

FRAGMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL-TERRACOTTA HYDRAS IN CORINTH

(PLATE 55)

GREEK ART is often understood as Athenian art, owing to the unique contributions of the artisans of Classical Athens and the scholarly attention they attract. Consequently, there has been a tendency to see the arts of other areas of Greece as more or less dependent upon advances in technique and style made in Athens. In recent years, these arts have been increasingly appreciated on their own terms, leading to a more accurate picture of Greek art as a whole.

In the case of Corinth, the archaeological record suggests that in the late Archaic and Classical periods fine contributions were made in the field of plastic arts in terracotta, ranging from large-scale sculpture to figurines of excellent quality. The role of Corinth in the development of terracotta sculpture has been recognized for some time,¹ although the remains from Corinth itself are usually fragmentary, and the attribution of examples from outside Corinth is not always certain. In this article two pieces of terracotta architectural sculpture, one previously unpublished, will be discussed. Both were excavated in the Tile Works at Corinth.² This installation includes the remains of two large kilns, one of which appears to have begun operating in the Late Archaic period; the other kiln was in use in the second half of the 4th and the early 3rd centuries. The artisans at the Tile Works produced a variety of terracotta objects, including roof tiles, heavy household pottery, and small altars, as well as architectural sculpture. Most, if not all, of the sculpture seems to have been made in the earlier kiln.

Both sculptures discussed here are fragmentary, but close study suggests that at least one is from the pediment of a small building and that it represents the Lernaean Hydra, adding another subject to the known repertoire of Corinthian architectural sculpture. This piece, a large part of a coiled serpentine body, can be dated to the 5th century B.C. by its archaeological context; the other piece, a head probably of a serpent, here published for the first time, is most likely Late Archaic in date on the basis of style.

The body fragment (Figs. 1, 2, Pl. 55:a, b) will be discussed first.³ In the following

¹ S. S. Weinberg, "Terracotta Sculpture at Corinth," *Hesperia* 26, 1957, pp. 289–319 (= Weinberg). The subject will be further treated by N. Bookidis in the forthcoming publication of the sculpture from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth. I am very grateful to Dr. Bookidis for permitting access to her unpublished manuscript on the technical aspects of Corinthian terracotta sculpture and for very helpful comments. The drawings reproduced in Figures 1–3 are by Jennifer Ingram. Photographs courtesy of the Corinth Excavations, American School of Classical Studies.

² The final publication of the Tile Works is in preparation by the author and C. K. Williams, II, Director of the Corinth Excavations.

³ Inv. no. SF-40-8 (MF-11804, FM-45). Max. pres. dim. 0.330. Max. inside D.: at A–B, 0.125; at F, 0.051–0.054; at G, 0.053–0.066; at I, 0.055–0.060. Pres. depth at bottom 0.140 m. Mended and partly restored in plaster. Weinberg, pp. 316–317, no. 43, pl. 70 (orientation of photograph incorrect). The fabric is coarse buff (Munsell 10YR 8/4 gray), pink at the core (5YR 8/4 gray), with abundant small-to-large

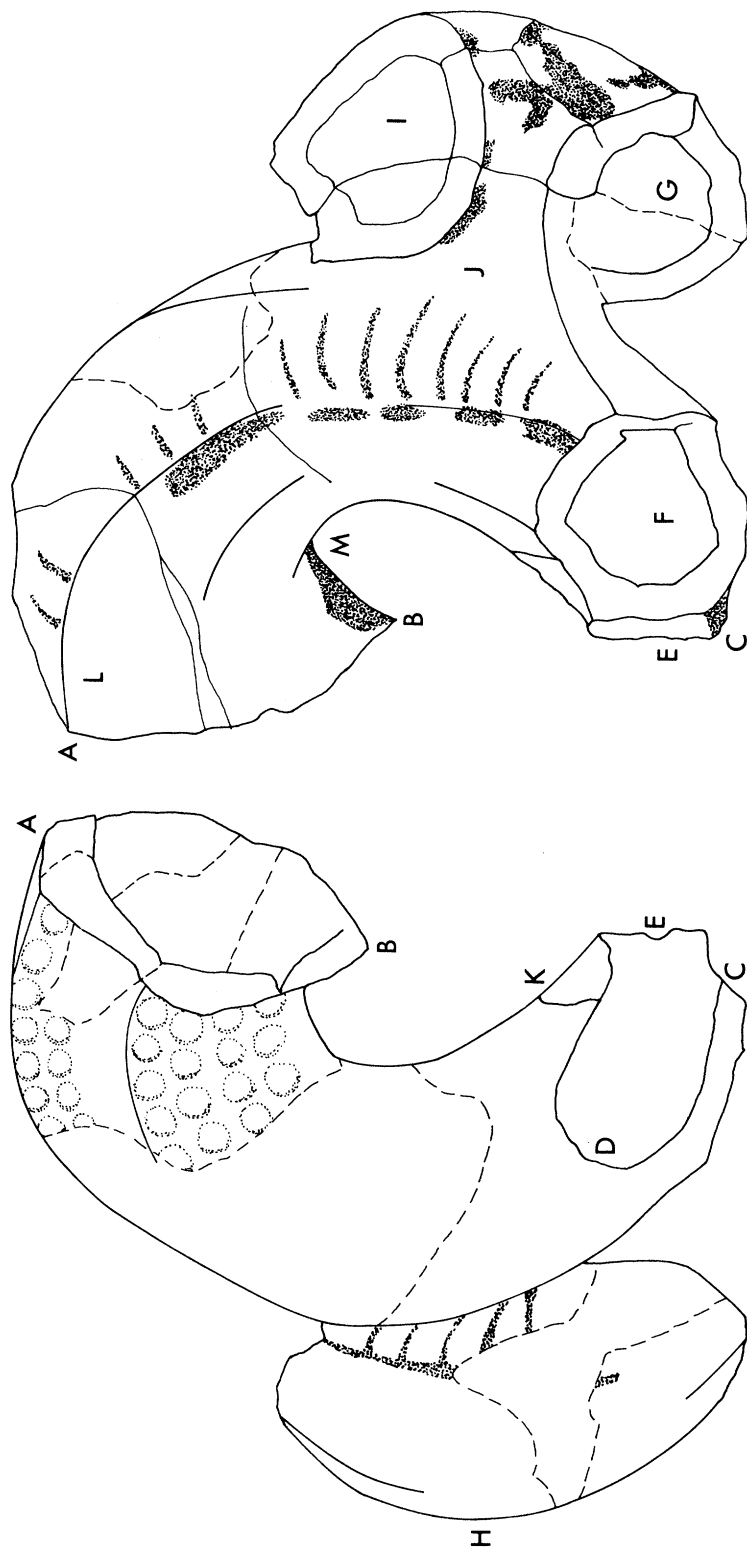


FIG. 1. Body fragment of Hydra (SF-40-8), as preserved, front view

FIG. 2. Body fragment of Hydra, as preserved, rear view. Scale 1:3

description, reference will be made to drawings of the front (Fig. 1) and back (Fig. 2), with specific areas indicated by letters of the alphabet.

The piece as preserved consists of the coiling tubular body of the Hydra, rolling towards the viewer's right. The widest preserved part of the tube (Fig. 1, A–B) is the neck, that is, the part of the body that spreads into the Hydra's multiple heads; it arches down in a broad curve to point C. At C, there is a patch of finished painted surface; above it is a broken surface, D. At C, the body twists towards the back (Fig. 2), where the tube breaks off at F. Here the cylindrical body, now much smaller in diameter, seems originally to have turned towards the viewer's right and probably formed a now missing horizontal coil which joined break G. This coil, which would not have been visible from the front, would have formed a stable base for the entire piece.

From G, the body originally turned upwards, becoming visible again at the front (Fig. 1) as a vertical coil, H, resting against the main arch of the body. At the top of H, the tube turned to the back once more, where it has broken at I (Fig. 2). The rest of the body, probably continuing to diminish in diameter towards the tail, is lost and must be conjectured. It probably descended sharply from I, covering area J (where the surface is rough and was never finished) and continuing to travel diagonally towards the viewer's left. The narrowing cylinder probably rested against the horizontal coil at F and turned once more to the front at E, which is a vertical joining surface. The tail may have rested against the flat surface in the front at D, which has a curving outline, and flipped back into either a single or a divided point.

At the other end, the widening neck (Fig. 1, A–B) begins to turn sharply downwards. It seems clear that the body wall must have dropped straight down from B to touch K, where the curving broken surface, its lower edge slightly turned up, suggests that the wider end of the cylinder rested for support.

The precise number and positions of the heads in the suggested reconstruction (Fig. 3) are conjectural, drawing upon other representations of the Hydra and taking into account the following possible technical considerations: the necks were probably not so long as those in painted and relief representations, since they would have been fragile in a freestanding terracotta piece; they may have been clumped together near their roots for further safety; and they may have overlapped in order to provide opportunities to connect them to one another (the arms of Herakles grappling among the necks could have provided some support as well).⁴ If the composition has been understood correctly, it was quite ingenious,

dark red and gray inclusions. The surface was finished with an extremely thin layer of fine, yellowish buff clay, almost like a layer of thick slip (the color varies from 2.5Y 7/4 at A to 10YR 7/6 at D). Weinberg, publishing the piece as a "Serpent from Pediment (?)", also suggested that "it is possible that the serpent-like creature may have been part of such a subject as Herakles and the Hydra." Other writhing creatures show definitely marine characteristics, such as fish scales and fins, cf. the Triton pediment from the Athenian Akropolis, conveniently illustrated in R. Lullies and M. Hirmer, *Greek Sculpture*, rev. ed., New York 1960, pl. 26; also the terracotta creature from Kalydon, identified as Typhon, E. Dyggve, *Das Laphrion, der Tempelbezirk von Kalydon*, Copenhagen 1948, pp. 185–188, 190, fig. 197.

⁴ Cf. the overlapping of forms in the Amazonomachy pediment, Weinberg, pp. 306–307, no. 8, pl. 65. The number of heads of the Hydra varies widely in both literary sources and artistic representations. Insofar as there is a "canonical" number, it is nine; see *RE IX*, s.v. Hydra, cols. 45–46.

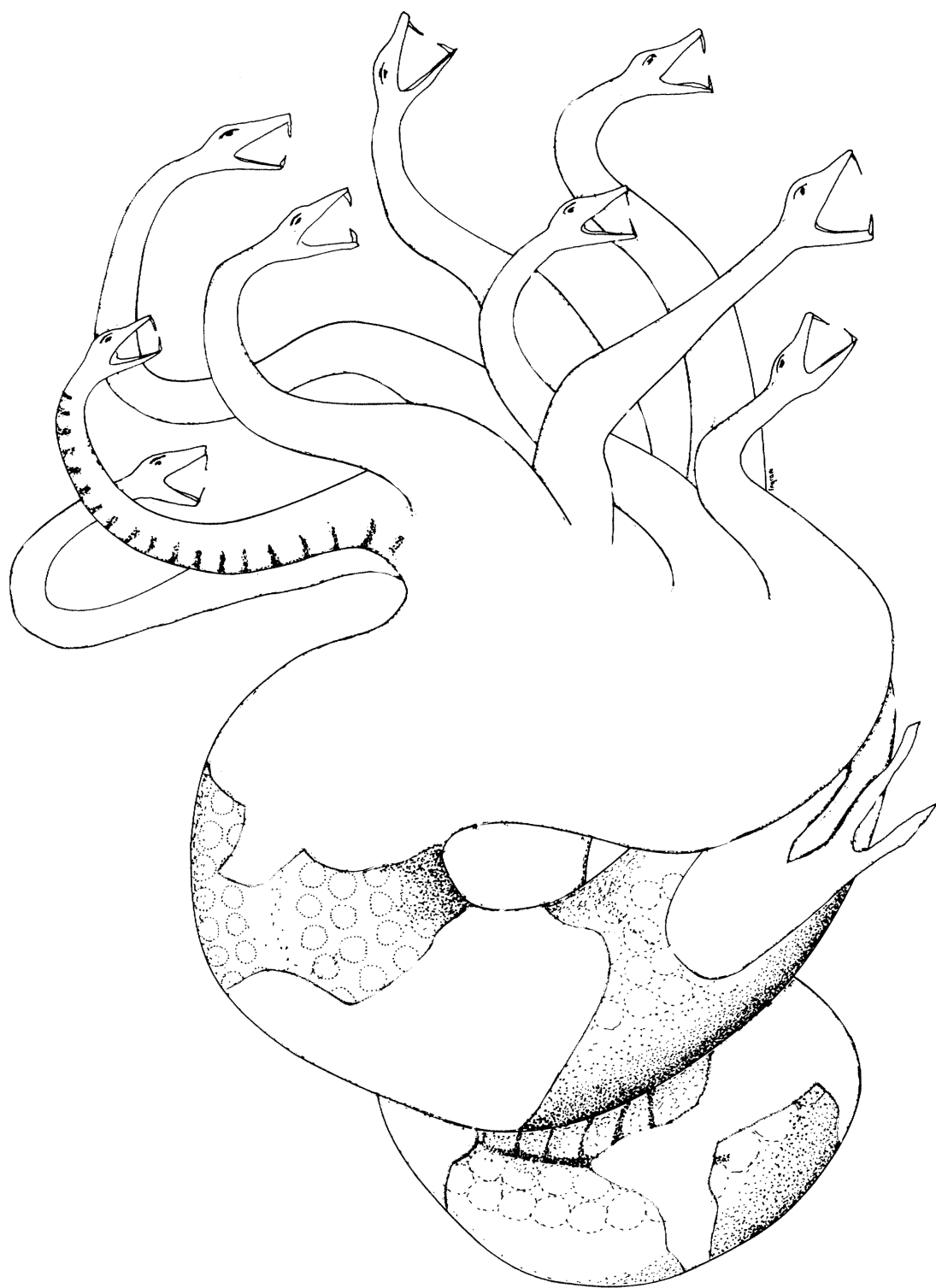


FIG. 3. Conjectural reconstruction of Hydra

providing a stable, hidden base at the rear, while allowing the viewer to see only the forward, rolling movement of the body. The coils at the rear would have provided additional stability to counteract the weight of the heads.

The piece, as far as preserved, was built by hand of clay slabs of irregular thickness (0.012–0.028). The slabs seem to have been made by pressing clay against a flat surface with the fingers; the upper, uneven surface became the unseen interior of the body. In addition to pressure marks, the inner surface shows here and there small added lumps of clay, as if patches were added to strengthen certain points. Logically, the horizontal base coil, from F to G, would have been formed first, perhaps from a single slab of clay rolled into a cylinder and then turned into a half-circle. The main vertical arch, up to point M, where the hollow interior is blocked (see below), probably followed. These tubular sections must have been added in short enough pieces to allow the artisan to reach inside to work the joins together. In fact, the breaks seem to have occurred at these relatively weak junctures. The smaller vertical coil H followed; its juncture with the main arch can be seen clearly at the back (Pl. 55:b). The descending section (now missing) over surface J must have followed, and then the wrapping to the front of the tail section. As the tail narrowed in diameter it may have become solid. Upon this foundation the construction of the head section could proceed. At M, the hollow arch was completely blocked off with a wall of clay, which probably strengthened this point where the heavy head portion began to descend. The walls here are more irregular than elsewhere; it may have been necessary to work with smaller pieces of clay as the body widened rapidly. A panel along the top of the body was flattened and a slight ridge pinched up to border the panel at either side. A slight vertical ridge was also pinched up in coil H.

There are no signs of the use of armatures; the solidly founded design may have made further support unnecessary. There is no evidence to suggest how the multiple necks were attached; they may have been given some support by means of small interior rods, impressions of which exist in other terracotta sculptures.⁵ One neck may have been attached at L, where there is a small rough patch; if so, it was simply stuck on (in Fig. 3 it would be equivalent to the left-most head emerging from the rear). It is possible that the multiple heads were moldmade, as is the head discussed below.

On the whole, the anatomical details were rather carelessly painted, the principal effort having been given to composition and structure. Certainly the surface shows little of the care and finish with which Corinthian terracotta sculpture was provided in the Archaic period.⁶ Circular finger impressions on parts of the body indicate scales; they can be seen very clearly on the front from A–B downwards and very faintly on coil H, left of the ridge and around to the rear. There are irregular areas of dilute brownish black paint over the scales on the front and also at the rear. It is not clear how extensively the surface was painted, since much of the paint seems to have been misfired.

⁵ Cf. M.-F. Billot, "Recherches sur le sphinx du Louvre CA637," *BCH* 101, 1977 (pp. 383–421), p. 393, fig. 7; p. 394, note 12.

⁶ See, e.g., the head of Athena from the Tile Works, Weinberg, pp. 317–318, no. 45a, pl. 73.

A ladder of curving horizontal lines was painted down the flat panel from A to F and on coil H. A few of these curving lines were lightly incised before painting. A wide vertical stripe bordered the panel; traces of this border also appear at C. The area adjacent to these stripes must have been reserved. The panel may be intended to represent the banded body pattern which some snakes actually have, or it may be a misunderstanding of the row of horizontal plates along the underside of a real snake. In Corinthian vase painting, the Hydra's body is either striped all around, or has the striped panel on the underside, or on both the underside and the back.⁷ The Hydra on the early 6th-century poros pediment from the Athenian Akropolis doesn't have a striped panel at all, but alternating stripes of red and blue all around the body, as on a banded snake.⁸ A red-figured stamnos by the Syleus Painter in Palermo shows a Hydra which clearly does have a panel down its back continuing from the central head.⁹ This painted Hydra representation is also of interest in that its general shape and proportions are similar to those of the Tile Works sculpture, although the composition is different. It shows that by *ca.* 500 B.C. this general Hydra type was known.

The archaeological context in which the Hydra was found is the fill of a cistern associated with the earlier of the two kilns in the Tile Works (see above).¹⁰ The latest pottery in this deposit, all of which seems to have been dumped at the same time, includes an Attic small bowl of *ca.* 430–420 B.C.¹¹ The bulk of the datable pottery in the deposit belongs to the middle or third quarter of the 5th century. It should be in this period that the Hydra was modeled, fired, and abandoned, and left lying about to be gathered up with other discards when the kiln went out of use and fill material was needed. It was abandoned presumably because it failed in the firing.

It is likely that the design was intended to fill part of a small pediment. Not only is it highly suitable in form for such a purpose, but the fact that the other sculpture found in the Tile Works is specifically architectural in purpose supports this idea.¹² The sloping design (Fig. 3) suggests that it filled most of the wing of the pediment on the viewer's left. It would not have extended into the corner, since the tail seems originally to have been wrapped around the body to the front. Herakles, in his confrontation with the Hydra, would have

⁷ P. Amandry and D. Amyx, "Héraclès et l'hydra de Lerne dans la céramique corinthienne," *AntK* 25, 1982, pp. 102–116, e.g., fig. 1, no. 5 (striped all around), nos. 2, 3 (underside); fig. 3, no. 6 (underside and back).

⁸ T. Wiegand, *Die archaische Poros-Architektur der Akropolis zu Athen*, Cassel 1904, pp. 192–195, pl. VIII: 4.

⁹ *ARV*², p. 251, no. 34; a convenient illustration in J. Boardman, *Athenian Red-Figure Vases. The Archaic Period*, London 1975, fig. 198.

¹⁰ Cistern 1940-3. In conformity with the excavation notebooks, this deposit has previously been called "Well C" in publications: Weinberg; G. R. Edwards, *Corinth*, VII, iii, *Corinthian Hellenistic Pottery*, Princeton 1975, p. 205, deposit 26. The published deposit date is the excavator's preliminary date, now more than 40 years old. This date must now be lowered, to conform with more recent chronological study of both Corinthian and Attic pottery.

¹¹ C-40-337. Generally similar to B. A. Sparkes and L. Talcott, *The Athenian Agora*, XII, *Black and Plain Pottery*, Princeton 1970, pp. 134, 297, no. 863, pl. 33.

¹² Acroteria: Weinberg, p. 316, nos. 40, 41; metopes: pp. 317–318, nos. 44, 45a–c. There is, however, literary evidence for a Herakles and the Hydra votive monument made of iron in Delphi, Pausanias, x.18.6, and one of unstated material in Olympia, v.26.7.

stood at or near the center of the pediment, facing left. Such a composition would be similar, though reversed, to the above-mentioned Archaic poros pediment from the Akropolis.¹³ There the Hydra is stretched throughout the entire right wing of the pediment, while Herakles stands just to the left of center, reaching across towards the Hydra's heads; behind him are Iolaos, the chariot, and tucked into the corner, the crab. If the arrangement of the subsidiary figures was the same in the Corinthian pediment, it is unclear how the corner behind the Hydra would have been filled. It might be objected that for the apparent contextual date of the sculpture, such a pediment would seem rather old-fashioned, both in choice of subject and composition. Yet if reasons other than artistic considerations necessitated this subject in a pedimental position, the designer would have been rather limited in his choices. The narrow, convoluted forms of the Hydra could not have been easy to manipulate in three dimensions.

Given the incomplete state of the Hydra, the dimensions of the pediment to which it originally belonged can only be estimated very roughly. We do not know how high the heads of the Hydra were lifted to strike, nor how close to them Herakles stood. In the Akropolis pediment, Herakles' head is missing, but he seems to have been a little taller than the Hydra; the empty apex of the pediment between them occupied roughly another *ca.* 0.10 m. The total height of this pediment was 0.790 m. and its length 5.80 m., proportionately about 1:7.¹⁴ If the composition of the Corinthian pediment was similar, we might estimate Herakles' height at *ca.* 0.50 m. and the pediment's height at *ca.* 0.60 m. If the proportions were approximately the same, the total length could be estimated at a little above 4.00 m.¹⁵ The depth of the pediment is also conjectural, since the rear coils of the Hydra are missing. The preserved depth of the piece is 0.14 m., but the pediment floor would have been at least twice as deep to allow for the overlap of the heads and the full arrangement of the coils.

The traditional Corinthian composition, as seen in 13 Corinthian vase paintings which must have had a common prototype, is quite different.¹⁶ In these paintings a somewhat elongated Hydra, its body low to the ground, is placed between Herakles and Iolaos at or near the center of a long frieze; its long necks lash out in both directions. If the Tile Works Hydra has been correctly understood, its high back would preclude such bilateral movement of the heads. The strong forward-rolling motion of the body suggests that the heads were gathered together to face in one direction. In these respects also, the Akropolis Hydra is recalled. Certainly the traditional Corinthian painted design, with its relatively narrow, outstretched Hydra's body and thin spreading necks is not really suitable for the more vulnerable medium of terracotta sculpture in the round.

In Athens, after the poros pediment, the subject remained interesting in different forms to black- and red-figure vase painters.¹⁷ One example, a black-figure rendering of *ca.*

¹³ Wiegand (footnote 8 above).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁵ Cf. the similar reconstructed pedimental proportions of a small Doric building closer in date to our pediment, the mid-5th-century Sicyonian treasury in Olympia, conveniently illustrated in A. Mallwitz, *Olympia und seine Bauten*, Munich 1972, pp. 167–168.

¹⁶ Amandry and Amyx (footnote 7 above).

¹⁷ For the collected Hydra iconography, see F. Brommer, *Denkmälerlisten zur griechischen Heldensagen*, I, *Herakles*, Marburg 1971, pp. 76–84; *idem*, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensagen*, 3rd ed., Marburg

530 B.C. by the Affekter,¹⁸ showing a thick-bodied, tightly coiled, forward-rolling Hydra, is somewhat reminiscent of the Tile Works sculpture. Precisely how the subject came to be used at Corinth in the 5th century for terracotta sculpture in the round, bearing a compositional relationship to considerably earlier Attic relief sculpture in stone, is not clear. Influence could not have come directly from the Athenian poros pediment, which, even if it had remained visible through the 6th century, did not survive the Persian destruction. No other similar Attic monuments were recorded or have survived. The idea could have been carried from Athens to Corinth through the small arts, but probably the best explanation is that there were other Corinthian explorations of the subject in plastic form during the Archaic and early Classical periods. One must look at the current archaeological record for other Corinthian Hydra representations falling between the latest vase paintings of *ca.* 580–570 B.C. and the Tile Works terracotta sculpture. The second piece from the Tile Works to be discussed here may help to lessen the gap.

This piece is a small fragmentary head of a mythological creature, preserving the top of the head and the right eye (Pl. 55:c).¹⁹ The top of the proper right eye is a pronounced double arch, its contours deepened with a knife; a deeply punched pupil lends it a fierce expression. Similarly shaped eyes can be seen in the Corinthian vase paintings of the Hydra.²⁰ Although griffins also show such eyes, the general conformation of the head seems serpentine, and the shape of the top of the head especially does not seem suited to a griffin. The top of the head is flattened, with a curving ridge in low relief running forward and terminating at the break in front of the right eye. At the broken left side there are traces of another ridge (see Pl. 55:d, top of head). The original pattern formed by these ridges is unclear, but they may have been intended to approximate the pattern of large plates on the head crowns of some actual snakes, or the bulging projections which sometimes occur above the eyes. Serpentine heads are not often represented in Greek art from the top, but an Attic black-figured neck-amphora in the Louvre has relief snakes seen from above flanking a gorgoneion.²¹ These serpentine heads show the small body scales interrupted on the crowns by a striking lobed pattern. The patterns of incised lines on the profile heads of the Hydras in the above-mentioned Corinthian vase paintings could mean something similar.

The smooth surface and clear definitions of the forms indicate that the piece was mold-made. The undersurface shows a fingerprint below the eye, presumably imprinted when the clay was pressed into the mold. Another piece of clay may originally have joined this surface, providing a lower eyelid and cheek. The fact that the head is moldmade is striking,

1973, pp. 79–82, with further references; most recently, see S. Karusu, "Zur Makron-Schale von der Akropolis," *AM* 98, 1983 (pp. 57–64), p. 60, note 16, with further references.

¹⁸ *Paralipomena*, p. 111, no. 37 bis; H. Mommsen, *Der Affekter*, Mainz 1975, pp. 108–109, no. 99, pl. 110.

¹⁹ Inv. no. SF-40-9 (MF-8731). Pres. L. 0.060, max. pres. W. 0.060 m.

²⁰ Amandry and Amyx (footnote 7 above), e.g. fig. 2, no. 13.

²¹ Louvre F 99, *ABV*, p. 228; *Paralipomena*, p. 107. See the good illustration in P. J. Connor, "'Spotted Snakes with Double Tongue.' An Unusual Gorgoneion Tondo," *AA (JdI)* 98, 1983 (pp. 23–31), p. 25, fig. 5, which contains a useful discussion of serpentine heads. There is also a red-figure dragon by Douris which shows curving flat folds of skin on its head, *ARV*², p. 437, no. 116; good illustration in P. Arias and M. Hirmer, *A History of Greek Vase Painting*, London 1962, pl. 147.

since it is unlikely that a mold would have been prepared unless the head had to be copied repeatedly, as in the case of terracotta figurines. The piece is unparalleled, however, in the very large collection of moldmade terracotta figurines at Corinth and is, moreover, very large for a figurine. A possible solution is to identify it as part of a sculptured serpentine creature with multiple heads, i.e. the Lernaean Hydra.

The fabric of the head is different from that of the body fragment, being fairly fine and soft throughout, greenish buff in color,²² without the core of coarser clay seen in the body. The application of painted decoration also differs. There are faint traces of white slip on the head, over which paint must have been applied after firing, no traces of which have been preserved. Although more common in terracotta figurines, this technique is also found in Corinthian terracotta sculpture of the first quarter of the 5th century B.C.²³

Even if the piece is to be identified as a Hydra's head, it is unlikely that it belonged to the same sculpture as the body fragment. Differences in technique and fabric could be explained on the grounds of suitability for different parts of the sculpture, but there is a difference in overall style as well. Specifically, the head shows a more linear, less plastic modeling than the body fragment, suggesting that it was made somewhat earlier than the body, probably in the first quarter of the 5th century. The treatment of the eye is not so clear a chronological indicator as might be expected. The incised eyeball and punched pupil are better known in Hellenistic terracotta sculpture,²⁴ the earlier works usually showing a painted eye.²⁵ The technique is not impossible earlier, however, as it is seen in the poros "Bluebeard" in Athens,²⁶ and certainly would have been an obvious technique for clay. Although the head was not found in a datable context like the body fragment, it was probably made in the earlier kiln of the Tile Works.

A question which is easier to ask than answer is whether these sculptures (or any of the other terracotta sculpture fragments from the Tile Works) were being prepared for buildings in Corinth itself or for export. As Corinth did not contain a pan-Hellenic sanctuary, there was no reason to prepare pediments for local treasury buildings, and so the only possibilities would be small shrines, perhaps heroa. For a heroon particularly, one of the Labors of Herakles would have been a suitable subject. While there is no specific building in Corinth, either recorded in the ancient literary sources or uncovered in excavation, to which these sculptures can be assigned, the reader's attention may be called to the slightly larger Temple A in the Peribolos of Apollo, as an example of the sort of small building which could have displayed pedimental sculpture of this approximate scale.²⁷

Since Corinth is known to have exported sculpture for architectural use, it is possible that successful versions of these commissions were sent away. In the present state of the

²² Munsell 5Y 8/2, with very sparse, very small dark inclusions.

²³ Cf. a bearded head from the racecourse area, C. K. Williams, II and P. Russell, "Corinth: Excavations of 1980," *Hesperia* 50, 1981 (pp. 1-44), pp. 31-33, no. 11.

²⁴ Cf. an early 2nd-century head of Aphrodite from Corinth, D. B. Thompson, "O Dea Certe," *AntK* 18, 1975, pp. 82-84.

²⁵ As in the Athena head (footnote 6 above).

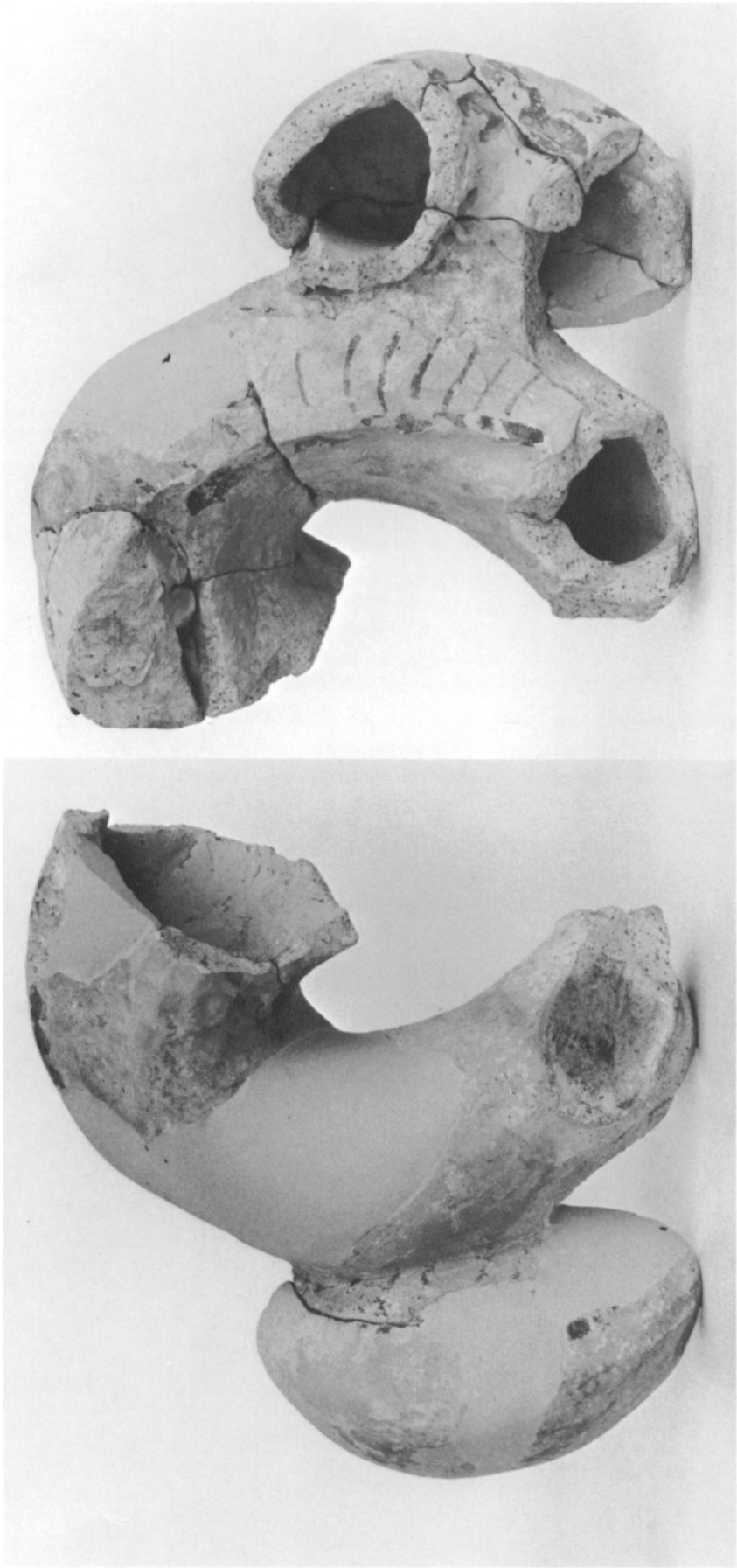
²⁶ The rendering of the eye is very clear in the illustration in Lullies and Hirmer (footnote 3 above), pl. I/II.

²⁷ R. Stillwell *et al.*, *Corinth*, I, ii, *Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass. 1941, pp. 4-16.

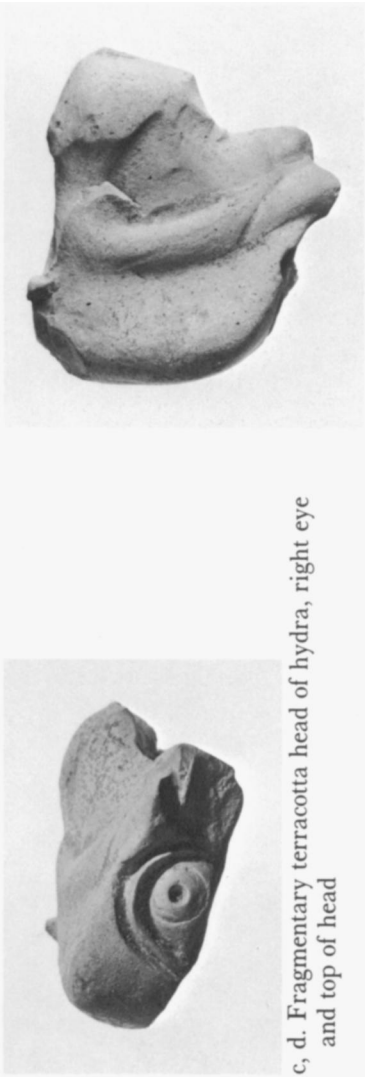
evidence, the only certain conclusion is that the production of terracotta architectural sculpture was still a thriving art in Corinth into the third quarter of the 5th century. The artisans who undertook such a technically difficult commission as a terracotta Hydra group in the round must have been ambitious as well as skilled, and if they were not breaking any new ground at this time, they were certainly, in the quality of design and execution, maintaining Corinth's reputation for manufactured products.

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a, b. Fragmentary terracotta hydra, front and rear views



c, d. Fragmentary terracotta head of hydra, right eye and top of head