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New findings and problems in studying marble (*stecaks*) from the territory of Serbia

Summary

Only a couple of graveyards with marbles recorded as *stecaks* necropolises went through probe archeological excavations in the last decade in the area of western Serbia, which is in professional and scientific circles marked as the territory of *stecaks*. Among them there are three necropolises carrying the same toponym in the name - *Mramorje* - in Middle Podrinje (Municipality of Bajina Basta), map 2, images 1-7. Results of their excavations, as well as for the first time published results of earlier excavations of two necropolises with marbles in Donje Polimlje (Municipality of Priboj) in southwestern Serbia (images 8-10) offered new insights and confirmation of the earlier in terms of the form of burial, dating and existence of the Church next to the graveyard with typical late medieval forms of monuments. At the same time they renewed the issues around studying *stecaks* from Serbia, which appeared with adopting of that term for **all** tombstone monoliths in Bosnia and Herzegovina that were being studied as a special "type" of monuments in relation to the monuments in the region. The result of this was that all graveyards in Serbia which contained gabled tombstone were treated as *stecaks* necropolises (map 1), while only some of the numerous tombstones of other forms but from the same period were classified as *stecaks*. Others with the same form were not classified in that way, although there is an obvious similarity between them especially in regards to ornaments, content of epitaphs or the form of burial. Those are numerous registered monuments in the form of boards, low coffins and butts and their variant forms from the village graveyards or graveyards formed next to church buildings, some feudal endowments and many monastery churches from the entire territory of Serbia, which were studied without comparison to phenomena related to *stecaks*.

According to the last listing (1996) 4.118 medieval tombstone monoliths (from 203 sites) labelled by the term *stecak* come from the territory of Serbia. That is not even close to the real number of tombstones in Serbia due to the above mentioned reasons. Discoveries of the new monuments and locations with medieval tombstones in the systematic surveys conducted in the entire territory of Serbia (images 11-16), showed that among them there were types of tombstones specific for certain regions, but also those which could be connected to *stecaks* according to certain elements. They pointed out the necessity of systematic registration and establishment of the unique typology of the monument forms in the entire territory of central Balkan, which should be treated under the **general** determinant of the medieval tombstones characteristics. They also draw attention to the necessity of archaeological excavations under marbles and including interdisciplinary research, as well as reviewing the justification of not only the categorizations through which *stecaks* entered into science but also of the term *stecak*.

Keywords: Serbia; graveyards; *stecaks* or marbles of different forms; late Middle Ages.