

A LATE BRONZE AGE BURIAL FROM GELJA LJUT IN EASTERN HERZEGOVINA

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This paper presents a set of Late Bronze Age grave finds from Gelja Ljut, near Gacko in eastern Herzegovina. The assemblage consists of a grip-tongue bronze sword, a spearhead and two socketed axes. The primary focus of the study is the morphological, typological and stylistic analysis of the artefacts in relation to other similar known objects, in order to offer a possible explanation for the issue of their chronological positioning and a potential place of manufacture or, at the very least, a cultural context. Ultimately, the site of Gelja Ljut provides us with an assemblage that was undoubtedly part of the inventory of a wealthy

person. The selection of these items for deposition is evidence of careful curation relating to the representation of the deceased, and stands as a testament to the complex cultural connections present in the form of a wider regional network during the 11th century BC. Furthermore, the interpretation of the ‘funerary set’ enables us better to understand human actions in the past, particularly for an area where the archaeological heritage of this period has, to date, been very poorly recorded.

Key words:

Eastern Herzegovina, Late Bronze Age, tumuli, spearhead, socketed axe, sword

Introduction

The Late Bronze Age of the Adriatic coast and its hinterland can be considered extremely dynamic and complex, with a wide variety of interactions and intense communication among the communities present in the region. Additionally, it can be seen as a period of intensive interregional movement of both raw materials and knowledge. Strong evidence of trans-Adriatic interaction also exists, with regular links forged between the western and eastern coasts, providing a basis for material and cultural diversity.¹ The artefacts of this period – primarily found in grave contexts – not only act as typological and chronological indicators, but also hint at the actions and activities that were significant in the lives of the people of that time. They also generated strong messages about social identity. To a certain extent, a grave inventory also indicates the level of access to wealth, because military equipment, costume and jewellery were the primary forms of material culture through which social identity was projected. An explicit demonstration of such intricate cultural connections at the end of the Bronze Age is provided by the reconstruction of a grave in a tumulus at Gelja Ljut, near Gacko in eastern Herzegovina. The interpretation of the ‘funerary set’ enables us better to understand human (inter)actions in the past, especially for an area like this, where the archaeological heritage from this period has, to date, been very poorly recorded.

The site and the history of its research

Many archaeological artefacts have intriguing and somewhat tangled histories in the period following their final deposition and later archaeological discovery. While some are published relatively quickly and enter the archaeological discourse through various later interpretations, for others we may wait decades just for their existence to become known. And the finding presented here is of this latter type.

Gelja Ljut is an archaeological site located on a high karst ridge near the village of Kula, in the western part of Gatačko Polje (map 1). This is a karst landscape typical of eastern Herzegovina, a large sub-region within the Dinaric Alps.² The location of the necropolis with tumuli has a dominant position and a direct connection with the nearby hillforts at Muhovići and Hodinići.³ During limestone quarry works on the northern side of the site in the early 1980s, several stone tumuli were destroyed, and it is from one of these that the finds of a bronze spear, a socketed axehead and a sword originate (Pl. 1),⁴ with another bronze socketed axehead being found subsequently (Fig. 1).⁵ Initially, these discoveries led to archaeological excavations. In 1984, Vukosava Atanacković-Salčić, of the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural and Heritage Monuments in Mostar, excavated one tumulus. The mound was circular in shape, 12 metres in diameter

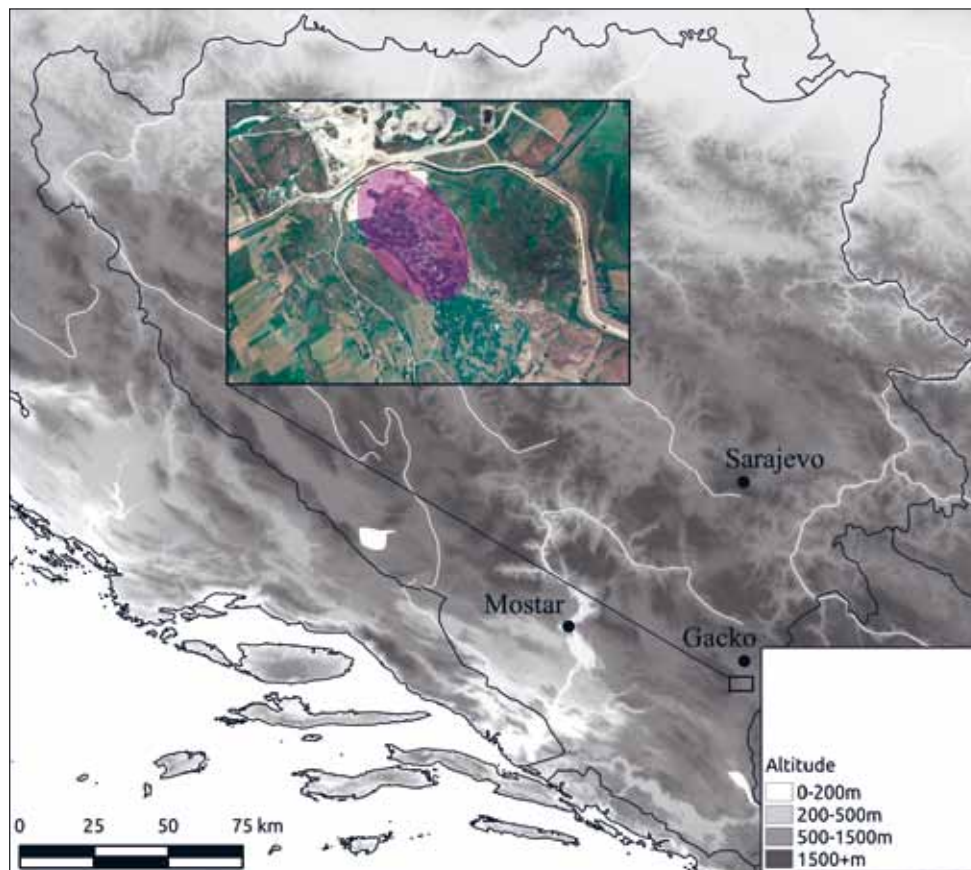
1 Batović 1983; Glogović 1989; Barbarić 2009; Blečić Kavur 2014; Blečić Kavur 2020; Pabst 2020a; Cwaliński 2020, 156–157; Iacono et al. 2022.

2 Петровић 1959; Milanović 2015, 15, 23.

3 Mandić 1985, 5, 12.

4 Miletić 1987, 144.

5 Mandić 1985, 3. None of the finds from Gelja Ljut has ever been presented, with their existence mostly being known from mentions in the brief outlines of various small reports, lexicon notes and local monographs.



MAP 1. Locations of prehistoric site Gelja Ljut (©Google maps; adapted by A. Jašarević).

and 2 metres in height, with the remains of a funerary structure in the form of a cist grave with a single burial being found in the centre. The deceased was buried in the grave in an extended position. No grave goods were found, and the grave was tentatively dated to the Early Iron Age.⁶ The archaeological finds that had been collected during quarrying operations have never been published, and are presented here for the first time.

Research into prehistoric sites on the territory of eastern Herzegovina began in the late 19th century. As in many other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the initial archaeological works were undertaken by pioneers of archaeology from the National Museum in Sarajevo. This is also the era in which systematic excavations, and collection and publication of materials according to the methodological principles of the time, can first be seen. The majority of finds originated from necropolises and tumuli, with only a relatively small proportion originating from hillfort settlements and hoards.⁷ However, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that a more comprehensive approach to the survey and excavation of the country's archaeological heritage was undertaken.⁸ Despite this long history of archaeological research, only a small proportion of the results and findings have ever been published.

Typological classification and chronological determination

Although the context of the grave within the tumulus was destroyed by quarrying work, certain crucial information that helps provide a general reconstruction of the grave inventory was recorded. In the absence of any reliable context, the primary analysis of such an assemblage focuses on its morphological, typological and stylistic analysis in relation to other known similar objects, in order to offer a possible solution to the issue of its chronological positioning and the potential place of manufacture, or at the very least a cultural context for its origins.

Spearhead

Bronze Age spears are considered a highly effective form of weaponry, and they have been interpreted as both thrusting and throwing implements. The diversity evident among spearhead forms clearly indicates that they are socially relevant as standard components of warriors' panoplies. It has been argued that spears were more commonly – or more intensively – involved in conflict, hinting of a 'hierarchy of weapons' that may well, in turn, be indicative of the presence of a 'hierarchy of warriors'.⁹

6 Atanacković-Salčić 1984, 20.

7 Čović 1978; Marijan 2001, 17–18.

8 Kujundžić 1985, 193–196; Žeravica 1988, 245–249; Žeravica 1989, 194–196; Marijan 2001, 33; Одавић 2003, 29–43.

9 Anderson 2011, 611; Bruno 2012, 43; Horn 2013, 42; Molloy 2018, 206.

One such bronze spear was found in the same tumulus as the sword and socketed axe (Pl. 1: 3). However, it remains unknown whether it was found in the same grave or in one of the other graves of the tumulus. The spearhead has a distinctive leaf-shaped blade with a very prominent rectangular-profile central rib. The lower part has a relatively large smooth conical socket, with two peg holes. The total length of the spearhead is 17 cm (Pl. 1: 2). Flame-shaped analogies of this spearhead are known from the Carpathian Basin, with groups of parallels and their relative chronological positions having been reevaluated on many occasions by numerous scholars.¹⁰ There are a handful of spearheads from northern Croatia that can be associated with the object under study, including the most representative finds of spears from the Late Bronze Age Tenja hoard, dated to the Br D/Ha A1 period, as well as Croatian hoards of phase II (i.e. the Veliko Nabrđe horizon), correlating to the 13th/12th centuries BC.¹¹ Similar stray-find spearheads have been discovered at Hardomilje, near Ljubuški in western Herzegovina,¹² and also one from Lika.¹³ In Dalmatia, such spearheads are known mainly as chance finds.¹⁴ Further parallels from the Late Bronze Age hoard of Roško Polje, in the Duvno region, are also worthy of mention; these approximately conform to the Ha A1 period, i.e. the second phase of Bosnian and Herzegovinian hoards.¹⁵ The spearhead can also be attributed to group IV, according to P. Turk's typology, on the basis of the finds at Mušja Jama, near Škocjan.¹⁶ A fundamental problem with spearheads in general is that many such finds yield no chronological information, with datable examples being scattered between the Br D and Ha B1 periods. On the basis of the relative chronological data currently available, this spearhead is most likely associated with the Ha B1 period (10th century BC) or alternatively Ha A2/B1 (11th–10th century BC).¹⁷ Its unique characteristics can be used to classify it as a local type.

Socketed axes

The assemblage derived from the tumulus also contains a single socketed axe (Pl. 1:2). The body of the axe has a hexagonal cross-section and side-loop. Decoration consists of a three-fold V-motif with a vertical line extending from the apex of the outermost chevron facing away from the faceted and thickened mouth. The overall length is 14.3 cm, with the width of the blade being 4.3 cm (Pl. 1: 3). On the basis of the results of both traditional and experimental research, similar utensils have primarily been interpreted as multi-functional objects. They could have been used as

both weapons and working tools, and alongside this a symbolic function has also been confirmed.¹⁸ The closest parallels that comprise all typological features present in this axehead are known mainly from the mountainous area between the Bosna and Drina rivers.¹⁹ Most notably, axes with a similar decorative scheme were present in the Motke hoard (Phase II/Br D–Ha A1).²⁰ Another hoard from northern Bosnia that also contains similar axes is that of Brezovo Polje (Phase III–IV / Ha A2–Ha B1).²¹ A chance find of a socketed axe at Donje Vrsinje–Milići²² and one at an unknown site in Dalmatia²³ can also be affiliated with this group. The closest chronological, geographical and typological parallels are best seen in two axes from the Debelo Brdo hoard (Phase IV / Ha B1–Ha B2).²⁴ Similarities can further be observed from the opposite coast of the Adriatic, with the closest resemblance (on the basis of the preserved morphology) demonstrated by the fragment of a socketed axe from Hoard 2 of Roca Vecchia (Lecce),²⁵ classified as a variant of the Manduria type of axe and dated to *Bronzo Finale* 2.²⁶ The relative chronological position and period of deposition of this find from Gelja Ljut is most likely Ha B1, or Phase IV (late 11th–10th century BC), according to the scheme proposed by P. König.²⁷ Essentially, this is a form that develops from the canonical type of socketed axes with V-shaped ribs. Its main distribution area is the territories of Transdanubia and the Western Balkans, with the highest concentration being found in the Sava–Drava interfluvium area, where such axeheads made their appearance at the beginning of the Br D period, albeit increasing in number during the later Ha A period.²⁸ The spatial distribution of axeheads – especially within hoards from northern Bosnia – shows that many local and foreign stylistic elements are incorporated into newer types.²⁹ This distribution pattern raises the possibility that the axe under study may not have originated from this territory, or, even if it were to have been locally produced, that its maker (or makers) followed regional styles. From the perspective of cultural background, the appearance of 'foreign' elements at Gelja Ljut resonates well with the model of a long-lasting metallurgical tradition that incorporated many local and distant stylistic elements, especially from the territories of the Western Balkans.

The second socketed axe from Gelja Ljut is unfortunately an isolated example from one of the devastated tumuli (Fig. 2).³⁰ The axehead has a trapezoidal shape, a small vertical shaft with annular thickening at the mouth, and three radial vertical ribs within the arcading formed above the blade. Symmetrical oblique

10 König 2004, 30–33; Blečić Kavur, Jašarević 2014, 41–42; Vasić 2015, 50; Leshtakov 2015, 113, 119; Bader 2015, 382–283; Turk 2016; Gavranović, Jašarević 2017, 112; Pabst 2020, 84.

11 Vinski–Gasparini 1973, T. 32: 7, 11, 13.

12 Čović 1985, 52–53. T. I, 3.

13 Vinski–Gasparini 1983, T. LII, 5.

14 Batović 1965, 45; Marović 1981, 34–37; Pabst 2020a, 84.

15 König 2004, 30.

16 Turk 2016, 81–83.

17 Turk 2016, 81–82.

18 Roberts, Ottaway 2003, 136; Mödler 2011, 51–53; Blečić Kavur, Jašarević 2014, 37; Dolfini *et al.* 2023.

19 Gavranović, Jašarević 2017, 121.

20 König 2004, T. 25: 15–17.

21 König 2004, T. 29: 5, 6, 8.

22 Gavranović, Jašarević 2017, 120–121. Fig. 7: 4.

23 Marović 1981, 46. Fig. 14: 4.

24 König 2004, T. 58: 3–4.

25 Maggiulli 2009, 325. Fig. 6: 2. 25; Scarano, Maggiulli 2014, 11.

26 Giardino 2016, 251.

27 König 2004, 27.

28 Žeravica 1993, 96–100; Hansen 1994, 182; König 2004, 37–40; Jovanović 2010, 27; Gavranović 2011, 130–133; Blečić Kavur, Jašarević 2014, 38–39; Gavranović, Jašarević 2017, 105; Dietrich 2021, 546.

29 Gavranović 2011, 130–133.

30 Mandić 1985, 3.



FIGURE 1. Socketed axe with an arcaded blade from Gelja Ljut (drawing made by J. Beus).

linear decorations were also created above this arcading. The side-loop has not been preserved. The length of the blade is 10 cm, and the width of the blade is 4.6 cm. Although exact parallels are not available, the closest resemblance can be observed in certain socketed axes from the Torovicë hoard (northern Albania) dated to the late 11th–10th century BC.³¹ In particular, the examples from Albania are decorated with the same series of radial lines, furthermore comparable with a number of Mandurian-type socketed axes of Carancini's variant E, dated to *Bronzo Finale* 2–3.³² Further similarities can also be seen in the chance find of a socketed axe at Čitluk³³ (western Herzegovina). The distribution pattern of small socketed axes with an arcaded blade and radial lines is even more interesting, since these can also be found in various parts of Serbia. Regarding the dating, they are primarily typical of the Ha A2–Ha B1 period.³⁴ Furthermore, geographically and chronologically speaking, they can be linked to the group of northern and central Bulgarian socketed axes of the Vărbica type.³⁵

31 Prendi 1984, 24. V, 3–7; Gori 2006, 209.

32 Carancini 1984, 151. T. 124: 3780–3784.

33 Žeravica 1993. T. 37: 393.

34 Gavranović, Kapuran 2014, 32–35.

35 Дергачев 2011, 82–86.

Sword

Swords are particularly complex weapons, and one of the most precious forms of metal objects of the Bronze Age. Their importance is derived from both their material value and their function as a weapon. Furthermore, the carrying of a sword was an indicator of social rank, which additionally contributed to the weapon's importance.³⁶ While swords are found in significantly smaller frequencies than utility adornments, their role nevertheless makes them a special focus in studies of the material culture of the Bronze Age. The core of the 'funerary set' from Gelja Ljut is a sword (Pl. 1: 1). According to the finder's account, many fragments of ornamented sheet metal were also found around the sword, presumably fragments of scabbard fittings, which have unfortunately not been preserved. The sword is characterized by its elegant, narrow blade and a semi-circular round shoulder, upon which are situated two rivet holes, with four more rivet holes being present on the flange-hilted grip. The sword has a distinctive long faux-midrib flanked by two small ridges that contract towards the top. The blade is almost straight, with a small border running around its lower third. The length of the sword is 53 cm from the tip to its 'fish-tail' terminal. The average width of the blade is 2.5 cm, while the thickness is 0.4 cm, and the width at the shoulder is 4.6 cm. The sword is excellently preserved and exceptionally well cast. This highly functional sword bears evidence of use before final deposition. A small notch is also evident on the sword blade; this mark shows similarities to others found on Late Bronze Age swords that have been argued to indicate sword-to-sword combat damage.³⁷ It seems quite plausible that the sword was taken out of circulation during or around the early stage of its use-life, and deposited in an intact state without any kind of visible ritual manipulation, such as intentional and violent mutilation and/or breakage (Fig. 2: 1; Pl. 1: 1).

This object belongs to the broad category of Late Bronze Age swords of the so-called *Griffzungenschwert* ('grip-tongue sword') type, which have also appeared in the literature under a variety of other names derived from different local typological classifications.³⁸ More precisely, the sword from Gelja Ljut fits into the so-called Rrethe Bazjë type group, as it has recently been defined.³⁹ These are usually characterized by the combination of a pointed rapier-like blade, broad semicircular shoulders, a 'fish-tail' terminal and a distinctive faux-midrib flanked by two small ridges.⁴⁰ The geographically closest parallel can be seen in an excellent example of an almost identical sword from Islam Grčki:⁴¹ this bronze sword has a length of 51.7 cm, although its 'fish-tail' terminal has been lost, and an average blade width of 1.9 cm, with the thickness of the blade being 0.5 cm. The same characteristic shoulders have an identical width of 4.6 cm, albeit with a slightly different arrangement of rivet holes (Fig. 2: 2).⁴²

36 Kristiansen 2002; Mödinger 2011; Harding 2011; Molloy 2018; Horn, Kristiansen 2018.

37 Hermann *et al.* 2020.

38 Kilian–Dirlmeier 1993; Harding 1995; Glogović 1995.

39 Pabst 2015, 109. Fig. 4: 3.

40 Teržan 1984, 111; Kilian–Dirlmeier 1993, 96; Harding 1995, 54; Pabst 2015, 109.

41 Batović 1970, 176. Fig. 1–2; Batović 1983, 314; Glogović 1989, 14. T. 10: 6; Glogović 1995, 11; Harding 1995, 54. T. 22: 188.

42 Batović 1970, 174–175.

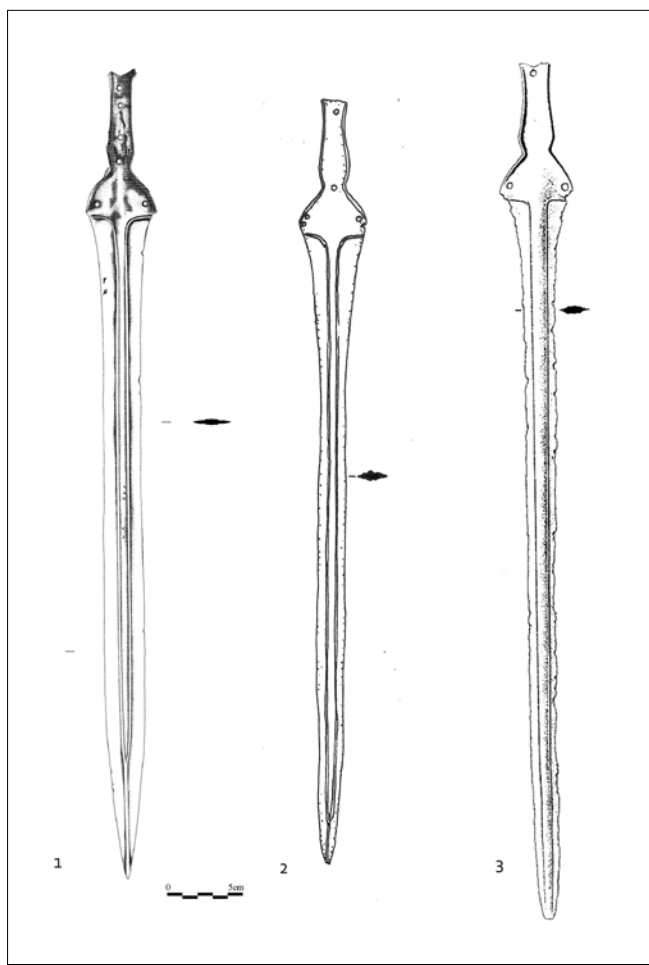


FIGURE 2. 1: Gelja Ljut (drawing made by J. Beus), 2: Islam Grčki (Glogović 1989, T. 10: 6), 3: Rrethe Bazjë (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, T. 35: 233).

At the time of publication of the sword from Islam Grčki, Šime Batović (1970) had not found adequate comparisons with respect to basic morphological characteristics, but he compared it to artefacts originating from the workshops located in the Danube-Sava-Drava interfluvium area dated to the Urnfield period.⁴³ He also drew further parallels from swords from the opposite side of the Adriatic, especially on the territory of Picenum, where they had also been interpreted through the lens of Urnfield influence on Italy.⁴⁴ Further comparisons can also be drawn with a sword from Rrethe Bazjë in Albania.⁴⁵ Although this sword is somewhat longer, at 62 cm, it bears all the characteristics of the two specimens previously described. The sword is unfortunately an isolated example from a devastated tumulus located in the Mati Valley (Fig. 2: 3).⁴⁶

The swords of Rrethe Bazjë type are generally attributed to the final stages of the Late Bronze Age: i.e. the turn of the 11th century

BC.⁴⁷ Several other swords with morphologically similar features can be attributed to variants of this type, with a sword from Pavelsko, in Bulgaria, being one of the earliest published among these.⁴⁸ In later studies, Klaus Kilian described such swords as being of Pavelsko-Rrethe Bazjë type.⁴⁹ However, when taking into account the different individual characteristics of these swords, it can be seen that this is not the most appropriate classification. The find from Pavelsko has a very high, narrow handle plate, as well as a greater number of rivet holes. This weapon is better associated with a sword from Lakavica, in present-day North Macedonia.⁵⁰ When also taking into consideration its overall shape, it could be suggested that this sword is not an import from the north, but rather acts as a boundary identifier for types that were produced either locally or to the south in Greece.⁵¹ In Greece, the retraction at the base of the hilt is commonly observed on iron swords, but rounded shoulders are comparatively rare. A similar sword comes from grave X/1 at Vergina;⁵² according to the typological classification of Imma Kilian-Dirlmeier, this is a sword of type Naue II, group A, variant 4 with 'fish-tail' terminal, dated to the Late Helladic IIIC period.⁵³ The sword from Tomb XXVIII at Tiryns gives another possible parallel; it is dated to the transition from the Sub-Mycenaean period to the Protogeometric.⁵⁴ Furthermore, a sword from Castellace, in Calabria, bears identical blade and mid-rib constructions. However, this specimen has slightly narrower shoulders, and is dated to the period *Bronzo Finale* 1-2.⁵⁵ This atypical sword from Italy is most probably of an exogenous origin, and was likely transported from Greece via the Adriatic. To counter this, however, Renato Peroni has stated the possibility of local production on the basis of the common tradition of the Alleron-Moulina type swords.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, this specific form appears to be limited to the Adriatic hinterland between Dalmatia and Albania. The similar features and design of the Rrethe Bazjë type swords indicate a manufacturing tradition amongst local workshops in this area, although certainly the initial impulse for such production must have come from northern Greece or the surrounding regions, where we also have swords with similar features.⁵⁷ It can be noted that most swords that possess faux-midribs are more elegant and with thinner blades than the 'original' design of Naue II swords. According to Barry Molloy, this meant that they were used in a manner that incorporated cutting techniques, similar to that employed for earlier Aegean midrib swords. Most were simply not suited to the robust slashing often postulated as being the defining characteristic of Naue II swords, largely due to the fact that they would bend or break if used in that manner. No

43 Batović 1970, 176.

44 Batović 1970, 181.

45 Harding 1974, 158; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 96. T. 35: 233.

46 Eggebrecht 1988, 197. kat. 44; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 96; Harding 1995, 54.

47 Pabst 2015, 109.

48 Hänsel 1970, 36. Fig. 2: 1.

49 Kilian 1976, 126. Fig. 4; Glogović 1989, 14.

50 Harding 1995, 40. T. 14: 99.

51 Molloy 2019, 146. Fig. 3.

52 Harding 1995, 54; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 96. T. 34, 232.

53 Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 96, 100.

54 Harding 1995, 54.

55 Bianco Peroni 1974, 6. T. 3: 185C; Pacciarelli 2006, 253. Fig. 2: 32.

56 Peroni 1985, 226-227.

57 Harding 1974, 158; Harding 1995, 54.

known examples date to earlier than LH IIIC, with examples being found across much of central and northern Greece, Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia and Bulgaria.⁵⁸ The rarity of these grip-tongue swords throughout the Adriatic and its hinterland supports the hypothesis that possession of such swords may have been considered a symbol of great prestige here. Consequently, intentional final deposition in a warrior grave represents a highly symbolic act in afterlife cosmology.

Conclusion

An important question remains as to how to interpret the Gelja Ljut finds within the depositional customs of the region. The most widespread form of funerary architecture across the Adriatic hinterland within the Western Balkans is the tumulus.⁵⁹ The number of graves found in the Herzegovina region that can be dated to the Late Bronze Age is very small,⁶⁰ with the largest number of tumuli containing remains from later periods, predominantly the Early Iron Age. However, a number of tumuli bear evidence of a long continuity of burials, stretching from the Early Bronze Age right up to the Middle Ages.⁶¹ This is an important facet of discussion in the context of landscape and continuities in the funerary-ritual sphere. The largest concentrations of tumuli – and also an impressive number of hillfort settlements – in the area of eastern Herzegovina are concentrated on and around the karst fields (polja).⁶² This landscape ensured water sources and arable land for the predominantly cattle-breeding population. At the same time, the karst fields were – both geostrategically and economically – connected with the ore-rich area of central Bosnia and with the so-called Mediterranean *koiné* of the coastal regions. In parts of northern Herzegovina and central and northern Bosnia, throughout the period of the 12th and 11th centuries BC, one can observe a considerable demographic potential, with new settlement structures and more pronounced and developed local and regional connections. This suggests a significant social stratification and organization, and, in turn, a more advanced economic and political structure. New settlements are primarily oriented towards ore-smelting and casting processes, bronze production, and finally ore exploitation, presumably from nearby sources.⁶³ There is evidence of a shift in production, with an increased number of local workshops. Another indicator of development in terms of technological traditions during the phase Ha A2 – Ha B1 is a strong oscillation of the proportion of tin in alloys, as compared to the more or less standardized values evident in the

preceding period. Finally, profound changes are also seen in the occurrence of many new types of jewellery and weaponry, with localized distribution patterns present across different regions of the Western Balkans.⁶⁴ The fact that the changes visible in the archaeological material occur almost synchronously across the different landscapes existing between the Danube and the Adriatic suggests a singular general and external reason, which may also be (at least in part) attributed to the climatic turbulence in the period between 1200 and 1000 BC.⁶⁵

All of the preserved artefacts from Gelja Ljut are indicative of belonging to a warrior panoply from the end of the Late Bronze Age. The bronze socketed axehead is perhaps one of the most ubiquitous tool forms of the Late Bronze Age, with this artefact type having been produced in many different shapes and sizes, which is suggestive of the axe's broad versatility as a tool or weapon. Variations in form and size can reveal to us the story of their practical – and perhaps social – function. In this context, their presence at Gelja Ljut is extremely important: although a fair number of socketed axeheads have been preserved in the area, no others to date have been recorded as part of a grave inventory.⁶⁶ The warrior attribute is made more prominent through the presence of a spearhead. Most other spearheads in the surrounding area have been found as parts of hoards⁶⁷ or as chance finds,⁶⁸ making them chronologically less reliable. On the other hand, leaf-shaped spearheads are commonly found in the tumuli of southern Albania (for instance at the sites of Himara, Dukat, Vajza and Bajkaj), with these being dated to the Sub-Mycenaean and Protogeometric period, a period corresponding to the Early Iron Age in Albania.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the broader context of the Ionian and Aegean area, the spearhead comes to represent a standard form of equipment within male graves in the 12th and 11th centuries BC.⁷⁰

The interregional connections of Gelja Ljut are best represented by the grip-tongue sword, categorized as being of the Rrethe Bazjë type. Swords were undeniably precious objects in the Late Bronze Age, as is demonstrated by their rarity in the graves throughout the Aegean and the wider Balkans.⁷¹ The unique design of this sword is almost certainly representative of regional craft trends, a product of local workshop traditions.⁷² Such traditions are reflected in the presence of a midrib flanked by two small ridges that are clearly a stylization of the midribs of earlier Type Di swords, common throughout the Aegean.⁷³ It could be

58 Molloy 2016, 350.

59 Čović 1978, 134.

60 Čović 1978, 134; Tomas, Rašić 2015, 82.

61 Marijan 2001.

62 Одавић 2003, 41–42.

63 Barbarić 2009, 314; Gavranović 2012, 107.

64 Gavranović *et al.* 2022.

65 Gavranović 2017, 119.

66 Čurčić 1907, 205; Marović 1981, 43–52; Žeravica 1993. During the excavation of a tumulus in Polog, near Mostar, W. Radimsky reported that a bronze socketed axehead and a knife were previously found in a destroyed tumulus at the same location, although no more precise information was given, except that the finds were privately held (Radimsky 1894, 446).

67 König 2004, 31–33.

68 Batović 1965, 45; Čović 1985, 52–52; Marović 1981, 34–40; Pabst 2020b, 385.

69 Bodinaku 2001, 53–55; Ćipa, *et al.* 2020, 463–464.

70 Avila 1983; Eder, Jung 2005, 490; Bukárou 2018, 409; Pabst 2020a, 82.

71 Eder, Jung 2005, 490.

72 Pabst 2015, 112.

73 Molloy 2018, 91.

argued that we have a local metal, being used following a local craft tradition with a blade cross-section derived from the Greek tradition. Such a combination is unlikely to arise incidentally, but a variety of interpretations of its origin can be derived from different understandings of encounters between the artisan and the warrior – who respectively made and used this weapon – and those operating in neighbouring regions. The ‘blended’ heritage of this sword, along with those of most others, may therefore reflect not a concoction of random variables, but instead intentional choices based on the convergence of traditions and lived experiences, as well as on the ongoing craftsman-warrior dialectic.⁷⁴ We assume that swords of Rrethe Bazjë type were produced in one of the local workshops, presumably upon the territory of present-day Albania. This is a region that shows more intensive contacts with the Sub-Mycenaean populations of Epirus, Aetolia-Acarnania and Cephallonia. After the decline of the Mycenaean palatial states, new dynamics began to operate within previously peripheral regions.⁷⁵ But the question of the distribution of individual finds still remains. If other material – for instance the amber beads of the Tiryns type and arched fibulae with two knobs on the bow – is taken into consideration, we see an incredibly vivid network incorporated into the extensive trade

and exchange contacts between the Sub-Mycenaean society in the south and the communities from the west and the east of the Adriatic, through to the Terramare culture in northern Italy,⁷⁶ with the Kvarner Gulf arguably being the most important core region in the Western Balkans and the Adriatic coastal area during the Late Bronze Age.⁷⁷ On the other hand, this network could well have had a reverse trajectory, for example with swords being moved as finished objects. Therefore, we should allow for the possibility that swords of Rrethe Bazjë type from Gelja Ljut and Islam Grčki moved (either by trade or by other mechanisms) as finished objects from south to north across the Adriatic hinterland. Nevertheless, typological characteristics alone cannot provide a definitive answer to this. Furthermore, many studies dealing with Bronze Age weaponry continue to focus predominantly on the examination of cross-Adriatic relations between Greece and Italy,⁷⁸ with the potential of the eastern coast of the Adriatic remaining relatively marginalized.⁷⁹ Ultimately, Gelja Ljut provides us with an assemblage that was undoubtedly part of the inventory of a wealthy person. The choice of such objects for deposition in the grave shows careful selection relating to the deceased, and stands as a testament to cultural connections within a wider regional network during the 11th century BC.

74 Molloy 2018, 96; Molloy 2019, 143.

75 Bejko 1999, 179; Eder, Jung 2005, 489; Cwaliński 2020, 155; Kraft 2021, 664.

76 Eder, Jung 2005, 489; Blečić Kavur 2014, 57. Fig. 25; Pabst 2020, 294; Cwaliński 2020, 155–156.

77 Blečić Kavur 2014.

78 Eder, Jung 2005, 489, 486; Jung 2009, 72; Jung, Mehofer 2013, 180, 184; Falchetti Peixoto, Iacono 2022, 152–153.

79 Molloy, Doonan 2015, 236.

SAŽETAK

KASNOBRONČANODOBNI GROB IZ GELJA LJUTA U ISTOČNOJ HERCEGOVINI

U radu je prikazan skup kasnobrončanodobnih grobnih nalaza sa lokaliteta Gelja Ljut, kod Gacka u istočnoj Hercegovini. Komplet se sastoji od brončanog mača sa jezičastom drškom, vrha koplja i dvije tuljaste sjekire. Primarni fokus istraživanja je morfološka, tipološka i stilaska analiza artefakata u odnosu na druge slične poznate predmete, kako bi se ponudilo moguće rješenje pitanja njihova kronološkog pozicioniranja i potencijalnog mjesta izrade, te određeni kulturni kontekst u kome su artefakti cirkulisali. U konačnici, lokalitet Gelja Ljut pruža nam

skup koji je nedvojbeno bio dio inventara bogate osobe, ratnika. Odabir ovih predmeta svjedoči o pažljivoj brizi vezanoj za predstavljanje pokojnika i svjedočanstvo je složenih kulturnih veza prisutnih u obliku šire regionalne mreže tijekom 11. stoljeća pr. Kr. Nadalje, interpretacija “funerarnog seta” omogućuje nam bolje razumijevanje ljudskog djelovanja u prošlosti, posebice za područje gdje je arheološka baština ovog razdoblja do danas vrlo slabo evidentirana.

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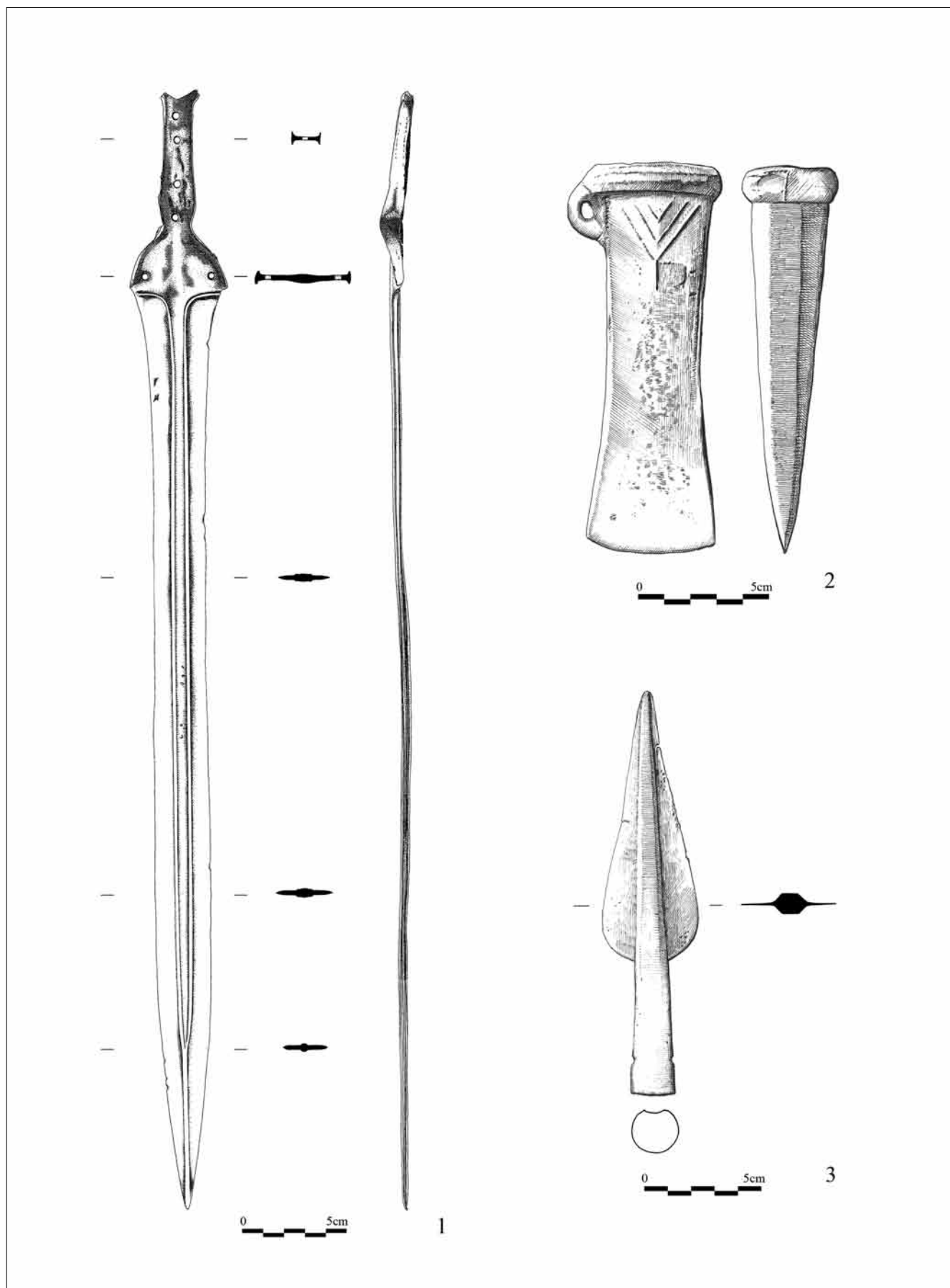
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**PLATE 1.**

A Late Bronze Age burial finds from Gelja Ljut: 1. Sword, 2. Spearhead, 3: Socketed axe (drawing made by: J. Beus).