

# A Late Bronze Age Hoard from Glentanar, Aberdeenshire

by Susan M. Pearce

## INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1971 Mr E Oddy, a gentleman living in Exeter, Devonshire, brought into the City Museum a bronze penannular armlet, and in discussion with him it emerged that this formed part of a group of sixteen bronze objects which were in his possession. The group was made up of four socketed axes, six penannular armlets and armlet fragments, two rings, two sets of triple-rings, and two cups each with a single projecting handle. The bronzes were formerly the property of Colin Matheson Milne Miller, Army Medical Corps, who, according to the entry in the *Roll of Army Medical Service (1727-1898)* was born at Nairn, Scotland, in 1826, and died at Eastbourne, England, in 1895. Colin Milne Miller was the son of the Rev Robert Milne Miller, who was minister of Aboyne and Glentanar, Aberdeenshire, from 1826 to 1848. The *Aberdeen Journal* for Wednesday, 29th March 1843, records 'some woodcutters in pursuit of rabbits on the hill of Knockie in Glentanner (old spelling) accidentally discovered under a cairn an ancient burial place, covered by a large flat stone. On removing this, they found articles including two bronze vessels, capable of holding about two-thirds of a pint, of neat workmanship, cast in rather an elegant shape, with a handle on one side; seventeen spear- or axe-heads of bronze, known among antiquaries by the name of celts; from thirty to forty bronze bracelets; six bronze rings of good workmanship, of different sizes'<sup>1</sup>. The Ordnance Survey six inch map shows 'bronze celts and cups found' at NJ 482953 on the top of Knockie overlooking what is now Glentanar House. The Ordnance Survey name book entry relating to the hoard, made in 1865, refers to two cups and six celts, and adds that James Ogg of Aboyne has one celt but that it is not known where the others are.\* There seems no reason to doubt that Mr Oddy's bronzes are part of this hoard, or that his cups are those described in the newspaper.

## DESCRIPTION

### 1. *Four socketed axes* (fig 1, pl 8)

Axe 1, 7.3 cm long, is nearly rectangular in section, and has a thick mouth-moulding and a second thinner moulding at the loop top. Axe 2, 7.4 cm long, is sub-rectangular in section, and has a rather thinner mouth and no clearly defined collar or secondary moulding at the loop top. Axe 1 belongs to the eastern English type, and Axe 2 is probably a local copy of this type. Coles' distribution map shows a group of seven of these types around the shores of the Moray Firth.<sup>2</sup> Axe 3, 7.6 cm long, shows traces of hammering above the edges of the blade on both sides. It has a wide collar extending down to the loop top, below which the body section descends in eight

\* I am much indebted to Dr J Close-Brooks for these references and pieces of information.

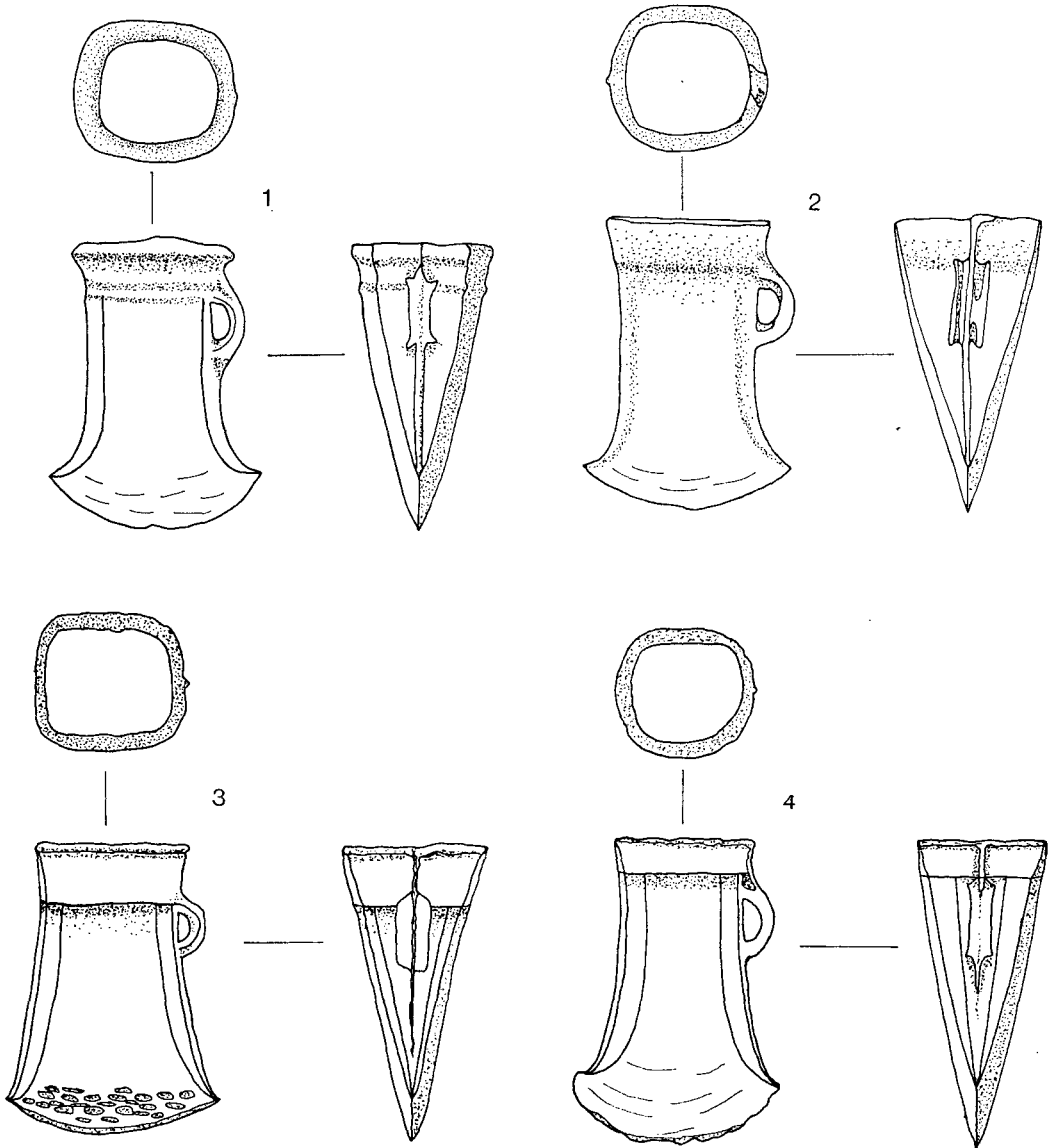


FIG 1 Socketed axes (4)

facets to a wide blade. Axe 4, 8.0 cm long, shows a more slender form with the same wide collar and eight-faceted body. It is very similar to the complete axe in the Horsehope hoard, Peeblesshire.<sup>3</sup> Coles considers the type to belong to the later Duddingston phase.<sup>4</sup>

2. Six penannular armlets and armlet fragments (fig 2, 1-6, pl 9)

Armlet 1 is 6.8 cm in diameter in external measurement across its widest point. It is oval in section, with prominent casting-seams on the inside. Armlet 2, 6.85 cm in diameter, is also oval in section. Both these armlets have expanding terminals with a greater projection on the outside.

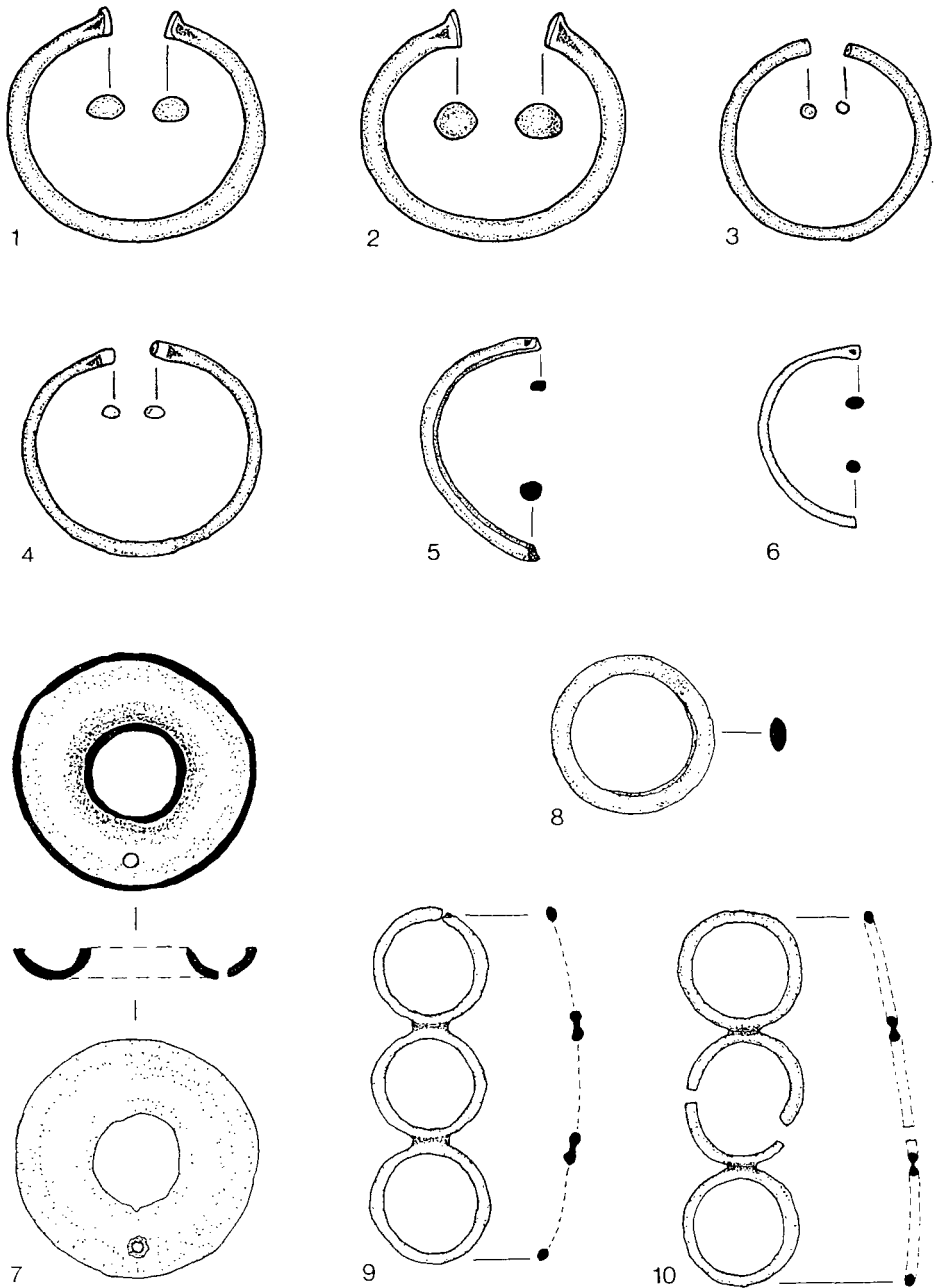


FIG 2 1, armlet 1; 2, armlet 2; 3, armlet 3; 4, armlet 4; 5, armlet fragment 1; 6, armlet fragment 2; 7, semi-tubular ring; 8, ring; 9, complete triple ring; 10, broken triple ring (1)

They compare with armlets from the Braes of Gight hoard, Aberdeenshire,<sup>5</sup> with one from the Wester Ord hoard, Ross-shire<sup>6</sup>, and with one from Heathery Burn, County Durham<sup>7</sup>. Armlet fragment 6 is the slightest of the six pieces. It is nearly plano-convex in section, and its terminal projects outwards. It is similar to an example from Heathery Burn.<sup>8</sup> Armlet fragment 5 is D-shaped in section, and thickens a very little at the terminal. It is comparable to an example found at Covesea, Morayshire.<sup>9</sup> Armlet 4 is 6.1 cm in diameter. It is D-shaped in section, and has what appears to be one transverse groove or step cut on the outer side near each of the terminal ends. It seems to compare most closely with an armlet found at Covesea.<sup>10</sup> These five pieces are all of the Covesea type, and armlets 1 and 2, and fragments 1 and 2 seem to belong to Proudfoot's Type 2 with plain terminals, while armlet 4 apparently belongs to his Type 2a with transverse ribbing near the terminals,<sup>11</sup> if indeed the cut on each end of this armlet qualifies it for Proudfoot's type. A combination of the two types also occurs in the hoards from the Braes of Gight, Covesea and Auchtertyre, Morayshire.<sup>12</sup>

Armlet 3 is a plain penannular ring, 5.5 cm in diameter, of a flattened oval section, flattening still further on the inside towards each of the terminals, which are not at all expanded. Similar armlets appeared at Balmashanner, Angus and at Covesea.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *The semi-tubular ring* (fig 2, 7, pl 10a)

The semi-tubular ring has an external diameter of 6.1 cm by 6.2 cm. It has a hole punched through it on one side 1.2 cm in from the outside edge. The convex side is smooth metal, and on the concave side the inner and outer edges have been slightly hammered over to form a narrow flat surface on each edge. A rather larger ring of this type, without the hole, came from the Monmore, Killin, hoard, Perthshire,<sup>14</sup> and there are others in the hoard from Inshoch near Nairn,<sup>15</sup> and from Great Freeman Street, Nottingham.<sup>16</sup> The hoard from Green End Road, Marden, Cambridgeshire,<sup>17</sup> has a similar piece, and so has the hoard from Welby, Leicestershire.<sup>18</sup> A semi-tubular ring was found in the hoard from Fortrie of Balnoon, Banffshire.<sup>19</sup> A further piece in the Grosvenor Crescent hoard, Edinburgh, which is almost D-shaped in section with two loops on a concave back was compared by Coles with another mounting in the Welby hoard.<sup>20</sup> These looped pieces may represent a development of the type.

### 4. *The two sets of triple-rings* (fig 2, 9, 10, pl 10)

The first set of these rings, complete but for a break on the outside of one of the outside rings, measures 9.3 cm on the outside of the curve and 9.1 cm from tip to tip on the inside of the curve. The second set is now broken across its centre section, but the two pieces fit together and the whole measures 9.1 cm on the outside of the curve, and 9.1 cm from tip to tip on the inside. Each of the two sets was apparently cast as one piece. The nearest exactly located parallel to these pieces in Britain appears to be the object in the Braes of Gight hoard<sup>21</sup> which was originally composed of three rings joined together in a strip by bending lengths of sheet metal around them. Childe compared this piece with the chains of many links from the Bavarian urnfield area,<sup>22</sup> which are very different to the two pieces from Glentanar. There is in the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland an object in the form of three bronze rings of graduated size cast in one piece, but flat rather than curved (Mus no DQ 384). This was purchased from a dealer and tied to it with a piece of string was a bronze ring 9.5 cm across having two smaller free-running rings cast on to it. They were bought together by the dealer from a farmer who lives between Newstead and Melrose, but unfortunately it is not known where they were found, or whether they were found in the same place. The ring with the free-running rings can be paralleled in Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Sets of triple-rings are also known from Ireland. The Bootown hoard<sup>24</sup>

had seven sets of triples and four sets of doubles, all of which appear to have been joined together by single bronze links, forming a flexible chain. The largest of these triple-rings is as long as those from Glentinar, but only two-thirds as wide, and the pieces in the Bootown hoard are not curved.

5. *The ring* (fig 2, 8, pl 10a)

The ring measures 4.2 cm by 4.1 cm in external diameter, and it is of a flat oval section. There is an area of corrosion which might indicate a point of wear, and the casting seams are clearly visible on the inside and the outside. Ten similar small rings were found in the Balmashanner hoard,<sup>25</sup> and eight in the Monmore, Killin, hoard.<sup>26</sup> The Heathery Burn hoard had seven rather smaller rings.<sup>27</sup>

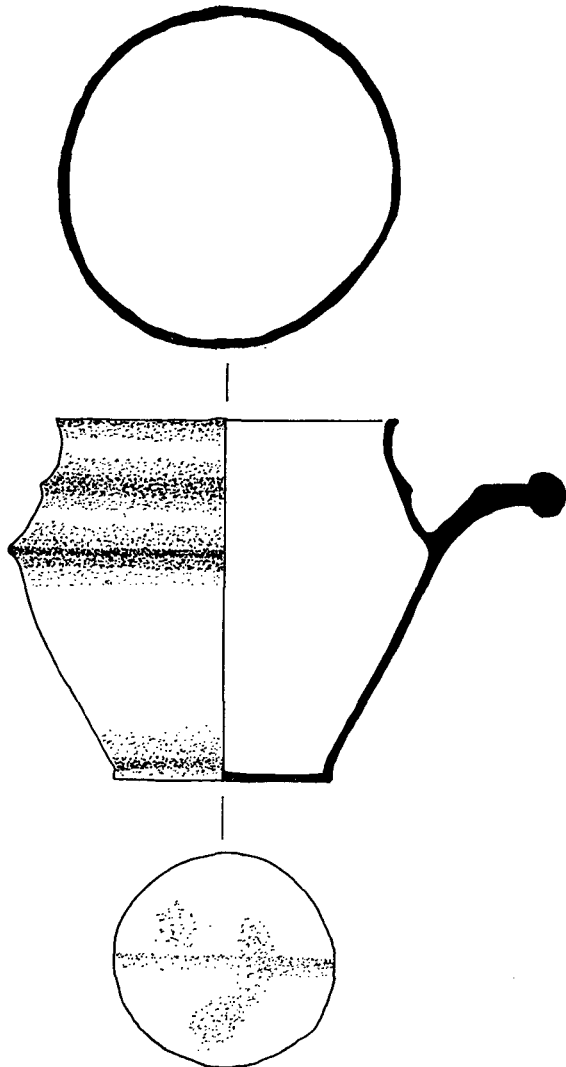
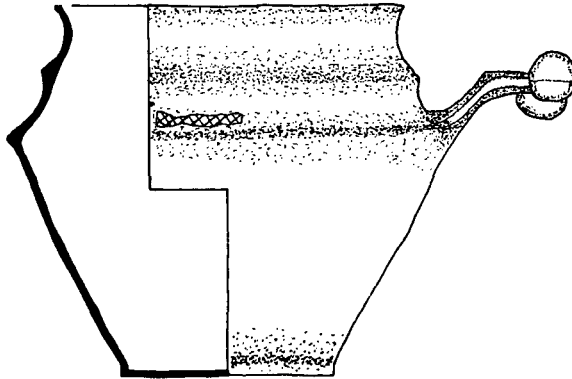


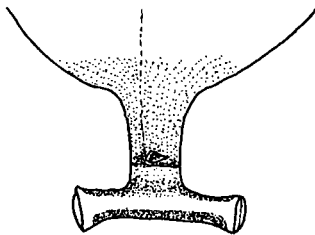
FIG 3 Cup 1 (3)

6. *The two cups* (figs 3, 4, pl 11)

The two cups are the most important pieces in the hoard. They have been cast from the same two-piece mould, although cup 1 is better made than cup 2. The casting seams are visible



handle from below



handle from above

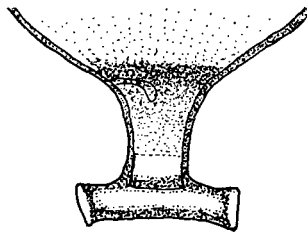


FIG 4 Cup 2, hatched area represents the upper plug (3)

in many places across the bottoms and up the sides of both cups, although the outer surfaces are finely finished. Both cups are 7.2 cm high, measure 7.6 cm across the mouth in external measurement, and 8.5 cm at their greatest width. They are flat-bottomed, and the plain lower part of each swells to a shoulder which is decorated with a cordon from which the handle springs. Above the shoulder is a second cordon, and above this is the lip, plain, and very slightly everted. The body of each cup appears to have been cast with a tang projecting from the shoulder, since on cup 1 the casting seam clearly runs up into the tang, but the upper part of each handle, with the cross-piece, seems to have been made separately and cast as a further process onto the tang, for on the underside of cup 2 a trickle of bronze can be seen overlapping the casting seam on the tang, although in most places the marks of workmanship have been carefully rubbed away. Cup 1 weighs 208.5 grams. It shows no flaws in the casting, and only very small spots of corrosion. Cup 2 weighs 172.3 grams. The thinner metal evidently resulted in flaws which had to be plugged, one plug being inserted just above the shoulder, the other on the opposite side 0.8 cm above the base of the cup. These plugs are carefully rubbed down on the outside of the vessel, but they have been left standing proud on the inside. Cup 2 shows a large area of black discolouration just above the

lower plug. Preliminary analysis of the metal of the cups has shown that the content of their bronze is consistent with that of the late Bronze Age.

Cast vessels are very rare in the British Bronze Age, and no close parallels can be offered for these Glentamar cups. The nearly semi-globular cast bowl from the Balmashanner hoard, which was  $3\frac{3}{4}$  in high, is much simpler and quite different,<sup>28</sup> as is the similar bowl from Ardoe, Aberdeenshire.<sup>29</sup> The cup from the Welby hoard offers the closest comparison, but although this piece is of the same general shape, carinated with some rib ornament on its upper portion, it is smaller, it has an omphalos base, and no handle. Smith and Clarke thought the Welby cup to be unique in the British Isles and on the Continent, but believed its form to be reminiscent of contemporary Central and Western European pottery.<sup>30</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The original hoard from Glentamar clearly contained at least sixty objects, of which perhaps half were penannular armlets. Of the material from the hoard which has now come to light, the four axes are of usual types, which Coles included in his Duddingston phase. The five Covesea type armlets in the hoard link it with the finds from Balmashanner, Auchtertyre, Covesea, Wester Ord, the Braes of Gight, and Ardoe; comparisons of the objects in these finds with material from the Rhineland, particularly the hoard from Homberg which included armlets with out-turned terminals and a cast bowl, and from Northern Europe, which has yielded necklets related to those from the Braes of Gight, led Coles to conclude that the Covesea material, which is limited to the North East, came, 'by the arrival in North East Scotland, from the Tay to the Moray coast, of settlers from the North West German plain'.<sup>31</sup> The Covesea complex did include a cast-vessel tradition, although as has been said, apparently nothing as elaborate as the two cups from Glentamar. The Glentamar semi-tubular ring, however, links the hoard in a wider context with the material from Heathery Burn, which had Covesea armlets and Urnfield horse-gear, and the hoard from Welby, which had Urnfield horse-gear and the cast cup most like the pair from Glentamar. The body forms of all these three vessels can be related to early Hallstatt pottery forms. It is conceivable that the two sets of triple-rings are pieces of horse-harness, although generally late Bronze Age horse-gear seems to involve more massive pieces than these, and the hoards containing it have many more varieties of types than the hoard from Glentamar appears to have done, as is shown by the hoards from Welby, Horsehope, and Parc y Meirch.<sup>32</sup> Also, none of the Scottish hoards with Covesea material apparently contain horse equipment (although the Heathery Burn Cave had both). The handles on the Glentamar cups present a problem for which no real solution can be offered. Handles somewhat reminiscent of those from Glentamar do occur on the sheet-bronze hemispherical bowls of Arnoaldi type in the hoard from Bologna, Italy, where there were examples with a long curving handle rivetted onto the bowl, with a cross-bar beyond which a tongue projected.<sup>33</sup> These occur in central Europe, but the resemblance to the Glentamar handles is not close, and the similarity, such as it is, may be coincidental. Isolated types do occur without obvious parallels in the late Bronze Age, and at present it appears that, although the hoard as a whole can be put into a well-defined and familiar context, the two cups are unique of their kind.

The hoard is now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. Museum registration numbers are as follows: axe 1 – DQ 369, axe 2 – DQ 370, axe 3 – DQ 371, axe 4 – DQ 372; armlet 1 – DQ 374, armlet 2 – DQ 375, armlet 3 – DQ 377, armlet 4 – DQ 376, armlet 5 – DQ 378, armlet 6 – DQ 379; semi-tubular ring – DQ 373; first set of triple rings – DQ 381, second set of triple rings – DQ 382; ring – DQ 380; cup 1 – DQ 367, cup 2 – DQ 368.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My grateful thanks are due to Dr C Burgess, Mr D Britten, Dr J Coles, Mr P Davey, Dr G Eogan, Prof. C F C Hawkes, Dr J Raftery, Dr H Savory, Dr E Munksgaard of the National Museum, Copenhagen, and Dr H-E Joachim of the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, for their comments and advice sent to me in correspondence, and in particular to Dr Joanna Close-Brooks for her great help and kindness to me. I must also thank Mr Alexander Hidalgo Jnr, who took the photographs.

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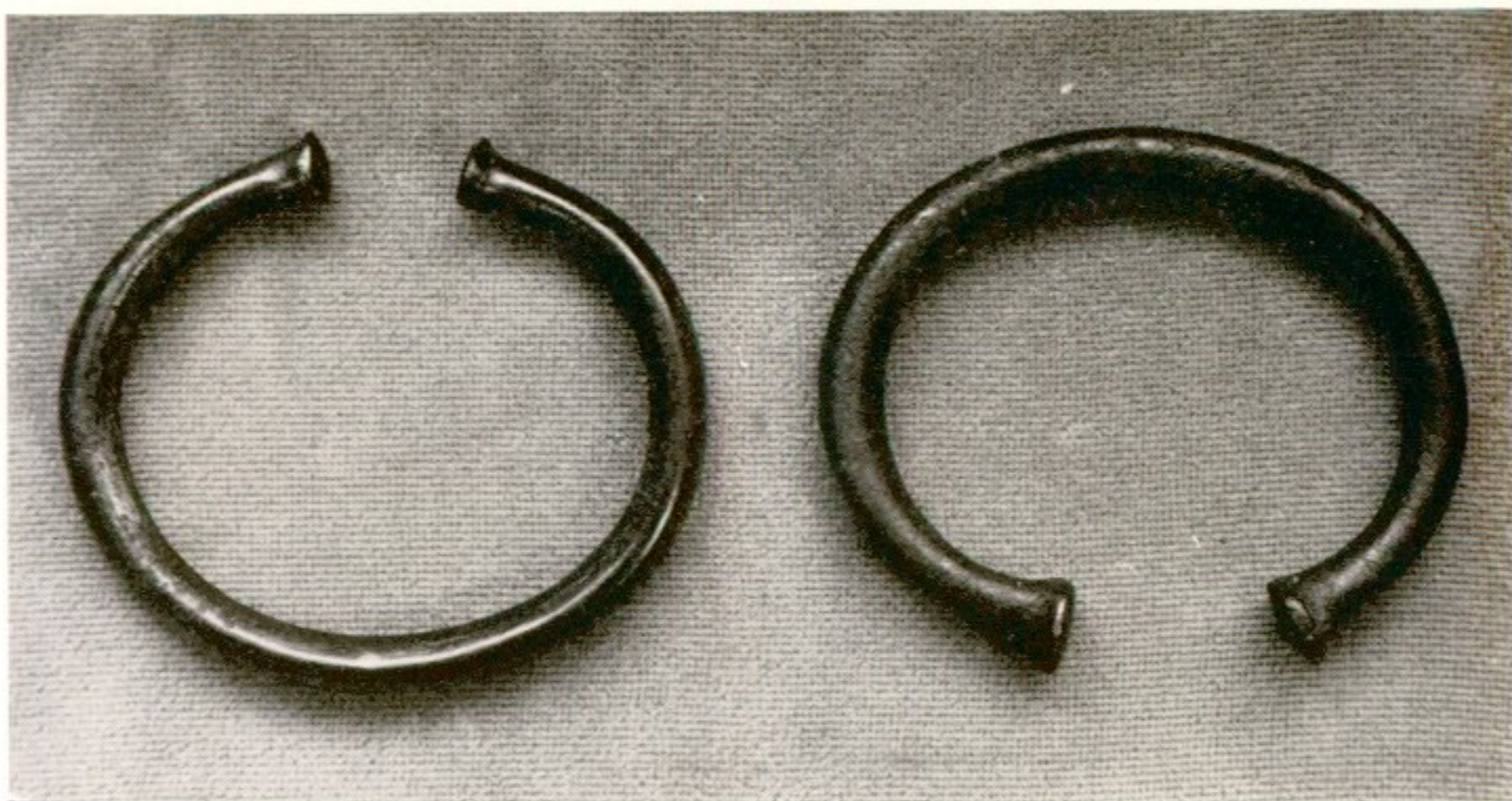


a Socketed axes, left no. 1, right no. 2 ( $\frac{3}{4}$ )

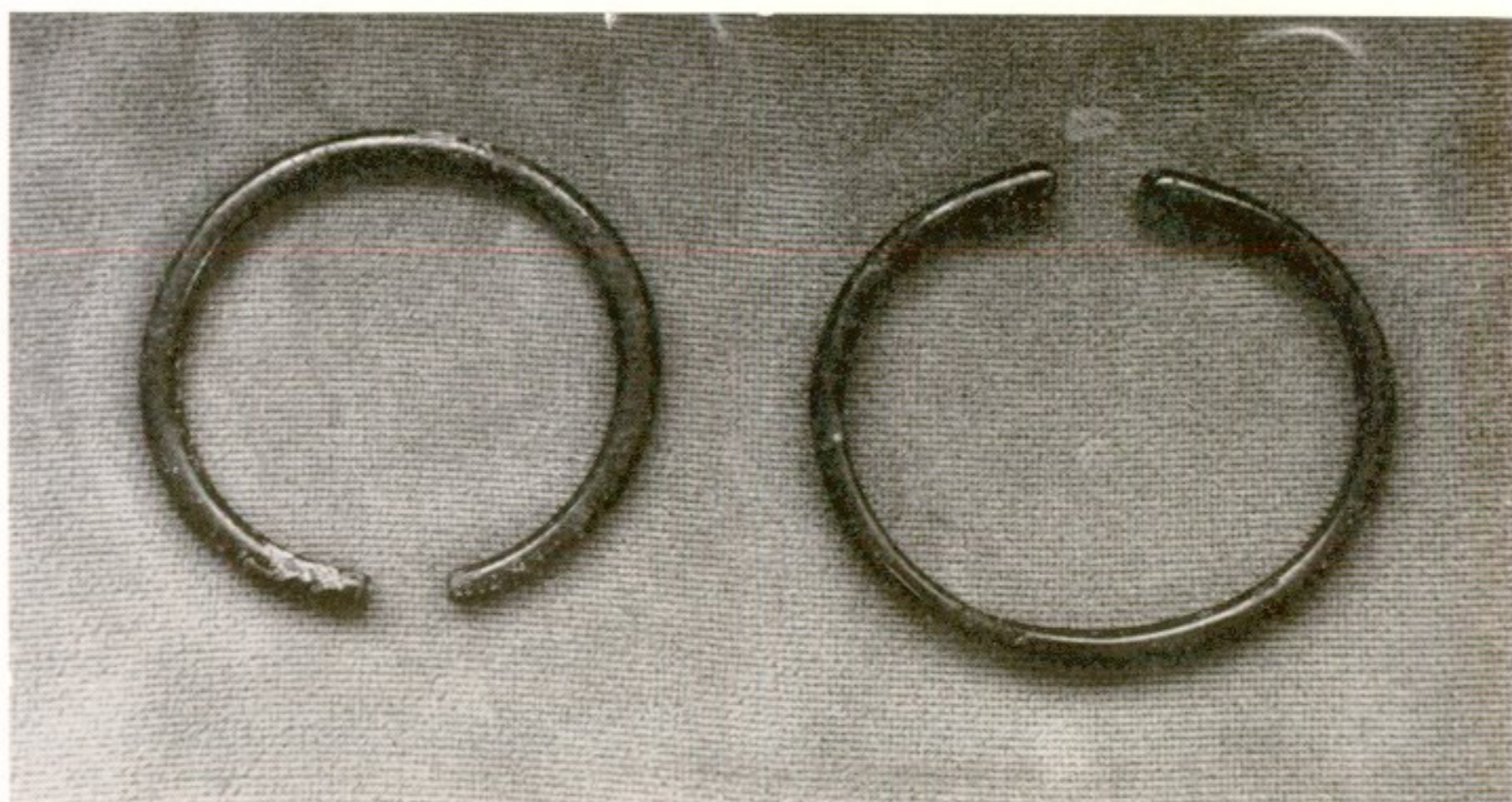


b Socketed axes, left no. 3, right no. 4 ( $\frac{3}{4}$ )



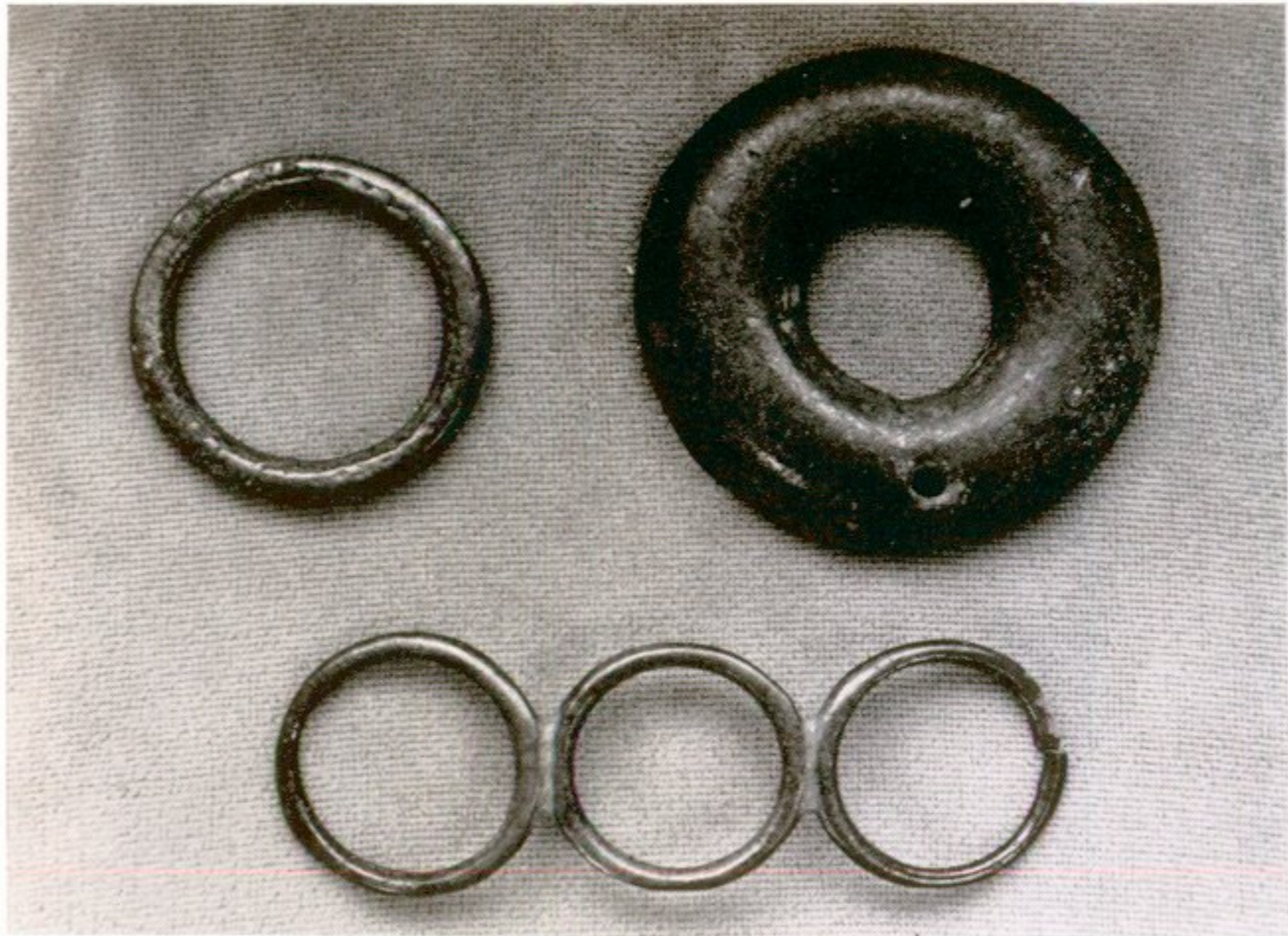


a Armlets, left no. 1, right no. 2 (3)

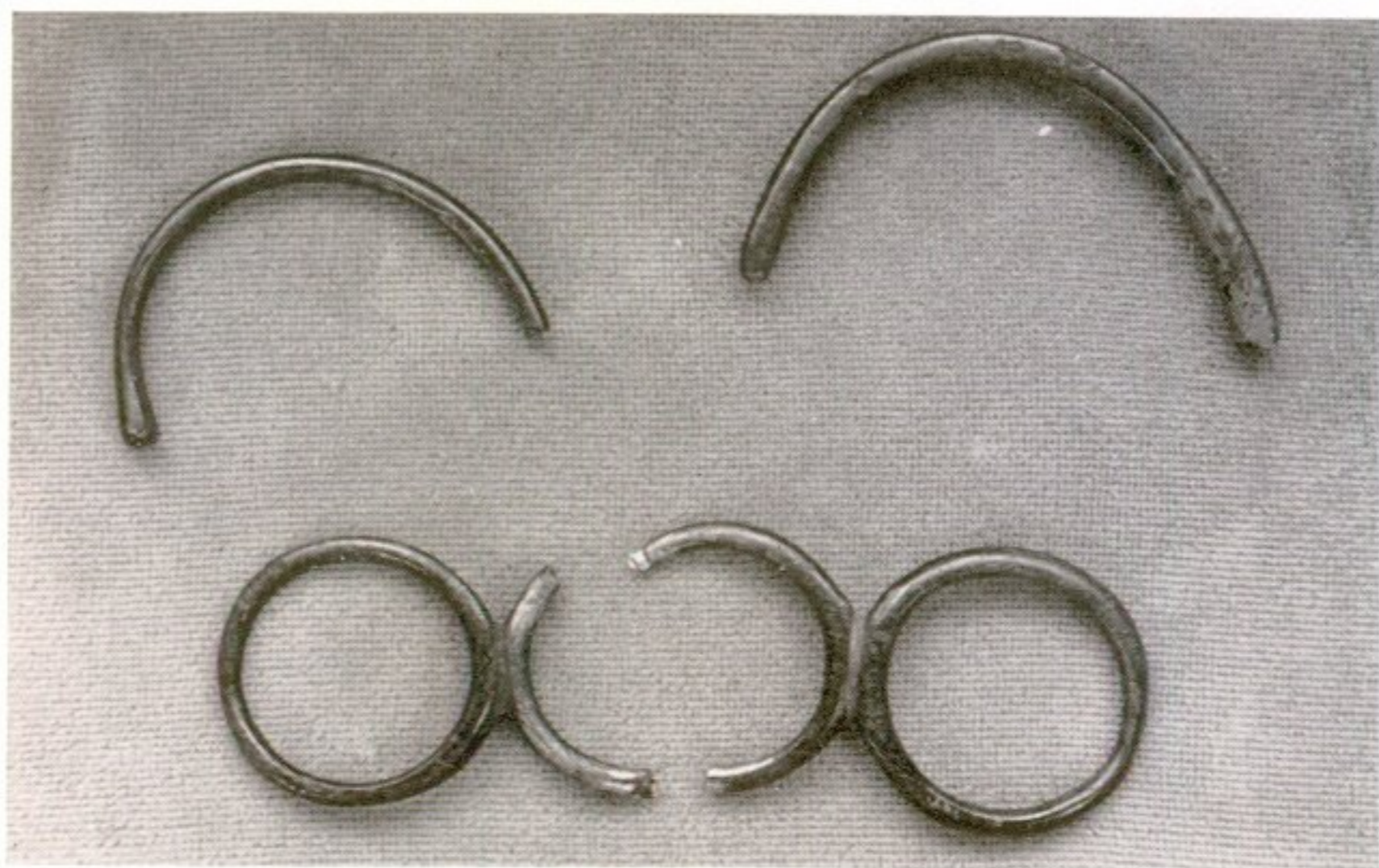


b Armlets, left no. 3, right no. 4 (4)



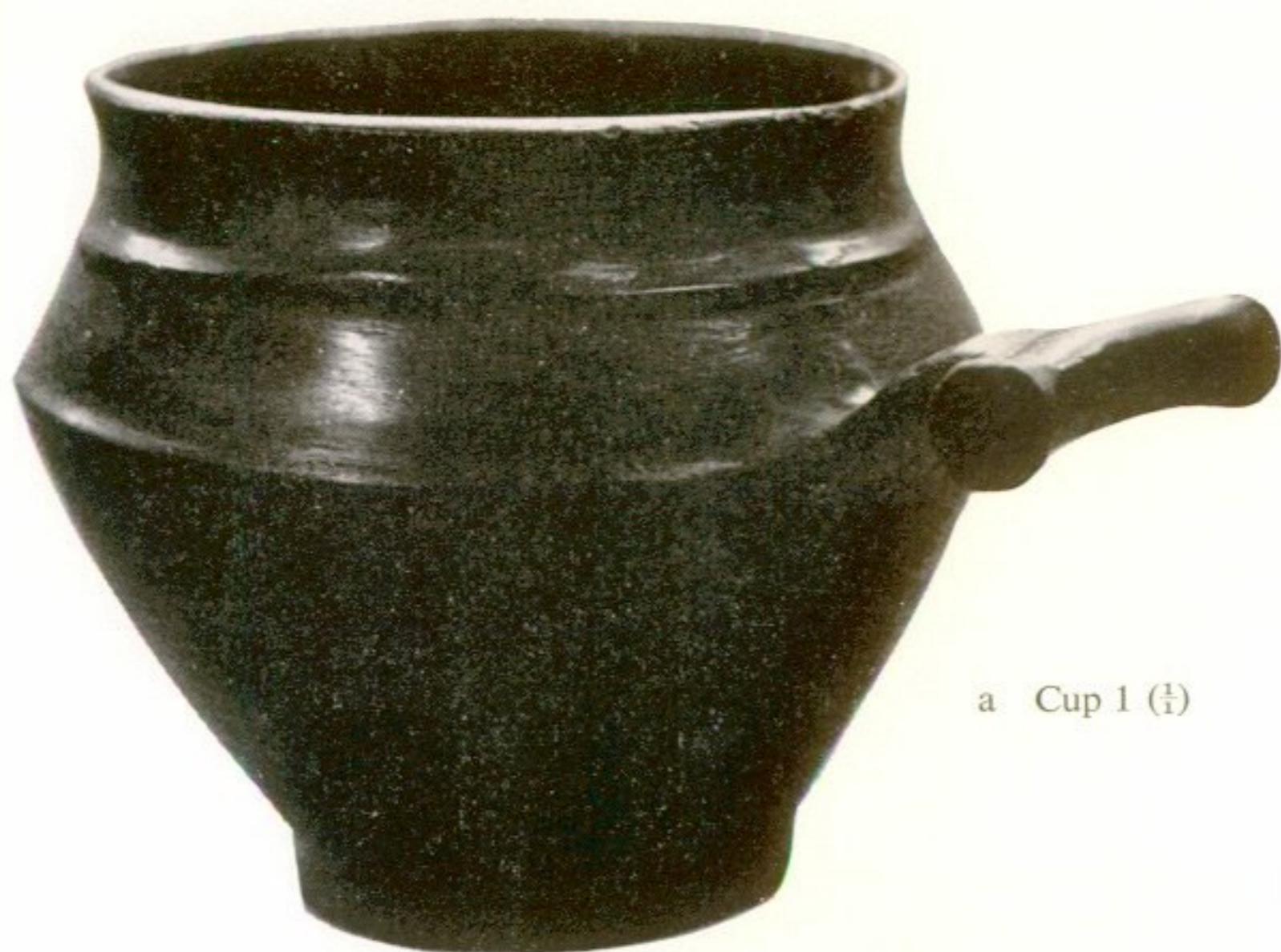


a Ring, semi-tubular ring, triple ring (3)



b Armlet fragments (left no. 1, right no. 2), broken triple ring (3)





a Cup 1 (½)



b Cup 2 (½)