

Introduction

The unusual circumstances that contributed to the successful rescue excavations of the prehistoric and Late Antiquity necropolis located in the southern part of Velebit village, as well as the future fate of the finds discovered on that occasion, recalls to a certain extent the fate that befell the nations of the former Yugoslavia. A short notice in the monography *Prehistory of Vojvodina*, in which Nikola Tasić listed this site in the south of the Carpathian Basin (northern Bačka) as an important and still unpublished site of the Tumulus culture (Tasić 1974, 235), as well as the statement of Draga Garašanin in *Prehistory of Yugoslavia vol. IV* (Garašanin, D. 1983, 542), were the only ones available for archaeologists in Serbia interested in the Bronze Age. This has remained so until the present day. It remains an archaeological and scientific riddle for the entire former Yugoslav archaeology as to why it came to that; the answer to which could not be provided even from the small number of participants of those excavations who are still alive.

Rescue archaeological excavations at the necropolis in the village Velebit took place on a small scale on several occasions during the 1950s and ended in 1970. Yugoslav archaeology witnessed a sudden growth, during this period, thanks to the biggest rescue excavation activities in Europe, when numerous sites along the banks of the Danube at the Iron Gates were excavated. These extensive excavations were conducted prior to the construction of the joint Yugoslav-Romanian energy enterprise, the power plant Đerdap I, between 1965-1972. Before that time, several necropolises had already been excavated in Vojvodina, such as the Early Bronze Age Mokrin necropolis and the Late Bronze Age necropolises in Idoš, Stojića Gumno in Belegiš, and the Karaburma necropolis south of the Danube in Belgrade. These discoveries changed the picture of the Bronze Age in Vojvodina, to which the excavations at Gomolava, a multi-stratified site with clear stratigraphic sequence, perhaps contributed the most.

The necessity for salvage excavations of the necropolis from the prehistoric and Late Antiquity periods in Velebit village near Kanjiža was initiated by the paving of a village road that ran across the site (Figure 1). It is interesting to note that the excavations at this site in 1970 were the most important Yugoslav-American collaboration in archaeology, since they received full funding from the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

The research was organized by the museums in Senta and Subotica, under the supervision of the Provincial Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Novi Sad. The director of the project was Laszlo Sekeres from the

City Museum of Subotica, while the American side was represented by Professor Stephen Foltiny from Princeton University (New Jersey, USA). Numerous local and foreign archaeologists took part in this research. The Town Museum of Senta was represented by Tripolsky Géza. On the Yugoslav part, the archaeologists who took part were the future academic Nikola Tasić, Milorad Girić, and Predrag Medović. Beside S. Foltiny on the American side, Norbert Riedl, Arthur Bankoff, Brian Butler, and Fred Smith also took part. Other scholars who took part in the research were Professor Richard Pittiony (Austria), Dr. Zoja Pivovarova-Benkovsky (Austria), Dr. Anton Točik (ČSSR), Professor Bohuslav Novotny (ČSSR), Dr. Georgi Georgiev (Bulgaria), Dr. Szadowsky, Dr. Otto Trogmayer (Hungary), Dr. Sándor Bököny (Hungary), Dr. Tibor Kovács (Hungary), Dr. Gyula Farkas (Hungary), and several conservation specialists, among whom the recently deceased Erdely József should be mentioned, as well as Peter Ritz. The Yugoslav team was also represented by Tatjana Brzjak, Svetlana Perišić, Zilka Kujundžić, Ljubinka Subotić (technical drawings), Nancy Chao, and Snežana Grčki. Photo number 2 was taken in the course of the excavations and features only a part of the numerous team members; the identification of the people in it was helped by Dr. Predrag Medović and Professor Arthur Bankoff, for which I am most grateful (Figure 2).

Although Velebit, the necropolis of Tumulus culture, remained in the shadow of the renowned Mokrin necropolis near Kikinda, which represents the eponym for the Early Bronze Age period in the southern Carpathian Basin, it is a wonder that the research at Velebit has remained unpublished for almost half a century. The City Museum of Senta, which has not enlisted an archaeologist in service for more than 35 years, currently contains 30% of the bronze jewellery and pottery finds, while most of the finds and



Fig. 1. Excavations in Velebit village.



Fig. 2. Excavation team from the 1970s.

human skeletal and incinerated remains have disappeared. Only a small number of photos have remained in the Museum of Subotica, which were received for this paper out of the kindness of colleague Agnes Sekeres. It is really lucky that the original drawings of all of the finds from the necropolis, which were drawn by Ljubinka Subotić-Spasić, remained at the City Museum of Senta. Over the course of time the research was forgotten, probably because much more attractive research was conducted at the sites of Gomolava, Kaluđerske livade, Gradina na Bosutu, Feudvar, Židovar, and other sites. For that reason, we are again at the beginning of the story where the fate of the research at the Velebit necropolis is similar to the fate of the former Yugoslavia: a well-conceived idea that, despite having produced good results, was forgotten over time. Even though the research at the Velebit necropolis was conducted by a high profile team of local and international archaeologists and was funded by foreign funds, the excellent results obtained remained unpublished and forgotten by the scholarly public. The fate of many finds from this site has also remained unclear.