

ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL BRONZE VESSELS FROM THE IRON AGE CEMETERY OF BOROVA (ALBANIA): A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

Abstract: The cemetery of Borova located in the region of Kolonja (south-east of Albania), had around 49 graves which contained rich inventories of pottery, jewellery, weapons, etc. These artifacts, which date mainly in the late Iron Age, i.e. around 6th-5th centuries BC, bear witness to the intensive exchanges in local productions with northern Greece. The typology of some tombs is closely associated with the princely graves of the Balkans as best evidenced by the richness of the inventory.

The discovery of one bronze *olpe*, two bronze *phiales* and one bronze *cylix* demonstrates the presence of Greek Archaic and classical imports of bronze vases in the Illyrian territory. The geographical vicinity enabled for an active trade in the region. This was possibly the case between pastoral societies which did not trade highly valuable goods, as in the case of tombs in Trebenishte and Novi Pazar, but more modest findings in bronze. These artifacts indicate an Iron Age society in transition to the Archaic and classical period with the use of valuable bronze vases by the Illyrian chiefs as the first signs of their 'Hellenization'

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INTRODUCTION

The cemetery of Borova is located in the region of Kolonja, in the south-eastern part of Albania (Fig. 1). This region possesses a rich archaeological heritage, starting from prehistoric to the medieval period and a strategic geographical position as ancient roads linking south-eastern Albania with Greece and Macedonia passed by here.

The flat cemetery of Borova had approximately 49 graves with different funerary rites, such as inhumation and incineration and with different tomb constructions (Fig. 2). This flat cemetery represents an interesting case of Albania's funerary customs as this period's main funerary rite was the tumulus. The graves feature rich inventories of pottery, jewellery, weapons, and so on. These artifacts date the cemetery mainly to the late Iron Age¹, around 6th-5th centuries BC, attesting, apart from the local productions, for strong trade links with Northern Greece². The typology of some tombs can be

¹ The chronological segment of the sixth–fifth centuries BC in most part of ancient Albania is considered as Iron Age period, beside the Greek colonies of Dyrrachium and Apollonia where this time frame is known as the archaic one, as elsewhere in the Greek world.

² ALIU 1994, 5-57.

closely associated with the princely graves of the Balkans as attested by the richness of their inventory.

Metallic vases are very rare in this cemetery and it shall be mentioned that they were found in graves nos. 2, 19, 32 and sporadically outside the graves. The main purpose of this paper is to introduce a typological and interpretative study of these objects to which no particular attention was paid in the original publication.

THE GRAVES

Grave no. 2, of a simple-cut type, inhumation rite, wherein one of the *phiales* was found, is one of the richest of the cemetery (Fig. 3); its inventory consists of a great number of jewellery in bronze, mainly pins, brooches and lots of bracelets, two pots in ceramic and a *phiale* in bronze (around 70 objects in total).

Grave no. 19 (Fig. 4) is a stone-lined construction, inhumation type, which inventory consisted of a locally produced *oinochoe* that imitates Ionic productions, a *skyphos* and a *cylix* with black glaze, most probably of Greek imports, and a *phiale* in bronze³.

Grave no. 32 (Fig. 6), of the simple-cut type and inhumation rite had a rich inventory which consisted mainly of weaponry items (spades, lances, knives, machete and a scepter), a bracelet, a ceramic *oinochoe* and a bronze *cylix*.

THE PHIALES

Phiales are of a shallow half circle shape with a central boss or *omphalon* (Fig. 3/8 and Fig. 4/1). The decoration extends from the *omphalos* to the rim and consists of a chain-shape tongue pattern connected at the base by a wavy double line stem (unfortunately it was impossible to identify the *phiales* during the search undertaken in the storage of the Institute of Archaeology in Korça). They are manufactured by hammering with the decoration in *repousse*.

This type, according to Lushey's classification⁴, is known as lotus *phiale* and is very well known in the Greek sanctuaries and the funerary contexts⁵. *Phiale* as a vase was initially a production of the 7th century BC Near East, and later around the middle of the 6th until the 4th century BC, became popular in Greece, Macedonia and Thrace, with one of the main centres of production being Corinth⁶.

The exemplars of Borova, especially the one in grave no. 19 (Fig. 4/1), based on the typology and the inventory of the grave, date back to around the 5th-4th centuries BC, given that it was found together with the black glaze drinking vases which, in turn, date back to the same period. Meanwhile, the other example found in grave no. 2 (Fig. 3/8) is dated to around the 6th-5th centuries BC, given that it was found in association with jewellery and ceramics dated mainly to this period. They seem to be imports from northern Greece, taking into account their rarity not only in Kolonja, but throughout Albania too⁷.

The *phiale* is the vase of libation *par excellence*. It used

³ ALIU 1994, 25-27.

⁴ LUSCHEY 1939, 121-128.

⁵ LUSCHEY 1939, 121-124; PAYNE/DUNBABIN/BLAKEWAY 1940, 148; ARCHIBALD 1998, 233-236.

⁶ PAYNE/DUNBABIN/BLAKEWAY 1940, 149; ARCHIBALD 1998, 31, 177.

⁷ VESELI 2014, 189-190: only five exemplars have been found in the entire country.

to be held with the palm outstretched and the middle finger reaching into the exterior depression. The inventory of tomb no. 19 (Fig. 4) demonstrates of such use. The *phiale* used for libation is associated with the *oinochoe* in ceramic, which was the most frequent type of vase used to pour out liquid offerings into the *phiale*. Indeed, we are probably dealing with vases used in special occasions such as, the black glazed *skyphos* and *cylix* for drinking wine, and *phiale* for libation or other drinking purposes.

The *phiale* found in grave no. 2 was probably used for the same purposes. The inventory (Fig. 3) indicates of a person of high status, who used valuable jewellery and valuable bronze vases for libation rites.

THE CYLIX

The *cylix* has a half spherical body, a horizontal shoulder and a distinct leg in a conic shape (Fig. 6/8). It has two short vertical handles in a stripe shape which rise over the embouchure, fixed with small nails on the rim and on the shoulder.

Cylixes have been in use starting from the 6th to the 3rd centuries BC and belong to different typologies, according to the shape of the body and of the handles⁸. The example in case seems to be an imported one that does not find many parallels outside the country⁹ and none in Albania. The associated material, in particular the ceramic *oinochoe* which is highly reminiscent of the Archaic Greek pottery, suggests of a date around the first half of the 6th century BC.

The *cylix* represents a vase that was used for drinking wine, as it is observed in many representations in painted ceramic. It was usually discovered in different archaeological contexts and was associated with other service vessels such as *oinochoes*, *situlae*, etc.¹⁰ In the context of this grave, the only vase which it can be associated with is a ceramic *oinochoe* of local production that was used to carry liquids; these were then served in the *cylix*.

The inventory of grave no. 32 (javelins, spears, knives, machetes, and scepter), a full warrior's panoply (Fig. 6), suggests the presence of a military person, most probably a chief given the presence of the scepter which, in most cases, defines the graves of the most important people of the community. It was not uncommon for a chief member of the society to use bronze vessels for his services.

THE OINOCHOE

The *oinochoe* or *olpe* (Fig. 5) was a sporadic find in the cemetery (outside the graves) and is characterized by a squat-globular body, short-tapering neck with oval embouchure and a reverted rim (Dimensions: h.: 18cm; diam. rims: 9.5 cm; diam. of body: 14 cm; diam. of base: 8.5 cm). The vertical handle has a leaf-shape inferior attachment, whereas the superior part is finished with two *rotelles* and schematic animal heads.

This type is studied by J. Vocotopoulou, who dates it back to around the 5th-4th centuries BC¹¹. This type of vessel has two variants: one with a leaf-shape handle attachment,

⁸ SIDERIS 2000, 11.

⁹ FILOW 1927, 10, abb. 9: similar *cylix*.

¹⁰ SIDERIS 2000, 11-17; VESELI 2013, 212-213: for the Albanian context.

¹¹ VOCOTOPOULOU 1975.

and the other with a leonine *protome*. It is widely spread in the northern part of Greece, Epirus, but was also found in Olynthus, Corinth¹² and in southern Italy¹³. It shall be emphasised that the examples from Italy are simpler and less decorated than the Greek counterparts. The main centre of production for this type was Corinth, as by the fact that similar examples in ceramic were quite common there; moreover, the leaf motif and the *protome* leonine, as handle attachments, were also quite popular in Corinth¹⁴.

The artifacts from Borova might be either a Corinthian or Epirote production, given the rarity of this type in Albania, wherein only two more examples, besides the one from Borova, are found: one in Vithkuq (near Korça), with a leaf-shape handle attachment and the other, in Amantia, with a *protome* leonine handle attachment¹⁵.

The function of this vessel, based in similar examples found in funerary contexts, is related to table services, given the round embouchure which serves more for stocking or bathing, rather than for pouring out liquids. In spite of the plain floral and the zoomorphic decoration or its total absence, the material in bronze indicates for a luxury-type vase. Unfortunately, in the case of the vase from Borova, it is difficult to identify its function, due to the absence of associated materials, since we are dealing with a sporadic finding outside the graves.

CONCLUSIONS

The discovery of one *olpe*, one *kylix* and two *phiales* in bronze is clear evidence of the presence of imported Archaic and Classical Greek bronze vases in the Illyrian territory. The use of bronze vases was not very common among southern Illyrians during the Archaic period, although their presence is evidenced by the necropolis of Trebenishte, Novi Pazar and elsewhere in the central Balkans where, besides from local productions, many imported bronze vases were found as well¹⁶. The material culture of the cemetery of Borova bears some similarities with that of Trebenishte cemetery and, many of the different types of objects it contained, display analogies with those found in the eastern and central part of the Balkans. Bronze vases in these necropolises were considered as exchange or status gifts and were often perceived as what the barbarians, in this context the Illyrians understood of 'Hellenism'¹⁷.

The *oinchoe* of Borova, as mentioned above, displays strong analogies with the counterparts of Vitsa. This is due to geographical vicinity which enabled for active trade in the region, probably between pastoral societies which did not trade highly valuable goods, like in the case of the tombs of Trebenishte and Novi Pazar, but more modest findings in bronze.

The *phiales*, on the other hand, which belonged to the simple typology of lotus *phiale*, display many analogies with

the Corinthian production, therefore extending the trade map of the Iron Age population of Borova; same applies to other categories of findings, such as the bronze *cylix*, attic *cantharos* and *skyphos* with black glaze, used for table services. In this context, it should be underlined that even the local ceramic production of this period used to imitate Greek ceramic vases¹⁸.

It shall be as well emphasized that these bronze vases were found in the richest contexts of the cemetery: grave no. 2, namely, had around 70 objects, whereas grave no. 32 is, most probably, the grave of one of the chiefs of the community, as the presence of an iron spectre suggests.

To sum up, these artifacts reflect a late Iron Age society transitioning to the Archaic and Classical period. The use of valuable bronze vases by the Illyrian chiefs can be interpreted as an attempt to imitate, in customs and in status, their 'Hellenized' counterparts.

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- ¹² ROBINSON 1941: tab. LV, no. 661; DAVIDSON 1942, tab. 49, no. 522-523; VOCOTOPOULOU 1975, 755.
- ¹³ TARDITI 1996, 166.
- ¹⁴ ROLLEY 1963, 468; ANDRIOMENOU 1975, 556; VOKOTOPOULOU 1975, 755.
- ¹⁵ VESELI 2014, 309-310.
- ¹⁶ FILOW 1927; VASIĆ 1983, 2002; ROLLEY 1983a, 735: these bronze vessels are absent on the Adriatic Sea shores.
- ¹⁷ ROLLEY 1983, 132.
- ¹⁸ ALIU 1991, 54-55.

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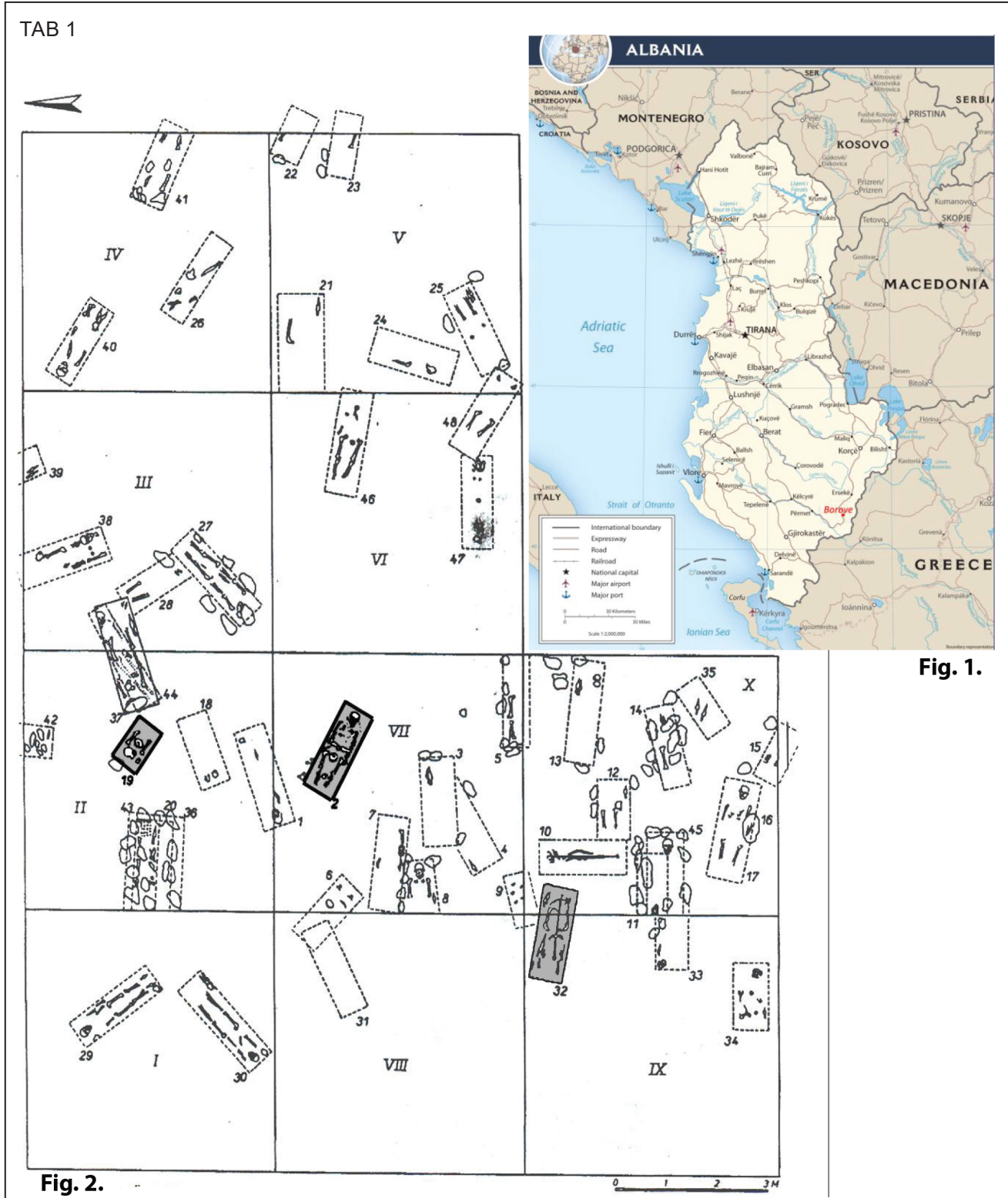
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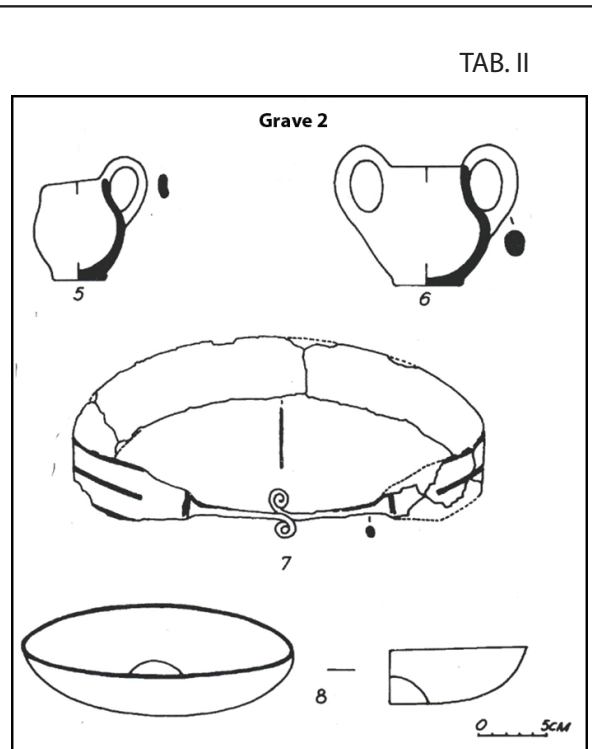
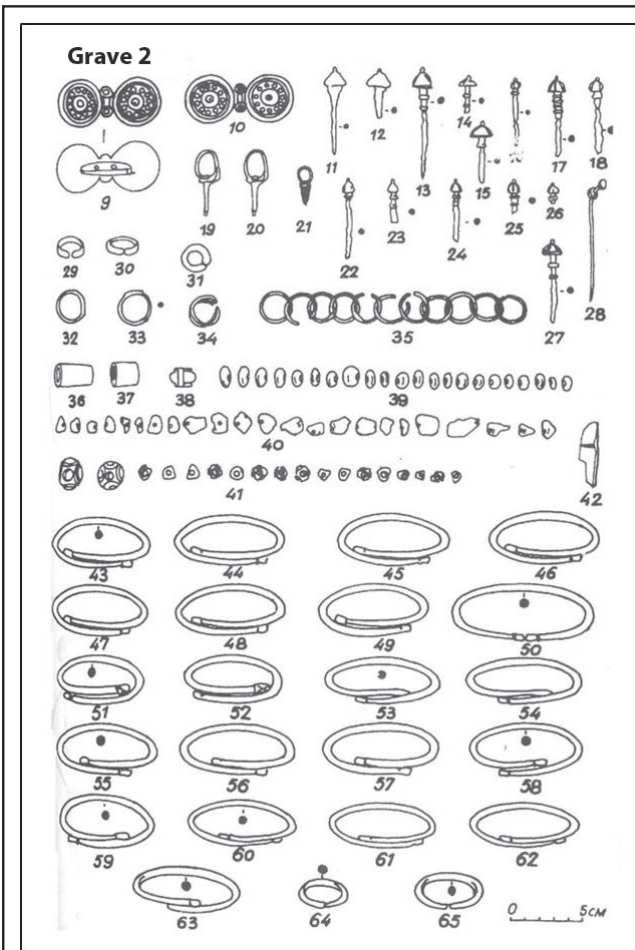


Fig. 3

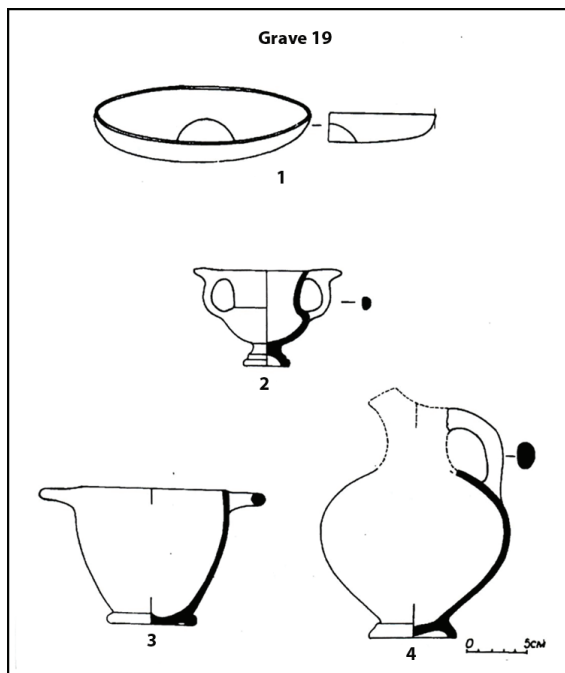


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5



Fig. 3. Grave 2 (After Aliu 1994, p. 60-61, Tab. I-II); Fig. 4. Grave 19 (After Aliu 1994, p. 68, Tab. IX); Fig. 5. Oinochoe or olpe

Grave 32

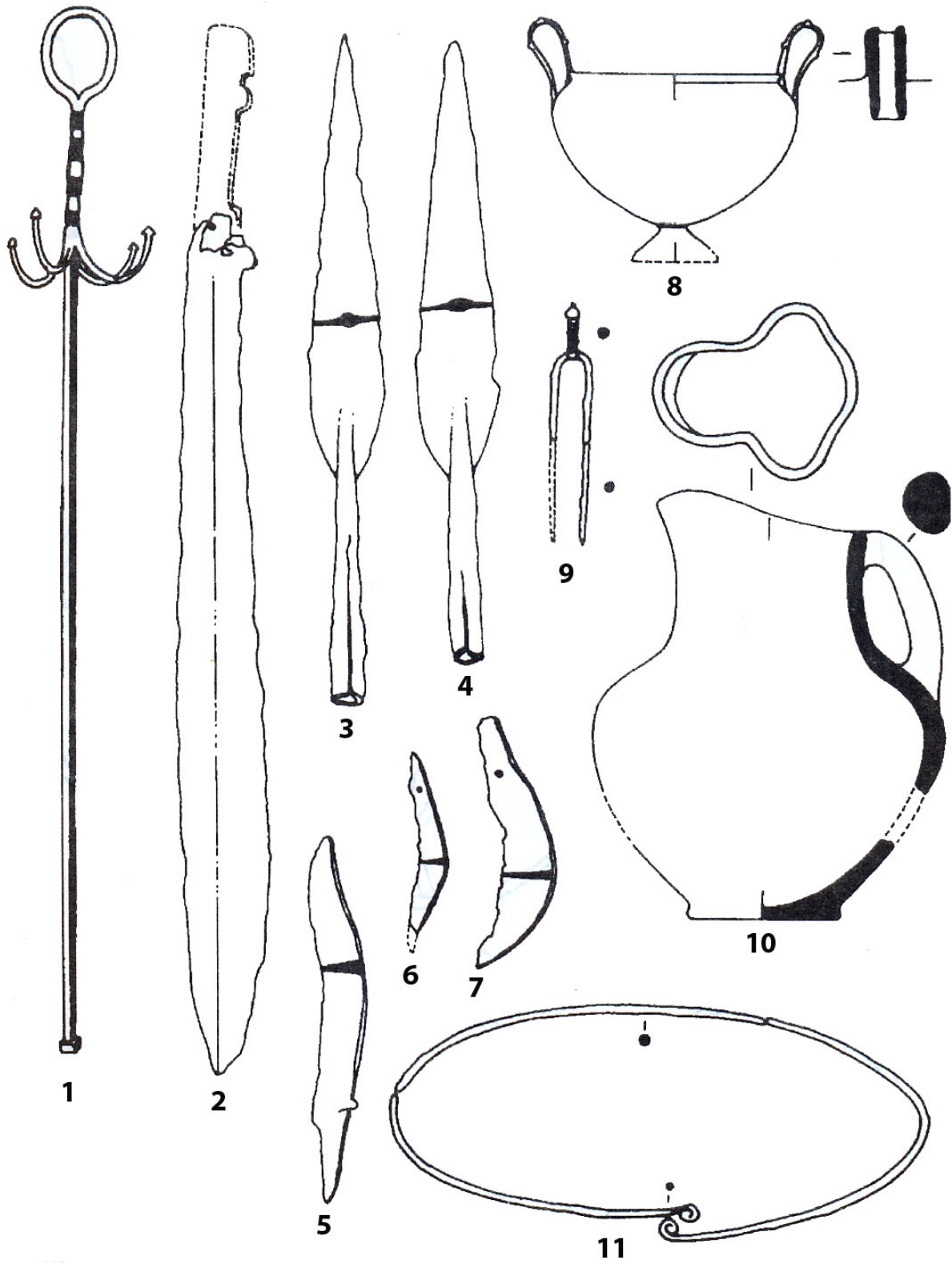


Fig. 6.

Fig. 6. Grave 32 (After Aliu 1994, p. 73, Tab. XIV)