

# The Princely Burials of the Central Balkans in Context

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*Despite a consensus that the Late Hallstatt ‘princely’ burials heralded the emergence of the earliest complex societies in the central Balkans, there is room for nuance. In this article, the ‘princely’ burial horizon is examined in light of the opposition between group-oriented and individualizing societies, while accepting that burials are as much an ideological statement as a reflection of social structure. On this theoretical basis, the author presents a study of two groups of ‘princely’ burials in North Macedonia and Bosnia in relation to contemporary and later burials, and with reference to settlement size in the Late Hallstatt and Classical–Hellenistic period. His analysis reveals that the inequality in burial assemblages of the Late Hallstatt ‘princely’ burial horizon decreases in the mortuary record of the fifth–fourth century BC, whereas the settlement size in the Classical–Early Hellenistic suggests emerging differentiation.*

**Keywords:** ‘princely’ burials, central Balkans, Late Hallstatt, Lorenz curves, settlement hierarchies

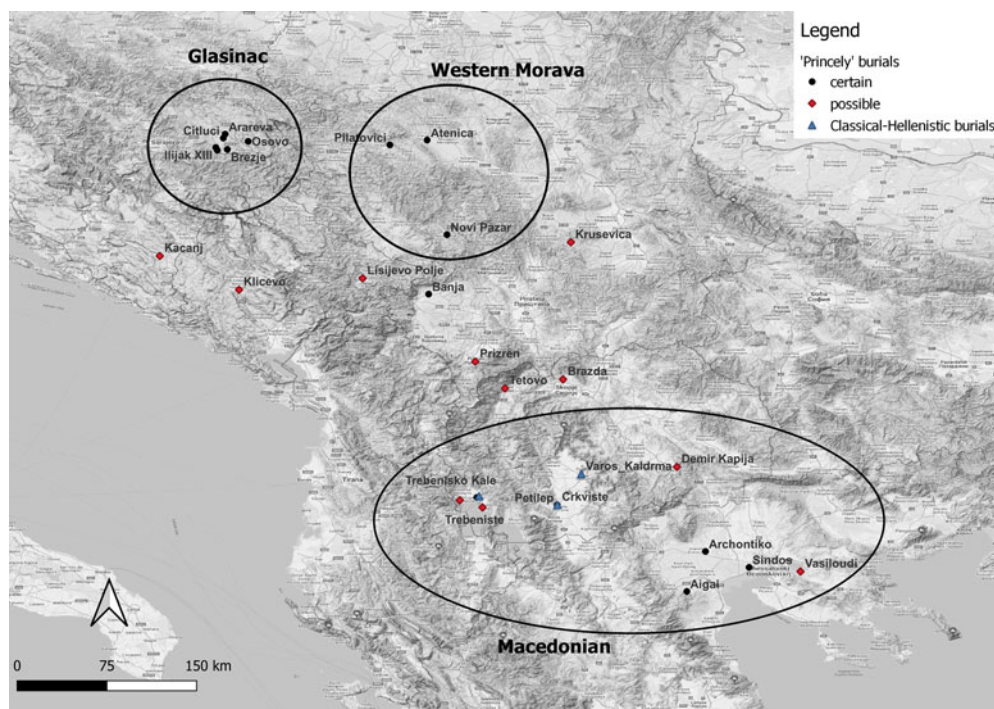
## INTRODUCTION

The Late Hallstatt ‘princely’ burials are surely one of the most widely discussed and best-known subjects in the archaeology of the central Balkans, with a century-old tradition of scholarship. Nonetheless, it is useful to offer some basic information to the uninitiated reader (Babić, 2002).

In Balkan archaeology, the concept of ‘princely’ burial refers to a series of wealthy interments dating from the middle of the seventh to the end of the sixth century BC. They are mostly limited to the western Balkans, extending from the Glasinac Plateau (discussed in this article) in eastern Bosnia in the north-west to the Bay of Thessaloniki in the south-east (Figure 1). The Macedonian group of burials (which includes the site of Trebenište discussed

here) belongs to a different socio-cultural circle but is included in this analysis for comparative purposes and because it is roughly contemporary with the northern groups (Babić & Palavestra, 2018).

The ‘princely’ burials are a loosely defined phenomenon, distinguished by the presence of luxury objects and imports in their assemblages and their wealth relative to other contemporary burials in the region. Certain elements of the material culture differentiate them from the elite burials of later periods. However, because they are defined almost intuitively, there are instances of contemporary burials that do not qualify as ordinary burials but also do not entirely fit the profile of ‘princely’ burials: altogether, the status of several dozen burials identified as ‘princely’ and of about a dozen other wealthy burials is uncertain (Babić, 2002: fig. 1)



**Figure 1.** Distribution of the 'princely' burials in the central Balkans and the Classical-Hellenistic cemeteries mentioned in the text.

While they are not a homogenous category, the 'princely' burials of the central Balkans represent a phenomenon that is unmatched in earlier or later periods (Jovanović, 1979; Babić, 2004; Vasić, 2009; Babić & Palavestra, 2018). They form a narrow horizon that lasted no more than a century and a half and closely match contemporary developments in western Central Europe (Table 1; Brun, 1987; Pare, 1992; Fernández-Götz & Arnold, 2017). At this scale, variations within the group as well as uncertainties over its spread are likely to exist, but these cannot undermine the group's integrity or pertinence to the study of the Iron Age societies in the central Balkans and beyond. Several syntheses address the phenomenon, including Čović (1979), Palavestra (1984), and Babić (2004). These studies have greatly advanced our understanding of Late Hallstatt Balkan

societies, their likely structure and degree of complexity, their connections with the Mediterranean world, their economic orientation, and their religious beliefs.

The general consensus among scholars is that the 'princely' burials were a symptom of a growing differentiation in wealth and status among local Late Hallstatt communities (Čović, 1979: 144; Palavestra, 1984: 1–8; Babić, 2004: 11–12). They belonged to a powerful new elite, who were able to mobilize specialized production of sophisticated equipment and luxuries and acquire goods produced far afield. The nature of the long-distance connections for acquiring such exotic goods is, however, a matter of debate (Babić, 2004: 49–58). Differential access to locally produced and imported luxuries helped create or maintain a solid power-base for the local elite and was a key element in the formation of the first

**Table 1.** *Periodization for the Balkans, Central Europe, and Greece.*

Area	Period	Absolute dates
Central Europe	Hallstatt D	650–475 BC
Glasinac	Glasinac IVc	
Morava Basin	Iron Age II and III	
Paeonia and Macedonia	Late Iron Age–Early Antiquity	
Greece	Late Archaic–Classical	
Central Europe	La Tène A	475–300 BC
Glasinac	Glasinac Va–Vb	
Morava Basin	Iron Age III and IV	
Paeonia and Macedonia	Classical–Early Hellenistic	
Greece		

proto-states in the study area. Similarly, the ‘princely’ burial horizon is seen as the first phase in the integration of the central Balkans into the wider Greek political, economic, and cultural sphere. The scholarly literature abounds in attempts at attributing the ‘princely’ burials to the rulers of the earliest known ethnic groups in the central Balkans (Benac, 1987; Vasić, 1991; Filipović, 2018). Thus, the ‘princely’ burial phenomenon stands at the dawn of history for this region, highlighting the transition to complex, proto-state societies.

Yet this seemingly robust and convincing interpretation requires closer examination. Indeed, nearly all relevant studies have looked at the question of ‘princely’ burials in isolation. I do not mean to say that this phenomenon has not been studied in the wider context of the Greek colonization of the Mediterranean or compared to similar developments in central Europe (Benac & Čović, 1957; Palavestra, 1988; Babić, 2004: 49–76) but that, by and large, funerary practices have been studied independently from their immediate mortuary and non-mortuary context (Palavestra, 1994). This is largely owed to

the scarcity or absence of data from contemporary settlements and ordinary or poor burials, but subjectivity and, in some cases, a lack of theoretical breadth have also played their part.

Few if any, would question that elite burials must be approached critically and within their social and historical context (Parker Pearson, 1993; Morris, 1999; Pope, 2022). Too often, however, this context is reconstructed solely on the basis of a small and unrepresentative segment of the funerary record. It is precisely because of their highly specific character, their exclusiveness, and symbolic nature, that ‘princely’ burials cannot be relied on to fully capture the nature of ancient societies. Setting aside the issue of post-depositional processes and their effect on recovery rates, exclusionary burial practices are too dependent on religious beliefs and ideology to be taken as direct reflections of social reality (Parker Pearson, 1982; O’Shea, 1984; Chapman, 2003).

The uncritical reading of the ‘princely’ burials has only served to reinforce long-held assumptions about the hierarchical structure of Iron Age societies (Arnold, 2021: 109–10). Typically, they were conceived as ethnically compact units headed by an aristocracy, archaeologically manifested in the ‘princely’ burials. The growing number of arguments against this simplistic model (e.g. Hill, 2006; Currás & Sastre, 2020a) calls for a reinterpretation of the ‘princely’ burial phenomenon.

The goal of this study is to reexamine the role of exclusionary burial practices in the Late Hallstatt societies of the central Balkans, but from a perspective that considers the entire funerary record (i.e. including ordinary burials) and integrates data relating to settlement hierarchy (Morris, 1987; Mihajlović, 2020). The quality of the evidence is far from ideal but does not preclude applying new approaches to the question of ‘princely’ burials. To this end, I analyse two of the

best-researched groups of such burials in the Balkan Peninsula, Glasinac and Trebenište, compare them to the burial practices of the succeeding centuries, and consider changes in settlement size between the Late Hallstatt and Classical–Hellenistic periods.

### PREMISES

Much has changed in the field of archaeology since Colin Renfrew and colleagues (1974) coined the concepts of group-oriented and individualizing chiefdoms. Evolutionary approaches and static categories in general have been thoroughly criticized and abandoned in many circles, and the scholarly focus has shifted from categorization to the study of processes and agency (Thurston & Fernández-Götz, 2021). Yet, Renfrew's two societal categories are worth revisiting, not least because they still resonate in modern literature (Currás & Sastre, 2020b; Arnold, 2021: 119).

Renfrew's group-oriented and individualizing chiefdoms were inferred from empirical observations of several prehistoric societies and ethnographic parallels. Although these societies share certain characteristics (limited territorial extent and population density, absence of towns and permanent institutions), they exhibit a series of contrasting traits and practices. One distinguishing trait sets them in an opposition to each other: whereas group-oriented societies are characterized by the presence of monumental constructions and the absence of visible status and wealth differences in material culture, most of the wealth in individualizing societies was invested in lavish burials or palaces, items indicating high status, rather than in major communal undertakings. The former are attested among the prehistoric societies of western Europe with their megalithic architecture, while the latter in the Bronze Age Aegean

or Iron Age Europe, best-known for their palaces and 'princely' burials.

There is an unconcealed evolutionism in this perspective (Thurston & Fernández-Götz, 2021: 1–3). Compared to individualizing societies, group-oriented societies are seen at a lower level of economic and technological development. It is the wider range of goods that provided individualizing societies with the material base to convey status and wealth differences. Here, I shall retain the opposition between group-oriented and individualizing societies but discard the evolutionary link, using the two types of society as a conceptual framework to rethink the brief episode of 'princely' burials in the central Balkans during the Late Hallstatt period and the radical social transformations they are thought to imply (Blanton et al., 1996; Arnold, 2021: 119–20).

Most studies of the 'princely' burial phenomenon have adopted an evolutionary perspective, which sees it as the decisive, if not the first, step in the rise of the earliest proto-state societies in the central Balkans. This view does not appear to be fully borne out by the archaeological evidence. On the Glasinac Plateau, the setting of the first 'princely' burials in this region, the 'princely' burial horizon was followed by a period of rapid decline in settlement numbers and burials (Čović, 1987). Here, I argue that the sudden appearance and disappearance of the 'princely' burials was an outcome of the cyclical oscillation of ancient societies between two opposite value systems and ideologies: one espousing strong communal identity and solidarity, and one adopting individual or group status and competition (Morris, 1999: 60–63; Blanton et al., 1996: 8–12).

### CASE STUDIES: GLASINAC AND TREBENIŠTE

Since the defining trait of 'princely' burials is their rich assemblages, it is essential to

examine how this wealth relates to that of the ordinary burials. Ideally, such an analysis should be based on individual cemeteries formed within relatively short timespans (O'Shea, 1984: 14, 30–31) but such cases are not easily found. It seems that most 'princely' burials did not belong to communal cemeteries in the first place, and, among the few exceptions, the material has rarely been published in its entirety.

The Trebenište burial ground near Ohrid (Figure 1) has a long history of investigations, in four episodes of excavations (Stibbe, 2003). This brought to light fifty-six individual burials with complete inventories of grave goods spanning the period between the early sixth and the early fifth centuries BC.

The mound burials on the Glasinac Plateau in eastern Bosnia (Figure 1) (Benac & Čović, 1957; Čović, 1987) consist of numerous small mound cemeteries dated to the Bronze and Iron Ages, scattered over an area of a few hundred square kilometres. The 'princely' burials in these cemeteries cover the period between the middle of the seventh and the beginning of the fifth century BC, a slightly longer timespan than at Trebenište (Govedarica, 2017 has redated some of these burials to the eighth century BC, but this revision creates a chronological conundrum that he did not address). Although the Glasinac material does not come from a single cemetery, it was used by close-knit communities that formed a discrete socio-cultural unit. The published assemblages from the Glasinac Plateau includes ninety-seven burials with more or less completely reconstructed sets of grave goods dated to the 'princely' burial horizon. Unfortunately, most of this material was excavated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, with standards of excavation and recording lagging behind even those of the earliest excavations at Trebenište. A series of

reassessments (Lucentini, 1981; Govedarica, 2017: 40) has, however, largely resolved this issue.

Let us briefly consider the nature of the samples analysed here. The small number of burials per generation indicates that they are not even close to representing the communities to which they belonged (Morris, 1987: 72–95). The question is not to estimate what proportion of the living population is missing, but to decide which segment of this population is likely to have been underrepresented in the Trebenište and Glasinac samples. The history of research at these burial grounds and their specific geoarchaeological contexts may be of help.

Both burial areas were discovered long ago and had long, if intermittent, research histories. This makes it less likely that too many rich burials are missing from our samples, and this is further supported by the lack of evidence of looting. Although the predominant burial forms and the local geoarchaeological circumstances differ, researchers at both sites have observed that the main factor affecting retrieval is exposure rather than burial. The poor burials at Trebenište are shallow, often lying less than 0.2 m below the present-day ground surface and hence more vulnerable to erosion than the rich burials set in pits 2 m deep. The last archaeologists who worked at Trebenište remarked that much of the surface material was probably derived from burials disturbed by erosion and modern land-use (Malenko, 1975; Kuzman, 1985). At Glasinac, there is a positive correlation between the size of the burial mound and the wealth of the burial. Small mounds often do not show any evidence of formal burial. Some scholars have even doubted their being burial mounds (Govedarica, 1978a), but the sparse archaeological material discovered amidst the heaps of cobbles does point to the possibility that



these are the remnants of disturbed, poorly constructed graves.

It would therefore seem that most of the missing burials at Trebenište and Glasinac would have qualified as poor, in terms of construction and grave goods. In addition, we should consider the possibility that certain segments of the population were given a different postmortem treatment and are entirely missing from the mortuary record (Morris, 1987: 97–109). All this leads to the conclusion that the distribution of grave goods across the original population of burials was probably far more uneven than suggested by the available sample.

## METHODOLOGY

The supposed social inequality in our study area, as reflected in the distribution of grave goods in Trebenište and Glasinac (Morris, 1987: 40–43; Mihajlović, 2020), must first be addressed, but poor data and limited space here prevent a discussion of the spatial patterns observed within cemeteries or the construction techniques employed (O'Shea, 1984; Hodson, 1990; Parker Pearson, 1999). Many scholars believe that the range of grave goods in Iron Age burial assemblages represent the personal belongings of the deceased, thus offering some reflection of social inequality (Čović, 1979: 164; Stibbe, 2003). Be that as it may, my goal here is to examine the distribution of wealth among the population of burials, and compare this distribution to data from the non-mortuary realm, not to reconstruct the structure of Late Hallstatt societies.

First, I analyse the distribution of burials across categories defined by the number of grave goods (e.g. poor, ordinary, rich, etc.; Shennan, 1990) but, to gain additional insights into the distribution of burial wealth, I shall also use a well-

established measure of social inequality known as the Gini coefficient. Although originally used to study income distribution in modern societies, the Gini coefficient can be used to index the amplitude of differences in the distribution of virtually any class of objects or attributes (Morris, 1987: 42–43; Smith et al., 2014; Scheidel, 2017). Here, it is specifically used to measure the inequality in the distribution of grave goods as a reflection of funerary ideology, not social inequality.

When calculating this index, it will be necessary to plot the cumulative frequency distributions of grave goods, the so-called Lorenz curves. Because of the small size of our samples, to compare the differences between the resulting Lorenz curves, a two-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (Shennan, 1990: 57–60) will be applied. The number of burials at Trebenište and Glasinac is uneven and, to facilitate comparison, the burial populations are ranked and broken into quartiles, and the quantity of grave goods expressed in percentages.

Because the range of grave goods, especially in the rich Trebenište burials, is bewildering, they must be summarized quantitatively (O'Shea, 1984: 61–63). The simplest way of comparing the wealth of individual burials is to count the number of grave goods in each burial, but this can be misleading, not least because different types of goods often have unequal values—a bronze crater is obviously worth hundreds of bronze pins or pendants. Therefore, the individual artefacts represented at Trebenište and Glasinac have been grouped into general categories and each category weighted by a factor ranging from 0.5 to 4, determined by the quantity and quality of the raw material, and the energy invested in their production (Table 2). Large artefacts and those made of rare or precious materials are valued higher than small artefacts made of bronze, iron, or ceramics. Obviously,

**Table 2.** Rank and weighting of the different categories of grave goods.

Category	Rank	Weighting
Gold	1	× 4
Silver vessels	1	× 4
Bronze vessels	1	× 4
Weapons and armour	1	× 4
Glass and faience	2	× 3
Silver jewellery and accessories	2	× 3
Insignia	2	× 3
Tools and instruments	3	× 1
Bronze jewellery and accessories	3	× 1
Iron jewellery and accessories	3	× 1
Ceramics	3	× 0.5

individual items, not fragments, are counted and for this we must rely on the reconstructions proposed in the publications. Artefacts that appear in very large and loosely determined quantities (amber or glass paste beads) were excluded from the analysis.

This approach not only makes it possible to compare individual graves from the same site but also to see the differential distribution of wealth between burial grounds that belong to different cultural backgrounds or periods. On the downside, the most obvious difficulty is to find a non-arbitrary way of assigning value to the different categories of grave goods. This must take into account not only the physical properties of the artefacts (size, weight, and material) but also the production techniques and the provenance of the objects, which are often elusive. But even if the finely-grained data necessary to make these calculations were available, it would still be impossible to assign a value to the local, symbolic worth of the different artefact types (Parker Pearson, 1993: 207). While I acknowledge these issues, these deficiencies do not necessarily undermine the integrated approach and methodology adopted in this study.

In a final step, I examine the evidence for settlement hierarchy and differential growth outside the realm of mortuary practices (Mihajlović, 2020), shifting the focus onto the data available for settlement size. Comparative, multiperiod, and cross-cultural analyses by economic geographers, anthropologists, and archaeologists have shown that complex and hierarchically organized societies regularly exhibit so-called ‘steep’ settlement hierarchies: a small number of large centres and a progressively greater number of settlements of smaller size and rank (Hanson, 2016). It is most easily visualized as a pyramid, with many settlements at its base and a few or one settlement at the top. This pattern is generated by the uneven distribution of the population and, concomitantly, labour, services, and wealth. By contrast, simple agrarian and poorly integrated societies usually have so-called ‘shallow’ hierarchies, that is, although there are differences in size between individual settlements, these are negligible and cannot be assigned to distinct size categories (Currás & Sastre, 2020b). These slight variations are related to the variable productivity of the respective settlements or the success of individual communities at exploiting their environments and increasing their numbers, not to their status and role in society.

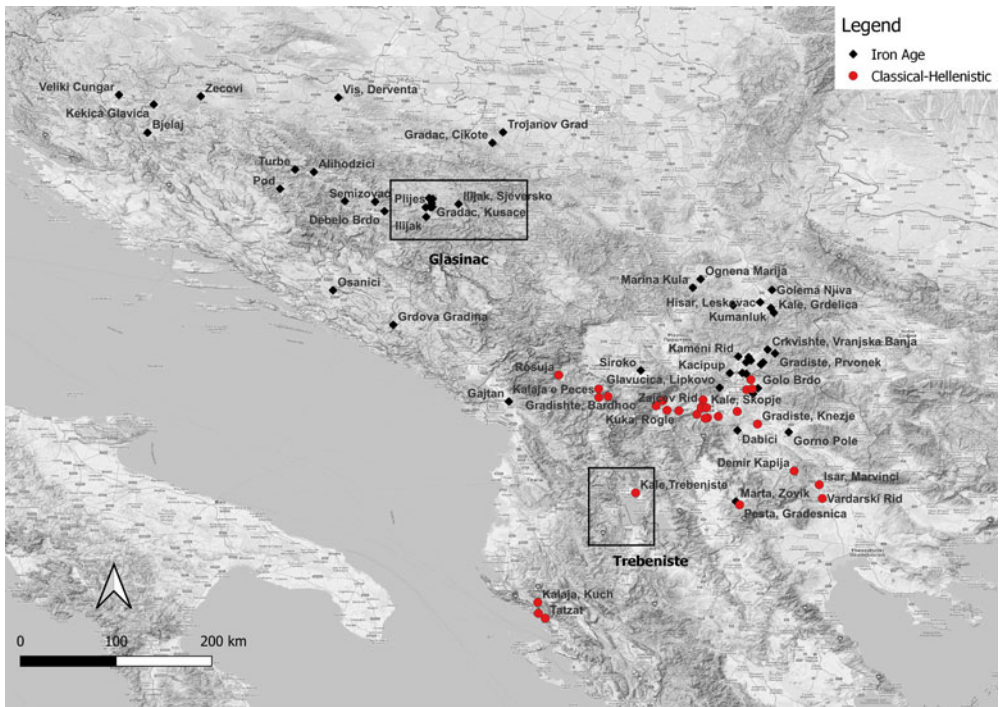
Starting with this premise, data were collected for the size of seventy-three settlements dated to the Late Hallstatt period and for thirty settlements dated to the Classical–Hellenistic period (Table 3). Although known mainly from limited excavations and surveys, the artefact assemblages suggest that these sites were permanently occupied. Only a few can be linked to specific ‘princely’ burials, but all are located in the same general area (Figure 2). Most are fortified hilltops, and the size estimates, extracted from plans or satellite images, generally refer to their walled areas. This is not without problems

**Table 3.** Sources used for assessing settlement size.

North Macedonia	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Serbia
Mikulčič, 1966c	Jubani & Ceka, 1971	Čović, 1965	Garašanin, 1973
Mikulčič, 1982a	Islami, 1972	Benac, 1975	Stojić, 1988
Mikulčič, 1982b	Ceka, 1985	Govedarica, 1978b	Stojić, 1997
Mikulčič, 1988	Përzhita, 1989	Čović, 1979	Stojić & Čadenović, 2006
Sokolovska, 1986	Përzhita, 1993		Bulatović, 2007
Georgiev, 1991	Cabanes et al., 2008		Bulatović & Jović, 2010
Georgievski, 1993			
Koco et al., 1996			
Mitrevski et al., 2005			
Matthews & Neidinger, 2014			
Donev et al., 2017			

because, in most cases, the construction date of the enclosure is unknown. Nonetheless, because there is very little evidence that the Late Hallstatt hilltop settlements extended beyond their ramparts, it is

likely that size estimates are roughly accurate or slightly higher. This changed in the Classical–Hellenistic period, with evidence of settlements spreading beyond their defences at several sites.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Late Hallstatt and Classical–Hellenistic settlements in the central Balkans.



## GLASINAC AND TREBENIŠTE COMPARED

The differences between the elite burials in these two sites have long been noted in the scholarly literature (Babić & Palavestra, 2018: 192). Although unaware of the elite burials in the Western Morava Basin at the time, Benac and Čović (1957: 31; Čović, 1979: 163–64) felt compelled to qualify their use of the epithet ‘princely’ for the rich burials on the Glasinac Plateau. They even suggested the label ‘proto-princely’ to indicate their similarity with the preceding horizon of warrior burials and their unimpressive assemblages relative to the other ‘princely’ burials then known (Govedarica, 2017: 59–60). The Trebenište burials not only contain a much wider range of artefacts than the Glasinac burials (gold is absent there) but also a greater number of imports and larger and more expensive items. The two burial grounds also differ in the number of rich burials (Babić, 2004: 72–75). Trebenište, like some other contemporary cemeteries in Macedonia, contains multiple elite burials—about a dozen—whereas most ‘princely’ burials to the north, including those on the Glasinac Plateau, appear isolated or in small groups (Chrysostomou & Chrysostomou, 2012).

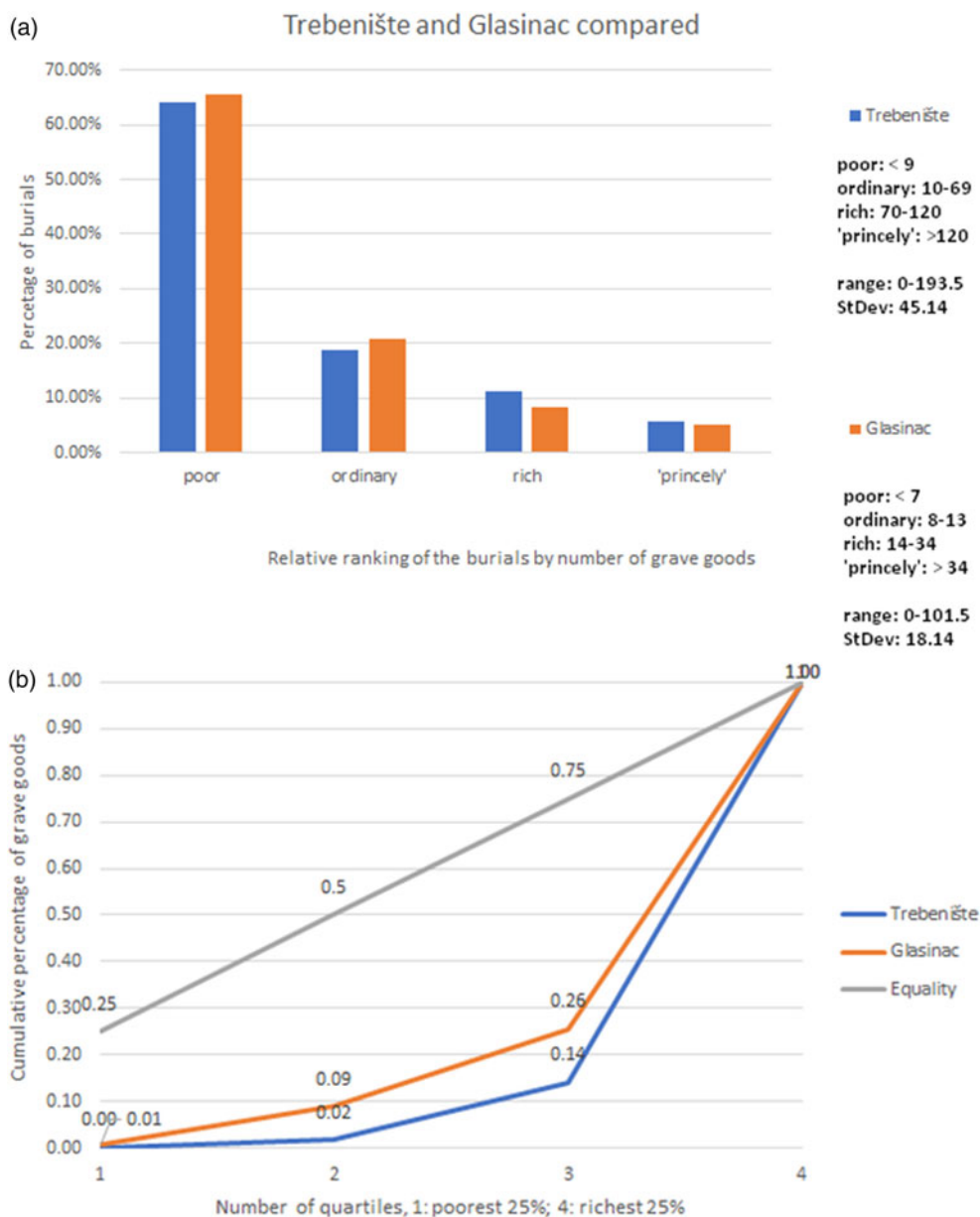
However, the differences between these two burial grounds are hardly apparent from the distribution of individual burials across categories defined by the number of grave goods recovered (Figure 3a). At both sites, the proportion of burials that fall into one of the four classes (poor, ordinary, rich, and ‘princely’) is the same. Note, however, the differences in the absolute quantity of grave goods and the variable spectra of the artefact types between the two cemeteries. At Trebenište, both the data range and the standard deviation are much greater than at Glasinac, suggesting subtler variations in burial wealth at

the latter site. In other words, the rich burials at Trebenište are richer than their counterparts at Glasinac, and these differences can be quantified.

Figure 3b compares the Lorenz curves for the distribution of grave goods at Trebenište and Glasinac. Individual burials are ranked by wealth and divided into quartiles, from poorest to richest. The top line plots the spread of grave goods in an ideal situation, in which each grave has an equal value of grave goods. In short, the steeper the segments of the Lorenz curves, the sharper the differences between individual burials.

The Lorenz curve for Trebenište lies further away from the ideal case than the Glasinac series, although statistically the distance between the two is insignificant (Table 4). At Glasinac, the bottom half of the burials contain nine per cent of all grave goods included in this analysis, whereas at Trebenište, the two bottom quartiles contain only two per cent. The gap between the two series continues to widen, so that at Glasinac the first three quartiles of burials contain slightly over one quarter of all finds while at Trebenište, they hold only fourteen per cent of all grave goods. The richest twenty-five per cent of the burials include seventy-four per cent of all grave goods and offerings at Glasinac, and eighty-six per cent at Trebenište. The different degree of inequality between the two sites is also evident from the Gini coefficients (Table 4).

If these figures have any value as measures of contemporary social, rather than transgenerational or purely symbolic, inequalities, the differences in wealth are remarkable in both societies. These differences must have been even sharper than suggested by the graphs, because the distribution of grave goods is also uneven among the richest quartile of burials.



**Figure 3.** a) The Glasinac and Trebenište burials compared; b) Lorenz curves for the Glasinac and Trebenište burials.

#### COMPARISON WITH FIFTH- TO FOURTH-CENTURY BC CEMETERIES

Notwithstanding some of the qualitative differences between Glasinac and Trebenište, both display similar patterns in the

distribution of grave goods, probably reflecting a common mortuary ideology. The occupants of the Trebenište 'princely' burials were better connected and supplied than their distant counterparts at Glasinac, but this is a different problem. At this stage, I

**Table 4.** Gini coefficients of inequality for the cemeteries analysed and results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests. Grey fields indicate that the null hypothesis is rejected.

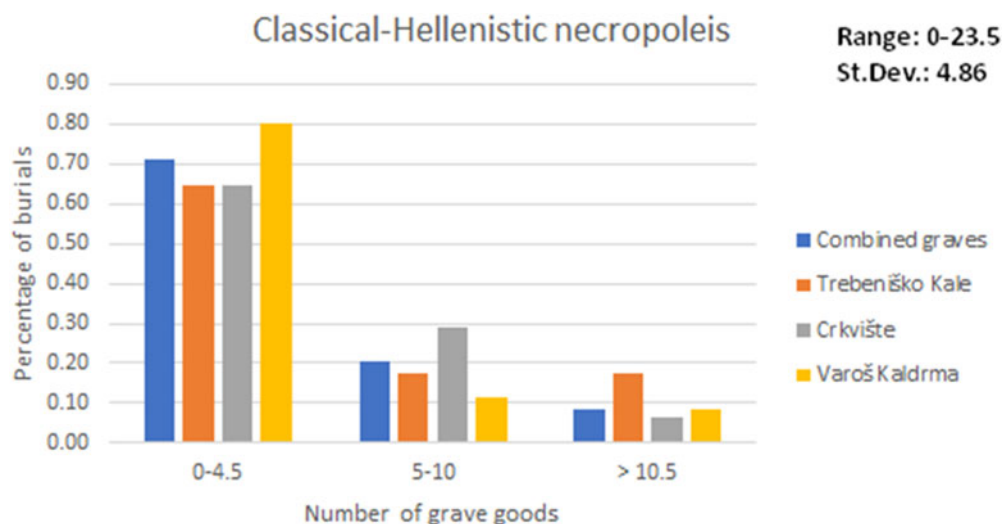
Burial ground	Gini coefficient	
Trebenište	0.735475	
Glasinac	0.662424	
Trebeniško Kale	0.549544	
Crkvište	0.494297	
Varoš-Kaldrma	0.625702	
Combined Late Hallstatt	0.739927	
Combined fifth–fourth century BC	0.570130	
Two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test		
Sites compared	Critical difference	Maximum difference
Trebenište–Glasinac	0.230000	0.11
Trebenište–Trebeniško Kale	0.380000	0.24
Trebenište–Crkvište	0.310000	0.33
Trebenište–Varoš-Kaldrma	0.300000	0.21
Trebenište, combined fifth–fourth century BC	0.240000	0.22
Combined Late Hallstatt and combined fifth–fourth century BC	0.190000	0.2

shall focus on the extent to which these distribution patterns continue into the Classical–Early Hellenistic period, which scholars often see as dominated by proto-state societies (Vranić, 2012).

Finding complete publications of cemeteries from this period that include a sufficiently large number of burials proved challenging. The necropolis at Trebeniško Kale, only a few kilometres north of the Trebenište ‘princely’ burials (Figure 1), is among the few partly excavated sites, but only about twenty graves have been published (Lahtov, 1959). A few burial grounds of this period are known from nearby Pelagonia, but the total number of graves excavated and published does not exceed thirty per cemetery (Crkvište: Mikulčić, 1966a, 1966b; Varoš-Kaldrma: Kitanoski, 1975). These samples are too small to be statistically meaningful, and amalgamating them could introduce other problems. Nevertheless, regardless of whether they are analysed separately or jointly, the deviations from the preceding patterns are obvious.

A first look at the number of burials per categories based on the weighted number of grave goods does not reveal any major differences (Figure 4). With the sole exception of Varoš-Kaldrma the poor burials comprise between sixty and seventy per cent of the total population at each site, echoing the situation in the preceding period. However, the range of grave goods in the Classical–Hellenistic cemeteries is much smaller than in the Late Hallstatt burial grounds and consequently the standard deviation is quite low. In other words, the differences between poor and rich burials were far subtler than in the preceding period, and this is not simply due to the absence of ‘princely’ burials in the Classical–Early Hellenistic cemeteries. Even the richest burials at Crkvište or Kaldrma would have ranked as ordinary among the Trebenište burials.

The differences between the two groups become far more evident once the cumulative distributions of the grave goods are compared (Figure 5a). As in the preceding period, in the Classical–Hellenistic cemeteries, the



**Figure 4.** *Distribution of burials by categories at Classical–Early Hellenistic cemeteries.*

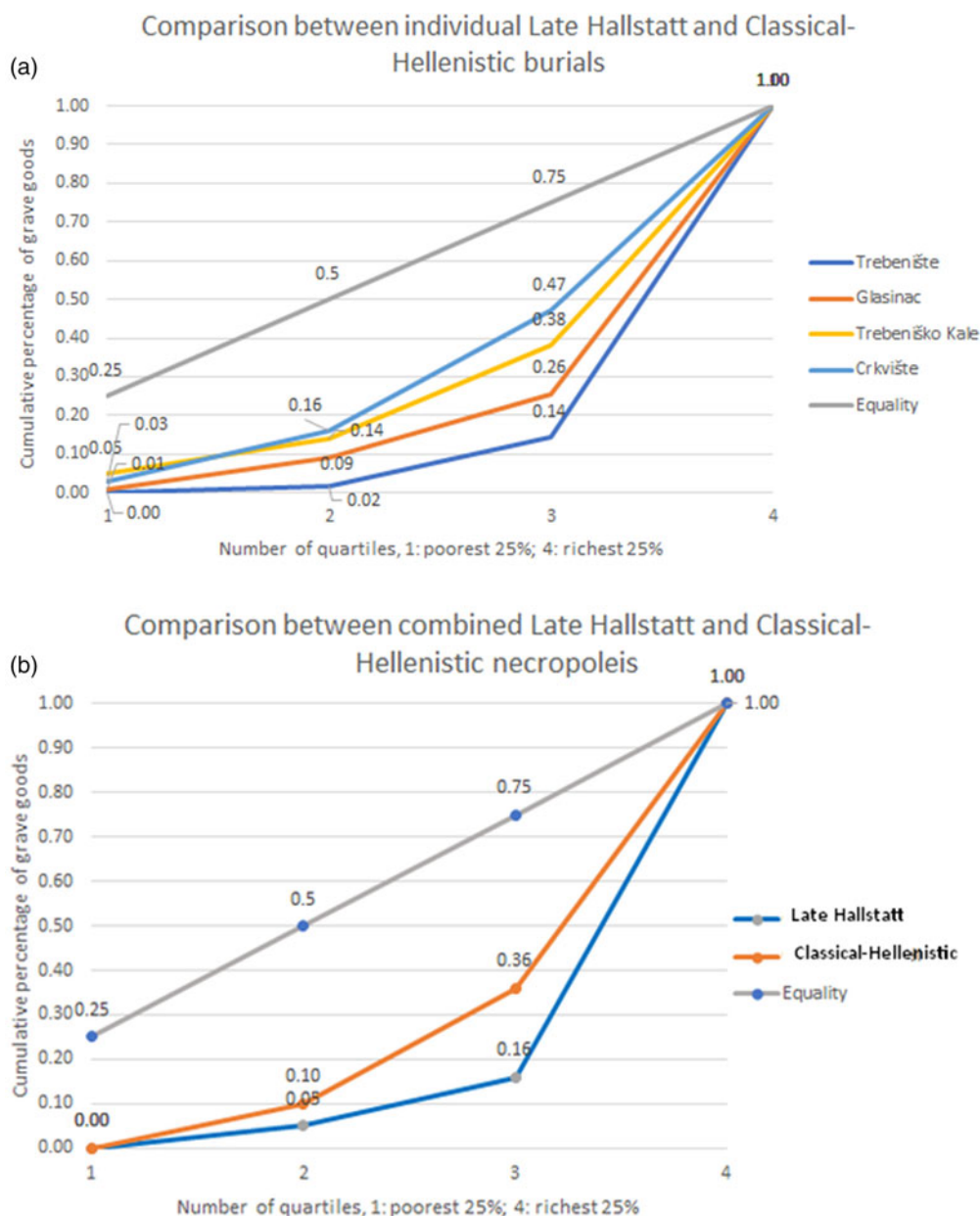
poorest quartile of burials contains less than one per cent of the total corpus of grave goods but, by the second quartile, the proportion of grave goods rises above ten per cent, whereas at Glasinac and Trebenište it stays below this threshold. In all Classical–Early Hellenistic cemeteries analysed here, the proportion of grave goods is greater than thirty per cent by the third quartile, reaching over forty-five per cent at the necropolis of Kaldra. By contrast, in Glasinac and Trebenište, the bottom three quarters contained less than one quarter of the total number of grave goods. Consequently, the resulting curves lie much closer to the Lorenz curve for uniformly distributed grave goods than the corresponding curves for Glasinac and Trebenište. Whether taken separately or jointly, Trebeniško Kale, Crkvište, and Kaldra have lower Gini coefficients than the Late Hallstatt cemeteries (Table 4). The samples are obviously too small for statistical testing, but when the cumulative distribution of grave goods from Crkvište is compared to the data series for Trebenište with the help of a two-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the differences are significant at a significance level of 0.05. The same holds true for the

Lorenz curves for the combined Late Hallstatt and Classical–Hellenistic cemeteries (Table 4; Figure 5b).

Despite the small sample size, the changing trends in the distribution of grave goods between these two periods are evident. The mortuary practices in the period that followed the ‘princely’ burials horizon were marked by a relative restraint, at least in the archaeologically visible spectrum of the funerary rites. However, this trend is open to different interpretation, as it is unclear whether these changes in funerary ideology reflect changes in religious beliefs or have wider social implications.

### SETTLEMENT SIZE

The most straightforward way to examine the presence of settlement hierarchies is to compare the number of settlements per size range (Figure 6a), but this is potentially misleading given the differences in the range of sizes of settlements in these two periods; namely, the Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements have a much greater

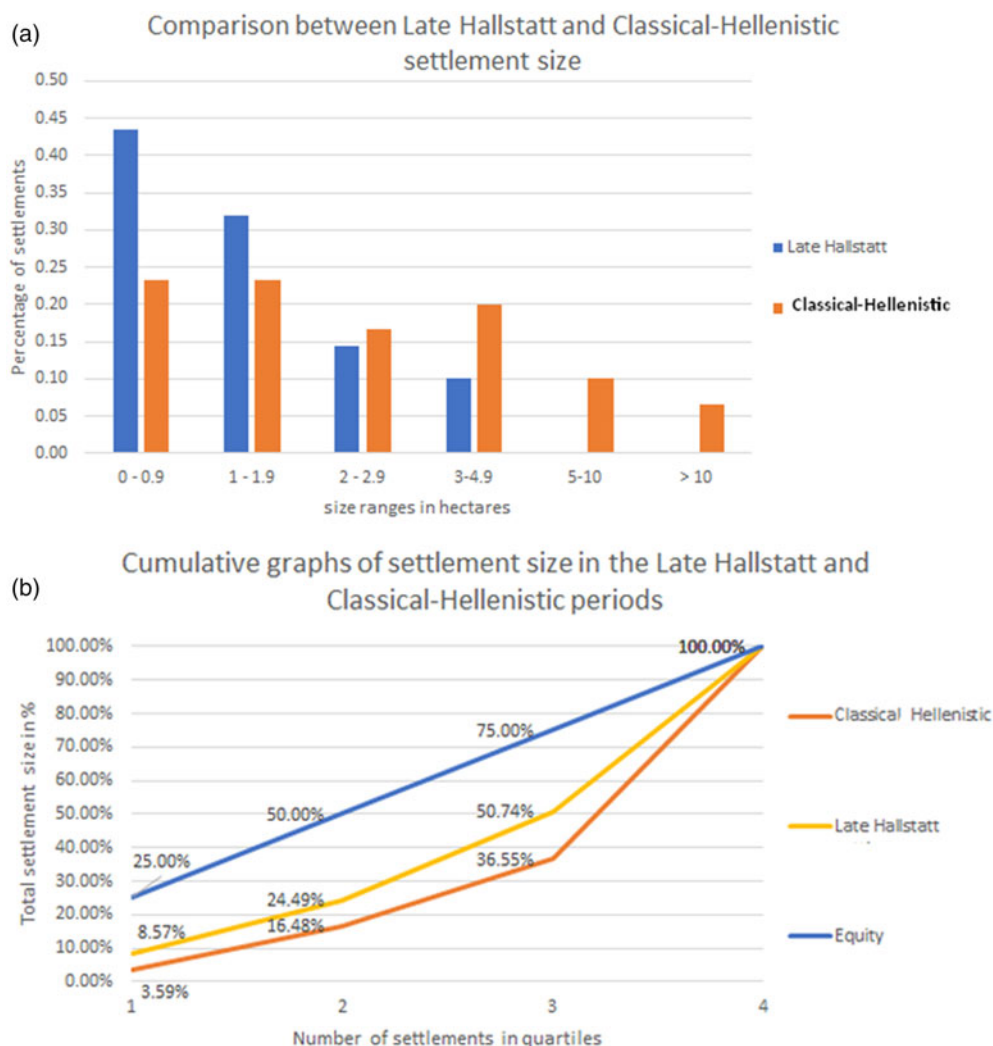


**Figure 5.** a) Lorenz curves for individual Late Hallstatt and Classical–Early Hellenistic cemeteries; b) Lorenz curves for the combined Late Hallstatt and Classical–Early Hellenistic cemeteries.

range of sizes than those of the Late Hallstatt settlements. The latter range between 0.2 and 4 ha, the former between 0.2 and 20 ha. Whereas, most Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements fall within the same range as the Late Hallstatt

settlements, five sites, or less than twenty per cent of the Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements, are two to three times larger than the largest Late Hallstatt settlements and they belong to a settlement tier that was absent in the previous period.





**Figure 6.** a) Comparison of size ranges of Late Hallstatt and Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements; b) cumulative graphs for settlement size in the Late Hallstatt and Classical–Early Hellenistic periods.

This is manifest in the cumulative graphs for settlement size (Figure 6b). The contribution of each quartile of Late Hallstatt settlements to the total settlement area is consistently greater than the contribution of the respective quartiles of the Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements, but this difference is most pronounced in the top quarter of settlements. The top quartile of the Late Hallstatt settlements accounts for one half of the total settlement area,

whereas the Classical–Early Hellenistic settlements of corresponding rank account for almost two-thirds of the total settlement area. Consequently, the cumulative curve for the Late Hallstatt settlements is closer to the distribution of settlements of equal size than the cumulative curve for the Classical–Hellenistic settlements.

The difference in settlement size among the Late Hallstatt settlements is negligible and determined primarily by factors such as

the local topography or agricultural productivity. Only in the Classical–Early Hellenistic period is there a true differential growth, with a small group of settlements rising to dominate the system. These differences in settlement size cannot be attributed to local environmental conditions. Their scale is such that they were likely to have been caused by social factors leading to the preferential concentration of people and wealth in a few settlements.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present analysis reveals two opposing trends in the mortuary and settlement records of the Late Hallstatt and the Classical–Early Hellenistic central Balkans. Whereas the mortuary record from the fifth–fourth century BC shows a decrease in the sharp inequalities in the distribution of grave goods that marked the ‘princely’ burials horizon, the data for settlement size in the same period point to an emergent differential growth. In the Late Hallstatt period, it is impossible to detect even the faintest expression of social inequality outside the realm of mortuary practices. If we were to judge by settlement size only, the Late Hallstatt Balkan societies would not have differed from their Neolithic predecessors (Perlès, 2001).

It can be objected that, by shifting the focus from burials to settlements, the scale of the analysis changed from individual or small groups of neighbouring communities to larger areas, but this is no way detrimental to my argument. On the contrary, it highlights the key difference between the Late Hallstatt and Classical–Hellenistic periods. During the ‘princely’ burial horizon, wealth was consumed in funerary rites, a practice that can be seen as either a sign of local competition or as a mechanism for removing the material aspects of inequality from the living

society and maintaining the old social order (Bradley, 1982; Arnold, 2021: 108). There are few other indicators of institutional or inter generational elite structures. This would suggest that the ‘princely’ burials were not part of a process of increasing social complexity, but emerged from older social structures that resisted interpersonal and intergenerational inequality and eliminated wealth through funerary deposition.

The real changes started to take hold in the fifth–fourth century BC, but only in the southern parts of the study area. In addition to the nascent settlement hierarchy, it is useful to point to a few other indicators of a growing social complexity, not necessarily hierarchical yet (Härke, 1982; Vranić, 2012; Fernández-Götz & Ralston, 2017). The first written references to organized polities and their rulers in our region do not predate the fifth century BC. This coincides with the first appearance of coins and masonry in the Balkan interior. The settlement record in general is far more palpable than in the preceding period, with evidence of specialized production at several sites. Perhaps the most symptomatic change is the presence of imported goods in the settlement assemblages, a category that had previously been strictly confined to burials and hoards. The material that was once associated exclusively with elite burials and possibly served to underline the social position of the deceased had lost much of its symbolic power and was used and discarded in everyday life.

The reduction in inequality reflected in the burial record should be seen as another symptom of the great transformations of the central Balkan societies after the end of the Hallstatt period. Their ideology and value system, the old ethos that defines individualizing societies, were gradually replaced by new beliefs and practices more at home among group-oriented societies.

This shift cannot be attributed to a hypothetical decline or social reforms in the period that followed the ‘princely’ burials horizon. The parallel analysis of the mortuary and settlement data presented here does not reveal stable social hierarchies in the Late Hallstatt period. As for the archaeological record relating to the fifth–fourth century BC, it can neither be qualified as impoverished nor does it hint at the emergence of a more egalitarian society. On the contrary, as noted long ago by Childe (1945: 17) and Bradley (1982: 120), the rise of supra-local polities, with formal hierarchies and permanent institutions, would have rendered earlier rules and practices of legitimizing or nullifying social inequality redundant or even subversive to the new order.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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## Les sépultures princières des Balkans du centre dans leur contexte

*Même si l'on accepte que les sépultures « princières » du Hallstatt final marquent l'émergence des premières sociétés complexes dans les Balkans du centre, la question mérite un traitement plus nuancé. L'auteur de cet article examine le phénomène des sépultures « princières » dans l'optique d'une opposition entre les sociétés communautaires et les sociétés individualistes tout en reconnaissant que les sépultures sont tout autant une affirmation idéologique qu'un reflet du tissu social. Dans ce cadre théorique, il présente deux groupes de sépultures « princières » situées en Macédoine du Nord et en Bosnie et les compare à d'autres contextes funéraires contemporains et plus récents ainsi qu'à la taille des habitats du Hallstatt final et des époques classiques et hellénistiques. Cette analyse révèle que l'inégalité des ensembles funéraires des sépultures « princières » du Hallstatt final diminue au cours des Ve et IVe siècles av. J.-C. tandis que la surface des habitats des époques classiques et hellénistiques augment, ce qui indiquerait une différenciation croissante.* Translation by Madeleine Hummler

*Mots-clés:* sépultures « princières », Balkans du centre, Hallstatt final, courbes de Lorenz, hiérarchie des habitats

## Die Fürstengräber des Zentralbalkans in Kontext

*Auch wenn allgemein angenommen wird, dass die „Fürstengräber“ die ersten komplexen Gesellschaften im Zentralbalkan ankündigte, kann die Frage auf differenzierter Weise behandelt werden. In diesem Artikel erforscht der Verfasser das „Fürstengräber“-Phänomen angesichts des Gegensatzes zwischen gemeinschaftlichen und individualistischen Gesellschaften, obwohl diese Gräber eindeutig ebenso viel eine ideologische Aussage als eine Widerspiegelung der sozialen Struktur darstellen. Auf dieser theoretischen Grundlage untersucht er zwei Gruppen von „Fürstengräber“ in Nordmazedonien und Bosnien in Zusammenhang mit zeitgenössischen und jüngeren Gräbern und in Bezug auf die Größe der späthallstattzeitlichen und klassischen-hellenistischen Siedlungen. Die Analyse zeigt, dass die Ungleichheit der späthallstattzeitlichen „Fürstengräber“ im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert abnimmt und der Umfang der klassischen-hellenistischen Siedlungen hingegen zunimmt, was auf eine wachsende Differenzierung deutet. Translation by Madeleine Hummler*

*Stichworte:* „Fürstengräber“, Zentralbalkan, Späthallstattzeit, Lorenz-Kurven, Siedlungshierarchie