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THE CIRCUM-AEGEAN AREA DURING THE 5TH AND 4TH MILLENNIA BC

Edited by

SØREN DIETZ,
FANIS MAVRIDIS,
ŽARKO TANKOSIĆ
and
TURAN TAKAOĞLU.

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Front cover: Ships carved into a rock from the site of Strophilas on Andros (photograph from the personal archive of C. Televantou); drawing of a rock carving from the main bastion on the wall at the site of Strophilas on Andros representing a procession of ships (drawing by C. Televantou).

Visviki Magoula, Thessaly: Reconsidering cultural change from the Arapi to the Dimini phase

Eva Alram-Stern

Introduction

The Dimini culture is generally understood as the cultural peak of the Late Neolithic period in Thessaly. However, little attention has been paid to the social and cultural changes which may have led to its emergence. Although stratigraphical information is limited, the rich finds of Visviki Magoula allow a characterisation of the preceding Arapi phase, which, by comparing it with the Dimini period, may help us in characterising the Late Neolithic sequence of Thessaly.

Visviki Magoula

The Neolithic settlement of Visviki Magoula is a small tell 6 m in height with a diameter of 150 m, situated in the South-Eastern Thessalian Plain north-east of Velestino, not far from Lake Karla¹ and known since the times of C. Tsountas and A. Wace and M. Thompson.² Excavations took place in 1941 under the auspices of the *Sonderkommando Griechenland* (Task Force Greece) of the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, Rosenberg being Hitler's leading theorist. The head of operations was H. Reinerth, professor of prehistory in Berlin and head of the "Office for Prehistory".³ The archaeological material and the archives which survived World War II are today stored in the National Museum at Athens as well as in the *Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen* at Lake Constance in Germany.⁴ Work on the publication of the finds from this excavation started in 2004, when the author was invited by A. Dousougli to participate in the publication.⁵ The study of the pottery showed that settlement of the tell started at the end of the Early Neolithic (EN) period and continued during the Middle Neolithic (MN) and Tsangli-Larissa phases. The main part of the material comes from the Arapi and Dimini phases. Some finds point to a continuation of settlement throughout the Rachmani

phases and Early Bronze Age I (Table 20.1). The site is well known for the plan of a so-called megaron, which D. Theocharis as well as K. Gallis illustrated in their overviews of Neolithic Greece and dated to the Arapi phase.⁶ This plan comes from its first and only publication in February 1942 in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the journal of the National Socialist propaganda ministry, aiming at demonstrating the Nordic descent of this building type and its inhabitants.⁷

Table 20.1. Chronological chart.

<i>Years BCE</i>	<i>Chronological subdivision</i>	<i>Important contexts and typological subdivision</i>	<i>Major pottery wares</i>
3500	Early Bronze Age	Petromagoula	Heavy Burnished Ware
	Chalcolithic	Rachmani	Crusted Ware
4500	Final Neolithic		
4500	Late Neolithic II	Otzaki B/C – Dimini	Brown on Cream Incised
			Black on Red
4800		Otzaki A	White on Red
		Arapi	Black on Red
			White on Red
	Late Neolithic I		Arapi Polychrome
		Tsangli-Larissa	Arapi Bichrome
5300			Brown on Buff
			Black Burnished
	Middle Neolithic	Sesklo I–III	Red on White
5800			Red Monochrome
	Early Neolithic	Sesklo A-B	Early Painted
6500		Argissa	Monochrome

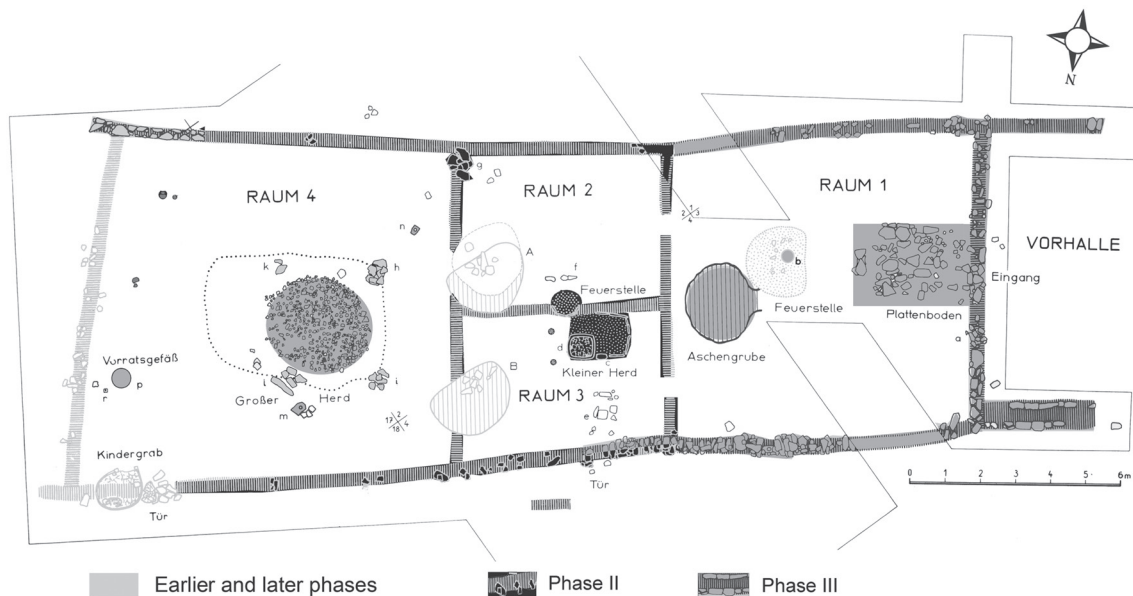


Figure 20.1. Visviki Magula: detailed plan with main settlement phases (original plan of 1941–1943, modified by E. Alram-Stern and M. Frauenglas).

However, a more detailed plan discovered in the former East Berlin, as well as the study of the profiles and photographs, shows that the settlement remains belong to different phases, so that the architectural layout has to be re-evaluated.⁸ All in all, the profiles prove that the building remains belong to a settlement sequence probably including rebuilding and modification of existing buildings (Fig. 20.1).

Two main phases may be seen: according to the profiles, an older construction phase consists of stone foundations with a superstructure of mud brick, which was indicated in the detailed plan. The layout of these walls suggests small rooms of 5.7×4 m in size. Up to now, no synchronous architectural remains have been published. But the small size of the rooms seems to be reminiscent of houses found in Sesklo.⁹

This structure includes a small oven or hearth of clay on a stone bedding, which was connected to an assemblage of cereals and ground stone implements pointing to food storage and preparation inside the house. The hearth itself exhibits strong parallels to Late Neolithic I Dikili Tash,¹⁰ and similar assemblages are known from the same site. Furthermore, it is similar to the house model from Platia Magoula Zarkou where it is depicted together with the family.¹¹

The remains of the subsequent building phase, which are preserved on a higher level, are of stone, with the supposed mud bricks missing. The walls are preserved in a very fragmentary way, but may have belonged to a larger building complex consisting of a sequence of rooms more than 8 m in width. Such buildings are known from nearby Pevkakia Magoula¹² as well as from Dikili Tash in Eastern Macedonia.¹³ But they also recall the well-known megaron buildings from Sesklo and possibly also Dimini.¹⁴

In the eastern part of the excavation area there was a large oven of which a circular stone base is preserved. The area of the hearth produced a number of spit supports which according to their incised decoration should be dated to the Dimini phase.¹⁵ The hearth itself, but also the ground stone tools documented in the plan have a good parallel at Palioskala.¹⁶ Therefore it may be argued that the building sequence of the tell consisted of an earlier settlement phase with small-roomed buildings hypothetically dating to the Arapi phase and of a later phase consisting of large-roomed buildings which may date to the Dimini phase though a Rachmani date is also possible.

Visviki Magoula pottery

Concerning pottery, except for a few finds documented *in situ*, the pottery has not been recorded according to strata. Therefore pottery from Visviki can only be dated with the help of published stratified material like that from Arapi, which exists for the pre-Dimini phases of the Late Neolithic period.¹⁷ For the Dimini as well as the Rachmani phases, the established stratigraphies of the excavations carried out by V. Milošević at Otzaki Magoula and Pevkakia Magoula and published by H. Hauptmann and H.-J. Weisshaar have to be used. However, the stratigraphy of both sites is problematic, although tendencies in terms of ceramics are evident.¹⁸ Therefore we know little about the pottery of the transition from the Arapi to Dimini phase as well as the continuities and changes which may have taken place during the Dimini and Rachmani phases. So the following observations must be treated with caution.

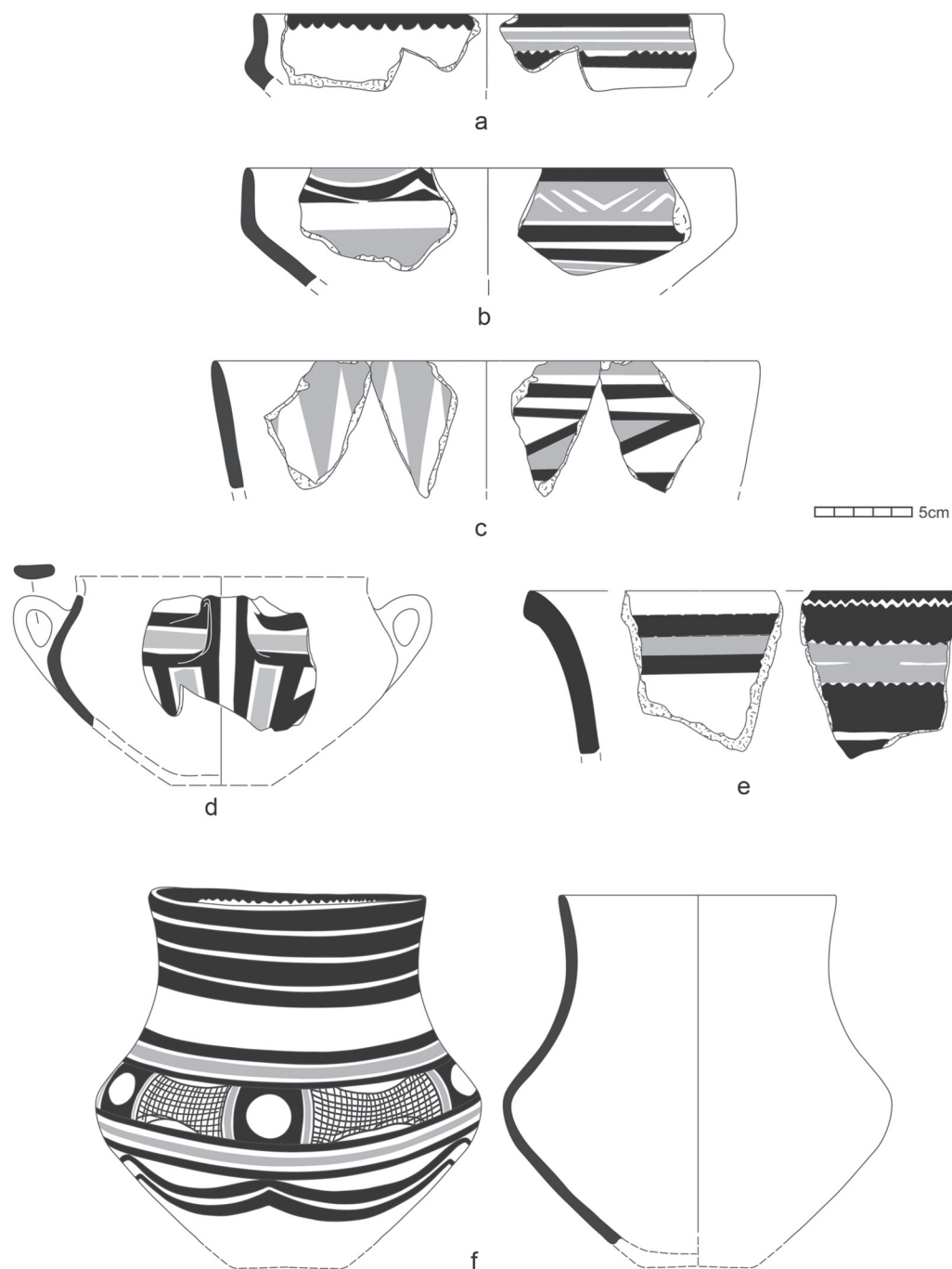


Figure 20.2. Polychrome Black-and-Red-on-White pottery of the Arapi phase: a. EAM 17291, b. EAM 18082, c. EAM 16818; d. EAM 16752, e. EAM 16752, f. EAM 17353 (drawings by E. Alram-Stern, A. Dousougli and M. Frauenglas).

From the pottery assemblage of Visviki, mainly decorated sherds and monochrome rim fragments of a certain size, all in all more than 3000 pieces, have survived. Because of this selection, a study cannot be based on a statistical analysis of the material. However, it seems that more or less all decorated sherds were kept, and on this basis the great variety of patterns and shapes can be used for defining the characteristics of the prestigious patterned Late Neolithic

pottery of the South-Eastern Thessalian Plain in the area of Lake Karla. On the other hand the characteristics of this pottery of the various Late Neolithic phases show that production and use of decorated pottery must have undergone a considerable change.

Starting with the Arapi phase, according to stratified analogies from Arapi Magoula¹⁹ about 400 sherds definitely date to this period. Of the pattern painted pottery, all in all

204 sherds belong to the polychrome Red-and-Black-on-White Ware,²⁰ 37 to the bichrome Black-on-White Ware,²¹ 5 to Red-on-White and 93 to the Black-on-Red Ware²² and 7 to the White-on-Red ware.²³ This is much more than has ever been published from the Arapi and Otzaki Magoula contexts, and especially the percentage of polychrome ware is remarkable.

For the polychrome pottery with red and black decoration on white slip a variety of shapes exist, which are decorated with characteristic motifs and syntax: the majority of them are bowls, numerous fragments coming from carinated bowls, decorated with hanging triangles, zig-zag and festoon patterns, which compare well with Arapi Magoula (Fig. 20.2a–b).²⁴ But there are also many fragments of deep bowls with globular or straight-sided bodies which are abundant in Pevkakia Magoula and unknown from the area of Larissa.²⁵ The interior decoration of these bowls is characterised by long triangles, and the exterior is covered with linear designs (Fig. 20.2c).²⁶ The petrographic analysis of nine fragments from such bowls shows that all of them were either produced locally or have a provenance from the area between Velestino and Sesklo/Dimini.²⁷ Furthermore, a number of globular bowls with loop handles as well as fruit stands with linear design are attested (Fig. 20.2d). But there are also larger straight-sided bowls, partly with everted rim and a very characteristic generous design, which have a diameter up to 40 cm (Fig. 20.2e, 20.3a). Furthermore, necked jars characterised by triangles, circles as well as cross-hatched fields are abundant (Fig. 20.2f). However, bichrome black on white pottery is limited to fruit stands and necked jars with characteristic design (Fig. 20.3b). A similar variety of shapes are produced in black on red and rarely in white on red ware, also including larger bowls and jars. In comparison to the polychrome ware, the decoration tends to be simpler (Fig. 20.3c–h). However, some motifs, like hanging triangles and rhomboids, connect the black on red ware with the polychrome ware (Fig. 20.3e, h–i). In general, all wares and shapes assigned to the Arapi phase show a remarkable variety in size.²⁸

Concerning the Dimini phase, 128 pattern-painted pottery fragments of Black-on-Red Ware,²⁹ White-on-Red,³⁰ polychrome ware with black and white paint on red surface³¹ as well as Brown-on-Cream Ware³² were collected. Black-on-Red and White-on-Red painted wares of this period are characterised by decoration covering the entire surface and often consisting of spiraloïd and meandroid design (Fig. 20.4). For the Black-on-Red Ware Hauptmann tried to differentiate an earlier phase he named Ayia Sophia or Otzaki A phase from a later phase named Otzaki B.³³ According to him, the pottery of the earlier phase is characterised by their execution in solid lines, while pottery of the later phase has its motifs filled with hatching or cross-hatching. These two styles possibly point to a stylistic development, the hatched decoration being connected with Brown-on-Cream Dimini

pottery. However, within the pottery material from Visviki several sherds actually combine both styles so that such a chronological differentiation needs still more stratigraphic proofing (Fig. 20.4a). Interestingly, of the few Black-on-Red fragments sampled two come from the area of Tsalmas.³⁴

In Visviki Brown-on-Cream Dimini ware is much less frequent than Black-on-Red (Fig. 20.5a–c). Half of the sherds come from the surface layer, all of them being highly fragmented. Larger fragments were only present in Trench B dug on the flank of the tell. All this points to a late date of the Brown-on-Cream Ware compared to other Dimini wares. Again, Visviki gives no evidence for continuity of bichrome Arapi Ware and Brown-on-Cream Dimini Ware.³⁵ With the exception of one local fabric, all pots sampled were produced in the area of Dimini.³⁶ In contrast to the Arapi phase, shapes of the Black or White-on-Red as well as Brown-on-Cream Dimini wares are more or less restricted to shallow, slightly carinated so-called Dimini bowls and to a minor extent to fruit stands. Polychrome Dimini ware differs considerably from the other pattern painted wares of this period (Fig. 20.5d–e). It is characterised by rhomboid, spiraloïd or meandroid motifs designed in broad strips. Furthermore, this ware comprises a variety of shapes including deep rounded bowls, fruit stands and necked jars.

Fifty-five sherds belong to incised wares,³⁷ of which several characteristic wares can be distinguished,³⁸ among them pottery with incised motifs filled with dots,³⁹ *Furchenstich* decoration⁴⁰ as well as fine incised decoration (Fig. 20.5f–i). In Visviki the characteristic shape of this ware is the deep bowl with vertically orientated triangular lugs (Fig. 20.5f–h). Most remarkably, in contrast to other wares, the incised bowls are characterised by a more or less standardised size between 16 and 20 cm.

In general, the incised motifs differ considerably from the most frequent painted pottery wares. It has been argued that, by analogy to the painted wares, the various incised wares belong to different stages within the Dimini phase, but this is difficult to determine since stratigraphic information is missing. As a matter of fact, the rhomboid design on some bowls with dot impressions (Fig. 20.5f) recalls a motif known from polychrome Dimini ware (Fig. 20.5d). On the other hand, isolated spirals on *Furchenstich* incised ware (Fig. 20.5g) may be connected with a Dimini Brown-on-Cream fruit-stand from Visviki (Fig. 20.5c), which again compares well with a fruit stand in Pevkakia Magoula.⁴¹ Fine incised ware is known from the Dimini phase settlement of Makriyalos II⁴² and should therefore be synchronous with Brown-on-Cream Dimini ware (Fig. 20.5h). In Visviki, in addition to the deep bowl, scoops with wishbone handles are attested, which Weisshaar already dates to the Rachmani phase of Pevkakia Magoula (Fig. 20.5i).⁴³

In summary, the decorated pottery of the Dimini phase differs considerably from the previous Arapi phase: during the Arapi phase there is a variety of pattern painted wares,

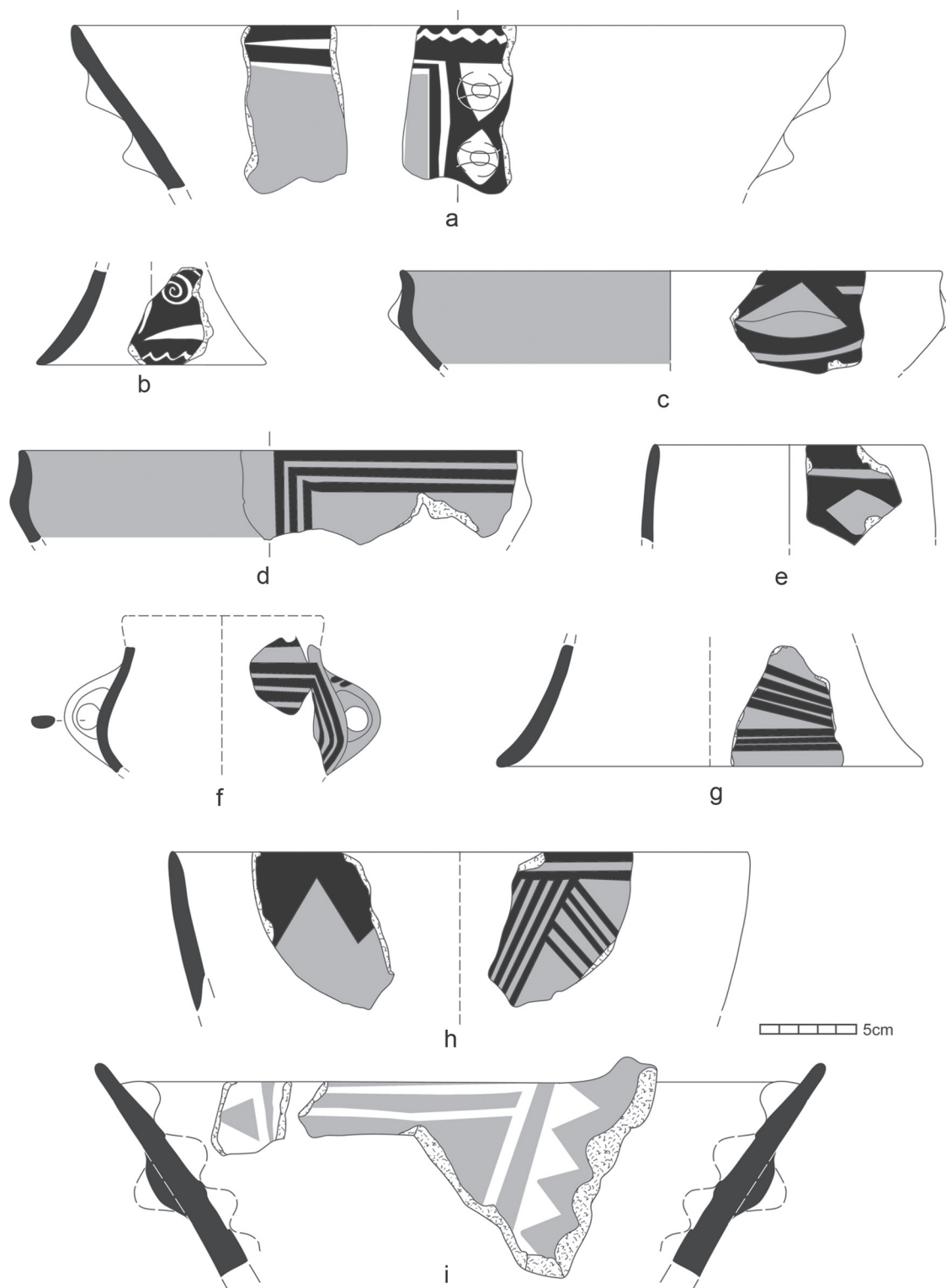


Figure 20.3. a. Polychrome Black-and-Red-on-White pottery of the Arapi phase EAM 16779, b. Bichrome Black-on-White pottery of the Arapi phase EAM 16877, c.-h. Black-on-Red pottery of the Arapi phase c. EAM 17010, d. EAM 17005, e. EAM 16994, f. EAM 17082, g. EAM 17033, h. EAM 17031, i. White-on-Red pottery of the Arapi phase EAM 16909 (drawings by E. Alram-Stern, A. Dousougli and M. Frauenglas).

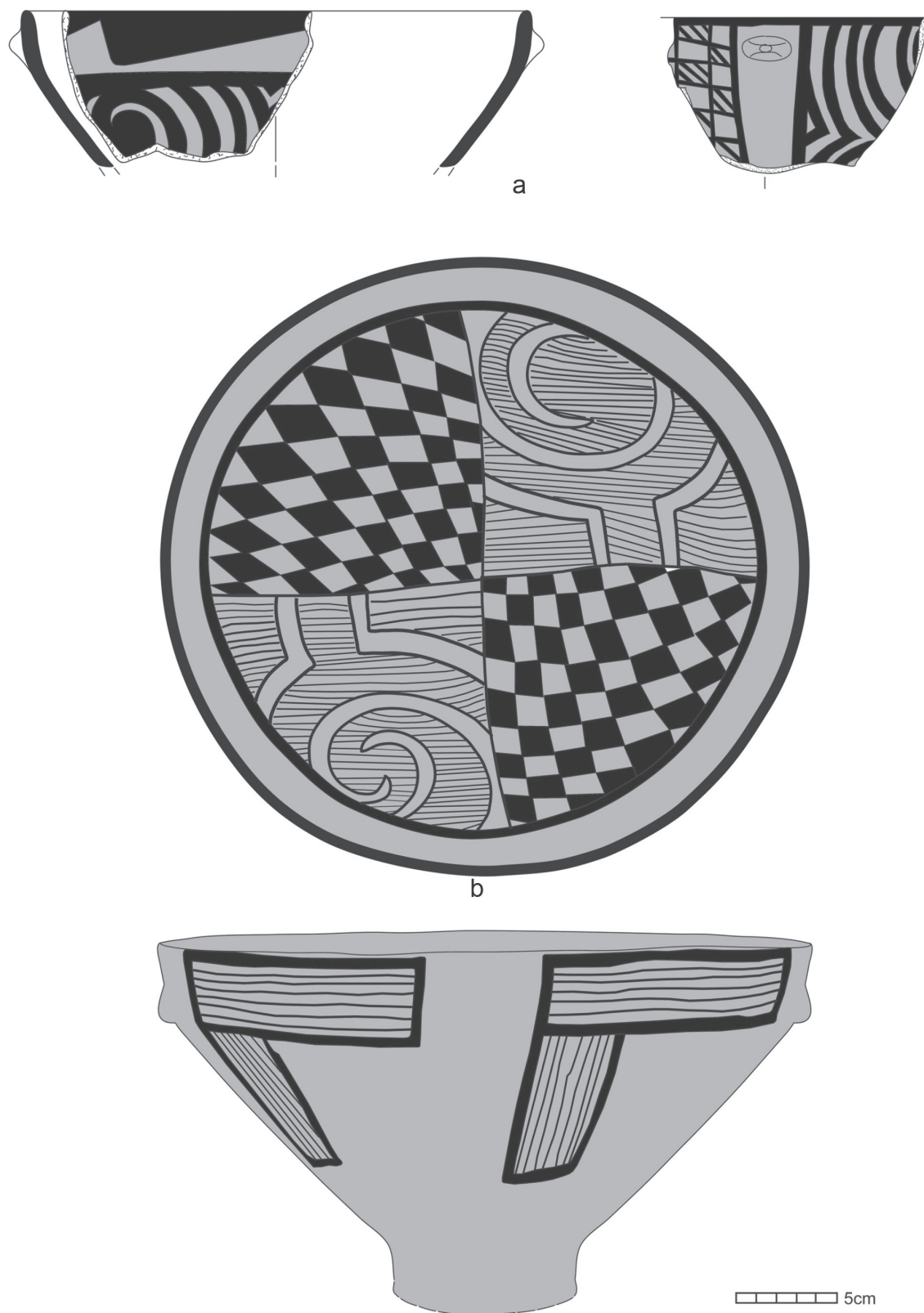


Figure 20.4. Black-on-Red pottery of the Dimini period, a. EAM 17081, b. 17260 (drawings by E. Alram-Stern, A. Dousougli and M. Frauenglas).

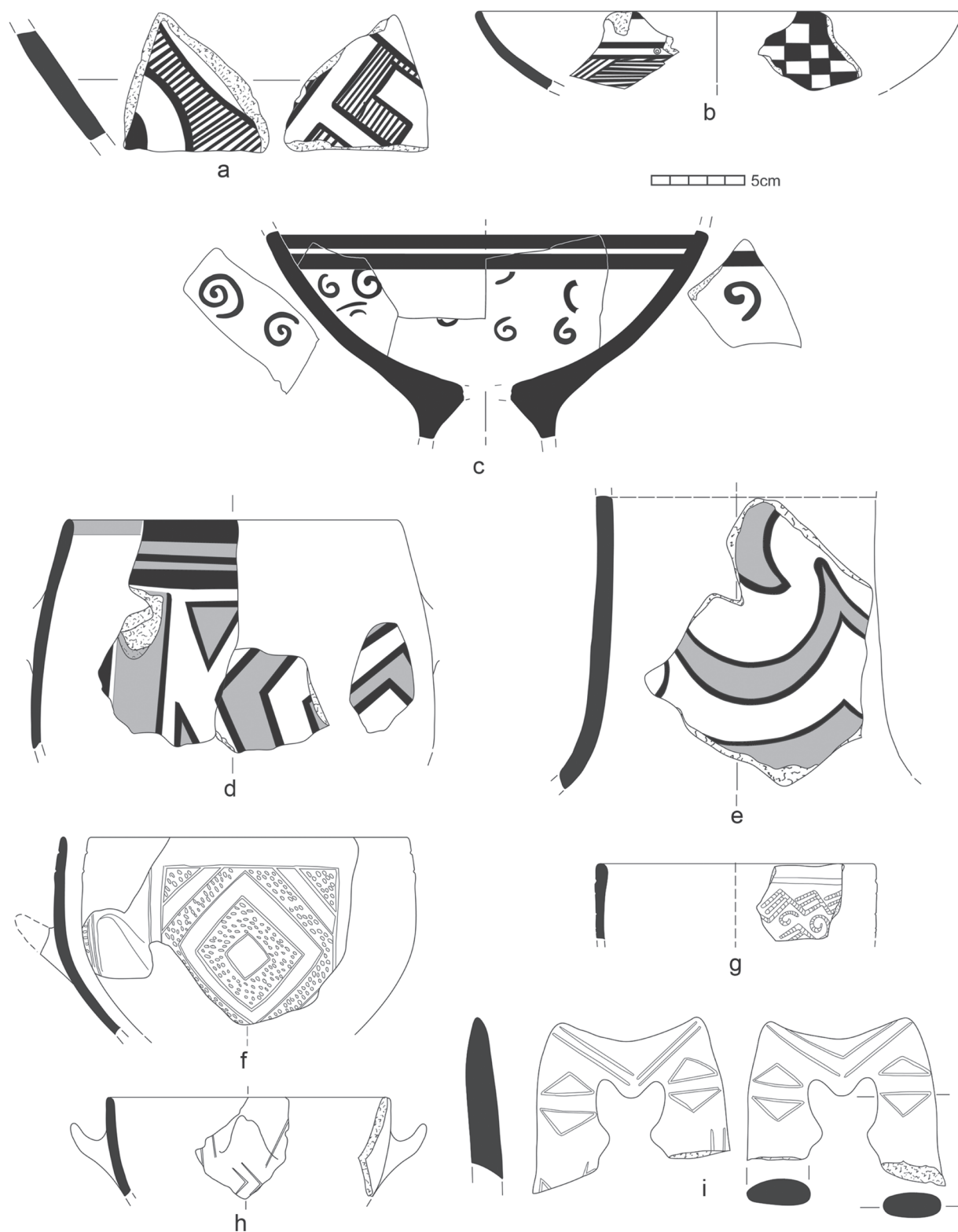


Figure 20.5. a–c. Brown-on-Cream Dimini pottery (a. EAM 17161, b. EAM 17093, c. PMU 30881); d–e. Polychrome Black-and-White-on-Red pottery of the Dimini period (d. PMU 28743, e. EAM 16854); f–i. Incised ware of the Dimini period (f. EAM 18095, g. EAM 17238, h. PMU 28883, i. EAM 17250) (drawings by E. Alram-Stern, A. Dousougli and M. Frauenglas).

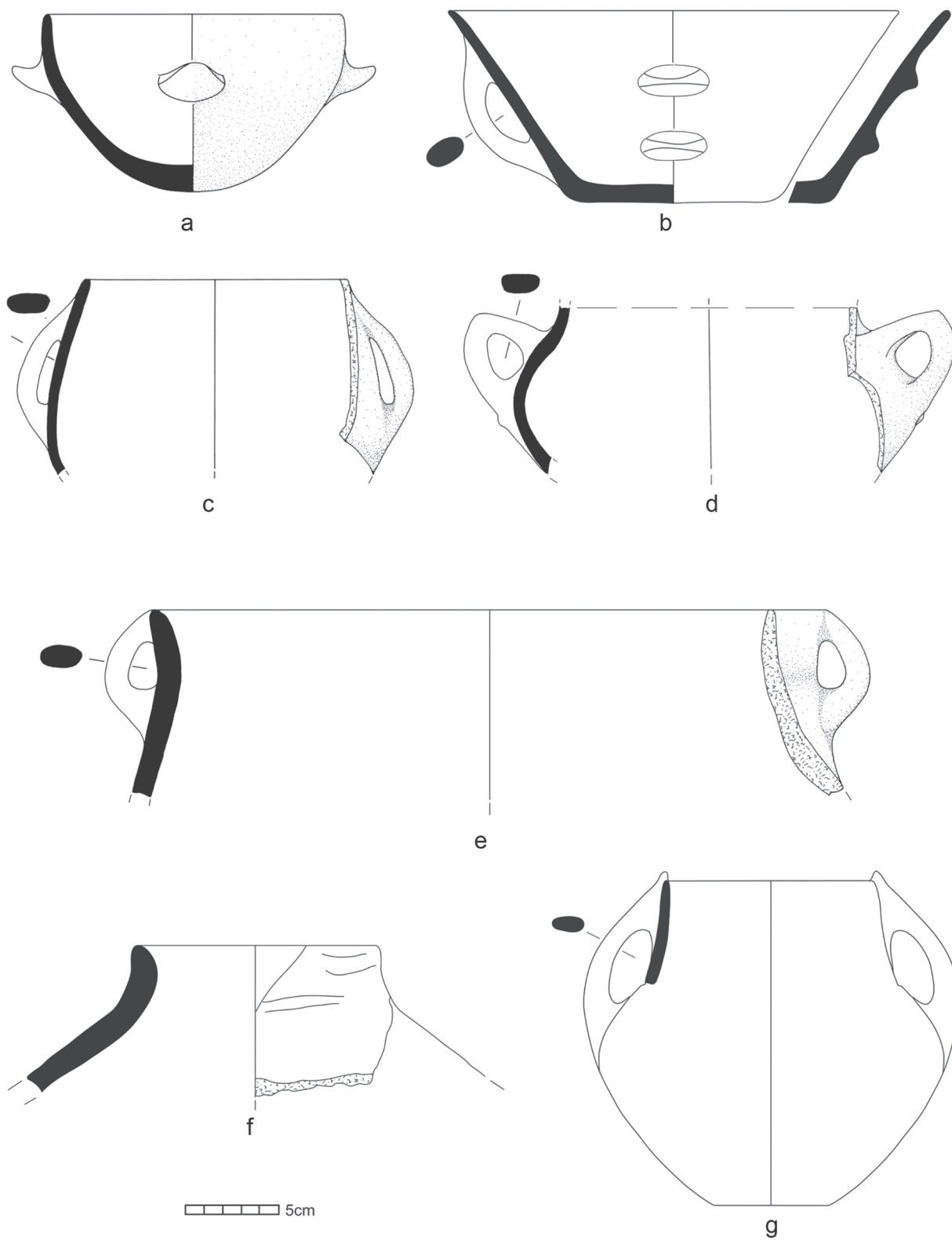


Figure 20.6. Monochrome pottery a. EAM 18099, b. EAM 18088, c. PMU 29069, d. PMU 29079, e. PMU 29073, f. PMU 28850, g. EAM 17361 (drawings by E. Alram-Stern, A. Dousougli and M. Frauenglas).

all of them being produced in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Perhaps with the exception of bichrome wares, there is no major preference for certain shapes in the production of specific wares. However, within the wares certain shapes are preferentially connected with certain motifs and their specific arrangements. Some of those arrangements seem to be similar throughout the Thessalian plain, others may be restricted to Southern Thessaly, as they are found in Pevkakia Magoula. Therefore, the relation between shapes and decoration seems to be more or less standardised, and we should think about the reasons which led potters to decide on such an arrangement. In general, pattern painting was applied during the Arapi phase for vessels used for serving and consumption.

In contrast, during the Dimini phase there are major differences in the application of bichrome Black-on-Red, White-on-Red, and Brown-on-Cream wares on the one side and incised as well as polychrome wares on the other side. Especially the bichrome wares show a restricted repertoire of shapes, which are, with the exception of a few footed bowls, mainly slightly carinated bowls of Dimini type. In contrast, the Visviki incised wares were restricted to deep bowls of a certain size and scoops. Therefore, these wares show a higher standardisation in terms of shapes, although the decorative motifs are combined in a most imaginative way. However, a number of different shapes and motifs are recorded for polychrome wares although they are all connected by a characteristic style. In general, pattern painted and incised wares were applied to bowls used for eating and drinking (Fig. 20.6).

Aside from these decorated wares, there was a large amount of monochrome pottery (Fig. 20.6), which is, of course, difficult to assign to a certain chronological phase without stratigraphy. As far as can be seen by analogies of the shapes of securely dated pattern painted pottery, the Arapi material included a larger number of red, black and brown monochrome bowls (e.g. Fig. 20.6b, d). In contrast, monochrome bowls attributable to the Dimini phase are rare. In Dimini itself, too, only 20% of bowls, most of them deep rounded bowls, are monochrome.⁴⁴ However, there is a high amount of hole-mouthed and necked jars, which must belong to Arapi as well as the Dimini phases. Therefore, it seems as if during the Arapi phase pots for serving were produced in monochrome as well as patterned wares, whereas during the Dimini phase monochrome pots more or less complemented the decorated eating and drinking vessels. Therefore emphasis was given to these patterned eating and drinking vessels, which could be used in social gatherings of people.

Conclusion

In conclusion it should be pointed out that this typological work on pottery shows that during the 5th millennium the

use of pottery underwent a significant change, which must be related to social and economic changes. This is also seen in the emergence of settlements with a radial layout like Dimini,⁴⁵ but also Visviki where a small-roomed layout was followed by large-roomed house units.

Furthermore, during the Dimini phase the manufacture of pottery shows further specialisation, as can be seen by the concentration of pottery production in the area of Dimini. Further circulation of raw materials is proven by the occurrence of *Spondylus* shell and the local production of *Spondylus* rings also in various inland sites.⁴⁶ All this points to an intensification of contacts, which possibly is to be connected with the circulation of metals as the new prestigious material at the dawn of the age of metals.⁴⁷

Notes

- 1 By its size of about 2 ha Visviki belongs to the smaller Neolithic sites of Thessaly (Demoule and Perlès 1993, 370; Johnson and Perlès 2004).
- 2 Gallis 1992, 93–4, no. 274 (Ayios Georgios Feron 3); Tsountas 1908, 4 no. 9; Wace and Thompson 1912, 8.
- 3 For the history of this institution and its activities in Greece: Hiller von Gaertringen 1995, 482–3; Schöbel 2002, 321–96; Schöbel 2008.
- 4 The finds stored in the National Museum have been returned to Greece in 1951, while the finds still stored in Germany were returned in June/July 2014.
- 5 Alram-Stern and Dousougli-Zachos 2015. The project has been granted by the Institute of Aegean Prehistory, Philadelphia and the Austrian Science Fund P 21596-G19 “Visviki Magoula/Velestino”. We would like to thank all those who supported this project, provided us with material and allowed us to study it, L. Papazoglou-Manoudaki, K. Paschalides, E. Konstaninidi-Syvridi, A. Christopoulou, K. Manteli (National Museum at Athens, Prehistoric Collection), G. Schöbel, P. Walter, J. Hummler (Pfahlbaumuseum at Unteruhldingen), B. Hänsel (Freie Universität Berlin), J. Heiden and U. Dirschedl (Archives of the German Archaeological Institute Berlin and Athens), V. Rondiri (Ephorate of Volos), G. Toufexis and K. Gallis (Ephorate Larissa) and A. Moundrea-Agrafioti (University of Volos).
- 6 Gallis 1996a, 65 fig. 2; Theocharis 1973, fig. 191.
- 7 Benecke 1942.
- 8 Alram-Stern 2015; Douzougli-Zachos and Alram-Stern 2009; Hänsel 2001.
- 9 Kotsakis 2006, 212, fig. 3, 214, fig. 4.
- 10 Deshayes 1974; Treuil 1992b, 41–3; 45–8.
- 11 Gallis 1985.
- 12 Andreou *et al.* 2001, 546; Weisshaar 1989, 9–12.
- 13 Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1994, 68–75; Andreou *et al.* 2001, 572.
- 14 Nanoglou 2001, 314.
- 15 Pappa and Nanoglou forthcoming.
- 16 Toufexis 2006, 57.
- 17 Arapi Magoula (Hauptmann and Milojčić 1969); Makrychori II (Demoule *et al.* 1988, 51).
- 18 Hauptmann 1981; Weisshaar 1989.

- 19 Hauptmann and Miložčić 1969, 49–77.
- 20 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3γ.
- 21 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α3.
- 22 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α2b.
- 23 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α1.
- 24 Hauptmann and Miložčić 1969, 112, pl. 13, 15–21.
- 25 Weisshaar 1989, 55–7.
- 26 Weisshaar 1989, pl. 1, 3, pl. 36.8.
- 27 Pentedeka 2015.
- 28 According to petrographic analysis of the ten pieces sampled, nine are probably local, one carinated bowl however coming from North-Eastern or Eastern Thessaly (Pentedeka 2015).
- 29 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α2b.
- 30 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α1.
- 31 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3β.
- 32 Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B3α2a.
- 33 Hauptmann 1981, 14–24, 47–9.
- 34 Pentedeka 2015.
- 35 For a characterisation of Brown-on-Cream pottery see Hitsiou 2003, 172.
- 36 Pentedeka 2015.
- 37 Hauptmann 1981, 63–74; Wace and Thompson 1912, 16, B2.
- 38 All sherds sampled come from locally produced vessels (Pentedeka 2015).
- 39 Compare Otzaki Magula (Hauptmann 1981, 278, pl. 80, 9), Argissa Magula (Hauptmann 1981, pl. 84, 9 [Otzaki A-Stufe]), Pevkakia Magula (Weisshaar 1989, pl. 29, 1, 6–7, 10, 12–6, 18–24), Phthiotic Thebes (Weisshaar 1984; Weisshaar 1989, pls 88–9).
- 40 Weisshaar 1984, pl. 58, 9.
- 41 Miložčić *et al.* 1976, pl. 15, 13; Weisshaar 1989, 146, pl. 2, 10.
- 42 Hitsiou 2003, 79–80; 170–1.
- 43 Weisshaar 1989, pl. 14, 14; pl. 133 type 203.
- 44 Souvatzi 2008, 120, fig. 5, 7, 121, fig. 5, 9.
- 45 Souvatzi 2008, 107–18.
- 46 Halstead 1993; for a production also in Visviki see Galik 2015a and Galik 2015b.
- 47 Zachos 2010.