

COMMENTS ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SO-CALLED SUPPORTS FOR PHIALAE FROM THE TOWN OF BREZOVO, PLOVDIV REGION¹

Petar Minkov

*National Archaeological Institute with Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2 Saborna Str., 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria;
petraki_orlovski@abv.bg*

ABSTRACT

This report discusses and analyses two ceramic objects defined as supports for a pair of phialae discovered together with other artefacts in a tumulus located in Radnev geran area near the town of Brezovo, Plovdiv district. The presence of objects similar to the supports, dated at the Middle Ages, provide grounds for a debate on their interpretation and chronology.

The supports are stored at NAIM – BAS, recorded in the inventory books under a common number – No. 1714. They are triangular in shape and the end parts of each of the shoulders are rectangular/rectangular-oval in shape and with a trapezoid cross-section. Their thickness is 1.1 cm and 0.9 cm, respectively. On one side, the surface is flat and their even part is carelessly smoothed with visible oblique/diagonal linear traces. On the other side, pyramidal low feet are modeled at the ends of the stilts. On the tips of one of the objects, there are visible traces of fired glaze, while on the other, in individual places, there are traces of present-day chipping – also at the tips of the feet. On the inner surface of the shoulders, there are noticeable shallow grooves and edges which stop before the zone of the feet and show that they were moulded.

Objects from the Middle Ages are similar to the supports under review. In literature these objects are known as „трикраки подставки/столчета“ (tripod supports/stools), „триноги/триножки“ (tripods), „tripod-stilts“/“props” or “earthenware supports”. They are characteristic of the lands of continental Greece where they first appeared, and the territories of the Balkan Peninsula and Transcaucasia. These finds are widespread in Bulgarian lands. There are well-known examples from Vidin, Melnik, Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen fortress, Cherven, Veliki Preslav, Varna, Sultantsi, Markovcha, Sozopol, and Nesebar.

The presented data about the stilts from Brezovo and their Medieval analogues from the present-day lands on the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor and Transcaucasia, as well as the presence of glaze on the surface of the legs of one of the tripods allow their more certain dating at the beginning of the 13th c. at the earliest.

Key words: Brezovo, Middle Ages, phialae, supports, tripod stilts, Post-Byzantine pottery

This report discusses and analyses two ceramic objects defined as supports for a pair of phialae discovered in a tumulus near the town of Brezovo.² The presence of objects similar to the supports, dated at the Middle Ages, provide grounds for a debate on their interpretation and chronology.³

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Research history

The two phialae and the supports thereof belong to a group of objects found in a tumulus near the town of Brezovo, Plovdiv region (fig. 1). It is located in the Radnev Geran area and was disturbed by looters in November 1897 (Филов 1919, 3). Some of the discovered objects were hidden or thrown away, while others were taken in and kept for an year at the National Library in Plovdiv. Later, V. Dobruský was sent to research the find on site, as well as three other mounds near the first one. From the excavations carried out, there is no report documentation or description of the circumstances of the excavations of the other tumuli (Филов 1919, 3). Brief information about the newly discovered antiquities was reported by the district engineer L. Machas to the Škorpil brothers. According to it, there was a “*foursquare*” tomb in the center of the tumulus, whose dimensions did not exceed those of a sarcophagus (Филов 1919, 4). The other information amounts to details on the location of the individual objects, about which Filov has certain reserves. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the two phialae (originally called “*basins*” by B. Filov) were discovered by the right arm of the skeleton of an individual (Филов 1919, 4).

From the information available, it becomes clear that there are no reliable data about the way the objects were discovered, their exact position in the grave space, or evidence whether the supports really belong to the set of silver objects. No additional details are known whether the tumulus was disturbed in later archaeological periods. There is no information about the presence of secondary graves and/or finds and materials with later dating (including from the Middle Ages).

Taking into account the information about the scattering of the find and the place where some of the preserved objects from the masonry tomb were stored, it can be speculated that they were mixed by looters with other finds from later periods (also stored at the National Library of Plovdiv). They were collectively presented and reviewed by V. Dobruský in this way, without taking into account their origin and original context.⁴

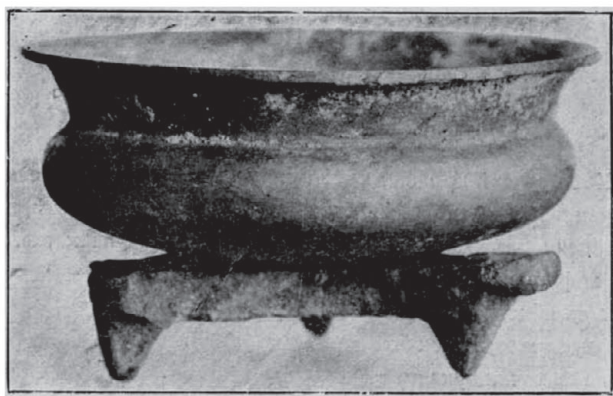


Fig. 1. Brezovo. Silver phiala on a ceramic support
(after Филов 1919, 12, обр. 10)

Обр. 1. Брезово. Сребърна фиала върху керамична поставка
(по Филов 1919, 12, обр. 10)

The ceramic supports⁵

The supports are stored at NAIM – BAS, recorded in the inventory books under a common number – No. 1714 (fig. 2, fig. 3). It is mentioned that: “...*These basins were placed maybe on the two clay tripods, about 2 cm high, which correspond in size and were found together with them in the grave...*” (Филов 1919, 11, 12, обр. 10). The dating proposed for them is the time between the 4th – 3rd c. BC and is based on the chronology of the bronze situla discovered in the same complex (Филов 1919, 14, № 11, обр. 11). In more modern times, based on the seals

⁴ Evidence of this is also the later “addition” of an iron object in the form of a knife with a chain attached to its handle. About it, Filov mentions: “According to a note in the museum inventory, this object was not found in the tumulus itself, but in its immediate vicinity. This is also confirmed by the information about the find provided by the Škorpil brothers...” (Филов 1919, 13, обр. 12 a).

⁵ The photo images of the tripods were made by Krassimir Georgiev, photographer at NAIM – BAS, for which I would like to express my gratitude.

of the eponym Megon I on two amphorae from the tomb complex, a more precise date for the tumulus from Brezovo was proposed – the first half of the 4th c. BC, more specifically – around 360 BC, and the phialae were referred a slightly earlier date (Стойанов 2017, 12, 40).

The ceramic supports are triangular in shape and the end parts of each of the shoulders are rectangular/rectangular-oval in



Fig. 2. Brezovo. Ceramic tripod stilt (Photo Krassimir Georgiev, NAIM – BAS)
Обр. 2. Брезово. Керамична тринога (фото Красимир Георгиев, НАИМ – БАН)



Fig. 3. Brezovo. Ceramic tripod stilt. Details with preserved traces of glaze (Photo Krassimir Georgiev, NAIM – BAS)
Обр. 3. Брезово. Керамична тринога. Детайли със запазени следи от глазура (фото Красимир Георгиев, НАИМ – БАН)

shape and with a trapezoid cross-section (fig. 4). Their thickness is 1.1 cm and 0.9 cm, respectively. The clay they were made from is light brown to beige in colour. The fabric of the second item is mixed with mica and fine particles (with sizes up to 0.1 cm). On one side, the surface is flat and their even part is carelessly smoothed with visible oblique/diagonal linear traces. On the other side, pyramidal low feet are modeled at the ends of the stilts. On the tips of one of the objects, there are visible traces of fired glaze (fig. 3: 1 – 3), while on the other, in individual places, there are traces of present-day chipping – also at the tips of the feet (fig. 2). On the inside surface of the shoulders, there are noticeable shallow grooves and edges which stop before the zone of the feet and show that they were moulded.

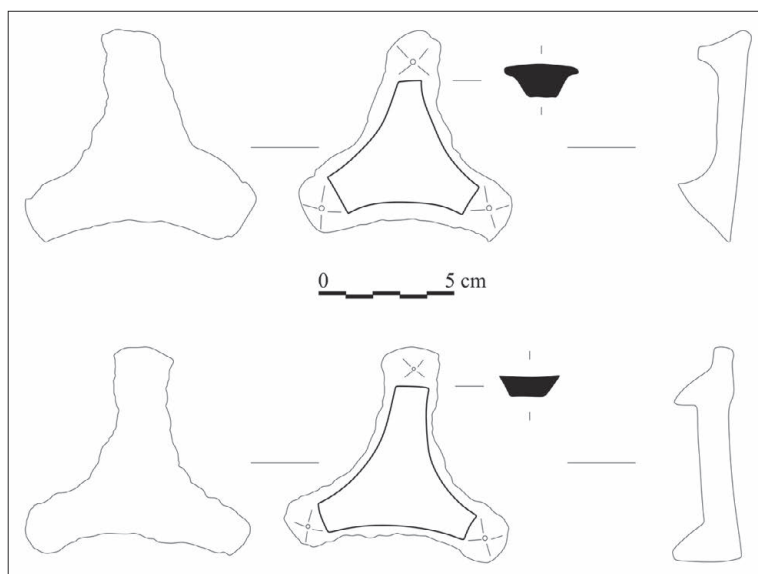


Fig. 4. Brezovo. Ceramic tripod stilts, graphic representation
Обр. 4. Брезово. Керамични триноги, графично изображение

To present day, there are no analogous objects from the Late Classical or Early Hellenistic Age in modern Bulgarian territory.

Parallels

Objects from the Middle Ages are similar to the supports under review. In literature these objects are known as „трикраки подставки/столчета“ (tripod supports/stools) (Георгиева 1985, 139; Цветков 1989, 131), „триноги/триножки“ (tripods) (Даскалов 2010, 727), „tripod-stilts“/“props” (Charalambous 2014, 281) or “earthenware supports” (Vroom 1998, 520). They

are characteristic of the lands of continental Greece where they first appeared, and the territories of the Balkan Peninsula and Transcaucasia (see below). These finds are widespread in Bulgarian lands. There are well-known examples from Vidin,⁶ Melnik (Цветков 1989, 131, обр. 196), Veliko Tarnovo (Георгиева 1974, 11; Долмова 1985, 10 – 20, обр. 1 – 2; Долмова-Лукановска 2007, 224, табл. VII, 254, 328, табл. XVII), Shumen fortress (Антонова 1995, 85, обр. 88 – 89/38, 39, 40, 41), Cherven (Георгиева 1985, 133 – 165), Veliki Preslav (Щерева и др. 1999, 45, 47, 143 – 145; Манолова-Войкова 2009, 217, обр. 4/1), Varna⁷ (Димитров 1960, 114 – 115, обр. 4; Кузев 1975, 155 – 159), Sultantsi and Markovcha (Кузев 1983, 130, табл. IV – 1, табл. IX – 5),⁸ Sozopol (Дражева 1992, 293 – 302), Nesebar (Даскалов 2010, 721 – 732), etc.⁹

They are thought to have appeared at the beginning of the 13th c., and their use in Bulgarian lands has been connected with the appearance of sgraffito decoration and glazed ceramics (Долмова 1985, 14; Щерева и др. 1999, 45; Даскалов 2010, 731). They spread on a wide territory, including the lands of the Balkan Peninsula, Byzantium and Transcaucasia (Долмова 1985, 14), and in Bulgarian lands they are found in the popular ceramic centers.

Information about these objects has been presented in a number of studies dedicated to tools used in firing glazed ceramics, some of which have been used in this study (Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 641 – 648; Papadopoulos 1992, 203 – 221; Charalambous 2014, 279 – 298). Some publications state that such tripods were used by ceramic masters at the beginning of the period of the “Three Kingdoms” in China and have been dated at 220 – 265, after which they travelled through Persia, the Middle East and Egypt and infiltrated Byzantium (Morgan 1942, 22 – 23, fig. 17h, i, n, o; Papadopoulos 1992, 208; Vroom 1998, 520; Zekos 2003, 455).

⁶ Unpublished materials from the exposition of RMH – Vidin.

⁷ For the data on Varna and Veliko Tarnovo – See Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 644.

⁸ The cited examples are from the 17th – 18th c., but they are technologically similar to the finds from the 13th – 14th c., which illustrates the long-term use of the ceramic tripods.

⁹ Other types of supports have been reviewed in Bulgarian literature, but they are not relevant to the ones under review here (Кузев 1975, 157 – 159, табл. III; Долмова 1985, 15 – 19, обр. 4; Дражева 1992, 300, обр. 9; Даскалов 2010, 723, обр. 2).

According to the crafting method, these objects can be divided into three groups, two of which are relevant to the aims of this study: 1. Handmade; 2. Made by casting in a mould.¹⁰ They are tools with a triangular/star-like shape and three small pointed legs (Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 642, Charalambous 2014, 281). Their dimensions vary: Width = 6/8 cm; thickness of legs = 0.8/2 cm – 1.8/3 cm (Papadopoulos 1992, 209).

They were used as separating supports in the firing of open glazed vessels, arranged on grates in the firing chamber of the kiln (Papadopoulos 1992, 209).¹¹ It is accepted that the practice of separating vessels during firing using this type of supports can be dated after 1200 at the earliest, and its quick adoption supported the development of glazed ceramics, its “mass production” and the generation and creation of new trends in glazed ceramics from the Late Byzantine period (Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 643; Charalambous 2014, 281). According to the author, this technological innovation had an impact on the development of ceramics from the Palaiologan period and Post-Byzantine ceramic production (Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 643).

Discussion. Chronology. Conclusion

The stilts belonging to the Byzantine ceramic production can unequivocally be referred to the time after the beginning of the 13th c. This has been tracked in studied workshops in a wide territorial zone covering the southern parts of Macedonia, South Epirus, Thessaly, Peloponnese, Attica (with finds from Mikro Pisto, Serres, Thessaloniki, Berea, Trikala, Thebes, Corinth, Sparta, the Athenian agora, etc.) (Vroom 1998, 520; Papanikola-Bakirtzi 1999, 158). Analogous objects have been registered in Medieval centers in present-day North Bulgaria, almost all of which played the role of an administrative or metropolitan center for different periods of time (ДОЛМОВА 1985, 12 – 14, обр. 1 – 3). The usual context in which they are found is the kilns or workshops where the ceramic production was prepared for firing.

From the data on the crafting methods for stilts, it can be presumed that the finds from Bulgarian lands were handmade or using a mould. It can be assumed that the objects from Brezovo were made in a mould, evidenced by the casting ridges on the inside surface of the three shoulders of the stilts.

The interpretation of the stilts from Brezovo is made difficult by the lack of clarity regarding the exact archaeological context they belonged to. Since the tumulus was destroyed, it is not clear whether there were secondary disturbances and other archaeological materials from the Middle Ages above the primary grave. At the same time, the scattering of a large part of the objects immediately after they were discovered does not guarantee that the collected materials were in their entirety or with the same original location.

From the known number of phialae with a certain context from present-day Bulgarian territory, no similar “sets” including a phiale with a support are known to correlate to the items from Brezovo. Such are also not known from neighbouring territories.

If the hypothesis is accepted that the discussed objects are from the Late Classical Age, it still leaves unanswered the question of the wide chronological distance between the group of artifacts from the 13th – 14th c. and their “prototypes” from around the middle of the 4th c. BC, what caused this vacuum of more than a millennium, without a second reproduction of this type of supports for metal vessels, until the time of the Second Bulgarian kingdom, when their presence is registered over a broad territorial scope.

¹⁰ Some of the objects have printed or incised symbols on their surface, which points to the workshop where they were made and hint at the size of the vessels to be placed on them (Παπανικόλα-Μπακιρτζή 1987, 645, Σχ. 2).

¹¹ Items from closed complexes from the Athenian agora have been dated at the Byzantine or Post-Byzantine period at the earliest (Papadopoulos 1992, 209, 210, fig. 3).

The presented data about the stilts from Brezovo and their analogues from the present-day lands on the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor and Transcaucasia, as well as the presence of glaze on the surface of the legs of one of the tripods (fig. 3) allow their more certain dating at the beginning of the 13th c. at the earliest, leaving unsolved the problem of the reasons for their presence in the grave inventory, comprising iron objects, a bronze situla, ceramic jug, two amphorae and two groups of silver objects – ornaments and elements from horse harness and “...a small number of banquet vessels...” (Стоянов 2017, 12).

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БЕЛЕЖКИ КЪМ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯТА НА Т.НАР. ПОСТАВКИ ЗА ФИАЛИ ОТ ГРАД БРЕЗОВО, ПЛОВДИВСКО

Петър Минков

Национален археологически институт с музей, Българска академия на науките, ул. „Съборна“ № 2, София 1000;
petraki_orlovski@abv.bg

РЕЗЮМЕ

Статията изследва и анализира два керамични предмета, определени като поставки за двойка фиали, открити в надгробна могила до гр. Брезово, Пловдивска област. Наличието на сходни на поставките предмети, датирани през Средновековието, провокират дискусия за тяхната интерпретация и хронология.

Поставките се намират във фонда на НАИМ – БАН като в инвентарните книги са записани под общ номер – 1714. Керамичните поставки са с триъгълна форма, с три правоъгълни рамена с трапецовидно напречно сечение. От едната страна повърхността е плоска, а от другата при краищата на поставките са моделирани пирамидални ниски крачета. По вътрешната повърхност на раменете се забелязват плитки жлебове, които прекъсват преди зоната, в която се свързват, образувайки ръбове. Поставките са широки 6 см и високи 2,2 см. По повърхността им има коси/диагонални линейни следи от оглаждане (?). Глината, от която са направени, е светлокафява до бежова, без примеси, като на отделни места има следи от съвременни отчупвания при връхчетата на крачетата.

В литературата тези предмети са известни като „триножки“. Според начина на производство могат да бъдат разделени на три групи, като за целите на изследването могат да се споменат две от тях: 1. направени на ръка; 2. изработени чрез отливане в калъп. Екземпляри от затворени комплекси от Атинската агора се датират в късноримският период. Те са пособия с триъгълна/звездовидна форма и три малки заострени крачета и са употребявани като разграничителни поставки между съдовете, за да попречат на слепването при изпичането им. Понякога след изпичането, при отделяне на съдовете

остават белези от външната повърхност на съда, което е видно от наличието на следи от глазура върху поставките (Charalambous 2014, 281). Поради тяхната роля на разделители при изпичането се смята, че са били изработвани от местни глинни и техният химичен и минералогичен състав е достоверен източник за съдържанието на глината, използвана от работилниците в даден район.

Горепосочените данни за находките от територията на днешна Гърция дават възможност да се приеме с по-голяма сигурност, че поставките от Брезово могат да бъдат датирани най-рано към началото на XIII – XIV в., като остава нерешен проблемът за причините за тяхното присъствие в гробния инвентар, съставен от две групи от сребърни предмети – апликации и елементи от конска амуниция, и „...неголям набор от банкетни съдове...“ (Стоянов 2017, 12).

Ключови думи: Брезово, Средновековие, фиали, поставки, триноги, керамика от поствизантийския период