THE LATER FIRST MILLENNIUM BC

COLOURLESS GLASS VESSELS FROM THE MAUSSOLLEION AT HALIKARNASSOS

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The satrap of Caria Maussollos died in 353 BC and was buried, by his sister and queen Artemisia, in Halikarnassos (modern Bodrum, Turkey). His burial chamber stood in the heart of the monumental tomb that became famous as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Artemisia died two years later and was buried in the antechamber of the same tomb. The Maussolleon was demolished in the 15th century, leaving behind a myth and, luckily, also some material finds.

Excavations at the site have revealed the foundation of the tomb and the bottom of the burial chamber. There, in a cutting associated with a tomb-robbers' mine, were found fragments of a few grave-goods; mainly gold, ivory, pottery and colourless glass. All evidence indicates that the finds belong to the rich inventory of the burial of Maussollos and not to that of Artemisia.

Eight colourless glass vessels have been identified from fragmentary material (Fig. 1). They are the first that can be securely dated to the first half of the 4th century BC, at the beginning of the colourless glass production of the classical period, and they provide secure ground for the comparison and dating of similar, unprovenanced vessels.

They were created within the cultural environment of the Achaemenid Empire but they must not be considered Persian. Many different cultural traditions contributed local popular shapes and decorative elements to form the Achaemenid International Style, which was common and widespread throughout the Empire. The Assyrian and Anatolian origins, and Ionian influence are evident in all the vessel shapes present in the Maussolleon.

A full report on the vessels is forthcoming in the excavation publication (Zahle 2004)

THE SHAPES

Tall calyx-cups

Two vessels are tall calyx-cups decorated with long petals. The shape of the tall calyx-cup originates in Mesopotamia (the 15th–14th century BC Hurrian Nuzi, and, later, the 8th–7th century BC Assyrian Nimrud), but may have roots in 3rd millennium Egypt. In the Achaemenid period it is incorporated in the repertory of the Achaemenid International Style and starts being decorated with the popular motifs of white lotus leaves and ionic (or long) petals. The only other extant glass tall calyx-cup is the vessel known as the Corning Beaker.

Beakers

Four vessels are beakers decorated with horizontal grooves. They are either thin (1–2mm) or thick walled (3–4mm). The grooves start below the rim, leaving an upper undecorated band; their width varies from 3 to 6mm. The bottoms are not preserved. Beakers 1, 2 and 3 probably had ordinary flat bottoms. Beaker 4 is too small and too inward sloping for an ordinary beaker. It is perhaps the lower part of a small conical animal-head beaker terminating in a small bovine or ram's head, now lost. The only extant glass animal-head beaker is the Miho Museum vessel.

Most of the silver and glass beakers of the classical and early Hellenistic period were found in Anatolia, so the shape is probably associated with that region. Their decoration also points towards Western Anatolia; grooves were a favourite decorative element of the Phrygian and Lydian metalwork, before they became incorporated in the Achaemenid International Style. Two almost comparable glass vessels exist: a complete one from Derveni, Macedonia, and a fragmentary one from Gordian, Phrygia.

Animal-head situla

One grooved vessel has very thick walls and its diameter is large for a beaker. It preserves an undecorated area, but it is not evident whether that is from the rim or from the lower body; the latter being perhaps more possible. The vessel is probably a situla, either with a flat bottom or with an animal-head bottom. Fragments that curve irregularly were also found; they are of similar fabric and thickness. They are probably associated with this vessel, and can be identified as parts from the nose and mouth area of a ram's-head.

The fragments do not indicate the existence of a rhyton (a bent or a horn type vessel with a perforated bottom). They belong to a straight animal-head vessel; those are never perforated. They originate in Assyria, but were also produced in West Anatolian workshops, and are often
terminating in a ram’s or a lion’s head. There is no other animal-head glass situla surviving. From the characteristics of the fragments, and by comparison to bronze and ceramic parallels, it appears that the animal represented is probably a ram.

Bowl

One vessel is probably a bowl. It is decorated with a rib and a groove, below the rim. Its rim lip and lower part are not preserved. There are no contemporary parallel finds to this vessel; similar but not totally comparable finds are the 8th–7th century BC cups from Nimrud. The relief decoration there is cut, unlike in the Maussolleion example which is moulded.

THE TECHNOLOGY

All the vessels were shaped and decorated by moulding. Their surface is smooth and all the details are sharp. There is no indication of cutting, except on the rim lips, which are slightly rough and were probably ground. It is not clear whether they were made by the indirect method (the lost-wax technique), or the direct one (stationary or rotary pressing). The existence on the same vessel of a moulded relief part (the animal head) together with grooves indicates the use of a wax model for the whole vessel, as it is impossible to cut negative grooves on the interior of a mould. The bowl has internal vertical striations that are impossible to explain, especially in the absence of the rim.

REFERENCE


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