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# Shell middens on Rakushechny Yar site: early Neolithic societies in southern part of Eastern Europe

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## Abstract

Site Rakushechny Yar located in the Low Don River basin is one of the earliest Neolithic sites in this region. Unique stratigraphy of this site, consisted of shell middens, remains of "wattle and daub" constructions, covered by sterile interlayers six meters thick in total made it one of the key sites for Neolithic period of Eastern Europe. The site was first investigated in the 1960–1970s by T.D. Belanovskaya, and recently new investigations were started. Investigations conducted here during 2016-2017 allowed revealing undisturbed cultural layers, including the lowest and the most ancient one which were never excavated before due to a high water level of the Don River. 14C dates achieved recently testify that different parts of the site were inhabited and used during various periods of time.

Part of this site located in the past near the lake on the river shore, might be attributed to a specialized place of water resources exploration. Remains of big fish species, mainly catfish and sturgeon, were found in different layers of shell middens and on sandy parts of the layers. Specific flint and bone industry can be traced here, as well as elaborated complex of flat-bottom pottery of different volumes. Along with shell middens and shell mounds, pits filled with different layers of *Unio* and *Viviparus* shells, fish bones, pottery fragments, polishing stones, flint tools and bone artefacts were found here. Walls of the pit were covered by clay, that served as a sort of a waterproofing layer. Remains of pile constructions were found also on the site among shell middens. Faunal remains testify use of different ecological niches and their resources. Recent finds of bones of domesticated species suggest even a more complicated organization of this ancient society.

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Further investigations and new methods implemented will allow making more reconstructions of the life of one of the most ancient Neolithic societies on the territory of Eastern Europe.

**Keywords:** shell middens, early Neolithic, Low Don basin, Eastern Europe, neolithisation