

PREHISTORIC POTTERY FROM THE ISTHMIA¹

(PLATE 57)

A prehistoric site of some size must exist near the Isthmian sanctuary, since scattered prehistoric material was encountered in minute quantities in the excavations.

Within the area of the temple itself, about a dozen Mycenaean sherds were found, all of which appear to belong to the first and second Late Helladic periods. In the ancient dump to the north of the temple, a few Mycenaean sherds occurred in the lowest layers, and at the east end of this area a rather squat cup stem (IP 296) of greenish buff Ephyrean ware was found. A Mycenaean kylix stem (IP 100) was found in the water basin west of the Poseidon temple. The trial trench across the Theater also produced some prehistoric sherds, principally Early Helladic and a few Mycenaean. They were found just above virgin soil within the scene building, and had apparently been washed down from the higher levels, since the entire deposit was mixed.

On the Rachi, a handful of nondescript sherds which appear to be Neolithic and some pieces of obsidian were discovered in a crack in the rock on the highest part of the hill. The only other prehistoric object from this area was a Mycenaean kylix stem (IP 290), found a little below the highest point. The presence of prehistoric sherds on this hill had been reported previously, although apparently no great quantity was ever found.² It does not seem likely, however, that it can have been the site of a prehistoric settlement of any size, since the season's excavations laid bare the greater part of the top of the hill, and no prehistoric material except the few pieces mentioned above came to light. Although there is little depth of soil, it is unlikely that all traces of prehistoric occupation would have been removed by the later inhabitation. Obviously there is a prehistoric site at the Isthmia, but it must be sought for elsewhere than on this ridge.

The only prehistoric deposit of any size came to light in a trench cut across the gully to the northwest of the temple. For the greater part of its length, this trench yielded mixed sherds, from late Roman back through Corinthian, with a very few Geometric, Mycenaean, and Early Helladic. In the northwest end of the trench, how-

¹ Most of the work on this article was done while I was in Greece as a member of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Saul Weinberg and Professor Oscar Broneer for their valuable help and criticism.

² It is included by Blegen in his survey of prehistoric sites in the Corinthia (*Corinth*, I, p. 112; *A.J.A.*, XXIV, 1920, p. 8). He locates the prehistoric material "on the hill above the stadium." Of the two hills that qualify under this description, the Rachi must be the one meant, since the later rock cuttings described by Monceaux are mentioned in connection with it, and only the Rachi has rock cuttings of this sort.

ever, from a depth of about a half meter to a meter, the sherds, though mixed, were prehistoric only, Early Helladic through Mycenaean. The Mycenaean sherds, Late Helladic I and II, include a number of cup stems of the squat variety, two pieces from the rims of bowls with wavy line pattern, and a piece from the shoulder of a squat alabastron (Pl. 57, a, left half), and three pieces of Ephyrean ware (Pl. 57, a, 2nd row from right), with the usual floral patterns. The Middle Helladic period is represented by a number of matt-painted sherds (Pl. 57, a, right hand row). Early Helladic sherds were the most numerous, and included coarse ware, finer unpainted ware, and a quantity of red painted pieces.

From a depth of approximately a meter, only Early Helladic material was encountered, including some intact vases lying together in the upper part of the layer. Stereo, consisting of irregular ledges of soft rock, was reached at a depth of 1.30 m. to 1.50 m. Sherds and pieces of obsidian were found throughout this layer. The deposit does not appear to be undisturbed. Large stones and lumps of clay and pieces of conglomerate broken from the edge of the gully were found among the pottery, and the whole deposit appears to have slid down the side of the gully. On the other hand the material can not have traveled far from its original position, since so many vases remained intact. Two pieces of bone in an extremely decayed condition were found with the deposit, and it is possible that the pottery came from a grave group that had washed down the gully.

The better preserved pieces of pottery were the following:

1. Pl. 57, b. Large open bowl (IP 136).

H. 0.109 m., diam. 0.198 m.

The profile presents a continuous curve from rim to base. The rim is slightly incurving, the base somewhat convex; there is no foot. Tan fabric, hard and well baked, covered on both sides with a thin, light brown wash.

2. Pl. 57, b. Open bowl (IP 138).

H. 0.077 m., diam. 0.151 m.

Shape similar to No. 1. Incurving rim, slightly convex base, no foot. Pinkish tan fabric, fairly hard, traces of red wash on outside.

3. Pl. 57, b. Small open bowl (IP 122).

H. 0.048 m., diam. 0.096 m.

Straight flaring sides, flattened base, incurving rim. Tan fabric, fine but rather soft. No trace of wash or glaze.

4. Pl. 57, b, d. Sauceboat (IP 133).

H. 0.065 m., W. 0.095 m., preserved L. 0.128 m.

The shape is unusual. The body of the pot is oval, merging into a rudimentary spout, which lacks the flaring everted corners of the common type of sauceboat; nor does the spout rise above the level of the body to any great extent. There is no foot, the underside being slightly convex. The back part is missing, and no part of a handle is preserved. The fabric is fine, hard and well baked, with a gray core and slipped reddish buff surface mottled with gray.

5. Pl. 57, b. One-handled cup (IP 124).

H. 0.09 m., diam. 0.085 m.

Globular body narrowing at the neck and then turning out at the rim. Flattened base, no foot; vertical strap handle from widest part of body to rim. Reddish tan fabric, somewhat soft

and gritty; a brown wash unevenly applied and now mostly missing covered the outside and the upper half of the inside.

6. Pl. 57, d. One-handled cup (IP 131).

H. 0.078 m., diam. 0.066 m.

Shape similar to No. 5. Soft tan fabric, covered outside, and inside neck, with a thin streaky brown wash, now mostly disappeared.

7. Pl. 57, b. Spouted pitcher (IP 137).

H. 0.13 m., diam. 0.088 m.

Round body, fairly narrow neck, beak of spout not very pronounced. Slightly concave base, no foot; handle grooved in a twisted pattern and grooves filled with white matter. Soft grayish tan fabric, containing much grit. The outside and the inside of the neck are covered with light red glaze, of a dull quality, shading in some places to a grayish brown; much of the glaze has flaked off.

8. Pl. 57, c. Spouted pitcher (IP 128 a and b).

Pres. H. of body 0.097 m., est. H. of jug *ca.* 0.18 m., diam. 0.146 m.

Round body, flattened base, no foot. The

beak of the spout and most of the handle are missing, but the handle was grooved in a twisted pattern. Grooved decoration on the body in the form of groups of parallel lines running down the body of the jar from a line around the base of the neck. Soft reddish tan fabric, containing great quantities of grit. Outside covered with red glaze mottled in one place to dark brown, but nearly all flaked off.

9. Pl. 57, c. Round-bodied jar (IP 127).

H. 0.10 m., diam. 0.117 m.

Everted rim, flattened, slightly convex base, no foot. Very poor fabric, soft and flaky, with tan core, reddish tan surface. No trace of wash or glaze.

10. Pl. 57, e. Round-bodied jar (IP 135).

Pres. H. 0.131 m., diam. 0.153 m.

The pot is incomplete, but the shape is similar to No. 9. Fabric smooth, but rather soft, with grayish tan core and light red surface. Outside, and just inside the neck, covered with good reddish brown glaze, varying to purple and black in patches, thick and evenly applied.

In addition to the group of more or less intact pots, many Early Helladic sherds were found. The majority seem to be from open bowls, but a few are from closed pots, cups and pitchers of the type described above. The fabrics ranged from the grittiest type of coarse ware, crumbly and badly baked, through fine, hard, well-baked pieces. Red wash or glaze was the most usual type of surface covering, if there was any, although light brown washes and a thicker black paint also occur. There was a good deal of plain cream or tan ware of good fabric, but apparently unslipped and unpainted.

In spite of the absence of burnished wares, the pottery from this deposit belongs to the earliest part of the Early Helladic period. The larger bowls suggest Neolithic types; the smaller are typically Early Helladic, and can be paralleled at almost any mainland site. Elsewhere they are commonly found with feet, and the absence of raised feet is an indication of early date in the pottery of the Isthmia deposit.⁸

The beaked pitcher is a common Early Helladic shape, but the two examples

⁸ All the Early Helladic I pottery from Asine lacked feet (L. Frödin and A. Persson, *Asine*, p. 205).

listed above are interesting for the twisted handles.⁴ A beak-spouted jug with a twisted handle was found on Lesbos, at Thermi,⁵ in Town V, which appears, however, to correspond to the later part of Early Helladic. The grooved decoration on the larger Isthmia jug is similar to that on some island pieces, plain handled beak-spouted jugs from Syros, which also have groups of parallel lines descending from the neck.⁶

The most significant vase in the deposit is the sauceboat. The striking peculiarities of the shape have already been pointed out; the common characteristics of the standard sauceboat are here hardly developed at all. The vase from the Isthmia must belong to a very early stage in the development of the shape, the history of which is not clear. If there was a development on the mainland, it should have proceeded from the low, oval boats with horizontal spouts, to the high, round type, with flaring, almost vertical, spouts. These types, however, have been found side by side, rather than in a stratigraphical sequence; and the sauceboat, on the mainland, appears as a fully developed form. A single example comparable to the Isthmia vase is one from the same area. Among the pottery from an Early Helladic shaft grave at Corinth, there was an intact sauceboat-shaped vessel of early type.⁷ The spout, as in the Isthmia vase, is merely a forward projection of the body, and is not differentiated at all. The shape looks somewhat clumsy and asymmetrical. The vase has a large vertical handle at the back, and a tall narrow foot, hollow underneath. A vase from Zygouries is somewhat comparable to that from the Isthmia, but has a more developed spout.⁸

Vases very similar to the Isthmia specimen have been found in Crete, where the developed sauceboat type does not occur. Some undecorated vases of this shape from the large Early Minoan multiple burial at Pyrgos have oval bodies with simple spouts rarely rising far above the body of the pot, and small horizontal handles at the back.⁹ Two examples have no feet; a third has an extremely large, hollow, bell-shaped foot, about two-thirds the height of the pot itself. It is interesting to compare this with the sauceboat from Corinth.

A similar vase was found at Koumasa.¹⁰ It has a simple spout and base, but differs in having a vertical handle and a painted decoration of hatched triangles. An example from Christos has no handle.¹¹ A marble example from an Early Minoan II tomb at Mochlos has a more pronounced spout, which flares out at the end in a way

⁴ Such handles have been found on cups and open vessels at Tiryns (K. Müller, *Tiryns*, IV, p. 17, fig. 8, pl. XX, 15), and Eutresis (H. Goldman, *Eutresis*, p. 114, fig. 151, 3).

⁵ W. Lamb, *Thermi*, p. 90, fig. 32, no. 510.

⁶ N. Åberg, *Chronologie*, IV, pp. 85, 88, fig. 171; 'Εφ. 'Αρχ., 1899, pl. IX, 2.

⁷ Heermance and Lord, *A.J.A.*, I, 1897, p. 322, II, 7.

⁸ Blegen, *Zygouries*, p. 91, fig. 80, no. 320.

⁹ St. Xanthoudides, 'Αρχ. Δελτ., IV, 1918, pp. 144, 145, fig. 6, no. 20, fig. 7, nos. 36, 37.

¹⁰ Xanthoudides, *Vaulted Tombs of Mesara*, p. 38, pl. XXVII, no. 4277.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pl. XL, b.

similar to the mainland sauceboats.¹² A related group of Early Minoan pots from Gournia and Vasiliki is somewhat different in having a long, shallow body with an elongated base, a plain spout, and a very small horizontal handle at the back.¹³

A vase similar to those from Pyrgos was found in an Early Bronze chamber tomb at Lapithos, Cyprus, and was possibly an importation from Crete.¹⁴

In the Cyclades, similarly spouted vessels have been found. A large deep vase from Syros has a very small spout, horizontal handles on the sides, and a ledge handle at the back.¹⁵ Another vase from this island has a crude spout and a knob handle at the back.¹⁶ An example in marble, also from Syros, is closer to the Cretan examples, and stands on a very high foot.¹⁷ The Cycladic example most comparable to the Isthmia vase and to the Cretan spouted vessels comes from Amorgos.¹⁸ It has a small vertical handle, a flattened base, and a spout which smoothly continues the line of the oval body and rises slightly above the level of the rim.

Consideration of the above series of pots leads to the suggestion that the type of vase from which the sauceboat eventually developed originated in Crete, where the form remained more or less static and never became very common. It spread to the Cyclades, where it developed an elegant shape and elaborate spout. The preponderance of oval, rather than round, sauceboats in the islands is an indication of this. Ultimately the shape was transferred to the mainland of Greece, where it achieved its widest popularity, and became one of the most typical Early Helladic forms.

Cycladic influence is observable further in the Isthmia group of pottery, for example, in the beaked jugs. The sauceboat itself cannot be a Cycladic import, since its fabric is mainland. That the shape was imported there can be little doubt.

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¹² R. B. Seager, *Mochlos*, p. 51, fig. 22, VI. 3, pl. VI.

¹³ H. B. Hawes, *Gournia*, p. 56, fig. 37, 1; Seager, *Transactions of the University of Pennsylvania Museum*, II, part 2, 1907, pp. 116, 121, 122, fig. 5, a, b, c.

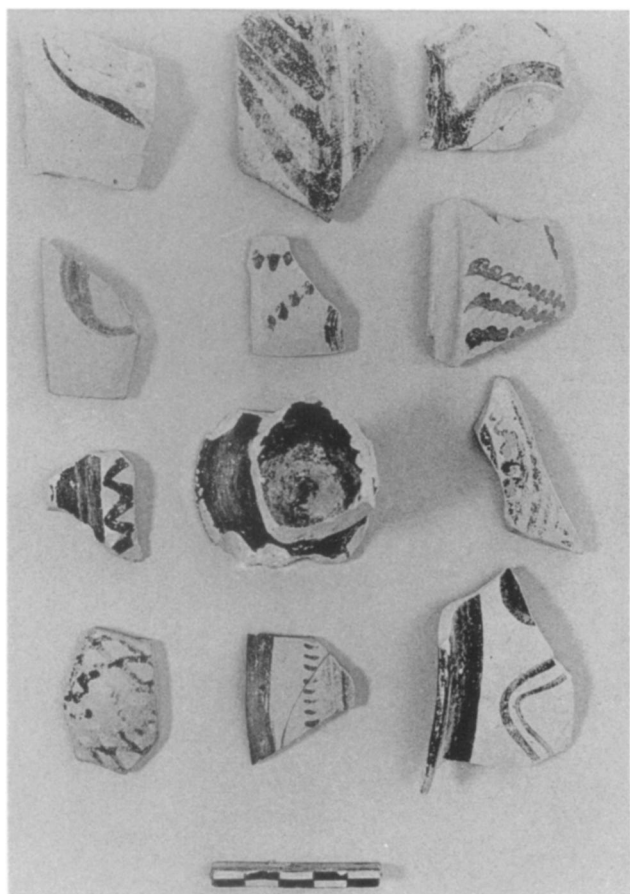
¹⁴ V. Grace, *A.J.A.*, XLIV, 1940, pp. 15, 16, note 1, fig. 9, 6B. 8.

¹⁵ Chr. Tsountas, 'Εφ. 'Αρχ., 1899, p. 94, pl. IX, no. 9.

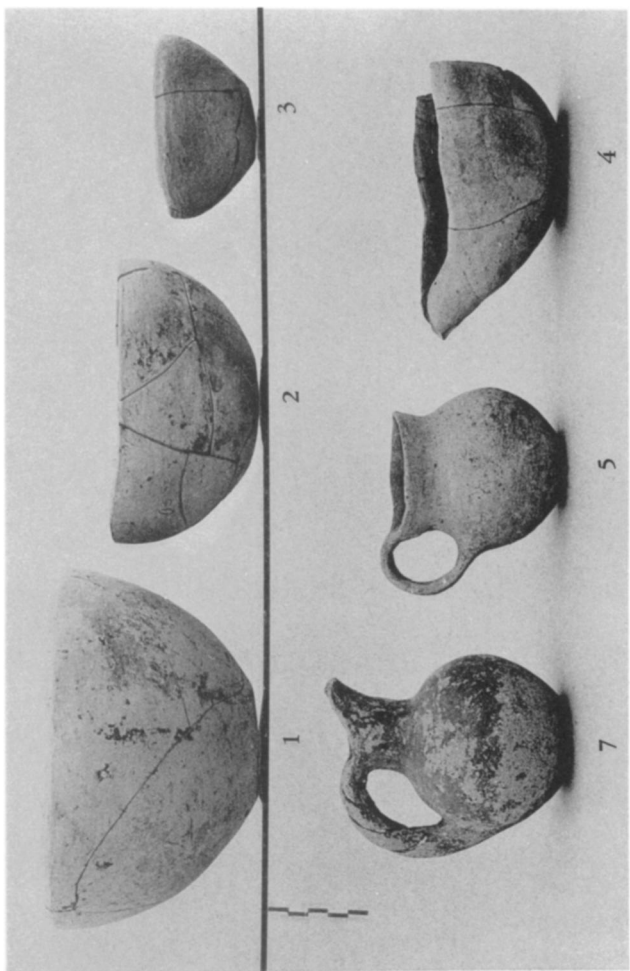
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

¹⁷ Åberg, *op. cit.*, p. 91, fig. 179.

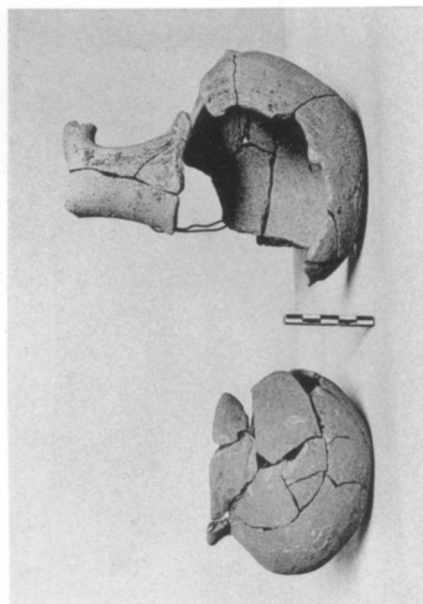
¹⁸ Tsountas, 'Εφ. 'Αρχ., 1898, p. 167, pl. IX, no. 7.



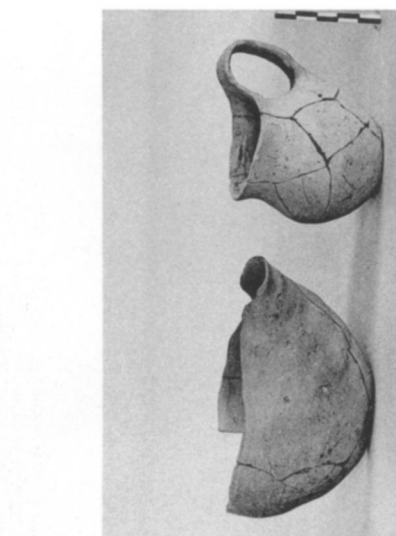
a. Middle and Late Helladic Sherds



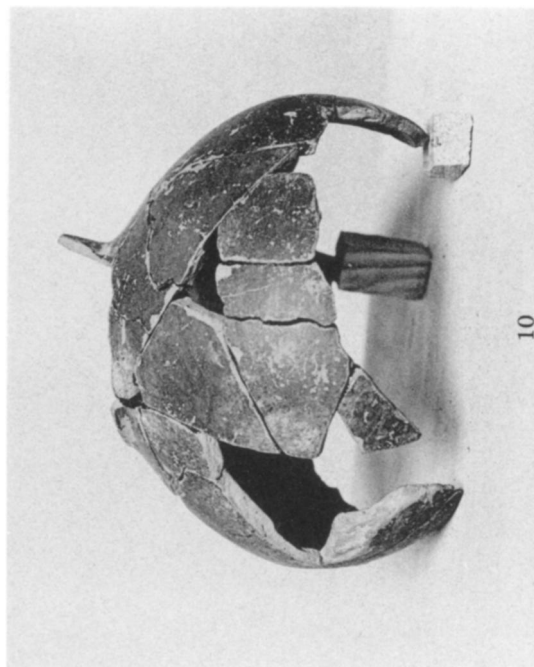
b. Early Helladic Pottery



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c. - e. Early Helladic Pottery



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