

# We're same colours, and we're different breeds ...

## *Smo iste barve in smo različnih vrst ...*

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### *Abstract*

The paper analyses amphoriskos-shaped glass beads from different archaeological contexts. As they reflect the complex social networks that connected different worlds, they can be used to interpret broader cultural processes – from ancient Macedonia to the Baltic, from the central Balkans to the heart of the Pannonian plain. Most importantly, we can use the finds to explain the concept of prestige in the analysis of material culture and to reconstruct the intercultural character of social elites, which created and sustained long-distance trade networks.

**Key words:** amphoriskos-shaped glass beads, long-distance trade, Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age

### *Izvleček*

Prispevek analizira steklene jagode v obliki amforiskov iz različnih arheoloških kontekstov. Uporablja jo se za interpretacijo širih kulturnih procesov, saj odsevajo kompleksne družbene mreže, ki so povezovale različne svetove – od antične Makedonije do Baltika, od osrednjega Balkana do osrčja Panonske nižine. Najpomembnejše pa je, da se najdbe lahko uporabijo za razlaganje koncepta prestiža v analizah materialne kulture in za rekonstrukcijo medkulturnega značaja družbenih elit, ki so ustvarile in vzdrževale trgovske mreže na dolge razdalje.

**Ključne besede:** steklene jagode v obliki amforiska, trgovina na dolge razdalje, starejša železna doba, mlajša železna doba

### Introduction

Europe presently is, and was in the past, a continent with many interacting regions. While some aspects, such as the relationship between Mediterranean cultures and Early and Late Iron Age cultural regions, for example, have been addressed many times, other inter-regional relationships have been neglected – especially those transgressing the Early/Late Iron Age cultural and chronological borders. Particularly since numerous authors claimed that the Balkans and the Eastern Adriatic coast were just the periphery of the more developed and wealthy

Greek world (especially in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE these were Archaea Macedonia and Syracuse on Sicily) and the contacts of these regions with their hinterlands were based on purely economic relations.

A mosaic of different prehistoric communities surrounded the Adriatic in the 4th century BCE. Each one of them possessed a limited territory and several fortified proto-urban centres controlled secondary urban agglomerations and spoke most probably a distinct language. While in the southeastern Alps and along the river Sava there were the last communities persisting in the last cultural manifestations of the Early Iron

Age, further to the north, in the Pannonian Basin, there were the communities we describe today as the Celts. Carriers of technological and stylistic innovations broadly described as the Late Iron Age – and despite their cultural variability, they unified in numerous stylistic and technological aspects a large part of central, eastern and western Europe. The writers of antiquity, referring to these communities, used different ethnonyms in describing them. They were subtly imposing that the lack of urbanization and political organization witnessed that they still did not reach the level of civilization of the people surrounding the Mediterranean. Not reducing the arguments to the dichotomy and divisions between the civilized in the barbarians, the authors used an array of subtle gradients to introduce them into the world of antiquity. These communities entered the Mediterranean world and made their debut in history especially at the end of the 5th and beginning of 4th century BCE during the great shifts of power when ancient Macedonia and Sicilian Syracuse included them into their economic networks and colonial ambitions – in the Greek narratives they were transformed from mythological into historical neighbours. As a result, their relationships shifted from being mythological to being economic and military, especially the last narrative dominated by Celtic migrations and invasions as well as the inclusion of Celtic mercenaries in power struggles among Mediterranean centres of power.

In the last century archaeology was desperate to provide the material evidence for several processes known from history on one and to synchronize the existing archaeological data with historical sources on the other side. Of course, the tracing of prehistoric weaponry in the Mediterranean (Kavur and Blečić Kavur 2014) and of luxury bronze vessels in central and eastern Europe (Blečić Kavur and Kavur 2010) seemed the easiest solution since it was interpreted as the mobility of warriors and as flow of diplomatic gifts connecting social elites on both sides. It was a major departure from the decades-old fascina-

tion with the historical events such as the Celtic raid towards Delphi, which dominated the narrative (Schönfelder 2007; cf. Szabó 1991). Slowly the focus started to move to processes predating the historical events, economic, cultural and religious contacts linking the Mediterranean and central Europe before the age of Celtic military invasions (Verger 2003). Beside the focus on massive imports such as pottery and amphorae, as well as important items, such a bronze vessel, clearly illustrating the networks of contacts between social elites, the focus shifted towards the circulation of assumable less practical and ideologically invested items – jewellery, trinkets produced in workshops of ancient Macedonia and Great Greece. Among them the most prominent, basically due to their large numbers, wide distribution and numerous culturally different contexts of discovery, role is played by simple amphoriskos-shaped glass pendants (Rustoiu 2015; Blečić Kavur and Kavur 2016; Kavur 2019).

Perhaps the oldest known archaeological discovery, chronologically and from the literature, predating the arrival of the Eastern Celts to the southern part of the Pannonian Basin, but clearly indicating the circulation of prestigious items of material culture was unfortunately also mostly ignored. Already in 1902 published assemblage from Sremska Mitrovica, most probably the remains of a single burial, included three fibulae and two bracelets made from silver, 74 amber beads, 61 coral beads, 262 amphoriskos-shaped glass pendants, a single melon-shaped glass bead, two elongated black glass beads and, most importantly, the remains of a bronze cup (Brunšmid 1902, 80). Although fragmented, the remains could be reconstructed as a cup with everted rim, low foot and two handles. Similar finds were in the assemblages from the Athenian Agora dated to the end of the 5th century BCE (Vocotopoulou 1975, 761–764). Today, among the most important finds from this context are the amphoriskos-shaped glass beads, numerous times discussed in the scientific literature. They were discovered in numerous different cultural contexts demonstrating the en-



Figure 1: Necklace composed from glass beads from Sremska Mitrovica (photo: Boris Kavur).

tanglement of past societies today interpreted in different cultural and chronological contexts and systems.

During the last few decades, new interpretations, based on concepts of entanglement, acceptance, and rejection, have enabled modern

understanding of specific items of Mediterranean material culture in prehistoric Iron Age contexts. They contributed to our understanding of the intercultural nature of the world but focused predominantly on valuables such as vessels displaying the prestigious economic status of exclu-

sively symbolic significance, such as situlae, cups, and rhyta. They were discussed presenting their typological and stylistic determination and proposing their most probable place of production – illustrating the processes of their distributions as indicators of mostly political ambitions. On the other hand, they were also describing the acculturations of indigenous elites accepting and manipulating these items.

By studying the material culture, new archaeological interpretations have altered the discourse on Mediterranean (cultural) colonialism by promoting concepts of identity and entanglement, acceptance and rejection, acquiescence, and resistance. This process significantly enriched our understanding of the intercultural character of the world in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Thus archaeology, for decades embedded in the historical narratives, became an even more culturally sensitive and anthropologically relevant endeavour. Modern studies focusing on culture contact (and culture redistribution) studies have transformed the archaeology of Mediterranean trade into a discipline with transdisciplinary relevance. A widespread critical consciousness about indigenous cultural practices (and material culture production and consumption) surfaced during this (fashionable) rise of multiculturalism. A leap was made from just talking about things and their physical properties to dealing with societies in terms of abstract processes of ideological manipulation with material culture.

### Discussion

Many papers and authors have discussed amphoriskos-shaped glass beads in the past two decades from a variety of perspectives, but it was only recently that chemical analyses of the glass contributed to the understanding of their production and origins.

Petar Popović presented the first major publication of them, focusing on finds from the Adriatic and particularly the Central Balkan region. He identified the workshops in ancient Macedonia as the most probable places of

their production and noted that despite the presence of multiple finds in Celtic graves, their production and circulation ceased with the Celtic invasion to the south (Popović 1997; Popović 2000, 274–275). On the other side, Stefania Vellani presented an overview of their presence on the western Adriatic coast and its hinterland. Demonstrating that a modest amount of such finds was known in the 4th century BCE generally in northern Italy, the most southern find came from a female burial in the hypogea in Via Molise in Canosa di Puglia where, amongst others, 99 beads were discovered (Vellani 2000, 42–45, Fig. 1).

A few years later, Martin Schönfelder included them into a broader historical picture illuminating their distribution because of the Celtic unsuccessful raid towards Delphi. He assumed that their distribution could explain their origins in mainly Greece but perhaps even Italy (Schönfelder 2007, 308–309). Building upon the critique of his approach and new data presented, Aurel Rustoiu demonstrated a much more complex situation with numerous previously uncharted finds (Rustoiu 2008, 52–57). Later he elaborated his position by dividing their distribution into western and eastern areas, where the western one was further sub-divided into four zones (Rustoiu 2015, 367, Fig. 3). His innovative interpretation proposed that the distribution of amphoriskos-shaped glass beads should be viewed in the context of economic and intercommunity connections across wide areas and since most of them were discovered in female burials, he assumed that exogamy played an important role in their circulation (Rustoiu 2015, 370–373). Vera Bitrakova Grozdanova focusing on their southern distribution presented that Macedonian workshops developed the art of production of light transparent glass in the 4th century BCE and concluded that they were their producer (Bitrakova Grozdanova 2011, 171).

In the latest publications on the distribution of amphoriskos-shaped glass beads, Martina Blečić Kavur and Boris Kavur acknowledged the previous discussions about the Danubian



Figure 2: Necklace with two amphoriskos-shaped glass beads and a golden lion-shaped pendant from grave 150 at the necropolis Golem Grad on Lake Prespa (Bitrakova Grozdanova 2011, 168).

corridor but focused on the importance of eastern Adriatic trade routes and regional distribution centres. Based on the association between Macedonian production, the dissemination of such finds in Slovenia, and the large concentration found in central Transdanubia, they concluded that amphoriskos-shaped glass beads were the most numerous, but not the only element found along these pathways (Blečić Kavur and Kavur 2017; Kavur 2019). Such a position was accepted by Attila Horváth, who discovered more than 500 examples on the Celtic cemetery at Csepel Island in Budapest, where beside different forms of glass beads, also corals and finger rings coming from the Mediterranean were discovered in female graves (Horváth 2017).

According to the widespread distribution of amphoriskos-shaped glass beads along the Adriatic coast and southeastern Europe, we can conclude that most of them were discovered in regional settlement centres, which served as important links in chains of long-distance trade and cultural connections, acting as distribution and redistribution centres for prestige items. They were points in a network of interlinked centres of power and trade, in which the redistribution and circulation of exotic prestigious goods created individuals accentuating their status and position with the creation of a cosmo-

politan fashion in which the Macedonian products played an important role.

In the necropolis of the Celtic World, those beads were discovered in female graves demonstrating a higher status of the deceased. Such assemblages were created to clearly exhibit the economic abilities of their owners to enter and perform a crucial role in the long-distance trade with prestigious items. In grave context, from Slovenia to Hungary and beyond, glass amphoriskos-shaped glass beads were discovered in graves not only displaying opulent grave inventories, such as grave number 247 from Csepel Island (Horváth 2017), but graves which displayed multiple cultural origins of the grave goods such as the grave number 37 from tumulus VII on Kapiteljska njiva in Novo mesto where in a modestly equipped female grave an amphoriskos-shaped glass bead was discovered together with a fibula of Eastern Celtic origin, regional bracelets and ankle ring as well as glass beads (Križ, Stipančić and Škedelj Petrić 2009, 318, 8.5.5, 320, 8.5.27). By creating such inventories, they substituted their expressions of identity with symbols of their status, with prestigious items acting as an intercultural composition of their attire. These burials included items originating from different sources and cultural backgrounds, indicating that these glass beads were one of the important el-

ements of “cosmopolitan fashion” consumed by individuals desiring to accentuate their social status.

A diffused distribution pattern was most probably the result of a system of gift exchanges that accelerated the flow between the vaguely geographically defined areas from which one was considered a source of prestige and power. Peer-polity interaction and competition stimulated the elites to emulate the consumption

and display creating several archaeological records. Although trinkets – are hardly recognizable outside of close personal interactions, with their visual idioms, they were perceived as exotic, and their iconography and raw materials were dramatically different. Small and worn on the body they were not as dramatically exotic as bronze vessels – their semantic message was not directed to a broad audience present on feasting and/or burial rites but limited, individual and



Figure 3: Necklace composed from glass beads from Přítluky, Moravia (photo B. Kavur).

personal. They were prestigious, although they were not on public display – their recognition required personal closeness and admittance into a restricted social circle. Only members of social elites were able to understand activities involving the procurement and redistribution of them as well as the symbolically codified identity of the possessor and his or her role within the society. They mediated this information through culturally constructed activities that included the formation of obligational relations between participants in the long-distance trade networks (Blečić Kavur and Kavur 2016, 250–252). These beads were holders of information about the social connections of the owner, their relational identities and their social status or statuses in the region. Moreover, it is through the known biography of the artefacts owned, and their history of circulation that they became links between people, objects and places creating the enchainment between them (Tilley 1999; Knappett 2011). Elevated into cultural icons, enabling people to identify strongly with them and to rely on these symbols as carriers of information in their everyday lives.

### Conclusion

Cosmopolitanism commenced its life as a project of participation in which commons exceeded the boundaries of their communal specificity and were aspiring to embrace the world as a shared sphere. They were not only replicating their cultural and aesthetic uniformity but organized diversity, the latter being the reflection of an increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures. As it was the long-distance trade and interconnectedness of regional communities that developed cultural characteristics without a clear anchorage in any one territory, without a clear pattern of consumption. Amphoriskos-shaped glass beads were trinkets transgressing cultural boundaries, interpreted, and reinterpreted in different contexts, creating a diversity of practices of their manipulations, and a multitude of appropriations by local communities. Flowing across the cultural borders

and linking central and southeastern Europe into a network connected with similar symbolic perceptions and desires for translucent prestigious jewellery. Trinkets were defined as small objects of clearly foreign origin produced from relatively inexpensive materials. They were not locally produced, and not even imitated, small enough to be worn around the neck but their details were only discernible from up close. Its' form and the material used reinforced its otherness and rendered it manifestly non-local – the object's distant origin was essential to its ontological status and meaning within the society. It was minor exotica somewhat wondrous and unusual but somewhat cheap, small but still considered prestigious (Arrington 2016, 2–3).

Despite their small size, they were considered items of prestige due to their materiality and distant origin. And prestige was the main asset in the premodern world of the 5th and 4th century BCE – not only reduced to the material manifestation in terms of artefacts but also, and even more intensively in the terms of symbolic capital which could have been converted easily in other forms of capital. The great imperial superpowers of that period, the Macedonian state on one and the Sicilian Syracuse on the other side, were increasing their prestige on the peripheries through direct and indirect promotion. A constant flow of artefacts, interpreted as symbolic, has crossed the economic and political boundaries of empires connected to world economies defined by market trade and their marginal regions where redistribution took place linked to territories embedded in subsistence economies lacking the mechanisms of wider integration.

The reception of the Mediterranean imports in prehistoric contexts remains substantially incomplete without an understanding of these prehistoric communities. The presence of imports, impeded considerations of the sites in their regional contexts as loci of cultural interactions. The places and mechanisms of origin of these items remain in the narrative as cultural fantasies, and the hinterland of the Northern Adriatic acts as an interstitial location, a “non-

place" between the Mediterranean and prehistoric times.

Within all these relations, amphoriskos-shaped glass beads served as society's foundational compass points – as anchors of meaning continually referenced in the reproduction of social relations and social roles. In addition, it was the similarity of social relations and social roles that connected different communities, basically different only due to their material culture. They were representative symbols considered worthy admirations that people accept as a shorthand to represent important ideas that were otherwise gradually diffused through oral storytelling traditions, common rituals and other means of ideological reproduction. The crux of their iconicity was that they were widely regarded as the most compelling symbol of a set of ideas or values that the societies deemed important (Holt 2004, 1–20). Ideas that actually changed along the long way of the distribution of the amphoriskos-shaped beads, demonstrating the cosmopolitanism of the prehistoric communities from the Aegean and Adriatic all the way to central-eastern Europe.

### Summary

For most of the twentieth century, historiography and archaeology justified the great divide between the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and the cultures of prehistoric Europe. Traditionally, the contacts were interpreted as military conflicts and the archaeological finds that crossed the borders on one side, and the other, were interpreted as objects related to these rare contacts of social elites – as military booty or as diplomatic gifts.

In recent decades, especially the archaeological interpretation of the processes of cultural and economic flows and social dynamics at the places of contact has begun to change radically. Analyses of the finds and the contexts of their discoveries on both sides showed that the contacts between the Mediterranean and Europe, based primarily on economic, as well as entirely on religious processes, were a historical constant and not an exception. Above all, it was shown that the flows of individual objects passed between centres of the redis-

tribution for which we assumed culturally completely different contexts in our archaeological constructions. Long-distance trade with objects originating from the workshops of Great Greece and Ancient Macedonia connected communities on the periphery of the Mediterranean world, and the shores of the Adriatic with communities in their hinterland and further on the continent – communities that experienced the end of the Early, or they already formed, culturally, technologically and aesthetically the beginning of the Late Iron Age. There are a number of items that mark long-distance trade, including glass pendants in the form of amphoriskos-shaped glass beads – jewellery trinkets made of monochrome blue glass and especially transparent glass, which represented the latest technological innovations of Macedonian workshops. The distribution of these objects along the Adriatic shore, through the central Balkans, and beyond the Black Sea to Pannonia enables reconstruction of the networks of contacts and, above all, the interpretations, and reinterpretations of the fashion of wearing them in different prehistoric communities. They show us the cosmopolitan spirit of the prehistoric communities of Europe – the economic relations of individuals and communities to exotic imports, their inclusion in local aesthetics and, above all, the interpretation and reinterpretation of exotic objects from the Mediterranean workshops that connected prehistoric Europe.

### Povzetek

Večji del dvajsetega stoletja sta zgodovinopisje in arheologija utemeljevala veliki razkol med antičnimi civilizacijami Sredozemlja ter kulturami prazgodovinske Evrope. Tradicionalno so bili stiki interpretirani kot vojaški konflikti. Arheološke najdbe, ki pa so prehajale meje na eni in drugi strani pa so bile interpretirane kot predmeti povezanimi s temi redkimi stiki družbenih elit – kot vojaški plen oziroma kot diplomatska darila.

V zadnjih desetletjih se je predvsem arheološka interpretacija procesov kulturnih in ekonomskih tokov ter družbenih dinamik na prostorih stikov začela radikalno spremenjati. Analize najdb in kontekstov njihovih odkritij na obeh straneh so pokazale, da so predvsem ekonomski, kot tudi na popolnoma religioznih procesih utemeljeni stiki med Sredozemljem in Evropo, bili zgodovinska stalnica ter ne izjema. Predvsem pa se je poka-

zalo, da so tokovi posameznih predmetov prehajali med centri redistribucije za katere smo v naših arheoloških konstrukcijah predvidevali kulturno povsem drugačne kontekste. Pokazalo se je, da je trgovina na dolge razdalje s predmeti, ki so izvirali iz delavnic Velike Grčije in Antične Makedonije povezovala skupnosti na obrobju sredozemskega sveta in na obalah Jadrana s skupnostmi v njihovem zaledju ter dalje na celini – skupnostmi, ki so preživljale konec starejše oziroma so že kulturno, tehnološko in estetsko tvorile začetek mlajše železne dobe. Med predmeti, ki so zaznamovali trgovino na dolge razdalje moramo vsekakor izpostaviti male steklene obeske v obliki amforiskov – nakitne drobnarije iz enobarvnega modrega, predvsem pa prosojnega stekla, ki so predstavljale zadnje tehnološke inovacije makedonskih delavnic na področju steklarstva. Opazujem, da je njihovo distribucijo po obalah Jadrana, preko centralnega Balkana in onkraj obal Črnega morja na prostor Panonije ter dalje, lahko rekonstruiramo omrežja stikov predvsem pa interpretacije in reinterpretacije mode njihovega nošenja v različnih skupnostih prazgodovinske Evrope. Prikazujejo nam kozmopolitski duh prazgodovinskih skupnosti – ekonomske odnose posameznikov in skupnosti do eksotičnih importov, njihovo vključitev v lokalno estetiko ter predvsem interpretacijo in reinterpretacijo eksotičnih predmetov iz sredozemskih delavnic, ki so povezovali prazgodovinsko Evropo.

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