The Miroč Mountain is situated on the right bank of the Danube, above the narrow and deep Iron Gate gorge. This is the wooded area with all characteristics of karst, i.e. with many deep sinks, water springs, small rivers and underground streams, caves, rock shelters and clefts in the rock. The highest, mostly rocky mountain plateau with just a few clearings extends in the north–south direction immediately along the Danube bank and the highest points are Veliki Štrbac (768 meters above sea level) in the central area and Visoki Ćukar (632 meters above sea level) in the south.

Working on the project Prehistory of Northeastern Serbia – Archaeological Site Surveying and Excavations that we initiated in 2004 on behalf of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Belgrade together with Dušan Borić from the Cambridge University we were faced with archaeologically insufficiently investigated wooded terrains in the Iron Gate hinterland. We must admit that at that time it did not pass through our minds to search for the Triballian sanctuaries or sacred places in the forests. In the background of renowned prehistoric sites Padina, Lepenski Vir, Vlasac and Hajdučka Vodenica on the Danube bank upstream and downstream of the mouth of Porečka river we expected to find smaller Early Iron Age barrows of the type discovered in Oltenia and the Romanian section of the Iron Gate1 or on the right Danube bank on the necropolis of Basarabi culture at the site Vajuga–Pesak downstream of Kladovo.2 This idea was supported by some of our »assistants in the field«, the self-proclaimed lovers of antiquities with metal detectors who told

SACRED GROVES OF THE TRIBALI ON MIROČ MOUNTAIN*

Abstract. – In this work are presented the results of the archaeological investigations at the site Mihajlov ponor (spring) conducted in 2005 and 2006. Few groups of densely concentrated circular stone structures, from 4 to 10 meters in diameter, have been discovered in the thick forest. The structures consist of outer stone circle made of few courses of broken stone and smaller inner circle made of the same stone. Various archaeological objects – fragments of pottery vessels, pieces of jewelry (iron and bronze single-looped fibulae with rectangular catchplate), iron knives, large iron arrowheads of Ferigile type and fragments of two pairs of bridle bits ending with horse head and griffon head have been discovered within two investigated structures. Particularly important are the finds of wild animal bones (deer, chamois, doe) and one human mandible that are like the other finds scattered within the stone structures.

Key words. – Triballi, cult places, Miroč open area sanctuaries, 6th – 5th century BC, iron bridle bits, stone structures.

* We gave a lecture under this title on November 17th 2006 in the National Museum in Belgrade when we officially presented the project Praistorija severoistočne Srbije (Prehistory of northeast Serbia) The basis for this work is also a lecture titled Miroč karst in the Danube Gorges hinterlands (NE Serbia) – one of the Sacred Mountains of the Triballi, given at the colloquium »Interpreted Iron Ages – Case studies, method, theory«, in the beginning of November 2006 in Linz (Landesmuseum). In gathering the material for the study of the Thracian sanctuaries very valuable help was offered to me by the colleague Nikola Theodossiev, from the University of St. Clement of Ohrid in Sofia and I wish to express my gratitude to him on this occasion. We are aware of the fact that term grove (in Serbian gaj – small forest), which we use is not the most adequate for the vast forest areas of the Miroč Mountain. However, slightly archaic Slavic world gaj (grove) has something mystic in itself. Sacred groves were permanent or temporary habitations of the deities of the antique world and cult places were mysterious initiation rituals took place.

1 Berciu, Coma 1956; Dumitrescu 1968; Guma 1993, 220–242.
us that they discovered some metal finds (iron spearheads, knives, bronze and iron arc fibulae, etc.) »under the stones« in the forested areas of the Miroč mountain and we cautiously associated these finds with stone-covered barrows. The real gold fever was instigated among the local treasure hunters by certain pieces of silver jewelry allegedly discovered in »tumuli« in the vicinity of Donji Milanovac. Somewhat more tangible traces were provided by Željko Čvorović, teacher in the village Miroč who has a small collection of antique and prehistoric artifacts. Special assemblage in this collection was a group of few iron objects (small single-edged knives, fragments of spearheads and arrowheads with concave base) discovered with metal detector at the site Mihajlov ponor situated few kilometers to the northwest of the present forest road Donji Milanovac – Miroč – Brza Palanka (modern road overlaps the line of the antique road Taliata – Gerulat – Aegeta). In the collection of Ž. Čvorović originating from the stone structures at Mihajlov ponor was also one single-looped bronze fibula, which the finder presented as a gift to our archaeological team (Fig. 1a) According to Ž. Čvorović one silver arc fibula (lost on the black market of antiquities) has also been found at Mihajlov ponor. We were only able to obtain the drawing of this silver single-looped arc fibula with elongated rectangular catchplate made by Ž. Čvorović (Fig. 1b).

In the course of site surveying in 2004 and 2005 we registered, besides Mihajlov ponor, previously unknown Late Bronze Age settlements (culture with encrusted pottery of Żuto Brdo – Gârla Mare type) in the village Miroč and at Ploče above the Gorge (Kazan). We also discovered one multi-layered settlement dating from the end of Bronze Age and from Early Iron Age under the hill called Glavica (site Kopana Glavica) to the north of the village Miroč with pottery of Gava, Basarabi and Fergile type. (Fig. 2).

The small-scale archaeological investigations were conducted in 2005 and 2006 only at the site Mihajlov ponor (spring) situated around 12 kilometers to the northeast of the village Miroč in the south section of the central Miroč plateau.4 The site is located around 200 meters to the southwest of the strong water spring at the foot of the hills Konjska glavica and Visoki žukar on the elevation in the thick forest surrounded by sinks and covering the area of approximately one hectare (Fig. 3). Thirty-two circular or elliptical stone structures, 4–12 meters in diameter, 0.40 to 1.20 meters high, and arranged in smaller groups have been identified in this area (Fig. 4). All the structures have the outer ring

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3 The archaeological site surveying of the later prehistoric sites in the Iron Gate hinterland have been carried out in 2004 by Mirko Peković, keeper in the Military Museum in Belgrade and archaeologist Marija Marić, while this author took part in surveying from time to time.

4 Members of the team investigating Mihajlov ponor in 2005 and 2006 were the directors M. Jevtić and M. Peković and archaeologists Marija Marić and Milica Bajčeta, archaeology student Aleksandra Subotić, geodesist Milan Arsenović and geologist Goran Klemenčić.
Fig. 2. Positions of the cult places Mihajlov ponor and Ploče on the Miroč Mt. and the others Early Iron Age sites in the Iron Gate

Сл. 2. Положај култних места Михајлов понор и Плоче на плато Мироч и други локалитети старије врсте доба у Јердапу

Fig. 3. Map detail with the site Mihajlov ponor on the Miroč Mt.

Сл. 3. Детаљ секције са локалитетом Михајлов понор на Мирочу
of rather large broken stones and the inside area is covered with earth and smaller stones (Fig. 5a, 5b). It was often the case that smaller circle consisting also of broken stones were constructed in the central zone of the larger circular structure. The massive outer circle of rather large broken stones that was higher than the internal segment of the structure was usually constructed against the virgin rocks protruding from the ground. The circular structures, which are smaller in diameter and not so high, were usually covered with smaller broken stones. Any regularity in disposition of these structures is difficult to establish as some of the stone circles are partially spread out and some of the circular stone structures were completely devastated by the tree roots. Nevertheless, it seems that each group usually consisted of three structures of various sizes. Similar groups consisting of few circular stone structures have been discovered about 700 meters to the north of the central area of the site also in thick and hardly passable forest. The new location marked as Mihajlov ponor 2 with rather large group of circular structures made of broken stone have been discovered about 350 meters to the southeast of the spring Mihajlov ponor, not far from the hill Čoka Grekuluj (meaning Greek hill in Romanian). At this location the zones with stone structures are also surrounded by big and deep ravines. Rather massive dry stone wall made of large broken stones resting on the virgin rock is preserved up to the length of around 30 meters in the northwestern section of this site (Fig. 6). Although this dry stone wall was disturbed.
to a great extent the protected entrance to the area with circular stone structures was encountered at one end and at the other end was rather large circular »tower«, i.e. the remains of the foundations of massive circular structure of indistinguishable purpose that was constructed of large broken stones in the same manner as the »rampart« (Fig. 7).

Somewhat smaller stone structures of circular shape, from 3 to 6 meters in diameter, with more or less prominent ring of broken stone have been also discovered in considerable quantity at the site Ploče to the north of Veliki Štrbac above Mali Kazan. Rather large number of circular stone structures at Ploče is situated in the thick forest in the central zone of the Miroč plateau nearby the hunting lodge of the Djerdap National Park and to the northeast of the belvedere above the Gorge (Kazan) (Fig. 8). The traces of unfortified settlement from the Late Bronze Age were registered in the immediate vicinity of the hunting lodge and forest warden post. The settlement, judging by discovered pottery fragments, belonged to the culture with encrusted pottery of Žuto Brdo – Gârla Mare type and was situated on the fringes of the forest, approximately 200 meters far from the first stone circles. The site survey of surrounding area revealed that this was not the single site of the Žuto Brdo culture on the Miroč Mountain.
The inhabitants of the village Miroč told us that there is a settlement of this culture in the vicinity of the antique fortification Gerulatis and there was found a fragment of the large figurine of the Žuto Brdo type (Fig. 9). We consider this to be of particular importance for studying circular stone structures as both Late Bronze Age settlements are at the same distance from the site Mihajlov ponor where while exploring and photographing one rather small structure we have discovered small washed out fragment of a vessel decorated with false cord ornament organized in the manner of the Žuto Brdo pottery.

According to Željko Ćvorović, who was our main guide when we discovered the site Mihajlov ponor, the plunderers with metal detectors have once discovered mostly iron objects (knives, spearheads, arrowheads etc.) at the site Ploče. After revisiting the site in May 2007 we encountered new traces of »antique lovers«, i.e. few shallow pits within the stone structures. We also found few fragments of black burnished Iron Age pottery (fragments of a neck of one amphora) in the excavated earth in the central zone of one of the stone circles. As the fragments are characteristics of the Basarabi culture this corroborates the information about the discovery of iron weapons at this site.

Circular, low structures of rather small size and covered with small broken stones have been also encountered in the course of site surveying in the forests in the northeastern regions of the Miroč Mountain near the crossing of the forest roads of which the main one runs to the Danube bank near Brza Palanka.

We have managed so far to investigate just two stone structures in the central zone of Mihajlov ponor with unusually small professional team and more than modest financial means. They are located between 450.15 and 451.34 meters above sea level and recorded in the field as structures VII and IX. Structure VII (10.90 x 9.20 m in diameter) consists of the outer ring built of two to three courses of larger broken stones and the interior segment within which the indigenous flat rocks were leveled using small broken pieces of limestone and sandstone mixed with reddish earth (Fig. 10). As the rocky foundation in the central zone of the stone structure was descending in cascades towards one end this zone was leveled using earth and small stones (Fig. 11). The circular walkway covered with earth and small pieces of broken stone that surrounded the central area of the »feature« was encountered outside the virgin rock base. Rather small surface (about 1 square meter) of densely packed and slightly burned soil was
encountered in the western section of the circular structure and on that surface either short-lived fire had been burning or the remains of some previously burnt organic material were burning out. Sporadic pottery fragments characteristics of the Early Iron Age cultures were discovered in the peripheral sections of the circular stone structure. They were of poorly refined clay, of coarse fabric and of brown and red/brown color. Few small bronze and iron objects and few glass eye beads have been found in the central zone of the structure. Most interesting are rather small bronze single-looped fibula (catchplate is missing) with spindle-shaped bow decorated with incisions and rather big iron arrowhead of Ferigile type\(^5\) (Fig. 12). Large concentration of small pottery fragments of the vessels of coarse and fine fabric was discovered in a layer of packed earth immediately above the virgin rock in the eastern section of the structure. We identified the pottery fragments typical of the so-called post-Basarabi horizon in NE Serbia and Oltenia and similar to the finds from the so-called Scythian horizon in Transylvania and to the pottery, which some Romanian archaeologists identified as Proto-Dacian. Besides the fragments of large pots and vessels identified as amphorae with tongue-shaped and horse-shoe shaped handles there were also found the fragments of smaller bowls with inverted and broadly faceted rim, deep conical beakers with one handle, beakers on short hollow foot etc. (Fig. 13). Small fragments of animal bones were likewise pottery and metal objects scattered without any conspicuous system within the circular stone structure. Some of the bones, which belong exclusively to the wild and hunted species (doe, deer, chamois), have the butchering marks. And finally we should mention as the most important find the singed mandible of a rather young male that was obviously brought from somewhere else and deposited within the stone circle (Fig. 14). In the course of investigations at the site Bagachina in the lower course of the Lom River in Bulgaria also a fragment of human mandible was discovered in one of many cult pits.\(^6\) The discovery of lower jaw and parts of human skeleton on another cult pit at this site is explained as confirmation that the Northern Thracians practiced human sacrifices.

Structure IX was situated just couple of meters far from previously described structure VII. It was almost

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\(^5\) Vulpe 1967, 66, Fig. 21 (tun. 62).

\(^6\) Theodossiev 2000, 137.
Fig. 9. Miroč village – Upper part of Žuto Brdo figurine from the Late Bronze Age settlement in the vicinity of Gerulatis

Сл. 9. Мироч село – горни део жутобродске фигурине са насеља из касне бронзане доба у близини Gerulatis-a

Fig. 10. Mihajlov ponor, plan of structure VII, after excavations

Сл. 10. Михајлов Јонор, скица конструције VII, јошле ископавања
Consider the surrounding area and was covered with thick layer of small broken stones without visible traces of the peripheral stone circle and its dimensions are 8.20 x 8.50 meters. Despite considerable difference in appearance of stone structures before investigation the archaeological situation within »structure IX« proved to be similar to the situation within previous structure. The massive peripheral circle consisting of virgin rocks and few courses of rather large broken pieces of limestone was clearly discernible and interior space above the virgin rock was filled with smaller and larger stones mixed with earth (Fig. 15). Many pottery fragments, few smaller animal bones and few bronze and iron jewelry pieces, tools and weapons have been scattered immediately above the virgin rock within the cover consisting of earth mixed with stones (Fig. 16).

The pottery was, like in structure VII, very fragmented often washed out and of rather poor, sandy fabric. In addition to the similar pottery shapes like the bowls with broadly faceted rims many fragments of finer fabric decorated with series of incised dots surrounding deeper impressed lines or broad channels have been also found in structure IX (Fig. 17). Many metal objects have been discovered within this structure as well as in the immediate vicinity (in the area between the stone circles) (Fig. 18). Particularly interesting are small single-looped fibulae made of bronze or iron and one of them is completely preserved including the flat rectangular catchplate. This type of fibulae dates from the time of the late Hallstatt period and is characteristic of the Ferigile group in the western parts of Romania. According to T. Bader the single-looped fibulae with bow of circular section and rectangular catchplate are very widely distributed jewelry type identified as the Donja Dolina type. In Oltenia this type of fibulae mostly comes from the tumulus burials (Gogoșu, Balta Verde, Gruia, etc.). Similar single-looped fibulae with flat rectangular or trapeze have been encountered in the graves in northwestern Bulgaria dating from the post-Basarabi horizon. It is assumed that this type of single-looped fibulae emerged in the northern Greece and via Macedonia reached as far as the north Balkans and Oltenia. Therefore, the fibulae with square catchplate are also known as the Marvinci – Gogoșu type. The fibula of almost identical shape as the bronze specimen from Mihajlov ponor (structure IX) and dated in the second half of the 6th century was registered in the necropolis with the cremation burials under the tumuli (tumulus 4) at the site Ieșelnița in the Mehedinți district.

Fig. 11. Mihajlov ponor, cascade virgin rock under the structure VII

Сл. 11. Михайлов погранич, каскадна вода стена, изнад која је изграђена конструкција VII

8 Gergova 1987.
Fig. 12. Mihajlov ponor, structure VII, archaeological objects
Сл. 12. Михајлов Јонор, констакција VII, Јокрећни археолошки налази

Fig. 13. Mihajlov ponor, structure VII, pottery from the accumulation inside the structure
Сл. 13. Михајлов Јонор, констакција VII, керамика из насића унутар констакције
upstream from the mouth of river Cherna, on the opposite Danube bank.\textsuperscript{10} Similar fibulae made of silver and rarely of gold with trapeze or square catchplate have been found in the horizon of so-called princely graves of Atenica – Novi Pazar type in the heart of the central Balkans. All these analogies suggest the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century as the time of their use. Another interesting find is the upper segment of ring-like pendant of the Ghidici type\textsuperscript{11}, which is characteristic of the late Basarabi culture (Zlotska pecina, Sofrnievo). Few rather big iron arrowheads with concave base and perforations on the tip (Ferigile type) were also found in this structure. Many similar iron arrowheads have been found at the site Kornjet in the village Podgorac in eastern Serbia.\textsuperscript{12} There were also found two fragmented iron belt buckles of rectangular shape (similar specimen comes from Zlotska pecina but it is still unpublished), many fragments of iron single-edged knives etc. One complete and two fragmented iron cheek-pieces have been found in the immediate vicinity of structure IX. According to the ends stylized as horse’s head and gryphon’s head they could be attributed to the Szentes–Vekerzug type,\textsuperscript{13} i.e. to the Scythian horizon in the south Hungary and west Romania as it is confirmed by the finds from the tumulus necropolis Curtea de Argeş.\textsuperscript{14} As far as we are informed these are the very first finds of cheek-pieces with zoomorphic endings, i.e. of the Scythian type, from the central Balkan area.

On the basis of the archaeological objects and the archaeological context within the circular stone structures at Mihajlov ponor we could cautiously assume that we are on the track of distinct cult places on the Miroć Mountain. It is important to point out that the nearest Early Iron Age settlement at the site Kopana Glavica is just few kilometers far from the cult place at Mihajlov ponor on the other side of Visoki Ćukar. It is necessary to explore archaeologically this settlement but already on the basis of the surface finds it is clear that these two sites existed simultaneously in the Early Iron Age. It could be assumed that inhabitants of this settlement, alone or with their neighbors, took part in construction of circular stone structures at Mihajlov ponor and in ritual deposition of offerings within these structures. Certain differences regarding the pottery found in one or the other investigated stone structure indicate that it was a long-lasting cult ritual, which was

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\textsuperscript{10} Nica 1975, Fig. 17/12; Guma 1993, 237–239.
\textsuperscript{11} Kilian 1975, 133, Taf. 91 (map of distribution of the ring-like pendants); Irmma Kilian – Dirlmeir calls this type Ghidici, after the hoard in Oltenia where 72 specimens were found (Kilian-Dirlmeir 1984). Unusually large quantity of these pendants has been found at some sites in western Bulgaria (D. Gergova 1987). Bronze ring-like pendants have been mostly chance finds and they were usually explained as horse harness decoration. In the grave of so-called Paeonian priestess from Macedonia this ring-like pendant was an integral element of the elaborate belt garniture (Mirrenescu 1991).

\textsuperscript{12} Vasić 2004, 16; Stojić 2006, Fig. 6.7.
\textsuperscript{13} Párducz 1954.
probably periodically resumed. It is also interesting that even modest data obtained at the site Ploča above the Kazan also indicate the connection between the cult circular stone structures and nearby settlement from the Late Bronze Age. This connection between Mihajlov ponor (cult places within few »sacred forests«) and the nearby settlement Kopana Glavica is, as it seems, already confirmed.

The registered stone structures of circular shape at few sites on the Miroč Mountain point to the traces of cult places within few sacred groves (»sacred forests«) so this mountain could be identified with reason as the »Sacred Mountain« of the Triballi, one of the largest Paleo-Balkan tribes in the Pre-Roman times.

It is probably not accidental that ethnological parallels from the northeastern Serbia also indicate venerating of sacred groves and certain trees, particularly the oak. One prehistoric settlement in the vicinity of Rudna Glava near Majdanpek, the earliest copper mine in the Balkans, is named Tri goruna meaning three oaks. It is interesting that there are usually one or few trees in the central zone of the stone structures at Mihajlov ponor. It is also significant that only in these regions of Serbia is venerated »the mother of the forest« or the lady of the forest. This belief is particularly popular in the Walachian villages in the Homolje and Miroč area, where the mother of the forest is still venerated today under the name of »muma Paduri«. The lady of the forest is imagined as beautiful woman with ample bosom and loose hair who is kind to the people especially women and pregnant women. There is significant information from the Walachian traditional culture that there are certain cult activities connected with the veneration of the »mother of the forest« (pomane muma Paduri). Also, one medicinal herb as well as picturesque forest area is also called »muma Paduri«. It is obvious that we are facing here clear re-

miniscence of the venerating of »sacred forests« in the Pre-Christian times. In the Serbian folk songs is also mentioned a fairy (vila Ravijojla) who is connected with the Miroč Mountain and this is certainly very deeply rooted in the tradition of the autochthonous population in the Iron Gate hinterland.

We borrowed the term »Sacred Mountain«, which is polysemantic and is usually associated with the cult places and sanctuaries of the ancient Thracians from N. Theodossiev from the University in Sofia.\textsuperscript{16} According to this author the term \textit{Hieron oros} in Greek literature clearly denotes the sacred character of the mountain massif and indicates the connections of »aniconical mountain rocks« with archaic idea about Great Mother of Gods. The idea that there is a connection between the »Mountain« and »Great Mother of Gods« is confirmed already in the end of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BC in Aristophanes’ comedy \textit{Birds} where Rhea (who is frequently syncretized with Phrygian Cybele) is called \textit{Meter Oreia}, i.e. »Mother Mountain«. In the dissertation of Theodossiev concerning material and spiritual culture of the Triballi and their successors in the northwestern Thrace in the Late Iron Age special attention was paid to the archaeological identification of the cult places and sanctuaries in the area between the river Morava (Margos) in Serbia and the river Isker (Oisko) in Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{17} Particularly interesting for us is the idea of N. Theodossiev about the existence of »Sacred Forests« in the territory of the Northern Thracians.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast to relatively numerous Pit Sanctuaries, which in our opinion are not always archaeologically confirmed with certainty and Cave Sanctuaries (Fig. 19), the identification of Sacred Forests as places where the Northern Thracians constructed their cult places and

\textsuperscript{17} Theodossiev 2000, 19–24.
\textsuperscript{18} Theodossiev 1998; Theodossiev 2000, 24.
Fig. 17. Mihajlov ponor, structure IX, pottery from the accumulation inside the stone circle
Сл. 17. Михајлов Јонор, конструкција IX, керамика из насипа унутар каменог венца
sanctuaries has for the time being confirmations only in the antique literary sources. The explanations of Theodossiev that it is possible to identify some pits within the Early Iron Age settlements in the eastern Serbia as distinct cult places of the Triballi is hardly plausible so these sites should certainly be omitted from the map of the Thracian sanctuaries. Only the large sacred complex with about 200 cult pits at the site Bagachina by the Lom River in the vicinity of Stalijska Mahala in northwestern Bulgaria is well-investigated. Besides already mentioned parts of human skeletons in two pits at this site, other cult pits contained large quantity of pottery and many sacrificed domesticated and wild

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animals. As possible sacred places of the Northern Thracians are distinguished the «cave sanctuaries» like the Rabiša (Magura) cave and Suha Peč in northeastern Bulgaria and the Zlot cave near Bor. There is an attractive idea of N. Theodossiev that Early Iron Age horizon in Zlot cave perhaps indicates the cult place, first of all on the basis of unusually numerous metal objects, i.e. jewelry pieces, weapons and horse equipment discovered there.  

The venerating of some forests as sacred places and identification of Hieron oros with the Thracian mountain Ganos (word from Thracian language denoting attributes as shining, sacred as well as the Slavic oronym Belasica in Macedonia) is related chiefly to the ritual practice of the Odrysae in the southern Thrace. Striking discoveries in recent years in the territory of the Odrysian kingdom, in the so-called Thracian valley of kings, had an impact on the opinion that cult architecture in Thrace could be mostly associated with rich royal tombs — under large barrows. The existence of sacred forests in the lands of the Northern Thracians (Triballi

Fig. 19. Map with cult places and sanctuaries of the Thracians after N. Theodossiev.  
Map is modified and Mihajlov ponor is added

Сл. 19. Карта са култним местима и светилиштима Трачана, према Н. Теодосијеву. 
Карта је прерађена и убачен је Михајлов понор
and Moesi) is indirectly confirmed by Cassius Dio (2nd–3rd century) who in his history of Rome in Greek language mentioned among other things the invasion across the Danube of the Bastarnae (30/29 BC), who subdued Moesia and then defeated their neighbors Triballi and Dardanians that were living in the land of those. The Roman state response to the crossing of the Bastarnae over the Balkan (Hemus) Mountain and their invasion of the land of the Thracian Denteleti was the successful campaign of the proconsul Marcus Licinius Crassus from Macedonia towards the Danube in 29/28 BC and the expulsion of the Bastarnae. Some of them got drowned in a panic flight across the Danube (the king of the Bastarnae was also killed) while the others found refuge in the »sacred forest« somewhere in the lands of the Moesi or Triballi (Dio. Cass. LI, 23.2–27.2, after M. Tačena 1987, 149–153) that was certainly not far from the Danube. The direct evidence for the existence of sacred places in the forests of the Northern Thracians known in the Serbian archaeology and historiography as Daco–Mysians comes from rather late source dating from the end of the antique period, i.e. from the geographic lexicon of Stephanos Byzantinus dating from the 6th century. Namely, in the note of Stephanos Byzantinus is interesting the explanation about the hill Temenites (Τημενιτῆς Λόφος) that could not be precisely dated but the »Sacred Hill« is related to Thrace towards the Triballi, i.e. for the Thracian territory in the vicinity of the lands of the Triballi as F. Papazoglu assumes or for the Thrace within the lands of the Triballi (N. Theodossiev 2000, 53).

Finally we tried here to summarize some of the ideas of the archaeologists from Bulgaria who are as it seems rather intensively searching in last twenty years for the cult places of the Thracians. Particularly interesting for us are the investigations in the area to the north of the Balkan Mountain where we expect that connections with NE Serbia are rather conspicuous. Thus, circular stone structures resembling those at Miroč have been recently published. They were discovered densely arranged one next to the other in the lands of the Getae (NE Bulgaria) at so-called Sector 168 within the large center Sboryanovo to the east of the town Ruse. These sites are usually connected with the cult places of some of the ancient deities and it is assumed that libations were poured there (there were found the eschara, hearths, kiln segments, braziers and the like). Slightly burned soil within structure VII at Mihajlov ponor vaguely indicates the place having similar purpose.

Despite certain similarities with some cult places in Thrace every attempt to reconstruct in rough outline the cult rituals at Mihajlov ponor seems at this level of investigation rather hopeless. However, we got the help in the course of excavations that we did not expect. The site was visited by local prophetess who talks with the deceased and has contacts with the world of the dead. After falling into trance this woman (called rusalja) said that she saw a group of beautiful women with loose hair, dressed into aprons and with light leather sandals around the stone structures. Perhaps, in the vision of this prophetess should be recognized the priestess or followers of the »mother of forest«, i.e. Great Mother of Gods.

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23 Papazoglu 1969, 416.
24 Papazoglu 1969, 56, 419.
26 Stoyanov et al. 2006, 48–49.
ABBREVIATIONS:

AAH: Acta Archaeologica Hungarica, Budapest.
Arch. Bulgarica: Archaeologia Bulgarica, Sofia.
MMA: Macedonica acta archaeologica, Skopje.
MCA: Materiale și cercetari arheologice, București.
PBF: Prähistorische Bronzezunde, München, Stuttgart.

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У истраживањима материјалне и духовне културе палеобалканских народа на тлу данашње Србије недостају проучавања религијског живота из преддримског доба. Овај недостатак се посебно уочава код Трибала који се подједнако проучавају у српској и бугарској археологији. Када смо својевремено питали колеге из Бугарске како препознају неко трачко светилиште на отвореном добио смо одговор да је најважније да се открије амбијент у којем се налази цетно место или светилиште. После првих, почетних радова на истраживању цетних места из преддримског доба на Мирочу, свесно смо да је амбијент веома важан за откривање све- тилишта на отвореном.

Захваљујући великом заштитном археолошком радовима који су претходили подигању електричних центала на илласку из Ђерданског клисура, у тешко приступљивим пределима клисура откривен су неки од најзначајнијих праисторијских локалитета у овом делу српског Подунавља (Лепенички Вир, Падина, Власац, Хајдучка воденица). Скоро сва откривена праисторијска налазишта у Ђердану забележена су у малим увалама и најнижи речним терасама, непосредно уз дунавску обалу. У залеђу Ђердана забележено је света неколико мањих праисторијских насеља, а детаљније рекогносцирање изведено је само у доњем току Поречке реке.

У организацији Одељења за археологију Филозофског факултета у Београду 2004. године покренут је нови пројекат сондионог рекогносцирања праисторијских налазишта у широм залеђу Ђердана. У почетној фази рада, рекогносцирање је обухваћено, поред осталих Мироч, која се простире дуж Доње клисура Ђердана. То је ретко наста- њено карстно подручје, са стеновитим пределима, у којима се налазе велике вртачке, мање пећине и потпакине, уз већи број извора питьке воде. С тога нас је причино изненадило необично праисторијско налазиште на локалитету Михајлов повор, испод Високог чукара, једног од највиших врхова у јужном делу Мироча (632 m надморске висине). У густој шуми, недалеко од извора питьке воде је једне велике вртаче, откривени су на простору од приближно једног хектара остатак преко 30 кружних камених прстена из куризитета ломљеног камена. На основу прикупљених површинских налаза заунутрахних камених прстена предстали су крај реченици да се ради о остатцима разграђених камено — земљаних тумула. Било нам је необично што су на Мирочу сачувани само перијерни камени прстенови, док се темељне облицење састоје у екипирању оних држалих камена, без носећих земље. При томе су унутар спољних венца од једног или два реда непосредно сачувани у средишњем делу остатак уског каменог прстена из неколико редова ломљеног камена, очувани до висине до једног метра.

У 2005. и 2006. години истражили смо две, локално очуване камене, кружне конструкције, пречника приближно око 10 метара свака. Унутар деловно очуваног венца од ломљеног камена, непосредно изnad живе стени, откривен је већи број покретних археолошких налаза који указују на остатке ермска оставка. У танком слоју земље и сирома ломљеног камена нађена је већа количина уломака керамичких посуда, која је донета из једног или више удаљених места. Унутар кружне камене конструкције откривен је већи број металних предмета, претежно рађени од гвожђа (једнопетласте кружне јубице, већи стрелце Ферабић типа, једносеклени нађени носови, деловни копља), неколико стакљених перли са оцима и др. Посебно је значајан налаз загређе мандибуле мушкарца млађих година, уз неколико костију ловних животиња (хлена, срна, дивокоза). Из друге камене конструкције посебан је изважен налаз гвоздене пислице са протомом коња, који припадају скитским животињама Касног Халата. Сви налази се опредељују у мањим фазама предиојерних гвозденог доба (VI—V век пре н.е.) и могу се приписати Три- балима из Херодотовог времена, који су у то време живели на простору од Мораве до Иске.