

# ANOTHER GLASS LAMP FROM PANNONIA

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## ABSTRACT

The use of glass lamps can be traced back to the early Roman imperial period, at which time they were modeled after clay *lucernae*. A very small number of them have been preserved in their entirety. When fragmented, they are very difficult to recognize. In the late imperial period, glass lamps were made in a significantly larger number, were different in shape, and were used to illuminate private, public, and sacred spaces. This paper presents a fragment of glass lamp from Cibalae.

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Scholarship has thus far registered only about 20 glass lamps in the shape of the Roman clay *lucernae*.<sup>1</sup> Compared to other types of Roman glass artifacts, this is an extremely small number. This does not mean they were not in use, but due to the fragility of the material, they are rarely preserved in their entirety and the lamp fragments are very difficult to recognize.

Until recently, in the area of the Roman province of Dalmatia (present-day Croatia), only two such glass lamps had been found: one in the city of Split and another on the island of Vis.<sup>2</sup> Several years ago, the analysis of the glass material from the archaeological excavation of the Roman town of Mursa revealed the first fragment of a glass-lamp disk ever recorded from the area of the province of Pannonia, in present-day northern Croatia; the fragment was published in the paper “A Fragment of a Glass Lamp from Roman Mursa” (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

Analysis of the glass material from another Pannonian Roman city, Cibalae, uncovered another piece of glass with a circular opening in the middle. It is small, measuring 4 cm in length and 2.4 cm in width. Just as in Mursa,<sup>4</sup> this fragment was found in the fill of a Roman pit that was cut in digging the foundations for a newer structure. The fragment is free blown and made of opaque light-green glass. The circular opening in the middle points to the possibility that in its original form this was a fragment of a glass-lamp disk. The fragment is concave in the middle with an annular rib surrounding the opening, similar to the lamp disks from Pompeii<sup>5</sup> and Split

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1 Arioli 2020, 89.

2 Buljević 2006.

3 Vukmanić and Leljak 2018.

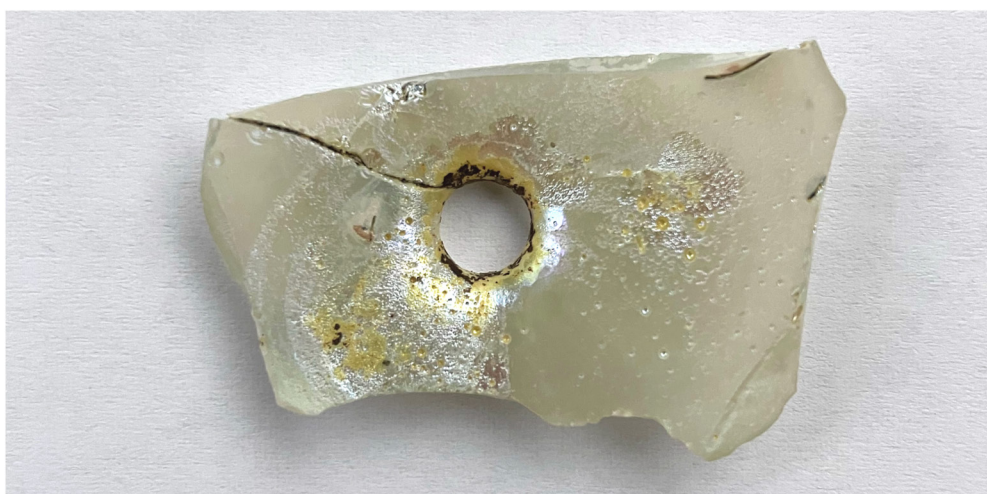
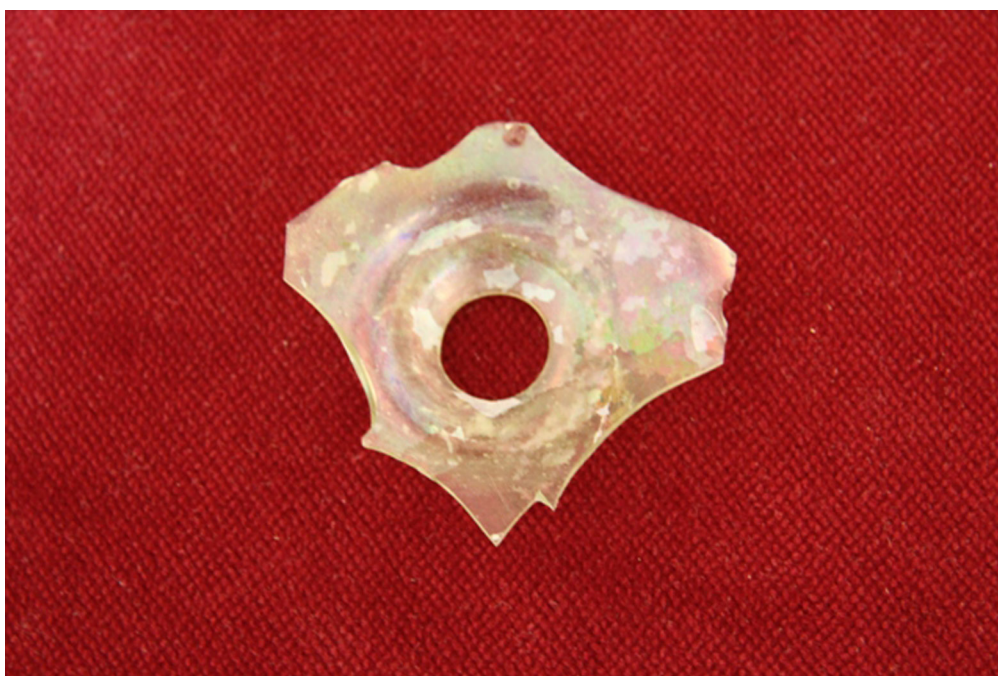
4 Vukmanić and Leljak 2018, 143.

5 Beretta and Di Pasquale 2004, 284–285.

## QUICK CITATION

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**FIG 1.** Fragment of a glass-lamp disk from Mursa. L. 6.5 cm; W. 6.4 cm. Second century CE. (Photo: Vedran Mesarić)



**FIG 2.** Fragment of a glass-lamp disk from Cibalae. L. 4 cm; W. 2.4 cm. Second or third century CE. (Photo: Mia Leljak)

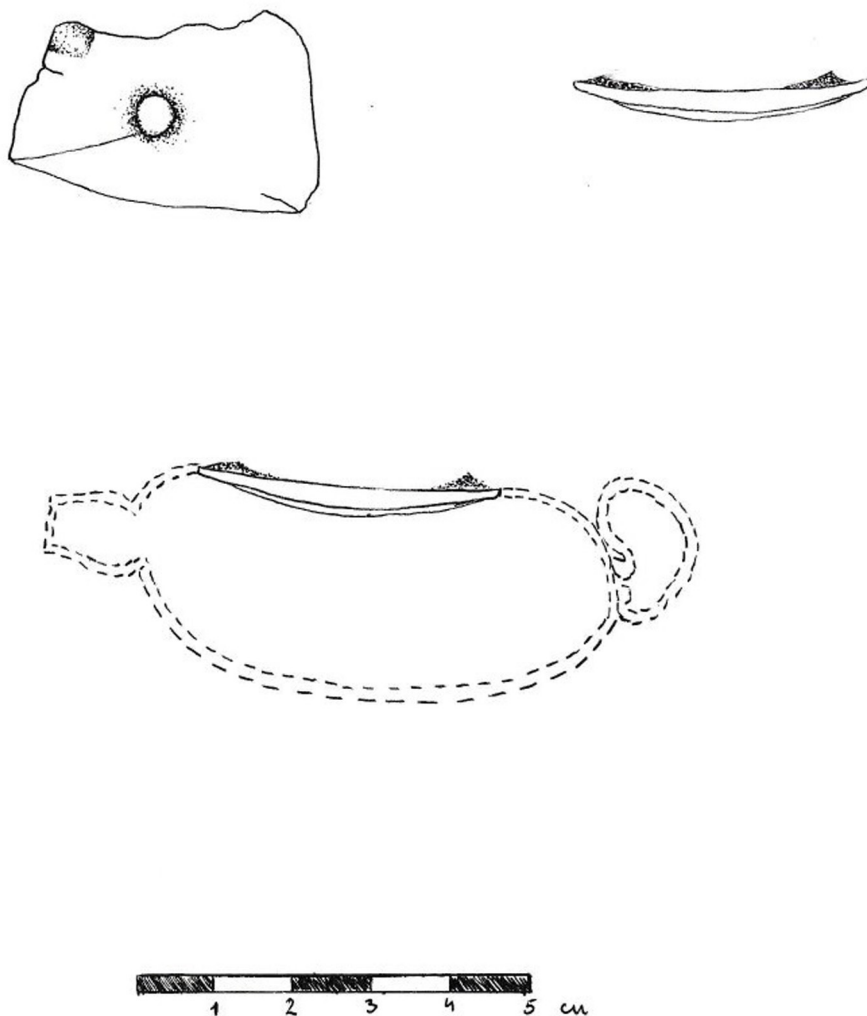


FIG 3. Drawing showing possible appearance of the lamp from Cibalae in Figure 2. (Drawing: Mirjana Pjevac)

(Figs. 2, 3).<sup>6</sup> The opening in the middle of the fragment is rather small, which is not unusual, since most other lamps found so far also have similar small openings.<sup>7</sup> The small hole further supports the hypothesis that this is a fragment of a lamp and not an inkwell. A comparative analysis of both vessel types was published by Christopher Lightfoot.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the size of the preserved fragment and the fact that no other parts of the vessel were discovered, the exact shape and appearance of the lamp cannot be determined. However, based on the mentioned elements and the comparison with other finds, especially the similar fragment from Mursa, it is very likely a fragment of a lamp disk. If so, this would mean that the fragments of two glass lamps have now been documented in southern Pannonia.

6 Buljević 2006, 109, fig. 1.

7 Arioli 2020, 95.

8 Lightfoot 2013.



Such glass oil lamps are characteristic of the first to third century.<sup>9</sup> The workshop origin of these lamps is unknown, but their distribution suggests western glassworking centers.<sup>10</sup>

## THE CONTEXT OF THE FIND

Colonia Aurelia Cibalae, today's city of Vinkovci in eastern Croatia, was an important Roman city in southern Pannonia. Due to its favorable location in the Pannonian valley on the banks of the Bosut River, in close vicinity of the Roman *limes*, the city found itself at many junctions of both roads and rivers that connected the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Even two Roman emperors, Valentinian I and Valens, were born there (Fig. 4).

To date, numerous archeological excavations have been carried out in Vinkovci and have brought to light significant information about the way of life and the appearance of the town from Roman period Pannonia.

The fragment of a glass-lamp disk was found at the Vinkovci-Korzo site during archaeological research carried out from May to July 2008. The excavations were conducted by the curator-archaeologist Hrvoje Vulić from the Gradski muzej Vinkovci (Municipal Museum of Vinkovci) and financed with city funding. The research location covers the area of King Zvonimir Street from the intersection with Ban Josip Jelačić Street to the intersection with Croatian Victims and Matija Antun Reljković Streets. The excavation area of probe B, where the lamp fragment was found, was 13 m × 24 m and the expected excavation depth was 3.2 m, according to the geomechanical project. The remains of older, probably Gepid and younger Roman, foundations of building structures were found on the site. They were both analyzed using the C-14 method and are dated to the periods 570–640 CE and 250–400 CE respectively (Fig. 5).<sup>11</sup>

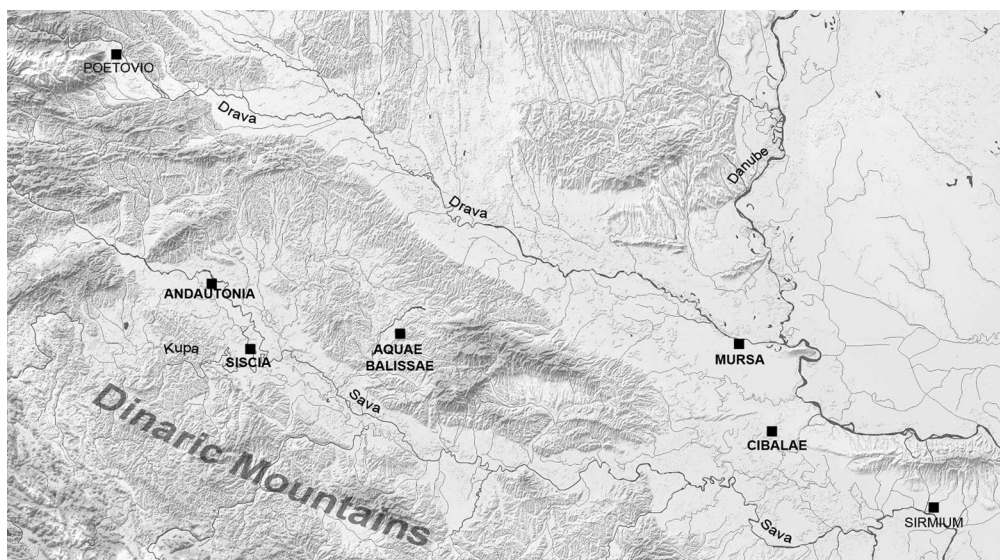


FIG 4. Map showing the location of the Cibalae. (Map: Tino Leleković)

9 Casagrande and Ceselin 2003, 35; Arioli 2020, 94.

10 Arioli 2020, 91, 93.

11 Vulić, Papeša, and Krznarić Škrivanko 2008.



**FIG 5.** Gepid house plan with waste pit from which the fragment in the southeast corner originates. (Photo: Gradski muzej Vinkovci)

Many fragments of glass vessels were found in probe B<sup>12</sup> (balsamaria, square bottles, beakers and bowls; fragments with facet-cut decoration, blue dots, incised lines; burnt glass), most of which indicate early Roman production and use, dating from the second half of the first to the third century CE. The fragment of a lamp disk from Cibalae is difficult to date precisely, as it was found in a waste pit cut by one of the foundations of the fifth-century Gepid house; the material in the pit shows a wide chronological range spanning from the third to the fifth century. However, as mentioned above, most glass fragments found in probe B are more characteristic of an earlier Roman period in typology. The color of the lamp fragment from Cibalae is also characteristic of an early Roman period, especially in southern Pannonia.<sup>13</sup> And, finally, the majority of all other Roman glass lamps known date between the first and third centuries CE. Therefore, based on all the evidence mentioned above we can assume that lamp was made in the third century at the latest, although the possibility of an earlier date is very likely.

## CONCLUSION

The fragment with an opening found in Cibalae is most likely a fragment of a glass disk of a Roman oil lamp modeled after its clay equivalent, which makes it the second discovered artifact, along with the one from Mursa, in the entire Croatian part of the former Roman province of Pannonia.

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished material.

<sup>13</sup> Leljak 2015, 51–55, 58.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was originally presented at an international glass conference, Along the Glass Trail, in Koper/Ljubljana, 2022, to celebrate the International Year of Glass. Since the conference publication is not planned, we modified the text and focused only on an as-yet-unpublished fragment of a Roman glass lamp in the shape of clay one, from Cibalae.

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