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# The *Scordisci*

## A story from the verge of the La Tène world

Ivan Drnić

### Historical narrative

In traditional academic narrative, a story about the *Scordisci* is part of the historical event, or, more precisely, series of events, testified by several ancient authors (Livy, Polybius (after Polybius): etc.), and often referred to as the 'great Celtic migration' (Todorović 1968, p. 5-10; Szabó 1991a, p. 303-332; Cunliffe 1997, p. 68-90). The eastern wing of this migration, with the starting point in the regions north of the Alps, went through the *Hercynian forest* into the Carpathian Basin, and then further into the Balkans, with the climax in the massive invasion of Macedonia and Greece in 280-279 BC. According to historical sources, after the devastating defeat of the Celtic armies by the Greeks at the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi, three groups of invaders proceeded on separate ways. The first crossed the Hellespont and formed the kingdom of Galatia, the second established the kingdom of Tylis in Thrace, and the last one, under the leadership of a certain *Bathanatus* returned through the Balkans to south-eastern Pannonia, where, together with the Celtic groups who did not participate in the failed invasion, formed a tribal alliance known as the *Scordisci* (Szabó 1991a, p. 303-305; Cunliffe 1997, p. 80-82). Rather scarce historical sources dealing with the Celtic invasion and subsequent formation of the *Scordisci* tribal alliance are known in the form of shorter notes which usually represent parts of larger stories written by several ancient authors, like Strabo, Justin, Diodorus Siculus, Appian, etc. In the course of the 20th century in historiographies of the former Yugoslavian countries, these scattered data were compiled to form a linear historical narrative indicating a well-defined ethno-political group – the *Scordisci*, from their formation in the first half of the 3rd century BC until their integration into the expanding Roman Empire at the end of the 1st century BC (Papazoglu 1969, 209-298; Todorović 1968, p. 5-18; Todorović 1974, p. 232-236; Jovanović 1987, p. 815-817). This narrative assumed the existence of a stable ethno-political group in the last three centuries BC in the area of south-eastern Pannonia and the central Balkans, from Slavonia in the west to the Iron Gates in the east, the Bačka region in the north and the southern Morava valley in the south (Popović 1992-1993) (fig. 1). One of the key presumptions in the interpretation of Scordiscian ethnicity, based on the little information provided by Strabo (Strabo VII, 5.12, VII,

3.11), was that the formation of the Scordiscian tribal alliance, besides Celts, also included indigenous Balkan communities, labelled as Illyrians and Thracians. Consequently, certain elements of their material culture, apart from the dominant La Tène forms, should be recognized in the material culture of the *Scordisci*. Furthermore, following Strabo's information (VII, 5, 12), the communities west of the Morava River allegedly formed the co-called Greater *Scordisci*, and those people east of the river were labelled Minor *Scordisci* (Papazoglu 1969, p. 272; Todorović 1974, p. 28, 30-31, fig. 16).

The development of the social sciences that took place in the last three decades, followed by a more intensive use of the natural sciences, evoked criticism of the established 'facts' about the ancient Celts (Fitzpatrick 1996; Wells 2001; Collis 2003 etc.). First of all, it was the critique of the ancient texts that were considered, in the course of 19th and 20th century historiography and archaeology, as objective historical and ethnographic facts. In most cases this critique did not mean that these written sources should be completely discarded as irrelevant for the study of the Late Iron Age continental communities. Instead, it emphasised the need of reading them according to the proper 'key' in which they were written, usually as genre texts, often politically motivated or personally biased. The second major critique in regard to a firmly established Celtic narrative points to the so-called ethnic determinism which reflects an alleged concept of Pan-Celtic unity and a firmly established 'Celtic nation' in the vast area from the Atlantic to the Carpathians and to Asia Minor. This is supposed to include a clearly defined language, material culture and sense of mutual belonging to one nation comprised of numerous subgroups or tribes. Today, it is quite obvious that these are concepts of national states formed in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, in the same period when the general academic narrative about the Celts was established (Dietler 1998; Mihajlović 2019, p. 158-164). It does not mean that the larger political entities with developed collective identities did not exist in the Late Iron Age, but, in contrast to traditional concepts of the Celts, they were probably much more fluid and unstable, subject to constant change, as was often the case with collective identities in premodern times (Fernández-Götz 2017).

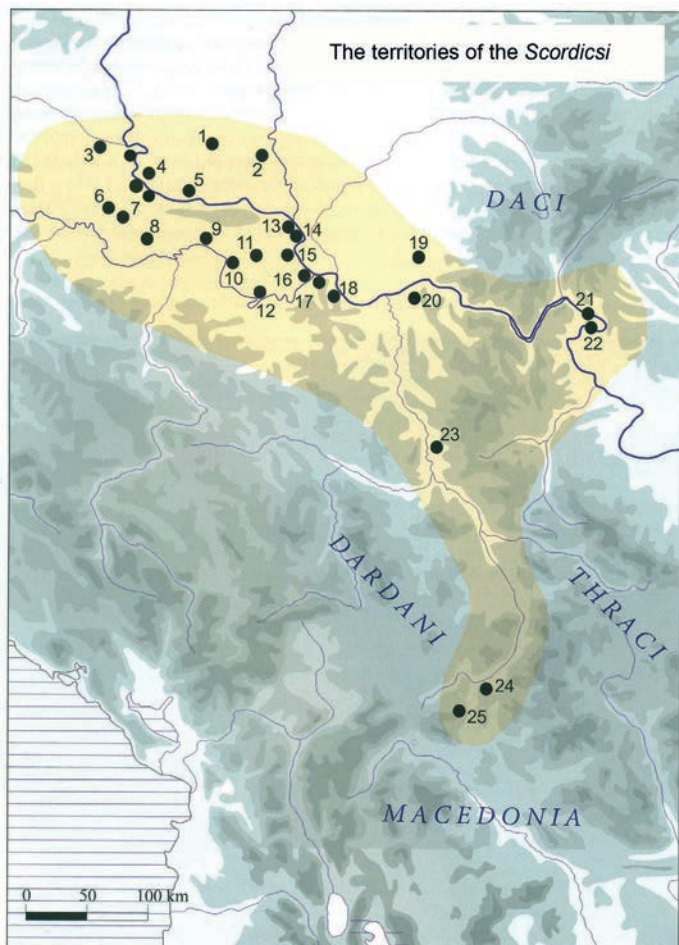


Fig. 1. Territories in southeastern Pannonia and Central Balkans traditionally attributed to the *Scordisci* (after Popović 2012).

To a certain extent, these new interpretative models have been applied to the Late Iron Age of south eastern Pannonia and the central Balkans. The first paper that offered a differentiated view of the historical processes that took place in the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC in the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans was *The Celts in Illyricum - whoever they may be: the hybridization and construction of identities in Southeastern Europe in the fourth and third centuries BC* by Daniel Dzino (2007). Rejecting the established narrative about massive Celtic migration from the regions north of the Alps as a single and homogenous ethnic group, which culminated in the great defeat at Delphi, he offered a different model. This model assumed more complex processes at the transition of the Early to Late Iron Age with the transmission of the La Tène cultural templates from the north of the Carpathian Basin to the south, and then further to the Balkans through several mechanisms: movements of smaller groups of people, but also cultural appropriation of the La Tène forms by Pannonian and Balkan autochthonous communities. This process resulted in the creation of new hybrid social, political and cultural entities that were considered (in an ultimately simplifying way) by the ancient authors as the Celts or Galatians. This critique goes so far as to call into question the invasion of Macedonia and Greece itself and assuming narratives of Hellenistic political propaganda (Dzino 2007, p. 55). Instead,

it is suggested that a series of small scale raids took place within a political and power vacuum after the death of Alexander III.

Vladimir Mihajlović (2019) went a few steps further in deconstructing established narratives about the *Scordisci* as a tribal alliance, formed after the defeat at Delphi. First, he consistently deconstructs the academic framework of the *Scordisci*, formed in the course of the 20th century in a predominant culture-historical paradigm. As previously mentioned, this was based on uncritical readings of ancient sources and on ethnic determinism. Then, after thorough evaluation of all available written sources, including epigraphic monuments, and analyses of material culture he offers new interpretations of the Late Iron Age communities of south-eastern Pannonia. First of all, he does not consider the *Scordisci* as a clearly defined ethnic tribe with an established territory (i.e. tribal core) and a unique culture and political organization (Mihajlović 2019, p. 273-275). Consequentially, the beginning of the Late Iron Age and affirmation of La Tène culture as a dominant force is not a direct reflection of the formation of the Scordiscan tribal alliance, but a part of a wider process of 'laténization' of eastern and southern Pannonia and the northern Balkans through the migration of smaller groups from central Europe, but also cultural appropriation of La Tène cultural templates by local communities. For example, the appearance of male graves with typical and uniform La Tène weaponry suggests not only the transfer of material culture, but also the dissemination of a unique warrior ideology shared by warrior elites of numerous communities in temperate Europe in the 4th-3rd centuries BC through supra-regional networks of communication. During this period these warriors interacted with the Mediterranean world, frequently serving as mercenaries in various Hellenistic armies (Szabó 1991b, p. 333-336; Kavur, Blečić Kavur 2014). Being barbarian foreigners, equipped with weapons produced in the La Tène style and fighting in a particular way, they were seen by the Mediterranean authors as a homogenous group – the Celts, which Mihajlović (2019, p. 164-166) considers to be a pseudo-ethnic category.

A period of relative stability on the northern Macedonian borders persists during the second half of the 3rd and the first half of the 2nd century BC. This is probably a result of well-founded relations between 'barbarians' from the north and Hellenistic rulers who used their mercenary services. This power structure collapsed after the fall of the Macedonian kingdom and the creation of the Roman province of Macedonia in 148-146 BC. From this period, until the final conquest of the central and western Balkans and southern Pannonia, frequent intrusions of *Scordisci* to the south, and Roman military expeditions to the north are mentioned in written sources. This is a period during which, according to Mihajlović (2019, p. 186-196), the emergence of a collective 'Scordiscan' identity took place. However, this does not imply the notion of direct decedents of the 'Brennus Celts', but rather a newly formed Roman pseudo-ethnic category for warriors on horseback from the regions north of the Roman province of Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation

<sup>1</sup> In his 2019 paper Mihajlović concludes that the purpose of the newly established ethnonym was '... to signify new enemies inside the Roman and

is corroborated by the fact that the earliest mention of the *Scordisci*, or Galatian *Scordisti* to be more precise, is on two identical epigraphic monuments from the Europos site in the Vardar river valley and at Delphi, dated to the period between 110 and 106 BC, and celebrating M. Minucius Rufus' victory against several Balkan and Thracian tribes, including the Galatian *Scordisti*. Thus, once formed with a gradual Roman advance deeper inland through the 1st century BC, the ethnonym was used for other communities of the central Balkans and the middle Danube region. With the Roman final push into this region at the end of the 1st century BC and the climax in the *bellum Pannonicum* (12-11/9 BC), those communities collectively called *Scordisci* were integrated into a new social and political context – the provinces of Pannonia and Moesia, some of them as peregrines (*civitates peregrinae*). One of these communities, situated in what is today the region of Syrmia, bore the name *civitas Scordischorum* (Mihajlović 2019, p. 259-268).

## Archaeological record

### The implementation of La Tène material culture in southern Pannonia

Instead of traditional interpretations which define the expansion of the La Tène culture from the north-western part of the Carpathian Basin towards the east and south in the context of the 'great Celtic migration', new models assume more complex processes that combined several mechanisms for the transmission of La Tène cultural templates. Migrations were definitely part of those mechanisms. However, in the case of the 'Celts' this certainly did not happen in the form of large homogenous groups moving over long distances in short periods of time, but probably in much smaller groups. This may have included colonists searching for agricultural land (or even ore deposits), warrior bands in the hunt for booty, glory and fame or mercenary contracts in the newly formed Hellenistic kingdoms (Hauschild 2010; Rustoiu 2012; Rustoiu, Berecki 2016). Also, it is necessary to take into account the movements of individuals in the form of exogamy or travelling craftsmen. All these groups and individuals were gradually moving back and forth in a process of small scale erratic migrations.<sup>2</sup> Together with the movements of people, La Tène material culture and mental templates were transmitted in the processes of appropriation, acculturation, assimilation, hybridization, resulting in complex relations between newly arrived groups and autochthonous communities (Hauschild

provincial Macedonian barbarian *imaginarium*.' The term could have a trivial meaning 'Mounted Gauls', or 'the Gauls who use a saddle', as Mihajlović points out, considering that the term *scordiscus* was used for a saddle in Roman military terminology from the 1st century AD. Although speculative, this hypothesis is well founded in the archaeological record of the central Balkans and south-eastern Pannonia from the second half of the 2nd and 1st century BC when an enormous increase of various elements of horse gear can be witnessed.

<sup>2</sup> For a theoretical background for migrations in archaeology see: Burmeister 2000; Hakenbeck 2008; Cameron 2013.

2010). The complexity of these processes is well documented in the northern and eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin in the structure of cemeteries from northern Hungary and Transylvania from the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC. For example, there are cemeteries with grave goods (weapons and costume elements) produced exclusively in the La Tène tradition, like Ménfőcsanak (Hungary) (Uzsoki 1987) or Ludas - Varjú-dűlő (Hungary) (Szabó 2012), but also examples which exhibit a significant portion of autochthonous Early Iron Age cultural elements (jewellery, pottery), like at Muhi-Kochmadomb (Hungary) (Hellebrandt 1999, p. 215-239).

Southern Pannonia was only a peripheral zone of the described cultural processes in the course of 4th century BC, although the first objects produced in the La Tène tradition, the *phalerae* from horse burial 1 from Vinkovci (Croatia), appeared in the region in the late 5th and the beginning of the 4th centuries BC (Majnarić-Pandžić 2003, p. 490-494, fig. 8-10). During the first two thirds of the 4th century BC, which represent the final phase of the regional Early Iron Age (the so called Črug phase: Božič 1981a, p. 315-316, tab. 2), which is contemporary with the central European LT B1, the number of these finds significantly increased. All known La Tène finds from this period are elements of female costume, like early La Tène zoomorphic or early Dux type fibulae, but also bracelets or anklets that were combined with certain autochthonous elements: hair loops made of twisted silver wire (Brunšmid 1909, p. 233, fig. 23, n°5; Dizdar, Potrebica 2002, p. 114, pl. 2, n°1, 3, pl. 3, n°1), or trans-regional objects of that time, like necklaces made of coral and glass beads (biconical, amphora shaped, etc.). These elements suggest a gradual transformation and the creation of hybrid female costumes in a process that was further elaborated in LT B2 phase. Two well-known examples from this period include the Črug hoard from Bačka (Serbia) (Vasić 1987, p. 555-556, pl. 56, pl. 57, n°1-11) and a grave from Velika in the Požega valley (Majnarić Pandžić 1995, p. 35-37, fig. 1-2; Dizdar, Potrebica 2002, p. 114-115, pl. 1-4) (fig. 2). There are also a few known cemeteries from this period, unfortunately with disturbed grave contexts, like Osijek-Zeleno polje (Croatia) (Spajić 1962, pl. 13-14, pl. 15, n°9, 11, pl. 16-17, pl. 21, n°25-27, pl. 26, n°44-46), Dalj-Busija (Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, pl. 4, n°1-5), and Bogdanovci (Brunšmid 1909, p. 231-237), with female costume elements from LT B1, and the full 'La Tène package' in LT B2.

### Early La Tène period in south-eastern Pannonia and the central Balkans

From LT B2 there is a significant increase of La Tène culture elements in the archaeological record of south-eastern Pannonia. Unfortunately, there are no excavated settlements of this period. Thus, archaeological interpretation of the period from the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC is heavily biased by funerary data. To make things worse, there are only two systematically excavated and published cemeteries: Karaburma/Rospi Čuprija in Belgrade, Serbia (Todorović 1956; 1963; 1967; 1972) and Pećine near Kostolac, Serbia (Jovanović 1984; 2018), while a large number of grave goods originate from

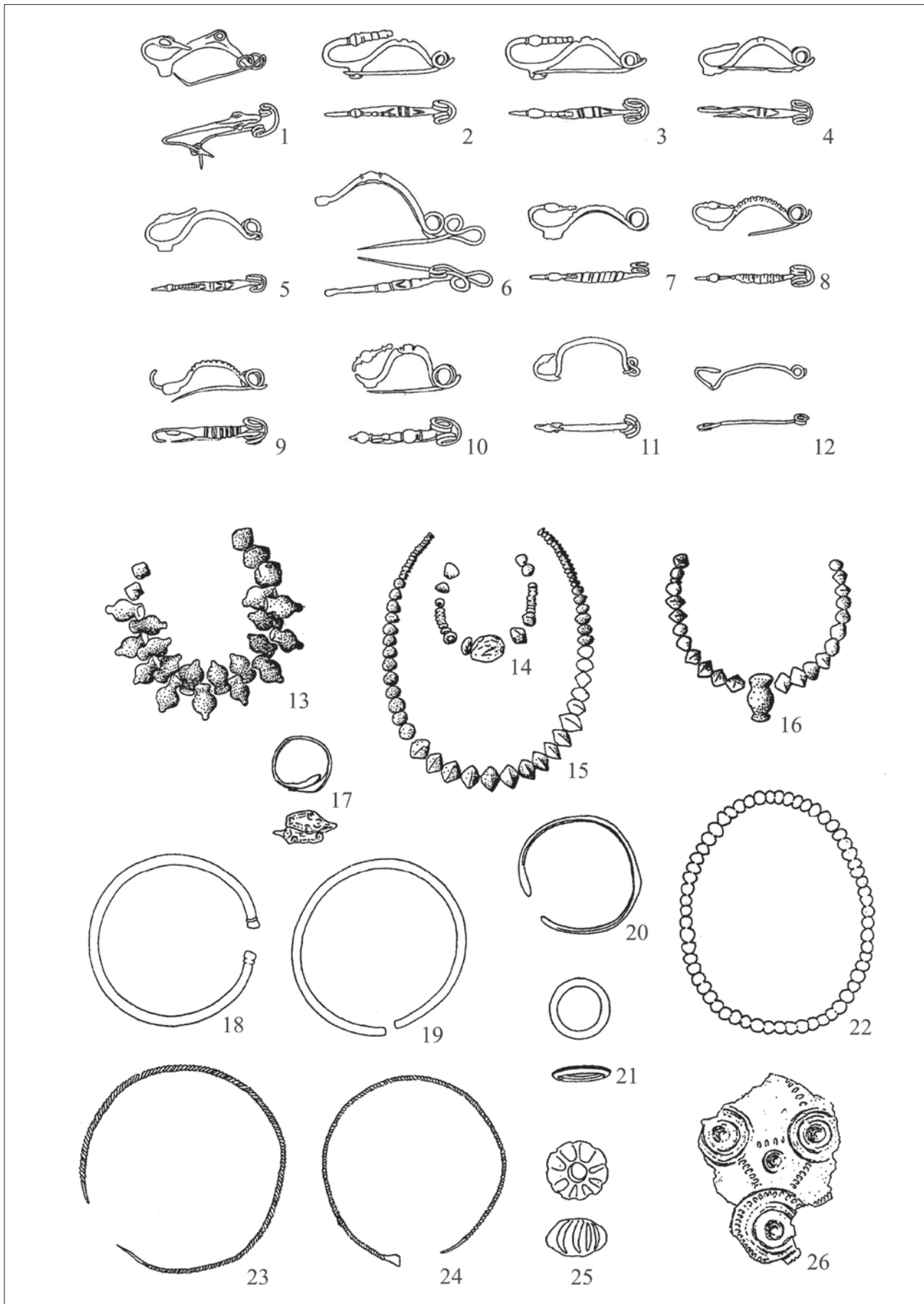


Fig. 2. Grave from Velika, Požega (after Potrebica, Dizdar 2002).

non-archaeological digs, like the Kupinovo cemetery in Syrmia, Serbia (Drnić 2015a).

Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija cemetery in Belgrade, situated on the right bank of the Danube, two kilometres east of the Sava River confluence, was excavated between 1954 and 1963. Around one hundred Late Iron Age graves were discovered, dating from LT B2 to LT D1/D2. Around ten more graves from the 1st century AD were excavated, testifying continuous burial of the local Iron Age community into the Early Imperial period (Todorović 1956; 1963; 1967; 1972). Some of the cemeteries from south-eastern Pannonia, e.g. Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija and Kupinovo, had been used over a long chronological sequence, from LT B2 to LT D1/D2, and in the case of Karaburma even into the 1st century AD (Egri 2016). This represents a regional particularity in the Carpathian Basin where most of the cemeteries are abandoned at the end of LT C1 (Berecki 2008; Szabó 2012, 141-152; Szabó 2018, 211-222; Rustoiu 2016). Long continuity of burial is also confirmed at some sites in the south-eastern Alpine region, like Novo mesto in Slovenia (Knez 1992; Križ 2005). This fact could be a reflection of the relative social stability of those communities over the course of the last three centuries of the 1st millennium BC.

From a chronological perspective, the cemetery of Pećine near Kostolac represents a different type of burial ground. It is situated on the right bank of the Mlava River, around 5 km to the southwest of the famous Roman site of Viminacium. The

cemetery was excavated in 1981-1982, and it contained nine Early Iron Age and 34 Late Iron Age burials (Jovanović 1984; Jovanović 2018). Continuous burial activity is attested from the end of the Early Iron Age to the beginning of the Late Iron Age (5th/4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC). This could serve as evidence of the continuity of the indigenous south-eastern Pannonian community who adopted new La Tène cultural models, but also kept some of their traditional elements, especially in female costumes. The creation of a hybrid material culture reflects, to a certain degree, the creation of new communities in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC, probably comprised of the autochthonous population and possibly a certain number of the newcomers from the north, resulting in the creation of more fluid identities expressed in different styles of female costumes in comparison to some other regions of the Carpathian basin (northern Hungary), and particularly to core La Tène regions (Bohemia).

The complexity and diversity of these cultural processes becomes more evident if the structure of LT B2 graves from Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija and Pećine near Kostolac is compared. At the first necropolis, among one hundred La Tène graves a minimum of 11-12 burials date to LT B2.<sup>3</sup> Seven of them contained warrior panoplies, with four of them with full equipment (fig. 3a; graves 62, 66, 71, and the most famous grave 22/23: Todorović 1972, pl. 8-9, pl. 19, pl. 22-25, pl. 33).

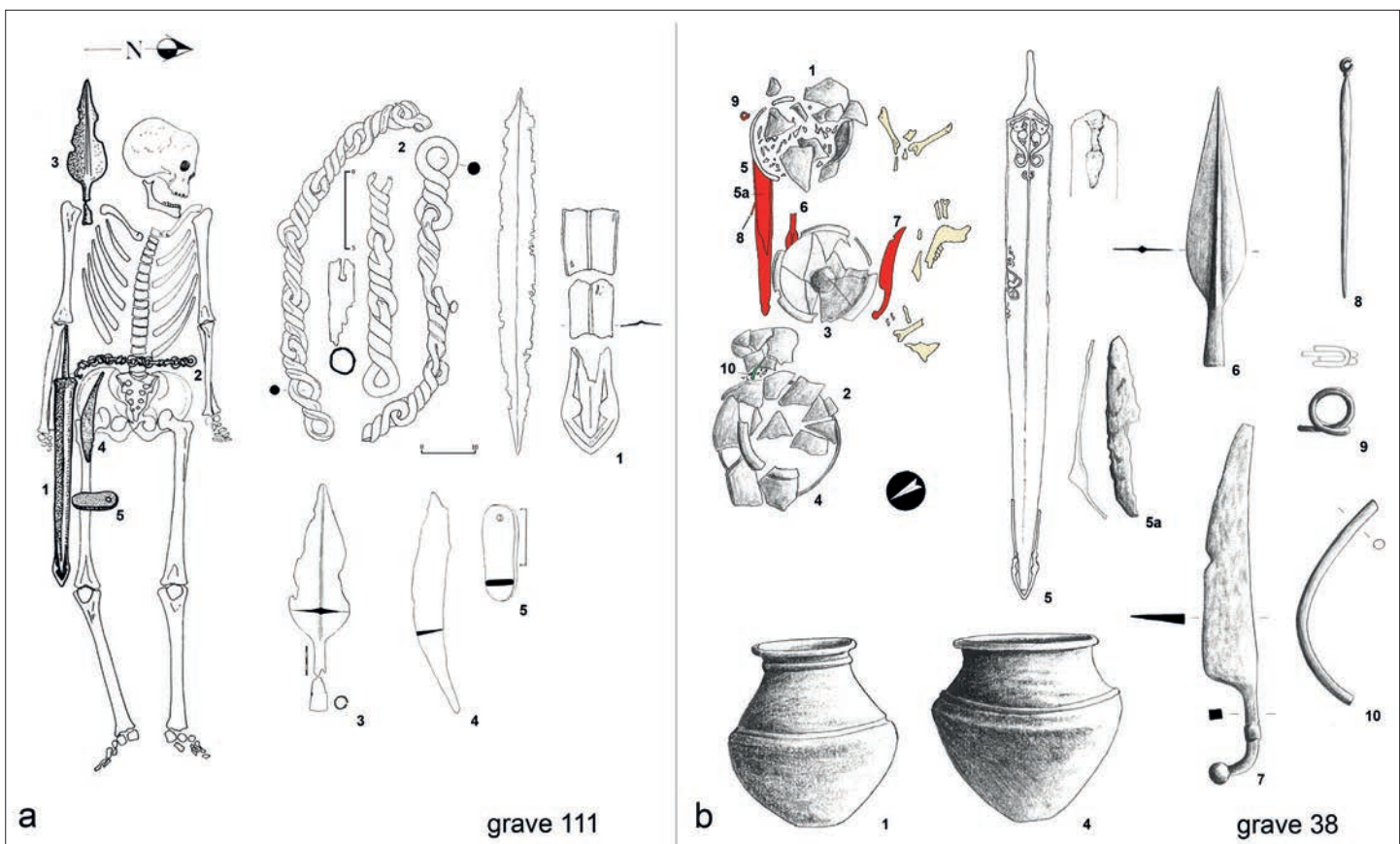


Fig. 3. a. Grave 111 from Karaburma cemetery (after Todorović 1972); b. Grave 38 from Pećine cemetery near Kostolac (after Jovanović 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The exact number of Early La Tène graves is not possible to establish, because several graves contained grave goods that could be broadly dated to LT B2-C phases, like knives of the Dürrenberg type or wheel-thrown *khantaroj* (Todorović 1972, pl. 15. grave 38, n°1-2, pl. 20, grave 58, n°1-2, grave 59, n°1-2).

At the cemetery at Pećine there are nine graves dated to the Early Iron Age (the 5th- the first half of the 4th century BC), which predates the Early La Tène horizon (LT B2). Among this earlier grave group, three graves (graves 10, 14, and 21) contain weapons typical for the final phase of the Early Iron Age in south-east Pannonia – a spearhead with a narrow blade and a knife – with analogies in several graves of the Early Iron Age Syrmian group (Trajković 2008, p. 43-44, 196-197; Anđelić 2017, 47, pl. 10-12). From the beginning of the Late Iron Age (LT B2) there are seven graves with weapons at the Pećine cemetery, but not a single one of them contained the full warrior panoply. Only grave 38 contained a sword in a scabbard decorated with a pair of dragons, together with a spearhead, but without a belt and shield pieces (fig. 3b). The weaponry of the skeletal grave 30 was composed of an Early La Tène spearhead and a 40 cm long knife with a slightly curved blade (fig. 4a). This type of fighting knife, sometimes labelled as a falchion or *falcata*, originating from the Greek world, was part of the warrior equipment of the 5th and probably the first half of the 4th century BC in southern Pannonia

(Vučedol: Brunšmid 1902, p. 69, fig. 26; Teržan 1977, p. 20, fig. 4, n°12; Donja Dolina: Truhelka 1904, pl. 44, n°13, pl. 49, n°5, pl 50, n°3, pl. 60, n° 2, etc.) and the western Balkans (Sanski Most: Fiala 1899, fig 20, 48, 78, 88, 149, 176). Its presence in the LT B2 grave in Pećine cemetery testifies the existence of, not only hybrid female costumes, but also warrior panoplies. The combination of Early Iron Age/Hallstatt and La Tène elements in warrior equipment is also confirmed in the south-eastern Alpine regions (Posočje, Dolenjska) at the beginning of the Late Iron Age (fig. 4b; Križ 2005, p. 67-68, 93-94, t. 39, n°3-5, 7, 13, t. 77, n°3-4; Laharnar, Mlinar 2019).

Within female costumes from these two cemeteries there are sets entirely comprised of La Tène elements, like cremated grave 60 from Karaburma with bronze and iron LT B2 fibulae of the Duchov type, two of them of the local variant Karaburma 63 type, a solid and hollow bracelet, accompanied with iron knives and a wheel-thrown pot (Todorović 1972, p. 25-26, pl. 21). The number of the female graves with La Tène costume sets is significantly higher at Pećine cemetery (graves 2, 3, 7, 12,

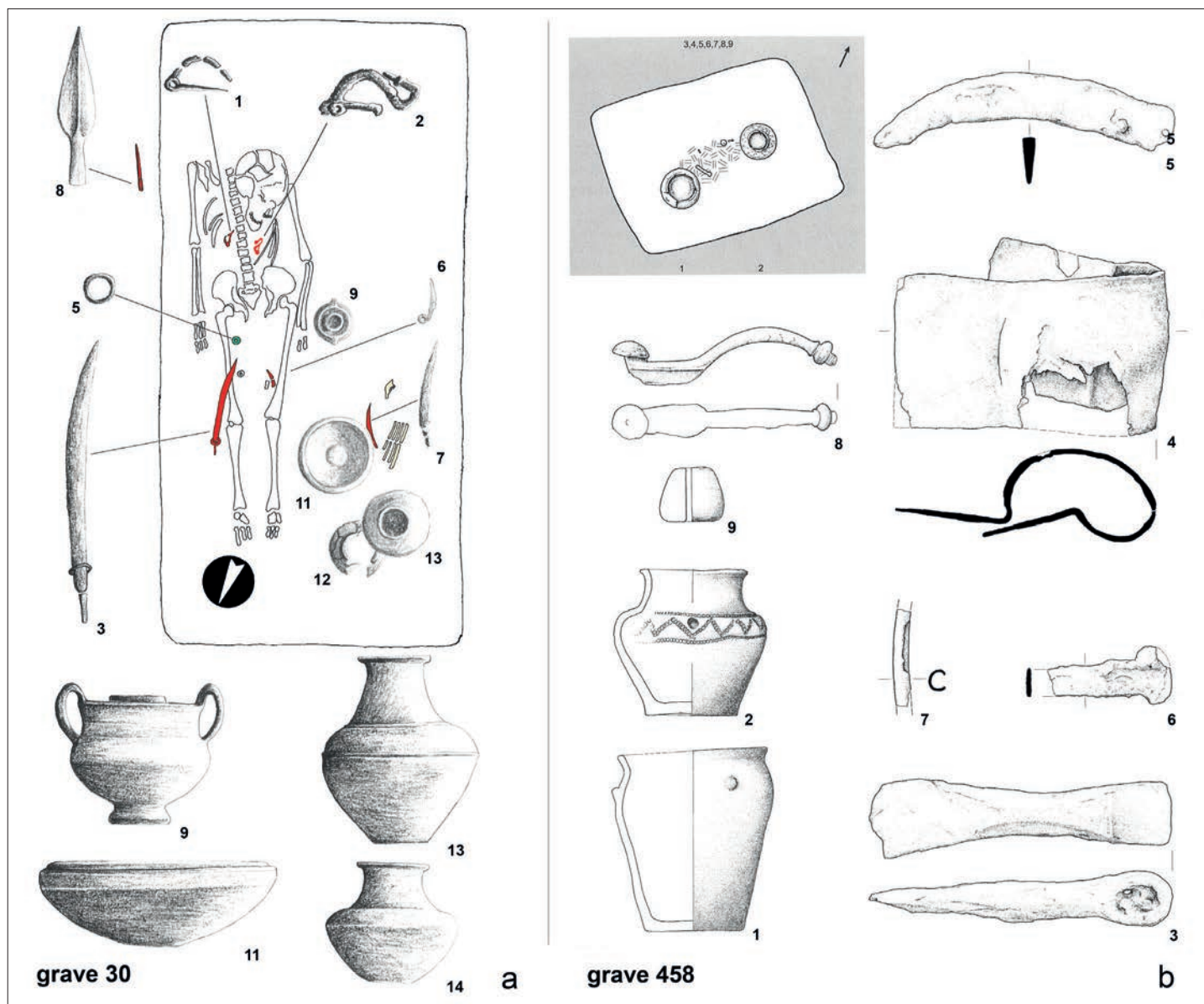


Fig 4. a. Grave 30 from Pećine cemetery near Kostolac (after Jovanović 2018); b. Grave 458 from Kapiteljska njiva in Novo mesto (after Križ 2005).

20, 27, 31, 41, and 43), which is another difference in contrast to Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija cemetery. For example, cremation grave 41 contained three fibulae of the Dux type, an iron open-ended bracelet produced in a plastic style with red coral inlays together with five ceramic vessels and an iron knife (fig. 5a; Jovanović 2018, p. 98-100, fig. 36, pl. 52-53).

The existence of hybrid female costumes in the region at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC was already mentioned, with typical La Tène elements, like Dux and Münsingen type fibulae, bracelets, and belt buckles, combined with the items of the local south Pannonian or western/central Balkan Early Iron Age origin - hair loops made of twisted silver or bronze wire, astragal belts, and necklaces comprised of glass beads. Two such graves, both inhumations are known from Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija cemetery (fig. 5b; grave 63 and 67: Todorović 1972, 26-27, pl. 23, n°1-6, pl. 25, n°1-5; Ljuština, Spasić 2012, p. 368-369, pl. 1, n°1-7). Similar hybrid costume sets are known from the Pećine cemetery (grave 19: Jovanović 2018, p. 49-51, fig. 14, pl. 19), as well as in a single grave from Repnjak in Kostolac (Jacanović 1987).

One of the autochthonous female costume elements, originating from the Early Iron Age tradition, are bronze astragal belts. These composite belts, originating from the western/central Balkans, were transmitted to south-eastern Pannonia and Transdanubia in the 6th century BC, and were continuously used in several variants by various Pannonian communities until the Late Tène period (Božić 1981b; Filipović, Mladenović 2017; Tonc, Dizdar 2018).

## Middle La Tène period

### *Early phase of the Middle La Tène period (LT C1)*

From a chronological perspective, the 'Celtic invasion of Greece' in 280-279 BC could serve as the breaking-point between the Early and Middle La Tène period, and, according to the traditional historical narrative, the formation moment of a new Scordiscan ethnic and political entity. However, this notion is problematic from an archaeological point of view because it is impossible to detect any significant rupture between LT B2 and LT C1 in the archaeological record. The last two thirds of the 3rd century BC (LT C1) are usually interpreted as a time of relative stability of most of the La Tène communities across Europe. Unfortunately, in south-eastern Pannonia, there are still no relevant settlement data so the interpretation of this period, just like in the previous phase, is based solely on the analyses of funerary finds. Still, in contrast to some other regions in the Carpathian Basin, like northern Hungary or Transylvania, it is possible to count no more than ten preserved warrior graves with typical LT C1 inventories. A total of five graves are known from Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija cemetery.<sup>4</sup> Grave 29 from Karaburma may serve as an example: a full weapon set, including a bent sword in a scabbard decorated with griffons of the group 2E, according

to the N. Ginoux classification (fig. 6: Todorović 1972, p. 19, pl. 11, grave 29, n°1-4, Pl. 12; Ginoux 2007, p. 109-110, cat. no. 137). Several single graves with typical LT C1 inventories are also known from the sites of Brestovik (Popović 1994), Vučedol (Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, p. 98-99, pl. 48), and Vajuga-Pesak (Popović 1989-1990), while a large number of stray finds testify numerous contemporaneous cemeteries. Probably the largest number of LT C1 weaponry comes from the destroyed La Tène cemetery from Kupinovo in Sirmia (Drnić 2015a).

Properly excavated female graves from LT C1 are even more rare in south-eastern Pannonia, though numerous analogies from the other parts of the Carpathian Basin are more than useful for the reconstruction of the female costume on the base of the large number of stray finds. Four graves that can be dated to the early phase of the Middle La Tène period are: grave 34 from Karaburma (Todorović 1972, p. 20, pl. 14, n°1-6), grave 28 from Rospi Ćuprija (Todorović 1963, Y 50), grave 1 from Feudvar (fig. 8b: Kull 1992), and a grave from the Vršac-At site (Jovanović 1975).

Among various types of fibulae known from south-eastern Pannonia a group with circular openwork discs on their back-bent foot, decorated using pseudo-filigree and pseudo-granulation techniques can be emphasised (fig. 7a). This type is widely distributed throughout the Carpathian Basin with three distinctive variants, with one of them being characteristic for south-eastern Pannonia (Brezňanová 2008; Jovanović 2011; Drnić 2015a, p. 77-80). Pseudo-filigree and pseudo-granulation techniques were also used in the decoration of other jewellery, like bracelets (fig. 7b), from the end of LT B2 and in LT C1 in the eastern La Tène zone, especially in the Carpathian Basin, but also in Bohemia and Moravia. Given their position on the border with the Illyrian, Thracian and Macedonian regions, south-eastern Pannonian communities most certainly played a significant role in the transmission and transformation of the concept of filigree and granulation, where these techniques were employed from the end of the 6th century BC onwards, mostly for artefacts made of gold and silver (Szabó 1975, p. 147-155; 2012, p. 103-109; Majnarić-Pandžić 2006).

Female costumes from the middle La Tène period also include different types of iron and copper alloy belts often accompanied with simpler or richly decorated belt buckles (Dizdar 2015; 2016a). One of them being the iron belts composed of rod-shaped spirally twisted links, typical costume element of the La Tène communities from the Carpathian Basin with only a few finds from the west, and the largest concentration of the finds in northern and south-eastern parts (fig. 8; Drnić 2015a, p. 89-93, map. 6; Dizdar 2016a, p. 82-85, pl. 4-5). The second type of belts are made of copper alloy segments, often decorated with enamel. Again, several variants suggest the existence of various workshops, with some of them operating in south-eastern Pannonia and producing belts with a characteristic combination of lyre-shaped and rectangular segments, called the 'Scordiscan type' (fig. 9; Challet 1992, p. 73-76, tab. 12). They were used during the LT C1, but also the LT C2 phase, as was suggested by the finds from Zvonimirovo-Veliko polje (Croatia) cemetery in the middle Drava River valley (Dizdar 2018, 17-18).

<sup>4</sup> Karaburma: graves 26, 29, 324, 325; Rospi Ćuprija: grave 39 (Todorović 1967; 1972).



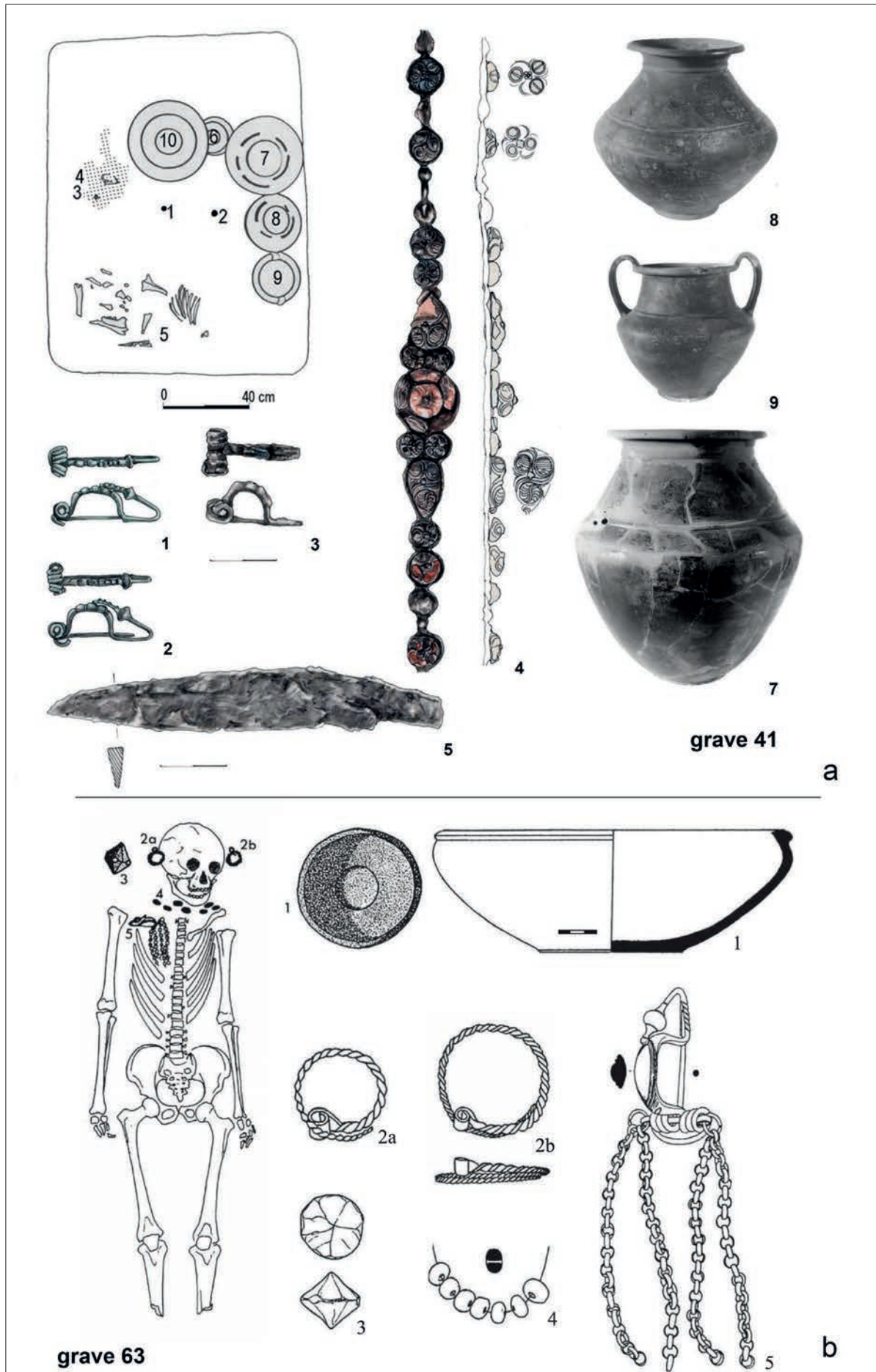


Fig. 5. a. Grave 41 from Pećine cemetery near Kostolac (after Jovanović 2018);  
 b. Grave 63 from Karaburma cemetery (after Todorović 1972).





Fig. 7. a. Fibulae with circular openwork discs from Kupinovo cemetery;  
 b. Bracelet from Kupinovo made in pseudo-filigree and pseudo-granulation techniques (after Drnić 2015).

and south-western Pannonia, at sites like Novo mesto-Kapiteljska njiva, Slovenia (Križ 2005), Brežice-Sejmišće, Slovenia (Jovanović 2006), and Slatina in Rožna Dolina (Pirkmajer 1991). In contrast, properly excavated LT C2 burials are rare in south-eastern Pannonia with only three known examples, all of them being graves with weapons. The most important is a double burial from Odžaci in the Bačka region, discovered at the beginning of the 20th century, with two swords in scabbards decorated in the Swiss style and parts of a wagon (fig. 10; Guštin 1984, 121-127). Another two are grave 32 from Rospi Čuprija (Todorović 1963, Y 54) and grave 22 from Pećine near Kostolac (Jovanović 1984, p. 80-84, fig. 8-9; Jovanović 2018, p. 56-57, fig. 17, pl. 24). The

actual number of LT C2 cemeteries in south-eastern Pannonia was significantly higher. This is corroborated by a large number of typo-chronologically defined objects, like swords, often with punch marks on the blades, sword scabbards of Lejars group 6, decorated in the Swiss style, ring-like belt elements, shield bosses (Rapin's type VIIb) and spearheads of (Rapin's type IIc) at sites like Osijek-Zelena Polje (Todorović 1968, pl. 14, n°6, pl. 15, n°1), Kupinovo (Drnić 2015a), Sremski Karlovci, Serbia (Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, pl. 39, n°1-4, 8-10, pl. 40, n°1-3), Obrež and Gospođinci, Serbia (Knežević-Jovanović 2003, p. 288-289, pl. 2, n°3-4, pl. 3).

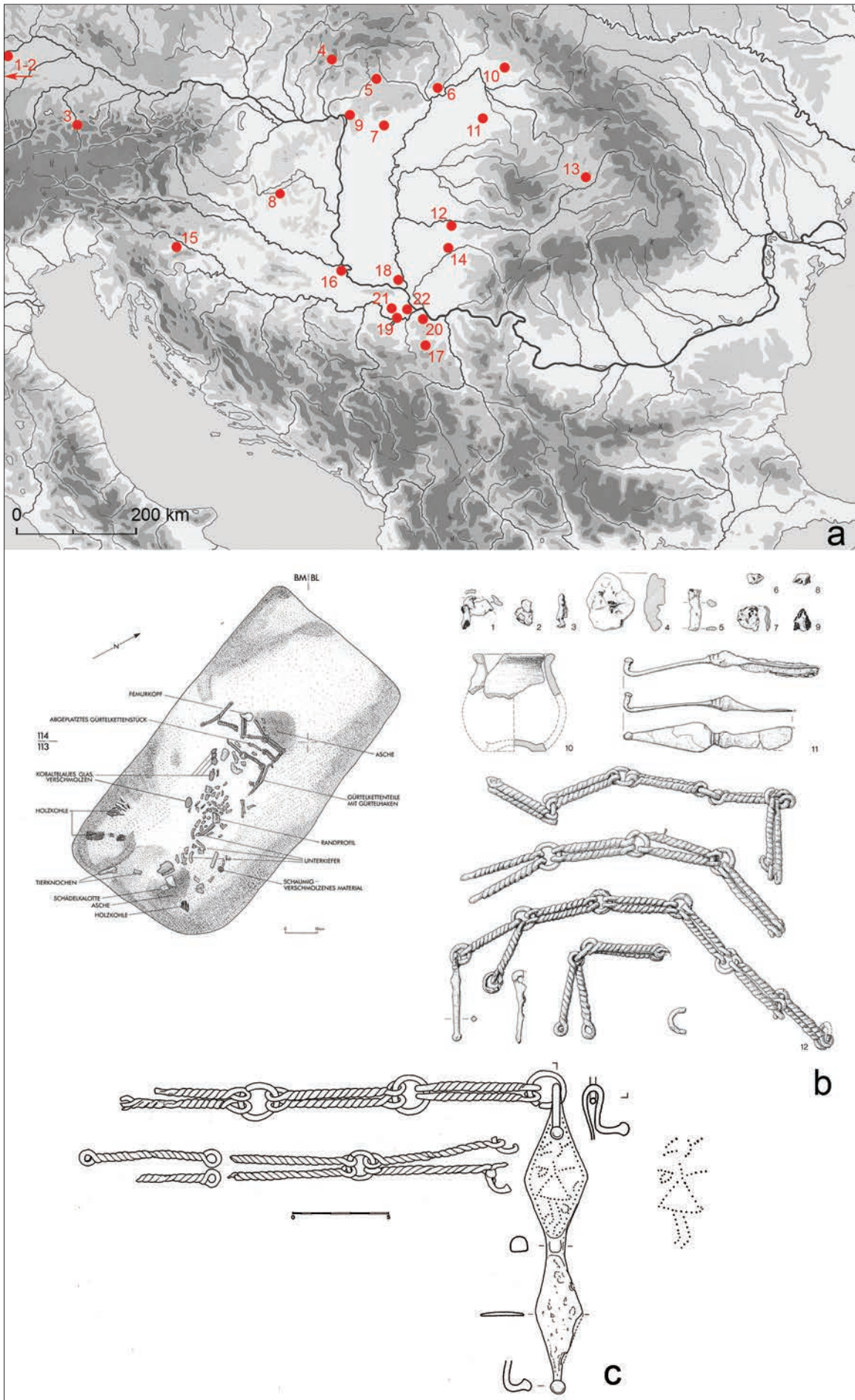


Fig. 8. a. Distribution of iron belts composed of rod-shaped spirally twisted links (after Drnić 2015); b. Grave from Feudvar (after Kull 1991); c. Belt with buckle from Surčin (after Drnić 2015).



Fig. 9. Buckle of the bronze belt of 'Scordiscan type' from Novi Banovci (photo: AMZ archive).

### Late La Tène period

For the period of the second half of the 2nd and the 1st centuries BC (LT D), the archaeological record reveals a significant increase in settlements and burials in south-eastern Pannonia. This is the period of the emergence of fortified settlements as a reflection of the political, economic, and cultural processes that took place in central Europe and led to the formation of what is called 'the *oppida* civilisation'. Around twenty known fortified settlements are known from the region, including Gomolava near Hrtkovci, Serbia, in the lower Sava River valley (Dizdar 2016,

p. 31-32, fig. 1; Mihajlović 2019, p. 210-219, map. 2). Having been extensively excavated and analysed over the course of more than two decades, Gomolava serves as a model for this type of settlement (Jovanović, Jovanović 1988). Other significant fortified settlements in Serbia are Gradina near Vašica on Bosut River (Popović 2003), and Čarnok in the Bačka region with clearly visible fortifications in a lowland landscape, while the cross-section of the wall reveals an earthen rampart with an outer ditch (fig. 11; Jovanović 2008). Recently, a similar settlement was geophysically surveyed at the site of Turski Šanac near Bačka Palanka, Serbia, revealing a settlement with a complex system of ramparts and ditches, interpreted as a heavily fortified centre of a Late La Tène warrior elite, with a dense concentration of features within the fortifications (fig. 12; Wendling 2019). In the Croatian part of the Middle Danube region there are several Late La Tène fortified settlements, the two most prominent being situated in the modern-day towns of Vinkovci and Osijek. The fortified 'cores' of both settlements were not larger than a few hectares, but the surrounding 'suburbia' extended over large areas, with evidence of intense metal and pottery production, and, in the case of Osijek, even the existence of a ritual area or sanctuary (Šimić, Filipović 1997; Dizdar 2001; Filipović 2010).

There are certain differences between these fortified settlements in south-eastern Pannonia and the central European *oppida*. They are smaller in size, wall/rampart structure is somewhat different and, in certain cases, they are positioned at prominent 'tell' sites with thick occupation layers from previous and later periods. These differences, along with a general unawareness of most of the western and central European authors, led to an exclusion of most of the south-eastern Pannonian fortified settlements from the research of the *oppida* phenomenon. Although much smaller in size, these settlements served all the functions their central European counterparts are renowned for. They were economic and production centres, with numerous pottery kilns and evidence of metal production (iron furnaces, slag remains, crucibles, moulds, etc.), but also focal points and probably centres of smaller political entities. As in the case of the complex wall constructions of central European *oppida*, apart from being defensive structures, the fortification systems of the south-eastern fortified settlements could also have conveyed a symbolic meaning, as a representation of the community's strength and unity, but also marking the physical and symbolic limits of the community or inside and outside space (von Nicolai 2014).

Besides fortified centres, numerous smaller unenclosed settlements are known in the region. Unfortunately, the current state of research does not allow for thorough analyses of the inner structure of these settlements, or their relation to fortified centres, but the available data, compared with similar sites in other regions of the Carpathian Basin, suggests the existence of two sub-types of these open settlements. The first includes sites with a limited number of features, which are best described as hamlets or farmsteads, like in the case of Atovac-Bregovi near the village of Kuzmin (Serbia), where the remains of two Late La Tène hamlets were excavated some 480 m apart (Brukner 1995; Drnić 2019). Larger rural settlements, covering larger



Fig. 10. Grave from Odžaci (after Guštin 1984).

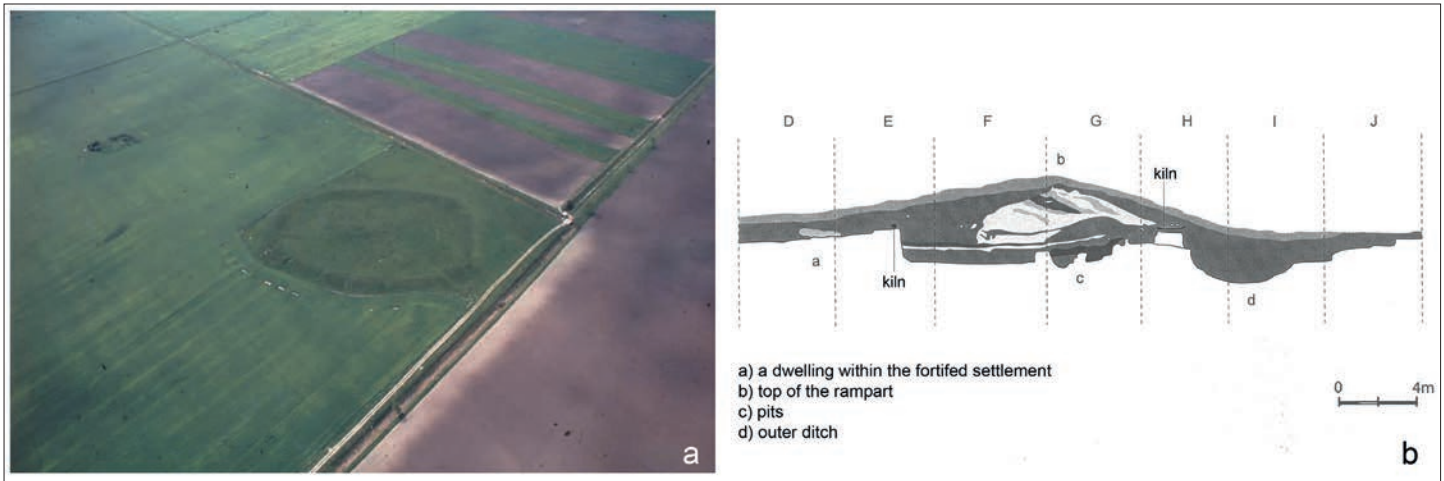


Fig. 11. Fortified settlement at Čarnok near Vrbas (after Jovanović, M. 2008).

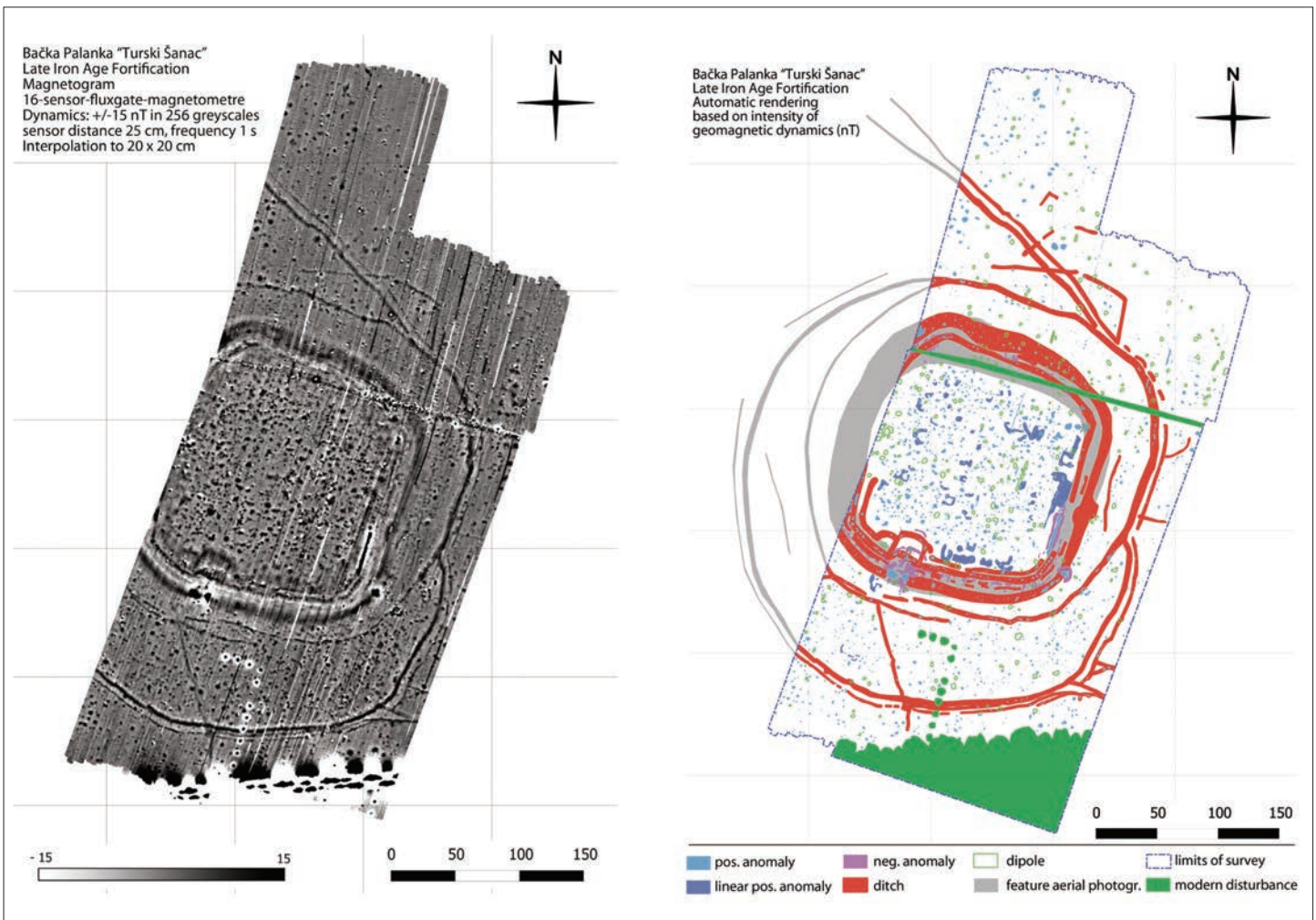


Fig. 12. Fortified settlement at Turski Šanac near Bačka Palanka (after Wendling 2019).

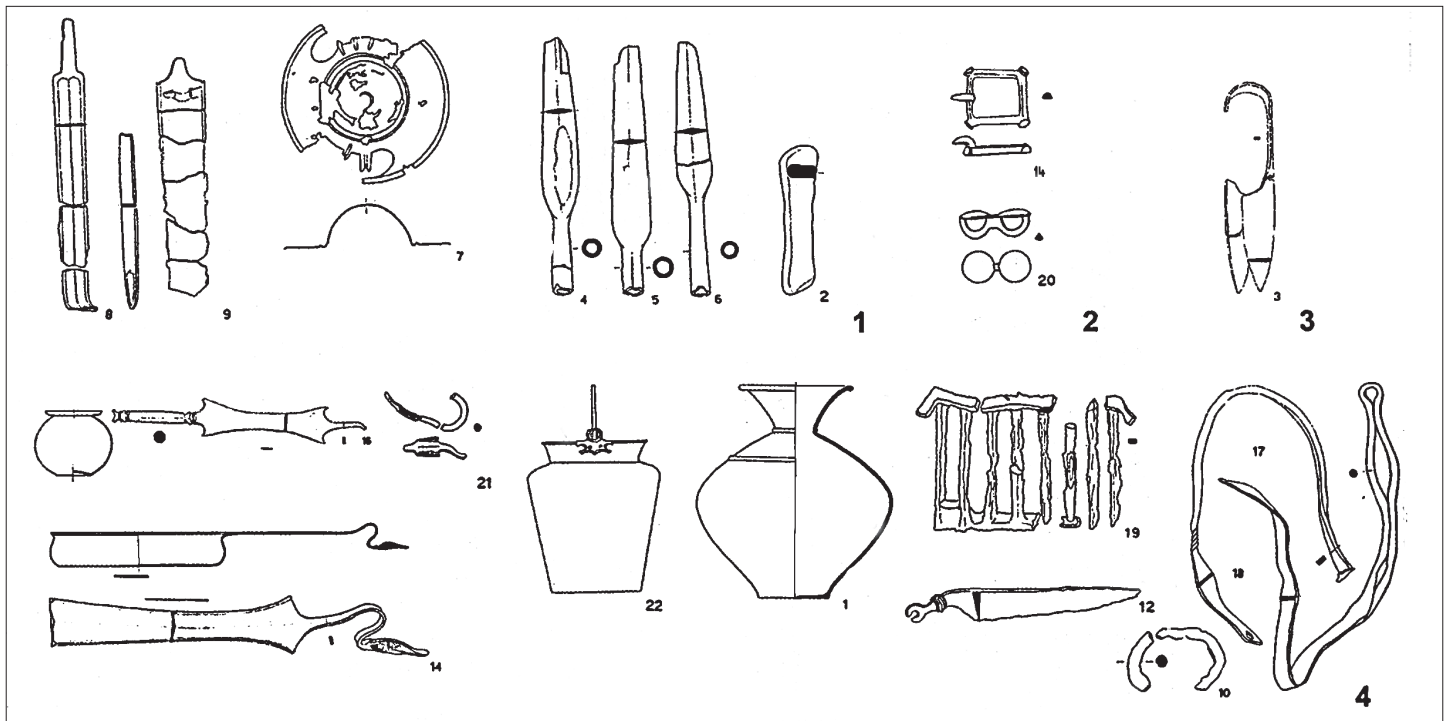


Fig. 13. Grave 92 from Karaburma cemetery (1. Weapons, 2. Horse gear, 3. Toiletries, 4. Objects used for eating and drinking) (after Todorović 1972).

areas with numerous different features, such as rectangular above-ground post-built houses, semi-dugout working places of the *Grubenhäuser*-type, ditches, and pits can probably be termed villages. One of these settlements was excavated at the site of Stružani near Slavonski Brod, Croatia, which yielded more than 15 post-built houses, as well as numerous dugout features (Miklik-Lozok 2012). Although some rudimentary traces of production have been recorded in some of these villages, e.g. pottery kilns, their economic potential in terms of production was considerably lower in comparison to some of the fortified centres, like Osijek and Gomolava. Recently, a large open settlement was discovered at Blato near Vinkovci, with evidence of metal production, coin circulation and long-distance contacts suggesting it could be interpreted as the south-eastern Pannonian equivalent of the Nēmčice-Roseldorf type of settlement in central Europe (Salač 2012; Fichtl *et al.* 2019), although with a somewhat later date between LT C2 and LT D2, with a peak in LT D1 (Dizdar 2016b).

This rather complex cultural landscape in the Late La Tène period also comprised numerous burial grounds. Karaburma/Rospi Čuprija cemetery shows a significant burial activity in LT D (fig. 13; Todorović 1956; 1963; 1967; 1972) while smaller groups of single graves are known from sites like Sotin-Zmajevac (Majnarić-Pandžić 1972-1973), Mala Vrbica-Ajmana (Stalio 1986), and Brestovik (Popović 1994). Hundreds of objects, including weaponry, costume elements, horse gear, wagon parts, and pottery, come from destroyed Late La Tène cemeteries from Mali Bilač in the Slavonia region in Croatia (Dizdar, Potrebić 2014), and Boljevci (Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, pl. 1-2, pl. 21), Hrtkovci (Dautova Ruševljan, Vujović 2006, p. 85-90), Kupinovo (Drnić 2015a), Obrež (Knežević-Jovanović 2003, cat. nr. 1-6, pl. 1), and

Surčin (Majnarić-Pandžić 1970, pl. 41-45) in the Serbian part of the Syrmia region.

Some trends in weaponry, already established in LT C2, like the replacement of sword belts with semi rigid metal parts by more flexible belts made of organic material with metal rings and buckles, accompanied with a significant elongation of the swords, continued in LT D1. This adaptation in armament certainly reflects some changes in fighting style with an emphasis on cavalry and horse riding. For example, around one metre long swords with a rounded, blunt tip, attested at numerous sites in south-eastern Pannonia, are a much more convenient weapon for horsemen than for foot soldiers (Dizdar 2009; 2015a, p. 29-34).

Furthermore, the appearance of circular shield bosses, the only umbo type present in the Late La Tène period in south-eastern Pannonia, indicates that the structure of the shields had changed, and that the characteristic vertical central thickening (*spina*) had disappeared.<sup>5</sup> Another modification to weaponry can be observed in the increase of the average length and weight of spearheads. Thus, in the LT D1 phase, certain spearheads were 50-80 cm long and weighed more than 500 grams (Drnić 2015a, p. 48-52; 2015b). As depicted in one of the scenes on the Gundestrup cauldron, they were used by horsemen as lances, but also infantry as an efficient weapon against enemy cavalry (Kaul 1995).

The change of weaponry with the purpose of adjustments to the needs of the cavalry in the 2nd century BC chronologically correlates with the appearance of the larger number of objects

<sup>5</sup> For the issue of the appearance of the circular shield bosses see Bochnak 2006 and Sievers 2010, p. 33-34.



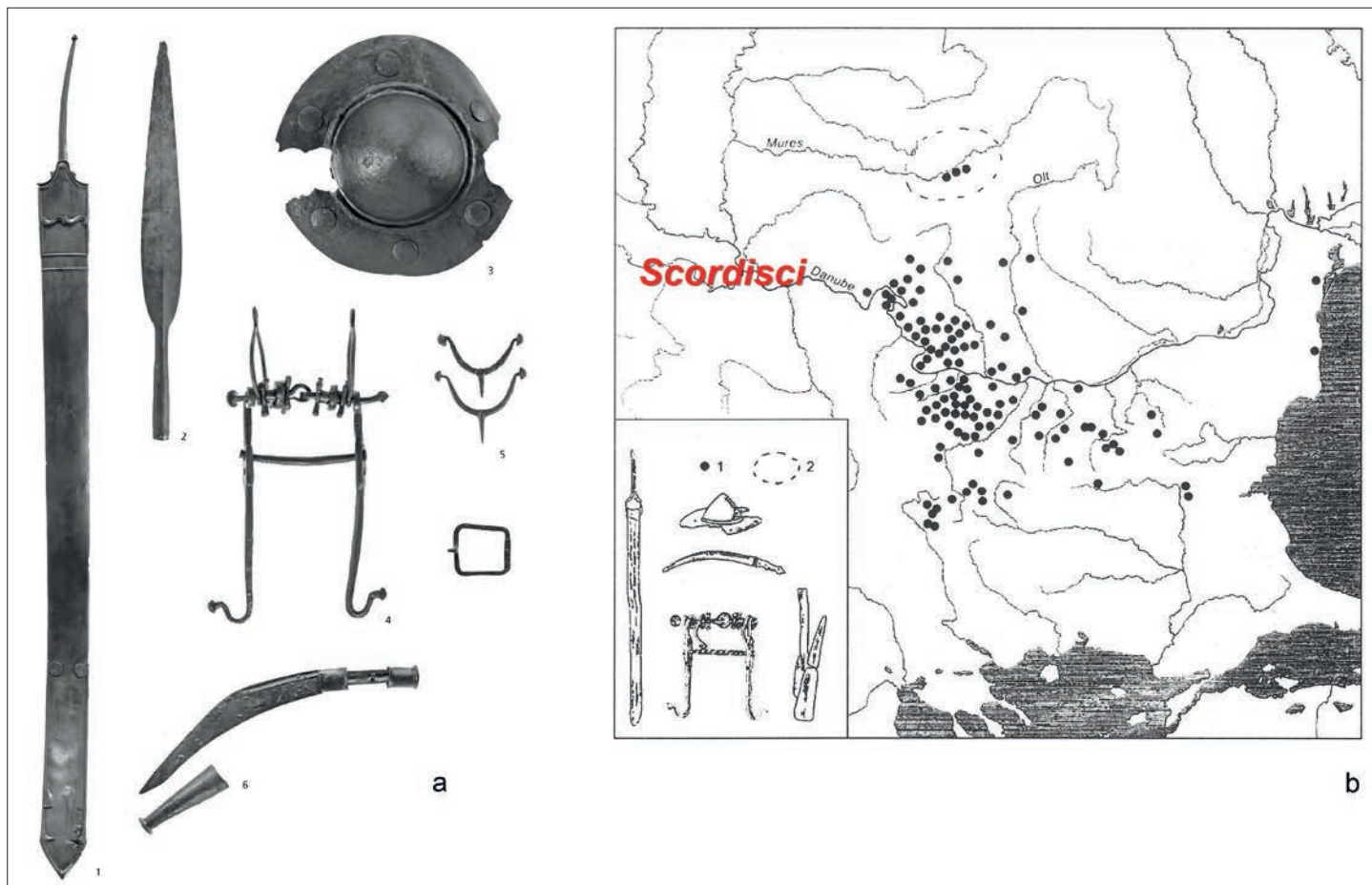


Fig. 14. a. Finds from destroyed grave from the north-western Bulgaria, Montana district (after Łuczkiwicz, Schönfelder 2008);  
 b. Distribution of the warrior graves of the Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii group (after Rustoiu 2005)

in the archaeological record which belong to horse-riding equipment, e.g. horse bits (Werner type 16), spurs, harness buckles, strap dividers, and different forms of buttons (fig. 13, n°2; Stojić 2003; Filipović 2009; Dizdar, Drnić 2018, p. 89-93). The emphasis on the cavalry represents a significant shift in combat doctrine in comparison to the previous Middle La Tène period when the main fighting force was based largely on heavy infantry (Rapin 1991, 321-331).

This phenomenon is not only characteristic for south-eastern Pannonia, and the central Balkans, the territories traditionally attributed to *Scordisci*, but also for the Lower Danube region, and the so called Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii group in south-western Romania and north-western Bulgaria (fig. 14; Rustoiu 2005; Łuczkiwicz, Schönfelder 2011). Here, the sets of weaponry and horse bits, almost identical to south-eastern Pannonian examples, occur either in flat graves or tumulus burials, with typical Late La Tène swords in scabbards, circular shield bosses, spearheads, and specific knives with curved, often decorated blades – the *sicas* (fig. 14a; Rustoiu 2007; 2018). This weapon, or possibly a sacrificial instrument because of depictions of birds of prey and solar symbols frequently applied to their blades, traditionally

associated with the Dacians, is also often found in the central Balkans and southern Pannonia (Dizdar, Drnić 2018, p. 72-78, fig. 5-6, map. 1). This suggests close connections of the warrior elites of the various communities inhabiting the regions north of the Roman province of Macedonia.

Late La Tène female costume changed to a certain degree in comparison to the Middle La Tène phase. Primarily, various types of iron and bronze belts disappeared, while the only belts used in south-eastern Pannonia were later variants of traditional astragal belts (Božič 1981; Filipović, Mladenović 2017; Dizdar, Tonc 2018), and belts made of organic material with belt buckles of the Laminci type. These objects, produced in several variants, were very popular in the second half of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC in several regions of the Carpathian Basin, from Transdanubia, through southern Pannonia and the central Balkans to Transylvania and Walachia, while specific elongated, triangular buckles appear in Trans-Carpathian Moldova (fig. 15; Drnić 2009; Guštin 2011).

Various types of fibulae were also important costume elements in the Late La Tène period. During LT D1 these are mostly fibulae of the middle La Tène scheme made of bronze

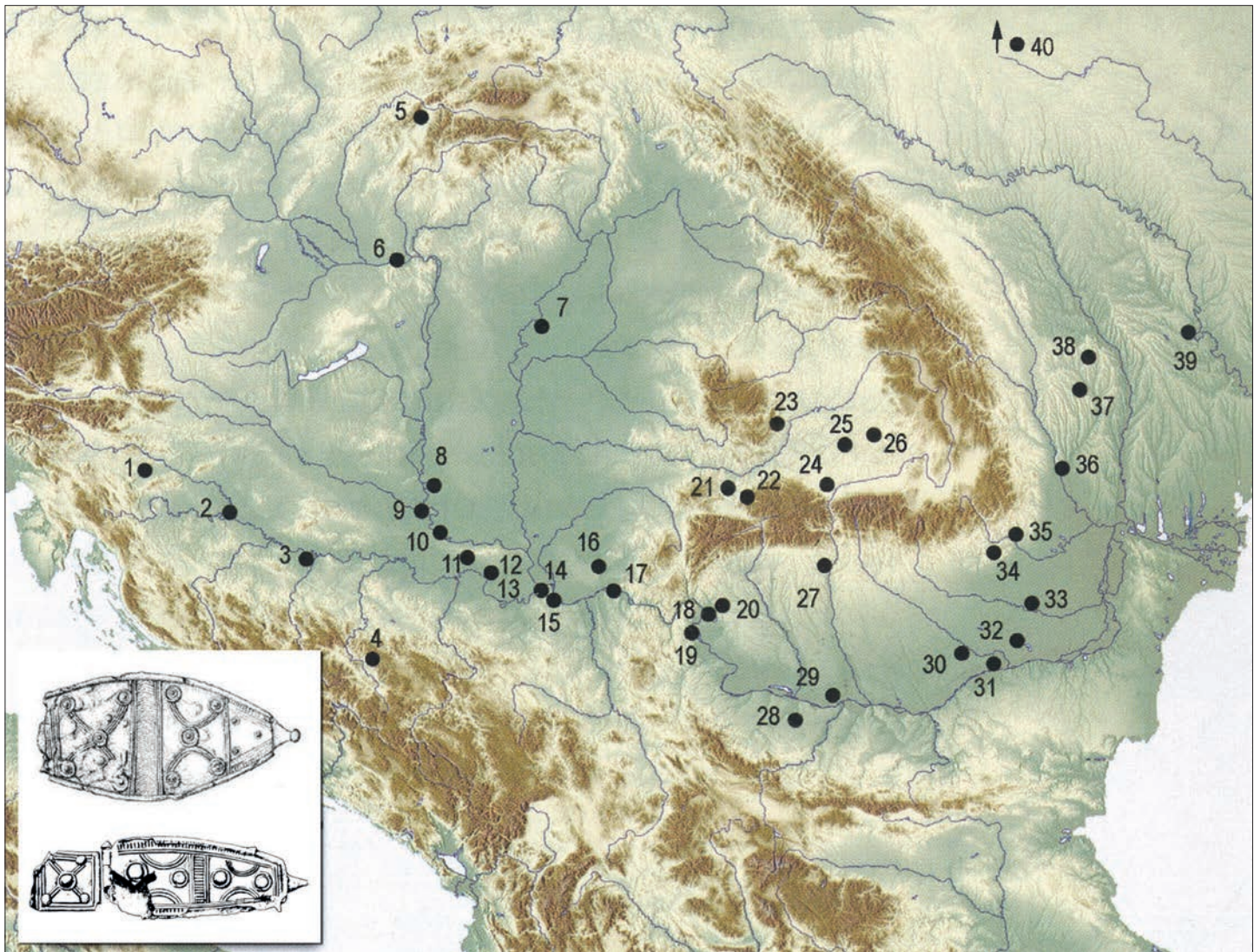


Fig. 15. Distribution of Laminci type belt buckles (after Guštin 2011).

wire. The other characteristic objects include fibulae of the Jarak type which were produced in more modest, bronze variant, but also sumptuous, massive silver pieces (Brunšmid 1902, p. 84-86, fig. 43-44; Jevtić *et al.* 2006). Recently, several cast Late La Tène fibulae, characteristic for western parts of the Carpathian Basin and the eastern Alps, were recognized in south-eastern Pannonia (Drnić 2012). Following general trends, in the LT D2 phase fibulae of a north Italian origin, like Jezerine and Gorica types, appeared in the costumes of south-eastern Pannonian communities (Dizdar, Tonc 2011; Drnić 2013).

## Conclusion

The presented archaeological material from southern Pannonia indicates certain cultural changes over the course of the 4th century BC with the introduction of the first objects produced in the La Tène tradition. At the transition from the 4th to 3rd century

BC a significant increase in La Tène cultural templates is attested in the region (primarily biritual burials with typical weaponry and female costumes) marking the beginning of the Late Iron Age. Apart from the characteristic La Tène warrior panoplies or female costumes, some of the burials from this initial phase contained autochthonous objects combined with those ones produced in the La Tène tradition. This indicates the creation of a hybrid material culture as a reflection of the complex social and cultural processes that took place in the south-eastern part of the Carpathian Basin at the transition from the 4th to 3rd century BC.

During the next three centuries (from LT B2 until LT D2) the material culture of the south-eastern Pannonian communities saw continuous development, as shown in previous chapters, similar to some other neighbouring regions, e.g. the Mokronog group from the south-east Alps and south-western Pannonia. Together with typical La Tène cultural templates, characteristic for the most of the Carpathian Basin, local material culture also bears certain specificities. Due to their peripheral position these

communities served the role of an agent between the continental and Balkan spheres, mediating La Tène forms to the south, and Mediterranean/Balkan to the north.

Over the course of the 20th century by combining the archaeological record with ancient written sources an interpretative framework was created used to reconstruct the ethnic identities of the communities of southern Pannonia and the central Balkans in the last three centuries BC. According to these interpretations, large groups of Celts, the bearers of the La Tène culture, first settled in south-eastern Pannonia, and then in 280-279 BC they launched a massive invasion of Greece and Macedonia. After the failed invasion, one of these Celtic groups returned to Pannonia. There, together with the Celts who did not participate in the Balkan campaign and some indigenous groups, they formed a tribal alliance known as the *Scordisci*. A century or two later, the warriors from the same ethnic group were fighting Roman armies, first on the northern fringes of the province of Macedonia, and later also in southern Pannonia.

Although a certain continuity in the material culture of the Late Iron Age south-eastern Pannonian communities can be recognized, new interpretations point to the problems concerning the concepts of *Scordiscan* ethnicity. Together with the critique of ethnicities and collective identities that are characteristic of the European Iron Age in general, particular focus is placed on the time of the emergence of the Scordiscan identity in the ancient texts and epigraphic monuments, which is the middle and the second half of the second century BC. This is crucial to understanding the problem of continuity between two collective identities of the earlier, so-called *Brenus* Celts, and the later *Scordisci* which could be, according to the recent interpretation, a newly formed Roman pseudo-ethnic collective identity for warriors on horseback in the tribal zone north of Roman Macedonia, that was gradually transferred in the following

decades to inland communities. In the eyes of the ancient writers, together with the central Balkans, and later south Pannonian La Tène communities, this term could conveniently include members (warriors) of the other Balkan groups, mentioned under various names. This could possibly explain why the ancient authors often mention conflicts with the *Scordisci* in association with other ethnicities, like Paeonians (App. I, 11. 3), Thracians (Liv. *Per.* 63), Dacians (Frontin. *Strat.* II, 4. 3) etc. Interestingly, at the same time when the term *Scordisci* appeared in the written sources (mid-second century BC), archaeological record from southern Pannonia, the Balkans, and Lower Danube shows a significant rise in the importance of cavalry.

The final phase of the Late Iron Age in south-eastern Pannonia and the central Balkans was marked by continuous Roman penetration, ultimately resulting in the conquest and integration of these regions into an expanding Roman Empire. As in the case of numerous other European regions, this conquest did not entail the annihilation of the native population, but their integration into the new provincial social and political context. Some of the larger Late La Tène fortified settlements became important Roman centres, like Vinkovci (*Cibalae*) and Osijek (*Mursa*) ranking even as colonies. Furthermore, there is evidence of the continuity in rural settlements from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD (Brukner 1995). Also, warrior graves from Karaburma/Rospi Ćuprija cemetery, dated to the 1st century AD, point to the incorporation of the local Scordiscan warrior elites into the Roman military apparatus, and at the same time indicate the survival of native burial customs (Dizdar *et al.* 2015; ; Egri 2016). Even the name of a collective identity, probably coined in the mid-second century BC, survived. The *civitas Scordischorum*, in the territory of Syrmia, became the administrative unit (*civitates peregrinae*) within the newly formed province of Pannonia.

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## Abstract

The Iron Age population of the south-eastern Pannonia is usually identified with the *Scordisci*, documented by the written sources. The paper deals with both the archaeological and the historical evidence on those area and period. Building on the recent critical approaches to written sources, the idea of *Scordisci* as a well-defined ethnic unit is tempered, in favour of a model of a constructed identity imposed by Greeks and Roman instead. Likewise, by taking the archaeological record into account, the earlier models imagining waves of massive migration are abandoned, in favour of more dynamic models including gradual penetration of small groups and processes of local hybridisation. According to these principles, archaeological evidence is followed and set into European context from the first appearance of La Tène culture features and creation of a hybrid La Tène / local culture in the 4th/3rd century BC till the Roman conquest of the area in the Augustan period after which the local population gradually integrated into the Roman world.

## Résumé

**Les *Scordisques* – une histoire aux marges du monde laténien.** Les populations de l'âge du Fer du sud-est de la Pannonie sont généralement identifiées aux Scordisques, peuple documenté par les sources antiques. La présente contribution prend en considération à la fois les témoignages archéologiques et historiques pour l'aire géographique et la période concernées. Pour les sources antiques, la prise en compte des approches critiques récentes permet de relativiser l'idée selon laquelle les Scordisques constitueraient une unité ethnique bien définie ; le modèle d'une identité construite, imposée par les Grecs et les Romains, est privilégié. S'agissant des données archéologiques, les modèles antérieurs imaginant des vagues de migrations massives sont abandonnés, à la faveur de modèles plus dynamiques incluant une pénétration graduelle de petits groupes ainsi que des processus d'hybridation locale. Sur ces bases, les témoignages archéologiques sont étudiés et replacés dans le contexte européen, depuis les premières manifestations de la culture de La Tène et la création d'une culture hybride, laténienne et locale, aux IV<sup>e</sup>/III<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C., jusqu'à la conquête romaine de la zone à la période augustéenne, époque à partir de laquelle les populations locales intégreront graduellement le monde romain.