

A GEOMETRIC GRAVE GROUP FROM THORIKOS IN ATTICA

(PLATES 63–64)

CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISCOVERY. On November 2, 1958, my family and I made a chance find at Thorikos in southeast Attica.¹ On the south side of the hill called Velatouri, above the theater, we came upon a recently disturbed grave. The find spot is *ca.* 400 m. northwest of the theater and *ca.* 11 m. directly south of (below) a fragment of wall *ca.* 6 m. long, built in ashlar style, preserved in one or two courses and now almost hidden in brush.

What first attracted our attention was a large number of fragments of homogeneous pottery of excellent fabric and decorative technique scattered in a fairly restricted area. Some of the breaks were old, proving that the pot or pots had been smashed at a reasonably remote period. But most fragments were newly broken and there had clearly been recent damage, whether deliberate or not.

Closer inspection showed that the sherds were mainly in an area just below a disturbed bit of ground which could be clearly distinguished from the unploughed and undisturbed surrounding surface. Furthermore, a large flat slab of stone, not unlike many others on the hillside, was leaning against a near-by shrub. The presumption is that a person or persons unknown had very recently removed the slab. It is not so clear whether or not he realized that the slab had covered an ancient grave. Since the hillside had recently been cultivated nearly up to this point, the owner might merely have been clearing ahead of the plough and unwittingly trampled and scattered the already broken pots. Although it was later clear that our search of the area did not turn up nearly all of the fragments, it is doubtful if any were deliberately removed. Possibly one or more complete pots and/or other more precious contents of the grave were discovered and removed. But it is at least equally likely that the objects we recovered represent the total grave furniture.

The disturbed area showed that the grave had been oriented roughly east-west

¹ I wish to express appreciation to the Greek Archaeological Service for permission to restore, publish and display the finds. To Mr. Nicholas Coldstream, of Cambridge University and the British School in Athens, who is preparing a definitive study of Greek geometric pottery, I wish to tender special thanks for his ready and willing help during the writing of this article. Others have assisted me at various stages: Professor Eugene Vanderpool and Mr. Colin Edmonson of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Professor Homer A. Thompson, Miss Alison Frantz and others of the Staff of the Agora Excavations. Plates 63, a-c, and 64, b are by Professor Saul Weinberg; Plate 64, a by Miss Alison Frantz. Plate 64, c is by Mr. V. Tombazes and permission to publish it is owed to Professor George Mylonas and Mr. Threpsiades.

and was apparently deeper and wider at the west end. Its dimensions seem to have been approximately 1.35 m. in length, 0.75 m. wide at the west, and 0.40 m. at the east. Disturbed earth reached a depth of at least 0.65 m. below the modern surface at the west end, and it can be presumed that the amphora had stood or lain there.² Since fragments of the pottery and one of the metal objects were still mixed in the loose earth, there can be no doubt that the grave was the source of all the objects described below.

The Greek Archaeological Service was immediately notified of the above facts. The vases were mended in the workroom of the American Agora Excavations, and permission was granted by the Greek Archaeological Service to exhibit the group in the new Davis wing of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens.

CONTENTS. The sherds collected proved to come from a fine grave group consisting of a neck-handled amphora, an oinochoe, a two-handled kantharoid cup, and a tripod stand (Pl. 63, a). All are of light buff clay. None show clear signs of burning. A few miscellaneous sherds which do not seem to belong to any of the above may not be from the grave, since the hillside is strewn with fine and coarse pottery of various periods. The heavily corroded iron objects, almost certainly from the grave, suggest that the burial was that of a mature male. They include the following items: a spear(?) head, two sections of a knife or razor, and two sections of a dagger(?) blade. Seven peculiar lumps of hard-baked clay and a dozen bits of broken and charred bone were also collected.

1. *Amphora* (Pl. 63, a, b). The large neck-handled amphora presumably contained the burial ashes. In shape it is midway between Kerameikos 253 of developed Early Geometric and 866 belonging to an early but settled phase of Middle Geometric.³ The former has a taller, narrower neck, more steeply sloping shoulder, and lower center of gravity. The latter has a

wider neck, broader and flatter shoulder, and higher center of gravity. In decoration the nearest parallel is Kerameikos 2155.⁴ The narrow neck panel is an early feature, while the friezes of vertical strokes and double axe (or "butterfly" or opposed triangles) on lip and body are at home in Middle Geometric.⁵

H. 0.555 m.; d. of lip 0.181 m.; min. d. of

² Cf. the description of a grave in the Athenian Agora by C. W. Blegen, "Two Athenian Grave Groups of about 900 B.C.," *Hesperia*, XXI, 1952, pp. 279-280.

³ Cf. Karl Kübler, *Kerameikos: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen. Die Nekropole des 10 bis 8. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. V Part I, Berlin, 1954, henceforth referred to as *Kerameikos*, V. For amphora 253, cf. pl. 25 (Grave 74) and for amphora 866, pl. 29 (Grave 37). Cf. also a wider-necked, slightly later example than ours recently discovered at Eleusis (*A.J.A.*, LXI, 1957, pl. 84, fig. 8).

⁴ Cf. *Kerameikos*, V, pl. 29 (Grave 36).

⁵ See also Peter Kahane, "Die Entwicklungsphasen der Attisch-Geometrischen Keramik," *A.J.A.*, XLIV, 1940, pp. 465-482. Kahane's pl. XVIII, 2, labelled advanced Early Geometric, has decoration very similar to ours but the shape is earlier with a distinctly heavier appearance and lower center of gravity. The only comparable vase from Corinth, though it is quite slim and elongated, should also be slightly earlier than ours (Cf. S. Weinberg, *Corinth*, VII, 1, pl. 10, 58).

neck 0.116 m.; max. d. of body 0.329 m.; d. of base 0.137 m. Repaired from many fragments; *ca.* half of rim restored; neck practically complete; one handle partially restored; more than half of body restored, especially in shoulder area; base and area immediately above it practically complete. Black glaze rather dull and heavily worn, tending to bluish into red areas; glaze on neck much more lustrous with brown or red predominating; noticeable tendency for unglazed inside surface to flake off. Decoration done with great care.

Neck. Swelling rim; relatively high neck with concave profile; black-glazed band w. 0.007 m. inside lip, extending 0.008 m. below lip on outside; rim decorated with frieze w. 0.008 m. consisting of repeated motif of ten vertical strokes between double axe pattern; distance from center to center of each triglyph-metope motif uniformly 0.04 m. where preserved; below frieze upper half of neck in solid reddish glaze 0.075 m. wide, ending at point just below upper join of handles; lower half of neck decorated by two reserved panels between handles, with solid paint under handles and separating panels; one panel complete, second nearly so; over-all dimensions l. 0.12 m. (horizontal), w. 0.076 m.; above and below meander itself a frieze w. 0.016 m. consisting of three black bands averaging 0.004 m. wide alternating with narrower reserved bands; each panel has two sections of the running meander motif h. 0.04 m.; heavy black lines w. *ca.* 0.002 m. outline meanders; hatched lines th. *ca.* 0.001 m.; extremely careful, regular, meticulous painting with skillful transitions in direction of hatching at corners.

Handles. Extend from neck to shoulder; broad and flat; fairly uniform w. *ca.* 0.046 m.; th. *ca.* 0.017 m.; under surface unglazed, although paint has run over edges in places; outer

surface decorated with ladder pattern of twenty-two horizontal bands averaging 0.005 m. th.; areas of solid glaze th. *ca.* 0.01 m. at top and bottom; black stripes run vertically at edges of handles and extend around curved surface; regularity and exactness not so marked as elsewhere on vase.

Body. Four wide zones in solid paint separated by three parallel friezes; lower two w. 0.018 m. consisting simply of three thin reserved bands; lowest *ca.* 0.078 m. above top of base; middle *ca.* 0.09 m. above lowest; upper frieze on shoulder total w. 0.05 m.; decorative scheme similar to rim panels, i. e. double axe w. 0.013 m. separated by ten vertical lines forming a repeated motif averaging w. 0.028 m.; outlines of opposed triangles have tendency to convex curves and to blend into each other rather than to meet in sharp angles; curvature probably result of lack of care rather than deliberate intent; frieze proper w. 0.02 m.; framed above and below by six narrow bands alternately painted and reserved.

Base. Low ring type.

2. *Oinochoe* (Pl. 63, a, c). In shape it is midway between the Early Geometric type of Kerameikos 927, which has broad foot, low center of gravity, and heavy neck⁶ and the more gracefully proportioned and taller Kerameikos 870 of Middle Geometric, with narrower foot, higher center of gravity and more slender neck.⁷ Nearest in shape, although with shorter neck, is a pitcher from Marathon.⁸ Decoration of body and handle quite standard; that of neck panel apparently simpler than most.⁹ (Left and right refer to sides as viewed when facing spout).

H. 0.236 m.; d. of mouth along axis of handle *ca.* 0.101 m.; d. of lip (transverse) *ca.* 0.103 m.; min. d. of neck 0.064 m.; max. d. of body 0.158 m.; d. of base 0.095 m. Reconstructed from

⁶ Cf. *Kerameikos*, V, pl. 71 (Grave 2). Cf. also Kahane, *op. cit.*, pl. XVII, 1 which is perhaps a bit closer to ours.

⁷ Cf. *Kerameikos*, V, pl. 72 (Grave 37).

⁸ Cf. *Πρακτικά*, 1939, p. 28 (Grave 1).

⁹ Cf. *Kerameikos*, V, pl. 74 (880, Grave 25) for closest parallel among Kübler's illustrations.

many fragments; following areas restored: left side of trefoil lip, spout, most of neck except under handle; about half of body and base (especially right side).

Rim. Trefoil; solid black glaze.

Neck. Rear half plain black glaze; surface worn and paint noticeably thin and streaked in places; reserved panel occupied front half; lower corner preserved at left showing part of meander motif; another section preserves top of panel, near (if not including) corner at right; panel h. *ca.* 0.043 m.; exact w. problematical but *ca.* 0.097 m.; design apparently consisted of two complete running meanders framed top and bottom by two narrow parallel black bands.

Handle. Ribbon type: w. 0.03 m.; th. 0.014 m.; inner surface unglazed; outer surface decorated with ladder pattern consisting of nineteen rather carelessly drawn transverse strokes.

Body. Solid black glaze, somewhat thin and streaky on shoulder and much worn in lower rear area; decorated with three identical friezes w. 0.01 m., consisting of three narrow reserved stripes each.

Base. Low ring base.

3. *Kantharoid Cup* (Pls. 63, a, 64, b). Nearest in shape is Kerameikos 251,¹⁰ with low handles and ring foot, although ours has slimmer profile in lower half of body. The wide and broad meander panel is more accentuated than in any of the published examples.¹¹ Ours seems to be one of the very latest of the type whose floruit hardly extends beyond Early Geometric.

H. 0.096 m.; max. d. of body 0.163 m.; d. of rim *ca.* 0.144 m.; d. of base 0.075 m.; h. of base 0.004 m. Reconstructed from fragments; lacks one handle, and about two-thirds of rim and shoulder. Whole interior and lower exterior solid black glaze; exterior paint tends to

be streaky and thin in places and has rather bluish metallic sheen; paint on interior heavier and darker.

Rim. Narrow offset concave moulding framed between two black stripes; on inside, below upper stripe a narrow band reserved and decorated with ladder pattern in short vertical strokes (clearly painted before inside glaze and extending under it); preserved sections suggest that ladder pattern may not have been continuous, although gaps may be result of wear.

Handles. Preserved one decorated with ladder pattern consisting of fourteen quite carelessly drawn horizontal stripes; solid glaze on inside and on *ca.* 0.01 m. of outside surface where each end joins rim and body.

Body. Shoulder decorated with running meander pattern in two panels separated by three vertical stripes behind handles; panel h. 0.047 m., including parallel stripes which frame them above and below; on better preserved side five sections of meander certain; probably not enough space for a sixth complete and of comparable width; width of individual keys and of hatched areas varies and lines not all at right angles; crosshatching drawn uniformly in one direction.

Base. Low ring type. Very slightly hollow beneath and unglazed.

4. *Tripod Stand* (Pls. 63, a, 64, b). It may have been meant to hold the kantharoid cup, since the d. of its inner ring, 0.158 m., corresponds so neatly to max. d. of 0.163 m. for cup. The nearest parallels are Kerameikos 249¹² of advanced Early Geometric context and a tripod in the Eleusis Museum (Pl. 64, c).¹³ Our example seems lighter and more sophisticated than either, with feet splaying outward in

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pl. 84 (Grave 74).

¹¹ Cf. cup from Marathon grave 5, *Πρακτικά*, 1939, pp. 30 ff. This is part of a Middle Geometric group. The shape reappears with high-swung handles at the end of Middle Geometric.

¹² Cf. *Kerameikos*, V, pl. 68 (Grave 74).

¹³ *Εφ.* 1898, pl. 4, 3. Skias in his text mentions two smaller tripods of similar type.

a graceful concave sweep continuous with the rim.¹⁴

Total h. 0.222 m.; outer d. at top 0.084 m.; distance from center point of one foot to next, 0.222 m. Reconstructed from many fragments; lacks about one-third of ring-band, parts of one foot and considerable sections of struts; some pieces in beautifully fresh condition, others very much worn. Decoration in general extremely careful. Black glaze often shading into red, even in same stroke where it was less heavily laid on; clay slightly more pinkish than that of other pots.

Ring-band. H. 0.05 m.; th. 0.013 m.; solid glaze on inside except for series (probably three) of thin parallel stripes (now very much worn) with total w. of *ca.* 0.005 m. just below rim; on flat surface of rim a series of panels each consisting of nine stripes separated by rather carelessly outlined double axes; uniform l. 0.043 m. from center point of one to next would accommodate eleven of the repeated motifs; transition of lip from horizontal to vertical surface in form of graceful convex moulding; continuous frieze of meanders framed by two heavy black stripes, w. 0.004 m. with three intervening stripes reserved, w. 0.002 m.; meander h. averages 0.033 m. and key design probably repeated thirteen times; meanders outlined in heavy black lines th. *ca.* 0.002 m.; hatching th. averages 0.001 m.; direction of hatching regularly reversed at two corners of each key by use of a small v-shaped insertion.

Feet. Three supports attached symmetrically under rim at intervals of *ca.* 0.15 m. (center to center); decided outward (concave) curvature tending to make the stand steadier; leg th. averages 0.013 m.; w. *ca.* 0.038 m., although flaring somewhat at top and especially at base where w. is *ca.* 0.05 m. (exclusive of struts); base also thicker and rounded, with easy transition into diagonal struts; inside surface of legs and struts solid glaze; vertical stripe reserved

on each edge, then two thick vertical black stripes frame meander decoration; lower black stripe of rim frames top of meanders and three (in one case only two) horizontal lines frame bottom; lowest line th. *ca.* 0.005 m.; meanders carefully drawn, with one or two changes in direction of crosshatching in each key; gradual diminution in h. of key designs, varying from 0.048 m. at top to 0.042 m. for center and 0.036 m. for lowest.

Struts. A pair support each foot; connected to bases and to lower rim at middle point between feet; approximately round in section with average d. 0.013 m.; vertical reserved stripe at transition to front surface, then thick black stripe framing a frieze of chevrons; where two struts join rim a thickened section w. 0.032 m. decorated with three rows of zigzags; lowest section of strut where joined to foot solid black glaze, now quite worn.

5. *Dagger(?) blade* (Pl. 64, a, a). Two sections, apparently of same object, but not contiguous; each broken at both ends; max. th. at center and diminishing toward edges, both of which were apparently sharp; no sign of central rib or attachment of hilt; shorter fragment l. 0.067 m., w. *ca.* 0.028 m., max. th. 0.025 m.; longer fragment l. 0.16 m., max. w. 0.025 m., min. w. 0.01 m.

6. *Knife (?) or Razor (?)*. (Pl. 64, a, b). Two sections, probably contiguous, but join not clear; lower convex edge must have been cutting edge; longer section has at one end a thinner tine 0.025 m. long for attachment of handle; over-all l. of longer section 0.071 m.; max. w. 0.02 m., max. th. 0.008 m.; l. of smaller section 0.049 m., w. 0.017 m., max. th. 0.007 m.¹⁵

7. *Spear(?) head*. (Pl. 64, a, c). One piece, badly rusted and broken at both ends; no sign

¹⁴ These three and related tripod stands deserve a thorough analytical study and comparison with metal prototypes. For a later example, cf. L. Shoe, *Hesperia*, I, 1932, p. 63, fig. 9.

¹⁵ In original shape perhaps like the crescent-shaped knife published by Blegen, *op. cit.*, fig. 3, 4.

of socket; pres. l. 0.10 m., max. w. 0.03 m.; max. th. 0.023 m.; channel or groove extending whole length on each side perhaps indicates position of fins.

8. *Clay Lumps*. (Pl. 64, a, d). Seven collected; all hard baked, light to dark red clay

with traces of black carbonized matter clinging to some; shapes very irregular; clay clearly in malleable condition at time of burial and burned hard during cremation; at least five preserve definite outlines and striations produced by harder objects against which they were pressed before being burned.¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS. The contents of our grave form an important and homogeneous group. Particularly noticeable is the triple comparison made above with similar vessels in Kerameikos Grave 74. According to Kübler, the contents of that grave range in date from the third quarter of the 10th to the first quarter of the 9th century. In all three cases the Kerameikos vases were cited as appearing earlier than our amphora, oinochoe and kantharoid cup in their respective lines of development. Hence, we may use the first quarter of the 9th century as a rough *terminus post quem* for our group. A lower limit is likewise suggested by Kerameikos Grave 37, from which two vases have been cited to illustrate a development slightly later than our amphora and oinochoe. Of the contents definitely belonging to the original Grave 37, Kübler dates a bowl in the first half of the 9th century and the three other vases to the third quarter (the amphora), last quarter (the oinochoe) and end of the 9th century. Consequently, a *terminus ante quem* for our group in the neighborhood of 825 seems to be indicated.

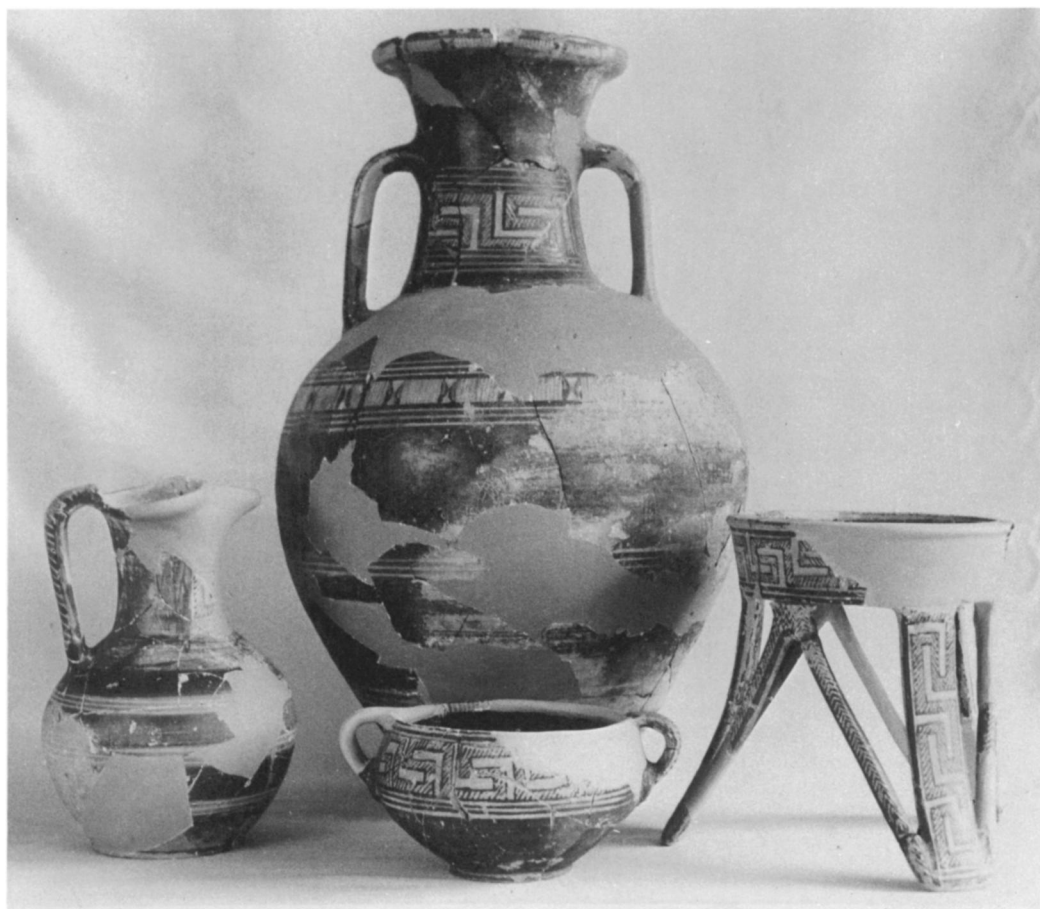
I would suggest, therefore, that the Thorikos burial was made in or not far from the third quarter of the 9th century, at the very threshold of Middle Geometric. There is no question of local manufacture or provincial stylistic traits. The quality of the pottery is fully equal to the most sophisticated tradition of the Athenian Potters' Quarter at this time. Perhaps the chief value of the vases is the clarity with which they illustrate an important ceramic transition. Mr. Nicholas Coldstream calls our find: "A significant group, delicately poised on the fence between Early and Middle Geometric." As far as I know, this is the first major evidence for habitation at Thorikos in the Geometric period. Wrede¹⁷ mentions a geometric fibula now in the National Museum and also geometric sherds scattered on the south slope of Velatouri hill, where he suggests a cemetery may have been located. In the later Bronze Age the little double harbor was an important link between Attica, the Cyclades and Crete. Evidence may still be found for at least a partial resumption of this role in the early Iron Age.

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¹⁶ Possibly to be compared with "clay ball" mentioned by Blegen, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

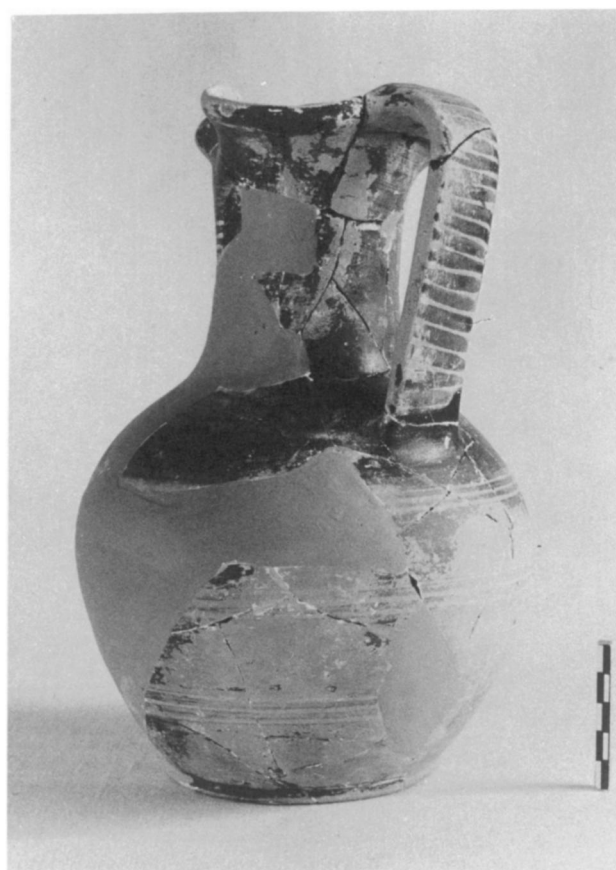
¹⁷ Cf. *R. E.*, s.v. *Thorikos*, cols. 338-340.



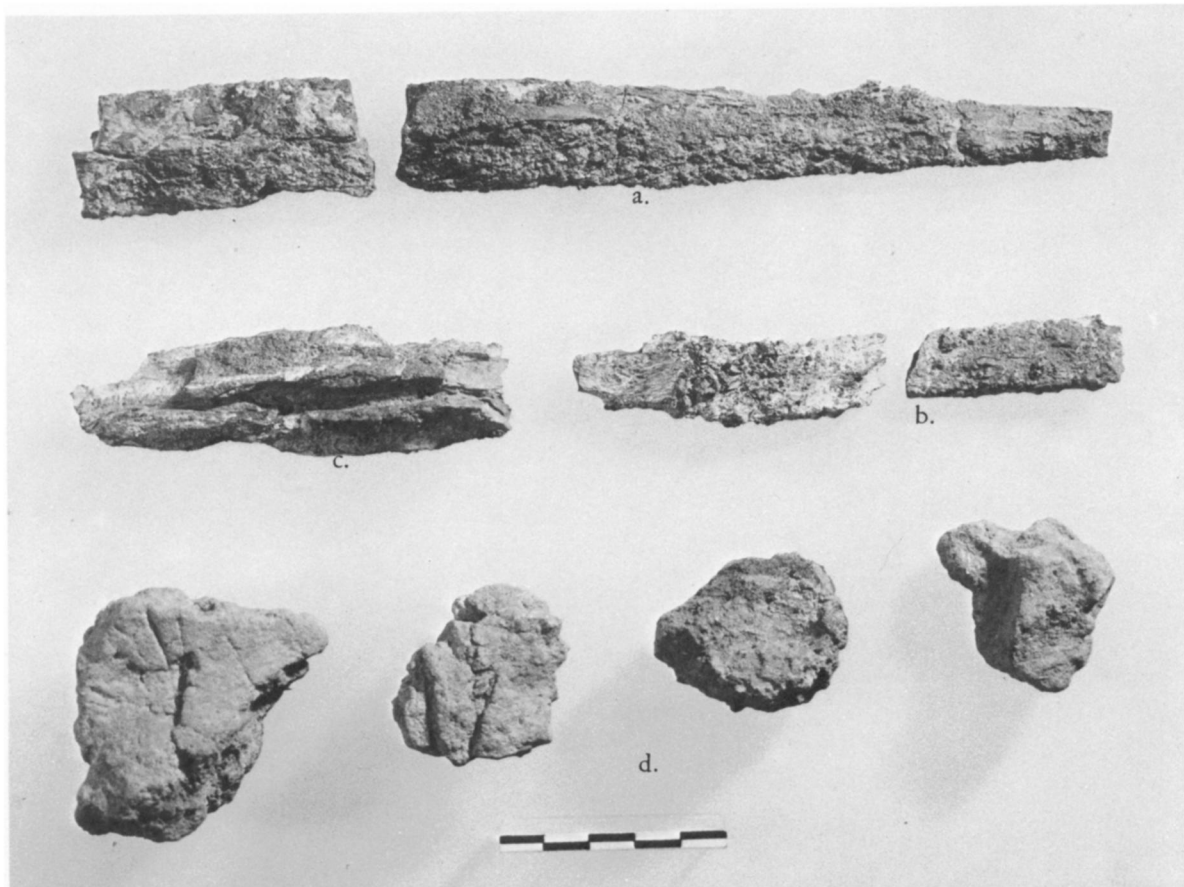
a. Pottery from the Grave, Nos. 1-4



b. No. 1. Amphora



c. No. 2. Oinochoe



a. Nos. 5-8. Dagger (*a*), Knife or Razor (*b*), Spear Head (*c*), Clay Lumps (*d*)



b. Nos. 3 and 4. Kantharoid Cup and Tripod Stand



c. Tripod Stand in Eleusis Museum