

**Terracotta figurines from ancient production centers in the territory of  
Nicopolis ad Istrum (Abstract)**  
**Pavlina Vladkova**

The article presents some of the most interesting images among terracotta figurines – statuettes of deities, discovered in production centres in the western part of the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum: Butovo, Pavlikeni, and Byala Cherkva.

Most numerous are the figurines of Venus, represented in various iconographic types. Four figurines and a mould depict Venus Pudica (Fig. 1 4; Fig. 2 5), and there is one figurine with a barbarized depiction of the goddess (Fig. 2 6). One terracotta figurine represents Venus with mirror (Fig. 2 7). Probably the heads of figurines that were discovered also belong to figurines of this deity (Fig. 3 10-13). Part of a figurine and a fragment of a mould, representing Eros and Psyche in standard iconography, also belongs to this group (Fig. 3 8-9).

Terracotta figurines of Venus are among the few finds from the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum that provide evidence of the popularity and propagation of the cult.

One figurine depicts Hermes in conventional type, with caduceus and purse (Fig. 4 14). The deity was rather popular both in the city itself and in its administrative territory. In Butovo, where the figurine was discovered, two votive plaques were also found, depicting Hermes respectively with Zeus and Athens, as well as a bronze statuette. The popularity of the god, worshiped by traders, resulted mainly from the fact that several main roads went through the region of the production centres, connecting some of the largest cities in Moesia Inferior, but also the military camp Novae with the province of Thrace.

Statuettes of Cybele, among the most venerated deities in Nicopolis ad Istrum and its territory, were also moulded (Fig. 4 15). This is evidenced by the discovery of

six epigraphic monuments, a clay mould for medallions from Butovo, ceramic trays with an epithet of the goddess, etc. After the city, she was most actively worshipped in the area of the production centres. The mould for terracotta figurines is another indication of Cybele's popularity.

The last figurine could represent Demeter, but it could be also of Cybele, seated on a throne (Fig. 4 16). The absence of iconographic specifics and typical attributes impedes the positive identification of the goddess.

There is no evidence for the manufacture of such items from Pavlikeni. Of all 16 figurines and moulds, presented here, only two statuettes were found in this centre - a figurine of Venus with mirror and a head of the goddess. The main manufacturer of terracotta figurines in the region was the centre at Butovo. In addition to the above discussed specimens, the local workshops produced also various toys for children - horses, soldiers and roosters.

No models were found, used for shaping the moulds. They were probably of perishable materials, wood or wax.

All terracotta figurines, with the exception of that of Hermes, were made in double moulds. On the discovered fragmentary halves of moulds, there are mortises and tenons for the exact fitting of the two parts. Some moulds were varnished for facilitating taking out the figurines, as well as for slowing down the wearing out of the mould. On the back sides of some terracotta figurines, there are openings that were made after the figurine was taken out of the mould and providing for uniform baking of the item. Some retouching was made before baking, particularly for modeling the clothing and the jewellery of the deities. Some figurines

were without glazing - a statuette of Venus, three heads of the same goddess, and the figurine of Hermes. This is unusual and puzzling.

What is to be noted is the large number of Venus figurines. On the other hand, depictions of Venus are not found on appliqués for decorating ceramic vases. In the same time, there are no terracotta figurines of the two most popular deities in the region, Heracles and Dionysus, depicted on appliqués for vases, votive plaques and patera handles. This would mean that there was strict differentiation - while vessels, decorated with depictions of deities, were meant for religious ceremonies and rituals in the nearby sanctuaries, and plaques were used as

votive gifts, terracotta figurines were used mainly for household altars. Having in mind the numerous figurines of Venus, and some aspects of her cult, some of them were possibly used for wedding and funerary rituals as magic items that did not need to be of high artistic quality. This could be the explanation for the lack of glazing on some of them.

Following the dating of the architecture, the numismatic and other materials, and on the grounds of comparisons with identical items of clay and metal from other Roman provinces, the terracotta figurines and moulds under consideration here should be dated to the period from mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to mid-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.