

# NORTHERN ELEMENTS REGARDING THE IRON AGE CULTURE IN MACEDONIA

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During the Iron Age, Macedonia was far more open to north influence and contacts than to the southern ones. This results mostly from the great ethno-cultural movements at the end of the Bronze Age and at the beginning of the Iron Age. As we want to get a panoramic view on the real character of the community relations in the north of Macedonia we have to start with the transitional period. At the same time, it is necessary to briefly review the recent and still unpublished finds in R. of Macedonia, along the Vardar Valley for greater accuracy.

The last three centuries of the second millenium B.C. linked through the complex ethno-cultural movements within frame of the so-called Great Aegean Migrations. A great deal of them are traced through the R. of Macedonia mainly along the Vardar Valley as central communication area. Even if there are a lot of written material, there still are many unsolved problems and their solutions are often searched against the lack of the archeological finds within the territory of R. of Macedonia. Meanwhile, such an emptiness gives rise to various speculations, speaking about the influences of the Central-European, Panono-Danubian, Illirian cultures and others too in Macedonia. For instance the version of the so-called Lausitz culture in Macedonia and the Illirisation of Macedonia has been used a lot.

Great attention has been paid to them, although not even a single find has been discovered along the Vardar Valley which can be connected with the Lausitz or Illirian conquerors from the north. Actually somme of the finds, mainly jewelry of Central-European origin appeared as new forms in Macedonia. But, they are regularly connected with the West- North Balkan elements. The Liburnians could be their possible introducers, over the Adriatic See, through South-East Albania, along the later Via Egnatia line, but not along the Vardar communication. The archeological panorama of the transitional period of the Vardar Valley is quite different.

After the latest discoveries of some necropolises from the transitional period along the Vardar Valley (*Klucka*, Hipodrom and *Kosur*, Dolno Sonje near Skopje; *Vodovratski Pat*, Vodovrati and *Dimov Grob*, Ulanci near Gradsko; *West Necropolis*, Stobi and *Palaio Gynaikokastro* near Kilkis) the following conclusion

has become evident<sup>1)</sup>. In the course of the transitional period, it still has been practised urn cremations, as a traditional value of the Bronze Age. On the other hand, gradually skeleton burial has been introduced, not as a consequence of the ethnic penetrations from the north, but as a result of transformation within the late Mycenaean influences.

At the villages of Vodovrati, Ulanci and Dolno Sonje bigger organized necropolises with pit and cist graves have been discovered (Phot. 1)<sup>2)</sup>. The dead ones were flexed and West/Eastwards oriented direction. Among the material, armour has not been found. The most numerous pieces are included in the pottery, mainly local, but under strong Aegean influences. Such are the local mat painted vessels (fig. 1.1-3), well known at the levels of the Late Bronze Age and Transitional period within the settlements in the Low Vardar Valley or the more indicative local Mycenaean vases (fig. 1.4-7)<sup>3)</sup>.

These necropolises, basically are very similar to some Sub-mycenaean necropolises in Greece<sup>4)</sup>. So, we can conclude that the introduction of the skeleton way of burring was caused by the longwhile and strong Aegean influences, specially after the colapse of the Mycenaean civilisation.

At the end of the Bronze Age, the Vardar Valley was widely opened and conected with the Late Mycenaean World. So, after the colapse of Mycenaean civilisation some of the Mycenaean benefits were accepted and went on living in this area, by the community, which did not involved destructive process. According to this, the first way of migrations coresponding to Mycenaean III B/C 1 period (After Milojcic) didn't leave any significant consequences in Macedonia. Along the Vardar Valley the remains of the war period have not been discovered. On the contrary, it has been found a stable culture firmly based on the traditional values of the Bronze Age and on the benefits of the Late and Sub-mycenaean culture. The events at the end of the 13-th century didn't breake these relations with Aegea. This was done by the destroyers of the Bronze Age settlements in the Low Vardar Valley, during the later waves of migrations mostly. The total stagnation and evident Balkanisations of the Iron Age in Macedonia, specially along the Vardar river resulted from the consequences of these migrations, coresponding to the end of Sub-mycenaean period in Greece<sup>5)</sup>.

Doubtlessly there were several successive waves, moving from north along the valleys of Morava and Vardar to south. They are recorded by the several burned levels, mainly of the settlement of Kastanas V, or in the *Burnt Levels* of Vardaroftsa and Vardina<sup>6)</sup>. These invasions caused the final destruction of the Bronze Age settlements in the Low Vardar Valley. After that, many new forms from north were accepted and they were to play an important part in the physiognomy of the new Iron Age culture in Macedonia.

In the late years, some new archaeological sites were discovered along the Vardar river, which in some way can be connected with these waves of migrations. Among them, the most important is the necropolis with urn cremations by the Hipodrom, near Skopje, excavated in 1989/1990<sup>7)</sup>.

A small part of this necropolis, only 11 graves, is examined. The cremation remains were put into bigger urns-vessels, covered with other wide opened bowls. The urns were dug into shallow pits and surrounded with circle protective construction made of river stones (Phot.2). There are some different forms of urn and lids (fig. 2.1-7). The most frequent among them are the biconical urn with withdrawn edge and 4 handles on the shoulders and bowls with 2 vertical handles.

Among the most important finds from Hipodrom we take separately the teeth of wild boar, which are worked out in such a way to form a helmet of the famous Mycenaean type. At the same time, we have to make a distinction from the vessels of the type of the small globular kantharoi, decorated with engraving and white incrustation (Phot.3). A particular category of finds is the pottery decorated with flutings (fig. 3.1-7). Among them, the dishes with so-called *turban dish* rim are predominant. Because of such combination of finds, this necropolis can be dated in 12-th eventually 11-th century B.C., right on the time of the Dacians' penetration of the Dacians to the Bronze Age settlements along Low Vardar Valley (Vardaroftsa, Vrdina, Kastanas and so on)<sup>8)</sup>.

As a new material which can be connected with the northern conquerors and with burnt levels at the mentioned sites, very often the fluted pottery is pointed out as new materials. Their trace can be clearly followed from north, along the Morava Valley (through the Mediana II) and in the Vardar Valley (through the Hipodrom near Skopje and West Necropolis in Stobi). Apart from the Morava - Vardar communication area this kind of pottery is not found.

Talking about the identification of the northern conquerors the traditional relations between the Low Danubian region and Macedonia seems very important. Some elements of the pottery from Hipodrom reveal of similarities with a certain form of vessels from the Danubian region in the Late Bronze Age. Many finds of ceramics with incrustation, most of them Low Vardar Valley or from the Eastern parts of Greek Macedonia, speak about close relationship between Macedonia and Danube in the Late Bronze Age<sup>9)</sup>. The kantharoi with incrustation from Hipodrom only confirms these contacts in the transitional period. It is possible that the bearers of the fairly aimed at incrustrated pottery and their neighbours make these movements south. Probably sands as they weakened or already destroyed centres of the Mycenaean civilisation, with which in the previous period they had close connections. To support the above mentioned facts some typical Danubian

objects in the Sub-Mycenaean or protogeometric necropolis in the Greece can be pointed out<sup>10</sup>). So, we can accept that for the reason of the big demographic increase, after previous economic prosperity, in the course of 12-th century the Low Danubian communities began to migrate to various directions. Some of them chose the way to the South along Morava and Vardar and the others to Asia Minor and Troy VII B 2. This conclusion comes out from the similarities between Hipodrom, material Westwards and Simnice-Plovdiv-Cerkovna group, Eastwards:

Consequences of these migrations will be experienced for a long time, specially along the Vardar River or in the territory of the Paeonian tribes. There, even in the course of the 8-th century, real Iron Age culture will be stable. Therewith, on the account of the contacts with Aegea, connection with northern cultures has been forced. It is obvious, the previous migrations traced the way and at the same time opened wide possibilities for a firm connection between Paeonian and Tribalian communities.

As to the materials of Iron Age culture the Paeonian territory there are numerous forms of Balkan origin, connecting Macedonia with the region between Morava and Iskara River on the north, over the sites like Suva Reka and Vlastica (in the East Kosovo) Macedonian and Vrtiste (in the Morava Valley) Zlotska Pecina and Zajecar (in the East Serbia) to Darzanica, Altimir, Beli Izvor, Krivodol and so on (in the North/West Bulgaria).

Regarding the Iron Age ceramics from the Vardar and Bregalnitsa Valley, a special position is taken by the vessels similar to the Central Balkan pottery, up to the Danube to the north. Decoration exceeds in vertical and oblique grooves, but also triangles, rhombus and other linear motifs done with engraving and pseudo-shnur, (fig. 4.1-7). The technique and motifs as well known as the so called *culture of incrustated ceramics*. The jewelry displays many forms with parallels in the same direction to North. Among the bow fibulae from the territory of Paeonian tribes we meet the same forms known from Suva Reka-Siroko, Vlastica, Macedonian, Rudovci, Zajecar, Darzanica and so on (fig. 5.1-7)<sup>11</sup>). On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the most numerous *Macedonian types* of jewelry in Balkan area are found just here. We mention only the fibulae, well known as an early type with a square saddle-shaped foot most of them found in North-West Bulgaria (Altimir, Beli Izvor, Lom and so on)<sup>12</sup>). Also, in Vrtiste, near Nis some bronze pendants and triple buttons of Low Vardar origin were found.

Some of the most popular products from the region between Morava and Iskara belong obviously the jewelry forms worked out in the characteristic openwork decorative style. Among them the best known are the so called *openwork*

*balts*. Their spreading to South leads us through the Morava Valley (Vrtise) and East Kosovo (Karagac) to the Vardar Valley and Paeonian territory (Vuci Dol, Veles, Dedeli and Vinica) (fig. 5.1-5)<sup>13)</sup> as well.

Among the Morava - Vardar communication ways there were not only transported ready made products for exchange, but also ideas for local production. For example, owing to the great economic power and developed metalurgy, the South-Paeonian communities produced different bronze objects, according to ideas from outside their territory. So, the characteristic decorative style from the North-West Bulgaria has been of special inspiration. In a female grave from Dedeli necropolis, near Valandovo an interesting bronze pendant is found<sup>14)</sup>. It is worked out and decorated in the same style, with the same elements as the famous forehead horse ornament from Sofronievo and Zlot (fig. 5.6). More information bring the composed pendants from the necropolis near Gevgelia (Suva Reka, Milci and Bohemitsa) (fig. 5.7-11). Their artistic value brings us back into the Late Bronze Age in the Low Danubian area. There, are well known similar forms shown on the anthropomorphic figures from the *culture of incrustated ceramics* <sup>15)</sup>.

As a conclusion we can say that the northern elements in the Iron Age culture in Macedonia are the result of the long-termed and close connections with the communities from the Central Balkan region, up to the Danube northwards. By far this connection was the result of the migration processes in the frame of the so-called Great Aegean Migrations from the 12-th and the 11-th century B.C. But, the traditional references and kinship of all tribes between Danube and Aegean See, related to the common so-called Danubian-Balkanic Complex of Early Bronze Age, must not be forgotten<sup>16)</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

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9. A. Hochstetter, Spätbronzezeitliches und früheisenzeitliches Formengut in Makedonien und im Balkanraum, Südosteuropa zwischen 1600-1000 v.chr., PAS 1, Berlin 1982, 108; Ch. Koukouli Chrysanthaki, Late Bronze Age in Eastern Macedonia, Thracica Praehistorica Pulpudeva 3, Sofia 1982, 238.

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13. R. Vasic, The Openwork Belts and the Early Iron Age Chronology in the Northern Balkans, Arch. Jugosl. XIII, Beograd 1971, Fig. 1; D. Mitrevski, Dedeli The Early Iron Age necropolis in the Low Vardar Valley, Skopje 1991.

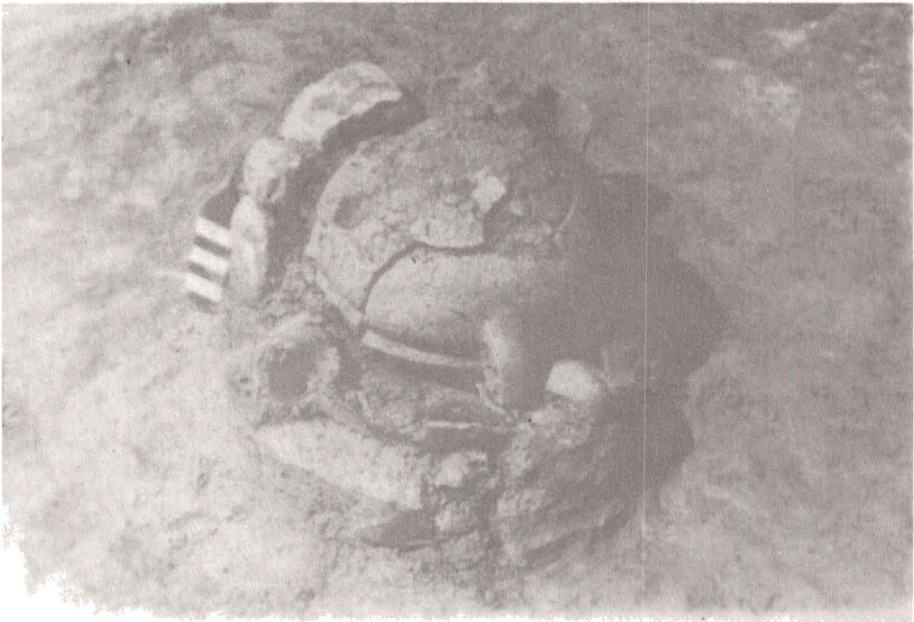
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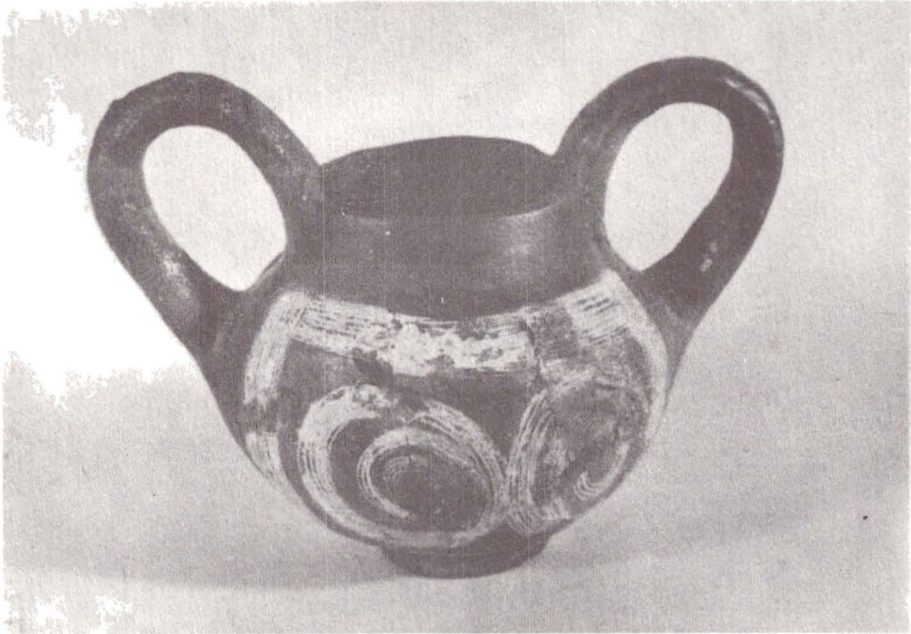
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**Phot.1** The Cemetery "Dimov Grob" Portal ,Ulanci near Gradsko

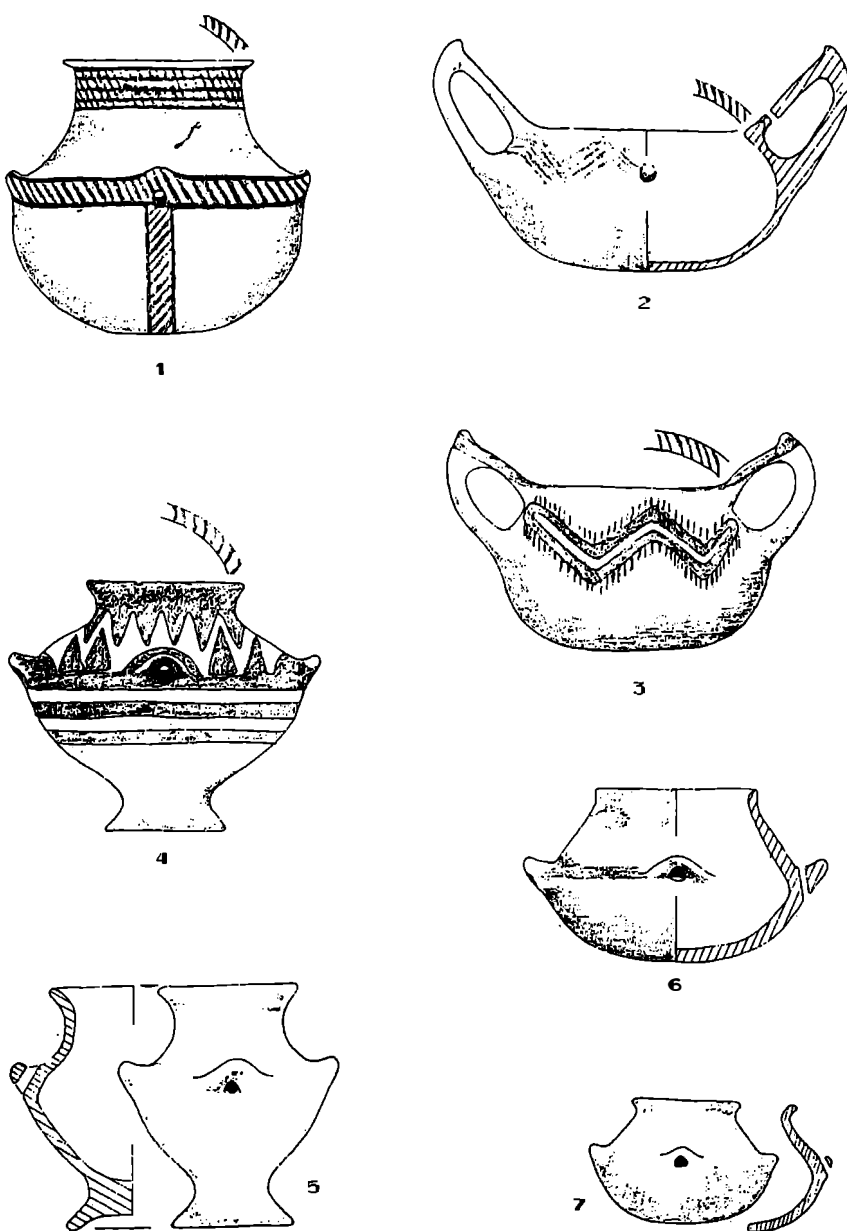


**Phot.2** A Grave of the Cemetery "Klucka-Hipodrom" near Skopje

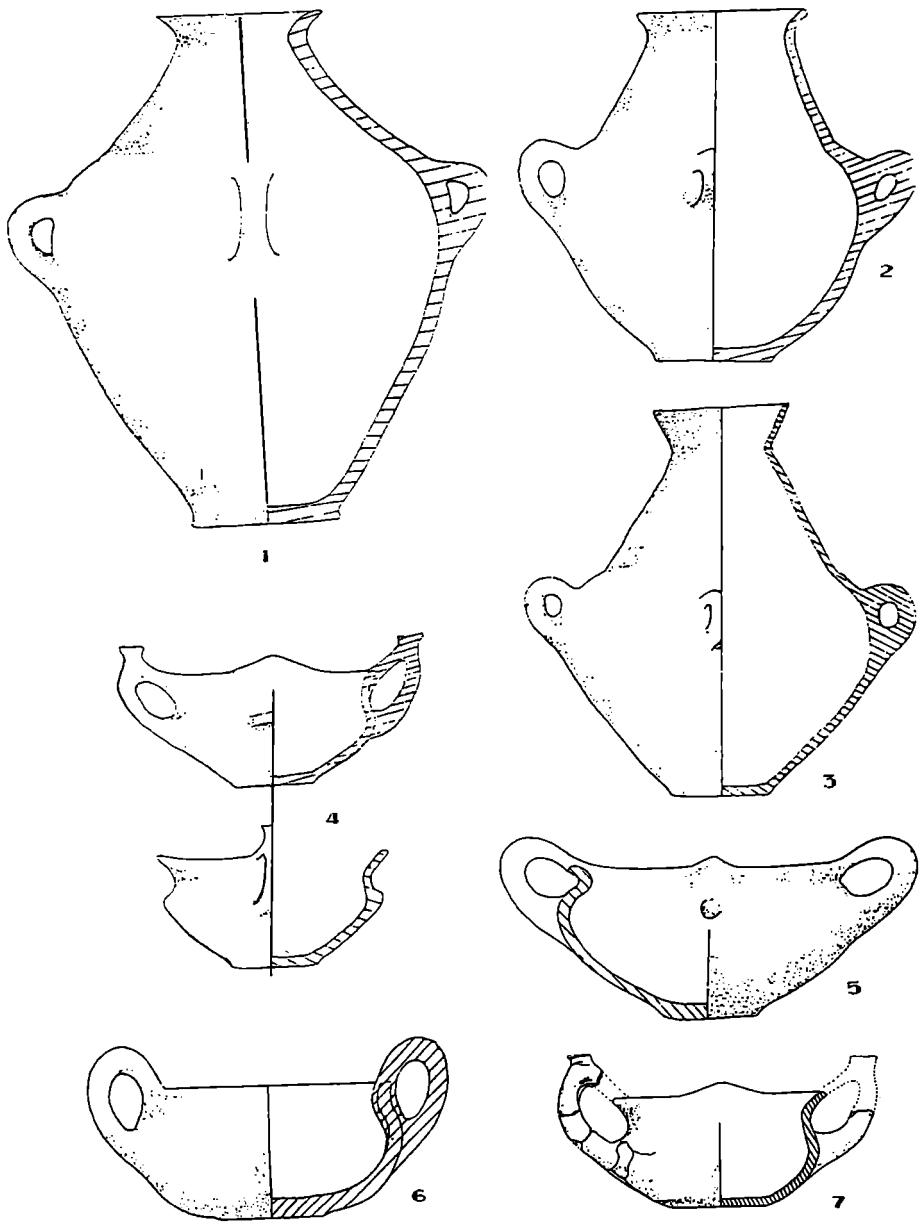


**Phot.3** The Globular Kantharoi with white Incrustation from "Klucka-Hipodrom" near Skopje

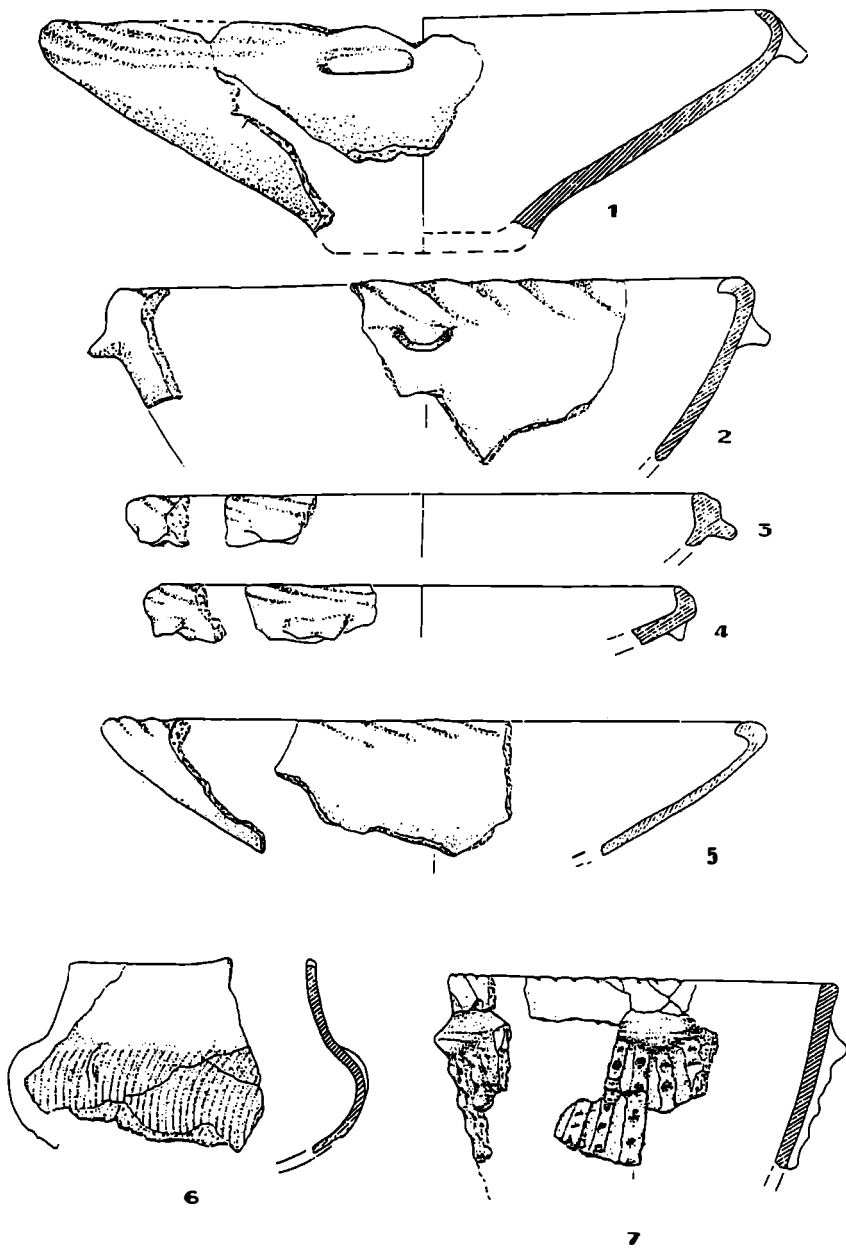




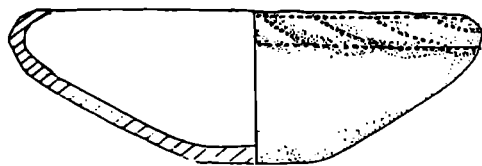
**Fig.1** Characteristic types of vessels from the cemeteries of the Transitional period along the Vardar Valley: 1,3,4 Dimov Grob, Ulanci near Gradsko; 2,5 Vodovratski Pat, Vodovrati near gradsko; 6 Demir Kaplija; 7 Košur, Dolno Sonje near Skopje S=1:2



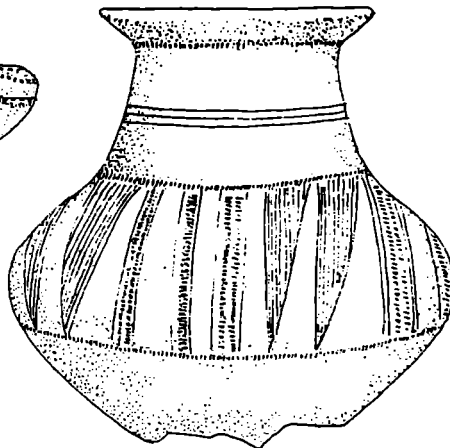
**Fig.2** Some basic forms of urns and lids from the cemetery Klucka - Hipodrom near Skopje' S=1:4



**Fig.3** Some finds of grooved-canelated ware from Klucka-Hipodrom, near Skopje  
**S=1:3**



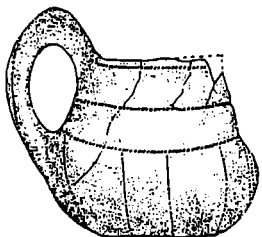
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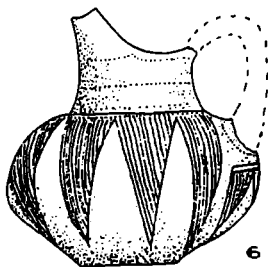
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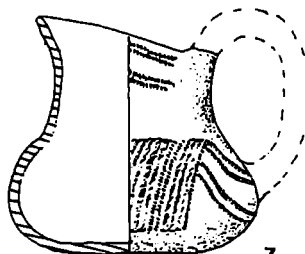
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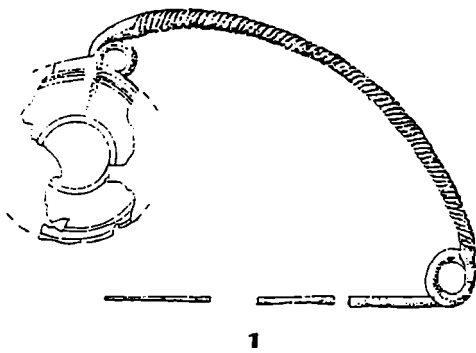


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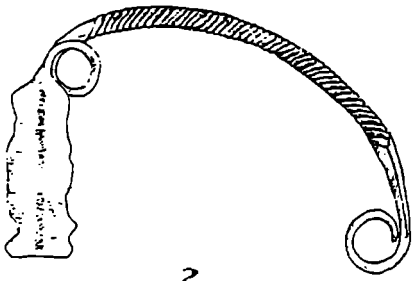


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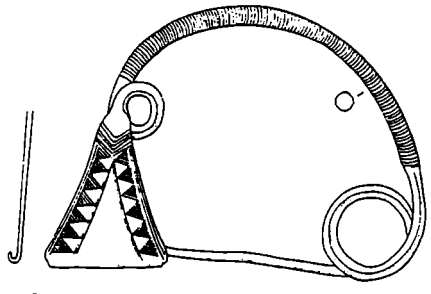
**Fig.4** Some Early Iron Age vessels from various cemeteries: 1,2 Sudic near Štip; 3,4,5 Dabici, Sopot near Veles; 6,7 Dubice, Vucidol near Skopje S<sub>1</sub>=1:3



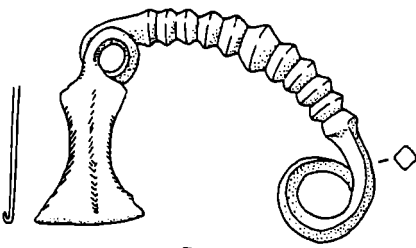
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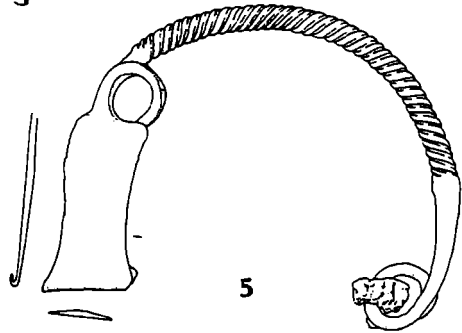
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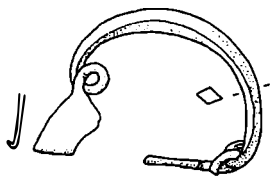
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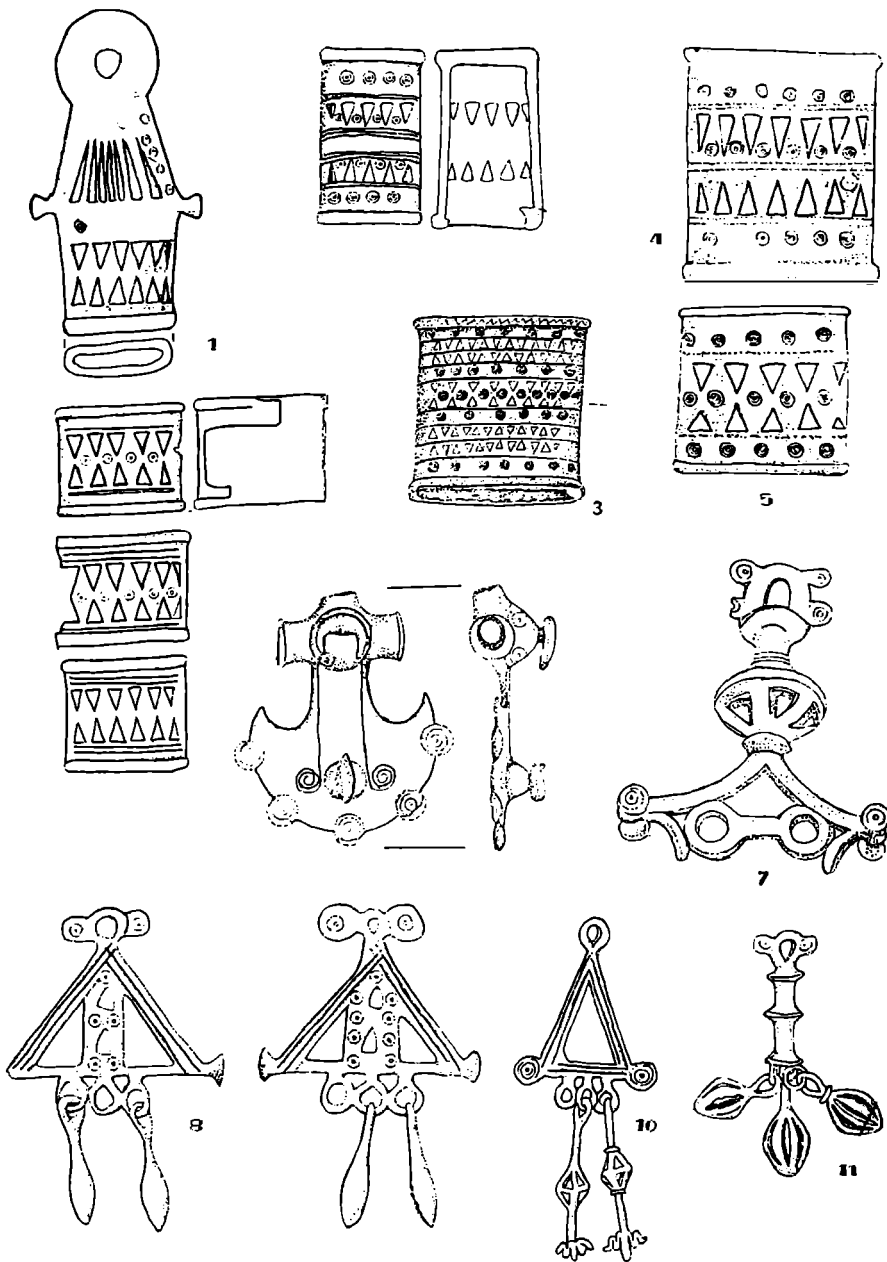


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**Fig.5** Some Early Iron Age fibulae from various cemeteries: 1 Orlova Cuka, Star Karaorman near Štip; 2 Kunovo Cuki, Orizari near Kocani; 3,7 Milici near Gevgelija; 4 Dubice, Volkovo (Vucidol) near Skopje; 5,6 dedeli near Valandovo



**Fig.6** openwork balts from: 1 Dubice, Volkovo (Vucidol) near Skopje; 2 Leski near Vinica; 3,4 Veles (In Benaki Museum); 5 Dedeli near Valandovo. Bronze from the Low group: 6 Dedeli near Valandovo; 7,10 Suva Reka near Gevgelija; 11 Milci near Gevgelija; 8,9 Bohemitsa