

LATE BRONZE AGE IN DALMATIA: STATE OF RESEARCH

Modern Dalmatia covers more than half of the Adriatic part of Croatia, from the Velebit mountain range on the northwest to the bay of Boka Kotorska in Montenegro on the southeast. In prehistory, as in the later stages of history, the region had three separate micro regions: Northern, Central and Southern Dalmatia.

In contrast to the west Adriatic coast, which has well-defined major cultural and interactive processes, LBA Dalmatia is a fairly ill-explored area.

From the second half of the 19th century the first occasional findings started to emerge, and were recognized by local scholars as Bronze Age artefacts (Batović 1983, pp. 274-275). So far, such data have unfortunately remained the basis for our understanding of the period. It is important to stress that the vast majority of the LBA artefacts from Dalmatia that are known today come from unknown or very ill-known archaeological contexts. Therefore, these artefacts are dated on the basis of the much more developed chronology of the Northern Croatia and Pannonian Urnfield culture (Vinski-Gasparini 1973, pp. 21-23). This is especially the case with finds dated to the Br D and Ha A1.

The known bronze hoards from the area also fit in this picture as they were not found by archaeologists, and are therefore not completely reliable. Only six of them dated to LBA are published (Glogović 2000, pp. 11-16).

Only few minor modern excavations have been undertaken, mostly in Central and Northern Dalmatia. Unfortunately not much has been published (Batović 1980, p. 24; Id. 1983, pp. 278-281).

Problems regarding the lack of modern excavations were recognized by local scholars who deal with LBA. Papers by Čović (1970), Batović (1980 and 1983), Marović (1981) and Protić (1988) summarise the known data. Mostly they analysed the known inventory and drew conclusions from it, relying on the presence of some widely spread bronze types.¹ The main differences in their papers concern chronological division of the Bronze Age.

Čović considers LBA in Dalmatia to have lasted from the second half of the 13th B.C. till the end of the 8th c. B.C., *i.e.* from the first wave of Aegean migrations to the Thracian-Cimmerian invasion in the Pannonian region of Croatia (Čović 1970, p. 70).

Batović proposes a chronological division of the period based upon some local characteristics of the bronze artefacts that emerged in the course of the 11th century B.C. According to him,

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¹ Their conclusions were very indicative, but still only partial, since very few data on the nature of those contacts, mostly between neighbouring areas, can be drawn out of the material without complete data. Some facts, like influences from the Urnfield culture of Northern Croatia and Pannonia throughout the period, exchange of ideas with central Bosnia and some contacts with Italian regions, can hardly be disputed, but the data set still remains very superficial.

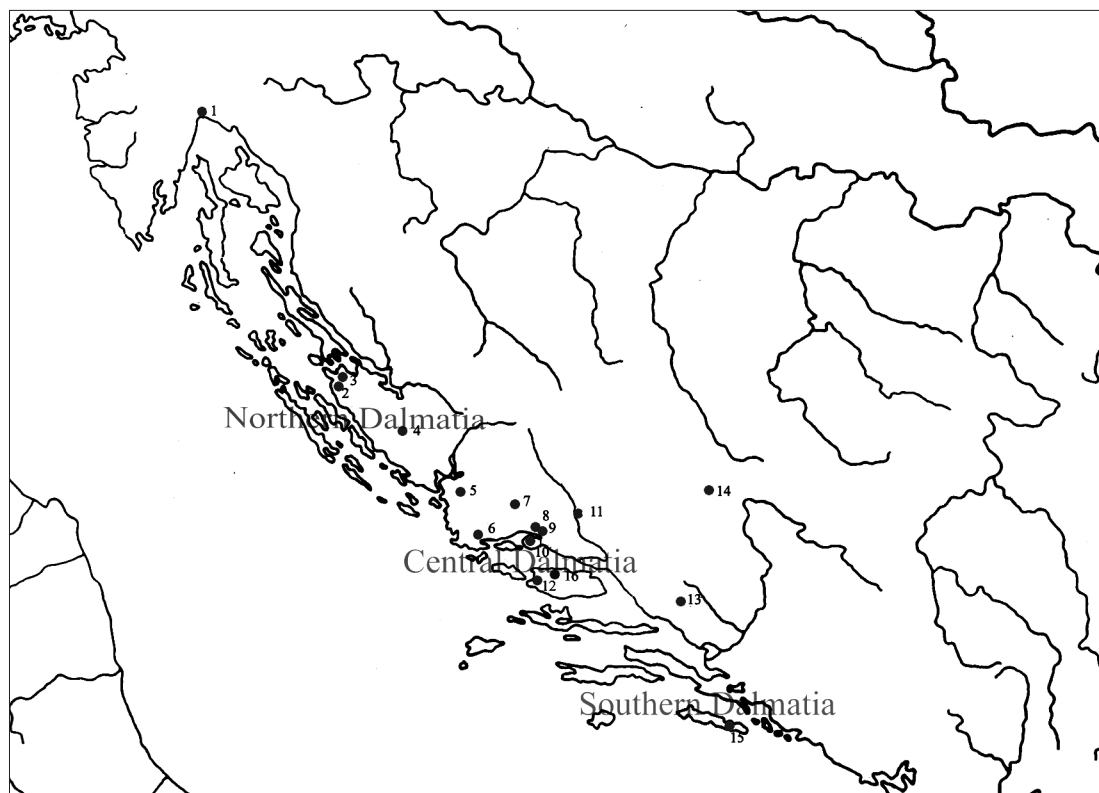


Fig. 1. - Dalmatian sites mentioned in the text. 1. Kastav; 2. Privlaka; 3. Vrsi; 4. Benkovac; 5. Podumci; 6. Dabar-Marina; 7. Benkovac; 8. Solin; 9. Vranjic; 10. Split; 11. Dugiš; 12. Rat kod Ložišća; 13. Orah; 14. Varvara; 15. Babino polje; 16 Škrip.

LBA in Dalmatia covers the period from the 11th to the 10th century B.C. (Batović 1980, p. 22). This phase represents the transitional period from the Bronze to the Iron Age. His arguments are based on the appearance of some local bronze types in the 11th and 10th century B.C. that mark the origins of independent and recognizable cultural phenomena among the Illyrian communities of *Delmatae* and *Liburni* (Batović 1980, pp. 30-31).

There are facts supporting both chronologies, but for the purposes of this meeting I shall concentrate on the 12th and 11th century B.C.

So far, the known LBA material from Dalmatia comes from settlements (hill-forts, caves and pile-dwellings), burials (in cists under stone mounds and in caves), enclosures and hoards. The majority of the archaeological material came to museums as accidental findings. The lack of excavations also entailed complete ignorance of the pottery. Only few ceramics had been collected by the second half of the 20th century, and the pottery collected later has never been systematically analysed. Generally, scholars tend to say that, according to their own experience, the ceramics are of bad quality, are poorly decorated and in their forms partly resemble the ceramics of Urnfield and west Balkan areas (Marović 2002, p. 256; Batović 1980, pp. 38-41).

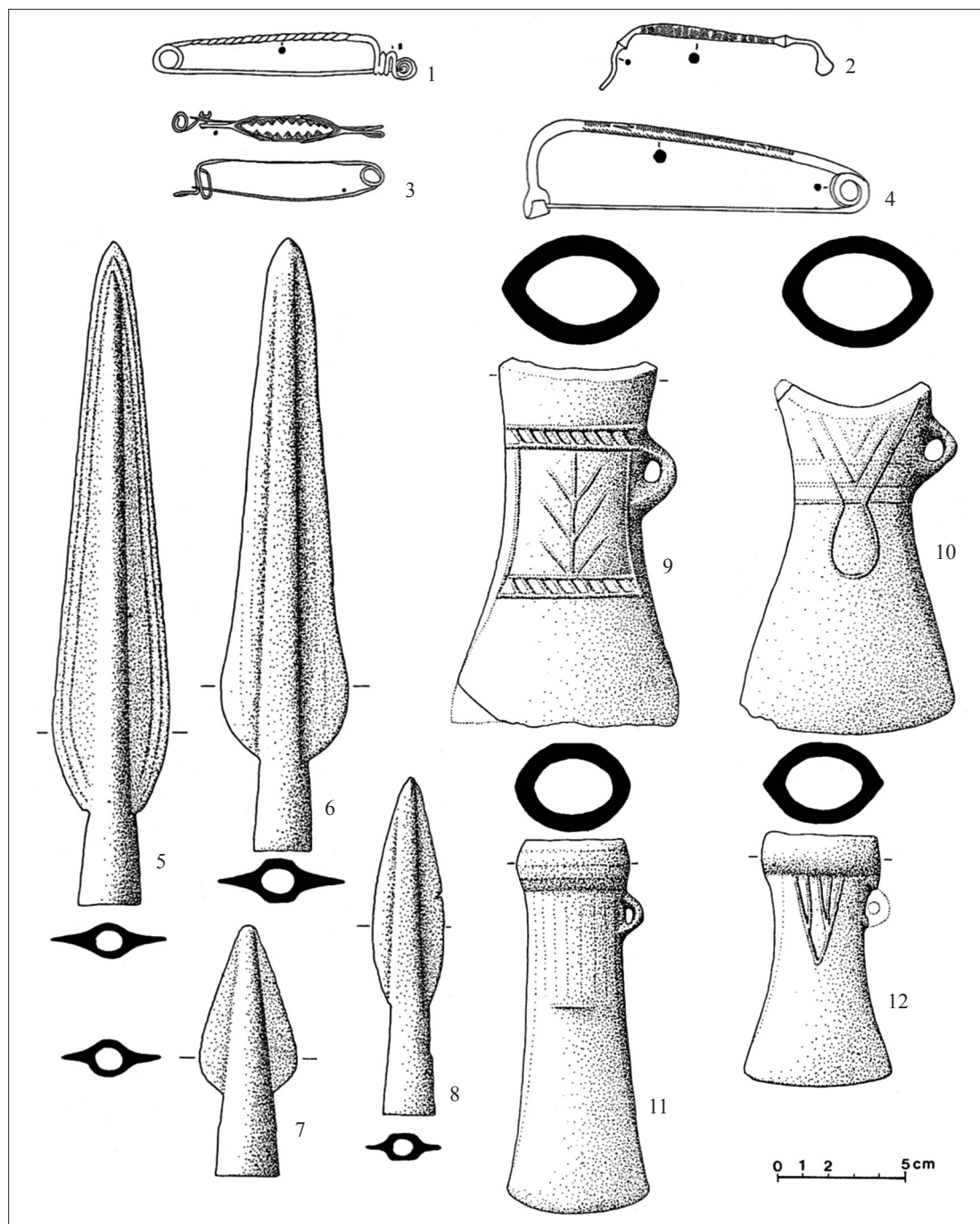


Fig. 2. - 1. Podumci; 2. Solin; 3 and 4. Split surroundings, unknown findspot; 5. Muć; 6-8. unknown provenience; 9. Ložišća, 10. unknown provenience; 11. Orah; 12. unknown provenience (1-4: after PROTIĆ 1988, fig. 17; 5-8: after PROTIĆ 1988, fig. 14; 9-12: after PROTIĆ 1988, fig. 12).

Bronze material from the Ha A1 period shows strong influences of the Urnfield area of Northern Croatia (Protić 1988, p. 217; Batović 1980, pp. 41-42; Glogović 2000, pp. 13-14).

According to Ksenija Vinski-Gasparini (1973, p. 125), the 2nd phase in the development of the Urnfield culture was the time when there is evidence of some kind of expansion to the South, whether by exchange of products of material culture, or due to some kind of population movements. For example, excavation data from the northern Herzegovinian hill-fort of Varvara, one of the few excavated, show traces of some changes in material culture connected with the influence from the North, but Čović argues that this change can be connected with larger population movements (Čović 1983b, pp. 411-412). As in Dalmatia, these issues wait for further excavation results, but it is the general opinion that there was no significant inflow of the Urnfield population from the North into Dalmatia (Batović 1980, p. 42; Majnarić-Pandžić 1998, p. 214).²

A very important artefact from this period is the violin bow fibula (fig. 2, 1-4). Only a few of them have been found in Dalmatia, and none from a well-defined archaeological context (Marović 1999, pp. 15-16; Id. 1981, p. 22). This type of fibula is very common in the Urnfield hoards of the 2nd phase, and all authors agree that the examples found so far are imports from there (Vinski-Gasparini 1973, pp. 112-125). The chronology of the violin bow fibulae from Dalmatia is disputable. Depending on the point of view of the author, they are compared with the ones from the Urnfield hoards of either the 2nd (Čović 1970, p. 74; Vinski-Gasparini 1973, pp. 124-125) or the 3rd phase (Batović 1980, p. 29-30).

Spearheads and socketed axes (fig. 2, 5-12) are present in Dalmatia from Ha A1. Since very few come from well-defined contexts, they are generally dated Ha A1-Ha B2.

According to the current state of research these products could mostly be imports from the Urnfield area, but there are also few examples of local production of socketed axes, chisels and spearheads in such settlements as Dugiš (fig. 3) in Dalmatia, or Varvara (fig. 4) in Northern Herzegovina (Marović 2002, p. 253, fig. XXVII; Batović 1980, p. 38). Considering the lack of raw material for their production in Dalmatia (Forenbaher 1995, p. 271), there must have been some significant imports of these items from the Urnfield area, and therefore a combination of sources providing the market with the needed goods.

Metallurgical activity at the hill-fort of Varvara was immense. The excavations have revealed moulds for the production of spearheads, chisels, pins, socketed axes and swords (Čurčić 1900; Batović 1980, p. 38). The centre produced long swords of European type and a local type of shorter sword with a solid grip (fig. 4, 1 and 4).

Two swords of Sprockhoff Ia type have been found in Dalmatia. One of them belongs to the Dabar-Marina hoard (fig. 5) (Glogović 2000, pp. 13-14). This hoard represents the best example of the inflow of objects from the Urnfield area. Within the assemblage there is one example of a bronze chest-plate. This is the only one so far found in Dalmatia, but this type of armour is well documented within the 2nd phase of the Urnfield culture in Northern Croatia (Vinski-Gasparini 1973, pp. 95-96). This hoard as a whole seems to be a direct import from the North.

In the Ha A2 period significant changes occur in the body of the archaeological material, especially among bronzes. Some kind of independent local development takes place in the northern

² It is also important to stress that in Northern Dalmatia no changes occur in the burials rite: skeletal burials in the crouch position remain dominant in this phase and continue into the Iron Age.

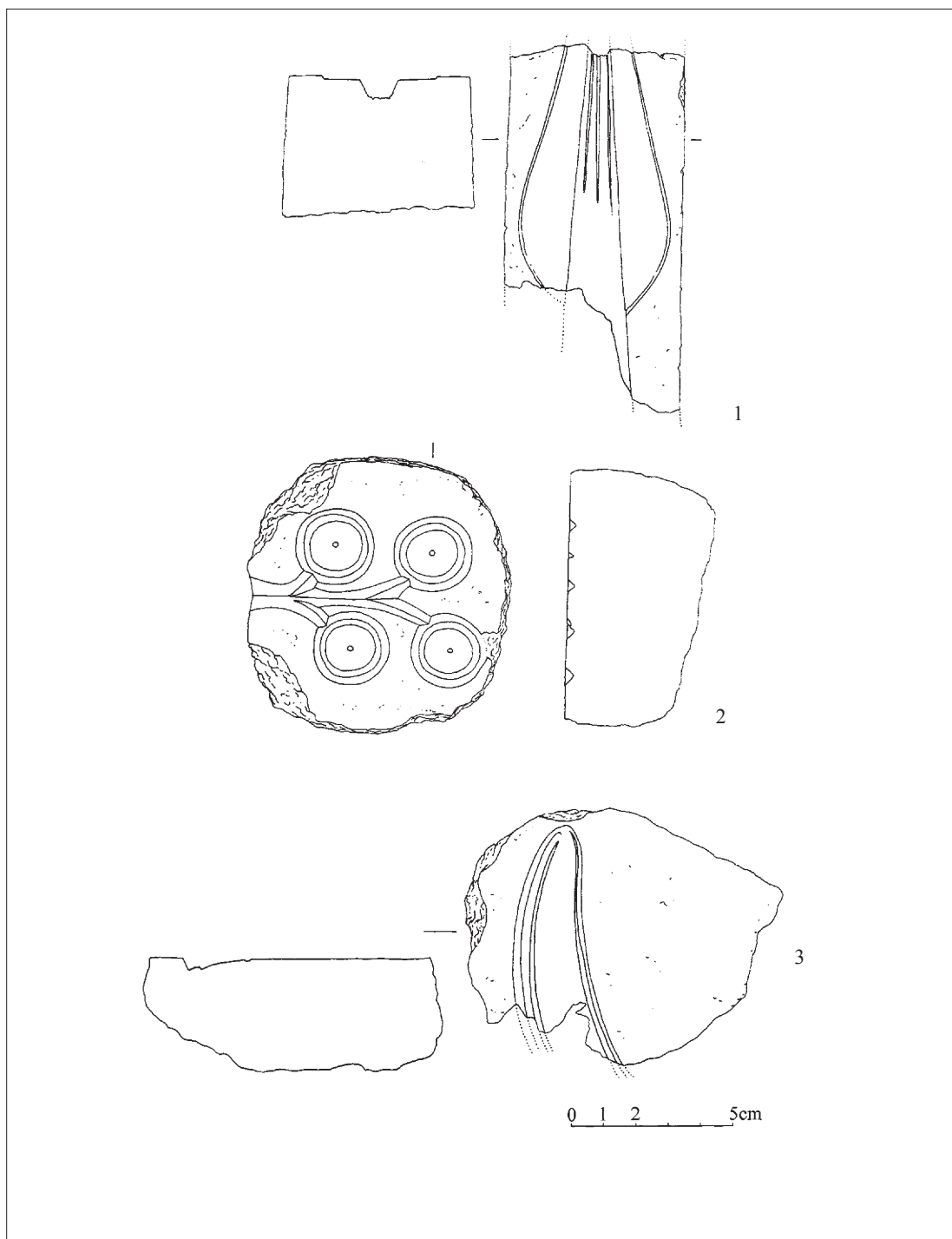


Fig. 3. - 1-3. Dugiš (after MAROVIĆ 2002, T. XXVII).

part of Dalmatia. This is marked by the emergence of a specific type of fibula, the arched fibula with two discs on the arch (fig. 6, 4). In this part of Dalmatia this type of fibula developed into the form which spread into the neighbouring regions of Istria, the hinterland of the Northern Adriatic (the area that was, in the Iron Age, inhabited by the *Japodes*) and Picenum, on the opposite Adriatic coast (Batović 1980, pp. 30-31). This was to be the leading type of fibula for almost three centuries.

This type of fibula is the first indication of the emergence of an independent cultural phenomenon. In the later centuries this culture would be connected with the name of the historic *Liburni*.

Most scholars claim that this fibula had locally developed from a variant of the violin-bow fibula, the one with two buttons on the arch (Batović 1980, p. 31). What still remains unanswered is the question raised by the fact that the violin-bow fibula is extremely rare in Dalmatia and that in Northern Dalmatia it is completely absent (Protić 1988, p. 223; Batović 1980, pp. 29-30). So, some questions remain to be answered about the origin of this type of fibula.

Along with these new types of bronze products, in the Ha A2 period Urnfield bronze types continue to be present in Dalmatia (Protić 1988, p. 217). Nevertheless, it must be taken into consideration that Ha A2 is the period when the production of these items is documented in Dalmatia as well as in the neighbouring area of Herzegovina (in the hinterland of Central Dalmatia). What the impulse for the production of the new bronze types was remains unknown, but one can only presume that the emergence of the new types was conditioned by the existence of some kind of developed metallurgic production. The bronze production evidenced at the Varvara hill-fort is something that we hope to find in some settlement in Dalmatia, in order to shed light on the emergence of the local bronze types. Given the current state of research, new excavations can effect radical changes in our knowledge.

Weapons present in Dalmatia support the picture of intensive contacts of LBA Dalmatia with the Northern Herzegovina metallurgic centres. These are further intensified in Ha A2 and later, as the presence of short, solid-grip swords in Northern Dalmatia shows (fig. 6, 2-3). These swords, whose production is documented at Varvara, were distributed in Northern Dalmatia and its hinterland as well as in Istria and central Bosnia (Batović 1980, pp. 36-37).

The development which is recognizable in the northern part of Dalmatia in Ha A2 began one century later in Central Dalmatia, in the Ha B1 period. It is also marked by the emergence of a new type of fibula (fig. 6, 5) (Čović 1970, pp. 74-75; Batović 1980, pp. 30-31), very similar to one from Northern Dalmatia. This fibula, of the so-called "Golinjevo" type, is widespread in the following centuries and shows a very high level of metallurgic skill.

In this period some very important bronze ornamental items came into fashion, such as "spectacle pendants" (fig. 6, 6) (Čović 1970, pp. 82-83). Such types had an independent development in this area, and greatly influenced the material culture for the following three centuries.

Typical settlements of this period are hill-forts (Croatian: *gradina*). Their spatial distribution is well documented (Gaffney *et alii* 1997; Stančić *et alii* 1999; Kirigin *et alii* 2006), but only one has been excavated systematically (Čović 1983b, pp. 393-394). Two other types of settlements appear in the area. One, with pile-dwellings, was excavated in the late 50s and recently published (Marović 2002), and is an example of settlement on the river Cetina, a very promising archaeological region in Central Dalmatia (Milošević 2006). The other, a LBA enclosed farmstead in Northern Dalmatia, was recorded and excavated in the mid 80s (Chapman *et alii* 1996, pp. 130-133, 220-227).

These facts limit our interpretations because hill-forts in the area are in use from the beginning of the Bronze Age and throughout the Iron Age (Benac 1985, p. 190; Čović 1983a, p. 136;

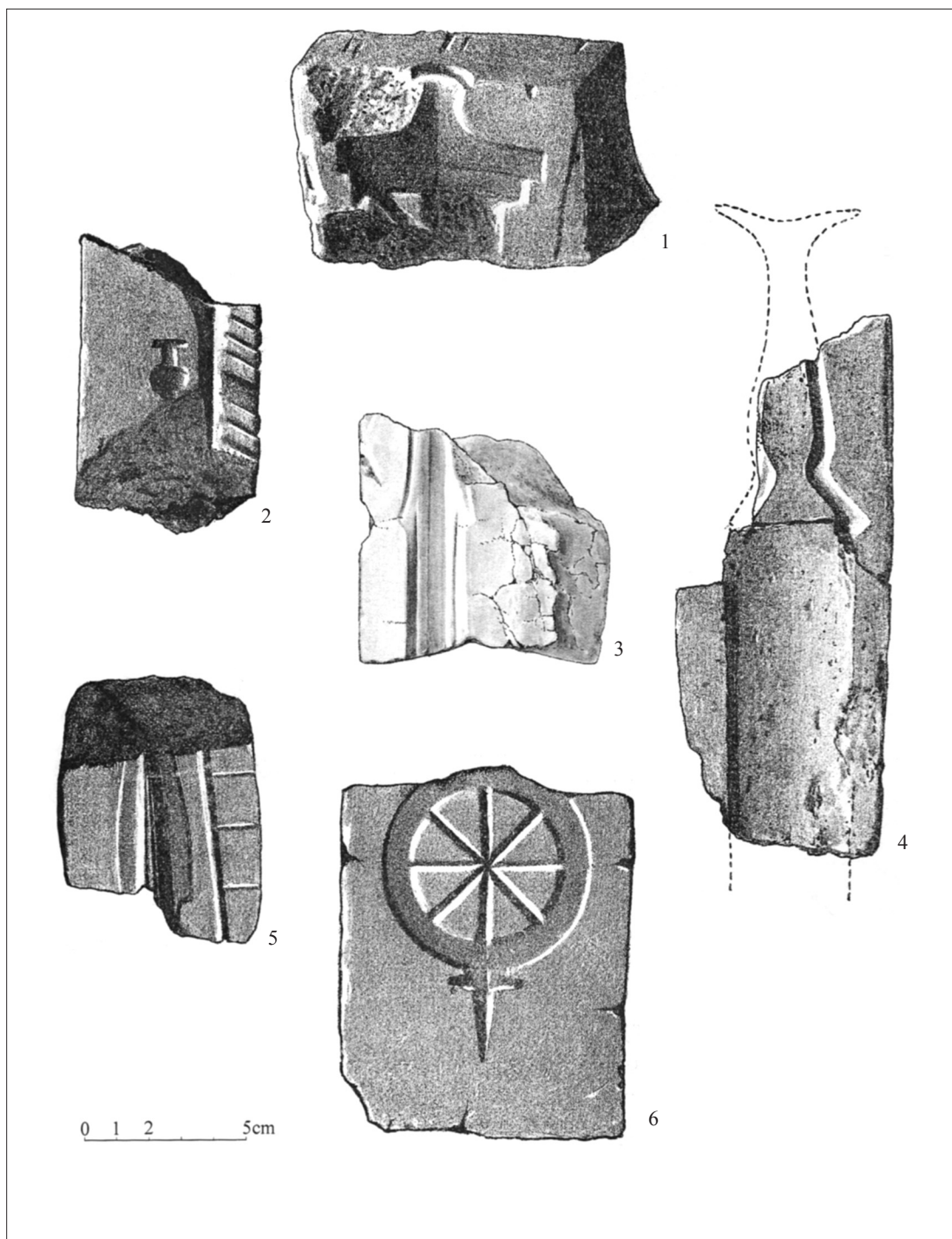


Fig. 4. - 1-6. Varvara (1-2, 4-6: after ČURČIĆ 1900, sl. 3, 6, 8; T. I and T. II; 3: after ČOVIĆ 1983b, T. LVIII).

Chapman *et alii* 1996, p. 153). Their dating is mostly based upon the comparison of surface collections of artefacts with the contemporary evidence from neighbouring areas, especially from the far better known Urnfield culture of Northern Croatia and the LBA centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Ha A1 there is a marked increase in the building of fortified settlements and the movement of populations from lowland sites to defended sites situated on strategic points in control of communication routes (Benac 1985, p. 192; Protić 1988, p. 200; Chapman *et alii* 1996, p. 154).

During the 12th and 11th centuries B.C. significant changes occur in the cultural landscape of Dalmatia. Spatial analyses combined with excavations have shown that in the LBA structures such as dry-stone walls on pasture land, agricultural clearance cairns, terracing walls and large dry-stone enclosures were built in Northern Dalmatia for the first time (Chapman *et alii* 1996, p. 151). This pattern is noticeable in most part of Dalmatia. Large investments of human labour included also the building of large fortifications and stone burial mounds. This implies that a hierarchical society existed, at least to some degree.

It is also very interesting to notice that in the 11th c. B.C. all Dalmatian sites with amber finds are in the territory of the communities which had started their own development by that time. This seems to correspond with the emergence of local bronze types. Such circumstances point to the existence of some kind of élite within these communities using amber as prestigious material.

Forenbaher (1995, p. 276) argued that the process of stratification of LBA Dalmatia societies had not produced strong and organized élites by that time. According to him, one of the indicators pointing to that is the absence of larger quantities of luxurious goods such as amber.

Taking all these facts into consideration, one can only suppose that the social development in Dalmatia was underway in the LBA, but, so far, not much can be said about it.

There are three Ha A1 and A2 burial sites with amber finds from Dalmatia (Privlaka, Vrsi and Vranjic), with a total of 27 amber beads found (Palavestra 1993, pp. 50-51, 65; Forenbaher 1995, p. 276). Each graves contained Tiryns-type amber beads, while two of them contained also Allumiere-type amber beads. The inventory of the Privlaka grave is perhaps the most interesting, as it contained 16 green glass beads, together with the Tiryns- and Allumiere-type amber beads (Batović 1983, T. XLIV).

In Central Dalmatia three amber beads were found in the grave at Vranjic, near Split, and dated, on the basis of the accompanying goods, to the second half of the 10th c. B.C. (Marović 1967, p. 8). The amber beads could well be older than the rest of the grave goods, falling within our period (Palavestra 1993, pp. 275, 290). Together with the bronze items and the amber, five glass beads were also found in the grave (Marović 1967, p. 8).

Another site with glass beads from Ha A1 and A2 Dalmatia is on the island of Mljet, at the Babino polje site, where 16 small blue glass beads were discovered by non-experts (Marović 1969, pp. 16-19).

All the Croatian scholars agree that the LBA glass beads so far known from Dalmatia are most probably imported from the North Adriatic production sites (Batović 1983, p. 319; Cardarelli 1992, p. 395). The presence of Tiryns amber beads that has been documented at Frattesina (Negroni Catacchio 1972, p. 17; Palavestra 1993, p. 251) and the distribution of the Allumiere beads (Cardarelli 1992, pp. 397-398) make a case for claiming that the vast majority of Ha A1 and A2 amber and glass from Dalmatia could be of North Adriatic provenience.

Reminiscent of that trade could be the presence, in a burial cave in Central Dalmatia (Marović 1999, p. 20), of a bronze pin (fig. 6, 1) found together with material of Ha A1 and A2.

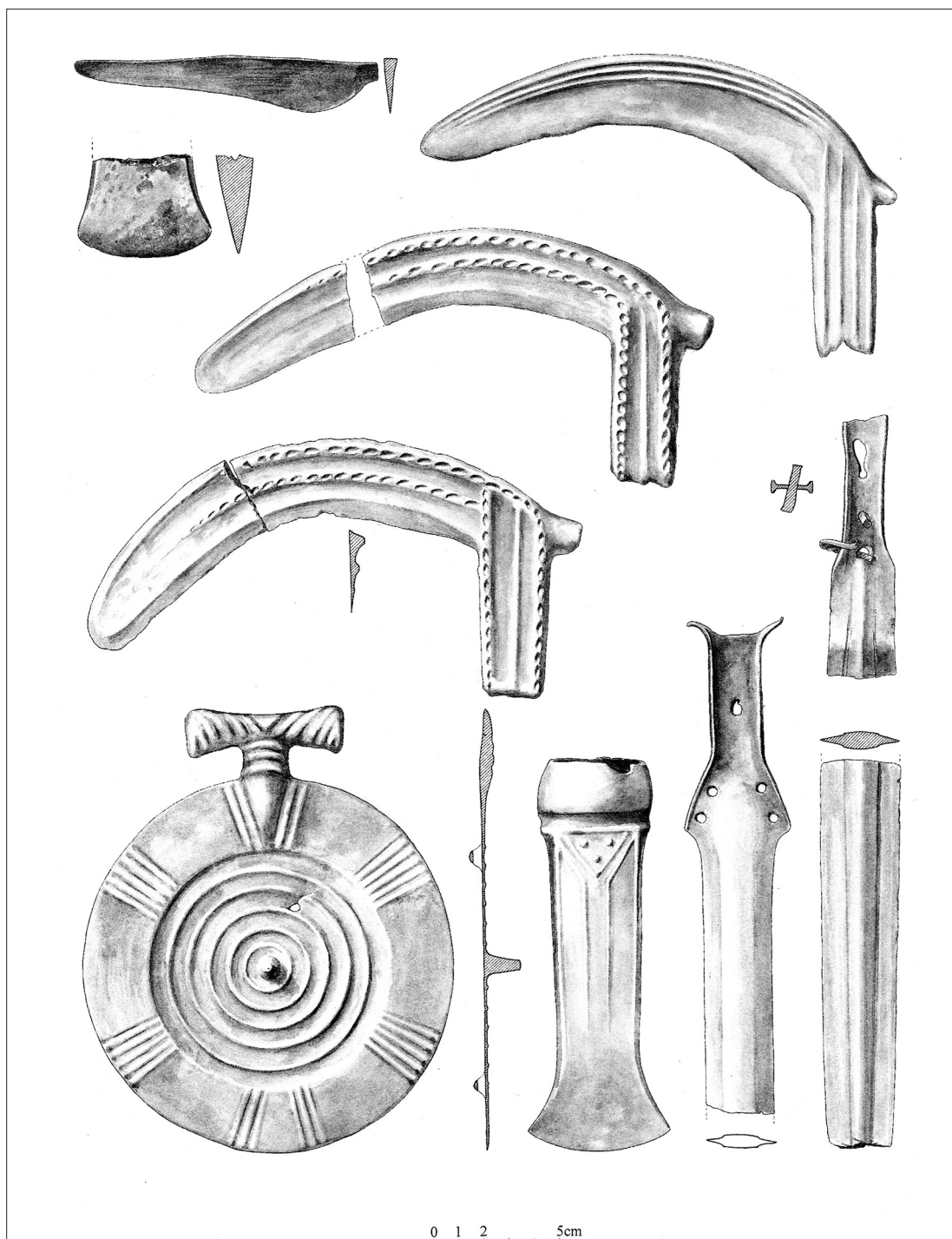


Fig. 5. - Dabar-Marina hoard (after BATOVIĆ 1983, pl. XLIX).

(The piece is the only one of its type from the east coast of the Adriatic). Similar pins have been found at Peschiera (Müller-Karpe 1959, pls. 13, 3; 104, 27).

One well-known piece, the miniature Makarska ingot, has raised a lot of questions and doubts regarding its provenience and dating. Considering the information available concerning this artefact, it is still hard to say anything precise regarding its origin and archaeological context. We know for sure that it was purchased by Sir John Evans together with eight other objects and that his son, Sir Arthur J. Evans, considered all these objects to be part of one hoard (Evans 1906, p. 360).

Some scholars, led by H.W. Catling (1964, p. 269, note 3), either doubted or rejected the possibility that it was purchased at Makarska, suggesting that in the inventory notes of Sir John Evans the site names could be mistaken. They favoured the site of Makrasyka at Cyprus as the finding spot and the place where the item was purchased. By contrast, Croatian scholars for the most part supported the position of Buchholz (1959, pp. 28, 35, 37) (often without mentioning the opposed opinions), who considered Makarska as the finding spot and dated the piece around 1200 B.C.³ It was used as a major piece of evidence for contacts with the Aegean.

After considering the pieces from the “hoard”, differences in their relative dates led Lucia Vagnetti (1971, p. 213) to presume that the pieces had been brought to Makarska from somewhere else. Marović (1984, p. 59, note 44) noticed that two flat axes from the “hoard” are common within the archaeological material from Dalmatia, while the other types are not present there. He supposed it possible, considering the nature of antiquity trade and collections of the time, that the “hoard” consisted of pieces collected from different sites, Makarska included. Dunja Glogović (2000, p. 15, note 4) published the content of an inventory card from the Ashmolean Museum, where these items are kept. She pointed to the fact that besides the city of Makarska, Dalmatia is also named there as a region where the ingot and the “hoard” were found. Further on, she claims that it is hardly possible that Sir John Evans could have mistaken both site and region.

Taking all this into consideration, it is almost certain that it cannot be questioned whether the items were purchased at Makarska. Nevertheless, the exact origin of the finds obviously cannot be established in this way.

A few pottery sherds have started a debate about the contacts between the Aegean and the eastern Adriatic coast. Two pieces of different vessels found at the site of Škrip (on the island of Brač) seem to be of Mycenaean origin, and are currently dated to the LH IIIB/IIIC period (Gaffney *et alii* 2002, p. 33; Kirigin 2006, p. 19). These are the only ones to have been found in Dalmatia thus far, and the question remains open as their origin. What makes the case even more interesting is the appearance of the Škrip site. This hill-fort site, unlike all the other similar sites in Dalmatia, possesses impressive fortifications built of large (up to 1.5 by 0.7m) rectangular stone blocks (Kirigin 2006, figs. 4 and 5). These fortifications are unique on this side of the Adriatic, and have always invited different interpretations. Their similarity to the Hellenistic fortifications present in the area made a case for attributing them to Hellenistic influence, but researchers have proven that their construction is somewhat different. Škrip walls were supported from the inside with an earthen bank, while Hellenistic walls in this area have two faces. Apart from that, no Iron Age remains have been found so far on the site.

³ There are some opinions in the Croatian literature that doubt Buchholz' classification of the Makarska ingot. They consider it to be of his type 2 instead of 3, and date it in 14th-13th c. B.C.: BATOVIĆ 1973, p. 66; MAJNARIĆ-PANDŽIĆ 1998, p. 202.

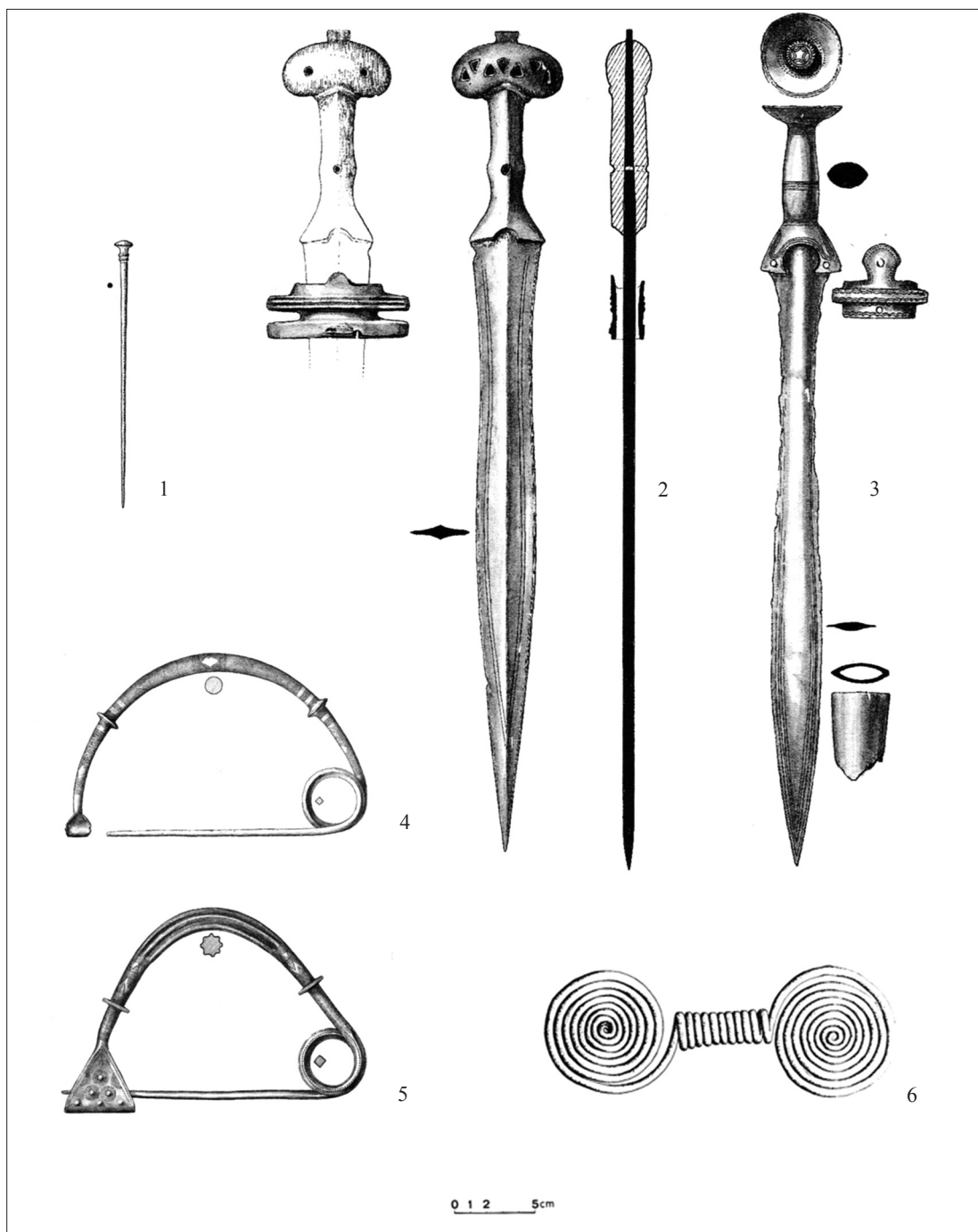


Fig. 6. - 1. Podumci; 2. Benkovac; 3. Kastav; 4. Vrsi; 5. unknown provenience; 6. Vranjic (1: after MAROVIĆ 1999, fig. 7; 2-3: after BATOVIĆ 1983, pl. XLVI; 4: after BATOVIĆ 1983, pl. XLIV; 5: after BATOVIĆ 1983, pl. XLVIII; 6: after PROTIĆ 1988, fig. 16).

One of the above-mentioned sherds was found within this earthen bank, what led the discoverers to assume that the walls were built under Mycenaean influence (Gaffney *et alii* 2002, p. 33; Kirigin 2006, p. 19). As the situation is not so clear,⁴ all this still awaits confirmation.

When we summarise the facts, we can be certain about few things. Evidence points to the connections with the Urnfield area, there are some proofs of intensive exchange with Northern Herzegovina, and strong indications of some kind of contacts and trade with Northern Adriatic. Unfortunately, the archaeological picture of Dalmatia in the 12th and 11th c. B.C. gives us little information about all those aspects that are relevant in any serious attempt to understand this period.

It is evident that only new excavations, together with spatial and environmental analyses will give us new and reliable results. The presented data, although deficient in many ways, are intriguing and stimulate research. Recent systematic surveys on Central Dalmatian islands and in the Cetina region (Gaffney *et alii* 1997; Stančić *et alii* 1999; Kirigin *et alii* 2006; Milošević 1998) show great potential. Our plan is to perform excavations at the key locations on the Central Dalmatian islands that have strong surface evidence of LBA and Iron Age material, hoping that the results will improve our knowledge of the period.⁵

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⁴ The excavations did not cover areas large enough to remove the doubts.

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