

FUNERARY PRACTICES IN THE REGION OF ČAČAK DURING THE IRON AGE

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Abstract. Excavations of tumuli have long tradition in the Čačak region, western Serbia.

The graves from the Iron Age were found in 10 tumuli. Several occasional finds testify about more necropolises from this period. It should be emphasized that all of the excavated graves were from the West Morava valley. From Dragačevo region come several occasional finds, but there is no Iron Age grave from the tumuli of the Kablar range. Beside the fact that it could be the result of insufficient investigation, this disposition of the Iron Age burial mounds can point out to certain socio-economic circumstances of this period.

The region of Čačak includes administrative territories of the Čačak and Lučani municipalities, as well as the regions which are in geographical connection to it. Čačak region, as a peripheral zone of the western Serbia, is a dividing belt between the hilly terrain of Šumadija and the mountains of the Inner Dinarids. (Pl.I) The two zones are divided by the fertile and slightly hilly West Morava valley. Geomorphologically, the Čačak region can be divided into three microregions: mountainous terrain of Dragačevo, mountainous range of Kablar and the West Morava valley with the surrounding hilly area. The geographical place as such determined direction of migrations and certain cultural influences, which caused development of prehistoric cultures in the region.

Tumuli in the Čačak region have been excavated since the end of the 19th century, when Sima Trojanović, professor of the Čačak High School, organized the first archaeological explorations of the tumuli in the villages Markovica and Negrišori in Dragačevo. The names of these villages became well known in archaeological literature as the term for the whole tumular complex. These excavations were not satisfactory in methodological sense, hence only the central parts of the tumuli were dug out, which caused only partial knowledge of the archaeological units. No matter what the 21st century archaeology thinks of these excavations, the results were published and it provided data about forms of funerary architecture, remains of rituals that had been performed and forms of grave goods and other finds, on the basis of which funerary practices can be at least partially reconstructed. An intense exploration of tumuli began in 1952, when the Čačak museum was established. M. Ikodinović and L. Nikitović made a great effort excavating and publishing the results of the excavations for quite a long period of time. Their work became fundamental for establishing a general picture about funerary forms under mounds from the Bronze and Iron Age in this region.

Since the beginning of the museum activities until today, 37 tumuli have been excavated. Most of them belong to the Bronze Age. If we accept the proposed geographical division of the Čačak region into three zones, it can be stated that the Iron Age tumuli have not been discovered in the Kablar range area so far. There are only a couple of accidental finds from a destroyed mound at the site Grotnica in Guča in Dragačevo, as well as some notes about iron finds from the mounds mentioned by S. Trojanović (Trojanović 1890: 105; Trojanović 1892: 7). The situation is different for the mounds excavated in the West Morava valley, where in contrast to the mountainous regions, some tumuli with the Iron Age graves have been explored. On this

level of exploration, it can be concluded that certain concentration of burials from this period can be traced on the plains. During the Bronze and Iron Age in this area, burial types were tumuli exclusively. It was very common for the Iron Age inhabitants to bury their dead in already existing tumuli. The only mounds made exclusively for the purpose of burying the Iron Age deceased were the princely mounds from Atenica. A number of occasional finds from this period witnesses about the existence of some unidentified tumuli. A great number of mediaeval graves, as well as the graves from later periods, up to the modern times, buried in the prehistoric tumuli is the confirmation that the local populations have in continuity been aware of the tumuli as sacred places and ancient tombs. Formation of mediaeval necropolises on the prehistoric tumuli is quite often at the territory of western Serbia (Валтровић 1893: 76-77, fig.1-2; Гарашанин Д., Гарашанин М.1956: 191-203; Гарашанин Д., Гарашанин М. 1958: 33-39; Ђурић 1996: 41-46). The same situation is in the Čačak region, at the mounds: Grotnica in Guča, Ornice in Guča, Babinjak in Donja Kravarica, Veliko Polje in Jančići, Atenica, Vidova-Prijevor cemetery, Gušavac in Mrčajevci.

Grotnica in Guča

At the site Grotnica in Guča in Dragačevo, in 1932 a grave was found, which was, according to the finder, under a stone pile, where a couple of metal finds were found. Some of the metal finds belong to the Iron Age. Three mounds, which remained from a bigger necropolis under tumuli at this site, were explored. The necropolis was founded most probably in the Early Bronze Age, while burials were more numerous during later phases of the Middle Bronze Age (Никитовић, Васић 2005: 123-139). In the course of excavations no grave from the Iron Age was found. On the basis of the terms of the find it can be assumed that there was either a hoard or a disturbed grave from the Iron Age. The inventory of the occasional Iron Age finds from Grotnica includes: three iron spears, three fragmented iron knives (unpublished) and a silver arc fibula (Vasić 1999: 86-87, kat.656). (Pl.VI/1-4)

Gušavac in Mrčajevci

The site Gušavac is placed in the village Mrčajevci, the area of which is spread mostly on the plain left bank of the fertile West Morava valley. The site is approximately 1 km from the Morava bank. When prospection was performed and five tumuli were spotted, three of them, which still remained, were excavated. Prehistoric grave units were almost completely destroyed by a medieval necropolis.(Pl.XII/1) Grave goods were dislocated (Радичевић 2000: 61-106). According to the pottery finds from the disturbed archaeological units, the mounds were most probably founded in the Early Bronze Age, and were in secondary use during the Iron Age and medieval period, which caused almost complete destruction of the older graves.

In the central part of the **mound 1** – the mound was 28 m in diameter – a disturbed pebble construction was discovered. The base of this construction was circular in shape. In the soil around the pebbles, some tiny remains of ashes and grime were found. *In situ* remained only the NW part of the construction, on which 60 amorphous amber beads were placed. In the immediate vicinity, there was a little area lined with pebbles, with plenty of remains of ashes and grime, and dimensions 1,2 x 0,6 m in SW – NE direction. The Iron Age finds from the mound consist of: amber beads, a fragmented spear socket, a fragment of an ornamental bronze plaque, while from the covering came: very few pottery sherds from the Hallstatt period and some burnt bones.

The **mound 2** is characterized by a concentration of pebbles with traces of grime and charcoal and few finds from the southern part of the tumulus. It may indicate a destroyed funerary construction. The Iron Age inventory of the mound 2 includes: amber, glass and bronze beads, fragments of a spear socket, ceramic cups, a lower part of an urn, a silver wire fragment, a fragment of a dagger, fragmented iron sheets, a fragment of a blade of an iron knife, some fragments of a boss belonging to a shield or a breast plate, and an arrow with three edges.(Pl. VI/3; Pl. VII/1,2)

Mound 3, with flattened calotte, was next to the mound 2. On its southern periphery an area of pebbles laid in one layer, rectangular in shape, was discovered. Among the pebbles there were some tiny pieces of burnt bones, grime and pottery sherds. A damaged hearth-incineration place, with traces of fired soil and a number of grave goods damaged by fire, was found as well. Its diameter was approximately 1,9 m. It is considered the place to which the remains from the pyre, being outside the mound, were taken. A construction in the shape of a smaller coffin, made of limestone slabs, was also found in the mound. Its orientation is E-W. Two or three slabs were placed vertically. Over their tops a big rectangular slab was laid. Dark brown soil with some tiny particles of small bones, presumably animal, was inside the construction. Most of the Iron Age finds from the mound 3 originate from the damaged incineration place: 6 fragmented iron loops, 6 rhomboidal iron plates and some 30 fragments of the plates with hammered circular protuberances on some of the fragments, fragmented spear sockets, fragments of a blade of an iron knife and a glass bead, (Pl. VII/3) while from the covering came some pottery sherds.(Стојић 1997: 27-36).

Vidova – Prijevor cemetery

On the modern cemetery in the village Prijevor near Čačak, in the vicinity of the confluence of the rivers Kamenica and West Morava, a group of tumuli have been known for quite a while. During a recent funeral, three bronze objects from the Iron Age were discovered (Никитовић 1997: 12-13, T.V/7-9). Near the cemetery, at the site Ade, a mound was archaeologically excavated, but the results whitness only about the horizon of burials from the Early and Middle Bronze Age (Stojić, Nikitović 1996; Никитовић 2000: 5–14). The existence of modern village (Vidova) cemetery on the tumuli, indicates strong traditions at the local population who bury their dead there, although it is not near the location of the modern village. The group of occasional finds includes: a bronze torc, a bracelet and an arc fibula. (Pl.IV/1-3)

Lugovi – Bent in Mojsinje

Not far from the site Gušavac in Mrčajevci, at the place called Lugovi – Bent in Mojsinje, a necropolis with five tumuli was excavated. It was discovered that the necropolis was established during the Bronze Age, the same tumuli being used for funeral purposes in the Iron Age, too. The results of the excavations were published in detail (Никитовић, Стојић, Васић 2002).

Mound 1 (22 m in diameter, 0,7 m high) is of earthen construction. 15 grave units with skeletal burials belong to the Iron Age. Some dislocated objects and human bones indicate a greater number of the Iron Age graves, which were destroyed by the later burials. Near the mound center a calottal oven (2 m in diameter) was found, with a concentration of pottery sherds in the vicinity. The Iron Age graves can be divided into two horizons. The graves No. 1, 2, 4a, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14-18 belong to the Early Iron Age, while the graves 3 and 6 date from the Hallstatt period. The older graves are characterized by skeletal burials, in stretched position, with arms along the body. Grave goods are represented by a ceramic vessel laid near the feet, and some bronze adornment in some of the graves. There is a specific grave with a skeleton of a child (grave 18), placed in crouched position.

The graves 3 and 6 belong to the younger horizon. The osteological material was in such a bad state of preservation that it could be only assumed that these were graves with skeletal burials with characteristic grave goods.

Mound 2 (17 m in diameter, 0,5 m high) was covered with soil in which were some pebbles and boulders. Aside certain grave units, some bone remnants on two spots and a burning place without any finds were discovered, too. Finds from the mound covering (spiral hair gear and fragments of bracelets) testify about a number of graves destroyed by the later burials. The graves No. 2-5 date from the Iron Age. To the earlier horizon (the Early Iron Age) belong the graves 3 and 5, with heavily damaged skeletons and grave goods. The graves 2 and 4 date from the younger horizon. The burials were skeletal, with the special case of of the central grave

(grave 4) where an oval construction of pebbles and parts of quern stones was made around the skeleton. (Pl.V/1)

Mound 3 (12 m in diameter, 0,5 m high) had some pebbles and boulders in its covering, and even tiny human bones on couple of spots, which indicate some destroyed graves. Only one grave, excavated in the mound centre, belongs to the Iron Age, namely to the younger horizon. Some remnants of burnt bones were discovered on a small zone, as well as some grave goods, including: two iron spears, an iron knife, a whetstone and a beaker with two handles.

Mound 4 (16,5 m in diameter, 1,2 m high) had only one grave in the centre, with poorly preserved skeleton and a ceramic cup from the Early Iron Age. Particles of human skeletons, fragmented whetstones and flint tools, and some pottery sherds witness about a number of destroyed graves.

Inside the **mound 5**, with earthen construction, 12 grave units from the Iron Age were discovered. Most of them (10 graves, No. 1, 3-5, 8-13) belong to the burial horizon of the Early Iron Age, while the graves 6 and 7 are from the younger horizon. The older graves are characterized by skeletal burials in stretched position on the back, with arms along the body and grave goods near the feet. The most common grave goods are ceramic cups, as well as bronze adornment. On this occasion it should be emphasized that in graves 1, 3 and 4 some iron objects – bracelets and a big fibula – occurred. (Pl.III/6,7) Graves 6 and 7 date from the younger horizon, where only in the grave 6 a damaged skeleton of a deceased with some characteristic grave goods was determined, while in the grave 7 there were no traces of skeleton, but only grave goods.

Umke (Royal chairs) in Atenica

The famous princely mounds on the site Umke or, according to the museum documentation, also called Royal chairs in Atenica, differ a lot from the previously described burial units. They are located in the vicinity of Čačak, in the river valley, some 2 km from the right bank of the West Morava. The mounds are distinct by their dimensions, as well as the type of the grave architecture, funerary rite and grave goods, which witness about high rank of the deceased. The mounds were deformed by ploughing and did not give any indications of what was inside them. It was the excavation that revealed the tumuli of huge dimensions, which must have dominated the landscape and this part of the West Morava valley. This site of great importance was published in detail (Đuknić, Jovanović 1965; Ђукњић, Јовановић: 1966).

In mound 1 (35 m in diameter and average height of 1-1,2 m) there were 25 skeletal, Christian burials from XVIII and XIX century. (Pl.XII/2) The prehistoric mound was made by the following units: the central grave, the peripheral grave and the peripheral supporting ring. (Pl. VIII) Constructions of the central and peripheral graves were partially destroyed by the burials of later graves, while the peripheral supporting ring was destroyed by modern ploughing. In spite of the damage, the primary appearance could be reconstructed.

The central grave had a stone construction in the shape of a cone (diameter of the base was 9 m, the height 1,9 m). It was built by rows of broken stone, nivellization of which was made of soil. The inner part was filled with broken stones and boulders. Grave goods were laid between the stone rows, mixed with soil and remains of pyre.(Pl.IX)

The peripheral supporting ring was constructed around the mound base. It marked the mound's biggest diameter. It consisted of: a surface layer of stones and pebbles, a stone pedestal and an appendix to the pedestal, made of small pebbles.

The peripheral grave had a stone construction which was dug into the already formed mound. According to the grave goods, the time span between the two grave units was short. In technical sense, the stone construction of the peripheral grave is almost identical as the central grave construction, which also indicates the short period of time in which they were formed. The stone construction, arc in shape (dimensions 2 x 7 m, height 0,6 m), was made of pieces of broken stones, which vary in shape and size. It was partially damaged by the later burials. The

grave goods were laid in the same manner as in the central grave – mixed in the soil layer or on the base.

Mound 2 was not completely excavated, because of some economic buildings belonging to the farm, as well as the road on its SW periphery. Diameter of the mound was 70 m, and the height varied from 1 to 1,5 m. In this mound, following objects were explored: the central grave, an incineration place, a supporting ring of the central grave and a sacrificial construction. (Pl.VIII)

The central grave was built on the base that was made by nivellization of the primary terrain and on which a group animal sacrifice was performed before the beginning of mound making. Some 1,2 – 1,4 m above the base, nivellization was made and a clay layer of some 18-30 cm was added to cover a smaller circular zone. That is how a strong base for the central grave construction was made. The technical details are identical as for the central grave from the mound 1. The base is square in shape, with dimensions 5,3 x 5,2 m (the central grave area of the mound 1 measured 65 m², and the one of the mound 2 - 25 m²) and preserved height of 0,9 m. It was damaged, specially in the central part, so that it was not possible to reconstruct the primary height. On one part of the base of the central construction some thin stone slabs were placed, making a kind of pavement. In favour of a special purpose and importance of the construction is the fact that on its surface there were fragmented skull bones of the deceased, along with the remains of pyre and some other gifts. (Pl.X) The offerings were placed, similar to the previous, between the stone rows, along with the remains of pyre.

The place of the pyre was on the platform, in the vicinity of the stone construction, i. e. inside the area among which the supporting ring was built. By the pyre place there was a small area paved with stone, arc in shape, orientation of which was N-S, dimensions 5,1 x 1,2 m. The pyre could be determined according to the remains of fire, with a great concentration of ashes on surface of 4 m². Some smaller remains of pyre were spread around the central construction.

The supporting ring of the central grave in the mound 2 was made on the platform (12-14 m in diameter), which is different in comparison to the mound 1, where the ring was at the periphery. The supporting ring of the mound 2 encircled both the central grave and the pyre place. It is more simple than the architecture of the ring from the mound 1 and it consisted of stone rows, making a short and massive wall, 2 m wide and about 0,4 m high. It was totally destroyed at some of its parts.

The sacrificial construction, with dimensions 17,8 x 10,8 m, is placed on a platform outside the supporting ring. Its base was formed of compact lines of one pebble layer, with average width 0,2 – 0,3 m. It shaped a rough square, divided into four. The sacrificial construction consisted of four rectangular spaces. In the central parts there were no special units, while two single units had 13/9 symmetrically placed altar, marked by pebble circles (0,15 – 0,5 m in diameter). Pebbles covered small funnel-shaped pits, which were filled by soil dark in colour, with the remains of charcoal and burned bones. In front of both of the rectangular lateral spaces, there were two more circular zones with pebbles (4 – 4,5 m and 2 – 2,4 m in diameter), without any pits below.

Conclusion

The beginning of the Iron Age in Serbia can be connected to the Bosut cultural group, which was spread in Vojvodina and north Serbia, i. e. to the first - Kalakača – phase of the group. The Kalakača phase can be dated to the period from the end of the 10th century BC until the middle of the 8th c. BC and belongs to the Early Iron Age. It is certain that iron was known to the Kalakača people. In favour of the statement that usage of iron was already known to these prehistoric populations one can put the fact that iron objects were found at the site of Kalakača. The eponym settlement site yielded material from the beginning of the I millennium BC, among which are some traces of a small iron object. These remains (probably from a blade of a small knife) are the first iron objects from a site of the Kalakača horizon of the Bosut group that have

been known so far (Jevtić 2006: 23). Still, there is no reliable confirmation of mastering iron metallurgy, i. e. exploitation of iron ores and producing iron objects.

The Hallstatt period, when iron is in wide use, in Serbia can be attributed to the period from the middle of the 8th c. BC until the end of the 4th c. BC or the beginning of the 3rd c. BC, i. e. until the penetration of the Celts, who carried the La Tène culture. The La Tène period lasted until the end of the 1st c. BC and Roman conquest of this region. Fibulae and certain adornment forms (pins, belts, and bracelets) are specially valuable for more precise chronological determination inside the Iron Age, which was divided into a number of phases, according to the change in the forms of material culture. The goods imported from Greece and Italy are of exceptional value for the topic (Vasić 2000: 24).

Territorial division among cultural groups in Serbia, their movements and development have not been known in detail up to now, which is mostly the consequence of uneven and insufficient state of exploration. There is a number of the Iron Age sites in the region of Čačak: settlement sites, necropolises and some accidental finds which can be treated as inventory from devastated graves. The most thorough review of the Iron Age sites in the region is supplemented by L. Nikitović (Никитовић 1997: 5-26). On the other hand, in the synthesis on the Iron Age in the Čačak region, R. Vasić (Васић 2000: 25-34) divided the Iron Age sites into a number of chronological phases, analysing archaeological material. This chronological model is adopted and used in this study, as well:

Horizon I. The Early Iron Age is represented by the graves from the Kalakača phase of the Bosut group. The graves from the second horizon at the site Lugovi-Bent in the village Mojsinje (Никитовић, Стојић, Васић 2002: 51-55) belong to this phase. 26 graves with inhumations were discovered at the site. Although the skeletons were in bad state of preservation, it was possible to determine that the deceased were buried in stretched position, on their backs, with arms on lateral sides of the body. Grave goods were left near the deceased. The most common are ceramic vessels, which can be divided into two groups: small coarse caotte bowls, poorly fired, obviously made for funerary purposes, (Pl. II/1-6) and hemispherical cups with one handle (Pl. II/10; Pl. III/1,2). These cups are of better manufacture, and presumably in the secondary use. The common kitchen ware was ritually damaged: the handle that rose above the rim of the cup was broken on purpose. The purpose may be preventing the deceased to return, since such a custom is well known and can be traced in the contemporary ethnography. It is thought to be part of preanimistic elements, which have been preserved until today (Влаховић 2002: 270; Бандић 2004: 255). The little bowls were found in 10 graves, while the big cups with broken handles were inside 7 graves, along with a beaker in one of the graves. The type and the shape of the vessels can testify about some chronological difference or certain ritual rules inside this burial horizon. The rest of the grave finds were found on the spots of their original use. Graves No. 1, 3 and 4 from the mound 5 form a separate unit, because of the iron objects that were found in them: bracelets, a big arc fibula with two loops, one of a kind, which was probably in use for attaching the linen cloth in which the deceased was wrapped (Pl. III/6,7). According to R. Vasić (Васић 2000: 25-26), the iron finds from the II horizon of the Mojsinje necropolis can be dated into the beginning of the 8th century BC, too. From the Kalakača horizon originate several graves with bronze adornment as inventory: thinner twisted torcs, spiral hair gear made of doubled wire with twisted middle parts, spiral hair gear with spiral endings, bracelets and anklet/leg-band/leg-ring. (Pl. III/3-5) These types of jewelery, on the basis of their delicate manufacture, indicates the time before the wide usage of iron, when jewelery generally became massive and crude. It can lead to the assumption that the graves with these types of jewelery a bit older, i. e. that a small cultural group existed here before the beginning of the Kalakača influence and the usage of iron (Васић 2000: 26). In four graves not a single find was found, perhaps because of the effects of the soil to complete decay of small ceramic vessels of poor manufacture. Orientation of the skeletons does not follow any special rule, although NW-SE

orientation prevails, being determined with certainty in 12 graves. Among the graves from this group, there is one grave with completely different funerary practice. A child was buried in it, in crouched position, without any grave goods. It may indicate different chronological attribution or some special ritual pattern, that was performed for some special reasons.

According to the anthropological analysis of the Early Iron Age graves from the Mojsinje necropolis, it is stated that the skeletons were in very bad state of preservation, because of the effects of some of the soil constituents. This is the reason why the analysis included only the determination of sex and age of the deceased, without any possibility to determine anthropological types of the ethnical group that used to bury their dead at Mojsinje (Цофман 2002: 63; Cofman 2003: 216).

Horizon II is the oldest phase of the Hallstatt period (750-650/625 BC). It is characterised by the numerous finds of the Basarabi pottery. The region of Čačak was obviously under the strong influence from the north-east and the vast Basarabi complex, which continued from the earlier phase of the Iron Age. No grave from this phase was recognized up to now.

Horizon III (650/625-550/525 BC) is rich in ceramics with typical „tremollo“ decoration. Accidental finds of bronze adornment from the mound of Vidova-Prijevor cemetery (Pl.IV/1-3) can be attributed to this horizon, as well as some graves from the Mojsinje necropolis: graves 3 and 6 from the mound 1, grave 2 from the mound 2, graves 6 and 7 from the mound 5 (Pl. IV/4-7) and some of the finds outside grave units (Васић 2000: 27). In R. Vasić's opinion, in this horizon penetration of the Glasinac culture elements can be easily recognized and *ipso facto* the connection of the Čačak region with the western parts of the Balkan peninsula. A presumption of skeletal graves was made, because the state of preservation of the skeletons from this phase is very poor. Only small traces of skeletons were discovered, but grave goods are copious. Most of the grave goods were pieces of adornment: fibulae, bronze and amber beads, bracelets, a double pin, bird cage pendants, but there were some ceramic vessels and iron knives, too.

Horizon IV. At the time of horizon IV (550/525-450/425 BC) the circumstances stabilized. It was the time of prosperity, development of trade and crafts, appearance of the mighty princes leading tribal communities, and creation of separate cultural groups in the region (Васић 2000: 33-34). The finds from the devastated graves from the Mrčajevci necropolis (Pl.VI/3; Pl. VII), the central graves from the mounds 2 and 3 at Mojsinje (Pl.V), as well as the most important site from this area – princely mounds from the site Umke in Atenica – belong to this horizon (Pl.VIII-XI). Considering the fact that the central graves from the mounds 2 and 3 at Mojsinje are not damaged in comparison to the rest of the Hallstat graves, they can be treated as the youngest grave units at this necropolis. Chronological determination of the tumuli from Atenica and Mrčajevci is confirmed by the finds imported from Greece and Italy. During the horizon IV, cremation of the dead is dominant. The only exception from the rule is the central grave with the inhumation from the mound 2 in Mojsinje (Pl.V/1). If the Atenica mounds are put aside, being the princely graves, the rest of the graves from the horizon can be defined as male or female only by the grave inventory, since osteological material is very poorly preserved. Iron weaponry – spearheads, knives, shield bosses, breast plates, whetstones – belongs to the graves of males-warriors, who were part of military class. On the other hand, jewellery finds from the mound 2 in Mrčajevci, with amber, glass and bronze beads, and perhaps certain pottery forms, (Pl.VI/5; VII/1,2) should be attributed to the female grave inventory (Стојић 1997: 34-35), which has the closest parallels with the central grave from mound I in Atenica.

Funerary architecture is present at the graves with both cremation and skeletal burials. The central grave from the mound 2 in Mojsinje had a frame around the skeleton (Pl.V/1). The frame was made of oval pebbles. Since only one skeletal burial has been thoroughly explored up to now, there is no sufficient information to make final conclusion about the rules in the funerary ritual. Speaking about the graves with cremation, it has been noticed that there were some

constructions of alined stones, in which incinerated bones of the deceased were buried. The best preserved are the Atenica mounds, but it can be assumed that the destroyed central stone construction from mound 1 in Mrčajevci was of the same type.

The princely Atenica mounds should be specially treated, when dealing with funerary architecture and grave goods (Pl.VIII-XI). Huge dimensions of the tumuli (35 m and 70 m in diameter) are the first to indicate high social status of the deceased. These mounds are one of the biggest ever excavated in the region of Central Balkans (Jovanović 2003: 191). The dimensions of the tumuli (an average diameter of a mound in the Čačak region is 20 m) and their place in the landscape undoubtedly had the purpose to emphasize high rank which the deceased had in the society. This aspect was studied in detail by A. Palavestra and S. Babić (Palavestra, Babić 2003). Complex funerary architecture, rich grave goods and specially organized funerary ritual confirm the previously stated idea. The main characteristics of the mounds are: orientation, that is respected in every case, almost identical central grave constructions made of pebbles, supporting rings. In mound 2 there was an inner ring to protect specially formed platform, signifying the most sacred place with the remains of pyre and grave of the dead prince (Jovanović 2003: 191-192). In both of the mounds the same ritual – cremation - was practised, while the grave goods are in accordance to the particular dead member of the princely family: weaponry, adornment and drinking vessel to the prince, mostly jewelery to the princess, symbolic weaponry and adornment to the child. Funerary ritual in the mound of the prince is more complex. A large sacrificial construction with evenly placed sacrificial pits is the biggest construction of this kind among princely tombs at the Central Balkans (Jovanović 2003: 192). This construction, as well as the disposition of the units inside it, can be in connection with the rythmical circles of Sun and Moon, by which the time was measured, and may be considered a calendar scheme (Jovanović 2003: 198).

The grave goods are at least partially personal belongings, placing of which into the grave was connected to the custom of leaving to the deceased what was his own, personal. On the other hand, some of the goods, such as gold geometrical appliques, appliques in form of a bee, amber, appearance of chariots, on which the prince and the princess from the Atenica mounds, have in fact symbolical-magical meaning in the funerary ritual of Palaeobalkan communities (Палавестра 1984: 85-86). The concept of mound building based on the circle and centre principle (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 1987: 320, 624) and usage of fire and stone certainly had, aside the constructive role, some ritual-magical character in the funerary practice, usage of which can be traced up to the present day (Тројановић 1930: 48, 255-262; Чајкановић 1985: 89-91).

Horizon V (450/425-300 BC) is almost unknown.

Horizon VI - younger Iron Age (La Tène period) in the region of Čačak is not characterized by numerous finds (Васић 2000: 28). Not a single grave from this period has been found so far.

As for the ethnical interpretation of the prehistoric populations, whose traces we can find buried under the tumuli of the Čačak region, it can be discussed with more certainty only for the developed phases of the Iron Age. Unfortunately, antique historical sources do not say anything in particular about the Čačak region during the second half of the 6th century BC and the first half of the 5th century BC, when the most exceptional find - Atenica princely necropolis - is dated. The problem of its ethnical attribution drew attention of many scholars. The first explorers, M. Đuknić and B. Jovanović, treated Atenica as a confirmation of the existence of an already formed stratum of the Illyrian tribe aristocracy (Đuknić, Jovanović 1965: 26). According to this, Atenica would be incorporated in the territory of Illyrian tribes *sensu largo*, namely to the Autariatae tribal league (Јовановић 1979: 68-69). D. Sreјović (Срејовић 1981) had another opinion. Discussing ethnical attribution of various princely graves at the Central Balkans, he concluded that the princes of the Triballi should be expected to be buried at Atenica. M. Stojić (Stojić 1990; Стојић 1995: 6-12; Стојић 1998: 10) also stands for the idea

that the Triballi were the tribe who inhabited West Morava valley during 6-4th century BC and whose princes were buried at Atenica. Stojić's opinion was accepted by L. Nikitović, who recognized the Čačak region as a part of the territory of the Triballi (Никитивић 1997: 23). According to R. Vasić (Vasić 1990: 70; Васић 1995: 22; Васић 2004: 25) the inventory from the princely graves from Atenica shows connections with the Glasinac group, but also differences which indicate an independent, still not sufficiently studied cultural circle. The Atenica graves have some features common to these from the tumuli from Mrčajevci and Ljuljaci. The graves from these three sites constitute one tribal community, to which warrior graves from the Mojsinje tumuli 2 and 3 can be added. In Vasić's opinion, the deceased buries under the Atenica mounds belonged to a distinct tribal community which was neither the Autariae nor the Triballi, but formed on the local substratum. Lack of fibulae, pins and bracelets, which are one of the most frequent elements of clothing of the Autariae and the Triballi, is in favour of this presumption. On the other hand, the same author (Васић 2004: 25) does not exclude the idea of the local community being part of the Autariae tribal league, which reached its apogee in the first half of the 5th century BC.

As it has already been emphasized, the Čačak region is not very rich in the grave finds dating from the Iron Age. Insufficient state of exploration and uneven number of excavated burials from different chronological phases still do not provide the possibility to see clearly the development and set all of the rules in the cult of the dead. Future excavations, focused on solving the problem, will surely provide much more information.

Something different is the fact that the mounds have been respected as sacred places and ancient tombs of forefathers on a wider area, which is the reason why much later, Christian graves were dug into these necropolises (Pl. XII). For that reason some modern cemeteries were formed on the spots of prehistoric tumuli. It may be a kind of continuity, which is used by the modern population to materialize connections with ancient inhabitants of this region.

Tab. I

	chronology and cultural attribution	sites	treatment of deceased	grave inventory	grave architecture	
I horizon: Early Iron Age	IX-VIII century BC Kalakača	Mojsinje: horizon 2	inhumation-stretched position	-pottery -spiral hair gear -calotte buttons -torcs -belt buckles -iron bracelets, fibula		
II horizon: Earliest Hallstatt phase	750-650/625 BC Basarabi	?	?	?	?	
III horizon: Second Hallstatt phase	650/625-550/525 BC Glasinac	-Vidova-Prijevor cemetery -Mojsinje: tumulus I/grave 3, 6, II/2, V/6, 7	inhumation?	-jewellery: fibulae, bronze and amber beads, bracelets, double pins, birdcage pendants -iron knives -pottery	?	
IV horizon: Third Hallstatt phase	550/525-450/425 BC	-Mrčajevci -Grotnica in Guča -Mojsinje: t. II and III/central graves -Atenica: princely graves	biritual: -dominant cremation -inhumation	male warrior graves: iron weapons (spears, knives, shield bosses, breast plates), whetstone	female graves: jewellery (amber, glass, bronze beads), pottery	-grave constructions of aligned stones -stone rings to retain tumuli -ritual platforms
V horizon: Fourth Hallstatt phase	450/425-300 BC	?	?	?	?	
VI horizon: La Tène period	300 BC-1 AD	?	?	?	?	

Characteristics of the Iron Age burials in the Čačak region

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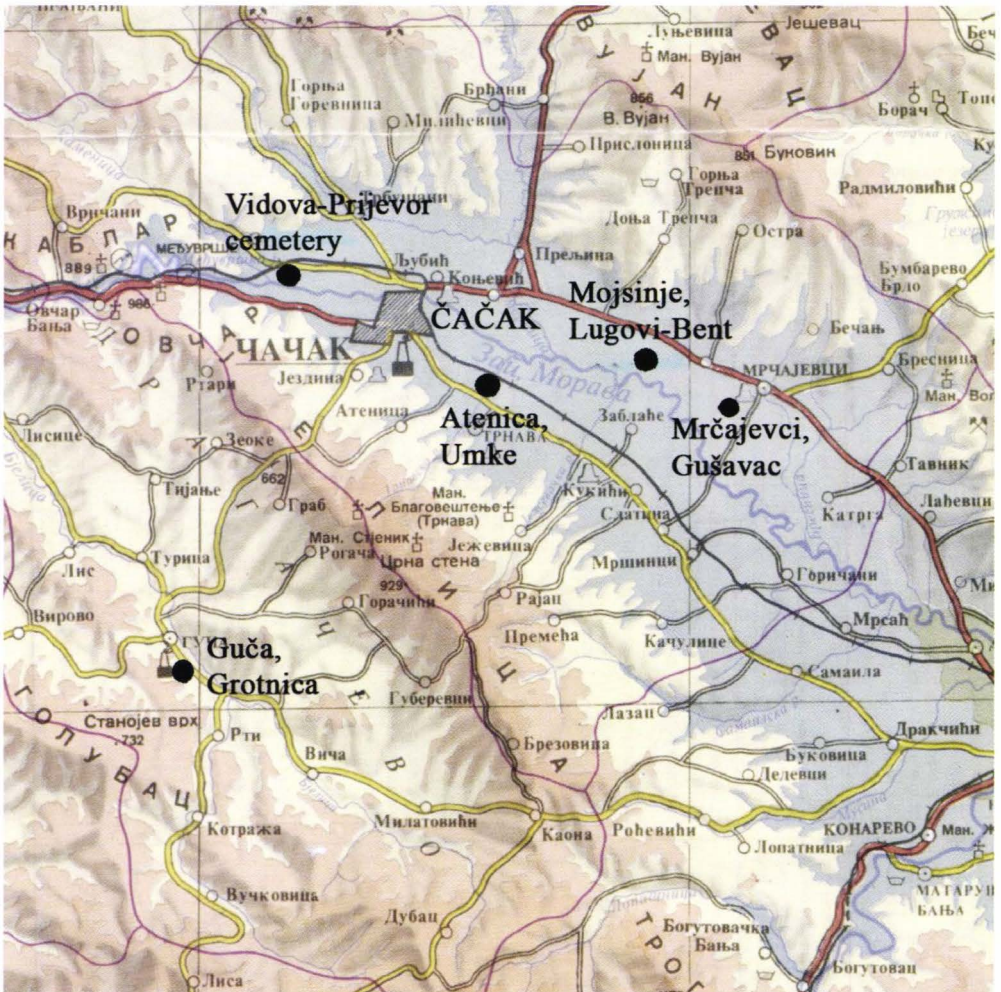
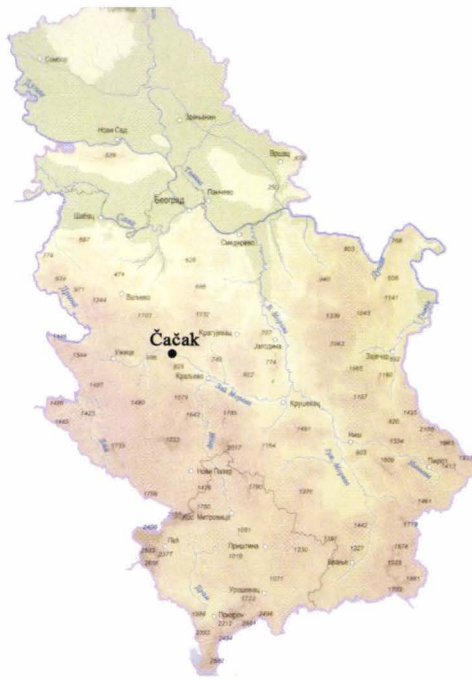


Plate I. Map with the sites.



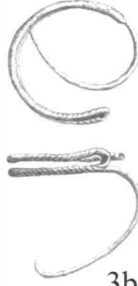
Plate II. Horizon 1 - Early Iron Age (Kalakača phase); site Lugovi-Bent in Mojsinje (fig.2,4,7 according to: Никитовић, Стојић, Васић: 2002)



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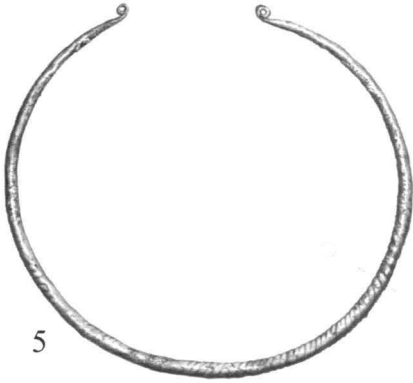
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3a

3b

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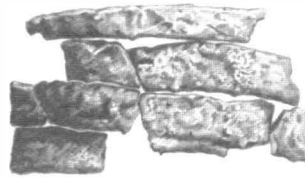
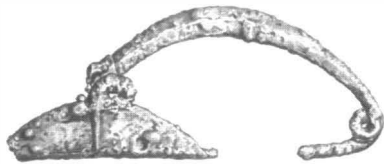
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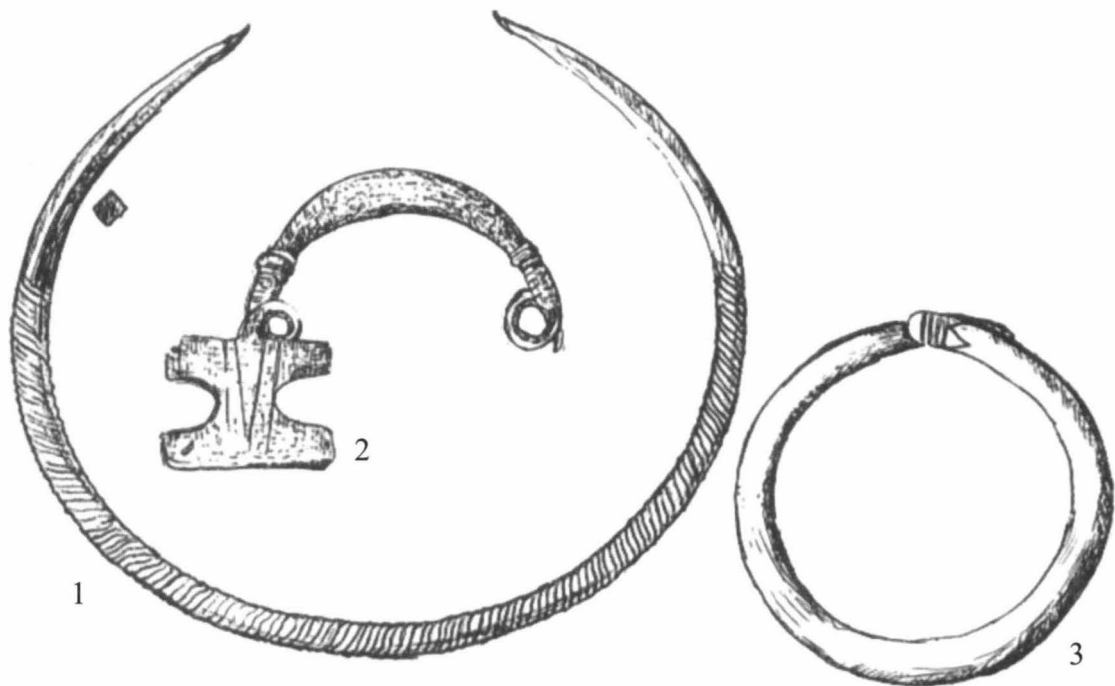
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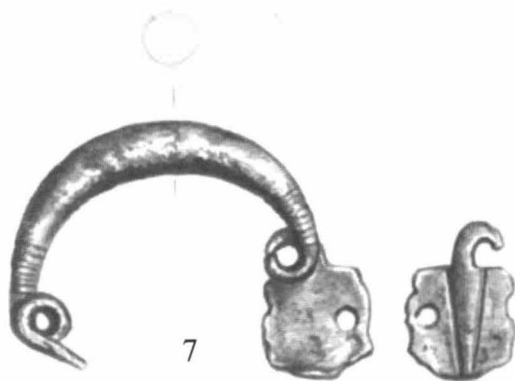
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Plate III. Horizon 1 - Early Iron Age (Kalakača phase); site Lugovi-Bent in Mojsinje. (according to: Никитовић, Стојић, Васић: 2002)



Vidova-Prijevor Cemetery (according to: Никитовић: 1997)



Lugovi-Bent in Mojsinje (fig.7 according to: Никитовић, Стојић, Васић: 2002)

Plate IV. Horizon III Second Hallstatt phase.

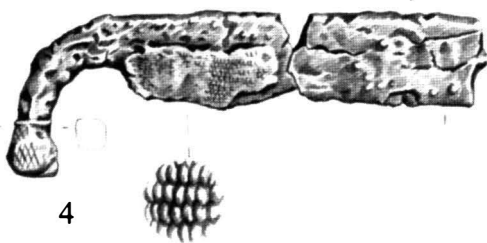
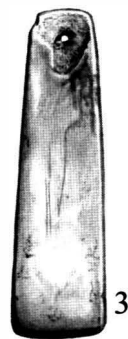
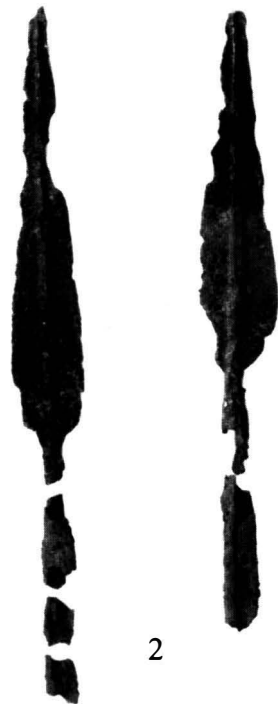
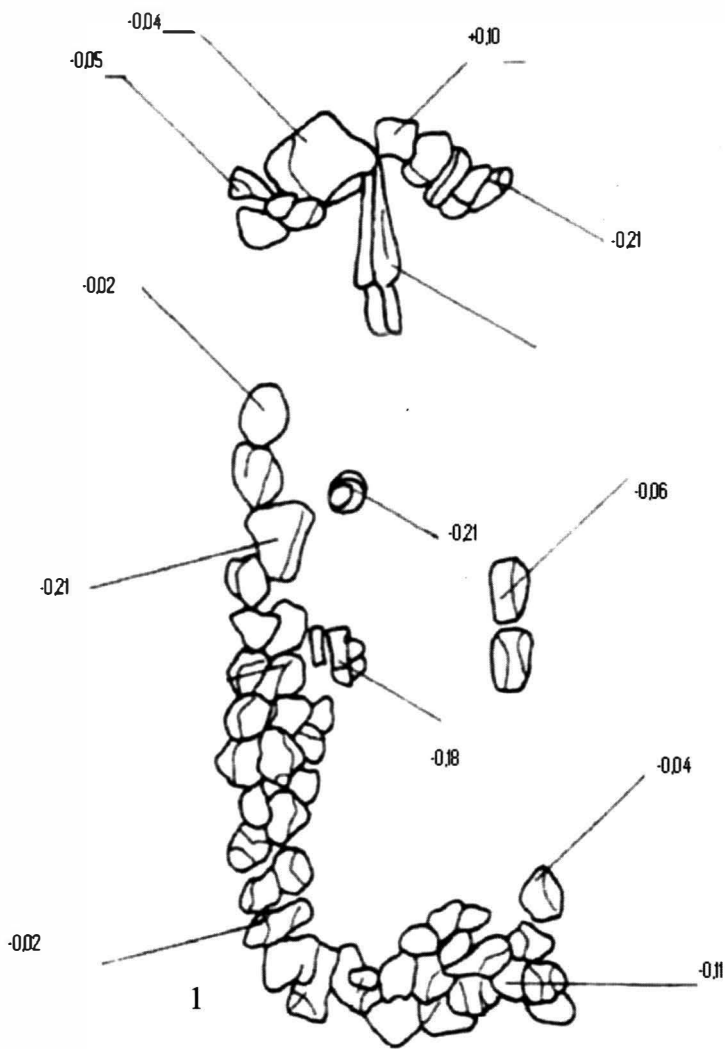
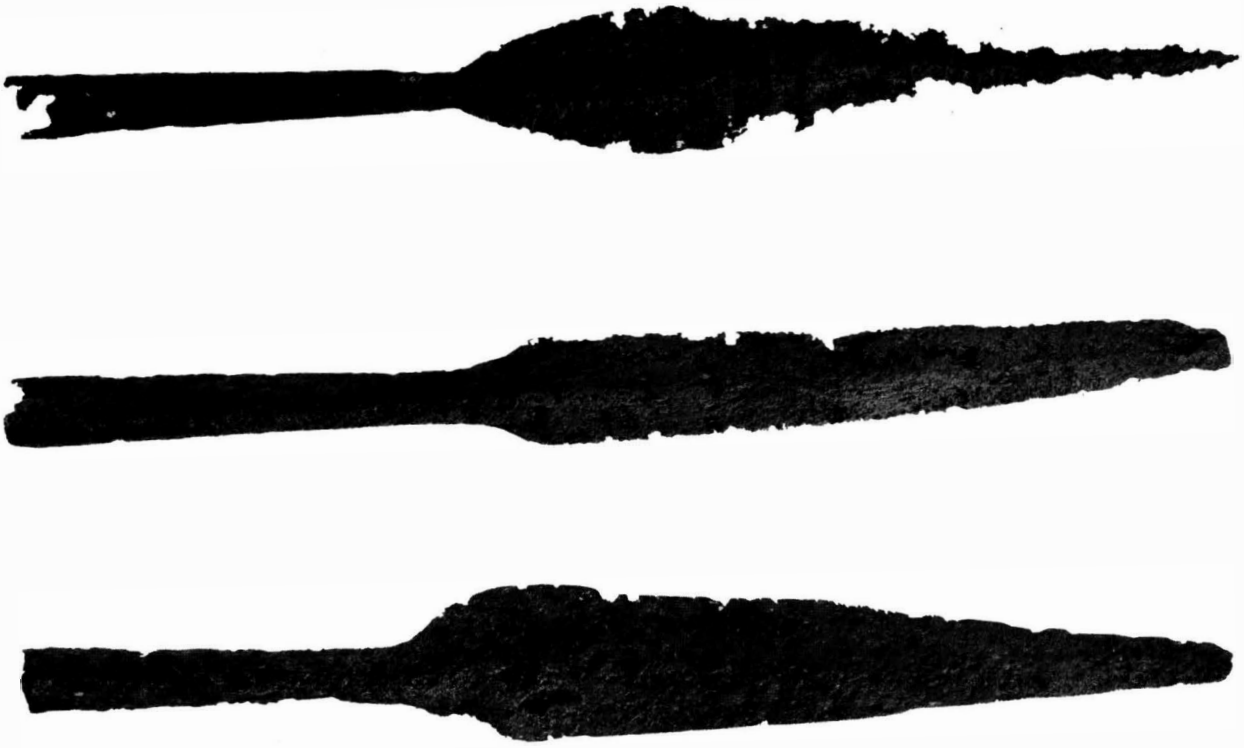


Plate V. Horizon IV Third Hallstatt phase; site Lugovi-Bent in Mojsinje (fig.1- 4 according to:Никитовић, Стојић, Васић: 2002).



Grotnica in Guča

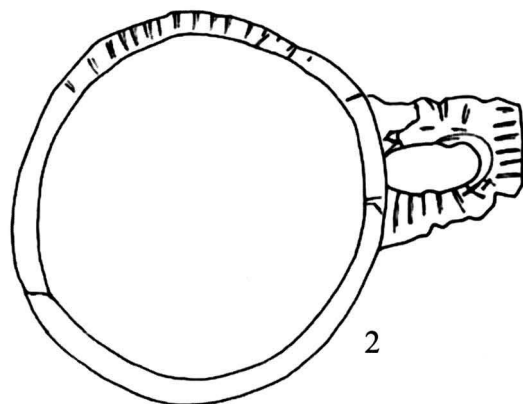


Gušavac in Mrčajevo (according to: Стојић: 1997)

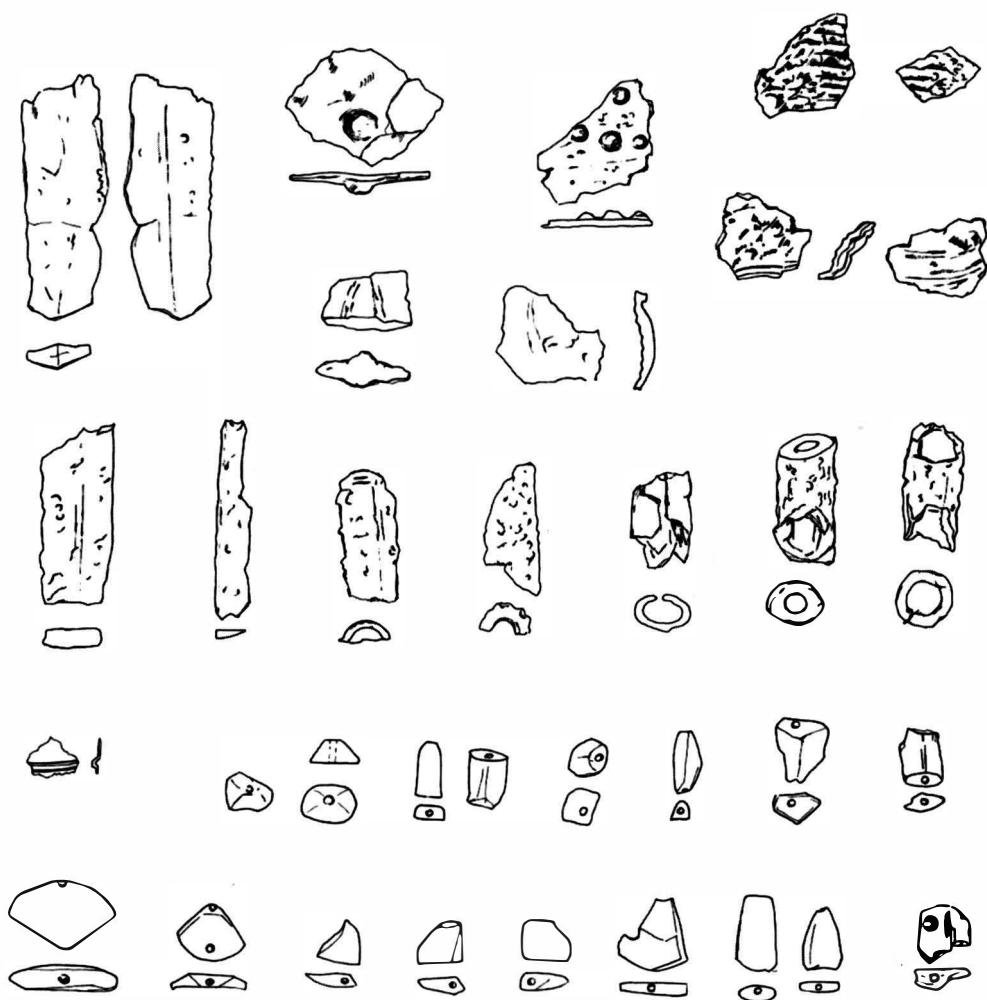
Plate VI. Horizon IV - Third Hallstatt phase.



1



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Plate VII. Horizon IV Third Hallstatt phase; site Gušavac in Mrčajevci
(according to: Стојић: 1997)

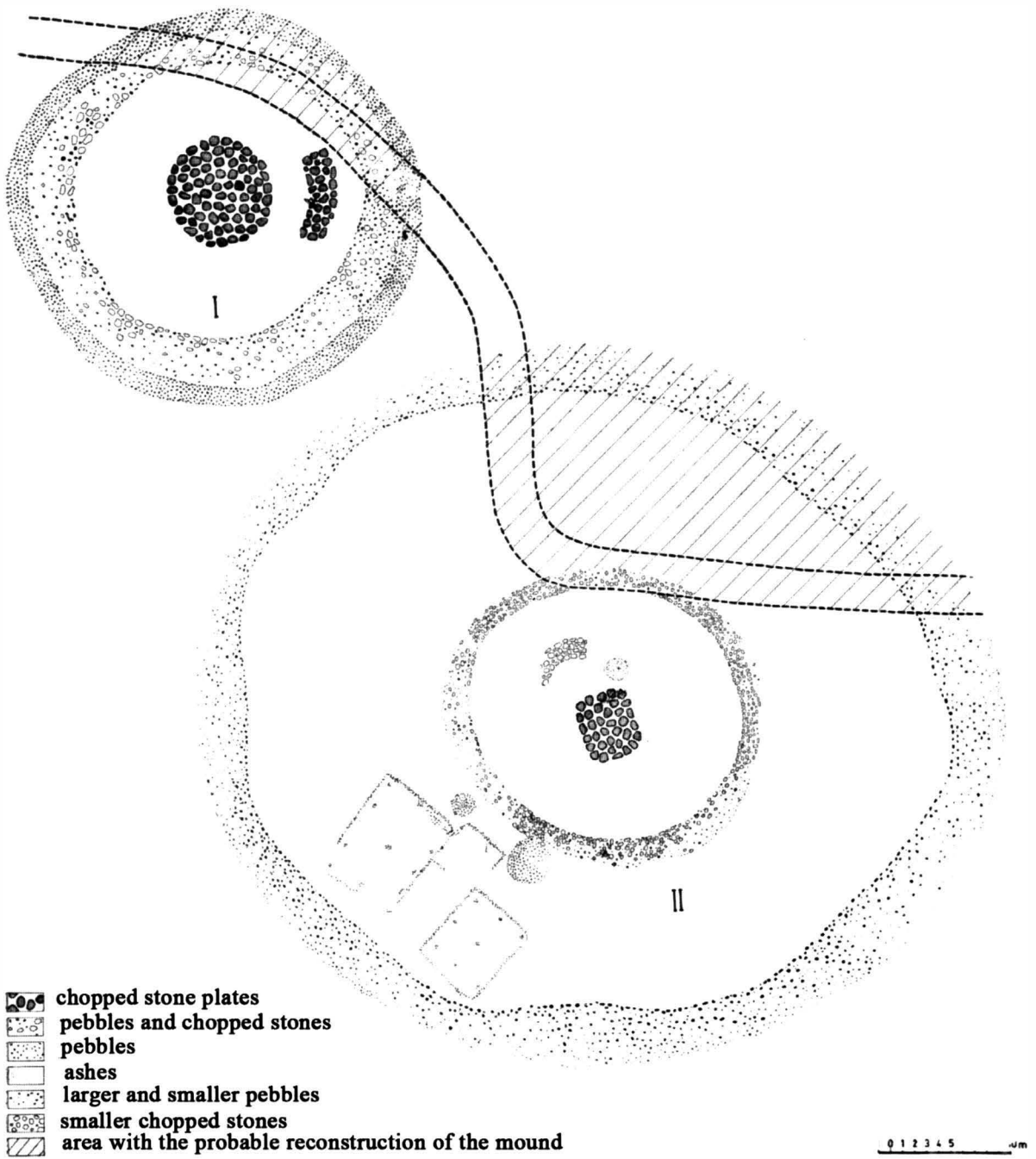


Plate VIII. Ground plans of Atenica mounds I and II (According to: Ђукнић-Јовановић: 1966).

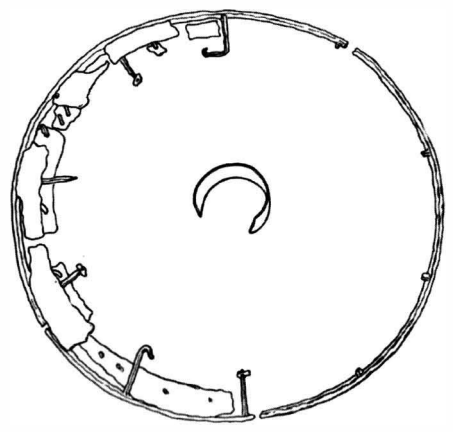
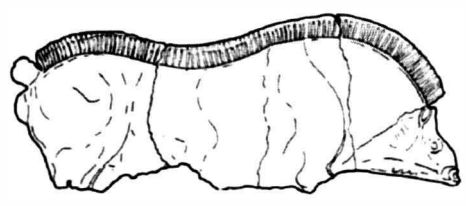
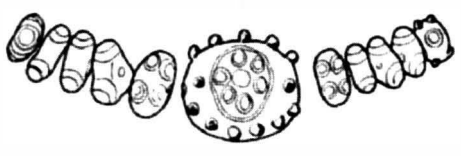
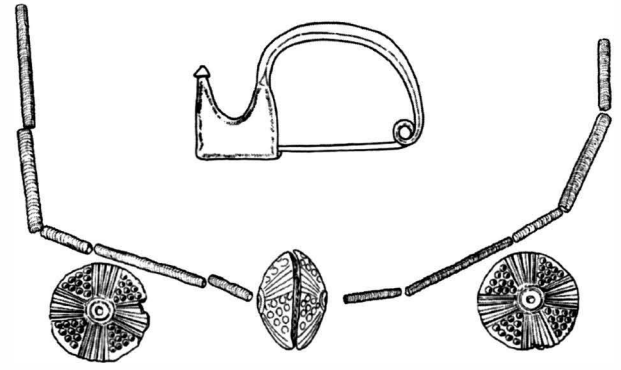
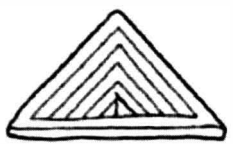
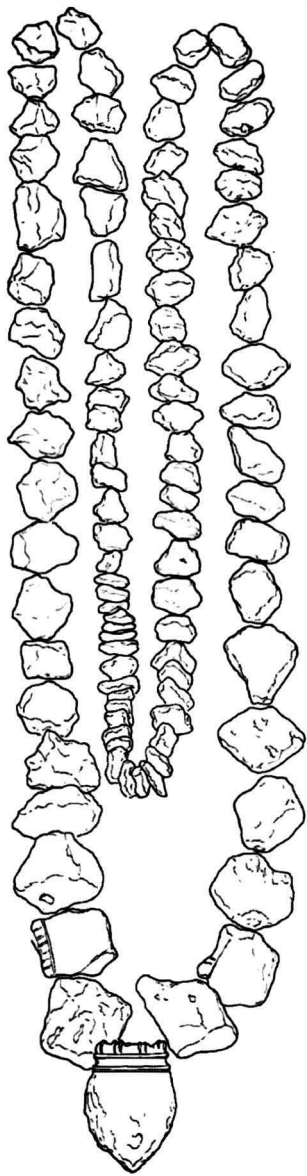


Plate IX. Horizon IV Third Hallstatt phase; site Umke in Atenica, mound 1 (according to: Тукнић, Јовановић: 1966).

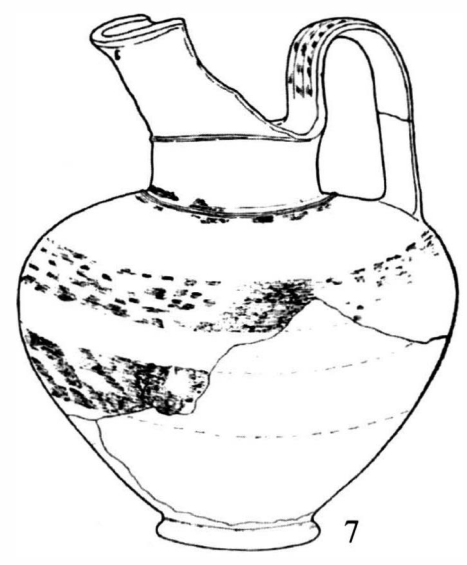
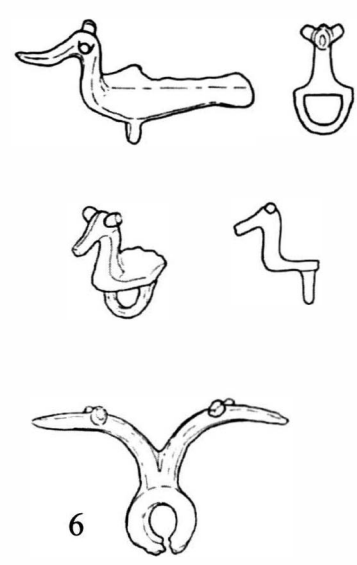
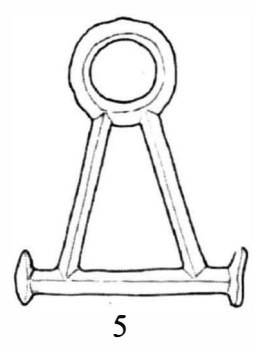
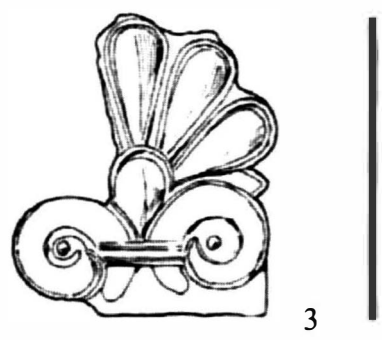
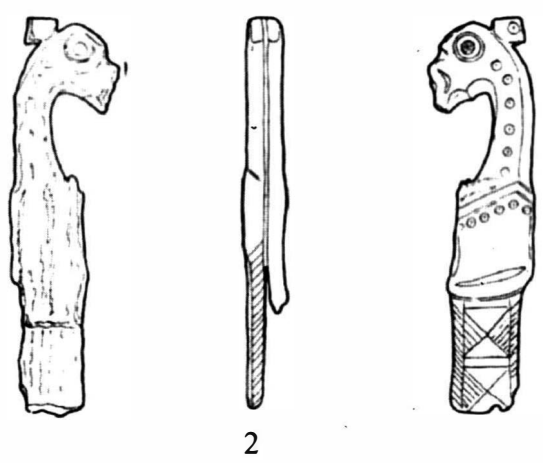
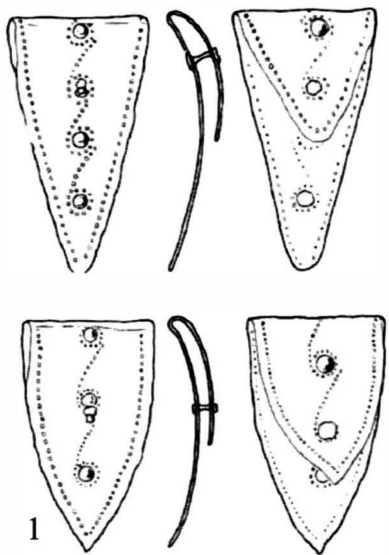


Plate X. Horizon IV Third Hallstatt phase; site Umke in Atenica, mound 2 (according to: Букнић, Јовановић: 1966).



Central grave construction in the mound 1 in Atenica (according to: Ђукнић, Јовановић: 1966)



Central grave construction in the mound 2 in Atenica

Plate XI.



Christian graves in the mound in Mrčajevo



Christian graves in the mound 1 in Atenica

Plate XII.