

Romans and Natives  
in the Danubian Provinces  
(1<sup>st</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> C. AD)

Edited by  
Lucrețiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba and Ioan Piso

PHILIPPIKA  
Altertumswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen  
Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 173

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## ROMAN MERCHANDISE BEFORE AND AFTER THE ROMAN CONQUEST

Milica Tapavički-Ilić

Before the Roman conquest, the Danube and the Sava valleys in modern Serbia were inhabited by a mixture of Celtic and local populations widely known as the tribe of Scordisci. (fig. 1) Their material culture was well-developed, especially when it comes to processing iron and producing wheel-thrown pottery. However, already during that period, especially during its last phase, actually 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, Roman import can already be traced.

The best examples are to be found in several graves excavated on the Celtic cemetery Karaburma (in modern Belgrade) and from cemeteries on the right Danube bank down streams from the Iron Gates.

The Karaburma cemetery was excavated during the late fifties and the early sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was fully published.<sup>1</sup> The total of 96 Iron Age graves have been unearthed, belonging to the period from the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>2</sup> Although the majority of graves belong to the typical Late Iron Age period, there are a few burials that already show traces of trade with the Romans.<sup>3</sup> The grave-goods in such burials include both typical Iron Age finds (Scordiscian pottery, weapons, brooches), but also some of the imported Roman items, like Samian pottery or vessels made of bronze, intended for wine consumption.

After the year 15 A.D., as the Romans established their castrum and settlement at the mouth of the river Sava into the Danube, some five kilometers upstream from Karaburma, the Scordiscian settlement seems to have existed undisturbed for a certain period of time. Only after the Roman castrum gained on importance did the Scordiscian one slowly lose its dominance.<sup>4</sup>

Finds of Samian ware and luxurious Roman pottery were discovered in Karaburma graves 8, 9, 44 and 145. All of the graves represent cremations.

In grave number 8 (fig. 2) there was a Samian bowl, while other grave goods included a grey kantharos with polished ornament, an iron ring and a piece of twisted iron wire, possibly part of a necklace.<sup>5</sup>

1 Todorović 1972.

2 Popović 2012 b, 148.

3 Popović 2012 b, 150.

4 Popović 2012 b, 150.

5 Todorović 1972, 12, T. II.

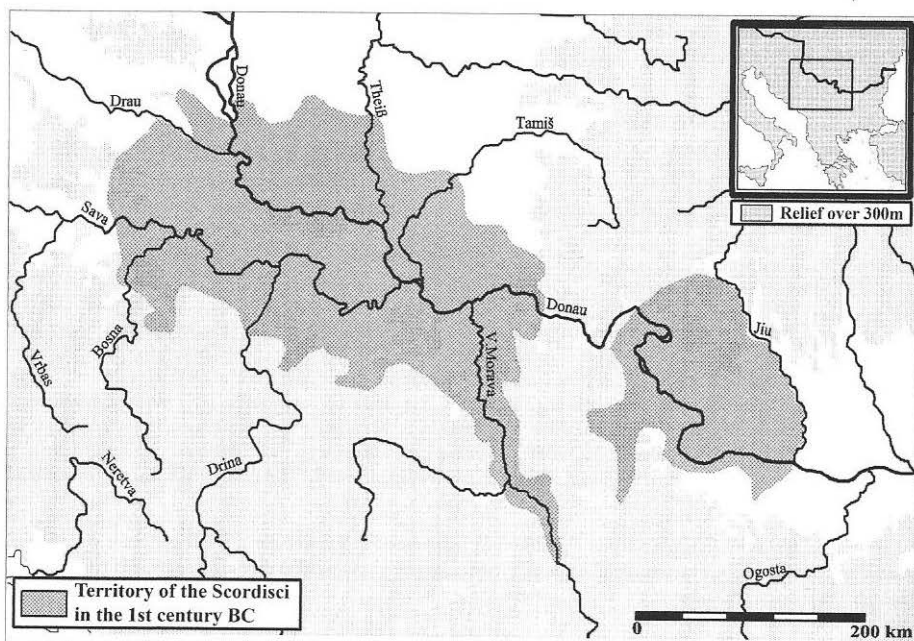


Fig. 1: Territory of the Scordisci tribe (map by V. Ilić).

Grave number 9 (fig. 3) shows a similar context – a Samian bowl with incised ornaments was placed in the grave alongside with a small grey jug, a bronze brooch and an iron knife.<sup>6</sup>

Grave 44 (fig. 4) includes a red jug of Roman origin, two iron spears and an iron knife,<sup>7</sup> similar to grave 145 (fig. 5), also with a red jug of Roman origin, an iron spear and an iron.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the presence of Roman table ware, it is obvious that all of the funerals mentioned above were rather simple cremations with just a few grave-goods. If one would judge only according to them, two would belong to women and the other two to men.

When it comes to imported bronze vessels, a different picture is shown. On the Karaburma cemetery, there were six cremated graves in which such finds were discovered (numbers 11, 12, 92, 97, 137 and 203).

Grave 11 (fig. 6) contained three pottery vessels, a knife, a spear and a shield buckle, all made of iron and a bronze *simpulum* with a long handle.<sup>9</sup>

Almost the same content was revealed from grave number 12 (fig. 7), with two pottery vessels, a knife and a spear made of iron, a whetstone and finally, items made of bronze – a *simpulum*, its handle and a wide and shallow bowl.<sup>10</sup>

6 Todorović 1972, 23, T. II.

7 Todorović 1972, 12–13, T. XVII.

8 Todorović 1972, 37, T. XXXVI.

9 Todorović 1972, 13–14, T. III.

10 Todorović 1972, 14, T. IV.

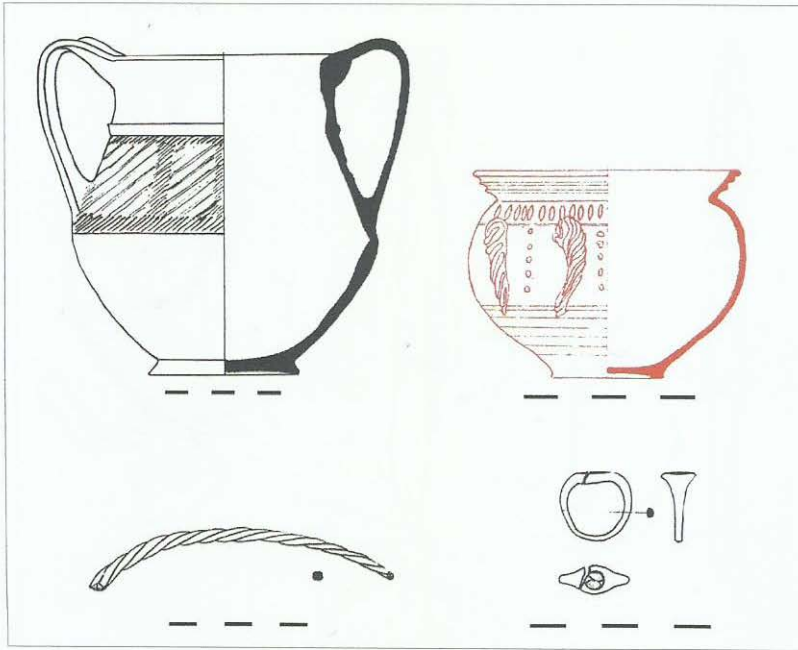


Fig. 2: Finds from Karaburma grave number 8 (after Todorović 1972, T. II).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

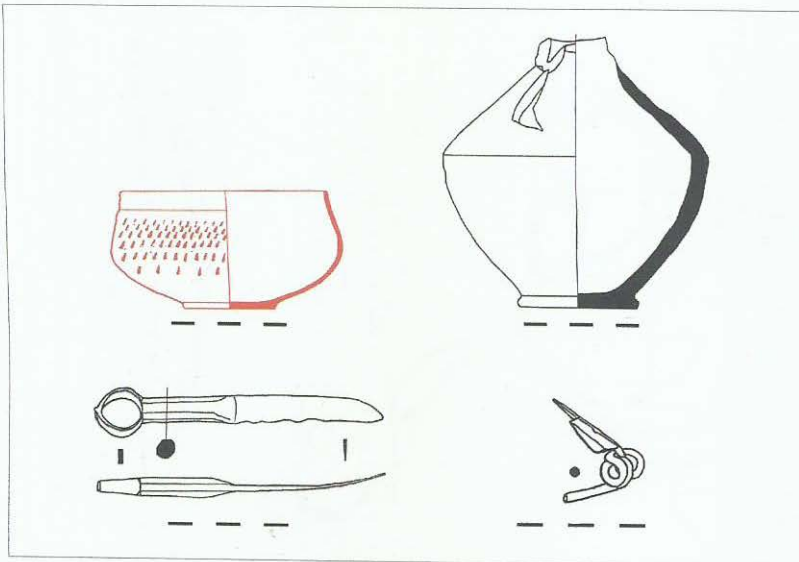


Fig. 3: Finds from Karaburma grave number 9 (after Todorović 1972, T. II).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.



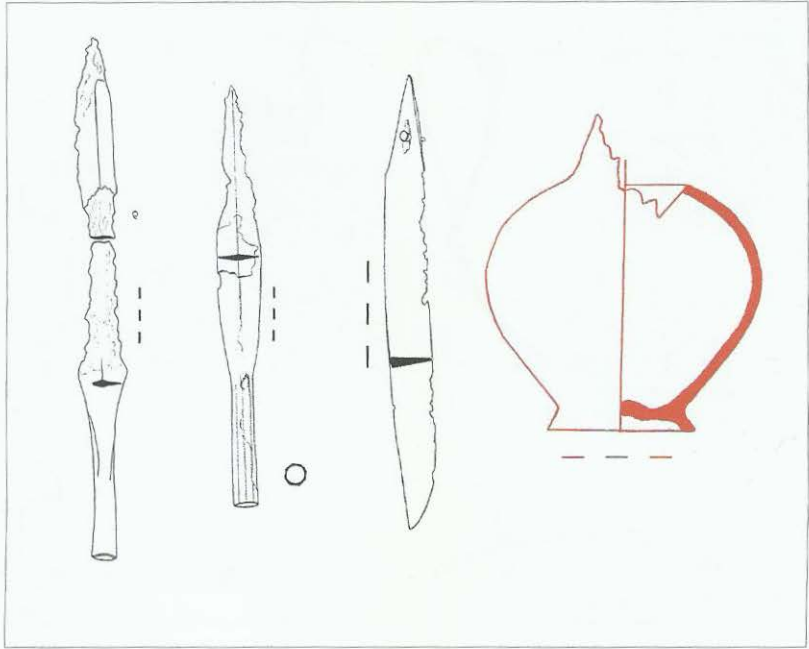


Fig. 4: Finds from Karaburma grave number 44 (after Todorović 1972, T. XVII).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

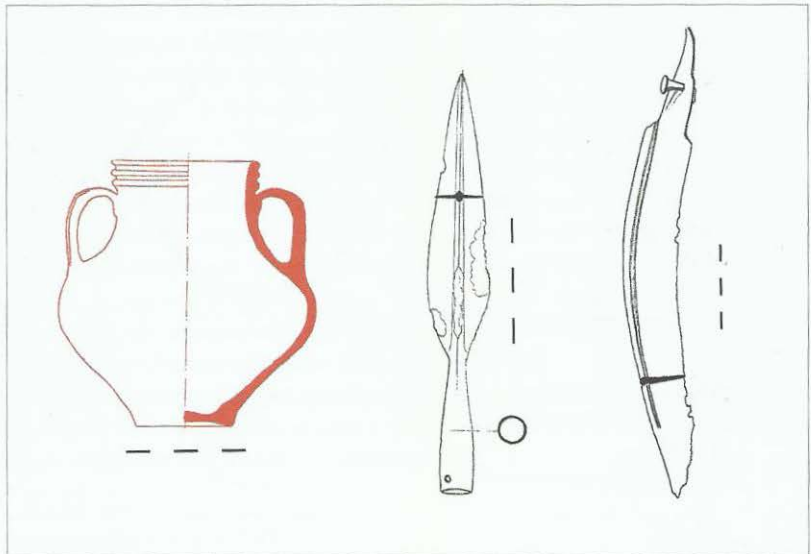


Fig. 5: Finds from Karaburma grave number 145 (after Todorović 1972, T. XXXVI).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

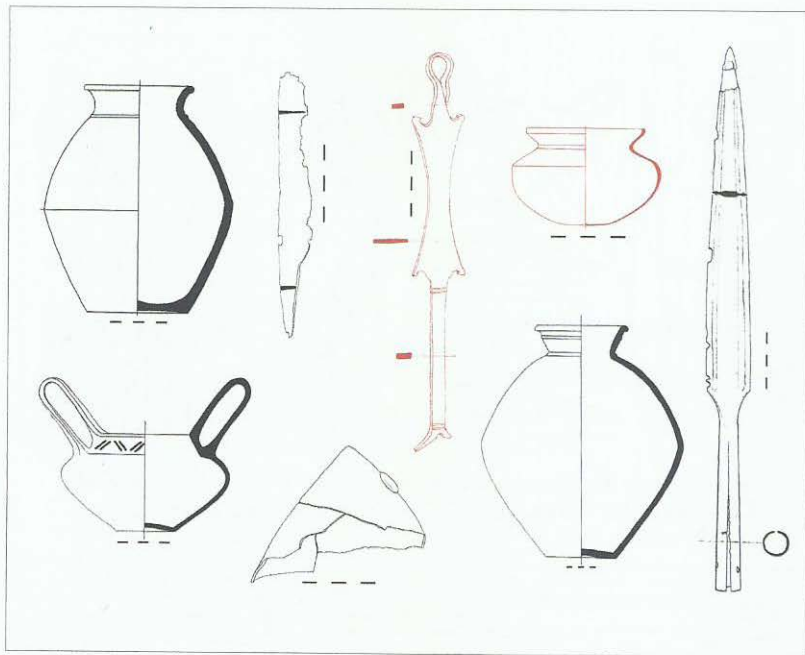


Fig. 6: Finds from Karaburma grave number 11 (after Todorović 1972, T. III).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

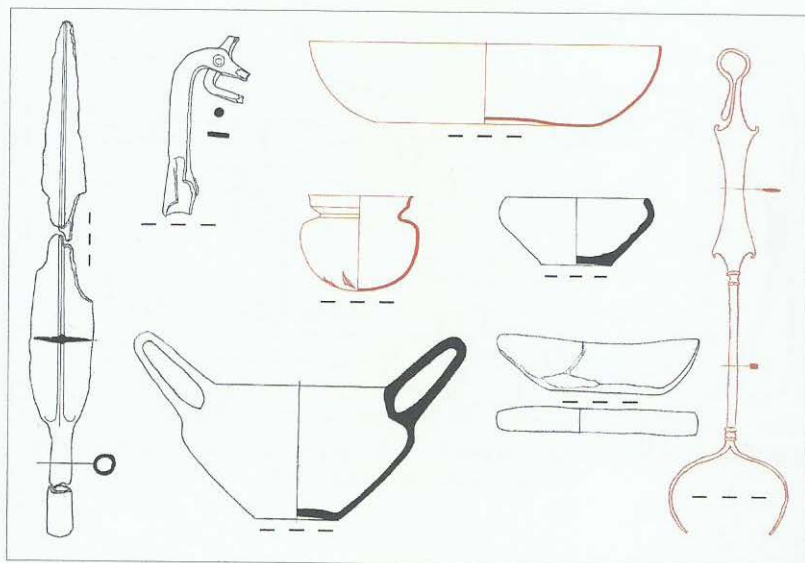


Fig. 7: Finds from Karaburma grave number 12 (after Todorović 1972, T. IV).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

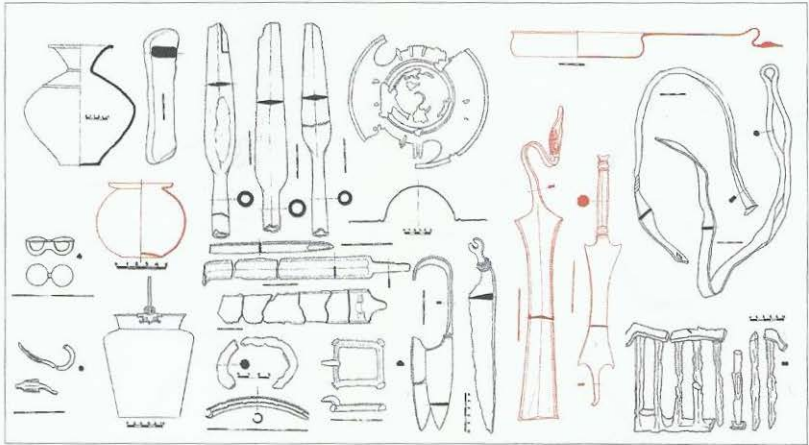


Fig. 8: Finds from Karaburma grave number 92 (after Todorović 1972, T. XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII and XXIX). Roman merchandise is drawn red

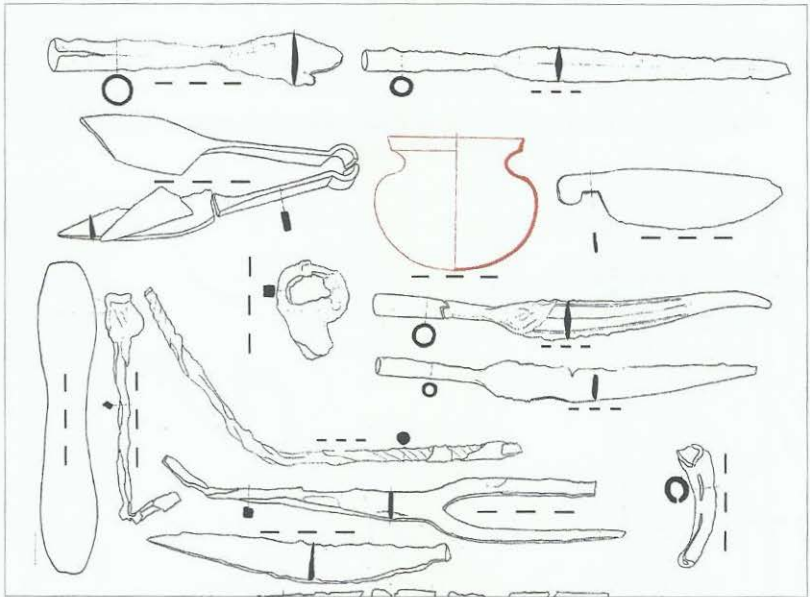


Fig. 9: Finds from Karaburma grave number 97 (after Todorović 1972, T. XXIX-XXXX). Roman merchandise is drawn red

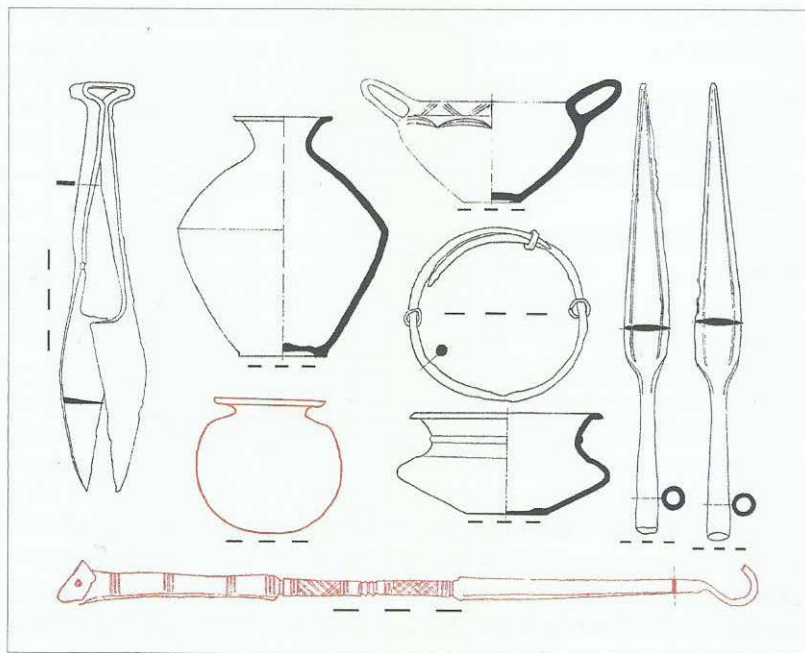


Fig. 10: Finds from Karaburma grave number 137 (after Todorović 1972, T. XXXVI).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

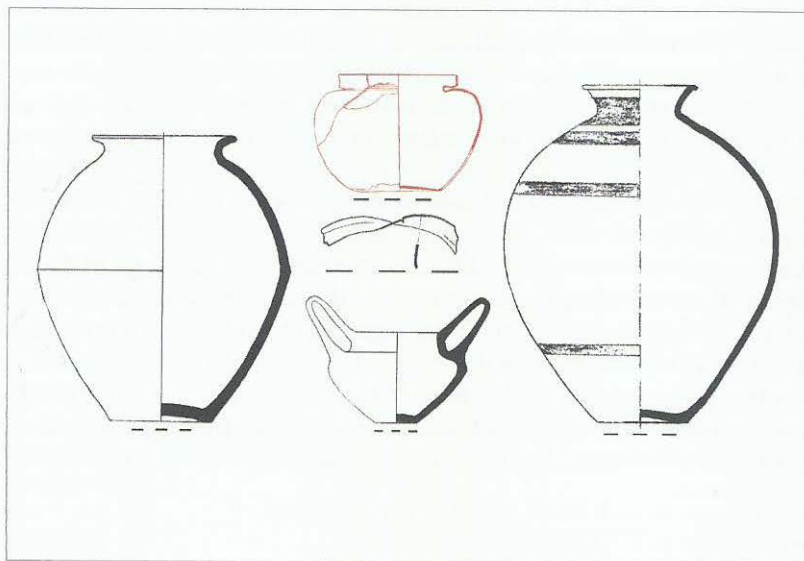


Fig. 11: Finds from Karaburma grave number 203 (after Todorović 1972, T. XXXVIII).  
Roman merchandise is drawn red.

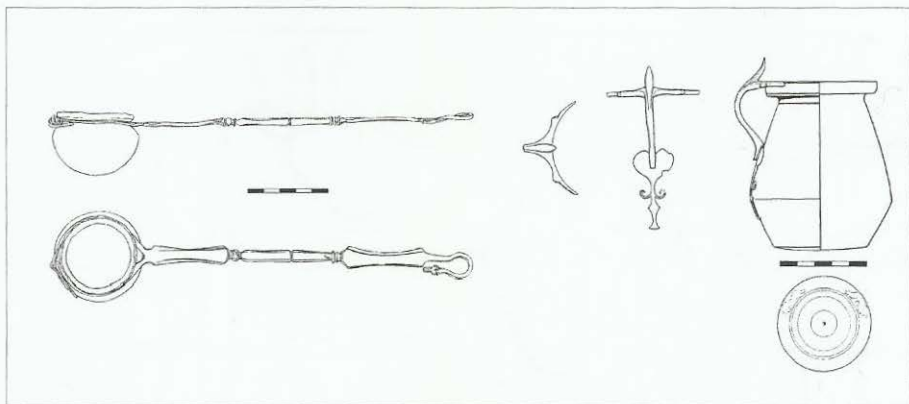


Fig. 12: Finds of bronze vessels from Mala Vrbica – Ajmana  
(after Popović 1992, Abb. 4-2 and Abb. 7-1).

Grave number 92 (fig. 8) revealed a real treasure with twenty-four grave-goods.<sup>11</sup> Besides typical grey pottery, there were two shield buckles, a sword and its scabbard, two spear-heads, a knife, several parts of a bronze belt, an iron belt buckle, a whetstone, an iron bucket, iron chains, an iron grill and some other fragmented items. However, the most outstriking finds from this grave include two bronze vessels and a handle of one of them. There were a *patera* and a *simpulum* with detached, but preserved handle. Its ending shows the image of a bird's head, possibly a duck.

Grave number 97 (fig. 9) also revealed many finds, fourteen of them.<sup>12</sup> They include an iron sword and its scabbard, four spears, iron scissors, two knives, a bronze belt buckle, an iron chain, two unspecific items and a small bronze *simpulum*.

Grave number 137 (fig. 10) also contained several grave-goods, with three pottery vessels, two iron spears, iron scissors, an iron arm-ring and a bronze *simpulum* with its handle.<sup>13</sup>

A bronze *simpulum*, three pottery vessels and deformed pieces of iron were also discovered in grave 203 (fig. 11).<sup>14</sup>

According to the number of finds, all of the afore mentioned graves can be described as well-equipped and according to the type of finds, they could be described as male.

A similar situation is shown in the Celtic cemeteries Mala Vrbica – Ajmana and Mala Vrbica – Konopište, both of them discovered at the right Danube bank, downstream from the Iron Gates and close to the village of Maja Vrbica. The sites were excavated between 1981 and 1988.<sup>15</sup> The site Ajmana revealed only two Late Iron Age graves, since most of the cemetery was destroyed by erosion and building activities during Antiquity and

11 Todorović 1972, 30-31, T. XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII and XXIX.

12 Todorović 1972, 32, T. XXIX-XXX.

13 Todorović 1972, 36-37, T. XXXVI.

14 Todorović 1972, 38-39, T. XXXVIII.

15 Popović 2012a, 17.

the Middle Ages. The site Konopište revealed five graves from the Late Iron Age, lying among many other graves from previous epochs. The dating for both cemeteries includes the period from the middle to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>16</sup>

In Ajmana cremation grave number 1, a scoop was discovered still lying in a bronze bowl. (fig. 12) Besides these two items, further grave-goods include weapons: spearheads and knives, local Scordiscian pottery, a silver-plated brooch from MLt scheme and an iron brooch.<sup>17</sup>

A similar find of a scoop comes from cremated grave number 18/1988, discovered alongside with weapons, jewelry, pottery and an iron brooch.<sup>18</sup>

From Ajmana again, a find of a small bronze jug is known.<sup>19</sup> (fig. 12)

A note has to be made here that the cemeteries of Mala Vrbica – Ajmana and Mala Vrbica – Konopište have not been published fully, with a plan of the excavation and with all of the graves and grave-finds described and depicted. Only the bronze finds mentioned above that clearly represent imported goods have been extracted, described and published.

Obviously, during the last century B.C. imported Roman goods were already present among the natives living along the right Danube bank. Most of them, if not all, can be brought in connection with wine consumption. Most of them were imported from Campana or north Italian workshops.<sup>20</sup> Roman merchants must have brought them to the Balkans in order to exchange them against raw materials or slaves. The great value that they represented for the locals, actually for the local elite, is confirmed with the fact that they were placed in their graves as grave-goods. If one would inspect the gender element, but only according to grave-good sets, one would understand that most of the graves would be described as male and only a few as female.

In addition, wine consumption would surely be connected with wine import. The ways of wine import in the central Balkans are still not known. There are no amphoras finds that would be dated in pre-Roman times but wine could have also been brought there in wooden barrels or some kind of leather containers. To put it in another way – the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.<sup>21</sup>

Strabo describes the merchants' road that lead from Aquileia, along the Sava valley all the way to the Danube (Strabo V.1.8). Another way that was used to transport goods from the Mediterranean to the central Balkans was from the south, attested with numerous coin hoards of Roman republican coins and those of the cities of Apollonia and Dyrrachium. Those roads, used by Roman merchants, were later those used by the Roman armies.<sup>22</sup>

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16 Popović 2012a, 18.

17 Popović 1992, 64.

18 Popović 1992, 66.

19 Popović 1992, 69.

20 Popović 1992, 61.

21 Turvey 2008, 267.

22 Dizdar, Radman Livaja, 2004a, 52.

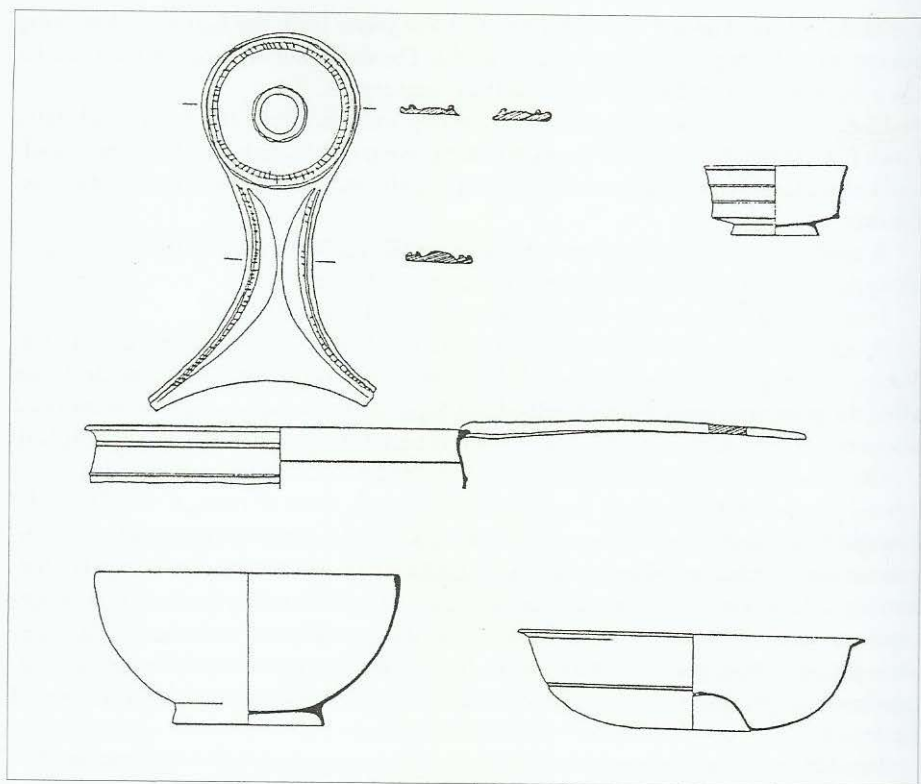


Fig. 13: Finds of bronze vessels from the Early Roman Period  
(after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 48, 1–6).

However, after the right Danube bank has become part of the Roman Empire, some aspects were changed. The local elite was partly included into the Roman state, while the other part was forced to leave and move either to new territories or even out of the Empire.

Still, Roman products continued to be brought to these territories, not any more on demand of the local Late Iron Age elite, but on demand of the newly settled Romans themselves, both soldiers and civilians. Tracing old and following the appearance of new merchandise does not solemnly reflect taste and needs of potential customers, but also trade and economic changes in the newly conquered territories.

Among the forms that were now very rarely traded are vessels made of bronze.<sup>23</sup> (fig. 13)

On the other hand, the amount of Roman pottery steadily grew, not just of vessels, but also of oil-lamps. Surely, distribution of olive oil comes with these products, too. Needless to say, pottery production of the Roman Empire possessed extreme economic importance, since distribution and quantities of pottery indicate directions and intensity

23 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 62, T. 48, 1–6.

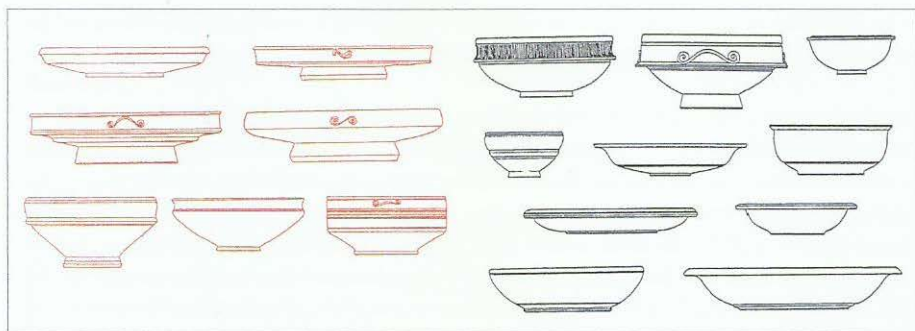


Fig. 14: Finds of Samian ware from pre-Roman and Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 22, 1-11). The types imported already during the pre-Roman period are drawn red

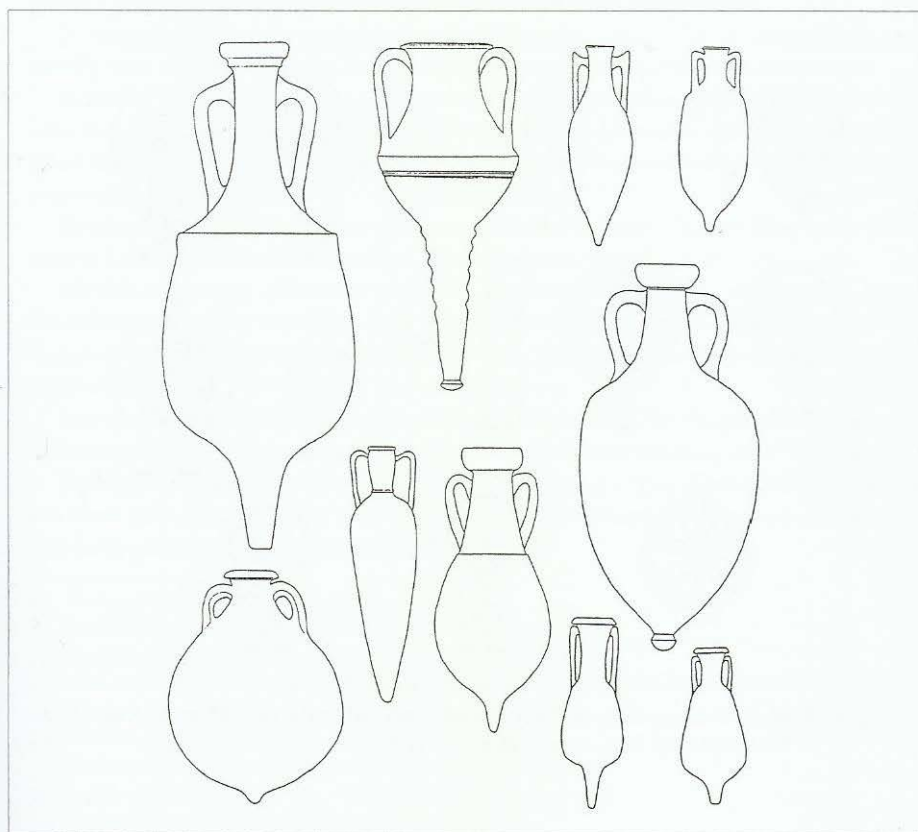


Fig. 15: Finds of amphoras from the Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 30).



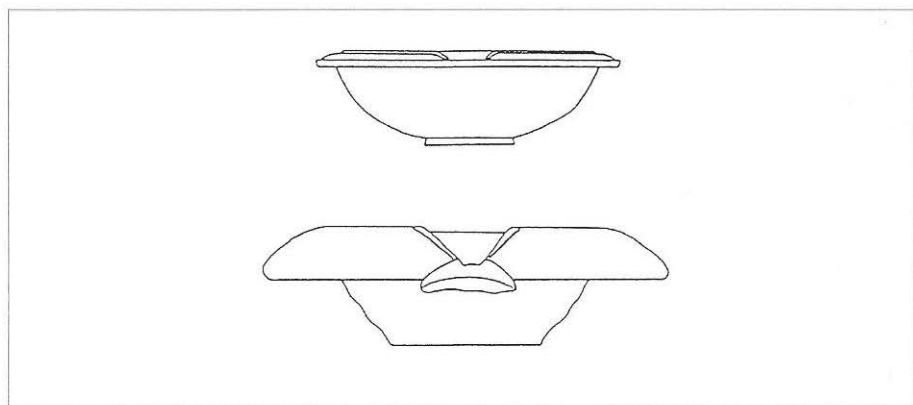


Fig. 16: Finds of mortars from the Early Roman Period  
(after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 26, 17–18).

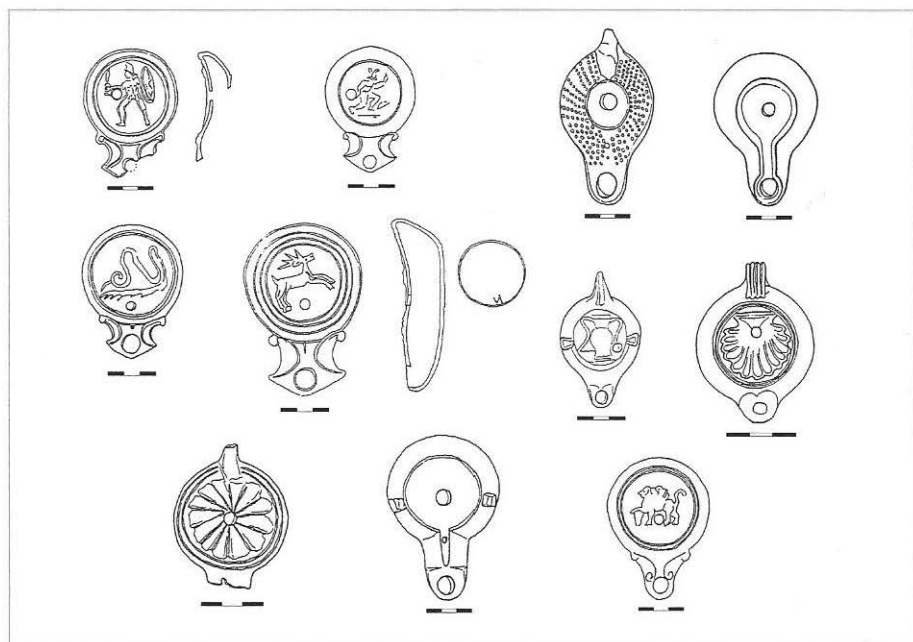


Fig. 17: Finds of oil-lamps from the Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 36, 4, 6; T. 38, 2, 1; T. 39, 6, 7; T. 40, 1, 4; T. 43, 1, 3, 7).

of trade and consumption of products. Furthermore, they indicate the existence of old or introduction of new diets.<sup>24</sup> Alongside with trade, transport and infrastructures were developed.

The area of southern Srem represents a good example, more specifically, the settlement of Sirmium. In pre-Roman times, scarce finds of Roman pottery included very few Samian pieces,<sup>25</sup> discovered within the native settlement of wattle and daub houses. After the army settled in and the settlement slightly moved away from the Sava river bank (slightly to the north), a larger spectrum of Samian ware can be noticed.<sup>26</sup> Many of early Samian pieces were unearthed on the cemetery of Roman soldiers and veterans.<sup>27</sup> Owing to several stamped Samian bowls (*Hilarus*, *Serius*), a more precise dating (15. BC to 15. AD, late Augustan period and Tiberius' rule) and origin (Arezzo workshop) can be obtained.<sup>28</sup> (fig. 14)

Besides Samian ware, there are now finds of amphoras, indicating wine distribution from Italy and Dalmatia.<sup>29</sup> (fig. 15) Further on, there are finds of mortars (*mortaria*) and pestles (*pistulla*), indicating acceptance of Roman cuisine.<sup>30</sup> (fig. 16).

It seems that the newly settled Italics (both the army and civilians) covered their needs mostly from military stocks of Italic merchandise and only partly from the natives.

A similar picture is shown in the Late Iron Age and early Roman settlement of Gomolava, but also in Petrovaradin (*Cusum*). Here also, finds of local Scordisican pottery were unearthed alongside with Samian ware from Arezzo and north Italic workshops, some of them stamped.<sup>31</sup>

Besides vessels, oil lamps were also brought from northern Italy.<sup>32</sup> They were discovered in Sremska Mitrovica, Gomolava, Novi Banovci, Surduk etc. (fig. 17)

At this early stage of Roman presence, Roman brooches were also spread. Aucissa brooches produced in Northern Italy were discovered in Sremska Mitrovica and Gomolava, dated into the Flavian period. In both cases, they were found in early Roman settlements.<sup>33</sup> (fig. 18)

It is similar with legionary brooches found in Gomolava, on the plateau that was used for a temporary military camp during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>34</sup> (fig. 19)

Finally, one should also mention glass bowls of Isings 3 type. They reached Srem from northern Italy. Finds of those were unearthed both in Sremska Mitrovica and Gomolava, also both in settlements and cemeteries.<sup>35</sup> (fig. 20)

24 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 28.

25 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 22, 1-5, 7.

26 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 33, T. 22, 1-11.

27 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 40.

28 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 31.

29 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 33, T. 30.

30 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 33, T. 26, 17-18.

31 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 35, T. 11, 1-4, 6.

32 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 51-57.

33 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 58, T. 45, 1, 2 T. 47, 1.

34 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 60-61, T. 46, 1-10.

35 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 62, T. 47, 6, 7.

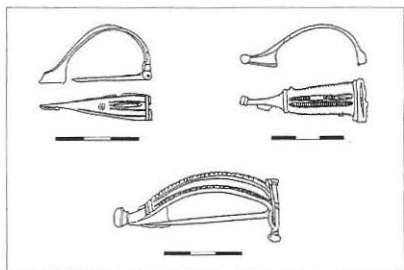


Fig. 18: Finds of Aucissa brooches from the Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 45, 1, 2; T. 47, 1).

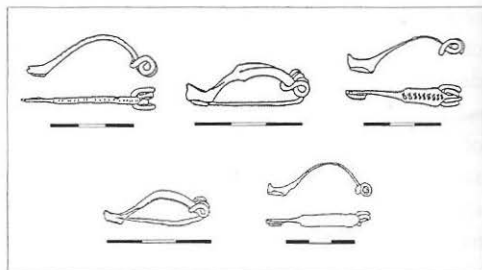


Fig. 19: Finds of legionary brooches from the Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 46, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6).

## Discussion

So, what were the most desired goods shortly before the Roman occupation and during the early times of Roman presence? Obviously, in both periods, those were not typical, everyday items that could be found in any household. Finds from pre-Roman times, the Samian ware and bronze vessels as parts of wine drinking sets were items that only a few could afford. The local Scordiscian elite most likely purchased such vessels from Roman merchants or exchanged them for raw materials or slaves. Wine must be added as an imported merchandise, although no finds of amphoras are known.

Since all of them were discovered in cremated graves, it was not possible to determine gender of the deceased by performing a simple anthropological analysis. However, the accompanying grave-goods usually indicated that the deceased were men. Only in some cases, one could suspect that they were women.

Most of the imported items reached the middle Danube valley from *Aquileia*, *Nauportus* and *Segestica*.<sup>36</sup>

After the Roman conquest, members of this local elite either stayed and were partly included into the Roman state, while many chose to leave and move out of the Empire. For example, many of them crossed the Danube and settled down on its left bank, outside the Roman empire.

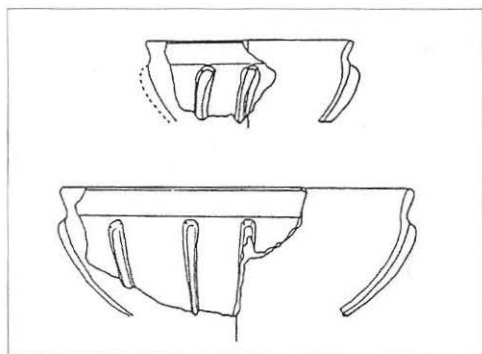


Fig. 20: Finds of glass vessels from the Early Roman Period (after Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, T. 47, 6, 7).

<sup>36</sup> Dizdar, Radman Livaja 2004b, 45.

Samian ware and bronze vessels continued to be brought to the territories along the right Danube bank, only their consumers were now members of the Roman army or the newly settled Italics. They already developed taste and need for such items, but they added some more, like glass vessels, oil-lamps or brooches. Finds of amphoras from this early stage testify that wine was brought from Italy and Dalmatia, now consumed by the Roman soldiers and civilians.

Research of different settlements in Pannonia Inferior showed an interesting picture. It can surely be reflected in parts of northern Moesia Superior. There is a big difference between early Roman urban and rural settlements. Most of the Roman goods were concentrated in urban settlements, but they can rarely be found in the rural ones. Obviously, Roman newcomers settled down in towns with more or less developed infrastructure, in which they could easily purchase Roman goods to which they were used. This refers to Italic settlers who were not soldiers. On the other side, there were Roman soldiers, who partially also inhabited urban settlements and who were buried on their edges. A good example is the military cemetery in Sremska Mitrovica (*Sirmium*), in which many of the early Roman finds were discovered.<sup>37</sup> Despite the opinion that during this early stage, border security was based on political arrangements with the neighboring barbarian tribes, it can be suspected that outside urban centers, Roman troops stayed in more or less mobile military camps, from which they tended to control the right Danube bank.<sup>38</sup> Those rather mobile troops carried their belongings with them and this is why some typical Roman items are sometimes discovered in fully rural environments. Only during Claudius' reign, proper *limes* was formed.<sup>39</sup>

If one wants to summarize, the conclusion would be that fancy Roman wine-drinking sets and Samian ware were eagerly purchased in pre-Roman times, but continued to be so also during the early stage of Roman presence in the Danube and the Sava valleys. Wine, too. Consumers from the former era were local Late Iron Age elite members, while consumers from the latter era included Roman soldiers and the newly settled Italic population. However, they added new items produced in northern Italy: glass vessels, oil-lamps, brooches and wine and oil in amphoras.

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37 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 40.

38 Brukner, Dautova-Ruševljan, Milošević 1987, 36.

39 Dizdar, Radman Livaja 2004b, 45, 46.

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