

Studia honoraria archaeologica

Zbornik radova u prigodi 65. rođendana prof. dr. sc. Mirjane Sanader



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Live long and prosper!

Rhyta as a symbol of wealth and infinity

Martina BLEČIĆ KAVUR & Boris KAVUR, Koper

*Hail you who have suffered what you had never
suffered before.
You became a god instead of a mortal.
Gold leaf from Thurii, Southern Italy
(Early or mid-fourth century BC)*

New interpretations, promoting concepts of entanglement, acceptance and rejections, enabled modern understanding of specific items of Mediterranean material culture in prehistoric Iron Age contexts. They enriched our understanding of the intercultural character of the world in the 4th century BC. Valuable as vessels of exclusively symbolic significance rhyta will be discussed presenting their typological and stylistic determination and proposing their most probable place of production.

Iconographically, the rhyta were mostly interpreted as an essential ritual vessel, as the symbol of the continuity of life celebrated on festivities. It became therefore accepted that rhyta as symbols and attributes of Dionysus as well as of heroes and heroized ancestors, were the reception of the unification of death and divine. On the territory of the Eastern Adriatic and its hinterland we have detailed knowledge about only two contexts of discoveries – of rhyta from Stična and Jezerine. Further, we can ascribe to burials the rhyta from Tujan and Nesactium, while the finds from Valtida, Trogir and Palagruža should be considered as elements of the banquet service used during specific ceremonies in settlements or on specific ritual grounds. Their use was based on an existent ideology embedded within the societies, which had the communal feasting ritual at its core, an ideology susceptible to symbols coming from Mediterranean production centres. Focusing on rhyta as symbols of Mediterranean imports, our archaeological interpretations will become more culturally sensitive and anthropologically relevant by focusing on culture contact and redistribution of material culture.

Keywords: Eastern Adriatic, Dolenjska, Pounje, Iron Age communities, ceramic rhyta, symbols, cultural contacts

The Research

Although we would like to think that it happened a few decades ago that the flow of information, the globalization of markets and the diffusion of value and network society changed the world we are living in, it actually happened a long time ago. To demonstrate these processes we have to understand the proper relation between the Mediterranean cultures, especially the Greek or Greek influenced centres

of production, and the world investigated by the archaeology of Iron Age Europe. This simple research focus has become increasingly relevant at the outset of the 21st-century in studies on intercultural characteristics of prehistoric societies. Not being any more archaeology of the spread of Greek artefacts through the world performing impact on indigenous peoples, the focus shifted towards comparability of artefacts and especially social practices in which these artefacts were employed. It was, focusing on individual cases, a departure from the generalizing grand narrative and the subtle introduction of individuals with their agencies into focus of archaeological research.

Such approaches replaced the callow understanding that culture contacts were exposed by the presence or absence of Greek/Mediterranean artefacts (actually by observing specific contexts and quantifying the ratio to indigenous ones). Recently archaeologists reframed their intellectual positions of the discipline towards the spread of Greek cultural practices and do no longer perceive the spread of artefacts as historical documents designed by culturally and economically superior societies (or modes of production). They became observed artefacts of surplus value, but at the same time recognized as elements of material culture manipulated in similar or even same practices in different political contexts – reflecting identical habits, symbolic background and ideological understanding minimizing the cultural differences between what was once considered being centre and periphery of the ancient world.

In the past presence of imports impeded considerations that some sites in their regional contexts acted as loci of cultural interactions and redistribution of exotica (Nesactium, Osor, Vičja luka ...) (Blečić Kavur 2015; Blečić Kavur & Kavur 2016; 2017), the places of their origins and mechanisms of their redistribution remained in the narrative a cultural fantasy. Although previously mostly focusing on the Greek presence in the Adriatic in the recent years, observing the distribution of luxurious metal vessels, the importance of Macedonian production/trade was addressed several times (Blečić Kavur 2012; Blečić Kavur & Kavur 2010; 2015; 2017.).

Still, in traditional interpretations, the territory of northern Adriatic pertained its role as an interstitial location, a “non-place” between Mediterranean and prehistory. At the same time was in archaeological explanations abandoned the uncritical position that prehistoric/indigenous peoples of south-eastern Alps impassively accepted the foreign artefacts they were offered. These prehistoric communities were only the geographical other, but not the ideological one and presence/use of rhyta, discussed in the present paper, is a clear denial of the symbolic geography of northern inferiority. Actually, it contradicts the narrative that Mediterranean centres of production and trade (equated with the Greek presence/Macedonian influence) functioned as the axis of binary distinction. It demonstrates that assumptions central to occidental fantasies of “superiority” such as Greek/barbarian distinction, so deeply embedded within the century long materialist narratives about Iron Age archaeology, are not relevant to the theoretical perspectives of the present Mediterranean cultures. Today, they should not be any longer perceived as the only effective cultural performers, agents of creative and artistic superiority who could perfectly enact their colonial plans in perfect conformity with a complete oblivion of the prehistoric cultural environment, this is the people, they have encountered, but creative partners in a dialogue, equally performed on both sides.

These new interpretations have altered the discourse on the Mediterranean (cultural) colonialism by promoting concepts of identity and entanglement, acceptance and rejections, acquiescence and resistance, most recognizable not only in presence but also in the use of specific items of material culture. This intellectual process significantly enriched our understanding of the intercultural character of the world in the 4th century BC. Consequently, 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) 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.

The Rhyta

Ceramic rhyta are luxurious forms of plastically formed drinking vessels, cups, of an open form and standardly manufactured with a single handle. Unable to stand alone when filled, they had to be held in hands. Originally, their form was imported from metal vessels, traditionally retaining the funnel shape. They were parts of drinking sets used in banquets during different festivities and parties, especially drinking rites performed by male companies. Further, they were used as ritual vessels for libations during different sacrifices and in burial ceremonies, especially in the Greek world (e.g. Hoffmann 1962; 1966; 1989; 1997: 164–205; Schreiber 1999: 237–241; Ebbinghaus 2008). Truth to say, the rhyton is an innovation of the classical Greek ceramographic production of the red-figure style of 5th century BC, experiencing as a form the broadest spectrum of use and formal development during the 4th century BC. Different regional styles of production were created in the workshops of Greek southern Apennine peninsula (Hoffmann 1962; 1966; 1989: 141; Rotroff 1997: 204–206; True 2006; Ebbinghaus 2008: 145–147).



Fig. 1. Rhyton from the hillfort of Valtida near Rovinj (photo: courtesy of the Rovinj City Museum).

The Iron Age cultural territory of the Eastern Adriatic coast and towards it gravitating hinterlands do not, despite the presence of numerous ceramic imports from Mediterranean workshops, feature a numerous and representative sample of most luxurious goods such as rhyta. Still, fragments of seven extraordinary vessels of this kind originate solemnly from the territories of Istria, Dalmatia, Pounje and Dolenjska region.¹ Valuable on their own right, they will be, as vessels of exclusively symbolic significance, analysed in the present study with the application of the archaeological method focusing on their typological and stylistic determination, suggesting their most probable origin/place of manufacture. In an adjacent detailed evaluation of the contexts of their discoveries, we will formulate and interpret their value within the heterogeneous autochthonous societies of the Late Iron Age on the discussed territory.

Presently known examples from Istria were fragmented and exact information about their discoveries are missing. The best-preserved rhyton comes from the hillfort of Valtida near Rovinj. The ceramic is of light yellowish colour, it has a cylindrical upper portion of the body with and the cup/beaker with a

¹ There is a red-figure rhyton with a ram's head of south-italic production coming from the Nugent Collection in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (Rendić-Miočević 2011).



1

2

Fig. 2. Rhyta from 1 – Tujan near Bale and 2 – Nesactium (Vizače) (photo: courtesy of the Archaeological Museum of Istria).

preserved part of a handle.² The lower part of the vessel is formed as a cattle head – more precisely it is a completely preserved depiction of a young bull/calf. An identical state of preservation is characteristic for the fragmented rhyton from Tujan not far from Bale.³ Both vessels were technologically and stylistically almost identical, accordingly suggesting that they were most probably produced in the same workshop.

Heads of young cattle were modelled in a mould depicting an animal with a narrowing lower jaw, rounded facial part and pronounced nostrils while frontally were positioned two in relief-depicted almond-shaped eyes. Above them, located on the temple area, were on both sides of the head two circular protrusions indicating the ears, while above were from the parietal bone protruding small horns. Rhytons figural part ends with the parietal part of the head while the upper cylindrical part was manufactured on a potter's wheel (Schreiber 1999: 237, 239). The third, highly fragmented, rhyton known from Istria was discovered in Nesactium. The preserved piece depicts only an eye with a part of the horn of the animal. Nevertheless, despite its fragmented state is the original surface well preserved and still covered with a polychrome coating.⁴

Morphologically could be both vessels from Valtida and Tujan included in the group of curved rhyta with protomes (cf. Hoffmann 1966; Ebbinghaus 2008). On their surface is partly preserved the black, once shining, coating characteristic especially for the pottery production from workshops creating on the Southern Apennine territory. It was characterized by the polychromy of motives and lively artistic expression, created with white and yellow paint applied directly upon the black shiny coating before the firing or before the second firing (Lanza 2006: 113–116). On individual parts of the rhyton from Nesactium are visible the remains of white and yellow painting. Due to characteristics of fine production, artistic creation and relatively light colour of the ceramic, we could ascribe the piece to the production of red-figured pottery of Gnathia style from Southern Apennine peninsula. Its production could be dated into the second half of the 4th century BC, which would correspond to phase VI of the local Istrian relative Iron Age chronology (Mihovilić 2002: 508, T. 5: 3; 2004: 113, Fig. 9c; 2013: 278; Mihovilić et al. 2002: 57).

However, the currently known two fragments of rhyta from Dalmatia should be observed in completely different circumstances. The first one comes from the centre of the city of Trogir (Greek *Tragurion*), where it was discovered during archaeological research in the Duke's palace. The second one comes from the island of Palagruža. This fragment, depicting the head of a donkey, should be attributed to the Attic production of the 5th or 4th century BC (Kirigin et al. 2010: 105–106; cf. Kirigin 2010: 109; 2013: 64), while the fragment from Trogir is much more illustrative and was in a previous analysis described as a head in the form of a maritime monster (*ketos*). Such examples were included in the so-called “main group” type of classification of south-italic plastic vessels according to Herbert Hoffmann and dated in the second half of 4th century BC (Petrić 1992: 32, 34–35, sl. 6; Kovačić 2010: 141). Both fragments, determined and dated according to their typological characteristics were discovered on sites directly linked to the Greek presence in the Adriatic and not like others to sites attributed to autochthonous Iron Age communities.

² Valtida, Rovinj, Rovinj City Museum, inv. no.: 510: ROV; 1786: A (Mihovilić et al. 2002: 57).

³ Tujan, Bale, Archaeological Museum of Istria, inv. no.: A 4985 (Mihovilić 2002: 508, T. 5: 3; 2004: 113, Fig. 9c; Mihovilić et al. 2002: 57).

⁴ Nesactium, Vizače, Archaeological Museum of Istria, inv. no.: P 26256 (Mihovilić 2013: 278).

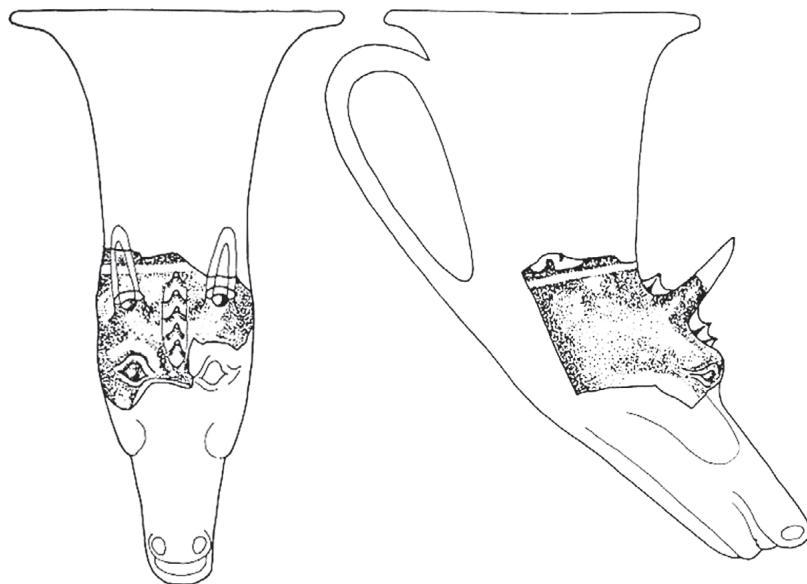


Fig. 3. Rhyton from Trogir (Duke's palace) (according to Petrić 1992).

Nevertheless, these Dalmatian and Istrian fragments are not the only known finds. Already in the 19th century was discovered a fragment of a rhyton, depicting a cattle head, in a grave from the necropolis Jezerine in Pritoka near Bihać in Pounje. It was discovered in grave 361 – a cremation burial in which besides the fragment of a rhyton a ceramic urn, covered with a bowl and two bronze fibulae of the middle La-Tène scheme were discovered (Radimský 1893: 397–398, T. VII: 17, T. VIII: 1, T. L: 13; cf. Teßmann 2001: Abb. 28: 6). Preserved protome, forming the lower part of the vessel, according to its production and style of decoration as well as the black slip, corresponds to the rhyton from Istria. Due to astonishing similarities, we could even assume that they were produced in the same production centre. Fibula with a globule on the foot as well as the other example with a hollow boat-shaped bow and a disc on the foot on which was most probably attached an amber pearl, belonging to the variant 90a according to typology of Fulvia Lo Schiavo, feature elongated crossbow shaped coils dating them into the 3rd century BC. It was a period when such types of fibulae were modern in the middle La Tène horizon of Celtic culture and their influence spread into the adjacent areas (Lo Schiavo 1970: 455, T. XXXIV: 13, carta VII; Guštin 1984: 322; Drechsler-Bižić 1987: 412, T. XLVII: 4; Teßmann 2001: 61–62). Taking into consideration the discovered grave goods and comparing them to other burials at the necropolis, we could assume that the deceased,



Fig. 4. Rhyton from the necropolis Jezerine in Pritoka near Bihać, grave 361 (photo: courtesy of the National Museum in Sarajevo).

buried in the grave, could be interpreted as a high-ranking person within the society buried in Jezerine. It could be dated into the 3rd century BC or into the 6th phase of cultural development in the eastern Japodian region according to the local relative chronology of the Iron Age (Drechsler-Bižić 1987: 411–415).

Even more interesting is the rhyton from Stična in Slovenia.⁵ It was discovered in grave 47 from tumulus IV. Most probably being already plundered in antiquity, it contained bronze ribbed ankle rings, amber and glass beads and a smaller ceramic spindle-whorl as well as horse bones (Wells 1981: 66, Fig. 101: b–e; Dular 2007: 739–740; cf. Frie 2018). It was interpreted as a burial of an important member of the broader Iron Age community in Stična who was buried with all her credits including the burial of a horse (or its parts) as well as with luxurious imported items from the Mediterranean cultural circle. H. Hoffmann focusing on Tarentine production already analysed the rhyton from Stična in a detailed study. It was ascribed to the class of “Tarentine rhyton with ram’s heads” from series C (Hoffmann 1966: 96–97, 146–147). Despite its precise identification, the discussion about it and/or its broader cultural significance in the context of its discovery never developed. Neither were noticed in the discussion the rhyta from Istria and Pounje.

The find from Stična is currently the best-preserved example, partly reconstructed from fragments of light brown pottery. Damaged was only the upper portion of the cylindrical neck. The band-like handle joins the upper and lower part extending from the central portion of the elongated neck. Despite the good general state of preservation, the surface is weathered – the slip and the painted decoration are missing.⁶ Still, as in the case of rhyta from Istria and Pounje, several incised and black painted portions are visible. The lower, figural part of the vessel represents the image of a ram’s head. Characterized by the modelled strong jaw, rounded facial portion and smaller nostrils positioned directly above a slightly opened mouth. Within the latter is located the opening for the flow of fluids – a formal element only rarely present in ceramic rhyton of a mostly late variant (Hoffmann 1966: 106; 1989: 157; Ebbinghaus & Jones 2001: 385). Frontally are located on each side in relief formed eyes, modelled from three concentric circles with a distinctively shaped circular iris. Above them, on the temporal area of the head, are two circularly involute, realistically modelled and with incisions decorated horns. Eyes and horns, in a reduced selection of decorative elements, dominate the vessel as such and especially in its lateral perspective. Horns, evidently not fully grown, beside the formation of the head itself, suggest that we are observing the head of a young animal – a young ram. It can be, due to its curved shape and ornamental elements such as circularly modelled eyes, triangular forehead and lacking the traditional fleece, as well as the opening for the flow of liquids, attributed to the South-Italic production of Gnathia style from the late 4th and early 3rd century BC.⁷

Analysing the chronological position of the grave, the situation becomes complex. Especially since only a minor proportion of grave goods were preserved. The later, consisting mostly of jewellery, are chronologically less sensitive. Of course, the massive ribbed ankle-ring with touching ends of the IIIb variant according to the typological classification of Sneža Tecco Hvala is a typical example of female attire of Iron Age Dolenjska region where, beside bracelets, they were mostly worn in pairs. Discovered in graves of wealthier individuals they are considered being emblems of status and indicative for the age of the deceased. Unfortunately, they are less chronologically sensitive since with minor variations they were used during the period from the Stična to Negova phase of the local relative chronology covering almost all of the Early Iron Age (Teržan 1995: 95; Grahek 2004: 148, sl. 39; Tecco Hvala 2012: 302–304, 306–307). Although the ankle ring could, with its massive appearance, indicate an older tradition, the grave should be taking into consideration the dating of the rhyton, to be more precisely, it should be dated in to the middle of the 4th century BC. A dating that would correspond to the final of the Negova phase, which is the end of the Early Iron Age of Dolenjska region.

⁵ The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, inv. no.: 40-77-40/13526 (Wells 1981: 66, Fig. 101: a; Polizzoti Greis 2006: 64–65, Pl. 4).

⁶ Soil acidity in Dolenjska region damaged the surface of numerous imported vessels (cf. Polizzoti Greis 2006: 64; Križ 2012: 38, 41).

⁷ Hoffmann 1966: 96–97; Wells 1981: 66. Although H. Hoffmann did not personally see the rhyton from Stična, he considered it’s possible origin in the Greek cities of the eastern Adriatic coast!?



Fig. 5. Rhyton from Stična, grave 47/4 (according to Polizzoti Greis 2006).

The Symbol

Today it is well known that moulds for the production of rhyta depicting young animals, especially cattle and sheep, were mostly discovered on the territory of Southern Apennine peninsula. Consequently, all presented fragments, including the fragment of *ketos* from Trogir, could be attributed to the Apulian artistic production, more precisely to workshops from Taranto (cf. Hoffmann 1966; 1989). According to their typology, the vessels from Stična (Hoffmann 1966: 96–98; 1989: 157) and Trogir, since the *ketos* features an opening at the base/muzzle, could be included into the group of so-called “real rhyta” or “theriomorphic funnels”. While the vessels from Istria and Jezerine are typologically cups, from which liquid, that is pure wine, was drunk.

Iconographically, the rhyton was mostly interpreted as an essential ritual vessel, as the symbol of the continuity of life celebrated on festivities with large quantities of the vine. It was, in the symbolic system of Greek art, mostly associated with the god Dionysus, whose attribute it became (Hoffmann 1989; True 2006; Ebbinghaus 2008: 146–151; Manassero 2018: 294–295). Ram, bull and donkey were the most frequent motives for the plastic decoration of vessels. Their selection was linked to the function of the vessel in individual ceremonies and festivities, especially during offerings and sacrifices. However, the cattle motive and especially the depiction of bulls were characteristic for the repertoire of products from workshops working on the southern part of Apennine peninsula (Holo 1974: 92–93; Hoffmann 1989: 141, T. 1; cf. Ebbinghaus 2008). Selection of motives was closely linked to the mystic doctrines of the Dionysus web of that ambivalent deity – especially since bulls were among the leading animals in his accompanying

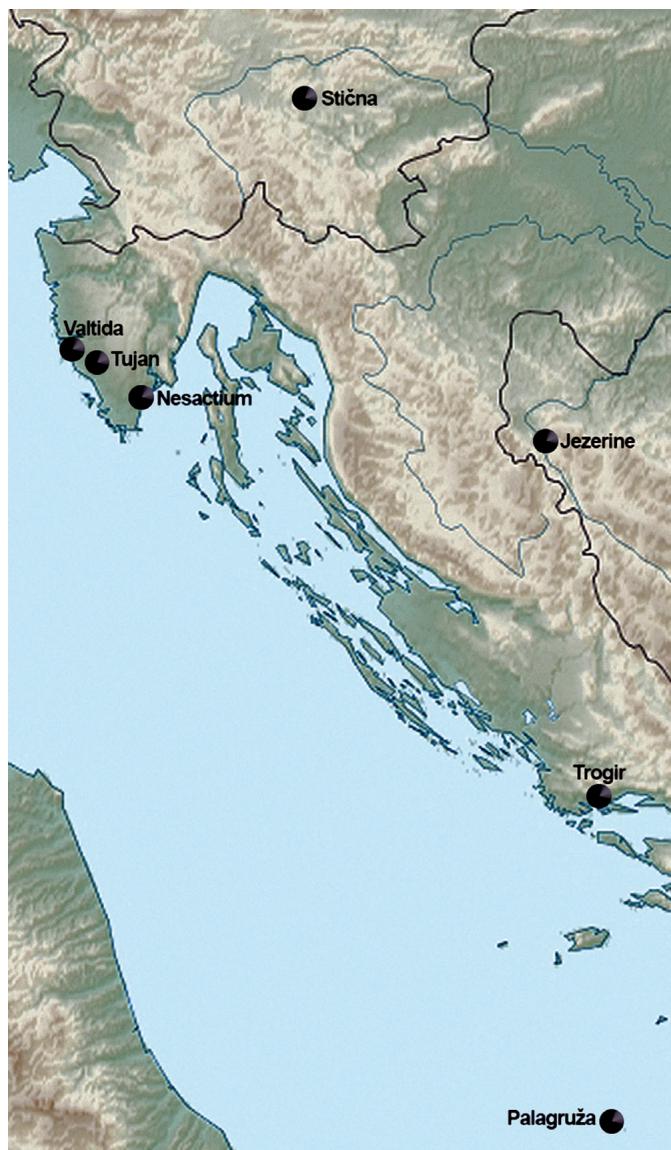


Fig. 6. Distribution map of imported rhyta on the territory of the Eastern Adriatic and its hinterland.

bestiary. Often the god himself was identified and worshipped in the form of a bulls/calf head, as a man with bulls' horns and as the god of wine. However, at the same time, he was also the god of the underworld, creator of ceremonial madness, religious enthusiasm and especially the god of sensuous women, fertility and carnal pleasures (Burkert 2011: 249–257; cf. Seaford 2006: 21–25; Isler-Kerény 2007). The bull, as a symbol *per se*, characterized by its inspiring presence, designating death and rebirth of Dionysus, of the man turned deity. It was another reason why, in burial rites, the bull as a metaphor symbolized the heroic ritual of an ordinary mortal. In addition, it was from there that it derived its eschatological dimension (Hoffmann 1989: 142).

The ram was also closely related to Dionysus. This time not as a symbol of the latter, but as to the god most often dedicated animal. Consequently, ram's head was the most frequent and important motive in the symbolic repertoire of rhyta of Attic ceramic production. Rams, especially young animals, were traditionally sacrificed in sanctuaries and during burial rites. Therefore, the head became actually a *pars pro toto* for all the forms of sacrifice and finally death itself. Enjoying exceptional importance in their social system it was, due to the "golden fleece", equated with gold and wool, the basics of Attic/Greek economy. Very soon, it developed into a symbol of immortality – but also of power and wealth which, in the end, was equated with the heroic status of the deceased (Hoffmann 1997: 47–51; cf. Ebbinghaus 2008).

Summarizing – the ceramic rhyton was a *specific subject* of Dionysius used during festivities, on ritual places and during burial rites. It was not only mandatory gear in processions but most of all in trance

dances of farrish and ecstatic women (Maenads), itifalc Satyrs and/or Silens in other forms of orgies (cf. Kefalidou 2009). Finally, during the midst of 4th century BC was developed the attribute of a hero-ancestor, an iconographic model well known from Attic grave reliefs of that time. It was therefore accepted that rhyta as symbols and/or attributes of Dionysus as well as of heroes and heroized ancestors, were the reception of the unification of death and divine. With other words – they were not just used as drinking vessels, but they were also a part of funerary furniture/service (Dentzer 1982: 314; cf. Holo 1974: 85; Hoffmann 1989: 134–137; Ebbinghaus & Jones 2001: 391–392). A rhyton placed into a grave, beside the deceased, designated the aristocratic ideal towards which the deceased strived. It assured his or her heroization – guaranteeing endless symposia, rebirth and fertility. It positioned the deceased into the same mental category as the participant of the divine banquet in the transition of the social and metaphysical meaning (Hoffmann 1989: 162–163; 1997: 47–50). As a medium of precisely determined meaning, it had a connotation of a peculiar form of “sacred ownership” of the deceased person. Sacrifice in every sense was a magical and mysterious act, extraordinary in its eschatological practice regardless of the type of medium (animal and/or wine). Namely, the “transition” between words enabled a death that “purified”; it enabled disconnecting the pure and spiritual from the impure and material. Moreover, it was the sacrificial victim, the animal or its substitute, that, as a metonymy, became the symbol of identity, of an extended ego expanding into unconsciousness. Exactly such a paradigm of “transition rite” was normal for the sacrificial and burial rites (Hoffmann 1989: 133–134).

The Society

Observing rhyta, their use and meaning in past societies, we can understand the past, or more exactly, construct the narrative about the past by contextualizing the discovery of these items. Understanding that the material culture is not only an accumulation of all the items included into our lives but the sum of individual objects with their own stories and meanings, own narrations which can be susceptible to analysis. How can we understand and interpret the rhyta in autochthonous contexts of Iron Age communities? What do they tell us about these communities? First, we should repeat that we have detailed knowledge about only two contexts of discoveries – of rhyta from Stična and Jezerine. With high certainty, the rhyta from Tujan and Nesactium can be ascribed to burial rites, while the finds from Valtida, Trogir and Palagruža should be considered as elements of the banquet service used during specific ceremonies in settlements or on specific ritual grounds.

Rhyta from Stična and Jezerine were discovered broken to pieces – we can assume that they were intentionally fragmented during the burial rites. They were, as a part of the funerary service included in the eschatological practice of sacrifice – considered being a medium, together with vine and other containers. If we, based on archaeological evidence, acknowledge the inclusion of rhyta into such contexts, they will become the main argument against a widely accepted perception of the great divide between Mediterranean civilizations and prehistoric barbarians in their hinterlands. Such evidence are the direct opposition to popular notions that the barbarians, contrary to “modest” Greeks were heavy drinkers consuming pure vine from large vessels (Hoffmann 1989: 134; cf. Blečić Kavur 2012: 158). Further, it is well known, that the societies of Dolenjska culture, as well as Japodi and Histri, performed burial rites and, through them, expressed their ideals and confirmed social status of members of their elites. In their own way, they followed and performed the praxis of heroization of the deceased. These practices were known from numerous contexts and could be documented by the discoveries of different items, but most of all they were made recognizable by monumental stone sculpture and the much more intimate art of the situlae.⁸

Imports of luxurious pottery, at the moment, the remains of four rhyta, can't be interpreted as being random or just a reflection of contemporary fashions. Adding the fact, that during excavations of the alleged tomb from 1981 in Nesactium, in a feature beneath the Roman temple, which had beside the burial most probably also a ceremonial function, several cattle bones were discovered (Jurišić 1996: 65, T. 21). Taking this into consideration we can confirm that the festivities and rituals of the local aristocracy did not differ

⁸ E.g. Mihovilić 2001; 2013 – with the earlier literature.

significantly from the rites in the southern Mediterranean world – at least when observing the mandatory inclusion of ritual ecstasies and feastings.

Unfortunately, lacking their archaeological context for several rhyta, we have to observe the relations they created in the cultural context in which they were discovered. We do need to look for and formulate narratives, which have explanatory and predictive rather than simply descriptive force – otherwise, we do prehistoric communities the courtesy of failing to recognize them as functional and coherent cultural systems. Consequently, we can all the rhyta discovered in Iron Age cultural contexts consider being a part of heritage of local communities, a *specific subject* coming from and indicating a precise system of symbols, which performed its role in everyday performances and burial rites demonstrating the cultural cohesion, mutual understanding and entanglement between superficially different cultures of the Old World. Rhyta as far-reaching influences from abroad made a huge difference for the mental wellbeing of the social elites – they enabled the existence of creative ritual space in prehistoric peasant societies on the edges of the Mediterranean world and beyond. These elites were, despite their spatial isolation, diligent in acquiring new information and active in their redistribution within their societies. Imported artefacts and their public display in ritual actions became the means of demonstration of the intercultural character of individuals included into long-distance trade and distribution well as redistribution of Mediterranean artefacts coming from centres of artistic production and targeting prehistoric societies of its hinterland consuming this artefacts/information. Such performances were functioning as active acts of creations in social status. Although it were not only artefacts but also information about these artefacts, about their use and explanation in ritual and social practices, which were introduced into presumably different cultural environments. Such knowledge played the main role in the repeating process of renegotiations of the social status of participants of these rituals. Communal feasting and display were a vehicle used to both imbibe and display the virtues of leaders and their social status. They were built on an existent ideology embedded within the society which had the communal feasting ritual at its core, an ideology susceptible to symbols coming from Mediterranean ideologies and not so different from them.

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