THE CAVE OF THE CYCLOPS

Mesolithic and Neolithic Networks in the Northern Aegean, Greece

Volume I

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The Cave of the Cyclops

Mesolithic and Neolithic Networks in the Northern Aegean, Greece

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Intra-site Analysis, Local Industries, and Regional Site Distribution

by

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Middle Neolithic Weavers Paint: Red Patterns as Markers of the Local Group's Identity

*Stella Katsarou-Tzeveleki**

Middle Neolithic Occupation in the Cave

Excavation revealed that the earliest post-Mesolithic human activity inside the Cave of the Cyclops occurred in two distinct areas: in the hall of the entrance and in an isolated area of the interior, which is surrounded by high stalactite and stalagmite columns. In the entrance hall, the Early to Middle Neolithic occupants spread their activity across most of the area (Fig. 1.4A), as can be concluded from the presence of a coherent, though variably thick, EN–MN deposit. This activity showed considerable intensity around a locus of successive hearths (Hearths 2, 3, and 4) in Trench B, Rectangle 4 (Fig. 1.6B). These hearths consisted of several sublayers of ash and charcoal alternating with reddish-yellow substrata that were almost baked and obviously suggested repeated use of the locus. The hearth was a

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short distance from a stalagmite column, which the Middle Neolithic population had probably utilized to better support the hearth's foundation. Unfortunately, much of the EN–MN deposit at the entrance has been disturbed by later human activity or subjected to erosional processes by subterranean waters or sediment subsidence.

The other occupation area is located at the central part of the cave's interior (Trenches A and D; Fig. 1.4A) on a natural terrace lying atop accumulated rocks and stalagmite formations at a considerable height from the floor of the cave's main chamber. This area is only accessible by a narrow trail from the entrance along the cave wall. The terrace is completely dark and very isolated, as it is enclosed by stalagmite "curtains" that leave only a small opening at one side. The place is small (about 10 m^2) and had an uneven floor in the Middle Neolithic, which we conclude from the spread of little stalagmites developing on the excavated floor. At one side, there is a natural cavity about 1 m deep inside the stalagmite bed where dripping water is concentrated. Though dark, cold, and extremely humid, the occupation of this place by all successive residents of the cave probably should be attributed to the abundance of water. Unfortunately, the deposits are so muddy that they preserve no stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 1.6A) and, therefore, make impossible any evaluation of the well-attested, dispersed charcoal found here. In fact, information on this area can only be inferred from ceramics, which outnumber the artifacts originating from the entrance, at least for the Middle Neolithic.

In summary, the Middle Neolithic occupants of the Cave of the Cyclops spread extensively in the area of the entrance, but for some reason occupied the distinct interior spot more intensely (Fig. 3.1). The entrance is far more advantageous in terms of size, natural light, temperature, and floor smoothness for temporary residence or refuge, but it was in the interior that we uncovered 80 percent of the total Middle Neolithic pottery of the cave, which was mostly painted. Nevertheless, apart from some pottery, the entrance of that period preserved a considerable assemblage of dietary remains, chipped obsidian and flint, as well as a few bone fishhooks, while the interior area preserved no material remains other than ceramics.

Type V. The Red-on-White Painted Pottery

Red-on-White painted pottery is the main component of the Middle Neolithic deposits and, as mentioned above, was mostly recovered in the dark cave interior (Table 3.1). It consisted of a total of 598 fragments (not one pot was found intact), 495 of which came from the interior context. The total diminished to 466 pieces after obvious joins had been made (Table 3.2). The presentation of the pottery discussed and cataloged in this chapter follows the format begun in Chapter 2, which provided an overview of the Early–Late Neolithic pottery from the Cave of the Cyclops. The Red-on-White painted pottery is designated as Type V, and the catalog numbers (in bold) continue consecutively from those in Chapter 2.

SHAPE REPERTOIRE

The pots are mostly made of coarse clay deriving from some local sediment naturally mixed with limestone fragments. It is not clear whether some of these fragments were intentionally added as temper. However coarse the clay may have been, visible surfaces have been smoothed very carefully and slipped to obliterate traces of coarseness. Vessels are limited to a few shapes, among which varieties of the deep ovoid vase, whose broad mouth forms either a collar neck or a thick high rim, are prevalent. The principal shapes of the Middle Neolithic vases from Youra have been categorized in the following typology (Fig. 3.2).

TYPE V.1

This category is represented by a deep open cup. Hemispherical in profile, the cup ends at a plain or differentiated, upright or slightly incurving rim (**728**, **729**). The body is estimated to measure ca. 0.20 m in depth. The base has not been preserved, but we assume that it was a high, ring-shaped base (Theocharis 1973, pls. I, IV). This cup should be placed at an earlier stage compared to the rest of the

material. It certainly belongs to tableware, though it is broad and deep enough for quickly mixing food. Similar vessels are recorded from Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 21c, 21l, 34d, 34e).

728. Fragments (three) from a deep hemispherical bowl with straight rim. Worn, brown, straight and zigzag lines and rim band on light brown background. Inner surface coarse yellowish brown. Diam. rim 0.24 m. B6.

729. Fragment from a deep hemispherical bowl with thin, outward-curving rim. Worn, brown, straight and zigzag lines and rim band on light brown background. Inner surface coarse yellowish brown. Diam. rim 0.23 m. B6.

TYPE V.2

This is a deep ovoid vase. It has a neck and is either a broad-mouthed or closed vessel (730–740). A popular shape of the period, this group comprises a large number of vessels with general similarities in profile, but small differences in details of curvature and mouth diameter. The body varies between spherical, ovoid, and slightly compressed at its lower part. Its upper part consists of an inward-leaning shoulder, slightly curved or even straight, with an average inclination of ca. 130 degrees. The profile is so widely curved that separation between shoulder and body cannot be located at a certain point (i.e., closed curvature or carination). Two or four rounded lugs with vertical perforations are very often attached just under the middle of the maximum height of the body.

The shoulder ends at a collar neck, which was produced from a separate coil and attached to the body at the end of the manufacturing process. This is why the neck join has always been very sensitive to breakage. The height of the neck ranges between 0.02 and 0.07 m and has either a collar or funnel shape, but the majority of vessels support a 0.03–0.04 m collar. The angle at the junction with the body is about 130–140 degrees, while the inclination of the neck is around 65–70 degrees. Wall thickness increases at the point of the junction with the shoulder, but decreases toward the upper end of the rim, which is pointed or rounded. There is a single case of a neck that carries an everted top instead of a plain rim. The diameter of the mouth measures around 0.20 m, except for a few vases that seem to exceed 0.25 m.

Fewer fragments have been found that belong to the lower part of the body; some are carinated at a small distance from the base, which makes the vase look squat. The squat profile is very popular at the time in this and other shapes; it is found in the neighboring settlement of Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, figs. 29–31) and on the Greek mainland at Sesklo (Tsountas 1908, fig. 83; Kotsakis 1983, fig. 138) and Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 105, 110–111). Wall thickness averages 0.05 m, but increases at such low carination.

Despite the large number of pots from this group, only a single example of a base has been preserved. It consists of a narrow (0.05 m diameter) ring that is 0.03 m high, in accordance with the structural preferences of this period for ring-shaped bases over flat and rounded bases. We therefore assume that such were the bases of all vessels of the group. The total height of the vase must be approximately equal to the rim diameter (0.25–0.30 m). A similar vase is recorded at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 223, fig. 9a:1).

The voluminous, hard-to-move shape of the container does not suit it to transport purposes. Its occurrence at the Cave of the Cyclops, however, suggests that it was somehow transported there, and it probably was not empty. Actually, it could have been easily secured on a transport animal or the back of a human. On the other hand, the narrow ring-shaped base excludes a possible function of cooking on fire, as it inhibits heat diffusion and thermal efficiency. Besides, a cooking vessel can be supported easily on fire, either on wood or ash, and does not need to carry a base itself. In fact, the large opening of its mouth and the capacity of its shape make this vase suitable for multiple functions. Its broad diameter may suggest a use for the container involving food preparation, processing either warm or cold materials (for instance, mixing or fermentation)—though not on fire—alongside a function as tableware for serving. At the same time, the vessel may have been used for short-term storage of solid (grains or powdered) foodstuffs, as its large mouth makes it rather inappropriate for liquids. In this case, it is suggested here that the collar neck creates an additional protection zone for the contents of the vase, and the inclination of the neck was possibly intended to serve for fastening a leather or cloth cover, which would stretch around and firmly bind the rim. Such a cover would protect the vessel's contents from insects and external environmental factors and allow it to ventilate at the same time.

This vessel type is spread throughout the mainland, east and west (Mellaart 1975, figs. 71–72). It is found in Albania (Korkuti 1995, fig. 11:1–3) and at Nea Nikomedeia (Yiouni 1996, 94), Sesklo (Wijnen 1982, 37:6; Kotsakis 1983, 75, shape 12), Otzaki (Milojčić-von Zumbusch and Milojčić 1971), Soufli Magoula (Papathanassopoulos 1996, 341, cat. no. 306), Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 115), Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 30, figs. 32–33), Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, 315), Euboea (Sampson 1981, figs. 11, 18), and Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 26n, 97).

730. Fragments (11) from body and neck join of broad-mouthed vase. Red solid triangles attached to solid lozenges on whitish background. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Diam. at base of neck 0.16 m. A5.

731. Fragments (eight) from globular body, short collar neck, and vertically pierced round lugs of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red patterns on light yellow background; reversed solid triangles on both sides of the neck, meander on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles alternating with "plant" motif on body. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim 0.18 m. A5.

732. Fragments (22) from globular body, short collar neck, and narrow, ring-shaped base of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red-orange patterns on whitish background; interlocking dogtooth on both sides of neck, wavy zigzag lines on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles completed with parallel and stepped lines on body, horizontal lines on lower body, solid base. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim. 0.18; h. base 0.03; diam. base 0.05 m. A5.

733. Fragments (17) from globular body and collar neck of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red patterns on whitish background; opposing solid triangles alternating with solid lozenges on both sides of neck, zigzag lines and checkers on shoulder canvas zone, rows of solid squares on body canvas triangles defined by vertical zigzags and alternating with sets of concentric circles. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim 0.22 m. A5.

734. Fragments (10) from globular body of closed or broad-mouthed vase. Red patterns on yellowish background; rows of solid squares on body canvas triangles defined by vertical zigzags and alternating with sets of concentric circles. Inner surface coarse red. Max. diam. body ca. 0.25 m. A5.

735. Fragments (five) from globular body of closed or broad-mouthed vase. Red patterns on yellowish background; zigzags on body canvas triangles defined by vertical zigzags and alternating with sets of concentric circles. Inner surface coarse red. Max. diam. body ca. 0.20 m. A5.

736. Fragments (seven) from globular body and collar neck of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red-brown patterns on yellowish-brown background; reversed solid triangles on both sides of the neck, concentric triangles completed with checkerboard on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles completed with parallel lines on body. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim 0.22 m. A5.

737. Fragments (seven) from globular body and collar neck of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red-brown patterns on yellowish-brown background; interlocking dogtooth on both sides of the neck, concentric triangles and lozenges completed with checkerboard on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles completed with parallel lines on body. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim 0.22 m. A5.

738. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Brown patterns on reddish-yellow background; zigzag lines on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles completed with parallel lines on body. Inner surface coarse red. Max. diam. body ca. 0.21 m. A5.

739. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Brown patterns on reddish-yellow background; zigzag lines on shoulder canvas zone, sets of concentric circles associated with parallel lines on body. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Max. diam. body ca. 0.19 m. A5.

740. Fragment from shoulder and collar neck of deep, broad-mouthed vase. Red patterns on yellowish background; opposing solid triangles on both sides of neck, concentric lozenges and triangles on shoulder canvas. Inner surface coarse red. Diam. rim 0.18 m. CHast18, 4.

TYPE V.3

This is a deep ovoid vase with a closed neck. It is a closed shape with a bulky and high body. It is similar to Type V.2, but the neck is more closed, measuring ca. 0.12 m in diameter (**741–743**). The closed mouth is probably indicative of a transport or storage function, and seems to suggest liquid contents, in comparison to Type V.2.

741. Fragments (29) from globular closed vase with high collar neck. Red patterns on yellowish background; reversed solid triangles on both sides of the neck, sets of concentric circles on body. Inner body surface coarse reddish brown. Diam. rim 0.18 m. A5.

742. Fragments (27) from globular body of closed vase. Brown parallel lines separated into vertical, horizontal, and oblique bands on green-brown background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. diam. body ca. 0.23 m. A5.

743. Fragments (26) from globular body and high collar neck of closed vase. Red-brown patterns on yellowish background; reversed solid triangles on both sides of the neck, parallel meander lines and concentric rectangles on body. Inner surface coarse brown. Diam. rim 0.10 m. A5.

TYPE V.4

This category is represented by deep, bell-shaped vases. Included here are two varieties: one is globular with inward-curving walls (**744**), and the other is long and narrow with upright walls (**745**). In the first group, the rim can be plain or rolled. The single example from the second group has a slashed rim, 0.045 m high. The depth of these vases is unknown, and reconstructions are based on similar examples from Hagios Petros and the mainland. This type of open and deep container may have been used for mixing or fermenting of foodstuffs, though not on a cooking hearth. The slashed rim may be intended to facilitate the fastening of a flexible cover, as suggested above for Type V.2.

744. Fragment of broad-mouthed vase with incurving upper walls ending in a straight rim. Vertical knob on the rim edge. Red-brown net on yellow background. Inner surface slipped yellow, unpainted. Diam. rim 0.14 m. A5.

745. Fragment of broad-mouthed vase with vertical profile ending in an angular, outward-curving rim. Brown zigzag and other lines on light gray surface. Diam. rim 0.20 m. A7.

TYPE V.5

This is an open vessel with upright walls and an upper part that is S-shaped in profile (**746**). It is shallow, with a rim large in diameter that must be equal to its total width. Such shapes have multifunctional capacities as tableware or for mixing food in small quantities. Similar shapes are recorded from Skyros (Theocharis 1959b, 315, fig. 33:10, 11), and Otzaki (Milojčić-von Zumbusch and Milojčić 1971, pl. 9).

746. Fragment from open vase with S-profile. Slipped light yellow gray on both surfaces, patterns not preserved. Diam. rim 0.20 m. A7.

TYPE V.6

This category contains shallow convex bowls. This is an unusual shape in the Greek Neolithic (Kotsakis 1983, fig. 10), and it has been considered to be orientalizing (Efstratiou 1985, 28). The body of the vase consists of two parts joined at an angle (Pl. 3.1A:**747**). Its upper part is upright and convex in profile (i.e., with an outward-leaning rim). Its lower part is calyx-shaped. The painter has incorporated the shape's carination into the structure of its decoration by identifying it with the lower finishing line of the decorative zone, which has been underlined with a broad solid band for this reason. The base has not been preserved, unlike similar examples from the neighboring site of Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 28, fig. 5:1, 2), which carry either a rounded or a ring-shaped base.

In terms of function, the shape is an excellent example of tableware—for serving and especially for drinking. Most probably it was not placed on the fire for cooking, because its convex-angular outline is incompatible with thermal conductivity. Furthermore, the cavities formed in the interior of the container inhibit the cooking of its contents. What distinguishes this shape from the contemporary repertoire is the combination of convex profile with carination, making this vessel very sophisticated. In addition to Hagios Petros, another example is recorded at Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 3:r, 30:k, o).

747. Fragments (11) from a carinated bowl with convex upper profile. Red-brown concentric lozenges and triangles completed with checkerboard in canvas zone on yellowish background. Inner surface slipped gray-black. Diam. rim 0.17 m. A5.

TYPE V.7

This category is represented by the calyx-shaped bowl (Pl. 3.1B:**748**). This is another rare shape. The upper part is heavily inclined outward (65 degrees) and is joined to the rounded lower part at an obtuse angle of 160 degrees. A small cavity is formed in the center of the high calyx walls. In a manner similar to Type V.6, the painter used the carination to mark the lower end of the decoration zone and placed the borderline just on it. This type of open container initially points to its utility for serving solid foods or liquids. The exceptionally marked inclination of the walls and the choice of an angular carination, all marking the central cavity, cannot be accidental. One also could attribute these choices to a specific functional purpose, such as the need to keep small quantities of plant materials concentrated in the very center to burn essences on the fire. Vitelli (1993a, 214–215) has assumed this function for similar vases from Franchthi Cave, positing that vegetable substances may have had aromatic or other psychotherapeutic

qualities when burned. She has observed traces of scraping on the interior of these containers, which she concluded were the result of cleaning residues from gluey substances. The Youra example did not bear such traces, but it has evident deposits of smoke on the outer surface, which have severely altered the color of the decorative patterns. It cannot be clearly discerned whether this was the result of unsuccessful firing or is owed to the use of the vase as an incense burner.

748. Fragment from carinated bowl with an outward-leaning upper body. Two opposing sets of gray-black parallel lines on light gray background. Inner surface slipped dark. Diam. rim 0.17 m. CWest 8, 5–6.

Lugs

No examples of handles of Red-on-White painted pottery have been preserved, and the number of lugs is limited (Fig. 3.3A; Table 3.3). A thin horizontal arched lug (**751**) that looks like a rib should be dated among the earliest of the sample. Similar types are found at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, fig. 54), Skyros (Theocharis 1959b, 316, fig. 34), and Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, fig. 17). The rest of the lugs are vertically pierced ovoid knobs (**731**, **749**, **750**), which are mostly attached to the belly of the Type V.2 deep, broad-mouthed bowl. It is possible that these vases carried two or four similar lugs at diametrically opposite points. The perforations of the lugs are small, ca. 0.05–0.08 m in diameter. These types are widespread at all contemporary sites, including at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 31, figs. 39–40), on Skyros (Theocharis 1959b, 318, fig. 35), in Euboea (Sampson 1981, pl. 2c), at Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, 39), in the Franchthi Cave (Vitelli 1993a, fig. 14), on Chios (Hood 1981, fig. 8:4), and at Hacılar IX–VI in Asia Minor (Mellaart 1975). They are found even as late as Saliagos (Evans and Renfrew 1968).

The practical value of these lugs is disputed (Efstratiou 1985, 35; Vitelli 1993a, 100). The fact that they get detached easily shows that the surface of attachment was not stable even at the moment when the vase was brand new; they therefore could not support the entire weight of the vase, especially if it was full. Furthermore, the presence of a ring-shaped base proves that the vessel was not designed for suspension. Finally, the size and shape of the lugs are such that they cannot replace handles, unless one assumes the use of a shaft, such as a wooden stick or rope. The use of rope, in particular, could be warranted for securing the vases on animals or men, in the case of transportation. Here, however, these specific vases are considered inappropriate for transport and were designed instead to stand on their base. These lugs were therefore either simply decorative (Vitelli 1993a, 100; Katsarou 2001b, 26–27), or their practical value must be sought elsewhere. In fact, it is suggested here that these lugs were intended to facilitate fastening a cover from the vase's neck or rim with thin, stretched ropes bound in their holes.

749. Fragment from open vase bearing vertically pierced, round lug. Worn red motifs on yellowish background. Inner surface slipped and burnished black. Max. h. 0.052 m. A4.

750. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase bearing a vertically pierced lug. Slipped yellow, with red zigzag line on lug. Inner surface coarse red. Max. h. 0.029 m. CWest 6.

751. Fragments (two) from body of closed vase bearing unpierced horizontal lug. Brown diagonal bands on whitish background. Inner surface coarse red. Max. h. of one sherd 0.052 m. Max. w. 0.046, 0.031 m. A4.

Red Pattern Decoration

The execution of the red patterns on the vases and the manufacture of the pots as a whole demonstrate supreme craftsmanship. The patterns, which are mostly curvilinear, are complex, though they manifest considerable standardization. We have distinguished approximately 50 different patterns, including some that are partly preserved and not fully identified. Few patterns, however, are used on

each vessel, which suggests that Neolithic painters created complexity not by using many different patterns on the same vessel, but by combining a small number of the same patterns (possibly only two or three) in many different ways.

Each vase type is divided into specific decoration zones, each of which is ornamented with the same standardized patterns according to the size and curvature of the zone. The major decoration zones (Fig. 3.3B) are the neck/rim, shoulder, main body, lower body, base, and lugs. It is possible that the zones of shoulder, main body, and lower body are a united decorative field. Carination or other morphological boundaries between these zones can serve as structural boundaries for decoration, and are thus almost always delineated with painted bands.

NECK/RIM

A considerable number of neck and rim sherds were found (a total of 155 pieces; see Table 3.3). This enables the observation that the potters' choices followed a certain pattern in the treatment of these parts of the vases. The neck and rim are the only fields of the vessel that are also decorated on the interior. The motifs of the interior almost always copy those of the corresponding outer surface. Closed or broad-mouthed and deep vases are usually left coarse and unslipped inside, except for a few cases where the inner surface has been smoothed and slipped. Open pots are always slipped on the inside, but are never painted. There are several different types of motifs that are usually found in the neck/rim area (Pl. 3.2).

Net

This motif (Pl. 3.2:1) consists of two crossing sets of thin parallel lines covering a narrow band along the rim (**744**). Crossing produces a series of adjoining lozenges, one vertical row of which has been painted solid. Similar examples were found at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 35, figs. 10:1, 30:1) and in Thessaly (Demoule, Gallis, and Manolakakis 1988, fig. 4:5).

Hatched Triangles

The hatched triangles (Pl. 3.2:2) on the rim/neck have varying number, thickness, inclination, and intermediary distance of hatched lines (**752**).

752. Fragment from low, outward-curving neck of closed vase. Red hatched triangles on yellowish background on both surfaces. Diam. rim 0.18 m. A5.

Solid Triangles

The apex of the solid triangle (Pl. 3.2:3) points downward (**731**, **741**, **743**). This is one of the most popular motifs of the period, as indicated at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 218, fig. 5:5), Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 98:A, 138:17, 141), Pyrasos (Theocharis 1959a, 42, fig. 9:1, 2, 5), Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, figs. A:2–43, 76), and Franchthi Cave (Vitelli 1993a, fig. 20r).

Interlocking Dogtooth

The interlocking dogtooth motif (Pl. 3.2:4) has two opposing rows of solid interlocking triangles: the upper row hangs from the rim and the lower stands on the line of the neck join (**732**, **737**). This pattern is very popular (Efstratiou 1985, fig. 10:6).

Solid Lozenges Alternating with Sets of Opposing Triangles

This motif (Pl. 3.2:5) is the only neck decoration pattern consisting of two different motifs, the lozenge and the triangle (**733**). The vertically opposing triangles are equilateral but not touching. Free-standing lozenges fill the intermediate area between the sets. The decoration is executed with little care for details of line thickness and inclination.

Opposed Solid Triangles

These occur in sets of two opposed solid triangles (Pl. 3.2:6) with overlapping apices, but they are placed eccentrically (**740**). Sets are placed without intermediate distance and cover the entire height of the neck.

SHOULDER AND BODY: CANVAS

The recovery of 434 shoulder and body sherds from different parts of the vessel (Table 3.3) leads to the conclusion that canvas is a major shoulder and body motif (Fig. 3.3C). At the Cave of the Cyclops, it has been recorded on 14 vases, mostly broad-mouthed and deep ovoid vessels (Types V.2 and V.3), except for one example coming from an open convex phiale (Type V.6). Canvas is a kind of thin net made from two crossing sets of parallel lines, which

can be divided into two types based on line inclination (Fig. 3.4A). The most popular variety has oblique, cross-hatched lines inclined at 40–50 degrees and 150–160 degrees to the left and right respectively. The other style of canvas, although much rarer, consists of vertical lines crossing horizontal parallel lines at, or close to, a right angle.

Canvas lines are usually as thin as 0.5–0.8 mm on average, but can be even less in some cases, which suggests that they were painted with a one-hair brush (Mavragani 2001, 38). The distance between the lines is about 2 mm on average, but there are considerable divergences from this average in favor of larger or smaller distances. Actually, one kind of distance variation can be observed on almost every pot with shoulder canvas between the upper and lower part of the canvas band: oblique lines from each of the crossing sets tend to converge toward the neck, but diverge toward the belly (Pl. 3.3:733). It is possible that this can be explained as the result of different diameters between neck and belly, but it may also indicate that the potter was painting the canvas lines from neck to belly.

Canvas is never left plain; this fact emphasizes the idiosyncratic function of this particular motif among known Neolithic patterns. The net, which divides the decorative field into hundreds of small squares, is actually drawn with the intention to serve as a metric base, to guide the execution of the final patterns that the potter has in mind. Within this net, the Youra painter drew the patterns by filling some squares with paint and reserving others, so that the final pattern shows symmetry and good proportion. Such a process necessitates that the desired design is arranged in squares, which the painter counted on the canvas under the general rule that each solid or reserved line should be as thick as one square. Small oversights are an inevitable result of the handicraft, and they are mostly owed to differences of distance between parallel lines, which cause unequal squares and thus small distortions to the final design. In summary, the canvas is made to measure and has a functional value instead of a decorative value; this is why its hatched lines are painted so thinly so that they are almost invisible in the final pattern.

The neighboring settlement of Hagios Petros is the only site where a similar canvas has been recorded to date, again with the same function (Efstratiou 1985, fig. 48). Although various net patterns have been recorded on the mainland, canvas bands functioning in such a manner are totally absent, which points to a local idiosyncrasy in the population of the Northern Sporades, as suggested already by Theocharis (1973, 57) and later by Efstratiou (1985).

Shoulder Canvas

Shoulder canvas consists of a band, about 0.06–0.075 m high, starting from the neck join and extending around the upper part of the vase. Unlike the upper boundary, which coincides with the neck join, the lower boundary is defined by a thick horizontal band. The location of this band at about one-third the height of the body is arbitrary, because no distinctive structural feature, such as carination or even close curvature, exists in this area of the vessel. Based on estimations, the shoulder canvas should contain approximately 380 cross-hatched lines in total around the vessel—about 160 lines for each set. In the case of canvas where vertical lines cross with horizontal parallel lines, however, the former should number slightly more than 380 all around, while the latter should not exceed 20 from the neck to the lower canvas border zone.

Shoulder canvas can host a considerable number of motifs, including two varieties of meander lines, checkers with horizontal zigzags, interlocking triangles, and concentric lozenges. Meander lines can be either Π-shaped (731) or wavy (**732**, **738**, **739**). Π-meander can be executed only on the type of canvas where hatched lines cross at right angles (Fig. 3.4A:1; Pl. 3.4:731). It consists of successive Πs moving rather randomly in alternating vertical and horizontal axes. In addition, Πs are not equal in the length of their arms. Such features are understood as indicating that the painter deliberately followed no predetermined plan. The second variety is a complicated stepped pattern or labyrinth. The wavy meander requires the standard type of canvas where lines cross at acute angles (Fig. 3.4A:2; Pls. 3.5, 3.6B, C:732, 738, 739). It actually consists of one zigzag line winding between vertical and horizontal axes inside the canvas zone.

Meander patterns are rather rare in contemporary pottery. Tsountas records one ceramic fragment

from Sesklo depicting a meander line, though not on canvas (Tsountas 1908, 188, fig. 98). In Asia Minor, Hacılar I was the center of the so-called "meander pottery style" (Mellaart 1961, 177) of the beginning of the 6th millennium B.C.

Similar meander/labyrinth patterns were standardized, however, especially on seals in that period. In fact, there are two Thessalian steatite seals and a contemporary sealing from the same area depicting exactly the same design (Theocharis 1959a, 66, fig. 28)—a kind of labyrinth consisting of rectangular areas set symmetrically on either side of a central line/axis. Another labyrinth design comes from the biggest and most important seal from Sesklo, also dated to the Middle Neolithic period (Tsountas 1908, 340, fig. 271; Papathanassopoulos 1996, 334, cat. no. 283), while the collection of seals by Theocharis (1973, 299, pl. 20) includes more samples of these types. In summary, Youra patterns fit well into a broad group of various meander or labyrinth designs (Onasoglou 1996, 163), which do not merely constitute common patterns, but also seem to be part of a major symbolic code within Neolithic society, as indicated by their presence on seals.

Apart from meanders, the shoulder canvas is decorated with various combinations of horizontal zigzags (Pls. 3.3, 3.6A:**733**), concentric lozenges, or opposing interlocking triangles (Pl. 3.7:**736**). Opposed triangles alternating with sets of concentric lozenges (Pls. 3.8, 3.9A:**737**, **740**) roughly reproduce neck/rim motif 5 (Pl. 3.2:5); lozenge sets touch the upper and lower boundary band and usually have a solid center. Checkers always fill the reserved area between these patterns. Checkers are produced by alternating solid and reserved squares, either individually or by uniting four squares so that the pattern is larger and more clear (Fig. 3.4B). There is always considerable carelessness in the brushstrokes, which are mostly ellipsoid, very often protruding into the adjoining blank squares, and only rarely fill their own square completely. Checkers are a very popular Neolithic pattern and are often found on parts of the vessel other than the body, such as around the rim, as in an open shape from Macedonia (Grammenos 1991, pl. 15:6), or on strap handles, as at Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 157:14). More examples come from Sesklo (Tsountas 1908, 188, fig. 98), Phthiotis (Dimaki 1994, fig. 19), and Franchthi Cave (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 13:i, 29:p, 29:q, 30:j). Checkers from Youra and Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, fig. 46), however, are not merely placed side by side with other patterns, but are absolutely bound to them by the underlying metric base that unites the entire frieze.

Body Canvas

Body canvas is placed in a large triangle or a lozenge rather than a horizontal frieze (Pls. 3.3, 3.6A, 3.9B, C, 3.10, 3.11). Most impressive are two pots where this triangular body canvas zone is attached to—and actually hangs from—the shoulder canvas frieze (Pls. 3.3, 3.6A, 3.9B:**733**, **753**). Lines from both nets are similar in terms of thickness, inclination, and intermediate distance. Close observation at the joins, however, reveals no exact correspondence between shoulder and body net lines, suggesting that the painter did not manufacture the shoulder and body canvas with one movement of his hand. Body canvas is decorated with sparse solid squares (Pls. 3.3, 3.6A, 3.9C, 3.10:**733**, **734**), parallel zigzags, which give a wavy impression (Pl. 3.11:**735**), and possibly checkers (Fig. 3.4C:**754**–**756**). Body canvas often alternates with concentric circles.

753. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed, thin-walled vase. Red line separating shoulder from body canvas zone on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse red. Max. h. 0.026 m. CEast 17, 7.

754. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase. Red-brown checkerboard on canvas on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. h. 0.027 m. CEast 18, 4.

755. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed, thin-walled vase. Red solid squares on canvas on whitish background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. h. 0.041 m. CEast 7.

756. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed, thin-walled vase. Red solid squares on canvas on greenish-yellow background. Inner surface coarse red. Max. w. 0.058 m. CEast 18, 4.

OTHER BODY MOTIFS

In addition to canvas, there are several other motifs (Fig. 3.5) that decorate vessels either independently or in association with canvas.

Concentric Circles

This is a popular motif (Fig. 3.5:1; Pls. 3.4–3.8, 3.10–3.12B:**731–739, 741, 757**) often underlying a shoulder canvas motif or alternating with a body canvas triangle/lozenge. The concentric circles occur in sets, usually around the lugs of a vase (Pl. 3.12A, B:**741, 757**). Most groups contain six to nine circles, on average approximately 5–7 mm thick, placed at roughly equal distance. The diameter of the circles progressively decreases until the smallest circle can fit around the central knob. It appears that vessels can have as many such groups as the number of lugs—i.e., up to four (Pl. 3.12B). There are also rare examples of circles very sparsely set within a concentric group (Fig. 3.5:18). Similar patterns have been found at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 215, fig. 2:3, 4), Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 149:6, 7), and also on some Thessalian seals (Theocharis 1973, 299, pl. XX).

757. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase bearing vertically pierced round lug. Red concentric circles surround lug on whitish background, worn motifs on lug. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Max. w. 0.050 m. A4.

Stepped Lines

Stepped lines (Fig. 3.5:2; Pl. 3.5:**732**) occur in groups of two, three, four, and six. They are usually attached to concentric circles or groups of parallel lines in an inclined position, but they have been painted later, as observed from differences between overlying and underlying colors. Similar motifs have been documented from Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 218, fig. 5:5), Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, fig. Γ:4–67), and elsewhere in central Greece (Weinberg 1962, 178, pl. 55l), but also from slightly later Urfirnis pottery (Phelps 1975, 160, 161).

"Plant" Motif

The "plant" motif (Fig. 3.5:3; Pl. 3.4:**731**) consists of seven vertical lines 4–6 mm thick, standing on a group of horizontal bands. Their upper part curves downward like an umbrella, except for one central line that continues straight up. The total height of the motif is approximately 0.15 m. It seems that this motif is a schematized depiction of a naturalistic image—possibly a tree whose trunk corresponds to the vertical part of the design and whose branches correspond to the curving bands. Naturalistic representations are very rare in this period (Theocharis 1967, 134; 1973, pl. XVIII; Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 134:12, 143:3, 152:16).

Inclined Parallel Lines with a Free End

This motif occurs on numerous occasions (Fig. 3.5:4; Pls. 3.5, 3.6B–3.8:**732, 736–739**). The inclined parallel lines are set in groups of two, five, or even 10. They are usually placed at an inclined position of approximately 45 degrees in the reserved area between shoulder canvas and groups of concentric circles. They make contact with the concentric circles, while the other end is free.

Lozenge Net

The lozenge net consists of crossing sets of parallel lines (Fig. 3.5:5; Pls. 3.9B, 3.12C:**753, 758**). This motif is very similar to neck/rim motif 1 (Pl. 3.2:1), but it covers a wider area and consists of larger lozenges due to thicker lines that cross much further apart. Lozenges are painted solid in selected vertical rows. One can observe small differences in terms of thickness, inclination, and distance between the lines. This is a very popular pattern at contemporary Neolithic sites, as we can see from Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 219, fig. 6:3, 4), Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 138, 145, 155), Sesklo (Tsountas 1908, pl. 7:2), Albania (Korkuti 1995, pl. 18:1–4), Phthiotis (Dimaki 1994, figs. 17:ξ, 22:γ; Tsouknidas 1994, fig. 11), Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, fig. 76:6–136), Liani Ammos in Euboëa (Sampson 1996–1998, fig. 14), and Franchthi Cave (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 20:q, 30:e, g, h, 31:a, d).

758. Fragments (15) from body of closed vase. Red-brown net pattern on light brown background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. diam. 0.195 m. A5.

Concentric Squares

The concentric square motif (Fig. 3.5:6; Pl. 3.13A:**759**) contains five, seven, or nine squares with a solid center. This motif is recorded on a seal from Thessaly (Papathanassopoulos 1996, 334,

cat. no. 283). It should most likely be regarded as another expression of the labyrinth pattern.

759. Fragments (10) from lower body of thick-walled, closed vase with strong curvature. Red concentric squares in sets. Inner surface coarse red. Max. diam. 0.176 m. A5.

Cross-hatched Lozenges

This motif is made of crossing parallel lines within a lozenge shape (Fig. 3.5:7, 15, 21). A checkerboard pattern is created by painting interior lozenges black (Pl. 3.13B:**760**). This decoration is similar to motifs from Achilleion (Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 150:2, 3), Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, fig. 76:3–115), and Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, fig. 29:i, n). There is one example where the central lozenge of the net is painted solid (Pl. 3.13C:**761**).

760. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed, thin-walled vase. Dark brown checkerboard on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse red. Max. h. 0.041 m. CEast 18, 4.

761. Fragment from lower body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed, thick-walled vase. Brown lozenge net from thin lines on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. h. 0.057 m. CWest 3.

Meander Bands Surrounding Concentric Rectangles

This motif combines the meander with concentric rectangles (Fig. 3.5:8; Pl. 3.14A:**743**). Four thick meander bands, divided into sets of two and placed opposite each other, wind around the pot. Two rectangles, placed one inside the other, fill the reserved area between opposing Πs. The reserved area is almost 0.08 m long; the central rectangle is painted solid. Each vase can have a maximum of six sets of rectangles.

Lozenges with Attached Triangles at Top and Bottom

This motif combines solid lozenges and triangles (Fig. 3.5:9; Pl. 3.14B:**730**). They are set next to one another in a horizontal or slightly inclined row. The pattern is found on several vases from the Cave of the Cyclops, though executed in varying sizes and with enough carelessness to create an impression of movement. Each component is possibly a schematic representation of a human, and altogether the motif may show people dancing. Other examples come from Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, fig. 5:7) and Tsani Magoula near Karditsa (Wace and Thompson 1912, 84f).

Zigzag Lines or Bands

There are several variations on this motif (Fig. 3.5:10–14; Pls. 3.3, 3.6A, 3.14C:**733**, **762–764**). The zigzag lines are found in groups, and vary in terms of inclination, density, length, and number of zigzags per set. Most vertical zigzags are placed at the border of the body canvas zones, usually in groups of five. Similar vertical zigzags constitute what the Turkish call the "yıldırım " (thunder) pattern of Asia Minor (Theocharis 1967, 136). There are a few vases from Youra where large zigzag bands cover the entire surface of the body, either in a vertical or horizontal position (Pl. 3.14C:**762, 764**; see also Efstratiou 1985, figs. 49, 50, 52). In one case, there are small solid triangles attached to the outer zigzag of the set (Pl. 3.14C:**763**; see also Efstratiou 1985, fig. 45). Zigzags are very popular in the Greek Neolithic, though with different functions between northern and southern traditions. In Thessaly, they are usually complementary to flamed and stepped patterns (Tsountas 1908, 189; Theocharis 1959a, 48, fig. 15:1–2; Otto 1985, pl. 32; Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 137:10–12, 138:6, 138:11, 141, 157). In contrast, in the Peloponnese, the pattern occurs as an independent decorative element (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 11, 12, 30), which is also revived by later Urfirnis Ware. Sets of zigzags similar to those from Youra are found incised at the slightly later site of Nea Makri in Attica (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, figs. 75–76). This pattern also corresponds with designs on contemporary seals, such as those from Nea Nikomedeia (Onasoglou 1996, 163; Papathanassopoulos 1996, 331, cat. no. 271), Sesklo, and other Thessalian sites (Theocharis 1967, 149–151, fig. 89; 1973, 299, pl. XX).

762. Fragment from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vessel. Brown dense zigzags on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. w. 0.025 m. A4.

763. Fragment from body of closed vase with thin walls. Set of five horizontal zigzags, with the upper one attached to solid triangles. Inner surface coarse red. Max. h. 0.026 m. CWest 5.

764. Fragment from shoulder and body of closed vase. Loose brown vertical zigzags on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse red. Max. diam. body 0.016 m. A.

Parallel Straight or Curved Lines or Bands in Groups

This motif also demonstrates several variations (Fig. 3.5:16, 17, 19, 20; Pls. 3.1B, 3.15A, B:**742, 748, 765, 766**). The parallel lines may be on several parts of the vase, even the neck. Those on the lower body are usually the boundary to upper decoration and circle the pot (Fig. 3.5:19; Pls. 3.4, 3.5:**731, 732**). Fewer examples of such groups intersect on the body from different directions (Fig. 3.5:16, 17, 20; Pls. 3.1B, 3.15A:**742, 748**). Many examples of this motif come from Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, figs. 2, 46, 47, 49, 53), Albania (Korkuti 1995, pl. 18), Thessaly (Theocharis 1959a, 42, fig. 9:3, 7; Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 141:11, 154:12, 154:13, 162:6), and Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, figs. 30:a, 30:i, 31:b).

765. Fragments (four) from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase. Red concentric circles in sets completed with parallel lines on whitish background. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Max. w. 0.028, 0.013, 0.030, 0.033 m. A.

766. Fragments (two) from body of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase. Red sets of concentric circles associated with parallel lines on body. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Max. h. 0.050, 0.028 m. A.

Large Solid Triangles

The large, solid triangles cover much of the body of the vessel (Pls. 3.15C, 3.16A:**767, 768**). This pattern should be assigned an earlier date within the last phase of the Early Neolithic based on the evidence of similar decorative elements from Thessaly (Theocharis 1973, pl. IV:1, 5; Winn and Shimabuku 1989, 137:1–4; Yiouni 1996, 132) and central Greece (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, fig. 76:2–43). A thin plastic zone on a worn painted fragment again suggests a late Early Neolithic date, judging from Nea Nikomedeia (Yiouni 1996, 170:3) and Ayio Gala (Hood 1981, fig. 18:89). Also, see the discussion of Early Painted Ware in Chapter 2.

767. Fragments (two) from body of a thin-walled, closed vase. Large red-brown, solid triangle on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse reddish brown. Max. h. 0.029, 0.053 m. C7, 1–4.

768. Fragments (two) from body of closed vase. Large brown solid triangle on yellowish background. Inner surface coarse gray. Max. h. 0.044, 0.019 m. A.

LUGS AND BASES

Lugs and bases have the least amount of extant information concerning their decoration: only eight lugs and one base were found in the Red-on-White pottery from the Cave of the Cyclops (Table 3.3). Lugs are usually painted with short lines placed in opposing diagonal sets (Pl. 3.4:**731**) or are decorated with zigzags (Fig. 3.3A:**750**). Some of the lugs are detached from the body of the vessel, indicating that, during manufacture, the body of the vessel had dried before the wet clay lug was attached. Each of the large, deep, broad-mouthed, necked jars probably bore more than two lugs on the body, most likely four lugs placed symmetrically at the maximum diameter of the body.

Only one base sherd has been retrieved, and it is solidly covered with paint. It can possibly be inferred, therefore, that all bases were painted solid.

MISTAKES IN DECORATION

All of these patterns are executed with much attention to detail, which is especially impressive for the micrographic patterns such as the canvas nets and overlying motifs. The painters were masters of this craft, and their expertise cannot be disproved by any small carelessness (Pl. 3.16B)—such as slight metric inequalities between translated motifs, curling canvas lines instead of absolutely straight lines, and poor connections between crossing patterns—which only can be discovered by close observation.

There is, however, one field where this craft can be unsuccessful, and that has to do with the stage of burnishing. It seems that the pot surfaces were still a little wet when the potter started burnishing, which spoils the decoration by moving particles of the pigment to the neighboring fields, "dirtying" other patterns or reserved areas (Pl. 3.16B:**741, 769**).

769. Body fragment of deep, broad-mouthed or closed vase. Brown labyrinth on yellowish ground. Spoiled slip. Inner surface coarse brown. Max. w. 0.065 m. A5.

Chronology

The group of painted vases from the Cave of the Cyclops that was described above should be dated to the early Middle Neolithic, Sesklo I phase (Gallis 1996b, 120), or Achilleion IIIb–IVa phases (Gimbutas 1989a, 28), therefore, the beginning of the 6th millennium B.C. In fact, one radiocarbon date from Trench B of the Cave of the Cyclops fits quite well within this relative chronological frame (5793–5640 B.C.; see Facorellis, forthcoming). This dating is confirmed by the affinities of Youra material with the neighboring site of Hagios Petros, suggesting that relations between the two sites were very close, if not that the cave's occupants originated from Hagios Petros.

Painted pots from Youra fall within the broad family of the so-called A3b wares of Tsountas (1908) and the A3b–c wares of Wace and Thompson (1912). They exhibit some earlier elements, however, and thus should be placed in a slightly earlier stage than classic Sesklo, as also pointed out by Theocharis (1973, 57) and Efstratiou (1985, 77–78) for the material from Hagios Petros. Basic criteria for this dating includes the rather archaic shapes at Youra and Hagios Petros (collar neck, ovoid body, low carination), which are reminiscent of older examples from Skyros (Theocharis 1959b) and similar archaic features still preserved in the cultures of Chaeroneia and Elateia in central Greece (Weinberg 1962; French 1972; Phelps 1975). By contrast, such features in Thessaly had already been subjected to considerable development. Another chronological marker results from stylistic comparisons with mainland patterns, suggesting that the complex linear designs employed in the Northern Sporades are associated with the southeastern Thessalian and central Greek linear tradition (e.g., at Zerelia, Chaeroneia, Elateia, and Orchomenos), rather than the more freehand flamed and stepped style from western Thessaly.

A few fragments of Youra pottery have been recorded that may belong to a pre-Sesklo phase or EN III, according to the Thessalian diagram of periods by Milojčić-von Zumbusch and Milojčić (1971; see also Theocharis 1973, 47; Gallis 1996b, 120), and thus to the end of the 7th millennium B.C. This date is based on stylistic criteria of shape and patterning, such as the use of the deep open bowl, and the employment of large bands and triangles for the decoration of the body of the vessel. Within these few fragments, however, we cannot yet discern any hint of localized style.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the Cave of the Cyclops was occupied briefly, though intensely, in the beginning of the 6th millennium B.C. and minimally at a slightly earlier stage. Decoration patterns show that the inhabitants belonged to a broader social sphere and shared common traditions and symbols with other people on both coasts of the Aegean, but they had at the same time developed their local idiosyncratic culture.

The Cave of the Cyclops Ceramic Vessel: What Is It?

To summarize, a series of Middle Neolithic Red-on-White painted vases were discovered in two spots in the Cave of the Cyclops, on the rather steep and isolated island of Youra. They are mostly deep ovoid vessels, apart from a few open bowls, and are decorated with complex sets of curvilinear patterns and nets. Most of the pots were located in a narrow, dark, humid, and uncomfortable terrace of the interior of the cave, and only a small portion was recovered within the entrance deposits. A series of questions arise out of their discovery. Who brought these vases inside the cave? From where and how were they brought? For what reason—did they serve a ritual or practical function? Is there some meaning in the fact that most pots preserved only their upper part? After more than a decade of research, we are now able to put forth our own scenario to answer questions such as who, how, and why.

To interpret the Youra vessels, one has to start from the general question, "what is a ceramic vessel?" Is it an object of evolution or diffusion? A construct of measurable parameters: length, height,

thickness, depth, color, material? A technical invention? The product of social conflict? The result of adaptation to a given environment? The outcome of a process of selection? A vector of messages? A system of structures? A set of ideas? A functional, decorative, or ritual utensil? Terms like "utilitarian" or "household pottery," "ritual vessel," "funeral vessel," or even "value-object" have occasionally been used to interpret the role of Greek Neolithic pottery and move away from a simple typological definition. These interpretations were heavily influenced by the views of Binford (1962), who divided objects into technofacts, ideofacts, and sociofacts. Realizing, however, that each vessel has no single meaning but brings together several properties, Binford (1965) revisited his theory and described a primary and a secondary function for objects.

This discussion of archaeological theory lasted about 40 years, and we are very fortunate to have put it behind us. In particular, the last two decades of the 20th century saw a conciliatory spirit in this fruitful debate, in addition to a tendency for self-criticism of unilateral models proposed up to then by evolutionist, diffusionist, processual, Marxist, structuralist, functionalist, and determinist archaeologists. In the context of this movement, which became a wider trend in the anthropology of the 1980s—the so-called "decade of cultural criticism"—and led to the introduction of post-processual theory by Hodder (1991, 156–181) and Trigger (1989), we are now able to choose the elements that define a ceramic vessel. These elements are denoted by keywords such as "know-how," "skill," "use," "meaning," "symbol," "structure," and "historic context," which are complementary in the final interpretation. Each vessel is a technical achievement and, at the same time, the product of skillful craftsmanship and expertise. It is made to serve a specific economic strategy and contribute to a productive process, which makes it a potentially utilitarian object. It reflects something of the personality of its maker and user in terms of their sex, aesthetics, and mode of thinking that also structures the object, though it can even reflect the mood of the moment. It may depend on symbolism that the makers and users improvise themselves or reproduce in the context of a religious, ritual, or customary tradition, but also on their position within the social dynamics of the group. All this means that each vessel has an identity—the identity of the person or group that created it, a message that marks it as recognizable within a cultural context with specific local and temporal boundaries. This identity is reflected in the formal features of each vessel; any change in identity entails a change of form. The following sections will discuss the above aspects of meaning one by one.

1. Member of a Cultural Group

The occupants of the Cave of the Cyclops are unique so far on Youra, because no traces of other sites have been located on the island. The only contemporary site is Hagios Petros, which is located in a protected bay on the southern side of the neighboring island of Kyra-Panagia. The Cave of the Cyclops is actually in the immediate vicinity of this island, although not of the village itself. Hagios Petros was a village of a few dozen families by the early 6th millenium B.C., and the settlement lasted for about 1,000 years, (Efstratiou 1985; 2001, 239). Although no other contemporary sites have been excavated in the area, it seems that there is a considerable precedent for occupation of this region, as suggested by the dense surface Paleolithic finds (Sampson 1998a; Panagopoulou, Kotjabopolou, and Karkanas 2001), the Mesolithic deposits of the Cave of the Cyclops, and the Early Neolithic site on Skyros (Theocharis 1959b).

Hagios Petros and the Cave of the Cyclops are strongly linked by identical pottery decorations and shapes, so that we may talk not only about similar cultures, but also about the same people and workshops at both sites—in other words, about a united Youra–Hagios Petros culture (Katsarou 2001b, 18). It is very likely that the occupants of the cave came from Hagios Petros, unless another contemporary village existed at the time in the area.

Within a wider geographical context, the Youra–Hagios Petros culture demonstrates only general affinities with contemporary mainland cultures, which makes it look very local. Regarding the material from Hagios Petros, Theocharis (1973, 57)

and Efstratiou (1985) pointed out this idiosyncrasy many years ago. But even as early as 1959, the difference had been hinted at by Theocharis' findings of a small EN site with idiosyncratic features on the neighboring island of Skyros (Theocharis 1959b).

Today, there is a clearer view of these local features, combined in the material culture of the two sites. Foremost is the use of local motifs (size and ways of structuring) on pottery. Canvas is unique to the Sporades, but even well-known motifs are handled in different sizes and levels of complexity. Combined with this is the use of archaic pottery shapes. Another feature is the microlithic tool technology in the cave and potentially also at Hagios Petros (Moundrea-Agrafioti 1992), possibly deriving from the Mesolithic tradition of the area. Finally, there are special clay figurine types from Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 38–44, 52), mixing Thessalian and Anatolian facial features. Their manufacture is poor and usually they are unbaked. Is it possible that they also were in the cave, but did not survive post-depositional processes?

Such local features denote another sub-group of the Greek Middle Neolithic, to add to the subgroups already identified by most scholars (Wace and Thompson 1912; Milojčić-von Zumbusch and Milojčić 1971, 100; French 1972; Theocharis 1973; Washburn 1983a; 1984; Efstratiou 1985, 100). These include eastern (Sesklo, Achilleion) versus western (Karditsa) Thessalian pottery, the wares of central Greece, and the pottery of the Peloponnese. The exact region that seems to share the closest affinities to the Sporades, and where the style may have originated, is found in west central Greece rather than in Thessaly. Tsangli and Zerelia may be considered the northern boundaries of this group, while Elateia, Chaeroneia, Orchomenos, Alai, Atalanti, and Nea Makri are its major sites. Their cultural link with the Sporades is demonstrated by similarities in painted patterns and the survival of archaic shapes, such as the broad-mouthed, deep ovoid vessel, which developed newer versions in contemporary Thessaly. Theocharis highlights the difference between Thessaly and central Greece by separating solid from linear styles (Theocharis 1967, 134; 1973, 77). He regards central Greek types as rather conservative, mostly based on simple linear designs (such as nets, triangles, chevrons, and diamonds), and structured by strict rules of translation, juxtaposition, or concentrism compared to contemporary Thessalian flame and step patterns, which are mostly rendered freehand and depict motion. Such different orientations of decoration are also observed in following generations; for instance, Nea Makri's late MN pottery has the same examples of incised zigzags and lozenges, as mentioned above.

According to Efstratiou, southern Asia Minor is another region that may have influenced the nature of the pottery at Youra. This link was first noticed with regard to the Hagios Petros figurative art that bore some unusual traits for the contemporary Greek Neolithic (Efstratiou 1985, 68–74). Efstratiou also based this link on certain pottery shapes, such as the convex phiale (Efstratiou 1985, 34), which abounds at Hagios Petros and is typical of Çatal Höyük (Mellaart 1975) but is rare on the Greek mainland. Another similar feature, according to Efstratiou (1985, 34), was the meander pottery style of Hacılar (Mellaart 1961) and patterns—such as the wavy line—that characterized eastern Aegean wares. It is indeed possible that some Anatolian influence is reflected in the Youra–Hagios Petros material culture.

Of course, typological similarities should be used very cautiously for further explanations, because older diffusionist or genetic theories are now under criticism. As Hodder (1986) has suggested, similar patterns may have different meanings for different people, societies, or communities, and should not be regarded as direct evidence of place of origin. In fact, as mentioned above, the Sporades have been densely occupied since the Paleolithic, so that the occupants of the cave and the village of Hagios Petros may well have been descendants of those early colonists. According to a theory by Chourmouziades, however, stated by Efstratiou (1985, 57), Neolithic colonists may have moved to the islands to survive an economic crisis on the mainland.

An important element to highlight about these people is their communication with mainland cultures via the sea, rather than their origin. Their location on these islands, separated by difficult straits where the sea and winds can be extremely rough and dangerous, suggests that these islanders had developed navigation techniques and had improved knowledge of the sea and natural phenomena. Communication was actually a matter of

survival for them, not just a requirement for trade or exchange.

Neolithic societies were largely supported by communication networks, which provided not only raw materials (such as clay and obsidian) or finished products (pottery, tools), but they also incorporated the isolated communities into a wider social sphere. Such communication played a reviving role, bringing ideas and new people and giving local people the opportunity to travel out of their community. It thus ensured their biological and cultural survival. Of course, this communication could be either peaceful or competitive, and part of the local tradition possibly was assimilated by stronger outside influences. In other words, the sea did not necessarily play a limiting role, as some determinists have supported. However "small" a world may be, it can become very "big" with the aid of communication networks (Cullen 1985; Kotsakis 1996b, 169–170). Efstratiou reflects this:

> . . . Permanent occupation in locations which might look remote does not always presuppose cultural isolation or lack of communication. There is certainly a delicate balance between what the environment can provide and what the prevailing technology can offer. What has been overlooked is the sense of familiarity the settlers must have already had with the environment, its capacities and its limitations, which must have been the first condition for people moving to establish settlements in the area. It is not an urge for experimentation and exploration which leads to such communities being set up, but rather the feeling of being in a familiar environment . . . communities at all levels of development tend to exploit situations, economic and environmental which they recognize as suitable to their technological skills; they do not initiate them and if the term "colonization" even in its weakest sense suggests adventure, experimentation and cultural isolation, it should, I think, be abandoned. (Efstratiou 1985, 59)

Additionally, Chourmouziades (1996, 58–60) has suggested the concept of centricity as opposed to the concept of periphery regarding the Neolithic village of Dispilio, near the lake of Kastoria, in northwestern Macedonia. He believes that a certain place is selected for settlement according to its position within a communication network. What he has stated for Dispilio fits very well with the case of the Youra–Hagios Petros culture—that prehistory knows no borders and any culture may be equally central with any other.

> The material culture of each such "central" site is not the pathetic recipient of cultural diffusion, but rather a culture which is active and regenerative through interaction. It is not a culture which flourishes because it is located on a certain route, but is rather a culture which by its own activities makes the development of such a route possible. (Chourmouziades 1996, 58–60)

2. An Economic Object

Like any other item, the ceramic vessel is the product of a specific subsistence strategy that processes natural resources to ensure survival, self-sufficiency, and growth for the population. This strategy determines every choice in the operational chain, from collection of raw materials to production and final use. This is why the reconstruction of subsistence strategy has been the interpretive goal of all research studies investigating artifacts such as ceramics.

The Neolithic mode of production in the Greek area involved productive forces, relations, and processes based mainly on the axis of farming/stock raising/fishing at the level of primary production, and handicraft (e.g., pottery, lithic industries, weaving) and trade at the secondary level. The quality and quantity of pottery as a product of secondary processing was directly dependent on the quality and quantity of the material issued by the primary productive activities, because they determined the availability of time and degree of systemization that could increase successful transformation. Yet, it also depended a great deal on the primary material, mostly foodstuff, which was processed either by cooking or other methods of preparation for immediate consumption, or by preservation, storage, and transportation for subsistence or symbolic use.

Unfortunately, we are unable to clearly ascertain the significance of the Youra vases for the economy of the site. No food remains or traces of use (e.g., evidence of fire) were identified to associate them

with stages of the economic process. Nor is it possible to distinguish any symbols providing information on local farming, stock raising, or fishing production among their decorative elements. We assume that, even with regard to symbolic functions, they were used for serving, short-term storage, or transportation of food mixtures. They may also have been used for food preparation without the involvement of fire (i.e., by mixing or fermentation). The situation in Hagios Petros is similar, as the pottery does not contribute any information on the subsistence strategy of the settlement. Therefore, in both sites, such information is derived only from complementary bone or vegetal findings, which suggest a combined agropastoral and fishing economy.

One feature that may have economic significance within Middle Neolithic Youra pottery is the fact that painted ware outnumbers any other pottery group from the cave, while contemporary coarse ware is rare. Although the occupation of the cave may have involved special patterns of pottery distribution that do not represent the whole system of subsistence, we cannot rule out that this pattern provides evidence for the model of Middle Neolithic economy observed in contemporary sites. According to this model, early pottery was limited in comparison with the mature 6th millennium B.C. or later Neolithic stages, and its use had not spread to include the bulk of everyday practical needs (Vitelli 1993a; Björk 1995, 114–115; Yiouni 1996). At Franchthi Cave, for example, Vitelli (1993a, 210) calculated that the annual production of pottery resulted in just 12–13 vessels in the beginning of the Neolithic and less than 100 in the stage contemporary to Youra, but twice as many in the Late Neolithic. The absence of large storage vessels from EN–MN settlements, though these sites were largely based on farming production, is another symptom of the same model. In the settlement of Hagios Petros, for example, Efstratiou (1985, 28) mentions only a few fragments of large coarse ware. This phenomenon is interpreted either as limited storage or limited use of pottery for storage compared with containers made of other materials (e.g., wood) or subterranean storage areas. The direct relationship between storage and pottery becomes evident by the late 6th millennium B.C. as a result of population growth and improved farming methods. Thus, pottery also acquires a clearer economic significance at that time.

3. *A Product of Specialization*

The indication for specialization in the Middle Neolithic community of the Sporades is by far the most economically significant information that this material can provide. The possibility of secondary processing presupposes a sufficient surplus of primary products to allow some individuals to move beyond the basic production of food to some degree, and work part-time or full-time in specialty production. By acquiring and expanding knowledge, they survive by exchanging their products for part of the surplus of the settlement's primary goods (Kotsakis 1996b, 169). At the same time, their specialized activity contributes toward creating a surplus that is channelled into exchange and increases the consumption needs of its productive agents.

Potters represented one such specialized group. Obviously, the more the community is able to reward the labor and time of specialized potters, the more systematically potters are able to work and the higher the quality of their products and size of their production. Because pottery demands time, physical energy, suitable materials, and specialized support in terms of equipment and know-how in all of its stages, it represents an "investment" by the economy of any community. The degree of specialization of potters and, more generally, the ability of Neolithic society to sustain specialized groups are questions that have frequently been addressed in literature about the Neolithic period. Some scholars underestimate the need of systematic labor for the production of pottery. In particular, Perlès (1992) has argued that, unlike raw materials for making stone tools, clay sources abounded, allowing pottery to be more favored and perhaps requiring less specialization; she thus implies that pots could be made in any household. Her theory, however, has been criticized by increasing numbers of scholars who favor a theory of specific individuals being systematically occupied with pottery production during the Neolithic

(Kotsakis 1983, 211; Vitelli 1993a, 216–217; Kalogirou 1994, 219). Unskilled individuals or "apprentices," as Kalogirou characteristically puts it (1994, 222), could not have formed, painted, and fired these vessels. It has even been suggested that the reputation of certain masters crossed the boundaries of communities (Schneider et al. 1990, 1994) and that specialization may have led to the existence of travelling potters as early as the 6th millennium B.C. (Björk 1995, 134).

Specialization during the Late Neolithic is more easily confirmed. For example, specialization in LN Black-on-Red pottery is implied by standardization of shapes and patterns, but also by standardization of fabrics as revealed by analyses of paste (Tsolakidou et al. 2008). Chemical sample analyses of this ware group from 10 different sites in eastern Macedonia showed that their ceramic fabric is similar and clearly distinct from other ware groups at the same sites. This implies sufficient organization of technology to ensure similarity by employing specific recipes, which perhaps originated from some central point that cannot be considered anything other than an atelier. It also implies organization of traffic from the center of production. The individuals involved in this production and traffic network cannot have been amateurs or accidental agents.

At any rate, one should not rush to conclude that ceramic production in the Neolithic coincided with full-time occupation and the type of organized collective ateliers, carrying out commissions and trading vessels, that developed in subsequent millennia. In any case, specialization—few producers, more consumers of a specific product, in the words of Costin (1991)—existed already in the Paleolithic, but its dynamics and degree of development varied depending on the period and material. The vases from the Cave of the Cyclops prove most vividly that the Middle Neolithic economy had the potential to support specialized groups. The knowledge, craftsmanship, and expertise required for the production of the painted vessels, in particular, could not have been acquired without permanent and systematic employment in this craft. These vessels are not products of idle, secondary, or amateurish activity. Even though they belong to an early stage, their underlying expertise, mastery, and know-how could not have been acquired without the systematic production of pottery, which would entail a substantial investment of time to the detriment of other productive activities. This investment involves not only the time required for the making of the vessel, but also the necessary time to set up installations, make tools, collect and process raw materials, and control the firing stages.

The direct inspiration of Youra pottery decoration from weaving indicates the existence of another handicraft of the secondary economy apart from pottery. Woven items must have played a primary role in household furniture: they were tradeable products in high demand and of vital importance for the composition of the Neolithic home. Woven products—fine fabrics and heavy rugs, coverings, partitions, but also cloths, mats, nets, and ropes—almost certainly outnumbered ceramic products in the home. Like pottery, weaving involves a series of activities that require long and systematic occupation with the object. From the collection of vegetal or animal fibers, washing, carding, spinning, and dyeing to the maintenance and processing of prefabricated products, weaving requires a great deal of time, labor, patience, a multitude of implements, installations, knowledge, and expertise. Certain groups of the population must have systematically practiced the craft of fabric- and basket-weaving in exchange for part of the food production surplus.

The flourishing and quality of pottery and weaving were due to systematic occupation and specialization, which were possible because the group had ensured enough food production surplus with its economic strategy to sustain members specializing in non-food-producing activities through a system of exchange. The community eventually had the economic potential to sustain not only the potters and weavers visible in the material of the Cave of the Cyclops and the settlement of Hagios Petros, but chipped stone specialists or perhaps even "tradesmen," i.e., people commuting between islands and the mainland to transport raw materials or other items. In summary, the Middle Neolithic pottery from the Cave of the Cyclops indicates an economy able to afford this secondary production system. The source of a thriving agricultural economy at Hagios Petros is visible in the fertile lands surrounding the settlement, while in the Cave of the Cyclops this information is missing. To fill the gap, the barren island should perhaps be associated either with Hagios Petros or with another similar but as yet unknown settlement in the area.

As an investment of time, labor, and materials resulting in—or consciously striving toward—an increasing surplus, pottery has an economic exchange value that is redeemed either by possessing the item (which corresponds to possession/storage of economic capital) or by exchanging it. Theocharis (1973, 39–40) has suggested that pots were tradeable; even coarse pottery is tradeable, according to Démoule and Perlès (1993). Yet to equate the function of high quality pottery to the role of "currency" (i.e., items that were manufactured to operate by exchange) cannot be confirmed by the Neolithic evidence found to date, and it would be unjustified to argue this case for the Youra vessels. "Currency" appeared in later periods, when the complexity of society made it possible for community authorities to control quantities of production. For the Middle Neolithic, we can assume only that certain groups may have had access to items and raw materials that were not accessible to the entire population, as seems to be the case at Sesklo (Maniatis, Perdikatsis, and Kotsakis 1988; Kotsakis 1996b, 168), which also implies some degree of social differentiation.

4. A Product of Know-how

The Middle Neolithic painted pottery from the Cave of the Cyclops is a small technological miracle. It is the outcome of a carefully tended process, from selection of raw materials to manufacture, painting, and firing. This could only have been executed by experienced and specialized technicians. The mixture of suitable clay and nonplastics shows an awareness of the method that provides vessels with resilience from thermal stresses during firing. Vessels were modelled with symmetry and stability. The polishing, burnishing, and firing processes complied with familiar techniques for high-quality painted pottery on the mainland; this shows that equally skillful technicians lived in the Sporades.

Each decoration is the living image of a particular painter's hand. The painting process can be reconstructed by following the lines, upward or downward strokes of the brush, filling, use of the oblique or other inclination of the tip, indications of painting speed, as well as evidence of trembling and mistakes. Different hands have not been identified, however, as this would require a highly specialized "graphological" study of the decorations.

The canvas decoration is the most striking part of this technology: the accuracy in executing delicate, complex, and minute decorations indicates a steady hand on the difficult curving surface of the vessel, familiarity with the dyeing material, and the capacity to alternate the use of brushes of different sizes, including the unusual implement of a single hair to draw lines thinner than half a millimeter. The decoration of canvas is miniature-like because it consists of small individual decorative areas arising from the intersection of the canvas lines. Each space has a surface area of a few tenths of a square millimeter and is either painted solid (checkers, zigzag lines, angles, or lozenges—each requiring a different stroke) or is left unpainted. This segmentation of decorative space aims at a composition with no recognizable details giving off a general impression of symmetry. The drawings on these vessels are meant to be viewed from a distance, just like a painting with small patterns is meant to be contemplated from afar.

By focusing on the details, however, one can notice small deviations in the patterns' inclination and size, which are totally justified by their handmade nature and should not undermine our impression of the skill and steadfastness of their painters. On the other hand, tiny inconsistencies indicate that the technician struck a balance between perfection and speed, sacrificing a small part of the former to save precious time, and put a certain limit on investment of time. Unlimited consumption of time meant waste with no gain for the painter, because the overall effect seems perfect anyway despite the tiny "mistakes." Besides, perfection in the sense of a machine's absolute accuracy cannot be achieved by hand, because hand dexterity has its limits. At that time, there were no pictures of mechanical decoration with which to compare it, so the effect must have seemed more than perfect.

All of this evidence attests to the extraordinary technical skill, expertise, and know-how of local

ateliers that had tools and "fine" hands for producing pottery of such caliber. This technique, as Efstratiou (1985, 56) agrees with respect to Hagios Petros, must have resulted from many years of experience within a tradition developed either on-site or elsewhere and then imported to the Northern Sporades.

5. *An Object Made for Practical Use*

The shapes of the Youra vessels have a specific utilitarian potential. It remains to be determined whether this potential was utilized or, because of the vessels' painted decoration, served no practical purposes. The question of the functional value of decorated vessels, especially painted ones, has given rise to various debates and theories. Many researchers, especially processual archaeologists, used to divide pottery into utilitarian and non-utilitarian (Demoule and Perlès 1993), taking a separatist view. The term "utilitarian" refers to the functional value of the formal characteristics of each vessel and not to their symbolic/conceptual (non-utilitarian) aspects. In this respect, utilitarian refers mainly to shape and not to decoration, which has no functional, but only semantic and symbolic, value.

Recently, however, scholars increasingly suggest that there is no division between utilitarian and social or symbolic pottery, based on studies at Kitrini Limni, Sesklo, Dimini, and Dispilio (Kalogirou 1994, 229; Voulgari 2002, 234; Souvatzi 2008). Researchers have come to believe, on the contrary, that each vessel possesses both symbolic and functional elements. It is maintained here that the functionality of formal traits in each vessel is part of the overall conceptual/symbolic and utilitarian role that the vessel is meant to play. In other words, the presence of symbols on the object does not reduce its functionality in the least. For instance, a drinking vessel that bears the engraved name of its owner is still a drinking vessel, though it is not the same as a cup with no distinguishing traits; perhaps their frequency of use is different. In this respect, Vitelli's (1993a, 101) simplistic formulation concerning pottery from Franchthi Cave is adopted here: decorated vessels may not have had the same use as undecorated ones. More emphatically, decorated versus undecorated vessels involved not so much different uses as different use priorities. The shape of decorated vessels was not totally irrelevant; on the contrary, despite their different destinations, decorated and undecorated vessels must have shared an area of common use. The field is still at the beginning of using organic residue analyses in pottery, and the results of these analyses will soon radically change our idea of decorated vessels as purely symbolic and use-"proof." Besides, sporadic information on the participation of painted vessels in practical functions does exist (e.g., two painted Neolithic jars with grain residue found at Servia; Heurtley 1939, 53, 135; Rhomiopoulou and Ridley 1974).

As far as the Youra vessels are concerned, the investment of labor and time implied by painted decoration does not contradict their utilitarian function as containers of some sort. The shapes of the Youra vessels are not accidental nor products of purposeless innovation. These shapes also occur with unpainted and monochrome vessels, which means that they incorporate acquired utilitarian properties. They still could have been decorative (i.e., an "item to be exhibited," according to Björk 1995, 128) or symbolic at the same time; if a particular shape did not serve some purpose, it would probably not exist. Potters would not have produced many different shapes for vessels had the shapes not meant something to them. If they needed the ceramic backdrop only to develop their symbols, they would have been more likely to choose the same shape—probably one much easier to decorate than the difficult and demanding spherical body they persisted in making.

The question becomes all the more pertinent if we assume that the cave's population did not live permanently on the island of Youra, but arrived there at regular intervals, carrying their household chattel from a place of permanent installation (possibly Hagios Petros). Why did they not choose a smaller shape more easily transported by sea, rather than the massive spherical vessel, if the latter was non-utilitarian (therefore, ritual or decorative) and destined to travel empty? On the other hand, having such a laboriously crafted vessel traveling empty

underestimates its shape and the work invested in its construction. One is prompted to argue that practical use accounts for these vessels no less than their symbolic function does.

The Youra vessels served a practical purpose within some kind of symbolic process. What might that purpose have been? (The symbolic aspect of these vessels will be discussed below.) There are no indications as to their former content, either in the Youra examples or in those from Hagios Petros. The relationship between pottery and preparation of food, however, is most probable.

POTTERY FROM YOURA AT THE SERVICE OF FOOD MANAGEMENT

Food management and processing is the domain par excellence associated with pottery. Yet the reasons for the appearance of ceramic vessels in the Aegean in the second half of the 7th millennium b.c. seem to have nothing to do with diet. Their emergence was associated previously with the so-called "Neolithic Revolution" (i.e., the domestication of animals and plants, permanent installations, and the discovery/revolution of cooking). After the latest discovery of Upper Palaeolithic clay establishments for food at Klisoura in the Peloponnese (Karkanas et al. 2004), one could easily argue that the function of the first pottery in the Early Neolithic was for food preparation. According to a more recent approach, however, permanent settlements were not linked to the emergence of pottery (Björk 1995, 1). Thriving, nonceramic settlements in the Near and Middle East between 10,000 and 7500 b.c. point in the same direction. Yet pottery does not appear to be connected with cooking, nor does it seem to arise from a change in dietary habits. On the contrary, early pottery is of exquisite quality and is painted.

According to Gardner's (1978) observations, early vessels from Achilleion, Sitagroi, and Anza bear no evidence of use for cooking. Similarly, no traces of fire have been identified on vessels from EN Knossos. At Nea Nikomedeia there is no distinct fabric or vessel shape that provides definitive proof for the existence of cooking pots. Yiouni, however, does not exclude the use of such pots; she explains this fact by citing the short duration of the local tradition of pottery manufacture and use, given that Nea Nikomedeia is one of the earliest ceramic sites in the Balkans (Yiouni 1996, 190). At Franchthi Cave, cooking pots account for no more than a mere 10 percent of the pottery, and their capacity is too small to assume they were used to cook for large groups of people. Vitelli (1989, 1993a, 1993b) believes that raw food had already been abandoned as of the Mesolithic, when ways of cooking were improvised that may well have survived into the beginning of the Neolithic. Evidence in that direction includes the presence of broad beans in Mesolithic sites and the bitter vetch that could only be eaten after it had been boiled and the water drained (Yiouni 1996, 191). According to another view, however, vetch could be eaten directly after soaking, once the water had been evacuated (Kalogirou 1994, 227). Wooden or stone structures (e.g., grids, slabs) would have ensured a hot, grilled, or smoked meat meal, well before the invention of pottery. The first "boiling" could have been achieved by placing a hot stone in liquid (for instance, milk; Björk 1995, 118). It is thought that cooking was invented in the Mesolithic because it multiplied foodstuffs (i.e., plant or animal foods that were hard or poisonous in their raw state were made edible), often made them healthier or more easily digestible, and increased dietary possibilities, which is very important for a growing population. Initially, Neolithic populations probably followed the same cooking recipes employed during the Mesolithic, still without the use of pottery. Besides, diet is an element of social identity, and taste is an idiosyncratic cultural value; both are integrated into tradition and change slowly.

For these reasons, it is most likely that pottery appeared to fulfill a function other than cooking. Its advantages for cooking (choice of shape, swift production of large numbers of vessels, thermal conductivity of clay, long life span, no damaging influence on foodstuffs) were gradually discovered by Neolithic populations, which led to a change in dietary habits. These changes occurred not at the beginning of the Neolithic, however, but later, perhaps in the 6th millennium, and became widespread and well established in the 5th millennium B.C.

At the time of Youra's occupation, people started to use pottery for foodstuffs, perhaps in the ways described by ethnoarchaeologists (Rice 1987, 208–243)—for cooking, serving, transportation, storage, and preservation. Probably, though, the

use of pottery had not yet spread and was still selective, mostly oriented toward distinct functions with symbolic meanings. Neolithic pottery probably served other purposes as well, perhaps unrelated to food preparation, such as processing (i.e., dyeing) hides and animal/plant fibers or as musical instruments.

As to the kinds of foodstuffs and preparations practiced in the Neolithic, we draw our evidence from actual dietary finds such as animal bones, shells, fish, and grain (pollen, phytoliths), and we seek inspiration from ethnographic parallels. Meat, milk, blood, fish, shells, vegetables, cereals, and fruits are thought to have been the main dietary ingredients (Bogucki 1986; Vencl 1994; Trantalidou 1996). Their distribution in farming, stock raising, or fishing communities varied; farmers probably enjoyed a wider variety of foodstuffs. In general, foodstuffs are divided into solid and liquid, vegetal and animal, farm or food collection products. Collection of vegetal foodstuffs is a commonly accepted source of food for the Neolithic, as it is thought to have covered approximately 20–30 percent of total food consumption (Björk 1995, 117); only Démoule and Perlès (1993) exclude it completely from Neolithic food sources. The possibility that the residents of Hagios Petros supplemented their diet with wild berries and fruits is suggested by Efstratiou (1985, 53). As for processing techniques, solid foodstuffs are subject to grinding, gruel-like preparations, mixing, soaking, crushing to extract juice, kneading, roasting, boiling (either alone or with liquid foodstuffs), or combining with alimentary by-products (e.g., cheese, yogurt). Naturally, water and salt act as catalysts in the latter processing.

With regard to Youra vessels in particular, it is most likely that food/meal preparation was their major function as part of some distinguished event. Their painted decoration, however, excludes placement on fire because flames or ashes would have a devastating effect on colors and veneers and thus devalue the "investment" represented by each vessel. It is true that a painted dish and sherds from other painted vessels were found in the cave of Theopetra with deposits of soot on their decorated surface (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2000b), suggesting that cooking vessels could have been painted and that painted vessels were sometimes exposed to fire. It is maintained here, however, that the investment of time and labor in the majority of Youra painted vessels was too great to expose them to fire.

Only the calyx-shaped vessel (Type V.7; Pl. 3.1B:**748**) may have served a purpose specifically related to fire, if we judge from the alteration of color on its surface. It is an open-rimmed, internally burnished, and polished vessel. The use of such open-rimmed and shallow vessels over fire was not uncommon. Analysis of organic residues identified a small cup at Makriyalos, Pieria, as a cooking vessel among other pots with expected cooking functions, though it would never have qualified as such under different circumstances (Urem-Kotsou, Kotsakis, and Stern 2002). At the Neolithic site of Stavroupoli in northern Greece, several open and shallow bowls as well as an offering table were identified as containing animal fat (Decavallas 2004, 355). Vitelli interprets a similar open bowl from Franchthi not as a cooking pot for preparing food, but as a vessel intended for the evaporation or burning of aromatic substances, with suspected ritual associations (Vitelli 1993a, 215–216).

As for the rest of the Youra vessels, the color variations were caused not by use in cooking, but during firing, which is supported by the fact that the alterations are spread across the entire surface of the vessels and not only at their base. The high, ring-shaped base of the vessels also points to a non-cooking use, or at least a function that does not include fire. Small cracks like those usually considered indicative of a use associated with fire cannot be identified easily or distinguished from firing cracks on the Youra vessels. Finally, there are no handles to help transport the pot during cooking by way of a wooden shaft threaded through the hole, and the existing protuberances are not of a suitable size or quality for such a purpose.

Even if the vessels do not look suitable for cooking on fire, they still may have been used for preparing food in a way that involved no actual fire (whether flame or ash). They could have been used for mixing various solid or liquid foodstuffs or for kneading, soaking, brewing, or a combination of these, perhaps with the addition of water boiled or heated in another pot (Vitelli 1993a, 214–215; Kalogirou 1994, 228). In case the vessel came in contact, even if indirectly, with boiled water or other hot materials, it should have been able to maintain its temperature. Thin walls and suitable temper, therefore, may have been employed deliberately to

serve this purpose. It is difficult to evaluate the significance of the porosity of Youra vessels (i.e., the volume of empty spaces encrusted in the clay), which seems rather large in most vessels, with the exception of a few that are internally polished or burnished. External burnishing seals the pores and ensures impermeability. On the other hand, aerating foodstuffs through the pores of internally coarse vessels may have been necessary, for instance, to drain excessive fluids and retain the thicker portion.

In view of the multiple roles that may be attributed to prehistoric vessels, the Youra pots also most likely functioned in the serving and consumption of foodstuffs. Serving is actually attached more closely to elite pottery than cooking. In the Neolithic, food generally seems to have been consumed in common, directly out of large vessels without using small individual plates, which is also suggested by the few small capacity, open-rimmed vessels of this period. In contemporary ethnological parallels that describe traditional customs, food (especially solid meals such as casseroles like shepherd's pie) was often consumed directly out of the common pot. This activity took on symbolic dimensions, as was the case with eating together in general, hence the Greek expression "they separated their pots" to denote quarreling. We should, therefore, not always expect prehistoric people to have specialized household items nor consider each vessel as belonging to an individual. Besides, many solid foodstuffs were probably eaten by hand. Open-rimmed shallow vessels, in particular, may have been associated with drinking instead.

Apart from food preparation and serving, deep vessels may themselves have transported prepared foodstuffs to the cave and provided short-term storage. Any contents that they carried into the cave could not have been liquid, as that would require a close-necked vessel. At any rate, either with solid or liquid contents, carrying these filled vessels into the cave would not have been easy given the rugged island topography and the steep trail leading to the Cave of the Cyclops. The protuberances on some vessels do not seem suitable for tying onto the body of humans or animals. These vessels, when full, therefore, could only have been transported with both hands to avoid spilling their contents. When empty, they could have been carried by animals. As for more open shapes, such as the carinated bowl (Type V.6; Pl. 3.1A:**747**) or the S-profile vases (Type V.5), they were probably transported empty inside other vessels or sacks to be used for serving and local consumption.

Incidentally, the question of how the hundreds of vessels found in remote and inaccessible caves were brought there has not yet been considered in a comprehensive manner. Consider, for example, the painted and unpainted pottery from the cave of Theopetra, located on a steep rock in the western plain of Karditsa (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2000a; Katsarou 2000), or the pottery from the cave of Sarakeno, on the cliffs surrounding the Kopais basin, about 100 m above ground level (Sampson 2006b). Both caves yielded a large quantity of Middle Neolithic vases. Were those pots transported to these locations empty or filled? How were they transported? Were they eventually produced on the spot? Did the vessels come and go, or did they stay in the cave for repeated use?

Returning to the scenario of filled vessels being brought into the Cave of the Cyclops, it is possible that they had a cover of some kind for storage. Given that ceramic lids were not constructed in the Neolithic, other materials, such as mat, leather, or cloth could have done the job easily, each offering different advantages. The use of such flexible stoppers is very likely for these vessels, as they add no extra weight (a slab, for instance, would be more suitable for an immovable jar) and allow ventilation and protection from dust and insects. Leather is perhaps more watertight and, thus, more suitable for liquids or foodstuffs that should remain moist. Leather and cloth work better if they are tied tightly around the base of the rim and their upper surface is well stretched. It is strongly suggested here that the shape of the neck and perforated knobs on the Youra vessels would have been dictated by the use of such flexible covers. The neck, for example, tends to have a marked outward tilt and is high enough to accommodate a well-stretched cover. The cover was either tied or fixed with a rope around the lugs, which would likely explain these small vertical knobs. Also, the decorations of the body might have been repeated on the covering using embroidery or weaving.

Long-term storage is rather weakly associated with Youra vessels in comparison to short-term storage of some foodstuffs that were intended for consumption soon after their placement in storage. Storage is linked with strong symbolism because it

incorporates anxieties and wishes about survival and continuity for the community and its traditions. In the case of Youra, the decoration of the vessels and their small capacity definitely imply only symbolic storage. At any rate, during this period, systematic storage does not yet appear to have been strongly associated with pottery. Although large vessels were also used in the Early–Middle Neolithic (for example, at Franchthi Cave and Achilleion), the relationship between pottery and storage developed largely as a function of the economic conditions prevailing by the beginning of LN I. It is at this time that farming and stock raising skyrocketed in quantity and quality, leading to surpluses that required storage (including animal products, fruits, cereals, legumes, etc.) and creating the need for processing (such as drying, salting, smoking) for future availability. In the Early–Middle Neolithic, by contrast, production was still relatively limited; storage in non-ceramic containers (e.g., baskets, hides, or storage pits), which were supplementary to pottery in later periods as shown for example in Makriyalos (Papa and Besios 1999), must have been common as indicated by examples from Nea Makri, Attica (Pantelidiou-Gofa 1991). Specifically, Yiouni (1996, 185) mentions that the number of storage vessels for each generation at Nea Nikomedeia was extremely small and goes on to interpret this as indicating the simultaneous use of perishable materials. At Achilleion, Björk (1995) identifies similar economic developments and concludes that production at this stage was still rather small, leading to small surpluses and limited storage needs. On the other hand, the conditions prevailing after the Middle Neolithic led to such a surplus of products that massive accumulation and preservation of foodstuffs was necessary for future consumption or exchange. Caves have predominantly been associated with such activities, particularly in the Late Neolithic (Sampson 1993a). It is precisely to distinguish different economic concepts of storage between the Early–Middle Neolithic and Late Neolithic here that the terms "short-term" with respect to the former and "long-term" with respect to the latter are used.

6. *A Structural Construction*

The decoration of Youra vases is comprised of individual structural elements in compliance with norms that, according to structural archaeologists, echo norms of the individual's or society's life. Thus, the object can be compared to a "text" that is "written" and "read" in terms of words and phonemes combined according to rules of grammar. Isolating the smallest constituent unit of decoration (i.e., an element that cannot be broken down further, but only multiplied) using formal/design analysis is an arbitrary process of reading determined by subjective criteria. To consider certain lines drawn by the potter as falling under one theme rather than another forms part of an interpretation. For example, what should be taken as the basic structural unit in solid triangles with their tops pointing downward—the solid triangle as a whole, the triangle's outline, or each of the three thin lines combined with angles to form the triangle? In hatched triangles, is the fundamental structural unit the hatched triangle as a whole or the triangle as an outline where hatching is a qualitative feature? Or should the basic structural value be found in the thin straight line? Such straight or curving lines actually serve as the basis of structure in any decoration, not only at Youra, but throughout the Neolithic. Yet, to deconstruct motifs to such an extent flattens all decorations into shapeless phonemes and ignores that fixed themes/"words" already had been established, such as the solid triangle, the diamond, the zigzag line, or the canvas. I believe that such fixed "words" were selected by the potter to construct the decorative "phrase," and they were not made up from the start by combining straight lines and curves. Even qualitative features, like the filling of internal surfaces with solid painting or hatching, the arrangement (for instance, either standing up or tilted), thickness, or length, constitute fixed characteristics of the structural unit, because they are established through mechanisms of schematization and reproduction.

Decorative patterns at Youra are based on only 12 structural figures: the straight line, straight band, zigzag line, curving line, circle, solid triangle, square, diamond, angle, parallelogram, meander, and

net. How are these patterns and their combinations structured on the vases? The Cave of the Cyclops vessels are generally divided into two large groups: those with canvas and those without canvas. Both groups, however, follow the same rules of decoration, which are based on multiplying each theme in one of the following ways: by translation; alternating opposites; alternation around a common center (e.g., diamonds, circles, angles, squares) that may be solid or, in the case of circles, coincide with applied lugs; or criss-crossing (e.g., canvas, net patterns).

Features of shape usually strongly influence how patterns are structured. The deep ovoid vases are divided into main decorative zones that coincide with the structural sections of the vessel—either three, the neck, shoulder, and lower half of the body, or two, the neck and body (apart from protuberances and the base). Open bowls are divided into two zones—upper and lower body (apart from the base)—on the basis of their carination. Carinations, either from neck to shoulder or from body to base, are usually highlighted by painted bands, a widespread feature in this period. Typically, the same structural concept was further transmitted to the following generations of Urfirnis and LN matt-painted pottery.

Only between the shoulder and the main body of the deep ovoid vases is there no form-related differentiation, such as a sudden change in outline. The point of transition lies at about one-third of the body's height, above the largest diameter and the protuberances, and is only notional (i.e., not visible in terms of form). The painter was free to separate the vessel into decorative zones or treat it as a single surface. Potters do not seem to have cared for distinguishing shoulders clearly by, for instance, introducing some form of bend at the lower margin of the shoulder; they may not have wanted to limit the body, which could also be treated as a united area of decoration. Besides, it would disrupt the dialogue between shoulder and body decoration, which persists even when the decoration of the two areas is different and not in contact. In addition, such bending seems unnecessary for the vessel's function.

Particular themes that are never seen on bodies occur on both the inside and outside of necks. When shoulder and body decoration is separated, each surface has its own repertoire. Shoulder themes are never seen on bodies and vice versa, because the body's canvas has a different size and incorporates different decorations. The shoulder coincides with the idea of a zone, while this is less pronounced on the body. Decorations on the body are not limited by narrow margins, while on the shoulder they are less free. The lower part of the body has narrow scope for decoration. Finally, the unique preserved base fragment is solidly painted.

These variations describe the roles attributed to various sections of the vessel by the painter. When shoulder and body were treated as a single area, decorations grew larger because their conception followed the surface that they covered. Protuberances became a structural part of decoration: their position dictated the placement of sets of concentric circles around them and, thus, the arrangement of all of the decoration on the body.

HOW TO INTERPRET STRUCTURE?

Archaeologists seduced by the structural approach have been led to believe that it is possible to grasp the meaning behind the structure of rock paintings in Paleolithic art, decorative patterns in pottery, or architectural configuration in residential or funeral complexes, and that this meaning reflects social, economic, or ideological reality for the ancient population (Shepard 1948, 1956; Muller 1977; Redman 1977; Plog 1980; Hodder 1982; Washburn 1983a, 1983b; Washburn, ed. 1983; Hardin 1984; Otto 1985; Hodder 1986, 35). Washburn begins her article "Toward a Theory of Structural Style in Art" (1983b) with the phrase: "We will discuss the relation between structure in ancient art and social relations." Thus, art is considered to obey a system of rules, like any other behavior or form of material civilization. A very comprehensive structural approach to the Greek Neolithic is employed by Otto in her discussion of Thessalian Neolithic decorations (1985). Washburn (1983a, 1984) also distinguishes between cultural subgroups of the Greek Neolithic on the structural level. Recently, Voulgari (2002, 217–241) has taken a similar approach to decorated pottery from the Neolithic lake settlement of Dispilio, located in northwestern Macedonia.

Washburn's study (1983a, 1984) of Neolithic painted decoration on mainland Greece concludes that, despite the wide distribution of certain popular patterns (e.g., circles, nets, chevrons, triangles,

parallel lines or bands, steps, and flames), variations of these decorations occur within each area, such as Thessaly, central Greece, and the Peloponnese. The size of patterns, their association with other themes, their position on vessels, and their frequency of occurrence are all subject to variation.

Large alternating circles are unique to the Sporades, while in Thessaly, circles are small, number one or two at the most, and occur as filling in the interstices of flamed patterns. Crossed lines occur everywhere, but their manifestation in the Sporades—their density and thinness, placement on shoulders, and use as a metric base for other decorations—is quite unique. In terms of arrangement, Thessalian decoration is mainly based on stepped and flamed patterns, usually developed along the diagonal axis and arranged in opposing forms, rather than simple parallel (either horizontal or vertical) translation of points or alternating patterns around a common center (such as circles, diamonds, squares, and parallel chevrons). In addition, decorations in Thessaly are not strictly linear, but executed with a sense of motion at the edge; they are called "flames" (i.e., they diverge from geometrical forms).

By contrast, in central Greece (defined by such sites as Elateia, Chaeroneia, Orchomenos, and Nea Makri) and the Peloponnese, patterns are more geometric. The arrangement of patterns is based mainly on austere, not necessarily complex, symmetry: it usually involves simple repetition or alternation of single patterns or groups, either horizontally, vertically, or around a common center (e.g., diamonds, chevrons). The themes and syntax are clearly close to those of Youra and Hagios Petros. The most typical example of this similarity is the survival of an incised version of the same combination of concentric diamonds with alternating chevrons and checkers at Nea Makri (Pantelidou-Gofa 1995, figs. 75–76) to the end of the Middle Neolithic.

Washburn (1983a, 140) argues that these elements of design structure seem to indicate homogeneous cultural composition and intensity of cultural interaction, as tested with ethnographic data. She notices limited coexistence of variations in any one area, which she interprets as limited communication between regions and the absence of a center that would function as a "market" (therefore, central place distribution), concentrating objects—and ideas—from multiple areas (Washburn 1983a, 163).

Washburn ultimately has made yet another kind of typological analysis. Interpretive perspectives of formal analysis are "illusory," as Hodder puts it (1986, 40). Is it really possible to link design form to society so directly? To what extent can we assume that subjectively defined design structures had universal social implications? Is it not arbitrary to assume that determined structures of patterns had the same meaning in all of those different cultural contexts? Such interpretations ignore that there is a symbolic meaning which mediates between structure of design and social functions (Hodder 1986, 40); it is this meaning that we should read first of all. Could this perhaps explain why structural theory, for all of its appeal, failed to prevail as a method of archaeological inquiry? Research should be protected from similar arbitrary links between symmetry and processes of social interaction, as suggested by scholars including Hodder (1982), Arnold (1983), and Lathrap (1983, 26). The view presented here, therefore, is that structure mostly indicates the individual traits of the particular people who produced these vessels. Norms point to them and not necessarily to the entire society and its activities. On the other hand, any person, including the Youra painter, can use structure creatively to make new structure and new societies.

7. Symbol and Message of Identity

The ceramic vessel of Youra is a bearer of meanings and symbols transfigured into matter ("the pot-as-person metaphor," Kalogirou 1994, 62). Space, in this case meaning the Cave of the Cyclops, is also an "object" susceptible to symbolization and interpretation. In other words, every vase is as much a signifier as a linguistic sign. The dual entity of form-meaning/symbol coincides, in fact, with the linguistic model of signifier-signified as suggested by Saussure (1916) to associate words with their significance. This model was the foundation of the discipline of semantics, which calls a sign "anything

that can be considered as the semiological substitute of another thing" (Eco 1976, 26). Eco extended the notion of signifier beyond linguistic signs (words or phonemes) to physical bearers (man-made objects) called material signs. The signified is the meaning of the bearer, its mental image (Eco 1976, 37), or even a psychological reality associated with its conception. For instance, the linguistic sign "figurine," as text and phoneme, is the signifier of an idea, the personification of a divine form, or the representation of a human being (the signified). Aside from the word "figurine," the object-figurine, with all of its material characteristics, is a signifier of the same notion.

According to Saussure (1916), only products of the human mind are material signs (i.e., intentional morphological inventions), not physical objects or incidental actions effected without mental processing by man (such as a tree, an animal, or a physical phenomenon). Unlike natural products, the cultural object is a purposeful dual entity that expresses a notion conceived by a human being and transfigured into matter through know-how. For example, in the case of the figurine, the object—whether of clay, stone, or metal, male or female, steatopygic or not—is the signifier of a notion conceived by the human mind, whether the notion of divinity or fertility, or the image of a particular person.

A physical object can also become a sign if invested with meaning by human beings. In this case, the physical object is "consecrated" by the emotional and ideological investment of an individual or community. It is transformed as a result of its particular social function and, in transcending its physical condition, enters the domain of the community's symbols and system of values. In this scenario, a simple stone of suitable form can be used as a weapon in a given moment without further processing. Fire is a sign. A vegetal, animal, or physical phenomenon can acquire symbolic dimensions in the human mind, paving the way for a mythological tradition or symbolism. The environment is admired, loved, and feared; thus, it takes a place in the emotional world and the human imagination. The primordial place of nature and its elements in mythology is a manifestation of nature's influence on ideology. In another example, an open, flat space where the community celebrates its festivities takes on a symbolic value and is vested with the ideological content of the events it hosts until it ceases to be a mundane, indifferent flat plot. The same holds true for a cave. In all of these examples, physical forms operate as substitutes for practical and/or symbolic functions, whereby people, without changing—at least not at first—the physical aspects of the object, invest it with their own meanings and transform it into a cultural object.

Each signifier is comprised of individual structural elements and characteristics of form that imitate reality in a naturalistic or abstract way or are ascribed a particular significance by arbitrary convention at some moment in history (e.g., linguistic signs). That is, a pre-existing system of structural elements is organized and combined in a novel way each time a new signifier needs to be created to assign a new signified. Just as phonetic signs have structure, so material signs obey structural organization (i.e., they arise from the combination and organization of morphological elements). For instance, such is the role of forms and ornaments in the syntax of ceramic decoration or architecture.

Thus, the ceramic vessel is a metaphorical and metonymic sign. Its meanings are messages emanating from a sender (for instance, the object's manufacturer) who consciously or unconsciously reifies his/her concepts through the vessel. The receiver can be any person who first conceives of the semantic bearer as observable image and then invests it with a conceptual dimension (interpreter). The figurine of a steatopygic woman made in clay by a Neolithic craftsperson embodies an ideological background that is readable by the community to which the craftsperson belongs and within which it assumes this signifying role. However, the same figurine may have another meaning to a different Neolithic group or to someone who lived in subsequent times (e.g., a modern looter, researcher, or visitor to a museum). The sender often is also the receiver, because he/she is the first to conceive of the morphological and notional reality of the object.

In addition, meaning can be redefined by use. Users project their own interpretations onto an object when they use it for different purposes or ascribe different roles to it. Each utilitarian choice is a point of view, a process of generating meaning, and a projection of the user's ideologies and symbolisms inscribed on the vessel through wear and tear. Wobst (1977) argues that each object increases its symbolic content as more and more sections

of society come in contact with it. The more an object is "looked at," the more messages it acquires.

Ethnographic studies have shown that artisans are not always aware of what they represent through decoration (Miller 1985). Decoration has reached them already stylized over many generations and has lost its conceptual content, maintaining only an abstract symbolization. The transmission and diffusion of a pattern from generation to generation alters its structure because the pattern may not be reproduced accurately, especially when its conceptual content is not fully understood by the people who reproduce it. The pattern is degenerated but repeated within a tradition ensuring social continuity.

In summary, to attribute a semantic dimension to any product of culture is to inscribe it in a process of communication similar to text. Each social and individual subject is reconstituted by way of communication, which ensures recognizability in a wider social context. Regardless of whether the sense intended by the sender is the same as the one construed by the receiver, the object constitutes a code in itself. Not only the symbols painted or incised on the vessel, but any element of its form (e.g., color, shape, polish), create part of this code. The Youra vessel is such a sign.

THE ORIGIN OF YOURA'S SYMBOLS

The symbolic aspect of Youra's pottery consists of various linear or curving ornaments and their structural elements, as discussed above in detail. The decorations of the Youra vessels have a geometrical character, unlike naturalistic forms that aim at a figurative representation of reality. Linear patterns are either accidental or develop from natural forms by way of abstraction, schematization, and mannerism. These forms may have acquired the status of symbols of metonymic character over the course of centuries or millennia. The process of schematization is based on a selection process, whereby people keep what they consider important and cast away the rest (Washburn 1983b, 2). The original form is not altered by this selection; on the contrary, any unnecessary characteristics are abandoned, and only those elements that are absolutely indispensable for recognition are kept. Abstract nonfigurative forms organized in patterns (e.g., crossed lines, crosses, arrows) existed already in earlier European Paleolithic art, often alongside figurative themes such as animals.

While figurative art (e.g., naturalistic representations, figurines) is an imitation and often exerts a magical power on human beings, schematic themes are not likenesses, so they move away from their physical models. Schematic themes, however, do possess a conceptual essence and trigger the faculty of the mind to retrieve memories. These signs are rooted deep in time, as attested by the history of human script (either pictogram, ideogram, syllabogram, or alphabet). Therefore, arbitrary as they may seem, each can operate as an illusionary presence that alludes to the essence or "soul" of a thing, as is the case with the drawings of children. This, not the external appearance of the thing, is what the symbolic sign tries to capture. According to Plato, this faculty of retrieval is due to the "memory" of pre-inscribed mental objects of schematic form.

These shapes, therefore, may not have had a conscious meaning for the potter. They may have survived schematically in a local tradition while their initial meaning changed or was lost to the particular potter. Some of the shapes were perhaps created by potters expressing their own thoughts or worldview. In either case, some of the shapes are likely to have originated from schematization of forms found in the natural environment. Such naturalistic themes are rarely found in pottery or any other forms of representation, such as seals (Sampson 1993a, 219, fig. 207:OΔ16). At Youra in particular, the undulating line (e.g., wavy meander) may indicate the sea or waves; vertical parallel lines with curving ends (e.g., "plant" motif) may imply trees; the canvas may suggest the wefts and warps of weaving. The wavelike lines are very common in the Hagios Petros pottery (Efstratiou 1985, 215, fig. 2:1, 6, 45, 48), both inside and outside the canvas. They are often rendered freely outside the canvas, which gives the pattern a naturalistic look that is indeed reminiscent of waves.

The potter's worldview is manifested not only in each separate ornament, but in the overall structure according to which themes are arranged into decorative proposals. Just as these patterns have a history in the Paleolithic, so they have a future through the centuries into the Bronze Age. It is not by chance that many of these patterns proved timeless and were used consistently by subsequent

populations, not only during the Neolithic (Theocharis 1967, 162), but also later.

Among the schematized patterns, it is important to highlight the maze or meander themes. These ornaments—two types of meanders on the shoulder canvas; meandering lines; concentric squares, circles, and lozenges; one fragment with a spiraling pattern (Fig. 3.6)—prevail in Youra pottery, and all encompass the same concept of labyrinth. The presence of the same decorative idea in contemporary Thessalian seals (Tsountas 1908, 340, fig. 271; Theocharis 1959a, 66, fig. 28; Theocharis 1973, 299, pl. XX; Onasoglou 1996, 163; Papathanassopoulos 1996, 334, cat. nos. 279, 281, 283) may be particularly significant as to the extent of this pattern's acceptability. It may have eluded the attention of research so far, but these patterns seem to mean something special; perhaps they are "ideograms" of certain meanings concerning ownership.

RELIGION AND CUSTOMARY LIFE

What can these symbols actually mean? It has been suggested that these symbols and the vessels that bear them have to do with some sort of religion or sacredness in the Neolithic (Gimbutas 1989b). Is this theory confirmed in the Cave of the Cyclops? As yet, the Greek Neolithic has yielded no clear evidence of an established religious consciousness and worship like those from areas such as southern Turkey, Syria, or Mesopotamia already by the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. As to the eventual association of metaphysical meanings with pottery, we may safely conclude that there are no exclusively funeral vessels in the Greek Neolithic, based on burials and jar inhumations from Thessaly (Gallis 1996a, 171), the Kouveleki Cave in Mani (Papathanassopoulos 1996, 341–343, cat. nos. 305–313), the Athenian Agora (Immerwahr 1971), the cave of Tharrounia in Euboea (Sampson 1993a, 239), and Kephala in the Cyclades (Coleman 1977). Nevertheless, several researchers believe that there was, if not an established religion, at least a metaphysical investigation into the notions of life and death or ancestors (Talalay 1993, 81; Orphanidis and Sampson 1993).

Gimbutas (1989b, 220), in particular, boldly goes so far as to reconstruct—based on the types of figurines and the places they were found at Achilleion—a religious life with specific rituals and places of worship, which she calls "shrines," in the daily household routine. She associates these rituals with painted vessels, ladles, and quadrupedal tables of clay (Gimbutas 1989b, 221), which she interprets as cult equipment. She assumes the presence of priests and priestesses and the existence of not one, but several deities, mainly female, some of whom originated in the Paleolithic. The "faces" of these deities were perpetuated in subsequent cults of the Bronze Age. In general, Gimbutas suggests that the basis of this religion was the worship of life, rebirth, and fertility, and it lacked elements of after-death worship.

Specifically, Gimbutas (1989b, 221) ascribes a symbolic and, indeed, religious content to the painted ornaments of contemporary pottery from Achilleion. She considers them part of an established Neolithic ritual for the worship of specific female deities (e.g., Bird Goddess, Serpent Goddess, Mother Goddess, Pregnant Goddess), which was celebrated in specially arranged areas of the home by ordained persons (priests). Such symbols include alternating Vs, zigzags, straight or wavelike lines, and triangles, which she attributes to the Upper Paleolithic. The V, frequently seen in painted form on handles and protuberances (at Achilleion, Sesklo, Tsangli, and Youra) or embossed on the body, is associated by Gimbutas with female symbols and the Bird Goddess in particular. She notes, furthermore, that the combination of large Vs with solid or reserved triangles, like those found on the canvas of the Youra vessels, is very common. The pattern of interlocking triangles, which occurs on the neck of vessels from the Cave of the Cyclops, and is painted in large bands on the body of Sesklo pots, is attributed by her to an ornithomorphic model (beak), again associated with the birdlike image of the main deity of Achilleion. She provides the same explanation for reverse solid triangles, which are very popular on rims during the Middle Neolithic. Incidentally, human figurines with similar bird faces were found at Hagios Petros (Efstratiou 1985, 40). Dense vertical, parallel, and wavelike lines, reminiscent of rain, as well as crossed lines are linked by Gimbutas with pan-European prehistoric symbols (1989b, 223). The wavelike lines are associated with the importance of water as the source of life. The crossed lines are not attributed to weaving models or other objects (e.g., nets), but are

considered variations of Vs and symbolic triangles. Finally, she believes that stepped decorations (which occur at Youra as well), represent horns of rams—animals of great value in the Neolithic economy. All of these are colorful assumptions, mentioned here mainly for their historic value in the literature.

Vitelli's ideas share a close affinity with those of Gimbutas, almost fanatically linking early pottery with sacral-ritual functions that eventually combined with sacred cures. Vitelli notices that some vessels were broken on purpose and do not bear evidence of use; she associates these with ritual meals. Drawing from Sheratt (1991, 57), she adds that the potters who produced these vessels perhaps were not the same persons as those who made utensils for everyday use. She is convinced that the former were distinguished members of Neolithic society with a spiritual role in the community; she calls them initiators, priests, diviners, shamans, spiritualists, or ritual healers (Vitelli 1993a, 217; 1995, 60–62). In her view, this role is partly due to the nature of pottery: when transubstantiated in fire, it looks to those not initiated in ceramic methods like a "miracle," bestowing "metaphysical powers" on the potter. The potter is an initiator who knows secrets, and this is what grants him power. The presence of such "holy" persons would guarantee cohesion in the community at the beginning of the Neolithic when social conflicts were perhaps intense. In the mature Neolithic, these secrets were no longer the attribute of only a few, because pottery was diffused to serve the daily routine of the household; those who made it and used it were no longer a small minority of initiated persons, but virtually everybody.

Researchers often assume a sacred importance for pottery almost arbitrarily, judging only from the quality of painted decoration or the unusual shape of the vessel, as with LN scoops, rhyta, or quadrupedal utensils (Coleman 1977, 11; Sampson 1993a, 91; Zachos 1996, 89). Only rarely are ceramic symbols readable and capable of guiding us to symbolic content in pottery. For example, two plastic figures (a female and an ithyphallic male) on a jar from the cave of Tharrounia, Euboea (Orphanidis and Sampson 1993, 206, figs. 202, 211 no. 27) may be associated with wishful symbolizations of fertility with greater certainty.

This hypothetical sense of religion was recently expressed through a theory on customary life in the Greek Neolithic (i.e., a tradition of social events whose perpetuation was identified with the community's continuity). These practices may not have been far removed from religion, as they were probably associated with the symbolism of (re)production and fertility. Many of these events probably incorporated a local mythology inspired by natural phenomena and elements of the environment (e.g., trees, woods, lakes, rivers, and caves) that almost reached the limits of sacredness. Prejudice, superstition, and even medical cures may well have formed an important part of customary life. The discovery for example of a LN foundation offering at Platia Magoula in Thessaly (Gallis 1996a) is strong evidence in this direction. Furthermore, recent literature has seen an increased interest in collecting evidence for communal practices in the Greek Neolithic settlements and cave deposits. Halstead (2004) summarizes the theoretical background for social gatherings and feasting and further extends the issue by arguing that commensalities were important for Neolithic society as they must have served ". . . *inter alia*, to mobilise additional agricultural labour, to negotiate and affirm social relationships at both an intra- and inter-settlement level, and to convert agricultural surpluses into symbolic capital in the context of social competition" (Halstead 2004, 157). He even argues for competitive feasting as a political strategy undertaken by farming households for promoting subsistence security (Halstead 2004, 158).

Some specialized research has been undertaken within the framework of the feasting theory in Greece. Evidence from Neolithic Makriyalos in Macedonia (south of Thessaloniki), suggests large-scale feasting in the settlement (Papa, Halstead, Kotsakis, and Urem-Kotsou 2004). At LN Ftelia on Mykonos (Sampson 2006a) the concentration of polychrome crusted tableware with food-mixing rim-perforated basins, pedestalled chafing dishes, and figurines has been assigned a similar interpretation of social gathering involving food preparation, consumption, and maybe also "ceremonial" painting of the polychrome ornaments on the pottery. Also recently, Stratouli (2007) discussed social deposition of pottery and symbolic restoration of floor surfaces by occupants of the Drakaina Cave on Kephallonia (in the Ionian Sea) to improve social cohesion and discourse. Before these assessments, Bjork (1995, 130) suggested

that ritual drinking was taking place in certain sacred areas of the Neolithic settlement.

All of these supposed practices were closely related to the symbolic meanings that food and drink carry within every society, as both constitute very characteristic cultural products. Diet and foodstuffs—from production to processing (cooking, kneading, mixing, collecting, etc.), apart from consumption and storage—take on a symbolic content and a particular social status in all ethnographic studies (Vencl 1994, 299). Any particularity or change in food and drink habits are indicative of a cultural idiosyncrasy and almost certainly reflect some social interaction (Urem-Kotsou, Kotsakis, and Stern 2002, 110).

Certain food substances and liquids carry primary symbolic value through time. For example, water, which is fundamental to survival, was at the center of such symbolism in later periods. The presence of a freshwater source was a basic criterion for human settlement already in the Paleolithic. In dry or arid zones, people collected rainwater in cisterns or pumped water from the ground. Water is both directly and indirectly indispensable for the human body, allowing human survival, but also ensuring the survival of animals and guaranteeing good crop yields. Claims over water give rise to conflict, while arrangements for its exploitation bring cooperation and lead to social hierarchy and central administration. Water, together with the earth, is a symbol of homeland (for e.g., see the Persian request of earth and water from the Macedonians in Herodotus 5.17). It is a symbol of purification and, in later periods, an object of worship.

Similar symbolic associations were created with respect to bread (note also bread decorations), salt, olive oil, wine, and cereals. Sacred drinks and recipes are reported from several periods and cultures. Ethnological and folk studies prove that, together with its food contents, the ceramic container is also symbolized, as in the case of a wine, olive oil, or cereal jar (Cullen and Keller 1990, 200–204). Pots are an integral part of food symbolism and also of the particular practices related to eating and drinking. All of these three, i.e., foodstuffs, containers, and the actions that connect them, are a united set of social values and are inseparable within any study of the functional and ideological understanding of pottery. Ornaments on the pottery are also inseparable from that meaning. Actually, many other artifacts, which are made of perishable materials such as wood or cloth, may be associated with food preparation and consumption. I am intrigued to suggest that cloth in particular was associated with Youra containers. The cloth could have been used as mouth coverings, which equally bore symbolism with the pots as expressed through similar ornamentation. I could go even further by suggesting that any physical transporter of these meaningful pots and their contents, either animal or human, also automatically shared the same meaning.

The importance of the painted symbol, container, and content (it is difficult to determine which aspect to put first, as I do not know from which one the meaning originated) increases the significance of the ceramic material and shape and, by extension, its physical maintenance. The user respects this form and tries to preserve it intact, which is impossible because every material is subject to wear and tear. To preserve a symbolic vessel (e.g., by gluing) is, in fact, an effort to preserve the symbol itself.

In summary, the function of EN–MN painted pottery in ritual and within customary Neolithic practices are strongly hypothesized by modern scholars. These hypotheses should remain in mind (along with the imaginary picture of complementary cloth artifcats) during the study of a few other aspects of Youra pottery, which follows.

"WEAVING" BACKGROUND

The interlacing of decorative patterns and their combinations, particularly on canvas vessels, suggests they were not established for pottery, but copied from somewhere else, almost certainly from woven materials and fabrics. Weaving, however, like basket, net, or rope making, is barely visible in the archaeological record, even though it acted as a catalyst in the Neolithic. Weaving is a very primitive craft and perhaps should be considered even older than the domestication of animals, with people using wool from dead animals or game, fluff rubbed off on trees, or maybe even their own hair (Barber 1991).

One must assume that woven items were omnipresent in the Neolithic home as covers, bedding, mats, partitions, and, of course, cloth. The presence of similar decorative patterns (for instance, checkers) on figurines and house simulacra in Neolithic

Thessaly (Theocharis 1973, 41–43) is perhaps a confirmation of the association of woven items with houses and people. Because of their perishable nature, knowledge about woven goods can only be gleaned indirectly from impressions on wet vessel bases, their influence on ceramic decoration, their representation in figurines, the related tools, and only rarely from raw materials. Only impressions on vessels abound in the archaeological record, however, and these derive mostly from mats, because mats were directly involved in the process of pottery manufacture and drying (Beloyanni 1993, 346–359; Tzachili 1997, 139), and far less frequently from fabrics (Carrington-Smith 1977, 114–117). Important information can be gained from clay weights and bone needles used both in weaving and net making. Also, an emphasis on raising certain breeds of goat and sheep to specific ages is indirect evidence of the exploitation of wool—alongside milk, meat, labor, and manure—which is a highly valuable by-product of domestication (Trantalidou 1996).

A huge amount of information exists about the influence of weaving on pottery, which was documented early in archaeological research. Indeed, Buschor (1912) attributed characteristics of the pottery of the Geometric period to the influence of weaving. Recently the relationship between weaving and pottery has been discussed mostly with regard to MN ceramic decoration in central and eastern Thessaly (Theocharis 1973, 67; Tzachili 1997). At the same time, great emphasis has been placed on the influence of weaving on Neolithic pottery at certain sites in Asia Minor, mainly Çatal Höyük (Mellaart 1967, 1975), which is thought to provide a typical example of the relationship between the two crafts (Burnham 1965).

In a recent review, the weaver S. Tsourinaki (2001, 34) concludes that the weave-like motifs of Youra and Hagios Petros are astonishingly reminiscent of pure images of fabric. She goes on to justify this relationship by recognizing different weaving techniques in the way painted decorations are interlaced. The Sporades vessels borrow decorations from weaving and render them according to the same structure by which fabrics are woven. That is, Tsourinaki sees a wider loan of weaving combinations, which goes beyond a single pattern and extends to the arrangement and linking of patterns. For instance, the horizontal translation of decorations is seen as a loan from weaving. By extending the argument, one might say that Youra's pottery borrows its structure and symmetry from weaving—not just its isolated decorations, but the way that the surface of the vessel is divided into sections to be filled by decorations as well. In other words, the Youra pottery borrows a mental process with all of its organizing criteria and taxonomic values, because structure is primarily a way of thinking and only secondly a technique.

This interpretation verges on the arbitrary, but other similar interpretive attempts are just as speculative. For example, Kent (1983, 135) recognizes six temporal and spatial categories of weaving in aboriginal civilizations in the southwestern United States. She identifies a preference for concentric versus juxtaposed patterns, which she interprets as an expression of their world-centric outlook. She interprets certain bold structural changes as an expression of social and economic changes. Moreover, she considers that the persistence of a type indicates resistance and survival of older ways of life in the face of dramatic change.

The structure in Youra's pottery contains the mathematical elements of thinking used in weaving. The vessel is separated into sections; on vases with canvas decoration, the shoulder and the body are divided into metric units by a fine net, which forms the metric base to arrange decorations with symmetry. Just as weavers count wefts and warps, leaving one and taking up the next, so potters count the canvas's squares, filling one with paint and leaving the next unpainted. But even in the absence of canvas, the surface is divided mentally into large sections to accommodate symmetrical circles around the body and intermediate decorations. Without such structure, the multitude of decorations covering as much as 80 percent of the surface and possibly the perishable cover would have been painted in a disorderly and inconsistent fashion, making the pot look messy. With this structure, patterns are neatly ordered into "propositions," however difficult it may be for us to interpret them.

The weaver of Hagios Petros and Youra was a measured, tidy personality with well-distributed, organizing values. There can be no weaving without mathematical structure. Design and combination of decorative details must be determined in advance in the craftsperson's mind, together with all of the necessary calculations. These calculations count wefts

and warps to achieve proper alternation of colors and patterns (Tzachili 1997, 267–270). By providing stability and rhythm to the woven fabric, the symmetrical repetition of dimensions contributes significantly to achieving a successful decoration; this repetition facilitates the memorization of numbers, which Tzachili (1997, 268) considers an important factor of success.

Rhythm, in particular, is a subconscious human faculty with healing properties (e.g., serenity, balance) that are triggered in collective activities (Schott-Billmann 1997, 51). In relation to weaving, rhythm is manifested in the synchronization of weaving movements and even sets off other simultaneous rhythmic behaviors (e.g., dancing, singing). This repetition is also found in ritual situations and corresponds to self-regeneration, endlessly renewable energy, and renaissance. The French psychologist Schott-Billmann (1997, 138) believes that when humans insist on repetition in their designs on materials, it is an expression of some strong desire of humans for life. Actually, repetition is the secret of success of the accomplished weaver, and refers to the practice of the mind in conjunction with the repeated movement of the hands. The art of the loom is indeed an art of the mind, as it presupposes that the weaver performs multiple calculations in her head and demonstrates memory and concentration in order to transform *her*—as Barber (1991) and Tzachili (1997, 276) put it—ideal designs into material images. The mental exercise and calculations required for the weaving process are so intense that they invest the art of weaving with metaphorical meanings, which denote designs organized in the mind ("to weave plots") or malice, entrapment, or machinations put together without the knowledge of others (Tzachili 1997, 276).

The relationship between weaving and pottery in the Sporades is very close and immediate on the level of structure and is not limited to the loan of a few isolated patterns. Art uses codified and organized non-verbal schemes. There can be no art without rules (Schott-Billmann 1997, 102). For instance, cubists adopted archaic systems of repetition, often drawing from series of letters and dots. We can venture to say, therefore, that the canvas group potters were copying not mere patterns but norms. They drew as if they were weaving, and they assimilated the mathematical structure of weaving as well as if they were weavers themselves.

It is not unthinkable that we have before us a population with two orientations of technical specialization—weaving and pottery. It may well be a group of women, because both crafts are associated with women rather than men by ethnological and anthropological research (see below). It is not impossible, therefore, that one craft drew from the other, as they were practiced by the same persons or by different persons who worked "side by side" within the same group. The fact that weaving was most influential may be taken as evidence that this craft was primary and practised more often than that of pottery painting. Several scholars (Theocharis 1967, 130; Tzachili 1997, 221) consider decoration with dyes a very ancient craft, exercized long before its first appearance on pottery on materials that leave no traces, such as mat, stone, wood, basket, or fabric. This type of decoration provided the prototypes later copied in vase painting. At Youra, potters did not merely copy from other materials, but "wove" with colors and brushes. On this weaving structure, they may have improvised patterns designed only for use on ceramic vases.

To summarize, we may conclude that symbols of long tradition were imprinted on weaving: they acquired structure and forms adapted to the technique of textures, which were later transferred to pottery using a weaving structure. It should not be overlooked, however, that Youra and Hagios Petros pottery includes vases with patterns other than canvas (e.g., circles, vegetal decorations), where a direct relationship between weavers and potters cannot be documented with certainty. Most likely these patterns from equally long traditions were passed down to pottery without the interference of weaving. In general, the relation between the two crafts and their artisans is obvious, not only in the pottery of Youra, but in a large portion of MN pottery in the Greek region, such as the Red-on-White ware of the Sesklo culture (Theocharis 1973, 283–290, pls. 4–11; Winn and Shimabuku 1989), the Urfirnis ware of the Peloponnese (Theocharis 1973, 291, pl. 12), as well as the Neolithic wares of Asia Minor (Mellaart 1975). Neolithic pottery was influenced to a lesser extent by crafts other than weaving, such as basketry (see the MN bowl from Lianokladi in Theocharis 1973, fig. 48); woodcarving, as suggested by some Dimini vases of the Greek Late Neolithic (see the famous brown polished incised jar with handles, exhibited at the

Volos Museum, Thessaly, which looks like a wood sculpture); or metalwork, as demonstrated by the sharply articulated and carinated black burnished vases of the late 6th-millennium B.C. Balkan Neolithic. Late Neolithic painted pottery (e.g., Black-on-White ware, matt-painted ware) stylized its symbols to such an extent that any relation to weaving is either remote or invisible. Anyway, it should be noted that pottery is not always the bearer par excellence of a society's symbols. At Çatal Höyük, for example, the highly elaborate painted decorations on houses had no equivalent in the household's pots, which were strictly monochrome (Mellaart 1967).

MESSAGE OF IDENTITY

The transfer of weaving models to the pottery of Youra–Hagios Petros conveyed a message of identity. In view of their superb quality, painted wares were prestigious articles and, via their weave-like patterns, they became prestigious articles of a particular group, exhibiting their skill, identity, and even tradition. One should not forget that weavers are familiar with the symbolization of their work, because fabrics and woven articles are objects par excellence of perceptual and symbolic significance for the individual. For instance, we dress not only to protect ourselves from the gaze of others, but to attract gaze. We are what we wear (Gilman 2002; Corrigan 2008): our aesthetics, boldness or timidity, and dynamism can be read in our clothes. They also reflect our financial situation, marital status (e.g., the outfit of the single woman, the betrothed, the bride, the widow in folk tradition), social standing, and descent. Similarly, the household's drapery bears related symbolism (for instance, the bride's trousseau). Finally, our society is reflected in our clothes.

In the context of such strong symbolization of clothing, it is not unlikely that the weavers of Hagios Petros and Youra put symbols on pottery to show who they were. Their pots functioned as a message conveying their meanings. The act of contemplating a vessel creates a relationship of communication between its author and the onlooker/reader, who becomes a receiver of messages. In the context of this communication, the author extends his/her readability and that of the author's group in the community and eventually a wider social area by means of the object or the reputation it creates; thus, the identity of the author is underlined and the author's status is enhanced. In this way, wares from the Youra–Hagios Petros culture function as remembrances of woven materials: they enhance, perpetuate, and expand their symbols and the readability of their group within the settlement's community and the wider social area in which they circulate. Of course, it is impossible to tell whether this specialization involved a common descent for the members of the group perpetuating their tradition and identity. At any rate, it is not unthinkable that "weave-like" vessels and their owners, with their distinct traits, participated in social (customary) manifestations of the community in the Cave of the Cyclops. Here, together with other groups, they offered (and broke?) their pots/symbols, perhaps together with their content.

It has been suggested that vessels carried small marks of difference to indicate a particular person, user, or artisan. Kalogirou (1994, 101), who interprets a certain slight wrinkling on the rim of LN wares from Kitrini Limni as such a mark, is influenced by Vitelli's line of argument (1993a, 216) for decorated early burnished pottery at Franchthi, where each vessel was thought to bear different ornaments to intentionally indicate a different person. Perhaps also at Youra, thematic variations of decoration do not merely suggest a specific social group (the weavers), but distinctive persons through personalized vessels. The question arises whether it is possible to identify the hands of particular authors in Youra's material. The criteria for such reading should include the choice of decoration on each vessel; the metric parameters of each ornament, accounting for all differences and similarities; and the "motion" of decoration as an indication of each painter's craftsmanship—in other words, the painter's "signature."

We only may safely identify indications of differentiation in the canvas group, which definitely suggest more than one, and perhaps as many as four, painters for these wares. We do not know what relationships these painters entertained with the painters of the other vessels. The absence of canvas on the other pots may suggest that they came from different hands; however, one cannot be sure. The difference in style between the two groups, which manifests mainly in the profusion of decoration in the canvas wares in contrast to the

stark ornaments and small surface coverage in the rest, is perhaps the main argument pointing to different hands or groups of painters. There are patterns common to both groups (e.g., solid triangles on the neck, concentric circles, straight or curving parallel lines, diamonds), but this in itself is not sufficient proof to establish provenance from the same painters. Likewise, similarities or differences among vessels without canvas is not of safe hermeneutical value.

The power of patterns as symbols and messages is supported by their presence, with a fair degree of symmetry and centrality, on contemporary seals (Theocharis 1973, 299, pl. XX; Onasoglou 1996, 163). Obviously, the role of seals is obscure to us. Unlike seals and sealings from the Bronze Age, where we may speak quite safely of ownership titles, Neolithic sealings are too rare for seals to be considered marks of ownership with any degree of certainty (Onasoglou 1996, 164). Their use to imprint ornaments on the bodies of pots is only speculation. Nevertheless, Theocharis (1967, 149) considers them to be markers of ownership directly inspired by weaving.

Ultimately, the only thing that may be said with some degree of certainty is that these patterns, whatever their meaning, enunciate fixed communication codes on all sorts of materials and objects, including non-extant items like fabrics, and possibly even human bodies.

8. A Product of Society

What kind of society is reflected in Youra's pottery? Can we detect, behind the individual, any social interaction with other individuals or groups? Do productive and social forces coincide so that every differentiation in production is reflected in social structure? According to Marxist theory, social actors clash because they are unequal. The causes of conflict are not explained but taken for granted, and they stand at the basis of any cultural activity, such as typology, ritual, and art. Specificities among groups are interpreted as the need for differentiation in the context of competition. Processual archaeologists view such conflict and inequality as deterministic (i.e., passively borne by the individual), because their causes are rooted in rules that are embedded in the subconsciousness, inescapable to all societies, and automatically at work (Bourdieu 1977). Are there inequalities and social antagonisms in the society of Youra, and to what extent is their pottery the product of these forces?

Hypotheses on the existence of social inequalities in the Greek Neolithic were initially formulated on the basis of vague assumptions, mainly with regard to the villages of Sesklo and Dimini. Unfortunately, the scarce offerings and simplicity of Neolithic graves offer little help in imagining Neolithic society. Theocharis, with Sesklo in mind, derives oppositions from the settlement's size (Theocharis 1973, 68). Kotsakis (1983, 209) extends this argument, writing that hierarchical societies, in general, are characterized by larger populations and denser habitation compared with non-hierarchical societies. The densely populated settlements of Asia Minor, Syro-Palestine, and the Middle East bear signs of social differentiation already in the Natufian culture and the Pre-Pottery Neolithic as attested in architectural variability, powerful symbolic features, and mortuary practices (Kuijt 2000).

Vitelli (1993a) also subscribes to the theory of social inequality and attributes it to increased friction in the beginning of the 6th millennium B.C., due to the transitional nature of this period, with some groups making solid progress and others lagging behind. She argues that potters were vectors of inequality, as initiators of rare and new knowledge, and eventually bearers of additional highly valued properties (acting as healers or priests). In her view, however, this inequality was dampened by compensatory factors, such as participation of everyone in rituals and practices for the common good. She considers Middle Neolithic society to be a counterbalancing field of opposing trends and views pottery as an aspect of social dialogue between the individual and the social context, a view expressing the post-processual approach. Innovations imply intensification of friction, while retreat into conservative norms implies a corresponding ease of tension. The notion that Middle Neolithic society protected equality is also put forth by Björk (1995, 124, 126), who believes that

part of all property (e.g., cooked meals) was distributed equally to all.

According to Vitelli, during the Late Neolithic, the former "secret" of pottery spread widely, which caused chain reactions in social structure. The ceramic pot was no longer rare, and its maker no longer occupied a prominent social position, which was eventually taken up by the metal worker. The secret of pottery became common knowledge, and the object lost the magical power assigned to it by the collective investment of the early period. Social antagonism became more fierce, raging among individuals and leading to hierarchies that were not as easily eroded as those of the past due to self-interest. Parenthetically, one should also consider the evidence provided by the recent surprising find of the latest Neolithic settlement at Strofilas on the island of Andros in the Cyclades (Televantou 2008), where the acropolis is protected by a developed system of fortification walls: more fortified settlements of the same period have been recovered in Attica (Steinhauer 2001). In particular, the Strofilas rock art engravings depict fierce navigators traveling on ships. Maybe they were invaders or pirates; otherwise, why should such complex fortifications be necessary?

Recent research on pottery from Sesklo confirms the older hypotheses about social inequality. This research is based on the quantitative distribution of pottery (i.e., the uneven spatial distribution of painted and unpainted pottery), as well as on "luxury" and prestige items (jewelry, metal objects, figurines). At Sesklo, this disparity has been interpreted as an indication, if not proof, of a fixed social hierarchy able to control not only wealth, but know-how, which was not equally distributed (Maniatis, Perdikatsis, and Kotsakis 1988; Kotsakis 1996a, 52–57; 1996b, 169; 1996c; Souvatzi 2008). In particular, according to Kotsakis the uneven distribution of painted pottery suggests a variance of access to raw materials but also special categories of wares whose function is not merely utilitarian, but associated with the fundamental economic and ideological magnitudes of Neolithic life (Kotsakis 1996a, 52). He states that the indications seem to suggest that this variance reflects deeper structural aspects in the organization of the settlement and does not represent simple distinctions of function between buildings (Kotsakis 1996a, 52). Kotsakis concludes that the asymmetry observed in space may reflect a kind of social asymmetry (Kotsakis 1996a, 54). Unfortunately, the dispersal of pottery in the settlement of Hagios Petros does not show variance of distribution between buildings to justify a similar conclusion.

The survey of uneven distribution, albeit contributing to a better understanding of Neolithic society, fails to answer another question: do different social groups have different pottery, either utilitarian or symbolic? In other words, does pottery vary between socially differentiated groups? A recent study on the red monochrome pottery of the later Middle Neolithic at Sesklo confirms the above conclusions by combining the quantitative approach with the qualitative criterion of ceramic material (Pentedeka and Kotsakis 2008). It has been observed that two different clay mixtures, which externally look alike, were used for particular forms in this pottery group, one in the acropolis and one in the town beneath. The researchers explain the intentional separation of clays as an effort to imply difference or even social antagonism between certain groups in the two areas. It is difficult, however, to envision how the distinct clay mixtures and the resulting social differentiation were distinguished in practice: vessels look the same externally, and the difference between them is only visible in the core, if they break.

Ethnoarchaeological researchers, who are able to study and compare pottery from every layer of a living social hierarchy, are divided over pottery as a field of expression of social competition. Earlier on, this concept was taken for granted and, as in structural theory, social models were matched with types of decoration. In an attempt to interpret the pottery of the Coahuila culture, for example, Taylor (1948) draws conclusions about society based on the decoration of extant fabrics from ancient sites and weaving techniques. More recently, this relationship has been questioned: Stanislawski (1978) believes that variance in pottery does not reflect the existence of two different groups, and similarities are quite possible between two different linguistic and social groups. After his ethnoarchaeological research in Africa, Hodder (1986, 109) also argued that relations of social hierarchy are not reflected in pottery.

Yet, contemporary research does not reject the relationship between pottery and social differentiation, and Hodder (1982) has come to take this view as well. Neolithic material culture may reflect either

the dominant ideology of the majority or the subversive ideology of a minority. It constitutes a field of social dialogue where more powerful social groups eventually find a way to impose their views and ultimately extinguish the possibility of this dialogue. In other words, we may argue that the statement made by pottery also reflects context. The opposite may be argued just as easily (i.e., the potter produces something that is incompatible with established aesthetics, ways of thinking, or even symbols, taking exception with the surroundings and using the product as a "voice" of protest or condemnation). The existence of common unifying rules accepted by all members of the group is by no means self-evident. Besides, any effects exerted by the social, economic, or symbolic system are filtered through the personal choices of the male or female potter. Incidentally, these choices depend on permanent traits like character and personality, as well as volatile or short-lived parameters like the mood of the moment, which may be hard to identify yet play a key role, especially in works of art. Pottery—whether or not a field of conflicting characteristics—also represents an area of unity and is probably modified only by deep and possibly slow changes in tradition and existing social relations. This is not just a matter of the potters' unwillingness to risk time, labor, materials, and user confidence. Pottery confirms the continuity of any group and, in this role, also constitutes a symbol of unity and collective identity. Thus, changes in pottery usually are met with great resistance from the potters' conservatism, in whose context ceramic products are stylized and fixed.

What sort of society underlies the form of Youra's pottery? There is not enough evidence at the moment to argue that it is the product of social antagonism. The type of vessels found at Youra are not isolated articles, but occur at two sites, in the Cave of the Cyclops and the settlement of Hagios Petros. Could this mean that they were totally accepted within their social context and were not the product of social competition? Furthermore, despite their unquestionable particularities, these vessels rely on a background of accepted general standards, such as the aesthetics of Red-on-White ware, linearity of decoration, fixed outline of form, manufacturing specifications for clay, and technical processing. Could these specific wares, however peculiar, have been understood and accepted by the community both in strict geographical terms and in the wider social context of the Neolithic Aegean? Although at this time it remains difficult to acknowledge conflict and fierce competition in a Middle Neolithic society, the question remains open.

9. A Product of Men or Women?

Who is behind Youra's pottery, men or women? And what might the interaction of the sexes in the Neolithic society of the Sporades have been? The relationship between the sexes in Neolithic society and the production process has attracted more attention from feminist archaeology in the last decade. Feminist archaeology (Arnold 1985, 101) tries to examine historical data free from modern social prejudice against women, which is based on the biological weakness of women versus men and the negative assessment of the female reproductive capacity. By transcending the male-oriented version of the archaeological past, one may look for a variety of roles for men and women in prehistoric society where distinctions were rather unlikely and actions were probably taken according to necessity (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2001, 44).

Perhaps it should be assumed that the division of social roles between the sexes emerged gradually, only once the basic problems of survival had been overcome. Based on ethnographic parallels we believe that the participation of women in Neolithic society was associated more with the home and nearby activities, similar to adolescents and the elderly. Far-off dislocation that demanded long absences (e.g., hunting, trade, or war) must have been more closely associated with men and younger members of the community. Pregnancy, parturition, and motherhood would limit women to a restricted range of action as compared with men. This range of action, instead of adversely affecting the position of women in Neolithic society and economy in favor of men, would give women a leading role. The woman was responsible for taking

care of and maintaining the home and the domestic animals and, as a result, for managing the surplus from farming and stock raising.

According to Vitelli (1993a, xx), the Neolithic woman operated as a worker who improvised her tools (i.e., she looked for raw materials to fabricate the objects necessary for her work). In this light, it is probably the woman who was responsible for the collection (Wright 1995) and processing of plastic and non-plastic raw materials, and she fashioned pots of sizes and forms that suited her.

In the majority of traditional ceramic centers, pottery is a female activity (Arnold 1985, 101–108). The relationship of pottery to woman helps explain the rapid diffusion of ceramic know-how through intertribal marriages (Björk 1995, 134). Naturally, when pottery first appeared in the Neolithic Aegean, it was not as a tool. As we have seen already, most scholars now agree that the first wares were not intended for cooking or storage, but ultimately for ritual purposes. The role of women is even more obscure at this stage, although the same scholars would have her play a leading part in these early rituals.

It has not been possible to identify typically female symbols/decorations in Neolithic pottery, although they must exist, considering other cultural products (e.g., clothing) where such differentiation is better marked, at least in ethnological terms. On the other hand, finds such as female figurines provide only inconclusive information on the position of women in Neolithic society. The majority of female figurines, many of which are interpreted as celebrating motherhood and the sacred role of fertility, do not prove that society was matriarchal, especially considering that male fertility is equally celebrated in the art of figurines (e.g., phallic sculptures).

To summarize, researchers seem increasingly inclined to attribute high social status to Neolithic women because of their leading role in the reproduction of the group's manpower and the preservation of its wealth. At this stage, women made the group larger and stronger and stood for its cohesion. This perhaps represented the culmination of her power. She subsequently lost power as subsistence strategies left the domestic sphere and grew too far afield for women to maintain (Ehrenberg 1989). Men gradually must have taken over farming, and male children became more desirable as extra hands were needed to work the land. At that point, pottery was no longer intended only for use in the home, but also for commercialization, and society became more dependent on male potters who were not tied to the domestic sphere. It is evidenced in the entire Mediterranean that during the Bronze Age, aspects of ceramic production (especially of jars) became the trade of itinerant craftspersons (Bloedow 1997), who, we believe, were men.

Youra's pottery, like any prehistoric ware, does not yield direct proof of the extent of female participation in ceramic production or the position of women in the community at large. The model described above, which is a product of applying modern ethnological and anthropological observations to prehistory, is largely accepted for the Greek region (Vitelli 1993a, 217; Tzachili 1997, 271). At Youra–Hagios Petros—as with any prehistoric ware that is highly influenced by weaving—the assumption of considerable female involvement in pottery is further corroborated by the relationship of the decoration to weaving.

Weaving is a female activity according to ethnological, ancient literary, and iconographic sources. Every time the term "weave" is mentioned by Homer, the subject is a woman, as opposed to the metaphorical use of the phrase "to weave plots," which is always related to men (Tzachili 1997, 271). The relationship of women to weaving is also a product of their close association with the home and with nature, where they seek, collect, test, and sort various raw materials including vegetal fibers and animal fibers from domestic animals (Barber 1997; Kopaka 1997; Nordquist 1997). The woman cards, spins, dyes, and weaves, but also sews, knits, embroiders, lays, washes, changes, and maintains fabrics. There is, however, one ethnological example—a Zairean tribe—where weaving is practiced by men, not women, at the center of the village. In this tribe women only embroider (Adams 1983).

Based on the above discussion, it therefore may be assumed that pottery and weaving are closely related to women. As each craft was practiced in the MN Sporades within the same population, if not by the same individuals, it is most likely that the craftspersons were women, and the combination of weaving and pottery production represents a double female tradition. This does not mean that the symbolic use of vessels in the Cave of the Cyclops was also carried out by women.

10. What Is the Role of the Painted Symbols/Messages in the Cave of the Cyclops?

Decorated painted vessels, of great symbolic value, and figurines have come to light in other caves during roughly the same period as the Cave of the Cyclops, for example at Theopetra, Sarakenos in Boeotia, and Franchthi (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2000a; Sampson 2006b; Talalay 1993; Vitelli 1993a). Similar forms and patterns in this decorated pottery are found at contemporary settlements, such as Hagios Petros and at Thessalian sites, though they differ with regard to quantitative details. In addition, painted pottery of great variety and refinement was found in all of the caves also used during the Late Neolithic, for instance from the caves at Tharrounia in Euboea (Sampson 1993a), Sarakenos in Boeotia (Sampson 2006b), Theopetra in Kalambaka (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2000a), the Corycian Cave on Mount Parnassos (Touchais 1981a), the Euripides Cave in Salamis (Mari 2001), the Franchthi Cave (Vitelli 1999), the Kouveleikes (Koumouzeli 1988) and Alepotrypa (Papathanassopoulos 1996) caves in Mani, and the Drakaina Cave on Kephallonia (Stratouli 2007), to mention just a few.

Apart from their practical functions for storage, human accommodation, and animal confinement, caves also have strong symbolic potential. Their dark interior and striking decoration, and the awe inspired by the sense of the unknown and the unexplored, invest them with symbolic significance for the community, excite the imagination, and inspire "mythologies." In addition, because of their vital importance to the community as a means to protect and maintain resources (e.g., animals, food, water), particularly during the Late Neolithic, they help define a population. As ancestral land, they serve as burial grounds for new members and represent continuity. In an attempt to interpret the use of the Euripides Cave during the Late Neolithic, Mari (2001, 183) concludes that the practical activities evidenced in the cave may have had symbolic attributes, and the various items recovered may have been equally meaningful. Similar magical/religious significance may also be evident in the Middle Neolithic. For example, the study of MN Franchthi (Vitelli 1993a, 215) draws the same conclusions, namely that painted vessels probably had limited practical scope and were connected with some special function inside the cave. At Youra, the cave is large and deep, it has plenty of water and rich decoration, and it is situated at a strategic location. The MN pottery is mostly painted; unpainted or monochrome vessels are rather limited. Food remnants and tools are equally limited, which may be seen as an indication of the cave's non-utilitarian use.

The location where the vessels were discovered in the Cave of the Cyclops is fraught with symbolic indications that are unavailable from the distribution of comparable painted material in the settlement of Hagios Petros. In particular, painted pottery was identified in an inner isolated recess with no natural light, clearly demarcated by stalagmites at a fair distance from the floor. It is the cave's most humid area, where a small collection of water probably existed on the same spot during the Middle Neolithic. Another factor implies a preselected location for the wares: the overwhelming majority of pottery fragments come from the upper part of vessels; 367 upper-body sherds were identified compared to 82 lower-body sherds and only one base (Table 3.3). Does this represent the ritual breakage or killing of vessels?

According to this scenario, these vessels were not meant to remain empty, in the same way that the Neolithic painted decorated vessel was not made solely as a work of art. These vessels must have had some functional value: the goods that they held (possibly fruits or other foodstuffs) bore as much symbolic content as the decoration painted on their surface. I have analyzed above how much diet, cooking, and food, aside from representing survival, possess strong symbolism deeply rooted in tradition and identity and how meaningful become all artifacts associated with a certain food context.

Subsequently, reconstruction of the activity involving the painted ceramics of the Cave of the Cyclops on the island of Youra is possible. The contents of Youra's pottery may have been prepared elsewhere, inside the same or a different pot, and transported to the cave. This brings up the question of origin. Where did the vessels begin their journey: from another settlement on Youra, another island,

the village of Hagios Petros on its neighboring island? It is probable that the broad-mouthed, deep vessels were covered by equally decorated covers made of fabric. The pots and their contents were laid in artificial illumination (because the area of deposition lacks natural light), suggesting a practical preparation of the spot. In this illumination, the red patterns would have come alive with brightness. The polish of the surface, perfectly preserved to this date, would have shone vividly and produced strong reflections. In addition, assuming that the vessels got wet in this humid environment, the water would have intensified the colors and deepened the contrast between the decorations and the light background, adding motion and life to the symbolic themes.

How often were these events repeated during the generally short period of this pottery? Was it one or more times per year? How many vessels were deposited on each occasion? Were they broken on the spot and their contents scattered? Did people really deposit only selected fragments, or is this a misconception? Was abundance of water the purpose of this ritual? Were these activities addressed to a specific deified idea? Why are Hagios Petros's figurines completely absent from the cave? Could it be that their expedient structure, produced at low temperatures (Efstratiou 1985, 43), did not survive in the muddy conditions of this specific location? Unfortunately, these questions have no answers.

Each ritual could not have lasted long, because the configuration of the area is inconvenient: no more than three to four participants could have attended, at least in the inner recess. The area is narrow, and the entrance allows only one person at a time, perhaps not even in a standing position. Nevertheless, it is likely that Youra's vessels were associated with sacred moments inside the cave that were collective rather than individual. Which group lies behind them? Perhaps it was the weavers, the group identified with the ware's symbols, which allude to their weaving identity. It is not unthinkable that this group represented, directly or indirectly, the entire population of the area, which might have specialized in this activity. At any rate, these events seem to have a collective character organized around a ceremonial repetition.

Recent evidence from the Drakaina Cave in Kephallonia (western Greece) has raised similar questions of intentional breakage and selective deposition of pottery within a particular context of social gatherings.

In summary, our image of religious and ritual life during the Neolithic is still unclear despite occasional hypotheses and the fact that Neolithic research is almost a century old. Even so, caves provide significant indications of their function as areas of social ceremonies in the Late Neolithic, more than in the Early/Middle Neolithic. The variety of decorated vessels in most Late Neolithic caves, the figurines, and the sporadic symbolic finds, such as the familiar jar with the male-female embossed figures from the cave in Tharrounia, Euboea (Orphanidis and Sampson 1993, 206), may have played specific roles in a series of symbolic actions. At least some caves should be redefined for the Neolithic as loci of organized social gatherings and feastings that were possibly connected with the seasonal symbolism of food production, in addition to other functions that they may have served. Such events would improve cohesion within the society and would reinforce and solidify tradition within the younger and older members of the group.

11. A Historical Object

Like all cultural objects, the Youra vessel is a historical object: it was produced in the course of specific historical processes that would never be repeated. In this sense, it is unique, because it is impossible to have exactly the same factors produce exactly the same thing again. Time, materials, culture, and the mood of the moment have changed. This position has not always been self-evident. For most of the 20th century, prehistoric civilizations were held hostage to determinism (i.e., the theory that human behavior is predictable regardless of time and space). Local peculiarities had no relevance under the force of general laws; the perennial annihilated the role of the individual in any given local, temporal, or cultural context. It was a universalizing approach that placed alterity in a secondary position and ultimately denied it. By the 1970s and more consistently during the 1980s, the theory

of the unity of human behavior began to collapse as researchers argued in favor of the unpredictable nature of human behavior and the idiosyncracy of time and place in pre-industrial societies.

Nowadays, we tend to consider that universal laws are not necessary to study the process of change in any civilization, and priority instead should be given to the association of each item with contemporary finds. Each cultural object is a product that resulted from a specific context, and this makes it a historical object because the context will never be the same again. The object can never be constructed in an identical way in terms of form or meaning because it is subject to the progression of time, thoughts, personal moods, inspiration, technological improvement, and change of materials. In other words, in different contexts, the same object has different meanings. These contexts are not a series of facts external to human beings, but actions and thoughts of specific persons. Thus, the notions of choice, will, and conscious or subconscious intervention by individuals in shaping their own lives, which had been underestimated or altogether ignored, are now entering the field of theory. People reflect, take action, are chosen, choose, assign roles, interpret, and categorize the visible world. Each object is in itself a category, a convention, and an interpretation: it assumes a role and is placed into a personal value system. Moreover, the object in question can assume this role only inside the particular ideological context that produced it. The notion of context challenges the hermeneutical ability of ethnoarchaeology, which draws examples from modern traditional societies to interpret societies of the past, considering them as intercultural phenomena regardless of time and place.

Conclusion: The Youra Vessel as a Unity

The Youra vessel, like any Neolithic earthenware, is a complex mix of forms and meanings that meets several needs, both functional and symbolic, some of which prevail and others of which recede. The total impact of these factors is cumulative, as multiple influences coalesce in the object and jointly define its role. It is impossible to define the relationship between function and symbolism without underestimating one or the other. Various theories have tried to explain the difference of symbolic gravity versus functionality by assigning priority or exclusivity to one or the other through the categorization of pottery. Binford (1962, 1965) introduced such classifications, dividing vessels into technofacts when they constitute tools, ideofacts when they are carriers of ideology, and sociofacts when they indicate social hierarchy. A functionalist approach that found favor in archaeological interpretation consists of separating pottery into utilitarian/household and non-utilitarian wares, an equally simplistic and dualistic idea. A sociological approach distinguishes between elitist and utilitarian pottery. Björk (1995) divides Achilleion's wares into two groups, heavy and light, depending on the stress accumulating in the clay through use. The former were used only for cooking, the latter for storage, serving, and display. Björk (1995) associates these categories with levels of symbolism, concluding that light pottery is more differentiated as compared to heavy pottery. Increasingly, however, researchers agree that "luxury" Neolithic ware should not be underestimated from the viewpoint of utility. Besides, Neolithic society does not seem to have reached such complexity of religious and funeral practices to produce different pottery for utilitarian, funeral, and religious uses, as occured from the Bronze Age onward. Each form, either general or individual, incorporates not one but several messages at the same time. Roles in Neolithic pottery overlap to such an extent that the network of conceptual forms and symbolism cannot be broken down. These meanings are interdependent and inextricably "bound" together. They are often subconscious, because identity is shaped not only by knowledge acquired and controlled consciously, but by experience transmitted by tradition or formed in the minds and hearts of people.

No doubt the functionality of any pottery form depends on the extent and kind of symbols it carries. Intensity and frequency of use are reduced as symbolic content (hence, investment of time and labor) increases. The awe surrounding symbols certainly inhibits a vessel's intensive daily use. Its tradeable

value is different: its place in the value system of the community is parallel to the meanings it carries. Because it is undetermined where one category ends and another begins, one should refrain from placing pottery into categories such as utilitarian, non-utilitarian, household, and symbolic among others, which are arbitrarily divisive. By separating these characteristics, we also separate the personality of the maker behind the pot, which can only be unitary.

Thus, while preserving the unity of meaning in every vessel from Youra, its characteristics can be summarized. It is a historical object; the typical product of a particular cultural group. It is defined precisely in space by two sites in the central Aegean, the settlement of Hagios Petros on the island of Kyra-Panagia and the Cave of the Cyclops on the island of Youra, both in the Northern Sporades. Also, it is defined precisely in time as the early Middle Neolithic (approximately 5800 B.C.). As a cultural object, it incorporates cultural influences from contemporary groups of the Greek Neolithic, with emphasis on central Greece.

The Youra vessel has an excellent technological structure fabricated by skilled potters and painters. It is an item with utilitarian potential for food processing. It is a symbolic item embodying symbols of an age-old tradition. It constitutes an element of identity bearing the marks of another specialized activity, weaving. It may represent a restricted group; as such, it may be a message, because it makes the group visible and recognizable to any external observer in the community, the wider social context, or through time. At the same time, however, its role is not static: as a symbolic object, it travels in the geographical catchment area of the community and participates in collective symbolic practices in the Cave of the Cyclops, where it may be ritually deposited. It is the result of specialized and systematic occupation and, as such, the product of a thriving economy able to sustain and reward specialized groups. It represents an investment in time, labor, material, and skill, and is a token of wealth and status for its owner. It may even be the product of embryonic social inequality or differentiation. Finally, it is a work of female inspiration and execution. The Youra vessel is a work of consistent and symmetrical technique, structured by craftspeople who measured and calculated their movements with precision and care for detail, but who were practical enough to avoid waste of time and labor. And, of course, it is a work of art.

FIGURE 3.1

Figure 3.1. Middle Neolithic population in the Cave of the Cyclops as inferred from the excavation of trenches (dark shading) and possible spread of habitation (light shading).

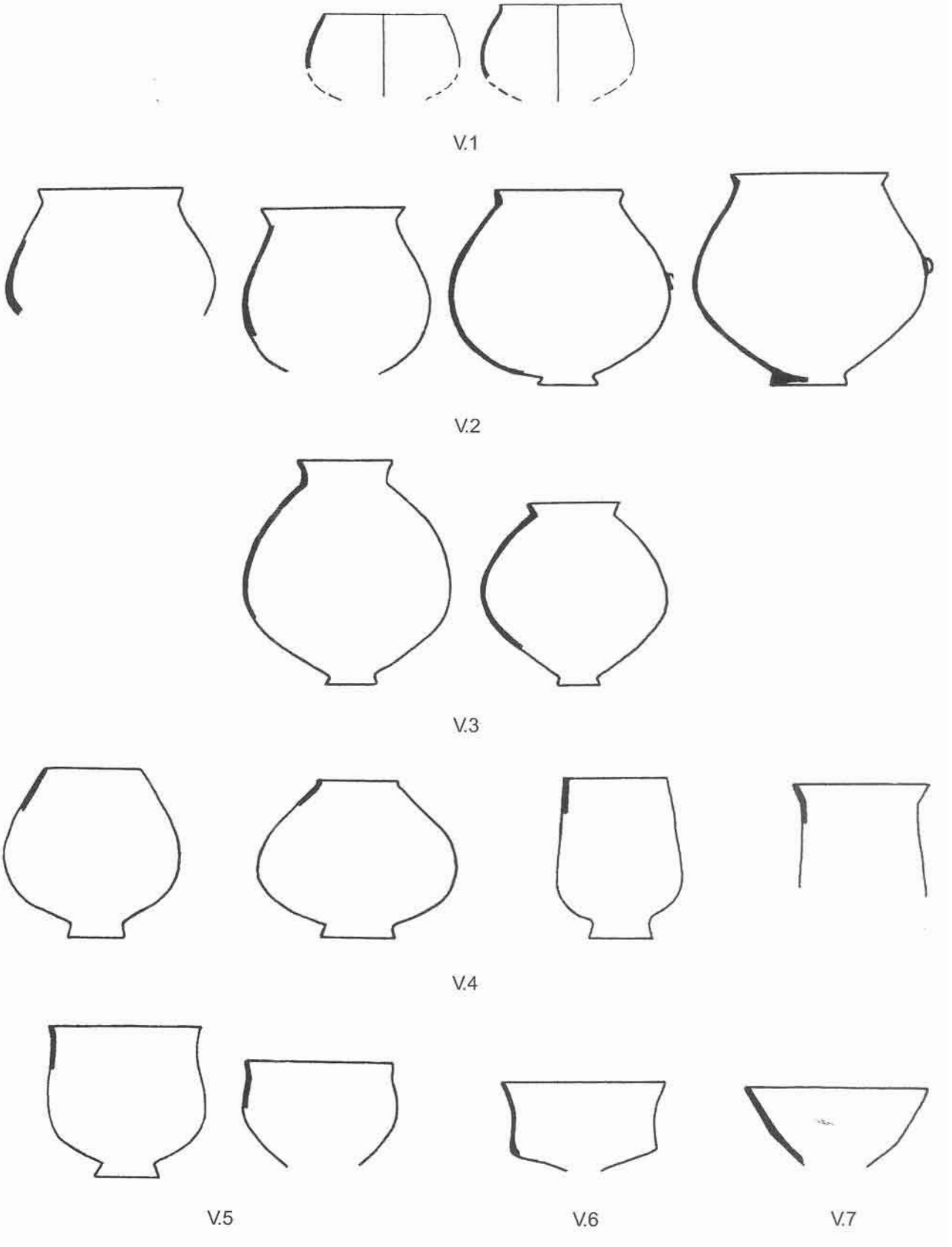


Figure 3.2. Red-on-White ware shape repertory.

FIGURE 3.3

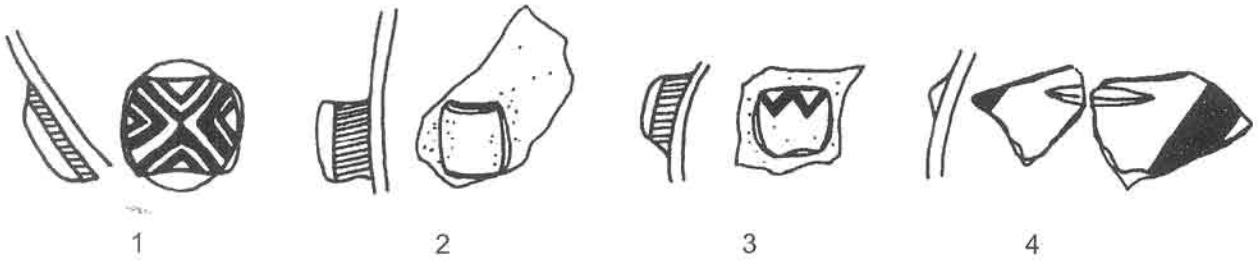


Figure 3.3A. Red-on-White ware lug types 1: **731**; 2: **749**; 3: **750**; 4: **751**. Not to scale.

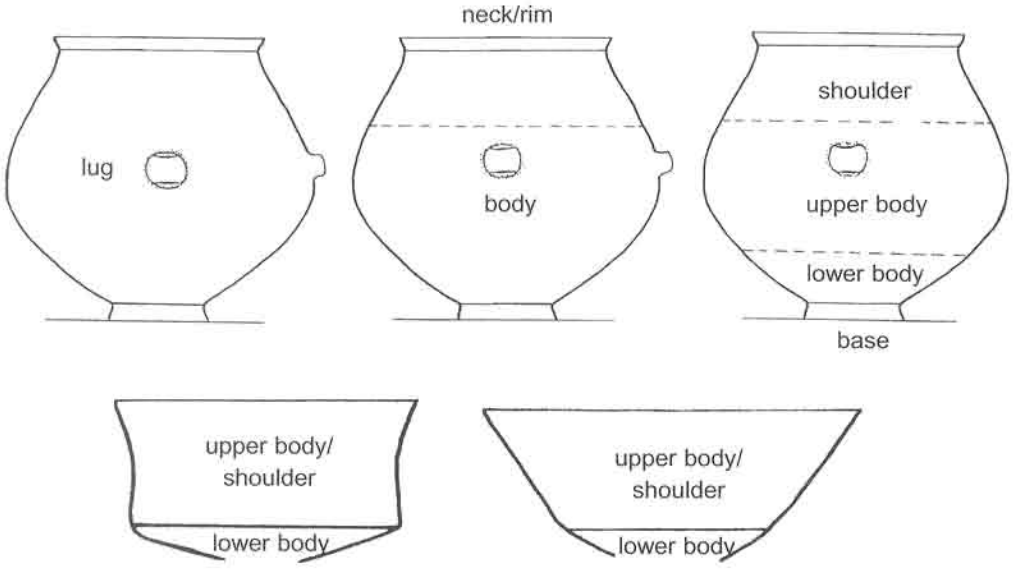


Figure 3.3B. Red-on-White vases separated into decoration bands.

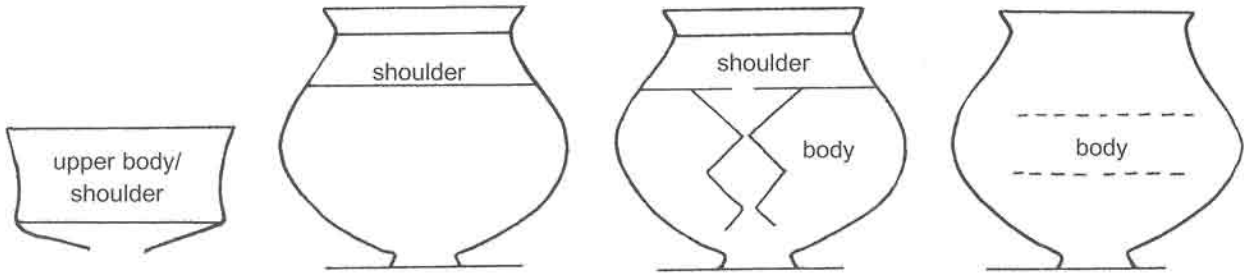


Figure 3.3C. Positions of canvas motifs on Youra vases.

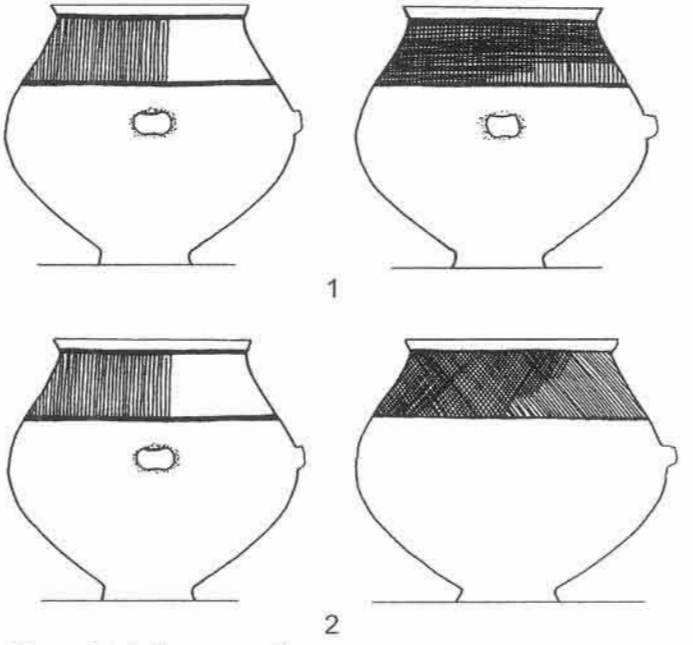


Figure 3.4A. Structure of canvas types.

Figure 3.4B. Types of checkers.

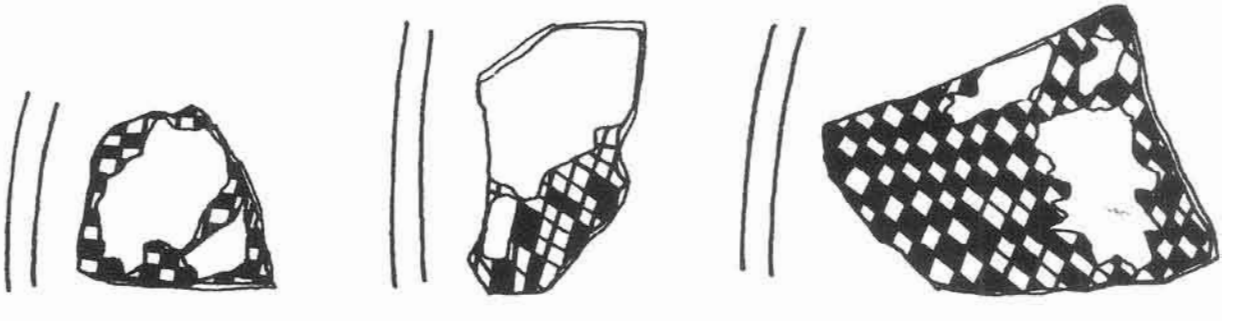


Figure 3.4C. Body fragments with canvas. Not to scale.

FIGURE 3.5

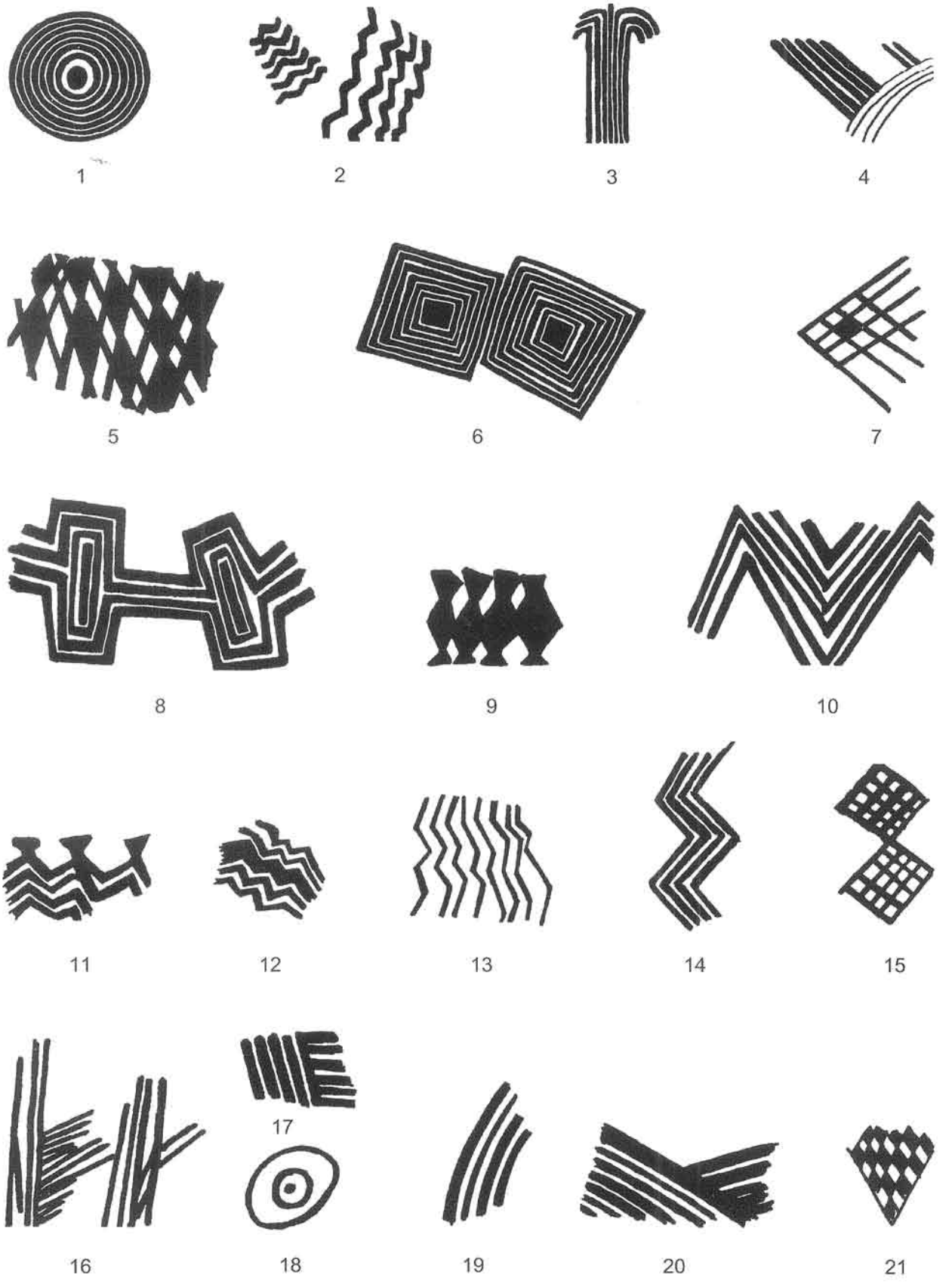


Figure 3.5. Types of other body motifs. Not to scale.

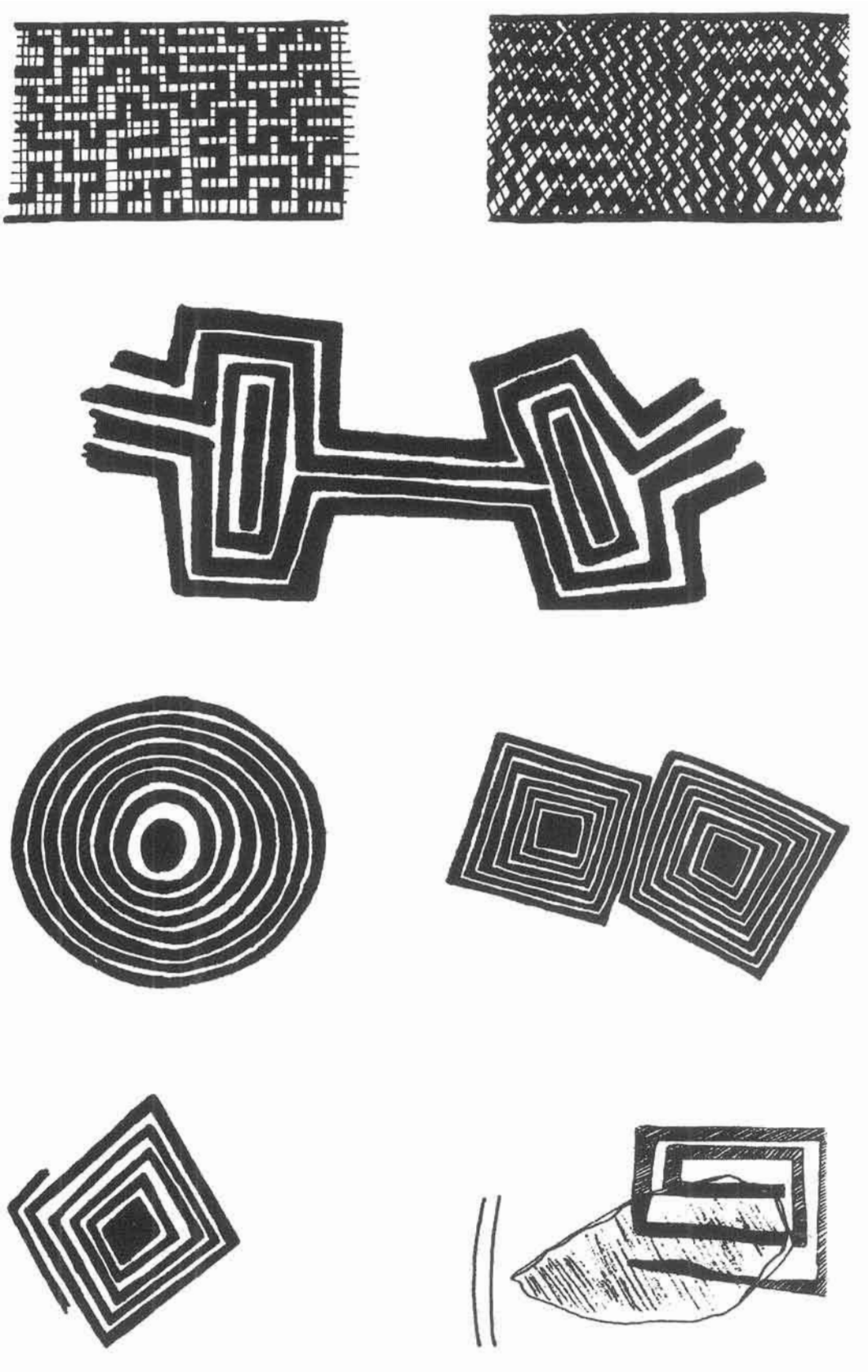
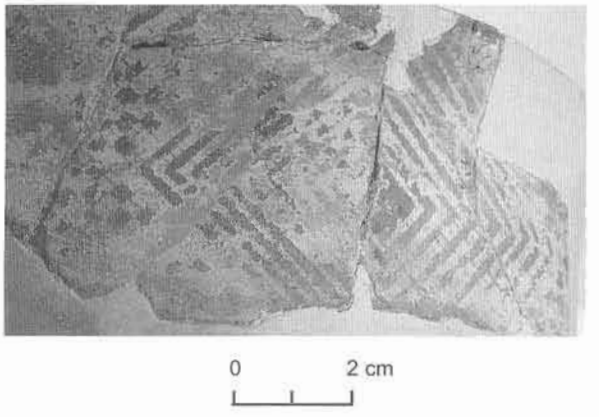


Figure 3.6. Collection of maze, meander, spiral, and concentric patterns from Youra. Not to scale.



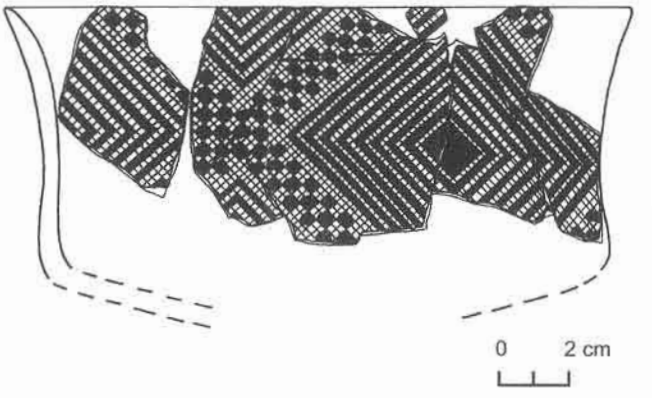


Plate 3.1A. Open bowl (**747**) with canvas band, detail and reconstruction of design.

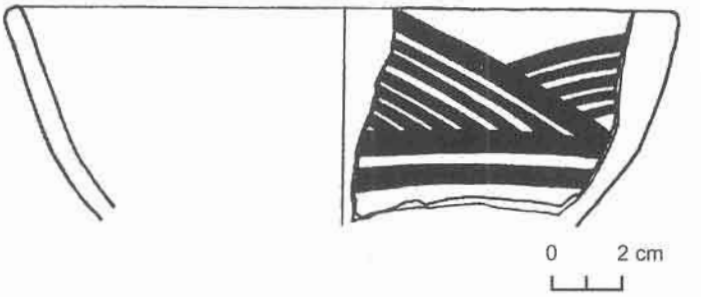
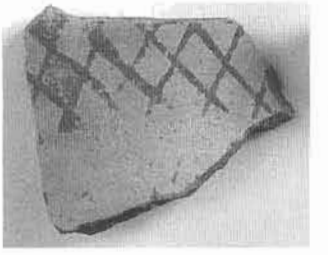


Plate 3.1B. Calyx-shaped bowl (**748**) with parallel lines, detail and reconstruction of design.

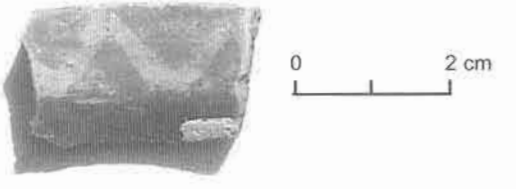
1



2

3

4



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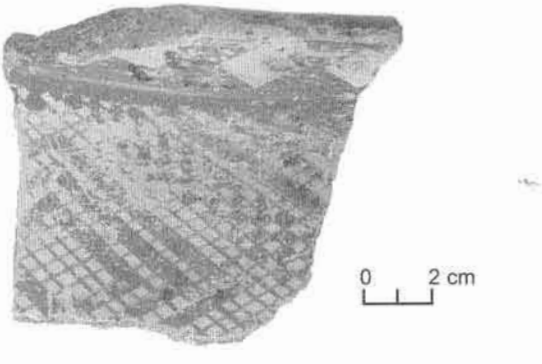
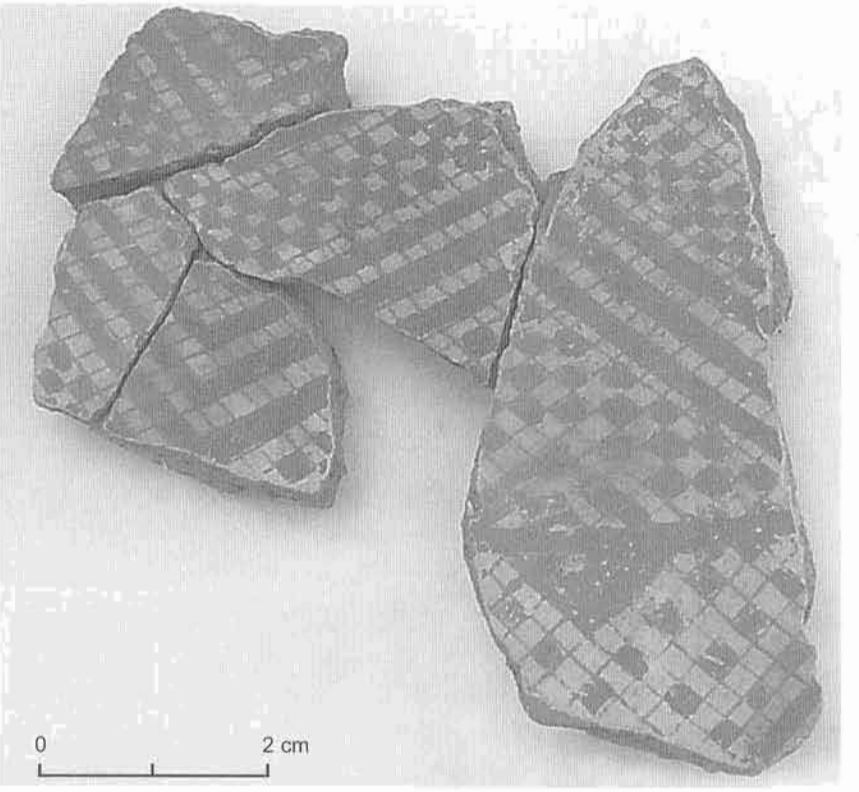


Plate 3.2. Neck/rim motifs. 1: **744**; 2: **752**; 3: **741**; 4: **732**; 5: **733**; 6: **740**.



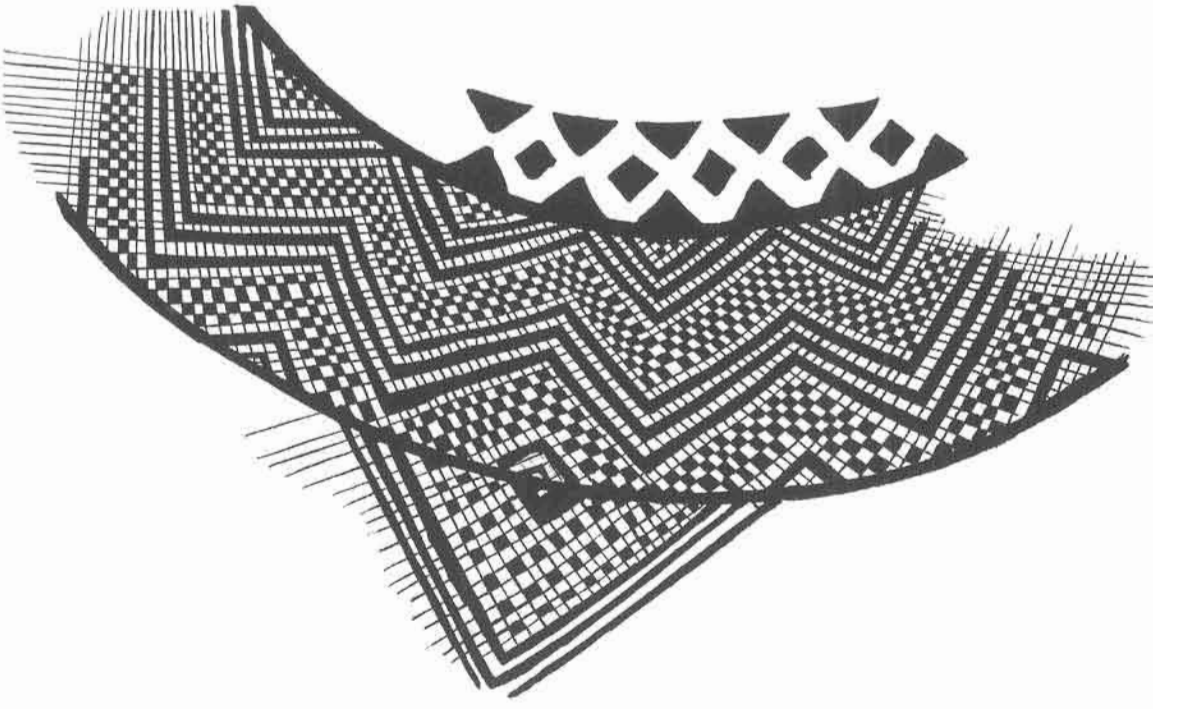
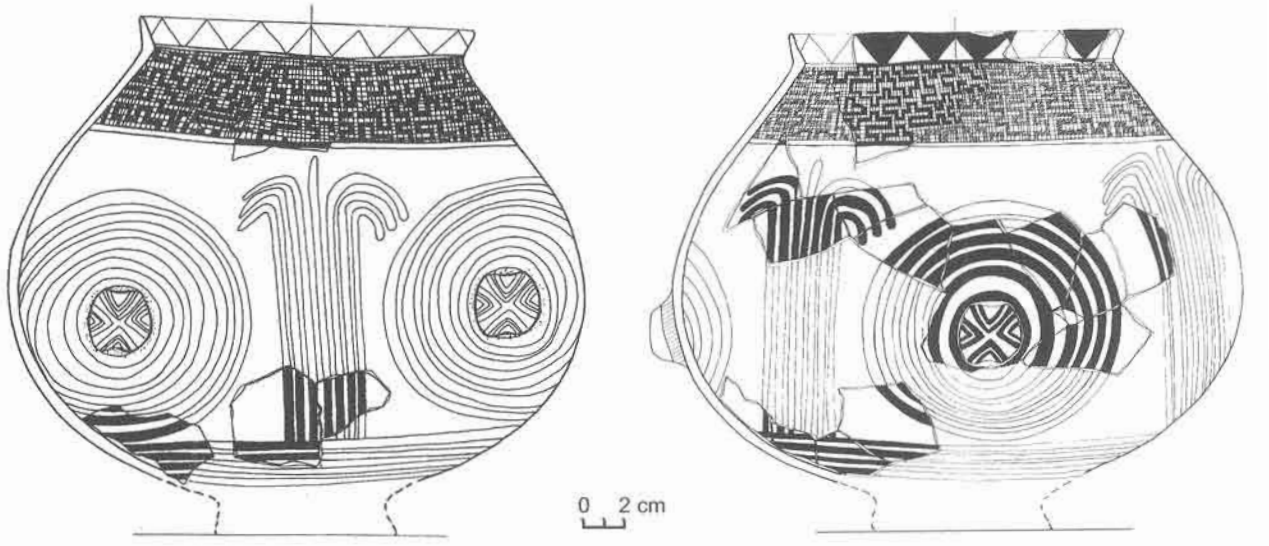
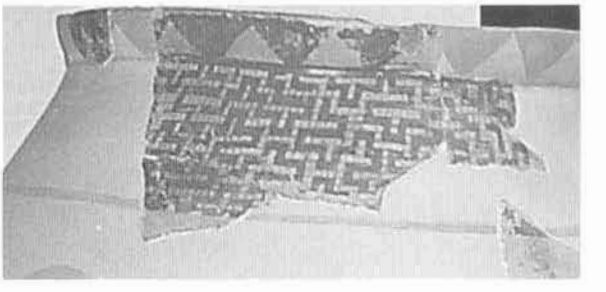
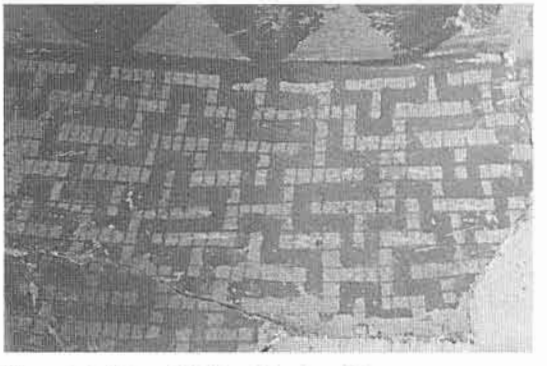


Plate 3.3. Vase (**733**). Top: detail of shoulder and body canvas. Bottom: reconstruction of design.







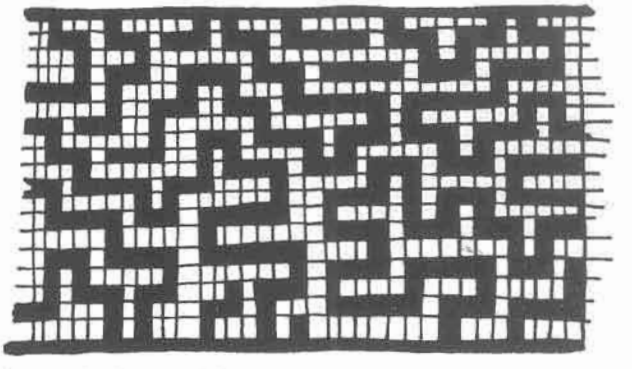


Plate 3.4. Vase (**731**) with shoulder canvas, concentric circles, and plant motif. Top: drawing of both sides of vase. Middle left: reconstructed pot. Middle right: detail of rim motif and shoulder canvas. Bottom left: detail of Π-meander on shoulder canvas. Bottom right: reconstruction of design on shoulder canvas.

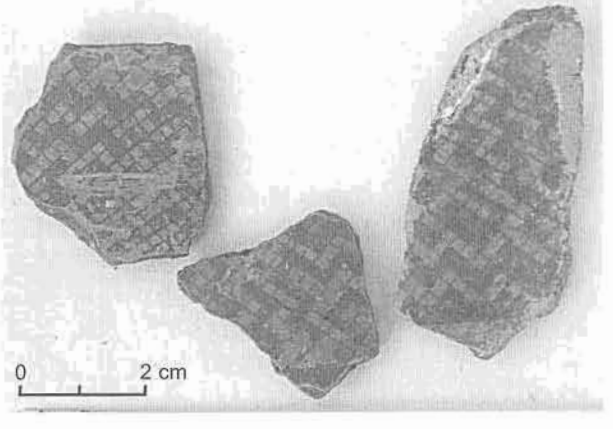


Plate 3.5. Vase (**732**) with shoulder canvas, concentric circles, and parallel and stepped lines. Top: drawing. Bottom left: detail of wavy meander on shoulder canvas. Bottom right: reconstruction on design on shoulder canvas.

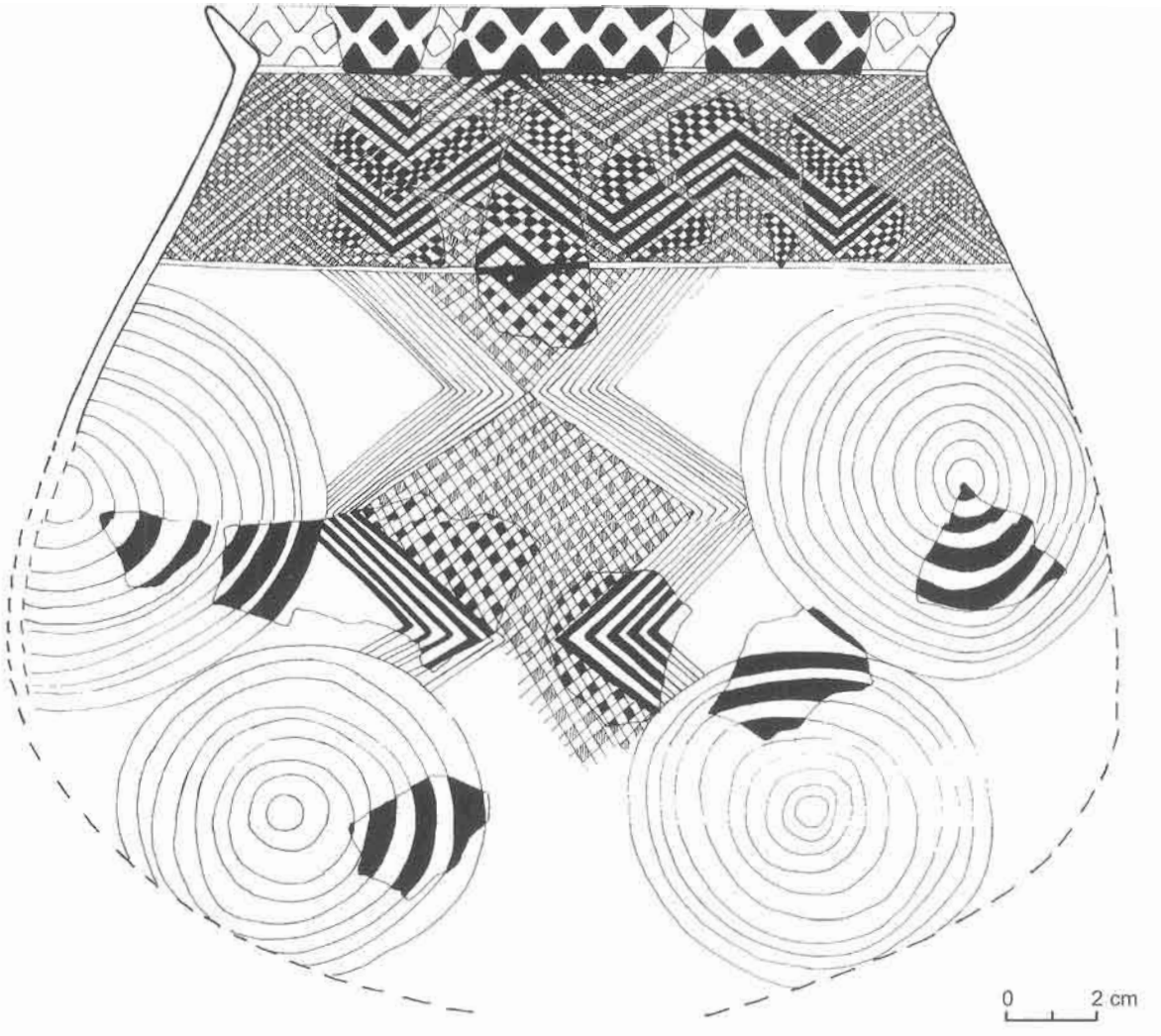
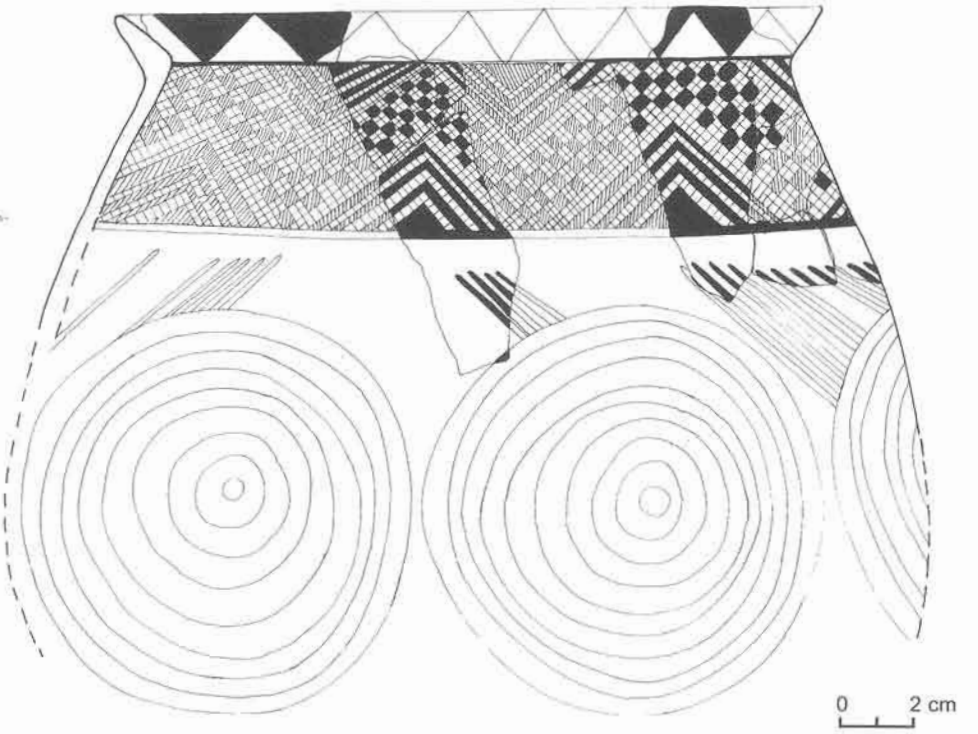
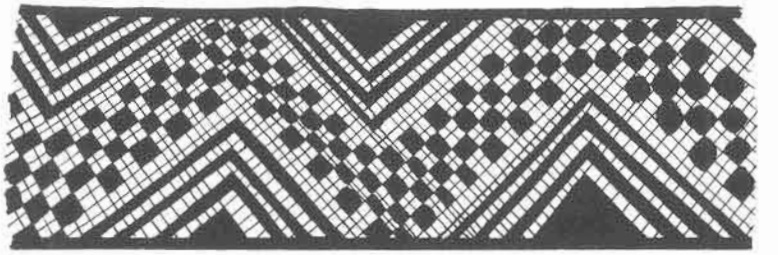


Plate 3.6A. Vase (**733**) with shoulder and body canvas, and concentric circles on body.

Plate 3.6B. Vase (**738**) with shoulder canvas and concentric circles on body.

Plate 3.6C. Vase (**739**) with shoulder canvas and concentric circles on body.





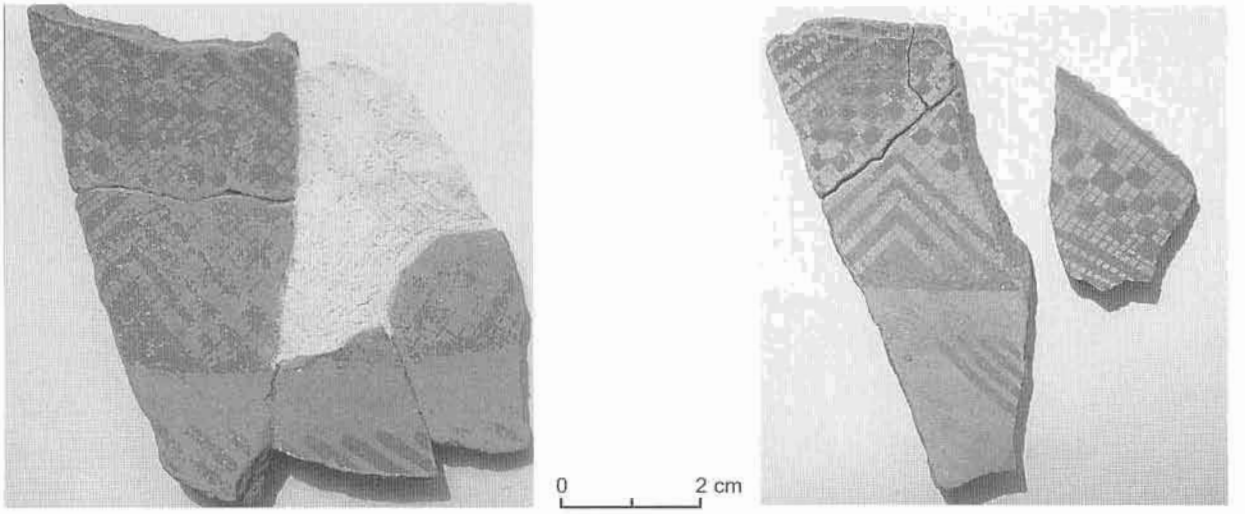
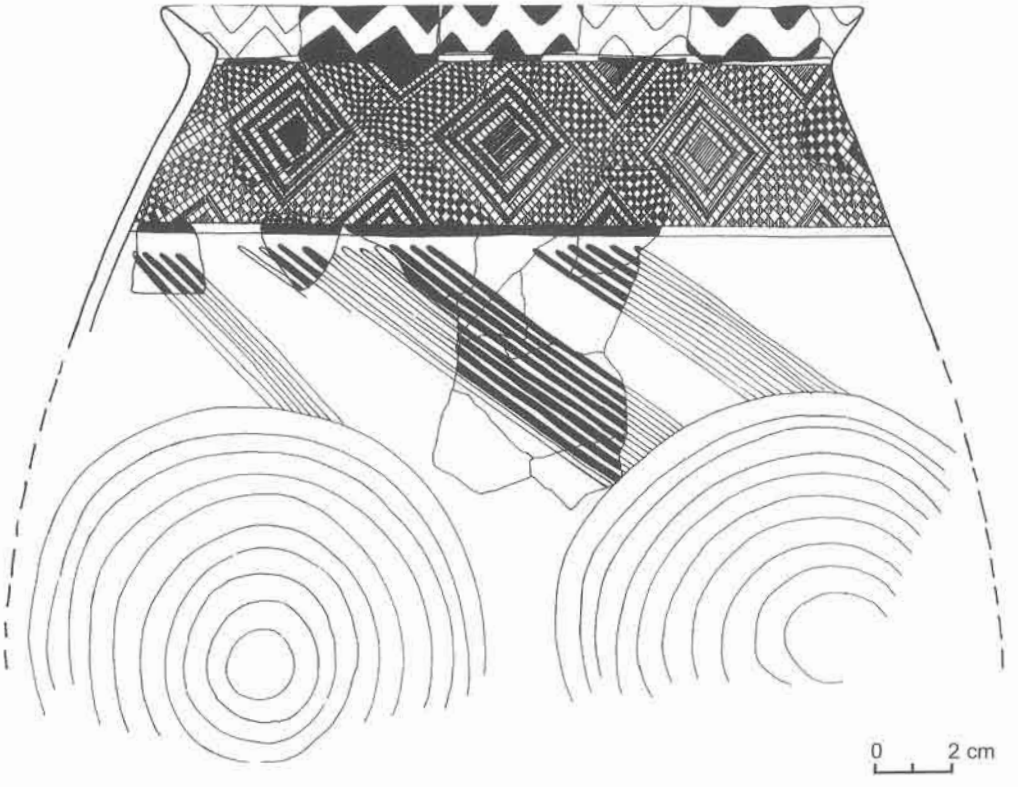


Plate 3.7. Vase (**736**) with shoulder canvas and concentric circles on body. Top: drawing. Middle: reconstruction of design on shoulder canvas. Bottom left and right: detail of shoulder canvas.



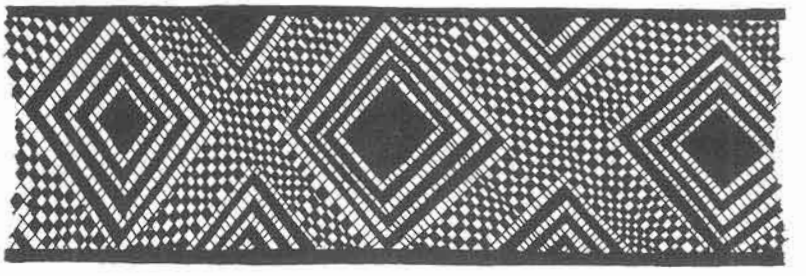
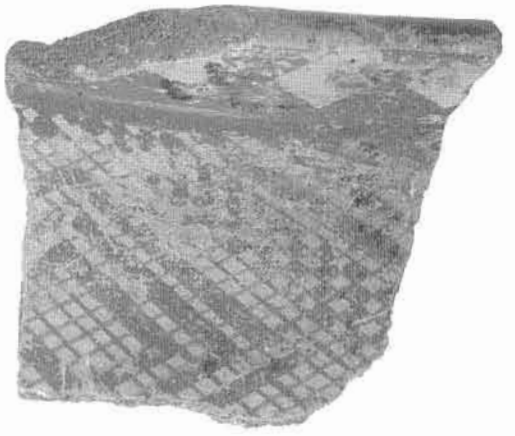


Plate 3.8. Vase (**737**) with shoulder canvas, concentric circles, and parallel lines. Top: drawing. Middle: detail of shoulder canvas. Bottom: reconstruction on design on shoulder canvas.



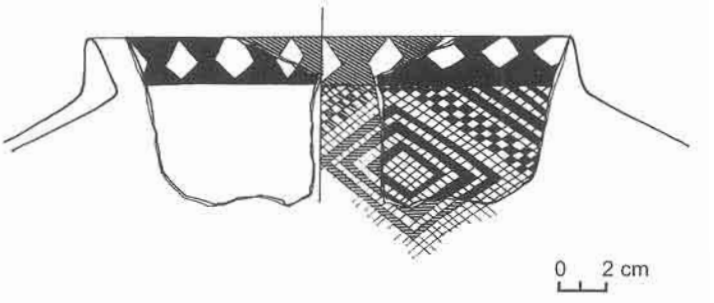


Plate 3.9A. Vase (**740**) with shoulder canvas, detail and reconstruction on design of shoulder canvas and rim.

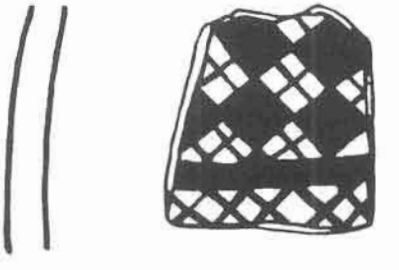
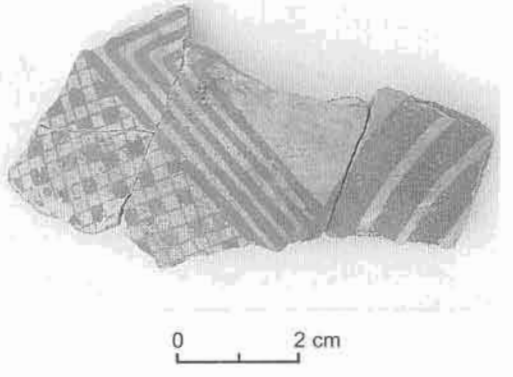


Plate 3.9B. Vase (**753**) with shoulder and body canvas, detail and rendering.



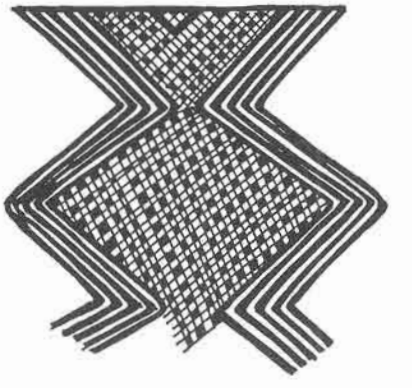
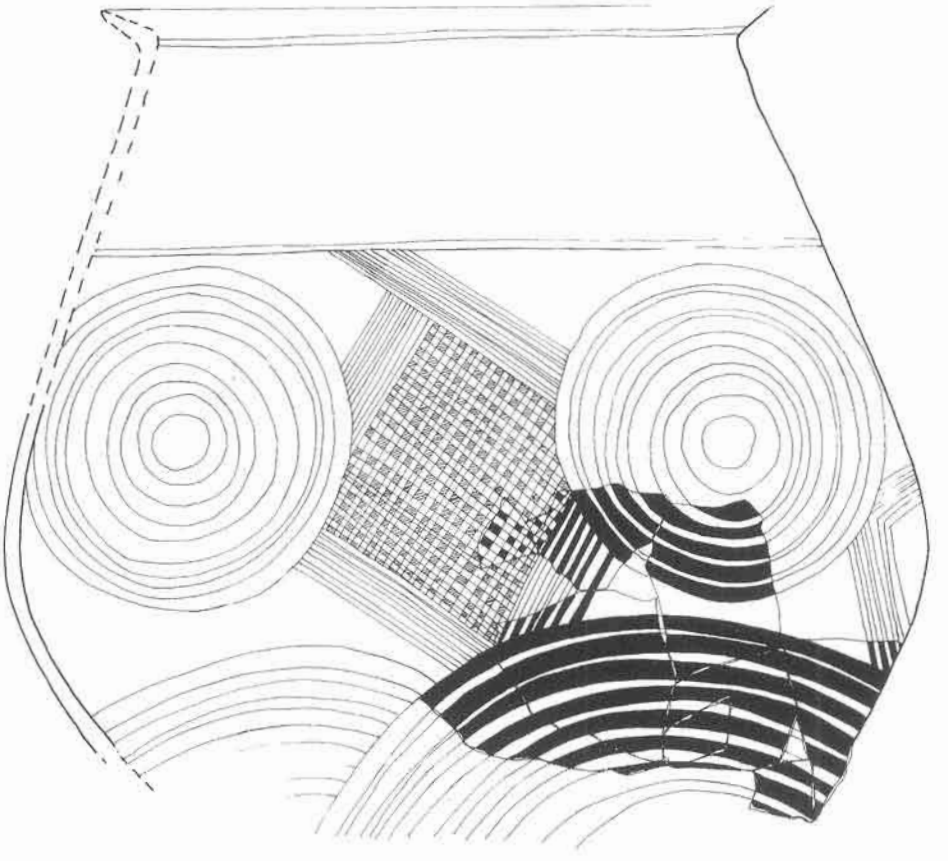


Plate 3.9C. Vase (**733**) with body canvas, detail and reconstruction of design.



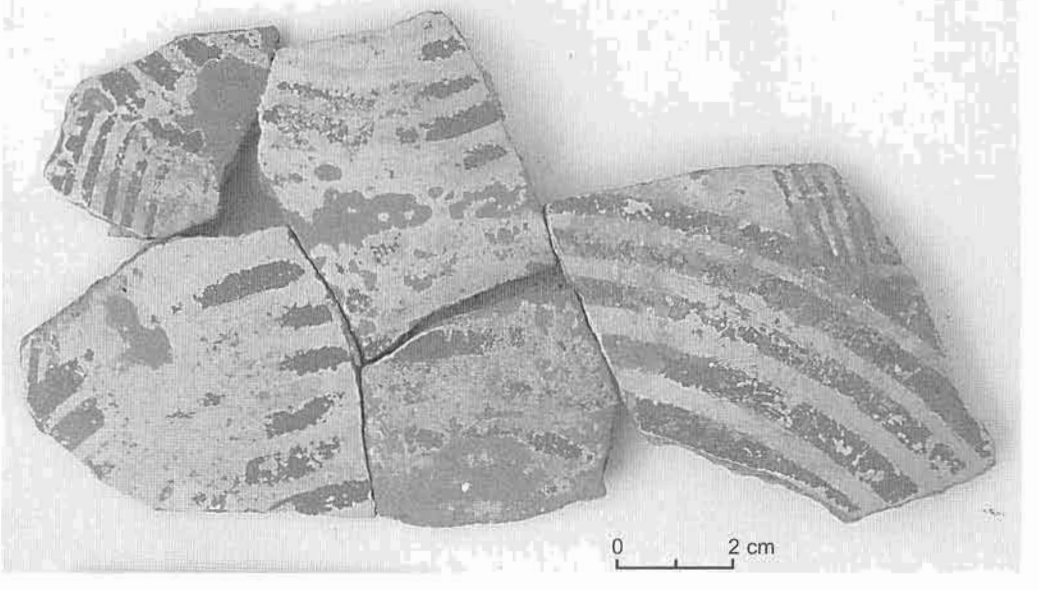
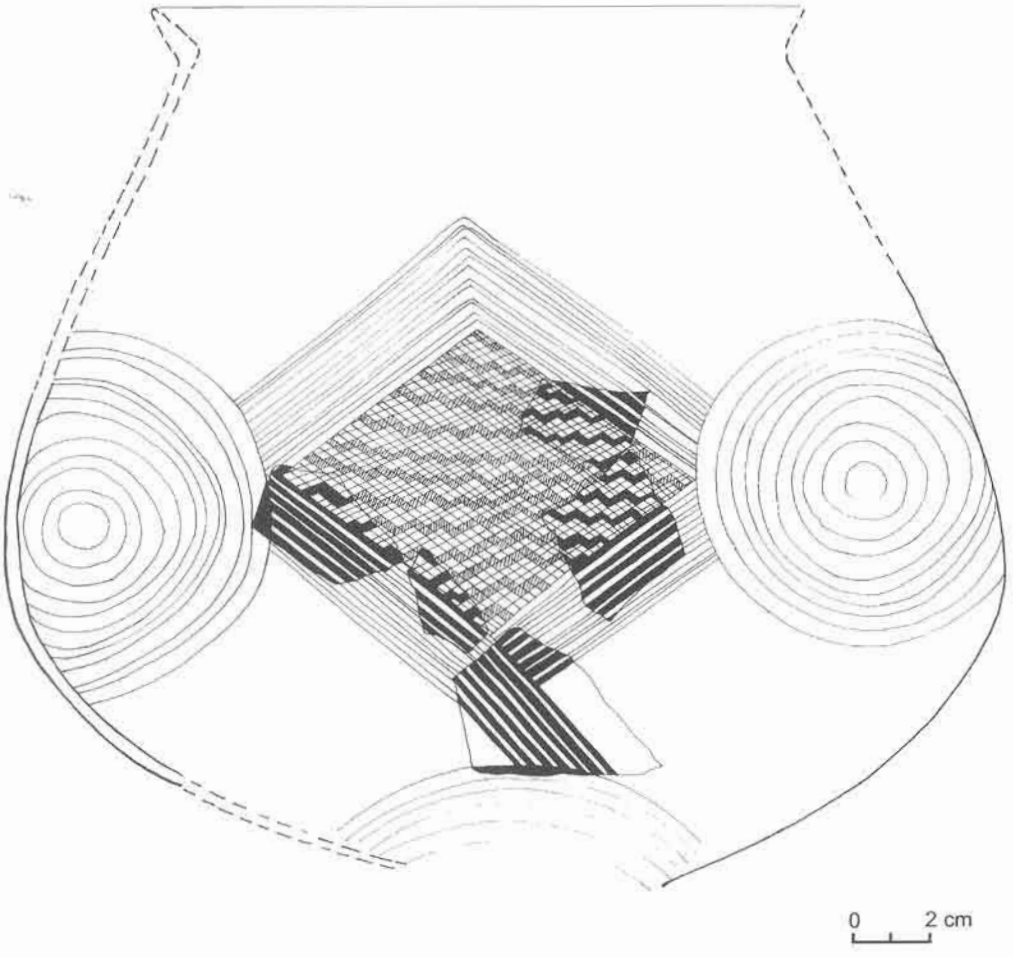
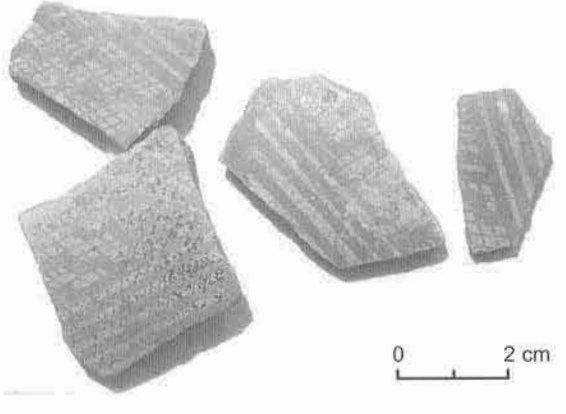


Plate 3.10. Vase (**734**) with body canvas and concentric circles. Top: drawing. Bottom: detail of body canvas and concentric circles.





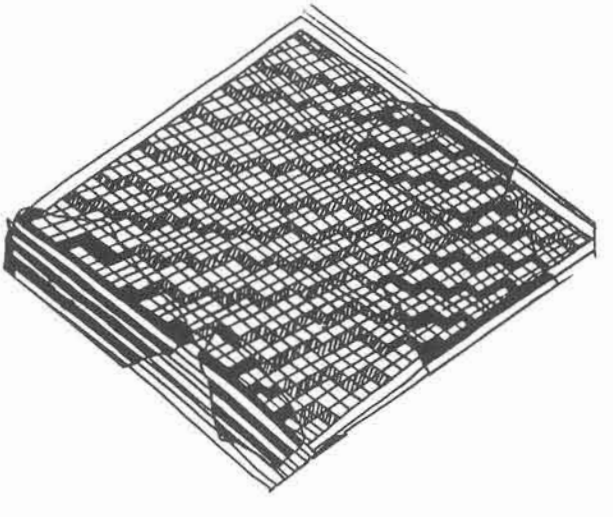
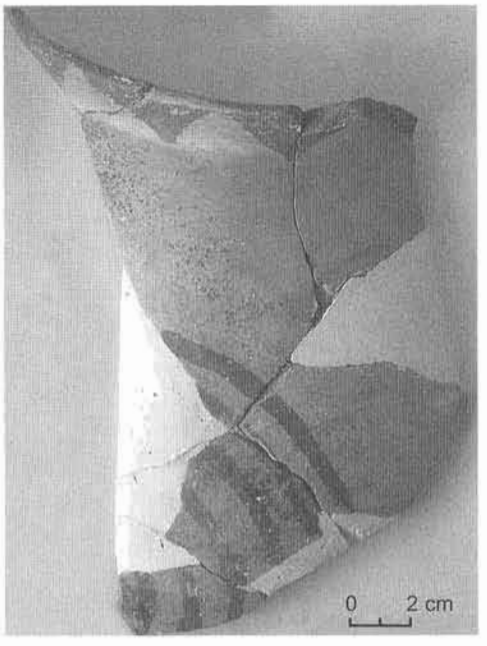


Plate 3.11. Vase (**735**) with body canvas and concentric circles. Top: drawing. Bottom left: detail of body canvas. Bottom right: reconstruction of design of body canvas.



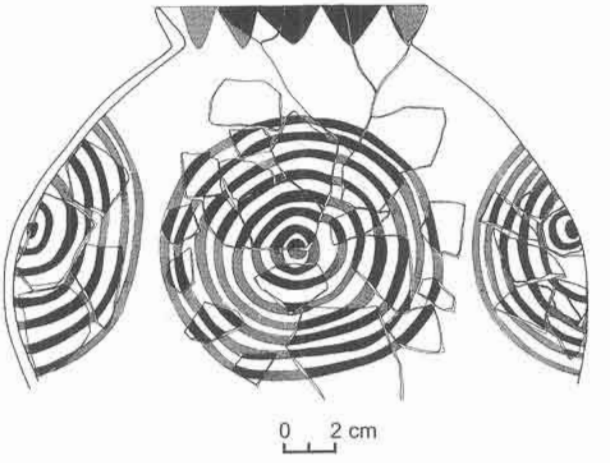


Plate 3.12A. Vase (**741**) with concentric circles, detail and reconstruction of design.

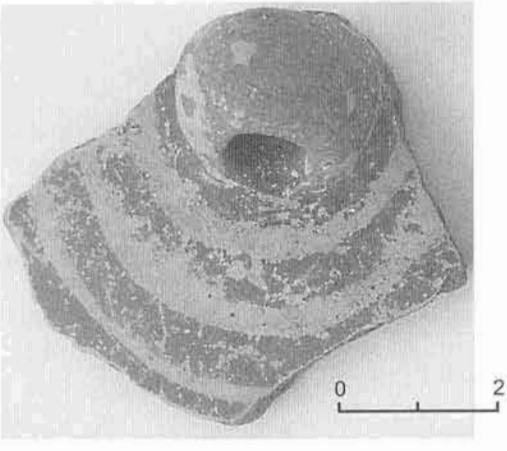
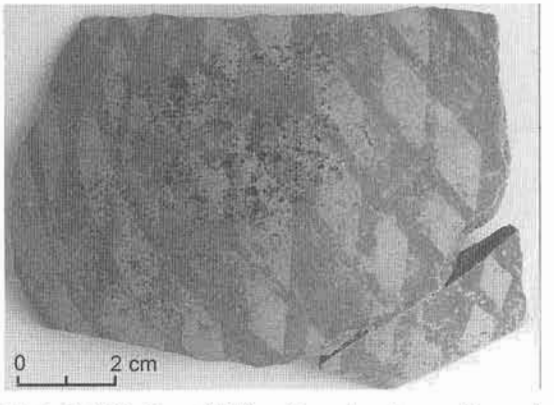


Plate 3.12B. Vase (**757**) with group of concentric circles around lug.



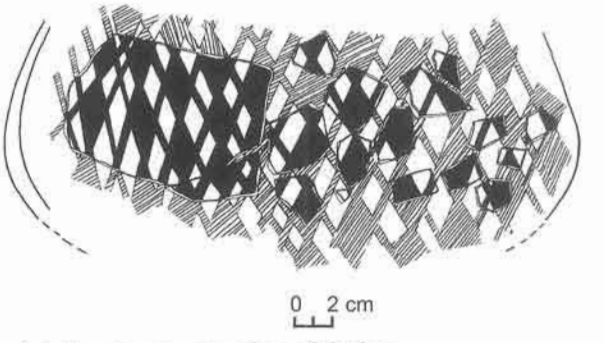
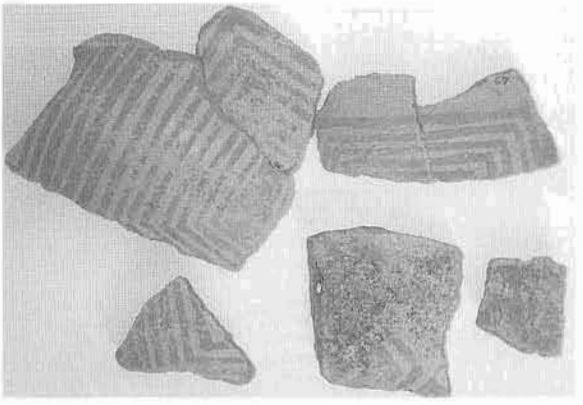


Plate 3.12C. Vase (**758**) with net pattern of large lozenges, detail and reconstruction of design.



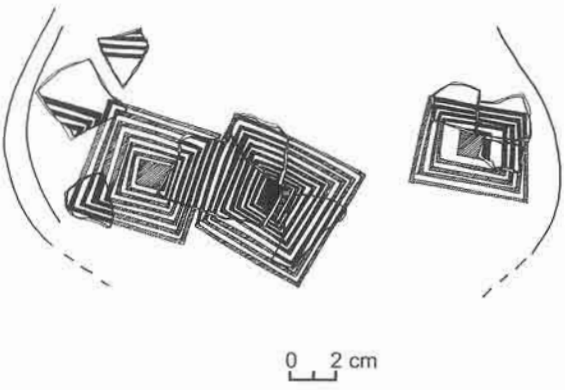
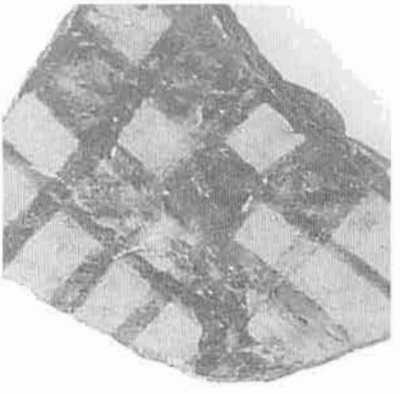


Plate 3.13A. Vase (**759**) with concentric squares, detail and reconstruction of design.



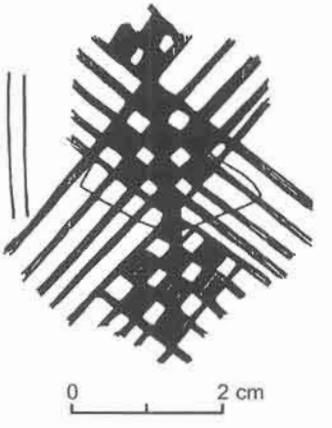
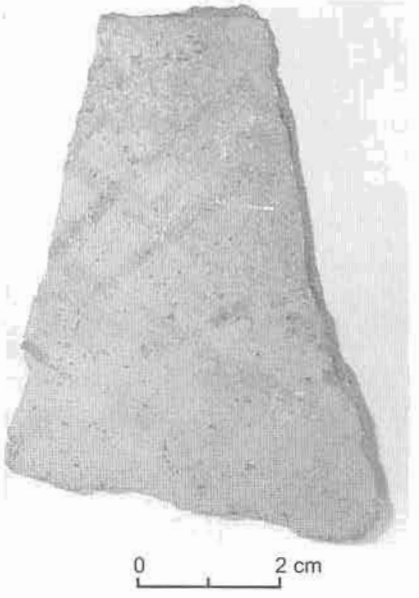


Plate 3.13B. Vase (**760**) with cross-hatched lozenges, detail and reconstruction of design.



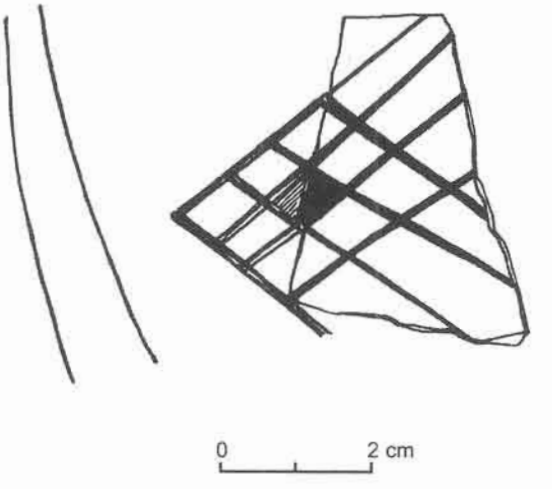


Plate 3.13C. Vase (**761**) with cross-hatched lozenges, detail and reconstruction of design.

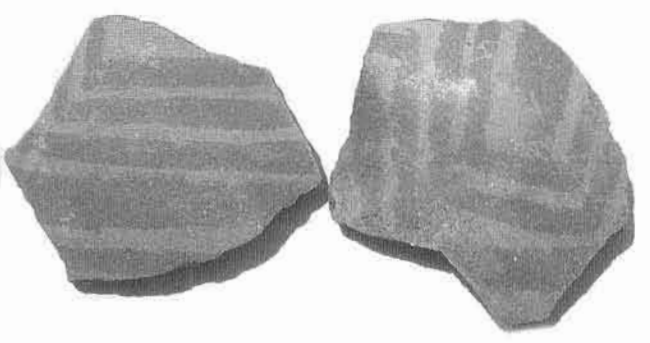
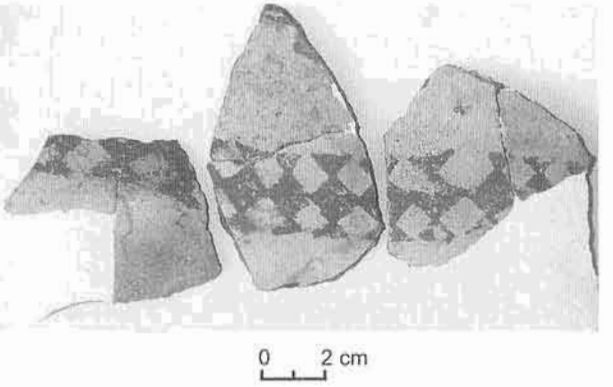


Plate 3.14A. Vase (**743**) with Π-meander bands, detail and reconstruction of design.



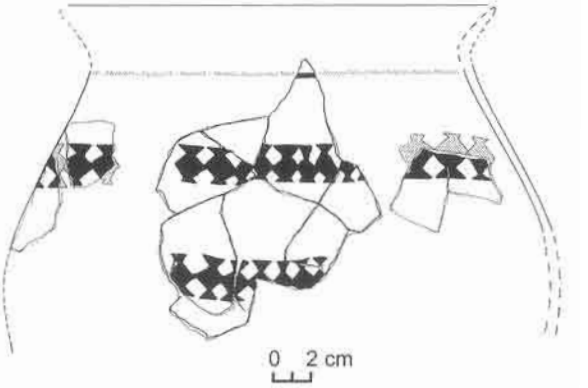


Plate 3.14B. Vase (**730**) with lozenges and attached triangles, detail and reconstruction of design.

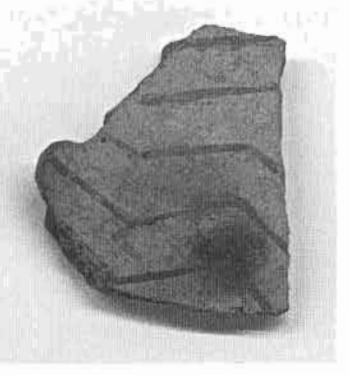
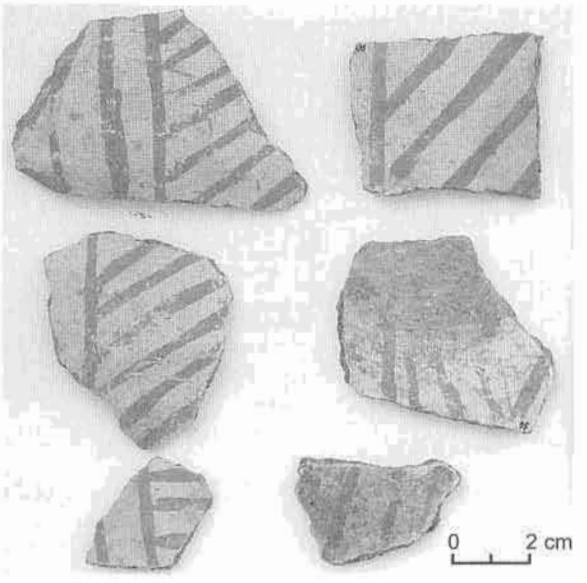


Plate 3.14C. Vases (**762–764**) with zigzag pattern.



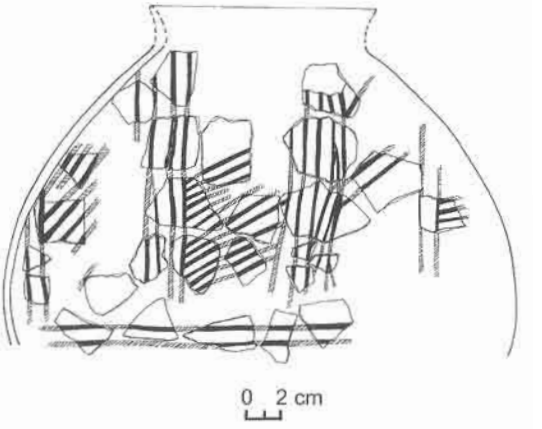
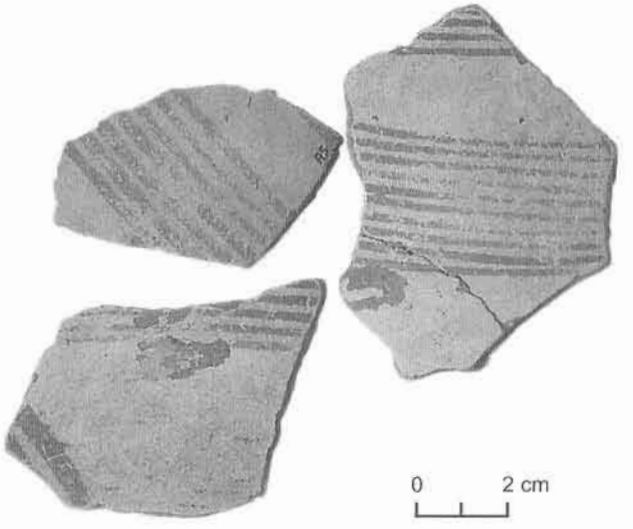


Plate 3.15A. Vase (**742**) with horizontal, vertical, and oblique groups of parallel lines, detail and reconstruction of design.



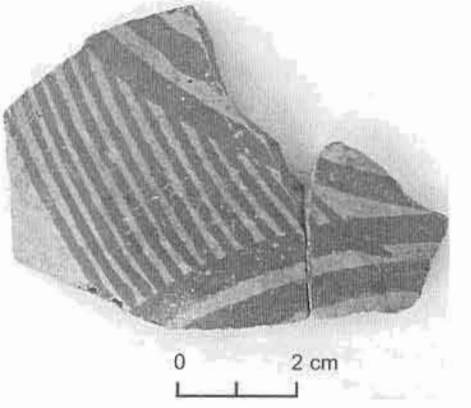
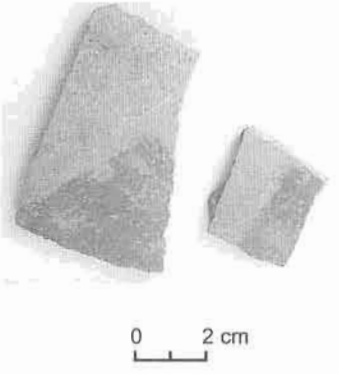


Plate 3.15B. Vases (**765**, **766**) with parallel lines.



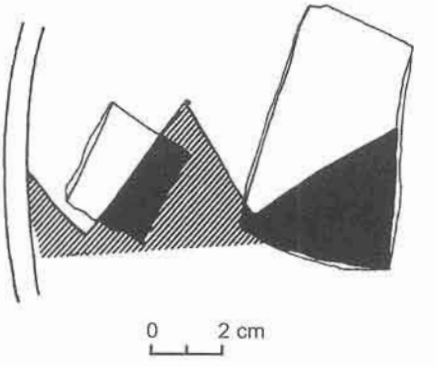
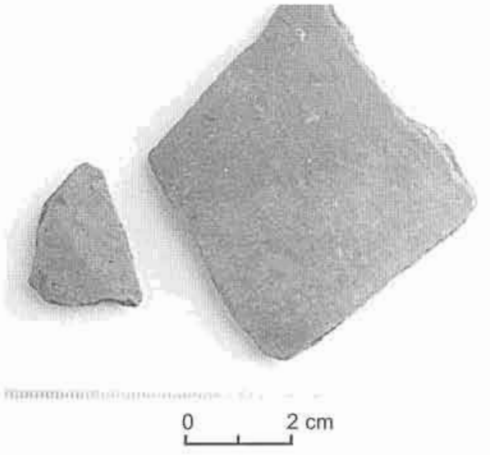


Plate 3.15C. Early painted ware, vase (**767**) with large solid triangles, detail and reconstruction of design.



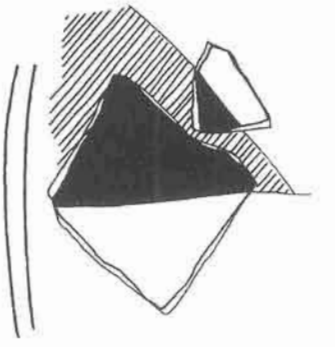
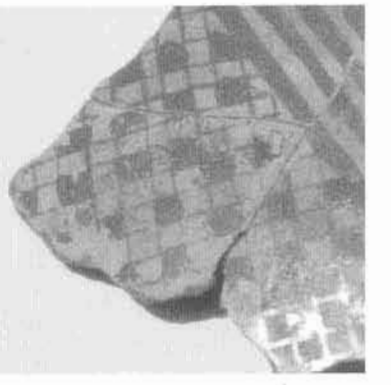


Plate 3.16A. Early painted ware, vase (**768**) with large solid triangles, detail and reconstruction of design.

732



733

741

769

Plate 3.16B. Examples of carelessness by a Youra painter (**732**, **733**, **741**, **769**).