

A CLOSE WATCH ON THE TISA: THE EARLY IRON AGE NECROPOLIS STUBARLIJA, SERBIA

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Abstract. The south-eastern part of the Carpathian Basin in the period traditionally known as the Late Hallstatt (6th-4th century BC) turned out to be the space of highly dynamic changes, most easily recognisable in funerary practice. In such an environment cultural unity cannot be expected. One of these cultural groups was the Syrmia group. One of the necropolises of the Syrmia group which was defined as such with certainty is the Stubarlija necropolis. It is situated on the right bank of the lower Tisa, near the village Mošorin. It contained five skeletal graves with inventory which included pottery finds with tradition of the Bosut group, and imported goods: Certosa fibulae, glass beads and cowry shells. The imported material confirms strong relations with other regions. According to P. Medović, the explorer of the site, this area was under the strong influence from the west, the river Sava being main communication route. However, the importance of the Tisa as an important transversal northward should not be neglected. The Stubarlija necropolis was chronologically positioned at the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC, but material confirmations for such datation are not as firm as they must be. Having this in mind, generally earlier dates should be taken into consideration.

Introduction

Later prehistory of the south-eastern part of the Carpathian Basin is full of periods of relative stability, as well as periods of collapse, remains of flourishing material culture and of sudden changes, traces of interregional trade and exchange and of forceful intrusions. Relatively short period traditionally known as the Late Hallstatt (6th-4th century BC) turned out to be particularly vibrant despite this region was quite far from the zones where the history of Old Europe was being created. During these centuries it proved to be the space of highly dynamic changes, most easily recognisable in funerary practice. This period is characterised by material legacy of the Bosut group, which is, in the first instance, defined thanks to the results of well explored settlement sites. At the same time, the graves from the late Hallstatt/the late phase of the Early Iron Age were marked as belonging to the Srem/Syrmia group, corresponding to the latest phase of the Bosut group – the phase with fluted pottery. One of the first necropolises recognised as belonging to the Syrmia group was the Stubarlija necropolis.

The necropolis at the site Stubarlija

The Stubarlija necropolis is situated in the village of Mošorin, roughly 800m from the prehistoric settlement Feudvar, on the northeastern edge of the Titel plateau in southern Bačka (Medović 2007, p. 5) (Fig. 1). Stubarlija was the graveyard which most probably belonged to the settlement of Feudvar in the near vicinity. Besides being the only necropolis in the nearby area, Stubarlija is also of matching size and cultural content (Medović 2007, p. 7).

After it was discovered in 1987 by P. Medović, the necropolis, which comprised the graves from the Bronze and Iron Ages, was being explored for a short period of time, until 1990, when all the research was cancelled due to deteriorating political situation in former Yugoslavia (Medović 2007, p. 5). The main excavation campaigns were carried out from 1992 to 1994, when 41 grave was uncovered - 35 graves with incinerations and urns, and 6 skeletal graves. It should also be noted that these excavations led to a discovery of a Sarmatian settlement, which existed between the 2nd and 4th century AD. Pit houses of this village devastated the prehistoric grave number 5 (Medović 2007, p. 7-9). All of the urn graves and the skeletal grave number 2 can be dated to the Bronze Age. The rest of the skeletal graves P. Medović considered a necropolis of the Syrmia group (Medović 2007, p. 67). The explorer of the site tended to associate the Syrima group graves with the settlements of the youngest phase of the Bosut group, the so called fluted pottery horizon, also present at the settlement of Feudvar. Portable inventory of the nearby settlement offers direct analogies for the pottery from the necropolis, particularly a two-handled beaker of comparable qualities and dimensions as the sample discovered in Stubarlija (Medović 2007, p. 69-71). Foreign elements such as the Certosa fibulae, strings of glass beads and cowry shells, Medović (2007, p. 72) interpreted as a cultural influence from the west, notably from Dolenjska in Slovenia. Based on the material in the graves, he dated the necropolis to the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC (Medović 2007, p. 72).

After re-analysis of the grave inventory from the late Early Iron Age necropolis, it was our intention to propose a slightly different dates for the necropolis and interpretation of routes via which some of the items from the grave inventory reached this area.

Description of the Early Iron Age graves

According to Medović (2007), five skeletal graves (Graves numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6) can be ascribed to the necropolis of the Syrmia group. Graves pits 1, 4, 6 and human remains buried in them are well preserved. Skeletal remains in these graves rest in supine position with heads on the east or north-east and belong to females.

In the Grave 1, an adult female, aged from 35 to 50, with around 160 cm of height, was buried with three strings of glass beads around the neck, a clay spindle whorl, three Certosa fibulae and 14 cowry shells (Fig. 2/1). North wall of the pit, next to the hip, was slightly disturbed, where a bottom of a Sarmatian vessel was found (Medović 2007, p. 10).

In the Grave 4, a young adult female, between the ages of 18 and 25, was found (Fig. 2/3). Around the neck and over the right clavicle, with several other glass beads scattered around the upper body, there was a necklace consisting of 57 glass beads. Three bronze Certosa fibulae were found *in situ*, while another one was uncovered dislocated and damaged probably accidentally during the excavation. The grave goods also include a pottery vessel placed next to the right foot, and a piece of corroded iron sheet (Medović 2007, p. 15).

In the Grave 6, a young adult female, between the ages of 23-26, was buried (Fig. 2/5). The hands were laid over upper abdomen, the right slightly over the left, suggesting that the deceased was holding an object of organic composition, which has decomposed over time. Shoulder injury, ascertained after the anthropological analysis of the remains, could also be the cause of this unusual arm position. The grave inventory includes a glass bead necklace, in its usual, expected place around the neck, a single glass bead, two pottery vessels and a bronze fibula (Medović 2007, p. 18).

The Grave 3 comprised poorly preserved skeletal remains of an adult and an 18 month old baby (Fig. 2/2). The young adult, between 20 and 25 years of age at the time of death, was laid on

its left side, oriented towards north-west, with the head resting in the south-east. Grave goods included several pottery vessels, which were scattered around the individual's skull. Glass beads were dispersed around the neck. P. Medović noted that two items from the grave were quite distinguishable from the rest of the grave goods associated with the Syrmia group: a cup with a handle with deep incisions and a conical bowl (Medović 2007, p. 12). He tended to explain them as chronologically preceding, although without any possibility to prove it.

The grave 5 contained skeletal remains of four different individuals, three children ranging from 1,5-12 years of age and an adult (Fig.2/4). This area was disturbed by the pit houses of the Sarmatian settlement, so skeletal remains from different graves were probably later thrown to the same pit (Medović 2007, p. 17). Although Medović attributed the grave to the Syrmia group, due to the fact that no grave goods had been discovered within the grave, this should be accepted with caution.

Description of the grave goods

Fibulae

Fibulae are a specific and sensitive element of female attire. Skeletal Graves numbers 1, 4 and 6 in the Stubarlija necropolis contain a total of eight bronze fibulae of the Certosa type. They are quite well preserved, except one, fragmented. They have common characteristics – a double spring and a thin rib on the bow where the foot starts. Differences can be seen in the design and decoration of the foot and bow.

The first fibula in the Grave 1 is 4,6 cm long and has a triangular foot with three engraved rings (Fig. 3/1). The other two are quite different from the rest of the fibulae from the necropolis. They have horn-like extension on the foot and two pairs of ribbed thickenings on the bow (Fig. 3/2-3). Triangular foot is not recognized at these fibulae, which is also a characteristic separating them from the rest. Their length is around 6cm.

In the Grave 4, four fibulae were found. One is damaged, while the other three, despite the same in shape, have different decoration on the foot and bow. The first fibula, 6 cm long, is decorated with longitudinal and transversal engraved stripes on the wide part of the bow (Fig. 3/4). The second one, 6,5 cm long, has a rib on the bow near the spring, but also a long line along the bow, and the triangular foot decorated with engraved rings (Fig.3 /5). The third one has one rib on the bow, near the spring (Fig. 3/6). The fourth one is so badly damaged that most of its bow and the entire foot are missing. This fragmented fibula, some 4,3cm long, consists of a double spring and fully preserved pin (Fig. 3/7).

In the Grave 6 a single fibula was found. It has a widened bow flanked from both sides with several decorative engraved transversal stripes. In the middle part of the bow two crossed lines are engraved. Foot is decorated with a sequence of slashes, flanked by a transversal line (Fig. 3/8). Length of the fibula is 6,5 cm.

P. Medović determined all of the Certosa fibulae from Stubarija to be analogous to the groups V and XIII according to the typology by B. Teržan (1977). In his opinion their place of origin was Slovenia, with the river Sava being the main communication route (Medović 2007, p. 70). These two types of fibulae are typical for the Syrmia group, and their abundance makes them one of the defining features of the group.

Glass beads

Another element of grave inventory which caught our attention is decorative glass. Grave 1 contains three necklaces composed of monochrome and polychrome glass beads (Fig. 4/1-3). The larger ones are mostly the so called “ring eye beads” with yellow base colour and a blue oval motif surrounded by white circles in one or two rows. A single necklace from the Grave 3 consisted of 43 beads in yellow, green, blue and white colour and only several ring eye beads (Fig. 4/4). The yellow and white beads of smaller diameter are constituents of the necklace in the Grave 4 (Fig. 4/5). A piece decorated with an engraved zigzag line (Fig. 4/6) and a piece with a triangular cross-section stand out from the rest (Fig. 4/7). Several other dislocated or damaged beads were discovered in the grave. Grave 6 contains another necklace with 49 glass beads, some of which are ring eye beads (Fig. 4/8). P. Medović considers the glass beads cultural influence coming from west, namely Dolenjska in Slovenia, along with the Certosa fibulae and cowry shells, probably using the Sava as a communication route (Medović 2007, p. 72).

Ceramic vessels

Three out of five skeletal graves contained some kind of pottery. Grave number 3 inventory included one single-handled beaker (Fig. 5/1), as well as a two-handled one (Fig. 5/2). Two ceramic vessels from this grave are distinct from the rest of the Syrmia group material: a cup with a handle with deep incisions (Fig. 5/3) and a conical bowl (Fig. 5/4). Grave number 4 contained only one fragmented two-handled beaker (Fig. 5/5), whilst in grave 6 a two-handled beaker (Fig. 5/6) is accompanied by a biconical bowl (Fig. 5/7).

Generally speaking, ceramic material from the Stubarlija necropolis includes single and double-handled beakers, conical and bi-conical bowls and a cup, all made with thin walls, well-polished and light or dark grey in colour. Exception to this rule is the cup from the Grave 3, which has a very rough finish and thick walls. Two double-handled beakers, from the Graves 3 and 6, have fluted surfaces on the shoulder, whilst other vessels are simply polished to a smooth surface (Medović 2007, p. 69).

P. Medović (Medović 2007, p. 69-70) excluded the possibility of these vessels acting as urns or grave goods from cremated graves, simply because of their meagre size and lack of any indication of burning.

Spindle whorl

Only one clay spindle whorl with a bi-conical cross-section was uncovered. It was found in the grave 1, where ceramic vessels were not discovered (Fig. 5/8) (Medović 2007, p. 10).

Cowry shells

The Grave 1 contained a type of finds which the rest of the graves lack - cowry shells. On the right side of the deceased, in the hip area, 13 cowry shells were found, and one in the vicinity of the left arm. As it has already been stated, P. Medović (2007, p. 71) argued that cowry shells had come along with the Certosa fibulae and glass beads from west.

The Stubarlija necropolis in the frames of the Syrmia group: chronological remarks and cultural interactions

The Syrmia/Srem group of the west Balkans complex of the late phase of the Early Iron Age was first defined by Garašanin (1973, p. 511-515). Today it is well known simply as the Syrmia group, after the focal territory on which the finds which can be ascribed to this group are spread, though the alternative term of South Pannonian Late Hallstatt group can be found, as well (Dizdar 2010, p. 301-302). It is connected with flat skeletal graves with rich inventory - the Certosa fibulae,

glass beads, astragal belts, long spearheads - from Syria and eastern Slavonia (cf. Ljuština 2010, p. 61). Initially, two phases were recognized: the earlier one which can be dated to the end of the 6th and in 5th century BC, and later one from 4th to the beginning of the 3rd century BC. The first phase is characterized by the finds of the plate-foot fibulae and Certosa fibulae (among which also earlier and later variants can be recognised) and the second one by find of Čurug type fibulae and the ones with multiply coiled arch (cf. Dizdar 2002, p. 83; Ljuština 2010, p. 61).

It is believed that this Late Hallstatt group was formed under strong influences which are connected with migrations from the Glasinac culture toward Sarmia and eastern Slavonia (Potrebica and Dizdar 2002, p. 83). The material culture of the region confirms strong relations with the west, namely Dolenjska (Vasić 1987, p. 557) and the east, but also with the south using the Morava transversal. It is also worth mentioning influences from the northern parts of the Pannonian plain which are reflected in the material with Scythian features (Potrebica and Dizdar 2002, p. 83).

Taking relations between the Bosut IVc settlements and the Sarmia group necropolises into consideration, it must be emphasized that they can be equalled at least at the territories of Sarmia and south Bačka (Ljuština 2010, p. 66).

Having in mind that the group was defined on the basis of grave finds along with some stray finds, fibulae are very sensitive and important element for its chronological determination. The fibulae of the Certosa type are one of determining elements for the Sarmia group. Generally, they are a new form in the Late Hallstatt period, distributed in Italy, southeast Alpine region and in the Balkans. They are roughly dated in the 5th and 4th century BC (Teržan 1977), but there is some indications that they occurred from the second half of the 6th century BC (Teržan and Črešnar 2014, p. 719-721). Various variants of the Certosa fibulae are distinguished, and it is possible to recognize chronological distinction among them.

As for the origin of the Certosa type at the territory of the Sarmia group, it is P. Medović's opinion that it should be traced in Slovenia (Medović 2007, p. 70). They can be explained both as a direct import from the eastern Alpine region and as a product of local workshops, undoubtedly under strong influence from the west, the river Sava being the main communication route.

The Certosa fibulae from Stubarlija belong to the eastern periphery of the area of their dispersion at the Balkan Peninsula. P. Medović determined all of them to be analogous to the variants V and XIII according to typology by B. Teržan (1977).

Fibulae of the variant V have extended bow, which is usually segmental and have a transverse rib often on the bow where foot starts. The foot was often decorated with circles and ends up with button (Teržan 1977, p. 323). According to B. Teržan, majority of the variant V fibulae are dated at the 5th century BC (Teržan 1977, p. 375). They appeared in the regions of Bačka, Sarmia and in northern Serbia most likely under the influence from the south-eastern Alpine region. This influence spread over Donja Dolina along the Sava to Sarmia and northern Serbia, but some hybrid forms prove that the Certosa fibulae were also made in local workshops (Vasić 1999, p. 100).

Another variant of fibulae that P. Medović recognised in the Stubarlija necropolis is the variant XIII. Common characteristic for this variant is crossbow spring, but there are various types of the basic form (Teržan 1977, p. 338). According to B. Teržan, the crossbow fibulae are predominantly concentrated in the south-eastern Alpine region, from where they spread in the Western Balkans and South-west Pannonia. In this area they were present from the second half of the 5th century BC, but they are particularly frequent in the 4th century BC (Teržan 1977, p. 380). They appeared in the mentioned area under the influence from the west, but they were also made in this territory as confirmed by the mould from the Karaburma (Vasić 1999, p. 101).

Having re-analysed the published fibulae from the Stubarlija necropolis, we noticed that none of them have crossbow spring – the defining feature of the variant XIII by Teržan (1977). All of them have double spring, long bow and rib on the bow near the foot (except the fragmented fibula from the grave 4), which are the defining features of the variant V by Teržan (1977). They have small differences in some characteristics and ornamentation, but the basic form is the Certosa fibula of the variant V. Two uniform fibulae from the grave 1 are a little more different from the others because they have horn-like extensions on the foot and two pairs of ribbed thickening on the bow. We did not find their direct analogies neither in the territory of the Sarmia group, nor on wider territory. Also, the rest of the fibulae from the Stubarlija necropolis do not have completely the same counterparts. If we look at others fibulae from the territory of the Sarmia group e.g. from Vučedol (Medović and Hänsel 2006, p. 491, T. IV/1-2,4-5), Vinkovci (Majnarić-Pandžić 1973, p. 39, T. XX/2), Apatin (Vasić 1999, p. 99, T. 49/823), Doroslovo (Брукнер 1959, p. 7, fig. 4), Sremska Mitrovica (Vasić 1999, p. 100, T. 50/843,844), Sremska Mitrovica - Salaš Noćajski “Lopatovac” (Vasić 1999, p. 99, T. 50/839,840) and Fabrika Tanina (Brunšmid 1902, p. 75), Novi Banovci (Vasić 1999, p. 102, T. 51/863), Šabac “Zorka” (Васиљевић 1976, fig. 4, 2), Pećine (Vasić 1999, p. 99, T. 50/837) and area of Požarevac (Vasić 1999, p. 99, T. 50/837A), we can see that small variations in appearance and decoration is typical for this variant of the Certosa fibulae.

It is possible that P. Medović based his opinion that Stubarlija necropolis should have been dated at the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC on the presence of the variant XIII of the Certosa fibulae. However, morphological characteristics of the fibulae do not indicate existence of this variant of the fibulae. They should be defined as belonging to the variant V, which is generally an older phase of development of the Certosa fibulae. Since we only have this variant, we suggest that the 5th century BC should be considered as the time when this necropolis was used.

General opinion that the occurrence of the Certosa fibulae in these areas is under the influence of the south-eastern Alpine region, spreading along the river Sava, can be accepted. But having in mind their diversity in the territory of the Sarmia group, we cannot exclude the possibility that some of them were locally produced. The unique design of the pair of fibulae from the grave 1 should be mentioned at this point.

Another material which is considered the result of interregional contacts and exchange is glass. As previously stated, glass beads appear in the Graves 1, 4 and 6. They are mostly monochrome in yellow, green, blue and white colour. Polychrome glass bead can be separated in three groups. Ring eye beads with yellow base colour and a blue oval motif surrounded by white circles in one or two rows are quite frequent, while only one bead with engraved zigzag line and one bead with a triangular cross-section were found.

This type of material is not very useful for chronological determination, but it can be used for determining potential contact routes existing in the past. Although P. Medović considers them a cultural influence coming from the west, probably Dolenjska in Slovenia (Medović 2007, p. 72), we think that some others routes should be taken in consideration, too.

Glass beads are frequent in the graves of Sarmia group e.g. in Šabac-Jela (Васиљевић 1977, p. 167-169, sl. 2/7), Šabac-Donjošorsko groblje (Васиљевић 1977, p. 170, sl. 4/1), Sremska Mitrovica-Fabrika tanina (Medović and Hänsel 2006, p. 491, T. I/2, II/3), Vinkovci-Silos (Majnarić-Pandžić 1973, p. 39, T. XX/3), Vučedol (Medović and Hänsel 2006, p. 491, T. IV/7), etc. where monochrome and polychrome ring eye beads are typical, but beads with zigzag lines also appear.

Usage of the monochrome beads spans from the Late Bronze Age to the La Tène period in Central Europe and wider, and they are numerous on very wide territory (Kemenczei 2009, p. 88). Consequently, they are not culturally and chronologically sensitive. Unlike them, ring eye beads can have chronological value. Based on their regional concentrations, it can be concluded about their usage in different cultural environments. The origin of the production of ring eyed beads is the middle part of Italy, from where their production spread in the areas of the eastern Alpine and central European Hallstatt culture in the course of the 8th century BC (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89). According to Kunter (1995), who analysed them from typological and chronological point of view, and also accurately mapped their occurrence in Europe and nearby areas, their concentration in Europe is in Dolenjska, Bohemia, Northern Bavaria and Champagne in France (Kunter 1995, p. 238-433, map 1). This type of beads was also common in the Scythian culture in the North-West Caucasus, where they are dated from the 6th to 4th century BC (Kunter 1995, 385). The northern Pontic Greek workshops were recognised as the places where they were manufactured (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89 with further references). In central and south-eastern Europe they were the most frequent in the 5th century BC (Kozubova 2013, p. 40 with further references). They were frequent in the necropolises of the Alföld group in Hungary, especially in the southern regions of the group (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89). Accordingly, they are considered typical for the Middle Tisa region at the beginning of the Scythian period, while in the Transylvania group only some burials had ring eye beads (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89). This type of beads occurred also in Transdanubia, in the region of the Hallstatt cultural circle, but in much smaller numbers, and sometimes associated with objects of the Scythian type of the Alföld group (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89). It is believed that this kind of fashion came to Transdanubia from the Middle Tisa region, and not from the Hallstatt cultures of Slovenia, where they were also very popular (Kemenczei 2009, p. 89).

Glass beads decorated with zigzag lines are typical for the Dolenjska group in Slovenia where they are dated to HaC2 (Gustin 1996). Their usage extends through Ha D and Early La Tène period (Kozubova 2013, p. 41 with further references). They were also found in the North Caucasian region in the Scythian steppe and forest steppe areas, as well as in the Scythian Alföld group in Hungary (Kemenczei 2009, p. 88 with further references; Kozubova 2013, p. 41). In the Middle Tisa areas such beads were less common, while using the ring eye beads was fashionable (Kemenczei 2009, p. 88).

Since the glass beads were concentrated in several regions, we cannot be certain from where they came to the territory of the Syrmia group. According to P. Medović, they were brought from the west, namely from Dolenjska. However, we noticed that the glass beads, especially the ring eye beads, were found in large numbers in the Scythian Alföld group, especially in the southern regions of the group in the Middle Tisa region. This fact prompted us to consider that zone as a possible place with which communities of the Syrmia group had contacts.

In contrast to the exotic goods, most of the pottery from Stubarlija are considered local products and are typical for Syrmia group. Pottery repertoire is quite narrow: single and double-handled beakers, conical and bi-conical bowls and a cup. In the grave 3 two ceramic vessels were found, which, according to Medović do not belong in the repertoire of the Syrmia group (Medović 2007, p. 12). He tended to explain them as chronologically preceding, although without any possibility to prove it. In our opinion, the cup with plastic decoration can be of Bronze Age origin. As for the conical bowl with tongue-shaped handle, similar manner of shaping handles can be found in the necropolises of the Syrmia group, such as Šabac – Donjošorsko Groblje (Васильевич 1976,

171, sl. 4/5) and Vinkovci-NAMA (gr. 19) (Majnarić-Pandžić 2003, 488, Abb. 7/1-2), though the manufacture of this particular vessel is unusual.

P. Medović emphasized that the ceramic material from Stubarlija was the only product that can be directly associated with the populace of Feudvar (Medović 2007, p. 69), with similar finds in Srem, Slavonija, Mačva and western Bačka, which can be attested by the pottery from funerary contexts in Vinkovci-NAMA Department Store (bi-conical cantharos with a single horizontal flute from the Grave 3, a small bi-conical pot from double grave 14 and a pot and conical bowl from the Grave 19) (Majnarić-Pandžić 2003, p. 484-488, Abb. 4/1, 6/1, 7/1-2), Sremska Mitrovica – Tannin factory (Medović, Hänsel 2006, T. I/1, 2) and Šabac – Donjošorsko Groblje (bi-conical beakers and a conical bowl with two tongue-shaped rectangular handles with fluted decoration, a pair of horizontal handles and four fluted lugs) (Васиљевић 1976, 171, Fig. 4/3,5).

Relation of the grave finds of the Sarmia group with the settlement horizon with fluted pottery Bosut IVc can be established with certainty by the stylistic-typological analysis of the pottery from a number of settlement sites. A kantharos, comparable in size, form, colour and quality of manufacture to those in the necropolis, was uncovered in the settlement of Feudvar (Medović, Hänsel 2006, p. 509, T. XIV/2). Analogous material was also uncovered in the latest Early Iron Age horizons of Gradina on the Bosut (sl. 244/2, 3) (Medović, Medović 2010, 257) and Petrovaradin Fortress (Medović, Hänsel 2006 506, T. XI/1), as well as in Damića Gradina in Stari Mikanovci near Vinkovci (Potrebica, Dizdar 2002, T. 4/2-4). Modest numbers of grey polished pottery detected within settlements P. Medović (2007, p. 70) explains with a possible funerary role of these vessels.

Specific meaning and importance of this hand-made pottery to the South Pannonian Late Hallstatt communities can be sensed by their presence as First Iron Age tradition in La Tène material culture, as witnessed by the material from the necropolis in Zvonimirovo (Dizdar 2010, p. 301-302), Middle Drava basin.

Spindle whorls are not usual element in grave inventory of the Sarmia group. This may be the consequence of the state of research, namely the fact that the most of the finds are chance finds or from some isolated graves. Analogies for practise of placing spindle whorls in the graves can be found in Alföld group (Kemenczei 2009, p. 93, Kozubova 2013, p. 122-128), and also in the Hallstatt of the south-eastern Alpine zone (cf. Križ 2013). There is still an open possibility that putting spindle whorls in graves was not a common practice for the populations recognised as the bearers of the Sarmia group.

Conclusion

The focus of our study was on the small group of people buried on the Stubarlija necropolis, who must have spent at least some part of their lives with a close watch on the river Tisa. The analysis of the elements of grave inventory, which is our magnifying glass into the life and death of the prehistoric populations, is also the looking glass, through which we try to bridge the past millennia. It is confirmed that, as in the case of other necropolises of the Sarmia group, for the Stubarlija community it was usual to bury their dead in flat graves. The deceased were buried with grave goods consisting of attire and jewellery, as well as of some objects which can be recognised as grave offerings. Meticulous analysis of the fibulae of the Cetosa type led us to more solid chronological delineation of usage of the necropolis. As only the fibulae of the variant V, which is generally an older phase of development of the Certosa fibulae, were recognised, the 5th century BC should be considered as the time when the necropolis was used. We did not find sufficient

confirmation for the later dating, as proposed by P. Medović. General opinion that the occurrence of the Certosa fibulae in these areas is under the influence of the south-eastern Alpine region, with the river Sava as the main communication route, can be accepted. On the other side, diversity of this type of fibulae in the territory of the Sarmia group leaves open the possibility that some of them were locally produced. Findings of moulds from some settlement sites make this possibility even more plausible. Local production is also suggested for the pottery found in the graves. The single find of a spindle whorl can also be seen as a local product, unlike the practice of putting it in the grave. Spindle whorls are not usual element in grave inventory of the Sarmia group. It is either that putting such objects was not a common practice for the populations recognised as the bearers of the Sarmia group, or it may be the consequence of the state of research. Analogies for such a practice can be found in the Hallstatt cultures of Alföld and south-eastern Alpine zone, which can be indicative for the individual mobility and/or preferences of the person, in whose grave the spindle whorl was found.

Moreover, some subtle elements of attire, today defined as exotic and sometimes almost invisible to the eye of the beholder but loaded with meaning can act as indicators of trade and exchange and *ipso facto* complexity of the cultural milieu. Among exotica there is this curious case of cowry shells, as well as the impressive collection of glass beads. Since during the analysed period the glass beads were concentrated in several regions, we cannot be certain from where they came to the territory of the Sarmia group. According to P. Medović, they were brought from the west, namely from Dolenjska. Our re-thinking the given solutions led us to the fact that the glass beads, especially the ring eye beads, were found in large numbers in the territory the Scythian Alföld group, especially in the southern regions of the group in the Middle Tisa region. For this reason, we look at this zone as a possible place with which communities of the Sarmia group had influential contacts, and recognize the great importance the river Tisa had for the people who lived on its banks.

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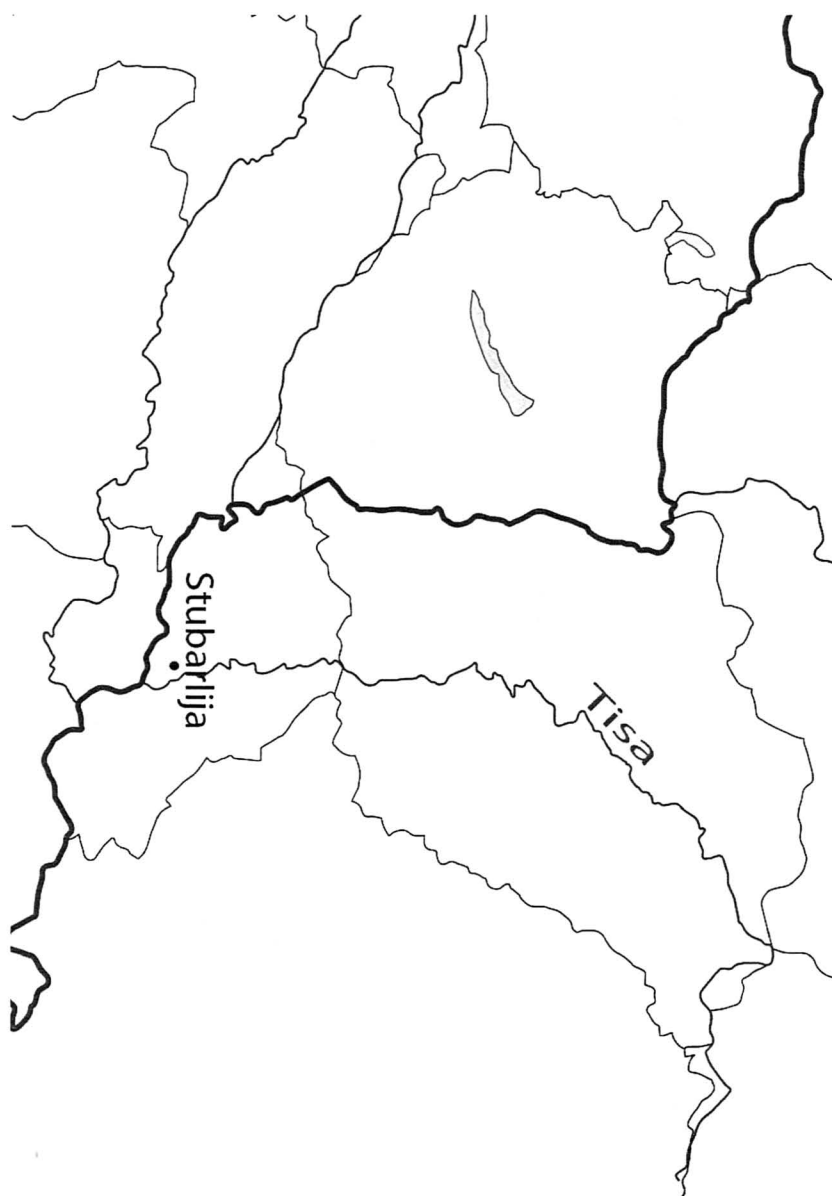


Fig. 1. Map of the lower Tisa basin with the position of the Stubalija necropolis.

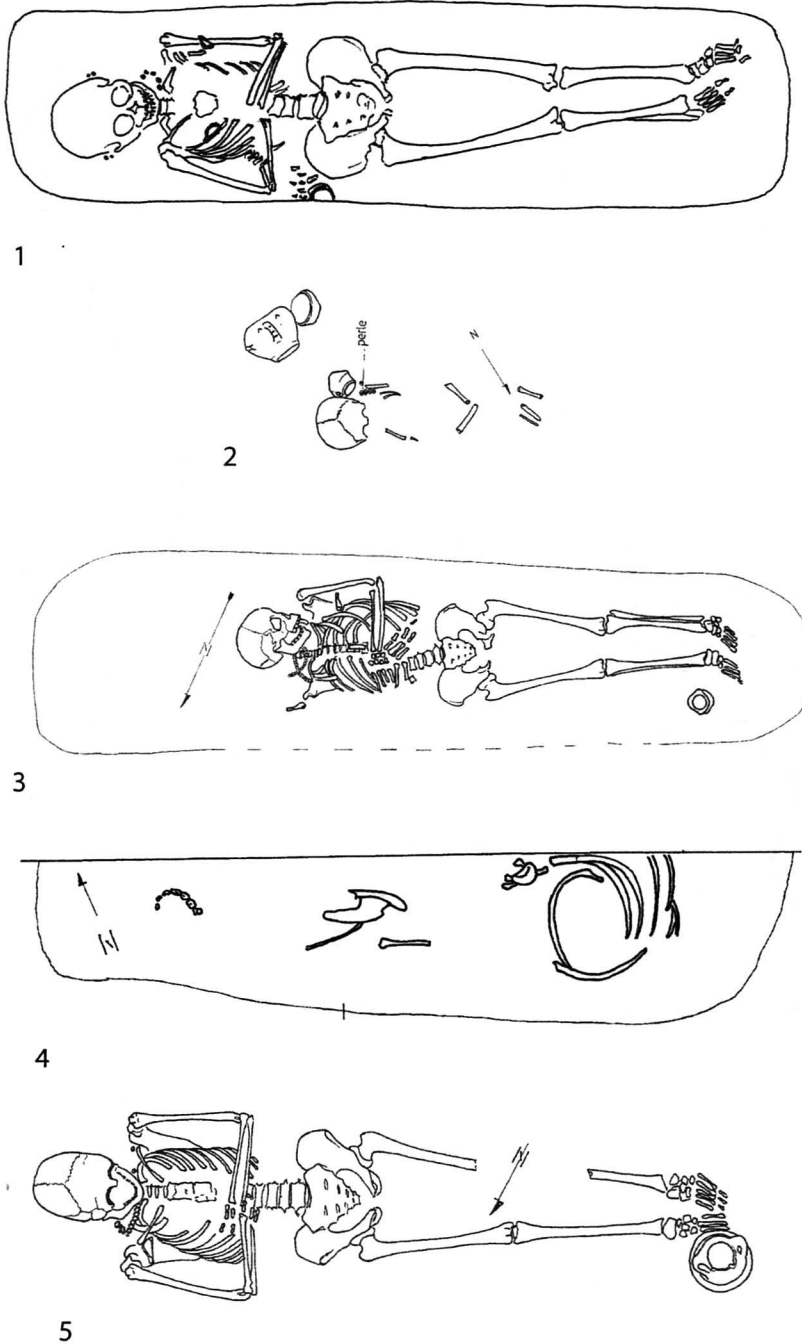


Fig. 2. Skeletal graves from the Stubarlija necropolis (modified after Medović 2007).

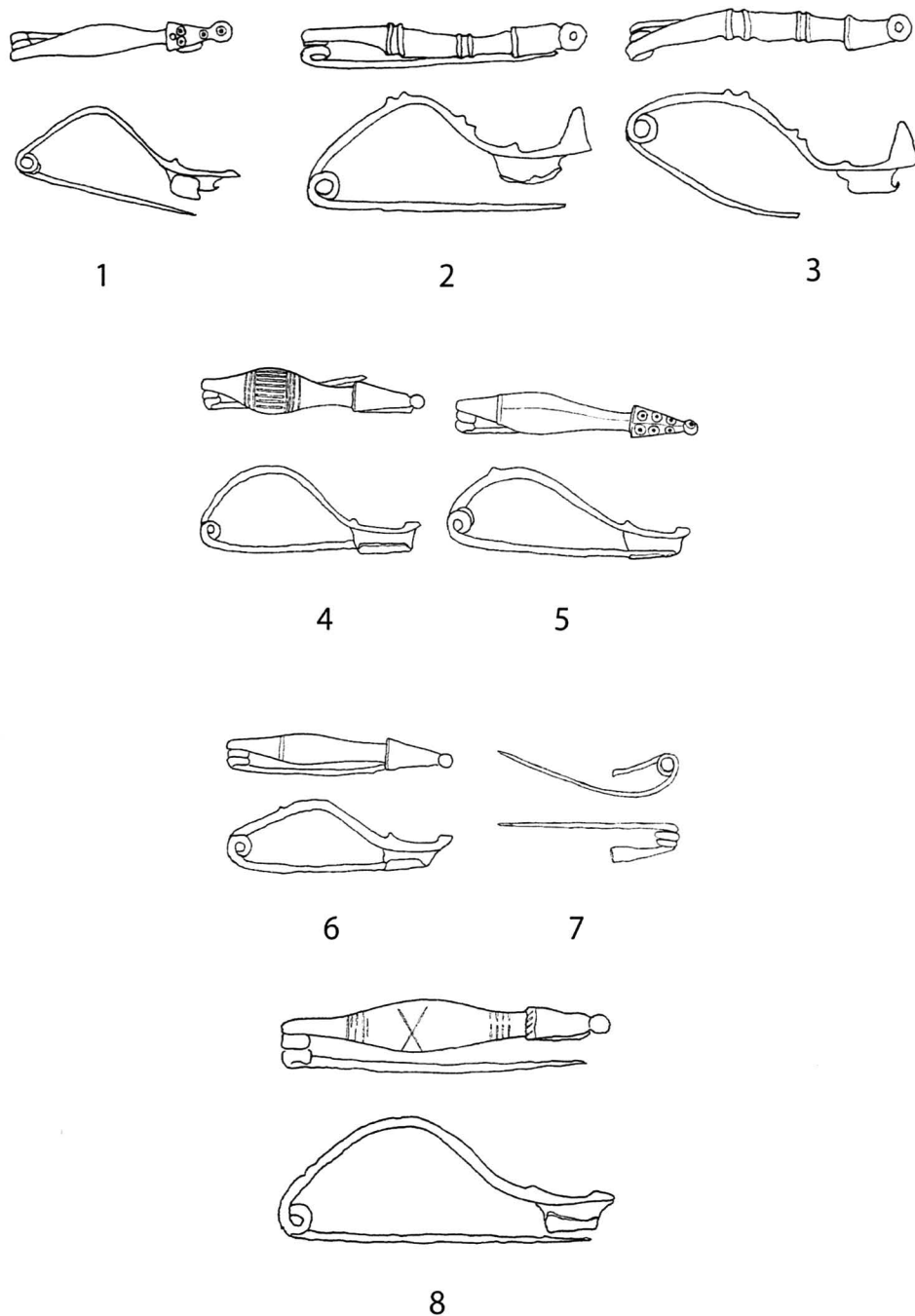


Fig. 3. Fibulae from the Stubarlija necropolis (modified after Medović 2007).

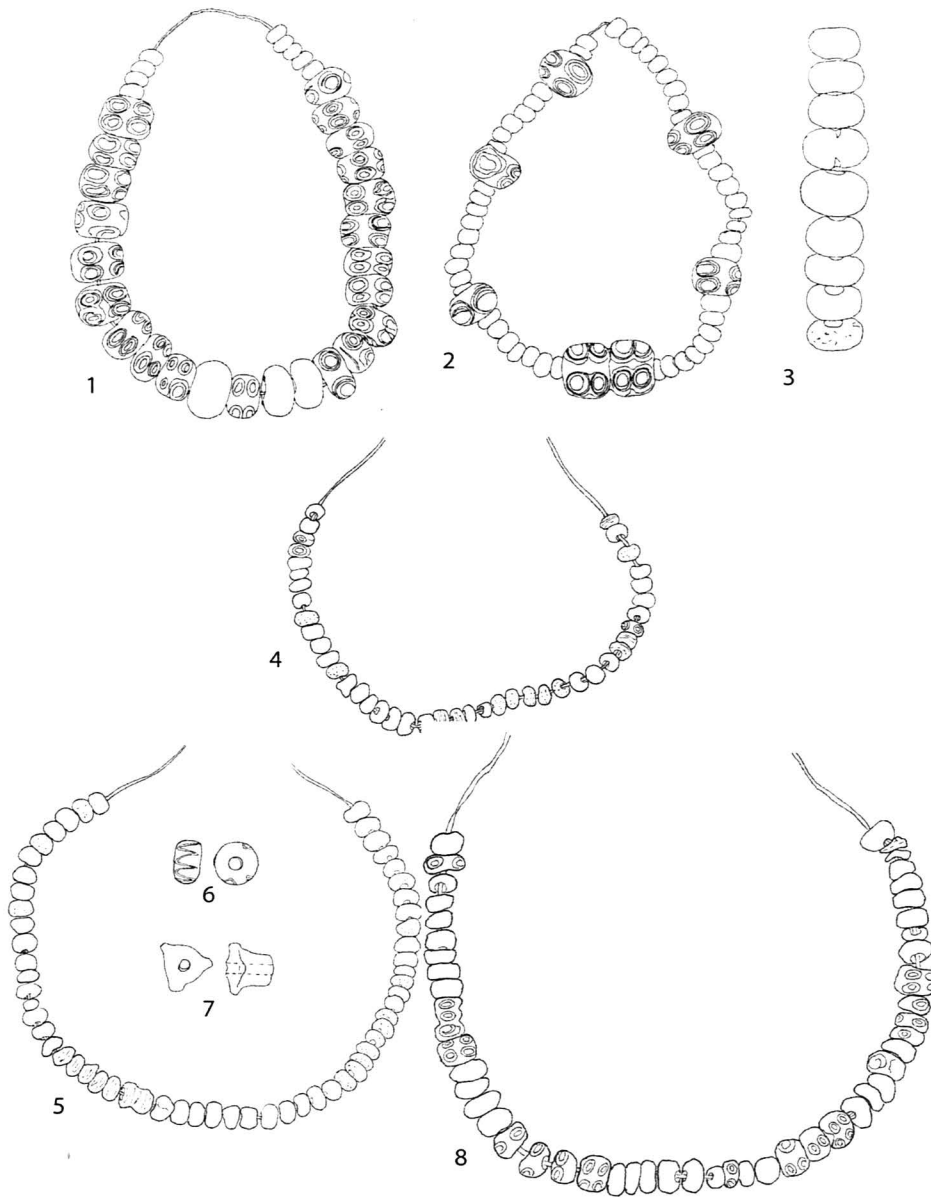


Fig. 4. Glass beads from the Stubarlija necropolis (modified after Medović 2007).

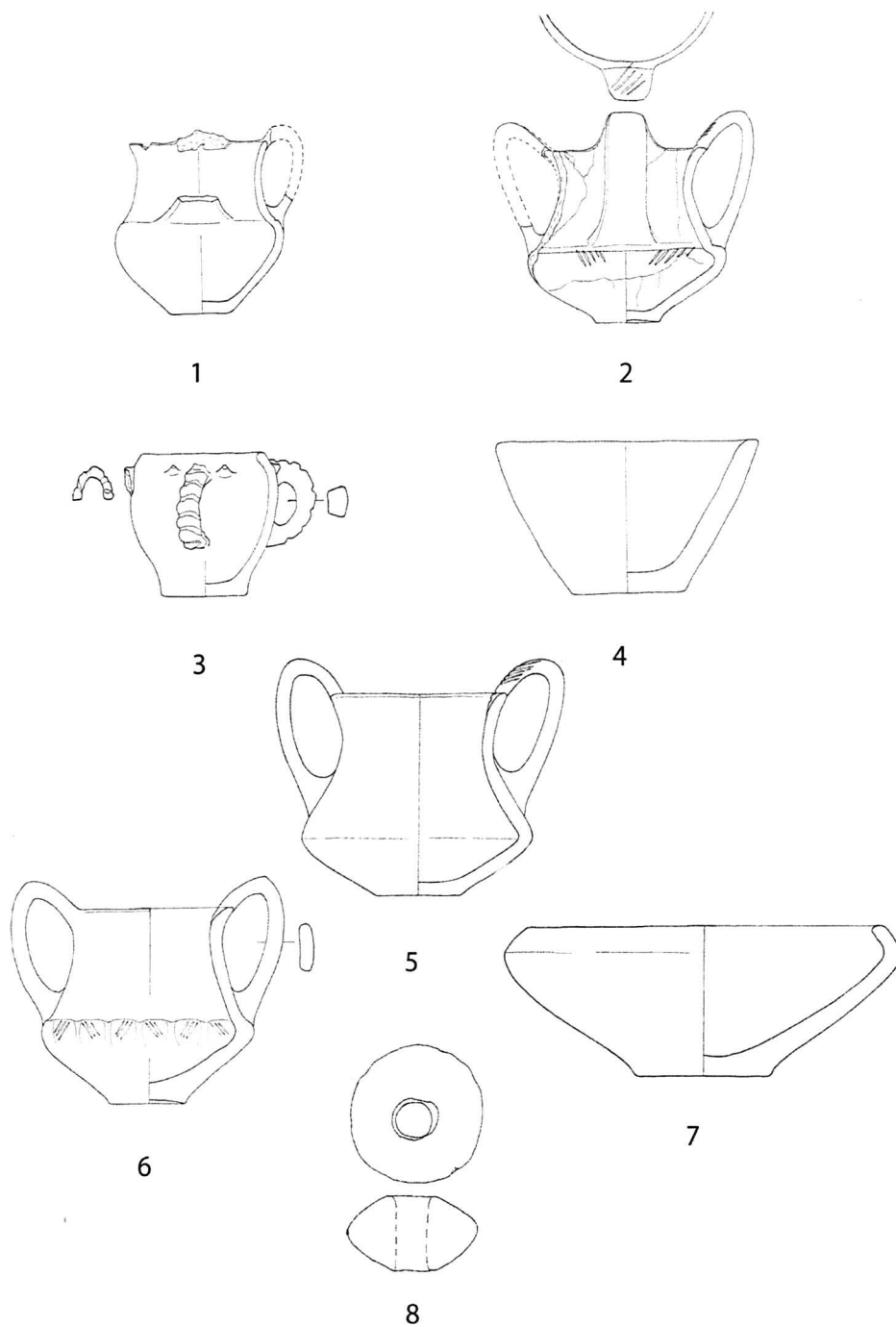


Fig. 5. Pottery from the Stubarlija necropolis (modified after Medović 2007).

