



Press Release

What did the early Celts use Greek pottery for?

A collaboration of researchers from Baden-Württemberg studies Greek ceramic imports and their meaning for the early Celts

Dr. Karl Guido Rijkhoek
Director

Antje Karbe
Press Officer
Phone +49 7071 29-76788
+49 7071 29-76789
Fax +49 7071 29-5566
karl.rijkhoek[at]uni-tuebingen.de
antje.karbe[at]uni-tuebingen.de

www.uni-tuebingen.de/aktuell

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What was the reason behind the importation of large numbers of feasting dishes and wine amphorae from the Mediterranean to the early Celtic regions north of the Alps between the 7th and 5th century BC?

Researchers from the Universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg together with the State Heritage of Baden-Württemberg and the Landesmuseum Württemberg in Stuttgart will work together to answer these questions in the framework of their project “BEFIM – Meanings and Functions of Mediterranean Imports in Early Celtic Central Europe”. BEFIM was awarded almost 1.3 Mio. € by the German Ministry of Research and Education in the framework of the funding focus “The Language of Objects”, and will be running until 2018.

For a long time, researchers explained this southern import as the desire of Celtic elites in Southwestern Germany, Switzerland and Eastern France, to imitate Mediterranean feasting practices. The researchers of BEFIM question this notion. They analyze how Celtic communities used these Mediterranean imports north of the Alps – whether they really wanted to imitate Mediterranean feasting practices or in contrast, whether they used these foreign objects as part of their own local practices. They will apply a combined multidisciplinary approach to assess the archaeological context of the imported vessels with use wear analysis of their interior surfaces, and characterization of absorbed lipid residues which may reveal traces of foods and beverages consumed in the past.

This will enable them to understand how foreign and local vessels were being used by the local elites and other groups of the population. Hence, was for example, Mediterranean grape wine being consumed from these drinking vessels, or was locally produced honey mead? BEFIM focuses on those transformative processes, in which formerly foreign objects become part of one’s own cultural traditions, perhaps taking on different functions and new meanings. Intercultural encounters have always had a

crucial transformative power – not only in the present, but also in the past – and objects from afar had an essential role in these dynamics.

The BEFIM collaboration is directed by Philipp W. Stockhammer (Heidelberg University) together with Cynthianne Debono Spiteri (University of Tübingen), Dirk Krausse (State Heritage Authority Baden-Württemberg) and Thomas Hoppe (Landesmuseum Württemberg).



Schnabelkanne, Stamnos, Rippenziste, Zierscheibe, Trinkhornbeschläge, attische Trinkschalen. Ensemble Kleinaspergle

Photo: P. Frankenstein / H. Zwietasch; Landesmuseum Württemberg

Contact:

Dr. Cynthianne Debono Spiteri
University of Tübingen
Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte
Junior Professor for Archaeometry
Phone +49 7071 29-78541
cynthianne.debono-spiteri@uni-tuebingen.de