

Graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase Type at the Viminacium Cemetery from an Aspect of their Ethnic Origin

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Viminacium, a Roman town and important military center of the Upper Moesia, was established at the confluence of Mlava with the Danube, close to the contemporary village of Stari Kostolac¹. It was located at the important military route leading from Singidunum to the south, towards Naissus (Fig. 1). Three roads were crosscutting this area, connecting the town to the east, west and south regions of the Roman Empire. At the same time, Viminacium was an important military and civil Danubian port².

Viminacium was the camp of Legio VII Claudia erected on the right bank of Mlava, and settled almost continuously from the 2nd to the 4th century. Its size was approximately 442.20 x 385.60 m. Legio VII Claudia arrived to Moesia in sixth and seventh decade of the 1st century A.D., from Dalmatia. However, an earlier turf and timber camp was erected on the same place, by one of the first Moesian legions - IV Scythica or V Macedonica. A civil settlement was established beside the military camp, as it was noted in epigraphic sources. Its traces have been archaeologically confirmed to the west of the camp.

The settlement received a municipal status under Hadrian in 117. A status of colony was obtained by the end of 239 under Gordian III. A permission to mint coins was then obtained too. In the course of sixteen years (239-256) the mint emitted coins with portraits of Emperors (since Gordian until Vallerian) at the obverse. The most frequent representation at the reverse is a female figure - personifying the town, flanked by lion and bull - symbolizing the two Upper Moesian legions³.

In the course of 500 years, the cemeteries beside the camp and canabae (Pećine, Više Grobalja, Na rupi, Kod bresta), span over the 1st and the 4th centuries⁴ (Fig. 2). There have been uncovered so far 2973 cremation burials. Among them 782, i. e., 21% belong to type IIIa, while 1721 belong to type IIIb, i. e., 63% of the total number. The Viminacium cemeteries contain the following types of cremation graves, according to their form and construction:

I - *Graves in the form of shafts* with circular or rectangular groundplan (radius of circular shaft graves is between 0.90 m and 1.60 m. The size of the shaft graves with rectangular groundplan is 1.60 m x 1.10 m and the depth is between 2 and 10 m);

II - *Urns* - mainly ceramic (one of bronze, and one of glass);

IIIa - *Rectangular and ellipsoid* (simple) pits with bottom and sides burned (the most frequent orientation NE-SW. Average size of the groundplan is 1.90 m x 1.10 m, and the pit depth is 0.40 - 0.50 m);

IIIb - *graves en étage*, similar in form to type IIIa, but with a smaller inner pit (orientation is the same as with type IIIa, average size of the groundplan is 2.20 m x 1.20 m and inner pit size is 1.00 m x 0.60 m, the pit depth reaching 0.50 - 0.70 m)⁵.

I - Shaft graves are very rare, which is understandable knowing that this is the most complex and the most expensive mode of burial. This grave type is recorded in Singidunum and also Sirmium. These are the eastern most places of the type characteristic for Gallia.

II - Urn burials are also rare. The latest urns were dated by the Trajan coins. They are represented by insufficiently baked hand made pots of crude fabric. Large red and gray baked pots of kaolin manufactured on potter's wheel were also used. Urns made on potter's wheel belong to a class of kitchen pottery used primarily in a domestic context. After being damaged they reused as urns⁶. Grave goods are exceptionally rare in this type of burial (coins, lamps, pottery, bronze amulets)⁷.

IIIa, IIIb - The most frequent grave form in the Viminacium cemeteries are simple and en étage pits with the red and gray 2-5 cm thick, and heavily burned walls (Fig. 3, 4). This type of graves is referred to as the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type, according to a typology established by M. Garašanin. According to it, types I and II correspond respectively to types IIIa and IIIb at Viminacium. Garašanin's type III was not recorded in these cemeteries⁸. Types IIIa and IIIb in the Viminacium cemeteries appear since mid-first until mid-third century. There are a few varieties of these grave forms. Simple rectangular grave pits with rounded corners were often covered by soil to form a small mound. Less often they had a covering tile, either flat or ridged. Using a board or an amphora split longitudinally for covering was extremely rare. Graves en étage were covered in the same manner. Covering the inner étage by a number of tiles fitted horizontally into a mud mortar, was also rare occasion. Burial pit was burned together with mud mortar and the entire grave construction. This variety of graves had a flat or ridged covering tile. This also represents the latest type of a grave form, appearing since mid-second until mid-third century⁹. Graves en étage with a lower étage constructed separately are later than the other graves of en étage type, and they are contemporary with the earliest skeletal inhumations marked by the same grave construction¹⁰. One of the varieties of this type is a grave pit with three étages, registered in two of the Viminacium cemeteries.

Grave goods were added after placing the cremated remains into the burned grave pits. Regular grave goods were: lamps, coins, pottery and glass vessels.

Necropolis	Type IIIa	Type IIIb	Graves in the form of shafts	Urns	Type IIIa and IIIb*	Total
Više grobalja	510	1066		38	162	1776
Pećine	267	630	23	37	203	1160
Kod bresta	5	19	6			30
Na rupi		6			1	7
Ukupno	782	1721	29	75	366	2973

* These graves were very damaged and it was impossible to recognize whether they belong to type IIIa or IIIb.

Ornaments, censers, cosmetic kit, instruments, small boxes, keys, sea-shells and wall frescoes were placed additionally, depending on profession and financial status of the individual. Weapons, tools and statuettes were rarely placed as grave goods. Coins and jewelry were often burned together with the deceased¹¹. Weapons are rarely registered within cremation graves. There were found (iron and arrowheads) in 19 graves, i. e. in less than 1% of the total number of graves. Placing of weapons into graves was not a Roman custom¹², and such graves thus may imply that local population practiced different burial rites having diminished in the course of romanization process.

All cemeteries at Viminacium contain parallel burial, both of the cremated and skeletal remains of the deceased. Contemporary graves with skeletal remains contain the same types of grave goods. Coins were often found in the mouth, and rarely in the hand of the deceased. Jewelry and metal parts of garment, such as buttons, pins, belts were placed at the spots corresponding to their function, while other items were arranged around the body of the deceased. The same arrangement was registered in the case of cremations. It seems therefore, that a burial procedure for cremated remains was based in the older tradition of skeletal burials. This assumption may be confirmed by an anatomical arrangement of bones in the case of incomplete cremations, as well as by the size of cremation graves¹³. The size of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type of graves correspond to that of skeletal inhumation pits. Sometimes they are even larger than simple skeletal burial pits¹⁴. A burial of non-cremated finger, a rite called "os resectum", was noted in some graves.

Graves with cremation in the Viminacium cemeteries were neither oriented in particular direction, nor had a durable above-ground marker. Multilayer burials are conspicuous. Graves are close one to another, crosscutting and damage followed shortly after a burial, within the same chronological time span, and only a sequence of burial could then be reconstructed. This fact explains the lack of above-ground markers, i. e., that grave mound itself had a role of temporary marker.

Graves containing both the cremated and the skeletal remains were also noted in the Viminacium cemeteries. According to their sequence, the cremation

was primary, i. e., body of the deceased was posed over cremated remains previously brought from the stake. Slightly burned bones of the deceased, placed in a still red-hot grave pit, confirm that burials were simultaneous. Anthropometrical analysis implied that mainly the women were cremated while the males were buried. It may be explained by mixed marriages of indigenous woman and arriving orientals¹⁵. In two cemeteries (Više grobalja and Pećine) there are graves with deceased cremated or buried, containing also the secondary interred skulls¹⁶. They were found both in male and female graves, so it is difficult to explain them as battle trophies. It is also difficult to interpret them as skulls of the previously deceased slaves placed into graves of the rich men, because they were also registered in graves containing no grave goods. A ritual significance of interment of skulls remains unclear because of the lack of analogies and the lack of data from the sources¹⁷.

Graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type are constructed mainly in a similar way, but the interpretation of them varied. M. Macrea and D. Protase argued that graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type from the site of Apulum (type IIIa at Viminacium) are of bustum type¹⁸. According to situation noted at the cemeteries of Romula and Matrica, M. Babeş and J. Topál noted that the graves en étage of IIIb type are of bustum type. On the other hand they argue that walls of graves of the type IIIa were burned while cleansing the sacral space by ritual fire, while the cremated remains were brought from the stake¹⁹. D. Benea, C. Tătulea and I. Andrişoiu² also think that walls of graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type from Drobeta and Micia were burned while cleansing the sacral space with "ritual fire". L. Bârză argues, on the basis of material from Mediaş Bratei²¹, that the cremated remains were brought from the stake to the grave pit. She explained that burial procedure consisted of the following steps: first the grave space was cleansed by "ritual fire" (burned walls), then animal bones were placed at its bottom (remains of "partial" sacrifice). Finally, remains from the stake were brought when already cooled²².

Majority of yugoslavian authors (Lj. Zotović, M. Garašanin) assume that cremation took place at the stake located on a special spot within the cemetery, and that burned grave walls were a consequence of cleansing by ritual fire. A few graves were registered with walls covered by boards, fixed to the walls by a large number of nails. This fact may explain a large number of nails in some graves, although another explanation goes to a large number of nails proceeding from a sedan chair, or having a ritual meaning with apotropaic content²³. Rejection of an idea that these graves are of bustum type may be found in a discussion by C. Wells concerning a "dimensional minimum" for this type of graves²⁴, pointing to the situation at Viminacium (loc. Više grobalja), where a large location for the stake has been registered. A space of 15 m x 15 m has been explored, but it may be assumed

it was larger. The width of the burned soil layer was between 20 and 60 cm. More than 300 hollows are registered as a support for the poles. Poles represented a part of the stake construction. If one assumes that each stake had 4 corner poles, than about 70 persons may have been cremated there. Cremations took place in a rather short time span, implied by coins of Hadrian, A. Pius and Faustina I.

There are various hypotheses about ethno-cultural attribution of graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type. It is difficult to relate this form of graves to a specific ethnical element, because they are recorded in a large area with various ethnic groups of population. K. Sagy²⁵ was the first to try an ethnical determination of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase graves. He assumed that the earliest graves of this type appeared in the Rhineland, deriving from the Late Iron Age with pit en étage. He was the first to assume that the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type graves, especially those en étage, may be related to the Celtic burial tradition. This idea was advocated in early studies of D. Srejšević and M. Baum²⁶. It was not entirely rejected, because of a possibility of merging various customs and processes in the Pannonian basin²⁷.

In the earlier Romanian archaeological literature an opinion prevailed that these were autochthonous Daco-Getic grave form (O. Floca, K. Horedt, M. Macrea, M. Rusu, D. Protase in earlier works)²⁸. In his recent works, D. Protase explains they reflect a Greek influence²⁹, while L. Bârză³⁰ and A. Rusu³¹ argue for an Illyrian influence. M. Babeş relates the graves type I to the settlers of Illyrian origin, and the graves en étage, in his opinion - a bustum type, to a population of the Greek-Thracian origin. J. Topál restrained in her work from ethnical determination of these graves³².

M. Garašanin and Lj. Zotović started from the assumption that a large number of these graves lies in the Dardanian territory, understood as the Illyrian frontier zone. Dardanian space is culturally and archaeologically outstanding, and may be directly related to the Daco-Mysian culture space. I. Mikulčić pointed to a particular significance of the research of graves en étage for determination of their genesis, because of their specificity and wide distribution. He assumed that the Thracian element had a decisive role for the form of these graves³³. A majority of our authors assume that this grave form and its origin should be studied in a framework of the Mysian-Dardanian culture complex. I. Mikulčić proposed a term of Tribalo-Mysian, reducing thus a role of the Dardanian component³⁴.

The noted grave form is specific for the Mysian-Dardanian area, i. e., geographically belonging to the Morava valley, Kosovo, upper Vardar valley, a part of the lower Danube area, and to the south-east Pannonia. It is assumed that this grave form spread from the primary Mysian-Dardanian area into eastern Dalmatia, Dacia and northern Pannonia. The appearance of these graves in Dacia is related to settlers from the Balkan provinces (Pirusti, Dardani). In Pannonia, these graves are registered within large towns (Aquincum, Brigetio, Intercisa, Poetovio) with a het-

erogeneous ethnic structure. Graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type are singled out as small insullae within the noted cemeteries, probably reflecting their different ethnic origin.

Graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type are registered already to the end of the 1st century, within the cemeteries of large civil and military centers such as Emona, Poetovio, Domavia, Doclea, Ulpiana, Singidunum, Viminacium, Sirmium, Naissus, Stobi, Intercisa, Acumincum, Aquincum, Apulum, Brigetio, in the Rhineland, and in Gallia (Fig. 5). They are thus recorded in all important romanized centers, where the presence of Italics and a powerful infiltration of the Roman culture was also confirmed.

Graves with urns, graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type, shaft-graves and skeletal inhumations were all contemporary in the Viminacium cemeteries. Cremation and inhumation were both practiced in all large military centers at the turn of 1st and 2nd century. In spite of a variety of burial practices, the attitude to post mortem life was the same, as confirmed by the same type of grave goods provided for a new life of the deceased. Items from the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type of graves do not differ from those in other types of graves in the same period. These items are of course more luxurious in large civil and military centers, than in the peripheral regions of the Empire. The graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type are the same all over the Illyrian, Thracian, Celtic, Gallic or Germanic regions, notwithstanding the ethnic identity of indigenous population³⁵. Parallel cremation and inhumations within large civil and military centers may be explained by an already confirmed presence of the Orientals who, on their part, and according to their proto-christian beliefs, had never accepted the Roman custom of cremation.

A thesis that a burial procedure applied in Mala Kopašnica-Sase type of graves was based upon pre-Roman or indigenous cremation tradition cannot be omitted. A large distribution of this type of graves, their synchronous appearance and nearly the same duration within a territory containing a variety of ethnic elements, as well as the standardized burial procedure, could be explained by a foreign influence. It could be supported by the following facts:

1. Graves are dispersed within a very large geographical area with a population belonging to various ethnic groups;

2. They spread into the provinces from important, powerful centers.

Both in Rome itself and its provinces, cremation began to be abandoned in the course of the 3rd century. Inhumation became dominant since the time of Severus, and cremation finally disappeared in the 4th century in Rome and its provinces³⁶. Examination of synchronous burials at the Viminacium cemeteries between the 1st and the 4th century implies that grave goods were the same, i.e., none of the grave types contained a specific material that could denote a particular ethnic identity of the deceased. Therefore, the thesis of the origin of this grave type

in the Daco-Moesian area cannot be omitted. That could be explained by the lack of analogies in the central Roman area. Graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type are not recorded in Italy.

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NOTES

1. About the town see: M. Mirković, *Rimski gradovi na Dunavu u Gornjoj Meziiji*, Beograd, 1968, 56; idem, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*, Vol. II, Beograd, 1986, with bibliography.

2. About location of town and its port, see: V. Popović, *Uvod u topografiju Viminacijuma*, Starinar, XVIII, 1968, 24-49; M. Mirković, *Inscriptions...*, 75, 105.

3. M. Mirković, *Rimski gradovi...*, 58-66.

4. B. Jovanović, *Les sépultures de la nécropole celtique de Pećine près de Kostolac (Serbie du nord)*, Études Celtiques, Paris, 1984; idem, *Nekropola na Pećinama i starije gvozdeno doba Podunavlja*, Starinar, XXXVI, 1985, 13-18. About 5 km southeast from contemporary ruins of Viminacium a large Celtic cemetery was excavated with 43 graves including 17 cremations. It was dated into the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century B. C. Both cremations and inhumations were registered. Cremation burials were placed into pits (1.50 x 2.20 x 1.60 m), and cremated bones were scattered in the west part of the burial pit. Pit walls were unburned. This burial procedure is different and cannot be related to the graves of Mala Kopašnica-Sase type.

5. Lj. Zotović, *Nekropole spaljenih pokojnika na teritoriji Gornje Mezije*, Leskovski zbornik, VIII, Leskovac, 1968, 19-30.

6. Lj. Zotović, Č. Jordović, *Viminacium I - Nekropola Više grobalja*, Beograd, 1990, 10.

7. Lj. Zotović, *Južne nekropole Viminacijuma i pogrebni običaji*, 48, Viminacium, Zbornik radova Narodnog muzeja 1, Požarevac, 1986, 42.

8. M. Garašanin, *Razmatranja o nekropolama tipa Mala Kopašnica-Sase*, Godišnjak VI, Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja, knjiga 4, Sarajevo, 1968, 6. A third, considerably rare type is represented by shallow, generally trough-shaped pit, filled with carbonized bones, remains from the stake and grave goods. Pits are oval or ellipsoid groundplan, sometimes smaller than in types I and II. Graves of type III were...

9. Lj. Zotović, Č. Jordović, *Viminacium I...*, 10.

10. A. Jovanović, *Rimske nekropole na teritoriji Jugoslavije*, Beograd, 1984, 103.

11. Lj. Zotović, Č. Jordović, *Viminacium I...*, 10.

12. H. Schönberger, *Provinzialrömische Gräber mit Waffenbeigaben*, Saalburg Jahrbuch, XIII, 1953, 53-56.

13. Lj. Zotović, *Južne nekropole...*, 43.

14. Lj. Zotović, Č. Jordović, *Viminacium I...*, 10.

15. M. Mirković, *Inscriptions ...*, 59, 175, 176; The presence of the Orientals was confirmed by the three inscriptions found at Kostolac (numbers 211, 212, 213).
16. Ž. Mikić, *Viminacium - Prilog grupnoj sekundarnoj sahrani lobanja*, Viminacium 8-9, Požarevac, 1994, 53-58.
17. Lj. Zotović, *Južne nekropole...*, 43.
18. M. Macrea, D. Protase, *Şantierul Alba şi împrejurimi*, MCA, V, 1959, 435-452.
19. M. Babeş, *Zu den Bestattungen im nördlichen Flachgräberfeld von Romula*, Dacia, XIV, 1970, 167-206; J. Topál, *Das früh- und mittelkaiserzeitliche Gräberfeld von Matrica (Százhalombatta-Dunafüred)*, AÉ, 108/1, 70-71.
20. D. Benea, C. Tăulea, *Morminte de incinerare descoperite la Drobeta*, Apulum, XIII, 1975, 669-675; I. Andriţoiu, *Şantierul arheologic Micia-Necropola. Raport pentru campania de cercetări din 1978*, MCA, A XIII-a Sesiune anuală de rapoarte, Oradea, 1979, 227-228.
21. L. Bârză, *Continuitatea populaţiei autohtone în secolele IV-V*, Bucureşti, 1973, 27-28.
22. A. Jovanović, *Rimske nekropole...*, 104.
23. Lj. Zotović, *Mala Kopašni Leskovac-Necropola*, AP, 2, 1960, 124; M. Baum, D. Srejšović, *Prvi rezultati ispitivanja rimske nekropole u Sasama*, Članci i grada za kulturnu istoriju istočne Bosne, III, Tuzla, 1959, 50.
24. C. Wells, *A Study of Cremation*, Antiquity, XXIV, London, 1960, 35.
25. K. Sagy, *Die Ausgrabungen im römischen Gräberfeld von Intercisa im Jahre 1949*, Intercisa, I, 1954, 61-123.
26. M. Baum, D. Srejšović, *Prvi rezultati...*, 23-54; idem, *Novi rezultati ispitivanja rimske nekropole u Sasama*, Članci i Grada za kulturnu istoriju istočne Bosne, IV, Tuzla 1960, 3-31.
27. A. Jovanović, *Rimske nekropole...*, 104-109.
28. O. Floca, *Sistemele de înmormântare din Dacia superioară romană*, Sargetia, II, 1941, 91; K. Horedt, *Moreşti*, Bucureşti 1979, 219-223; M. Macrea, D. Protase, M. Rusu, *Şantierul arheologic Porolissum*, MCA, VII, 1961, 363-371; M. Macrea, D. Protase, *Şantierul Alba...*, 435-452.
29. D. Protase, *Riturile funerare la Daci şi Daco-Romani*, Bucureşti, 1971, 27.
30. L. Bârză, *Continuitatea...*, 25-32.
31. A. Rusu, *Cercetări în necropola Muncelu-Brad*, MCA, A XIII-a Sesiune anuală de rapoarte, Oradea 1979, 219-223.
32. J. Topál, *Roman cemeteries of Aquincum, The Western Cemetery (Bécsi Road)* I, Budapest 1993; J. Topál, *The southern cemetery of Matrica (Százhalombatta-Dunafüred)*, Budapest 1981.
33. I. Mikulčić, *Neilirski elementi među skupskim nalazima na prelazu iz predrimskog u rimsko doba*, Naučni skup Sahranićivanje kod Ilira, Beograd 1979, 245.
34. M. Garašanin, *Pogrebni običaji kod Ilira u rimsko doba*, Simpozium Duhovna kultura Ilira, Herceg Novi, 4-6 nov., Sarajevo 1984, 159: "Although remaining with this statement within a hypothetical domain, we can provide more positive data for relating the graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type to the Illyrians, even in the sources and memorials.

Concerning it, the well known *tabulae ceratae* from gold mines at Ampelum and Alburnus Maior (Corabia) in Transylvania, i.e., from a mining center where the graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type with all their properties were registered, have to be noted".

35. L. Zotović, *Prilog problemu etničke pripadnosti grobova tipa Mala Kopašnica - Sase*, Simpozium Duhovna kultura Ilira, Herceg Novi, 4-6 nov., Sarajevo 1984, 166.

36. F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua*, Paris, 1949, 389.

ABBREVIATIONS

AÉ =Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest.

AP =Arheološki pregled, Beograd.

MCA =Materiale și cercetări arheologice, București.

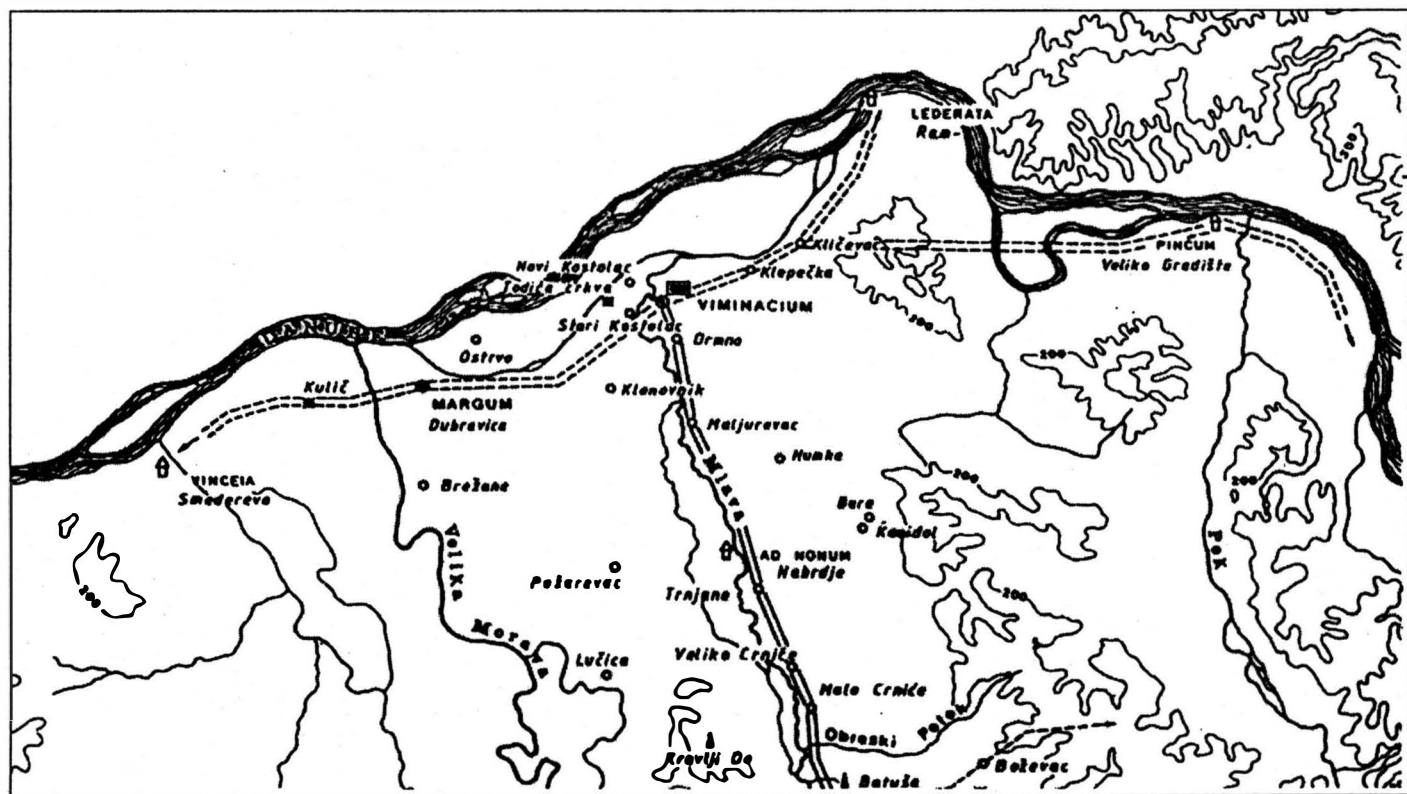


Fig. 1 - Viminacium, and its territory, M. Mirković, IMS II, Beograd, 1986, 21.

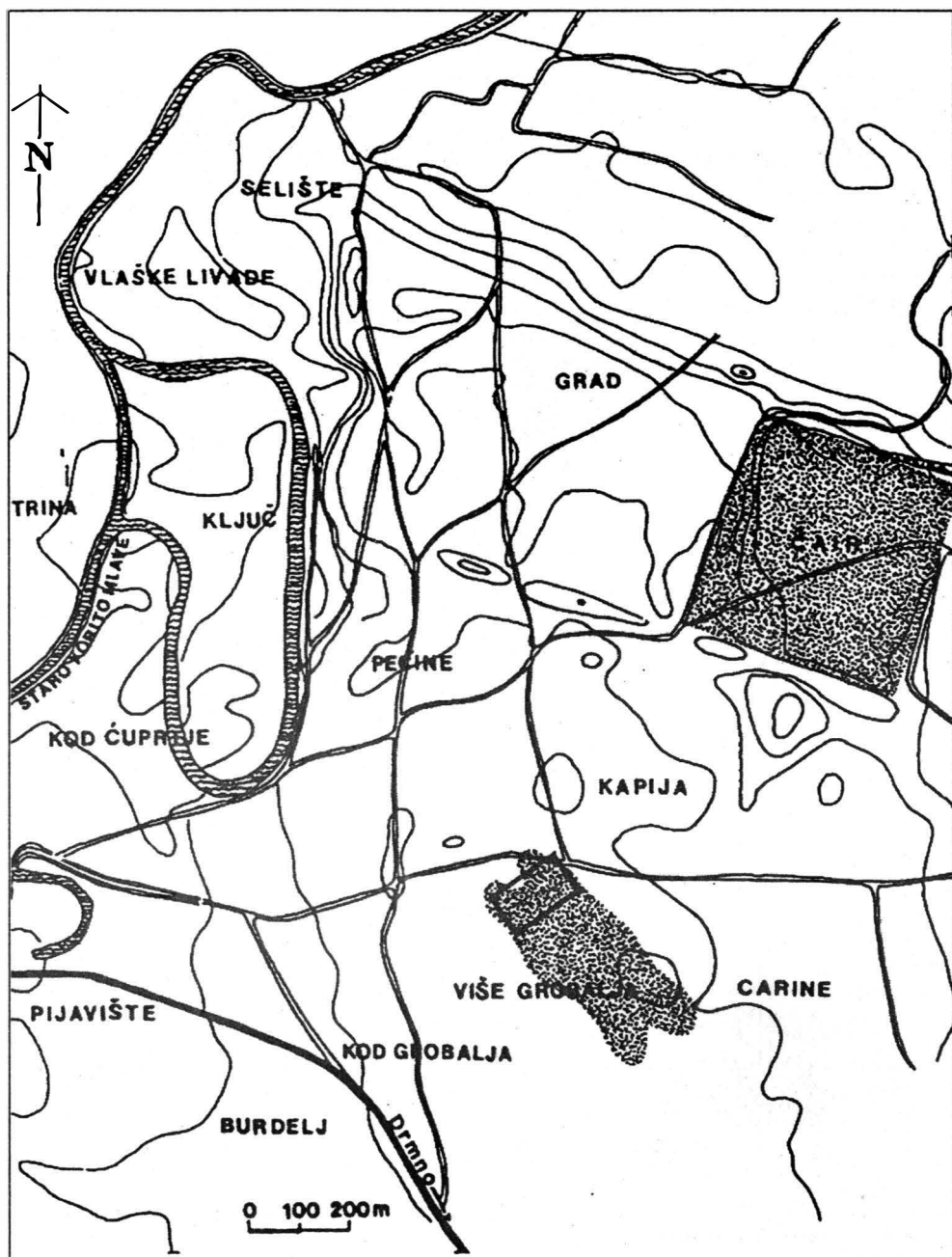


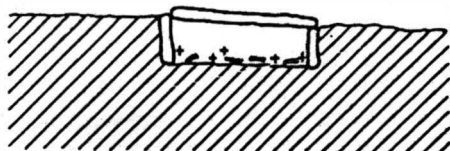
Fig. 2 - The situation of Viminacium, Lj. Zotović, Viminacium, 1, Beograd, 1990, 4.



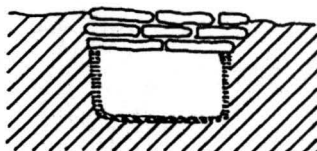
G₁ 38



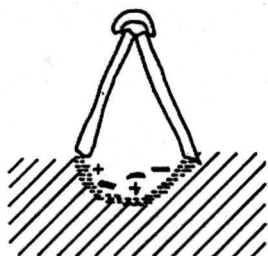
G₁ 240



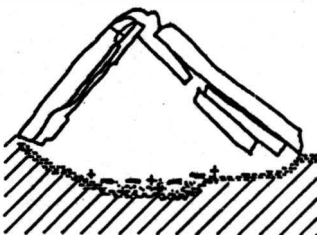
G₁ 50



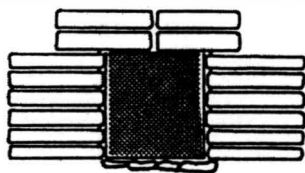
G₁ 347



G₁ 18



G₁ 17



G₁ 360

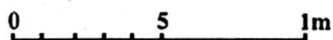


Fig. 3 - Mala Kopašnica-Sase graves type IIIa. Graves G1-347 and G1-360 are from the necropolis Pećine. The others are from the necropolis Više grobalja.

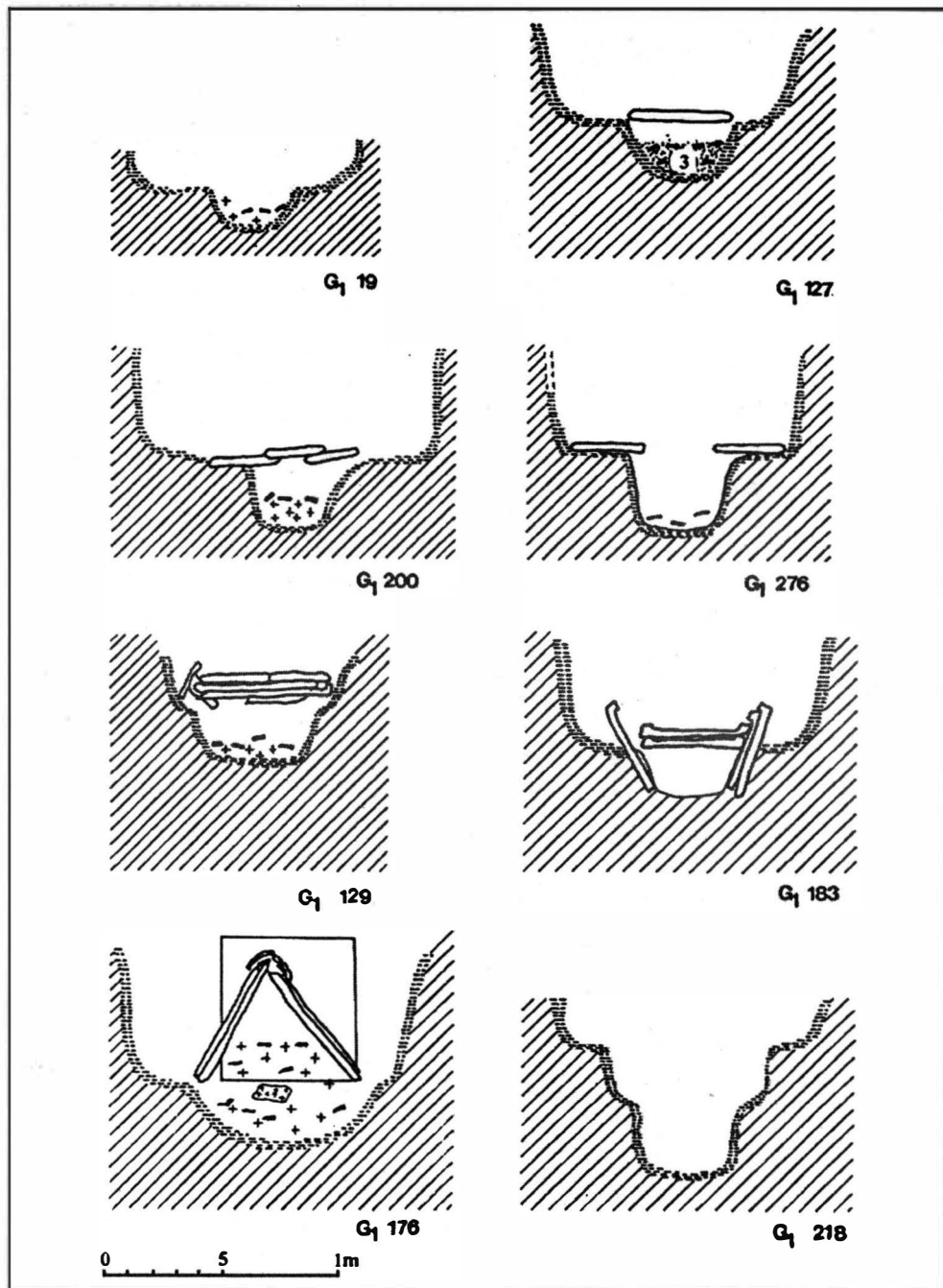


Fig. 4 - Mala Kopašnica-Sase grave type IIIb - necropolis Više grobalja.

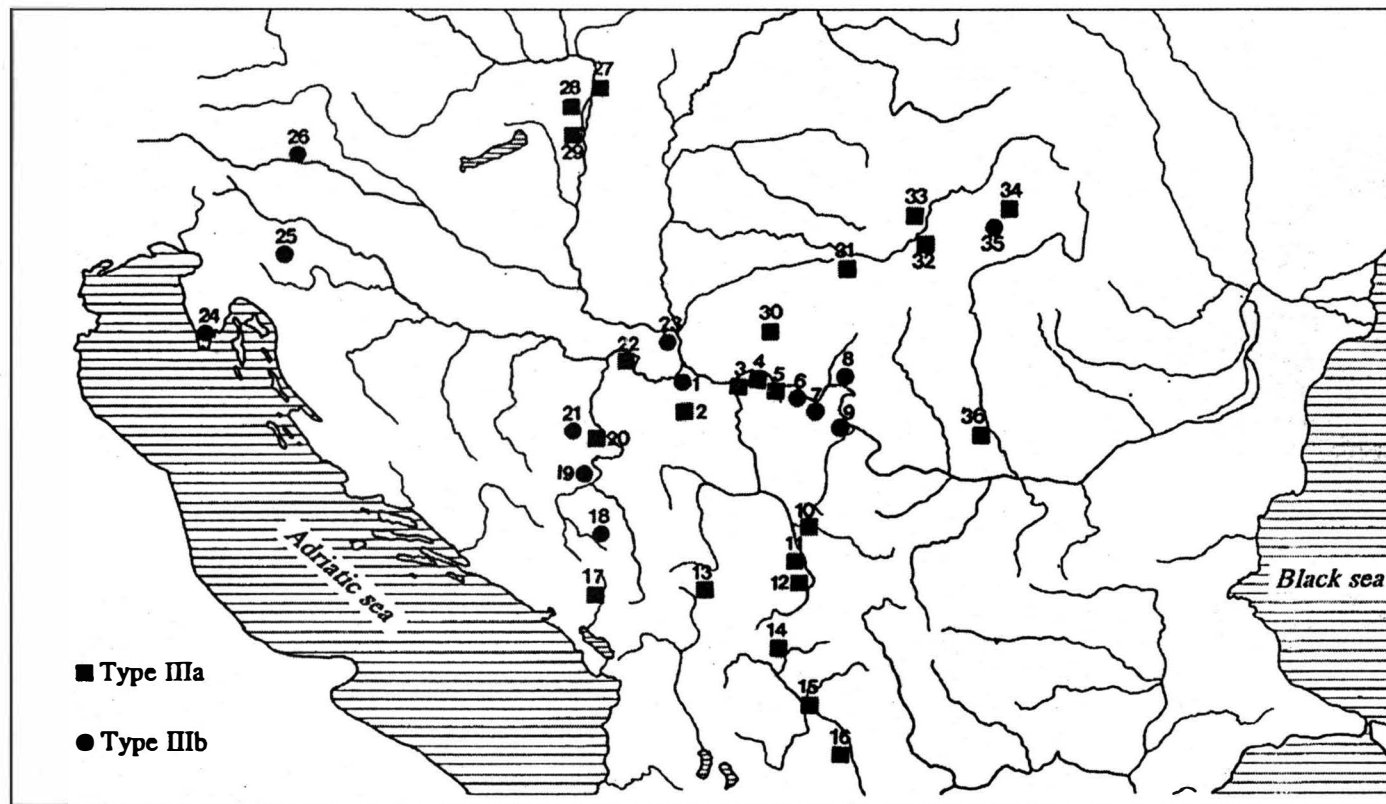


Fig. 5 - The important sites of Mala Kopašnica-Sase graves type: 1. Singidunum, 2. Guberevac, 3. Margum, 4. Viminacium, 5. Pincum, 6. Boljetin, 7. Ušće Porečke reke, 8. Turnu Severin, 9. Prahovo, 10. Niš, 11. Velika Grabovnica, 12. Mala Kopašnica, 13. Gračanica, 14. Scupi, 15. Stobi, 16. Demir kapija, 17. Duklja, 18. Komini, 19. Rogatica, 20. Sase, 21. Stup, 22. Sirmium, 23. Beška, 24. Pula, 25. Ribnica, 26. Ptuj, 27. Aquincum, 28. Matrica, 29. Intercisa, 30. Rešca, 31. Micia, 32. Sebeš, 33. Alba Iulia, 34. Sighișoara, 35. Mediaș, 36. Romula.