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# THE SO-CALLED ILLYRIAN-PANNONIAN *KANTHAROI*: REVIVAL OR TRANSFORMATION?

***Abstract:*** The article discusses the evolution of the so-called Illyrian-Pannonian kantharoi throughout the Late Iron Age and the early Roman provincial period, and their relationship with the so-called Danubian kantharoi, which became popular in the Carpathian Basin during the early and middle LT. A number of factors are considered, including the earlier integration of indigenous communities from the southern Carpathian Basin into different regional networks of interaction and the social and cultural transformations experienced by the same communities towards the end of the Late Iron Age. Some technological influences coming first from the Scordiscan ceramic repertoire and later from the Roman one must also have contributed to the appearance of certain local variants of kantharoi. The analysis demonstrates that a preference for two-handled drinking vessels persisted throughout the entire Late Iron Age in much of the southern Carpathian Basin, having earlier origins, and this preference was still visible during the early Roman provincial period.

***Keywords:*** Carpathian Basin; Danubian *kantharoi*; Illyrian-Pannonian kantharoi; invented tradition; ceramic technology; social practice.

## Introduction

During a long and outstanding scientific career, Petar Popović has written about a wide range of topics that are important for understanding the history and archaeology of the Late Iron Age communities from the Carpathian Basin. The great majority of these studies are based on an extensive knowledge of the material culture belonging not only to these communities, but also to those from the neighbouring regions. His comprehensive book about the Scordiscan coinage (Popović 1987), as well as the articles that discuss the late Republican bronze vessels (Popović 1992), the characteristics of the latest phase of indigenous ceramic production (Popović 2000), or the circulation of amphora-shaped glass beads in the western Balkans and the southern Carpathian Basin (Popović 1997), are some of the most influential. These works are the result of his keen interest in the material evidence of the social, economic and cultural interactions between the indigenous communities from the aforementioned regions and the Mediterranean basin, and in the ways in which these shaped local practices, customs and beliefs throughout the Late Iron Age. Consequently, a note about the emergence of the so-called Illyrian-Pannonian ceramic *kantharoi* in the southern Carpathian Basin is a fitting homage to his scientific endeavour of integrating the archaeology of this part of Europe into the wider scientific debate concerning the relationships between the Mediterranean world and temperate Europe during the Late Iron Age.

## The early Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharos*

In archaeological literature, this term usually designates a ceramic vessel that is characterised by a carinated or, more often, squat-shaped body, a flat narrow base without a foot, and two raised strap handles attached to the rim and above the maximum diameter (Fig. 1). The vessel is usually listed among the forms specific to the Iron Age indigenous ceramic repertoire from the lower Sava and Drava basins, down to the confluence with the Danube, and the north-western Balkans, hence the accompanying ethnonyms.

This particular ethnic labelling is problematic due to a number of reasons. First, both Illyricum and Pannonia are Roman geopolitical constructs that largely reflect the evolution of the Roman state's external policy between the middle Republic and the early Principate, which was neither coherent nor continuous, but adapted to various socio-political and economic circumstances, and its perception of the populations encountered during its expansion. These constructs had almost nothing to do with the pre-conquest political or ethnic layout of the regions in questions, for which the written information is rather patchy and almost exclusively coming from Greek or Latin sources (Dzino, Domić Kunić 2012; Egri 2019: 25). Second, material culture has no predetermined identity and its practical and symbolic functions and meanings are created through social practice, being continuously shaped and transformed in the process of human interaction in different social contexts (Miller 1985: 11-12; Appadurai 1986: 5 and 34; Kopytoff 1986; Hodder 2004: 69). An important consequence is that the same object may be given various meanings by different people in different contexts, underlining the necessity of a contextual analysis of archaeological evidence, which would

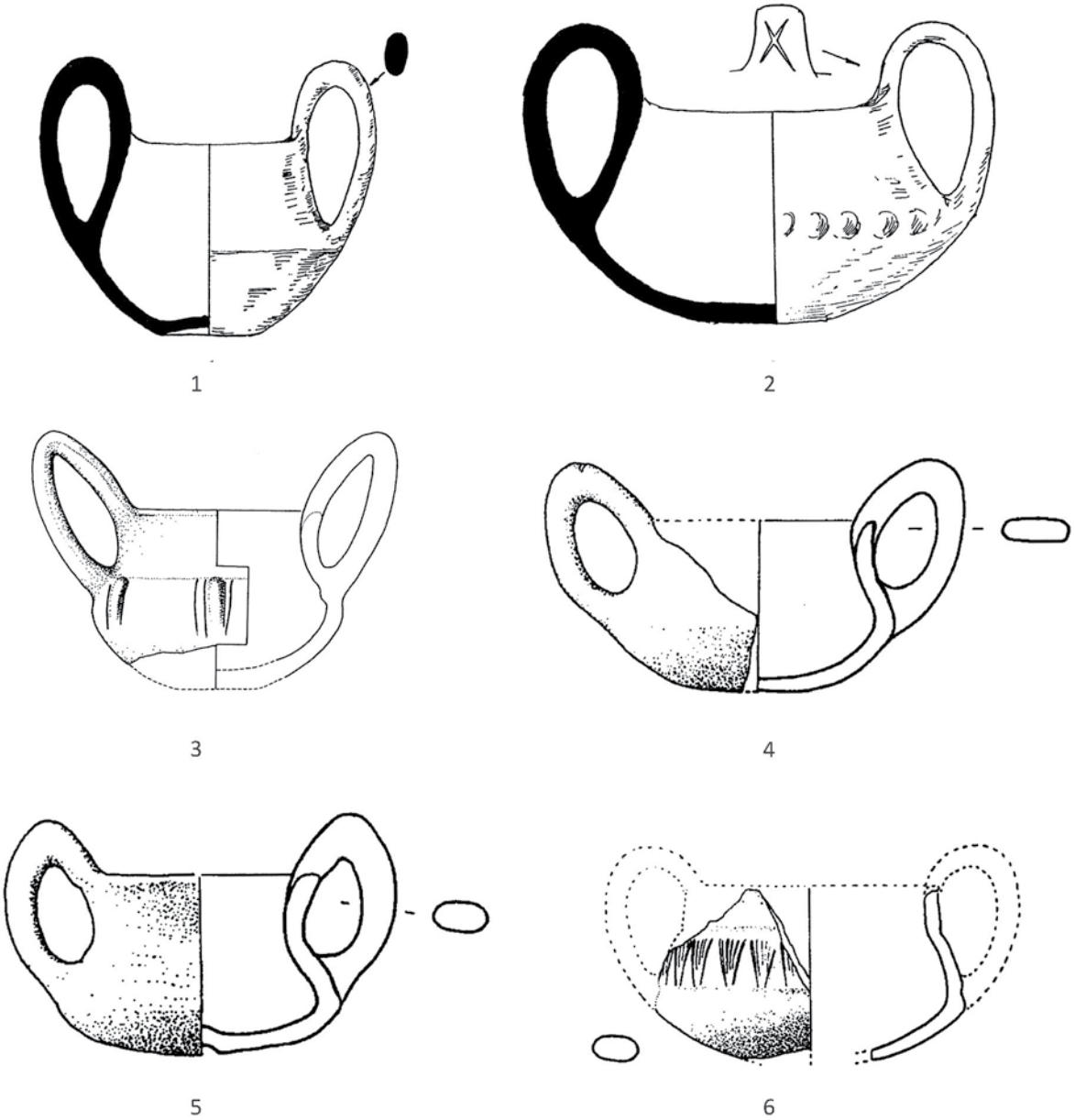


Fig. 1. Illyrian-Pannonian kantharoi, different scales: 1–2. Szentlőrincz (after Jerem 1968); 3–6. Stari Mikanovci (after Dizdar 2001 and Potrebica, Dizdar 2002).

allow the identification of the associated social and cultural practices that characterised a particular community or social group.

The vessels in question have been classified as *kantharoi* on the basis of their main morphological features, which resemble, more or less closely, different variants of the Classical and Hellenistic vessels bearing this name (Edwards 1975: 71-88; Rotroff 1997: 83-92; James 2018: 86-90; see also Rustoiu, Egri 2011: 17), though some authors have opted to identify them as pseudo-*kantharoi*. In the Greek-speaking areas of the Mediterranean basin, the form was usually associated with the cult of Dionysos, thus, with wine drinking, and some ceramic variants appeared in contexts dated to the Archaic period (Courbin 1953). Its raised handles were normally set 180º apart and allowed it to be passed between two reclining symposiasts. However, the origin of this vessel has proved to be difficult to pinpoint. At least some of the early forms seem to have a western Anatolian origin, attested by a series of Late Bronze Age two-handled ceramic vessels that resemble the so-called sessile *kantharos,* whose popularity increased during the Archaic period in the mixed cultural environment from the north-eastern Aegean area, where it was primarily encountered in cult or funerary contexts (Ilieva 2011).

Returning to the so-called Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharoi*, it has been noted that earlier variants of two-handled drinking vessels were used by different populations from the southern Carpathian Basin from the end of the Early Iron Age (Dizdar 2010, with previous bibliography). Still, the form apparently has much older local origins, attested by a series of two-handled handmade vessels found in Eneolithic and Bronze Age sites from the Central Balkans and the middle and lower Danube basin, pointing to the recurrent emergence of this kind of vessel among different indigenous populations through time. In a recent study, Petar Popović has suggested that it would be more appropriate to call these two-handled vessels Balkan *kantharoi* on account of their more likely origin and distribution area (Popović 2014).

The form continued to appear in some peripheral areas of the Drava – Sava – Danube interfluves, which were characterised by a more heterogeneous social and cultural environment during the early and middle LT, despite the increasing popularity of the so-called Danubian *kantharoi* in much of the Carpathian Basin. The two main types even coexisted in some settlements and cemeteries, leading to the appearance of some new variants. The persistence of the so-called Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharos* during this period could be the result of a strong indigenous ceramic tradition in the respective peripheral areas, motivated by some localised requirements that the new two-handled forms could not always fulfil, though the precise nature of them cannot be clearly identified. The existence of a certain degree of conservatism among some of the indigenous consumers could, perhaps, also be taken into consideration. Different variants of the traditional form are known from a few cemeteries, such as Zvonimirovo-Veliko polje and Kupinovo, or from settlements like Gomolava, Vinkovci-Dirov Brijeg, and Stari Mikanovci-Damića Gradina (Dizdar 2010; see also Majnarić-Pandžić 1970: pl. X/4; Jovanović, Jovanović 1988: 86, fig. 13, pl. V/12, 14, XL/5; Dizdar 2001: pl. 18/5; Potrebica, Dizdar 2002: 92-93, pl. 4/2-4).

The aforementioned Danubian *kantharoi* (Fig. 2) first appeared in the LT B2a (variant 1), becoming widespread in most of the Carpathian Basin during the LT C1 (Rustoiu, Egri 2011: 20-52, fig. 4). Their variant 1 (Dizdar 2013, 292-303, identifies two different types within this variant) imitated more or less faithfully the Hellenistic *kantharoi*, especially the calyx and the Attic straight-walled ones. Their emergence was most likely related to the increasing interactions with the Mediterranean basin, sometimes mediated by communities from the northern Balkans and Macedonia, during the period in question. The other two variants, which only appeared in the LT B2b, were created by local potters by adding two more or less raised handles to two different types of common local vessels, the tall carinated bowls and the large bitronconical or ovoid jars (see also the Pecine type and others in Dizdar 2013, 304-309, figs. 119-121). The appearance of the latter variants was most likely a response to the increasing demand of the local consumers for different kinds of two-handled drinking vessels. Their interest was spurred not only by the popularity of the Hellenistic *kantharoi*, imported or locally made, but also by the earlier widespread use of the aforementioned Illyrian-Pannonian two-handled drinking vessels. The size could have also played a role in their emergence,

since several examples belonging to variants 2 and 3 of the Danubian *kantharoi* were much larger than those belonging to variant 1, thus being able to hold a larger quantity of beverage. They could perhaps have been used for mixing and/or decanting. Accordingly, the emergence of these new variants could also have been related to the particular convivial practices in which the vessels in question were used. Still, all three variants of the Danubian *kantharoi* disappeared from settlements and cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin in the first decades of the 2nd century BC. A vessel recovered from the earliest level of habitation in the settlement at Gomolava is among the latest dated discoveries (Jovanović, Jovanović 1988: 126, no. 13, pl. V/13).

## The late Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharos*

During the same period, two-handled drinking vessels closely resembling the traditional Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharoi* started to appear in cemeteries and settlements from the southern Carpathian Basin, replacing the Danubian ones. A number of different regional variants have recently been identified, primarily based on the body outline (Dizdar 2013, 316-329). These seem to be particular creations of the local potters, who transformed the earlier two-handled squat-shaped vessels by incorporating certain morphological details of variant 1 of the Danubian *kantharoi*, notably the cylindrical neck, the annular base, and the more slender body, as well as the burnished geometric ornaments of the Scordiscan ceramic tableware (Fig. 3). The resulting vessels, usually made of fine grey to black fabric and having a carinated body, a cylindrical or conical neck decorated with burnished geometric details, and two raised strap handles that were sometimes obliquely set, have commonly been found in contexts dated to the late 2nd century – 1st century BC, and even later during the first decades of the Roman provincial period (see, for example, Popović 2000: 84-85 and 96, pl. 2/2-4, 5/20-23 and 10/6; Dizdar 2013, 316-329, figs. 123-127). They visually recalled the tradi-

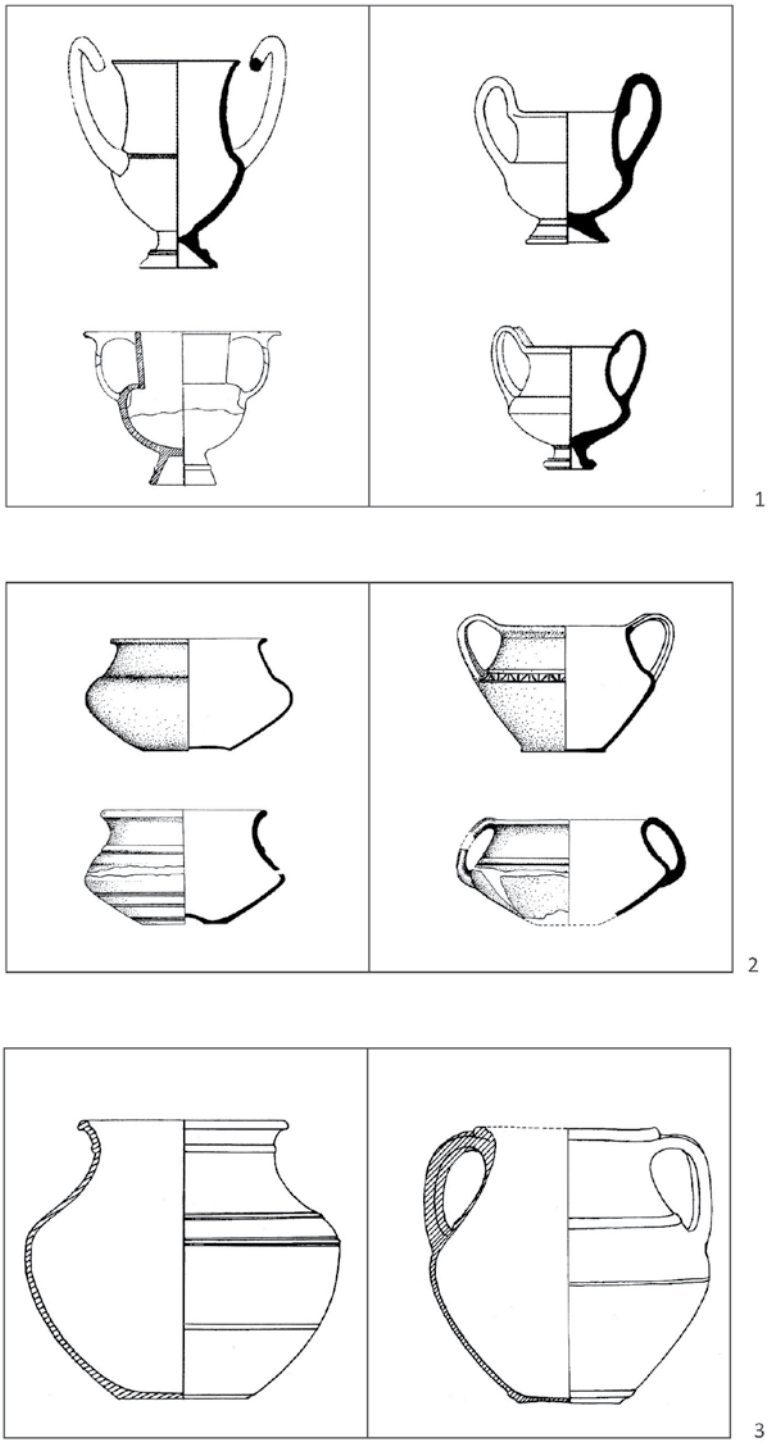


Fig. 2. Typology of the Danubian kantharoi (after Rustoiu, Egri 2011).

tional form, while also incorporating other more recent morphological features that entered into the local ceramic repertoire, most likely responding to the new demands of the local consumers.

Although these vessels were popular mostly in the Scordiscan territory from the Drava – Sava – Danube interfluves, several examples are also known from other areas in the Carpathian Basin, such as northern Hungary, south-western Slovakia, Crişana and Transylvania (Kelemen 1987: 205, pl. XXI/6; Bednár et al. 2005: 145, pl. 3/4, 11/1, 17/6; Crişan 1969: 140-141, pl. LXXI/1, 3-4, 6-8; another example comes from the settlement at Poiana, to the east of the Carpathians, see fig. 64; Popa, Totoianu 2000, 78-79, fig. 20, pl. XVI/1). Their wider circulation could perhaps be related to the increased individual and collective mobility that characterised much of the Carpathian Basin, especially during the 1st century BC and at the beginning of the 1st century AD, though the number of finds remains small in all of these peripheral regions.

It has previously been considered that the Danubian imitations of the Hellenistic *kantharoi* disappeared from the region in question due to the diminished direct contacts with the Mediterranean world (Kruta, Szabó 1982: 58-59), while no straightforward typological relationship existed between any variant of the Hellenistic *kantharoi* and the late Illyrian-Pannonian ones (Kruta, Szabó 1982: 63, fig. 9). However, a diverse range of archaeological evidence (e.g., Rustoiu 2005: 75-81, figs. 18 and 21; Mihajlović 2014: 199-207; Dizdar, Tonc 2014: 590-592; see also Egri 2019: 65-73)

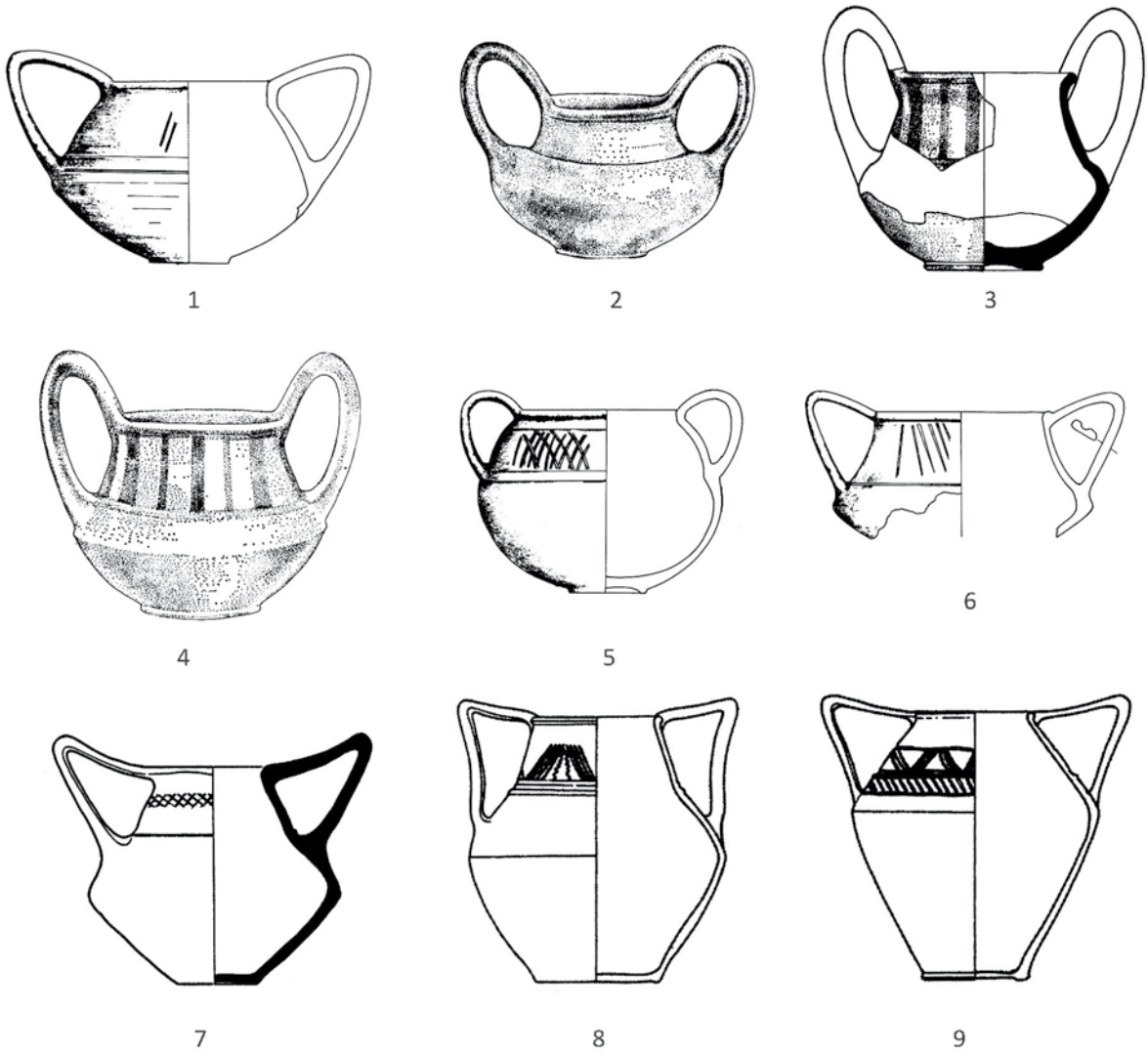


Fig. 3. Late Illyrian-Pannonian kantharoi, different scales: 1, 5–6. Židovar (after Sladić 1986); 2–4. Gomolava (after Jovanović, Jovanović 1988); 7. Mala Vrbica-Ajmana; 8–9. Kale-Krševica (after Popović 1989–90 and 2014).

demonstrates that the indigenous communities from the southern and eastern Carpathian Basin still maintained contacts with Italy and the western Balkans until the end of the Late Iron Age, either directly or through the mediation of other communities from the surrounding areas. At the same time, the supposed reduction in long-distance connectivities would not explain the concomitant disappearance of variants 2 and 3 of the Danubian *kantharoi,* which combined local and Mediterranean features.

As a matter of fact, the answer to this question lays in the principal morphological similarities between all of these forms – the deep, carinated or ovoid body and the two raised strap handles – which apparently were enough to convince the local consumers that they were perfectly suitable for the same practical and/or symbolic functions in which their predecessors were used. Furthermore, despite minor morphological variations, the preference for two handled-drinking vessels actually persisted during the entire Late Iron Age, leading first to the creation of two new local types of *kantharoi* based on other already known local ceramic forms, then to the so-called revival, in the Scordiscan territory, of a traditional vessel most likely having a similar morphology and functionality.

In the first case, the stylistic input was more likely provided by the metal and ceramic Hellenistic *kantharoi* whose arrival in the Carpathian Basin was facilitated by the establishment of a number of complex regional networks of interaction that included some of the indigenous communities from the territory in question, as well as others from the northern and western Balkans, also reaching Macedonia and Greece. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Macedonian kingdom in particular seems to have had quite a significant influence northward until its dismantling by the Romans in the mid-1st century BC (Rustoiu, Egri 2011: 35-42; see also Sideris 2000: 13-20; Kavur, Blečić Kavur 2018: 158-159; Egri 2019: 76-78). Within these regional networks, the novel form coming from the south was first imitated in the Carpathian Basin and later adapted to suit the local taste and practices, hence the appearance of the so-called Danubian *kantharoi*. However, the interest in them faded during the first decades of the 2nd century BC.

In the case of the so-called revival of the traditional form in the core area of the Scordiscan territory, the influence of the indigenous substratum predating the Celtic arrival could have played a role, perhaps aided by the persistence of earlier forms of two-handled drinking vessels in the peripheral areas. Another element that could have contributed to this phenomenon was the tendency of certain social groups or individuals to resort to various real or invented traditions in order to claim a long and prestigious lineage anchored in the history of the community, or an adherence to

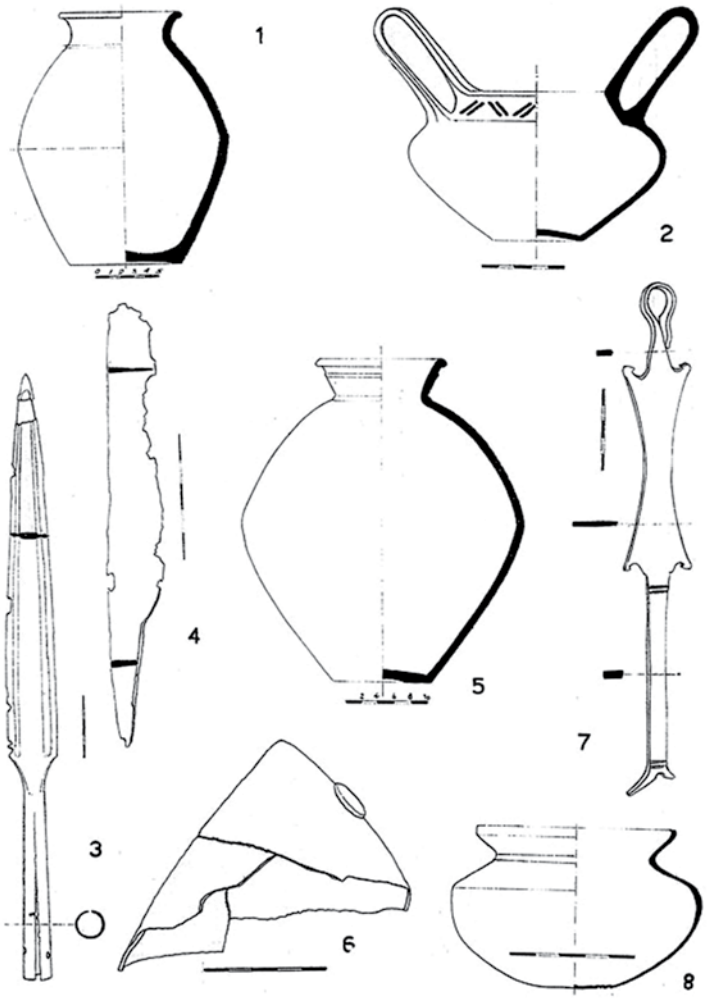


Fig. 4. Funerary inventory from grave 11 at Belgrade-Karaburma (after Todorović 1972).

a shared social and cultural heritage. The practice was mainly meant to consolidate their social status and authority while also maintaining or restoring the social cohesion within the community. This is more commonly encountered at times of social stress, when the local social structures and norms are challenged by newcomers, or even from the inside, due to extraordinary political, demographic, economic or military events (Hobsbawm 1992: 4-6; for an archaeological analysis of this phenomenon in Late Iron Age and early Roman provincial Pannonia, see Egri 2012 and 2019). The frequent presence of these vessels in burials associated with the dominant social groups seems to confirm this hypothesis, though the possible late elevation of certain individuals belonging to the local pre-Celtic populations into these groups should not be overlooked.

The main body of archaeological evidence comes from the cemetery at Belgrade-Karaburma (Todorović 1972), but other examples are also known from some incompletely published cemeteries from the same region, like Mala Vrbica-Ajmana in the Danube's Iron Gates region (Stalio 1986: 32-34, fig. 28-49). Unlike the Danubian *kantharoi*, the late Illyrian-Pannonian ones are almost exclusively encountered in male burials, for example in graves nos. 11 (Fig. 4) and 112 at Belgrade-Karaburma (Todorović 1972: 13 and 35, pls. 3 and 33-34), while in female burials they are usually replaced by tall carinated cups without handles or sometimes by single-handled ovoid beakers. For example, graves nos. 39 and 110 (Todorović 1972: 21-22 and 34, pls. 15 and 32) at Belgrade-Karaburma contain a cup each, whereas grave no. 15 from the same cemetery (Todorović 1972: 15, pl. 6) includes a beaker. In this case, it is possible that the two-handled beakers were perceived as symbols of male identity, at least in funerary contexts ascribed to the Scordisci. A similar gender-based differentiation of drinking vessels has been observed in Celtic cemeteries from northern Italy, dated to the 4th – 3rd centuries BC. In this case, a shallow cup (*kylix*) was placed exclusively in male graves, while the funerary inventories of the women contain only tall cups (*skyphoi*) as drinking vessels (Lejars 2006: 88).

It is also important to note that although these drinking vessels inspired by the so-called Illyrian-Pannonian tradition were included into the conviv-

ial practices of the dominant social groups, there were no changes in the functional structure and symbolic meanings of the funerary assemblages. Thus, these late local *kantharoi*, together with other feast-related objects and the weaponry, were still meant to define the identity and status of the martial elites, while also providing a sort of connection with the common past, the associated practices helping them to stand out as a distinct social group within the local communities.

Even after the disappearance of proper burials from the area of the Sava – Drava – Danube interfluves during the so-called Beograd 3b horizon, which corresponds to the LT D2 in the Central European chronology, the late Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharoi* continued to be used by members of the local communities, as attested by the finds from different fortified and open settlements (Dizdar 2013, 317-318, 320-322, 327). The form continued to evolve throughout the late 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, leading to the appearance of taller vessels with a slightly wider rim diameter and less raised strap handles that were sometimes fired in an oxidising atmosphere, probably influenced by

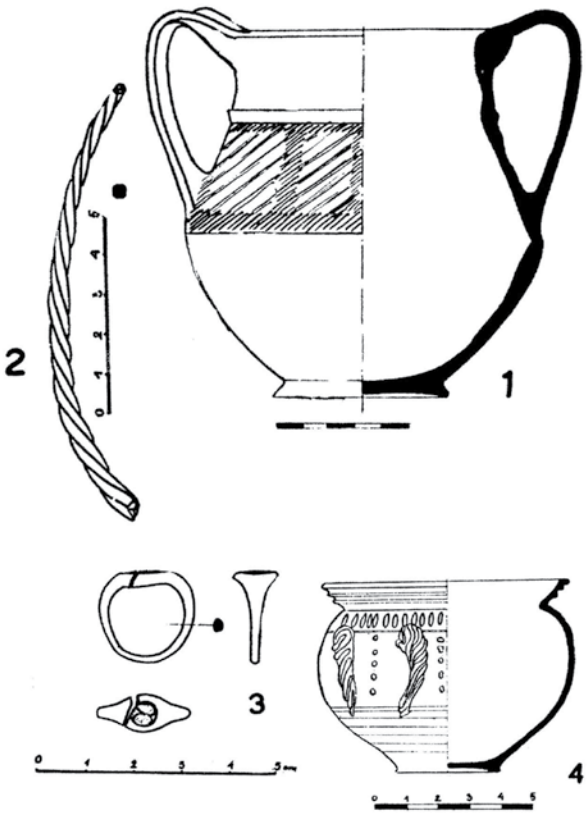


Figure 5. Funerary inventory from grave 8 at Belgrade-Karaburma (after Todorović 1972).

Roman tableware. These new variants are quite commonly encountered during the Roman provincial period in southern Pannonia (e.g., Bojović 1977: 52-53, pls. 35-37; Brukner 1981: 41, pls. 103-105; 1988, 110, 112-113, fig. 7-8), and some examples are also known from a small number of settlements in pre-Roman Dacia (Crişan 1969: 178, figs. 93-94, pl. LXXI/2) that were integrated into some regional networks of interaction oriented towards the empire.

Other similar examples are known from a series of burials from the same Belgrade-Karaburma cemetery, belonging to the so-called Beograd 4 horizon (Egri 2016), which corresponds to the first decades of the 1st century AD. For example, one wheel-thrown grey *kantharos* was used as funerary urn in cremation grave 8 (Todorović 1972: 12, pl. 2/1-4) (Fig. 5), whereas an almost identical vessel was found in cremation grave 10 together with an iron spearhead and bronze (or brass) fragments of a sword scabbard of the Mainz type (Todorović 1972: 13, pl. I2/1-3; see also Egri 2016: 342-343). On the other hand, cremation grave 145 from the same cemetery contains a different type of *kantharos*, having a fine red fabric, a tall cylindrical neck decorated with two prominent nervures under the rim, a bitronconical body and a narrow concave base resembling a ring-shaped one; two strap handles are attached to the middle of the neck and above the maximum diameter of the body. Vessels with nearly similar features were also found in other sites from southern Pannonia, for example at *Mursa* and *Cibalae*, where they were largely dated to the 1st and 2nd century AD (Brukner 1981: 101, pl. 103/1-3, 5). The funerary inventory in question can be more likely dated to the first half of the 1st century AD due to the accompanying weaponry, which includes an iron spearhead belonging to the Pannonian variant 1.2 and an iron slashing knife with a curved blade (Egri 2016: 346).

The presence of weaponry in some of these graves and in others from the same cemetery, which have been dated to the first decades of the 1st century AD, suggests that they belong to a community that had some connections with the Roman army but was also keen to revive several funerary practices that were at least perceived as traditional, namely cremation and the offering of food, feasting implements and weaponry (Egri 2018 and 2019: 89). The weapon-bearing members of this community were more likely involved in a system of regional control set up by the Roman state, which functioned in the area of the Drava – Sava – Danube interfluves during the late 1st century BC – early 1st century AD. This hegemonic system based on friendly indigenous leaders was only abandoned by the Roman state after the *Bellum Batonianum*, at the beginning of the 1st century AD, when supplementary Roman troops were brought over to build forts and enforce the defensive structures in this region.

## Concluding remarks

It can be noted that the preference for two-handled drinking vessels persisted throughout the entire Late Iron Age in much of the southern Carpathian Basin, with earlier origins. A number of morphological variations that occurred through time were the result of different cultural and technological influences following the integration of several local communities into different regional networks of interactions during the early and middle LT, and again at the end of the Late Iron Age.

One relevant example is provided by the adoption and transformation of the Hellenistic *kantharoi* in the wider Carpathian Basin, which contributed to the emergence of the so-called Danubian *kantharoi*. Other morphological variations were most likely related to the internal social transformations experienced by many local communities, which contributed to the appearance of new social and cultural practices in which these vessels were integrated.

At the same time, the earlier two-handled beakers known as the Illyrian-Pannonian *kantharoi* remained in use, especially in the peripheral areas of the Scordiscan territory. These forms contributed later to the appearance of new variants of this type that often incorporated a number of features borrowed from the aforementioned Danubian *kantharoi* and also from the Scordiscan ceramic repertoire. Their so-called revival can more likely be seen as a return to a traditional form that was considered an appropriate connection with the common past. These later variants continued to evolve during the later stage of the Late Iron Age and in the early Roman provincial period, in some cases incorporating morphological and technological de-

tails that were adopted from the Roman ceramic repertoire.

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