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АЛЕКСИНАЦ



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## A MINOAN (?) DAGGER FROM LIPOVACKO GRADISTE (CENTRAL BALKANS)

**Abstract:** *The paper describes a bronze dagger which by shape and other characteristics reminds of the Early Bronze Age so-called Minoan daggers of southern Aegean region and Crete. The dagger is dated to the period from the Early Minoan III to Middle Minoan I, i.e. 2200-1800 BC in absolute dates. Based on the new researches, as well as some older finds, the paper points to possible contacts between the Central Balkans and Aegean region during the early Bronze Age.*

**Keywords:** *Dagger, Bronze, Early Bronze Age, Central Balkans, Minoan civilization, Aegean Region, 2200-1800 BC*

The bronze dagger which will be analyzed in this short paper was discovered 20 years ago on the territory of Lipovacko Gradiste.<sup>30</sup> The Lipovac fort, or Gradiste, is known in literature as part of the medieval complex around St. Stefan monastery,<sup>31</sup> in the vicinity of Lipovac village.<sup>32</sup> It is a religious complex with ruins of the medieval

30 The dagger was found in 1997 by Saša Stevanović from Sokobanja, and until the present day has been his private property. No other archaeological material was found around the dagger. The authors thank Mr. Stevanović for the permission to publish this find. We are also grateful to Dr R. Vasić, Dr A. Bulatović, M.Sc. D. Jovanović, Dr M. Blečić-Kavur, Prof B. Kavur, Dr B. Moloy, Prof A. Harding and Prof. Jockenovel for their help and useful comments about the find. This paper is the result of the work on the Archaeology of Serbia: cultural identity, integrational factors, technological processes and the role of the central Balkans in the development of the European prehistory project (no. 177020), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

31 The first triconchal church is dedicated to the *Transfiguration of Jesus*, which is confirmed by a Turkish register from the 16th century, where (1536 and 1574-95) the existence of the *Transfiguration of Jesus* (Lipovac) monastery was registered in the Bolvan nahiye (Кашић 1972: 106-107, 109).

32 Милићевић 1876: 788; Каниц 1989: 134; Јиричек 1959: 77-78; Костић 1969: 458-460; Кашић 1972: 106-107; Љубинковић 1973; Гагулић 1977; Спирић 1995: 81-82; Цветковић 1999; Поповић 2002; Милојевић 2014: 14-16.



fort Lipovac, medieval necropolis, a cave hermitage and monastery.<sup>33</sup> The fortified part of the site is located on southern slopes of Leskovik hill, and it is positioned on the cascade reef above the seasonal stream which, together with other smaller creeks, forms the St. Stefan river near the monastery. In the hill karst, we can mark off several bigger plateaux, where we can probably locate more intensive construction activities, and beside that, these places are points with a good view of the valley. During the field surveys in 2014<sup>34</sup> on this hillfort, beside Roman and medieval pottery, prehistoric pottery was also found, but without the typical characteristics of any exact chronological span.



Fig. 1. View of the Monastery complex and Svetostefanska valley from the top of Gradiste.

The finding itself is a bronze double-edged dagger blade of 21.3 cm in length, with a central ridge and an extended heart-shaped upper part, where there are four perforations for handle rivets. The cross-section of the blade is rhomboid, but from its central part, the blade slightly widens towards the end. The blade begins with a rounded tip (0.9 cm wide), from which point

33 Поповић 2002: 157.

34 The field surveys were carried out as part of the *Archaeological prospection of the Aleksinac area* project, which is jointly organised by The Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade and Aleksinac Museum.



it widens gently in a triangular form and reaches the maximum width of 6.8 cm at the part where the perforations begin; the functional part of the blade ends here, and at the upper part of the dagger there is a heart-shaped shoulder. The central ridge is 19.8 cm long, with an elongated rhomboid cross-section with slightly concave sides. The central ridge starts at the joint of the arches,<sup>35</sup> where it is the widest (2 cm) and thickest (0.7 cm). From that point, it gradually narrows and becomes thinner (0.9 cm wide; 0.3 cm thick). There are two parallel perforations along both edges of the blade, made by hitting a punch tool against it (as it could be concluded by the jagged outer edges of the perforations). The perforations were made by the same tool, since all the holes have the same diameter (Ø 0.3 cm). The blade's thickness is 0.05 cm. Traces of use are visible on both sides of the blade, especially on its middle part. The surface area is smooth, covered with a dark green patina layer. The weight of the dagger is 161.7 g.



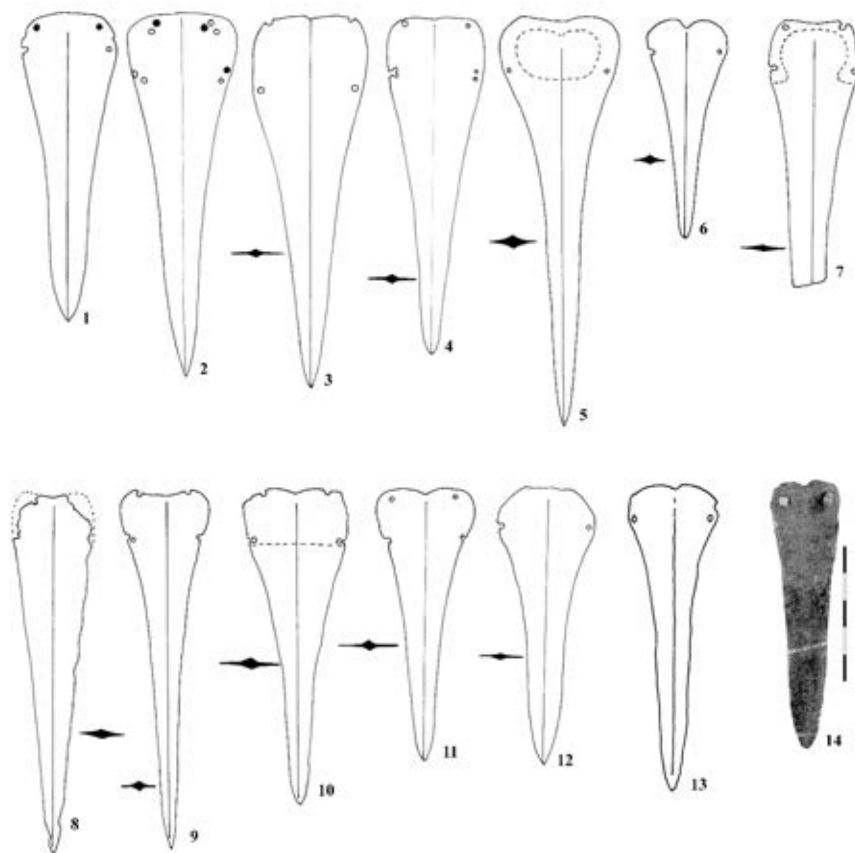
Fig.2. Drawing of the dagger from the Lipovac hillfort.

At the first glance, the dagger resembles the pieces of Early Bronze so-called Minoan daggers, such as the ones found in the south Aegean region or Crete, during the Early Bronze Age. Those are triangular long daggers with concave upper part – the so-called heart-shaped daggers. Another characteristic of some pieces is that the blade doesn't go straight from the top upper part which is usually the widest part, but narrows at approximately 1/3 of the blade length. The only dagger somewhat similar to this one found in this area would be the specimen from the Klicevac necropolis (T. I/14), found in the urn of Dubovac-Zuto Brdo culture of the Middle Bronze Age (Br B-C). However, this piece belongs to short daggers, and it has only two rivet-holes of a larger diameter, as well as a thin, flat cross-section. The four

35 The central ridge appears on the dagger as gradually increasing in thickness. On the dagger, this is visible as two triangle-shaped surfaces (one on each side), whose tops (at the angle of 45°) go to the highest point of the central ridge. In that way, the central ridge gets the full cross-section at 0.11 cm from the heart-shaped beginning and 0.4 cm from the tip of the dagger.



small perforations for the handle, grouped two by two on the outer sides of the shoulders, could indicate the connection between the Lipovac dagger and the ones from the Aegean region. Actually, that principle of positioning the holes, in combination with their diameters, is usually characteristic of Aegean daggers, and that combination is not found on other European territories. The Lipovac dagger could be analyzed and compared in three basic categories – by: 1. shape, 2. cross-section, 3. number and position of the perforations on the shoulder.



T. I. Heart-shaped triangular daggers(1-12 after Branigan 1974; 13 after Prendi 2002) Zigurries (1), Naxos (2), Lefkas (3), Amorgos (4, 10-11), Kumasa B (5-7), Platanos A (8, 12), Chania (9), Voden (13), Klicevac (14).



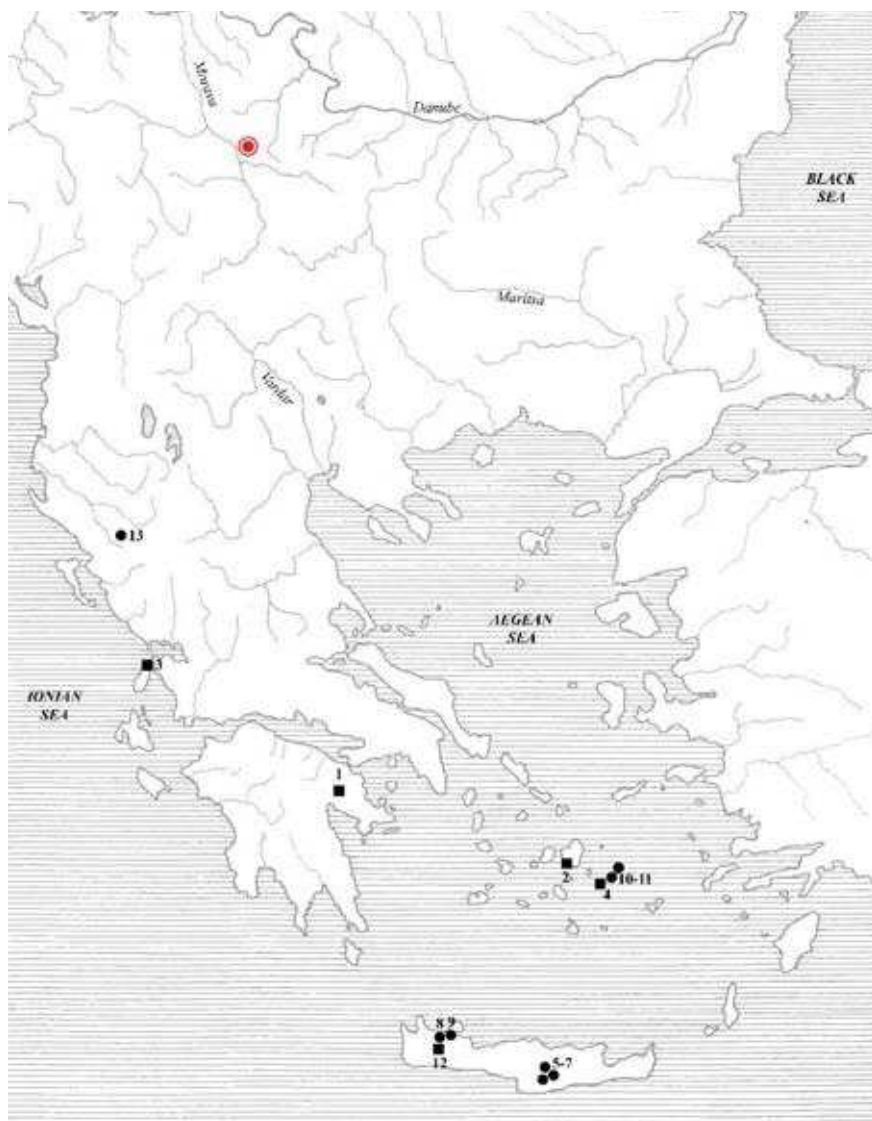


Fig. 3. Map of the distribution of the heart-shaped triangular daggers Ziguries (1), Naxos (2), Lefkas (3), Amorgos (4, 10-11), Kumasa B (5-7), Platanos A (8, 12), Chania (9), Voden (13), Klicevac (14).

Triangular-shaped Early Bronze Age daggers appear on the territory of nearly whole Europe, like in Czech Republic,<sup>36</sup> southern Germany,<sup>37</sup>

36 Novak 2011: T. 28/371-374.

37 Wels-Weyrauch 2015: T. 20/220-221.





France<sup>38</sup> and Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>39</sup> These specimens, on the whole, could be chronologically positioned from the 2000 to 1500 BC. However, we do not find heart-shaped triangular pieces out of the Aegean region, and as such we may mention pieces from Koumasa B (three specimens, T. I/5-7), Amorgos (three specimens, T. I/4, 10-11), Platanos A (T. I/8), Khania (T. I/9) in Greece,<sup>40</sup> and one piece from Vodhine (T. I/13) in present-day Albania.<sup>41</sup> If we compare blades' cross-sections, we can find most uniformity among the pieces from Levkas (T. I/3), Amorgos (three specimens, T. I/4, 10-11) and Khania (T. I/9).<sup>42</sup> Only four mentioned pieces share both elements with the Lipovac dagger – three specimens from Amorgos (T. I/4, 10-11)<sup>43</sup> and the one from Khania (T. I/9).<sup>44</sup> Admittedly, we do not know what the cross-sections of all daggers from the Aegean region look like. Daggers with four rivets in a rectangular or trapesoid formation are usually found more often in the Aegean region. Moreover, these rivets, almost as a rule, are never positioned side by side, as is the case with our piece. The Amorgos dagger (T. I/4) has six rivets, four of which are grouped like on our dagger, while on the Naxos specimen (T. I/2), there are nine rivets, but it is unknown which holes are the primary ones, and which are secondary.

Regarding the chronology of the Lipovac dagger, if we presuppose its potential connection with the Aegean region, we can date it to the period from the Early Minoan III to Middle Minoan I phase, i.e. 2200-1800 BC in absolute dates.<sup>45</sup> The chronology of long daggers of type III and IV after K. Branigan<sup>46</sup> certainly points to such dating. Their first appearance is in the Early Minoan I period, but without such cross-section of the blade.

Furthermore, the absence of such pieces from a wider region of the Central Balkans suggests certain problems, in the first place the question of contacts and relations with far Aegean and Mediteranean regions during the Early bronze age. The area where the dagger was found was occupied by the Bubanj-Hum III complex and Bubanj-Hum IV-Ljuljaci culture<sup>47</sup>

38 Gallay 1981: T. 38/533.

39 Gerloff 1975: Pl. 18/184-188; Burgess and Gerloff 1981: Pl. 4/30-31, Pl. 12-13.

40 Branigan 1974: cat. 199, 201, 214, 217, 219, 221-222.

41 Prendi 2002: fig. 2/3.

42 Branigan 1974: cat. 157, 159, 219, 221-222.

43 Branigan 1974: cat. 159, 221-222.

44 Branigan 1974: cat. 219.

45 Branigan 1974: 3.

46 Branigan 1974: 8 and further.

47 Булатовић и Станкоски 2012: 327.





in the period between 2200-1800 BC, and there are no testimonies about their contacts with the southern areas so far. The finding of a two handled beaker with a globular belly and funneled neck, which somewhat resembles the so-called Depas pottery, originates from the site of Bubanj<sup>48</sup>, but on the other hand, it rather points to contacts with the central Danube basin than with the Aegean.<sup>49</sup> Beakers of the Junacite type, on the other hand, point to closer connections of the Central Balkans region and Thracia, and they appear on the area of the southern Morava river valley and the northern Vardar valley at the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millenia BC.<sup>50</sup> Also, beakers of the Bubanj-Hum III type<sup>51</sup> occur in the layer 3 on the Junacite site. Beside these, a recently isolated phenomenon of an oven modeled in the settlements and necropolises of Early Bronze Age<sup>52</sup> points to more intensive contacts with the northern Aegean regions. These objects are connected with the Bubanj-Hum III complex and Armenochori culture, and chronologically fit the Early Minoan/Early Heladic III and Middle Minoan/Middle Heladic I period.<sup>53</sup> Still, an important finding which testifies about direct contacts is golden jewelry from the central grave of the mound 1 in Bare near Kragujevac.<sup>54</sup> According to the reconstruction by the author, the jewelry has its closest analogies in the Troy IIg and Tepe Hisar,<sup>55</sup> which correspond to 2300 BC. Communication routes for these contacts should probably be looked for towards the south and east. Unfortunately, a potential contact between the Aegean region and Montenegro coast and further towards the Balkans' mainland during the transition from 3rd to 2nd millenium BC, which was suggested before,<sup>56</sup> could not be taken as a

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48 Стојић и Јоцић 2006: 188, cat. 183, T. LXXIV/183, fig. 48.

49 Булатовић и Станкоски 2012: 63.

50 Булатовић и Станкоски 2012: 241.

51 Bulatović 2014: 68.

52 Bulatović 2013: 1 and further.

53 Bulatović 2014: 67-68.

54 Srejović 1976: 122.

55 Srejović 1976: 126.

56 Паровић-Пешикан 1985: 20 and further.



possibility after the new absolute dates.<sup>57</sup> Further research and new findings will probably solve some of the above-mentioned questions and problems<sup>58</sup>.



Fig. 4. Photo of the dagger from the Lipovac hillfort.

57 Saveljić-Bulatović, Guštin i Hincak 2015: 31-35. The finds are dated to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC.

58 The inclusion analysis of the dagger was performed by an handheld XRF apparatus Olympus Innov- X Delta Classic DC-4000, and these values were obtained: 10% Sn, 1.2% Zn, 0.5% Fe, 0.2% Pb и 0.2% Ti. Unfortunately, even though we have values given by K. Branigan for some of the Minoan daggers, we think that it is not wise to compare all data, considering the fact that his analysis was conducted 50 years ago. W. Powell, A. Bankoff and A. Huska carried out the analysis of our dagger, and we also use this opportunity to thank them.



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