

Tracing Mobile Craftsmen in the La Tène Lower Traisen Valley and Beyond

Peter C. Ramsel

Abstract

The activities of craftsmen (including mobile ones) have occasionally been the subject of works on the La Tène period in Lower Austria. In this case, the research concerns special forms of decoration on ceramics in the Lower Traisen Valley, namely oblique hatchings between two concentric circles, which are discussed based on examples in the Traisen Valley and the surrounding areas and may be an indication of the presence in this area of mobile craftsmen.

Keywords

Middle Danube region, La Tène period, ceramics, decoration

Over the last few years, during the processing of La Tène period cemeteries from northeastern Austria, similar and identical decorations on artefacts or decorations executed in the same technique have repeatedly come to light. These decorations were found on bronze and iron as well as on bone and pottery. This area, also known as the NAG (Northeastern Austrian Group) (Ramsel 2020), covers the area of Lower Austria, the northern part of the province of Burgenland and the surrounding areas.

As part of the FWF project ‘Celts Across The Alps’ (CATA), investigating the cemeteries of Franzhausen, Walpersdorf (1997/98) and Gemeinlebarn, which are located in the Lower Traisen Valley in Lower Austria, similar

decoration techniques and motifs were observed on several pieces when analysing the ceramic decorations.

In this particular case, we are dealing with the motif in which two concentric circles are used with a diagonal hatching between them (Fig. 1). Here are the selected examples:

- *Linsenflasche*: Gemeinlebarn (Lower Austria), Grave 82/13 (Ramsel 2012)
- Bowl: Ossarn (Lower Austria) 1984, Grave 17/10 (Neugebauer 1992, Fig. 12/10)
- Bowl: Modrá (Moravia), Obj. 7/2003 (Goláňová 2018, Fig. 56)
- *Linsenflasche*: Gars-Thunau (Lower Austria), FNo. 57353, 1996 (Karwowski 2006, Fig. 32)

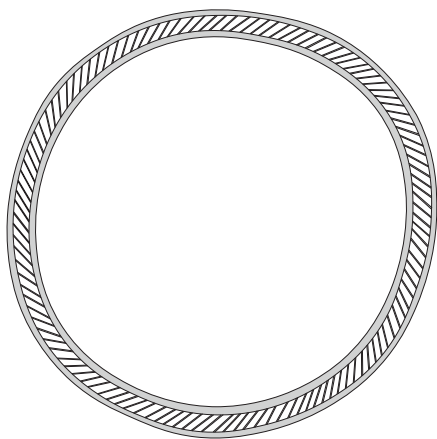


Fig. 1. Mentioned and discussed decoration (L. Kohl).

Gemeinlebarn, Grave 82 (Fig. 2a)

Inhumation of a male (?) individual (25–40 years old), grave shaft approximately rectangular with strongly rounded corners, l. 2.92 m, w. about 1.63 m, 0.48 m below the top of the humus, at the level of the top of the gravel. The skeleton lies orientated S-N on the west side of the burial pit in an extended supine position (FNo. 1). Iron spearhead in the southwest corner (FNo. 4), bronze animal head brooch in the southern part between pottery and bones (FNo. 5), bronze fragment (FNo. 6) and bronze hollow ring (FNo. 7) in the northeast part of the burial, vessel with two *Linsenflaschen* in the southeast corner (FNos. 11–13). The *Linsenflasche* FNo. 13 (Fig. 2b), which also has a complex pattern of compass ornamentation, should be emphasised in this context.

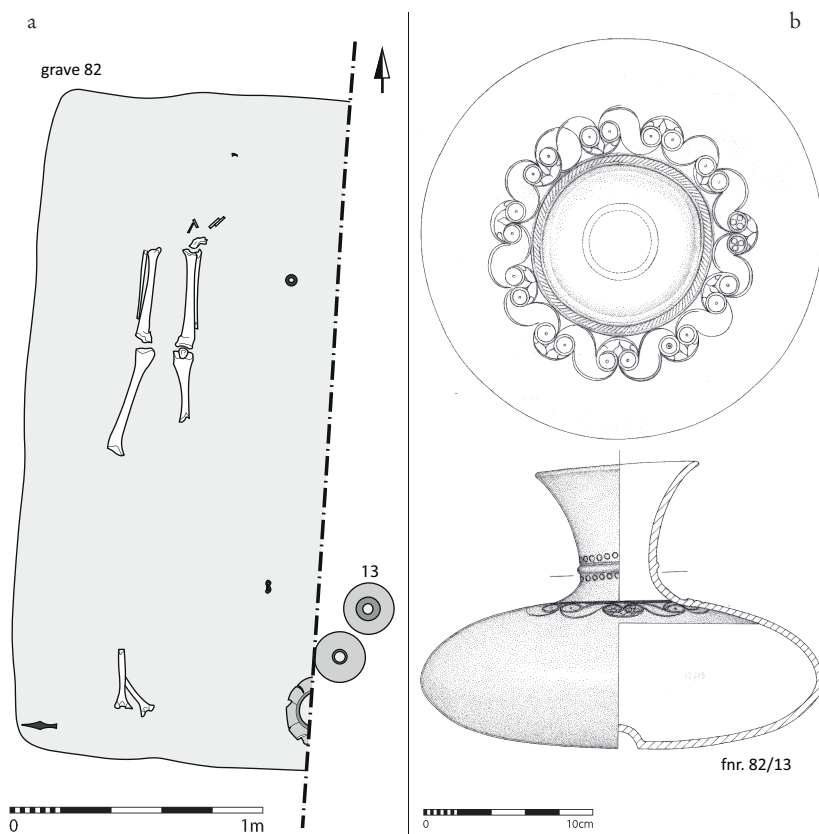


Fig. 2. Gemeinlebarn, Grave 82. – a. The grave (A. Gatringer, L. Kohl); b. *Linsenflasche*, FNo. 82/13 (M. Imam).

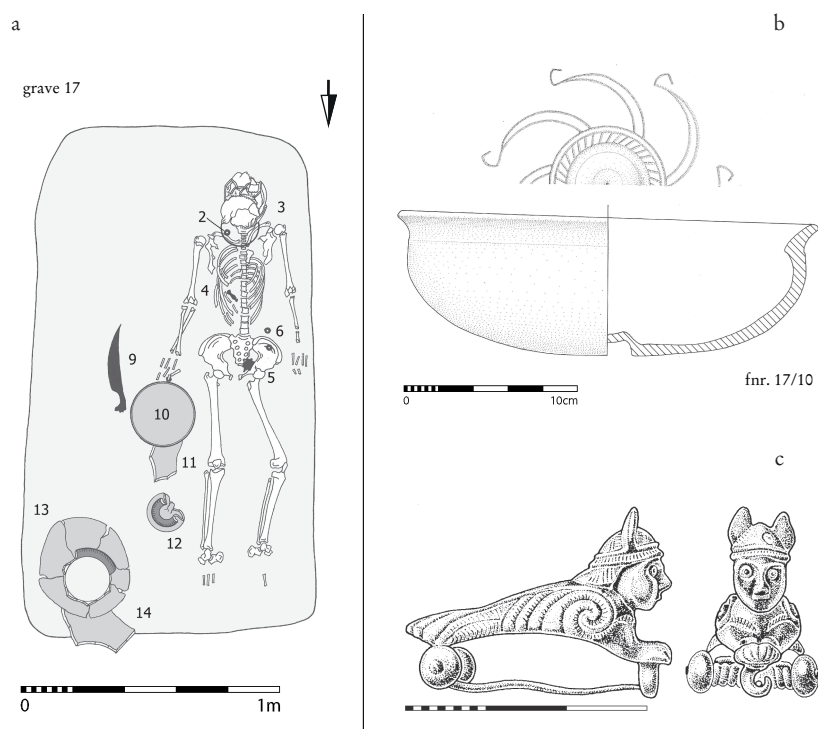


Fig. 3. Ossarn 1984, Grave 17. – a. The grave (A. Gatringer, M. Vignoli); b. Bowl, FNo. 17/10 (L. Leitner); c. Figurative Sphinx fibula (L. Leitner; Urban 2012, 1428).

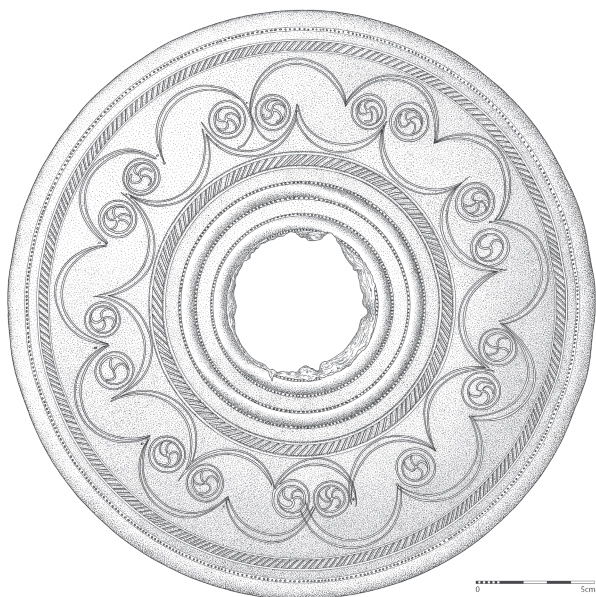


Fig. 4. *Linsenflasche* from Gars-Thunau (after Karwowski 2006, Fig. 32; B. Lethmayer).

FNo. 13: *Linsenflasche*, omphalos, domed lentil-shaped body, short conical neck with bulge (on both sides of the bulge framed by a groove above and below, followed by a frieze of simple circular stamps), convex rim; below the neck, two concentric circles, the space in between filled by diagonal hatching, the shoulder engraved with a complex circular pattern (circles connected in various ways by floral motifs); finely slipped clay, smoothed surface, h. 16.9 cm, belly dm. 24.1 cm, rim dm. 9.8 cm.

Ossarn 1984, Grave 17 (Fig. 3a)

Inhumation of an adolescent individual (15–17 years old), approximately rectangular grave pit with rounded corners, nearly S-N orientated, l. 1.95 m, w. 1.10 m; skeleton in extended supine position, on E side, orientated SW-NE, right forearm rotated. Necklace (FNo. 3), glass bead (FNo. 2) and bronze roll (FNo. 2) in the neck area; two fibulae (FNos. 4 and 7) in the chest/abdominal area; on left pelvis, two bronze buttons (FNo. 6); on the right hand, a ring (FNo. 8); north of the right-hand, a bowl (FNo. 10) and bowl fragment (FNo. 11); next to it, an iron knife (FNo. 9), then a small vessel (FNo. 12); in NE corner, a large vessel (FNo. 13) and pottery fragment (FNo. 14). In addition to the already known figurative brooch (Neugebauer 1992, Fig. 24/11) and the bronze belt hook with box-shaped fitting (Neugebauer 1992, Fig. 38/4), the bowl with interior decoration (Fig. 3b) will be described in more detail.

FNo. 10: bowl, wheel turned/post-turned (?); fine slipped clay; omphalos; calotte-shaped lower part; shoulder step; flaring, convex rim; rim thickened inside with

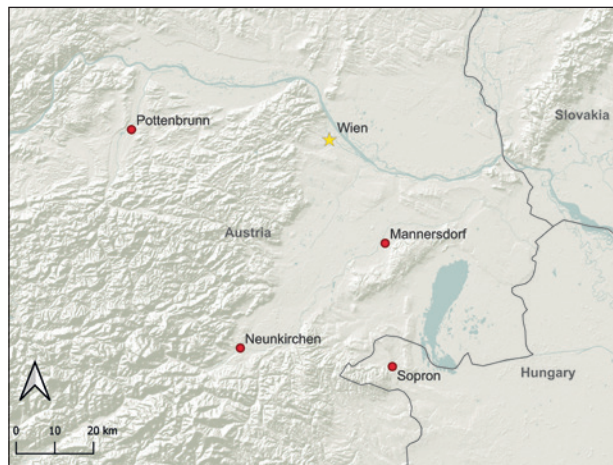


Fig. 5. Distribution map of the ceramic stamp (Mapping: L. Kohl; basemap: www.esri.com).

edge; omphalos pushed out so inside visible. Interior design: band with slanting grooves around the omphalos; double concentric grooves; hooks swinging to the left, converging at the tip and having a small hook in the opposite direction; rim dm. 24.4 cm, h. 8.0 cm, wt. 0.6–0.8 cm; omphalos dm. 2.8 cm.

Modrá, Obj. 7/2003

Sunken house, 450 × 460 cm, nearly rectangular, disturbed by the border of the excavation trench (Goláňová 2018, 36, Fig. 15). Bowl, wheel turned, omphalos, nearly calotte-shaped lower part, convex rim with shoulder edge (Goláňová 2018, 52/2); dm. 17.0 cm, h. 4.4 cm, wt. 0.3–0.4 cm. Interior decoration: five circular eye stamps on the turned-out omphalos; six concentric circles; oblique hatching in the space between the first and second circular eye stamps with spacing between the third and fourth and the fifth and sixth circular stamps (Fig. 3c; Goláňová 2018, Pl. 5/36).

Gars-Thunau, FNo. 57.353

Linsenflasche, flat, lancet-shaped body, neck broken off; the outer rim is turned out with circumferential beading; on the underside, 3 × 2 grooves; on the upper side (from outside to inside), a groove with incisions; double groove with oblique hatching; complex pattern in circular decoration, also with small circles with a swirl of four arms; another double groove filled with oblique hatching, as well as two circumferential beads with accompanying incised grooves; smoothed surface; h. 5.6 cm, belly dm. 25 cm, wt. 0.8 cm (Fig. 4).

Conclusion

There are, however, other examples of the same or similar pottery decoration in the area in question. For the first time,

similarities could be recognised as a result of the identification of four ceramic vessels from Mannersdorf am Leithagebirge, Sopron-Krautacker, Neunkirchen and Pottenbrunn. These are all decorated with the same stamp (Fig. 5). A relative chronological sequence of production was established based on the level of wear of the stamp. This is the first time that the possibility of mobile craftsmen has been pointed out.

Compass ornamentation is another type of ceramic decoration. This was also observed on other materials such as bronze and bone and has already been discussed in more detail (Ramsl 2024; Ramsl 2025). The bowl with internal decoration from Oberndorf/Ebene (Grave 1982, 9/16) serves as an example (Fig. 6). New specimens are constantly being discovered and recorded in the current project ‘Celts Across The Alps’ (CATA).

All of the previously published and newly presented examples show that different types of ceramic decoration were used in the area described. They may indicate that mobile artisans were circulating within this area, possibly practising their crafts at different locations on a seasonal basis.

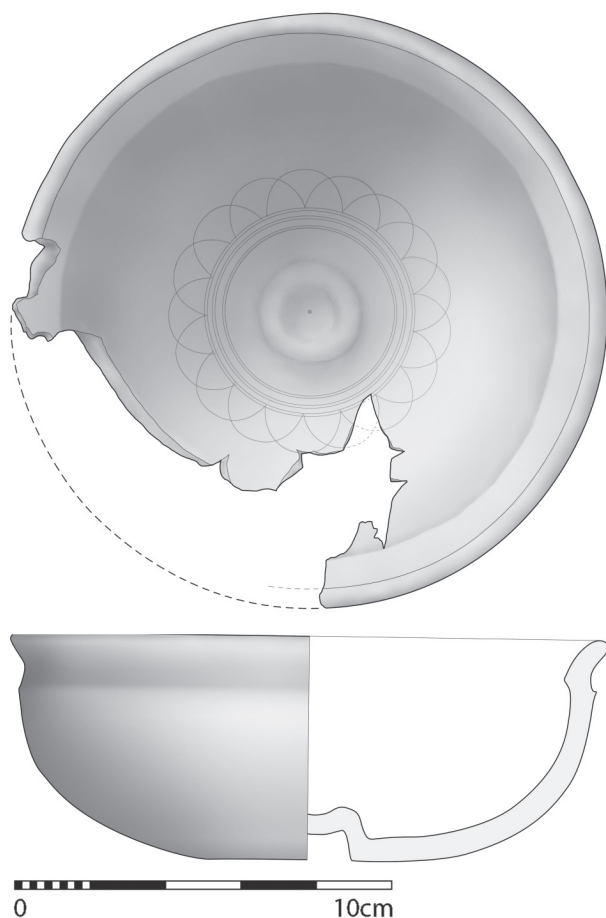


Fig. 6. Oberndorf/Ebene, Grave 1982, 9/16, Bowl with compass decoration on the inside (M. Vignoli).

Acknowledgements

At this point I want to say thank you to Leona Kohl (CATA, Vienna), Patrik Urban (CATA, Vienna/Brno), Christoph Blesl (BDA, Vienna) and Petra Goláňová (Masaryk University, Brno). The work was fully funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF P36086-G), ‘Celts Across The Alps’ (CATA).

References

- Goláňová 2018
P. Goláňová, The Early La Tène Period in Moravia. *Studien zur Archäologie Europas* 32, Bonn 2018.
- Karwowski 2006
M. Karwowski, Thunau am Kamp – Eine befestigte Höhensiedlung (Grabungen 1965–1990): Die latènezeitlichen Siedlungsfunde. *Mitteilungen der Prähistorischen Kommission* 61, Vienna 2006.
- Neugebauer 1992
J.-W. Neugebauer, Die Kelten im Osten Österreichs. *Wissenschaftliche Schriftenreihe Niederösterreich* 3, St. Pölten – Vienna 1992.
- Ramsl 2012
P. C. Ramsl, Gemeinlebarn. In: S. Sievers, O. H. Urban, P. C. Ramsl (Eds.), *Lexikon zur Keltischen Archäologie*. *Mitteilungen der Prähistorischen Kommission* 73, Vienna 2012, 622–623.
- Ramsl 2020
P. C. Ramsl, The northeastern Austria group in the early and middle La Tène periods (NAG). In: G. Pierrevelcin, J. Kysela, S. Fichtl (Eds.), *Unité et diversité du monde celtique. Actes du 42^e colloque international de l’Association Française pour l’Étude de l’Âge du Fer*, Prague, 10–13 mai 2018. *Collection Afeaf* 2, Prague 2020, 367–381.
- Ramsl 2024
P. C. Ramsl, La Tène period compass ornaments in the Lower Austrian Traisen Valley. In: F. Olmer, B. Girard, R. Roure (Eds.), *Expressions artistiques des sociétés des âges du Fer. 46^e colloque international de l’Association Française pour l’Étude de l’Âge du Fer*, Aix-en-Provence 26–28 mai 2022. *Collection Afeaf* 6, Paris – Prague 2024, 179–184.
- Ramsl 2025
P. C. Ramsl, Going round and round – compass decoration in the La Tène period of the Lower Traisen Valley, Lower Austria, *Študijné Zvesti* 72/1, 2025, 167–182.
- Urban 2012
O. H. Urban, Ossarn. In: S. Sievers, O. H. Urban, P. C. Ramsl (Eds.), *Lexikon zur Keltischen Archäologie*. *Mitteilungen der Prähistorischen Kommission* 73, Vienna 2012, 1427–1428.

Peter C. Ramsl
Department of Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology
University of Vienna
Franz-Klein-Gasse 1
1190 Vienna
Austria
peter.ramsl@univie.ac.at
orcid.org/0000-0002-1906-3875