

ILIPINAR IN THE PREHISTORY OF NORTHWEST ANATOLIA

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ABSTRACT: Recent excavations at Ilipinar in Northwest Anatolia, throw new light on the prehistory of this region and its relations with both Central Anatolia and the Balkans. Radiocarbon dates of the Fikirtepe fase at Ilipinar show the contemporaneity of the so-called Fikirtepe culture with the Early Neolithic of the northern Balkans.

KEYWORDS: Northwest Anatolia, prehistory, early farming.

1. INTRODUCTION

It would be premature to rewrite the prehistory of Northwest Anatolia on the basis of the first results of the excavations of the dwelling mound of Ilipinar. Nevertheless it seems worthwhile presenting an overview here of the most important information that has been obtained by means of archeological research in this region, against the light of which the position of Ilipinar gets sharper contours.

Down the centuries many travellers have passed through Asia Minor, and eye-witness reports of travellers about monuments of classical antiquity along the west and south coasts of this peninsula have attracted the attention of historians for just as long. The northwestern part of Asia Minor, known in classical times as Bithynia – we call it by the less historically bound name of Northwest Anatolia – became the scene of wide-scale archaeological research in the second half of the last century, when in 1870 the well-known excavations in Hisarlik-Troy began.

It was this urban settlement which, despite its limited size, provided a chronological basis for the prehistory of Northwest Anatolia, thanks to the systematic research carried out in the 1930's by C. Blegen (Blegen et al., 1950). The stratigraphy of Troy is still valid as a frame of reference for the chronology of the Bronze Age in the entire eastern Mediterranean region.

Since that time, whenever archaeologists, like Kurt Bittel, have carried out research in Western Asia Minor, their main objective was to trace prehistoric occupation which could be related to the sequence of Troy (Bittel, 1955). The presence or absence of features similar to those of this settlement formed a standard for determining the age of other sites. The same applied when Bittel recognized

the settlement of Fikirtepe as pre-Trojan on the basis of its layout and find inventory (Bittel, 1969-1970: p. 16).

In spite of this distinct interest in the Troad, in the region to the north and east of the Sea of Marmara only very little archaeological research of any importance has taken place. Many reconnaissances have been carried out, however, of which only a few have been recorded in the form of extensive reports (French, 1967). In this connection one excavation is worthy of mention: the research at Demircihöyük. This prehistoric settlement, situated on the border between Bithynia and Phrygia, was investigated first of all in the years before the Second World War (Bittel & Otto, 1939), and again in the late 1970's and early 1980's (Korfmann, 1983). Although this settlement is very instructive as regards the Bronze Age, it has not contributed to extension of the pre-Trojan chronology.

It was the excavation of Fikirtepe that introduced an essentially new element in the prehistory of Northwest Anatolia. Fikirtepe is situated near Kadiköy (the old Chalcedon), not far from Istanbul, along the north coast of the Sea of Marmara (fig. 1). It was first noticed at the beginning of this century (Bittel, 1942). Since then the name of Fikirtepe has appeared in the literature repeatedly. Material from this site was collected regularly at the surface, by T.J. Arne (1922), among others. Inspired by the spirit of his time to provide prehistoric population groups with euphonious names, Arne put forward the view that the bearers of this unknown culture were Thracians who had crossed over from the Balkans. Fortunately he wished to refrain from making any further speculations as long as no systematic research had taken place. This research was first carried out thirty years later.



Fig. 1. Map of the area referred to in the text. 1. Nea Nikomedeia; 2. Argissa; 3. Otzaki; 4. Sesklo; 5. Franchti; 6. Azmak; 7. Karanovo; 8. Troy; 9. Fikirtepe; 10. Pendik; 11. Ilipinar; 12. Marmaracik; 13. Yenişehir II; 14. Menteşe; 15. Demircihöyük; 16. Haçilar; 17. Çatal Höyük.

2. THE 'FIKIRTEPE CULTURE'

In three short seasons (1952-1954) excavations were carried out at Fikirtepe by Bittel, who at that time was director of the German Archeological Institute in Istanbul, with the cooperation of a few Turkish colleagues (Bittel, 1969-1970). The settlement lay at a distance of about 1.5 km from the coast, in a gently rolling landscape, close to a spring and a small stream that flowed into the sea. On the basis of the distribution of finds in the terrain the excavators estimated that the settlement extended over an area of one hectare. From the excavation trenches it was evident that the culture layer was on average half a metre thick and belonged to one period.

In the area investigated, that was of rather limited extent (c. 500 m²), no clearly recognizable architecture was excavated. This area was found to contain irregular pits with fragments of burnt daub, which showed impressions of wattlework. Bittel presumed that these clay fragments and pits were associated with each other, and he proposed that the settlement had probably consisted of a number of small wattlework huts varying in shape from irregular to more or less circular. As no post-holes could be discerned in the soil, he was of the opinion that the wall posts had not been dug in but had rested on stone supports. Three or four such buildings were thought to have stood in the trenches that were exposed. In and near the huts the dead had been buried in crouched position; one of the deceased had been provided with grave-gifts.

The find inventory of Fikirtepe largely consists of the three following categories: pottery, flint and bone tools. The pottery is grey to brown or reddish brown, and often has a burnished surface and a mineral temper. The forms of pot represented are bulbous with open or closed upper rims, often provided with vertically perforated knob-shaped lugs or flat horizontal grips, so-called ledge handles. In addition there are dishes and bowls, which are sometimes oval. Lightly incised geometric designs like triangles, squares and zig-zag bands are occasionally present on the pots, but these features are mainly characteristic of square containers which stood on tall legs.

It would appear that the flint industry of Fikirtepe is derived from Epipaleolithic blade industries in the region (Özdoğan, 1983): predominantly small blades with or without retouch and a few scrapers and arrowheads. The objects made of bone and antler testify to the high standard of craftsmanship in the working of these materials. In addition to needles and awls of various kinds, skilfully cut spoons or spatulae form the most conspicuous component of the collection.

Concerning the ecological aspect, the author mentions that the region was probably wooded at the time of the occupation, and that this would have provided good opportunities for hunting. This is indicated by the finds of bones of fallow deer, wild pig and hare in the settlement layers. According to Bittel, in his summary of an analysis of the faunal remains by Röhrs and Herre (1961), domesticated animals like cattle, sheep, goat and to a lesser extent

pig formed part of the economic basis of the prehistoric inhabitants, who also consumed fish and shellfish. A re-evaluation of the faunal remains by Boessneck and von den Driesch (1979) has been responsible for some shifts in emphasis; for example it has been shown that fishing (of mainly brackish-water fish) played a relatively more important role than hunting in the provision of food. This orientation towards the marine environment is also evident for other settlements of the same cultural horizon in Northwest Anatolia.

The second settlement of the Fikirtepe type is Pendik; this site lies on the same northern coastal strip, but 25 km further east. The physical conditions are almost identical to those at Fikirtepe: situated close to the coast and in the immediate vicinity of springs. The settlement extends over about four hectares, as is evident from the distribution of finds on the one surface. After a sounding in 1961, a more extensive excavation was carried out in 1981 which has so far remained unpublished.¹

The cultural layer is probably two metres thick on average, and contains exclusively artifacts of the Fikirtepe tradition. Here too irregular pits and fragments of burnt daub with impressions of wattlework were observed, these being suggestive of hut architecture.

The pottery strongly resembles that of Fikirtepe as far as fabric and forms are concerned; here geometrically decorated pottery is represented in even smaller quantities (less than 1%) than in the previous settlement. There is also a similarity in the bone-working and the flint industries. Concerning the latter, double-backed blades, thick round scrapers and end-scrapers, a few sickle blades and geometric microliths belong to the range of tools, while bladelets are numerous. In addition to flint, obsidian (sporadically: 5%) was used for making small blades. Although no study was made of botanical and zoological remains, the large quantities of mollusc shells in the occupation layers are indicative of the importance of the nearby coast for the village economy.

In view of the scarcity of querns and sickle blades both in Pendik and in Fikirtepe, it has been suggested that agriculture was probably not of primary importance for the provision of food (Özdoğan, 1983). It is still not clear to what extent agriculture contributed to the economy of Fikirtepe, but in our opinion the frequency of occurrence of such tools that are associated with the raising of grain crops is not a very reliable criterion for determining the role of agriculture.

The foregoing description may seem rather extensive, but it has to be pointed out that apart from the Trojan chronology the Fikirtepe culture is the only beacon, as it were, in the prehistoric landscape of Northwest Anatolia. For this reason the factual

evidence has been described in some detail.

Before paying attention to the investigation of the dwelling mound of Ilipinar, a few words can be said about the distribution pattern of the other sites of the Fikirtepe tradition, all of which are known only from field reconnaissance. As Bittel (1942) had already remarked, large parts of the coastal region around the Sea of Marmara (especially the Asiatic coast) are not accessible. Thus the question as to what extent this culture was confined to the coastal environment cannot be satisfactorily verified. From surveys in areas inland that are accessible it appears that there too sites of the same type are present. It is noteworthy that these sites were localized in the surroundings of open water: Yenişehir II, Menteşe and Marmaracik in the basin of Yenişehir – at its deepest point still swampy in spite of canalization – which in prehistoric times very probably formed a lake for the most part, and Ilipinar which is now situated 1.5 km away from the lake of Iznik. An exception to this setting is the previously mentioned Demircihöyük, situated in the hilly region of Esişehir, which showed a stratified Bronze Age occupation as well as unstratified finds of Chalcolithic and Neolithic date (Seher, 1987). The initial assumption that the Fikirtepe tradition was limited to the region around the Sea of Marmara has not been fully corroborated. Intensive field reconnaissance in Turkish Thrace has not provided any evidence at all of Neolithic occupation (Özdoğan, 1987). For this reason the focus of attention for the region considered by Ehrich (1965: p. 409) as 'critical' for establishing links between the Balkans and western Asia has to be shifted to the eastern part of the Sea of Marmara. For the meantime the geographical distribution of the Fikirtepe culture appears to be restricted to this locality.

3. ILIPINAR

Although Ilipinar is of medium size (c. 250 m in diameter and 5 m high) by the standards of tells in the Near East, this site is one of the largest and best preserved on the route from Central Anatolia to the Sea of Marmara. As was the case with Fikirtepe and Pendik, the choice of location by the first inhabitants seems to have been determined by the proximity of a spring. The sea is 15 km away; nevertheless the marine influence on the diet of the community certainly appears to have been present, in view of the large numbers of shells of mussels and oysters in the older occupation layers.

The following description of the research results is based only on the findings of the first excavation season in the autumn of 1987. For this reason only a broad and provisional picture is presented here, while it is not yet possible to comment on some

aspects of the research, for example the study of plant and animal remains.

Along the steep slope of the dwelling mound, near the spring, a 20 m long section was made with an average height of 5 m. The uppermost 1-1.50 m has been disregarded on account of recent and subrecent disturbances. Below this there is a clearly recognizable complex of culture layers. Halfway down this section this layer complex overlies a peaty depression, possibly a silted-up creek which was connected with the spring before or at the beginning of the occupation. On either side of this depression rows of posts were exposed, of which the wood – although completely petrified – still retained a well-preserved structure. These posts measured c. 10 cm in thickness and up to about half a metre in length, and stood close together in rows oriented more or less north-south. As the width of the exposed area at the bottom of the profile was only a few metres, it was not possible to assign these rows of posts to well-defined structures. In two cases it could be established that posts, truncated at the base end, had been placed in trenches.

In association with these oldest architectural features found so far, pottery, bone and stone artifacts² were encountered.

Pottery (fig. 2) is exclusively handmade, light- to dark- or grey-brown in colour and well-fired and

burnished. Its temper is mineral, often with an organic addition which caused 'chaff-faced' surfaces. Shapes are closed as a rule; open shapes (bowls) occur in small quantities. The closed shapes are plain rimmed (hole mouth pots) or have a small outward bent collar; bodies are globular with rounded or – less frequently – flat bases. Vertically pierced lug handles or flat triangular-shaped handles characterize these pots. The bone and antler industry comprises a variety of worked implements including antler handles, bone spoons and awls. Chipped stone occurs in limited quantities and is of poor quality compared to the stone industries of Central and eastern Anatolia. The industry is based on the production of bladelets and has a small component of obsidian. No further details can be given before analyses have been carried out.

This 'lowest' level is sealed off by a red-burnt thin layer of architectural debris: chaff-tempered chunks of mud which sometimes display impressions of poles and are therefore likely the remains of wattle and daub structures. This layer of burnt debris is not limited to the section but runs along the steep slope over a distance of at least 40 m.

Above this layer no indications were found of any buildings, although here and there traces of wood could be observed. Broadly speaking the rest of the section can be divided into two levels, both varying



Fig. 2. Work in process at the section.

from 1 to 1.50 m in thickness. The lower one, overlying the burnt layer, must be associated with the material culture of Fikirtepe and Pendik, on the basis of the finds present. This is testified in the first place by the pottery, which in terms of form and manufacture is strikingly similar to that from both sites, apart from the absence so far of rectangular containers on legs and geometric motifs³, and in the second place by the bone and antler industry, which appears to have been hardly subject to change in the older as well as in the younger layers of Ilipinar.

The upper level of the section has provided few useful data, on account of its situation close to the surface of the steep slope and the narrowness of the strip that could be excavated. This is compensated, however, by the 10x10 m squares that were opened on the mound: three squares on the central part (W-13, X-13, Y-13) and two on the east slope which has been substantially levelled by agrarian activities (AA-13, BB-13). In this overview we shall limit our attention to the observations made in X-13, Y-13 and AA-13.

In the square AA-13, which contains Late Hellenistic/Early Roman building structures and a cemetery dating from the Byzantine period, very fragmentary remains of wooden architecture were recorded, together with pottery and other finds. Among the pottery the numerous sherds decorated with fingernail impressions and grooved lines constitute a very conspicuous element (fig. 3). This pottery is mostly greyish-brown in colour and is hardly or not at all burnished. A few of these sherds were also found near the top of the above-mentioned section. The most common types of undecorated pottery are bowls, small S-shaped pots and smooth-necked pots, all with plain rims and burnished. The temper is fine to coarse mineral.

Concerning the squares X-13 and Y-13, situated higher up, it should be mentioned that below the disturbed top layer, measuring 50 to 80 cm in thickness, occupation floors and hearths in association with extremely decayed mudbrick structures were exposed. Below this in X-13 a wooden structure was found. The outside walls of this structure, which measures c. 5x2.70 m, appear to have consisted of a construction of thin posts with horizontal planks on each side, judging by the remains found and the coloration of the soil. At the ground level of this cabin like structure crosswise-lying beams were found, which may have supported a wooden floor.

In contrast to AA-13, this higher level is not characterized by finger-impressed and pinched ware; here the predominant decoration is the application of grooved lines that run from the neck to over the belly. Pots decorated in this way are often dark grey to black. Another feature is the occurrence of carinated shapes and pots with more

sharply profiled necks than those observed in AA-13.

The picture outlined here of the occupation history of the mound is very incomplete and will have to be supplemented in numerous places in the course of the research. The chronological sequence will have to be studied in more detail, the groups of finds will have to be investigated and the spatial distribution of the various occupation phases will have to be determined. Yet at this stage already it is possible to say something about the chronology of Ilipinar and to indicate certain parallels with other settlements as regards the find material.

A series of ¹⁴C datings for the level above the burnt layer of the section that undoubtedly represents the Fikirtepe tradition in Ilipinar, gives this level an age of around 7000 BP (uncalibrated radiocarbon years)⁴. In this way a chronological basis has been established for the Fikirtepe culture, almost forty years after its discovery. The level under the burnt layer, which appears to be a few centuries older, shows analogies with the Fikirtepe level in the various find categories, and thus continuity of development can probably be assumed. On the other hand several forms of pottery from this oldest level in Ilipinar known so far show unmistakable parallels with the Ceramic Neolithic of Hacilar (IX-VI). The chronological difference of one or more centuries between the two settlements poses a problem that will possibly be solved when more datings of 'Lower Ilipinar' become available⁵.

Ilipinar has not only provided the Fikirtepe culture with an absolute age, but with its lowest level it demonstrates the relation between this culture and Central Anatolia that has been suggested a number of times in the past. It is clear, moreover, that this culture should not be regarded as an isolated entity, but as a *Stufe* in the process of development of the Neolithic in Anatolia. Finally a few remarks about analogies with regard to the Neolithic of southeastern Europe.

The pinched and finger-impressed wares excavated in square AA-13 are a phenomenon so far unknown in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of Anatolia. In the Balkans, however, notably in Bulgaria and northern Greece, these forms of decoration – designated barbotine technique – are frequently found in the early ceramic cultures (Karanovo in Bulgaria; the last phase of 'Early Neolithic' or Pre-Sesklo in Greece). In Ilipinar this pottery has not yet been dated absolutely, but on the basis of the present stratigraphical data a dating immediately after the Fikirtepe phase can be assumed, i.e. after 7000 BP. This decoration technique, which has also been observed for the same period west of the Balkans, is probably one of the most striking examples of cultural contacts in the

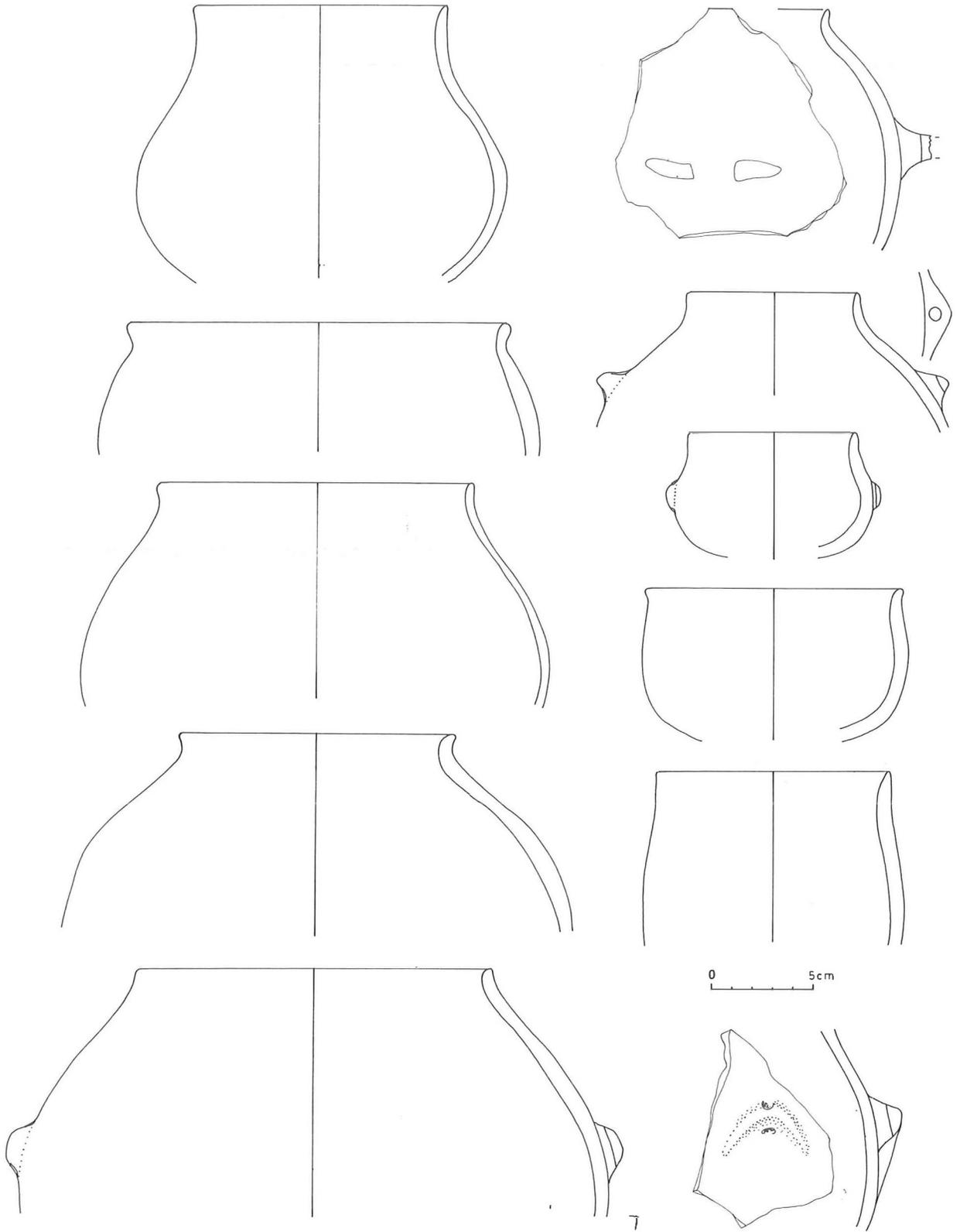


Fig. 3. A choice of pottery shapes from the lower level of the section.

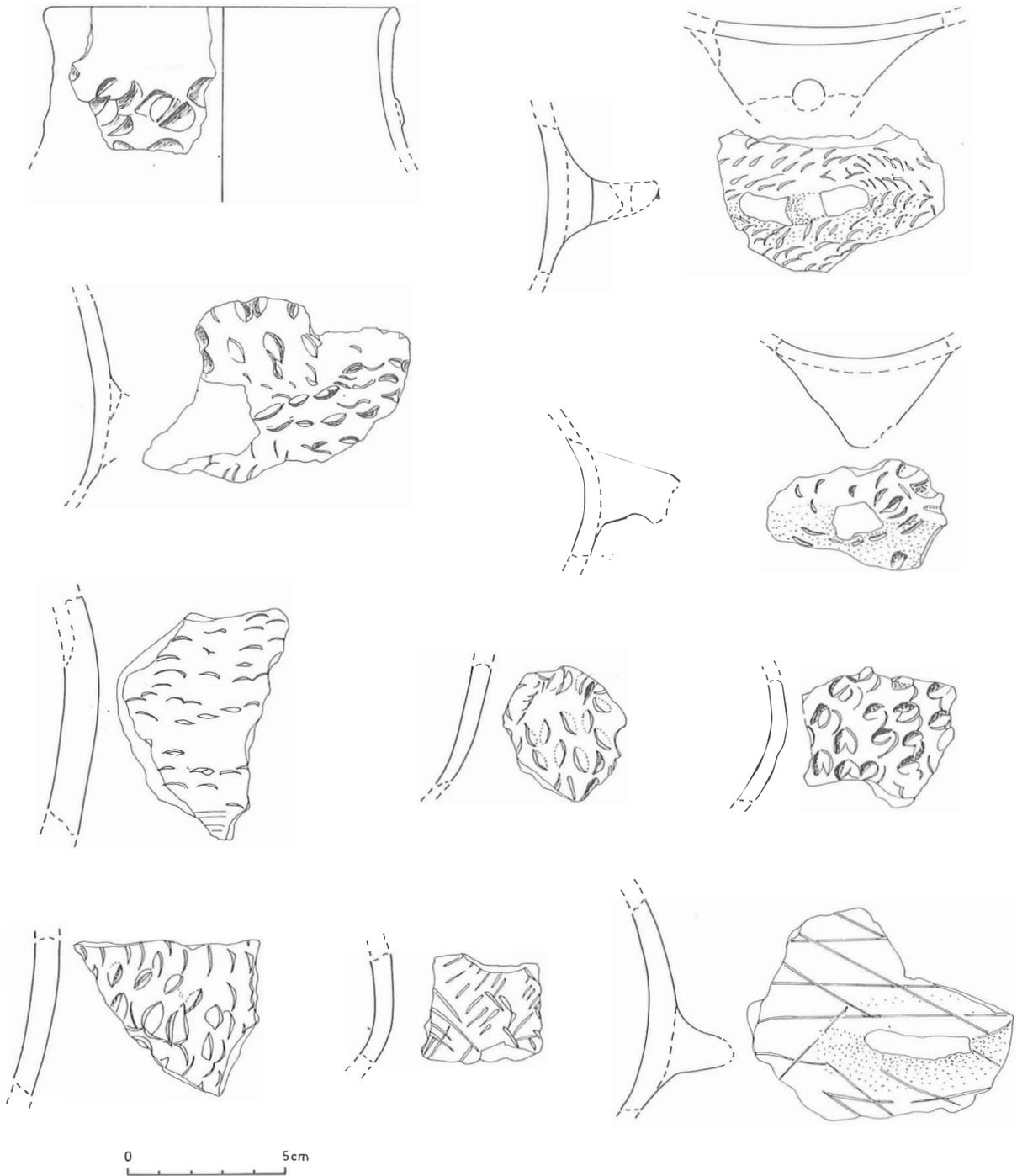


Fig. 4. Pinched, nail impressed and incised wares from square AA-13.

Neolithic between Anatolia and southwestern Europe.

With reference to the beginning of this article it can be said that Ilipinar, judging by the first results of the research, is in an important position

with regard to tracing the prehistory of Northwest Anatolia. But Ilipinar is important in other ways too. In the field of material culture this settlement, as it has become clear, offers good perspectives for determining the role played by Northwest Anatolia

as a contact zone between the Near East and Southeast Europe at the time of the early farming cultures. It is hoped that the extent to which this region contributed to developments in food production on the European continent will become clear in the course of the research.

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5. NOTES

1. A sounding by S.A. Kansu in 1961 (Kansu, 1963) and a regular excavation in 1981 by the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. The above description of Pendik is based partly on Özdoğan's article (Özdoğan, 1983) and personal communication, and partly on our own observations.
2. A first analysis of a pottery sample has been made by L. Thissen.
3. The quantities of pottery decorated in this way are very small indeed in Fikirtepe and Pendik (cf. *infra*).
4. GrN-15077, 7020±50 BP; GrN-15078, 6920±70 BP; GrN-15079, 7140±120 BP; GrN-15080, 6910±110 BP; GrN-15085, 7100±50 BP; GrN-15088, 6970±110 BP.
5. GrN-15083, 7240±140 BP; GrN-15084, 6440±50 BP; GrN-15087, 7070±50 BP. Of these three samples only the oldest has a reliable position under the burnt layer. As for the other two, these are present at the same depth, but above sample GrN-15084 the burnt layer is interrupted (possibly penetrated from above) and above GrN-15087 the burnt layer is hardly visible.

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