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# Bronze objects of early Iron Age in southern Carpathian Basin

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## Résumé

Artefacts made of metals, especially bronze, can no doubt be considered elite goods in the region of the southern Carpathian Basin throughout its prehistory. The rarity of the ore and the distance it travelled to be made into these objects fortifies this claim. In the Late Bronze Age, we can also witness the high density of hoards consisting of exclusively bronze objects and ingots. Numerous interpretations of hoards converge in the same conclusion, which is that the bronze objects are rare and special. This trend can be observed with the advent of new age, the Early Iron Age.

Settlements and necropoleis of the Early Iron Age of the south Carpathian Basin follow a pattern that can be observed throughout Europe. Settlements are in most cases fortified hillfort sites with the access road leading straight through the accompanying necropolis. These necropoleis are most often characterized by tumulus graves – earth mounds with wooden chambers and dry stone wall constructions with remains of the deceased individual and grave goods.

One such example is the site of Kaptol in eastern Croatia. The site itself consists of two necropoleis and a hillfort. The site is well known from the late 19th century when it was first mentioned. First excavations were carried out in the '70s while the still ongoing systematic excavations started in 2000. Excavations were primarily focused on the tumuli burials while in the last decade the focus slowly shifted towards the hillfort itself. The topic of this presentation will focus on one such grave, the tumulus six of the Gradci necropolis. In this grave, among other finds, a bronze sword was found. It is interesting to mention that the type of the sword and its few surviving parallels, all from the Balkans, can be dated to the late Bronze age. Therefore, this sword can be interpreted as a piece of traditional armament following the theories by Tomedi and Trachsel.

Generally we can assume that bronze as a material was very valuable in itself during the Bronze Age, so the original objects which were damaged or had otherwise lost their primary function were often smelted and recycled into new, useful ones. Nevertheless, with the introduction of iron, bronze objects with a more aesthetic or symbolic value might have been kept in their original state to mark the special status of the person using them.

This interesting find from Kaptol paints a clearer picture of traditional weapons, being important elite status markers for individuals possessing them a few hundred years after their creation, once again showing us the importance of metal objects as elite goods. It also shows that the object itself was more valuable than the raw material, for it was kept in its original form and not recycled into another artefact, which might be the case of the many broken weapons from earlier Bronze age hoards.

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**Mots-Clés:** Iron age, Carpathian Basin, Tumulus, bronze sword