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## RECTANGULAR GRAVE VESSELS AND STAMPED CERAMICS FROM THE ROMAN PERIOD IN THE CENTRAL BALKANS

(a Contribution to the Study of Prehistoric Traditions during the Roman Period)

*Abstract.* – This paper discusses the rectangular grave vessels discovered, with cremated human remains, at several Roman period cemeteries in western Bulgaria, northeast Macedonia and southeast Serbia. All the cemeteries show similar funerary rites, burial procedures and ceramics, suggesting a very conservative population whose culture was based on prehistoric traditions. In the second part of the paper, on the basis of the presented archaeological material and historic sources, the author tries to determine the ethnicity of the population who buried their dead at these sites.

*Key words.* – rectangular vessels, 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century, west Bulgaria, southeast Serbia, northeast Macedonia, cremation, graves, stamped ornaments, prehistoric traditions, conservatism, Thracians, the Bessi.

In recent years, at several Roman period cemeteries in the farthest southeast of Serbia, rectangular baked clay vessels, mainly with coarse surfaces, have been discovered. Similar vessels are known from Roman period sites in western Bulgaria, north-eastern Macedonia, and on the southwest slopes of Mt. Stara Planina. This paper focuses on issues concerning the territory over which the vessels were unearthed, on their origin and purpose, and on the ethnicity of the population which used them.<sup>1</sup>

### SITES CATALOGUE

#### SOUTHEAST SERBIA

##### **Mala Lukanja, Kamik site, Pirot**

The Kamik site is situated on the southwest slopes of Mt. Stara Planina, on the elevated Visočica river terrace, southeast of the village of Mala Lukanja (map 1/1).<sup>2</sup> It is a Roman period cemetery lying on an elongated plateau of 20 x 50 m, at an altitude of 570 m above sea level. Twenty-three graves with cremations and 7 stone constructions without a grave pit or human remains were discovered. In the graves numbered 2, 5 and 9, in addition to other material, rectangular vessels were found.

Grave No. 2 is a circular grave pit 1m in diameter, filled with the remnants of a pyre and covered with a stone construction. Fragments of four vessels were found in the pit, of which one has a rectangular base. The bottom of the vessel and the upper rim are decorated with incisions (Pl. IV/35). The vessel shows traces of burning.

Grave No. 5 is also a circular grave pit of 1m in diameter, covered with a stone construction, with the remnants of a pyre within the pit. On the square based vessel found in the pit, the corners were plastically curved and stretched out, and the bottom is decorated with sheaves of short incisions (Pl. IV/34). This vessel shows traces of burning as well.

Grave No. 9 is identical to the other two graves in shape and size. The bottom of the rectangular vessel from this grave is decorated with an incised fish-bone motif, while the upper rim is decorated with a series of slanting incisions (Pl. IV/36). All the vessels are of coarse structure and rough surface. In the last grave an urn, placed on a ceramic plate, was found containing cremated human remains. In the urn there was a small

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<sup>1</sup> This Paper is the result of the scientific and research project *Metal Age in the Morava Basin*, No. 147 007.

<sup>2</sup> Пејић 1993, 48–72.

ceramic pot and a ferrous knife.<sup>3</sup> Though this cemetery has graves of different shapes (trapezoid, ellipsoid, rectangular), it is interesting to note that the vessels were found only in the circular pits. The author dates the cemetery to the period between the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

#### **Mala Lukanja, Ljubavica site, Pirot**

The Ljubavica site is situated at the west end of the steep slope of the Bežanica hill, northwest from Mala Lukanja village, at an altitude between 575 and 590 m above sea level.<sup>4</sup> The cemetery lies ca. 1.5 km northwest of the Kamik site (map 1/2). Thirty four graves<sup>5</sup> were found at this cemetery. Rectangular vessels were found in two graves.

In grave No. 6, a pear-shaped pit with pyre remnants preserved in it, covered with a stone construction, a vessel was found with a square-shaped rim and a circular based bottom (Pl. IV/32). On the outer bottom side of the vessel there is a ring-like low foot-stand. The bottom of the vessel is decorated with an incised fish bone motif.

Grave No. 8 is an ellipsoid pit, covered with a stone construction. Among other ceramic offerings and a ferrous single-edged knife, a rectangular vessel on a low ring-like foot-stand was found (Pl. IV/33). The bottom of the vessel is decorated with an incised fish bone motif.

The rectangular vessels from both of the graves have a good structure, with a smoothed slip of reddish and black colour. On the basis of grave goods analogies, the author dates the cemetery to between the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> and the mid 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### **Mala Kopašnica, Kamenitica site – Moravište, Leskovac**

Mala Kopašnica is situated ca. 12 km southeast of Leskovac, by the highway Niš – Skopje (map 1/3). The Kamenitica site – Moravište is positioned on a mildly rolling plain, on the southeast periphery of Leskovac Polje. An investigation of this site revealed a cemetery with cremated remains and rectangular and circular based shallow vessels. The cemetery was first excavated in 1960, when two characteristic vessels were discovered – one circular and the other rectangular based with ornaments in the form of incised scratches on the inner lower side.<sup>6</sup> In 2003, excavations were continued and a rectangular vessel was found in grave No. 23, a rectangular pit with baked walls, in the centre of which there was a smaller rectangular pit also with baked walls and bottom.<sup>7</sup> The cremated remains were scattered

across the bottom of the upper and lower tier. This grave belongs to the Mala Kopašnica – Sase type. The rectangular vessel found in the grave is of coarse fabric with arched sides and slightly elongated corners (Pl. II/18). In the same grave were found two small pots with two handles which appear quite frequently in the inventory of the cemeteries where rectangular vessels were also discovered. For the present, this cemetery represents the westernmost point in the distribution of the rectangular vessels, and is the site with the lowest altitude above sea level where this kind of vessel has been found. This cemetery is placed chronologically by the authors into the period starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Donja Ljubata, Stojkova njiva site, Bosilegrad**

Donja Ljubata is situated ca. 15 km west of Bosilegrad, at the natural communication connecting this region with the Vranje–Bujanovac Basin (map 1/4). The site is located on a slope in Dolinci mahala, facing south-east, towards the village and river.<sup>9</sup> The altitude above sea level of the cemetery is ca. 1050 m.<sup>10</sup>

During the construction of a village road, 300 m west of the house of Bojanče Anastasov, at a depth of 2–3 m, stone grave constructions were discovered. During a visit to the site, eight graves were noted, of which seven were at the same relative depth, ca. 80–100 cm, while one of the graves was at the depth of 1.5 m. Judging by the profile layout, the graves were dug in rows turned in the direction northeast – southwest, while the distance between them ranged from 1 to 2.5 m.

Grave 1 is a pit 1–1.2 m wide and ca. 0.5 m deep at the bottom of which the cremated remnants of the deceased were deposited. The pit was covered with broken stones (tumuli?).

Grave 2 – situated ca. 2 m from grave 1 in a north-easterly direction. It was dug ca. 0.5 m deeper than the others. The grave pit ca. 0.5 m wide and 0.5–0.6 m deep

<sup>3</sup> Pejić 1993, T. 16, T. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Pejić 1993, 15–47.

<sup>5</sup> Pejić 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Ercegović-Pavlović, Kostić 1988, fig. 146.

<sup>7</sup> Фидановски, Цвјетићанин 2005, 97–98.

<sup>8</sup> Фидановски, Цвјетићанин 2005, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Bulatović 2005, 176–177.

<sup>10</sup> On 03. 03. 1999, the site was visited by a team consisting of Slađan Andonov, who informed us of the site, Nikola Cvetković, associate of the National Museum in Vranje and Goran Mitrović and Aleksandar Bulatović, archaeologists of the National Museum in Vranje.



Map 1. Sites with rectangular vessel finds and mention of the Bessi:

● rectangular vessels finds; ● the Bessi mention sites

List of rectangular vessels sites: 1. M. Lukanja, Kamik; 2. M. Lukanja, Ljubavica;

3. M. Kopašnica, Kamenitica–Moravište; 4. D. Ljubata, Stojkova njiva; 5. Ljanik, Stare kolibe; 6. Sebrat, Selište; 7. Svinjište, Dlje njive; 8. Svinjište, Reka; 9. Otošnica, Mogila; 10. Kostin Dol, Jačkov rid; 11. Drašan, Krešta; 12. Kyustendil, Hisarlik; 13. Kyustendil, Kadin Most; 14. Kočani, Kasarski krug; 15. Pernik, Kraljev Dol; 16. Smoljan, Gela; 17. Samokovsko, Popovjane

The Bessi mention sites: a) Vidin; b) Remesiana; c) Klečevce; d) Skupi; e) Serdica; ?) Besapara

Карта 1. Локалитети са налазима правоугаоних осуда и именом Беса:

● налази правоугаоних посуда; ● локације са поменом Беса

Списак локалитета са правоугаоним посудама: 1. М. Лукања, Камик; 2. М. Лукања, Љубавица;

3. М. Копашница, Каменишница–Моравиште; 4. Д. Љубата, Стојкова њива; 5. Љаник, Старе колибе; 6. Себрат, Селиште; 7. Свињеште, Дље њиве; 8. Свињеште, Река; 9. Отошница, Могила; 10. Костин Дол, Јачков рид; 11. Драшан, Крешта; 12. Бустиендил, Хисарлик; 13. Бустиендил, Кадин Мост; 14. Кочани, Касарски круг; 15. Перник, Кралев Дол; 16. Смољан, Гела; 17. Самоковско, Појовјане  
Локације са поменом Беса: а) Видин; б) Ремесиана; в) Клечевце; д) Скупи; е) Сердица; ?) Бесапара

was lined with broken stone on all sides. At the bottom, also covered by broken stone, lay the cremated remnants of the deceased, and immediately above these there was a 0.4 m layer of charred wood fragments.

Grave 3 – is situated ca. 2.5 m from grave 2 in a north-easterly direction. The pit is of the same size as grave 2, and lined with broken stone on all sides. A large, barrel-shaped vessel with horizontally profiled rim, with a wide strap handle positioned immediately below it (Pl. III/21), was found in the pit. The vessel, of grey colour and smoothed surface, was made on a potter's wheel. Within the vessel there were two smaller vessels – a biconical mug with two vertically position-

ned handles and a bucket-shaped vessel. The mug is 5.5 cm high. It was made on a potter's wheel and coated in brown slip (Pl. I/6 and Pl. III/20). The handmade bucket-shaped vessel with a slightly everted rim is 12 cm high. Its shoulder is decorated with larger slanting incised scratches in a horizontal row (Pl. III/27). From this, or from one of the nearer graves, comes a shallow grey plate, 5.5 cm high, with an everted profile rim of 28 cm in diameter and a ring-like profiled bottom of 9 cm in diameter (Pl. III/22).

Grave 4 – is situated ca. 2 m northeast of the grave 3. The shape of the grave is identical to that of the grave 1. No inventory was found in the grave.

Grave 5 – is the only grave containing an interred body. It is positioned ca 1.5 m from the preceding one. Construction consists of broken stone, around and over the deceased, interred in a fully strait position on the back. Above the pelvis and above the stone in the upper part of the construction were found fragments of a 5 cm high rectangular vessel. The vessel is of grey colour with dark-grey slip and is made of well refined clay. It is decorated from the outside with a »bird's leg« motif in the cogwheel imprint technique alternating with impressed concentric circles (Pl. I/3 and Pl. III/19).

Grave 6 – is situated ca. 0.5 m above grave 5. Remnants of a 30 cm long, horizontally placed piece of timber (a plank?) were found there. It is not certain whether this is a separate grave or a part of either grave 5 or 7.

Grave 7 – is situated ca. 1 m from grave 5. The grave construction is identical to those of graves 2 and 3. Within the construction were found fragments of 2 rectangular vessels of coarse structure. The vessel bottoms are decorated with larger incised scratches. One of them is decorated with incisions on the outside as well, while the other is decorated outside with »swastika« motifs and symbols in the Latin letter »V« shapes, which overlap in some cases (Pl. I/2, 5 and Pl. III/23, 25). A 5 cm high wheel-made bell-like drinking cup, (Pl. I/4 and Pl. III/24) was found there also. It is of red-brown colour and of fine fabric.

Grave 8 – is situated ca. 1 m below grave 6 and in it were found remnants of carbonized wood as well as a rectangular vessel, the inner bottom side of which was decorated with larger incised scratches. The vessel is of red-brown colour, of coarse fabric and size of 14.5 x 13.5 x 4 cm (Pl. I/8).

In this cemetery three grave types were established:

- shallow pits with remnants of the deceased deposited at the bottom, covered by broken stone (remnants of low tumuli?);

- deeper pits lined and covered with broken stone, with remnants of the deceased deposited in urns, and ceramic vessels as offerings;

- inhumation grave with a broken stone construction and a rectangular vessel as offering.

This cemetery is, according to the funerary rites of the dead, identical to the cemeteries in the surroundings of Pirot and in the territory of the west Bulgaria. Thanks to the ceramic material, the identical analogies of which were found at Ljanik, near by, together with coins from the Viminacium mint, the Donja Ljubata cemetery was dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Controversy appeared only with regard to the inhumation gra-

ve, squeezed between the two graves with cremated dead, but without any damage caused to the latter. Generally speaking, S. Mašov is right to believe that graves in these cemeteries had landmarks above ground to avoid damage at subsequent burials.<sup>11</sup> Inhumation graves also appear at other cemeteries with cremated dead and rectangular vessels (Otošnica, Drašan and Kočani). Ornamentation, fabric, and the quality of firing of the rectangular vessels from this cemetery remind one powerfully of the prehistoric ceramic production from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC in the eastern part of the central Balkans.

#### Ljanik, Stare kolibe site, Preševo

Ljanik is situated on the eastern slopes of the Rujan, several hundred meters west of the river Pčinja (map 1/5). The Stare kolibe site is positioned on a hillock on the northeast periphery of the village, at an altitude of ca. 650 m above sea level.

The cemetery was discovered in 1998 when Ljanik residents handed in two rectangular vessels »full of ashes and soot«. <sup>12</sup> Later on, it was discovered that two illegible coins from the Viminacium mint were found in them which dated the cemetery to the period after 239 AD.<sup>13</sup> The sizes of the rectangular vessels are 20 x 17.5 cm and 26 x 18 cm, with the bottom decorated with large impressed scratches. Vessel walls are ca. 1 cm thick and 5 cm high. The smaller vessel had a small divider in one corner, while the other one had corner recipients in the shape of a cup (Pl. I/1 and Pl. IV/28, 29). This vessel has ribbed vertical plastic reinforcement in the corners below the cups. Nearly identical analogies of these vessels were found at the close-by Sebrat, and in the village of Otošnica by Kriva Palanka, then in Dragaš by Vrace, in the environs of Kyustendil and other sites in south-eastern Serbia and north-eastern Macedonia.<sup>14</sup>

#### Sebrat, Selište site – Gornjo obrusce, Bujanovac

A larger cemetery from the Roman period is situated in the village Rusce, in the region of Selište – Gornjo

<sup>11</sup> Машов 1975, 41–49.

<sup>12</sup> The vessels were brought and presented to the National Museum in Vranje by N. Cvetković and M. Denković. We use this opportunity to thank them.

<sup>13</sup> We thank Mr. R. Kadri from Lučani for this data.

<sup>14</sup> The material from the village of Otošnica is permanently displayed in the National Museum in Skopje. For the cemetery in Dragaš see Машов 1975, 41–49; Иванов 1920, 87, obr. 63/a; Najdenova 1972, 151, fig. 10; Гарашанин 1959, 70; Гарашанин 1968, fig. 31.

obrusce, positioned on a larger slope slanting mildly towards the southeast, and intersected by the Klenike – Reljan road (map 1/6). The average altitude of the site is ca. 700 m above sea level. Local residents found urns with the remnants of cremation, broken stone, soot and coins. These finds attracted looters who excavated graves on several occasions. They left behind ceramic fragments of which some belonged to rectangular vessels. Two vessels survived in tact.

One is of smaller size (14 x 12 cm) with curved recipient in one corner. The bottom of the vessel is decorated with larger incised scratches arranged into regular rows (Pl. IV/31).<sup>15</sup>

The other vessel is of larger size (22.5 x 20 cm), also with a rectangular base, with incised scratches on its bottom arranged in regular rows. It is made of poorly refined clay with sand traces. It has a light brown smoothed slip, and the outside walls are decorated with a series of rectangular imprints in a horizontal row below the rim and with slanting rows in the shape of the Latin letter »V«. Between these ornaments there are stamped circular ornaments divided by triangular segments giving them appearance of a six pointed star (Pl. II/12 and Pl. IV/30). On two corners there are conic recipients (cups), the bottom of which is decorated with identical impressed stamps. On the rim, in the two remaining corners, there are the same impressed stamps, but without recipients. The upper rim part is decorated with a slanting series of rectangular imprints made with a cogwheel tool.<sup>16</sup> The ornaments on this richly decorated vessel have not been recorded on other rectangular vessels to-date. The decoration technique and the motifs of this vessel, however, have analogies in the ornamentation of early Iron Age ceramics and on ceramics of late antiquity from eastern Macedonia, southeast Serbia and west Bulgaria.<sup>17</sup> Vessels of glossy smoothed surfaces, of grey and brown colour, decorated with impressed stamps and rectangular imprints appear in a great number in mountainous regions east of the Southern Morava (Prvonek, Motina, Novo Selo, Davidovac – Pl. II/9, 11, 13).<sup>18</sup> According to coin and a late antiquity buckle finds, the vessel was dated into the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Svinjište, D'lge njive site, Preševo**

The D'lge njive site is situated some 400–500m west of the Dorotejci mahala, at an altitude of ca. 650m above sea level (map 1/7). Judging by the surface finds (lead and ceramic weights, millstones, bricks, ceramics, coins) an antique settlement lay on a long strip of land in the direction north-south, and on its east slope. On

the northeast periphery of the site, on both sides of the road intersecting the site, there are remnants of antique cemeteries with urns. The urns are of globular shape, and were surrounded by broken stone construction and arranged in a series with a distance of ca. 0.5m from each other, while the distance between the rows was ca. 2m. The urns were found at the depth of 0.5 to 0.6 m. Besides the urns, there was a lot of ash and unidentified Roman coins and other vessels, among which there was a rectangular vessel.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Svinjište, Reka site, Preševo**

During archaeological excavations in the late autumn of 2005 on the Reka site (map 1/8) on the left bank of the village river, ca. 50 m south of the village, at a cemetery a fragment of a rectangular vessel, of coarse appearance with the bottom decorated with large imprints of irregular circles in a series (Pl. I/7) was found. There are no further indications – except of the closeness of the modern and medieval cemeteries – that there was an antique cemetery on the site. Site altitude is between 600 and 620 m above sea level.

### **NORTHEAST MACEDONIA**

#### **Otošnica, Mogila site, Kriva Palanka**

Otošnica is situated near Kriva Palanka, at the farthest northeastern point of the FYR of Macedonia (map 1/9). At the Mogila site, at an altitude of ca. 550 m above sea level, below a larger tumuli, a Roman cemetery was found with both inhumation and cremation burials.<sup>20</sup> There are a total of 40 graves dated from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. The majority of graves are inhumations and were covered with bricks. On the basis of coins, the graves were dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The cremation burials were covered with broken stones. In

<sup>15</sup> The vessel is in the National Museum in Vranje.

<sup>16</sup> The vessel was found together with coins from the 4<sup>th</sup> century and a late antiquity buckle. It is owned by Lj. Stanković from Leskovac. We use the opportunity to thank him for insight into the material.

<sup>17</sup> Gotzev 1994, T. I 19/6; See works of Шурбаноска 1999, 251 and on; Соколовска 1976, 157 and on.

<sup>18</sup> Bulatović 2005, 177–178.

<sup>19</sup> We thank Krunislav Atanasković, for data information. Unfortunately, we failed to obtain closer data on the rectangular vessel, except that it was of smaller size and of rectangular base.

<sup>20</sup> We thank our colleague Cone Krstevski from Muzej na Makedonija in Skopje for the data.

the opinion of the author, who carried out excavations, these graves are of earlier date, though no plausible chronological finds were made to corroborate the thesis. In a number of graves with cremations rectangular vessels were found. The vessels are decorated with incised wavy lines on the upper rim surface, then with plastic button-like extensions at the rim corners, while the vessel bottoms are ornamented with fingertip imprints, triangular imprints or grooves, i.e. with longer incisions. One of the vessels is of circular base with its bottom decorated with longer incisions, while the other has a divided recipient similar to the vessels from Ljanik and Sebrat. Together with these vessels, a bell-shaped vessel was found, identical to the specimen from Donja Ljubata, as well as stamped ceramics, identical to the vessel shapes and ornaments from the late antiquity sites of southeast Serbia (Gložje, Novo Selo, Davidovac, Motina – Pl. II/9, 11, 13).<sup>21</sup> Particularly striking are the similarities of the biconical goblet with three handles, from this site, identical to the specimens from Gložje and Skupi and a bowl with a wavy rim in the shape of small horns, decorated with incised lines following the rim contour and with circular stamps.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Kostin dol, Jačkov rid site, Delčevo**

The Jačkov rid site is named Selište as well and is situated between T. Jačkov's house and the Bulgarian border, at an altitude of above 700 m above sea level (map 1/10).<sup>23</sup> It is a narrow ridge oriented east – west where antique pythos, Roman coins and two rectangular vessels were found. One of the two vessels is preserved and is kept in the National Museum in Štip. It is a rectangular based vessel with a smaller recipient in the corner. The vessel bottom is decorated with larger incised scratches. At the time, due to lack of analogies, the vessel was dated in the Neolithic, but today, thanks to numerous analogies from the neighbouring territories, and the antique finds from the same site, the vessel is now believed to be late Roman in date.

#### **Kočani, Kasarski krug site**

The Kasarski krug site is situated in Kočane, on a steep slope at an average altitude of ca. 350 m above sea level, on the left bank of the river Kočanska reka. Four graves were examined, of which three were cremations and one an inhumation.<sup>24</sup> The cremation burials were covered with ellipsoid tombs made of river cobbles. Above the pit containing the remnants of the deceased, ashes, animal bones and offerings, was a sepulchral flat-stone cover. In two cremation burials, two rectangular vessels were found with one recipient in the cor-

ner and the bottom decorated with a series of longer incised scratches (Pl. II/14, 15). These vessels are virtually identical to the specimens from Ljanik, Sebrat and Otošnica, while for the other vessels from the graves the author found analogies in Stobi, Pernik, Marvinci and other sites in Eastern Macedonia. In grave 2, with cremated remains, the vessel found was of identical shape to the one from Donja Ljubata (Pl. III/20), decorated with incised swastika on the belly.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to point out that this ornament is also present on a rectangular vessel in Donja Ljubata (Pl. I/5 and Pl. III/25). The author dated the cemetery roughly into the period between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **WEST BULGARIA**

#### **Drašan, Krešta site, Vrace**

On the Krešta site, not far from Drašan, at an altitude of ca. 350 m above sea level, there is a cemetery from the Roman period (map 1/11). A total of 34 graves were discovered of which 33 contained cremations and one an inhumation (a child).<sup>26</sup> The deceased were cremated on a pyre platform and subsequently the remnants were deposited into urns or shallow pits. Offerings, such as ceramic vessels, coins and metal articles were deposited around the urn and the grave pit. Above the graves were found remnants of broken stone constructions (stone wreaths or tumuli). The author dates the cemetery into the period from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the mid 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, ascribing it ethnically to the autochthonous Thracian population because these funerary rites (specifically the stone wreath) in this territory are related to prehistoric Thracian customs. In some of the graves rectangular vessels were found. Two of them are identical to the vessels from Ljanik or Sebrat (coarser pottery without outer side finishing, scratches on the bottom, smaller recipient in the corner), while one rectangular vessel of fine fabric and smoothed slip had a horizontally profiled rim at the narrower sides. The broadened rim was decorated with incised lines in

<sup>21</sup> Not published material, kept in the National Museum in Vranje. J. W. Hayes names this type of ceramic Macedonian *terra sigillata* (Hayes 1972, 405–407).

<sup>22</sup> Од археолошкото богатство на СР Македонија 1980, фиг. 530.

<sup>23</sup> Гарашанин 1959, 70.

<sup>24</sup> Атанасова 2005, 211 and on.

<sup>25</sup> Атанасова 2005, 211 and on.

<sup>26</sup> Машов 1975, 41–49.

the form of volutes, while the surface workmanship and the ornamentation remind of the so called Macedonian *terra sigillata*. Another vessel of circular base attracts attention, with its fine fabric, smoothed slip and one recipient in the form of a cup on the rim.<sup>27</sup> The shape and position of the recipient recall the vessels from Ljanik and Sebrat.

#### **Kyustendil, Hisarlik site**

On the Hisarlik site in Kyustendil (map 1/12), at an altitude of ca. 700 m above sea level, a rectangular vessel with reinforced outer edges and a bottom decorated with incised scratches was found under unknown circumstances.<sup>28</sup> The attention was paid to the very regular layout of the scratches. Namely, after a vertical series come horizontal series of five scratches, then again follows the vertical scratches series, after which the horizontal series of four scratches follow, continuing in succession up to horizontal rows with one scratch, while the whole composition ends with the vertical scratches series. The vessel was not dated when published, but on the basis of analogies it should be considered late Roman in date. A similar vessel (map 1/13)<sup>29</sup> was found at the Kadin Most site in the surroundings of Kyustendil.

#### **Kralev Dol, Pernik**

In the village Kralev Dol, ca. 6 km southeast from Pernik (map 1/15), during research of a late Roman villa, at an altitude of ca. 800 m above sea level, part of a rectangular vessel was found. The vessel had a cup on the rim of one of the corners (Pl. II/16). The bottom was decorated with imprinted circular stamps in the form of a wheel with several spokes, as well as with concentric circles.<sup>30</sup> The site is dated into the period of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### **Popovjane, Samokov**

The village of Popovjane is situated on the south slopes of the Plana Mountain, ca. 20 km northwest of Samokov, at an altitude of ca. 1000 m above sea level (map 1/17). Besides the cemetery with 138 researched graves, mining furnaces and remnants of an early Christian church were found.<sup>31</sup> Though the cemetery contains both cremation and inhumation burials, the author states that the graves are contemporary and belong to the same period and were used by one tribe. It was noticed, however, that the burials with cremated remains contained richer and more various grave goods compared to the inhumations, in which only one glass cup and a baked clay pitcher were found. The

cremation burials contained offerings such as floating wick, glasses, coins, jewellery, and various types of vessels, as well as shallow coarse vessels of rectangular or circular bases, with or without recipients in the form of a cup on the rim.<sup>32</sup> The vessels are identical to those from the other mentioned cemeteries; the geographically closest analogies were evidenced in Drašan.<sup>33</sup> It is indicative that all the other vessels from these graves, by their shapes and ornaments, are identical to the vessels from the other cemeteries in which rectangular vessels were found. Namely, in this cemetery the cremation burials also contain bell-shaped cups, mugs with two handles and vessels with three handles.<sup>34</sup> Ornamentation is reduced to stamps in the form of concentric circles, circles divided into several segments, small rhomboids and an ornament looking like a series of cogwheel tool imprints. On a fragment there are palm branches which the author believes to be the products of the Greek and Asia Minor ceramic tradition in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.<sup>35</sup> Slag was found in the larger part of the cemetery. On the basis of the slag and the remnants of furnaces, the author is of opinion that the population was engaged in mining. The cemetery is dated to the period of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### **Gela, Zaeвете site, Smoljan**

In the central part of the Rhodope, at an altitude of ca. 1400 m above sea level, northwest of Smoljan, lies the small village of Gela. Not far from the village, at Zaeвете, is a cemetery with cremation burials under small tumuli (map 1/16). Of the 25 discovered tumuli, covering as many graves, nine were from the Roman, while the remaining number belonged to the Halstatt periods. The funerary rites and grave construction at this cemetery were identical to those at the cemeteries in Ljubata, Drašan, Mala Lukanja and Kočane. In one of the graves, a coarse rectangular vessel was found, very similar to the specimen from Drašan, with broadened horizontally profiled rim (Pl. II/17). The vessel bottom is decorated with small imprinted circles. The

<sup>27</sup> Машов 1975, obr. 4/g, 6/b, 7/a, b.

<sup>28</sup> Иванов 1920, obr. 63/a, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Иванов 1910, 178, obr. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Најденова 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Митова-Цонова 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Митова-Цонова 1978, ch. Abb. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Машов 1975, obr. 7a and b.

<sup>34</sup> Митова-Цонова 1978, ch. Abb. 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Митова-Цонова 1978, ch. Abb. 16.

author ascribes the cemetery to the autochthonous Thracian population, and dates it to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>36</sup>

### CLOSING INTERPRETATIONS

Judging by the locations of the mentioned cemeteries, the central region of the population which used these vessels was the territory in the farthest southeast of Serbia (map 1/4–8), then the Ossogovo Mountains in the northeast of the FYR Macedonia (map 1/9–11, 14) and the territory of present-day southwest Bulgaria (map 1/12, 13, 15, 17). These cemeteries were also found on the slopes of the Stara Planina (map 1/1, 2, 11), and in one case in the Rhodope as well (map 1/16). Attention is drawn to the fact that these cemeteries have been found exclusively in mountainous regions east of the Južna Morava and the Vardar, at an altitude above 500 m, but in most cases, even above 650 m. The only exception to this is the cemetery in Mala Kopašnica situated at an altitude of ca. 250 m above sea level, which is also the most western site to produce the rectangular vessels. Furthermore, this cemetery belongs to the Mala Kopašnica – Sase type with different funerary rites and sepulchral construction and consequently differing from the other cemeteries with rectangular vessels and it should be pointed out that only two rectangular vessels were found at Mala Kopašnica, though the larger part of the cemetery was investigated. The data suggests, therefore, that the rectangular vessels were not typical for this cemetery, as was the case at most of the mentioned cemeteries, and that the vessels from Mala Kopašnica should be treated as atypical finds.

It can be stated with almost complete certainty that these vessels were related exclusively to funerary rites because they are mostly found in graves, mainly cremation burials, and only in one case, in an inhumation burial (Donja Ljubata).

It was possible to date the rectangular vessels because of the sufficient number of sensitive finds associated with them. Most of the cemeteries are from the late Roman period, to be more precise, from the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> to the mid 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. In spite of some indications that the coarse vessels are older than the refined rectangular vessels with slip, there is, to date not enough evidence to assert this thesis with confidence. In Mala Lukanja, for instance, in the older cemetery (end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> up to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries) only coarse rectangular vessels with rough outer surfaces were found, while in the later one (mid 3<sup>rd</sup> to the mid 4<sup>th</sup> centuries) appear vessels of finer fabric with smoothed slip.

The grave constructions in which the rectangular vessels appear is very characteristic. In most cases, except for the one in Mala Kopašnica, these are shallow pits containing the cremated remains and offerings, or deeper pits with offerings and an urn, within which are deposited the cremated remains. In both types there are stone constructions above the pit, which probably represent the remnants of small tumuli. An exception is the inhumation burial with stone construction at Donja Ljubata, in which a richly decorated rectangular vessel with glossy smoothed grey slip was found. It is of interest to note that this, obviously later burial, did not damage the neighbouring cremation burials, supporting the theses set forth by S. Mašov that these graves had an above-ground landmark, most probably in the form of smaller tumuli. This thesis is supported by the heaps of stones above the graves. At the cemetery at Drašan the body of a child was interred and covered with a tegula, but without offerings. Consequently it cannot be included in the discussion of the relative chronological comparison of the inhumation burials with those containing cremated remains. When grave construction is concerned, analogies for this kind of burial have been discovered in Skupi, where the dead were laid into the pit and covered with tegulas or planks. Most burials of this type in the province of Upper Moesia belong to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, which does not corroborate the thesis that the inhumation burials from our cemeteries are of later date than the cremations.<sup>37</sup> In the Otošnica cemetery, however, under a large mound, we find both inhumations and cremation burials. In this cemetery the inhumations are most certainly of later date – the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. On the basis of this scarce and conflicting information one cannot, with confidence, establish the chronological relation between the two types of burial at these cemeteries. Nevertheless, the stratigraphy from Otošnica and Donja Ljubata, certainly suggests that the inhumations are in fact of later date. This could be a consequence of a delay in the Christianization of the territories concerned, compared to the more accessible regions by the main communication routes. In eastern Macedonia and southeast Serbia, in the immediate vicinity of the western limits of the territory in which cemeteries with rectangular vessels appear, the burial of cremated remains was characteristic (Tarinci, Crljani, Lipec, Krupac, Blato, Staničenje etc.). A similar funera-

<sup>36</sup> Najdenova 1972, 151.

<sup>37</sup> Јовановић 1984, 126–129.

ry rite was also practiced in central Bulgaria, involving cremation and subsequent deposition of the remains under tumuli (Plovdiv, Popovica, Tulovo etc). Further to the west the Mala Kopašnica – Sase grave type was widespread (Mala Kopašnica, Niš, Skopje, Stobi etc).<sup>38</sup> Burial under tumuli is related to the autochthonous Thracian customs. This thesis is supported by the tumuli discovered in the Morava basin, where a great number of Thracian anthroponyms were also registered, pointing to the intensive presence of the Thracian ethnic community in this region as well.<sup>39</sup> F. Papazoglu notices that the territory with the distribution of cemeteries under tumuli coincides with regions where the presence of the Thracian ethnic element is certain.<sup>40</sup>

The shape of the rectangular vessels is very unusual for the rich ceramic production of the Roman period. Similar vessels are typical of the Neolithic in Thrace and also in the southern reaches of the Starčevo and Vinča cultures. Such vessels, in fact sacrificial altars, usually had foot-stands and were richly decorated with incised ornamentation.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, in these late Roman cemeteries, in addition to the rectangular vessels, we find circular vessels with or without recipients on the rim (Mala Kopašnica, Otošnica, Drašan, Popovjane). In addition to the mentioned sites, such vessels appear in cemeteries in the surroundings of Pleven in northwest Bulgaria.<sup>42</sup> Circular based vessels recall the prehistoric kernoses, typical of the Bronze and Iron Ages. It is known that circular and rectangular vessels from antiquity, with recipients looking like kernoses, were used for certain rituals related to the cult of the dead. We wish to stress that remnants of some burnt material were found in the recipients of the rectangular vessels from Ljanik, and that these vessels were connected exclusively to cemeteries. In nearly all cases, these vessels showed signs of burning, which is further proof of their ritual function. Ornaments in the shape of so-called »birds' feet« from Ljubata recall the adoration attitude, with hands raised to heaven, as is the case with the Magurata cave drawings in northwest Bulgaria. This data also connects these vessels with some Thracian cults and confirms their purpose in rituals of funerary sacrifice.<sup>43</sup> Similar rectangular cases for ashes made of baked clay were used in the Middle East in the Hellenic and Roman periods.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the ritual purpose of these vessels is obvious, as they served as some kind of sacrificial altar.

The other ceramic inventory from the graves with rectangular vessels (sacrificial altars) is evenly distributed in nearly all the cemeteries. Low drinking vessels

with two strap handles levelled with the rim are found, except at Ljubata, and also appear at both the cemeteries in Mala Lukanja, in Otošnica, then in Mala Kopašnica and Sebrat. The origin of these vessels should be sought in Thrace.<sup>45</sup> The authors date them to the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are most numerous during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Ljubata plate has some analogies, when rim and bottom profiling are concerned, with the Mala Lukanja plates, but nearly identical analogies were found at the Kale sites in Krševica, Vardarski rid and other Hellenic period sites.<sup>46</sup> The Ljubata bell-like drinking cups are known from Otošnica, but also from the Hellenic, i.e. Laten period from the Kacipup site in Oraovica.<sup>47</sup> The urn shapes from Ljubata and Mala Lukanja are also connected to Thracian origin.<sup>48</sup>

The rectangular based sacrificial altars appear only in some of the graves at the mentioned cemeteries. For the present, it is not clear whether this fact can be explained by the specific ethnic or religious choice of the deceased within the framework of a larger ethnic or spiritual community or by differences in the social status of the deceased.

Incisions and impressions predominate in the ornamentation of the rectangular based sacrificial altars, particularly on the inner bottom side (nearly all vessels), and sometimes even the outside vessel walls (Donja Ljubata, Sebrat, Drašan, Otošnica). The most common motifs are a series of incised scratches arranged in rows or set at random, grouped fingerprints and wavy lines, and solar symbols (swastikas from Donja Ljubata and Kočane). In addition to incisions and impressions stamps appear on the rectangular vessels, but also on other vessels from the grave inventory of these cemeteries. Favourite motifs are concentric circles and other variants of circular stamps (Otošnica, Donja Ljubata, Sebrat) which were widely distributed motifs in late

<sup>38</sup> Јовановић 1984, 100 and on, 112 and on, 133 and on.

<sup>39</sup> See Цончев 1960a and 1960b, 101 and on, 121 and on, as well as other numerous authors writing about Thracian mogilas.

<sup>40</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 172–202.

<sup>41</sup> Детеv 1959, 57 and on, obr. 82; Garašanin 1979, 126, 167.

<sup>42</sup> Машов 1975, 45 and on.

<sup>43</sup> Theodosiev 2000, 134, Fig. 10, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Јовановић 1984, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Кабакчијева 1986, Т. 16/229, Т. 17/233, 234; Најденова 1985, Т. 13/15, Т. 15/164.

<sup>46</sup> Поповић 2005, Т. II/3; Митревски 2001, drawing 1.

<sup>47</sup> Vukmanović, Popović 1982, Т. IX/4.

<sup>48</sup> Најденова 1985, Т. 31/85,92; Кабакчијева 1986, Т. 34/402.



Map 2. More important sites of ceramics decorated with cogwheel tool and combined with stamped concentric circles

Карта 2. Важнија налазишта керамике украшене радлом у комбинацији са жиґосаним концентричним круґовима

antiquity in the territories east of the Južna Morava and along the course of the Vardar. These motifs, frequently combined with a series of cogwheel tool imprints, appear on vessels from sites of: Golemi grad (south-west Macedonia) dated by the author to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, Źujince by Preševo, Gložje by Bosilegrad (Pl. II/11), Novo Selo by Trgovište, Motina (Pl. II/9), Davidovac (Pl. II/13), Novi Dojran, Stobi, Probištup, Demir Kapija, Skupi, Valandovo, Pernik, Kralevo Dol and many other sites from this territory (map 2).<sup>49</sup> These ceramics are of finer fabric texture with smoothed slip or glaze of red, grey or brown colour, which, in addition to the mentioned ornamentation, prompted J. W. Hayes, to call it Macedonian terra sigillata.<sup>50</sup> These ornaments are very frequent in western Bulgaria (Kyustendil, Pernik) as well.<sup>51</sup> From the ceramic vessel shapes decorated in this fashion we single out biconical goblets on a low foot-stand with two or three handles and bowls with overhanging wavy rim in the shape of horns representing copies of the form Drag. 46 terra sigillata (Valandovo, Mediana, Davidovac, Otošnica, Ulpiana and other).<sup>52</sup> Besides this territory, they appear sporadically in Pannonia and Moesia.<sup>53</sup>

Stamped ceramics appear at other sites in the central Balkans as well, but they are not restricted to the regions related to the rectangular vessels, and the de-

<sup>49</sup> Битракова-Грозданава 1989, fig. 41, 46, 120; Брмболић, Ружић, Митровић 2005, Т. III/2, 5, 6; Т. IV/1, 9; Т. V/2–6; Соколовска 1976, 165, fig. 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 18, 20–24; Јованова, Михајлова 1999, 241, fig. 41; Шурбаноска 1999, 257, fig. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10; Јовановић 2004, fig. 105. Besides the mentioned sites, these shapes of biconical vessels with one, two or three handles and stamped ornamentation, combined with cogwheel tool decoration, were found on the site Isar in Marvinci, Kunova Čuka in Orizari village, Gorica in Vinica etc. Material is on permanent display in the Museum of Macedonia in Skopje.

<sup>50</sup> Hayes 1972, 405–407.

<sup>51</sup> Динчев 2003, обр. 112, 113; Стаикова 1983, обр. 4, 6; Љубенова 1981, обр. 20/1–3, 22, 39, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Шурбаноска 1999, 257, fig. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10; Медијана 1979, fig. 66. Bowl from Davidovac, situated between Vranje and Bujanovac, decorated with cogwheel tool and circular stamps, kept in the National Museum in Vranje.

<sup>53</sup> These bowls, widely distributed on our territory, appear sporadically in Sirmium as well (Brukner 1981, Т. 66/21, 23, 25, 93/166) and Singidunum (Bojović 1977, Т. LII/473, 474), which is customary for the Roman civilization with extended trade.

coration motifs differ greatly. In Ulpiana, for instance, stamped ceramics appear with motifs of human feet, vegetables, rhomboids and human figures. Ornaments made with cogwheel tools are very sporadic, as are concentric circles. S. Fidanovski does not give an origin of these ornaments, finding analogies in Stobi and Demir Kapija.<sup>54</sup> According to Hayes, the stamped ceramics are characteristic of North African workshops from the period after 320 AD with decoration motifs differing much from those related to the territory with distribution of rectangular based sacrificial altars.<sup>55</sup> He compares the so-called Macedonian terra sigillata with ceramics from Gaul, emphasizing however, that this kind of ceramic was internally distributed in Macedonia, though sporadic finds exist in Athens, Corinth and Constantinople. The author dates these ceramics, characterized by grey bowls with horizontally profiled rims, sometimes with an overhanging wavy rim, to the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>56</sup> T. Cvjetičanin, however, when discussing stamped ceramics in the eastern part of the central Balkans, allows the possibility that these ceramics were a »product of local style transformation«. <sup>57</sup> According to O. Brukner, several groups of stamped ceramics, widely distributed during the Roman domination of the Balkan Peninsula, could be distinguished. In addition to the ceramics imitating terra sigillata techniques and forms, there are specimens made under the influence of the »Pergamon« ceramics, then specimens from the workshops of Pannonia, the Middle Danube basin and imports from North African workshops.<sup>58</sup> The decoration of the ceramics related to the territory with cemeteries yielding rectangular based sacrificial altars, is much poorer and the favourite motifs are mainly reduced to concentric circles, variants of the segmented circle and cogwheel tool imprints (map 2) as compared to the stamped ceramics from the above mentioned workshops (palmettes, rosettes, rhombs, hearts, human footprints, small sticks, figure-of-eight, gem imprints and other). The question of the cultural influences of the Hellenic and Thracian regions in the southeast to the stamped ceramics is left open by O. Brukner.<sup>59</sup> In any case, judging by the choice of motifs and shapes, the territory of southeast Serbia, western Bulgaria and eastern Macedonia is clearly distinguished culturally from other parts of the Balkan Peninsula during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. In particular the fact that, besides stamped ceramics, other forms and ornaments characteristic of other Balkan regions during the period of Roman domination do not appear in this territory, or appear only sporadically, support this thesis. The stamped concentric circle mo-

tifs and series of cogwheel tool imprints are certainly not of Roman but rather of autochthonous origin. Concentric circles are a very frequent motif of the Basarabi and Pšeničevo – Babadag cultures from the Iron Ages, while the cogwheel tool is used during this period, beyond the territories of these cultures, in Kosovo and Metohija and in southeast Serbia.<sup>60</sup> The »Birds' foot« motifs, made with a cogwheel tool and combined with imprinted concentric circles from Ljubata and other sites of late antiquity from this territory, are also found, for instance, in early Iron Age sites in Thrace (Pšeničevo, Ravadinovo), then in eastern Serbia (Mala Vrbica, Mihajlovac and other) and many other sites, mainly in territories east of the Velika Morava and Južna Morava and north of the Grdelica Gorge.<sup>61</sup> An identical motif is very frequent on the heads of hinged fibulae of the Asia Minor type, one of the most widely distributed fibulae types in the Balkan Peninsula during the period after the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, particularly during the early Hellenic period.<sup>62</sup> It is noticed that this ornament is neither connected to a definite fibulae type nor to a definite territory in which the fibulae appear.<sup>63</sup> M. Jevtić connects the combination of the two motifs to the Insula–Banului type of the early Basarabi culture dating it into the late 9<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>64</sup> During this period, the vast territory of the entire east part of the central Balkans was overtaken by cultures using the mentioned decoration motifs. In the north, it was the Basarabi culture, in the south and east, Pšeničevo–Babadag culture, which together represented the cultural complex of stamped ceramics during the early and the developed Iron Ages.

The mentioned territory coincides to a large extent with the territory in which, more than a millennium later, the rectangular funerary vessels under discussion were in use. During the late Iron Age, under the inten-

<sup>54</sup> Фидановски 1990, 17 and on, T. 3/6, 4/17, 5/23, 15/44.

<sup>55</sup> Hayes 1972, 217.

<sup>56</sup> Hayes 1972, 405–407.

<sup>57</sup> Cvjetičanin 1991, 192.

<sup>58</sup> Brukner 1981, 30–32.

<sup>59</sup> Brukner 1981, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Гарашанин 1988, 66 and on, map 4.

<sup>61</sup> Gotzev 1994, fig. 3–11; Jevtić 1983, T. XI/3, T. XIII/3, T. XIX/5; ibid 1994, P1. I/1–3, P1. II/1, 4, P1. III/1, 3 and other; Bulatović 2005, 164–166.

<sup>62</sup> Vasić 1985, fig. 8 and 9; Praistorijske kulture Pomoravlja i istočne Srbije, cat. No. 492; Господари сребра, cat. no. 142.

<sup>63</sup> Vasić 1985, 121 and on.

<sup>64</sup> Jevtić 1994, 131.

sive Hellenization of local cultures in these regions, these ornaments all but disappear in this territory. Cogwheel tool decorations in this period appear in a negligibly small number at the Kale site in Krševica (fig. 10) and Kacipup in Oraovica.<sup>65</sup> Given the fact that the Kale site in Krševica has been intensively researched for some years now and that it has a powerful stratum from this period, the argument of insufficient data must be disregarded, though only several fragments were found decorated with this ornament. In Macedonia, this ornament disappeared completely during the Hellenic period to reappear on fine ceramics with slip during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>66</sup> Similar conditions pertain in the upper valley of the river Strouma, where cogwheel tool ornaments<sup>67</sup> appeared, in this period, after a break of several centuries. D. Mitova – Džonova is of the same opinion that the stamped motifs originate from the ceramics production tradition of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC.<sup>68</sup> One must wonder why this kind of ceramic decoration was neglected in this territory during the Hellenistic period and under the early Roman Empire. Perhaps the Hellenization, and then the Romanization of the native cultures suppressed autochthonous ceramic forms and ornamentation in these regions, only for them to reappear after the decline of Roman culture during late antiquity. A similar process seems to have occurred in Illyria at the same time. Here the autochthonous population of the interior underwent a cultural boom evidenced in the stylization of tombstones irresistibly recalling prehistoric forms.<sup>69</sup> This moment, it seems, was the last instant for the autochthonous communities to return to their own cultural traditions before their utter disappearance under the East Roman Empire and subsequent Slav invasions.

Finally, one cannot but speculate upon the ethnicity of the population settled in this territory during late antiquity and using these rectangular vessels in funerary sacrifice rituals.

The first step, at this point, is to determine the ethnicity of the population – whether they were the Dardani or the Thracians. Avoiding discussion of the origin of the Dardani, we intend here to accept the current opinion of a great number of authors who consider them to have been a separate people inhabiting the territory between the Thracian tribes in the east and Illyrian tribes in the west. The lower Južna Morava and the upper Vardar regions, in the opinion of F. Papazoglu, were Thracian up to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and only later were they taken over by the Dardanians. Archeological material from this period is uniform and reduced to the Hellenized ceramics in use over the vast territories of

the south Balkans, Thrace and the Aegean world, which, we are quite aware, makes the ethnic determination of this population even more difficult. In late antiquity, however, Thracian origins are recognizable in the ceramic material and funerary rites of this territory, and also in toponyms. F. Papazoglu states that Thracian names are concentrated in the Južna Morava valley and the territory east of the river.<sup>70</sup> One source informs us that during the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century, most of the young men who were drafted into the army from Skupi, Nais and Remesiana, were Thracians.<sup>71</sup> A. Jovanović compares the cemetery from Gornjan near Bor with Thracian built cemeteries, stating that the deceased was of Thracian origin.<sup>72</sup> Generally speaking, this territory was Thracian during the Roman period. There is doubt, however, as to which of the Thracian tribes used rectangular and which circular sacrificial altars?

In the historical sources from the end of the old era, in the territory east of the lower Southern Morava and the upper Vardar regions, the following Thracian tribes are mentioned: the Medi, Denteleti and Bessi. While the Medi and the Denteleti are not mentioned anymore in the period of the Roman Empire, the Bessi are mentioned even later, consequently, they will be given more attention hereafter. The Bessi are first mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when Herodotus describes them as courageous warriors and free Thracians of Satri origin, living in the high forested mountains, where they pay homage to Dionysius' Oracle.<sup>73</sup> The burial under a tumulus in Duvanli near Plovdiv is from this period and is thought to be that of the cremated ruler of the Bessi, Skythodokos.<sup>74</sup> This data is of particular significance since it points to the fact that cremation and burial under tumuli was practiced at that time, as was the case with our much later and poorer cemeteries.

<sup>65</sup> Krševica material is not published and is kept in the National Museum in Vranje. Compare: Vukmanović, Popović 1982, T. X/7, T. XI/1, 2, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Соколовска 1976, fig. 9, 10, 21, 22; Шурбаноска 1999, fig. 5; Јованова, Михајлова 1999, fig. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Група аутора 1981, obr. 34/4, 35; Љубенова 1981, obr. 20/1, 22/5, 39/1, 2; Најденова 1985, T. 100.

<sup>68</sup> Митова-Џонова 1985.

<sup>69</sup> Срејовић 2002, 44 and on.

<sup>70</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 194.

<sup>71</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 188.

<sup>72</sup> Јовановић 2004, 195.

<sup>73</sup> Herodotus, book VII, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Theodosiev 1995, 376.

Strabo states later that this Thracian tribe had occupied most of the Hem, bordering with Rhodope and the Peoni, and was separated from the Illyrians<sup>75</sup> by the Autariati and the Dardanians. It is hard to believe that the Dardanians, at that moment, extended to the Strouma and the Hem in the east, consequently, the only acceptable theory to explain this source is that the Bessi had spread, at the expense of other Thracian tribes, all the way up the Južna Morava basin, i.e. up to the mountains east of it. This settles them in the territory where, three centuries later, the rectangular based sacrificial altars were used. It is hard to say what caused the expansion of the Bessi to the west, but one plausible cause might have been the presence of the Celts at the time in western Bulgaria, a thesis becoming more and more plausible in the light of new research.<sup>76</sup> M. Tačeva, however, takes issue with this opinion of some older authors stating that existence of a Scordisci state in the territory the Bessi is not very probable.<sup>77</sup> From our point of view, conflict between the Celts and the Bessi could have been the cause of their migration to the west. However, for the present, this thesis cannot be corroborated archaeologically because no rectangular based sacrificial altars appear in this territory prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. One source confirms the great mobility of this tribe, stating that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century a great number of Bessi were forcefully moved to Dobruja.<sup>78</sup> F. Papazoglu believes in the spread of some Thracian tribes to the west, therefore she presumes that the Bessi are the same warlike tribe from Strabo's quotation: »Having restrained their immediate neighbours the Dardanians, Agriani and other unknown tribes ...«<sup>79</sup> An inscription from Skupi in which Tit Aurelie introduces himself as a Bess, corroborates this thesis.<sup>80</sup> By emphasizing his origin, he suggests that his nationality was not typical of Skupi, but at the same time it shows that a certain number of Bessi lived in this town, while their homeland was probably somewhere in the vicinity of Skupi. These ethnonyms are found on a stele from Kličevac near Kumanovo and in the surroundings of Vidin.<sup>81</sup> On an inscription from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century a Bess is mentioned, born in Serdica, in Magari vicus.<sup>82</sup> The mention of an autochthonous settlement, situated in the region of northwest Thrace, in the surroundings of Pautalia and Serdica, named Besapara is very important.<sup>83</sup> The presence of the Bessi is witnessed by a mention of this tribe from the ecclesiastic author Paulin, when speaking of the bishop Nicketas of Remesiana who was converting the Bessi. This refers to the period from 366 and 415 AD<sup>84</sup>. The forts Besiana and Besiana are mentioned in Dardania in the manuscript *De*

*aedificus* by Procopius, again indicating their presence on the eastern periphery of Darдания.<sup>85</sup> The same source mentions courageous warriors who were influenced neither by the Roman nor Byzantine cultures during the influx of the Slavs into these territories. Maybe these warriors could be identified as the Bessi, since the description of a distinctly conservative tribe could be applied in full to them. The data about their own language further confirms their conservatism, as does the fact that they are mentioned in some sources separately from the Thracians.<sup>86</sup> The Bessi are also mentioned as very skilful miners, which is very indicative, given the fact that a lot of slag was found at the cemetery in Popovjane, and that smelting furnaces were located in the immediate vicinity of the cemetery.<sup>87</sup> In addition to the above, this fact may indirectly connect the cemeteries with rectangular vessels to the Bessi. Their skilfulness in mining could have been the reason of their presence in the territory with the rectangular based sacrificial altars, for it is known that some of the Roman emperors issued edicts and moved peoples from Thrace, Dalmatia and Asia Minor to the central Balkans regions rich in ores.<sup>88</sup> After the 4<sup>th</sup> century, even the Bessi, judging by the inhumation burials found with the cremations, began to merge with the civilization of the Eastern Roman Empire, as witnessed by the fact that the Byzantine emperor Leo I (457–474) was Bess in origin.<sup>89</sup> The last mention of the Bessi is in the *Strategicon* by Cecaumenos Byzantine, a writer from

<sup>75</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 78, 162.

<sup>76</sup> Domaradski 1984; Jovanović 1995, 143 and on; Theodosiev 2000.

<sup>77</sup> Тачева 1987, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Тачева 1987, 176.

<sup>79</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 188, 221.

<sup>80</sup> Papazoglu 1969, 187.

<sup>81</sup> Stankovska 2004, 168 and on, photo 4.

<sup>82</sup> Тачева 1987, 171.

<sup>83</sup> Тачева 1982, 442.

<sup>84</sup> Мирковић 1981, 102.

<sup>85</sup> Procopius 1955, 60–61.

<sup>86</sup> Jordanus in his book *Goths*, chapter 12 (75) writes that the Danube was called Hister in the Bessi language, while Suetonius (*Life of Twelve Caesars*, chapter 3) mentions them separately from the Thracians.

<sup>87</sup> Veget. *Epit. re mil.* (Lang) I, 28 (taken over from N. Miteva 1988, notice 14).

<sup>88</sup> Мирковић 1981a, 80.

<sup>89</sup> After the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Procopius, Theophylactus Simocatta, Eugrius and other writers recorded the Thracian origin of many Byzantine emperors (taken over from Miteva 1988, 12–16).

the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in which the Vlachs are considered to be the descendants of the Dacians and the Bessi, connecting the Bessi again to the Vlach and Dacian territories i.e. to the east and southeast of Serbia, northeast Macedonia and western Bulgaria.

On the basis of all this data it seems safe to assume that the population settled in the territories where funerary altars with rectangular and circular bases appear in late antiquity, was Thracian in origin. Moreover, in view of the mentioned historical sources, the position of the cemeteries and the ornamentation reflecting cultural conservatism, it seems fairly safe to assert that the territory associated with the rectangular based vessels was inhabited by the Bessi.

## CONCLUSION

Analyzing the shape, ornamentation and conditions of finds of rectangular based sacrificial altars, along with the chronologically sensitive finds accompanying them, it is clear that they were sacrificial recipients used in funerary rites in cemeteries with cremated dead, within the period starting from the 2<sup>nd</sup>, but most frequently in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. On the basis of the shapes and ornamentation on rectangular based sacrificial altars, and on the other ceramic material from these cemeteries, it seems safe to conclude that they were used by a highly conservative population retaining the cultural traditions of the prehistoric epoch, particularly those of the developed Iron Age of Thrace.

The sacrificial altars and cemeteries appear in western Bulgaria and the Rhodope, then in southeast Serbia and northeast Macedonia, which, according to historical and epigraphic sources, corresponds to Thracian territory. The funerary rites practiced in these cemeteries appear to be a continuation of prehistoric traditions, which also ethnically identifies this population.

A more precise ethnic determination of this population seems possible since the distribution of the sites concerned corresponds to areas where the Thracian tribe the Bessi is mentioned. These are Remesiana, near Bela Palanka, Vidin in northwest Bulgaria, the environs of Serdica, Klecevice near Kumanovo and Skupi. The ethnonyms Besapara in northwest Thrace and Besiana and Besaiana in east Dardania are also indicative. The majority of the cemeteries with the rectangular based altars lie within a corridor running

north – south, following the northern slopes of Mt. Stara Planina in the north, descending along the western slopes of the same mountain, then along the western ridge of the mountainous massive east of the Južna Morava up to the west slopes of Mt. Ossogovo. This line could be imagined as the western border of the territory of this ethnic community, particularly given the fact that the Bessi mentioned above stressed their ethnicity, claiming to be a minority in relation to the Thracian and Dardanian population or a population of some other origin. This suggests that the Bessi territory spread east from this line, in which cemeteries with cremated dead and rectangular based sacrificial altars are found. This thesis is corroborated by the scarce written sources, as well as the disposition and topographic characteristics of the cemeteries.

It is not quite clear, however, why the majority of these cemeteries, which could primarily be ascribed to the Bessi, are situated so far to the west in relation to the Bessi territory described by antique writers. Is the reason insufficient research of the mountainous Rhodope region, or did the Bessi from another area retreat gradually to the west (Scordisci?, Bastarni?) at the end of the old and the beginning of the new era to settle in this territory in the late antiquity? It seems these migrations were most intensive during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, as the majority of these cemeteries, in the territory west of the Rhodope, were dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> centuries, while the cemeteries on the Rhodope and on the slopes of the Stara Planina were dated somewhat earlier into the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. The appearance of the slag at the cemetery in Popovjane is indicative because it could be connected with the Bessi, who were known as skilful miners in the late antiquity. Finally, according to Cecaumenos, the Vlachs are descendants of the Dacians and Bessi, thus geographically localizing the Bessi to the territory where the Vlachs settled later, which is almost identical to the territory with cemeteries with rectangular vessels finds.

Insufficient research of this culturally isolated and very conservative geographic region prevent final conclusions. On the basis of everything mentioned, it seems that the cemeteries with rectangular based sacrificial altars could primarily be ascribed to the Thracian tribe the Bessi.

Further research is imperative in order to confirm cultural and ethnic relations between the inhabitants of this region from the last millennium BC and the first centuries of the new era.

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**Резиме:**

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## ГРОБНЕ ПОСУДЕ ПРАВОУГАОНЕ ОСНОВЕ И ЖИГОСАНА КЕРАМИКА ИЗ АНТИЧКОГ ПЕРИОДА НА ЦЕНТРАЛНОМ БАЛКАНУ

(прилог проучавању праисторијских традиција у римској епохи)

Рад се првенствено бави правоугаоним посудама архаичног изгледа које су нађене махом на касноантичким некрополама са спаљеним покојницима на територији западне Бугарске, југоисточне Србије и североисточне Македоније. Некрополе се састоје од гробних рака елипсоидног, или правоугаоног облика, изнад којих су се налазиле камене конструкције, најчешће у виду веома ниских тумула. Уз ове посуде правоугаоне основе, понекад са реципијентима у виду чашица на угловима или унутар посуде у једном углу, које су, сасвим је извесно, служиле као жртвеници, налазе се и друге посуде чије форме и орнаменти припадају трачкој аутохтоној керамици. Од украсних мотива најчешћи су утиснути концентрични кругови у комбинацији са низом правоугаоних отисака начињених назубуљеним инструментом – радлом. Готово идентични украсни мотиви појављују се током раног и развијеног гвозденог доба на керамици басараби културе на северу и бабадаг – пшеничево – равадиново културном комплексу на истоку, а слична орнаментика поја-

вљује се на керамици на територији југоисточне Србије, североисточне Македоније и Косова. И конструкција гробова као и сепулкрални обред, затим облици и орнаментика посуда представљају извесне рецидиве из праисторије ове области.

Други део рада бави се идентификацијом народа који је насељавао ову територију у периоду римске доминације. Анализирајући штуре историјске изворе и епиграфске податке везане за ову територију, затим ритуал сахрањивања, облике и орнаментике посуда са некропола са правоугаоним жртвеницима, констатовано је да се сасвим сигурно ради о становништву трачког порекла. Судећи по диспозицији некропола, затим конзерватизму у материјалној култури, као и натписима из северозападне Бугарске, источне Србије и североисточне Македоније на којима се спомињу Беси, закључено је, са извесним резервама, да су Беси једино племе које је, према свему изнетом, у античком периоду могло да настањује ову територију.

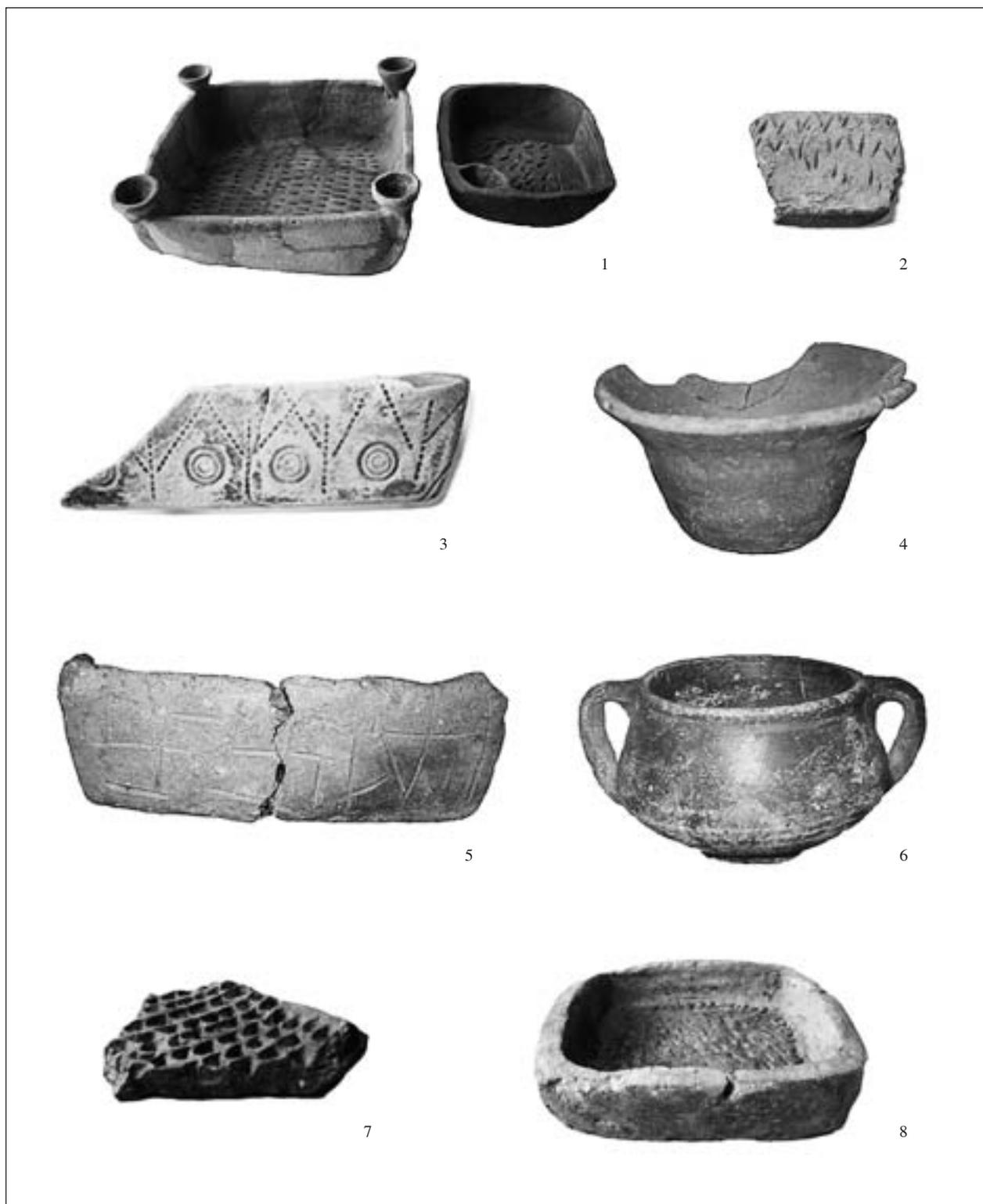


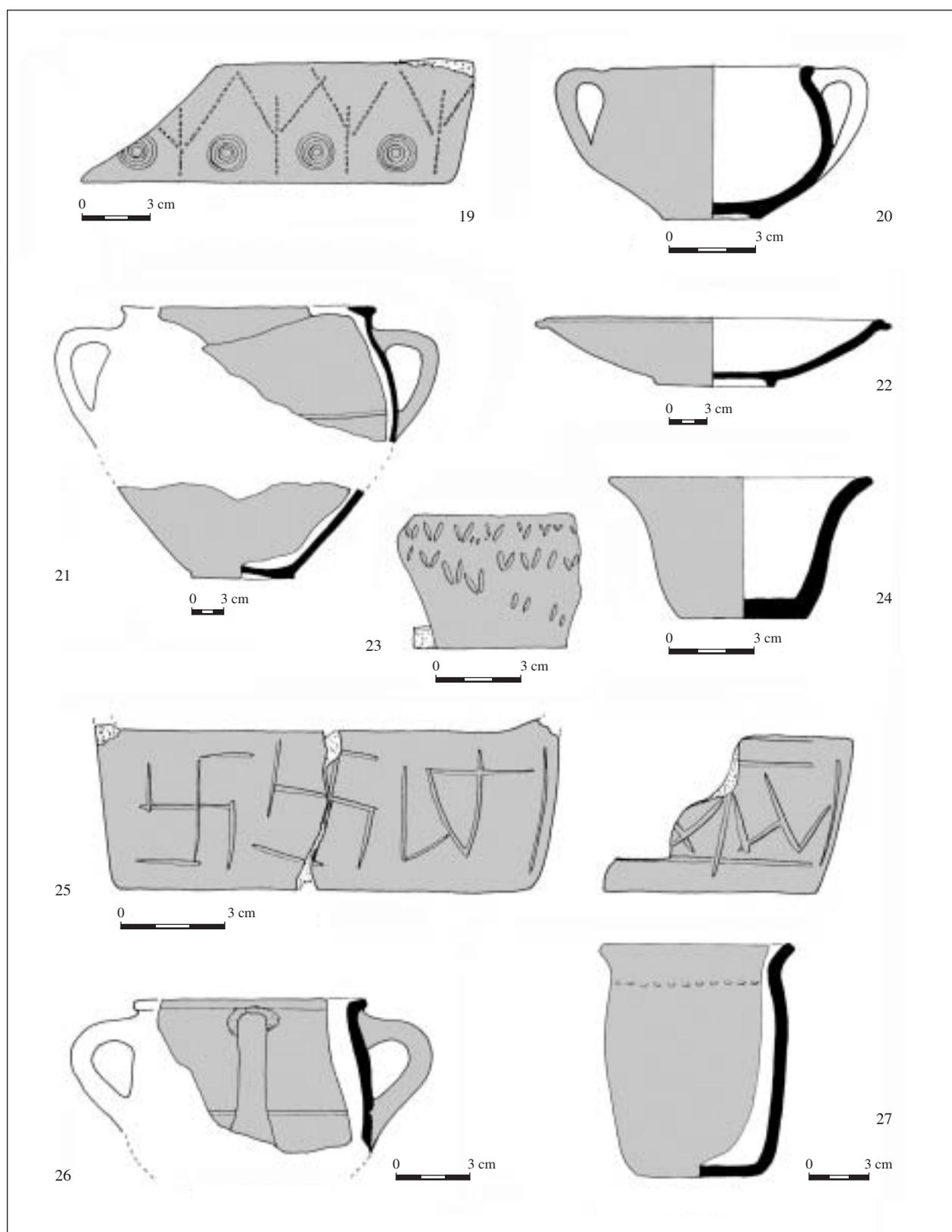
Plate I – 1. Vessels from Stare Kolibe site in Ljanik by Preševo; 2–6 and 8. Vessels from Stojkova njiva site in Donja Ljubata by Bosilegrad; 7. Vessel fragment from Reka site in Svinjište by Preševo

Табла I – 1. Посуде са локалитетима Старе колибе у Љанику код Прешева;  
2–6 и 8. Посуде са локалитетима Стојкова њива у Доњој Љубатици код Босилеграда;  
7. Фрагмент посуде са локалитетима Река у Свињишту код Прешева



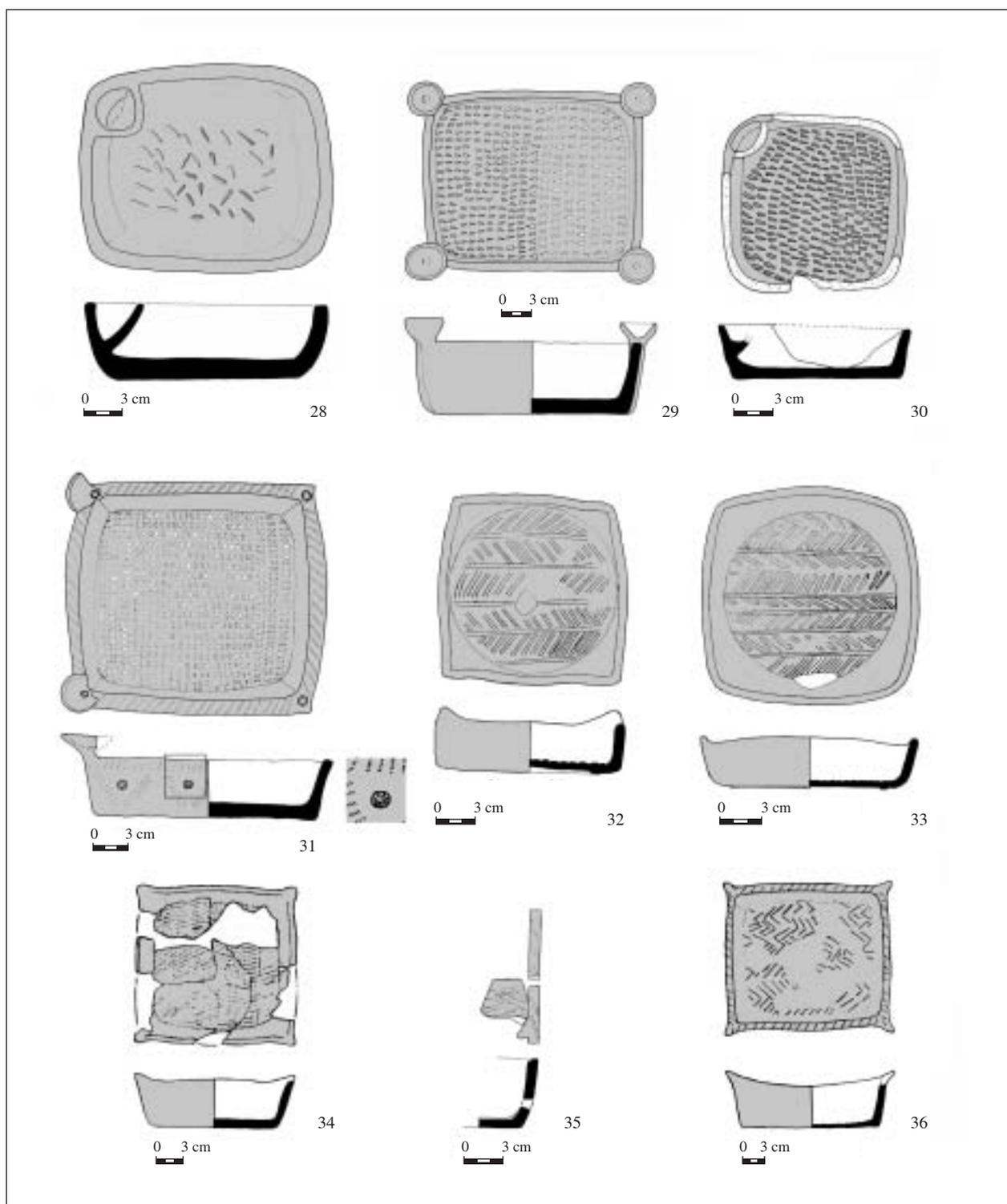
Plate II – 9. Vessel from Motina by Vranje; 10. Vessel fragment from Kale site in Krševica by Bujanovac; 11. Vessel from Gložje by Bosilegrad; 12. Vessel from Gornjo obrusce site in Sebrat by Preševo; 13. Vessel fragment from Gradište site in Davidovac; 14–15. Vessels from Kasarski krug site in Kočane (taken over from Atanasova 2005); 16. Vessel from Kralevo Dol by Pernik (taken over from Atanasova 2005); 17. Vessel from Zaevete site by Smoljan (taken over from Najdenova 1972); 18. Vessel from Kamenitica–Moravište in Mala Kopašnica by Leskovac (taken over from Fidanovski, Cvjetičanin 2005)

Табла II – 9. Посуда са Мошине код Врања; 10. Фрагмент посуде са локалитета Кале у Кршевици код Бујановца; 11. Посуда из Гложја код Босилеграда; 12. Посуда са локалитета Горњо обрусце у Себраћу код Прешева; 13. Фрагмент посуде са локалитета Градиште у Давидовцу; 14–15. Посуде са локалитета Касарски круг у Кочанима (преузето из Атанасова 2005.); 16. посуда из Кралевог Дола код Перника (преузето из Атанасова 2005.); 17. Посуда са локалитета Заевете код Смољана (преузето из Најденова 1972.); 18. Посуда са локалитета Каменица–Моравиште у Малој Копашници код Лесковца (преузето из Фидановски, Цвјетићанин 2005.)



*Plate III – 19–27 Vessels from Stojkova njiva site in Donja Ljubata by Bosilegrad*

*Табла III – 19–27. Посуде са локалитета Стојкова њива у Доњој Љубати код Босилеграда*



*Plate IV – 28–29 Vessels from Stare Kolibe site in Ljanik by Preševo; 30–31 Vessels from Gornjo obrusce site in Sebrat by Preševo; 32–33 Vessels from Ljubavica site in Mala Lukanja by Pirot (taken over from Pejić 1993); 34–36 Vessels from Kamik site in Mala Lukanja by Pirot (taken over from Pejić 1993)*

*Табла IV – 28–29. Посуде са локалитетима Старе колибе у Љанику код Прешева; 30–31. Посуде са локалитетима Горњо обрусце у Себрајћу код Прешева; 32–33. Посуде са локалитетима Љубавица у Малој Лукањи код Пироџа (Пејић 1993); 34–36. Посуде са локалитетима Камик у Малој Лукањи код Пироџа (Пејић 1993)*