

30 YEARS

# ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA



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On the cover: tetradrachm struck in *Amphipolis*, Macedonia, First Meris (Roman protectorate); diademed and draped bust of Artemis to right, bow and quiver over her shoulder; all at the center of a Macedonian shield ornamented with stars within crescents; 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC; History Museum at the city of Petrich (SW Bulgaria), inv. #2, possibly found in *Heraclea Sintica*; photo Lily Grozdanova; see the paper of A. Korzun in this issue.

# Investigating *Spondylus* Shell Ornaments at the Chalcolithic Tell Settlement from Pietrele – Măgura Gorgana (Romania): Typology, Functionality and Symbolism

ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA  
XXX, 2 (2026), 1-28

Meda TODERAȘ / Monica MĂRGĂRIT

**Abstract:** The Pietrele-Măgura Gorgana tell settlement in southern Romania, a key Gumelnița culture site, yields a substantial assemblage of ornaments made from shells, with a notable emphasis on *Spondylus* sp. This study inventories 130 *Spondylus* items and situates them within the broader economic and symbolic landscape of the tell settlement. The analysis demonstrates that exotic raw materials were predominantly represented by finished ornaments, suggesting that long-distance imports arrived at Pietrele in advanced stages of production. The *Spondylus* assemblage reveals a diverse typology, including bangles, cylindrical and tubular beads, biconvex beads, massive beads with central perforation, perforated plates, pendant, and a decorated object, highlighting a spectrum of uses from personal adornment to potential symbolic items. A detailed examination of the bangle series documents consistent use-wear patterns and, in recycling episodes, reworking into pendants. The presence of repair-like and transformation traces indicates a dynamic material economy in which fragmentary pieces could be repurposed to fulfill evolving aesthetic or symbolic needs. When integrated with comparative data from other Gumelnița tell settlements and broader Neolithic/Chalcolithic contexts, Pietrele's *Spondylus* ornaments highlight patterns of exchange, craft specialization, and the social meanings attached to personal ornamentation. The results contribute to a refined understanding of how long-distance materials were incorporated into local production networks and how typological variety reflects both functional use and symbolic value within Gumelnița communities.

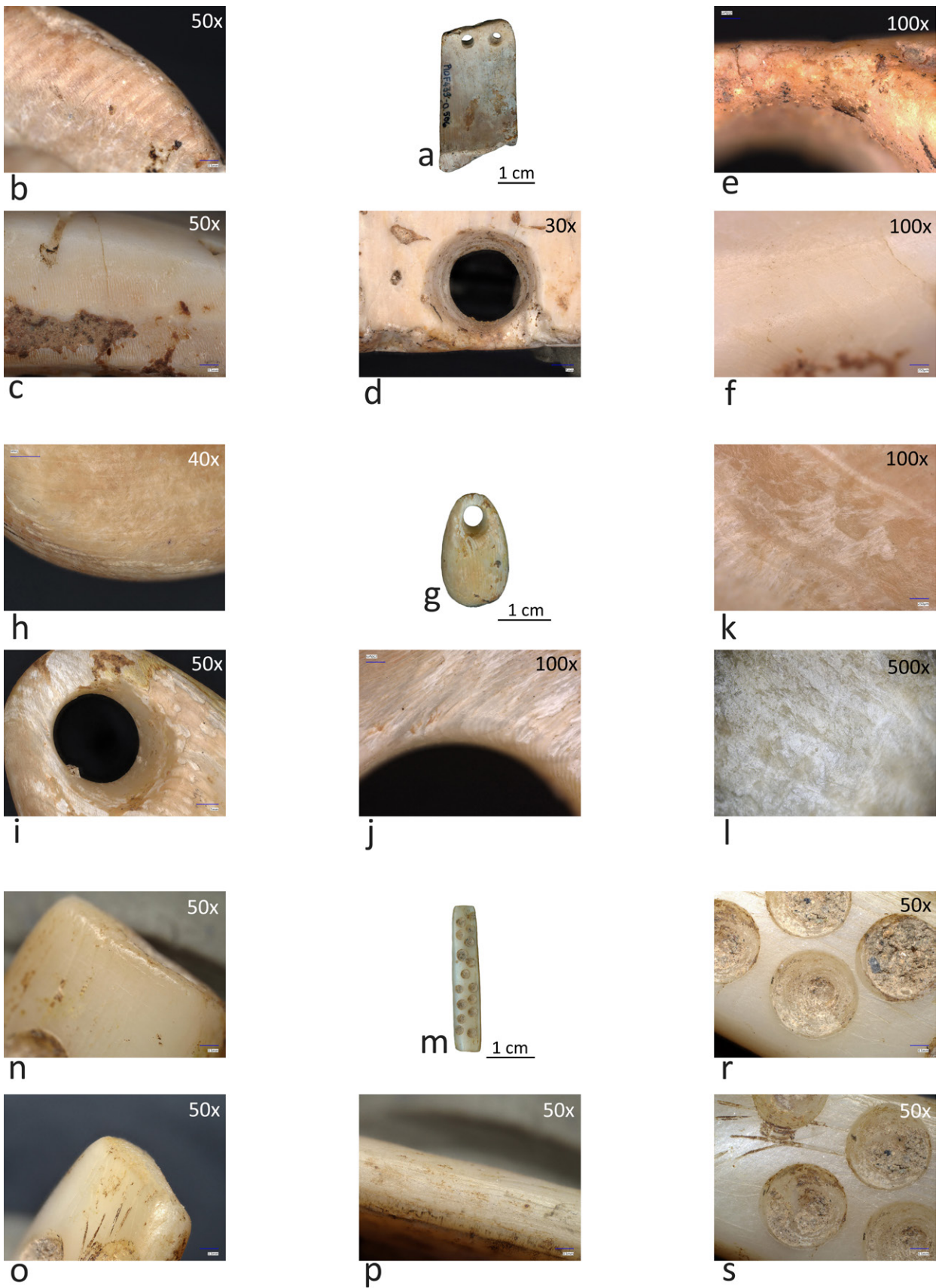
**Keywords:** Chalcolithic, Gumelnița culture, *Spondylus* shell, typology, operational scheme, symbolic value.

## INTRODUCTION

The tell settlement at Pietrele-Măgura Gorgana is located east of Pietrele village in southern Romania (Giurgiu County) (**fig. 1**). Systematic excavations have been conducted since 2004 as a joint project between the Eurasian Department of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, and the Institute of Physical Geography at Goethe University Frankfurt.

Pietrele tell settlement belongs to the Gumelnița culture, one of the most significant Chalcolithic cultures in southeastern Europe. Based on radiocarbon dating calibrated to stratigraphic ceramic sequences, the site was occupied approximately from 5200 to 4250 cal BC, representing an extended occupation along the Lower Danube of nearly 1,000 years. This long continuity renders Pietrele a uniquely important archive for understanding the development of the Chalcolithic period in the region.

The most prominent feature of the site is the tell settlement itself, known as *Măgura Gorgana*, which rises about 9 metres above the surrounding terrain. During the Copper Age, it would have constituted a highly visible and imposing landmark in the landscape. The



**Fig. 11:** a *Spondylus* perforated plate; b-c, h, o abrasion marks; d, i perforation details; e, j use-wear at the perforation level; f, k-l use-wear areas; g pendant; m decorated object; n sawing marks; p scraping marks; r-s decoration details (Monica Mărgărit)

# Cult and Its Representation in *Heraclea Sintica*: Two Female Statues from the Polis

ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA  
XXX, 2 (2026), 29-38

Arina KORZUN

**Abstract:** This study examines two female marble sculptures from *Heraclea Sintica*, an ancient city located in southwestern Bulgaria, and explores their potential significance for understanding the religious life and artistic production of the polis during the Hellenistic period. The first piece is a sculpted head, discovered in the *forum* of *Heraclea* and initially dated to the Late Hellenistic period. On the basis of the *Melonenfrisur* type and iconographic considerations, a revised – Early Hellenistic – date may be proposed for the head. Close parallels with numismatic representations, particularly those depicting Artemis on coinage from *Orthogoreia* and on issues minted under Pyrrhus I, allow the author to advance the hypothesis that the head may have formed part of a cult statue of Artemis.

The second sculpture, a female torso discovered on the *acropolis*, is preserved only fragmentarily. On the basis of its stylistic features, a tentative attribution to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC may be proposed. The character of the drapery and the general pose may suggest that the figure could be interpreted as Artemis and may perhaps be seen as echoing sculptural types associated with the Praxitelean tradition.

Taken together, these sculptures may point to the prominence of Artemis in the religious landscape of *Heraclea Sintica* and reflect both local artistic traditions and broader Hellenistic influences. They may further suggest the presence of active sculptural workshops in the city and its integration into the cultural and ideological framework of the Macedonian court.

**Key words:** *Heraclea Sintica*, Hellenistic sculpture, Artemis, *Melonenfrisur*, Praxitelean tradition.

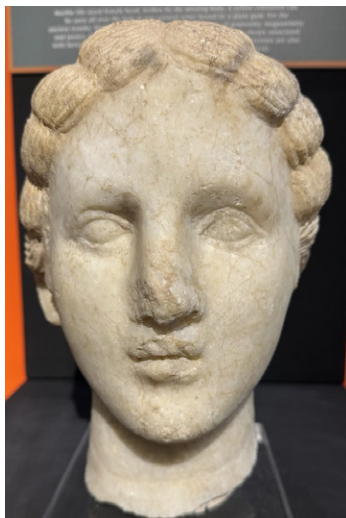
Although some information is available about the cults of *Heraclea Sintica*, archaeological evidence for the city's sanctuaries and temples remains limited (Vagalinski 2022a, 103-108). Nevertheless, the existence of a sanctuary of Nemesis within the *forum* (Vagalinski 2020b, 214-224; 2022a, 103; 2022b, figs. 49-50; Korzun 2024, 6-11) and a temple of Heracles to its east is well established. The latter contained a cult statue of the god, fragments of which were recovered during the excavation seasons of 2019 and 2025 (Vagalinski 2022a, 104; 2022b, figs. 619A, 619B, 620; Vagalinski / Traykova in press).

In such a context, two female statues, possibly representing goddesses, unearthed at *Heraclea Sintica* may provide important evidence for the religious life of the polis.

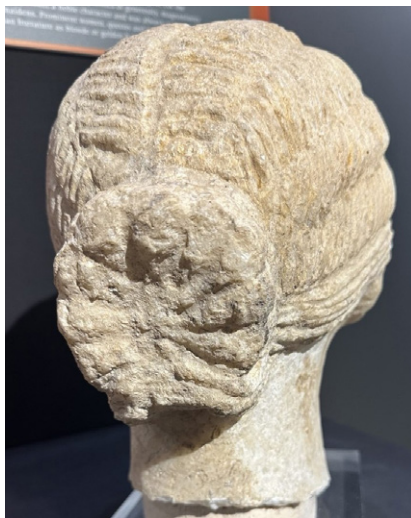
## THE MARBLE HEAD FROM THE FORUM

A sculpted head intentionally embedded in a later wall – was discovered during the 2018 excavation campaign (figs. 1-4; Vagalinski 2020a, 11-16, figs. 23 a-h; 2022a, 25, 2022b, fig. 171). It had been carefully placed on its right side in a niche at the northern end of a wall that appears to have served as a protective cover. This wall leans against the western face of the substructure of another wall built during the third settlement period, which delimited the eastern side of the *forum*. Stratigraphic evidence indicates that the sculpture was damaged after an enemy attack on the city in AD 282/283 (Vagalinski 2022a, 42)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This date is supported by the most recent fieldwork; previously, the date of the attack had been suggested as after AD 276 (Vagalinski 2020a, 14).



**Fig. 1.** Marble head from *Heraclea Sintica*, front view, Petrich Historical Museum (A. Korzun)



**Fig. 2.** Marble head from *Heraclea Sintica*, back view, Petrich Historical Museum (A. Korzun)



**Fig. 3.** Marble Head from *Heraclea Sintica*, profile, right view, Petrich Historical Museum (A. Korzun)

Stylistic analysis, based primarily on the hairstyle, suggests that the piece could be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC and may have belonged to a statue of a goddess. However, a portrait identification cannot be ruled out (Vagalinski 2020a, 14-16). Indeed, certain features of the image may support a portrait identification, particularly the closely set elongated eyes and the slight thickening of the nose; however, both may also reflect the sculptor's style or skill.

Overall, the image emphasizes youthfulness and reflects a tendency toward idealization. The face is characterized by an elongated oval, full lips, and a small mouth, defined by a drilled line.

The hair, neatly parted at the center, is arranged in strands and gathered into a knot at the back of the head (the so-called *Melonenfrisur*). At the same time, the hairstyle exhibits a certain informality: strands partially cover the upper ears, and soft curls at the temples lend the image a subtle dynamism while emphasizing the youthful character of the figure.

Certain features may tentatively suggest that the figure could have had a cultic function. First, traces of painted blond hair are preserved<sup>2</sup>; second, the deliberate placement of the sculpted head within a specially constructed niche may also be of significance<sup>3</sup>.

It is well known that the *Melonenfrisur* hairstyle is characteristic of both portrait and divine representations. Its emergence appears to date to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC and is related to youthful imagery. In funerary reliefs and statuary, the earliest evidence dates to the late Classical period (340-330 BC), with examples originating from Attica (*Kerameikos*) and Epirus (Gkikaki 2011, 476-486, figs. Mb-G1-2). Such representations in votive reliefs remain limited; the closest parallel may be observed in the hairstyle of the Muses on the well-known Mantineian base, associated with Praxiteles (Corso 2004, 67, fig. 34; Καλτσάς 2007, 82-86; Gkikaki 2011, 481, figs. SK-W 5, Mb-W 1).

At approximately the same time, the hairstyle also appears in sculpture in the round, where it is connected to divine representations, above all with Artemis. One of the earliest images of the young god-



**Fig. 4.** Marble head from *Heraclea Sintica*, profile, left view, Petrich Historical Museum (A. Korzun)

<sup>2</sup> For the painted blond hair of the head, see Vagalinski 2020a, 11-16 with further bibliography and footnote # 10 in the text below.

<sup>3</sup> The closest parallel for the burial of the head of a cult statue is the deliberate concealment of the head of Aphrodite at the agora of Smyrna (Ersoy 2015, 84).

# An Antoninianus Hoard from the Domitianus Agora of Phaselis

ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA  
XXX, 2 (2026), 39-52

Lütfullah Ufuk ERDOĞAN / Kasım OYARÇİN

**Abstract:** This study examines a small hoard of *antoninianus* coins recovered during the excavations of the *Domitianus* Agora in the ancient city of *Phaselis* (Antalya). The hoard was discovered in a cavity between the blocks of a north-south oriented wall separating Room 11 and Room 12 of the agora. The hoard consists of a total of 18 coins, all of which are *antoniniani* marked with XXI, minted after the *Aurelian* reform of AD 274 and before the reform of *Diocletian*. The hoard includes two coins of *Probus*, two of *Carinus*, nine of *Diocletian*, and five of *Maximian*. In terms of mint distribution, the mint of *Cyzicus* is represented most frequently with 10 specimens, while *Antiochia* ranks second with five specimens; the mints of *Heraclea*, *Siscia*, and *Tripolis* are each represented by a single specimen. An examination of the chronological distribution shows that the earliest coin dates to AD 280, while the latest specimens date to AD 294-295. This suggests that the hoard does not represent a long-term accumulation but rather consists of coins that were in circulation around AD 295. The placement of the coins in a cavity within the wall indicates that the hoard was most likely concealed for temporary safekeeping. The small number of coins and their limited total value suggest that this accumulation may represent a short-term saving, possibly derived from the proceeds of a minor commercial transaction or a payment received in return for a service. The aim of this study is to evaluate the hoard recovered during the excavations of the *Domitianus* Agora in the ancient city of *Phaselis* within its archaeological context and to present new data on coin circulation in the Late Roman Period. The *Phaselis* hoard contributes to the understanding of monetary circulation in the region in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD through the coin types it contains, its mint distribution, and its chronological range. A large proportion of the Late Roman coin hoards known from Anatolia consist of hundreds of coins and are often discovered without a secure archaeological context. In contrast, although the *Phaselis antoninianus* hoard contains a limited number of coins, it is of particular importance due to its reliable excavation context.

**Key words:** *Phaselis*, *Domitianus* Agora, Roman Coin Hoard, *Antoninianus*, Late Roman Period.

*Phaselis*, located today within the borders of Tekirova District of Kemer, in the province of Antalya, occupies a strategic position at the intersection of the regions of *Lycia*, *Pamphylia*, and *Pisidia*. Its sheltered harbors (Aslan 2016, 31-47; Aslan et al. 2018, 1-13) and the commercial networks it established indicate that *Phaselis*<sup>1</sup> developed as an active port city on both regional and international scales from the early periods onward (Schäfer et al. 1981; Möller 2000, 79; Tüner-Önen 2008, 64) (fig. 1).

The archaeological evidence and ancient sources clearly demonstrate that *Phaselis*, one of the important port cities of the region, was situated on the principal maritime trade routes of Antiquity thanks to its favorable geographical location<sup>2</sup>.

The city had three harbors (North Harbor, Central Harbor, South Harbor) in Antiquity<sup>3</sup>. The South Harbor is located to the southwest of the city's acropolis, on the eastern side of a wide bay. The harbor occupies a naturally sheltered position against winds and waves, a condition that was further reinforced by the construction of breakwa-

<sup>1</sup> The earliest concrete evidence related to the city's maritime trade dates to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. These finds were identified in the *bothros* within the Altar of Apollo, which was uncovered immediately to the south of the quay structures during the 2024 excavation season.

<sup>2</sup> For the city's maritime trade and its position on maritime routes, see Heipp-Tamer 1993, 52, 58, 76; Tüner-Önen 2008, 68-69; Aslan / Baybo 2015, 1-4; Orhan 2023, 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> *Strabo*, in his work *Geographika*, states that *Phaselis* had three harbors with the expression: "after this comes *Phaselis*, which has three harbors, a noteworthy city, and a lake," see: Strab. 14.3.9.



PLATE 1

# A River as a Treasury: Solidi of Valentinian II from the Nišava river (in Niš, *Naissus*)

ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA  
XXX, 2 (2026), 53-63

Marija JOVIĆ

**Abstract:** This paper presents the first documented discovery of Late Antique solidi from the territory of Late Antique Niš (*Naissus*), dating to the period of the Valentinian dynasty. *Naissus* functioned as an important administrative, military, and communication center in the central Balkans during this time. Despite the city's prominent status in Late Antiquity, no official discovery of gold coins had previously been reliably confirmed, leaving a significant gap in the reconstruction of high-denomination monetary circulation in the region. In 2017, five solidi of Valentinian II were accidentally discovered in the bed of the Nišava river, near the "Old Bridge" in the settlement of Brzi Brod, approximately 1.6 km downstream from the imperial residence of *Mediana* (map 1). Although the find does not derive from a controlled archaeological context, it represents a rare and valuable testimony to the presence of imperial gold currency in Late Antique *Naissus*.

The paper discusses the circumstances of the discovery, the numismatic characteristics of the coins, and their historical context, with consideration of possible reasons for their deposition. This find contributes new data for understanding monetary circulation and the socio-economic conditions in *Naissus* in the Late Antiquity.

**Key words:** solidi, Valentinian II, *Naissus*, Late Antiquity, gold coinage.

## INTRODUCTION

To date, no official find of late antique gold coinage has been reliably confirmed within the territory of ancient *Naissus*, from the period of the Valentinian dynasty, despite the fact that the city at that time constituted a major administrative, military, and communication center of the central Balkans, situated at the crossroads of important transport routes. The absence of such finds from a secure archaeological context significantly hampers the reconstruction of monetary flows of the highest denominations, which in Late Antiquity were closely tied to the state fiscal system, military payments, donatives, and the functioning of the imperial administration.

The importance of gold coinage in the Late Roman Empire was the result of profound monetary and fiscal transformations initiated by the reforms of Diocletian and subsequently consolidated during the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Although the precise details of these reforms are not fully known, their long-term consequence was the provision of a relatively abundant supply of gold coinage struck to a strictly defined standard, which facilitated a gradual return to a monetized economy (Kent 1956, 191). A decisive step in this process was the monetary reform of Constantine I, namely the introduction of the solidus in AD 309, rightly regarded as the most significant reform of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. This measure marked the abandonment of earlier monetary traditions and the establishment of a new system based on the gold standard, with the *solidus* becoming the principal unit of account and the cornerstone of the stability of the late Roman financial system (Bacuh 2008, 31). Military salaries, although formally still expressed in kind (*annonae* and *capita*), were increasingly converted into monetary equivalents, clearly indicating the growing role of gold



Fig. 1. Solidus from the Nišava River, specimen #1 (M. Jović)



Fig. 2. Solidus from the Nišava River, specimen #2 (M. Jović)



Fig. 3. Solidus from the Nišava River, specimen #3 (M. Jović)

The reverse depicts a scene with two rulers seated, jointly holding a globe as a symbol of universal dominion; between their legs appears a palm branch, while above the composition is represented Victoria with outstretched wings. For the issues of Valentinian II, it is characteristic that the young emperor is most often depicted on the right and on a smaller scale in relation to the co-emperor on the left, clearly reflecting the hierarchical relationship within collegiate rule (Pearce 1940, 156). Given that the coinage was struck in the aftermath of the catastrophic Roman defeat at the Battle of Adrianople (AD 378), the presence of Victoria on the reverse further emphasizes the idea of restored victory and the legitimacy of imperial authority, explicitly conveyed through the legend VICTOR-IA AVGG. Such a composition represents a typical propagandistic motif of Late Roman coinage, aimed at underscoring the unity of the rulers and the stability of the Empire (figs. 1-3). Shortly after Valentinian I proclaimed his son Gratian as co-emperor and conferred upon him the title of Augustus in AD 367, Trier emerged as one of the principal imperial residences in the West, while its mint developed into the primary issuer of gold coinage for the western part of the Empire. Within this context, the solidus type *Victoria Avgg*, bearing the mint mark TROB and a distinctive reverse design, retained a dominant role in western monetary production for nearly a quarter of a century. A new variant of the *Victoria Avgg* type, featuring Valentinian II represented as a child, began to be issued toward the end of Gratian's first decade of rule (AD 377) (RIC IX, 4-6). These solidi most commonly bear the mint mark TROBT, while rarer subtypes with the marks TROBC and TROBS are also attested, including the specimens recovered from the Nišava River. The final letters in these mint marks denote individual officinae (workshops) within the mint – namely the first, second, and third officina (Pearce 1940, 141).

Based on the currently known and published specimens, only two identical examples have been recorded within the territory of Serbia corresponding to the solidi discovered in the Nišava River: one originates from Kostolac, while the findspot of the other remains unknown (Vasić 2008, #58-59). Identical specimens have also been recorded outside the territory of Serbia, namely one example in the hoard from Dortmund, Arnsberg (Depeyrot 2009, 50, #72), as well as two examples in the Hoxne hoard (Depeyrot 2009, 311, #13, #14). According to the inventory of hoards from the territory of the former Yugoslavia, issues of Valentinian II are attested in a total of five hoards (Bosanski Brod / Derventa in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Donja Kupčina / Pisarovina in Croatia; Gobovce / Kranj in Slovenia; Vinkovci in Croatia; Žepče in

# New Data on the Distribution of 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Glass Hand Grenades in Europe: The Finds from the Baba Vida Fortress, Bulgaria

ARCHAEOLOGIA BULGARICA  
XXX, 2 (2026), 65-85

Vanya STAVREVA

**Abstract:** This article presents, for the first time, a collection of twenty glass hand grenades (complete and fragmented) discovered during archaeological excavations at the medieval fortress of Baba Vida in Vidin, Bulgaria. These artifacts, manufactured from thick *forest glass* (*Waldglas*), are the only examples of their kind found within the territory of present-day Bulgaria. The study analyzes the finds within their specific archaeological and historical contexts, providing a comparative analysis with similar collections across Europe and the Mediterranean (Germany, Austria, Serbia, Spain, Greece, etc.).

The author hypothesizes that the presence of these weapons in Vidin is directly linked to the brief Austrian occupation of the fortress (1689-1690) during the Great Turkish War. The paper examines the production technology, physical characteristics, and fragmentation effectiveness of glass grenades in comparison to those made of cast iron or ceramic. A comprehensive review of written sources and museum holdings enables the compilation of an up-to-date distribution map of this type of ammunition in Europe.

**Keywords:** Vidin, Bulgaria, glass hand grenades, forest glass (*Waldglas*), Great Turkish War, 17<sup>th</sup> century, conflict archaeology.

## INTRODUCTION

A group of objects made of thick glass stands out among the finds discovered during archaeological excavations at the medieval fortress of Baba Vida in Vidin, Bulgaria. They consist of spherical containers with a narrow mouth on a short neck, possessing approximately uniform dimensions and weights (**fig. 1**). These items were unearthed in layers generally attributed to the Ottoman period. Similar finds are not known from elsewhere in the territory of Bulgaria; however, they are encountered in museum collections in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Great Britain, Turkey, and the United States. The provenance of a significant portion of these objects is uncertain, as they were acquired through donations or entered museums without contextual information. Consequently, finds from secure archaeological contexts, such as the present case, are of decisive importance for establishing their chronological and territorial distribution, as well as for their interpretation.

In recent years, the prevailing opinion has been that these are glass hand grenades. Various hypotheses have been advanced regarding their genesis and distribution, with the general consensus being that they represent an innovation in Western European arms production. Different researchers attribute them chronologically to a fairly wide range from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The present study aims to analyze the finds from the Baba Vida fortress within their archaeological and historical context. The glass hand grenades discussed in this article were discovered during earlier excavations conducted between 1977 and 1988 and have been stored at the Regional Historical Museum in Vidin for more than forty years



Fig. 1. Glass hand grenades from Baba Vida Fortress, Vidin, Bulgaria (V. Stavreva)

without being analyzed. Their publication and introduction into scientific circulation are of significant importance, given the scarcity of such finds from archaeological excavations.

#### SITE BACKGROUND

The medieval fortress of Baba Vida is located in the city of Vidin, on the right bank of the Danube River. Occupying an area of approximately 9.5 decares, it is equipped with two lines of fortification walls, nine towers attached to the inner curtain wall, two towers attached to the outer wall, and a protective moat. It was constructed during the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and its initial building phase represented a combination of new structures and constructions inherited from previous epochs – Roman and Early Byzantine (Вългов 1987а, 29; 1987b, 52). Presumably, during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the fortification underwent a major reconstruction and was expanded with an outer defensive line consisting of a peripheral semi-arcuate moat on the landward side and a relatively low defensive wall. A second major reconstruction was carried out between 1356 and 1360, when two defensive lines were fully shaped and new towers were built (Вългов 1987b, 53). Around the inner courtyard during the Bulgarian Middle Ages, domestic and cult buildings were likely situated, with their walking level determined at a depth of 1.80 m below the contemporary ground level. In the northern corner, there was a small church or chapel. In the period encompassing the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, a massive two-story building was constructed around the inner courtyard, with the ground floor comprising thirteen chain-arranged rooms of almost identical dimensions and a rectangular plan. In front of them stood an arcaded two-armed portico, whose supports, together with the vaulted roofing of the rooms, carried the structure of the upper residential floor (Вългов 1987b, 53-54).

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