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REVIVAL OF THE LA TÈNE TRADITION IN THE MIDDLE BALKANS IN THE 3RD CENTURY AD

Modern Ćuprija (*Horreum Margi*), lies at the right bank of the river Morava (*Margum*), in the central part of Serbia (**fig. 1**). Thanks to its favorable position, at the crossroads of several land- and fluvial roads, it developed rapidly during the Roman Imperial period. This conclusion can be drawn because of its name *Horreum*. This town is considered to be one of the most important food distributors for the military stationed along the right Danube bank in the Iron Gate district.¹

Several epigraphic monuments testify to its great importance. One inscription probably originates from *Novae* in Lower Moesia. It confirms that *Horreum Margi* bore the status of a *municipium* during the reign of Alexander Severus.² Another inscription, from the time of Caracalla, was dedicated by a praetorian, whose *origo* was *Horreum Margi*. According to this inscription, one is allowed to conclude that it received municipal status during the reign of Marcus Aurelius or Septimius Severus at the latest.³

One of the inscriptions confirms the stationing of the *Legio VII Claudia* in *Horreum Margi* in the second half of the 2nd and in the 3rd century AD.⁴

Horreum Margi is mentioned by Felix Kanitz in his travels.⁵

In 1987, while excavating the fortress of *Horreum Margi*, two pottery fragments were found, indicating the survival of Late Iron Age pottery traditions.

They were both found in the “C” layer (level C) of the military barracks, within the military camp of *Horreum Margi*. This layer can be dated back into the time of the emperor Aurelian (end of the 3rd century AD) until the middle of the 4th century AD.⁶

The fragments come from two different bowls, but show similar characteristics: they are both gray in color, of fine fabric and bearing polished ornaments.

Fragment 1 (**fig. 2**) represents a bowl fragment, S-profiled, with its rim slightly bent to the outside. The bowl had a rim diameter of 29 cm, its surface is gray both inside and outside. The outer surface is polished – the upper part is less polished than the lower part. The inner surface bears polished bands. The rim is also slightly polished. Its inflection point is gray as well. The fabric is composed of sandy clay with small sand grains. The base is missing, only a tiny part of it is visible and this makes it possible to determine the bowl height, which measures approx. 12 cm. The bowl most probably belongs to table pottery.

Fragment 2 (**fig. 3**) is also a bowl fragment, S-profiled, with its rim slightly bent to the outside. The bowl had a rim

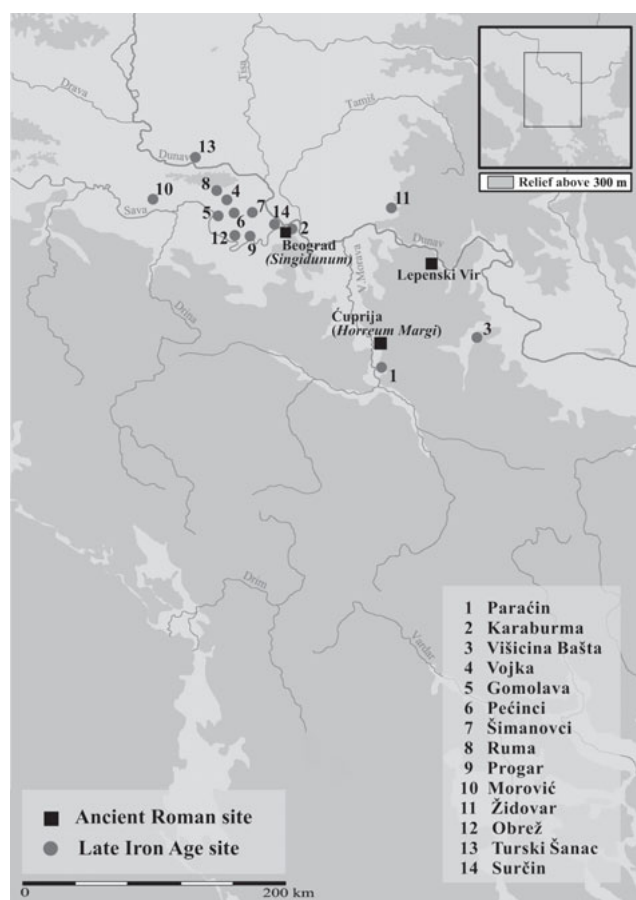


Fig. 1. The position of Ćuprija (*Horreum Margi*) with related Late Iron Age and ancient Roman sites.

diameter of 26 cm, its surface is gray both inside and outside. This fragment is slightly rougher in appearance than the first one. The outer surface is polished, also more at its lower part. The inner surface bears polished bands, as well as some parts of the rim. The whole fragment is much more worn out than the previous one. Its inflection point is gray, while the fabric consists of clay with small sand and quartz

¹ ПЕТРОВИЋ 1981, 53–54.

² PETROVIĆ 1979, 58.

³ Ibid. 58.

⁴ ФЕРЈАНЧИЋ 2002, 292 inscription 385. IMS IV 84.

⁵ KANITZ 1991, 217; 219; 220; 222; 231; 233–237; 240; 248.

⁶ ПОРОВИЋ 1989, 69.

grains. The base is missing. The maximum preserved height of the fragment measures 6 cm.

Both fragments seem to derive from the Late Iron Age pottery tradition of the 2nd century BC. That was the period when the Scordiscian culture was at its zenith and the time of development of polished gray pottery. This pottery type was at its peak after the victory of Scipio over the Scordisci in 84 BC, and it continued to exist even after the Roman occupation.⁷

The earliest analogies can be found at Karaburma, grave nos. 20,⁸ 39,⁹ 40,¹⁰ 56,¹¹ 74,¹² 100¹³ and 222¹⁴ (fig. 4–5).

Another analogy was found at Obrež, where this type of vessel was used as urns (fig. 6).¹⁵

Analogies from Židovar include bowls belonging chronologically to its first¹⁶ and second¹⁷ phases (fig. 7).

Analogies from Turski Šanac include bowls found within a Scordiscian *oppidum* (fig. 8).¹⁸

Analogies from Surčin include two bowls, one with a lid (fig. 9).¹⁹ The same type was found at Vranja, Hrtkovci,²⁰ Dumbovo-Beočin,²¹ Pećinci-Tromeđa,²² Voganj/Bare,²³ Livade-Sremska Mitrovica,²⁴ Bregovi-Atovac in Kuzmin,²⁵ Velike Ledine in Kuzmin,²⁶ Gajići-Adaševci,²⁷ Tromeđa-Pećinci²⁸ and Žirovac-Ruma.²⁹

Analogies from Paraćin-Gloždak indicate the existence of Late Iron Age elements (both Scordiscian and Dacian) in the 1st century AD. In grave no. 4 an S-profiled bowl was found, which was typical for the Late Iron Age of this region (fig. 10).³⁰ During sondage excavations of the same site, similar fragments of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery were found, which can also be dated to the 1st century AD.³¹

Another parallel to these types was found at Višicina bašta near Gamzigrad village.³² Similar vessels belonging to Late Iron Age S-profiled bowls of various types and subtypes can be dated into the Flavian period, actually into the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century AD.³³ Among the examples found at this site, bowl fragments stand out, which bear polished ornament on their inner and outer surfaces. The closest analogy to the first example presented in this paper is the fragment depicted on Tables II/8 and IV/1,³⁴ while the second example shown in this paper can be connected to the fragment depicted on Table V/6.³⁵

Analogies from Belgrade (*Singidunum*) can be classified into two variants of the same type.³⁶ They are defined as type I/28 (fig. 11).³⁷ This type can be dated between the first half of the 2nd to the middle of the 4th century AD, while the majority originates from complexes and layers dated to the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century AD.³⁸

Another analogy was found next to the watch-tower at Lepenski Vir, on the bank of the Danube. Along with other fragments from the same layer, it is dated to the 3rd century AD (fig. 12).³⁹

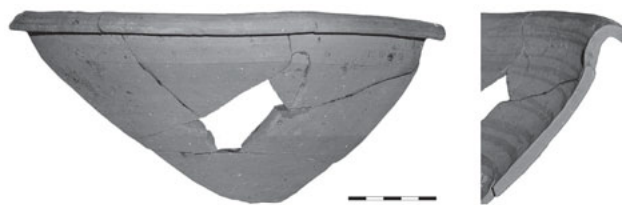


Fig. 2. Bowl fragment 1 from Čuprija (*Horreum Margi*).



Fig. 3. Bowl fragment 2 from Čuprija (*Horreum Margi*).

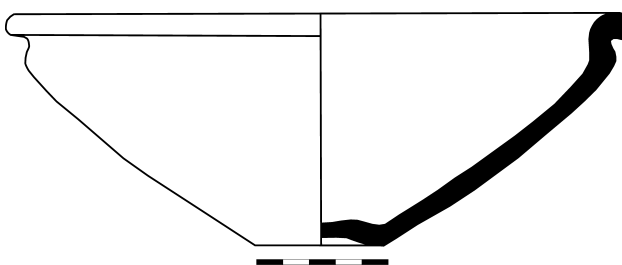


Fig. 4. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Karaburma, Grave No. 40.

Similar examples are known from Vojka in Srem, former southern *Pannonia Inferior*.⁴⁰ Further analogies from Srem include bowls from Gomolava,⁴¹ Pećinci,⁴² Šimanovci,⁴³

⁷ SLADIĆ 1986, 49.

⁸ TODOROVIĆ 1972, 16 Pl. VII, gr. 20,1.

⁹ Ibid, 21 Pl. XV, gr. 39,3,4.

¹⁰ Ibid, 22 Pl. XVI, gr. 40,1,3.

¹¹ Ibid, 25–26 Pl. XX, gr. 56,5,8.

¹² Ibid, 29 Pl. XXVI, gr. 74,1.

¹³ Ibid, 33 Pl. XXXI, gr. 100, 1, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid, 39 Pl. XXXIX–XL, gr. 222,3,6,10.

¹⁵ SLADIĆ 1986, 29 Pl. XIV, 10.

¹⁶ Ibid, 31; 32 Pl. XVI, 5, 9, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid, 33–34 Pl. XXV,1,2; 34 Pl. XXVI,1,3.

¹⁸ Ibid, 37–38 Pl. XXXV,1,6.

¹⁹ Ibid, 45 Pl. XLVI,4; XLVII,4.

²⁰ DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1974, 109–111 Pl. LXIV,8; LXVIII,5.

²¹ BRUKNER 1995, 91 Pl. V,13.

²² Id, 1983, 52–53 Pl. XXV, 3.

²³ Id, 1986–1987, 77,4.

²⁴ Id, 1995, 93 Pl. III,28,29,31.

²⁵ Ibid, 94–95 Pl. VIII,71.

²⁶ Ibid, 96 Pl. X,95.

²⁷ Ibid, 97–98 Pl. XII,112.

²⁸ Ibid, 98–100 Pl. XIII,127,129.

²⁹ Ibid, 108 Pl. XVIII,180.

³⁰ ГАРАШАНИН 1964 Fig. 6,79–87.

³¹ ПОПОВИЋ 2003, 260.

³² СЛАДИЋ 2005, 212.

³³ Ibid, 220.

³⁴ Ibid, 213 Pl. II,8; IV,1.

³⁵ Ibid, 213 Pl. V,6.

³⁶ ВОЈОВИЋ 1977, Pl. L/458, 460.

³⁷ НИКОЛИЋ-ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 2000, 29; 30.

³⁸ Ibid, 30.

³⁹ СРЕЈОВИЋ 1984, 197 Pl. I,2.

⁴⁰ BRUKNER 1981, 95 Pl. 88,106,107.

⁴¹ Id, 1987, 35 Pl. 11,11; Id, 1992, 26 Pl. 10,64–65.

⁴² Ibid, 37 Pl. 15,10.

⁴³ Ibid, 37 Pl. 16,9.

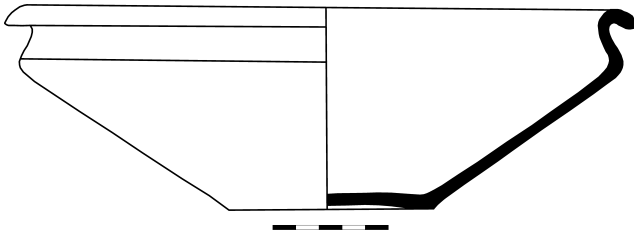


Fig. 5. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Karaburma, Grave No. 74.

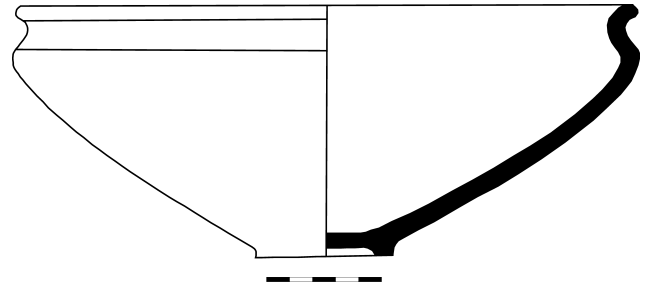


Fig. 6. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Obrež.

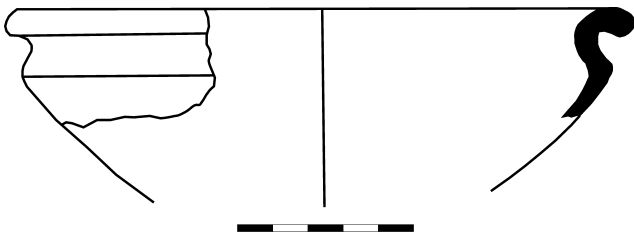


Fig. 7. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Židovar.

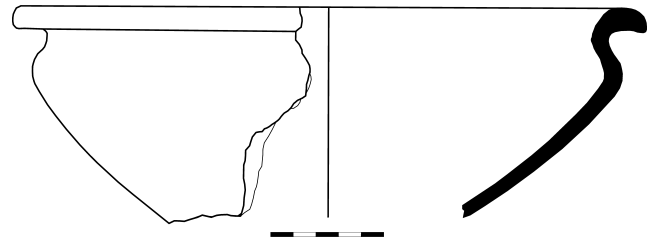


Fig. 8. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Turski Šanac.

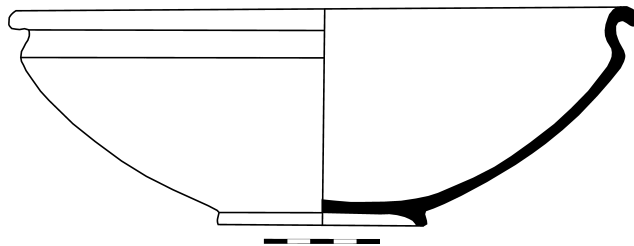


Fig. 9. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Surčin.

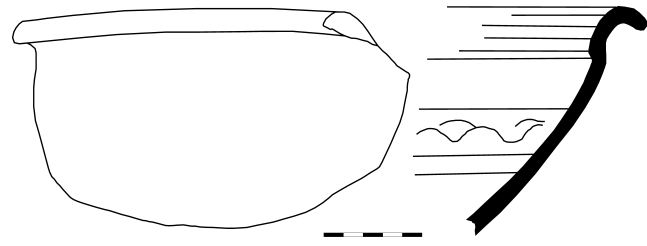


Fig. 10. Late Iron Age bowl fragment from Paraćin-Gloždak.

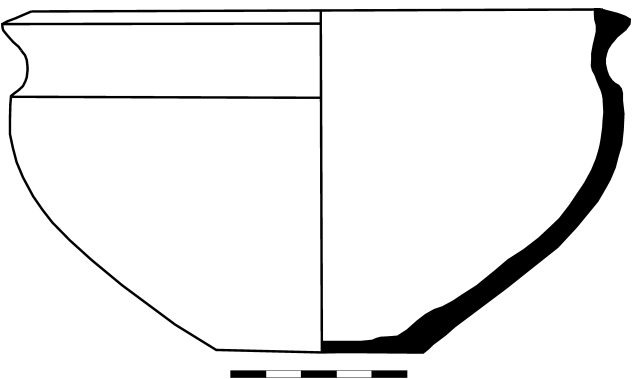


Fig. 11. Roman bowl type from Belgrade (*Singidunum*).

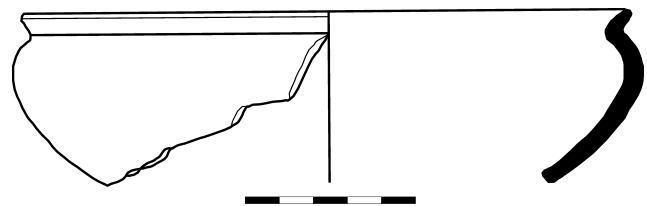


Fig. 12. Roman bowl from Lepenski Vir (Roman watch-tower).

Ruma,⁴⁴ Progar⁴⁵ and Morović.⁴⁶ They show the same surface finish of their inner and outer surfaces, their color is gray and they can also be dated to the 2nd–3rd century AD.

Analogous vessels can be found in Hungarian Transdanubia, dating to the La Tène D period. In this district, because of its considerable distance from the municipal industrial centers (i.e. those were pottery manufacture and

metallurgy were practiced), Roman goods would not quickly have replaced the traditional La Tène D products.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid. 37 Pl. 18,5.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 37 Pl. 19,11.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 38 Pl. 21,9.

⁴⁷ GABLER 1982, 68–70 Fig. 7,6.

The two fragments from *Horreum Margi* mentioned here obviously derive from the Late Iron Age traditions of the Middle Balkans. These traditions include Celtic (i.e. Scordiscian) manufacture of pottery, which was highly developed for that period of (pre)history. Vessel types of this kind, which were produced during prehistoric times, continued to be produced in the same or very similar manner during Roman times. The presence of such pottery types reflects the influence of autochthonous potters on Roman provincial pottery production. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD polished gray pottery is revived within the so called "Celtic Renaissance", showing once again the strength of the Iron Age Celtic traditions. The presence of Celtic traditions in such a late Roman period is also confirmed by various toponyms and personal names which appear along the right Danube bank in *Moesia*.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ MIRKOVIĆ 1968, 16; 130; CIL III 8151; III 8117.

Questions raised by this paper include the following:

- Why do such fragments appear in a layer dated into the 3rd and 4th century when according to literature they should be dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD? It might be possible that the Late Iron Age tradition persisted for longer than has been suspected so far. Unfortunately, this question remains unanswered, since there are no closed finds so far, like burials for instance, which would offer more precise data on this matter.
- How should one explain the technique, which is from the Late Iron Age, but appears in late Roman times? Possibly this technique was very highly developed and was still practiced by local potters even after the appearance of the Roman ceramic ware.
- Is the technique of bowl-making in any way to be associated with the survival of the native Late Iron Age population? As follows from the previous question, it is highly possible that the local population from the Late Iron Age was still identifiable as such even several hundred years later.

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