

OBJECTS FROM A WELL AT ISTHMIA

(PLATES 54–56)

AN ancient well not far from the center of the Isthmian sanctuary was found by the modern owner of the property, who dug it out to provide water for his household. From time to time it had to be deepened as the water-level receded. In 1953 the original bottom was reached and some fragmentary pottery and other objects were brought up. They were transferred at once to the museum at Old Corinth, where I was able to examine and photograph them before and after they were mended. The pieces were entered in the inventory of the Isthmia Excavations.

The well is about 200 m. southwest of the sanctuary of Poseidon. One of the pots bears a dedication to Demeter, whose precinct in just this region is being investigated by the University of Chicago expedition. Professor Broneer and his colleagues will take up the topographical and historical implications of the discovery in their publications. The present account is primarily descriptive.¹ Of chief interest are No. **1**, a black-glazed skyphoid krater with applied figures in relief, and Nos. **16**, **17**, two bronze armlets or anklets of non-Hellenic origin. A Corinthian skyphos, a cup, three diminutive bowls, five plain jugs, three lamps, and a terracotta figurine, make up the rest of the group and furnish evidence for its date.

1. Skyphoid krater. Fig. 1, Pls. 54, 55.

Inv. IP.384. H. 0.284 to 0.29; D. at rim 0.243 to 0.249; full span handle to handle 0.393; D. body 0.228; D. base 0.125. Broken and repaired; a few small chips missing. Fine compact biscuit, light brick-red to pinkish. Wholly coated, except on standing surface of ring base, with thick lustrous black glaze which has fired red in small areas of interior, rim, both sides, and under base. Surface slightly chipped and worn, especially on rim, handles, base, and projecting parts of plastic figures. Light bright red miltos-paint in horizontal grooves. Dull pinkish or creamy white paint preserved on the object below figure 1, on the club of Herakles, in traces on the thyrsos of figure 6 and earrings of figures 4 and 7.

A dedicatory inscription (Pl. 54) is neatly scratched on the inner surface of the rim above side A, accurately spaced between the handles: $\Sigma\text{ΟΦΑΔΑΜΑΤΡΙ}$ ($\Sigma\acute{o}\phi\alpha\Delta\acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\tau\rho\iota$) in letters of the fourth century.

It is a capacious vessel, comparable in volume to a small bell krater but in shape resembling a fourth century Corinthian skyphos (cf. No. **2**, Pl. 54). The lower part

¹ Many colleagues looked at the objects with me and gave me the benefit of their knowledge and opinions, for which I would record thanks.

of the body contracts in a concave profile to a columnar foot. The handles, set horizontally below the flaring rim, are elaborately embellished with acanthus leaves. Minor decoration of the body comprises bands of ivy, the tendrils incised and the leaves and berries in added color (now mostly lost), below the rim and above the foot; incised horizontal grooves dividing the zones; and impressed quinquefoil palmettes in double columns below the handles and in a band just above the base (Pl. 55).

Two broad zones of vertical ribbing occupy most of the surface. The upper, 0.085 m. wide, bears a series of seven applied figures in relief (maximum projection 0.013 m.). These were obviously made in moulds and pressed against the side of the

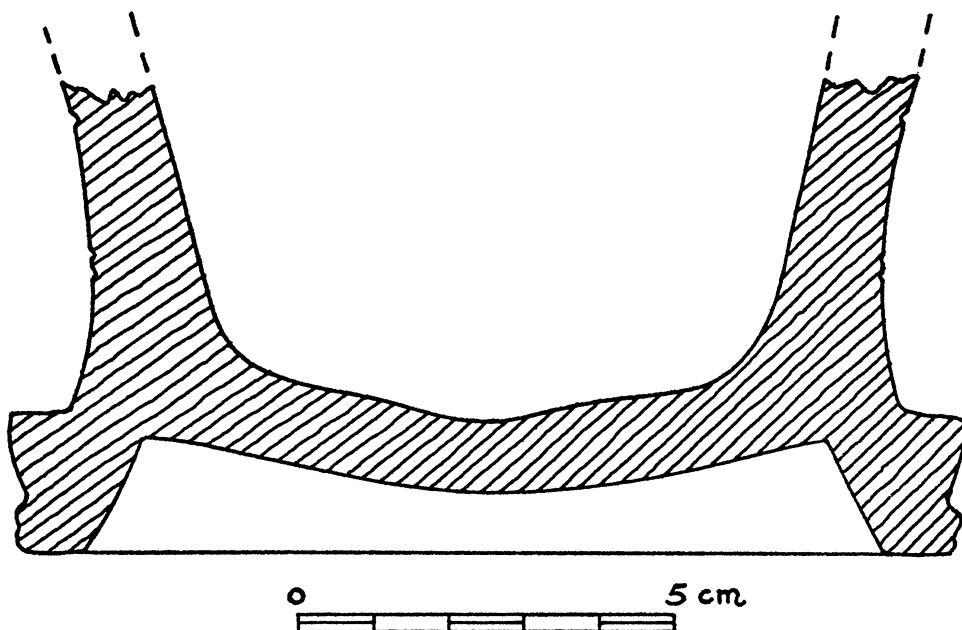


FIG. 1. Foot of No. 1, Skyphoid Krater. Drawing by G. V. Peschke.

pot, to which they adhere firmly. There are slight evidences of trimming and reworking along the edges of each. The figures are as follows:

Side A

1. (Pl. 55). Man in violent posture of ecstasy or agony; head bent forward as he moves to the right, his right hand pressed to his breast, left arm extended, left leg bent and raised in air. Bands above the ankles indicate that he wears boots. A cloak is wrapped over his left upper arm and trails out before and behind his body; or perhaps the strand behind is a tail. Passing obliquely behind his legs is a thyrsos tipped with a bulb at its upper end. An oval object, probably representing the disk of a tambourine seen in quarter-view, stands tilted on the ground below his body.

This is a bacchic figure in a moment of frenzy. The head is indistinctly

moulded but is most like that of a bearded satyr. He is ithypallic, and the cloak and attributes are suitable. The staff and oval object can scarcely be interpreted as spear and shield, nor is the garment that of a warrior in action.

2. (Pls. 54, 55). Girl standing with body bent forward to right, right leg advanced and left bent, looking up at Herakles (figure 3) and clutching his outstretched arm. Her hair is caught up perhaps with a band around her head and trails behind and in a tress beside her neck. A band of soft cloth encircles her body at the breast and folds of the same material hang before her and are visible again below, between her legs and ankles but in the plane behind them; the body is otherwise uncovered.

3. (Pls. 54, 55). Herakles standing, facing left. His head is inclined forward, his body upright; his left leg is straight, the right bent at knee with toes scarcely touching the ground. His straight right arm, thick and short, holds the girl; his left is bent, with hand on hip, holding the club. The club is conspicuous, painted white. Folds of a cloak are draped over his left arm and hang down behind the club. His head was covered, undoubtedly with the lion's scalp, which seems to have hung over the back of his neck and shoulder; reworking of the clay has obscured the details. His face is bearded and he scowls down at the girl under bushy eyebrows.

These two figures make a united group, joined together by the arm of Herakles above and by the ridge of ground at their feet; they must have been cast in a single mould.

The scene is one of the many amatory episodes in the career of the hero. The same or a very similar encounter is portrayed in metal, for example, a silver emblema that was in the Czartoryski collection,² bronze mirrors in the British Museum³ and in the Stathatos collection in Athens,⁴ a feeble copy of late date in the Loeb collection.⁵ Herakles in the Czartoryski, Stathatos, and Loeb pieces has slumped to a half-reclining posture and supports himself on his left arm. The London mirror shows him still standing. He is of course drunk in all these representations. The original on which the Isthmia figure was modelled was a masterpiece. This is the mighty Herakles, striving to maintain command and still almost succeeding, but his body is about to relax; the position of his right foot is aimless and uncertain. He has not been drawing the girl to him but has tried to hold her away, and his strength now fails.

She is not cringing; her power is greater than his and she knows it. Oikonomos in describing the Stathatos mirror called her Auge. J. de Witte was right, I think,

² J. de Witte, *Gazette Archéologique*, 1880, pp. 138-142, pl. 23,b.

³ W. Züchner, *Griechische Klappspiegel (Jahrb., Ergänzungsheft 14)*, KS 92, p. 65, pl. 27.

⁴ G. P. Oikonomos, *Annuario*, XXIV-XXVI, 1946-1948, pp. 133-140, pl. XV; P. Amandry, *Coll. Stathatos, Les Bijoux*, pl. IV, a.

⁵ J. Sieveking, *Bronzen, Terrakotten, Vasen der Sammlung Loeb*, pl. 6.

in recognizing her as Methe, the attendant of Dionysos, winning again in the contest that her lord had won on another occasion but adding the enticement of her womanliness to that of the wine.

4. (Pl. 55). Maenad seated on a rock, upper body in front-view, head turned slightly to left, legs to right. She rests her right hand on the rock and with her left holds up a fold of her himation; her body is clothed in a diaphanous chiton; the material is gathered in thick folds over her lap. Her earrings are white disks. Compare figures 5 and 7.

Side B

5. (Pl. 55). Maenad seated on a rock, similar to figure 4 but reversed, head turned right, legs left. The modelling of the drapery is less distinct.

6. (Pls. 54, 55). Maenad seated on a rock, upper body in front-view, head turned to left, legs to right. Her right arm is raised, hand holding a thyrsos which stands on the ground; left hand on knee; left leg crossed behind right. She wears a Phrygian cap, folded at the top and trailing down on the exposed side to the shoulder. Her body is clothed in a short chiton; knees and lower legs are bare. There is a thick fold of material high on the waist and other folds of drapery hang down at the left. A ridge around the ankle suggests the top of a low boot.

The posture is seen in vase paintings of the late fifth and fourth centuries, often in figures of Dionysos himself, his body normally uncovered from the waist up. Here the maenad has something of Paris in the Judgment scenes, the cap, the dress, the legs that might be showing trousers below the knees.⁶

7. (Pl. 55). Maenad seated on a rock; an almost exact duplicate of figure 4, cast from the same mould (compare, e.g., the right hands). A white dot marks her left earring.

Figures like 4, 5, and 7 are found in vase paintings from the time of Meidias onward through the fourth century.⁷ Whether seated at the dressing table or upon rocks of the mountainside, they are elegant and graceful, daughters of Aphrodite, poised with masterly self-consciousness. Here they are undoubtedly maenads, though the bronze originals from which they were copied may not have had any Bacchic connotation.⁸

All seven figures are thus seen to be associated with Dionysos and the wine that

⁶ Cf. a calyx-krater by the Kadmos Painter in Leningrad, *A.R.V.*, p. 804 (H. Metzger, *Repr. du IV Siècle*, pl. XXXVII), and the late fourth century hydria from Alexandria in Munich, F.R., pl. 40 (Pfuhl, *M.Z.*, III, pl. 244, no. 598); also, especially, the figures of Dionysos and Paris on gold rhyta in the Panagjurište treasure, E. Simon, *Antike Kunst*, III, 1960, figs. 3, 4.

⁷ E.g. Metzger, *op. cit.*, pls. II (Berlin oinochoe), VII (New York lekythos), XIV (Athens krater), XVIII (Leningrad lekane), XXXIV (Athens hydria).

⁸ Cf. the goddesses on the Judgment rhyton from Panagjurište, *op. cit.*, fig. 4, pl. 1, 4.

filled the krater. There is little else that links them to each other. The figures were taken from metal, probably bronze, originals and are in most respects good casts from good moulds, with a few signs of hasty retouching. The bronzes were in high relief. They were probably made in the first half of the fourth century, looking back to traditions of the fifth. The pot was made, I think, in the third quarter of the fourth century, a forerunner of the Calenian⁹ and Gnathia vases. Ours is a remarkable piece, without close parallel. Its place of manufacture cannot be determined with any certainty. The clay, in its texture and color, and the glaze could be Attic, but the extravagance and incongruity of the composition are not what one expects to find in Athens at this time. A south Italian provenience is not impossible; objects were brought over long distances and offered at the Isthmus (see Nos. 16, 17, below). On the other hand, Corinth itself was the great center for bronze work of the sort here copied¹⁰ and although the fabric of the pot is scarcely paralleled by pieces found locally up to now, Corinthian origin is not to be excluded.

The dedication was made by Sopha,¹¹ a woman of Dorian speech, to Demeter. Since the rim and handles show a little wear, we may suppose that the vase had been used for a brief time at her house before this. Special appropriateness of shape and decoration need not be sought; enough that it be a sumptuous gift to the goddess.

2. Skyphos. Pl. 54.

Inv. IP.378. H. 0.083; D. 0.079. Light buff biscuit of Corinthian clay; black glaze partly worn off.

Contraction of the lower body in this type of skyphos was well established before the middle of the fourth century.¹² Broneer comments on the chronology in connection with the upper filling of a well at Corinth, deposited at the time of the construction of the South Stoa.¹³ A skyphos of shape very similar to our No. 2 was found in Pyre 6, House C, Room 8, in the Athenian Agora; the burning is dated by R. S. Young near the end of the fourth century.¹⁴ The example from Isthmia is to be assigned to the second half of the century, probably the third quarter.

3. Cup-kantharos (fragment). Not illustrated.

Inv. IP. 377. H. of frag. 0.064; D. rim estimated 0.085. Biscuit pink-orange with grayish tinge. Black glaze fired red in patches.

⁹ G. M. A. Richter, *A.J.A.*, LXIII, 1959, pp. 241-249.

¹⁰ Züchner, *op. cit.*, pp. 175 ff. F. Courby, *Les Vases Grecs à Reliefs*, p. 196.

¹¹ A rare name. Cf. Σόφη, *C.I.G.*, II, 3738; Σόφων, *I.G.*, II², 839, line 73 (Bechtel, *Personennamen*, p. 499). The accent is on the first syllable.

¹² D. M. Robinson, *Olynthus*, V, pls. 184-185.

¹³ *Corinth*, I, iv, p. 95 and note 54.

¹⁴ *Hesperia*, XX, 1951, p. 121, pl. 51, c, 4.

The base and handles are missing. The proportions, I think, were like those of Agora P 13529,¹⁵ which belongs to the third quarter of the fourth century. H. A. Thompson's B 17 and B 46 are more attenuated.¹⁶

4. Diminutive bowl. Pl. 56.

Inv. IP.374. H. 0.024; D. 0.057. Biscuit of light gray-buff Corinthian clay; coating of black glaze mostly lost. Flat bottom cut from wheel. Rim upright.

5. Diminutive bowl. Pl. 56.

Inv. IP.375. H. 0.023; D. 0.085. Same clay and glaze. Ring base. Incurving rim.

6. Diminutive bowl. Not illustrated.

Inv. IP.376. H. 0.04; D. 0.072. Same clay and glaze. Ring base. Incurving rim.

7-11. Water jugs. Pl. 56 (Nos. **7-9** not illustrated).

Inv. IP.379-383. All fragmentary, partially restored. H. *ca.* 0.20 to *ca.* 0.33; D. of bodies *ca.* 0.15 to *ca.* 0.26. Moderately fine orange-red to brown biscuit with grayish tinge; thin walls; hard gritty texture. Minor variations in shape: No. **9** has wider mouth and lacks distinct neck; handles normally flattened, that of No. **11** having small reflex tips at rim; bottoms flat, slightly concave, or disklike.

12-14. Terracotta lamps. Pl. 56 (No. **14** not illustrated).

Inv. IP.371-373. Biscuit of fine pinkish clay (No. **14** grayish-pink); good black glaze, chipped. All of Corinth Type VII. No. **12**: H. 0.042; D. 0.072; L. 0.104; Athens Type 25A. No. **13**: H. 0.038; D. 0.057; L. 0.091; Athens Type 25 B.

No. **12**, with handle, is scarcely to be dated after the middle of the fourth century; No. **13**, with lug, is probably later, perhaps third or fourth quarter.¹⁷

15. Terracotta figurine. Pl. 56.

Inv. IM.823. H. pres. 0.116. Head and part of pedestal missing. Moderately soft pink clay with buff slip. Vent at back. Girl dancing, right leg advanced; left forearm extended outward, holding dress; right arm bent and pressed against side of body; right breast exposed.

¹⁵ D. B. Thompson, *Hesperia*, XXIII, 1954, p. 74, pl. 24, j.

¹⁶ *Hesperia*, III, 1934, pp. 337, 344.

¹⁷ O. Broneer, *Corinth*, IV, ii, pp. 45-46 and I, iv, p. 95, note 57; R. H. Howland, *Agora*, IV, pp. 67-68, 72-73.

This belongs to a large well-known class of dancing figures that had its origins in the fifth century and was popular in the fourth and third. The type is noted by Winter.¹⁸ His No. 7a, with a head (which does not belong), is 0.21 m. high. A fragment from Cyrenaica in the British Museum¹⁹ is from a taller figure, which is dated early in the fourth century. Shrinkage and reworking of the moulds suggest that the example from Isthmia be dated in the later part of the fourth century.

16. Bronze armlet or anklet. Pl. 56.

Inv. IM.821. D. external 0.113, internal 0.07; W. of bosses av. 0.038; Th. of shell minimum 0.005. Blue-green patina. Six of the eight bosses were formed in one piece (now broken, two and four), the other two in a second piece with socketed projections at either end. One end of the shorter piece was hinged to the adjoining end of the longer, where there was a transverse cross-pin. The metal between the bosses is worked into half-reels, more distinctly than in No. 17. The bosses are hollow.

17. Bronze armlet or anklet. Fig. 2, Pl. 56.

Inv. IM.822. Pressed roughly to oval shape: D. external 0.105 to 0.12, internal 0.065 to 0.075; W. of bosses 0.038 to 0.04; Th. of shell minimum 0.002. Green patina. Similar to No. 16 but lighter. The longer piece is broken (two and one-half bosses, and three and one-half). The socketing of the shorter piece appears in the drawing, Fig. 2.

Nos. 16 and 17 are clearly a pair. They were presumably worn on the arms or the legs; if by a man, probably at the wrists; if by a woman, possibly above the elbows or at the ankles or both. The short hinged section was swung outward when the band was to be placed on the arm or leg, and then swung back and hooked into position.

The remarkable fact here is that these ornaments are not Greek but belong to the Celtic people of Central Europe. They have been found most plentifully in the eastern area of the La Tène culture, Bohemia and Moravia, Slovakia, Austria, and Hungary; examples occur farther west in Bavaria and Switzerland, and rarely in northern Italy (district of Bologna) and in eastern France (Marne and Basses-Alpes).²⁰ Elements of the same culture appear in Yugoslavia as far south as the region

¹⁸ F. Winter, *Die Typen der figürlichen Terrakotten*, II, p. 146, no. 7 (four examples, two of which are known to come from Corinth).

¹⁹ R. A. Higgins, *Catalogue of the Terracottas*, no. 712.

²⁰ J. Déchelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique Celtique et Gallo-Romaine*, IV, pp. 728-729; O. Montelius, *Civ. primitive en Italie, It. septentrionale*, Sér. B, pl. 112, 14, pl. 113, 5; J. Schráníl, *Die Vorgeschichte Böhmens und Mährens*, p. 233, pl. XLVII, 4; I. Hunyady, *Kelták a Kárpát-medencében (Diss. Pannonicae, Ser. II, 18)*, especially pl. XXXI, 2; J. Filip, *Keltové ve Střední Evropě*, plates *passim* with examples from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia; B. Benadík, E. Vlček, C. Ambros, *Keltische Gräberfelder der Südwestslowakei*, pp. 122-124, pls. V, VIII, XIV, XXVII;

of Sarajevo. To the best of my knowledge no other *Nussringe* like the pair from Isthmia have been found in Greece.

There are several varieties of bronze armlets or anklets in the repertory of the Celtic Late Iron Age. One type has many small solid bosses, either plain or elaborately

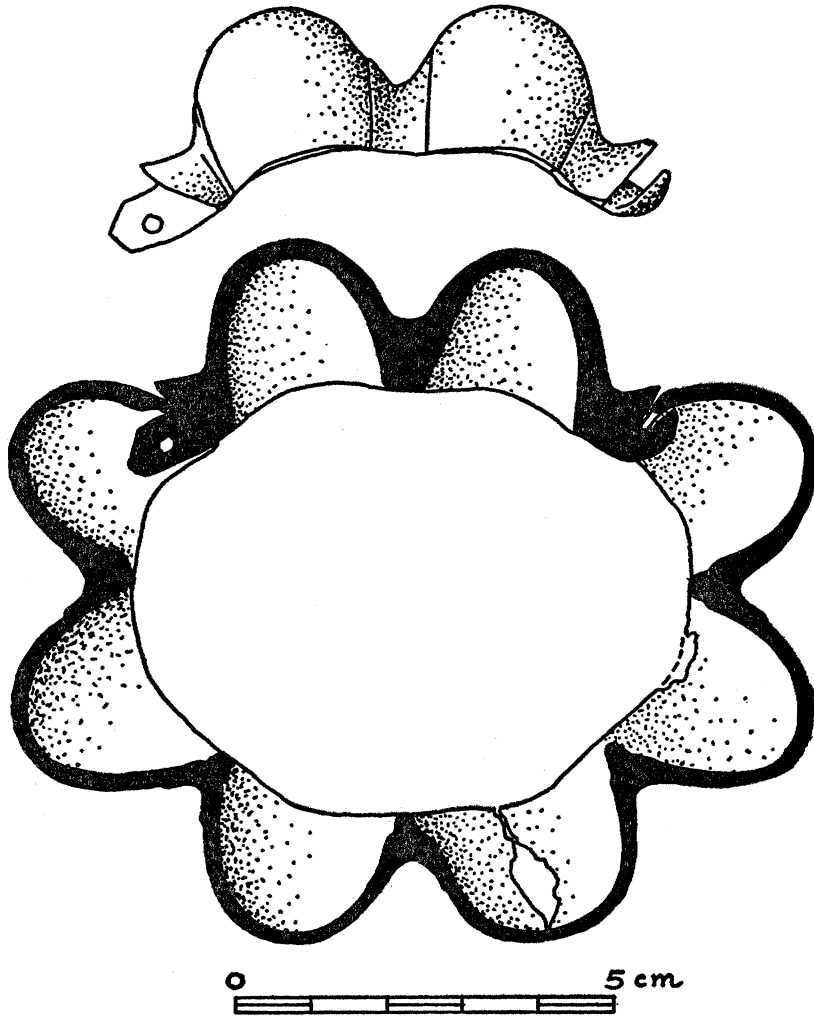


FIG. 2. No. 17, Bronze Armlet or Anklet. Drawing by G. V. Peschke.

modelled with curving ornament. The second principal type, which seems gradually to have replaced the former, has hollow bosses with smooth surfaces, larger in size and progressively fewer in number down to a minimum of three. Examples like our Nos. 16 and 17 are found abundantly in the eastern area in graves assigned to a

R. Pittioni, *Urgeschichte des Österreichischen Raumes*, fig. 473, 1, 3, fig. 475, 6. (I would thank Dr. S. Foltiny and others for directing me to numerous publications of related material).

developed stage of La Tène C, generally equated with La Tène II in Switzerland,²¹ falling in the third and second centuries B.C. The complexities of Celtic chronology and the question whether the armlets might be as early as the other objects in the well at Isthmia are beyond the competence of the undersigned and must be left to qualified specialists.

It is impossible to determine why and when the objects in this group were dropped into the well. Since the krater, No. 1, was a votive offering, one thinks of occasions when shrines were cleared out, for example after some disaster had desecrated the building and its contents or simply when space became too crowded. But in cases of that sort the votives were usually discarded in large numbers; the present group is small, and there is no reason to suppose that many pieces from it were lost before the discovery was reported. The objects recovered are furthermore remarkably varied, including some that were rare and perhaps costly along with others that were exceedingly common. Archaeological investigation of the near-by sanctuary of Demeter may furnish some enlightenment.

Most of the pottery and the terracotta figurines were manufactured probably in the third quarter of the fourth century and almost certainly before 300 B.C.; some may be as early as 350 B.C. If the Celtic bronzes are to be dated necessarily after the turn of the third century, we must suppose either that the objects fell into the well at various times or that they were accumulated and kept together for several decades and then discarded. The latter explanation is the more plausible.

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²¹ Professor J. M. de Navarro in correspondence kindly informs me that armlets of our type are in fact to be dated to a late phase of Early La Tène (LT. I c) rather than to Middle La Tène, but that they are unlikely in any case to occur before 300 B.C. He states that the *Hohlnessarmringe* are found only in the graves of women, and adds the interesting and most reasonable suggestion that the pair at Isthmia may have belonged to a captive. On Celtic offerings that have been found under water see his forthcoming article in 40. *Bericht der Röm.-Germ. Kommission*.



No. 1. Skyphoid Krater, Side A.



No. 1. Side B.



No. 1. From above.



No. 2. Skyphos.



No. 1. Figures 1, 2.



No. 1. Figures 3, 4.



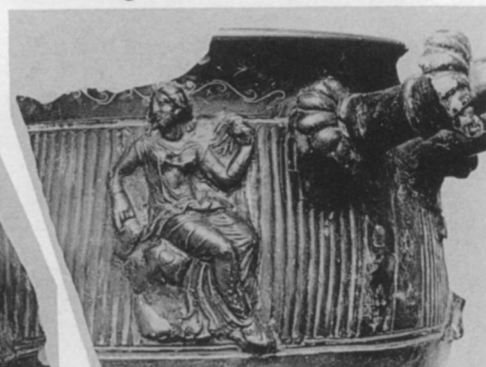
No. 1. Side A.



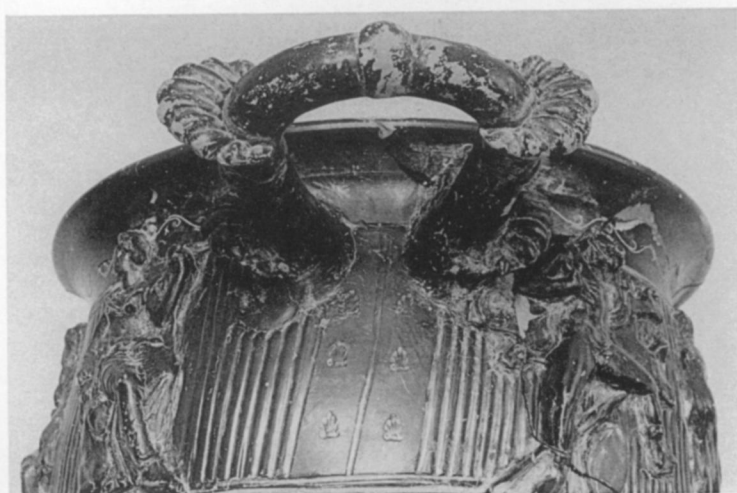
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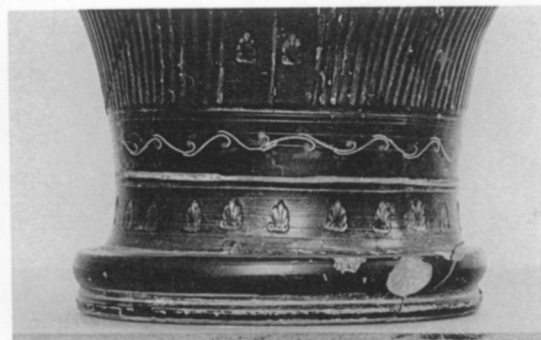
No. 1. Figures 5, 6.



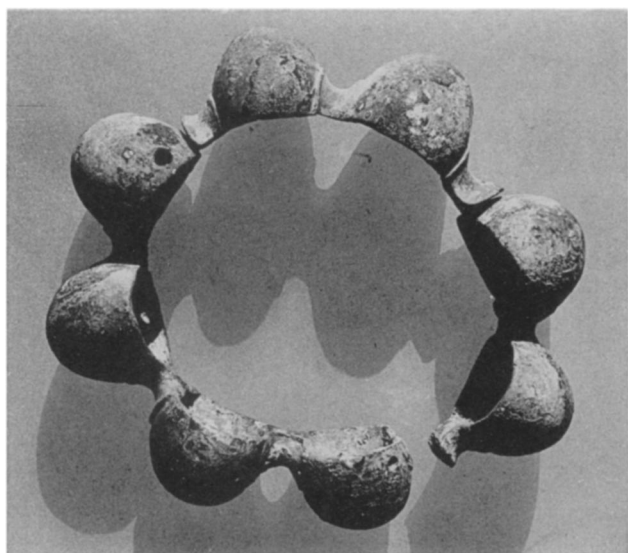
No. 1. Figure 7.



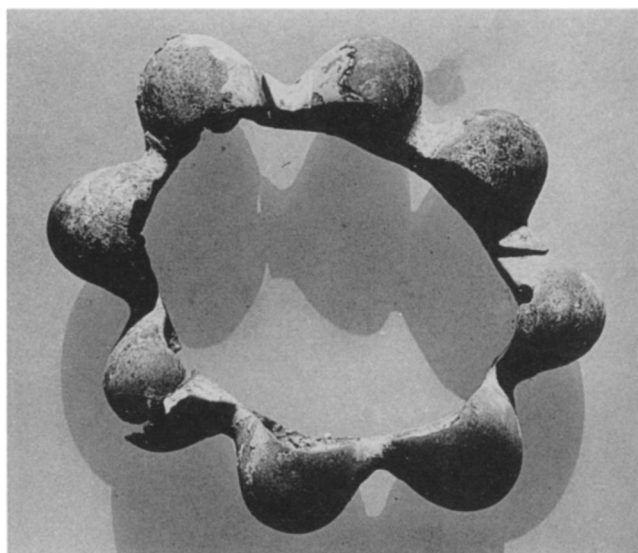
No. 1. Handle.



No. 1. Foot.



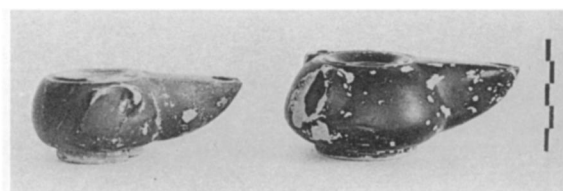
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No. 17

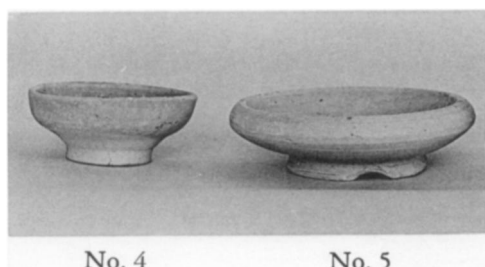


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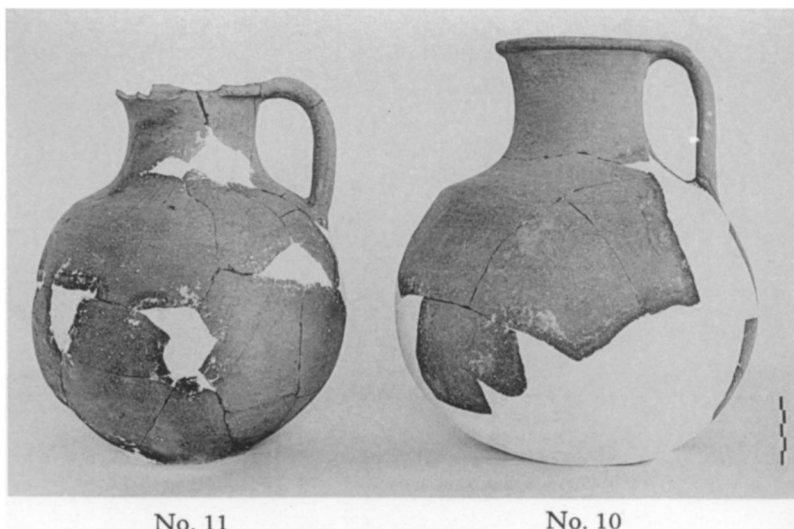
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No. 12



No. 4

No. 5



No. 11

No. 10