

THE EARLY ROMAN GLASS HEAD-SHAPED CUP FROM CALLATIS (ROMANIA): A REASSESSMENT

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Abstract: A glass cup shaped as a human head with African features, found decades ago as part of the grave goods belonging to a disturbed Early Roman inhumation burial from Callatis (1st c. AD), represents the focal point of this paper. The intention of the authors is to re-discuss this find, so far unique for Romania, both from a technological and artistic perspective, in relation to similar finds from other areas of the Roman Empire.

Rezumat: O cupă de sticlă cu corpul în formă de cap cu trăsături africane, descoperită cu decenii în urmă într-un mormânt de înmușiere roman timpuriu distrus de la Callatis (sec. I p.Chr.), reprezintă punctul central al acestui articol. Intenția autorilor este de a rediscuta această descoperire, unică până în prezent pe teritoriul României, atât din punct de vedere tehnologic, cât și artistic, în relație cu descoperiri similare din alte zone ale Imperiului roman.

Keywords: head-shaped cup, Early Roman glassware, Isings form 78a, Callatis, Black Sea coast

Cuvinte cheie: cupă în formă de cap uman, sticlărie romană timpurie, Isings form 78a, Callatis, coasta Mării Negre

INTRODUCTION

A glass cup shaped as a human head with African features, found decades ago as part of the grave goods belonging to a disturbed Early Roman inhumation burial from Callatis (1st c. AD), represents the focal point of this paper. The intention of the authors is to re-discuss this find, so far unique for Romania, both from a technological and artistic perspective, in relation to similar finds from other areas of the Roman Empire. This research is part of an ongoing collaboration of the authors with the objective of publishing a book on Roman glass cups, beakers and bowls in the collections of the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța.

FIND CONDITIONS

The vessel was recovered during rescue excavations taking place in the early spring of 1966 on the construction site from Neptun, which was to become a well-known seaside summer resort, situated on the western coast of the Black Sea, between the

modern cities of Constanța (ancient Tomis) and Mangalia (ancient Callatis), Romania. The intervention of the work teams in charge of excavations for buildings' foundations, sewer systems and heating systems in this area led to the destruction of numerous archaeological contexts, among them a large number of burials. The archaeological team from the county museum in Constanța managed to ensure a professional excavation of some of the contexts, while in the case of those already affected there was a concerted effort to recover as much as possible of the surviving archaeological material¹.

The vessel entered the collections of the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța (at that moment the Museum of Archaeology Constanța) with the inventory number 14851.

FIND CONTEXT

One of the spots which offered rich and interesting finds was *Spălătorie (Carwash facility)*, where a number of 10 graves, forming small clusters, were identified. The archaeologists, when informed about the situation, managed to excavate only two of these graves. On their arrival at the find spot, the other eight graves were already destroyed by the previous interventions of the workers. A first cluster of four graves found in this already disturbed condition, located near the eastern wall of the carwash facility, had among them an inhumation burial at a depth of 4 m. It was still possible to recover a part of the grave goods and rests of the container, in various states of preservation. It was determined that the following items were initially associated inside the grave: large nails, identified as belonging to a wooden coffin; a bronze locker from a wooden box or casket; various glass fragments; the damaged but complete glass vessel in the shape of a human head².

The number of burials clustered in this area made the author of the excavations to consider that they were part of a necropolis belonging to one of the numerous *vicus* type settlements mentioned as being in existence around the city of Callatis. All the identified graves, both inhumation and cremation burials, were dated based on their surviving grave goods to the 1st-2nd c. AD. The better-preserved inhumation burials pointed towards the habit of placing the dead on an east-west alignment, with the head oriented towards east, in those cases in which this type of disposal of the body was used. In addition, some of the inhumation graves had the coffin protected by a vaulted roof, made of limestone boulders³. Unfortunately, the grave that contained the vessel in the shape of a human head seems to have been too much affected to allow any certainty

¹ Iconomu 1968, 235, 252.

² Iconomu 1968, 252-253, figs. 26-27.

³ Iconomu 1968, 261.

regarding the existence of such a structure, as no mention is made in the article. Still, the presence of the large nails, with good analogies in better-preserved graves from the area, indicates that it was indeed an inhumation burial inside a wooden coffin.

The consultation of the Register no. 4 from the museum provided roughly the same information found in the article published in 1968 and cited above. Iconomu himself introduced the data in the register, on February 2nd 1966, so probably really soon after the moment the discovery took place. The specific spot of the find is indicated as being Neptun, the Vilas of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Carwash facility, and the chronological framework of the grave is "Roman period". The entries following the glass vessel with human head (Inv. No. 14851) include:

- iron coffin nails, pyramidal in shape, short, with large heads (number of items unspecified, all of them under Inv. No. 14852);
- fragments of glass mixed with fragments belonging to bronze items (all placed together under Inv. No. 14853);
- two identifiable bronze items, a locker with ring-shaped orifice for key, belonging to a wooden box, not preserved, and a ring from a wooden box, not preserved (Inv. Nos. 14854-14855).

The glass beaker in the shape of a human head was the only item from this funerary context illustrated in the article from 1968.

THE GLASS HEAD-SHAPED CUP FROM CALLATIS IN THE ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

Constantin Iconomu was the first to offer a description of the glass cup, in his article from 1968, discussing also the find context and possible chronology of the item. He described the vessel as representing a female character, most probably a Nubian, based on the hairstyle. The author used two criteria for dating the vessel, which he refers to as 'beaker' (*pahar*), most probably to the 1st c. AD. On one hand, he mentioned possible analogies with similar finds from Pompeii discussed by Isings and included by this author in her Form 78a. On the other hand, he took into consideration the general dating of other grave goods connected to the cluster of graves. He also indicated the height of the item, as being 0.098 m⁴.

Mihai Bucovală selected the vessel for his book on glass vessels from Tomis, published in the same year as the article of Iconomu. He indicated the provenance of the vessel as Neptun (Mangalia Nord) and the year of the find, 1966. The dimensions offered by the author are the height (0.098 m) and diameter at the rim (0.066 m). The description of the state of preservation and characteristics of the vessel, also referred

⁴ Iconomu 1968, 259.

to as 'beaker', were much more thorough than in Iconomu's paper. It was specified that the vessel suffered deteriorations at the inferior part and at the rim. The base was described as circular, flat, with a small circle in relief in the centre. The beaker represented a female head with oriental features: prominent cheekbones, small wide nose, and full lips. The head had a neat hairstyle, with vertical curls on several levels, stringed with pearls, and earrings. The glass was green, with spots of silvery iridescence. It was included in Isings form 78a, shaped in the form of human heads. For analogies, the author sent to two vessels with Black heads from Pompeii, and a double-head vessel from Dura-Europos. Although the long lifespan of the mould-blown technique is mentioned (from the 1st c. AD up to even the 5th c. AD), the author did not contradict Iconomu's proposed dating. He considered that the vessel could be dated to the 1st c. AD, or possibly the beginning of the 2nd c. AD, based on context and closest analogies⁵.

The vessel was later mentioned by Cristina Drăghici, who included it in her Group IV – luxury items represented by mould-blown imported vessels –, describing it as head-shaped beaker⁶.

More recently, the item was mentioned in an overview, conducted by Costel Chiriac and Sever-Petru Boțan, on the situation of Hellenistic and Roman glass finds on the western coast of the Black Sea, as representative of the category of mould-blown beakers most probably of Syro-Palestinian origin⁷.

THE GLASS HEAD-SHAPED CUP FROM CALLATIS REASSESSED

As part of an ongoing project of preparing a book on glass cups, beakers and bowls from the collections of the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța, the authors of the present paper took into consideration also the human-head cup. The vessel was re-measured and re-described. The next steps are a re-contextualisation, based on the advancements of research on this category of items, and a discussion of some opinions regarding the importance and potential of this find.

Dimensions

The vessel has a total height of 10 cm, the diameter of the mouth of 5.8 cm, the maximum diameter of 7.4 cm (corresponding on the vessel's body to the character's nose), and the diameter of the base of 5.7 cm. The height of the vessel's rim is 1.6 cm. The constriction marking the limit between the rim and body (shaped as a human head) has a diameter of 4.8 cm. There is another constriction below the body,

⁵ Bucovalea 1968, 53, cat. no. 58.

⁶ Drăghici 2009, 215, fig. 19.

⁷ Chiriac, Boțan 2014, 531, pl. VIII/7.

marking the limit between the body and the base (shaped as the character's neck), with a diameter of 4.4 cm (on the character's neck). The height of this base is 1.2 cm. The thickness of the vessel's rim varies between 0.2 and 0.4 cm.

All the measurements were taken using an electronic calliper. Still, it should be mentioned that the restoration of the vessel, made in all probability very soon after discovery, could have introduced some modifications. Although minor, in combination with the small size of the vessel, they could have resulted in important variations in comparison with the original state of the cup.

In the same time, the differences between the new set of measurements and the original ones, indicated by Iconomu and Bucovală, cannot be explained this way, as it is clear from the illustration that the vessel was already restored in 1968, when it was published in parallel by the two authors. In this case, the most probable explanation resides in the difference in quality between the measuring instruments. The oral history connected to that period emphasises the lack of tools, utensils and instruments hampering the work of the Romanian archaeologists, and the fact that in many cases a school ruler was used for measurements for the lack of something better.

Description

The vessel is made of thick, good quality glass, transparent green, with flaring neck, the body in the shape of a human head, and a flat base (Fig. 1). The rim is cracked-off, slightly inverted, and ground. The vessel was mould-blown, using most probably two vertical sections for the body and disc-shaped section for the base. Mould seams are visible on both cheeks of the character, in front of the sideburns, more clearly on the right cheek (Fig. 2). The vessel represents the head of a male character with African features. The character has a rigid facial expression, with square jaw and dimpled chin, a flat nose, fleshy cheeks, high-arched eyebrows, furrowed brow, and narrow eyes. The round prominent eye globes present no marked pupils or irises (Fig. 3). His mouth is half-open, leaving both rows of teeth visible (Fig. 4). The character wears hemispherical earrings and has short sideburns, consisting of two locks of hair each (Figs. 5-6). His hair is braided in short vertical braids arranged in four tiers and, on the head, he wears a wreath consisting of a branch with heart-shaped leaves, and possibly berries, tied at the back (Fig. 7-8; see also Fig. 5 for a heart-shaped leaf visible behind the ear). On the bottom of the vessel, on the base, there are three concentric circles with central dot. The decoration is not in crisp relief – due to either preservation state or the fact that it was blown in an overused mould – and as a result some details were more difficult to identify than were others. The vessel is cracked and heavily mended. Remains of whitish weathering crust are still present on the surface, together with strong iridescence.



Fig. 1. The glass cup with male head from Callatis – frontal view (photo by P. Nicolau)



Fig. 2. Three-quarter view of the face from the right with mould seam still visible in front of the sideburn (photo by P. Nicolau)

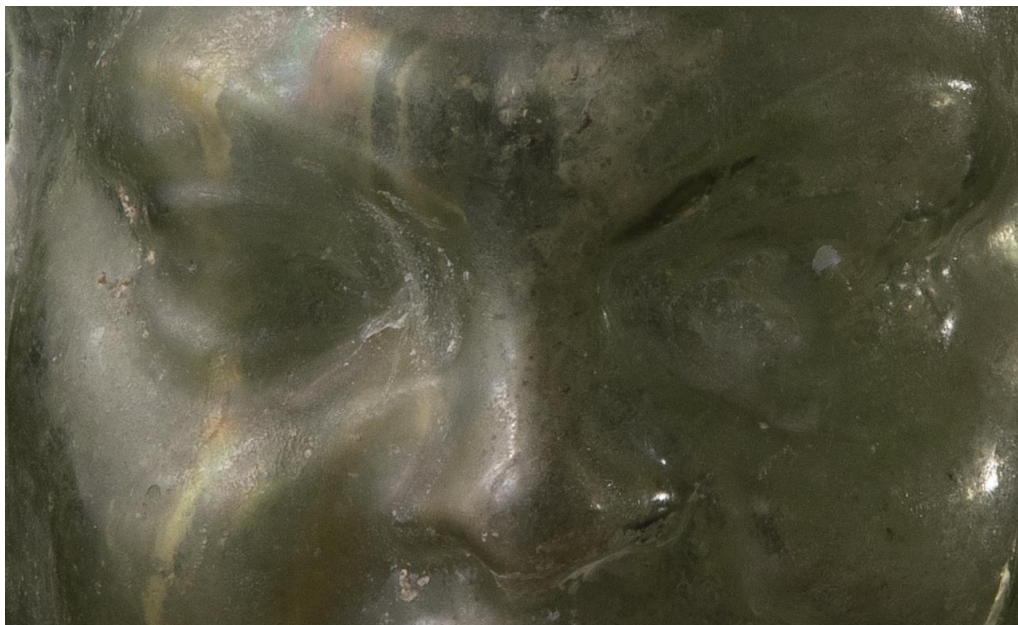


Fig. 3. The prominent pupil less eyes – detail (photo by P. Nicolau)

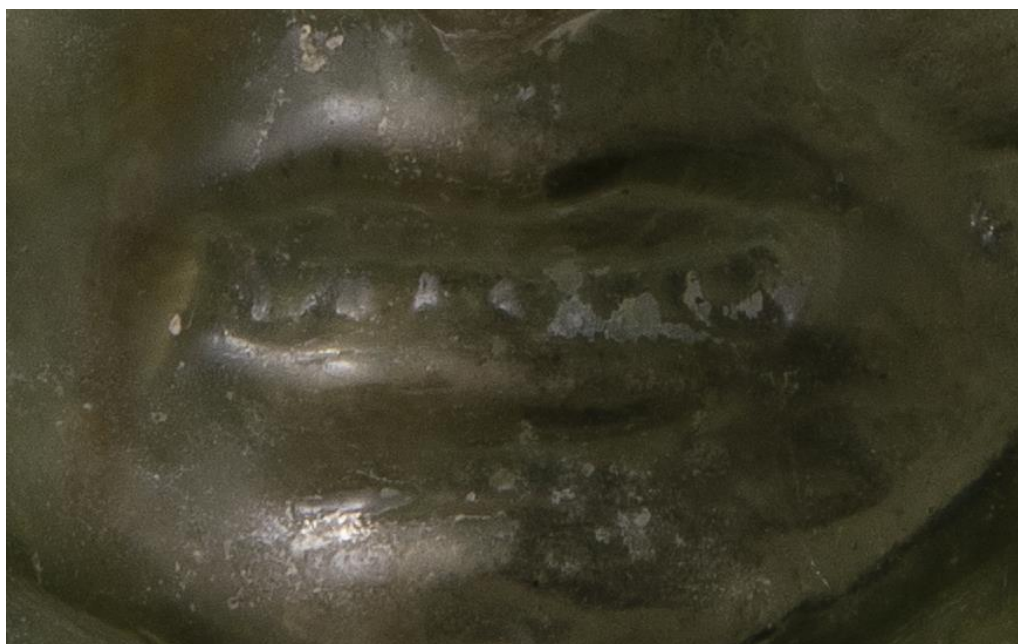


Fig. 4. Mouth with both rows of teeth visible – detail (photo by P. Nicolau)

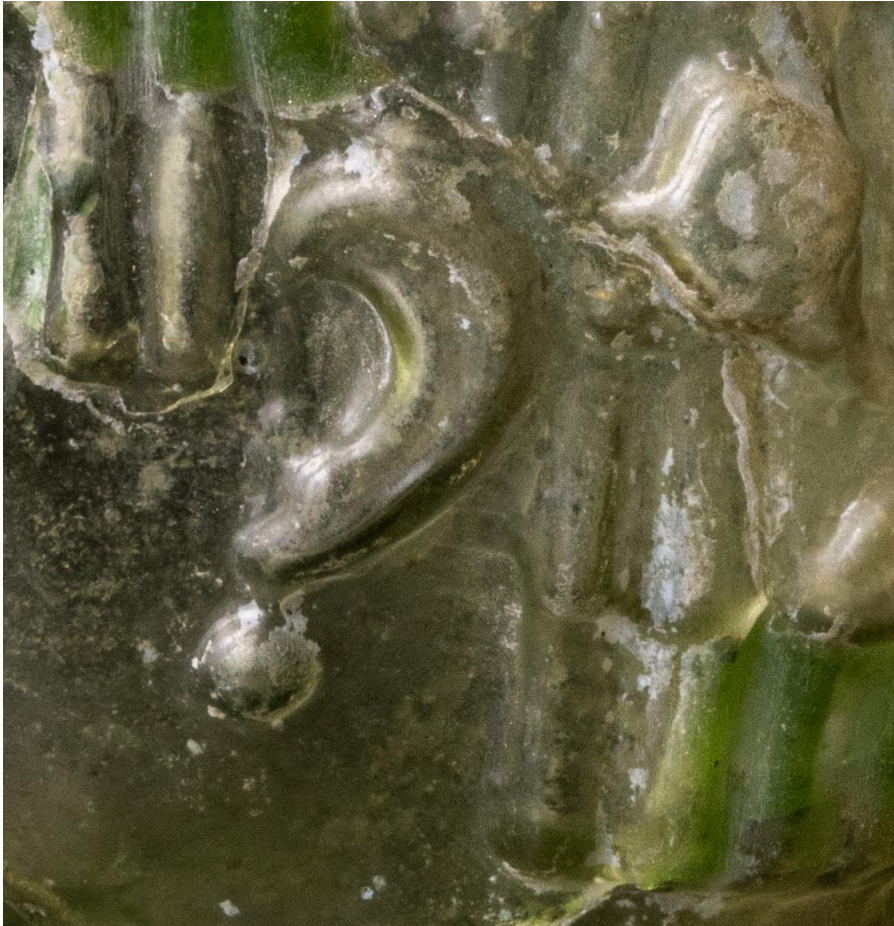


Fig. 5. Ear with hemispherical earring – detail of the left side of the head (photo by P. Nicolau)

ANALOGIES

There are several good analogies published or mentioned in the dedicated literature, which will be presented below. In each case, the items will be referred to exactly as named in the respective publications.

The cup from Asia Minor (the Yüksel Erimtan Collection)

This vessel was dated to the late 1st to early 2nd century AD, and described as a cup in the form of a negro-head (Reg. no. 144). The dimensions are maximum height 9.7 cm, diameter of the rim 5.6 cm, and diameter of the bottom 5.0 cm. The colour of the glass is light blue-green. The body of the vessel was blown in a three-part mould,

with mould marks visible to either side of the face in front of the ears and at the back of the neck, and pontil mark on bottom. It has a knocked-off and ground rim, short, convex neck, plastic body, and slightly oval, flat bottom. The body of the vessel is in the form of the head of a black man wearing a wreath of ivy leaves. The hair is arranged in long, vertical plaits. The character has small knob-like earrings. The face has full cheeks and the mouth is open, as if in a grimace. On the bottom, there are three faint raised concentric circles. The vessel was broken and mended, with plaster fill around rim and in neck. It has soil encrusted on interior, and on exterior traces of black, enamel-like weathering. The vessel also presents some dulling and iridescence. The glass has pinprick bubbles. The vessel was included by the authors in Isings Form 78a⁸.

Cup with Male Head in the collections of the Corning Museum of Glass

The vessel was dated to the mid-1st to early 2nd c. AD. The indicated dimensions are the height of 10.5 cm and the maximum diameter of 7.5 cm. The glass is transparent light green and the body was blown in a mould with three vertical sections and baseplate. It is a cup with body in form of male head. The vessel is characterised by a cracked-off rim and a short, tapering neck. The head is beardless, with hair indicated by five horizontal layers of vertical, ropelike strands, cut in fringes across forehead and back of neck, and with two short strands in front of each ear. The character has prominent eyebrows, nose, and cheeks, and a dimpled chin. The lips are parted to show teeth. He has a garland made of a single strand of ivy leaves around his head. The circular boss below each ear probably indicates earrings. The wall of the vessel splays below neck and has a rounded edge at the bottom. The base is flat, with four raised concentric circles. No pontil mark could be identified. The vertical mould seams are concealed by hair, but are visible in front of the ears and on the back of the neck. The vessel is incomplete: a triangular section, broken out of the rim, was restored; the head was broken and repaired, with one small loss at point of impact on left cheek. The surface preserves patches of gray to brown weathering and accretion⁹.

The vessel was acquisitioned from the Strauss Collection (No. 79.1.63), and described at that moment as cup in the shape of a black man, greenish, mould-blown, made in the Roman Empire, and dated to the 1st c. AD. The vessel was restored and had a height of 10.5 cm¹⁰.

⁸ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61, cat. no. 22.

⁹ Whitehouse 2001, 67, cat. no. 538.

¹⁰ *Important Acquisitions* 1980, 103, cat. no. 4.



Fig. 6. Sideburn consisting of two locks of hair – detail of the right side of the head
(photo by P. Nicolau)



Fig. 7. The glass cup with male head from Callatis – back view with the wreath tied above the neck (photo by P. Nicolau)



Fig. 8. Lateral view of the right side of the head – the wreath with heart-shaped leaves visible above the ear (photo by P. Nicolau)

Cup in the shape of a male negroid head in the collections of the Toledo Museum of Art

The vessel entered the museum's collections as a gift from Edward Drummond Libbey (1923.457). Stern considers that the vessel was probably made in Italy. It was dated to the second half of the 1st c. AD. The given dimensions are the height of 9.5 cm, the body height of 7.3 cm, the maximum diameter of 7.0 cm, the rim diameter of 5.7 cm, the base diameter of 5.3 cm. The vessel was made of transparent manganese coloured greyish red purple glass, medium thin and showing blowing spirals. The fabric could not be determined because of the weathering crust. The vessel is characterised by a free blown rim, body blown into a three-part mould of two vertical sections and a disk-shaped base section. The mould seams are visible on either side of the face along the two locks in front of the ear. The relief is crisp and there is no sign of a pontil mark. The cup has a flaring ground rim, a body in the shape of a head on a sturdy neck, a flaring, nearly circular flat base, with decoration on the underside. The body is in the shape of a male head with Negroid features wearing a wreath. The author emphasises the surprising contrast between the childlike profile and the frontal view, which shows a broad square face with a grim expression. The face is characterised by a knit brow, eyebrows arched high over narrow eyes with small round pupils, eyelids modelled with deep pouches under the eyes, fleshy dimpled cheeks with the underlying bone structure strongly represented, wide flat nose, half-open mouth with a pronounced upper lip and visible teeth, and a dimpled chin. The crescent-shaped ears present a groove along the centre, with spherical earrings dangling from the lobes on both sides. The thick coils of hair are carefully aligned vertically to make a decorative pattern: approximately 11 curls on the forehead; two in front of each ear; and four tiers of curls on the back of the head. The wreath, tied at the back of the head, consists of leaves and berries. On the underside of the base, there is a mould-blown design of three raised concentric circles with a raised dot at the centre. The body of the vessel was broken into many pieces and repaired; half of the rim was also restored. Both the interior and the exterior are covered in rainbow iridescence and severe surface pitting¹¹.

Cup in the shape of ethnic head from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

One of the two cups in the shape of ethnic heads with African features in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (29.100.75) also represents a good analogy for the cup from Callatis. The mould-blown glass cup from the Roman Empire was dated to the second half of the 1st c. AD, and has a height of 9.5 cm. It entered the museum's collections as a bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer in 1929, and

¹¹ Stern 1995, 219-220, cat. no. 139.

was formerly part of the collections of H.O. Havemeyer. It was said that the vessel came from Scythopolis (Beit She'an, Israel)¹².

Cup in the form of the head of a black man from the Harvey Rothenberg Collections, New York

A cup, mould-blown in the form of the head of a black man, is described as being made of light green glass in the Roman Empire, and dated to the 1st c. AD. The total height of the vessel is 10.8 cm¹³. In the illustration, it looks complete and very well preserved.

Other possible analogies

Other items that were considered as coming from the same mould, or at least representing the same variant of the type, are a cup from the British Museum (GR 1868.5-1201, formerly Raoul Rochette and Slade Collections) and a cup from the Izmir Archaeological Museum (inv. no. 4338)¹⁴.

TYPOLOGY

The item belongs to **variant a** of **Isings form 78**, mould-blown vessels, usually flasks, with plastic shapes. The author defines her form 78a based on two vessels made of purple glass, probably beakers, found in Pompeii, "made to resemble negro-heads"¹⁵. In a similar manner, Landes included such vessels in the variant of cups shaped as grimacing heads – "gobelets en forme de tête grimaçante"¹⁶.

The first, to our knowledge, to indicate the close similarities between the cup from Callatis and another find were Lightfoot and Arslan, discussing the cup from Asia Minor. Even more, they considered that there is a strong possibility that the two vessels were blown in the same mould¹⁷.

Stern included such vessels, considered also cups, in her Type A (single ethnic head), and determined, based on typological details, four series:

- Series 1: made in a mould inscribed with the Greek name of the maker (Tryphonos)
- Series 2: made in a mould inscribed with the Roman name of the maker (C. Caesi Bugaddi) and a radiate bust on the underside of base

¹² Lightfoot 2020, 85, figs. 4-5.

¹³ *Recent Acquisitions* 1982, 88, cat. no. 4.

¹⁴ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61; Whitehouse 2001, 67.

¹⁵ Isings 1957, 93.

¹⁶ Landes 1984, 341.

¹⁷ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61.

- Series 3: made in a mould with 3 concentric circles on the base; probably lacks a maker's name
- Series 4: the base is similar to that of Series 3, but the head is characterised by a protruding mouth and lower face¹⁸.

Stern, using the description offered in Bucovală's book, briefly discussed the vessel from Romania. She considered that it could be included in her Series 3, although not coming from the same mould as the very similar item from the Toledo Museum of Art (cat. no. 139). The author reaches this conclusion because Bucovală described the vessel found at Callatis as having only one prominent small circle on the base¹⁹. In fact, as it was mentioned above, at the reassessment of the typological details of the cup it was noticed that the base is decorated in fact with three concentric circles, as other items included into Series 3, and as the cup from the Toledo Museum. Most probably, Bucovală indicated only the central raised dot, and failed to identify the concentric circles, which are less visible.

Whitehouse agreed with the existence of at least four series of mould-blown cups shaped like a male head, often with Negroid features. Discussing one of the two cups with male head in the collections of the Corning Museum (as seen above), he also indicates as analogy the vessel from Callatis, considering that they belong to Series 3 after Stern²⁰. Similarly to Stern, who created her series using facial features as one of the criteria, Whitehouse considers that those belonging to heads included in Series 3 – despite similarities with the other series, such as the mouth half-open and the hairstyle – are not obviously Negroid, as the faces represented on cups representing the other three series²¹.

TECHNOLOGY

The mould-blowing technique developed from the invention of glassblowing, probably in the first quarter of the 1st c. AD. It allowed the glassmaker to replicate designs and shapes at will, using pre-made clay, metal, or wooden moulds²².

The mould construction type for mould-blown vessels in the shape of human heads was discussed by Stern, based on items from the collection of Toledo Museum. The author described her Mould Construction Type VII (MCT VII) as having a separate flat disc-shaped base section that sometimes bears decoration. This mould construction

¹⁸ Stern 1995, 204-205.

¹⁹ Stern 1995, 205.

²⁰ Whitehouse 2001, 67.

²¹ Whitehouse 2001, 67.

²² Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 22.

appears to have been the rule for cups with ethnic features made during the 1st c. AD. The undersides of some of the series were decorated with raised concentric circles²³. Another aspect noted by Stern is that despite the high relief of the representations, which made more difficult the extraction of the vessel from the mould, most head-shaped vessels were blown in moulds with only two vertical sections²⁴. Following this observation, the cup in the shape of a male Negroid head from the collection of the Toledo Museum of Art is described as being blown in a mould with two vertical parts and a disc-shaped base section with the characteristic decoration. Even more, the vertical seams were still visible along the two locks in front of each ear²⁵.

However, other cups belonging to this variant were described as being made in a mould with three vertical parts and a disc-shaped base section. In this situation are the cup from Asia Minor²⁶ and the cup from the Corning Museum of Glass²⁷. In both cases, the seams were identified in front of the character's sideburns and on the back of head and neck.

Taking into consideration this situation, the vessel from Callatis was carefully investigated, but it was impossible to identify any clear evidence of a third seam visible on the back of the head or the neck. From this point of view, the cup from Callatis seems to have been mould-blown in a very similar manner to that used for the cup in the Toledo Museum of Art, using only two vertical sections for the body and a third disc-shaped part for the base.

The only part that would have necessitated subsequent interventions after the cup was mould-blown was the rim. As noticed by Stern, since a pontil mark is unusual in the case of such vessels, most probably the rim must have been finished either while the vessel was still in the mould or after it was removed from the mould, being kept in position with the aid of a clamping device²⁸. The fact that the cup from the Yüksel Erimtan collection has a pontil mark²⁹ indicates that in some cases this method could have been employed for finishing the rim. The cup from Callatis shows no sign of pontil mark on its base, so it is safe to presume that the rim was worked while the vessel was still in the mould or that another device was used for keeping the vessel in position during the intervention.

²³ Stern 1995, 204.

²⁴ Stern 1995, 203.

²⁵ Stern 1995, 220.

²⁶ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61.

²⁷ Whitehouse 2001, 67.

²⁸ Stern 1995, 204.

²⁹ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61.

Based on the cases in which descriptions that are more detailed were offered in the archaeological literature, it seems that there were two main approaches to the rim. In the case of the item from the Corning Museum of Glass, the rim was cracked-off³⁰; no other interventions seem to have been noted. In the case of the items from the Yüksel Erimtan collection³¹ and the Toledo Museum of Art³², the rim was cracked-off and ground. The cup from Callatis is similar from this point of view to this second group, the rim being ground as a finishing after being cracked-off.

A question arising from the fact that there are mould-blown glass vessels very similar typologically is if there can be identified items blown in the same mould. In the case of the cup from the Yüksel Erimtan collection it was taken into consideration by the authors the probability that all the known items with the same features came from the same mould, including here also the cup from Callatis³³. Discussing the great similarity between the cup from the Toledo Museum of Art and the vessel from Callatis, Stern dismissed the possibility of being blown in the same mould due to differences in the decoration of the base³⁴. This aspect was already tackled above: during the reassessment of the vessel, it could be noticed that in fact the cup from Callatis is characterised by the same three raised concentric circles with central dot as other similar items.

In order to obtain a clearer image of the similarities and differences between cups belonging to Stern's Series 3, we gathered the known information regarding glass colour and dimensions in the table below.

Table 1. Comparative view of the cups belonging to Series 3 after Stern

Collection	Find place	Colour	Height	Diameter rim	Diameter maximum	Diameter base
MINAC	Callatis	green	10	5.8	7.4	5.7
Corning	unknown	light green	10.5	-	7.5	-
Metropolitan	Beit She'an?	pale blue-green	9.5	-	-	-
Rothenberg	unknown	light green	10.8	-	-	-
Toledo	unknown	greyish purple	9.5	5.7	7	5.3
Yüksel Erimtan	Asia Minor?	light blue-green	9.7	5.6	-	5

As already stated in the archaeological literature, this series lacks homogeneity from the point of view of colour. It seems that many items were made using the naturally coloured glass typical for the Early Imperial period, resulting in pale blue-green, pale green or green variants. The only vessel made of glass clearly treated in order to

³⁰ Whitehouse 2001, 67.

³¹ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61.

³² Stern 1995, 220.

³³ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992, 61.

³⁴ Stern 1995, 220.

obtain a specific colour is the cup from the Toledo Museum of Art. The purple glass indicated by the author as the glass of which the item was made was obtained by adding manganese as a colouriser³⁵. However, the colour of glass cannot serve as an indicator of either using the same mould or using different moulds. There was no technological impediment in using the same mould for creating items with identical features but from glass in various colours.

Unfortunately, neither the variations in dimensions inside this group can be used as a perfect indicator from this point of view. The variations in the total height of the vessels and in the diameter of their rims are small enough to be dismissed as reflecting the fact that, while the body of the vessel was mould-blown, the rim was freely worked. Therefore, there are good chances of varying both in height and in width from vessel to vessel and as a result influencing the general aspect and size of the cups, even if these were made using the same mould and by the same glassmaker.

The variations of maximum diameter and base diameter could be an indicator for the use of different moulds. Unfortunately, several aspects of this issue make such a conclusion less clear-cut than it could be desired. A first aspect regards the precision of the measurements. The items were published, and thus measured, in different moments during quite a large time span. There is no doubt that a variety of instruments was used, with various degrees of precision. The recent re-measuring of the cup from Callatis clearly shows how much the results of two sets of measurements conducted on the same item can vary. A second aspect regards the fact that all vessels for which exists enough information underwent – in some cases drastic – mending/restoration. Differences in comparison to the original are only to be expected. Finally, the possibility that at least some moulds were used extensively enough to suffer modifications, such as erosion of the decoration, and as a result adding some millimetres of glass to the walls of vessels made later in the series, cannot be excluded. As a matter of fact, in comparison for example to the cup from the Toledo Museum of Art, described as having a crisp relief³⁶, the authors of the present paper could not help noticing that the relief of the cup from Callatis can be described in any other terms than “crisp”. Of course, this is nothing more than a subjective opinion, impossible to quantify. Still, the difficulties in determining the smaller details of the decoration seem rather to indicate that the vessel from Callatis was more probably blown into a mould that was not at its first use.

³⁵ Stern 1995, 220. Cups belonging to the other series were also sometimes made of purple glass, as is the case with items from Herculaneum and Pompeii (Scatozza Höricht 1986, 52; Ziviello 1989, 224).

³⁶ Stern 1995, 220.

CHRONOLOGY

One of the few aspects on which the researchers who worked on this type of vessels seem to agree completely is the chronological framework for their production and use. The fact that cups in the form of male heads with African features were found both at Pompeii³⁷ and at Herculaneum³⁸ makes certain their existence during the 1st c. AD. It is less clear when their use stopped, as in most cases a dating to the 1st c. AD or 1st – beginning of 2nd c. AD is proposed for various items without further arguments. On another hand, no items belonging to this group were recovered until now from clear later contexts, as is the case of other types of vessels, mould-blown and with plastic decoration in the form of human head, produced until the 4th c. AD³⁹.

However, although the finds from Pompeii and Herculaneum seem to solve the chronological aspect of the discussion, in reality things are far from being so clear-cut. The main problem is that the entire group, covering the four series of Type A, identified by Stern⁴⁰, was dated in the archaeological literature to the 1st – beginning of 2nd c. AD, based on these two find contexts, while in reality only some of the series are represented on these two sites⁴¹. No vessel that could be included in Stern's Series 3 was recovered so far from either Pompeii or Herculaneum. This situation tends to weaken the foundation on which the chronological framework was proposed for this particular group of cups. As a look at the table can easily indicate, the overwhelming majority of known items have unknown origin, as they entered museum collections from the antiquities market.

The only items offering some indication regarding their origin are the cup from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, said to come from Scythopolis (Beit She'an)⁴² and the cup from the Yüksel Erimtan collection. In this last case, it was considered that the objects forming the collection have very good chances to have been acquisitioned from the region, thus a find place somewhere in present-day Turkey was seen as a strong possibility⁴³. Unfortunately, although, as it will be shortly discussed below, these two items bring interesting information based on possible find context, it does not help in any way solving the chronological aspect.

³⁷ Isings 1957, Form 78a; Ziviello 1989, 107.

³⁸ Scatozza Höricht 1986, 52.

³⁹ Isings 1957, Forms 78b-c; Stern 1995, 201.

⁴⁰ Stern 1995, 205.

⁴¹ For example, Stern creates her Series 4 based on the fragmentary cup from Herculaneum (1995, 205).

⁴² Lightfoot 2020, 85.

⁴³ Lightfoot, Arslan 1992.

This situation transforms the cup with male head from Callatis into the only representative of Stern's Series 3 with a (somewhat) clear find context, offering a chance of identifying a chronological framework. Unfortunately, the fact that the vessel comes from a destroyed burial does not help, as the dating of the finds was made, as already mentioned in the beginning, based on the dating of grave goods from burials belonging to the same cluster. Still, the general chronological framework for that part of the necropolis seems to indicate a rather tight dating of all the graves to the 1st – 2nd c. AD. Therefore, there are good chances that indeed all the glass cups with Negroid features, no matter the variant, were produced during the 1st c. AD, or the 1st – beginning of 2nd c. AD.

ORIGIN / AREA OF PRODUCTION / WORKSHOP

Any discussion regarding the origin of the cups tends to be hampered by the lack of clear contexts or any additional information regarding the finds.

The cup from Callatis was considered in the early publications as being of "certain oriental origin", and as a sign of regular commercial connections of the cities from the western coast of the Black Sea with the Orient⁴⁴. More recently, a Syro-Palestinian origin was taken into consideration for a series of finds from the western coast of the Black Sea, including a mythological beaker, a lotus bud beaker and the beaker in the shape of a human head⁴⁵.

Stern conducted a more thorough analysis for the entire type. While acknowledging the problems surrounding the origin of these glass cups, the author stated that a western origin should be considered a possibility⁴⁶. She even indicated for the cup in the shape of a Male Negroid Head from the Toledo Museum of Art that it was "probably made in Italy"⁴⁷. In her opinion, despite the Negroid features, there is no evidence to support the common hypothesis that these cups were made in Alexandria. Stern allows for Series 1, based on the name of the glassmaker, a possible eastern Mediterranean production, maybe Phoenicia, following Landes⁴⁸, but emphasises the fact that all the other find spots are in the western part of the Roman Empire. In its turn, Series 2 is characterised by a manufacturer with Latin name; together with the find place for such an item in Britain, these could be arguments for a western production⁴⁹.

Additional arguments are connected to the fact that Alexandrian glass workers were slow to take up the new technique of glass blowing, that the Egyptianizing

⁴⁴ Bucovală 1968, 139.

⁴⁵ Chiriac, Boțan 2014, 531, pl. VIII/7.

⁴⁶ Stern 1995, 205.

⁴⁷ Stern 1995, 219.

⁴⁸ Stern 1995, 205; Landes 1984, 343.

⁴⁹ Stern 1995, 205; Newby, Painter 1991, pl. XVII/d.

motifs became a fashion in Rome, remaining popular in Italy, after the annexation of the new province, and also that during the 1st c. AD Roman legionaries from Africa were stationed at western sites⁵⁰.

However, although the last decades did not change the general image on this type of cups, we consider that some observations could be made regarding possible areas of origin, without negating Stern's conclusions.

It is impossible not to notice a trend in the case of Stern's Series 3, when the find place – be it certain, probable, or possible – is taken into consideration. These are as follows:

- Callatis (present-day Mangalia, Romania), on the western coast of the Black Sea
- Scythopolis (present-day Beit She'an, Israel)
- Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) – the item from the Yüksel Erimtan collection
- Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) – the item from the Izmir Archaeological Museum

Therefore, unlike the other series of the type, which are western finds, with the best archaeological contexts at Pompeii and Herculaneum, the representatives of Stern's Series 3 seem on the contrary to cluster (as much as only four finds with relatively known context can cluster) in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Two more observations could possibly lend some weight to this line of enquiry. One was made by Whitehouse, regarding the clear difference in the facial features between Series 3 cups and all the other series – despite common elements, such as hair arrangement and slightly open mouth⁵¹. Stern, while discussing the favourite subjects adopted for glass head-shaped vessels, noticed that representations of childlike faces are more common in the eastern Mediterranean⁵². In our opinion, this observation could be linked with another of her observations, regarding this time exactly the Series 3 cup from the Toledo Museum of Glass. The author emphasised the surprising contrast between the childlike profile and the frontal view, a face with a grim expression⁵³. The same contrast can be clearly noticed between profile and frontal view in the case of other cups belonging to this series, including the cup from Callatis. The profile becomes childlike with the slightly upturned small nose, full lips, and rounded chin, while the frontal view is made to look grim by the grin showing teeth, the forehead with its frown, and the pouches under the eyes (compare Figs. 9-10 with Fig. 11).

⁵⁰ Stern 1995, 220; Landes 1984, 343.

⁵¹ Whitehouse 2001, 67.

⁵² Stern 1995, 203.

⁵³ Stern 1995, 220, cat. no. 139.



Fig. 9. Lateral view of the right side of the head showing a childlike profile
(photo by P. Nicolau)



Fig. 10. Lateral view of the left side of the head showing a childlike profile
(photo by P. Nicolau)



Fig. 11. Frontal view of the head with a grim expression (photo by P. Nicolau)

Therefore, an eastern centre of production serving mainly an eastern commercial network cannot in our opinion be completely ruled out as a possibility.

FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC ASPECTS

There can be no doubt regarding the intended use of these items as drinking cups, based on their typological details. It was considered that the forms are revivals of older head-shaped vessels in other media, a possible explanation being the antiquarian interests of the Roman society prevailing during the Augustan period⁵⁴.

Such a trend would most probably have received a strong support in the fashion change occurring after the annexation of Egypt⁵⁵, with artistic themes and motifs influenced by Egyptian models, as it is logical to assume that the subjects must have been dictated by consumer demand⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Stern 1995, 201.

⁵⁵ Stern 1995, 220.

⁵⁶ Stern 1995, 203.

Such representations were considered as “a type, like the so-called true or pure Negro, with Negroid traits in their most marked forms”⁵⁷. They were far from restricted to specific materials, and there are numerous variants made of clay or metal⁵⁸. Although present in use also previously, as part of the Greek material culture, there is an increase during the Roman period of the number of vessels using Blacks as a simple form of decoration⁵⁹, without necessarily attributing to this type of representation deeper meaning. In fact, in what concerns glass as the material, Stern identified two main categories of representations: one group with representations of deities and mythological creatures, and a second group consisting of unusual faces, mostly foreigners with interesting ethnic features⁶⁰.

Therefore, the cup from Callatis could be included in the category of *utilitaria*, as an object in the same time functional and decorative. The ivy wreath present on the head of the character could have been used as a hint at its intended function as drinking vessel, as it was noticed that in the Roman culture a very common instance was matching the theme of the decoration to the function of the vessel⁶¹.

The use of glass as material could have enhanced the properties and value of such a vessel. On one hand, glass was valued in the Roman society for aesthetic qualities such as transparency, colour or on the contrary colourlessness, and shine⁶². On the other hand, as glass could be moulded in various shapes⁶³, such a vessel could have been used also to indicate the social and economic status of its owner through the capacity of obtaining such an item, as well as his/her aesthetic tastes and inclinations.

The transparency of glass drinking vessels in general could have indicated the desire to display the promise of future enjoyment and/or to ensure the quality of the drink⁶⁴.

Still, in the case of the cups in the shape of human head it is easy to notice that the rule, no matter the series they belong to, is to be made of naturally coloured glass or even intentionally coloured glass, as discussed above. While these vessels were transparent enough to allow the user to see the content through their walls, and not only looking from above – as in the case of ceramic or metal items, there can be no

⁵⁷ Snowden 1970.

⁵⁸ Zhuravlev, Khmelevsciy 2020, 425.

⁵⁹ George 2003, 176.

⁶⁰ Stern 1995, 203.

⁶¹ Swift 2022, 207.

⁶² Swift 2022, 206.

⁶³ Swift 2022, 207.

⁶⁴ Swift 2022, 208.

doubt that their blue-green, green or purple colour would have changed the perceived colour of the liquid. The question is if this effect was intentional or not. As discussed by Swift, this could have allowed the owners the choice of liquids either in order to harmonize or to contrast with the colour of the vessels⁶⁵.

Other perceived qualities of such drinking cups are shared by glass tableware in general, as one of the most important characteristics of this material is that it does not retain unpleasant tastes and smells, ensuring a pleasant eating and drinking experience. Other aspects include visual and tactile variation⁶⁶. From this perspective, the cups in the shape of human head were no doubt well adapted for such requirements, as their transparency, shine, colour (both empty and filled), smoothness, and relief decoration would have appealed to their users' senses. Even more, the fact that they were blown in a mould ensured their conformity with principles of Roman aesthetics, such as unity, balance, and symmetry⁶⁷. In fact, discussing their production technique, Stern connected the use of two vertical panes, with the lateral seams concealed in the character's hair, with the desire of the producers of leaving the face unmarred, thus concluding that for such vessels the frontal view of the faces was the most important. In comparison, the author discusses a flask with human head as one of the few instances in which the mould seam runs down the nose of the character, indicating that the profile constituted the principal view⁶⁸.

CONCLUSION

The glass cup from Callatis represents an interesting find on multiple levels. The small number of vessels belonging to this specific variant in combination with the fact that it is the only representative of the group with clear (although disturbed) find context make it a precious find in the context of the research on Isings form 78a in general, and Stern's Series 3 specifically. The cup has also value as a representative of the mould-blown Roman glassware category, of which there is a small number of finds on the western coast of the Black Sea in comparison with blown glass vessels. Even more, it represents a reflection of the connections of this region with other areas of the Roman Empire. Its intended use as a drinking vessel could reflect either a local, Greek tradition of banquets and conviviality adapting to new shapes and materials with the integration of this area in the Roman world, or people coming in the area from other part of the empire, and bringing new fashions and elements of material culture with them.

⁶⁵ Swift 2022, 210.

⁶⁶ Swift 2022, 209.

⁶⁷ Swift 2022, 209.

⁶⁸ Stern 1995, 204.

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