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The Pottery of Bylazora: A short introduction

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The ceramic material from the first season of excavation at Bylazora yielded a good representation of what to expect in terms of different wares, groups, and types. However, due to a lack of undisturbed contexts, little could be said about the material's typology and chronology. With the second season we have gained a greater understanding of this material. What follows is a brief and general introduction to the pottery of Bylazora.

Pottery Groups

In addition to the cooking pots, storage containers, plates, bowls, and other table and coarse ware vessels that one finds on any ancient site with wheel-made pottery, four other groups of pottery from Bylazora are worth discussing in detail.

1. Paionian Grey Ware (Fig. 20).

Paionian Grey Ware is by far the largest and most common group of pottery at Bylazora, where it surpasses even coarse ware. The frequency is not unique to the site, though, since the ware is found on most sites (with occupation more recent than prehistoric) from the middle and upper flow of the Vardar to the northern borders of the Republic of Macedonia, or, in short, all over Paionia. In fact, this pottery is found even farther north, in southern Serbia and Kosovo, which could indicate that it is not an exclusively Paionian ware. Southern Serbia and Kosovo are in territories traditionally Dardanian, the northern and often hostile neighbours of the Paionians (**Fig. 1**). Even so, the pottery forms a distinctive group in terms of clay, technique, shape, and decoration, and is more common in the Paionian heartland, rarer south of Demir Kapija. A systematic, large-scale, cross-cultural study of this group has still to be undertaken.

No production centres for Paionian Grey Ware have been identified, though pottery workshops have allegedly been located. All of the vessels belonging to this group are wheel-made. The clay is usually grey or more rarely brown. The surface can often have a smoothed, almost polished finish. Quite often the vessels of especially the Hellenistic period have an added slip in more or less the same colour as the clay, or are occasionally burnished. There is not much in the way of decorative designs, other than basic geometric patterns, such as grooved or incised lines, zigzag patterns, etc.

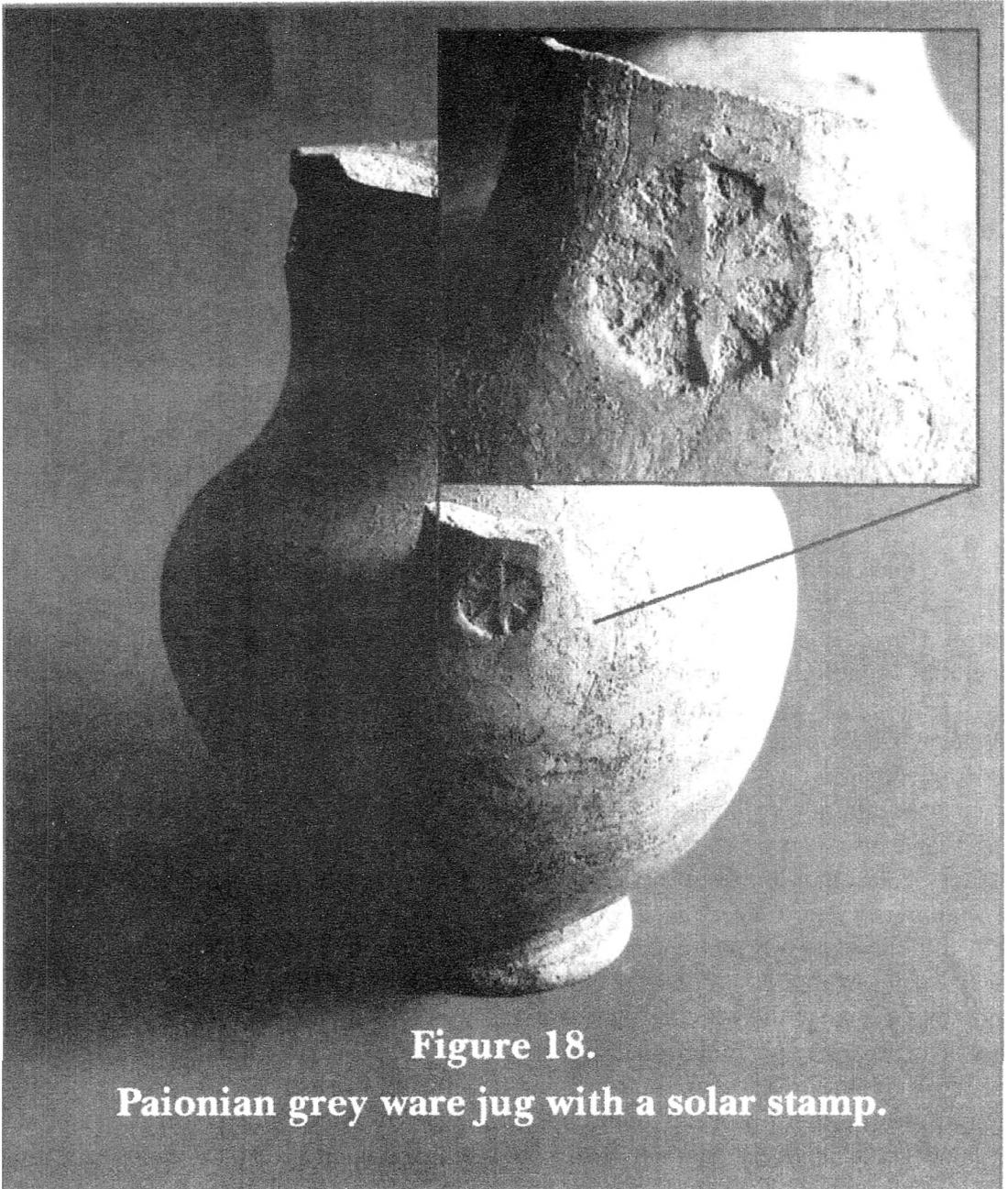
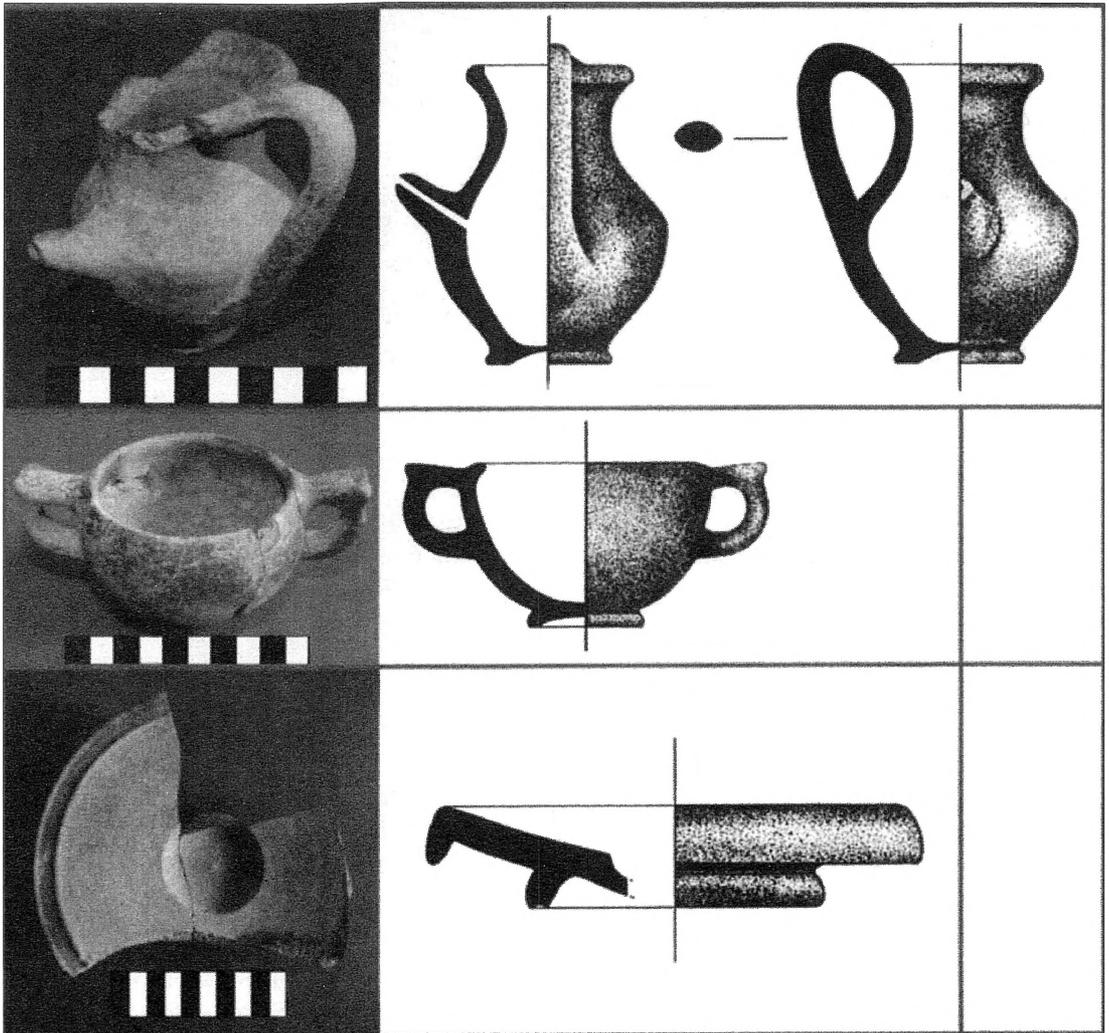


Figure 18.
Paionian grey ware jug with a solar stamp.

(Fig. 21).

Paionian Grey Ware can be divided into two subgroups. The first subgroup continues the traditions and shapes of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Shapes from Bylazora in which this continuation is most evident are bowls with vertical handles, and jugs with diagonally cut spout (**Fig. 22**).

The second subgroup imitates the Greek tradition. As early as the 6th century BC, the Paionians, following the trend of many non-Greek workshops in the central Balkans, adopted Greek shapes. By the late 5th and early 4th centuries, the phase of the ramp-propylon complex, the imitated shapes are restricted to the most common Greek shapes of the time: *kantharoi* of the Classical type, *skyphoi* of the Attic form, *echinoi*, *oinochoai*, and



hydriai, as well as a range of unspecified table-ware shapes and storage vessels, which is comparable to most sites. The names used by modern scholars for Greek shapes are used for the Paionian Grey Ware imitations as well. What nomenclature the Paionians utilized is unknown. For a fuller discussion of pottery shapes, see (www.tfahr.org/PhotoArch_Present.html).

One should not, however, be too rigid in separating the Paionian Grey Ware material into one of these two subgroups. Many vessels display a fusion of the two, applying traditional Iron Age decorative elements to Greek shapes. A recurring example of this was the use of nipples, incised geometric designs, rouletting, and other Iron Age style decorative elements, to a trefoil *oinochoe*, a Greek Classical shape (Fig. 23).

Paionian Grey Ware is a surprisingly poorly understood pottery group, and it has often been claimed that its shapes display little or no typological development. This is mostly due to a lack of sites with abundant material and proper archaeological contexts. Bylazora, however, provides such premises for a future typological study of Paionian Grey Ware. Additionally, in order to improve the chronology of Paionian Grey Ware, one should compare any typological developments to the better understood Greek typologies. Even if the chronology is not the same, it could be argued that it is



possible to use the same principles of development and, more importantly, to observe if Paionian Grey Ware follows the same relative chronology as the Greek. Few, if any, sites present as good an opportunity to undertake such a study as Bylazora.

The shapes adopted by the Paionians were among the most common Greek shapes, some with a minimum of change over time. The question is whether it is viable to use Greek forms as a *terminus ante quem* or *terminus post quem* for Paionian Grey Ware. The very general changes seen in shape and decoration necessitate the study of complete, or close to complete, vessels. In light of this it is paramount to decide the chronology of Greek vessels in Paionian contexts.

2. Imported Fine-Ware.

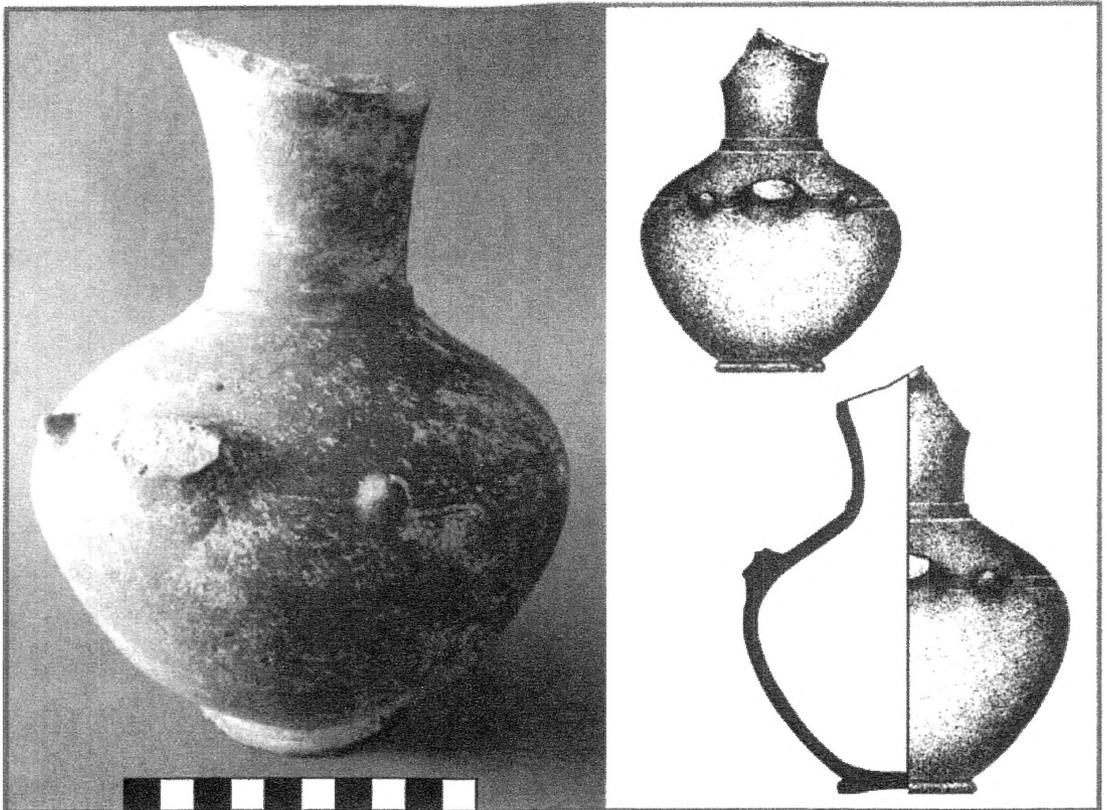
The great majority of vessels belonging to this category are Attic Black Glaze. The most common shape among Greek imports generally found in other Paionian contexts is the *skyphos*. Next come *lekythoi*, *hydriai*, and *lekanides*. The picture at Bylazora deviates somewhat from this norm, with *kantharoi*, *echinoi*, bolsal cups and lip-cups (such as the Rheneia cup) being the most common (Fig. 24). There are two main factors at work behind this divergence. First, Bylazora has offered contexts unlike any Paionian site excavated before. Second, there seems to be a strong presence of local and Paionian pottery production at Bylazora, and it is possible that this supplanted certain shapes that were imported at other sites. Looking at the imported pottery assemblage as a whole, it paints a picture of stable trade relations with Athens from the mid-5th to the mid-3rd century. It is, of course, entirely possible that this situation can be altered; further exploration of the site might yield older material, for example.



With regard to chronology: first, finds made in the Athenian agora, with its well-established chronology, have been heavily relied upon for the purpose of dating. This chronology needs to be used with caution at other sites, since it is established for the contexts at the agora of Athens and no two archaeological sites are identical. In other words, the chronology of the material found at Bylazora remains highly susceptible to modification. Second, one does not have as firm a grasp on the chronology of Greek imports found in Paionia as elsewhere. The lack of contexts to make cross-references to, the limited variety of contexts (most examples come from burials), and our failure to understand the Greek-Paionian relationship in terms other than one of core-to-periphery, all play a part.

Third, this opens the question concerning the lifespan of imported fine-ware, especially. It is a fairly straightforward matter to assess the beginning of the importation of various types simply by comparing occurrences in the archaeological record in both Greece and Paionia. For example, obviously Paionians could not have started importing Attic types before they were in production in Attic workshops. But the Paionians could have used them longer, perhaps decades or generations after the Athenians themselves had stopped making or exporting them. Unfortunately, the lack of dateable contexts makes this end-period blurry. Were the vessels in use longer in Paionia than in Greece? Was the lifespan of the vessel the same as in other non Greek societies where Greek pottery was utilized? These are questions that need to be solved before the better understood Greek chronology can make its full contribution to the chronologies of Paionian archaeology.

If these questions are to be answered, the shortcomings outlined above must be overcome through a widening of the archaeological search to encompass Paionian



settlements, a re focusing of research to other spheres of society than the funerary, and a new approach to the archaeological evidences of Greek-Paionian relations.

3. Paionian Fine-Ware.

The Paionians attempted to imitate Greek Black Glaze with varying degrees of success. Few examples of this group were found at Bylazora. A stronger tradition among Paionian potters was matt red-painted pottery (**Fig. 25**). In the late 6th or early 5th century the production of wheel-thrown buff-ware started. Most common are simple alternating reserved and red-painted bands reminiscent of Ionian Cups, but also waves and zigzag patterns are found. Designs were increasingly applied to Greek shapes. A continuation of this group is seen in fine- and plain-ware vessels of the Hellenistic period, decorated with horizontal bands or panels painted in a diluted dark brown paint (**Fig. 26**).

A rarer type of fine-ware found at Bylazora was the red painted, floral-decorated *skyphos* (**Fig. 27 and 28**). In the next article I shall argue that the Greek influence evident in these vessels can be used for chronological purposes. This is not novel idea, as Greek influence on Paionian pottery is attested to again and again by the Paionians adopting Greek shapes after direct contact was established with northern Greece in the 6th century BC.

4. Loom Weights.

Though not strictly a pottery group, loom weights are considered here as part of the ceramic material. Little can be said at this stage concerning the typology and chronology of the loom weights found at Bylazora (**Figure 29**). Nonetheless, a few interesting patterns have started to appear. The ceramic weights display a limited range of forms, the most common being the conical and the pyramidal, and they are



all fired grey in colour. Most interesting is perhaps that the pyramidal type quite often bears a stamp.

Many different stamps were noticed, but three recur. One of the simplest stamps bears the Greek letter Kappa (**Fig. 30**). What this could signify is hard to tell, although as with most stamps it is probably a potter's stamp, denoting the workshop. Another, more elaborate stamp shows a woman wearing a long dress (a Greek *peplos*?), casually stretching one arm out with the palm of her hand turned up (**Fig. 31**). Could this depict the Greek goddess Athena, the patroness of weaving? The last stamp type takes the form of a star, sun, or wheel (**Fig. 32**). Well made versions closely resemble the Vergina or Macedonian star. Significantly, the stamp occurs on Paionian Grey Ware vases as well (**Fig. 18**). Again, this stamp most likely denotes the workshop that made the vessels, but the stamp is rarer on vessels used for serving, eating and drinking. The occurrence of such a potter's stamp on both an *oinochoe* and loom weights also might mean that these are roughly contemporary; a fact which might eventually aid us in dating those contexts that would otherwise have little dateable material.

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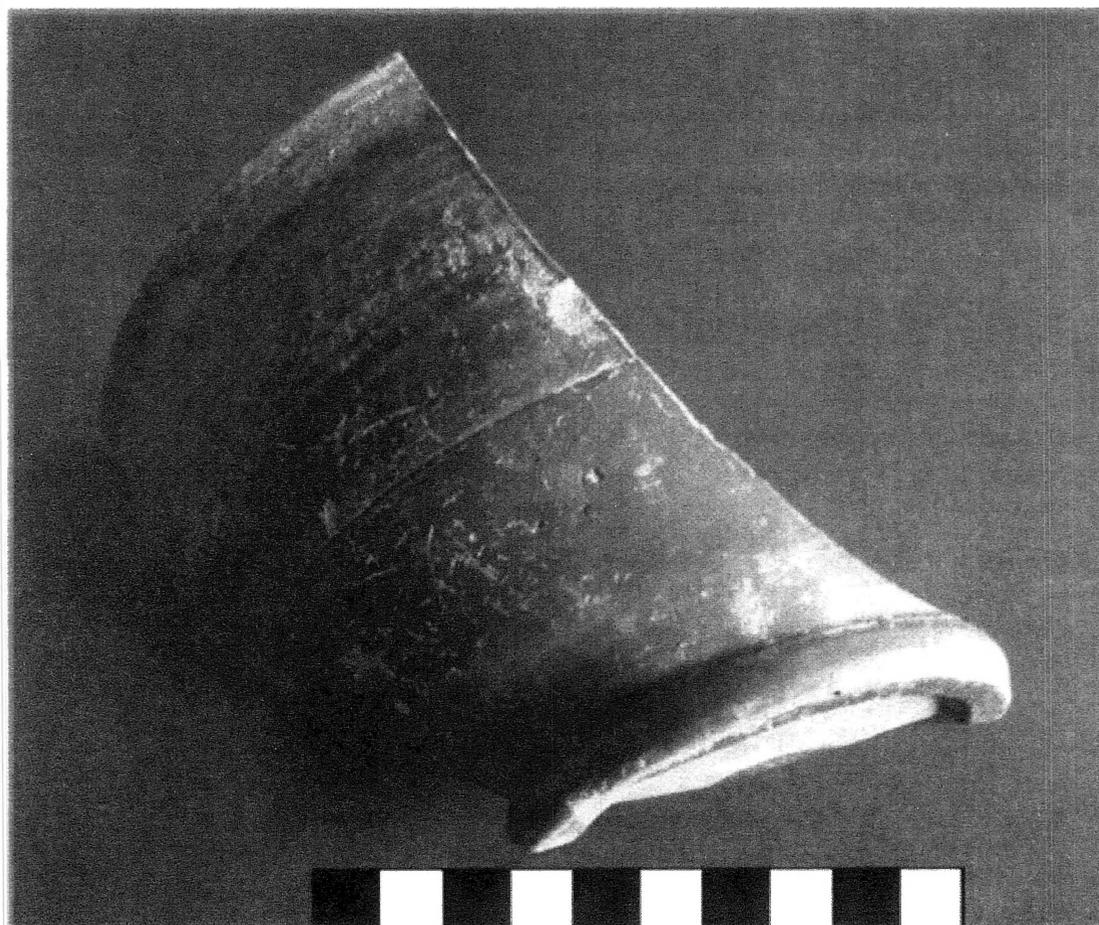
Резиме:

Керамиката од Билазора

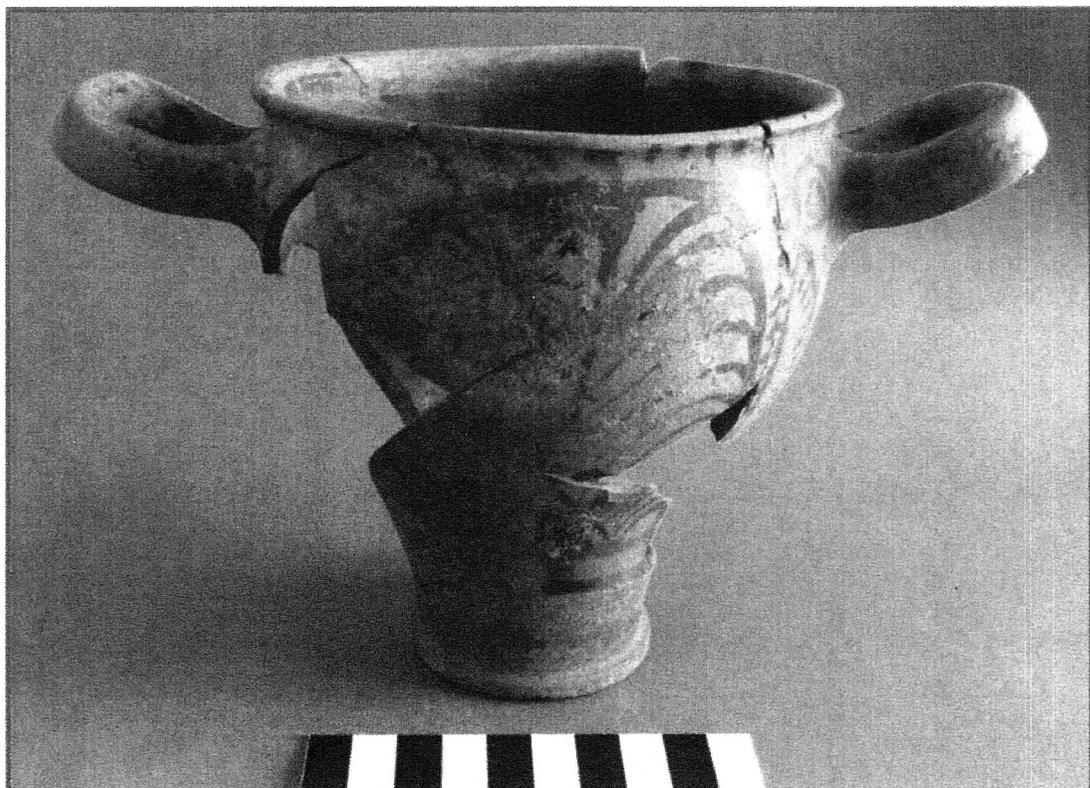
Во овој текст е претставена керамиката од Билазора од првата кампања на ископувањата. Имено, откриена е керамика со широк спектар на типови, форми и квалитет. Сепак, заради недостигот на интактен контекст, малку може да се каже за типологијата и хронологијата на материјалот; иако беше направен обид да се даде краток и општ опис на керамиката од Билазора. Таа е издвоена во неколку групи.

Сивата пајонска керамика е најголемата и најзастапената група на керамика. Таа е чест наод на сите локалитети од територијата на Пајонија. Досега не се утврдени центри за производство на сивата пајонска керамика. Квалитетната импортирана керамика е највеќе застапена со атичка керамика со црн фирнис. Во однос на формите, најчест наод од другите пајонски локалитети се скифосите, лекитите и хидриите. Билазора е исклучок, бидејќи тука се позастапени кантаросите, ехиноите, киликсите. Увезената керамика отсликува силни трговски врски со Атина во периодот помеѓу средината на V-иот и стередијата на III-иот в.п.н.е. Квалитетната пајонска керамика е обид да се имитира импортираната керамика со црн фирнис и резултатот бил повеќе или помалку успешен. Неколку примероци на ваква керамика се најдени на Билазора, сепак посилна била традицијата да се имитира црвенофигуралната керамика. Иако теговите за разбој не се типична форма на керамика, вброени се меѓу анализираниот материјал. Наодите од Билазора се сивопечени, со конусна или пирамидална форма. Интересно е што пирамидалните тегови носат жиг; забележани се повеќе, но само три се повторуваат почесто. Првиот жиг е едноставен, само претстава на грчката буква К (карра); вториот е жена во долг пеплос-најверојатно Атина, заштитичката на ткајачките. Третиот жиг е сонце или ѕвезда, подобро изведените примероци наликуваат на ѕвездата од Кутлеш.

Последниот жиг се појавува и на сивата пајонска керамика. Овој жиг најверојатно ја означува локалната работилница, а бидејќи се појавува и на теговите за разбој и на керамиката, можно е да се истовремени.







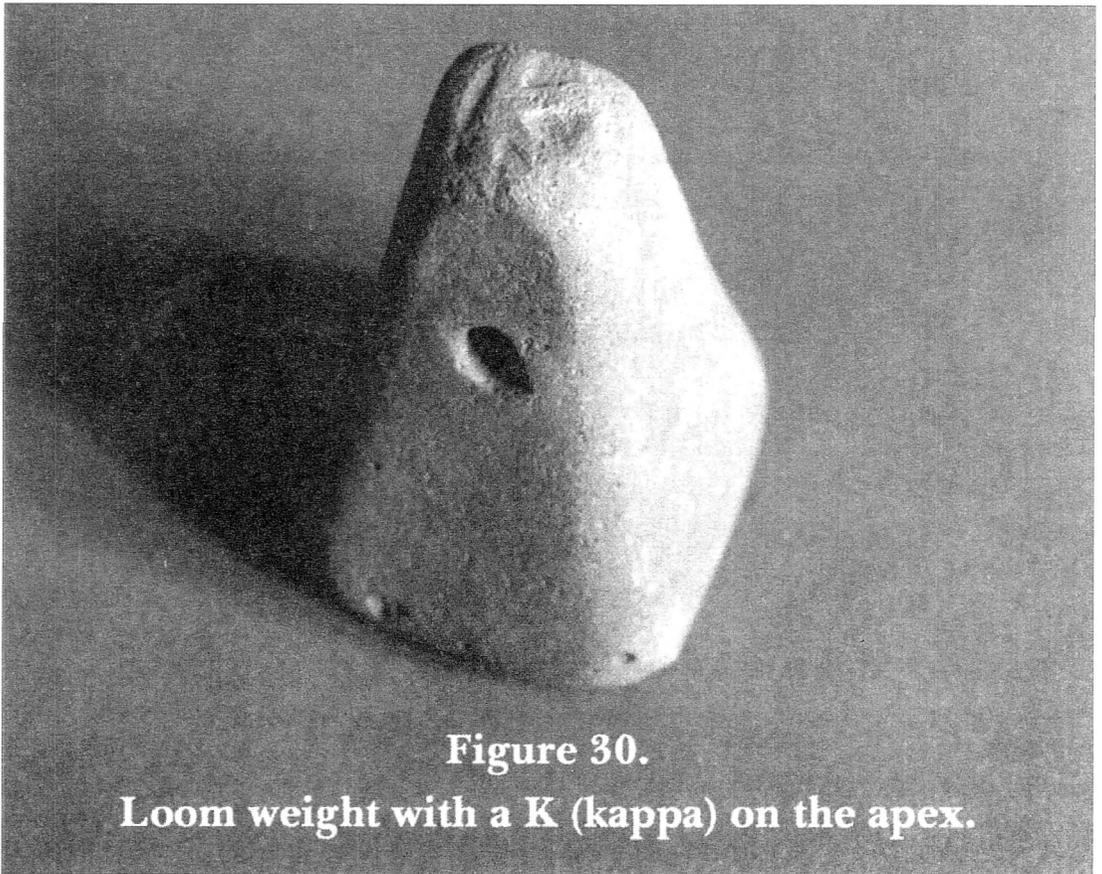
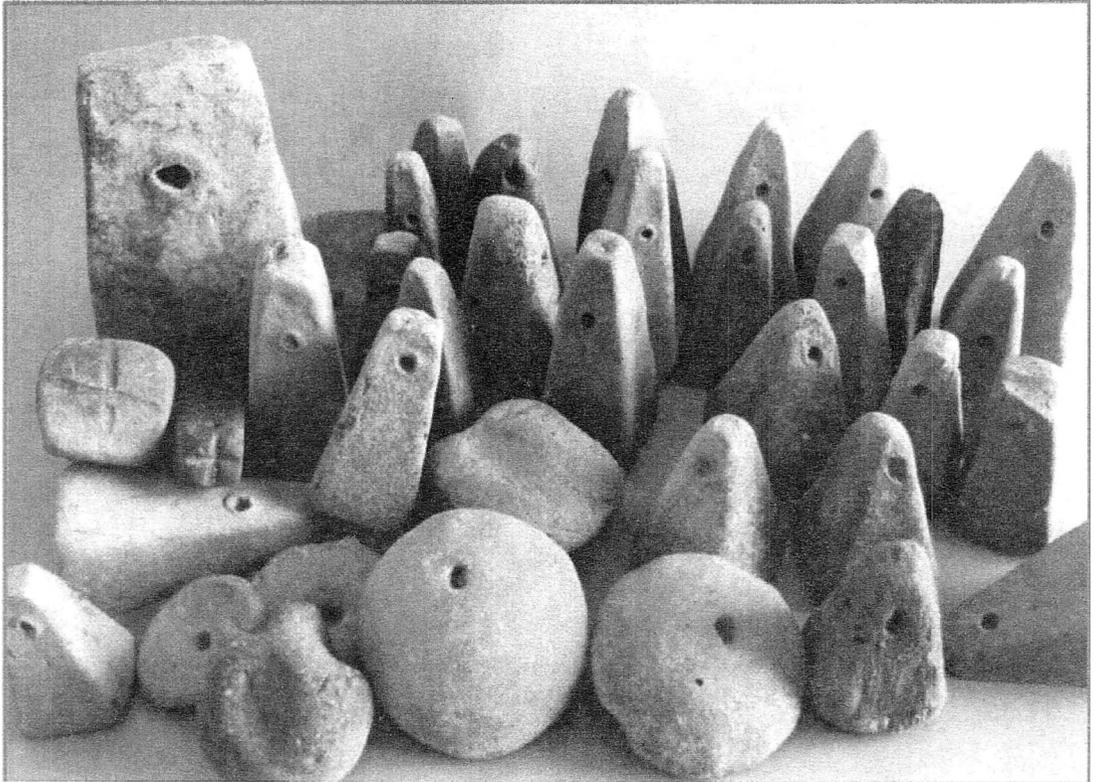


Figure 30.
Loom weight with a K (kappa) on the apex.

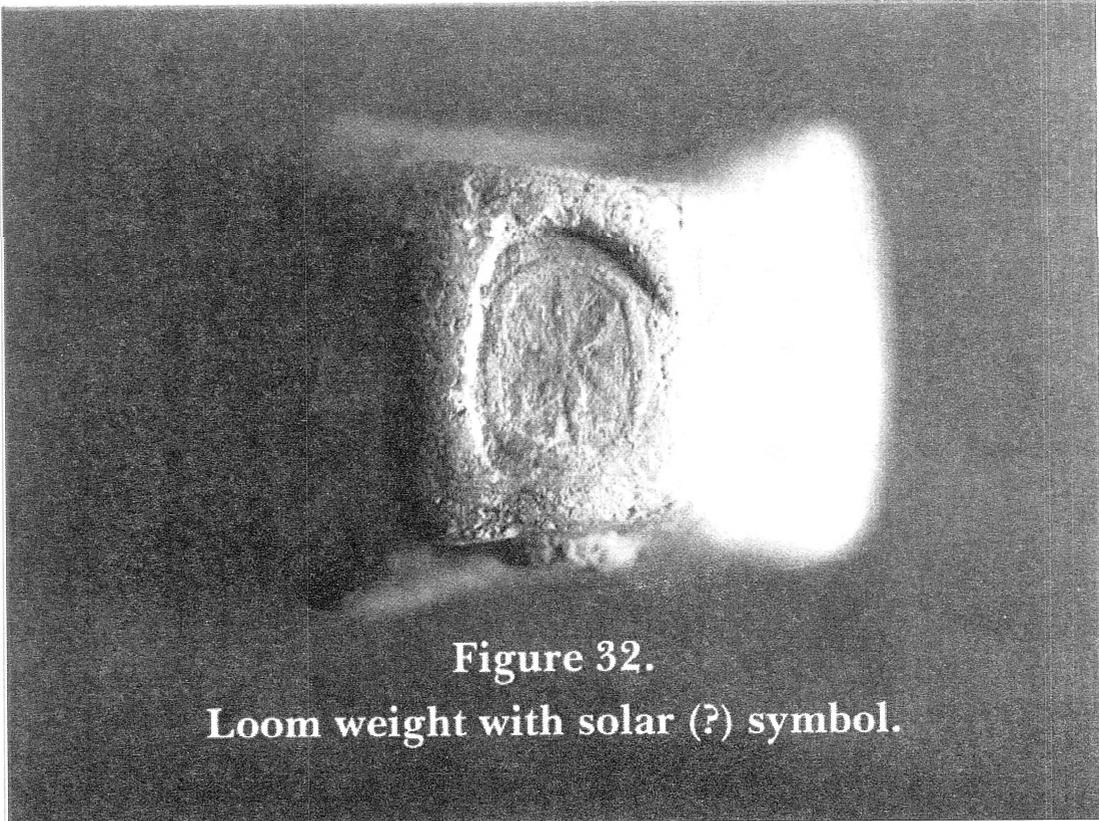
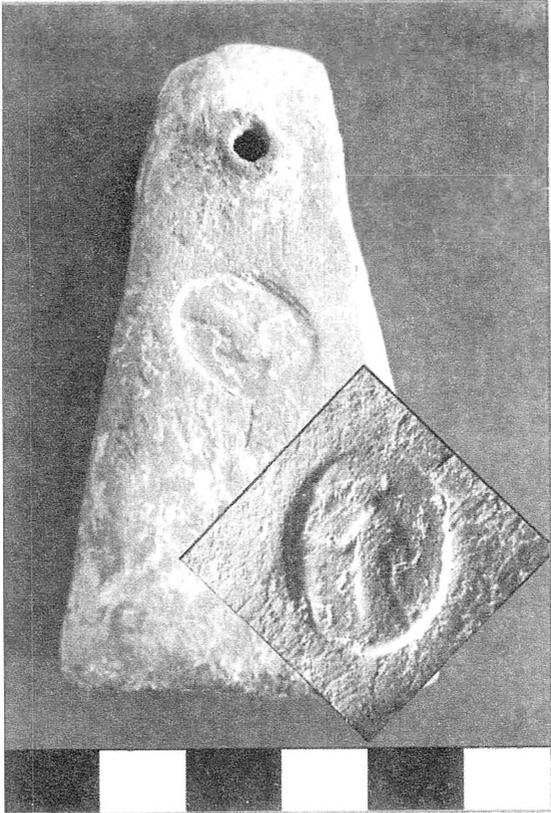


Figure 32.
Loom weight with solar (?) symbol.