A000-Eur-Greece-Vapheio-Cup-Gold-1400-1450 BCE

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| Figs. 1-4. Greece-Vapheio-Cup-Gold-1400-1450 BCE  **Formal Label:** Greece-Vapheio-Cup-Gold-1400-1450 BCE  **Accession Number:** A000  **Display Description:**  These two masterpieces of Mycenaean gold-smithing were found together in a tholos or "beehive" tomb at Vapheio five miles south of Sparta, southern Greece, which was excavated in 1889 by Christos Tsountas. The Vapheio tholos tomb consists of a 97-foot walled approach, leading to a 33-foot diameter, corbelled-vaulted chamber in the floor of which the actual grave was cut. These cups haves a flat base, straight flaring sides, and a single handle. Vapheio style cups are found also in middle Minoan levels in Crete and were popular on the mainland in the late Helladic Period.  **LC Classification:**  **Date or Time Horizon:** 1400-1450 BCE  **Geographical Area:** Vapheio tholos tomb, Laconia, Greece  **Cultural Affiliation:** Mycenaean metalwork  **Medium:** Gold  **Dimensions:** 7.6 x 9.9 cm (3 x 3 7/8 in)  **Weight:**  **Provenance:** Vapheio tholos tomb, Laconia, Greece  **Condition:** Museum reproduction  **Discussion:** The first cup above shows a bull being captured by hobbling a bull’s leg with a rope, while simultaneously the animal mates with a cow as three grazing bulls look on. The bottom cup above shows one bull caught in a net, as the traditional hunter-gatherers had done for millennia, while another attacks two hunters as a third hunter flees. The cups appear to have been imported from Crete where bulls were considered to be sacred. Both cups were probably made in the same atelier with the first being the product of a master goldsmith, as it is more carefully executed, while the second, which is slightly inferior to the first, is probably the product of an understudy. The naturalistic compositions were added via repoussé, a technique in which the relief is made by hammering the reverse side of the metal.  “Stylistic differences between the two gold Vapheio cups and the technical differences between the two silver cups found with them suggest a distinction between Mycenean and Minoan gold and silver vessels based on two different ways of producing these vessels. The new Grave Circle B at Mycenae provides the beginnings of the Mycenean manufacture of precious metal vessels with the practice of rolling handle edges around strengthening wire, a feature never found in Minoan metalwork. Early vessels frequently manufacture the floor of the cup with a raised boss. Mycenean vessels also use flat-headed rivets. Myceneans work metal directly by hammering, surfaces are left unsmoothed, with traces of the tooling. Minoans, use indirect methods prefering three-dimensional curves and rounded moldings to straight forms and make frequent use of fusion to attach copper parts to silver. Minoan craftsmen were highly regarded and their products prized. Not only were their vessels imported in great number to the Greek mainland and Cyprus, but evidence indicates that the metalworkers themselves emigrated to Mycenae, Vapheio and Midea, where they produced new designs to please the Mycenean taste. In Crete, they appear to have worked primarily in silver, using gold only sparingly, for added decoration. When they arrived on the Mainland, they worked also in gold, which they smoothed and polished to a high finish” (Davis 1973).  **References:** |  |
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| http://www.namuseum.gr/images/blank.gif |

Davis, Ellen N. 1973. The Vapheio cups and Aegean gold and silver ware. Ph. D. New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science