

Fragment of a second vas diatretum from Serdica

(Abstract)

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The present report discusses a fragment of glass open-work vase – vas diatretum, discovered in 2012 during excavations in the centre of Sofia (Fig. 1). The fragment was discovered at elevation 539.00-538.80 in Room 13 of one of the large Late Antique buildings that occupied an entire insula (Fig. 2). In the contemporary levels of the building, 18 coins of the second half of the 4th – early 5th c. were found.

The fragment of vas diatretum (Fig. 3) is of irregular triangular shape and dimensions as follows: 4.5 by 4.1 cm, 0.12-0.18 cm thickness of glass. On its outer surface, seven stems of the open-work decoration are preserved, organized in three horizontal rows (Fig. 4). They have the following dimensions: first row – one stem, 0.6 x 0.18 cm; second row – three stems, 0.6 x 0.16, 0.56 x 0.19 cm, and 0.2 x 0.19 cm (fragmentary); and third row – three stems, 0.2 x 0.25 cm, 0.2 x 0.16 cm, and 0.19 x 0.26 cm. On the external surface of the glass vase, between the stems, there are irregular concavities, situated vertically and horizontally (Fig. 5). The body of the vase and the stems are made of translucent, naturally coloured glass of white hue. On the top of the stem that is closest to the rim, there is a small green piece of the openwork decoration.

Identifying the upper part of the vase depends on the typical S-shaped curve

from the rim to the middle of the cup, and its horizontal position is based on the visual alignment in one plane of the stems of the open-work decoration (Fig. 6). The position, the dimensions and the different spaces between the stems of the first, second, and third row indicate that the open-work decoration consisted of two elements – an inscription and net. Based on the presented observations and following the parallels with similar entirely preserved vases, a graphic reconstruction of the vase is offered (Fig. 7).

According to this reconstruction, the vas diatretum from Serdica had a diameter of 11.5 cm and was 7.2 cm high. It belongs to Group B – vases with reticulated decoration only. The closest parallels of the discussed vase are the specimens from Brigetio, Hungary, and from Corning Museum of Glass, used as prototypes for the hypothetical reconstruction. One specific feature of the vase from Serdica is its hemispheric shape that predefined the smaller dimensions and volume. Probably, such vases were used as kaniskia/ canistra – glass lamps with open-work decoration. Because of their smaller dimensions and weight, these diatreta were better suited for hanging by means of a metal ring, hung on bronze chains.

The newly-found fragment from Serdica is the second similar vase from the city and the fourth in Bulgaria. At present,

such luxury items are known from Yambol, Nicopolis ad Istrum, and Serdica. The new piece clearly puts Serdica in the lead regarding these vases.

The chronology of the fragment from Serdica depends on the general chronology of the openwork glass vases and on the coins that were discovered in the contemporary layers. The combined evidence indicates a date in the second half of the 4th c.

The concavities on the external

surface of the fragment (Fig. 5) resulted from the additional treatment of the vase with special tools and abraders. These traces on the diatretum from Serdica could be seen as evidence that the vase was made through gradual cutting and carving of the wall that was initially considerably thicker. There would not have been such traces if the finishing work on the vase was limited to completing the open-work decoration after the vase was already formed on an intermediate mould.