

A. Apakidze, G. Kipiani and V. Nikolaishvili (Tbilisi)

### **A RICH BURIAL FROM MTSKHETA (CAUCASIAN IBERIA)**

Mtskheta is situated not far from Tbilisi at the confluence of the Mtkvari (Kura) and Aragvi rivers (Fig. 1). From the early 3rd century BC, when the (Caucasian) Iberian kingdom was created, until the 5th century AD it was the capital. Hellenistic and Roman remains have been found, both in the modern town of Mtskheta and in surrounding areas (Greater Mtskheta). The most remarkable are Bagineti (Armaztsikhe) and Armaziskhevi, the latter the residence and burial place of high ranking officials (*pitiakshes*) of the Iberian kings. Large-scale archaeological investigation has continued since 1937. In 1994, on the foundations laid by the Mtskheta Archaeological Expedition of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, the Mtskheta Archaeological Institute was created.

Tomb No. 14 was uncovered in August 2001 in the north-eastern wall of Svetitskhoveli cathedral, 330 cm from the socle and 670 cm from the northern corner, at a depth of 170 cm below the modern surface. The tomb was built of rough, sandstone slabs set into a yellowish-pale blue clay soil and oriented west-east. The roof of the burial was flat. It consisted of three sandstone slabs resting upon the north and south walls. The joins between the slabs were reinforced with a thick (10-15 cm) lime-wash paste. The roof slabs (263 x 148 cm; 20 cm thick) overlapped the cist. Four solid stone slabs formed the walls of the burial, and the long walls had vertical slots 11-18 cm wide. All the slabs were well dressed, especially the inner surfaces, bearing traces of a chisel. An iron pin was attached to the south-western corner of the rim of the cist for hanging a thick, square bronze plaque (a mirror? – see below, No. 18). The outer dimensions of the burial are 211-213 cm x 120-130 cm; inner, 209 x 96 cm; height 96 cm. The tomb was not robbed, indeed it was so well sealed that no earth had penetrated within (Figs. 2, 4).

The floor of the tomb was paved at the west end by three and a half brick plinths (Fig. 3). One bears the imprint of the paws of an animal. The plinths measure respectively 58 x 28 cm, 58 x 59 cm and 59 x 58 cm; each was 5 x 3-

3.5 cm thick. The body was laid flat on its back, the head to the west and turned to the right. The hands were placed over the pelvis, and the legs were bent slightly at the knee and were apart. Although the skeleton as a whole was in very poor condition, it was possible to determine its sex, female, and age, 40-50.

There were some 24 pieces of gold, silver, bronze, iron, glass, etc., in the burial.

1. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1611) (Fig. 5). A gold signet-ring with a carnelian gem-intaglio, found near the left hand of the body. The bezel is ovoid and figured. A pair of cast gold panthers is welded to the hoop, holding in their teeth and paws a hammered bezel of gold sheet. A reddish carnelian intaglio represents the left profile of a female bust encircled with a Greek inscription ΒΑCΙΑΙCΚΑ/ΟΥΛΠΙΙΑΝΑΞΙΑ. Height of ring – 19 mm; width – 17 mm. Length of gem – 20 mm; width – 17 mm. Total weight – 9.89 g. This is the first such ring to be found in Georgia.

2. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1612) (Fig. 6). A cylindrical gold ink pot consisting of two pieces – a pot covered with a heptagonal lid pierced in the centre and covered with a movable plate attached by a pair of bosses also pierced at the edge. The sides of the heptagon are unequal and they are ornamented with ovals and stylised lotus leaves. It has been damaged by compression. The body of the ink pot is reinforced by four hoops. Found to the left of the pelvis. Height – 120 mm; diameter of base – 43 mm; diameter of body – 47 mm; diameter of hole – 8 mm; total weight – 95.55 g. It is the fifth ink pot found at Mtskheta, all in burials from the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

3. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1613) (Fig. 7). A gold sheet forming the cover for a desk set (see No. 17). It is square, open-work, decorated with a floral design and with a terminal mounting; the frame is decorated with scratched, irregular dashes. There is a two-line Greek inscription within the frame: ΒΑCΙΑΕΩCΟΥCΤΑΜΟΥ | ΤΟΥΚΑΙΕΥΤΕΝΙΟΥ. There are two pairs of holes at the corner of the sheet. In the upper corner there is a pin resembling an eight-petalled rose. Found near the pelvis. Length – 97 mm; width – 9 mm; thickness – 1 mm; height of side – 10 mm; weight – 52.95 g.

4. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1614) (Fig. 8). A two-tanged gold pendant case for an amulet, in the shape of an open box curving inwards. A pair of grooved tangs is soldered onto the edges of the underside. Found at the waist. Length – 27 mm; width – 17 mm; height – 10 mm; weight – 1.79 g. A similar amulet case was found in another female burial – No. 2 in the Armaziskhevi elite cemetery.

5. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1615) (Fig. 9). A pendant made of a pair of gold running spirals soldered on a round-headed tang. Found at the waist. Length – 26

mm; width – 16 mm; weight – 4.91 g. No such pendant has hitherto been found in Mtskheta.

6. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1616) (Fig. 10). A gold pendant. An ovoid brooch is set with a chalcedony relief bust of a lady wearing a gold necklace. She is dressed in a chiton(?). Her carnelian coiffure is flattened on the back of her head. She has a straight, prominent nose, thick lips and a chin jutting out a little. Found near the pelvis. Height – 27 mm; width – 16 mm; diameter of brooch – 15-16 mm. A similar pendant, but with a male bust, was found at Mtskheta Baiatkhevi cemetery, in tile burial No. 35, dated to the 3rd century AD.

7. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1617) (Fig. 11). A gold pendant. An ovoid brooch of false-ropé design with a tang, set into which is a carnelian bust of a boy wearing a gold necklace. The forehead recedes, the nose a little snub, the lips thick and the cheeks plump, the chin juts out a little, and the boy's hair, divided into five parts, is plaited. Found near the pelvis. Height – 12 mm; width – 12 mm; weight – 1.68 g. The bust is a fine piece of perfectly sculpted relief work. A similar gem, but set in a finger-ring, has been found at Mtskheta, Samtavro burial No. 905.

8. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1618) (Fig. 12). A gold pendant, similar to No. 7. Its rear surface is slightly damaged. The boy is adorned with an impressed, criss-cross garland around the neck. The bust is encircled by a pair of grooves. Height – 12 mm; width – 12 mm; weight – 1.70 g.

9. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1619) (Fig. 13). A gold pendant with a tang, with a three-layered agate intaglio in the shape of a high, truncated cone, representing a seated Zeus, holding a sceptre in his right hand and a bolt of lightning in his left; his eagle before him. Found near the pelvis. Height with tang – 25 mm; width – 17 mm; height of gem – 7 mm; width – 8 mm. Similar pieces were found at Mtskheta, Samtavro and Ertsoianeti.

10. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1620) (Fig. 14). A false-roped, tanged gold pendant, set with an almond-shaped, light violet, transparent amethyst, slightly ridged on the back. Found in the central part of the south wall. Height – 26 mm; width – 16 mm; weight – 3.68 g. An amethyst of a similar form was found elsewhere at Mtskheta, in tomb No. 25, set into a gold finger-ring of the second half of the 3rd century.

11. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1621) (Fig. 15.1). A gold pendant, with a pair of transverse rods soldered onto two fish-shaped verticals. On the lower rod an octagonal sky-blue glass bead is mounted. Two grooved tangs are soldered on to the pair of fish. Found in the central part of the south wall. Height with tang – 17 mm; width – 12 mm; thickness – 7 mm; length of bead – 18 mm.

12. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1622) (Fig. 15.2). A gold pendant similar to No. 11. Height – 22 mm; width – 21 mm; weight – 5.455 g.

13. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1623) (Fig. 16). An agate balsamarium. It is pear-shaped, with a cylindrical neck and a gold lid. A gold ring, with three gold chains terminating in flat gold plates, is linked to another gold chain, which is attached to the lid by means of a tang. The three gold chains may easily be attached to three equidistant holes in the body of the balsamarium. A hole in the underside of the balsamarium is set with a gold-framed garnet. Height – 33 mm; diameter – 27 mm; weight – 13.80 g. A similar balsamarium, but gold and with a rough surface, was found in sarcophagus No. 7 at Armaziskhevi cemetery.

14. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1624) (Fig. 17.1-2). A tanged gold coin pendant. Obv. – a draped bust of Faustina II, left profile, encircled with the inscription FAVSTINA AVGVSTA and a circle of dots. Rev. – a draped, full-face image of Venus holding an apple in her right hand; inscription VE..NVS. Found near the pelvis. Height with tang – 17 mm; diameter – 13-14 mm; thickness – 1.5 mm; weight – 3.865 g.

15. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1625) (Fig. 18.1-2). A tanged gold coin pendant, similar in form to the previous example, but the coin is a gold denarius minted in Rome. Obv. – a draped bust of Lucilla (164-169 or 183 AD), right profile; bust encircled with the inscription, LVCILLAE AVGVSTAE, and a half loop of dotted line. Rev. – Pietas, a full-face, draped image; right hand raised over a burning altar; left hand holding a box; inscription around the image PIE..TAS, with part of a circle of dots. Found near the pelvis. Height with tang – 16 mm; diameter – 15 mm; weight – 3.75 g.

16. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1626) (Fig. 19). An ovoid earring made of gold wire, with open ends; soldered onto it a gold rod with a coral bead on it and a flattened end. Found in the middle of the south wall. Height – 20 mm; diameter – 12 mm; weight – 1.37 g.

This type is quite common in Georgia (Mtskheta, Urbnisi, Ertso) but the great majority of them have been found in Greater Mtskheta in sites dated to the 3rd-4th centuries (Armaziskhevi, Samtavro).

17. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1627) (Figs. 20-24). A silver desk set and pencil-box, damaged and with a patina. The box was found near the pelvis of the deceased.

The box is formed of two parts. The first is the rear of a boat-shaped item consisting of two silver sheets with a corrugated lid attached (see detailed description below). The space between the sheets is divided by three tetrahedral rods – one transverse, the other two running along the sides – with the empty spaces between them filled with some plaster.

The lid also is in two parts. One piece is of corrugated silver, terminating in a raised, triangular case (8 x 7 cm) for holding an ink-pot. It is decorated in high relief. The device on the case is bordered by three arches supported by

spiral columns. The arches are inscribed respectively MENAN ... (damaged; some letters missing), ΟΜΗΡΟΣ and ΔΗΜΟΚΡΕΝΗΣ – the names of the three male figures (Menander, Homer and Demosthenes) enclosed by them. The second part is an open-work gold cover (see No. 3).

The second piece of the box, mainly its rear surface, forms a device divided into three bands each of three figures, crowned with a cordon of *astragaloi*. Over each of the upper row of figures is an arch supported by spiral columns. The height of figures varies (see below). Below each row Greek inscriptions, engraved in so-called *tabulae clipeatae*, contain the names of the muses. The letters are burnished and incrustated. The inscriptions are framed in gold; the figures of the nine muses are gilded.

The figures in the upper row (left to right), dressed in long chitons, are the muses of history, lyric poetry and comedy; their names: ΚΛΙΩ, ΕΥΤΕΡΠΗ, ΘΑΛΙΑ. Clio holds a slate pencil in her right hand and a book in her left. Euterpe holds a trumpet in her right hand and some wind instrument in her left. There is an altar between Clio and Euterpe. Thalia holds a comic mask in her left hand and a ploughshare in her right.

The middle row contains the muses of tragedy, dance and love poetry, with their names: ΜΕΛΠΟΜΕΝΗ, ΤΕΡΨΙΧΟΡΗ, ΕΡΑΤΩ. Melpomene holds a tragic mask in her left hand with her right arm akimbo. Terpsichore has a lyre in her left hand and a plectrum (?) in her right. Erato has a flanged lyre in her left hand and some enigmatic object in her right.

The lower row houses the muses of singing, sacred dance and mime, of astronomy and of epic poetry, with their names: ΠΟΛΥΜΝΙΑ, ΟΥΡΑΝΙΑ, ΚΑΛΛΙΟΠΗ. Polyhymnia holds a scroll in her right hand and a mask in her left. Urania holds a pointed slate pencil in her right hand and a globe at her waist in the left. Calliope has a scroll in her left hand and her right hand pressed to her breast.

Length of box – 34.6 cm; width of top – 9.1 cm; of bottom – 6.6 cm; height of sides – 2.5 cm, 2.5 cm, 3 cm; thickness – 1.5 cm.

Length of other sheet – 30.2 cm; width of top – 8.5 cm; of bottom – 6 cm. Ink-pot case – 8 x 7 cm at top of lid.

Upper row figures (right to left) – 69 mm, 74 mm, 73.5 mm.

Middle row (right to left) – 62.5 mm, 64 mm, 67 mm.

Lower row (right to left) – 62 mm, 61 mm, 63.5 mm.

External dimensions of inscription frames (top to bottom) – 49.5 x 24.5 mm, 44.5 x 23 mm, 45 x 20.5 mm.

Internal dimensions of the frames (top to bottom) – 41 x 18 mm, 38 x 17.5 mm, 39 x 13 mm.

The rest of the desk set consists of three writing implements – one-piece pens with nibs. One of the pens has an iron plug driven into the top. All three are made of silver sheets (12 mm wide; 1 mm thick), the joints between which are soldered from top to nib. They were placed within a special case made of two silver sheets. Length of pen and nib – 23.3 cm; diameter – 7-8 mm; diameter of body – 10 mm; length of nib – 3.7 cm; width of nib – 1.5 mm (2 mm for the one with the plug). This is the first desk set to be found in Georgia.

18. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1628). A square bronze plaque (mirror?), broken into six pieces, coated with a malignant patina; with the remains of a wooden frame. Next to it was a bronze handle, again with wooden remains adhering to it (used for hanging the mirror?). Found at the south-western corner of the burial. Height – 31.3 cm; width – 27 cm; thickness – 3-4 cm.

19. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1629) (Fig. 25). An ovoid, shallow agate saucer, probably the base of some larger vessel. The underside edges are chipped. Found in the middle part of the south wall. Length – 9.75 cm; width – 7.4 cm; height of sides – 7 mm (outer), 6 mm (inner); thickness – 6 mm.

20. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1630) (Fig. 26). A decorated agate drinking vessel with straight sides. The body is cylindrical, tapering slightly at the bottom. The base is flat and everted. The body is ornamented with a pair of relief cordons between which are eight rhomboid reliefs with a ninth, larger one in the centre. Found near the right thigh bone. Matt white veins run through the glass itself. Height – 8.3 cm; diameter of body – 6.4 cm; diameter of rim – 5.6 cm; diameter of base – 3.5 cm.

21. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1631). Pieces of a clear glass vessel. Found in the middle part of the south wall.

22. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1632). Pieces of a clear glass vessel. Found in the north-east section of the burial.

23. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1633) (Fig. 27). An iron pin, round in section, with a ball-shaped head; one piece, hammered, rusted and broken into four pieces. Found near the lady's breast.

24. (Inv. No. 01-6-X-1634). An iron pin, round in section, rusted and broken into three pieces. Similar to No. 23. Length – 12 cm.

The great majority of the grave-goods found in tomb No. 14 belong to the 3rd century or to the first half of the 4th century AD. Thus, the tomb most probably dates to the late 3rd or early 4th century. Various of the finds, particularly the desk set, together with bronze and silver ink-pots and styli discovered previously, point to a high level of literacy among the elite in the period when Mtskheta served as capital of Caucasian Iberia. Some pieces from the tomb seem to have been made in foreign workshops – further evidence of quite close trading contacts with Rome, Iran, etc.

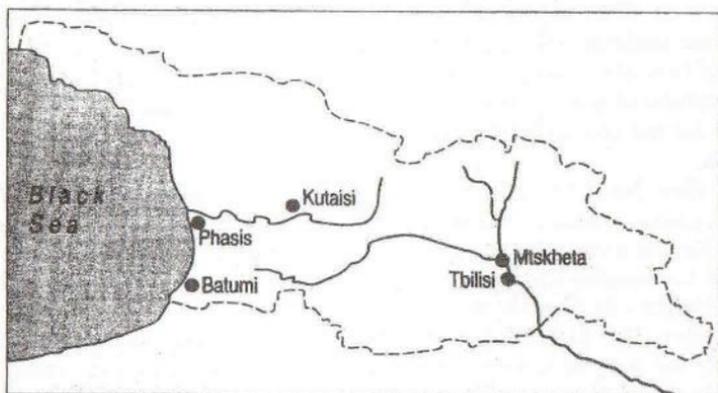


Fig. 1. Map of Georgia showing location of Mtskheta (adapted from Apakidze and Nikolaishvili 1994, 17, fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Tomb No. 14.

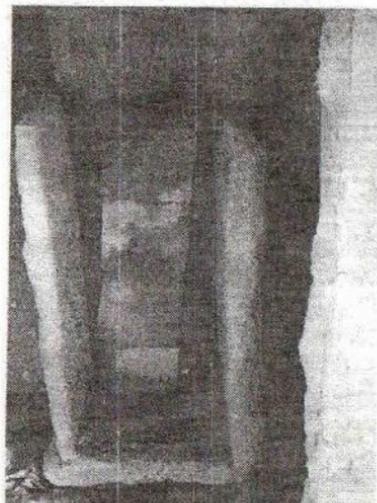


Fig. 3. Tomb No. 14 after removal of skeleton and grave-goods.

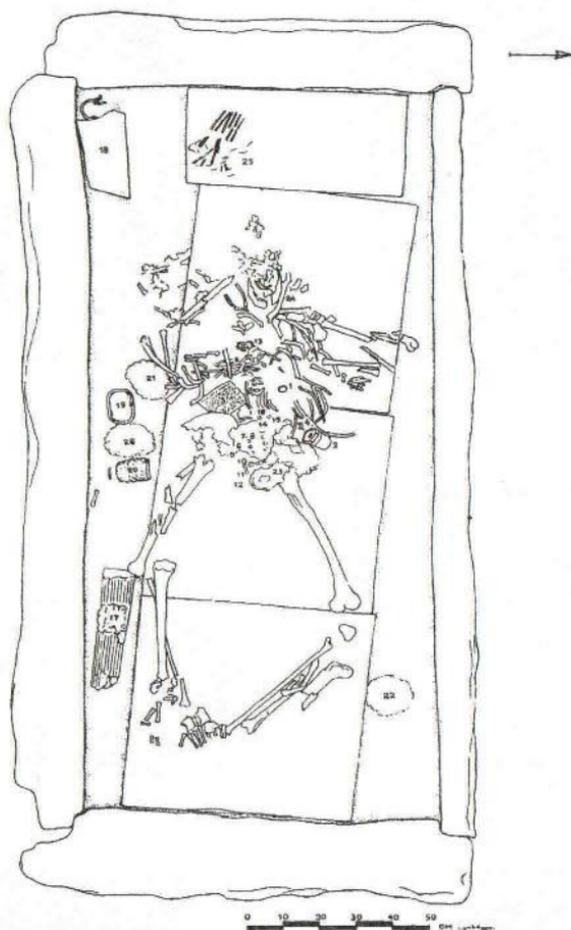


Fig. 4. Drawing of tomb. 1 – gold signet-ring; 2 – a cylindrical gold ink pot (part of desk set and pencil-box); 3 – a gold sheet (part of desk set and pencil-box); 4-12 – gold pendants; 13 – agate balsamarium; 14-15 – gold coin pendants; 16 – gold earring; 17 – silver desk set and pencil-box; 18 – bronze plaque (mirror?); 19 – agate saucer; 20 – glass drinking vessel; 21-22 – fragments of glass vessels; 23-24 – iron pins; 25 – fragments of wood; 26 – fragments of glass vessel.



Fig. 5. A gold signet-ring with carnelian gem-intaglio.



Fig. 6. A cylindrical gold ink pot.



Fig. 7. A gold sheet forming the cover for the desk set.



Fig. 8. A two-tanged gold pendant case.



Fig. 9. A gold pendant.



Fig. 10. A gold pendant.



Fig. 11. A gold pendant.



Fig. 12. A gold pendant.



Fig. 13. A gold pendant.

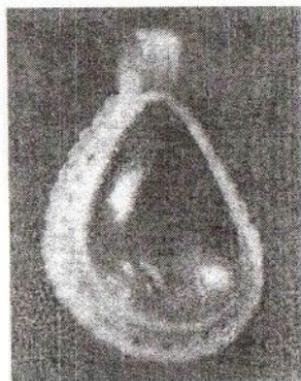


Fig. 14. A gold pendant.

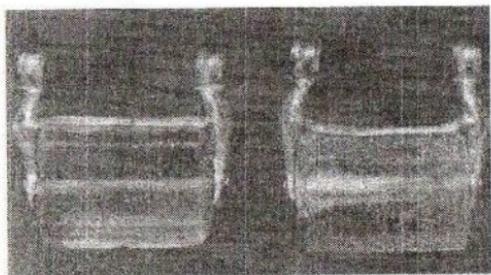


Fig. 15. 1-2. Gold pendants.

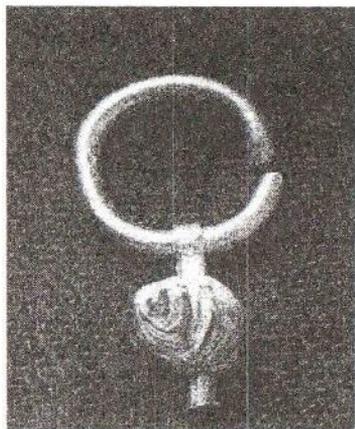


Fig. 19. Gold earring.



Fig. 20. A silver desk set and pencil-box.

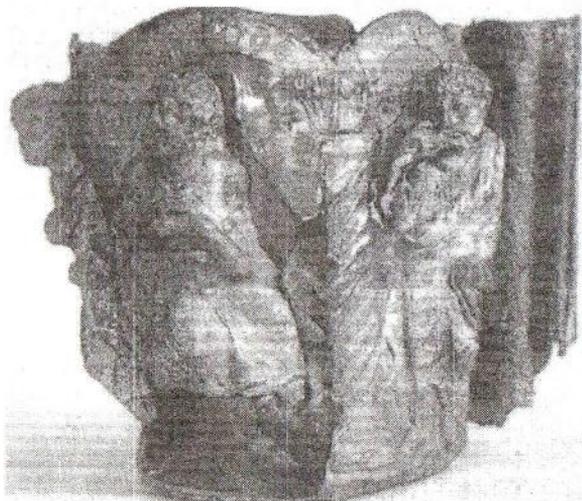


Fig. 21. A silver desk set and pencil-box.



Fig. 22. A silver desk set and pencil-box.



Fig. 23. A silver desk set and pencil-box.

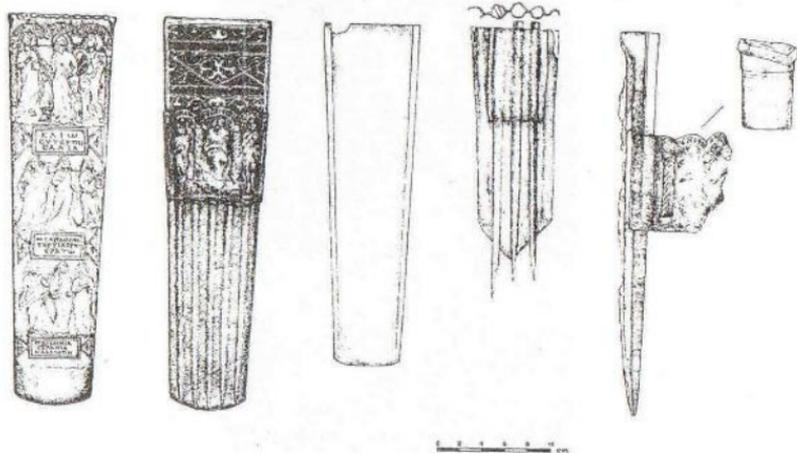


Fig. 24. A silver desk set and pencil-box.

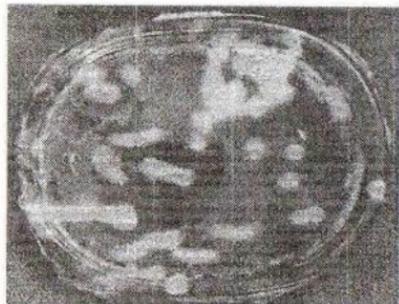


Fig. 25. Shallow agate saucer.



Fig. 26. Agate drinking vessel.

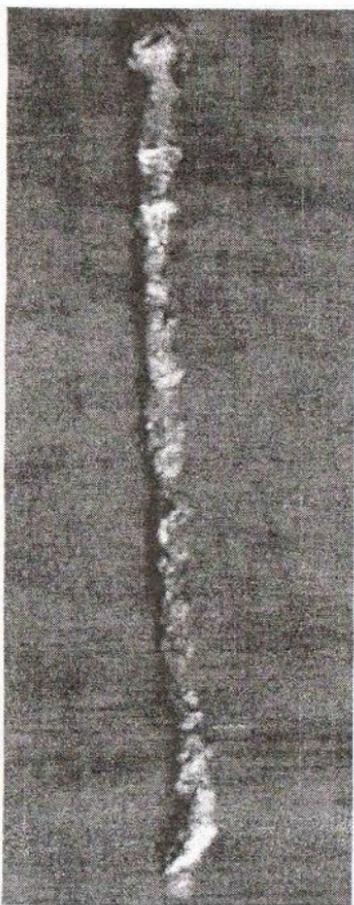


Fig. 27. Iron pin.