



TAZZA FARNESE / ALLEGORY OF THE NILE or THE FERTILITY OF EGYPT

Anonymous, after an antique carved banded agate

Egypt (probably Alexandria); ca. 100-150 BC | *the present cast*: Naples, Italy (Chiurazzi Foundry);
late 19th or early 20th century

Brass/Bronze; 173 mm

Provenance:

Trinity Fine Art (John Winter, dealer, London, UK)

Modern cast of excellent quality. Rich black patina applied to obverse and reverse. Reverse exhibits evidence of cut and filed sprues with a large sprue located in the center, shaved with a large file. There is an unidentified blue chalk mark on the reverse, probably a number. Barely visible, along the margin of the reverse are a series of numbers, probably six digits, with the last three being "000" in black paint, over top of what appears to be an earlier painted number in smaller form and in red or burgundy ink. These are either dealer or catalog collection numbers.

The present plaque reproduces one of the most celebrated carved stones from classical antiquity, the *Farnese Cup* (*Tazza Farnese*), a banded agate admired for its natural beauty, sculptural accomplishment and technical excellence (Fig. 04).

The *Farnese Cup* is thought to have originated in Hellenistic Egypt and probably in Alexandria during the 2nd century BC. The allegory depicted on the cup's interior, which constitutes the design of the present plaque, is thought to depict the divine triad of Egypt or correspondingly the Eleusinian triad of Greece. The two female figures at its base are indicative of the changing seasons while the two male figures in flight in the upper part of the scene depict the Etesian winds that blow over the Nile River during the summer. Some interpretations suggest that the figures may represent the Ptolemaic royalty, with Cleopatra (69-30 BC) represented as seated on the sphinx. There is also speculation that the imagery was at one time Christianized after the sack of Constantinople during the fourth Crusade. This may have helped preserve the object from the typical destruction met by other antiquities of the pagan world.

Though unconfirmed, the *Farnese Cup* is suggested to have been the property of Cleopatra and its continued history of ownership includes a colorful myriad of characters including Frederick II (1194-1250), Timur (1336-1405), Alfonso V of Aragon (1416-58), Pope Paul II (Pietro Barbo, 1417-71), Lorenzo de' Medici (1469-92) and Margaret of Parma (1522-86) from whose descent the cup remained in possession of the Farnese family to whom it owes its namesake. The *Farnese Cup* remarkably survived its long journey, completing its sojourn in Naples during the 1730s and presently residing in the city's Archeological Museum (Inv. 27611).

In addition to being considered one of the finest art objects of the antique world, the *Farnese Cup* has also been held in high esteem by its many prominent owners. In Renaissance Italy it was particularly valued, deemed the most prized possession of Lorenzo de' Medici, and serving as a source of inspiration during Italy's revival of the classical era. Its influence can be seen in various paintings. Nicole Dacos (1989) notes that Raphael's (1483-1520) teacher, Pietro Perugino (1446-1523), used the figure of Jupiter from the *Farnese Cup*

Fig. 01: *The Birth of Venus*, by Sandro Botticelli, ca. 1484-86 (Uffizi, Florence)

Fig. 02: *The Creation of Adam*, by Michelangelo, ca. 1508-12 (Sistine Chapel, Vatican City)

for his figure of David on a painted tondo now at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Nantes (Fig. 03). Though less apparent, the present author notes Raphael may have borrowed the same motif for Jupiter as depicted in his *Council of the Gods* fresco in the loggia of Agostino Chigi's (1466-1520) Villa Farnesina in Rome. Also loosely suggested is Dacos' observation that Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) seated portrayal of *St. John in the Wilderness* (Louvre) could be related.

The Etesian winds of the *Farnese Cup* are famously borrowed for Sandro Botticelli's (1445-1510) masterpiece, *The Birth of Venus* (Fig. 01) while Raphael's *Expulsion of Attila* and Piero di Cosimo's (1462-1522) *Myth of Prometheus* likewise use the Etesian winds as models for characters in their paintings. Martha Dunkelman's (2010) suggestion that Michelangelo (1475-1564) may have modeled the airborne and reclining God in his famous *Creation of Adam* for the Sistine Chapel after the Etesian winds is a remarkable possibility (Fig. 02). This idea is conceivable when considering his later large fresco of the *Last Judgment* in the same chapel borrows its composition from the reverse of a small bronze medal designed by his early instructor, Bertoldo di Giovanni (1420-91), informing of Michelangelo's appreciation for small glyptics fostered under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Little scholarship has been given to the study of bronze casts of the *Farnese Cup*. In 1989 Dacos commented on their scarcity, noting only two examples.¹ Francesco Rossi (1989) commented on their fine quality, suggesting they could have been cast in Renaissance Florence. Doug Lewis (2001) later conducted a census counting six examples,² and even later (2008) proposed that Baron Boissel de Monville (Thomas Charles Gaston, 1763-1832) may have owned a cast,³ suggesting it to be the example now at Yale University. Perceived from its obverse, the Yale cast features an attached suspension loop comparable to the type used by Monville. However, a recent visual inspection of its reverse has shown that the suspension loop of the Yale cast is not the precise type used by Monville for the display of his collection.⁴

There are several opportunities in which casts of the *Farnese Cup* could have been made. Marina Belozerskaya (2012) cited the present cast,⁵ suggesting it may have been made while the Scottish goldsmith, William Dugood (d. 1767), had access to it in Florence ca. 1722-23. Dugood had been commissioned by Dorothea Sophie of Neuburg (1670-1748) to assess the Farnese jewels and took thousands of casts of the Farnese collection, in wax, sulfur, plaster and lead. While bronze casts haven't been identified, Dugood did make a sulfur cast of the *Farnese Cup* which is now located in the collections at Burton Castle Hall in the UK where it was acquired by William Constable in the mid-to-late 18th century. Belozerskaya suggests that 18th or 19th century bronze casts of the cup could have been made after this sulfur cast but this seems unlikely judging by the divergence in quality between the bronzes and the sulfur example.

There has been an early predilection among scholars to attribute an old production to the bronze casts of the *Farnese Cup*, chiefly on account of the proclivity for its past owners to render bronze copies of their prized gems, such as Pope Paul II and Lorenzo de' Medici. It has also been suggested that casts may have occurred during the 16th century while the cup was owned by Margaret of Parma. The gem-engraver and plaquette producer, Giovanni Bernardi (1494-1553) visited Margaret to create a cameo of her likeness, providing the opportunity for him to have rendered a bronze cast of the *Farnese Cup* during his visit. The cameo was commissioned by Bernardi's friend and patron, Alessandro Farnese (1520-89), who himself desired the cup for his own collection but was unable to wrest it from Margaret's possession. A cast would have whetted his interest. However, there is no documentary evidence to support this theory as enticing as it may be.

Another opportunity to cast the *Farnese Cup* could have occurred during Catherine the Great's (1729-96) extensive commission for requested casts of the Farnese collection in 1780, executed by Bartolomeo Paoletti in Rome, though no documentation has verified Paoletti specifically made casts of the object. Lewis (2001), however, has commented on plaster

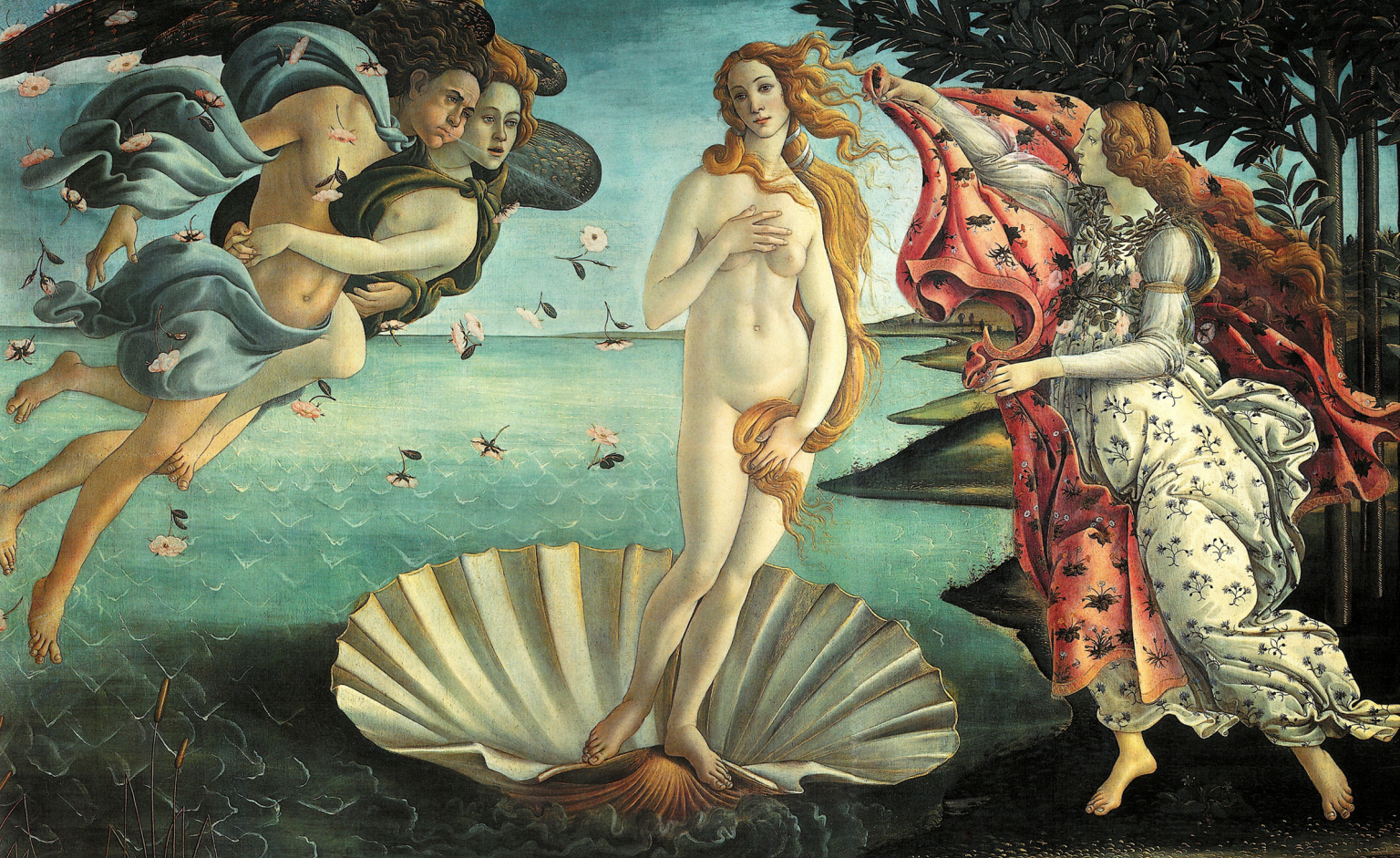




Fig. 03: *David tondo*, by Pietro Perugino (Musée des Beaux-Arts of Nantes, France)

casts of the *Farnese Cup* intended for collectors that were produced during this period, possibly accounting for the origin of the bronze casts.

The present author counts thirteen casts of the *Farnese Cup* with a possible fourteenth,⁶ all of which are suggested here to be modern casts.⁷ A tentative visual analysis suggests two independent productions are possibly responsible for the documented casts. The distinction is based on summarily reproduced flaws or minor characteristics that imply the casts could derive from two independent workshops or master molds. Although the categorization of the plaques into two types must remain conditional the author distinguishes them as a: *Variant A* (Florentine?): Yale (Inv. 1960.36), AD&A (Inv. 1964.484), and Victoria & Albert (Inv. A.18-1930) examples; and *Variant B* (Naples): Budapest (Inv. 5175), Amedeo Lia (Inv. Bp45), Lederer collection and the present example.

Suggestive of their modern origin is the earliest recorded provenance for the documented casts, identifiable with Sigmund Morgenroth's example now at the AD&A Museum and acquired by him from the Florentine collector and specialist dealer

of plaquettes: Guido Pini. In Ulrich Middeldorf's (1944) catalog of Morgenroth's collection, the plaquettes acquired by Morgenroth from Pini are suspect in regard to their quality, age or modified subjects. Graham Pollard (1989) elaborated on these suspicious casts⁸ while Lewis noted via private communication (March, 2016) his detailed and unpublished revelations on further suspect plaquettes emanating from Pini's shop. In light of these observations regarding Pini's activity, whether personally involved in forgeries or simply a distributor of them, it's possible the *Variant A* casts of the *Farnese Cup* are due to the activity of a Florentine foundry perhaps in possession of a late 18th century plaster mold from which to derive their casts. Stefano Bardini, also an active Florentine dealer, should also not be ruled out as a possible channel through which modern Florentine casts of the *Farnese Cup* could have been sold.⁹

Gigi Buttazzoni (Bigli Fine Art) (private communication, 2015) suggested the Chiurazzi foundry in Naples could be a possible source for the late 19th century manufacture of bronze casts of the *Farnese Cup*. With the kind assistance of Carol Mattusch, it was confirmed that bronze casts of the *Farnese Cup* were produced by the Chiurazzi foundry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The object is listed in their catalog, in-print until 1929 and identified as No. 417, available in two patinas: *Herculaneum* and *Renaissance*.

The Chiurazzi foundry began operating in the 1860's and during the 1870's was granted authorization to reproduce antiquities belonging to the Archeological Museum of Naples, a prestige nowadays prohibited. Many of their productions are unmarked and on occasion have been so convincingly reproduced as to be mistaken as original antiques. The high quality of casts belonging to *Variant B* identifies them as the product of the Chiurazzi foundry, executed ca. 1870s-1930s. Miriam Szocs at the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, has communicated (email, 2016), that plans have been made to conduct XRF testing on the cast of the *Farnese Cup* in their museum. It should be interesting to observe if the results further confirm their modern facture.



¹ Dacos must refer to the Sigmund Morgenroth example now at the AD&A Museum and an example in the Lederer collection, both published before 1989.

² See Lewis (2001) footnote 31.

³ Lewis suggested Lot 57 in Monville's 1861 sale catalog described a cast of the *Farnese Cup*: "*Fond de la coupe de Benvenuto Cellini.*" However, this lot more likely refers to a very popular cast of *Athena Introducing the Arts and Sciences*, mistakenly considered a work by Cellini during the 19th century but more likely the work of an artist working in the manner of Hans Jakob Bayr, ca. 1600. For a discussion of this plaquette see Ingrid Weber (1975): *Deutsche, Niederlandische und Franzosische Renaissanceplaketten*. Bruckmann Munchen, Germany; No. 786, pp. 339-40, plate 218.

⁴ In light of this, Lewis, via private communication (February, 2016) commented, "I now incline to feel —as you do— that all the examples of the "Nile" may perhaps be Chiurazzi casts (or at least relatively modern ones)."

⁵ Belozerskaya references the present cast in Chapter 7, footnote 33; pp. 245-46.

⁶ AD&A (Inv. 1964.484); Amedeo Lia (Inv. Bp45); Budapest (Inv. 5175); Victoria & Albert (Inv. A.18-1930); Yale (Inv. 1960.36); private collection (Dorotheum auction, 7-9 May 1923, No. 224); private collection (Bonhams auction, 2 Nov 2011, No. 98); private collection (Cambi d'Aste auction, 18 Nov 2014, No. 208); private collection (Meeting Art SPA, Vercelli auction 7 Nov 2015, Lot 475); ex- Smolderen collection (Künker auction, 9 Sep 2016, Part Lot 4849); private collection (Pierre Bergé & Associés auction, 1 Jun 2017, Lot 27); an example on consignment with Altomani & Sons in 2017 and the present cast. Lewis (2001) cites an art market example in Milan (1998) which is either a thirteenth example or possibly the example sold through Cambi in 2014 or offered by Altomani & Sons. Avery (1998) cites a bronze cast of the *Farnese Cup* at the Museo di Palazzo Venezia because Pietro Cannata's plaquette catalog of the Palazzo Venezia collection features three pages of figures depicting "after the antique" plaquettes in its introduction (Cannata, 1982; pp. 14-16), one of which is a bronze cast of the *Farnese Cup* (Fig. 6M; p. 15). While Cannata features an appendix regarding these featured plaquettes (pp. 26-27) he does not cite their source. However, the images reproduce cropped plates from Ernst Bange's 1922 catalog of the Staatliche Museen Berlin collection of plaquettes with the exception of the photograph reproducing the cast of the *Farnese Cup* which Lewis has clarified is the Lederer collection example.

⁷ Most recently, examples at the Victoria & Albert and Amedeo Lia Museums have been published as 19th century casts while Lewis (2001) updated the Morgenroth cast to a 19th century dating.

⁸ See Pollard (1989) footnote 15.

⁹ Lynn Catterson (Columbia University) has been a chief proponent in analyzing Bardini's involvement in the sale of forgeries. Quantities of plaquettes sold through Bardini are certainly suspect and given the size and diversity of his collection he had a reasonable knowledge of the subject.

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