Metal Vessels from "Hohla" (Novoerkassk)

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"The main monument of the time", "the most interesting find of the century in Southern Russia", "famous", "well-known", "outstanding". Such were the names that were used to describe the burial mound in Novočerkassk upon its discovery. The importance of this burial mound was appreciated at once and is still valid. This is confirmed by the large number of publications connected with the things from the "Hohlač". All these publications however discussed only gold goods: the diadem, gold bracelets, bottles, cups. This part of finds has been studied more or less completely, though the stylistic analysis of it is not done thoroughly enough.

Other things from "Hohlač" which for a long time were known as the "Novočerkassk hoard"—the assemblage of imported metal vessels have not been either studied or even published up to now*. These things were only mentioned at best in the descriptions of the find[1]. This caused controversy about the date of the burial, which is going more than a century since discovery of mound in 1864.

As a rule, the chronology of the burial was determined by the gold things only. Typology and chronology of the animal style is not specified well enough, and because of this "Hohlač" was dated by different scholars from the Late Hellenistic period[2] to the Migration period[3].

The things of the local, North Pontic area production, the chronology of which has been specified would enable us to date the "Hohlač" more accurately, but as this burial mound was discovered by chance, when carrying out building works, these things were not preserved. So the imported metal vessels could be the only source to solve the problem of its date. The chronology of these things is defined rather exactly by the similar finds in the West and Central Europe.

This work is discussing the investigation of these vessels and presents some conclusions drawn from it[4].

The silver bowl of spherical shape with a conical lid on it is decorated with three griffins' protomes *(pl. 132, fig. 1, 2a,b)*. One of them has a hinge to attach the lid. The sides of the bowl are very thin, the body and the lid being polished by the lathe. The rough low base ring was made most likely later to replace the lost one.

These griffins' figures enable us to place this bowl in the large group of ritual vessels widespreaded in eastern Mediterranean within the period from the seventh to the fifth century B.C.[5]. During Phoenician and Greek colonisation of the Mediterranean world they spread to Etruria, Illiria and Gallia.

The Novočerkassk bowl differs from the ones collected by H. Jantzen in some important details: it has a lid, a short foot, and a lesser number of protomes.

The vessels most close to this bowl were found in Etruria[6]. They are ceramic, but close to the bowl from "Hohlač" both by the shape and by the number of protomes.

The Etrurian ceramic bowls most likely imitated the metal vessels. One of them was found in the grave of the archaic necropolis, others in the temple of Diana. The surface of the second vessel bears a carved dedication to Diana. This find confirms the ritual functions of the vessels with griffins' protomes. M. Nikolanci considered such vessels to be sacred censers *(thymiaterion)*[7].

As distinct from our bowl the griffins on the censer from the Archaeological Museum in Split, were used as feet, but their number corresponds to the Novočerkassk ones[8].

Nikolanci arrived to the conclusion that the censer from Split was made not in Phoenicia itself but in regions where the Phoenician influence was spread to a great extent[9].

The silver amphora has a squat, bulbous body and tall neck, slightly narrowing toward the rim. The orifice is closed by a lid with a semispherical top which is well inserted into the neck *(pl. 133, fig. 3, 4)*.

Out of the two existed handles only one is preserved. The upper part of the massive and separate cast handle has the form of ducks' heads with long beaks. The soldering plate at the base of the handle has the form of a stylized leaf. The lower part of the handle above the soldering plate is decorated with three vertical rows of pearly ornament *(pl. 133, fig. 5)*.

The exact analogies to this amphora are unknown. Bronze amphorae of similar shape were found in Thrace[10] and in Syria[11]. The graves with such amphorae belong to the first half of the first century A.D. By the style of handle-decoration[12] and type of upper attachment the amphora from "Hohlač" can be dated from the third to the second century B.C. In that case we can consider it a prototype for bronze amphorae of the early Empire.

The area of its spread shows that the manufacturing of similar silver amphorae was situated not in Italy but in Greece and Asia Minor. The attention should be paid to the fact that though also in Italy there are isolated cases of similar finds[13].

The silver *askos* has a little bulbous body and a rough base ring that was made later instead of the lost one, like in case with the bowl with griffins' protomes. The upper part of the body and the handle are not preserved *(pl. 134, fig. 6, 7)*. A. Radnoti dated this *askos* around the period from the first century B.C. to the first century A.D. and thought it to be made in Italy[14]. He was of the opinion that *askoi* were not produced in provincial workshops.

As distinct from other vessels of this kind the *askos* from Novočerkassk is less squat. As far as we can judge by the attachments of the handle it was not cast which was typical for metal *askoi* of early Empire. When reconstructed it will be a cylindrical roll fastened in the staple. Its close analogy is the vessel from Pompeii[15]. By the shape of its body the *askoi* from the Museums in Karlsruhe[16], Saint-Germain[17] and from Bagaevski burial mound nr. 13 on the lower Don[18] are very similar to it.

The silver *kantharos* was cast and then polished by the lathe. Only one handle of this *kantharos* is preserved. It looks as a horizontal plate attached to the body by ducks' heads which clasp the rim *(pl. 134, fig. 8, 9)*.

Vessels of the *kantharos* shape with straight sides standing on a base ring are most characteristic of the Imperial period[19]. In the first century A.D. they came into the provinces of the Empire and to the neighbouring territories of the Barbarian world among other ware of Roman production. They were in use here up to the third century A.D.[20] D. Strong considers that these kinds of drinking cups were made in main centres of the Empire, especially in eastern provinces[21].

The shape of *kantharos* like that of Novočerkassk looks like the shape of richly decorated drinking cups of which it was the imitation in all probability. So these *kantharoi* seem to be of later time. The silver handles of this type of vessels are kept in the Archaeological Museum in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), (Inv. nr. 132-12). As the handle of our *kantharos* they have a simple construction (without vertical ring under the horizontal plate) and ducks' heads chased very roughly. The exact place of their finding is not known, and it is difficult to contend whether they are imported or made in local workshops. In any case the fact of their finding itself makes it possible to believe the Thrace as the place where the drinking cups without decoration were made. It is impossible to determine the close date of the *kantharos* from "Hohlač" because there are no assemblages of such cups.

The bronze amphora falls to the category of amphorae with rounded body and narrow neck with horizontal rim, and equipped with solid cast handles decorated with relief ornament *(pl. 135, fig. 10)*. The base of the handles is usually decorated with masks in low relief, rare with female protomes.

There are some unique finds of amphorae of this class in provinces. They were found only in Thrace and Moesia. The vessels of this type have been found only in Pompeii[22]. Outside the Empire the bronze amphorae of this kind were discovered in Lucklum[23] and in Bagaevski burial mound nr. 13[24].

The earliest grave containing an amphora of this type is in Lucklum dated by the coins from the second half of the second century B.C. The latest are the graves in Thrace: two of them could be dated from the late first—early second century A.D.[25], and one from the first half of the second century A.D.[26]. Bagaevski burial nr. 13 close to the "Hohlač", buried in the third quarter of the first century A.D.[27].

The mask on the soldering plate at the base of the handle *(pl. 135, fig. 11)* is similar to the mask on the jug handle from Sliven[28].

In "Hohlač" there were found rim fragments and a handle of another amphora which is of the H. Eggers 129-type, when reconstructed. The size of the handle *(pl. 136, fig. 14)* and the diameter of the rim show that it was a large vessel with the di. of the rim 11 cm. and the height *c.* 50 cm. Amphorae of this size were found in the graves from the burial mound nr. 7 in Čatalka[29] and in the brick tomb in Plovdiv[30].

After the find in Hässelby H. Eggers dated amphorae of the 129-type from the period "B"[31]. A. Radnoti thought them to be used during the whole first century A.D.[32]. In Thrace and in South Russia burial mounds with these amphorae were buried some time later[33].

Both "Blechkannen" (Sheet-vessels) from "Hohlač" belong to the type which was widespread in the Danubian provinces and in the Pontic region *(pl. 135-136, fig. 12-13)*. Judging by the territory of their discovery (in Thrace-16; in Pannonia-4; in North Pontic area-10) they could have been produced in Thracian centres. In Thrace there were known also their imitations in pottery[34]. The prototypes for them were jugs produced in Italy. They differ from the Thracian ones by polishing after forging. Besides that they have handles but cast bronze handles instead of iron ones, which sometimes come with relief decorations on the soldering plates.

As these jugs are the latest imported things found in the mound "Hohlač" which indicates the time of its erection, it is necessary to discuss in detail the question of their dating. "Blechkannen" of Italian fabrication appeared in Roman provinces in the second half of the first century B.C.[35] and were used no later than in the third quarter of the first century A.D.[36]. The most early jugs of Thracian production were discovered in the graves of the late first to the early second century A.D.[37]. The greater part of them was found in the burials of the period from the second to the third century A.D.[38].

In the Southern Russian steppes "Blechkannen" appeared at the very end of the first century A.D. The jugs from "Hohlač" turn to be the earliest examples in this region. One of them *(pl. 135, fig. 12)* has general proportions of body and neck, correlation of its dm. with the h. and the shape of the neck very close to the Italian prototypes. In spite of the closeness to imported "Blechkannen", it was certainly made in a Thracian workshop. It was not made by the lathe and had iron rivets on the rim which shows that the handle was forged from iron.

Taking into consideration the time used already by the nomads in Pontic steppes we can date the jugs from "Hohlač" from the late first to the early second century A.D.

"Hohlač" belongs to the group of large mounds which are classified together not only by the burial ritual but by the presence of rich imported vessels also. Problems of the relative and the absolute chronology of all these burial mounds are the subject of a special work. But even the preliminary comparison of rich sets of metal vessels from "Hohlač" and other burials of this kind (burial mound "Sadovi"[39], Bagaevski nr. 13 and 14[40], Sokolovski[41], Kirsanovski[42]), demonstrates that this imported ware belongs to the brief chronological period of the seventies A.D. to the mid-second century A.D. This allows to date the whole group of large mounds of the lower Don area by the period not earlier than the seventies A.D. Grave goods of local production from these burials—amphorae and other pottery, jewelry, etc., do not contradict this conclusion. There are no burials with rich sets of imported ware, which we may connect with any earlier period of the last decades B.C. to the mid-first century A.D. in the lower Don area.

Burials that date from the second to the third century A.D. (burial mounds Melehovski[43], Krepinski nr. 11/33[44], Zentralni nr. 20[45]) do not contain so much imported ware, as "Hohlač" and other mounds of the earlier group. Moreover, they are not Italian, but provincial, Thracian, as a rule production.

The appearance of such group of large mounds in the short period and in one region is not accidental. If we try to connect this fact with the historical events of the first century A.D., we discover the following situation.

In the first half of the first century A.D. there are tribes of Aorsi and Siraces wandering in the lower Don area. The latest information about them in this region is connected with the events of forty-nine A.D. at Bosphorus. In his description of the internecine war between Cotys and Mithridates Tacitus said that Cotys formed an alliance with Eunones, the tzar of Aorsi, against Mithridates and his allies Siraces[46]. Further developments led Mithridates to defeat. He was handed over to the Romans, but he was promised the preservation of his life[47]. In this connection there took place the exchange of letters and ambassadors between the tzar of Aorsi and Emperor Claudius, from which we may surmise that Rome was well-informed not only about the affairs in the Bosphoran kingdom itself, but also in the Barbarian world. For Rome it was also very important to know the national composition of the population in the adjoining regions and to foresee their possible reaction to the Roman interference.

In the following 15-20 years in the North-East region of North Pontic area some important

events took place but to our regret they were not mentioned by the ancient authors. It was in this period that the Alans appeared in the lower Don area and in the region of the Sea of Azov[48]. The earliest information about them we find in Seneca's and Lukan's works. Seneca mentions the Alans when he writes about enemies of Rome on the Danube[49], according to Lukan they inhabited the North Caucasus[50]. Most valuable is the information of Josephus about Alans in seventy-two A.D. Josephus calls the Alans the Scythians who live around Tanais and the Sea of Azov[51]. The ancient sources, thus, make it evident that the Alans appear in the lower Don area between forty-nine and the end of the sixties. This allows to link the whole group of large burial mounds in the Don area not with the Sarmatians, as it was generally accepted[52] but with the Alans.

Probably the new nomadic tribes of Southern Russian steppes established closer contacts both with the Bosphoran kingdom and the Roman Empire. The authorities of the provinces adjoining the European Sarmatia (Moesia, Thrace), which were constantly exposed to lazyges' and Roxolans' tribes border raids, tried to find allies in nomadic tribes of the Pontic area against the frontier tribes. The Roman Empire wanted the neutrality condition in Parthia as well. Some part of rich imported vessels could come to the steppes of the Sea of Azov area by way of diplomatic gifts to the nomadic chiefs.

Metal vessels from "Hohlač" fall into three chronological groups, which have also rather clear territorial limits *(pl. 136, fig. 15)*. The first group contains silver vessels which belong to the period from the fifth to the third century B.C., and were produced in oriental workshops (the bowl with griffins' protomes, the amphora), while the second group has the products of the Italian workshops of the early Empire period (the bronze amphora, the *askos*, and perhaps the *kantharos*), and the third one groups the vessels of the first century A.D. from provincial centres ("Blechkannen").

How could the vessels produced with an interval of 400-500 years in centres divided from each other by thousands of kilometers, find themselves in one burial, moreover, in the grave of a Barbarian, who was so far from the Roman world? Before answering this question, let us try to ask another one. Where, could the silver vessels be preserved during more than 500 years?

The undoubtfully ritual function of one of them would suggest the answer—in the temple or in the shrine.

The high-born man buried in "Hohlač" belonged to Alans and this together with the time of erection of the mound makes it possible to connect the set of vessels from the grave with a quite concrete historical event—the raid of Alans to the Transcaucasus in seventy-two A.D., which was described by Josephus[53]. In this year Alans in alliance with Iberians raided Parthia for the first time. Besides the mentioned above excerpt one can find the information about this raid in the works by Suetonius[54], in the medieval *"History of Armenia"* by Moses Horenskij[55] and in Georgian chronicles[56]. It is legitimate to connect the vessels from "Hohlač" with the plunder of some shrine in Parthia at the time of this raid. Rich articles of Italian and provincial production could come to the Don area not only as gifts, but as spoils of war and also by the trade way.

In conclusion some remarks should be made about the social status of the nomad buried in "Hohlač". It was a woman's burial. All the scientists are unanimous about it. But there is no common opinion about the status of the deceased. Fragments of silver sheet of chair legs and the diadem with representation of the "Tree of Life" worship in the upper part, which were found in the grave, help us to solve this problem.

Judging by murals of some brick tombs in Panticapaeum and other representations, the chair which was used as a throne was the accessory of a goddess, or of a supreme priestess to this goddess. But we can't contend, that "Hohlač" is the burial of a priestess. Neither Alans[57], nor Scythians, who were akin to them[58], nor their descendants Ossetes[59] had a special social hierarchy of priests. The functions of priests were the duty of the tzar or of the chief of the tribe (kin).

It was a representative of this supreme Alans nobility, whose duty included the functions of the priestess who was buried in "Hohlač".

Notes

* The short report about vessels from "Hohlač" cf. B.A. Raev, Metaličeskije sosudy kurgana "Hohlač" (Metal vessels from burial-mound "Hohlač"), in: *Artamonov Festschrift* (*Problemy arheologii* 2, 1978) 89f.

[1] *Otčet Imperatorskoj Arheologičeskoj Kommissii,* Petersbourg (1864) 20-21; C. de Linas, *Les origines de l'orfèvrerie cloisonnée* 2 (1878) 132; I. Tolstoj - N. Kondakov, *Russkije drevnosti v pamjatnikah iskusstva* (Russian Antiquities in the Works of Art) 3 (1890) 133; D.B. Šelov, Italijskije i zapadnorimskije izdelija v torgovle Tanaisa pervyh vekov n.e. (Italian and West-Roman Goods in the Tanais' Trade of the First Centuries A.D.) *AArchHung* 17, 1965, 262f.; V.V. Kropotkin, *Rimskije importnye izdelija v vostočnoj Evrope* (Roman Imports in Eastern Europe) Arheol. SSSR D1-27, Moskva (1970) nr. 731, 797.

[2] M.I. Rostovcev, *Skifija i Bospor* (Scythia and Bosphorus) (1925) 585.

[3] Tolstoj-Kondakov *op. c.* (*supra* n. 1) 132-140.

[4] I am grateful to I.P. Zasetzkaja, the chief of Sarmatian section of Hermitage Museum for providing information and photographs which my work needs.

[5] U. Jantzen, *Griechische Greifenkessel* (1955).

[6] *NSA* 1895, 425; *NSA* 1897, 479.

[7] M. Nikolanci, Arhajski import u Dalmacije, *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 68, 1966 (1973) 95f.

[8] M. Nikolanci, Maloazijski import u istocnom Jadranu, *Jadranska obala u protohistoriji* 1972, 274.

[9] Nikolanci *op. c.* (*supra* n. 7) 98.

[10] A.M. Mansel, Grabhügelforschung in Ostthrakien, *BIAB* 13, 1939, 154f.; B. Djakovič, Nahodki iz necropola na anticnij Plovdiv (Finds from Necropolis of Ancient Plovdiv) *BIAB* 1, 1922, 50f.

[11] M.H. Seyrig, Antiquités syriennes, 53, Antiquités de la nécropole d'Emèse, *Syria* 29, 1952, 204f.

[12] The similar decoration of handle cf.: *Allard Pierson Museum, Algemeine gids,* Amsterdam (1956) nr. 767.

[13] F.B. Tarbell, *Catalogue of Bronzes, etc., in Field Museum of Natural History* (*Field Mus. of Natural History Publication* 130, *Anthropol. Series* 7, nr. 3, 1909) nr. 143.

[14] A. Radnoti, *Die römische Bronzegefässe von Pannonien* (*Diss. Pannonicae* 2, nr. 6, 1938) 144f.

[15] V. Spinazzola, *Pompei* 2 (1953) fig. 732.

[16] E. Wagner, *Antike Bronzen der Grossherzoglich-Badische Alterthümersammlung in Karlsruhe* (1885) pl. 11.

[17] S. Reinach, *Guide illustré du Musée de Saint-Germain* (n.d.) 94, fig. 94.

[18] B.A. Raev, Vaisselle italique de bronze dans les tombes de la noblesse sarmate sur le Bas-Don, *BMAH* 46, 1974, 146, fig. 10.

[19] D.E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate* (1966) 133-4.

[20] H.J. Eggers, *Der römische Import im freien Germanien, Atlas der Urgesch.* 1 (1951) Gesamtkatalog, nr. 1966.

[21] Strong *op. c.* 137.

[22] Tarbell *op. c.* (*supra* n. 13) nr. 137-140, 142.

[23] H. Willers, *Neue Untersuchungen über die römische Bronzeindustrie von Capua und von Niedergermanien* (1907) 19.

[24] Raev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 18) 145, fig. 7.

[25] Cremation grave 2 in Burgas (Arch. Mus. Burgas, Inv. nr. 2613); cremation grave in Dalakov Kladenec (C. Bujukliev, Trakijski mogilni pogrebenija ot okolnostite ns Stara Zagora [The Thracian Burial-graves in the Environs of Stara Zagora], *Arheologia* 15, 4, 1973, 35f.).

[26] Cremation grave in Tulovo (G. Tabakova-Zanova - L. Getov, Mogilni pogrebenija ot s.Tulovo, Starozagorski okrâg [The Burial-graves in Tulovo, Region Stara Zagora], *Arheologia* 11, 4, 1969, 29f.).

[27] Raev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 18) 147.

[28] I. Velkov, Novi mogilni nahodki (New Founds of Ancient Burials), *BIAB* 5, 1929, 30, fig. 32.

[29] D. Nikolov - C. Bujukliev, Novi trakijski mogilni pogrebenija ot Čatalka, Starozagorsko (The Thracian Burial-graves in Čatalka, Region of Stara Zagora), *Arheologia* 9, 3, 1967, 10f., fig. 16.

[30] B. Djakovič, Trakijska grobnica pri Plovdiv i nekropol na drevnija grad (The Brick Tomb in Plovdiv and the Necropolis of Ancient Town), *Sbornik na narodnii umotvorenija, nauka i knižnina* 22-23, 1907, 1f., fig. 28, 2; 28, 3.

[31] Eggers *op. c.* (*supra* n. 20) 171.

[32] Radnoti *op. c.* (*supra* n. 14) 158.

[33] Cremation graves 2 and 3 in the burial mound "Rošava dragana" in Čatalka (grave 2: D. Nikolov - C. Bujukliev, Trakijski mogilni grobove ot Čatalka, Starozagorsko [The Thracian Burial-graves in Čatalka, Region of Stara Zagora], *Arheologia* 9, 1, 1967, 20f.; grave 3: Nikolov-Bujukliev *op. c.* [*supra* n. 29] 10f.); cremation grave in the burial mound nr. 7 in Čatalka with coins from Caesar to Galba (Nikolov-Bujukliev *op. c.* [*supra* n. 29] 15f.); the brick tomb in Plovdiv with the assemblage of vessels of the last quarter of the first century A.D. (Djakovič *op. c.* [*supra* n. 30] 1f.); Končukohabl (Kropotkin *op. c.* [*supra* n. 1] nr. 769); Bagaevski mound nr. 14 (Raev *op. c.* [*supra* n. 18] 147).

[34] B. Sultov, *Antičnye zentry keramiki v nižnej Mezii* (The Ancient Centres of Pottery Craft in Moesia Superior) (1976) fig. 81.

[35] A. Haffner, Zum Ende der La tènezeit im Mittelrheingebiet unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Trierer Landes, *Archäol. Korrespondenzblatt* 4, 1974, 59f., fig. 3, 2.

[36] Nikolov - Bujukliev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 29) 10f., fig. 10a.

[37] Nikolov - Bujukliev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 33) 19f.; D. Nikolov - C. Bujukliev, Razkopki na mogilen nekropol pri Čatalka prez 1967 g. (The Discovery of Burial-graves in Čatalka in 1967), *Arheologia* 12, 2, 52f.; Mansel *op. c.* (*supra* n. 10) 154f.

[38] See the detail analysis of "Blechkannen" in: B.A. Raev, Les "Blechkannen" de province et leurs prototypes italiques, in: *Annales Univ. Jean Moulin, Lettres* (1976) 155f.

[39] S.I. Kaposhina, A Sarmatian Royal Burial at Novocherkassk, *Antiquity* 37, 1963, 256f.

[40] Raev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 18) 139f.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] B.A. Raev, Novoe pogrebenije s rimskim importom v Nižnem Podon'e (The New Grave with Roman Imports in Lower Don Area), *SA* 1979 (now in print!).

[43] Kropotkin *op. c.* (*supra* n. 1) nr. 789.

[44] Raev *op. c.* (*supra* n. 38) tab. 2, 18.

[45] L.M. Kazakova - V.P. Kopylov - S.A. Naumenko, Raskopki kurganov u poselka Zentralni (The Excavation of Tumuluses near the Village Zentralni), *Arheologičeskije otkrytija* 1975 (1976) 123.

[46] Tacitus, Ann. XII, 15.

[47] *Ibid.* XII, 19-21.

[48] The most complete surveys of the early Alans are: B.S. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West* (Chapter 1: Alans beyond the Frontier) (1973) and J.S. Gaglojti, *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza Osetin* (Alans and the Ethnical History of Ossettes) (1966). Neither author did especially discuss the problem of Alans in the lower Don area.

[49] Seneca, *Thyest.*, 627f.

[50] Lucan, *De Bell. Civ.*, VIII, 215f.

[51] Josephus, *De Bell. Jud.*, VII, 7, 4.

[52] T. Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians* (1970) 101f.

[53] Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, XVIII, 4, 97.

[54] Suetonius, *Domit.*, 2, 2.

[55] M. Horenskij, *Istorija Armenii* (The History of Armenia), ed. N.O. Emin (1893) 98.

[56] *Kartlis Chovreba* 1 (1955) 45.

[57] V.I. Abaev, *Osetinskij jazyk i folklor* (The Language and Folklore of Ossettes) 1 (1949) 63f.

[58] B.N. Grakov, *Skify* (The Scythians) (1971) 82.

[59] Abaev *op. c.* 65, n. 1.

List of illustrations

Pl. 132, fig. 1: Silver bowl with griffins' protomes. h. 20 cm.
Pl. 132, fig. 2a, b: Silver bowl with griffins' protomes. Details.
Pl. 133, fig. 3a-d: Silver amphora. h. 18.7 cm.
Pl. 133, fig. 4: Silver amphora.
Pl. 133, fig. 5: Silver amphora. Handle.
Pl. 134, fig. 6: Silver *askos*. h. 16 cm.
Pl. 134, fig. 7: Silver *askos*. Detail.
Pl. 134, fig. 8: Silver *kantharos*. h. 5.8 cm.
Pl. 134, fig. 9: Silver *kantharos*. Handle.
Pl. 135, fig. 10: Bronze amphora. h. 35 cm.
Pl. 135, fig. 11: Bronze amphora. Handle.
Pl. 135, fig. 12: Bronze "Blechkanne". h. 39.5 cm.
Pl. 136, fig. 13: Bronze "Blechkanne". h. 19.3 cm.
Pl. 136, fig. 14: Handle of bronze amphora. h. 21 cm.
Pl. 136, fig. 15: Chronological positions of metal vessels from "Hohlač".