

# A Phoenician beaded glass necklace with a human head pendant from the South cemetery of the ancient town of Lefkada

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## ABSTRACT

*The article presents an imported glass beaded necklace, with a head pendant as the central piece, recovered from the South necropolis of the ancient town of Lefkada, in the Ionian Sea. The artifact was found more than 30 years ago in a 3rd century B.C. tomb along with other burial goods, such as ceramic vessels, that function as relative chronological markers. The “exotic” necklace is discussed here as evidence for cultural and commercial exchanges between Lefkada island and Phoenician/Punic merchants.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Phoenicians, famous mariners of the ancient world, dominated for many centuries the Mediterranean trade routes connecting their homeland to the coasts of Europe and north Africa (Moscati 1968; Markoe 2000; Aubet 2001; Woolmer 2017; Sader 2019; Bonadies et al. 2019; Lopez-Ruiz 2021; Jigoulov 2022). Besides the well-known cities such as Cadiz, Utica, Carthage, Sulci and Kition, with their deep and significant historical connection to the Phoenician culture, there are many other coastal sites that might have served as commercial centres for the Phoenicians (Aubet 1995; Bourogiannis 2014).

The ample archaeological record concerning Phoenician culture is enriched with new excavation data every year, providing thus useful information about their seafaring ventures in the Aegean (Kourou 2007, 2008; Bourogiannis 2012; Ioannou 2017; Ilieva 2019). During the Early Iron Age, there was a notable increase in the level of communication and exchange between Greek and Phoenician civilizations (Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006; Bourogiannis 2018). Exotic pottery, metal objects and luxurious artifacts made from ivory and glass are among the characteristic Phoenician finds discovered in Greece, indicating the cultural and economic interaction between the two cultures. During the past decades, three significant exhibitions in Greece have sparked discussions about the connections between different Mediterranean regions and the Phoenician presence in the Aegean (Stampolidis and Karetsou 1998; Stampolidis 2003; Adam-Veleni and Stefani 2012).

Phoenician ships carried Phoenician glass products in their long expeditions, and simultaneously many Phoenician glass craftsmen settled in various places around the Mediterranean, spreading their art. These pioneers not only produced elegant luxurious glass objects but were also responsible for some revolutionary techniques in the glass industry (Uberti 1988; Barthélemy 1992; Caubet et al. 2007; Docter and Sonneveld

2009). In Greece, various glass artifacts have been connected directly or indirectly with the Phoenicians, whilst the ongoing research highlights the presence of local glass workshops in Greek territory (Adam-Veleni 2010; Ignatiadou 2013; Triantafyllidis 2000). According to some researchers, various products might belong to a group known as the “Rhodian-Mesopotamian” workshop, founded in Rhodes by Mesopotamian immigrant glassmakers (Harden 1981; Barag 1985); others hesitate to confirm this hypothesis (Triantafyllidis 2000). The eastern Mediterranean has always been one of the busiest waterways and Rhodes certainly played a significant role in commercial activities and the transit trade during that period (Kourou 2014).

Undoubtedly, among the most recognizable glass works produced and distributed initially by the Egyptians and the Phoenicians were the glass pendants in the shape of a human, animal, or demon head (Haevernick 1981; Grose 1989). These pieces of jewellery were formed by winding hot glass over a metal rod that was coated with a core of sand and/or clay. Individual elements, like the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, curls for the hair and beard, were either indicated with different colors or were composed by prefabricated spiral ringlets and beads pressed into the hot glass of the head. Once the pendant was completed, it was removed from the rod, annealed and the core was scraped out with the aid of a sharp tool. A suspension loop is placed in the upper part so that the miniature glass amulet can be worn alone on a string or be part of a necklace ornamented with multi-colored glass beads of various types (simple, anthropomorphic, eye beads, etc.) on both sides. In rare cases, some necklaces bore more than one glass head pendant.

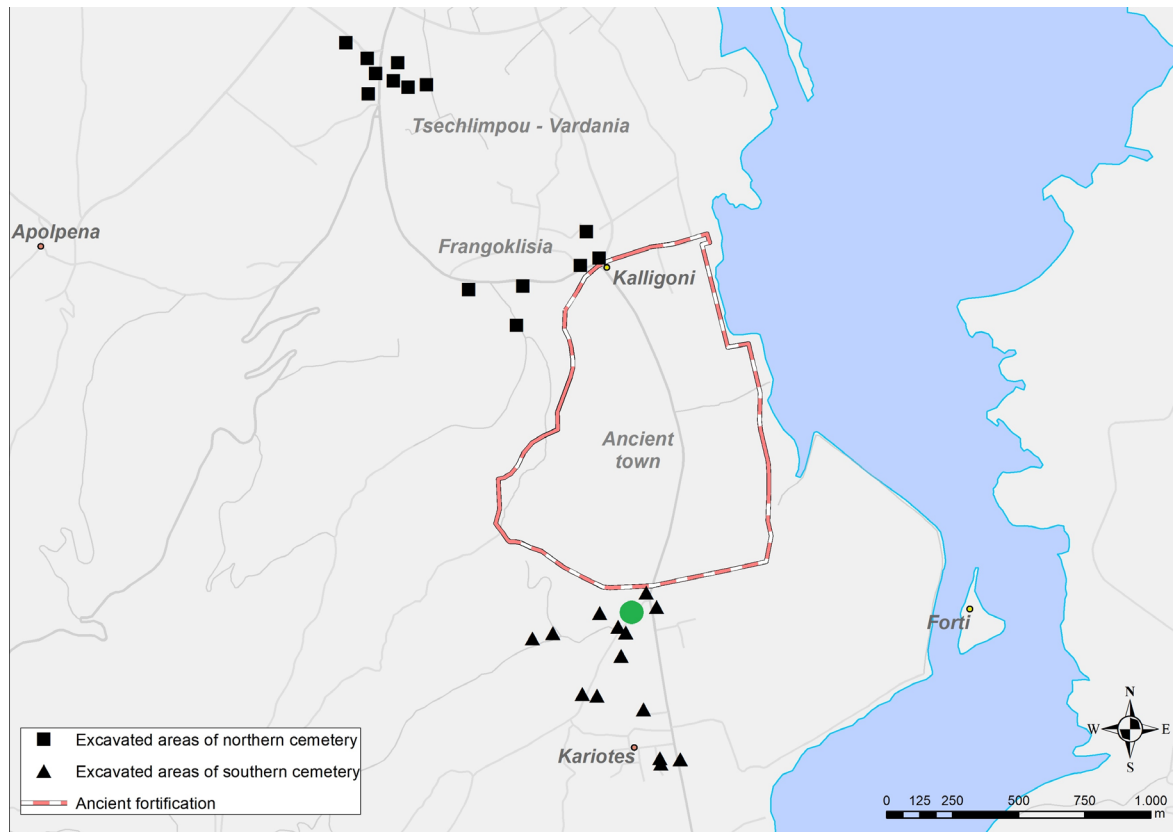
Almost every pendant is unique, but nevertheless, due to some common characteristics, they are grouped into six distinctive categories: Type A: Demon Mask, Type B: Male head with sleek or twisted hair style, Type C: Male head with curly hair and beard, Type D: Female head, Type E: Animal figures, Type F: Miscellaneous (Seefried 1982). Since all types have many morphological variants, they can even be sub-categorized. They first appeared in Egypt during the 8th century B.C. (Seefried 1982, 65). In the 7th century B.C., they became popular both in Phoenicia and the rest of the Mediterranean. Pendants from the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. represent grotesque-looking human faces. From the late 6th century B.C., rod formed pendants appeared in Rhodes (Triantafyllidis 2003). Their production experienced the greatest development, and they took on the most artistic features during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. During the 4th century B.C., they lost their oriental character and adopted Hellenistic style expressions. The main production centre was Carthage, but Cyprus and Rhodes still maintained their activities (Tatton-Brown 1981). The glass pendants on a core disappear around the 1st century B.C., when blown glass makes its first appearance.

In many cases, it can be exceedingly difficult to establish a precise chronology for these pieces of jewellery, especially where stray artifacts of unknown provenance from museum collections or finds from digs with disturbed stratigraphic layers are concerned. Furthermore, this type of object can easily pass from hand to hand and be kept for many years as an heirloom and therefore there is a need for a broader time frame for their chronology. In such cases, a glass jewel from a sealed tomb enriches the archaeological record and facilitates the dating of comparable material.

## A GLASS NECKLACE FROM THE SOUTH CEMETERY OF ANCIENT LEFKADA

The ancient town of Lefkada, colonized by the Corinthians in the late 7th century B.C., became a great walled city with a gridiron plan, an agora, a theatre, and a thriving port (Rontogiannis 1988; Andreou 1998; Vikatou and Chavela 2013; Bonelou 2020; Staikou forthcoming; Vikatou et al. forthcoming).

Two cemeteries were laid *extra muros*: the Southern is located at the Kariotes area, whilst the Northern is divided into two parts in the wider Kalligoni-Vardania area. Many rescue excavations in the two cemeteries have brought to light hundreds of tombs, dating from the Archaic to the Roman period (Andreou 1998, 181–85; Douzougli 2001; Staikou 2016). In the Southern Cemetery, and more specifically in the area Spasmeni Vrissi (Fig. 1), a rescue excavation first took place in 1981 and then in 1987 (Andreou 1981, 1987).



Εικ. 1. Map of the ancient town of Lefkada, with the Northern and Southern Cemeteries. The green circle indicates the area where the necklace was found.

During the second field season, 29 cist-graves and five tile-graves were found, enclosed by two rectangular *perivoloi*, separated by a road. In this paper we examine the burial items from tomb 17, which were found inside *perivolos* 2 (Fig. 2).

The cist was covered with three slabs, which were found intact and *in situ* during the excavation. The cist was 1.90 m long and 0.70 m wide, with a maximum overall height of 0.69 m. Inside the cist a single burial was found.

The excavation diary gives no information about the bones found inside the tomb. Furthermore, the skeletal material from this grave has not been preserved in the storage facilities of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Aitolokarnania and Lefkada and no photographic documentation has been found in the old archive of the Ephorate. Thus, we can only rely on a sketch from the field notebook (Fig. 3).

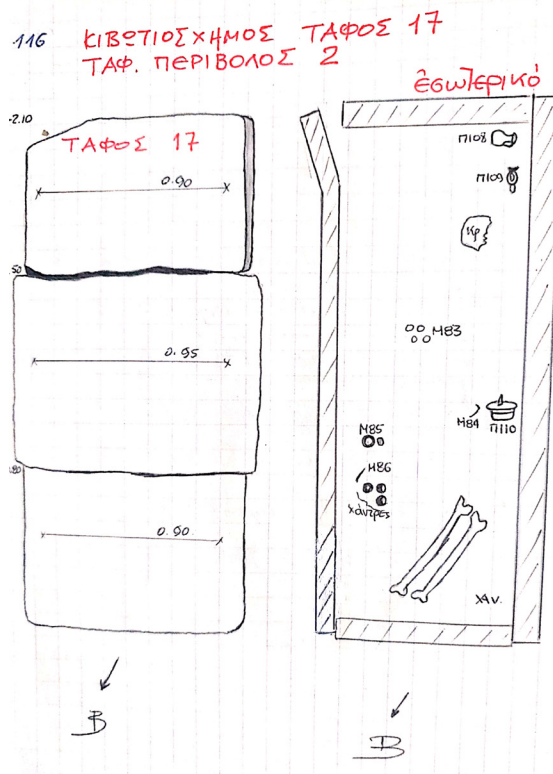
In the north edge of the cist two femurs are depicted, and near the south-western corner a cranium (marked with Greek letters κρ) is shown. All the bone material appears to come from an adult skeleton.

The deceased was accompanied by many objects, found scattered all over the un-looted grave. This paper focuses on an extraordinary brightly colored glass jewel (Fig. 4): a necklace with a human head pendant (Archaeological Museum of Lefkada (henceforth AML) Cat. No. 2793) and seven glass beads of various sizes and colors (AML Cat. No. 4642).

The pendant of a bearded male face is rod-formed; opaque yellow glass is used for the face, nose, mouth, and ears; additions are made in translucent cobalt blue glass. The blue eyes and eyebrows were added while the yellow glass was still hot. The round pupils were minuscule circular blue beads surrounded by a yellow coil. The right eye is missing; the two eyebrows almost meet in the middle above the bridge of the nose, but the lower part of the left one is not preserved. There is a large yellow protruding nose, with no indication for nostrils, small circular yellow ears (Fig. 5) and a small yellow open mouth with thick lips. The mouth is surrounded by a beard, made up of six thick blue curl coils. The twisted band (“turban”) across the forehead is a mix of blue and yellow



Εικ. 2. Photo of *perivolos* 2, from the south. Cist tomb 17 is at the north-western corner.



Εικ. 3. Sketch depicting tomb 17, from the field notebook.



Fig. 4. The glass beaded necklace with the male head pendant as a central piece.



Fig. 5. The right profile of the pendant.



Fig. 6. The back side of the pendant.



Fig. 7. The globular lekythos from tomb 17.

colors; the band is flanked at both ends, right over the ears, with a big blue curl of hair. The suspension loop bears a central groove and is applied at the front on top of the head. The rod hole on the back is surrounded by a blue layer of glass (Fig. 6). Height (loop included): 2.9 cm. Width: 1.9 cm. Depth: 1.4 cm.

The pendant from Lefkada is similar to type C VI, which dates between the 3rd to the 1st centuries B.C. (Seefried 1982, 29, 118, pl. II). There is a well-preserved undated item of this type found in Chios, Greece. The similarities are seen in the headband, but mainly in few but thick cylindrical curls rendering a beard around the mouth, although in the Chios example the coils are more protruding (Seefried 1982, 118, n. 3, fig. 38).

On each side of the pendant, which was the central piece of the necklace, seven more glass beads were strung.<sup>1</sup> The biggest one is a blue polished bead with a matt finish (diam. 1.1 cm, thickness 0.7 cm). Of similar dimensions is a blue gloss bead with three flutes, partially resembling a poppy-seedpod (diam. 1 cm, thickness 0.7 cm), whilst one blue glass bead is decorated with a white stripe around the middle (diam. 0.8 cm, thickness 0.6 cm). A very small yellow bead (diam. 0.3 cm) and three tiny blue beads (diam. 0.2 cm) were also attached to the necklace.

Apart from the glass necklace, the rest of the burial items in tomb 17 are:

- A globular lekythos (AML Cat. No. 4638) made from yellowish fine-grained local clay (Fig. 7). Its plain surface was left uncoated. It is a production of a Lefkadian workshop that can be dated within the 3rd century B.C. (Andreou 1994, 200, pl. 149a; for a similar example see Pliakou 2009, 204, pl. 17).

<sup>1</sup> In the past, only the head pendant was displayed in AML. During this study the glass beads were found in the archaeological storage facilities of Lefkada, and the reconstructed necklace is now on display in the museum.



Εικ. 8. The lamp from tomb 17, displayed in the AML.



Εικ. 9. The cooking pot from Tomb 17.

– An unglazed terracotta lamp (AML Cat. No. 2253 – exhibited in the museum). The discoid oil lamp is wheel-made, from yellowish clay, undoubtedly of local manufacture (Fig. 8). It has an elongated nozzle and one handle pressed towards the body (Andreou 1994, 200, pl. 149a).

– A *lopas*, i.e. a cooking pot with lid and one looped handle (AML Cat. No. 4639). A common type of kitchen utensil, made from coarse homogeneous red/orange clay. The pot is restored from many broken pieces; a horizontal loop handle is attached to the lip; the handle is partially missing (Fig. 9). Similar examples from the Athenian Agora and the South Cemetery of Lefkada date to the middle of the 3rd century B.C. (Andreou 1994, 201–2, pl. 149a; for a similar example see Staikou et al. 2014, 626–27, pl. 205b).



Εικ. 10. Small finds from tomb 17. A glass stone (a), a bronze ring (b), four bronze hoops (c).

– A glass stone (AML Cat. No. 2781). Plain with flat bottom and round on top; transparent; very light blue; weathered surface; almost circular. Diam. 1.5 cm. Max. thickness 0.6 cm (Fig. 10a).

– A bronze ring (AML Cat. No. 2782 – exhibited in the museum). The plain metal band hoop is 2.3 cm wide, with round top and flat bottom that bears no decoration or bezel whatsoever (Fig. 10b).

- Four bronze hoops (AML Cat. No. 4641). Very small and thin with a diameter range from 0.5 to 0.7 cm (Fig. 10c).
- A small bronze coin (AML Cat. No. 4640). The coin cannot be classified due to the thick and rough corrosion layers (diam. 1.8 cm).

## DISCUSSION

The glass head pendants were perceived as amulets with apotropaic powers against the evil eye. During the antiquity, but even until recently, among the peasant population of modern Greece, it was believed that people with blue eyes could more easily spread the curse of the evil eye (De Ley 1981, 195). It is probably for this reason that the eyes of these protective charms are made from blue glass, apparently as a way of repelling the evil eye. Even a unibrow was also thought to have the ability to cast the look, and maybe that is the reason why many of the glass pendant heads have monobrows, or eyebrows attached close to each other, as is the case of the Lefkadian find.

Glass head pendants have been found scattered all over the Levantine coast, Cyprus, Sicily (Spanò-Giammellaro 2010), Sardinia, Spain, and especially Carthage. The production centres were originally located in the eastern Mediterranean, mainly in Phoenicia and Cyprus, then in Rhodes. From the 4th century B.C. Carthage leads, not only by sheer number, but also by the quality and the size of its pendants (Seefried 1982).

In Greece, until 1982, 43 pendants of various types had been documented (Seefried 1982, 162-65). In recent years, six examples from the Macedonian prefecture of Greece have been mentioned as well; a ram's head (Adam-Veleni 2010, 355, cat. no 385), a male head of unknown provenance (Karamitrou-Mentesidi 2008, 100, pl. 151), three female heads, from Abdera (Adam-Veleni 2010, 407, cat. no 499), Edessa (Chrysostomou 2013, 163, cat. no. 278, pl. 50) and Pella (Lilimpaki-Akamati 1994, 209, cat. no. 409, pl. 41) respectively, and a demon's head from Florina (Exarchea 2021, 49, pl. 30). Several glass pendants in the form of bearded heads were found in the adyton of the temple at "Vryokastro" site in Kythnos (Mazarakis Ainian 2005, 97). Similar to the female heads from Macedonia is a stray find depicting a woman's head, exhibited as a donated item in the Archaeological Museum of Rethymno, Crete. The male head glass pendant from Lefkada, is the first known example found in the Greek Ionian islands.

Lefkada was a renowned commercial hub of north-western Greece during the Classical and Hellenistic era (Zachos and Douzougli 2003). The Corinthian colony, from the Archaic period onwards, served as an intermediate trading post between southern and central Greece and the shores of Epirus, Illyria, Italy, and Sicily. The town had a flourishing large port near the southern edge of the city wall, whilst another smaller port was operating in the north-eastern part of the island. During 2018–2022 an excavation near the main ancient pier took place and part of a complex, which can probably be identified as a small hostelry (*katagigion*), was unearthed (Staikou forthcoming). The provision for accommodation right by the port suggests that foreign merchants would arrive in Lefkada from various parts of the Mediterranean basin, seeking a place to spend one or more nights.

Given the role of Lefkada as a main trading centre in the Ionian Sea, we can assume that many products would arrive from all over the Mediterranean, due to the existence of an extensive commercial network. During a recent research project, thousands of amphorae fragments were examined, in order to discover some trading patterns (Filis and Staikou 2022). It seems that Lefkada is dominated by many local or regionally produced type B amphorae, but also amphorae from Corinth and more rarely from the north and south-eastern Aegean. A fragment of a Punic amphora was identified, which might indicate a commercial network between the Punic world, Lefkada and Corinth. It should be noted that Punic amphorae have been found in the Punic Amphora Building (PAB) in Corinth, dating to the mid-5th century B.C. (Fantuzzi et al. 2020). The presence of other western imports (Italy, Sicily) is limited in Lefkada; they became more noticeable from the 2nd century B.C.



onwards. Few amphorae fragments belong to the well-known Chian straight-neck type with the characteristic conical dating to the late 4th century B.C. As previously mentioned, a well-preserved glass pendant of the C VI category has been found in Chios.

Furthermore, scarce evidence of the presence of foreigners, some of whom might have been traders, can be obtained from the inscribed gravestones found in the ancient cemeteries of the island. The stelae bear, in some cases, not only the name of the deceased, but also their origin (Zachos and Douzougli 2003, 72). Thus, we know that some of the tenants in the cemeteries of Lefkada came from Minor Asia, Croton, Syracuse, Marsalis, Taranto, and Carthage.<sup>2</sup>

The head pendant from Lefkada was undoubtedly imported, judging from its refined craftsmanship and skilful details. The large number of similar excavated finds from Carthage and Sicily indicates a Punic workshop, rather than a Phoenician one (Haevernick 1981, 306). It is questionable, however, whether it was a consequence of direct trade relations between the Lefkadians and the Punic world, or it arrived in Lefkada indirectly. The presence of such pendants in Sicily may also indicate an alternative maritime route, through which the glass necklace could have reached Lefkada.

The pendant from Chios, discussed above, is undated, but its type appears in the 3rd century B.C. The similarities with the Lefkadian find provide some evidence in support of an eastern Mediterranean route. Corinth, on the other hand, could be an intermediate trade station, since Lefkada was a Corinthian colony. The thriving metropolis had extensive trade transactions, while the commerce with the Phoenicians is well attested (Morris and Papadopoulos 1998; Sherratt 2020). There is limited evidence of relationships between Corinth and Lefkada after the 4th century B.C., after the battle of Chaeronea (338 B.C.). After Philip II conquered the island, the colony disconnected from the metropolis and became part of the Confederate state of Epirus (Zachos and Douzougli 2003, 44). The coins from Corinth that are exhibited in the AML (11 silver and two bronze) date from the 5th and 4th century B.C., but as already mentioned, Corinthian transport amphorae dating from the 3rd century B.C. have been found in the ancient port (Filis and Staikou 2022). Thus, we indirectly conclude that, to some extent, the Corinthians preserved economic ties with Lefkada, several centuries after the colonization of the island.

To summarize, the glass artifact from Lefkada confirms once more the commercial role of the Ionian Island in the wider Mediterranean basin. With reference to the bone material of the grave, discussed above, we cannot make any strong conclusions about the sex, the age, or the status of the necklace's owner. The local ceramic artifacts that accompanied the dead, point towards the burial of a Lefkadian, who carried the pendant as an exotic apotropaic adornment, probably without any deeper religious symbolism. The rare glass necklace from the South Cemetery of Lefkada dates within the 3rd century B.C. With its unique and expressive features the male head pendant represents one of the most elaborate and beautiful examples of its kind in Greece. The fact that it was found in a sealed tomb adds additional value.

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<sup>2</sup> People of Carthaginian origin are referred in tombstones from Demetrias (Arvanitopoulos 1928, 91). Various types of funerary monuments with exclusively Greek or bilingual inscriptions belonging to people of Phoenician origin have been found in the ancient cemetery of Kerameikos, as well as in the Academia (Salta 2012, 178). For another funeral plaque from Rhodes see Patsiada 2012, 170, cat. no. 124.

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