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REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BRNJICA CULTURAL GROUP

Abstract. – A large number of newly registered and researched sites help to distinguish regional characteristics in the Brnjica cultural group development. On the basis of special features in the material culture, pottery in the first place, several regional entities were identified: (1) Kosovo with the Raška Region and Pešter, (2) The Južna and Zapadna Morava confluence zone is characterized by interweaving of the Brnjica and Paraćin cultural groups and, afterwards, by a mixture of Brnjica cultural group elements with the Iron Age I a – b cultural groups from the Velika Morava basin, (3) The Leskovac–Niš region is characterized by symbiosis, after the initial phase, and later on by integration of the Brnjica cultural group with the ethno-cultural complex Iron Age I b in the Morava basin, and (4) the Južna Morava Region, upstream from Grdelica Gorge, the Pčinja and the Upper Vardar Regions, is characterized by specific Brnjica cultural group archaeological material. The sites with Brnjica type pottery finds in Blagoevgrad, Plovdiv as well as on a number of sites in Pelagonia, Lower Vardar basin, on the island of Thasos and Thessaly, show the extent of influence of the Brnjica cultural group within the period between the 13th and 12th centuries BC and portend the role of the Brnjica population in the events designated as the Aegean Migration.

Key words. – Brnjica cultural group, regional characteristics, pottery, iron, Aegean migration.

Until recently, our knowledge of the Brnjica cultural group (or cultural group Donja Brnjica – Gornja Stražava) was based on the research results from fifteen or so sites, mainly necropolises.[1] There were no data on settlements and habitations.[2] The total archaeological collection of the Brnjica community amounted to less than three hundred objects, mostly ceramic vessels.[3] This cultural group was characterized as the final phase, »… of a long evolution to be followed with certainty through the entire Bronze Age, while closely connected to the Balkan–Danube complex and elements the linguists mark as Dako–Moesian. Therefore, this group's finds could be identified with the non-Illyrian component in the Dardanian ethnogenesis.«[4]

After M. Garašanin's synthesis in the *Praistorija jugoslovenskih zemalja,* the works of a larger number of authors significantly promoted the cognition on territory, genesis, development, settlements, habitations, material culture, forms of economy, chronology and other characteristics of the Brnjica cultural group.[5]

The year 1999 was the turning point in Brnjica community research when archaeological excavations were carried out on a multilevel settlement of the Brnjica cultural group in the southeast part of the Hisar site in Leskovac. On that occasion, only the trial excavation of an area of 4 x 2 m showed Brnjica cultural group layers of 1.2 m in depth with four strata, representing four development phases of this cultural group

[1] Garašanin 1983, 774; Lazić 1996.

[2] Garašanin 1983, 775.

[3] Lazić 1996.

[4] Garašanin 1983, 778.

[5] Булатовић 2000, Булатовић 2001; Булатовић, Томовић, Капуран, 2005; Ерцеговић-Павловић, Костић, 1988, 24; Garašanin D. 1996; Georgiev, 1989; Georgiev 1991; Georgiev 1992, Hänsel, Hochstetter 1986; Hochstetter 1984; Jevtić 1990; Jevtić 1997; Jovanović 1999; Krstić 1992; Lazić 1996; Lazić 2005; Luci 1997; Luci 1998; Luci 1998a; Медовић 2001; Mehmetaj 1990; Mehmetaj 1993; Mitrevski 1993; Mitrevski 1997; Mitrevski 2003; Пејић 2001; Stefanovich-Bankoff 1998; Stojić 2000; Stojić 2000a; Stojić 2001; Stojić 2001a; Stojić 2002; Stojić 2003; Stojić 2006; Стојић, Јоцић 2000; Стојић, Јоцић, Перић 2000; Стојић, Перић, Јоцић 1999; Стојић, Чађеновић 2001; Стојић, Чађеновић 2006; Стојић–Јоцић 2006; Стојић, Пешић, Јовић 2007; Tasić 1996; Tasić 1997; Tasić 1998; Tasić 2001, Tasić 2003.

(Brnjica I a–b, Brnjica II a–b). Several thousands objects were unearthed (mainly pottery fragments) of which around one thousand were published.[6] The oldest stratum was characterized by pottery forms already known from earlier researched necropolises of this cultural group – urn type vessels with a plastic ring around the inner rim edge, S-profiled bowls on a more or less pronounced bottom (with some objects the belly is ornamented with distinctly broad slanting cannelures), pear-shaped goblets with distinctly broad slanting cannelures on the belly, then goblets and cups with triangular rim broadening and, sporadically, large cone bowls with faceted rim. The structure of the pottery differed greatly from those found at necropolises, it was mainly fine and medium; there was also a great difference in the baking grade and processing of the outer surface (grinding/polishing). In the following stratum (II), beside all ceramic forms found in stratum I, there was a smaller amount of cannelured ceramics; the number of S–profiled bowls was smaller, but the number of cone bowls with faceted rim and cups had increased. In stratum III, the S–profiled bowls are scarce, while the share of other ceramic forms, characteristic of the two oldest strata, is significantly diminished, with a sudden enhancement of the share of cannelured ceramics of Iron Age I b type of the Morava basin[7]. The last, IV stratum, is thin and except for the 1999 trial excavation, it is found only in certain parts of the site. A predominance of cannelured ceramics is characteristic for stratum IV, with sporadic finds of Brnjica ceramics typical for strata I and II at the Hisar site.

The information acquired led to the conclusion that the Hisar site represents the entire development of the Brnjica cultural group in the Južna Morava basin and that the basis out of which the Brnjica cultural group developed were the cultural elements from the last phase of the Vatin cultural group (Mojsinje–Dobrača horizon)– (for instance: goblets and cups with triangular rim broadening, cannelured bowls and S-profiled goblets and one or double handled goblets very similar to the corresponding Vatin forms from the Mojsinje–Dobrača horizon)[8]; that already in the second phase (strata II–Brnjica I b phase) contacts were made with the cultural complex Iron Age I a from the lower Morava basin, manifested in the cannelured ceramics characterizing to the greatest extent the cultural groups of the complex; the predominance of the cannelured ceramics in the III stratum (Brnjica II cultural group phase) can be explained by the influx of the ethnic element from the North (Morava basin I b phase) and its mingling with the autochthonous population, while the thin and poor IV stratum is the obvious reflection of the situation in the wider region of the Morava basin (Morava basin I c phase) and central Balkans – the consequence of the sudden population decrease.

The archaeological excavations in Leskovac gave the key to identification of the Brnjica finds in other museums in the Morava basin; through classification of material and intensive identification, trial and protective excavations, fifty-four Brnjica cultural group sites have been designated, of which ten are in the Vranje region: Ljanik, Svinjište, Biljača, Končulj, Lučane, Surdul, Priboj, Klinovac, Piljakovac and Žujince; twenty-five in the Leskovac region: Leskovac, Vučje, Grdelica, Crcavac, Vrapce (Mihajilo Jojić homestead site), Vrapce (Kućevštine site), Sijarinska banja, Maćedonce, Bobište (Izvorište site), Bobište (Sastanci site), Živkovo, Semče, Zbežište, Togačevac, Jašunja, Jarsenovo, Lapotince, Vlasotince, Slatina, Podrimci, Mala Grabovnica, Zlokućane, Lipovica and Pirot [9]; eight in Niš region: Bratmilovce, Gornja Glama, Donje Vlase, Malča, Niš – Medijana, Niš – Bubanj, Paradik and Hum[10], and eleven sites within the Južna and Zapadna Morava confluence zone: Boljevac, Globoder, Zdravinje, Jasenje, Kruševac, Makrešane, Mali Šiljegovac, Mačkovac, Praskovče, Stalać and Čitluk.[11]

The archaeological excavations in Leskovac were intensified from 2002.[12] These excavations have been carried out up to the present; research was carried out on different parts of the site covering an area of over 1,500 m². An enormous quantity of archaeiological material was unearthed: tens of thousands of objects

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[6] Stojić 2000, 12–16; Стојић 2001, 17–25; Капуран, Стојић 2000.

[7] »Cannelured ceramics« from strata I and II differ essentially from the cannelured ceramics from strata III and IV; cannelures on the ceramics from strata I and II (Brnjica I phase) are shallow and roughly performed, while those from the strata III and IV are distinct and precisely performed and thus very similar to the ceramics canneluring technique of the Iron Age I b type of the Morava basin. Not applied on the Brnjica II period ceramics, grooving is the characteristic technique for the Brnjica I period ceramics. On ceramics from the Iron Age I b phase in the Morava basin refer to: Stojić 1986, 42–48; Stojić 2004, 149, 156–157.

[8] Стојић 1998.

[9] Ерцеговић-Павловић, Костић 1988, 24; Stojić 2000, 12–20; Стојић 2001, 10–18; Stojić, 2003, 120–121; Булатовић 2000, 23–42; Булатовић 2001, 163–178; Булатовић, Томовић, Капуран 2005, 399–437.

[10] Стојић, Јоцић 2006, 55, 80, 95, 134, 149, 157, 199, 229.

[11] Чађеновић 2001; Стојић, Чађеновић 2006, 64, 87, 91, 94, 102, 155, 160, 177, 186, 207, 225.

[12] Stojić 2002, 236–238.

(vessels, pottery fragments with typological or style characteristics, ceramics and items in bronze, bone, iron and stone) and architectural plastics.

The main characteristic of the Hisar site of over hundred hectars is its scarce population during the Brnjica cultural group period; only the plateau of several hectars in size and several terraces on the Hisar hill slopes, also covering an area of several hectars, show traces of scarce population. During the Brnjica cultural group period, the plateau was protected by a deep moat with a palisade on its inner side, a fortification similar to that from a significantly later period of prehistory (8th century BC) on the Gradac site in Lanište in the Velika Morava basin.[13] The cultural layer of the Brnjica cultural group reaches over 1.6 m in certain parts of the plateau, and in vertical stratigraphy the first three strata, evidenced in the 1999 trial excavation were confirmed.

On the terrace, where the first excavations were carried out in 1999, a ferrous metallurgy center was discovered with evidence of iron production as well as of ferrous objects manufacture from the first two phases of the Brnjica cultural group.[14] The find of a cast for moulding bronze axes – kelts indicated that bronze objects were produced in the same place. Slag locations were also found, several ferrous objects, multi-armed air blowing ceramic pipes (for blowing air into the furnaces), dozens of furnaces (of which several at least were used for ore smelting; under a furnace calotte were found smaller pieces of amorphous iron), hundreds of millstones (on some, traces of ore grinding were preserved), large pieces of amorphous iron (the largest specimen of several kilograms was found in a furnace), charcoal pits.[15] On this part of the site were found together: a bronze axe – kelt and a cruciform ferrous axe. Here were also found: a bronze razor similar to the Vinča specimen and a needle for which there are analogies in specimens from Banat and Mačva (Ha A).[16] These bronze artefacts, dated to the 12th–11th century BC, confirm the conclusions based on ceramics, on the share of the cultures from the lower Posavina and the Serbian Danube valley in events during that century in the Južna Morava basin and in the south of the Balkan Peninsula.

Judging by an exceptionally great number of bone artefacts, semi-finished articles and bone remnants, found on one of the terraces of the Hisar site, there must have been the specialized workshop for production of bone objects.

Thus, on the Hisar site in Leskovac, in the Južna Morava basin centre, at the unavoidable point of all the Morava valley communications, and within the Jablanica and Veternica river basins in the east-west direction, a large settlement of the Brnjica cultural group was situated, consisting of a fortification – acropolis on the highest and most prominent part of the site and of specialized settlement parts on the slopes. The entire Brnjica cultural group development was documented in the vertical stratigraphy and in dozens of closed entities. Architectural plastics (zig zag grooves, spirals, circles) strongly resemble the Mycenaean architectural plastics, on one hand, and the architectural plastics in the Velika Morava basin and in the Serbian Danube valley, on the other.[17]

In Kosovo and Metohija, necropolises are predominant among the sites,[18] but two settlements were identified (Valač and Tenešdol)[19]. Though it is not advisable to make final conclusions on the material culture characteristics of a community on the basis of the finds – grave offerings (particularly of the »grave pottery«), the finds from the Brnjica cultural group settlements – among which there were no cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I types of the Morava basin – point to the uniqueness of the Brnjica community in this large central Balkan basin. Brnjica cultural group pottery from Kosovo is identical to the pottery found in strata I and II on the Hisar site in Leskovac. Does it mean that in Kosovo are represented only the oldest phases of the Brnjica cultural group, or, on the other hand, that the community development in Kosovo had a different direction lasting as long as the Brnjica cultural group in the Južna Morava basin? It is possible that Kosovo had a specific role within the framework of the Brnjica community; for instance – seasonal pasture regions or livestock winter shelter for the wider

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[13] Stojić 1986, 61–62.

[14] Stojić 2002, 238; Stojić 2006; Стојић, Пешић, Јовић 2007, 30–31.

[15] Stojić 2006; Стојић, Пешић, Јовић, 2007, 31.

[16] Weber 1996, 219, cat. no. 487; Vasić 2003, 80–81, cat. no. 530–531; Стојић, Пешић, Јовић 2007; Paper is at hand: Bronze and Ferrous Artefacts of the Brnjica Cultural Group from the Hisar Site in Leskovac.

[17] Stojić 1986, 31, fig. 3, 9–10; Stojić 2004, 66, T. XLII/11, 73, T. LII/7, 79, T. LVIII/16, 95, T. LXXVI/8, 99, T. LXXX/17–18, 100, T. LXXXI/19, 119, T. XCVIII, 121, T. CII/3, 124, T. CVII/8–9, 126, T. CIX/2, 130, T. CXIV/9–19, 135, T. CXX/12; Hänsel 1991, 71–83.

[18] Srejović 1960, 83–135; Мехметај, 1993; Lazić 1996; Luci 1997, 120–146; Луци 1998, 165–175; Tasić 1997, 287–299; Tasić 2001, 7–14; Tasić 2003, 39–61.

[19] Tasić 1960, 45–47; T. III/2, T. IV/5, T. VI/6, T. VII/1–2; Mehmetaj 1990, 89–92.

community; geographically, it was a well isolated region, encircled by mountains and protected from the strong winds blowing along the Morava valley. Settlements in Končulj, Tenešdol and Valač, suggest that Kosovo distributed its defence system along its bordering lines and along the communication routes leading into this large valley. The necropolises in the central part of Kosovo, except for burials, could have played the role of exceptional sacred places by which ownership over territory was emphasized, implying the responsibility of countrymen to take care of these sacred places at any price (as well as of the territory as a whole) as they represented also strongly fixed landmarks in seasonal movements. It was quite clear that they counted on the »help« of their dead countrymen to intercede with celestial powers and secure the existence and future of the community. Under such circumstances it is important to have an identity, a definite burial ritual and the same kinds of offerings, which was shown exactly in the reproduction of the same or very similar grave offerings over a longer period. For instance, the novelties, such as the cannelured vessels, emerging under the influence of the Velika Morava basin within the Iron Age I period, do not appear in the graves. The appearance of such artefacts in the necropolises meant an essential change of the ethnic and cultural identity, which was not the case with the Kosovo necropolises. Thus, doubt remains whether the Brnjica community in Kosovo lasted as long as the one in the Južna Morava basin or shorter, the latter being more plausible.

On the Pešter and Raška regions necropolises and settlements were registered at Delimeđe, Dojeviće, Delimeđe–Melaje, Novopazarska Banja and Postenje.[20]

Within the Južna Morava and Zapadna Morava confluence zones there are eleven Brnjica ceramics sites. Three kinds of sites are characteristic: (1) sites with Brnjica ceramics exclusively, (2) sites characterized by mixed Brnjica ceramics and Paraćin cultural group ceramics (Paraćin I) and (3) sites in which the Brnjica ceramics are mixed with the cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I type in the Morava basin.[21] On the territory where the three main communications intersect in the central Balkans, exactly this kind of site could have been expected: the Morava basin in the direction north-south, with the Zapadna Morava valley in the direction east-west, in the region where the communities from the Iron Age I in the Velika Morava and Zapadna Morava basins are faced and interwoven with the Brnjica cultural group. The Konopljara site in Čitluk is indicative for the historical interpretation of the period with its closed features from the late Bronze Age (ca. 14th century BC) characterized by the Brnjica and Paraćin cultural groups elements, then the features with exclusive Brnjica ceramics and those in which Brnjica elements are permeated with the ones characteristic of the Iron Age I in the Morava basin, and, finally, numerous features with exclusive archaeological material typical for the Iron Age I b in the Morava basin, among which there are several grave entities.[22]

In the Vranje–Bujanovac basin and the gravitating regions there are numerous lowland and hill fort settlements.[23] The hill fort settlements are located in such a fashion that they are obviously part of a defence system within smaller geographic features – basins. Among those settlements are ones with palisade fortifications (Končulj), like the Hisar site in Leskovac, while some (Svinjište), are protected with a dry stone wall.[24] The region is characterized by ceramic forms such as the ones from the oldest Brnjica cultural group phase in the Hisar site in Leskovac, then by the incised decoration ceramics, while the cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I type in the Morava basin is found at a limited number of sites and exclusively in the Južna Morava valley.[25]

In Macedonia, particularly in the Pčinja and Vardar basins, a large number of sites are registered with Brnjica ceramics type. There are fifteen sites of the Brnjica ceramics in the Pčinja basin.[26] At the Ključka site in Skopje were found more or less all the ceramic forms and decoration techniques as the ones from the Hisar site in Leskovac.[27] To this site belong parts of a helmet made of wild boar's teeth, pointing to the undisputed influence of the Mycenaean world.[28] A collection of the Brnjica vessels, characteristic of the Brnjica I period, was found in the Varoš site in Prilep.[29]

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[20] Летица 1979, 73–77; Летица 1981, 10–14; Lazić 1996; Jevtić 1997, Pl. XV/1.

[21] Чаѓеновиќ 2001; Стојић, Чаѓеновиќ 2001, 48–55.

[22] Стојић, Чаѓеновиќ 2001, 47–80; Стојић, Чаѓеновиќ 2006, 228–229, cat. no. 25–26; Стојић, Чаѓеновиќ 2006, 228–229, cat. no. 25–26.

[23] Булатовић 2000, 23–42; Булатовић 2001, 163–178; Булатовић, Томовић, Капуран 2005, 399–437; Лазић 2005, 134–172.

[24] Information acquired from A. Bulatović, who carried out trial excavations on the site in 2006.

[25] Лазић 2005, T. VIII/5–9, T. IX/1–3.

[26] Георгиев 1989; Георгиев 1991; Георгиев 1992; Mitrevski 1993, 115–124.

[27] Mitrevski 1993, fig. 1–2.

[28] Mitrevski 1993, 119, fig. 11.

[29] Праисторија во Македонија 1976, 55, cat. 496–498; Hänsel, Hochstetter 1986, 255–262.

In strata 18–9 on Kastanas, in the lower Vardar basin, there are numerous and diverse ceramics rather similar to the Brnjica ceramics from the Južna Morava basin sites; in strata 19–18 (ca. 1600–1400 BC)[30]; in strata 17–15 (ca. 1400–1190 BC)[31], in strata 14–11 (1190–1000 BC)[32], strata 10–8 (ca. 1000–900 BC)[33]. Some ceramic forms such as cone vessels with faceted rim appear on Kastanas much later, as is the case with the cannelured ceramics.

On the Kamena čuka site in Blagoevgrad, the Brnjica ceramics and one of the Mycenaean type were found together.[34] Kamenska čuka hill fort, by the layout and the way of building (stone fort) is much more likely to have belonged to the Mycenaean civilization than to the Brnjica cultural group. Given its position on the best communication route leading from northern Greece to the North and the fact that it is situated at the border of the Brnjica territory, it can be assumed with certainty that the contacts of the Mycenaean world and the Brnjica community were made through this very hill fort, which, was confirmed also by archaeological material.[35]

The Plovdiv hoard is the most eastern ceramics site similar to the Brnjica cultural group ceramics, while the necropolises in the Raška region and the Postenje hill fort are the most western Brnjica ceramics sites (Detev, 1964; Jevtić, 1997, Pl. XV/1). The influence of the Brnjica cultural group is visible on the contemporaneous ceramics in a larger number of sites in the north of Greece (up to Thessaly) including some of the northern Aegean islands (Thasos, for instance).[36]

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In order to reach a conclusion on the number of sites, territory, regional and other characteristics of the Brnjica cultural group, it should be kept in mind that the degree of investigation at individual geographical features belonging to the community differs very widely. When the Južna Morava basin is concerned, there are certain advantages singling it out from the neighboring regions, such as: (primarily) its position on the main and only communication in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula in the direction north-south, the remarkable fertility of the land reclaimed each year by regular annual floods, somewhat more favourable climate than some of the neighbouring regions (due to the influence of the moderated Mediterranean climate across the Preševo watershed), ore, stone and energy resources; these are the main reasons of continuous population of this region during all prehistoric stages, starting from the Neolithic. It seems, however, that the present ratio of the registered number of the Brnjica cultural group sites in the Južna Morava basin and other regions of the same community is unrealistic. If in only the Južna Morava basin, a smaller part of the territory of the community, more than fifty Brnjica sites are registered, then it can be presumed with utter certainty that an exceptionally high number of settlements and necropolises can be expected over its entire territory, which makes it a significantly higher number than any of the contemporaneous cultures on the Balkan Peninsula.

Consequently, it could be stated at present that there are several regions on the Brnjica cultural group territory with certain specific characteristics as to the number of inhabitants, population density, appearance, size, topography and settlement disposition, material culture in individual development phases or during the entire development, particularly with regard to decoration and representation of respective ceramics forms, duration and several other characteristics; for instance, on the territory south of the Grdelica Gorge (in that part of the Južna Morava basin, in Pčinja and Vardar basins) ceramics were more frequently decorated by incision, while cannelured ceramics appeared in scarce number. The Leskovac and Niš regions, with the exception of

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[30] Hochstetter 1984, T. 1/1–14, T. 2/10, T. 3/1, 8, 110–12, T. 5/3–4, 7, T. 6/9, T. 7, T. 8, T. 9, T. 10/1 – the most typical ceramic form of the Brnjica cultural group;

[31] Hochstetter 1984, T. 12/2, 3, 12, T. 15, T. 16, T. 21/2–7, T. 23/7–8, T. 24/4, 6–10, T. 25, T. 26, T. 27 (specifically figure 10 – rim of the most typical urn of the Brnjica cultural group) T. 31/11, T. 33/3, 9–10, T. 34, T. 36, T. 37/5–13

[32] Hochstetter 1984, T. 39/10, T. 45/10, T. 50 (specifically two vessels of a type belonging to the most distributed urn kind in the Brnjica cultural group) T. 56/8–9, T. 65/2, T. 70/5, T. 71/2 (the first appearance of the cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I type in the Morava basin) T. 76/1 (and of cone vessels with faceted rim) T. 78/2–3, 6 (the handle reminding of the Brnjica handles with a trapezium-like plastic decoration on its upper part) T. 99/3, 6–7 (cannelured ceramics as the one in the Hisar site) T. 101/4, 8 (cannelured ceramics as the one in the Hisar site) T. 102, T. 109/8, T. 110/8–9, T. 112/3 (cannelured ceramics as the one in the Hisar site).

[33] Hochstetter 1984, T. 116/3–5, 10, 12, T. 117/2–5, 10 (cannelured goblets with plastic broadening on the shoulder, typical of Hisar site) T. 122/2 (strainer), T. 124, T. 125, T. 129 (cannelured goblets), T. 136/4–5, 138/7 square vessel as the Hisar specimen, T. 144, T. 145, T. 147/3 (cover).

[34] Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998, 274, fig. 26/A–D.

[35] Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998.

[36] Grammenos 1980, I/4, II, VI/12, VII/10, IX/5, X/2, XI/3, XII/2–3; Grammenos 1982, fig. 2/AD/, AV, AG; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1982, fig. 5/1–2.

the oldest phase, are characterized by an increasing share of cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I type in the Morava basin in the ceramics fund during other development phases of the Brnjica cultural group.[37] The initial phase (ca. 14th century BC) in the Kruševac region is characterized by a mixture of the Paraćin and Brnjica ceramic forms, while the following phase is distinguished by a higher representation in number of cannelured ceramics typical of the Iron Age I a in the Morava basin as compared to the Brnjica one; during the rest of the Iron Age I there are scarcely any ceramics typical of the Brnjica cultural group.

The ceramics from the Kosovo sites fit by style and type into the ceramics of the first two phases of the Brnjica cultural group in the Leskovac region, with the exception of the cannelured ceramics. However, it is unclear whether the cannelured ceramics are absent from Kosovo due to lack of influence from the communities of the Serbian Danube valley, the Velika Morava basin and the Brnjica community from the Leskovac region, or whether the Brnjica cultural group development in Kosovo was shorter-lived than that of the Južna Morava basin, making it impossible for the cannelured style of decoration to spread into that region.

Due to insufficient research, no definite conclusions can be reached with regard to the Brnjica community characteristics in the Pešter and Raška regions (Delimeđe, Dojeviće, Delimeđe–Melaje, Novopazarska banja, Postenje sites) but it seems these regions do not differ much from Kosovo with regard to the archaeological material, though it should be emphasized that the ceramics from the Humpa site in Dojeviće village have some specific characteristics compared to the ceramics from the Kosovo sites, and particularly those referring to the phase I in the Leskovac region.[38]

There are only a few sites east of the Južna Morava with ceramics finds typical of the Brnjica cultural group: Pirot (Mađilka site), Lukanja, Blagoevgrad (Kamenska čuka) and Plovdiv.[39] While the Pirot site is situated on the periphery of the Brnjica cultural group region, the Blagoevgrad site and particularly the Plovdiv site most probably testify more to a degree of influence from the Brnjica cultural group than they do to the actual presence of this culture in the Struma and Maritsa valleys. The Pirot ceramics, however, are more related in style to the south region of the Brnjica cultural group (south of Grdelica) than to the Leskovac region, as the Pirot ceramics are characterized by incised decoration. The ceramics, especially the decoration on a certain number of goblets, point to the influences of the Govora and Čerkovna cultural groups and several others from the last four centuries of the second millennium BC.[40] In the Morava basin, south of Grdelica, and at the Macedonian sites, the urns with plastic ring around the inner rim edge are much more scarce and cannelured ceramics are sporadic, which is an essential difference compared to the Leskovac and Niš regions. A certain number of ceramic vessels with painted decoration from Saraj brod as well as a certain number form Thasos and Thessaly demonstrate Brnjica cultural group influence with regard to the vessel forms.

CLOSING INTERPRETATIONS

The basis for the genesis' process of the Brnjica cultural group (and other cultural groups from the late Bronze Age and Iron Age I from what had been Vatin cultural group territory) was the most recent stratum of the Vatin cultural complex – the Mojsinje–Dobrača horizon.[41] The Brnjica cultural group borrowed a series of ceramic forms from the cultural manifestation, marked as the Mojsinje–Dobrača horizon, (pear-shaped urns with rounded protrusions on the shoulder, goblets with double or one handle with a triangular broadening at the rim, S-profiled bowls with triangular broadening at the rim and others). The transformation period of the cultural horizon Mojsinje–Dobrača into cultural groups: Brnjica, Belegiš, Iron Age I in the Morava basin and Žuto brdo was short and its is common knowledge that the very process was significantly influenced by Mycenaean civilization up to the end of the 13th century BC.[42]

Development of the mentioned cultural groups is characterized by significant mutual permeation. In contrast to the Paraćin cultural group from the late Bronze

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[37] On ceramics characteristics from the Iron Age I a phase in the Morava basin: Stojić 1986, 33–42; Стојић 2004, 144, 148.

[38] Летица 1979; Летица 1981; Lazić 1996; Jevtić 1997, Pl. XV/1.

[39] Јевтић 1990; Пејић 2001; Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998; Детев 1964.

[40] Hänsel 1976, 59–62, 76–87, T. 4–6, T. 9–11.

[41] Stojić 1998.

[42] This was shown by the architectural plastics on the Feudvar site in Mošorin, as well as by the architectural plastics on a larger number of sites in the Velika Morava basin (Sarina međa in Jagodina, Vrbica in Dragocvet, Panjevački rit in Jagodina, anthropomorphic plastics in Mycenaean anthropomorphic plastics style in the Panjevački rit in Jagodina and anthropomorphic plastics within the framework of the Žuto brdo–Grla Mare cultural group. Hänsel 1988, 2–64; Hänsel 1991, 71–83; Mitrevski 1993, 119; Stojić 2004, 292–295; Hänsel 1988, 2–64; Hänsel 1991, 71–83; Mitrevski 1993, 119.

Age (ca. 14th century BC) and the community marked as the Iron Age I a in the Morava basin, characterized exclusively by lowland settlements, the Brnjica cultural group is equally charcterized by hill fort and lowland settlements. The Paraćin cultural group and the cultural manifestation marked as Iron Age I a in the Morava basin, on one hand, and the Brnjica cultural group on the other, are not distinctly divided by territory; for instance, Paraćin necropolises are registered up to Aleksinac, while the Brnjica cultural group finds are mainly registered in the Južna and Zapadna Morava confluence zones, where necropolises belonging to the Paraćin cultural group have been discovered. The influence of this cultural group is also detectable at individual sites of the Velika Morava basin.[43]

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Somewhere around the 14th century BC, in the Južna Morava basin, a large number of Brnjica cultural group settlements appeared, among which were numerous large and artificially fortified hill fort settlements. Research to-date suggests various possible reasons for the appearance of such a large number of hill fort settlements in such a short time. The principal reason was, undoubtedly, the protection of the densely populated territory, communication control (of the Morava basin and other river zones), preservation of natural resources and sacred places (large necropolises), organization of economic and social life as well as the consequences of internal social development (social differentiation), relations with neighbouring communities and, particularly, it seems, with the Mycenaean world. It is a well-known fact that the Mycenaean world, several centuries prior to its downfall, had a monopoly over the bronze trade in the Mediterranean and, consequently, the demand for bronze increased enormously, thus arousing the interest of the Mycenaean world in communities which possessed bronze (that is, the alloy ores) or in the communities across whose territory these contacts were made.[44]

All the cultural groups (Belegiš, Paraćin, Brnjica) on the one-time territory of the Vatin complex had iron objects at their disposal.[45] Namely, there are undoubted proofs that the Belegiš and Paraćin cultural groups used iron objects, while it is known for the Brnjica community that it produced iron in its earliest development phase (in the 14th century BC) and made objects from this metal.[46] Iron – »the royal metal« or Homer's »metal dearer than gold«, as with the Hittites, was produced within the Brnjica community under the auspices of the largest and strongest fortification – on the Hisar hill in Leskovac, in the very core of the Brnjica territory. There is no proof that the Mycenaean world produced iron, but it used it.[47] It cannot be ruled out that the Mycenaean world procured this metal from the same places it obtained bronze (that is, bronze ores) – a significant share from their Balkan hinterland. Goods exchange as well as other contacts with the Mycenaean civilization undoubtedly influenced the Brnjica community development favourably and, at the same time, enhanced the appetites of its leading circles for possession of more and more precious goods to confirm their social status.

Relatively numerous sites in which ceramics of Brnjica type were found in the Vardar basin as well as in the north of Greece up to Thessaly, point to population movements from the central Balkans towards the Mycenaean territory at the time when the Brnjica community flourished, reached its peak and, like others, developed ferrous metallurgy, but neglected the protection of the northern regions of its territory. Under such conditions, the cultural group from the Iron Age I b phase in the Morava basin found ways to leave the Velika Morava valley and reach the Južna Morava basin up to the Grdelica Gorge, undoubtedly causing movements further to the south in response. The powerful advance of cultural groups from the north (from the Serbian Danube valley and the Velika Morava basin) is proved not only by the cannelured ceramics of the Iron Age I type, but also by bronze artefacts (decoration needles, axes-kelts, razors, bracelets) from the Hisar site in Leskovac. From that moment on, the archaeological material of the Južna Morava basin north of Grdelica Gorge is characterized by a mixture of the material culture of the Iron Age I community in the Morava basin with traditional forms of the Brnjica population in proportionally 10: 1 during the Brnjica I b phase, up to 5 : 1 during the Brnjica II a phase, and 1 : 4 in the last phase of this cultural group.[48] The quantity of the archaeological material, however, shows a significant decrease in the population of the Južna Morava basin north of Grdelica Gorge as compared to the 14th century BC. At the same time some regions of the Middle

[43] Tasić 1963; Тодоровић, Симовић 1959; Чађеновић 2001; Стојић, Чађеновић 2006; Stojić 1994, 219, Pl. 1–3.

[44] Bouzek 1985, 30–35, 39–69, 81–82, 92–244.

[45] Stojić 2002.

[46] Stojić 2006.

[47] Pleiner 2000, 10, 23.

[48] Scientific processing of the ceramics was carried out by M. Svilar.

Danube basin were completely deserted (during Ha B1, ca. 10th century BC), while the population in the Velika Morava basin decreased in number as was the case in the Južna Morava basin, with a sudden decrease in material culture quality. After the process had reached the lowest degree, somewhere at the turn of the 10th to the 9th century, a sudden revival of life occurred. The process most probably started from the south and continued northward, reflected in the erection of a great number of settlements, characterized by necropolises with numerous offerings made of iron (torques, bracelets, bangles, fibulae).[49] Generally speaking, a key role in the revival in the central Balkans and the Serbian Danube valley was played by the descendants of those who had moved several centuries before from the Morava basin to the north of Greece, at the very least they influenced subsequent events in these regions.

From the above, the conclusion can be reached that the impressively numerous Brnjica community from the 13th century BC, populating an enormous territory from the Pešter and Raška regions in the west up to Struma in the east and from the Južna and Zapadna Morava confluence zone in the north down to the Taor Gorge in the south, took part in the events designated as the Aegean Migration, which, *inter alia*, caused the destruction of the Mycenaean civilization and the great upheavals in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 13th and the beginning of the 12th centuries BC. This community knew the ferrous metallurgy, it developed craftsmanship based on iron, and had contacts with the Mycenaean civilization. One must wonder whether this very population initiated events which fatally reflected themselves on Mycenaean civilization, shifting communities from the north of Greece towards the south or did this population only use the opportunity to expand into the territory of the communities which had earlier moved towards Attica and Peloponnesus. At the beginning of the 11th century BC the population from the Velika Morava basin and the Serbian Danube valley (Iron Age I b phase in the Morava basin) reached the central part of the Južna Morava basin and mingled with the autochthonous Brnjica population, leaving behind deserted territory, particularly the Danube basin. The end of the 11th and the beginning of the 10th centuries BC in this part of the Morava basin witnessed a sudden decrease of population. Some large regions of the Brnjica cultural group, on the other hand, such as the Kosovo, Pešter and Raška regions were probably already deserted by the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 12th centuries BC and would remain unpopulated or strikingly poorly inhabited right up to the 8th century BC. Life in the Morava region and in the Serbian Danube valley was revived before the end of the 10th and during the 9th century BC, and the population is characterized by massive use of iron.[50] At present, it is not possible to answer precisely the question whether this »life revival« was the consequence of the new population influx or rather the result of the beneficial influence on the remaining population in the Morava basin and in the Serbian Danube valley, which brought about the revival of life and raised the cultural level in a short time due to innovations in economy and better social organization. Regardless of the dilemma whether this happened due to population influx or influence, the main protagonists of that crucial event at the beginning of the last millennium BC came from the north of Greece, most probably from Greek Macedonia. There is no doubt that elements of the Brnjica ethnic and cultural traditions from the 13th century BC are incorporated into their national being. This important event, with far reaching consequences, is confined to the Južna Morava basin, on one hand, by an exceptional technological discovery – the discovery of ferrous metallurgy in the 14th century BC and confirmed in the Brnjica settlement on the Hisar site in Leskovac, and by the life revival in that and other regions of the Morava basin and the Serbian Danube valley at the end of the 10th and in the 9th centuries BC, on the other hand.

The question arises whether one of the two booms in ferrous metallurgy, the initial one in the 14th and 13th centuries BC or the one at the beginning of the last millennium BC, could perhaps be connected to the Dorian migration and their iron weapons. It is generally accepted that the Dorians came from the north and northwest in the 11th century BC, conquered Peloponnesus and destroyed the remains of the Mycenaean civilization. The »north« and the »northwest« could be identified with the very territory in Greece for which evidence exists of a connection with the Brnjica tradition. Generally speaking, the same people known under the name of the Dorians, who reached the Peloponnesus and had at their disposal ferrous arms and superior military organization, had influenced crucially the life revival in the north at the end of the 10th or at the beginning of the 9th century BC in certain regions of the central

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[49] Никитовић, Стојић, Васић 2002, 42–44, 52, 54; Стојић, Васић 2005.

[50] Стојић 2002; Стојић, Васић 2005, 177–182; Никитовић, Стојић, Васић 2002, 42–44, 52, 54.

[51] Papazoglu 1969, 101–102.

Balkans. Do the ethnonyms, Dorians and Dardanians, which sound quite similar, designate one and the same people? Do the toponyms in Troada, the town at the foot of Ida on the Hellespont (between Ilion and Abid), the former name of the island of Samotraki, and the name of the straits between the Sea of Marmora and the Aegean, reflect the recollection of a powerful people whose roots most probably lay in the Morava basin?[51]

The most recent results of archaeological research confirm the opinion given by M. Garašanin on »Dako–Moesian elements« in the ethnicity of the Brnjica cultural group, but exclude any Illyrian component.

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РЕГИОНАЛНЕ КАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ БРЊИЧКЕ КУЛТУРНЕ ГРУПЕ

Велики број новорегистрованих и истраживаних локалитета омогућава да се се уоче регионалне карактеристике у развоју брњичке културне групе. На основу специфичности материјалне културе, првенствено керамике, идентификовано је неколико регионалних целина: (1) Косово са рашком облашћу и Пештери, (2) зона става Јужне Мораве и Западне Мораве окарактерисана прожимањем брњичке и параћинске културне групе и, затим, мешавином елемената брњичке културне групе са културном групом из гвозденог доба I a–b из басена Велике Мораве, (3) лесковачко-нишка регија коју одликује, након почетне фазе, симбиоза, а касније и интеграција, брњичке културне групе са етнокултурним комплексом гвоздено доба Ib у Поморављу и (4) област Јужне Мораве узводно од Грделичке клисуре, Пчиње и горњег Повардарја, окарактерисана специфичним инвентаром брњичке културне групе. Локалитети на којима је налажена керамика брњичког типа у Благоевграду, Пловдиву, као известан број налазишта у Пелагонији, доњем Повардарју, на Тасосу и Тесалији указују докле је стигао утицај брњичке културне групе у периоду XIII–XII века пре н.е. и наговештавају улогу брњичке популације у догађајима означеним као Егејска сеоба.