

# **The Emir Ware from Shahr-i Sokhta**

**Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi**  
**Iranian Center for Archaeological Research**  
**m\_sajjadi@hotmail.com**

## **Abstract**

One class of pottery vessels from Shahr-i Sokhta consists of a type of Grey Ware in the form of jars, bowls, pots and cups with a thin grey body. It was first seen in various ancient cemeteries in south-eastern Iran and Pakistani Baluchistan, including the tombs of Shahi Tomps. Later, other specimens of this grey pottery, known as Emir Ware, were also found in Afghanistan and Sistan. In Iran, during the excavations at Shahr-i Sokhta, especially in the graveyard, more samples of this pottery were found. This elegant and delicate grey pottery has various motifs enclosed in bands of curved lines. Its main design inside the bowls is very similar to a swastika.

## **1. Introduction**

A class of pottery characteristic of Shahr-i Sokhta is Grey Ware, first identified and reported by A. Stein in the ancient site of Shahi-Tump and then in the cemeteries of south-eastern Iran and Pakistani Baluchistan (Stein 1931: 93). Years later, Walter Fairservis found other specimens of this grey pottery in Sistan, Afghanistan (Fig. 1). In order to distinguish it from another type of Grey Ware in the region, he

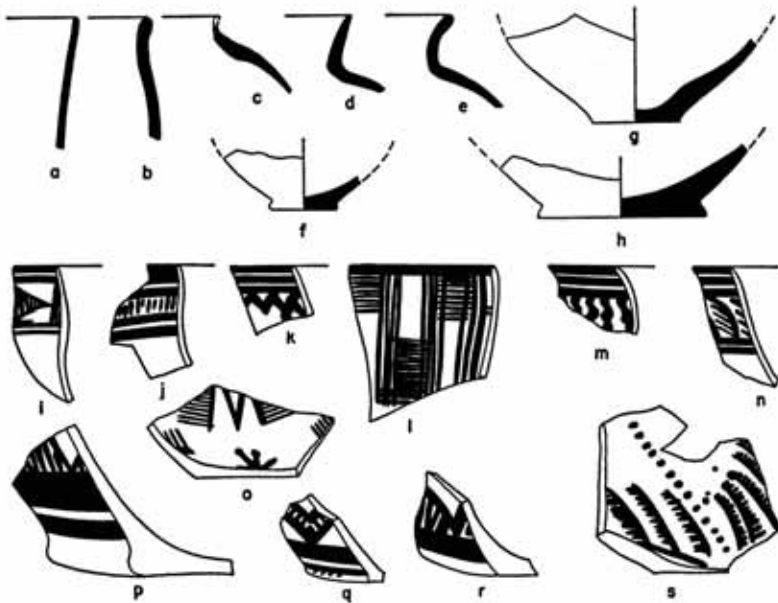


Fig. 1: Emir Ware pottery (Fairservis 1961: 86; Fig. 44).

named it 'Emir Ware' (Fairservis 1961). According to Fairservis, Emir Ware is an elegant and delicate grey pottery with a variety of designs bounded by a number of curved lines seen in relatively deep bowls. It is characterised by geometric and natural designs, in some cases combined with each other (Fairservis 1961: 86), and it is distinct from Faiz Mohammad Grey Ware.

The production techniques, geographical distribution and chronology of this type of pottery have been carefully studied and explained by Wright (1984; 1985; 1989; 2013) and Mutin (2013). Plenty of this pottery type was found at Shahr-i Sokhta during the 1997-2018 excavations, when more than 900 graves were excavated (Sajjadi 2003; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2014; 2020) (Fig. 2).

## 2. The Emir Gray at Shahr-i Sokhta

The pottery assemblage of Shahr-i Sokhta is mainly divided into three groups: Buff Ware, Grey Ware and Polychrome Ware. Despite the proximity of the area

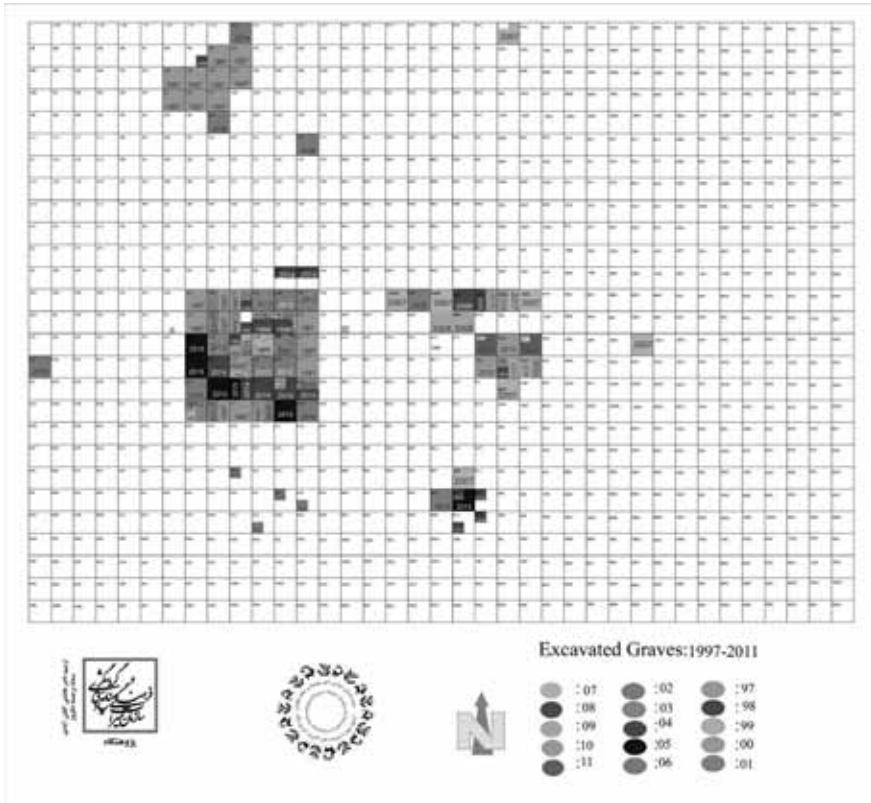


Fig. 2: excavated graves in Shahr-i Sokhta, 1997-2014.

to Baluchistan, very little Red Ware, almost all of which appears to be imported, can be observed in this assemblage.

Due to the huge volume of pottery (Fig. 3) found during the excavations we do not have exact statistics for the pottery fragments found during excavations, but based on the other evidence and scattered statistics related to excavation data, about 90% of the pottery is Buff Ware, 1% is Polychrome Ware, Red Ware and miscellaneous types, and the rest (about 5% of the pottery assemblage of the site) is plain and painted Grey Ware (Lamberg-Karlovsky - Tosi 1973).

The quantity of Grey Ware at Shahr-i Sokhta is thus much smaller than that of Buff Ware, and although the quantity of this type found in the graveyard is



Fig. 3: concentration of pottery fragments and other wastage on the surface in Shahr-i Sokhta.

significant, it accounts for only about 5% of the painted pottery in residential areas.

Most of the Grey Ware was found in the central part of the graveyard, while in the northern part it is very scarce, the most common types here being painted Buff Ware bowls (Fig. 5) , large painted jars (Fig. 4) and cylindrical flower vases (Fig. 6) .

In terms of their structural features, the Grey and Red Ware vessels of Shahr-i Sokhta are characterised by compactness, hardness and the presence of sand temper. These vessels were produced almost uniformly and without fundamental changes throughout the occupation of the settlement, from Period I to the beginning of Period IV, although in the last few decades of Period III and the beginning of Period IV, the production of both types was gradually halted. Emir Ware patterns are different from other Grey Ware motifs. They include various delicate and beautiful designs, as well as a combination of different types of



Fig. 4: Shahr-i Sokhta Buff Ware Jars, brownish painted decoration on the shoulder.



Fig. 5: Shahr-i Sokhta Buff Ware bowls, black painted internal decoration.



Fig. 6: Shahr-i Sokhta Buff Ware cylindrical flower vases, brownish painted decoration with hanging and regularly spaced sheaves of twin vertical dentate lines.

geometric and natural lines. Straight lines, zigzags, horizontal bands of triangular designs and ladder-shaped decoration with plant motifs are common on the inside of the bowls. The designs are painted on the inner and outer surfaces of the bowls, using soft and delicate brushes, in black, red and brown. The background colour and surface of the vessels varies from very light grey to dark cream to black, but the predominant background colour is standard grey. The decorations are black, grey and sometimes pale red. The patterns are often carefully drawn and are of relatively fine craftsmanship.

The main motifs on the central field of the internal surface are four ‘fan blades’ or two intersecting *S*-shaped lines bounded by other motifs. Generally, the upper third of the outer surface of the bowls is painted with geometric patterns. In some cases, the same internal pattern has been drawn by means of a decal with minor changes on the outer surfaces of the bowls.

Grey Ware vessels are mostly found in graves in the central part of the cemetery. In some cases, all the grave goods were Grey Ware (Fig. 9), while in the northern part of the graveyard they are very rare.



Fig. 7: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls: 1-2. Black on dark grey, 3-4. Light red on light grey.

Two distinct types of Emir Ware pottery have been found at Shahr-i Sokhta: deep dishes and bowls whose main decoration is a kind of swastika pattern on the internal surface, and another type without this pattern and decorated with other types of motif, although none as frequent as the swastika patterns. This second group of patterns are less internally consistent.

Bowls with non-swastika motifs can be generally divided into three separate groups: a. deep bowls with decorative motifs on the outer surface; b. Small bowls with decorative motifs on the outer surface and c. deep bowls with decorative motives on the interior surface.



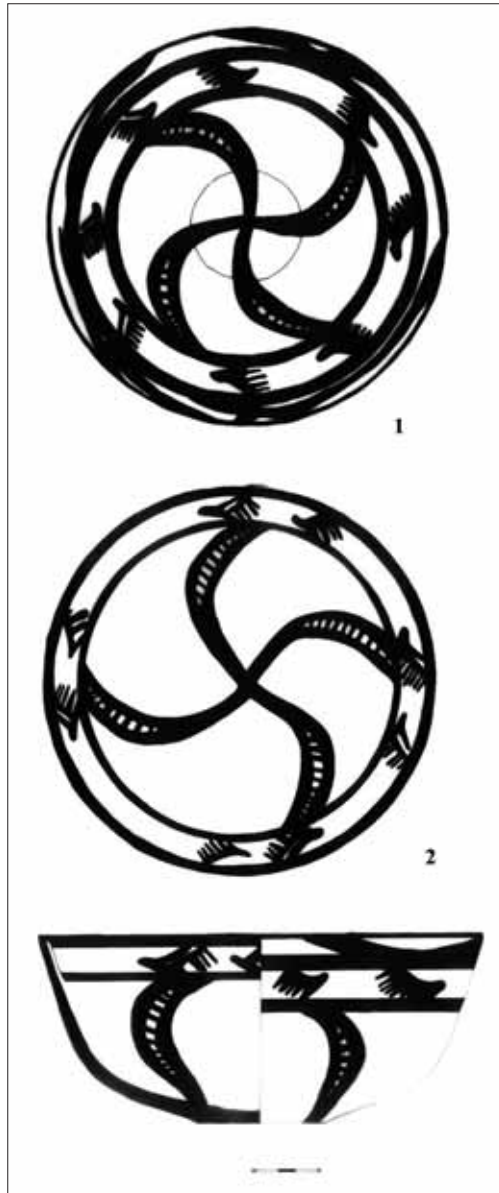


Fig. 8: Shahr-i Sokhta Emir Grey Ware: 1. External patterns; 2. Internal patterns (G.N.5301/6).





Fig. 9: Shahr-i Sokhta grave goods (G.N.1516): two alabaster bowls, six Grey Ware vessels.



Fig. 10: Grey Ware vessels: 1-3. Painted red decorations on grey pots; 4. Painted black decoration on very light colour teapot.

a. Conical bowls with slightly raised foot, wide mouth, flared rim. Designs drawn on the upper part of the external body and more rarely on the internal surface (Figs. 11-12).

b. Small bowls with slightly flared rim, rounded base and decorative motifs on the upper part of the outer surface (Fig. 13).

c. In terms of form, shape and distribution of patterns, the third group of bowls are quite similar to those decorated with swastikas. The interior and exterior of these bowls are decorated with various designs. The main difference between this group of bowls and those decorated with swastikas is their internal and external decoration, and one of the features they share is the use of patterns to create a kind of division of the bottom of the bowls. The decorative motifs of this group are divided into 5 main groups and 26 subgroups (Figs. 14-16).

This composite structure of internal patterns is not limited to Grey Ware bowls, but is also seen in some Buff and Red Ware vessels. In the case of Red Ware bowls, in one example, the internal and external decorative motifs are the exact reverse of each other (based on a decal) covering the entire interior and exterior surfaces of the bowl (Fig. 17).

Grey Ware bowls decorated with Spoked/Swastika patterns are bowls whose internal parts are decorated with two intersecting S-shapes. Patterns are drawn in various shapes on the internal surface of the bowls, dividing it into four parts, and in some cases into three or five parts. The central and main motifs were usually restricted and confined by other sub-motifs on the inner edges of the vessels.

These bowls are usually medium-sized and their average height varies between 6-9 cm, while the mouth and base measure 12-16 cm and 4-8 cm in diameter respectively. The temper of the vessels is very soft and well mixed with the clay, and their bodies are completely smooth and polished. The decorative motifs are delicately drawn inside and on the upper parts of the exterior of the vessels. In some cases, the internal pattern is repeated on the exterior surface of the vessels.

The patterns on the upper part of the outer surface of the bowls consist of geometric shapes composed of curved and straight lines or a combination of the two. Thirteen main and sub-groups have been identified (Fig. 18).

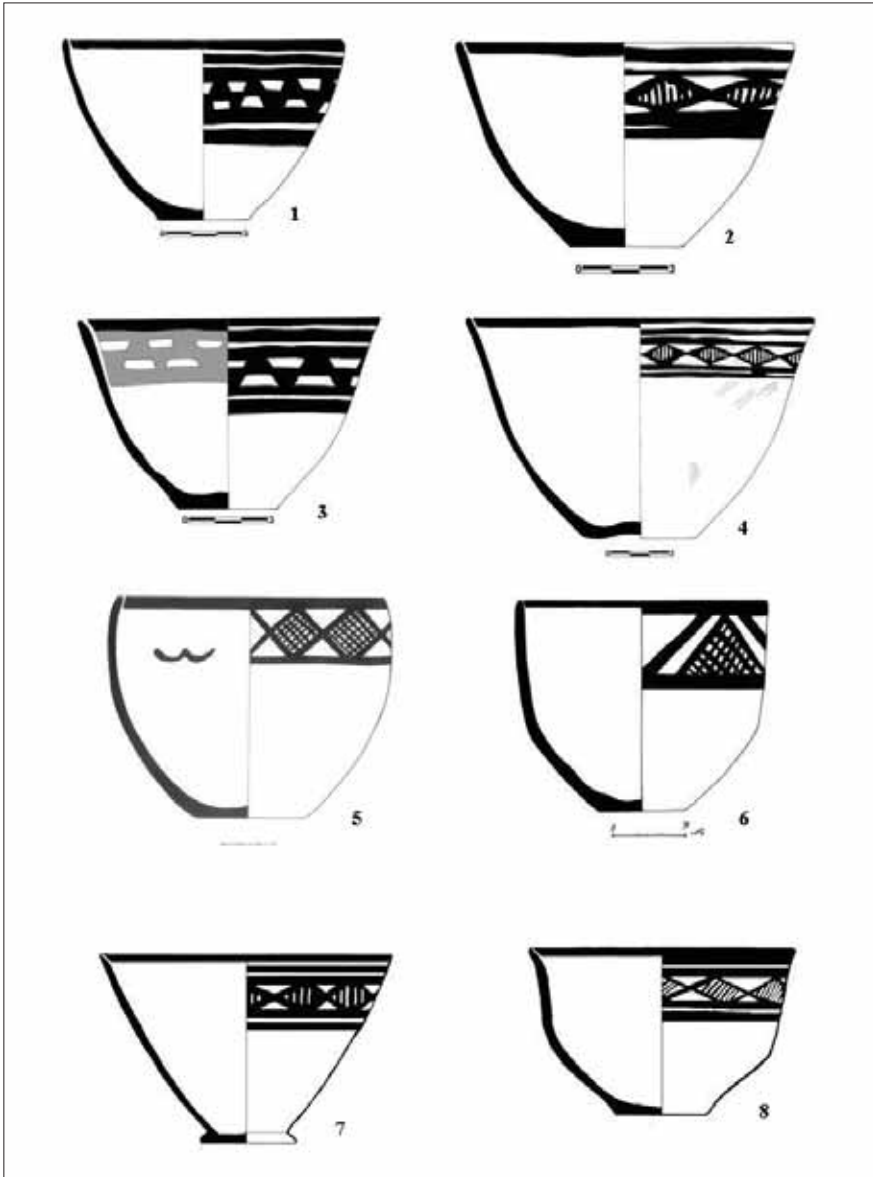


Fig. 11: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware deep bowls with external decorations: 1. G.N.8725/98; 2. G.N.8725/97; 3. G.N.8725/94; 4. G.N.8725/96; 5. G.N.5203/0; 6. G.N.5502; 7. G.N.1605/10; 8. G.N.1400/59.

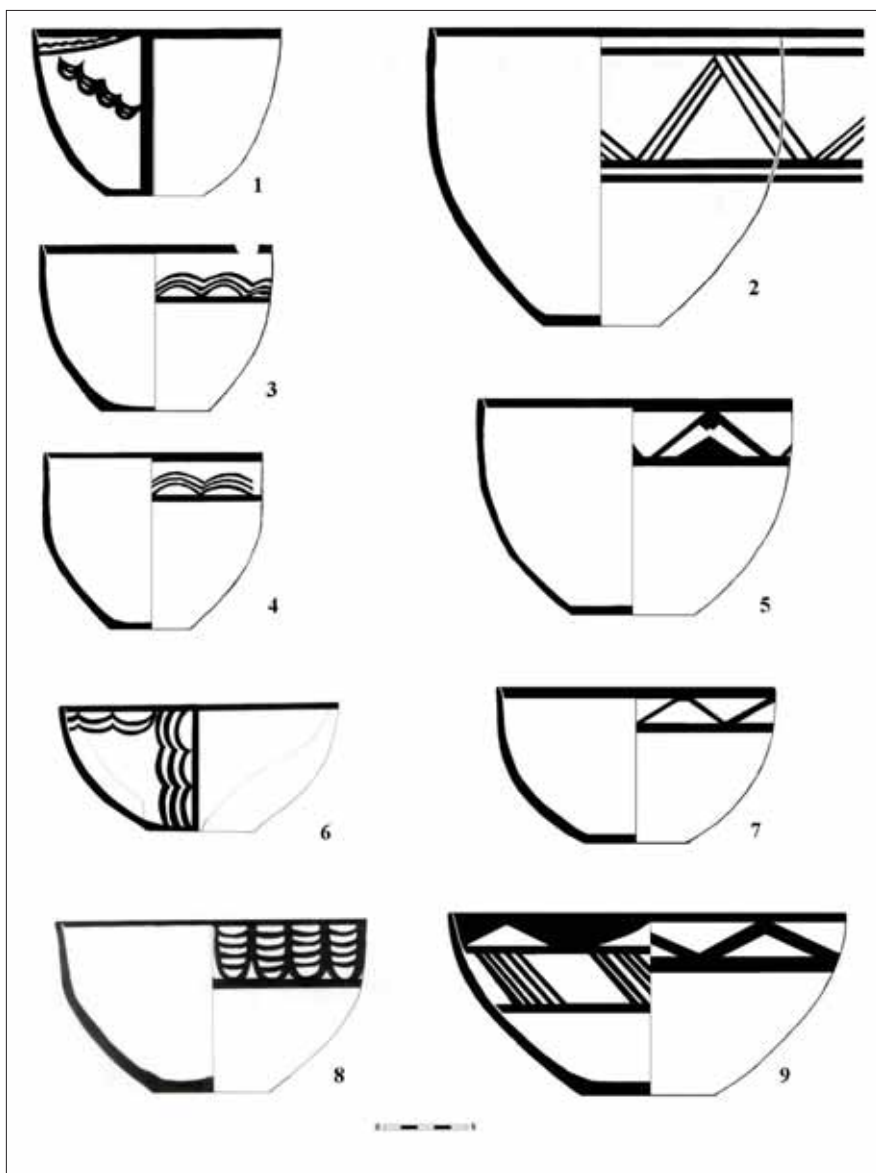


Fig. 12: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware deep bowls with external decorations: 1. G.N.1708/2; 2. G.N.2810/5; 3. G.N.1708/8; 4. G.N.1708/9; 5. G.N.2701/5; 6. G.N.4212/5; 7. G.N.1708/5; 8. G.N.4410/3; 9. G.N.2810/1.

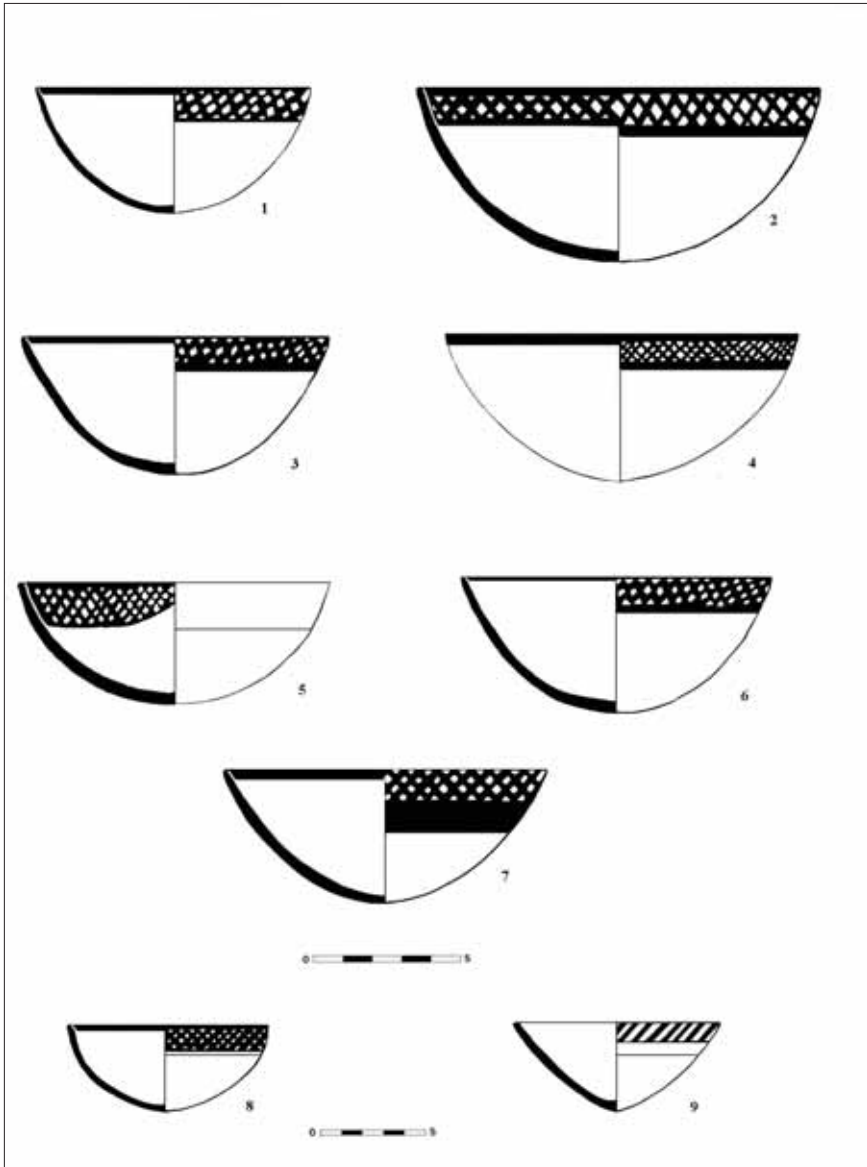


Fig. 13: Grey Ware small bowls with external decorations: 1. G.N.1717/1; 2. G.N.1608/3; 3. G.N.1716/8; 4. G.N.2703/7; 5. G.N.1519/5; 6. G.N.1718/7; 7. G.N.1413/5; 8. G.N.1300/13; 9. G.N.1700/3.

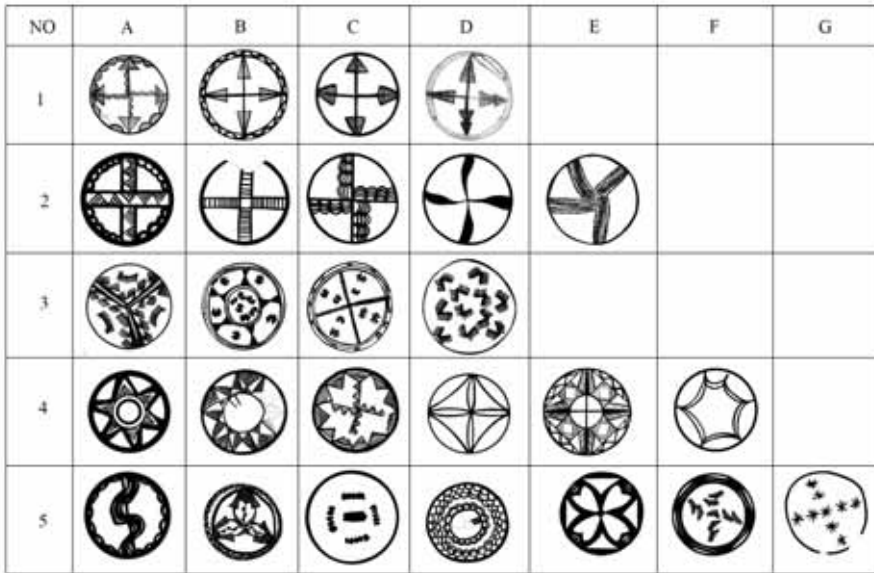


Fig. 14: non-swastika patterns.

As mentioned, the central designs inside the bowls are bounded and decorated with stripes with various designs. These interior designs are more numerous and their shapes are more diverse than the stripes on the outer surface of the bowls. A total of 19 main groups and 46 subgroups of decorative motifs have been identified. All the designs on the inner edges of these bowls are geometric combinations except for the very abstract design of a 'Baluchi goat' (Figs. 19-20).

Concerning the intersecting S-shaped 'spoke' patterns, it was pointed out that the main motifs on Emir Ware bowls are intersecting S-shapes or 'fan blades' that divide the interior part of the vessels into three or four and in a few cases five parts. These motifs are divided into 12 main groups and a number of subgroups, including designs with division into three parts (Fig. 21) and four parts, without additional exterior or interior decorations (Fig. 22). There are also motifs that are similar to the aforementioned but drawn freely, with no restrictive circles around them (Fig. 23).

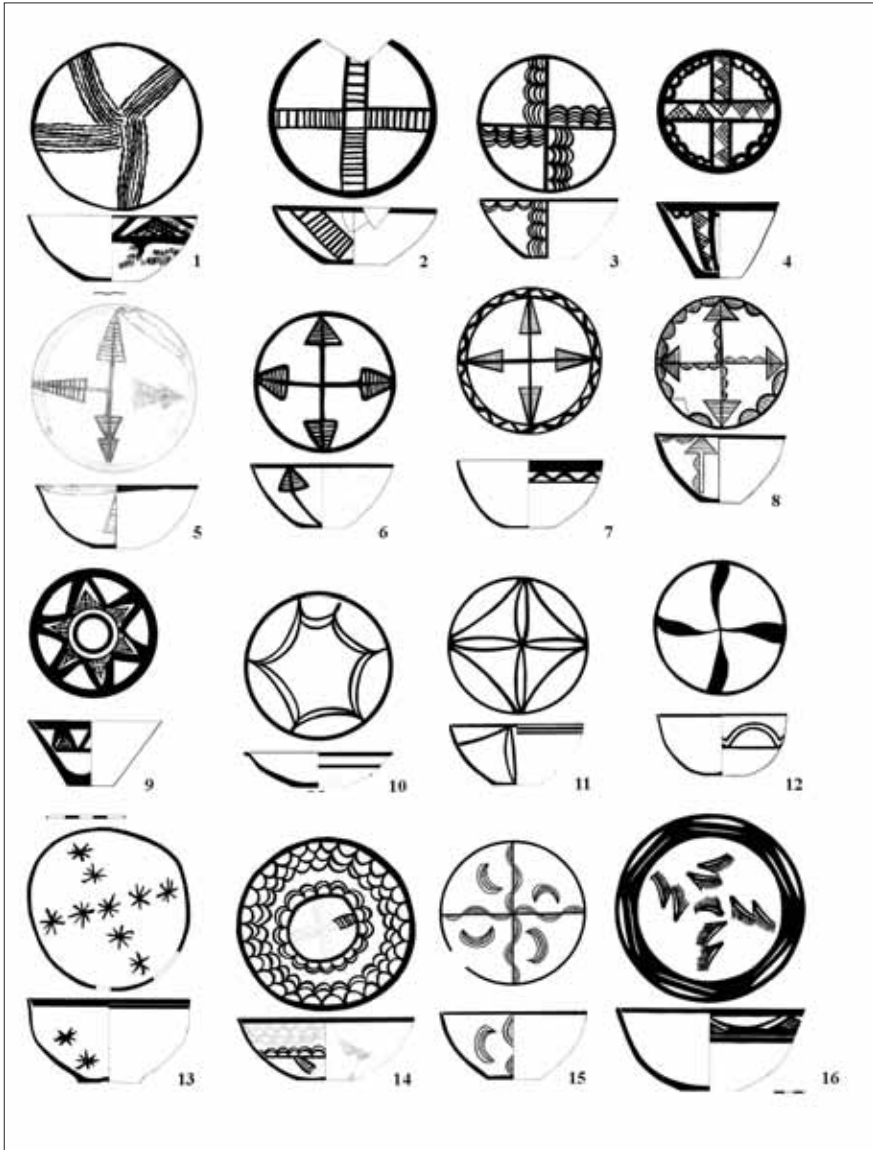


Fig. 15: Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.8621/3; 2. G.N.4212/17; 3. G.N.4212/15; 4. G.N.1701/2; 5. G.N.5207/4; 6. G.N.3909/9; 7. G.N.2701/2; 8. G.N.1708/1; 9. G.N.1706/12; 10. G.N.7935/3; 11. G.N.4215/1; 12. G.N.1717/5; 13. G.N.8519/1; 14. G.N.3903/10; 15. G.N.1706/6; 16. G.N.5603/2.





Fig. 16: Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.1706/2; 2. G.N.5603/2; 3. G.N.3503/1; 4. G.N.4103/5; 5. G.N.1713/7.

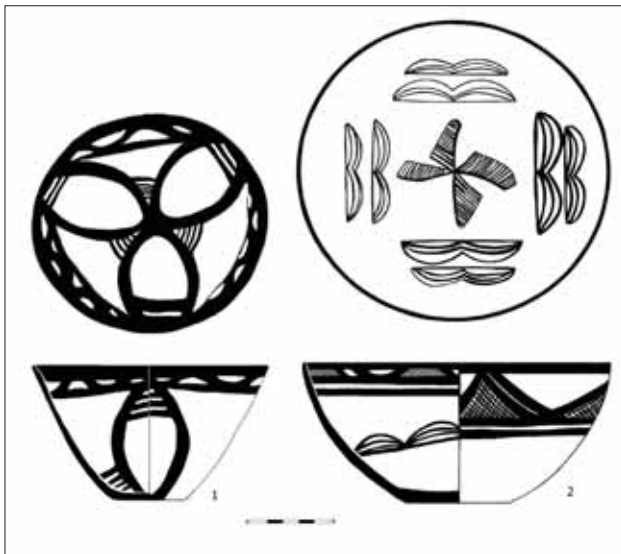


Fig. 17: Painted Red Ware bowls: 1. G.N.2511/3; 2. G.N.2501/1.

NO	A	B	c
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

Fig. 18: external motifs on the upper part of Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns.











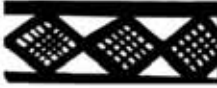








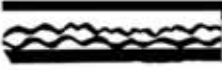
No	A	B	C
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			

Fig. 19: decorations on the internal edges of Grey Ware bowls with swastika patterns.














NO	A	B	c
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			

Fig. 20: decorations on the internal edges of Grey Ware bowls with swastika patterns.

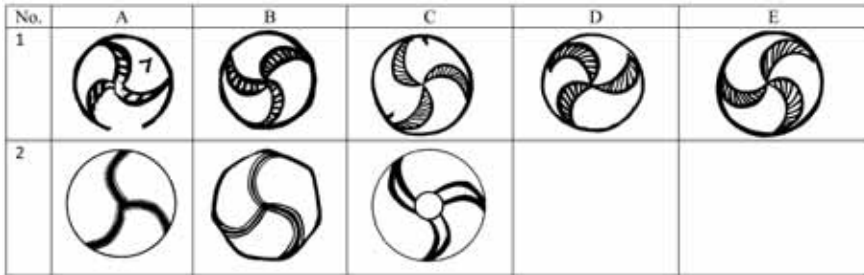


Fig. 21: interior of bowls divided into three parts by crescent-shaped spokes bounded by a circle.

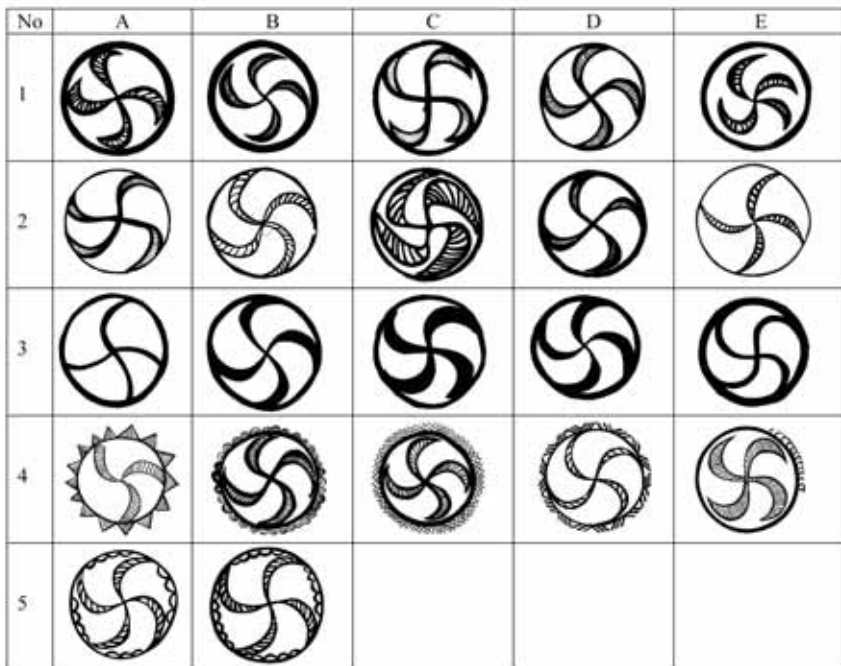


Fig. 22: interior of bowls divided into four parts by intersecting S-shaped spokes bounded by a circle.

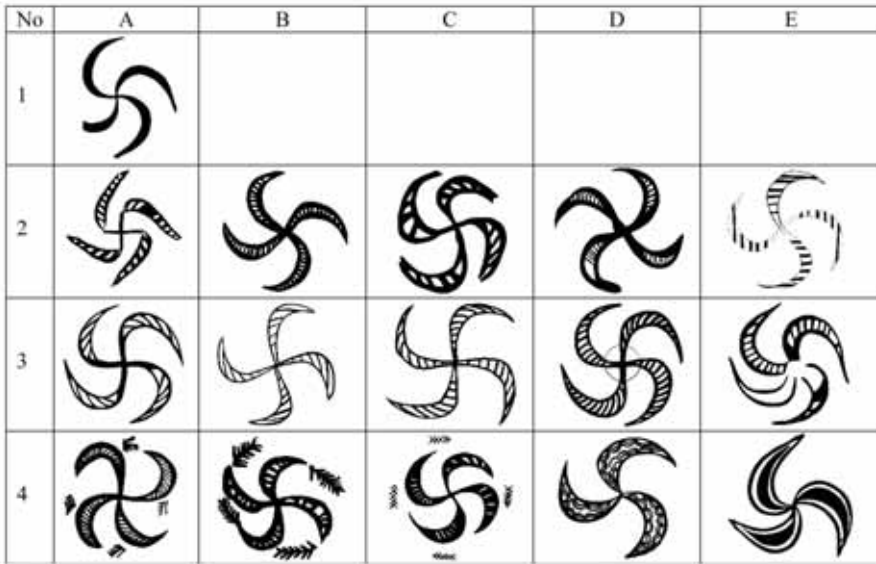


Fig. 23: interior of bowls divided into four parts by intersecting S-shaped spokes not bounded by a circle.

The Emir Ware pottery of Shahr-i Sokhta is similar to what Wright first classified as Emir Ware (Wright 1989: 146). The paste of these vessels is light brownish grey and both the inner and outer surfaces are decorated with patterns. They mostly consist of deep bowls.

This pottery was produced for a sustained period during Phases 9-7, which account for 90% of the production of Grey Ware at Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi 2003; Piperno - Salvatori 2007). Emir Ware seems to have been in use from the last quarter of the fourth millennium to the first half of the third millennium BC. The second type of Emir Ware in Shahr-i Sokhta consists of dark grey vessels with a very thin body. The paste of this pottery is from brown to grey in colour, and both the outer and inner body surfaces are painted. It consists of deep and rather small bowls with a thin body. This type of pottery has mostly been found in association with Phases 7-4, although specimens have also been seen for Phases 9-8 and 3. A. Stein believed that because these vessels were found in graves and were made with great care and technique, they had special uses in funeral rituals (Stein 1929; 1931).

Other specimens of Emir Ware, along with Faiz Mohammad Grey Ware, which is mostly seen in graveyards in Baluchistan and south-eastern Iranian sites, confirm Stein's theory.

Following Wright and based on our own analysis, the Faiz Mohammad pottery of Shahr-i Sokhta is from the central regions of Pakistani Baluchistan and from the lands located between Baluchistan and the Iranian plateau.

At Shahr-i Sokhta, shallow bowls in the style of Mehrgareh V-VII and Damb Sadat II-III are found in contexts dated to Periods III and IV (Sajjadi 2003), while the Emir Ware of Shahr-i Sokhta I-III is coeval with Bampur I-IV and Yahya IVC-B.

The presence of Grey Ware vessels in large quantities in the tombs may suggest that these bowls were made solely for use in funeral rites and burials, but the evidence is contradictory. All the Emir Grey Ware vessels found in the graves bear signs of extended use in daily life, but some of the Buff Ware vessels of this graveyard, especially those recovered from catacombs, are brand new. Not only had the latter not been used during the lives of the buried individuals, but it seems that these unpainted Buff Ware bowls and jars were made exclusively for use in funeral rites. In addition, the arrangement of these new vessels in the tombs is very uniform, suggesting the presence of a group of priests or people specialized in arranging the objects in the tombs (Sajjadi 2007). The best examples of such previously unused utensils can be seen in burials G.N.4301, G.N.1400, G.N.1404 and G.N.1405 (Figs. 24-25).

The presence of one or more objects in tombs is a tradition of the site which was practised in all periods. Thus, the presence of Grey Ware vessels cannot be considered a special phenomenon seen only in certain graves but rather a normal and common funerary practice. Another reason regardless of their association with vows and so on might be the deceased's presumed desire to take these vessels and other objects with her/him to another world.

However, the deceased may wished to have these vessels in their tombs purely because of the elegance of their shape and structure and their fine patterns, especially the Emir Grey Ware bowls decorated with three- and four-spoke motifs, so distinct from other bowls.





Fig. 24: new and unused Buff Ware bowls.

We have already seen that the central part of almost all the grey bowls is divided into three or four parts using various designs. It is hard to imagine that the patterns were drawn aimlessly and without thought. These motifs are usually a reflection of the surrounding environment or events that took place in the region in which the pottery was found.

In addition to geometric decorative patterns, there are also patterns that deal with nature in some way. These include patterns that show the flow and movement of water, patterns that depict mountains and patterns that depict the animals or vegetation of an area. By examining and analysing these meanings, one can understand to some extent the natural and even sometimes intellectual conditions of a society.

In Emir Ware, the decorative curved lines are drawn in such a way that they depict the movement of the intersecting S-shapes from right to left and sometimes from left to right. Even in spoked patterns with almost right-angled rather than curved blades, the same rotational motion can be seen. This kind of movement can be interpreted as a rotation without beginning or end, i.e. an eternal movement.

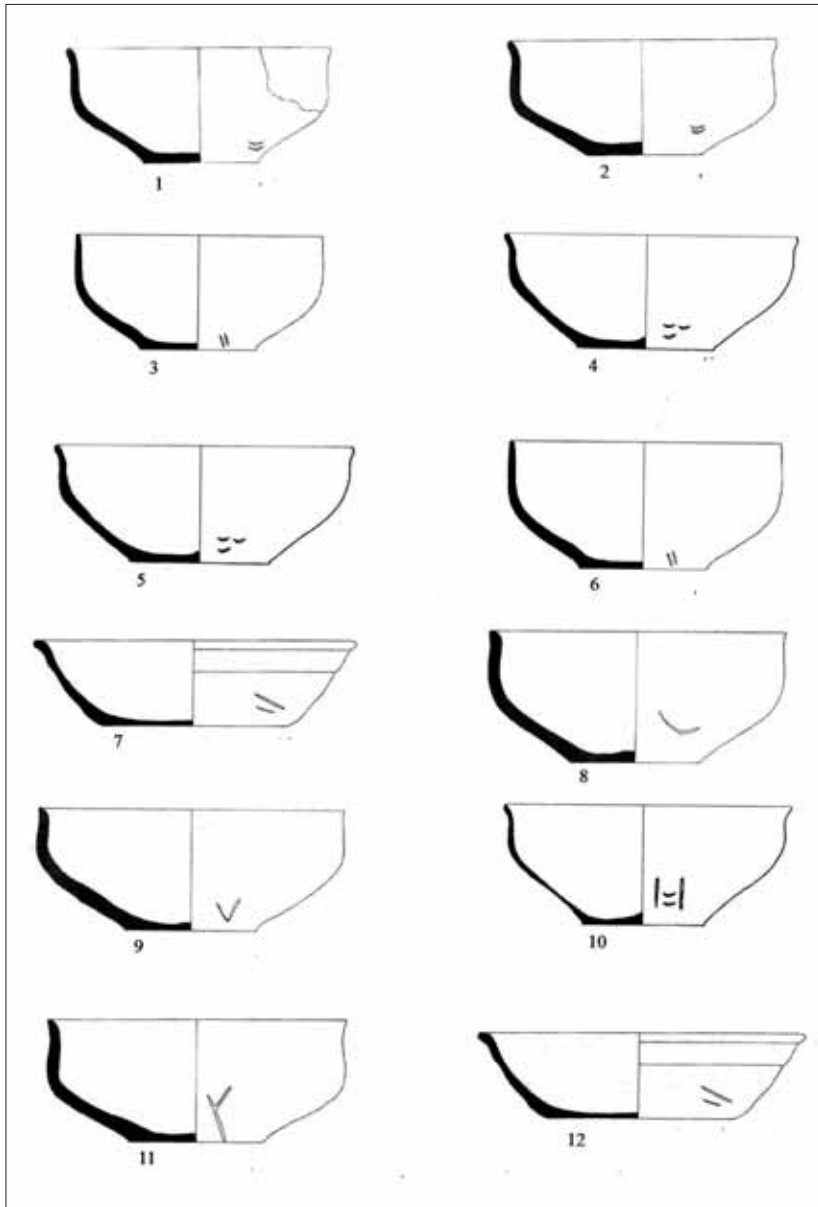


Fig. 25: new and unused Buff Ware bowls with potters' marks (G.N.1400).

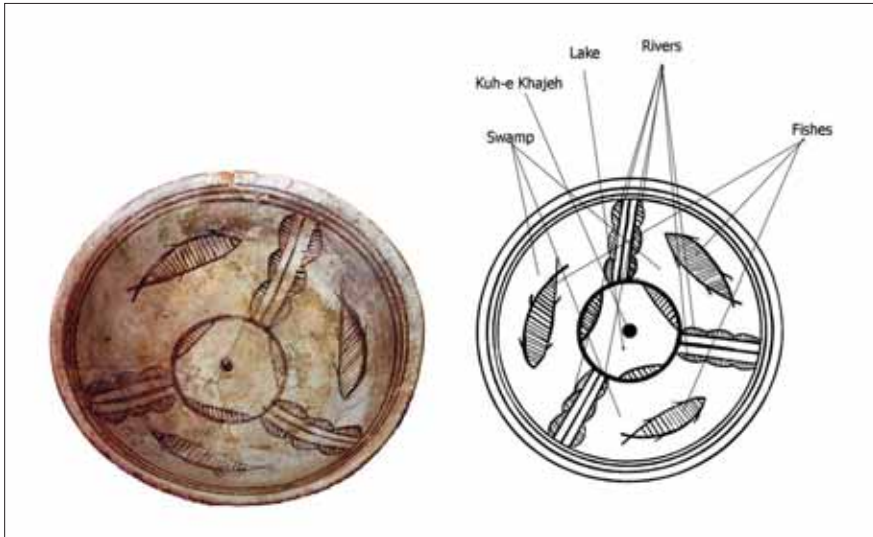


Fig. 26: reflection of the natural environment and 'map' of southern Sistan on a Buff Ware Deep Dish (Sajjadi 2017).

In accordance with this interpretation, the three-bladed or three-spoked motifs can be seen as three stages of human life, i.e. birth, life and then death, and each of the three fields separated by the blades is a symbol of one of these stages of life.

Perhaps this is why these painted vessels were placed in the graves with their owners after the material end of their lives, serving to inspire them after the first two stages of life as they enter the third stage. This cycle continues forever: they will be born again and life will continue.

Cross patterns are sometimes interpreted as depicting the sun's rays. It should be noted here that the sun, fire and light had a special value in the society of Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi - Shahin 2018). In the cemetery of Shahr-i Sokhta, the orientation of the graves and the deposition of the individuals in the graves are not regular, but rather depend on the position of the sun in the sky.

In addition, each of the four parts created by the crossed blades may be a symbol of the four elements of nature, namely sun, water, wind and earth. It

should be noted that this interpretation is only an initial suggestion to justify the existence of these motifs.

As mentioned earlier, the data from the tombs are indicative of the use of these vessels in funeral ceremonies (Piperno - Tosi 1975; Piperno 1979; Piperno - Salvatori 1983; Sajjadi 2007-2009) (a revised chronology of Shahr-i Sokhta based on new data obtained during the second cycle of excavations is under preparation Ascalone *et al.* in press).

However, there are also data, in the form of fragments and (more rarely) intact vessels in the residential areas of Shahr-i Sokhta, Tepe Yahya and Bampur, showing their use in daily life (Fig. 27). Thus, it can be concluded that in the late fourth to mid-third millennium, a special type of Grey Ware pottery was produced at Shahr-i Sokhta which, in addition to its daily use, played a special role in funerary rites and this product was also common in Pakistani Baluchistan in the same period, where it had the same use.

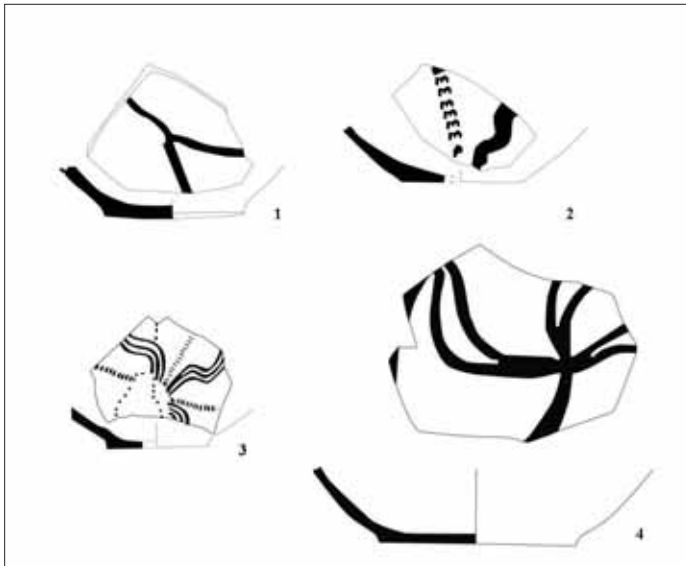


Fig. 27: Grey ware pottery: Bampur I-IV, Nos. 1-3 (de Cardi 1970 figs. 25.251;18.38;30.20; Yahya IVC2. No. 4 (Potts 2001; Fig.1.6 K).

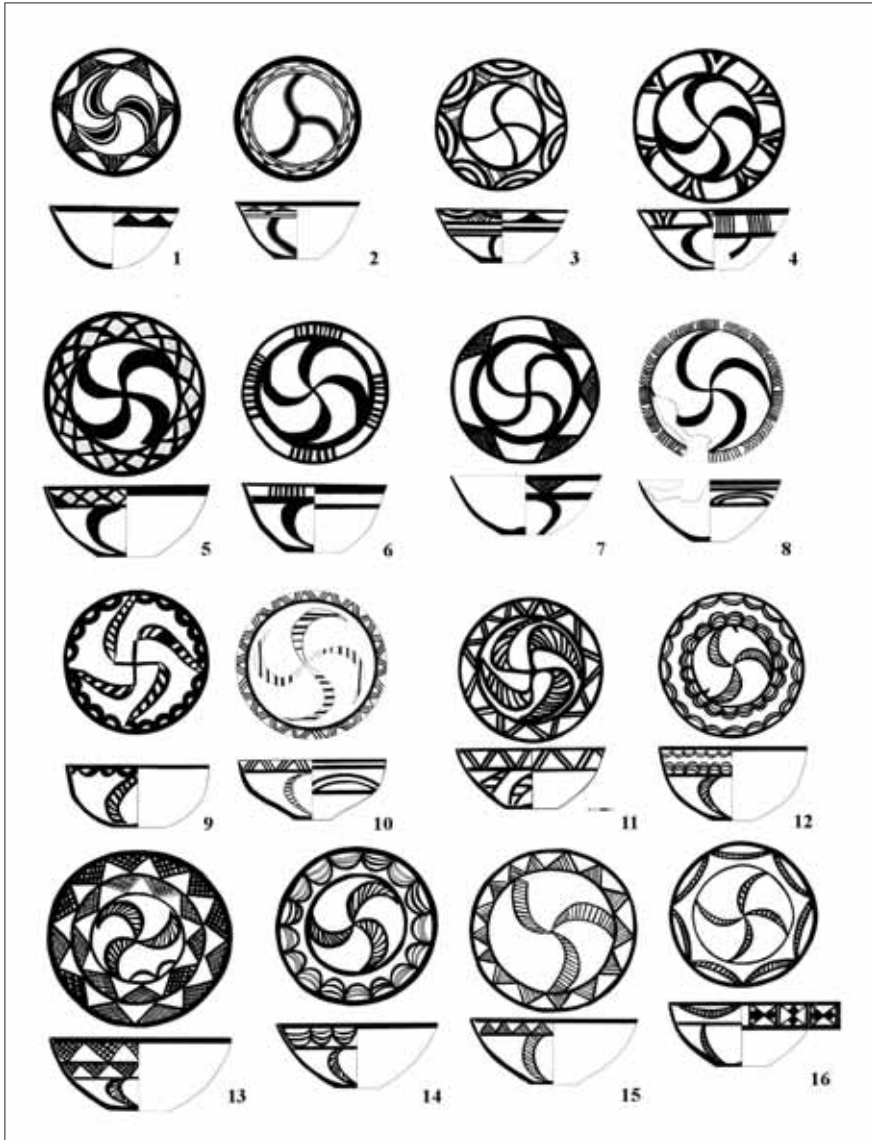


Fig. 28: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with swastika patterns: 1. G.N.5201/12; 2. G.N.1706/7; 3. G.N.3105/6; 4. G.N.3204/2; 5. G.N.3400/6; 6. G.N.3502/4; 7. G.N.5003/4; 8. G.N.5106/1; 9. G.N.1515/5; 10. G.N.1516/2; 11. G.N.2810/6; 12. G.N.3903/3; 13. G.N.3905/10; 14. G.N.3907/7; 15. G.N.4212/9; 16. G.N.5106/2.

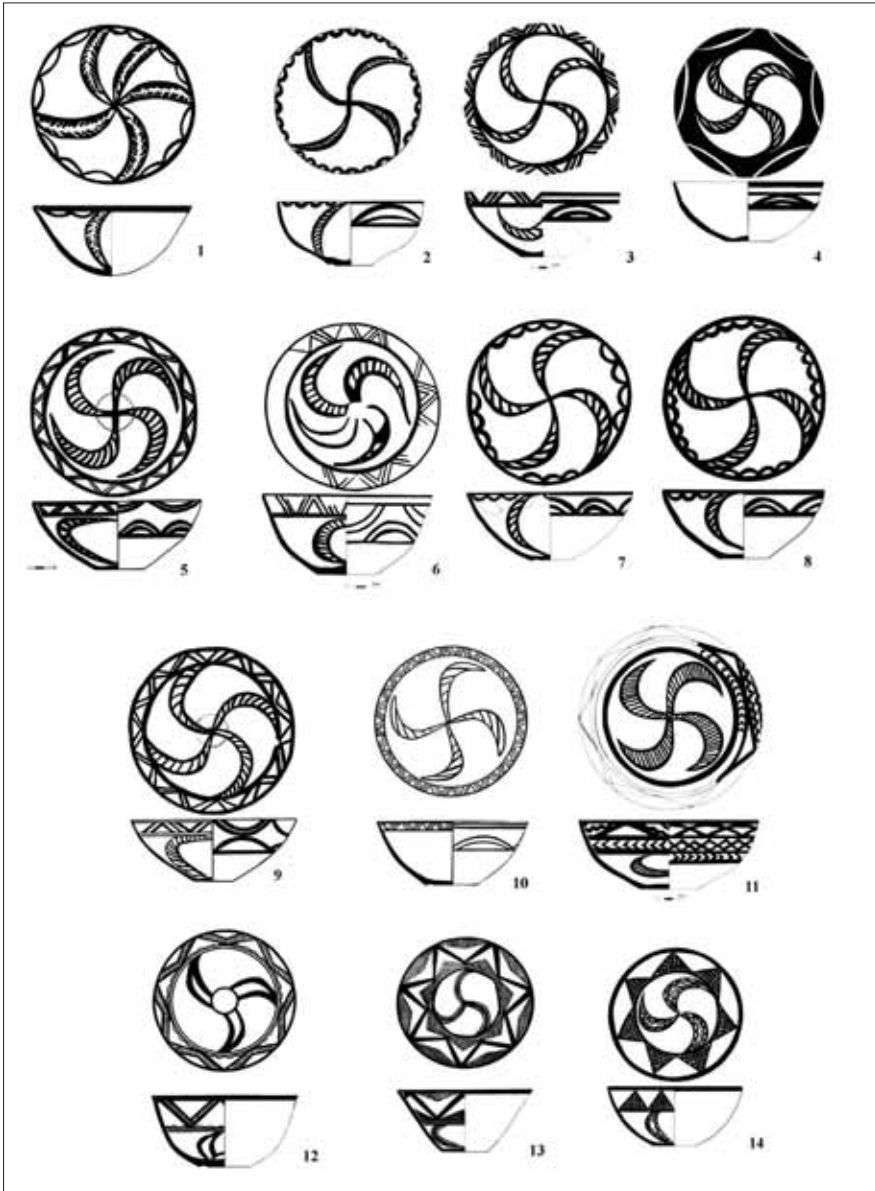


Fig. 29: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika.

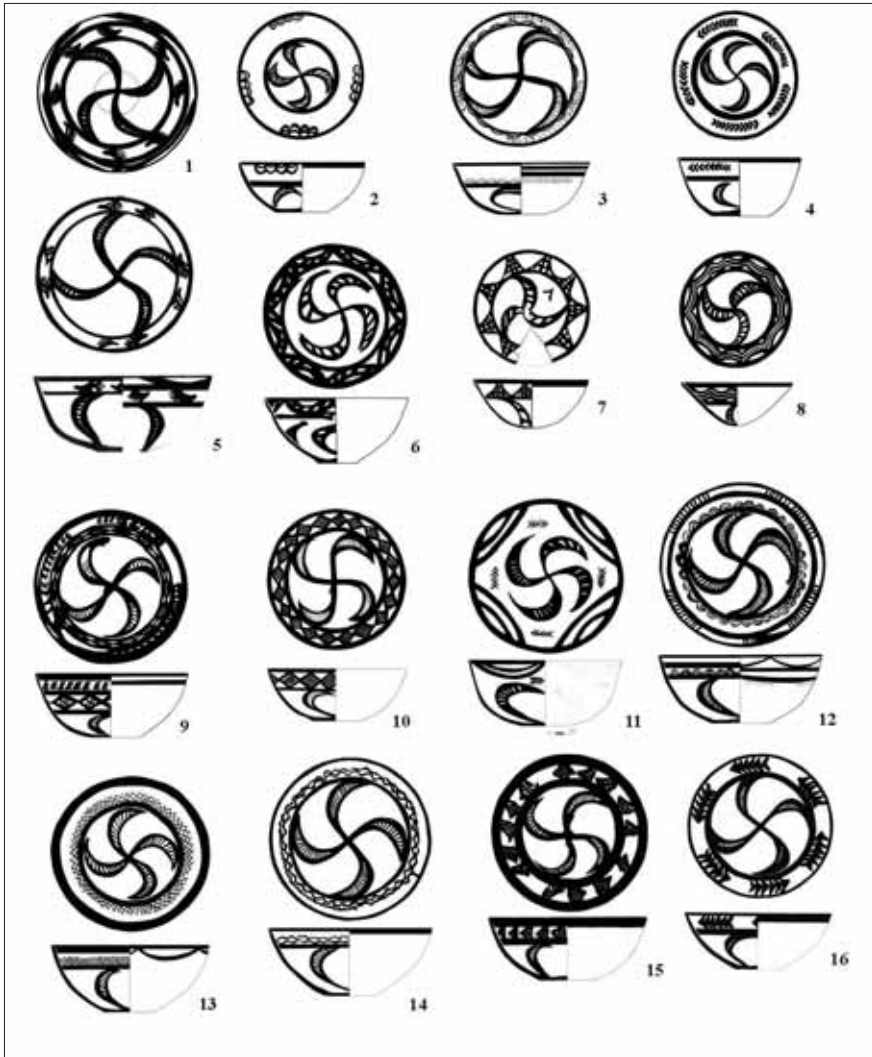


Fig. 30: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.5301/6; 2. G.N.1413/3; 3. G.N.1703/4; 4. G.N.1716/1; 5. G.N.5301/6; 6. G.N.1613/6; 7. G.N.1713/3; 8. G.N.1708/12; 9. G.N.3000/8; 10. G.N.3102/4; 11. G.N.3105/5; 12. G.N.3208/2; 13. G.N.3503/3; 14. G.N.3912/6; 15. G.N.4303/3; 16. G.N.4314/7.



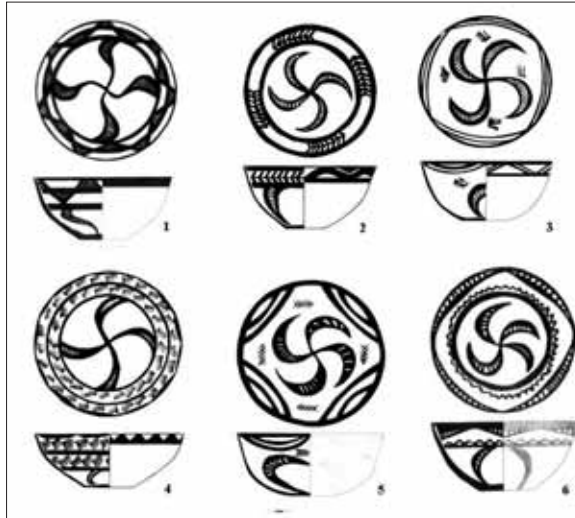


Fig. 31: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.5202/3; 2. G.N.1613/2; 3. G.N.1702/1; 4. G.N.1703/2; 5. G.N.3105/5; 6. G.N.5106/10.



Fig. 32: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.8910/4; 2. G.N.8817/8; 3. G.N.8320/12; 4. G.N.8225/94.



Fig. 33: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.8725/51; 2. G.N.8725/97; 3. G.N.8725/98; 4. G.N.5113/4; 5. G.N.1706/9; 6. G.N.8702/3; 7. G.N.8819/6; 8. G.N.8819/00; 9. G.N.8322/55; 10. G.N.4314/31; 11. G.N.4215/6.



Fig. 34: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.6401/2; 2. G.N.1701/2; 3. G.N.5302/5; 4. G.N.1706/5; 5. G.N.3106/3; 6. G.N.4410/11; 7. G.N.4410/14.



Fig. 35: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.4314/5; 2. G.N.4311/4; 3. G.N.2800/3; 4. G.N.2906/4; 5. G.N.1414/6; 6. G.N.1504/4.



Fig. 36: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.4212/4; 2. G.N.5603/2; 3. G.N.4408/3; 4. G.N.7934/7.

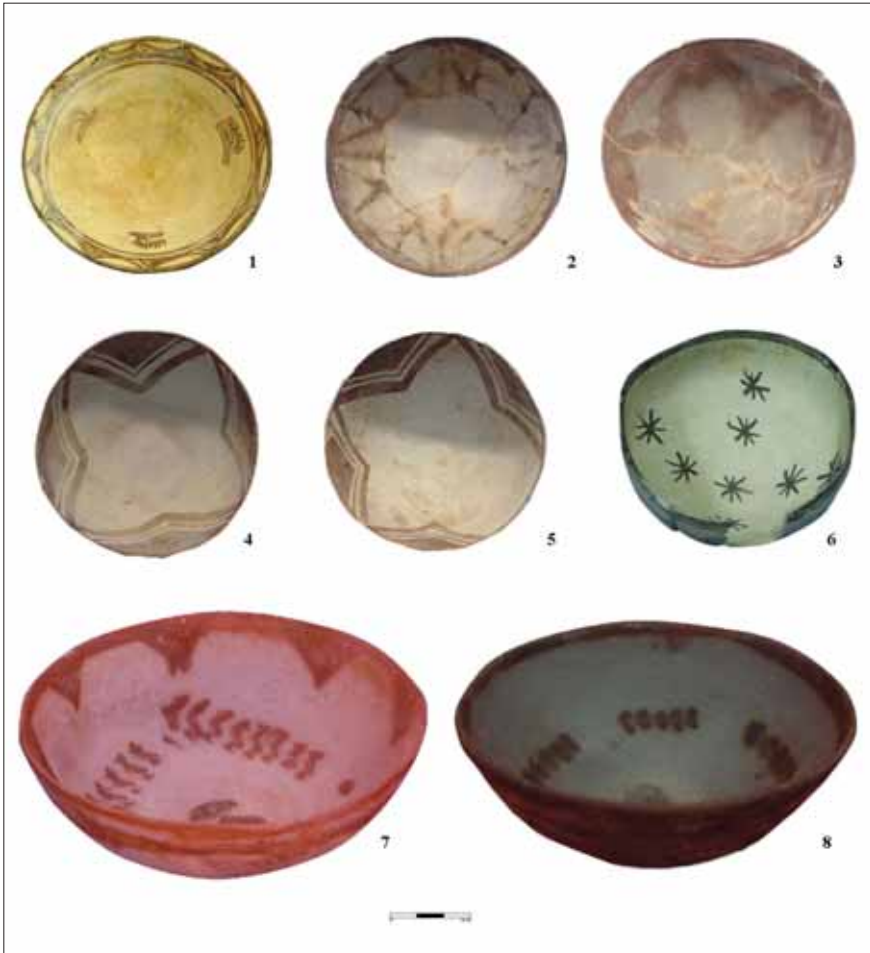


Fig. 37: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. SB-AB 1017; 2. G.N.4314/2; 3. G.N.4314/3; 4. G.N.4408/3; 5. G.N.4408/5; 6. G.N.8519/1; 7. G.N.1604/5; 8. G.N.3503/1.



Fig. 38: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.9021/10; 2. G.N.8725/87; 3. G.N.8725/93; 4. G.N.8725/95.

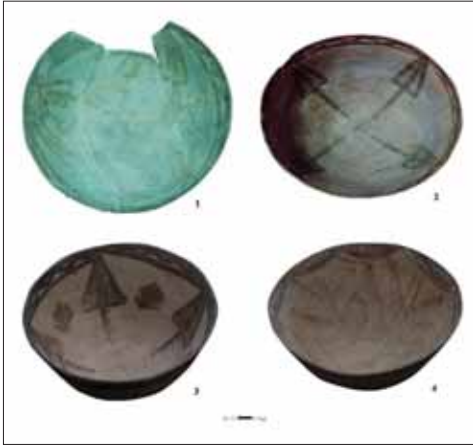


Fig. 39: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal non-swastika patterns: 1. G.N.1713/7; 2. G.N.2702/2; 3. G.N.5207/4; 4. G.N.9302/00.

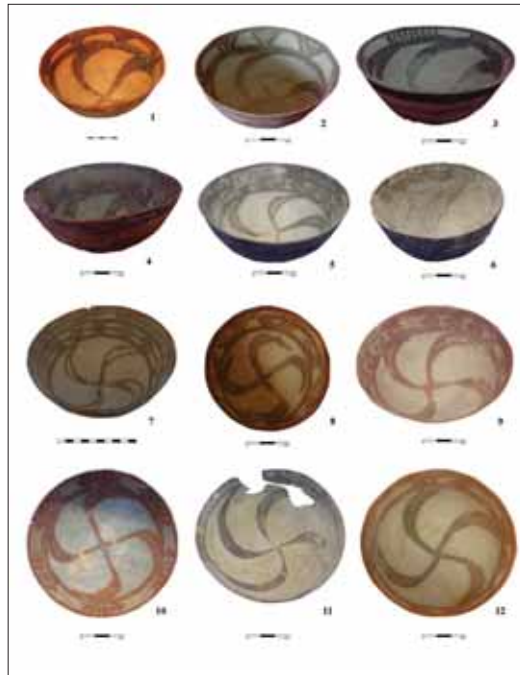


Fig. 40: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.1601/6; 2. G.N.3204/2; 3. G.N.3502/4; 4. G.N.1600/00; 5. G.N.5113/2; 6. G.N.6401/3; 7. G.N.3000/8 8. G.N.3000/2; 9. G.N.4303/3; 10. G.N.4314/7; 11. G.N.5106/1; 12. G.N.8301/6.





Fig. 41: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.6200/5; 2. G.N.1613/4; 3. G.N.1706/7; 4. G.N.2800/4; 5. G.N.3204/3; 6. G.N.5106/10.

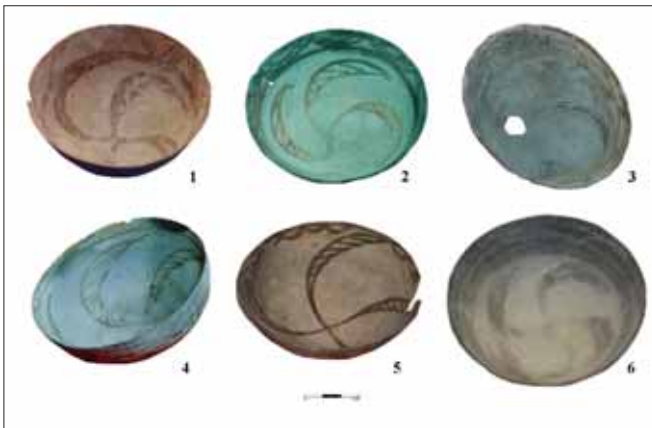


Fig. 42: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.1703/1; 2. G.N.1703/4; 3. G.N.9348/4; 4. G.N.3102/4; 5. G.N.7809/3; 6. G.N.5106/10.



Fig. 43: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.7809/4; 2. G.N.1718/2; 3. G.N.3100/5; 4. G.N.1703/2; 5. G.N.1718/2.



Fig. 44: Shahr-i Sokhta Grey Ware bowls with internal swastika patterns: 1. G.N.1718/15; 2. G.N.1718/14; 3. G.N.1601/9; 4. G.N.9298/5; 5. G.N.4411/4; 6. G.N.1717/5; 7. G.N.3000/8; 8. G.N.1613/2.

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