

MIDDLE NEOLITHIC POTTERY GROUPS  
of the  
PELOPONNESE AND THESSALY REGIONS  
of  
MAINLAND GREECE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Middle Neolithic of Greece falls roughly between 5000 and 4000 BC. It is a period of increased development for man. Stock-breeding is only 2500 years old, and agricultural activity is even younger. Community development, spurred from the Early Neolithic, is markedly increased with the development of the "acropolis" and walled fortifications. Settlements are now permanent and have become a center of social development for man; the community is a place he calls home.

Pottery also exhibits great improvement during the Middle Neolithic. Shapes are well developed, material is of good quality, and the decorated pots mark a high degree of artistic style. It is the Middle Neolithic pottery types of the Peloponnese and Thessaly regions that this paper will discuss.

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## TERMINOLOGY

The following paper on Middle Neolithic pottery uses terminology based on the convenient tripartite scheme devised by Weinberg in 1947 (Weinberg 1947, p. 171-81; 1954, p. 96). Systematically it divides the neolithic period into Early, Middle, and Late Neolithic. In recent years a Final Neolithic phase has been employed to provide leeway between Late Neolithic and Early Helladic (Phelps 1975).

This system was contrived for Southern Greece, but has now been adopted for use throughout the Greek mainland. However, it should be understood that Thessalian sites hold their own nomenclature. A system devised by Tsountas in 1908 divided the neolithic into Thessaly A and B. Milošević (1950) further developed the sequence into Frühkeramik, Protosesklo, and Vorsesklo, these being three phases corresponding to Early Neolithic; Thessaly A corresponding to Middle Neolithic (with which this paper is concerned); Thessaly B corresponding to Late Neolithic; and Dimini being transitional between Late and Final Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (see chart at end of text).

Milošević and others (French 1972) feel that Weinberg's tripartite scheme lacks flexibility. They propose that areas of Greece; i.e., Central Greece, Peloponnese, Boeotia, etc., should have their own cultural "phase" names. This, however, could lead to a rapid proliferation of confusing and complex terminology, which in turn, would lead the reader into deciphering the area and date to which the phase name belongs. Furthermore, it would tend to make correlations with other

mainland sites difficult. Until a simple, more flexible phase name system can be worked out, the tripartite scheme shall have to suffice.

In the Middle Neolithic a further subdivision is made and is used in both the Peloponnesian and Thessalian sequences. These divisions are simply Phases I, II, III; or, early, middle, late, and will be used interchangeably in this paper. Also, the abbreviations EN., MN., and LN. (Early, Middle, and Late Neolithic) will be used when appropriate.

A number of terms used in this work need clarification and definition before the reader begins.

1. Urfirnis: is a category of pottery characteristic of the Peloponnesian MN. It is distinguishable by its particularly streaky glaze and its inherent glossy quality that makes burnishing unnecessary. Another feature is the "scraped" appearance of its unglazed interior surface.
2. Tectonic: (p.80) pertains to constructive design of the pattern; or, in an architectural sense, we may add the meaning artistic structuralism.
3. Reference to figures are placed in quotes; e.g.(7;1,2). The first number is the figure page; the second number (s) refers to the particular drawing on that page.

#### SHAPES of the Peloponnesian and Thessaly

The repertory of the Peloponnesian Urfirnis shapes consists of bowls and cups, pyriform jars, carinated forms, and collared jars.

A dominant type of bowl which shows continuity throughout the Early and Middle Neolithic is the open shallow bowl.(1;1,2). This bowl appears in a variety of sizes and has been found with every type of base, from the early ring (1;3) to the later pedestal (1;4). Figure 1;2 , is a typical bowl of all Middle

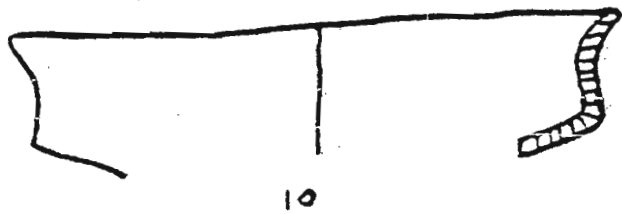
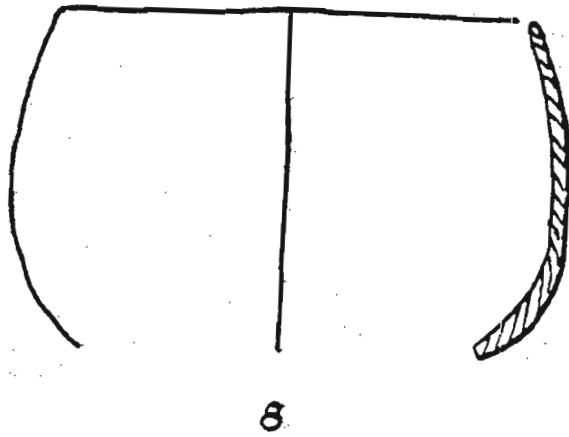
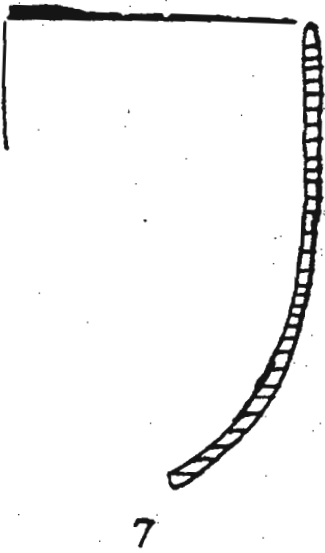
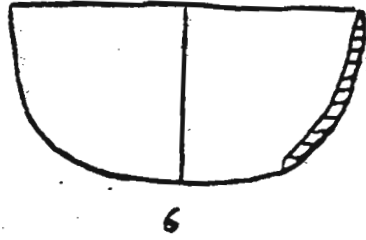
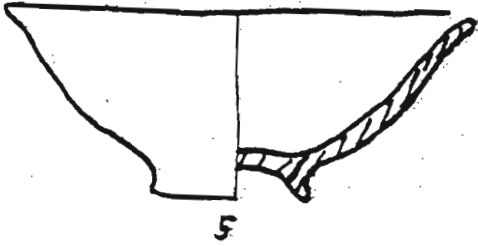
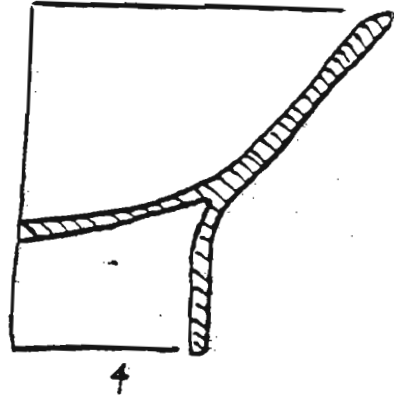
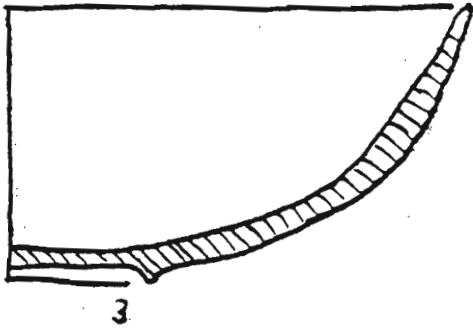
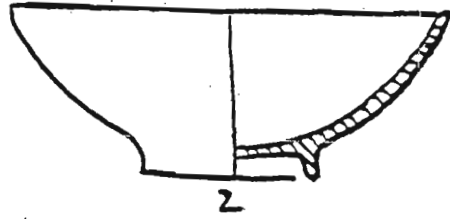
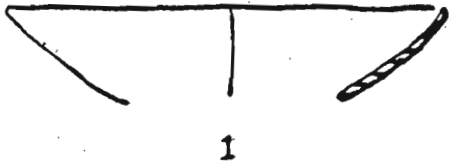


Fig.1

Neolithic phases in the Peloponnese. Other shallow bowl forms include straight sides (usually with conical bases or high pedestal "fruitstands", (1;4), and concave forms in which the upper section splays slightly (1;5).

Medium-sized open vessels range in size and proportion from small hemispherical cups (1;6) to large hemispherical bowls (1;7), with predominantly straight sides.

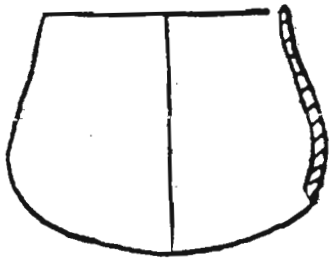
Closed bowls were a common feature of the Early Neolithic. The large, deep closed bowls eventually merge into the Middle Neolithic pyriform jars (1;8).

The flaring or splaying rim on bowls and jars is characteristic of the Peloponnesian MN. The rim angles upwards (1;9,10); the early phase having rims on a globular form with a gradual development towards a more angular or carinated shape in the late phase.

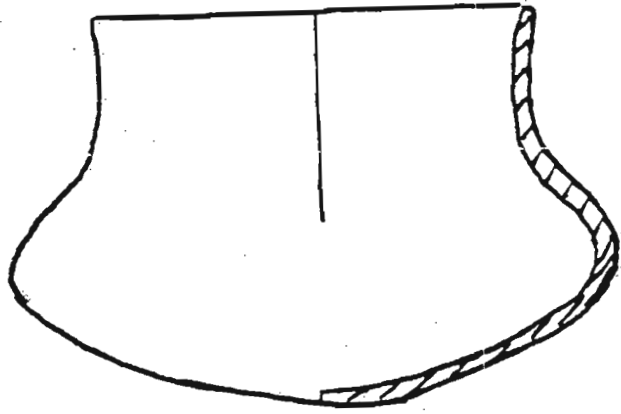
The pyriform jar, some with S-profiled walls, has been placed by Phelps (1975:133) into three categories; concave (2;1), medium (2;2), and narrow (2;3). Actually these categories merge with each other. The concave pyriform jar develops out of the bowl form and is transitional between a bowl and a jar. The distinction between bowl and pyriform shapes, is that the latter are deeper and have more profile.

Carinated bowls of all sizes are common in the middle and late phases of MN (2;4,5) with many resting on conical bases (2,7). A few carinated dishes are found in the extreme latter part of phase III (more within LN), but are only known at Corinth (2;6)(Weinberg 1937, p. 501).

Collared jars are divided into low (3;1,2), medium (3;3,4),



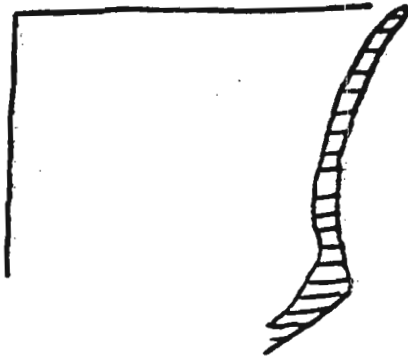
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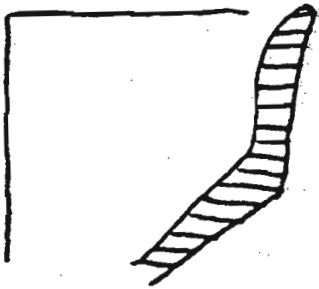
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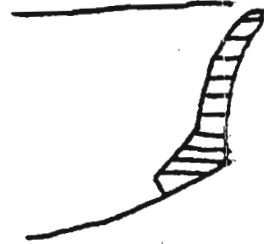
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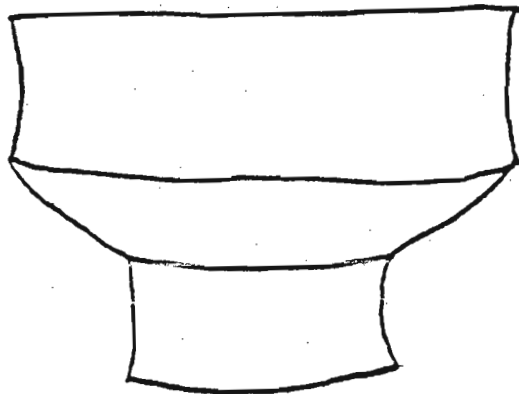
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Fig. 2



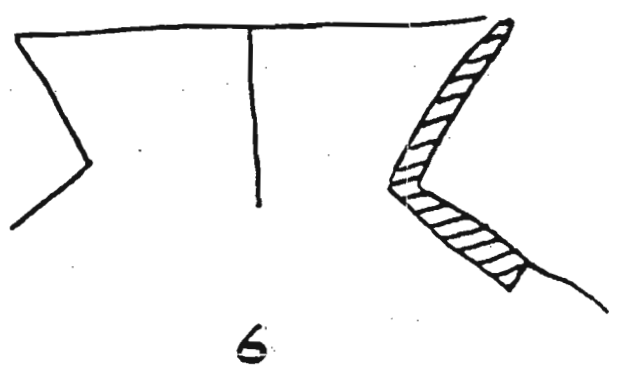
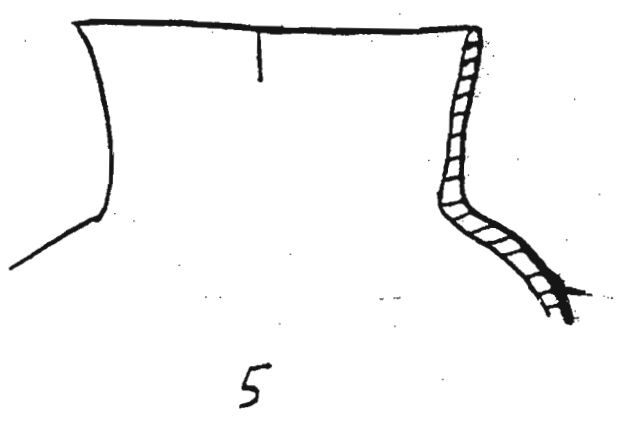
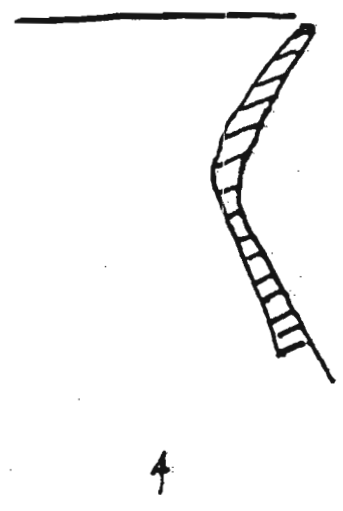
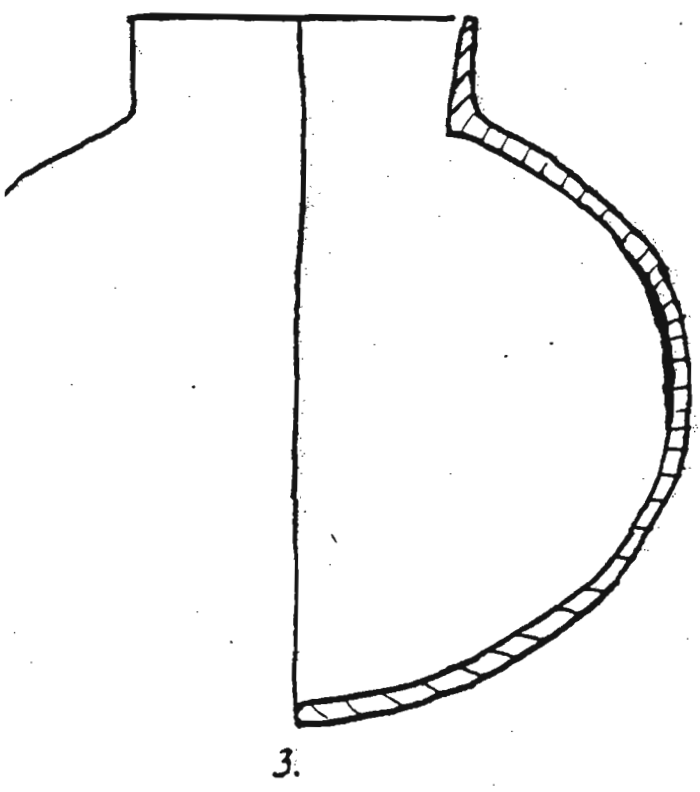
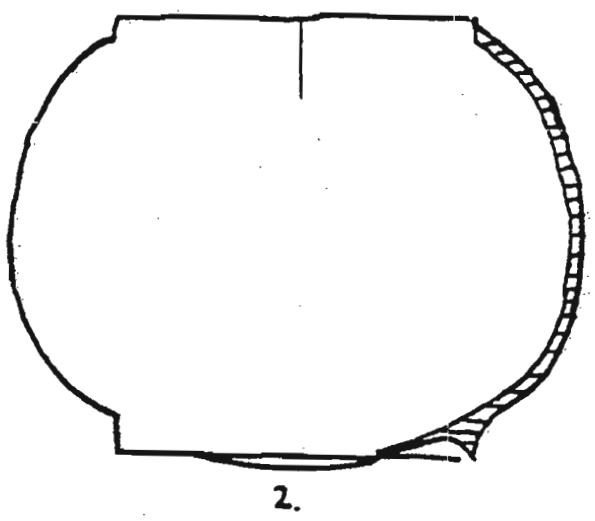
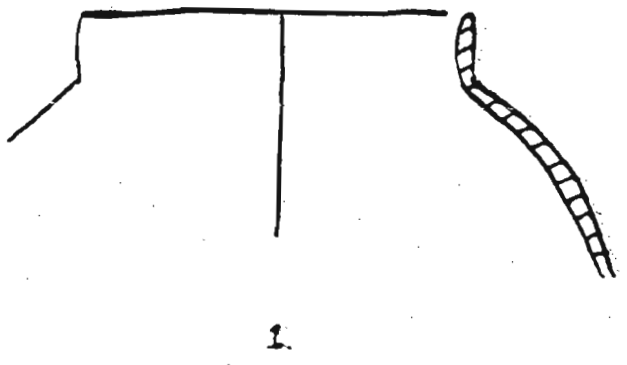


Fig. 3

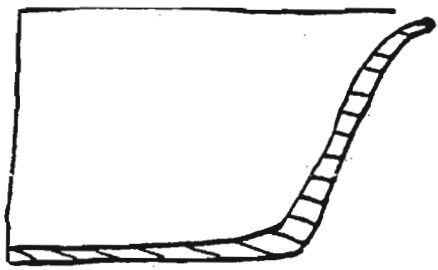
and high (3;5,6) collar types, with either globular (3;3) or narrow (3;4) bodies. Collared jars are a continuance from the Early Neolithic, but show a marked increase in the Middle period. They exhibit a great variety of shape and proportion, and no doubt, function.

The standard type of lug for the Middle Neolithic is the spur. It is usually confined to bowls and is set just below the lip. A new feature of the period is handles. They never became very common and are confined to pyriform and collared jars.

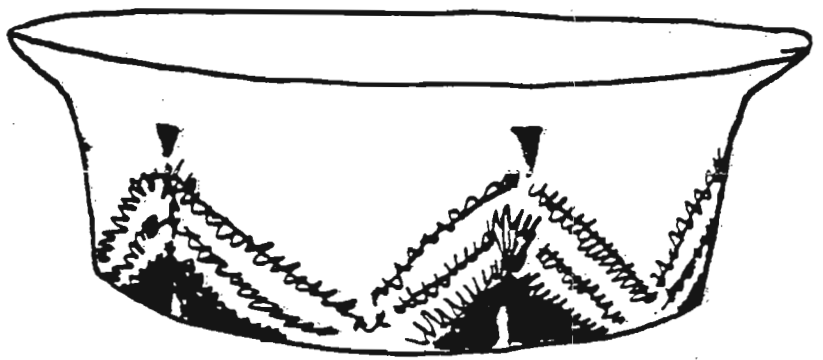
In the Thessaly region of Northern Greece, the repertory consists of bowls, mugs, hemispherical and globular jars, and carinated bowl forms.

The most common types of bowls are wide open shapes with a flat bottom and splayed lips (4;1,2); and a wide open type with nearly vertical sides (4;3). Bowl shapes gradually develop wider and lower rims (dishes) and are set upon high conical bases (4;4); preceding the Late Neolithic "fruitstands" (4;5). There is also a wide variety of medium, straight-sided, hemispherical bowls with raised bases (4;6) and small narrow-necked closed bowls (4;7a,b).

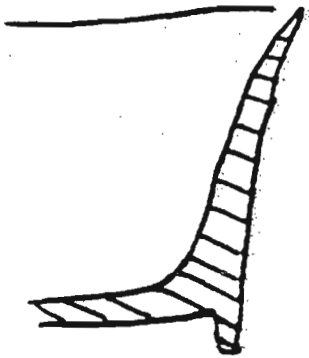
The hemispherical and globular jars are a carryover from EN, or Protosesklo, with the raised base being an addition of the Middle Neolithic (Holmberg 1964 :16). Medium collared (5;1) and high collared (5;2) are more numerous than low collared pieces. Many of the jars have extremely narrow or funnel-necked collars with very robust bodies (5;3). Narrow shaped jars appear to be nothing more than globular elongations (5;4). An excep-



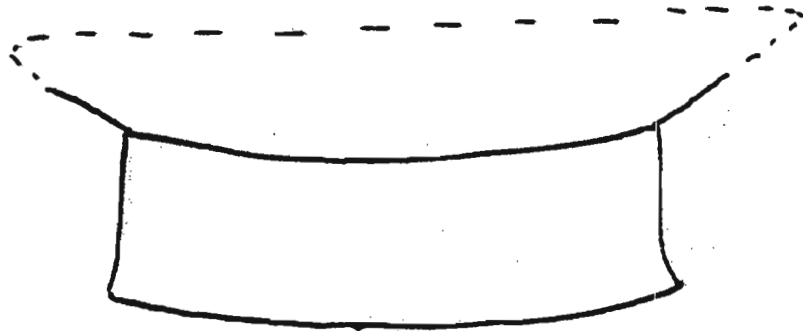
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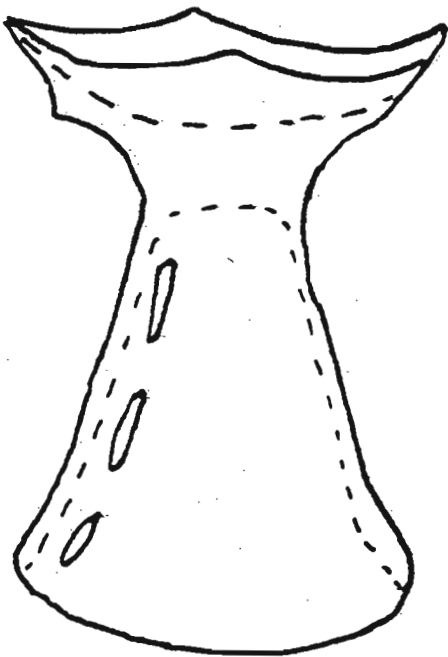
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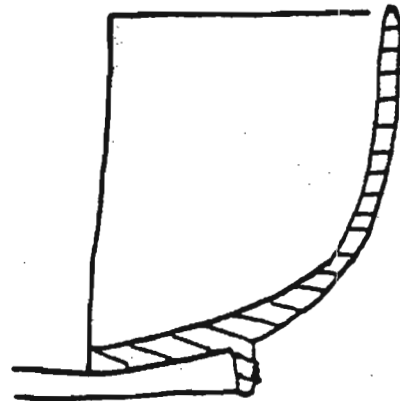
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6



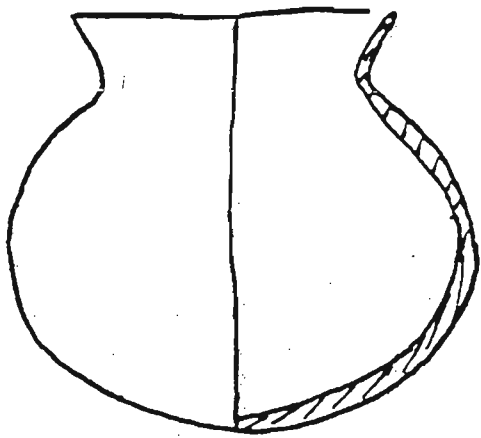
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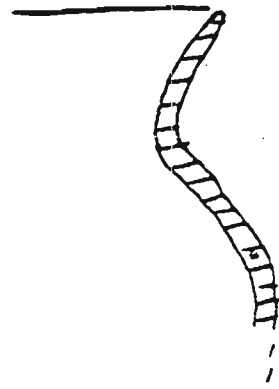
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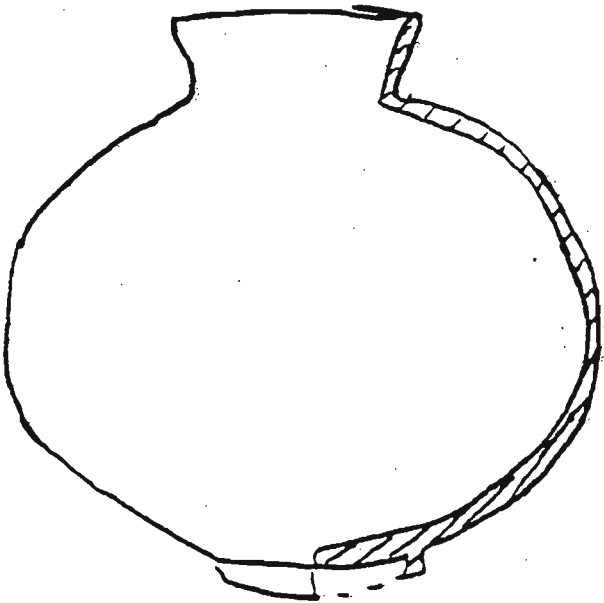
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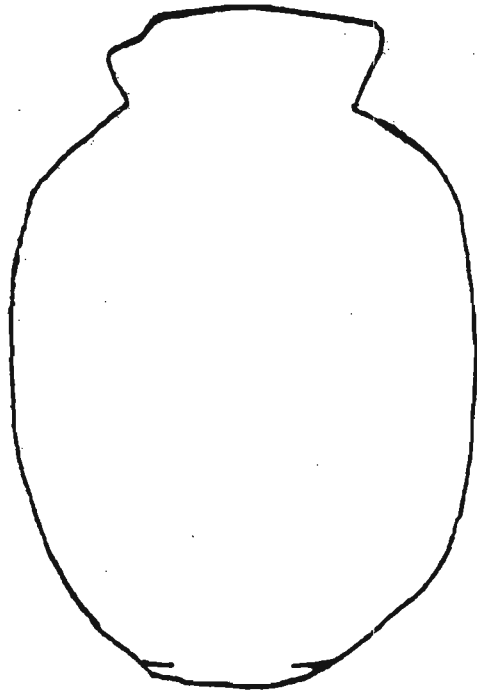
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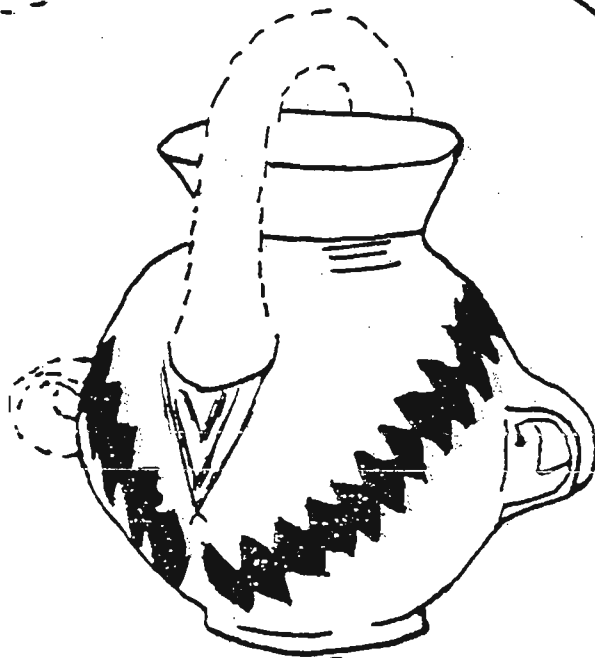
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tional to the jar repertory is the "bail-handle" form found at Tsangli (5;5)(Wace and Thompson 1912:112).

From the earliest sequences of Thessaly A are found bell-shaped mugs with splaying rims (6;1). These are the most frequent mugs, or cups, found; although pyriform or pot-bellied types are common (6;2).

What is said to be characteristic of the middle and late phases of Thessaly A is the carinated bowl form (6;3). The bowls usually have one or two tubular handles in the concave upper part and a raised base for support (Holmberg 1964:112).

Handles are very prevalent in the Thessaly A period. They occur on bowls, mugs, and jars, and usually take a vertical or tubular shape, some having raised edges.

Peloponnesian and Thessalian shapes are basically the same. Differences may be seen in bowls and cups. The closed bowls and globular jars of Thessaly are not as refined as the Urfirnis shapes. However, the mugs of Thessaly and especially the handles are developed far better than those of the Urfirnis ware.

#### FABRIC

The fabric of Urfirnis ware is uniform throughout the Middle Neolithic, and the Peloponnesian. Ware quality is good, being well formed, thin-walled, and thoroughly baked. Two classes of fabric are used in description: fine ware and coarse ware. (The same applies for Thessaly).

Characteristically, the fine Urfirnis fabric is hard and dense, has a granular texture, and is tempered with gritty

white particles and sometimes fine mica. White grits vary in number and are dispersed throughout the clay. Inner surfaces of the more closed vessels are smoothed down with a broad blunt tool. When the tool is drawn across the surface, sharp incisions are created by the dragging of the gritty particles along with the small blades of the tool (Weinberg 1937:500; Phelps 1975:126). The exterior surface is treated in the same manner only the incisions are smoothed out.

Color of the fine fabric ranges from light pink to deep brick. Being well-fired, the color is uniform throughout; only occasionally a dark non-oxidized center is found.

Coarse ware is made in much the same way. The ware is generally porous and sometimes has large white grits. The color is usually dark (brick) and is often mottled.

The quality of the fabric in Thessaly is no less than that of the Urfirnis ware. The fine fabric is usually thin-walled, well-baked, and on the whole is clear of grit, even though white particles occur at times. Sponginess, a characteristic of Protosesklo, is no longer found.

The inner surfaces are well-smoothed and the wares' exterior is normally well-burnished. Color ranges from a lustrous cream to black. Red and white are the two most common.

The coarse ware is thick, the clay is mixed with sand, and the surface is not highly burnished. The thickness is more common for incised ware and large storage jars. Color ranges from yellowish-brown to gray to black.

Brief mention should be made as to why the potters created two types of fabric. The fine ware was mainly for decorative

purposes and it became a medium for the individual potter to artistically express himself. It may be safe to assume that the fine and highly decorative wares were also used for religious purposes. The coarse ware on the other hand, was utilitarian. It was used for cooking, storage, etc., and was also cheap and needed less care in manufacture.

### FINISH

As mentioned in the previous section, the surface of Urfirnis ware is worked down with a blunt tool. Following this is the treatment of smoothing down the exterior of the vessel, and the interior treatment of bowls. Burnishing the surface of Urfirnis ware is sometimes practiced. This process is important since it renders a vase less porous; it is functional as well as decorative.

A slip or clay wash (actually a glaze in the case of Urfirnis) is applied to a great number of pots. Jacobsen puts the estimate of slipped pots at 70% for Phase II of the Middle Neolithic (Jacobsen 1969:366). Slip colors range from red or orange to black; the most common being a reddish-brown or mahogany.

The slip of the early phase is often thin, dull, and streaky, giving the appearance of having been swabbed on with a cloth. At Franchthi, Jacobsen (1969:363) notices that the early "non-lustrous" slip develops into a high lustrous appearance in the middle phase. Phase II ware has an inherent glossy quality (glaze), and is the high point of technological expertise in Urfirnis ware.

The degree of luster depends on the chemical composition and fineness of the slip, the thickness of application, firing

conditions, and the smoothness of the surface. The latter is important for the Urfirnis glaze. The surface must be smoothed down to attain a high luster from the slip; otherwise, it will be dull (Phelps 1975:128-9). However, if the surface is smoothed too much or well burnished, then the slip will not adhere.

Burnishing is done in two ways: 1) light burnishing before the slip application; and 2) burnishing after the slip application. If in the first method the burnishing has not eliminated all the tool marks, the slip will be thicker in the depressions, creating dark streaks. The streaks left by the "brush" application of the slip may often be seen crossing the surface marks.

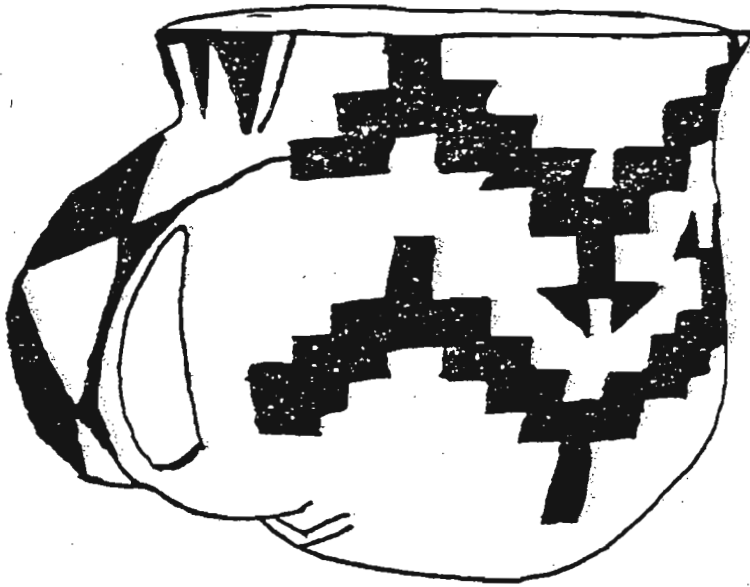
In the second type of burnishing, the outer surface of the slip is worked to bring out luster. The tone is generally unaffected.

Parts of the vessel were often left in reverse and decorated with painted patterns. These patterns were applied in much the same manner as slips; the only difference is that the paint was applied more thickly to make a darker color. The darkest part of the decorated slip would be where lines of the patterns intersect.

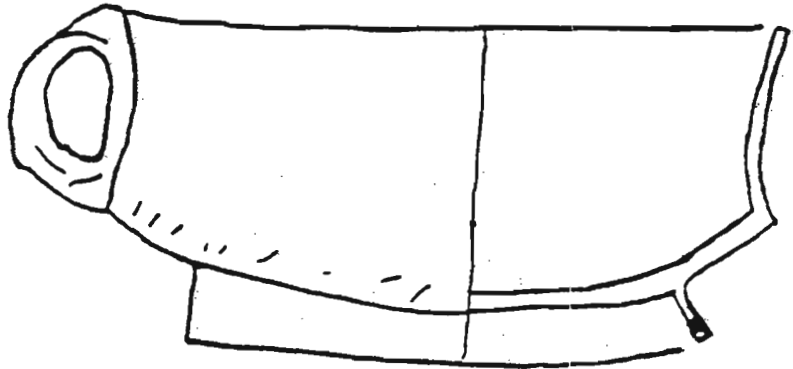
In Thessaly A the pottery is covered with a thick slip that varies in color from red-brown to black to white. Burnishing varies from low to high. The finished ware is of two types; monochrome and red-on-white or white-on-red. A third type, coarse ware, is without a slip and is lightly burnished (Wace and Thompson 1912:13-5).

The slip colors of the fine monochrome ware are red (the predominant color), black, and white. The slip is usually applied over clay material of the same color (red slip over red

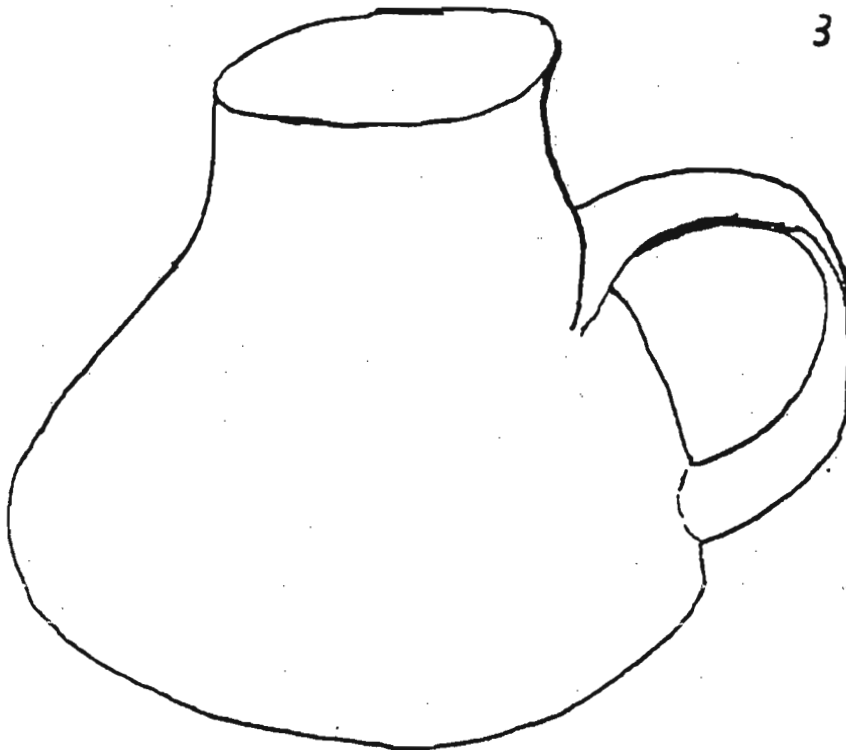




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3



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Fig. 6

material) and is highly burnished giving the pot a deep rich color and a fine luster.

Of the painted ware the red-on-white consists of two varieties. In the first, the vessel is covered with a thick white slip and a deep red slip is painted over it in decorative patterns. In the second, the vessel is again covered with a thick white slip and then over this is applied a thick red slip. When the latter is still damp the potter scrapes out linear patterns in the red, exposing the white slip below. Care must be taken not to scratch too deeply, so as not to damage the white slip below. On the other hand, too shallow a scratch will leave a pinkish tinge. Both types of these red-on-white have a brilliant burnish.

White-on-red ware has a burnished red slip decorated over with a matted white paint. The white paint is applied after the burnishing of the red slip, this making the former very flaky.

Less common wares of the period include a red-brown on buff in which burnishing is done after firing (Wace and Thompson 1912:15). An incised ware with small geometric designs arranged in chains has a slip applied between the incisions. Towards the latter part of Phase III in Thessaly a gray-on-gray appears followed by a black burnished. The gray ware lasts a very short time and may be transitional to black burnished which is characteristic of Thessaly B (see chart).

The difference in finish treatment between the contemporary pottery of Thessaly A and the Peloponnese is great. In Thessaly we find: 1) the color range is wider and includes the fine white

slip; 2) burnishing is used effectively as the only means of bringing out luster; and 3) slip application is thicker and often a slip of a different color applied over another.

The Urfirnis glaze is the "trademark" of Peloponnesian pottery. The clay slip used produces an inherent gloss and does not require the burnishing that Thessalian pottery needs to bring out luster. It is the chemical composition and fineness of the clay wash that is mainly responsible for the glaze effect. The color of Urfirnis is usually a mahogany or darker - never white.

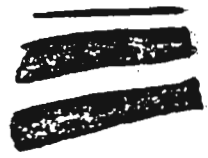
#### PATTERNS

Urfirnis patterns are constructed of simple lines that vary in width. The lines can be straight or wavy and form rectilinear and geometric patterns.

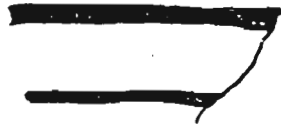
The running type design is the most common pattern found. The patterns are divided into three groups: 1) the simple horizontal band (7;1,2) found on the upper part of the rim and sometimes as "necking bands" at carinations: 2) continuous zig-zags and chevrons which may consist of one broad line (7;3) or a group of parallel lines meeting at angles (7;4,5); and 3) chains of filled triangles and lozenges (7;6,7). Triangles are often filled with cross-hatching.

Rim pendant decoration consists of solid inverted triangle motifs (7;8). Tails are eventually developed on these (7;9,10). Short vertical lines are also used as rim motifs (7;11).

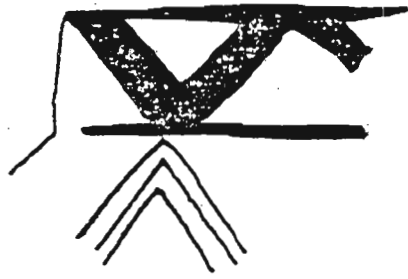
Static motifs consist of vertical lines, broad or thin (7;12,13) and the complicated "tectonic" pattern of Phase II (8;1-4). The intricate "tectonic" patterns mark (along with



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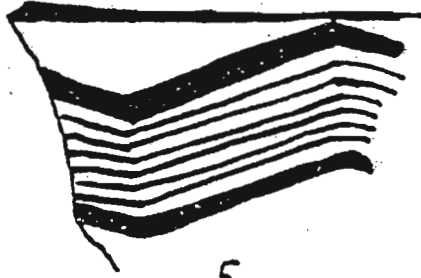
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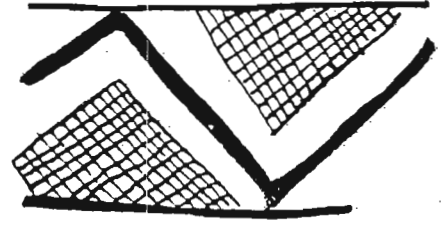
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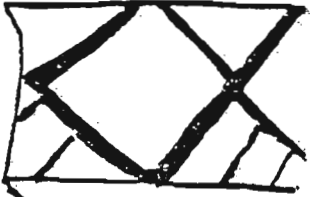
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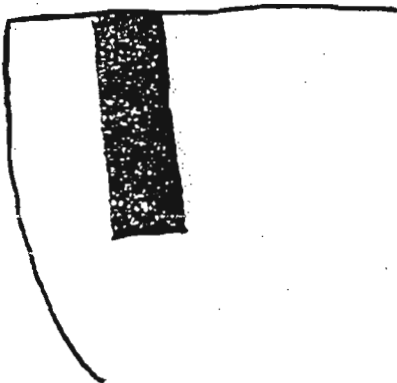
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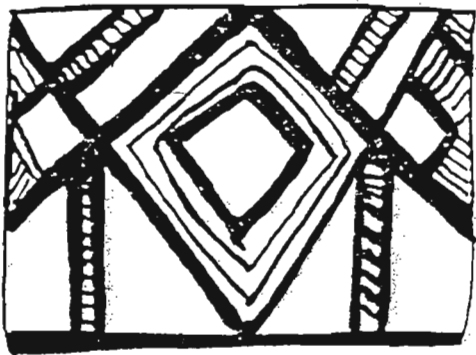
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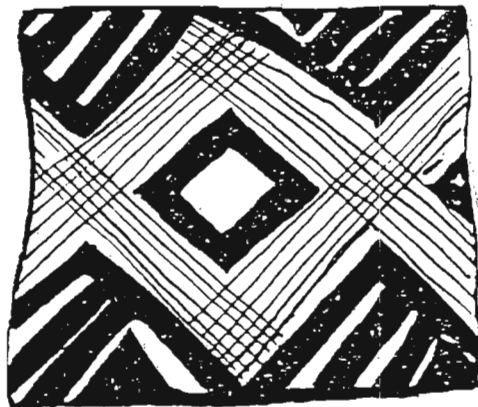
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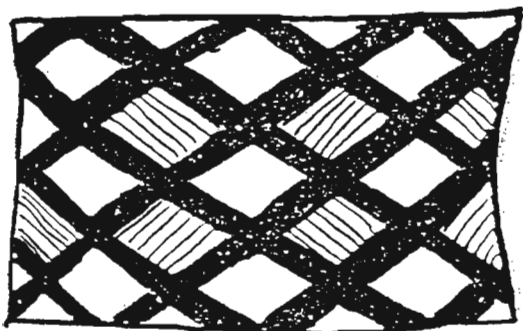
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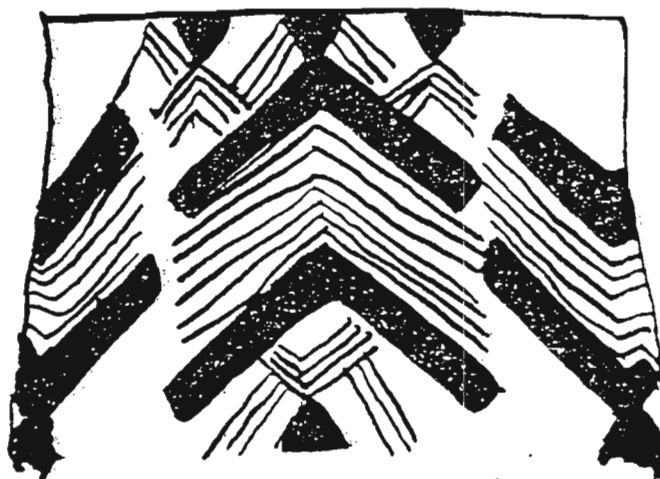
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4

the fine glaze) the high period of Urfirnis ware development.

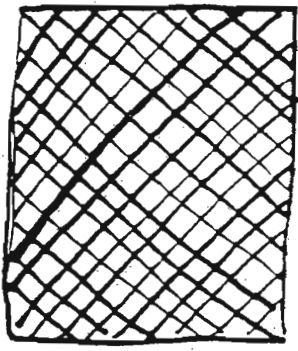
In decoration of the open bowl the simplest motifs are of the early phase. These designs are usually basket weaving patterns (9;1) or simple cross-hatching (9;2). The common motif of all phases is the multiple chevron with triangles on the lip (9;3). An elaborate pattern was the division of the bowl interior into quadrants using solid or wavy lines as fillers between broad lines (9;4,5).

Characteristic motifs employed in Urfirnis ware include solid motifs of triangles, squares, lozenges, and dots (9;6-9). Broad lines are used to emphasize and are used in chevron and tectonic patterns, with wavy and thin straight lines as fillers.

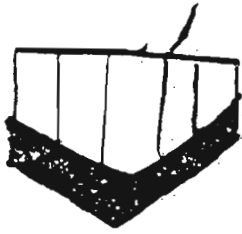
Thessalian patterns consist of the so-called solid style (stepped triangles and squares in a zig-zag pattern); and linear designs with straight or wavy lines and broad flame or wolf's tooth bands running around bowls.

In the running type pattern the solid style design uses triangles, lozenges, and rectangles to form either a stepped pattern (6;1) or a zig-zag arrangement (5;5). Linear patterns are made up of thin wavy or straight lines bordered by thicker lines that run around the bowl in a ribbon or broad chevron pattern (10;1,2). The edge of the broad line has a development from a saw-toothed edge (10;2) to stretched-out spine (10;3) to the common fire flame pattern (10;4). These running ribbons rarely meet at ends; instead one end terminates near the lip, the other near the base (10;4,5).

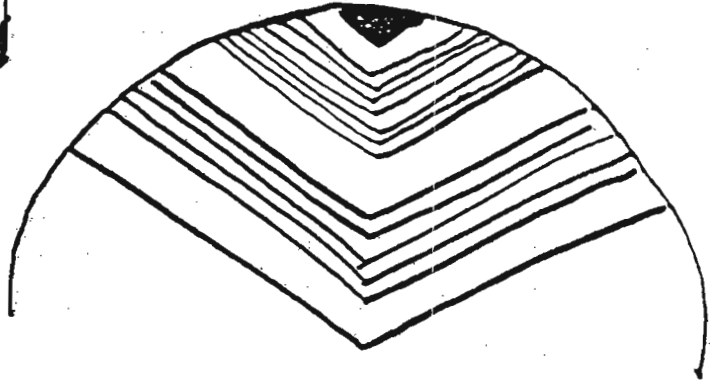
Rim pendant decoration consists of a thin or broad painted line (10;2-7). Some carinated shapes have a solid toothed



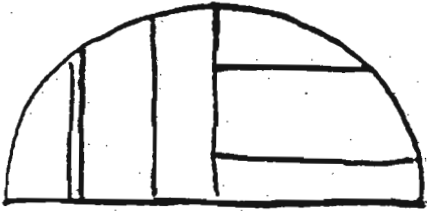
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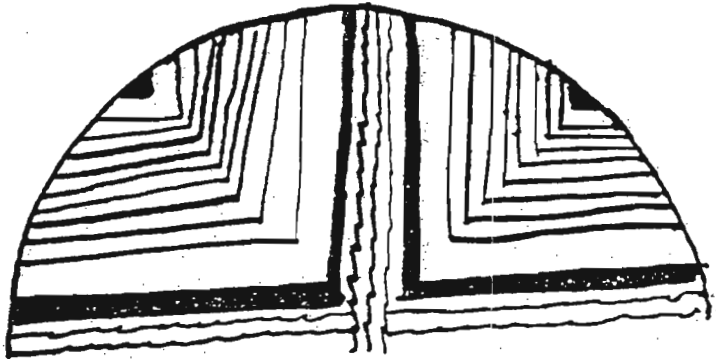
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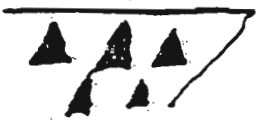
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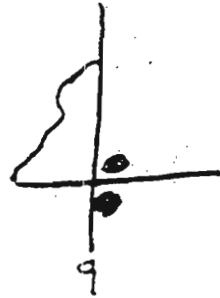
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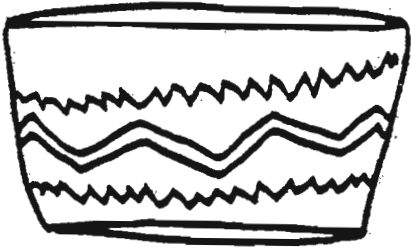


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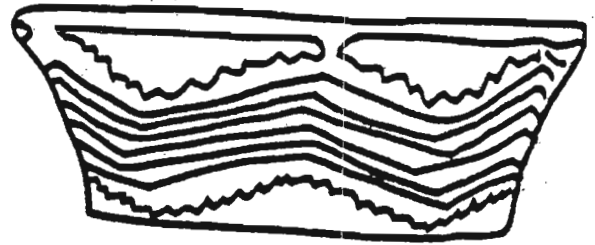


9

Fig.9



1



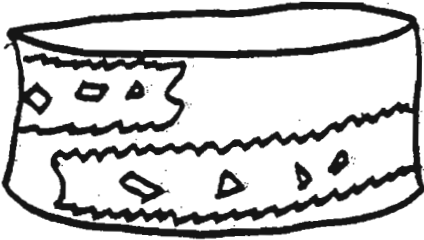
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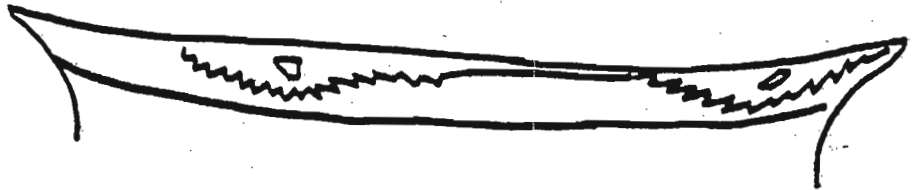
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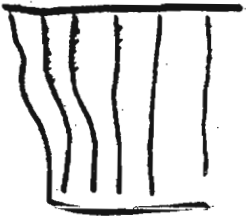
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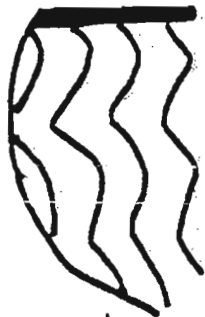
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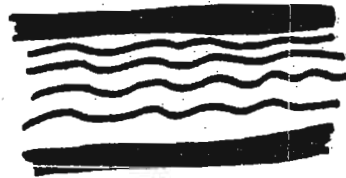


a



b

9



10

Fig. 10



pattern with an open triangle in its center, placed around the rim (10;6). Solid inverted triangles are also found.

Linear decorations are comprised of thin straight lines, many in the form of chevrons (10;8) and wavy lines often in a general motif pattern (10;10). Vertical and zig-zag lines sometimes run the height of the bowl (10;9a & b).

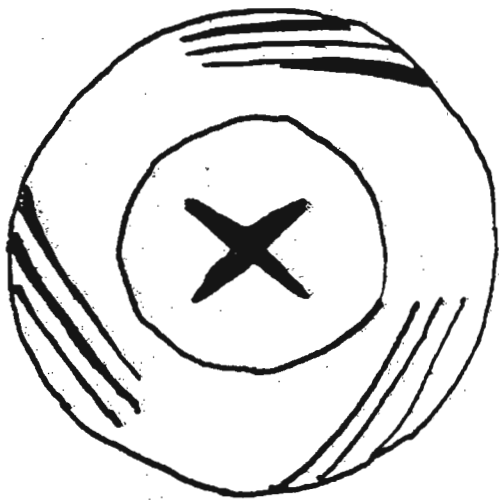
Open bowl decoration consists of simple linear designs on the interior edge with the flat bottom decorated with an X (11;1). Another common pattern has thin lines running vertically across three areas of the inner rim. Below the line a broad, spined ribbon circles the bowl. The center is decorated with a star (11;2). In Phase II an interesting whirl pattern appears (11;3). Once believed to be rooted in Samarra (a cultural development in the northwestern area of Mesopotamia contemporary with the Greek Neolithic period), most scholars now believe the whirl pattern to be indigenous to Greece.

Thessalian motifs are somewhat simple; much like Urfirnis. Rectangles, triangles, and lozenges (11;4-6) are the most common types. They are arranged in a stepped pattern (6;1), or used as filler decorations in bands.

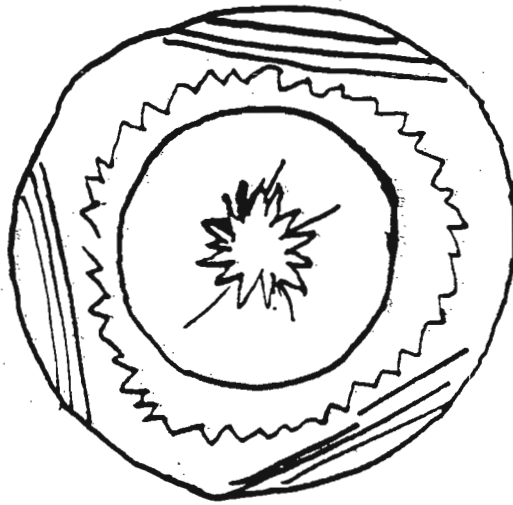
In the northern Thessaly region incised ware is found (Wace and Thompson 1912:14). Patterns are formed by wedge-shaped and round incisions arranged in chains of geometric design (11;7).

#### THE SPREAD OF POTTERY AND RE-EVALUATION OF CERTAIN EVIDENCE

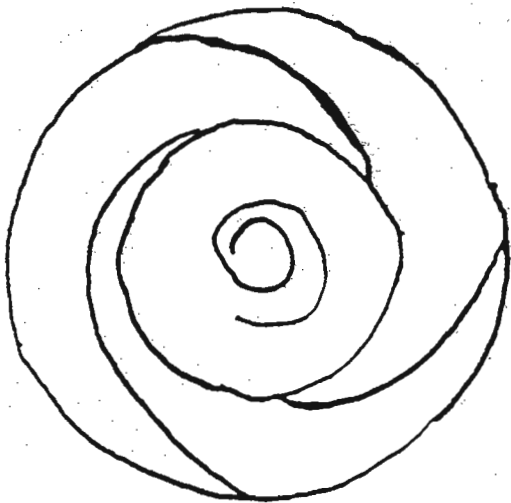
The arrival of pottery in Greece appears to be sudden and widespread. General opinion is that the potters arrived with their well-developed forms from the Aegean and Near East. Close parallels are drawn by Weinberg (1954, 1965a) between Greece and



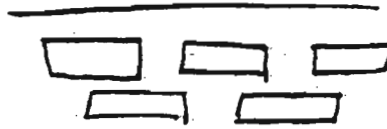
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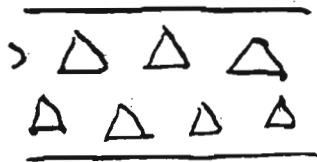
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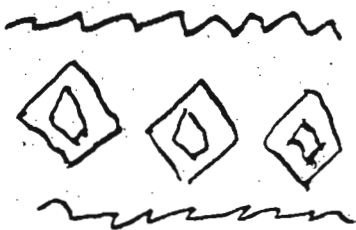
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4



5



6



7

Fig.11

the Eastern Mediterranean, all well within the diffusionist framework. However, with the recent shift in C-14 dates (Renfrew 1971), the Early Neolithic in Greece is partly synchronous in development with the settlement of Catal Huyuk (an "advanced" cultural development in Anatolia with pottery sequences dating to the eighth millenium B.C.) and at least 2000 years earlier than Neolithic Egypt (Theocharis 1973: 112-113). Scholars are now modifying their explanation in saying that the Neolithic developments in the Near East, Greece, and the Balkans are practically parallel with one another. The old view held that the Neolithic developed in the Near East, then spread across the Aegean to Greece, then up to the Balkans. But the evidence for the spread across the Aegean is practically nil, and with the recent upset in C-14 dating a great deal of compiled evidence is going to have to be re-evaluated.

Turning to the specific period discussed in this work, we find that the ceramic development in Greece has a certain continuity from the Early Neolithic up until the end of the Middle Neolithic (as evidenced by Jacobsen at Franchthi). The black burnished ware from the north is a break that marks the beginning of the Late Neolithic. Weinberg, however, believes the whirl patterns of Thessaly (see p.82) are derived from the Samarran pottery (1965a:295;1965b:592) and accounts for Urfirnis ware as an arrival of a new population from the Near Eastern Halaf culture (1965a:292-6).

I do not intend to write a polemic against Weinberg, but I believe on both accounts above he uses selective evidence

in drawing these conclusions. In the case of the Thessalian whirl it is very dangerous to contend that it had its origins in Samarra. Why would the whirl pattern be the only influence? What about architectural techniques and figurines? It is very unlikely that one simple pattern would find its way into a repertory of designs that is immune to its contemporary neighbors - especially the highly developed Urfirnis ware.

In the case of the Urfirnis arrival, Jacobsen (1973:264), shows at Franchthi a continual ceramic development throughout the Early and Middle Neolithic. The theory of a new intervening population has a weak basis. First it is reasonable to assume that a population transfer from the center of the Near East to the Peloponnese would leave traces along the way. None have been found. Secondly, a population immigrating to another is capable of influencing, as well as changing, not only the pottery techniques of the existing society, but also other major components; such as, architecture, figurines, and economy. At present no traces of these changes are found. Further work must be done in the area.

In concluding this paper, it is only proper to place the Middle Neolithic in the whole of the Greek Neolithic. As mentioned in the introduction, the Middle Neolithic dates between 5000 and 4000 B.C. The beginning of the Neolithic period in Greece dates to approximately 6400 B.C. The terminating point is around 3100 B. C., when the Bronze Age is making its rise.

The pottery of the Greek Neolithic reaches its height of development during the Middle period. The Late Neolithic experiences a cultural influence from the north; an influence

from which the pottery enters a period of decadence. Black burnished ware rapidly replaces the Urfirnis and monochrome vessels. The fabric of the black burnished is rough and the decoration is simplistic. It is not until the Mycenaean Age (1400-1100 B.C.) that we find pottery comparable to that of the finest decorated wares of the Middle Neolithic.

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- Fig. 1 - 1 & 2 convex form; 3 convex with ring foot; 4 straight side high pedestal; 5 concave form; 6 small cup; 7 large bowl; 8 large deep closed bowl; 9 & 10 flaring rim bowls. (Phelps 1975).
- Fig. 2 - 1 concave pyriform; 2 & 3 medium and narrow pyriform; 4 & 5 carinated bowls; 6 carinated dish; 7 carinated bowl on conical base. (Phelps 1975 - Weinberg 1937).
- Fig. 3 - 1 & 2 low collared jar; 3 & 4 medium collared jar; 5 & 6 high collared jar. (Phelps 1975).
- Fig. 4 - 1 & 2 wide open bowl with splayed lip; 3 wide open bowl with vertical side; 4 conical base; 5 LN "fruitstand". 6 medium hemispherical bowl; 7 small narrow necked closed bowls. (Wace and Thompson 1912).
- Fig. 5 - 1 medium collar; 2 high collar; 3 narrow-necked globular; 4 narrow jar; 5 "bail handle" jar. (Wace and Thompson 1912; Holmberg 1964).
- Fig. 6 - 1 bell-shaped mug; 2 pot-bellied mug; 3 carinated bowl (Wace and Thompson 1912).
- Fig. 7 - Urfirnis motifs (Phelps 1975).
- Fig. 8 - Urfirnis "tectonic" patterns (Phelps 1975).
- Fig. 9 - 1 & 2 basket weave and cross-hatch; 3 multiple chevron; 4 7 5 quadrant design; 6 - 9 basic motifs (Phelps 1975).
- Fig. 10 - Thessalian fire-flames, wolf's teeth, and motifs (Wace and Thompson 1912).
- Fig. 11 - Thessalian bowl interiors and motifs; 7 incised ware (Wace and Thompson 1912).