

ZOOMORPHIC BRONZE HANDLE OF A JUG FROM SLEPČANY¹

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/szausav.2025.suppl.3.1>

Keywords: Southwest Slovakia, Roman Period, Bronze vessel, handle, Eggers 125 type

Abstract: The topic of the article was the analysis of a random find of a zoomorphic bronze handle from Slepčany (Zlaté Moravce dist.). The handle originally belonged to a jar of the Eggers 125 type. This kind of vessel appears in the Barbaric since the middle of the 1st century AD together with a bowl with a horizontal handle as a pair. It was used to wash hands before eating and is a sign of the Romanization of the non-Roman population north of the empire's border. The handle was analysed via non-destructive methods, which, together with stylistic analysis, helped to identify its place of manufacture. Recent grooves on its surface and additional negative inspection of the site point revealed the fact that the find got to this place only secondarily.

INTRODUCTION

In mid-October 2016, Szymon Nowak, a resident of the village of Slepčany (Zlaté Moravce dist.), noticed a strange decorated metal object with an animal head in the topsoil while walking in a field east of the village. He took the object home and after several days of searching for information, also with the help of his acquaintance, came to the conclusion that it was an archaeological find from the Roman period and reported it to the Regional Monuments Board Nitra.² Subsequently, on November 3rd, 2016, the find³ was handed over to an employee of the Regional Monuments Board Nitra, who, together with the invited employees of the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Nitra (J. Rajtár, L. Kováčsová and Š. Hritz), inspected the plowed field in the location of “Horné diely” on the eastern bank of the creek “Drevenica” (Fig. 1). The approximate location of the find was examined with a metal detector within a 50 m radius, but no other metal finds were found. Within a radius of approximately 200 m, a surface collection was carried out, during which 4 small fragments of coarse-grained dark greysherds were found, which might be dated back (only tentatively) to the prehistoric period (Bisták 2016). The find is today deposited at the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

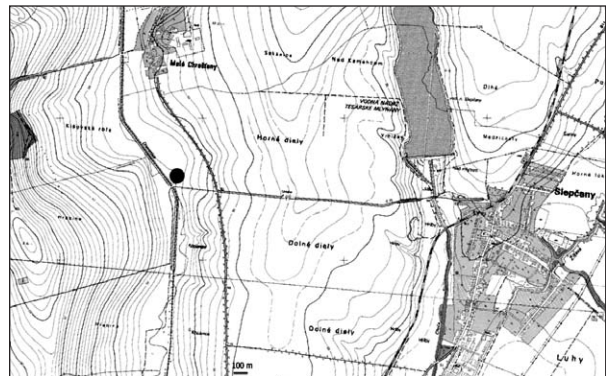


Fig. 1. Place of discovery on the topographic map (Source ÚGKK SR, added by P. Bisták).

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIND

(Fig. 2)

The T-shaped bronze zoomorphic handle comes from an Eggers 125-type kettle. Its body is ace-rounded, it has the shape of the letter D in a lenticular section). It is decorated with a plastic rib on the surface, which gradually

¹ This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contracts No. APVV-21-0257 and APVV-22-0151.

² We express our gratitude to Marek Lintner, a graduate from the Department of Classical Archeology at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Trnava University, for mediating the notification of the find and the subsequent communication with the Regional Monuments Board Nitra.

³ Together with the bronze handle, S. Nowak also passed a small fragment of a decorated modern pewter rivet, which he had found at the same location.

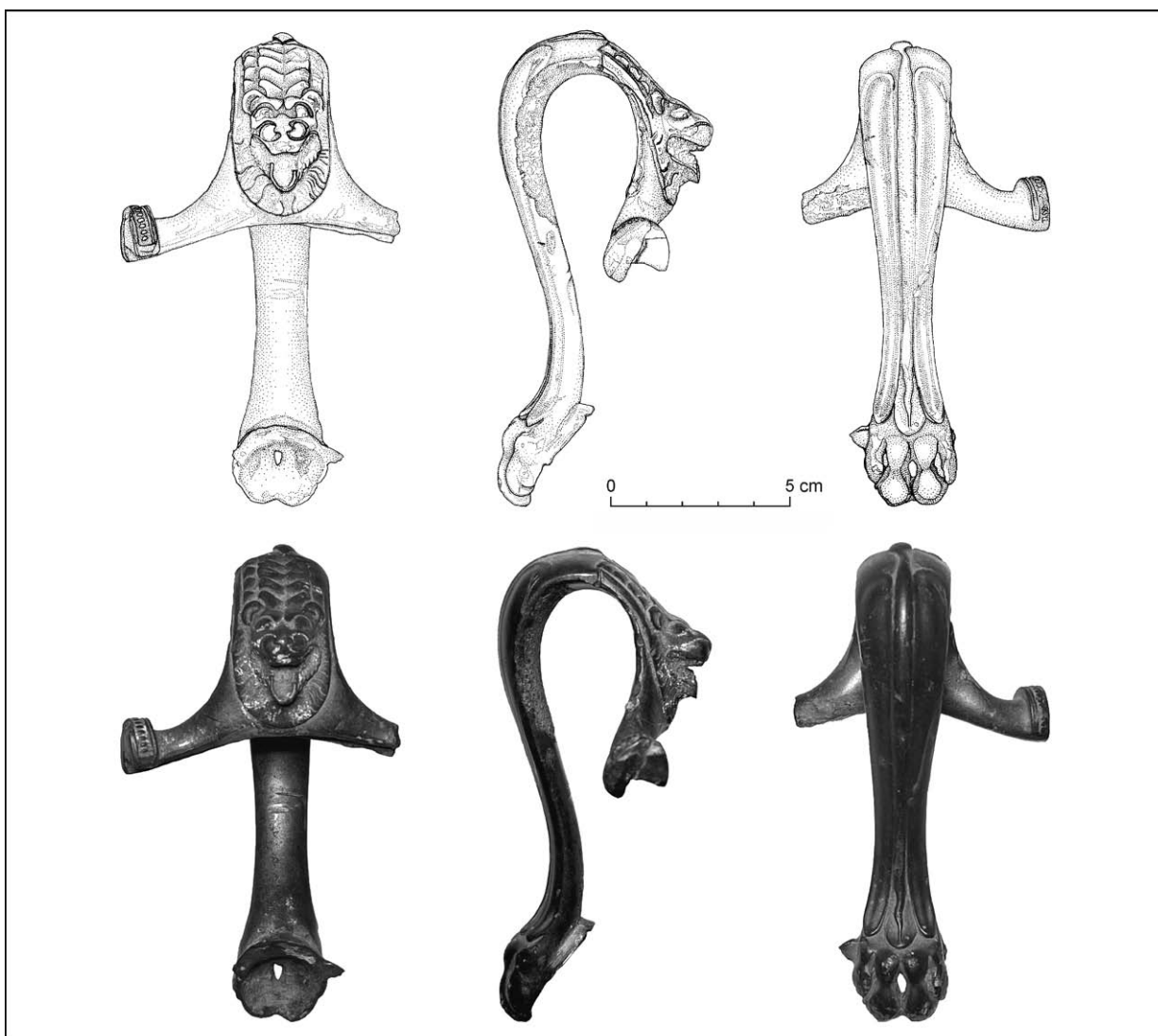


Fig. 2. Zoomorphic handle from Slepčany (drawing M. Zubajová).

transits in the lower part into the shape of a left paw, consisting of four links on a disc forming the terminal on its lower end. The disc had already been damaged in the past. It probably happened when the handle was separated from the body of the vessel. In the upper part, the plastic rib ends with a ball-shaped protrusion. The upper part of the handle is decorated with a sculpted lion's head with an open mouth, tongue out, wide eyes, ears and divided mane. The handle is finished by two arms at the point of connection to the mouth of the vessel, the left arm is fully preserved and finished by a plastic ring decorated with ribbing, the right arm is broken in about two-thirds. Probably, like the disc, one arm was broken when the handle was separated from the body of the vessel. The surface of the handle is covered with a green patina. Some engraved ornaments were filled with a white crystalline substance. There are numerous traces of modern (recent) damage on the handle, which probably arose during the agricultural cultivation of the land in which the handle was located.

Metric data: length: 134 mm, max. thickness: 14 mm, min. thickness: 10 mm, max. width: 25 mm, min. width: 15 mm, trapeze width: 72 mm, trapeze thickness: 10 mm, weight: 315.1 g (*Haruštíak 2017, 5*).

INTERPRETATION AND DATING OF THE FIND

The discovered handle was made by casting. It was originally soldered to a bronze jug. It is a kind of trefoil mug jug, with an extended handle, a low bulbous body and a flat bottom (Type Eggers 125).

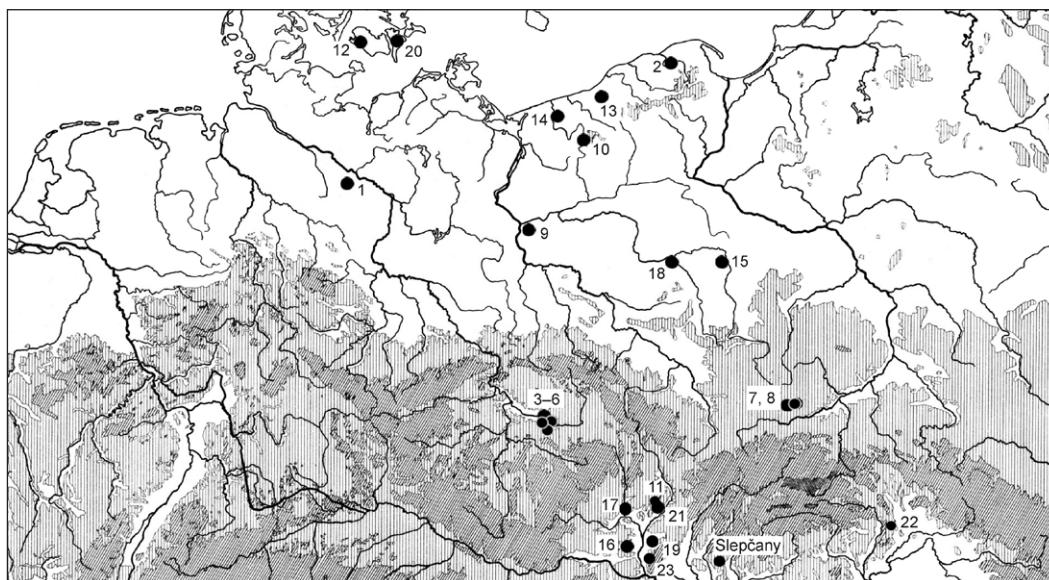


Fig. 3. Finds of jugs with trefoil mouths in the Central Danube Barbarian Region. 1 – Billerbeck, Lüchow-Dannenberg dist. (D); 2 – Czarnówko, Łęborg dist. (PL); 3 – Dobřichov-Pičhora, Kolín dist. (CZ); 4 – Dobřichov-Pičhora, Kolín dist. (CZ); 5 – Dobřichov-Pičhora, Kolín dist. (CZ); 6 – Dobřichov-Pičhora, Kolín dist. (CZ); 7 – Giebułtów, Kraków dist. (PL); 8 – Giebułtów, Kraków dist. (PL); 9 – Górzycy (Göritz-Dommühlen), Slubice dist. (PL); 10 – Gronowo (Groß-Grünow), Drawsko Pomorskie dist. (PL); 11 – Havřice, Uherský Brod dist. (CZ); 12 – Hoby, Gloeslunde Parish, Lollands Sønder dist., Maribo county (DK); 13 – Kretomino, Koszalin dist. (PL); 14 – Lubieszewo (Lübsow), Gryfice dist. (PL); 15 – Łęg Piekarski, Turek dist. (PL); 16 – Mistelbach, Mistelbach dist. (A); 17 – Mušov, Brno dist. (CZ); 18 – Prusinów, Jarocin dist. (PL); 19 – Sekule, Senica dist. (SK); 20 – Stangerup, Maglebrände parish, Falsters Nørre dist., Maribo county (DK); 21 – Staré Město, Uherské Hradiště dist. (CZ); 22 – Zemplín, Trebišov dist. (SK); 23 – Zohor, Malacky dist. (SK; after *Kasprzak 2017*, Abb. 5; edited by E. Hrnčiarik).

This vessel shape, also referred to as oinochoe, is already documented in the Greek binding art of the Early Geometric period (*Boardmann 1998*, fig. 7). At the same time, it is generally believed that these ceramic vessels already imitated more expensive metal models. The black surface was supposed to evoke corroded (worn) silver. However, it can be assumed that there were also other metal (gold or bronze) versions that have not been preserved, or possibly are proven only in fragments. A vessel of this shape was also popular with the Etruscans and other ancient civilizations. Probably thanks to its decorative and functional shape, the shape has not changed much and was used until the modern age.

In most cases, the body of the vessel has a smooth surface, decorated only with thin, horizontal grooves in the upper part. However, there are also more luxurious jugs that have embossed or plastically decorated mouths. However, the decoration of these jugs is concentrated on their handles. It is a plastic decoration, which is sometimes supplemented with engraving. In the lower part, they are attached to the body of the container using an attachment, which is usually plastically decorated. Most often we come across figural decoration dominated by female heads, depictions of a small cupid or just his head. Dionysus masks, plant tendrils (most often coming from grape-vines) and sometimes lion's paws also appear here. The body of the handle itself is usually profiled, decorated with plastic protrusions (mostly ribbed), and sometimes supplemented with engraved ornaments. In the upper part of the handle, in a place where it bends towards the container, there is usually a plastic (rarely engraved) decoration depicting the protome of a lion with a tongue out and an exuberant mane. The handle from Slepčany belongs to forms where lower part is decorated with a left paw.

Their distribution was mapped by H. Sedlmayer in her work *Die römischen Bronzegefäße in Noricum* (*Sedlmayer 1999b*, Anm. 209). The closest parallel to the analyzed find from Barbarian territory comes from cremation grave G at the cemetery in Sekule (SW Slovakia), where it was found, among other things, with a bowl with a horizontal handle (*Rajtár 2021*, 137–139). Another handle comes from the burial ground in Mistelbach and differs from our find only by minor decorative surface modifications (*Friesinger 1976*, 19–21).

In the Middle Danube Barbarian territory, there are fragments of jug handles E 125 from Mušov, Staré Město-Uherské Hradiště, Dobřichov-Pičhora or from Havřice (*Jílek 2012*, 55), however, the lower part of the handle has not been preserved in these specimens, and therefore cannot be considered as clear parallels. From the territory of Slovakia, a fragment of a jug with a lion protome was also preserved in the glow grave 77 at the cemetery in Zemplín (*Budinský-Krička/Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1990*, 253–255) or in grave 6/2010 in Zohor (*Elschek 2013*, Abb. 3). On the

other hand, finds of similar jars from the territory of Roman provinces, for example from Vienna (*Sedlmayer 1999a*, 16, 17), Carnuntum (*Partsch 1987*, 248), or Brigetium (*Nuber 1972*, 216). Jugs with trefoil mouths can rarely be found in various places in Central European Barbaric (*Kasprzak 2017*, Abb. 5). More prominent presence (Fig. 3) can be observed especially along the so-called Amber Road, closer to the borders of the Roman Empire (especially west of the Malé Karpaty/Little Carpathians).

Jugs with trefoil mouths were used for pouring liquid. In the case of the investigated type, there is no completely unified opinion on its use. The very context of the find is important for the interpretation. H. U. Nuber has already pointed out that it is found in graves in pairs together with a bowl with a horizontal handle. The same author supposes that they were used to wash the hands, most often before eating or before a religious ceremony (*Nuber 1972*, 45). This custom was practiced not only in the Roman Empire, but was also adopted by the Barbarian tribes, while it is considered to be one of the signs of their Romanization (*Kunow 1983*, 81). On the other hand, however, J. Schuster thinks that it might not always been like that. Arguing that jugs, but also bowls with horizontal handles also appear independently, and thus we cannot speak of „the importation of their functions into Barbaric“ (*Schuster 2016*, 99). In the case of the handle from Slepčany, we do not know the context of its burial in the ground. However, this is a kind of handle that can be included in Nuber's typology as Type E – Millingen, which is always documented in the Middle Danube Barbaric in a pair with a bowl with a horizontal handle. It also applies to all the above-mentioned parallels from graves in Mistelbach, Sekule or Zemplín. We could also assume, in his case, despite J. Schuster's claim, that it comes from a set for washing hands before eating.

Since the handle from Slepčany is an accidental find, it is necessary to rely only on published parallels when dating it. H. U. Nuber places the first occurrence of Eggers 125 type jugs in the Claudian period (*Nuber 1972*, 53, 54), but its use is also sought in earlier decades, i. e. around the middle of the 1st century AD (*Jílek 2012*, 56; *Kunow 1983*, 24). The youngest comes from the 3rd century AD. In the case of the burial site in Sekule, the handle was dated to the second half of the 2nd century on the basis of the accompanying grave inventory (*Hüssen/Rajtár/Voss 2017*, 116, Abb. 5). In the case of the find from Mistelbach, dating to level B1-B2 is supposed (*Kunow 1983*, 139).

MATERIAL ANALYSIS OF THE HANDLE AND THE QUESTION OF ITS ORIGIN

The handle from Slepčany (Fig. 4) was investigated by non-invasive (XRF, Raman spectroscopy) and invasive (SEM-EDS) methods (Fig. 5), which was carried out by the Department of Conservation Science of the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava (*Machatová/Drotovánová 2024*).

XRF analysis with a portable device X-MET8000, Oxford instruments on five points of the surface showed the presence of elements typical for a bronze alloy (copper and tin), with a minor proportion of silicon, lead, phosphorus, iron, aluminum, arsenic and traces of silver (Table 1). However, the presence of aluminum, silicon and iron can also be related to the presence of surface deposits and inorganic incrustations. The find is characteristic of lead bronze and is in good agreement with the reference literature (*Bingjie et al. 2018*, 724–728; *Boccaccini et al. 2023*). The normalization of the data (Table 2), may result in an overestimation of the absolute lead (Pb) content, however, according to *P. Craddock* and *A. Giumlia-Mair (1988)*, the excessive amount of lead above 2% may be connected to cheaper production.

The results of the XRF analysis are in good correlation with the results of the SEM-EDS analysis of the powder taken from a recent fissure (sample no. 1), probably created by a plow damage. SEM-EDS analysis with JEOL JSM-6060LA scanning electron microscope with EX-23000BU energy-dispersive spectrometric analyze confirmed that the sample contains copper (Cu), tin (Sn) and lead (Pb). Furthermore,



Fig. 4. Localization of non-invasive Raman measurements of white incrustation (A), green patina (B) and localization of extraction of sample for SEM-EDS analysis of pure alloy (recent surface damage – C) and black patina (D).

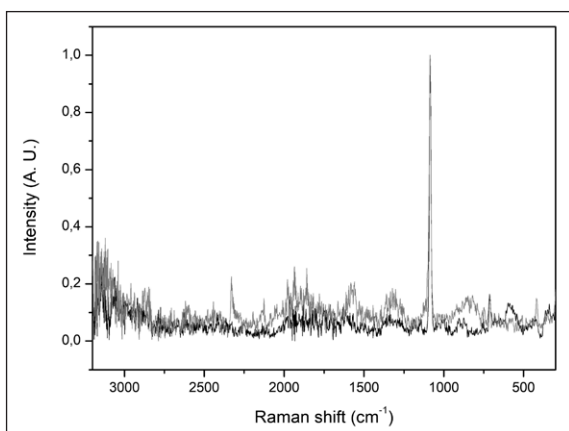


Fig. 5. Raman spectra white incrustation (black line, point A, Fig. 4) and green patina (gray line, point B, Fig. 4).

the presence of carbon and oxygen and admixture of iron and silicon was detected in the sample. Copper is represented by 71.31–88.81%, tin by 7.6–15.5% and lead by 2.02–13.60% (Table 2).

SEM-EDS analysis of the powder sample of the black patina (sample no. 3) showed a practically identical absolute representation of the elements as the alloy (Cu, Sn, Pb, Fe, Si, P, Cl), but it differs in the proportions of the elements. The surface layer contains a significantly higher proportion of tin (Sn:Cu ratio ~ 2:1). This observation is in good correlation with the reference literature (Cockrell 2009, 85–90). The sample also contains small alloy fragments. The available instrumentation does not allow a closer study of the zonation of the patina on the surface of the work.

Two surfaces on the back of the handle, which were connected to the edge and body of the jug, were analyzed

Table 1. Elemental composition determined by measurement from the surface of the object based on XRF analysis.

Elemental composition (%)										
Measurement	1	σ	2	σ	3	σ	4	σ	5	σ
Cu	58.91	0.092	50.57	0.114	55.02	0.093	56.09	0.092	58.91	0.092
Sn	22.09	0.08	16.3	0.09	19.99	0.08	22.37	0.083	22.09	0.08
Si	6.99	0.045	19.91	0.097	9.89	0.054	8.83	0.066	6.99	0.045
Pb	4.45	0.31	3.88	0.345	5.49	0.332	5.26	0.338	4.45	0.31
P	2.44	0.017	1.4	0.021	2.58	0.018	0	0	2.44	0.017
Fe	1.64	0.021	3.06	0.038	2.06	0.025	2.16	0.025	1.64	0.021
Al	1.39	0.077	3.74	0.125	2.68	0.083	2.88	0.082	1.39	0.077
As	1.34	0.071	0.85	0.078	1.3	0.075	1.53	0.076	1.34	0.071
Ag	0.07	0.009	0.07	0.013	0.07	0.009	0.09	0.009	0.07	0.009

Table 2. The ratio of the main components of the alloy, neglecting minor and trace elements, based on SEM-EDS analysis.

Element	Cu	Sn	Pb
Measurement 1	77.95	14.76	7.28
Measurement 2	83.21	12.05	4.74
Measurement 3	84.22	12.01	3.77
Measurement 4	88.81	7.6	3.6
Measurement 5	85.62	10.38	3.99
Measurement 6	82.01	10.72	7.28
Measurement 7	78.27	15.43	6.29
Measurement 8	71.31	17.96	10.73
Measurement 9	83.69	12.61	3.7
Measurement 10	83.59	8.88	7.53
Measurement 11	71.85	11.67	16.48
Measurement 12	76.88	9.52	13.6
Measurement 13	80.2	15.5	4.3
Measurement 14	84.62	12.37	3.01
Measurement 15	82.82	11.31	5.87
Measurement 16	84.57	11.15	4.28
Measurement 17	87.73	10.25	2.02

separately. SEM-EDS analysis of the white crystalline substance (sample no. 2) from the distal part mainly contains calcium carbonate (CaCO_3), fragments of the handle alloy (Cu, Sn, Pb), a minor amount of silicon (Si) and phosphorus (P), but rarely are also represented aggregates containing lead and tin. These aggregates could indicate the presence of lead-tin solder. However, the ratio of both elements is relatively constant in the available sample. Raman spectroscopy (Raman spectrometer BRAVO, Bruker) confirmed the presence of calcium carbonate in the form of calcite. SEM-EDS analysis of the green-colored patina (sample no. 4) from the point of connection with the edge of the jug confirmed the presence of calcium carbonate and also demonstrated the presence of a siliceous deposit containing copper, tin and lead, probably in the form of fragments of the original, or in the form of migrated soluble salts (mainly Cu and Pb). Raman spectroscopy demonstrated the presence of distinct bands of calcite (CaCO_3) and copper carbonates, probably including malachite ($\text{Cu}_2(\text{OH})_2\text{CO}_3$), which is in good correlation with the reference literature (Boccaccini et al. 2023; Ciupiński et al. 2010, 4926–4949; Privitera et al. 2021).

The results of the material analyses indicated the presence of copper in the range from 71.31 to 88.81%. In comparison with the results of similar analyses on bronze finds from southern Italy (especially around Pompeii; Gorecki *et al.* 2017, 201, 202, Abb. 11), or other implemented on Pompeian finds stored in the collection of Chancellor K. W. N. L. Metternich in Kynžvart (West Bohemia; Jílek *et al.* 2022, 129) its representation is significantly lower. Such results prove that the handle from Slepčany was not made in Italy, but somewhere in the provinces. Such workrooms, unlike in Italy, use less copper and more lead in the production of bronze vessels. This does not change the fact that also in the vicinity of Pompeii, for practical reasons, a different percentage of lead was used for handles, cast legs, and various decorations (Jílek *et al.* 2022, tab. 4), but its representation is not as high as in the case of the find from Slovakia. Trefoil jugs together with bowls with a horizontal handle Nuber Type E – Millingen were thus produced in several production centres of the Roman Empire. In the case of the find from Slepčany, its Gallic origin can be assumed on the basis of stylistic analysis.

CONCLUSION

Numerous recent grooves on the surface of the handle were first created in connection with tillage. Based on the results of the inspection of the find site (without the detection of other accompanying finds from the Roman period), it is likely that this rare find got here only secondarily. Two possibilities come into consideration.

The first is it was transferred by means of agricultural activity from other localities in the vicinity. A settlement from the Roman period was recorded in 2005 approx. 300 m south of the discovery site, for example, or it is also recorded in the cadastres of the nearby villages of Malé Chyndice or Beladice-Malé Chrástany (Gabulová 2015, appendix 1). Unfortunately, the sites are only recorded thanks to systematic surface prospecting and have not been investigated so far. In the case of found shards, they are only fragments of ceramics which can only be tentatively dated back to the Roman period.⁴ There are even several Roman marching camps in nearby town Vráble (Hüssen/Ölvecký/Rajtár 2016, 101–105). Considering the state of preservation of the handle, but also the fact that it was broken off from the jar, it is possible that it did not come from the settlement but from an unknown burial ground. Namely, in a housing estate, a non-functioning piece of bronze weighing more than 315 grams would not have gone unnoticed and would certainly have been melted down and secondarily used for the production of something else.

However, the handle could have entered the ground much later than at the time of its use. In the vicinity of Slepčany there are several manor houses (e.g. Ambrózy-Migazzi manor house, known as the Mlyňany Arboretum), whose owners had often imported various „antique artefacts“ from their travels. Among these could also be a very decorative, zoomorphic handle, which could have been stolen from the mansion, or could have been stolen during looting after World War II or at the time of nationalization after it. The thief was then able to throw it away as worthless near Slepčany.

A bronze, zoomorphic handle from Slepčany is among the unique finds originating from the Roman period in our territory. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of its discovery, it is not possible to reconstruct its function in a barbarian environment (neither primary nor secondary). However, it is an excellent example of Roman provincial artistic craft in our territory.

Translated by Dalia Šaškovičová

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⁴ We thank Dr. M. Gabulová from the Institute of Archeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences for the information.

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Bronzové zoomorfné držadlo kanvice zo Slepčian

Peter Bisták – Erik Hrnčiarik – Zuzana Machatová

Súhrn

Témou predloženého článku bola analýza náhodného nálezu zoomorfného, bronzového držadla zo Slepčian (okres Zlaté Moravce). Predmet našiel obyvateľ obce Slepčany, ktorý ho následne odovzdal pracovníkovi KPÚ Nitra. Na mieste nálezú sa uskutočnila obhliadka zoraného poľa, počas ktorej sa nepodarilo nájsť žiadne ďalšie kovové nálezy, iba niekoľko pravdepodobne pravekých atypických črepov. Bronzové zoomorfné držadlo v tvare písmena T pochádza z kanvice typu Eggers 125. Krčahy s trojlístkovým ústím slúžili na nalievanie tekutiny. Tento typ nádoby sa v barbariku vyskytoval od polovice 1. stor. po Kr. a objavuje sa spolu s miskou s horizontálnym držadlom ako pár. Používali sa na umývanie rúk pred jedlom, prípadne pri náboženských obradoch. Ich výskyt mimo hraníc Rímskej ríše sa považuje za znak romanizácie nerímskeho obyvateľstva. Držadlo bolo podrobené analýzam pomocou nedeštruktívnych metód, ktoré spolu so štýlovou analýzou napomohli k určeniu jeho miesta výroby. Recentné ryhy na jeho povrchu a dodatočná negatívna obhliadka miesta náleziska poukazujú na fakt, že nález sa dostal na toto miesto až sekundárne. A to buď tu bol prenesený prostredníctvom poľnohospodárskej činnosti z inej lokality v okolí. Prípadne sa do zeme mohol dostať oveľa neskôr, ako v čase jeho využitia. Mohol byť odcudzený počas rabovania po druhej svetovej vojne, či v čase znárodňovania po nej. Zloď ho následne mohol ako bezcenný vyhodit' neďaleko Slepčian.

Obr. 1. Miesto nálezú na topografickej mape (zdroj: ÚGKK SR, doplnil P. Bisták).

Obr. 2. Zoomorfná rukoväť zo Slepčian (kresba M. Zubajová).

Obr. 3. Nálezy kanvic s trojcípym ústím v stredodunajskom barbariku. 1 – Billerbeck, okr. Lűchow-Dannenberg (D); 2 – Czarnówko, okr. Łębork (PL); 3 – Dobřichov-Piřhora, okr. Kolín (CZ); 4 – Dobřichov-Piřhora, okr. Kolín (CZ); 5 – Dobřichov-Piřhora, okr. Kolín (CZ); 6 – Dobřichov-Piřhora, okr. Kolín (CZ); 7 – Giebułtów, okr. Kraków (PL); 8 – Giebułtów, okr. Kraków (PL); 9 – Górzycy (Göritz-Domműhlen), okr. Slubice (PL); 10 – Gronowo (Groß-Grűnow), okr. Drawsko Pomorskie (PL); 11 – Havřice, okr. Uherský Brod (CZ); 12 – Hoby, obec Gloeslunde, okr. Lollands Sønder, kraj Maribo (DK); 13 – Kretomino, okr. Koszalin (PL); 14 – Lubieszewo (Lűbsow), okr. Gryfice (PL); 15 – Łęg Piekarski, okr. Turek (PL); 16 – Mistelbach, okr. Mistelbach (A); 17 – Mušov, okr. Brno (CZ); 18 – Prusinów, okr. Jarocin (PL); 19 – Sekule, okr. Senica (SK); 20 – Stangerup, obec Maglebraede, okr. Falsters Nørre, kraj Maribo (DK); 21 – Staré Město, okr. Uherské Hradiště (CZ); 22 – Zemplín, okr. Trebišov (SK); 23 – Zohor, okr. Malacky (SK); podľa *Kasprzak 2017*, Abb. 5; doplnil E. Hrnčiarik).

Obr. 4. Lokalizácia neinvazívnych Ramanových meraní bielej inkrustácie (A), zelenej patiny (B) a lokalizácia odberu vzorky na SEM-EDS analýzu čistej zliatiny (nedávne poškodenie povrchu, C) a čiernej patiny (D).

Obr. 5. Ramanove spektrá bielej inkrustácie (čierna čiara, bod A, obr. 4) a zelenej patiny (sivá čiara, bod B, obr. 4).

Tabela 1. Prvkové zloženie určené meraním z povrchu predmetu na základe XRF analýzy.

Tabela 2. Pomer hlavných zložiek zliatiny, pri zanedbaní vedľajších a stopových prvkov, na základe SEM-EDS analýzy.

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