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NEW CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE EARLY IRON AGE STRATIGRAPHY AT THE SITE OF HISAR IN LESKOVAC (Sector I)

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Abstract – Archaeological research at the site of Hisar in Leskovac began more than a decade ago and has initiated numerous papers on the relationship between the Mediana and Brnjica cultural groups and cultures that marked the transition from the Bronze to the Early Iron Age in the Central Balkans. This paper seeks to highlight and correct some of the key mistakes which have emerged in the stratigraphic interpretation of this multi-horizon site, and in such a way contribute to the better understanding of cultural movements at the transition from the 2nd to the 1st millennium BC.

Key words - Bronze Age, transition from Bronze to Iron Age, Early Iron Age, black metallurgy, Turović pin.

wenty two years have passed since the first archaeological excavations at the site of Hisar in Leskovac, which produced several papers concerning the stratigraphic problems regarding different topics tied to the finds of material culture from prehistoric and historic periods discovered at this multi-horizon hill fort settlement. Without any doubt, it is an important site which, owing to its position at the rim of the Leskovac valley between the courses of the Jablanica and Veternica rivers, was suitable for continued settlement from the Bronze Age until the 19th century AD, or until the end of the Ottoman domination, which is clearly reflected in its own name, Hisar.

After the initial phase of excavations, initiated in 1994, a new excavation project was conducted by Dr Milorad Stojić from the Archaeological Institute starting from 1999. After four short campaigns (from 1999 until 2005), the largest areas were excavated over se-

veral months in 2006, when course of the excavations were parallel in Sectors I and III (hilltop plateau) (Fig. 1). Some of the finds belong to the Neolithic and Eneolithic, but the cultural stratigraphy is represented by the Late Bronze Age (Brnjica culture Br C/D Ha A1),

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¹ The site of Hisar was first mentioned by Miloje M. Vasić, and the first surveys were conducted by M. Garašanin, while the first systematic excavations in 1994 were conducted by the National Museum in Leskovac and the Archaeological Institute, with the hill-top plateau excavated on that occasion, which is dominant above present day Leskovac; Bogdanović, Jocić and Popović 1995. After that, smaller scale excavations were conducted on the eastern side of the hill, in September 1999, which took place in Sector I, in the road section on the mid point of the eastern slope. Later excavations followed in 2002, 2003 and 2005 over the area of Sector I; Crojuħ 2006. The last excavations were conducted in winter, towards the end of 2007, but only over the area of Sector III, and were also small scale.

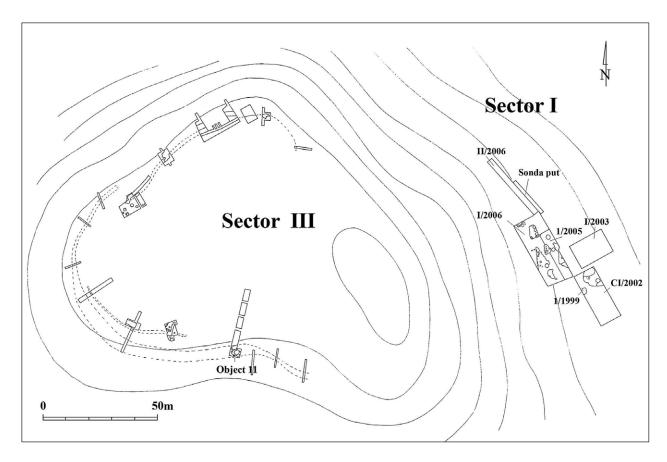


Fig. 1. Hisar site with sectors and investigated space

Сл. 1. Локалишеш Хисар са секшорима и исшраженим йовршинама

Iron Age I (Ha A2–B2) and Iron Age III (6th and 5th centuries BC), Late Antiquity and Middle Age periods.² Prior to the excavations at Hisar, there were an incomparably larger number of known Brnjica group necropoleis, contrary to the markedly low numbers of known settlements, of which only Mediana stands out, so that the existing pottery typology was primarily based upon the finds from burial contexts. Little was known about other, utilitarian pottery. The only secure analogies were offered by the publications of M. Garašanin about Mediana,³ the unpublished PhD dissertation of M. Lazić from 1996, and the publications of A. Bulatović regarding research in the Južna Morava river basin.⁴

The aim of this paper is to underline serious mistakes in the interpretation of finds from the Early Iron Age at Hisar, which were, primarily, as a result of ignoring the influence of natural and anthropogenic processes, such are erosion, the consequences of bombing during the Second World War, as well as insufficient knowledge of prehistoric metallurgy. By ignoring these

parameters it is inevitable that some wrong conclusions were drawn about the cultural stratigraphy of Sector I, from excavations in Trench 1/99 (1999), to 2006 (trenches I and II in Sector I) (Fig. 1).

These mistakes were made by the author of this paper during the interpretation of results from the 1999 campaign,⁵ by ignoring the fact that statistics point to a high percentage of mixed pottery finds with characteristics of Early Brnjica and Late Belegiš II–Gava cultures in the same contexts, or, in all 4 cultural horizons, which were clearly defined in section A–B.⁶ Evidence

² Булатовић, Јовић 2010, 200; Stojić 2006; Stojić 2009; Bulatović 2009; Стојић 2011; Капуран 2009, 94–118; Капуран 2009а.

³ Garašanin 1996.

⁴ Булатовић 1999/2000; Bulatović 2009.

⁵ Trench 1/99, measuring 4 x 4 m, was dug into the steep slope above the road in Sector I. Стојић 2001, 60; Капуран, Стојић 2001.

⁶ Стојић 2001, 60.

for the mixed stratigraphy is indicated not only by percentages in the given tables of diagnostic finds but, as later research would conclude, in several structures (undisturbed units and pottery finds) which were identifiable within the cultural layers in trenches I and II, of Sector I from 2006.

By analysing pottery finds from trench 1/99, in his paper from 2001, A. Kapuran overlooked the fact that strata I – IV could also have emerged as a result of the intense effect of erosion processes which move from the higher points of Hisar Hill (plateau, Sector III), bearing in mind that the trench was opened on the mid point of the steepest slope on the eastern side of the site (Fig. 1).⁷ The almost equal quantitative relationship between the Brnjica and Belegiš II-Gava groups, based on the statistics of bowl type 4 representation, beaker and urn types 3, 4, 5 and 6, best attest to the sedimentation being due to erosion processes.⁸ This oversight also became obvious in 2006, when large scale excavations were conducted in trench I (area of 25 x 8 m), II and the "Road" trench in Sector I.⁹ A. Bulatović and S. Jović, in the monograph "Leskovac", present certain finds of diagnostic pottery from the cultural horizon in Sector I, as well as at Structures 3 and 14, which show that there is no clear boundary between the finds of the Ha A2/B1 and B1/B2 periods. There are even examples in isolated cases where structures with earlier finds are stratigraphically situated above structures characteristic of younger cultural horizons. The only exceptions are the closed units of dug in dwellings and shallow pits which belong to the end of the Early Iron Age. 10 This research shows that one of the rare stratigraphically securely defined structures is the already mentioned Structure 14, in which, one next to another, an iron axe (a flat axe with "wings") and a hollow cast bronze socked-axe were found, which date to the Ha B/B2, or the 9th century BC, at the earliest. 11

The 2006 excavations in Sector I led to the discovery of one above-ground dwelling structure (designated as Structure 44+17/06) (Fig. 2) which is, based on pottery finds from its floor, dated to the Ha A2–B1, as previously stated by Bulatović and Jović. ¹² In a small depression dug into the soil bed (Structure 33/06) (Fig. 2), or a levelled house floor, pottery of the older Brnjica phase from the end of Bronze Age (Pl. II/1–4) was discovered together with Iron Age pottery from the Ha A2–B1 (Pl. II/5–9). A group of pottery was found on the southern rim of the preserved house floor (Structure 29) where, among mixed finds of Brnjica (Pl. I/1–4) and channelled pottery (Pl. I/5–12) in the

VIIIth excavation level, a conical bowl decorated with sloped channels typical of the 11th and 10th centuries BC, according to Bulatović (Fig. 2), was also found *in situ*. ¹³ Such a channelled bowl, which was laying on its base, represents a *terminus anti quem* for the start of the settlement in Sector I. Concerning Sector III at the upper Hisar plateau, it is without doubt that an older settlement with dug-in dwellings across that area, the closed units of which contained exclusively early Brnjica pottery, which is best illustrated in Structure 11 (dug-in dwelling). ¹⁴

If we analyse the stratigraphy of the Early Iron Age in Sector I, it is important to look back at one, blandly stated, controversial find, a Turović pin, which is described as "the oldest evidence of iron ore metallurgy" in archaeological literature. 15 In a paper published in 2002, M. Stojić stated that the Turović pin was discovered "at the bottom of the trench 1/99 section", according to the statement from Šćepan Turović, who brought this artefact to the Museum. 16 In his next paper it is then stated that the same artefact comes from "a layer for which relative chronology is securely defined (or that there are no observable dug-ins from younger horizons)", and is dated to the 13th or 12th century BC, ¹⁷ but later dates the same artefacts to the 14th century BC.¹⁸ It is not reliable to treat finds brought to the Museum in the same regard as those from secure archaeological contexts, irrespective of who found and

⁷ Капуран 2001, 95; Стојић 2001, 60.

⁸ Капуран 2001, Т. 1; 2; 4; 5.

⁹ A. Kapuran conducted field excavations at this part of the site, under the direction of Dr M. Stojić.

¹⁰ Stojić 2009, 176.

¹¹ Булатовић, Капуран 2013, 114–115.

¹² Булатовић, Јовић 2000, 200.

 $^{^{13}}$ Булатовић 2010, Табела 5/IIb. Structure 29 was situated within the above-ground dwelling 44+17/06 which A. Kapuran attributed to the Bronze Age, without a complete insight of the pottery material, and guided by the previously accepted statement that the oldest horizon in Sector I is represented by the Late Bronze Age. Капуран 2009, 108-111, сл. 47.

¹⁴ Капуран 2009, 116, Сл. 59, 60.

¹⁵ The artefact has the form of a pin (measurements h=0.645 m and r=0.021 m) made from wrought iron with a very small, almost negligible, percentage of admixtures, having an irregular biconical head with a rectangular cross-section. The body of the pin has a circular cross-section, except one segment below the head (or at the neck) which has a rectangular cross-section.

¹⁶ Стојић 2002, 6.

¹⁷ Stojić 2002, 235.

¹⁸ Стојић 2011, 13-14.

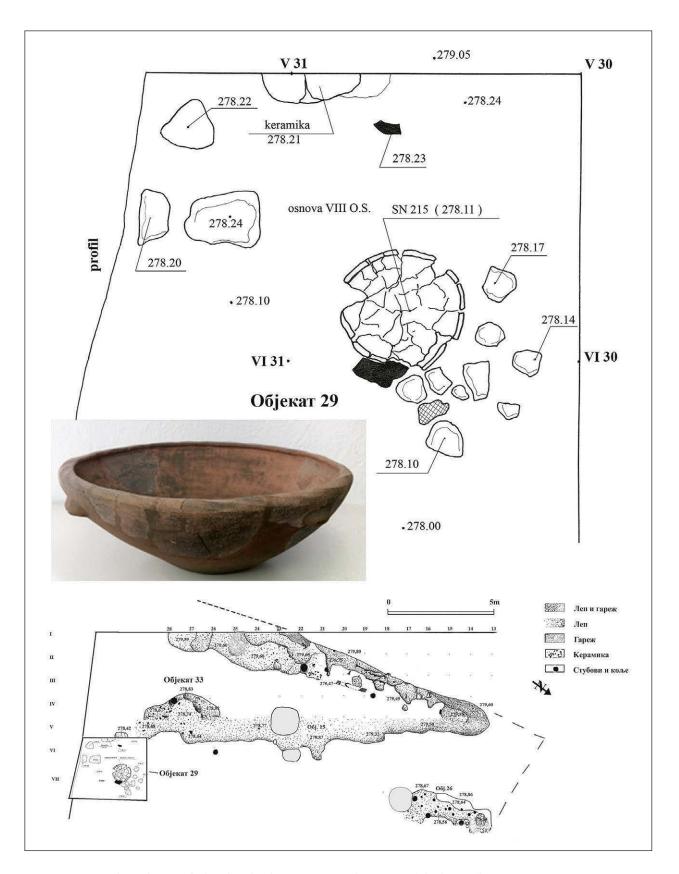


Fig. 2. Sector I, thrench 1/2006, detail with Object No. 29 and remains of the house flore

 $\mathit{Cл.}\ 2.\ \mathit{Cek}\overline{\mathit{u}}$ ор $\mathit{I},\ \mathit{cohga}\ 1/2006,\ \mathit{ge}\overline{\mathit{u}}$ аљ $\mathit{ca}\ \mathit{Oбjek}\overline{\mathit{u}}$ ом $\mathit{29}\ \mathit{u}\ \overline{\mathit{u}}$ одница куће

brought them, especially considering that Š. Turović volunteered at the site during the 1999 campaign. ¹⁹

During 2003 and 2005, M. Stojić focuses further archaeological excavations on the area where the pin was allegedly "discovered" (Fig. 1/Trench 2005). The results of these excavations from 2006, are represented by photos of the bases of "metallurgic" furnaces (from the end of the Bronze Age) and metal slag, and also mentions various pounders, which could have had the function of preparing the iron ore for further smelting processes.²⁰ The very fact that the furnace bases are surrounded with metal slag is not evidence enough to confirm the installations were for ore smelting, because of the greater influence of erosion in this sector. In photos 8 and 9 in the same paper, 21 in front of the "metallurgic furnaces", at the lower levels, there are no observable pits or tailings, into which hot slag and the remains of burning would have been deposed, as an inevitable by product of ore smelting. The statement that the metallurgic furnaces had calotte shaped roofs raises further confusion,²² and we can say it is the only case of this kind of furnace from prehistory, since the only previously known form is that of an angled cylinder with an open top, which Tylecot and Pleiner illustrate with numerous publications concerning prehistoric metallurgy.²³ The author of the research presents photos of iron finds, which he states were discovered on the base of a "furnace with a calotte roof", but they are typologicaly uncertain and could belong to other, possibly younger cultures, the presence of which is attested to in Sector I (house floors from the early Byzantine period, and pits and kilns from the Middle Ages).²⁴ We are also lacking key information about the precise location of these furnaces, their absolute heights and at least one technical drawing of the situation in which they were found. We also consider that, in order to draw any conclusions regarding prehistoric iron (black) metallurgy, a key point to consider is the physical and chemical analysis of slags. The find of "iron cake" represented in photo 5a has no defined archaeological context, and was discovered using a metal detector just below the soil bed in the area of the "Road" trench, which is some 50 m from the discovered furnaces.²⁵ The relative chronology of these metallurgic structures, as with the entire horizon (Bronze Age 14th–13th century BC), is illustrated by the author with a fragment of painted "Mycenaean" pottery, after which he publishes the same pottery fragment as a find from the 5th century BC, or from the end of the Early Iron Age.²⁶

As a result of everything stated here we can assume that the "reputation that Šćepan Turović enjoys in the National Museum in Leskovac", cannot be a reason to accept his statements unreservedly. The physical and chemical analysis to which the Turović pin was exposed, and the EDXRF method, 27 also cannot represent a valid argument on its own that this is a unique case of early iron metallurgy in the Central Balkans. The analogies that Stojić offers, ²⁸ only have similarities with the Turović pin in their length, but it should be taken into account that they come from clear contexts, the tumulus in Borovsko and Maravić at Glasinac (Fig. 4/1,2),²⁹ or the bronze hoards on the territory of Slovakia³⁰ and Hungary.³¹ They are all made from bronze and mostly decorated with incisions (although there are also undecorated examples). The pins from Glasinac and Slovakia have decorated heads and circular section expansions on the neck, while the Turović pin has a head and an expansion of a rectangular shape. Concerning the analogies with Iglarevo,³² it can be openly stated that they do not have anything to do with the Turović pin, but exclusively with pins found at the necropolis in Donja Brnjica (Fig. 4/3,4).

Maybe the origin of the Turović pin should be sought in the Ottoman period in the Central Balkans since, according to its length, material and method of smithing, it is most similar to dervish needles, with

¹⁹ From a conversation with members of the archaeological team, Š. Turović could, in those circumstances, ascertain what kinds of finds have value for the study of the Early Iron Age. However, the greatest doubt is cast by the fact that, after the end of excavations, Š. Turović conducted illegal excavations on his own in the same trench which was previously back-filled, in which he, according to his statement, found the needle. During 2006 another, almost identical iron pin appeared, for which the other discoverer says that it was discovered several km from Hisar; Stojić 2006: 107, Fig. 7.

²⁰ Stojić 2006, 108.

²¹ Stojić 2006, Figs. 8 and 9; In photo 5a, a piece of slag of semi spherical cross-section and large measurements can be observed.

²² Stojić 2006, 107.

²³ Tylecot 1987; Pleiner 2000, Fig. 33.

²⁴ Stojić 2006, 107, Fig. 3–5.

²⁵ Stojić 2006, Fig. 5a.

²⁶ Stojić 2009, 178: Fig. 29.

²⁷ Стојић 2002, 6.

²⁸ Стојић 2011, 14.

²⁹ Benac i Čović 1956, T. XXVII/9, 21; XXXI/2, 20; XXVIII/5.

³⁰ Říhovský 1983, 6/80–85.

³¹ Movotna 180, T. 24/568–678; T. 24–25; T. 35/707, 714–715.

³² Љуци 1998, 171/1–3.



Fig. 3. a) Turović needle (drawing by M. Savković); b–c) Illustrations of the dervish rituals Сл. 3. a) Туровићева иїла (цршао М. Савковић); b–c) илусшрације дервишких ришуала

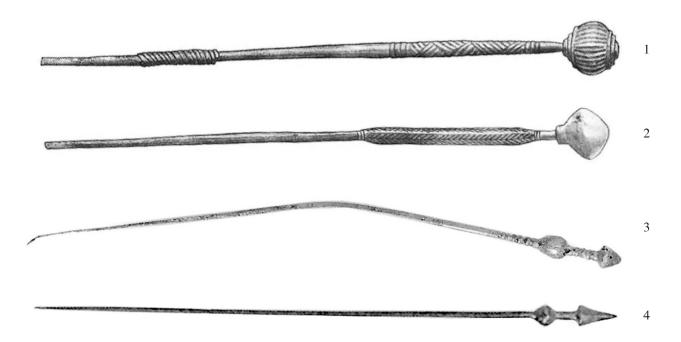


Fig. 4. 1, 2) Glasinac (drawings by H. Wolfart); 3, 4) Iglarevo (photo by V. Popović) Сл. 4. 1, 2) Гласинац (цршала Х. Волфарш); 3, 4) Иїларево (фошоїрафије В. Пойовић)

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which members of this order pierced themselves during ritual trances (Fig. 3/b–c). The smithing technique, as a process in which almost all the oxygen is removed, which prevents corrosion (and reduces the risk of blood poisoning), favours this assumption. We can observe a similar technique on the find of an iron pin of large measurements discovered in Pazarište, a northern suburb of the Ottoman fortified town of Svrljig.³³

Finally, we can conclude that in Sector I of Hisar in Leskovac there are no structures from the older Brnjica

culture of the Late Bronze Age and that there are is secure evidence regarding iron metallurgy from the 14th century BC, or prehistory in general.³⁴ Additionally, the Turović needle should not be used as evidence of early iron metallurgy. On the other hand, numerous finds point to metallurgy from historical epochs, which do not diminish the importance of this multi-horizon site in the history of the Central Balkans.

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³³ Petrović, Filipović i Milojević 2012, Fig. 13; S. Milojević included this pin, about 1 m long, in the homeland collection of Svrljig, as inventory number 1190. If it is, in any case, true that the Turović pin was found in Trench 1/99, we have to stress that this area was a suburb of the Ottoman fort situated in Sector III at Hisar.

³⁴ Stojić 2008, 80.

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НОВИ ПРИЛОЗИ ЗА СТРАТИГРАФИЈУ СТАРИЈЕГ ГВОЗДЕНОГ ДОБА НА ЛОКАЛИТЕТУ ХИСАР У ЛЕСКОВЦУ (Сектор I)

Къучне речи. – бронзано доба, прелазни период из бронзаног у гвоздено доба, старије гвоздено доба, црна металургија, Туровићева игла.

После више од две деценије истраживања на локалитету Хисар у Лесковцу показала се потреба за ревизијом неких закључака као и гледишта на културну стратиграфију овог вишеслојног локалитета на коме је констатовано насеље из позног бронзаног доба (брњичка културна група Вг С/D На А1), гвозденог доба I (На А2–В2) и гвозденог доба III (VI–V век пре н. е.), касне антике и средњег века. Циљ овога рада јесте да се укаже на озбиљне грешке које су у првом реду настале услед пренебрегавања утицаја разних фактора – природних и антропогених процеса, ерозија, последица бомбардовања из II св. рата, као и недовољног познавања технологије праисторијске металургије – који су довели до низа погрешних закључака о културној стратиграфији на Сектору I, и то почевши од истраживања из 1999. године па до оних из 2006. (сл. 1).

Почетничке грешке у интерпретацији резултата из кампање 1999. године начинио је аутор овога рада стога што није обратио пажњу на чињеницу да постоји висок проценат помешаних налаза керамичке продукције са карактеристикама и брњичке и Белегиш II-Гава културе у истим контекстима, односно у сва 4 културна хоризонта, који су се прилично јасно оцртавали на профилу А-В. Анализирајући у свом раду из 2001. године керамичке налазе из сонде 1/99, А. Капуран није узео у обзир чињеницу да су стратуми I–IV могли настати и дејством интензивних ерозионих процеса који иду из правца виших кота брда Хисар (платоа Сектора III), будући да се сонда налазила на средишњем делу најстрмије падине са источне стране локалитета (сл. 1). Ова грешка постала је очигледна тек 2006. године, када су предузета обимна истраживања сонди I (површине 25 m x 8 m) и II те сонде Пут на Сектору І. Истраживања из 2006. године показала су да једини сигуран и стратиграфски дефинисан објекат из старијих хоризоната представља Објекат 14, у коме су се, једна поред друге, налазиле секира од гвожђа (тип пљоснате секире са крилцима) и шупља бронзана секира келт, која се датује најраније у На В/В2, односно у 9. век пре н. е.

Истраживања на Сектору I из 2006. године довела су до открића надземног стамбеног објекта (означеног као Обј. 44+17/06) (сл. 2) који, према налазима керамике на његовој основи, припада На А2–В1 – као што су претходно констатовали Булатовић и Јовић. У мањој депресији у здравици (Објекат 33/06) (сл. 2), која је уједно представљала газну површину у кући, у истом контексту откривена је керамика старије фазе Брњице са краја бронзаног доба (Т. II/1–4) и гвозденог доба На А2–В1 (Т. II/5–9). На јужном делу пода куће налазила се група керамике (Објекат 29) и у њој је, међу измешаним налазима брњичке (Т. I/1–4) и канеловане

керамике (Т. I/5–12), у VIII о. с. in situ откривена конична здела украшена косим канелурама карактеристичним за XI и X век пре н. е. – према Булатовићу (сл. 2).

Контроверзни налаз Туровићеве игле, као пример "најстарије металургије гвожђа", такође треба критички и у реалном светлу сагледати и притом узети у обзир наведене грешке. У раду из 2002. године М. Стојић наводи да је Туровићева игла откривена "у дну профила сонде 1/99" - према наводима Шћепана Туровића, који је овај предмет донео у Музеј. Већ у следећем раду наводи се да исти предмет потиче "из слоја чија је релативна хронологија поуздано утврђена (тј. нема видљивих укопавања из млађих хоризоната)", и датује се "у XIII или XII век пре н. е.", да би у следећем раду исти предмет био датован у XIV век пре н. е. Током 2003. и 2005. године, археолошка истраживања била су фокусирана на простор око места где је игла наводно "пронађена" (сл. 1/сонда 2005). Као резултати тих истраживања презентоване су у раду из 2006. године фотографије са основама "металуршких" пећи (са краја бронзаног доба), затим металичне шљаке, као и бројни растирачи који могу да се користе у фази припреме руде гвожђа за даљи процес топљења. Забуну изазива и тврдња да металуршке пећи поседују калоту, што је неуобичајен, а можемо рећи и јединствен случај за топионичарске пећи из праисторије, будући да је до сада позната једино форма закошеног цилиндра без калоте, што Tylecot и Pleiner илуструју у радовима везаним за праисторијску металургију. Као налази од гвожђа приказано је неколико предмета који су се такође налазили на подницама пећи са калотом, али они типолошки могу припадати и другим, хронолошки млађим културама на Сектору I. Такође, остали смо ускраћени за кључне информације о прецизнијој убикацији ових објеката, о надморским висинама, за фотографије затечене ситуације или за неки технички цртеж. Сматрамо да би за закључак да је у питању праисторијска металургија гвожђа потребно извршити физичко-хемијске анализе шљака, од којих иначе комад представљен на фотографији 5а нема прецизно дефинисан археолошки контекст и нађен је веома близу здравице на простору сонде Пут, око 50 m даље од наведених пећи. Можда порекло Туровићеве гвоздене игле треба тражити у периоду турске доминације на централном Балкану, будући да према димензијама, материјалу и техници ковања највише сличности показује са дервишким иглама којима су се припадници дервишког реда пробадали у ритуалном трансу. У прилог овој тврдњи можемо навести налаз гвоздене игле великих димензија нађене на простору опустелог насеља Пазариште, у северном подграђу турског утврђења Сврљиг-град.

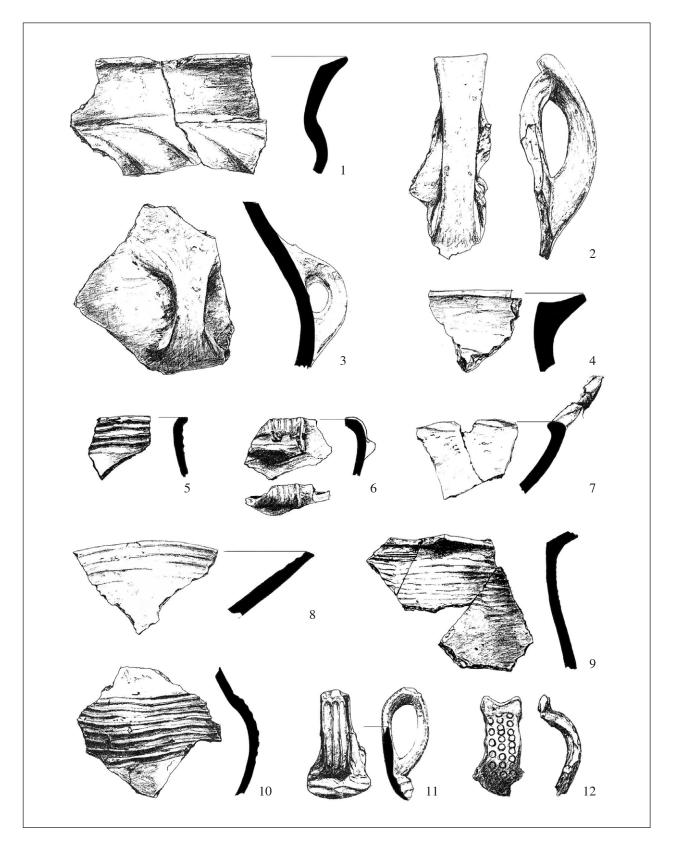


Plate I – Object No. 29: 1–4) Early Brnjica type cerramic; 5–12) Ha A2–B1 cerramic finds (drawings by M. Stojić) Табла I – Објекаш 29: 1–4) Керамика сшарије фазе брњичке трупе; 5–12) Керамика На А2–В1 периода (црпала М. Стојић)

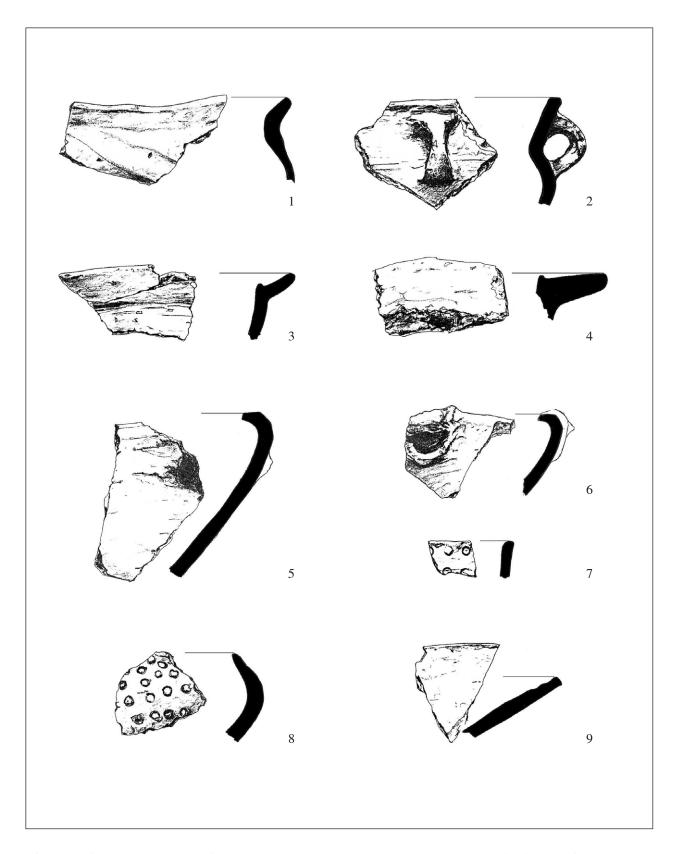


Plate II — Object No. 33: 1—4) Early Brnjica type cerramic; 5—9) Ha A2—B1 cerramic finds (drawings by M. Stojić) Табла II — Објекаш 33: 1—4) Керамика сшарије фазе брњичке їруйе; 5—9) Керамика На А2—В1 йериода (цршала М. Сшојић)