposits have been identified some 3 km northeast of Tell Petko Karavelovo, on the steep right bank of the river Yantra.



Figure 26. Chipped stone artifacts from pit E63: (1) flakes of coarse-grain raw material; (2) flakes and fragments of better quality flint. Image Credit: M. Gurova.

the shaft-hole axis. The hole is almost circular, with a diameter of 1.7 cm. There is no agreement in the literature for the use of this tool type. They have mostly been accepted as pickaxes for digging earth or as battle axes (for a discussion, see Boyadzhiev 2014, 61ff). Strangely, both uses fit perfectly to the two possible interpretations: the tool that the pit was dug out with or the weapon the pig was killed with. Its working edge is 12 mm wide, while the width at the end of the curved part is 22 mm, where the thickness is about 33 mm. The comparison of this tool and the hole in the pig's skull shows that the sizes correspond to each other. If it was really the killing instrument, the blow was very heavy, resulting in a penetration of at least 5 cm in the head.

The ceramic assemblage of pit E63 is not homogenous (fig. 28). Contrary to pit 103, where ten vessels were restored from all the sherds in the deposit (Chohadzhiev 2017, 13f, fig. 8–11), E63 yielded only single ceramic fragments. They all show the conservative style of ceramic production in the PK-A and B phases. The absence of necked pots is fully confirmed in this assemblage, too. Some of the sherds were secondarily fired and probably come from the burnt debris of house D9. In fact, no evidence connects any of the ceramics to the deliberate deposit of the pit. Most numerous are the large open vessels with a simple profile (fig. 28.2–4, 7, and 9). The underrim is well smoothed and



Figure 27. Artifacts from pit E63: (1) perforated shell; (2) belemnite; (3) antler tool. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

the rest of the surface is covered with barbotine, the border between them being emphasized by either a row of nail impressions (fig. 28.2) or an impressed cordon (fig. 28.3). This type of vessels predominates in both the early and middle Chalcolithic pottery. The differences are mostly in the shape (Chohadzhiev 2017, 14) but these ceramics could not be attributed to a specific phase as no carination sherds were found in E63. The plain bowls with cylindrical upper part and inverted conical lower part (fig. 28.1) and the with narrow-line graphite painting style (fig. 28.12 and 13) are common in the end of the early Chalcolithic at the site. The two preserved bases are flat.

The two uppermost layers of the deposit contain mostly burnt daub. Besides the powdered dust, there are also numerous small daub pieces as well as large architectural

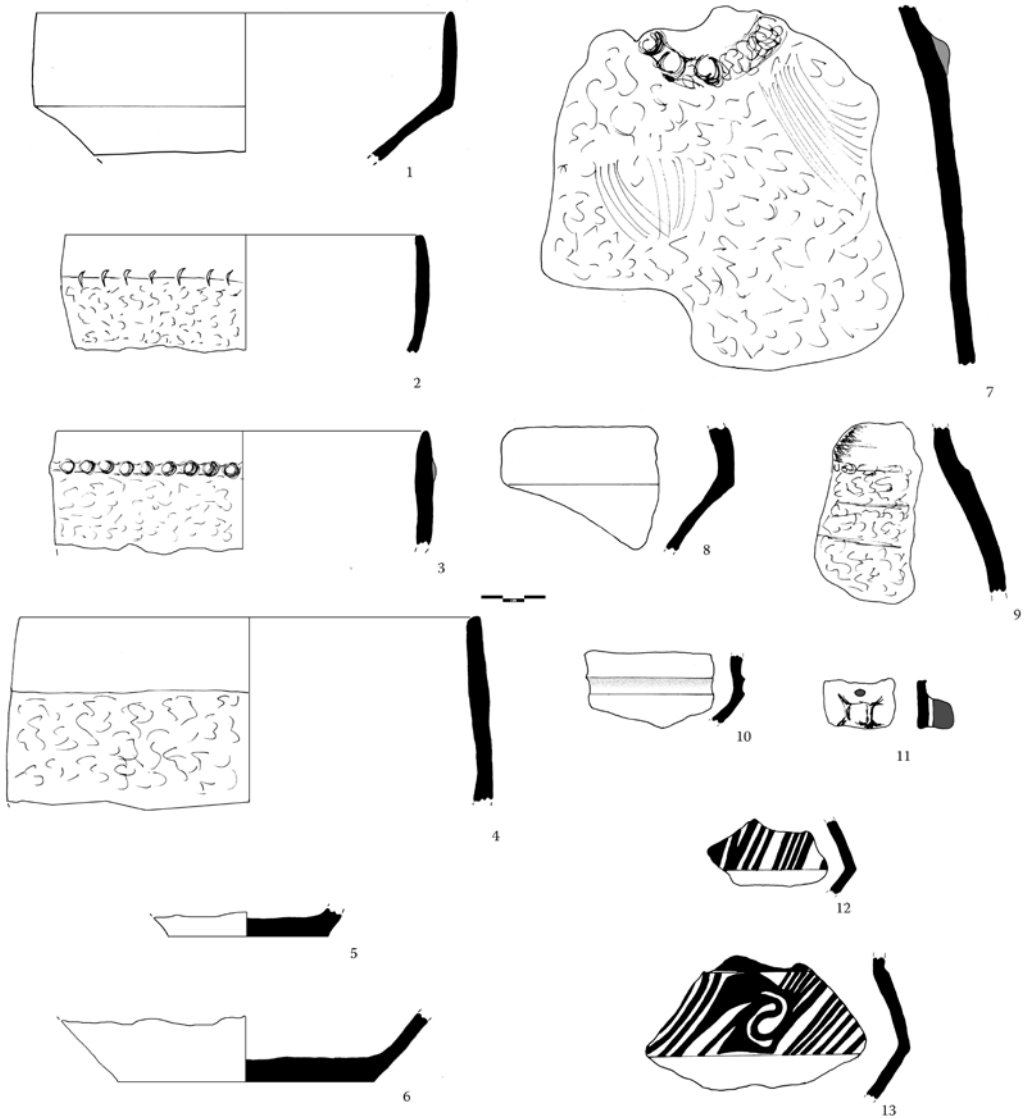


Figure 28. Ceramic sherds from pit E63. Image Credit: A. Yanakieva.

details (fig. 29) with all features common for the early Chalcolithic house debris (Chohadzhiev 2021, 162ff). The manner of filling the pit and the abundance of burnt daub in the cap of the deposit closely resembles pit 103 (Chohadzhiev 2017, 11f). Based on the detailed definition of ‘structured deposition’ at the late Neolithic pit site of Sarnevo in Upper Thrace, the burnt daub is always present in the pits’ sealing as well as in the deposits (Bacvarov 2017, 230ff). Tell Petko Karavelovo offers another perspective to this

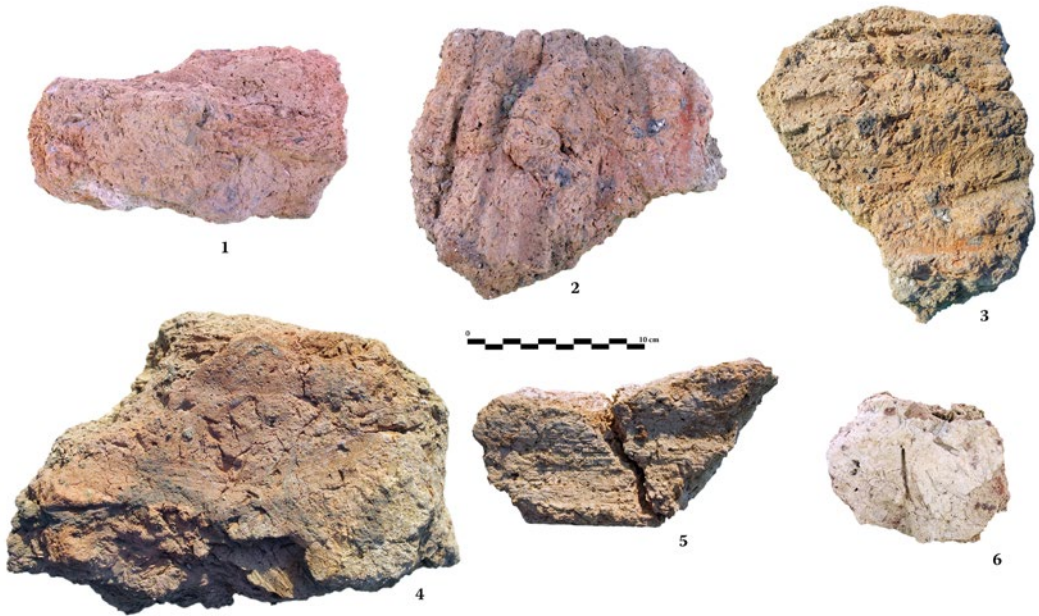


Figure 29. Burnt daub pieces from the deposit of pit E63, probably excavated from house D9. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

substantial observation. While at pit sites, the pits were dug out in the bare ground, at tell sites, almost every pit truncates structural debris. In the cases of pits 103 and E63, the burnt daub that had been excavated during the digging of the pit, was returned as backfill. The inclusion of the burnt house debris to the ‘structured deposition package’ is thus not necessarily false, but is certainly a point to be wary off.

Deliberate deposition of oven base plaster pieces is represented in both pits 103 and E63. It was identified only in the topmost layers. The practice of intentional removal of oven base plaster is well attested at Tell Petko Karavelovo (Chohadzhiev 2017, 18f), and the evidence from both pits obviously shows what could have happened with the removed pieces.

Although pit E63 was very carefully excavated, it yielded no charred grain but only charred wood. Of the total of 16 plant remains, 4 are of oak (*Quercus* sp.), 4 of ash tree (*Fraxinus* sp.), 3 of elm (*Ulmus* sp.), 3 of guelder rose (*Viburnum* sp.), and 2 of alder (*Alnus* sp.). And while the ash and oak remains were found mostly in the ashy topmost layer, the *Viburnum* and the alder appeared at the bottom of layer III and seem to have been the remains of a wicker grid or even a basket. The use of *Viburnum* in the wattle of wall construction is well recorded for the middle Chalcolithic house D3 (Chohadzhiev et al. 2021, 273, fig. 2). It does not need much courage to speculate that most of the deliberate-

ly deposited items in E63 – the weights, the rocks and the piglet – were placed in a basket. At the end, a fire was started on top of the pit, but only for a short time and it did not affect the loom weights in the deposit.

The deposits of both pits 103 and E63 not only demonstrate similar structure and pattern but also yielded very close radiocarbon dates, even though different material was dated, and at different laboratories: 5818 ± 26 BP (SUERC 104018) from a pig bone from E63¹ (fig. 30.1), and 5805 ± 20 BP (UCIAMS 187054/ULA 6800) from charred wood from 103 (fig. 30.2; Chohadzhiev 2017, 18, fig. 15). A close look at the uncalibrated date intervals shows that they overlap for a period of 33 years between 5825 and 5792 BP. The calibration spreads these two dates in the time span roughly between 4750 and 4600 cal BC, but their positions in the chrono-stratigraphic model for the site seem to suggest that the two depositional events occurred in a very short period around the year 4700 cal BC (fig. 30.3).²

* * *

Pit E63 offered abundant material for reflection on the issues of structured deposition and ritual pits. Since it was first released (Richards & Thomas 1984), the ideas of structured deposition had been elaborated and widely discussed (cf. Garrow 2012).

In this paper, we wouldn't like to theorize but just to find a proper place for our 'humble pit', as J.C. Chapman called this class of feature (2000a, 61). It contains most of the elements included by K. Bacvarov in his definition of the 'Late Neolithic ritual package' (2017, 230ff): ceramic sherds; broken grinding stones; faunal remains; burnt daub; artifacts (imitations?) that were made especially for pit deposition (here, the loom weights); sealing and separating the layers with pure clay; presence of mussel shells and bird bones; objects of different and uncommon raw materials (here, the chipped stone assemblage). And having completed this recipe, we would perhaps be satisfied and stopped there, if it was not for the pig. Sacrificing piglets and burying the remains in pits is a well-documented practice in the Hittite society, both by written sources and archaeologically (Collins 2001). This made us dig deeper in the issues of pig sacrifice, as the case of pit E63 seems to be one of the earliest records of a deliberate piglet sacrificial deposition and offers curious details and complex archaeological evidence. The following trip through the ritual practices of ancient societies does not aim to prove any connection, but rather to try – using written sources and examples from later time – and recalibrate our focus from seeing what we know towards finding out more and seeking deeper beyond what

¹ A bone from the piglet was selected for radiocarbon dating as it was the 'main character' in pit E63, and because of the individual's young age.

² This model is based on features with reliable stratigraphic position. As the stratigraphy of the excavated features is not the same in the different trenches, the place of certain feature in the area has also been considered in relation to the features it is in a direct superposition with. Thus, in trenches E and F, pit E63 is overlapped by features D3, E5, and E11, while in trench B, pit 103 truncates features 50 and 67 and is obviously later than them and feature 127.

To pit the pig: The curious case of feature E63 at Tell Petko Karavelovo

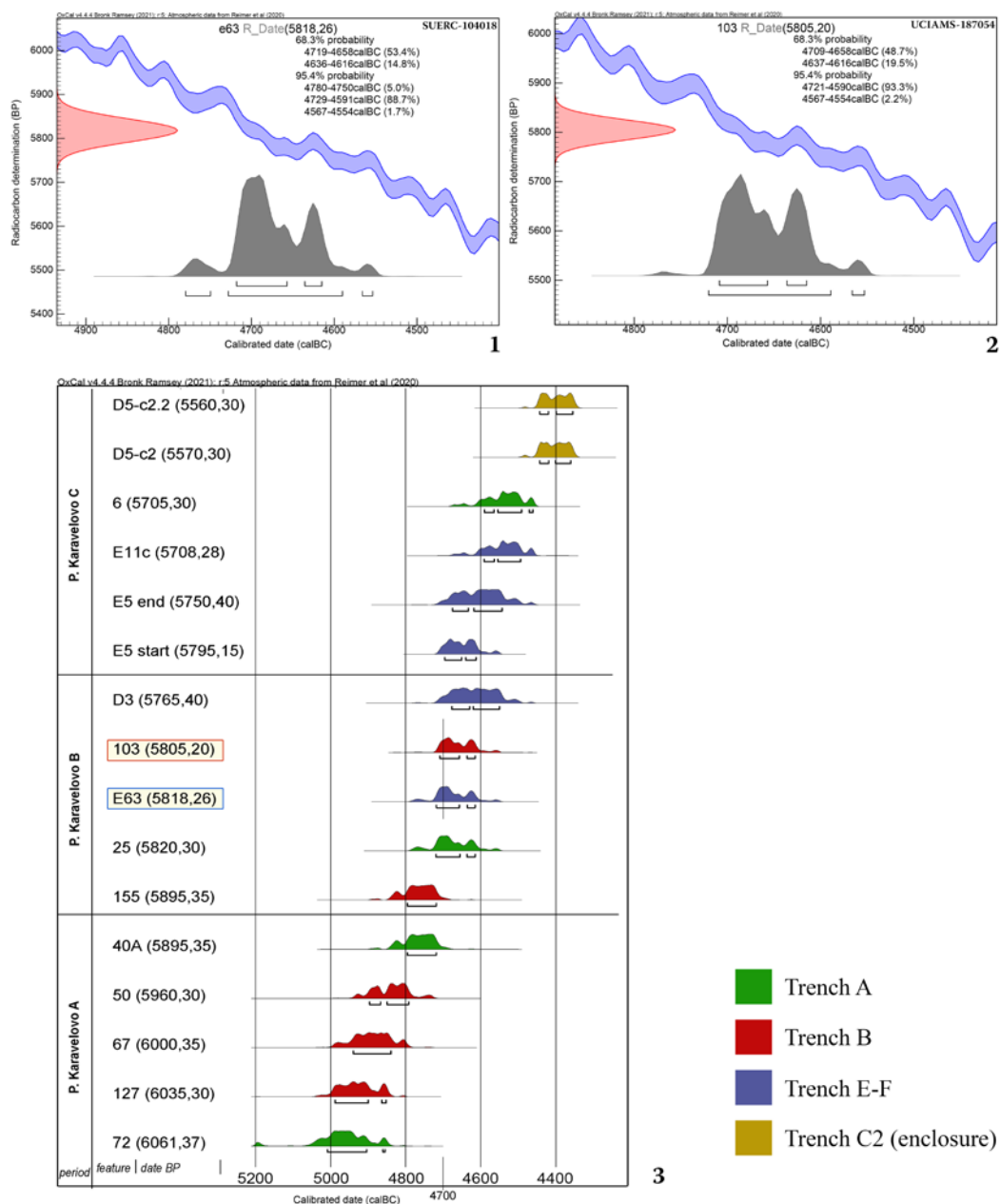


Figure 30. Radiocarbon dates: (1) ^{14}C date on a pig bone from pit E63; (2) ^{14}C date on charred wood from pit 103; (3) unmodeled radiocarbon sequence of Tell Petko Karavelovo. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

would usually be labeled as another ‘extraordinary’ or simply ‘ritual pit’.

Pigs nowhere enjoyed particularly high status in the ancient world. They were never viewed as sacred animals, and certain societies even had pork prohibitions. Usually, the restrictions on pork consumption were associated with the fact that pigs are scavengers, their squeal is unpleasant, and they live in a sty and eat everything, including their own excrements (Collins 2006, 156f). The relation between the taboos and the awareness of the danger of pork consumption due to Trichinosis has been timidly proposed by Koot van Wyk (2014). He even argued that ‘It is remarkable that all the animals listed by Moses in Leviticus 11 as unclean for eating, are nearly all appearing in the researches between 1833–2005 on Trichonella, e.g., cockroaches [*sic!*], horse, dog, cat, pig, fox, bear, crocodile, rats, etc.’ (2014, 112). The osteological analyses of the early Chalcolithic faunal remains from Tell Petko Karavelovo are positive that management and consumption of pigs were essential for the subsistence of this community (Karastoyanova & Chohadzhiev 2017), and a taboo on pork is unlikely. And although pork was not the subject of a dietary taboo in most ancient societies, ‘pigs are rarely featured in art, infrequently mentioned in texts, and their cultic use is extremely limited’ (Collins 2006, 160). B.J. Collins also reasoned that ‘As a symbol of fecundity, pigs were invoked in analogic magic in order to secure the wellbeing of the community... [and] the goddesses to whom a pig is offered... all have associations with birth and fertility’ (2006, 170).

A very distinctive feature of the female Greek festival of the Thesmophoria was the piglet sacrifice. The resemblance between the ‘late Neolithic ritual package’ at pit sites in Upper Thrace and the Thesmophoria was first demonstrated by Bacvarov (2017, 229 and 232). ‘It is a festival to honor the goddess of agriculture [Demeter], in which the women of the community celebrate among themselves’ (Collins 2001, 235). Piglet bones occur frequently in places of worshiping chthonic deities such as Demeter and Persephone (Ruscillo 2013, 185), as the rituals included deposition of piglets into caverns and pits (*megara*) and later use of their remains (McLardy 2015, 2). Such pits, besides piglet bones, often contain other stuff: bones of birds, potsherds (McLardy 2015, 5), shells and fishbones (Ruscillo 2013, 189). All these elements are present in pit E63. Another clue linking it to the Thesmophoria is the basket. Baskets (usually called ‘*kanoûn*’) appear frequently on Greek vases illustrating sacrificial ritual, where they are shown as low flat objects with raised horn-like projections around the sides (Van Straten 1995, 31ff). Although these baskets were usually used in the pre-kill part of the sacrificial ritual, they frequently occurred in some post-kill contexts, as part of the entire offering complex (Van Straten 1995, 162ff). Overall, pig sacrifice was particularly common for the cult of Demeter (Ekroth 2014, 333).

Piglet sacrifice also happened in ancient societies for substitution, for purification, or in military rituals (Collins 2006, 173ff). A small pig was the usual sacrifice among the Romans and Etruscans in rituals ratifying alliances, either matrimonial or political (Gladhill 2016, 53f). A shocking parallel could be found between the hole in the skull of

the pig from E63 and Livy's description of the way a pig was killed by the early Romans. The kill was performed by means of stone or flint blade with a blow on animal's head and later several smashing hits with stone on the body (Gladhill 2016, 60).

Choosing a pig of young age for sacrifice is a multicultural phenomenon. It might be explained with the fact that swine is a surplus animal (of low agricultural value) and has high reproductivity (Hamilakis & Konsolaki 2004, 143). It is the high reproductivity that seems to be the reason for the direct connection of pigs and fertility rites; it also explains why pig sacrifice is a preferable female activity. Rituals as Thesmophoria and allusions to Demeter, Kore and Persephone were contextualized by M. Gimbutas for the prehistoric Balkans exactly for the relation between pigs and the 'Vegetation Goddess' (1982, 211f).

The strong 'sense of femininity' in the case of pit E63 is also emphasized by the presence of loom weights. Tools of textile production are not rare in prehistoric pit deposition, but so far, there are no parallels connecting them directly to the deposition of sacrificed pigs. Spinning and weaving tools have been found frequently in Greco-Roman votive deposits and sanctuaries (Gleba 2009). Most loom weights may have been used before the dedications but at least some of them were made for this purpose only. Occasionally, the recipient is labeled by an inscription. Most common are dedications to Athena and Hera, but loom weights, dedicated to Demeter/Ceres are very frequent, too (Gleba 2009, 70f). Textile production and its tools in antiquity were undisputedly related to women (Barber 1994, 29ff; Nixon 1999, 561ff; Brown 1970, 1075f; Nunley 2002).

The role of women in pig management has been discussed in detail by Collins (2006, 168f). Moreover, she adduced examples from Roman literature that indisputably confirm the connection between the pig and female genitalia, e.g. M. Terentius Varro's 'For our women, above all however the wet nurses, identify the female vulva of virgins with *porcum* and the Greek with *choiros* indicating that it is a suitable symbol of a wedding' (Res Rusticae II, 4: 9–10, as cited in Collins 2006, 169f).

In a prayer, the Hittite king Mursili II (1345–1315 BC) refers to the troublesome Kaska people as 'swineherds and weavers of linen' (van Wyk 2014, 113). Its arrogance and contempt aside, it's as if this quote describes the people who made pit E63 more than three millennia earlier. Collins explained this description of Kaska with the fact 'that pig raising and weaving were tasks performed by women. Given the Hittite concern with preserving masculinity, the characterization was thus not a favorable one' (2006, 157).

The presence of avian bones in pit depositions, especially accompanied by ornithomorphic figurines as was the case at Tell Yunatsite (Boyadzhiev et al. 2021, 298f) is an indicator for the special place of birds in the mythological beliefs of the Copper Age. The golden eagle wing bone from pit 103 is also a clue for the significance of bird wings in pit depositions (Chohadzhiev 2017, fig. 14.4). For pit E63, it's all too obvious that the crow wing was deliberately deposited in the pit, maybe on one of the rock slabs. Avian remains from archaeological contexts are still underresearched (cf. Dirrigl et al. 2020). On the other hand, a crow wing is a frequent attribute of witchcraft and magic as crows and

ravens are well known for their intelligence. Traditionally, they show up in the realm of magic and mystery, appearing in spells, occultism, religions and folklore, usually as mediators between the worlds of humans, dead, ancestors and gods. The reason for the special attitudes to crows could be also rooted in the fact that corvids are among the few animals that exhibit social response to a dead member of their species (Swift & Marzluff 2015).

The belemnite semi-cylinder is another object from E63 that can be linked with magical practices. Some primitive societies associated belemnites with heavenly interventions (see examples in Boyadzhiev 2014, 104ff). A reflection of their meaning in the Copper Age can be found in their presence as grave goods at cemeteries as Polyanitsa and Sushina, in both male and female burials (Boyadzhiev 2014, 115).

An identification of the deposition of a pig and loom weights in pit E63 as a female social practice is certainly disputable. It does represent an 'odd deposit' in the sense used by Garrow (2012, 94), but there is a thin thread that connects everything in this pit with ritual or magic. It was not just a sacrificial pit as the piglet was not the only part of the deposit. Burying the leftovers from sacrifices dedicated to the gods of the Underworld is well documented practice in ancient societies (Ekroth 2014, 329). But in the case of pit E63, a distinct sequence of activities was identified that seems to follow certain – well known to the depositional actors – patterns, which could be defined as 'highly formalized or structured behaviour' (Richards & Thomas 1984, 191). The discussion on archaeological identification of ritual actions is old but irresolvable. The distinction between practical and ritual is a 'product of post-Enlightenment rationalism' (see discussion in Brück 1999). Pit E63 at Petko Karavelovo shows a record of a social practice that was very well-reasoned for the people who performed it. And even though the practice could not be recovered completely, one can speculate on the story behind it and on the actors involved. There are only two major differences between the 'female' pit E63 and feature 103; in the deposit of the latter, instead of loom weights, the main elements are ceramic vessels, and instead of a pig, there are remains of one individual each of the following species: red deer, roe deer, fox, wisent (or auroch), and golden eagle. They are all wild animals and can be obtained only by hunting. The paradigm says that hunting is traditionally a male domain, especially in complex societies, despite the modern trends of denying the traditional perceptions of gender roles (for discussions and argumentations see Gurven & Hill 2009). Thus, the opposition between the 'female' pit E63 and the 'male' pit 103 is obvious. It is pure speculation that two pits at the tell site that are located less than 15 m away from each other, are the archeological record of a single event of 'matrimonial alliance', which happened sometime shortly after 4700 BC. However...

Disclaimer

All interpretations, allusions and speculations in this paper were made by Alexander Chohadzhiev. The other co-authors took part with their expertise and scientific reports. Nadezhda Karastoyanova analyzed the faunal remains. The chipped stone assemblage was

studied by Maria Gurova. The conservation and restoration were performed by Alexandra Yanakieva who had also excavated pit E63 at Tell Petko Karavelovo. The archaeobotanical analysis was done by Paul Bacoup and Pauline Méphane.

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