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Topraktepe, A Middle Chalcolithic Site in Avanos, Nevşehir; 2020-2021 Archaeological Survey Results

Avanos, Nevşehir'de bir Orta Kalkolitik Yerleşimi, Topraktepe; 2020-2021 Arkeolojik Yüzey Araştırması Sonuçları

Araştırma Makalesi – Research Article

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Summary

Investigations of early prehistoric settled communities in Volcanic Cappadocia are based primarily on research projects concentrating on the western part of the region. These projects were mainly conducted by Istanbul University Department of Prehistory. Our knowledge about the early settled life in Central Volcanic Cappadocia, which refers to Nevşehir and its periphery, is very limited and built on a few regional survey projects. The Nevşehir Neolithic Survey Project, "NENESU" was initiated in 2019. The primary objective of the project is to evaluate the Volcanic Cappadocian prehistoric cultures in an integrated approach with the current survey technologies. Within the scope of the NENESU Project, a prehistoric slope site (Topraktepe) was found in the Avanos region in 2020, and surveys were conducted in the area during the 2020 and 2021 seasons. This article aims to present results from the 2020-2021 seasons of the NENESU Project on Topraktepe.

Keywords: Cappadocia, Avanos, Prehistory, Middle Chalcolithic, Survey

Öz

Volkanik Kapadokya'nın erken tarihöncesi yerleşik toplulukları hakkında gerçekleştirilen araştırmalar bölgenin batısına odaklanmış durumdadırlar. Bu araştırmaların çoğu İstanbul Üniversitesi Tarihöncesi Arkeolojisi anabilim dalı tarafından gerçekleştirilen projelerdir. Merkezi Volkanik Kapadokya olarak tanımlanan Nevşehir ili ve çevresinin en erken yerleşik toplulukları üzerine elimizdeki sınırlı veriler az sayıda yüzey araştırmasına dayanmaktadır. NENESU (Nevşehir Neolitik Survey) projesi 2019 yılında bölgede araştırmalarına başlamıştır. Projenin ana hedefi Volkanik Kapadokya Bölgesi'nin tarihöncesi kültürlerini modern yüzey araştırmaları metodolojilerini kullanarak bütüncül bir bakış açısı altında değerlendirilmesidir. NENESU Projesi kapsamında 2020 yılında Nevşehir ili, Avanos ilçesi sınırları içerisinde Topraktepe adıyla anılan bir tarihöncesi yamaç yerleşimi tespit edilmiş ve 2020-2021 yıllarında alanda kapsamlı yüzey araştırmaları gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu araştırma makalesi Topraktepe'de iki sezon içerisinde gerçekleştirilen çalışmaların sonuçlarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kapadokya, Avanos, Tarihöncesi, Orta Kalkolitik, Yüzey araştırması

Introduction

The southeastern part of central Anatolia is called "Volcanic Cappadocia" by geologists (Fig. 1)[1]. The diverse volcanic geomorphology of the region is the main reason for this specific definition. This particular territory is divided into three different areas. The western part of the region, also known as western Volcanic Cappadocia consists of Hasan, Melendiz, Keçiboyduran, Göllü, and Nenezi mountains and the volcanic landforms located around them. The Central Volcanic Cappadocia zone, which refers to the present-day city of Nevşehir and its margins, comprises dense volcanic cones, domes, and maars that are generally located towards the south. According to geologists, this southern volcanic territory is the main reason for the expansion of the unique volcanic landforms extending throughout the entire city[2]. The Erciyes Mountain and its periphery constitute the eastern Volcanic Cappadocia region at the modern city of Kayseri.

Before the 1950s, the existence of prehistoric sites pre-dating the Bronze Ages in the north of the Taurus Mountains seemed unrealistic for archaeologists working in Anatolia. However archaeological surveys in Central Anatolia carried out by James Mellaart during the 1950s broke down this prejudice[3]. The discovery of Çatalhöyük and the excavations in 1960s provided crucial information about the prehistoric communities of Central Anatolia. In the Volcanic Cappadocia region, Ian Todd's archaeological surveys in 1964 and 1966 revealed various prehistoric sites[4], some of which are still under investigation today.

Our knowledge about the Chalcolithic period in Volcanic Cappadocia, on the other hand, is based on a few archaeological surveys and excavations. During Burhan Tezcan's surveys in Aksaray in 1951 several find-spots yielding material dating to the Chalcolithic period were identified, e.g., in the Gelveri town at Yüksek Kilise (Fig. 1)[5]. The soundings carried out by Ufuk Esin[6] and later by Sevil Gülçur revealed some pottery fragments, as well as obsidian and bone tools dating to the Chalcolithic period[7]. The prehistoric site of Güvercinkayası was found by Sevil Gülçur in 1994 and excavations were started in 1996 (Fig. 1). Archaeological findings indicate that the site was occupied during the Middle Chalcolithic Period[8]. Kabakulak, another prehistoric site located in the Ortaköy district of Aksaray was found by Ian Todd during the 1960s (Fig. 1)[9]. According to Summers, prehistoric material from Kabakulak can be dated to the Late Chalcolithic period[10]. Köşk Höyük, a Late Neolithic - Early Chalcolithic site is located in Niğde (Fig. 1). Excavations were carried out by Uğur Silistireli, and later by Aliye Öztan. Tepecik Çiftlik, , a contemporaneous site with Köşk Höyük, is also located in the Çiftlik town of Niğde. Ongoing excavations at the site are led by Erhan Bıçakçı[11]. Tepecik Çiftlik and Köşk Höyük provide crucial information for the Late Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic transition in Volcanic Cappadocia[12]. Recently, another prehistoric survey project was started in 2017 by Abdullah Hacar[13]. This project is crucial as it provides the most recent data on the western Volcanic Cappadocian Chalcolithic, as well as for the application of current survey methodologies. In Central Volcanic Cappadocia, the Civelek Cave, located 8 km to the northeast of the Gülşehir district in Nevşehir yielded prehistoric finds[14] (Fig. 1). The plan of the cave was drawn and the archaeological findings inside were collected by cave specialists. Andreas Schachner and Şenay Schachner studied the prehistoric pottery

[1] Toprak 1998: 55.
[2] Toprak 1998, 63.
[3] Mellart 1954, 175-240, Özbaşaran 2011, 103.
[4] Todd 1980.
[5] Tezcan 1958.
[6] Esin, v.d. 1991, Özdoğan 2019, 453.
[7] Gülçur, Kiper 2009., Özbudak 2012, 270-272.
[8] Gülçur 2004, 142.
[9] Summers 1991, 125.
[10] Summers 1991, 131.
[11] Bıçakçı v.d. 2012.
[12] Bıçakçı v.d. 2007, 237, Bıçakçı v.d. 2012, 89-134, Öztan 2012, 196-200.
[13] Hacar 2019.
[14] Schachner, Yenipınar vd. 1997.

from the Civelek Cave[15] and dated the material to the Early-Middle Chalcolithic periods[16]. According to Ulf Dietrich Schoop, Civelek pottery is another variation of the Early Chalcolithic culture groups located in the northeast of Konya[17].

The NENESU Project

The history of prehistoric research in Volcanic Cappadocia builds upon the survey and excavation projects that were mainly carried out by Istanbul University Department of Prehistory [18]. However, the primary focus of these investigations is restricted to the western part of the region, which refers to the present-day cities of Aksaray and Niğde. The limited information about the central part of the region comes from the survey projects conducted in the 1960s and 1990s. Unfortunately, apart from Todd's surveys during the 1960s, majority of the research concentrated on particular areas without a comprehensive approach. The Nevşehir Neolithic Survey (NENESU) Project started with a certain objective to provide a unified picture for Central Volcanic Cappadocia in Cappadocian prehistory.

The primary geographical scope of the NENESU Project is the present-day city of Nevşehir, including the Avanos, Ürgüp, Gülşehir, Kozaklı, Acıgöl, Derinkuyu, Merkez and Hacıbektaş districts. Identification of territories that could have been suitable for the earliest sedentary communities (e.g., in terms of settlement location and subsistence strategies) is the main purpose of the project.

The southern part of the Central Volcanic Cappadocia region consists of Derinkuyu and Acıgöl districts, encompassing an area characterized by rich volcanic landforms. According to geologists, this particular territory is defined as the Derinkuyu-Acıgöl cluster and includes miscellaneous volcanic cones, domes, and a few maars[19]. Geographically, this volcanic area can be defined as an extension of the Western Volcanic Cappadocian landforms. From an archaeological point of view, due to the existence of rich obsidian sources, a number of prehistoric sites are located in the west. Therefore, a consideration of a similar potential for this region brings forth the possibility of prehistoric sites in the Derinkuyu-Acıgöl area, contemporaneous with the sites in the neighbouring region of Western Cappadocia.

The Kızılırmak river, flowing in an east-west direction across the Avanos and Gülşehir districts is the primary water source for the region. In terms of prehistoric settlement strategies, this particular territory could have had provided a favorable environment for early sedentary communities. The Damsa stream, a tributary of the Kızılırmak river, flows in a north-south direction across the Ürgüp district. According to Ian Todd and Nur Balkan Atlı's research around the Damsa dam lake and the Avla Dağ rising on the eastern bank of the Damsa stream, find-spots were found presenting a diverse assemblage of prehistoric chipped stone tools[20]. During the recent investigations on Avla Dağ in 2019 within the scope of the NENESU Project, we have identified several locations yielding pottery fragments and chipped stone finds, indicating that different locations on Avla Dağ were chosen by prehistoric communities[21] Hacıbektaş and Kozaklı districts comprise the northern territory of Central Volcanic Cappadocia, a crucial connection region for prehistoric communities towards the southern volcanic area, as well as to Northern Central Anatolia.

According to the geographical scope and the scientific objectives of the NENESU Project, primary survey locations were determined with GIS applications. The cooperation between the GIS software and mobile devices assists to specify possible prehistoric locations on the field. Using the "Compass 55" application, the whole field investigations became observable on the GIS. The contribution of "ALOS Research and Application Project" and "US Geological Survey", whose web pages provide digital elevation models, helped us to produce research maps on GIS. Locations containing dense archaeological material were scanned by drone to produce 3D models of the sites which contributed to

[15] Schachner, Yenipınar vd. 1997, 11-12.
[16] Schachner, Yenipınar vd. 1997, 20.
[17] Schoop, 2005(a), 137.
[18] Özbaşaran 2011.
[19] Toprak 1998, 63.
[20] Todd, Pasquare 1965., Balkan-Atlı, Cauvin 1998.
[21] Güngördü 2021.

further understanding the distribution of archaeological findings and possible special or prominent contexts.

Topraktepe

Topraktepe lies in Central Volcanic Cappadocia, about 2 km to the southwest of the Avanos district in Nevşehir city (Fig. 1). The natural hill, which is about 1040 m above sea level, covers an area of less than 4 ha (Fig. 2). In about 400 m distance to the site, Matçançayı is the nearest water source for Topraktepe. The Kızılırmak river flowing in the east-west direction is about 2 km in distance from Topraktepe.

The environmental setting of Topraktepe reveals two distinct geographical features. In terms of landforms formation, the Nevşehir-Avanos highway can be seen as a boundary line. The northern side of the road exhibits an abrupt change in topography. Kılıçdağ (1228 m.), Çaltıtepesi (1215 m.) and Karadağ (1219 m.) extend along the east-west direction just as a natural wall. Due to the intensity of the volcanic landforms and the scarcity of water resources and green vegetation, agricultural activities are restricted in this area. On the contrary, the southern side of the highway is at a lower altitude, providing a fertile area with numerous water sources and wide green vegetation. Through the substantial number of streams irrigating this entire area, miscellaneous vineyards are placed. Topraktepe is situated on the northern edge of this fertile territory adjacent to the Nevşehir-Avanos highway.

Topraktepe is exposed to soil erosion which is easily recognizable on each slope. In terms of settlement strategies, due to the low level of erosion and inclination, the northern slope must be seen as the most suitable zone for prehistoric settlers (Fig. 3). The southern slope which faces the southern fertile territory is also a suitable place since it provides an advantage to control to whole southern region due to its elevation (Fig. 4).

Prehistoric pottery and chipped stone material were found on both the northern and southern slopes during the 2020-2021 investigations at Topraktepe (Fig. 3-4). Due to its topographic advantages, the majority of the material was found on the northern slope. A total of 285 pottery fragments were found. The pottery assemblage of Topraktepe consists of 58 rims, 6 bases, 7 handles, and 214 body sherds. All examples are hand-made from gray or brown colored clay with mostly organic and rarely inorganic temper and burnished on both sides.

Black burnished ware is the main component of the assemblage. In terms of surface colors, the Topraktepe ware could be classified into two different sub-categories:

1- Brown and gray colored ware
2- Black colored ware

The first group, brown and gray colored wares contain a mottled surface stemming from the firing process in a controlled reductive atmosphere (Fig. 5a). Black mottled parts do not cover the entire area on the surface and appears partially. Mottled examples are represented in all typological shapes.

The second group, black colored wares are another common type in the pottery assemblage and are represented in all vessel types (Fig. 5b). Due to the surface color, incised decorated examples can also be grouped under the black colored wares (Fig. 13). The lack of profiled examples makes it is difficult to provide a typological evaluation. Dotted patterns on the surface were created by a pointed tool and filled with white colored paste. Incised body sherds indicate that the decoration pattern covers the entire surface. However, in one example the dotted pattern is restricted by two horizontal overlapping lines.

Based on the rim shapes, a typological classification of the Topraktepe pottery assemblage can be made. However, it should be noted that due to the limited preservation of the rim, only some preliminary insights can be provided in this study. Both jar and bowl types are represented in the assemblage. Hole mouth vessels are a common type (Fig. 6), while necked jars also exist (Fig. 7). Bowls could be classified into straight walled (Fig. 8) and semi globular types (Fig. 9). However, due to the limited number of preserved rims, typological descriptions are restricted. Besides these shapes, rims, flat bases (Fig. 10), and vertical handles (Fig. 11) are also present.

The chipped stone industry of Topraktepe is primarily made from obsidian. Flint constitutes a small portion of the assemblage. The presence of both obsidian and flint cores indicates that the tool production process was carried out on-site (Fig. 12). The chipped stone assemblage consists of mainly flakes and blade fragments.

The Middle Chalcolithic Period in Volcanic Cappadocia

The first half of the sixth millennium BC, the transition phase from the Late Neolithic to the Early Chalcolithic in Volcanic Cappadocia, points to the continuation of the Neolithic traditions, although some local differences appear[22]. However, the second half of the era witnessed essential changes in local communities.

The first indication of this new way of life is the diversification of settlement types. Hacar provides information about different settlement types during the end of the 6th and first half of the 5th millennium BC[23];

The first settlement type consists of sites located in agriculturally favorable territories. Tepecik Çiftlik and Köşk Höyük suits well for this description. These sites contain earlier levels, indicating chronological continuity[24]. Sites located on top of natural hills or slopes that dominate their peripheries present a second settlement type. These sites differ from the first type with the lack of chronological continuation, and apparently, these locations were not preferred before by the prehistoric communities in the region. Güvercinkayası can be evaluated in this group[25]. The last settlement type is the seasonal camp-sites. The primary cause for the establishment of such sites is animal husbandry practices. Hacar mentions that such sites were found during his surveys[26].

The Early Chalcolithic pottery of Volcanic Cappadocia is represented by red slipped and dark or black colored wares. The black/dark colored wares become dominant during the Middle Chalcolithic. Incised decorations are recognizable in both the Early and Middle Chalcolithic periods[27].

The Middle Chalcolithic period in Volcanic Cappadocia was defined by the investigations carried out in the western part of the region. Güvercinkayası reveals the primary information about both settlement patterns and pottery traditions of the Middle Chalcolithic period in the region. The Middle Chalcolithic pottery of the site is classified under four main groups; Black/Dark Burnished Ware, Simple V Incised Decorations, Light Paste Ware, and Bichrome Painted Sherds. The dominant type, Black/Dark burnished ware is divided into two sub-groups as monochrome and polychrome types[28]. Both relief and incised decorations were recognized on the wares. For instance, panels filled with impressed dots and also panels filled with lozenges bordered by fluted lines were recognized[29]. Storage jars is the most common type. A large number of medium or small sized vessels such as hole mouth jars or conical and semi globular bowls are also among the recognized shapes[30].

Conclusion

Topraktepe is located in a special place at the edge of two opposite geographical zones: a hilly arid area without any water resources or green vegetation towards its north, and a fertile territory with numerous streams and vineyards towards the south. As mentioned above, the choice of settlement location during the Middle Chalcolithic in Volcanic Cappadocia indicates a preference towards the natural hills or slopes that dominate their peripheries. Based on its location and topography, Topraktepe is a suitable place in

[22] Özdoğan 1993, 179.
[23] Hacar 2019, 32-33.
[24] Hacar 2019, 31.
[25] Hacar 2019, 32-33.
[26] Hacar 2019, 32-33.
[27] Özbudak 2016, 133-144.
[28] Çaylı 2009, 108.
[29] Gülçur 2004, 146.
[30] Gülçur 2004, 145.

terms of settlement strategies as this natural hill dominates the fertile territory to the south, a favorable zone for both hunting and husbandry practices.

Topraktepe pottery assemblage could be categorized under the Dark/Black Burnished ware. Both the gray or brown and black burnished sub-groups indicate a tendency towards organic temper use, while rare examples of inorganic temper use are also recognized. The majority of the wares were slipped and burnished on both sides. In terms of typology, both jar and bowl shapes are present within the assemblage. Unfortunately, due to the limited preservation of the rims, only a preliminary assessment of the ware shapes could be proposed. Hole mouth vessels are common in typology. Similar shapes are unknown in Tepecik Çiftlik and Gelveri. However, comparable examples are known from Güvercinkayası (Fig. 15). In Northern Central Anatolia, hole mouth vessels are known from Büyük Güllücek[31], Yarıkkaya[32], Büyükkaya[33] and Yazılıkaya[34]. Necked jar shapes also exist, and similar shapes are recognized both at Tepecik Çiftlik (Fig. 16a), Gelveri (Fig. 16b) and Güvercinkayası (Fig 16c). Bowl types could be categorized under straight walled and semi globular shapes. Straight walled bowls are known from Tepecik Çiftlik (Fig. 14a) and also Büyük Güllücek[35] and Yazılıkaya[36] in the north. Straight walled, semi globular types are present within both Güvercinkayası (Fig. 14c) and Tepecik Çiftlik (Fig. 14b) assemblages.

Incised decorated wares are known from Gelveri, Tepecik Çiftlik, Köşk Höyük, and Güvercinkayası with different compositions such as wave motifs, parallel lines, or triangle and circle motifs. Although in small numbers, incised decorated black burnished body sherds were recognized in the Topraktepe pottery assemblage. The composition which consists of incised dots bordered with lines is comparable with the Tepecik Çiftlik (Fig 17b), Köşk Höyük, and Güvercinkayası (Fig. 17a) examples. Moreover, the Northern Central Anatolia contain some comparable examples of incised decorated wares. Incised decorated sherds which have both engraved and grooved decorations are known from Büyük Güllücek[37]. Even in small number, some incised decorated sherds are also recognized from both Yarıkkaya[38] and Büyükkaya[39]. In Lake District Region, Hacılar layer I which is dated to the Early Chalcolithic period, contain a few incised and grooved decoration[40]. Early Neolithic layers of Kuruçay represent some incised decorated sherds which contain rows of engraved dots and curved lines[41]. Even in small number, Early Chalcolithic layers of Kuruçay also provide some incised decorated body sherds in layer 8 and 7[42]. A few incised decorated sherds are also known from the Early and Late Neolithic layers of Höyücek[43].

The 2020-2021 archaeological surveys at Topraktepe demonstrate the occupation of the natural hill during the Middle Chalcolithic period. The choice of settlement location and the dominant pottery tradition reinforce this assumption. According to the surface treatments, decorations and vessel shapes, the most comparable materials belong to Güvercinkayası, dating to the end of the 6th and the first half of the 5th millennium BC. Therefore, it could be proposed that the Topraktepe assemblage represents an occupation of the site during this time span.

[31] Schoop 2005(a), 43-47.
[32] Schoop 2005(a), 57-62.
[33] Schoop 2005(a), 50-56, Schoop 2005(b), 28, 29, 31, 34.
[34] Schoop 2005(a), 62-63.
[35] Schoop 2005(a), 43-47.
[36] Schoop 2005(a), 57-62.
[37] Schoop 2005(a), 46.
[38] Schoop 2005(a), 60.
[39] Schoop 2005(a), 56, Schoop 2005(b), 18.
[40] Schoop 2005(a), 157.
[41] Schoop 2005(a), 164.
[42] Schoop 2005(a), 164-165.
[43] Schoop 2005(a), 169.

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Figures

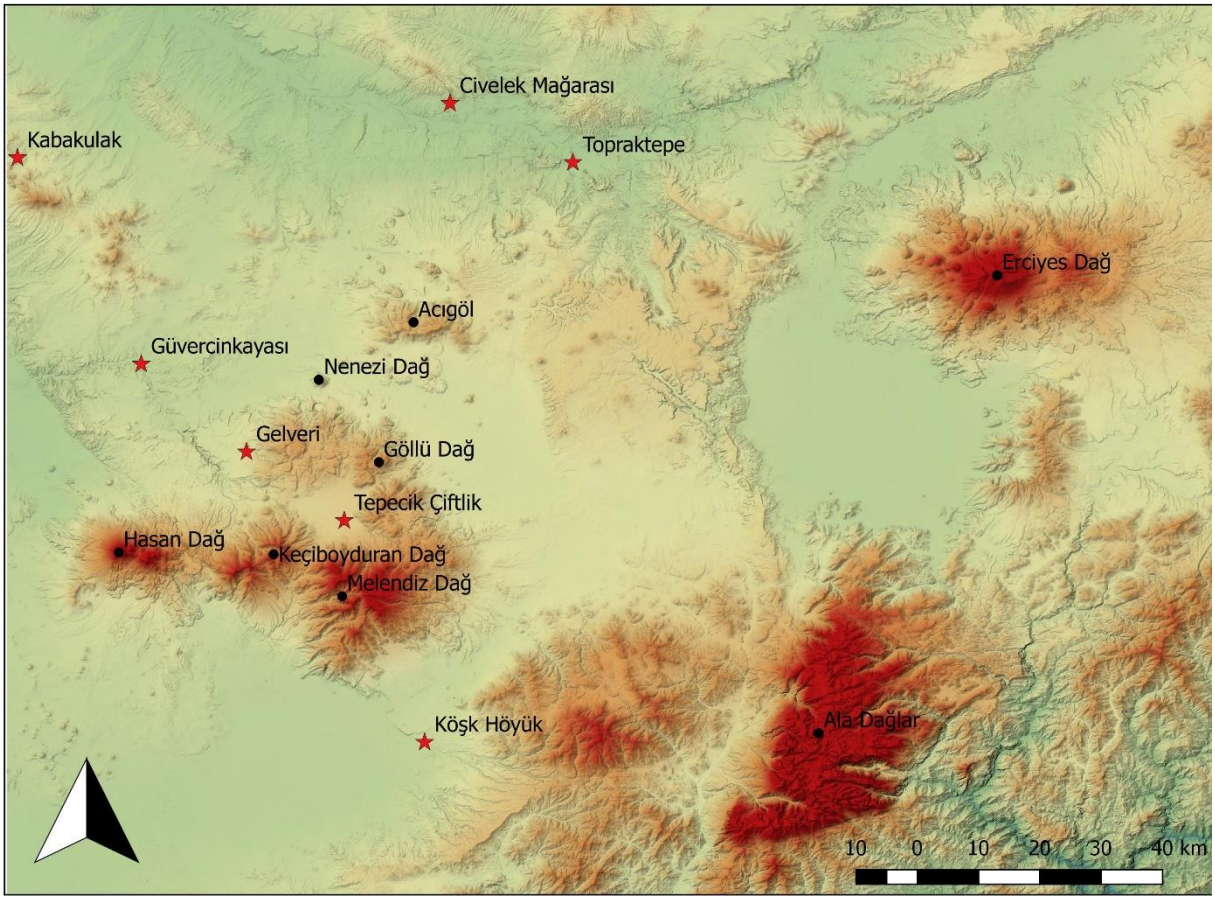


Figure 1. Volcanic Cappadocia Region and the sites mentioned.

Figure 2. Topraktepe

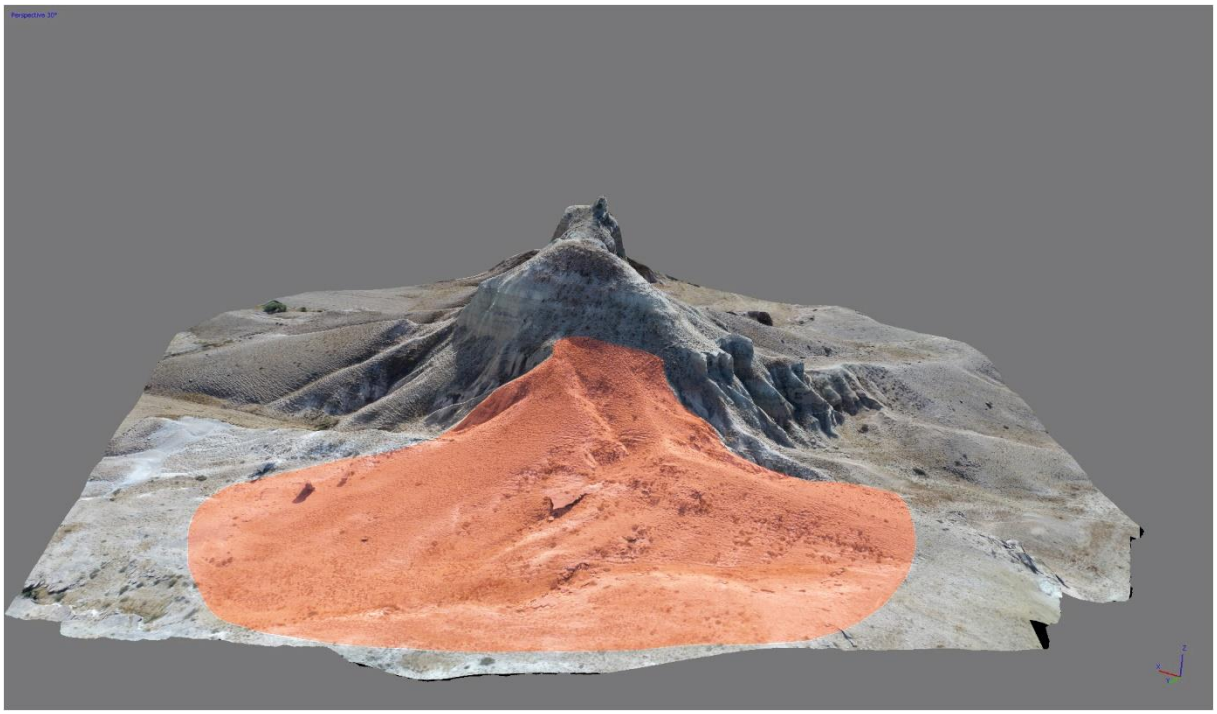


Figure 3. Topraktepe northern slope and the distribution of the archaeological material.

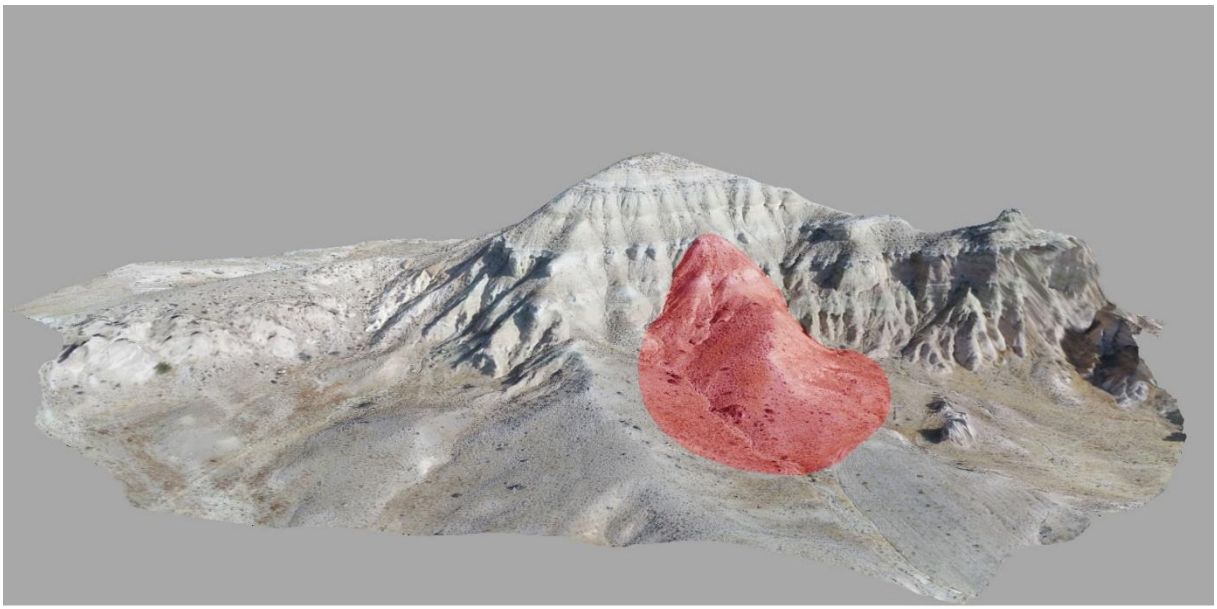


Figure 4. Topraktepe southern slope and the distribution of the archaeological material.

a

b

Figure 5. Topraktepe Wares

(a. brown-gray colored examples, b. black colored examples)

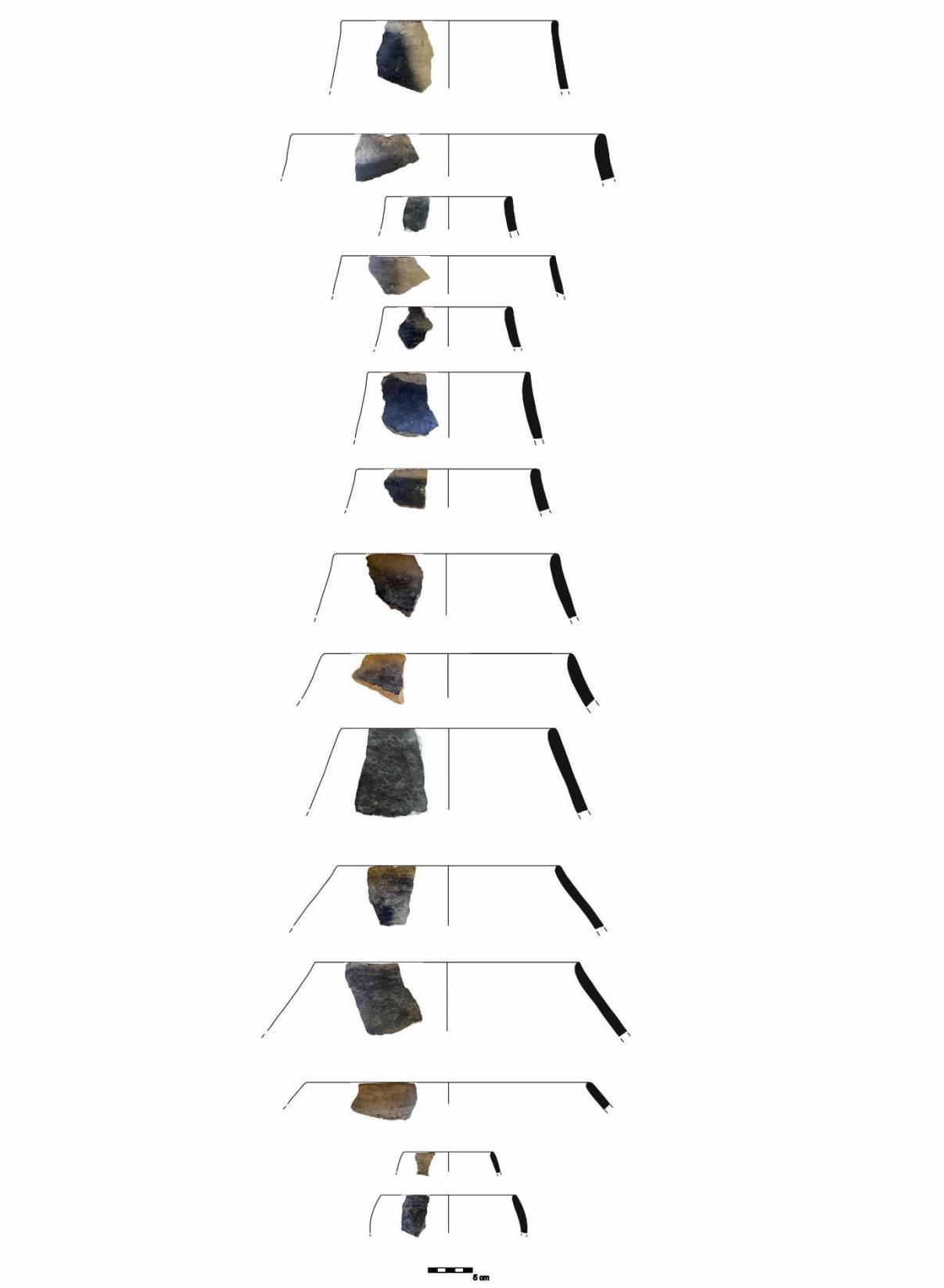


Figure 6. Hole mount jars

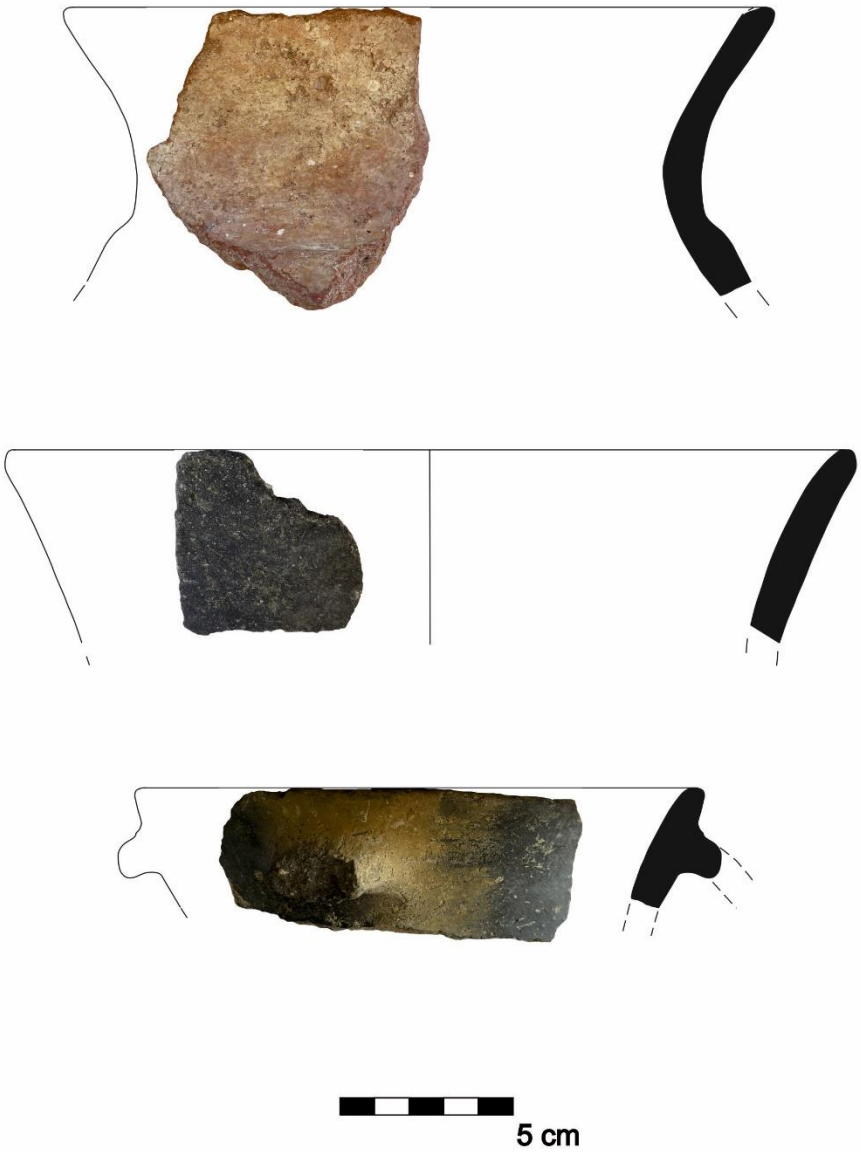


Figure 7. Necked jars

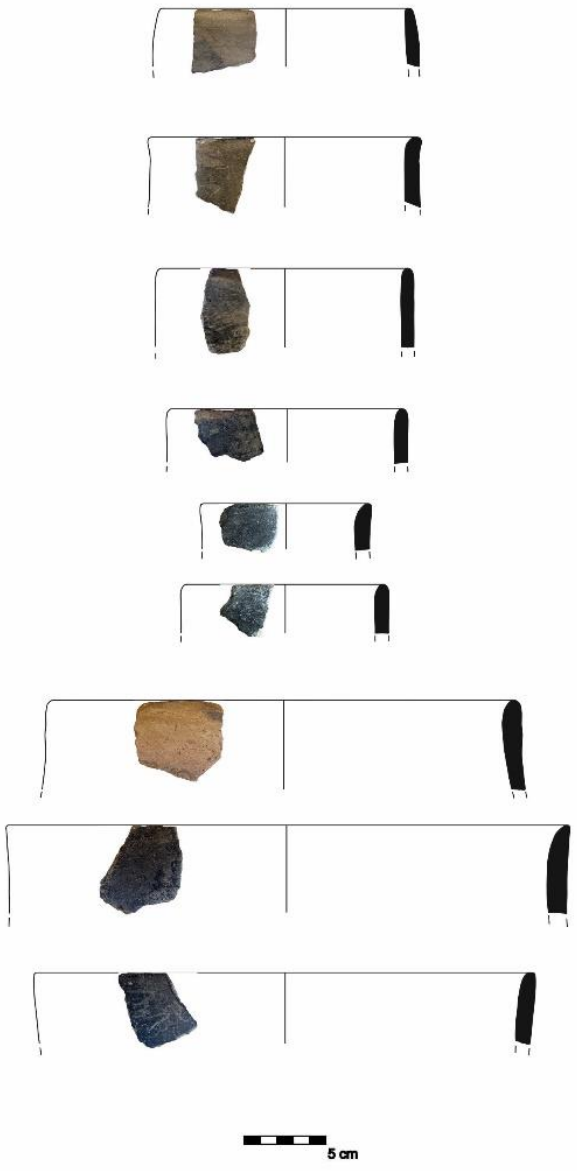


Figure 8. Straight walled bowls

Figure 9. Semi-globular bowl

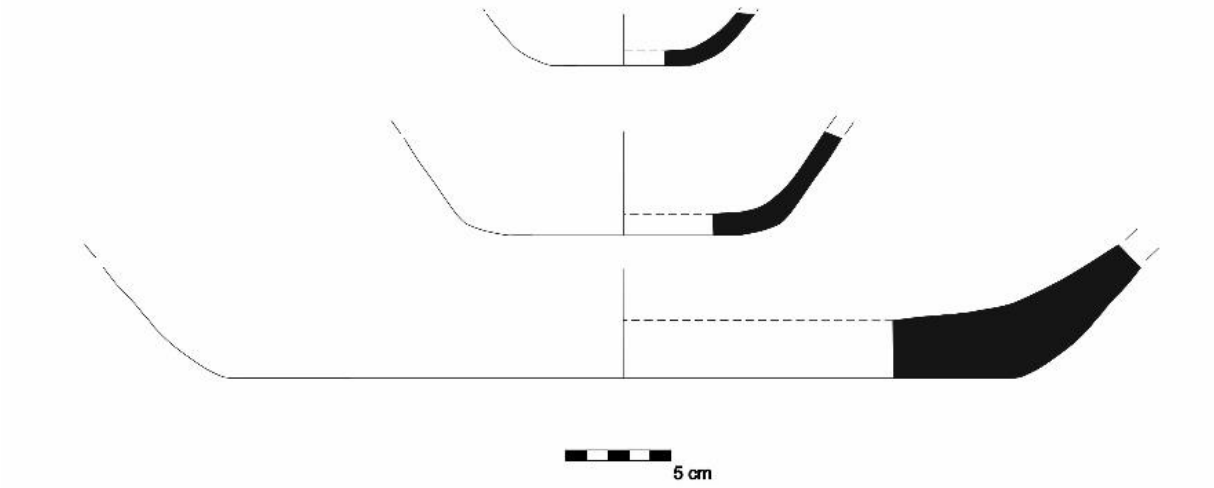


Figure 10. Bases

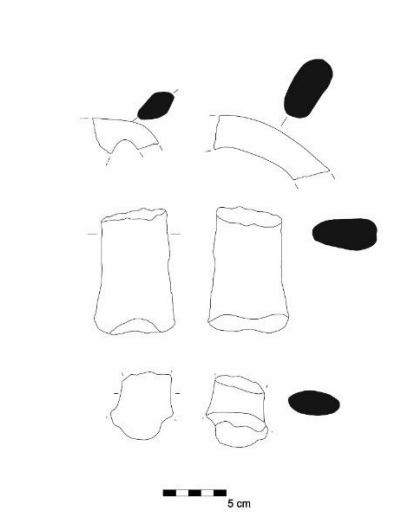
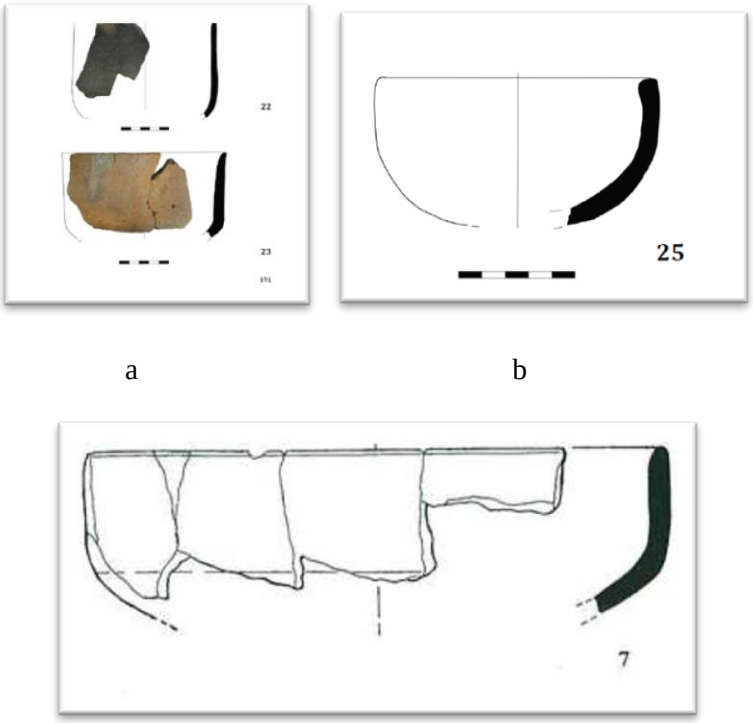


Figure 11. Handles

Figure 12. Obsidian and flint cores

Figure 13. Incised decorated body sherds



a b

c

Figure 14. a. Tepecik Çiftlik straight walled bowls (Özbudak 2016: 191),

b. Tepecik Çiftlik straight walled, semi-globular bowls (Özbudak 2016: 192),

c. Güvercinkayası straight walled, semi-globular bowls (Gülçur 2004: 150).

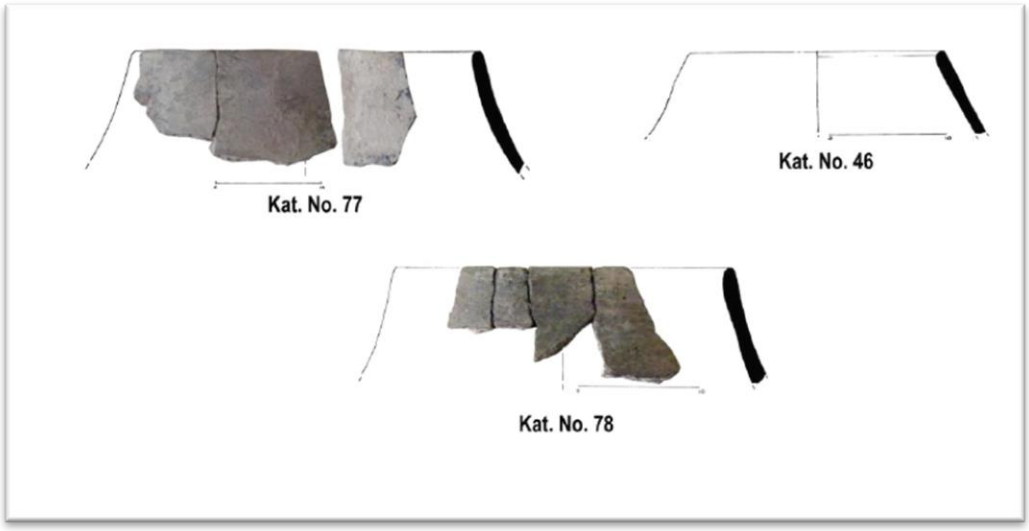
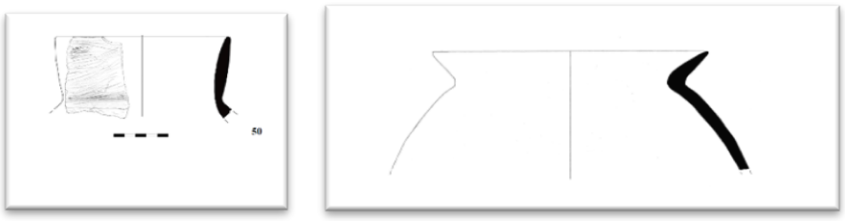
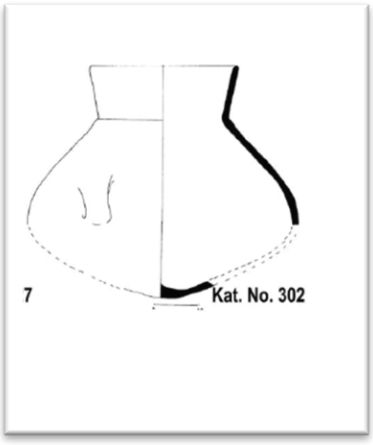


Fig 15. Güvercinkayası hole-mouth vessels (Çaylı 2018: 73).



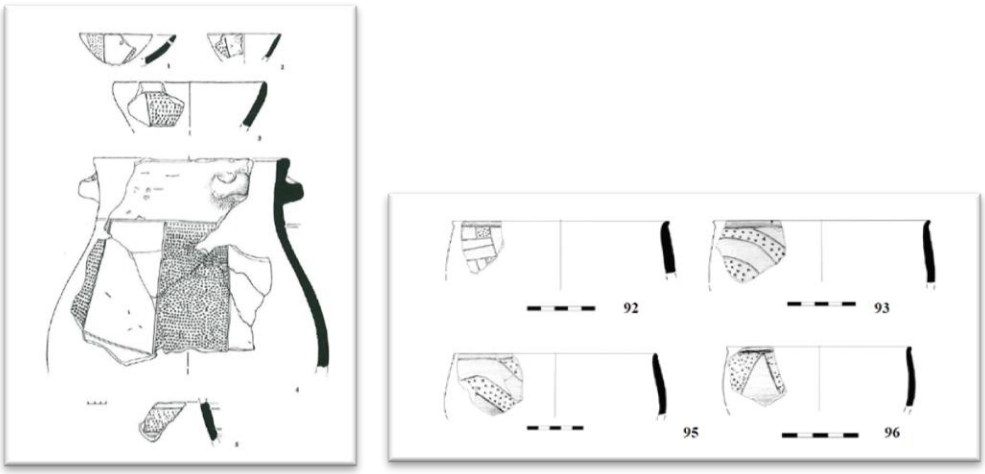
a b



c

Figure 16. Necked Jars a. Tepecik Çiftlik (Özbudak 2016: 198), b. Gelveri (Özbudak 2010: 138).

c. Güvercinkayası (Çaylı 2018: 89).



a b

Figure 17. Incised decorated vessels a. Güvercinkayası (Gülçur, 2004: 159), b. Tepecik Çiftlik (Özbudak 2016: 205).