

Němčice and Pistiros: Glass Beads as Historical Markers in the Third Century BC

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ABSTRACT

The largest known collection of La Tène glass from Němčice in Moravia dating to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC also includes glass beads originating in southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean. As in Pistiros, the beads could have been related to the same events of a military, trade or other nature. The relative scarcity of imported beads in Němčice is explained by the glass-working activities at this site, which covered the needs of the local population.

KEYWORDS

Glass beads; La Tène period; imports; central Europe; southeastern Europe; Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

Jan Bouzek recently published glass beads found in the Greek town of Pistiros in central Bulgaria, which was destroyed during the Celtic campaign to the Balkans in 279/278 BC. He interpreted the same types of beads, especially amphora-shaped and biconical, found in Moravia (Brno-Horní Heršpice and Přítluky) as plunder from this campaign (BOUZEK 2011; BOUZEK – DOMARADZKA 2011; BOUZEK 2013).

Beads of the same origin as those from Pistiros were also found in Němčice, Moravia, in the Middle Danube region of Central Europe, where they made up a small part of the heretofore largest collection of glass in La Tène Europe. The Němčice site is known as an open lowland agglomeration that served as a centre of production and trade in LT B2-C2, i.e. in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. The broad range of local production activities included the minting of coins, bronze metallurgy, iron smithing and glass-working (ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ 2006; ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ – NOESKE 2008). Local La Tène glass-working produced glass bracelets, finger-rings, beads, spacers and production waste, some 2000 items altogether (VENCLOVÁ *et al.* 2009). However, in addition to locally made products, the collection also contains a few glass artefacts imported from the south or southeast. Their occurrence is hardly surprising, since contacts with southern Europe and the Mediterranean are also strongly manifested in other Němčice finds such as bronze artefacts and coins.

In this article, attention is paid to the 3rd century BC glass beads from the Němčice collection, which were made neither there nor in La Tène Europe and whose provenance can be determined with some degree of certainty. Less characteristic beads whose cultural and chronological affiliation is ambiguous are not addressed in this work. Likewise not included are types of (imported) beads from the Late Hallstatt period (Ha D2-LT A), a small number of which are also found in the collection. Since settlement from this period has not been identified at Němčice, these specimens must be regarded as antiquities kept at the La Tène site.



Basic data is taken from the catalogue and analysis of the glass collection from NĚMČICE (VENĀLOVÁ forthcoming), which also provides a definition of new types of beads (here types 416, 555 and 720) added since the classification system for Iron Age beads was first published (VENĀLOVÁ 1990). The inventory numbers of the beads refer to the collection of the Moravian Museum in Brno. It should be recalled that all of the finds from NĚMČICE come from surface survey and can only be roughly dated to LT B2–C2 based on the presence of diagnostic artefacts, including coins, other metal objects and chronologically sensitive glass items such as glass bracelets.

IMPORTED BEADS FOUND AT NĚMČICE

Type 303. Biconical beads, cobalt blue translucent glass. NĚMČICE inv. nos. 176362j, 177176b. Pl. 5/1.

Parallel beads of the same colour are known from the Libčeves cemetery in Bohemia, probably from a LT B1–C1 context; other beads from the Žatec region are lacking a find context. Several biconical beads of different colours or colourless were also found in Bohemia and Moravia (types 301–302, 304–305 according to VenĀlová). Finds from Moravia, Slovakia and the Middle Danube region appear in LT B1 contexts (to which graves from Pŕítluky and Brno-Horní Heršpice also date) as well as in LT B2 (BUJNA 1991, 231–233); beads from Bohemia (possibly still worn in LT C1) belong to the same period (VENĀLOVÁ 1990, 58–59). Biconical beads, blue and of other colours appear beginning in the sixth century BC in the broad area from the Mediterranean through southeastern Europe, the Carpathian Basin and up to the northern Pontic area; central Europe is at the periphery of their occurrence (VENĀLOVÁ 1990, 58–59, with refs.; PUROWSKI 2012, Group I. VI, 329–330, Fig. 87). A total of twenty-eight biconical beads made of colourless to greenish glass were found recently in the Greek town of Pistiros, mostly thanks to wet sieving (BOUZEK 2013, 251, Fig. G2:12; Pl. 71:2–9). They are usually accompanied in necklaces (in Pistiros as well) by glass amphora-shaped beads/pendants (their excentric perforation technically makes them pendants). M. Schönfelder (2007, 308–309, Abb. 2) ascribes Greek origin to amphora-shaped beads. However, the origin of biconical beads is traced to a number of locations. One possible production site is the island of Rhodes, where a glass workshop was in operation from the 3rd century to the beginning of the 2nd century BC (REHREN – SPENCER – TRIANTAFYLIDIS 2005); finds from the site include biconical beads (DAVIDSON WEINBERG 1969). J. Bouzek (2011) dates the find contexts of amphora-shaped pendants in Pistiros to around 300 BC and to the year 279/278 BC. As stated in the introduction, necklaces of similar amphora-shaped beads from Moravia also containing biconical beads are interpreted by Bouzek as plunder Celts brought back from the Balkan wars (cf. BOUZEK – DOMARADZKA 2011, 16, Pl. 5:10–12). This could therefore also be true for biconical beads from NĚMČICE dating to the 3rd century BC. Of course, beads from LT B1 find contexts, i.e. from the 4th century BC, must have reached central Europe earlier and are therefore related to other events.

Type 307. A ribbed (melon) bead, possibly with five to seven ribs divided by sharp grooves and made of cobalt blue translucent glass. NĚMČICE inv. no. 177145. Pl. 5/1.

The specimen belongs to a large group of melon beads of translucent glass, either colourless with a greenish tint or light, dark or cobalt blue (types VenĀlová 306–311). Melon beads are spread widely from Egypt through the eastern Mediterranean and up to southern and espe-



cially southeastern Europe and the Pontic area, and even further toward the east; they are among the most frequent finds in central Europe. They were mapped in the area to the north of the Alps and to the west of Moravia most recently by D. Neubauer (2007, 92–94, Abb. 26). The chronological highpoint of the occurrence of this type is the Late Hallstatt period, Ha D2–LT A, while individual specimens are also found in La Tène graves at least until LT B2 and even in later contexts in lands further east (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 59–62, with refs.). Of course, it is also possible that the latest specimens are simply relics saved as curiosities or family ‘treasures’. Blue beads could perhaps be somewhat later than those of colourless glass. Therefore, only these later specimens, including the bead from NĚMČICE, could be linked to the workshop on the island of Rhodes in the 3rd century and the beginning of the 2nd century BC, where this type was apparently a local product (DAVIDSON WEINBERG 1969).

Type 416. A bead of an irregular barrel-shaped form made of cobalt blue translucent glass and decorated with white rings in two rows, arranged in zigzag or 1–2–1; greater number of rings (more than six). NĚMČICE inv. nos. 176318, 177134. Pl. 5/1.

The type is almost identical to type 408 (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 65–66), which differs only by the opacity of glass. The large group of beads decorated with rings also includes types 404–405, with rings in a single row (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 64–65). The beads are easily confused with ‘*Vielaugenperlen*’ in the terminology of Th. E. Haevernick (cf. KUNTER 1995, 113–122), which are decorated with stratified eyes (eyes are defined as circular decorative elements of at least two colours of glass differing from the matrix glass; cf. VENCLOVÁ 1990, 34). The most typical variant is the combination of blue and white glass. Although the chronological and geographic distribution of the group is broad, the main concentration is clearly in southern to southeastern Europe, i.e. in northern Italy and the Adriatic, whereas the frequency of finds in the more northern reaches of Europe is far lower. Alekseeva (1975, Tab. 15:1–20) provides a concise summary of types and variants from the northern Pontic area. Earlier specimens (with a single row of rings) date to the Hallstatt period up to the Late Hallstatt period, with their first appearance possibly in the Final Bronze Age (MATTHÄUS 1987). The later group, mostly with multiple rows of rings, became popular in La Tène Europe in LT B–C1, when a central European origin is even considered (though not documented) for some of them (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 64–66, with refs.). The specimen from NĚMČICE typologically belongs to this group.

Type 555. A low rounded bead, opaque light blue to turquoise glass, 3–4 blue and white two-layered stratified eyes made from one layer of white and one layer of dark blue glass. NĚMČICE inv. no. 177130. Pl. 5/1.

Along with types 501–504, this type belongs to the group of beads with blue and white two-layered eyes. These beads appear in Europe as early as the Final Bronze Age and in the Hallstatt period; the next occurrence is in the third century BC, a.o. in the Pontic area (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 68, with refs.). Also belonging to this group is a type 555 turquoise bead from grave 64 in Palárikovo, Slovakia, which was accompanied in a necklace by other two beads with two-layered eyes, yellow and dark blue (PIETA 2010, Fig. 22:9), along with combed beads (see below) and type 3b/1 bracelets. The grave is dated to LT C1, i.e. to around the second half of the 3rd century BC (BŘEZINOVÁ *et al.* 2013, 121, Pl. 5, 6). A yellow and dark blue bead with two-layered eyes was also found in Pistiros (BOUZEK 2013, 250, Fig. G2:14, 15; Pl. 70:2–3, 8–10). Although K. Kunter displays beads with blue and white, two-layered eyes in tables by Th. E. Haevernick (KUNTER 1995, Abb. 2:12, 15, 32, 41; 3:2, 10), she does not address them separately. The origin



of some of the beads with two-layered eyes can again be traced, among other possibilities, to the Rhodes workshop in the 3rd century BC. The collection from the workshop perhaps contains both aquamarine beads with blue and white stratified (?) eyes as well as beads with eyes applied as sections of canes; however, the differentiation of these two types is not clear from the published data (DAVIDSON WEINBERG 1969, 145, Pl. 79a, c; 84c).

Type 720. A cylindrical to barrel-shaped bead, dark blue translucent glass, combed yellow and light blue decoration (light blue lines on top of yellow lines produce the visual effect of green). Němčice inv. no. 176308. Pl. 5/1.

Alekseeva lists combed beads of various forms in the northern Pontic region (ALEKSEEVA 1978, Tab. 30); possible parallels include her types 259–261, 264b (Tab. 29:4; 30:1–19) or 332–333, 339–341 (Tab. 31:9–18, 19, 30), which occur in many colour variations. Combed beads were made in general over a long period of time beginning in the 6th century BC; types closer to the specimen from Němčice were probably produced between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC (ALEKSEEVA 1978, 36–37, Fig. 14). Combed beads (two four-sided and one spindle-formed) were part of a necklace from the aforementioned LT C1 grave 64 in Palárikovo, Slovakia, where they were also accompanied by a type 555 bead (see above). The origin of combed beads is traced to the broader Mediterranean area. Related, albeit possibly somewhat later less robust types of combed beads appear in central Europe, namely in collections from the oppida (VENCLOVÁ 1990, 94, types 716–718).

CONCLUSION

Despite its small size, the assemblage of imported 3rd century BC beads from Němčice represents a characteristic spectrum of types occurring in the Middle Danube region at a number of La Tène sites; only amphora-shaped beads are missing. This popular assortment of beads arrived here from the south and southeast as early as the 4th century BC and then in particular in the 3rd century BC. The latter period is well demonstrated by finds from Němčice and Pistiros. Although certain beads or entire necklaces could have been brought back as plunder from military campaigns to the Balkans, others found their way to central Europe earlier and in many other ways.

Southeastern imports apparently reached central Europe along the Amber Route. Many bronze artefacts from Němčice dating to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC come from the broader Middle Danube region, while others demonstrate contacts with Slovenia and Italy (ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ 2006; ČIŽMÁŘ – KOLNÍKOVÁ – NOESKE 2009). Non-Celtic coins from the territory between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, from the Adriatic, the Apennine peninsula, Sicily, Massalia and the southern Mediterranean document much broader contacts (KOLNÍKOVÁ 2012).

Although the very small number of imported glass beads at Němčice might seem surprising, this can probably be explained by own production of glass personal ornaments in the second half of the 3rd century BC and in the 2nd century BC in the secondary glass workshop at the site (VENCLOVÁ *et al.* 2009). This workshop, which also produced beads, was able to cover local demand. Glass-working at the site was made possible by imports of raw glass, probably from the Syro-Palestinian area, i.e. the eastern Mediterranean. Evidence of the trade in glass ingots comes from the cargo of shipwrecks, and the chemical composition of glass artefacts in „barbarian“ Europe made (like the ingots) from natron glass produced in the eastern and



southern Mediterranean. Raw glass itself is therefore another highly significant southeastern import brought in the 3rd century BC to NĚMČICE and other glass workshops in La Tène Europe.

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