

CYPRriot ARTISTS OF THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

BY J. B. HENNESSY

SITUATED in the North-east corner of the Mediterranean, the island of Cyprus has long been a mecca for archaeologists. From the beginnings of settlement in the Neolithic period its history has been interwoven with that of the surrounding mainland areas and the Aegean, yet, in spite of this close contact, its people have ever been noted for their independence and individuality. As far back as we can see in the archaeological record, this individuality has been visible in the art of the island and nowhere more so than in the pottery of the succeeding ages. The ceramic artists of the island chose to form their pottery without mechanical aids until the period of the Late Bronze Age (c. 1600–1550 B.C.)—even though the wheel had been in use for some 1500 years, only a few miles to the East, in Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine.

The care expended on each of these creations is evident in any collection of Cypriot Bronze Age pottery and was a feature which made the products of these early artists much sought after by the world's major museums. The tombs of Ancient Cyprus have been pillaged with a thoroughness which is rare even in the Near East nor, indeed, has this interest been one confined to the last century. I remember seeing, some twenty years ago, the deposits from a Roman soldier's grave, exhibited in a local museum in England. Mixed in with the local Roman grave goods were two Late Bronze Age juglets from Cyprus. The soldier had obviously been stationed there early on in his career and he was probably not the first and certainly not the last person quartered in the island to be attracted by the works of the Bronze Age artists.

This appeal, both to individuals and museums, has, however, helped to create a serious gap in the archaeology of the island. To the present day our knowledge of the Early and Middle Bronze Age periods (c. 2300–1600 B.C.) in Cyprus is derived almost entirely from tomb groups, for it is only from the burials that complete pieces can be sought to fill the museums and private collections. As yet there has been no systematic exploration and stratification of the settlements of the period. This has meant that the succession of events in this important phase of the island's history has been entirely created on an imagined technological and typological development of tomb types, burial customs, and, most of all, on the pottery and other small objects which form the offerings to the deceased in the tombs. The pottery of Bronze Age Cyprus has been analysed, typed, named and re-named until it seems that even this greatest aid to archaeological reconstruction must be exhausted.

The desperate need is for the proper stratigraphical excavation of settlements ; but until this happens, and one hopes in the not too distant future, there seems no harm in wringing a little extra information from the already well-worked pottery of earlier excavations.

Whilst recently working through the collection of Early Cypriot pottery in the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia,¹ it seemed that the work of a number of individual artists could be isolated amongst those who had decorated the vessels of the Early and Middle Bronze Ages.

Stewart² had already noted a general progression in the shape and decoration of Early Cypriot pottery from large to smaller forms and from free-field to zonal ornament. It appeared worthwhile to attempt to take these observations a step further. It was apparent that if more precise limits of space and time could be set to the various styles, one would have a useful check on the accepted temporal subdivisions of the Bronze Age archaeology of the island and perhaps some indication of internal trading patterns.

At first sight the work of one person appeared to stand out very clearly.

The clays of the pots were uniform, slip and polish were consistent, both in colour and treatment, the incised ornament, with a basic minimum of patterns, was highly distinctive and individual quirks were often visible in the execution of the design.

In memory of the man who has done most to elucidate the Early Bronze Age of Cyprus I propose that this individual should be named the Stewart artist. He appears in the list below as Stewart No. 2. I have had the opportunity to look at some sixty pieces³ attributed to this artist and I have no doubt of their single origin.

In addition to this initial identification the work of at least ten other artists can be isolated amongst the various collections of the pottery of the period. It is not intended to treat all of these here, as this can be little more than a first notice of what will become a major study. The four artists dealt with hereunder will be treated in chronological order.

THE ARTISTS

Stewart No. 1

Of the eighty pieces which can be attributed to this artist all except two are from the Great North Coast cemetery at Vounous.⁴ The two exceptions are from

¹ Research in the Museum was connected with the publication of the late Professor J. R. B. Stewart's last four excavations in Cyprus. The writer is grateful to the Australian Research Grants Committee whose support has made this work possible.

² Stewart, J. R. B., *Handbook to the Nicholson Museum*, Second edition (Sydney, 1948), pp. 127-40.

³ I am most grateful to Dr. Vassos Karageorghis, Director, and Mrs. Angelike Peiridou of the Department of Antiquities and the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, for their generous assistance in this research.

⁴ Stewart, E. and J. R., *Vounous 1937-38* (Lund, 1950); Dikaios, P., *The Excavations at Vounous-Bellapaise in Cyprus 1931-2*, *Archaeologia* 88 (1938) pp. 1 ff.; Schaeffer, C. F. A., *Missions en Chypre 1932-35* (Paris, 1936).

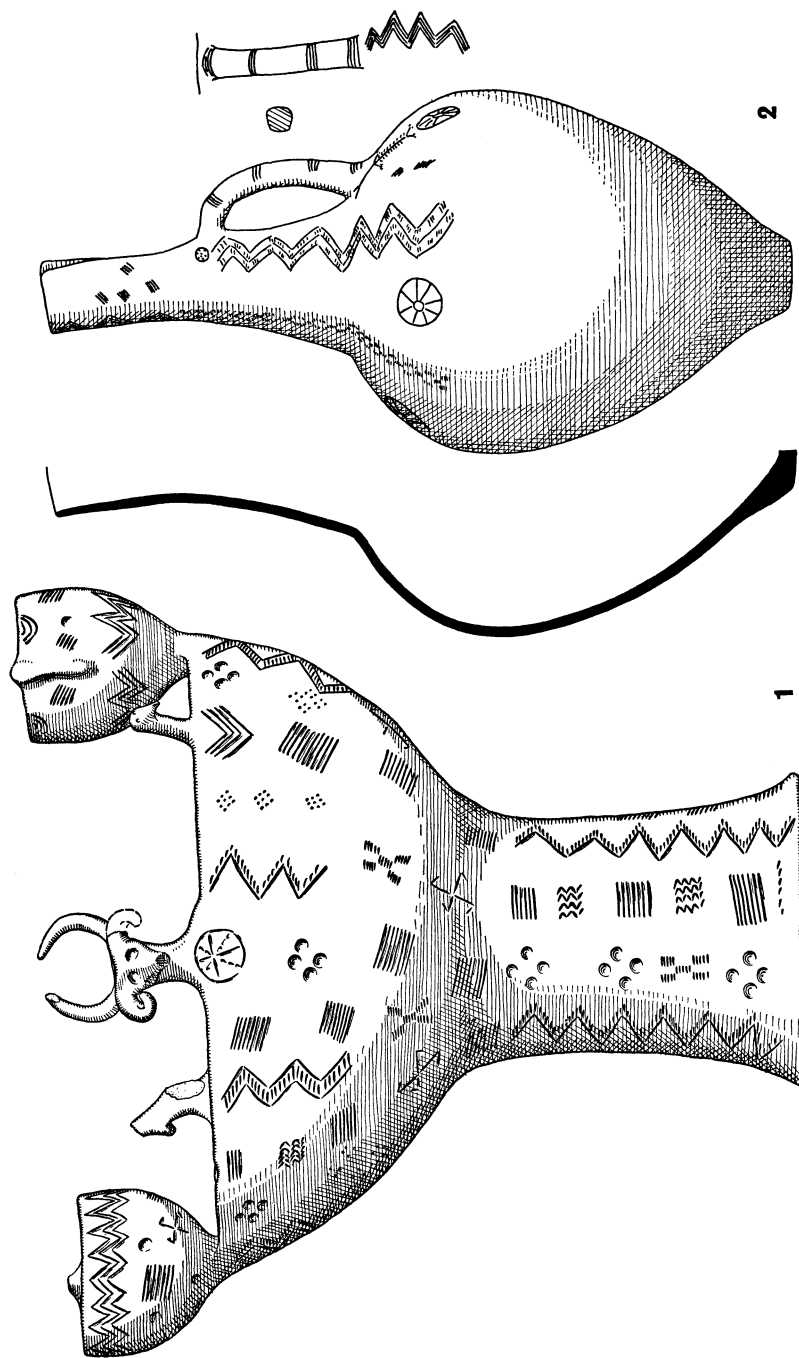
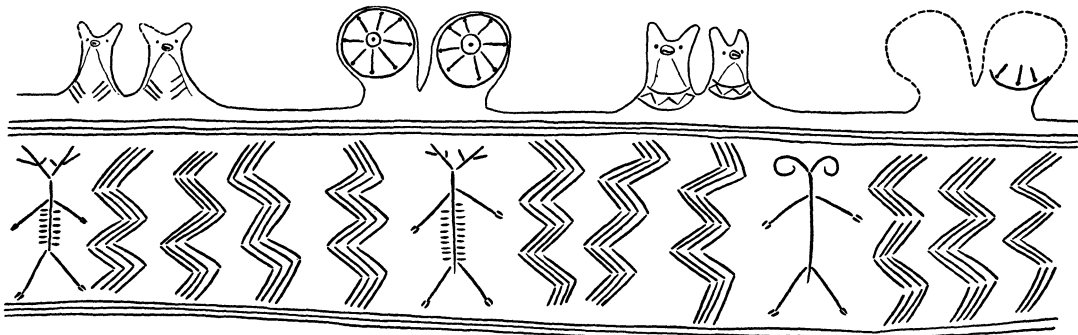
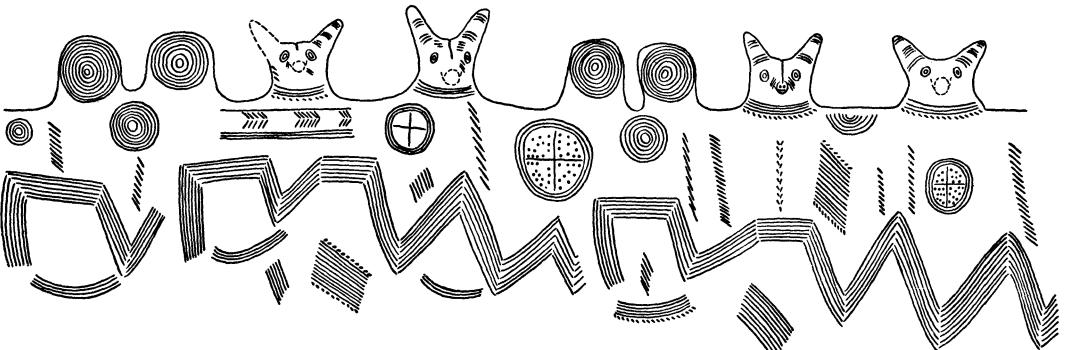


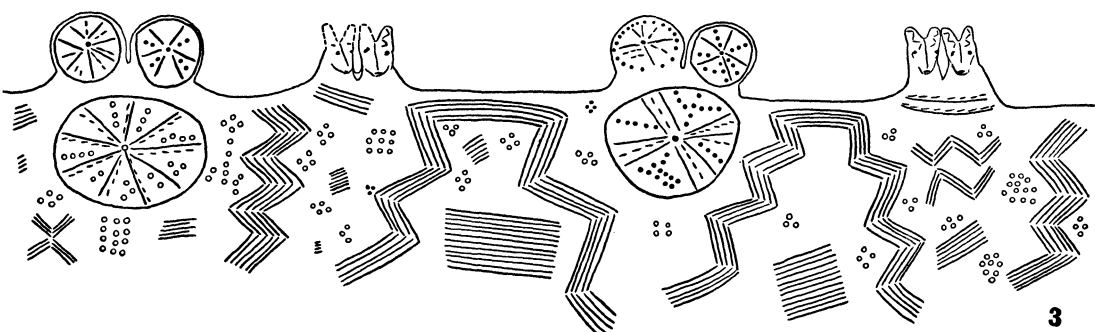
FIG. 1.—Stewart artist No. 1.



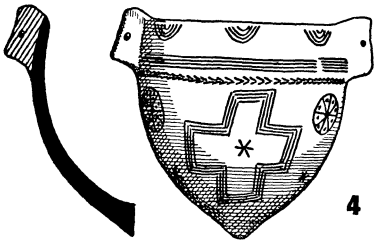
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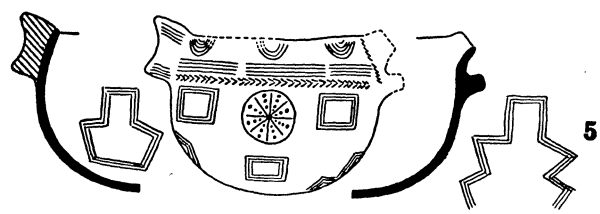
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FIG. 2.—Stewart artist No. 1.

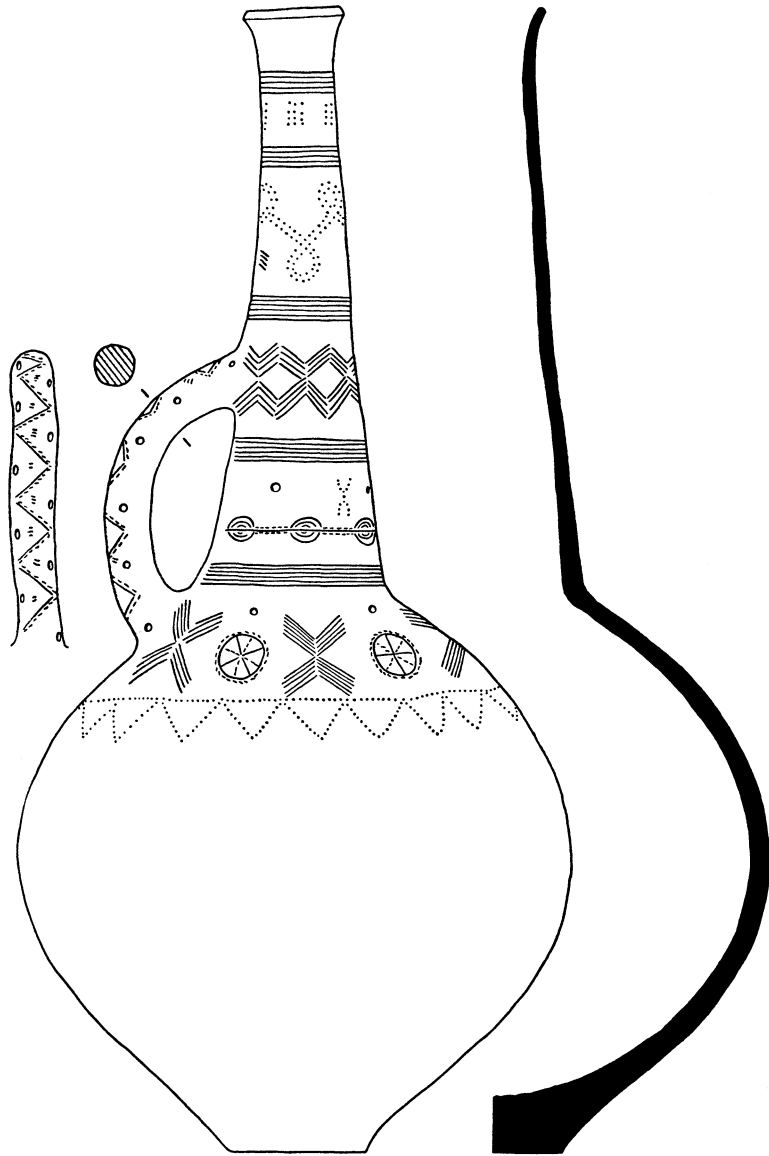


FIG. 3.—Stewart artist No. 1.

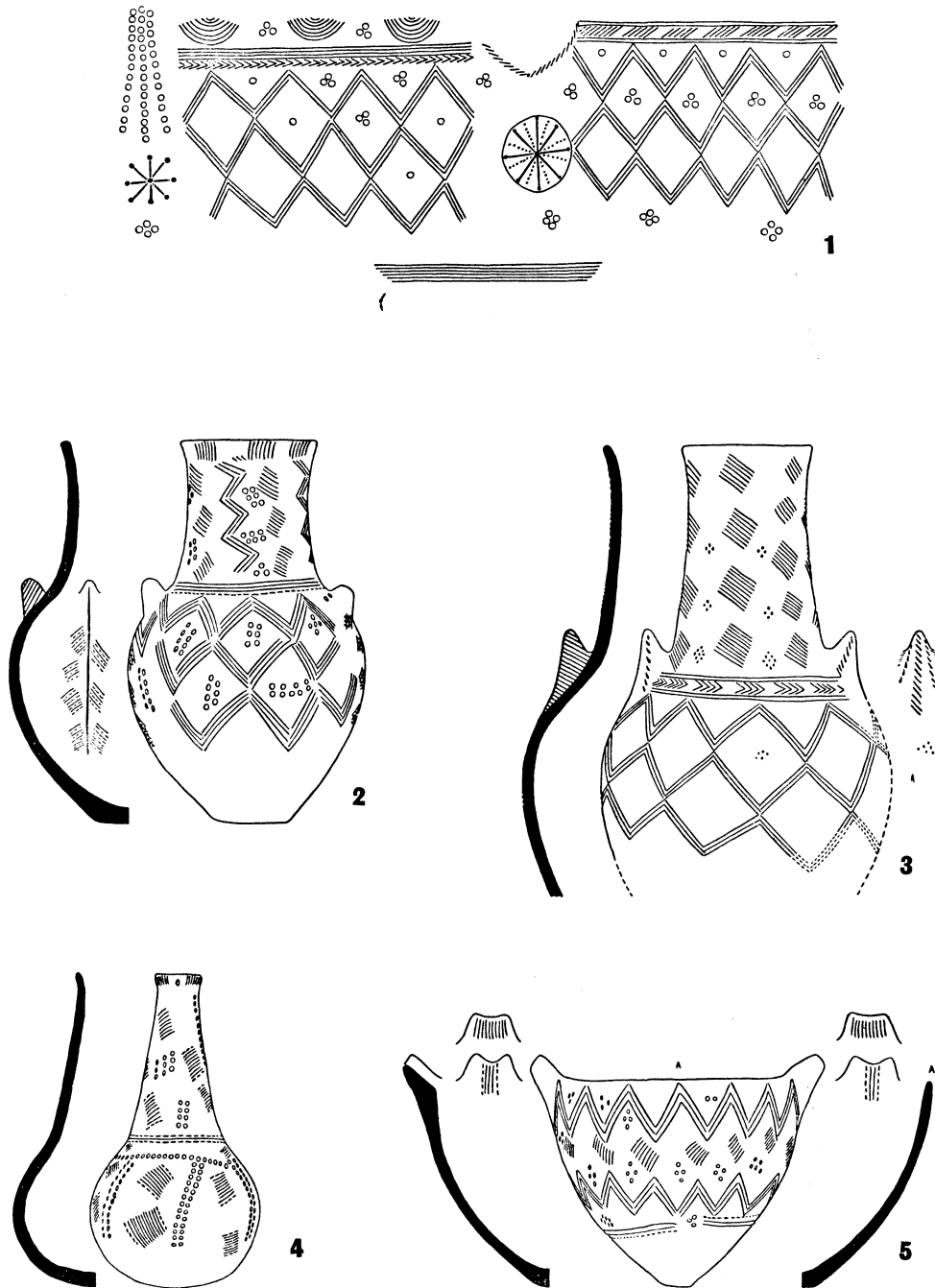


FIG. 4.—Stewart artist No. 1.

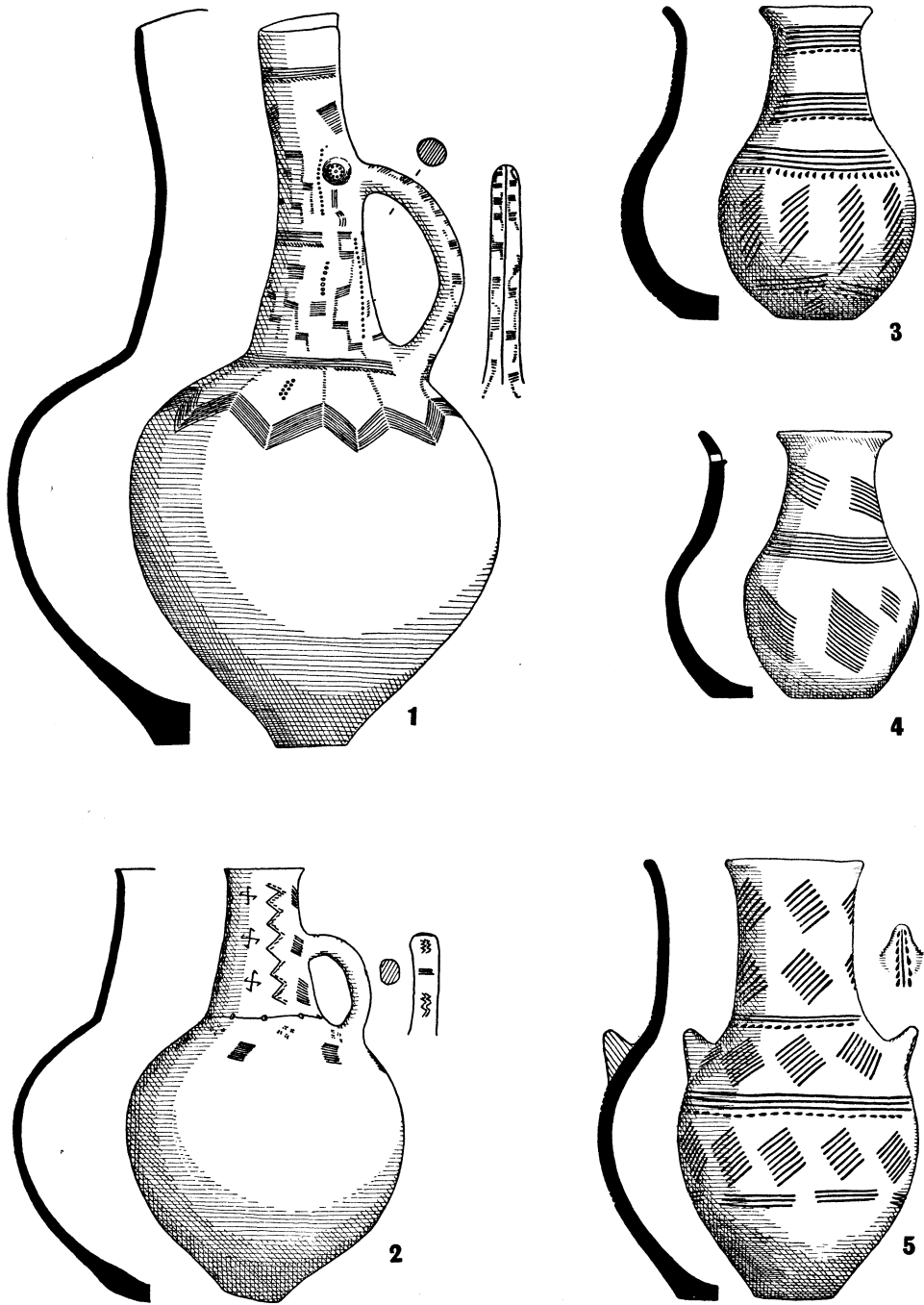


FIG. 5.—Stewart artist No. 1.

Stewart's excavations at Palealona⁵ and both are now in the Museum of the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of New England, Armidale.

This artist is responsible for perhaps the finest of all the Early Bronze Age ceramics. He appears to have been both potter and decorator. The clays are uniform in the use of tiny grits and straw as temper, the vessels are well slipped, usually dark red and both polished and burnished to a high lustre. He uses a wide variety of shapes which include magnificent large cut-away spout and round-mouthed jugs (Fig. 1 : 2 ; Fig. 3) ; bottles (Fig. 4 : 4) ; ear-lug flasks (Fig. 4 : 2, 3) ; tulip and horn-lug bowls (Fig. 4 : 1, 5)⁶ and he appears to have been responsible for a majority of the fascinating cult vessels (Fig. 1 : 1 ; Fig. 2 : 1-3) of the Early Cypriot I period.

The incised decoration, using a wide variety of symbols, is always very carefully drawn and favours the free-field style, although broad horizontal zones appear on some of the larger jugs and cult vessels (Figs. 2, 3). The most favoured motifs are based on the circle, often referred to as sun discs on the cult vessels (Figs. 1, 2, 3) : dots usually in groups (Figs. 1, 2, 3) ; stitch patterns (Figs. 1, 3, 5) and groups of horizontal or oblique lines (Figs. 1-5) ; occasionally joined by shorter lines to give a running pattern (Fig. 5 : 1). Equally distinctive, but less common, is his use of schematic human or animal forms (Figs. 1 : 2 ; 2 : 1) ; reversed swastikas (Figs. 1 : 1 ; 5 : 2) and scrolls (Fig. 3).⁷ He also has the marked peculiarity of occasionally introducing a squared top into the carefully drawn running chevron patterns (Figs. 2 : 2, 3, 5) ;⁸ and again appears to be responsible for the only use of concentric rectangles (Fig. 2 : 5) in the Early Cypriot repertoire. Another pattern unique to this artist resembles the five spot on a dice (Figs. 1 : 1 ; 2).⁹

The pieces which can be attributed to this individual all come from tomb groups classified by Stewart¹⁰ as Early Cypriot I and appear to belong to the earlier and middle phases of the period.

It is possible that another group of pots (Fig. 5 : 3, 4, 5)¹¹ restricted in shape to bottles and ear-lug flasks and restricted in their decoration to the simpler linear patterns employed by Stewart No. 1 are representative of the earlier work of this artist.

⁵ In preparation.

⁶ See also Stewart, J. R., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, Vol. IV, Part 1A* (Lund, 1962) ; Fig. LVIII : 4 ; Fig. LX : 2-4 ; Fig. LXXIX : 1 ; Fig. CXXXIII : 10, 12 ; Fig. CXXXIV : 17, 18 ; Fig. CXXXVIII : 7. Many other pieces which can be attributed to this artist will also be seen in these plates. A full list will appear in a major report on the artists of the Early Bronze Age in Cyprus.

⁷ *Ibid.* See also Fig. LXXIX : 1.

⁸ *Ibid.* See also Figs. LX : 2-4 ; CV : 9 ; CVI : 5.

⁹ Groups of five horizontal lines arranged in the pattern of a dice five on Fig. 1 : 1 or as a running pattern up the neck of Fig. 1 : 2.

¹⁰ Stewart, J. R., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, Vol. IV, Part 1A*, pp. 388-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.* See also Fig. XCIX : 5, 6, 7, 15 ; CI : 18 ; CII : 3 ; CIII : 1, 3, 4, 6 ; CVI : 3. There could be an interesting connection between this group and those of the south coast sites, Fig. CVII : 2, 4. It is also of interest that the designs on this early group appear to be closely allied to the simple incised stitch designs of the Philia Culture.

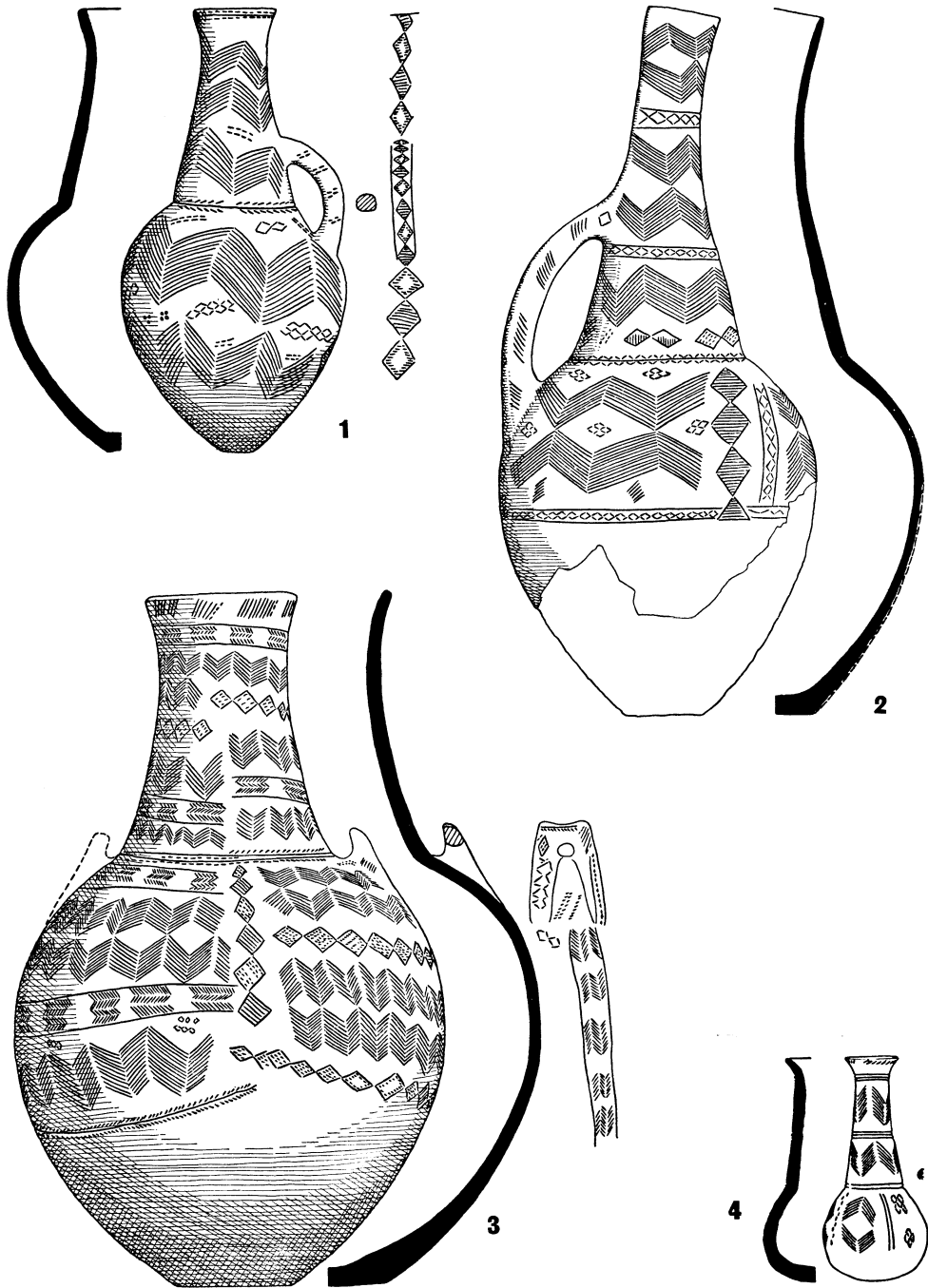


FIG. 6.—Stewart artist No. 2.

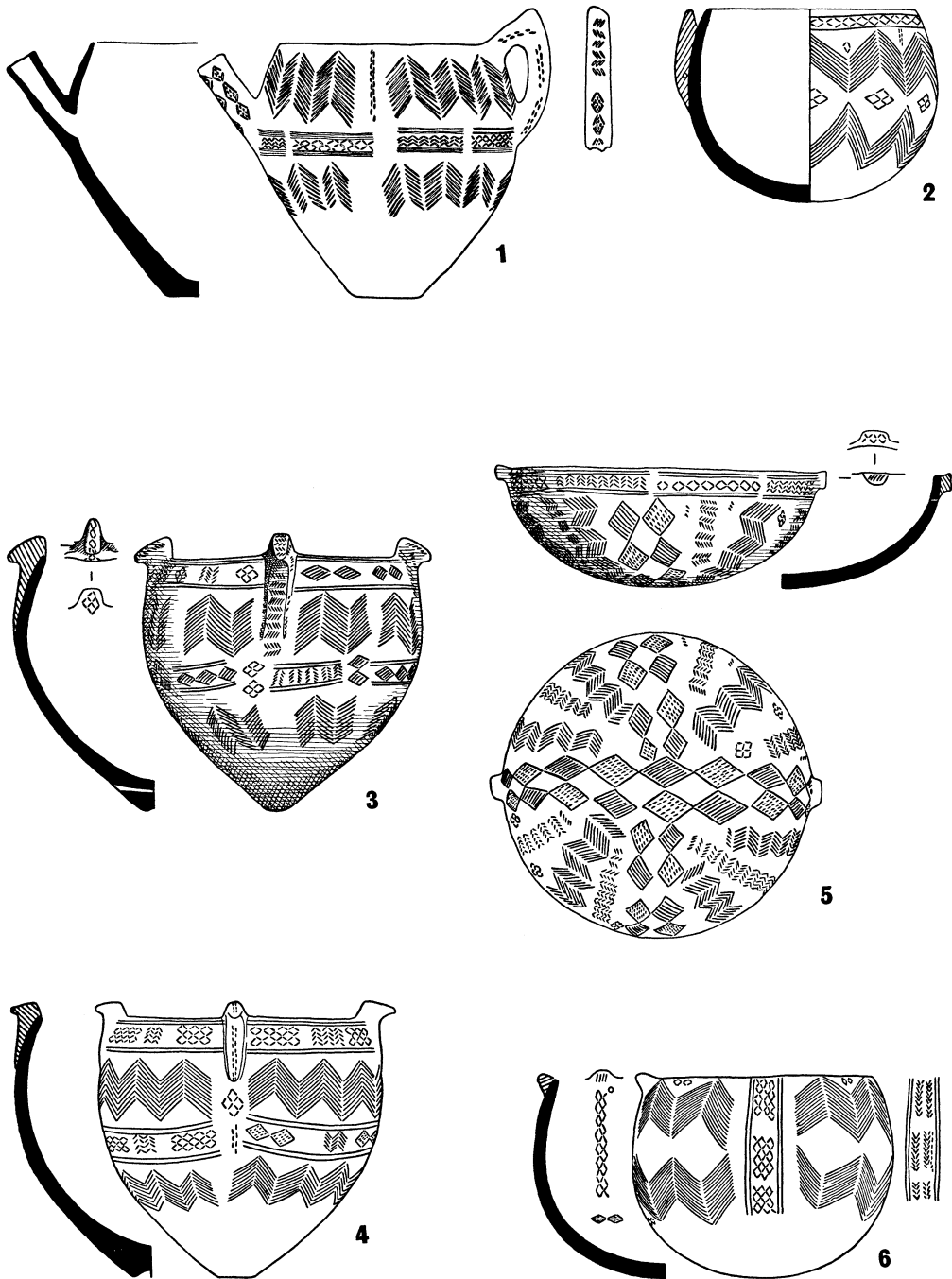


FIG. 7.—Stewart artist No. 2.

Stewart No. 2

This artist favours cylindrical neck jugs, mainly of medium size (Fig. 6 : 1);¹² ear-lug pots (Fig. 6 : 3)¹³ and tulip bowls (Fig. 7 : 3, 4).¹⁴ Rarer shapes are horn-lug bowls (Fig. 7 : 2);¹⁵ broad open bowls (Fig. 7 : 5); goblets¹⁶ and small gourd-shaped flasks (Fig. 6 : 4).¹⁷ The small teapot (Fig. 7 : 1) appears to be unique. He also seems to be the man responsible for much of the interesting and individual pottery models, which occur mainly at the site of Vounous. Models of horns, brushes or combs, dagger sheaths and spindles all show a uniformity in manufacture and decoration.¹⁸

In only one case have I been able to isolate the work of this man on the cut-away spout jugs of the earlier period of the Early Bronze Age (Fig. 6 : 2).

An inspection of the clays and surface treatment of all these vessels shows a marked uniformity. The clays used are of two kinds. The first is a rather friable, laminated clay with a generous grit and fibre inclusion, the other an extremely fine, well-levigated clay with only tiny grits used as a temper.

The surface treatment of the vessels is always a very careful, even polish and the artist favours practically a 50 per cent division of the pottery surface blackened. The slip colour over the remainder of the surface is usually a light orange-red. A number of pieces are in the rarer black-polished ware.¹⁹

The incised ornament of these vessels is highly individual and repetitive. His major theme of ornament is based on a diamond pattern and within this the most distinctive element is a tiny diamond formed by four separate stabs (Figs. 6 and 7). These occur singly, in pendant or horizontal lines or in more elaborate patterns. Larger diamond patterns either completely or partially filled with dot, stab or hatched ornament are equally common (Figs. 6 and 7).

One surprising feature in the otherwise very carefully drawn patterns, a feature which perhaps heightens his individuality, is that one in a series of these patterns is often unfinished (Fig. 6 : 1 ; 7 : 6).

Another hallmark of Stewart No. 2 is the widespread use of very carefully drawn multiple chevrons in which several individual characteristics can be noticed.

¹² *Ibid.* See also Figs. LXXIX : 2, 4 ; LXXV : 9-15.

¹³ *Ibid.* See also Fig. CVIII : 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* See also Figs. CXXXIII : 11 ; CXXXIV : 19, 24 ; CXXXV : 1, 2, 4, 17, 18 ; CXXXVI : 1, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* See also Fig. CXXXVIII : 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Fig. CXXXV : 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* See also Fig. CL : 6, 20. One splendid example has been found at Karmi (Lapatsa) Tomb 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Figs. 1 90-91 and see also Stewart, E. and J. R., *Vounous, op. cit.*, Pls. III, XCVI-XCVIII.

¹⁹ Schaeffer, C. F. A., *op. cit.*, Pl. XVII : 2 ; see also Stewart, J. R., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, Vol. IV, Part IA*, Fig. CLIII : 8-11, 15-17.

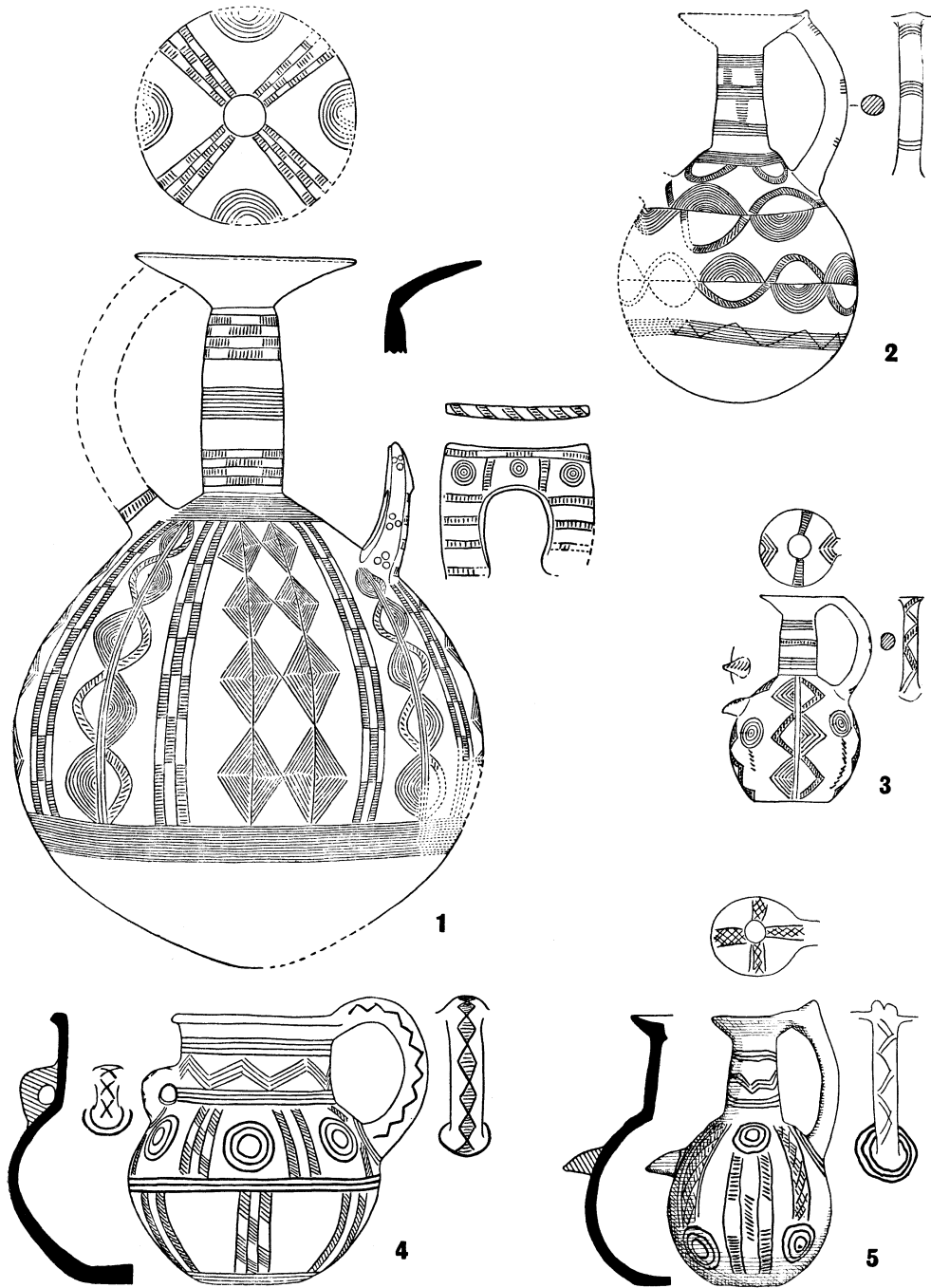


FIG. 8.—1-3. Lapithos artist ; 4, 5. Dhenia artist.

The multiple lines are never joined at the apex, the start of each line is marked by a deep stab showing a firmness which was to become evident in the completed line (Figs. 6; 7). Multiple chevron patterns are used as single elements but also often antithetically opposed. The small stab lines used for the tiny diamond patterning are again occasionally used in small multiple chevron patterns (Fig. 7: 4-6). Another rarer pattern is for groups of alternating horizontal, vertical or chevron pattern lines divided by small dots or stabs (Fig. 7: 1, 4). The artist also, for zonal subdivision, will frequently use a very carefully drawn stitch pattern (Fig. 6: 1). Ornament may be rarely free-field; but is mostly zonal, and this ties in very well with his suspected position in the Early Cypriot period covering the latter part of Early Cypriot I and the earlier phase of Early Cypriot II. Examples of his work mainly occur in Stewart's tombs from Vounous, but a considerable number of pieces are also figured in the excavations of Dikaïos²⁰ and Schaeffer.²¹ There is one example from Lapithos²² and a number of pieces from Karmi (Lapatsa), Fig. 7: 1.²³

Lapithos Artist

A third individual seems to have been centred at the north coast site of Lapithos. Considerably later in the Early Bronze Age and, indeed, transitional into the beginnings of the Middle Cypriot period his work is again outstanding for the great care taken in the execution of the designs.

Typical of his work are the antithetically opposed concentric and hatched semi-circles or triangles used to give a final divided diamond or circle pattern (Fig. 8: 1-3).²⁴ Hatched chevron or ladder patterns also predominate (Fig. 8: 1-3). The decoration appears to be confined to small Red polished gourd juglets, again noteworthy for the close parallels in the proportions of their shape. There is one example of this artist's work from Dikaïos' excavations at Vounous.²⁵

It is possible that an equally carefully drawn group from Lapithos is again the work of this person.²⁶

Dhenia Artist

Later still and well into the early years of the Middle Bronze Age a fourth artist can be isolated—probably centred at Dhenia where the material appears to be mainly represented.

The Dhenia Artist favours bold, deeply incised concentric circles and hatched ladder patterns (Figs. 8: 4, 5). His work is quite distinct from that of the Lapithos Artist in that the design is less carefully executed and the hatching in the ladder

²⁰ Dikaïos, P., *op. cit.*, Pls. XLVI: 1; XLVIII: 6; LI: 5.

²¹ Schaeffer, C. F. A., *op. cit.*, Pls. XVI: 2; XVII: 2; XVIII: 2; XXI: 2.

²² Lapithos Tomb 311B: 19. Dated by Stewart to E.C. IIIA (Survival).

²³ See also footnote 19.

²⁴ See also Stewart, *op. cit.*, Fig. XCI: 13.

²⁵ Dikaïos, P., *op. cit.*, Pl. LIII: 15 (Tomb 21: 30), dated by Stewart to Middle Cypriot 1A.

²⁶ Stewart, J. R., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, Vol. IV, Part 1A*, Figs. XCI: 12; XCIV: 8; CXIX: 3.

patterns tends to be oblique rather than the very careful horizontal hatching of the Lapithos Artist. Small bowls and juglets appear to be the most common shapes and some of the latter have been found as far afield as Lapithos,²⁷ again, as with the Stewart Artists, demonstrating a localized trade in the pottery of the period.

These few remarks are intended as nothing more than a preliminary suggestion of what could prove to be a most useful analysis of the Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery of the island. The work of quite a number of other artists is readily visible in a glance through the plates of *S.C.E. IV, 1A*, e.g. (1) Figs. LIX : 3 ; CXXXII : 8. (2) Figs. XCIII : 2 ; XCIV : 1, 3, 4 ; but it will require a much more intensive survey of the pottery itself as well as the design before a final volume can be produced. Spectrographic analysis of the clays and a corpus of finger prints, often visible but smudged, in the interior of the vessels, could also throw interesting light on the problem.

²⁷ Stewart, J. R., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, Vol. IV, Part 1A*, Fig. CXL : 6. See also Figs. CXL : 7 ; CLIV : 15, for other examples from Dhenia.