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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AT SALAT CAMİ YANI
A Pottery Neolithic Site in the Tigris Valley, Southeast Turkey

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Introduction

There seem to be distinctive disparities between the Pre-Pottery Neolithic and Pottery Neolithic periods in Southeast Anatolia. Although a series of "cult buildings" found at Çayönü and Nevalı Çori are well deserved of considerable attention (Özdoğan and Özdoğan 1998, Hauptmann 1993), recent breathtaking findings at Göbekli Tepe have entirely altered the image of Pre-Pottery Neolithic societies (Schmidt, 1999, 2000). As well as the life size male statue from Yeni Mahalle and other hilltop sites detected in Şanlıurfa province (Hauptmann 2003, Çelik 2000a, 2000b), these are explicit evidence of a high level of social complexity in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic periods in addition to the large settlement size, sophisticated layout of settlements and active long-distance trade already known.

In contrast, in the subsequent Pottery Neolithic period, settlement size was evidently diminished and no public buildings have yet been discovered. It seems likely that the whole social system had once collapsed at the latest by the beginning of the Pottery Neolithic, and rather simple farming communities came into existence instead (Özdoğan 1999: 232-33). However, mainly due to the scarcity of fully investigated sites, the background of this decline remains unknown. Until a decade ago only a few Pottery Neolithic sites were excavated in Southeast Anatolia, and even the chronological framework has not been well established.

Surface survey at the site of Salat Cami Yanı[1] in the Ilısu Dam reservoir area of the Tigris valley provides new information on the Pottery Neolithic settlement in Southeast Anatolia. Comparison with the sites in the adjacent regions suggests that this site might represent the earliest phases of the Pottery Neolithic period.

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TAÇDAM Project

Ironically, the archaeological investigations in East and Southeast Anatolia have been encouraged by the construction of a series of large-scale dams on the Euphrates. Well-organized rescue projects such as the Keban and Lower Euphrates Projects have made a great contribution to Anatolian archaeology, although an enormous number of invaluable sites have been submerged in artificial lakes. With other projected dams on both the Euphrates (Carchemish Dam) and Tigris (Ilısu Dam), a new rescue project has been launched by TAÇDAM (Centre for Research and Assessment of the Historic Environment) in the Middle East Technical University at Ankara.

Since 1998, in the framework of the TAÇDAM Project, a number of archaeological investigations have been actively progressing. In the Euphrates valley, Akarçay Tepe and Mezraa Teleilat provide well stratified sequences from the Pre-Pottery to Pottery Neolithic periods (Arimura et al. 2000, Karul et al. 2002). Now it has become clear that, at least in the Pottery Neolithic, the Anatolian Middle Euphrates shares common material culture with the Syrian Middle Euphrates and the Balikh valley. In recent years, with the completion of the Carchemish Dam, the main rescue activities are gradually shifting to the Ilısu Dam reservoir on the Tigris. So far, three Neolithic sites have been excavated here: Demirköy Höyük (Rosenberg and Peasnall 1998), Körtik Tepe (Özkaya et al. 2002) and Hakemi Use (Tekin 2003, 2004). The former two sites are dated to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, which are well comparable to Hallan Çemi located in the upstream area of the Batman River. The Pottery Neolithic sequence attested at Hakemi Use shows a close resemblance to those in the upper Khabur basin and north Iraq.

Salat Cami Yanı

Salat Cami Yanı is situated ca. 20 km east of the modern city of Bismil in Diyarbakır province and is located on the left bank of Salat Çay, about 3 km upstream from its confluence with the Tigris (Fig. 1). This site was first discovered in 1989 during the course of the Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance project (Algaze et al. 1991). Late Neolithic, Early Bronze Age and Early Islamic materials were noted. This settlement was then registered as site S60/29 by TAÇDAM. Additional collections in 2002, made by the Salat Tepe excavation team, provided more detailed information about the site (Görmüş 2003).

The topographic map drawn in the early 1970s (Fig. 2) demonstrates that Salat Cami Yanı was originally a low and oval shaped mound adjacent to the modern village of Yukarı Salat. When we visited the site in 2003 for the first time, however, the extent of the village had been greatly expanded towards the riverbank, and consequently this Neolithic settlement was completely included within the modern village. Probably in the course of this village expansion, the site of Salat Cami Yanı itself has unfortunately been seriously destroyed by the removal of soil and building activities of local people. The end of the mound has been almost thoroughly levelled.

Therefore, the initial goal of our activities at Salat Cami Yanı was to generate a detailed topographic map, drawn with 0.5 m contour intervals, in order to record the present state of the site precisely and to reconstruct or locate the virtually levelled mound (Fig. 3). Some contours appear to still reflect the original form of the site and generally correspond well with the earlier topographic map. Based on the surface distribution of archaeological materials, the estimated extent of the settlement stretches over ca. 220 m x 130 m.

During the course of mapping and field observations, it became clear that there were two places which remained 1 – 1.5 m higher than the surroundings. One survives under a modern homestead and the other is left as a small yard. Accordingly, the highest current point of the site, 536.4 m above sea level, is found here. In the profiles exposed on the edges, ash deposits and traces of mud bricks or *pisé* were clearly visible as well as some Neolithic ceramics and obsidian artifacts. It seems quite likely that they are the remnants of original tell deposits, which have been saved from destruction.

Furthermore, we had an opportunity to examine another profile exposed on the south slope of the settlement facing Salat Çay, where soil had been removed on a large scale by local people. In the profile (Fig. 4), about 1.5 m deep from the surface, the remains of mud brick or *pisé* walls were detected at different levels, as well as ash layers and some Neolithic ceramics and obsidian artifacts. It is evident that there are at least two building layers in this sector. Reddish orange coloured soil, seen at the bottom of the profile in places, seems to be the virgin soil. Contrary to general assumptions, it becomes clear that artificial cultural deposits continue down to 533 m above sea level and, in spite of severe site destruction, deposits at least about 3.5 m thick still remain at Salat Cami Yanı, when the present highest point of the site, 536.4 m, is taken into consideration. It is also worth mentioning that rather unusual Neolithic pottery, mineral tempered and well burnished, was exclusively collected in the discarded soil from this place.

The present condition of the site prevented us from applying systematic surface collection. The estimated extent of settlement was arbitrarily divided into 9 collection units. The Neolithic pottery was densely scattered around and between the two elevated places mentioned above. Therefore, it can be assumed that the centre of the Neolithic occupation is found somewhere around there.

Surface finds

Chipped Stone

Osamu Maeda analysed the chipped stone assemblage. The chipped stone artifacts collected at Salat Cami Yanı are made of obsidian (Fig. 7: 1-5) and flint (Fig. 7: 6-10), both showing rather distinctive lithic production strategies. Most of the obsidian bears a greenish tinge. Consequently, one can assume that it was brought to the site from the East Anatolian sources such as Nemrud Dağ and Bingöl, although this needs to be confirmed by chemical analysis. Among the obsidian artifacts, truncated and retouched blades/bladelets, probably detached by pressure flaking, are common (Fig. 7: 1-5, Fig. 10).

The existence of some obsidian flakes suggests that lithic production was practiced at the site.

The quality of the flint is generally coarse. It seems likely that pebble stones, which can be obtained in the riverbed of Salat Çay even today, were used as raw material. Among the flint artifacts, amorphous flakes are dominant (Fig. 7: 8-9) and the ad hoc manufacture of flint is likely. One piece of flint hammerstone was also collected (Fig. 7: 10). In general these chipped stone industries correspond well to those of the Pottery Neolithic in adjacent regions.

Pottery

The great majority of the pottery collected at Salat Cami Yanı can be assigned to the Neolithic period, while a handful of sherds of later periods, mostly Early Bronze Age and Islamic, was also acquired. In general the Neolithic pottery bears rather homogeneous features (Fig. 9). Almost all of it contains a large quantity of coarse chaff temper with occasional coarse mineral inclusions. On the vessel walls dark coloured cores are clearly visible. The surface colour is usually light, varying from reddish brown to buff. In general both exterior and interior surfaces are well smoothed, while some specimens are slightly burnished.

The vessel shapes are generally simple and primitive. Open forms such as shallow bowls (Fig. 5: 2-3), hemispherical bowls (Fig. 5: 8) and bowls with straight sides (Fig. 5: 4-5) are prevalent, while some fragments of carinated bowls (Fig. 5: 6-7) were also obtained. As for the closed forms, hole mouth jars (Fig. 6: 2-3) and pots with concave necks (Fig. 5: 11, Fig. 6: 1) are known. The latter have a gradual transition from the bodies to the necks. Bases are generally thick and flat (Fig. 6: 7-12). A base fragment (Fig. 6: 13) indicates that oval shaped vessels are also existent.

Decorated pieces are virtually absent and an applied band with impressions (Fig. 6: 4) is the sole example of decoration. No painted pottery was collected. There are two types of handles: one is a horizontally elongated ledge handle attached below the rim (Fig. 6: 6), the other a large crescent shaped handle on the rim (Fig. 6: 2-3).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the rather exceptional Neolithic pottery collected at Salat Cami Yanı. This is exclusively and heavily tempered with mineral inclusions (Fig. 5: 1, Fig. 8 left), and the surfaces are dark grey coloured and well burnished. Although only a few pieces were obtained so far, they are totally different from the main Neolithic ware group mentioned above and show a close resemblance to the general traits of the earliest pottery which is recently attested in adjacent regions as we will see below. Moreover, these materials were exclusively collected from the discarded soils on the south slope, where virgin soil was exposed. This evidence might indicate that there is another Pottery Neolithic phase at Salat Cami Yanı, which precedes the phase with chaff tempered light coloured ware.

The results of the surface survey reveal that Salat Cami Yanı is a very important Pottery Neolithic site in Southeast Anatolia in spite of heavy site destruction. It seems

likely that there are at least two Pottery Neolithic phases at Salat Cami Yanı, although this naturally needs to be confirmed by stratigraphical evidence[2].

Some remarks on the early Pottery Neolithic Sequence

The initial stage of pottery manufacturing

Thanks to the recent progress of archaeological investigations in Turkey and Syria, our knowledge of the beginning of pottery manufacturing in the Near East has greatly improved in the last decade. The transition from the late PPNB to the Pottery Neolithic has been well explored at several sites one after another. It was once believed that Dark-faced Burnished Ware (hereafter DFBW) in the north Levant (*Amuq Phase A*), chaff tempered and light coloured pottery in the Balikh valley (e.g. *Tell Assouad, Tell Damishliyya*) and Proto-Hassuna in north Mesopotamia was the earliest pottery in each region. However, now it is evident that all of these materials represent not the initial but the subsequent stage of pottery manufacturing.

In the north Levant Pottery Neolithic layers preceding Amuq Phase A were detected at Tell el-Kerkh 2 (Tsuneki and Miyake 1996, Miyake 2003). A ware group called Kerkh Ware is predominant in the lowest pottery bearing layers and might be a predecessor of DFBW. It is exclusively tempered with mineral inclusions and the vessel walls are generally thick compared to DFBW. The surfaces are usually slightly burnished without any decoration. The vessel shapes are generally simple; only hemispherical bowls and globular deep bowls are known. Recently it is maintained that the pottery called Sandy Ware found in the basal layers of Yumuktepe could be comparable or contemporary with Kerkh Ware (Balossi 2004: 117-18), while the pottery itself seems to be rather different.

In the middle Euphrates valley the recent excavations at Akarçay Tepe, located in the Carchemish Dam reservoir, provide a well stratified sequence from the late PPNB to Pottery Neolithic periods (Arimura et al. 2000). Three Pottery Neolithic phases are recognized. The pottery in the middle phase, or Phase II, bears a close resemblance to the materials of Tell Assouad (Le Mière 1979) and Tell Damishliyya (Akkermans 1989), which was once thought to be the earliest pottery in the Balikh valley. In Phase III, comprising the earliest pottery-bearing layers, a considerably different type of pottery was obtained. It exclusively contains a large amount of mineral inclusions which cause the weightiness of the pot. The exterior surfaces are slightly but carefully burnished, while the interior usually remains smoothed. No decorated sherd was found but horizontally elongated ledge handles are common. The vessel shapes are rather simple: deep globular pots with flat bases are exclusively known. Similar pottery was discovered at Mezraa-Teleilat as well (Karul et al. 2002: 138) and the so-called "black series" pottery

[2] This has been confirmed by the 2004 season work at Salat Cami Yanı with secure stratigraphical evidence. Two distinct Pottery Neolithic phases were attested.

found at Tell Halula seems to be well comparable to the earliest pottery at Akarçay Tepe (Faura and Le Mière 1999).

Further to the east, in the upper Khabur basin, a similar situation has been encountered. The recent excavations at Seker al-Aheimar also provide good evidence for the transition from PPNB to Pottery Neolithic (Nishiaki 2001). In the layers between the PPNB and Proto-Hassuna, heavily mineral tempered and burnished ceramics were obtained.

Although these newly attested earliest ceramics are not exactly identical to each other, some common features can be noted as follows. They exclusively contain heavy mineral inclusions. The surface is slightly burnished and lacks decoration. In general the pottery is well fired and not crude at all. The vessel shapes are rather simple. Especially in the east, from the middle Euphrates to the Khabur basin, ledge handles are commonly seen. The burnished and mineral tempered pottery collected at Salat Cami Yanı bears a general resemblance to these materials. If our evaluation is correct, the Tigris valley around Bismil will be included within the distribution area of the earliest pottery.

In any case, there are two important things to be mentioned here. First, these materials seem to be truly the earliest pottery in each region and, as the stratigraphic evidence clearly shows, it is not likely that much earlier pottery will be found in the future. Second, it has come to light that the earliest pottery in north Mesopotamia, including the middle Euphrates valley, is not chaff tempered and light coloured but mineral tempered and burnished. This evidence will make a great contribution to illuminating the function of early pottery and the reasons why people started to make pottery.

Subsequent developments in the Pottery Neolithic

In the next stage of the Pottery Neolithic regional variations of pottery became evident. Broadly speaking, two distinctive pottery groups emerged in the Near East. One is mineral tempered and burnished pottery represented by DFBW in the west, and the other is vegetal tempered and light coloured ware in the east. For the time being, the boundary seems to be found somewhere around the regions between the Qoueiq and Euphrates valleys.

Now it is evident that the middle Euphrates valley produces the same pottery assemblages as in the Balikh valley. As already mentioned above, the Phase II pottery of Akarçay Tepe shows a close resemblance to that of Tell Assouad and Tell Damishliyya (Arimura et al. 2000, Le Mière 1979, Akkermans 1989). It contains large quantities of vegetal temper. The surface is light coloured and generally smoothed. On the thick vessel walls, dark coloured cores are clearly visible. The vessel shapes are simple, and ledge handles, loop handles and horizontally applied bands are conspicuous. The same type of pottery is attested at Mezraa-Teleilat, Gürcütepe and Sürük Mevkii as well in Southeast Anatolia (Karul et al. 2002, Beile-Bohn et al. 1998, Stein 1992).

In the upper Khabur basin the pottery assemblage of this stage is represented by the Proto-Hassuna phase at Tell Kashkashok II (Matsutani ed. 1991) and Tell Seker al-Aheimar (Nishiaki 1991). Needless to say, Proto-Hassuna sites were also found in north Iraq such as Umm Dabagiyah, Tell Sotto and Yarim Tepe I. In general the fabric,

surface treatment and firing techniques are similar to the pottery in the middle Euphrates and the Balikh valleys, while the vessel shapes and decorations are rather different. In this region carinated vessels are common. Painted sherds, applied decorations and incised decorations are also conspicuous as well as the presence of husking trays.

Most of the Neolithic pottery collected at Salat Cami Yanı shows a general resemblance to Proto-Hassuna pottery as regards manufacturing techniques. However, the virtual absence of painted pottery, applied decoration and husking trays at Salat Cami Yanı might indicate its early date. As a matter of fact, at Hakemi Use, the other Pottery Neolithic site in the Ilısu Dam reservoir, chaff tempered painted ware, which is comparable to the Proto-Hassuna type, is attested (Tekin 2003, 2004). This evidence clearly indicates that a Pottery Neolithic phase with painted pottery exists in the Tigris valley as well. Consequently, it is likely that Salat Cami Yanı had been abandoned before the painted pottery tradition became widespread in the region. Actually a monochrome pottery assemblage which reminds us of Salat Cami Yanı was already attested at Ginnig in north Iraq (Campbell and Baird 1990).

For the time being, it can be suggested that Salat Cami Yanı possibly covers the period from the initial to the subsequent Pottery Neolithic phases preceding the traditional Proto-Hassuna period. Together with the remarkable implications of Hakemi Use, future investigations at Salat Cami Yanı will provide significant evidence for the Pottery Neolithic sequence in the Tigris valley.

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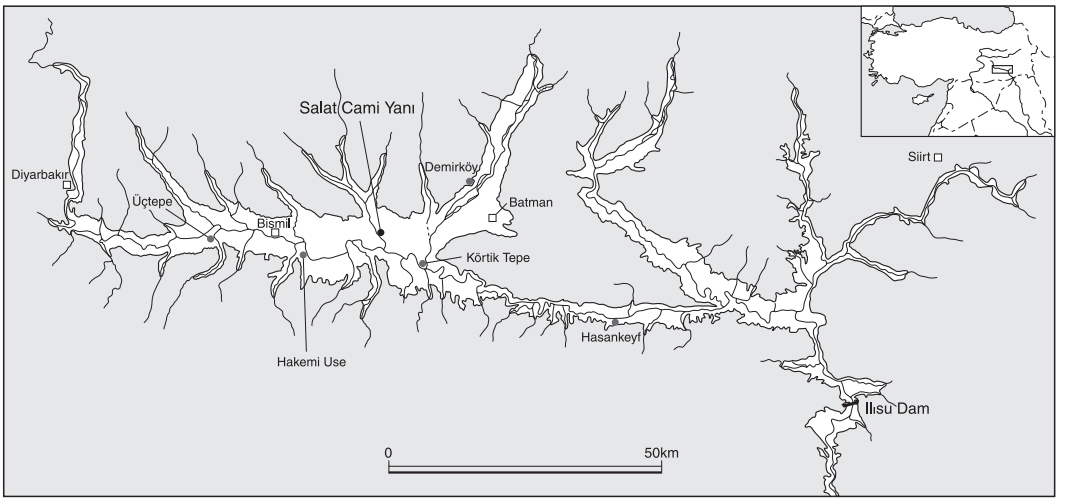

Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Salat Cami Yanı in the Tigris valley.

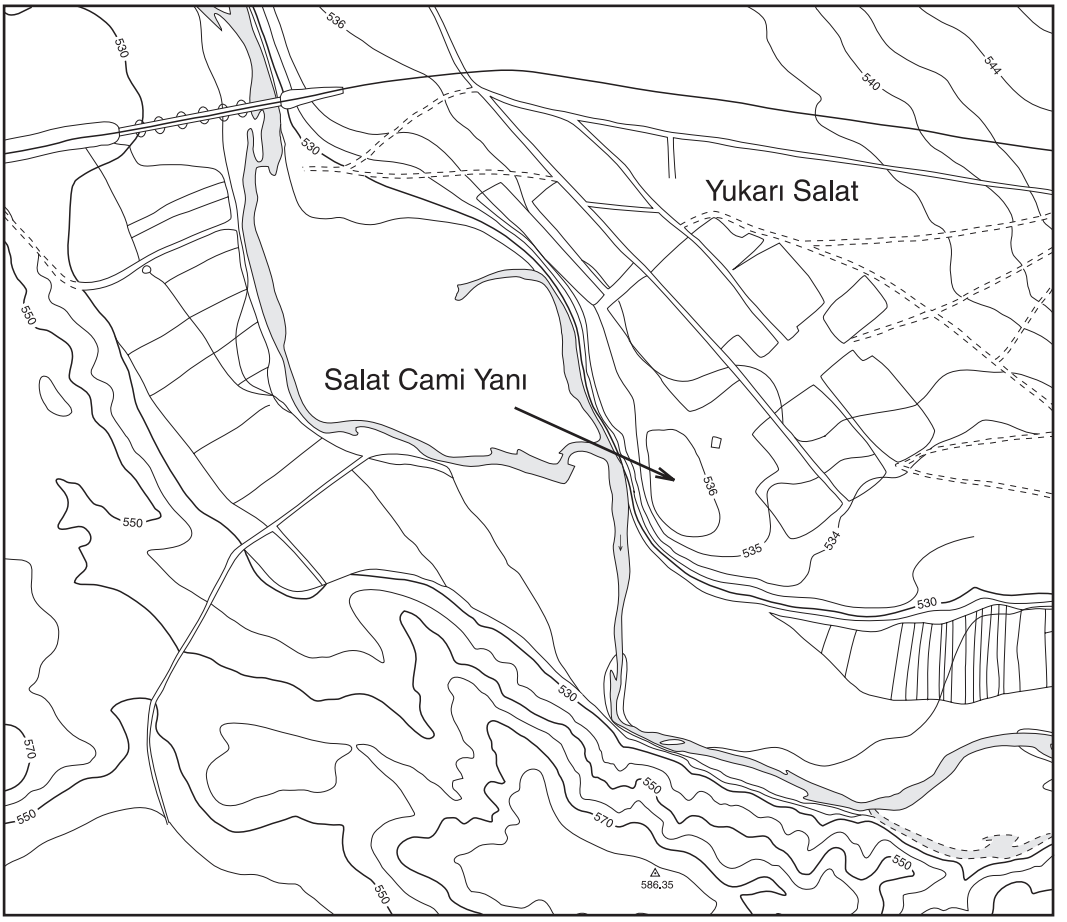

Fig. 2. Topographical map drawn in the early 1970s showing the location of Salat Cami Yanı and the modern village of Yukarı Salat.

Fig. 3. Topographic plan and the present state of Salat Cami Yanı.

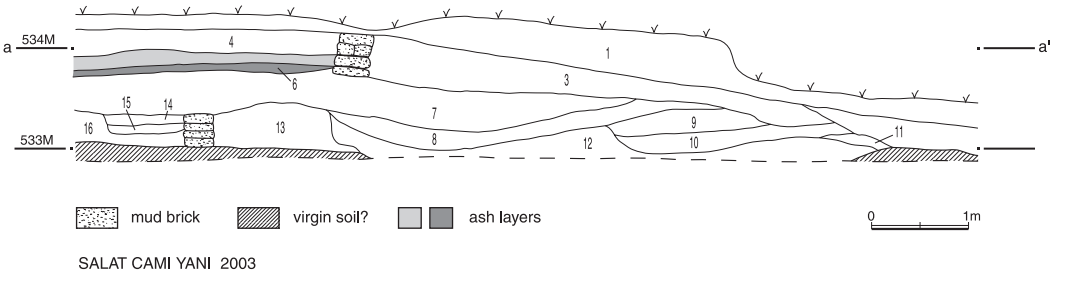

Fig. 4. The profile exposed on the south slope of the settlement.

Fig. 5. Neolithic Pottery

1. Large amount of mineral inclusions. Exterior slightly burnished and dark gray. Interior smoothed and gray. No dark coloured core.
2. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and dark brown. Thick dark coloured core.
3. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and light buff. No dark coloured core.
4. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Slightly burnished and reddish brown. Thick dark coloured core.
5. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and light brown. Thick dark coloured core.
6. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Slightly burnished and light brown. With reddish brown slip (?). Thick dark coloured core.
7. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and buff. Thick dark coloured core.
8. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and brown. Thick dark coloured core.
9. Plant and mineral inclusions. Smoothed and grayish brown. Thick dark coloured core.
10. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and dark brown. Thick dark cloured core.
11. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and buff. Interior smoothed and dark brown. Thick dark coloured core.

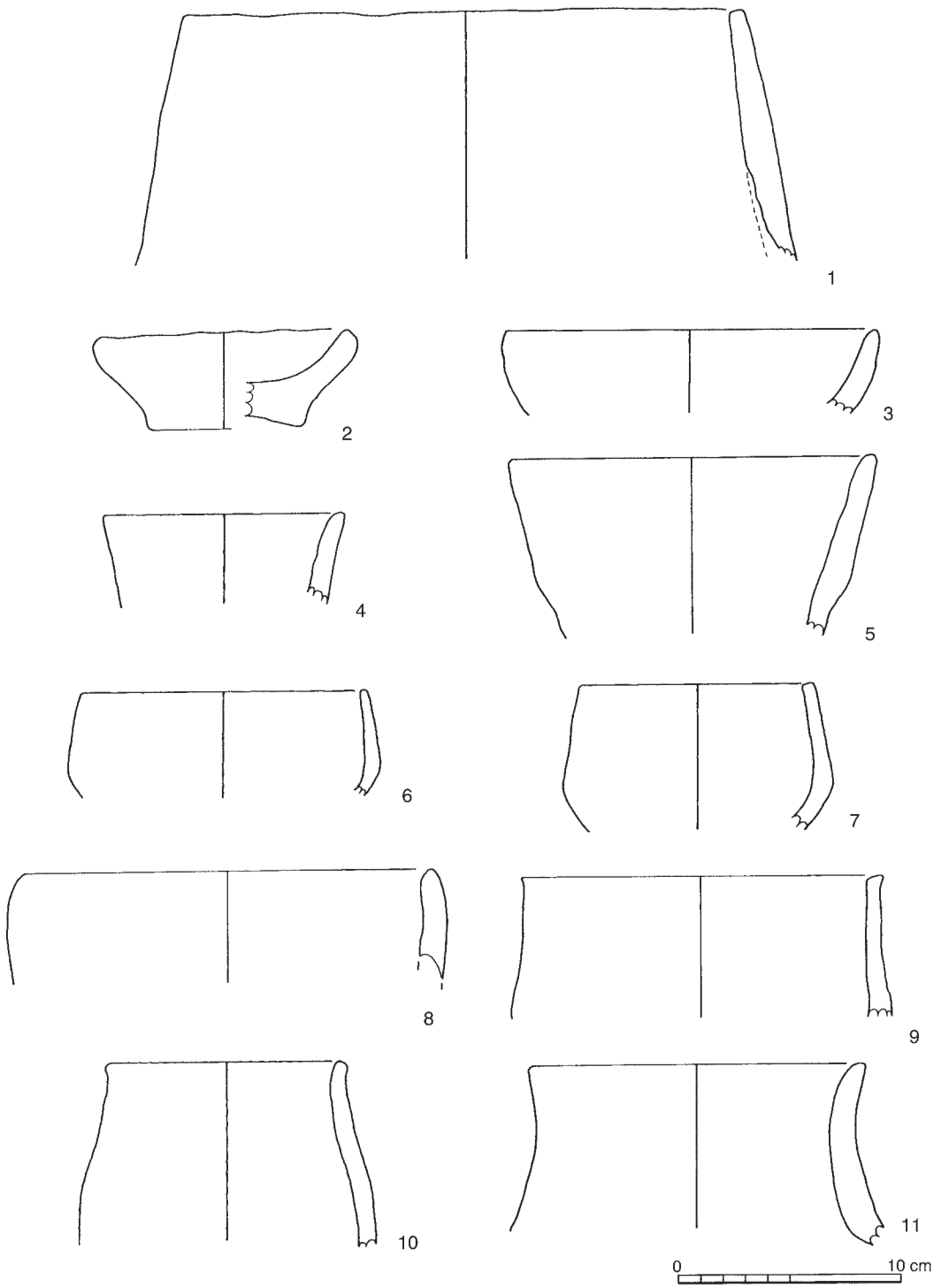

Fig. 5. Neolithic Pottery.

Fig. 6. Neolithic Pottery

1. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and reddish brown. Interior smoothed and buff. Thick dark coloured core.
2. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and pinkish buff. Thick dark coloured core. Crescent shaped ledge handle on the rim.
3. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and reddish brown. Interior smoothed and light buff. Thick dark coloured core. Crescent shaped ledge handle on the rim.
4. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and pinkish buff. Interior smoothed and buff. Thick dark coloured core.
5. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and buff. Interior smoothed and light brown. Thick dark coloured core.
6. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and buff. Interior smoothed and reddish brown. Dark coloured core.
7. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and orange brown. Thick dark coloured core.
8. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and buff. Interior smoothed and light brown. Thick dark coloured core.
9. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and reddish brown. Interior smoothed and grayish brown. Thick dark coloured core.
10. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exteror slightly burnished and light buff. Interior smoothed and buff. Thick dark coloured core.
11. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and cream buff. Thick dark coloured core.
12. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Smoothed and pinkish buff. Thick dark coloured core.
13. Large amount of plant inclusions with some grits. Exterior smoothed and reddish brown. Interior smoothed and dark reddish brown. Thick dark coloured core.

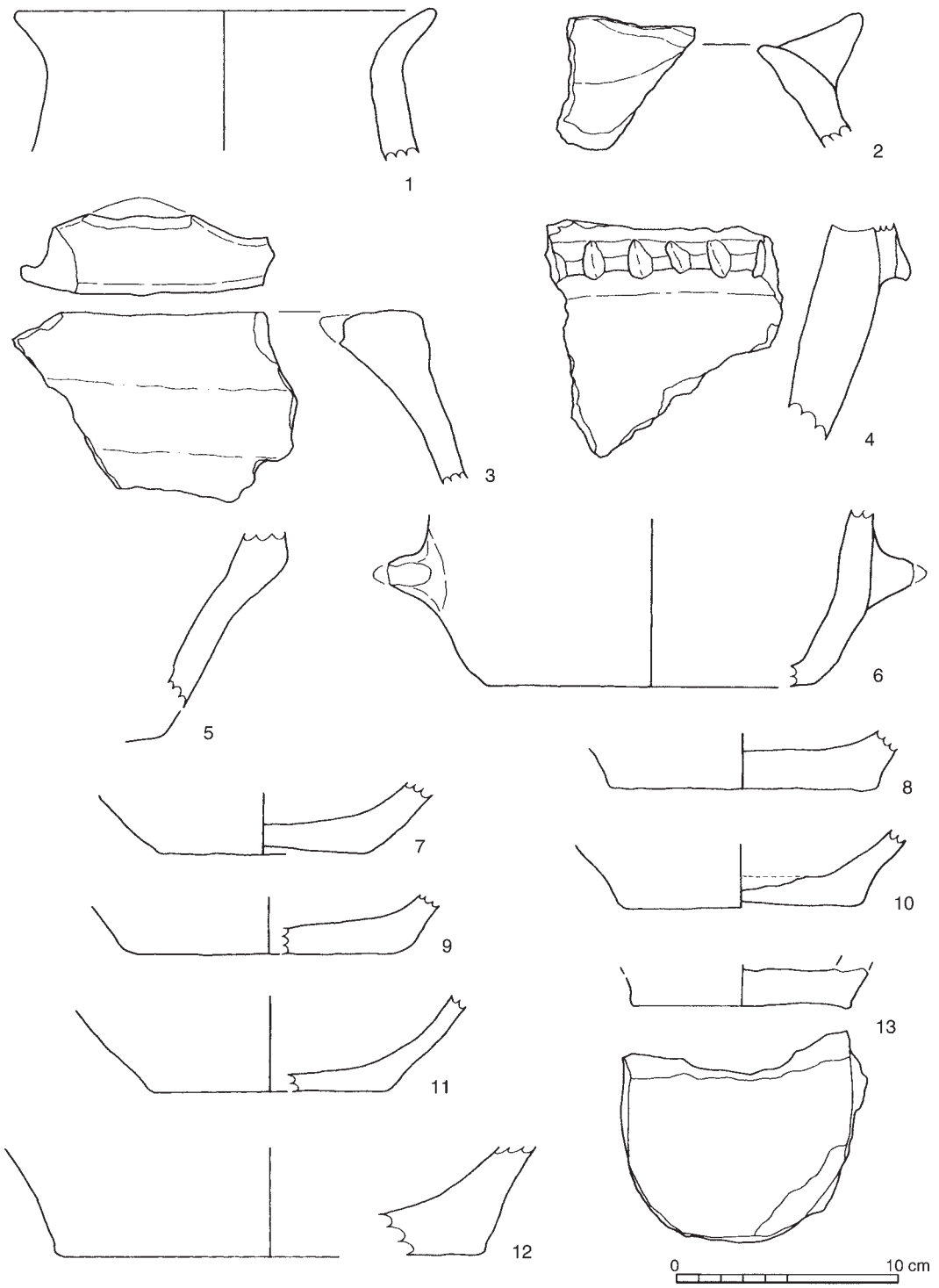

Fig. 6. Neolithic Pottery.

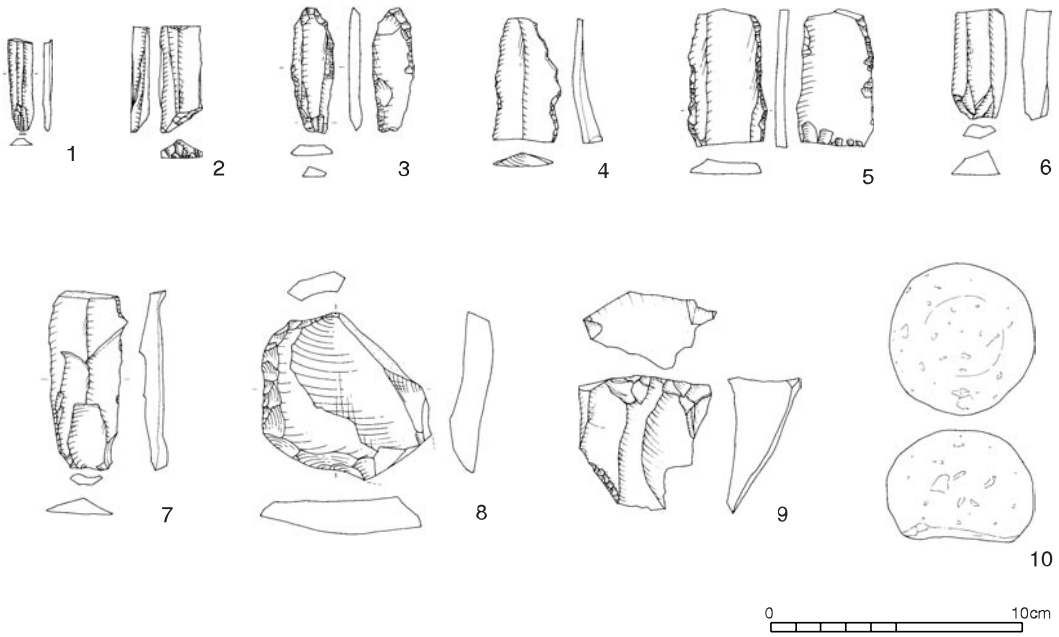

Fig. 7. Chipped stone artifacts.

Fig. 8. Neolithic Pottery.

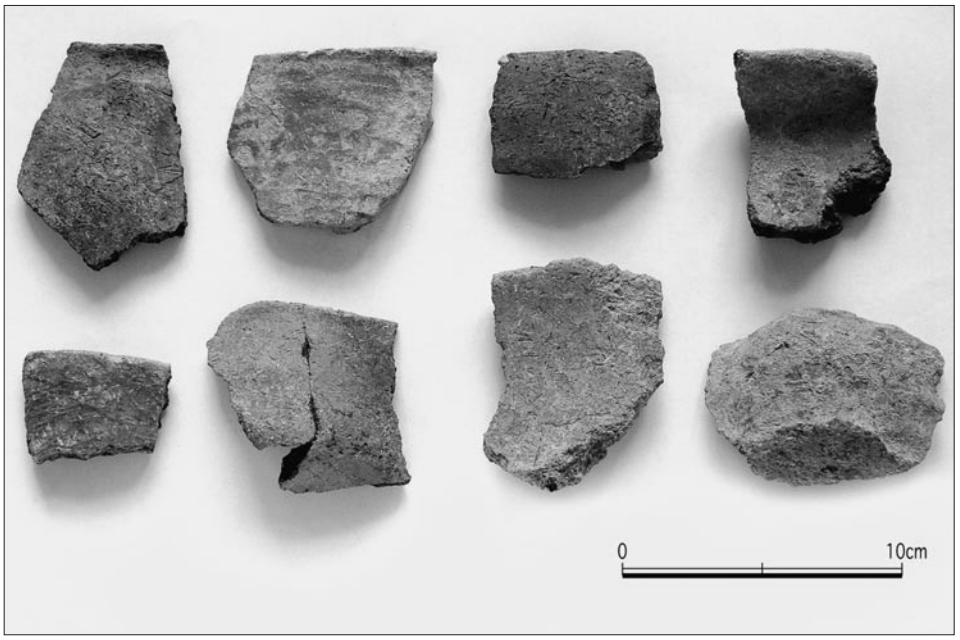

Fig. 9. Neolithic Pottery.

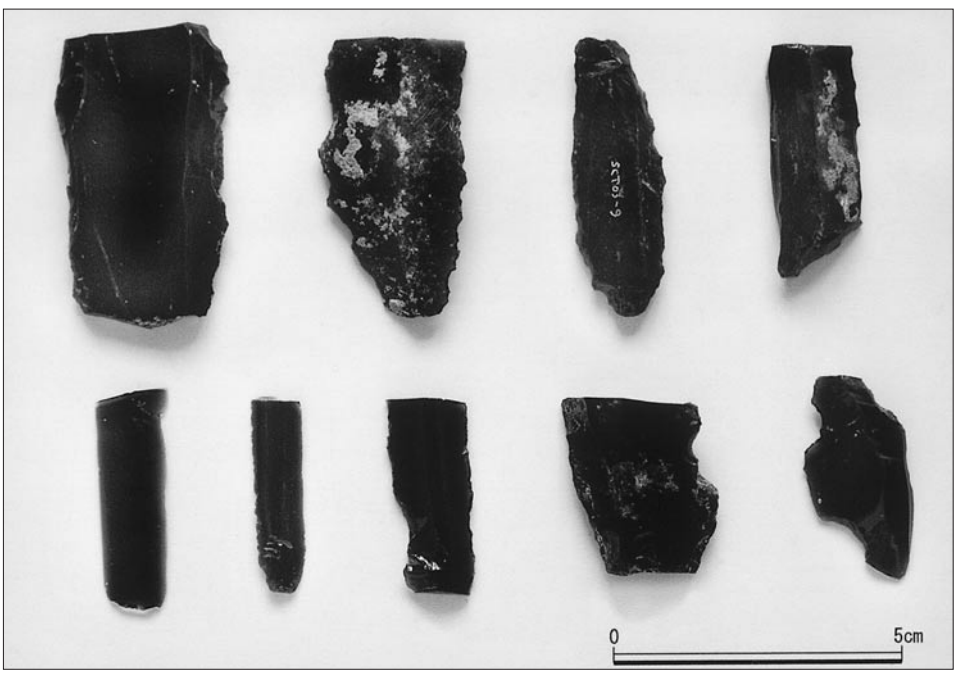

Fig. 10. Obsidian artifacts.