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TWO IRON SWORDS FROM THE LOWER COURSE OF THE SOUTH MORAVA

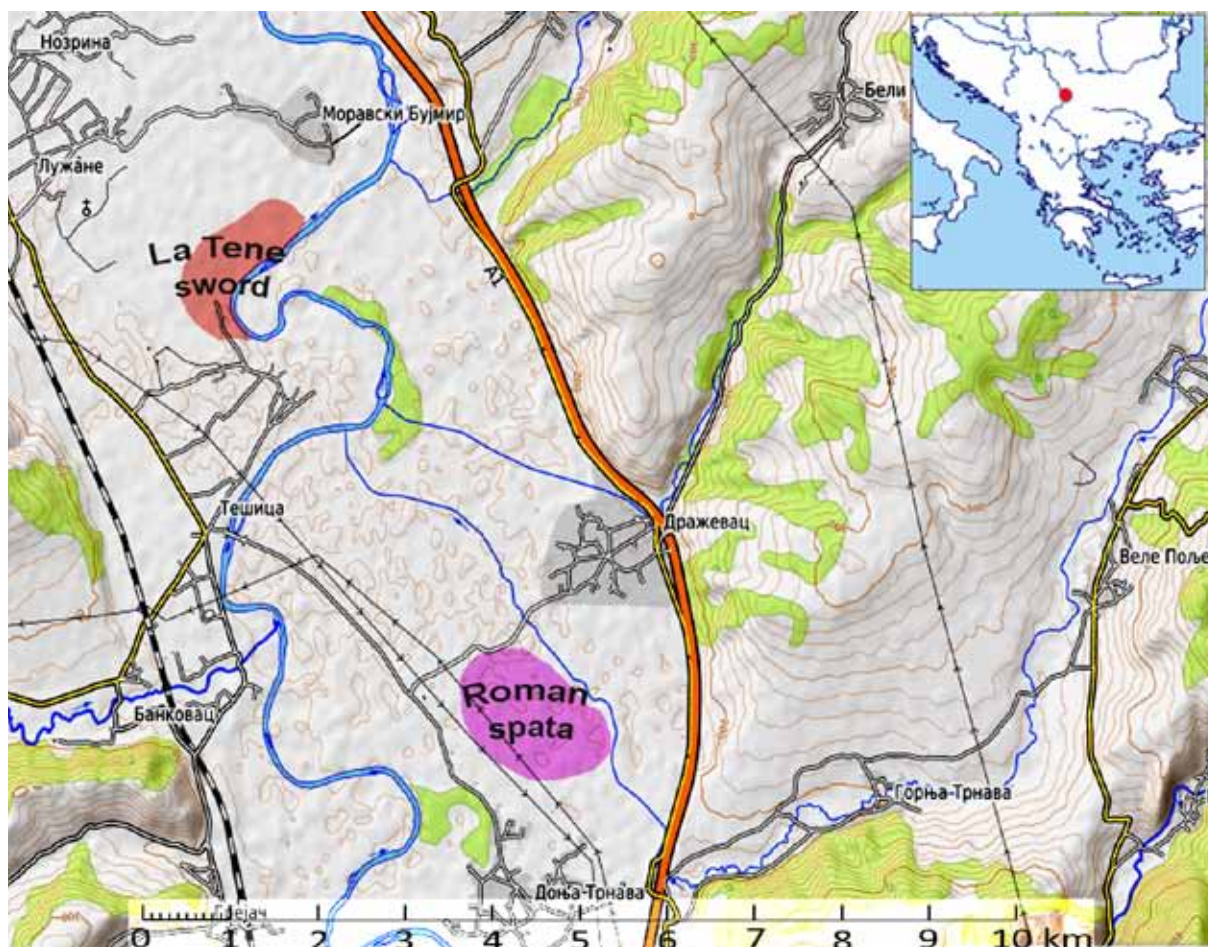
Abstract: The paper analyses two iron swords that represent chance finds from the valley plains between the present-day cities of Niš and Aleksinac, within the lower course of the South Morava river. Both examples are well preserved double-edged swords utilised during two different periods. The first sword belongs to the collection of the Hometown Museum in Aleksinac. It was discovered during gravel extraction on the left bank of the South Morava river, between the villages of Lužane and Tešica. Without a doubt, the sword represents an early Celtic type, positioned into the LT B2/C1 period, based on existing analogies, or the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC. The other sword comes from the collection of the National Museum in Niš, where it was stored as a chance find from the village of Draževac. For years, the sword has been interpreted as a Late La Tène example. An audit analysis has shown that this sword, a long-term exhibition piece of the prehistoric collection, in fact, represents a solidly preserved Roman spatha. In conclusion, several military campaigns across the territory of the Central Balkans, along with their archaeological records, are analysed, in order to provide a comparison with the Celtic campaigns towards the southern Balkans in 279 BC, and provide a possible interpretation for the uncommon location of the sword.

Keywords: LT B2/C1, spatha, military campaign, historical sources, Central Balkans.

Many local and foreign archaeologists directly associate the words Celts and La Tène of the Central Balkans with the works of Petar Popović. His initial papers, although related to the protohistorical numismatic finds from the Central Balkans, have directed his fruitful work on the subject of the protohistory of the Balkans and, therefore, towards the issues of the Celts and Scordisci. Consequently, in time, P. Popović completely affirmed himself to the research related to the protohistorical population and, besides several professional excursions, positioned himself as an authority on the subject of the Central Balkans during the final centuries BC. However, the representation of archaeological finds in the region, and the state of research of certain regions, has determined the scientific opus of the author on La Tène subjects.

Hence, only a few papers by P. Popović (1994; 1996; 2012) reflect on the early presence of Celts and finds of their material culture in the region. In his final comprehensive review from 2012, in the monograph *Central Balkans between the Greek*

and the Celtic world (Централни Балкан између грчког и келтског света), on page 46 the author notes: “Towards the end of the 4th century BC, the Celts have occupied considerable parts of the Carpathian Basin and settled in the area around the Sava and Danube rivers. Thus, Pannonia and the Danube region became a starting point for belligerent groups of Celts that soon after flooded parts of the Balkans, and invaded Macedonia, Greece, and the renowned sanctuary of Delphi in 279 BC. One of the main directions of their penetration towards the south was the Morava Valley...” Although aware that the cited lines by P. Popović might sound old-fashioned and in the manner of the cultural-historical archaeology, and that the overall problem regarding the invasion of Delphi could be easily relativised within the professional domain and categorised as a *passé* narrative, this paper will continue the cited plot of P. Popović and present another unusual Celtic find from the lower course of the South Morava river, which is chronologically positioned between 325 and 275 BC.



Map 1. Early La Tène sword and Roman spatha find-spots.

The paper will briefly present a sword from the collection of the National Museum in Niš, which has been chronologically misinterpreted into the Late La Tène period for half a century. Such an interpretation has principally been caused by the nature of publications, relying primarily on descriptions, without the accompanying documentation.

Sword from the collection of the Hometown Museum in Aleksinac

The sword from the Hometown Museum in Aleksinac represents a chance find that found its way into the museum as a gift from a private collection (Милојевић, Филиповић 2017). It was discovered in the course of the mechanical extraction of gravel from the banks of the South Morava river, in the administrative municipality of Aleksinac, in the area between the villages of Lužane and Tešica

(Map 1).¹ The area includes an alluvial plain on the southern fringe of the Aleksinac Basin, which encompasses the space² between the left bank of the South Morava river and the north-eastern slopes of the Jastrebac mountain. The valley between the villages of Lužane and Tešica is covered with fertile plough land with numerous marks of an old riverbed, while the wider area along the riverbank is marshy and prone to flooding during the rainy months. Such characteristics of terrain indicate the fleeting nature of the South Morava watercourse, which was subject to frequent flooding and waterbed shifts in this area. The information that the sword was found in the river indicates the possibility that it might, in fact, originate from a remote location, although its solid state of preservation does not indicate such a case.

¹ The riparian area of these villages has a long tradition of intensive exploitation of gravel and sand for the construction purposes (Костић 1969: 488).

² The alluvial plain within the aforementioned area measures up to 4 km wide, with an average altitude of 167 m.

The degree of preservation of the sword during its discovery remains unknown, due to the fact that it came to the Museum cleaned and coated with a layer of paraffin. There is no major damage on the sword, save for several indentations on the blade, which could easily represent signs of usage. The sword is characterised by a short tang, rectangular in cross-section, which ends with a small spherical pommel. The transition from tang to the blade is executed through a concave shoulder. The blade, which is rhomboid in cross-section, gradually narrows and thins, ending in a sharp point. The total length of the sword is 63.1 cm, comprising the blade with the shoulder at 50.6 cm long, the tang at 10.7 cm long, and the pommel at 1.8 cm long. The weight of the sword is 205.1 g. (Fig. 1).

Based on its characteristics, the sword from the Hometown Museum in Aleksinac is attributed to the Early La Tène short-sword with concave shoulder and a sharp point. The spherical pommel on this type of sword represents a secondary characteristic, which strengthens its stylistic and typological determination within the Early La Tène swords from the territory of Central Europe. Swords with a concave shoulder and pointed blade are common for the territory of the Pannonian Basin,³ while examples with a spherical pommel occur in a wider area, such as examples from Požarevac (Božić 1981: T. 6/5), Grave 1 in Unterpemstätten-Zettling (Guštin, Kavur 2015: Pl. 1/1), Grave 9 from Srednica (Lubšina Tušek, Kavur 2009: fig. 5), a chance find from Kosd (Szabó, Petres 1992: 100, cat. no. 67, Pl. 70), Grave 7 from Iškovac (Szabó, Petres 1992: 105-106, cat. no. 91, Pl. 91), a disturbed grave from Formin (Szabó, Petres 1992: 112, cat. no. 119, Pl. 115/2), a disturbed grave from Šumanovci (Szabó, Petres 1992: 116-117, cat. no. 138, Pl. 124) or Grave 6 from the Monte Bibeles necropolis (Vitali 2003: Tav. 256, tombe 66, 266; Lejars 2008: 193, tombe 66). Interestingly, a sword with similar characteristics is possibly represented on a fresco from the famous Thracian tomb at Sveshtari in Bulgaria (Anastassov 2008). Similar swords with a spherical pommel modelled as a mask could be chronologically younger,⁴ and most likely represent an evolutive variant of the basic

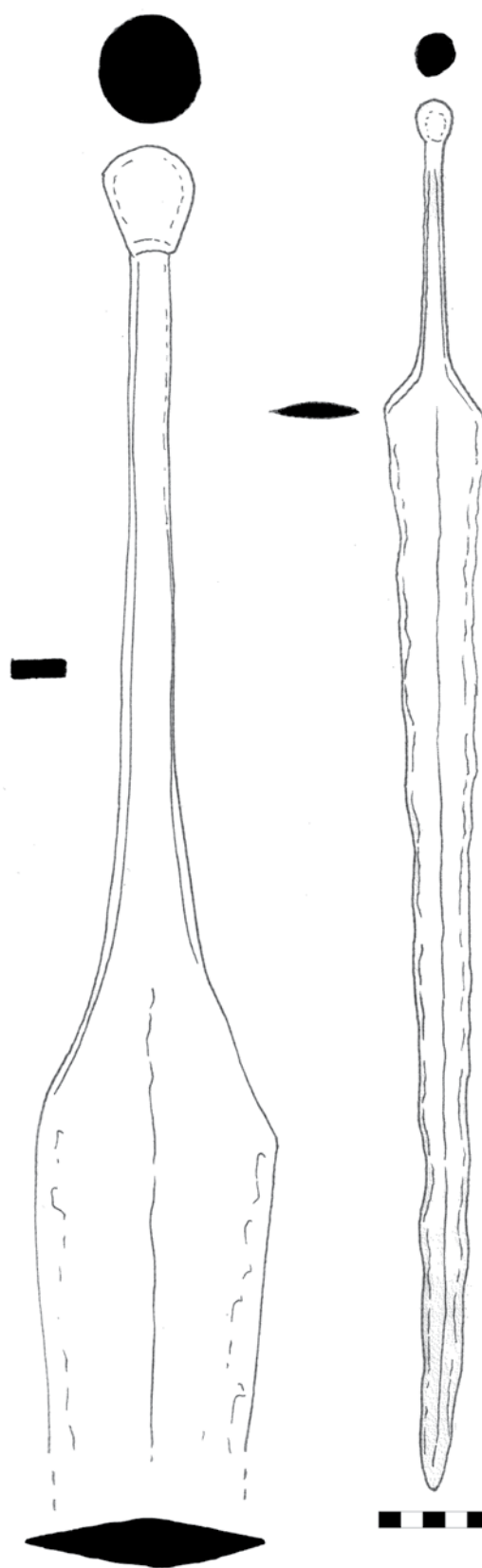


Fig. 1. Early La Tène short-sword from the South Morava river (drawing: A. Kapuran).

³ Detailed in Drnić 2020b: 98 and further, with complete earlier literature.

⁴ Detailed in Drnić 2015: 23 and further, with complete earlier literature.

type. According to the stylistic and typological characteristics, the sword from the South Morava river belongs to Early/Middle La Tène swords of the LT B2/ LT C1 phases, or the Belgrade 1 phase, according to D. Božič (Božič 1981: 324 and further). In general, such swords correspond to those examples recorded together with decorated scabbards made of iron sheets and with a heart-shaped chape, known as the Hatvan-Boldog type, one of the four types of the Kosd systematisation and classification according to E. Petres and M. Szabó (Petres, Szabó 1985; Petres, Szabó 1992). Based on the aforementioned analogies, the sword from the South Morava river could be attributed to the LT B2 period or the very beginning of the LT C1 period, meaning the period between the final quarter of the 4th and the first quarter of the 3rd century BC. The fact that no sites from the Early La Tène period have been registered between the villages of Lužane and Tešica, prevents us from connecting the sword with a certain location in the vicinity of the find spot. It is peculiar to highlight that at the end of the 19th century, Đoka Jovanović recorded the existence of a mound in the area of the Lužane and Tešica villages (Јовановић 1892: 81), although from the perspective of contemporary research such data is disputable, considering that no mounds have been recorded in this area. On the other hand, the information provided by Đ. Jovanović should not be easily dismissed as several mounds have been registered in the wider area of the plain on the left bank of the South Morava river, such as those in the nearby Moravac (Гарашанин, Гарашанин 1951: 168; Вучковић-Тодоровић, Тодоровић 1959) and Nozrina (Милојевић, Трајковић-Филиповић 2017: 136-138), of which several have been archaeologically excavated. The small-scale excavations of those mounds determined their attribution to Roman and medieval periods (Васић 1910: 273; Јовановић 1984: 144), with sporadic prehistoric finds (Вучковић-Тодоровић, Тодоровић 1959: 291-292).

Sites on which Late Iron Age material was recorded in the wider area of Lužane and Tešica are Šanac in Gornja Trnava (Тодоровић 1968: 23) (approximately 7 km southeast of the find location of the La Tène sword), Carina in Vakup (Милојевић, Трајковић Филиповић 2017) (10 km to the north), Drum in Sečanica (11 km to the

south),⁵ Velika Česma in Vrtište (Стојић, Јоцић 2006: 67) (12 km to the south), Vrečić Backyard in Rutevac (Булатовић, Филиповић 2011: 32, T.1/7-12), Gorča in Niš (Дејановић (ур.) 1971: 56) (20 km to the southeast), Liljače near the village of Vovan (Милојевић 2017), Darov in Pasi Poljana (Тодоровић 1974: 185; Ђурић 1985: 22; Стојић, Јоцић 2006: 200; Милановић 2011: 164) (22 km to the south) and Medijana in Brzi Brod (Дејановић (ур.) 1971: 55) (24 km to the southeast).

Sword from the prehistoric collection of the National Museum in Niš

The sword from the prehistoric collection of the National Museum in Niš also represents a chance find, which was acquired in 1956 as a gift from the finder himself. The sword was found in a private field within the valley on the right bank of the South Morava river, opposite the previously presented example from the vicinity of the Tešica and Lužane villages. More precisely, the find location is associated with a particular field in the village of Draževac, in an area marked as Ograde (Map 1). The aforementioned area measures approximately 1 km² within the alluvial plain of the Draževac and Donja Trnava villages, on the southern fringe of the Aleksinac Basin. The Draževac plain encompasses a wide valley extension positioned between the course of the South Morava river and the slopes of the Ozren and Devica mountains. The watercourses of Velepolska and Belobrška rivers, which flow into the South Morava river, were formed through the mentioned mountain massifs. Their valleys, together with the nearby Toponička river represent important natural connections with the mountainous hinterland of Moravski Golak. However, the most important natural communication in the area is the South Morava Valley itself, which merges with the Nišava Valley approximately 10 km to the south, forming one of the most important communication hubs of the Central Balkans.

The exact conditions of the find remain unknown and the notes of Natalija Đurić indicate that the sword was possibly discovered within a

⁵ The site of Drum is known from archaeological records from surveys in 1982, conducted by the National Museum in Niš.

ploughed mound.⁶ However, the source of that information remains unknown considering that the sword ended up in the museum years before the respective curator was employed. On the other hand, the data regarding the existence of mounds in the Draževac region is not surprising, considering that the aforementioned antique-period mounds were recorded on the other bank of the South Morava river. Besides the sword, the only known archaeological finds from the area of Ograde are connected to the Early Iron Age (Милојевић, Трајковић-Филиповић 2017: 103).

The sword is 87.8 cm long with a uniform width of parallel edges (5.1 cm), which only narrow within the final 5 cm of the blade (Fig. 2). The tang is formed as a triangular thorn (length: 14 cm; width 0.8-1.9 cm), with a rectangular cross-section (1 cm thick), which emerges from a completely flat shoulder and ends in a spike. The blade is rhomboid in cross-section with two longitudinal grooved bands running parallel to edges (width 1.2 cm). The weight of the swords is 622.3 g (Fig. 2).

During the acquisition in 1965, the sword was listed in the inventory book of the Antique Department under number R/396 and, 15 years later, during the preparation of the exhibition *Prehistoric Cultures of the Morava Region and Eastern Serbia* (Праисторијске културе Поморавља и источне Србије), it was transferred to the Prehistoric Collection and a new inventory number PR/3456 was assigned. Within the catalogue of the exhibition, the sword was published without either a drawing or photo, as an *Iron Sword of the La Tène Type* (Дејановић (ур.) 1971: 56). Meanwhile, the reanalysis of the sword with insight from contemporary literature relevant for La Tène and antique weaponry determined that the type of sword is not represented during the Late Iron Age and that the shape and the manner of production correspond to examples of Roman *spathae* represented throughout the empire between the 2nd and the 4th century AD. (Bishop, Coulston 1993: 126-135, fig. 86-87). Similar misinterpretations of such swords are known from the literature (Radman-Livaja, Drnić 2016), especially from the time when archaeology did not adequately master the stylistic and typological characteristics and classifications of iron



⁶ АНМН, Notes from the 1981-1982 survey of the highway route.

Fig. 2. Roman spatha from Draževac (drawing: A. Kapuran).

objects, as the focus of the study of material culture was on the non-ferrous and precious metals, as well as their alloys. One of the most similar examples regarding both the dimensions and typology is the *spatha* from the Belgrade City Museum, dated from the end of the 3rd to the first half of the 4th century AD (Бујовић 2000/2001: 47). Due to the lack of context and detailed conditions of the find, it seems inappropriate to discuss a more precise chronology of such finds. Another example, possibly even more similar to our example, judging by the dimensions, is the recently published *spatha* with marks of a workshop and a military unit from Ratari near Obrenovac (Црнобрња, Ратковић 2019), which bears the mark of a weaponry workshop from the area of antique Naissus (Црнобрња, Ратковић 2019, 258-259).

Several antique-period sites are known from the surroundings of Draževac, while certain authors locate the Roman *Gramrianae* or *mutatio Rariana* within the area of the village (Каниц 1989: 134). Numismatic finds from the collection of the Hometown Museum in Aleksinac indicate that a late antique site was located in the vicinity of the village, at the Mamutovac location. Approximately 5 km from Draževac, late antique sites have been registered in the Bukovik area near Beli Breg, Mitovo Branište near Donja Trnava, and the sites of Kusi Bres and Po Strani are known from the village of Gornja Trnava (Милојевић, Трајковић-Филиповић 2017: 53, 79, 100). Felix Kanitz described the remains of antique *Gramrianae* or *Rariana* in the place of the former Turkish guard near Draževac (Каниц 1989: 134), which is highlighted as the final settlement on the *Via Militaris* Road before Naissus. The antique *Gramrianae* is not precisely located, yet according to antique itineraries, the station was positioned approximately 12 miles (18 km) (*Tabula Peutingeriana*) or 13 miles (19 km) (*Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum*) north of Naissus, which indeed corresponds to the present distance between Niš and Draževac.⁷ The topographic position of Draževac tends to favour such an interpretation.

The find of the late antique *spatha* from Draževac could, perchance, be connected with military campaigns correlated with the Barbarian invasions

during the final quarter of the 4th century AD. The archaeological record of turbulent circumstances is illustrated by hoards of coins deposited in the wider area of Niš. The first major crisis was caused by the Gothic War (376-382 AD), illustrated by the large hoard from Maćedonce near Medveđa,⁸ with the series ending with pieces coined between 375 and 378 AD (Јанковић-Михалцић 2005: 54). A similar reason was most likely behind the deposition of two hoards from the Aleksinac Basin, whose series end with Gratian and Valens coinages (364-375 AD) (Рашковић 1997: 110-111).

This paper will not deal with the find of the late antique *spatha*, and the precise analyses and detailed publication is left to colleagues dealing with younger periods. However, it is important that we have provided the revision of this supposedly La Tène sword from the prehistoric collection of the National Museum in Niš and concluded that it does not represent a weapon associated with the Late La Tène period.

Discussion and concluding remarks

We return now to the Early La Tène sword and the historical setting of the territory in which it was found, as well as the facts regarding the distribution of Early La Tène weaponry in the Central Balkans during well-defined chronological scopes. In that context, a sentence from P. Popović's monograph *Central Balkans between the Greek and the Celtic world* (Централни Балкан између грчког и келтског света) is particularly important (2012: 48): *The Celtic invasion of Greece is well-known from antique written sources, yet those events did not provide considerable archaeological traces, which represents an additional problem for scholars...*

The approximate chronological span of the sword between 325 and 275 BC makes it logical to connect it with the Celtic penetration towards the south of the Balkans, known from historical sources (Papazoglu 1969: 210-215). The words of P. Popović on the lack of archaeological traces correlated with the aforementioned invasion, certainly

⁷ The aerial distance between Draževac and Aleksinac is approximately 12 km and between Draževac and Niš approximately 17 km (Петровић 2007: 74).

⁸ The hoard is kept in the National Museum in Niš and contains 3,971 Roman bronze coins from the 4th century AD, with the chronological span between Constantine and Gratian.

⁹ Highlighted by authors.

come from decades of experience and insight into the sites and archaeological material in the Central Balkans. On the other hand, numerous cases indicate that the material remains do not reflect historical events and, therefore, historical sources represent the only testimony of such military campaigns. Due to the lack of archaeological material, certain younger authors have even introduced the idea that the invasion of Macedonia and Delphi represents an exaggerated result of Hellenistic political propaganda in historical sources, and that those should rather be observed as small-scale raids during the turbulent political events following the death of Alexander the Great (e.g., Džino 2007: 55). The greatest uncertainties were supported by the fact that the lack of archaeological material in the Serbian Danube region from the period preceding the Celtic invasion is in line with the idea of small-scale raids, although several papers have been recently published that provide a specific treatment of the appearance of La Tène material culture in graves from the end of the 4th and the first half of the 3rd century BC, and the general idea of its occurrence in the Central Balkans and the Danube region (Majnarić Pandžić 1995; Popović 1996; Blečić Kavur, Kavur 2010; Ljuština 2013; Jovanović 2014; Lazić 2017; Jovanović 2018; Mihajlović 2019; Drnić 2020a).

Before attempting to provide answers to some of the raised questions, a short overview of natural communications within the territorial scope of this paper will be provided. Certainly, the Central Balkans had the best connections with the Pannonian Plain, as the northern extent is widely open to the Danube and Sava valleys, originating in Central Europe, as well as rivers on the northern borders of the Balkans, such as the Drava or Tisza (Цвијић 2000a: 26). However, although open to the north, the communication lines of the Central Balkans became more dispersed in the south and concentrated on only a few primary roads. Two of them are the most important natural routes: *Morava - Vardar* and *Morava - Nišava - Isker - Marica* (*Via Militaris*) (Filipović 2018: fig 1). Cvijić believed that the *Morava - Vardar* route was more traversable (Цвијић 2000a: 27), which fits into our potential route of Celtic penetration towards the south, although Cvijić also mentioned that the *Via Militaris* was of greater importance (Цвијић 2000b: 100). K. Jireček, the famous Czech histo-

rian and Balkanologist, on the other hand, considered the *Via Militaris* to be the main communication route of the Balkans (Jireček 1957: 73). All of the primary trans-Balkan routes had their crossroads, but the present-day area of Niš is certainly the most important and fundamentally strategic crossroad of the Central Balkans, and the discussed sword was recovered not more than a several-hour-walk from the crossroad. Likewise, according to Cvijić, a series of large rifts in a meridian direction, with a length of more than 100 km, occur from Golubac on the right bank of the Danube river to the present-day city of Paraćin. In that direction, the massifs of Homolje, the Beljanica mountain, and the Kučaj mountain separate the Great Morava and Mlava valleys from the Timok Basin.¹⁰ Still, it is apparent that the valleys of the Crnica and Grza rivers and Čestobrodica with the Stolice Pass are the most easily accessible natural communication from the Morava Valley towards the Timok Basin, regarding the territory south of the Danube river. This lateral road, first towards the east after the Danube crossing, is important due to the fact that the earliest find that could be connected with the Celtic population was recorded on its route - a dragon head fibula from Banjska Stena, which is chronologically attributed to LT B1 period (Сладић 2003). It is important to highlight the opinion of A. Rustoiu (2012: 361) on possible contacts of armed groups involved in the crossing of territories controlled by other communities. During such trespasses, gifts were exchanged, including horses with harnesses, luxury wares, jewellery, and dress or garment accessories. Some of the La Tène artefacts found in indigenous contexts in the southern Carpathian Basin might have been distributed toward the south. Peculiar is the fact that both the fibula and the sword were recorded within important communications that connect the Central Balkans with the south and east.

The highlighted lack of material remains from the end of the 4th and the first half of the 3rd century BC has guided our research towards the analysis of archaeological material from two historically confirmed military campaigns in the Balkans, although both a millennium and a half later than the presumed Celtic penetration towards the south. We

¹⁰ On the potential prehistoric Great Morava-Timok route refer to Filipović, Mladenović, Vučković 2019 and Filipović, Mladenović 2019.

consider that a sufficient number of papers over the last decade minutely analysed the origin and chronology of finds related to La Tène period burials within the Danube region and that the repetition of the *circulus vitiosus* would not contribute to a more precise interpretation of our sword. Therefore, the possible interpretation will be reached through an indirect path of analogies.

Since the Balkans has always been a common route for military campaigns, we have decided to analyse the quality and quantity of material remains of those campaigns that are well documented in historical sources. The analysis includes two large-scale and short-lived military expeditions, the Third Crusade and the movement of an army from Belgrade to Sofia in 1189, and the well-known Mongolian Invasion in the Balkans in 1242.

Although armies of the First and Second Crusade used the *Via Militaris* as one of the roads towards Constantinople, historical sources provide most data on the crusaders passing through the area during the conquest of the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (Matković 1878: 118-144; Фејић 1996; Loud 2010; Коматина 2015; Freed 2016: 490-503; Узелац 2018). Historical sources testify that Fredericks' army numbered approximately 30,000 soldiers and that the trip from Braničevo to Niš lasted a total of 16 days (Узелац 2018: 151-160), while previous armies made the journey in half the time (Узелац 2018: 56, 117). Almost all of the historical sources, of which some were written by participants in the campaign, inform us of the misfortune of crusaders and pilgrims during the journey, primarily due to conflicts regarding food and supplies with the local population, but also due to raids by the domestic population in the numerous forests and swamps of the Central Balkans. (Узелац 2011: 100-102; Коматина 2015: 77). Of particular importance is the information from *Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris* that "the bodies of almost all of the pilgrims that were buried along the road were dug-up and removed from their graves by Bulgarians" (Узелац 2018: 158-159). From those lines, we can assume that the soldiers and pilgrims that were killed or died on the road were buried at the site and that burial in the local cemetery was not an option in those cases. Therefore, a rational archaeological question arises; how many of those graves or even chance finds of Crusade Era

weapons and military equipment of western provenance, which could confirm the historical sources, have been recorded on the *Via Militaris* so far? As far as we are aware, no such finds have been recorded from Braničevo to Pirot. By comparing such a state with the issue of the Celtic invasion in 279 BC, we could assume that the numbers of soldiers and pilgrims were blown out of proportion and that the Crusades might have been of a smaller scale. Indeed, the only crusader burial in the Central Balkans is recorded in Grave XII from Mound II at the site of Kunovo-Čuki near Kočani, in present-day Macedonia (Џидрова 2005). Besides the antique and New Era burials, a grave of a crusader with a pair of spurs and a bronze ring dated to the Third Crusade was recorded within the Iron Age mound (Џидрова 2005). Without engaging the issue of medieval roads and other routes of the crusade,¹¹ it seems this this single grave cannot solely confirm the dramatic events regarding the destiny of a vast army of tens of thousands of soldiers that crossed the Central Balkans on their way towards the east. On the other hand, the grave could confirm the historical source regarding lone burials along the road.

The Mongolian invasion across the Balkans represents a suitable comparable event for several different reasons, in contrast to the Third Crusade. This invasion came from the southwest and did not fully utilise the Morava-Vardar communication. It was an utterly violent event and executed by a population whose material culture differs from the concurrent European material culture in all parameters. Therefore, one would expect that certain objects or even graves are clearly recognised within the dominant material culture of the 13th century AD. Following the devastation of Hungary in 1241, the Mongols pursued King Béla to the Adriatic, and in the early spring of 1242, one of the units went further south towards present-day Montenegro, where it laid waste to several coastal towns and executed the local population (Узелац 2015: 50; Sophoulis 2015). Thereafter, most likely by using the only diagonal trans-Balkan and shortest and fastest road from the Lower Danube and Oltenia towards the Mediterranean – the *Lissus-Naissus-Ratiaria (Archar)* road (Петровић 2007:

¹¹ Some of the Crusade armies utilised the well-known *Via Egnatia*, which crossed the Balkans on an east-west axis, from Constantinople to Thessaloniki, Durrës and the Adriatic.

87), the Mongols advanced towards the Lower Danube and, at one point, certainly had to pass along parts of the Morava-Vardar communication and the *Via Militaris* Road. The precise route of such an advance has not been archaeologically confirmed, considering that archaeological evidence is still lacking within the aforementioned route. Traces of Mongolian fires and devastation have been registered in Hungary, as burnt houses, numerous hoards of metal artefacts as well as dozens of deceased throughout the burnt village with numerous injuries and severed heads have been recorded in the village of Orosháza-Bónum (Gyucha, Lee, Rózsa 2019). The deceased were not buried and all age categories were represented (Gyucha, Lee, Rózsa 2019: 1048-1053). Similarly, remains of large fires and the destruction of urban architecture, burials with arrow points, severed extremities, and dislocated deceased covered with burnt parts of the church have all been recorded in Svač, in present-day Montenegro (Zagarčanin 2017: 190-197). Unfortunately, except for Svač, archaeological traces of the Mongolian advance in the hinterlands of the Balkans are completely missing (Радичевич 2020). Previously proposed connections between the destruction layers of Ras and Studenica Monastery with the Mongolian invasion have not yet been confirmed (Радичевич 2020: 241). Although such an invasion represented a swift operation, it seems reasonable to assume that archaeological traces would have been discovered on their route, although there is a possibility that the archaeological material remains uninterpreted within museum storage facilities.

Particularly interesting archaeological records on Roman military campaigns during the Marcomannic Wars have been recorded within the Middle Danube region. More than 20 temporary military camps have been registered in the territories north of the Danube river, of which most have been archaeologically researched (Hüssen *et al.* 2020). Besides scarce archaeological finds, numismatic finds and examples of weapons and military equipment stand out, while structures are represented solely by V-shaped trenches and hearths in thin cultural layers (Hüssen *et al.* 2020: 24-29). On the other hand, a total of 10 temporary military camps and a small necropolis with six burials of Roman soldiers has been recorded near the fort of Iža (Hüssen *et al.* 2020: 27-29). The

Roman soldiers died in hostile territory, where they were buried as well. Such burials represent a necessity due to technical reasons and the burial of deceased individuals in “hostile” territory can be considered a common military practise, as is the case with previously analysed crusaders or numerous other cases from the war history of the 20th century.¹²

The presented events serve as examples of reliably confirmed large-scale military campaigns that left significantly fewer archaeological traces than expected, based on the analyses of various historical sources. The reason for the lack of results regarding the quest for archaeological material from the short-term conflicts or military campaigns across the mentioned territory, confirmed by historical sources, should be sought through the prism of the relationship between the civilians and soldiers and material goods during wartime. Primarily, campaigns and wars reflect a state of constant turmoil and insecurity during which civilians protect their material goods through relocation or hiding. From a military point of view, one of the basic defensive strategies is to preserve weaponry, equipment, and other logistics necessary for life sustain, while on the other hand, at the core of offensive tactics is the need to capture the same resources in a functional state (Стокић 1871; Klauzevic 1951; Sun Cu 2009). During wars, weaponry becomes a scarce and needed commodity, resulting in a constant rise in prices, providing a lucrative environment for war profiteers or even individuals that do not hesitate to desecrate graves containing potential goods such as weapons, as seen in the example of the Bulgarian thieves mentioned in *Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris* (Узелац 2018: 158-159). The desecration of graves of adversaries could, likewise, have been connected with the perception of the local population towards the conquerors, who not only caused all the problems, but often represented a population with a different culture, religion, tradition, and language, which, together, could have provided an

¹² German military cemetery near Sologubovka in Russia is a fine example of such practice. It holds bodies of more than 30.000 German soldiers, victims of the Eastern Front during the Second World War (1941-1944). Similar example is the Zeitenlik Cemetery in Thessaloniki, which hosts 20.000 graves of Serbian, French, Italian, English and Russian soldiers, victims of the breach of Salonica Front during the First World War.

“excuse” for such a moral deterioration within the local populations.

We can conclude that most military doctrines consider weaponry to be one of the most important resources, wanted by both warring parties, with the goal to preserve their own and take over the opponent’s arsenal. It is a fact that equipment and weaponry with specifications favoured by the opponent would not be easily accepted, mostly due to a lack of training and “sentimental” issues. Therefore, it is only logical to presume that following short-term campaigns, most of the seized arsenal would be either melted down or adjusted to the victors’ personal needs and taste, therefore losing its original characteristics.

With this approach, it has primarily been attempted to explain the low representation of the material culture of conquerors during invasions within hostile or transit territories. Since weaponry and military equipment represent a basic form for the distinction of the material culture of invading armies, their scarce representation within the archaeological material should not come as any surprise, especially in the context of short-term and unsuccessful campaigns, such as the Celtic penetration towards the southern Balkans and the raid of Delphi in 279 BC. The only relevant locations in which weaponry could be expected are the raiders’ graves in hostile territory. However, even those burials, and especially those with lavish grave goods, have probably often been desecrated and raided by native populations, due to both sentimental reasons and potential profit. Hence, it can be assumed that the greatest chance of preservation was in those cases when the graves were located in highly respected locations, such as the burial of a crusader within the Iron Age mound at the site of Kunovo-Čuki near Kočane.¹³ Considering that during the 19th century several mounds were recorded near the location in which our Early La Tène sword was found (Јовановић 1892), a similar interpretation could be possible. Likewise, more straightforward presumptions are possible; that the sword ended up in river deposits by pure chance, as the warrior dropped it directly into the river during the crossing.

translation: Ognjen Mladenović

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¹³ On the Slavic respect towards mounds during the medieval period refer to Веселичић 2008.

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