

The Cave of Castelvenere

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Abstract – Excavations carried out at the Cave of Castelvenere in the province of Lucca have brought to light archaeological remains from various epochs datable from the second millennium B.C. up to the first centuries of the Christian era. The objects discovered suggest that the cave was the scene of cult activity - a conclusion supported in part by the recovery of a number of unusual bronze figurines of great antiquity, all either female or hermaphrodite.

The Cave of Castelvenere is situated on the left bank of the Turrtecava river, a right-hand tributary of the Serchio, at the base of the great limestone cliffs of Monte Penna in the Commune of Galliciano. The entrance to the cave is at an altitude of around 650 metres, and lies at the eastern end of a subvertical wall several kilometres long and at various places more than a hundred metres high that runs in an east-west direction between the villages of Cardoso and Vallico di Sopra. The cave has a wide opening in the shape of an irregular rectangle oriented towards the south [Fig. 1(a)] and in front of this one can see calcareous terracing formed in ages past by the flow of the water that runs along the left-hand side of the cave.

The succession of steps and hollows on the right that extend from the entrance all the way inside the cave are also clearly due to the concretionary and erosive actions of what today has become little more than a rivulet.

Our exploration was limited to the first chamber, which is horizontal, funnel-shaped, and around fifty metres long [Fig. 1(b)]. At the end of this section the tunnel forks and by following the right-hand branch one can, as shown by the reconnaissances of various speleological associations, continue for about a kilometre into the side of the mountain.

The cave is known to most locals as the *Cave of Casteltendine* but older people tend to refer to it as the *Cave of Castelvenere*, with the first name likely being a simple evolution of the second; we shall in any case adopt the older term both for ethnological reasons and, as we shall see, for archaeological ones¹.

The oral tradition of the inhabitants of these parts has an abundance of stories – who knows to what extent the stuff of legend – that suggest the cavern was the stage for banditry, communal feuding, and massacres. The cave most certainly must have been used in times not too remote from our own since only ten or so metres below the entrance there are the remains of a fortification with walls that appear to be mediaeval. It seems furthermore that not long ago pottery fragments datable from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were found in the cave.

This latter news amongst other reasons made us sure that unknown people had been excavating inside the cave and we thus felt compelled to intervene. The work of the Department of the Natural History of Mankind, done in collaboration with the Archaeological Development Group of Lucca and with the Lucca section of the International Institute for Ligurian Studies, has consisted primarily in sifting through the mounds of topsoil left by the clandestine diggers and in the rectification of the walls of the clumsy excavation with the aim of ascertaining the stratigraphic progression. Careful analysis seems to have made clear, however, that the material is found mixed together and without cultural sequence. Both animals and man have in fact contributed to the confusion of the not very substantial (20-50 cm) deposit, as has the stream which when in full flow has on various occasions encroached upon the entire surface of the cave. This is also suggested by the extremely fragmentary nature of the pottery unearthed. One must however make clear that neither the man-made articles nor the faunal remains show signs of flotation. In short it seems obvious that the objects were deposited by man more or less in the area where they were brought to light (probably on the

¹MDT: This is not obvious to me. Older references tend to refer to it as “*Cascaltendine*” which is different again and more like the supposedly newer name. See e.g. “*An excursion to Mount Gragno and the Cave of Cascaltendine*”, by P. Magri 1880. Transl. M.D. Towler

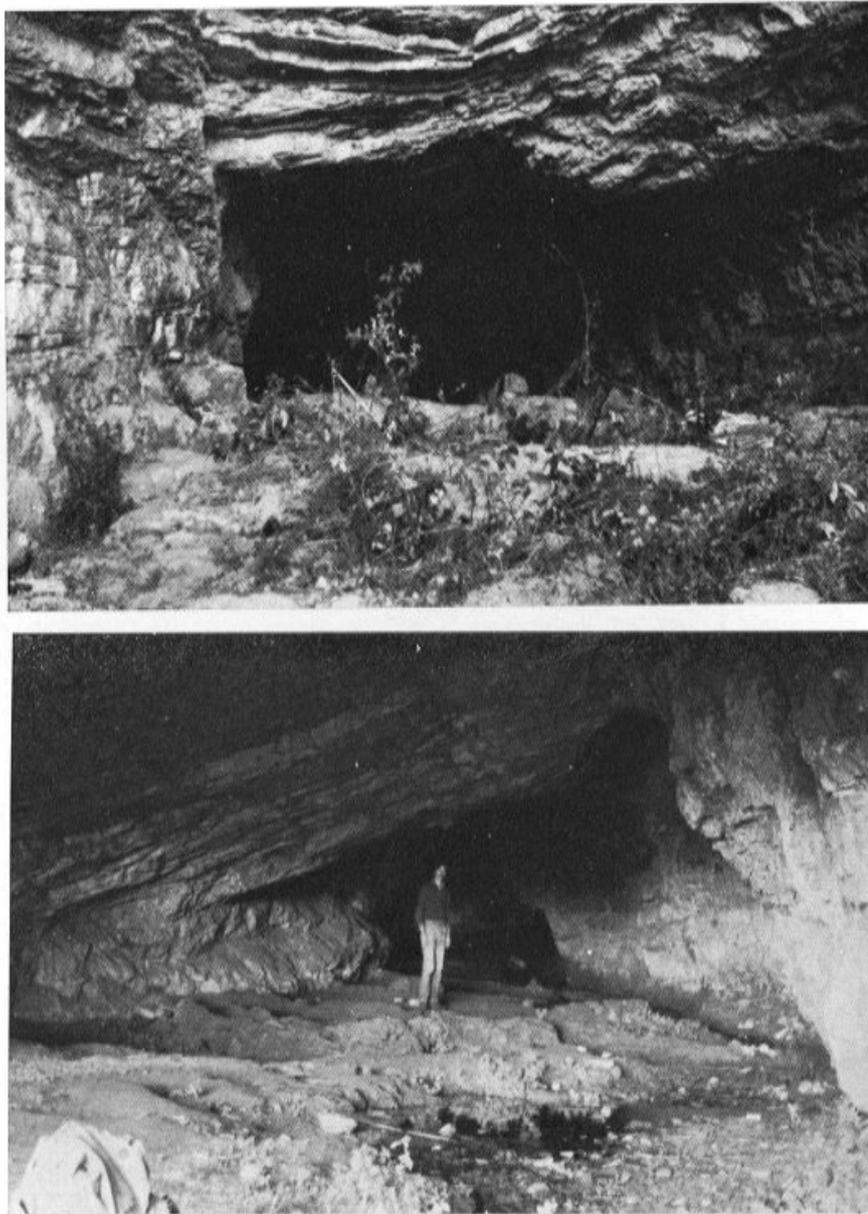


Figure 1: (a) the entrance, and (b) the inside, of the Cave of Castelvenere.

small plateaus which surround the ‘basins’) and that either the vortices of the little torrent or periodic cleaning by humans moved them a short way into the hollows.

The excavation was principally concerned with the first two hollows on the right-hand side close to the cave entrance which were the only ones found to contain archaeological remains. Others on the inside, when tested, were found to contain only a sterile sandy material. All are delimited by hard, dense calcareous concretions formed by the water of the stream (Fig. 2).

The first hole (A) - elongated and relatively straight - yielded a total of twenty-one clay fragments of various ages together with four bronze figurines. The second considerably larger hole (B) has been divided into three sectors (I, II, III): the first and the third led, in percentage terms, to more finds than the second. From what has already been said it seems clear that the only criterion for study is the typology².

²MDT: In archaeology, the classification of things according to their characteristics.

The Finds

The following objects belong typologically to the Aenolithic³:

- a large chip of grey flint which retains a partial crust and shows crude bifacial working with detached irregular flakes;
- a broken pendant in shaly stone with a circular hole at one end;
- a fragment of rough ceramic with obvious inclusions of calcite, decorated with a characteristic broom motif (A.M. RADMILLI [1974]);
- a flat handle pierced horizontally, reminiscent of a type found in the sepulchral cave of Maggiano⁴ (C. CORAZZA [1969]).

The following fragments of domestic pottery in rough ceramic are probably attributable to the transitional phase between the Bronze and Iron Ages:

- nine rim sherds⁵ belonging to medium-sized pots of which two are straight and rounded, three straight and flattened, and four are everted;
- three handles of which two are ribbon-like (one is fragmentary) and one tongue-shaped; this last one seems to be from the Subapennine tradition (R. PERONI [1959]);
- two fragments with raised-relief cords decorated with deep vertical marks;
- two fragments with horizontal stripes similar to the decorated *cocciopesto*⁶ of Chiavari (N. LAMBOGLIA [1972]).

The following fragments of rough ceramic with multiple calcite inclusions are of uncertain typology:

- a discoidal button;
- fifteen fragments with smooth horizontal cord markings;
- a fragment with light bands of striping which intersect each other at an acute angle;
- six hundred and thirty-three fragments belonging to pots of imprecise shape.

The following clay items should be assigned to the Ligurian culture:

- a little pot of blackish semifine ware, with a broad-brimmed rim and a long narrow vertical handle, in the shape of a truncated cone with a flat bottom;
- twelve more or less everted rim sherds, in semifine or rough blackish ceramic, in two cases lightly decorated with broad linear marks. The analogies with earthenware from the Antro

³MDT : i.e. the Copper Age - a phase in the development of human culture in which the use of early metal tools appeared alongside the use of stone tools. In this part of the world that means around the 4th millenium B.C.

⁴MDT: Just west of Lucca near the upper branch of the A11 motorway.

⁵MDT: Pottery fragments from the top of a vessel that retain enough surface area to distinguish the lip portion.

⁶MDT: 'Cocciopesto' is an ancient impermeable cement made of a compound based on hydraulic lime and crushed terracotta.

della Paura of Gioviano (P. MENCACCI [1974]) and other little caves of the Val di Lima, suggest that they be dated to between the VII and V centuries B.C.;

– ten fragments of rough semifine greyish or reddish ceramic reminiscent of types from the Ligurian Necropolises of the III-II centuries B.C.;

– seven fragments of semifine blackish or greyish ceramic decorated with a series of sinuoidal marks; clay objects such as these recall the decorative motifs of Provençal ceramics from the VI-V centuries B.C. - we are however more inclined to believe these are indigenous imitation pottery rather than imported earthenware (O.-J. TAFFANEL [1967]).

The following handmade items must be considered culturally Etruscan:

– two bases of fine ceramic plates on which traces of reddish paint can be discerned;

– two slightly flared lips of bucchero ware⁷;

– eight fragments of bucchero belonging to vases of indeterminate shape;

– a biconical spindle whorl with a central hole, identical to that found at Campo Casali (G. FORNACIARI *et al.* [1970]);

– a fragment of comb, in bone, preserving a double row of converging linear incisions.

The following clay items are of Attic importance (Fig. 3, 4, 5):

– twenty-eight fragments of a large *kylix*⁸ with a high foot, subdivisible as follows: ten fragments with no particular characteristics amongst which are two handles; a rim fragment under which can be seen the letters ...AS; a rim fragment with part of an inscription (...TOS); a rim fragment on which appear the barely visible letters ...LOS on the left of a palmette⁹ surrounded by a plant volute motif interrupted by the prolongation of the central leaf; a fragment reconstructed from various pieces, depicting a male figure in a static position with the left arm hanging by the body, on the right of which are painted clay-colored palmettes connected by means of spiral motifs to a central fan-shaped palmette; a fragment showing part of the torso and pelvis as well as the hands of a male individual; a fragment on which can be seen, in profile, part of a back, right arm, and left elbow; a fragment depicting the head of a young man; a rim sherd with a left foot and part of the right; two fragments depicting a young man with the following characteristics : right arm raised to the level of the shoulders, head turned in the direction indicated by the arm (between the arm and face there is an inscription 'LUKOS'), right leg firmly planted on the ground to make a pivot for the slightly twisting body, trailing left leg crossed by the left leg of another individual standing on tiptoe.

Four fragments of the interior circular tondo were found: two exhibit a series of stag-

⁷MDT: Etruscan earthenware pottery common in pre-Roman Italy chiefly between about the 7th and early 5th century BC. Characteristically, the ware is black, sometimes gray, and often shiny from polishing.

⁸MDT: A type of ancient Greek wine-drinking cup with a broad relatively shallow body raised on a stem from a foot and usually with two handles disposed symmetrically. The almost flat interior circle on the interior base of the cup, called the tondo, was the primary surface for painted decoration in the Black-figure or Red-figure styles of the 6th and 5th century B.C. As the representations would be covered with wine, the scenes would only be revealed in stages as the wine was drained. They were often designed with this in mind, with scenes created so they would surprise or titillate the drinker as they were revealed. Dionysos, the god of wine, and his satyrs are common subjects. Scenes of heterosexual or pederastic love, sex, or orgies are also often depicted. The shape of the *kylix* enabled the drinker to drink whilst recumbent, as was the case in the typical symposium, or 'drinking party'.

⁹MDT: A motif based on the fan-shaped leaves of a palm tree.

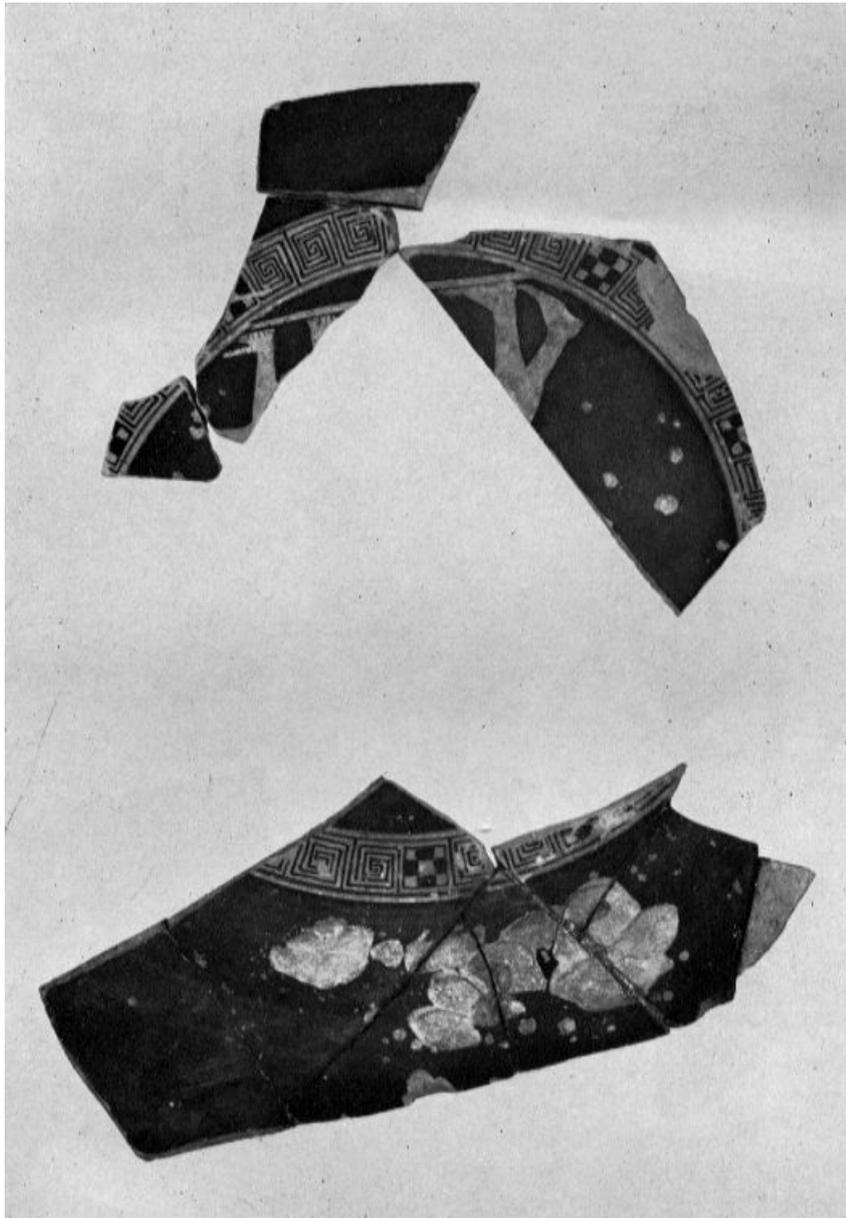


Figure 3: *Fragments of Attic kylix with red figures. 2/3 natural size.*

gered meanders¹⁰ with a chequerboard motif every two, three or four spaces; one fragment showing the bare feet, one behind the other, of a moving male figure; one fragment a piece of meander and the feet of a man in a static position.

– twenty-six fragments belonging to pots of indeterminate shape.

From what has been said it appears that the *kylix* can be attributed to a master operating in the second half of the 5th century B.C. (J.D. BEAZLEY [1963]).

¹⁰MDT: A meander is a decorative border constructed from a continuous line, shaped into a repeated motif (also called a Greek fret or Greek key design).

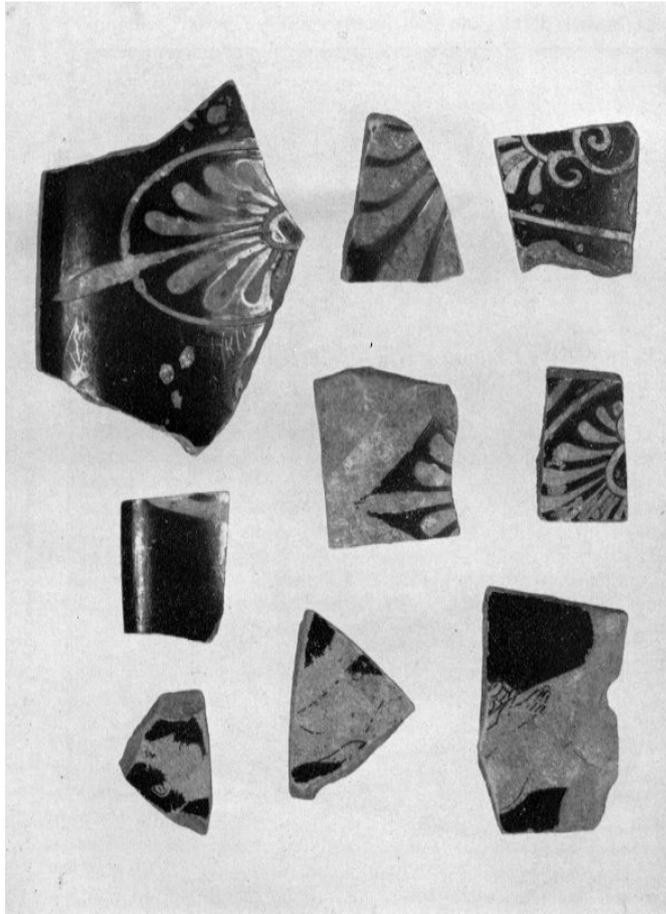


Figure 4: *Fragments of Attic kylix with red figures. Around natural size.*

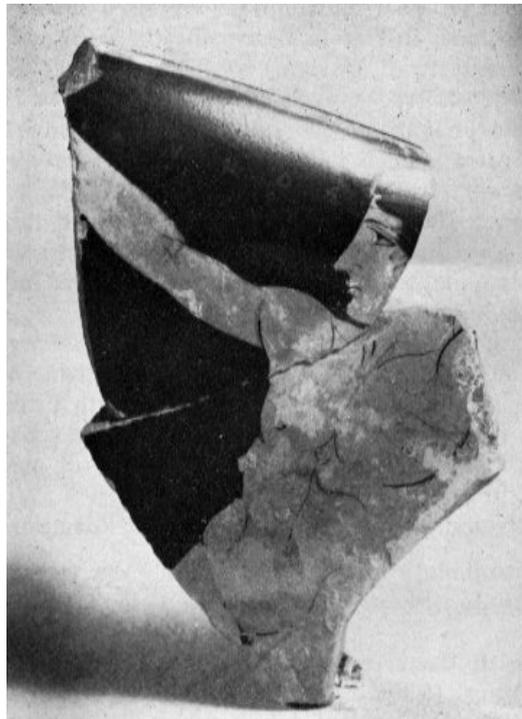


Figure 5: *Fragment of Attic kylix with inscription. Almost twice natural size.*

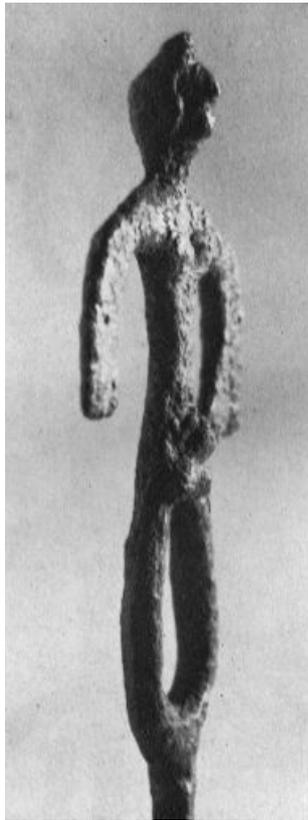


Figure 6: *Hermaphrodite bronze figurine covered in encrustations (see also Fig. 7 no. 1). Around twice natural size.*

The Cave of Castelvenere has also yielded many unusual little bronze figurines (eight whole, eleven incomplete, eleven fragmentary): of these, thirteen exhibit attributes of both sexes (Figs. 6-10) while nine are evidently female (Figs. 11, 12, 13 no. 1).

There appear to be no general typological differences between the various figurines, all of which appear to be the fruit of the same technical, stylistic and religious concept. They generally have pointed heads meant to represent the styling of the hair; the faces bear prominent noses, often lightly hooked and sometimes so pronounced as to resemble a beak; the mouth is outlined with a linear indentation; the eyes by contrast are like dots and the ears are hidden by hairstyles that encroach on part of the face; the neck is usually short but not thickset; the shoulders open out in a half-arc which continues on into the arms that run in a longitudinal direction almost parallel to the body as far as the hips; the hands, more or less markedly palmiform¹¹, have the fingers delineated by little vertical grooves. The torso, wide at the junction with the arms, tapers and then widens out again towards the connection with the lower limbs; the latter, in an entirely original solution, curve around in a leaf shape and reunite before terminating in a functional wedge.

All of the bronzes exhibit short incised transverse grooves on the arms, on the curve of the legs, and on the front and back surfaces of the trunk. These grooves are more numerous in the female figurines and perhaps indicate the presence of fabrics or of jewellery. In the females the hairstyle is depicted on the nape of the neck by means of little incisions arranged in a variable manner; and on the shoulders there are additional incised decorations that without doubt are designed to suggest the idea of a certain type of womanly clothing.

As we have intimated, thirteen of the idols possess strongly prominent breasts in addition to their masculine sexual attributes. In certain bronzes found in various zones of Italy (G. COLLONA [1970, fig. 344]; R. BIANCHI BANDINELLI *et al.* [1973, fig. 22]) discs or

¹¹MDT: in the form of a palm-leaf

hemispherical bowls serve as simple representations of the nipples of masculine individuals: in those cases, however, the breasts had a definite lesser relief with respect to the sexual organs; this is the opposite of what is seen in the little bronzes of Castelvenere where the breasts and male sexual parts are equally evident but also have the same shape. We are therefore inclined to believe that what we see here is a genuine hermaphrodite representation.

The dimensions of the undamaged specimens are as follows : their height varies from 4.5 to 5.0 cm; their maximum width at the hands is around 1.8-2.0 cm. The state of casting and conservation varies between individual figurines, but all of the examples show an intense green patina..

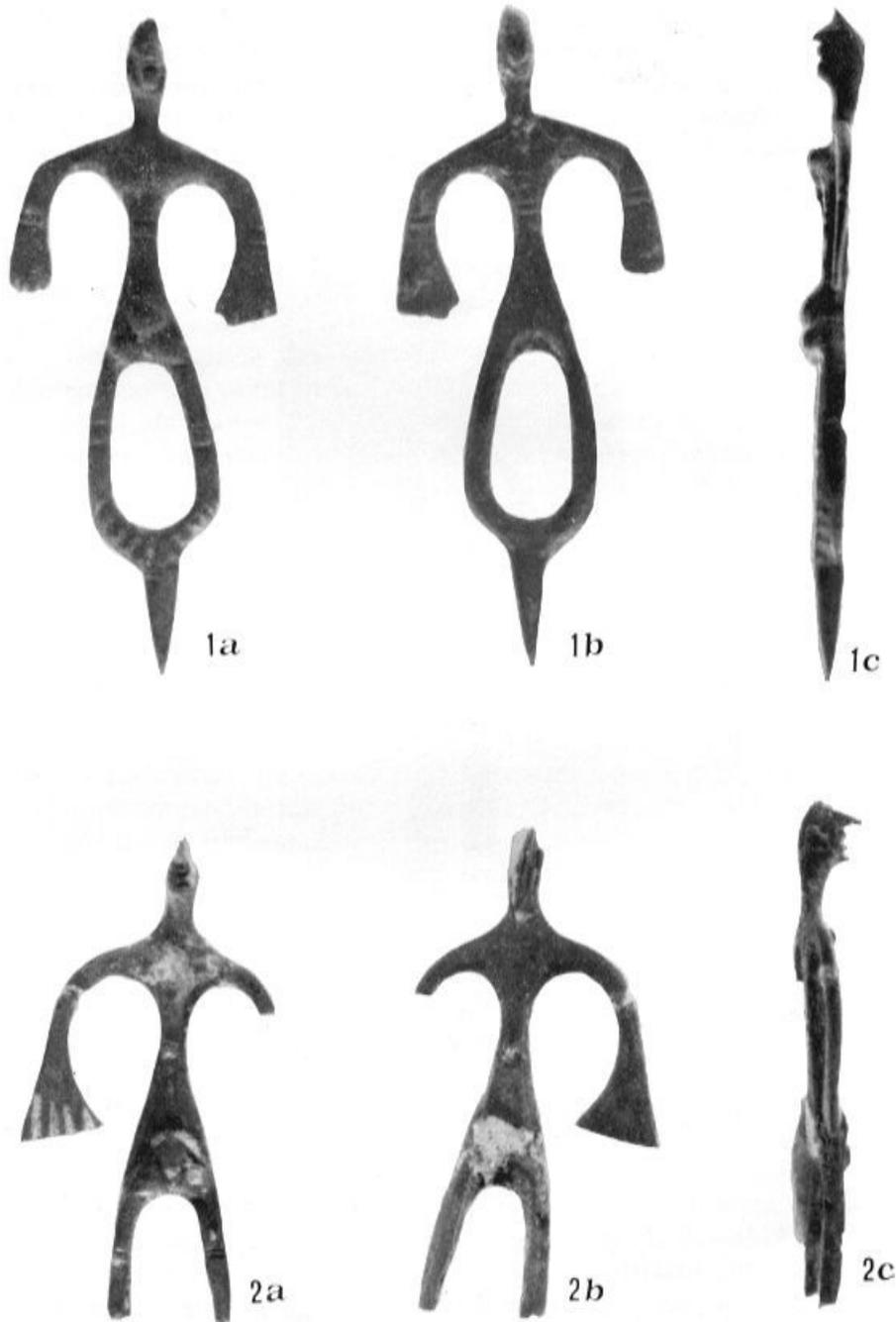


Figure 7: *Hermaphrodite bronze figurines, around 3/2 natural size.*

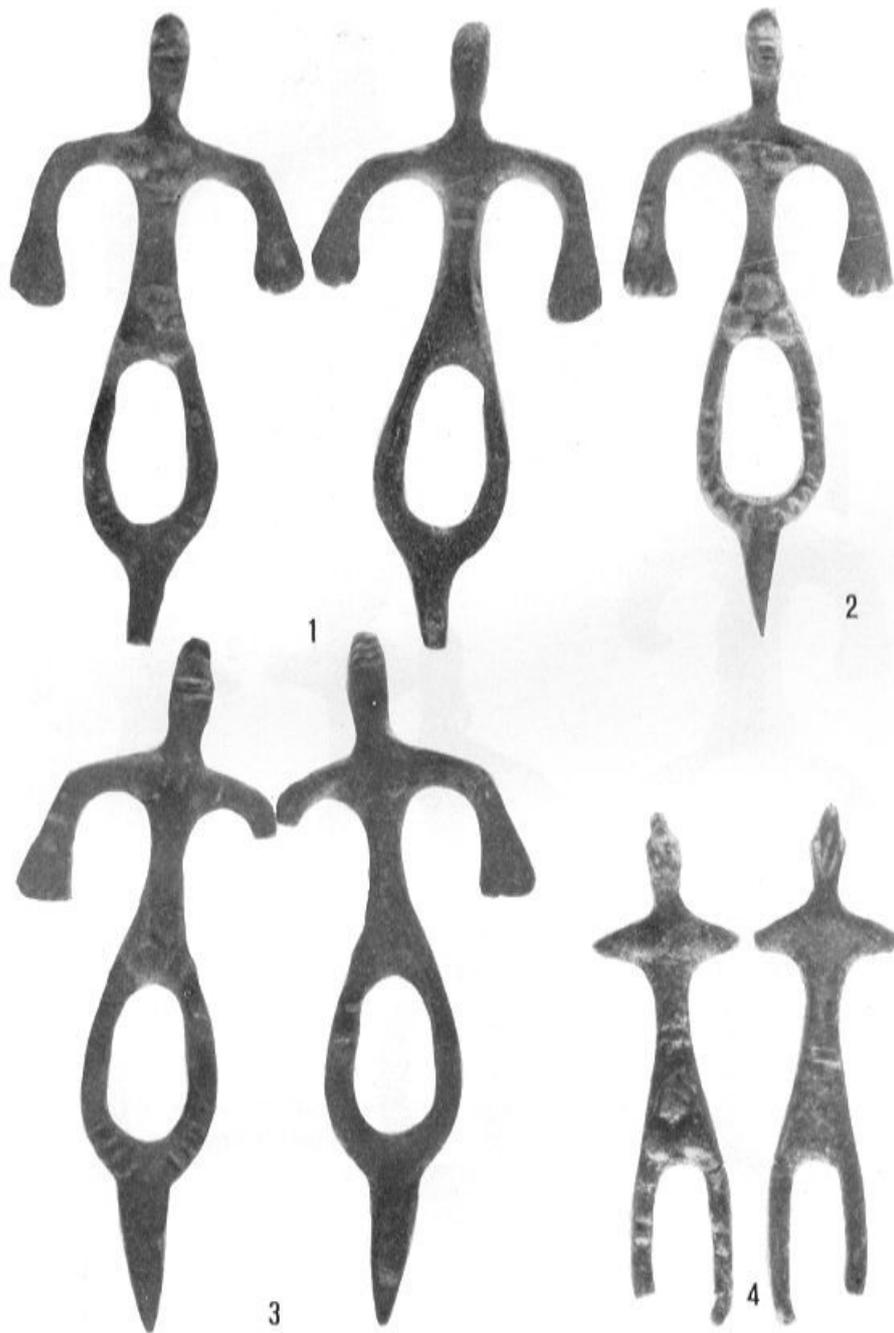


Figure 8: *Hermaphrodite bronze figurines, around 3/2 natural size.*

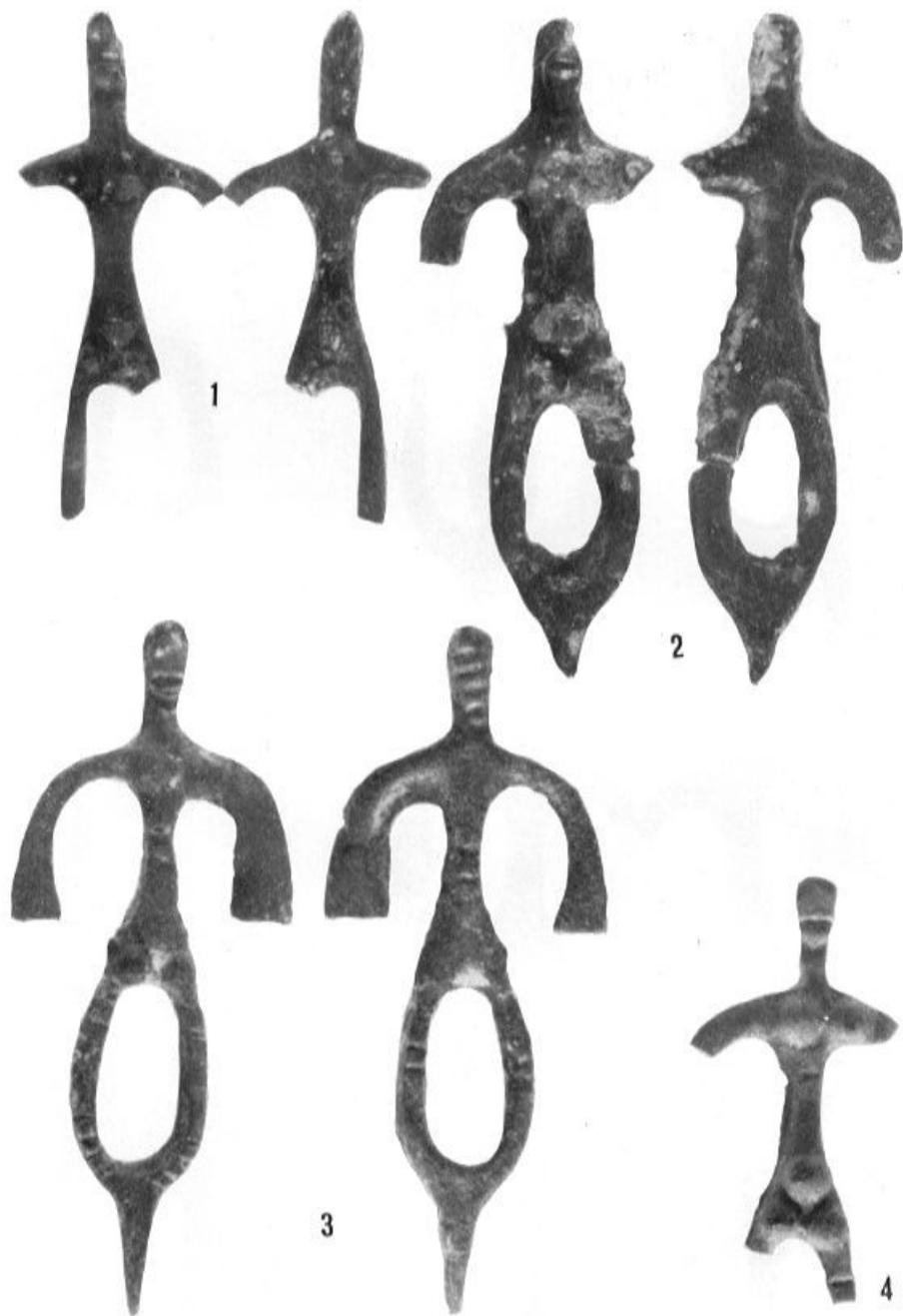


Figure 9: *Hermaphrodite bronze figurines, around 3/2 natural size.*

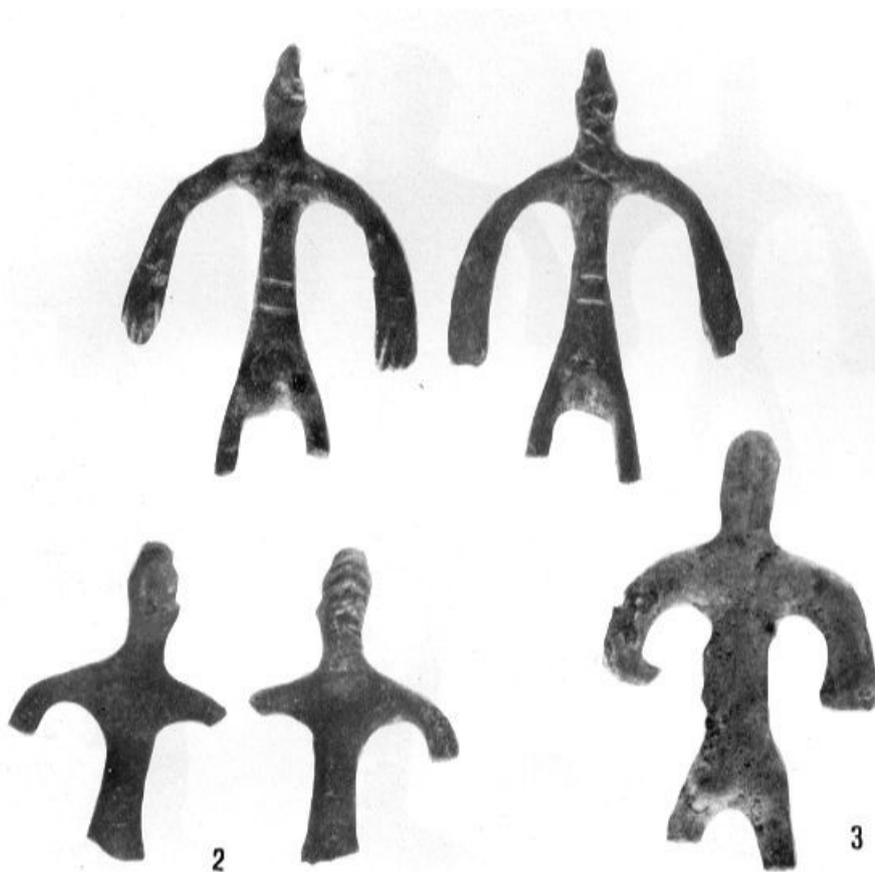


Figure 10: *Hermaphrodite bronze figurines, around 3/2 natural size.*

Whole hermaphrodites (4)

The first of these [Fig. 7 : 1a, 1b, 1c] has two horizontal parallel grooves on each arm, two horizontal grooves halfway down the arc of the legs, and at least ten grooves near the union with the wedge; on the back of the figure very fine vertical grooves are visible on the head, and there are two grooves per arm and two on the waist almost at the same height. The state of preservation is good.

In the second figure heavy corrosion prevents us from identifying the number of grooves that appear to have been immediately under the testicles as well as on the arms, on the thorax and on the arc of the legs; on the nape of the neck the hairstyle is depicted through five transverse parallel grooves.

The third figure shows, at the same height, two horizontal parallel grooves on the arms and on the thorax as well as, without any break in continuity, twelve grooves which descend, six only part way, from the arc to the wedge; on the back the hairs are in a skullcap parted in the centre and furrowed obliquely. The state of preservation is good.

The fourth example differs from the preceding ones by having a smaller number of grooves on the arc of the legs, and by having three additional horizontal grooves, two under the breasts and one immediately above the testicles; on the back of the head fishbone incisions are visible. The state of preservation is good.

Whole females (4)

The first figurine shows two grooves on the thorax, four (two on the left and two on the right) on the leg arch, and an indeterminate number on the wedge; four zigzag incisions

are present on the nape of the neck, and on the back there are two horizontal parallel ones; unfortunately the face appears damaged on the left and the wedge is corroded.

The second example is strongly corroded and it is not possible to define the number of grooves that can nevertheless be made out on the front and back of the arms, the thorax, the back and on the leg arch. One can also discern a latticework of incisions on the back.

The third bronze, reconstituted from two fragments, has an accentuated clavicular line from shoulder to shoulder; on the nape of the neck the hairstyle is more defined with two oblique grooves that meet at an acute angle at the neck enclosing three vertical grooves which prolong themselves as far as the forehead.

The fourth figure, corroded, has a prominent clavicular line and a network of incisions on the back.

In all the female bronzes the vulva is represented by a vertical incision crossed horizontally by lighter grooves.

Incomplete hermaphrodites (8)

The first of these, which is missing an arm, has three horizontal grooves on the right arm and one groove above the testicles. On the leg arch, close to the wedge, there are four oblique grooves on the right and five on the left. On the reverse side one can see the usual grooves on the arms and back, and oblique incisions on the head. The state of preservation is good.

There is another bronze where because of the untidy casting one can recognize the general form but not the particulars of which the only clear ones are the sexual attributes; it lacks the left forearm and the whole right arm.

The third figure, a little smaller than the preceding ones, is corroded and lacks both the arms and the terminal part of the leg arch; on the reverse side the arrangement of the hair has a certain originality terminating, at the nape of the neck, with an X-shaped incision.

The fourth [Fig. 7 : 2a, 2b, 2c], missing the right arm and the lower part of the leg arch, is characterized by a hooked profile, by a pronounced stretched nose, and by a hand widened like a palm in a manner more accentuated than in all the other idols. The hairstyle, done in vertical grooves, terminates at the nape of the neck with a V-shaped incision.

The fifth, missing from the waist downwards, is corroded, particularly on the left-hand side. The details of the face are scarcely visible. The hairstyle is delineated by three superimposed X-shaped incisions.

The sixth lacks the arms and the part below the junction with the legs; it appears corroded and the details are scarcely visible with the exception of the sexual attributes which are clearly in evidence; on the nape of the neck one can see incisions in the shape of a circumflex accent.

The seventh, missing from the junction with the legs down, shows imperfect casting. Only the general shape and the sexual attributes are visible. It is not incised.

The last lacks both arms and legs; on the back the hair is represented by superimposed V-shaped incisions.

Incomplete females (8)

The first of these, lacking a left arm, retains surface casting residues on the trunk. On the shoulders are two groups of oblique incisions, each one formed by four grooves; they intersect at right angles and are bounded below by a horizontal groove.

The second, broken off below the breasts, has been reassembled. The right arm is missing. Very much in evidence are both the clavicular line and the vertical line of the vulva from which very fine horizontal parallel striations depart at right angles. The decorative grooves by contrast lack relief. The hairstyle is emphasized by vertical incisions on the head and oblique ones on the nape of the neck; groups of intersecting oblique incisions converge on the shoulders.

In the third example, which is very corroded and lacking the left arm and wedge, the transverse incisions near the vulva are more obvious than before; the hairstyle is again emphasized by oblique incisions. On the shoulders one can make out groups of grooves that meet forming an angle more obtuse than in the preceding figure. On the reverse side there is a vertical incision¹² analagous to that which in other female figures represents the vulva.

Fragments (11)

Here we have three busts missing their arms, three pieces of wedge, two hand fragments, three fragments of the lower abdomen of which two belong to female figurines and one to a hermaphrodite; one of the females is sporting a wedge decorated with six horizontal partly overlapping grooves (Fig. 13, nos. 2, 6).

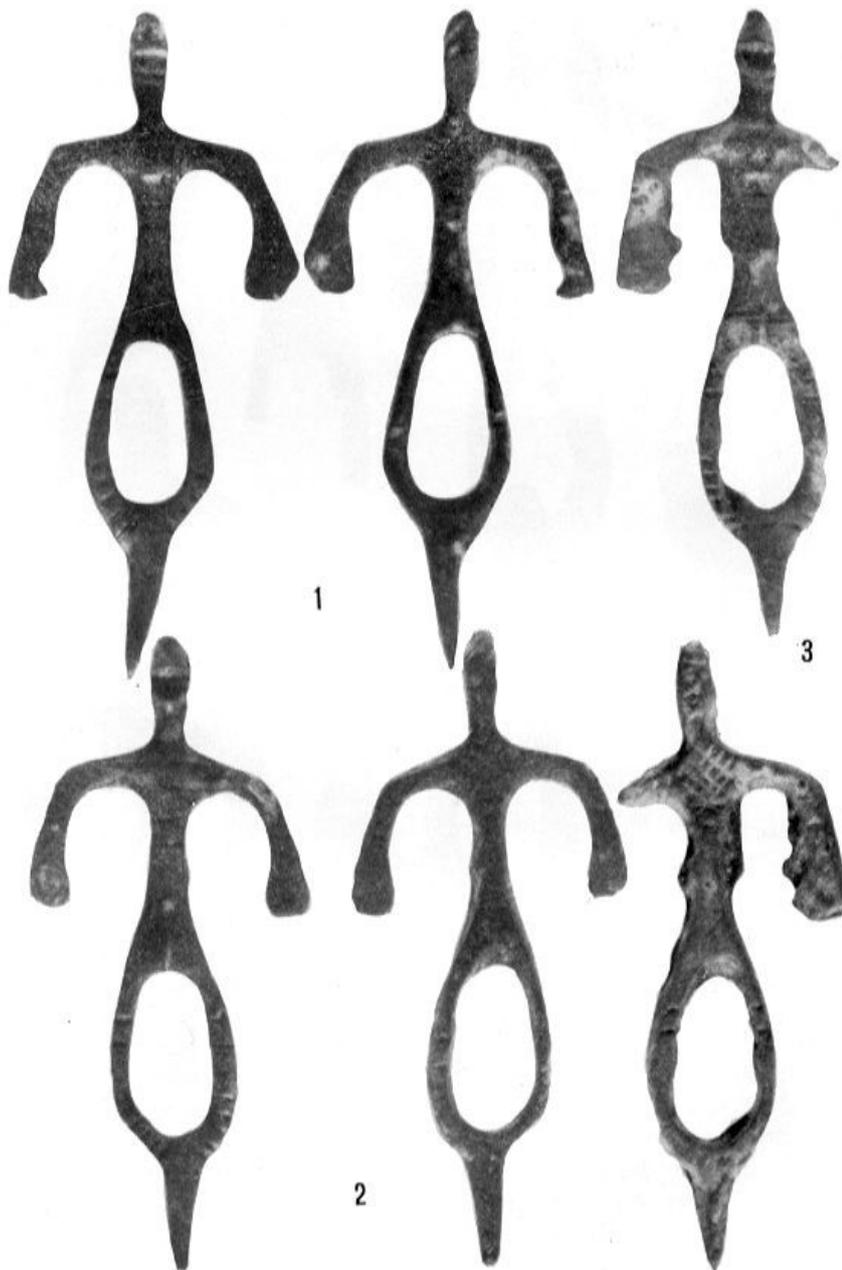


Figure 11: *Female bronze figurines, around 3/2 natural size.*

¹²MDT: Known as the 'crack of the arse' outside archaeological circles.

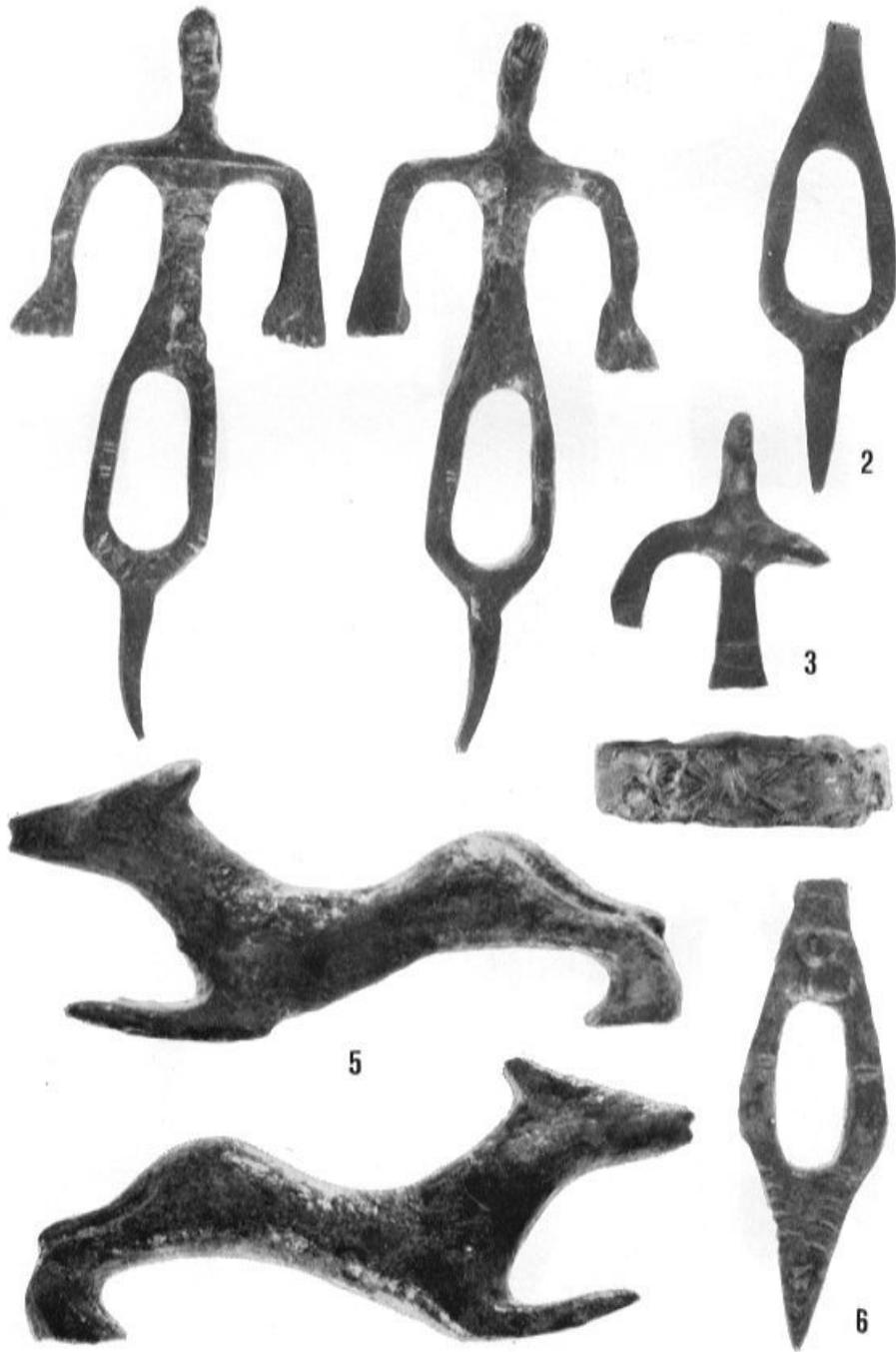


Figure 13: *Female bronze figurines, fragments, ring, and bronze dog, around 3/2 natural size.*

In general neither the female nor the androgynous figurines show particularly pronounced differences, other than perhaps in the greater abundance and variety of grooved decoration in the female bronzes compared to the hermaphrodites.

All of the idols seem to be part of an artistic scheme which has its oldest precedents in the rock paintings of the Paeolithic tradition and continues as far as the miniature bronzes of the Italic world.

The rejoining of the arc of the lower limbs, which in other periods and places assumed a particular significance and which we already find in the Bronze Age graffiti of Polvorin near La Coruña (H. KÜHN [1956]), is in our case probably only the outcome of some original geometrizing conception.

The fact that the Castelvenere figurines terminate in a wedge can be easily explained

through some kind of functional motivation: presumably it was to allow them to be easily driven into something such as earth, wood, or clay for some reason that we are not in a position to know.

The androgynous nature of the figurines has its precedents in the miniature bronze statues datable between 1000 and 600 B.C. found in regions of the Caucasus. (H. KÜHN [1956]). The myth of hyperanthropism is present also in Greek literature: Plato speaks of it in his *Symposium* where he tells us of primitive beings, originally hermaphrodite and sexually self-sufficient, who were divided in half by Zeus as a punishment.

It is virtually certain that this particular type of representation was linked to the religious sphere, even if it is probable that the hermaphroditism of our idols is only the result of cultural reminiscences and that the makers of our little masterpieces were not fully conscious of the ideas or myths that they were representing.

Putting to one side the issue of the sexual attributes however, we find that in terms of general and particular morphology the figurines from the Cave of Castelvenere show the closest analogies with the Umbrian schematic (G. COLONNA [1970]). In terms of the overall conception, the bronzes closest to ours are those of the “Marzabotto Group” but points in common with the southern Umbrian schematics - for example with the “Esquiline Group” - are not lacking, particularly if we look at the angularity and facial features.

It should however be pointed out that certain features of the Castelvenere bronzes seem altogether infrequent in the Umbrian output. For example one could point to the pronounced representation in some of our female idols of the clavicular line, which brings to mind the analogous figurative conception in the stone stele of Minucciano and of Lunigiana (A.C. AMBROSI [1969]).

In the Castelvenere figurines we see an authentic creative freedom far in advance of the simple imitation of acquired models; most importantly - notwithstanding that they were produced in series and with limited means - their level of quality is generally more elevated than the contemporary production of Umbria or Etruria.

That said, this group of ancient bronzes of the Middle Serchio Valley, whose originality and typological homogeneity might permit us to define them as the “Castelvenere Group”, quite clearly exhibit the characteristic geometrizing ideal of the Umbrian school.

A number of other unusual bronze objects were found in the Cave of Castelvenere:

– a small idol, 5.5 cm in height and lacking the proximal extremity, that exhibits a smooth face with a curved profile, globular eyes, a trapezoidal nose in light relief, squared shoulders, very short arms that seem cutoff ending with little vertical grooves to indicate the fingers, a flat wide thorax with a hint of dotlike breasts, a vulva outlined with a three-pronged incision, and slightly curved legs divided by a deep vertical grooving (Fig. 12, no. 1). In all probability the bronze terminated in a wedge. Making an exception for the timid disposition of the legs, it clearly diverges from the “Castelvenere Group” resembling in its general lines the Umbria-Lazio laminas and in particular, both because of the big head flared at the top and with its incised tridentate stylization of the sexual organ, it resembles Colonna’s number 335 (G. COLONNA [1970]). It is not easy to date this figurine: we incline, however, towards a certain antiquity with respect to the “Segni Group” and would attribute it to the 5th Century B.C.

– a fragment of bronze sheet that could belong to one of the previously-mentioned laminas.

– a laminated ring of an impure silver alloy with an efflorescence of copper bearing a stamped rosette.

– a bronze ring with an intense green patina.

– a small stylized dog in a dynamic pose with forelegs thrown forward and tensed hind legs (Fig. 13 - no. 5). The light-coloured shiny patina evident on the underside of the rear paws, clearly differentiated from the greenish patina of the rest of the animal, shows that he was attached to a vase or some other metallic object either as a handle or for decorative purposes. The Castelvenere dog brings to mind the ones on the cauldron of the Bernardini tomb, and in some respects, also those of Campovalano (R. BIANCHI BANDINELLI *et al.* [1973, Figs. 156 and 115]) which were dated, respectively, to the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.

Finally, the following additional manufactured items were found in the Cave of Castelvenere:

- a large number of glass fragments from small bottles and cups dating from Roman times;
- five bronze coins from the Imperial epoch (two depict Diocletian and one Domitian);
- around a hundred clear grey fragments of *terra sigillata*.
- twelve fragments of objects made of iron.
- ten clay fragments belonging to at least two oil lamps.

The fauna

The bone finds were analyzed by Dr. C. Sorrentino of the Institute of Anthropology and Human Palaeontology at Pisa. There were 837 in total of which 205 were identifiable. They were distributed as follows:

Hole A: 26 identifiable bones and 48 unidentifiable slivers;

Hole B, sector 1 : 61 identifiable bones and 213 unidentifiable fragments;

Hole B, sector II : 51 identifiable bones and 118 unidentifiable;

Hole B, sector III : 67 identifiable bones and 253 unidentifiable.

The species present were as follows:

	Hole A	Hole B, I	Hole B, II	Hole B, III
<i>Bos sp.</i>	5	5	7	7
<i>Sus scrofa L.</i>	13	25	13	28
<i>Ovis vel Capra</i>	8	18	21	13
<i>Cervus elaphus L.</i>	-	-	2	-
<i>Aves</i>	-	13	8	19

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the finds seems to have established that the Cave of Castelvenere was used by man from at least the beginning of the second millennium B.C. until the late Roman period. We will omit, in what follows, any assessment of more ancient or more recent material.

The first problem that presents itself is the question of whether those particular clay objects indicated to be of doubtful typology in the description are to be considered Etruscan or

pre-Etruscan. The same dilemma arose at the Etruscan village of Campo Casali near Viareggio where not even the stratigraphic sequence was of use in resolving it. The data we possess, being of a purely typological nature, do not allow us to settle this question; nevertheless the commonalities between the Castelvenere pottery and that of definite Ligurian origin discovered in the caves of Campore near Pescaglia (M. ZECCHINI [1973]) and Monte Croce in the Commune of Piazza al Serchio (G. FORNACIARI [1972]) incline us to attribute them to the Ligures.

The finds have yet again clearly demonstrated how valuable the contribution of oral tradition can be in archaeological investigations. In the case of the Cave of *Castel Venere* the image of the castle is evoked by the rocky spires that tower above the cavity, and the devotional aspect - whence the name *Venere* (= *Venus*) - is suggested by the great quantity of votive objects brought to light. We remain ignorant of the origins and causes of the religious phenomenon that took place in our cave, but it seems certain that the memory must have been handed down from generation to generation until the present day even if limited solely to the aforementioned original name.

The Castelvenere cave is not the only one to have been the scene of cult activity: in many such rock cavities, from the Neolithic onwards, there took place ritual ceremonies connected with the fertility of the earth, perhaps even because men thereby felt themselves closer to the Chthonic divinity (A.M. RADMILLI [1974]).

Some of these caves exhibit natural hollows or potholes (R. GRIFONI CREMONESI [1969]), while in others prehistoric man - with definite religious intentions - excavated pits of varying sizes in which abundant remains of fauna have been discovered together with various types of manufactured object. Amongst the most frequent species of animal in the cult deposits are - as in the Cave of Castelvenere - the cow, the pig, the goat or sheep, and the deer.

Neither is the cave of Castelvenere the only one to have borne witness to a long continuity of cult activity. In the Marmite di Ofena cave¹³, for example, such ritual phenomena, beginning with the use of cylindrical cavities by the Neolithics and continuing with the Bronze Age people who decorated the edges of potholes with circles of stones, lingered until the Roman era when a pothole was filled with votive clay figures and an altar of squared stone was constructed (O. TERROSI ZANCO [1966]). A prolongation of cult activity until the first centuries of the Christian era is also documented in the cave of Ciccio Felice¹⁴ where squared stone blocks are present near the entrance. (A.M. RADMILLI [1956]).

With the Cave of Castelvenere it is not impossible that we find ourselves faced with cults connected with the fertility of the earth, and that a certain ritual weight was attributed by the inhabitants of the Middle Serchio Valley to the peculiar stream given birth to by the mountain. Furthermore the presence of those distinctive and conspicuously hermaphrodite or female bronzes mean that one cannot even discount the hypothesis that a bona fide cult of fertility was practised inside the cave.

The valuable objects discovered inside also testify to the great importance attached to the cult cave of Castelvenere by a Ligurian population that archaeological discoveries show us to have been extremely poor, so much so that even amongst their funerary goods it is difficult to find manufactured objects of any worth.

As far as the provenance of the pottery is concerned the greater part, as we have seen, must be considered to have been imported. Even though the percentage of unquestionably Ligurian objects is not very high, this does not however permit us to assert that the cave was frequented for cult purposes by the Etruscans. In all probability these people were only the channel, on Ligurian soil, of high quality products such as the Attic ceramics and the bronzes. Nevertheless the abundance of foreign manufactured objects apparently available to the Ligurians demonstrates that commercial movement of the Etruscans in the Serchio valley should no longer be thought of as a sporadic and later phenomenon. Rather it is to be

¹³MDT: Near the town of Ofena in the province of L'Aquila, Abruzzo.

¹⁴MDT: Near Avezzano around 50 km south of L'Aquila, Abruzzo.

considered as a genuine and organized continuous penetration beginning at least in the 6th century B.C.

Up to now one had spoken of uncertain commercial Etruscan influences in the Garfagnana on the basis of the left-to-right inscription *AKIV* present on an ossuary hailing from the necropolis of Pianellone near S. Romano (A.C. AMBROSI [1958]). Today the reality of the Etruscan expansion onto the eastern side of the Apuans has been demonstrated by the finds in the Cave of Castelvenere and the Antro della Paura (P. MENCACCI [1974]). And we are not required to believe that the infiltration of the Tyrrhenians onto Ligurian land was always accompanied by military action: on numerous occasions they had to count more on the quality of their goods than on force of arms. One of the more persuasive pieces of evidence has to be the iron, of which slag has been discovered at Bientina, at S. Lorenzo a Vaccoli, and at S. Gimignano di Ponte a Moriano. Minerals such as these came from the Isle of Elba, across the Arno and the series of marshes which at that time covered what is now the plain of Lucca, arriving in the form of unprocessed ore or as worked products first at the Lucca 'islands' and then on to the manufacturing centres of the Serchio valley.

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