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MARIJA LJUŠTINA

**SOUTHERN FRINGE OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN
DURING THE 4TH CENTURY BC AND THE FIRST CONTACTS
WITH THE LA TÈNE WORLD: THE CASE STUDY
OF THE BELGRADE CONFLUENCE, SERBIA**

ABSTRACT

M. Ljuština 2013. *Southern fringe of the Carpathian Basin during the 4th century BC and the first contacts with the La Tène world: the case study of the Belgrade Confluence, Serbia*, AAC 48: 87–110.

During the late phase of the Iron Age I the Carpathian-Danube area was already populated in a complex manner. During the Early La Tène period on the southern fringe of the Carpathian Basin and the adjoining parts of the Balkan Peninsula various cultural manifestations evolved from a substrate of different population groups. Our present knowledge about the substrate population is incomplete therefore one aim of the present study was to review the archaeological record on communities residing in the *Belgrade Confluence* zone, the first to come into contact with the La Tène world and, consequently, to be affected by the Celtic arrival. Another aim was to define types of archaeological evidence that document different forms of contact. Some of the early finds suggest an indirect influence of the La Tène style, possibly also a transfer of technology, although the model of direct contacts, indicated by presence of imported objects, should be taken into consideration, too. The close of the 4th century BC should be accepted as the time of evident physical presence of the Celtic newcomers in the region. Finally, the study is also aimed on finding a plausible solution to the question as to source area within the Celtic territory from which the first impetus came to the Balkano-Danubian populations to embrace the achievements of the La Tène culture.

Key words: Pannonian Plain; Belgrade Confluence; Celts; First Iron Age; La Tène culture; cultural contacts

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of the 4th century BC, having made their way south through the Pannonian Plain, the Celts reached central Balkans and made a stop in the region known as the *Belgrade Confluence* (Fig. 1) — where the Danube is joined by its tributaries the Tisa, Sava, Tamiš and Morava. Fritz Schachermeyr (1895–1987), Austrian scholar, named this area *Belgrader Konfluenz* because modern Belgrade actually lies at centre of the area of confluence of the Danube and its major tributaries (Garašanin 1984, 6). There is no denying that the

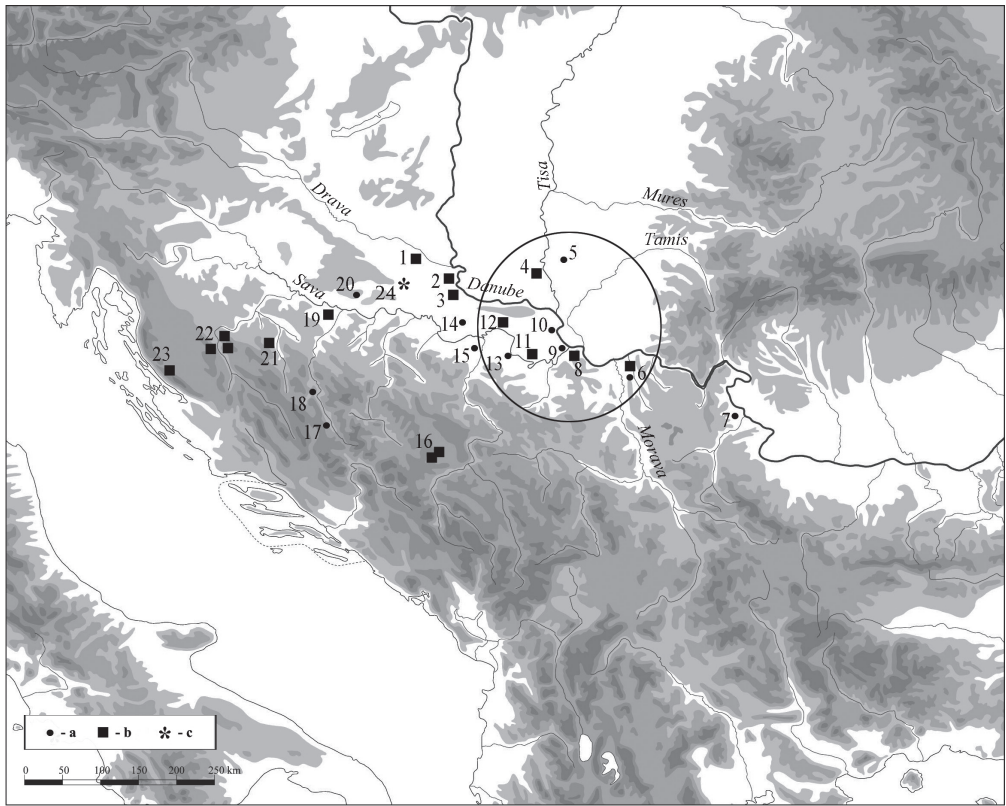


Fig. 1. Map of distribution of Dux-Münsingen fibulae in the Central Balkans and adjoining southern part of the Carpathian Basin; drawn by M. Ljuština after P. Popović (1996, Fig. 14), with modifications (encircled is the zone of Belgrade's confluence; o. — okrug; ž. — županija).

a — chance finds; b — necropolises or graves; c — settlement.

1 — Osijek, Osječko-baranjska ž., Croatia; 2 — Dalj, Osječko-baranjska ž., Croatia; 3 — Bogdanovci, Vukovar, Vukovarsko-srijemska ž., Croatia; 4 — Čurug, Južnobački o., Serbia; 5 — Bašaid, Severnobački o., Serbia; 6 — Pećine, Viminacium, Kostolac, Braničevski o., Serbia; 7 — Negotin, Borski o., Serbia; 8 — Karaburma, Rospri Čuprija, Grad Beograd, Serbia; 9 — Zemun, Grad Beograd, Serbia; 10 — Novi Banovci, Sremski o., Serbia; 11 — Kupinovo, Sremski o., Serbia; 12 — Sremska Mitrovica, Sremski o., Serbia; 13 — Šabac, Mačvanski o., Serbia; 14 — Gradina na Bosutu, Sremski o., Serbia; 15 — Rapanić Polje, eastern Republic of Srpska; 16 — Gosinja Planina, Podilijak, Rusanovići, eastern Republic of Srpska; 17 — Pod, Srednjobosanski kanton, Federation Bosnia and Hercegovina; 18 — Majdan, central Republic of Srpska; 19 — Donja Dolina, northern Republic of Srpska; 20 — Pleternica, Požeško-slavonska ž., Croatia; 21 — Sanski Most, Unsko-sanski kanton, Federation Bosnia and Hercegovina; 22 — Ribić, Jezerine, Golubić, Šibensko-kninska ž., Croatia; 23 — Vrebac, Ličko-senjska ž., Croatia; 24 — Stari Mikanovci, Vukovarsko-srijemska ž., Croatia.

Belgrade Confluence is a separate geographic zone — it differs from others in its special geographic characteristics, which by themselves create an idea about a geographic or natural whole. Of these, morphological features are the first to draw attention. They are accompanied by many other characteristics, originating from different latitude, climate, vegetation, soil fertility. Association of the ideas proceeds from the geographic features to the historical role of the zone, its succession of cultures and its current status. A connection between the two

sorts of facts is sought unintentionally. It is of particular interest to connect geographic features with historical and sociological facts, if the zones played an important role in the history and cultural development (Cvijić 1991, 21).

If the zone of the *Belgrade Confluence* is examined within a wider context of the Balkan Peninsula, the geographical and geological intermediary between Europe and Asia, its importance for various forms of relations and contacts established along the Danube as well as within the Carpathian Basin and the Balkan hinterland, all the way to the Aegean coast and eastern Mediterranean, becomes apparent. A closer inspection of the map of the Balkan Peninsula shows that its northern border is almost fully open towards the Carpathian Basin and that the great rivers forming its boundary all have their sources almost at the very centre of Europe. Connected by this broad zone to the European continent the Balkan Peninsula is not separated from the rest of the continent by any high mountains as is the case of the Iberian and the Apennine peninsulas. It gradually passes into the broad Pannonian Plain, and moving eastward, to the Romanian or the Pontic Plain. In this way, it is fully open to the north. At the same time, this northern border is divided into two parts by the Carpathian-Balkan arc. The western, Pannonian part, is closely tied to Central Europe and, to some extent, Western Europe too. Moreover, the northern Balkan border watercourses — the Sava and the Danube — make for an easy access to Central Europe and strengthen the relations, especially of the parts of the peninsula to the west of the Carpathian-Balkan arc (Cvijić 1991, 22, 25–26; Garašanin 1984, 6). The Danubian route has always been one of Europe's major ways, and its tributaries — the great rivers which create the *Belgrade Confluence* — converge on the Pannonian borders.

The links of the Carpathian Basin with the Aegean follow the line of the Morava-Vardar valley, which was the unavoidable communication route even at the time of Celtic campaigns in the Balkans. According to classical authors the Celts were brought to this part of the Hellenistic world by historical events at least on two occasions. The first was the Celtic invasion, which ended in a defeat at Delphi in 279 BC (Popović 2009, 248).

THE BELGRADE CONFLUENCE AND ITS FIRST CONTACTS WITH THE LA TÈNE WORLD — SOME THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

For the *Belgrade Confluence* the so-called Celtic migrations of the 4th and 3rd century BC are a presumed historical background. During this period the La Tène culture expanded from its main area in Central Europe to Southern France, Northern Italy, the Middle Danube and even farther east. The Celts extended their territory to Greece and even as far as Asia Minor. Still, the question if the expansion of La Tène culture was identical with the historical

Celtic migrations has remained without a final answer. Archaeological sources suggest the first appearance of La Tène culture on the Middle Danube already at the end of the 5th c. BC (cf. Hauschild 2010; Ljuština, Spasić 2012; Scheeres et al. 2013). According to the archaeological record the consequence of these events was a major culture change. In a long-term process, during the last three centuries BC, funerary practices, pottery production, weaponry, tools, dress and jewellery changed significantly. With the appearance of the La Tène style the forms of the Iron Age I gradually integrated with the new ones, until most of the area was dominated by La Tène culture.

During the late phase of the Iron Age I the Carpathian-Danube area was already populated in a complex manner. During the Early La Tène Period on the southern fringe of the Carpathian Basin and the adjoining parts of the Balkan Peninsula various cultural manifestations evolved from a substrate of different population groups. Our present knowledge about the substrate population is incomplete and vague therefore one aim of the present study was to review the archaeological record on communities residing in the *Belgrade Confluence* zone, the first to come into contact with the La Tène world and, consequently, to be affected by the Celtic arrival. What remains the most problematic is how to recognise reliably archaeological material of local provenance dated precisely at the 4th century BC. As will be demonstrated further on in the text, ceramic material characteristic for particular Late Hallstatt cultural manifestations (the term Hallstatt is used as a synonym for the Iron Age I) is mostly dated to the period 6th–5th c. BC, and its continued use during the 4th century is only highly likely, though without any solid confirmation in most cases, when we are faced with chance finds or finds from settlements. On the other hand, when we do have chronologically sensitive objects from funerary contexts, as pointed out by A. Rustoiu (2011), as is the case of oenochoe ceramics dated to the late 4th century BC recorded in a grave at the necropolis Pećine in Stari Kostolac (Jovanović 1985), and a bronze situla and a phiale from grave No. 22 at Karaburma in Belgrade (Todorović 1972) — the situla was dated to the late 4th and early 3rd century BC, the phiale — to the first half of the 4th century BC — we are actually faced with the fact that the entire inventory of these graves of the newcomers gives them much later dates, more likely, the 270s BC (La Tène B2b), which means that the bronze vessels were used during a longer period (Rustoiu 2011, 92–93). The content of the set comprising artefacts from the 4th century BC is even more problematic if one is simultaneously faced with the opinion stated as early as 1980s by D. Božič (1981, 317, 324–325) and M. Guštin (1984, 319), according to which the grave unit No. 22 from Karaburma should be firmly placed in the 4th century BC, right on the basis of its bronze vessels. Elaborate argumentation in support of the view has been recently published by M. Blečić Kavur, B. Kavur and M. Guštin (Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010; Guštin, Kavur 2011). Not denying the fact that some bronze vessels had been in use during a longer period,

even during lifetime of several generations, the authors (Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010, 65, 68) give the older chronological determination, to the mid and second half of the 4th century BC. The vessels could have reached the member of the Celtic warrior elite as a diplomatic gift or *keimelia*, or simply by a trade route across northern parts of Macedonia (Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010, 76).

Another aim of the present study is to specify the types of archaeological evidence on various forms of contact. At this point we need to establish a firm theoretical framework. Until now, as H. Potrebica and M. Dizdar observed correctly, both in Serbian and in Croatian literature the concept of the *arrival of the Celts* has been replaced in many cases simply by *introduction of the La Tène culture* without, however, solving the complex problem of contacts which would have led to the introduction of something evidently new for the locals. We need to make a distinction between the processes of *Celtisation* and *Laténisation* although, owing to specific cultural dynamics of the region's indigenous communities these are primarily processual categories, each of them comprising several models. Therefore, the main question is how the indigenous population, already *Laténised* to some extent, perceived the incoming group which was fully determined by their *Celtic* features, in terms of La Tène material culture (Potrebica, Dizdar 2012, 170). Some of the early finds suggest an indirect influence from La Tène style, possibly a technological transfer, although the model of direct contacts, indicated by the presence of imported objects, should be taken into consideration, too. The end of the 4th century BC should be accepted as the time of evident physical presence of the Celtic newcomers in the region. For that reason, the model proposed by D. Džino (2008), according to which the *Celts* in southeastern Europe were not necessarily an entirely different and foreign *ethnic element* or *stratum*, but the same people with a different way of expressing identity, is accepted only to the extent of acceptance of some migratory movements, since it is well emphasized (Džino 2008, 58) that the spread of La Tène could not be achieved without movement of populations, possibly through small bands of settlers searching for farmland, establishment of trade links, warfare and answering the growing demand for mercenaries from the Hellenistic world.

Finally, the study is aimed also on finding a possible solution to the question on the source area within the Celtic world of the first impetus which came to the Balkano-Danubian populations to embrace the achievements of La Tène culture, given that recent literature offers a range of possible models.

THE BELGRADE CONFLUENCE DURING THE 4TH CENTURY BC — A GLIMPSE INTO THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

The communities from the late phase of the Iron Age I (dated roughly to the 6th–4th century BC), whose material traces are recognized as specific culture

groups, obviously had undergone substantial change during that period. Taking the end of the 6th century BC as a *terminus ante quem* for the great Basarabi culture complex in which the region of the *Belgrade Confluence* had been integrated, one needs to bear in mind that disintegration of that same complex during the period that followed led to the formation of cultures/culture groups known as the Bosut III group, the Srem group, the Zlot group, and the Rača-Ljuljaci group of the Morava Basin (Ljuština 2010b), the bearers of which are expected to have been subject to *Laténisation* and/or *Celtisation*. The following text is by no means meant to be an exhaustive review of all the finds which possibly illustrate the material culture of the 4th c. BC in the region of the *Belgrade Confluence*. It is, rather, an attempt to indicate the present state of coping with some specific phenomena observed in material culture.

Despite the fact that the main territory of the Rača-Ljuljaci group was in central Serbia and the Morava basin, it deeply influenced the Serbian part of the Danube Basin; this is evidenced by finds of conical beakers with a slanting rim and a single ribbon-shaped handle — the so called beakers of Rača-Ljuljaci type — at the necropolis Pećine near Viminacium (Fig. 2) on the right bank of the Danube, as well as across that river, as is the case of the settlement site Židovar in Banat (Ljuština 2010b, 60–61). The beakers of Rača-Ljuljaci type are actually the first illustration of the problematic content of the set of artefacts from the 4th century BC.

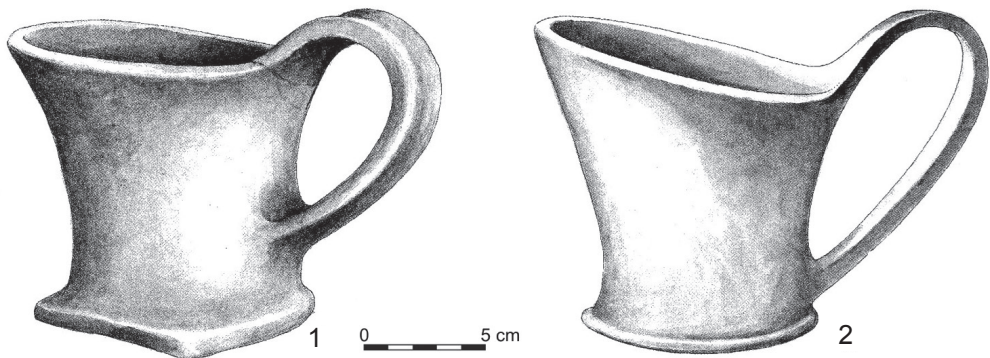


Fig. 2. Pećine in Stari Kostolac, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Beakers of Rača-Ljuljaci type; after A. Benac (1987, Fig. LXVII:1–2).

The necropolis Pećine in Stari Kostolac is a site with graves of an autochthonous Iron Age I population, dated to the period 6th–4th c. BC, and Celtic graves, dated to the 4th–early 3rd c. BC. The site was excavated in 1981–1982, when 43 graves were explored — nine from the late Iron Age I and 34 from the La Tène period. The necropolis is still waiting for the final monograph. Only a selection of graves and of the archaeological material have been published so far (Jovanović 1984; 1985; 1992; 1994; Popović, Jovanović 2005; Stojić, Jovanović 2008).

In the late Iron Age I graves, placed in the central part of the necropolis, the burial rite was inhumation whereas in the Early La Tène part of the necropolis there were 17 cremation and 17 inhumation graves. B. Jovanović (1985, 13) noted that the Celtic graves may have been dug into the ground in rows, but without any special regularity. There were smaller groups of graves, at a distance of about 15–20 m. Most of the grave pits were dug to the depth of 0.9–1.7 m, some to that of 1.5–1.7 m. The inhumations were deposited within rectangular 1.75 × 0.5 × 1.35 m pits. The grave pits containing urned cremations were 1.5–2.2 × 1.2–1.6 m. There was also a circular grave pit, with a diameter of cca. 1 m (Jovanović 1985, 13; Stojić, Jovanović 2008, 408).

The inhumation graves dated to the late Iron Age I, attributed by M. Stojić and D. Jacanović (2008) to the Triballoi, held the following grave inventory: pottery (cups and beakers), jewellery (double pins with omega heads) and iron weapons (curved knives and spears). Some graves contained deep conical beakers, type Rača-Ljuljaci. The same authors (Stojić, Jovanović 2008) regard this type of beaker as a pottery form the most characteristic for the Triballoi and date it to the close of the 6th and to the 5th c. BC. Outside Pećine type Rača-Ljuljaci beakers were recorded in graves at Ljuljaci, Rača, Atenica and Mrčajevci, as well as in settlements Sarina Međa at Jagodina and at Hisar in Leskovac (Stojić, Jovanović 2008, 408–409). None of these sites can provide us with proof of prolonged use of the pottery type during the 4th c. BC. This is true also of site Židovar in Banat, where the material from the late Iron Age I settlement is more likely to go back to the 5th c. BC (*cf.* Ljuština 2010a).

It is evident that the La Tène graves identified at Pećine contain a larger number of grave goods than the Late Iron Age I graves, namely: jewellery (fibulae, bracelets, earrings), weapons (swords, knives and spears) and pottery (bowls, cups, beakers, amphorae, lids). Some graves held some very early forms, of which the more notable are a bronze fibula with a coral rosette, type Münsingen (Jovanović 1985, 14, Fig. 1; see Fig. 3:1), an iron bracelet with coral inlay (Jovanović 1985, 17, Fig. 6), a ceramic beaker with a zoomorphic handle (Jovanović 1985, 16, Fig. 4), and amphora decorated on the shoulder with stamped concentric circles and S motifs (Jovanović 1985, 15, Fig. 2–3). Given their chronological attribution to the end of the 4th and the first half of the 3rd c. BC (but more likely, all of the 3rd c. BC, as suggested more recently by B. Jovanović [1992]), the earliest La Tène graves from the necropolis Pećine are, together with some graves from the necropolis at Karaburma in Belgrade, the oldest Celtic graves in the Balkans datable to the time when Celts established themselves in this easternmost peninsula of the Mediterranean. It is obvious that the area where the necropolis Pećine is situated was the territory of issue of the Celtic raids on Thrace (298 BC), Macedonia (280 BC) and Greece (279 BC; see Spasić 1992, 21; Stojić, Jovanović 2008, 409).

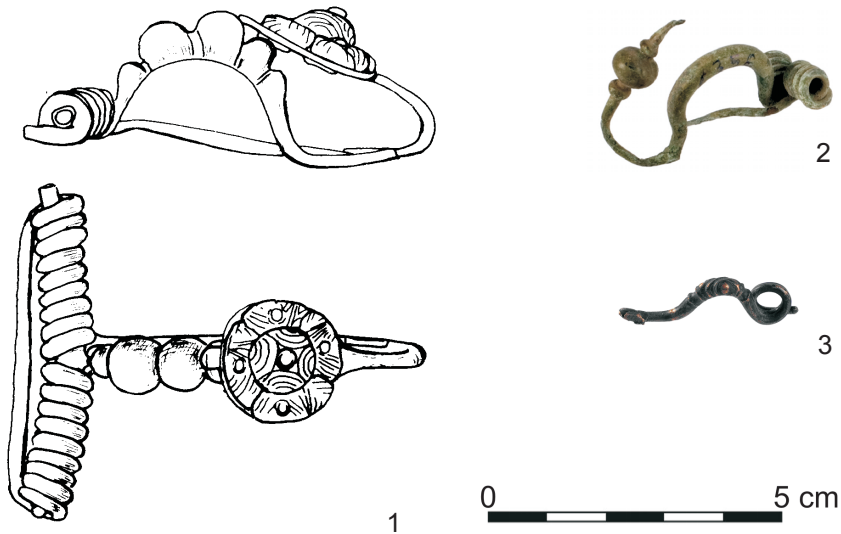


Fig. 3. Bronze fibulae; computer design M. Ljuština, I. Florkiewicz.

1 — Pećine in Stari Kostolac, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Bronze fibula of Münsingen type; after B. Jovanović (1992, Fig. 18); 2 — Čair in Stari Kostolac, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Bronze fibula of Dux type; after M. Stojić, D. Jacanović (2008, Fig. 138); 3 — Ostrovo near Kostolac, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Bronze fibula; after M. Stojić, D. Jacanović (2008, Fig. 115).

The entire territory around the confluence of the Morava and Mlava with the Danube is rich in traces of early contacts of the local communities with the La Tène world. The National Museum at Požarevac has in its keeping a large number of objects of Celtic origin, chance finds from the site Čair in Stari Kostolac. The site is situated on the right bank of the river Mlava, some 800 m to the north of the site Pećine, where a high slope, Kličevačka Klepečka, begins and dominates the surrounding Stig area. Exceptional topographic and strategic position of the site is the main reason for setting up here a military camp and a settlement of the Roman town Viminacium, under which name the site is far better known in archaeological literature. Most of the La Tène objects date to the Middle and Late La Tène, but the earliest chronological limit is defined by a bronze fibula, type Duchcov/Dux (Spasić 1992, 5, 20). This 3.6 cm long specimen has an everted foot with a small ball and 8-coil spring (Spasić 1992, 6, Pl. I:1; cf. Fig. 3:2).

Several Neolithic and Iron Age sites are recorded in Ostrovo near Kostolac. Ostrovo is one of the largest Danube islands, extending from the confluence with the Velika Morava to Ram's ridge, between km 1079 and km 1101 of the Danube. The island's length is 22 m, its width approximately 3 km. Some of its area was a marshland. Its north-eastern end is covered with sand from the sandy desert of Deliblatska Peščara, while its western part has fertile and well drained land. These characteristics of the island indicate that it is not a regu-

lar river island, made by accumulation of river deposits and thriving marshy vegetation, but by the shifting of the main channel of the Danube to the north, caused by strong river currents in the Great Morava and the Mlava. Ostrovo has a very important geo-strategic position, connecting southern Banat with the Morava valley and the Braničevo region (Stojić, Jovanović 2008, 163).

According to M. Stojić and D. Jacanović (2008), there is evidence that Ostrovo near Kostolac may be identified as *Peuce* — the island on the Danube where the Triballoi found refuge from the threat by Alexander III of Macedon in 335 BC (*cf.* Arrian, I.2., p. 9–11). Thanks to its size (cca. 65 km²) and geographic description (position at a river crossroads, steep banks) the island could accommodate the large population of the retreating Triballoi. Archaeological finds — Late Iron Age I pottery — confirm the presence of the Triballoi on the island itself, and in its immediate vicinity, at the necropolis Pećine in Stari Kostolac. There are actually three La Tène grave-fields in this area — at Pećine, Rudine and Repnjak; at Repnjak there was a Celtic grave holding a cremation burial dated to the 3rd c. BC (Jovanović 1987, 7–17; Spasić 1992, 19; Stojić, Jovanović 2008, 163–164). From the site Ostrovo comes a find of a bronze fibula (Fig. 3:3), 3-cm long, attributed to the Early La Tène and the Dux-Münsingen horizon (Stojić, Jovanović 2008, Fig. 115, Pl. L:1).

An unexpectedly large number of sites in the Braničevo region dated to the period 6th–4th c. BC — a total of 17 — indicates a high population density during the time when the area was settled by a people identified by M. Stojić and D. Jacanović with the Triballoi (Stojić, Jacanović 2008, 371) or, less conclusively, with the bearers of the Rača-Ljuljaci group of the Late Hallstatt period. One of the most important archaeological sites is Toplik at Malo Crniće. It is situated on the eastern edge of the village, above the broad alluvial plain of the Mlava River. The site was named after a thermal spring, neglected and abandoned in the past. Not investigated by regular archaeological fieldwork the site was studied only by a field survey and yielded pottery finds spanning the Neolithic to the Iron Age (Stojić, Jacanović 2008, 189), also from late Iron Age I finds (Fig. 4:1–3) e.g., a characteristic fragment of a large pithos with an everted rim, “X” incisions and a plastic cordon on the shoulder with the same type of decoration (Fig. 4:3), and some Late La Tène ceramics (Fig. 4:4–7). The site Mogila at Salakovac (Fig. 5:1–2) yielded fragments of pottery dated to the 6th–4th cc. BC which perfectly match the finds from Toplik.

The pottery published in a volume dedicated to the archaeology of the Braničevo region (Stojić, Jacanović 2008, 281) and a vast number of metal finds held by private collectors indicate that during Iron Age I and II the site Vasina Glavica at Šetonje was a major hillfort. Presumably, a silver loop-shaped earring, some 4.5 cm in diameter, with open ends with conical terminals (Stojić, Jacanović 2008, 282, Pl. CXX:15; *cf.* Fig. 6) comes from this site. Alternately, the earring may come from site Salakovac (Stojić, Jacanović 2008, 491). It has analogies among finds from the necropolis

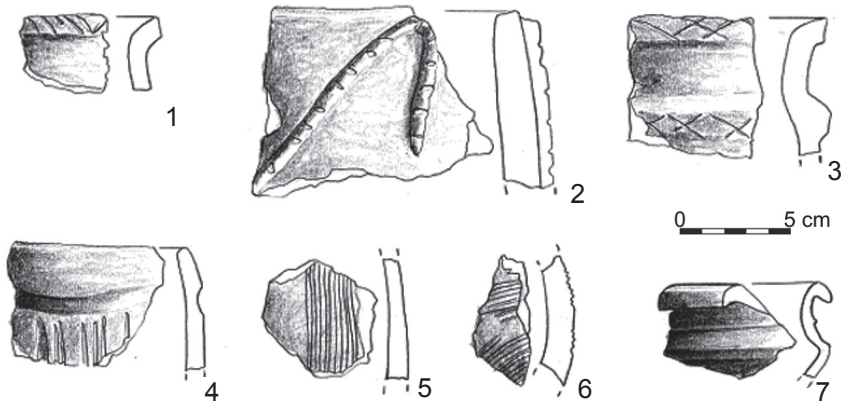


Fig. 4. Toplik in Malo Crniće, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Iron Age pottery; after M. Stojić, D. Jacanović (2008, Fig. LXVIII).

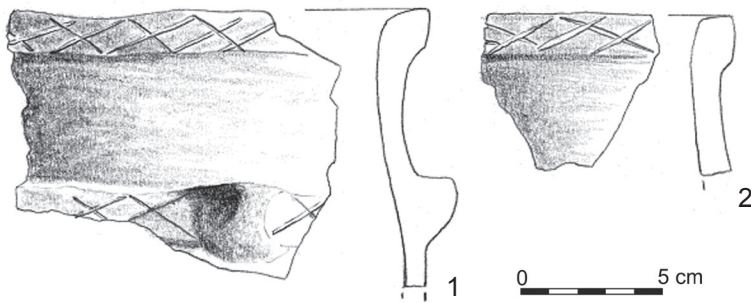


Fig. 5. Mogila in Salakovac, Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Iron Age pottery; after M. Stojić, D. Jacanović (2008, Fig. CII:1-2).

Pećine where the inhumation grave No. G3–991 contained two silver earrings of twisted wire with a conical terminal in association with a belt buckle, a Certosa fibula, an early Dux fibula and two plain bronze loop-shaped earrings (Jovanović 1994, 112; 2007, 822–823).

The reference to distinctive loop-shaped jewellery leads us to the largest La Tène necropolis in Central Balkans — in Karaburma in Belgrade. In the inventory of inhumation grave No. 63 and No. 67, regarded as the earliest in that necropolis, dated to late 4th–early 3rd c. BC, according to J. Todorović (1972, 87), there were objects recognized as autochthonous: in both graves, penannular earrings of twisted wire, in grave No. 67, a ceramic vessel; there were also objects identified as imports from the Celtic environment which at that time was already established across the border: a Dux fibula and a bowl (grave No. 63), glass beads — in both graves (Todorović 1972, 71; Fig. 7). The necropolis in Karaburma is linked with the proto-historic Singidunum and comprises 96 graves. Only six of them are inhumations, the rest are cre-



Fig. 6. Vasiina Glavica in Šetonje or Mogila in Salakovac (?), Braničevski okrug, Serbia. Silver loop-shaped earring; after M. Stojić, D. Jacanović (2008, Fig. 150).

mation burials. The graves were discovered in an area 1200 × 200 m. Their arrangement was irregular. We have to note that the grave pits could not be defined and recorded in the documentation because of the soil structure and heavy erosion of the slopes at Karaburma over the last twenty centuries. The graves formed several groups of 10 to 40 features. Some groups were found very near to one another, while others were at a distance of a few meters from the neighbouring groups. The graves forming individual groups belonged to all of the burial phases. Graves dated to the younger phases of La Tène did not intersect those from older phases of the necropolis suggesting the use of some form of above-ground grave marker (Todorović 1972, 9–10, 45).

Apart from grave No. 63 two more inventories recorded at Karaburma held Dux fibulae. Grave No. 60 (Todorović 1972, 25–26) contained a wheel-thrown urn with cremated human remains, two bronze earrings, three small iron knives, an iron buckle, an iron ring and four Dux fibulae (Fig. 7: 9–10, 12). This is the first such concentration of Dux fibulae recorded in Serbia so far. Grave No. 66 held the cremated remains of a man and a grave inventory which included a wheel-thrown cinerary urn, parts of a shield, two iron knives, an iron spear, an iron chain and a Dux fibula (Fig. 7:11) found near the urn (Todorović 1972, 27–28). The distribution of Dux fibulae at the Karaburma necropolis proves that this fibula type was not exclusively a female or a male dress accessory (Božić 1981, 323, Fig. 4; Ljuština, Spasić 2012, 371).

In grave No. 23, in the nearby site Belgrade–Rospi Ćuprija, one more Dux fibula was found (Fig. 7:8). As in the case of grave No. 63 at Karaburma, No. 23 is an inhumation burial, undetermined as to sex. The deceased lay with hands on the pelvis and with crossed feet. The grave inventory included a large iron fibula (Fig. 7:8), two parts of an iron buckle and a wheel-thrown bowl, placed at the feet (Todorović 1956, 46, 50). The unusual position of this burial



Fig. 7. Selected grave inventory attributed to the Dux-Münsingen horizon, from the necropolises at Karburma and Rospri Čuprija in Belgrade; after M. Ljuština, M. Spasić (2012, Pl. 1:1-12) 1-5 — Karaburma, Grad Beograd, Serbia, grave No. 63 (1 — Dux fibula; 2 — biconical iron fragment; 3 — silver earrings; 4 — glass beads; 5 — wheel-thrown bowl); 6-7 — Karaburma, Grad Beograd, Serbia, grave No. 67 (6 — silver earrings; 7 — glass beads); 8 — Rospri Čuprija, Grad Beograd, Serbia, grave No. 23 (Dux fibula); 9-10, 12 — Karaburma, Grad Beograd, Serbia, grave No. 60 (Dux fibulae); 11 — Karaburma, Grad Beograd, Serbia, grave No. 66 (Dux fibula).

brings to mind the funerary practices observed in the Srem group from Iron Age I (*cf.* grave No. 18 at Doroslovo–Đepfeld necropolis — see Ljuština 2010, Pl. 5), although the grave inventory displays evident Early La Tène features (Ljuština, Spasić 2012, 371).

The Srem group of the West Balkans complex was first defined by M. Garašanin (1973, 511–515) and corresponds to a number of flat inhumation graves with rich inventories (Certosa fibulae, glass beads, segmented belts, long iron spearheads) discovered in the region of Srem/Syrmia and in eastern Slavonia, dated to the 5th–4th century BC. Broadly speaking, two chronological subdivisions can be made on the basis of this material: an earlier (late 6th–5th century BC), characterized by finds of plate-foot and type Certosa fibulae, and a later (late 5th–4th century BC) with Čurug fibulae and forms with a multiple coil bow (Ljuština 2010b, 61).

The first important data about the graves, only later attributed to the Srem group, were published in early 20th century (Ljuština 2010b, 61 [with references]). One of the earliest and most distinctive Srem group finds, the Čurug Hoard (Grbić 1928) actually comes from the Bačka region rather than from Srem. This rich silver hoard, containing both material of local provenance and imported goods decorated with filigree — finger rings, earrings, hinge fibulae with stellar ornaments on the bow (Fig. 8–9) — is also a proof of the first contacts of the autochthonous communities with the Celtic world. The bronze Dux fibula (*cf.* Fig. 9:1) is a material confirmation of the above claim. The Čurug Hoard was of such an importance that D. Božić (1981, 315) named the last horizon of the Iron Age I after it (the Čurug stage).

The story of the Čurug Hoard goes back to 1927 when the National Museum in Belgrade received the first batch of objects from a deposit discovered at Čurug, in Bačka. While preparing the soil for hops processing, Đoka Ćesarov came upon the hoard in his garden, behind his yard, in the village Čurug, in an area called Jarak. A major part of the hoard were silver objects. After the first part of this deposit passed to the National Museum, Jozo Petrović, Curator of the museum, went to Čurug to make a survey of the site and find out if more items from the hoard could be discovered in possession of the local people. The visit resulted in gaining the following pieces of information: all the items had been discovered as a group, the content of a single deposit, in a site described above, resting at a depth of 1.20–1.50 m; among the locals there were more objects from the hoard, which were probably later all sold to the National Museum (Grbić 1928, 10).

The Čurug Hoard included 4 silver fibulae, 6 silver bracelets, 8 silver finger rings, 4 bronze fibulae (one of them type Dux, three fibulae with hoops and chain pendants), fragments of bronze fibulae, fragments of bronze belts, fragments of bronze rods, 7 amber beads, amber lumps, 2 glass beads and 2 stone beads (Grbić 1928, 10).

The Early La Tène bronze fibula, 8.9 × 3.3 cm, has a 10-coil spring. Its bow is thickest in its middle part, and has a design of three lengthwise grooves.

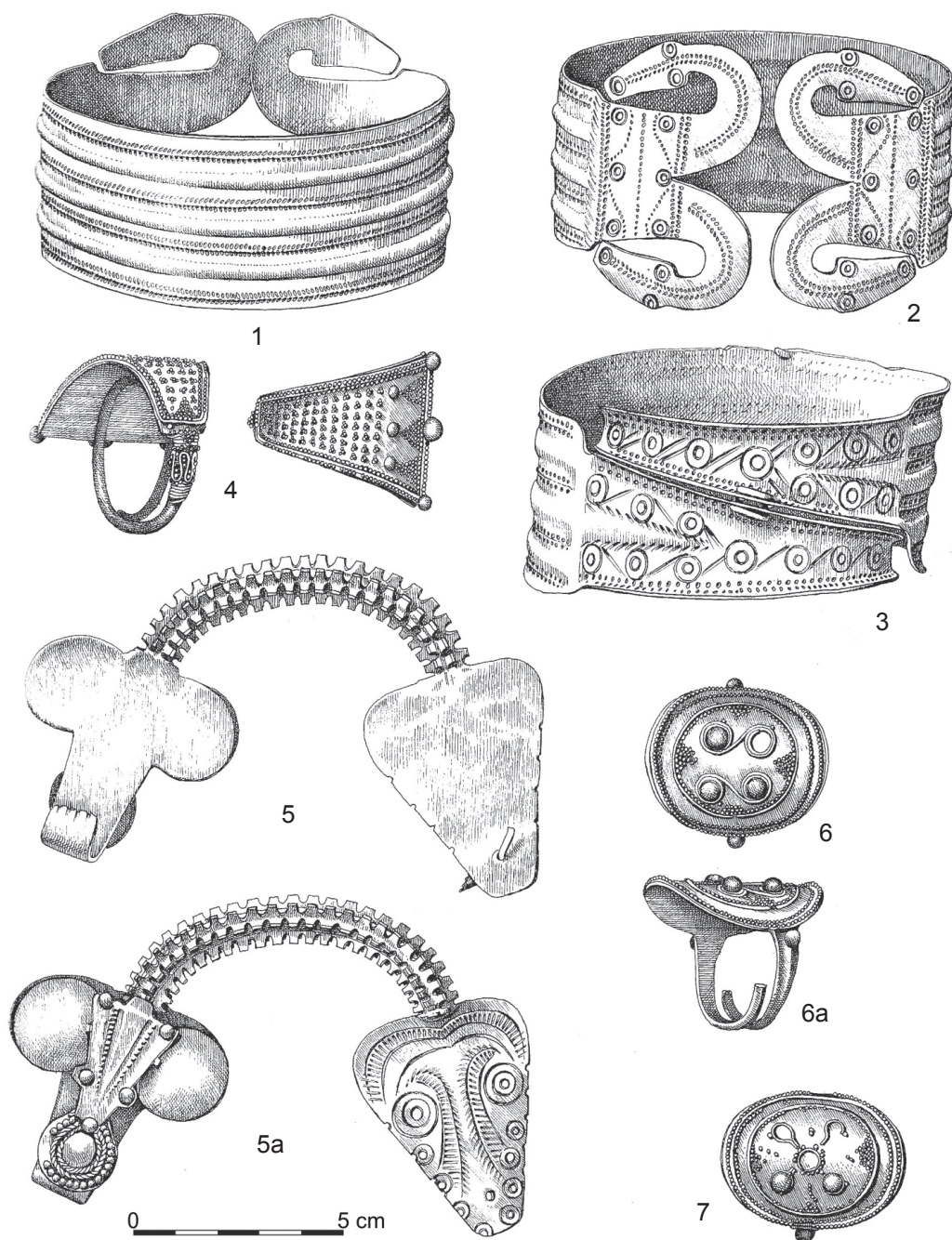


Fig. 8. Čurug hoard, Južnobački okrug, Serbia; after A. Benac (1987, Fig. LVI:1-7).

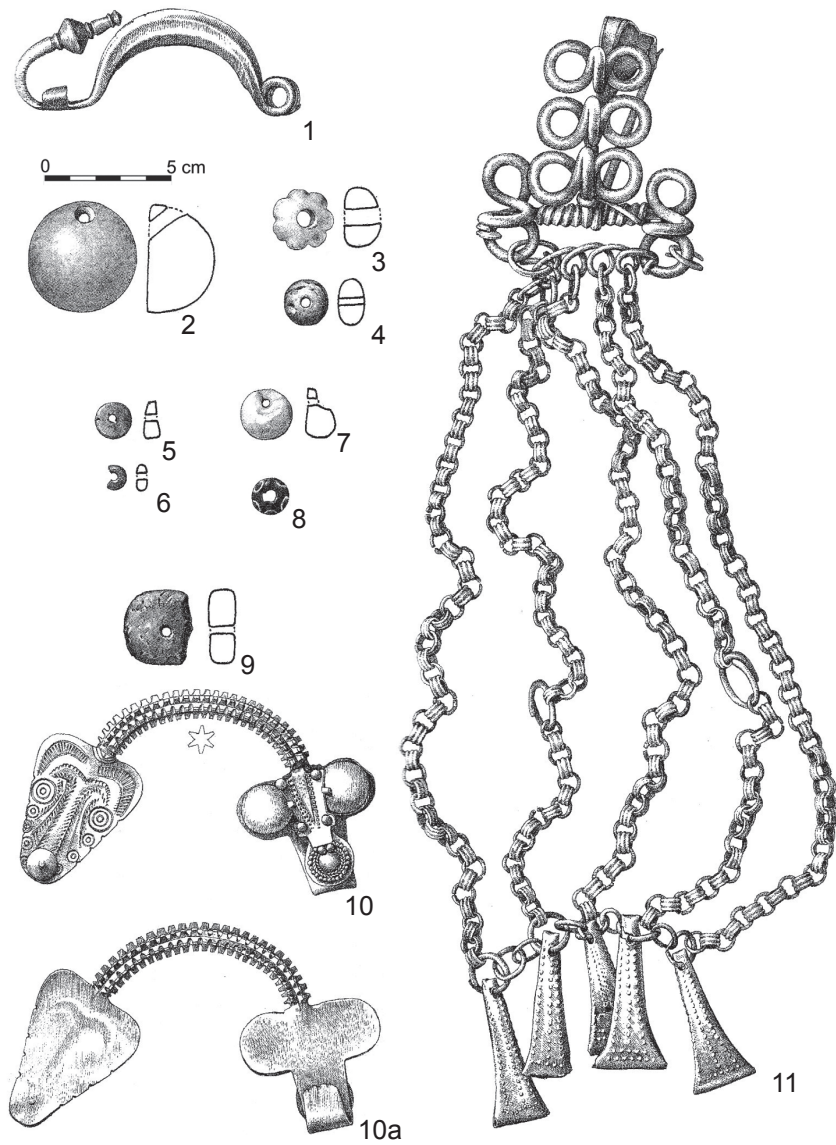


Fig. 9. Čurug hoard, Južnobački okrug, Serbia; after A. Benac (1987, Fig. LVII:1–11).

The foot curves back towards the bow, without touching it, and ends in a small biconical knob (Grbić 1928, 18, Pl. I:5).

Discussing the cultural and chronological attribution of the Čurug Hoard M. Grbić (1928, 22) claimed that the deposit cannot be regarded as foreign and odd in the culture environment of the area and the time. As for the silver fibulae, he was determined to confirm whether Greece was the source of this type of fibulae, in the sense of a centre of their manufacture, or in the sense of a culture zone which provided the northern regions an impulse for independent manufacture. M. Grbić found it easy to determine the chronology of the hoard by the presence in it of the Early La Tène bronze fibula and the Late Hallstatt fibulae with hoops, which led him to attribute the deposit to the time of transition from the Hallstatt to the La Tène, or, the period 5th–3rd century BC. Later discussions helped refine the dating proposed by M. Grbić. The Čurug Hoard, as well as the graves discovered at Sremska Mitrovica (Sremska ulica) and Bogdanovci, may be dated to mid–4th century BC and its second half, by the presence in it of the hinged fibulae and the fibula of Early La Tène design (Vasić 1987, 557).

D. Popović was the first to link the graves attributed to the Srem group to settlements placed in phase III of the Bosut group (Popović 1981). This idea has been accepted and used in most recent works of P. Medović and B. Hänsel (Medović, Hänsel 2006; Medović 2007), dealing with settlement sites (Ljuština 2010b).

An alternative definition of the group was proposed by R. Vasić. Basing on the analysis of portable finds he came to the conclusion that the development of the Srem group was connected to the influence and — possibly — to smaller or larger migrations from the south, from the Glasinac cultures territory — eastern Bosnia and western Serbia — to Srem and eastern Slavonia. There is evidence also of connections with the Iron Age I of Slovenia (Dolenjska group) and the regions of Donja Dolina — Sanski Most group (Vasić 1987, 557).

Apart from numerous non-local elements, most notably, gold and silver jewellery decorated with filigree and granulation, imported from the south, finds attributed to the Srem group have a distinctive flavour which indicates the presence of a certain local component. The material from the Čurug Hoard is the best example of this: local variants of hinged fibulae may be said to represent an almost independent achievement of the metalworking art as compared to their prototypes known from Macedonia, the source of only the basic design. Also, the shape of the silver bracelets from the Čurug Hoard has a long local tradition (Vasić 1987, 557).

R. Vasić (1987, 557–558) was under the impression that in the Srem group, after the domination of foreign, mainly Glasinac culture elements at the end of the 6th and during most of the 5th century BC, there was a complete symbiosis with the local communities and a stronger manifestation of earlier traditions in material culture through more noticeable activities of lo-

cal craftsmen and workshops. This is the period of the flowering of the Srem group and its search for its own expression when this culture unit, with far less influence from the Glasinac culture, may have combined selected Glasinac elements with Western Balkan forms which, thanks to their utility, like in the case of the Certosa fibula, spread over a vast area. Inspiration from imported Greek specimens is confirmed too, and also, from locally produced high quality imitations. To judge from the variety and rich selection of the grave goods the Srem group may be said to have reached its full economic and political development, and probably, gone on to play a historical and cultural role in the region. In this context, some connection with phase III of the Bosut group at sites Gomolava and Gradina on the Bosut River must have existed but the socio-economic flowering of this qualitatively new group might have led to significant changes of the rural character of the settlements in question. There is still a possibility that new input from these sites will alter our current understanding of these settlements.

The Srem group ceased to exist as a distinctive culture phenomenon with the arrival of Celts to the area. Nevertheless, its indigenous population survived this critical period and continued until the Roman period, as confirmed by a modest but still observable number of elements in the material culture of the later age. In this sense it is valid to connect the Srem group with tribes of Amantini and Breuci which, according to the written sources, lived in Srem/Syrmia and eastern Slavonia, and are mentioned in the region after the downfall of the Scordisci, at the beginning of the Roman rule (Vasić 1987, 558 [here the written sources are listed]).

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE LA TÈNE OIKUMENE

As a land bridge between the Danube Basin and the Balkans, the *Belgrade Confluence* zone appears during the 4th c. BC as a melting pot on a cultural crossroads. Even with modest evidence we can still say that during the Early La Tène period the Danube Valley and western Balkans share a number of characteristics in their material culture. One of its more outstanding elements are fibulae with an ornamented bow and an oval plaque with a frame, as e.g., the fibula from grave No. 63 from Karaburma. The same feature, the bow in the shape of a medallion, appears in three fibulae with chains from Bogdanovci, and on a pair of fibulae from Osijek. The specimen from Karaburma has its closest analogy in the fibula from site Rusanovići, at Glasinac (Popović 1996, 119). Chronologically, these fibulae belong in the period 4th to mid-3rd century BC (LT B2), their distribution is shown on the map (Fig. 1). The entire series of these finds displays some similar solutions, in evidence already during the Early La Tène, but as P. Popović (1996, 120, 124) has noted they do not appear to be actual imports from the original Celtic territory, as suggested by

J. Todorović (1972, 87). Presumably the fibulae were manufactured somewhere between the Sava and the Danube, modelled on earlier examples. These forms were taken to the western Balkans and later manufactured there using similar models. It is more likely that the influence of the La Tène style was indirect, or that there was a transfer of technology, from Slovakia, through Transdanubia, to this part of the Balkans (Popović 1996, 120, 124). And this means that the chronological position of these finds is in need of reassessment, and their dating may have to be pushed forward a little.

The model of a direct Celtic influx in the form of imported objects while it cannot be ruled out entirely (*cf.* the case of the bronze vessels in Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010) should be regarded as less plausible. We are left with the question of the identity of the craftsmen and workshops which produced the goods, and that of their recipients, the people who wore them in life and were buried with them in death (Ljuština, Spasić 2012, 371).

To come back to the routes of the Celtic influx to the area of the *Belgrade Confluence*, the major river courses other than the Danube — most notably, the Tisa, with its tributary the Mureş — come to the fore of research. They could be the link, though by no means the shortest route, with areas which were affected earlier by the Celtic arrival. The Celts had moved into Transylvania and areas to the west of modern Romania starting from the second half of the 4th century BC, while the regions to the south of the Drava, the Tisa basin, or eastern Slovakia were not affected by this development. If we leave the question of potential routes aside for the time being (for the routes which lead to Banat *cf.* Rustoiu, Ursuțiu 2013), what is known for certain is that the Celts reached the Middle Danube during the reign of Philip II of Macedon (Ferencz 2007, 193). In the area within the Carpathian arc, after the arrival of the Celts, the material culture takes on a heterogeneous aspect, the result of contacts of the autochthonous population with the newcomers. Unfortunately, on the Middle Mureş and everywhere within the Carpathian Basin the material evidence secured so far does not offer sufficient information to specify the nature of the interaction between these two populations and their mutual influence (Ferencz 2007, 181). According to a more recent interpretation (Ferencz 2007, 194 [with references]), some groups of the Senones would have taken part in the first raids made by the Celts in Transylvania. The spread of early Celtic artefacts suggests the involvement of contingents originating from Transdanubia, and of some others too, from the Alpine region.

The culture group in the Serbo-Croatian part of the Danube basin, marked by a distinctive La Tène material culture, is attributed to the Scordisci (*cf.* Todorović 1968; 1974; Božić 1981; Guštin 1984). The Scordisci were perceived as an amalgam of a *Celtic* component deriving from the *central Celtic area* with local tribes which soon replaced some features of their autochthonous culture and became, in their material culture, an integral part of the La Tène world. The Celtic component has often been defined as that of invaders and

intruders, the latter positioned themselves within the society as a sparse ruling class which stood above the local group, and imposed, as well as advertised, La Tène features as important parts of the identity of those communities. The small size of the invading groups should account for the lack of archaeological evidence which would enable us to make a clear distinction between the newcomers and the residents at the time of their encounter. Although in some cases the two groups can be identified at the formative stage of their cultural entities e.g. in the Early La Tène grave-fields at Pećine (Jovanović 1985) and Karaburma (Todorović 1972), the insufficient and poorly published material prevents us from grasping fully the true nature of their relationship. However, the presence of both groups at the same necropolis (though in the necropolis of Pećine in separate clusters) indicates that this relationship was different, or at least, far more complex, than the one suggested by the standard concept of foreign leaders and the conquered population (Potrebica, Dizdar 2012, 165).

We now have evidence to argue that some of the elements of *Celtic* material culture had been introduced to the local Iron Age communities through exchange and trade networks before they became part of the La Tène culture complex (cf. Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010). Better still, a closer examination of local culture groups has revealed that the fundamental structural change of the Iron Age I communities in the region of interest had taken place before any of the La Tène elements reached this part of the world. Having analyzed funerary discoveries from the region of Banat, A. Rustoiu and A. Ursuțiu (2013, 325) concluded that the varied funerary practice was an indicator that at the beginning of the Iron Age II, or more precisely after the middle of the 4th century BC, the plain of Banat was culturally oriented towards the communities from the southern Pannonia and northwestern Balkans, defined by the authors as *Illyrian*, whereas the communities from the southern Banat preferred the northern Balkans cultural models.

In the late 6th century BC rich graves and tumuli disappear from the Eastern Hallstatt Circle and many centres of local elites which used to be active for centuries apparently cease to function as focal points of communication and/or economic networks. Nevertheless, it appears that some of these centres continued to operate at some level, and that local communities had not been wiped out and were not subject to so drastic a social differentiation, but rather, they underwent a significant transformation, in a process far more complex than we are able to grasp at present (Babić, Palavestra 1999, 30; Potrebica, Dizdar 2012, 167).

What makes the situation even more complicated in archaeological sense is that no settlement sites datable to the period of the coming of the Scordisci, their settlement and consolidation (late 4th to mid-2nd century BC) are recorded at present in the regions of Srem, eastern Slavonia, southern Bačka and northern Serbia (Dizdar 2001a, 93). For this reason it is important to accentuate the discovery of an Early La Tène fibula, type Dux (Dizdar 2001a, Pl. 46:5), in

the layer of the late phase of Iron Age I at Damića Gradina, Stari Mikanovci, a site of *tell* type with evidence on occupation by a succession of cultures: Sopot, Vučedol, and Bosut of Iron Age I (Dizdar 2001a, 27–29). Although it is not exactly the region of the *Belgrade Confluence*, the fibula from Damića Gradina (Fig. 1 [point No. 24]) indicates that the melding of Hallstatt and La Tène cultures is a process observed across the region (Dizdar 2001b, 109). Identification of the type of material culture indicative for autochthonous, Iron Age I origins is of particular interest. As it has already been stated, this type of material culture is largely unknown today, primarily due to the insufficient investigations of sites that can be dated to the end of the Iron Age I and the transition to the Iron Age II, which is perceived to have been the time of numerous technological, *culturological* as well as ethnic changes that will lead to the creation of those proto-historical ethnicities that will be the first from these parts to find their way into classical written sources and that marked the final phase of proto-historical development of the south-Pannonian area (Dizdar 2013, 366).

Still another problem was that the earliest La Tène material in our area consisted almost exclusively of personal ornaments, discovered in female graves (Majnarić-Pandžić 1996; Popović 1996), and that male items datable to the same period were completely unknown (Potrebica, Dizdar 2012, 167). The way in which some sets of dress accessories were assembled is important and also relevant for particular manner of constructing and expressing various collective identities. For example, the inhumation graves No. 63 and No. 67 from Karaburma very likely belonged to indigenous women, as the suite of their personal ornaments bring together, in an original manner, silver jewelry from the local tradition with dress accessories of La Tène type (Ljuština, Spasić 2012; Rustoiu 2013). According to A. Rustoiu (2013) this regional exchange would reflect the emergence of complex social-political and economic networks which may have defined the relationships between these communities having a different origin and traditions, and at the same time, point to the mobility of some individuals, who contributed to the circulation of these *tangible* products, but also of others which were *less tangible*, such as knowledge, practices, ideologies, beliefs, etc.

* * *

Keeping in mind the complexity of the reality of living in the *Belgrade Confluence* in the 4th c. BC, with the traditional way of life significantly altered in the wake of an inner transformation, and with the La Tène world, with all its novelties, on the doorstep, in our future research we need to take a multi-disciplinary and a multi-dimensional approach. No matter how modest our current understanding of the region during this age is, it confirms that both the autochthonous and the new expanding populations must have been members of an open society, eager to accept outside influences. It is up to us to

discover to what extent this acceptance was a matter of fashion, prestige, pressure, or simply — curiosity.

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