



Provenance studies of Central European Neolithic obsidians using external beam milli-PIXE spectroscopy

B. Constantinescu^a, D. Cristea-Stan^a, I. Kovács^b, Z. Szókefalvi-Nagy^{b,*}

^a National Institute for Nuclear Physics and Engineering “Horia Hulubei”, Str. Reactorului No.3, Bucharest-Magurele, Romania

^b Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Konkoly-Thege Miklós út 29-33, H-1121 Budapest, Hungary

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 March 2013

Received in revised form 18 May 2013

Accepted 10 June 2013

Available online 23 July 2013

Keywords:

External beam PIXE

Obsidians

Non-destructive analysis

Cultural heritage

ABSTRACT

External beam milli-PIXE technique was used for the determination of the elemental concentration ratios in some Prehistoric obsidian tools found in Transylvania, in the Iron Gates region near Danube, as well as on a few relevant geological obsidian samples from Slovak Tokaj Mountains, Lipari, Armenia. As provenance “fingerprints” the Ti to Mn and Rb to Zr ratios were used. The results confirm that the Transylvanian Neolithic samples have a Slovak Tokaj Mountains provenance. For Iron Gates samples, there are at least two different geological sources: for Late Neolithic tools, the origin is also the Slovak Tokaj Mountains but for Late Mesolithic–Early Neolithic samples, the sources are clearly different, possibly of the Hungarian Tokaj Mountains or the Balkan–Aegean origin.

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1. Introduction

The natural volcanic glass called obsidian is one of the most important archaeological rocks used to make tools and weapons before the appearance of metal raw materials [1]. In Central Europe the geological sources are limited and concentrated in few geographical areas: Armenia, Eastern Anatolia, Italian Lipari and Sardinia, Greek Melos and Yali islands, Hungarian and Slovak Tokaj Mountains. A map displaying these areas is given in Fig. 1. In order to determine the geographical areas of origin of obsidian and to identify the prehistoric long-range trade routes and possible population migrations, the determination of the elemental concentration ratios can be of great help, since each geological source often present a specific chemical fingerprint. In Transylvania (the North–Western part of Romania, a region surrounded by Carpathian Mountains) Neolithic obsidian tools were discovered mainly in three regions: North–West – Oradea (near the border with Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine), Centre – Cluj and Southwest – Banat. A previous analysis of some samples from these regions indicated the Slovak Tokaj Mountains source (Carpathian I) as predominant provenance [2]. Special cases are the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites from the Iron Gates (on river Danube, at the border with Serbia) [3] directly related to the appearance of agriculture replacing the Mesolithic economy based on hunting and fishing and the Teleorman (South of Romania) Early Neolithic sites. In the case of obsidians three long-distance trade routes could be considered:

those starting from Caucasus Mountains via the North of the Black Sea, from Greek islands or Asia Minor via ex-Yugoslavia area or via Greece–Bulgaria or from Central Europe – Tokaj Mountains [4]. Our archaeological samples – i.e. Neolithic obsidian tools – from Oradea region (Seleuş, Bucin, Taşad), from Cluj area (Iclod, Tzaga, Turda, Silagiu) and Mesolithic and Early Neolithic tools from Iron Gates on Danube area (opposite to famous Vinca site) – Cuina Turcului and from Teleorman – Magura were borrowed from the “Tara Crişurilor” Museum Oradea, Transylvania’s History National Museum Cluj and Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest. A detailed description of all these archaeological sites can be found elsewhere [5].

In this work the argumentation of the previous paper [2] for using the ratios of the content of some neighbouring elements for provenance characterisation has been followed. For this strategy the external beam milli-PIXE spectroscopy [6] is a more convenient choice compared to some frequently used analytical techniques as ICP/MS, NAA, PGAA and so on. External beam milli-PIXE is fully non-destructive, there are not any mechanical or thermal damages at the proton currents used, and the analysed objects are not activated during the analysis. In contrast to in-vacuum milli-, or micro-PIXE methods where the objects should be put into a vacuum chamber raising serious size limitation, in the case of external-beam PIXE, objects of practically any sizes can be studied. In comparison to traditional XRF analysis the accurate location and the spatial limitations of the regions to be analysed are much easier. In addition, the generally lower background of more regular shape allows easier spectrum evaluation. These general merits of the external beam PIXE technique and the millimetre beam size

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +36 1 392 2513; fax: +36 1 392 2598.

E-mail address: szokefalvi-nagy@wigner.mta.hu (Z. Szókefalvi-Nagy).