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SOME FINE WARES FROM THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN *AQUILEIA* BETWEEN THE 2ND AND THE 3RD CENTURY AD

The importance of *Aquileia* as an *emporium* with strong relations with the Eastern Mediterranean since the very first years of its foundation as a Roman colony (181 BC) has been increasingly proved by recent investigations on the site.¹

New data about these connections for the mid-imperial age have recently been acquired through the excavation of a stretch of an ancient ditch that served as part of the Aquileian harbour network from the 1st through the first half of the 3rd century AD. The same area was to be occupied by the last part of a modern ditch used to collect the excess water from the adjoining fields, so the archaeological investigation took place before this important site was touched.² The excavation of the so called “Canale Anfora”, once flowing towards the sea to the west of the Roman town, brought to light an incredible amount of objects. Among them are amphorae, common and coarse ware, terra sigillata of different productions, glass, large quantities of fauna, wood, bone and leather artefacts and, due to the characteristics of the site, an exceptional quantity of botanical evidence.³ All this interesting material is now being studied in order to publish the complete context.

Here only some of the fine wares of eastern origin will be presented, in particular vases and lamps of Knidian production and cups/pyxides from Corinth, leaving Eastern Sigillata, attested by large quantities both of ES A and ES B, to the complete publication of the site.⁴

In the layers related to the final use of the ditch, dated between the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD some fragments of Knidian Relief Ware were found, both part of two different table jugs in the shape of a ram. The first fragment is only a small part of the head of the animal (**fig. 1,2**); the clay is hard fired, brownish grey, possibly because of the conditions of the deposit, with a thin brown slip. The second vessel is much better preserved, and it has been possible to reconstruct it from a few sherds (**fig. 1,3**). The shape is the same as that of the previous jug, only a little smaller in size; once more the clay is hard-fired and rather greyish in colour, only small traces of the original slip are visible. Fragments of a third jug were found in the initial excavation of the site, at the end of the eighties. This last vessel is shaped like a different animal, a big feline, possibly a lion (**fig. 1,1**); the clay and slip condition seem much better, being hard fired, pinkish brown in colour and with a thin brown slip. Even if during this first part of the excavations no stratigraphy was taken into consideration, so that no context data are avail-

able for this fragment, it is rather obvious that the chronology is very likely to be the same as that of the recent finds. As is well known, Knidian jugs are widely distributed in the Mediterranean area in the years between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD;⁵ jugs in the shape of a ram are already among the known examples, even if these finds present a peculiar feature in the shorter development of the mouth.

Two more fragments are of Knidian origin, but in this case they belong to a particular kind of lamp so far unknown in *Aquileia*. The first fragment (**fig. 1,4**), with hard-fired clay, light brown in colour covered by a thin reddish-brown slip with metallic sheen, is part of a rectangular base with a floral decoration on one side and a very tiny relic of the plastic upper part. The second sherd could be related to more or less the same part of the object, but the upper element is better preserved (**fig. 1,5**). In this case the clay is almost grey and very hard, but no slip is detectable. This kind of *polylichnai* lamp seems to be quite rare, but its diffusion covers almost the same chronology as the mould-made jugs of the same origin.⁶

¹ Early and close connections with the Eastern Mediterranean are testified by the amphorae and pottery finds in the Essiccatoio Nord site in *Aquileia*: F. MASELLI SCOTTI/V. DEGRASSI/A. GIOVANNINI/P. MAGGI/L. MANDRUZZATO/F. SENARDI/P. VENTURA, *Aquileia. Essiccatoio Nord*, scavi 1993, *Aquileia Nostra* 64, 1993, 313–336. – F. MASELLI SCOTTI/V. DEGRASSI/M.R. MEZZI/L. MANDRUZZATO, *Essiccatoio Nord*, scavo 1995, *Aquileia Nostra* 67, 1995, 49–80. – L. MANDRUZZATO/C. TIUSSI/V. DEGRASSI, *Appunti sull' 'instrumentum' d'importazione greca ed orientale ad Aquileia*, *RCRF Acta*, 36, 2000, 359–364.

² L. BERTACCHI, *Il sistema portuale della metropoli aquileiese. Antichità Altoadriatiche* 20, 1990, 242–243. – L. BERTACCHI, *Il canale Anfora. Quaderni aquileiesi* 6–7, 2000, 31–32.

³ Other materials testify the intense trading life of the Roman harbour; together with local and other Italian and western productions are an incredible amount of Aegean cooking pots (double in number with respect to coarse ware vessels) and a large variety of amphorae (mainly coming from the Southern Adriatic, the Eastern Mediterranean and in a smaller percentage from Africa and Spain). So far only a preliminary communication about the results of this investigation has been given, while a team of scholars is working towards the complete publication (F. MASELLI SCOTTI, *Aquileia, Canale Anfora. Aquileia Nostra* 76, 2005, 372–376).

⁴ I'd like to thank dott.ssa Franca Maselli Scotti for having kindly permitted me to present here these data, anticipating the complete publication of the site. Adriana Comar, from the National Archaeological Museum of Aquileia, made the drawings and Fabio Prenc helped me to arrange their layout in the figures; I wish to thank them both for their help.

⁵ *Atlante I*, 233–235.

⁶ D.M. BAILEY, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum III (Roman Provincial Lamps)* (London 1988) table 81, Q2727.

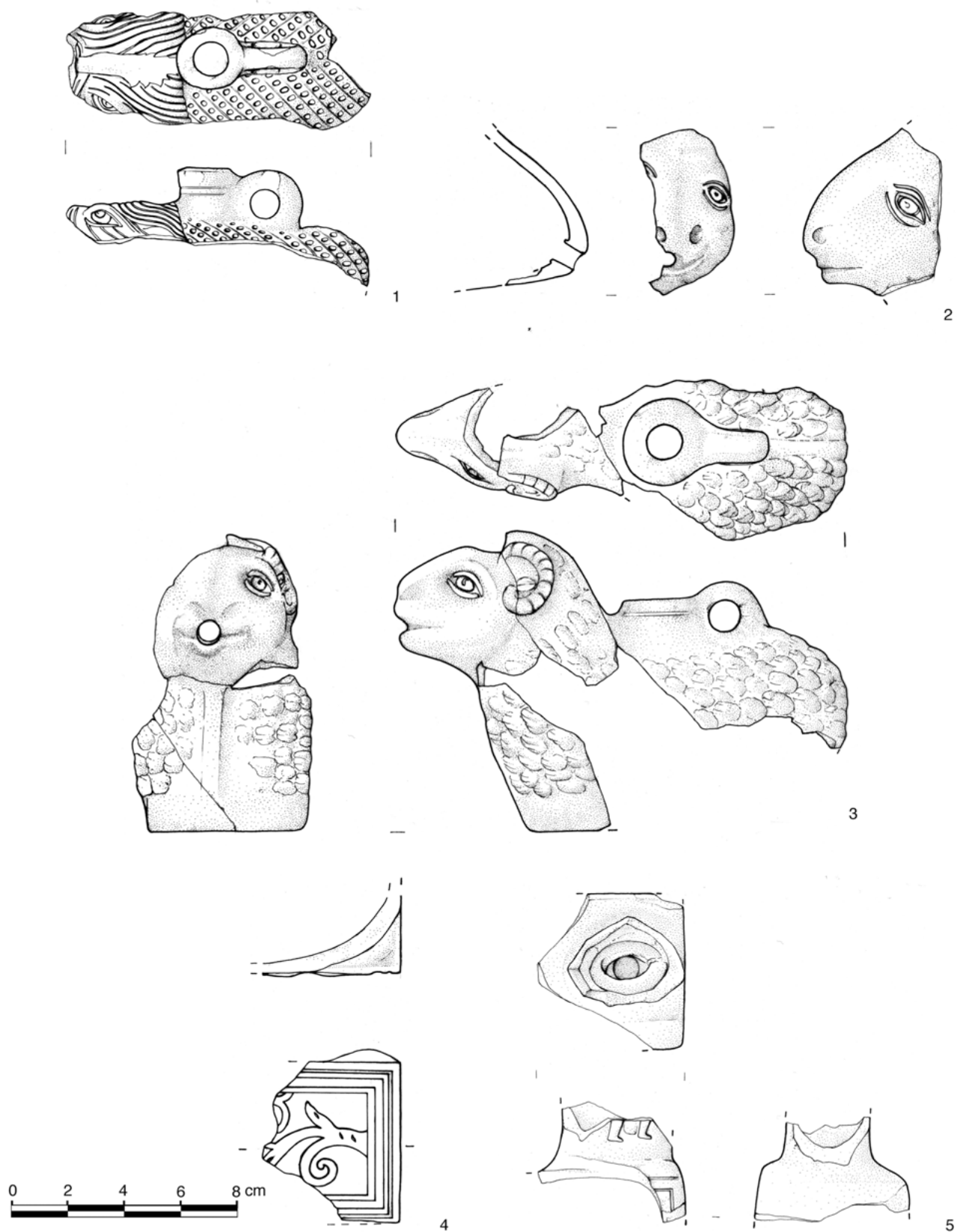


Fig. 1. 1–3 Knidian relief ware; 4–5 Knidian lamps. Scale 1:2.

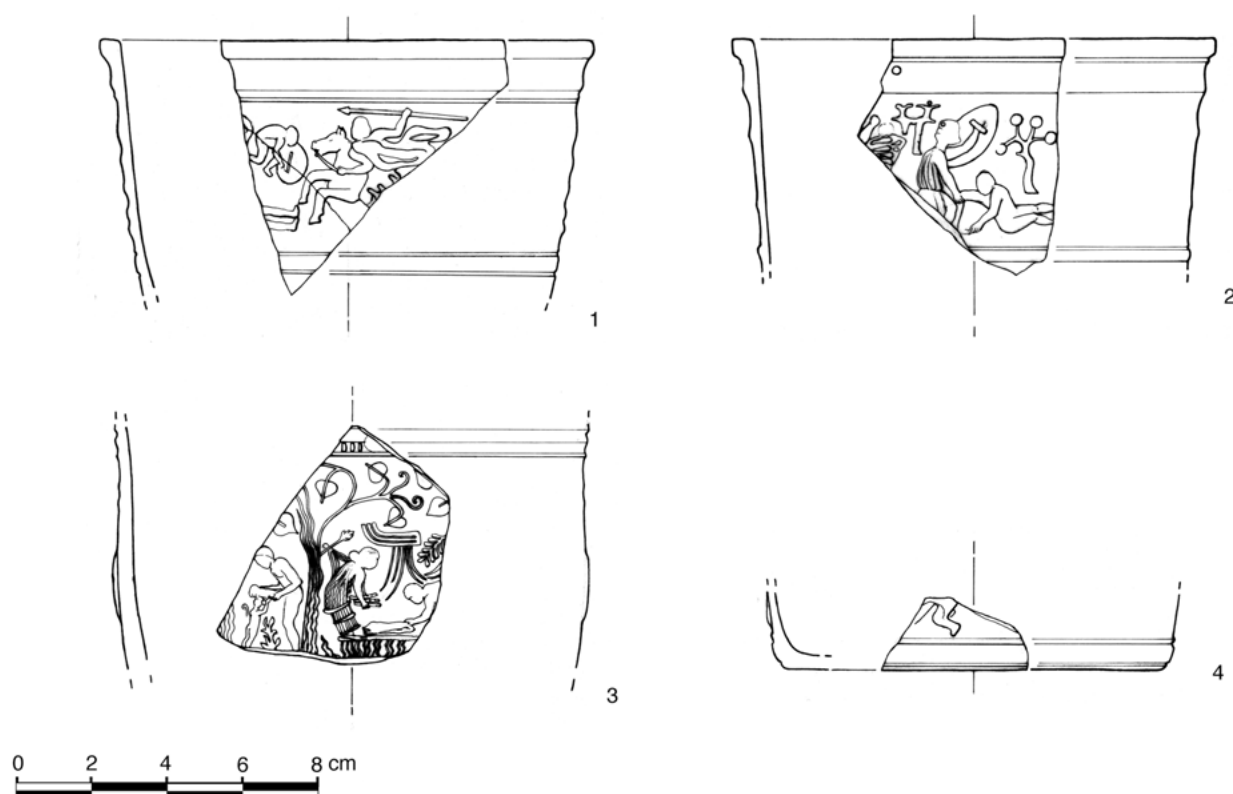


Fig. 2. 1–4 Corinthian cups/pyxides. Scale 1:2.

From the same layers come also the fragments of three bowls/*pyxides* of Corinthian production.⁷ The first is decorated with battle scenes (fig. 2,2);⁸ the clay is light brown and quite soft; few traces of the original brown slip are preserved. The second is decorated with ritual scenes (fig. 2,3);⁹ the clay is much harder than in the preceding sherd, the slip is well-preserved and the decoration is more readable, possibly because the mould was newer. The third fragment is too small to permit a certain identification of the subject represented (fig. 2,4); it could be battle scenes again, but too little is visible. A fourth fragment was found at the end of the Eighties, when the first part of this ditch was excavated, but as previously stated, no context data are available for this sherd (fig. 2,1). In this case the decoration is very badly impressed, the clay is pinkish brown and the slip is bright orange. Until the analysis of the find-context has been completed these fragments can make no contribution to the definition of the chronology commonly accepted for this particular production.¹⁰ The two decorations attested on the Canale Anfora samples seem to be the most common, and definitively the more attested in *Aquileia* and its hinterland.¹¹

In *Aquileia* other contexts dating to the same period have given the same pottery association,¹² and the picture seems to be quite the same also at other sites under Aquileian influence, like a recently published *domus* in Tergeste.¹³

It is not easy to track down the route followed by these products on their way from the Eastern Mediterranean to *Aquileia*. The presence of Corinthian Relief Bowls and Knidian lamps on the Dalmatian coast, in the area of *Pula* and in Croatia and Histria in general,¹⁴ could be interpreted

either as another attestation in a region under the economical influence of *Aquileia* or as a significant indicator of the possible route followed by the traders. Abundant finds of ES and Aegean cooking ware, associated in many contexts in *Aquileia* with Knidian and Corinthian ware, along the eastern Adriatic coast seem to give substance to such an hypothesis.¹⁵

⁷ Atlante I, 255–256.

⁸ SPITZER 1942, group II.

⁹ SPITZER 1942, group III.

¹⁰ D. MALFITANA, La ceramica «corinzia» a rilievo di età romana. Primi risultati di una ricerca in corso. RCRF Acta 36, 2000, 181–188.

¹¹ To the list published by Maurizio Buora of the findings in the region (M. BUORA, Coppe corinzie nell'Alto Adriatico. Quad. Friulani Arch. 15, 2005, 103–111), a cup with battle scenes from Zuglio, UD, must be added (L. MANDRUZZATO, Zuglio, proprietà Franzin. Sondaggi 2001. *Aquileia Nostra* 72, 2001, 538–545.).

¹² L. MANDRUZZATO, Immobile Pasqualis. *Aquileia Nostra* 67, 1996, 264–267.

¹³ F. MASELLI SCOTTI/V. DEGRASSI/G. MIAN, Gli scarichi della *domus* di piazza Barbacan a Trieste: un contesto di II – inizi III secolo d.C. Atti e Mem. Soc. Istriana Arch. e Storia Patria 102/1 (n.s. 51/1), 2003, 19–105.

¹⁴ Alka Starac kindly informed me of some of the finds of bowls and lamps in excavations in *Pula*: A. STARAC, Antički nalazi iz sondačnog iskopa kod crkve sv. Nikole u Puli, godine 1961. *Opuscula Arch.* 16, 1992, 193. – EAD., *Pula – rezultati nekih sondačnih istraživanja*. *Histria Arch.* 28, 1997 (1999), 172; 196. – T. BRADARA, Nalaz keramičkih svjetiljki uz jugoistočni kut foruma u Puli. *Histria Arch.* 29, 1998 (2000), 122. – M. JURIŠIĆ, Podmorska arheološka istraživanja na Vižuli – Pokretni nalazi. *Histria Antiqua* 14, 2006, 307.

¹⁵ J. ISTENIĆ/G. SCHNEIDER, Aegean cooking ware in the Eastern Adriatic. RCRF Acta, 36, 2000, 341–348.

Bibliography

Atlante I

Atlante delle forme ceramiche I. Ceramica fine romana nel bacino mediterraneo (medio e tardo impero) (Roma 1981).

SPITZER 1942

D. C. SPITZER, Roman Relief Bowls from Corinth. *Hesperia*, 11, 1942, 162–192.