'PRINCELY GRAVES' OF THE CENTRAL BALKANS – A CRITICAL HISTORY OF RESEARCH

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Abstract: This article critically explores the century-long history of research into a particular set of archaeological finds. The 'princely graves' – funerary assemblages dated to the early Iron Age (seventh to fifth centuries BC) containing, among other things, luxurious objects produced in Archaic Greek workshops – are known from various parts of temperate Europe, and were first recorded in the central Balkans region by the end of the nineteenth century. By their very nature, these finds pose several important theoretical and methodological problems, one of them being the need to bridge the divide between the procedures of prehistoric and classical archaeologies. The first attempts to account for these exceptional finds, in Europe as well as in the Balkans, were guided by the culture-historical procedure, typical of the archaeological investigation of the time. During the 1960s New Archaeology brought about the notion of chiefdom as a tool to account for the Iron Age societies. The concept was introduced into research on the central Balkan finds, proving successful in overcoming the shortcomings of the previous explanations, but at the same time creating new ones, encapsulated in the critique of the evolutionary approach. This review of research into the 'princely graves' concludes in proposing several new lines of inquiry, already introduced in the European archaeological theory: issues of group identity and individual actors, and phenomenological approaches to time and space.

Keywords: central Balkans Iron Age; chiefdom and polis; culture-historical approach; history of research; individual, space and time; 'princely graves'

The intention of this article is to critically explore the history of research into a particular phenomenon of central Balkan archaeology, from the time of the first discoveries at the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. The finds in question are funerary assemblages dated to the early Iron Age of the region (seventh to fifth centuries BC), labelled as 'princely graves' (Benac and Čović 1957; Palavestra 1984) due to their elaborate architectural traits and opulence of offerings – among them objects of Greek manufacture. These finds are an important part of the archaeological heritage of the central Balkans, dealt with in numerous scholarly papers and taking up a significant part of curricula and textbooks for archaeology students. Similar sets of finds are recorded in other parts of continental Europe (Fischer 1982; Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Mohen et al. 1987; Wells 1980). Consequently, in their writings on the subject archaeologists from the region have

felt the influences of various strains of European archaeological practice and some tacit, more often than overt, theoretical stances have been taken. The choice of the role models and modes of their application is of course indicative of the general state of affairs in an archaeological community. It is therefore my hope to outline some general trends of archaeology in the central Balkans by monitoring a particular example. The ultimate goal of the article is to make a modest contribution to the grand project of European archaeology, which can be successful only if all the particularities of European experience are taken into account, modern as well as past.

DAWN OF THE PRINCES

The first finds under discussion here were unearthed at the Glasinac plateau in eastern Bosnia, at the end of the nineteenth century (see Fig. 1). From 1888 to 1897 Ćiro Truhelka, Franjo Fiala and Đorđe Stratimirović conducted extensive research in this area resulting in the collection of material, which constitutes the basis of our knowledge of the late prehistory in the area. From 1889 to 1899 they published extensive reports in *Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und der Herzegovina*, thus laying the foundation of the modern scholarly research into the subject. More than 1000 burial mounds were registered, scattered over the plateau covering some 1000 km^2, varying in details but following the general pattern – stone constructions covered with earth, measuring on average 10 m in diameter. The pottery, weaponry and ornaments retrieved from the graves, in the opinion of the first researchers, upheld to the present day by the majority of the archaeologists involved in the subject, showed stylistic and technological uniformity. Some of the grave finds were recorded as being of Greek origin, but this was not commented on extensively in the published reports. The human bone remains were not collected, but reported as either interred or cremated in almost equal proportions.

The next discovery came with the Trebenište cemetery by lake Ohrid in Macedonia, found by chance in the course of the final military operations of World War I (Filow and Schkorpil 1927). Seven graves were unearthed, containing objects of both local and Greek manufacture, but also some hybrid forms, such as the famous golden foil masks (Garašanin 1992). Filow dated the material to the end of the sixth century BC, and linked the Greek goods to the workshops of Corinth and south Italian Greek colonies. The idea was thus established, to be pursued for many years to come, that a wealthy ruling class emerged among the prehistoric community of the central Balkans by the end of the sixth century, rich and powerful enough to posses luxurious imports from the Hellenic world.

In 1956 a very detailed seriation analysis of the material from Glasinac was undertaken, and a two-volume catalogue produced of the material, divided into Bronze and Iron Ages (Benac and Čović 1957). An evolution of forms was established, which testified for a continuous development of material culture in the Glasinac area from the early phases of the Bronze Age well into the Iron Age. The 'Glasinac culture' of the Bronze and Iron Ages appeared on the stage, defined typologically, spatially and chronologically, but solely on the basis of funerary

Figure 1. *Map of the Balkan Peninsula showing all the sites mentioned in the text (drawn by the author).*

monuments. Settlements of the region and period were not identified at the time and indeed have remained almost completely unknown to the present day (see Govedarica and Babić 1992). At this stage of the research, the perceived continuity of the traits of material culture and its spatial consistence, expressed in the notion of the Glasinac culture, were definitely associated with a particular ethnic group, whose ethnonym is testified in the ancient written sources – the *Autariatae* tribe has become inextricably associated with the late prehistory of eastern Bosnia (cf. Garašanin 1991; Vasić 1991). The concept of the Glasinac culture has subsequently been supplemented by the notion of the 'Glasinac-Mati cultural complex', encompassing the regions of eastern Bosnia, south-western Serbia, Montenegro and northern Albania (Čović 1987:575; Vasić 1987b:572), over which a significant affinity of material culture has been noted.

The impressive catalogue by Benac and Čović also bequeathed the term 'princely tombs' to the archaeological community, designed to denote a series of mounds with special qualities. These graves were separated and denoted as princely on the grounds of the quality and quantity of the goods they contained, the position inside the mound, the cemetery itself and their general geographical setting. They invariably included Greek products, and some of the locally produced items were also defined as the material symbols of newly acquired social and military power, especially battleaxes (Benac and Čović 1957; Čović 1979:144). Following this procedure, 10 graves from the Glasinac mounds were labelled as princely burials. The idea of a ruling group among the early Iron Age communities of the central Balkans was thus expressed in definite terms and the criteria for its identification were established (Fig. 2).

The next field discovery that fitted the notion of a ruling elite in the early Iron Age of the central Balkans came about in 1957 at Novi Pazar (Mano-Zisi and Popović 1969), in south-western Serbia (Figs 3 and 4). A large number of silver and bronze objects – jewellery and vessels of autochthonous and Greek origin, and pieces of black-figure Greek pottery – were found in a wooden chest by the foundation walls of a medieval church. The next year, two large mounds were excavated at Atenica near Čačak in western Serbia, producing three graves and traces of elaborate ritual activity (Djuknić and Jovanović 1966). In spite of the perceived differences, and primarily in terms of the typological characteristics of the finds, both Novi Pazar and Atenica were instantly associated with the finds from Glasinac
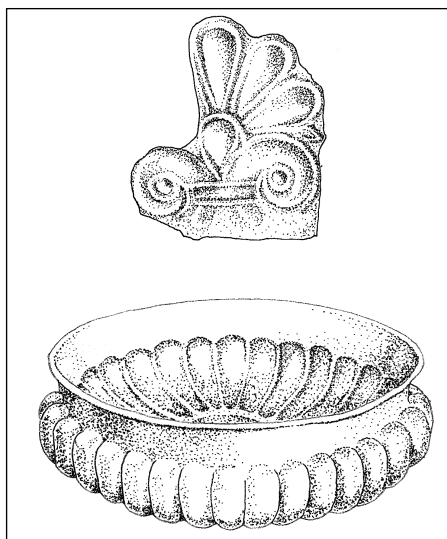

Figure 2. *Bronze vessels: a – silver plaque, Atenica (drawn by V. Vasiljević); b – bronze bowl, Ilijak, Glasinac plain (drawn by V. Vasiljević).*

Figure 3. *Hydria: bronze hydria, Novi Pazar (photo courtesy of owners, the National Museum, Belgrade).*

and Trebenište, and the 'princely graves horizon' was established, lasting through the sixth and fifth centuries BC and covering the area of eastern Bosnia, western Serbia, and northern Macedonia. The spatial distribution of this horizon, however, did not correspond to the boundaries of Iron Age cultural groups established for the central Balkans (Vasić 1977, 1991). The striking element of the Greek imports found in all these graves set them apart from the rest of the Iron Age material of the region (Vasić 1987a). However, the material itself, although recognized as foreign, remained largely unexplained and was
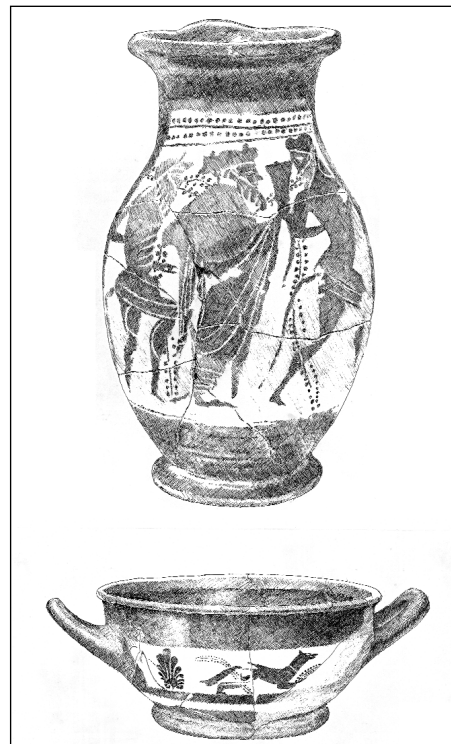
used basically to refine the chronological inferences and seriation of the local products.

This early period of investigation corresponds in detail to the notions prevailing in archaeological inference in the contemporary European context. Seriation resulting in typological–chronological charts, perceived uniformity of material culture expressed in terms of 'cultures' or 'cultural groups', and the subsequent ethnic attributions were the major components of archaeological research in the first half of the twentieth century (Johnson 1999:16ff.; Jones 1997:15ff.). Although applied, these procedures have not been commented upon, but rather taken for granted, which is another common trait of the culture-historical procedure and its implicit nature (Jones 1997:24).

INFLUENCES ALONG VALLEYS

During the 1960s a more vivid interest emerged in the Hellenic products from

Figure 4. *Pottery: a – black-figure olpe, Novi Pazar; b – black-figure kylix, Novi Pazar (drawn by D. Jovanović).*

the early Iron Age contexts, and attempts were made to explain their presence far into the Balkan hinterland. A series of papers and monographs was produced (Djuknić and Jovanović 1966; Mano-Zisi and Popović 1969; Popović 1975), dealing with 'the character of the Greek imports and the routes of their penetration', as stated in one of the titles (Parović-Pešikan 1960). Following what was implicitly taken to be the only possible procedure, analogies were sought for the bronze vessels, pottery, warrior equipment (see Fig. 5) and jewellery of Greek origin. Chronological inferences were still very much pursued and aimed at least partially at offering reliable clues for cross-dating the local products found in association with the Greek objects. Thanks to the scrupulous efforts of the scholars dealing with Classical Greece, from Winckelmann's pioneering works in the middle of the eighteenth century (cf. Morris 1994; Shanks 1996), a vast reference base was available. Unsurprisingly, objects corresponding in morphological terms to those from the graves at Trebenište, Glasinac, Atenica and Novi Pazar have been recorded in many places over the Aegean, from Corinth – the prime suspect from the times of Filow – to Magna Graecia, and as far as the Black Sea Greek colonies. The dates and provenance were thus established for most of the Greek objects from the princely graves.

The need now arose to account for the distance between the places of production and the central Balkan Iron Age graves where the Greek imports came to be interred. Depending on the supposed Greek workshop determined as a source, suitable routes were sought for and found in the geographically most obvious communication routes. The valleys of the Vardar, Ibar and Morava linked Corinth to the Balkan hinterland, and the route along the Danube was proposed to bridge the distance between the Black Sea colonies and Glasinac. If discussed, the reasons for this movement of objects were explained in terms of the all-pervasive mercantile nature of the Classical Greek culture. Parović-Pešikan (1960:38, 44) suggested 'trade connections between the central Balkans and the Aegean world from the beginning of the first millennium'; Popović (1975:60, 61) judged that the most important factor in the contact between the central Balkans and Archaic Greece was economic in nature, and that the economic development of the Balkan tribal community was its initial mover. Djuknić and Jovanović (1966:56, 57) connected the
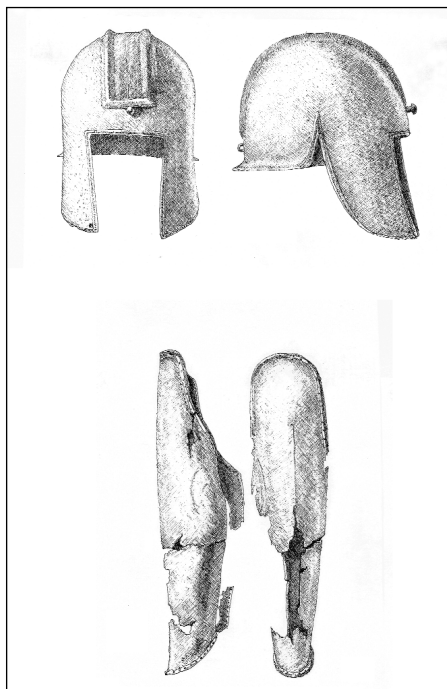

Figure 5. *Armour – bronze helmet and greaves, Klicevo (drawn by D. Jovanović).*

supposed flourishing Greek trading activity towards the Balkans with the expansion of Persia by the end of the sixth century, which hindered the Hellenic presence in the eastern markets, a point taken up and further developed by Vasić on several occasions (1983, 1987a:733).

In these explanations the culture-historical approach practised in the previous years came to its ultimate outcome. Along with the tables presenting typological affiliation and the development of certain shapes, with temporal values ascribed to them, the spatial distribution of the finds was accounted for. The 'commonsensical' insight that objects move along suitable spatial routes led to the drawing of maps with arrows pointing along river valleys, indicating the movements of goods from the presumed production centres to their places of discovery. The notion of 'space as container, divorced from humanity' allowed for this 'objective plotting on maps' (Tilley 1994:9).

On the other hand, the irresistible flow of the dominant Greek culture needed no explanation whatsoever, and its material exponents were seen as naturally spreading over the less-developed areas (very much unpopulated in this account), contagious 'like measles, only nicer' (Dietler 1990:356). The long-lasting reverent attitude towards the achievements of the ancient Greeks rendered them indisputably responsible for influencing and 'hellenizing' everything they came in contact with. The traditional 'great divide' between prehistoric and Classical archaeologists (Renfrew 1976) further promoted the attitude that the Greek goods found in the early Iron Age graves of the central Balkans can only be explained in terms of a dominant culture exercising its influence over its inferior surroundings. The pattern of explanation for the phenomenon was thus widely accepted among the archaeologists concerned with the material, and the subsequent new finds at Pilatovići in western Serbia (Zotović 1985:80–100) and Pećka Banja in Metochia (Palavestra 1984:58–60) were added into the picture and the explanatory model supplemented by additional data, but not re-examined.

CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

At this stage a great shift was well under way in archaeological theory in western Europe – the 'New Archaeology' was gaining impetus, intending to remedy all the shortcomings of the culture-historical approach (Gibbon 1989; Johnson 1999). Among the subjects to be re-evaluated and investigated in the new key were of course the goods produced in the workshops of Archaic Greece retrieved from the funerary assemblage contexts of early Iron Age temperate Europe. The starting point was the concept of 'chiefdom' as defined in the neo-evolutionary approach in social anthropology (Gibson and Geselowitz 1988). The concept of social evolution through defined stages of band, tribe, chiefdom and state gained wide popularity among archaeologists during the 1970s and has been applied ever since. Occasionally refreshed (Earle 1991), and judged as a 'consistent theoretical and methodological approach' (Hedeager 1992:viii), in spite of very severe objections (cf. Gosden 1997:303; Yoffee 1993), the schema is still present in archaeological writing in Europe.

In the case of relations with Archaic Greek culture, the consolidation of the new group in power among the Iron Age communities of temperate Europe, defined by its economic prerogatives of redistribution, has been seen as the most obvious explanation for the presence of the luxurious imported objects in its possession. On the other hand, the still prevailing interpretation of the nature of Archaic Greek culture itself, and its relations to neighbouring peoples, is based primarily upon its mercantile character, backed up by the interpretation by which the tribal heads of the Iron Age communities exchanged raw material and agricultural products, lacking among the Greeks, for the splendid Hellenic goods. The intensification of this relationship further promoted stratification in the hinterland, where the heads exercised the exclusive right to communicate with the Mediterranean, thus enjoying the fruits of this exchange and strengthening their leading economic and therefore political position in the community.

By the end of the 1970s, in the Anglo-American literature, this approach was framed in a kind of manifesto in the influential article by Frankenstein and Rowlands (1978), based upon the material excavated in south-western Germany. Its theoretical basis is the concept of 'world system' and of 'centre and periphery' (Champion 1989; Rowlands et al. 1987), according to which events in any segment of the global pattern, especially those of an economic nature, may be explained by the mutual dependence of all its constituent parts. In this process relations of domination are created among the units which, although prone to changes, determine the extent and character of exchange between them at any given moment. In the case of the relation between Archaic Greece and the Iron Age of Europe, according to the model of Frankenstein and Rowlands, the domination of the Hellenic component, embodied in its cultural and economic strength, caused the change in the social pattern further inland. The relation of economic dependency upon the exchange with the south and the flow of luxurious goods decisively influenced the continental communities, their internal social and economic relations. The idea was widely accepted and elaborated in several more detailed studies. The Greeks, however, were still seen as the inevitable source of influences and luxurious goods, although their need for expanding markets was occasionally coupled with the need for natural raw materials, such as timber, resin and slaves (cf. Wells 1980). In producing them, the chiefdoms of Iron Age temperate Europe perpetuated their internal social differentiation and relations of dependence towards the Greek influence.

Chiefdom and polis

Among the central Balkan archaeologists dealing with the early Iron Age material the New Archaeology agenda was explicitly applied in the work of Aleksandar Palavestra (1984, 1994, 1998). His research, however, has been primarily concerned with the local component of the phenomenon, and the Greek side in the relationship has remained largely neglected. Following his work, during the 1990s I aimed my own research at trying to bridge the 'great divide', by taking into account the reassessments of the Archaic Greeks by historians and archaeologists from the 1970s onwards (Babić 1998). A short summary follows.

One of the important tasks before me was to investigate the applicability of the Frankenstein–Rowlands model to the situation in the central Balkans, especially because since the 1970s a number of weaknesses in this interpretation had been pointed out, even among the scholars pursuing the same processual line of argument (Bintliff 1984:166, 167; Dietler 1990; Gibson and Geselowitz 1988:6). Among the objections put forward concerning the actual material the model deals with, it has been stressed, is that the small quantity of the Greek goods recorded in the hinterland does not fit into the pattern of a mighty economic input from the south and control over its redistribution as the key elements of the social change (Bintliff 1984:166–167; Dietler 1990:357, 358). The review I undertook of the imported objects in the central Balkans pointed to the equally low number of Greek products in the hinterland. It seemed fruitful to investigate the implications of this observation in connection to the reassessment of the Archaic Greek economy and its relations to the other communities, especially those based upon colonization.

The concept of 'centre and periphery' (Champion 1989; Rowlands et al. 1987) was introduced among archaeologists primarily to remedy the shortcomings of the diffusionist approach, since it accounted for the shifts of the roles of centres and peripheries, and introduced the idea of semi-peripheries – buffer zones which spatially and temporally allowed for the changes in the world system and the reverse of relations of domination. The needs and internal conditions of each side in the presumed contact are to be considered, and the dominant partner's role is seen as driven by internal needs for resources, however they are culturally defined. So I set off to examine the internal conditions of the Archaic Greeks.

The idea of trade as the prime mover of Hellenic society and economy, and therefore one of the key reasons leading to the foundation of new settlements all over the Mediterranean and Black Sea shores, has been giving way to the concept of the basically agricultural nature of the Greek economy and society throughout the Archaic and Classical periods (Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1986; Finley 1973, 1983; Humphreys 1978; Morris 1987; Snodgrass 1980). The foundation of the colonies and their subsequent life in the new environment came, above all, to be explained by the need for arable land, not for trading posts and new markets (Malkin 1987). It has therefore proved necessary to rethink the nature of the communication between the Archaic Greeks and the contemporary peoples of the central Balkans, and to seek to explain the exchange between them by reasons other than trade.

The notion of ritual exchange of gifts as the manifestation of good intentions, among individuals as well as whole communities, initially formulated by Marcel Mauss in his seminal work (Mauss 1954), has been meticulously elaborated ever since (Godelier 1996). The institution of gift-giving of goods, especially designed for the purpose of creating and maintaining friendly relations through the creation of debt, has been attested in the case of Archaic Greece (Mitchell 1997; Morris 1986), as well as the Iron Age communities in temperate Europe (Gosden 1985). Following this line of argument it was possible to propose an interpretation to explain the relations among the Greeks and the central Balkan peoples, which accounts for the small scope of exchange in exceptional objects, whose possession is restricted to the members of the group in power.

The need for such a manifestation of good will surely existed at the moment of the foundation of the colonies of Apolonia and Epidamnos in the south-eastern Adriatic by the beginning of the seventh century, just before the first imported goods reached the central Balkans (Beaumont 1936, 1952). Archaeological and written sources on the colonizing activity of the polis of Corinth in Epirus and Albania (Morgan 1988) point to the complex relations between the indigenous population and the newcomers, which had to be clearly regulated at the moment of foundation of the permanent settlements, and the agreement unquestionably announced, in a manner that was clear and acceptable to all parties. The ritual exchange of objects specifically designed for the purpose was a custom familiar to both sides in the contact. The oldest Greek objects to reach the central Balkan lands, and the prevalent class throughout the relationship, have indeed been bronze drinking vessels, definitely associated to rites of hospitality among the Greeks and subsequent gift-giving (Fischer 1973; Mitchell 1997:135).

From the contact point to the place they were subsequently found in the interior of the Balkans, the Greek products could have travelled along the already established network of exchange and relations of reciprocity. Indeed, movement of goods is testified, independent of the Greek component, between the area where the Adriatic Greek colonies were founded and the Glasinac plateau, where the first Hellenic imports are registered. The objects moving from south to north were items of ceremonial warrior equipment (Benac and Čović 1957; Čović 1987), heavily decorated and most probably echoing the symbolic significance of ritual exchange among the prominent members of the communities. From the initial model of 'centre and periphery', I here moved to the idea of 'peer polity interaction' (Renfrew and Cherry 1986), in order to account for the exchange among the central Balkan communities, after the Greek products changed hands at the Adriatic coast and started their life in the new context. Constant negotiation over resources among these transhumant cattle-breeders (Palavestra 1994, 1998) demanded a socially accepted way of creating and maintaining coexistence. The idea was introduced of 'social storage' – gift-giving aimed at creating ties of obligation to be activated in the times of resource shortage, as one of the modes of peer polity interaction (Halstead and O'Shea 1982).

Some details of the social order of the central Balkans early Iron Age further pointed to ways to interpret the emergence of the group in power and its strategies to maintain the dominant role in the society, other than the exchange with the Greek south. The issues of social structure and organization have been approached on many previous occasions via the analysis of funerary assemblages following the processual stratagem (Parker Pearson 1999:72 f.; Peebles and Kus 1977; Saxe 1970). An analysis of this sort has been carried out on the material from the region to the extent allowed for by the state of research, publication, and accessibility of the data (Babić 1998:97ff.). This examination of the relation of the graves with Greek goods to the contemporary burials of poorer inventory and lacking in offerings of foreign origin was aimed at establishing the ways in which the heads of the communities differed from the rest of the population and on what grounds their status was founded. The analysis has especially been aimed at establishing whether the influx

of the Hellenic imports decisively influenced social change and stratification in the hinterland. Following the 'consequent methodological and theoretical approach' (*sensu* Hedeager 1992), comparative archaeological and ethnographic material on chiefdoms was used as the initial model in the search for the origins and foundation of the social status of the early Iron Age chieftains.

Among the assemblages treated, the earliest status symbols pointing at somewhat more significant difference among the members of the community were noted in the case of the graves from the Glasinac plateau, especially from the Ilijak cemetery. These graves were separated and denoted as princely on the grounds of the quality and quantity of the goods enclosed, the position inside the mound, the cemetery itself and their general geographical setting (Čović 1979:144). However, traits pointing to the beginning of the process have been noticed in the graves of the preceding Bronze Age (Čović 1963:56), leading to the assumption that the social stratification of communities during the later prehistory of the central Balkans, and indeed that of all Europe, is a process not to be confined to the early Iron Age period. The conventional archaeological systematization into the Bronze and Iron Age periods, based primarily on technological traits, does not bear the same importance in respect of social life, so this convention, necessary and useful in many situations, should be treated with restraint in this respect (cf. contributions to Gwilt and Haselgrove 1997). What is more, in the region of Glasinac this transition is almost unnoticeable in respect to all the aspects of the material culture, stressed by the fact that the cemeteries were used continually (Čović 1963:51, 1987). If we bear in mind the importance of affiliation to a certain kin group claiming the right to direct descent from the founder, considered typical of chiefdoms (Gibson and Geselowitz 1988; Peebles and Kus 1977), the need to emphasize the line of descent by all available means need not come as a surprise. Kinship relations and status inheritance are strongly indicated in the case of the central Balkan princely graves, indicating that this was in fact the decisive mechanism in the ascribing and maintenance of social positions (Babić 1995, 2001). The inherited status of the chieftains is especially stressed by the elements noted in the examination of female and young persons' burials (Babić 1998:148ff., 2001). The power emerging from belonging to a clan or lineage, including the major economic prerogative of the role in redistribution of goods and resources, is also reflected in the right to possess exceptional goods. These objects symbolically represented the status of their owner in political and economic respects, but they did not create this status.

The basic conclusion of the research has therefore been that the contact with the Archaic Greeks was not a large-scale commercial activity, nor the major catalyst for changes among the early Iron Age central Balkan communities. The Greek objects came into the possession of the Balkan communities through the network of diverse modes of exchange, starting from the initial contact point in the Adriatic coast, where the Greek settlers offered them as tokens of their peaceful intentions. They gained symbolic value that corresponded to the already existing social and political relations among the inland communities, and further moved along the already existing central Balkan network of exchange, into which they were incorporated without causing major changes in the economic and social order.

The case of the Ohrid region and the Trebenište cemetery was taken to further prove that the influx of the valuables from the south need not be associated with the political dominance of their new owners. In this cemetery a large number of graves were furnished with luxurious goods, pointing to the whole community whose well-being was based upon the geographical position in the line of exchange. The more modest graves at Trebenište are dated immediately before and after the appearance of the rich ones, a fact that underlines the impression that the whole population, or most of it, felt the beneficial results of their control over communication. The end of the sixth century and the beginning of the fifth, when this process took place, is the time of sudden decline in the frequency of the princely graves further inland. All this supports the assumption that Trebenište was in fact a cemetery of a 'gateway community' (Hirth 1978; Hodges 1982), rather than a group of princely graves. The activity of this community was to be felt later on, by the middle of the fifth century, in the areas east of the region of princely graves of Pilatovići, Atenica, and Novi Pazar, which up till then had been almost completely passive regarding the situation in the south. Consequently, the long-maintained association of Trebenište with the finds from Glasinac, Atenica, and Novi Pazar was questioned and refuted in terms of the social order they represented.

To sum up, in an attempt to approach the early Iron Age of the central Balkans and its social order, especially in respect to the contacts with the Archaic Greek culture, from an angle different and hopefully more fruitful than the existing culture-historical explanations in the archaeological literature of the region, I turned to the 'soft' processual approach. The basic concepts of chiefdom, centre and periphery, and peer polity interaction led me to propose a relationship between central Balkan early Iron Age chiefdoms and Archaic Greek poleis based upon the ideas of ritual exchange and social storage. I pursued the ideas of the 'Snodgrass school' of archaeologists dealing in Greek archaeology (Shanks 1996), whose 'questions were those more of the historian than of the classical archaeo-logist, and his methods more those of the prehistorian than of the classicist' (Morris 1994:39), in the quest to solve the problem of the 'great divide' imposed by the nature of the phenomenon investigated: Archaic Greek objects retrieved from early Iron Age contexts. The models applied were all consistent in terms of their basic premises and made it possible to move a step further from the unpopulated valleys along which Greek objects moved, propelled by the expansion of Greek markets.

SPACE, TIME AND INDIVIDUAL

Let me now indulge in the benefits of hindsight on my own work and of its critique. The broad strokes in which I worked left a lot of the details of the pattern unexplored – a shortcoming of the research results I tried to remedy on several occasions (Babić 1995, 2001) by addressing more minute aspects of the phenomenon, such as gender roles and 'cultural biographies' (Kopytoff 1986) of the objects I dealt with. However, the task has not been completed.

While I was immersed in devising the ways of peaceful coexistence of the central Balkan peoples, modern as well as ancient, a dispute was well under way

among the west European archaeologists, especially the British ones. A diversity of viewpoints and concerns put forward in the last decades has engaged archaeologists in a wide range of debates already conducted within the humanities and social sciences, not previously taken into account by the archaeologists working within the processual framework (cf. Johnson 1999; Thomas 2000). The issues of time, space and, within them, active strategies of individuals, both present and past, have undermined some basic notions by which archaeological research has been conducted.

One such notion under scrutiny is the concept of 'culture' as put forward by Gordon Childe (Johnson 1999:16; Jones 1997:15, 48), and applied in many instances, the Glasinac culture and Glasinac-Mati complex being among them. The idea of discrete, homogeneous, integrated cultures, implicitly equated with distinct 'tribes', has given way to the more dynamic and complex understanding of group identity and its reflections in material culture (Canuto and Yaeger 2000; Jones 1997). Where ethnic affiliations are concerned, the definition of an ethnic group has been proposed as 'any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or coexist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent' (Jones 1997:xiii). This constructive nature of ethnicity has also been insisted upon in the case of the ancient Greeks and their relations to non-Greek-speaking peoples with whom they came into contact (J.M. Hall 1997). The heterogeneity of self-perception and the constant negotiation of their ethnic unity and variations resulted in a strong ideological and political movement from the middle of the fifth century BC onwards, to create a 'discourse of barbarism' (E. Hall 1989:2) in order to promote the sense of Hellenic distinctiveness and cohesion. At the end of the seventh century, however, Greekness was much more vague to the Greeks themselves, as well as to those meeting them.

This line of argument obliges me to reconsider the basic polarity of the pattern I devised. Largely dependent on previous descriptions and classifications, my research treated two relatively homogeneous sides in the contact, reflected in the terms of chiefdom and polis, and defined spatially and temporally. Therefore the notion of the Glasinac-Mati complex underlay my inferences, which is seriously undermined in terms of the self-perception of the peoples living in the region. The community over which the individuals buried with the Greek objects exercised their power has to be defined in different terms than morphological similarities over an area of the types of pottery and metal objects, supposed to remain virtually unchanged for several hundreds of years. Along the same lines, the attitude of the 'Greeks bearing gifts' to the south Adriatic towards the peoples with whom they came into contact needs re-evaluation in terms of their own experience of unity and difference. Since 'self-aware community identities are always informed by and interacting with the outside's stereotypes, concepts and power' (Isbell 2000:263), an interplay of the identities may be suggested going much beyond the exchange of ritual gifts.

The reverse of the procedure seems to be on the agenda, not working on the basis of constraining pre-conceived large entities. For instance, an insight into the

sequential nature of the evidence from the graves, as proposed by Olivier (1999), brings in the possibility of inference surpassing assumption of the static and sealed funerary assemblages. Working on the premise that 'construction, rather than usage of large monuments matters' (Paynter and McGuire 1991:9), the time invested in the erection of the monuments can be fragmented to the benefit of archaeological inference. The attention paid to the passing of time as a constituent element of human experience and active strategies of individuals (cf. Barrett 2000:63; Gosden 1994) may add a dimension to our understanding of our subject of research.

There are severe limitations, however, in the quality of the data: most of the material was recovered before 1960 and, with notable exceptions, such as Atenica, the excavation method and documentation leave much to be desired. Virtually all the information comes from funerary contexts, settlements have not yet been recorded that relate to the graves in question. However, in spite of these limitations, and perhaps because of them, the recurrent theme of central Balkan archaeology needs to be reconsidered, surely out of its own merit, but also to the benefit of European archaeology. The possibility of approaching the grand theme of European heritage – the ancient Greeks – from this particular angle is but one of such favourable outcomes of pursuing the hints proposed. Cross-reference between the prehistorians and classicists is essential in this respect, and may be mutually rewarding. Finally, constant re-evaluation is needed of the theoretical concepts currently under debate and their introduction into various European archaeological surroundings, both in terms of the subjects and the researchers involved, for the benefit of the study of the past.

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Abstracts

"Tombes princières" des Balkans – une chronique critique de la recherche

Staša Babić

Cet article étudie de façon critique la recherche, datant déjà de plusieurs siècles, sur un ensemble particulier de trouvailles archéologiques. Les "tombes princières" – des ensembles funéraires datant de l'âge du fer ancien (septième au cinquième siècle av.JC) contenant entre autres des objets luxueux crées dans des ateliers de la Grèce archaïque – sont connues de différentes parties de l'Europe tempérée, et furent décrites pour la première fois dans la région des Balkans à la fin du 19e siècle. Ces découvertes, de par leur nature même, soulèvent d'importants problèmes théoriques et méthodologiques, à savoir, par exemple, comment combler le fossé entre les procédures de l'archéologie préhistorique et de l'archéologie classique. Les premières tentatives d'expliquer ces découvertes exceptionnelles, en Europe aussi bien qu'aux Balkans, reposaient sur les moyens de l'histoire culturelle, typiques à la recherche archéologique à cette date. Dans les années soixante, la "New Archeology" proposait le terme de chefferie pour faire comprendre les sociétés de l'âge du fer. Ce concept fût introduit dans la recherche aux Balkans et s'avérait fructueux pour maîtriser les défauts des explications précédentes. Mais cette approche créait aussi de nouveaux problèmes, à savoir la désapprobation de cette démarche évolutionniste. Cette revue de la recherche sur les "tombes princières" se termine en proposant plusieurs nouvelles approches, déjà introduites dans la théorie archéologique européenne: la question d'une identité collective de groupe et d'acteurs individuels, et approches phénoménologiques du temps et de l'espace.

Mot-clés: âge du fer des Balkans, approche historico-culturelle, chefferie et polis, espace et temps, histoire de la recherche, individu, "tombes princières"

„Fürstengräber" des Zentralbalkan – eine kritische Forschungsgeschichte

S. Babić

Dieser Aufsatz ist eine kritische Untersuchung der bereits Jahrhunderte während Untersuchung einer besonderen archäologischen Fundgattung. Die „Fürstengräber" – Grabkomplexe, die in die frühe Eisenzeit (7.–5. Jh. BC) datiert werden und neben anderen Gegenständen auch Luxusobjekte aus Werkstätten des archaischen Griechenland enthalten – sind zahlreich aus Europa bekannt; sie

wurden gegen Ende des 19. Jh. zuerst im Zentralbalkan beobachtet. Durch ihre außergewöhnliche Stellung sind mit ihnen verschiedene theoretische und methodische Probleme, so z.B. die notwendige Überwindung der Kluft zwischen den Vorgehensweisen der Prähistorischen und der Klassischen Archäologie, verknüpft. Die ersten Versuche, diese außergewöhnlichen Funde zu behandeln, basierten in Europa wie auch in der Balkanregion auf dem kulturgeschichtlichen Ansatz – typisch für die archäologischen Forschungen dieser Zeit. Während der 1960er Jahre prägte die New Archaeology den Begriff „Chiefdom" als Werkzeug zur Untersuchung eisenzeitlicher Gesellschaften. Dieses Konzept wurde auch in die Erforschung der Funde aus dem Zentralbalkan eingeführt und half einerseits erfolgreich bei der Überwindung der Unzulänglichkeiten früherer Erklärungsversuche – schuf jedoch andererseits dabei neue Probleme, die in der Kritik evolutionistischer Ansätze eingeschlossen waren. Dieser Rückblick auf die Erforschung der „Fürstengräber" mündet in verschiedene neue Untersuchungslinien, die bereits in die europäische Archäologietheorie eingeführt wurden: Fragen zu Gruppenidentität bzw. individuellen Handlungsträgern sowie phänomenologische Ansätze zu Raum und Zeit.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Chiefdom und Polis, Eisenzeit des Zentralbalkans, „Fürstengräber", Forschungsgeschichte, Individuum, Raum und Zeit, kulturgeschichtlicher Ansatz