Archaeologia Austriaca, Band 110/2026, I–VII
© 2026 by Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien

Begića Glavica, a Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Sanctuary in Central Bosnia

Mario Gavranović
Ajla Sejfuli
Irene M. Petschko
Nicole Mittermair

Abstract
The excavations (2024–2025) at the hilltop site Begića Glavica near Travnik in central Bosnia were prompted by the discovery of a metal hoard within the massive stone rampart, erected directly upon a large burnt feature with pottery vessels in situ. The radiocarbon dates suggest activities between the 13th and 9th centuries BC. The Begića Glavica site represents a unique spot in the regional framework, most likely a place of gatherings and ceremonial events.

Keywords
Balkans, metal ages, sanctuary, metal finds, channelled pottery

Introduction

Central Bosnia is a distinct region within the western Balkans, marked by the mountains of the Dinaric Alps and the basins and valleys of rivers such as the Vrbas, Lašva and Bosna and smaller tributaries (Fig. 1). The current picture suggests a dense occupation throughout the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (1400–500 BC) with numerous and well-connected hillforts (Čović 1965; Gavranović 2011). Although varying in size, the majority of the hillforts share a comparable topographic position on strategic peaks, terraces and plateaus over nearby valleys. Indicative of hillforts in this area is pottery decorated with incised geometrical ornaments, which is often considered to be a specific cultural trait (Čović 1983a). The stratigraphy of a few investigated sites indicates long-term occupations spanning several centuries. Only recently, the discovery of first burial grounds provided insights into the mortuary practices of the local population, with inhumation as the primary rite (Gavranović et al. 2023a; Gavranović et al. 2023b).

The position of the Begića Glavica site on a small plateau above the mouth of the Lašva Valley fits well into the general pattern of expected settlement positions (Fig. 1). The site was, however, not registered until 2022, when metal detectorists extracted a metal hoard from the edge of the readily visible rampart. The hoard, kept at the Regional Museum Travnik, consists of several hundred small buttons, a variety of belt buckles, astragal belt pieces, and metal sheets. Based on chronologically indicative belt pieces, the hoard was most probably deposited in the 6th century BC, although the metal objects might have been collected over a longer period. This extraordinary find and the impressive size of the rampart on a relatively small plateau triggered archaeological investigations in 2024 and 2025 in a collaboration by the Regional Museum Travnik and the Austrian Archaeological Institute.

Excavations

The primary goal of the excavations was to cut the rampart in the segment where detectorists had seriously disturbed the feature and to dig trenches on what was assumed to be the settlement plateau. As it currently appears, the rampart does not enclose the plateau but has an unusual L-shaped form with a total length of ~63 metres and reaching up to 3 metres in height (Fig. 1). Hence, the rampart does not prevent access, but rather divides the plateau. The rampart was built using local soil and whitish limestone, which does not

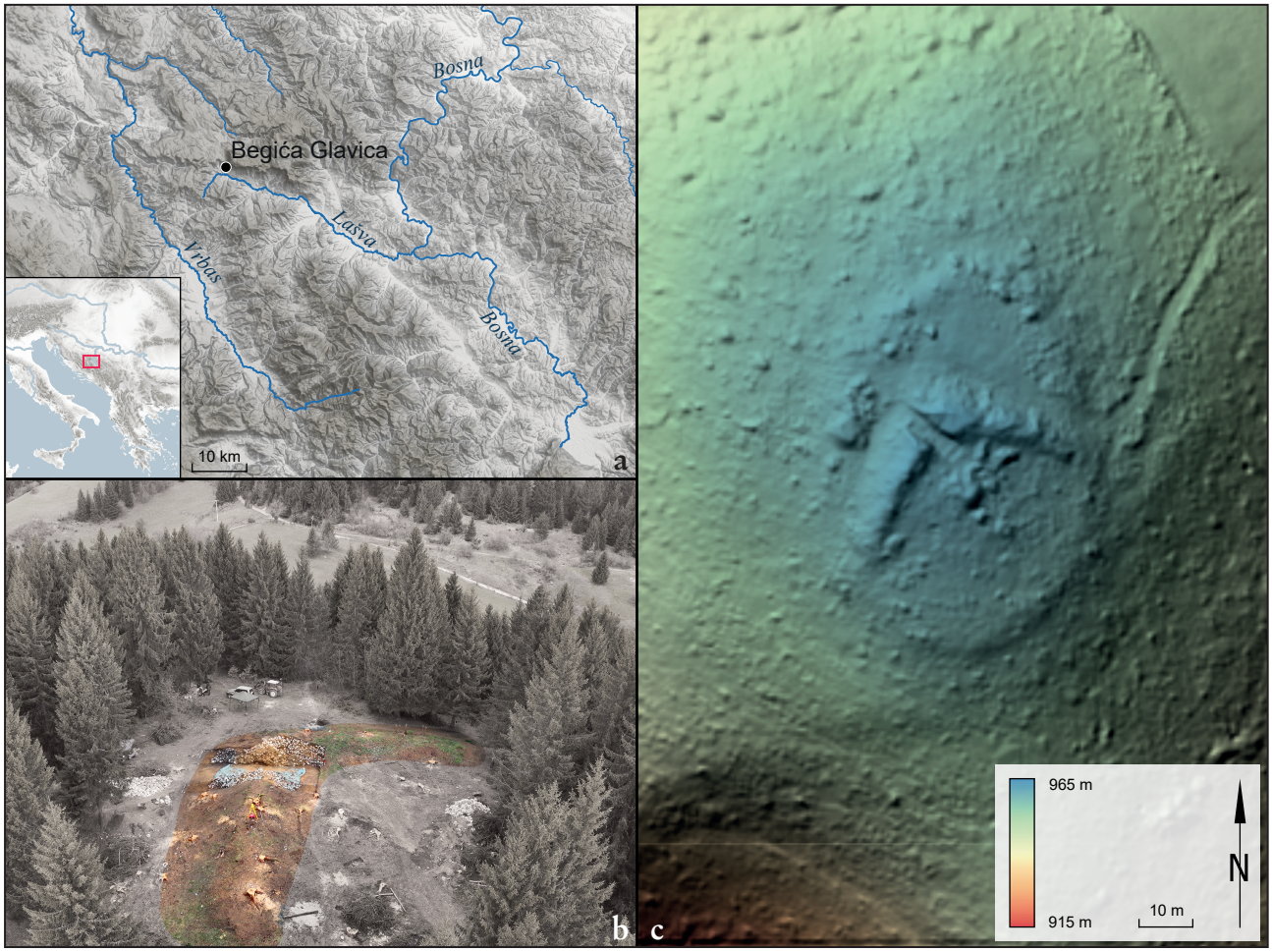


Fig. 1. – a. Position of the site (Base map: NASA, OSM contributors, Natural Earth; design: OeAW-OeAI/I. M. Petschko); b. Arial view of the site with rampart layout in colour (Photo: OeAW-OeAI/I. M. Petschko); c. Digital elevation model of the site (Lidar capture: OeAW-OeAI/M. Hernandez Cordero).

occur at the site, with the nearest natural source being located at a distance of 1.5 km. The layering of stones indicates different and likely chronologically separated construction phases, with traces of various events such as small burnt areas with charcoal, pottery concentrations and metal depositions (Fig. 2). The core of the rampart consisted of densely packed stones in the shape of a larger rectangular structure (Figs. 2, 3a–b). Below the bottom layer of the stones, we encountered remains of a burnt object with well-preserved burnt wooden planks, remains of burnt floors and a walking surface and pottery in situ (Fig 3c). Particularly noteworthy are two large (c. 1 m) storage vessels, with one of them found in an overturned position (Fig. 3d) and the second one dug vertically into the soil.

In terms of the stratigraphy and extension, it is obvious that the rampart, or at least its initial phase, was erected directly above the burnt structures with the aim of covering them. The outer parts of the rampart, particularly in the northwest, were easily distinguishable as the subsequent, younger addition (Fig. 2). The excavation of four trenches on the plateau on both sides of the rampart yielded neither finds nor archaeological features, with yellowish sterile soil directly under the surface. At the current stage of research, the only settlement traces present are the burnt structures under the rampart, while all later activities at the site were apparently closely connected to the rampart and its gradual expansion.

Finds and Dating

Apart from pottery fragments, which occur in all documented stratigraphic units of the rampart, the finds include individually deposited metal objects such as a decorated mace-head pin found on the surface (Fig. 4/7), a spearhead broken into three pieces (Fig. 4/6), a carefully arranged set of metal ornaments (two anklets, two bracelets, spirals; Fig. 4/1–5), a clay figurine (Fig. 5/12) and a few animal bones.

Among the diagnostic pottery, there is a clear prevalence of fragments decorated with channels and facets

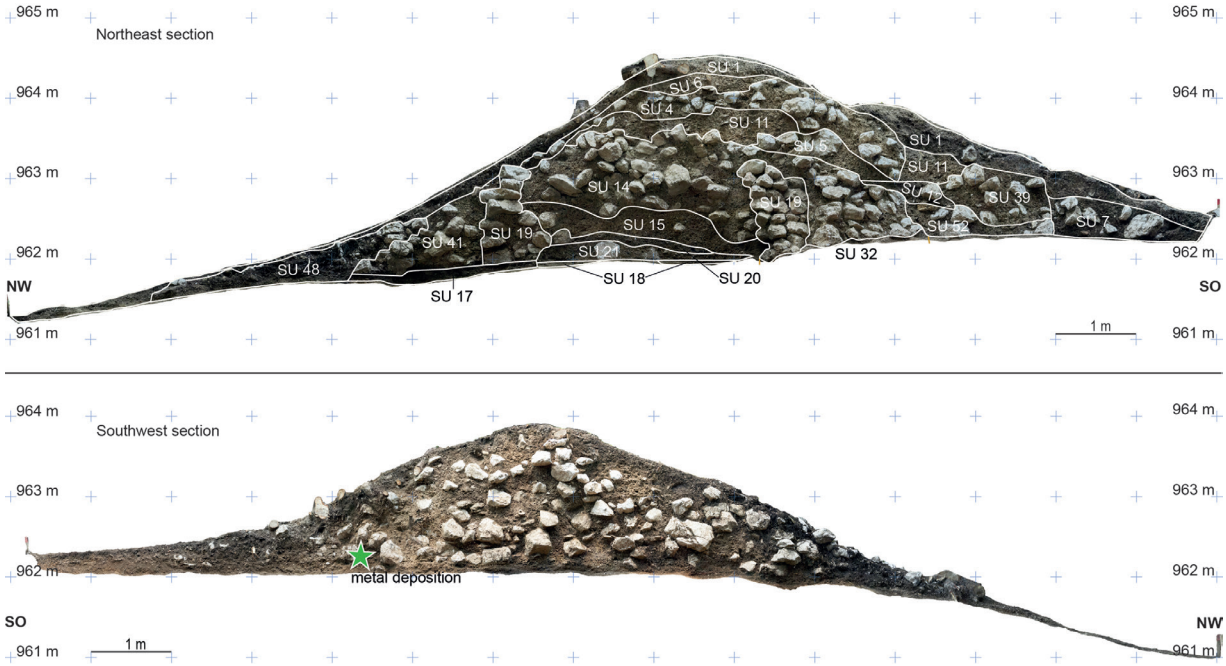


Fig. 2. Sections of the rampart with stratigraphic units and position of the metal deposition (Photogrammetry and drawing: OeAW-OeAI/ I. M. Petschko).



Fig. 3. – a. Rectangular core of the rampart (from the south); b. Rectangular core of the rampart and burnt layer underneath (from the south); c. Overturned pithos within burnt structure; d. Burnt structure under the rampart (Photos: OeAW-OeAI/M. Gavranović, I. M. Petschko).



Fig. 4. Metal depositions from the rampart (Photos: I. M. Petschko, A. Sejfuli, M. Gavranović; drawings: S. Maslić; design: OeAW-OeAI/ N. Mittermair).

(Fig. 5/1–11). The incised geometric ornaments, which are typical of pottery from all nearby hillforts, appear only as an exception (Čović 1983a; Čović 1983b; Gavranović 2011; Gavranović, Sejfuli 2015). Regarding typology, all vessel types appear to be present, however with an increased occurrence of cups, beakers and bowls (Fig. 5). In better investigated regional sites, such as Pod or Varvara, pottery with channels is known only in very low quantities from the layers dating between the 13th and the 11th century BC (Čović 1983a; Gavranović 2011). Comparable channelled pottery is far more indicative of the Urnfield groups across the Carpathian Basin and Danube area (Vinski-Gasparini 1973; Bulatović 2009; Čović 2010).

The same region is also indicated by the decorated mace-head pin (Fig. 4/7), a jewellery type widely distributed in central Europe and the southern Carpathian Basin during Ba D and Ha A1, yet unknown in central Bosnia thus far (Novotná 1980, 141; Říhovský 1983, 51, 141; Vasić 2003, 53). Decorated anklets with bent ends and a round cross-section, bracelets with a D-section and a spearhead with vertical ribs on the socket part are metal types known mostly from younger contexts (Ha B1–Ha B2/3), with most of the analogies coming from surrounding sites in the western Balkans (König 2004; Gavranović, Sejfuli 2015).

The clay figurine (Fig. 5/12) has a human body and zoomorphic elements (bear head or mask). Small clay figurines with a combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements are known from sites in the region and represent one of a few figural representations during the Late Bronze Age in this part of Europe (Čović 1983a; Gavranović 2022).

Based on the find spectrum from the excavations, the activities at the site took place during the entire Late Bronze Age (13th–9th centuries BC). However, the looted metal hoard from the rampart bears witness to younger activity with specific belt types from the 6th century BC (Teßmann 2004; Filipović, Mladenović 2017).

Seven available radiocarbon dates acquired from samples from the excavations span between the 13th and the 9th century BC (Fig. 6). However, there is a clear divergence between dates from animal bones and charcoal, even if they come from the same stratigraphic units, with charcoal dates being consistently older. It is thus likely that either older wood or inner parts of wood have been used for fire and construction. In general, the dates align well with the



Fig. 5. Pottery from Begića Glavica. – 1–11. Selection of diagnostic pottery; 12. Clay figurine (Photos: A. Sejfuli; drawings: S. Maslić; design: OeAW-OeAI/M. Gavranović).

stratigraphical position of the samples, with the bone found in the uppermost stratigraphical unit being the youngest one (VERA 8660: 1013–891 BC), and the bone from the burnt structure below the rampart the oldest one (VERA 8663: 1131–930 BC). The four dates from the bones suggest that the activities below the rampart date between the 11th and 9th centuries BC (Fig. 2, SU 17, SU 18 and SU 32). The date from SU 13 marks the time after the rectangular core of the rampart was built (Fig. 2, see SU 11 and SU 12).

Conclusions and Outlook

The appearance of the Begića Glavica site and its find repertoire stands out among other Late Bronze and Early Iron Age sites in the region. As only a portion of the rampart has been excavated, what else will be found and what other structures will be unearthed below it remains open. Particularly striking is the absence of typical local pottery as well as the recurrent deposition of metals throughout the centuries. The current data indicate that the rampart was formed over

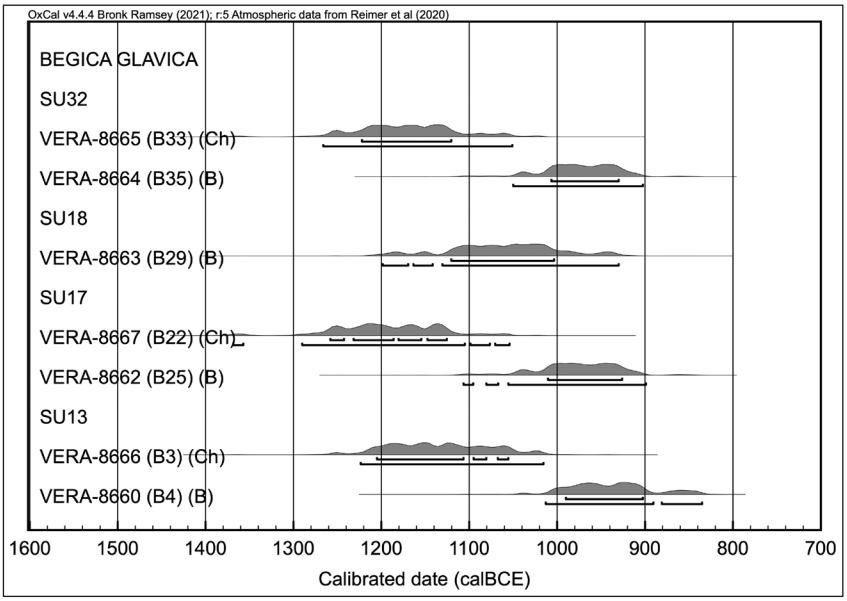


Fig. 6. Radiocarbon dates (Design: OeAW-OeAI/L. Webster).

a longer period, while the site itself was probably a place of occasional gatherings, during which the rampart was extended and metals were deposited. Even more intriguing is the fact that the rampart covers burnt features, leaving room for several scenarios including denial or worshiping of previous structures/people who lived there and violent or ritual destruction. The fact that centuries after the first, apparently turbulent events, this place was visited either by the local population or/and by groups from more distant regions, who performed metal depositions, feastings and ceremonies, reveals its immense importance in the collective memory.

References

Bulatović 2009
A. Bulatović, Origin and distribution of slightly biconical bowls with facetted or channelled rim from the end of Bronze and the beginning of Iron ages on the Balkan Peninsula: contribution to the study of ethnic and cultural movements in Southeast Europe at the end of Bronze and the beginning of Iron ages, Starinar 59, 2009, 89–108.

Čović 1965
B. Čović, Uvod u stratigrafiju i hronologiju praistorijskih gradina u Bosni, Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu 20, 1965, 27–145.

Čović 1983a
B. Čović, Srednjobosanska kulturna grupa. In: A. Benac (Ed.), Praistorija jugoslovenskih zemalja IV: Bronzano doba. Sarajevo 1983, 433–461.

Čović 1983b
B.Čović, Prelazna zona. In: A. Benac (Ed.), Praistorija jugoslovenskih zemalja IV: Bronzano doba. Sarajevo 1983, 390–413.

Čović 2010
B. Čović, Bronze Age in northern Bosnia in the light of new research, Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu 52, 2010, 277–87.

Filipović, Mladenović 2017
V. Filipović, O. Mladenović, Contribution to the study of astragal belt segments from the territory of central and southeastern Europe, Prilozi Instituta za Arehologiju u Zagrebu 34, 2017, 143–183.

Gavranović 2011
M. Gavranović, Die Spätbronze- und Früheisenzeit in Bosnien. Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 195, Bonn 2011.

Gavranović 2022
M. Gavranović, Late Bronze Age geometric decoration in the western Balkans – style and status. In: J. Maran, R. Băjenaru, S.-C. Ailinăcai, A.-D. Popescu, S. Hansen (Eds.), Objects, Ideas and Travelers: Contacts between the Balkans, the Aegean and Western Anatolia during the Bronze and Early Iron Age. Volume to the Memory of A. Vulpe. Proceeding of the Conference in Tulcea 10th–13th November 2017. Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 350, Bonn 2020, 431–447.

Gavranović, Sejfuli 2015
M. Gavranović, A. Sejfuli, Unpublizierte Bronzefunde aus dem Lašvatal in Zentralbosnien, Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja 44, 2015, 67–94.

Gavranović et al. 2023a
M. Gavranović, L. Waltenberger, I. M. Petschko, E. Bujak, I. Cogo, Kopilo: a newly discovered Late Bronze and Iron Age burial ground in Bosnia, Antiquity 97/392, 2023, e10.

Gavranović et al. 2023b
M. Gavranović, I. M. Petschko, I. Cogo, M. Dević, L. Waltenberger, E. Bujak, N. Mittermair, Gräberfeld Kopilo bei Zenica – Neue Erkenntnisse zur Bestattungsweise während der Spätbronze- und Früheisenzeit in Zentralbosnien, Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja 52, 2023, 52–73.

König 2004
P. König, Spätbronzezeitliche Hortfunde aus Bosnien und der Herzegowina. Prähistorische Bronzefunde XX/11, Stuttgart 2004.

Novotná 1980
M. Novotná, Die Nadeln in der Slowakei. Prähistorische Bronzefunde XIII/6, Stuttgart 1980.

Říhovský 1983
J. Říhovský, Die Nadeln in Westungarn I. Prähistorische Bronzefunde XIII/10, Stuttgart 1983.
Teßmann 2004
B. Teßmann, Grabhügel 30 aus Rusanovići: Untersuchungen zu Kontakten zwischen der Glasinac-Hochebene und dem westlichen japodischen Raum (Lika-Hochebene), Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja 33/34, 2004, 139–183.
Vasić 2003
R. Vasić, Die Nadeln im Zentralbalkan (Vojvodina, Serbien, Kosovo und Makedonien). Prähistorische Bronzefunde XIII/11, Stuttgart 2003.
Vinski-Gasparini 1973
K. Vinski-Gasprini, Kultura polja za žarama u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj. Zadar 1973.

Mario Gavranović
Austrian Archaeological Institute
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Dominikanerbastei 16
1010 Vienna
Austria
mario.gavranovic@oeaw.ac.at
orcid.org/0000-0001-6249-1819

Ajla Sejfuli
Regional Museum Travnik
Mehmed-paše Kukavice 1
72270 Travnik
Bosnia-Herzegovina
asejfuli@gmail.com
orcid.org/0000-0001-7857-7692

Irene M. Petschko
Austrian Archaeological Institute
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Dominikanerbastei 16
1010 Vienna
Austria
irene.petschko@oeaw.ac.at
orcid.org/0009-0008-0391-6504

Nicole Mittermair
Austrian Archaeological Institute
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Dominikanerbastei 16
1010 Vienna
Austria
nicole.mittermair@oeaw.ac.at
orcid.org/0000-0001-5686-448X