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A THREE-HEADED GLASS BEAD FROM VIMINACIUM

Abstract: The paper presents a new find of a three-headed glass bead from the vicinity of Viminacium, Serbia. The bead originates from the multi-layered site of Nad Klepečkom, and represents the second find of a three-headed glass bead in the territory of Serbia. In this paper, the glass bead is provided with a typological and chronological background, and discussed within the scope of the existing glass beads in the territory of Serbia and the neighbouring regions.

Keywords: glass bead, Viminacium, Scordisci, Balkans, La Tène period.

Introduction

The multi-layered site of Nad Klepečkom is located on the right bank of the Danube river, approximately 3 km east of the present-day confluence of the Mlava and Danube rivers, on the north-western fringe of the Stig Region of Serbia (Figure 1, No. 14). It lies on a loess terrace east of the renowned antique town of Viminacium. Due to endangerment from the “Drmno” coal seam, rescue archaeological excavations of the site were reinitiated in 2008, while the first rescue actions were conducted back in 2004. In the period between 2010 and 2013, the excavations at the site yielded a number of antique period objects, two necropolises dated between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD, and a *villa rustica* dated to the 2nd century AD. The multi-layered nature of the site was determined through all of the excavation campaigns (Mrđić, Jovičić 2012; Redžić, Danković 2012; Redžić *et al.* 2014a; Redžić *et al.* 2014b; Jovičić, Redžić 2014; Спасић-Ђурић 2015: 36-37). The corpus of prehistoric finds from Viminacium, including the site of Nad Klepečkom, confirmed that the site was continuously inhabited during the Late Eneolithic (Bulatović *et al.* 2019), the Early and Late Bronze Age (Kapuran *et al.* 2019a), the Early Iron Age and the La Tène period (Late Iron Age) (Kapuran *et al.* 2019b; Спасић 1992; Спасић 1997; Mladenović *et al.* 2019).

In the course of one of the campaigns of systematic surveys in 2011, a glass bead was recorded within the area that would be excavated in the following years, where the aforementioned remains of successive prehistoric settlements were registered. Unfortunately, the glass bead was not published in the volume on prehistoric finds from Viminacium and its surroundings.

The glass bead from the site of Nad Klepečkom has a cylindrical shape, with a length of 2.6 cm, and a diameter of 1.9 cm (Figure 2). It is relatively well preserved, with visible deterioration, due to the fact that it represents a surface find, therefore most likely exposed to various atmospheric conditions for a period of time. The bead itself is separated into two almost identical sections, representing summary depictions of anthropomorphic faces. The third face is missing due to damage to the bead, yet, based on known examples, it can be assumed that the bead was comprised of a total of three faces. The preserved faces are composed of an elongated and emphasised central portion (nose), surrounded by two eyes represented by circles with a dot in their center. The faces are separated by a vertical rib. The colour scheme of the preserved faces of the bead is white and dark blue, with two different nuances of blue – dark blue for the background, and slightly lighter for the eyes. The upper edge of each bead is lined with white “drops”.

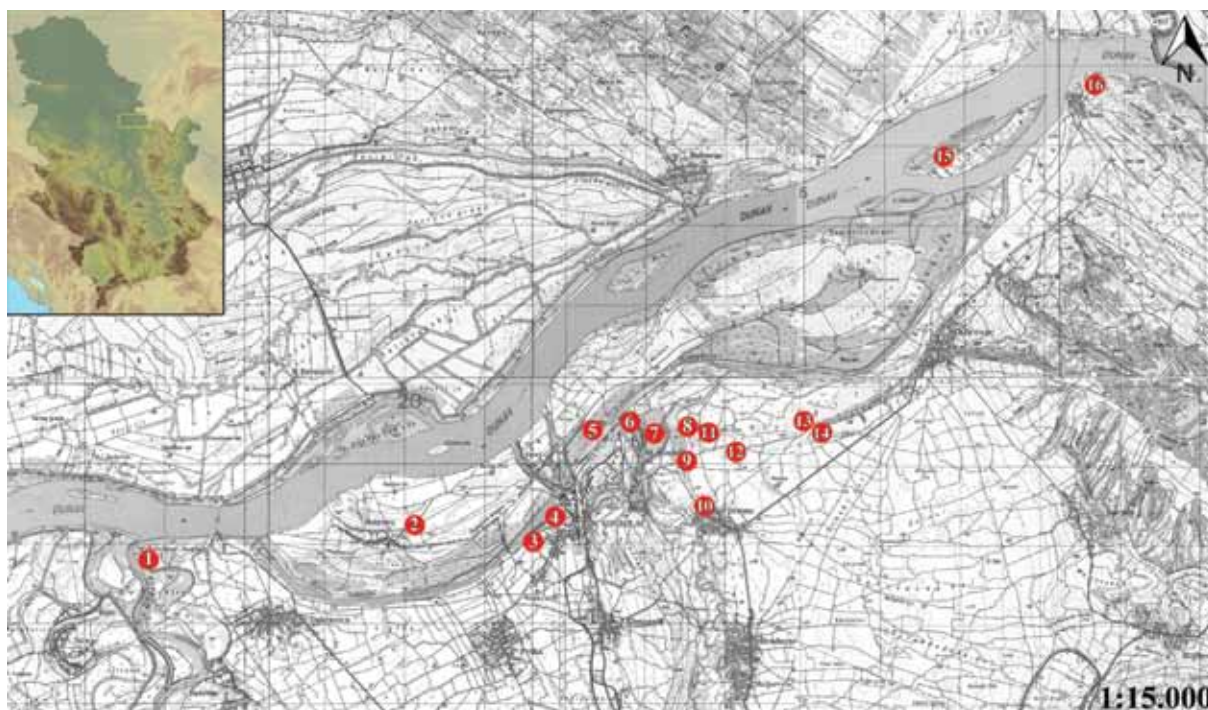


Fig. 1. La Tène sites and individual finds from the area of Stig: 1. Orašje-Dubravica (Margum); 2. Ostrovo-Kostolac (više lokacija); 3. Dunavac-Kostolac; 4. Repnjak-Kostolac; 5. Humka-Kostolac; 6. Mali Grad-Todića Crkva; 7. Rudine; 8. Čair; 9. Pećine; 10. Drmno; 11. Viminacium; 12. Pirivoj; 13. Rit; 14. Nad Klepečkom; 15. Čibuklija-Ostrovo; Ram (Lederata) (Mladenović et al. 2019).

Origin and Distribution

The most comprehensive overview of glass beads with faces was provided by T. E. Haevernick. According to her typology, such glass beads, with three (most often), four, or five faces (*Rbhrenperlen*, *Maskenperlen*), are marked as group 6 of glass beads, to which our example is attributed as well. Based on their distribution throughout the Mediterranean world (Seefried 1982), their origin is sought in Phoenician glass workshops, although the high representation of such beads within the North Pontic area indicated the existence of workshops in Greek colonies within that part of the world (Haevernic 1977).

Besides the Mediterranean world, their highest distribution has been recorded from the North Pontic region to the east, the Tisza Valley, eastern parts of Central Europe (Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia) to the west (Ludikovský 1968; Wozniak 1996; Karwowski 1997; Karwowski 2005; Karwowski 2010; Březinová, Soják 2009; Venclová 2016; Čižmarová 2019), the Carpathian Basin (Hungary, Romania), and the Adriatic coast

(Croatia) to the south. Such beads have been recorded in other territories as well, such as Slovenia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, where they represent rather rare finds (Karwowski 2005). Regarding the distribution and typology of face-beads, M. Karwowski separated two distinct typo-distributional forms of face-beads, squat beads and slender beads. Our example could be attributed to the squat form, which is common for the southern and eastern zones of their distribution (Karwowski 2005: 166). Within the northern and central zones of their distribution, such face-beads are commonly connected with the domain of the so-called eastern La Tène culture and are believed to have been obtained through contacts with Pontic areas, following the routes along the Danube, Tisza and Sava rivers (Karwowski 2005, 167). Within the territory of South-eastern Europe, their highest distribution has been recorded within the Carpathian Basin, in present-day Hungary (Polgar, Vác-Kavicsbánya, Mezonyarad, Nyirbator, Tiszalok, Sayopetri) (Szabó 1985; Szabó 2001; Hellebrandt 1999; Čižmarová 2019), and Romania (Mangalia, Constanta-Tomis, Govora, Greacea, Pietroasele-Gruiu Darii, Bratei,

Bunesti, Fintinele-Livada, Piscolt, Zimnicea) (Crişan 1974; Crisan 1975; Preda, Bârlădeanu 1979; Zirra 1979; Alexandrescu 1980; Nemeti 1988; Sîrbu *et al.* 1996; Rustoiu 2011; Sîrbu, Matei 2013; Berzovan 2019). Furthermore, face-beads have been recorded on the eastern Adriatic coast (Croatia) (Kompolje, Prozor) (Drechsler-Bižić 1966; Balen-Letunić 1990), and Bulgaria (Kolmen, Nesebar, Sveštari) (Чимбулева 1964; Čižmarová 2019). Only two examples have been recorded in present-day Serbia (Krševica and Nad Klepečkom) (Popović 2007), one example in Tolmin in present-day Slovenia (St. Lucia) (Balen-Letunić 1990),¹ and one example in Donja Dolina in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina (Marić 1964) (Figure 3). As highlighted by M. Karwowski, the face-beads from the territory of South-eastern Europe are not strictly related to La Tène culture, as demonstrated by examples from Croatia. The examples from the Kompolje and Prozor necropolises originate from graves, which yielded material culture typical for the Iapodes tribe (Balen-Letunić 1990: 45-47). When discussing the origin and distribution of face-beads in Croatia, D. Balen-Letunić makes an important remark. The eastern coast of the Adriatic was connected with commodities that circulated throughout the Mediterranean, and since no face-beads were recorded on the western coast of the Adriatic, which led the author to the conclusion that the face-beads from Iapodian graves came from the Pontic area, through the valleys of the Danube and Sava rivers, which she further supported with a find of a face-bead from Donja Dolina on the bank of the Sava river (Balen-Letunić 1990: 45), on a presumed trade route.² Such a remark is of particular importance for the discussion on the origin of such face-beads in the territory of present-day Serbia. As previously mentioned, only two examples are known from this territory, one example from the site of Krševica in the South Morava Valley, and the second example from the site of Nad Klepečkom, presented in this paper. According to P. Popović, the three-face bead from the site of Krševica should either be connected with the Celtic presence at the site and

within the South Morava Valley, dated to the 2nd/1st century BCE, or regarded as an import from the Mediterranean (Popović 2006; Popović 2007: 818; Вранић 2022: 69, with cited literature).



Fig. 2. Three-face glass bead from Nad Klepečkom.

The observations provided by D. Balen-Letunić and P. Popović speak in favour of a North Pontic origin of our example. An additional argument for this is the position of the site of Nad Klepečkom itself. As mentioned, the site is located on the right bank of the Danube river, and somewhat east of the Mlava and Danube confluence, within the Stig region. The distribution of prehistoric and Roman sites in this region indicate that the area was on one of the main communications that came from the east, possibly crossing the Danube from the Banat region east of the site, and led further to the west through the Danube and Sava valleys, and to the south by the Mlava and Morava valleys (Cf. Мишић, Ђокић 2011; Filipović, Mladenović 2019). Regarding the cultural context of the face-bead from Nad Klepečkom, judging by the number and distribution of sites and finds attributed to the La Tène period, from the 4th/3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE, and the Scordisci settlement at the site itself, the face-bead from the site should most probably be connected with the Celtic/Scordisci cultural domain (Figure 1).

¹ The example from Tolmin is considered Mediterranean (Balen-Letunić 1990: footnote 11, with cited literature).

² For a slightly different view on the topic, based on a find of a glass head-shaped pendant in Nadin (Croatia), refer to Čelhar, Kukoč 2014: 96, with cited literature.



Fig. 3. Face-beads in the Balkans and the Danube region: 1. Tomlin (St. Lucija), 2. Kompolje, 3. Prozor, 4. Donja Dolina, 5. Nad Klepečkom, 6. Krševica (Kale), 7. Govora, 8. Gruiu Darii, 9. Zimnicea, 10. Greaca, 11. Sveštari, 12. Mangalia, 13. Constanța, 14. Kolmen, 15. Nesebar.

Chronology

In terms of chronology, face-beads do not represent particularly sensitive finds. In the Pontic area, their occurrence is dated to the 4th/3rd century BCE, and to the mid-3rd century BCE within the eastern La Tène domain (Karwowski 2015: 166). Unfortunately, finds of face-beads rarely originate from enclosed archaeological contexts, therefore preventing the possibility of a more precise chronological attribution. The earlier dating is proposed for the example from Grave 2b at the Mangalia necropolis on the western shore of the Black Sea, which is dated to the end of the 4th century BCE (Preda, Bârlădeanu 1979: 104). Similarly, the face-bead from the fortress of Gruiu Darii, originates from the phase dated to the 4th/3rd century BCE (Șirbu, Matei 2013: 348). The example from the Daco-Getic necropolis in Zimnicea originates from a horse burial, which belongs to the later phase of the necropolis, dated after the 3rd century BCE (Alexandrescu 1980: 32). Likewise, based on the remaining inventory of the disturbed presumed Celtic grave from Fîntînele, the example of a face-bead is dated to the beginning of the 2nd century BCE (Crișan 1975: 55-56). The example

from Grave 127 in Kompolje is, based on the analogies with a grave from Prozor, dated to the 3rd/2nd century BCE, although A. Tonc proposes a slightly earlier dating to the Lt B2 period, meaning the final quarter of the 4th and the first half of the 3rd century BCE (Cf. Balen-Letunić 1990: 45-47; Tonc 2017: Figure 2).

Dating of the three-face glass bead from Nad Klepečkom is certainly problematic since it originates from a survey as a surface find. The earlier dating to the 4th/3rd century BCE does not seem plausible in the context of this site, since there is a gap in settling at the site between the 5th and the 2nd century BCE (Kapuran *et al.* 2019b: 164). The Scordisci settlement at the site, based on the material culture and one absolute date, is positioned into the end of the 2nd and the 1st century BCE, with a possible prolonged duration into the 1st century CE (Mladenović *et al.* 2019: 204-206). Such a late date does not fit properly into the chronological span of similar beads in the surrounding regions, and a more likely dating could be connected with the neighbouring site of Pećine. The Early La Tène necropolis of Pećine is located approximately 7 km west of the site of Nad Klepečkom and dated to the second half of the 4th and the beginning of

the 3rd century BCE, thus chronologically corresponding to finds from Kompolje and Prozor, and therefore providing a more plausible chronology for our example.

Final Remarks

Typologically, the example from the site of Nad Klepečkom is similar to examples from Kompolje (Grave 127 and disturbed grave), Prozor (disturbed grave), and Krševica, both in terms of form and the selection of colours (Balen-Letunić 1990: Tabla 1/1-3; Popović 2007: Sl. 3/14). In terms of dimensions, our example is almost identical to the bead from the site of Krševica and two examples from Kompolje and Prozor (Popović 2007: Sl. 3/14; Balen-Letunić 1990: Tabla 1/2-3). Regarding the colour scheme, P. Popović does not precisely highlight the colour of the faces of the bead from Krševica and solely mentions blue, white and yellow. The examples from disturbed graves in Kompolje and Prozor (no. 2 and 3) possess two white faces and one yellow face, while the remaining beads possess either two yellow faces and one white face or two green faces and one white face. Certainly, our example had two white faces and matches the aforementioned ones, while the colour of the third face remains unknown. A prominent difference can be noticed in the lack of small drops (“beard”) in the lower portion of our example, compared to the examples from Kompolje and Krševica, which could likewise be a consequence of their state of preservation.

The discussion of the origin of the piece is significantly blurred by the fact that it represents a survey find. However, going back to the point made by D. Balen-Letunić, on the Pontic origin of examples from the eastern Adriatic coast, the example from Nad Klepečkom would perfectly fit into the proposed trade/exchange route that followed the valleys of the Danube and Sava (Balen-Letunić 1990: 45). As seen in Figure 3, a number of face-beads from Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria gravitate toward the Danube Valley, therefore reaffirming the idea of their direction of distribution.³ Face-beads are known for their cultural variabil-

ity, ranging from the La Tène domain in central and eastern Europe, Iapodian on the Adriatic coast, Dacian in the Carpathian Basin, and “Greek” in the Pontic area. Based on the nature and finds from the site, the example from Nad Klepečkom should be set into the Celtic/Scordiscian cultural domain, and dated to the 4th/3rd century BCE. The relationship between the examples from Nad Klepečkom and Krševica, which are similarly dated, remains unknown. Based on the existing research and historical sources, the region of Stig represented a stronghold of the so-called Celtic populations from the 3rd century BC, and their settling significantly intensified during the 1st century BCE, following their defeat by Lucius Cornelius Scipio in 84 BCE (Todorović 1968: 107; Papazoglu 1969: 272 and further; Popović 1994: 17-20; Lazić 2017: 69 and further). On the other hand, based on the scarcity of sites from this period, P. Popović suggested that the period related finds from Krševica represent the results of a short-lasting “stopover” for their raids against Hellenistic and Roman Macedonia, which are attested in written sources (Papazoglu 1969: 209 and further; Popović 2007: 818). Such a point of view should be taken with caution, considering that a significant number of Late La Tène sites have been recorded in the valleys of the Great and South Morava (Булатовић 2000; Булатовић, Филиповић 2011; Filipović *et al.* 2019).

The function of these three-faced glass beads remains unknown. Some authors consider that such beads represent pendants which were worn on a necklace, and connect them with the apotropaic sphere, as amulets that protected its owner from spells and misfortunes (Balen-Letunić 1990: 45-47). The find of a three-faced glass bead from the site of Nad Klepečkom, on the right bank of the Danube river, reaffirms the idea of a trade/exchange route that connected the Black Sea with the eastern Adriatic coast. However, the large number of excavated sites along the banks of the Danube and Sava, and the relatively low number of three-face glass beads recorded, indicate that such beads possibly represented an exclusive, rather than common, item for the prehistoric populations that inhabited the Balkans between the 4th and the 1st century BCE.

³ Another significant concentration of face-beads is observable within the Carpathian Basin, which would rather be connected with the Tisza river.

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