
Boris Kavur and Miloš Spasić

University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper and Belgrade City Museum
boris.kavur@upr.si and spasicmilos@gmail.com

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE...

LOOKING AT THE DECORATED SCABBARD FROM RITOPEK

Abstract: Although an accidental discovery, the find from Ritopek, and especially the sword with a decorated scabbard, became a reference point and a much-reproduced image in the Celtic archaeology of south-eastern Europe. In this presentation we are again presenting the depicted image composed from several elements – the plastic style decorated suspension loop and reinforcement clamp, the similarly decorated upper part of the scabbard and an incised image of a deconstructed Type III dragon-pair in the lower part of the image. Taking into consideration the technologies of production and motifs used, we propose that the sword was decorated by two different artisans and most probably in two different regions. Based on several analogies, we assume that the plastic style decoration was produced in the territory of today's Slovenia, while the incised motifs were added in the territory of today's Serbia. Consequently, the sword with its scabbard becomes a symbol of communications and interaction – linking communities, production centres, and group as well as individual identities within the dynamic realm of the Middle La Tène world.

Keywords: Ritopek, Middle La Tène, sword decoration, dragon-pairs, plastic style.

Prologue

Most images from the past are not art, or at least most archaeologists do not think they are. In addition to pictures made following the Western concept of art, derived from Classical Antiquity via the Renaissance perfecting the reflection of reality, those predating or existing in parallel with ideological, aesthetical and chronological worlds (Müller 2014: 37) are often described with a rhetoric of defiance or indifference, or even as ignorance of true art. Prehistoric Celtic items are especially often not well described in terms of art (which is a problem with the archaeological rhetoric rigidity and not with the art itself), but forced down into the shady concept of production described as crafts. Such a decision is often excused by the notion that there are not many ideas about the function of Celtic art, that individual styles and used symbols can enable the reconstruction of a visual language, but they cannot be understood (Megaw, Megaw 2001: 16–20). This is not a consequence of technology employed in production or the following of different evolutionary trajectories of stylistic development,

but more due to the fact that these images are often principally intended to convey information, bound by the necessity to perform a utilitarian function and, therefore, unable to express much more than what meets the eye. However, they can present more complex questions of representation, convention, medium, production, interpretation and reception than fine art – there is a hidden, wider meaning in inexpressive images. We would like to present one such story, the story of the decoration on a sword's scabbard from Ritopek in Serbia.

Introduction

The village of Ritopek is located some 20 km east of the Serbian capital of Belgrade. Sites dated from the Neolithic to medieval period are situated on the high river terrace above the Danube, and the Belgrade City Museum and the National Museum in Belgrade house a significant number of objects dating to various (pre)historic periods (Гаршанин 1954; Тодоровић 1967; 1971; 1975) (Fig. 1). Spacious terraces above the Danube were

used both as domestic living spaces and as a funereal landscape – the earliest graves date to the Early Eneolithic Tiszapolgar culture, as confirmed by the find from the site of Ritopek-Dalekovod, which is most certainly a grave good (Тодоровић 1967). Middle and Late Bronze Age graves are most numerous among the 16 graves discovered during the only extensive archaeological excavation carried out at the site of Ritopek-Dalekovod, during 1960 (Тодоровић 1967). Finds from cremation grave 12, i.e., two iron spears, a ceramic bowl, an iron knife and horse bits with a bridle (Тодоровић 1967), and several other items, e.g., decorative plates of the Scythian animal style (Тодоровић 1967: T. IV: 2, 4; see also Јовановић 1977; Јовановић 1999; Ljuština, Ninčić 2017), speak of the long tradition of this sacral landscape before the arrival of the Celts.

Jovan Todorović mentioned seven Celtic find spots in the village of Ritopek in his 1974 book on the Scordisci (Todorović 1974: 184, 186). All sites were located on the high Danube river terrace, on the approximate 7x2 km area between the confluence of the Bolečica river in the northwest and the confluence of the Plavinački potok (stream) in the east. The necropolis at the site of Dalekovod is at the north-western part of this area and Plavinački potok is situated at the far eastern point of the Ritopek Danube terrace, suggesting that the whole area was once populated. Despite numerous finds, only the necropolis of Dalekovod was systematically excavated and only a single Celtic cremation grave was discovered (Тодоровић 1967: 154, 155, T. II: 10–13, T. III: 5). Unfortunately, numerous Celtic graves from the village of Ritopek were, in the past, destroyed by looters and the discoveries were sold on illegal markets and are now owned by both local and international collectors of antiquities (Тодоровић 1975: 79).

Numerous Celtic objects were collected as stray finds or were presented to the Belgrade City Museum by locals from Ritopek, originating from the same site of Dalekovod (Todorović 1967: 155, 156, T. III–V). Based on the number and composition of stray finds from the sites at the village of Ritopek, Vodice and Plavinački potok

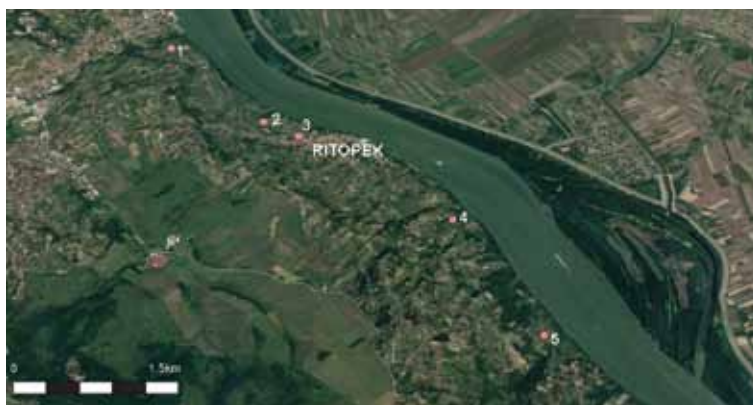


Fig. 1. Reconstructed positions of Celtic sites in Ritopek: 1. Ritopek–Dalekovod; 2. Ritopek–Vodice; 3. Ritopek–Oglavak; 4. Ritopek–Kamenita glavica; 5. Ritopek–Plavinački potok.

(mainly iron objects otherwise deposited as grave goods), Todorović made a sound conclusion that Celtic necropolises were also probably located here (Todorović 1974: 184). Furthermore, Todorović refers to three other sites located in the village of Ritopek, i.e., Ritopek–Zapisi, Ritopek–Kamenita Glavica and Ritopek–Oglavak, with a smaller number of accidental Celtic finds recovered (Todorović 1974: 186).

The so-called double grave from the site of Ritopek-Plavinački potok was discovered by chance during construction works. All objects were found by a local from Ritopek and were sold to Belgrade City Museum by Tihomir N. Pantić, a local from the village of Ritopek. Thus, the circumstances of discovery are to be taken with great caution, since the context of the find was described by the local who found them and not by specialist archaeologists. It was reported that metal finds were supposedly discovered in a 0.5m deep hole, piled in a heap, with no osteological remains or pottery. J. Todorović did not have any doubt regarding the reported circumstances of discovery, since similar Celtic burials with scattered cremations were already known from the broader vicinity, e.g., Karaburma (Тодоровић 1975: 79). A total number of 9 iron objects were sold to Belgrade City Museum and later published by Todorović who reproduced an idealised illustration of the finds (Fig. 2). Two iron swords exhibited substantial differences in their preservation, demonstrating different rituals of the manipulation of material culture – despite the fact that they were reported as being in a bad state of preservation, they were reproduced as intact. Additionally, the second sword, illus-

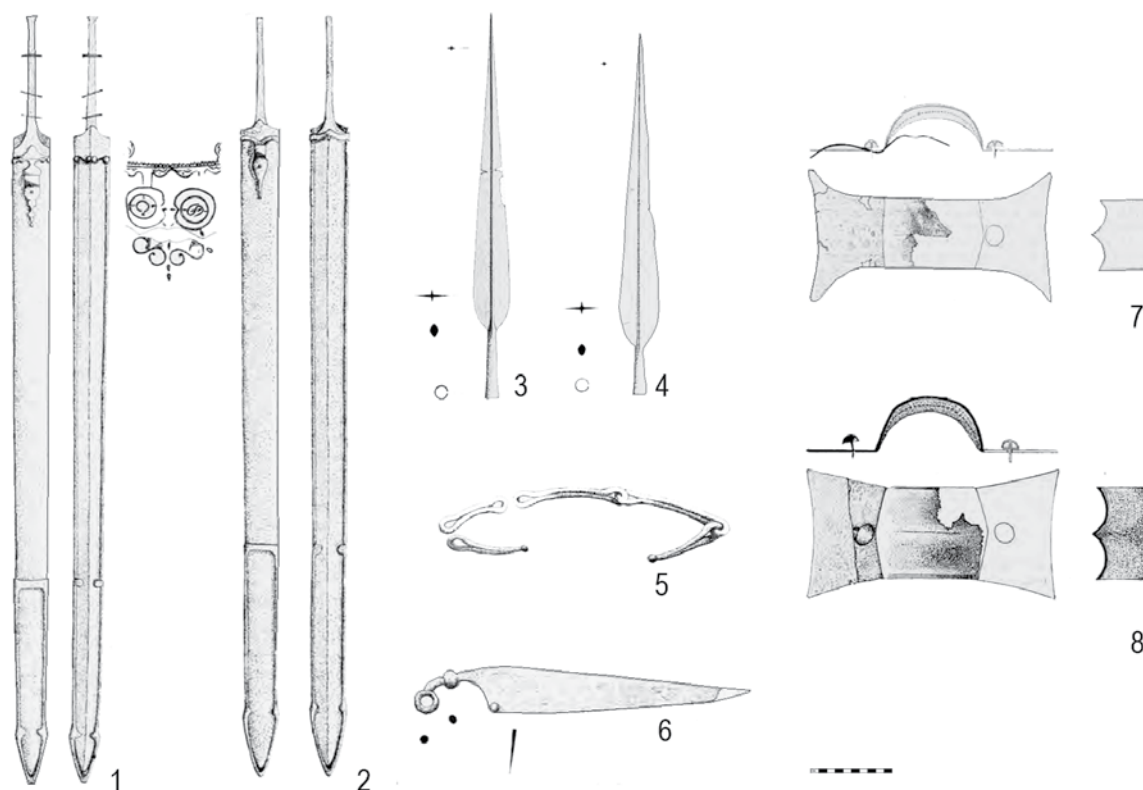


Fig. 2. Inventory of the double grave from Ritopek–Plavinački potok, without one of the chain-belts: 1. Iron sword and scabbard, ID number AP 7101; 2. Iron sword and scabbard, ID number AP 7102; 3. Iron spearhead, ID number AP 7105; 4. Iron spearhead, ID number AP 7106; 5. Iron chain belt, ID number AP 7109; 6. Iron battle knife, ID number AP 7107; 7. Iron shield boss, ID number AP 7104; 8. Iron shield boss, ID number AP 7103 (after Тодоровић 1975).

trated as fully extended, was actually intentionally folded. In the collection were two shield bosses, broken in halve and their state of preservation was clearly indicated on the illustration. Also surprisingly, the spearpoints were reproduced as almost intact, even though they were both heavily bent several times. Furthermore, the discovered belt elements were parts of two different belts, while the large knife was described as the only single element in the supposed burial.

The scabbard

All iron objects from the so-called double warrior grave from the site of Ritopek–Plavinački potok were heavily corroded after almost 50 years since their discovery. All finds were inadequately conserved, using paraffin wax, after their arrival at Belgrade City Museum, a conservation procedure that is now outdated. Later, they were again re-conserved in the period from 2008–2012. The

decorated scabbard was in poor condition, with active corrosion visible on all surfaces. Its corrosion led to the mineralisation of some parts, which did not contain much of the iron core anymore. Consequently, some parts were no longer preserved and have not been reconstructed. To reconstruct the history of the object we can look at its original publication and several details indicating its state of preservation. We can assume that the drawing was actually an idealistic reconstruction and that the situation of the object was similar to its present state. The first major problem of the original illustration is the decoration of the scabbard itself – it was not projected into the sword but depicted separately and enlarged between the two swords (Тодоровић 1975: 80, Fig. 1: 2) (Fig. 3). Unfortunately, the illustration was very schematic and missing several details and, most importantly, it was turned upside down. The second detail of its preservation is observable on the illustration of the scabbard (Тодоровић 1975: 80, Fig. 1), where we can see that the front plate is at least a centimetre

higher than the backplate. Since it was drawn out of position on the upper side, we have to assume that the sword was already fragmented, but depicted as intact.

Today, the preserved upper part of the scabbard presents a completely different picture and it is the intent of this contribution to pay attention to several details in its production and decoration. The sword is removed from the scabbard – the front and back sheath of the chambered plates are held together by the edges of the backplate folded over the edges of the narrower one and by the reinforcement clamp.

To describe it accurately we have to deconstruct it into the several constructive elements of the visual narrative - the ornament of the scabbard consists of three partly preserved elements produced using different techniques:

- The first element of the decoration, although only partly preserved, is the iron clamp that held together and reinforced the two plates of the scabbard. The sword was partly pulled out of the scabbard and the front plate was also pulled out of its original position. The front plate is currently positioned almost a centimetre higher than initially



Fig. 3. Front side of the scabbard with the remains of the reinforcement clamp.



Fig. 4. Reverse of the scabbard with the suspension loop.

– as we can see on the outlined undecorated part of the scabbard of the same form as the clamp that once covered it. The reinforcement clamp is part of the arched suspension loop (Fig. 4). On the reverse are two rounded loop plates fixed with a central rivet to the plate – the lower one extends into an elaborate profiled extension, while the upper one continues on the left and right in the form of the reinforcement clamp. On the reverse of the clamp there are four oval widenings and two profiled, elevated large buttons on the sides. Despite its poor preservation in the upper portion, it currently seems that the suspension loop and the reverse of the reinforcement clamp were not decorated. The front side of the clamp consisted of four connected flat circular buttons decorated with undulating tendrils forming two horizontal figures of eight. Unfortunately, however, only the first left button exhibiting the remains of the decoration is preserved. A circular tendril, elaborated in high relief ran along the edge of the button and terminated in a rounded point. The tendril became wider and bigger towards the middle of the scabbard.

- The second element of the decoration was elaborated above the clamp – two tendrils in the form of a figure of eight were positioned symmetrically on each side of the scabbard. Produced in high relief, they were of similar form as the decorated front side of the clamp with a smaller circle laterally and a larger one in the middle. Above and below them were several incised leaf-shaped ornaments.

- The main decoration of the scabbard was produced with a different technique and following different stylistic conventions, contrary to the plastic, high relief elaborated decoration, it is incised. It consists of two circles filled with yin-yang shaped ornament surrounded by four incised leaf-like elements. Below the circles are two undulating lines ending with a leaf-shaped ornament in the centre. Eight similar ornaments are located between and above the circles – one of them being positioned into the deepening of the circle facing the central rib. Each circle has a vertical “foot” consisting of two lines running first parallel and then forming two horizontal bumps – larger ones in the middle and smaller ones laterally. All of them are decorated with two inscribed smaller bumps and a leaf-shaped central ornament. Below them is a horizontal line and below it another undulating line

limiting the ornament. Vertically along the lateral edges are two incised bumps, again filled with an ornament in the form of two smaller bumps and a leaf.

To understand the role and position of the scabbard in the Celtic archaeology of Serbia and wider, we have to observe its publications and direct comments about the decoration. Interestingly the illustration of the sword was published even before the item was properly described and published according to archaeological standards – it was depicted in the book *Scordisci* where Jovan Todorović used its “standard illustration” to illustrate the chapter about the armament. The sword lacked the ornament on the scabbard, but was reproduced on page 208, turned upside down and with a completely wrong subtitle (Todorović 1974: 83, Sl. 60: 208; 131). A year later, in the first publication of the find in the journal *Starinar*, the author depicted both swords together with the ornament positioned between them. Here the mistake was repeated and the ornament was again turned upside down (Тодоровић 1975: 80, Fig. 1; 2). The standard illustration appeared again in the book *Skordisci i starosedeooci u Podunavlju* almost 20 years later, where it was illustrated, again without the ornament, in the English version of the article by Petar Popović about the Scordisci (Popović 1992: 35, Fig. 31). In the same year, Miklos Szabó and Éva Petres reproduced a redrawn image of the *Starinar* illustration in their compendium of decorated weapons from the Carpathian Basin (Szabó, Petres 1992: 241, Pl. 123: 2). From here, the upside down ornament entered specialist international literature.

The unusual decoration of the sword was only rarely commented on. M. Szabó and É. Petres described it as a combination of a dragon-pair Type III and of the Hungarian sword style, but also added that the exact position of the ornament and its style of ornamentation are not clear from the published illustration (Szabó, Petres 1992: 116). Furthermore, T. Stöllner, although listing the sword on the dragon-pairs map, sustained himself of attributing the ornament to a specific type (Stöllner 1989: 166), while N. Ginoux added it to the list and catalogue without any description or comments (Ginoux 2007: 175).

Discussion

Looking at Celtic art, the most emblematic motif was usually defined as a “dragon-pair”, an image being almost exclusively discovered depicted on scabbards of swords. The subject of numerous presentations and publications was discussed on an individual and regional level, swords were published and maps generated. Consequently, it was mostly colloquially explained as a protective element of the swords and its bearers, or later as an element and materialisation of the long-distance communication networks connecting, on a symbolic level, the military caste from Celtic societies across Europe. Looking at the speed and extent of its diffusion, it seemed as if we had never before witnessed such a quick spread of technological and stylistic elements across Europe as in the 4th and 3rd century BC, in a period of wide mobility and, from our present perspective, targeted movements of armies and small groups of Celtic immigrants.

In our presentation, we will approach and observe the decoration of the sword from Ritopek from an iconographic perspective – as a means to follow the transformation and disintegration of the widely accepted image on its way of becoming a stylised visual code lacking any figural elements. Consequently, we will observe Celtic art as being truly modern before its time. The process of transformation and standardisation of the dragon-pair motif will be used for considering modernism in its narrow sense of an increasingly autonomous and medium-specific artistic expression of the Iron Age.

It is now 30 years since V. and R. Megaw pointed out that studies of the origin of this motif clearly show a risk of dependence on distribution maps of contemporarily known finds (Megaw, Megaw 1989; 1990: 55). These maps, with their dots interpreted as if they reflected a past reality, are subject to dramatic changes through time and every publication of a new corpus of finds could shift the presumed production centres and reverse the previously presumed directions of expansion. However, let us return to the beginning. It was José Maria DeNavarro, in his pioneering publication, that managed to summarise the multitude of known decorations and to reduce their variability into three distinct groups of depictions. Subsequently, Types I, II and III of dragon-pairs were born (DeNavarro 1959: 98–100).

We can, undoubtedly, claim that this is one of the longest living definitions in Celtic archaeology that is, despite numerous modernisations due to its simplicity and, most importantly clarity, still used by archaeologists across Europe. When J. M. DeNavarro presented his division of dragon-pair motifs, it seemed that the Type III dragon-pairs were rare in the east and most numerous in the west. Consequently, he assumed that Switzerland was the most probable place of origin of these motifs. He described them as having been derived from Type I and being highly abstract, due to the reduction of forms and merging of once independent extremities, creating an impression that the bodies of the dragon-pair were constructed from nothing more than two concentric circles topped by a deconstructed palmette (DeNavarro 1959: 99–100). Three decades later, V. and R. Megaw presented a picture that had changed due to new discoveries (and new interpretations of Celtic art) (Megaw and Megaw 1989; 1990). At that time, it seemed that Type III dragon-pairs were most common in Switzerland and on the territory of the then Yugoslavia. Less than a decade later, T. Stöllner produced a detailed list and map of swords with dragon-pairs and their number grew again (Stöllner 1998: 162–167). The last comprehensive overview was published by Nathalie Ginoux in 2007, when she, although still based on the general principles of the previous typological division, demonstrated a much more dynamic evolutionary development of the iconic image and a more detailed typological division (Ginoux 2007). Her map still demonstrated the highest concentration of this type of ornament in Switzerland, but the number of specimens on the south-eastern and southern edge of the Carpathian Basin along the Sava and Danube rivers increased dramatically (Ginoux 2007, 121, Fig. 61). She took a step back in order to venture two steps forward; instead of the tripartite division of J. M. DeNavarro, she introduced a binary division of a Type 1 motif (zoomorphic lyre) and a Type 2 motif (griffon pair). Furthermore, she introduced into this bipartite division a several-stage development of the motif; a process of abstraction and decomposition described in four stages (Ginoux 2002: 76–79). In a further elaboration, she additionally subdivided both types and stages of development according to the technical manufacture and visual expression of the decorations (Ginoux 2007: 39–121).

The only discussion addressing the scabbards decorated with dragon-pairs in south-eastern Europe was published in 2020 by I. Drnić. He only presented the Early La Tène scabbards with griffin-pairs and zoomorphic lyres, but still demonstrated a substantial increase of known examples (Drnić 2020: 105, Fig. 6).

Regarding the description of the central ornament on the scabbard from Ritopek, the body of the griffin-pair, it is important to consider the concept of abstraction and deconstruction of the Type II ornament as proposed by N. Ginoux. She demonstrated that the organic form of Type II becomes more geometric and reduced, consequently transforming the image into Type III, indicating that these are just stages on a continuum of image transformation, which she subdivided into four stages. In the last stage, the body of the once recognisable griffin is reduced to a circle on a vertical foot standing on a horizontal surface and above it are just tendrils indicating the form and position of the once present beak. According to her opinion, the introduction of relief in the later developed form was an attempt to intensify the visibility of the image with the use of a third dimension. With this development also came the fear of empty surfaces and the subsequent multiplication of smaller ornamental elements filling the empty spaces of the image (Ginoux 2002, 77-78; Ginoux 2007, 65 - 73). With her approach, she actually returned to the position proposed in the beginning by J. M. DeNavarro and discussed by numerous authors supporting the opinion that all motifs are actually linked in an evolutionary chain and that Type II is also a derivation of Type I (Szabó 1989: 119). In acknowledging such an approach we can assume that the tendrils above the circular body on scabbards from graves Brežice 47 (Jovanović 2007: 25, Sl. 16), Dobova 10 (Guštin 1981: 224, Abb. 1) and Karaburma 29 (Todorović 1974, 140, Sl. 101) represent the formal remains of the beaks, but looking at the ornament of scabbards from Negotin (Szabó, Petres 1992: 238, Pl. 120: 1), Brestovik (Ginoux 2007: Pl. 80) and Ritopek (Fig. 3) we can no longer identify such logically connected elements. Consequently, based on the find from Ritopek, we could further supplement her four-stage transformation of the image with a fifth stage, where the remains of the head and beak are absolutely absent, the body is reduced to a circle, and the foot is

represented only with straight vertical lines linking the circle with the horizontal line. The once figurative body becomes reduced to a series of geometric motifs, but the image is now supplemented with decoration coming from another tradition – with undulating lines, tendrils, yin-yang shaped ornaments and leaf motifs filling the empty spaces.

Perhaps a visually less impressive, but no less important, element of decoration is the use of the undulating line incised along the lower part of the body and below the horizontal line beneath. An undulating line on the outer side and above the body is known from the scabbard from grave 29 from Karaburma (Todorović 1974: 140, Sl. 101), while it appears below the body and below the horizontal line on the scabbard from Negotin (Szabó, Petres 1992: 238, Pl. 120: 1), and in the upper row of the three different undulating horizontal lines on the sword from Dalj (Szabó, Petres 1992: 223, Pl. 105: 2). Furthermore, an almost horizontal undulating line is running below the magnificent, Swiss-sword-style decorated, and almost identical, scabbards from Odžaci and Dobova grave 23 (Guštin 1984b: 124-125, T. 7: 2; Sl. 4).

Also of interest is the leaf-shaped motif occurring inside and around the body, below the foot as well as on the side, where it appears in a combination of three leaves. A similar decoration is known from the scabbard from grave 6 of Dobova in Slovenia, where a single leaf appears inside the indentation of the body and centrally above the body (and below the beak), while two groups of three leaves appear below the body and on the side (Guštin 1982: 202, Abb. 6: 3; 1983: T. XC: 9; 1984, T. 47: 1; Jovanović 2007: 23, Sl. 14).

Finally, we can look at the second element, the reinforcement clamp with the suspension loop. The reinforcement clamps were a visual problem; N. Ginoux proposed that their visual function changed in the later period. These functional elements shifted from a visually attractive element in the plastic style decoration to a disturbing one running across the dragon-pairs image, covering it and dividing it into two parts. However, in the final development of the motif, they again became plastically decorated and with the deconstruction of the image inserted into the position where they partly replaced the head or their decoration stood in for the eye of the dragon (Ginoux 2007: 73). Although the frontal side of the clamp from Ritopek is not

fully preserved, it could not have played such a role since its outline follows the motif of a figure of eight and is positioned far too low to substitute for the beak.

The plastically decorated clamps connected to the suspension loop with the side rods forming a T-shaped element above the upper loop-plate are typical of the Hungarian sword style where comparable elements, although highly variable, can be observed on several swords in the Carpathian Basin, such as Halmajugra 2 (Szabó, Petres 1992: 135, Pl. 17) and Kečovo (Szabó, Petres 1992: 211, Pl. 93: 2). Perhaps the most similar form of the suspension loop was discovered on the sword from Regöly, which has one of the few scabbards decorated in the Swiss sword style (Szabó, Petres 1992: 174, Pl. 56). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the frontal reinforcement of the clamp is, unfortunately, preserved only on the left side with a profiled button on the side and the first flat button on the frontal surface. The horizontal deeply incised side button and the front button decorated with a spiral running along its outer edge and ending with a circular point in high relief were both manufactured in the tradition of the plastic style. The best comparison with a similar spiral on the side button comes from grave number 47 at Brežice in Slovenia (Jovanović 2007: 25, Sl. 16). Nevertheless, this scabbard is a strange piece – its decoration is composed of a Type III dragon-pair in the upper and a Hungarian sword style vegetal tendril ornament in the lower part. Additionally, both ornaments were manufactured in deep relief so characteristic of the plastic style and the space between individual elements was filled with symmetrical circular tendrils. Such S tendrils are actually a rare element on the decoration of scabbards, but appear on other items decorated in plastic style, such as fibulae and decorative nail-heads on spears (Szabó 1989b; Čižmář 1996). Perhaps we could also observe a reflection of this decorative approach on the scabbard from Sremski Karlovci, where the inside of the Type III dragon-pair and the space above it was decorated with ornament of symmetrical and non-symmetrical triskele tendrils (Szabó, Petres 1992: 243, Pl. 125: 1). However, the ornament within the circular body of the dragon could also be linked to the same ornamental tradition as the bipartite division of the ornamental field, described as the ying-yang motive. It seems that the oldest ones are known from the scabbards

from Szob (Szabó, Petres 1992: 189, Pl. 71) and Sremska Mitrovica (Szabó, Petres 1992: 237, Pl. 119: 1) where it divides the space between two dragon beaks.

Discussing the weaponry of the Taurisci and Scordisci, Dragan Božič demonstrated that Middle La Tène swords on both territories feature decorations elaborated in Hungarian and Swiss style as well as examples of scabbards decorated with Type III dragon-pairs, according to J. M. DeNavarro (Božič 1983: 78). Moreover, in his overview of the Celtic occupation and material culture in the former Yugoslavia, Mitja Guštin stressed that there is an observable similarity in the decoration of Middle La Tène sword scabbards from the territory ascribed to the Scordisci and the Taurisci, especially in those decorated with Type III dragon-pairs according to J. M. DeNavarro (Guštin 1984: 339). Although their observations were based mostly on the selection of motifs, it seems today that the plastic decoration of the frontal reinforcement clamp and the spiral motif above it, produced with a similar technique, offer the strongest confirmation of their claims. If we also take into consideration the Dobova – Odžaci pair of swords, we can formulate a hypothesis according to which it seems plausible that the sword from Ritopek (actually its scabbard) was most probably produced in the north-east, perhaps in the Dobova – Brežice region, transported to the south-east and finally decorated in the region of today's northern or central Serbia.

Conclusion

This essay, dedicated to our dear friend Petar Popović, is not an archaeological article about the heavy contextualisation of the discovery, an eloquent justification of all the parallels and an explicit explanation based on all the literature to enable the precise dating of each element in the supposed grave – it is just an essay drawing attention to a familiar piece of archaeological (Celtic) heritage of Serbia that has never been presented in its entire beauty. Previously, we were unable to recognise the creativity of the masters who produced the elaborate plastic design with its fluent vegetal form that was later adapted to local aesthetic conceptions by another artisan. Interpreted as a product of two workshops, two traditions and two crafts, it becomes a link between two centres

(and worlds) of eastern Celtic creativity, a reflection of the relationships between people and material culture. The combination of two information systems exceeds the purely narrative nature of the decoration. Combining two crafts elevates the product with its aesthetic to the level of art. It tells us more about the social complexity of the Celtic populations traditionally referred to as Scordisci, since the decoration is a direct testimony of aesthetic (and social) interactions reflecting complex systems of thinking. By combining different traditions it emphasises non-deterministic and non-linear behaviour in the selection and combination of motifs and styles. It demonstrates interactive interdependencies among cultural system components of individual sword producers (and owners), indicating complex behaviour emerging from simple interactions and long-distance trade (and mobility) networks. Additionally, interactions were not just simple information transmissions but important multiplicative events for the development of local identities that, by combining different stylistic information, generated novelty and innovation in the decoration of swords. A materialisation of several identities projected into the iron scabbard of the sword from Ritopek created one of the most intriguing but, at the same time, modernistic decorations where the abstraction of the organic form was taken a step further. We can observe in the decoration three creative processes involved in its production; disarticulation, repurposing, and disruption of form and meaning. The sword and the scabbard were produced as a part of the corpus decorated in a late form of the plastic style, but another artist revived, manipulated and repurposed this historic imagery and material culture. With his intervention and addition of new decorative elements, he disrupted the preconceived ideas about scabbard decoration. Furthermore, he completely disarticulated another decoration, the Type III dragon-pair, removing it consequently from its historic connections and then, finally, he repurposed the decoration of the scabbard as if it was a new, fresh and undecorated product. With his actions he (let us assume it was a he) disrupted both the understanding of the past and present role of the decoration and created a new perspective for the future. The artist did not express conflict with the past but presented his personal interpretation and understanding of the functioning of art. The latter is a form of material culture intended to have

specific social effects; it grows out of performance and participation (DeMarrais, Robb 2013: 6). It is not about a solitary artist producing a work of art, it is about all the participants involved in its production and all the audience involved in viewing it. Art constitutes social interactions in which the specific element of material culture, in our case the sword with its scabbard, is involved. Based on our observations, we can ascribe to the scabbard from Ritopek a series of social interactions that took place in two culturally (and ethnically?) different environments on the territories of today's Slovenia and Serbia.

This brings us to the beginning of the ideas about stylistic development in art and the potential for the creation of new artistic forms and expressions. It has been argued that the origins of increasing social complexity (and creativity) lie in growing community sizes and the exponential increase in social interactions (Ortman et al. 2015). Such an explanation would perfectly fit the observation of variability in material culture and stylistic features in larger agglomeration centres, where improvements in material condition accelerated specialisations in production; observable in the case of Celtic cemeteries at sites like Karaburma and Rospki Čuprija in Serbia or in Dobova and Brežice in Slovenia. However, if we observe regions with a low level of settlement agglomeration, indicated by numerous Celtic Middle La Tène burial sites around Ritopek (and in a larger area around today's Belgrade) in Serbia, or the plain of Ptuj in Slovenia, we can assume a low level of social connectivity and, consequently, a high level of productivity diversity in societies with kin-based institutions. As a consequence, redistributive rituals and cultural discourses were performed on a less institutionalised and almost individual level, again stimulating the numbers of random social interactions. With a less rigid social (and aesthetic) control, the variability in material culture and artistic expression can, therefore, be perceived as a consequence of interactions of numerous factors; economic stability, settlement patterns and communication networks that created the Middle La Tène world as we understand it today. Nevertheless, as we can see, it is, from the perspective of "European global archaeology", in less prominent regions of the Celtic world, such as the surroundings of Ritopek, that we can expect the creation of the most interesting pieces of Celtic Art.

Bibliography

- Božič, D., 1981.** Relativna kronologija mlajše železne dobe v jugoslovanskem podonavju. *Arheološki vestnik*, 32, 315–347.
- Božič, D., 1983.** Oborožitev bojevnikov mlajše železne dobe, in *Kelti: Kelti in njihovi sodobniki na ozemlju Jugoslavije*. (Ed.) D. Božič, Ljubljana: Narodni muzej Ljubljana, 77–82.
- Čizmajer, M., 1996.** Neue Erkenntnisse zur Verzierung keltischer Waffen in Mähren. *Études celtiques*, 32, 127–136.
- DeMarras, E. and Robb J., 2013.** Art makes society: an introductory visual essay. *World Art*, 3(1), 3–22.
- DeNavarro, J. M., 1959.** Zu einigen Schwertscheiden aus La Tène. *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, 40, 79–119.
- Drnić, I., 2020.** Griffins from the Danube. Early La Tène sword in decorated scabbard from Sotin, Eastern Croatia. *Stydia Hercynia*, 24(2), 98–126.
- Гарашанин, Д., 1954.** *Каталог метала I*. Београд: Народни музеј
- Ginoux, N., 2002.** La figuration et sa déconstruction: l'exemple du motif de la paire d'animaux fantastiques affrontés sur les pourreau d'épée laténiens. *Sbornik národního muzea v Praze. Řada A – Historie*, 56(1–4), 71–82.
- Ginoux, N., 2007.** *La theme symbolique de "la paire de dragons" sur les fourreaux celtiques (IVe – Iie siècles avant J.-C.)*. Etude iconographique et typologique (BAR International Series 1702). Oxford: BAR Publishing
- Ginoux, N., 2008.** Pendragon's ancestors, in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium, Vol 28*. (Eds.) K. Conley, E. Lehmann and S. Zeiser, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures, 63–78.
- Ginoux, N., 2012.** Images and visual codes of early Celtic warrior elites (5th – 4th centuries BC), in *Kunst und Kommunikation: Zentralisierungsprozesse in Gesellschaften des europäischen Barbarikums im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Ed.) Ch. Pare, Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 179–190.
- Guštin, M., 1982.** Keltische Schwerter aus Jugoslawien, in *L'Art Celtique de la période d'expansion IVe st III siècles avant notre ère*. (Eds.) P.M. Duval and V. Kruta, Hautes Études du monde gréco-romain 13, Genève, Paris: Librairie Droz, 191–202.
- Guštin, M., 1983.** La tomba n.6 di Dobova e l'ornamento delle lance La Tène, in *Popoli e facies culturali celtiche a nord e a sud delle Alpi dal V al I secolo a.C.* Milano: Civico museo archeologico di Milano, 100–105.
- Guštin, M., 1984a.** Die Kelten in Jugoslawien. *Jahrbuch Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum*, 31, 305–363.
- Guštin, M., 1984b.** Prazgodovinski grobovi z vozovi na ozemlju Jugoslavije, in *Keltski voz*. (Eds.) M. Guštin and L. Pauli, Brežice: Pokrajinski muzej Brežice, 111–132.
- Јовановић, Б., 1977.** Примерци животињског стила скитског и трачког гвозденог доба у Србији. *Старинар*, 27, 19–31.
- Јовановић, В., 1999.** Die Tradition der skythischen Eisenzeit in der frühen Latènezeit des Nordbalkans, in *Le Djerdap – Les Portes de Fer à la deuxième moitié du premier millénaire av. J. C. jusqu'aux guerres daciques*. (Eds.) M. Garašanin, P. Roman, I. Stînga, N. Tasić and M. Vasić, Kolloquium in Kladovo–Drobeta-Turnu Severin (September–October 1998), Beograd: Arheološki institut, Balkanološki insitut, Srpska akademija znanosti i umetnosti, 37–40.
- Јовановић, А., 2007.** *Kelti na sotočju Save in Krke*. Brežice: Posavski muzej Brežice
- Ljuština, M., and Ninčić I., 2017.** Scythian Weapons and Horse Harness in the territory of Serbia. *Археологія і давня історія України*, 2,23, 245–254.
- Megaw, M.R. and Megaw J.V.S., 1989.** *The Italian job*. Some implications of recent finds of Celtic scabbards decorated with dragon-pairs. *Mediterranean Archaeology*, 2, 85–100.
- Megaw, M.R. and Megaw J.V.S., 2001.** *Celtic art. From its beginnings to the Book of Kells. Revised and expanded edition*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Megaw, J.V.S. and Megaw M.R., 1990.** „Semper aliquid novum...“ Celtic dragon-pairs re-reviewed. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 42, 55–72.
- Müller, F., 2014.** Theorie der keltischen Kunst: Ein Versuch, in *Celtic art in Europe. Making connections. Essays in honour of Vincent Megaw on his 80th birthday*. (Eds.) C. Gosden, S. Crawford and K. Ulmschneider, Oxford, Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 28–38.
- Ortman, S., Cabanis, A., Sturm, J. and Bettencourt L., 2015.** Settlement scaling and increasing returns in an ancient society. *Science Advances*, 1(1), 1–8.
- Popović, P., 1992.** The Scordisci from the fall of Macedonia to the Roman conquest, in *Scordisci and the native population in the middle Danube region*. (Ed.) N. Tasić, Posebna izdanja 48, Beograd: Balkanološki institut, Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 35–52.
- Stöllner, T., 1998.** Grab 102 von Dürrnberg bei Hallein. Bemerkungen zu den Dürrnberger Kriegergräbern der Frühlatènezeit. *Germania*, 76, 59–168.
- Szabó, M., 1989a.** Beiträge zur Geschichte des Keltischen Drachenpaarmotivs, in *Communicationes archaeologicae Hungariae*. (Ed.) I. Fodor, Budapest: Magyar nemzeti múzeum, 119–128.
- Szabó, M., 1989b.** Contribution au problème du style plastique laténien dans la cuvette des Karpates. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 41, 2–32.
- Szabó, M., 1996a.** L'expansion celte et l'armement décoré. *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome – Antiquité* 108(2), 523–553.
- Szabó, M., and Petres É.F., 1992.** *Decorated weapons of the La Tène Iron Age in the Carpathian basin* (Inventaria praehistorica Hungariae V). Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum
- Тодоровић, Ј., 1967.** Праисторијске некрополе у Ритопеку. *Старинар*, 17, 153–162.
- Тодоровић, Ј., 1971.** *Каталог праисторијских металних предмета*. Београд: Музеј града Београда
- Тодоровић, Ј., 1972.** *Praistorijska Karaburma I: Nekropola mađeg гвозdenog doba*. Beograd: Muzej grada Beograda
- Тодоровић, Ј., 1974.** *Skordisci: istorija i kultura*. Novi Sad, Beograd: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine i Savez arheoloških društava Jugoslavije
- Тодоровић, Ј., 1975.** Двојни ратнички гроб Скордиска из Ритопека. *Старинар*, 24–25, 79–83.
- Васић-Деримановић, Ј., Адамовић, Н., and Николић Е., 2016.** Двојни гроб и случаји налази из античког периода из Ритопека. *Гласник Српског археолошког друштва*, 32, 155–180.