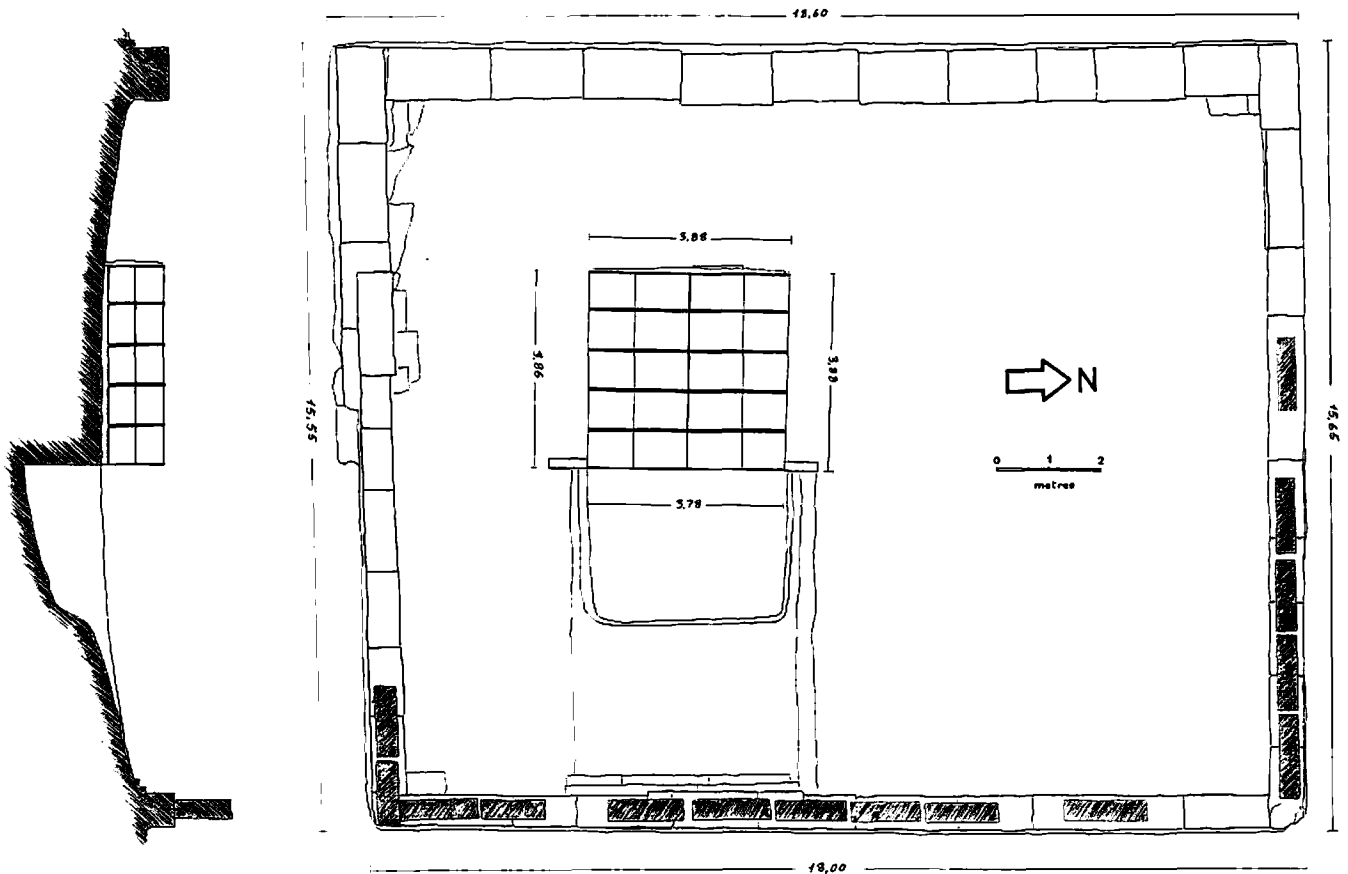


AN UNDERGROUND SHRINE AT PAESTUM



1. Plan and section of the sacred precinct at Paestum enclosing the underground shrine.

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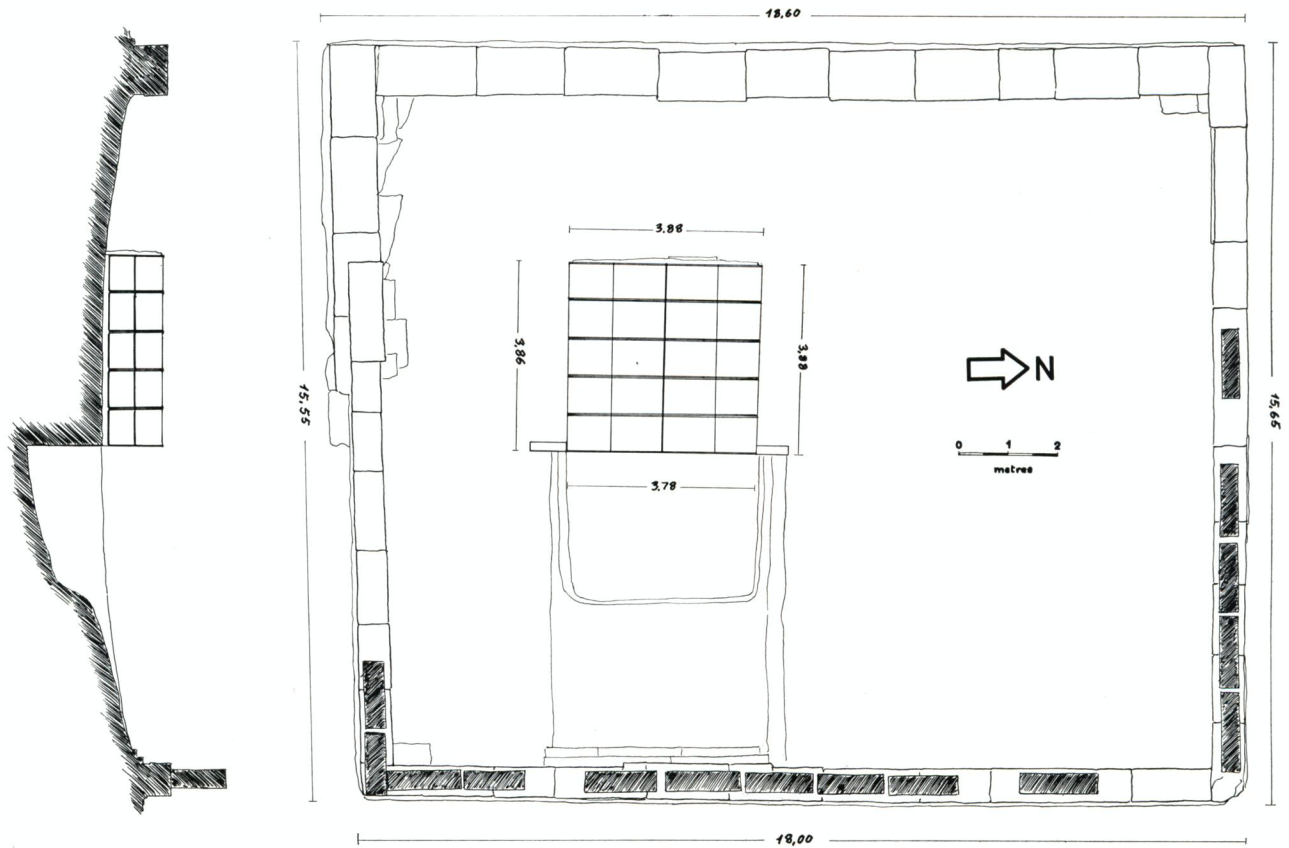


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AN UNDERGROUND SHRINE AT PAESTUM



1. Plan and section of the sacred precinct at Paestum enclosing the underground shrine.

- More than a year ago Dr. Sestieri gave us a general account of ancient Poseidonia, a Greek city in central Italy now called Paestum, and of the excavations going on there (ARCHAEOLOGY 7 [1954] 206-213). Since then he has been working steadily at the site and his efforts have been richly rewarded by the discovery of the amazing subterranean shrine he describes for us here. Extraordinarily well preserved and with many unique features, it is one of the most interesting finds of recent years.

ON THE RIGHT of the ancient road which leads from the forum of Poseidonia to the Temple of Athena (formerly called the Temple of Ceres) was discovered in July 1954 a quadrangular enclosure (Figure 1). This enclosure, 130 meters (143 yards) distant from the temple, is made of squared blocks of local limestone resting on two courses of similar foundation blocks. Upon these stood a row of vertical slabs, of which three were still in place on the north side, while others had fallen nearby. As we dug within the enclosure, there began to appear, near the south and west sides, a gabled roof covered with clay tiles (Figures 2, 3). At first this seemed like the covering of a very large tomb. As we continued to dig, we saw that the roof belonged to a small rectangular building which abutted against the rock on three sides (Figure 4); only on the east side, where the rock had been cut away, could the total height of the wall (2.25 meters, or nearly 8 feet) be seen. This wall is made of limestone blocks in courses. The foundation projects slightly. The three blocks of the top row form a triangle supporting the gable which is made of two slabs resting obliquely against each other. The gabled roof is formed of two rows of limestone slabs, in turn covered with large clay tiles, ten on each side. These were bonded to the slabs with mortar made of clay and ashes. The top of the roof is one meter below the present ground level and ten centimeters below the row of blocks of the enclosure on which the vertical slabs were placed; therefore it was below the ancient ground level.

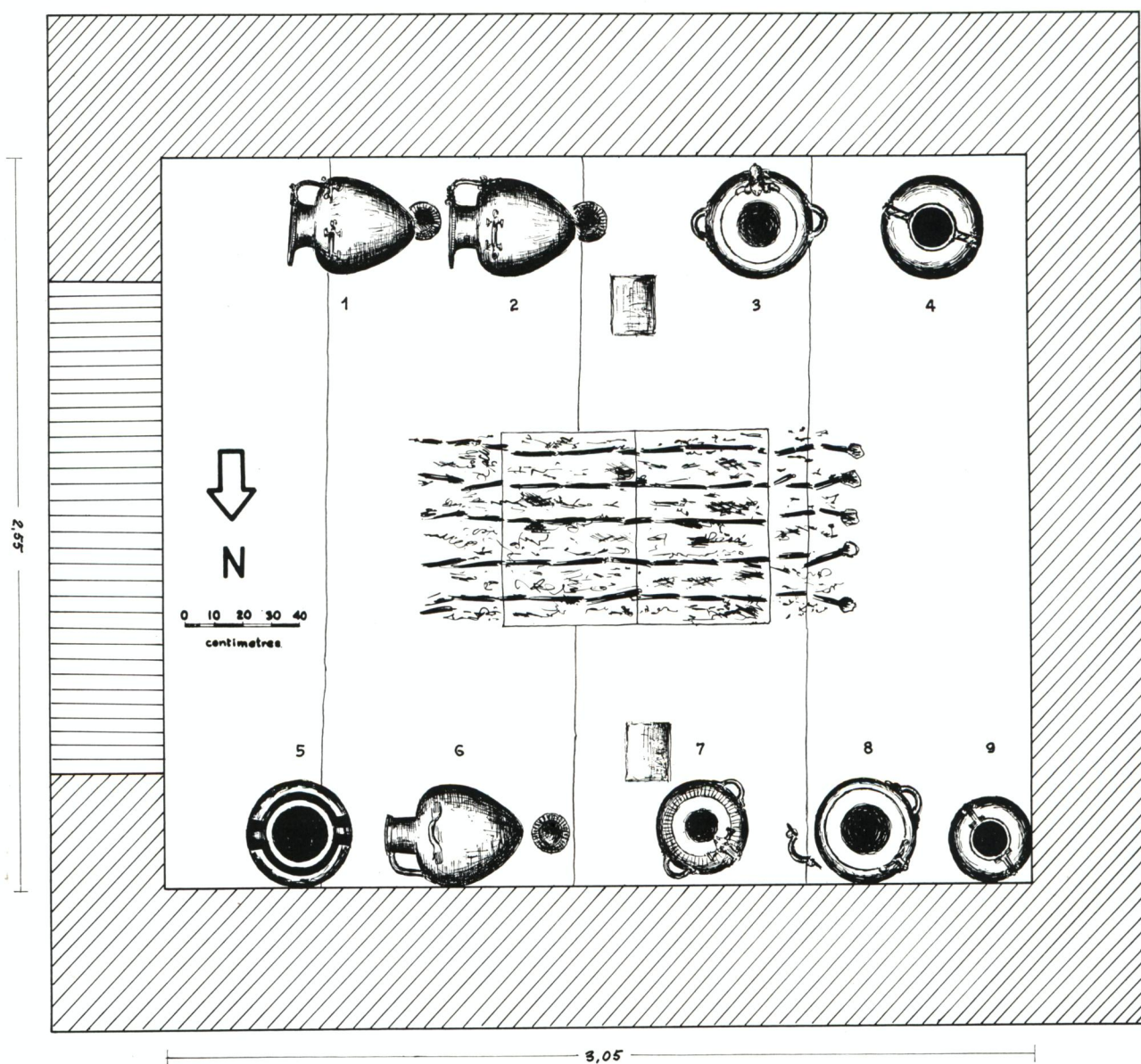
Excavation has demonstrated that the enclosure was a sacred precinct (*temenos*) and therefore the construction within must have been sacred in character. This is evident also from the fact that the building had no opening and the interior consequently was inaccessible. Since all the roof blocks and tiles were broken we were able to remove some of these and penetrate inside. The interior proved to be a rectangular room with a plinth around

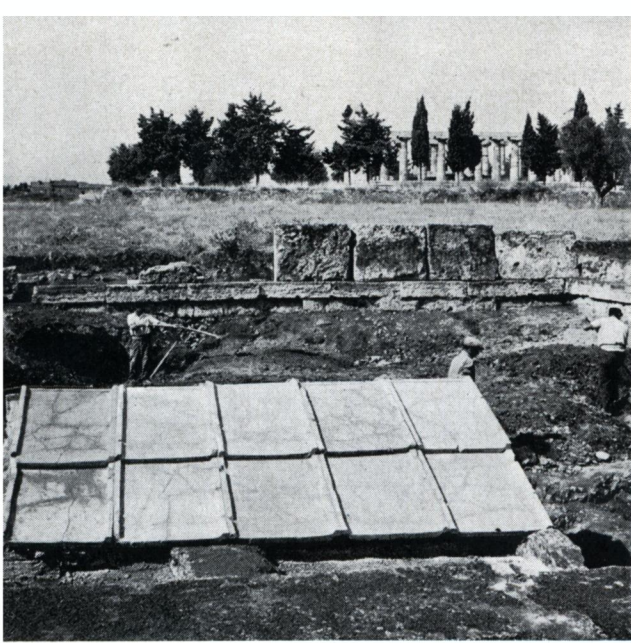
the base of the four walls; this is repeated above on the two long sides and on the short west side, where it follows the lines of the gable. The floor is composed of four limestone blocks.

The first thing which one notices is that the whole of the interior, walls and roof slabs, is covered with a thin layer of white plaster. The only exception is the middle blocks of the eastern side, and it is clear that here an opening was left for depositing offerings before the building was finally closed. From outside one can see, beside each of the central blocks, depressions which must have served for the points of crowbars used to fit the blocks in place. The roof slabs were supported by two longitudinal wooden beams. The positions of these beams are indicated by unplastered strips of ceiling each 21 centimeters wide and, on the end walls, by holes into which they fitted. Evidently the beams were also plastered. But these were not the only roof supports; at the middle of each beam stood a vertical post; on the pavement are depressions in which these rested. Between these depressions, in the center of the floor, is a kind of bench made of two pairs of blocks, one pair on top of the other. The bench is 54 cm. high, 68 cm. wide and 92 cm. long. Upon this were fragments of five iron rods, their ends fallen on the ground. Beneath some of these fragments were still attached remains of thin wooden tablets, and on top of them bits of an iron net (Figure 5) made of interlaced strips (rather like that found on the bed in the Regolini-Galassi tomb at Cerveteri). Upon this net was preserved a small portion of a very thick cloth (Figure 6) which, because of salts and rust, appears to be made of metal, but woolen fibers can be recognized in it. We have, therefore, a bed with a woolen coverlet.

This assemblage, with the bed in the middle, the white plastered walls and ceiling, and particularly the gabled roof, reminds us of gabled tombs at Paestum. The resemblance to a tomb became more evident because of

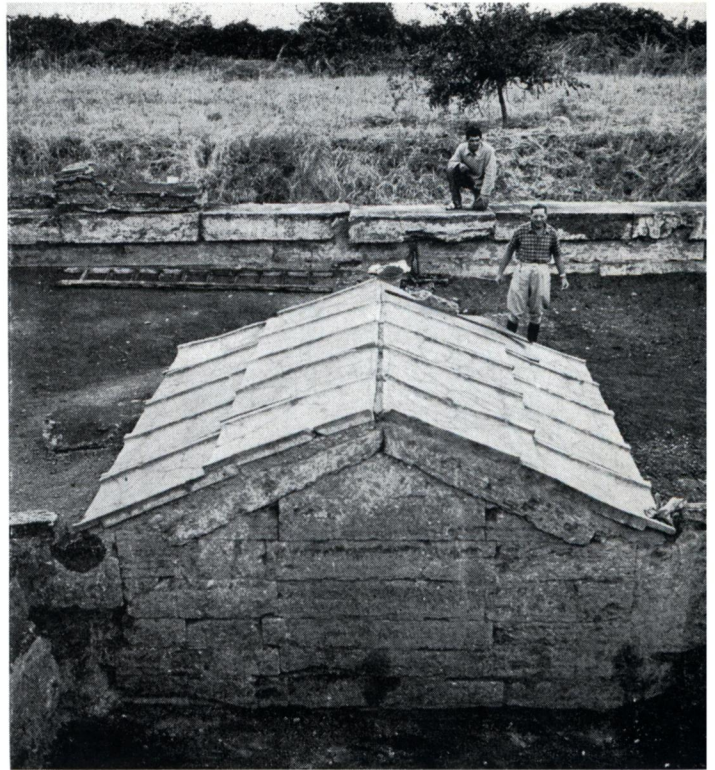
2. Plan of the interior of the underground shrine as it appeared when it was discovered.



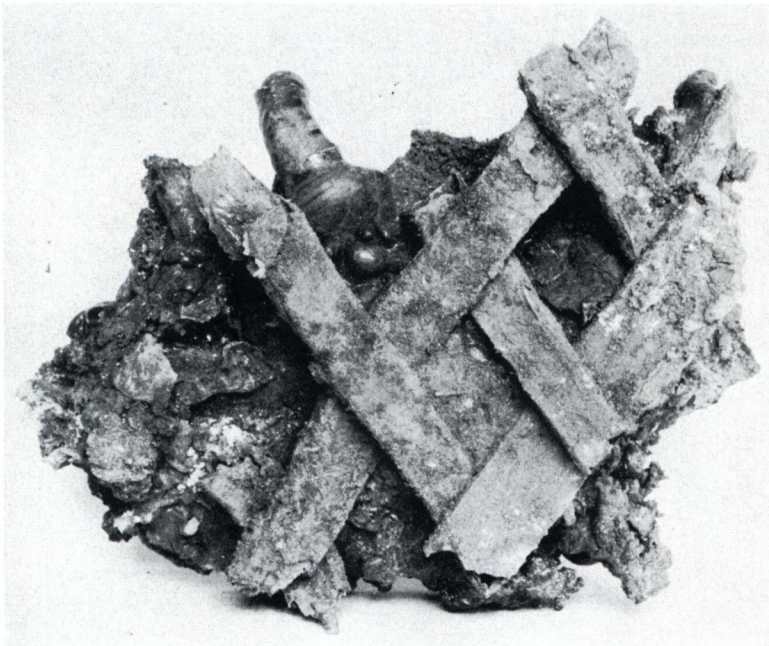


3. The precinct wall and the tiled roof of the underground shrine, during excavation. In the background is the Temple of Athena.

PAESTUM *continued*

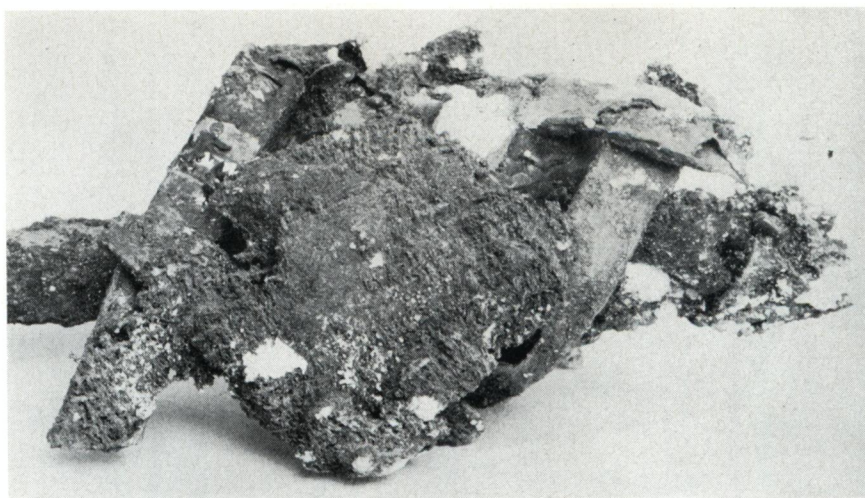


4. The shrine, front view, with the precinct wall behind. The author stands immediately behind the building.



5. A fragment of the iron bed-net found in the shrine.

6. Remains of the woolen textile found on the bed-net.



the nature and placement of the objects deposited in the room. Along the north and south walls stood eight bronze vases—four on each side—two amphoras and six hydrias (Figure 7). In the northeast corner was a huge Attic black-figured amphora. This vase was empty, but the bronze vases were found to contain yellow honey, still soft and smelling strongly of wax. They had been sealed with corks. One of these—a simple disk, now blackened—is entirely preserved.

Let us now examine the eight bronze vases. We can divide them, according to form and style, into three groups, the first including two fairly similar hydrias, the second, three nearly identical hydrias, and the third, one hydria and the two amphoras.

THE FIRST GROUP: These two hydrias, although a little different in form—the first, less rigid and a little bigger in the body, is of a slightly more ancient type—are of substantially the same style and are certainly contemporaneous.

The rounded and decorated shoulder of the first hydria (Figures 8-10) joins the body in an elegant curve. The most interesting elements are the handles. The vertical one is a band with rows of beading, ending at the bottom in a palmette with volutes between two sphinxes whose wings curve inward. At the top of the handle, between two roundels, is a very fine lion's head facing toward the inside of the vase. The mane, which is parted into four sections, is treated with particular care; on each pointed lock the hairs are subtly incised. The same treatment appears on the handles of the great krater found at Vix, in France. The horizontal handles end on each side in a double lion protome. The front paws reach outward in front of the muzzles. The open mouths, as well as the deep incisions around the mouths and the indications of muscles on the paws, give these protomes a particularly Oriental character.

The form of the second hydria (Figures 11, 12) is a little more rigid, the ornaments on lip and base are



7. Five of the eight bronze vases found in the shrine.



8. Bronze hydria of Group I, height 45 cm. Note the delicate incised decoration on the shoulder, the elaborate repoussé ornament on the rim, and the two rows of tongue pattern on the base.

9. Detail of the hydria in Figure 8, showing the palmettes which are lightly incised on the ends of the roundels which terminate the handles.



PAESTUM *continued*



10. Detail of the hydria in Figure 8, showing one of the horizontal handles with median ridge of bead and reel, ending in a double lion protome.

simpler. The vertical handle is a superb piece of sculpture: a lion, erect on his hind legs, rests his front paws and muzzle on the rim of the vase as if wishing to quench his thirst with the liquid it contained. The taut body is masterfully rendered, with elegant limbs and spare flanks. Nevertheless, the powerful muscular mass of the haunches, the hind legs and the strong paws is emphasized. The mane, although lacking incised details, is well rendered. The lion's hind feet rest on a palmette, to whose volutes are fastened two serpents; two more serpents with flat triangular heads and long dragon beards emerge from under the forepaws. The horizontal handles are similar to those of the first hydria, but end in two pairs of equine protomes, with their front legs bent. The manes are rather long, with a tuft falling forward between the ears and eyes. Similar treatment is found on the krater of Vix and also on bronze figures from South Italy, like the tripod of Metapontum and the horseman of Grumentum, which are attributed to Tarentine art.

THE SECOND GROUP (Figure 13) includes three hydrias which, although presenting slight differences in detail, can be considered identical. Their form resembles that of the second hydria of Group I but with the shoulder slightly more rigid. The decoration on handles, rim and base is very elaborate. The vertical handles end below in a woman's head which seems to rise from the volutes of a palmette. On each side is the figure of a ram; at the top of the handles are two young lions. The female head is very delicate and accurate in detail. The rams, too, are striking because of the delicate workmanship. No less care is given the figures of the lions, which are particularly remarkable because of the perfect rendering of details. Their elegant manes, with locks defined by subtle incisions, form a kind of collar and hang down the back like a cloak. The horizontal handles, with a median band of bead and reel, have roundels with incised palmettes, like those on the first hydria of Group I. The handles end in palmettes on each of which is the head of a bird with a long beak, probably a water bird.

To these three vases we can compare examples from South Italy, especially the hydria of Sala Consilina, which is identical in form, in accessory ornament and in the handle decoration; in this example, however, the lions are less finely worked. Very similar, too, is the hydria of Randazzo, in Sicily, which has the handle in the form

of a youth bending backward, resting his feet on a palmette and his hands on the rim. This vase also has two rams below and two lions above. Jugs with handles bearing the same animals and a palmette, but without the female head, have been found in Campania, but these are provincial, probably imitations of prototypes from Magna Graecia. The vertical handle with a female bust is derived typologically from Laconian hydrias; the most famous example, dating from the early sixth century B.C., is in a private collection at Darmstadt, Germany. The handles of this vase are simple: at the bottom of the vertical one there is only a female head. On the Paestum hydrias, as on those of Sala Consilina and Randazzo, the new element is the horizontal placement of the animal figures above and below. This is the only feature which remains in the provincial Campanian vases.

THE THIRD GROUP, consisting of one hydria and two amphoras, is clearly different from the other two. The hydria (Figures 14, 15) has an oval body and a flat, slightly oblique shoulder. On the narrow lip is a band of beads separated by bars, and below is an incised band; the rather high base has a series of incised lines which were intended as a simplified tongue pattern. The vertical handle has a median band of bead and reel; the palmette at the bottom has volutes ending in serpent heads. Above are two lion protomes, rather sketchily rendered. On the upper part of the handle is incised a palmette. The whole ensemble is schematic and rather rough in quality. The horizontal handles are also decorated with a median band of bead and reel; the attachments are in the form of two hands, not very finely worked. The first amphora (Figure 16) has the same form as the hydria and the same decoration on rim, neck and base. It differs only in the handles. These are crossed obliquely by four cords in relief. The attachment at the top is in the form of two volutes almost touching; at the bottom is a palmette with volutes ending in two flat serpent heads, rather like those of the hydria. The small amphora (Figure 17) is more elegant and harmonious in form than the two vases just described. The foot is rather high and decorated with concave tongues; the lip, as in the other vases of this group, barely projects from the neck. The handles have a ridge in the middle and slightly raised borders; the lower attachment is a flat palmette lightly incised. Above, each handle terminates in two little closed hands which have a space

11. Two views of another bronze hydria of Group I, height 41.3 cm., with a handle in the shape of a lion. Note how the serpents beside the lion, above and below, constitute horizontal elements which contrast sharply with the verticality of the lion's body.



PAESTUM *continued*

12. Detail of the hydria in Figure 11.





13. Bronze hydria of Group II, with figures of lions and rams. The hydrias of this group, all practically identical, measure 42 cm., 42.5 cm. and 44 cm. The incidental decoration consists of large dots in relief, above darts, on the rim, and of concave tongues on the base. On the woman's head note the hair, which has lightly incised waves on the forehead and four pointed tresses in front. The rams have both front and hind legs bent under their bodies and their muzzles turned outward.

PAESTUM *continued*

left between the fingers and palm, probably for a cord, so as to enable one to hold the vase with one hand.

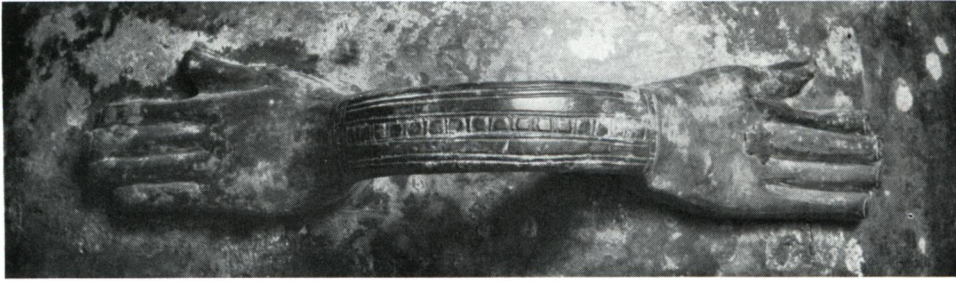
The bronze vases found in the shrine constitute an imposing group. The first five are homogeneous and present characteristics common to many products coming from South Italy or from Sicily (Randazzo). The question of their origin deserves more study but at present it seems logical to assume that the five hydrias of Groups I and II were made in a colony of Magna Graecia. The vases of the third group, less fine but with handles showing imitative elements, were probably made at Poseidonia itself, and almost certainly in a single workshop. Chronologically, the whole group can be assigned to the period between 530 and 510 B.C.

This dating is confirmed by the presence in the shrine of an Attic black-figured amphora (Figure 18), perfectly intact. This superb example of Archaic Attic vase painting shows on one side the introduction of Herakles to Olympos: the hero carries his club but he wears a chiton and himation instead of the traditional lion's skin. He has already taken his place on a chariot. Behind him Athena, wearing a high-crested helmet, is preparing to act as charioteer. Beside the chariot stand Apollo and Hermes, the latter distinguished by the *petasos* and *caduceus*. In front of the horses is Artemis; she is identified only by a little fawn with very long ears. On the



14. Bronze hydria of Group III, height 50 cm.

15. Detail showing one of the horizontal handles of the hydria in Figure 14.



other side of the vase are Dionysos and Hermes, the former crowned with vine leaves and carrying a drinking horn and two long branches. Hermes has a pointed cap but no *caduceus*. Between the two gods is a splendid figure of a long-horned goat. Behind each god are a satyr and a maenad in lively dance. The freshness of the scene, its rhythm and harmony, make it artistically the main side of the vase, whereas the other side is more important in content. But on both the design is equally excellent and clearly the work of the same artist. He combines with delicacy of line the use of polychromy (white and violet) and of incision to indicate details and ornaments. His style, influenced by the work of Exekias, is very close to that of Andokides. It is quite possible that the vase was selected for an offering in this sanctuary because of its two subjects: the apotheosis of Herakles, with the suggestion of resurrection; and the *thiasos*, which symbolizes the beatitude of the Elysian fields. This is apparently the reason for the presence of the figure of Hermes, who here appears in the character of *psychopompos*, guide of souls.

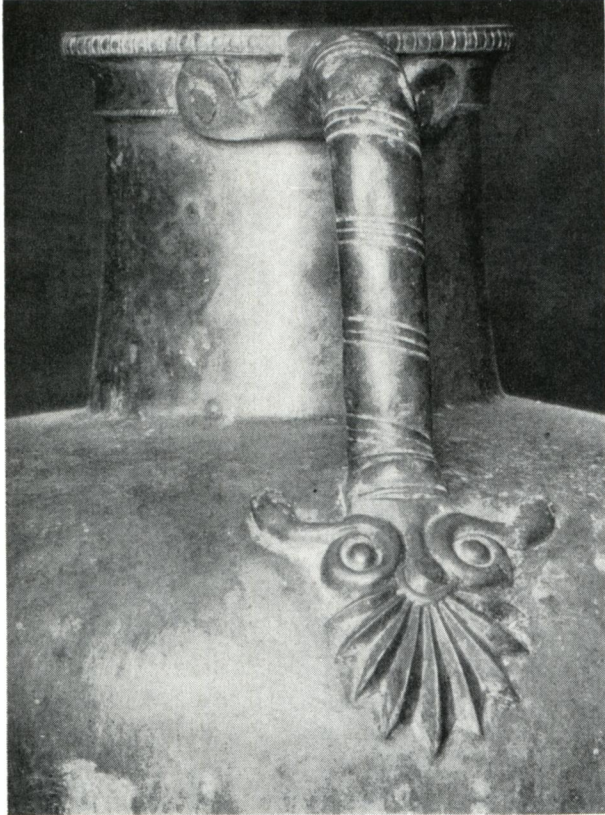
WE EXCAVATED the ground around the building down to bed rock; in it were many fragments of Archaic pottery—Attic, Ionic and some Corinthian. On

some of the black-glazed cup fragments and on others of Ionic style decorated with stripes is incised the Greek letter M; on an amphoriskos (small amphora), Ionic in style but locally made, is incised the following inscription in Archaic Greek characters:

"I am sacred to the Nymph."

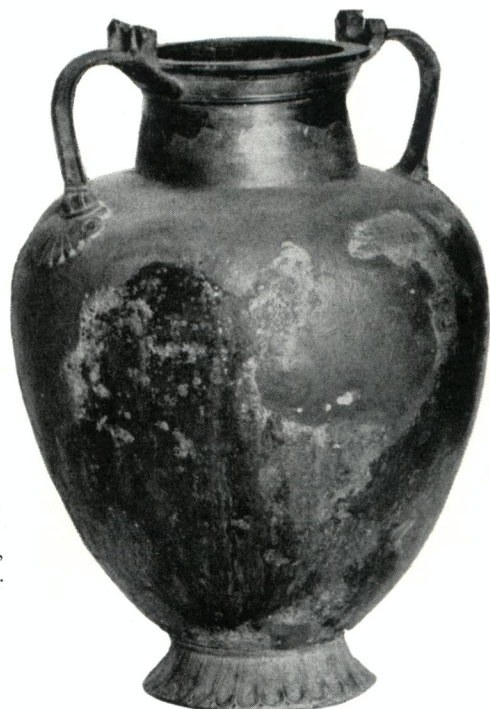
The building was clearly sacred, and because of its resemblance to a tomb must be considered as an underground shrine. The vases contained in it have a feminine character; they are like those which women used for drawing water, and at Paestum such vases are found only in women's graves. Naturally an underground sanctuary could be dedicated only to a divinity of the underworld. The presence of the bed and the absence of an image signify that in the shrine, invisible and inaccessible to human beings, the divinity was considered as actually present. The honey in the bronze vases symbolizes immortality and recalls ambrosia, the food of the gods. Honey was offered to rustic divinities as well as to subterranean gods. According to the ancient Greek mystery religions a divinity of the dead was protector of fertility and fecundity as well; these religions were basically agrarian. The divinity dies to rise again, symbolizing nature's yearly cycle: six months of the year Persephone is in Hades and six months on earth. In

scriptions incised on pottery fragments found within the *temenos* help to identify the divinity of the shrine. The M is frequently found; elsewhere it occurs on a little vase from the deposit in the so-called Basilica, now identified as a temple of Hera, the mother goddess *par excellence*, the divine wife who presided over deaths and births. To her was sacred the pomegranate, symbol of fecundity and resurrection, and terracotta statuettes in her image are found in many tombs at Paestum. Her agrarian character is also clear from figurines found both at Poseidonia and at the sanctuary of Foce Sele, which show a nude female bust rising from a tuft of leaves—a clear representation of fertility. On top of the figure is a lily, also a symbol of fertility, which was used for incense. The M probably stands for MHTHP (mother), since Hera was the mother goddess. And because she was the divine wife it is likely that the dedication to the



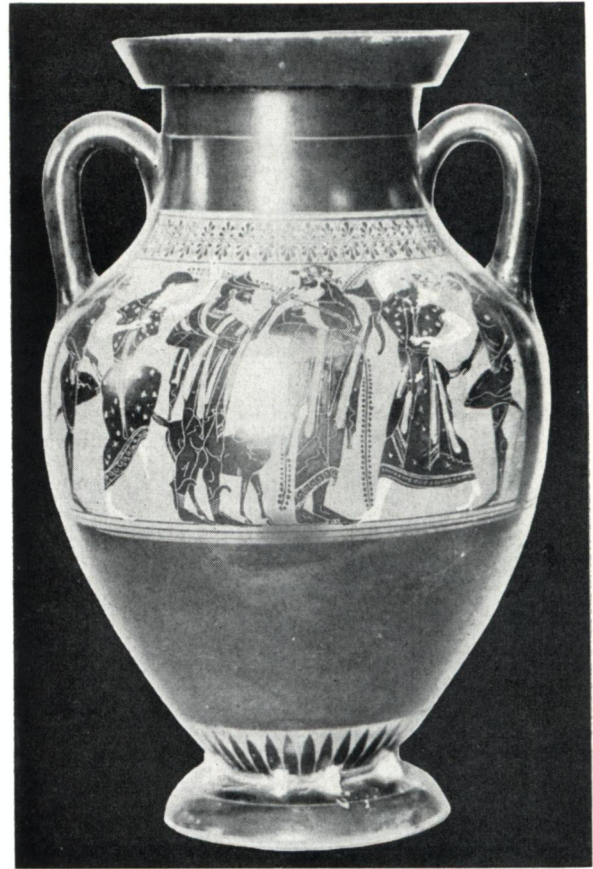
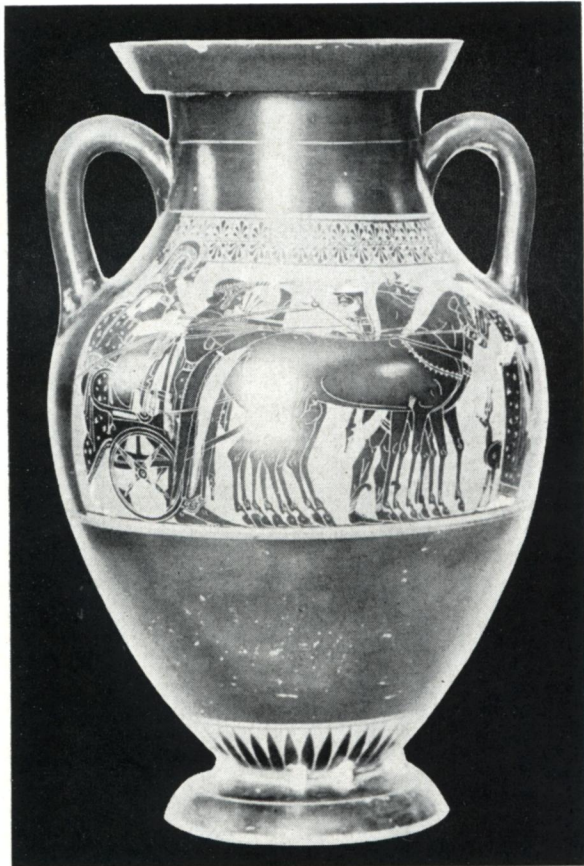
16. Detail of the amphora, height 49.6 cm., of the same shape and style as the hydria in Figure 14.

PAESTUM *continued*



17. The small bronze amphora, height 36.7 cm., of Group III.

nymph, mentioned above, does not refer to a nymph in general but to *the* Nymph in the original meaning of the word—that is, to the Bride, Hera, Bride and Mother, Goddess of the dead and of fertility, who assures the faithful of resurrection to eternal life. The subterranean shrine is perfectly suited to such a concept of the divinity. Completely concealed from human sight, it could be considered as the sacred heart of the city, the most holy spot in the sanctuary of the powerful and most ancient goddess. The bed may have symbolized the *ἱερός γάμος*, the sacred marriage celebrated in the underworld between Hades and Persephone. Here the goddess Hera, in one of her aspects, served as a substitute. The resemblance of the shrine to a tomb is explained by the identification of Hera with Persephone as goddess of the dead, a function shared with the indigenous divinity who had been worshiped before the incoming Greeks substituted Hera.



18. The black-figured Attic amphora found in the shrine. On the side shown at the left is the introduction of Herakles to Olympus; above is a group with Dionysos and Hermes.