

LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL GLASS FROM BUTRINT (ALBANIA)

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In Late Roman period, Butrint city (SW Albania), was one of the most important seaport of the eastern Mediterranean, due to its very favorable position and its long human presence (from the 5th century BC to the modern age). The city seems to have particularly flourished after being declared a Roman colony under Augustus in 31 BC, but even after the Roman period, Butrint was still at the center of the trade routes to the Eastern regions.

During the archaeological campaign of 2011 directed by David Hernandez (University of Notre Dame - US), aimed at identifying the eastern border of the Butrint Roman Forum, several glass artifacts, dated to the late Roman period, were recovered.

In this study we analysed 43 fragments of glass (38 transparent, 5 opaque) of different objects (drinking glass, bowls, mosaic tesserae) dated from the 4th to the 6th centuries AD.

The aims of this work are: i) understand the raw materials, the manufacturing techniques employed for glass production and understand their evolution through the time; ii) produce a correct classification of pieces of uncertain date; iii) interpret the economic development and the trade models of this area.

The chemical analyses were performed by electron microprobe (EMPA) for major and minor elements and by ICP mass spectroscopy (LA-ICP-MS) for trace elements.

The chemical results indicate that, after the exclusion of some outliers, the samples can be classified into two groups: i) produced with natron as fluxing agent (38 sample) and ii) produced with plant ash as source of flux (5 samples)-with these latter probably representing a later intrusion and not belonging to the original group of materials. The natron glass can be further divided, on the basis of the concentration of Fe, Ti and Mn, in the two main compositional groups widespread in the Mediterranean from the 4th century onward: HIMT (24 samples) and Levantine I (14 samples) [1]. Among the HIMT samples, we found both "weak" HIMT (14 samples) and "strong" HIMT (7 samples) [2]. The 3 remaining samples seem to form a new HIMT group showing higher iron and a different Fe/Ti ratio never found up to now in Late Roman glass.

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