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A NEW TYPE OF EARLY IRON AGE FIBULA FROM ALBANIA AND NORTHWEST GREECE

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# A NEW TYPE OF EARLY IRON AGE FIBULA FROM ALBANIA AND NORTHWEST GREECE

## ABSTRACT

This article presents a hitherto unknown type of Early Iron Age fibula from Lofkënd in Albania, together with related examples from Kënet in northeastern Albania and Liatovouni in northwestern Greece. Dubbed the “Lofkënd type,” this group of fibulae can be securely dated to the late 10th or 9th century B.C. The author discusses the evidence provided by archaeological context, as well as the date, distribution, and cultural affinities of the new type.

An idiosyncratic and previously unknown type of Early Iron Age fibula is presented in this article. Two examples of the type were found among the prehistoric burials in a tumulus at Lofkënd in southern Albania, and a third, fragmentary, example in an Early Iron Age tumulus at Kënet (Kënetës) in northern Albania. A fourth example, also very fragmentary, comes from the recently excavated Molossian cemetery at Liatovouni at the confluence of the Aoös and Voidomatis rivers in Epirus, near Konitsa, in northwestern Greece.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the fragmentary example from Liatovouni, preserving

1. The Lofkënd and Liatovouni sites have been published only in preliminary reports and shorter papers dealing with specific aspects of each site: for Lofkënd, see Morris 2006; Papadopoulos 2006; Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, 2008; for Liatovouni, see Douzougli 1996. For the tumulus at Kënet, see Jubani 1983, pp. 84, 123, pl. III, tumulus I, no. 29.

My thanks are due to the Lofkënd team members for their assistance in various matters connected with this article, not least to my codirectors, Sarah Morris and Lorenc Bejko, and, in particular, to Ilir Zalosnjaja for the object drawings, Max Farrar and Samantha Martin-McAuliffe for the tomb drawings, Stanislav Parfenov and Chris Johanson of the UCLA Experi-

ential Technology Center for the map (Fig. 1), Rich and Anna MacDonald for their photography, Alket Islami for the aerial photograph of Lofkënd (Fig. 2), and Vanessa Muros for overseeing the conservation of the Lofkënd finds from 2006 to 2008. I am especially grateful to my collaborator in the publication of the small finds from Lofkënd, Roven Kurti, who also generously provided the photograph of the fibula fragment from Kënet (Fig. 7). My thanks, too, to Esmeralda Agolli for her assistance in translating Albanian site reports. In the preparation of this paper I have referred to information that will be published in greater detail in the forthcoming final report of the excavation at Lofkënd, especially the chapter by Lynne Schepartz on the

bioarchaeology of the tumulus. For providing access to the material from Liatovouni, I am grateful to Angelika Douzougli and Konstantinos Zachos, who also provided the drawing of the Liatovouni fragmentary fibula (Fig. 8); the cemetery at Liatovouni is currently being studied for publication by Douzougli and myself. Finally, I wish to thank Skender Aliu, Lorenc Bejko, and Muzafer Korkuti for many hours of fruitful discussion on the archaeology of Albania. It was Professor Korkuti who suggested that I publish the Lofkënd fibula type separately as an article. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous *Hesperia* referees for a number of useful suggestions that have greatly improved this article.

only the catchplate, was so unusual that it was not originally identified as being from a fibula, and its form was only recognized once the more complete examples from Lofkënd came to light; the same is true for the fragmentary example from Kënet.

Following a brief overview of the excavations at Lofkënd, the new type of fibula is fully described, and the evidence of its context, date, and cultural affinities is assessed, in order to encourage the identification and publication of further examples. A further aim of this article is to draw attention to the important river “corridors” of Albania and northwest Greece—particularly the Aoös/Vjosë river valley—as a conduit for the movement of people, commodities, and ideas, not only in the historical period, when the importance of these rivers is well documented, but in prehistory as well.

## EXCAVATIONS AT LOFKËND

Excavations at the prehistoric burial tumulus of Lofkënd in Albania were begun in 2004 as a collaboration of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences at Tirana, and the International Center for Albanian Archaeology. The tumulus lies in the Mallakastër hills, which rise to the southeast of the modern regional center of Fier, not far from the village of Lofkënd (Fig. 1). Despite its relatively small size (20.54 × 10.54 m) and the fact that it is located only some 350 m above sea level, the Lofkënd tumulus dominates a hilly and riverine landscape and is visible from a considerable distance (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup>

The choice of site and the overall aims of the archaeological project at Lofkënd are described in detail elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> It was anticipated that the exploration of a major site in this region predating and partly overlapping in time both the foundation of the Greek colonies on the coast (Apollonia and Epidamnos) and the so-called proto-urban centers of the hinterland (such as Margëlliç, Mashkëzë, Byllis, and Klos/Nikaia) would lead to a better understanding of the historical processes that contributed to the rise of urbanism in Illyria.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the careful excavation of an ostensibly undisturbed burial tumulus such as Lofkënd has provided much new information on the processes of tumulus formation and construction, as well as interesting evidence for a more complex relationship with both the proto-urban centers and the colonies than was hitherto suspected. The excavations have also produced much new data on prehistoric and protohistoric mortuary customs in this part of Albania.

2. Papadopoulos 2006; Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, pp. 105–112; 2008.

3. Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007.

4. Apollonia and Epidamnos are the only examples in Albania of Greek

colonies in the true sense, i.e., formal *apoikiai* of a sponsoring *metropolis*, or mother-city: see Graham 1964, esp. pp. 26–27, 130–132, 149–151; Hammond 1967, pp. 425–426, as well as pp. 134, 470–471, 515. For Apollonia, see van Compernelle 1953, p. 56;

Stocker and Davis 2006; Dimo, Lenhardt, and Quantin 2007; for Epidamnos, Davis et al. 2003 is indispensable. For bibliography on the Illyrian sites, see Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, pp. 108–110, nn. 3–5, 8, 13.

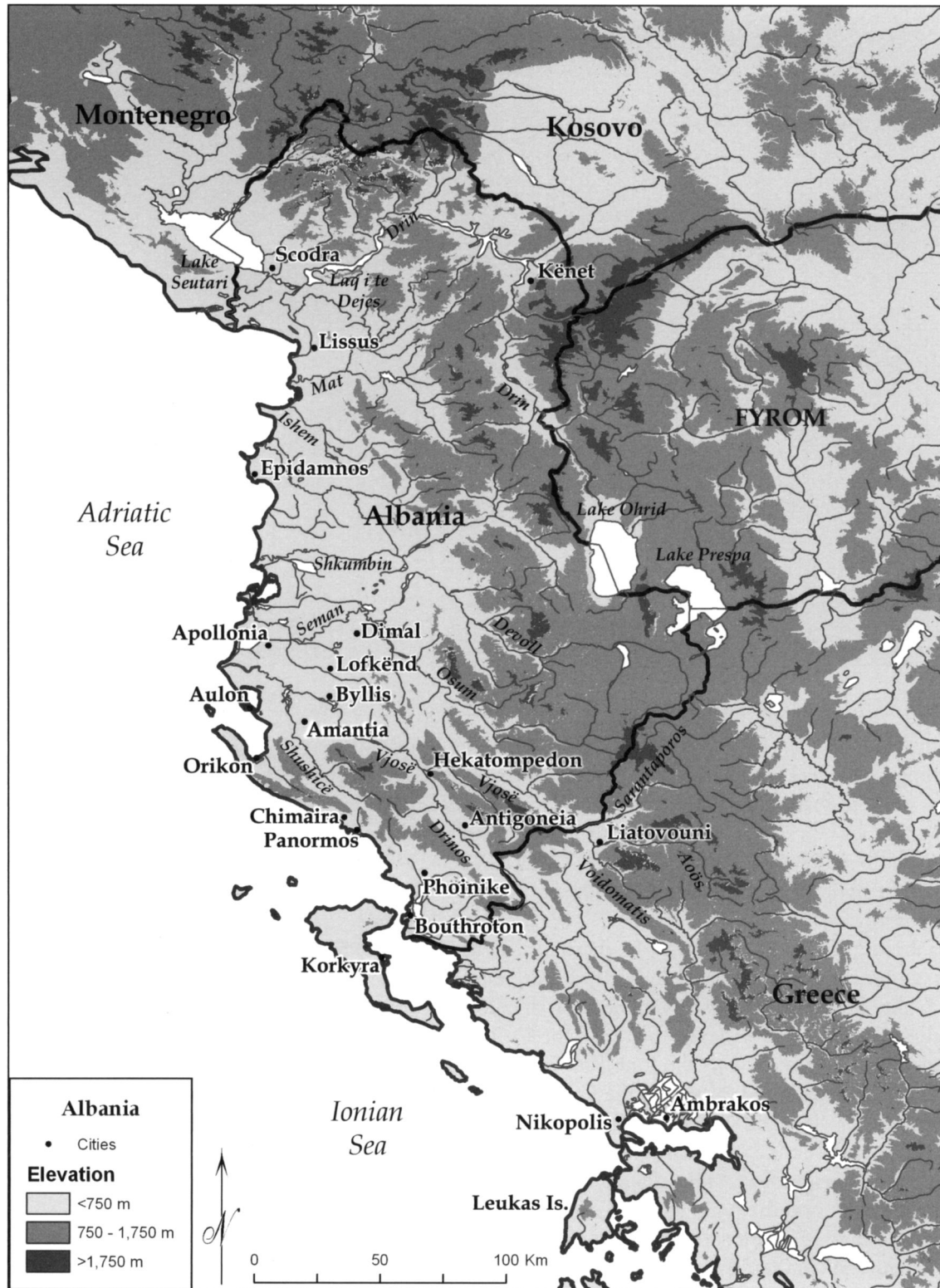


Figure 1. Map of Albania and surrounding regions of southeastern Europe. S. Parfenov and C. Johanson





Figure 2. Aerial view of the Lofkënd tumulus at the conclusion of the 2005 season. Photo A. Islami

By the conclusion of the final season of excavations in 2007, a total of 100 graves had been recorded and cleared, many of them multiple burials containing two, three, or sometimes more individuals; in total the skeletal remains of more than 150 individuals were recovered.<sup>5</sup> All of the graves were inhumations except for two cremations; among the many burials, one is illustrated here by way of example: tomb XXXVIII (grave 79), which contained an inhumed adult male aged 30–40 years at death and a cremated adult, probably female (Fig. 3).

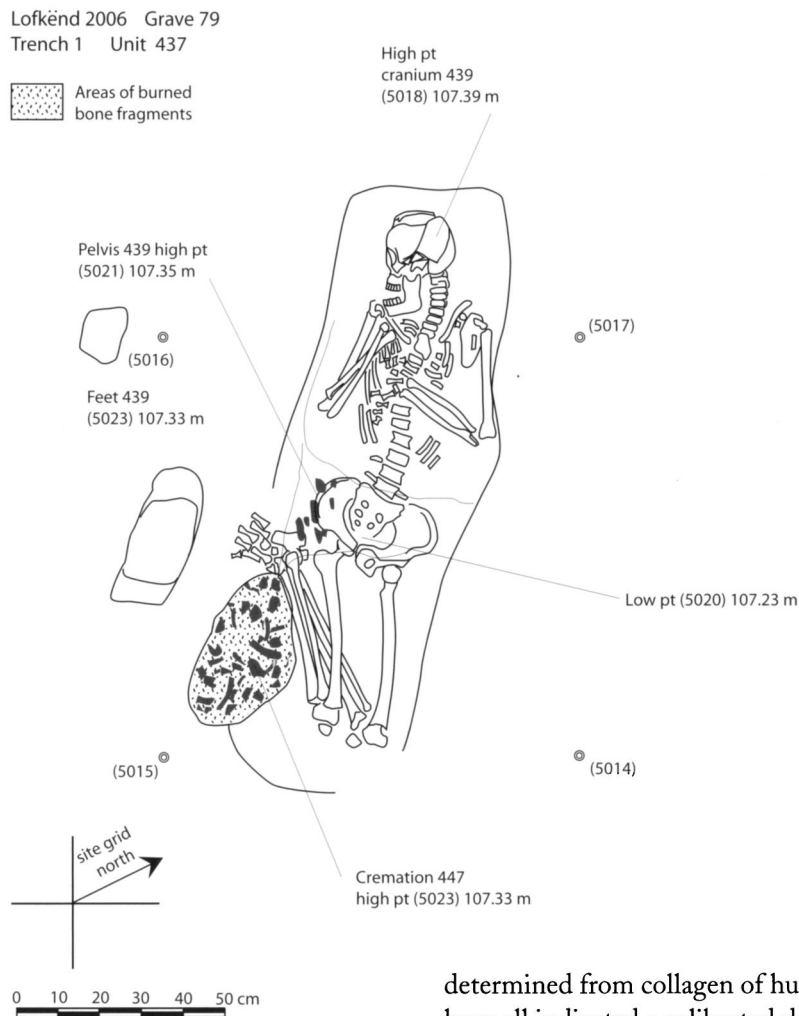
Calibrated AMS <sup>14</sup>C dates from 16 charcoal samples and 20 human bone samples from the site, carried out by Brian Damiata at the Keck AMS facility at the University of California, Irvine, have indicated that the earliest burials can be assigned to at least the 14th century B.C.—that is, they are contemporary with the Late Bronze Age or Mycenaean era in Greece, and more specifically with the Late Helladic IIIA1 and IIIB period in the Aegean—and that the latest graves all cluster around the late 9th or, perhaps, the early 8th century B.C. In addition to the 85 prehistoric burials, some ancient activity at the mound may be traced into the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., and the tumulus was reused for burials in the modern era, at which time 15 infant (mostly perinatal) and several adult inhumations were interred in the northeast sector of the mound.<sup>6</sup> AMS <sup>14</sup>C dates

5. The physical anthropologist of the project is Lynne Schepartz; all anthropological identifications are hers.

6. Because of their prominence in the landscape, many prehistoric mounds—not only burial tumuli but also settlement mounds (*toumbes* or

*magoules* in Greece)—have seen later use as burial grounds. Late burials were discovered in the tumulus complex (tumuli 9, 10, and 11) at Apollonia, and in several prehistoric settlement mounds in Greece and Turkey. In his publication of the prehistoric mound

at Zygouries in the valley of Kleonai in the Peloponnese, Carl Blegen (1928, p. 39) noted the existence of seven graves at various points within the settlement, three of which appeared to date from Byzantine or later times. Similar late burials, nine in all, were



**Figure 3.** Lofkënd tomb XXXVIII (grave 79), containing an inhumed adult male and a cremated adult, probably female. Drawing M. Farrar and S. Martin-McAuliffe; photo R. MacDonald

determined from collagen of human bone samples from these later tombs have all indicated a calibrated date between A.D. 1800 and 1810, but with a broad range of  $\pm 127$ –155 years. Full details of the AMS  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating are provided elsewhere, as is the project of reconstructing the tumulus, for which some 2,000 mud bricks were made from the soil of the tumulus in order to rebuild the excavation balks, which subsequently served as a framework to contain the earth.<sup>7</sup>

Finds deposited in the prehistoric tombs include whole vessels of various types of handmade wares common in southern Illyria and northwest Greece, including matt-painted pottery; a broad array of bronze, iron, gold, bimetallic, and bone jewelry, including dress and hair pins, fibulae, headbands (often referred to as “diadems” in the literature), and other

uncovered in the central area of the Neolithic and Bronze Age low settlement mound of Sitagroi in northeast Greece (see Renfrew, Gimbutas, and Elster 1986, pp. 182–184). As was the case with the three late burials at Zygouries, all of the skeletons at Sitagroi were oriented east to west, heads to the west, facing east; their date is uncertain, but the excavators judiciously noted an Iron Age date, probably well after Classical antiquity (Renfrew, Gimbutas,

and Elster 1986, pp. 182–184, pl. XVII, nos. 1, 2). Certainly the few items of personal ornament associated with some of the Sitagroi tombs look Late Byzantine or post-Byzantine (see esp. Renfrew, Gimbutas, and Elster 1986, pls. XVIII, XIX). A solitary late burial, described as a “mittelalterliche Grabfund” (Hänsel 1987) and more fully equipped with grave goods, was uncovered in the northwest portion of the excavations at Kastanas in Mace-

donia. As was the case at Zygouries and Sitagroi, the skeleton was oriented east to west, head to the west, facing east, the same orientation as the late burials at Lofkënd (see Hänsel 1987, p. 113).

7. For the AMS  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating, see Damiata et al., forthcoming; for the reconstruction of the tumulus, see Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2008.

head ornaments; and beads of glass, faience, iron, and semiprecious stone.<sup>8</sup> Common among the fibulae, particularly in bronze, are well-known types such as the ubiquitous “spectacle” fibulae of southern Europe,<sup>9</sup> and the type generically referred to as “Schlangenfibeln” in German, of which numerous examples were noted early on from Late Bronze and Early Iron Age sites in Sicily and southern Italy.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the iron fibulae from Lofkënd include a few types that are either extremely rare or not attested at all in other parts of the Balkans or in Europe more generally.

A full typology of the Lofkënd fibulae will appear in the final publication of the site. The aim of this article is to present one of the most idiosyncratic types among the iron fibulae from the site. Given the nature of the type, and the fact that the iron in all of the extant examples is heavily corroded, it seems best to begin with the contextual evidence from the Lofkënd excavations and the information pertaining to the date of the fibulae before presenting a detailed description of the type and a discussion of its distribution (limited as it is currently) and its cultural affinities.

## CONTEXT, DESCRIPTION, AND DATE OF THE LOFKËND FIBULAE

The two fibulae from Lofkënd were found in tomb LV (grave 53) and tomb LXV (grave 30). Both were pit tombs containing a single inhumation. Tomb LV was the northeasternmost of all the prehistoric burials in the tumulus. The skeleton was found in a very poor state of preservation, the bones fragmented and splintering; the condition was in part due to the proximity of the tomb to both the edge of the tumulus and the modern surface. All that survived of the deceased were parts of the cranium, arms, and legs belonging to a child aged eight ( $\pm 1$ ) years at death. The body was oriented southeast to northwest ( $120^\circ$ – $130^\circ$ ), with the head to the southeast. Determining the original disposition of the body was difficult, as virtually nothing of the torso or lower arms was preserved. The cranium appeared to have been laid out supine, as the mandible was facing up; the left humerus was by the side of the body and the right arm was probably bent across the torso; the legs were flexed, the knees evidently facing southwest. No clear grave cut or fill was discerned during excavation. The tomb as preserved measured 0.90 m long, 0.24–0.40 m wide, and 0.13 m deep.

8. A small selection of the finds from the first two seasons of excavation is presented in Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007; for the bronze headbands of prehistoric Lofkënd, see most recently Papadopoulos, forthcoming.

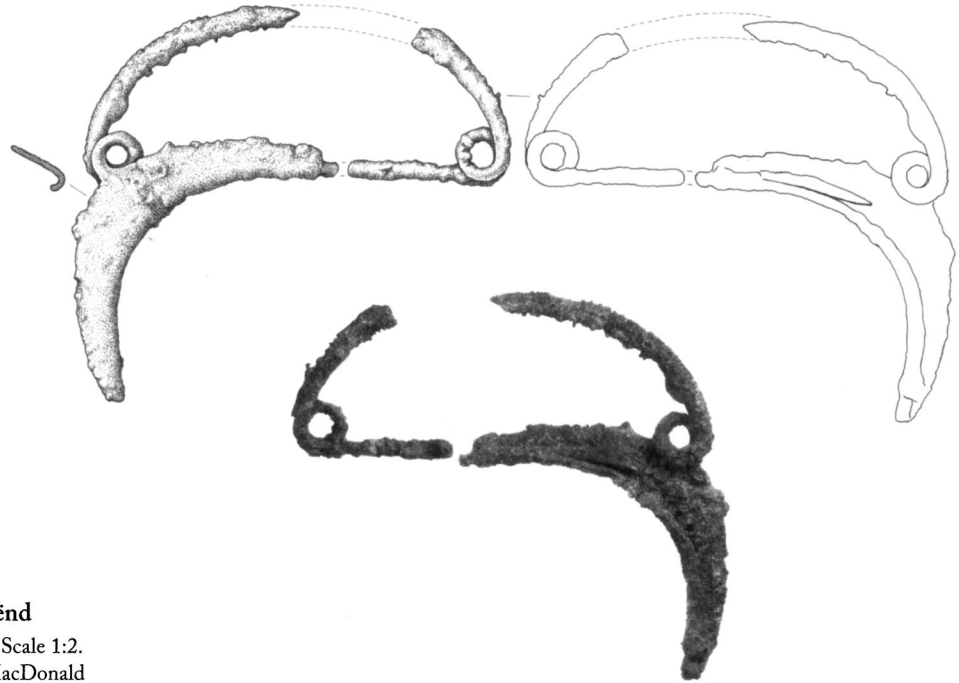
9. For spectacle fibulae, see especially Blinkenberg 1926, pp. 253–262, type XIV (“agrafes en spirales”); Sundwall 1943, pp. 170–176 (“Plattenfibeln”); Benton 1950, 1952; Alexander 1965; Alexander and Hopkins 1982. For

more specific bibliography on spectacle and related fibulae from various parts of Europe, see Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, p. 118, n. 37.

10. See especially Sundwall 1943, pp. 136–169, esp. pp. 136–156; p. 143, figs. 208, 210, 211; p. 150, figs. 225 (D IIß31, Cume), 226 (D IIß38, Pantalica); Philipp 1981, pp. 287–289, nos. 1031–1045. This distinctive type of fibula is conventionally known as the “Cassibile” type, so named after the site

in Sicily excavated by Paolo Orsi: see Orsi 1899, esp. pp. 137–138, pl. XIII, nos. 6, 7. The type is often referred to in the Italian literature as “fibula serpeggiante” (e.g., Lo Schiavo 1983–1984, p. 135, fig. 47, no. 2); in German as “Schlangenfibeln” or, more specifically, “sizilien Schlangenfibeln” (Kilian 1970, p. 332, pl. 9:I, no. 3); similarly, in French, as “fibule à arc serpentant de type ‘sicilien’” (La Genière 1968, p. 315, pl. 31, no. 5).





**Figure 4. Iron fibula 1, Lofkënd tomb LV (grave 53), TLV-2.** Scale 1:2. Drawing I. Zaloshnja; photo R. MacDonald

Despite the poor state of preservation of the bones, this proved to be one of the richest burials in the tumulus in terms of the quantity of material deposited with the deceased. A small, one-handled, handmade vessel (Lofkënd TLV-1) was found to the north-northeast of the cranium, standing more or less upright. The distinctive iron fibula 1 of Lofkënd type (TLV-2; Fig. 4) was found in situ beside the pot, oriented roughly east-west, and had clearly been worn over the right shoulder of the deceased, while a bimetallic figure-of-eight fibula (TLV-3) was found over the left shoulder, beside the mandible.<sup>11</sup> Two iron tubular beads (TLV-4, TLV-5) were found, one on either side of the mandible, and another two iron beads (TLV-6, TLV-7), together with a glass bead (TLV-8), were discovered with the cranium in the conservation lab in the process of cleaning. The fibula can be described as follows:

11. The appearance of two fibulae, or else a fibula and a dress pin, one worn on one shoulder, the other on the opposite shoulder, was noted in several of the more lavishly furnished tombs at Lofkënd, which were primarily inhumations of adolescent females or children. Unless purely for display, these dress fasteners, together with substantial pseudomorphs of textile preserved especially on the iron fibulae, provide important evidence for the type of dress worn by the deceased at the site. The burial customs of the adolescent females and children are being studied for publication by Lyssa Stapleton, the textile pseudomorphs by Vanessa Muros; both studies will be published in the final excavation report on Lofkënd.

#### 1 Large arched iron fibula

Fig. 4

Lofkënd TLV-2 (SU: 1.0321), SF 261.

L. (arch, spring to spring) 0.119, L. (including catchplate) 0.126, H. (arch) 0.047 m; Wt. (all fragments) 28.9 g.

Large arched iron fibula with two springs and large lunate catchplate, type II.2. Reconstructed, as shown, in two preserved groups of fragments, plus 10 small to minuscule nonjoining fragments and chips. All fragments corroded. Including the nonjoining fragments, the fibula is more or less complete.

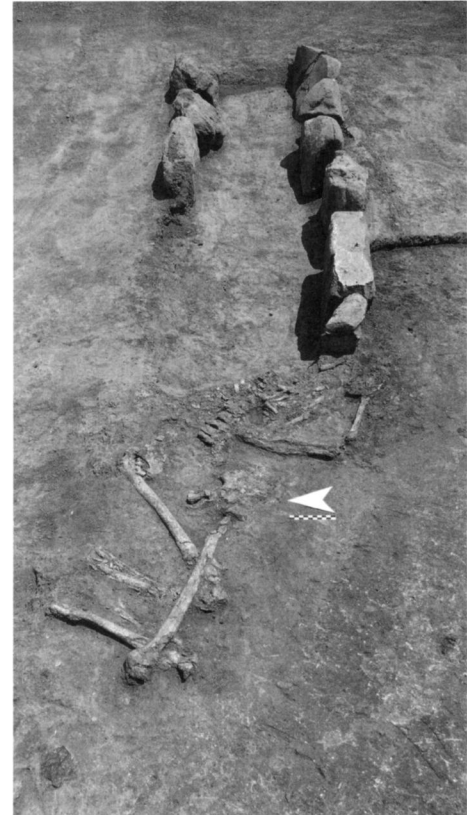
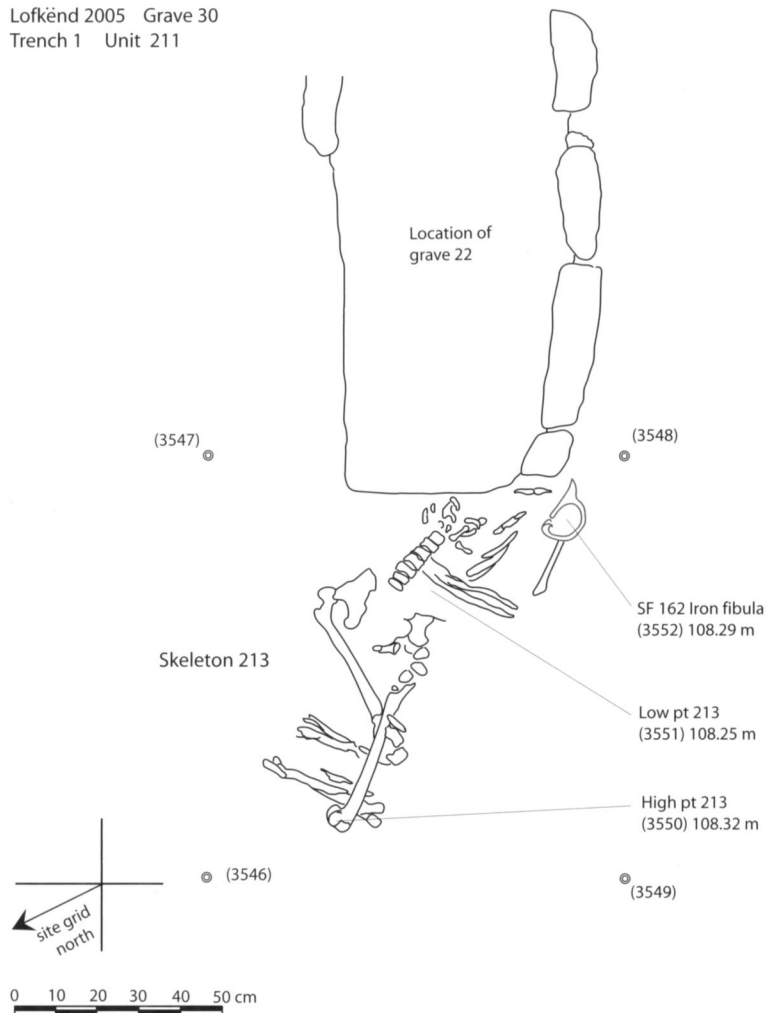
Arched bow, circular in section; spring (two turns), developing into pin, which is also circular in section, tapering toward sharp point, well preserved (in catchplate). Bow at opposite end connected to center of catchplate by a second spring (one and a half turns). Large lunate or crescent-shaped catchplate, hammered flat, with lower edge upturned to form a lip in order to accommodate the pin.

Textile pseudomorphs present on many fragments.

Cf. 2, but with more elongated, and curved, catchplate.



Lofkënd 2005 Grave 30  
Trench 1 Unit 211



**Figure 5. Lofkënd tomb LXV (grave 30) and its relationship to modern tomb LXXXVI (grave 22).**  
Drawing M. Farrar and S. Martin-McAuliffe; photo R. MacDonald

In the burial in tomb LXV (grave 30), the cranium, upper cervical vertebrae, and upper right torso, including the right arm, of the deceased were completely destroyed by the cut for the modern tomb LXXXVI (grave 22), though what survived of the human remains was comparatively well preserved (Fig. 5). Some of the scattered human bone (including cranial fragments) noted in the area of tombs LXXXVI and XCII (grave 23) may derive from this tomb as well. The skeleton was oriented southeast to northwest ( $130^\circ$ ), with the head, which was not preserved, to the southeast. The torso of the deceased (SU 213), identified as an adult female aged 18–35 years, was laid out in a supine position, with the left arm, and probably also the right, folded across the lower chest; the legs were flexed, the knees pointing southwest. The tomb measured 1.12 m long, 0.60 m wide, and 0.07 m deep. Iron fibula 2 (TLXV-1; Fig. 6) was found in situ over the left shoulder of the deceased, where it would have been worn.

## 2 Large arched iron fibula

Fig. 6

Lofkënd TLXV-1 (SU: 1.0213), SF 162.

L. (as preserved, including catchplate) 0.150 m; Wt. (all fragments) 47.6 g.



**Figure 6. Iron fibula 2, Lofkënd tomb LXV (grave 30), TLXV-1.**  
Scale 1:2. Drawing I. Zaloshnja; photo R. MacDonald

Large arched iron fibula with two springs and large lunate catchplate, type II.2. Reconstructed from various joining fragments, as shown, plus 28 nonjoining fragments and chips; including all fragments, the fibula is more or less complete, but heavily corroded.

Arched bow, circular in section, and slightly thicker at apex of arch; spring (one preserved turn, probably originally two), developing into pin, which is also circular in section, tapering toward point, but less well preserved than in 1. Bow at opposite end connected to center of catchplate by a second spring, only partially preserved; there appears to be an additional iron backing at the center of the catchplate to reinforce the juncture (no similar backing on 1). Large lunate catchplate, as in 1, but heavier, and a little more triangular than crescent-shaped, with upturned lip to accommodate pin.

Since both fibulae 1 and 2 were found in situ, the context made possible a reconstruction of their precise form, despite the heavily corroded state of the iron. It was clear in both cases that, in addition to the spring separating the arch from the pin, there was an additional spring at the juncture of the arch and catchplate, and that both fibulae had large, roughly crescent-shaped catchplates, with the one on 1 more distinctly crescent-shaped than that on 2.

The lack of imported Greek or Italian pottery made it difficult to date the tombs on the basis of the local handmade wares, the absolute chronology of which is far from straightforward.<sup>12</sup> The many items of personal ornament, together with the relatively few tools and weapons found in

12. All of the pottery deposited in tombs at Lofkënd is handmade; for a published selection, see Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, pp. 120, 124, 126, figs. 12:a, 17, 19. Similarly, virtually all of the pottery encountered

in the tumulus fill was handmade (see, e.g., Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, p. 133, figs. 27, 28); the only exceptions were fragments of Corinthian kotylai noted in topsoil and some of the upper levels of the tumulus, and

the occasional fragment of modern pottery found on the surface of the tumulus. The Lofkënd pottery will be published by Seth Pevnick and Esmeralda Agolli.

tombs, were likewise difficult to assign chronologically with any precision, since several types enjoyed a long history in Illyria spanning several centuries.<sup>13</sup> Although the grave goods were of little assistance in dating the tombs beyond the broadest of chronological parameters, it was possible to arrange the Lofkënd tombs into a series of chronological phases on the basis of both horizontal and vertical stratigraphy (many of the tombs were stratigraphically interrelated, in some cases up to four or even five tombs overlapping vertically), elevation within the tumulus, and, not least, AMS <sup>14</sup>C dating, both of collagen taken from human bone and of charcoal samples recovered from some of the tombs.<sup>14</sup> Excluding the modern burials, there were at least five phases of prehistoric tombs (phase I being the earliest), and for each phase there is at least one and sometimes as many as six AMS radiocarbon dates. Tombs LV and LXV both belong to phase IV, one of the later—though not the latest—phase of burials in the tumulus, which is assigned to the late 10th and 9th century B.C.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, both fibulae are broadly contemporary with the earlier Geometric or Subprotogeometric period in the Aegean.

## COMPARANDA AND CULTURAL AFFINITIES

Although a number of related fibulae in both iron and bronze have been found in the Balkans, I know of only two other examples that can be assigned to the same type as the fibulae from Lofkënd: what appears to be a fragmentary catchplate (3, Fig. 7) from tumulus I at the site of Kënet in Albania, excavated by Bep Jubani;<sup>16</sup> and an unpublished fragment of a fibula (4, Fig. 8) from the Molossian cemetery at Liatovouni, excavated by Angelika Douzougli.<sup>17</sup> The former, although said to recall a fibula, was not recognized as such; the latter was originally classified by me as an “unidentified iron attachment.”

Kënet is located in northeast Albania, not far from the border with Kosovo, along the east bank of the Drini i Zi (Drin) River. The site consists of a series of tumuli, immediately to the south of the modern town of Kënet, of which only four have been systematically investigated.<sup>18</sup> The iron fragment in question was not found in a grave, but in the fill of tumulus I.

13. For useful overviews of Albania in the later Bronze and Early Iron Age, see Prendi 1975, 1982; Hammond 1982.

14. The phasing of the tombs at Lofkënd, together with a fuller account of the relative and absolute chronology, will be presented in the forthcoming final publication of the excavations. For a preliminary account of the <sup>14</sup>C dates from Lofkënd and Apollonia, see Damiata et al., forthcoming.

15. Of the 12 burials assigned to

phase IV only one, tomb LXVI (grave 31), the latest of the group, was dated by AMS <sup>14</sup>C, which yielded a calibrated date of 863 ± 44 B.C. Although there was only one <sup>14</sup>C date for this phase, the more numerous radiocarbon dates for the preceding and subsequent phases confirm the chronology of phase IV as well.

16. Jubani 1983, p. 84, illustrated on p. 123, pl. III, no. 29.

17. On the cemetery, see Douzougli 1996, pp. 18–25, 44–51, figs. 3–23. I am

grateful to the excavator and to Konstantinos Zachos, the current Ephor of the 12th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Ioannina, for permission to study and publish the fibula here.

18. See Jubani 1983, esp. pp. 77–79, figs. 1, 2. For the location of the site, see the map published in Koka 1985, p. iii, and most recently in the *Carte archéologique de l'Albanie* (Cabanes et al. 2008, esp. p. 34, fig. 1; p. 46, fig. 1).

In the published report, the excavator describes the object and its context:

In the southeast sector [of tumulus I], 2.70 m from the south balk and 1.40 m from the east balk at a depth of 0.40 m from the center was found an iron brooch/attachment . . . in an area surrounded by a few stones, which did not define any specific feature. The shape of the brooch/attachment, as the drawing shows, recalls a fibula, but it seems to have served also as a decorative element.<sup>19</sup>

A formal catalogue entry was not provided, but on the basis of the published notes, drawing, and a photograph of the fragment,<sup>20</sup> the main elements can be described as follows:

**3** Fragmentary catchplate of an iron fibula

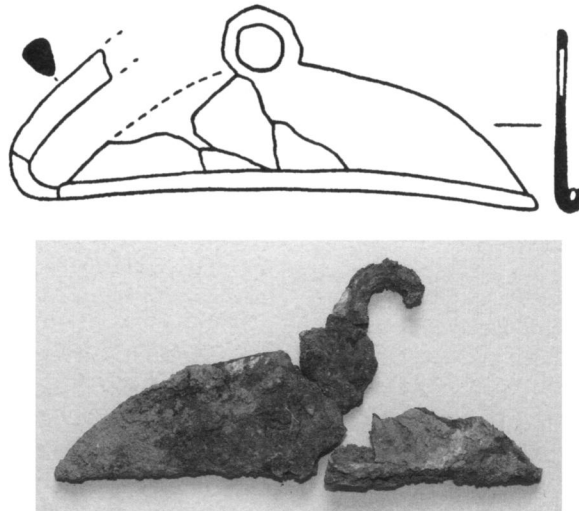
Fig. 7

Kënet, tumulus I, tumulus fill, no. 29.

P.L. ca. 0.10 m.

Reconstructed from several fragments preserving most of the catchplate, including part of one of the springs, but only a small portion of what should be the pin.

Large, roughly lunate catchplate, hammered flat, with lower edge upturned to form a lip in order to accommodate the pin. Portion of one spring survives at the upper center of the catchplate. To left (see drawing) the remnants of the spring, evidently bent back.



**Figure 7. Fragmentary catchplate of iron fibula 3, Kënet, tumulus I, tumulus fill, no. 29.** Scale ca. 2:3. Drawing after Jubani 1983, p. 123, no. 29; photo courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana

The Molossian cemetery at Liatovouni is located at the confluence of the Aoös and Voidomatis rivers in the rich valley of Konitsa, in northwestern Greece, only a few kilometers from the Albanian frontier.<sup>21</sup> The earliest burial is a remarkable Late Bronze Age inhumation of a well-armed adult

19. Jubani 1983, p. 84. I am grateful to Esmeralda Agolli for assistance in translating the Albanian.

20. I was unable to inspect this piece firsthand; the description here is based

on the excavator's published report: Jubani 1983, pp. 84, 123, pl. III, no. 29.

21. For a preliminary overview of the cemetery at Liatovouni and for other sites in the valley of Konitsa, see

Douzougli 1996. Hammond (1967, pp. 273–274) appears to have been the first person to have noted the archaeological site at Liatovouni.



male, who was buried with two bronze swords and two bronze spearheads of Mycenaean type,<sup>22</sup> a corselet with some 11 bronze bosses and numerous small round bronze studs variously referred to in the literature as “buttons,” “κομβία,” “domes,” or “small bosses,”<sup>23</sup> and two rock-crystal beads.<sup>24</sup> This was the earliest tomb in a cemetery that subsequently extended around it, consisting of a total of 103 burials, all inhumations, ranging in date from the 13th or 12th century B.C. through the late 5th or early 4th century B.C. These contained an impressive array of grave goods, including local Early Iron Age handmade matt-painted pottery, numerous imported Late Geometric, Archaic, and Classical vessels (Corinthian, Attic, West Greek, Ionian Island, and Thapsos Class), a rich variety of bronze vessels, jewelry, and arms, a panoply of iron weapons, in addition to iron and bimetallic jewelry, and objects of silver, ivory, bone, wood, faience, glass, semiprecious stone, and terracotta. The material displays strong connections with central and southern Greece, particularly the region of the Ambrakian and Corinthian gulfs, south Italy, and southern Illyria, as well as with the Balkan peninsula more generally.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the tombs, a small contemporary settlement (*komē*) was excavated adjacent to the cemetery.<sup>26</sup>

Fibula fragment 4 (Fig. 8) was found in Liatovouni tomb 20, which also contained five handmade matt-painted vessels (an askos, a kantharos, and three double jars), two bronze finger rings, and nine beads (one of bronze, two of faience/glass paste, and six of glass), as well as an unidentified fragment of iron.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of the small finds deposited in the grave,

22. The larger of the two swords is a classic example of the well-known “Griffzungenschwert,” also known as Naue Type II: see Naue 1903; Sprockhoff 1931; Snodgrass 1967, pp. 28–29; Desborough 1972, p. 308. Important studies of this type of sword, often including a typology largely based on the grips, have been presented by Cowen (1955), Catling (1956, 1961), Bianco Peroni (1970), Schauer (1971), and Bouzek (1985, pp. 119–122, with good comparanda in figs. 56, 58, 61, and 64, nos. 1–6, pl. 8, no. 2, pl. 9, nos. 1, 3). The type in Greece, with examples from Bulgaria and Albania, has been comprehensively studied by Kilian-Dirlmeier (1993). The smaller sword, a sword-maker’s *tour de force*, is a classic example of a Sandars type F sword, for which see Sandars 1963, pp. 133–139, pl. 25; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, pp. 76–91, esp. nos. 180–182. The two bronze spearheads from the tomb are textbook examples of the Late Bronze Age type A and type B spearheads, as classified and described by Snodgrass (1964, pp. 116–119; he also provides, on pp. 136–137, a useful list of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age tombs with two or more spearheads).

23. For full discussion of bosses, including various means of fastening, see Fellmann 1984; for both types, see, among others, Snodgrass 1964, pl. 19 (= 1967, pl. 14, left and right of center), from Kaloriziki, Cyprus, dated ca. 1100 B.C.; for the original publication of the Kaloriziki tomb, which remains essential, see McFadden 1954, p. 140, pl. 25, fig. 33. For full discussion of Greek and Italian comparanda for the small buttons, see Papadopoulos 2003, pp. 86–88. For Archaic and Classical comparanda, see Robinson 1941, pp. 260–265, pl. LXX, nos. 1037–1072, with discussion of various uses; Boardman 1967, pp. 227, 229, fig. 149, nos. 429, 430, one of which is pierced at the top (Emporio, Chios); Zancani Montuoro 1983–1984, p. 72, fig. 23, pl. XLIV:b, nos. 6–8 (Macchiabate cemetery at Francavilla Marittima, Calabria). For the more common “bottoncini emisferici,” with a small eye or loop at the center of the underside for fastening, see Papadopoulos 2003, pp. 86–87. For the κομβία of Vergina, see Andronikos 1969, pp. 236–238, figs. 75, 76; Radt 1974, pl. 39, nos. 1–5.

24. The two rock-crystal beads

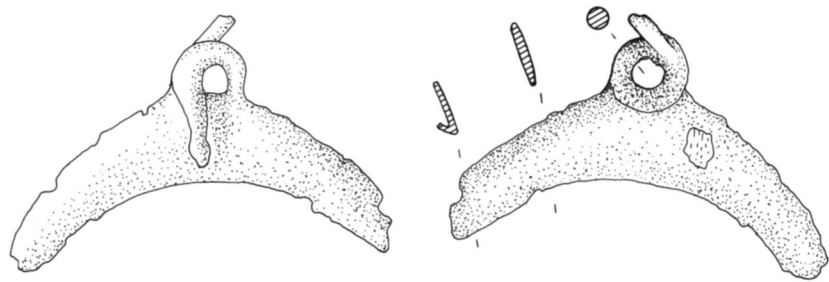
recovered from the burial are very similar to two slightly larger rock-crystal beads found in one of the Late Bronze Age tombs in Kalpaki in the Ioannina basin, in association with bronze swords and spearheads; see Dakaris 1956, p. 116, fig. 2, nos. 12, 13, with full discussion on pp. 129–130. For rock crystal generally in Bronze Age Crete, see Marinatos 1931.

25. The useful overview by Kilian (1975) of cultural and material connections between the Aegean and Adriatic in the Early Iron Age remains fundamental reading; see further Bouzek 1987, 1997.

26. For discussion of the nature of settlement in Epirus and southern Illyria, see Douzougli and Zachos 1994, 2002; Douzougli 1996; Zachos 1997; Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007; see further Tartaron and Zachos 1999.

27. Ioannina Museum 7986, 7990, 8066, 8067, 8068, 8118, 8119, 8134α–στ (inclusive), and 7984. It was the discovery of fragments of a similar double vase on the modern surface that first led Douzougli to suspect the existence of an early cemetery in the area, which led in turn to the excavations at the site.

Figure 8. Fragmentary catchplate of iron fibula 4, Liatovouni, tomb 20, no. T20-8, p.L. 0.085 m. Ioannina Museum 7980. Drawing A. Phaklari



together with comparanda from the Molossian cemetery at Vitsa Zagoriou, the tomb can be dated to the 9th century B.C., the latest finds perhaps extending into the early 8th century B.C., a date broadly in keeping with the two fibulae from Lofkënd.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4 Fragmentary iron fibula

Fig. 8

Liatovouni cemetery, T20-8; Ioannina Museum 7980.

P.L. 0.085 m; Wt. 13.2 g.

Reconstructed from three joining fragments preserving the greater part of the lunate catchplate of an iron fibula, including one of the springs. Nothing of the bow or pin survives. Corroded.

More or less flat, lunate-shaped sheet of iron, with a flanged overhang on one side and spring attached on the upper surface, but with at least one of the turns of the spring extending onto the opposite side (on which, at one point, there is what appears to be a small adhering piece of wood or other organic material).

Because the fibula bow and pin were missing, the function of this object remained undetermined for a long time.

Although there are a number of related fibula types elsewhere in the Balkans, none that I know of share the same form in all respects with the four examples presented above. From the region of Glasinac in Bosnia-Herzegovina have come several related iron fibulae (Fig. 9) that are smaller than the examples from Lofkënd (about half the size), with a shorter, distinctly triangular, catchplate rather than the characteristic lunate catchplates of the Lofkënd, Kënet, and Liatovouni examples.<sup>29</sup> The overall length of the Glasinac fibulae is about the same as the length of the catchplates of the Lofkënd, Kënet, and Liatovouni fibulae. This type in bronze was first noted at Hallstatt.<sup>30</sup>

A similar situation prevails in other parts of the central and northern Balkans. In Rastko Vasić's compilation of the fibula types of Vojvodina, Serbia, Kosovo, and FYROM, the type described above from Glasinac is classified among the "zweischleifige Bogenfibeln mit dreieckigem Fuss" ("two-spring arched fibulae with triangular catchplate"), a type common in both bronze and iron (Fig. 10).<sup>31</sup> The type is further subdivided into

28. For the cemetery at Vitsa Zagoriou, see Vokotopoulou 1986.

29. Three examples are illustrated in the published reports: Benac and Čović 1956, pl. XXXV, no. 10 (Planje tumulus I, grave 3), with a maximum length of 0.088 m; Benac and Čović 1957, pl. XI, no. 27 (Gosinja planina, tumulus I, grave 1), p.L. 0.073 m;

and pl. XII, no. 18 (Podlaze, tumulus LXXXVI), p.L. 0.081 m.

30. See Sacken 1868, pl. XIII, no. 11.

31. Vasić 1999, pp. 49–54, pls. 25–27, nos. 286–334. (Vasić does not cite the examples from Glasinac, as Bosnia-Herzegovina falls outside his area of study.) For the occurrence of the type

in Greece and Macedonia, see Bouzek 1974, pp. 131–133, fig. 42, E 9 (with examples from the Argive Heraion, Lousoi, Boiotia, Sparta, Chauchitsa, Aivasil, Chalkidike, Perachora, Serres, and Karaorman [FYROM]); with addenda in Bouzek 1982, esp. p. 56.



Figure 9. Two iron fibulae from the Glasinac region: (a) Podlaze, tumulus LXXXVI, p.L. 0.081 m; (b) Planje, tumulus I, grave 3, p.L. 0.088 m. (a) After Benac and Čović 1957, pl. XII, no. 18; (b) after Benac and Čović 1956, pl. XXXV, no. 10

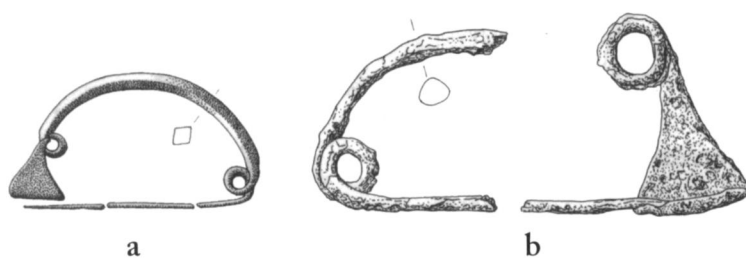


Figure 10. (a) bronze fibula from Dedeli (southern FYROM), grave 37, p.L. 0.064 m; (b) iron fibula from Vajuga, Pesak (eastern Serbia), grave 4, p.L. 0.107 m. (a) After Vasić 1999, p. 49, pl. 25, no. 287; (b) after Vasić 1999, p. 50, pl. 26, no. 309

three variants: (1) with a plain arch, either circular or rhomboidal in section, (2) with a twisted arch, and (3) with a lozenge-shaped arch, hammered flat; the first is known in bronze and iron, and the other two variants in bronze only.<sup>32</sup> Of these, the largest examples and those closest to the Lofkënd type are two iron fibulae, both from Vajuga, Pesak, one (Fig. 10:b) 10.7 cm in length, the other 10 cm (i.e., about two-thirds the size of the Lofkënd fibulae). Not only are they considerably smaller than the Lofkënd type, their catchplate is distinctly different. Farther north in the Balkans, this type is well represented in Slovenia.<sup>33</sup> Related to the two-spring arched fibula with triangular catchplate is a type with a circular catchplate and another with what is referred to as an “hourglass” catchplate (“zweischleifige Bogenfibeln mit kreisförmiger Fussplatte” and “zweischleifige Bogenfibeln mit sanduhrförmiger Fussplatte”).<sup>34</sup> Although a few examples of these types approach the size of the Lofkënd fibulae, their form is very different. Nothing published from central Europe or the Italian peninsula closely resembles the Lofkënd type.<sup>35</sup>

In dealing broadly with the “zweischleifige Bogenfibeln,” Vasić notes that the type may be dated between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C.<sup>36</sup> Among the latest examples of this type of fibula—not noted by Vasić, as his catalogue did not include examples from Greece—is one from grave 3 at Aivasil in Greek Macedonia, which was found together with a Corinthian

32. For the variant with plain arch, see Vasić 1999, pp. 49–51, pls. 25, 26, nos. 286–318; with twisted arch, see pp. 51–52, pl. 27, nos. 319–330; and with lozenge-shaped arch, see pp. 53–54, pl. 27, nos. 333, 334 (see also the “Variante mit schlangenförmigen toriertem Bügel,” p. 53, pl. 27, nos. 331, 332). For distribution, see pl. 63:b.

33. See, e.g., Mason 1996, p. 16, fig. 4, no. 18; p. 18, fig. 6, no. 7.

34. Vasić 1999, pp. 54–57, pls. 28, 29.

Most of the examples with the so-called hourglass catchplate assembled by Vasić are not as distinctly hourglass shaped as some of the fibulae from Glasinac illustrated by Benac and Čović 1957, esp. pl. XXII, nos. 1–4.

35. There are no examples published in Müller-Karpe 1959 that are close to the Lofkënd type, although the related types assembled by Vasić and discussed above are well represented. In a similar vein, although

triangular catchplates are not uncommon among Italian fibula types (e.g., Sundwall 1943, pp. 108–109, figs. 129, 133, B IIam3, B IIßa2), as well as in some Greek types (e.g., Blinkenberg 1926, p. 79, fig. 66, p. 80, figs. 68, 70, among others), these are smaller and they differ in form from the Lofkënd type. For Italian fibulae, see further Montelius 1895–1910.

36. Vasić 1999, p. 48.

kothon.<sup>37</sup> As for the earliest “zweischleifige Bogenfibeln,” these can be dated no more precisely than the 8th century B.C., and there is no evidence to suggest raising their date.

It is possible that the difference in date between the earliest examples of this group and the Lofkënd fibulae may be due in part to the fact that one set of dates is based on synchronisms that rely heavily on the conventional chronology, while the other is based on <sup>14</sup>C dates, but it is equally possible that the two-spring, arched fibula with triangular catchplate is a later variant of the earlier Lofkënd examples. Moreover, the date of the Lofkënd fibulae is corroborated by the solitary example from Liatovouni, where a 9th-century date seems to be supported by the contents of the grave, not by radiocarbon dating.<sup>38</sup>

The problems of chronology, particularly in the central Balkans and Europe more generally, are further exacerbated by the chronology of the earliest use of iron, which has been much debated in the past,<sup>39</sup> although there has been general consensus that objects of iron appear in Albania in the 11th century B.C.,<sup>40</sup> a date now borne out by radiocarbon dates from Lofkënd. Be that as it may, the evidence for a 9th-century date is strong for the iron fibulae of this type from Lofkënd and Liatovouni, and it is possible that the type first develops in the 10th century B.C.

## CONCLUSIONS

The little that is currently known about the distribution of what I have been calling the Lofkënd fibula type is interesting, in that it essentially follows, at least in part, the path of one of the great rivers of the Balkans, the Aoös/Vjosë (Fig. 1). To the northwest of the river there are two examples from Lofkënd, and to the southeast one from Liatovouni.<sup>41</sup> The valley of Konitsa in Greek Epirus, where Liatovouni is situated, is essentially defined by two rivers that merge to flow perennially through it: the Aoös and the Voidomatis.<sup>42</sup> A unique ecosystem, it brings into close proximity two very different physical environments: on the one hand, a lowland area with plentiful and continuous water year-round, together with extensive riverside agricultural fields and pastures, and on the other, an upland with high hills, grassy slopes, and meadows. At their confluence, the Voidomatis, which carved the impressive Vikos Gorge farther south, runs in a north-south direction, whereas the Aoös runs roughly east-west, merges with

37. See Gardner and Casson 1918–1919, esp. pp. 19–22; for the fibula, see p. 21, fig. 12; for the kothon, pl. V:2.

38. Although the jewelry from Liatovouni tomb 20 cannot be dated with any precision, the date of the handmade pottery deposited in the tomb is corroborated by the conventional date of similar pottery at Vitsa Zagorion, which is more often found with contemporary imports of Greek Geometric pottery. For the Geometric imports at Vitsa, see Vokotopoulou 1986,

pp. 276–280, figs. 65–69 (Corinthian pottery, as well as the Thapsos Class), pp. 285–286, fig. 71 (various pots of western Greek Geometric).

39. See Forbes 1950, pp. 419, 455; Alexander 1962, pp. 123, 130 (both with references to the earlier literature).

40. Prendi 1982, p. 229; see also Prendi 1975.

41. Lofkënd is located just north of the Gjanicë River, which runs parallel to, and several kilometers north of, the Aoös/Vjosë.

42. Pliny (*HN* 4.1.4) gives the Molossians two rivers, the Aratthos and the Aphas. In discussing these, Hammond (1967, pp. 707–708) writes: “The latter is not the upper Louros, which rose in Molossis, because we have the ancient name Charadros [Charadros]. It might be the Dhipotamos or the Voidomati; the latter is more likely as the name Aphas may be related to the Aous into which it flows.” For the river Aphas, see further Karatzeni 1997, p. 239.



the Voidomatis, and flows northward into Albania, where it is known as the Vjosë.

Immediately south of the Greek-Albanian border, near the monastery of Molyvdoskepasto and not far from Mesogephyra, the Aoös merges with the Sarantaporos, which runs ENE–WSW from Mt. Grammos, north of the Aoös and more or less parallel with it.<sup>43</sup> Much of the water flowing into these rivers derives from the Tymphe, Smolikas, Zagori, and Grammos mountain ranges. After passing through the spectacular gorge of the Aoös/Vjosë,<sup>44</sup> before reaching the Adriatic just south of the Greek colony of Apollonia, the Aoös/Vjosë merges, not far from Tepelenë, with another great river, the Drinos.<sup>45</sup> The ancient Antigoneia, a hilltop settlement exploited by Pyrrhos, is located to the southeast in the valley of the Drinos.<sup>46</sup> This is a landscape dominated by rivers.

The valley of the Aoös provides one of the most important natural routes between the mountainous interior of Epirus into southern Illyria and on to the Adriatic, a route that must have been exploited for millennia, as it still is today.<sup>47</sup> R. L. Beaumont discusses an important land route mentioned by Thucydides, which enabled the Corinthians in 435 B.C. to send troops to Epidamnos via Apollonia, without having to sail around Korkyra.<sup>48</sup> Beaumont traces the route from Ambrakia, a strong Corinthian ally, up the Louros valley toward the plain of Hellopia (i.e., the plain of Ioannina), controlled by the Molossians, and from there northward to the Drinos valley, through Chaonian territory, to the Aoös/Vjosë valley, and down the river to Apollonia.<sup>49</sup> In this way, some of the most mountainous terrain of

43. Until recently, the only trace of human activity in this area after the Palaeolithic and before the post-Byzantine period, which sees a noticeable increase in settlement in the valley, consisted of two Mycenaean bronze swords from a tomb at Mesogephyra near the confluence of the Aoös and Sarantaporos rivers, both of which are assigned to LH IIIA: see Dakaris 1956, p. 131, figs. 6, 7; Sandars 1963, p. 120, pl. 21, nos. 3, 4 (Perama); Hammond 1967, pp. 274, 321–322; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, pp. 46–47, pls. 14, 15, nos. 73, 81; Douzougli 1996, pp. 25–26; Tartaron and Zachos 1999, p. 69, fig. 12, nos. 73, 81; Soueref 2001, pp. 31–32, 253, fig. 53:I, II; Tartaron 2004, p. 149, fig. 8:2, nos. 73, 81. The Mesogephyra tomb is one of approximately 20 isolated Mycenaean cist graves scattered throughout Epirus at various elevations and in diverse environmental settings, either singly or in small groups of up to four; these are discussed by Papadopoulos (1976, pp. 277–279) and Tartaron (2004, pp. 148–154).

44. See Beaumont 1952, map facing p. 62; see further Hammond 1966,

p. 40, fig. 2 (map 1), pls. 2–4. The gorge (Στενά του Αώου) runs for some 12 km due east of Tepelenë.

45. The Aoös/Vjosë is largely responsible, together with the Seman River, for the extensive alluvial fill west of Apollonia that left the ancient city stranded many kilometers from the sea. The Gjanicë River, just south of the Lofkënd tumulus, is a tributary of the Seman.

46. A joint Albanian-Greek project has been investigating Antigoneia since 2005 under the direction of Konstantinos Zachos, Dhimitër Çondi, and Shpresa Gjongecaj; for a preliminary report on the first season, see Zachos et al. 2006. Other important ancient settlements of the historical period located on or near the Aoös/Vjosë include Byllis and Klos-Nikaia, both on high hills overlooking the river, as well as Nymphaion; for the location of these sites see Papadopoulos, Bejko, and Morris 2007, p. 107, fig. 2. Since early modern times Nymphaion has been identified with Selenicë, across from Byllis on the Vjosë. It is still a modern producer of hydrocarbons, not

least of which is high-quality bitumen. For the exploitation and importance of bitumen in both prehistoric and historic times, see Morris 2006.

47. The modern border crossing between Greece and Albania at Melissópetra on the Greek side, corresponding to Tre Urat on the Albanian side, is located some 7.5 km north of the confluence of the Aoös and Voidomatis rivers. The drive today from Arta (ancient Ambrakia) to Apollonia in Illyria essentially follows a series of river valleys.

48. Thuc. 1.26.2 (ἐπορεύθησαν δὲ περὶ ἑς Ἀπολλωνίαν); Beaumont 1952.

49. Beaumont 1952, pp. 64–65. This is the route followed by the modern road from Ioannina to Gjirokastër/Argyrokastro and Tepelenë. Beaumont (p. 65, n. 49) adds that it was also the route used by Lord Byron in 1809. For an important overview of the topography of Hellopia and archaeological discoveries in the Ioannina basin from the Final Neolithic through the Early Iron Age, see Zachos 1997.

southeastern Europe was easily traversed by a large body of men moving along river valleys. In later history, the same landscape, particularly the Aoös Gorge, featured prominently in the Roman campaign against Philip V during the Second Macedonian War of the early 2nd century B.C.<sup>50</sup> A century earlier, King Pyrrhos of Epirus (319–272 B.C.) controlled a network of urban centers from Ambrakia in the south to Antigoneia in the north by means of the river valleys of Epirus,<sup>51</sup> and in a similar manner, Ali Pasha (1741–1822), of Tepelenë and of Ioannina, expanded his territory to include most of Albania, western Greece, and much of the Peloponnese by exploiting the same river valleys.<sup>52</sup>

As has been the case in the historic period, so for millennia in prehistory the river valleys of Epirus and southern Illyria must have been the primary conduits for the movement of people, ideas, and commodities. Moreover, this movement worked in both directions, from northwest to southeast *and* from southeast to northwest. Consequently, these rivers connected an even larger network of people and ideas, linking the Balkans with a greater Europe to the north and west and with the cultures of the Aegean and Mediterranean beyond to the south and east.

Whether we refer to the distinctive iron fibula with two springs and a large lunate catchplate as the Lofkënd type or the Aoös/Vjosë type is moot, but the fact that the type is also found at Kënet in northeast Albania suggests that its distribution was not limited to the Aoös/Vjosë corridor. It is hoped that future excavations, together with closer study of already excavated material, will provide more examples of this distinctive fibula and help to map its distribution more accurately than is currently possible.

50. Fully discussed in Hammond 1966.

51. For Pyrrhos, see, among others, Nilsson 1909, pp. 69–77; Klotzsch 1911, pp. 153–218; von Hassell 1947; Nenci 1953; Franke 1955, pp. 87–88; Lévêque 1957; Garoufalas 1979.

52. For Ali Pasha see, most recently, Fleming 1999.

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