

A NEW CELTIC SCHNABELKANNE, CONFISCATED IN BAD DÜRKHEIM, NOW KEPT IN MAINZ

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Celtic beaked bronze jugs are among the most creative and sophisticated bronze products of the Early La Tène culture. A hitherto unknown example of this rare type of objects was offered in 2015 at a London auction house. The auction was stopped by the police and finally the object was confiscated in Bad Dürkheim in Palatinate. After legal disputes, the confiscation was confirmed by a final judgement and the object was handed over to the *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum* in Mainz (now *Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie*) for safekeeping.

The piece belongs to the small group of five Celtic beaked jugs so far. The beak and neck area are cast and also so attached to the body of sheet metal. The total of four masks on the handle represents a uniform pictorial program. The closest parallel of this jug is the one from the secondary grave at the Kleinaspergle tumulus in Württemberg.

The jug is an important trace of a 'princely grave' of phase Lt A, which was probably destroyed by looters in the area of Southern Hesse, Baden-Württemberg or Rhineland-Palatinate some years ago.

Here a new Celtic beaked bronze jug, a *Schnabelkanne* will be presented. This piece, however, bears the shadow of having been excavated by looters. Nevertheless, there is a ray of hope. The police confiscated the piece after it was offered at an English auction house and finally the jug was handed over to the *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum* in Mainz (since 1st of January 2023 *Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie*) for safekeeping in trust.

THE STORY

On the 24th of September 2015 the *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum* in Mainz was informed of an upcoming auction of a Celtic beaked jug, six days later, on the 30th of September 2015, at an auction house in London. The cryptic indications of provenance in the auction catalogue make one wonder: the jug is said to come from a 'German private collection', acquired in 2006, before that from another German private collection since the 1980s and before that in Luxembourg private collection, before the 1980s. Moreover, the sparse information published by the auction house that the jug had already been in private hands for several decades is hardly credible. It can be ruled out that such a spectacular find could have remained hidden from the professional world for such a long time.

The old aristocratic collection from which unprovenanced antiquities allegedly all originate, as suggested by dealers, is a fairy tale. Cabinets of curiosities, created at a time before the countries of origin had relevant antiquities laws, did indeed exist. But the objects kept there, have usually found some kind of documentary expression over the centuries, in old copperplate engravings, inheritance deeds or early publications.

Even before the auction begins, the *Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Baden-Württemberg* files a criminal complaint, because Baden-Württemberg, along with Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse, each can be considered as the country of origin and thus the potential owner. The Federal Criminal Police Office investigates the consignor and the alleged previous owners, obtains the cancellation of the auction and the return of the jug to the consignor. At the consignor's house in Bad Dürkheim, in Palatinate, the jug is seized by the Neustadt an der Weinstraße Criminal Investigation Department, first handed over to



Fig. 1. Celtic *Schnabelkanne*, confiscated in Bad Dürkheim, now kept in Mainz. Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA.

the local branch of the *Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz* in Speyer and then brought to the RGZM in Mainz for examination. Result: It is an authentic antique original, even though considerable missing parts were added. The public prosecutor's office, which in the meantime had initiated preliminary proceedings against the collector from Bad Dürkheim shortly thereafter terminates these proceedings and orders the return of the jug to the suspect. Reason: Regardless of the actual ownership situation, a criminal prosecution was ruled out because of the statute of limitations.

Up to this point, the case follows a familiar pattern: if antiquities of dubious origin are seized at all and investigative proceedings are initiated, sooner or later they are stopped and the seized antiquities are returned to the suspected dealer – despite overwhelming evidence of a criminal origin (Müller-Karpe 2010; 2011; 2012; 2014; 2017). In our case, however, the Ludwigshafen police headquarters and the police in Neustadt refuse to follow the public prosecutor's instruction to hand over the beaked jug. Instead they order a prolongation of the seizure under the risk prevention law on the basis of the Police and Regulatory Authorities Act: Considering the circumstances, there were serious doubts about the alleged acquisition of ownership by the man from Bad Dürkheim, who had also spread different versions about the provenance of the jug. The continued proceedings are aiming at averting the danger that the jug would finally be lost for the real owner, who had not yet been identified. Furthermore, the marketing of archaeological finds of suspicious origin, as in this case, is a financial incentive and driver for further lootings and illegal excavations. This therefore constitutes an immediate threat to the archaeological record which is manifested in the find context of those antiquities that are still preserved in the ground.

The collector from Bad Dürkheim sues the police for the return of the jug before the Administrative Court of Neustadt an der Weinstraße. However, on 5th June 2018, the court rejects the complaint and confirms the seizure (VG Neustadt 2018). This landmark judgment is now legally binding and

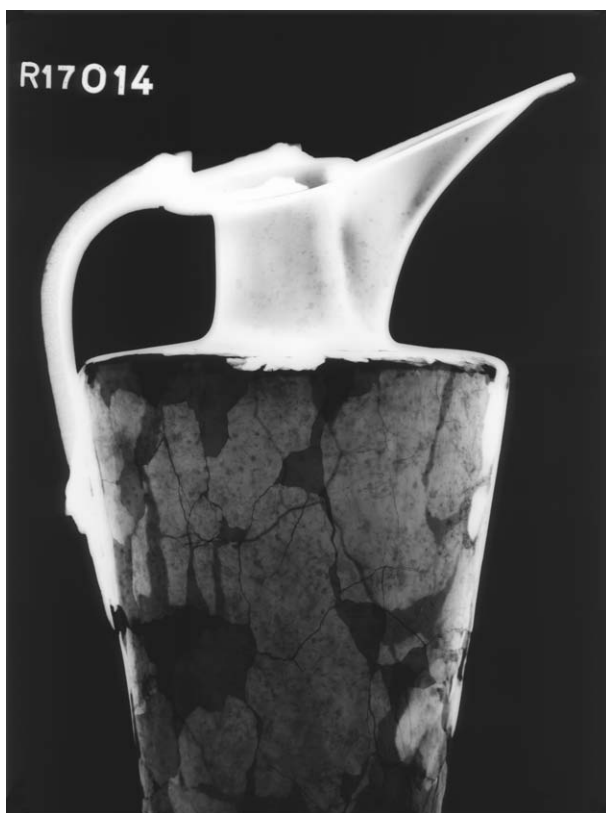


Fig. 2. Celtic *Schnabelkanne*, confiscated in Bad Dürkheim, now kept in Mainz, x-ray photo of the upper part. X-ray photo St. Patscher, LEIZA.

can be viewed on the internet. The successful action of the police in their own responsibility, even in the absence of support from the public prosecutor's office, is encouraging (Müller-Karpe 2021). The jug was handed over to the RGZM for safekeeping in trust. Now, based on further investigations and the evaluation of the available evidence, it is important to obtain clues that will identify the place where the jug was found and the circumstances of the find. This, hopefully, will enable us one day also to return the jug to the federal state, where it was found.

DESCRIPTION

The jug (Fig. 1), with a total height of 48.1 cm, consists of several parts: a separate base, the body made of sheet bronze, the area of the neck and beak with a cover plate, and the massive handle. Unlike Etruscan beaked jugs, it is not chased from one piece (Eiden 1995; Pabst 2018). The base plate was made separately and added later; it was turned over from the outside around the lower rim – like a modern tin can. No traces of turning the base on a lathe were visible. The conical body consists of a simple sheet of bronze. No traces of driving or evidence of a joint were observed, nor are there any visible patches of

reparation; the surface was probably once polished. The sharp bend at the shoulder (Fig. 1) is considered rather unusual for the shape of the vessel.

But the restoration report of a Dutch private company, which was hired for the restoration of the jug by the consignor, provided us of photos in the state of discovery. They confirm this bend and a largely straight course of the wall. During this restoration, the additions were generously treated with paint, thus concealing the fact that this is after all a highly fragmented, fresh ground find with some missing parts. X-rays in Mainz and 3D-CT in Esslingen reveal very well the numerous debris of corroded bronze sheet (Fig. 2), some of it quite small, which was more or less carefully collected by the looter(s).

The area of the shoulder/neck and the beak with the cover plate provide information about the complex manufacture of the jug: the cover plate and beak as well as the neck down to the middle of the shoulder are made of cast bronze, 2–3 mm thick and probably from one piece, as the X-ray show (Fig. 2). Inside the jug, the radiographs show casting residues that have not been cleaned and bubbles from the casting. In the area of the shoulder, the connection to the sheet metal body was made by casting, which means that this upper part was cast and connected to the body of the vessel.

The cover plate of the beak, with its distinctive angular undercuts on the inside, formed the base for the design of the wax mould. The groove on the underside still suggests the finger line of the person working. The actual beak was attached in wax to the top plate, the width of the spout was about a little finger. And then came the casting in lost mould, which at the same time made the connection to the sheet metal body.

The handle consists of a masked handle attachment with a five-leaf palmette, it runs up to another mask on the mouth, where the handle splits into two arms, which again end in masks. The handle is decorated with three beaded bands on the back, the central band developing into a sculpted back crest in the area of the mouth; on the arms, the profile is semicircular and undecorated. The handle was again made by casting in a lost mould; X-rays show numerous casting bubbles (Fig. 2). It is a lead-tin bronze with a high tin content, which was well suited for casting.



Fig. 3. Celtic *Schnabelkanne*, confiscated in Bad Dürkheim, now kept in Mainz, view of beak, cover plate and upper part of the handle. Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA.

The handle is attached to the body of the jug and to the lid employing rivets. There are carefully hidden rivets in the middle of the two arms on the mouth, behind the ends of the mask, as well as in the central head on the handle. Further rivets sit in the handle attachment: a central, well-sewn rivet at the top of the head and probably at least two more at the tips of the central palmette leaves, on each side. The rivet on the right has survived, while the corresponding one on the left is missing, but is plausible here and has been restored.

THE ARTWORK

Figural representations in the form of sculpted faces are found on both ends of the arms, the base of the handle and on the attachment. They are all characterised by oversized, round eyes with indicated pupils; the noses are pointed and triangular. These are typical faces of the Early La Tène period (Megaw R./Megaw J. V. S. 2001), almost composed of abstract ornaments. All the faces on the jug follow a uniform concept and they could represent or refer to the same person/figure. Of particular interest are the hair-styles and headdresses.

On the masks on the side arms (Fig. 3), the headgear is set off by a notched line, then a pointed, elongated and finely ribbed mop of hair develops, which may have been given the shape of a Berru-type helmet (Schönfelder 2005) and ends in a thickened teardrop. Slender S-shaped tendrils begin on both sides and end below the thickened end of the 'helmet knob' – thus creating the image of a triple palmette.

The face at the upper base of the handle (Fig. 3) is most strongly profiled, a mouth is barely visible between the nose and the chin, the cheeks are very sculptural. A headdress or coiffure of two teardrop-shaped tips, merging into the midrib of the handle, is not covered here by a straight band, but by two beaded arches above the eyes.

This motif of the divided headdress or hairstyle is found again in the figure on the handle attachment, where it merges into the three-row beaded handle above the rivet, and is separated from the rest of the

face by a beaded band. The eyes are accentuated by outwardly open parabolas, the mouth is only a fine line and the chin is narrower than the plastically rounded cheeks in each case – thus resembling the masks on the handle arms. A five-ribbed toggle beard seems to be striking, as well as side curls, set off by pearl ribbons.

Pointed silens or animal ears cannot be identified on the jug in Mainz – this motif, however, appears on all four faces of the jug from Kleinaspergle (Lkr. Ludwigsburg, Germany; *Kimmig 1988*); it is considered to have been adopted from the attachments of the stamnos.

On both sides of the beginning of the beak (Fig. 3), there is a mirror image of an animal emerging from a pelta ornament; the head, eye and ear are clearly visible. The pointed ear, the small head and the slender neck make us think of a hind. A double S-band develops from the open mouth, which then runs forward to the tip of the beak, where it merges into another ornament.

COMPARISONS

Until now, only five ‘Celtic beaked jugs’ were known in their full forms; they will be briefly presented and compared here in order to better classify the piece in Mainz.

A first small group consists of the specimens from grave 112 from the Dürrnberg (Bez. Hallein, Austria; *Hundt 1974; Moosleitner 1985*) as well as from grave 1 from tumulus 1 at the Glauberg (Wetteraukreis, Germany; *Bosinski 2018*). The jug from Dürrnberg, excavated in 1932, comes from an ancient robbed chariot grave. Characteristic features are the elegantly curving sides divided by ornate ribs and the richly varied figural decoration on the handle. These characteristics also apply to the second piece of this group from the rich main grave from the Glauberg, carefully uncovered in 1994 in a regular excavation (*Frey/Herrmann 1997*) and then in the laboratory. Both pieces seem like siblings – but not like twins. The two pieces are united by the complex figural decoration on the handles and the expansive shape of the attachment or an intermediate plate. For the jug from the Glauberg, the production of the body from a sheet of metal with a joint is considered certain. In both cases these are the only bronze vessels in the graves; at the Glauberg Etruscan bronze import is otherwise completely absent, at the Dürrnberg it is at least relatively rare, and regular ‘princely graves’ with several Etruscan pieces are also unknown.

A twin pair of beaked jugs came from a find at Basse-Yutz (départ. Moselle, France; *Haffner 1993; Megaw J. V. S./Megaw R. 1990*) in Lorraine. They were discovered by chance in 1927 together with two Etruscan stamnoi. Two years later, the pieces were purchased by the British Museum and have been in London ever since. What is striking here is the inlay work with what used to be red coral; this is a technique that occurs particularly frequently in the western Moselle region and Saarland, but also occasionally in the Palatinate, and which has been given the name ‘Weiskirchen workshop’ (*Echt 2007; Haffner 1979; Nortmann/Neuhäuser/Schönfelder 2004*, 169–171). In addition to red coral, mention should also be made of – technically very innovative – red enamel on the dog, which was used for decoration, when the lines became too fine to be inlaid with coral. Besides the dogs on the handle arms, the duck that sits on the beak and seems to swim away with the poured liquid is particularly striking.

The ‘Celtic beaked jug’ from the Kleinaspergle tumulus (Lkr. Ludwigsburg, Germany) has been completely preserved except for the lower part. The burial mound had been quite expertly examined in 1879, and the grave goods are in the *Landesmuseum Württemberg* in Stuttgart. Here, too, a rich grave is known. Among the grave goods were a large cauldron, a ribbed cist, an Etruscan stamnos, two Greek drinking bowls with Celtic gold repairs and gold fittings from two drinking horns. The beaked jug is also decorated only with human masks. The derivation of the jug’s masks from the silen heads of the stamnos is one of the prime examples of the transfer of Mediterranean figurativeness into early Celtic art.

The Kleinaspergle and the Mainz jug show quite similar faces, possibly something like a gag beard, a palmette underneath, perhaps hair on the side of the head, pointed silen ears on the Kleinaspergle, on the other jug ‘normal’ ears, the hair away from the forehead, still divided into two strands at the top. The top of the handle itself with a decoration reminiscent of the Etruscan model (see *Vorlauf 1997*). If we look at the faces at the end of the handle, a similar picture emerges. Considering the now known comparisons, the new piece and the jug from the Kleinaspergle belong closest together.

The fragment of a beaked jug’s spout and an animal-shaped handle from Borsch (Wartburgkreis, Germany; *Storch 1986*) in Thuringia are also often attributed to the Celtic beaked jugs. However, if we

look at the high attachment of the handle to a clearly rounded shoulder of the vessel, the attribution does not seem to be so simple. In Basse-Yutz, the zoomorphic parts of the handle develop out of the attachment; in Borsch, the entire handle is zoomorphically shaped. This seems to be a new creation of its own, using the beak of a jug, but with a different handle shape. Since a broader spectrum of Mediterranean imports was brought to Central Europe, reworking and new creations took place.

Recently, a curved animal from a handle arm of a Celtic beaked jug came to light during a detector survey at Pavlov-Děvín (Dist. Břeclav, Czech Republic; *Golářová 2021; Golářová/Navrátil 2017*). Its head is looking backwards, the mouth is open and the lips are curled outwards. The piece was formerly attached to the arm of a handle and was itself riveted to the mouth of the jug. The outside of the animal is decorated with interlocking S-spirals. This find in Southern Moravia shows, that this vessel form was also present in regions that do not know any 'princely tombs'. Southern Moravia thus also belongs to the Early La Tène core area with rich art. Another animal can be mentioned here, the beast from Droužkovice (Dist. Chomutov, Czech Republic; *Megaw J. V. S./Megaw R. 2002*) in Northwestern Bohemia. It is a hint that early La Tène *Röhrenkannen* could have existed in these areas. For the moment, the lids of these vessels are the only bronzes with riveted creatures.

CONCLUSIONS

Celtic beaked jugs are under the most elaborate object of early Celtic craft and art (*Jacobsthal 1944*, Nos. 381 a–b Basse-Yutz, 382 Dürrnberg, 383 Borsch, 385 Kleinaspergle) and they belong to the highest elite of the Early La Tène period. They were probably used to serve alcoholic drinks – traces of honey mead were found in the jug from the Glauberg (*Rösch 2002*). They are voluminous vessels, and they work for poring liquids (*Frey/Dobiat 2019*, 559–561). In addition to the practical aspects, the jugs, like other bronze vessels, served as a means of self-expression for the elite, in that they had their own history, meaningful art and provided an occasion for remembrance and conversation (*Stöllner 2019*, 596–602). A chronological classification beyond an assignment to the phase Lt A is difficult; the piece in Mainz certainly dates neither to the very early beginning of this phase nor to the transition to Lt B1a.

Currently, three variants of this vessel form can be identified, with very small numbers: Dürrnberg and Glauberg as well as the animal from Pavlov-Děvín form a particularly decorated group. They belong to the highly creative eastern early La Tène art. The pieces from Kleinaspergle and the specimen in Mainz are simpler in their decoration – nevertheless they do not have to be older. In each case, they are based on a uniform concept. The pair of jugs by Basse-Yutz is well integrated into the 'Weiskirchen workshop tradition' through the design of the coral inlays, and which can be dated to the Lt A–Lt B1a transition. These three groups represent not necessarily only three workshops, but nevertheless three concepts with which bronze smiths dealt with the challenge of the beaked jug.

Celtic beaked jugs come from rich graves, with gold jewellery, weapons, chariots and other bronze vessels. The jug presented here in detail was confiscated in Bad Dürkheim – we assume that it was also found in the surrounding area. We are not able to pretend, that it comes from Bad Dürkheim itself. It certainly comes from a grave, probably a burial mound. It was already badly corroded and splintered. So the burial mound must not have been preserved, but perhaps it was visible e.g. in aerial photography. The jug was certainly not a chance find. People had deliberately sought out burial mounds, searched there with a metal detector. Perhaps at dusk in the forest, perhaps hidden between vines.

In the same time horizon, where the beaked jug appears, other first-class Early La Tène objects appear on the art market. All of them could come from one princely grave. The potential origin of the other objects is harder to pin than the origin of the beaked jug. But for all, the northern part of the Upper Rhine Valley would perfectly fit. We hope in the future to shed more light on this case. The beaked jug confiscated in Bad Dürkheim was not found alone in a grave.

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Nová keltská zobákovitá kanvica, skonfiškovaná v Bad Dürkheime, v súčasnosti uložená v Mainzi

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Súhrn

Článok predstavuje novú keltskú zobákovitú kanvicu, ktorú polícia zhabala, keď bola v roku 2015 ponúkaná na predaj v anglickom aukčnom dome. Po súdnych ťahaniciach bol džbán nakoniec v roku 2018 odovzdaný do úschovy *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum* v Mainzi (teraz *Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie*).

Bronzová kanvica (celková výška 48,1 cm), pozostáva z viacerých častí: samostatného dna, tela vyrobeného z bronzového plechu, oblasti hrdla a zobáka s pokrývkou a masívneho držadla. Kónické telo je z jednoduchého bronzového plechu. Oblasť pliec/hrdla a zobáka s pokrývkou poskytujú informácie o komplikovanom postupe výroby kanvice. Pokrývka a zobák, ako aj hrdlo až po stred pliec sú vyrobené z liateho bronzu. Vnútri džbánu sú na röntgenových snímkach viditeľné zvyšky po odlievaní a bubliny ako pozostatky procesu odlievania. Horná časť nádoby bola odlíata a spojená s plechovým telom nádoby v oblasti pliec. Držadlo pozostáva z maskovitej atáše s päťlistou palmetou, vbieha do druhej masky na ústí a tam sa držadlo rozdeľuje do dvoch ramien, ktoré tiež končia maskou. Držadlo bolo vyrobené odlievaním do stratenej formy; k telu kanvice a k veku sa pripájalo pomocou starostlivo ukrytých nitov.

Na oboch koncoch ramien, na báze držadla i na atáši sa nachádzajú figurálne zobrazenia vo včasolátenskom štýle v podobe ľudských tvárí. Všetky sa vyznačujú nápadne veľkými okrúhlymi očami s naznačenými zrenicami; nosy sú špicaté a trojuholníkové. Všetky tváre na kanvici majú jednotnú koncepciu a mohli by predstavovať alebo odkazovať na tú istú osobu/postavu.

Doteraz bolo známych len päť exemplárov úplných „keltských zobákovitých kanvic“. V súčasnosti sa dajú rozlíšiť tri varianty tejto formy, pričom každý variant zastupuje len malý počet exemplárov. Prvú malú skupinu tvoria exempláre z antického vykradnutého hrobu s vozom z Dürrnbergu a z mohyly 1 v Glaubergu. Obidve kanvice spája zložitá figurálna výzdoba na držadlách a expanzívny tvar atáše alebo stredovej platne. Patria k vysoko kreatívnemu okruhu

východného včasnotaténskeho umenia. Dvojica zobákovitých kanvíc pochádza z náhodného nálezu v Basse-Yutz v Lotrinsku. Na základe dizajnu koralových inkrustácií sa dajú začleniť do „tradície weiskirchenskej dielne“ a datovať do prechodu LT A a LT B1a. „Zobákovitá kanvica“ z bohatej mohyly Kleinaspergle sa zachovala takmer kompletne, chýba jej však spodná časť. Zobákovitá kanvica je tiež zdobená len ľudskými maskami. Vzhľadom na dnes známe paralely stojí nový exemplár najbližšie práve ku kanvici z Kleinaspergle. Predstavené tri skupiny nereprezentujú nevyhnutne len tri dielenské okruhy, ale azda aj tri odlišné koncepty, akými výrobcovia bronzových predmetov pristupovali k náročnej výrobe zobákovitých kanvíc.

Keltské zobákovité kanvice pochádzajú z bohatých hrobov so zlatými šperkami, zbraňami, vozmi a inými bronzovými nádobami. Tu podrobne prezentovaná kanvica bola skonfiškovaná v Bad Dürkheime – predpokladáme, že sa niekde v tejto oblasti aj našla. Určite pochádza z hrobu, pravdepodobne z mohyly. Bola značne skorodovaná a poškodená (rozlámaná). Mohyla sa teda nemusela zachovať, ale azda bola viditeľná napr. na leteckej fotografii. Kanvica určite nebola náhodným nálezom. Ľudia úmyselne prehľadávali mohyly detektormi kovov. Možno za súmraku v lese, možno ukrytí vo viníci.

Obr. 1. Keltská zobákovitá kanvica skonfiškovaná v Bad Dürkheime, v súčasnosti uložená v Mainzi. Foto S. Steidl, LEIZA.

Obr. 2. Keltská zobákovitá kanvica skonfiškovaná v Bad Dürkheime, v súčasnosti uložená v Mainzi, röntgenový snímok hornej časti. RTG snímok St. Patscher, LEIZA.

Obr. 3. Keltská zobákovitá kanvica skonfiškovaná v Bad Dürkheime, v súčasnosti uložená v Mainzi, pohľad na zobák, veko a hornú časť držiadla. Foto S. Steidl, LEIZA.

Text translated by the author

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