

Tatjana Cvjetičanin

BOOSTING UP CRAFTS: RITES AND LOCAL PRODUCTION OF POTTERY

With the Roman rule in the province of Moesia Superior, a new form of incineration burials emerged, known as the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type. Pottery played an important role in these burials and was used in various phases of the ceremony, as well as grave goods. For the most part vessels were produced specifically for burial, as funerary pottery, withdrawn from use straight away and utilized in the canonized ritual, for food offerings and other rites. At present, the largest number of the known MKS type graves is excavated at Viminacium – capital of the province, Mt Kosmaj – imperial metalla and Mala Kopašnica – village. At all these sites pottery kilns were discovered as well. It seems that one of the consequences of the new burial rites was the development of a special branch of the local ceramic production. The growth in the pottery production was tightly connected with death.

Funerary pottery – Kilns – *Moesia Superior* – Mala Kopašnica – Sase burial type

Over the last several decades, “a gradual shift in what archaeologist expect pottery to tell them” is apparent (Greene 2005a: 51), proceeding beyond typologies and chronologies, and discussing either about path and range of invention, innovation and diffusion (Greene 2000: 29-59) or about Roman economy. Incorporation of pottery in the study of economic history, as a reliable form of proxy evidence for the dynamics of Roman imperial economy (Greene 2005a: 39-44), led to a variety of concepts in understanding the processes operating in the Roman ceramic production and consumption (Greene 2005a: 48; Greene 2005b). However, more often than not, recognizing wider patterns in ceramic industry, as well as social attitudes in pottery usage, produced simple social-economic assumptions, either about free-market Roman pottery trade or – drawing inspiration from core-periphery models (Greene 2005a: 39) – consumption associated with Romanization, considering Romans and natives as two entities that are reflected in archaeological remains.

With the Roman rule in the province of *Moesia Superior*, a new form of incineration burials emerged (**fig. 1**), known as the Mala Kopašnica-Sase (aka MKS) burials (Cvjetičanin 2016: 711-730; Jovanović 1984: 100-110; Jovanović 2000: 209-210). They consist of a rather wide and shallow rectangular pit (MKS type I) or of a wide pit with smaller, mostly rectangular pit dug in the middle, i.e. stepped or graves à l'étage (MKS type II). The majority of pits was scorched by intense fire before the placement of the deceased, incinerated at *ustrinum*. The MKS burials occur until the second half of the 3rd century. The main characteristics of these burials, in traditional cultural-historical approach, are continuity from Iron Age, the existence of a strong indigenous element opposed to the Roman with visible transformation of the local identity ('Romanization'), and homogeneity of population practising MKS burials (Cvjetičanin 2016: 711-730).

The MKS burials make for about 70% of all excavated graves in Upper Moesia, found in necropolises of both urban and rural settlements as well as in different districts, in mining regions, as well as on the Moesian fortified border (Jovanović 2000: 209, Fig. 2). At present (**fig. 2**), the largest number of the known MKS graves is excavated at *Viminacium* – the capital of the province (Korać and Golubović 2009; Zotović and Jordović 1991), Mt. Kosmaj – imperial *metalla* (Glumac 2015) and Mala Kopašnica – village (Stamenković, Ivanišević and Pešić 2016: 17-45). Worthy of note is that pottery kilns were discovered at all those sites as well.

A complex consisting of three brick and four pottery kilns, working spaces and a well, dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries, was excavated at the heart of one of the *Viminacium*'s necropolises (Jordović 1994: 95-106). Pottery kilns are with a circular base and a central free-standing pedestal or with rectangular free-standing longitudinal supports, of the type that developed from rectangular brick kilns. Pottery found in the workshop complex and waste in one of the kilns is identical with pottery that could be found at surrounding necropolises (Raičković 2007).

The newly discovered pottery kilns at the eponymous site of these burials, at Mala Kopašnica (Ivanišević, Stamenković and Jović 2016: 59-62), are located at the fringe between the settlement and the necropolis. The complex, kilns with circular base and a central free-standing pedestal, is dated in the period from the second half of the 2nd century to the mid-3rd century.

The third pottery workshop, with the remains of three large kilns and a segment of a rectangular building (**fig. 3**), is located at the site Purina Čerga, one of the necropolises recorded at the core of the Mt. Kosmaj mining region (Cvjetičanin 2017: 217-235). One kiln is of the type with circular base and a central free-standing pedestal and the other two are

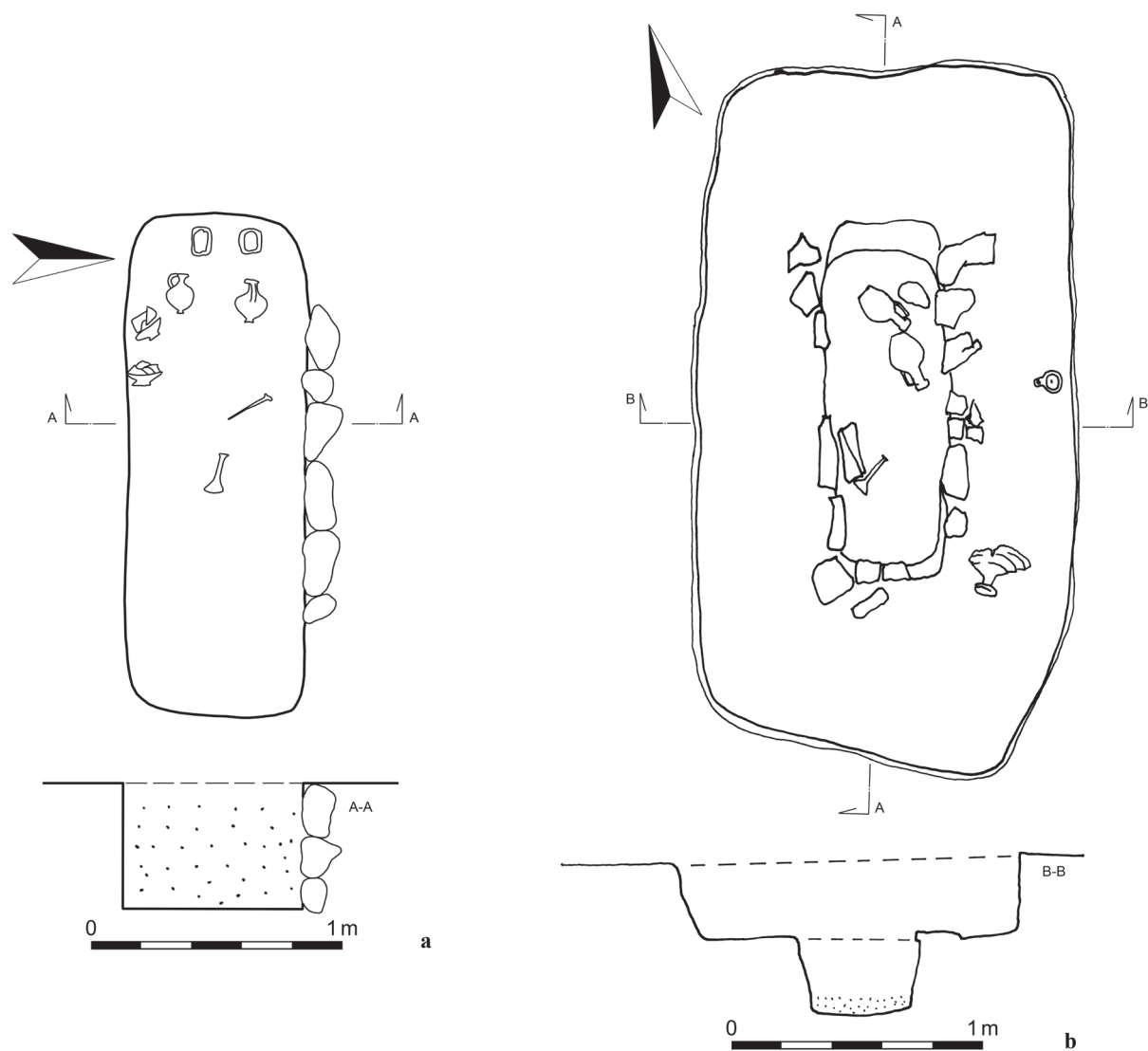


Fig. 1. Mala Kopašnica-Sase (MKS) grave types I (a) and II (b, c).

rectangular, with free-standing longitudinal supports or with longitudinal pilasters, starting from the back wall of the kiln. Based on the kiln types and construction elements, the complex would belong to the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century.

The development of the local pottery production is similar to the development of ceramic industry in other Roman provinces. The transfer of technology, as Greene has stressed (1992: 101-105), took place on a major scale in the Roman Empire. Therefore, outside the well-known, major ceramic centres, local craftsmen were able to manufacture a wide variety of products, from high-quality (and technologically demanding) ceramics to cooking wares. New workshops operating from the last decades of the 1st and mostly from the 2nd century (Bjelajac 1990: 143-147; Cvjetičanin 2000: 245-254; Cvjetičanin 2001: 62-64; Cvjetičanin 2014: 113-117; Raičković 2007: 49-50) changed overall the ceramic picture, some of them replacing imported wares, some of them introducing new classes (Cvjetičanin 2001), all responding to the demand of the Moesian population.

Following the Roman regulations, it is not unexpected that kilns discovered at necropolises are *extra muros*. However, pottery workshops and kilns were noted at several Upper Moesian sites not connected or used as necropolises (Cvjetičanin 2000: 245-254; Cvjetičanin 2017: 220-223). Even at Viminacium itself, other kilns were found nearby the river Mlava as well (Bjelajac 1990). This could easily be an issue of economic competition of local industries. However, the question arises: was the location near the necropolis just convenient or if there is more to it? Whom did those workshops supply?

In the majority of the aforementioned MKS type burials, grave deposits/goods were found, either those burnt with the deceased or those later placed in graves. Pottery is the most common – it played an important role in these burials and was used in various phases of the ceremony and as grave goods

as well (Cvjetičanin 2018: 214-235). In most cases pottery is placed in the upper part of the pit, along the walls, and there are visible patterns in placement – it is grouped together, in line along the wall or in a pattern of a triangle (fig. 4). Common are graves with three vessels, and the majority of them have three flagons.¹ Pottery typology is rich and diverse



Fig. 2. Distribution of the MKS burials (after Jovanović 2000).

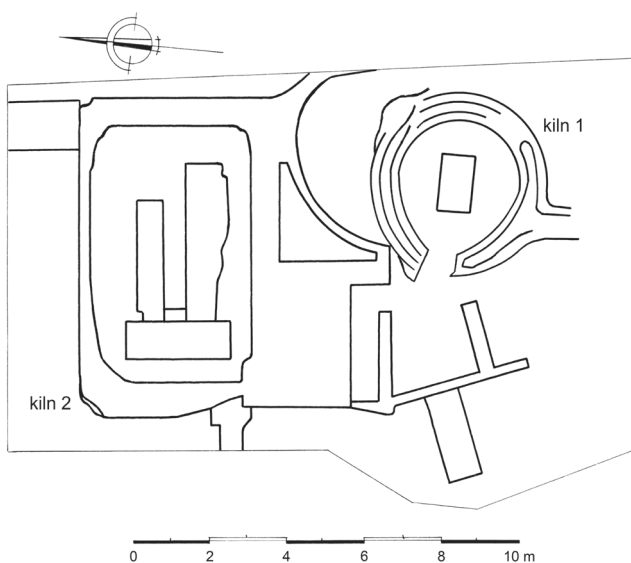


Fig. 3. Remains of the pottery workshop at the Purina Čerga site (National Museum's documentation, 1954).



Fig. 4. MKS burial type II, Gomilice necropolis, Mt. Kosmaj region.

¹ For example, at the Gomilice necropolis, three jugs appear in about 48% graves with pottery deposits.

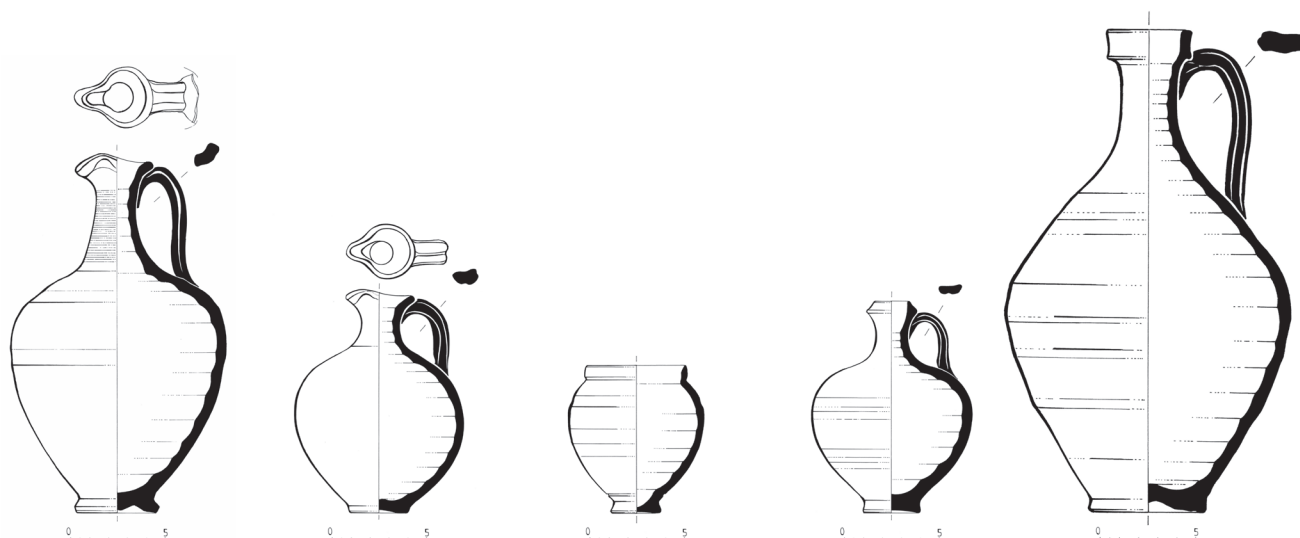


Fig. 5. Typical pottery from the necropolises in the Mt. Kosmaj region.



Fig. 6. Typical pottery from the Gomilice necropolis, Mt. Kosmaj region.

(Cvjetićanin 2013: 27-92; Korać and Golubović 2009; Pešić 2005: 37-83; Zotović and Jordović 1990), but this diversity is very misleading: jugs, flagons, beakers and cups are usually present (fig. 5), with occasional bowls and censers. All forms are common in the Upper Moesian production, from the end of the 1st to the 3rd century, showing overall similarity with other ceramic assemblages in Upper Moesia, and even wider, in the middle and lower Danube provinces. Production attributes are uniform: red fired coarse vessels are dominant, or in the case of beakers and bowls occasionally grey fired ones. Pottery is of poor quality, and most of it without any surface treatment and decoration. Rare are examples of red or black colour coated pottery and of glazed pottery.

A high proportion of drinking vessels, opposite to their quantity at other types of sites where kitchen pottery predominates – for example settlements or forts – indicates a sphere different than household. As said, vessels offered are mostly

coarse, porous, and plain (fig. 6), and the most striking feature has typically no traces of usage. For the most part the pottery was produced specifically for burial. It was funerary pottery, which was straight away withdrawn from use and utilized in the canonized ritual, for food offerings and other rites.

Although the exact range of wares and the volume of production of these workshops is not fully known, the waste at *Viminacium* workshop containing vessels' fragments identical to those found in graves, indicates that they were manufacturing pottery foremost for one-time use, i.e. 'graveyard' pottery. One can argue that coarse, undecorated vessels are the products of potters that were not skilful artisans, but – for example – the *Viminacium* workshop from the times of Hadrian has already very elaborated Roman forms and techniques in its repertoire (Bjelajac 1990: 147; Cvjetićanin 2001), indicating excellent adjustment of local potteries to new ceramic styles and highly skilful craftsmen.

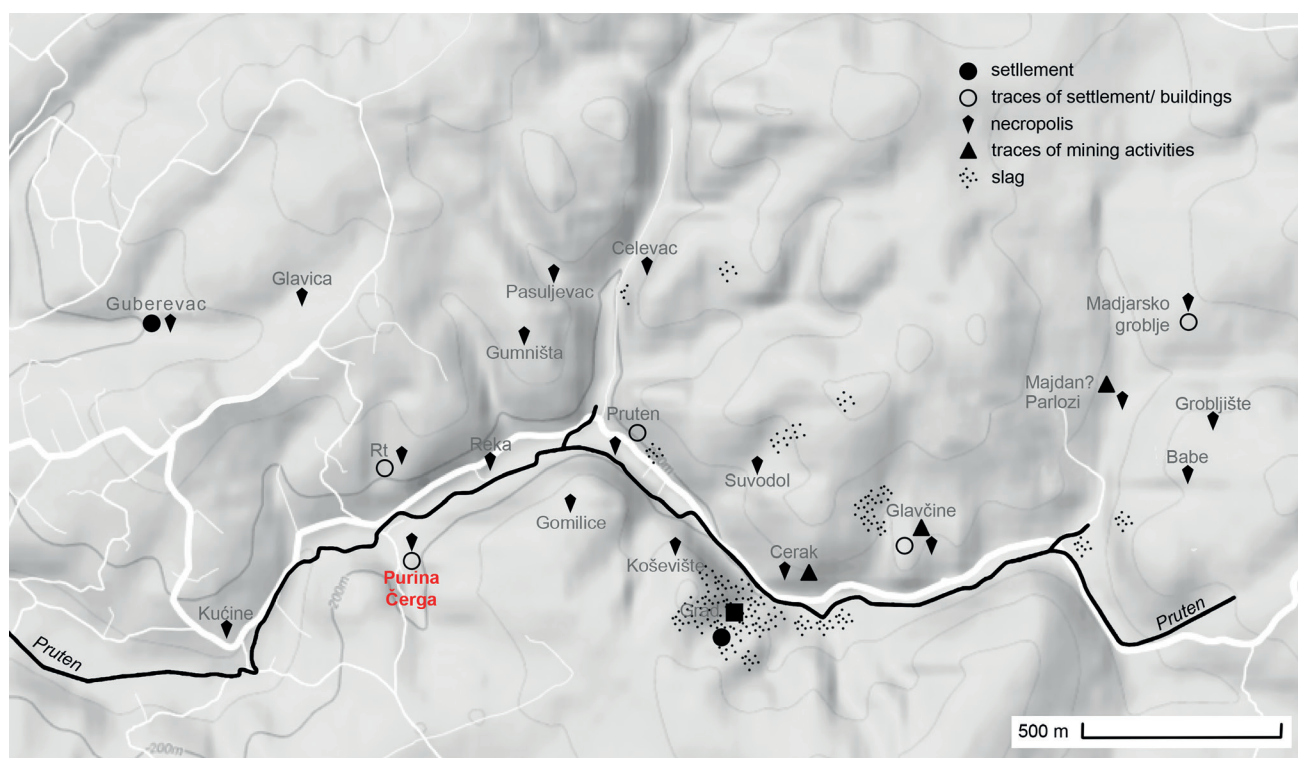


Fig. 7. Location of the Purina Čerga site and necropolises in its vicinity (after Cvjetićanin 2017).

It is funerary pottery, locally produced. Even though it is very hard to identify its consumers by status, gender, origin, or to understand differences observed in burials and social meaning they may have had only on the grounds of the pottery (Cvjetićanin 2018: 214-235), it is clear that pottery production was responding to the particular needs. It is safe to assume workshops were supplying the very same necropolis they were located at, and judging by the size of the kilns, the adjacent ones as well. For instance, the workshop at Purina Čerga also produced wares for the necropolises in the vicinity (Cvjetićanin 2017: 226), about 300 to 1,000 m away (**fig. 7**).

It seems that the homogeneity in form can equate with homogeneous meaning once in the hands of the consumers. It is safe to assume that pottery, particular functional groups and types of drinking vessels and tableware, from the second half of the 1st century until the middle of the 3rd century had the same purpose and meaning in the funeral practise. Those vessels were designed to fulfil particular function (Pitts 2010: 125-127). Complexity of beliefs of individuals/groups that practices the MKS type burials, the approach to sacral space, value of objects placed and socially constructed context of necropolises with the MKS type burials is yet to be fully understood, as well as the distinctive nature of new rites, appearing simultaneously with changes in the Roman rule at the end of the 1st century, and the distinctive choice of deposited artefact, including ceramic vessels.²

The focus of this paper is not upon pottery as the mark of prosperity or the sign of vibrant economy (Greene 2005a, 48), not on military impact in the pottery production – although the army was important for this province at the Roman border, as a consumer with great demands and with significantly concentrated means (Hopkins 1980: 101-102). The attention is on the community/individuals and their experience of the world, social attitudes, on rituals and religious significance of disposing of the dead.

It seems that one of the consequences of the new – adopted or syncretistic – burial rites was the development of a special branch of the local ceramic production. The growth of crafts and economy, growth in the pottery production, was tightly connected with death. Moreover, it shows once again that truly responding to demands is only the local production.

Tatjana Cvjetićanin
National Museum, Belgrade
t.cvjeticanin@narodnimuzej.rs

² Three flagons in each grave usually are considered to be for three sorts of liquids (Crnobrnja 2005: 165; Raičković 2011: 155), or as a symbolic meal, in a ritual that is not possible to reconstruct.

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