

# EARLY MYCENAEAN MORTUARY MEALS AT LERNA VI WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THEIR AEGINETAN COMPONENTS

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## Abstract

The integrative role played by feasting in the creation and maintenance of hierarchical social relations is well documented in the archaeological and ethnographic record. During the past decade, several archaeological contexts from the Bronze Age Aegean have been interpreted as remains of such activities. It is argued that a large portion of the mortuary remains from the two shaft graves at Lerna VI represent clear examples of this phenomenon already at the beginning of the Mycenaean period. Arguments for such an interpretation are presented here, followed by an overview of the Aeginetan component in the assemblage.

## INTRODUCTION

Half a century has elapsed since the discovery of the two shaft graves at Lerna. As a full account of their remains is in preparation, the remarks that follow offer only some preliminary thoughts on a few aspects of the pottery retrieved during excavation.<sup>1</sup> The first concerns the depositional history of the pottery in the fill of the shafts. Although a bit more complicated than in many other circumstances, this exercise is a prerequisite to understanding the possible circumstances and, ultimately, the motives behind its final deposition. A second aspect of the pottery to be discussed here involves a selective presentation of the vessels imported from the island of Aegina and a tentative evaluation of their bearing on the overall interpretation of the material. Needless to say, further analysis of the material may produce results that modify or even supersede this preliminary presentation.

## THE SHAFT GRAVES

A short account of the excavation of the two graves will serve as a springboard for the discussion of the ceramic vessels. The first shaft grave (SG 1) at Lerna

came to light in the northeast corner of area B on July 28, 1954 (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> In his field notebook, the trench supervisor Spiridon Charitonides remarked that "it is very probable that we have a shaft grave here. So from now we shall distinguish its filling by layer giving new number at each one of them." The outline of the shaft was recognized as a rectangular patch of soft, gray earth close to the surface at approximately 7 m above sea level. It measured roughly 2.50 m east to west and 4 m north to south. The shaft continued downward for more than 2 m and was excavated in artificial units called pottery lots, consisting of a letter designating the area and a consecutive number. Mixed in the filling were large quantities of Late Helladic (LH) I pottery and animal bones as well as some worked objects of different materials.

Beneath the soft filling was a layer of compact, reddish brown clay covering the entire floor of the excavated pit. The grave chamber was found immediately below this layer in the form of four walls built of large, flat slabs of stone. There was a gap over a meter wide in the western wall. The grave contained brown earth mixed with some stones probably fallen from above. Under the debris was a floor of rounded beach stones. No funerary remains, either in the form of grave offerings or human bones, were found despite additional soundings below the paved floor. This lack of finds, in combination with the damaged western wall, led Caskey to suggest that the grave had been robbed of its contents and that the fragmentary pottery in the fill had initially been part of the funerary offerings accompanying the deceased in the grave.

The following year a second grave (SG 2) of similar construction and content was excavated only 5 m to the east of the first one (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> The shaft was somewhat larger in plan than the previous one and the grave had been sunk more than 3 m into the ground. The bulk of the sherds recovered from the filling did

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<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 2002 the Lerna Publication Committee invited me to undertake the publication of the remains from Lerna VI. Besides a handful of pit and/or cist graves, the material consists primarily of ceramic material recovered from the two shaft graves excavated in 1954 and 1955 and

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subsequently published in preliminary form by JOHN CASKEY in *Hesperia*.

<sup>2</sup> CASKEY 1955, 32–4, pls. 15–7.

<sup>3</sup> CASKEY 1956, 155–7, pls. 39, 41c.

SG 1 from North



Restored SG 2 from North

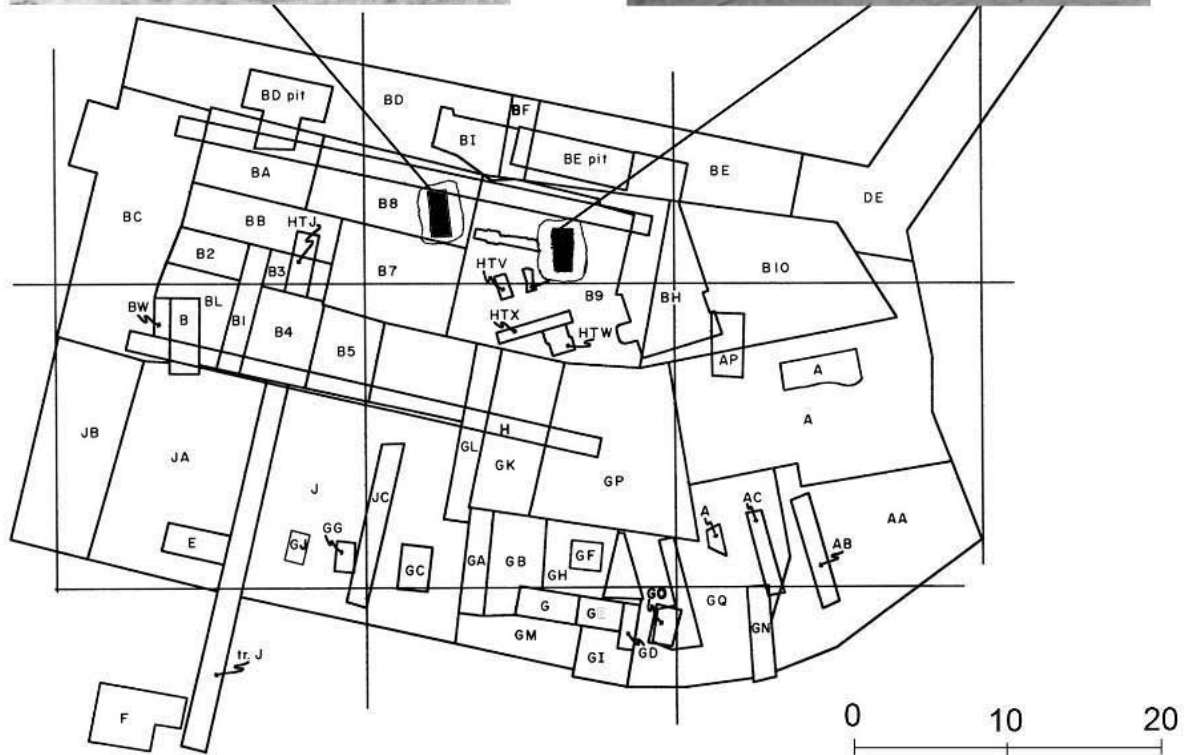


Fig. 1 General excavation plan of Lerna with the two shaft graves (SG 1-2) indicated

not differ qualitatively in any apparent way from those in SG 1 but appeared in larger numbers.

The collapsed grave chamber was enclosed by remains of four badly damaged stone walls and was floored with pebbles. Once again, there were clear

signs that the funeral content had been removed. In the middle of the pebbled floor a couple of small bones, mainly tarsals and metatarsals, of an adult indicated that the grave had originally held at least one person.<sup>4</sup> Still left in chamber, in the southwest

<sup>4</sup> ANGEL (1971) did not include in his study the human bones found on the floor of SG 2.



Fig. 2 LH I Mainland Polychrome Vapheio Cup (L.598) and Semiglobular Cup (L.597) from SW corner of floor in SG 2 at Lerna

corner, were two complete LH I mainland polychrome cups, apparently funeral offerings (Fig. 2).

#### Depositional History

There is no unambiguous evidence as to when the shaft graves were opened and stripped of their content. However, a rectangular cutting about a meter down along the southern rim of the shaft in SG 2 held an upright slab of stone at the bottom. In the hollow thereby created, two largely restorable LH III kylikes (FS 267) had been placed. MARTHA WIENCKE has suggested that they are remains of a commemorative ceremony performed at the grave either in connection with or after the removal of the contents.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, with no later intrusive pottery in the shafts, it is hard to escape the notion of a Mycenaean exhumation of the bodies and removal of the funerary offerings. Furthermore, as will become evident, the chronologically very homogeneous pottery assemblage excavated from the two shafts also indicates that much of the soil, intermixed with material, was put back soon if not immediately after the removal of the bodies.

Except for the fact that the graves contained no burials when excavated, the strongest indication of their disturbed condition is provided by pottery joins within or between the two shafts (Fig. 3). Although some joins may well have been overlooked during analysis, there can be no doubt about the mixed character of the fill in each shaft. Additionally, it can be

surmised that the refilling of each shaft utilized material from the same source. As a result of these findings, the original lots were combined into larger units, better corresponding to the noticeable divisions within the graves (Fig. 4). Units B733 (SG 1) and B1536 (SG 2), for example, correspond roughly to the shaft of each grave, although some additional material is to be found in surrounding units as well.

Had the shafts been left open and the grave chambers exposed after the removal of their burials, it would be natural to assume a more or less even pace at which the two pits were gradually filled up with settlement debris. Discarded fragments from the same vessels would have been deposited at approximately the same level in each shaft. This is not the case, however. Instead, the soil and broken pottery was thrown back into the shafts so that sherds from one vessel ended up at very different levels, best illustrated in the long vertical distance between some joining pottery fragments. Also, except for the very small number of LH III sherds probably intentionally deposited some distance down in the shaft of SG 2, there are no later intrusive sherds in units B733 and B1536. These two observations constitute a powerful contextual argument that the LH I vessels excavated from the shafts were deliberately redeposited at a single moment in time soon after the removal of the skeletons in the LH III period. Hence, although we do not possess complete and undisturbed funeral assemblages from the graves, we should still regard

<sup>5</sup> WIENCKE 1998, 201; cf. CASKEY 1956, 157 and BLACKBURN 1970, 171.

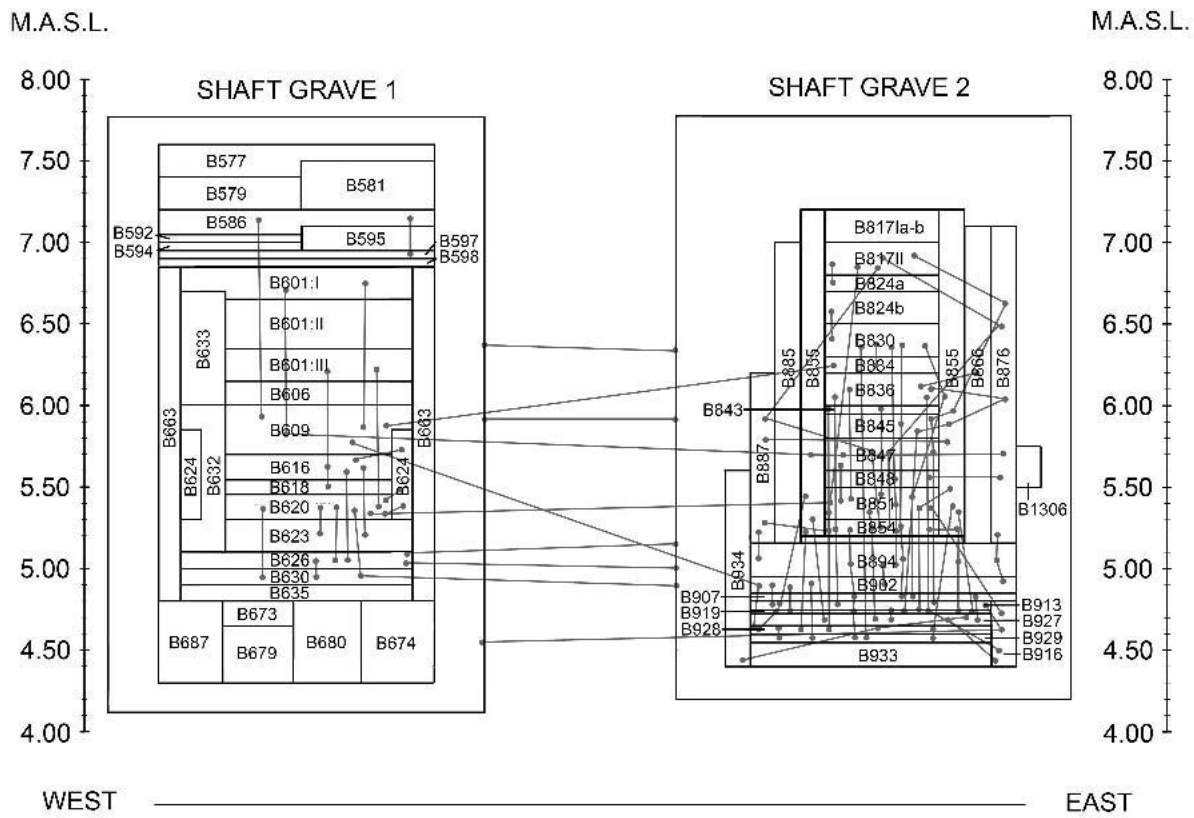


Fig. 3 Schematic sections of SG 1 and SG 2 at Lerna with selected pottery lots recorded during excavation. Each dot within a lot represent one pottery fragment, consisting of one or more sherds, while the connecting lines represent joins between them

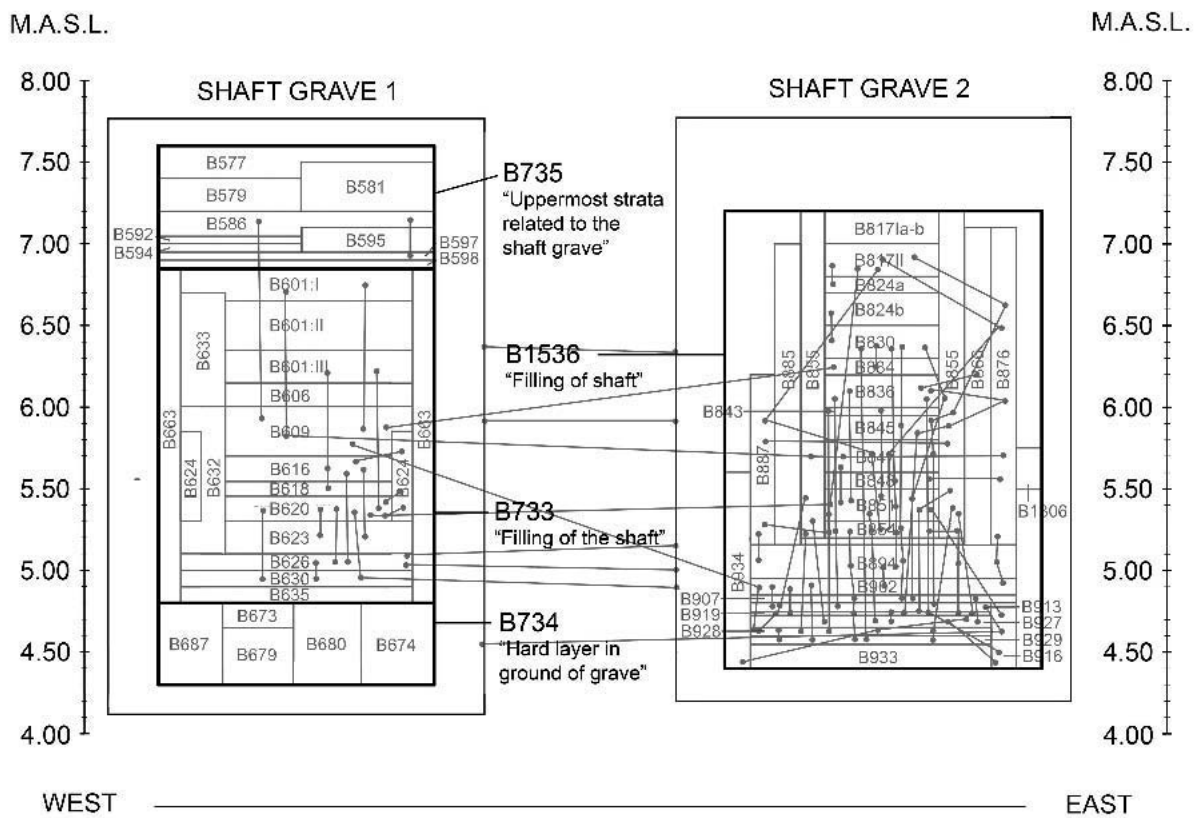


Fig. 4 Schematic section of SG 1 and SG 2 at Lerna with pottery lots combined into larger analytical units

the material from the fills, including also the faunal remains and the miscellaneous nonceramic objects, as integral parts of the original burials.<sup>6</sup>

### THE POTTERY

Depending on the properties considered – whether mineralogical constituencies in the clay, manufacturing techniques, shapes, surface treatment or decoration – the fragmentary vessels from the two principal units B733 and B1536 can be sorted in a number of different ways. To facilitate comparisons, a division similar or identical to that used in many previous studies of ceramic assemblages from Early Mycenaean (EM) deposits in the central and southern Greek mainland is presented below (Fig. 5). The quantification is based on sherd counts by CASKEY and other excavators during initial analysis of the pottery and before any substantial discards. While the fill in SG 1 contained around 4,000 sherds, the shaft in SG 2 held at least 11,000 and possibly up to 14,000 sherds.<sup>7</sup> Only a very small number of these, ca. 120 sherds, were intrusive from Early Helladic (EH) and Middle Helladic (MH) layers surrounding the shafts.

A wide range of pottery classes were present in the shafts. Several matt-painted and unpainted vessels of fine- or medium-tempered fabric reveal only subtle or no differences from those in use in the northeast Peloponnese during the end of the MH period. Others, however, place us firmly within the LH I period. Pattern painted decoration in a matt, bichrome style, found on mainland polychrome and Aeginetan bichrome vessels, suggest such a date. Sherds with iron-based paint, either lustrous pattern-painted on a light background or as a semi-lustrous to lustrous background for white pattern-painted decoration, provide even more compelling evidence (Fig. 6).

It is difficult to determine what to make of the different amounts of pottery in the two shafts, both in total number of sherds and in their distribution

among various pottery classes. For instance, SG 1 contained a higher ratio of plain, unburnished pottery than SG 2, while the latter showed a higher percentage of painted Aeginetan vessels. If we consider the depositional history of the pottery, including the opening and refilling of the shafts in LH III resulting in numerous joins between the two shafts, it is perhaps best to treat the content of both shafts as one analytical unit. As such, it reveals some remarkable traits.

### Comparisons With Contemporary Settlements

A comparison of the pottery from the shafts with contemporaneous settlement contexts on the southern and central Greek mainland is hampered by a general dearth of published material. At Lerna itself, the settlement was probably located some distance to the northeast of the shaft graves, in area D, but we know very little about its ceramic remains. Even when excavators have taken great care to describe and differentiate various types of LH I pottery at other settlements, the sherds have been few, as at Tsoungiza and Kiapha Thiti, or have been subject to previous discards, as at Korakou.<sup>8</sup> Statistics from SÖREN DIETZ's study of some deposits from LH Asine can, however, serve as a general reference point (Fig. 7).<sup>9</sup> A few hours' walk away, this coastal settlement probably shared many formal traits also found at contemporary Lerna.

Three differences in the comparison of the pottery assemblages are particularly striking. The most apparent is the significantly lower percentage of unpainted, unburnished pottery in the Lerna shaft graves. While this type of pottery amounts to 38 percent at LH I Asine, its frequency reaches only 12 percent in the shaft graves. Second, the Lustrous Mycenaean pottery, novel for the period, is much more common in the shafts than in an ordinary settlement context. At Asine this type of pottery accounts for only 1 percent of the total pottery measured by sherd count. An even lower ratio was

<sup>6</sup> GEJVALL 1969 (animal bones); BLACKBURN 1970 (miscellaneous finds). Subsequent analyses by DAVID REESE of the saved animal bones and by ELIZABETH BANKS and me of the miscellaneous objects kept in the Argos museum will supplement or modify previous results.

<sup>7</sup> The standard estimate of pottery quantities at Lerna were in "baskets". The shaft of SG 1 contained 13–14 baskets of pottery, while the shaft of SG 2 contained approximately 30 baskets. These figures say little more than that the latter shaft contained more than twice as many sherds as the former. Several discards of pottery after the excavation render

many quantitative estimates impossible today. Before these occurred, however, CASKEY carefully noted the number of sherds in selected ware groups and the percentages of most other wares present in units B733 and B1536. Combined with a knowledge of the criteria behind CASKEY's classification, these numbers allow for a rather detailed reconstruction of the assemblages' internal composition as retrieved during excavation.

<sup>8</sup> RUTTER 1989; MARAN 1992; DAVIS 1979.

<sup>9</sup> DIETZ 1991, 93, fig. 26.

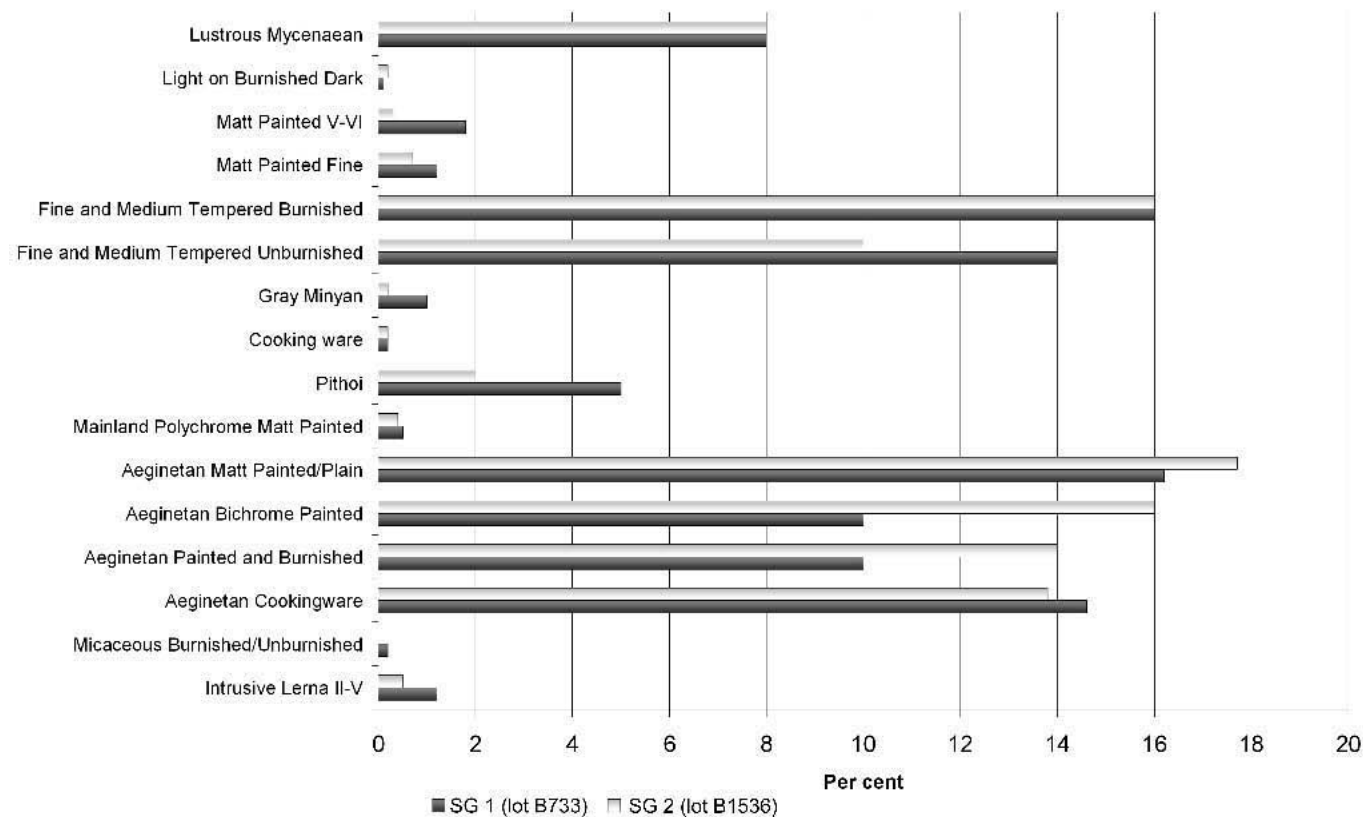


Fig. 5 Distribution of different pottery from Lerna shaft graves

recorded by JEREMY RUTTER at LH I Tsoungiza and by JOSEPH MARAN at Kiapha Thiti.<sup>10</sup> In the shaft graves at Lerna, this type of pottery is roughly eight times as common.

The third major difference is the very high amount of Aeginetan painted pottery in the shaft graves compared to an ordinary settlement context. Aeginetan imports are very common on the Greek mainland in LH I, but they rarely account for more than 20 percent of the total pottery and are dominated by wide-mouthed cooking jars. In the shaft graves, sherds from Aeginetan cooking jars are outnumbered by 1:4. Instead we find large numbers of mono- or bichrome pattern painted, as well as solidly painted and burnished vessels from the island.

### Mortuary Meals

Most of the vessels from the shafts cannot have been funeral offerings in an ordinary sense. The estimated number of vessels collected from the shafts is so large that it would have been impossible to fit all, or even a majority of these vases into the roofed compartment

together with the deceased. Before discard, Caskey estimated the number of vessels within each ware group. Based on different rim profiles and/or decorative motives on the saved pottery, renewed calculations in 2003–2004 have convinced me that his numbers are not disproportionate (Fig. 7). It is true that very few of the nearly 1,000 vessels originally identified could be fully or even mostly restored after excavation. However, on the proposition that both graves had been opened and refilled before excavation, it makes perfect sense that many fragments of the vessels were never redeposited in the shafts. By and large, the sherds left exposed at the top and around the shafts have disappeared by means of erosion and human activity. Only a few joins between sherds inside and around the edges of the shafts have been identified during analysis.

To sum up the ceramic evidence, we are thus confronted with an assemblage too large to have been fitted into the graves, but with a depositional history and several indications in its internal composition that strongly suggest that it is not ordinary settle-

<sup>10</sup> RUTTER 1989, 10; MARAN 1992, 204–7.



Fig. 6 Selected LH I Lustrous Mycenaean Decorated and White on Burnished Dark vessels from Lerna shaft graves



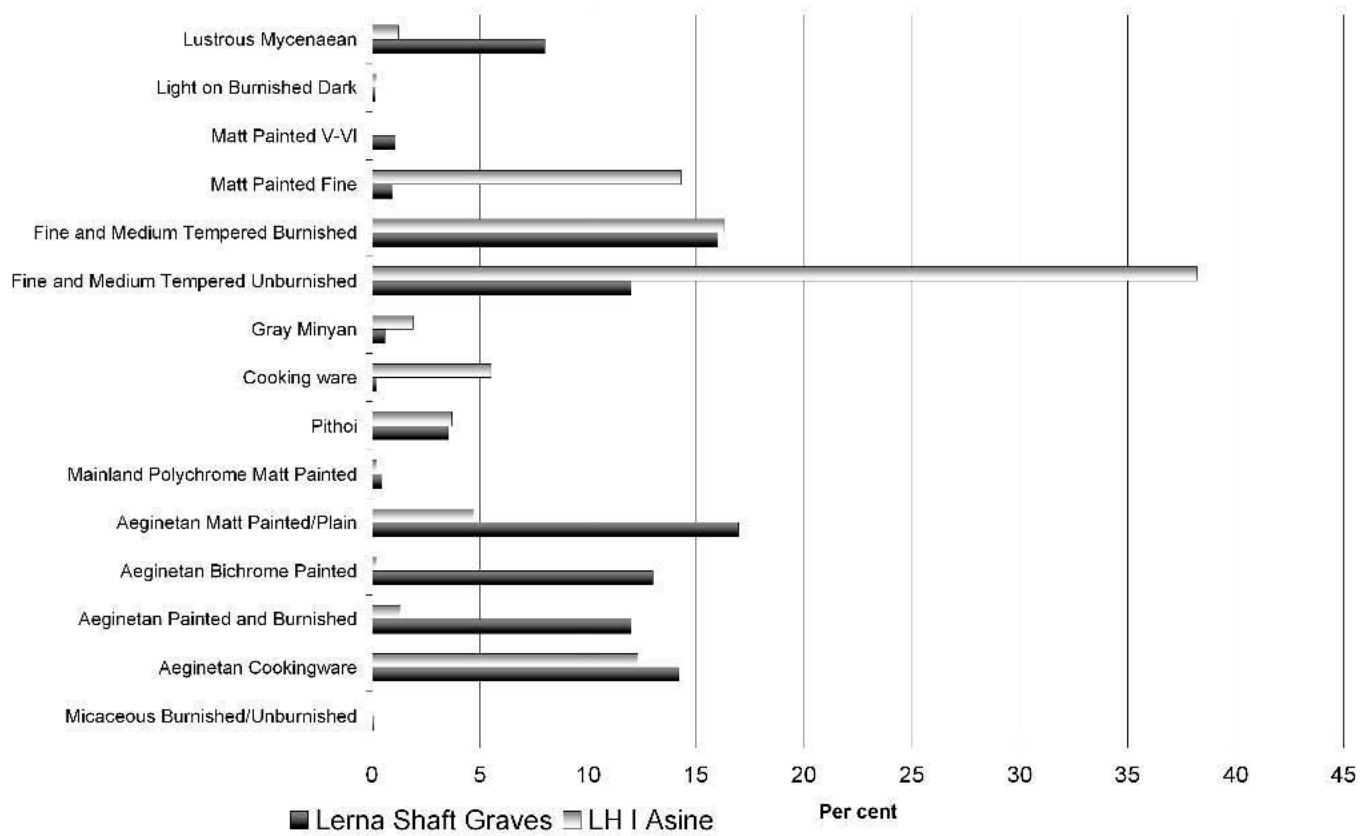


Fig. 7 Distribution between different pottery classes from Lerna shaft graves and at LH I Asine

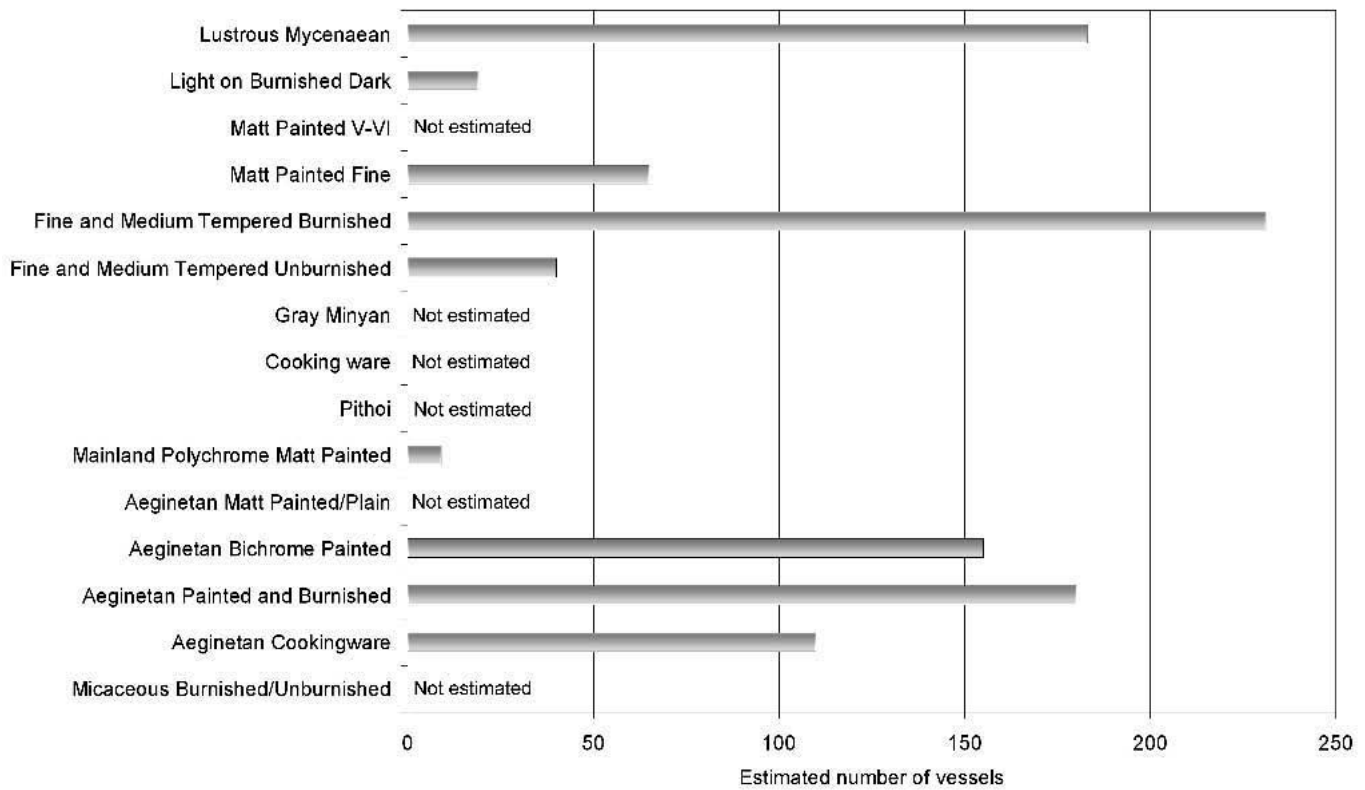


Fig. 8 Estimated number of fragmentary vessels in SG1 (B33) and SG2 (B) prior to discard

ment debris. Only by assuming that most of the vessels were intentionally thrown into the shafts, probably above the roof of the graves, can we account for their large number. Although the number of the dead originally interred in the graves is unknown, the mainland polychrome cups found on the floor of SG 2 and the homologous ceramic content of the shafts suggest that all of the burials took place in LH I. Before the shafts were filled, all of the vessels were thrown into the shafts, together with a large number of animal bones and possibly other organic materials that together produced over time the distinctly gray color of the soil. Because of the opening of the graves and the removal of the funeral offerings in later Mycenaean times, it cannot be ruled out that, in addition to the two polychrome cups mentioned above, a number of vessels were originally placed as grave goods inside the grave chambers together with the deceased. This would not, however, affect the overall number of vessels in a significant way.

The practice of depositing pottery and remains of food above or in the shaft of a grave is not unique to Lerna. Fragmentary vessels as well as animal bones and shells were found in the fill of many graves in Circle B at Mycenae.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, animal bones, shells and traces of burning were found close to a few MH graves at Kirrha and on the cover slabs of grave 31 at Ayios Stephanos.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, these contexts have been interpreted as the remains of meals held by kin groups in connection with the burials.<sup>13</sup> In a similar fashion, I argue that an overwhelming majority of finds from the two shaft graves at Lerna represent extensive examples of the same phenomenon. What is especially striking at Lerna is the magnitude of the assemblage as well as its relative completeness when compared to other grave contexts on the EM mainland.

The social dimensions of food and drink, especially in the maintenance of group relations and in the negotiation or resistance of power and dominance, has been well investigated both cross-culturally and in the prehistoric Aegean.<sup>14</sup> Feasting has become the buzzword of contemporary social archaeology while the theoretical and methodological approaches to the

subject differ in both scope and depth. Most closely related to the contextual evidence at Lerna, an entire volume of conference papers has been devoted to the identification of Mycenaean feasting behavior. Following an introduction, JAMES WRIGHT presents a detailed overview of some proposed archaeological correlates to the phenomenon, chiefly from funerary and palatial contexts on the mainland but also from Neopalatial Crete. Through the overall patterning of metal vessels found in late MH and EM tombs, rather than detailed descriptions of specific ceramic assemblages, he argues that feasting played a key role in the process of social differentiation that becomes most apparent with the creation of centralized palatial economies on the mainland: WRIGHT himself acknowledges that “largely missing from this [his] analysis is evidence for the multiple forms of feasting, and the social and ritual nuances of the practice of feasting that transpired during the Late Bronze Age (LBA) in the Aegean”.<sup>15</sup> The vessels retrieved from the shaft graves at Lerna are part of the physical remains from a specific instance of feasting during LH I with which it will eventually be possible to evaluate and contrast the general proposals presented by WRIGHT. Below, only one feature of the assemblage is highlighted, but one that may have repercussions for our understanding of the larger setting of the funeral feasts. It is hoped to become clear that during these events the stage was provided not only with food and drink but also with material that carried social, and probably also political, significance for those who attended.

### The Aeginetan Component

It is possible to distinguish a very large group of ceramic imports from the island of Aegina by means of visual inspection of their fabric coupled with chemical and petrographic analyses. The sherds from these vessels, defined mainly by their volcanic inclusions but also manufacturing technique, shape, surface treatment and decorative schemes, outnumber all other ceramic classes combined and constitute around 56 percent of the entire ceramic assemblage from the shaft graves at Lerna. The vessels can be

<sup>11</sup> MYLONAS 1973, 22, 37, 45, 80, 82, 110, 122, 158, 177, 187, 221; cf. MARINATOS 1953, 63–66 and MYLONAS 1957, 134–5.

<sup>12</sup> DOR *et al.* 1960, 58–9; TAYLOUR 1972, 219, 222.

<sup>13</sup> GRAZIADIO 1988, 92.

<sup>14</sup> WIESSNER and SCHIEFENHÖVEL 1996; POTTIER 1999; DIETLER and HAYDEN 2001 (ethnographic and archaeolog-

ical studies outside the Aegean); HAMILAKIS 1998; 1999a; 1999b; ISAAKIDOU *et al.* 2002; HAMILAKIS and KONSOLAKI 2004; HALSTEAD and BARRET 2005 (archaeological studies from the prehistoric Aegean).

<sup>15</sup> WRIGHT 2004, 137.

further broken down into discrete classes, amply attested at many settlements during the Shaft Grave period (Fig. 8).

Fragments from cooking jars, tripods and lids constitute ca. 25 percent of all the Aeginetan sherds (Fig. 9). Some whole vessels and several large fragments make it possible to delineate the principal shapes of this type of pottery in the graves and to note which shapes are lacking or are represented only in small amounts. Medium- to small-sized, wide-mouthed jars with one vertical shoulder handle dominate the repertoire. Their bases are invariably raised or splaying. Large jars without handles and with a rim diameter of more than 30 cm are extremely rare or lacking altogether. Prefiring marks, common on shoulders especially during the first half of the MH period, occur during LH I only on or below handles or bases. A fair number of fragments of what can only be lids are present as well. Although no complete specimens of this combination in fabric and shape has to my knowledge been published, it is probable that what looks like inverted bases with circular handles are the tops of covers intended for wide-mouthed jars. Also, three or four tripod legs, and a fragment of a bottom from a tripod, find good parallels at Tsoungiza, Korakou and Kiapha Thiti.

Among the solidly painted sherds, three shapes have been so far identified (Fig. 10). The first, a goblet on a low pedestal foot, is extremely common. Ribbing on the stem is very rare and incisions are unattested. The krater with short rim, horizontal loop handles and a ring base, the second shape that is clearly recognizable, occurs considerably less frequently than the goblet. A single rim fragment with

part of a vertical strap handle suggests that cups occur also, albeit in small number. In common with all shapes, their painted surfaces are only moderately burnished and the red color shifts to brown or black on about one out of ten vessels.

The narrow-necked jar is the commonest shape among the pale-surfaced sherds with monochrome, pattern painted decoration (Fig. 11). Unlike that of their MH predecessors, the paint on several of these fragments apparently contains only small amounts of manganese, as it often shifts somewhat in color within the same decorative element from black to brown or dark reddish brown. The jars are sparsely decorated, usually with concentric circles on the shoulder and with loops or circles around the bases of handles. CASKEY did not estimate the number of these jars found in the fills of the graves. Among the saved sherds, however, 61 horizontal handles would suggest a minimum of ca. 30 vessels. Open shapes in the same fabric are very rare: only a handful of rim fragments from kraters and an occasional undecorated cup fragment have been found (Fig. 12).

Most Aeginetan mixing bowls from the shaft graves are instead decorated in a bichrome style. These vessels merit some attention because of their sheer number in the fills of the graves. Fragments of more than 150 vessels, mostly kraters, were collected during excavation. The kraters typically have short, everted rims, horizontal loop handles on the belly, and ring bases (Fig. 13). The rim diameter usually lies within a range of 20–30 cm, although larger examples are also attested. The interior and exterior rim is usually painted red but a few are either black or undecorated. Black circles or loops decorate the

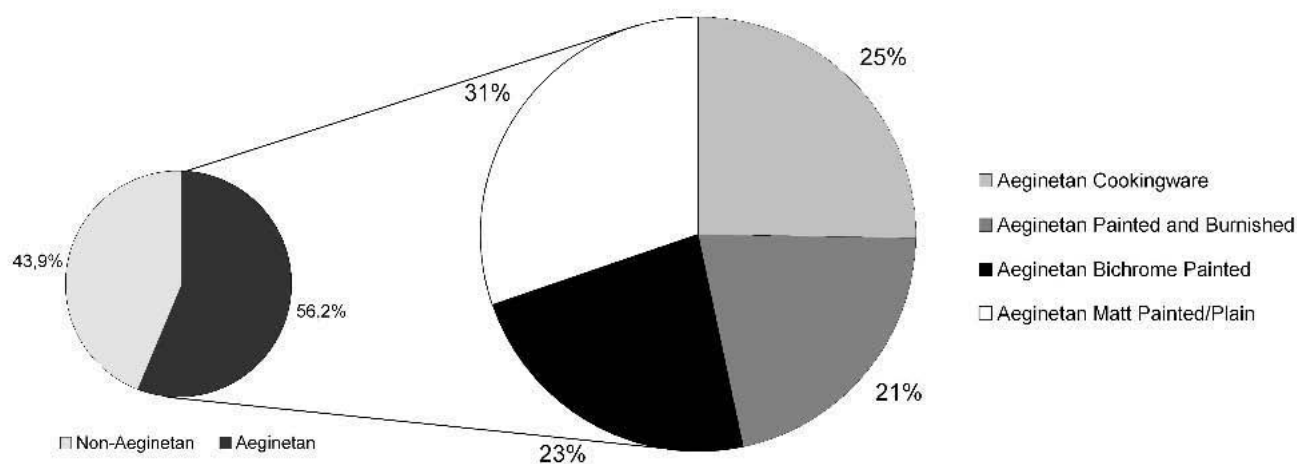


Fig. 9 Distribution of Aeginetan pottery classes

bases of handles. As a rule, two or three horizontal bands are found around the belly and one at the junction between the body and the base. The motives vary somewhat more on the shoulder zone, but wavy bands are most amply attested. With few exceptions, black bands are found above or framing red ones. A very limited number of sherds shows only red decoration and should perhaps, technically speaking, not be termed bichrome. Somewhat more unusual, but still amply attested, are the kraters with opposing or crossing diagonal lines painted on the shoulder (Fig. 14). Once again, black lines frame red lines, red dots, or red wavy lines. Two bowls or small kraters – manufactured in the same fabric as the others, as far as I have been able to observe – deviate both in shape and decoration (Fig. 15). To my knowledge, there are no good parallels to these. The first has pendant triangles below the rim, framed by lines in the color contrasting that of the triangle's filling. The second example, also unique, shows opposing semicircles between cross-hatched panels. The red semicircles are framed by the black ones while the red bars, for once, enclose the black ones. Finally, bichrome decoration is also found on a small number of narrow-necked jars (Fig. 16). Rim fragments with a red band on the interior or exterior lip suggest the occurrence of around ten such vessels. Some more intact examples are known from the destruction level at Akrotiri and the decoration seems to be more or less the same at both places.<sup>16</sup> Vertical and horizontal lines of black color usually enclose a broader red band or wavy line.

### Value, Action and Politics

The overall number of Aeginetan vessels in the fillings of the graves is so large that we cannot avoid asking ourselves how their presence influences the overall understanding of the ceramic assemblage. In other words, is there a connection between the identification of the material as one or two feasting assemblages on the one hand, and the very large number of Aeginetan vessels in the overall ceramic record on the other? In my opinion, there is. Without resorting to simplistic views of how notions of power and prestige are mediated through the use of material culture, the potential range of socially meaningful messages that could be carried by these funeral feasts should be acknowledged.

In many discussions about social stratification and political hierarchizing, archaeologists implicitly

equate economic value with social value. Especially in the early LBA Aegean, uneven access and distribution of selected material categories – e.g., imported pottery, metal vessels, weapons, and jewelry – have been seen to convey in some way certain key social values tied to individuals or groups of individuals. This relationship between economic and social values, but also between the material and the immaterial, is of paramount importance if changes observed in the mortuary customs during the Shaft Grave period are to be properly understood. Theories of economic value have to be explicitly reconciled with social value from a perspective where human actions, intentions and desires are at the core of analysis.

In a recent study, David Graeber suggests that most human activities that relate to the creation or realization of value should not be separated analytically: “Rather than having to choose between the desirability of objects and the importance of human relations, one can see both as refractions of the same thing. Commodities have to be produced . . . social relations have to be created and maintained; all of this requires an investment of human time and energy, intelligence, concerns. If one sees value as a relative distribution of that, then one has a common denominator”.<sup>17</sup> The overarching medium through which value is realized, however imperfectly and biased, is action. Different activities thus represent, at a general level, the pursuit of desires and values that convey more general ideas of what it means to be human and part of society.

As today, these ideas were naturally multifaceted and complementary, but occasionally also contradictory. It is thus impossible to assign only one specific value to the Aeginetan vessels found in the shaft graves at Lerna. As containers not only for food and drink, but also of past actions, they echoed a multitude of messages when used during the funeral meal. The vessels were used in a local setting that could easily be reconciled with values embraced by most people: the sharing of food and drink probably represented one of the most basic ideas of what a community was all about. The importance and long history of hospitality, and of the ability to provide for guests, can be tentatively suggested on the basis of funeral assemblages and floor deposits from at least as early as the later half of the MH period. Gullög Nordquist has presented several instances of sets of very similar drinking vessels found on floors in three

<sup>16</sup> MARTHARI 1982.

<sup>17</sup> GRAEBER 2001, 45.

houses at Asine and one at Tsoungiza. The same pattern is also found in several graves. Together, these instances seem to indicate the importance attached to the ability to sponsor a drinking ritual, even if small and including only a few persons.<sup>18</sup> But while reminiscent of a familiar tenet, the large set of vessels used in the funeral meals at Lerna also carried other messages. The sheer magnitude of the set in combination with its deliberate destruction implied both the importance of the event and the length to which the sponsor had gone to mark the occasion. Produced in the fortified settlement at Kolonna or in its neighborhood, the Aeginetan vessels signaled access to a network of social relations beyond those of most individuals on the Argive plain – relations that surely also incorporated customs and material goods of foreign derivation from Cycladic, Minoan or minoanized areas.

By linking some material resources, such as the amassing of several hundred Aeginetan vessels, with ideas about exclusivity, knowledge, opportunity,

and fortitude albeit cushioned in a familiar setting that emphasized continuity, reciprocity, hosting and provision, some important values were under negotiation during the funerals at LH I Lerna. In Graeber's words, "the ultimate stakes of politics . . . is not the struggle to appropriate value. Instead it is to establish what value *is*".<sup>19</sup> In terms of political centralization and hierarchizing, there can be little doubt that some of the values on display at Lerna were crucial for the formation of the Mycenaean polities during the generations to come. The persons who attended the burials in the shaft graves at LH I Lerna numbered, at a minimum, several hundred and possibly thousands. Followers of the deceased and his or her kin gathered in a collective ritual to reinforce bonds of obligation and affiliation and possibly also to witness the transferral of certain rights to an heir. Ultimately, these rights, if not already present in modest scale during LH I, were to be formalized into political offices vested with certain powers.

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<sup>18</sup> NORDQUIST 2002.

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<sup>19</sup> GRAEBER 2001, 18.

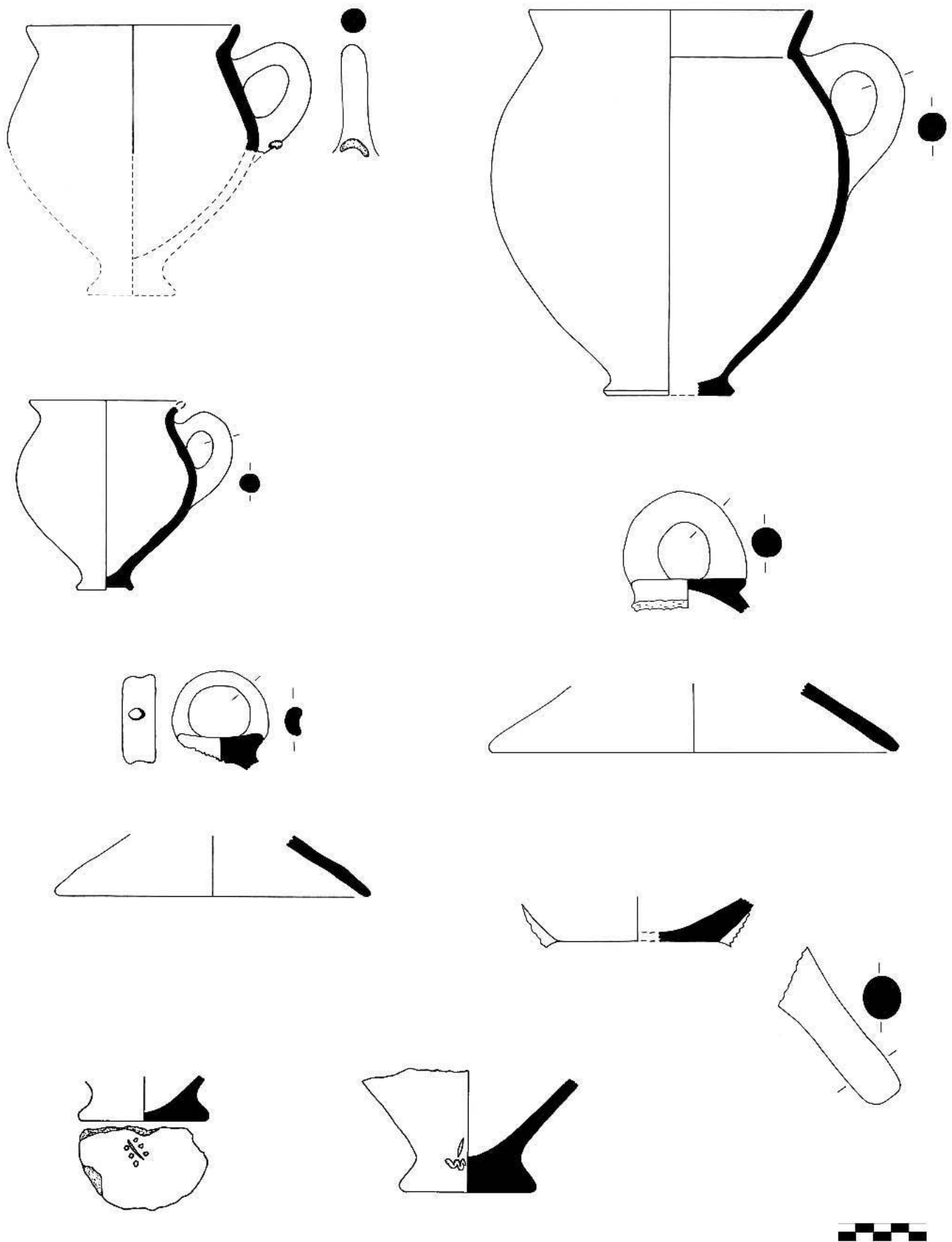


Fig. 10 Aeginetan cooking jars, lids, and tripods

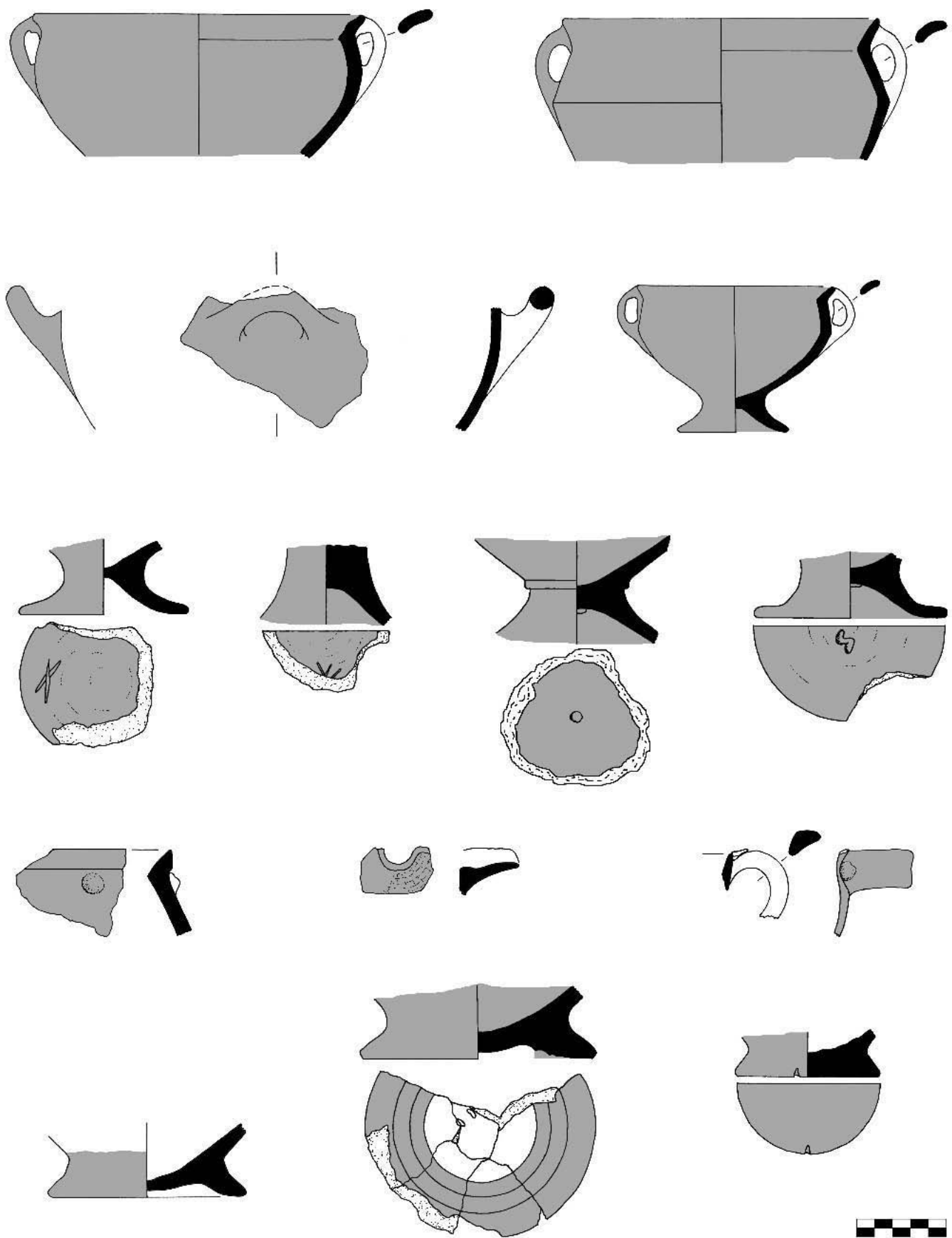


Fig. 11 Aeginetan Painted and Burnished goblets, kraters, and cup

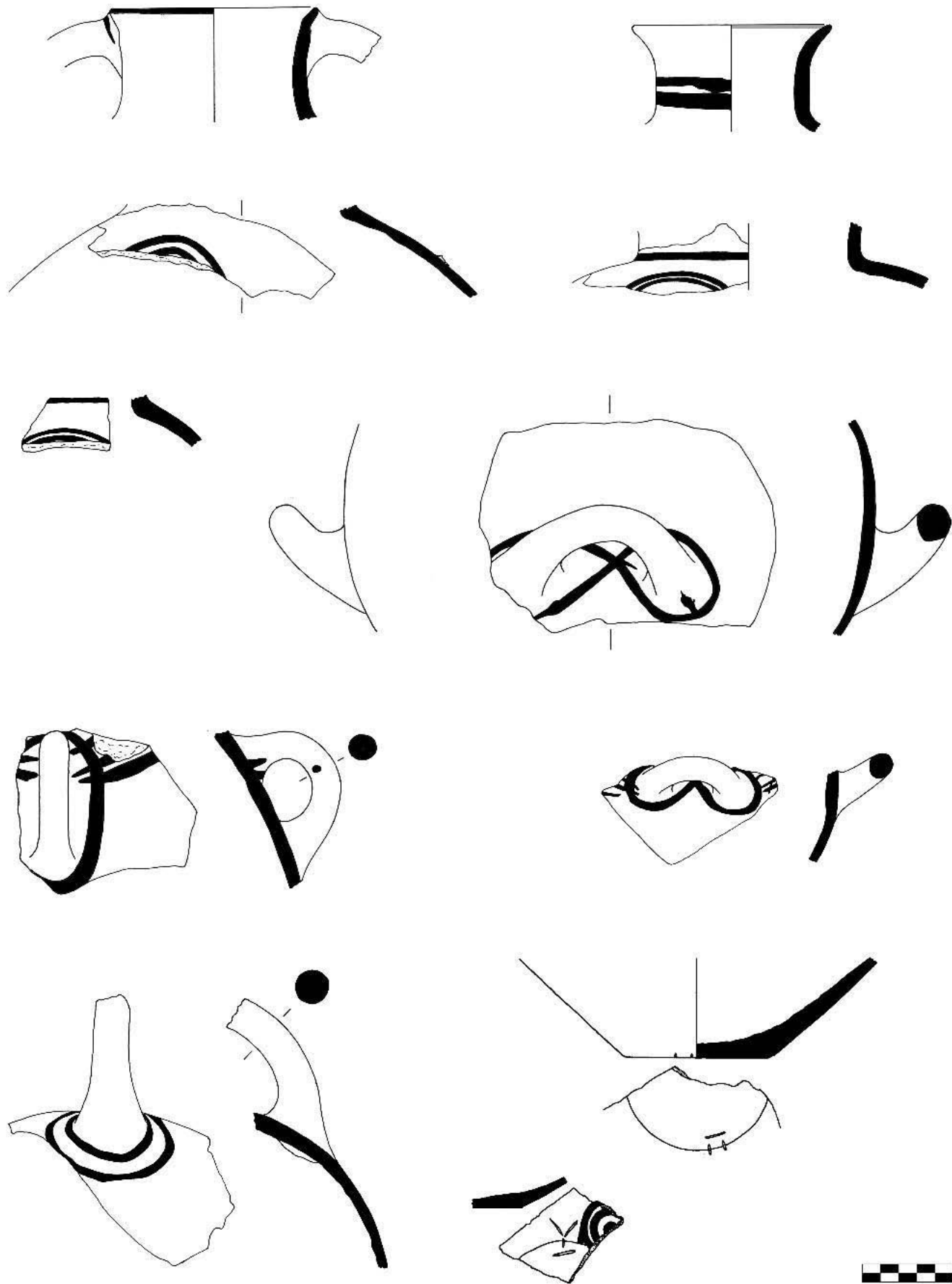


Fig. 12 Aeginetan Matt Painted narrow-necked jars

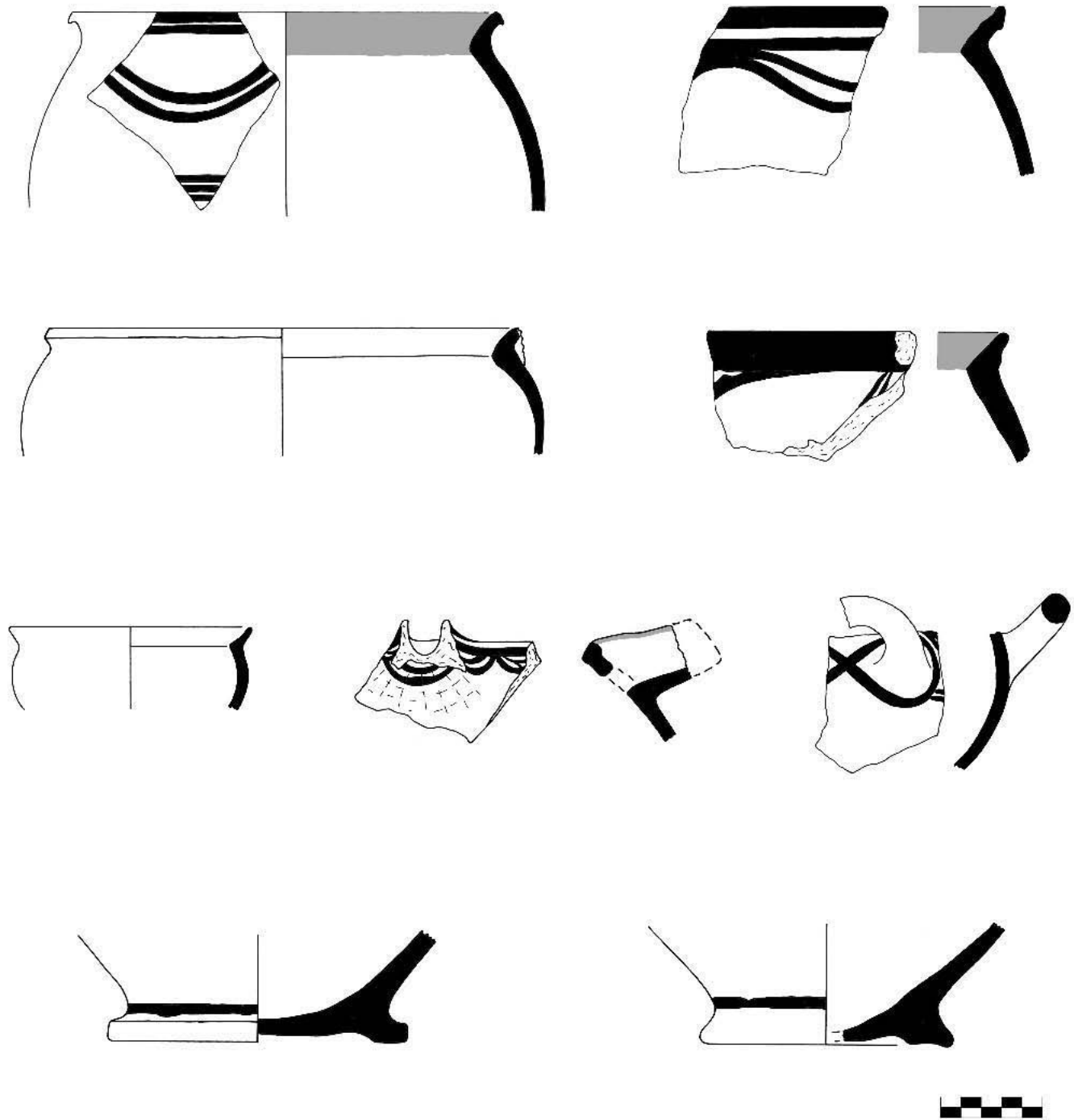


Fig. 13 Aeginetan Matt Painted kraters and cup

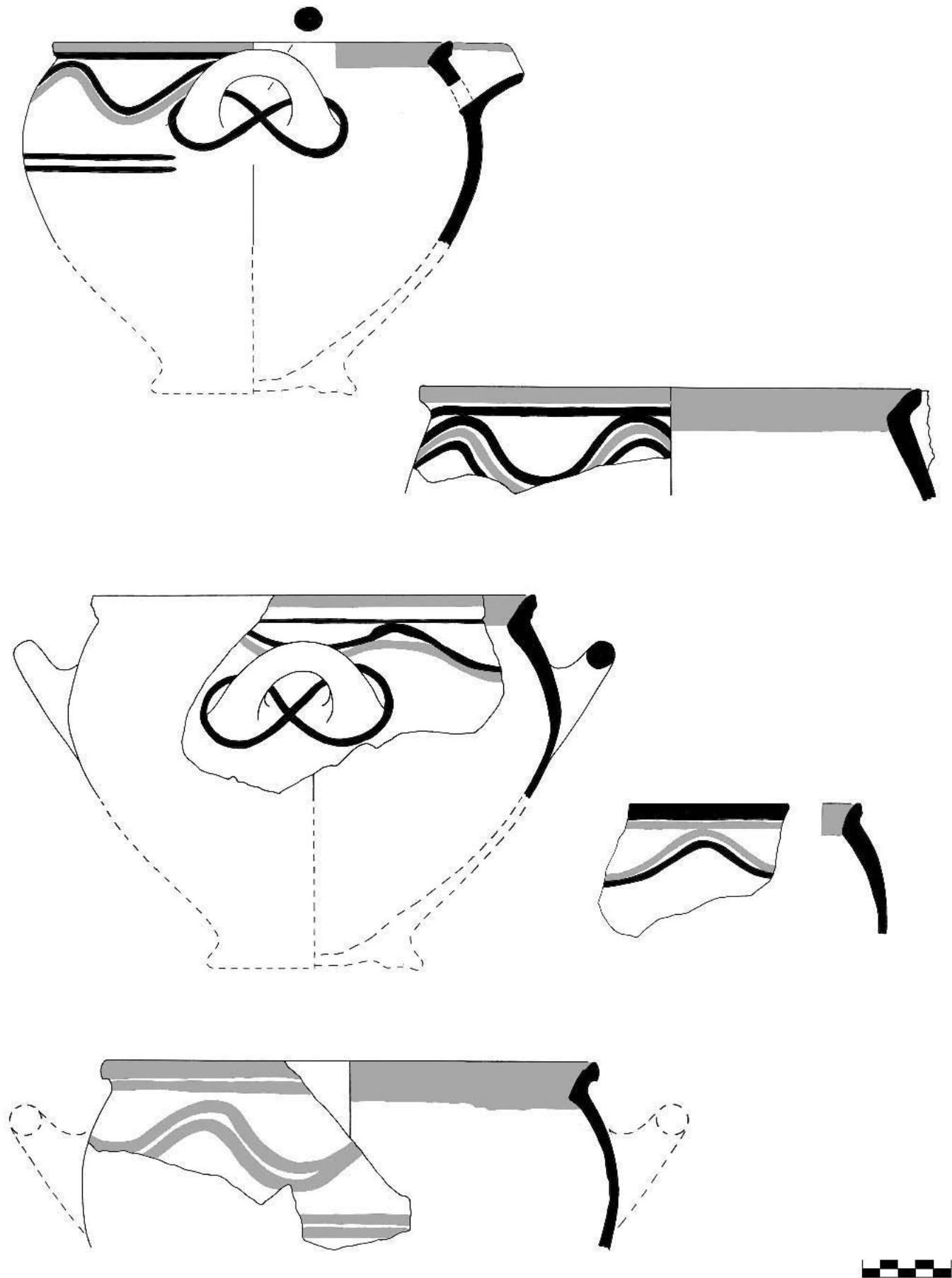


Fig. 14 Aeginetan Bichrome Painted kraters with wavy bands on shoulder

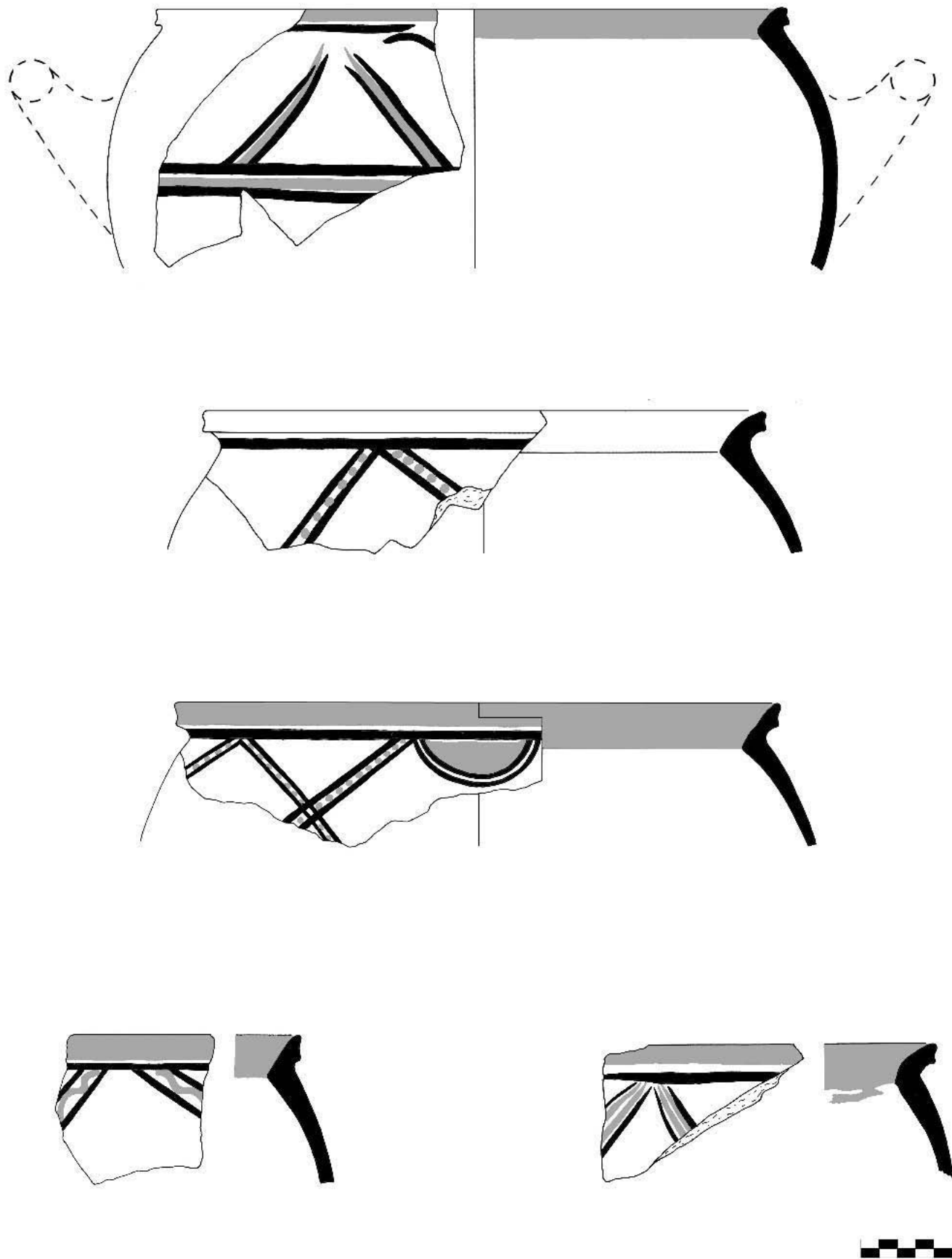


Fig. 15 Aeginetan Bichrome Painted kraters with opposing or crossing diagonal lines on shoulder

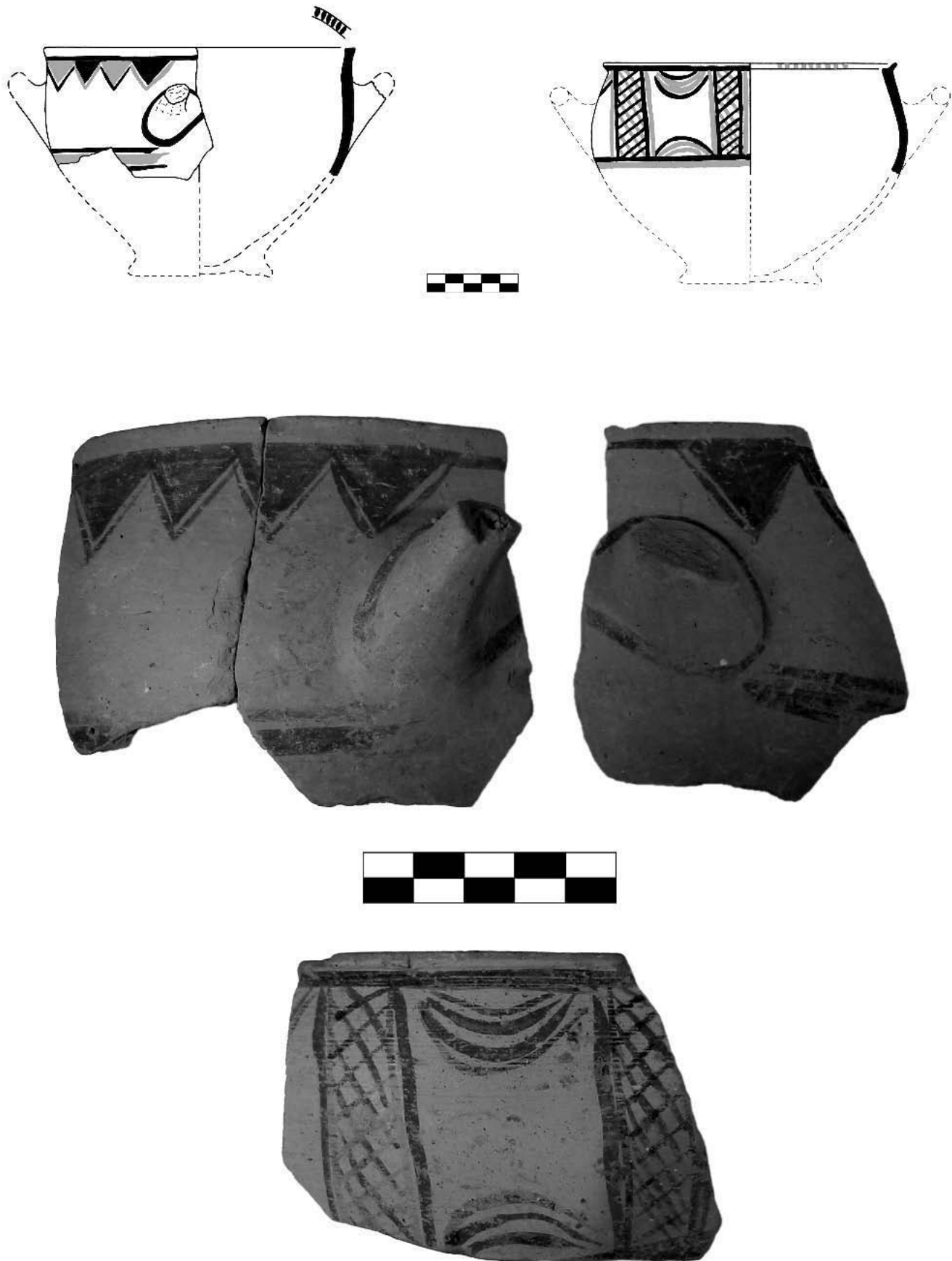


Fig. 16 Aeginetan Birchrome Painted kraters with pendant triangles and cross-hatched panels between opposing semi-circles

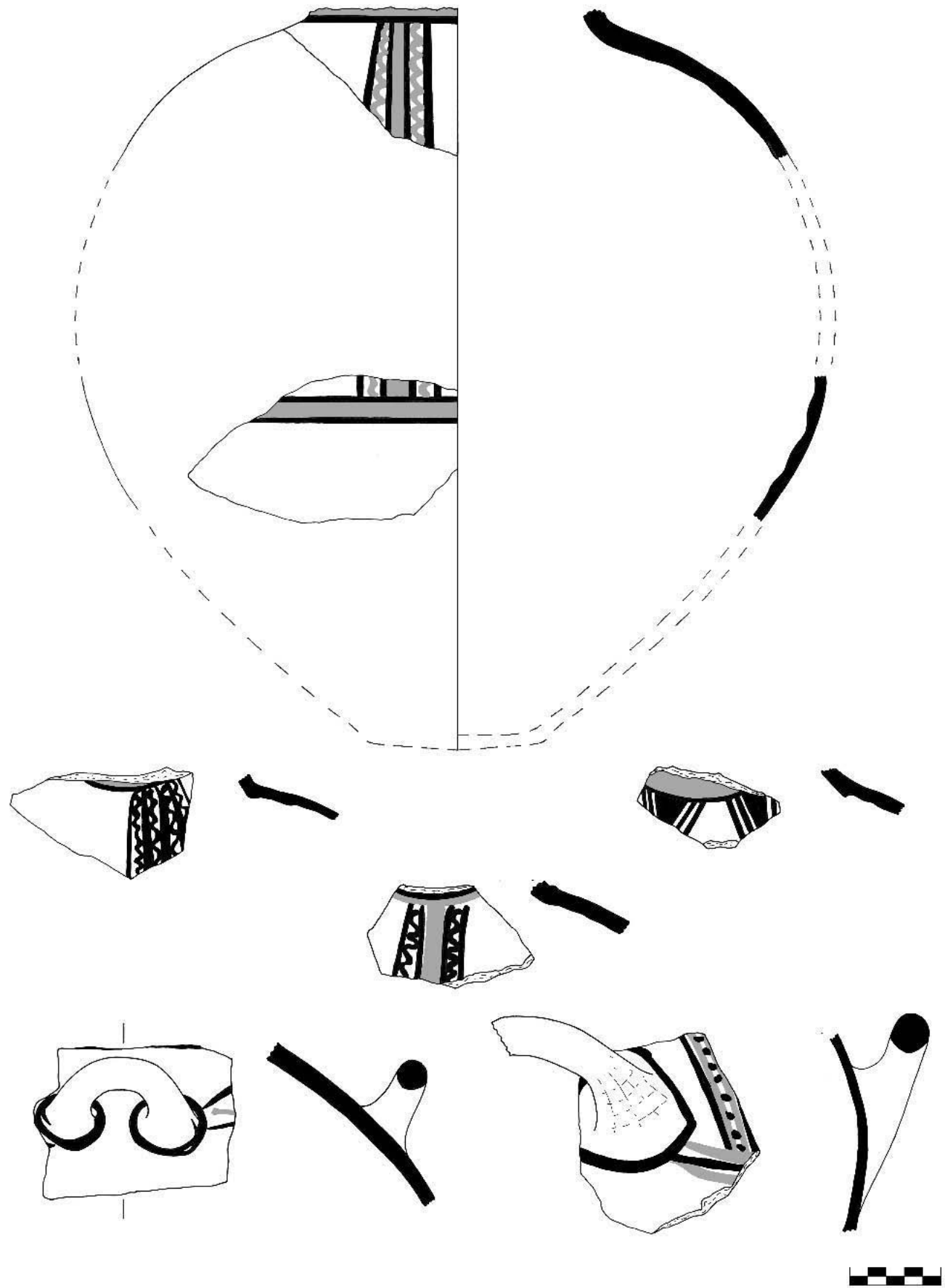


Fig. 17 Aeginetan Bichrome Painted narrow-necked jars

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