

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSIGHT INTO THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CULTURAL PATTERN IN WESTERN SERBIA

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Key words: Western Serbia, Bronze Age, cultural differences, continuity, border.

Abstract: The paper gives a schedule of cultural development and mutual differences during the Bronze Age in the wide area of the West Morava river valley defining the border territory between western and central Serbia. It suggests how the main geomorphologic features influence in creation of general markers of cultural identity.

The cultural development during the Bronze Age in western Serbia is marked by erection of numerous barrows used in sepulchral ritual, practiced since its very early phase. The culture known under the name of *Belotić-Bela Crkva* (Garašanin 1983a) was characteristic for the period of the Early Bronze Age, dated to the 2nd half of the IIIrd millennium and the beginning of the IInd millennium BC (Fig. 1). Many graves under the mounds reveal its main features. The deceased were incinerated or skeletally inhumed, with the modest grave inventory that mostly consisted of typical ceramic ware. One of the most prominent characteristic of this period, especially typical for Dragačevo region (that was the name proposed for the whole phenomenon) (Dmitrović 2016, p. 204) is represented by inhumed males in flexed position, buried within the cists made of massive stone slabs. These cists are, by regularity, placed in the center of the mound, while the grave goods are usually consisted of ceramics, the most often beakers with elongated neck and two handles (Fig. 2). The *Belotić-Bela Crkva* culture, widely spread within the western Serbia, known from Sava on the north to Montenegro on the south and from the Drina river on the west to the West Morava river on the east is followed, but with a significant chronological gap, with the culture marked in the earlier literature as *west Serbian variant of the Vatin culture*, the name set by M. Garašanin (1983b). On the basis of a significant amount of the new findings and parallels, the authors such as N. Tasić (2002), V. Filipović (2013), M. Ljuština and the author of this study (Ljuština, Dmitrović 2016) have correctly noticed that the culture from west Serbia bears a local, autochthonous expression with the noticeable influences from the Belegiš I culture from north, wherefore Ljuština and Dmitrović proposed its name as *West Serbian group of the Middle Bronze Age*. Beside the chronological discontinuity that measures a couple of centuries from the earlier culture *Belotić-Bela Crkva* (Dmitrović 2006, fig. 135), the graves belonging to this group take almost the same territory, identically known just after the sepulchral findings. Interesting fact is that the Middle Bronze Age graves were at times buried into the earlier mounds, founded in the Early Bronze Age or new mounds were formed within the older necropolises.

The Middle Bronze Age burials kept the most of previous burial practice, now with an evident prevalence of incineration. The novelty is represented by metal items, mainly jewelry made of bronze – mostly torcs, bracelets, pins, noppennings and tutuli (Dmitrović, Ljuština 2010). The weapon was rare. The shapes and decoration of ceramics (Fig. 3) are very similar with the Belegiš I

group beakers (Тасић 2002, p. 172), while the metal items in general represent the centraleuropean types, where some local inventions and individual characteristics point to the possibility of domestic manufacturing (Васић 1997, p. 44).

In regard to the aforementioned stages, the Late Bronze Age is represented by few graves uneven chronologically leveled, that makes this period as quite unknown and without possibility to make clear regularities (Dmitrović 2014). A significant group of graves was found in Stapani necropolis, near Užice, consisting of skeleton inhumed deceased furnished again with the typical metalkraft products of centraleuropean origin (Zotović 1985, p. 65-67, T. XVI/1-11). The type of burial – inhumation – here testify on strong local component, where in time of prevalence of incineration and a lateral pressure of the great Urnfield complex, a small local, indigenous population in mountains of western Serbia preserved the traditional sepulchral ritual, accepting again the influence in material culture from the north.

In contrast to the relatively good explored sepulchral customs, settlements are still fragmentary known. Here belong a small group of settlements disposed at the eastern border of the mound phenomenon (Fig. 4), in the zone of northern course of the river Western Morava: Slatina in Gornja Gorevnica (Дмитровић 2009), Sokolica in Ostra (Стојић 2000; Дмитровић, Љуштина 2007) and Milića brdo in Ljuljaci (Богдановић 1986). These settlements are interconnected by mutual existence of biconical beakers with two handles, sometimes with plastic attachments on their tips and fan shaped edge (Fig. 5). This beaker type, according to the earlier authors, was attributed to the Vatin culture (Garašanin 1983b; Стојић 2000), while recently it was ascribed to a separate culture, typical for central Serbia, and different from Vatin. A. Bulatović and J. Stankovski named them as the Ljuljaci type determining them to the 6th type according to their classification (Булатовић, Станковски 2012, p. 241, 260, 343). The beakers of Ljuljaci type mainly appear at the sites in the lower part of the South Morava valley, Timok region, Great Morava and West Morava valleys, as well as in Šumadija region. They can be traced as single finds in the part of the Danube basin from the Tamiš confluence to the Iron Gates, and sporadically even in the Tisa and Maros basins (Булатовић, Станковски 2012, p. 337). In general, the ceramics from these settlements are quite different from already known material culture from necropolises. According to specific ceramic shapes and decoration, these sites should be ascribed to the *Bubanj Hum IV – Ljuljaci* group distinguished by A. Bulatović and J. Stankovski which was typical for central Serbia during the first centuries of the IInd millennium BC. They concluded that this culture succeeded the earlier cultural phenomenon named as Bubanj-Hum III, sharing as well the same territory (Булатовић, Станковски 2012, p. 337).

By comparing the leading ceramic forms from settlements and necropolises one can notice many distinctions which can indicate on completely different origins and cultural and chronological development (Dmitrović 2016, p. 238-240). The disposition of the settlements at the east as well as the particular archaeological material can lead to the assumption that the territory of Šumadija was inhabited by a completely different praehistoric culture which made a kind of a defensive system along the western borders of Šumadija region. There is a possibility that the population from the sites of Ostra, Gorevnica and Ljuljaci migrated from the east and occupied this territory repressing the aged Belotić – Bela crkva culture who retreated west from the mountain Jelica. The hillfort type of the settlement in Ostra (Fig. 6) and Ljuljaci as the hidden position of Gorevnica testify to insecure times and a need to establish protected habitats. There was a strong reason for selecting these locations, most likely for surveillance and defense (Fig. 7). The continuity in settlements in Ostra and Ljuljaci, at the 2nd half of IInd millennium BC, has been confirmed by ceramics from the

developed phase of Vatin culture and from the late Paraćin culture, corroborating the different cultural pattern on the east from the river West Morava.

When speaking on these two culturally and geographically different areas - the low hilly region of Šumadija and the mountainous region belonging to the Dinara massive, divided by a fertile West Morava valley - one could confirm that the basic geomorphology represent in general a very important component of human existence and contribute to the economic development and its features (Степић, Јаћимовић 2006, p. 72-73; Тројановић 2008, p. 180-185). The West Morava river course and its wide valley can be supposed as an important connection as the separation line between them, labeled by settlements on the one side and by mounds on the other. The same border line was noticed even during the succeeding historical periods – it was the boundary for the appearance of the Iron Ages tumuli and the phenomenon of the princely graves, where one can recognize the paleo Balcanian tribes of Autariatae and Triballoi or some separate ethnic group similar to the mentioned tribes (cf. Васић 1995; Vasić 2005). Similar division was during the existence of Roman Empire in Balkans, where the same area was between Roman provinces of Upper Moesia and Dalmatia, which however confirm this idea.

As the final observation is that there is necessary to keep on researching on the very important and interesting area of the West Morava river valley, whose better exploring will help in resolving and understanding different features of Bronze Age cultures that developed there.

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		Vojvodina	Great Morava valley and Šumadija	Glasinac	Western Morava valley
EARLY	2500	Somogvár - Vinkovci ↓ Nyrseg, Nagyrév ↓ Maros ↓	Late Vučedol ↓ Bubanj - Hum III ↓	Glasinac I (Barakovac, Kovačev Do, Županovići) ↓ ?	Belotić - Bela Crkva - Veliko Polje; Mrčajevci; - Stone cists horizon (Dragačevo group) - Markovica - Negrišori, Dučalovići, Lučani, D. Kravarica - Dubac, m. VII, Prijedor; Lučani, Kruševlje ↓
	2000	Vatin ↓ Encrused Pottery Horizon ↓ Hügelgräber culture	Bubanj - Hum IV - Ljuljaci ↓ Ljuljaci II ↓ Ljuljaci III	? ↓ Glasinac IIa	Settlements Bubanj - Hun IV - Ljuljaci (G. Gorevnica, Ljuljaci, Ostra) ↓ ? ↓ ?
MIDDLE	1500	Belegiš I - Cruceni ↓ Belegiš II - Gava	Dubovac - Žuto brdo ↓ Paraćin I ↓ Paraćin II	Glasinac IIb ↓ Glasinac IIIa ↓ Glasinac IIIb	Western Serbian group of the MBA - Dubac, Ravnine, Prijedor Mojsinje - Babinjak, m. III; Grotnica; ↓ - Baluga
LATE	1000				
		Bosut - Kalakača		Glasinac IIIc	Kalakača (Mojsinje)

Fig. 1. Chronological table for the Bronze Age cultures in the central Serbia (according Dmitrović 2016).

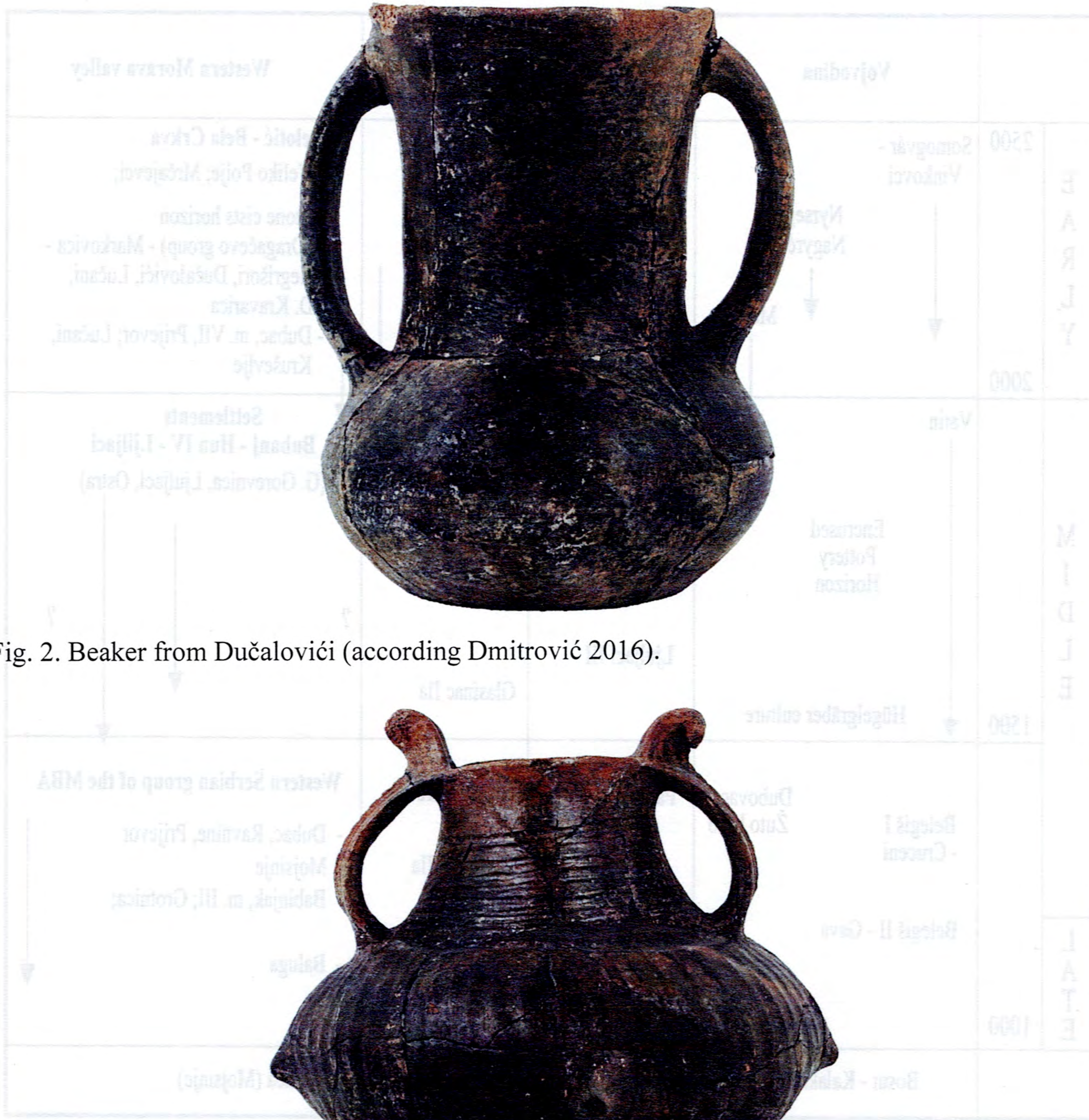


Fig. 2. Beaker from Dučalovići (according Dmitrović 2016).



Fig. 3. Beaker from Jančići (according Dmitrović 2016).

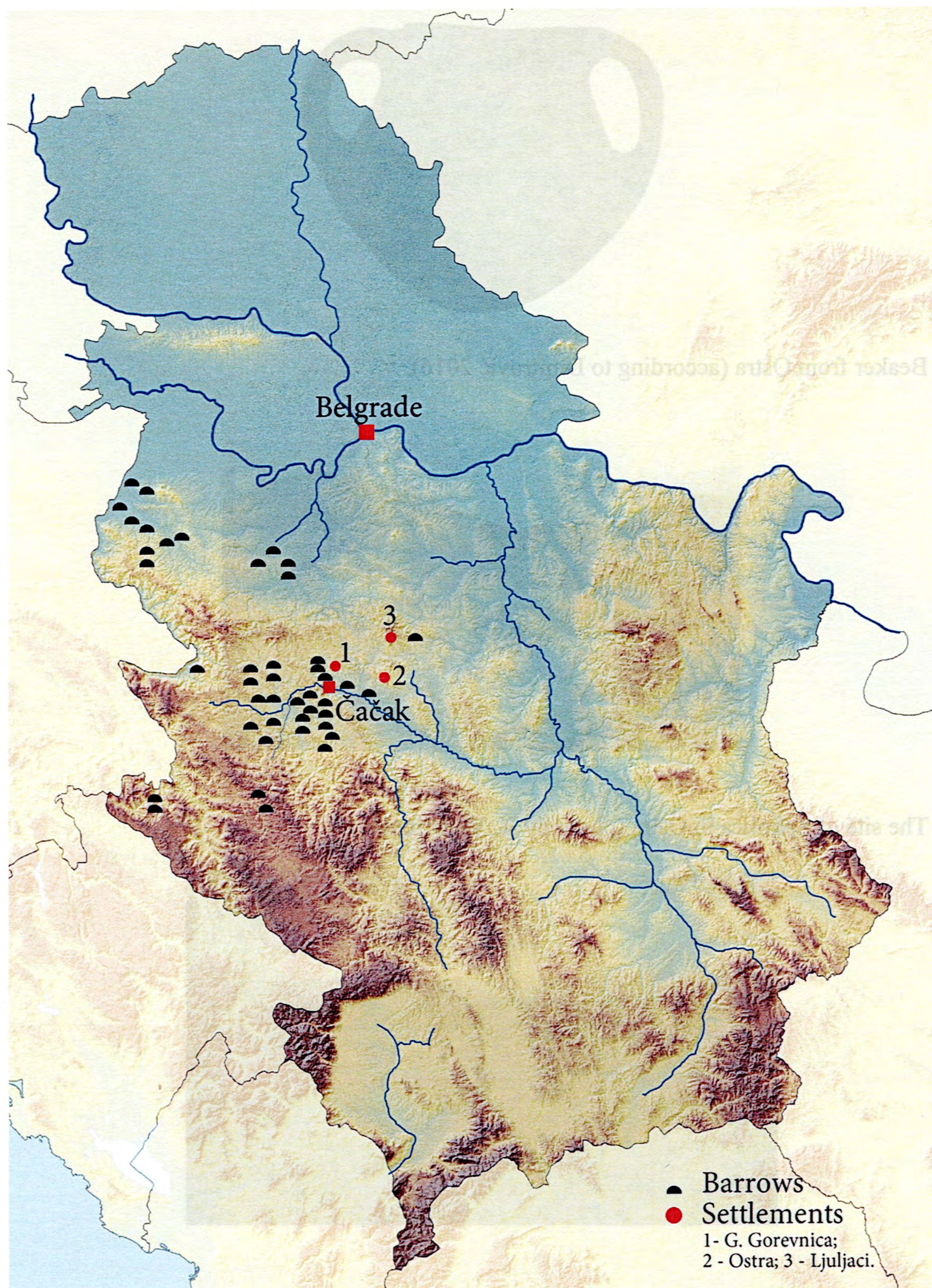


Fig. 4. Map depicting the Bronze Age mound distribution and settlements belonging to Bubanj Hum IV – Ljuljaci culture.



Fig. 5. Beaker from Ostra (according to Dmitrović 2016).



Fig. 6. The site of Sokolica in Ostra (photo by V. Vujadinović).



Fig. 7. The view from Sokolica in Ostra hillfort toward the West Morava valley and the Jelica mountain range (photo by V. Vujadinović).