

Votive sticks - small distaffs from the territory of Bulgaria

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Based on the evidence of tombstone reliefs from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the author argues that the so-called votive sticks must be defined as small distaffs. The upper part of these objects is either spindle-shaped, or it ends with a small figurine of *Venus-Isis* or a bird. A ring is always modeled at their lower end. Originally, the small distaffs were connected with the cult of Venus-Isis and were considered a specific sign of the mistress of home. They survived the adoption of Christianity and gained great popularity during

the Late Antiquity, but already modified according to the standards and requirements of Christian symbolism.

The finds from Bulgaria do not differ by style and workmanship from the known samples from the rest of Europe, Asia Minor, and Egypt. At this stage of research, the small distaffs with spindle-shaped upper part may be dated to the 2nd-3rd century AD, those with a figurine of *Venus-Isis* - to the 2nd-4th century, and the bird-topped ones - to the 3rd-6th century AD.