TEGEA II

INVESTIGATIONS IN THE SANCTUARY OF ATHENA ALEA 1990–94 AND 2004

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General Editor:
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The Norwegian Institute at Athens
Athens 2014
During the excavations in the northern sector of the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea, in all areas, a considerable quantity of bronze objects and fragments were found, mostly jewellery (pins, rings) and votive sheets. These are published by Mary Voyatzis in this volume.1

Less frequent and in poor condition are the fragments of bronze vessels; the fragments are generally very small and extremely fragile, made from very thin sheet.

Most of these fragments came from contexts with chronologically mixed materials, fills of the 4th century including materials from previous periods; consequently their date remains in most cases uncertain, between the 7th and the 4th century.2 A more precise stratigraphical date can be established only for the fragments coming from the stratigraphical units D7/34 and /66, where the material is chronologically homogeneous and datable to the second half of the 7th century.3

**Bowls**

The most frequent shape is the hemispherical bowl, made from very thin, hammered sheet, with a small, thicker rim of triangular cross-section and a more or less clearly hemispherical body. This type is attested by some fragments large enough for the shape to be recognized, and by a great number of very small fragments of rims with remains of the body attached. None of these fragments has any decoration.

These bowls are a fairly generic type, and because of their simplicity their parallels cover a long period of time and extensive geographic contexts. It is natural for vessels of this shape to be frequently attested in a sanctuary, because of their function as drinking or libation vessels. Within the Peloponnesian area immediate comparisons are found at Olympia.4

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1 See section ix.
2 See section iv (Tarditi), 59–68. – All dates in this section are understood as B.C.
3 For these contexts, see the account in section iv (Tarditi), 78–80.
4 Furtwängler 1890, 96 no. 668, pl. 35.
cross-section slightly turned inwards; the body begins straight. Below the rim there are two small suspension holes. Dimensions: rim Th 0.15, wall Th 0.1, L 2.9 cm.

Inv. no. 4330 (Tex no. 875). Location: D7/66 (7th-century debris layer).

Date: second half 7th c.

**Rim fragments, not catalogued**

From the stratigraphical units C6/30; C6-C7/79a; C6/80; C7/80a; C7/89; C7/92a (3 frgs); D5/02; D6, north-west corner (2 frgs); D7/14 (Tex no. 108); D7/14 (4 frgs); D7/14 – E7/19; D7/65; D7/66 (7 frgs); D9-D10 (4 frgs); E6/12 (Tex no. 156); E6/12 (Tex no. 157); E6/18 (Tex no. 144); E6/28; E6/37 (Tex no. 635); E7/20 (Tex no. 323).

**Phialai**

Of Oriental origin, the phialai are among the most frequently attested votive offerings in the Greek sanctuaries, because of their function as specific vessels for libations and sacrifices. They are attested from the 7th century onwards.

From the excavations in the northern sector of the sanctuary three examples of this shape have been recovered: two plain phialai (BrN-V 9–10) and one mesomphalic (BrN-V 11). The mesomphalic phiale is only partially preserved; it was simple, with a moulding surrounding the hemispherical omphalos and the plain basin. The other fragments are very small, just preserving a segment of the rim with part of the body; the presence on both of a zigzag decoration, very lightly incised on the surface, suggests that they could belong to the phialai shape, trying to imitate in a simplified way the most common decoration, of vertical lines or schematic lotus flowers that often characterize these vessels.

This type of vessel has recently been studied systematically, as an attempt to clarify the general development of the shape and the different productions. It should be noted that the simple shape makes this kind of research very difficult.

The phialai are widely attested in many Peloponnesian sanctuaries, and as they were used for libations at private banquets they can also be found in dwelling contexts. The phialai from Tegea are very fragmentary, so it is difficult to date them and to suggest a production area. For the mesomphalic example, similar mouldings are found on a phiale from Votonosi and on one from Olynthos, so that a period between the second half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th century may be suggested.

**BrN-V 9** Fragment of body and rim

Small rim with triangular cross-section, slightly turned inwards; rectilinear body decorated with zigzag engravings. Dimensions: H max. 1.7, W 2.9 cm.

Inv. no. 553. Location: C7/105 (second layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

**BrN-V 10** Fragment of body and rim

Small rim with triangular cross-section, just turned inwards; rectilinear body. 0.8 cm below the rim the body is decorated with thin zigzag engravings. Dimensions: rim Th 0.2, wall Th 0.05, W 2.9, H max. 2.6 cm.

Inv. no. 3862 (Tex no. 398). Location: D7/14 (first layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

**BrN-V 11** Mesomphalic phiale

Preserved are two joining pieces of the bottom, part of the omphalos and some body fragments; no fragments of the rim. The omphalos is surrounded by a moulding. Dimensions: D of the omphalos 4.6, wall Th 0.1 cm.

Inv. no. 3853 (Tex no. 389). Location: E7/31 (second layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

Date: second half 5th – first half 4th c.

**Miniature vessels**

Among the small bronze objects recovered during the excavation there were some miniature vessels. Most of them were probably phialai, although the difference from the bowl shape is not always easily recognized.

All the fragments are made from thin hammered sheet, with just one exception (BrN-V 16), which is probably cast.

The presence of miniature vessels is quite normal in a sanctuary, since they were very common and cheap votive gifts. The shapes are also convenient for this context, as they are mostly phialai.

**BrN-V 12** Miniature bowl

Complete. Plain rim turned outwards; hemispheric body. Small, rectangular handle with suspension hole. Dimensions: wall Th 0.05, D 1.5 cm.

Inv. no. 3553 (Tex no. 82). Location: E6/17 (first layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

**BrN-V 13** Miniature phiale fragment

Partially preserved; round wall, flat bottom. Dimensions: D 2.4 cm.

Tex no. 599. Location, F. no.: C6-C7/71e-18 (first layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

**BrN-V 14** Miniature phiale fragment

Partially preserved; small plain rim turned outwards, flat bottom. Dimensions: D 2.5 cm.
Fragments of metal vases from the northern sector

T II.xi Fragments of metal vases from the northern sector

BrN-V 15 Miniature phiale fragment Pl. 2
Partially preserved; flat bottom with small omphalos, rounded body. Dimensions: D 3 cm.
Tex no. 698. Location, F. no.: C7/107-4 (first layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

BrN-V 16 Miniature phiale Pl. 2
Complete, probably cast. Rim with small, dotted decoration; straight wall, convex bottom with omphalos. Dimensions: D 2.2, H 0.7 cm.
Inv. no. 3798 (Tex no. 334). Location: E7/20 (second layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

Podanipter basin

This type of object, which is frequently found in Greek sanctuaries, is attested at Tegea by only one piece, the handle fragment BrN-V 17. The curvilinear course of the bottom part of the rod and the round indentation where it starts to curve indicate that this knob is the lateral end of the handle of a podanipter basin. The actual handle would have been semicircular, either decorated or plain.

Fragments from podanipter basins are found in great number among the bronze vessels from sanctuaries as well as from tombs.10 The fragment from Tegea has exact parallels with two semicircular handles ending in lateral knobs, from Athens and Delphi.11 Handles with such lateral ends projecting over the rim are widely attested also in a more elaborate shape, with the handle composed of two facing animals.12 All these examples are Greek products; the oldest ones are datable at the end of the 6th century, but most are from the early 5th, while the examples with more elaborate vegetal decoration can be dated to the second half of the 5th or the beginning of the 4th century.13 The piece from Tegea, with a plain surface of the knob, can be dated to the first half of the 5th century.

BrN-V 17 Fragment of a handle from a podanipter Pl. 2
Cast knob with hemispherical head and prominent central button; the rod has a circular cross-section and a ring below the knob. The preserved end is flat, to be joined with the basin; where the rod becomes flat there is a semicircular indentation corresponding to the rim of the basin. Dimensions: knob D 2.1, rod D 0.9, H 6.2 cm.
Inv. no. 3787 (Tex no. 321). Location: E7/20 (second layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).
Date: first half 5th c.

Handles

Since handles are usually cast, they are generally better preserved in the soil than the very thin body walls which have only been hammered.

The examples found during the Tegea excavations belong to different kinds of vessels.

The fragment BrN-V 18 is very unusual: it consists of a cast rod with two prominent rings, where the handle was originally inserted. Of the handle only a small fragment is preserved, from which it is possible to suggest that it had an “omega” shape. The rod was fixed to the basin with two small nails, one of which is preserved. Although the piece has no exact parallels, it may be suggested that it belonged to a basin or some similar shape.

The simple semicircular handle BrN-V 19 is not typical of any specific shape and could, because of its dimensions and the joints, belong to a simple bowl or a small basin.

The handle BrN-V 20 has a U-shape and was joined to a vessel with small, hammered nails, in such a way that its position against the body of the vase can be determined. The shape of the handle and its horizontal position suggest that the vessel might be a two-handled cup, such as a kotyle.

BrN-V 18 Handle Pl. 2
Handle fragment originally of “omega” shape. The joint is cast, of rectangular shape with two prominent rings for the insertion of the handle; simple ribs decorate the surface and the ends. Dimensions: L 8.1, H 1.4 cm.
Tex no. 783. Location, F. no.: C7/113-5 (first layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

BrN-V 19 Handle Pl. 2
Small semicircular handle made from a rod with square cross-section. Dimensions: W 3.8, rod Th 0.4 cm.
Inv. no. 4333 (Tex no. 878). Location: D7/66 (7th-century debris layer).
Date: second half 7th c.

BrN-V 20 Handle Pl. 2
Small handle of U-shape, made from a rod with circular cross-section, round and flat ends. The small nails joining the handle to the vessel are preserved, and at one end a small fragment of the vase sheet remains. Dimensions: rod D 0.4, W 4.1, H 2.2 cm.
Inv. no. 3865 (Tex no. 401). Location: E7/31 (second layer with bronze objects, Late Classical/mixed).

Shafts

Only one fragment of a shaft has been found, which because of its long, rectangular shape and the profile certainly might belong to a patera or a strainer. The shaft is very simple, without any indication of the palmette or duck-head decoration that is a typical feature in this kind of vessels. An inscription IEPA is incised on the upper surface, indicating that the vessel was originally part of the sacred furniture of the sanctuary.

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10 For a careful review of this shape see Tarditi 1996, 126–37.
BrN-V 21

Rectangular sheet with slightly concave long sides, becoming wider at one extremity; the opposite one is curving. The inscription **IEPA** is incised on the upper side. Dimensions: L 8.4, W 1.7–2.1, Th 0.2 cm.

Inv. no. 3803 (Tex no. 339). Location: E7/23 (layer with marble chips, Late Classical/mixed).

**Spools**

This category is also represented by only one example: a cast bronze spool with beaded decoration. Since there are no holes at the extremities, it was not connected with a handle; thus it was probably welded to the rim of the vessel only as a decoration.

Such bronze elements can be found on vessels of different shape. As decorations, the spools are widely attested on the rims of lebêtes and basins\(^\text{14}\) and also on a group of thymiateria with hemispherical basins and tripod bases,\(^\text{15}\) probably of Corinthian production.

For the spool from Tegea, the absence of any other indications and the variety of vessels with which it may be connected do not allow a precise chronological and geographical definition. In a general way, the period of the 6th and the 5th centuries may be suggested.

BrN-V 22

Spool of cast bronze, with the extremities slightly widened and decorated with some rings. The body of the spool is decorated with four beads, each separated by a couple of rings indicated by very small strokes imitating the beaded decoration. There are no visible traces of the soldering to the vessel, which might be a basin, a lebes or a thymiaterion. Dimensions: D 1.3, L 4.3 cm.

Inv. no. 3907 (Tex no. 444). Location: E7/32 (second pebble floor, Archaic).

Date: early 6th to late 5th c.

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\(^{14}\) Cfr. an example from Ambelokipi, Athens: P. Amandry, “Collection P. Cannelloupolous: Lébèis de bronze,” *BCH* 95, 1971, 608, fig. 11.


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**Conclusions**

All the materials recovered are weakly characterized, both by shape and by the almost complete absence of decoration. This greatly reduces the possibility of reaching exact conclusions on the chronology and the place of production of each piece.

All the shapes that could be recognized are very simple, and are mostly bowls and basins. These were very common in the equipment of Greek sanctuaries and were frequently offered as votive gifts.

Judging from the fragments, closed shapes such as oinochoai or hydriai seem to be completely absent. Any meaningful decoration, such as appliques, is also missing.

All the fragments are very simply made, mostly from thin hammered sheet. Such objects were possibly created by local workshops, temporary or itinerant and very simply structured; they may have been active only on special occasions like religious celebrations, when they would produce simple objects for the visitors of the sanctuary. There is good evidence for such temporary activity of metal workers in the immediate vicinity of the Geometric cult buildings, while they were standing,\(^\text{16}\) and this evidence may be relevant also for the following Late Archaic and Early Classical periods, when probably most of the bronze vessels are to be dated. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that such objects were imported from other centres of production, or that there was a local production also of more complicated vessels. Such products are attested by the podaniper handle and the spool, which could only have been produced by a workshop equipped also for casting.

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**Literature:**


Robinson 1941 = D.M. Robinson, *Olynthus X, Metal and minor miscellaneous finds, An original contribution to Greek life*, Baltimore 1941.


\(^{16}\) See *Tegea I*, section ii (Nordquist), 157–78.
Plate 1. Fragments of bronze vessels (BrN-V 1–10).
Plate 2. Bronze vessels from the northern sector (BrN-V 11–22).