The Cave at Vari. VI. The Terra-Cotta Lamps

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American School
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THE CAVE AT VARI

VI

THE TERRA-COTTA LAMPS

[PLATES XII–XIV]

THE lamps, nearly one thousand in number, which were found in the cave at Vari[1] are of the type commonly called "Roman," but are of late date.[2]

Like some of the lamps found in North Africa, they illustrate the transition from the "Roman" to the "Christian" lamp.[3]

The best and earliest specimens resemble in shape Dressel's *forma* 25,[4] but the clay is coarser and the workmanship much inferior. Lamps of this form (cf. Fig. 1)[5] are found in large numbers in Greece, and the fact that they are rarely or never found except in Greek lands seems to indicate that they repre-

[1] For other considerable finds of lamps in one place, see Birch, *Ancient Pottery*, 2d ed., pp. 132 f.; *Mélanges Archéologiques de l'École française à Rome*, XII, 1892, p. 116; Πρακτικὰ τῆς ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρίας, 1900, p. 40; *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 1902, p. 390; *Am. J. Arch.* VI, 1902, Suppl. p. 21.

[2] One wheel-made lamp, of the third century B.C., was found; cf. *Musée de St. Louis de Carthage*, pl. xxiv, no. 24.

[3] La Blanchère and Gauckler, *Musée d'Aloui*, pl. xxxiv, nos. 38–55.

[4] *C.I.L.* XV, 2, fasc. 1, Tab. iii, no. 25.

[5] The lamp in Fig. 1, together with fifty or sixty others, most of them in fragments, was found in a conduit at Corinth, in May, 1902. Length, 0.106 mm.; width, 0.084 mm.; height, exclusive of handle, 0.027 mm. On the bottom is incised the name KAΛΛICTOY, together with a heart-shaped leaf. The National Museum at Athens has on exhibition about fifty lamps of a similar type, and scarcely a museum in Europe is without a specimen.

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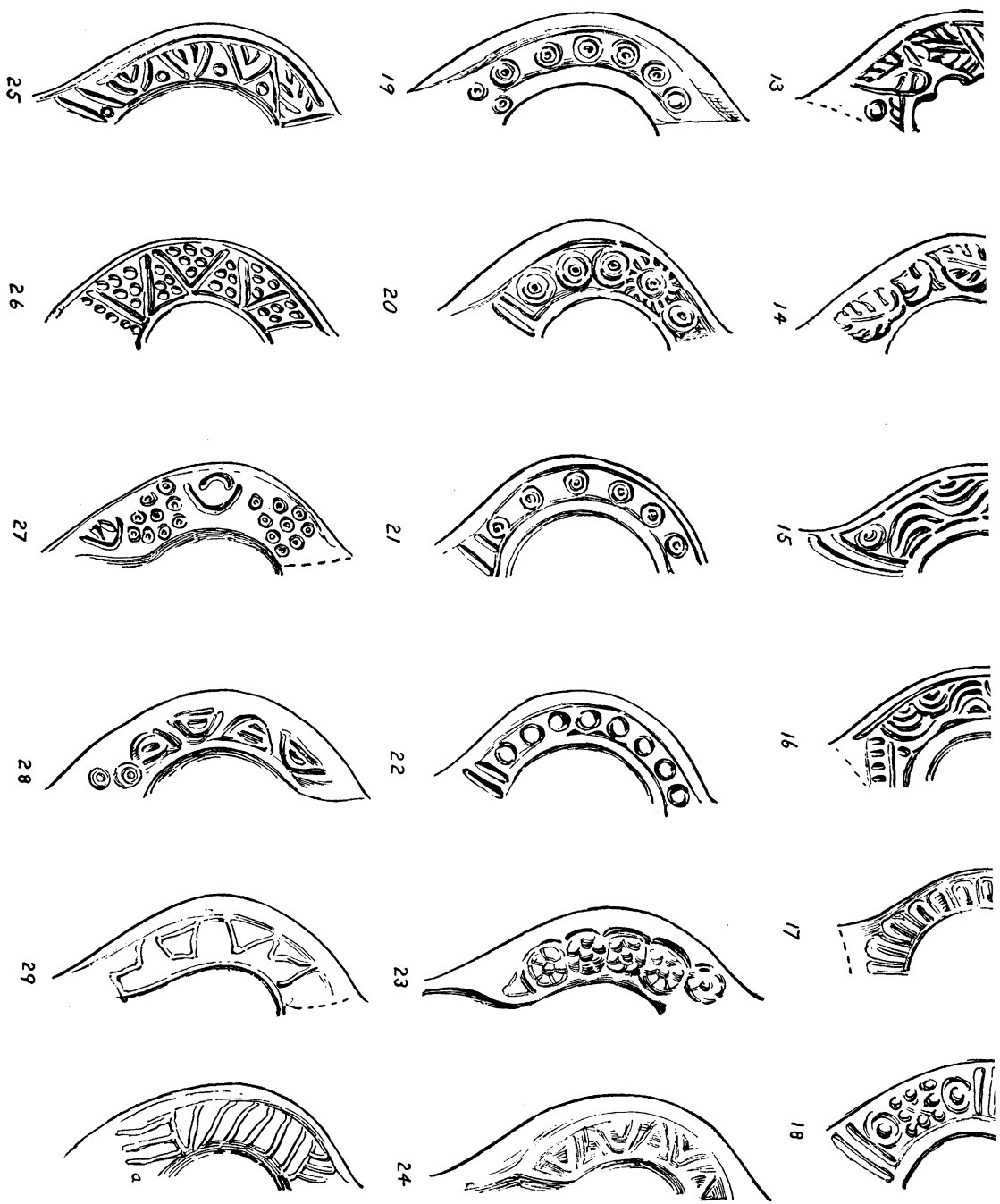

LAMPS FROM VARI: TYPES C

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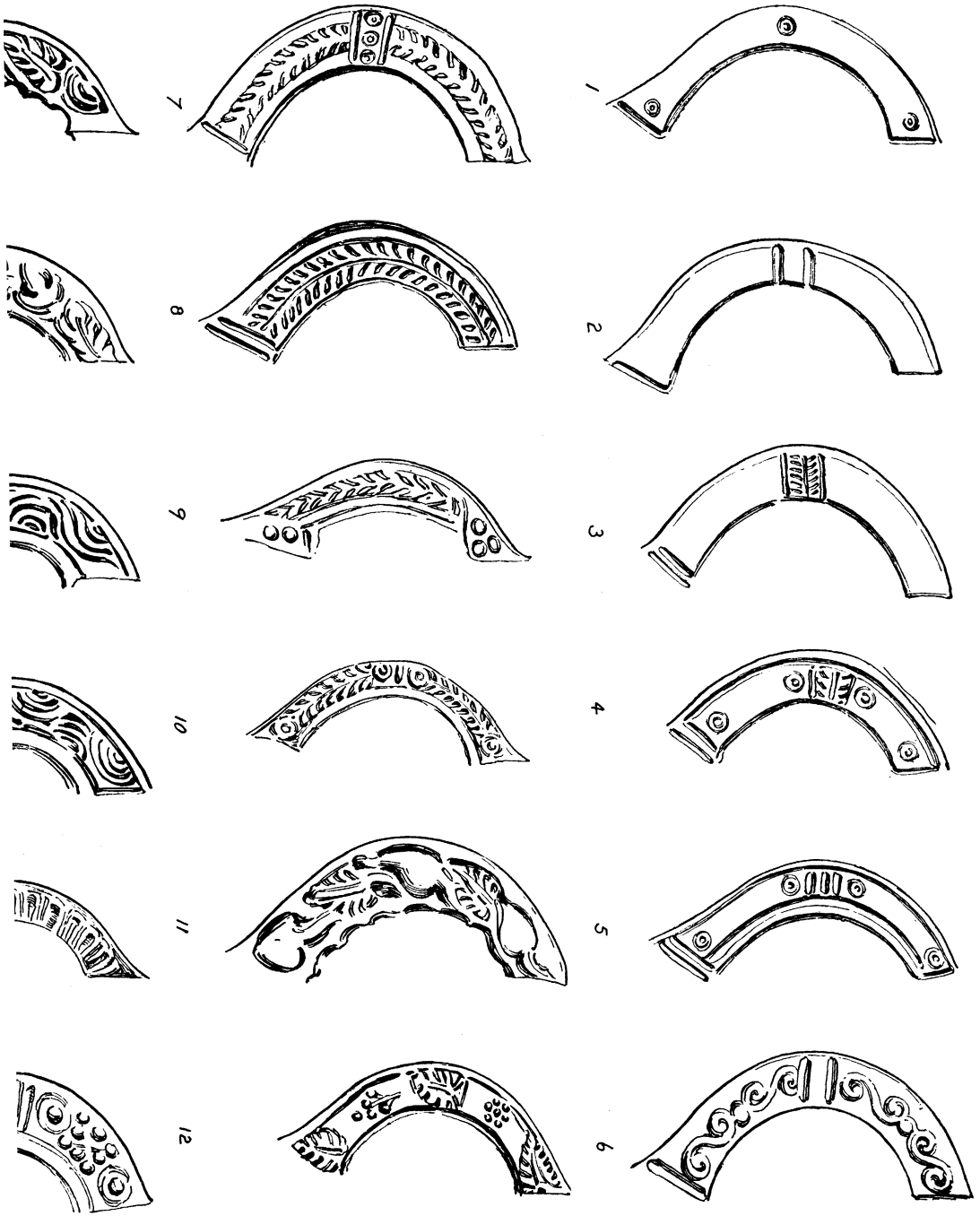

OF DEVICES ON BORDERS

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LAMPS FROM VARI: DEVICES ON BORDER AND DISK

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SEVEN LAMPS FROM VARI

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sent one of the types which the Roman lamp assumed on Greek soil.[1] These lamps are of a fine, pale yellow, or pinkish clay, very thin and delicate, and usually without a slip of any kind. The handle (*ansa*), without which none of these lamps seem to have been made, is straight and perforated, and on its upper surface are two or three grooves. The nozzle (*myxa*) is short and rounded, and is without a trace of the arabesques which are a characteristic of the Roman lamps of the first and second centuries of our era.[2] The upper surface of the nozzle is plain, and is raised a little above the border (*margo*). The border itself is either left plain or is decorated with a kind of ovolo pattern, or less frequently with a vine. In most cases two nobs of clay, 2 mm. to 3 mm. in height and flat on top, rise, one on either side of the lamp, from the centre of the border.[3] The device on the centre of the upper surface (*discus*) consists of a rosette or a relief similar in subject and execution to the reliefs found on Roman

FIGURE 1.—TERRA-COTTA LAMP FROM CORINTH.

[1] Cf. Birch, *op. cit.* p. 132.

[2] See J. Toutain, in Daremberg and Saglio, *Dict. Ant.* II, p. 1323; La Blanchère and Gauckler, *op. cit.* pp. 149 ff., pl. xxxiv, nos. 23–31; Dressel, in *C.I.L.* XV, 2, fasc. 1, p. 783; J. Fink, *Sitzungsber. d. kgl. bayer. Akad. 1900, phil.-hist. Classe*, p. 687.

[3] Similar but taller nobs on lamps stamped with the name FORTIS, etc. (Dressel, *op. cit.* Tab. iii, no. 5; Fink, *op. cit.* Taf. iii), are explained by Fink (p. 688) as means by which the two halves of the lamp were held together before the firing. Dressel (p. 783) gives the more probable explanation that they were made in imitation of similar projections on bronze lamps, to which were fastened the suspension chains. In addition to the examples given by Dressel of clay lamps in which these projections are actually pierced (unpublished lamps, sketches of which are in the possession of Costa, Naples) might be added Passeri, *Lucernae Fictiles*, I, Tab. prelim. no. iii, and Proleg. p. vii. Dressel, in *Röm. Mitth.* VII, (1892), pp. 144–157, shows that most of the lamps shown in the work of Passeri are spurious, but makes no mention of the Prolegomena.

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lamps of the better period. The bottom (*fundus*) usually has, scratched across it with a fine-pointed instrument, a name in the genitive. This inscription, with a single exception, so far as I have been able to learn,[1] is in Greek letters.[2]

It is from this type that the lamps from Vari were developed. But the best of them are far removed from their prototype in fineness of clay and in the degree of art displayed. So it would be fair to date the earliest of them as late as the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century. There are only half a dozen lamps of the fully developed "Christian" type of the fifth century. We may therefore, with a considerable degree of probability, say that nearly all the lamps from Vari are of the fourth century of our era. This hypothesis is strengthened by the testimony of the coins found together with the lamps,[3] and by that of the monograms found on the lamps themselves (see below, p. 345).[4]

The lamps from Vari, then, illustrate the later steps in the development of the "Christian" type. The majority of them are ornamented with devices symbolic of the Christian religion. This, together with the fact that none of the earlier lamps were found, indicates that they were brought there by the Christians who used the cave as a gathering place in the fourth century (see p. 284). The occurrence of heathen devices on many of the lamps does not weaken this hypothesis.[5]

The lamps are of a coarse red clay, baked very hard. They vary in length from 65 mm. to 120 mm.; and their length,

[1] Muselli, *Antiquitatis Reliquiae*, no. 140, has C · CLU · SUS; cf. Dressel, *op. cit.* p. 810.

[2] Cf. Birch, *op. cit.* p. 132.

[3] See also pp. 284 f., 335 ff.

[4] According to Schultze, *Katakomben*, V, p. 123, the monograms, and , are first dated at Rome 323 and 355 A.D., respectively. The lamps from Vari on which these are found occur in about the middle of the series, chronologically considered.

[5] The persistence with which heathen reliefs appear on "Christian" lamps is illustrated by a lamp found at Carthage (P. Delattre, *Rev. de l'Art Chrétienne*, 4ième Sér. III, 1892, no. 752), which bears on the disk a representation of Achilles dragging the body of Hector around the walls of Troy.

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breadth, and height, exclusive of the handle, are to each other about as 3 : 2 : 1. With the exception of two *trymyxi* (one of which is shown in PLATE XIV, 7 *a* and 7 *b*), they are all *monomyxi*. Some of the earlier ones are covered with a red slip. The nozzles all show signs of having been burned, and in one a portion of a wick was found.[1] Olive stones in many bore testimony to the kind of fluid used.

In describing the lamps, the parts will be discussed in the following order:[2]

(1) The handle, (2) The nozzle, (3) The border, (4) The disk, (5) The reverse.

(1) **The Handle** (Fig. 2). — This is a solid piece of clay, 10 mm. to 12 mm. in height, at the back of the lamp. Its

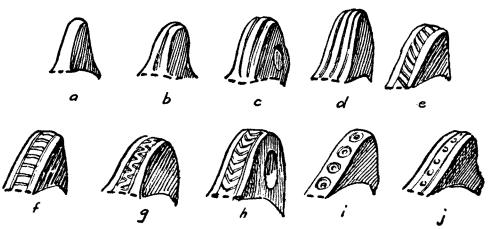
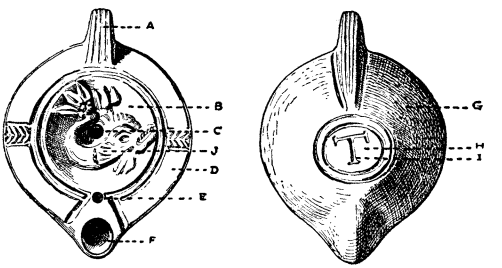


FIGURE 2. — TYPES OF LAMP HANDLES FROM VARI.

upper surface is either left plain (*a*), or is ornamented with one, two, or three longitudinal grooves (*b*, *c*, *d*), with cross hatching (*e*, *f*, *g*, *h*), with a row of concentric circles (*i*), or of

[1] For other cases of wicks found in lamps, see Becker-Göll, *Gallus*, III, p. 396; *Cosmos*, November 24, 1900, p. 695.

[2] *A*, handle.
B, disk.
C, oil aperture.
D, border.
E, small aperture.
F, nozzle; wick aperture.
G, body of lamp.
H, reverse.
I, trade-mark.
J, relief.



For the nomenclature, see also Kenner, *Antike Thonlampen*, Einleitung, pp. 12 ff.

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dots (*j*). It is seldom entirely — more often partially — perforated, but most frequently is unpierced. The lower surface of the under portion of the handle, which extends down over the back of the body (*crater*) of the lamp, is usually ornamented in the same way as the upper surface. At the lower end, where the handle approaches the bottom (*fundus*), there is often an imitation in clay of the means by which in bronze lamps the handle was riveted to the body (Fig. 5, 1). No lamp was found without a handle.

(2) **The Nozzle.** — This calls for little comment. It is short, rounded, and plain, like that of its prototype (see above, p. 339), but its upper surface, instead of being raised above that of the border, is merely separated from it by one or two lines (cf. PLATE XIV, 4). In the later lamps the transition from the body to the nozzle is so gradual that it is difficult to say where the former ends and the latter begins. In these lamps a broad shallow groove is often found connecting the disk with the wick aperture (cf. PLATE XIV, 4), as in the "Christian" lamp.

FIGURE 3. — TERRA-COTTA LAMP FROM VARI.

(3) **The Border** (PLATE XII). — In the earlier specimens this shows, better than any other part, the relation between these lamps and the one mentioned above (p. 339). The nobs have disappeared, but are indicated, as in the case of the nozzles, by lines (Nos. 1–7, 10, 18). Between these lines are seen a palm leaf (Nos. 3, 4) or dotted rings (No. 7). Dotted rings are also found on the outer side of these lines and near the handle and nozzle (Nos. 4, 5, 18). Some borders show also scrolls (No. 6), palm leaves (Nos. 7, 10), or squares of dots (No. 18). As time went on, the lines indicating the nobs were abandoned. The chief ornaments from this time on are the

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palm leaf, very much conventionalized (Nos. 8, 9), which occurs on about one-half of all the lamps; wavy lines, which are next to the palm leaf in frequency (Nos. 15, 16); vine leaves (No. 13) with grapes (No. 11) or berries (No. 12); oak leaves (?) (No. 14); and a rude ovolo pattern (No. 17). Many show dots, dotted lines, and small rosettes (Nos. 19–22). These are probably but little earlier than the conventional ornaments on the borders of "Christian" lamps (cf. No. 23, on a fully developed "Christian" lamp). Later still are the triangles (Nos. 25, 26; cf. No. 24), pyramids of dots (Nos. 26, 27), rude letters and meaningless signs (Nos. 28–30). None of the borders are entirely plain.

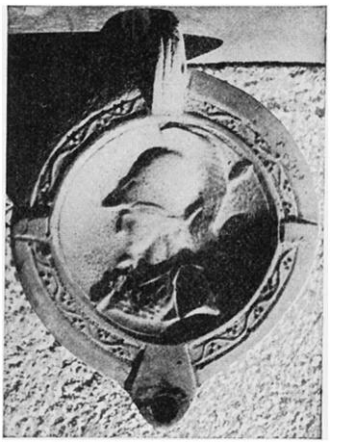

FIGURE 4. — TERRA-COTTA LAMP FROM CORINTH.

(4) **The Disk.** — In about two-thirds of the lamps the disk is entirely plain. It is pierced by from one to seven holes, which served as means for introducing the oil into the lamp. Between the nozzle and the disk was also, in most cases, a small aperture, through which the wick might be raised or lowered.[1]

On the disks of about two hundred lamps there is a rosette of from six to twenty petals, or a shell (*pecten*). The reliefs on about eighty show the conventional types of subjects, but the workmanship is of the crudest sort. The gods are but sparingly represented: Artemis, with her hound (PLATE XIII, 4); bust of Athena, with helmet, spear, and aegis (Fig. 3);[2] Athena, armed with helmet, shield, and

[1] Fink, *op. cit.* p. 687, explains this as the aperture through which a peg was passed to hold the two halves of the lamp together when they were first taken from the mould. But the inside of the lower half shows no trace of having received a peg, as it would, especially in these lamps on which so little care was spent, if a peg had actually been used.

[2] A lamp found in Corinth in May, 1902, may be compared (Fig. 4).

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spear, standing with her face to the left (PLATE XIII, 1);[1] bust of Isis, with an uncertain object at her right (PLATE XIII, 3); Eros, playing Pan's pipes, reading from a scroll at a sort of pulpit (PLATE XIII, 7), walking with inverted torch, and praying with uplifted hands. Pan is represented with his pipes (PLATE XIII, 5). The only scene from the adventures of the heroes is the contest of Heracles with the Nemean lion (PLATE XIV, 2). There is one scene from the amphitheatre, — a man fighting with a bear (PLATE XIV, 1). As miscellaneous are to be classed: an acrobat turning a somersault[1] over the back of a bear (PLATE XIV, 6);[2] a man with a long spear, standing in front of his horse; a man mounted on horseback, with a whip in his right hand; and a figure seated astride a dolphin, with a whip (?) in his right hand (PLATE XIV, 5).[3]

As symbols appear: the dolphin with the trident (p. 341, footnote 2); the crescent and the *bucranium*. Animals are numerous. We find the bear, boar, lion, ox, sheep, and wolf. One lamp shows an animal like a bear, with the legend ΦOBOC.[4]

[1] Ch. Bigot, *Bulletin de l'École franç. à Athènes, Août*, 1868, pp. 33 ff., mentions a similar lamp in the National Museum at Athens.

[2] In *Ath. Mitth.* XXVII (1902), p. 260, Abb. 5, the reader will find figured a very much better copy of this type of relief.

[3] The meaning of the device on the lamp represented in PLATE XIII, 2, is uncertain. It seems to be a struggle between the human being in the centre and an animal to the right, while to the left, behind the human figure, is a lamb or kid. If it could be proved that scenes from the Bible appear on lamps of so early a date, one might see in this relief an attempt to represent an episode in the life of David (*I Sam.* xvii, 35).

[4] Ludwig Deubner, *Ath. Mitth.* XXVII (1902), pp. 253–264, regards two lamps similar to this one, which are now in the National Museum at Athens, as grave offerings. "Dass sie (the lamps) aus einem Grabe stammen, ist die nächstliegenden Annahme. . . . Der kilikische Inschrift (Heberdey and Wilhelm, *Denkschr. d. Wiener Akad. 1896, phil.-hist. Kl.* p. 38, no. 94) hat uns Phobos als Wächter des Grabes gezeigt: . . . der daemonische Bär, der auf den Lampen ausdrücklich als Phobos bezeichnet ist, soll wie das Licht der Lampe selbst uber des Grabes Frieden wachen und alles Unheil von dem Toten fernhalten auf dem dunkeln Wege der zum Jenseits führt" (p. 264). But the lamp from Vari was certainly not used as a grave offering; and a similar lamp, found in May, 1902, in the ruins of a Roman shop near the Agora in Corinth, was evidently not intended for this purpose. Would not the ordinary purpose of the lamp — to dispel the darkness of night, together with its horrors — explain

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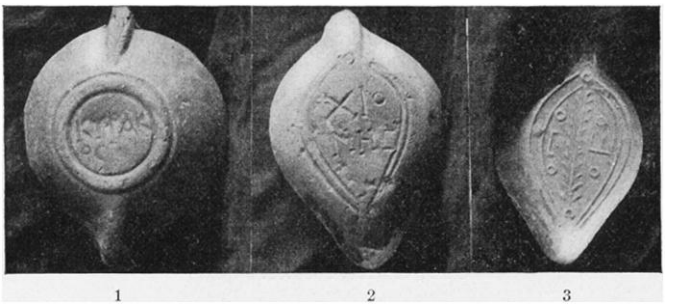
Of emblems which are surely Christian the following are found: the cross; the monograms, ☧ ☧ ☧ ☧ (see also ☧, on the border and on the reverse of the *trymyxus* (PLATE XIV, 7 *a* and 7 *b*)); the cock, alone and with the palm branch; a fish; two fishes; the dove; the eucharistic chalice; and the chalice with the dove brooding over it (the symbol of the Holy Spirit) (PLATE XIV, 4).[1] Only one obscene subject is represented, and this is on one of the earliest lamps.[2]

(5) **The Reverse.** — The bottom of the lamp is rarely left entirely plain. A few lamps show only the shape of the bot-



1 2 3

FIGURE 5. — THREE INSCRIBED LAMPS FROM VARI: REVERSE.

tom, outlined in one or more rings or heart-shaped or oval lines, made by means of a blunt instrument in the soft clay. Nearly all have some device as a trade-mark within these lines.

sufficiently the apotropaïc use, on the disk of the lamp, of the "daemon of terror"?

I should like to offer, as a suggestion, the reading ΧΡΥ (Χρύ[σου]) (?) instead of ΧΓΥ, for the inscription on the reverse of the lamp figured by Deubner, *l.c.* Abb. 3 and 4 (p. 259). A careful examination of this inscription, two years ago, with the aid of a magnifying glass seemed to show the second letter as Ρ rather than as Γ.

[1] See P. Delattre, *Revue de l'Art Chrétienne*, 4ième Sér. I, 1890, pp. 129 ff.; II, 1891, pp. 39 ff., 296 ff.; III, 1892, pp. 133 ff., 224 ff.; IV, 1893, pp. 34 ff.; *Missions Catholiques*, Année 12, 1880, pp. 278 ff., 290 ff., 302 ff., 326 ff., 338 ff., for a systematic classification and explanation of devices found on "Christian" lamps.

[2] It is an interesting fact that no obscene relief has ever been found on a "Christian" lamp.

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In two-thirds of the lamps this consists of a palm leaf, often with small dotted circles on either side. Another frequently recurring device is a number of small rings arranged in pyramids, squares, or circles.[1] Other devices are: the cross; the cross *gemmée*, ; the monogram, ; a palm tree, ; a fish, ; and the eucharistic chalice, , all incised; and a heart-shaped leaf *in relievo*.

About two hundred of the lamps have on the reverse side a letter or letters, or a name in the genitive. These are, without exception, in Greek, and are incised. Sometimes with the inscription is a palm leaf or a pyramid of dots.[1] The following is a brief summary of the inscriptions:[2]

1. Shape II, longitudinally (4 examples); device, rosette (2 examples).[3]

2. Shape I; device, *pecten*.

3. Shape II.

4. Shape II; device, rosette.

5 *a*. Shape I; device, rosette.

b. Shape I; device, bust of Athena. (Fig. 3.)

6. Shape II; device, figure seated astride a dolphin; Εὐδώ[ρου]. (Plate XIV, 5.)

7 *a*. Shape II (2 examples); device, rosette (1 example).

b. Shape II (2 examples); devices, rosette, *pecten*; Εὐκάρπου.

[1] See Dressel, in *C.I.L.* XV, 2, fasc. 1, p. 860, for an explanation of these.

[2] The shapes I, II, and III are shown in Fig. 5. Shape IV (Plate XIII, 2) is almost never inscribed. Shape V is the conventional "Christian" lamp.

[3] Most of the inscriptions are written across the bottom of the lamp, with the tops of the letters toward the handle. The inscriptions which run longitudinally across the bottom, beginning at the handle, are so indicated. The number of instances of each inscription is given and, when one exists, the device on the disk.

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8. Shape II.

9. Shape II; **Καρπήμης** (cf. *C.I.G.* 4208 c, **Καρπίμη**).

10. Shape I; device, ram facing left.

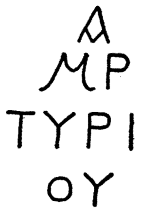
11 *a*. Shape I (16 examples); devices, rosette (15 examples), bust of Athena (1 example). Shape II, longitudinally (2 examples). Shape III (1 example).

b. Shape II; device, dolphin.

c. Shape II.

d. Shape II.

12. Shape I; device, obscene; **Κύρακος** (cf. Aesch. *Frag.* 354, **Κύραξ**, a dog's name). See Fig. 5, 1.

13.  Shape II; **Μαρτυρίου**.

14. Shape I; device, Pan with pipes. (PLATE XIII, 5.)

15 *a*. Shape II, longitudinally (4 examples); device, rosette (4 examples).

b. Shape II.

c. Shape II.

d. Shape II; device, rosette.

16. Shape II (3 examples).

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17 *a.* Shape I (2 examples); device, rosette (2 examples).

b. Shape I (2 examples); devices, lion (1 example), Heracles and the Nemean lion (1 example); Στρ. (PLATE XIV, 2.)

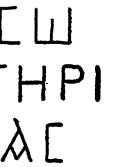
c. Shape I; device, rosette; Στρα.

18 *a.* Shape I; device, Eros reading from a scroll. (PLATE XIII, 7.)

b. Shape III (44 examples); device, cock and palm branch. Shape II (6 examples); devices, rosette (5 examples), sheep (1 example). See Fig. 5, 3.

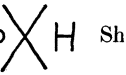
19. Shape I; device, cock and palm branch.

20 *a.* Shape II.

b.  Shape II; device, cock facing right; Σωτηρίας.

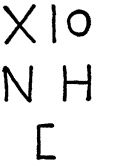
21. Shape II.

22 *a.* Shape II.

b.  Shape II.

23 *a.* Shape V (1 example).

b. Shape V (1 example).

c.  Shape V.

d. Shape II (34 examples); devices, rosette (8 examples), monogram (2 examples), figure praying (1 example); Χιόνης. See Fig. 5, 2.

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24 *a*. Shape I (5 examples). Shape II (7 examples); devices, rosette (6 examples), monogram, *bucranium*.

b. Shape I (4 examples). Shape II (1 example); devices, rosette (2 examples), mounted man (1 example).

c. Shape II.

d. Shape I; device, bust of woman.

e. Shape II (2 examples); device, monogram (1 example).

f. In relief.

25 *a*. Shape 1; device, rosette.

b. Shape II (2 examples); device, rosette (1 example).

c. Shape II.

26. Shape I.

27. Shapes I and II; device, rosette.

28. Shape III.

29. Shape I (5 examples); devices, rosette (3 examples), crescent, dolphin with trident. See p. 341, note 2.

SAMUEL ELIOT BASSETT.

NEW HAVEN.

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