

A LAMP WITH INTERNAL WICK HOLDER FROM SIKYON, GREECE

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ABSTRACT

From 2013 to 2017, excavations at Sikyon in the northeast Peloponnese region of Greece revealed a Roman period industrial complex in the southeastern corner of the central agora. During one phase of activity (second half of the fourth to mid-fifth century CE), a room at the northern end appears to have functioned as a wineshop. This shop was destroyed in the early fifth century, and excavation revealed a robust assemblage of pottery, glass, metal implements, and coins. Among the glass finds was a lamp with internal wick holder, the westernmost example of the type now identified. This note provides an overview of the deposit from which the lamp was recovered, a discussion of the lamp itself, and the potential of this deposit for shedding light on its function and chronology.

THE EXCAVATION CONTEXT

The city of Sikyon in the Hellenistic and Roman periods lay on a plateau overlooking the coastal plain and the Gulf of Corinth to the north. Its agora (central public space) was marked out by a series of monumental public buildings: temples, a council house, a gymnasium, and several long stoas. The area immediately south of the stoa that marked the southeast corner of the agora was, from at least the mid-first or second century CE, an industrial zone focusing on pottery production, as a series of kilns attests ([Fig. 1](#)). In the late fourth or fifth century, pottery production continued, especially of wine amphoras, and a complex of connected workshops and workspaces was constructed nearby. Pressing floors and liquid-collecting installations built in these spaces suggest an expansion of the local wine industry.

A few meters north of the pressing floors lay further evidence of this industry. In a repurposed room of a first- or second-century CE building, Sikyonian merchants ran what appears to have been a wineshop. This room was not large, 4.4 m × 3.8 m. One entered it from the east, through a doorway nearly a meter wide. The limestone and mudbrick walls featured at least one window. The roof was tiled, and the floor was a light-yellowish plaster.

QUICK CITATION

Gallimore, Scott, and Martin Wells. "A Lamp with Internal Wick Holder from Sikyon, Greece." *Journal of Glass Studies* 66 (2024): 216–220



FIG 1. Workshop complex and wineshop at Sikyon: (a) workshop complex; (b) destruction deposit; (c) wineshop. (Photos: courtesy of Yannis Lolos)

Excavators working in the room uncovered a deposit characteristic of destruction contexts. Locally manufactured and imported wine amphoras, a large storage jar, ceramic and glass vessels, ceramic funnels, a stewpot, metal items like a knife and a spatula, the remains of a marble countertop, and halves of two round marble tabletops that were being used as cutting boards lay broken on the floor where they fell. Some 46 coins were found scattered on the floor, at the center of which lay an iron and wood box with an iron chain attached, which may have been a padlock. A further 15 coins were found in the fill directly over the floor, along with more ceramic and glass vessels, more bronze and iron items, and the remains of a glass lamp with internal wick holder, the only example of its kind so far identified in Greece outside of Athens.

THE LAMP

The lamp (catalogue number MF 2016-110) is fragmentary and, unfortunately, comprises only the wick holder.¹ No part of the bowl was identified, meaning the overall shape of the vessel cannot be reconstructed. The destruction and dumping of material into that space significantly damaged the glass vessels in the shop (Table 1).

The wick holder comprises a short cylindrical tube, very slightly swollen across its bottom half, that flares out at the bottom but is broken right before attachment to the bowl (Fig. 2). It is topped with a slightly everted rim that was folded inward. The glass

¹ We thank Anastassios Antonaras for identifying this lamp and other glass finds during a visit to Sikyon in 2017.

Shape	Quantity	Comparanda
Hemispherical bowl	2	Antonaras 2017, 60–61, type 12.i
Bowl with tubular rim	2	Weinberg 1988, 77, no. 328
Plate	1	Antonaras 2022, 95, no. 177
Spherical bottle	1	Antonaras 2017, 99–100, type 51a
Cylindrical bottle	2	Weinberg and Stern 2009, 133, no. 300
Square bottle	2	Weinberg and Stern 2009, 144, no. 314
Bottle, six- or eight-sided	1	Antonaras 2017, 130–131, type 97
Jug with funnel mouth	2	Weinberg and Stein 2009, 144, no. 314
Unguentarium	1	Antonaras 2017, 157–158, type 139
Tubular ring base	1	Weinberg 1988, 68, no. 238
Lamp with internal wick holder	1	Weinberg and Stern 2009, 164, no. 372
Stemmed lamp (?)	1	Antonaras 2022, 103, no. 259
Beaker lamp	1	Antonaras 2022, 109, no. 326
Windowpane	2	Antonaras 2022, 121–122, nos. 459–462

TABLE 1. Summary of Glass Finds from Destruction Deposit

is very pale green, bordering on colorless. Blowing spirals are evident, particularly on the interior of the tube, and much of the surface is covered in flaking white enamel. Some small bubbles are present, along with iridescence. The interior of the tube also has some brown staining. With respect to measurements of the tube: H. 3.9 cm; Diam. (outer rim) 1.7 cm; Diam. (inner) 1.3 cm; Th. (wall) 0.14 cm.

The lamp likely dates to the early fifth century CE, contemporary with the use and destruction of the wineshop. A very similar lamp was found at Athens in a context dated to the early fifth century CE.² From the number of lamps with internal wick holders found at Athens from the fifth through at least the late sixth century, Gladys Weinberg and Marianne Stern argue there may have been a local production at the site, influenced by the development of the type within the Syria-Palestine region.³ Lamp MF 2016-110 is the only example with an internal wick holder thus far found at Sikyon, and its similarity to an Athenian find and the potential of production there may suggest it is an import from that site.

WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

Lamps with internal wick holders are rarely attested in mainland Greece, except for numerous finds at Athens.⁴ Up to now, Athens had also represented the westernmost site for this type, but the Sikyon find indicates the shape did reach farther west, possibly coming from Athens itself. The destruction deposit from which this lamp was recovered dates to the early fifth century based on several different categories of evidence. Among the pottery finds were several African Red-Slip dishes (forms 50B, 52,

² Weinberg and Stein 2009, 164, no. 372, fig. 21, pl. 33.

³ Weinberg and Stein 2009, 155.

⁴ Weinberg and Stein 2009, 154–155.



FIG 2. Lamp MF 2016-110. Found in Sikyon, possibly made in Athens, early fifth century CE. H. 3.9 cm. (Photo: Amalia Siatou; Drawing: Author)

59B, 60) that sit comfortably in the second half of the fourth to the early fifth century. Other pottery shapes—including various local and imported amphoras, a pithos, several funnels, and a cooking pot—all have good parallels of the late fourth to early fifth century. The glass assemblage, summarized in [Table 1](#), comprises forms dated from the late third through early fifth century. Among the coins, the majority ($n = 30$) are issues of Constantius II, dating between 355 and 361 CE.⁵ Despite coming from a destruction deposit, these coins are quite crisp and easily legible, suggesting they had not been in circulation for too long.

Recovery of this lamp from an early fifth-century deposit adds to the growing body of evidence that examples with internal wick holders originated at least by the early fifth century, and perhaps during the late fourth century. A find from a room of a private house at Petra in Jordan destroyed by an earthquake, perhaps in 419 CE, provides valuable information for the early history of this lamp type.⁶ Two early finds are also known at Athens, one from an early fifth-century deposit and another from a late fourth-century context.⁷

Lamp MF 2016-110 also provides evidence for use of glass lamps, particularly those with internal wick holders, in private contexts. Stern has noted that glass lamps

⁵ Irini Marathaki, coin specialist for the Sikyon excavations, identified the coins from this deposit.

⁶ Keller 2000, 31.

⁷ Weinberg and Stern 2009, 6, 155, 164, no. 372, illustration 1.

developed in the eastern Mediterranean during the fourth century for daily use.⁸ Findspots of lamps with internal wick holders have often been associated with churches, synagogues, and tombs, while the Petra finds came from a private house.⁹ Interestingly, it also appears that the wineshop at Sikyon relied solely on glass lamps for lighting at the time of the destruction. While some fragments of ceramic lamps were recovered from a dumped fill that sat directly atop the destruction layer, no examples were found with the use assemblage in the shop. Along with the lamp with internal wick holder, glass examples from the deposit included a beaker lamp and, possibly, a stemmed lamp.¹⁰ Windowpane fragments were also recovered from the destruction, suggesting another source of light for the room. Further study of lamps with internal wick holders will continue to shed light on their chronology and function within different regions of the eastern Mediterranean.

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⁸ Stern 2001, 262.

⁹ Weinberg and Stern 2009, 155.

¹⁰ The stemmed lamp fragment could instead be the bottom of a flask or amphoriskos. For a potential parallel, see Weinberg 1988, 77, no. 328, fig. 4–37.