

**A Step into the Past**  
**Approaches to Identity, Communications and Material Culture in**  
**South-Eastern European Archaeology**





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# A STEP INTO THE PAST

Approaches to Identity, Communications and  
Material Culture in South-Eastern European  
Archaeology

Papers dedicated to Petar Popović  
for his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday

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ТЕХНОЛОШКОГ РАЗВОЈА И  
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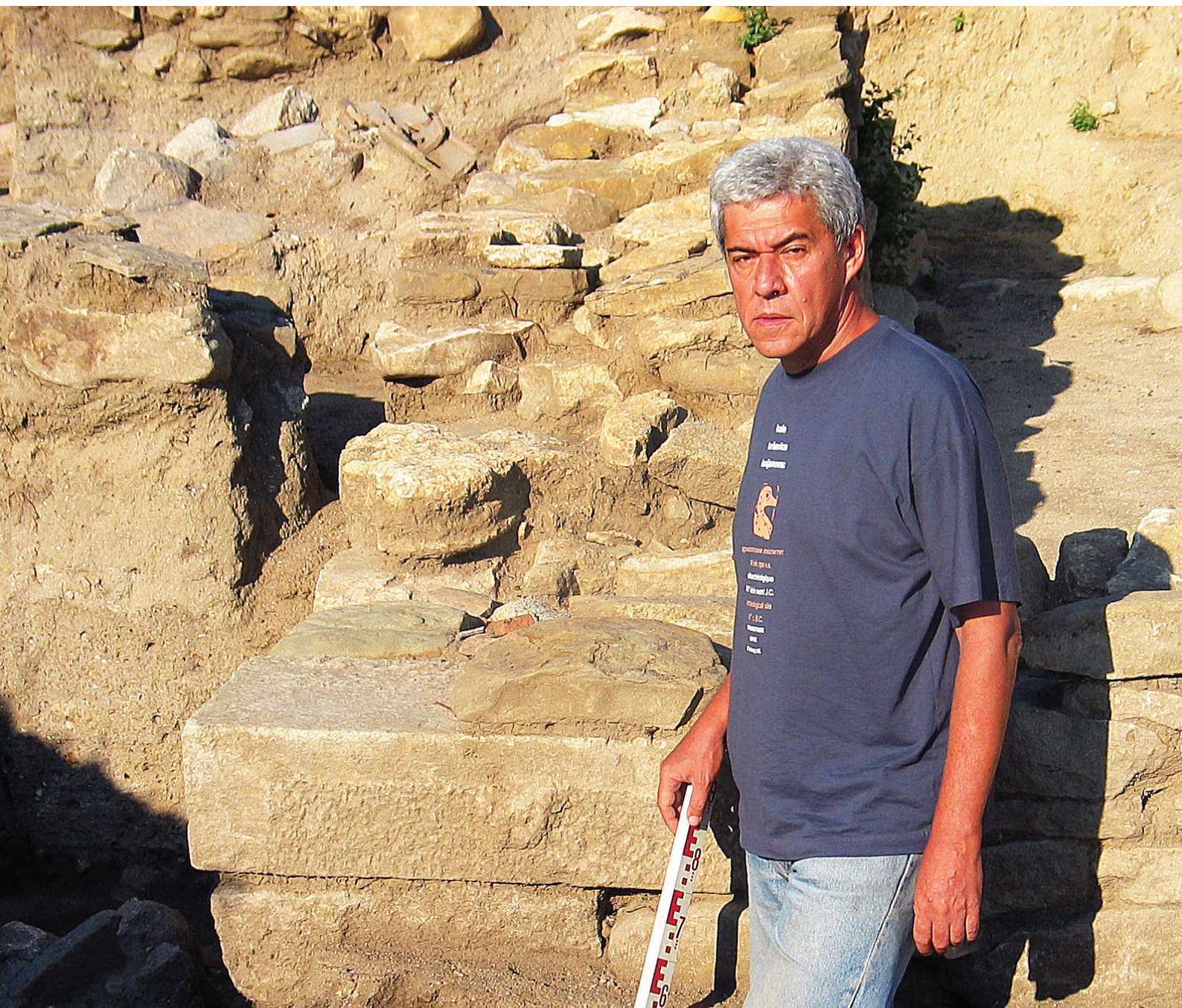
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Wesley D. ...



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Библиографија Петра Поповића израђена је према Интернационалном стандарду за скраћени библиографски опис (ISBD). Референце су подељене у три целине: монографске публикације, прилози у зборницима, серијским и осталим публикацијама и преводи, прикази књига, унутар којих су поређане хронолошки.

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## INTRODUCTION: PETAR POPOVIĆ AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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It is a rare occasion that one researcher's career in archaeology including published results, extensive fieldwork and professional contacts, can inspire a volume with such vast, diachronic and diverse topics as is the case here. Namely, the bibliography of Petar Popović (*see* Bibliography of Petar Popović in this volume) contains numerous papers, chapters, and books focused on numismatics; (*e.g.*, Popović 1983; Поповић 1987; Borić-Brešković, Popović 2006), ancient Celts and Scordisci, their cultures, migrations and contacts (*e.g.*, Jovanović, Popović 1991; Popović 1992a; 1992b; 1992c; 1993; 1994; 1996a), the Balkan Bronze and Iron Ages (*e.g.*, Vukmanović, Popović 1982; Popović, Vukmanović 1992; Popović 1996b), Kale–Krševica (*e.g.*, Popović 2006; 2012), etc. These publications reveal his main scholarly interests in social, cultural, and economic aspects of the interrelations between the Paleo-Balkan communities and the Greek and Roman worlds. Beginning in the 1960s, Popović participated in numerous local and multinational excavation projects targeting some of the most prominent archaeological sites in Serbia and former Yugoslavia (*e.g.*, Padina, Gomolava, Vinča, Bosut, Kadića Brdo, Faros, Issa). As a result, along with abundant friendships, fruitful discussions, and international contacts, he also became an indispensable participant in most regional archaeological interpretative endeavours focusing on problems beyond the Iron Age and numismatics. Having all this in mind, the three editors along with all of the authors, who are Petar's friends and colleagues, have happily decided to publish this volume as a birthday present to him. Our scholarly goal is to provide space for some new answers to the archaeological questions Petar Popović is interested in. Since his interests remain vast and focused on still very current topics, connecting the two is not a difficult task.

Beyond social, economic and other interactions and communications, we decided to focus on identity and material culture changes as an interpretative thread connecting all the chapters and people behind this volume. When it comes to geography, Popović's scholarly interests are focused on the Balkans in prehistory and protohistory, and on regional and global contacts local communities had with societies inhabiting regions in the Mediterranean or further inside continental Europe. Hence, we have divided this volume into two segments beginning with the Danube as a route or a "highway" in prehistory and protohistory, and the consequent identity and material culture changes. In the second segment, the focus is on social, economic and cultural interactions between the communities from south-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean world, from prehistory to the Middle Ages.

### **The Danube as a "highway": identity, communications and material culture changes in south-eastern European Prehistory and Protohistory**

A significant portion of Petar's research is focused on Iron and previous Bronze Age phenomena in the Balkans. Since most of these periods' cultural manifestations and identity characteristics are considered reflections of some interrelations and contacts with other cultures, in the next few pages we will discuss the importance of the Danube as a communication route. Besides obvious scholarly interests,

this topic is also appropriate since Popović conducted some of his very important excavations on the banks of this river, contemplating its role in the lives of prehistoric men and women (e.g., Popović, Vukmanović 1992).

During prehistory, the Danube represented a “highway” for various central European and Balkan communities that moved, interacted and shared achievements along its course, consequently changing their ways of life, customs and cultures. However, this river was more than just a two-way communication route. The inexhaustible food and other resources it supplied allowed numerous hunting, agricultural, pastoral and warrior communities to establish long-term or temporary settlements. During the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition, in the late seventh millennium BC, the earliest permanent food-producing settlements appeared along its banks (Ђорић 2008). Subsequently, the first urban-looking Vinča culture centres were built along this and other rivers as well (Ристић, Опачић 2005: 73). These changes represented the most important segments of the so-called process of Neolithisation, which apparently originated in the Middle East and slowly spread into the Balkans and beyond (Waterbolk 1971: 342).

After the collapse of the Neolithic communities, settled in fertile areas of the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans, numerous dynamic and migratory societies of the Copper Age moved upstream and Bronze Age societies moved downstream along the middle course<sup>1</sup> of the Danube, towards the Balkan Peninsula (Тасић 1983a: 55). It is believed that during the Early Iron Age, the penetration went exclusively from the Black Sea along the lower and towards the middle Danube course (Тасић 1983). Historical sources say that at the end of the Old Era, the mighty conquerors of the Old World, such as the phalanxes of Alexander the Great or the Roman legions, finally arrived on its banks (Јовановић 2010). The ancient name of the Danube was *Istros*, and Herodotus stated that it sprung in the Celtic country near the city of Pirene, and flowed through the middle of Europe cutting it into two parts (Херодот II: 33). Eventually, the Danube became a border that divided but also connected the Roman Empire with various other communities, creating a very dynamic socio-political context (see Rustoiu in this volume).

Some of the most attractive prehistoric archaeological finds from the territory of Serbia dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Age are found on the banks of the Danube. Namely, the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC was characterised by three phases of the penetration of the Encrusted Pottery culture, first pointed out by Miloje Vasić at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the beauty of the anthropomorphic plastic typical for this culture inspired numerous European archaeologists to remain focused on this phenomenon for a long time (Васић 1907: 47; 1912: 189; Childe 1929; Гарашанин 1973: 351; Letica 1973: 52; Majnarić-Pandžić 1982: 47; Coles, Harding 1979; Holenweger 2011). Another term used for the Encrusted Pottery culture is the Transdanubian culture, which I. Bona elaborated upon by connecting it to some wider Bronze Age phenomena with similarly decorated ceramics – using the technique of *Furchenstich* and white incrustation (Bona 1975: 194). The dominance of the Encrusted Pottery culture in the Danube region appeared in stages, spreading from the north to the south. N. Tasić labelled its older phase in the territory of southern Hungary and Baranja the Transdanubian culture, while in the territory of Srem and Banat, under the influence of the Szremla culture, he argued that it turned into the Dubovačka culture (Tasić 1974: 229). During its last phase, in the area of Iron Gates and further into Romania, the Dubovačka culture grew into the Žuto Brdo culture (Тасић 1983: 82), or the Žuto Brdo-Girla Mare cultural complex (Garašanin 1983: 520). There are various hypotheses about the cultural movements and interactions behind these Middle Bronze Age phenomena. Many authors argue that the Encrusted Pottery culture concentrated in the Danube region exchanging their luxury ceramics for metal products from the Eastern Carpathian basin, and obtaining raw materials and finished metal products from centres of metallurgy in Central Europe (Bóna 1975: 220-222). The intensive exchange between Middle Bronze Age communities in the Carpathian basin is best illustrated by numerous imitations of forms and decorations taken from neighbouring communities (Kiss 2011: 217).

In the territory of Serbia, the Dubovačka culture group is best represented by several exceptional finds: the now-lost Kličevac idol (Васић 1952-1953), the models of carriages pulled by birds (Dupljajska and Vrsačka kolica), and the gold jewellery hoard from Vrbica (Гарашанин 1954, Т. II; Molloy *at al.* 2023).

<sup>1</sup> The Danube’s middle course begins near Budapest and ends near Turnu Severin, and is 860 km long (Дукић 1983: 25).



Arguably, the two chariot models can be figural representations of the agrarian cycle that was mythically linked with the solar and chthonic movement of Apollo, and his three seasons spent in the south and one in the north, with the Hyperboreans (Jovanović 2007, 10). The other characteristics of the Encrusted Pottery culture are flat necropolises with cremated individuals placed in urns and short-lived settlements which only occupy narrow strips along the banks of the Danube and its immediate hinterland, outside of which there are almost no other traces of this phenomenon. Consequently, it seems that during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, these communities dominated the European communication route along the Danube until the arrival of the Gava culture in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. M. Peković lists around 150 sites of encrusted ceramics in Serbia, concentrated exclusively along the course of the Danube and around the confluence of the Tisa, Sava and Morava rivers (Пековић 2013: 25, Map 1).

Petar Popović made a significant contribution to clarifying the relationship between the Encrusted Pottery culture and the Gava culture (fluted ceramics) through research in the territory of Ključ (Konjska glava), the area where the Danube passes from the middle to its lower course. These rescue excavations took place within the project of the construction of the Đerdap II hydroelectric power plant during the 1980s. Popović directed or took part in the research of Livade – Mala Vrbica, Vajuga Pesak, Ljubičevac – Gornje Ostrvo, Egeta, Ljubičevac – Obala, and Konopište (Вукмановић, Поповић 1984; Премк, Поповић, Бјелајац 1984; Поповић 1984; 1984a). An interesting feature of the Ključ region is that several necropolises from different prehistoric periods (from the Mesolithic to La Tène) and the Middle Ages are concentrated in this relatively small area. The inhumation burials were characteristic of the Mesolithic (Kula in Mihailovac – Сладић 1984), the Neolithic (Konopište) and in the Early Bronze Age (Vajuga – Popović, Vukmanović, Radojčić 1986, Fig. 3), while the cremated burials dominated in the Late Bronze Age (Glamija – Krstić 2003; Vajuga-Korbovo – Krstić 1986; Konopište – Popović, Vukmanović, Radojčić 1990; and Peska near Korbovo – Radojčić 1986). In Ključ, there are also several necropolises with cremated individuals belonging to cultural groups Žuto Brdo–Girila Mare and the Gava culture buried together – Veliki Gradac, Konopište, Vajuga–Korbovo, as well as the Balej necropolis in northwestern Bulgaria (Alexandrov, Ivanov, Hristova 2016).

The Early Iron Age, when the Bosut group dominated the Danube region, stands for the period of the appearance of iron, but not in its full use (Васић 1997: 92). Then, on the territory of Ključ, the inhumation burials reappeared, which can be seen at the Vajuga-Pesak necropolis (Popović, Vukmanović 1998). This necropolis simultaneously shows the characteristics of the late Kalakača and the early Basarabi. It is also one of the largest Early Iron Age necropolises on the territory of Serbia, next to the group tomb at Gomolava (Tasić 1972). There are more necropolises with these characteristics on the left bank of the Danube, in today's Romania, where the dead were buried under tumuli, which is not the practice in Serbia, on the right bank (Dumitrescu 1968). However, in the Valley of Western Morava River, there are Bronze Age skeletal burials under tumuli, which can be seen in the necropolis of Mojsinje near Čačak (Никитовић, Стојић, Васић 2002).

Numerous Celtic tribes penetrated the Carpathian Basin, Transylvania, the middle Danube course and the Balkans during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Jovanović 2018). At the turn of this century, the Eastern Celts reached the banks of the Danube in Serbia where they took a break for several decades, to consolidate their strength for further penetration into the Eastern Balkans and beyond. This period of consolidation is best illustrated by the necropolises at Karaburma and Rospri Ćupria in Belgrade, and Pećine near Kostolac (Тодоровић 1956; 1974; Јовановић 2018). Almost a century passed from the appearance of the Celts in the Danube region of Serbian to the first traces of their presence in north-eastern Serbia (Поповић, Сладић 1997: 109). The characteristics of the discovered material culture indicate that the social groups behind these finds are the so-called kingdom or the tribal alliance of Skordisci (Todorović 1974), while the discoveries of the coins from the hoard in Jabukovec – barbaric imitations of Tetradrachms – represent the first issues of their autonomous coinage in the Balkans (Поповић 1987: 39). The presence of Celts in the area of Ključ was almost non-existent during the first phase of the invasion of the Balkans, and warrior graves appeared only at the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, e.g., the grave from Čubra near Negotin (Поповић, Сладић 1997: 102,103). The grave from Debelica (near

Knjaževac), and the necropolises Vajuga-Pesak (near Korbovo), Ajman and Konopište (near Kladovo) belong to the third horizon of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> century BC. There was another necropolis on the river island near Ljubičevac, which over time was washed away by erosion into the Danube (Поповић, Сладвић 1997: 104). The funeral rites were again transformed, so now the deceased are exclusively cremated and their remains are placed in pits together with weapons and pottery (Popović 1992c: 116). Weapons include spears, swords, massive knives and shield bosses, while ceramic accessories are represented by grey cooking pots and bowls thrown on a potter's wheel and ornamented with polishing, as well as "fructieras" on high feet (Popović 2001).

The local production of pottery reveals hybrid shapes taken over from the earlier Iron Age, which were given a new look due to the use of the potter's wheel (Popović 2014; *cf.*, Egri in this volume). This was also the case with the finds from a child's grave discovered near the village of Mokranje in Negotin, in which the skeleton of a 2-year-old was covered with a "fructiera" and a larger fragment of cooking pot thrown on a potter's wheel, while among other ceramic items in the grave, there were also larger hand-made pots with characteristic shapes for the Ferigile culture of the Early Iron Age (Popović, Kapuran 2011). Although the grave chronologically belongs to the transition from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the child was inhumed, which is completely different from the funeral customs typical to the Mali Skordisk in this period.

The chapters we decided to place in this section of the volume will provide thorough insights into some of the most prominent material culture changes in south-eastern European prehistory and proto-history, spanning from the late Neolithic till the Roman conquest. The authors focus on various topics, from Metal Age cultural horizons at Foeni-Salaş in Romania to various distinctive objects discovered in south-eastern Europe. A reader will find valuable information about Early Eneolithic arrowheads, Bronze Age golden objects, various types of prehistoric and protohistoric fibulae, some concepts behind an archaeological site, „barbarian“ *kantharoi*, scabbards and swords, belts, Scordiscian ladies, glass beads and Roman statuette discovered in indigenous contexts.

### **The Mediterranean connections: social, economic and cultural interactions between south-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean world, from prehistory to the Middle Ages**

Social, economic and cultural interrelations between numerous European communities from the past and the Mediterranean world are some of the most prominent topics in archaeology and history. Trade and exchange of material culture, transfers of knowledge and technology, communications and human mobility, therefore, become questions of paramount importance, and how these interrelations were perceived in scholarly endeavours usually follow some broad socio-political trends of modern societies (Gosden 2004; Dietler 2011). Petar Popović contributed to answering some of these questions by interpreting various Paleo-Balkan cultural phenomena emerging from contacts with ancient Greeks and Romans. His main focus was on the emergence of local Iron Age coinage and the use of Greek and Roman Republican pieces (*e.g.*, Поповић 1987; Borić-Brešković, Popović 2006), on the culture of Scordisci (*see above*) and on the site of Kale Krševica (*see below*).

Since we did not receive any numismatic contributions for this volume, which could have been expected given the bibliography of Petar Popović, here we decided to pay attention to a lesser-known but often quoted section from his monograph on the Scordiscian coinage (Поповић 1987). It is a question he asked – whether and from what moment in the past this or any other coins used by Scordisci or other Paleo-Balkan communities can be considered as evidence of the existence of market and human understanding of concepts of prices in the modern sense of the word (1987: 28, 132-133). Without slipping into the primitivist vs. modernist, or substantivism vs. formalism debates in history and anthropology (*see Dalton 1968; Finley 1981*), Popović's question about how the role of money could have changed over time represents a very important theoretical breakthrough in Serbian and ex-Yugoslav archaeology.

Subsequently, further development of such ideas has led to the conclusion that communities from the past should never be viewed through the prism of ‘ancient civilisations’ like Greece and Rome or modern European societies, but as culture-specific phenomena, and that the spirit of the age (or *Zeitgeist*) should always be taken into consideration when contemplating any past or present culture (*cf.*, Vranić 2022: 157-180).

**Kale-Krševica:** During the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, more than a hundred years before the first La Tène finds reached the Sava and the Danube region, another culture (or cultures) located in today’s Northern Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania and southern Serbia was going through extraordinary changes (*see* Parazoglu 1967; Папазоглу 1980; 1988; Микулчиќ 1999; Theodossiev 2011; Archibald 2013; Popov 2015), which was equally important for Petar Popović and his scholarly interests. This culture does not have a straightforward archaeological name as is the case with earlier prehistoric ones, and in archaeological literature, it is referred to after different Paleo-Balkan ‘tribes’ or ‘peoples’ – e.g., Paeonians, Thracians, Illyrians. The most prominent is its characteristic connections with the Mediterranean world, which are visible in almost all aspects of locally produced objects and structures, in numerous Greek and Macedonian imports, and overall similarities of the locally produced material culture on this vast territory.

Beginning in the early 2000s, Petar Popović has dedicated almost two decades of his career to excavations and interpretation of the site Kale-Krševica, located to the south of Vranje in southern Serbia (*e.g.*, Popović 2006; 2012). This fortified Iron Age settlement is very unusual compared to other Iron Age sites in modern-day Serbia (*see* above). Yet, it is very similar to all contemporary settlements in Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Northern Greece (*see* Nankov 2011; 2015; Popov 2015; Mitrevski 2016) as it represents one of the most prominent manifestations of these ‘Hellenised’ phenomenon in the southern Balkans (Vranić 2022).

Kale-Krševica is located on and around a small hill (Kale), covers an area of around 5 hectares (with less than 5% being excavated), and is divided into several zones or parts of the settlement: the ‘acropolis’, the ‘slopes’ and the ‘suburbium’ (Popović 2005; 2006; 2007; 2012). The ‘acropolis’ is located on a plateau and it is enclosed by a massive stone rampart and a deep wide trench oriented towards Mt Rujen. Besides some earlier prehistoric finds, the earliest structures and objects belonging to the ‘Hellenised’ phase are discovered at the ‘acropolis’ and they are dated to the final years of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. At this moment, a few domestic structures with inner yards were built along a street-like communication (*see* Vranić in this volume). The finds of Attic red-figure late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC pottery are important since they provide some crucial temporal and regional context for the earliest buildings. During the entire 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Kale-Krševica ‘acropolis’ withstood some significant changes resulting from intensive building campaigns featuring various domestic and public structures, which changed the site’s appearance several times. The architecture consisted of broken stone foundations, wattle and doubt walls (maybe some adobe) and roof tiles.

At the end of this century, significant architectural changes also took place at the ‘suburbium’ of the Kale-Krševica site. Here, Petar Popović discovered probably the most prominent structure – a massive subterranean barrel vaulted ashlar masonry water reservoir (measuring 9.68m long × 5.74m wide externally, and 9.48×5.26m internally), built following the architectural principles used in Macedonian and Thracian royal burial chambers. This structure sits in the middle of a large fortified complex consisting of several buildings, two ramparts, many post holes and bearings for horizontal wooden beams cut into the slope of the Kale hill, as well as numerous domed bread ovens and pits. The purpose of this ‘hydro-complex,’ as it is labelled in the literature, was to provide a safe place for food production on a massive scale in at least a dozen bread ovens conveniently located near the water reservoir, tapping into a subterranean aquifer (Popović 2009; Popović, Vukadinović 2011; Vranić 2019).

**The issue of Damastion:** The location of the enigmatic city of Damastion is a very prominent topic in Popović’s research. Strabo mentioned Damastion and its mining activities twice, saying that the silver mines belonging to this city were situated in the hinterland of Epidamnos and Apollonia, further to the east, somewhere in the Illyrian realm (7. 7. 8). In another passage (8. 6. 16), Strabo also says that by

the end of the 5th century BC, Greeks from the island of Aegina and the Chalcidicean city of Mende had founded the city Damastion near the silver mines in Illyria (Popović, Vranić 2013). Petar Popović strongly believes that the issue of the location of Damastion could not be answered without taking into consideration the Kale-Krševica site (Popović 2012). One of the main reasons behind this belief, besides the appearance of the discovered material culture and settlement planning, was an already established proposal that Damastion due to the position of the silver ore in the Balkans should be located in modern-day Kosovo and Metohija (e.g., Ujes 2002). If so, Kale-Krševica appears to be the most prominent unnamed ancient settlement in this general area, and definitely, the one that shows the most direct contact with the Greek world, especially with the Chalcidicean region that was important in Strabo's story.

To this day, unfortunately, Petar Popović has not been able to prove that Kale-Krševica is indeed the ancient mining city of Damastion. Some indications are going in favour of his claims and yet others contradict it, and we will not go any further into this discussion here. What needs to be underlined is that when it comes to the discovered locally produced material culture at Kale-Krševica (objects and structures alike), it is very difficult to find anything that does not have a very direct technological and stylistic analogy in northern Greece during the same period. Combining this information with the location of ore deposits in the region, Popović's hypothesis about the location of Damastion at Kale-Krševica seems more probable. On the other hand, the fact that this site is not unique when compared to other fortified settlements discovered nearby, in North Macedonia and Bulgaria, it is obvious that further research is needed. This is especially the case when it comes to the segments of this site built after the moment when Damastion stopped producing silver coins during the second half of the fourth century. Namely, the discoveries at the 'suburbium' of the Kale-Krševica site (e.g., the barrel-vaulted reservoir) inevitably bring into the picture the issue of the Macedonian army.

The chapters in this section tackle various diachronic issues concerning communications between prehistoric and historic societies from south-eastern Europe and ancient Greeks and Romans, and the social, economic and cultural consequences of these interrelations. There are contributions covering a long period, from important Bronze Age burials in Monkodonja, Istria, to prominent Early Medieval rings showing some Byzantium traditions. Also, chapters focus on Iron Age silver production, jewellery, the culture of ancient Paeonians, Attic red-figure pottery from Kale-Krševica, Thasian transport amphorae stamps, Philip II's and Alexander the Great's commanders in ancient Thrace, Greek towers in Dalamntia, Gilded wreaths found in unexpected contexts, history of the archaeological discipline in the Balkans, representations of Dionysus and Mars in Roman provinces, Romans on the Adriatic after 476 AD, and 8<sup>th</sup> century AD fibulae with Christian motifs from Dubrovnik.

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