

Grave find of a clasp knife bone handle with a representation of Hercules from the position of Schicht's administrative building in the area of Mursa's eastern necropolis

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The paper deals with the issue of several skeletal graves found in 1937 during the construction of the Schicht-Lever chemical industry's administrative building in Osijek, present-day Saponia d. d., in Matije Gupca Street. Since the graves were not found during systematic archaeological excavations, and the finds in question are of an older date, archaeological documentation is completely missing and the only available data on some grave finds are registered in the first inventory book of the Museum, the so-called, Celestin's Book, in addition to the Meeting Minutes of Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa" (Antiquity Afficionados' Society "Mursa") from October 1937 and a newspaper article in Hrvatski list (Croatian Times) from December 1937. The paper examines the Roman clasp knife bone handle with a representation of Hercules found in one of the abovementioned graves discovered in Mursa's eastern necropolis.

Keywords: *clasp knife bone handle, Hercules, skeletal grave, eastern necropolis, Mursa*

Introduction

In 1937, during the construction of the Schicht-Lever chemical industry's administrative building in Osijek, present-day Saponia d. d. in Matije Gupca Street, several Roman brick-built skeletal graves were discovered. The graves were found in Mursa's eastern necropolis 1.75 meters deep, while the size and orientation of the burial are not known (Buntak 1937: 14; Bulat 1989: 34; Göricke-Lukić 2000: 40–41, 60, 136–137; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 88, 90–91). In her monograph *Sjeveroistočna nekropola rimske Murse (Northeastern Necropolis of the Roman Mursa)*, H. Göricke-Lukić categorized these graves as Graves 38–40 (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 18–19). According to H. Göricke-Lukić, Grave 38 is a type of brick-built grave with a triangular cross section, a Type I grave, in other words. This type of grave has a square bottom paved with bricks where the body of the deceased was placed with grave goods and then covered with bricks mounted on a ridge. The bricks were then attached with plaster and imbrex (ridge caps). Grave 39 belongs to Type 1/a graves which are prismatic with a flat roof, with the bottom and sides of the rectangular pit layered with bricks and covered with one or two rows of bricks. The sides are plastered. Grave 40 belongs to the type of prismatic grave with a sloping roof – Type 1/b. The bottom and sides of the rectangular pit are bricked up and plastered, while the bricks placed on the ridge make the roof of the tomb (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 18–19, 40–41, 136–137; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 27).

The issue of the so-called Graves 38–40

According to the records from *Celestin's Book* and *Inventarna knjiga I. and II. (Inventory Book I and II)*, it is evident that a systematic archaeological excavation was not carried out on the position of Schicht's administrative building, resulting in the lack of any documentation for the graves in question. Only sporadic data have been recorded on certain grave finds (type of find, location of find, dimensions), without details of grave units in the Museum inventory books, and with some information provided in the Meeting Minutes of the *Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa" (Antiquity Afficionados' Society "Mursa")* from October 1937 and in a newspaper article in *Hrvatski list (Croatian Times)*¹ from December 1937.

The reason for not carrying out archaeological excavation or at least supervision is lack of resources and professional staff at the Osijek City Museum at the time. More precisely, the Museum had only one expert employed full-time – Franjo Buntak². He assumed the role of head curator from prof. Vjekoslav Celestin³ on January 1, 1937 and performed all activities related to the work of the Museum, such as, museum management, acquisition and inventory of materials, permanent exhibition work, collection of materials on the field, writing professional papers, etc. (Kovač 2017b: 26–28).

According to the Meeting Minutes IV of the regular monthly meeting of *Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa"*, which took place on October 5, 1937, its member, curator Franjo Buntak reported under item X the finds discovered while digging the foundations of Jugošihht Palace⁴ near a Lower Town square⁵. What needs to be taken into account are the conditions in which Buntak collected the findings for the Museum as is evident from the Minutes: "Sadly, despite the utmost care and even though Jugošihht's director Švank promised the workers would receive 10 dinars for each find, they / mostly people from Lika and Dalmatia / use any means necessary to hide and sell around town anything they find, convinced it is highly valuable, so a lot of different objects are sold around town." (Grubišić 2005: 113). Curator Buntak did whatever he could under such circumstances to collect and document on site.

One of the reasons why data on these grave finds are very scarce is that, at the time, there was no Museum *Entry Book (Knjiga ulaska)*,⁶ listing all the items that entered the Museum and the relevant information. There was only the inventory book – the so-called *Celestin's Book*, introduced by prof. Vjekoslav Celestin and passed on to Buntak after his predecessor died. This inventory book has records of some objects found at Schicht's administrative building in 1937, and the same items were later copied to the independent inventory books of the Archaeology Department.⁷ The lack of archaeological documentation creates a major problem in classifying the grave goods into a single grave unit. Because there was no entry book at the time, we do not have a unique list of all the items that entered the Museum in 1937, which

¹ Franjo Buntak, "Rimski grobovi u Osijeku. Nešto o nalazima prigodom kopanja temelja za nove zgrade tvornice Schicht-Lever" ("Roman Graves in Osijek. A few words on the finds discovered while laying the foundations of the new Schicht-Lever factory building").

² Franjo Buntak (1910–1985) was an art historian and archaeologist who replaced professor Vjekoslav Celestin in 1937 as the curator of the Osijek Museum. He advocated a new permanent exhibition, an increase in the number of items, archaeological excavations and supervisions. He played a significant role for the development of museology in Croatia and is the author of the *Osječki Gradski muzej (Osijek City Museum, 1940)*, one of the pioneering museum documents in Croatia. He held his position until June 1941 when he returned to Zagreb.

³ Vjekoslav Celestin (1862–1936) was a professor of classical philology at the Osijek Classical Gymnasium. He was the head of the Osijek Museum and curator from 1893, holding that office for the next 46 years. In addition to the enormous efforts he invested in providing a permanent space for the Museum and the increase of the Museum's depot, his role in the inventory of archeological and numismatic objects and the establishment of the Museum Hemeroteque and the *Essekiana* Collection is particularly relevant.

⁴ A common name used for the Schicht-Lever factory at the time.

⁵ Present-day Bana Josipa Jelačića Square in the Lower Town.

⁶ *Knjiga ulaska (Entry Book)* were instated at the Museum of Slavonia only in 1949.

⁷ *Inventarna knjiga I. (Inventory Book I)* of the Archaeology Department was established in 1953. The first entry was made on January 30, 1953. It is important to note that *Celestin's Book* was, up until then, the only comprehensive book with all the items which were brought to the Museum, with items ranging from archaeological, historical, natural history, arts and crafts and other objects. After it was decided that inventory books should be kept separately for each department, all the archaeological data were copied to the new inventory books of the Archaeology Department.

would be extremely helpful in this case. The items were probably accompanied by some notes, otherwise, even these few pieces of information would not exist in the inventory books.

In the above mentioned Minutes of the *Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa"*, Franjo Buntak states that during the digging of the Jugoših building's foundations, relatively few objects were found. Additionally, he points out Mithras' altar, Mithras' relief and little bone Hercules as relevant finds. He also says that "Everything else that was found are sundries" (Grubišić 2005: 113). Therefore, Buntak did not bring a complete list nor a detailed description of the grave finds. In *Hrvatski list* he wrote: "Same as with other objects, there were also relatively few coins. Among those, we have Probus, Gordian III, Tacit, Numerian, and Carinus coins... Apart from coins, two fragments of necklace were found, a fragment of an object which must have been used as an ornamental pendant for a dress and a bottom of an Aretine ware. It is extremely important to mention a very lovely Hercules figurine made of bone...". This is where Buntak also mentions two stone monuments found 3 meters deep – the altar and relief of Mithra (Buntak 1937:14). He does not mention other finds, neither in the Minutes from October 5, nor in the article from December 4, 1937, but some of them are known from the Museum inventory books.

H. Göricke-Lukić in her two monographs on Mursa necropolises presented the values (type and number of finds) for different types of graves in tables, along with a disclaimer that this is not a complete and actual picture because the graves were found totally or partially devastated. She also shows that items for which the exact number could not be identified and which were registered, and can not be reliably identified today, are shown in the table with the label + (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 40–41; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 91). This refers to the finds from the so-called Graves 38–40. The author offers a list of finds for Graves 38–40 as follows: 3rd century coins,⁸ a clay pot,⁹ a terra sigillata cup,¹⁰ four iron nails,¹¹ an iron chisel,¹² necklace fragments,¹³ and the most interesting find in our case, mirror bone handle in the shape of Hercules¹⁴ (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136–137; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 91, 118–119, 125, 140, 205).

Caution should be advised because there is no archaeological documentation, so in interpreting the grave unit, we rely solely on the information that was included in the inventory books a few decades ago, as well as the daily press releases and brief notes from the Minutes of the *Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa"*. While writing this paper, we noticed several illogical and ambiguous pieces of information in recent releases that are not in line with the information presented by Franjo Buntak on two occasions or those from the inventory books related to the grave units found during the construction of Schicht's administrative building in 1937.

Buntak wrote about the abovementioned graves in *Hrvatski list*, where he did not mention the exact number of graves, only stated that "a few Roman graves were found 1.75 m deep while digging. It's a pity that there are so few graves.". He also mentions that "all of the graves are brick-built, triangular, square or in the shape of an upsidedown trapeze" (Buntak 1937: 14). H. Göricke-Lukić reports that three graves were found and named them Grave 38, Grave 39 and Grave 40, and mentions Buntak's article from *Hrvatski*

⁸ Due to missing documentation, coins cannot be clearly identified neither in terms of number, nor location of their find. According to Franjo Buntak's reports, these are imperial coins as follows: Gordian III (238–244), Tacitus (275–276), Probus (276–282), Numerian (283–284) and Carinus (283–285). H. Göricke-Lukić states that it is impossible to identify these coins today at the depot of the Museum of Slavonia's Numismatic Department (Buntak 1937: 14; H. Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205).

⁹ Published under inventory number: MSO-AA-1338 (H. Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205), presently inventory number AMO-AA-1338. Change in nomenclature of all inventory numbers occurred in 2018 when the Archaeological Museum Osijek was established and all the Collections from the Archaeology Department of the Museum of Slavonia became part of the Archaeological Museum Osijek.

¹⁰ Inventory number: AMO-AA-5928. Published in 2000 and 2011 (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205) where it was mistakenly cited as inventory number MSO-AA-5937. This cup bottom (Drag. 33) has a stamp: MELAV22V2 (Bulat 1958: 81).

¹¹ Inventory number: AMO-AA-6883/1–AMO-AA-6883/4 (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205).

¹² Inventory number: AMO-AA-6884 (Göricke-Lukić 2000: 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205).

¹³ Not included in the inventory and impossible to identify physically.

¹⁴ Inventory number: AMO-AA-5694. The typology was mistakenly set as a mirror knife handle in Bulat 1989, Göricke-Lukić 2000 and 2011. The item is actually a clasp knife bone handle with a representation of Hercules (Kovač 2017a: 99–101, 299–300, T.5: 16).

list as a source, but Buntak did not mention the exact number of graves found in the “Schicht Palace”. H. Göricke-Lukić probably concluded there were three graves because Buntak mentioned their shape and listed three different types of graves. In fact, today we can not state for sure how many graves were found at the position of the new Schicht-Lever factory administrative building site in 1937, since the exact data was never written, published or simply preserved in the documentation of the Museum of Slavonia.¹⁵

Similarly, *Inventarna knjiga I.* states that the clay pot (AMO-AA-1338) was found in the position of “the soap factory in 1939 when the foundation was laid at a depth of 3 m” and that it was introduced into the Museum as a gift from Jovan Gojković in 1947 (*Inventarna knjiga I.*, inv. no. 1338). The two pieces of data do not match in this case – the year 1939 and the depth of the find itself, because Buntak reported on finding the graves in 1937 at 1.75 m. It could be that Gojković mistakenly wrote the wrong year of the find when the donation was made, but given that he also mentioned the depth of 3 m there may have been a record of the circumstances of the find from the very beginning, but we can not know that with certainty. It is possible that this find does not belong to one of the graves found in 1937 or it was actually found in that position, but two years later at another excavation in the factory area. Moreover, when we checked the documentation on the construction of the Schicht-Lever factory’s administrative building in the Osijek State Archives¹⁶ we found that the Request for a Building Inspection was received on July 26, 1938 (*Uporabna dozvola 1938*). This certainly points to the fact that the building was already built in the summer of 1938.

The situation with the four nails finds (AMO-AA-6883/1–AMO-AA-6883/4) and the iron chisel (AMO-AA-6884) is also unclear. In *Inventarna knjiga II.* the year 1937 is not mentioned as the year of the find, only “193?...” with a description of the findings as: “Osk, d. g.,¹⁷ the left SW cornerstone at Saponia (Šiht) with human bones, 2 m deep” (*Inventarna knjiga II.*, inv. no. 6883/1–6883/4; 6884). It is possible that this was in 1937, not only because the location and description place the finds at the SW cornerstone of Saponia, but human bones found 2 m deep are also mentioned, which is very similar to Buntak’s record of 1.75 m.

Clasp knife bone handle with a representation of Hercules

Clasp knife handles are not a Roman invention and have been known since the Iron Age. The oldest clasp blades with a bone handle date from the Hallstatt culture period (Ha D), found in graves at the Hallstatt site in Austria. In the later period, they appear on other sites across Europe, such as grave 10 at Ménfőcsanak in Transdanubia from the late Iron Age (LT B / LT C) (Horvath *et al.* 1987: 38, 40, Pl. X: 5a–5c; Kromer 1959a: 72, 76; 1959b: Taf. 31: Fig. 8, Taf. 32: Fig. 21). However, it was only with the process of romanization that figurative representations were introduced on such items and are now considered to be one of the most abundant iconographic representations of the Roman era (Anderes 2009: 202; Kovač 2017a: 99).

Clasp knife handles could be made of wood and metal, while one of the favorite raw materials is certainly bone raw material (bone, horn, antler and ivory) (Jackson & Friendship-Taylor, 2002: 24; Kovač 2017a: 98). Bone raw material has an advantage over other raw materials in the manufacture process due to strength and elasticity, since the handles, due to their specific purposes, had to withstand significant stress while being used (Kovač 2017a: 98).

What separates clasp knife handles from other handles is that the metal blade could move without the help of a spring. It moved only with the help of a kind of pivot pin inserted into a perforation on one side of the handle, so the blade could be folded into the handle, allowing safe carrying.

Clasp knife handles are commonly found at Roman sites, and some specimens, especially figural handles, often fall into the category of top quality artisanship (Anderes 2009: 202). Favorite motifs

¹⁵ I would like to thank my colleague Ante Grubišić of Museum of Slavonia’s History Department for helping me examine the Documentary Collection of the said Department. Unfortunately, no lists related to archaeological items have been preserved from the 1930s, Buntak’s period at the Museum, nor lists of grave inventories for the Schicht-Lever factory area.

¹⁶ I would like to thank my colleague Danijel Jelaš, Phd for helping me examine the documentation at the Osijek State Archive regarding the Schicht-Lever factory.

¹⁷ OSK, d. g. = Osijek, Donji grad (Lower Town).

on figuratively shaped handles are gladiators, mythical heroes such as Hercules,¹⁸ various deities¹⁹ or animals²⁰ often depicted in hunting scenes (Biró 1997: 180; Giovanni 2004: 10; Fries 2008: 32). Along with the exceptionally popular representations of a gladiator or two fighting gladiators, Hercules was a particularly common motif, most often depicted on Roman objects with his two main attributes – club and Nemean lion skin.²¹ Hercules' attributes are only displayed as the hero holds them or across his shoulder / back (Maršić 2007: 11).

In Roman mythology, Hercules is the equivalent to the Greek god Heracles. This most famous hero of Antiquity is the son of the supreme god Zeus (Jupiter) and the mortal Alcmene. Zeus's wife, Hera (Juno), knowing her husband was unfaithful, tried to kill his unlawful son by any means necessary and made his life miserable. That is why, although he was born as Alcides, his mother changed his name to Heracles, which means "Glory of Hera" in order to appease Hera. But Hera was relentless and persecuted him for years, even when he was a grown man with wife and children. Hera turned him mad and made him kill his family. In order to atone for his sins, he was placed in the service of the king of Mycenae and Tiryns, King Eurystheus, who gave him the famous Twelve Labours.²² As a hero, he is known for his superhuman strength and the courage he showed in executing these twelve dangerous labours (Sanader 1994: 88; Kovačec 2002: 527; Mark 2014). He is known as the patron of merchants, profit and success, athletics, youth, palestras, gymnasiums, baths, healing springs, roads, passengers and liberators, but also as an inspiration for theatrical plays and literary works. His cult is well represented in the Roman provinces, as well as in the Republic of Croatia where a large number of Roman finds have been discovered with the representation of this hero (Pinterović 1967: 48–49; Sanader 1994: 90–93, 96–114; Busuladžić 2017: 164–166).

From our point of interest, the most relevant find from the position of the new Schicht-Lever administrative building is certainly the clasp knife bone handle with a representation of the hero and demi-god Hercules (Fig. 1). In some previous publications, this item's typology was erroneously defined as a



Fig. 1. Clasp knife bone handle with representation of Hercules, Archaeological Museum Osijek, AMO-AA-5694 (photograph: D. Jelaš, 2019).

¹⁸ Example can be found in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier (Fries, 2008: 33), in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (Moreno 1982: 477, 518), in Landesmuseum Bonn (Hale 2018; LVR / AB 2018) etc.

¹⁹ Examples can be found in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier: Pan (Fries, 2008: 32), Amor (Fries, 2008: 34) and Aphrodite (Fries, 2008: 35–36); from the Porolissum site in Romania: Amor riding a dolphin (Vass 2011: 297); from Avenches in Switzerland: gladiator and Amor (Schenk 2008: 192, 269) etc.

²⁰ Examples can be found in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier: dog (Fries, 2008: 27), lion (Fries, 2008: 28), dolphin (Fries, 2008: 29) and pig's hoof (Fries, 2008: 30); from the Porolissum site in Romania: Amor riding a dolphin (Vass 2011: 297); from Lemonum in France: dolphin (Bertrand 2008: Fig. 22/1) etc.

²¹ Other common attributes include a bow and arrow, apples of the Hesperides and a goblet (Maršić 2007: 122).

²² The Twelve Labours of Hercules: kill the Nemean Lion; kill the Hydra of Lerna; capture the Cerynitian Hind; capture the Erymanthian Boar; clean the Stables of Augeus; drive away the Stymphalian Birds; bring back the Cretan Bull; bring back the Mares of Diomedes; bring back Hippolyte's Girdle; bring back the cattle of Geryon; bring back the Golden Apples of Hesperides; and bring back Cerberus from the underworld.

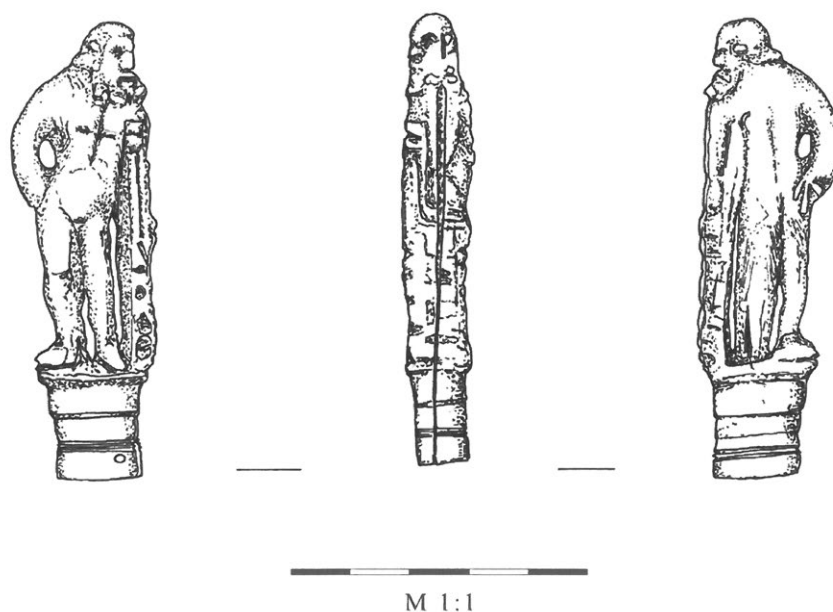


Fig. 2. Drawing of a clasp knife bone handle with representation of Hercules, Archaeological Museum Osijek, AMO-AA-5694 (drawing by: D. Radman, 2016).

mirror bone handle (Bulat 1989: 45; Göricke-Lukić 2000: 43, 60, 63, 136; Göricke-Lukić 2011: 205) or mirror bronze handle (Göricke-Lukić 2011: 118–119). It is, in fact, a clasp knife bone handle with traces of green patina that was most likely caused by corrosion of the bronze blade set in the lower part of the handle, a pedestal on which the hero stands. The item's typology was indeed correctly defined in 1962 by Danica Pinterović as a clasp knife handle in her article "O rimskoj bronci s terena Osijeka i okolice"²³ and later in her monograph from 1978 (Pinterović 1962: 102; Pinterović 1978: T. LXV, 1).

Our clasp knife handle (AMO-AA-5694)²⁴ was made of compact long bone tissue of a large mammal, most likely cattle, and shaped like a standing figure of Hercules, who is leaning on the left on his deadly club (Fig. 2). The hero is nude, standing in contrapposto on an oval pedestal which is also part of the folding mechanism of the handle, showing a perforation for inserting the pivot pin which secured the blade. The pedestal has simple ornaments in the form of two groups of ringed notches, with two horizontal notches in the one group, and one horizontal notch in the other. The incision for the blade is located at the side of the club, at Hercules' left hand. The robustness of the club is rendered in irregular notches along the entire club. Hercules is depicted as a manly and muscular man, which is the usual way of representing this superhuman hero, resting on his club. His face is well formed and treated with much more detail than the muscular body with stylized muscles on his chest, abdomen and back. His head is dominated by a strong nose and a lush beard. On the part of the handle with the perforation for the folding mechanism there are traces of green patina, most likely from the blade which has not been preserved (Kovač 2017a: 299–300, cat. no. 16, T. 17: 16). As previously mentioned, our handle, according to grave goods found in the abovementioned graves, can be dated to the 3rd century, more precisely, in the period between 238–285 (Bulat, 1989: 45, 58, cat. no. 141; Göricke-Lukić, 2000: 41, 60–61, TXVI: 1; Göricke-Lukić, 2011: 119).

An almost identical handle to this one is kept at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier (Fries, 2008: 33), differing from ours in several ways. Hercules from Trier (Fig. 3) is holding his club over his left shoulder with his left arm while our Hercules is resting with his left hand on the club. The Trier Hercules is also standing in contrapposto on an oval pedestal, but unlike ours, the Trier specimen has other attributes of the hero – the skin of the Nemean lion, as well the apple of the Hesperides in his right hand pressed against his chest. The incision for the blade is in the same place as on our specimen, on the left side of the club. Both items are of equal quality.

²³ "About the Roman bronze from Osijek and surrounding sites".

²⁴ Dimensions: height: 7.55 cm; width: 2.3 cm; thickness: 1.1 cm.



Fig. 3. Clasp knife bone handle with representation of Hercules, Rheinischen Landesmuseum Trier, Inv. 720 (according to: Fries 2008: 33).

A beautiful clasp knife with a bone handle representing Hercules was found in 2017 in the sarcophagus²⁵ of a young Roman woman²⁶ in Zülpich (Germany), the Roman *Tolbiacum* (Hale 2008; LVR / AB 2018). This excellent piece of work shows the manly, bearded Hercules as he is resting on the club under his left arm. The body is muscular and highly detailed. This handle is a much finer piece of work than both our and the Trier one, and what also distinguishes it from the latter two is the fact that the blade of this clasp knife has been preserved.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to clarify the issue of brick-built skeletal graves found in 1937 during the construction of the administrative building of the Lower Town Schicht-Lever chemical factory in Osijek, present-day Saponia d. d., located in what used to be Mursa's eastern necropolis. From the case outlined, it is apparent how important it is to have detailed data from an archaeological site and how important the documentation kept during systematic archeological excavation is. By reading the literature published on the skeletal graves found at the aforementioned location in the Lower Town and the records in the inventory books of the Museum, we noticed several inconsistencies and ambiguities.

In his article in *Hrvatski list*, Franjo Buntak did not mention the exact number of graves, only that these graves were very few. The three graves (Grave 38, Grave 39 and Grave 40) mentioned in H. Göricke-Lukić's publications are actually a misinterpretation of the information provided by Franjo Buntak in his article for *Hrvatski list*, where he does not mention the exact number of graves, only three different types of graves appearing on the site. The exact number of graves was never published by Franjo Buntak, neither in *Hrvatski list*, nor in the Minutes of the *Društvo prijatelja starina "Mursa"*. Furthermore, apart from the unestablished number of graves, it is also unclear which grave goods were found in which grave. In the *Inventarna knjiga I.*, for the ceramic pot the year 1939 is listed as the year of the discovery, which does not coincide with Buntak's data about the foundations being laid in 1937, nor with the data we found in the Osijek State Archives, where it is apparent that the Use Permit was issued in the summer of 1938, which

²⁵ Grave goods were dated to the 3rd century, consisting of: glass perfume bottles, a make-up palette, bone hairpins (one with a golden head) and needles, gold and jet bracelets, decorative clasp knife bone handle depicting Hercules, necklace fragments and a silver hand mirror.

²⁶ She was 25 to 30 years old.

excludes the possibility that it was one of the grave finds found while digging the foundations in 1937. For four iron nails and an iron chisel in *Inventarna knjiga II.*, the year of the finds is not listed as 1937, there is only “193?..”, but it is very likely that these findings are from 1937, given that there is data referring to the SW cornerstone of Saponia as the place of those finds, and a mention of human bones found 2 m deep, which is very similar to 1.75 m mentioned in Franjo Buntak’s article from 1937. It is also known that 3rd century imperial coins were found in the graves: Gordian III (238–244), Tacitus (275–276), Probus (276–282), Numerian (283–284) and Carinus (283–285). It is unknown which coins were found in which grave and they can not be identified in the depot of the Museum of Slavonia’s Numismatic Department, which is where these coins should be.

In our view, the most interesting of all the found grave goods is the clasp knife bone handle with a depiction of a resting hero and demi-god Hercules, made of compact long bone tissue of a large mammal. Our Hercules is shown in one of the most familiar poses, which appears in both small and monumental plastic art pieces, leaning on his most common attribute – his club. Stylistically speaking, a handle identical to ours can be found at the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Trier where Hercules has two other attributes – the apple of the Hesperides and the skin of the Nemean lion. Both of these handles show in the best light the beauty and the artisanship of Roman bone carving.

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