

*GNATHIA AND RELATED
HELLENISTIC WARE ON
THE EAST ADRIATIC
COAST*

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	iii
Aims of the study	iv
Methodology	iv
I. <i>Gnathia</i> Ware in Southern Italy	1
I. 1. History of research and the name	1
I. 2. Origin	2
I. 3. Decoration: from the painters to the decorators	4
I. 4. Shape	7
I. 5. Production centres	8
I. 6. Production technology	11
I. 7. Archaeological context	13
I. 8. Distribution in the Mediterranean	15
I. 9. The problems of chronology	15
II. <i>Gnathia</i> Ware on the East Adriatic Coast	18
II. 1. History of study	18
II. 2. Vessels from collections	19
II. 3. Vessels from archaeological context	20
II. 4. Imported <i>Gnathia</i> ware	23
II. 5. Issaeian <i>Gnathia</i> ware	30
II. 6. Other possible production centres of <i>Gnathia</i> ware on the East Adriatic coast	41
III. Related Hellenistic Ware on the East Adriatic Coast	43
III. 1. Red-figure vases	43
III. 2. West Slope ware	50
III. 3. <i>Alto Adriatico</i> vases	55
III. 4. Black-glazed ware	55
III. 5. Grey-glazed ware	58
III. 6. Group of Late Hellenistic coated ware	59
IV. the East Adriatic Coast from the 4th to the 1st centuries BC	61
V. Catalogue of <i>Gnathia</i> Ware from the Greek and Hellenistic Collection in the Split Archaeological Museum	65
V. 1. Imported <i>Gnathia</i> vessels	65
V. 2. Isseian <i>Gnathia</i> vessels	111
V. 3. Unidentified vessels	152
Abbreviations	160
Bibliography	161

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Introduction

Gnathia ware is a painted Hellenistic ceramic type with yellow, red and white decorations on the black surface of the vessels. Due to a decoration technique simpler than that on the previous Red-figure vases, *Gnathia* ware became the most widespread type of Hellenistic ware, and also the first type of south Italian ware that was exported in large quantities outside of the main area of production. *Gnathia* ware takes its name from ancient *Gnathia*, today Egnazia (a town on the Adriatic coast between Bari and Brindisi) in south-east Italy, where it was first discovered in 1845. For the last two decades, research has shown that this type of ware was produced in the pottery workshops in the Greek colonies in southern Italy from the second quarter of the 4th to the beginning of the 2nd c. BC, with the leading production centre in Taras, today's Taranto, on the coast of the Ionian Sea. Archaeological excavations at sites in southern Italy have also shown that *Gnathia* ware was popular not only in the Greek colonies, but among indigenous communities as well. Furthermore, some indigenous centres developed their own style for production of *Gnathia* ware, and also exported their products to other regions.

Gnathia ware was found at numerous sites down the East Adriatic coast and its hinterland. The current state of research and published materials show that *Gnathia* ware was found in the Greek settlements in Central Dalmatia, most of them in Issa (Vis), on the island of Vis, and in indigenous settlements along the East Adriatic coast from the Istrian peninsula in the north to the south-east Adriatic, today's Albania. The high number and specific characteristics of *Gnathia* ware have raised questions about the development of local production, especially in ancient Issa, where local production has already been assumed. However, this is still a largely unexplored area of study. There has been a notable lack of systematic analysis of Hellenistic ware, and thereby *Gnathia* ware, that could otherwise greatly contribute to a better understanding of the local production, and also the contacts between the East Adriatic and southern Italy and other regions of the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic period.

Thanks to numerous archaeological excavations in southern Italy, and especially in Apulia (now Puglia in south east Italy), as well as the accompanying publications thereof, current knowledge of *Gnathia* ware has reached a stage where we can speak of the entire production process, which covers all aspects: from moulding and decorative techniques, to firing and distribution, from identification of the different workshops to an understanding of the function of the vessels in different archaeological contexts. Familiarity with all of the aforementioned aspects of production fosters an understanding of the development of pottery production in the Hellenistic period, trade contacts, and the dissemination of the knowledge of pottery production and exchanges of ideas. This is the main reason why this study is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I have gathered all available data on publications of *Gnathia* production in southern Italy, mainly in Apulia, classified according to the aspects of production, from origin and development, through different workshops, to archaeological contexts and chronologies. I attempted to adhere to the same principle in the second section of this study when discussing *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast and mainly Issaean *Gnathia* production. I believe that this approach facilitates an understanding of the development of pottery production on both Adriatic coasts, and allows us to make comparisons and, finally, identify the connections in the Adriatic area during the Hellenistic period. Since *Gnathia* ware is often found at archaeological sites with other types of ware that were produced from the mid-4th to the 1st c. BC, it was necessary to provide, in the third section of the study, an overview of related types of ware on the East Adriatic coast and trace their production centres, possible influences on local production and reconstruct the trade networks.

Aims of the study

The aims of this study are fourfold: to present *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast, to define local Issaean *Gnathia* production from manufacturing to distribution (including the typology of shapes and decorations), to identify other pottery workshops along the East Adriatic coast and, finally, to understand the trade and contacts in the Adriatic during the Hellenistic period. Although the aims of the study may seem ambitious, once all of the material was gathered into a single study, it provided sufficient information to set the objective. It is noteworthy that the study presents the current state of research, so additional work needs to be done. However, work on the default task and the information obtained by the analysis of *Gnathia* and related ware facilitated greater insight into the history of the Adriatic area in the Hellenistic period. Further, the provenance of the material allowed for the reconstruction of contacts in the Adriatic and neighbouring regions. The questions of contacts and trade may seem peripheral to the main objective of the study, i.e. *Gnathia* and related ware, but they are vital to an understanding of the historical context of this area. So an additional aim of the study is to open up the East Adriatic region to scholars who are studying the history and economy of the Mediterranean basin in the Hellenistic period.

Methodology

The present study of *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast included analysis of all thus-far published vessels from archaeological sites along the coast, islands and hinterland. First and foremost it was necessary to gather all published vessels and, for convenient reference, to create the database according to available data: archaeological site, type of site, (e.g. in a sanctuary, settlement or necropolis), type of vessel, provenance the vessel (import or local product) and other vessels found in the same archaeological context. The database organised in this way facilitated the processing of a vast amount of information. Unfortunately, all data sets could not be obtained from all archaeological sites due to a lack of information from publications. However, based on the current state of research and publications, *Gnathia* ware was found at 40 sites along the East Adriatic coast, i.e. 426 vessels were found. An impediment to analysis of materials unearthed in sanctuaries and residential complexes, as always, is that vessels are often very fragmented and it was difficult to recognize the shape of the vessel or to trace the painted decoration. The published tombs from the Martvilo necropolis (the western necropolis in Issa), where *Gnathia* ware vessels make up most of the tomb assemblages, were very helpful for this analysis. The vessels from the Martvilo necropolis are well preserved, but unfortunately not all of the tombs have (yet) been published. The Greek and Hellenistic Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Split (hereafter AMS) holds the largest collection of Hellenistic ware in Croatia.¹ Most of these vessels came from the devastated Martvilo tombs and over the last century were purchased mostly from private collections.² Among them are 179 *Gnathia* vessels that were also included in the analysis and presented in the Catalogue herein. Although for most of these vessels the archaeological context is unknown, such as the tomb number, making it difficult to reconstruct the entire tomb assemblages, the importance of these vessels is that they are preserved in their entirety, and were very helpful in the interpretation of shapes and decorations. To sum up, the study of *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast included 426 published vessels from the 40 archaeological sites and 179 vessels from the AMS Greek and Hellenistic Collection. The total number of analysed vessels is 605. Most *Gnathia* vessels on the East Adriatic coast were found in Issa.

The analysis of *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast encompassed two methods: the traditional comparative stylistic analysis established by Thomas B. L. Webster and John R. Green, and contextual analysis if there were sufficient data. Although in recent years stylistic analysis has garnered considerable criticism, it is still the only possible method when studying vessels from unknown or uncertain archaeological contexts, such as the vessels from the AMS Greek and Hellenistic Collection. Furthermore, even if the collected information from archaeological excavations provides enough data for contextual analysis, such as the stratigraphic relationships between cultural layers, the vessels are often interpreted by comparative stylistic analysis. The contextual analysis applied in this study included analysis of all related material found together with *Gnathia* ware: vessels, coins and stratigraphic relationships. However – and this bears repeated emphasis – not all information from archaeological sites could be obtained.³

¹ There is also a collection of *Gnathia* vessels in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum, but most of them were part of the private collection of Count Nugent from Trieste and they are mostly from southern Italian sites, but unfortunately without precise archaeological data. According to the data, only four vessels were found at sites on the eastern Adriatic, and they belonged to the collection of the Miklausić family from Zagreb. These are a pelike of Lucanian production and an amphora (published without photo) from Lumbarda on the island of Korčula, two oinochoai from Stari Grad, and an oinochoe of the Ribbed with Palmette Rosette group from Vis (Vikić, Damevski 1982, pp. 97-148).

² Kirigin 2008, p. 5.

³ Often in publications of pottery materials from archaeological sites, a great obstacle is the presentation of separate pottery material, e.g. presenting only one type of ware and only certain types of vessel and disregarding other finds in the same context.

Comparative analysis was not only conducted on the decoration of the vessels, but also applied to determine the development of vessel shapes. Comparisons were again made to the typologies of Apulian shapes, or to be more precise, to the typology for Late Classical and Hellenistic vessels from the Taranto necropolis established by Enzo Lippolis and the typology of *Gnathia* ware in Peucetia, in central Apulia, established by Eliza Lanza.⁴ Comparing the development in shapes of both typologies, I singled out similarities and differences in shape on the most common type of *Gnathia* vessels on the East Adriatic coast: oinochoai, pelikai and skyphoi. As already mentioned, most *Gnathia* vessels were found in Issa, and most importantly, the vessels from Issa exhibit the characteristics in shape and decoration that distinguish them from Apulian production, and they point to the possibility of local production in this Greek settlement in central Dalmatia. Defining the characteristics of Issaean *Gnathia* ware, and following the developmental path of Apulian typologies, in this study I shall present the first typology of the most common shapes of local Issaean *Gnathia* ware.

To ensure better insight into *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast and its local production, it was necessary for the study to include related types of ware that were found at archaeological sites on the East Adriatic coast, from South Italian Red-figure vases to different types of Hellenistic ware. This overview of related ware facilitates a better understanding of the relationships, influences, contacts and development of local production in the East Adriatic area in the Hellenistic period.

When defining local *Gnathia* production and production centres, special attention was accorded to archaeometry. Although archaeometric analysis of Hellenistic ware on the East Adriatic coast is at its very beginning, some initial steps have already been taken. In cooperation with the Split Archaeological Museum and the Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering of Zagreb University, the first archaeometric analysis of local Issaean *Gnathia* ware was conducted. X-ray diffraction and optical microscopy were conducted on sherds of imported and local *Gnathia* vessels, and on samples of raw clay and temper collected during the geological survey of the clay beds on the island of Vis. The first results, which I will present here, have shown the differences in clay composition between imported and local *Gnathia* vessels.

I am aware that the study has its shortcomings, because it depends on the sites excavated so far, the reliability of published data, and the preserved condition of the vessels, but for now it is the only way possible. This is mainly because previous publications of *Gnathia* ware on the East Adriatic coast are not homogeneous. The publication of *Gnathia* and other related ware from Issa, Pharos (today Stari Grad on the island of Hvar), and Cape Ploča on the peninsula between Trogir and Šibenik in Croatia and Budva in Montenegro provide detailed information about the archaeological context and detailed descriptions of the vessels and/or potsherds. Unfortunately, for other sites the publications contain mostly brief descriptions with illustrations (drawings or photos) or only a short note in the text about their discovery without detailed descriptions and illustrations. Where possible, and where I was personally able to examine already published material, I attempted to provide detailed descriptions. Therefore, this study constitutes a systematization of the current state of knowledge of *Gnathia* and related ware on the East Adriatic coast, and it is also the first study to propose a typology for a Hellenistic type of ware in the East Adriatic.

⁴ Lippolis 1994, pp. 239-281; Lanza 2006b, pp. 63-86.