

FUNERARY PRACTICES DURING THE BRONZE AND IRON AGES IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Proceedings of the 14th International Colloquium
of Funerary Archaeology in Čačak, Serbia
24th – 27th September 2015

Beograd - Čačak, 2016



International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (UISPP) – 30th
Commission: Prehistoric and Protohistoric Mortuary Practices
Association for Studies of Funerary Archaeology (ASFA) – Romania

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Beograd - Čačak, 2016

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THE UNKNOWN KNOWN: NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL "CLOTHES" OF RITEŠIĆ – *work in progress*

Martina Blečić Kavur
Aleksandar Jašarević

Abstract:

The Illyrian helmet is one of the most distinctive archaeological finds - as a symbol of authority and a historical attribute it held a prominent place in mythologies of many Early Iron Age Balkan communities. The situation is similar today – figuratively speaking as far as the archaeological literature is concerned. With the announcement of the well-preserved Illyrian helmet our jubilarian Rastko Vasić attached such a quality to Ritešić, an archaeological site near Doboj in the northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The helmet from Ritešić thus became the only known fact about the archaeology of that area. Moreover, the same burial mound, where the helmet was found, included a large collection of finds that are kept in the Museum in Doboj. Although being reduced in quantity, the remaining finds of attire, military equipment of the deceased and contributed set of ceramics suggest, that a group of prominent people of that area must have been buried there. Apart from what is already known about Ritešić, this paper will present what has been unknown so far, as its new archaeological "clothes". It will update our knowledge about the Iron Age elites from the western Balkan area.

Keywords:

Northern Bosnia, Ritešić, Iron Age, grave goods, Illyrian helmet, swords

The Illyrian helmet from Ritešić was not, fortunately, as previously thought an isolated find. Namely, exactly 41 years ago in 1974, during the road construction between Doboj and Modriča, archaeologists from Museum in Doboj were able to collect grave goods from a single destroyed burial mound. The archaeological site was named as "*Humka na drumu*" ("Tumulus on the road"). It was located on a small plateau on the bank of river Bosna between the hills and the river (Fig. 1). Minor archaeological excavations were conducted and very modest documentation was produced, the finds were never published and the site was not even mentioned in *Arheološki leksikon* of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The short report contained details concerning the constructions of the burial mound - after placing the deceased on the bottom of the tumulus, the entire surface was covered with clay. Subsequently it was overlaid with a stone cover which was again superimposed with earth. Exact details on the



Fig. 1 - Sites covered by the research marked on the geopolitical map of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

position of the deceased and the construction of the graves are unknown. Separated was only a single grave – the so-called "*Grave with a helmet*".^[1]

Moreover, the same burial mound, where the helmet was found, included a large collection of material finds and osteological remains. Since the "*clothes*" were chosen as the title metaphor, we will begin with their significance. Hence in the first and reduced introduction will be presented an interesting selection of attire (Fig. 2). Fibulae were presented with 2 well preserved examples lacking the pins. One was of Certosa type and the other one was a bow fibula with a hammered foot. Discovered were also 5 double pins made from bronze, 2 of which were violently deformed. Further was discovered a temporal ring made from bronze wire with 2 coils which had inserted a decorative pearl; three bronze chains made from bronze wire and 3 polygonal amber beads as well as 44 yellow round glass beads (Fig. 2).

From all of these items, culturally and chronologically the most important are fibulae and pins. Extensive studies of our jubilarian provide us crucial support for the analysis of that topic. *Fibula of Certosa type with a spring with a double coil*, according to Rastko Vasić (Vasić 1999, p. 99-100) or type V according to Biba Teržan (Teržan 1976, p. 376-377) (Fig. 2/2), was a witness of cultural links between the territories of northern Bosnia and Posavina with the Eastern Alpine cultural circle, undoubtedly along the so-called *Posavina corridor* with prominent positions of Donja Dolina and Sanski Most (Teržan 1976, p. 382, fig. 18; Vasić 1999, p. 100, T. 68A; Gavranović 2011, p. 203). Fibulae of this type were distributed from Hungary to Glasinac and to Transylvania (Fig. 3). They became a recognizable element of 5th century BC fashion and were, among other items of material culture, discovered with Illyrian

[1] Archive documents in the Museum of Doboј (ARH 01/74).

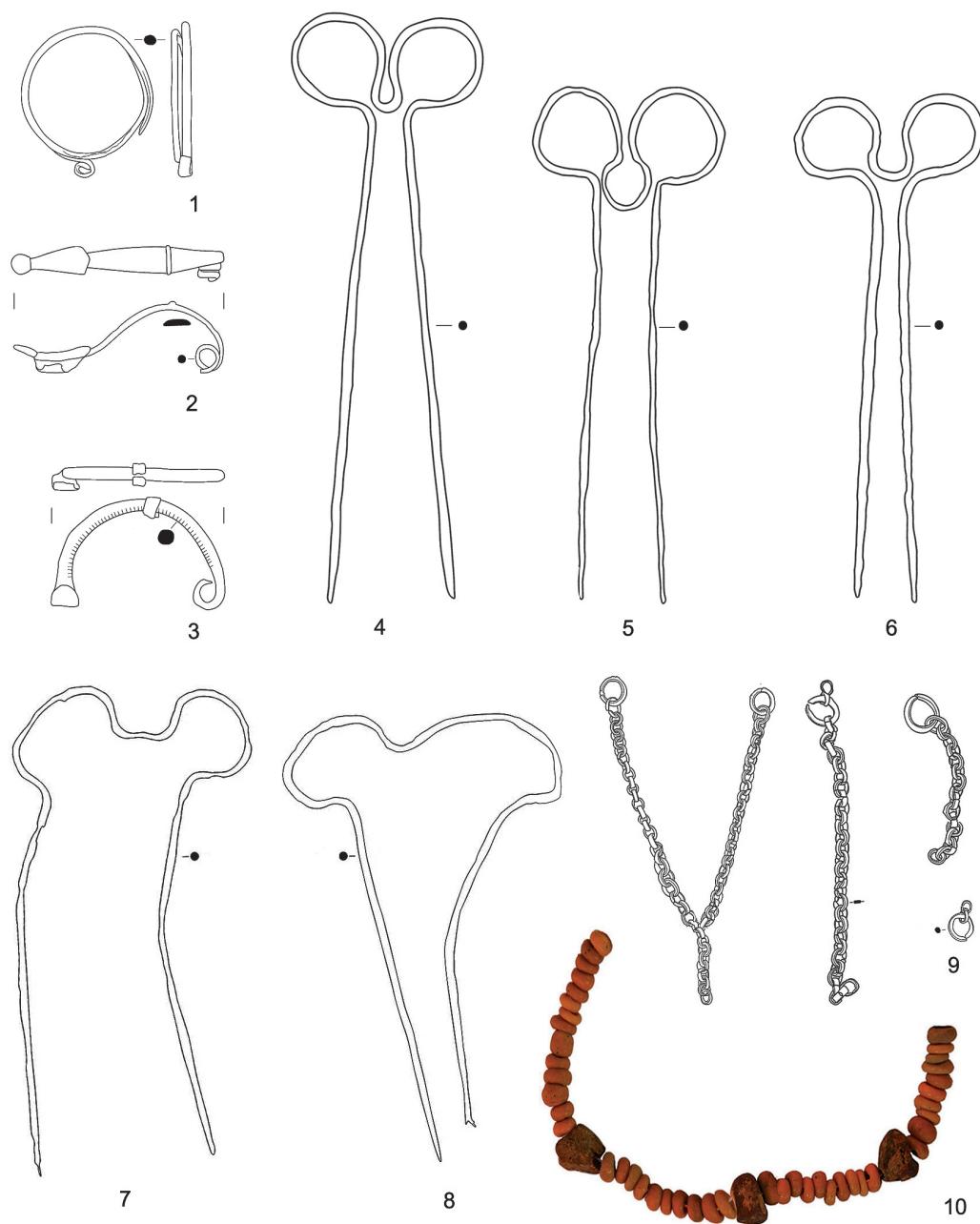


Fig. 2 - The repertoire of attire and jewellery from Ritešić (M. 1: 2).

helmets (for example in Taline on Glasinac, e.g. Teržan 1976, p. 376; Čović 1987, p. 630; Vasić 2010, p. 43, T. III, 4; Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2012, p.104, T. VII, 13) in male, but known also from female graves.

A simple *bow fibula with a hammered foot* is a less chronologically sensitive object (Fig. 2/3). However, it is culturally significant for the territory of Glasinac culture where they were often discovered as a part of regular grave goods (Benac and Čović 1957, T. VI, 5; Gavranović 2011, p. 189-190, fig. 176).

Double pins of the IVa type according to the typology of R. Vasić (Vasić 2003, p. 123-128) (Fig. 2/4-8) were extremely territorially extensive, culturally relatively heterogeneous and chronologically long-lasting, within an interval ranging from the 8th to the 2nd century BC. Thus, they got the "status" of

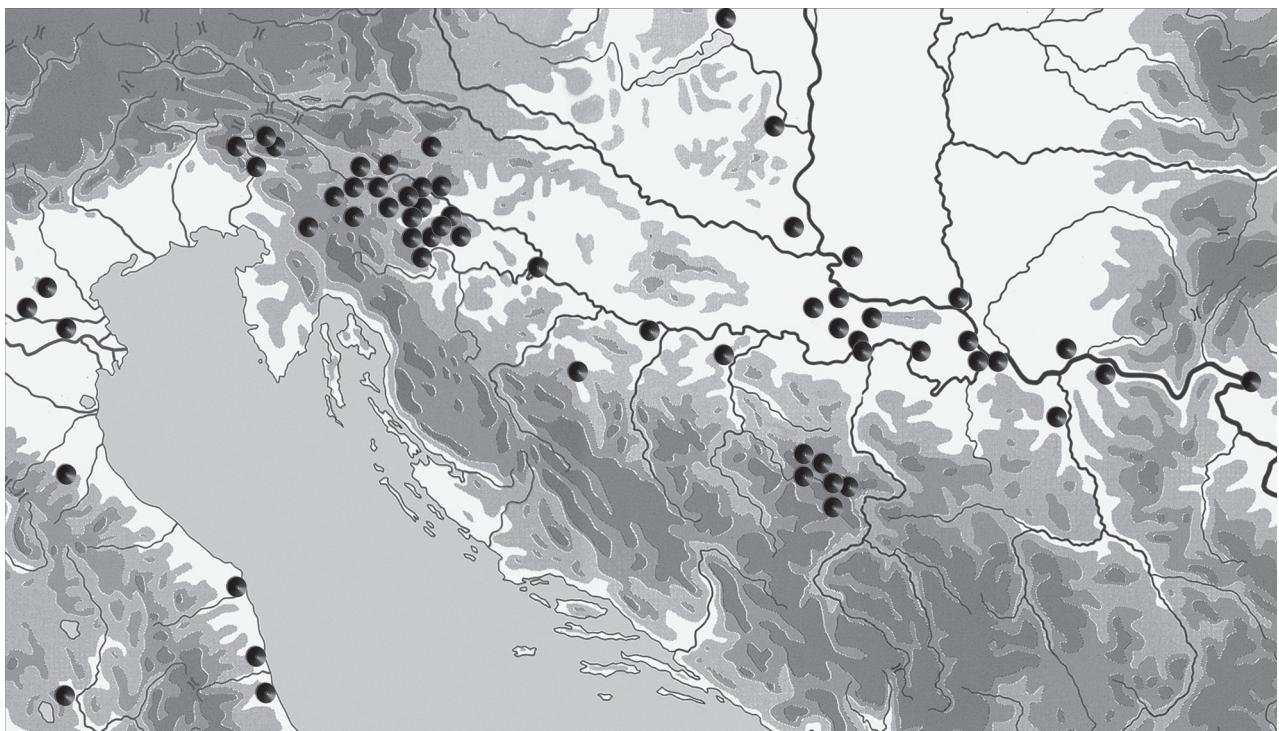


Fig. 3 - Distribution map of the Certosa type fibulae of variant V, i.e. with double spring coil
(supplemented after Teržan 1976; Vasić 1999).

an "eternal" fashionable, functional and decorative piece. Despite that their concentration and quantity, as well as their typological variability were significant for the territory of the Balkans (Fig. 4) and, consequently, they were referred to as the "Balkan-type" pins (Vasić 2003, p. 126, T. 69; Blečić Kavur and Miličević-Capek 2011, p. 34-39, fig. 4). In relation to other regions, the period of their absolute domination in fashion was precisely determined for the territory of western Bosnia and Lika as the period of the 5th and 4th century BC according to R. Vasić (Vasić 1982, p. 248; Vasić 2003, p. 126). At this point, we should also refer to their characteristic occurrence in the so-called princely graves of the Balkan area, not to mention all the rich and/or warrior graves – a fact which was also reflected in the example of Ritešić. They were more numerous in male graves, but were occasionally, although less numerous or only as individually finds, also discovered in female attires. Besides being used independently and functionally they were used only decoratively for the fixing of a composition of additional ornaments, chains, pendants and similar items – which confirms a possible interpretation for the discovery of chains and anklets from our tumulus. This was also attested by the famous Macedonian examples as well as the find from Herzegovinian Gorica (Blečić Kavur and Miličević-Capek 2011, p. 39; cf. Truhelka 1899, fig. 50).

When analysing military equipment we will focus on one of the offensive as well as the defensive equipment. Discovered were very well preserved bronze Illyrian helmet of III A2 type as well as iron spears and iron swords/knives in a poor state of preservation (Fig. 5, 7).

The *Illyrian helmet* was well analysed and interpreted in the scientific literature, first published exactly by R. Vasić (Vasić 2010, p. 43) (Fig. 5). Typologically it belongs to the III A2-a type of Illyrian helmets, with a decorative border composed from stamped squares, according to the typology of M. Blečić Kavur and A. Pravidur (Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2012, p. 63-73, 103-104, fig. 14, T. VI, 12). The closest parallels can be observed in the case of the helmets from Taline on Glasinac, Kamenjača at Breza or the

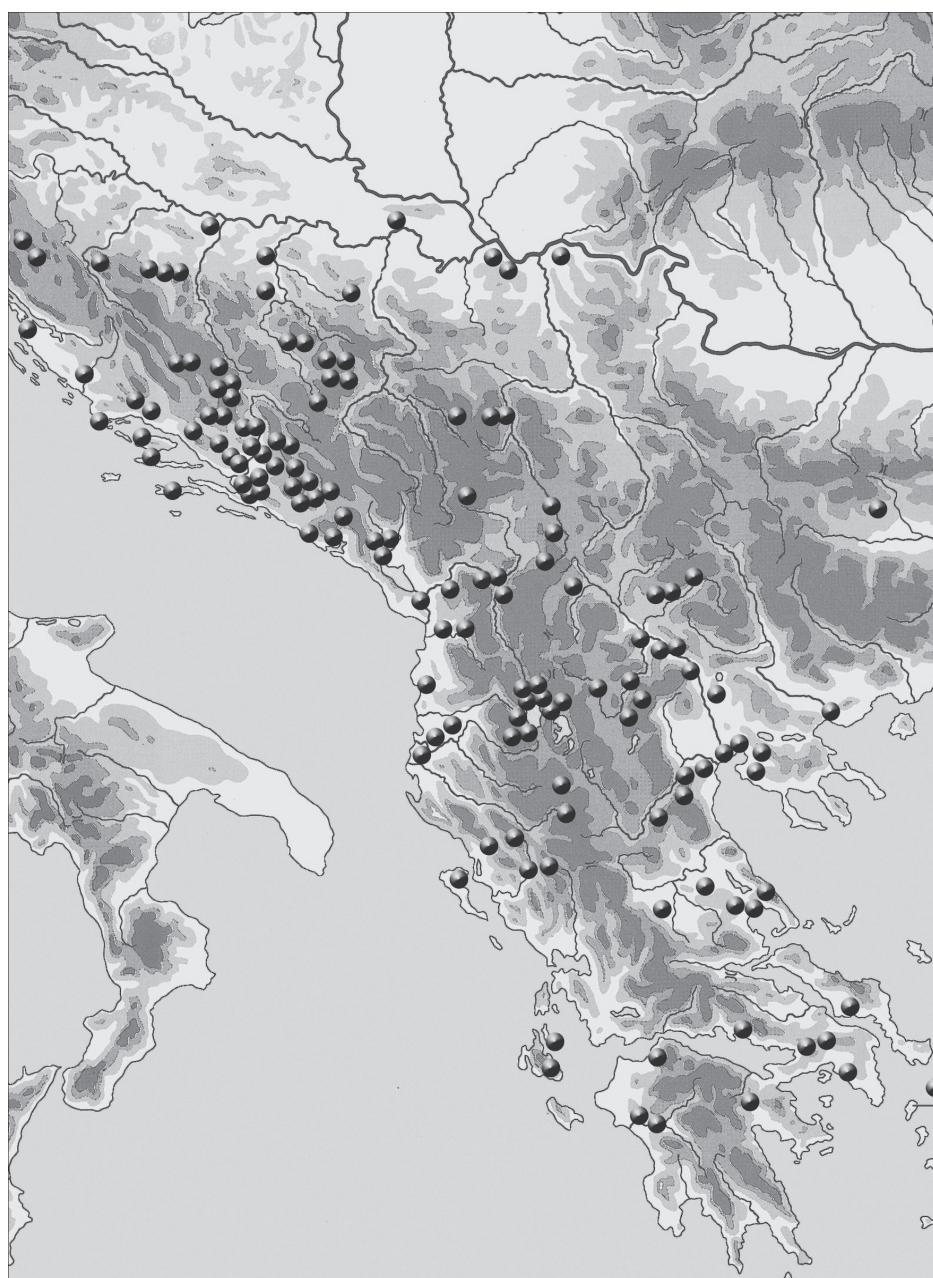


Fig. 4 - Distribution map of the double pins of type IVa (according to Vasić 2003; Blečić Kavur and Miličević-Capek 2011).

helmet from the Sava and, on the other side, on the necropolis of Čarakovo near Prijedor (Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2012, p. 67-68, T. V, T. VI, 11, T. VII, 13, 15-19). Contrasting to the every other variant known to date, Illyrian helmets of III A2-a type were the most geographically widespread and hence the most culturally diverse type. A noticeable increase, both geographically and quantitatively, is a feature of the western Balkans, the eastern Adriatic coast and the Macedonian areas (Fig. 6). Although, an entirely new and fascinating geographical shift is now demonstrated on the northern edge of their range, extending along the river Sava from Novo mesto in the west to Sremska Mitrovica in the east whence it continues north-eastwards all the way to the Transylvanian sites. The area of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, stands out markedly as being more fully documented. With 15 helmets classified with certainty



Fig. 5 - Illyrian helmet of the III A2-a type from Ritešić.

as belonging to this variant, it is second just behind the territory of historical Macedonia. Regarding to chronology, the helmets of this type were characteristic for the end of the 6th and 5th century BC (according to Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2012, p. 72-73, 83-84, fig. 18) (Fig. 6).

As in cases of Čarakovo and Taline, as well as in other rich warrior's graves on the broader territory of the Balkan and the Eastern Adriatic coast, the Illyrian helmets were mostly discovered together with a set of iron spears, swords and knives. In the same way were armed the deceased from the warrior's grave of "brothers in arms" with Illyrian helmets from Novo mesto Kapiteljska njiva VII/19 (Egg 1999, fig. 4-5, 7-10, 15-16; T. 12-19; Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2011, fig. 5-6; Križ 2012, p. 116-121).

Already in the 6th and particularly in the 5th and 4th century BC *iron spear points* were a standard part of military equipment of both warriors and military aristocracy in the wider Balkan region deposited in sets consisting of several spear points (Čović 1987, p. 454; Marijan 2000, p. 94, T. 4-6; Blečić Kavur and Miličević-Capek 2011, p. 63-64). At the present site, they constitute the most numerous, but also the most damaged group of finds. Discovered were a total of 13 smaller or larger recognizable fragments. It is accepted that spear points with a triangular cross-section of the rib are slightly older and that the elongated forms with a flattened rib and a long leaf, which might have served as throwing spears, are slightly more recent (Čović 1987, p. 630). The period of their use is generally considered to fall into phases IVc-2/Va of the Glasinac culture according to B. Čović (Čović 1987, p. 459, 626, 633).

The deterioration of the iron, especially when dealing with a fragment, prevents us from determining the type of weapon with certainty – was it a single-edged or a double-edged sword. This is also an aggravating characteristic, at least when speaking about a *machaira/kopis* or a curved knife, which originally allowed both possibilities (Blečić Kavur and Miličević-Capek 2011, p. 65). Given the structure and the form of the highly corroded finds, 11 fragments could be interpreted as parts of swords – but

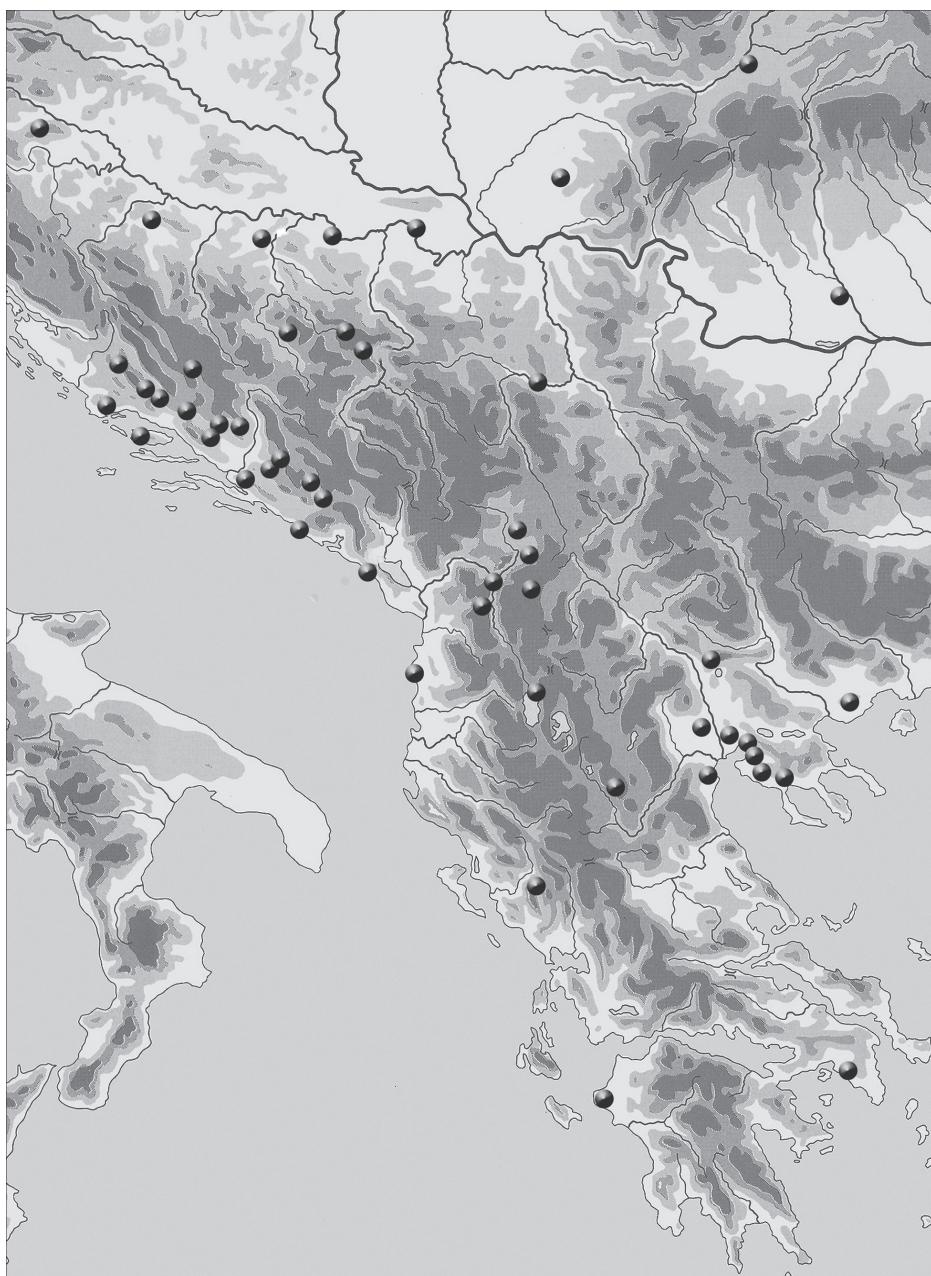


Fig. 6 - Distribution map of Illyrian helmets of variant III A2-a (according to Blečić Kavur and Pravidur 2012).

also this opinion should be dealt with caution until the detailed and final conservation of all iron items (Fig. 7). On some fragments of the handle were preserved rivets which may belong to straight, short double-edged swords of a *xyphos* type, while the largest fragment with 3 rivets could be a part of a *machaira* handle as known from Sanski Most (Parović Pešikan 1982, p. 35-39, T. III, 3). To the sword of *xyphos* type could be ascribed also 4 fragments of the middle part of the blade and the final tip of the sword's blade (Fig. 7/4-7). To a curved single-edged sword of *machaira* or *kopis* type (Quesada Sanz 1994, p. 77-92; Quesada Sanz 1997, p. 62-65, 153-157) most likely belonged 3 fragments (Fig. 7/8-10) while to *knives* could be attributed only 2 larger fragments (Fig. 11-12). In any case, the final number of the offensive weaponry will be known after the conservation.

The fact, however, is that in the 5th century BC swords and curved long blades were more often in use (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, p. 126; Sekunda 2001; Teleaga 2008, p. 289-292, fig. 55). It is also accepted that all three types of swords were used, without major difference, in cavalry and infantry units. However, the *xiphos* was a very expensive form of weaponry, most often associated with aristocratic circles. It played therefore a significant role among the warrior aristocracy; many times properly as status symbol – an *insignia*, rather than as truly functional weapon (Τουράτσογλου 1986; Sekunda 2001, p. 37; Webber 2003, p. 550-551; Nankov 2007, p. 37; cf. Sekunda 2010).

The final proof that the Ritešić burials belong to the aristocratic rank is the discovery of an exceptional object – a decorative bronze plating of the sword's sheath. Due to its shape and profilation, we can attribute it to a double edged sword. It was made from a thin bronze sheath, partially damaged by the corrosion of iron decorated with a plain decorative composition, but with a luxurious effect. Three lines of concentric circles with a dot in the centre produced with stamping and grooving covered the whole area. Circles were connected by tangents of embossed dots. Due to stylistic characteristics this composition of decoration is particularly well distributed on jewellery such as fibulae, earrings, buckles, belts etc. in the Glasinac culture during the 6th, 5th and 4th century BC.

In the tradition of decorating swords should be noted that very similar style starts to appear already during the final phase of the Late Bronze Age on the swords of Kulen Vakuf type from Kulen Vakuf or Škocjan (Harding 1990, p. 102, 104, T. 45: A 13, A 17-18, A. 25; Turk 1994, p. 124-125, T. 33). Related decorations can be found on a curved single-edged sword of Basarabi type from Novo mesto, princely grave I/16, from the beginning of the 7th century BC (Knez 1993, p. 20, 41, 42-43, T. 19; Križ 1997, p. 45, 49; Križ 2012, p. 103-104; cf. Teržan and Črešnar 2014, p. 715-716)^[2]. Nonetheless, so far are not known comparable object from the same period or geographic area. In *modus operandi*, we can assume the similarities with the bone carved sheath from the swords from Osovo princely grave, which is according to its geographical, cultural and chronological relation certainly most appropriate (Fiala 1897, p. 597, T. I; Benac and Čović 1957, T. XXVII, 4-5).

The ceramic set is poorly preserved and very fragmented, with a few isolated fragments of handles, a decorated small cup, and a larger fragment of a pot – *pithos* with ribbon appliqué with embossed decoration. As such, the form and manner of decoration fits the known distribution of related or identical ceramic types in northern Bosnia (types northern Bosnia sites Ripač, Sanski Most, Čarakovo) (Radimsky 1895, T. XXXV, 282; Fiala 1896, p. 231, fig. 33; Čović 1987a, p. 257-256, 261; Gavranović 2011, p. 172-173, 180, fig. 233, 251). Certainly is interesting a jug or amphora with a cylindrical neck and incised ornaments in the form of hanging triangles. Similar examples were found in Glasinac and in other northern Bosnian necropoles – Ripač, Sanski Most, Čarakovo or Donja Dolina (Fiala 1896, p. 237-238, fig. 57; Truhelka 1904, p. 224, fig. 56, T. LXV, 21; Čović 1987b, p. 505; Gavranović 2011, p. 81-82, fig. 104).

Finally we can conclude that the deceased were buried with standard equipment and costumes typical for the central and western Balkan region. Properly, preliminary anthropological analysis of the preserved osteological material demonstrated that in the tumulus were buried 4 individuals – 3 males and a single female.^[3] The most interesting find, of course, is the Illyrian helmet with an almost fully preserved skull. Due to the oxidation of the metal the skull remained covered in a greenish patina. At the time of death, the warrior was from 35 to 50 years old. For now this is the first example of a burial of a "warrior with an Illyrian helmet" on his head in south-eastern Europe. Ritešić thus belongs to the region of

[2] Similar, most likely an imported, single-edged sword with a T-shaped hilt is known from Podilijak, tumulus B7, on Glasinac, which is positioned in the IVb phase of the Glasinac culture (Čović 1987, p. 591, 601-602, fig. 34, 8).

[3] The research is carried out in collaboration with colleague Zrinka Premužić from Institute of Anthropology in Zagreb.

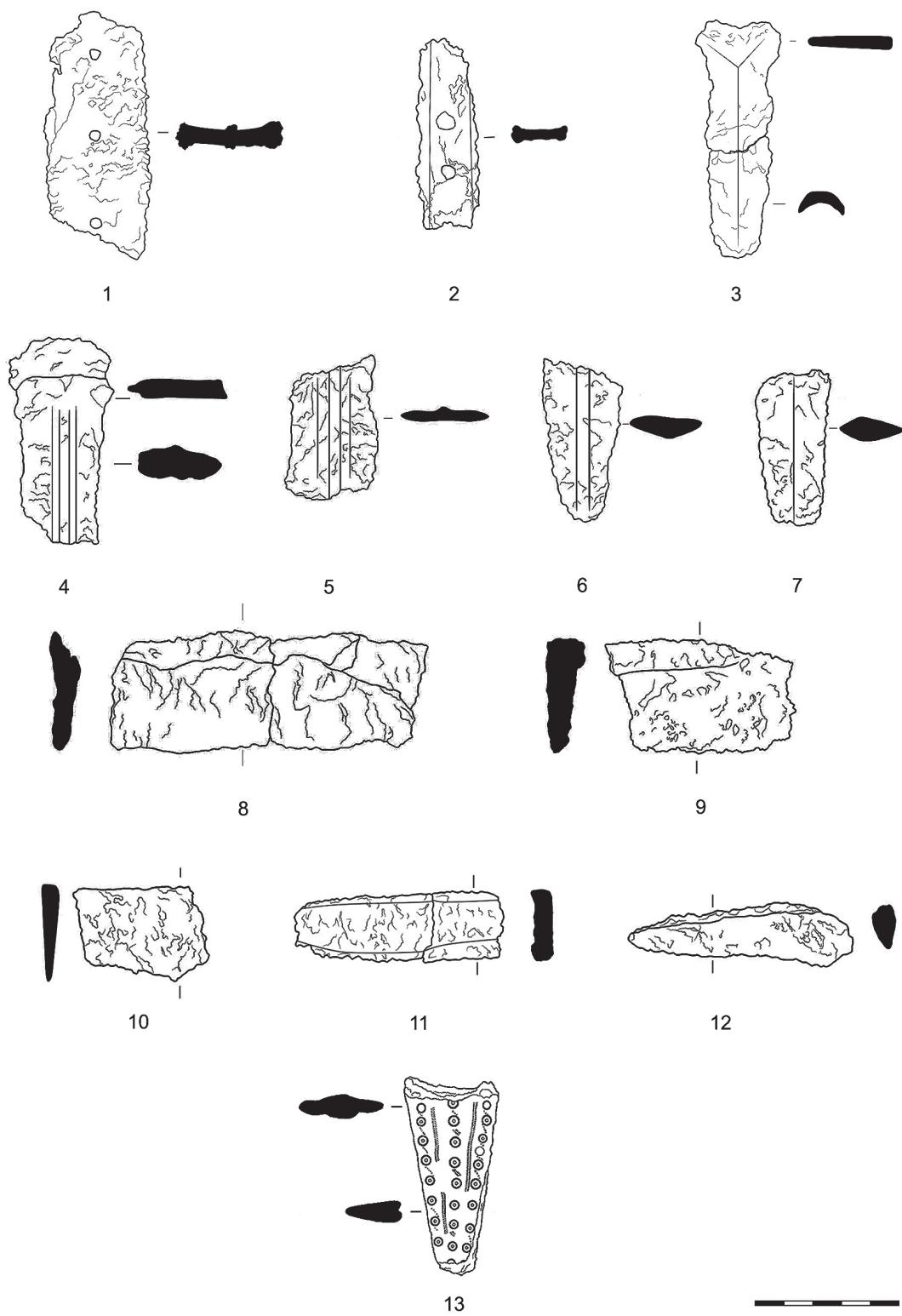


Fig. 7 - The repertoire of military equipment from Ritešić tumulus (M. 1: 2).

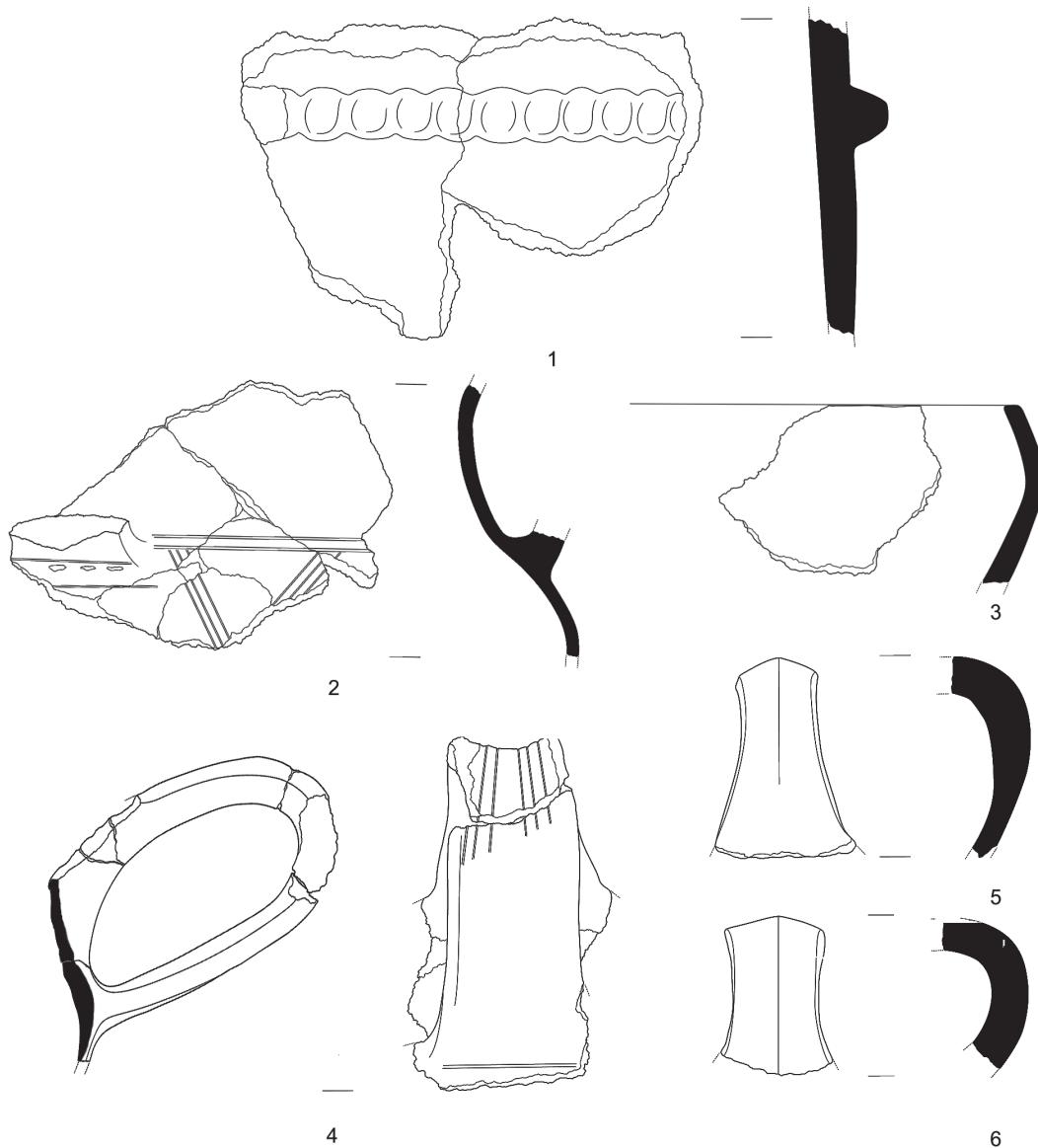


Fig. 8 - Pottery fragments from Ritešić tumulus (M. 1: 2).

northern Bosnia with close prominent sites such as Donja Dolina, Čarakovo and Sanski Most in the west, Glasinac in the east and Kamenjača in the south. Elements of attire, jewellery and military equipment demonstrate a more central Balkan cultural affiliation of Ritešić belonging to the Glasinac IVC-2 phase. The cultural and historical aspect of these graves demonstrate a highly socially ranked individuals in the community from the time of the second half of the 5th century BC – the period when throughout the Balkan rich and military graves emerged. In any case, we believe that Ritešić supplements the effigy of our knowledge about the Iron Age warrior elite in the Balkans, particularly its northern edge – the so-called *Posavina corridor*.^[4]

[4] We would like to thank Zrinka Premužić and Petra Rajić Šikanjić (Institute of Anthropology in Zagreb) for their cooperation and to Boris Kavur (University of Primorska, Koper) for comments that greatly improved the manuscript. The drawings were done by Vanja Žigić and M. Blečić Kavur, the photographs by A. Jašarević, the graphics, designs and plates by M. Blečić Kavur.

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903.5"637/638"(4)(082)

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INTERNATIONAL Colloquium of Funerary Archaeology (14 ; 2015 ; Čačak)
Funerary Practices During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Central and
Southeast Europe : Proceedings of the 14th International Colloquium of
Funerary Archaeology in Čačak, Serbia, 24th - 27th September 2015 /
edited by Valeriu Sîrbu ... [et al.]. - Belgrade : Faculty of Philosophy;
Čačak : National Museum "Čačak", 2016 (Belgrade : Službeni glasnik). -
378 str. : ilustr. ; 28 cm

Na vrhu. nasl. str.: International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric
Sciences (UISPP) - 30th Commission: Prehistoric and Protohistoric Mortuary
Practices [and] Association for Studies of Funerary Archaeology (ASFA) -
Romania. - Radovi na franc., engl. i nem. jeziku. - Tiraž 300. -
Rastko Vasić : biography: str. 6. - Str. 23-27: Introduction /
Delfina Rajić, Valeriu Sîrbu, Rastko Vasić. - Rastko Vasić : bibliography:
str. 9-21. - Bibliografija uz svaki rad.

ISBN 978-86-6427-040-3 (FF)

а) Васић, Растко (1937-) - Биобиблиографије б) Гробови и гробља -
Европа - Бронзано доба - Зборници с) Гробови и гробља - Европа -
Гвоздено доба - Зборници д) Посмртни обичаји - Европа - Бронзано доба -
Зборници е) Посмртни обичаји - Европа - Гвоздено доба - Зборници

COBISS.SR-ID 225941516

ISBN 978-86-6427-040-3



9 788664 270403