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**ABOUT SOME “SLAVIC POTTERY”  
FROM SLOVENIA**

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Recently came to my knowledge a book that brings together papers about early pottery from Slovenia (\*Slawen 2002), and I have some comments about. First of all, the idea to make a book only with early pottery from a defined area looks to me very appropriate; one can find a considerable stuff tightly packed, fully bilingual, carefully illustrated, with homogeneous lay out. Romanian archaeologists should consider carry out the model. What the Romanians can't do for now refers to the benefits of a solid economy, that aloud Slovenian researchers to use advanced physics analyses like radioactivity and thermo-luminescence. I should add, on the actual background of nasty arguments about rescue diggings in Romania, that a representative part of the book is made up following salvage operations.

I am not going to make a review, because that is already written (STANCIU 2002), but I will point out some of doubtful achievements of our colleagues. The main issue is the “Slavic pottery”, concept that all archaeologists from eastern and central Europe have to dial.

Beginning with the basic things, I have to say that at least some Slovenian archaeologists have problems on identifying shaping techniques, specifically the hand made and slow wheel made pottery. The examples could be pitiful plenty, but I'll resume for two: Matiaž Novšak shows up a ceramic lot from Grofovsko – Murska Sobota about he thinks that is hand shaped (NOVŠAK 2002, 28), making himself clear mentioning that there were no wheel traces. The point is that the slow wheel modeling leaves no traces, but the free-hand modeling does. Let's take a closer look to the pottery from Grofosko. The pots are extremely fragmented, excepting two complete shapes, both decorated; the first (*Ibidem*, p. 29, cat. 2; fig. 2/1 in this paper) is incised with a single line, straight horizontal on belly diameter, or clumsily waved on shoulder, repeated on body; the second (*Ibidem*, p. 30, cat. 9; see fig. 2/2) is decorated too with incised waved and straight lines, traced with a multiple narrowed tool, presumably a comb (as all archaeologists say; the object itself, the comb, is extremely rare). Looking on the rest of the ceramic lot, one can conclude that almost

all body fragments are decorated. The picture doesn't match all we know already about hand made pottery in Romania (but not only) for the same time. The concepts "hand made pottery" and "decorated pottery" are almost exclusive. The statistics produced for the settlements from Dulceanca (Teleorman county, southern Romania) prove that only 5.7% from the hand made pottery is decorated. The overall situation in Muntenia (that is about the same size like Slovenia) is very close: 6% from 216 pots with the upper half present are decorated, but the waved line is not a usual pattern. The figures for Slovakia in the sixth and seventh centuries are similar, but smaller: 4.5%. Why should believe that things are running so strange in Slovenia?

There are also non-statistic arguments to support my hypothesis that the pots on the stake are made with a contribution of a slow wheel, as well as shape and decoration. One should be a pen craftsman to perform a nice wave with the free hand, on wet pebbled clay, that is too much for an illiterate society. The incisions traced on items from figures 2/1, 2 are not the best man can do, yet they seem to me made on a spinning base, if compared with the few examples known on hand made pottery (examples on DOLINESCU-FERCHE 1979, fig. 2/1; 1992, fig. 17/20, 18/18, 19/2).

Another set of comparative terms is delivered by relative sections thickness on both techniques (see figure 3 for terms):

Territory and modeling technique (averages)	Upper thickness (PGrs)‰	Lower thickness (SGri)‰
Muntenia, hand made pottery	52	124
Muntenia, slow wheel pottery	41	96
Slovakia, hand made pottery	61	115
Slovakia, slow wheel pottery	52	89
Grofovsko (fig. 2/1)	38	92
Grofovsko (fig. 2/2)	23	58

Table 1. Sections thickness and shaping techniques

The way I get the figures is maybe less important here, although who wants to know can find out<sup>1</sup>. Basically, the lower figures show thinner sections, quantifying the mastership of shaping. The comparison is excluding the possibility that Grofovsko pots to be hand made shaped, no matter the personal skill of the artisan. In the database I use (six thousands records) there is any similar figures for hand made pottery that could fit the last row in the table above.

The problems are the same for two shapes processed from Most na Soči–*Repelc* (MLINAR 2002, fig. 1/ 1, 2; reprinted here on fig. 2/4, 5), pots considered also as hand made technique (*idem*, 112), defined also by very low figures for sections thickness (41 with 54 and 34 with 73). A similar landscape one find for entire shape pots from Murska Sobota–*Nova tabla* (GUŠTIN, TIEFENGRABER 2002). For the last I was tempted to give credit to the authors, on the basis of lack of that decorative pattern so typical for slow wheel pottery. The sections thickness average is still too low: 40 and 76; the only one shape that fits the hand made usual description is that from GUŠTIN, TIEFENGRABER 2002, fig. 6/1 (see fig. 1/1), for which is recorded an upper thickness with the value 55, and the base thickness with the value 126. Perhaps not only by chance, the last pot is the only one dated radiocarbon on the second half of the sixth century; all other pots from fig. 1 (2-5) are dated for the second quarter of the seventh century.

The ceramic lot from Murska Sobota–*Nova tabla* (*Ibidem*) is the most interesting from the entire collection, as a result of a developed digging, of a morphological typology that makes sense, and <sup>14</sup>C analyses for 13 living contexts. The cross-examination of the ceramic types frequency (*Ibidem*, 59, fig. 15) and the serial table for types distribution on contexts (*Ibidem*, 61, fig. 16) requires some commentaries. We take note that the “Slavic” pans are associated only with “hand made pottery”, habitually not decorated, a category that usual goes for “early Slavic pottery” (before the middle of the seventh century for Slovenia, but later in northern territories); the same is true for notched lips. I am restraining an historical outlook about the last (see yet CURTA 2001, 292, the map from fig. 69), but I can’t help not to say that these “events” are sensitive similar to Muntenia anamnesis (one century earlier), but contrasting with northern Slavic world

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<sup>1</sup> TEODOR 2001, volume I, chapter 1, § 1.1.2.9 and 1.1.6, correlated with volume II, section I, memos A and B. The sections thickness (measured in multiple points and averaged) are reported on bordered diameters (thousand parts).

(Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia) or with north Bulgarian material culture from seventh century.

One striking issue is the complete split for “primitive” (or “early”) and “medieval” living contexts (GUŠTIN, TIEFENGRABER 2002, 61, fig. 16). The pot types 1 to 5 (“hand made”) are not mixed anywhere with evolved types (6 to 9, comb like decorative patterns). However, the radiocarbon dating is overlaying two “primitive” contexts (SZ 3, SO 58) with a “medieval” one (SO 47). We will not delay on that contradiction, due to the low level trustworthy for such analyses (TURK 2002, 83:  $1\sigma = 68,2\%$ ). The real disturbing fact is the hypothesis of a cultural breakpoint somewhere in the second quarter of the seventh century. One possible answer is a migration; a second possibility would be a “cloud point”, a sudden change in political and economical environment. Although the former is much fairer (connected with turbulences experienced by Avar conglomerate in the fourth decade, see CURTA 2001, 109), the last would be considered. The craft techniques are not an *a priori* attribute for one people or another (as wrong supposed), but a result of a specific political and economical set up. Childish simply, *any* population should use wheel made pottery *if possible* (= some conditions are fulfilled); symmetrical, *any* “civilized” population will lash-up “barbaric” artifacts if the others are not available. Any craft can be fair performed in an *organized* political frame. This is why that breakpoint from the fourth decade of the seventh century looks interesting to me, like a landmark for political crystallization, in that Slavic world edge.

Another surprising issue for Murska Sobota–Nova Tabla is the absence of the transition between “primitive” and “medieval” contexts. I suppose that would be only by chance, like temporarily abandonment of the site for the time of the transition. The transition episode seems to show up to Podgorica – Ljubianca (NOVŠAK 2002 a), in the inventory of the same context, that includes pots made in both techniques (*ibidem*, 92, fig. 1 – the upper half of a undecorated pot; fig. 4-6 – pots with the most typical decoration for VII to IX century).

Another challenging feature is the morphology of the “early Slavic” pottery. I used the *Compass* database seeking for comparison, expecting some suggestions about the origins of the population that produced that pottery. I did not choose to work with the entire ceramic lot available for Slovenia, taking in to the focus only some of it, that looks closest from what usual is considered “early Slavic”, searching for the best chances to trace the spring (fig. 1/1-5; 2/1-5). In fact, it is not very much to do today, without a better knowledge of Roman inheritance in the studied areas.

I tried for the beginning the method of the “absolute analogy”<sup>2</sup>. The results were disappointing: ceramic types 1, 2d and 5 (Murska Sobota–Nova Tabla; fig. 1/1, 4, 5 in my selection) have no absolute analogy, and types 2a and 2b (fig. 1/3, 4) have ambiguous joins (one for Slovakia and one for Muntenia each).

Because the easy way was fruitless I had to employ scattered graphs, which went much further. The comparative lots are composed from Slovakian pottery (FUSEK 1994, only seventh century stuff, most of them from western part, a few from central and eastern territories), Popina cultural group (KOLEVA 1992, north-eastern Bulgaria, mid seventh century or later) and, of course, Slovenian selection (fig. 1 and 2).

The distinction between the three groups is obvious and refers to the specific height. The most usual shapes from Slovakia are those with  $l/a$  around 1.2; Popina stuff goes for 1.1; Slovenian most typical is around 1.

In Slovenian lot there is any shape taller than 1.2; as a consequence, the comparison with pots taller than that is stopping here.

The usual proportion for upper height ( $l_s/l$ ) follows similar rules for all cultural groups, balanced from 0.3 to 0.5; the deviances are few and are to find only for Bulgarian and Slovenian groups, that is a little bit surprising, because those shapes are most probable northern facieses (more fashionable for northern Ukraine or middle Vistula, expected more for Slovakia than in former Roman territories).

Comparative average figures:

Ukraine (RUSANOVA 1973; Korceak, VI century):  $l/a = 1.17$ ;  $l_s/l = 0.32$

Poland (PARCZEWSKI 1993; only VII century and only southern areas):  $l/a = 1.15$ ;  $l_s/l = 0.35$

Iatrus (BÖTTGER 1982; only pots, IV-VI centuries):  $l/a = 0.90$ ;  $l_s/l = 0.43$

Capidava (OPRIŞ 2000; hand made pottery; mid sixth century):  $l/a = 1.2$ ;  $l_s/l = 0.46$

Gropşani (POPILIAN, NICA 1998; fast-wheel pottery only, first half of the VI century):  $l/a = 1.06$ ;  $l_s/l = 0.43$

For a first look, things seem run mixed and confused. In fact, a better look delivers interesting observations.

First of all, the graph is storied, suggesting two distinct traditions (the issue is not just a piece of cake, so, this is not the place and time to speak

<sup>2</sup> TEODOR 2001, § 1.3.4. Basically, there are 15 morphological criteria and established tolerance gap for each. The database gets a “target” and delivers all records that match *all* the conditions.

about); the ground-store defines narrowed bases ( $k/a < 0.5$ ), named bridge-like "South"; the upper store ("North") defines large bases ( $k/a > 0.5$ ).

In spite of the apparently indistinctively behavior for the three regional groups, one can take note that the "South" is mastered in Slovakia, makes a majority for Popina (5 to 3), but is not usual in Slovenia (3 to 7). The south-north segregation is less obvious for Slovakia, but striking for Slovenia and Bulgaria; the are more possible explanations for such a picture, yet I am limiting again to the observation that the both traditions are present in the same area from southern Lower Danube from the Late Roman period (Iatrus  $k/a = 0.38$ ; Capidava  $k/a = 0.58$ ; average figures), making the maximum and the minimum of the comparative list (below), close to the figures for the ceramic lots in focus (southern spot, averages: Popina  $k/a = 0.45$ ; Slovenia  $k/a = 0.41$ ; northern spot, averages: Popina  $k/a = 0.62$ ; Slovenia  $k/a = 0.58$ ).

Comparative average figures:

Ukraine:  $f/a = 0.83$ ;  $k/a = 0.55$   
 Poland:  $f/a = 0.82$ ;  $k/a = 0.49$   
 Iatrus:  $f/a = 0.67$ ;  $k/a = 0.38$   
 Capidava:  $f/a = 0.78$ ;  $k/a = 0.58$   
 Gropşani:  $f/a = 0.74$ ;  $k/a = 0.47$

X axis (SU) means the difference between rim angle (angle from C point in fig. 3) and neck angle (angle from B in fig. 3); Y axis (St) means the difference between the upper and the lower tangents (see fig. 3, angles "ts" and "ti").

This time the cultural specific is produced along a diagonal line starting from the origin of the graph, affecting all terms. The Popina group is clustering the right-up corner. The Slovakian pottery masters the lower half, defined by negative values for St (i.e. shapes with lower body more arched than the upper body).

Two thirds of Slovenian pottery is located in "Popina quarter", while one third behaves like Slovak shapes.

Comparative average figures:

Ukraine: SU = 11; St = -2  
 Poland: SU = 26; St = 6  
 Iatrus: SU = 75; St = -4  
 Capidava: SU = 50; St = 14  
 Gropşani: SU = 58; St = 6

The comparative terms are fully explicit: the poor modulation of the upper end of the shape is defined for Slavic genetic territories far away from Roman world (Ukraine, Poland). Per contra, Slovakia was placed under Roman influence long time before the Slavic genesis begun, and the figures reflect that well-known fact (GODŁOWSKI 1984): 43° upper modulation for seventh century pottery (FUSEK 1994, all fragmentary shards where the date fits). The average for Slovakia is yet inferior to Popina (51°) or Slovenian test group (48°). The last are obviously inheriting much more than the Roman land; one can't miss the figures fitting (Capidava  $SU = 50^\circ$ ). Of course, the hand made pottery from Roman sites worth an own-based analysis, on a larger platform.

I'll put an end to the morphological comparison, not because it can't be useful developed, but I just rest the case. I had to check if the obsessional references to Slovakian experience (just some examples: ŠAVEL 2002, 16; KERMAN 2002, 24; TUŠEK 2002, 39; etc) makes sense or not; and does not. The best resemblances with contemporary Slavic world, if any, go for colonists (?) group from Lower Danube. It is very unlikely that the look-like is due to some common “roots”, because such roots can't be illustrate (KOLEVA 1992) in a scientific and controllable manner; it is much more plausible that the “unity” factor could be identified in the Roman asset. The material motion for acculturation is far to be a mere story and I am not going to accept a battle on such a scanty place. For now it's enough to postulate such an inheritance.

The conviction of sharing the same origin with all Slavs is so ingrained that one of the authors (TIEFENGRABER 2002) is presenting a one-shard paper (a little one; the shard is also little, about 4 x 5 cm) and does not hesitate to make some scientific allegations about “Praga Type” (*Ibidem*, 34).

Not only the pot-shapes are suggesting that we have here a qualitative different cultural process, which is not completely congruent with facieses from outside former Roman territory. The fast development of the modeling techniques is one of that features that gives early Slovenian culture a definite and peculiar profile. The dissemination of the slow wheel practices is completing in Slovenia about half a century earlier than Slovakia, one century before Poland and about two before Ukraine.

The frozen concepts of Slavic archaeology (like “Praga type”, “Korceak culture”) are captive to migrationist theories, quite old and not in the best shape. The idea of common origin of all Slavs, generated through linguistic models (see CURTA 2001, 6-8, 12-13) is politically based and not very seriously challenged until very recent on the archaeological ground. I

grow up myself with such theories and I believed – as anybody else – in their capability to describe major historical processes; but the migrationist theory does not cover facts, at least not the archaeological facts. From the pottery point of view, it is impossible to identify a “center” for the diffusion of a presumable early “Slavic” culture; there is either any *common* culture in the background of “Slavic” people, but a lot of *different* old cultures that contributed somehow. There are as many “primitive Slavic cultures” as major territories one can survey, on modern Slavic countries and in the neighborhood<sup>3</sup>. The “unity” of Slavic world should be perhaps searched outside material culture.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example TEODOR 2001 (vol. I, § 5.3.3; vol. II, section IV, J.5, conclusions, graph 17) for the misfit between pottery shapes in Ukraine and Poland and the “impossible center”.



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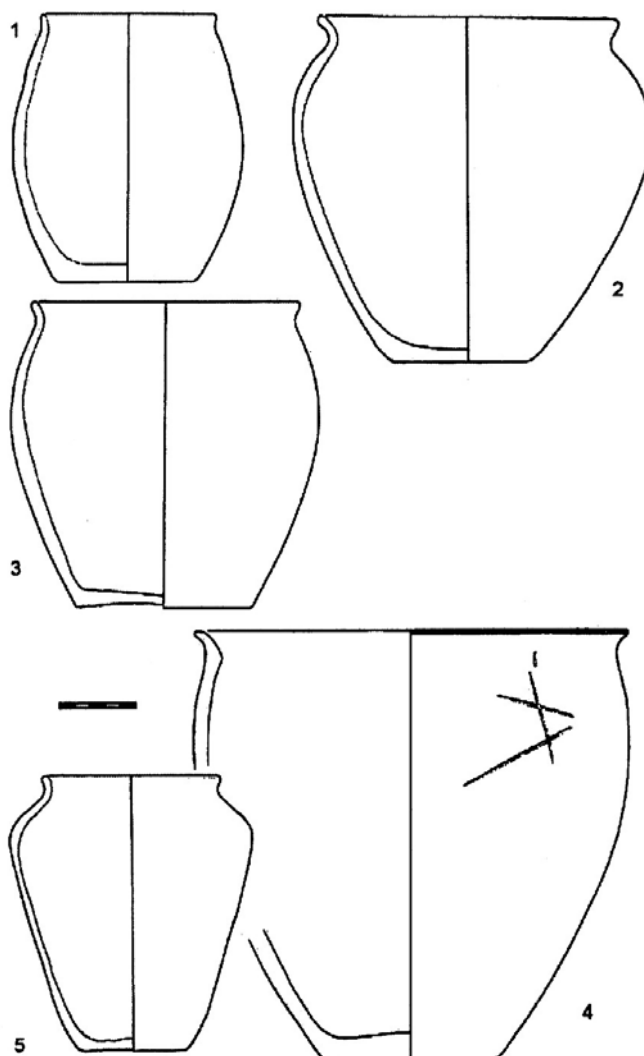


Fig. 1. Slovenian pottery for the late sixth (1) and the first half of seventh century (2-5) from Murska Sobota – Nova tabla.

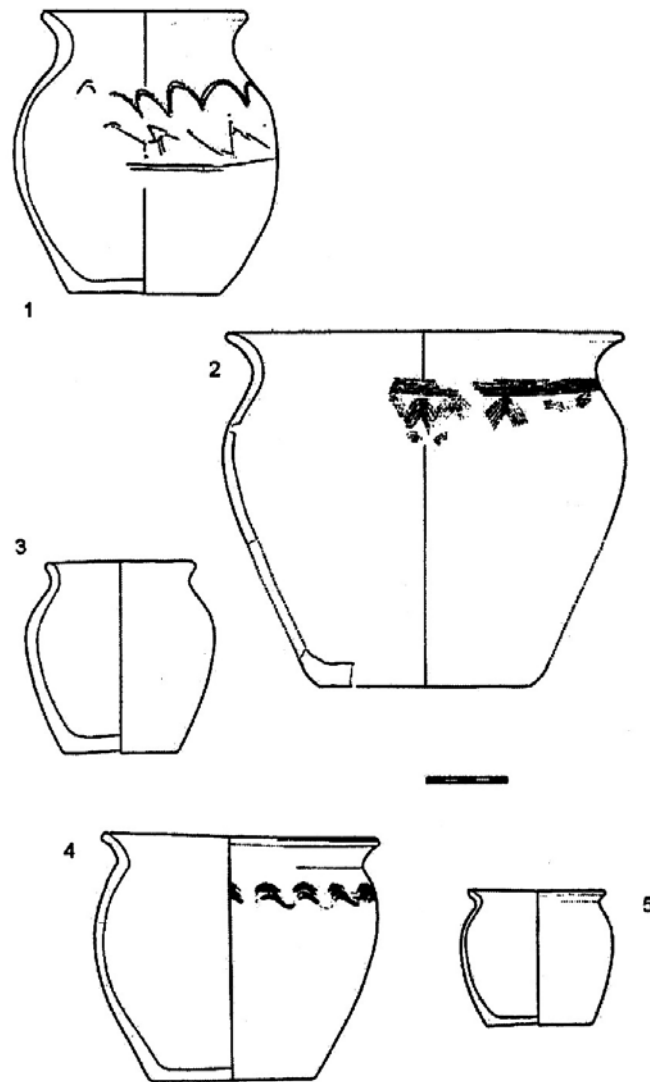


Fig. 2. Seventh century pottery from Slovenia; Murska Sobota – Grofovsko (1-2), Ptuj-Brstja (3), Most na Soči .

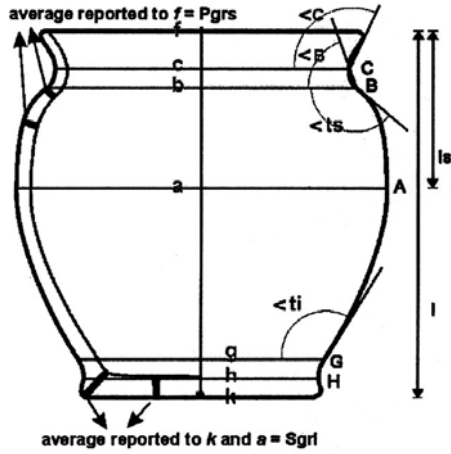


Fig.3. Simplified view of Compass measurement system.

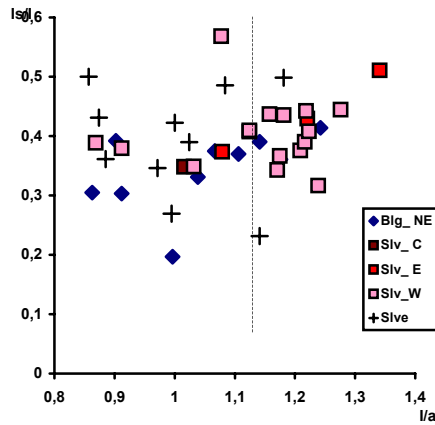


Fig. 4. Heights report.  $l/a$  means the report between height and body diameter;  $is/i$  means the report between the upper height and total height; see also fig. 3 (infra)

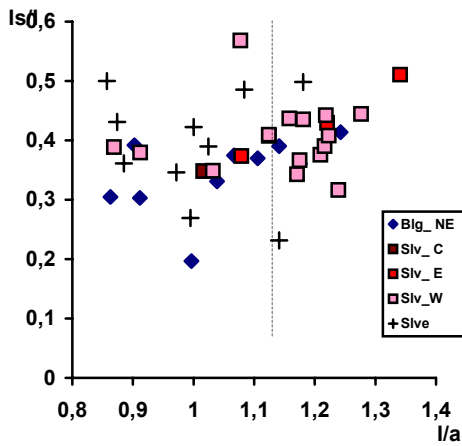


Fig. 5. Diameters relationship. The  $f/a$  axis means the report between the upper diameter and the body diameter; the  $k/a$  axis means the report between the bottom diameter and the body diameter (see also fig.3).

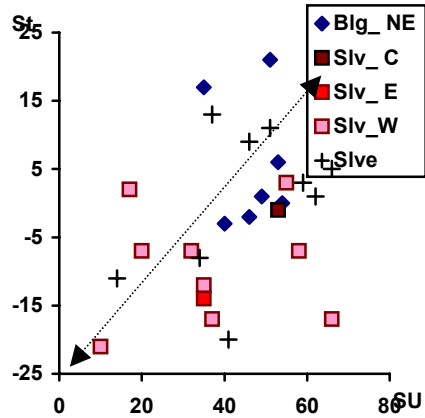


Fig. 6. Angles differences graph.