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Perirrhanteria stands from Krševica Kamniti bazi oltarjev *Perirrhanteria* iz Krševice

Petar Popović

Abstract: The stone stands from a settlement of the 4th century BC and first decades of the 3rd century BC were discovered at the site of Kale-Krševica in south-eastern Serbia. The other finds permit the conclusion that they were the lower segments of ritual objects – altars, *perirrhanterion*.

Key words: Kale-Krševica, urban settlement, cult, *perirrhanteria* stands, 4th–3rd centuries BC

Izveček: Na najdišču Kale-Krševica v jugovzhodni Srbiji sta bili v naselbini, ki sodi v 4. in prva desetletja 3. stoletja pr. n. š., odkriti kamniti bazi, ki ju avtor interpretira kot baze ritualnih oltarjev, *perirrhanterion*.

Ključne besede: Kale-Krševica, urbana naselbina, kult, *perirrhanteria*, 4.–3. stol. pr. n. š.

During the course of archaeological excavations of the large complex in the lower part of the site of Kale-Krševica in 2006 two stone columns of considerable size were found lying next to each other in association with other finds in the lower part of the large excavated area (Fig. 1). The continuation of the

excavations revealed that these are almost completely preserved high stands, which supported water basins. They were called *louterion* (λουτήριον), or *perirrhanterion* (περιρραντήριον), depending on either a profane or sacred function. They were made in one piece (usually of baked clay) or in segments (as are the examples



Figure 1 Structures in the lower part of the site – „hydrotechnical complex“ (2006).

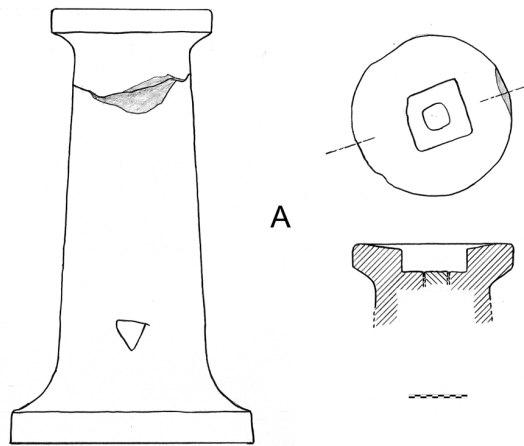


Figure 2 *Stand A.*

under discussion). They were characteristic of Greek regions or areas under Greek influence (Iozzo 1981, 143–145; Radić 1988, 36–37).

Both of the examples from Krševica are made of a light beige-cream coloured conglomerate and differ slightly in size and some details.

Stand A (*Fig. 2*)

Kale-Krševica, suburbium, trench E, profile II-III/06 („hydrotechnical complex“)

Height 0.755 m, base diameter 0.428 m, rim diameter 0.28 m. An approximately square recess (0.102 × 0.096 m, 0.038 m in depth) was carved in the place intended for the basin. A hole with the remains of a stone wedge (0.04 m in width), probably the last remnant of the receptacle, was recorded in the centre. A triangular piece of grey stone was found near the stand base, carefully inlaid at the point where the stand had been damaged.

Stand B (*Fig. 3*)

Kale-Krševica, suburbium, trench E, profile II-III/06 („hydrotechnical complex“)

Height 0.64 m, base diameter 0.412 m, rim diameter 0.24 m. The circular recess for the attachment of the receptacle has a diameter of 0.126 m and is 0.024–0.034 m in depth.

Observation suggests that both basins were substantial in weight, and were made of stone. According to the stand height they could have been up to 1 m in diameter.

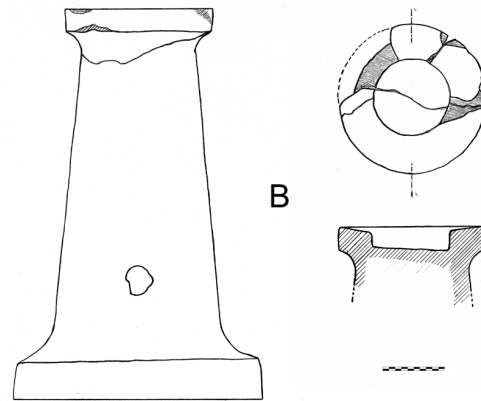


Figure 3 *Stand B.*

Therefore, there was no dilemma in the selection of the topic for this paper, dedicated to our colleague and friend Bojan Djurić. Thus, we have chosen for this occasion the largest of the most beautiful stone objects, which have been discovered in Krševica. Objects of this kind would not perhaps draw special attention, if it were not for the fact that this find was encountered within a settlement dating from the 4th century BC and first decades of the 3rd century BC, situated in the heart of the Balkans far from the Greek regions (*Fig. 4*). The most recent excavations indicate that this settlement consisted of the acropolis and suburbium, which were surrounded by a rampart and covered an area of circa 5 ha. The rampart, buildings, walls and various structures were discovered within an area of over 500 m² at the lower part of the site and were merely part of a much larger complex with urban structures extending along the



Figure 4 *Location of the site of Krševica.*



Figure 5 *Second horizon with structures and stands in situ (2006).*

Krševica river. Although the settlement existed for just over a hundred years, quite specific conditions and circumstances led to intensive building activities and a change in the initial concept and basic appearance of this part of the settlement. These were the result of drastic hydrological changes and rising ground water level, which endangered the structures close to the river. The modern situation has not changed with most of the site being under water for much of the year. Archaeological excavations are possible only if the pumps are in continuous operation. This situation resulted in three building horizons as the outcome of the successive filling and leveling of earlier structures. The entire central area is occupied by an ashlar faced stone platform (circa 5 m in width and over 2 m height). Two walls of large stone blocks ran in divergent directions up the slope (*Fig. 1*). It is assumed that they regulated water flow and protected the settlement on the slope from excessive rainfall. In this way the area was divided into a southern and northern zone, whilst the rampart that protected the settlement towards the river extended in the east. A completely preserved vaulted structure (most probably a reservoir) was discovered in the southern zone in the previous year, whilst excavation in the northern zone revealed many postholes cut into the subsoil, sections of wall, remains of ovens and other features, dating from the earliest horizon. As a result of the change in the water level this part of the complex had been covered with soil to a depth of up to one metre. The second horizon with ovens



Figure 6 *Stands in situ (2006).*

and remains of various features, including the above mentioned stands, was established on top of this. The summary account of the stratigraphic data of this section of the site concludes with the third and final horizon, that is represented by a building with two rooms, which was built against the northern face of the platform after the leveling of the previous horizon (*Fig. 5* and *1*; Popović 2005; *id.* 2006, 525; *id.* 2009a; *id.* 2009b).

It is difficult to say anything more precise about the second horizon, which we are interested in at this moment. The only recorded remains are those of the wall of a rectangular structure. Regular rows of postholes that could be part of a structure that was built of light material were found beside this wall (*Fig. 5*). The two stands were found lying next to each other within the structure and parallel to the single row of stones. They were carefully arranged and secured with pieces of stone (*Fig. 6*). Traces of burning have been noted in many places with broad traces, possibly fragments of burnt timber beams, next to the stands. Fragments of bricks were found under and around the stands, whilst a large quantity of potsherds, many of them from fine wares, were scattered over a large area.

Both stands had been deposited in a safe place for use on a later occasion, but it is obvious that the upper parts, the water basins, are missing. The fragments of these massive objects would have been easily recognized, but not a single piece that could be identified with certainty as a fragment of a stone

basin has been recorded within the entire area. The preserved basins could have been transferred to some more suitable place, but it still remains unclear as to why the stands had been left behind. In view of this, the question may be raised as to whether corresponding stone receptacles existed on the site at this given moment. The two stands were made of conglomerate that was not identified in this area and the basins should have been made of a non-porous higher quality stone. These objects of distinct purpose were usually produced by specialist workshops, such as those in Corinth or Athens (Iozzo 1987; *id.* 1989; Sparkes, Talcott 1970, 219). Therefore, we assume that these examples arrived from Greece together with coins, amphorae or tableware from the Attic and north Aegean workshops (Popović 2007a; *id.* 2007b). If there were any interruptions in the procurement chain, then stands without basins would not serve any purpose and the settlement would have remained without the altars. These are just a few of possible solutions and there is an analogous example that could be considered, which was discovered during excavations at the site of Vardarski Rid (ancient *Gortynia*) in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The structure known as the „House with a Sanctuary“ contained a marble stand of high quality manufacture. It also had a square recess at the place intended for the basin like the one on the example from Krševica (Mitrevski 2005, 81–83, Fig. 79).

These objects, regardless of their various functions, for washing and bathing, or libations and other rituals, could only have been distinguished according to the archaeological context (Fig. 7). The stands from the lower part of the site were found in a layer, which contained a large quantity of local and imported pottery, as well as animal bones. Much of this pottery was fine tableware, which was scattered over a large area. As a result the conservators required a considerable amount of time to reconstruct a few complete vessels out of the very small sherds. This work is not yet complete and mention can only be made at this moment of just two groups of interesting examples, which may be associated with the context of this find. The concentration of fine tableware in

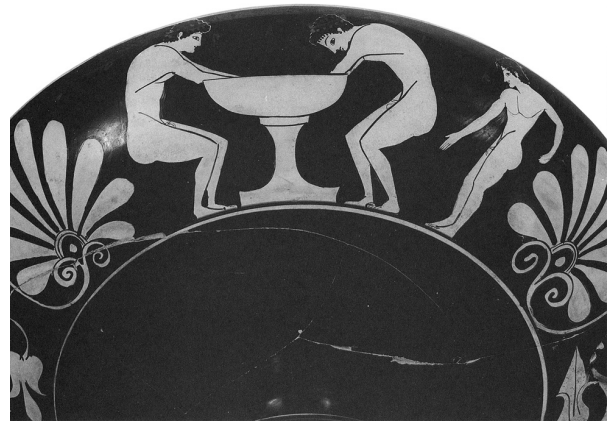


Figure 7 *Loutorion*. Image on an Athenian red figure cup (after Oakley 1992, Pl. 46.2).

this section of the complex was obviously not accidental and such vessels for preparing and serving wine could only have been used on special occasions, emulating the *symposia*, cult rites or rituals.

The first group consists of two fragmented thin-walled vessels of almost identical shape, bowl-shaped cups or *Kantharoi*. They are 7.4 cm and 7.2 cm in height, the bases of both are 4 cm in diameter. They are reddish in colour on the exterior and have nuances of an olive colour on the interior. The shapes are dated to the end of 4th and the beginning of the 3rd centuries BC (Sparkes, Talcott 1970, Fig. 7, no. 690; Rotroff 1997, 92, Fig. 11.131).

The second group comprises two black-glazed *phialai*, which differ in just a few details. One has a ribbed lower wall with a diameter of 16 cm and a height of 5 cm (Popović 2006, Fig. 8.6; *id.* 2007b, Fig. 5.3). The second is undecorated with a diameter of 15.2 cm and a height of 4.4 cm. The *phialai* were wine vessels that were usually used for pouring libations to the gods in religious rites, but were also used on other occasions, including various ceremonies and *symposia* (Sparkes, Talcott 1970, 105; Clark *et al.* 2002, 127). Such pottery vessels are rare, but similar forms in metal have been encountered from Greece to Romania (Θεμελης, Τουρατσγλου 1997, 66; Popescu 1997, 186, 198). There were no less than 109 *phialai* among many other silver vessels dating to the 4th century BC in the well-known Rogozen treasure from north-western Bulgaria (Mapa30B 1996, 9–57).



Figure 8 *The two Kantharos cups.*

These two examples from Krševica alone might not be considered as strong evidence for the purpose of the stone stands (as altars parts). However there are other finds, which more convincingly bear witness to cult and ritual activity in this section of the site. Deer antlers sacrificed and dedicated to a hunting cult have been discovered near the slope not far from the stands. A *boukranion*, the head of an aurochs (*bos primigenius*) was found in the southern section of the site, next to the vaulted of the building. Finally, in addition to other objects, many animal skeletons were found in the process of emptying this large structure. After analysis it became clear that ten horses and twenty dogs had been sacrificed and thrown into the abandoned building (Popović 2009b; *id.* 2009c). The various structures of cult purpose within such a restricted area are eloquent testament to the inhab-



Figure 9 *The two black-glazed Phialai.*

itants of this so far anonymous settlement, which maintained close contacts with the Aegean throughout its entire existence. It seems that they were ill favoured by destiny and they made tremendous efforts in their struggle with the rising water in an attempt to preserve the vital riverside sections of the settlement. Thus, their desire to gain the favour of the gods is more than understandable. There was always room for a variety of cults and rituals and also for two sacrificial altars, the *perirrhanteria*.

Illustrations: Nebojša Borić, Nenad Lazarević, Slobodan Tripković, Aca Đorđević, Petar Popović.

Conservators: Zvezdana Popović, Maja Živković.

Povzetek

Med izkopavanji leta 2006 na najdišču Kale-Krševica sta bila med drugim odkrita tudi dva popolnoma ohranjena kamnita podstavka. Predstavljata spodnji del oltarjev na visoki nogi, ki so imeli širok in plitev recipient. Ti predmeti so bili glede na namen, posvetni ali sakralni, imenovani *lauterion* (λαυτήριον) ali *perirrhanterion* (περιρραντήριον). Značilni so za grški prostor ali območja pod grškim vplivom. Izdelani so bili iz keramike iz enega ali več delov. Obravnavana primerka sta večdelna. Predmet te vrste morda ne bi pritegnil posebne pozornosti, če ne bi šlo za odkritje znotraj naselbine iz 4. in prvih desetletji 3. stol. pr. n. š. iz osrčja Balkana, daleč od območja, ki je imelo tesne vezi z Egejo. Rezultati zadnjih raziskav kažejo, da je naselbino sestavljala akropola s predmestjem. Celotno območje naselbine, ki obsega okoli 5 ha, pa je bilo obdano z obzidjem. Raziskani predeli z obzidjem in s stavbami ter različni objekti predstavljajo le del veliko večjega kompleksa z urbanimi strukturami, ki se je raztezalo vzdolž reke Krševice. Zaradi hidroloških sprememb je bil ta del naselja ogrožen, problem naraščanja nivoja vode so takratni prebivalci reševali z zaporednim nasipavanjem in zasipavanjem starejših stavb, kar je bistveno spremenilo prvotno urbanistično podobo. Pojav različnih obredov in kultov, ki so dokumentirani na tem razmeroma omejenem in majhnem prostoru, lahko razumemo tudi kot odogovor na nove hidrološke razmere.

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