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TWO EARLY BYZANTINE FIBULAE FROM THE PČELINJI KRŠ SITE IN LAZNICA NEAR ŽAGUBICA

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with early Byzantine fibulae from the Pčelinji krš site, located in the area of Laznica village, near Žagubica in eastern Serbia. The objects are accidental finds, discovered by locals on surface terrain and during earthworks. They were subjected to conservation and X-ray fluorescence. The first specimen is completely preserved. It is a bow-type fibula with a backward turned foot and a coil. The other presented fibula, in this case fragmented, is defined in older literature as the "western Balkan" or the "Dalmatian" type.

KEYWORDS: FIBULAE, EARLY BYZANTINE PERIOD, PČELINJI KRŠ, "XRF" ANALYSIS, DATING.

In the south-eastern part of the Braničevo district, more precisely in the vicinity of Žagubica in the area of Homolje, several sites that can be characterised with certain reservations, on the basis of archaeological research, as late antiquity or early-Byzantine, have been registered (Fig. 1). Trench excavations in the aforementioned area were performed at the sites of Zad in Ribare and Pčelinji krš in Laznica (Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 2-3; Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 103; Миловановић 2016b: 25, 76). Агchaeological field surveys were also performed to a greater or lesser extent at some sites: Šetaće in Osanica, Pregrada-Podkrš in Žagubica and Potaj Čuka near Žagubica. Based on collected accidental finds, visible architectural remains and terrain configuration, it can be assumed that the above mentioned sites were inhabited during the 6th century.1 It should be noted that these are high,

hardly accessible positions, which are mainly approachable from only one side. One of these archaeological sites is the aforementioned Pčelinji krš. Archaeological excavations at this site were carried out on two occasions, in 2006 and 2007. Archaeological findings from prehistory, late antiquity and the early Byzantine period were recorded at that time.²

2016a: 137. In the vicinity of Žagubica, there are also indicative sites that, based on toponyms, reports of individual travel writers and memories of the locals, may indicate settlement during the late antiquity and early Byzantine period. So far, they have not been archaeologically explored, Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 5, 15, сл. 2; Каниц 1985: 272.

2 The head of archaeological excavations in 2006 was D. Mrkobrad (with Project Manager S. Mišić). Excavations in 2007 were conducted by D. Jacanović. Additionally, numerous accidental finds originating from this site have been collected by the locals for decades. Upon inspection of these finds it is concluded that this material predominantly belongs to the early Byzantine period. A smaller number of finds, at least for the time being, suggest settling also during the late Antiquity period, Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 2, нап 3, кат. бр. 20, 56; Миловановић 2016 a: 125-126. Based on a partial insight into the documentation from archaeological excavations and the examination of the accidental finds, which, as already empha-

¹ Such a statement must be taken with certain caution since the chronological determination is based on accidental archaeological findings. The possibility of settling at these sites should not be ruled out, e.g. also in the 4th century, Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 6; Миловановић

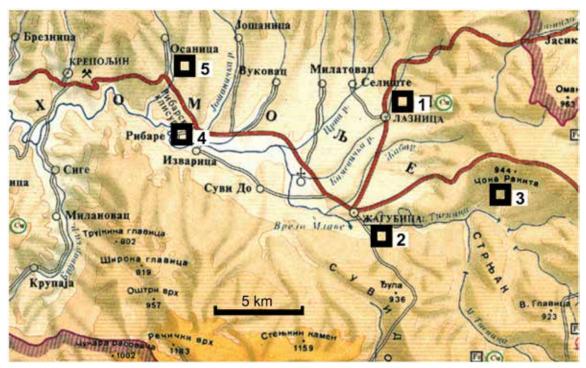


Fig. 1 Approximate distribution of 4th -6th century archaeological sites in the vicinity of Žagubica: 1. Pčelinji krš in Laznica; 2. Pregrada-Podkrš in Žagubica; 3. Potaj čuka near Žagubica; 4. Zad in Ribare; 5. Šetaće in Osanica.

The site in question also has the Vlach name "Krš ku albina," which loosely translated means bee's karst, i.e., Pčelinji Krš. At the beginning of the 20th century, the ethnologist T. Đorđević also recorded the toponym "Šetaće" for this place (Ђорђевић 1910: 232),³ but it was not preserved by the locals. When we speak about the site's position, we can say that it was wisely selected, at an altitude of about 580 m.⁴ The massive wreath of the Homolje Mountains stretches towards the north. On the south side of the elevation, below sharp cliffs,

sised, are mostly determined as being from the time of the 6th century, the Pčelinji krš site is defined by the author of this paper as early Byzantine. More precisely, the fortified settlement was most probably built during the time of Emperor Justinian (527-565), and served the population until the Avar and Slav attacks at the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th century, Миловановић 2018; Whether there was construction activity on the hill above Laznica during late Antiquity or some other period, we will learn after the published report from two years of archaeological excavations, Миловановић 2016a: 122, нап. 491.

- 3 About the history of Pčelinji krš research see Миловановић 2018: 7-8.
- 4 The height is calculated according to the military geographical map.

flows a stream called "Valja kum umbarju" (Valley with the vessels). In the western and eastern part there are slopes. A spacious meadow, on which, according to the memories of the local people, there were walls, stretches northwest, at a slightly lower altitude from the place where the aforementioned archaeological excavations were carried out (Fig. 1, 2). Approach is most suitable from this side. On the terrain the remains of fortifications are visible (Fig. 3, 4). East of the fortification, there are the surrounding hills, while on the opposite side, at an altitude of about 400 m, there is a view towards Laznica village, through which the Kamenička River flows (Миловановић 2018: 8).

A certain number of accidental archaeological finds, roughly defined as from prehistory, late antiquity and the early Byzantine period, are kept in the Homolje Heritage Museum in Žagubica, as well as by the locals of Laznica. On this occasion, we have selected two fibulae which are currently the only items from this site that have been subjected to any conservation procedure. They were



Fig. 2 Pčelinji krš, Google Earth image. 34T Easting: 566260.29 m E, Northing 4898588.46 m N, Eye altitude 1.44 km, Imagery Date 29 June 2017, Image 2018 CNES / Airbus

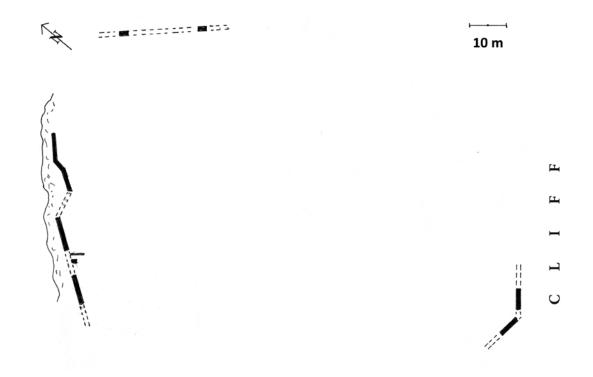


Fig. 3 Pčelinji krš, sketch of fortification base.

subjected to X-ray fluorescence (XRF analysis).5

The first fibula is completely preserved, with a noteworthy feature being that its part that is bent backward is slightly deformed. It is a type of early-Byzantine bow fibula with a bent backward foot and a coil. The object is made of high quality iron, with the dimensions 7.1 x 1.5 x 0.2 cm. The width of the bow is 1.2 cm, and the width of the foot is 0.9 cm (Fig. 5, Fig. 7/1). It is a strap-shaped bow and is slightly wider than the trapezoidal foot. Both of the aforementioned parts of the fibula have a rectangular cross-section, decorated with framed incised lines on the upper side, while a well preserved coil is between them. On the head of the fibula, around the horizontal axis, a spring, also made of iron, is formed. The preserved needle is located outside a deformed tubular catchplate. According to the testimony of the locals, the object was found at the foot of the western slope of the site during earthworks in 2015.

There are three developmental forms of these fibulae (Uenze 1992: 146-154). A specimen from Pčelinji krš can be classified with great certainty in the so-called second transitional form in which the bow gradually increases in relation to the foot. The ornamentation, also presented, involves an equal amount of decoration in the foot and bow of the fibula. It should be emphasised that the first form is characterised by approximately the same dimensions of the foot and bow where the foot is primarily decorated, while in the third the bow becomes visibly wider. Chronologically, all three forms can be roughly placed in the 6th-7th century. It should also be noted that they are simultaneous with buckles of Sučidava and Salona - Histria types (Spehar 2010: 58-59). On the other hand, we also note the recent findings from the early-Byzantine site of Gradina on Jelica Mountain, near Čačak. During archaeological excavations in

⁵ Conservation and XRF analysis were performed by M. Čolović and M. Stojanović from the National Museum in Belgrade, in 2016. I am most thankful to my colleagues for their generous help. The fibulae are located in the Homolje Heritage Museum in Žagubica, Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 21-22.



Fig. 4 Pčelinji krš, remains of the western rampart.

2015, similar samples of functional parts of clothing were found. The difference which is observed at first glance relates primarily to the width of the bow, which is in this case slightly narrower than the trapezoidal shaped foot (Радишић 2017: 103, кат. 40, 41). Here is most probably a special group of transitional forms of early Byzantine bow fibulae with a bent backward foot and a coil. The final conclusion on this assumption will be provided by future research and interpretations. Also, it should be emphasised that during this period, the Romans wore fibulae in the middle of the chest or on the shoulder when buttoning their robes (unlike the Germanic tribes who wore them in pairs). This kind of clothing was common for both sexes in the Empire (Милинковић 2004: 192, сл. 6). The transitional form of early Byzantine bow fibulae with bent backward foot and a coil, according to previous research, was widespread in the area of Đerdap. It is interesting to note that all previously discovered specimens in the aforementioned region were made of bronze (Špehar 2010: 58-59;

Јанковић 1981: 173-174, T. XVI/4-5). Some analogous items have also be found in Gamzigrad (Felix Romuliana) (Јанковић 1983: 136, кат. бр.194; Живић 2003: 184, кат. 435; Петковић 2010: 199, сл. 173). Several fibulae of the transitional form were discovered in Macedonia, at the Budinarci and Gradište sites (Mikulčić 2002: 200, Abb. 95/2; 300-301, Abb. 199/2). In Bulgaria, similar findings have come from Pernik (Любенова 1981: 168-169, обр. 107/2, 108). One fibula was also discovered in the vicinity of Ljubljana in Slovenia (Bitenc in: Knific 2001: 58, kat. 169). In the area of the Braničevo district, findings of this type were recorded in the Germanic tombs of the 6th century in the Viminacium area (Viminatium) (Ivanišević, Kazansky et Mastikova 2006, Fig. 9).

The other fibula from Pčelinji krš belongs to a type that is known in the older literature as a western Balkan or Dalmatian type. It is a fragmented specimen, made of iron, missing a needle, spring and a bent backward part of the foot. The fibula was found at the site itself (on the top of the hill)







Fig. 6 Fragmented fibula of the "western Balkan" type.

in 2004 in disposed earth from illegal explorations. Its preserved dimensions are 5.5 x 0.9 x 0.4 cm, bow width 0.9 cm, foot width 0.5 cm (Fig. 6, Fig. 7/2). On the head of the object there is a polyhedron shaped button, coated with brass. On the wide fibula bow, or more precisely on its lateral, front sides, a damascening technique was noted with inserted copper wires, diagonally or vertically arranged, some of which are not preserved. In these places, the position in which they were originally inserted is visible. Using the same technique, in the middle of the bow, a ribbon made of gold and silver alloy was inlayed, and is partially preserved. The ribbon was framed by copper wires located on the sides. On the surface there are three smaller evenly distributed horizontal incisions. Between the foot and the bow of the fibula, a larger, preserved double coil is visible. The foot, with a wavy upper surface, was originally covered with thin foil (gilding technique), and it is also made of an alloy of gold and silver. Over this foil, thin copper wires, evenly distributed, were transversally attached using a damascening technique. Most of them remain preserved on the lower, flat part of the foot. The characteristic of this type of functional part of the garment is primarily reflected in the foot, which is noticeably longer than the smaller wide bow. In older literature it was written that these specimens were typical for the western Balkan region of the early Byzantine

period and that they ethnically belong to the indigenous population. They were most numerous in Salona and its surroundings, therefore it was considered that this was their production centre (Vinski 1967: 39-40; Радичевић 2009: 413). However, recent archaeological research has shown that such specimens are also seen in the central Balkans. In 2009, D. Radičević was the first to draw attention to their distribution outside the western part of the peninsula during the aforementioned epoch. Certain analogies were even found in the territory of Bulgaria. 6 Territorially, the closest specimens were recorded in the Više grobalja necropolis (grave 143) in the Viminacium area during archaeological excavations. The entire grave is defined as being from the second third of the 6th century, the horizon C2 (Ivanišević, Kazanski et Mastykova 2006, 122, Pl. 26/7). On the other hand, there are specimens from the early Byzantine settlements that have some similarities to the fibula from Pčelinji krš. These are fibulae that originate from the Gradac site near Svrljig (Радишић 2015: 291) and Gradina on Jelica Mountain (Радишић 2017: 105, кат. бр. 46). The common features of these findings are transversal wires on a wavy foot. Analogous specimens have, on the upper part of the foot, a preserved foil, made of copper alloy, as opposed to the finding from

⁶ Радичевић 2009: 412-416 with the aforementioned analogies.

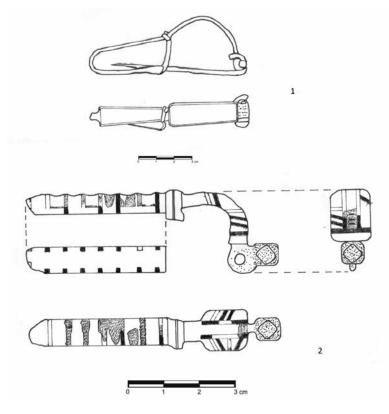


Fig. 7 Fibulae from Pčelinji krš after conservation.

Laznica, which is made of gold and silver alloy. Similarities are also seen in the ornamented bow. They are dated to the second half of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century (Радишић 2015: 292 и 295; Радишић 2017: 105, кат. бр. 46). In the area of south-eastern Serbia, fibulae of this type are also seen in the vicinity of Knjaževac (Јовановић 1993: 65). Analogous items can also be found in Nebeske stolice in Kopaonik, as well as in the vicinity of Kruševac, and they are dated to the 6th century (Рашковић 2015: 323-324, Т. II/4-5). Several specimens also come from the surroundings of Belgrade (Bojović 1983: 73-74, kat. br. 325-327, T. XXXIII). In Macedonia, analogous findings for these fibulae can be found at the Hisar-Kale site near Tetovo (Mikulčić 2002: 470, 388, 3).

Based on the various techniques and materials, the fibula from Pčelinji krš in the area of the village of Laznica, near Žagubica, represents a special specimen of early Byzantine fibulae. Although the find is fragmented, according to analy-

ses that have been executed, it can be said that the specificity of this object is primarily reflected in the various techniques that were applied during its manufacture. In addition, XRF analysis has also revealed different metals. At this point, it is difficult to say how this fibula reached these areas, since it was an accidental find. Their appearance in the territory of the Central Balkans has been interpreted in different ways in science (Радичевић 2009: 415-416).

The objects that were discussed in this paper, as pointed out, were found on the terrain surface and during earthworks, according to the testimonies of locals from Laznica. It seems that their archaeological context will remain forever unknown; therefore, caution is needed when making any final conclusions. Judging by analogous bow fibulae with a backward turned foot and a coil which were discovered at early Byzantine sites in Serbia and its surroundings, they are generally defined as being from the time of the 6th-7th

century. A somewhat similar situation exists with the "western Balkan" type. On the other hand, it should be noted once again that the remains of fortifications at Pčelinji krš most likely belong to the time of the great Justinian restoration after 527 AD, while their destruction is related to the Avar and Slav attacks at the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th century. In this case, the fibulae presented in this paper can be placed chronologically, with a certain reservations, at the time between the emergence and the destruction of the fortification in the village of Laznica.

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⁷ See footnote no. 3 in this paper.

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REZIME

DVE RANOVIZANTIJSKE FIBULE SA LOKALITETA PČELINJI KRŠ U LAZNICI KOD ŽAGUBICE

KLJUČNE REČI: FIBULE, RANOVIZANTIJSKI PERIOD, PČELINJI KRŠ, "XRF" ANALIZA, DATOVANJE.

U radu su obrađene ranovizantijske fibule sa lokaliteta Pčelinji krš, koji se nalazi u ataru sela Laznice kod Žagubice na prostoru istočne Srbije. Predmeti predstavljaju slučajne nalaze, pronađene od strane meštana na površini terena i prilikom zemljanih radova. Na njima je izvršena konzervacija i rendgenska fluorescencija. Prvi primerak je sačuvan u celosti. U pitanju je tip lučne fibule sa posuvraćenom stopom i obmotajem. Druga predstavljena fibula, u ovom slučaju fragmentovana, opredeljena je u starijoj literaturi kao "zapadnobalkanski" ili "dalmatinski" tip. Arheološka iskopavanja na ovom lokalitetu vršena su u dva navrata, 2006. i 2007. godine. Tom prilikom su evidentirani arheološki nalazi iz praistorije, kasne antike i rane Vizantije. Vidljivi ostaci fortifikacija, najverovatnije pripadaju vremenu velike Justinijanove obnove nakon 527. godine, dok se samo stradanje vezuje za avarske i slovenske napade krajem 6. ili početkom 7. veka. U tom slučaju, fibule koje su predstavljene u ovom radu možemo u hronološkom smislu, sa određenom dozom rezerve, opredeliti u vreme između nastanka i stradanja utvrđenja u ataru sela Laznice.