

## Bronze *hydriai* and mirrors with depictions of Sirens in Thrace (Abstract)

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The paper discusses bronze *hydriai* and one bronze mirror with Sirens, discovered in burials in Thrace. The *hydria* from Sez-Sevmes near Varna (fig. 2) is the only one that was used as cinerary urn, while the others were placed as grave goods in rich burials of Thracian aristocrats. The presented vases allow for attempting a more precise chronology, based on the morphological and the stylistic features of the bronze items. The term *hydria* is used for a group of vessels that in the Greek culture served for storage of water, as prizes in athletic games, as votive gifts in sanctuaries, as cinerary urns or as votive urns.

The function of the *hydriai* in Thrace is not entirely clear. Such vases are discovered in necropoleis, but there are also quite a few chance finds, which fact makes difficult specifying their use. Undoubtedly, they were luxury items that occur in rich burials together with other artifacts of precious metals, fine pottery, and weapons and armour. Bronze mirrors with Sirens are another important product of ancient toreutics. Obviously, they were related to women and only rarely occur in burials of men and children. Despite all variations, mirrors were among the toiletries related to female beauty.

So far in Bulgarian literature, there is no summarizing publication dealing with bronze *hydriai* and mirrors with Sirens. The burials with such finds have been treated summarily, without a detailed typological and chronological analysis. The authors of the publications have dated these items within broad limits, often within a century.

The technology of the manufacture of bronze *hydriai* involves two main techniques - hammering and casting. The former was used for making the body of the vase, and the latter - for the handles and the foot. For a more detailed rendering of the attachment (at the base of the vertical handle), repousse technique was also used. Casting was the main technique for making mirrors. The disc was polished in order to become reflective.

*Hydriai* with Sirens at the base of the vertical handle are divided in three groups. The first and largest one comprises Sirens with wings bent upwards (figs. 1-6). It is most stylistically diverse and has numerous parallels in the Mediterranean. These Sirens mark the beginning and define the main

characteristics of this type of *hydriai*. The second group comprises Sirens with horizontal wings (figs. 7-9), and the third one brings together Sirens with lowered wings (fig. 10). The last two groups are a typological development of the first one.

Chronologically, bronze *hydriai* with Sirens at the base of the vertical handle in Thrace form a compact group and are typical of the period from the second quarter of the 5th c. BC to the end of the century. It should be noted that the Sirens with wings bent upwards appear some 25 to 50 years before the other types and have longest use. In the third quarter of the 5th c. BC, the three groups were produced and used simultaneously. This fact indicates a certain peak in the development of the depictions of Sirens on *hydriai* and mirrors. In the last quarter of the 5th c. BC, the tradition of depicting Sirens with horizontal and lowered wings dies out.

It is difficult to be definitive about the place where the *hydriai* discovered in Thrace were made. Nonetheless, the parallels of some specimens allow for the assumption that they were made in the same workshop, or at least in workshops that followed common traditions. As a place of production of the *hydria* from Obretenik (fig. 4), I suggest a provincial workshop in Epirus, based on the similarities with a handle in Munich (cat. No. 16.47), found in Ioannina. The *hydriai* from Sez-Sevmes (fig. 2) and Pazardzhik (fig. 5) were probably made in Boeotia, from where there are seven vases with similar decoration. The vase from Koprivets (fig. 3) has obvious flaws and it could be presumed that the handle attachment was made by a poorly trained artisan or in a workshop without traditions in making such ornaments. The possibility that it was made in Thrace cannot be excluded. However, until parallels are identified in Thracian art, this hypothesis remains speculative. Very few Sirens with horizontal wings have been found in the Greek world, which fact makes it difficult to attribute them to a production center. Nonetheless, it could be presumed that in the second half of the 5th c. BC they were produced in the area of Corinth, from where they spread to Northern Greece and Thrace.

Regarding the geographical distribution, the higher concentration of *hydriai* to the north of

the Balkan Range cannot be overlooked. Depicting Sirens on specific bronze items indicates certain symbolism, the meaning of which is yet to be clarified. Another important moment concerns the function of these items in the life of the Thracian society, and of the aristocracy in particular. There is no evidence of *hydriai* or mirrors discovered in household context. All discussed specimens, except for the chance finds from Nova Mahala

(fig. 7), Krachimir (fig. 6), and Pazardzhik (fig. 5), come from burials. In life, these vessels could have served for storage of water, needed for the dilution of the wine during symposia. However, they are not a principal element in banquet scenes on black- and red-figure vases. On the other hand, the presence of the *hydriai* in funerary context probably indicates their important role in the funerary set of the Thracian aristocrats.

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