

## GLASS DOVES AND GLOBES FROM THESSALONIKI. NORTH ITALIAN IMPORTS OR LOCAL PRODUCTS?

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The Roman time is for Thessaloniki a period of development that culminated with the city's lifting to the status of the imperial seat by Galerius in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. Glass vessels appear for the first time in Thessaloniki in considerable numbers during the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D., as a result of the invention of free blowing that led to a considerable drop in their price and consequently made them accessible to wider parts of society. *Unguentaria* represent the biggest part of the surviving examples and they are found almost exclusively in graves. Bird-shaped and spherical, short-necked vessels are the most widely-spread ones and they are usually found together in the same burials, in both necropolises of Thessaloniki. In the present work these two forms will be examined typologically, their period of use will be determined, it will be attempted to locate their production place and also to determine the reasons that contributed to their wide distribution in Thessaloniki<sup>1</sup>.

### BIRD-SHAPED *UNGUENTARIA*

Vessels of this form render plastically the shape of a small bird with a long, conical tail (fig. 1). They possibly represent a pigeon, the bird connected with goddess Aphrodite and with female beauty, whose form is used already in classical antiquity for *unguentaria*<sup>2</sup>.

Finds from Thessaloniki can be subdivided into three subgroups, according to the rendering of their head and beak (fig. 2):

1. Round head with very short beak.
2. Ovular head and long beak.
3. Head and beak formed with a simple bending of the tubular neck.

The vessels were free blown. What remains unclear is whether they were blown from a globular bubble of glass or if they were formed by lamp-working, by reheating, blowing and bending a preformed glass tube. They also present one of the most ancient forms of containers made for a single use. When the vessel was modeled, the tip of its tail was left open. After filling the vessel with its powder content, the tip of the tail was reheated and the vessel was sealed. The consumer was obliged to carefully break the tip of the tail in order to access its content.

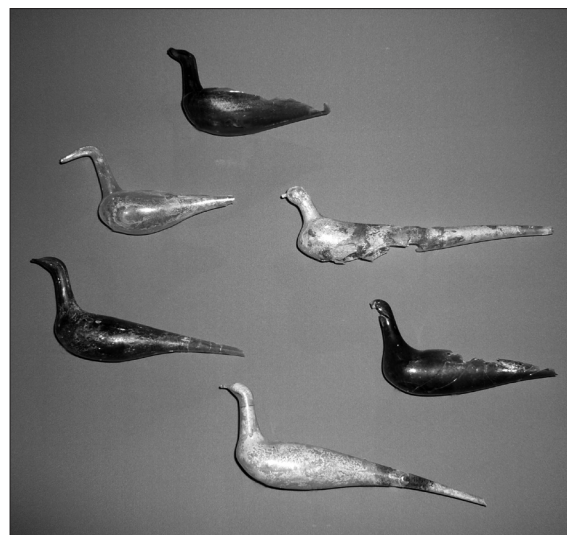


Fig. 1. Bird-shaped *unguentaria* from Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

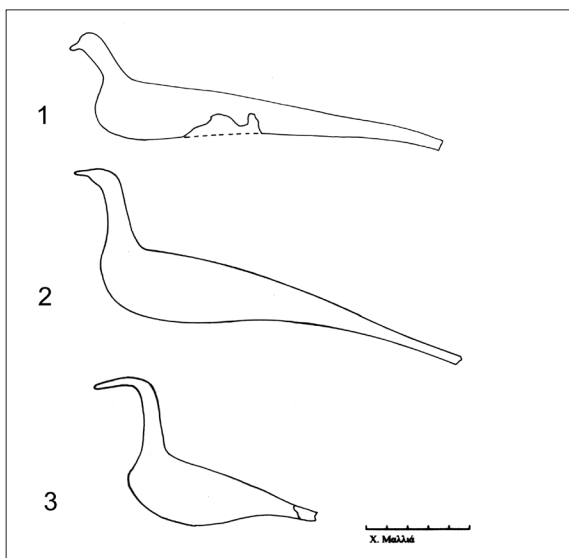


Fig. 2. Drawings of the three types of bird-shaped *unguentaria* found in Thessaloniki.

The content of these vessels has been partly preserved, **due to their closed shape, or its powdery nature**. It appears that the small spherical *unguentaria*, which will be discussed below and usually are found together with the bird-shaped ones, contained the same powders<sup>3</sup>. Chemical analyses proved that they contained a probably cosmetic mixture of red ochre, *gypsum* and quartz. Only in one intact vessel a liquid is preserved which has been identified as a fragrance, possibly rosewater<sup>4</sup>. Yet it seems that the vessel was filled and resealed sometime later, possibly right before it entered the museum's collection<sup>5</sup>.

The contents of four vessels from Thessaloniki were analyzed; they are blue, red and pink. Blue is identified with Egyptian blue, red with haematite, i.e. red ochre; and pink with the organic dye madder root, which was fixed with the help of a mordant, most commonly alum. Also, all examples contained quartz or silica and calcite, which were considered to be remains of the soil and not part of the original powder<sup>6</sup>.

At least 40 examples have been unearthed in Thessaloniki, in more than 18 burials, while new examples keep appearing in new salvage excavations

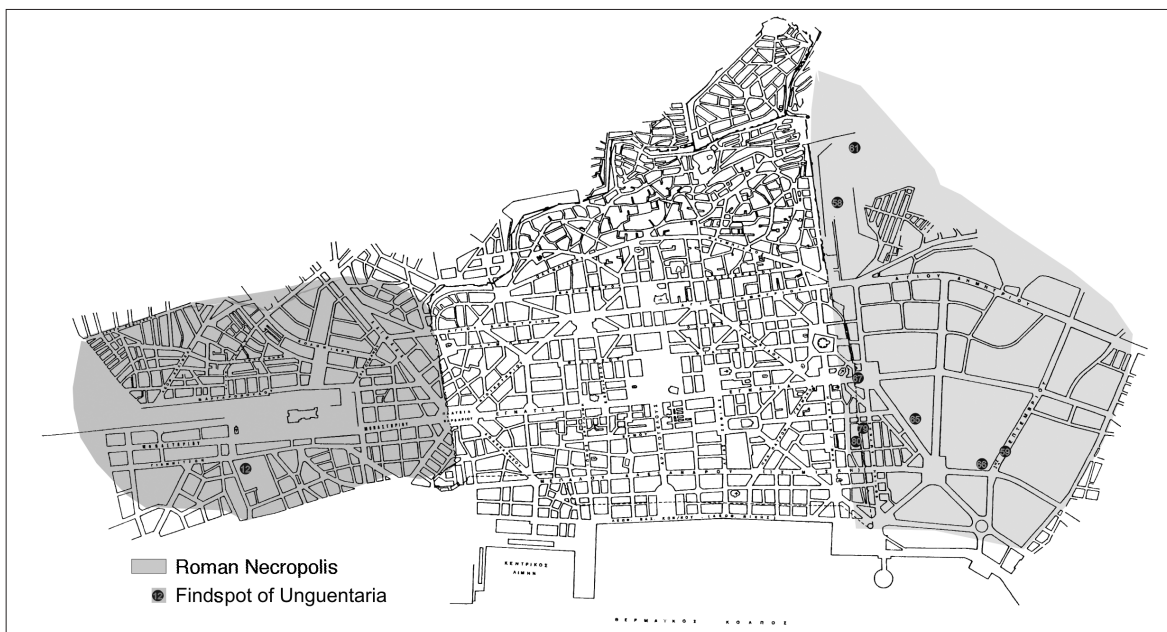


Fig. 3. Map of ancient city of Thessaloniki.

(fig. 3). They are mainly found in graves of the Eastern cemetery, and they appear only sporadically in the Western cemetery<sup>7</sup>. They are made of thin, usually colorless, bluish or greenish glass, and only very rarely of dark blue glass. They can be up to 25 cm long, usually ca. 18. Their maximum height is 12 cm but **usually ca. 8**. **In most cases two or more** bird-shaped vessels are placed in the same probably female burial, often accompanied by several spherical *unguentaria*.

The finds that can be independently dated are of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D. Examples of all three sub-groups are found together in the same graves, so it appears that they were used simultaneously<sup>8</sup>.

This form of *unguentaria* is well-known and is mainly found in Western provinces of the Roman Empire<sup>9</sup>. Quite big numbers are found in the cemeteries of the Ticino Canton<sup>10</sup>, and Avenches<sup>11</sup>. Also, several examples have been found in Germany<sup>12</sup>, Holland<sup>13</sup>, Northern Italy<sup>14</sup>, Pompeii and Herculaneum<sup>15</sup>, Croatia, Split<sup>16</sup>, Patras<sup>17</sup>, Heraklion, Crete<sup>18</sup> and Monasteriaki Kephala of Knossos<sup>19</sup>. The area of Ticino<sup>20</sup>, Avenches<sup>21</sup> and Lyon<sup>22</sup> have been archeologically determined to have been their production sites. The *unguentaria* were produced and used between the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. A.D.<sup>23</sup>.

#### SPHERICAL, SHORT-NECKED *UNGUENTARIA*

Vessels of this form have a nearly perfectly globular body, with a curved bottom, which prevents them from standing upright<sup>24</sup>. They have a very short

neck with cracked-off upper end. (figg. 4-5) This end presents such a striking resemblance to the tip of the tails of the bird-shaped *unguentaria* that we are led to the assumption that those were also sealed, after being filled up, with reheating and that the consumer had to crack the top off in order to get access to the contents.

They are very thin vessels, made of clear, colorless greenish or bluish glass. Only very few are made of dark blue and purple glass and none of them bears any kind of decoration (fig. 6).

Their content is a fine, light blue, red or pink powder, apparently cosmetic and looking identical to the content of spherical *unguentaria* found in other regions, and also to the content of bird-shaped *unguentaria* from Thessaloniki<sup>25</sup>. Light blue powder has been identified with Egyptian blue and pink with red ochre.

Over 30 examples have been found in more than 12 burials in both cemeteries of Thessaloniki<sup>26</sup> (fig. 3).

Many examples have been found in Italy<sup>27</sup>, Switzerland<sup>28</sup>, Germany<sup>29</sup>, Holland<sup>30</sup>, France<sup>31</sup> and few in Croatia<sup>32</sup>. They are considered North Italian products, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D.<sup>33</sup>. In Greece they have been found also at Patras<sup>34</sup>, Thebes<sup>35</sup> and Monasteriaki Kephala, Knossos<sup>36</sup>.

As it has already been stated, deformed bird-shaped *unguentaria* have been unearthed in the West, designating the production sites of the form. It seems logical that their spherical companions were also produced in the same centres. Local production of these forms in Thessaloniki can not be proved,



Fig. 4. Spherical, short necked *unguentarium* from Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

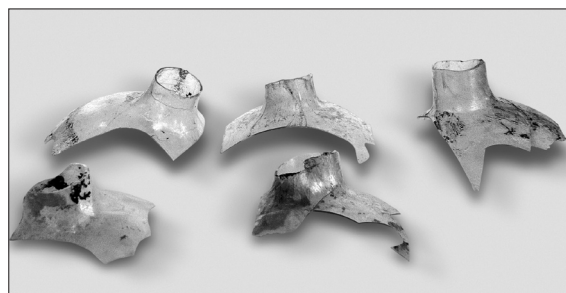


Fig. 5. Spherical *unguentaria* from Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

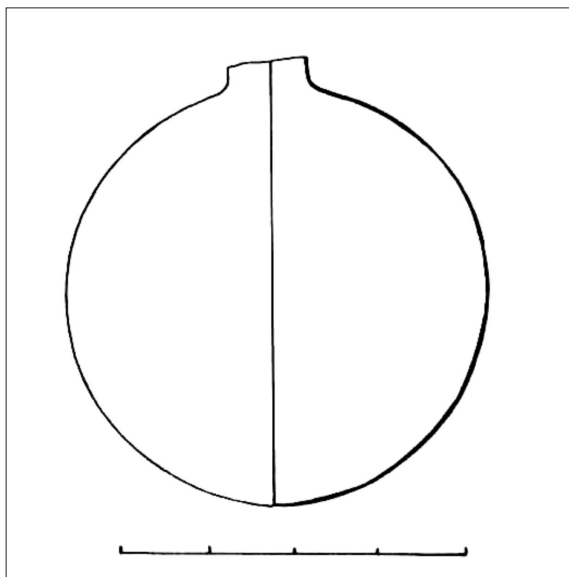


Fig. 6. Drawings of spherical, short necked *unguentarium* from Thessaloniki.

because neither deformed examples have been found, nor glass working remains of this period have been unearthed in the city. However, there are indications that the finds from Thessaloniki could have been local, Macedonian products.

The first fact, that needs to be noted, is that Thessaloniki is the only place with so many finds outside Switzerland and North Italy, where their workshops have been located. Also, compared to all other forms of the 1<sup>st</sup> - early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. *unguentaria* found in Thessaloniki, these two forms stand out, representing 24% and 18%, respectively, of the total number of finds.

In addition, it is interesting that bird-shaped and spherical *unguentaria* are unknown in other Macedonian sites. And although a certain differentiation is generally noticeable among glass finds of Thessaloniki and those from other Macedonian cities, probably indicating different trade routes and origins, very few other forms known in Thessaloniki are completely unknown in its neighbouring regions.

Moreover, it should be stressed that there are several differences between the western finds and the finds from Thessaloniki. The bird-shaped ones are considerably bigger than their western counterparts; they are made of thin colorless bluish glass; and the most widespread group among them, the ones with head and beak formed with a simple bending of the tubular neck, do not occur at all among the western finds. As to the spherical *unguentaria*, it must be noted that all finds are big-sized, ca. 8 cm tall, made of thin, bluish, colorless glass and none of them bears any kind of applied decoration in contrast with their western counterparts which are smaller, made of thick, intensely colored glass, and often decorated with an applied thread, spirally wound around them<sup>37</sup>. It is evident that they present a different production line from the one that produced their western counterparts. Also, their big quantity, both in absolute numbers and in comparison to other contemporary glass *unguentaria*, renders very possible the hypothesis that they present local products.

Closing, it is interesting to shed light to the social and economical conditions that permitted, or led to the import, and/or local production of these special forms of vessels. For that we need to look at the character of the city itself. Thessaloniki, as a port with flourishing trade, presented an important centre of attraction for merchants from different areas of the Roman Empire<sup>38</sup>. An active Jewish community is present already in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C. Also, Thessaloniki, among several other Macedonian cities, was colonized by Italians already during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. B.C. It is epigraphically attested that during the mid 1<sup>st</sup>. c. B.C. these Italians, at least in bigger cities, had been organized in communities, *conventus civium Romanorum*. These *conventus* were active until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D., when their members were fully assimilated with the local population of their new homelands. And therefore, it could be stated that until then they were still feeling, more or less, Italians. In the city of Thessaloniki, the presence of a considerable number of Italian immigrants, some of them from NW Italy, which were organized in a society with common commercial interests, *conventus*, is epigraphically attested already in the Augustan period<sup>39</sup>. To the commercial activity of these Italian *negotiatores* of Thessaloniki, or to the will of their women to continue to decorate themselves in fashions or with products of their homeland, which ultimately

accompanied them in their graves, should be ascribed the presence in Thessaloniki of these *unguentaria* in such big numbers, some of them real north Italian imports, and most of them local products.

Finally, in corroboration to the hypothesis of their local, Thesalonian, production goes the fact that, although *negotiatores* were also active in several other Macedonian cities, these two forms of *unguentaria* are exclusively present in Thessaloniki.

## NOTES

\* Special thanks I express to the glass researcher Dr. D. Ignatiadou for suggesting the local character of the bird-shaped *unguentaria* and for encouraging me to elaborate this theory.

<sup>1</sup> The vessels under discussion are described as *unguentaria* in a more liberal use of the term, although it is known that they did not actually contain unguents, i.e. oily ointments. Due to the nature of their content they should rather be called *pulveraria*, *pudriers* or *powder compacts*, a term that is quite strange to the terminology of Greco-Roman archaeology and therefore avoided.

<sup>2</sup> ISINGS 1957, form 11; ANTONARAS 2005, pp. 241-248; ANTONARAS 2009, form 120, pp. 286-88.

<sup>3</sup> ISINGS 1957, p. 26; CARINGTON-SMITH 1982, p. 293; WHITEHOUSE 1997, p. 121; HOTTENTOT, VAN LITH 2006, pp. 185-198.

<sup>4</sup> The vessel was found in Rovasenza and is kept in the Museo di Antichità, Turin. See CARDUCCI 1968, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>6</sup> I thank the excavator Dr. M. Tsimbidou-Avlonitou for allowing me to study the glass finds from her excavations and also to conduct chemical analyses in samples of their content. The analyses were conducted by the chemist of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Dr. Er. Mirtsou, in the Department of Chemistry, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The samples were examined with XRD method.

<sup>7</sup> ANTONARAS 2009, form 120, pp. 286-88.

<sup>8</sup> Bird-shaped vessels, very similar to the ones of the 3<sup>rd</sup> subgroup were produced in the western provinces of the Roman Empire during the late 3<sup>rd</sup> - first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> cc. See, ARVEILLER-DULONG, ARVEILLER 1985, pp. 141-142, nos. 306-308, pl. 306-308, with older bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> ISINGS 1957, form 11, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> CARAZZETTI, BIAGGIO SIMONA 1988, pp. 80-81; Επίσης, BIAGGIO SIMONA 1991, vol. 1, pp. 125-129.

<sup>11</sup> BIAGGIO SIMONA, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 125-129.

<sup>12</sup> FREMERSDORF 1961, p. 19, pl. 1, 2; GOETHERT-POLASCHEK 1977, form 157, p. 257, nos. 1527-1529, figg. 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> ISINGS 1957, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> CALVI 1968, pl. 18/2.

<sup>15</sup> SCATOZZA-HÖRICHT 1986, pp. 53-54, no. 106.

<sup>16</sup> BULJEVIĆ 2002, vol. I, 395; vol. II, 84-85, 200.

<sup>17</sup> KOLONAS 2002, pp. 109-134, esp. no. 8, pp. 112-113.

<sup>18</sup> ALEXIOU 1966, B2, p. 408, pl. 437δ.

<sup>19</sup> CARINGTON-SMITH 1982, p. 272, fig. 4/12-14, 16, pl. 36c-e.

<sup>20</sup> BIAGGIO SIMONA 1991, vol. 1, pp. 125-129.

<sup>21</sup> MOREL, AMREIN, MEYLAN 1992, pp. 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> MOTTE, MARTIN 2001, p. 313, fig. 14: 1-4, 15.

<sup>23</sup> BIAGGIO SIMONA 1991, vol. 1, pp. 125-129.

<sup>24</sup> ISINGS 1957, form 10, pp. 25-26; ANTONARAS 2009, form 116, pp. 278-279.

<sup>25</sup> On the content of spherical and bird-shaped *unguentaria* in the western provinces see HOTTENTOT, VAN LITH 2006, pp. 185-198.

<sup>26</sup> ISINGS 1957, form 10, pp. 25-26; ANTONARAS 2009, form 116.

<sup>27</sup> ISINGS 1957, p. 26; DE TOMMASO 1990, pp. 40-42; MACCABRUNI 1991, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> CARAZZETTI, BIAGGIO SIMONA 1988, no. 15, p. 44; BIAGGIO SIMONA 1991, vol. I, pp. 120-123, pl. 12, 13, 51; RÜTTI 1991, form AR 123, nos. 2247-48, pl. 100.

<sup>29</sup> ISINGS 1957, pp. 25-26, form 10; GOETHERT-POLASCHEK 1977, form 155, pp. 157, 254, nos. 1497, 1504, fig. 79; HARTE 1999, form D2, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> ISINGS 1957, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> SENNEQUIER 1985, nos. 310-311, pp. 200-201.

<sup>32</sup> BULJEVIĆ 2002, vol. I: 394; vol. II: 84, 200.

<sup>33</sup> ISINGS 1957, p. 27. DE TOMMASO 1990, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> AGALLOPOULOU 1973-74, B2, p. 369, pl. 235β; DEKOULAKOU 1975, B1, pp. 115-117, pl. 65δ. KOLONAS 2002, no. 9, p. 113.

<sup>35</sup> HAEVERNICK 1981, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> CARINGTON-SMITH 1982, pp. 270-272, pl. 4/2, 36b.

<sup>37</sup> Like the ones exhibited at Römisch-Germanisches Museum Cologne, or the Greek examples in the Archaeological Museum of Patras.

<sup>38</sup> On the foreign communities in Thessaloniki see: A) On Italian *negotiatores*, see ΠΙΖΑΚΗΣ 1983, pp. 511-521 and VELENIS 1996, pp. 8-15; B) On Jews, see NIGDELIS 1994, pp. 297-306; C) On other foreigners and especially those from Asia Minor, see ROBERT 1974, pp. 242-243.

<sup>39</sup> EDSON 1972, nos. 32, 33; ΠΙΖΑΚΗΣ 1983, pp. 511-524; VELENIS 1996, p. 9, inscriptions dated generally in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D.



## ABSTRACT

The lecture will focus on two relatively widely known forms of 1<sup>st</sup> c. glass *unguentaria*; the bird-shaped ones (Isings Form 11) and the small globes (Isings Form 10), which are usually found accompanying them.

Both forms are considered to be (at least mainly) products of the North Italian and South Swiss regions. They are found more frequently in cemeteries of the central European provinces, while in the Eastern Mediterranean region their occurrence is only sporadic. Thessaloniki presents a striking exception to this statement with more than 40 examples of bird-shaped *unguentaria* and more than 30 examples of globular ones. Also, it should be noted that both forms are usually far bigger than their western counterparts, and are made of glass of an entirely different quality, more transparent and less colourful glass. The content of the vessels is identical to the one that is attested in western examples, consisting of red, blue or white powder. These observations, along with the well attested presence of active Italian *Negotiatores* in the early 1<sup>st</sup> c. Thessaloniki, lead us to the hypothesis that these two forms might possibly be associated with them. They might be local products, originally meant to continue a tradition of their homeland and cover the personal needs of their women. Or, they could also be products of a Western centre, which were specially altered to meet the needs of a different form of commerce conducted by that group of newcomers in the society of Thessaloniki, i.e. long distance trade, which demanded more contents.

Key words: Thessaloniki, Glass *unguentaria*, Form Isings 11, Form Isings 10, Italian *Negotiatores*.

Il presente articolo studia due forme ampiamente note di unguentari in vetro del I sec. d. C.; si tratta di quelli a forma di uccello (Isings forma 11) e quelli, piccoli, sferici (Isings forma 10), che sono stati solitamente rinvenuti in associazione. Entrambe le forme sono considerate prodotti (almeno in prevalenza) dell'Italia settentrionale e della Svizzera meridionale. Salonicco presenta una straordinaria eccezione rispetto all'opinione corrente, dati i suoi 40 esemplari di unguentari a forma di uccello e di più di 30 di quelli globulari. Inoltre si deve osservare che entrambe le forme sono di dimensioni considerevolmente maggiori rispetto a quelle dei corrispondenti occidentali e presentano un vetro di qualità molto diversa, più trasparente e meno colorato. Il contenuto dei recipienti è identico a quello degli unguentari occidentali ed è formato da polvere rossa, blu o bianca. Queste osservazioni, insieme con la presenza ben attestata di *negotiatores* italici nell'iniziale I sec. a Salonicco, ci permette di ipotizzare che queste due forme possano eventualmente essere associate ad essi. Essi possono essere prodotti locali, volti inizialmente a continuare una tradizione della loro madrepatria e a soddisfare le esigenze delle loro donne. Oppure essi potrebbero essere prodotti dell'area centrale dell'Occidente, modificati per andare incontro alle esigenze di una differente forma di commercio, praticata dai nuovi venuti nella società di Salonicco, ovvero i traffici a lunga distanza, che richiedevano un contenuto maggiore di merce.

Parole chiave: Salonicco, unguentari di vetro, forma Isings 11, forma Isings 10, *negotiatores* italici.

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