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## **Ancient Slavery in the Central Balkans: Some Starting Points on pre-Roman Period**

**Abstract:** The paper considers the issues related to slavery in the Central Balkans in the proto-historic i.e. Late Iron Age period. It is conceived as a first step towards more profound future study, and deals with the history of research and theoretical-methodological approaches to the problem of slavery among the Late Iron Age communities. The text revisits earlier interpretations of slavery derived from ancient written accounts and archaeological evidence, and then offers insights that rely on recent research of slavery in general, and in prehistoric period in particular. Finally, it is argued that it is necessary to consider the possibility of ‘societies with slaves’ when researching the Central Balkan Iron Age communities, even though they are often regarded as ‘small-scale societies’ that profoundly differed from the Mediterranean ‘slave societies’.

**Key words:** slavery, Central Balkan ‘tribes’, Late Iron Age, ancient written accounts, archaeological evidence, ‘small-scale societies’

### Introduction

As one of the most horrid and cruel kinds of human relations, slavery has attracted the wide and deep academic attention over the last century. Ancient slavery and its various forms across different societies and epochs is not an exception, but, to the contrary, has often served as a frame of reference for general and global assessments of slaving practices, their types and consequences (e.g. Finley 1980; Bodel and Scheidel eds. 2017; Lenski and Cameron eds. 2018). Since the work of Moses Finley (see Lenski 2018, 106) there have been growing investigations and vibrant discussions of slavery in the Mediterranean and surrounding areas that enormously increased our knowledge about the phenomenon (e.g. Bradley and Cartledge 2011). Here I would like to consider how this tremendously important subject has been approached in the case of the Central Balkans within the domestic (i.e. former Yugoslavian and Serbian) ancient studies. In order to do so, it is essential first to offer some basic notes on geographical terminology and chronological framework.

The term ‘Central Balkans’ has been commonly used within Yugoslavian historiography and archaeology of the pre-Roman and Roman eras, especially after the

pivotal work of Fanula Papazoglu (1969; 1978), who defined populations between the western ‘Illyrian’, eastern ‘Thracian’, and southern ‘Greek’ parts of the peninsula as the ‘central Balkan tribes’. The notion designates the area between the Danube (ca. from Drava to Isker rivers), the central part of modern Northern Macedonia, the western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the northwestern part of Bulgaria (Papazoglu 1969: unpaginated final map in the publication; Figure 1). The term is particularly widely accepted in Serbia, since it covers most of its territory, but evades utilizing the modern denomination for ancient past, and therefore has more neutral appeal.



**Figure 1** - the area of Central Balkans with territories of pre-Roman ‘tribes’ according to Papazoglu (1969)

Regarding the chronology, here the period is covered from ca. IV c. BCE to the end of I c. BCE. The centuries of the old era are often characterized by scholars as ‘protohistoric’ antiquity, meaning that communities of the area left no written records of their own, but were mentioned in classical sources and henceforth entered the research spotlight of modern historiography. During the last decades BCE the region of the Central Balkans was integrated into the Roman Empire (with most of its parts inside the later province of Moesia Superior), and started to share its dynamics and common features up to the early Byzantium, which is why it is commonly regarded as historic antiquity.

From this brief chronological and geographical introduction, it is already apparent that any academic inquiry is associated with complex theoretical, methodological, epistemological and interpretational problems. First is the fact that the period in question has been studied from the standpoints of two close, but not entirely complementary and mutually harmonious academic disciplines – history and archaeology, each one burdened with the difficulties concerning the nature and potential of its respective evidence (i.e. text and materiality). The relationship of the two has been intricate and fluctuates in general, but it is particularly specific when it comes to protohistory and similar contexts (e.g. Roman provincial) of the scarce written records (see e.g. Moreland 2001; Laurence 2012). Second, over the last five centuries of the old era the region in question was at the fringes of the Mediterranean world's focus, and more importantly, at the edges of different empires and hegemonic entities: most notably Hellenistic and Roman, but also Persian, Thracian and Daco-Getian. This caused the dynamic relations of the Central Balkan populations and their neighbors, which oscillated from open hostilities to vassalage, military cooperation and economic contacts. Thirdly, the period of I c. BCE – I c. CE marks the transition from one (pre-Roman) to the other, substantially different (Roman) political, social, cultural and economic environment. In other words, this timeframe saw various sorts of discontinuities and changes introduced by the Roman imperial structure in the course of emerging provincial settings.

All of the listed specificities are pertinent to the study of slavery as well, and initiate a whole range of questions: from the basic ones of whether the pre-Roman communities in the Central Balkans knew of and practiced this kind of social relations, to those concerning if the provincial slavery in the area accorded with other parts of the Empire, to what manners and extent. However, in order to reach these problems, it is first essential to look at the previous research of ancient slavery in the area, how it was investigated, what ideas and theoretical frameworks lie behind the existing interpretations, and what is the current state of knowledge about the enslaved people and enslaving practices in the Central Balkan antiquity. As stated in the title, the main focus of the paper is to establish the basis for further study by opening the main line of discussion and outlining the pressing questions, which is why this paper should not be understood as a conclusive overview of the Late Iron Age slavery in the Central Balkans.

## Historiographic Interpretations of Pre-Roman Slavery

Let us begin with the views on protohistoric slavery offered by ancient historians and based on their source materials i.e. classical textual accounts. It should be immediately stated that academic historiography of antiquity in Serbia started at the end of XIX c. when Nikola Vulić (1872–1945) returned from his stud-

ies in Germany and took the lecturing position at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Although in previous centuries there were several Balkan scholars who initiated close reading of classical literary sources and interpreted passages that mention the region and its populations, thus paving the way for further investigation,<sup>1</sup> it is Vulić who introduced the approach of rigorous academic analysis and provided critical revision of surviving historical narratives. His method included strong positivistic principles, manifested through source-criticism and strict lingering within the limits of data from the texts, with no detours into the areas of bold suppositions or uninformed speculations. Additionally, being the true offspring of historiography of his epoch, Vulić was predominantly oriented towards political history of ancient times, which, narrowly following the ancient authors' main thematic concerns and narratives, was itself preoccupied with questions of war, military campaigns, big political events and figures, administrative divisions and exact chronology. Consequently, Vulić focused his inquires on territorial distribution of the people mentioned in ancient texts (such as Scordisci, Dardanians, Paeonians, Breuci, Desititates, etc., seeing them as fully fledged ethnic tribes), and their historical destinies, i.e. chronology and outcomes of wars they waged against the Macedonian kingdom or the Romans (see e.g. Vulić 1901, 1907, 1910, 1926a, 1926b, 1926c). On the one hand, this was a completely logical step, since Vulić, as a pioneer of academic ancient history in Serbia, had to get facts, terms, geography and chronology of events straight, and to establish the basic interpretational order. On the other hand, however, this meant that he remained completely within the scope of traditional historiography, having little or no interest in the topics such as economy, culture, social organization, or other aspects. Additionally, as the perspective of socio-cultural evolution was held as truism at the time, for Vulić all pre-Roman populations were barbarians at the lower level of development, that improved their way of life only by being romanized after the conquest and integration into the Empire (e. g. Vulić 1938, 1939). Thus, from his perspective, the spheres of life of the pre-Roman 'tribes', other than politics and war, were not really pressing research issues, both because there was no abundant evidence of this kind in ancient sources, and because 'undeveloped' barbarians were not really historically relevant societies when compared to Greco-Roman 'civilization'. Hence, the question of societal relations of various types, including the slaveholding, was not on Vulić's research agenda and, as the matter of fact, it can be characterized as a complete blind spot (as it generally was in the European scholarship of ancient period at the time). This is also confirmed by the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> These were learned churchmen who worked under the classicist intellectual influence and wrongly linked classical antiquity (especially the Illyrians) to the history of Southern Slavs: Vinko Pribojević (middle of XV c.–after 1532), Marvo Orbin (1563–1610), Juraj Križanić (1618–1683), Matija Petar Katančić (1750–1825).

in the period between two World Wars several other researchers of protohistoric antiquity in Serbia had a very similar approach, concentrating on the questions of ethnic belonging, political history, tribal territory, etc. (Budimir 1929, 1930, 1937; Jankulov 1940).

After the World War II, Fanula Papazoglu, Vulić's academic successor, carried out a comprehensive study of all available source material directly or indirectly linked with pre-Roman populations of the Central Balkans. Her work resulted in the fundamental book, published in Serbo-Croatian in 1968 and then in English in 1978, and adequately titled *The Central Balkan Tribes in pre-Roman Times*. Continuing Vulić's already established course of research, she offered the reconstruction of history of the Triballi, Autariatae, Dardanians, Scordisci and Moesians in the greatest possible detail. Her perspective was strongly ethno-deterministic and mainly concerned with political history, 'rise and fall' narrative and territorial expansion of each of the 'tribes', as well as with their relations towards the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman worlds (see Mihajlović 2014a, 2019, 58–65). However, Papazoglu also tried to assess the issues of social organization, economy (i.e. mode of production), customs and religion, as far as literary sources allowed her to do. As a theoretical Marxist and a true believer in general progress, she deemed the pre-Roman tribes as barbarians, each at a different scale of social and cultural development, and each evaluated by the criterion of how close its social organization, way of life (sedentism/nomadism, types of settlements), style of warfare and economic base resembled the Mediterranean slaveholding and culturally 'advanced civilizations' (Papazoglu 1969, 334–372, 1978, 439–489). In such interpretational framework, the physical proximity and intensity of contacts with (what in her words were) the "cultured nations of antiquity", played a key role: the nearer the tribe was to Greece, Macedonia and Roman provinces, and the stronger influences it received, the more developed evolutionary stage it allegedly accomplished (Papazoglu 1969, 336, 1978, 441–442). By this grading scheme the Triballi, Autariatae and Moesians belonged to the 'primitive' people, as the most of their social and cultural features were 'underdeveloped'. On the other hand, the Scordisci and Dardanians were placed higher on the ladder, the latter being valued as the most progressive and showing the closest parallels with the Mediterranean societies in terms of supposed monarchical organization, armed forces grouping (phalanx), the existence of towns and complex economy (Papazoglu 1969, 367–368, 372, 1978, 481–483, 489; for critical review Mihajlović 2018a).

To this categorization of the Dardanians Papazoglu added another piece of evidence: Athenaeus' (II c. CE) quote of Agatharchides' (II c. BCE) mention of slave (*douloi*) ownership among them,<sup>2</sup> which incited her to reflect further on

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<sup>2</sup> But Agatharchides the Cnidian, in the thirty-eighth book of his history of the Affairs of Europe, says that the Dardanians had great numbers of slaves, some of them having

the issue, thus being the first ancient historian in Serbia to deal with the problem of protohistoric slavery.<sup>3</sup> Starting from the premise that the Dardanian society was a tribal and not a class one, and assuming that slaveholding relations were only at their onset, she concluded that the slaves mentioned by Agatharchides were not actually chattel slaves, but some other kind of dependant population (Papazoglu 1969, 369, 1978, 483). Citing the examples of *prospelates* among the neighboring Ardiei, as well as helots of Sparta and *penestae* of Thessaly, she noted that Dardanian slaves could have been a sort of subdued ethnic group(s) who lost their freedom but kept the land which they cultivated for their subjugators (i.e. for the thin layer of ethnic Dardanians - Papazoglu 1969, 369–370, 1978, 483–486). As an alternative possibility, again supported by analogous cases from antiquity, Papazoglu suggested that Dardanian slaves could be understood as dependant peasantry that operated under clientage relations (1969, 370–371, 1978, 486–487). In the end, using the population estimates for ancient Macedonia and Thrace, she opted for the latter argument, concluding that Dardanian slaves most probably were not of other ethnicity, but free members of the tribe with limited political rights or no rights at all, who were obligated towards landowning aristocracy (Papazoglu 1969, 371–372, 1978, 487–488).

Although very briefly considered due to the lack of source material that would allow more elaborated analysis and conclusions, the problem of slavery in the pre-Roman Central Balkans stayed within Papazoglu's scope of interest and she revisited it on several other occasions. Comparing the Illyrian and (alleged) Dardanian kingdoms, she repeated her basic premise: slave owning was a matter of general socio-economic development. This is why in the more conservative northern parts of Illyrian kingdom there was a continuity of dependant peasantry, whereas in its southern parts, which were at the higher level of progress thanks to the proximity of the Greek world, there was a full-fledged slaveholding, especially in towns and particularly in the coastal ones (Papazoglu 1988, 160–161). Similarly, as Dardania was at the lower socio-economic level, the "real slaveholding relations among the Dardanians developed slower than in Illyria" and dependant peasantry was a more plausible scenario than chattel slavery, although "the closeness of Macedonia and constant warfare could not be without influence on their [i.e. the Dardanians'] social structure" (Papazoglu 1988, 161, 1997a, 1997b). Additionally, she emphasized that this was not an outcome of warfare and subjugation, but of an internal economic development linked to socio-economic relations typical for kinship-tribal stage of social evolution (Papazoglu 1997b). In the end,

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*a thousand, and some even more; and that in time of peace they were all employed in the cultivation of the land; but that in time of war they were all divided into regiments, each set of slaves having their own master for their commander* (Athenaeus VI, 103).

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of accuracy it is true that Agatharchides' note was considered earlier by Truhelka (1929, 66) and Budimir (1949), but this was briefly and in passing, both simply concluding that Dardanians had serfs - *kmetovi* (i.e. not slaves).

she concisely summarized: “if our judgments are correct, then we can conclude that in the Central Balkans existed the institution of dependant peasantry, but not the collective slavery” (Papazoglu 1997b, 28; similarly Mirdita 2015, 158–162). Thus, from Papazoglu’s evolutionary standpoint, the phenomenon of slavery was intimately linked to a more advanced economic and political organization, the one that operated within ancient (Greek, Hellenistic and Roman) states and emerged after the dissolution of previous tribal social structures. Therefore, in their contexts, slavery meant full property over people, and should be distinguished from the types of subordinate categories that did not include ownership of humans and were inherited from the older (pre-state) socio-economic stages that still existed in the interior of the Balkans (Papazoglu 1997b). In conclusion, Papazoglu’s genuine interest in the matters of dependant relations in antiquity was, on the one side, determined by her general theoretical views (Marxist and evolutionary), and on the other hand limited by the scarcity of written evidence for the Central Balkans. This is the reason why she studied in greater detail underprivileged social categories and dependant relations in Greek and Hellenistic worlds (Papazoglu 1993, 1995, 1997c), while the Central Balkan populations were considered only to the extent discussed above.

However, Papazoglu’s influential interpretation of the protohistoric ‘tribes’ as defined by the level of their general socio-economic development, decisively colored the further research. None of the succeeding ancient historians in ex Yugoslavia, to the best of my knowledge, ever challenged her views, nor tried to review, modify or complement what she already indicated about the issue of pre-Roman slavery. Surely, this is mostly due to the lack of ancient authors’ accounts about ‘barbarian’ social life in the Central Balkans, which hinders extensive interpretations, even in the form of hypothetical assumptions. Nevertheless, the absence of interest on the matter is also the result of the wide acceptance of Papazoglu’s evaluation of the position of the Central Balkan ‘tribes’ on the social, political, economic and cultural scale of general progress in antiquity. According to such views, they always stay primitive tribal groups at the margins of the classical world, and are primarily relevant as military and political forces occasionally interacting with the ancient ‘civilized’ states. Locked into the role they have been given by traditional perspectives of historiography,<sup>4</sup> protohis-

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<sup>4</sup> Contrary to one might expect for the former Socialist Yugoslavia, Marxism was not the dominant social theory in the fields of ancient history and archaeology and it left few marks on the choice, direction and methodology of research (see Babić 2002; Novaković 2021, 424–431). Papazoglu was an exception who tried to implement some of the Marxist theoretical views but, generally, the investigation of prehistory and antiquity was untouched by the Marxian topics of class struggle, social categories of enslaved, underprivileged and exploited. This is a stark contrast in comparison to the situation in Soviet scholarship (see Baryshnikov 2020).

toric populations of the Central Balkans are never appreciated as more than communities with simple social relations, not anywhere near the complexity of the Mediterranean cultures. Unfortunately, this is not the case only in historiography, as archaeology of the pre-Roman Central Balkans closely follows the same line of thought.

### Archaeological Interpretations of Pre-Roman Slavery

Prehistoric archaeology in Serbia really started to develop after the World War II. Although there has been some work in the previous decades as well, its scope and quality is a far cry in comparison to activities from the 1950s onwards. The intensification of research, thanks to the increased number of professional archaeologists and regular funding, marked the substantial growth in knowledge about prehistoric epochs. This period also saw the full introduction of culture-historical paradigm with its overwhelming interest in cultural groups, specificities of their material culture, and definition of their geographical and chronological distribution (on these issues see e.g. Palavestra and Babić 2016; Milosavljević 2020). The same framework applies to investigation of the Late Iron Age (ca. IV c. BCE–beginning of CE), with the important difference of its very tight bond with ancient history. In fact, it is because of the ethnonyms used by Greek and Roman authors to signify communities of the Central Balkans, that investigation of the Late Iron Age took conspicuously ethno-deterministic character. This meant that the collective names from ancient accounts were understood as objective indices of stable and normatively defined ethnic tribal identities, with their respective territories, histories and distinguishable cultures that had their specific material manifestations. Within such epistemic constellation, the historical reconstruction of Papazoglu (1969, 1978) was decisive, as it played the role of the pervasive interpretational fabric, while archaeological evidence was conformed to the historiographic narratives of the Central Balkan ‘tribes’ (see Džino 2011; Mihajlović 2014a, 2019, 32–74). In effect, the late Iron Age archaeology ascribed meaning to its data almost exclusively by referring to reconstructed ‘tribal’ histories, thus drastically limiting the range of research questions and problems it tried to solve. The paradigmatic publication that fully articulates such an approach is *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja (The Prehistory of Yugoslav Lands)* volume V, entirely dedicated to the Iron Age (Benac ed. 1987), which was conceived as comprehensive synthesis of the previous archaeological research. Although it abounds in descriptive information on material evidence of the late Iron Age populations of the Western and Central Balkans, the interpretations were entirely determined by historiographic framework, problems of ethnicity, tribal delimitation and material culture that could be seen as an ethnic feature, while the issues of social structure, political organization

and economy played a marginal part. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that the topic of slavery stayed outside of archaeological consideration.

Indeed, even the studies specifically directed towards particular ‘tribes’ and taking into account a bit wider scope, do not give a different picture. For example, in his discussion of the ‘Scordiscan’ social structure, given under the presumption that it was analogous to ‘Celtic’ communities described in ancient accounts, Todorović (1974) suggested hierarchical ordering. According to his hypothesis, there were princes at the top of ‘military democracy’ of each of the tribes of the ‘Scordisci’ (since he presumed these were composed of many smaller tribal groups); then there were leaders of clans (i.e. kinship groups) within each of the tribes; priests (who shared the rule with the previous); traders; artisans and, finally, peasants occupied with farming and animal husbandry (Todorović 1974, 116–118, 258). Interestingly, Todorović did mention slaves, but pointed out that they cannot be discerned, and presumed that even if they existed, there was no strict social differentiation as the one that operated in the “classical period of slaveholding system” (1974, 118, 258). Referring to Papazoglu, he posited that the Scordisci were somewhat less developed than the Dardanians, and it cannot be said that they had slaves who farmed the land in peace and fought for their masters in war (as in the case of the latter). Additionally, he cited the ancient accounts about Scordiscan cruelty towards captives, probably wishing to imply that they took no prisoners of war into enslavement but executed them all (Todorović 1974, 119). Similar passing comments on the slaves among the ‘Scordisci’ is found in the works of Petar Popović. Analyzing the distribution and circulation of foreign and local coinage in the area attributed to the ‘tribe’, he deduced that the Balkan ‘barbarians’ were familiarized with silver coinage thanks to their civilized neighbors, and that the way they got the money was “based on plunder, collective mercenary service, gifts that obliged them to friendship, as well as trade, especially of slaves” (Popović 1987, 132). He also postulated that the II–I c. BCE inflow of drachms of Apollonia and Dyrachium into continental Balkans was the result of trade, and although it is not certain what was exchanged, drew attention to Strabo’s report (5.1.8)<sup>5</sup> about Illyrians around the Danube who, among other things, also traded slaves for olive oil and wine. In his opinion, this piece of information also applies to the Scordisci, whereas its archeological confirmation, along with the coins, is to be found in copper-alloy vessels for wine consuming imported from the northern Italy (Popović 1992, 50). The Scordiscan slave trading is also considered

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<sup>5</sup> *Aquileia, which is the nearest to the head [of the gulf], was founded by the Romans, to keep in check the barbarians dwelling higher up. You may navigate transport ships to it up the river Natisone for more than sixty stadia. This is the trading city with the nations of Illyrians who dwell round the Danube. Some deal in marine merchandise, and carry in wagons wine in wooden casks and oil, and others exchange slaves, cattle, and hides.*

by Dubravka Ujes-Morgan, who entertains the possibility, but emphasizes that “commercial reasons, such as a very intensive slave-trade, still cannot explain such a wide-ranging, abundant and rapid spread of drachmas” (Ujes-Morgan 2012, 374), and instead opts for their obtainment through mercenary employment of the Scordisci. In summary, archaeological perspective vaguely accepts the likelihood of Scordiscan association with slavery, but in the form of participation in commerce that led to the slaveholding Mediterranean societies. Following the taken-for-granted reputation of the Scordisci as prominently warlike ‘tribe’ at the ‘barbaric level of development’, this reasoning presumes that Scordisci were selling their captives, but probably did not have slaves of their own.

As for the ‘Dardanians’, who are (according to ancient accounts) presumed to be a stratified society with dependant peasantry if not slaves, archaeological knowledge is extremely limited. The area ascribed to the ‘tribe’ is very poorly researched, and the early part of the Iron Age is much more familiar than the later centuries. Nevertheless, in the published syntheses it is the ethnic attribution of archaeological material that completely colored the picture, whereas the discussion of social structure, categories of population and dynamics are almost entirely omitted (Tasić 1998; Berisha 2012). Except for the purely speculative and cursory interpretation of Shukriu on slave owning aristocracy and clearly stratified social categories among the Dardanians (Shukriu 2008, 15), that does not rest on archaeological evidence of any sort, there are no other attempts to examine the issue of slaveholding from the archaeological perspective. The same is true for the other Central Balkan ‘tribes’ covered by the Papazoglu’s study (e.g. Vasić 2004; Stojić 2011), but also for the ‘Hellenized’ V–III c. BCE settlement of Krševica in southern Serbia that yield convincing evidence for contacts with Greek and Hellenistic worlds (e.g. Popović 2012; Vranić 2012; 2022).

In defense of this situation, it must be stressed that the Late Iron Age archaeological data is notably scarce due to the low level of research, and save from the area ascribed to the ‘Scordisci’, there is extremely limited knowledge of settlements and necropolises dated into the last four centuries BCE. Another issue that must be considered is the fundamental difficulty of tracing slavery via archaeological evidence, both because general limitations set by its underdetermination and equifinality, and because the materiality associated with enslaved people does not stand out as separate and easily recognizable category per se (see e. g. Mata 2020; Taylor 2021). In addition to the discussed theoretical and thematic direction of the local archaeological tradition, such a constellation produced notably peripheral status of the subject of pre-Roman slavery in the Central Balkans. However, in the light of various developments in the research field of ancient slavery there are some important points to be considered that might open new paths for further research.

## Pre-Roman Slavery in the Central Balkans and Networks of Human Trafficking

To start with, it has been long established and widely accepted that the continental Balkan populations, as well as those living along the Adriatic and the Black Seas, were the source for slave trade that ultimately led to the Greek cities, most notably Athens. As demonstrated in several studies, the Iron Age communities, polities, interest groups and individuals participated in the exchange networks that included the traffic of people, some of them (as in the Thracian area) being famous exactly as slave suppliers, and probably operating as both intermediaries for long-distance human trade and obtainers of the locally enslaved (seminal work: Finley 1962; recent contributions with older bibliography: Taylor 2001; Avram 2007; Braund 2011, 115–123; Tzochiev 2015, 420–421). The similar possibility for one of the Central Balkan ‘tribes’ was put forth by Papazoglu: noticing the negative connotations of the ethnonym Triballi in Attic literary tradition she concluded that the infamous repute must have originated under the perception of the Triballian slaves whose presence is confirmed in V–IV c. Athens (Papazoglu 1969, 66–68, 1978, 83–86).<sup>6</sup> She also presumed that these slaves reached Attica via the Thracian ports (Papazoglu 1978, 83), meaning that she was well aware of the ancient accounts about the role of Thrace in the Athenian slave supply. Although there was no further elaboration of implications of this view, either by Papazoglu or other historians and archaeologists, the possibility of the Central Balkan people being the part of slave trafficking is a worthwhile idea.

The site of Kale-Krševica is a good vantage point in this regard. Located in the Južna Morava valley, in the south of the present-day Serbia, and dated to second half of V–first half of III c. BCE, it is one of the northern- and western-most ‘Hellenized’ settlements in the continental Balkans. The distinctive feature of the hill is its fortification erected according to the Greek and Hellenistic architectural principles, in V–VI century. Another trait typical for Greek architectural tradition is uncovered at the plateau: the remnants of stone drywall foundations of buildings that had sun-dried brick walls and roof tiles. Additionally, the barrel-vaulted reservoir with the system of collecting and streaming water was built at the foothill in the end of IV c, possibly by some Hellenistic army, or at least using the technological knowledge developed within such a context. Close links with the Aegean are also apparent through the presence of imported Greek pottery for food and drink storage and consumption, including various types of painted vessels (some with Greek alphabet letters and graffiti inscriptions), as

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<sup>6</sup> A valid notion considering the recent perspective on the role the foreign slaves had in the Greek prejudiced views and the construction of ethnic stereotypes about ‘barbarians’ (Harrison 2019).

well as coinage, fibulae and jewelry (Popović 2006, 2012; Vranić 2012, 2019, 2022). It remains unknown what was the nature of the Krševica settlement: could it be interpreted as a Greek emporion and even identified with the settlement of Damastion known from IV c. coin emissions and Strabo (as implied by Popović 2012, 43–45); or is it a result of local population's agency, who used Greek and Hellenistic models either by hiring architects, or by mastering the knowledge in the close contact with its source; did it have really anything to do with the Macedonian Empire, army and succeeding kingdoms, assuming the role of northern garrison of mayor Hellenistic political players (e.g. Philip II, Alexander III, Lysimachus, Cassander); or it was a stronghold of the locals who could have been mercenaries of Hellenistic kings and had close contacts with Macedonia and the Aegean, thus inclining to some aspects of these cultural templates (the options considered by Vranić 2012, 2018, 2019, 2022). Whereas it is presently impossible to pinpoint the most plausible scenario, the fact remains that the site was connected with the Greek world and that the imported objects found there reflect more or less regular economic links, albeit of unknown sort and scale (common sense impressions about intensive free trade are now considered in a much more careful way - Vranić 2012, 144–146). Usually, it is presumed that Greek poleis had particularly strong interest in exploitation and trade of ore in the continental Balkans (Vranić 2012, 147–153; Tzochov 2015, 421), which is exemplified in the case of already mentioned unidentified settlement of Damastion (Popović 1987, 24–34; Ujes Morgan 2018), and presumed for Kale-Krševica (despite of the current lack of evidence of metal processing at the site - Popović 2012, 45). Leaving aside this strand of thoughts, and although at a speculative level, it is necessary to consider that the economic interrelation of the Greek and Hellenistic worlds with the populations in the Central Balkans also included human trafficking, and that the sites such as Kale-Krševica could have been a sort of hubs inside the long-distance networks that facilitated the slave supply for the Mediterranean. While it is true that so far there have been no published finds that could be associated with slaves at Krševica, and one of the excavators briefly mentions slavery only with respect of workforce needed for the construction of fortification (Popović 2012, 44), if we remember the Triballian, Thracian and Pontic examples, this possibility has to stay open. Furthermore, the martial aspects of the settlement (stone blocks fortification, ditch, enclosed water reservoir and finds of weaponry), whether they were directly linked with some Hellenistic monarch's army or local military force, are also telling: contexts of warfare as a normalized functioning mode are especially favorable for enslavement and slave commerce (e. g. Taylor 2001, 2021; Avram 2007, 247; Lenski 2009; Braund 2011, 120).

This leads to another important aspect: the time span of Krševica settlement corresponds with the period of increased militarization that occurred both with-

in the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkan region. The processes set forth by the Persian and then Macedonian expansion, followed by constant conflicts of the Hellenistic powers, along with other drifts, also brought the high demand of armed force, partially satisfied by the employment of hired armies recruited among the populations from different fringes of the Mediterranean world. The internal dynamics of the continental Balkan societies was probably spurred by these general tendencies and manifested through the rise of martial features at the end of Early and the beginning of Late Iron Age. These trends are evident in both the Greek and Hellenistic written accounts (Papazoglu 1978; Šašel Kos 2005), no matter how unreliable and biased they are, and archaeological data from the region that shows emphasis on weaponry in burial contexts (e.g. Todorović and Todorović 1970; Đurić, Glišić and Todorović 1975; Tasić 1974, 261, 263; Kull 1991, 159–160; Babić and Palavestra 1999; Medović 2007, 67–72; Ljuština 2010; Jovanović 2018). The impending process of Latènization that corresponded with the crises in the Hellenistic world (at the end of IV and first decades of III c.) meant further acceleration of these impetuses, as it constituted a world dominated by highly mobile warrior groups of different sizes that had intensive interactions with the Hellenistic powers, and probably as well among themselves (summary in Mihajlović 2019, 178–186, 280–289 with bibliography). Furthermore, the steady Roman advance in the Balkans that reached its first culmination in the dissolution of the Macedonian kingdom (168 BCE), and continued piecemeal until the end of the old era, constantly generated disturbances in the webs of political arrangements and gave a fruitful ground for at least occasional outbreaks of conflict at the edges of newly established provinces and zones of control (as the wars of populations under the names of ‘Scordisci’ and ‘Dardanians’ demonstrate - Papazoglu 1978, 156–187, 279–345). Leaving aside what kind of collective identifications were actually hidden under the general umbrella ethnonyms used by the Greek and Roman authors (i.e. Autariatae, Triballi, Dardanians, Scordisci, Moesi, etc.), the Central Balkan communities or some of their parts were entangled in the networks of armed violence, be it as mercenary troops or interest groups, in alliances against southern neighbors or in mutual combats. These four centuries were complex in regard of diversity of implicated political entities and dynamics of their interactions, and while the scope and intensity of militarization certainly oscillated and differed (cf. Mihajlović 2018b), the wider historical setting surely energized belligerent impulses. In such a context, taking prisoners in battles, raids, plunders, intrusions and long-distance movements of armed forces could have been a regular affair, ranging anywhere from a collateral outcome to the main aim of warfare. In turn, this would mean that at least some portions of captives could end up enslaved and brought to supra-regional networks of slave-trade. In other words, having in mind the general historical climate in the Mediterranean world

of IV–I c. BCE, the Central Balkans Iron Age communities indeed could have actively and regularly participated in the ongoing slave supply system, especially because they were at the fringes of violent slave-holding imperial structures (cf. Braund 2011, 122).

Plausibility of this scenario is one thing, but its corroboration is a completely different matter, since there are only circumstantial, open-ended and scarce pieces of evidence. The best probability of being associated with slave traffic has the coinage of Mediterranean origin. Starting with Hellenistic issues and reaching the peak with the Apollonia and Dyrrachium mintage (together with Roman denarii) in I c. BCE, the inflow of coins has already been considered as the result of trade activities, including the slave exchange (Popović 1987, 68, 128, 132, Ujes 2003; compare similar explanation for the massive appearance of Roman denarii in Dacia: Crawford 1977; Lockyear 2004, 70; Stan 2014, 65–66). However, it is also noted that the acquisition of foreign coinage could have been an outcome of a different process, i.e. the payment for military services that local ‘tribes’ provided to the Mediterranean superpowers (Popović 1987, 129–130). This is especially emphasized in the case of such finds from I c. BCE in the area of ‘Scordisci’, who are believed to be engaged as mercenaries or allies of the Roman armies and fractions that actively operated in the Balkans from 80s BCE onwards (Ujes-Morgan 2012; cf. Mihajlović 2014b). In other words, even though tempting, the explanation of import of the Hellenistic and Roman coinage as the result of slave-selling is inconclusive and it is impossible to see it solely in these terms. Nevertheless, if at least a portion of foreign coinage came through the web of human trafficking, this begs the question of how exactly the exchange worked: were the traded individuals prisoners of war or were they bought from farther areas and then re-sold to Mediterranean interested parties? The first scenario would imply that the political entities of the Central Balkans must have been in more-or-less continuous mutual armed conflicts that enabled relatively regular enslavement or, alternatively, there existed social practices by which people became slaves in their own communities as a result of e.g. punishment, debt, self-selling, selling by others, etc. While for the latter we have no evidence whatsoever, the former at least generally resonates with the supposedly fragmentary nature of the Late Iron Age in the Central Balkans: the general ethnonyms used by ancient authors in all probability disguise the world of multiple micro-regional political entities that had diverse and changing multilateral relations (for the ‘Dardanians’: Mihajlović 2018a, cf. Mirdita 2015, 156–158, for the ‘Scordisci’: Popović 1987, 136–138; Mihajlović 2019, 2020). The second scenario, which is of course not mutually exclusive with the previous, is that the Central Balkan communities participated in the network of long-distance slave exchange. While the supra-regional connectivities indubitably existed, and probably could facilitate the efficient movement of enslaved

people along their channels, it is impossible to associate them with slave traffic in terms of evidence. The only exception, but of purely speculative nature, could be the local coinage that appeared as emulation of Hellenistic issues (predominantly the posthumous silver issues of Philip II) in III century, and during II c. developed in the production of various local types (known from single finds and hoards) associated with the 'Scordisci' (Popović 1987). Regrettably, the purpose of this coinage is not completely clear (as to whether they had a strictly economic role, symbolic meaning, bullion function, or some combined capacity), and the sort of authority/authorities that issued them is unknown (i. e. if it was an individual or a collective body, leader, community, territorial entity or interest groups), which creates considerable difficulties in understanding their true nature (Mihajlović 2019, 248–250). The fact that they circulated and were hoarded, together with the existence of large and small 'denominations' and finds from settlements (most notably Gomolava - Popović 1988, 101–104, 203–205), testify to their pecuniary value and probable utilization in economic transactions. Consequently, it might be plausible to entertain the possibility of the role of local coinage in the Late Iron Age (i.e. La Tène) networks of exchange that could have included the traffic of people. Of course, even if used for these purposes, the local coinage was certainly not exclusively linked to the commerce of slaves, as there were other kinds of commodities that could have circulated through supra-regional networks and left no archeological trace whatsoever, not to mention various services (e. g. martial or artisan) and other practices (e.g. gift and 'dowry' type exchange). On the other hand, minted metal is especially suitable form for long-distance transport,<sup>7</sup> while the hoards comprised of such pieces could suggest preparedness-for or consequences-of large amount cash transactions involved in the bulk exchange of any sort of goods, including humans. Additionally, the production of local coinage in the Late Iron Age Europe would imply that such exchanges operated in the La Tène world internally, which have important bearings for the consideration of long-range slave-commerce across the realms of 'barbarians' (see Mata 2019).

Furthermore, if the Central Balkan communities indeed partook in slave traffic that facilitated income, this poses the questions of who exactly profited, how the fortune circulated further, and in what ways this process influenced local economic and social lives. However, while these are important and thought-provoking problems, at the moment the absence of any archaeological context makes it difficult to identify the individuals and groups that differen-

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<sup>7</sup> It might be indicative to acknowledge Popović's (1987, 79) note about three hoards of the Moldavian *Huși-Vovriești* type coins (associated with the 'Celts-Bastarnae') being found in 'Scordiscan' area, while one hoard containing *Serbian group* issues (assigned to the 'Scordisci') is known from the supposed region of 'Celts-Bastarnae'.

tiated as affluent and powerful thanks to the supposed participation in slave commerce. In fact, after the period of lavish 'princely' graves, in the area of Central Balkans there is a marked lack of burials that stand out by accumulated wealth or some other features, and it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reliably discern the graves that might have belonged to supposedly distinguishable higher social layers. For example, although for the populations under the ethnonym of 'Dardanians' there are ancient accounts that allow presumption of some degree of stratified social relations and existence of aristocratic mode of functioning (Mihajlović 2018a, 192), so far there have been no funerary or settlement contexts that could be convincingly interpreted as belonging to person(s) with amassed economic or social power. Admittedly, the scope of archaeological research and data is extremely modest, but even the known burial units with the pieces of e.g. imported items (Todorović and Todorović 1970, grave 1; Đurić, Glišić and Todorović 1975, graves nos. 2, 30, 34), cannot be straightforwardly connected to clearly privileged echelons, let alone slavers. Even for the populations further north in the Danube-Sava confluence (traditionally interpreted as the 'Scordisci'), where the archaeological evidence is more familiar and diverse, both settlements and burials display no obvious indices of clearly stratified society. While it is true that some of the graves are different from the majority, their distinction is not such to point to the economically, politically or professionally hierarchized and evidently asymmetric social setting. Instead, the current evidence suggests the scenario of communities that operated by largely heterarchical principles, and although social diversity among their members surely existed, it is hard to argue there were institutionalized divisions by classes or inherited/acquired group privileges (Mihajlović 2020).

Thus, the only indicator of possible economic (and thereof, perhaps, socio-political) inner variations could again be found in hoards of valuable items (some with imported and local silver coinage, some with jewelry: Popović 1987; Jevtić, Lazić and Sladić 2006). Nevertheless, it remains unknown if these assemblages belonged to individuals or collectives (e.g. family, kin, clan, interest group), and if they were at all accumulated in relation to slave commerce. While such possibility is of course open, and although the increasing number of voices advocate that slaving and slave traffic were a common feature of the Iron Age Europe (Arnold 1988; Gronenborn 2001; Taylor 2001, 2021; Mata 2019; Redfern 2020), nothing can be said with a higher level of certainty. If the plausibility is permitted that at least some of the collected riches came from the slave-supply activities, this would further invite the question similar to the issue of hoards possession: was the ownership of slaves and involvement in their distribution individual or collective? If former, what was the social and professional profile of persons associated with such enterprise - merchant, middleman,

dominant figure of local community, leader of a warrior group? If latter, would this mean that slave-traffic was a joint undertaking of a family, clan, corporative interest body, martial part of society or 'public' communal entity of whatever scale? In other words, the right and potential to manipulate hypothetical 'human commodities' is intimately linked to social structure and functioning of the Central Balkan protohistoric communities, which is a complex, ambiguous and largely unclear matter.

### The Late Iron Age Central Balkan: 'Societies With Slaves'?

Finally, all of the aforementioned leads to an even more intriguing problem: were the Iron Age societies in the Central Balkans of slaveholding kind? This is evidently a multifaceted and complicated subject for plenty of reasons, ranging from inner societal organization in the Late Iron Age, to a spectrum of particularities and nuances covered by the terms slave and slavery, to obstacles in identification of (im)material clues of the phenomena. As we have seen, the protohistoric populations of the Central Balkans are traditionally interpreted as 'barbarians' who, because of the lower level of economic and cultural development, did not have intricate social relations and institutions common to complex 'ancient civilizations'. Regarding slavery, this approach entailed that the Central Balkan 'tribes' could not have possibly been slave-holding communities (as this was the feature of the developed Mediterranean states), and thus the question was never considered as a worthwhile line of study. However, recent research of slavery in the 'small-scale', 'non-state', 'decentralized', 'tribal' societies of the Americas and Africa clearly point that the alleged social 'evolutionary stage' and 'insufficient complexity' of political and economic institutionalizations do not disagree with slave owning. To the contrary, the surviving evidence points to the widespread practice of enslavement and slave-holding that existed locally prior the colonial era, and was subsequently accelerated thanks to the mass-scale enslavement and human-trading (Robertshaw and Duncan 2009; Cameron 2017, 2018; Snyder 2018; Santos-Granero 2018; Lovejoy 2018). According to these case studies, the most common source of slaves was captivity, very often there was sex and age bias (adult males as potentially rebellious were executed, while women, children and youths were enslaved), and the enslaved were both distributed further and kept within slavers' communities, where they usually were marginalized and treated as outsiders (i.e. 'socially dead' in terms of Patterson e.g. 2017) with varied chances of full integration. This strand of research was taken as a frame of anthropological reference in attempts to tackle prehistoric slavery in Europe and several authors have emphasized the plausibility of slave-holding

in the Iron Age (Gronenborn 2001; Taylor 2001, 2021; Mata 2019; Redfern 2020). In some cases there is compelling evidence from very well documented archaeological contexts and detailed bioarchaeological analyses that point to the Iron Age ‘predatory landscapes’ where taking captives, enslaving people and owning slaves was a regular occurrence (Redfern 2020). In rare instances, there are direct material manifestations such as chains or visual representations (Taylor 2001, 28, 2021, 18), while in others the bold new views caution us to think twice about some of the ‘ritualistic’ contexts in a more practical, yet instructive ways (e. g. Mata 2019, 33–38 suggests that La Tène ‘cult places’, certain types of walled and rectilinear (‘viereckschanzen’) enclosures could be understood as transshipment centers and holding facilities, respectively).

However, in the Central Balkans, and predominantly from the ‘Scordiscan’ area with relatively abundant evidential pool, there are no direct proofs of slave-holding from settlements, whereas the available burial data is considerably frustrated by the normative practice of cremating the deceased. While there are few graves that could be regarded as non-normative, such as e.g. collective burial of three individuals from the settlement of Gomolava (Jovanović and Jovanović 1988, 53–58, 186–187), or disturbed interment (no. 16) of a human (with bronze necklace) and a horse (with bits) in Karaburma necropolis (Todorović 1972, 15–16, T. VI), it is of course impossible to a priori characterize them as slave-related. Additionally, it is quite uncertain whether the persons of subordinated position would be buried within necropolises of a dominant group, even if they really existed in the Central Balkans Iron Age societies. The evidence from few excavated settlements of the ‘Scordisci’ area of II–I c. BCE also offers no indices of marginal social groups or individuals. The settlement pattern consists of enclosed spaces of several hectares and smaller open-type clusters of houses. The dwellings in both sorts of settlements were similar (above-the-ground or pit-houses with one or two rooms, sometimes with adjoining storage pits) and generally there is no evident distinction among them suggesting social disparities of their owners. They were probably the residential units of household sort, and could be seen as associated with some kind of kinship groups (Mihajlović 2020, 221–226, 243–245). However, despite the picture that suggests a generally even distribution of social capacities with no obvious ranking of groups or individuals, it should be said that slave-holding in small-scale societies is nearly always related to household level of functioning and involves simultaneous inclusion in (by virtue of shared space and daily life entanglement with ‘masters’) and exclusion from (slaves are never full equals with members of the kin group they belong to) regular kinship relations (Cameron 2017, 211; 2018, 152, 153, 156; Snyder 2018, 172–175, 184; Santos-Granero 2018, 200–203). With this in mind, as well as the role slaves had in small-scale societies’ economic activities that relied on corporative and kin labor (Cameron 2018, 166; Snyder 2018, 175–

178; Santos-Granero 2018, 199), it can be said that the overall social setting of the Late Iron Age communities in the middle Danube allowed the holding of subordinated category of individuals that might have resembled servitude. Combined with the fragmentary nature of II–I c. world in this area, meaning the presumed existence of clusters of neighboring enclosed settlements that acted as micro-regional political entities (Mihajlović 2019, 242–250, 307–311), it is maybe not farfetched to speculate the presence of a limited number of slaves that could have come from local (hostile) interactions and could have been tied to particular households, or even had communal role. Other ancillary backings of this speculation can be recognized in the supposed intensification and diversification of economic activities (agriculture, crafts, trade - see Popović 1992; Radišić 2022), and possible professionalization and increased significance of the martial parts of society that occurred towards the end of old era, in the face of Roman conquest of the area (see Mihajlović 2018b).

Albeit all of the above is hypothetical, it is nevertheless time to reconsider the traditional skepticism towards slavery in the protohistoric Central Balkans. As its previous systematic dismissal stems from biased general assumptions on what type of relations belongs to which artificially defined and imagined stage of socio-economic evolution, it would be beneficial to revisit the issue having in mind more opened approaches. This will evidently not be an easy task, since the clues of slavery are not obvious or straightforward. Nonetheless, by changing the starting position and mindset we may learn how to be more sensitive in utilizing and surmounting subsidiary data and circumstantial indicators. For example, a good first step would be to think with the possibility that the Late Iron Age Central Balkan communities were associated with slavery, and to try to conceive how our current knowledge is supplemented or altered by this variable. From there, we could perhaps work out more efficient ways of looking for evidence and using analytical tools that could check our starting presumptions. Ultimately, the problem of ancient slavery in the Central Balkans is important not just in order to understand the protohistoric period in more elaborated manner, but also to reassess if the subsequent Roman period really introduced a complete novelty in the form of institutionalized chattel slavery, or the local communities were already familiarized with this sort of social relations. In turn, this is not yet another transitional ‘curiosity’ in the emergence of provincial structure, but might be regarded as essentially relevant for local experiences, adaptations, resistances and relations towards transformative processes brought by the Roman Empire: ideologization of and attitudes towards enslavement and usage of other humans as tools could have been one matter if there existed an earlier cognitive and customary framework of that kind, and quite another if these were unfamiliar spheres of social relationalities.

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*Antičko ropstvo na centralnom Balkanu:  
polazne tačke o pre-rimskom periodu*

U radu se diskutuju dosadašnji pristupi i tumačenja ropstva u antičko doba u okviru domaće (jugoslovenske i srpske) historiografije i arheologije. Razmatraju se teorijsko-metodološki pogledi na pitanja postojanja ropstva i načini tretmana ovog problema na osnovu istorijske i arheološke građe. Kao prostorna odrednica u tekstu se uzima centralni/središnji Balkan kako je definisan od strane Fanule Papazoglu (1969), a potom široko prihvaćen u domaćoj protoantičkoj i antičkoj historiografiji i arheologiji. Vremensko ograničenje kojim se tekst rukovodi obuhvata raspon od IV v. pre nove ere (koji označava početak mlađeg gvozdenog doba) do kraja stare i početka nove ere (kada središnjim Balkanom ovladava Rimsko carstvo). Granica između ove dve epohe važna je i sa tačke gledišta razmatranja ropstva: dok se za pre-rimska „plemena“ najčešće pretpostavlja da usled nižeg „stepena“ društvenog, ekonomskog i kulturnog razvoja nisu imala institucije koje su bile uobičajene u antičkim „civilizacijama“, pa tako ni ropstvo, rimski period se po posmatra kao doba kada je ropstvo uobičajena društvena praksa. Iz ovog razloga je važno problematizovati da li su kasnogvozdenodopske zajednice bile upoznate sa institucijom ropstva ili je ona

uvedena zajedno sa uspostavljanjem rimske provincijske strukture, što pak okreće brojne druge implikacije. Članak najpre obraća pažnju na prethodne interpretacije ropstva među tzv. srednjobalkanskim (pre-rimskim) „plemenima“ sa stanovišta pisanih izvora i skreće pažnju da je ova tematika bila obrađivana usputno i bez većeg interesovanja, između ostalog i usled nedovoljnih antičkih literarnih podataka. Tekst se potom okreće dosadašnjem tumačenju protoantičkog ropstva iz arheološke perspektive, i upućuje da ni unutar ove discipline nije sistematski pristupano pomenutom istraživačkom pitanju. Kritičkim osvrtom na prethodne podatke i zaključke, uz upotrebu novijih rezultata istraživanja ropstva (uopšteno i u pra- i proto-istorijskim okvirima), na kraju se diskutuje o mogućim putevima za razmatranje ropstva u protoantičkom periodu, odnosno pružaju se smernice koje je neophodno imati u vidu u pokušajima istraživanja i razumevanja kasnogvođenodopskog sveta na središnjem Balkanu.

*Ključne reči:* ropstvo, centralni Balkan, kasno gvozdeno doba, antički pisani izvori, arheološki podaci, „zajednice malih razmera“

*Esclavage antique dans les Balkans centraux:  
points de départ sur la période pré-romaine*

Cet article discute des approches et des interprétations précédentes de l'esclavage dans l'Antiquité dans le cadre de l'historiographie et de l'archéologie nationale (yougoslave et serbe). On étudie les points de vue théoriques et méthodologiques sur les questions de l'existence de l'esclavage et les moyens de traiter de ce problème sur la base du matériel historique et archéologique. Les Balkans centraux, tels que définis par Fanula Papazoglu (1969) et ensuite largement acceptés dans l'historiographie et l'archéologie proto-antique et antique nationale, sont considérés comme le déterminant spatial dans le texte. La limite temporelle qui régit le texte couvre la période entre le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle AEC (qui marque le début du second âge du fer) jusqu'à la fin de l'ère ancienne et le début de l'ère commune (lorsque l'empire romain règne sur les Balkans centraux). La frontière entre ces deux époques est également importante du point de vue de l'étude de l'esclavage : alors qu'on suppose le plus souvent que les « tribus » pré-romaines n'avaient pas d'institutions ayant été courantes dans les « civilisations » antiques en raison de leur développement social, économique et culturel inférieur, et que, par conséquent, ils ne connaissaient pas l'esclavage, la période romaine est considérée comme une époque où l'esclavage était une pratique sociale habituelle. Pour cette raison il est important de se demander si les communautés laténiennes connaissaient l'institution de l'esclavage ou si elle était introduite avec l'établissement de la structure romaine provinciale, ce qui à son tour déclenche de nombreuses implications. L'article s'intéresse d'abord aux interprétations précédentes de l'esclavage parmi les soi-disant « tri-

bus » (pré-romains) des Balkans centraux du point de vue des sources écrites et attire l'attention sur le fait que ce sujet a été traité de manière incidente et sans intérêt majeur, entre autres à cause du manque des données de la littérature antique. Ensuite, le texte se tourne vers l'interprétation précédente de l'esclavage proto-antique de la perspective archéologique et souligne que la question de recherche mentionnée n'a pas été abordée systématiquement même au sein cette discipline.

*Mots-clés* : esclavage, Balkans centraux, second âge du fer, sources écrites antiques, données archéologiques, « communautés à petite échelle »

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