

CORINTHIAN VASES IN MONTREAL AND SAINT JOHN

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IT HAS FOR some time been the intention of the writer to make available to the scholarly world a knowledge of the Corinthian pottery existing in the northeastern states and eastern Canada, in smaller collections where the prospects of a corpus publication may not be immediately in evidence. So far this project has advanced only slowly, owing to the pressure of other commitments.¹ However, it is a pleasure to present and comment on the vases in two Canadian collections. There is, of course, a fair representation of Corinthian pottery in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto already published.² Apart from this, I am not aware of any other pieces east of, say, Toronto, other than the series in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and a solitary cup in the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, to be described below. I should be glad to be corrected on this score, if readers have better knowledge, or access to private collections about which I have not been able to obtain any information. Needless to say, it is now becoming possible to attribute Corinthian vases to masters, or at least to relate them to known masters, with greater conviction than was possible a generation ago. As almost any vase may throw a revealing light on this concern, even if it cannot immediately be assigned to a painter, it becomes a matter of some importance that unrecorded specimens be brought to light.

The most striking vase of this entire group is a large, handsome kotyle in a relatively good state of preservation, decorated with two friezes and closely set rays at the base (pl. 1).³ A smaller set of rays is superimposed over the normal rays so that long, vertically extended, staggered triangles rise above the flaring foot. The painting of the rays and the frieze subjects is steady and careful, and the incisions are careful. The centre of the principal side (pl. 1, top right) is denoted by a double

¹Already appeared: "Corinthian Vases at Wellesley College," *AJA* 68 (1964) 167-172. I am deeply indebted to the authorities of the museums named in Montreal and Saint John for permission to study and publish the vases presented here and assistance in obtaining photographs. I leave out of account a cup (53.Cb.1) which has suffered from over-painting and two Etrusco-Corinthian alabstra (all in Montreal). The Editor wishes to express his gratitude to The Canada Council for a grant to subsidize the publication of the plates accompanying this article.

²D. Robinson, C. Harcum, J. Iliffe, *A Catalogue of Greek Vases in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology* (Toronto 1930) 42 f.

³Inv. 59.Cb.3; height 16 cm. and width 30 cm. including handles; purchased from H. K. Monif (New York).

lotos flanked by confronted, sickle-winged griffin-birds whose breasts snuggle into the concavity formed by the flaring calyxes of the lotoses. The creatures appear to be peering into the plant. Since their tails are spread, they occupy most of the space between the handles, but for good measure the artist has squeezed in an additional pair of flanking creatures, a siren whose face has been damaged by a break, on the left, and another griffin-bird on the right, also damaged. The wings of the latter creatures are raised and their tails, being spread also, continue and extend well under the handle. Under each handle (pl. 1, top left, bottom right) is a small bird with closed wings facing right. In this way the symmetrical effect is lost on one side; it is therefore clear that the handle birds do not belong to the scene but serve as definite dividers separating the front (A) from the back (B) of the vase. On side B (pl. 1, bottom left), two sirens with raised wings and spread tails confront one another directly; they are again flanked by griffin-birds, of which one has a sickle wing, the other raised wings.

It is worth noticing the devices used by the artist to achieve an effect of variety. The patterns, as far as wings are concerned are (A) *b-a-a-b*; (B) *a-b-b-b*; as far as sirens and griffin-birds are concerned, the patterns are (A) *a-b-b-b*; (B) *b-a-a-b*. I have pointed out in the publication of a krater by the Cavalcade Painter⁴ how precisely, one may say mathematically, articulated the design sense of vase decorators of the mature Corinthian period was; in effect, the discipline of the Geometric style was still bearing its fruit many generations later.

More or less directly under the central tableau of the upper frieze is a browsing goat, right (pl. 1, top right). The lower frieze is disclosed as subordinate by its narrower proportions and the fact that only quadrupeds, rather than the more exotic bird-creatures, are depicted. Panthers flank the goat on the left and right, but facing outwards. If we continue under the left handle (pl. 1, top left), we find another browsing goat, left, so that this panther is flanked by two browsing goats, both facing left. Next, under the confronted sirens (pl. 1, bottom left), comes a panther, left, confronting a ram with lowered head. We are now back to the right-hand panther of side A (pl. 1, top right) and the ram is flanked by panthers facing inward (pl. 1, bottom right). I describe these arrangements in detail to call attention to the fact that the seemingly casual animal frieze is subject to conventional rhythmic patterns as well as the main frieze.

It is evident from the above analysis that the artist of this kotyle was decorating it rather in the manner of a krater than in the usual sense of kotylai, which generally have single rays, single friezes, and an upper

⁴"The Three Maidens Group," *AA* 73 (1969) 109 f.

border of vertical wavy lines. Even more to the point is the almost complete lack of filling ornament (there are several blobs, probably accidental, in front of the siren of side A). Even the closest formal parallel that I can cite, a kotyle in Taranto,⁵ slightly smaller, makes use of dense filling ornament and mixes quadrupeds with sirens and sphinxes in the upper frieze (there is no connection between the style of these two kotylai). The Taranto vase further emphasizes the kotyle shape by drawing in the foot, whereas the Montreal kotyle has a broad, wide base which gives it the massive effect of a larger vase.

One is therefore driven to look in the direction of kraters and also to cups, which developed in much the same spirit, for stylistic relationships of this unusual kotyle. It is true that the main thrust of krater-cup themes was narrative rather than purely orientalizing. However, the decoration of both principal and subordinate frieze in the latter sense remained a possible disposition.⁶ An extensive examination of relevant materials seemed to confirm that the Montreal kotyle can, at present, be best understood within the general sphere of the Three Maidens Group (essentially kraters and cups), as I have recently defined this (see note 4), even though it is not possible for me to ascribe the kotyle to any known master in this group. Its ram and goats seem to descend from the prototype of the Medallion Painter; the birds recall the substantial creatures of both this painter⁷ and those of the Painter of Brussels A 2182.⁸ I am not suggesting that these masters and our kotyle-painter were necessarily bench-mates, though they could have been. But, in a curious sense, the general type and arrangement of the kotyle figures are unmistakably related, and certainly belong to the earlier half of Middle Corinthian. In quality, the kotyle compares favourably with the principal artists in the Three Maidens Group.

The Montreal Museum has three alabastra, all of some interest, and two of them rather prepossessing. They represent a distinct chronological succession. The smallest is to be dated most probably early in the Early Corinthian period.⁹ The griffins (pl. 2, top), who confront one another

⁵*AS Atene* n.s. 21/22 (1959-60) 140, figs. 115-116; much the same can be said of *CVA* Paris Bib. Nat. 1, pl. 10, 1 and 3.

⁶Krater: H. Payne, *Necrocorinthia* (Oxford 1931; hereafter *NC*) Cat. 1162 (apparently); more often, with orientalizing bird-creatures on one side and narrative scene on the other, e.g., *AJA* 65 (1961) pls. 11-12 (Copenhagen). A cup in London, *NC* Cat. 1014, stands in much the same relation as the Taranto kotyle. The artist has mixed felines with the bird-creatures of the main frieze and added sirens to the quadrupeds of the lower frieze and made use of filling ornament. Cup artists tended to mix bird-creatures and animals in a frieze subordinate to a narrative scene.

⁷See D. A. Amyx, "The Medallion Painter," *AJA* 65 (1961) pl. 1f.

⁸*Ibid.*, pl. 4c. There is a slightly Dodwellian air to the Montreal panthers.

⁹32.Cb.3; height 8.3 cm.; museum purchase.

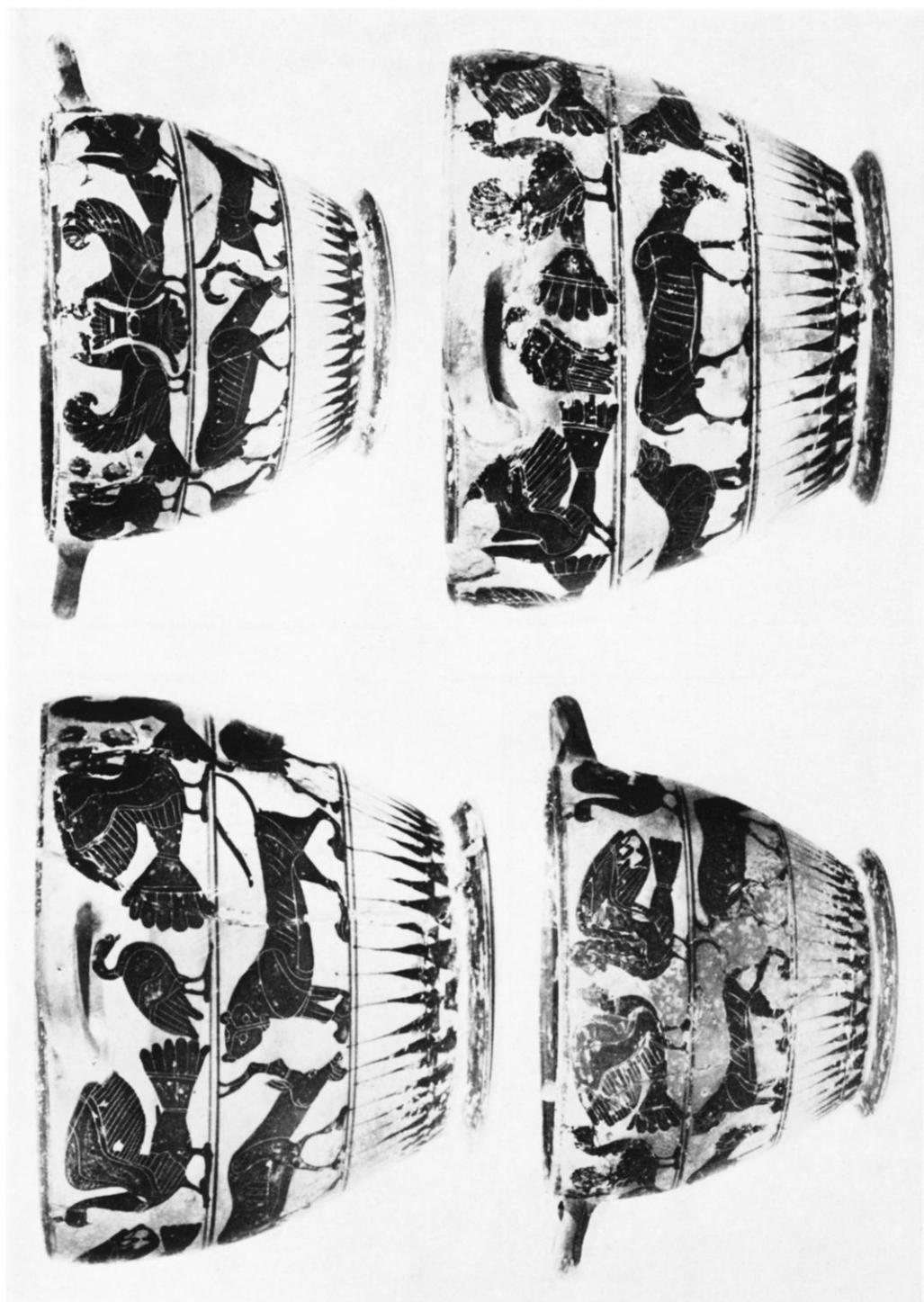


PLATE 1. MONTREAL MFA 59.Cb.3. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.

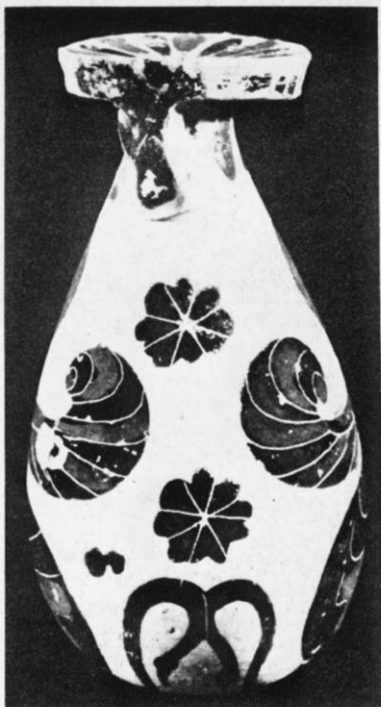


PLATE 2. (Top) MONTREAL MFA 32.Cb.3. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.
(Bottom) MONTREAL MFA 25.Cb.1. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.

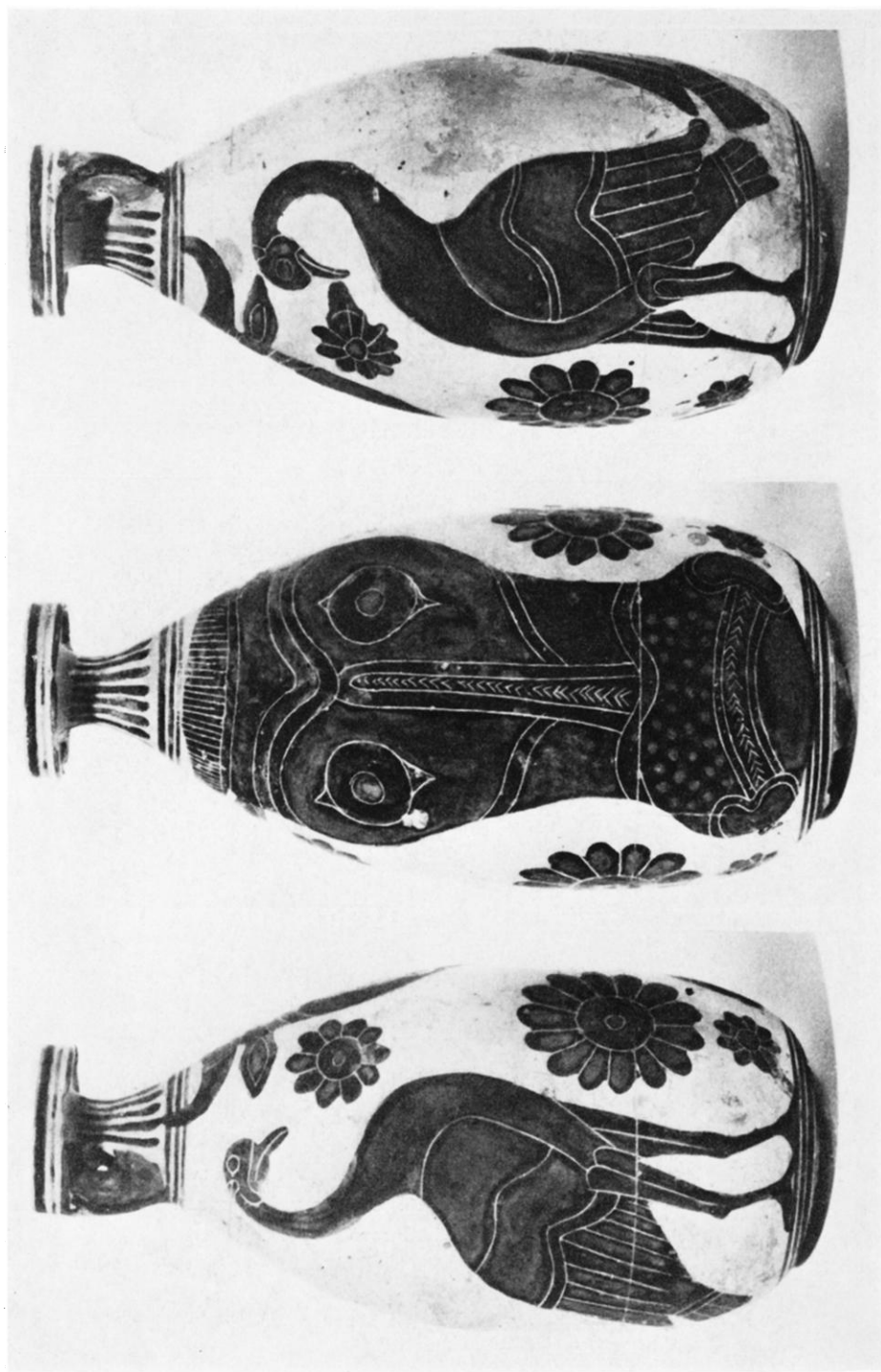


PLATE 3. MONTREAL MFA 25.Cb.2. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.



PLATE 4. (*Top*) MONTREAL MFA 38.Cb.2. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.
 (*Middle*) MONTREAL MFA 38.Cb.3. COURTESY MONTREAL MFA.
 (*Bottom*) SAINT JOHN GK 45.139. PHOTO BENSON.

with open beaks, their tails touching under the handle, and show one curled wing, are still strongly reminiscent of the type employed by the Painter of the Double-Sphinx;¹⁰ the style, of course, is different, being somewhat looser and, one might say, more spirited: the bend of the neck and the angle of the head have an almost coquettish effect. The rosettes are of a size, type and arrangement found on Early Corinthian alabastra.¹¹ The griffin type involved here is seen in a more advanced form in the work of the Red Dot Painter,¹² but again the details are rather different. I cannot attribute this piece at present.

The next alabastron in chronological order is about twice the size of the one just discussed, bulkier, and more firmly organized, with double lines setting off the petals of the neck and underside from a large cock (pl. 2, bottom right) with displayed wings and a griffin-like ear (?) in the main frieze.¹³ At the back, directly under the handle, a water bird (pl. 2, bottom left) with closed wings has been tucked in between the tips of the cock's wings. The remainder of the field is fairly closely filled with incised rosettes of various sizes, some rather large, and a few incised blobs. Of interest is the attenuated, palmette-like filler placed between the neck and the hither wing of the cock. A smaller version of the same, without the tail and placed horizontally, almost touches the upper back of the water bird. For orientation we are led at once to the Erlenmeyer Painter¹⁴, who was doubtless the foremost practitioner of stately cocks with displayed wings in the Middle Corinthian period. We find this same painter was also given to the use of palmettes tucked in between the wings and necks of his fowls, that he usually doubled incisions of the eye-circle and that he separated the comb from the head with a long continuous double curve. The similarities listed assure us contemporaneity and possibly even direct influence between the Montreal alabastron and those of the painter mentioned, but there are significant differences, particularly in the type of rosettes, in the leg marking and the alabastron shape (furthermore, the Erlenmeyer Painter does not add water-birds). It is not yet possible to say who the painter of our alabastron is; but a fuller understanding of the descendance of cock-types is gradually becoming possible.

The third, largest and latest alabastron of the series has a bulbous body tapering to a small neck and disk with parallel lines instead of dots on its side.¹⁵ The spontaneity of the previous works has been replaced by a

¹⁰J. L. Benson, *Geschichte der korinthischen Vasen* (Basel 1953; hereafter *GKV*) 29, List 32:3.

¹¹Cf. Payne, *NC* pl. 17, 4.

¹²Benson, *GKV* 31, List 37.

¹³25.Cb.1; height 17.8 cm.; gift of F. C. Morgan.

¹⁴J. L. Benson, "The Erlenmeyer Painter," *Antike Kunst* 7 (1964) 72 f., esp. pl. 25.

¹⁵25.Cb.1; height 20.3 cm.; gift of F. C. Morgan.

rather wooden regularity, as one can ascertain even by comparing the petals on the necks. This measured, formal quality carries over to the boukranion (pl. 3, middle) which is flanked by a large and two smaller symmetrically placed rosettes with incised centres and petals, and by tall, goose-necked water-birds with closed wings (pl. 3, left, right). The boukranion is large and elaborate, very carefully drawn and painstakingly incised; much of its surface was covered with purple enhancement. The same description applies to the birds. This alabastron is dated to the Late Corinthian period and can be assigned unequivocally to the Herzogovina Painter.¹⁶ It takes its place as one of the two or three most elaborate works of an artist who normally contented himself with unpretentious sketches of goats and panthers. This is the first example of a boukranion in his œuvre and shows that this motif persisted, albeit in somewhat frozen form, into the last phase of Corinthian painting. In several ways the alabastron forms a very useful adjunct to our conception of this artist and his times.

Two small round aryballoi fall into the class of mass-produced vases for which it is often impossible to discern any very characteristic style or suggest a very close date. Both of these, at first glance, look rather late, but, in fact, at least one is certainly Early to Middle Corinthian. This aryballos has a quite short neck which makes the disk seem almost to be resting on the body.¹⁷ On top of the disk is a ring of short bars enclosed by circles.¹⁸ There are dots on the side. On the body, two panthers are confronted over a large rosette with incised centre ring and petals (pl. 4, top left). A corresponding rosette was placed approximately under the handle (pl. 4, top right). The drawing of the panthers is not so much careless as simply awkward and uninspired. The device of felines confronted across an elaborate floral motif was popular in the Middle Corinthian period and occurred occasionally even earlier.¹⁹ The introduction of a rosette in the central position could perhaps be a labour-saving reduction of this scheme; there are several parallels for it.²⁰

The second aryballos in fact demonstrates an intermediate stage in this type of adaptation.²¹ A kind of palmette, but without a definite

¹⁶D. A. Amyx, "An alabastron by the Herzogovina Painter," *BABesch* 38 (1963) 89 f. Add to the list presented there a round aryballos in Palermo: Fondazione Mormino, inv. 665: browsing goat to left; same, London, Horniman Museum; and an alabastron in Moscow: *Wiss. Ztscht. der Univ. Rostock* 16 (1967), "Die griechische Vase," pl. 100, 1-2.

¹⁷38.Cb.2; height 6.4 cm.; gift of F. C. Morgan.

¹⁸Presumably a schematization of the fine petals on disks of the lion group: NC, 289, fig. 125.

¹⁹Payne. NC pl. 22, 1.

²⁰T. J. Dunbabin, *Perachora* 2 (Oxford 1962) no. 1608 (dated EC); Payne, NC Cat. 566 (from Delos, EC); Corinth, KP 26 (unpublished, MC).

²¹37.Cb.3; height 5.8 cm.; gift of F. C. Morgan; listed in *Canadian Art* (Winter 1959) no. 63 (illust. on p. 12).

stem, is suspended between two panthers (pl. 4, middle left). A very similar formation, used as a filling ornament, occurs on a Middle Corinthian alabastron in Taranto.²² The artist has placed an inverted palmette-rosette behind the right panther of our aryballos (pl. 4, middle right) and balancing rosettes over the middle of the back of each panther. The line across the forehead of the left panther has become a purely decorative wave.²³ The rather arid formality of the scheme and drawing and the use of circular bands on the top and side of the disk point to a late phase of Corinthian animal style: Late Corinthian, but probably not far removed from Middle Corinthian.

The New Brunswick Museum in Saint John has a Late Corinthian cup with offset rim which demonstrates the end phase of the tradition of exotic bird-creature decoration discussed above in connection with the Montreal kotyle.²⁴ The cup has a reserved band on the interior of the lip where the wall bends, and at the centre. There is a purple stripe directly on the ground below the reserved band at the lip, also at intervals inside complementary narrow bands of black paint. Both A and B of the exterior friezes have a bird with reverted head facing another similar bird with a griffin-bird at the right (pl. 4, bottom). The style, as my drawing (Figure 1) reveals, is somewhat more decadent than that on a



FIG. 1. SAINT JOHN GK 45.139. DRAWING BENSON.

similar cup in Philadelphia²⁵ but not so degenerate as that on an unpublished cup in private possession in Cambridge (Mass.) which has reduced the birds to silhouette blobs.

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²² *AS Atene* n.s. 21/22 (1959-60) 137, fig. 112.

²³ Cf. similar formation on Corinth, KP 1889 (unpublished, MC). Cf. a Late Corinthian aryballos with similar feline: E. Langlotz, *Griechische Vasen in Würzburg* (Munich 1932) pl. 10, 108.

²⁴ GR45.139; height 7.2 cm.; diameter without handles 10.5 cm.

²⁵ *JfA* 60 (1956) 229, pl. 77: fig. 42.