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САДРЖАЈ – SOMMAIRE

РАСПРАВЕ – ETUDES

Miloš JEVTIĆ, Momir CERVIĆ Circular Enclosure from the Early Copper Age in North-Western Serbia Site of <i>Šančina</i> in Desić, near Šabac (excavations 2017–2019)	9
Милош ЈЕВТИЋ, Момир ЦЕРОВИЋ Кружни земљани објекат из раног бакарног доба у северозападној Србији. Локалитет Шанчина у Десићу код Шапца (истраживања 2017–2019)	44
Aleksandar KAPURAN, Mario GAVRANOVIĆ, Igor JOVANOVIĆ Bronze Age Burials within the Morava, Nišava and Timok Basins	45
Александар КАПУРАН, Марио ГАВРАНОВИЋ, Игор ЈОВАНОВИЋ Сахрањивање у сливовима Мораве, Тимока и Нишаве током бронзаног доба	71
Vojislav FILIPOVIĆ, Aleksandar BULATOVIĆ, Rada GLIGORIĆ Mound 28 from the Paulje Necropolis in Brezjak. A Contribution to the Absolute Chronology of the Late Bronze Age in Serbia	73
Војислав ФИЛИПОВИЋ, Александар БУЛАТОВИЋ, Рада ГЛИГОРИЋ Хумка 28 са некрополе Пауље у Брезјаку. Прилог апсолутној хронологији позног бронзаног доба у Србији	88
Marko DIZDAR, Asja TONC Late La Tène Fibulae of the Rakitno Type – Evidence of Contacts Between the Western Balkans and the Southern Part of the Carpathian Basin	91
Марко ДИЗДАР, Асја ТОНЦ Каснолатенске фибуле типа Ракитно – Сведочанство контаката западнога Балкана и јужнога дела Карпатске котлине	106
Aurel RUSTOIU The “Dacian” Silver Hoards from Moesia Superior. Transdanubian Cultural Connections in the Iron Gates Region from Augustus to Trajan	109
Аурел РУСТОЈУ „Дачке” оставе сребра из Горње Мезије. Прекодунавске културне везе у области Ђердапа од Августа до Трајана	131
Ljubomir JEVTIĆ Production of Ceramic Building Material in Ancient Viminacium	133
Љубомир ЈЕВТОВИЋ Производња керамичког грађевинског материјала у античком Виминацијуму	154

Bojana PLEMIĆ, Adam N. CRNOBRNJA A New Review of the Topography and Typology of the Danubian Horsemen Lead Icons in the South-Eastern Part of Pannonia Inferior	155
Бојана ПЛЕМИЋ, Адам Н. ЦРНОБРЊА Нови осврт на топографско-типолошку заступљеност оловних плочица култа подунавских коњаника у југоисточном делу Доње Паноније	170
Nadežda GAVRILOVIĆ VITAS, Dan DANA Zeus and Hera <i>Souideptēnoi</i> : The Sanctuary at Belava Mountain near Turres/Pirot	181
Надежда ГАВРИЛОВИЋ ВИТАС, Дан ДАНА Зевс и Хера <i>Souideptēnoi</i> : светилиште на планини Белава код Пирота/ <i>Turres</i>	216
Milijan DIMITRIJEVIĆ, John WHITEHOUSE The Vicinal Road Between Sirmium and the Great Canal of Probus. Exploring Roman Roads in the Glac Study Area	217
Миљан ДИМИТРИЈЕВИЋ, Џон ВАЈТХАУС Вицинални пут између Сирмијума и великог Пробовог канала. Испитивање римских путева у оквиру истраживачког подручја Пројекта Глац	251
Miša RAKOCIJA A Marble Statue from Niš of an Early Byzantine Imperial Woman	253
Миша РАКОЦИЈА Мермерна статуа рановизантијске царске жене из Ниша	266
Florin MĂRGINEAN, Erwin GÁLL “ <i>The Outskirts of the Khagan</i> ”. The First “Avar” Conquerors in the Lower Mureş in Light of the Graves from Pecica “Est/Smart Diesel”: Archaeological and ¹⁴ C Analyses	267
Florin MĂRGINEAN, Erwin GÁLL „ <i>Die Aussenbezirke des Khagan</i> ”. Die ersten „Avar“-Eroberer im unteren Mureş im Licht der Gräber von Pecica „Est/Smart Diesel”: Archäologische und ¹⁴ C-Analysen	288
Kewin PECHE-QUILICHINI Les vaiselles produites dans le nord de la Corse vers 1600 apr. J.-C. : l’exemple de la tour littorale de L’Osari (Belgodère, Haute-Corse)	301
Kewin PECHE-QUILICHINI Locally Produced Northern Corsica Vessels of Around 1600 AD: Example from the Coastal Tower of L’Osari (Belgodère, Haute-Corse)	326
ПРИЛОЗИ – APERÇUS	
Dragoljub BOROJEVIĆ Natural Environment as an Influencing Factor for the Architecture of the Dinaric and Carpathian Log Cabin	337
Драгољуб БОРОЈЕВИЋ Природно окружење као фактор утицаја на архитектонику динарске брвнаре и брвнаре на Карпатима	352

КРИТИЧКИ ПРИКАЗИ – COMPTES RENDUS CRITIQUES

Ivan BUGARSKI

- Jozef Zábojník, Július Béreš, Pohrebisko z obdobia avarského kaganátu vo Valalikoch-Všechsvätých. Archeologica Slovaca Monographiae – Studia Instituti Archaeologici Nitriensis Academiae Scientiarum Slovacae Tomus XXVI, Archeologický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, Nitra 2016 (+ CD-ROM);
Jozef Zábojník, Pohrebisko z obdobia avarského kaganátu v Obide. Archeologica Slovaca Monographiae – Studia Instituti Archaeologici Nitriensis Academiae Scientiarum Slovacae Tomus XXVI, Archeologický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, Bratislava – Nitra 2019 (+ CD-ROM) 353

IN MEMORIAM

Мая ЖИВИЇ

- Ана Премк (1937–2022) 371

- Editorial Policy and Submission Instructions for the *Starinar* Journal 373**

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BRONZE AGE BURIALS WITHIN THE MORAVA, NIŠAVA AND TIMOK BASINS

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Abstract. – Following more than seven decades of research on the Bronze Age cremation burial grounds in the territory of Serbia, the new absolute dates provide us with an opportunity to determine a more precise chronological sequence of different local cultural manifestations. Although the pioneers of the Serbian archaeology after WWII defined the main cultural trajectories that led to the establishment of cremation as the main burial rite during the 2nd millennium BC, several misconceptions were established that need to be corrected, considering new data. We regard this paper as our contribution to the better understanding of the cultural and chronological sequence in the Central Balkans during the Bronze Age.

Key words. – Central Balkans, Bronze Age, burials, cremation, burial rite, urns, absolute dates

The basins of the Morava, Timok, and Nišava rivers are located in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula.¹ The area is bordered to the north by the Carpathian Massif and the Pannonian Plain, to the west by the West Morava river, to the east by the Wallachian Plain, and finally, to the south by the Nišava region and Stara Planina (Map 1).

Following WWII, D. and M. Garašanin started the first investigations on the Bronze Age cremation burial sites in central Serbia at sites such as Dobrača near Kragujevac,² Belotić and Bela Crkva,³ and Gloždak near Paraćin.⁴ The discovery of further sites within the Morava Basin and its tributaries, such as Rutevac,⁵ Đurinac and Dvorište near Despotovac⁶ and Maćija near Ražanj,⁷ led to the definition of the Paraćin group of the Bronze Age.⁸ The main characteristics of this distinct cultural phenomenon are the practice of exclusive cremation, ceramic urns and the occasional use of stone circular constructions in burial architecture. Urn cemeteries with similar finds and circular stone constructions were also later uncovered at the sites of Rajkinac near Jagodina⁹ and Mađilka near Pirot.¹⁰ Due

to the limited scope of the excavations, delayed publications and inadequate storage of anthropological remains, our knowledge about the Paraćin group remained restricted. The basic chronological division in the phases Paraćin I and Paraćin II, as proposed by M. Garašanin, draws upon the ceramic typology according to which graves with channelled vessels represent the younger stage, with an assumed range between the 15th and 13th century BC.¹¹ It is worth pointing out that in one of the early studies of D. Garašanin she

¹ Cvijić 1991, 199.

² Garašanin, Garašanin 1950; Garašanin 1958.

³ Garašanin, Garašanin 1958.

⁴ Garašanin 1958a; Garašanin 1983.

⁵ Todorović, Simović 1959.

⁶ Trbuhović 1961.

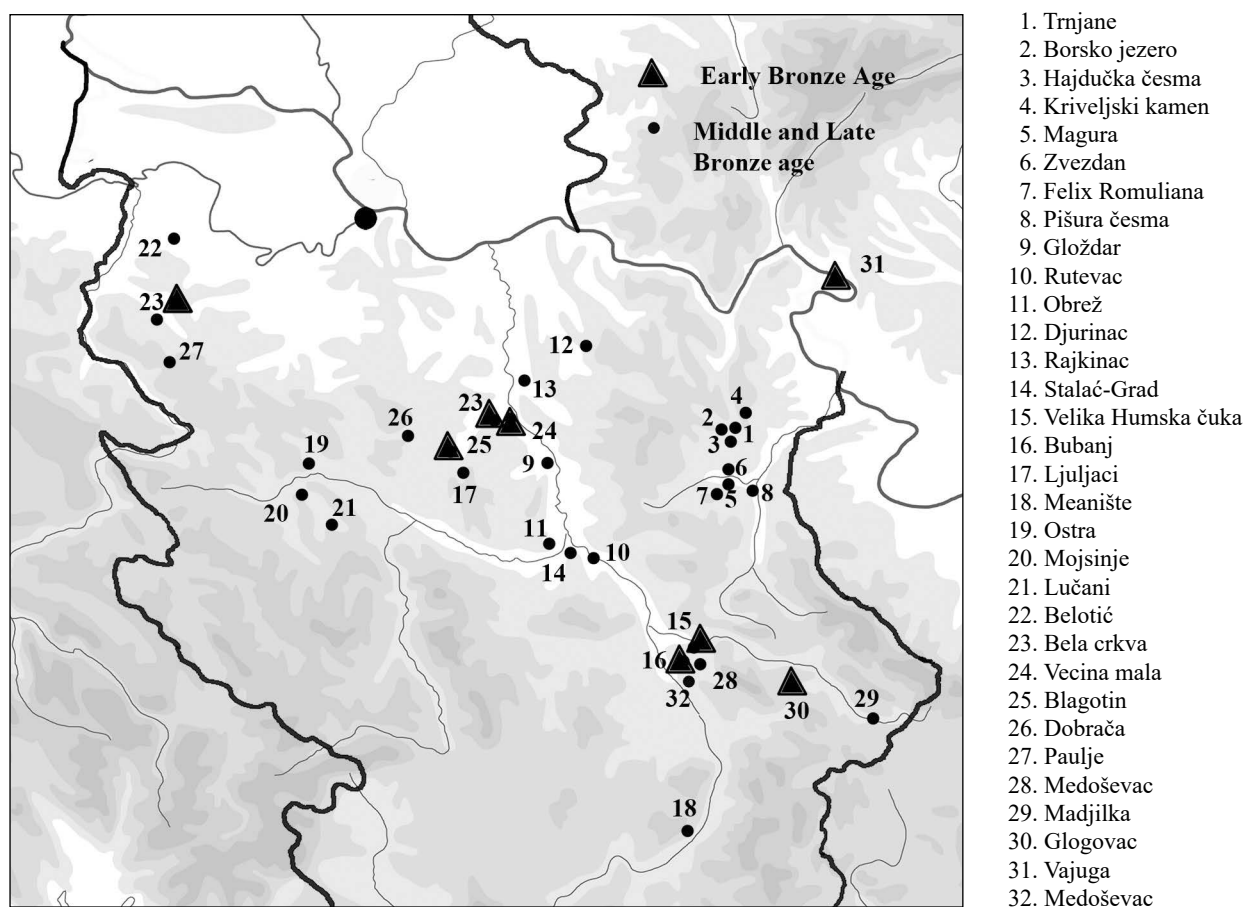
⁷ Tasić 1965.

⁸ Garašanin 1983; Peković 2007.

⁹ Stojić 1980.

¹⁰ Jevtić 1990.

¹¹ Garašanin 1983.



Map 1. Early and Middle Bronze Age burials in the Morava, Timok and Nišava Basins

Карта 1. Гробови раној и средњеј бронзане доба у сликовима Мораве, Тимока и Нишаве

stressed that the emergence of urn cemeteries of the Paraćin group precedes the beginning of the Urnfield culture in central Europe and is, therefore, not directly connected with this Pan-European phenomenon.¹²

In the territory downstream of the Danube river near Đerdap, within the Ključ region (“Konjska glava”), a series of discoveries of burial grounds with urn graves were made in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. Before that, M. Vasić published the finds from the site of Kličevac, also situated on the Danube bank, with an urn cemetery of the Middle Bronze Age.¹³ The banks of the Danube also host some other sites, including Glamija, near Korbovo¹⁴ with pottery indicative of the Žuto Brdo–Gárla Mare group as the most eastern branch of a large complex of Transdanubian encrusted pottery.¹⁵ Urn graves with incrustrated pottery were also discovered at the site of Pesak, near Korbovo.¹⁶ During the excavations of the Roman fortification of Taliata, further urn graves with incrustrated pottery

of the Žuto Brdo–Gárla Mare group as well as urn graves with channelled pottery assigned to a subsequent cultural complex known as Gáva–Beleğiš II, were recorded.¹⁷ Rescue excavations in the 1980s resulted in the discovery of the sites of Konopište (known as Mala Vrbica–Livade in the literature) with both Žuto Brdo–Gárla Mare and Gáva–Beleğiš II urn graves,¹⁸ Vajuga–Selište (urn cemetery) and Vajuga–Pesak (inhumation graves from the Early Iron Age).¹⁹

¹² Garašanin 1958b.

¹³ Vasić 1953.

¹⁴ Krstić 1983; Krstić 2003.

¹⁵ Şandor-Chicideanu 2003; Reich 2006; Kiss 2012.

¹⁶ Cermanović 1960; Letica 1975; Radojčić 1986.

¹⁷ Bulatović et al. 2013, 82.

¹⁸ Vukmanović 1983; Popović 1998; Đorđević 2019.

¹⁹ Premk et al. 1984; Popović, Vukmanović 1998.

The first discoveries of Bronze Age urn cemeteries within the Timok Basin in north-eastern Serbia occurred a few decades later. Apart from scarce data on urns, which were brought to the National Museum in Zaječar from the sites of Pišura Česma in Zaječar and Zvezdan–Tekstilni kombinat, the first archaeologically documented cremation graves were found in 1984 in the proximity of building “E” of the Felix Romuliana Imperial Palace.²⁰ Between 1986 and 1988, B. Jovanović and I. Janković investigated the urn cemetery at Trnjane, located 8 km west of the city of Bor.²¹ Further urn cemeteries in Magura near Felix Romuliana,²² Borsko Jezero and Hajdučka česma came to light in the 1990s.²³ The beginning of the 21st century was marked by new research at the Borsko Jezero site, the discovery of the Kriveljski Kamen–Bunar cemetery²⁴ and the onset of the systematic investigation of the Hajdučka Česma cemetery.²⁵ The main characteristic of the urn cemeteries in north-eastern Serbia near the city of Bor, is the regular presence of stone circular constructions around the urns, as well as a paucity of grave goods, with only sporadic metal objects or smaller vessels occurring in urns or within the stone constructions. Regarding the regional and cultural classification, the urn necropolises in north-eastern Serbia were considered a regional subgroup of the Paraćin group²⁶ or as a distinct cultural manifestation called the *Gamzigradska group*, according to D. Srejšović and M. Lazić.²⁷ Since no absolute dates were available for any of these sites, B. Jovanović estimated a Late Bronze Age dating, or more precisely a period between the 14th and the 11th century BC, assuming a relationship to the European Urnenfelder culture.²⁸

Several decades after a series of discoveries made by D. and M. Garašanin and the premature death of D. Srejšović, B. Jovanović and R. Vasić were among the few researchers that thoroughly dealt with Bronze Age burial practices in eastern/north-eastern and Central Serbia.²⁹ Based on the analyses of pottery and burial practices, they outlined several regional groups including the Brnjica group in southern Serbia and North Macedonia, the Paraćin group with two regional subgroups (Morava and Timok subgroups), and the Belegiš group in northern Serbia and Vojvodina. In terms of dating, all of these regional groups were, until recently, associated with the Middle and Late Bronze Age, or the period between the 15th and 11th century BC.³⁰ However, the new absolute dates from north-eastern Serbia have unmistakably demonstrated, at least for this specific region, a much higher age with most of

the urn graves falling into the period between the 20th and 18th century BC.³¹

In this paper, we will first present absolute dates from some of the sites in Central Serbia assigned to the Paraćin group and discuss their relationship with the neighbouring groups. We will also provide an overview of the tradition of the cremation burial rite in the Central Balkans and undertake a closer analysis of typical pottery of the Bronze Age regional groups that practiced cremation and deposition of cremated remains in urns.

Burial rite

In general, burial rituals represent one of the most intimate and sensitive processes within a human community and are, therefore, least susceptible to changes. Based on archaeological facts, it is not easy to determine the period in which cremations became the exclusive burial rite in the territories of the Central Balkans. Among the earliest evidence are the graves at the site of Padina, upstream of Lepenski Vir, with one of them having a bowl typical of the Copper Age Kostolac culture as an urn.³² Given erosion and alluvial sediments severely disturbed most of the graves, it was not clear if the uncovered stone rings near the urns actually belonged to the burial architecture. However, as represented by a grave from Gomolava near Hrtkovci in the region of Srem, communities of the Kostolac group also practiced inhumations.³³ Of note is also an inhumation grave with three individuals from the site of Glogovac near Bela Palnaka in the Nišava Valley, with an absolute date pointing to the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC and, thus, corresponding to

²⁰ Srejšović, Lazić 1997, 229.

²¹ Jovanović, Janković 1990; Jovanović, Janković 1996; Jovanović 1999; Kapuran et al. 2020.

²² Srejšović, Lazić 1997, 228; Lazić 2010; Lazić 2016.

²³ Lazić 2004; Kapuran, Miladinović-Radmilović 2011.

²⁴ Kapuran et al. 2013.

²⁵ Gavranović et al. 2022.

²⁶ Jovanović 1999.

²⁷ Srejšović, Lazić 1997.

²⁸ Jovanović 1999, 71.

²⁹ Jovanović 1999; Vasić 2013.

³⁰ Vasić 2013.

³¹ Kapuran et al. 2020, 52–53; Mehofer et al. 2021; Gavranović et al. 2022.

³² Jovanović 1976, 132.

³³ Jovanović 1976, 132; Petrović 1984, Fig. 28.

the final stages of the Kostolac culture.³⁴ Regarding a broader geographical context, a cremation grave assigned to the Kostolac group was also discovered at the site of Dvorovi in neighbouring north-eastern Bosnia.³⁵ In the same region, two further urn burials from the Copper Age (Kostolac and Baden cultures) with absolute dates indicating the 28th and 26th century BC, became known at the site Novo Selo, near Bijeljina.³⁶ With the current level of research, it can be concluded that within the cultural complex described as the Kostolac culture, both inhumation and cremation were practiced.

Following the Early Bronze Age, the site of Verbicioara in Oltenia (a close neighbouring region northeast of Serbia) also represents a good example of a bi-ritual burial site with inhumation and cremations in urns.³⁷ Grave goods from the skeletal graves included bronze *Noppenrings* and a pin of the Cyprian type, dated to the Br A period.³⁸ On the other hand, C. Schuster considers that during the Bronze Age, skeletal burials prevailed in Muntenia, while incineration was common for the territory of Oltenia.³⁹

It is indicative and highly interesting that one of the earliest cemeteries with exclusive cremations was unearthed in the territory of southern Serbia at the site of Ranutovac, near Vranje.⁴⁰ The excavations revealed two clusters of graves with several interconnected circular stone structures. The remains of one or several cremated individuals were placed in the centre of the stone structures, and after that were covered with ceramic vessels.⁴¹ According to the absolute dates, the cemetery in Ranutovac falls in the time frame between the 22nd and the 19th century BC, making it one of the earliest Bronze Age cremation cemeteries in the Central Balkans.⁴² In this context, it is noteworthy that in the same region of southern Serbia, inhumation seemed to be a prevailing rite in the preceding Late Copper Age, as demonstrated by the mentioned grave find from Glogovac in the Nišava Valley. Hence at the current level of research, it appears valid to presume that the adoption of cremation as a burial rite started by the end of 3rd millennium BC; first among communities in southern Serbia.⁴³ The establishment and diffusion of certain cultural traits that would, in subsequent periods, occur further to the north, would follow thereafter.

The substantial changes that occurred in the Central Balkans by the end of the 3rd millennium can also be traced in a contrasting picture when it comes to the density of archaeological sites from the Late Copper and Early Bronze Ages. For instance, within the area between the Sava, Danube, and Great Morava rivers,

there are a total of 14 sites attributed to the Late Copper Age (Kostolac group),⁴⁴ while for the Early Bronze Age, only sites at Ostrikovac, Vecina Mala, and Blagotin are known thus far.⁴⁵ Even more extreme is the example of north-eastern Serbia (Timok Basin), with 80 registered locations attributed to the Kostolac or regional Coțofeni–Kostolac groups, and practically no sites from the start of the Early Bronze Age.⁴⁶ In western Serbia, within the Jadar and Pocerina regions, there is also an obvious disparity between the total of 17 Late Copper Age sites and only 4 Early Bronze Age sites, even with the addition of two settlements and one necropolis from the start of the Middle Bronze Age (Ostra, Gornja Gorevnica, and Lučani–Kruševlje).⁴⁷ In short, after the Late Copper Age there is a significant decrease of sites in the whole area of the Central Balkans, which indicates a noticeable reduction of population in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC (Map 1).

Currently, the transition between the Late Copper Age and Early Bronze Age is best documented in the tell sites of Bubanj and Velika Humska Čuka, near Niš, with a long-lasting occupation activity from the Early Copper Age until the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁸ A characteristic for the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC is the emergence of a pottery style named Bubanj–Hum IV (after a hiatus in the second half of the 3rd millennium following the previous Bubanj–Hum phase). The fact that the pottery of the Bubanj–Hum IV stage also appears in regions further to the north, between the Danube, the Morava and the Timok Basins, points at an intensification of contacts between the local communities.⁴⁹ It is not to be excluded that

³⁴ Lazić, Ljuština 2017, 130; Bulatović et al. 2020, 1171.

³⁵ Kosorić 1965.

³⁶ Gavranović et al. 2020, 55.

³⁷ Crăciunescu 2004, 72.

³⁸ Berciu 1961, 146, Abb. 16; Vasić 2003, 13.

³⁹ Schuster 2003, 132.

⁴⁰ Bulatović 2020.

⁴¹ Bulatović 2020, Fig. 2.1; Fig. 2.2; Fig. 2.32.

⁴² Bulatović 2020, 95.

⁴³ Bulatović 2020; Cavazutti et al. 2022.

⁴⁴ Nikolić 2000, 9–38.

⁴⁵ Stojić 1986; Nikolić, Kapuran 2003.

⁴⁶ Kapuran, Bulatović 2012, Map. 1.

⁴⁷ Bulatović 2021, Fig. 1.

⁴⁸ Bulatović, Milanović 2020.

⁴⁹ Bulatović 2021, 142–143.

some of these contacts also mirror the movement of specific population groups and occupation of some regions, following the pause after the Late Copper Age. In the case of the Timok Basin, with more than convincing signs of an abandonment after the Late Copper Age, one of the reasons for the possible renewed occupation was the abundance of copper ore sources that became even more attractive with the increasing demand for copper raw material for the growing bronze metallurgy.⁵⁰

North-eastern Serbia – urn cemeteries

Almost three decades after the last excavations by B. Jovanović at the site of Trnjane, the renewed cooperation between the Museum of Mining and Metallurgy in Bor and the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, brought a new research initiative to the Bor region. In the meantime, the research of the Borsko Jezero necropolis was finished in 2002, but the results have still not been sufficiently published.⁵¹ The new impetus for the research started in 2017 within the framework of cooperation between the OREA Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology (now the Austrian Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences), and the research projects; *Visualizing the Unknown Balkans* and *New insight in Bronze Age metal producing societies in the Western and Central Balkans*.⁵²

Based on the recently obtained absolute dates, all of the urn cemeteries in the vicinity of Bor, including Trnjane, Borsko Jezero, Kriveljski Kamen–Bunar, and Hajdučka Česma,⁵³ belong to the earliest stages of the Middle Bronze Age or the period between the 20th and 18th century BC.⁵⁴ Of the same age, are also the associated settlement sites with traces of copper ore processing and metal production in Trnjane (immediately to the west of the cemetery), Ružana and Čoka Njica.⁵⁵ Based on the chronological terminology for the Central Balkans, the sites in the region of Bor are connected with the stage of the Bujanj–Hum IVa – Ljuljaci.⁵⁶ Supportive of the dating into the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age is also an occurrence of a specific shape of two-handled beakers with trapezoidal extensions on the rim, in the Timok Basin.⁵⁷ As demonstrated in the comprehensive studies about the typology, dating and distribution of two-handled beakers, the finds with a trapezoidal extension on the rim are indicative of the early Middle Bronze Age (Bujanj–Hum IV) with northern Greece and North Macedonia as the most probable areas where this type emerged and then gradually spread to the north.⁵⁸ On the other hand, beakers

with button-shaped extensions on the handles appear to be more linked with an area north of the Danube or the Vatin culture.⁵⁹ The finds of beakers with button-shaped extensions from the settlement site of Ljuljaci, near Kragujevac are an obvious example that certain cultural influences from Southern Pannonia also reached the area of the Central Balkans at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.⁶⁰ A two-handled beaker with proto-Vatin characteristics, dated to the Early Bronze Age was also found at the Kruševlje site in Lučani, in western Serbia.⁶¹

Prior to the new research results, the urn cemeteries in north-eastern Serbia near the city of Bor were described as a phenomenon that is associated to the Paraćin group, or more precisely to the regional Timok group.⁶² B. Jovanović came to this conclusion by analysing the pottery from a stylistic and typological point of view and by a comparison of burial practices. With a deeper insight into the ceramic inventory of urn cemeteries near Bor and with a significant amount of the new absolute data, we believe that this opinion needs modification and that new narratives should be created.

⁵⁰ Mehofer et al. 2021.

⁵¹ Lazić 2004, 109; Kapuran, Miladinović-Radmilović 2011.

⁵² Thanks to the cooperation as well as the professional, logistical, and financial help of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, we have acquired important data through geophysical prospection (geomagnetic measurements and LIDAR scans), physical and chemical analyses of metal slags, and radiocarbon absolute dates. The project “*Visualizing the unknown Balkans*” was supported by the Innovation Fund “Research, Science and Society” of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (PI: B. Horejs and M. Gavranović). The project “*New insight in Bronze Age metal producing societies in the western and central Balkans*” was supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) P 32095 (PI: M. Gavranović).

⁵³ It is highly possible that an urn cemetery also existed at the site of Šoka Lu Patran. Fragments of urns and burnt human remains were found within the depot of the Museum of Mining and Metallurgy in Bor by I. Jovanović. No additional data on the research, such as diaries, inventories, or technical documentation is available. Based on information from the estate owner, I. Jovanović managed to reconstruct the location of the site in the vicinity of Zlot Cave.

⁵⁴ Kapuran et al. 2020; Gavranović et al. 2022.

⁵⁵ Kapuran et al. 2020; Mehofer et al. 2021.

⁵⁶ Bulatović et al. 2020, 1178–1179.

⁵⁷ Bulatović, Stankovski 2012, 321; Bulatović 2021, 141.

⁵⁸ Bulatović, Stankovski 2012, 321.

⁵⁹ Bulatović 2021, 141.

⁶⁰ Bulatović 2021, 140.

⁶¹ Ikodinović 1968; Dmitrović 2016, 149.

⁶² Jovanović, Janković 1996; Jovanović 1999.

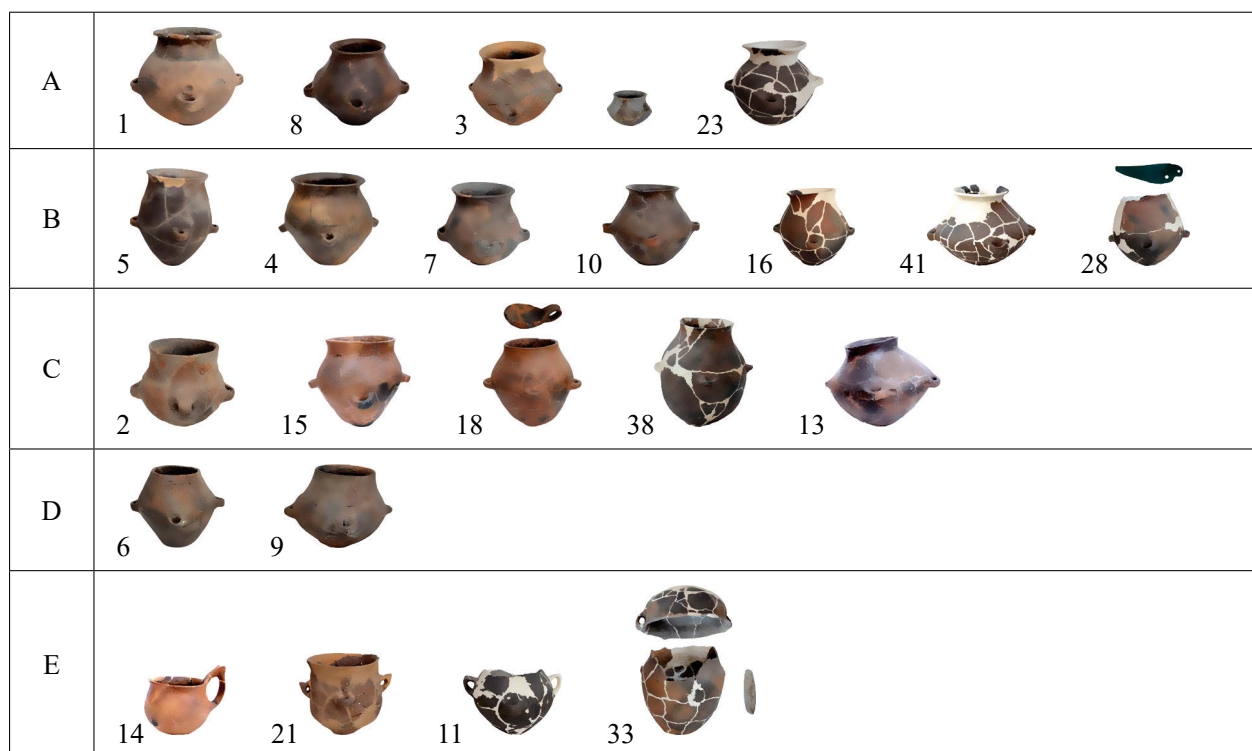


Fig. 1. Ceramic types from Trnjane (after: Jovanović, Janković 1996)

Сл. 1. Керамички типови на Трњанима (према: Јовановић, Јанковић 1996)

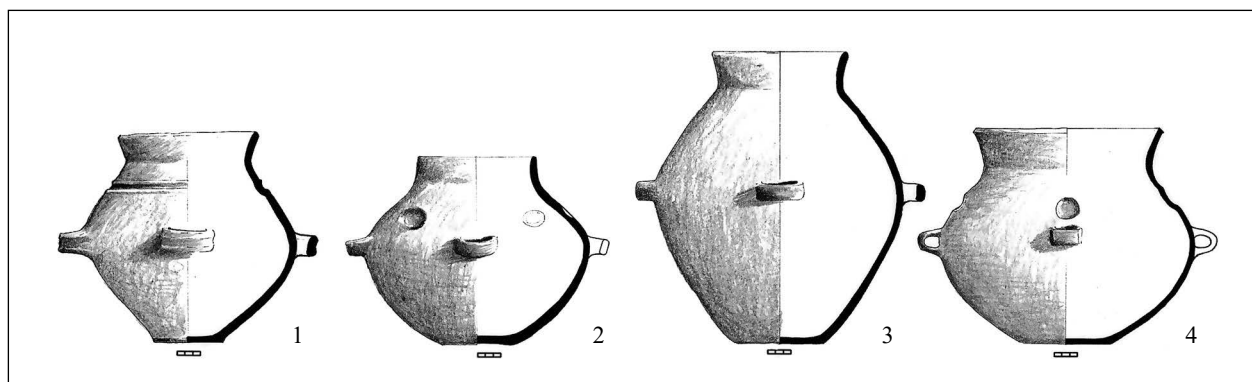


Fig. 2. Kriveljski Kamen–Bunar necropolis

Сл. 2. Некропола Кривељски Камен–Бунар

Namely, based on forms and decoration, B. Jovanović separated ceramics from Trnjane into 5 groups (A–E).⁶³ We consider that such a classification is unnecessarily elaborated with details, since biconical urns are clearly the dominant form (groups B, C, and D), and the differences are observed in the degree to which the neck of the vessel is emphasised. The common characteristics of all urns from Trnjane are one or two

pairs of horizontal handles. The third group of vessels, defined as group E, are somewhat atypical as they expose some elements typical of the Vatin pottery.⁶⁴ Save for finger impressions above horizontal handles

⁶³ Jovanović, Janković 1996, 187–188.

⁶⁴ Jovanović, Janković 1996, 188, 193, Abb. 9.

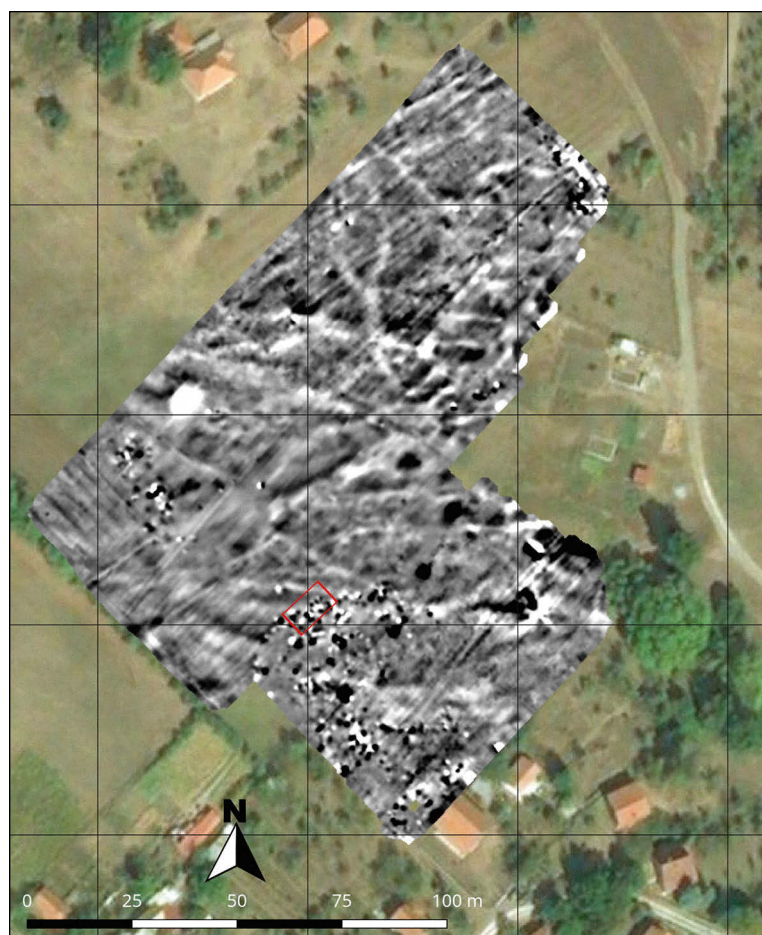


Fig. 3. Hajdučka česma necropolis

Сл. 3. Некропола Хајдучка чесма

on several urns, the pottery of group E is characterised by triangular extensions on the rim, as is the case with a bowl that covered one of the pear-shaped urns (Fig. 1/33).⁶⁵ A similar “S” profiled vessel of an inverted bell shape, with a horizontal and vertical knee-shaped handle was also attributed to group E (Fig. 1/21).⁶⁶ It should be mentioned that except for the triangular extensions on the rim, only decorations comprised of pitted finger impressions are present among finds from Trnjane (Fig. 1/1).

Out of four urns discovered within the characteristic circular stone structures at the Kriveljski Kamen–Bunar site, two are biconical with an emphasised neck and horizontal handles (Fig. 2).⁶⁷ The decorations are horizontally burnished channels, (Fig. 2/1) and pitted finger impressions (Fig. 2/2.4).

The first urns at the site of Hajdučka Česma, located 2 km west of Brestovačka Banja and just 1.5 km from the site of Trnjane, came to light in 1992 during small-scale rescue excavations, yet no documentation exists (Fig. 3, Fig. 4/1–2).⁶⁸ Systematic archaeological

excavations at Hajdučka Česma in 2018 and 2019 yielded a total of 14 graves with circular stone constructions, however, the geophysical prospection suggests the existence of a large cemetery with around 100 circular stone constructions. The uncovered urns from Hajdučka česma have, thus far, shown a larger variety of forms and decorations, especially when compared to other nearby urn cemeteries. For instance, the urn with a lid (a bowl with a triangular and rectangular extension on the rim) from Grave 1 (Fig. 4/6) has a pear-shaped form and modelled triangles with pitted impressions positioned above horizontal handles. The closest parallels for that type of decoration are known from the site of Pančevo–Donja Varoš (Vatrogasni Dom), dated to the Early Bronze Age, or

⁶⁵ Jovanović, Janković 1999, Abb. 9/1.

⁶⁶ Jovanović, Janković 1999, Abb. 9/1.

⁶⁷ Kapuran et al. 2013, T. 1.

⁶⁸ Srejšević, Lazić 1997, 227; Kapuran et al. 2014, 216–217.

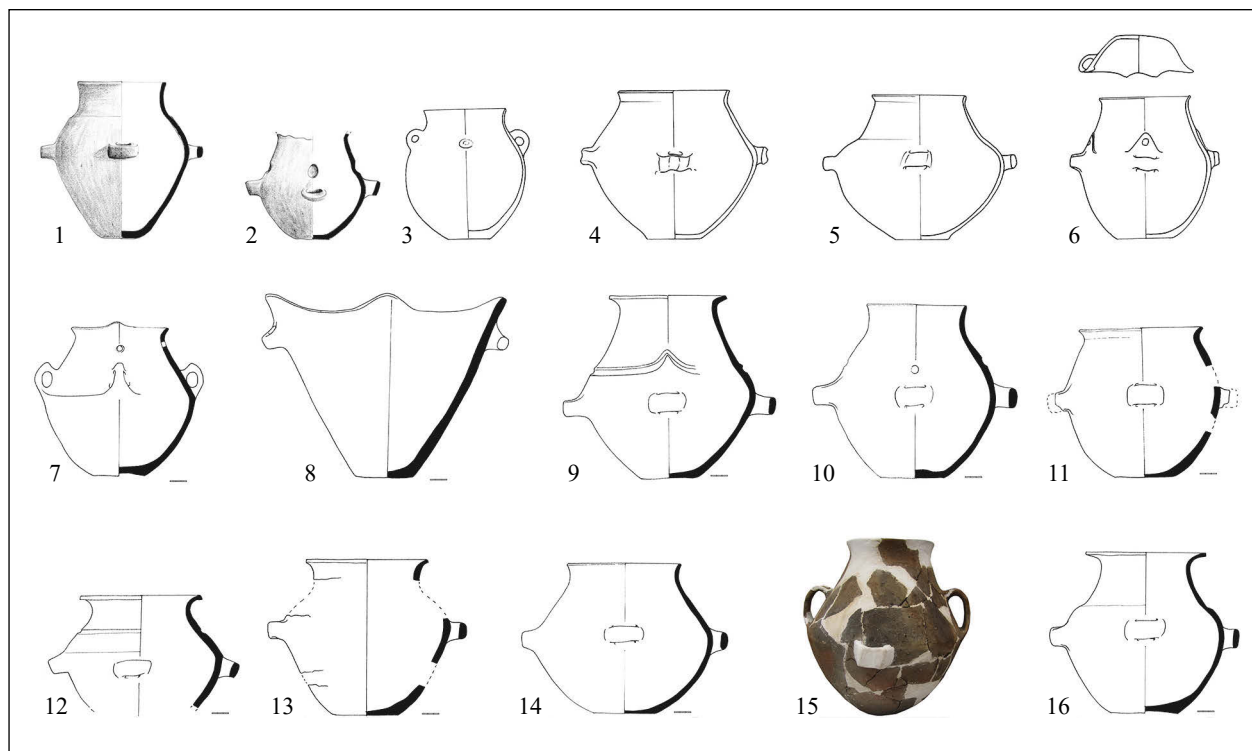


Fig. 4. Urns from the Hajdučka Česma necropolis

Сл. 4. Урне са некрополе Хајдучка чесма

the Proto-Vatin.⁶⁹ In addition, a belly-shaped urn from Grave 4, with two tongue-shaped protomes placed above a pair of vertical handles was found (Fig. 4/3). Such vessels have numerous analogies in Ljuljaci,⁷⁰ Lazarev Grad,⁷¹ Ostrikovac II,⁷² Bosut–Gradina,⁷³ Vinča,⁷⁴ Feudvar,⁷⁵ and Židovar.⁷⁶ Two biconical urns, each with a pronounced neck and rim, from two graves at Hajdučka Česma, also have a burnished horizontal channel above the handles (Fig. 4/12, 9). A unique example of decoration is represented by a channel in the form of the letter A on an urn from Grave 7 (Fig. 4/9), which relates to the previously mentioned decoration on the urn from Grave 1 (Fig. 4/6). The sharply biconical urn from Grave 5 has vertically positioned handles and a rim decorated with a triangular extension (Fig. 4/7). The most similar example is the urn from Grave 13, with a clear biconical form, elongated neck, and a pair of vertical and horizontal handles (Fig. 4/15). A unique urn form within the Timok Basin is a vessel from the destroyed Grave 6, for which we presume secondary use for a burial. The rim abrasion especially indicates the secondary treatment of the vessel. However, there is also a possibility that the urn repre-

sented the lower cone of a larger pot (Fig. 4/8). The urn from Grave 8 also had a decoration with impressions above the handle (Fig. 4/10). The grave goods from Hajdučka Česma included spindle whorls (found both in the urn and/or within the circular stone constructions), small ladle-shaped lamps and, in one case, a corroded bronze sewing pin. Numerous fragments of two-handled beakers and smaller cups were found between the circular stone constructions.

The necropolis at Borsko Jezero was since in the early 1960s, as a result of the construction of a dam for the reservoir on the confluence of Valja Žon creek and Marcelova River, 12 km west of the city of Bor.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Rašajski, Gačić 1985, 15; Grčki-Stanimirov 1996, 76.

⁷⁰ Bogdanović 1986, 44, Fig. 58.

⁷¹ Stojić, Čadenović 2006, Fig. 27.

⁷² Stojić 1989, 181, Fig. 16.

⁷³ Popović, Radojčić 1996, 25/32.

⁷⁴ Tasić 1984, T. 14/9.

⁷⁵ Hansel, Medović 1991, T. 9/1.

⁷⁶ Lazić 1997, Fig. 23.

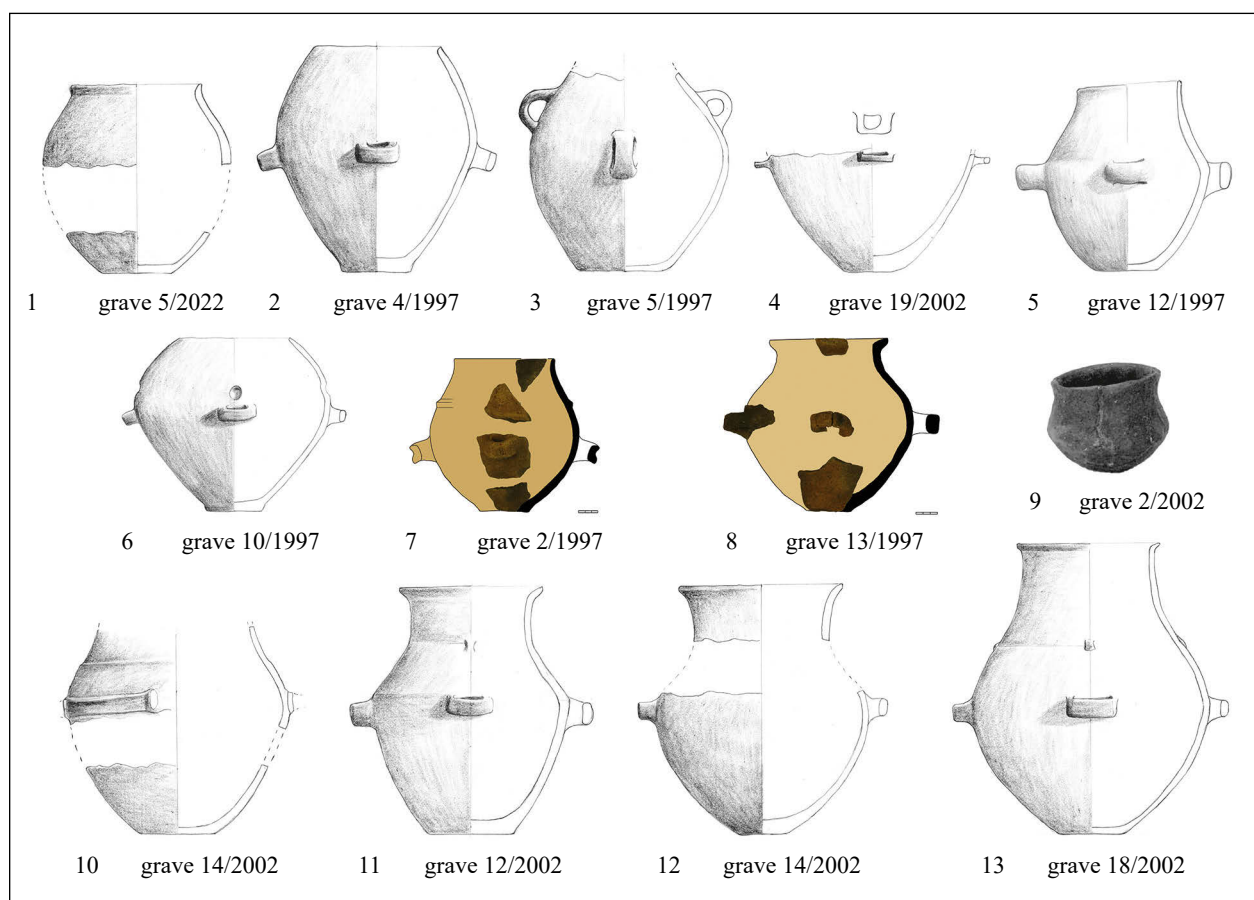


Fig. 5. Urns from the Borsko Jezero necropolis

Сл. 5. Урне са некрополе на Борском језеру

A high degree of water oscillations destroyed a substantial number of stone structures, especially those positioned on the higher location of a tongue-shaped ridge above the confluence.⁷⁸ The excavations took place in 1997 and 2002.⁷⁹ In most of the graves, only the lower parts of the urns remained intact. The reconstructed urns corresponded well to the existing repertoire from other adjacent cemeteries. The characteristic decoration of biconical urns with elongated necks are miniature, vertically positioned protomes between the shoulder and the neck of the vessel, like in the case of graves 12/2002 and 18/2002 (Fig. 5/11,13). The belly-shaped urn from Grave 2/1997 was decorated with a modelled horizontal band on the rim (Fig. 5/10), and the urn from Grave 10/1997 has pitted impressions above horizontal handles (Fig. 5/6). The urn with the oval belly shape and everted rim from Grave 10/1997 is the only one with a combination of two horizontal and two vertical handles (Fig. 5/3).

The second group of Bronze Age sites in north-eastern Serbia is situated near the city of Zaječar. The cemetery on the Magura hill, 10 km west of Zaječar, is positioned on the right bank of the Crni Timok, next to the Felix Romuliana Imperial Palace. The cemetery covers an area of 1,650 m²,⁸⁰ with a total of 82 graves excavated between 1989 and 1996. With the exception of two urns, all the urns were deposited within the circular stone constructions, comparable to the cemeteries in the Bor area. At the beginning of the 4th century AD, the Roman emperor Galerius (305–311 AD) erected

⁷⁷ Lazić 2004, 109.

⁷⁸ Kapuran, Miladinović-Radmilović 2011, T. 1; Kapuran et al. 2014, 100–102, Fig. 96, T. 19–20.

⁷⁹ Kapuran et al. 2014, 212.

⁸⁰ Srejšević, Lazić 1997; Lazić 1998; Lazić 2004; Lazić 2010; Lazić 2016.



Fig. 6. Urns and grave goods from the Magura necropolis

Сл. 6. Урне и гробни прилози са некрополе Маџура

two burial mounds at the same place, one for himself and one for his mother Romula, as well as two temples. Interestingly, the foundations of the antique buildings did not disturb the prehistoric necropolis to any significant degree, as they covered the central portion of the flattened plateau on the top of the hill. The fact that the Romans took into consideration the existence of a prehistoric burial ground indicates that it was still visible during the erection of the imperial mounds. The Romans could have respected the continuity of this sepulchral space and, therefore, selected the Magura hill for the burial of the emperor and his mother.

In terms of the chronological interpretation, the urn cemetery at Magura needs a critical re-evaluation. It is important to emphasise that M. Lazić and D. Srejšović considered Magura as well as the nearby hill top settlement at Banjska Stena key sites of the cultural manifestations called the *Gamzigrad Group*, for which they assumed a general dating into the Bronze Age.⁸¹

Similar to the sites near Bor, stone burial structures from the Zaječar area were made of an outer ring comprised of large stones with an urn in the central part of

the construction. However, unlike the cemeteries in the vicinity of Bor, the interspace of stone constructions at the Magura site was filled with slabs made of grey marl. The diameters of the stone structures vary between 1 m and 6 m. In two cases, the urns had a covering made of flat marl slabs. Some of the marl slabs had been engraved with geometrical ornaments such as nets, circles, spirals, and bands of parallel lines. In addition to spindle whorls, two-handled beakers, and cups, the grave goods also included metal artifacts; a fragmented arrowhead made of bronze sheet (Fig. 6/16), a spearhead (Fig. 6/19), and a fragmented biconical head of a pin (Fig. 6/17).⁸²

Although a certain number of ceramic vessels from Magura display certain stylistic and typological similarities with the urns from the sites in the vicinity of Bor, there are also significant differences in both form and decoration. Following the discovery of the

⁸¹ Lazić 1998, Lazić 2016, 30–31, Fig. 5/1.

⁸² Vasić 2003, 61, T. 22/330.

Magura necropolis, the authors assumed connections with the Vatin and Paraćin groups of the Danube and Morava regions, along with the Verbicioara group of Oltenia.⁸³ In their later works however, such parallels have been abandoned. Some peculiarities of the burials at Magura, such as decorated stone lids, handles modelled as recipients (cup-shaped) (Fig. 6/1,3,4,5), and incised ornaments (Fig. 6/1,12), led D. Srejšović and M. Lazić to a definition of the Gamzigrad group in which they also included the sites of Trnjane, Hajdučka Česma and Borsko Jezero.⁸⁴ According to the available data and the degree of research at the time, such interpretations were based on relatively solid foundations. However, in light of updated results and the discovery of new sites, it is necessary to revise such a standpoint, especially considering the significant change in the chronology and that the urn cemeteries near Bor are considerably older (20th–18th century BC) than previously assumed (14th–11th century BC⁸⁵).

A critical review of the genesis and the validity of the definition of the Gamzigrad group should start with analyses of the style and typology of the urns, along with the analogies of grave goods from the Magura necropolis. The ornaments of bands of incised lines organised in simple or elaborate geometric systems (Fig. 6/1,12) are similar to the decorations of the urns from the earlier phase of the Belegiš group. Illustrative of the connections between the urns from Magura and Belegiš I is the vessel from Grave 40, as well as an urn for which we have no data regarding context (Fig. 6/1,12). Both have a slightly biconical form with a wide belly, a long cylindrical neck, and decoration consisting of incised lines or elaborate geometric shapes.⁸⁶ The urn from Grave 63 is almost identical to vessels common for the Verbicioara group (Fig. 6/2), both in terms of the everted neck and the characteristic horizontal rib. Similar vessels also appear in the territory of Banat, in Vatin (Fig. 11/1)⁸⁷ and Crvenka (Fig. 11/2).⁸⁸ The previously mentioned Grave 63 from Magura is one of very few without a circular stone construction, and it had a bronze spearhead as a grave good (Fig. 6/2).⁸⁹ As highlighted, among the published urns from Magura, some of the vessels display similarities with urns from sites in the vicinity of Bor, as well as with urns from cemeteries of the Paraćin group in the Morava Valley. These finds and the new chronological assessment of the urn cemeteries in north-eastern Serbia speak in favour of the assumption that the cultural influence from the east spread towards the central parts of Serbia during the transition from the Middle

to the Late Bronze Age. However, it should be also considered that the urns with elongated and everted necks and incised ornaments from Magura (Fig. 6/1–4,12) have no close analogies among finds from the Timok Basin nor the Morava region. For handles modelled in forms of small recipients (cup-shape), which M. Lazić describes as a characteristic of an earlier phase of the Gamzigrad group, parallels are to be found in some sites in the vicinity of Bor,⁹⁰ in Antimovo near Vidin in Bulgaria and in a wider territory between Aegean Macedonia and Transylvania.⁹¹ The same author considers that the common elements in decoration emerged due to the interaction with coexisting groups in the surroundings.⁹² Such an argument can be considered valid if we assume the dating of Magura in the period after the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. It is most likely that M. Lazić made a potential misjudgement when incorporating and recognising the influences from the surrounding Middle Bronze Age groups on the Gamzigrad group without knowing the exact time span of the Magura cemetery. The current chronology of the Magura rests upon metal finds and does not correspond with the new absolute dates for the sites in the Bor area.⁹³ Pins with biconical heads are, in the territory of Serbia, characteristic of the Late Bronze Age as they occur in hoards of the Br D–Ha A1 horizon.⁹⁴ A spearhead from Grave 63 (Fig. 6/19) is in the typology that L. Leshtakov assigned to group H XII, with most corresponding finds also dating between Br D and Ha A1.⁹⁵ Spears attributed to the same type from northern Germany and Scandinavia date to the same period.⁹⁶ Relying on the chronological frame of Magura provided

⁸³ Srejšović, Lazić 1997, 240.

⁸⁴ Srejšović, Lazić 1997, 241.

⁸⁵ Jovanović 1999, 73.

⁸⁶ Srejšović, Lazić 1997, Fig. 33.

⁸⁷ The vessel is deposited under number i.b. 9985 in the City Museum of Vršac.

⁸⁸ Tasić 1974, 210, fig. 139.

⁸⁹ Srejšović, Lazić 1997; Lazić 2016.

⁹⁰ Two fragments were discovered during the survey. The example from the site of Čoka Njica could belong to an urn from a destroyed grave, since circular stone structures have been recorded at the site.

⁹¹ Lazić 2016, 32, Fig. 7/4.

⁹² Lazić 2016, 33.

⁹³ Srejšović, Lazić 1997; Lazić 2016.

⁹⁴ Vasić 2003, 61, T. 22/330.

⁹⁵ Leshtakov 2015, 106, T. 156.

⁹⁶ Jacob-Freisen 1967, 198, T. 107/1.

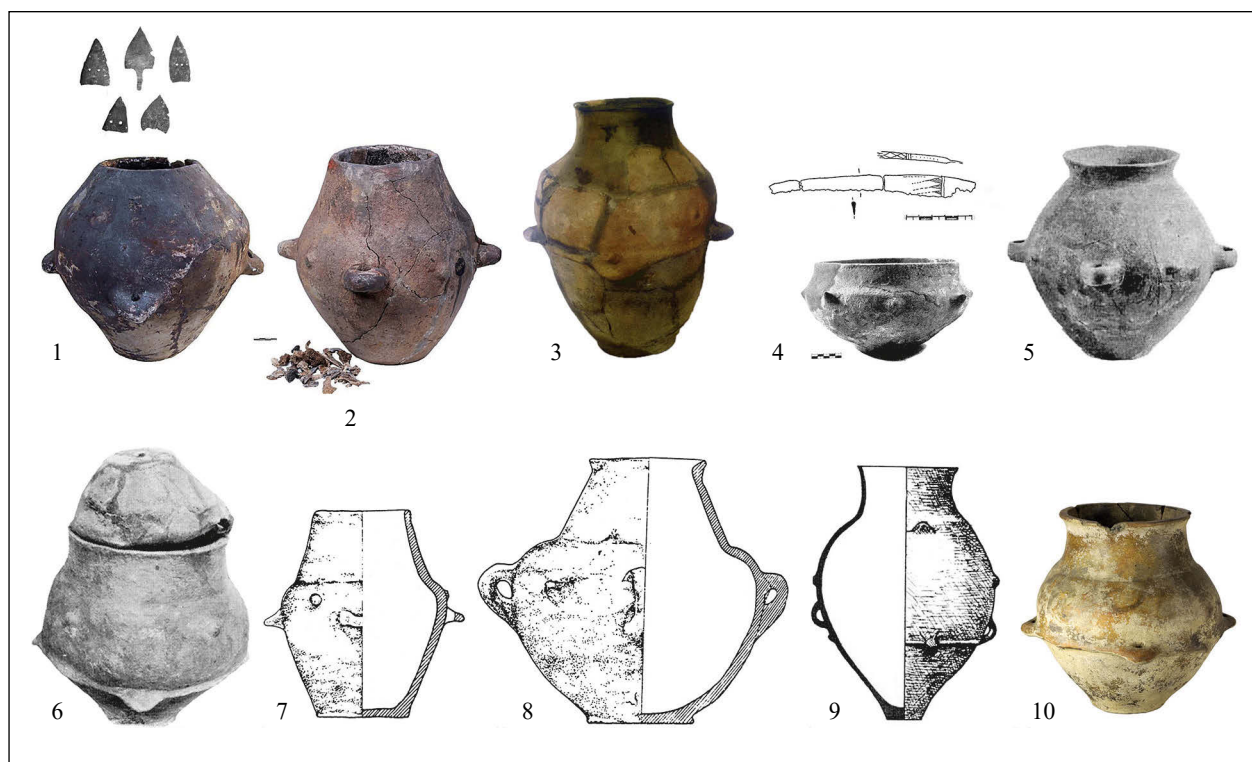


Fig. 7. 1–2. Rutevac; 3, 10. Obrež; 4. Đurinač; 5. Zvezda; 6. Rajkinač; 7–8. Mađilka; 9. Dobrača

Сл. 7. 1–2. Рушевац; 3, 10. Обреж; 4. Ђуринац; 5. Звездан; 6. Рајкинац; 7–8. Мађилка; 9. Добрача

by authors of excavations, R. Vasić linked the spearhead from Magura with the Vatin and Verbicioara groups, and presumed a dating to the Br B/C periods or Middle Bronze Age. Interestingly, R. Vasić dated other finds of this type from Serbia to Br D–Ha A1 periods.⁹⁷ The fragmented and perforated arrowhead made of bronze sheet (Fig. 6/16) displays close analogies with finds from graves in Rutevac near Aleksandrovac (Fig. 7/1),⁹⁸ and Donja Brnjica near Priština.⁹⁹ The urn cemetery of Donja Brnjica, which produced almost identical arrowheads, belongs to an early phase of the Brnjica group, with a most probable dating in Bz D, which corresponds to the 14th/13th century BC.¹⁰⁰

While the final judgement regarding the chronological relationship between the cemeteries in the Bor area and Magura will be possible only after the publishing of further absolute dates, it is indicative that, according to the bronze finds, the upper chronological span of the Magura site falls between the 16th and 15th century BC. In contrast, the urn cemeteries mentioned near Bor (Trnjane, Borsko Jezero, Kriveljski Kamen and Hajdučka Česma) all date between the 20th and 18th century BC.

Besides differences in the way the urns are decorated (incising of elaborated motifs and bands of lines), it should be pointed out that one of the urns from the Magura cemetery and one further from the nearby site of Zvezdan had the so-called *Pseudo-Buckel* protomes (Fig. 6/6).¹⁰¹ Since such a decoration is usually linked to the Tumuli culture of the Middle Bronze, these finds contradict the recent opinion about the non-existing elements of Tumuli culture in the Timok Basin.¹⁰² The *Pseudo-Buckel* protomes could indicate the presence of certain cultural influences from the Morava region, or the Paraćin group, during the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, towards the Timok Basin (in this particular context). Interestingly, *Buckel* protomes have not been recorded on any of the urns from the sites near

⁹⁷ Vasić 2009, 47, T. 9/113.

⁹⁸ Todorović, Simović 1959.

⁹⁹ Srejić 1960.

¹⁰⁰ Parović-Pešikan 1995, 18, 23; Stojić 2000, 11.

¹⁰¹ Lazić 2016, Fig. 2/7; Srejić, Lazić 1997.

¹⁰² Bulatović et al. 2018, 127.



Fig. 8. 1. *Bela Crkva, Humka 3, Urna 1*; 2. *Maćija*; 3–4. *Mojsinje*; 5. *Maćija*; 6. *Makrešane*; 7. *Despotovac*; 8. *Dobrača*

Сл. 8. 1. *Бела Црква, Хумка 3, Урна 1*; 2. *Мађија*; 3–4. *Мојсиње*; 5. *Мађија*; 6. *Макрешане*; 7. *Деспотовац*; 8. *Добрача*

Bor, which does not come as a surprise, considering their dating into the first half of the 2nd millennium BC i.e., before the Tumuli culture phenomenon. However, *Buckel* decorations are common on urns attributed to the Paraćin group, as clearly shown on the examples from Rutevac (Fig. 7/1–2),¹⁰³ Obrež near Varvarin (Fig. 7/3,10),¹⁰⁴ Đurinac near Petrovac (Mlava) (Fig. 7/4),¹⁰⁵ Rajkinac near Jagodina (Fig. 7/5),¹⁰⁶ and Stalać.¹⁰⁷ The same decoration also appears on two urns from the Mađilka burial site near Pirot.¹⁰⁸

Cultural and chronological dynamics in the Morava Valley – new absolute dates

Given that the absolute dates were, thus far, not available for the urn cemeteries assigned to the Paraćin and Brnjica groups, it is difficult to make an association with north-eastern Serbia (Timok Basin), where urn cemeteries started around 2000 BC. For the area of the Brnjica group in southern Serbia, absolute dates from the settlement sites indicate the period between the 14th and 11th century BC, and are, thus, much younger than the urn cemeteries and associated settlements in the Bor area.¹⁰⁹

Here, we present the very first absolute dates from the urn cemeteries Rajkinac and Gloždak, assigned to the Paraćin culture, as well as the dates from the site of Mađilka in the contact zone between the designated areas of the Paraćin and Brnjica groups. In addition, we also bring an absolute date from the site of Medoševac near Niš, with an inventory (bronze finds) connected to the Tumuli culture.

In the case of Rajkinac, the dates are from anthropological remains from one of three graves within the stone ring.¹¹⁰ Two samples were analysed from one of the graves (cremated human remains), and the dating

¹⁰³ Todorović, Simović 1959, fig. 2, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Tasić 1991, 122; Tasić 2001, fig. 3; Stojić, Čađenović 2006, 294–296.

¹⁰⁵ Trbuhović 1961, fig. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Stojić 1980; Stojić 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Stojić, Čađenović 2006, fig. 32.

¹⁰⁸ Jevtić 1990.

¹⁰⁹ Bulatović et al. 2021, Tab. 1.

¹¹⁰ Stojić 1994.

was conducted at the Isotoptech Laboratory in Debrecen. The absolute dates were calibrated by OxCal v. 4.4.2.¹¹¹ Both samples from Rajkinac yielded almost identical values (DeA-34106: 3047 ± 46 and DeA-34107: 3056 ± 48), while the calibrated dates fall between 1430 and 1130 BC, with a higher probability between the 14th and the 13th century BC (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13). The dates from Rajkinac are the first tangible evidence that urn graves from the sites in the Morava region, assigned to the Paraćin group, are strikingly younger than the urn cemeteries near Bor in the Timok Basin. In the context of the available absolute dates from the Central Balkans, the grave from Rajkinac would approximately be concurrent to the central grave (cremation without urn) of Mound 4 at the site of Krstac–Ivkovo Brdo in western Serbia,¹¹² and to the dates from the settlement layers at the sites of Svinjište and Medijana in southern Serbia.¹¹³

The Gloždak cemetery¹¹⁴ is one of the key sites for the dating of the Paraćin group. D. Garašanin identified two groups of graves at the site and concluded that the burials could be separated into two phases; the earlier, belonging to the Late Bronze Age, and the later one from the Transitional Period (Fig. 9/4–6).¹¹⁵ Here, we present two absolute dates from Gloždak, which support the assumption of two distinct phases at the cemetery. The absolute dates, calibrated with the same parameters as the previously mentioned samples from Rajkinac, originate from cremated remains in Grave 1/1956 (DeA 34114) (Fig. 9/4) and Grave 4/1956 (DeA 34113) (Fig. 9/5). The absolute date of Grave 1 is 2987 ± 44 BP with a calibrated span between 1390 and 1050 BC (Cal2-sigma), and Grave 4 is almost a century older with an absolute date of 3096 ± 44 BP and a calibrated span between 1490 and 1220 BC (Fig. 12). Interestingly, based on a stylistic and typological obser-

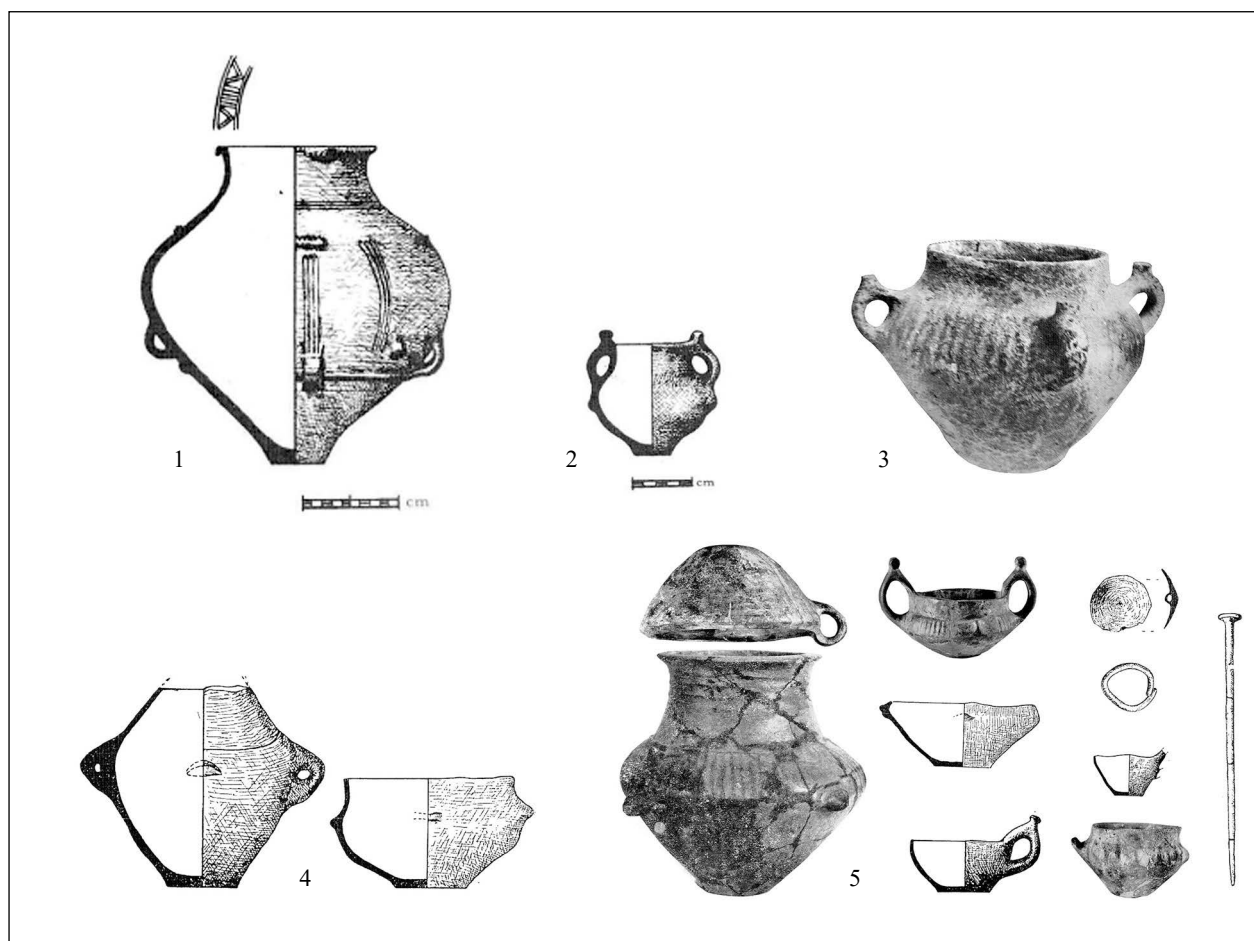


Fig. 9. 1–2. Dobrača; 3. Dvorište; 4–5. Gloždak

Сл. 9. 1–2. Добрача; 3. Двориште; 4–5. Глождак



Fig. 10. 1. Rajkinac necropolis; 2. Mađilka necropolis

Сл. 10. 1. Некропола Рајкинац; 2. Некропола Мађилка

vation, an opposite conclusion was drawn. According to D. Garašanin's classification, pottery decoration and inventory from both graves, Grave 4 would represent the younger, and Grave 1 the older phase. The presented dates are certainly insufficient for a final conclusion on the chronology of the Gloždak site, especially considering that both dates have a wide chronological span with mutual overlaps (transition between the 14th and the 13th century BC). Moreover, both dates are from cremated remains and, thus, probably indicate the age of the fuel (wood) used for the pyre. However, it is striking that Grave 1, which contained a ceramic repertoire typical of the Paraćin group (urn, bowl), is younger than Grave 4 with channelled vessels, usually connected with the expansion of channelled pottery towards the south.¹¹⁶ Regarding the other available dates in the Central Balkans, Grave 4 is chronologically associated with the central grave of Mound 18 from the Brezjak necropolis (Paulje, north-western Serbia), and with Grave 107 from the Velebit burial site in the north of Vojvodina.¹¹⁷ The younger Grave 1 corresponds to the dates of settlements in southern Serbia attributed to the Brnjica group, such as Končuclj and Svinjište.¹¹⁸

One of the crucial sites for a better understanding of the mutual relationships between the Paraćin and Brnjica groups, and the sites in the north-eastern Serbia, is the Mađilka urn cemetery. The site is located in south-eastern Serbia near Pirot, and shows remarkable similarities with the urn cemeteries in the Timok Basin. Mađilka was excavated in 1987 and 1988, with most of the site disturbed by foundations of younger structures.¹¹⁹ The burial architecture is comparable to

the sites in the Bor and Zaječar regions, with the urns positioned within circular stone structures. In some cases, several urns were buried within one stone structure, either in their central or peripheral zones (Fig. 10/2). A total of 40 graves has been recorded (of which only 23 are preserved), distributed within 7 circular stone structures, with a diameter between 3 m and 5 m. The author of the excavations came to the conclusion that the cremated remains of younger individuals were buried without urns, directly on the ground and covered with bowls, usually within the peripheral zones of the stone circles.¹²⁰ The plan of the site has not been published, but one of the few available illustrations shows that the urns were deposited in the centre of a smaller stone circle, which is surrounded by a larger one. According to the photos in the Museum of Ponišavlje in Pirot, the space between the small and

¹¹¹ We would like to thank Dr Lyndelle Webster (Austrian Archaeological Institute) for her assistance in the calibration of absolute dates.

¹¹² Dmitrović 2016, 101; Bulatović et al. 2018, 123.

¹¹³ Bulatović et al. 2022.

¹¹⁴ Although the site is in the literature known under the term Gloždar, its local name is Gloždak.

¹¹⁵ Garašanin 1958a; Garašanin 1970, 122. V. Vilipović, V. Vučković, and J. Mitrović will soon publish a series of absolute dates from the site. Based on these results, the upper chronological limit at Gloždak does not surpass the 15th century BC.

¹¹⁶ Bulatović et al. 2021.

¹¹⁷ Bulatović et al. 2018, Tab. 1; Kapuran 2019, 93.

¹¹⁸ Bulatović et al. 2021, Tab. 1.

¹¹⁹ Jevtić 1990.

¹²⁰ Jevtić 1990, 93.

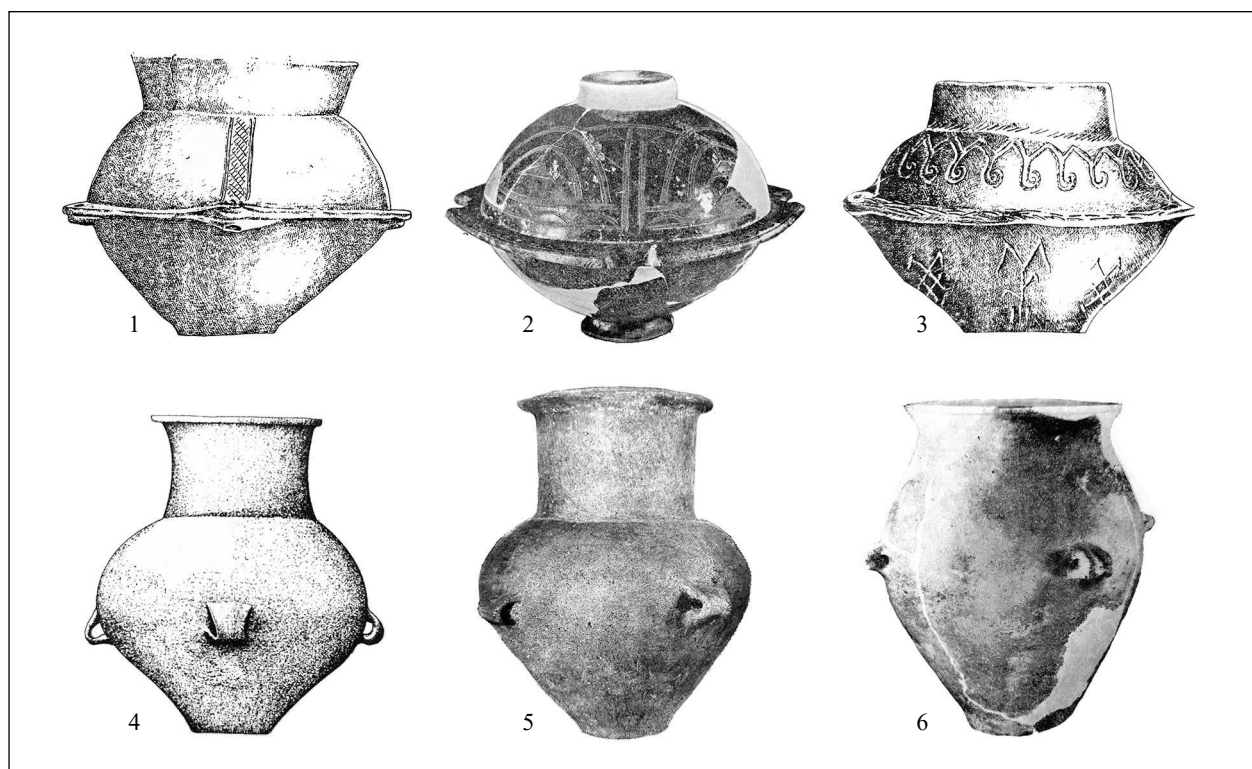


Fig. 11. 1. Vatin; 2. Crvenka; 3. Ludoš; 4. Stojića gumno; 5. Karaburma; 6. Vatin

Сл. 11. 1. Вајин; 2. Црвенка; 3. Лудош; 4. Стојића ђумно; 5. Карабурма; 6. Вајин

large stone circle was filled with smaller stones (Fig. 9). This resembles the burial traditions known from the Magura and Kriveljski Kamen–Bunar sites. Judging by the grave goods, which are more abundant than in the case of cemeteries in the Timok Basin, and by the stylistic and typological characteristics of the urns, the Mađilka necropolis is much closer to the Brnjica group. However, of particular interest are two urns with typological traits more typical of the Paraćin group. They are both belly-shaped with tongue shaped handles and *Buckel protomes* in between.¹²¹ What is also indicative of Mađilka is the appearance of the smaller beakers or kantharoi, lavishly decorated with a white incrustation that some authors connect with western Bulgaria and an area of the Čepin group.¹²² However, in the systematic evaluation of the two-handled beakers in the Central Balkans by A. Bulatović, the finds from Mađilka are attributed to the so-called Paraćin type, distinguished by decorations with either an incised inverted letter V or letter M, and with spiral endings.¹²³ Additionally, among the finds from Mađilka is also a beaker with an extremely biconical recipient on a high foot. This is a shape uncommon for urn cemeteries in eastern and

Central Serbia, and points more to the Tumuli culture.¹²⁴ The next analogy is a similar beaker from the burial mound of Lugovi near Zvornik, in eastern Bosnia.¹²⁵ It can be presumed that some of the beakers or other smaller vessels had the function of a lamp, probably with a chthonic background. In this context, we should mention small ladle-shaped cups from Trnjane and Hajdučka Česma, also identified as lamps,¹²⁶ as well as smaller jugs from the site of Idoš in the area of Banat, which most likely had the same function.¹²⁷ Given the heterogeneous character of the finds from Mađilka with elements of the Brnjica and Paraćin groups, grave architecture similar to north-eastern Serbia and some vessels indicating a link to the Tumuli

¹²¹ Graves VI/3 and VII/1, Jevtić 1990, 101.

¹²² Hänsel 1976; Jevtić 1990, 102; Lazić 1996, 43.

¹²³ Bulatović 2011, 125.

¹²⁴ Jevtić 1990, T. V/13.

¹²⁵ Kosorić 1992, T. 3/3

¹²⁶ Kapuran et al. 2020).

¹²⁷ Molloy, Milić 2018, 109.

culture, it was intriguing to know what age the obtained absolute date would point to, since any possibility between the 19th/18th and the 12th century BC is not ruled out. Of two urns with characteristics of the Paraćin group, cremated human remains were preserved only in Grave VII/1. The absolute date acquired from the cremated remains is 3149 ± 46 BP (DeA-34110), and the calibration indicated a span between 1510 and 1290 BC (Cal 2-sigma). The date, although, representing one sample from one grave, indicates that the Mađilka site could be slightly older than the urn cemeteries of the Paraćin group in the Morava Basin. A date with a similar span is known from the site of Svinjarička Čuka near Lebane, with traces of a Late Bronze Age occupation.¹²⁸ If confirmed, the dating of Mađilka to the 15th century BC could connect this site with Magura, already indicated by a similar burial architecture. Therefore, the Magura and Mađilka cemeteries could represent both the chronological and the cultural link between considerably older urn cemeteries near Bor and cremation burial sites assigned to the Paraćin group in the Morava Basin, as well as the Brnjica group in southern Serbia.

Tumuli culture and the Central Balkans

The question of cultural dynamics in the Morava Valley during the Early and Middle Bronze Age remains open, considering that the sites from the end of the 3rd to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC are, thus far, underrepresented (Ostra near Vrnjačka Banja and Ljuljaci near Kragujevac). Based on the stylistic and typological traits of the urns and new radiocarbon dates, it is reasonable to assume that the formation of a specific style of decoration at the Magura cemetery was, to a certain extent, influenced by the Tumuli culture, with some elements also pointing to the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin and Oltenia. According to currently available data, the cultural elements connected to the Tumuli culture started to appear in the Central Balkans first in western Serbia or the west of the Morava Valley following the Early Bronze Age.¹²⁹ From this area, some elements also spread to the east, reaching the Timok Basin (Magura) and partly into southern Serbia.¹³⁰ According to N. Tasić, the process of the expansion of influences of the Tumuli culture across the Central Balkans occurred during the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, or at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age.¹³¹ Such an opinion is somewhat confirmed by an absolute date from the Paulje tumuli cemetery, which falls between the 15th and the 13th century BC.¹³²

When it comes to the stylistic and typological characteristics of the urns from burial sites in western Serbia, another important aspect needs to be addressed. This is the presence of incised and impressed ornaments that can be linked with the Danube area and cemeteries of the Belegiš I or Belegiš–Crućeni group.¹³³ The connection between the Belegiš–Crućeni group and the preceding or partially overlapping encrusted pottery complex has been demonstrated in several studies.¹³⁴ For instance, beakers with encrusted pottery occur in several graves of the large cemetery of Stojića Gumno.¹³⁵ Following the interpretation of N. Tasić, the encrusted pottery played a significant role and influenced the manner of decoration of the Belegiš pottery, especially the ornaments described as false cord.¹³⁶ However, an interesting observation based on the anthropological analyses of the cremated remains from the Kaluđerske Livade urn cemetery suggests an opposite conclusion. As the analyses revealed, urns decorated with false cord contained remains of male individuals, while females were in urns decorated with bands of incised lines. This sheds new light on the burial ritual, confirming that differences in the decoration of urns are not necessarily connected to chronology.¹³⁷ In the case of western Serbia, it is important to highlight that within tumuli burials, *Buckel protomes* characteristic of the Tumuli culture often occur together with incised and impressed decoration on the same urn. In Mound 3 at the site of Bandera near Bela Crkva, an urn with a wide belly, cylindrical neck, and *Buckel protomes*, was found in a grave together with bronze jewellery typical of the Tumuli culture (spherical applications, and horseshoe- and heart-shaped pendants) (Fig. 8/1).¹³⁸ Moreover, the urn was additionally decorated with bands of arched incisions, while vertical and zig-zag lines covered the part between the *Buckel protomes* and the lower part. Similar incised arches in combination with *Buckel protomes* are especially

¹²⁸ Horejs et al. 2019.

¹²⁹ Bulatović et al. 2017, 52.

¹³⁰ Tasić 1972, 94; Kapuran 2019, 7, Map. 2.

¹³¹ Tasić 1972, 94.

¹³² Gligorić et al. 2016, 105, Fig. 3.

¹³³ Tasić 1972; Szentmiklosi 2006.

¹³⁴ Tasić 2002; Petrović 2006.

¹³⁵ Tasić 2002, 175.

¹³⁶ Tasić 2002, 174.

¹³⁷ Petrović 2006, 149.

¹³⁸ Garašanin, Garašanin 1958, 38–39, Fig. 10. 15.

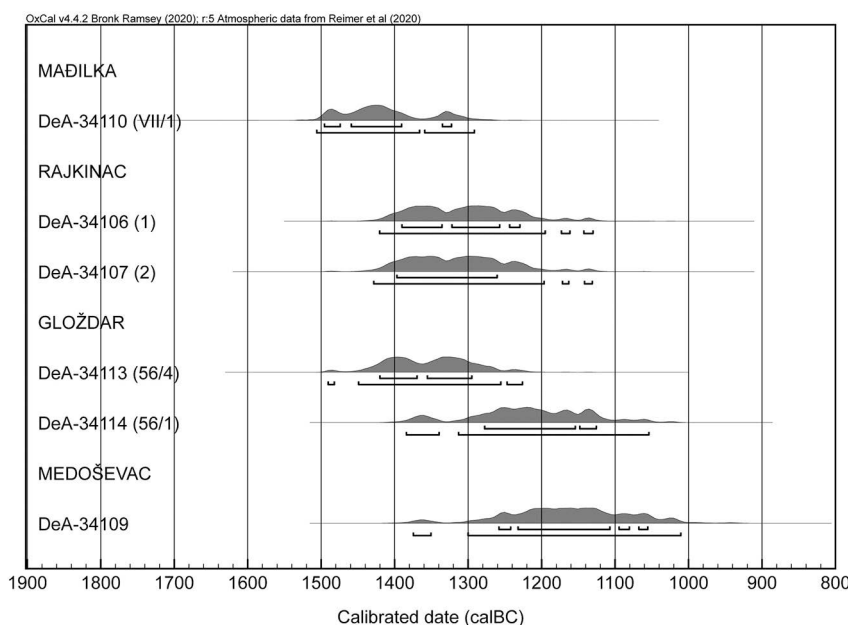


Fig. 12. Absolute dates from the Mađilka, Rajkinac, Gloždak and Medoševac necropolises

Сл. 12. Абсолютни датуми са некропола Мађилка, Рајкинац, Глождак и Медошевац

characteristic for the earlier phase of the Belegiš I group, as seen on urns from the Stojića Gumno in Belegiš,¹³⁹ Karaburma,¹⁴⁰ Ludoš near Vršac,¹⁴¹ and graves 6 and 17 from Stubarlija.¹⁴²

Influences of the Tumuli culture and Belegiš I group on the Bronze Age communities of western and Central Serbia are also found in the ceramic inventory of cemeteries in Dobrača near Kragujevac,¹⁴³ Mojsinje and Krstac near Čačak. The most prominent example is certainly the tumuli cemetery of Mojsinje.¹⁴⁴ Urns with a wide belly and cylindrical neck, decorated with *Buckel protomes* from mound 1¹⁴⁵ have decoration identical to that on urns from Velebit,¹⁴⁶ Stojića Gumno,¹⁴⁷ Karaburma¹⁴⁸ and Idoš,¹⁴⁹ which are all situated north of the Danube and Sava rivers. Relevant for the chronology of Mojsinje burials are two bronze pins, one of the *Hülsenkopfnadeln* type and the other of the *Lochhalsnadel mit doppelkonischem kopf und vierkantigem schaft* type, both dated to Br C1.¹⁵⁰ An additional chronological framework for the presence of the Tumuli culture in western Serbia was provided with an absolute date between the 15th and 13th century BC from the site of Krstac–Ivkovo Brdo, with an urn from Grave 3 (Mound 2), decorated with typical *Buckel protomes*.¹⁵¹ Further similar urns of the Tumuli culture type have also been uncovered in Mound 3 at the Donja Kravarica site.¹⁵² All these finds suggest a close affiliation to the Tumuli culture burial sites within the West Morava region, from where certain elements could also reach Central and eastern Serbia.

Regarding the influences of the Tumuli culture in southern Serbia, a collective find of bronze jewellery from Medoševac, now in the National Museum in Niš, is one of the most indicative examples.¹⁵³ Following the original publication, the metal finds appear to originate from a grave context.¹⁵⁴ Thanks to the revision of finds housed in the National Museum in Niš it has been confirmed that the jewellery was discovered during earthworks in 1969, at a military airport in a suburb of Niš called Medoševac.¹⁵⁵ An urn was discovered at a depth of 0.5 m, surrounded with fist-sized pebbles,

¹³⁹ Vranić 2002, Nr. 53 and 74.

¹⁴⁰ Todorović 1977, 88, 101, 202, 205.

¹⁴¹ I.B. 10379, NM Vršac.

¹⁴² Medović 2007.

¹⁴³ Garašanin 1973, 361.

¹⁴⁴ Nikitović et al. 1997; Stojić 1998; Nikitović et al. 2002.

¹⁴⁵ Nikitović et al. 2002, T. IV/1, T. VII/41, T. VIII/46.

¹⁴⁶ Kapuran 2019, Fig. 78/1.

¹⁴⁷ Vranić 2002, 152/130.

¹⁴⁸ Todorović 1977, 47, 48.

¹⁴⁹ Tasić 1974, 529/186.

¹⁵⁰ Vasić 2003, 16, 29–30.

¹⁵¹ Bulatović et al. 2018, 123.

¹⁵² Dmitrović 2016, Fig. 7.

¹⁵³ Garašanin 1972; Kapuran 2019a.

¹⁵⁴ Garašanin 1972, 43.

¹⁵⁵ We are grateful to P. Milojević and T. Trajković Filipović for this information.

Labornr // AMS 14C Lab Code HEKAL Sample Nr.	Site /Context	Material	14C Alter [yr BP]	Cal 2-sigma	Labor	Calibration data set
DeA-34110	Mađilka Grave VII/1	cremated bone	3149 ± 46	BC 1510 – 1290	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20
DeA-34106	Rajkinac Grave_Sample 1	cremated bone	3047 ± 46	BC 1430 – 1130	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20
DeA-34107	Rajkinac Grave_Sample 2	cremated bone	3056 ± 48	BC 1430 – 1130	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20
DeA-34113	Gloždar _56/4	cremated bone	3096 ± 44	BC 1490 – 1220	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20
DeA-34114	Gloždar _56/1	cremated bone	2987 ± 44	BC 1390 – 1050	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20
DeA-34109	Medoševac	cremated bone	2954 ± 50	BC 1380 – 1010	Isotoptech Zrt. Debrecen	INTCAL20

Fig. 13. Absolute dates from the Mađilka, Rajkinac, Gloždak and Medoševac necropolises

Сл. 13. Ајсолујини датуми са некропола Мађилка, Рајкинац, Глождак и Медошевац

and covered with stone. In addition, the report mentions that skeletal remains were found at the same location in previous years. There is no photo or drawing of the mentioned urn. The storage box in the museum marked as “Medoševac” contained only cremated human bones and a fragment of a channelled, high lifted handle belonging to a cup/beaker. Based on this, Medoševac may represent an unknown bi-ritual necropolis, which cannot be further excavated due to its position. The mentioned skeletal graves and the bronze jewellery from one of the graves could indicate the possible influences or presence of the Tumuli culture in this area.¹⁵⁶ The analysis of burnt remains from the urn yielded an absolute date of 2954±50 (DeA-34109) with a span between 1380 and 1010 BC (Cal 2-sigma), and with a dating to the end of the 13th and into the 12th century statistically most probable (Fig. 12). In the context of recently published dates from southern Serbia, a similar age is attested for cultural layers at Ranutovac and Hisar, with pottery of the Brnjica group and channelled pottery of the Belegiš II–Gava horizon.¹⁵⁷ Since the jewellery from Medoševac undoubtedly represents forms typical of the Tumuli culture, and the obtained absolute date from the cremation remains is younger, the question arises as to the context of the unburned jewellery items and the possibility that it belonged to one of the skeletal graves. If that is the case, the urn would represent the later phase of the burial site, from the Late Bronze Age (13th–12th century BC).

Conclusion

Thanks to the results from the past decade, newly obtained absolute dates, and the stylistic and typological analyses of pottery from cremation graves, we have tried to propose a new narrative for the genesis of the Bronze Age groups in Serbia, south of the Sava and Danube rivers. Following the relatively modest archaeological record from the Early Bronze Age, the situation substantially changed during the Middle and Late Bronze Age with the emergence of different local groups with urn cemeteries as the main burial practice. In terms of the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age in the Morava, Timok and Nišava Basins, the appearance of the Bubanj–Hum IV – Ljuljaci pottery spectrum, as defined by A. Bulatović and J. Stankovski, for now represents the best parameter.¹⁵⁸

As testified by the recently presented absolute dates, cremation as a dominant burial rite was practiced in different local communities of the Central Balkans during the transition from the 3rd to the 2nd millennium BC, making this area one of the first that completely adopted this practice.¹⁵⁹ The building of circular stone constructions around the urn, as in the

¹⁵⁶ Vasić 1997; Kapuran 2019a.

¹⁵⁷ Bulatović et al. 2021, Tab. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Bulatović, Stankovski 2012, 343.

¹⁵⁹ Cavazutti et al. 2022.

case of cemeteries near the city of Bor, or around the cremated remains, as in Ranutovac in southern Serbia, seems to be another connecting element shared by groups in the Central Balkans. There are also cemeteries with similar stone constructions around urns in Northern Greece,¹⁶⁰ possibly indicating a far wider spread of this phenomenon during the transition from the 3rd to the 2nd millennium BC than previously assumed.

The absolute dates presented here from the urn cemeteries in Rajkinac and Gloždak, assigned to the Paraćin group in the Morava Basin and Mađilka (Brnjica group) in the Nišava Basin with comparable stone features around the urns, show a much younger age (15th–13th century BC) when compared to the sites in north-eastern Serbia, near Bor (20th–18th century BC) or to Ranutovac (21st–19th century BC). Judging by the current state of the research, similar pottery to that in the sites near Bor accompanied by a typical burial practice (urns and circular stone structures) first started to appear in the area along the Morava river and in the other parts of eastern and Central Serbia from the middle of the 2nd millennium. The significant chronological gap between the sites in the Bor region (urn cemeteries and settlements involved in copper production) and the urn cemeteries in the Morava and Nišava Basins (Paraćin and Brnjica groups) suggests more complex and differentiated cultural interactions than previously thought. Even within the Timok Basin there are apparently two regionally and chronologically separated developments, with the sites around Bor all dating between 2000–1600 BC and urn cemeteries around Zaječar (Magura) that appear to start around 1500 BC, just as the settlements and cemeteries near Bor ceased. Therefore, we consider that the term *Gamzigrad group*, as defined previously,¹⁶¹ is not adequate to describe the entire Bronze Age development in north-eastern Serbia. To a certain extent, it can be ap-

plied only for the micro-region around Zaječar during the Late Bronze Age.

In terms of cultural interpretation, we also find that the sites near Bor (Trnjane, Hajdučka Česma) cannot be connected with the Paraćin group, as stated in previous studies,¹⁶² due to the significant chronological disparity. At the current level of research and based on the available absolute dates, we can assume that the burial practice with urn cemeteries and circular stone constructions was first performed by the communities near the city of Bor that were engaged in copper production. From this geographically isolated area, certain cultural traits, including burial architecture and some specific pottery shapes, started to transfer into the neighbouring regions with a chronological delay of two or three centuries. The cemeteries of Magura and Mađilka could be observed within the wider context of the diffusion of influences from north-eastern Serbia towards the Morava and Nišava Basins. At the same time, we have also demonstrated that the archaeological material from the time around 1500 BC, as most of the urn cemeteries outside the Bor area emerged, also shows a presence of certain forms and decorations from the Tumuli culture, which most probably came from western Serbia. Some finds from Magura also indicate communication with the Verbicioara group in Oltenia. Hence, the archaeological repertoire in Magura appears to be the result of a mixture of several stylistic and typological characteristics with certain local traits (stone decorated slabs) that, all together, created a specific cultural manifestation. Similar pattern with influences from north-eastern Serbia, the Tumuli culture, the eastern Balkans and distinct local traits also led to the emergence of the urn cemeteries in the Morava Basins during the same time span (1500 BC), eventually described as the Paraćin culture.

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¹⁶⁰ Asouhidou 2011.

¹⁶¹ Srejović, Lazić 1997, 241–242; Lazić 1998, 148; Lazić 2016.

¹⁶² Jovanović 1999; Vasić 2013.

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САХРАЊИВАЊЕ У СЛИВОВИМА МОРАВЕ, ТИМОКА И НИШАВЕ ТОКОМ БРОНЗАНОГ ДОБА

Кључне речи. – Централни Балкан, бронзано доба, сахране, кремација, погребни ритуал, урне, апсолутни датуми

Захваљујући резултатима истраживања током последње деценије, и апсолутним датумима, као и резултатима стилско-типолошких анализа керамике из гробова спаљених покојника, покушали смо да презентујемо ново виђење генезе бронзаног доба у Србији јужно од Саве и Дунава с једне и западног Поморавља и Понишавља с друге стране. Прве радове и мишљења у вези са овом проблематиком потичу од наших уважених колега као што су академици Б. Јовановић и Д. Срејовић, као и од колеге М. Лазића.

Мада је на територији између Дунава, Саве, Западне Мораве и долине Нишаве, постојала извесна културна цензура током раног бронзаног доба, у средњем и позном бронзаном добу ситуација се знатно мења, нарочито на примеру некропола са спаљеним покојницима. Сматрамо да разматрања о транзицији из Бубањ – Хум III у Бубањ – Хум IV – Љуљаци културу у Поморављу, које су представили А. Булатовић и Ј. Станковски, на темељан и аргументован начин презентују процес преласка из раног у средње бронзано доба на територији јужног Поморавља, Тимочке Крајине и централне Србије. На основу нових резултата апсолутних датума, популације које насељавају Тимочку Крајину и околину Бора кремирају своје покојнике и урне похрањују унутар кружних камених конструкција већ на прелазу из III у II миленијум пре н. е. Сматрамо да овакав погребни ритуал има одређене подударности са погребним ритуалом практикованим на некрополи у Ранутовцу код Врања (јужна Србија), али и са сличним гробним конструкцијама откривеним у северној Грчкој, што би могло да указује на постојање извесног балканског феномена некропола са спаљеним покојницима и архитектуром у виду кружних камених конструкција који се јавља на почетку II миленијума пре н. е., о чему ће још бити речи.

Треба нагласити да у исто време, у централном Поморављу и Шумадији до данас нису откривени гробови раног и средњег бронзаног доба. Могуће је да су географски изоловане и затворене заједнице које експлоатишу бакар у околини Бора тек након три-четири века почеле са ширењем културних утицаја у правцу југа и запада, односно ка долинама Црног Тимока и Велике Мораве, где се отприлике средином II миленијума пре н. е. формирају заједнице које праве скоро исту керамику и негују сличне праксе сахрањивања са кружним каменим конструкцијама уз присуство локалних карактеристика. Судећи и према репертоару налаза и према новим апсолутним датумима, некропола Мађилка могла би се посматрати у контексту ширења ових утицаја из северо-

источне Србије ка долинама Мораве и Нишаве. Истовремено се међу археолошким материјалом могу препознати и други утицаји који долазе од осталих културних центара средњег бронзаног доба.

У утицајима који долазе са севера најбоље сведочи вагински пехар са Бањске стене који показује све карактеристике хоризонта Љуљаци III. Утицаји који стижу од Хугелграбер и Белегиш I култура са запада такође се срећу на керамици на Магури (гроб 40 и још једна урна без ознаке на Магури). Одређени утицаји долазе и из правца североистока, односно од културе Вербицоара (урна из гроба 63 на Магури и посуда са Бањске стене). Идентитетске особености, као и извесни космополитизам заједница концентрисаних у непосредној околини некрополе на Магури, огледају се у различитим декоративним стилизованим утилитарној и погребној керамици. Јединствене погребне обичаје свакако представљају декорисане камене плоче којима су урне на Магури биле поклопљене, а присутан је и већи број металних налаза у гробовима него што је то био случај у околини Бора. Промене погребног ритуала у односу на некрополе у околини Бора можемо повезати са повољнијом географском позицијом, будући да се Магура и Бањска стена налазе у централној зони долине Црног Тимока, која се пружа у правцу исток–запад и спаја централни са источним Балканом.

Теорија Д. Срејовића и М. Лазића како су гробне конструкције заједно са урнама на некрополи Магура представљале јединствен случај била је значајна у време када је Магура откривена (1994–1996), али су нова открића утицала да се ово мишљење промени. Основни разлог за ове промене у првом реду представљају нови апсолутни датуми који јасно указују да су некрополе код Бора старије од некрополе на Магури и да погребни ритуални на некрополама из бронзаног доба у Тимочној Крајини имају извесне подударности са истовременим некрополама у сливу јужне Мораве (Ранутовац), а можда и са неким некрополама даље ка југу Балканског полуострва. Претпоставка да су дршке моделоване у виду чашице јединствена појава на територији Тимочке Крајине такође не стоји, будући да оне ипак постоје и у другим културама средњег и позног бронзаног доба у географски блиским областима на истоку и североистоку, као што на једном месту М. Лазић наводи. Због тога сматрамо да је термин гамзиградска култура исправно користити само у оквиру микрорегије која обухвата десну обалу Црног Тимока, али искључиво током касног бронзаног доба, и да самим тим тај термин није адекватан за дефинисање целокупне културе

бронзаног доба у североисточној Србији. На основу спроведених истраживања и C14 датума сада је сигурно да на територији Тимочке Крајине у бронзаном добу постоје две фазе. Старија фаза (прва половина II миленијума) у којој насеља и некрополе више гравитирају у околини Бора, док млађу фазу (друга половина II миленијума) представљају насеља и некрополе формиране у области атара села Гамзиград, настале под утицајима који долазе са севера (Бор), из Поморавља са запада и из правца Олтеније са североистока, и да је њихова симбиоза изнедрила један стил који се најјасније одражава на облицима и декорацији урни на некрополи Магура.

Апсолутни датуми из гробова у урнама на некрополама Рајкинац и Глождар, које припадају парафинској групи, свакако ће допринети бољем сагледавању међусобних односа популација из бронзаног доба са некрополама спаљених покојника на централном Балкану. Апсолутни датуми са ових локалитета који се крећу у оквиру од краја 15. до 13. века пре

н. е. показују да се ради о знатно млађим некрополама од оних у североисточној Србији (Трњане, Борско језеро, криваљски Камен и Хајдучка чесма) које се датују у период између 20. и 17. века пре н. е. У погледу културне интерпретације, вреди споменути да је раније некропола Трњане сврставана у контекст налазишта парафинске групе, али сада знамо да је она много старија.

Што се тиче апсолутног датума са локалитета Медошевац, где је под нејасним околностима пронађен сет бронзаног накита типичног за културу гробних хумки, као и неколико скелетних укопа те гробова у урнама, апсолутни датум из спаљених остатака једног гроба сугерише како је на овом месту током кратког пробоја културе гробних хумки постојала и млађа некропола из позног бронзаног доба, односно транзиционог периода из бронзаног у гвоздено доба, што је свакако занимљив податак у смислу односа појединих културних манифестација на простору јужне Србије.

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