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NEW FINDS OF PESCHIERA FIBULAE IN THE IRON GATES REGION

Abstract: Throughout his successful career, Petar Popović dedicated more than 10 years to the research of the Bronze and Iron Age settlements and necropolises in the Iron Gates region. His extensive knowledge and field experience, as well as long-lasting friendships with colleagues from the National Museum in Belgrade, have all contributed to the greater degree of research at the site of Konopište in Mala Vrbica near Kladovo. The renewed excavations at the site were initiated by A. Đorđević, curator of the National Museum in Belgrade, back in 2015. The excavations resulted in new finds of the so-called violin-bow fibulae (Violinbogenfibeln), or the Peschiera type of fibulae, which represent a prominent piece of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age attire. New insight into the funeral ritual and the double-natured function of Peschiera fibulae are the focus of this paper.

Keywords: Danube, Bronze Age, Mala Vrbica-Konopište, Urnenfelder, Gava, violin fibulae, Peschiera fibulae.

The first mentions of the sites of Livade and Konopište in Mala Vrbica date to the beginning of the 20th century, in the study on Žuto Brdo culture by M. M. Vasić, who mentioned them as the site of Kurvingrad (Васић 1912) (Fig. 1a, 1b). In the course of the Iron Gates II rescue archaeological excavations, it was confirmed that the toponym Kurvingrad refers to three separate sites. The prehistoric necropolises at the site of Konopište was significantly devastated by the construction of a large object in Antiquity, during the 2nd and 3rd century AD (Fig. 1c). The cultural stratigraphy at the site indicates the importance of the location of Konopište throughout the prehistoric, antique and medieval periods, as it most likely represented a strategic position for reaching the left bank of the Danube. The island of *Šimian*, which enabled the route across the Danube during high-water and the formation of ice, is located between the village of Mala Vrbica on the right and the village of *Šimian* on the left bank of the Danube, in present-day Romania. There is also a possibility that during Antiquity, some smaller dock was located downstream of the location, in the area of Kurvin grad.

Besides Mirjana Vukmanović, the director of excavations and curator from the National

Museum in Belgrade, Petar Popović from the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade participated in the rescue and systematic archaeological excavations that were conducted within several campaigns between 1980 and 1988. A total of 1,000 m² were excavated together with the renewed excavations in 2015. Between 1980 and 1988, prehistoric necropolises with cremated deceased buried in flat graves (*Urnenfelder*) and a medieval necropolis with inhumed deceased were recorded. The prehistoric necropolises comprise 13 graves attributed to the Encrusted Pottery Complex (Žuto Brdo-Girila Mare-Cirna), 19 graves attributed to the Gava Channelled Pottery complex (Hinova-Mala Vrbica-Balta Verde) and 4 graves attributed to the Late Iron Age (Popović, Vukmanović, Radojčić 1990; Popović 1998; Ђорђевић 2019). Of 32 graves and enclosed features recorded during the 1980s, only 3 graves and one cenotaph have been published (Вукмановић 1983; Popović 1998; Ђорђевић 2019). Additionally, 4 graves and one hoard of bronze objects were recorded during the 2015 excavations directed by A. Đorđević (Ђорђевић 2019; Đorđević, *forthcoming*). The focus of this paper lies in new finds of the *Peschiera* type of fibulae that originate from Grave No. 4, re-

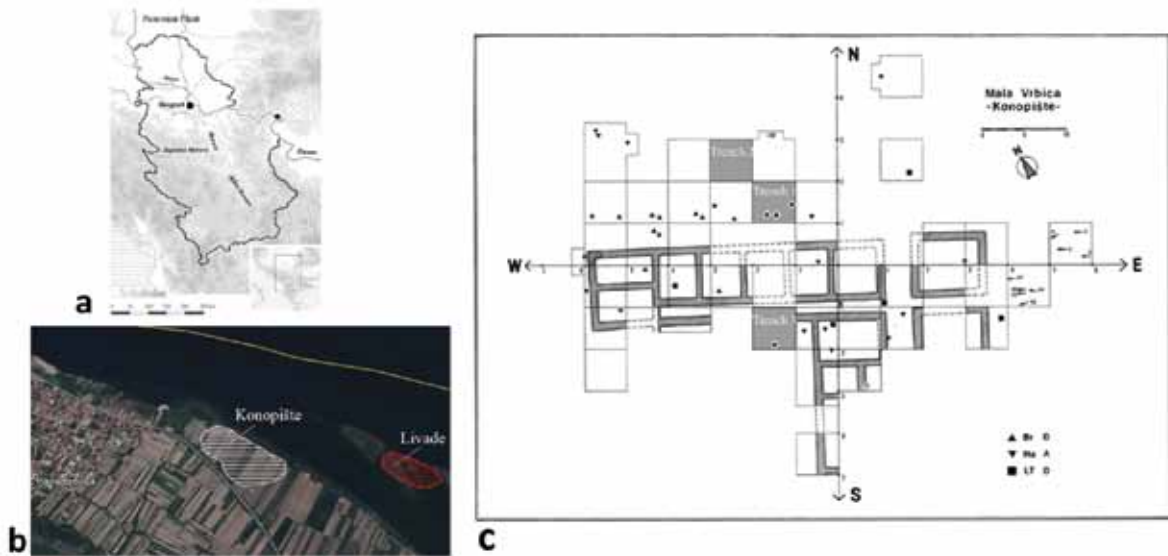


Fig. 1. a) Map of Serbia with Konopište site; b) Location of the Konopište and Livade sites; c) Konopište site.

corded during the 2015 excavation campaign at the Konopište necropolis (Fig. 2).

Besides the field excavations, the contribution by Petar Popović to the research of the necropolis is marked through the publication of one sepulchral feature from the 1988 campaigns. The feature 4/1988 was located on the northern periphery of the necropolis, and it was represented by a circular zone filled with river pebbles, with dimensions of 4 x 1.5 m, which covered a pit. The pit most likely had a sepulchral character, considering that the architecture deviates from the prevalent burial of urns into a grave pit, which was a common ritual practice on Bronze Age necropolises with cremated deceased in the Danube region (Popović 1998: 148). The eastern half of the pit was filled with pebbles in the form of a retaining wall, while the western half of the pit yielded finds of several vessels and a dog skeleton. Large biconical vessels were aligned next to the northern edge of the pit together with the remains of a pig skeleton, and a small binocular vessel, a *pyraunos* and ritually crushed bowls mixed with soil and animal bones were recorded in the central part of the pit (Popović 1998: 147-148).

Aside from the graves in which the *Peschiera* type of fibulae was recorded, Grave No. 20 should be highlighted, in which 2 decorative pins of the *Flachkegeligem* type were recorded (Vasić 2003: 64, Taf. 23/361), of which one is attributed to the *Halsrippung* variant (Vasić 2003: 64, Taf. 24/367). Likewise, Grave No. 3/1988 should be noted, in

which a bronze knife with decorated bone handle plating together with channelled pottery was also found (Ђорђевић 2019: 122, 124, Fig. 8, 9, 11). A. Đorđević accepts the common dating for the Hinova-Mala Vrbica-Balta Verde for this grave, which falls within the time frame between 1100 and 1000 BC (Jevtić, Vukmanović 1996: 290; Ђорђевић 2019: 134;).

Ever since the first graves were discovered at the site of Konopište, M. Vukmanović realised the importance of *Peschiera* type of fibulae and highlighted them in several articles. A double-looped fibula of the *Peschiera* type, decorated with parallel incisions was recorded in Grave No. 1/1980 together with a group of channelled vessels (Вукмановић 1983: 44, сл. 1).¹ Regarding the context itself, Grave No. 1/1980 represents a cenotaph, as no remains of the deceased were recorded in it, but solely unburnt femurs of a pig that lay on the bottom of the pit.² The fibula was located at the bottom of the pit, next to the largest vessel, which led A. Đorđević to the conclusion that the fibula served as a safety buckle for the textile in which the vessel was wrapped (Ђорђевић, forthcoming). R. Vasić agrees with the dating proposed by M. Vukmanović, who attributes the example from the site of Konopište to examples with triangular scheme fibulae, and dates them to the Ha A1 period (Вукмановић 1983: 46; Vasić 1999:

¹ The group consisted of five biconical vessels and two cup-ladles decorated with channels.

² The data on the context was revisited in the documentation of the National Museum by A. Đorđević.

15, Taf. 2/20), meaning the Late Bronze Age, according to R. Vasić (Vasić 1999: 16). Grave No. 2/1981 contained 8 vessels, of which three biconical ones served as urns, and the fourth contained no remains of the deceased, just one cup-ladle. A *pyraunos*, two conical bowls, of which one contained the remains of the cremated deceased and the other an unburnt pig bone, were also recorded

sewing needle with flaps. Bones of an adult together with a bronze pin of the *Flachkegeligem* type were recorded in the conical bowl. A fibula of the *Peschiera* type with one loop and a preserved twisted bow was located on the bottom level of the pit, next to the largest biconical vessel, which contained no human remains (Вукмановић, Поповић 1984: 87, сл. 59; Вукмановић 1983: 45, сл. 2;

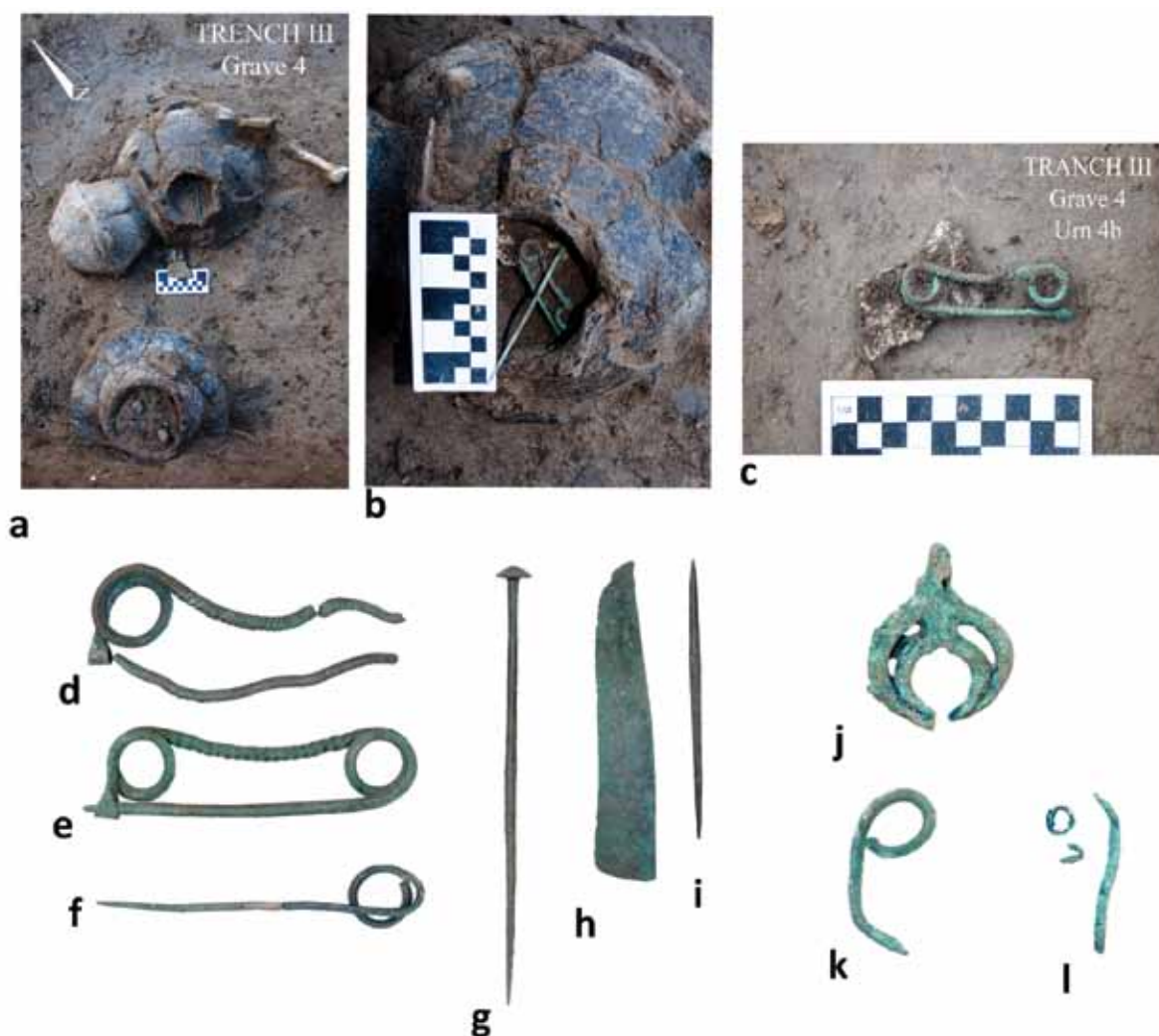


Fig. 2. Bronze finds from the grave 4/2015.

within the grave. An infant and adult were buried in urn 1, and a fragmented blade of a knife was recorded as a burial gift.³ The remains of a young adult and a bronze pin with a conical head were recorded in urn 2. Urn 4 contained the remains of an adult female, a child aged between 5 and 10, and a new-born. The grave goods consisted of a

Vasić 1999: 15, Taf. 2/15). The fibula from Grave No. 2 is dated to the same period as the example from Grave No. 1 (Vasić 1999: 16). Based on the context, it can be assumed that this fibula is also connected with the process of wrapping the textile around the vessel.

As highlighted above, renewed excavations at the Konopište necropolis were conducted in 2014/2015, when a total of four new graves were recorded (Ђорђевић 2019; Ђорђевић, *forthcom-*

³ The anthropological analyses were conducted by M. Roksandić.

ing). One of the graves was attributed to the Žuto Brdo-Girila Mare group, two graves were attributed to the Gava culture, and the urn from Grave No. 1/2015 could belong to the Late Iron Age necropolis, although the upper part of the urn is missing. Grave Nos. 1, 2, and 3 were located in the central part, and Grave No. 4/2015 was located in the southern part of the necropolis.

The context of Grave No. 2/2015, with an inventory counting a total of nine vessels, is particularly interesting for the reconstruction of the burial ritual at the Konopište necropolis. Burnt bones of the deceased were recorded both in the urn and within the pit, while all the other vessels represented grave goods. Save for the typical characteristics of the necropolises within the Danube region, the grave possesses certain analogies with the urns at the Szeremle necropolis (Bóna 1975, Taf. 255). Grave No. 3/2015 is represented with two biconical channelled vessels, of which the smaller one served as an urn, three so-called turban dishes (bowls), and one cup-ladle. Besides the bones of the cremated deceased, a decorative pin of the *Flachkegeligem* type (Vasić 2003: 64) and a sharpening stone were also recorded, while the larger biconical vessel contained a cup-ladle with a missing handle (Đorđević, *forthcoming*).

The most important finds for the subject of this paper are those that originate from Grave No. 4/2015, comprised of three biconical channelled vessels, of which two served as urns, one bowl on a high conical foot, one channelled so-called turban dish (bowl), a small beaker and one cup-ladle with a channelled handle (Fig. 3). An adult male was buried within urn 4a,⁴ and the grave goods comprised one bronze awl with a square cross-section (Fig. 2/i), a fragmented blade of a single-edged knife (Fig. 2/h), and a fragmented pin of a looped fibula (Fig. 2/f). Judging by its dimensions, the pin with a loop would most likely belong to the *Peschiera* type. None of the bronze objects from urn 4a were burnt on the funeral pyre.

A decorative pin of the *Flachkegeligem* type (Fig. 2/b, g) and a fibula of the *Peschiera* type (Fig. 2/b, c, e) were recorded on top of the infill of urn 4b, above the cremated remains of the deceased. The pin is dated to the transition between the Ha

A1 and Ha A2 periods (Vasić 2003: 64). The first fibula from this urn was, due to corrosion, fused with a large fragment of a cranial bone (Fig. 2/c), which is uncommon for graves with cremated deceased in the Danube region. An almost identical fibula was recorded within the urn infill, below the previous one (Fig. 2/d). Partially burnt femurs of sheep and goat and a rib of an unidentified mammal were recorded next to the urn.

A cup-ladle was recorded within the biconical vessel 4c (Fig. 3/c). Besides the abovementioned bowls, a small biconical beaker filled with animal bones (Fig. 3/f), a crescent-shaped bronze pendant, and several fragments of bent bronze wire were all part of the funeral ritual (Fig. 2/j, k, l). The crescent-shaped pendant is analogous with the find from Svračkovo in Western Serbia (Zotović 1985: 42, T. X/11) and with the pin fastener from the Vršac-Majdan hoard, which is dated to the Ha A period (Рашијски 1988: 22, 27, Сл. 2/16, 17). Other fragments of bronze from the biconical beaker most likely belong to a decayed chainlet composed of small hoops made of thin wire.

As an important and typologically relevant piece of attire, the *Peschiera* fibulae are characterised by an elongated body or bow and loops with a large diameter, which is represented on examples from the Konjuša hoard, where some pieces exceed 20 cm in length (Валтровић 1890: 74-79, T. VII; Vasić 1999). R. Vasić notes that the over-emphasised dimensions do not necessarily reflect the specific status of their owners (Vasić 1999: 16).⁵ Various decorative techniques and motifs that characterised those fibulae through time did not affect their function. O. Betzler assumes that the large dimensions and the tendency to bend the bow were connected with the increase in the volume of textiles that the fibula could envelop (Beltzer 1974: 12). The initial form of those fibulae did not vary significantly over time, from the elongated forms (Konjuša) to the fibulae of the triangular scheme, which was minutely analysed by O. Dorer in his study of their genesis (Dorer 2008: 544 - 546, Abb. 3). According to his version of shape modification, it could be concluded that the fibulae from Konopište and Vajuga are similar but do not represent the type with a triangular scheme fibula, as

⁴ The anthropological analyses of the remains of the deceased recorded during the 2015 campaign were conducted by S. Stefanović.

⁵ R. Vasić supports those claims with analogies from graves of Knossos.

those are closer to the standard elongated form, resembling a “fiddle”, with two large loops.

Besides the fact that they are underrepresented on necropolises with cremated deceased in South-eastern Europe, the *Peschiera* fibulae with a twisted bow from urn 4b in Grave No. 4/2015 at the Konopište necropolis are rare finds both in the Balkans and the Apennines (Dorer 2008: Abb. 2).

The new finds from the Konopište necropolis refute K. Kilian’s claims that they were not usually worn in pairs (Killian 1985: 152, Abb. 1; Vasić 1999: 16). Likewise, according to the overall form and the shape of the foot, those examples are parallel solely to the fibula from the cenotaph at the Vajuga-Pesak necropolis and a fibula of unknown origin from Korbovo

(Вукмановић 1983: 45, сл. 2; Kilian 1985: Abb. 10/3). Some authors refer to *Peschiera* fibulae as *Schlangenfibeltype* (Doner 2008: 543), and others define them as *Wiege* fibulae, which would appear in *Urnenfelder* necropolises in Southern Pannonia several centuries later (Kilian 1985: 191). The twisted bow that tends to bend, connects the examples from the Konopište necropolis with snake-shaped fibulae that are common during the final phases of the *Urnenfelder* horizon in a slightly altered form; such is the case with the site of Doroslovo. With all of the aforementioned, the assumption proposed by K. Kilian, that the examples from Konopište and Vajuga most likely represent a local form developed on the existing interactions between Italy and Greece, seems the most plausible (Kilian 1985: 200).

In terms of chronology, M. Guma separates the Hinova-Mala Vrbica into two phases. One of the chronological references for the later phase of the group is the *Peschiera* fibulae, while the occurrence of bronze knives in graves is connected to the earlier phase (Guma 1995: 108). The fact that urn 4a of grave 4/2015 contained a blade of a bronze knife, and urn 4b two *Peschiera* fibulae, questions the proposed chronology. Considering the

funerals were simultaneous and that there are no indicators of a secondary burial within the grave, the stated chronological references are contradictory. According to the finds of *Peschiera* fibulae, grave 4/2015 corresponds to the later phase of the Hinova-Mala Vrbica group, dated to the Ha A2-Ha B1, meaning the second half of the 11th and the first half of the 10th century BC (Guma 1995: 109).

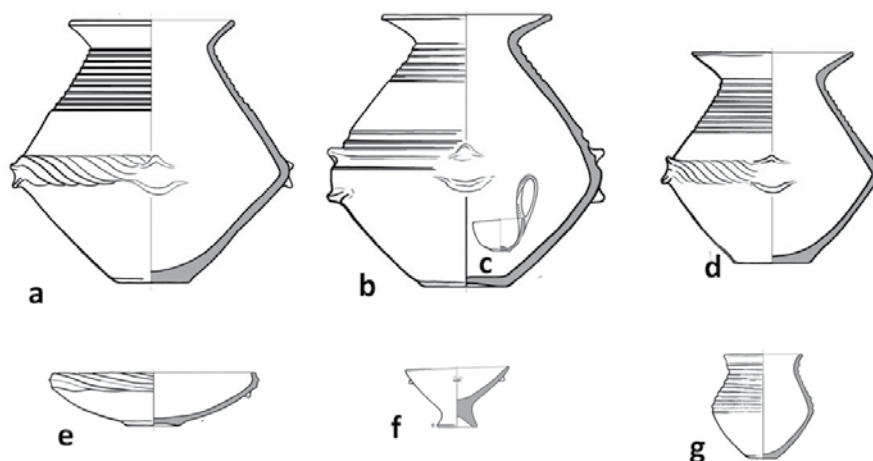


Fig. 3. Konopište necropolis, grave 4/2015, pottery finds.

To reconstruct the Bronze Age burial ritual at the site of Konopište, several characteristics of the context of Grave No. 4/2015 should be taken into consideration. Besides the precisely determined position of the *Peschiera* fibulae within urn 4b, the taphonomy of the remains of the female deceased buried within the urn should be examined as well. In the context of the Bronze Age, there are examples where the remains of the deceased were carefully selected from the funeral pyre and often purified with water. On the other hand, some examples indicate that the remains laid in the urns were following the anatomical position of the body, meaning that the extremities were deposited on the bottom, thorax bones above them, and cranial bones on top. In such cases, the urn served as a medium that simulated the return of the deceased into its primordial form, a symbolic reincarnation (Rebau-Salsbury 2010: 67). Such funeral practice can be observed at the Late Bronze Age necropolis of Cottbus (Brandenburg, Germany), where almost all of the body parts of the cremated deceased are deposited within urns, following the anatomical articulation (Cherzo-Roman, Williams 2014: 243). Considering the remains of the deceased from urn 4b at the site of Konopište could not be separated by

anthropologists and that there were no conditions to recover the remains in layers (Миладиновић-Радмиловић 2009: 11), our assumptions on the abovementioned ritual practice remains open for the time being. However, the fibula merged with the large fragment of cranial bone within the very top of the urn remains the most intriguing find.

The primary function of *Peschiera* fibulae was as a buckle for Late Bronze Age clothing, although a peculiar occurrence was recorded within the ritual practice at the site of Konopište, based on the detailed analyses of archaeological materials and documentation from previous excavations. Besides the two mentioned fibulae from urn 4b of Grave No. 4/2015, other examples of *Peschiera* fibulae were recorded in positions that indicated that they served to secure the textiles that sealed the mouth of biconical vessels without the remains of any deceased. Those were exclusively recipients in which a cup-ladle was laid as a grave good, which indicates a more complicated process within the ritual burial practice at the necropolis, and whose importance is emphasised with a fibula that had the function of “sealing” the recipient without human remains. It remains open whether the “doubled ceramic sets” from the Konopište graves could be connected with the funeral process of rinsing the remains from the funeral pyre, where a cup-ladle would serve as an instrument for water and a large biconical vessel as a recipient for rinsing the osteological remains, or that they represent the remains of a libation ritual (Ђорђевић 2019: 129).

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