

Separation and Unity: Spatial Organization and Social Order at Neolithic Settlement Complexes on the Great Hungarian Plain

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The first tell settlements were established in present-day Greece and Bulgaria in southeastern Europe in the mid-seventh millennium BC. Horizontal settlements representing various levels of integration, from hamlets to small villages, maintained a dynamic interaction with these tells. In the Carpathian Basin, Early Neolithic villages emerged with explosive intensity along the Danube and Tisza rivers around 6000 BC, and as opposed to the southern Balkans, networks of dispersed, ephemeral settlements characterized by a scattered layout evolved.

Recent, large-scale excavations in the Carpathian Basin suggest a specific trend during the Middle Neolithic. Circular ditch systems commonly occurred in the central zones of new, large settlements across the Linearbandkeramik area ca. 5300-5200 BC. In Eastern Hungary, on the Great Hungarian Plain, deposits accumulated resulting in vertical growth within these enclosures. This process reflects new attitudes to space, and coincided with the emergence of novel ritual activities inside an area that had previously been physically separated from habitation zones at many nucleated sites on the Plain by the beginning of the Late Neolithic, ca. 5100-5000 BC. These activities followed rules that were fundamentally different from those practiced in the social context of horizontal sites. Parallel to this process of demarcation, a conscious effort may have occurred to elevate the area within the enclosures. Using a term coined by Andrew Sherratt, the construction of an "Ersatz-Tell," a monument began. Around the same time, circular enclosures were built west of the Danube. Yet these ditch systems, and their counterparts across Central Europe, were usually uninhabited, and were devoid of everyday activities.

We argue that tells in Southeast Europe and enclosures in Central Europe represent a visual expression of similar inherent contents although in different cultural contexts. This hypothesis is best represented by the symbolic and physical unity of the Polgár-Csőszhalom tell and its circular ditch system, located within the interaction zone of two major cultural complexes in Europe. The complex monument, systematically developed by the growing community, brought about new forms of social integration that contributed to community cohesion and identity construction.