

Tonc, Asja

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BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE ALPS: TRACES OF MOBILITY AND TRADE OF THE LATE IRON AGE SOCIETIES IN THE NORTHERN ADRIATIC

Asja Tonc

Abstract:

The systematic study of protohistoric societies in the north-eastern Adriatic area in the period from 4th until the end of 1st century BC, i.e. in the Late Iron Age, allowed a more detailed typology with sometimes significant revisions of dating of particular finds or assemblages. The societies show an autonomous development, often with integration of new elements in a very original, specific way. The geographical conditions surely influenced the fragmentation into smaller groups, so we cannot talk of homogeneity within the supposed ethnic boundaries of the Liburni or Iapodes. In fact, there seem to be several groups that share common traits, maybe even language and religion, but also have an autonomous development and specific position within the network of communication and contact. This is perhaps most evident with the Una valley community, or when comparing southern and northern Liburnia. Even in time of increasing Roman influences and interventions, these communities maintained their autonomy and original expression. This is shown in the continuity of local shapes of fibulae and other dress elements, and also by integrating new types in the local costume (like brooches type Alesia and Distelfibeln in Una valley graves). The slow introduction of new elements can at first be connected with the local elite, whose members quickly adapted to economic and social changes under new circumstances.

Keywords:

north-eastern Adriatic, Late Iron Age, Liburni, Iapodes, Colapians, distribution and trade networks, identity

Résumé :

Entre la mer et les Alpes : traces de mobilité et de commerce des sociétés de la fin de l'âge du Fer de l'Adriatique septentrionale

L'étude systématique des sociétés protohistoriques dans le nord-est de l'Adriatique du IV^e au I^{er} s. av. n. è., c'est-à-dire l'âge du Fer tardif, a permis la mise en place d'une typologie plus détaillée, avec parfois la possibilité de rectifier les datations de découvertes ou d'ensembles particuliers. Les sociétés montrent un développement autonome, intégrant souvent de nouveaux éléments de manière spécifique et très originale. Les conditions géographiques ayant sans doute influencé la fragmentation en petites communautés, il est impossible de parler d'homogénéité au sein des supposées frontières ethniques des Liburni et des Iapodes. Dans les faits, il semble que plusieurs groupes partagent des traits communs, peut-être même la langue ou la religion, mais suivent toutefois un développement autonome et possèdent une position spécifique au sein du réseau de communication et de contacts. Le cas le plus manifeste est probablement celui de la communauté de la vallée d'Una, ou lorsqu'on compare le sud et le nord de la Liburnia. Alors même que les influences et les incursions romaines s'intensifient, ces communautés entretiennent leur autonomie et leur mode d'expression propre. Cela est visible à travers la persistance

de certaines formes de fibules locales ou d'autres éléments de vêtement, mais aussi par l'intégration de nouveaux types au costume local (comme les broches de type Alesia et les Distelfibeln dans les tombes de la vallée d'Una). L'intégration lente de nouveaux éléments peut en premier lieu être relié aux élites locales, dont les membres s'adaptaient rapidement aux changements économiques et sociaux.

Mots-clés :

nord-est de l'Adriatique, fin de l'âge du Fer, Liburni, Iapodes, Colapians, réseaux de distributions et d'échanges, identité

Introduction

The dissertation "Protohistoric communities in the northern part of the East Adriatic coast and its hinterland" aimed to gather all available data on the material culture of the observed area for the period between 4th and the end of 1st century BC. The area in question is situated between the rivers Raša in the west, Kupa in the north, Una in the east and Krka in the south-east. From the perspective of ancient written sources, this area is ascribed to Liburni, Colapians and Iapodes (Fig. 1).

The need for revision became evident in light of new literature and research, revealing some dating or interpretations, especially those dealing with questions of identity or Romanisation, as obsolete or inadequate from today's perspective. This revision was accomplished by gathering information in ancient written sources and data on burial or settlement characteristics from publications, as well as by analysing different categories of material, mainly dress and jewellery items, with fibulae as by far the largest category. Unfortunately, the context is often missing, since there are numerous chance finds or pieces found during the excavations at the end of the 19th and/or very beginning of the 20th century.

1. A new look at typology and chronology

The most important issue to be revised was that of chronology. The existing divisions elaborated by Šime Batović for the Liburni (Batović 1987) and Ružica Drechsler-Bižić (1987) and Zdravko Marić (1968) for the Iapodes seemed inadequate when compared to chronological schemes for neighbouring communities. The mentioned authors were correct in the basic divisions as well as in emphasizing the development of certain dress elements or other features from the end of the Late Bronze Age onwards. The continuity of these communities and their cultural development into the Late Iron Age are evident not only in prolonged usage of dress elements, but also in the continuity of settlements and burial grounds, as well as of communication networks. However, a fresh look showed

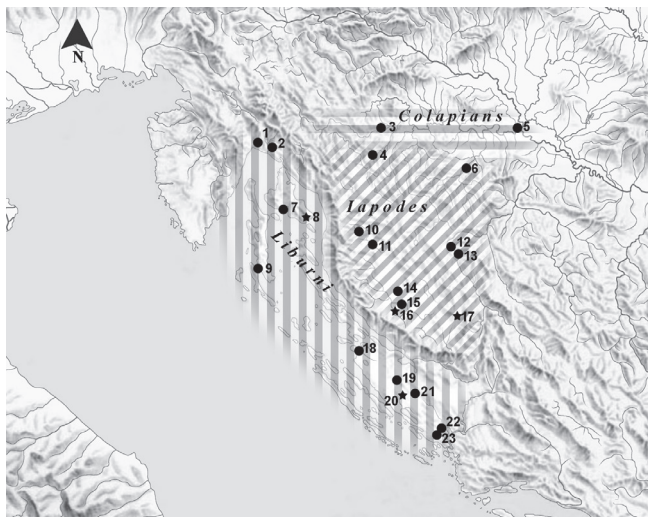


Figure 1: Map of the observed area with most important sites. Circle: cemetery or settlement; star: hoard; 1. Kastav; 2. Grobnik; 3. Vinica; 4. Trošmarija; 5. Sisak; 6. Turska Kosa; 7. Krk; 8. Baška; 9. Osor; 10. Kompolje; 11. Prozor; 12. Ribič; 13. Jezerine; 14. Široka Kula; 15. Vrebac; 16. Lički Ribnik; 17. Mazin; 18. Nin; 19. Nadin; 20. Jagodnja Gornja; 21. Aserija; 22. Dragišić; 23. Velika Mrdakovica (A. Tonc).

the possibility of correcting the dating of grave assemblages or specific types (especially helpful are grave associations with objects of foreign origin or influence that are rather well-dated in their core distribution areas) and establishing a more detailed division into sub-phases, or better said a grouping of items that can be placed more precisely within the boundaries of the already established chronological phases (Fig. 2). It was especially important to trace the development of types of local or regional distribution – sometimes used for a longer period with only slight morphological changes – that illustrate the changes of costume and can be considered as markers of autochthonous identity.

One interesting grave assemblage can be mentioned here to illustrate the revised chronology. According to Z. Marić, Grave 122 from Ribič in the Una valley belongs to phase Vb, *i.e.* between 35 BC and AD 10/20 (Fig. 3; Marić 1968, Tab. XII:10-20). However, a new analysis of all items present in the grave allows a different dating. The brooch with two knobs (*Kugelfibel*) is dated to the later phase of Middle La Tène and early phase of Late La Tène; the kantharos of Hellenistic (Mediterranean) origin is datable between the mid-3rd and mid-2nd centuries BC, while the brooch with one large amber bead can be dated from the second half of the 2nd century BC onwards. The latter belongs to a very particular local form with double spring and glass or amber beads, sometimes even with fragments of re-used Celtic glass bracelets on the bow. The type develops from the beginning of 4th century BC, and not just after the mid-3rd century BC as suggested by Z. Marić. The longevity of the original scheme, although with changes of decoration (decrease in number of beads, sometimes use of imported elements), suggests there was a need to keep this very distinguishable type as a marker of regional costume. Based on the finds, the general dating of Grave 122 can be placed

in the 2nd century BC. Furthermore, the assemblage is a good example for the “mixture” of La Tène and Hellenistic influences that allow parallel dating and possible corrections. A similar grave with “mixed” content of domestic local shapes and Hellenistic items, is a grave from Prozor in Lika with trapezoid belt buckles, also datable to the 2nd cent. BC (Balen-Letunić 1996). These examples clearly demonstrate that the hinterland of the north-eastern Adriatic rests in a position where spheres of influence meet.

2. Distribution and contact networks

Another important issue is that of the origin of objects, loosely divided into imported, regional and local, with distribution maps that allow a better comparison of particular elements or dress combinations. In this, the mere presence of a type is not the only important element, but one also has to consider its frequency in a specific area. Several forms of regional distribution, such as Kastav type brooches (Blečić Kavur 2009, Fig. 2), appear in the wider area as a sign of a regional communication network, in this case one oriented towards *Caput Adriae*, and cannot be considered as belonging to a single community.

Although the distribution maps can be biased due to state of research and publication, differences in dress can be observed not only between different communities, but also within the area supposedly belonging to the same ethnic, corroborating the idea of fragmentation of the territory. Significant differences are evident not only with individual types or their frequency, for example between the Kvarner region (northern Liburnia) and northern Dalmatia (southern Liburnia), but also in the orientation and preferred areas of contact of a specific community. Of course, the communication routes reflect the geographical position of the communities. Natural communication routes such as river valleys, major obstacles (mountain ranges) and fragmentation of the coast for sure influenced the development and establishment of networks of a specific community. This is one of the reasons why these groups show a very distinct, original material culture.

The northern Liburni (Kvarner) have a more emphasized orientation towards northern Italy and wider Alpine area, as well as numerous common traits with Lika and Una valley, *i.e.* Iapodes, and with Colapians. This is shown by the distribution maps of regional types, such as buttons of type Ribič or Vinica, trapezoidal pendants with horse protomes, *etc.* Connections with the rest of the Liburnian territory are mainly observed in types of more regional character, sometimes even supra-regional, such as fibulae of type Baška or Certosa.

The Una valley community(-ies?) is situated on an important north-south route, which at the northern end connects with the Sava River valley, a very significant East-West communication axis, and at the other end extends towards northern Dalmatia and the Adriatic coast. The importance of this route is also suggested by the distribution of coin hoards of so-called Mazin type (Bertol, Farac 2012, p. 97, for the most recent map). The distribution maps of several mentioned regional types show particularly strong connections with Vinica (Colapian centre) and the Kvarner region. Of course, there are many traits in common with the central Iapodic region, Lika, but in the latter there seem to be fewer Celtic influences. An important feature is the adaptation of new types to local customs, like

| Absolute chronology (y. B. C.) | R. Drechsler-Bižić 1987: Iapodes | Marić 1968: Una valley | Š.Batović 1987: Liburni | Middle Europe | Characteristic types |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|--|
| 380–320 | 5. | III | Va | LT B1 | Italic palmette buckles Triangular belt buckles Basket and fish-tail shaped pendants Bulae Fibulae type Baška Certosa VIIe/f, Ic/d Westbalkan variant of type Dux Amphora shaped glass beads Earrings type Kvarner |
| 320–250 | | | | LT B2 | Liburnian plate fibulae Fibulae with double spring and glass/amber beads Openwork belt plates Hat-shaped buttons type Vinica; Cross-shaped buttons Trapezoid pendants with protomae Horseshoe ear-rings (?); Human mask glass beads |
| 250–190 | 6. | IV | | LT C1 | Pseudo-filigree brooches Types Kastav; Nezakcij Fibulae with 1 knob Rectangular belt plates; conical and Ribić type buttons Shepherd's crook pins |
| 190–150/120 | | | | LT C2 | Types Mötschwil; Zvonimirovo; Valična vas Double-spring with 3 ambed beads and glass bracelet fragments Fibulae with enamel type Vinica, Kugelfibeln Nut-shaped fibulae Trapezoid belt plates type Prozor; Cast belt plates Glass bracelets Boat-shaped earrings |
| 150/120–80 | 7. | Va | | Vb | LT D1 |
| 80–15 | | | Vb | | LT D2 |

Figure 2: Chronological table with characteristic types (A. Tonc).

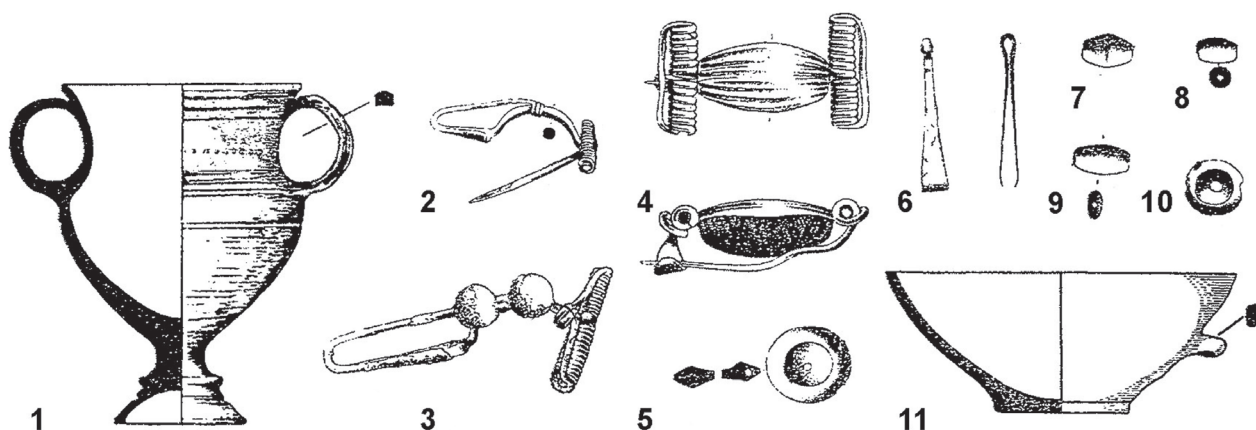


Figure 3: Finds from Ribić, Grave 122 (after Marić 1968, Pl. XII).

the fibulae with two knobs that show very particular characteristics and have to be distinguished from their counterparts in the Mokronog Group not only in the morphological traits or preference of bronze for casting, but also in the way of wearing. Later, a similar pattern can be observed in the integration of fibulae of type Alesia or *Distelfibeln* in the local costume.

The Kupa valley is another interesting area situated on the intersection of multiple spheres of influence. Iapodic or northern Adriatic influences are evident in many elements, but also appearing are elements which place Vinica (in part also Sisak) on the periphery of the Carpathian Basin in general – such as pseudo-filigree brooches (Jovanović 2011, Fig. 5) or those with enamel-decorated plates (Guštin 2011, Fig. 8). Naturally, the links to the Mokronog Group, more precisely with the Dolenjska (Lower Carniola) region, are especially important: to name just a few, brooches of type Zvonimirovo or glass bracelets of series Gebhard 27 (Gebhard 1989, p. 18; Dizdar 2006, p. 86-90, map 5; 2013, p. 241-244). Some types can be associated with female dress, thus possibly indicate individual mobility, maybe even existence of marital ties between these communities. Also, the Kupa area has to be considered as mediator in the transfer of products, ideas and customs of La Tène communities towards the areas inhabited by other autochthonous communities in the northern Adriatic region.

3. Tracing identities

The differences shown in material culture, *i.e.* in dress elements and their combinations, can be added to those in burial customs – between different communities, but also within a specific area. In fact, sometimes the latter were even explained as a sign of different ethnic presence, as for the supposed Iapodes in the Kvarner region, to whom supine inhumation burials have been attributed (Olujić 2007, p. 116-117). But, the rite occurs on only two locations (Grobnik and Kastav), in just a handful of graves and without many properly excavated sites in the same area that would allow a significant statistic for comparison. Also, supine inhumation occurs in southern Liburnia in the last centuries BC, even though only on some sites (Dragišić, Velika Mrdakovica, Nadin) and then usually in very particular family tombs with large amounts of Hellenistic pottery. There are signs that this type of burial sometimes appears even before, *i.e.* in the Early Iron Age (Dragišić: Brusić 2000; newer excavations in Nadin: Kukoč 2009; 2011), so we cannot connect this rite exclusively with the Iapodes. There can be many reasons for variation in grave ritual – the need to show one's status, gender or age *etc.* (*cf.* Lucy 2005, pp. 86-87, 105), so for sure there are, at least for the time being, no sufficient arguments for interpreting any specific rite solely as an expression of ethnic identity. This is even more obvious when comparing many differences in dress and burial customs between the two cemeteries in the Una valley, basically contemporary and lying very close to one another: Ribić has a clear dominance of incineration from the very beginning, while on Jezerine inhumation burials continue to exist even when incineration becomes more dominant (Marić 1968, p. 42, 45). The differences are probably to be explained by other, non-ethnic reasons, maybe as a reflection of family groups or some other similar division. The ethnic identity is not a fixed trait that can be easily recognised in

certain features of the material culture and one's need or way to express it can vary according to different circumstances (Hall 1997, p. 135; 2002, p. 9-10; Jones 1997; Shennan 1989, p. 11-13). In this light, the mentioned differences in burial ritual have to be carefully considered and cleared of any ethnical connotations, at least before comparing all other traits of the material culture that could be considered relevant for the issue of ethnicity. In the case of the protohistoric communities of the eastern Adriatic, the revision of typology and chronology showed that the differences observed in material culture can be traced back through all chronological phases of the Late Iron Age, suggesting that the diversification of the groups within a given territory was not a random choice, but one deeply rooted in the identity of a single group.

Furthermore, there are indications in ancient sources that seem to point to the existence of smaller communities. Some names appear in unclear context or seem to be used, suggesting that smaller communities were at a certain point integrated into the more important (for that time at least) larger groups – Iapodes or Liburni. The possibility of bias and prejudice in written sources and the problem of an outer perspective, as well as the use of literary *topoi* in descriptions of the “barbaric” tribes, have to be considered when trying to link ethnic names with archaeological material (*cf.* Bourdin 2012, p. 17-44; Fernández Götzt, Ruiz Zapatero 2011, p. 229; Džino, Domic Kunić 2013, p. 55-60). Still, all data suggests a much more complex picture than the one with only a couple of ethnic groups covering a large area, reflecting a foreign point of view that doesn't necessarily match the real situation. The most prominent names could probably be defined as ethnic networks, *i.e.* larger groups with a certain level of common activities and characteristics, but no political organization (Fernández-Götzt 2013, p. 71-72). The latter reflects in historical events, like different “Liburnian” communities choosing different sides in the Roman civil war between Pompey and Caesar, or later, during Octavian's conquests of 35 BC, with differences in Iapodic territory (quick surrender on one side and resistance on the other, therefore no common political decision; see Šašel Kos 2005). Inside these larger groups there were thus many smaller communities on a more local scale, as also indicated by the differences in costume, burial rituals *etc.*

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of various aspects of our present knowledge on the autochthonous communities in the Northeast Adriatic area suggest that we cannot see them as homogenous, but in fact composed of many smaller groups with several traits in common, maybe even those regarding language and religion, but each with its original development and specific position within the network of communication and contact.

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Asja TONC - PhD student

Thesis supervisor: Marko DIZDAR

Affiliation: Institute of Archaeology (Zagreb)

Email: asja.tonc@iarh.hr

