NEW FINDS FROM RUTEVAC AND DELIBERATION ON PURPOSE, ORIGIN PLACE OF PRODUCTION AND ETHNIC ATTRIBUTION OF MRAMORAC TYPE BELTS

Abstract: A pair of nearly identical silver artefacts was found in Rutevac by Aleksinac, known as Mramorac type belts, which used to be found exclusively in Pomoravlje and within the Big Confluence zone. Twenty four such artefacts were published; of which 20 are of silver plate, two of gilt silver plate and two of gold plate. The very fact that they are void of any fastening devices at the corresponding ends for buckling up purposes or pinning up to a surface (cloth or leather), excludes their purpose as belts to be used around people’s waist; it could, however, be assumed that they served as a part of equipment of secular and religious leaders – as a kind of decorative ribbon – broad bands with ample symbols, worn over the shoulder and breast – at the same time cult object and a sign of dignity of the person wearing it. The fact that all the artefacts were found within one and the same territory and that they were reconstructed due to frequent wear suggest the production and maintenance in one or more local workshops in Pomoravlje. Artefacts belonged to the Triballi, the only ancient Balkan peoples who were confirmed, both archaeologically and on the basis of historical sources, in Pomoravlje, in the Triballian valley, living at the end of the 6th and in the 5th centuries BC, the period to which these luxurious artefacts were dated to.

Key words: Moravac type belts, ribbons, silver, Pomoravlje, Autariati, Triballi.

On March 17th, 2007, during foundation diggings for the new church of Ognjena Marija (by the old one) in Rutevac, a pair of silver artefacts was found, known as Mramorac type belts. At the spot there was nothing at all suggesting the existence of a grave. Artefacts were found at the depth of approximately 0.8 m, on the edge of the river terrace, above the Južna Morava River. As soon as the workers digging the foundations found the artefacts, the priest informed thereof Mr. Saša Ristić, a collector from Rutevac. Mr. Ristić photographed the artefacts in situ, taking them later to keep in his collection (Fig. 1). The photo shows that the silver artefacts were circularly bent, one in the other. There were no other finds.

Sides on the foundation ditch did not show any traces of burial, suggesting that the spot in which the belts were stored was relatively narrow.

According to their ornamentation and size of 0.97 x 0.17 m, the artefacts from Rutevac are identical, one of them is heavy 385 gr and the other 400 gr (slightly damaged), made of plate of equal thickness.\footnote{Data concerning weight of the artefacts were obtained from the owner.} One of the artefacts was damaged during excavation works. As differing from majority of artefacts of this type, which were in constant use prior to the storage, many of them worn-out, cracked or even mended,

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there are no traces of use on the mentioned ones. According to the size and number of decorative motifs, these „belts“ belong to the group of smaller sizes and more modestly decorated.

Approximately one third of the „belts“ is broadened into a trapezoid shape, while the rest of it is strapped (Figs. 4-9). Ornament is symmetrically set, same as in all other artefacts of the same type. Along the edge of the trapezoid part runs a strap wrought in embossing technique, within which there are: strapped motif shaped as Old Slavonic letter Å (az), sand clock motif or labrys, swastika motif with ends shaped as the Cyrillic letter Ч and strapped swastika of standard shape. There are 12 calotte-shaped bulges, set within and around the mentioned motifs. The narrow – strapped part of these silver artefacts is edged by embossed dots and decorated with two rows of rhomboids, the inner part of which is decorated with embossing.

According to their shape and ornamentation, the artefacts from Rutevac are very similar to those from Mramorac and Novi Pazar and to some other ones. The only discrepancy with regard to all the other artefacts of the same type is in the fact that the corners on the wider part of the artefacts from Rutevac are not rounded.

Up to date were published 24 artefacts of the same type made of silver and gold, including the artefacts from Rutevac (Fig. 10). A number of such artefacts are kept abroad, but everything points to the fact that they also were found within the territory of Serbia. These artefacts were found in Pomoravlje and on the Titel plateau. From time to time, artefacts of same type are offered for sale in auction catalogues, but without a mention of the place of origin, thus it could be plausible that even they originate from the mentioned regions of our country.

Fig. 1. Artefacts in situ

Сл. 1. Предмети in situ

These artefacts were considered belts, though they did not have either buckling or fastening devices to clasp or pin the artefact to an organic surface (cloth or leather). On one of the recently discovered belts of gilt silver plate from Batinac there is twice repeated stylized figural composition which can be understood only when the scene is watched horizontally, meaning that it was foreseen to set the complete artefact vertically, along its longitudinal axis, thus excluding any possibility to use it as belts around people’s waist.

The following data are relevant for determination of purpose, origin, place of production and ethnic attribution:

- Published were twenty four precious artefacts looking like belts made of silver and gold plate, decorated by geometric motifs, in lesser number by vegetative ones (palmette motif), and the pair from Batinac was decorated by twice repeated identical figural composition.
- The largest number of artefacts is made – 20 of silver plate, two of gilt silver plate and two of gold plate.
- All these precious artefacts were found in Pomoravlje – 19 specimens and – 5 specimens – in Lower Tisza region.
- These are the most luxurious and most precious artefacts within internal Europe of the period, at the end of the 6th and in the 5th centuries BC.
- They also represent the most numerous species of large artefacts made of silver and gold in Europe, from the period corresponding to the end of the Archean and beginning of the classic period of Greece.
- The ends of the artefacts are void of any buckling or fastening devices for clasping or pinning it to a surface (cloth or leather) thus excluding their purpose to be used as belts around people’s waist.

3 Valtrović, Ibid.
4 Stojić 2007, 55, Abb. 5.
5 According to information obtained from associates, there are artefacts made of bronze plate from Pomoravlje, kept in private collections in Belgrade.
7 In Mid Europe, particularly within the region between the Boden Lake in the east and the Geneva Lake in the west, were found approximately 700 belts made of bronze plate during the period ranging from the 6th to the 4th centuries BC, which were rather narrower than the Mramorac type “belts” and have belt clasps and elements for fastening to a cloth or leather; a large number of decorative motifs from these belts are similar to those on the silver and gold “belts” from Pomoravlje: calotte-like bulges, rhomboid rows, swastikas, sand clock motifs; there are no palmette motifs or figural composition on them; these mid-European artefacts were made in continental geometrical style, while the artefacts from Pomoravlje and Lower Tisza Region suggest intertwining of European geometrical tradition with east Mediterranean figural elements: Kilian-Dirlmeir 1972; Stojić 2007.
Twice repeated stylized figural composition on artefacts of this type, which could be understood only if the scene is watched horizontally, means that they were foreseen to be set vertically, along its longitudinal axis – thus excluding their purpose to be used as belts around people’s waist.8

In Umčari were found, together with the belts, parts of human skeleton and the Novi Pazar treasure, originating from a grave, includes two belts as part of the inventory, consequently, it was concluded that these artefacts represent offerings in graves. Both pairs of belts from Batinac, judging by all the facts, originate also from graves.9

On all these artefacts, with exception of the Rutevac ones, there are visible traces of intensive and relatively long use. All of them are, more or less, damaged by the use – they are worn out, jagged and cracked; on several of them cracks were repaired by narrow silver straps fixed with silver rivets, and on some of them were very successfully reconstructed original motifs, also in silver, according to the original sample.10

The fact that all these artefacts were found in one and the same territory and that the damages caused by constant wear were reconstructed, suggests that they were wrought and repaired in one or more local workshops in Pomoravlje and (or) possibly, in the Lower Tisza Region.

Artefacts found in pairs are either identical or very similar.

8 Stojić 2007, 55, Abb. 5.
9 Stojić 1986, 25, Idem 2007; The findings of these artefacts from Rutevac rouse some doubts whether these artefacts always have sepulchral context.
10 Stojić 1986, 86.
On the basis of finds from Novi Pazar, from the end of the 6th century BC and analogies with the Sindos necropolis, these artefacts are dated into the period at the end of the 6th and first half of the 5th centuries BC.\(^\text{11}\)

These most recent findings, the first from the Južna Morava Basin, back up assumption of goldsmith’s craftsmanship influence from the Thessaloniki hinterland onto the toreutics in Pomoravlje.\(^\text{12}\)

Artefacts belonged to the Triballi, the only ancient Balkan peoples who were confirmed, both archaeologically and on the basis of historical sources, in Pomoravlje, in the Triballian valley, living at the end of the 6th and in the 5th centuries BC, the period to which these luxurious artefacts were dated to.\(^\text{13}\)

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12 About cultural connections between Pomoravlje and Macedonia, that is, of the Thessaloniki region: Stojić 2007, 63-64. Even earlier, there were some findings which could have been connected to the findings of Mramorac type, originating from Južna Morava Basin, among which is gilt silver bracelet from Vrtište from the 6th century BC, the one end of which is hammered into a trapezoidal shape and decorated on the upper and bottom sides in embossing technique with motifs reminding of individual letters of the Greek alphabet while the other end finishes with a sphere shape: Garašanin/Ajdić 1971, Kat. Nr. 470; Vasić 1987, T. LXVIII/16, Idem 1994; bracelet from Vrtište is of similar shape as the silver ring from Pećka Banja, only the hammered part is narrower: artefact from Pećka Banja: Arheološko blago Kosova i Metohije 1998, Kat. Nr. 228.

13 As differing from the previous periods, there is certain number of literary sources on the geographic position of individual regions of the Triballian land during the last development period of this peoples, on the basis of which, however, it is not possible to determine boundaries of the whole country of this peoples. The oldest written source on one part of the Triballian territory comes from Herodotus (485-425 BC), the “father of history” who, most probably, conveys data of the logograph (logograph = historian and geographer) Hekatey. Hekatey from Milet was tireless traveler collecting data on Europe and Asia for the sake of king Darius and his aggressive policy, during the last quarter of the 6th and at the beginning of the 5th centuries BC, which he published in his work Gês periodos (Geography). He gave, inter alia, description of many regions in the Danube watershed, including also Pomoravlje. It is certain that Herodotus took over, from this citizen of Milet, data for his own History – Historiai (Narratives) on rivers the Angro (Južna or Zapadna Morava together with Ibar) and the Brongo (Velika Morava) and Triballian valley. “The river Angro flows north from the Illyrian country and flows into the Triballian valley – πεδιον το Τριβαλλικον and into the river Brongo, and the Brongo flows into the Istar. Thus the Istar accepts both big rivers.” There is a certain dilemma concerning Hekatey’s and Herodotus’s river Angro – whether it is Južna Morava or more probably Zapadna Morava together with the Ibar. It is certain that the Brongo is Velika Morava and the Triballian valley – πεδιον το Τριβαλλικον – the Velika Morava valley. Since the Velika Morava valley does not cover huge territory, certain experts wonder why should the ancient writers mention in their work this rather small region and overlook considerably larger regions in this part of the world. If, however, one takes into consideration continuity of life in this valley during all the development periods of the Triballi, its strategic significance during the transitional zone from the northern into the central Balkans, defense systems, fortifications, number of settlements and necropolises, including settlements and necropolises from the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th centuries BC, material proofs
Archaeological material from the period 6th-5th centuries BC found within the regions of the south Bačka and Banat, which is very similar to the archaeological artefacts from Pomoravlje of the same period, suggests that these regions belonged also to the same peoples.

The cult purpose of these artefacts is suggested by the unique shape and motifs found on each of the specimen, such as motifs in the shape of the big Old Slavic letter Å (az), sand clock (or butterfly) and swastika (palmette being its alternation, as confirmed by the specimen from Požarevac).14

Since two identical specimens were found as offerings at the internment of the dead person, it is certain they belonged to one individual, who used to utilize them simultaneously.

One person can wear two such specimens only if they are placed over the shoulders, with the broader part on the breast, of course; in this manner (put in vertical position) the symmetric ornamentation would be emphasized and the figural compositions could be quite understandable.

This kind of artefacts, the broader part of which is one third of the longitude and one half of the total mass, without additional equipment, could be worn placed over one and the other shoulder.

The problem, however, is that metal sheets bend naturally into a circle (in the same manner the belts in Rutevac were found), which means that they could not be closely pressed against the body.

Were these artefacts used as belts around the waist (which is rounded) there would be no reason for them to be jagged or cracked, because cracks on strapped sheet objects are caused by unnatural bending, such as most probably was bending over human shoulders.

There is small possibility, though it could not be excluded altogether, that these artefacts were part of equipment in a temple, that is, on the altar, but in such a case there is inevitable speculation concerning its jaggedness and damage by obvious manual use thereof and particularly one must wonder why would these artefacts end as offerings in a grave of an individual, even if he were a priest.

It could, however, be assumed that these luxurious artefacts served probably as a part of equipment of secular and religious leaders – as a kind of decorative ribbon – broad bands with ample symbols, worn over the shoulder and breast – at the same time cult object and a sign of dignity of the person wearing it.15

Taking into consideration everything mentioned so far, the corresponding name for these big and luxurious artefacts is lenta – decorative ribbon.16

of contacts of the population of this region with the oldest Greek colonies on the western part of the Black Sea Region, consequently, it is no wonder that the famous Greek historians knew about this region. Stojić 1997, 119, 123, 126-128. 119-133: The development of the Triballi within the territory ranging from the Ibar valley and Ovčarsko-Kahlerska Gorge in the west up to the Isker in the east and from the confluence of the Tisza in the north up to the Gredelica Gorge in the south during the period of the 6th-4th centuries BC is characterized by their connections with the Greek and Macedonian world. The first contacts with this world was achieved by the southwest parts of the community at the end of the 6th and at the beginning of the 5th centuries BC, as represented by the findings from Pećka Banja, Novi Pazar, Atenica and Krusevica. During the first decades of the 5th century, contacts of this region with the Greek world ceased, but very soon, the central regions of the population – Južna Morava, Velika Morava and Lower Tisza basins established contacts with Macedonia, Thessaloniki hinterland, as confirmed by analogies for many elements (appearance, size, kinds of material, decorative motifs) found on the luxurious artefacts of Mramorac type. During the Greek-Persian or Peloponnesian wars, the connections were interrupted of this world with the region in the center of which was the Morava valley. During the last decades of the 5th century BC, simultaneously with the break up of contacts made along the Morava-Vardar valley, the most eastern region (between the Timok and the Isker rivers) of the mentioned population takes over primacy in connections with the Greek world.

14 Symbolic meaning of the swastika and palmette (palm) is exceptionally positive and similar: Chevalier/Gheerbrant 1983, 661-662, 474.

15 On symbolic significance of these artefacts: Stojić 2007, 62-64.

16 Lenta – decorative ribbon – is a Russian name for wide strap placed over shoulders and breast, on which are pinned high decorations: Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika 1969, 186.
Any possibility is excluded that these artefacts belonged to Autariati or Illyrians, as confirmed by the following facts:

- Up to recently, the luxurious artefacts of Mramorac type were considered Illyrian, even the proofs that the Illyrians and the Autariatians had conquered Pomoravlje, justifying such attitude on the basis of several bronze artefacts from the Illyrian territory (but not always from the Autariatian one) decorated by the same technique, though very modestly, which were established as prototypes for the future luxurious artefacts from Pomoravlje.

- It is understandable that magnificent and numerous toreutic products (belts, decorative ribbons, straps, earrings, bracelets and other), such as the ones originating from the Macedonian Sindos, influence goldsmith craftsmanship in some of the neighboring and close-by regions, but it is not probable that artefacts, such as the ones from the Illyrian territory, are models for the largest ad most expensive artefacts in the interior Europe during the 6th and 5th centuries BC.

- According to written sources, the influx of the Autariati from their homeland towards the southeast of the Balkan Peninsula occurred at the end of the 4th century BC, in 335 BC, at the time of return of Alexander III (the future Alexander the Great) from his campaign against the Triballi, that is, approximately 200 years later with regard to the dating of the Mramorac type findings.\(^{17}\)

- Even if the influx of the Autariati towards the east across Pomoravlje occurred at the end of the 6th or in the 5th centuries BC, for which, however, there is no basis either in the Greek sources or in archaeology, it would be very hard to explain the existing distribution of the Mramorac type “belts” finding sites – the Morava valley – Lower Tisza Region, the two regions on the north-south axis, of which one is not even on the Balkan Peninsula.

- At the end, it is not possible to connect distribution of any kind of archaeological material on one cardinal direction with the ethnic influx on another cardinal direction (the Autariati moved in the west-east direction, while the decorative ribbons were found in the north-south direction).

\(^{17}\) Papazoglu 1969, 69-67
Anyway, not one specimen of luxurious artefacts, like the mentioned ones in Pomoravlje and Lower Tisza Region, was found within the Autarian (or Illyrian) territory.

There are still supporters of the theory on Autarian or Illyrian origin of these artefacts, though it is not possible to defend such an attitude because, inter alia, how to explain the fact that a population, which has never either produced or had at its disposal certain kind of very representative luxurious artefacts in their homeland, all of a sudden, in some supposedly occupied territory, such as Pomoravlje and Lower Tisza Region (!!!), has a mass production of such objects in the new environment and uses them during an extensive period of time and intensively at that.18

The most recently discovered pair of Moravac type artefacts made of precious metal from Rutevac – the Južna Morava valley- which is published in this paper, represents the first artefacts of this type with reliable discovery circumstances and without a sepulchral character. This find, with regard to its location, confirmed the significance of the Vardar-Morava communication with the Thessaloniki region for the development of goldsmith craftsmanship in Pomoravlje in the 5th century BC.


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Приликом копања темеља за нову цркву Огњене Марјије (поред старе) у селу Рутевац пронађен је пар сребрних предмета, кружно савијених један у другоме, познатих као појасеви типа мраморац. На том месту није постојало ништа што би евентуално указивало на хумку. Предмети су нађени на дубини приближно 0,8 м, на ивици терасе, изнад саме долине Јужне Мораве. Предмети су фотографисани in situ, а чувају се у приватној колекцији у Рутевцу. На фото снимку, на бочним странима (у профилу) рова за темељ не виде се трагови неког укопа, што указује да је укоп у који су појасеви похрањени био релативно узан.

Према украсу и величини, предмети из Рутевца су истоветни, димензије су им 0,97 x 0,17 м, а начињени су од лима уједначене дебљине. Један од њих незнатно је оштећен приликом земљаних радова. За разлику од већине предмета овог типа, који су, пре него што су похрањени, дуго били у употреби, а многи су искрзани, напукли и чак крупљени, на овим се не виде трагови употребе. Према величини и броју украсних мотива, ови појасеви припадају групи мањих димензија и скромније украшених. Приближно 1/3 појаса чини трапезасто проширен део, док је остатак тракаст. Украс је симетрично распоређен, као и на свим осталим предметима истог типа. Дуж ивице трапезастог дела, у техници пунктирања, изведена је трака, у којој се налазе: тракасти мотив у виду старословенског слова Å (аз), мотив пешчаног сата, мотив свастика са завршетцима у облику слова Ч и тракаста свастика уобичајеног облика. На том делу изведено је и 12 калотаста испушћења, распоређених унутар и около непотребних мотива. Узани, тракасти део ових сребрних предмета овиван је пунктираним тачкама, а украшен је са два реда ромбоиди, чија је унутрашња половина украшена пунктиром.

Предмети из Рутевца према облику и декорацији веома су слични примерима из Мрамораца, и Новог Пазара и још некима. Једина разлика у односу на све остали предмете истог типа јесте у томе што углови на ширем делу предмета из Рутевца нису заобљени. До сада је објављено 24 предмета истог типа од сребра и злата, укључујући и ова два из Рутевца; сви потичу из Поморавља и зоне ушћа Тисе. Због изгледа и величине ови предмети сматрају се појасевима, мада на њима није било делова за закопавање нити причвршћивања за неку орнаменталну подлогу (тканину или кожу). На једном од скорије нађених појасева од позлаћеног сребрног лима из Батинца налази се два пута поновљена стилизована фигурална комбинација, која се може разумети само ако се сцена посматра водоравно, што значи да је целу предмет био предвиђен да би био постављен вертикално, према својој подужној оси, што искључује могућност да су коришћени за опасивање људи.

Извесно је да су ови скупоцени предмети вероватно чинили делове опреме световно/верских старешина, ленте – широке траке, крцате симболима, ношене преко рамена и груди – истовремено култне предмете и знаке достојанства личности која их носи. Најновијим налазима, првима из басена Јужне Мораве, оснивају се претпостављене утицаје златарства из залеђа Солуна на тореуту и у Поморављу; предмети се приписују североисточним Трибалима јер су једино они, археолошки и на основу историјских извора, потврђени у Поморављу у првом веку пре н.е. Пар предмета типа мраморац, од племенитог метала, из Рутевца у долини Јужне Мораве, који се објављују у овом раду, први су предмети тог типа о којима постоје поуздани услови налаза, и то негробног карактера. С обзиром на своју локацију, најновији налаз је поготово значајан вардарско-моравске комуникације и солунске регије за развој златарства у Поморављу у V веку пре н.е.