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Idea or interpretation: forming the identity of Illyrians in early archaeological studies

Introduction

The identity of the inhabitants of what is now frequently called the Western Balkans in the 1st millennium BC has intrigued many authors, amateurs, professionals, travel writers and adventurers, antiquarians, historians, and archaeologists since the collapse of the ancient world. At the end of the 20th century, the unfortunate events during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia silenced not only the idea of Illyrian identity in post-Yugoslav archaeology, but also ethnogenetic research outside the Balkans. The return of the issue of identity and its construction in the past two decades, especially regarding the Illyrians, has been relatively modest. Among the work which stands out in this area is that of Danijel Džino, who, more than a decade ago, devoted special attention to the issue of the (de)construction of the Illyrians, which, according to him, has not been addressed sufficiently in the modern literature, especially outside the Balkans (Džino, 2014, 1–2). On several occasions I have argued that the name Illyrians was used in the Graeco-Roman world (primarily in the Greek world) essentially as a geographical term and not for a specific ethnic community (Kaljanac, 2009, 37–55; 2010, 53–79; 2021, 17–62). For Džino, the Illyrians are initially a Graeco-Roman construct (Džino, 2014, 1). Of course, the Graeco-Roman concept of Illyrians was certainly not the only form nor the moment when the Illyrian identity was constructed. Different uses, constructions, and reconstructions were always in accordance with the needs of the given moment and political situation, as can be seen in the works of different authors and proposers of ideas that have dominated until today. Džino (2014, 2, 3, 9, 11, 15) traced these ideas chronologically: a) ancient knowledge of the Illyrians, b) medieval and early modern Illyrians, c) the Illyrians of the 19th and 20th centuries in the romantic and colonial context, and finally, d) the period of the 20th century with the dominant Albanian and South Slavic discourse. Most of these so-called phases are a reflection of their time and the related political ambitions, and especially the national issues of the day. The Albanian idea of Albanians as direct successors of the Illyrians



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was heavily instrumentalized as a political means of appropriating the past in the clash between Albanian and Serbian researchers, primarily concerning the region of Kosovo (Džino, 2014, 16). The South Slavic discourse viewed the Illyrians as original inhabitants who slowly disappeared through the Roman world and merged with the new settlers, the Slavs, leaving them certain traditions and ways of life that were incorporated into the new population (Džino, 2014, 16). Different interpretations of who exactly these people were and whose past in these regions was older – not only with regard to the aforementioned Slavic and Albanian discourse, but also to other interpretations in the former Yugoslavia – accumulated a fairly large corpus in archaeological literature. Important changes emerged during the last decade when the Illyrian background (and construction) was more thoroughly studied in the political context (e.g. Džino, 2012, 88; Kaljanac, 2014, 126–199).¹

Looking at the historical development of the construction of the Illyrians, Džino pointed to the key factor of the origin of knowledge and narratives about the Illyrian identity – the Graeco-Roman concept of Illyrians, which became the cornerstone for the formation of Albanian identity, the Illyrian idea of Ljudevit Gaj, and even the Yugoslav ideological concept of brotherhood and unity. However, we are still asking some fundamental questions: Who were, in fact, the Illyrians? If they represented a (non)political construct, how were they constructed? On what arguments were these claims based? Were these arguments essentially the statements of distinguished and once “untouchable” archaeologists who planted such ideas deeply in the wider circles of archaeology and historiography? Answering all these questions would require a separate study. Here, I would like to focus only on one aspect of some basic methodological issues in early Illyrian archaeology, which had a substantial impact on our current lack of knowledge about this notorious prehistoric community called the Illyrians.

The concept of identity and identification of Illyrians in archaeology

For Džino (2014, 17–18), the turning point in the detachment from the Yugoslav Illyrian paradigm and a serious turn from the Pan-Illyrian thesis was made at the Symposium on the Territorial and Chronological Delimitation of the Illyrians in Prehistory held in Sarajevo in 1964, which was followed by gatherings in 1966 and 1968. The two most important concepts that set the foundation for future research were presented on this occasion. The first concept was presented in the paper *Prediliri, Protoiliri, Prailiri* (Eng. Pre-Illyrians, Proto-Illyrians, Pra-Illyrians) by Alojz Benac (1964, 59–95). Based

1 For example, Illyrianism in the Slavic state was one of the important factors in the foundation of “brotherhood and unity”, a slogan that connected nations from Slovenia to Macedonia (Džino, 2014, 18; Kaljanac, 2014, 212).

on the migration model of Nikolai Yakovlevich Merpert (Merpert, 1961, 180–182), Benac proposed the idea of migrations and grouping of indigenous populations, from which, at the end of the Eneolithic, foundations were made for the later formation of the Illyrians (Benac, 1964, 63–64).

The second concept was presented by Borivoj Čović, who assumed the existence of two cultural regions – the central one, originally Illyrian, and the wider one, which included certain communities and groups that did not fully share the Illyrian cultural identity (Čović, 1964, 96–110). According to Čović, the territorial delimitation of these identities could be determined by observing the principal differences in burial rites, inhumation or cremation (Čović, 1964, 98). Čović claimed that during the 6th and 5th centuries BC, inhumation was “the original and dominant rite” in the central Illyrian region (Čović, 1964, 101), while cremation occurred only exceptionally and existed only for short periods. Other important researchers of Illyrians (e.g. Stane Gabrovec, Milutin Garašanin, Radoslav Katičić, Zdravko Marić) essentially accepted Benac’s and Čović’s premise, and tried to accommodate their theses to support the turn from migratory to indigenous development (Džino, 2014, 17; Kaljanac, 2014, 204).

Another important issue Benac spoke about at this symposium was the question of the methodological approach in the research of identity, at the time more specifically termed as ethnogenesis (Benac, 1964, U diskusijama, 267). The methodology Benac proposed was based on two lines of inquiry – historical analyses of the written sources and archaeological interpretation of ethnic aspects of the material culture. The combination of these two modes of research remains present in its essence to this day. However, such an approach, which combines written sources, paleolinguistics, and diagnosing ethnic elements in archaeological finds, has for some time not been considered sufficient for such research (Džino, 2012, 87).

Therefore, following Džino’s claim about the unsatisfactory methodology used in such studies, we have looked at the archaeological methods in more detail to determine with what archaeologists have been actually operating. In the written sources the Illyrian name was known well before the birth of archaeology, a trivial but important fact since it influenced archaeology, as we will try to show below. Early historical data and interpretations in subsequent periods influenced later interpretations, including archaeological ones. However, this relationship acted in both directions – archaeology itself also influenced the understanding and formation of the Illyrian research in other disciplines. The results of archaeological research, primarily from Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian period (1878–1918), provided the majority of archaeological data on the basis of which archaeologists of the second half of the 20th century formed their knowledge, interpretations, and constructions of the Illyrian ethnogenesis and identity (Novaković, 2011, 339–362; Džino, 2014, 14).

The Illyrians and their identification

The concept of the Illyrians as a people had already appeared in historical interpretations in the 16th century. The most notorious case is Vinko Pribojević's famous speech on Hvar in 1532, where he claimed that the Illyrians were of Slavic origin. His speech was political and also propagated the idea of Slavic unity by connecting the Illyrians with modern peoples. Among the pioneers who laid down the ideological foundations for such claims were Juraj Križanić (1618–1683) and Pavao Ritter-Vitezović (1652–1713). In the spirit of his political beliefs, Križanić advocated the idea of the unity of the Slavic peoples under the patronage of the Russian emperor (1759, 1009), while Ritter-Vitezović's ideas placed him in the position of the predecessor of the 19th-century Illyrian movement led by Ljudevit Gaj.² In 1696, he published a work entitled *Kronika aliti spomen vsega svieta vikov* (Eng. Chronicle, or the remembrance of ages of the entire world) where, in the appendix (*Pridavku*), Ritter-Vitezović equates the names of Slavs and Illyrians showing the expansion of *Illyrii, aliti Szlovinskoga Naroda* (Eng. Illyrians, or the Slavic people), 1959, 1012). During the great rise of Illyrian movement in Croatia (1830s), several political movements emerged on the foundations laid by Ritter-Vitezović, instrumentalizing different interpretations of the texts of classical authors and the results of linguistic research.

The so-called Illyrian movement of Ljudevit Gaj, active in the 1830s and 1840s, was undoubtedly the most prominent among them. Although the ideas represented in Gaj's movement existed earlier – as seen in the long tradition of identification with the Illyrian name – 1835 is traditionally taken as the beginning of this political and cultural movement, primarily because the first issue of the journal *Danica ilirska* was published that year.³ The Illyrian movement formed its programme based on two cornerstones: the linguistic unity of the Southern Slavs and the idea of continuity with former Illyrians. The motto of Ljudevit Gaj very clearly reflected this stance: *Naša narodnost, ako ilirska ne bude, mora propasti* (Eng. Our nationality, if it is not Illyrian, must perish) (Rita Leto, 2004, 169). The ideas that Gaj presented in his motto are also recognizable in his proclamation from 1839 (in the final version by Dragutin Rakovac): *Imena pako Hèrvat, Sèrb,*

2 At this point it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the Illyrian name has been used in different ways since the 15th century in the context of archaeological and historical (mis)uses. In addition to the aforementioned Pribojević, Vitezović and Križanić, it is also necessary to mention authors such as Juraj Šizgorić (1445-1509), Mavro Orbin (1563-1614), Bartol Kašić (1575-1650) or Filip Grabovac (1698-1749) who in their works also advocated Illyrian continuity from the past until their eras. The institutional interpretation of the Illyrian name was certainly not absent, and the Illyrians were incorporated into the societal fabric in various ways, whether it was through the association of the institution of St. Jerome in Rome with the name Illyrian College (*Collegium Hieronymianum Illyricorum*), the publication of various dictionaries of the Slavic Illyrian language or through heraldic symbols during the period of Austro-Hungarian rule.

3 The term *Danica* is the traditional name for the morning star (i.e. Venus) in South Slavic languages. *Danica ilirska* was initially published under the title of *Danicza horvatzka, slavonzka y dalmatinzka* (Eng. Danica of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia).

Slovenac jesu samo grančice na grani ilirskoj, kao god što su imena: švabsko, saksonska itd. samo grančice na grani njemačkoj (Eng. The names such as Croat, Serb, Slovenian are only twigs on the Illyrian branch, just as the names: Swabian, Saxon etc. are only twigs on the German branch) (Šicel, 1997, 132). One of the fundamental ideas of the movement was that the political freedom of the Southern Slavs (primarily in the Austrian Empire) could also be claimed from the autochthonous Illyrians (i.e. Slavs) and their long historical continuity in the Western Balkans. Archaeology was not there yet, so Gaj argued for this continuity based mostly on linguistic research. Continuity could serve as the legal claim for introducing Illyrian (i.e., Slavic/Croatian) as the official language in the Austrian Empire (Šicel, 1997, 143).⁴ The idea of the Illyrian movement must have had an impact on the formation of the archaeology of the Illyrians, at least indirectly.

The first appointed curator in the newly established Provincial Museum in Sarajevo (1888) was Ćiro Truhelka, who soon became one of the prominent figures in local archaeology, and it was he who has to be credited for the first archaeological research of the Illyrians in the Western Balkans. Soon after his appointment, Truhelka started to excavate barrows at Glasinac, a plateau some 40 km northeast of Sarajevo, and immediately he interpreted the finds as Illyrian without too much argumentation – on the basis of a “little bit of historical news” (Truhelka, 1890, 393). He did this by associating the onomastics of the Arareva gromila site with the Albanian word *Arar*, the word for burial mound (*gromila*) and the name Bato with the Illyrian prince. Considering that Truhelka came to Bosnia and Herzegovina as an archaeologist of Austria-Hungary, born and educated in present-day Croatia, it is expected that he was influenced by the political currents of the time.⁵ Truhelka, having no prior archaeological experience, at least not in prehistoric archaeology, started his career in the Provincial Museum in his early twenties. His *ad hoc* attribution of Glasinac to the Illyrians could not have come from his own systematic research and knowledge of archaeology, so he must have been influenced by some ideas in circulation. One of the ideas that certainly influenced Truhelka was from Höernes himself, who in 1888 in his book *Dinarische Wanderungen: Cultur- und Landschaftsbilder aus Bosnien und der Herzegovina* connected the prehistoric inhabitants of this area with the Illyrians, and their successors specifically with today’s Albanians (Höernes, 1894, 323-325).⁶ Nevertheless, discoveries

4 The question of Illyrian continuity occupied an important place in the works of Ljudevit Gaj, i.e., in *Danica* 10 - 15, where he wrote about who the ancient Illyrians were.

5 We should remember that the Austrian occupation of Bosnia was not just a military operation. The Austrian government had serious plans to modernize (i.e., Westernize) the newly occupied country. Besides large investments in the industrialization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Austrian government also invested substantial funds in changing its cultural identity. In this sense, the introduction of archaeology was a colonial project. However, the Austrian efforts were also met with suspicion and even hostility, especially in neighboring Serbia.

6 The question of the ethnic affiliation of the inhabitants of prehistoric Glasinac was one of the features of the famous Congress of archaeologists and anthropologists held in Sarajevo in 1894 (Palavestra, 2014, 680). For more see: Kuzmanović et al., (2012).

,from Glasinac (e.g., the famous Glasinac cart) and the excavations of Truhelka, Fiala, Ćurčić, Stratimirović, Čović, and even Govedarica, in the span of 90 years, epitomized Glasinac as the main site of the Illyrians, especially in Yugoslav archaeology.

During the period of the former Yugoslavia (1918 – 1991) and the rapid development of archaeology in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the idea of the Illyrians as the ethnic ancestors of the local population remained, but work in this area transformed its goals and certain methodological approaches over time. The Illyrians were one of the main research topics of the Centre for Balkan Studies of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been working since 1963 as part of the Scientific Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which in 1966 was transformed into the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The focus was ethnogenesis as a part of Illyrian archaeology, a topic widely present in Yugoslav archaeology (Novaković, 2011, 409). The Centre organized a key event, the Symposium on Territorial and Chronological Delimitation of the Illyrians in Prehistory, held on the 15th and 16th May 1964 in Sarajevo. The participants were some of the most prominent Yugoslav scholars, such as Benac, Čović, Garašanin, Katičić, and Gabrovec. During the symposium, the presentations and findings of Benac and Čović attracted the most attention, and laid the foundations for Illyrian studies in the following years.

According to Benac's paper *Prediliri, Protoiliri, Prailiri* (Eng. Pre-Illyrians, Proto-Illyrians, Pra-Illyrians), the formation of the Illyrian ethnos began with the Baden, Kostolac, and Vučedol cultures in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia, along with the emergence of some types of material remains such as long flint knives or stone battle axes (Benac, 1964, 63–64). For him, one of the most important factors for identifying this process was the appearance of graves under barrows of the so-called Glasinac type and the appearance of hoards with copper tools (Benac, 1964, 63–64). Čović pointed to several methods for revealing ethnic unity through archaeological finds. He proposed that observation of burial rites (inhumation or cremation) raises the possibility of defining a wider Illyrian region, which he called the “central Illyrian region” (Čović, 1964, 98). Burials in this assumed area were predominantly inhumation graves in barrows (Čović, 1964, 98–99). Speaking about the period between the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Čović pointed out that “it is not a coincidence” that this type of burial is so dominant (Čović, 1964, 100), evidently emphasizing that a dedicated form of inhumation rite is a means of expressing ethnic coherence. Based on this and the prevalence of certain types of jewellery, weapons, and ceramic material, Čović defined the geographical region of Illyrian ethnos.

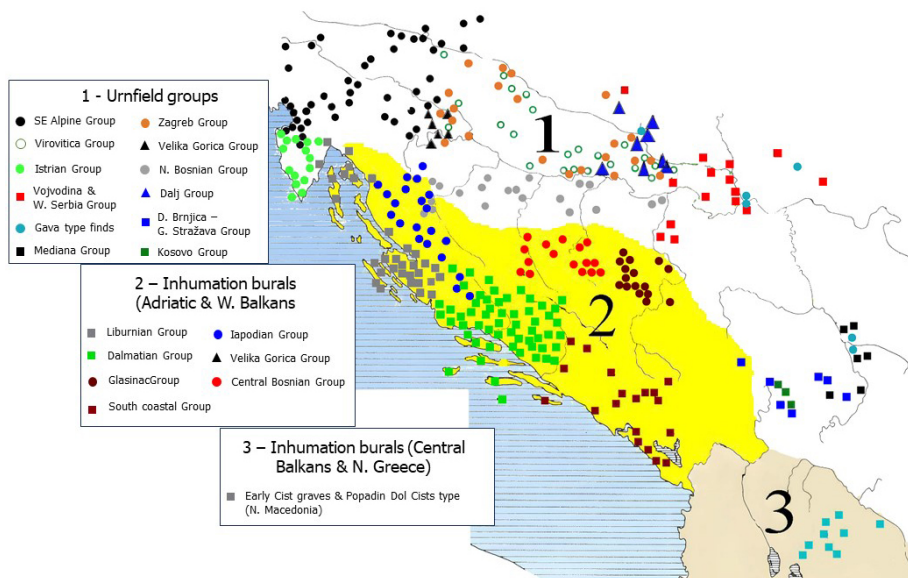


Figure 1: Map reconstruction of the distribution of the narrow Illyrian area according to Čović (map prepared by A. Kaljanac).

The ideas of Benac and Čović and other participants at this gathering, as well as the presentations from the symposium on the Illyrians in the Greek and Roman period that was held in 1966, were generally not criticized. They became the basis of the break with earlier pan-Illyrian theses, and served as the foundation for the approach which developed during the second half of the 20th century. However, even the presenters themselves, including Benac and Čović, noticed or hinted at one of the most significant weaknesses of their own approach – that the Illyrians were already in the area, as defined by linguists and historians. This largely determined the archaeological research, which, essentially, provided additional proof for an already generally accepted “fact”. The fact that the research result was already “known” made the researchers uncertain of what they should discover.⁷ The Illyrians were both known to researchers and a subject of research, but no one knew who they really were. From a methodological point of view, the search for arguments to prove a predetermined answer would necessarily require different constructions that would eventually lead to the desired goal. Unfortunately, as it turned out, there was no lack of such constructions.

⁷ This was pointed out by Čović in 1966, at the end of the gathering about the Illyrians in classical times, saying: “It seems to me that we are at the same point, if not even a step back in the most fundamental methodological issues. We still cannot agree on what we mean by the term the Illyrians in an ethnic sense” (Čović, 1967, 74. U diskusijama).

On archaeological data and the (poor) knowledge about Glasinac

Archaeology in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the modern sense, began with the arrival of Austria-Hungary. Large construction projects, primarily railways, led the occupying forces to areas that were traditionally isolated and separated from the centres developed during the Ottoman period. During the construction of the Han Podromanija – Rogatica road in 1880, Lieutenant Johann Lexa (1854–1903), the director of the project, came across and excavated several prehistoric barrows. What Lexa discovered on that occasion is unknown, but one of the finds became very famous – the cult cart that made the area of Glasinac famous to this day inspired all subsequent research on the Glasinac plateau. The spectacular content of these findings prompted a publication by Ferdinand Hochstätter (1829–1884) in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Vienna* (Hochstätter, 1881, 289–298). During these works, the first four barrows at Glasinac were excavated (Hochstätter 1881, 291), but there are no records on the method of excavation. Only through comparison with subsequent research can we see that the aim was to collect the objects and to record approximate positions of finds, as was the case in numerous excavations that followed. The Austro-Hungarian army also carried out other excavations at Glasinac, led by Glossauer and Brudl in 1886 (Čović, 1988, 74). These results were published by Moriz Hoernes (1852–1917) in *Grabhügel-funde von Glasinac in Bosnien* (Hoernes, 1889, 134–149).⁸

As a consequence of this discovery, the first systematic research of the Glasinac area began soon after the establishment of the Provincial Museum in Sarajevo, which was directed by Ćiro Truhelka between 1888 and 1890. Truhelka's explorations were continued by Fiala, Stratimirović, and later, in the second half of the 20th century, by Čović and Govedarica (Kaljanac et al., 2019, 181–189). The Čović and Govedarica projects were conducted much later after the establishment of the archaeological Illyrian discourse in the Austrian period. And, despite the “solutions” presented at the Illyrian symposia in 1964 and 1966 and the results of Govedarica's research, the interest in Illyrians and their identity did not disappear (Džino, 2014, 19).

8 The aforementioned excavations in the Glasinac area, as well as other excavations of that period in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are, as previously pointed out, interpretatively connected with attempts to determine the ethnicity of the prehistoric inhabitants and their connection with historical documents, or historiographic theses, from which the Illyrian affiliation of the local population has already been established. For this reason, the goal of this part of the paper is to point out the type and quality of archaeological data that were collected back then by the colonial archaeologists of the Austro-Hungarian period, and on the basis of which the previously highlighted Illyrian theses were derived. Of course, in addition to this the goal of this paper is also to show on the isolated example of Glasinac, in the ratio that this publication allows, the consequences of the archaeological approach of that time as well as, in the last instance, to problematize the interpretive usability of the archaeological finds of that period in the present day. In this sense, the ultimate goal is to point out the fact that the former Illyrian interpretation of archaeological finds is closer to the idea that various archaeologists tried to prove, rather than a real statement based on the scientific interpretation of material findings.

Modern archaeology and its theoretical considerations of various problems and interpretations have recently undergone significant developments. Research on the formation of archaeological knowledge has been recently gaining increasing attention, raising one of the fundamental questions of the discipline: the relationship between the collecting of archaeological data and its interpretation. The majority of today's archaeologists, or at least those more familiar with archaeological epistemology, agree that the collection and access to archaeological data is fundamental for the correct interpretation of the results of archaeological work. The reason why archaeologists conduct excavations is to find empirical evidence which may be interpreted differently (Palavestra, 2020, 28). Processing objects turns them into data (Palavestra 2020, 29). An essential tool in this process is adequate recording. Each of these procedures contributes to the archaeological interpretation (Palavestra, 2020, 29). But what to do when archaeological data was inadequately collected or recorded? Is interpretation from inadequately collected data also inadequate?

Illyrian archaeology started with Glasinac in 1888, with massive excavation campaigns in the next twelve years. These excavations of, for example, Arareva gromila, Čitluci, Ilijak, Kusače, Osovo, Rusanovići, Taline, and many sites (Čović, 1988, 79), revealed a large number of impressive finds. But with the exception of some modest information published in the Herald of the Provincial Museum, we do not have much new information on how these excavations were actually conducted and how they were recorded.⁹ Nevertheless, despite very modest records and information, archaeologists created the Glasinac culture, with an “imagined” ethnos, and its core area in Glasinac. The real issue here is how they did this. This issue requires a thorough revision of data collection and analysis of how archaeologists formed their data. In an ideal situation, archaeological objects, including the data resulting from the interpretation of archaeologists, can be considered if there is reliable information about their discovery and *in situ* contexts.

Our analysis should shed light on some important circumstances which may have affected the very discovery and correct recording of artefacts, including the presence and active involvement of competent experts. The presence of an expert guarantees, as far as possible, the scientific validity of the work (Babić, 2018, 11; Kaljanac, 2023, 62). The findings that do not meet the criteria of reliability of information regarding the methods and records of discovery have only very limited interpretative value and much less weight in creating an interpretation (Eggert, 2014, 110–111). The site of Glasinac and Glasinac culture itself were never subjected to this kind of critical scrutiny. The entire idea of the role of this culture in the creation of Illyrian identity, proposed by Benac and Čović by

9 Although more recent research was conducted by Govedarica from 1975 to 1992, the publication of this work has not yet taken place, and these results can still not be used for new or improved interpretations.

considering the burials in barrows as a manifestation of Illyrian cultural coherence, was actually formed on the uncritical treatment of findings with very poor and unreliable data about their original contexts. Interestingly, certain information was, indeed, available and even noticed by some contemporary archaeologists, but it seems that this was consciously ignored. Here, we will present some of this information.



Figure 2: Map of the geographic distribution of prehistoric barrows on Glasinac according to Truhelka (1889, 26).

The exploration of Glasinac and the related culture was initiated in 1888 by Truhelka as the official archaeologist, who participated in these excavations until 1891, when, at least according to his claims, he handed them over to František Fiala (Truhelka, 1942, 72). Truhelka's research on Glasinac is published in the Herald of the Provincial Museum. However, Truhelka's memoirs (1942) shed additional light on this matter.

According to his testimony, in the summer of 1888, when he set out for Glasinac for the first time, on horseback in the early dawn, Truhelka was accompanied by his faithful companion, Mehaga Pliska (Truhelka, 1942, 68), an amateur searching for various kinds of treasures (Kaljanac, 2023, 66–67). In Sokolac, he also met another associate, a certain Marinko Zoranović, a former *hajduk* (brigand), then a prisoner until the Austrian occupation, when he was freed. Zoranović also worked as a “scribe”, who made various records

for sick people (Truhelka, 1942, 69). Truhelka stated that Marinko, unlike Mehaga, regularly accompanied him on the explorations of the Glasinac necropolises and that he knew all the people and places making the explorations, and thus Truhelka was welcomed in the local community. Immediately after arriving at Sokolac, Truhelka noticed a hillfort and several barrows in its vicinity. He started to excavate them the next day (Truhelka, 1942, 69). Truhelka did not mention Mehaga in his tours with Marinko, so we can assume that Mehaga did not participate in these first excavations. However, he went to Glasinac with Truhelka, and the question is where exactly he was. According to Truhelka, Mehaga carried out excavations, apparently of numerous barrows, since Truhelka left him to carry out the excavations whenever his presence was not needed (Truhelka, 1942, 70).

The final outcome of these excavations, as well as of those that followed after Truhelka, is quite well known and certainly influenced subsequent archaeological interpretations: hillfort settlements were spread throughout this area, indicating the need for strategic fortification to secure it from attacks. The buried people were soldiers who possessed swords, short heavy knives, iron spears, bronze greaves, hats like those worn by Trojan heroes, and as Truhelka stated, “*some Corinthian helmets brought from Greece*” (Truhelka, 1942, 70–71). The published reports show that Truhelka collected the grave goods exclusively without making any precise records. Spatial positioning was carried out in the most elementary way, and most, if not all, excavated places are completely unknown today and impossible to revise. Truhelka dedicated more attention to listing individual objects that he deemed important, and their detailed description (Truhelka, 1889, 32–33; 1890a, 68–95; 1890b, 386–319; 1891, 306–316).

Truhelka’s work on Glasinac was continued by Fiala¹⁰ from 1892 to 1897 (Fiala, 1892, 389–440; 1893, 717–763; 1894, 721–760; 1895, 533–565; 1896a, 343–355; 1896b, 429–461; 1897, 585–619). In reality, however, Fiala did not introduce any significant changes in methods. In his published reports we can notice a slightly greater number of references to situations and positions of graves, somewhat more detailed descriptions of the excavations, and slightly more numerical data (Fiala, 1895, 564). After Fiala, the excavations at Glasinac were briefly led by Đorđe Stratimirović, who, unlike Truhelka and Fiala, seems to only have been interested in a more detailed consideration of archaeological excavation methods and the establishment of an appropriate system of recording (Stratimirović, 1891, 338–349; Kaljanac et al., 2019, 184). The results of this “spectacular” period, when Austro-Hungarian officers apparently excavated 12 barrows, Truhelka 207, Fiala 868, and Stratimirović 147 (in total 1,234 according to their publications), made Glasinac globally famous, and they were repeatedly used in numerous interpretations during the 20th century. However, there are also some lesser-known facts, as outlined below.

10 František Fiala, mentioned above as archaeologist. signed his works as Franc or, sometimes, as Franjo, not to be confused with other František Fiala (1895–1957), who was a younger Czech architect.

The first significant processing of this material and an attempt at interpretation of the 19th-century excavations was published in two monographs (Glasinac 1 and Glasinac 2) in 1956 and 1957 by Benac and Čović. They noticed that a large amount of ceramic material was found in numerous barrows but not stored in the Provincial Museum.¹¹ It was quite clear that the material from Glasinac was already incomplete, as metal finds were kept while pottery was discarded. Benac and Čović compensated for this deficiency by drawing various analogies from other regions and later research (Benac et al., 1956, 37), which is certainly a commendable effort but methodologically still inadequate for drawing more serious conclusions. Benac and Čović did not have an explanation for discarding the pottery, but Truhelka might have had one. According to Truhelka, Mehaga Pliska – who evidently carried out excavations at Glasinac during Truhelka's visits to necropolises with Marinko Zoranović – was a person who was a big enthusiast but also “disappointed that there was no gold to be found”. Truhelka (1942, 66) wrote that Mehaga “consoled himself that I was satisfied with the ‘old junk’ that was discovered, although he was nodding his head”. Since Truhelka allowed Mehaga to carry out the excavations, he could discard pottery on many occasions. Whether Mehaga participated in and carried out excavations during Fiala's campaigns remains unknown, but it is quite clear, judging by the number of excavated barrows, that Fiala could not have carried out excavations of such scale alone.

Finding out who participated in Fiala's excavations and what methods were used can most likely be completely written off. According to the official record from 26 January 1940, during the revision of the archives of the Provincial Museum Branislav Đurđev, a trainee curator, discovered a box he described as “a completely unsorted correspondence and legacy of late Fiala, a curator” (Figure 3). The legacy of Fiala was not inventoried and was literally gathering dust in a box, and Đurđev was the first who found it. After handing over the materials to the Directorate of the Museum, the material was distributed among departments, and the legacies of Radimski and Fiala finished up in the prehistory department. Since then, no one ever mentioned it again. We recently tried to access this material, but it could not be found in the museum. According to what can be discerned from Fiala's published reports from 1892 to 1897, he investigated exactly 868 barrows (Fiala, 1892, 389–440; 1893, 717–763; 1894, 721–760; 1895, 533–565; 1896a, 343–355; 1896b, 429–461; 1897, 585–619), although some authors round this number to 870 (Čović, 1988a, 51). It is quite clear that Fiala could not have carried out this amount of research on his own or adequately controlled it, especially since he did not have adequate archaeological knowledge because he was a chemist.

11 “The reports of F. Fiala and other authors mention that certain barrows contained many ceramic fragments. However, these fragments did not reach the Museum depot and inventory. Today, it is not clear why these authors rejected the ceramic material, even though these could be smaller fragments.” (Benac et al., 1956, 37).

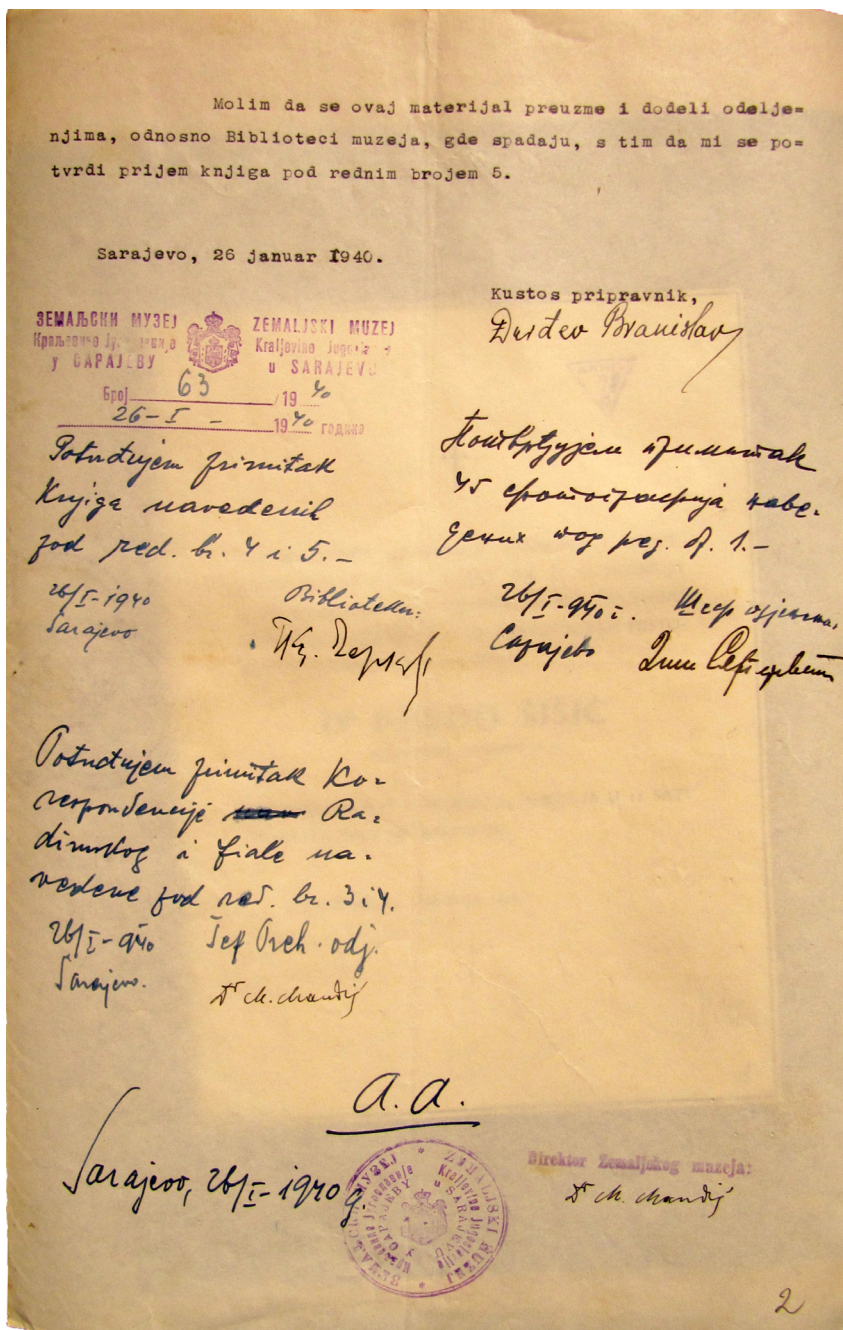


Figure 3: Document about the last known trace of Fiala's legacy in the Museum from 1940.

The situation with Truhelka and his excavations is somewhat different. Many, if not all, of his diaries and personal notes survived and avoided the fate of unorganized archival materials. Besides his episode with Mehaga Pliska and Marinko Zoranović, we can determine, at least partly, the course of his explorations. His diaries contain drawings of different Bosnian-Herzegovinian towns, landscapes, old buildings, and some details of his first research in Glasinac. Among his notes, there are several pages with drawings of different archaeological finds, more and less known today. These drawings also include sketches of several barrows, as well as graves that Truhelka recorded. As an illustration, I would single out examples of the Arareva gomila site, Taline, and Gradac.

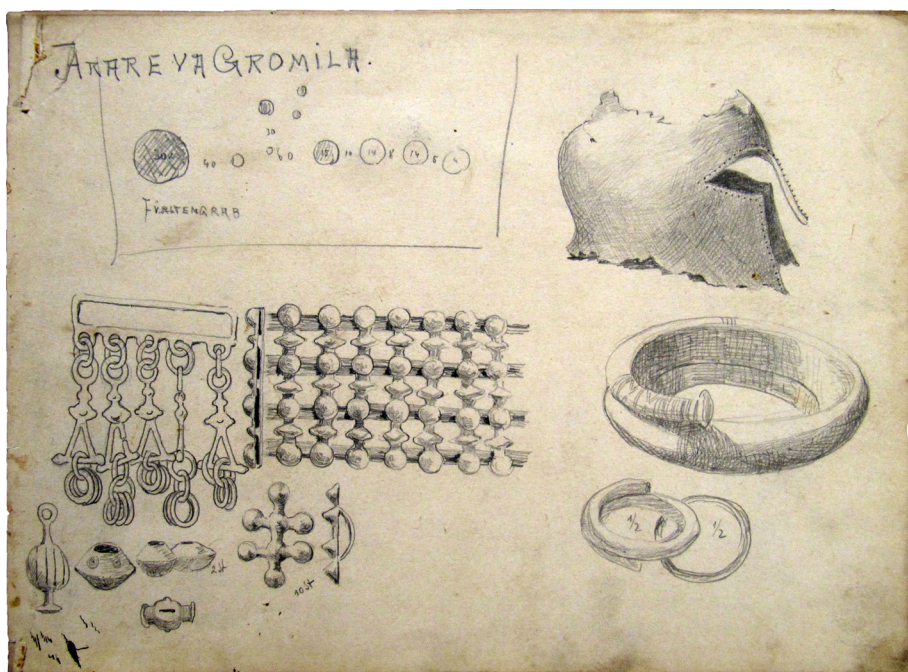


Figure 4: Drawing of the finds and correlation of the investigated barrows of the Arareva gomila site and those in the immediate vicinity of its location (from the personal diary of Ćiro Truhelka).

On one of the pages on which the exploration of the famous Arareva gomila site (Figure 4) was recorded, and along with sketches of some jewellery, there are drawings of a Corinthian helmet and astragal belt discovered in this barrow. However, very important information is represented by small sketches of the barrow group (Figure 4). The largest among the barrows, marked as *Fürstengrab* (Figure 4), evidently represents

the Arareva gromila. Truhelka also plotted the spatial distribution of the surrounding barrows, together with notes on the extent of their exploration. It is clear that the Arareva gromila was completely excavated, while some of the surrounding barrows were excavated only partially. We can also assume that he wrote down their dimensions with numbers next to or inside the sketched barrows. On another page in his diary, Truhelka paid somewhat more attention to the spatial distribution of the explored barrows. These are the only notes where Truhelka recorded some spatial information (Figure 5). In addition, two other sites were recorded here, Gradac near Sokolac and Taline.

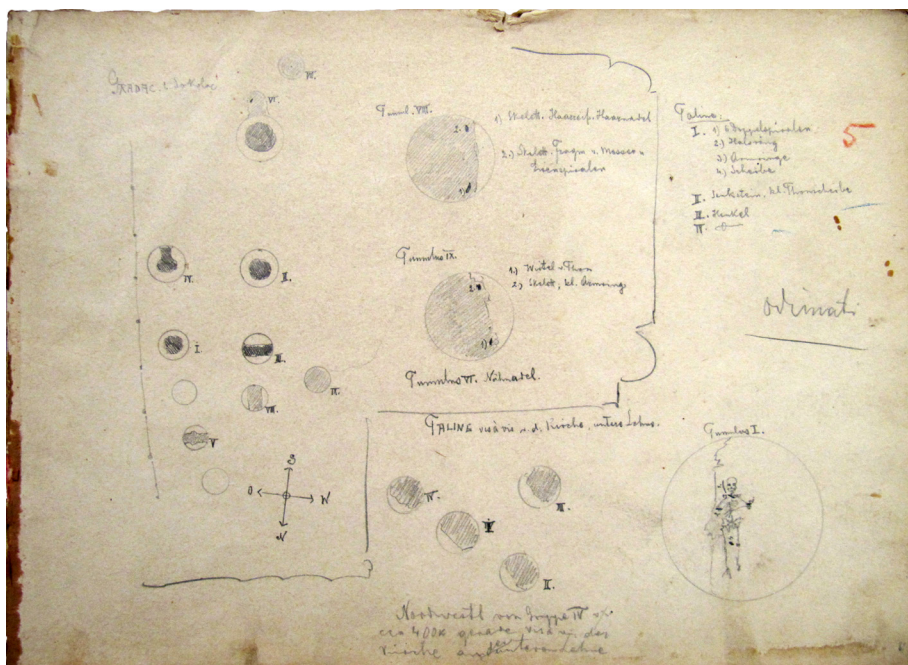


Figure 5: Drawing of the distribution of the explored barrows at the sites of Gradac and Taline (from the personal diary of Ćiro Truhelka).

As far as the Gradac site is concerned (Figure 5), it is evident that Truhelka paid special attention to barrows VIII and IX, where he recorded the skeletons and method of excavation, while other barrows were only plotted. Some barrows were excavated only in their centres, and some were only peripherally cut. At the Taline site he excavated using a fairly uniform method, but generally recorded only certain types of finds in the barrows. However, Barrow I was recorded more thoroughly by sketching the skeleton and its position (Figure 5). Truhelka practised a similar method at several

other sites, but for many of them there is no clear information about the number and distribution of barrows. According to the diary, these excavations lasted or at least were recorded from 29 June to 9 July 1889 (for a total of nine or ten days altogether) during which Truhelka investigated a total of 66 barrows.¹² According to his published reports in the Herald of the Provincial Museum, Truhelka excavated some 207 barrows, significantly less than Fiala, but in just a two-year research period. If we assume that during his second campaign, in 1890, he investigated the same number of barrows that he recorded in his diary, the obtained number of 132 would barely exceed half of the total. In that case, more than half of his research is questionable in terms of the origin of the finds and whether they were excavated by Truhelka or only collected by Mehaga Pliska, who we know was discarding ceramic finds.

If we remember that the records on Fiala's explorations are very likely lost and that Truhelka's diaries indicate that he was personally present only at a few of the sites, then the later archaeological interpretations in general, and those on the Illyrian identity in particular, are based on very limited and unreliable archaeological data. Besides Truhelka and Fiala, in the 19th century some of the barrows in Glasinac were also excavated by the Austro-Hungarian army officers (12 barrows) and Stratimirović (147 barrows).. Today we do not know the precise locations and contexts of finds for most of these, and the majority were excavated by poorly qualified people. However, the very number of excavated barrows made the Glasinac culture famous, and had a great impact on developing the wider idea of the Illyrians in archaeological interpretations. Due to ignored or poorly recorded data in these early excavations, the interpreters from the 1950s onwards, and especially the advocates of the Glasinac archaeological culture, attempted to compensate in a *post festum* way by looking at the pottery and other finds from other sites, interpretations of the settlement patterns, and by accommodating the image of the Glasinac culture to historical and linguistic interpretations.

Conclusion

While Danijel Džino strongly argued that the question of the Illyrian identity throughout history was an issue of different perceptions of the Illyrians and the past in different time periods, the question of their construction can be viewed from different perspectives. The first one, as applied by Džino, observes the history of the use of the Illyrians as a means to achieve various political goals. The second perspective, which we have presented here, stays in the field of archaeology and observes the process of knowledge creation through analyses of research methods. However, at a

12 As this page of the diary shows, these are the following barrow numbers: Sokolac-4; Taline-4; Čavarino selo-6; Bandino selo-3; Čardak-4, and Čitluci-3.

certain point Džino's and our perspectives converge. The ideas of Ljudevit Gaj and his Illyrian movement in the 1830s, though politically defeated, still exercised influence in the political and cultural milieu in Croatia in the following decades. This undoubtedly left significant traces on young Truhelka during his days in school. The term *Illyrians*, also supported by the Illyrian movement, developments within the Albanian national awakening and so on, was already generally accepted as a fact. While carrying these ideas, or some of them, during his explorations and in his publications, Truhelka regularly used the terms the *Illyrians* and *Illyrian tribes*, and with his excavations at Glasinac he established the basis of the archaeological Illyrians, who remained connected with Glasinac culture even in the time of Benac and Čović. At present, there is still no publication that would prove why the community of the Autariatae or the Glasinac culture should be called the *Illyrians*, nor is there a clear archaeological assemblage that would imply something like that. Truhelka himself reports that he was not personally carrying out any archaeological research, but Mehaga Pliska, an amateur, did so on Truhelka's behalf. There is also no evidence that Fiala was able to lead the excavations of 868 barrows, considering that his legacy was lost in the National Museum. These facts bring into question the interpretive potential of a large amount of archaeological material from Glasinac. Poorly recorded finds and their contexts make the collected objects more museum props useful for school education and tourism rather than a proper base for understanding processes such as the establishment of the Illyrians. Moreover, we also do not know which objects Truhelka interpreted as Illyrian.

It seems that Truhelka, as well as the subsequent researchers, uncritically assumed that these objects are left by Illyrians because they were already "there" in historical and linguistic interpretations, and suited various political or other goals. Being an Illyrian was, therefore, an idea older than archaeology itself, an idea that was created before archaeological interpretation and therefore could not be its product either. It evidently did not require high expert archaeological knowledge. The role of "Illyrian" archaeology was ultimately to support and make tangible the Illyrian idea, and not the other way around.

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Ideja ali interpretacija. Oblikovanje identitete Ilirov v zgodnjih arheoloških študijah

Ključne besede: Iliri, arheologija v Bosni in Hercegovini, avstro-ogrška arheologija, Glasinac, Ćiro Truhelka, arheološko dokumentiranje

V nacionalnih arheologijah, ki so nastale po koncu Jugoslavije, se je pojavila refleksija starih arheoloških idej, še zlasti o etnogenezi in identiteti Ilirov, teme, ki je prevladovala v jugoslovanski arheologiji. Nove ideje so vključevale tako tiste, ki so nadaljevale in potrjevale stare teorije, kot tudi tiste, ki so skušale dekonstruirati Ilire, kjer je bil najbolj vpliven avtor Danijel Džino. Z našim prispevkom o tem, kako je nastajalo arheološko znanje o Ilirih s prvimi in najbolj množičnimi izkopavanji na Glasincu v 19. stoletju, ki so služila kot empirična podlaga za pripoved o ilirskem Glasincu in Ilirih v jugoslovanski arheologiji v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja, želimo dodati še eno komponento v dekonstrukciji Ilirov.

Idea or interpretation: forming the identity of Illyrians in early archaeological studies

Keywords: Illyrians, archaeology in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austro-Hungarian archaeology, Glasinac, Ćiro Truhelka, archaeological recording

In the national archaeologies formed after the dissolution of Yugoslavia there emerged new reflections of old archaeological ideas, especially about the ethnogenesis and identity of the Illyrians, topics which dominated Yugoslav archaeology. The new ideas varied from those which continued and reaffirmed older theories to those which attempted to deconstruct them, among which the most influential was that of Danijel Džino. The topic of our paper – how the initial archaeological knowledge about the Illyrians was created – adds another component in deconstructing of Illyrians. The paper analyses the first and most massive excavations at Glasinac in the 19th century which served as an empirical base for creating the narrative of the Illyrian Glasinac and Illyrians in Yugoslav archaeology in the 1950s and 1960s.

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