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A cup by Aristeas the Cypriot from Villa Bartolomea (Verona)

Abstract

In questo breve contributo viene proposto il riesame e una nuova attribuzione per una coppa in vetro soffiato in stampo di età romana, rinvenuta nel 1958 a Villa Bartolomea (VR) e già pubblicata nel Corpus delle Collezioni Archeologiche del Vetro nel Veneto come il generico prodotto di officine siro-palestinesi o nord-italiche. Il motivo decorativo della coppa di Villa Bartolomea viene confrontato con quello di una coppa rinvenuta in Croazia, presso l'Augusteum di Narona, e bollata dal vetraio Aristeas il Cipriota. Attraverso il confronto con l'esemplare bollato, la coppa di Villa Bartolomea viene quindi attribuita alla produzione di Aristeas, datata agli inizi del I sec. d.C. Insieme ad Ennion, Aristeas è considerato uno dei vetrai più abili nella soffiatura in stampo, ed è uno dei pochi vetrai del mondo antico ad essere noto per nome.

In this paper, I will propose a re-attribution for a mould-blown Roman glass cup found in Villa Bartolomea, near Verona, and already published in the Corpus of Archaeological Glass Collections in Veneto as a cup of Syrian or Italian production. The decorative pattern of the cup can be compared to the one of a recently published glass cup found in the Augusteum of the Croatian city of Narona, which is marked by the famous glassmaker Aristeas the Cypriot, dated to the beginning of the 1st century AD. Together with Ennion, Aristeas is reputed one of the finest Roman glassmakers, and is one of the few known by its name.

1. Introduction

In this paper I will propose a re-attribution of a Roman mould-blown glass cup found in Villa Bartolomea in the plain of Verona. The cup has already been published in the Corpus of Archaeological Glass Collections in Veneto as a product of unspecified Syrian or northern Italian workshops but is actually a work from the famous glassmaker Aristeas the Cypriot, active during the first half of the 1st century AD[1]. He was both one of the few glassmakers of the ancient world to be known by his name and – together with the more famous and prolific Ennion – one of the most important producers of mould-blown glass, renowned for the quality of his works. The attribution hypothesis is discussed trough the comparison with other Sidonian glasses, namely vessels bearing the marks of Ennion and Aristeas himself. This attribution will provide new data to the knowledge of Aristeas' work and hints towards a better knowledge of Sidonian glasses in northern Italy.

[1] FACCHINI 1995, p. 214, n. 513.

2. Aristeas the Cypriot and Sidonian glassmakers

The mould-blowing glass manufacture technique was invented in late Augustan times in the Syro-Palestinian region, possibly in Sidon which by that time was both an active port and a city renowned as a luxury glass production centre[2]. The glassmakers of Sidon were experts in performing different techniques. In fact, according to Pliny, they were capable to produce glass vessels argenti modo caelati[3]: according to current interpretation, they were blown into moulds in order to obtain vessels with relief decoration resembling metal tableware[4]. Among their products are tableware – mostly cups and beakers, but also small bottles, unguentaria and jugs; this kind of vessels are usually referred to as "Sidonian" glasses.

Some cups and beakers are among the earliest and finest examples of Sidonian glasses. They are often decorated with radial flutes, grooves, geometric or vegetal patterns[5] and characterised by the presence of the producer's name, marked in Greek letters using the verb ποιέω (to make) in a tabula ansata[6]. A fragment of this kind was found in the site of Magdalensberg in Austria and is currently the earliest mould-blown glass fragment to have ever been found in an archaeological context dating to the Augustan times[7]. The names of two glassmakers are known from such marks: Ennion and Aristeas[8]. Their vessels are considered of the highest quality among the Sidonian ones and were diffused and traded across the whole Mediterranean. Ennion was the most active and performing, as more than 60 vessels with his mark have survived into our time. Archaeological finds date his activity between Tiberian and Claudian times. His production was varied and diversified, as vessels of different forms are known: cylindrical and globular cups, beakers, kantharoi, six-sided vessels, jugs and a pyxis bearing his mark have been found across the Empire (Fig. 1).

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[2] STERN 1995, pp. 65-66; STERN 1999; STERN 2010; WIGHT 2014; archaeological-based chronological data are also discussed in STERN 2000.
[3] Plin. *Nat.* XXXVI, 66, 2.
[4] STERN 1995, pp. 66-69 analyses data on the fame of Sidon as a glass-making centre. STERN 2007, pp. 357-362; STERN 2015 discuss the archaeological interpretation of the techniques and the philological interpretation of Pliny.
[5] CALVI 1965; STERN 1995, pp. 72-73.
[6] Another similar signature on Alexandrian cast glass is presented in LIGHTFOOT - PICON 2015.
[7] CZURDA-RUTH 1998, n. 782; STERN 2000.
[8] Iason, Meges e Neikais are the other mould-blowing, Sidonian glassmakers known by name; they were active in a later period and produced almost identical beakers, possibly suggesting that they worked together. Their glasses have a diffusion limited to the Eastern Mediterranean: STERN 1995, pp. 73-74.

They were decorated with different patterns: geometric patterns, vegetal friezes, sequences of figures as stars, dots, palmettes and columns and naturalistic images are known[9].

Ennion's vessels were found in the whole Mediterranean, with a distribution spanning from the Syrian coast – where they were likely produced – to Spain and Morocco, reaching also the Black Sea and some limes fortresses.

Fig. 1. Cup by Ennion from northern Italy in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection. Public domain image.

The highest concentration of finds occurs in the Adriatic region, notably in northern Italy and along the Dalmatian coast; Aquileia is the single findspot to have provided the highest number of finds[10] (Fig. 2).

[9] Ennion's work has been the subject of many studies. The most important are: HARDEN 1935; HARDEN 1944-45; LEHRER 1979; MCCLELLAN 1983; PRICE 1991; STERN 1995, pp. 69-73; DE BELLIS 2004; ISRAELI 2011; LIGHTFOOT 2014; LIGHTFOOT 2015.

[10] ETEROVIC BORZIC - SERVENTI 2013; MARCONE 2017 provides a synthesis on the relations between Aquileia and the East; MANDRUZZATO 2015 summarizes the finds of Syro-Palestinian mould-blown glass imports.

Aristeas is the sole other glassmaker whose production can be compared to Ennion's[11]. This circumstance and their unique habit of marking their vessels in tabulae ansatae, suggest that they had a close professional – and possibly human – relationship[12].

As he apparently produced only cups, Aristeas' production seems to have been less articulated and varied than Ennion's. Aristeas' work is known only through a short catalogue of six examples (Fig. 3). Only four vessels have his mark. A skyphos from Albonese, near Pavia in northern Italy, is decorated with a vegetal pattern between two rows of short flutes[13].

Another skyphos from the Augusteum of Narona presents on the walls a geometric pattern consisting of two bands of raised horizontal lines above and below a frieze of vertical flutes surrounding the tabula ansata[14]. A globular cup from the military camp of Burnum in Croatia has a vegetal frieze surrounding the tabula ansata, above and below two groups of radial flutes[15], and another one from the Constable-Maxwell collection, which was allegedly found in the Eastern Mediterranean, has a central band of stylised palmettes surrounding the tabula ansata between two rows of radial flutes[16]. As the decorative patterns used by these glassmakers were highly distinctive – almost exclusive of their works – and perfectly replicable, some small unsigned fragments were added to this list through comparison with the signed vessels: a small wall fragment from Zeugma[17] and another one from Caesarea Maritima[18] have the same identical stylised palmettes of the Constable-Maxwell cup.

The marks present two variants, distinguished by the occurrence or absence of the mention of his Cypriot origin. The Albonese cup has the mark APICTEAC / ΕΠΟΙΕΙ, whilst the Constable-Maxwell one is marked APICTEAC / ΚΥΠΡΙΟC / ΕΠΟΙΕΙ. Both cups from Croatia, despite having different forms, bear the same mark, which is fragmentary but epigraphically integrable as APICTEA / C ΚΥΠΡΙΟ / C ΕΠΟΙΕΙ. Until recent years, no vessels from archaeological contexts have been known, and Aristeas' activity was dated through stylistic comparison to the same period of Ennion's.

The Burnum cup is the first and sole of his vessels to have been found in context: it was found in the fillings used to raise the ground before the construction of the amphitheatre of Burnum, which are dated between late Augustan and early Claudian times[19].

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[11] CALVI 1965; MCCLELLAN 1983, group M1 and M2; STERN 1995, pp. 71-72; STERN 1995, pp. 72-73; BORZIĆ 2011; BULJEVIĆ 2014; LIGHTFOOT 2014.
[12] LIGHTFOOT 2014, p. 42.
[13] CALVI 1965; DIANI - INVERNIZZI 2015, pp. 205-207.
[14] BULJEVIĆ 2004, p. 189, n. 8, p. 204, fig. 8.
[15] BORZIC 2011.
[16] LIGHTFOOT 2014, Catalogue, p. 114, n. 28.
[17] LIGHTFOOT 2014, p. 24.
[18] ISRAELI 2015, p. 117. Fig. 10.1, 1.
[19] Literature on the excavation data is provided in BORZIĆ, 2011, p. 83.

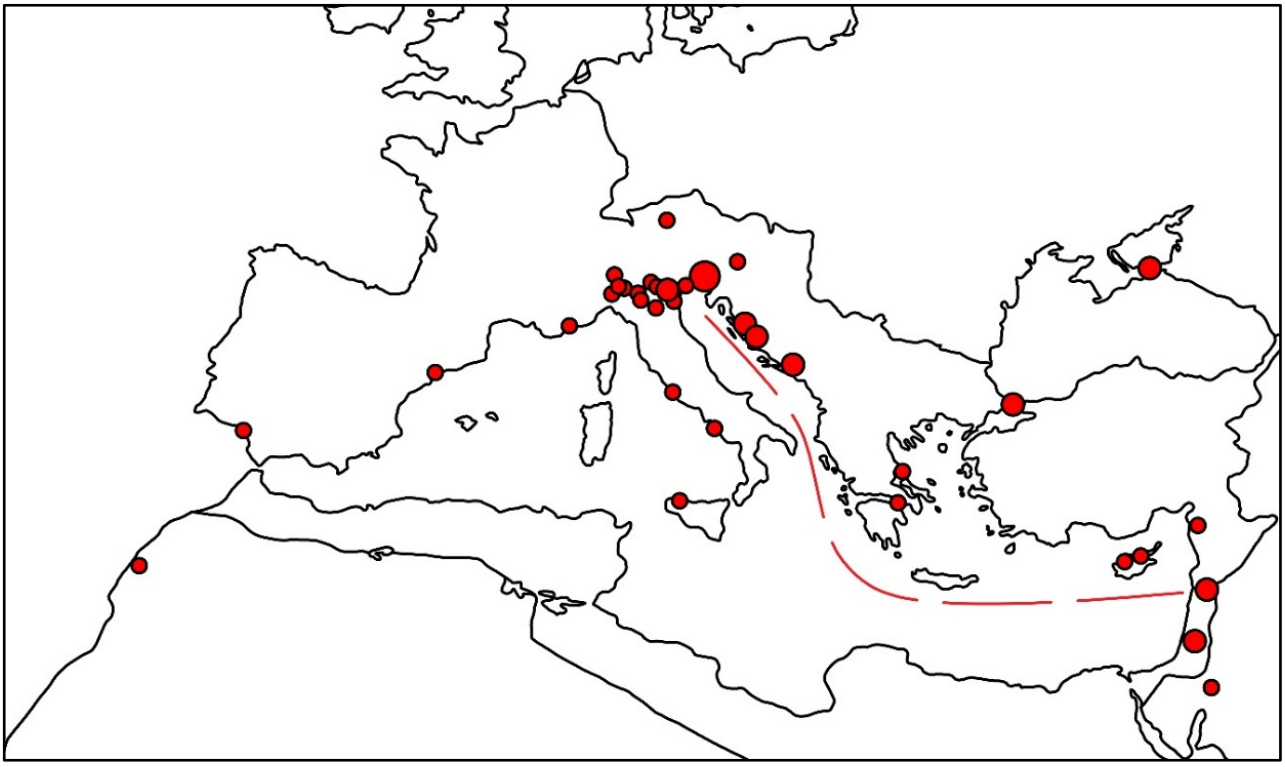

Fig. 2. Distribution map of Ennion's glasses.

The adjective "Cypriot" could refer both to the glassmaker's origin as well as to the location of his workshop. No elements allow to ascertain if he effectively worked on Cyprus or not, but – due to the characteristics of his production and his connection with Ennion – it is assumed that Aristeas too worked in the Syro-Palestinian region[20]. The adjective "Cypriot" is currently attributed to Aristeas' origin, rather than to his activity on the island[21]. In fact, by that time, declaring a Cypriot origin was of no advantage for a glassmaker, whilst declaring a Sidonian one could have been convenient, due to the fame of the city's glass production[22]. Possibly, the mention of his origin was due to the need of being recognised together with a manifestation of "national pride", similar to others which occur in Cypriot inscriptions from the same time[23].

[20] STERN 1995; LIGHTFOOT 2014, p. 24.
[21] STERN 1995, p. 72; BORZIĆ 2011, pp. 86-87.
[22] A notable example of the fame enjoyed by Sidonian glassmakers is provided by some glassmakers working in Rome: they used to pinch the handles of their free-blown *skyphos* cups with marks recalling their Sidonian origin: DEL VECCHIO 2004, pp. 31-35; STERN 2015, p. 80.
[23] MILFORD 1980, pp. 1370-1372.

Fig. 3. Overview of Aristeas' known cups from Albonese (Author's elaboration: frieze decoration re-drawn after CALVI 1965, fig. 6, and outline after pictures in DIANI - INVERNIZZI 2015, fig. 10), Burnum (after BORZIĆ 2011, fig. 2), Constable-Maxwell cup (picture and line drawing are published by permission of Bonhams and Martine Newby).

3. The Villa Bartolomea cup: an ignored glass by Aristeas?

3.1 The cup and its finding

The cup discussed in this note was found in Villa Bartolomea, in the plain of Verona, and is located with no accession number in the archaeological section of the Fioroni Museum in Legnago, currently closed to the public. It was found in 1958 in a Roman funerary area in the Stangheletti ground[24]. The necropolis was found by chance during ploughing: many graves were destroyed and the grave-goods were dispersed. We have notice of the finding thanks to Maria Fioroni, a local archaeologist and collector active in the Veronese plain. She was informed of the find by the local priest and subsequently managed to recover some objects, among which a blue glass cup "una ciotola di vetro blu" was noted, which is probably the one under discussion[25].

The cup is made of blue mould-blown glass and has cylindrical walls with a rounded basis and a raised foot-ring. It is 5,5 cm high, and the foot is 4,6 cm large (Fig. 4). It is incomplete as it was broken during its recover: the inferior part is almost complete, whilst the walls are largely lost, as they never reach the rim and only a raised spike preserves part of the decoration. The wall decorative pattern is articulated into three registers: a frieze of vertical ribbing is preserved, as well as two raised horizontal lines above the frieze and five horizontal raised lines below it. The lower part of the cup is decorated with a radial pattern of alternate flutes and spikes, and inside the foot-ring four raised circles can be noted[26].

3.2 Comparisons and attribution

No close comparisons for this cup were known at the time of its publication, and it was an unicum among the larger group of Sidonian mould-blown glasses.

Due to this circumstance, it was correctly identified as a Sidonian vessel, but by that time it was impossible to recognise its actual creator. Giuliana Maria Facchini, in the Veronese volume of the "Corpus delle collezioni Arheologiche del vetro nel Veneto", recognised its similarity to Ennion's cups of the so-called "geometric style" cups[27] and attributed it to Syro-Palestinian or northern Italian manufactures. She also noted the impossibility of reconstructing its original context[28].

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[24] CAPUIS - LEONARDI - PESAVENTO MATTIOLI - ROSADA 1990, p. 238, n. 252.2.
[25] The circumstances of the find are described in detail in FIORONI 2014, pp. 79-80.
[26] FACCHINI 1999, p. 214, n. 513, tav. XVII, 513, tav. XXXIX, 513.
[27] PRICE 1991; DE BELLIS 2004, pp. 166-170, stile 3.
[28] FACCHINI 1999, p. 197.

Some years later, in the conclusive volume of the Corpus, Annamaria Larese proposed that this cup, together with other mould-blown cups and pyxides, were the products of one or more northern Italian workshops which were capable of managing the mould-blowing technique and produced vessels imitating the Sidonian ones[29]. The Villa Bartolomea cup has a peculiar decorative pattern, which finds very rare comparisons in glass literature. It has indeed a strong similarity with Ennion's "geometric" cups, as in both cases the decoration is based on a row of vertical flutes around the tabula ansata, and the lower part is decorated by radial flutes. Despite this similarity, its closest comparison is a cup which was still unpublished in the time of these studies: the cup marked by Aristeas from the Augusteum of Narona, whose attribution to the Cypriot glassmaker is granted by the mark [APIC]TEA[C] / [K]ΥΠΡΙΟ/ [C] [E]ΠΟΙΕΙ[30] (Fig. 4).

Both cups are fragmentary and incomplete, as the Narona cup lacks most of its lower part and its foot-ring. Despite the partial conservation of both examples, their close similarity is immediately evident. Both have the same profile, with straight walls and a curved lower part with no protruding parts. The wall decoration pattern is identical, as in both cups is organised on three registers and both have the unique characteristic of two groups of relief horizontal lines above and below a frieze of vertical flutes. The incomplete upper frieze of the Villa Bartolomea cup has two raised lines, whilst the Narona cup has three lines that reach the extant rim; the lower registers of both cups consist of five raised horizontal lines. Decorative patterns disposed on three registers seem to be typical of Aristeas' skyphos cups, as they also appear in the Albonese cup; Ennion, on the other hand, uses more frequently two-register patterns. The inferior part of both cups has the same pattern of alternate radial flutes and spikes also found in the Burnum and Constable-Maxwell cups by Aristeas.

This comparison shows that the Narona and Villa Bartolomea cups have the same form and profile, identical decorative patterns and the same dimensions; moreover, these cups are the only examples to share all these features among the Sidonian mould-blown glasses of the early 1st century AD. Thus, the Villa Bartolomea cup may be identified as a product coming from the workshop of the glassmaker Aristeas the Cypriot.

[29] LARESE 2004, pp. 18-19.
[30] BULJEVIĆ 2004, p. 189, n. 8, p. 204, fig. 8.

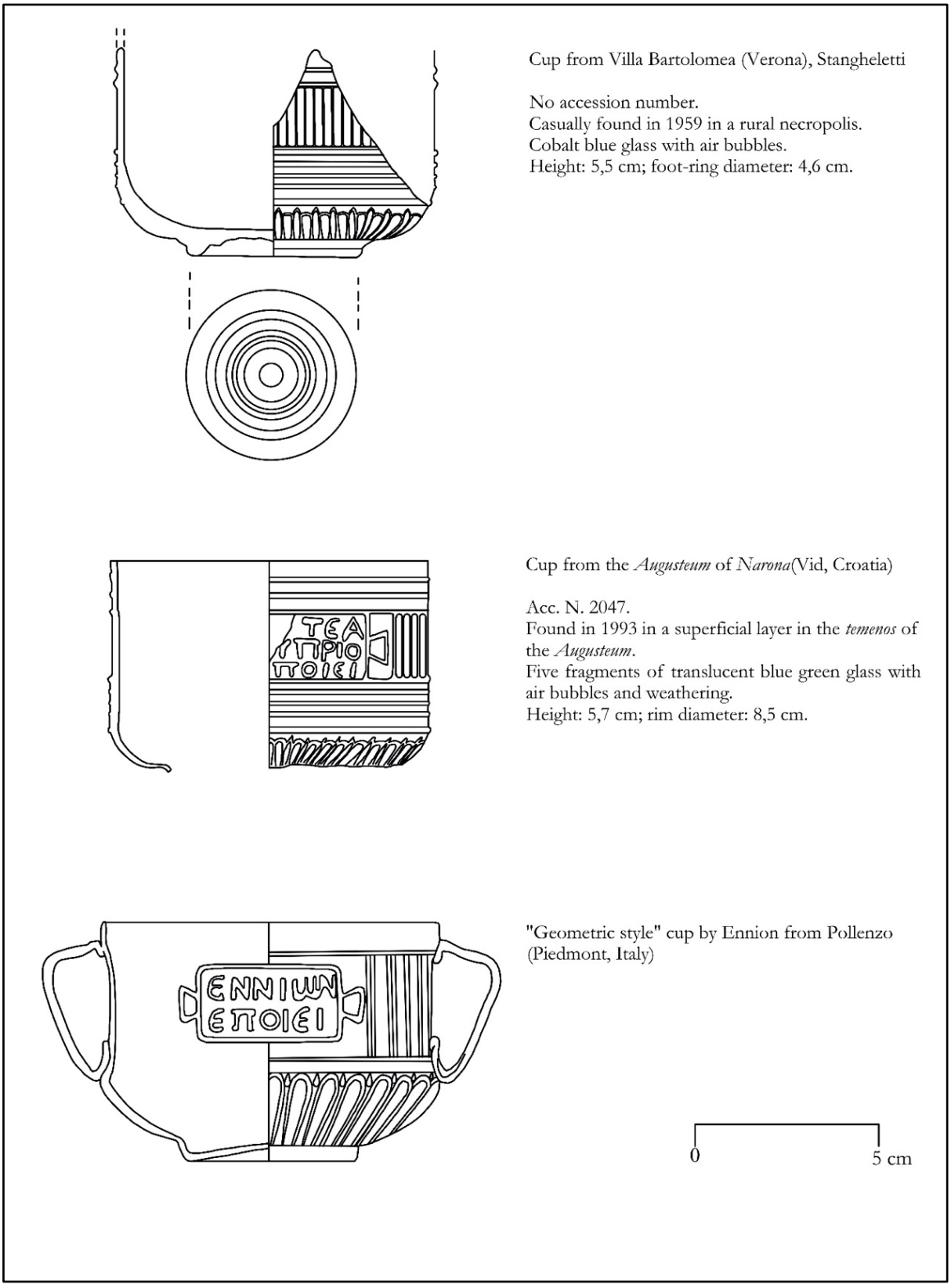

Fig. 4. Comparison between the Villa Bartolomea cup, the Narona cup by Aristeas and a "geometric" cup by Ennion. All cups were re-drawn by the author after the original plates in FACCHINI 1999, pl. XXXIX, 513; BULJEVIĆ 2004, fig. 8; FILIPPI 2006, fig. 61.

4. Some notes on glass circulation

The production of Aristeas is known from a far inferior number of examples than Ennion's. The attribution of the Villa Bartolomea cup to his workshop does not provide substantial new data for the knowledge of this glassmaker's activity but offers some hints for further reflections.

It has already been noted how Aristeas' production, if compared to Ennion's, seems to be less varied, as half of his known production consists of cups coming from the same mould set of the Constable-Maxwell cup; now, the identification of a new pair of identical vessels enforces this observation. The update of the distribution map offers a hint for reconsidering the circulation of Aristeas' vessels (Fig. 5).

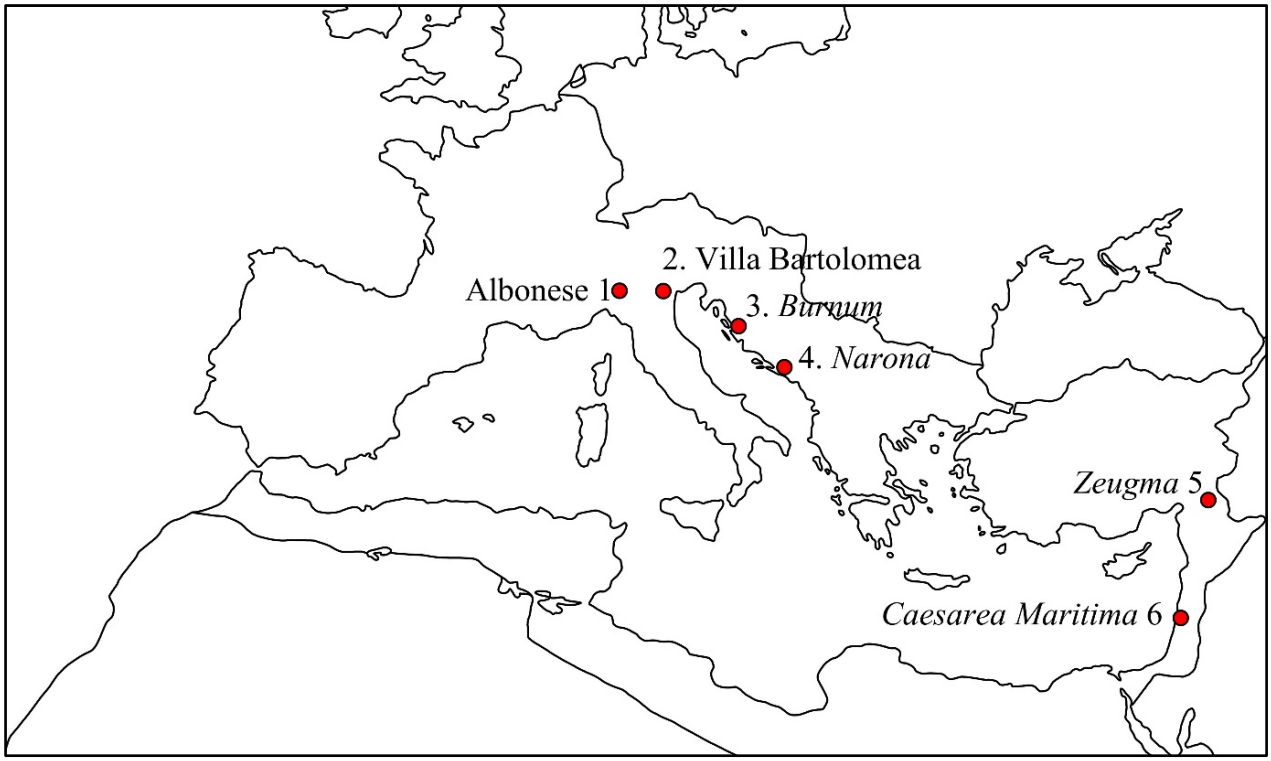

Fig. 5. Distribution map of Aristeas' glasses.

Their distribution spans between the East (fragments from Caesarea Maritima and Zeugma and Constable-Maxwell cup), the Adriatic region (cups from Burnum and Narona) and northern Italy (cups from Albonese and Villa Bartolomea). Evidently, Aristeas' glasses were distributed along the same trade routes used for Ennion's ones: there are some finds near the (supposed) productive centre in the Syro-

Palestinian region and significative presence in the Adriatic region and northern Italy, suggesting a sgnificant role of sea trade – notably the Adriatic sea route – in their distribution[31].

They also reached the northern Italian plains, where – after passing through the seaports – they were traded along the internal sea routes. The low number of vessels by Aristeas currently known does not allow to fully evaluate his role in this trade, even if his workshop had clearly a lower output than Ennion's one, although Aristeas' glasses were likely widely appreciated.

The finds from Villa Bartolomea highlight the role of the Adige river as a vector for glass trade, operating at a lower scale than the Po river: Villa Bartolomea provided another example of mould-blown glass, notably a pyxis with a floral pattern[32]. Moreover, apart the coastal ports and the areas in close proximity of the Po river, Verona is one of the few places in the inland of the Venetia to have provided finds of imported mould-blown glasses of certain Eastern provenience, which may have reached the city by river trade[33].

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have discussed the addition of a Sidonian mould-blown glass cup to the catalogue of Aristeas' known works through the comparison with another marked example which was yet unpublished by the time of its publication. This attribution suggests hints for further reflection. Firstly, it underlines the importance and need of continuous update and revision of data: when dealing with a peculiar topic and glass types known from unique or extremely rare specimens, new data provide new hints for update of older finds, which in turn may contribute to a general progress of studies.

Secondly, the attribution of the Villa Bartolomea cup to an Eastern workshop must be confronted with previous hypotheses. Notably, this cup – together with other mould-blown glasses – has been identified by A. Larese as the product of a hypothetic northern Italian glassmakers producing mould-blown glasses of Sidonian style[34], and other similar proposals can be found in other papers of recent Italian literature on this topic. A proper discussion of such an issue would require a larger survey of literature about mould-blown glasses from northern Italy and other regions and cannot be approached in this paper. However, this case-study provides an example of the possibility of how some rare glass types with no comparisons – neither in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean – may have been considered as unique

[31] STERN 1995; LIGHTFOOT 2014.
[32] FACCHINI 1999, p. 218, n. 525.
[33] Two vessels in the Museum of Verona were probably found in the necropolis of the city: they are a jug decorated with radial flutes and a vegetal frieze and a beaker with the greek inscription *ΛΑΒ / Ε ΤΗ / [Ν ΝΙ / ΚΗΝ]* of Harden's group K: FACCHINI 1999, p. 168, n. 385; FACCHINI 1999, p. 146, n. 321.
[34] LARESE 2004, pp. 18-19.

and experimental products, thus supporting the idea of a regional production. Moreover, when dealing with goods produced in series and traded along long distances the find-spot of the products does not always provide a good element for discussing the location of the workshop. In fact, even though the Narona and Villa Bartolomea cups are the only vessels sharing an unique decorative pattern, and both were found in the Adriatic region, the link with an Eastern workshop is provided only by the mark of Aristeas on the Narona cup. Indeed, if the mark on the Narona cup had been lost, their correct identification would have never been possible.

One last note. Hypotheses of regional production, although very suggestive, cannot be proposed or dismissed without a proper argumentation and support of adequate data both from Eastern and Western areas, in addition to regional sources. A complete dismission of these hypotheses is unlikely. Nevertheless, future studies, hopefully based on a larger and more complete picture, may provide other similar case studies which in turn may lead to a correct assessment of regional production.

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