Kamnite grobnice; gomile; knežji grobovi; pozna bakrena doba.


Gruda is a term used to describe stone and earth mounds in Montenegro and south Dalmacia. Some of these barrows contain graves from the period of the Copper Age, and are historically one of the most interesting monuments in Montenegro, representing a group of important archaeological sites which are geographically and effectively a contained cultural unit. The high barrows of the Mala and Velika Gruda in Tivat, and Boljevića Gruda at Podgorica possess, respectively, huge tombs constructed from limestone slabs and exceptional grave inventories, thereby represent one of the first prehistoric elites of the uppermost social strata, dating to the transition from the 4th to the 3rd millennium BC. In addition to these princely tombs there are a number of barrows of the same age, such as at Mogila na Rake, Sutomor; Rubeži by Nikšić and Kujava tumul II by Danilovgrad, which also possess monumental stone chambers, but their grave goods are poorer, consisting of only a ceramic set with a one handled jug and a bowl on the ring foot with stamp-rolled and excised decoration. Ceramic sets are typical for all grave inventories of this age. The stone chambers covered with huge barrows are the earliest architectural stone construction documented in Montenegro until now.

Gruda - Poslednji dom prvih knezov v Črni Gori iz obdobja bakrene dobe

Key words
Stone tombs; tumuli; princes graves; Late Cooper Age.
1. Introduction

In the distant past the Adriatic coast of Montenegro was a convenient strategic position for the routes from the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas and towards populations living in the hinterlands of Central and West Balkan and further east in the Danube valley. In a period of transition from the 4th to the 3rd millennium BC a powerful local elite appeared on the coast and their hinterland in the river valleys of Zeta and Morača. These elites expressed their economic and social importance through the monumental constructions of their tombs, which were placed beneath high banked barrows and, in some cases, provided with exquisite grave goods (fig. 1). For justifiable reasons, the first monograph study of this period of transition from the Copper to the Bronze Age was named The Golden Age of Montenegro [Saveljić-Bulatović, Lutovac 2003].


Translated "Gruda" means a fist of earth on the field, and are frequent topographical features in the region from Herzegovina to Montenegro. In the Croatian and Montenegrin languages are so named isolated large mounds made of stone or earth. Because of their huge size and significance in the memory of the local inhabitants, the toponymal Gruda in Montenegro, like p. e. in the area north-east of Podgorica, south of Danilovgrad, etc., are often marked on topographical maps, even on Google Maps. The term Gruda is not only used as a toponymical term in the landscape, but even villages have such names as p. e. in south-eastern Herzegovina, not far from Imotski a village Grude and in the hinterland of Dubrovnik in the community of Konavle a village Gruda.

The eastern Adriatic coast and the slopes of the Dinaric Mountain region have the panorama of a typical stony landscape, with distinct and varied stone constructions for farmsteads and the rural agricultural and pastoral economy. In Montenegro’s landscape, riddled with dry stonewalls, stand out numerous artificial mounds; part of them arises as result of cleaning off the surface of fields.

2. The funeral barrows

Most of these mounds were specifically built for funerary purposes. The last one, the tumuli – are funeral barrows which, at the time of their construction, served as highly visible monuments to the deceased. Even today they are present in great numbers in the environment, despite the fact a number were flatted with time because of field work and natural erosion.
In the south-eastern Adriatic barrows were constructed mostly as individual tombs (in some cases as family necropoli too), and date from the period of the Late Copper Age to the period of Late Iron Age (end of 4th to 1st millennium BC). In later generations the earliest constructed tumuli were often reused as graveyards, as at Velika Gruda [Della Casa 1996]. This practice is even observed in some cases in the Mediaeval period and the beginning of the Modern era as can be seen p. e. on tumuli at Borovica by Plevlja, Gruda Boljevića and Momišići at Podgorica [Saveljić-Bulatović 2015, 51].

A group of detected or archaeologically excavated tumuli from the Montenegrin area (fig. 1), which date to the Late Copper to Early Bronze Age transition, are significant because of their high barrows, stone tombs and extremely rich grave goods. Indeed, they are quite outstanding on the stage of European early prehistory. The construction of large tumuli and stone tombs with extremely heavy limestone slabs demonstrates a developed social structure with the technical knowledge needed for breaking the heavy limestone slabs in quarries. Combined with this is the often long-distance transport of such slabs and construction of the tomb chamber. In the 4th millennium BC building tomb chambers from extremely heavy stones was a technical achievement, which was emulated by organized Neolithic communities all over Europe (and other continents too) in the so called Megalithic (Dolmen) graves culture. To cover grave chambers with building stone or earth barrows was an important part of the funerary ritual that also required significant organization of human forces.

The precious grave goods in some princely graves demonstrate both craftsmen’s capacities and access to long-distance trade networks [Maran 2007, 11, 12]. But more importantly, they simultaneously reflect the high rank of the deceased in the society in the area of Montenegro’s Adriatic coast and the Zeta valley. These monumental tumuli with royal grave inventories, such as at Velika and Mala Gruda and Gruda Boljevića, are proof of the exceptional role of this region in relation to the lower strata.
of hierarchy of other societies in the Balkans and Middle Europe.

The barrows with huge stone chambers deserve special attention because they represent the oldest stone architecture which has been archaeologically researched in Montenegro. The tumuli of the Late Copper Age were generally of a width between 15-20 metres; their height varies between 1.8 and 6 metres (fig. 2). They were built with earth, with the earthen cover often having a stone covering, as in the case of Kujava, tumulus II with little rocks collected from nearby (fig. 2: 5), or the tumulus of Mogila na Rake (Mogila in English) which was covered with a layer of pebbles (fig. 2: 2); it is very possible that similar pebbles were also used for the Gruda Boljevića barrow too. Barrows were also protected around the edges with a kerb; a dry stone wall employing small local limestone blocks or pebbles. At Kujava, tumulus II after the barrow was built over the stone chamber, the large barrow was bordered with kerb, a 1 m wide dry stone wall being employed small local limestone blocks or pebbles. At Kujava, tumulus II after the barrow was built over the stone chamber, the large barrow was bordered with kerb, a 1 m wide dry stone wall was made inside the slope of barrow by limestone slabs and outside by massive rocks (fig. 2: 3, 5) [Lutovac 2016, 4, sl. 2].

3. The stone chambers

The primary graves of the Late Copper elites were constructed in the following stages: first a 1m deep grave pit was dug into the earth’s surface and oriented east-west. After the closing phase of the funeral ceremony the deceased was put in the pit. The graves were practically without grave goods; only rarely do they have modest objects associated with them. The pit was filled with earth; earth was collected from the surrounding area and a high, visually striking barrow was constructed over the pit (fig. 2: 1).

A good example of these early types of funerary practices and architecture is the barrow at Gruda Boljevića during phase 1 and barrows from surrounding area as p. e. Stoj in Albania [Guštin, Preložnik 2015, 34, 35, sl. 17]. These barrows likewise have small dry-stone walls around them and are, as a rule, not as substantial as the subsequent generation of tumuli.

In the second generation of the Late Copper Age, Montenegrin tombs were constructed as stone chambers with huge limestone or other lithic material. They represent a local variant of the megalithic tombs prevalent in the Neolithic period – the dolmens. To construct the tomb chamber the heavy stone slabs, mostly limestone had to be quarried, transported and built together as a covered chamber (fig. 2). This required a knowledge of quarrying, stone masonry and a high degree of social organisation.

The construction of tombs using large, naturally occurring limestone slabs became, by the period of the Late Cooper Age, the conventional grave form of the new elite. The layers of plate limestone in this region enabled the use of huge slabs for tombs. Individual slabs were mostly used, provided a single piece would do. However, in instances where a single slab would not cover the extent of the chamber, two were employed. The height of these slabs were about 0.7 meters, with a thickness of about 0.2 m.

In the middle of the future tumulus four large slabs were placed on the floor of the earth, making a tomb chamber approximately 1.30 x 0.80 metres. In some cases an artificial floor was prepared using thin stone plates and burned argil terrace, as in the tumulus of Mogila na Rake (fig. 2: 2) [Zagarčanin 2012]. At the tumulus of Kujevo II both central chambers were provided with a prepared earthen plateau, the ends of which were reinforced with limestone plates (fig. 2: 3) [Lutovac 2016].

In order to better fix the slabs in position, they were partly embossed on the edges (Mogila na Rake, Kujava II); sometimes in the adjoining corners of the slabs we note the presence of smaller stone inclusions employed as reinforcing chocks (fig. 3: 2, 6).

Following the deposition of the deceased, the four vertical slabs, along with the entire whole chamber were covered with a large limestone slab of greater dimensions than the chamber vertical slabs, with a thickness of 0.15 – 0.20 metres (fig. 3). In case of Mogila na Rake the outside surfaces of the tomb slabs were coated with small rocks.

Slika 3: Grobnice zgrajene iz ploščatega apnenca: 1 Kujava II, grob 1 in 2 pri Danilovgradu (foto Savo Prelević); 2 Sutomore-Mogila na Raki (foto Mladen Zagarčanin).

Figure 3: Tombs constructed of limestone slabs: 1 Kujava II, tomb 1 and 2 by Danilovgrad (photo by Savo Prelević); 2 Sutomore-Mogila na Raki (photo by Mladen Zagarčanin).
Within the tomb chambers the deceased were orientated north-east – south-west (fig. 4). After the chamber walls were covered with heavy large stone slabs, a high barrow was built atop it composed of earth or stones. In the case of the princely grave from Gruda Bojevića (phase 2) there are no evidential remains of stone chamber and limestone slabs [Gustin, Preložnik 2015, 34].

During the funerary ceremony the deceased was put in crouched position together with rich grave goods. In the Kujava II tumulus, as in the Mogila na Rake tumulus also, the researchers noted a kind of platform made of limestone plates or stones, with small fragments of ceramic and ashes. It is surmised that this platform was prepared for funeral rituals after the tombs were closed.

The tombs with princes equipment, for example at Mala and Velika Gruda, Gruda Boljevića, phase 2 were built for a single elite person, however there also existed other funerary practices where multiple tombs were placed beneath the barrow, or multiple persons were placed within the same tomb. In the Kujava II tumulus two stone chambers were constructed next to each other (fig. 3: 1). In tomb 1 there were found three persons (a juvenile and two adult), whilst in tomb 2 only one (adult) individual was found. A similar case of simultaneously buried persons was also found in the tumulus at Mogila na Rakica, where the bones of a man, a young boy and possibly a woman were discovered.

4. The great goods

As a good example of the rich graves of the Late Copper Age we shall briefly consider the grave inventory from the Gruda Boljevića barrow. In this case, in the centre of tumulus, two deceased were buried, the first one “the founder” in the pit, the second – “the prince” –1 m above the first on his tumulus surface (fig. 2: 4). The only object associated with the first individual was a flint tool. This person could have belonged to the newcomers or founders of the new civilisation in the region.

The second grave, placed on the surface of the barrow of the first deceased, is, on account of the grave goods, typical of the “princes horizon” of the Late Copper Age. The rich collection of objects consisted partly of personal attire and weaponry, and also of a richly decorated ceramic set typical of the time. The objects of personal adornment consisted of two precious golden lockrings (fig. 4: 1); atypical personal head ornamental of “princes” in early Montenegro tumuli. Aside from the tumulus of Gruda Bojevića they have been found in the region only at Mala and Velika Gruda in Tivat. Similar lockrings have a wide distribution as p. e. on the Greek island of Leukas and are spread in wide area of the Lower Danube until the Carpathian basin.

The weapons consisted of a battle axe made from stone (fig. 4: 2). The battle axe from the grave of Mala Gruda was made from electrum. Both the Mala Gruda and Gruda Boljevića examples have an identical golden shaft-hole plug. In both graves there were also elite small daggers with triangular blades. In Gruda Boljevića a comparable example made from bronze was recovered (fig. 4: 3), whereas in Mala Gruda a golden one was found. Daggers in this form were geographically widespread. In the tumulus at Velika Gruda the weaponry is represented by a simple bronze axe and heavy bronze tools of different shapes. A trapezoidal pendant of red stone (fig. 4: 4) allows an interpretation as a whetstone for daggers and axes to be made.

Pottery with stamp-rolled and excised decoration are typical grave goods for all stone tombs in the tumulus horizon of Late Copper Age (fig. 1). In Gruda Boljevića a set of three ceramic vessels, atypical of grave goods, was recovered. Usually only two ceramic vessels were placed in graves; typically a plate and a jug, or in the in the tomb of Kujava, a plate and a bowl.

The asymmetric plate on the ringfoot with stamp-rolled and excised decoration on both surfaces of the vessel from Gruda Boljevića (fig. 4: 5), Velika Gruda, Ruheža, Mogila na Rake and Kujava is also known in the form of pottery sherds from settlement contexts from Odmot pečina and Ravljevc pečina (pečina = cave), confirming that this form and decoration was also used in quotidian life.

The jugs, a widespread functional form in Eastern Europe and Minor Asia in the period of Late Copper Age and
Early Bronze Age, with a long handle that connects the rim and shoulder or belly, have similar decorations to the plates, and are a type known from Gruda Boljevića (fig. 4: 4), Mala Gruda and Mogila na Rake.

The unique funnel like ceramic, with a decorated exterior and plain interior (fig. 4: 6) belongs to the plate and jug stylistic tradition, but as an object it has no analogies as of yet.

This featured ceramic set, comparable to other examples from elsewhere in Montenegro, consists of highly decorated plates (and funnel) with plain interiors and exteriors like jugs with stamp-rolled and excised executed ornament. They are therefore a popular and long-lasting vessel type, produced with ornamentation that seems to form a "fashion trend" that reaches from the Eastern Alps, Carpathian basin and to the Adriatic coast. In the Montenergins examples we recognize a regional type produced by various local workshops.

For the origins of the formation of this new community in Montenegro we have to search the Yamnaya culture (named after the Ukrainian Ямна культура, yamnaya, yamna = pit), a Late Copper Age/Early Bronze Age culture of the Southern Bug/Dniester/Ural region (the Pontic steppes) dating to the end of the 4th and first half of the 3rd millennium BC [Heyd 2011].

The connection between the two cultures is the type of pit grave burials in which the deceased was deposited in a crouched position within barrows. Later links include the aforementioned lockrings (as part of the costume of the upper class), weaponry (axe and dagger) as insignia of precious metals and a special ceramic set of the Montenegrin variant which were also important elements of the Yamnaya culture.

Weaponry is ubiquitous, prevalent in the Aegean area and Eastern Europe. The ceramics for the funerary services are local products, but made following interregional forms of the period. Its special execution of decoration with furrowed incision is recognisable in this region, and archaeologists like to connect this ornamentation with the Vučedol culture on the river Sava and even the Ljubljanica March culture in the far west.

Because of the special ceramic decoration with furrowed incisions
it has been connected with the so-called Adriatic type of the Ljubljana culture [Dimitrijević 1967; 1979], according to what was perceived as an adequate definition for the finds of this horizon in south-eastern Adriatic and Montenegro [Govedarica 2010; Lutovac 2016; Lutovac 2016; Zagarčanin 2016] until the Early Bronze Age period. Joseph Maran viewed the central graves of Velika and Mala Gruda and Gruda Boljevića as Montenegro variants of the Late Vučedol culture and Early Bronze Age period [Maran 2007, 8-12].

Following the excavation of the central grave from the Velika Gruda barrow and comparison with the artefactual inventory from Mala Gruda and a broader synthesis of the data for central and eastern Europe, the eastern Adriatic coast and Greek-Ionic area Margherita Primas [1996, 135] proposed that this cultural horizon represented a distinct Adriatic group named Kotor facies. He argued: "Da sich zwischen der montenegrinischen Keramik (Velika und Mala Gruda, Rubeža) und der Facies Ig (Ljubljana, note by author) keine spezifische Parallelen erkennen lassen und auch die ehemals vermutete Synchronlage wohl abzulehnen ist, empfiehlt sich die Definition einer montenegrinischen Lokalfacies, die wir in folgendem Facies Kotor nennen. Von zukünftigen Forschungen in Nordalbanien ist mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit eine Erweiterung in diese Richtung zu erwarten" and placed it chronologically and culturally within the Late Copper Age period [see also Della Casa 1996, 135; Guštin 2006, 89 Guštin, Preložnik 2015, 28-31].

5. Absolute dates

In order to provide absolute dating for the two phases of Montenegrin "princely" graves, we have the radiocarbon dating of human bone from the primary central grave of the tumulus at Gruda Boljivića, dated to c.3050 BC (3090-3044 cal BC), close to the dates obtained by analysing the wood from princely grave from the Velika Gruda tumulus (2800-2700 cal BC). These two dates allow us to conclude that the Montenegrin "princes horizon" can be dated, on basis of C14 dating, to the first two centuries of 3rd millennium BC. Although the tumuli are easily visible and some of them archaeological researched, the contemporary settlement layer have until now been known only from a few ceramic fragments from the caves at Odmunt pećina and Raviča pećina. Recently archaeological excavations of Predrag Lutovac on Samobor gradina (hillfort) on the edge of the Skadar Lake brought numerous ceramic fragments corresponding to the outstanding funerary ceramics of the graves. If the tumuli with their tombs and grave goods were exceptional, the research of the settlement is the first step to recognize the domestic world of this prehistoric society in Late Copper Age.

It is possible to accept that the different grave good assemblages, ranging from the rich examples from Gruda Boljivića and both Velika and Mala Gruda, to poorer assemblages composed of two sets of vessels at other sites, represent two different social levels. But it has to be noted that the key feature of such sites are the barrow and stone tomb-- for these to be built required a sizeable effort and assumes a high degree of respect for the deceased and a developed social structure. The large limestone slabs were, in most cases, to be quarried from the landscape and transported a sizeable distance to the chosen location for the last resting place of the deceased.

6. Conclusions

Where are the roots of this sudden development in Montenegrin region with the "princes horizon"? Are they the result of newcomers with new technological knowledge, who discovered the potential of mineral resources in the mountains or even developed the smith’s activities given by the almighty gods? [Durman 2006]. This question will remain open to await adequate research of the settlement layers or discovery of the remains of the mines which furnished these graves. With the "princes horizon" huge tombs were constructed to make use of massive limestone slabs. With this in mind we can also begin to speak of the stone masonry visible on settlements in the form of huge dry-wall fortifications. Using more modest dimensions, of thinner limestone slabs from the surrounding area, the tomb constructions with limestone slabs continued to be utilised within the landscape of eastern Adriatic coast and their hinterland through history until the Modern Period.
Bibliography


