

Fittings from an Etruscan Chariot

(*Tavv. XXVIII-XXXIII*)

Several years ago the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a number of bronze and iron fittings of great interest (1). The process of cleaning them has only lately been completed and they are now shown in the Etruscan Gallery of that Museum. The bronzes — of which there are altogether sixty-six (pl. XXVIII) — consist chiefly of plaques of various shapes and sizes, finials, and rings; the iron pieces — about 20 odd pieces, now much corroded (pl. XXIX) — are mostly large rings and cylinders. All are said to have been found together in a tomb.

The illustrations, with indications of scale, will make it unnecessary to give detailed descriptions and dimensions of these miscellaneous pieces; but we shall try to interpret them. Is it possible to determine to what kind of object they belonged — assuming of course, what is not certain, that they all came from one ensemble? An important clue is supplied by the little bits of wood which occasionally adhere to the backs of the plaques and finials. One might think, therefore, of a piece of furniture — a couch or a magnificent chair; but then what about the rings and cylinders? A likelier guess is that we have here the remains of a chariot. The large iron rings (cf. pl. XXIX) could be bands from the wheel hub — slightly hollowed out on the inside to keep them in place on the wooden hub and graduated to fit the different parts they occupied; the iron cylinders (pl. XXIX, top, right and left) could be bushings from inside the wheel or the axle shaft; the ten graduated bronze rings (pl. XXVIII, bottom, left), looplike buckles (pl. XXX, 4) the clusters of rings (pl. XXX, 1) and the tubular crosses with rings attached (pl. XXX, 3), might come from the harness; the little hook ending in a bird's head (pl. XXXI, 3) is evidently part of the bridle bit; the magnificent finial in the form of a kid's head (pl. XXXI, 4-6) is probably the end of the hitching pole.

The other pieces, most of which retain their bronze or iron rivets for attachment, may have served as braces and ornaments on the body of the chariot. Ten of the braces are S shaped (cf. pl. XXXII, 3); one forms a design of two serpents (pl. XXXII, 4); ten are projections, evidently for masking tenons (pls. XXX, 2, XXXI, 2, and pl. XXXII, 1-2); three appear to be angle

(1) *Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*, XXXIV, 1939, pp. 41 ff. As the bronzes were purchased their exact provenance is not known.

(2) I owe the identifications here suggested to William Chapman, superintendent of the Metropolitan Museum, once a practising carpenter. While he was an apprentice he helped to reconstruct the famous chariot from Monteleone.

braces (pl. XXVIII, top, left), two look like cleats in which the ends of the stanchions were housed (pl. XXVIII, top, right); others may be finials railings (cf. pl. XXVIII, bottom, right); still others ornamental buttons (pl. XXXI, 7-9).

Many of these fittings are plain, some are decorated. One has a superb relief of a youth wearing a mantle and shoes and playing the lyre (pl. XXX, 2); others are ornamented with Medusa masks (pl. XXXI, 7-9), the mask of a satyr (pl. XXXI, 1-2), and heads of serpents (cf. pl. XXXII, 4). A few have bold designs of scrolls, lotos buds, and palmettes (cf. pl. XXXII, 1-4).

The only other known set of such bronzes is in the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome. They include a number of pieces similar to ours, as well as two frame-like angular objects, bent up in the middle, which perhaps served as steps for mounting — though no such steps occur in ancient representations of Greek and Etruscan chariots. All have been assembled — not unsuccessfully — as parts of a chariot (pl. XXXIII). But the details are hypothetical. It is not even certain that the pieces were all found at the same time, for they came to the Villa Giulia Museum as a gift of Alessandro Castellani without records of excavation (3). Though our set bears out the supposition that the Villa Giulia pieces also constituted one find, it is of course possible that several different objects — that is, perhaps a chair in addition to a chariot — were present in each tomb. We have therefore not attempted a reconstruction. This much, however, we can say. The chariot to which our newly acquired pieces perhaps belonged could not have been of the same type as the famous chariot from Monteleone (4). That has the typically Etruscan form with curved solid front and solid sides, as was indicated by its well-preserved bronze sheathings. Among our newly acquired pieces there are no such sheathings and all the plaques are level, not curved. Therefore, the chariot — if chariot it was — on which our pieces fitted must have been of a different type. Presumably it had the familiar form with sides partly open and with rails and supports, which was in use in both Greece and Etruria (5).

That our bronzes and those in the Villa Giulia are Etruscan is suggested by the style of the decorations. The type of face of the lyre player (pl. XXX, 2) and the rendering of his drapery — with several sets of symmetrically stacked folds, wavy incised lines between them, and delicately incised borders of lines and dots — find analogies in the best Etruscan work of about 500 B. C. and later. The Satyr and Medusa masks are like those which frequently occur on Etruscan handles of the period. And the two winged figures on the Villa Giulia plaques also have an Etruscan look. We can therefore safely attribute both sets to Etruscan artists. They show the height of Etruscan work in bronze at this epoch. The head of a kid (pl. XXXI, 4-6) is a masterpiece of simplification, and the lyre-player (pl. XXX, 2) can take its place beside some of the best Greek work of this type. Particularly fine are also the plaques with lotos buds, palmettes, and serpent heads (cf. pl. XXXII, 1-4) which illustrate the highly developed decorative sense of the Etruscans.

(3) I am indebted for this information to Paolino Mingazzini through the kindness of Doro Levi.

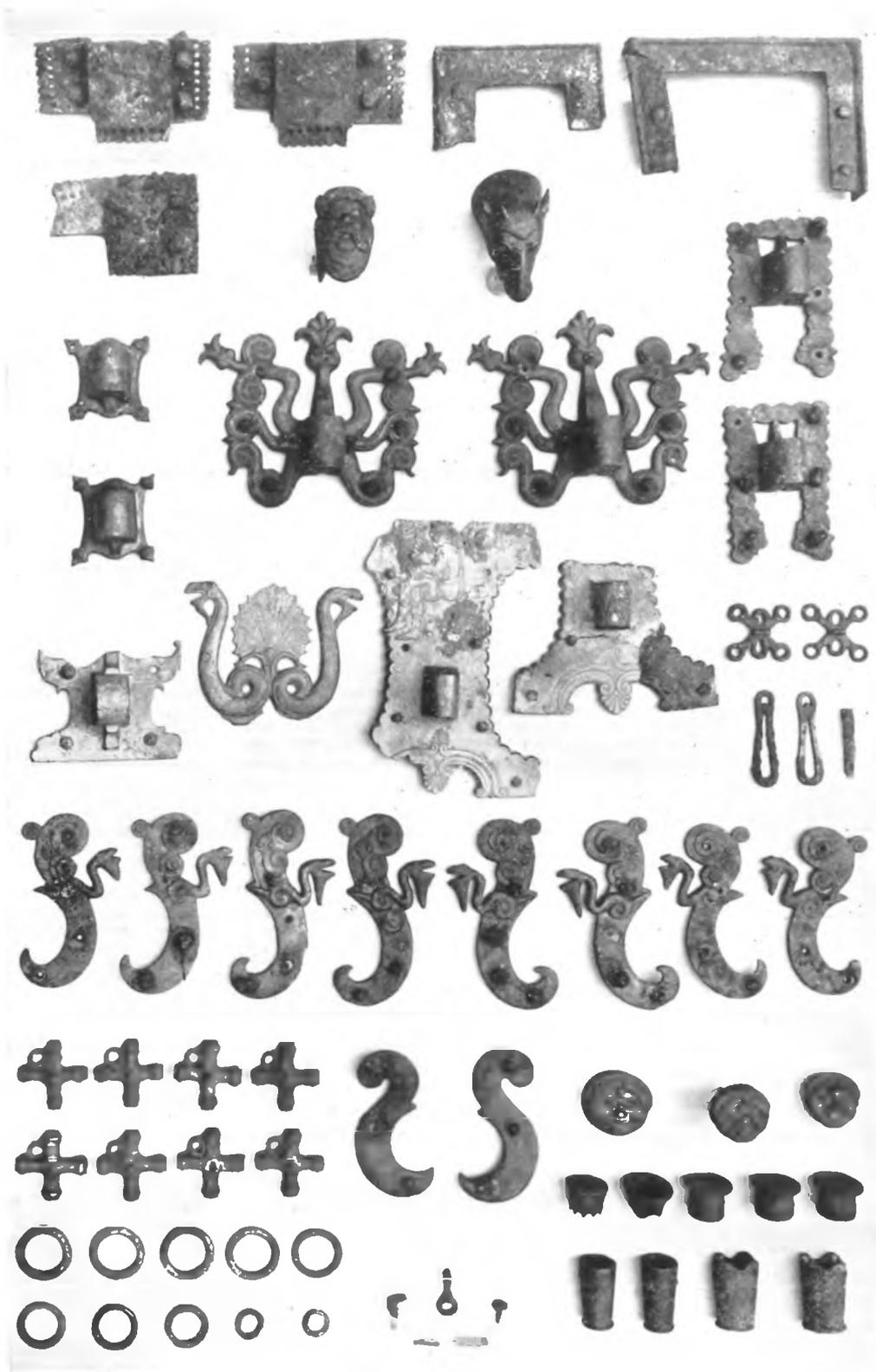
(4) FURTWÄNGLER, in *Br. Br.*, pls. 586, 587; G. M. A. RICHTER, *Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Bronzes in the Metropolitan Museum*, no. 40.

(5) Cf. NACHOD, *Der Rennwagen bei den Italikern*, pp. 72 ff.

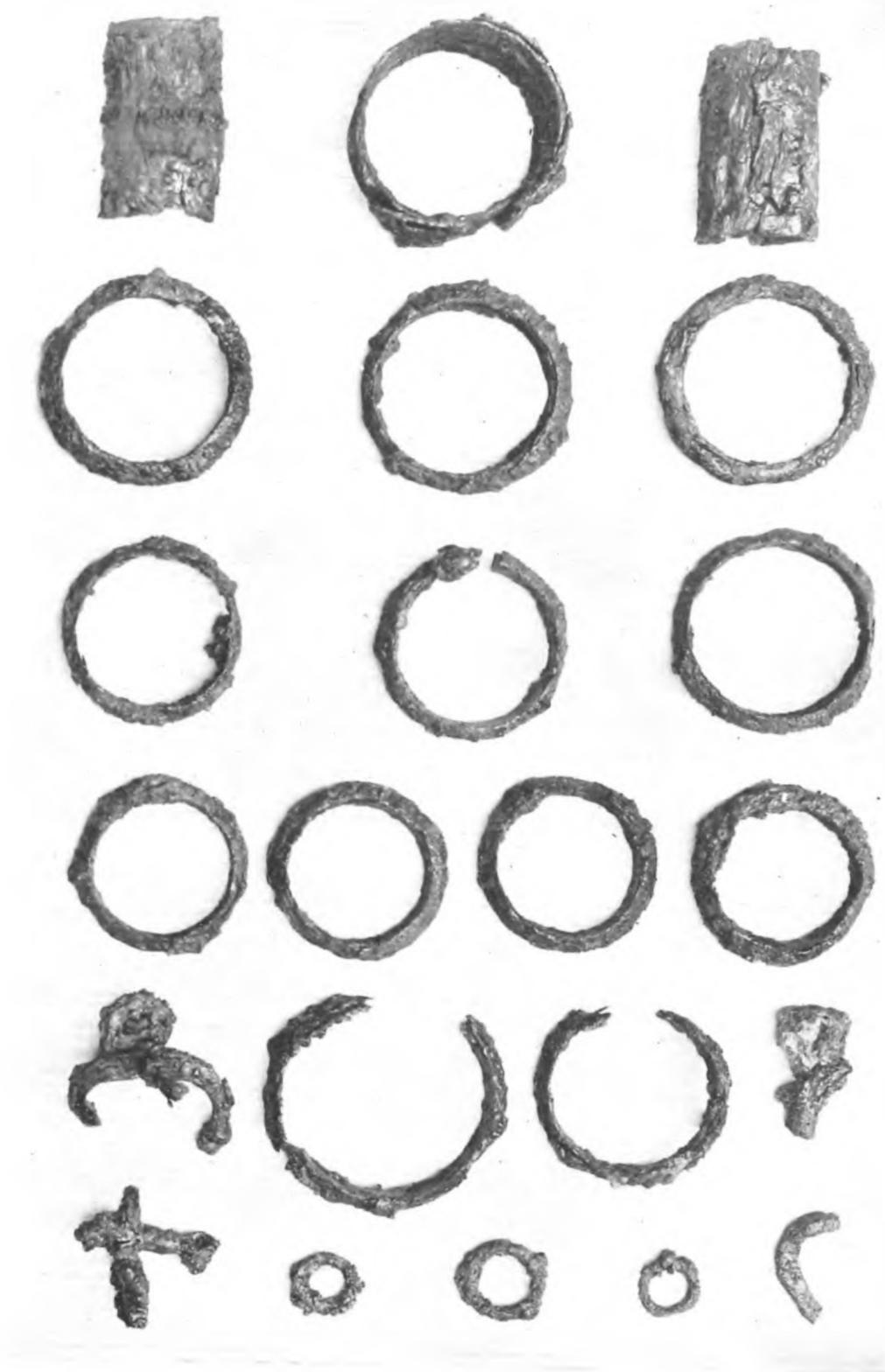
In the early fifth century — the probable period of these bronzes — Etruria was still the dominant power in Italy, for her supremacy was only beginning to be challenged by Rome. Artistically and commercially she had close connections with Greece, and she had great wealth — as suggested by the sumptuous chamber-tombs and such amazing dedicatory offerings as the terracotta warriors in the Metropolitan Museum. Since the Homeric custom of using chariots in battle seems to have practically died out in the classical period — surviving only in a few outlying places like Cyprus and Cyrene (6) — we may suppose that our chariot perhaps played a part in an important parade or race. The beauty of its decorations suggests a member of a ruling Etruscan family as its owner.

C. M. A. Richter

¹⁶¹ Cf. P. LAMBERT in PAULY-WISSOWA, vol. IV A, s. v. *Streitwagen*, col. 350.



NEW-YORK — METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — Bronze fittings perhaps from a charist - Scale c. 1:5.



NEW-YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — Iron fittings said to have been found with the bronze fittings shown in tav. I. Scale c. 2:7.



1



2



3



4

NEW-YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — 1. Cluster of rings perhaps from the harness - 2. Plaque with lyre-player - 3. Tubular cross perhaps from the harness - 4. Buckle perhaps from the harness.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

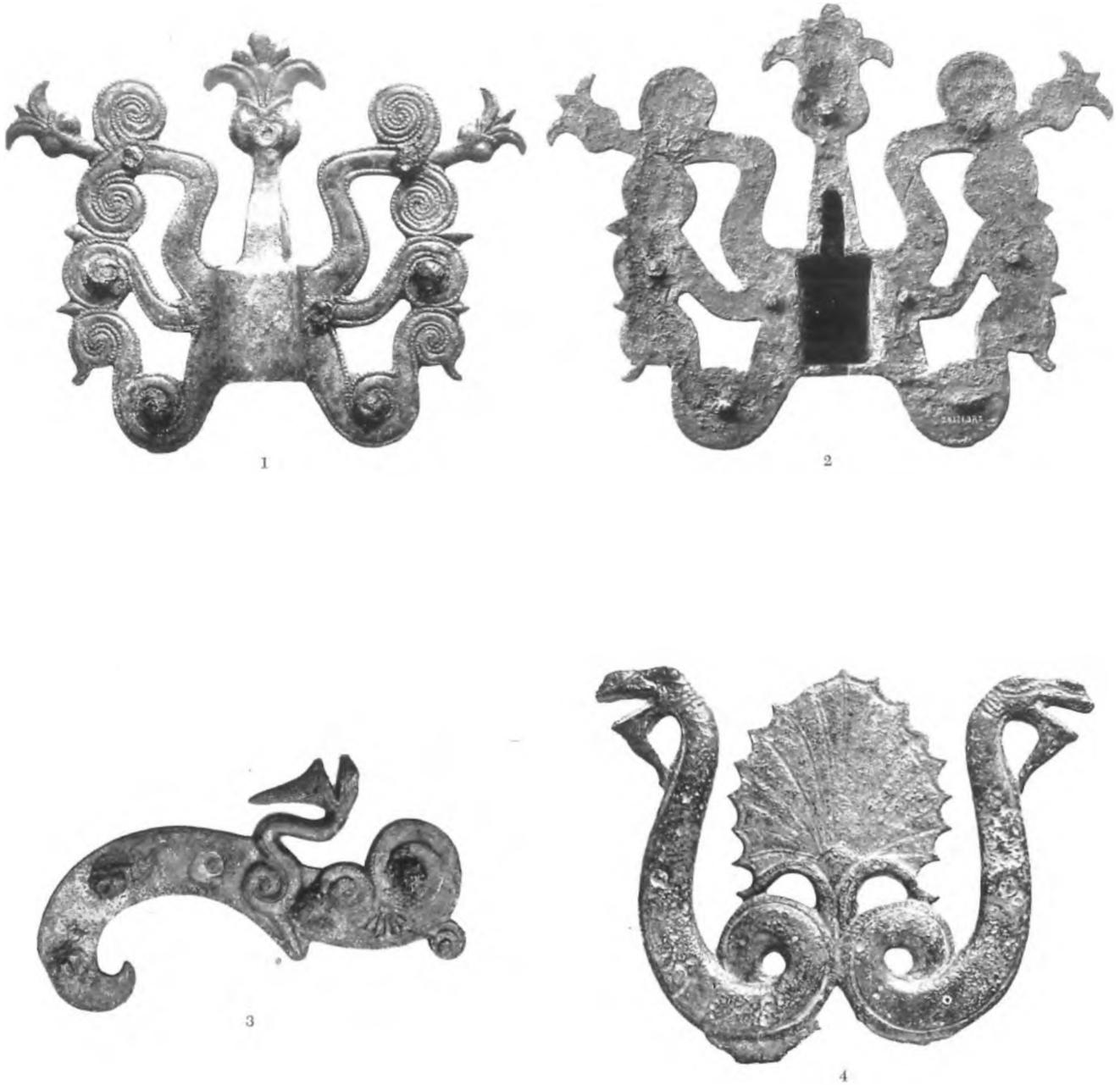


8

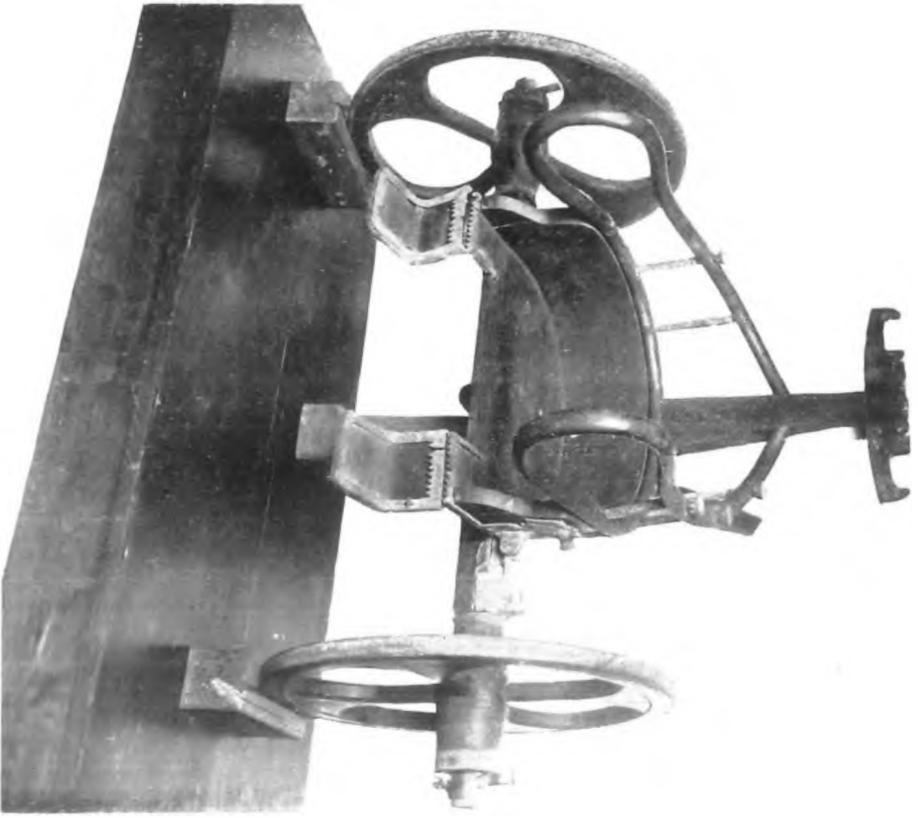
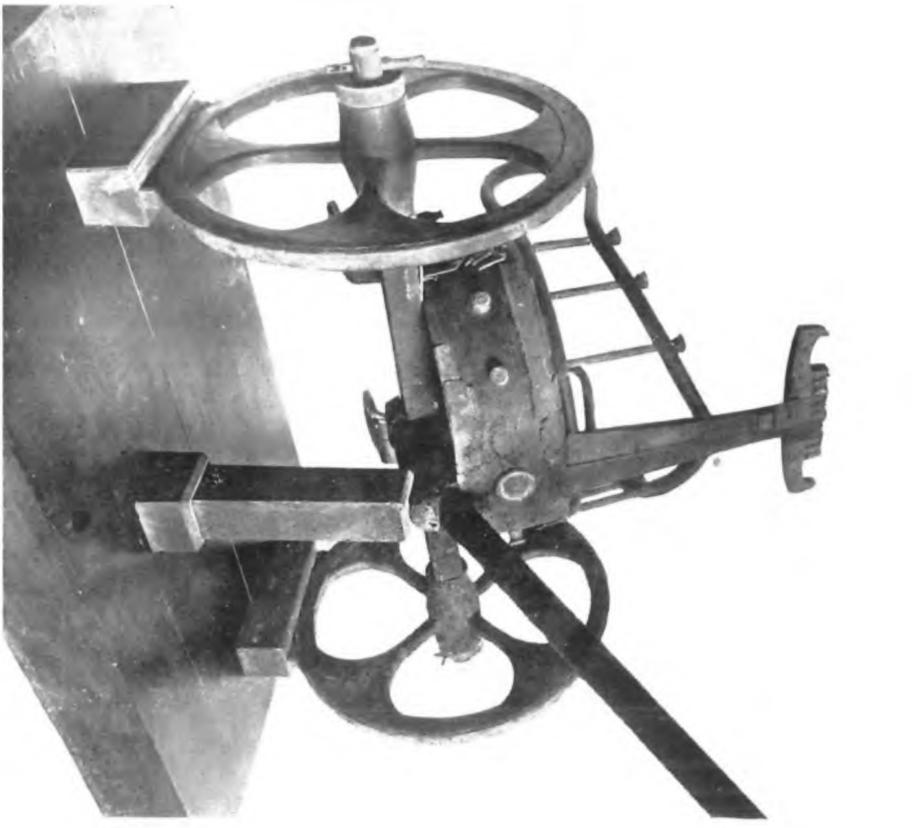


9

NEW-YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — 1-2. Fitting with head of satyr
 3. Hook, perhaps part of the bridle bit - 4-6. Kid's head, perhaps from the end of the
 pole - 7-9. Ornaments in the form of Medusa masks.



NEW-YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — 1. Plaque with projection for masking tenon - 2. Back of plaque n. 1 - 3. Brace with iron rivets - 4. Brace in the form of two serpents.



ROMA - MUSEO NAZIONALE DI VILLA GIULIA - Modern copy of an ancient chariot
with ancient bronze fittings.