FOOTSTEPS OF THE ARAB-BYZANTINE ARMIES IN OSMANİYE PROVINCE, CILICIA

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Abstract

Potsherds collected during archaeological survey in Osmaniye Province shed light on the medieval landscape of the plain of eastern Cilicia. The footsteps of the armies of Islam can be followed in the region by examining remaining material culture as the area was once part of al-thughur, the Arab-Byzantine frontier. Among the medieval potsherds collected in the survey, sherds of Islamic wares are the subject of the present study. The Islamic potsherds are mostly productions of the Abbasid period. The Islamic pottery repertoire of the Osmaniye survey contains both glazed and unglazed wares of which some examples will be introduced here as a preliminary evaluation of the medieval potsherds from the ongoing survey.

The Osmaniye Archaeological Survey collected considerable numbers of medieval potsherds belonging to various cultures in the Cilician plain. During the early medieval period, the plain became a frontier zone of Arab armies, and this lasted around 300 years. The region changed hands frequently from the 11th to the 14th centuries. New settlements and forts were built and old ones were refortified by the armies of Islam, Byzantium and the Crusades. Potsherds identified culturally and temporally as Islamic wares are introduced in the present study.

The Cilician plain is accessed via a couple of well-known mountain passes, namely the Cilician Gates in the Amanus and Taurus mountain ranges. Major ancient routes fork in the plain, in Osmaniye Province, heading east or south to cross the Amanus Gates via the Arslanlı Bel or Belen passes to proceed to Syria or to the Euphrates. Lesser known mountain passes on the Anti-Taurus mountains, mostly taken in the medieval period, also connect Osmaniye Province east of the plain to the high plateau of Anatolia via three ancient minor routes, such as Akyol, Zelhi, and Mezi (Alkım 1959: 62).

People of various origins and cultures took these routes to settle the Cilician plain, enriching and diversifying the prevailing cultures. Armies and tradesmen also trespassed on these ancient routes, leaving materials of their culture including potsherds at settlements along the routes. Settlement patterns in Osmaniye Province during the medieval period consists of a few inhabited mounds situated along the

routes like the beads of a rosary, and castles perched on mountain peaks like eagles' nests guarding the plain and the routes.

In the early medieval period, the plain was exposed to an entirely new culture by the arrival of Arab armies after an edict of Emperor Heraclius ordered the eviction of Cilicia to create a 'no man's land'. Arab sources confirm that inhabitants of the sites between Iskenderun (Alexandria ad Issus) and Tarsus left for the uplands, but also note that while civilians left, the empty castles became stations for Arabs starting in AD 640/41 (Brooks 1898: 183). Osmaniye Province together with the Cilician plain became the frontier proper, the *awasim* of the Arab armies, then the border zone, *al-thughur* of Bilad al-Sham. Old fortresses such as Ayn Zarba were re-occupied and new fortifications, such as al-Masissa and al-Muhtakkab were built (Brooks 1898: 205).

Cilician castles as well guarded commodities changed hands frequently between the armies of the Arabs, Byzantines and Crusaders. Although inhabited for long intervals, castles are the most parsimonious sites for yielding many kinds of potsherds, whereas settlements in the plain yield a rich variety of ceramics, including those of Byzantine and Islamic origin (Tülek 2010: 227).

Settlements where remarkable numbers of Islamic potsherds are found are mostly aligned on the ancient route stretching east to west. These are the Taşlı 4, Yapılıpınar, Yamalık, Tevekli and Tepesidelik Mounds, and Örenşehir. Örenşehir yielded the highest quantity of Islamic potsherds, and it is remarkably situated at the intersection of routes between the mentioned mounds. Örenşehir is identified as a walled enclosure, possibly Islamic in origin, and could have been a *mısr* as part of the *amsar*, or a *qasr*. Tevekli and Tepesidelik Mounds are located very close to Ayn Zarba castle, which was passed by the ancient route which extended from Örenşehir to the north-west. To the north of Örenşehir there are three more sites yielding Islamic wares: these are Mağralı Tepe, Aygır Mound and Babaoğlan castle. Babaoğlan is the only castle yielding potsherds of high quantity and diverse origins. It is a well secluded castle in a thickly forested hill located on the ancient route Akyol. The ancient route Akyol starts from Örenşehir, and winding to the north-east, it passes by the Babaoğlan castle and finally heads in the direction of Marash, Germanikeia (Alkım 1959: 62, 71).

Islamic potsherds found at the above-mentioned sites can be classified initially as unglazed and glazed wares. Most of the unglazed pottery is grouped as Common Ware based on form and function, of which most are cooking pots, water vessels, and other containers for daily use. The potsherds are also grouped depending on colour of fabric and decoration technique as Cream Ware, White-on-pink Ware, Pink Ware, Brown Ware and Brittle Ware. The glazed potsherds are grouped according to colour of glaze and decoration. This paper briefly introduces examples of Brittle Ware and Pink Ware.

A: Unglazed Ware

1. Brittle Ware

Brittle-Ware fragments are mostly found in Örenşehir, with a single find from Aygır Mound. The fragments have a red fabric with rare inclusions of mica and lime, fine, hard-fired and thin-walled. A few of them have a red-orange fabric, and some sherds have a blackened exterior surface. Triangular ledge handles, hole-mouths and ribbing are characteristic of this pottery type. Two examples are presented here: Cat.nos.1 and 2 are fragments of cooking pots which are common at excavated sites in north Syria (Northedge *et al*. 1988: 83).

Cat.no.1 is from Örenşehir. It is the rim of a cooking pot with interior horizontal ribbing and a single horizontal ridge on the exterior. The fabric is red (2.5YR 4/6 in Munsell's colour chart), and the exterior is blackened with smoke (Fig. 1).

Cat.no.2 is a body fragment of a cooking pot with a triangular ledge handle. Similar to Cat.no.1, its horizontal ribbing is not accentuated on the exterior. Its fabric is a light red colour (2.5YR 5/6) (Fig. 2).

Examples similar to both Brittle-Ware fragments are found among the Rakka, Tell Rifa'at and 'Ana Brittle-Ware repertoire. It is noted that cooking pots of Brittle Ware of the Abbasid period have a distinctive feature with two triangular ledge handles. A similar example to the Osmaniye Brittle Ware is found at 'Ana and it is dated to the early Abbasid period, i.e. the middle of the 8th century (Northedge *et al*. 1988: 90).

2. Pink Ware

Fragments of Pink Ware are found in lesser quantity than the other types of unglazed Islamic pottery. Cat.no.3 is the neck of a jar (Fig. 3). The pink-coloured neck fragment was found in the south of Mağralı Tepe which is 10 km north of Örenşehir, together with an example introduced below (Cat.no.13). Its fabric is light red (2.5YR 6/8). It is mid-fired with very rare lime, mica and sand inclusions. It is decorated with a wave band incised using a comb flanked by two band applications each bearing finger impressions. Distinctive features of these jugs are that they are in the form of amphorae and have long necks decorated with comb incisions with wave bands and finger impressions (Miglus, Stepniowski 1999: 42, pl. 43.d). Parallels to this fragment are found in the pottery repertoire of Rakka and the Qal'at Ja'bar excavations (Tonghini 1998: 64). In Rakka (Tell Aswad), pottery groups AC and AG storage jars and jugs contain similarly decorated neck fragments. The fabrics of the Tell Aswad fragments are light red in colour, also numbered 5YR 5/6 and 2.5YR 6/8. Coin finds provide a date between the second half of the 8th and third quarter of the 9th century for the Tell Aswad potsherds (Heidemann 1999: 15).

B: Glazed Ware

The glazed potsherds of Osmaniye are grouped as 'Monochrome-Glazed Ware' in green or yellow colour, 'Under-Glaze Painted Ware' in splashes of various types, 'Under-Glaze Figural Painted', 'Frit Ware: Turquoise-Glazed Black Under-Painted', and 'Lead-Glazed Sgraffiato'.

1. Monochrome-Glazed Ware

a. Green Glaze
Cat.no.4 is a green-glazed fragment decorated with impressed circles. It was found in Babaoğlan castle. It has a very pale brown fabric (10YR 7/3) (Fig. 4). Its fabric is hard-fired and homogenous. An identical parallel is found in the al-Sabah collection and dated to the 8th century (Watson 2004: 163).

b. Yellow Glaze
Cat.no.5 is a yellow-glazed fragment of a small bowl. It has a reddish-yellow fabric (5YR 7/6) (Fig. 5). It is hard-fired with rare small lime, stone and grog inclusions. Yellow glaze is thickly applied over white slip. No parallel to this fragment has yet been found.

2. Under-Glaze Painted Ware

Under-glaze painted ceramic fragments in the Osmaniye ceramic repertoire appear in various forms of 'Splash-Ware' style, which consists of 'monochrome', 'bichrome', 'measles', and 'figural-painted' types. A common feature of this ware is that the alkaline glaze is opacified with tin (Daiber 2006: 115). Monochrome-Glazed Splash-Ware ceramics are dated to the early 9th century and the Bichrome-Glazed Splash-Ware fragments are dated to the middle of the 9th century (Daiber 2006: 115). Islamic ceramics in the 'Splash-Ware' style appear after the first contact with the Chinese ceramics of the T'ang dynasty.

a. Monochrome Splash Ware
Cat.no.6 is a body fragment from the Tepesidelik Mound. It is under-glaze painted in splashes of green colour; its fabric is reddish-yellow (5YR 7/6). It is hard-fired with rare small mica and sand inclusions. There is no slip application on the surface but tin-opacified alkaline glaze is observed. A similar example is found at Baalbek (Daiber 2006: pl.3.d.).

b. Bichrome Splash Ware
Cat.no.7 is from Yapılıpınar Mound. It is under-glaze painted in splashes of green and black colour; its fabric is pink (7.5YR 8/4). It is hard-fired and contains rare grog and

sand inclusions. There is no slip application; tin-opacified alkaline glaze is applied. The Yapılıpınar fragment is very similar to a fragment found in Baalbek (Daiber 2006: pl.3.c).

Cat.no.8 is from Tevekli Mound. It has a pink fabric (7.5 YR 7/4). It is hard-fired with rare grog, lime and mica inclusions. It is a base fragment on which splashes of green and black were applied under a tin-opacified alkaline glaze without slip.

Cat.no.9 is also from Tevekli Mound. It is a rim fragment. It has a reddish-yellow fabric (7.5YR 7/4). It is hard-fired with rare grog and mica inclusions, and has a thinner wall than the former. Both Cat.nos.8 and 9 provide close analogy to the Baalbek finds illustrated by Daiber (2006: pl. 3a, 3b). Both examples are dated to the middle of the 9th century.

c. Measles Ware

Cat.no.10 is from Yapılıpınar Mound. It is a base fragment. Spots in green and black are applied onto the ceramic without a slip, under a tin-opacified alkaline glaze (Fig. 6). Its fabric is mid-fired and very pale brown (10YR 8/4). The clay has rare grog and sand inclusions. Similar examples to this ware are found in Örenşehir ceramic fragments nos 159 and D-10. Both of the Örenşehir fragments have yellowish glaze applied on white slip. The mottled or spotted decoration of splash ware is reminiscent of Measles Ware of Chinese production, again of the T'ang Dynasty.

Parallels to the Measles-Ware fragments are found in the Baalbek pottery repertoire (Daiber 2006: pl. 3e). According to Daiber's chronology, mottled Splash- or Measles-Ware fragments are the latest productions of the splash style, dated to the 10th and later centuries. A close parallel to the Yapılıpınar Measles-Ware fragment was found in the 'Ana excavations and dated by Northedge to the 11th century (Northedge *et al*. 1988: 94, fig. 44.1).

d. Under-Glaze Figural Painted Ware

Cat.no.11 is the only example in our repertoire with figural painting (Fig. 7). It is a body fragment in yellowish-red fabric (5YR 6/6). It is hard-fired, with rare lime and mica and dense grog inclusions. Under a tin-opacified alkaline glaze figural painting was applied in green and yellow colours outlined in black. The glaze is applied both inside and out, and there is no slip. We have as yet no parallels to this fragment.

e. Frit Ware: Turquoise-Glazed Black Under-Painted

Cat.no.12 is a rim fragment found in Taşlı 4 Mound. The fabric is white (2.5Y 8/2), soft and porous (Fig. 8). There is a decorative pseudo script on its rim applied in black under turquoise glaze. Parallels to this fragment are found in the Samsat and Rakka Islamic pottery repertoires. The Samsat fragments have been dated to the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century (Bulut 2000: 10-12, figs 2, 3, 4, forms 2a, b, c.). The Resafa and Baalbek excavations yielded similar fragments, also painted in black under a turquoise glaze; identified as Rakka Ware, they are identical to the Taşlı

4 Mound fragment. The Baalbek fragments are also dated from the 13th to the 14th century (Daiber 2006: 120, pl. 9 f-n).

3. Lead-Glazed 'Sgraffiato' Wares

Our unique example Cat.no.13 was found in Mağralı Tepe's south field (Fig. 9). The fragment is nicely decorated with splashes of manganese in purplish-red over a neatly scratched half-palmette motif on white slip. It has a hard-fired reddish-yellow fabric (5YR 6/6), which has rare grog, mica and lime inclusions. Designs of mostly floral patterns scratched on white slip under a clear lead glaze with splashes of copper-green, manganese-purple and iron-brown are thought to have been first produced in Nishapur in the 9th century as an imitation of Chinese mottled ware, and were widely used and produced until the 12th century everywhere in the Islamic world. Red pottery vessels with patterns mostly in the form of half-palmettes are particularly observed decorating ceramics produced in Nishapur (Lane 1947: 12, pl. 6B). The Mağralı fragment is very close to the red-coloured bowl of Nishapur with neatly executed half-palmette flowers illustrated by Lane, which has been dated to the 9th and 10th centuries. A Nishapur bowl with half-palmette flower in the Metropolitan Museum is similar to our fragment and it has also been dated to the 9th and 10th centuries (Wilkinson 1961: 107, fig. 10).

Potsherds collected during the archaeological survey in Osmaniye Province present a rich repertoire of Islamic ware. Various types of Islamic ware represented in this repertoire are not samples of luxury ware but are mostly for daily use. Settlements yielding Islamic ware in Osmaniye Province are few and generally situated along major military and trade routes. Örenşehir, centrally situated at the junction of all of these routes, stands out as the major Islamic settlement providing the highest quantity of Islamic potsherds in the province, as if Islamic culture disseminated from it to the entirety of Osmaniye Province.

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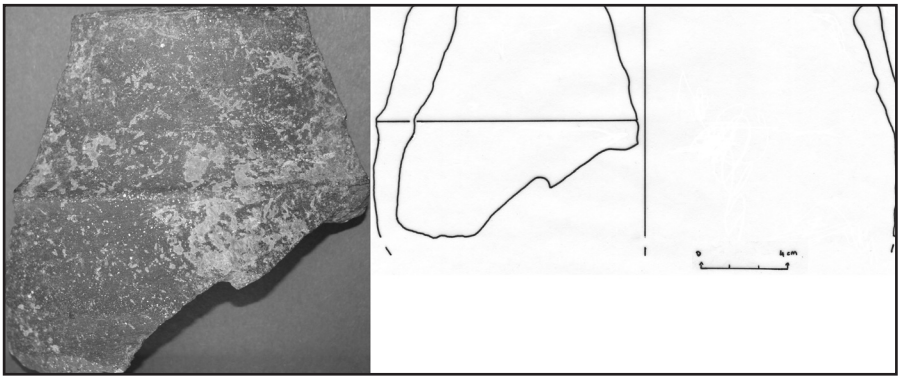


Fig. 1: Cat.no.1, from Örenşehir, fragment no. 2006-B-20.

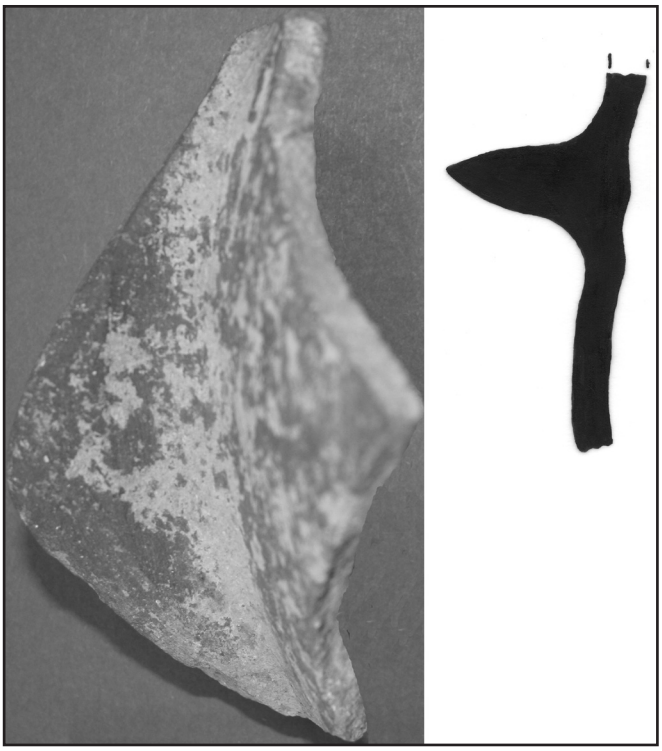


Fig. 2: Cat.no.2, from Aygır Mound, fragment no. 2006-G-17.

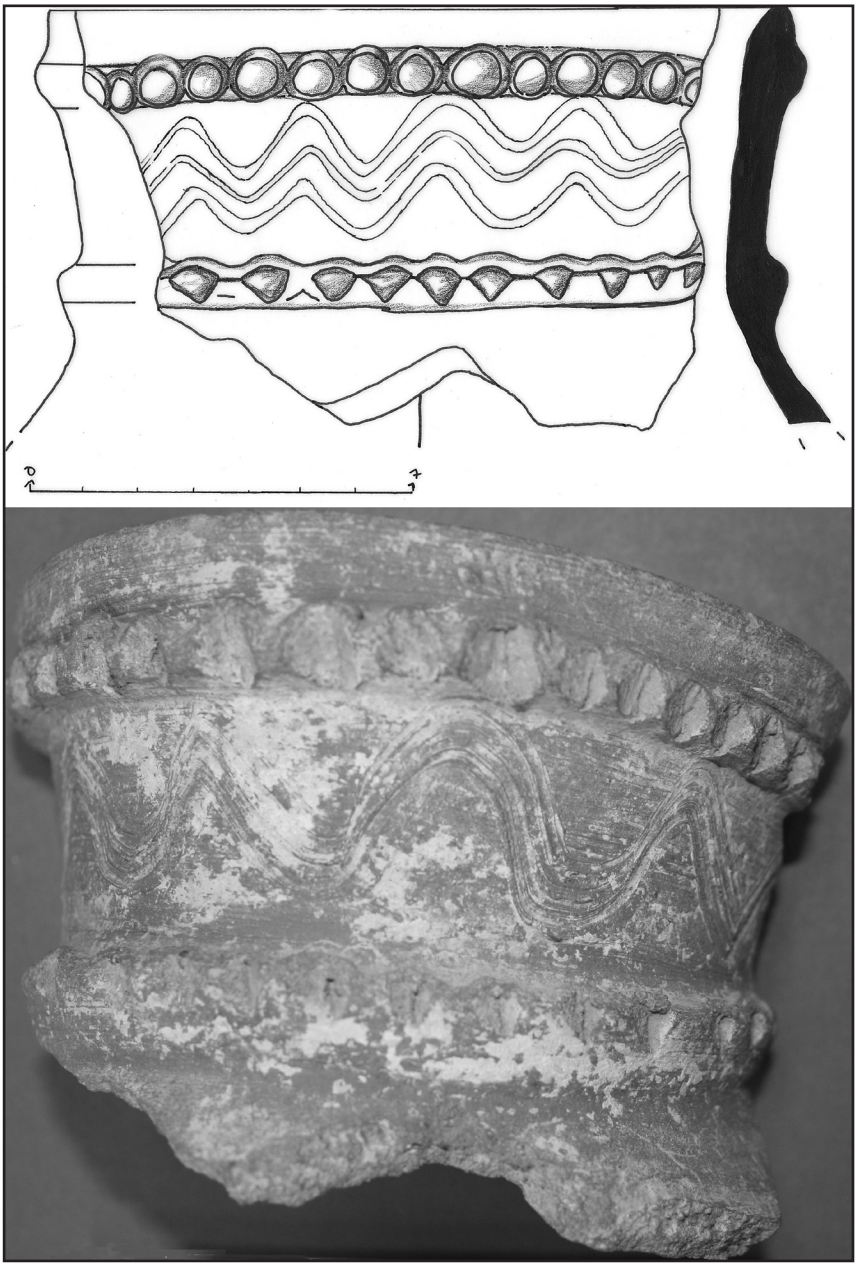


Fig. 3: Cat.no.3, from south of Mağralı Tepe, fragment no. 2009-03.

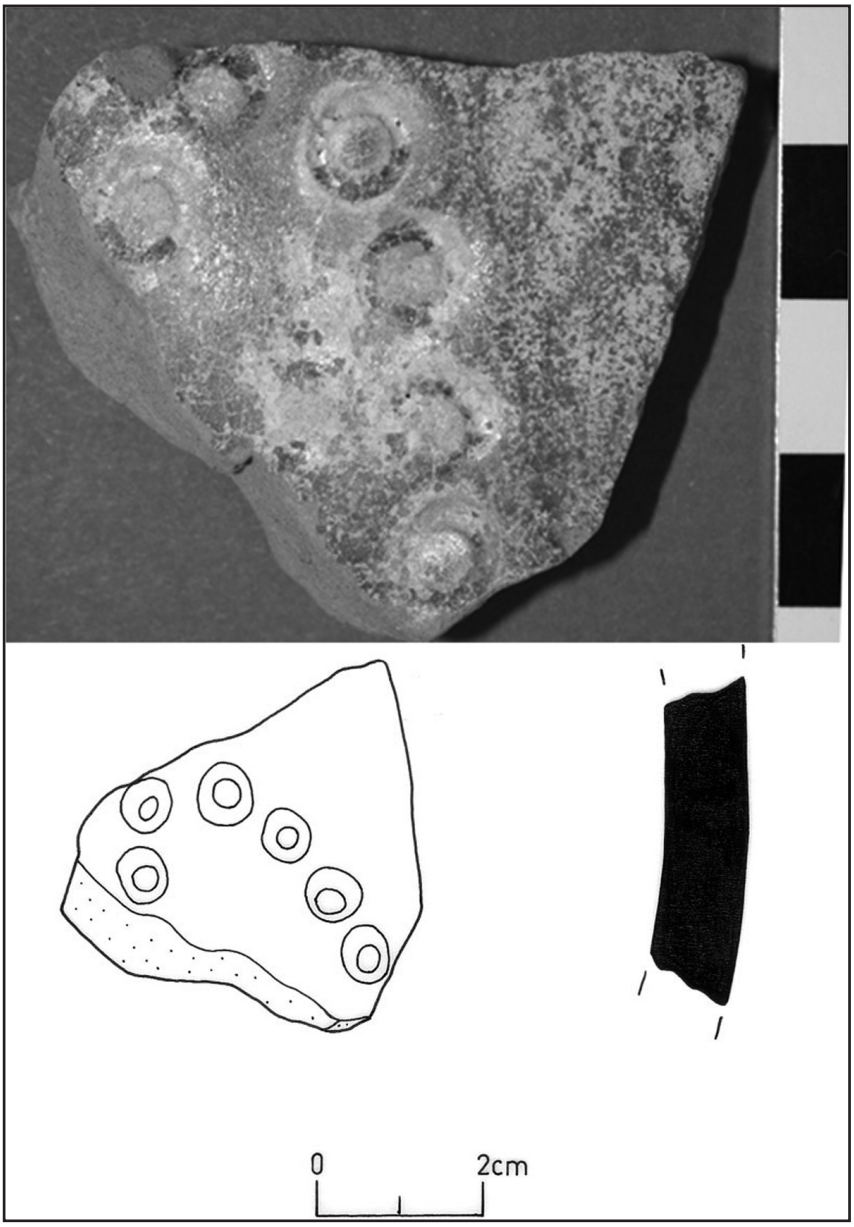


Fig. 4: Cat.no.4, from Babaoğlan Castle, fragment no. 2006-30.

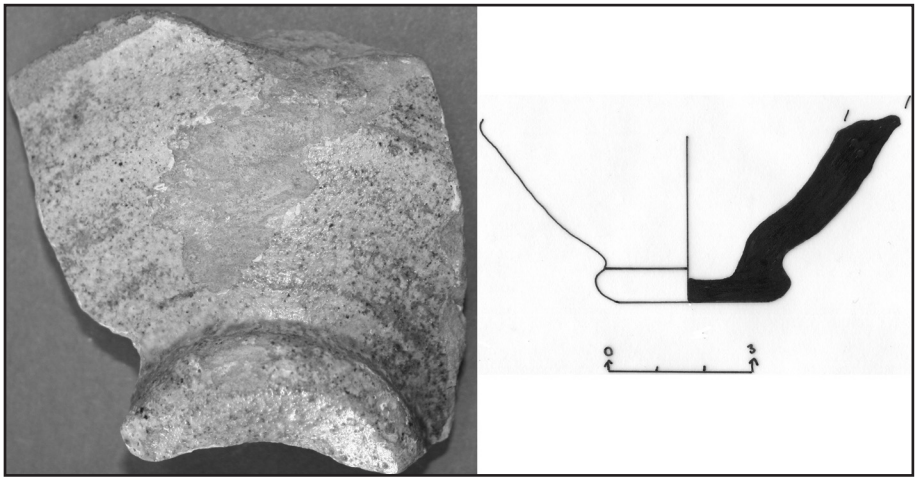


Fig. 5: Cat.no.5, from Yapılıpınar Mound, fragment no. 2008-GZA-07.

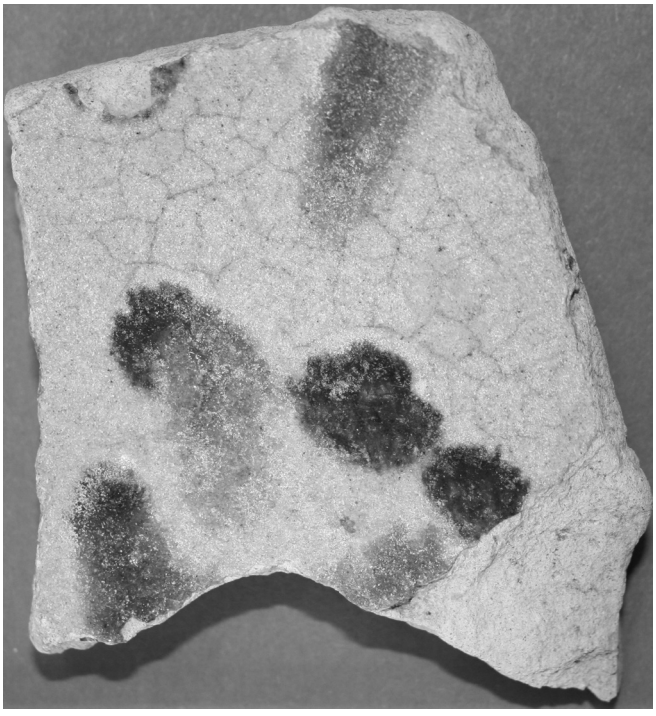


Fig. 6: Cat.no.10, from Yapılıpınar Mound, fragment no. 2008-K-01.

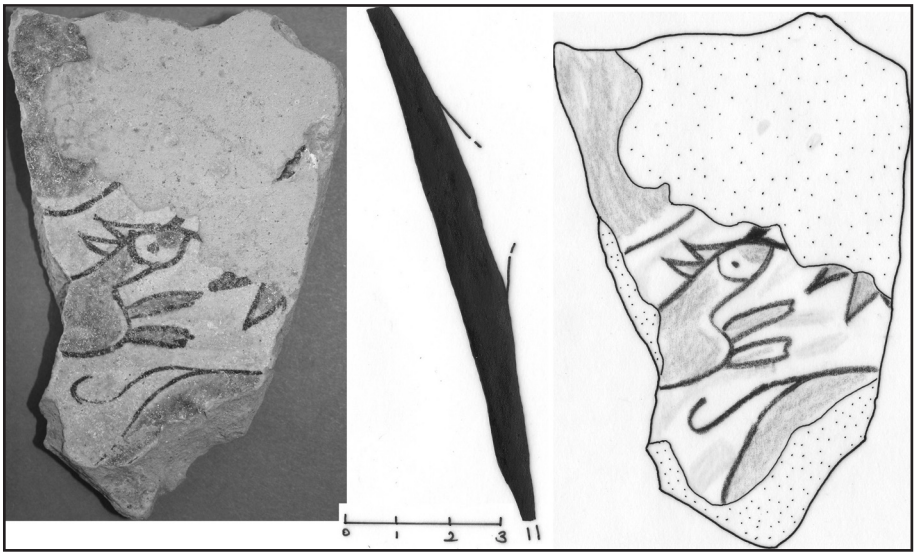


Fig. 7: Cat.no.11, from Yapılıpınar Mound, fragment no. 2008-K-02.

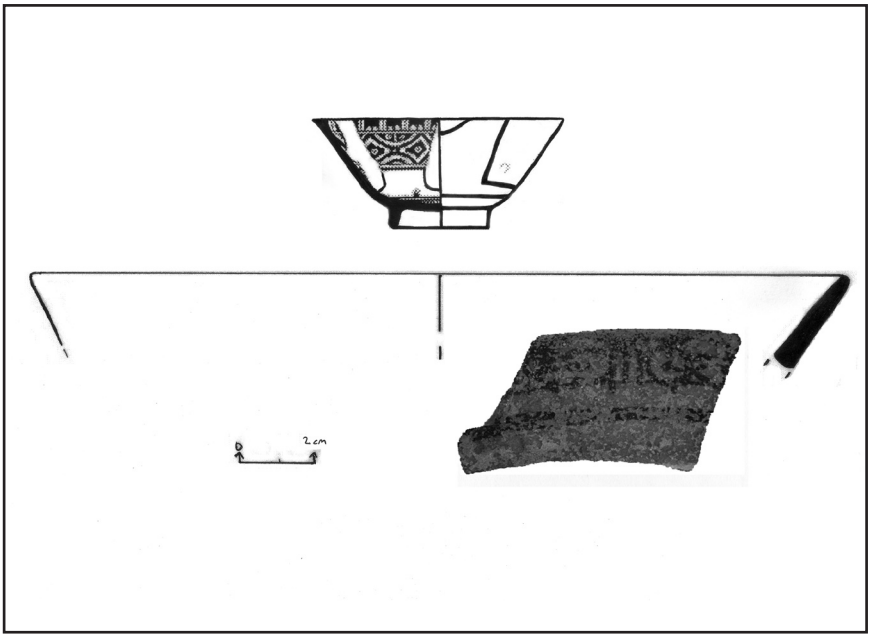


Fig. 8: Cat.no.12, from south of Mağralı Tepe, fragment no.2009-40.

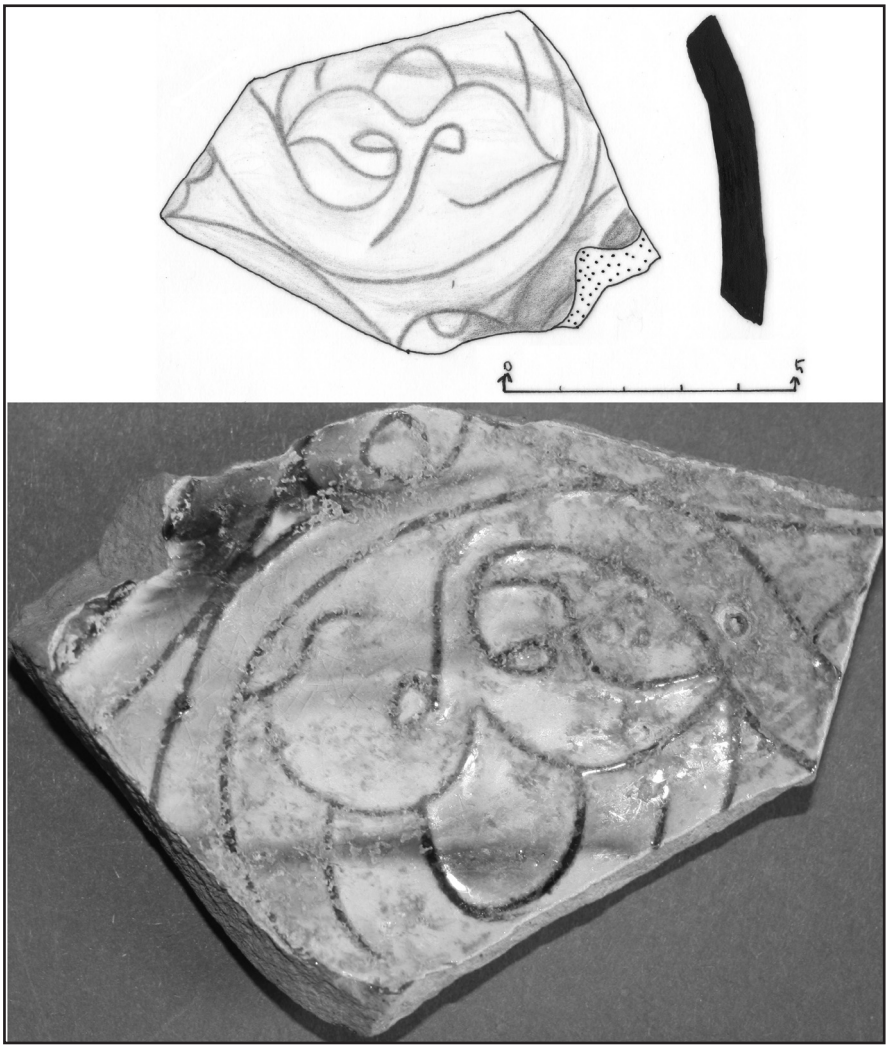


Fig. 9: Cat.no.13, from Taşlı 4 Mound, fragment no. 2008-D-02.