

GREY POTTERY FROM THE LATE CLASSICAL/EARLY HELLENISTIC PERIOD OLBIA NECROPOLIS BASED ON MATERIALS FROM THE HERMITAGE MUSEUM

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to present examples of ordinary undecorated grey pottery discovered in Olbian necropolis. Nowadays these pieces can be found in Hermitage museum. These materials date from Late Classical/Early Hellenistic period. They were discovered in excavations carried out at the end of the 19th– beginning of the 20th centuries. Older studies focused especially on ceramics discovered inside the settlement. This is why a complex analysis of funerary finds from the Olbian necropolis had to complete these studies. The most frequent shapes in the excavated graves are: fish-plates, jugs, small lekythoi, amphorae and small bowls.*

Pottery is the material found on a larger scale than any other which is always the object of scholars' special interest. These works enable scholars to resolve such issues as the emergence and development of trade relations between various parts of the Ancient World and the time when colonies appeared. Ordinary undecorated pottery is important because it was mainly used for everyday domestic purposes in view of its relative cheapness in comparison with painted pottery.

In recent years, from amidst the vast mass of undecorated pottery, grey pottery has attracted the closest attention from scholars.

The first main types of grey and red pottery from the Hellenistic period were singled out from the materials originating from the excavations at Olbia in 1935 and 1936 and these samples were also used for chemical and technical studies¹. This combination of various methods for investigating pottery made it possible to obtain the most significant results so far. It was noted that vessels of identical shape were manufactured from both red and grey clay, which was a result of the

¹ KNIPOVICH 1940, p. 129; KUL'SKAYA 1940, p. 171.

technical features of the firing process. Yet the quantity of grey pottery vessels and the variety of shapes used was far less than in the case of red pottery vessels. It was also difficult to reconstruct the vessels reliably in view of their fragmentary nature.

In order to introduce more precision into the results of this research, it is necessary to include materials from the necropolis in the study as well.

In the Hermitage Museum, materials from excavations undertaken by I. E. Zabelin and V. G. Tizengauzen in 1873 were preserved, and so were materials from V. N. Yastrebov's excavations in 1894, Ur. A. Kulakovski in 1900 and those of B. V. Farmakovskii in 1901-1914². The main place for burials at that time was the territory north of the Northern Ravine. At that time the territory west of the Hares Ravine was also being used for burials. More than two hundred burial complexes could be dated to the Late Classical - Early Hellenistic Period³.

Only in 17 of the burial complexes simple grey pottery vessels had been found. Materials from 11 of the burial complexes have been stored in the Hermitage Museum. The simple grey pottery from burials included fish-plates, jugs, small *lekythoi*, *amphorae* and small cups.

Fish-plates were found in two of the burial complexes. In 1902 a grave with a side-chamber was found – grave No. 74, which had a floor of mud bricks and contained a large number of grave goods: a black glaze *kylix*, a fish-plate and three small flasks, a coin and an *amphora* with a small toe. The fish-plate was on a ring-foot (**Fig. 1**). The edge was turned outwards and was decorated with two incised bands. The edge of the small central bowl was curved and rose up above the surface of the plate. Round it there was an indented band. On the outside, the plate was covered with a dull and dense dark-grey glaze. The inside was reserved and on its surface small mica flakes could be seen. The surface of the vessel was rough and slightly uneven. Plates of this shape were typical for the Late Classical – Early Hellenistic period⁴. Similar fish-plates were found in levels from the 3rd-2nd century B. C.⁵ B. V. Farmakovskii had suggested that our grave should be dated to the 4th-3rd century B. C. and Parovich-Peshikan – to the 3rd century B. C.⁶

In this complex the black glazed *cup-skyphos* is probably the earliest item (it is kept in the Archaeological Museum in Odessa). The latest variants of this type of *cup-skyphos* date from no later than the first quarter of the 4th century B.C.⁷; they were probably no longer in use there. However, the black glazed *cup-skyphoi* found in Olbian graves in complex with coins of Borysthenes and at Panskoe I are later than 380 B. C.⁸; this fact shows that they were still in use in the periphery at the time of the late 4th – early 3rd century B. C.

² SKUDNOVA 1988, p.5-7.

³ PAROVICH-PESHIKAN 1974, p. 210-211; KOZUB 1974, p. 133-167.

⁴ SPARKES, TALCOTT 1970, p. 147-148, p. 311 No. 1071 plates with slightly down turned rim, No. 1072-1076.

⁵ ROTROFF 1997, p.315-317 No. 709-732, Figs. 50-51.

⁶ FARMAKOVSKII 1906, p. 133; PAROVICH-PESHIKAN 1974, p.165.

⁷ SPARKES, TALCOTT 1970, p.110-111, p. 278 No. 608 Pl. 26.

⁸ ZAITSEVA 1973, in graves No. 6, 1912; No. 85, 1912; No. 63, 1913; No. 7, 1914; No. 22, 1914, tab. 48-49; HANNESSTAD 2005, p. 190-191; KARYŠKOVSKII 1988, p. 82-83; FROLOVA, ABRAMZON 2005, p. 20, 24.

Small flasks (medicine bottles) of pale yellow clay represent the type of flask which is known among the finds in Olbian cemetery, coming from graves dated to the 3rd-2nd century B.C., and also in town settlement layers of the Hellenistic period⁹. The Athenian Agora small medicine bottles were found in context dated to 350-270 B. C.¹⁰

A coin from Borysthenes in a very poor state of preservation¹¹ and the *amphora* from the same grave have been lost since and cannot be taken into consideration for dating. This grave is probably dated to the late 4th – 3rd century B. C. and the fish-plate was used for several centuries without significant change.

A second fish-plate was found in grave No. 37 in 1905 (Fig. 2)¹². As noted in the excavation log-book the grave had been looted and therefore it is impossible to judge what the full range of grave goods would have been. In the inventory a fish-plate and a fragment of an iron object are listed. The shape is similar to the one found in 1902 and it differs from it only with regard to the profiling of its edge. It is possible to date this fish-plate to the 4th-3rd century B. C.

Yet fish-plates of a similar shape were to be found in many other centers as well. In ancient Tyras and in the necropolis at Koshary – a rural settlement at the edge of Olbia – a plate similar to the material from Olbia was found, dating from the second half of the 4th or the first half of the 3rd century B.C.¹³ At Belozerskoe settlement a grey fish-plate of a similar shape was also found.¹⁴

In Olbia, in levels relating to the city, fish-plates of the same shape made of red clay are often found. As assumed by T. N. Knipovich, the slightly protruding edge of the small central bowl and the band round it were characteristic for local production¹⁵.

The most popular vessel shape as far back as the archaic period was the jug. Jugs of various shapes were also found in the necropolis of the Late Classical – Early Hellenistic period.

A jug (Fig. 3) was found in grave No. 30 in 1911¹⁶. It is on a ring-foot with a rounded body, a low neck and a rounded rim turned outwards, the handle is flat. The surface of the vessel is rough. Together with it, a bowl-shaped *kylix*, a reticulated *lekkythos*, a bead with representation of a human face and a terracotta figurine of Cybele were found. The bowl-shaped *kylix* is dated to 325-310 B. C.¹⁷ The terracotta figurine of Cybele is dated to the 4th or 3rd century B. C.¹⁸ A bead with double-sided representation of a human face, coming from the excavations in Pantikapaion, is dated to the 4th - 3rd century B. C.¹⁹

⁹ FARMAKOVSKII 1903, p. 100 grave 41; p. 104 grave 71; p. 106 grave 81, tab. V No. 19-22; KNIPOVICH 1940, p.148-149; LEVI 1985, p.110-111, Fig. 116.

¹⁰ ROTROFF 1997, p.423-424 No. 1772.

¹¹ FARMAKOVSKII 1906, p. 232.

¹² KOZUB 1974, p. 143. According to U. I. Kozub dated 5th B. C.

¹³ KOWAL 2008, p. 80-83 fig. 2,1.

¹⁴ BYLKOVA 2007, p. 59 Fig. 47,3.

¹⁵ KNIPOVICH 1940, p. 161-162, pl. XXXVIII ,8 and pl. XXXIX,5.

¹⁶ KOZUB 1974, p. 154.

¹⁷ SPARKES, TALCOTT 1970, 122; Pl. 28 No. 688-689.

¹⁸ SKUDNOVA, SLAVIN, KLEIMAN 1970, p. 54 Tab. 35,1; KHUDIYAK 1940, p.85-86.

¹⁹ KUNINA 1997, p. 254 No. 45.

A small jug (**Fig. 4**), which was found in grave No 13 in 1902, has a ring-foot with a rounded body, a high neck and a rim that formed a sharp angle and is turned slightly outwards. The flat handle is attached to that rim. The surface of the vessel is rough and slightly uneven so that small mica flakes could be seen in the grey clay. B. V. Farmakovskii suggests that this grave is dated to the 3rd – 2nd century B. C.²⁰

A jug (**Fig. 5**) was found in 1911 in grave No. 33²¹. It has a ring foot, a round body, a high ribbed neck and a rim turned outwards at a sharp angle. A black-glazed *cup-kylix* was found with them at the same time.²² Jugs similar in shape were manufactured over a long period during the 5th and 4th centuries B. C.²³

Another jug (**Fig. 6**) was found in grave No. 9 in 1908²⁴. Together with the jug, a black-glazed *kantharos*, dating from the last quarter of the 4th century B. C. and an *unguentarium* decorated with white and red bands were found.

The jug (**Fig. 7**) was found in grave No. 57 in 1912²⁵. It has a round body on a low ring-foot, a low neck, a rim turned slightly outwards and a flat handle. The surface of the vessel is rough and slightly uneven and small mica crystals can be seen.

The *lekythos* (**Fig. 7**) with a round body, a narrow neck and a funnel-shaped rim neatly cut off at the top and a grey pottery jug with a round body on a low ring-foot, a low neck, a rim turned slightly outwards and a flat handle were found in this grave. The *lekythos* was been made from pale clay. Together with the jug and the *lekythos*, a black-glazed *cup-skyphos* and an *amphora* were found. The latest variants of this type of *cup-skyphos* date from no later than the second quarter of the 4th century B.C. A similar *cup-skyphos* was found both in grave No. 74 in 1902 with a grey fish-plate and also in grave No. 81 with flasks (medicine bottles) excavated in 1901. The amphora from Heraclea with a stamp ΣΤΥΦΩΝ, which would have been important for dating purposes, can be dated to 380-370 B.C.²⁶. The surface was covered by black dull glaze. Traces had survived from the brush with which the glaze had been applied.

The second grey *lekythos* (**Fig. 8**) with an almost circular body on a low ring-foot, a narrow neck and a rim like those of Attic *lekythoi* was found in grave No. 129 in 1902. As pointed out in the list of finds, a black-glazed *kylix* and a clay jug were also found.

The third grey *lekythos* (**Fig. 9**) with an almost circular body on a low ring-foot, a narrow neck and an out-turned curved rim was found in grave No. 4 in 1908.²⁷ From the whole range of discovered items, the base of a black-glazed *kylix*, fragments of an amphora and complete iron nails with remains of wood have been found. In the Hermitage Museum there are fragments of an *alabastron* made

²⁰ FARMAKOVSKII 1906, p. 117-118.

²¹ KOZUB 1974, p.153

²² Cf. *kantharos* from grave No. 78a, 1913.

²³ VENEDIKOV 1963, p. 159-167.

²⁴ PAROVICH-PESHIKAN 1974, p. 167.

²⁵ KOZUB 1974, p. 158-159 dated first half of the 4th B.C.; Cf. PAROVICH-PESHIKAN 1974, p.180 dated 3rd B. C.

²⁶ MONAKHOV 2003, p. 125, 129.

²⁷ PAROVICH-PESHIKAN 1974, p. 180.

of alabaster, a terracotta gilded figure of Eros (part of the applied decoration for a black-glazed vessel) and fragments of terracotta figurine of Eros (?). The terracotta gilded figure of Eros is dated around 340-330 B. C.²⁸

All the grey *lekythoi* should probably be dated to the 4th century B. C. A similar shape is presented among the Hellenistic pottery from the Athenian Agora.²⁹

A small amphora (**Fig. 10**) with a rounded body on a low ring-foot and with a narrow neck was found in grave No. 78a in 1913. The rim is turned slightly outwards. The handles are oval in section. The clay is grayish green. On the outside the amphora is covered with a dense dark-grey glaze. The finds made at the same time of a black-glazed *kantharos* and an *hydria* made of Phoenician glass were important for dating the complex of the grave. The black-glazed *kantharos* has a plain rim and judging from the materials of the Athenian Agora, its date should be the last quarter of the 4th century B. C.³⁰ The *hydria* made of Phoenician glass dates from the 4th or 3rd century B. C.³¹

Small bowls on a ring foot with rounded walls were found in Hellenistic levels in considerable quantities. As far as we can judge, these vessels differ only in small details: the walls might be more or less curved, the height of the foot and the profile of the edge (curved or horizontally cut). As assumed by T. N. Knipovich, these bowls were found in Olbia in Trench 'I' in layers of the late 4th – 2nd century B. C.³² Large quantities of bowls were found at Koshary site³³. A small grey pottery bowl, made of typical Olbian clay (**Fig. 11**), was found in 1873, in the upper part of one of the burial-mounds above ground (for which no numbers were provided). Its surface had been worked carelessly. Bowls of this shape have also been recorded in the materials of the Athenian Agora, associated with the Early Hellenistic period³⁴.

Thus we can distinguish four main shapes of grey ware in Olbia of the Late Classical - Early Hellenistic period: fish-plates, jugs, *lekythoi* and bowls.

The first steps towards a chemical and technical study of clays and pottery originating from the excavations at Olbia were taken in the 1930s. The results obtained by O.A.Kul'skaya provided the basis for all subsequent research devoted to the local pottery of Olbia, although the author did point out that they were of a preliminary nature³⁵. This work had been carried out with T.N.Knipovich, an outstanding specialist in the pottery of the North Pontic region. While Knipovich had been working in Olbia using exclusively visual methods of assessment, she had singled out a group of pottery materials, which differed from imported samples and she assumed that it must have been produced locally. So as to confirm this using the materials obtained in 1935 and 1936 from Trench 'I',

²⁸ KOPCKE 1964, s. 45-46.

²⁹ ROTROFF 1997, Pl. 81 No. 111-113.

³⁰ ROTROFF 1997, pp. 84, 242-243 Pl. 1 No. 4, 5, 10, 11.

³¹ ARVIELER-DULONG, NENNA 2000, p. 129 No. 1657.

³² KNIPOVICH 1940, p. 146.

³³ KOWAL 2008, p. 77.

³⁴ ROTROFF 1997, p. 171-187.

³⁵ KUL'SKAYA 1940, p. 171-187.

Knipovich had selected typical examples of pottery, which she then compared both with local clays and also with imported pottery.

O.A.Kul'skaya was seeking answers to two questions: were there among the clays available around Olbia any suitable for pottery production and which of their components were characteristic for the local raw material. In the course of her research it was established that grayish green clays suitable for pottery production were to be found in the eighth level under Pontic limestone and in addition in that same level there were layers of very malleable clays of a higher quality. These plastic clays, found in considerable amounts, could have served as more or less good raw material for various pottery items. This was how the raw material for pottery production in ancient Olbia was identified.

A further comparison was made between analyses of items after a preliminary firing and fragments analyses of ancient pottery, manufactured both with and without the use of a potter's wheel. It was confirmed that these clays had been used as raw material for local production. Data from petrographical analysis revealed that plastic calcareous clay and clay that was not calcareous had been used for the manufacture of pottery vessels. For wheel-thrown glazed vessels, which had been carefully fired, malleable clays that were uncalcareous were used as a rule. A characteristic feature of the Olbian clay was the inclusion of grains of quartz sand, the largest of which could often be seen at the surface of vessels. The color of the clay could vary – from reddish to red-brown, grey, yellowish and greenish. The surface of the vessels – even those made from carefully prepared fine clay was rough to the touch. The quality of the modeling of the vessels was not always good. Samples of glaze used to cover the vessels were also analyzed. It was established that for glaze the same clay was used, which was distinguished by the fact that it contained iron oxides and an alkaline³⁶. It is necessary to point out that research into clays and glaze of this kind, which was being carried out by American scholars at the same time, produced similar results. Yet, in the years that followed, chemical and technical research into clays and pottery which Soviet scholars had carried out with such useful results was not carried any further. Another attempt was undertaken by a group of scholars in the 1960s. For this study they selected samples of both imported pottery and what was presumed to be local ceramics for building³⁷. When the analyses of these clays were compared with the results obtained earlier, data were obtained which showed that from the end of the 4th century B.C. various types of roofing material were being manufactured in Olbia in substantial quantities as well as pottery – flat tiles and *kalyptera* of various shapes. These studies, carried out at a high level, still provide the main basis for the study of various groups of local Olbian pottery.

Grey pottery found in the necropolis at Olbia has traditionally been held to be the work of local potters in the majority of cases. It has been noted on more than one occasion, that this pottery on the whole differs clearly from imported items and, in its turn, differs as regards the quality of manufacture and the

³⁶ KUL'S'KA 1958, p. 91.

³⁷ BOGDANOVA-BEREZOVSKAYA, NAUMOV, KOVNURKO 1964, p. 314-320.

variations in the clay. It used to be thought that local potters made vessels of varying quality. Certain potters used to specialize in making specific types of vessels.

The vessels which are closest as regards quality of clay and finishing are two fish-plates (**Fig. 1, 2**), jug with an ovoid body, low neck and flat handle gently bent (**Fig. 3**), which are distinguished by the good quality of their clay and their dark-grey glaze. A clear similarity in clay, grayish green with standard Olbian inclusions — particles of calcium and quartz and technique for applying grey glaze can be seen in the two small *lekythoi* (**Fig. 8, 9**), the small amphorae (**Fig. 10**), the small jug with a high narrow neck (**Fig. 4**). A large jug with a high cylindrical neck on a ring-foot (**Fig. 7**) was made of similar clay and has a similar technique of applying grey glaze.

A grey *lekythos* (**Fig. 7**) with a round body, a narrow neck and a funnel-shaped rim neatly cut off at the top clearly shows that it was produced from pale-grey clay.

It is possible that not all pottery was made in Olbia itself and that a small proportion of it could have come from other production centers.

Only a detailed analysis of all the relevant material both from Olbia and from its environs and also from the whole of the North Pontic region will provide the answer to this question.

Grave No. 74, 1902:

1. Fish-plate. Diam. 25.5 cm. H. 3.4 cm. Inv. No. O.1902.117
2. Small flask. Diam. 3.4 cm. H. 4.8 cm. Inv. No. O.1902.116

Grave No. 37, 1905:

1. Fish-plate. Diam. 25.7 cm. H. 4.9 cm. Inv. No. O.1905.49

Grave No. 13, 1902:

1. Jug. H. 10.9 cm. Diam. rim 5.9 cm. Inv. No. O.1902.16

Grave No. 9, 1908

1. Jug. H. 16.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.86
2. *Unguentarium* with bands. H. 12.2 cm. Diam. 6.6 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.87
3. *Kantharos* black-glazed. H. 13.0 cm. Diam. rim 8.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.88
4. Fragment bone handle with nail. Inv. No. O.1908.89
5. Silver small finger ring. Diam. 2.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.90
6. Iron knife blade and bone handle with nail. H. 5.8-1.1 cm. H. 4.5 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.91

Grave No. 30, 1911

1. Jug. H. 18.7 cm. Diam. 14.6 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.90
2. Bowl-shaped kylix. H. 6.8 cm. Diam. rim 9.6 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.89
3. Net *lekythos*. H. 7.3 cm. Diam. 4.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.88
4. Terracotta figurine of Cybele. H. 11.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.87

5. Fragment bronze mirror. H. 11.5 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.86
6. 10 nails. H. 1.8-12.3 cm.
7. Silver small finger ring. Diam. 0.9 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.83
8. Silver small finger ring. Diam. 0.8 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.84
9. Bead with representation of human faces. H. 2.9 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.82
10. 4 beads, spheroid, with incised 'eyes'. Diam. 1.0-1.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.81

Grave No. 33, 1911:

1. *Cup-skyphos*. H. 5.1 cm. Diam. rim 11.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.97
2. Jug. H. 15.6 cm. Diam. 7.5 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.98
3. Bronze bracelet. Diam. 7.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1911.95
4. Bronze earring pendant in fragments. H. 3.4 cm.

Grave No. 57, 1912:

1. Jug. H. 17.1 cm. Diam. rim 10.1 cm. Inv. No. O.1912.230
2. *Lekythos*. H. 10.0 cm. Diam. 8.3 cm. Inv. No. O.1912.229
3. 20 beads. Diam. 0.7-1.3 cm. Inv. No. O.1912.228
4. Iron knife blade. H. 7.1 cm. Inv. No. O.1912.231
5. *Cup-skyphos*. H. 5.5 cm. Diam. rim 11.5 cm. Inv. No. O.1912.225

Grave No. 129, 1902:

1. Small *lekythos*. H. 9.8 cm. Diam. rim 3.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1902.204

Grave No. 4, 1908:

1. Small *lekythos*. H. 9.1 cm. Diam. 7.6 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.66
2. Bone with incise. H. 2.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.68
3. *Alabastron* fragments. H. 0.4-3.4 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.67
4. Fragments terracotta figurine of Eroses (?). H. 2.6 cm. H. 3.1 cm. H. 3.5 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.65
5. Terracotta gilded figure of Eros. H. 2.3 cm. Inv. No. O.1908.64

Grave No. 78a, 1913:

1. Small *amphora*. H. 10.6 cm. Diam. 8.2 cm. Inv. No. O.1913.283
2. *Kantharos* black-glazed. H. 8.1 cm. Diam. rim 6.3 cm. Inv. No. O.1913.282
3. *Hydria*. H. 8.0 cm. Diam. 5.0 cm. Inv. No. O.1913.284

Burial 1873:

1. Small cup. H. 4.7 cm. Diam. 9.3 cm. Inv. No. O.1873.29

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Fig. 1 - Grave No. 74, 1902.



Fig. 2 - Grave No. 37, 1905.



Fig. 3 - Grave No. 30, 1911.

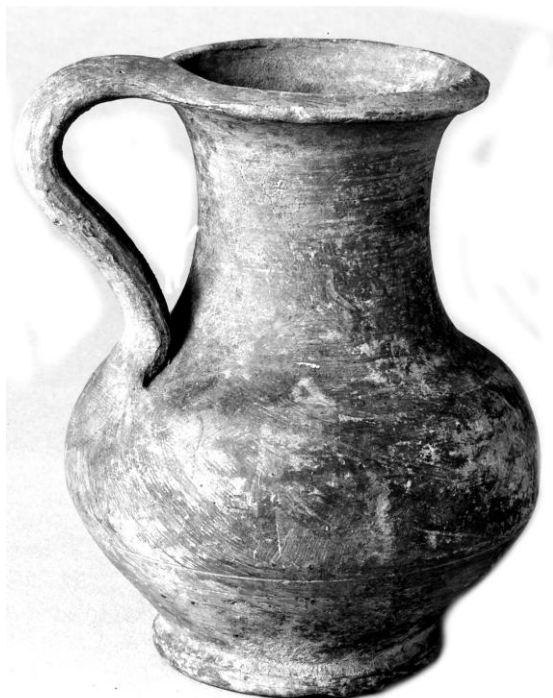


Fig. 4 - Grave No. 13, 1902.

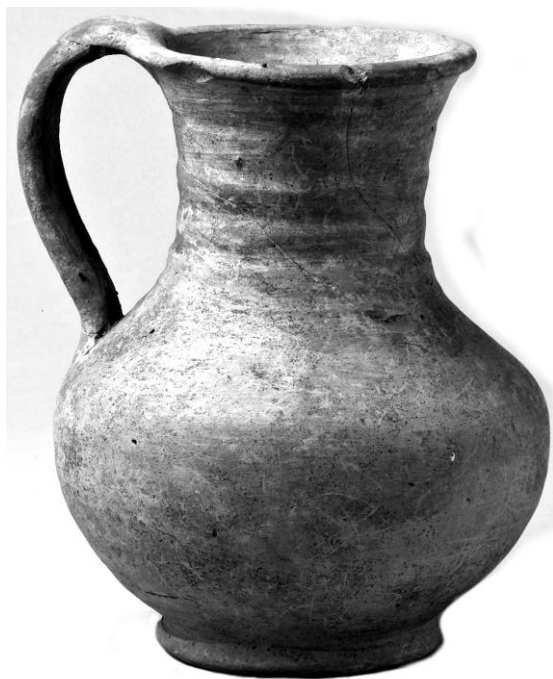


Fig. 5 - Grave No. 33, 1911.



Fig. 6 - Grave No. 9, 1908.



Fig. 7 - Grave No. 57, 1912.



Fig. 8 - Grave No. 129, 1902.

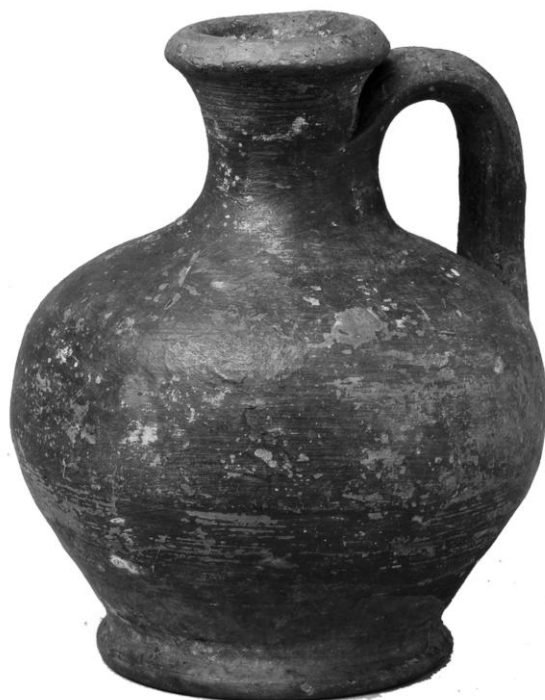


Fig. 9 - Grave No. 4, 1908.



Fig. 10 - Grave No. 78a, 1913.



Fig. 11 - Burial 1873.