

Mario Gavranović, Daniela Heilmann,  
Aleksandar Kapuran and Marek Verčík (Eds.)

Spheres of Interaction

Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences  
Institute of Classical Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague  
Chair for Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology, Department for the Study of Culture and Ancient Studies,  
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München – LMU Munich

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FACULTY OF ARTS  
Charles University



Mario Gavranović, Daniela Heilmann,  
Aleksandar Kapuran and Marek Verčík (Eds.)

# **Spheres of Interaction**

## **Contacts and Relationships between the Balkans and Adjacent Regions in the Late Bronze / Iron Age (13<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE)**

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Language editing: Jana Mokrišová  
Layout and graphics: María Antonia Negrete Martínez, OREA  
Cover layout: Angela Schwab, OREA

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# Some Light in the Dark Ages: Remarks on Cultural Continuity during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in West Morava Basin

Marija Ljuština, Katarina Dmitrović

## Abstract

The West Morava River Basin located in western Serbia has a long tradition of archaeological investigation and is best known for the long lasting prehistoric tradition of burials under tumuli. In contrast to the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, both characterised by cemeteries with both inhumations and cremations, our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age funerary practice is fragmentary and insufficient to reconstruct the events at the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE in the region. In the middle part of the basin, it seems that burial customs during this period maintained the basic form common in the previous phases, including the use of burial mounds, cremation, and deposition of ashes of the deceased in urns. The site of Baluga-Katovac is the only one in this part of the Morava Basin where grave finds belong to the so-called transitional period from the Bronze to the Iron Age. In the upper part of the basin, the mountainous area of western Serbia, the indigenous Late Bronze Age population inhumed their dead in supine position, as indicated by the finds from the cemetery Stapari near Užice.

The evidence for the end of this insufficiently investigated period is presented by the graves from the Kalakača phase of the so-called Bosut group, found in the mound cemetery in Mojsinje, and several ceramic sherds from nearby hillforts. The graves with inhumations from Mojsinje, along with those in the Stapari cemetery and possibly Dobrača near Kragujevac, represent a rare phenomenon of this period, shared in the area south of the Danube and Sava Rivers. Our methodological framework for the examination of the character of contacts and influences from the north has been based on the recognition of imitations on the frequent archaeological material, mainly pottery, and on the assumption that it was connected to the presence of indigenous people.

Archaeology of the period at the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE, when communities from the West Morava Basin lived at the most remote edge of the "Urnfield world", has not provided us with sufficient data to know what happened with the Bronze Age populations who cremated their dead. The only connecting link with the Early Iron Age is the use of tumuli as part of burial practice, which leads us to presume that the Late Bronze Age populations went through substantial changes during the centuries immediately preceding the Iron Age, when the region became for a short time integrated into the Danubian world of the Bosut group. It can also be expected that in this area, far from the leading cultural centres, prolonged adherence to older cultural patterns changed only slowly, and populations consistently kept most of long-established funerary practices.

## Riassunto

Il bacino della Morava Occidentale ha una lunga tradizione di scavi archeologici ed è meglio conosciuta per la lunga durata della sepultura sotto i tumuli. Al contrario della prima e della media età del bronzo, tutte e due caratterizzate dalle necropoli birituali, la nostra conoscenza dei rituali funebri della tarda età del bronzo è frammentaria e non basta per ricostruire gli eventi alla svolta dal II al I millennio a.C. nella regione. Nella parte media del bacino, sembra che i riti funebri durante questo periodo hanno mantenuto la loro forma originale dai periodi precedenti, al primo posto per quanto riguarda l'uso dei tumuli funebri, incinerazione e il deposito dei resti del defunto nelle urne cinerarie. La località di Baluga-Katovac è l'unica nel bacino della Morava Occidentale, la quale svela i ritrovamenti tombali appartenenti al cosiddetto periodo di transizione dall'età del bronzo al quello del ferro. Nella parte superiore del bacino, nell'area montagnosa della Serbia occidentale, la popolazione indigena dell'età del bronzo seppeliva i suoi morti in posizione supina, come è stato verificato nella necropoli di Stapari accanto alla città di Užice. Quest'insufficientemente conosciuto periodo termina con le tombe di Kalakača fase del gruppo di Bosut, trovate nelle necropoli sotto i tumuli in Mojsinje e parecchi frammenti di ceramiche trovate sulle coline fortificate nelle vicinanze. Le sepolture con i defunti inumati da Mojsinje, insieme con la necropoli di Stapari e possibile di Dobrača presso la città di Kragujevac, rappresentano il raro fenomeno di questo periodo conosciuto al sud dei fiumi Sava e Danubio. Contare alla presenza delle popolazioni indigene, la nostra struttura metodologica, determinata all'esaminazione del carattere dei contatti e di riflessi dal nord, ha la sua base sul ricognoscimento dell'imitazione sui ritrovamenti frequenti, a partire dalla ceramica.

L'archeologia dei secoli alla svolta dal II al I millennio a.C., quanto le comunità di bacino del fiume Morava Occidentale hanno visitato sui margini remoti del mondo dei campi di urne, non ci ha fornito informazioni sufficienti per rivendicare cosa è successo con le popolazioni dell'età del bronzo le quali incinerevano i suoi morti. L'unico collegamento con la prima età del ferro sarebbe l'usanza dei tumuli nel rito funebre, la quale ci offre un presupposizione che la popolazione della tarda età del bronzo ha passato cambiamenti sostanziali durante i secoli che precedevano l'età del ferro sensu stricto, quando la regione era, per il breve periodo integrato in mondo danubiano della cultura di Bosut. Può anche essere previsto che nella zona, lontano dai principali centri culturali, i precedenti modelli culturali sono lentamente cambiati e mantenevano costantemente la maggior parte della loro pratica funeraria.

### Apstrakt

Basen reke Zapadne Morave, koji se nalazi u zapadnoj Srbiji, poznat je po dugotrajnoj praksi sahranjivanja pod tumulima u praistoriji, čija arheološka istraživanja imaju veoma dugu tradiciju. Za razliku od ranog i srednjeg bronzanog doba, za koje su karakteristične nekropole sa inhumacijama i kremacijama, naše znanje o pogrebnim običajima kasnog bronzanog doba je fragmentarno i nedovoljno za rekonstruisanje događaja na prelazu 2. u 1. milenijum pre nove ere u ovom regionu. Stiče se utisak da su u tom periodu, u srednjem delu basena, pogrebni običaji zadržali osnovnu formu uobičajenu u prethodnim fazama, koja podrazumeva upotrebu grobnih humki, kremacije i polaganja pepela pokojnika u urne. Lokalitet Baluga-Katovac jedini je u ovom delu Pomoravlja sa grobnim nalazima iz takozvanog prelaznog perioda od bronzanog ka gvozdenom dobu. U gornjem toku, planinskom području zapadne Srbije, autohtone kasnobronzanodopske populacije skeletno su sahranjivale svoje pokojnike u ispruženom položaju, na šta ukazuju nalazi sa nekropole Stapani kod Užica.

Svedočanstvo o završetku ovog nedovoljno istraženog razdoblja predstavljaju grobovi Kalakača faze takozvane bosutske grupe, otkriveni na nekropoli pod tumulima u Mojsinju, kao i nekoliko keramičkih fragmenata sa obližnjih gradina. Grobovi sa inhumacijama iz Mojsinja, zajedno sa grobovima iz nekropole Stapani i potencijalno Dobrače kod Kragujevca, predstavljaju redak fenomen za ovaj period, u zoni južno od Save i Dunava. Naš metodološki okvir za ispitivanje karaktera kontakata i uticaja sa severa zasnovan je na prepoznavanju imitacija na arheološkom materijalu sa učestalom frekvencijom nalaza, uglavnom keramici, i na pretpostavci da je ta pojava povezana sa prisustvom autohtonog stanovništva.

Arheologija perioda prelaza 2. u 1. milenijum pre nove ere, kada su zajednice iz zapadnog Pomoravlja živle na najudaljenijem rubu 'sveta polja sa urnama', nije nam obezbedila dovoljno podataka za saznanje o tome šta se dogodilo sa bronzanodopskim populacijama koje su spaljivale svoje pokojnike. Jedini povezujući faktor sa starijim gvozdenim dobom jeste upotreba tumula kao deo pogrebne prakse, što nas dovodi do pretpostavke da su populacije kasnog bronzanog doba prošle kroz korenite promene tokom vekova koji su neposredno prethodili gvozdenom dobu, kada je ovaj region postao za kratko vreme integrisan u podunavski svet bosutske grupe. Takođe se može očekivati da se u ovoj oblasti, daleko od vodećih kulturnih centara, produžena privrženost starim kulturnim modelima menjala samo polagano, i da je stanovništvo dosledno zadržalo većinu davno uspostavljenih pogrebnih praksi.

### Keywords

Late Bronze Age, Early Bronze Age, West Morava Basin, cemeteries, pottery

### Introduction

This study has been carried out with the aim of shedding light on the insufficiently known period of the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age and examining the character of contacts in the region around River Morava, namely the West Morava Basin. This zone functioned as a natural connector between the Dinara Massive of the western Balkans and the main transversal corridor of the central Balkans – the Morava-Vardar Valley – with its surrounding and more remote, but culturally connected areas.

As already stated, the West Morava Basin represents a very important natural communication route of the central Balkans (**Fig. 1**). It includes the river valley and its surroundings, spanning the Požega Ravine in western Serbia, where the Moravica, Djetinja, and Skrapež Rivers meet and flow into the West Morava River, and central Serbia near Stalać, at the confluence of the West Morava and the South Morava, creating the Great Morava River. The northern part of the West Morava Basin, which geographically belongs to western Serbia, has a long tradition of archaeological investigation and is





**Figure 1** – Map of Serbia showing sites belonging to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the western Morava Basin (M. Ljuština/K. Dmitrović)

best known for the long-lasting prehistoric tradition of tumulus burials. In contrast to the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, both characterised by inhumation and cremation burials, our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age funerary practice is very fragmentary. The period of the Late Bronze Age is marked by development of a cultural complex closely associated with the Urnfield phenomenon in western Serbia and the Paraćin II culture in the central part of the country.<sup>1</sup>

### **Toward the Early Iron Age: Cultural Environment of the West Morava Basin in the Late Bronze Age**

Despite the small number of sites and findings in comparison with the previous phases, there are enough elements to establish that in western Serbia, during the Late Bronze Age the main cultural impetus came from the Urnfield cultural complex (originating in the north), which is reflected in the forms and

<sup>1</sup> Dmitrović/Ljuština 2013, 156–159; Ljuština/ Dmitrović 2017, 125.



**Figure 2** – Vessels from the site of Katovac in Baluga (after Dmitrović 2016, fig. 6,1; 7,1; 9,2)

decoration of ceramic wares and metal findings. Although ceramic production was influenced and conditioned by the availability of local resources, potter's technical decisions were not limited to the local environment, raw materials, and tools, but were also socially and culturally defined. The fluted decoration characteristic of Urnfield pottery in large parts of Europe creates an effect a three-dimensional surface, which draws the eye across the surface of the pot.<sup>2</sup> It is no wonder that it became popular in the remote parts of the central Balkans. Still, it seems that the traditional sepulchral form – the mounded burial – remained in use even during this period. Mound building is a cultural practice, as it is a deliberate choice to bury under a mound, when there were equally acceptable – and less time-consuming – alternatives. Mound-building is not necessary for reasons of hygiene or to simply dispose of a body, as a hole in the ground is good enough. People who built tumuli wanted to do more than dispose of a body. Certainly, they wanted to cover the body, to make the perishable bodily remains invisible this way<sup>3</sup> just as was the practice of their ancestors and/or predecessors, who had inhabited the same land. In accordance with what, A. Harding stated that the burial mound may not literally “house” the soul of the deceased, but it certainly serves to commemorate the person.<sup>4</sup> The task of reconstructing the developments in the following transitional period from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age is more demanding for our region of focus, as there are only a few sites that offer material testimonies for such reconstructions.

The site of Katovac in Baluga near Čačak is the single one in this part of the Morava Basin with grave finds belonging to the so-called transitional period from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age. The remains of a black-polished amphora, probably used as an urn, with channelled decoration were found as a stray find, whereas later excavations revealed one layer containing pottery of the so-called Basarabi style, but without any trace of older grave units.<sup>5</sup> In Baluga, in addition to a damaged urn, six more vessels – presumably grave goods (**Fig. 2,1–3**) – were found, all showing strong parallels with contemporary finds from the Danube Valley and central Serbia.<sup>6</sup> This group consisted of a conical bowl, a bi-conical vessel, and three relatively similar beakers of smaller dimensions, generally characterized by rounded bellies, flat bottoms, and two handles that extended above the rim. One of them was more defined in terms of shape, having a sharp cone-shaped junction and a horn-like appendix on the handle's top.

These findings were in quite a good condition when they were found, aside from the big polished amphora. It is therefore very possible that the whole unit originally came from a grave with cremated deceased placed in the urn, while other vessels served as grave goods. Based on the stylistic and

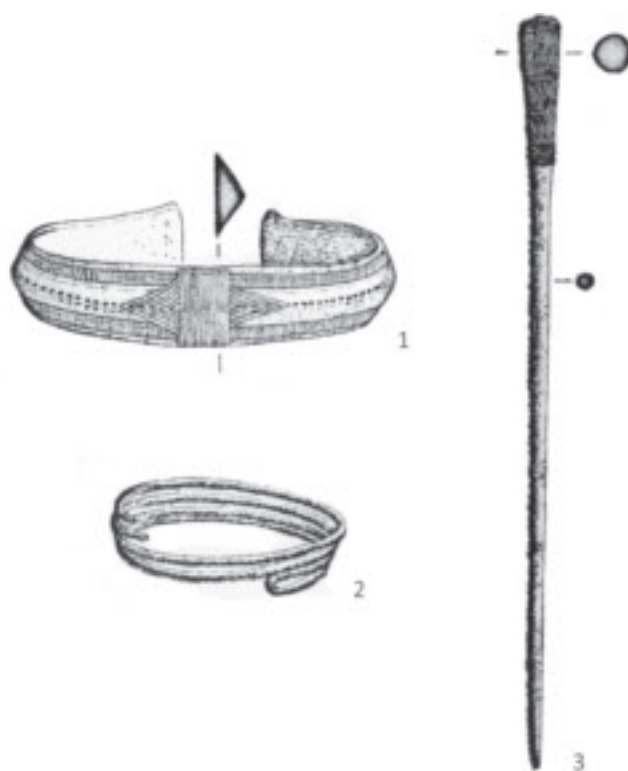
<sup>2</sup> Sofaer et al. 2013, 473; 475.

<sup>3</sup> Harding 2011, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Harding 2011, 26.

<sup>5</sup> After the unpublished results of the excavation of the site in 2008. Documentation kept in the National Museum Čačak.

<sup>6</sup> Dmitrović 2016, 24–26; Dmitrović/Ljuština 2013, 159; Ljuština/Dmitrović 2017, 126–127.



**Figure 3** – Findings from the site of Stapari, dating to the Late Bronze Age (after Zotović 1985, pl. 16,1.4–5)

typological features of the vessels, it is possible to consider them as a mixture of influences from the north – the Belegiš II Culture – with those from the east and southeast – especially from the territory of the Paraćin II Culture. The features similar to the Belegiš II Culture one can recognize in the amphora and the biconical beaker with carved lines, which have parallels in the sites of Karaburma, Vojlovica and in Slavonia. Other biconical beakers, without carved stylized ornaments and with appendixes of the handle's top are familiar within the Paraćin Culture.<sup>7</sup>

In the upper part of the basin by the mountainous area of western Serbia, the indigenous Late Bronze Age population buried their dead in supine position, as evidenced by the Stapari cemetery near Užice. The Stapari cemetery was in use for a long period of time, from the very beginning of the Early Bronze Age until the Early Iron Age.<sup>8</sup> The horizon corresponding to the Late Bronze Age is represented by several inhumations, but the skeletal remains are poorly preserved. Still, it was possible to determine that the deceased were laid out in a stretched position, lying down on their back. Sometimes, graves were lined by stone, but these features are also badly preserved. The horizon from the Late Bronze Age can be identified by the typical grave inventory for the period, consisting mostly of metal items, usually jewellery (**Fig. 3,1–3**), and rarely also of ceramic vessels. In addition to the graves containing individual skeletal remains, there was also a grave (grave no. 10) with cremated remains of the deceased, representing an exception to the customs in this area. This grave contained a pendant in the shape of labrys and a lunular pendant, calotte-shaped buttons and a small conical cup.<sup>9</sup> Skeleton grave no. 8 revealed a pin with an enlarged head decorated with incisions (“Keulennadel”), a sewing needle, an open bracelet with enlarged and thickened endings, two bracelets made of twisted bronze wire, a saltaleone, hair rings, a round ribbed plate and a cup with one ribbon-like handle.<sup>10</sup> A thin torque, a big spectacle shaped pendant, a bracelet made of twisted bronze wire, a bracelet with twisted body and hooped endings and a pin with a nail shaped head represented the inventory of a skeleton grave

<sup>7</sup> Dmitrović 2014, 263 with further references.

<sup>8</sup> Zotović 1985, 65–67; Đurić 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Zotović 1985, pl. 16,8–10.

<sup>10</sup> Zotović 1985, pl. 16,1–7.



**Figure 4** – Grave Number 11, mound V, from the second phase of the Mojsinje cemetery (documentation of National Museum Čačak, photo: L. Nikitović)

no. 14.<sup>11</sup> Ceramic finds are represented by a cup with one ribbon-like handle on the rim (grave no. 8), a bowl with a rim decorated by slanting sets (grave no. 13) – the so-called turban dish – and a beaker with a tongue-like handle with slightly enlarged summit (grave no. 19)<sup>12</sup>, very similar to the vessels from the site of Vujetinci, located between Čačak and Kragujevac, dated to the Ha A period.<sup>13</sup> The most expressive parallels can be traced to the Glasinac region or the Drina Basin, where the “core” of indigenous community, who preserved the traditional burial customs, was located.

The insufficiently investigated and sparsely attested period’s end is represented with the graves defined by the excavators (L. Nikitović, M. Stojić, R. Vasić) as belonging to the Kalakača phase of the Bosut group from the tumulus cemetery in Mojsinje near Čačak,<sup>14</sup> as well as several ceramic sherds from the nearby hillforts. By the village of Mojsinje at the site of Lugovi-Bent, situated on a plain ca 1 km from the present-day course of the West Morava River, is a cemetery with five mounds. Three burial horizons were distinguished here based on the level of the burials, treatment of the body, and grave inventory.<sup>15</sup> The earliest horizon is represented by the cremation burials attributed to the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age. This is followed by a horizon with inhumations, represented by 26 graves. These are a rare phenomenon (along with the graves excavated in the Stapani cemetery near Užice and possibly also at Dobrača near Kragujevac) in this period in the area south of the Danube and the Sava Rivers.<sup>16</sup> For that reason, we consider this pattern as a local phenomenon with strong influence from the region of Kalakača.

Generally speaking, graves belonging to the second horizon of the Mojsinje cemetery are typical because of their burial rite – the deceased was laid down in a supine position, often surrounded with grave offerings comprising ceramic vessels, jewellery, as well as parts of clothing adornments made of bronze and iron (**Fig. 4**). Jewellery was usually found on the body at a place where it would have been

<sup>11</sup> Unpublished. Grobovi pristanovnika sjeverozapadnog Balkana, karton no. 2400/2400a.

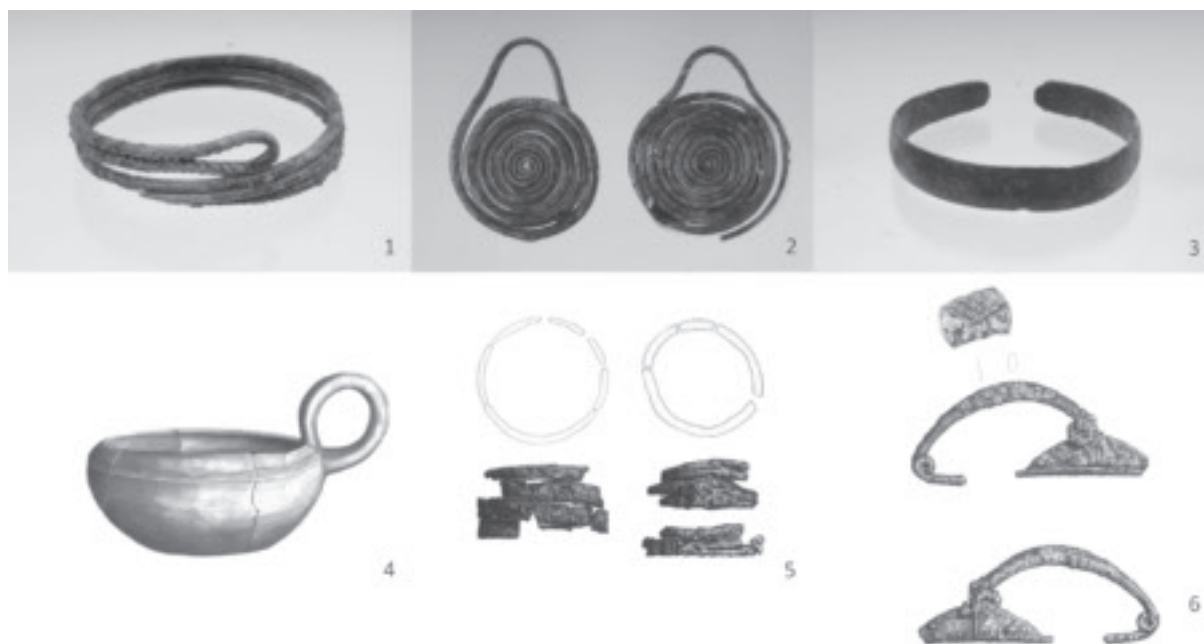
<sup>12</sup> Zotović 1985, pl. 16,7.12.13.

<sup>13</sup> Nikitović 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 108–119.

<sup>16</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 113.



**Figure 5** – Metal findings from the second phase of the Mojsinje cemetery (after Nikitović et al. 2002, pl. 6,29–38; 11,78–79; 11,95; 16,139.141; photo: M. Bojović)

worn. Bronze items are represented by torques, buttons, hair-rings, and anklets. The group of iron objects from this cemetery – an arch fibula and bracelets – represents the very first iron objects so far in the wider area (**Fig. 5,1–6**). Ceramics consisted of bowls or cups of calotte or conical shape, some with a deliberately broken handle, which were placed at the foot of the deceased (e. g. graves 1, 2, 9, 15, 16 from mound I and graves 5, 8 in mound V).<sup>17</sup> Jewellery was mostly found in female graves (graves 7 in mound I, damaged grave no. 5 in mound II, grave 3 from the mound V),<sup>18</sup> while a big iron fibula was found in the grave of a male individual (grave no. 4 in the mound V).<sup>19</sup> Beside their practical purpose as objects used in life, these objects should also be tied to the status of the deceased and the mortuary preferences of the broader group.

The Stapani cemetery is in general very similar to the cemetery at Mojsinje. The graves that show the influence of the Kalakača phase are located in the older part of the cemetery. These might have originally been under tumuli, which are now completely erased, and the deceased were buried in the same manner as at Mojsinje – in supine position with ceramics vessels at the legs (**Fig. 6,1–2**).<sup>20</sup> Although only partially published, the general characteristics of the Stapani cemetery can be reconstructed as tied to the developments at Mojsinje, and testifying to the existence of an indigenous community in western Serbia also during the Early Iron Age.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Chain of transformations: recognition of influence from the zone of the Kalakača phase of the Bosut Culture on the material culture from the West Morava Basin**

Assuming the presence of the indigenous people, our methodological framework for the examination of character of contacts and influences from the north of the West Morava Basin, namely from the Serbian part of the Middle Danube Basin where the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age is tied to the development of the Kalakača phase of the Bosut Culture, was based on the recognition of imitation

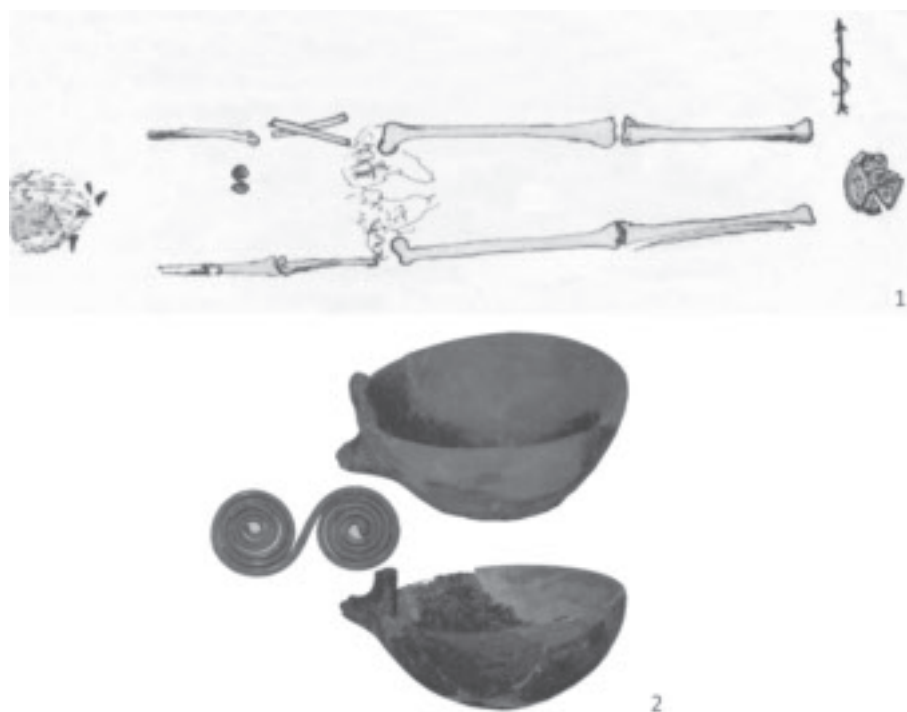
<sup>17</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 34; 93; 98; 106; 112–113.

<sup>18</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 95; 100; 105; 112–113.

<sup>19</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Đurić 2013, 85; 91 supplement 22,33.

<sup>21</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, 116; 119; Đurić 2013, 91; 92; 97.



**Figure 6** – Grave Number 18 and findings dated to the Kalakača phase from of the Stapani cemetery (after Đurić 2013, supplement 23; pl. 2,9–11)

on common finds, such as pottery. The pottery used by local communities could be recognised as locally produced, and as a result of imitation of desirable wares from the north. The act of imitation in behaviour, customs or material culture within or between groups of people seems to increase in frequency at times of social change, when new territorial and social boundaries are evolving.<sup>22</sup> The transition from the Bronze to the Iron Ages might be indeed one of those times of transition.

Another question arises when dealing with the problem of how local communities initially became included in the contact with and gained the possession of foreign goods, which were then later imitated locally. One of the possible solutions is one-way economic transfer. Humans produce things, which are then passed from one person to another. This basic principle is contained within the concept of exchange. There are specific kinds of transactions in every human society, in which an object is moved from one place to another, potentially not for exchange for an object from the receiving area (e.g., household pooling, forager food-sharing, inheritance, endowments, theft, gift to host, charity, hospitality, and sacrifice). By definition, not all of these are strictly speaking economic exchanges. One type occurs when economic wealth is traded for prestige or power; another type when economic goods are moved around but when there is no exchange in kind. From an economic point of view, these could be classified as one-way transfers. These one-way transfers are interesting, as they occur in every human society and are of economic significance and great importance for people. They have, however, received very little attention. In addition, these events have been largely invisible in the conceptual apparatus of anthropologist interested in economics.<sup>23</sup> Still, it is up to us to decide whether to take into consideration the concept of one-way economic transfer – perhaps gifts to host, hospitality, and even sacrifice – when we search for the origins of objects that were imitated locally.

Imitation of special objects may take place at the level of the individual, household, village, region, or even further afield. The greater the distance and time from the original source, the less likely it is that the original meaning contained within the form and/or raw material as well as the function of the

<sup>22</sup> Choyke 2008, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt 2005, 291–292; 300.

particular object will keep its initial meaning. Imitation also reflects complex phenomena. Recognizing how social behaviour manifests in material culture is always challenging and open to a variety of interpretations. Also, the motivation for imitation may take numerous forms.<sup>24</sup>

According to the approach proposed by A. Choyke, created for study of shifting meaning and value through imitation in earlier European prehistory, but applicable for later periods as well, there are five types of imitation, which may occur alone or in combination. The first type of imitation is that from rare raw materials into easily available materials. The second type of imitation involves the enhancement of the status of a socially identifiable object. Imitation is one way to transfer and transform the meaning of an object or the value of the raw material it is made from for a new audience from outside the original social context. Such enhancement of meaning may occur both within and between societies. A particular object may have special social meanings that change depending on the rank or gender/age group(s) that the owner belonged to. Type 3 imitation involves copying of the general form of the original artefact into an available raw material. The new raw material adds on new, related symbolic meaning to the symbolism embedded in the original object. The change in raw material, although it may have represented new meanings, was not necessarily related to a change in value. Imitation type 4 refers to copies of specific emblematic forms altered for use in new functional contexts, while imitation type can be recognised in copying of forms between groups without transference of meaning.<sup>25</sup> In our case, the proposed system had to be significantly modified, since we mainly dealt with objects that were not indicative of high status.

The combination of two types of imitations was recognised in the pottery. These include what can be classified as imitations of types 4 and 5. Imitation of type 4 includes copies of specific emblematic forms of objects altered for use in new functional contexts.<sup>26</sup> They are represented by artefacts the social meaning of which reflects original social or ethnic identity, but their form or raw material used have been altered to make the object conform to new working or decorative contexts. Thus, the physical properties may be altered to make the object usable in a new way whilst the form is carefully maintained. By altering some aspects of the form of a special object, it becomes possible to employ its imitation in other social contexts or for use by other members of the society.<sup>27</sup> The creation of type 5 objects involves copying external, re-interpreted forms between communities. Ultimately, these shapes have nothing to do with their meanings in their original contexts. The forms are adapted based on a re-interpretation. Sometimes the original social and technical function may be completely lost in the process of physical imitation and transformation. Different types of imitation can sometimes be embodied in a single object. Imitation of motifs and forms can be gathered from various media and combined in a new artefact, fashioned out of new raw materials, thus producing layers of meaning, which may or may not be a conscious effort on part of people who use the object. In fact, different levels of symbolic meaning can exist for individual beholders, or groups of beholders, of a particular object.<sup>28</sup>

Based on the postulates as explained above, a chain of transformations that link the original ceramic material from the Danubian Kalakača to the material from the West Morava Basin can be recognised as a result of imitation, and described as material with strong 'Kalakača influence'. This can also be established in accordance with the model proposed by J. Czebreszuk and M. Szmyt.<sup>29</sup> A complex of artefacts that went through the process of selection can be recognised, among which pottery, originating from both settlements – including vessels from Kalakača (**Fig. 7**)<sup>30</sup> and Gradina na Bosutu (**Fig. 8**)<sup>31</sup> – and graves – including vessels from Stapani (**Fig. 6,2**)<sup>32</sup> and Mojsinje (**Fig. 5,4**)<sup>33</sup> – predominate. The items selected by the West Morava villagers were then a subject of local imitation, which eventually ended their lifecycles as grave goods. As only a limited number of shapes was used as grave goods, it is very possible that there were some guiding principles for the selection and positioning of vessels within a grave, or possibly that these few shapes were made just for funerary purposes. The

<sup>24</sup> Choyke 2008, 5–7.

<sup>25</sup> Choyke 2008, 7; 9; 10; 12; 14.

<sup>26</sup> Choyke 2008, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Choyke 2008, 12; 14.

<sup>28</sup> Choyke 2008, 12–13.

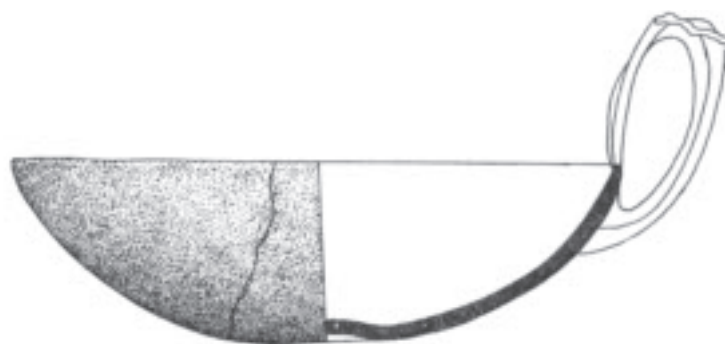
<sup>29</sup> Czebreszuk/Szmyt 2008, fig. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Medović 1988, 104 fig. 87,4.

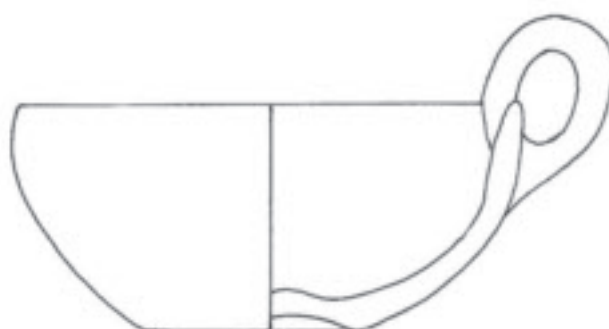
<sup>31</sup> Medović/Medović 2010, 37 fig. 27,10.

<sup>32</sup> Đurić 2013, pl. 2,11.

<sup>33</sup> Nikitović et al. 2002, pl. 15,143.



**Figure 7** – Ceramic cup from Kalakača in Beška (after Medović 1988, 104 fig. 87,4)



**Figure 8** – Ceramic cup from Gradina na Bosutu in Batrovci (after Medović/Medović 2010, 37 fig. 27,10)

analysis of ceramics from the Kalakača phase in the area south of the Sava and Danube Rivers is problematic, however, as it is based on a very few fragments from settlement contexts,<sup>34</sup> leading to the inevitable conclusion that the material culture of this phase is still insufficiently known. Therefore, we have to rely on objects deposited in graves, and it should be questioned whether they reflect certain ethnic identification or newest technical and technological possibilities. Perhaps they might have irretrievably lost their original meaning upon deposition into a grave. It should be also kept in mind that, even if pottery was made in a domestic setting or workshop, the network of social relations involved in its creation influenced household, kin, and wider social contacts,<sup>35</sup> and, consequently, the selection of pottery found in a grave was deliberate and multi-dimensionally meaningful.

### **Conclusion**

Archaeology of the period at the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE, when communities from the West Morava Basin lived at the edge of the Urnfield world, have not provided us with sufficient data to reconstruct social changes of the Bronze Age populations who maintained cremation as their burial rite. The only connecting link from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age seems to have been the usage of tumuli in burial practice, which leads us to assume that the Late Bronze Age communities went through substantial changes during the centuries immediately preceding the Iron Age, when the region was for a short time integrated in the Danubian world of the Bosut group. It can also be expected that in this area, far from the leading cultural centres of the period, prolonged life of traditional cultural patterns changed only slowly, and while the traditional funerary practice was consistently maintained,

<sup>34</sup> Stojić 2000, 19 pl. 3,11.14.

<sup>35</sup> Sofear/Budden 2012, 117.



it became enriched by the new styles and forms of grave goods, which reflected this changing spirit of the epoch.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasise that not just the studied territory, but also the whole area of western Serbia continued to keep strong contacts with northern neighbours throughout prehistory. This is visible in the Eneolithic and Bronze Age material culture,<sup>36</sup> and in many aspects it can be detected in subsequent periods as well. Yet, the new mobility of ancient communities in western Serbia can be illustrated by a later well-known example for a mode of transport typical in the region, called “kiridžovanje”.<sup>37</sup> This becomes a traditional mode of mobility of inhabitants of the mountainous parts in the west of modern Serbia, conditioned by geography and bearing influence on behaviour, habits, and needs of the people.

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trade and transportation, exchanging local goods with bigger trade centers. This institution is also known during the Middle Ages in this region. For details see Trojanović 2008, 238–283.

<sup>36</sup> Dmitrović 2016, 229–237.

<sup>37</sup> “Kiridžija” (Turkism, old-fashioned) – “ponosnik” is a traditional term for a peasant from western Serbia, who in certain times of the year practiced caravan

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Marija Ljuština  
Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy  
Belgrade University  
mljustin@f.bg.ac.rs

Katarina Dmitrović  
National Museum Čačak  
katarina.dmitrovic@gmail.com