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Anthropomorphic glass pendants from the West Pontic Greek colonies (Abstract)

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This paper presents all the human head pendants discovered until now along the western coast of the Black Sea, including unpublished finds; to trace their distribution into the Thracian interior; and to define their chronological framework. Non-specialized publications often do not distinguish between anthropomorphic pendants and anthropomorphic beads. Morphologically, a defining feature of the pendants – in this case depicting bearded male heads with bulging eyes – is the presence of a loop for hanging on a string. On the other hand, ornaments with a string hole that goes through their entire body could be labeled as beads. The present text considers only pendants depicting bearded male heads made of glass paste of various colors.

Several unpublished pieces have been introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time. For the purposes of this study, M. Seefried's classification has been used, as it appears to be most convenient, and the pendants from the West Pontic region fit well within its framework; they belong to four types: B II, B III, C I, and C II.

At present, there is no consensus about the provenience of the pendants. Initially, they were considered Phoenician due to their high concentration in the Syro-Palestinian region, as well as in Cyprus, Rhodes, and Egypt. However, still greater number were found in Carthage and the Punic colonies in Sardinia, Sicily, Ibiza, and Spain, and some authors take this as an indication they were manufactured

there. Another hypothesis suggests a 'secondary' Pontic manufacture center.

Glass pendants have rarely been discussed in Bulgarian publications. From the area of Bulgarian Black Sea coast, only a few finds from the cemetery of Apollonia and a single piece from the vicinity of Odessos have been published. Two artifacts from Callatis and Histria in the Romanian part of the Western Pontic littoral can be added to this list. On the other hand, the strong interest in these personal ornaments in the international literature has resulted in various summarizing works and classifications.

Two types of pendants have been identified at Apollonia Pontica: B II and B III. They were worn both by themselves and as parts of strings with other beads and elements (fig. 2). The available evidence suggests that strings were worn not only on the neck, but probably on the ankle as well. All five pieces from Apollonia date from the first half of the 4th c. BC: one is more securely dated to the first quarter of the century (fig. 1 1), three more date to its second quarter (fig. 1 3-5), and the fifth is given a broader date in its first half (fig. 1 2). Three out of five were found in graves of children of different ages and could be related to the so-called strings of amulets (περίαιμμα in Greek) worn across the shoulder by crawling toddlers and small children depicted on small red-figure oenochoai and lekythoi. The skeletal remains from the remaining two graves at Apollonia have not yet been examined by osteologists, but they are presumably female, as indicated by the presence of finger rings that have been found predominantly in burials of women.

The best preserved pendant in the West Pontic region, which is also of the highest quality, could be related tentatively to Odessos (type B III) because the place it was found at – probably a disturbed burial in the modern town of Devnya – is located about 5 km beyond the presumed limits of the chora of Odessos. Initially it has been dated to the late 4th c. BC, but an earlier date in the first half of the century is also possible, having in mind the pendants from Apollonia.

Callatis is the only Dorian colony that yielded a single glass pendant (type B II). It was found, together with 40 glass beads, in a cremation (?)

burial that has been dated significantly later than all above-presented finds: the second half of the 3rd-2nd c. BC. It should be noted, however, that the grave has been disturbed and due to the insufficient information, its dating remains uncertain.

Ionian Histria also yielded a single pendant (type C I or C II) without a clear context. Based on the other finds, a broad date in the 4th c. BC can be suggested.

The pendants from the area to the north of Apollonia come from partially or entirely disturbed graves, which makes the precise dating problematic. For this reason, the Apollonian pieces could serve as a chronological benchmark, indicating that the glass pendants with bearded male heads appeared in the West Pontic region in the 4th c. BC and are better attested in the first half of the century. Only Callatis raises the question about their prolonged use until the late 3rd-2nd c. BC, but the compromised context does not allow for any definite conclusions. What is to be noted is the absence of glass pendants at Mesambria and Tomis, but this may be explained with the state of research.

The observations on the Thracian interior complement our knowledge of the situation in the coastal area and provide more evidence about the dating of the pendants. Four items from the territory of Bulgaria have been published thus far: two from tombs II and III in Mogilanska Tumulus in Vratsa (type B III, fig. 5 1-2), one from a burial mound at Krushuna near Lovech (type B III, fig. 5 3), and one from Mavrova Tumulus at Starosel near Hisarya (type B II, fig. 5 4). They have been dated to the period between the third quarter of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd c. BC and most probably all of them come from female burials.

One of the questions that provokes particular interest among scholars is the function of the bearded male head pendants, and several hypotheses have been put forward: an ordinary ornament, special amulet, or a depiction of a deity. Most authors support the thesis about the apotropaic meaning of the pendants, especially of the items that were discovered far away from Phoenician or Punic contexts. The fact that they have often been found in graves of children and women lends additional credibility to this interpretation. Nonetheless, they could have combined apotropaic and decorative functions.