

CREMATION BURIALS AT VIMINACIUM (I – III C. A.D.)

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Abstract. Cemetery of Viminacium was first excavated by Prof. Valtrović in the year 1882. From 1977 at the territories of southern graveyards immense salvage excavations were conducted at the place where was built power plant Kostolac. During centuries, along with the city and military camp, a number of necropolises have been established for the burials of heterogeneous population of antique Viminacium. Till now southern necropolises are the best explored but in the last two years the excavations are conducted at the territory of eastern graveyard. Among cremation graves are well graves, burial in urns and specific grave type well-known as Mala Kopašnica-Sase.

First information about graveyards of Viminacium gave us Valtrović in the year 1882 when he registered a big necropolis from the roman period covering the vast territory along the right bank of river Mlava southern of the “city” of Viminacium. Than he conducted small excavations at that place and by the topographical research later confirmed existence of northern and eastern graveyards (Valtrović 1884, 3-14).

From 1977 at the territories of southern graveyards immense salvage excavations were conducted under direction of Ljubica Zotović. Namely, at those place were built power plant Kostolac, and the coal strip mine is devouring the space closer and closer to the camp and city of Viminacium conditioning survey archaeological excavations, nowadays eastern of camp and the city.

Viminacium was *municipium*, than *colonia*, strategical and administrative centre of the roman province – *Moesiae Superior* (Map 1). The camp, city and necropolises are found at the plane ground, at one of the meander of river Mlava, close to nowadays village of Stari Kostolac (Mirković 1968, 56-6; Mirković 1986). Besides the constant defence force of the camp, among inhabitants were veterans with their families, newcomers from Italy and Romanized provinces, individuals from the Hellenistic areas, newcomers from Syria and, naturally, domestic population of Illyrian, Celtic and Thracian origin.

During centuries at this territory, along with the city and military camp, a number of necropolises have been established for the burials of heterogeneous population of antique Viminacium. Following roman customs graveyards were formed out of the town, probably along the communication leading to the city.

Until now southern necropolises are the best explored. However, in the last two years the excavations are conducted at the territory of eastern graveyard. The cemeteries at Viminacium contain parallel burial, both of the cremated and skeletal remains of the deceased.

Among cremation graves one specific grave type is appearing – so called well graves. First grave of this type were explored by the end of XIX century at the territory of antique Singidunum just in the same period when the archaeologists in Europe had the chance to research them for the first time. In the first half of XX century lot of excavations have been conducted in southern France (Gallia) and southern Germany, during which this grave type is confirmed. Our archaeologist had the chance to explore graves in the shape of a well at Sirmium and Singidunum (Map 2). At the territory of Viminacium cemeteries they appeared in the most

number. The reconstruction of the grave type and funeral rite is made following the results of archaeological research. General conclusion considering form of the graves is that grave pits of a round shape had a depth from 3.20 to 9.60 m, while their diameters were from 0.75 to 3.00 m. The form of cylinder was gradually narrowing down the bottom. They are encompassing a chronological span between I and III century. The speciality of this grave type are wooden chambers in which inner were usually found cremated remains of humans.

Until now is concluded that the most number of well graves are appearing in Gallia and in south Germany which points out at the Gauls as the carrier of specific burial form (Golubović 1999, 15).

For the presence of Gauls at Viminacium there are evidences in the historical sources. It is recorded they arrived in Upper Moesia in the military operation by the end of the I century AD. The army concentrated on Danube during the period of Domitianus wars, was formed from soldiers recruited in Italy and western Roman provinces. At the oldest military diploma from Moesia the names of ten cohorts included III, IV, V, VII and VIII Gallorum had been recorded. This Gaulish cohorts descended from Rhein at the same time with legio I Italica and V Alaudae in the year 75 A. D. (Mirković 1968, 33). In Pannonia and Moesia the well graves appears at the three site and all of them are at the territory inhabited with Celtic tribe Scordisci what is archaeologically confirmed. However, that funeral rite was not familiar to them and if they embraced it as something brought by people of similar ethnical origin is not possible to discern.

Urn burials are also rare. They are represented by not sufficiently baked hand made pots of rough fabric. Large red and gray baked pots of kaolin manufactured on potter's wheel were also used. Urns made on potter's wheel belong to a class of kitchen pottery used above all in a domestic framework. After being damaged they were reused as urns. Burial at urns are making 6 % of all burials at Viminacium (Golubović 1998, 249).

The most frequent grave form at the Viminacium cemeteries are simple and en étage pits with the red and grey 2-5 cm thick, and heavily burned walls. There are a few varieties of these grave forms. Simple rectangular grave pits with rounded corners were often covered by soil to form a small mound. Less often they had a tile covering, either flat or ridged. This type of graves is referred to as the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type (Map 3), according to a typology established by M. Garašanin following eponym sites and it represents typical grave type with cremation which appears at the territory of eastern Dalmatia, south-eastern Pannonia, Moesia Superior and at the parts of Dacia and Thracia on the very East (Garašanin 1968, 6). Seems the appearance of this grave type could be certainly dated to the end of I century in all provinces in which the grave type is recorded and only some grave are dated in IV century (Jovanović 2000, 209). At Viminacium they could be dated from I to III century. The majority were found during eighties of XX century at the southern graveyards. During the recent excavations among this type grave one special was researched at the site Kod koraba, the most eastern necropolis of Viminacium (Fig. 1) It contained quite unique find – led reliquary (Fig. 2, 3).

There are two explanations for the specifically red-grey burnt walls of the graves. According to the first they are the result of burning the body of deceased at the place (so-called *bustum*) and to the second they are result of lustration, respectively ritual cleaning of the grave with fire (Jovanović 2000, 205). Burnt walls were also explained with additional cremation the rest of deceased at very grave or placing still hot cremated remains from the stake. However, there are no possibilities the remains could so equally burnt the bottom and the walls of the grave pit till the depth of 5 cm. Also, according roman custom, the burning of the corps was always conducted during the night while the funeral followed next day when stake was already cold (Göricke-Lukić, 2000, 94).

The results of *bustum* reconstruction, two experiments from the year 1989 directly supports hypothesis of *ustrinum* – burning on the common fire. For that test as the control were

used the results of I and II century *bustum* excavations south-eastern of the antique *vicus Juliacum*. Goods were placed at the stake above dug grave and instead of the deceased human body the pig were put. Above the grave pit of dimensions 1,60 x 1,10 x 0,80 m were deposited the oaken and birchen logs weigh 582 kg till the height of 1,30 m. When the temperature of 800°C was reached, the charcoal of logs fell down i filled three quarters of the grave. However, the body of the pig was not burnt enough and it was necessary to add 40 kg more logs to achieve the degree of cremation found in control graves. So, after whole process the grave pit was almost completely filled with charcoals and ashes (Gaitzsch, Werner 1993, 55-67). The layer of charcoal and ashes in the graves of Viminacium, at the bottom of second étage of average dimensions is usually 5 to 10 cm. There is also another one proof considering Viminacium that these are no graves of *bustum* type. Namely, in the year 2003, at the site "Pirivoj" was dug one real *bustum*. The shape responded to those of grave en étage with cremation, but the layer of charcoal and ashes was more than half meter thick, what was never recorded in any till now excavated grave. This *bustum* is unique and without doubt was burial place of highly ranked person.

Graves type Mala Kopašnica-Sase made more then 90% of all cremations at Viminacium – the rest are graves in the shape of a well and urns.

During 2006 at the site Pirivoj the most eastern part of Viminacium necropolis is undertaken. The situation which has been already seen at other parts of cemetery - he photo from the most recent excavations at the site Pirivoj – skeletons and cremation of various orientations are crosscutting each others.

Regular grave goods were: lamps, coins, pottery and glass vessels. Ornaments, censers, cosmetic kit, instruments, small boxes, keys, sea-shells and wall frescoes were placed additionally, depending on profession and financial status of the believer. Weapons, tools and statuettes were rarely placed as grave goods. Coins and jewelry were often burned together with the deceased (Zotović, Jordović 1990,10). Weapons are rarely registered within cremation graves.

Various grave types are pointing out at the complex ethno-cultural situation. For the graves Mala Kopašnica – Sase type is difficult to relate to a specific ethnical element, because they are registered at a large area with a population belonging to various ethnic groups. Discussion about ethno-cultural attribution this grave type is still quite vivid. Considering Viminacium it has to be count with the domestic population with the influence of Romanized newcomers.

K. Sagy (Sagy 1954, 61-123) was the first to try an ethnical determination of the graves. He assumed that the earliest graves of this type appeared in the Rhineland, deriving from the Late Iron Age with pit en étage. He was the first to assume that the Mala Kopašnica - Sase type graves, especially those en étage, may be related to the Celtic burial tradition. This idea was advocated in early studies of D. Srejšović and M. Baum (Baum, Srejšović 1959, 23-54; Baum, Srejšović 1960, 3-31). It was not entirely rejected, because of a possibility of merging various customs and processes in the Pannonian basin (Jovanović 1984, 104-109). M. Macrea and D. Protase argued that graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type from the site of Apulum (type IIIa at Viminacium) are of *bustum* type (Protase, Macrea 1959, 435-452). According to situation noted at the cemeteries of Romula and Matrica, M. Babeş (1970, 167-206) and J. Topal (1981, 70-71) noted that the graves en étage of IIIb type are of *bustum* type. On the other hand they argue that walls of graves of the type IIIa were burned while cleansing the sacral space by ritual fire, while the cremated remains were brought from the stake. D. Benea, C. Tatulea (1975, 669-675) and I. Andritoiu (1979, 227-228) also think that walls of graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type from Drobeta and Micia were burned while cleansing the sacral space with "ritual fire". L. Barzu argues, on the bases of material from Mediaş-Bratei (Barzu 1973, 27-28), that the cremated

remains were brought from the stake to the grave pit. She explained that burial procedure consisted of the following steps: first the grave space was cleansed by "ritual fire" (burned walls), than animal bones were placed at its bottom (remains of "partial" sacrifice). Finally, remains from the stake were brought when already cooled.

Considering ethnical determination, at any territory where graves type Mala Kopašnica-Sase is appearing, they have the characteristics of indigenous cultures of pre-roman period. This type was registered already at the end of I century, within the cemeteries of large civil and military centers such as Emona, Poetovio, Domavia, Doclea, Ulpiana, Singidunum, Viminacium, Sirmium, Naissus, Stobi, Intercisa, Acuminum, Aquincum, Apulum, Brigetio, in the Rhineland, and in Gallia, what means in all significant romanized centres, where the presence of Italics and a powerful infiltration of the Roman culture were also confirmed.

It is obvious that burial procedure applied in Mala Kopašnica-Sase type of graves was based upon pre-Roman or indigenous cremation tradition at any site where they appearing. However a large distribution of this type of graves, their synchronous appearance and nearly the same period within a territory containing a diversity of ethnic elements, as well as the uniform burial procedure, could be explained by a foreign influence what support the following: namely, graves are spread within a very large geographical area with a population belonging to various ethnic groups.

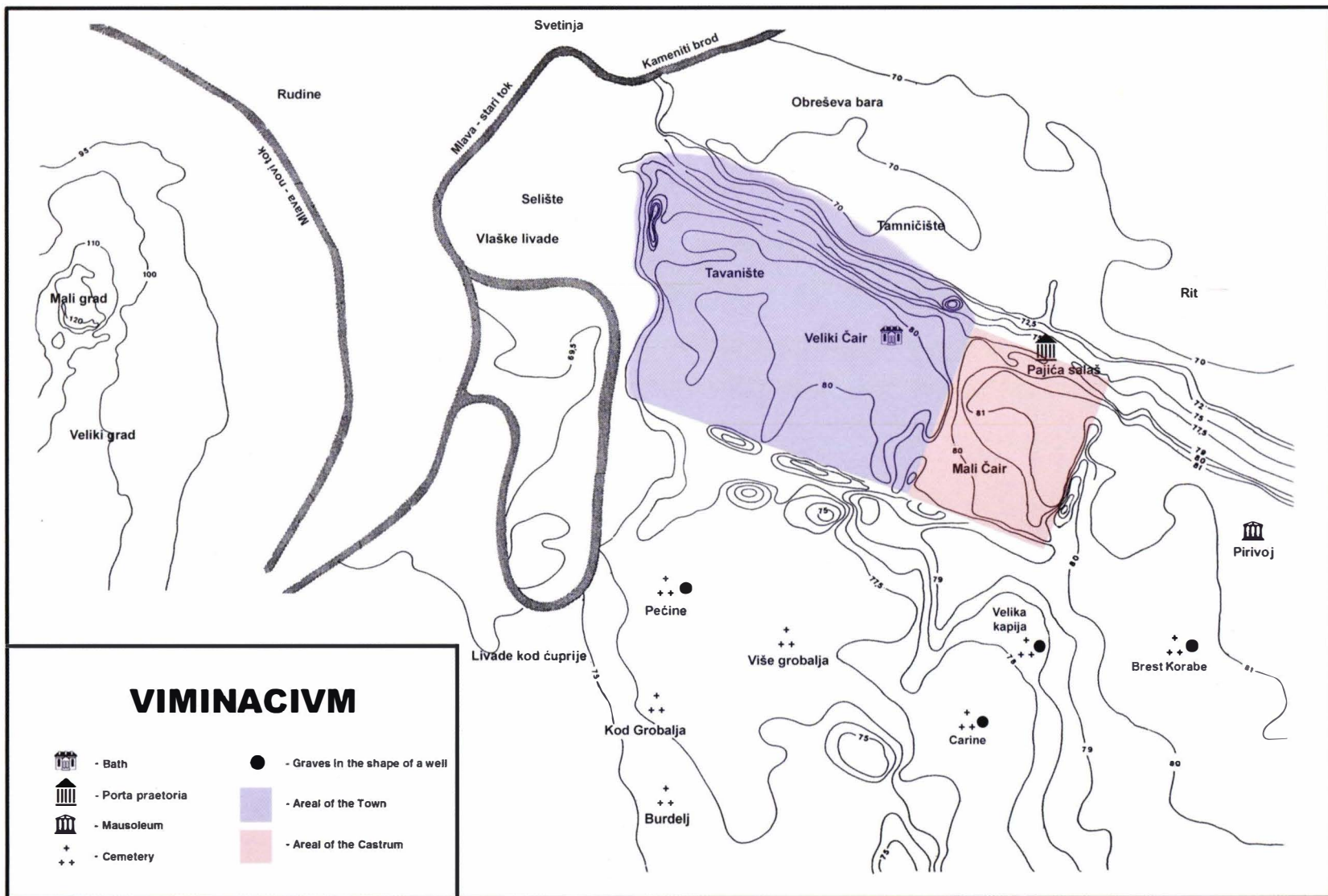
The necropolis Viminacium is among biggest excavated graveyard from the roman period and therefore ideal to procure the explanation, for example, of acculturation process considering autochthonous population with newcomers from other roman provinces and finally to give the picture of life in the multi-ethnic town as Viminacium certainly was in those times.

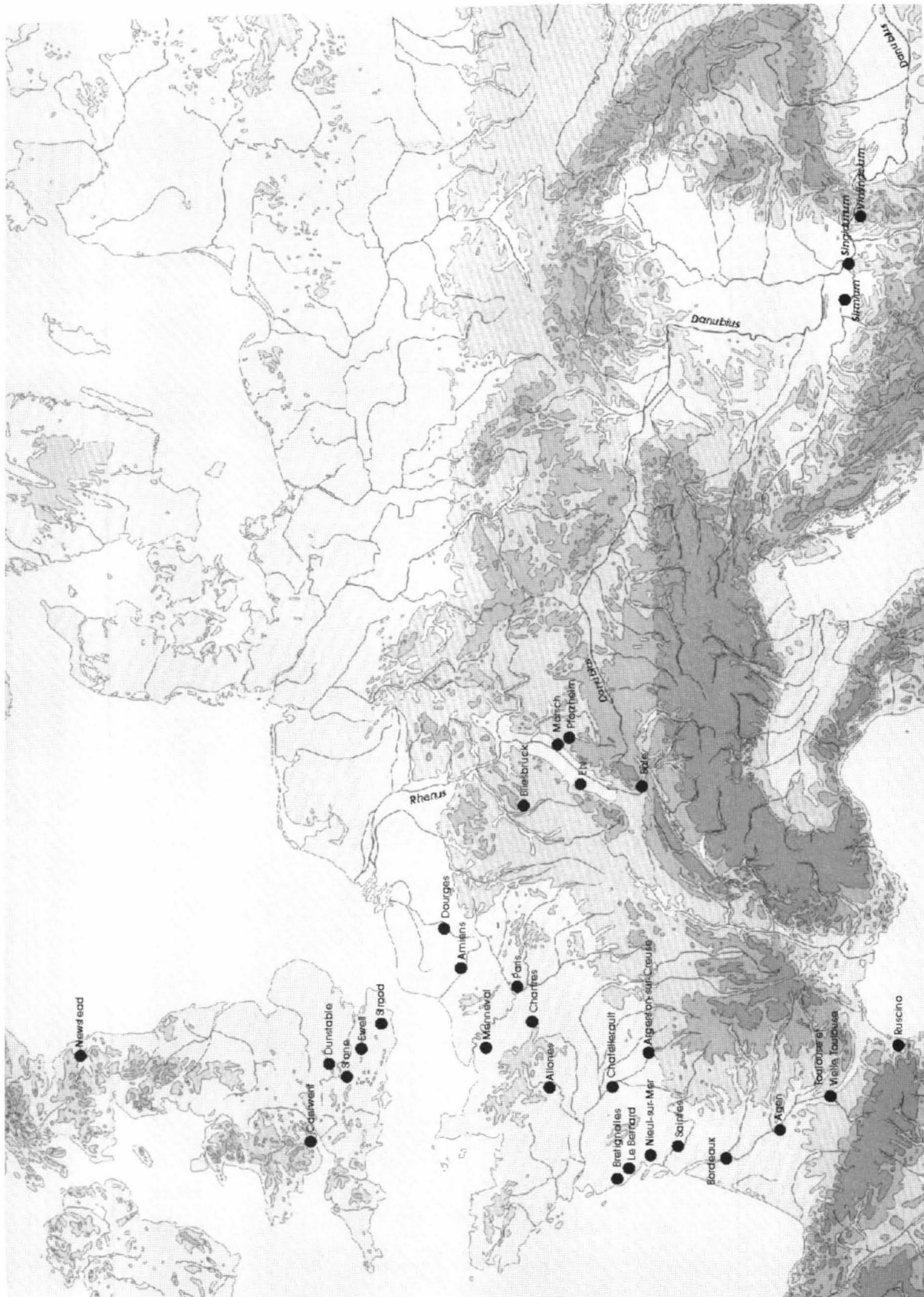
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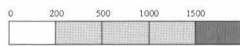
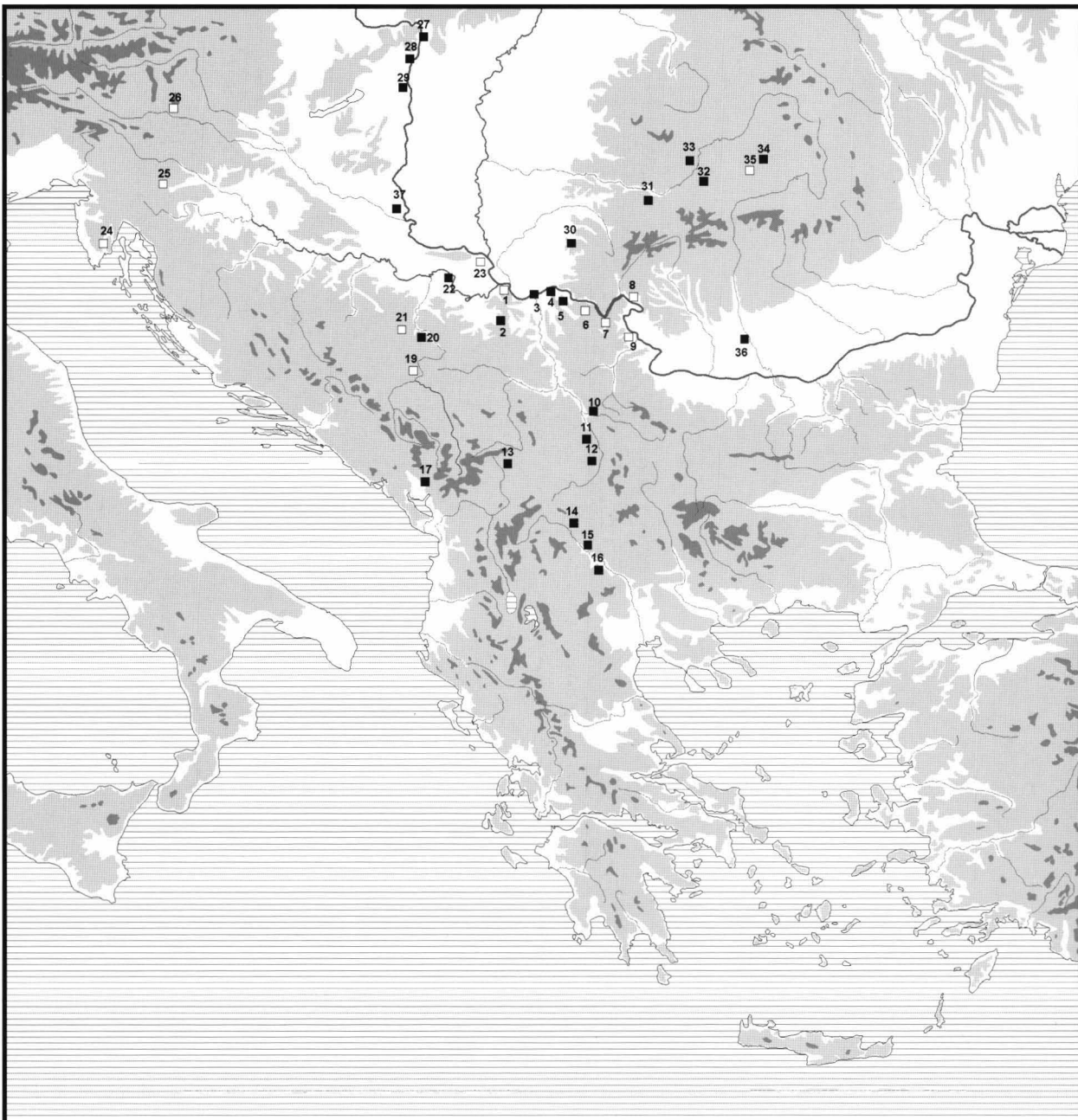
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Map. 1. Viminacium sites





Map. 2. Distribution map of well graves



□ Tip Mala Kopašnica - Sase I

■ Tip Mala Kopašnica - Sase II

1. *Singidunum*, 2. *Guberevac*, 3. *Margum*, 4. *Viminacium*, 5. *Pincum*, 6. *Boljetin*,
 7. *Ušće Porečke reke*, 8. *Turn Severin*, 9. *Prahovo*, 10. *Naisus*, 11. *Velika Grabovnica*,
 12. *Mala Kopašnica*, 13. *Ulpiana*, 14. *Scupi*, 15. *Stobi*, 16. *Demir Kapija*, 17. *Doclea*,
 18. *Komini*, 19. *Rogatica*, 20. *Domavia*, 21. *Stup*, 22. *Sirmium*, 23. *Beška*, 24. *Pola*,
 25. *Ribnica*, 26. *Poetovio*, 27. *Aquincum*, 28. *Matrica*, 29. *Intercisa*, 30. *Rešca*,
 31. *Micia*, 32. *Sebeš*, 33. *Apulum*, 34. *Sigișoara*, 35. *Mediaș*, 36. *Romula*, 37. *Mursa*

Map. 3.



Fig. 1. Cremation grave G1 - 115



Fig. 2 - 3. Led reliquary from the G1 - 115.