



A World-Altering Technology

Script Development in Predynastic Upper Egypt

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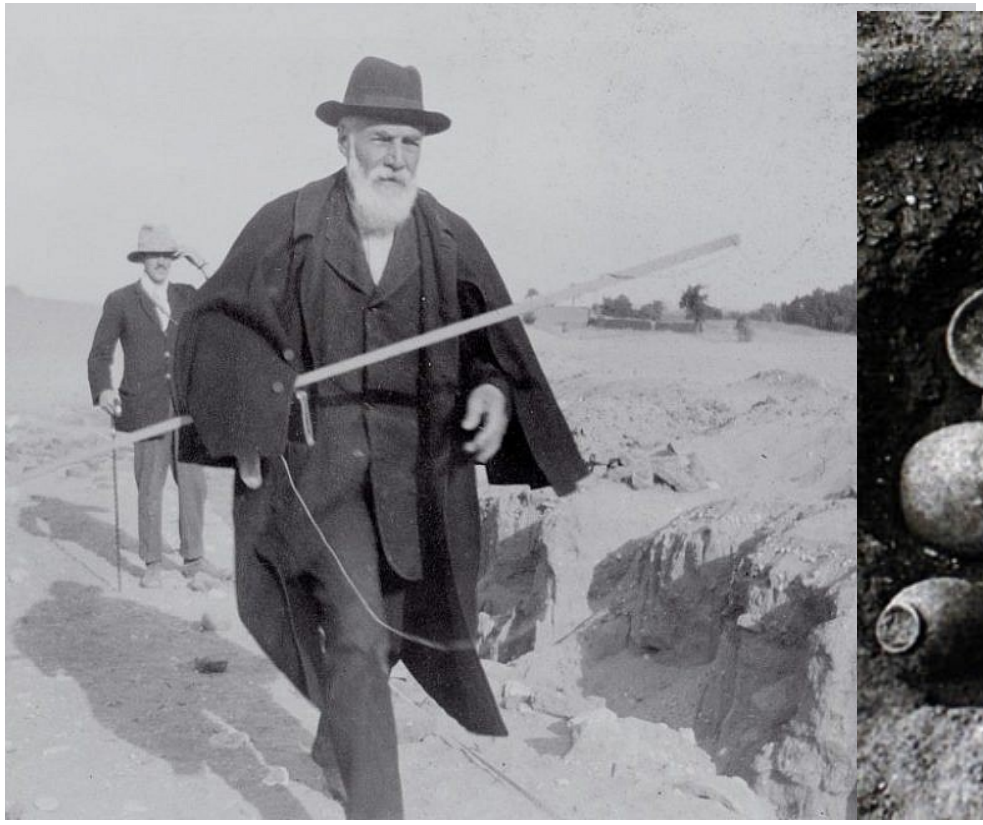
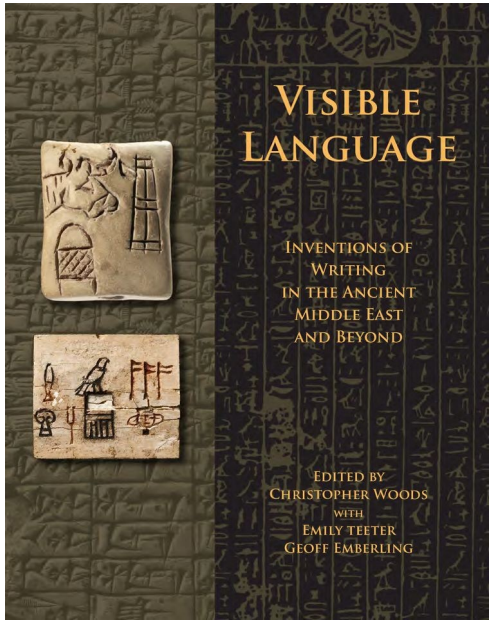
Introduction: inventing the Predynastic (3,900 – 3,100 BCE)

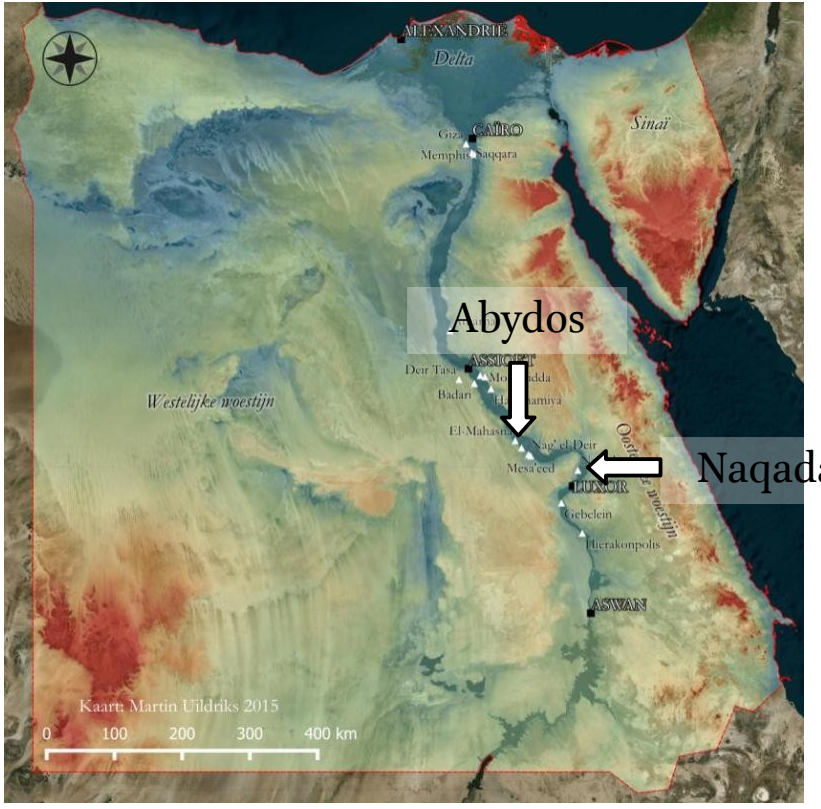


Burial at Naqada

Introduction: problem and question

- **Writing**
  - 19th century model: history disconnected from prehistory
  - "a conventionalized system of visual communication representing language" (MacArthur 2010, 115)
  - "...continuous speech" (Stauder 2010, 137; Regulski 2013)
  - "a visual code" (Stauder 2010, 139)
- **Abydos**
  - *When* do graphics behave as writing? (proto-writing)
  - *How* do graphics start behaving as writing?





Introduction: two (?) sign inventories from U-j at Abydos

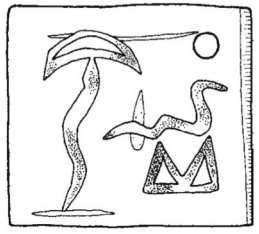
(Naqada III ~ c. 3,300 BCE)

LG?

FIGURE 6.2. Dipinto from Tomb U-j depicting scorpion and tree signs. Perhaps to be interpreted as "Plantation of King Scorpion." Scale 1:2

ꜣbw LG?

grḥ



ḏw(w.t)

SC?

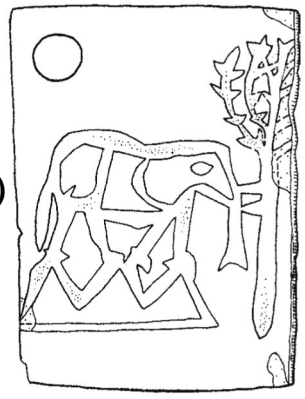


FIGURE 6.4. Tag from Tomb U-j, perhaps reading *ḏw grḥ* "Mountain of Darkness," or "Western Mountain." Scale 2:1

FIGURE 6.5. Tag from Tomb U-j, perhaps reading *ꜣbw* "Elephantine." Scale 2:1

s(.t) *bꜣ*

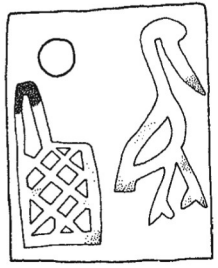


FIGURE 6.6. Tag from Tomb U-j, perhaps reading *bꜣst* "Bubastis" (?). Scale 2:1

← Reading order; LG = Logogram; SC = Semantic classifier

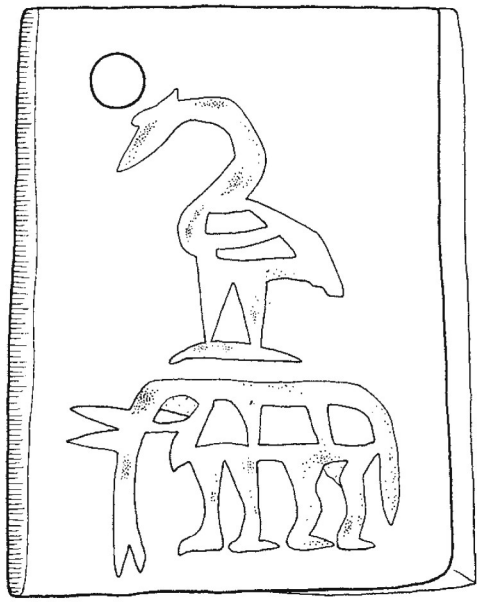
Introduction: principles of writing in U-j

- **Indexed to language:**
  - Single unambiguous string of speech
  - Particular message (place-names)
- **Calibrated (same size; see image on the right)**
- **Independent from referent?**
- **Drawn from earlier graphic inventories**

FIGURE 6.3. Tag from Tomb U-j. Note the calibration of the size of signs to each other. Scale 2:1

Bird

Elephant?

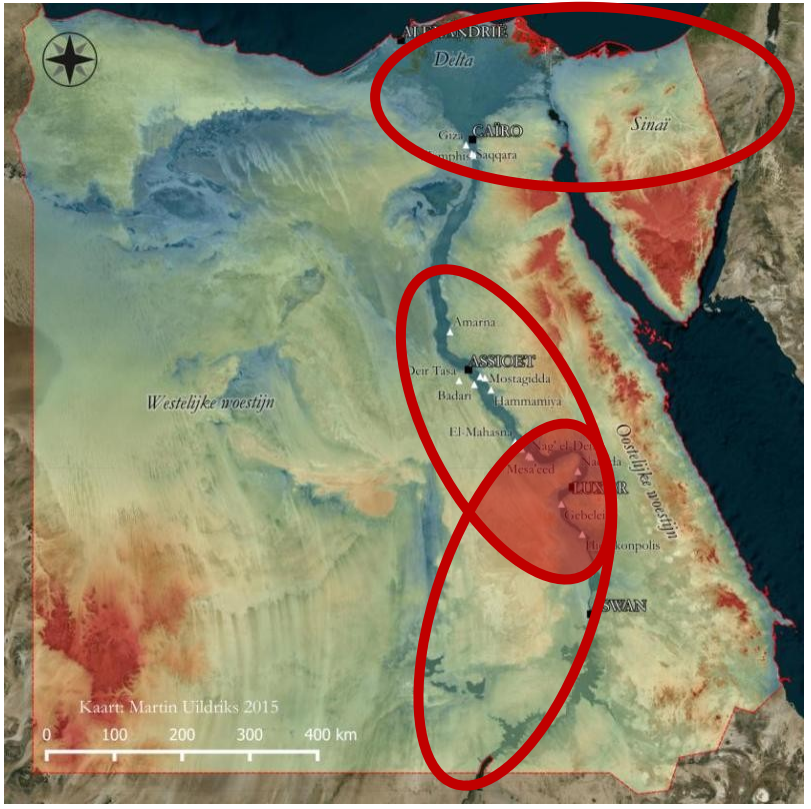


(Notes: the elephant sign is assumed and resembles other signs and the bird has striking parallels in imagery considered non-linguistic)

Introduction: *how* did graphic recording of language develop?

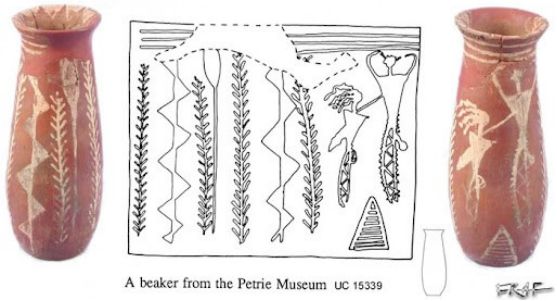
1) **Sign inventories originate in various Predynastic sources**
   - Ceramics & rock art: spread over large territory (see map)
   - Increasingly organized along specific narrative and linguistic functions
   - Considerable stylistic regional variance
2) **Visual vocabularies developed within two if not more communities of practice**
3) **U-j is the result of Predynastic linguistic development; not only antecedent to dynastic hieroglyphics.**

Predynastic imagery ⟷ **Dynastic hieroglyphics**

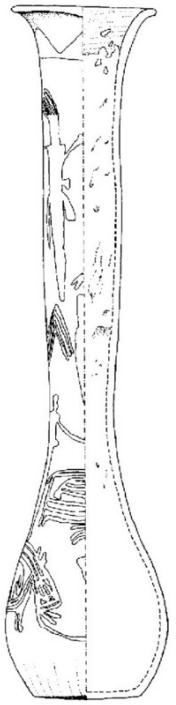


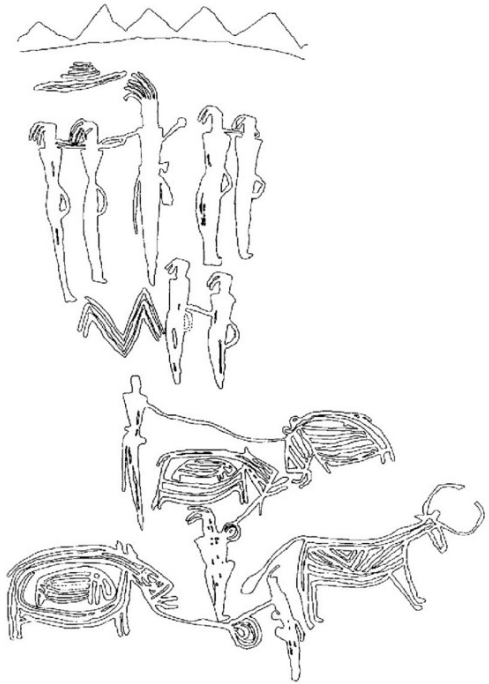
Predynastic Ceramics: C-Ware

(Naqada I ~ c. 3,900 – 3,700 BCE)



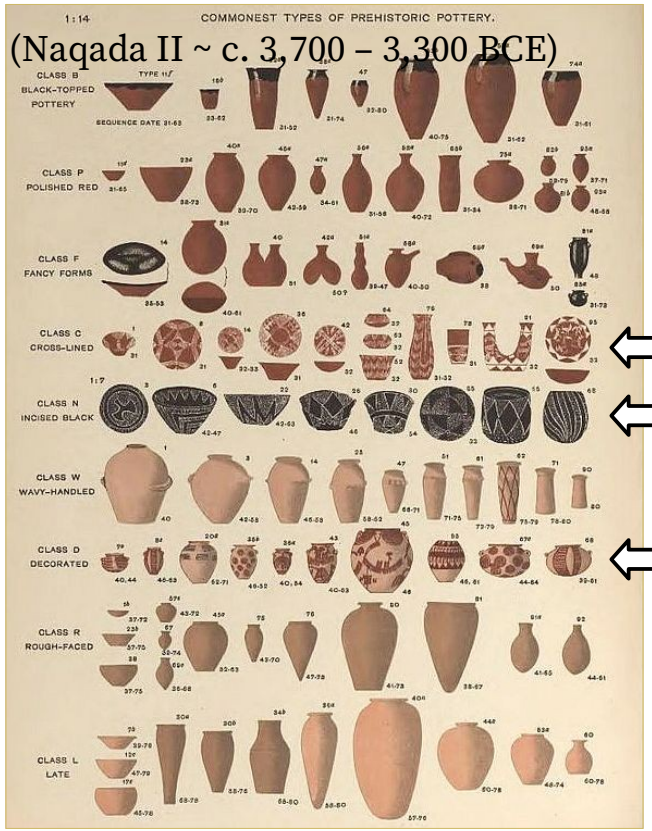
A beaker from the Petrie Museum UC 15339





Predynastic Ceramics: D-Ware

(Naqada II ~ c. 3,700 – 3,300 BCE)



C-Ware

N-Ware

D-Ware

Naqada IIC/D (c. 3,500 – 3,350)

Naqada IID (c. 3,400 – 3,300)

Naqada IIIA (c. 3,350 – 3,300)

Notes: N-Class ceramics (Nubian imports) are not discussed in this paper; dates based on style and approximate

Predynastic Ceramics: D-Ware

(Naqada IIC/D ~ c. 3,500 – 3,350 BCE)

Predynastic Ceramics: C-Ware & D-Ware (1)

(A-G)

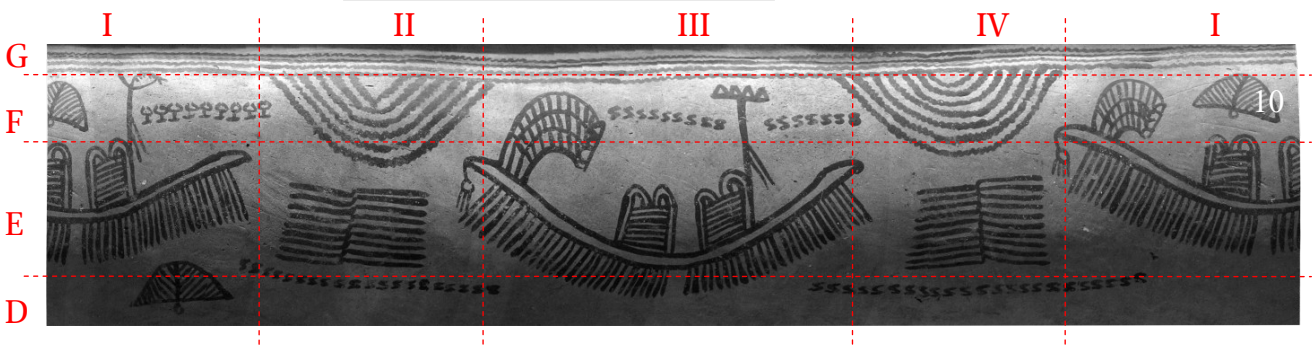
(D-G)

(AB, D-G)

(A-D)

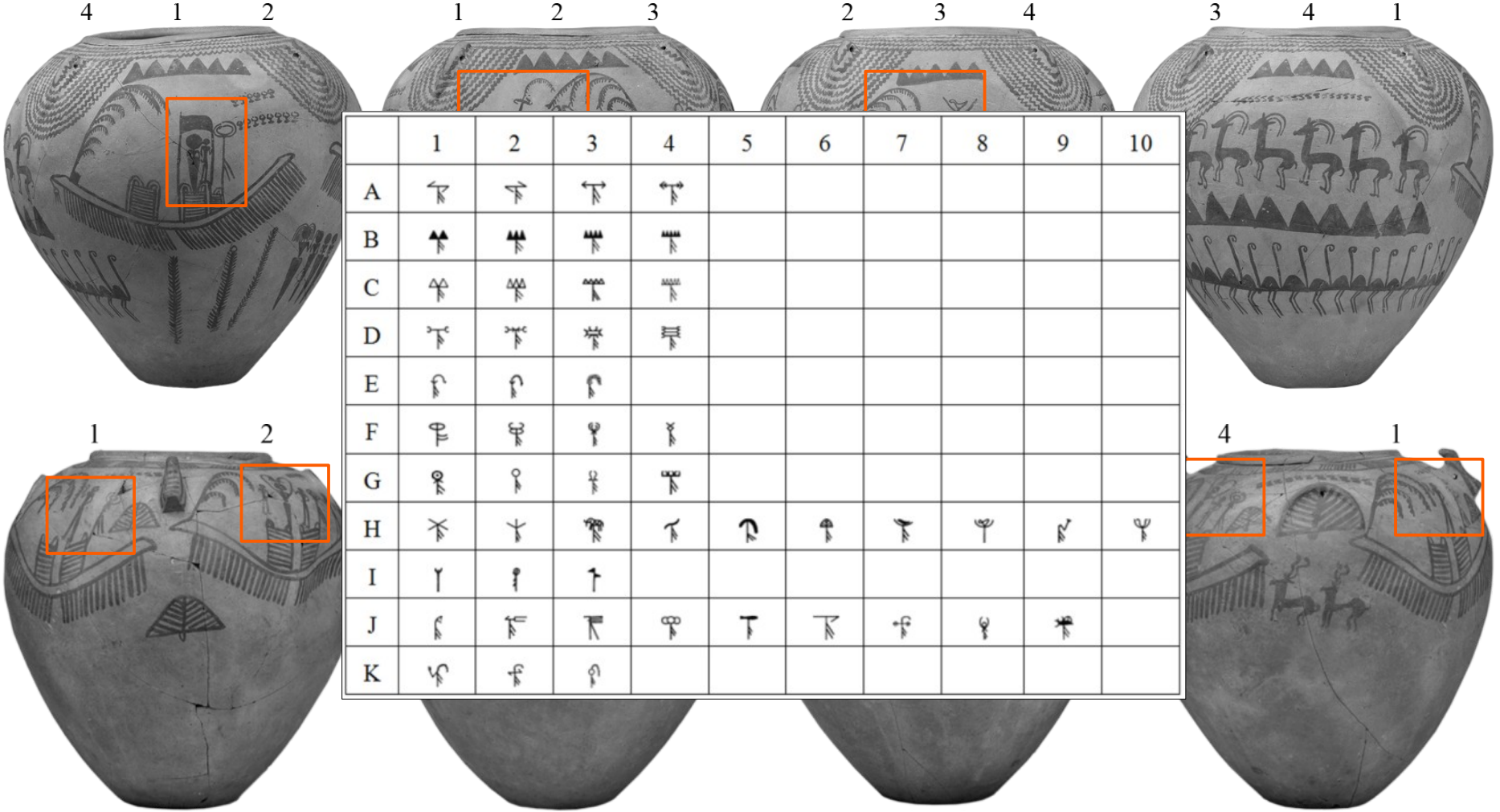
(A-D)

(Note: lug-handles broken off)



Note how handles (type or absence) follow decorative scheme

Predynastic Ceramics: narration in D-Ware



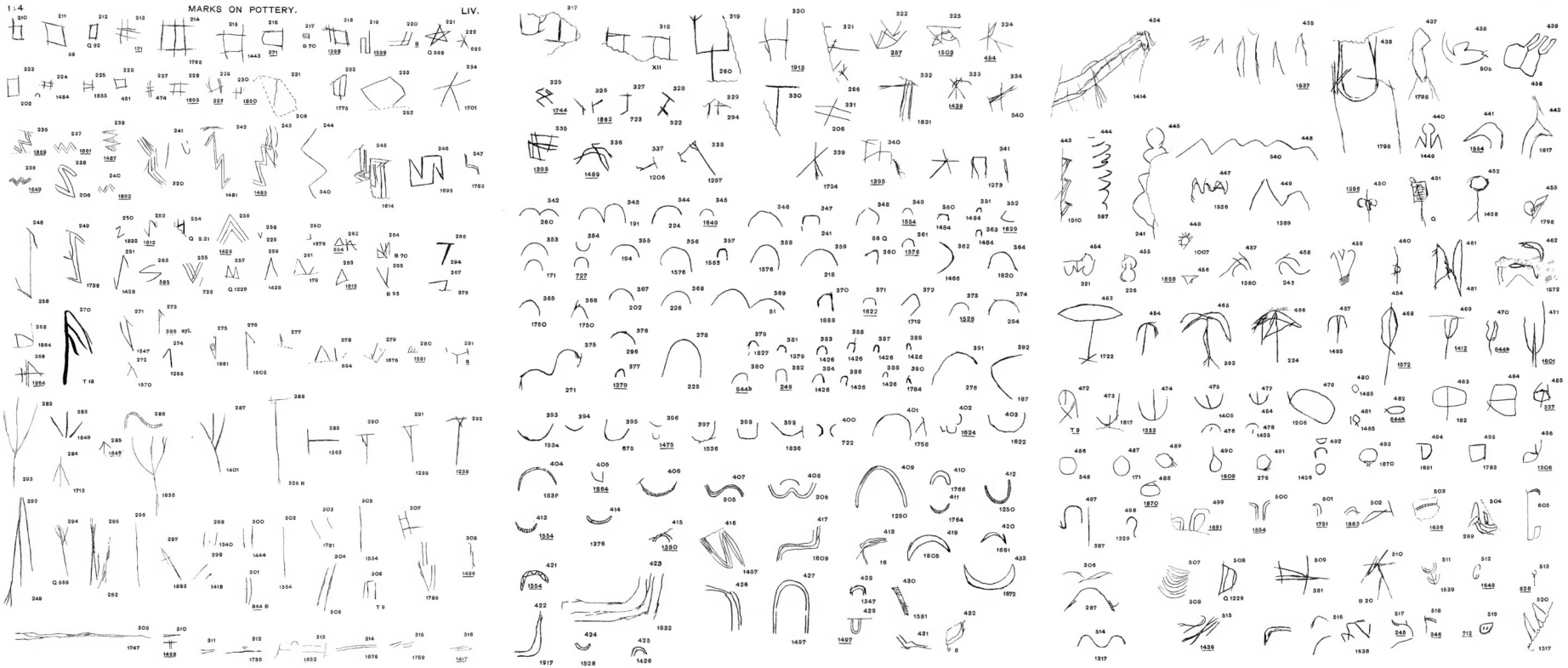
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A										
B										
C										
D										
E										
F										
G										
H										
I										
J										
K										

Naqada IIC/D (c. 3,500 – 3,350); note human figures and interchangeable motifs

Predynastic Ceramics: C-Ware & D-Ware (1)

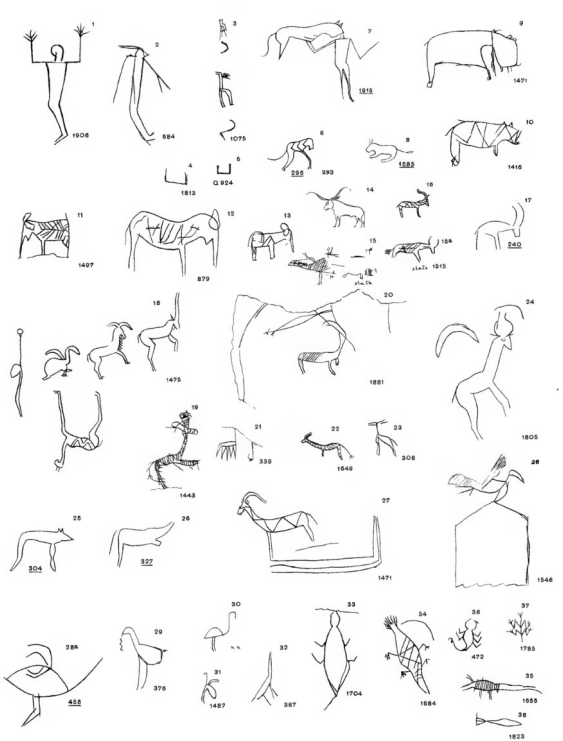
(Naqada IID ~ c. 3,400 – 3,300 BCE)

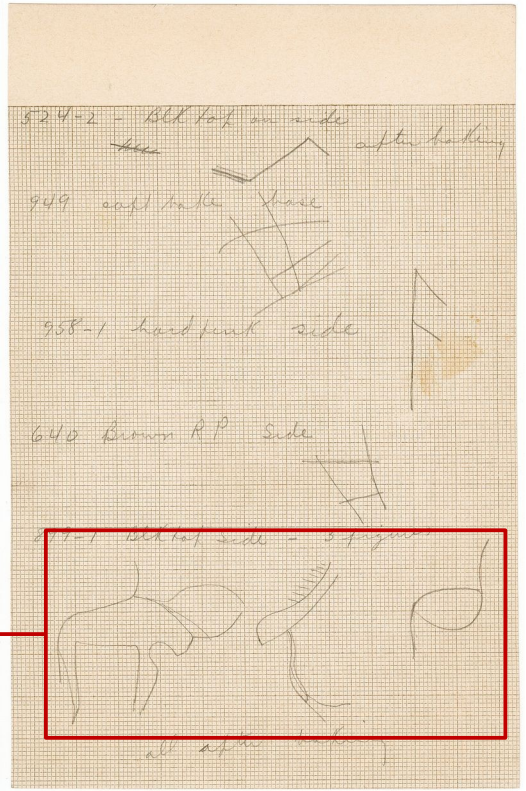
Predynastic Ceramics: Some Potmarks from Naqada



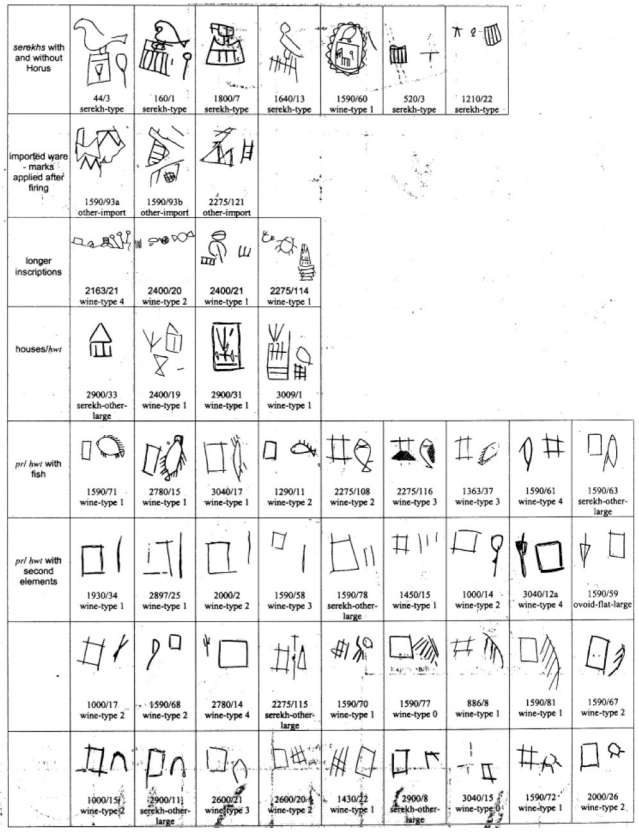
Predynastic Ceramics: Potmarks on Black-Topped Ware

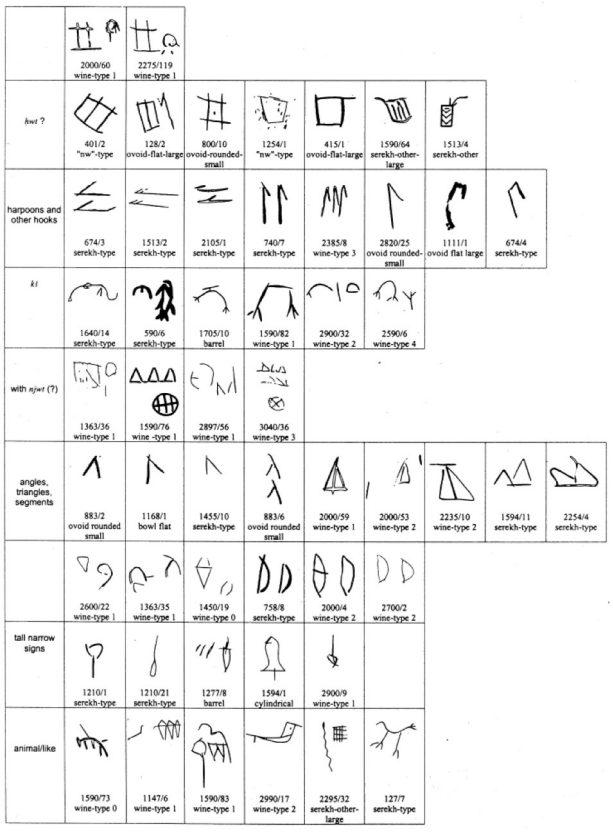
(Naqada I ~ c. 4,400 – 3,100 BCE)

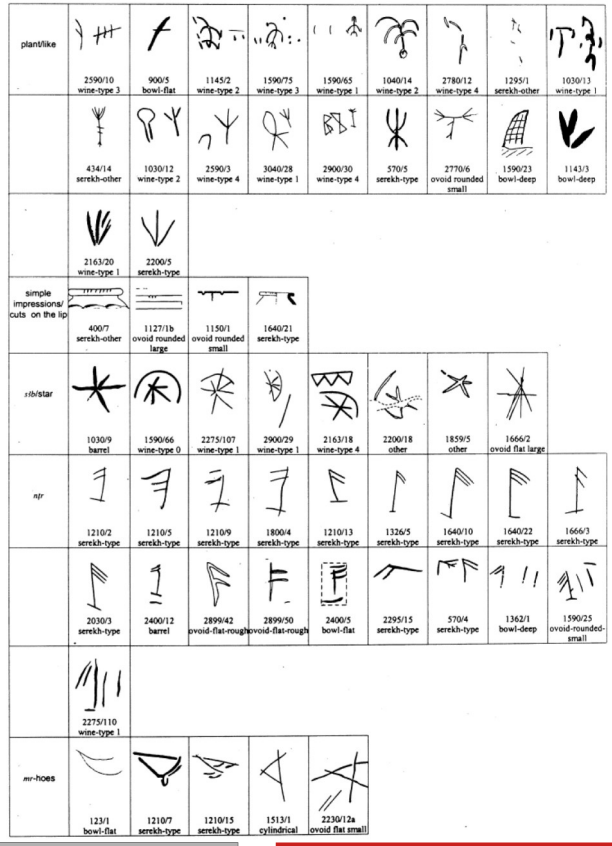




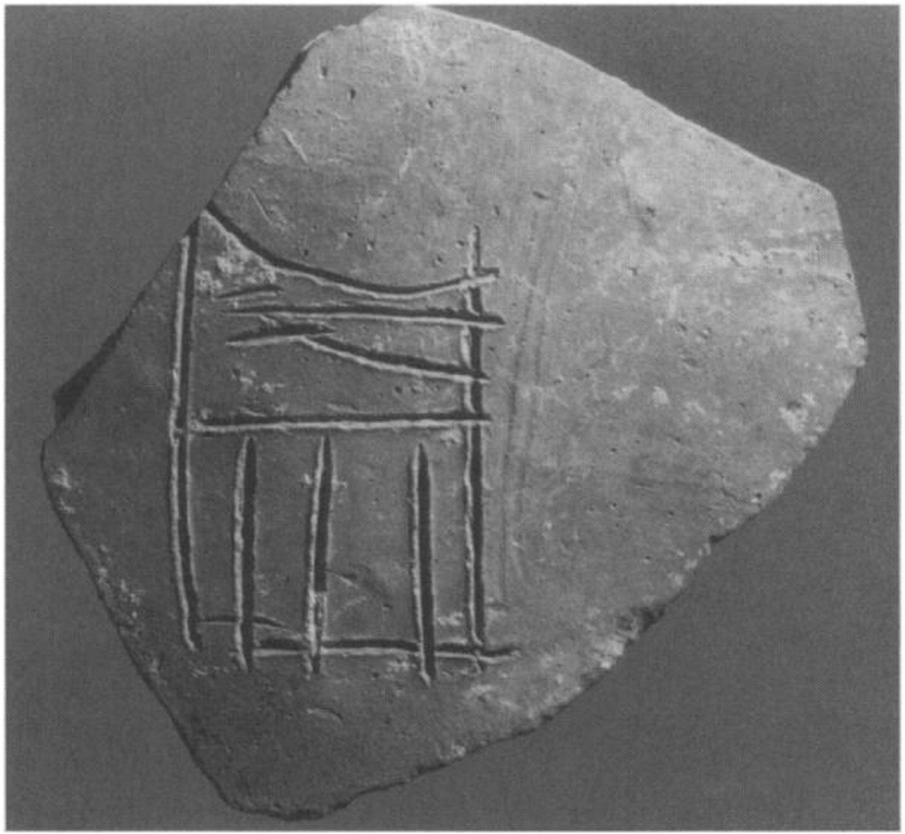
Predynastic Ceramics: Potmarks from Minshat Abu Omar

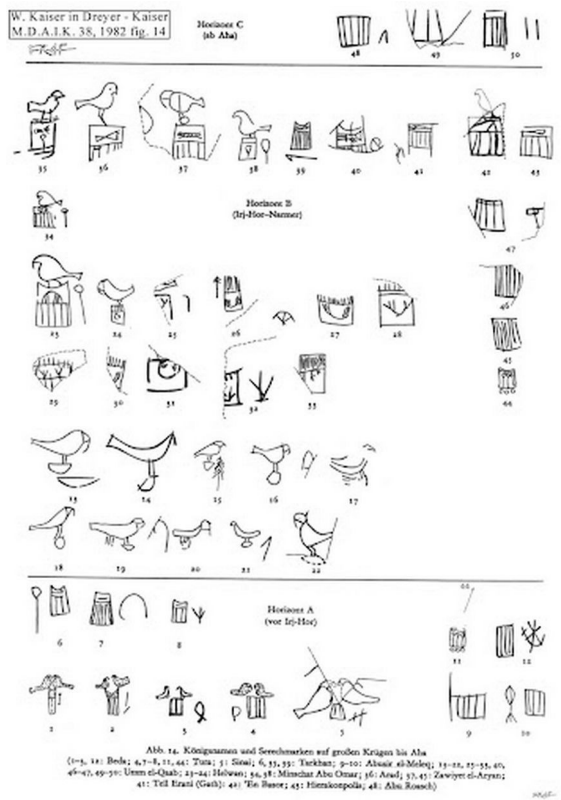




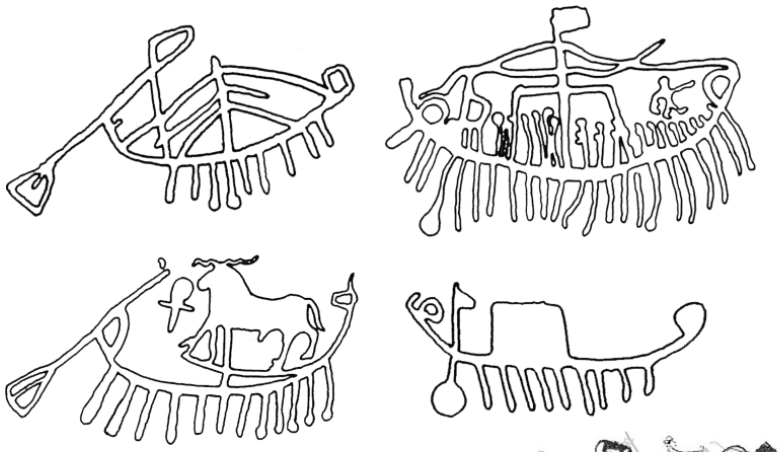


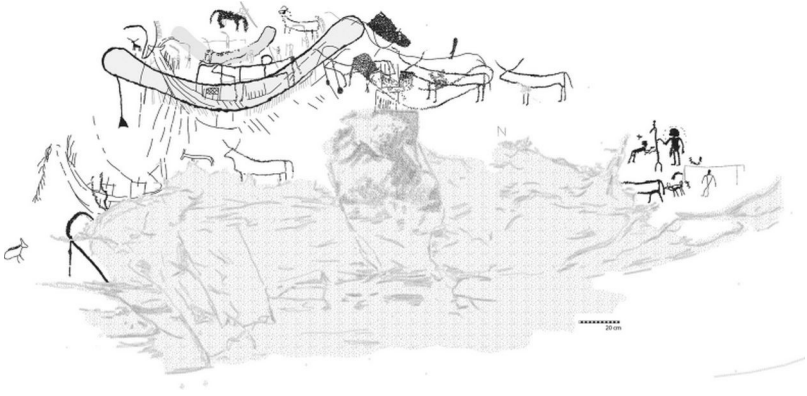
Predynastic Ceramics: serekhs (*srḫ*)

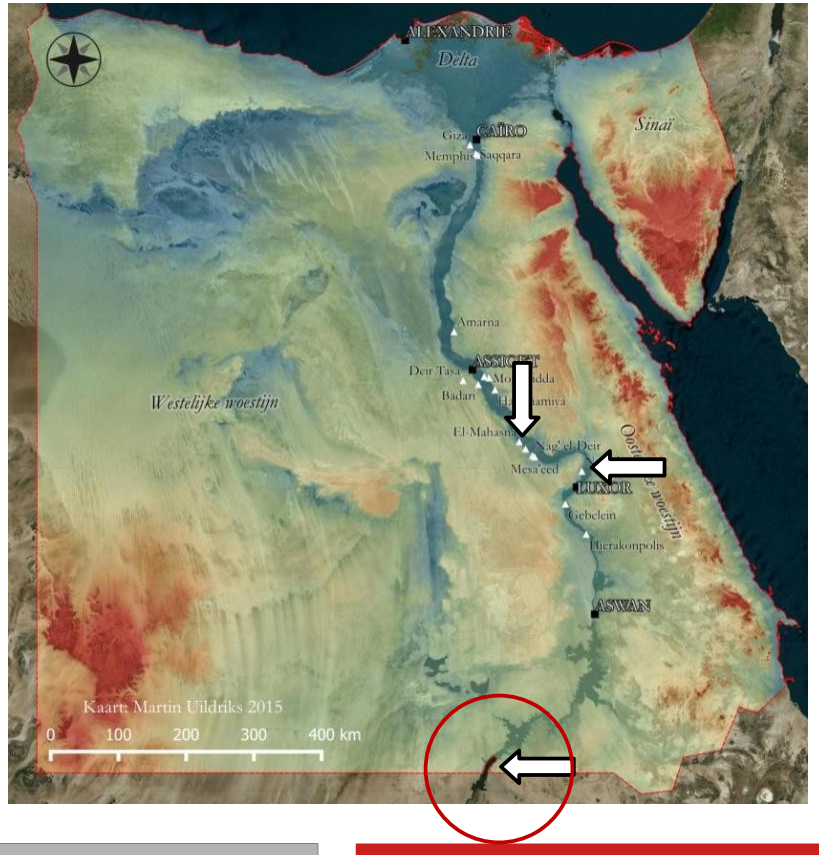




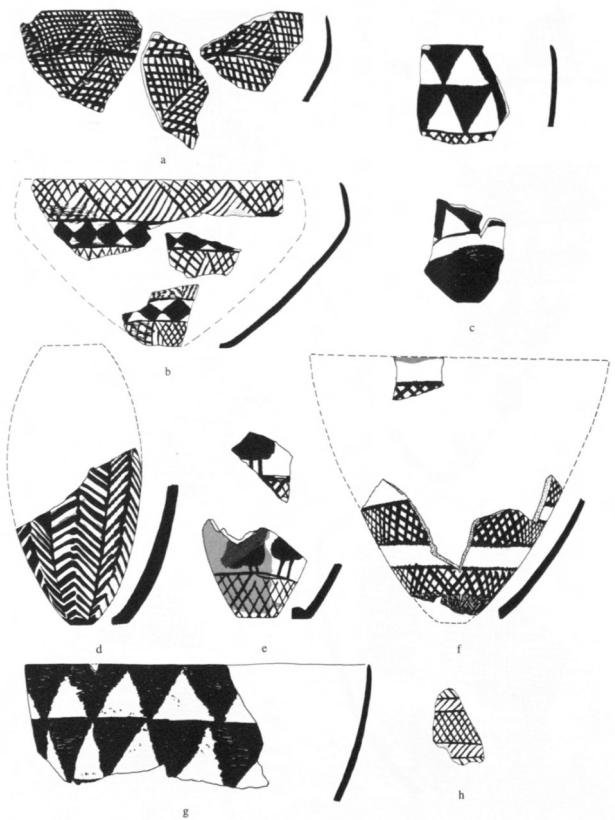
Predynastic Sayala: Rock Art

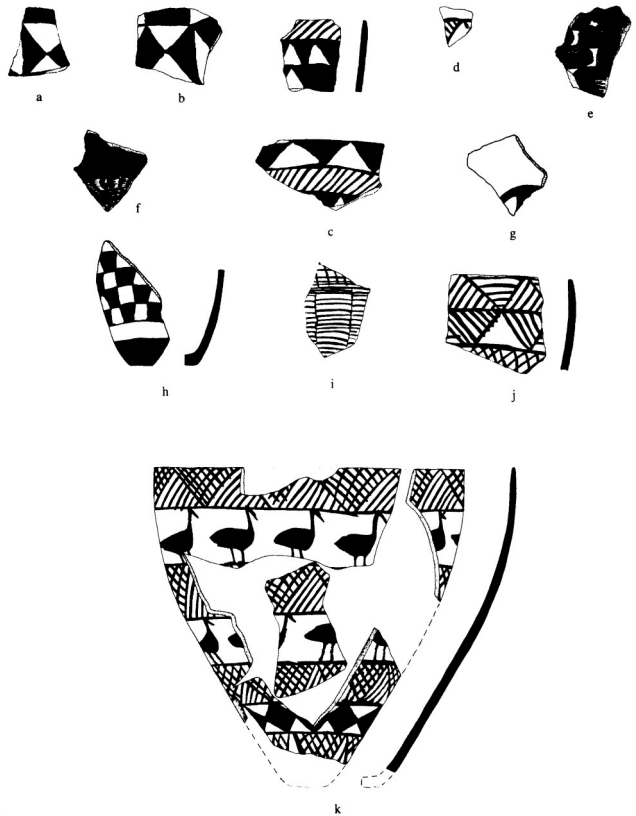


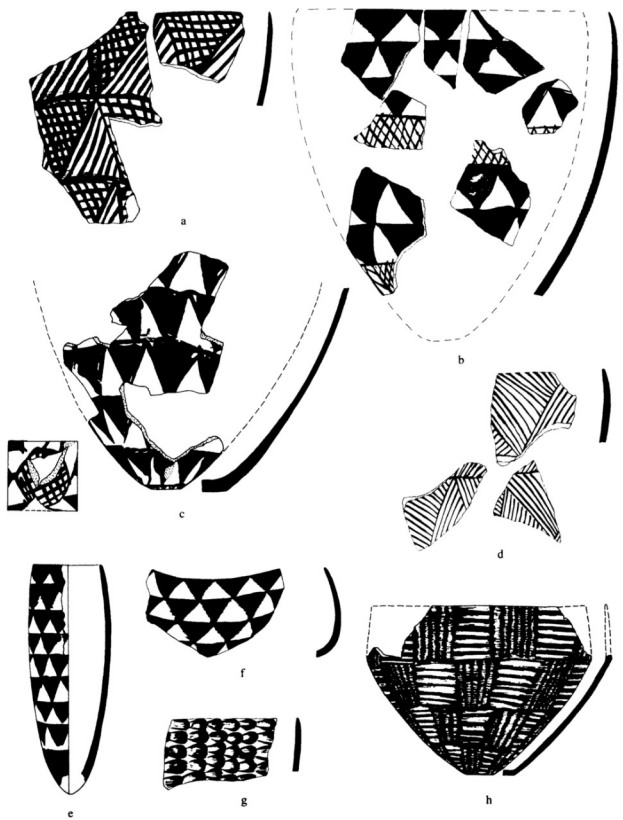




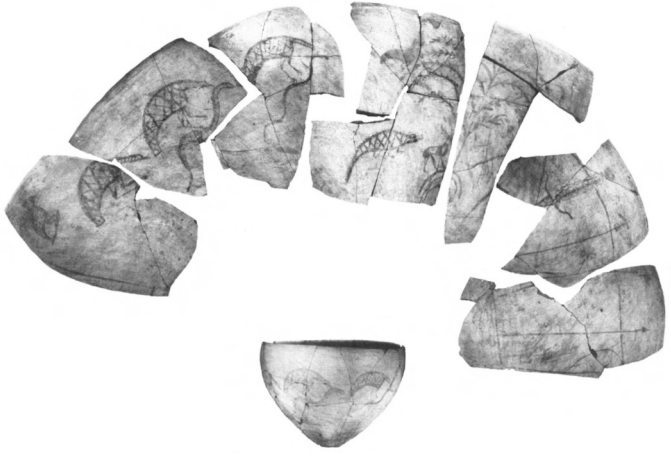
Predynastic Sayala: Ceramics from Qustul

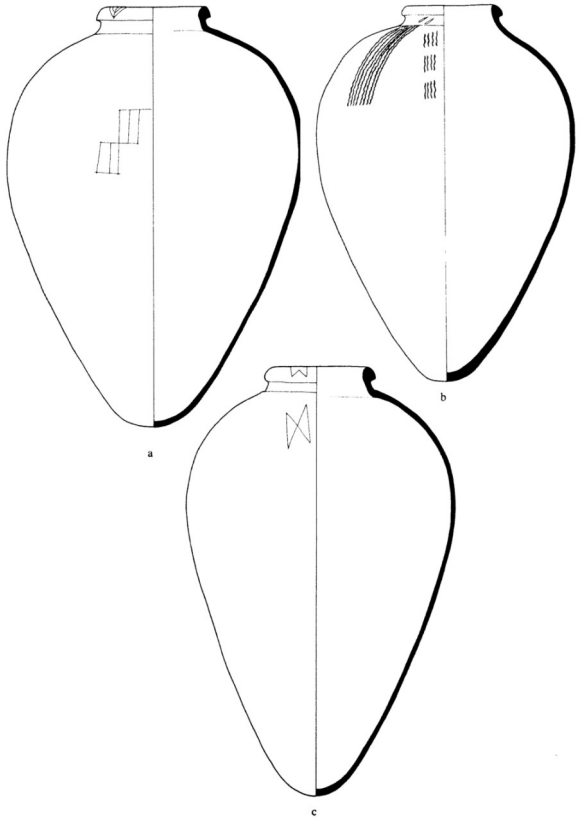


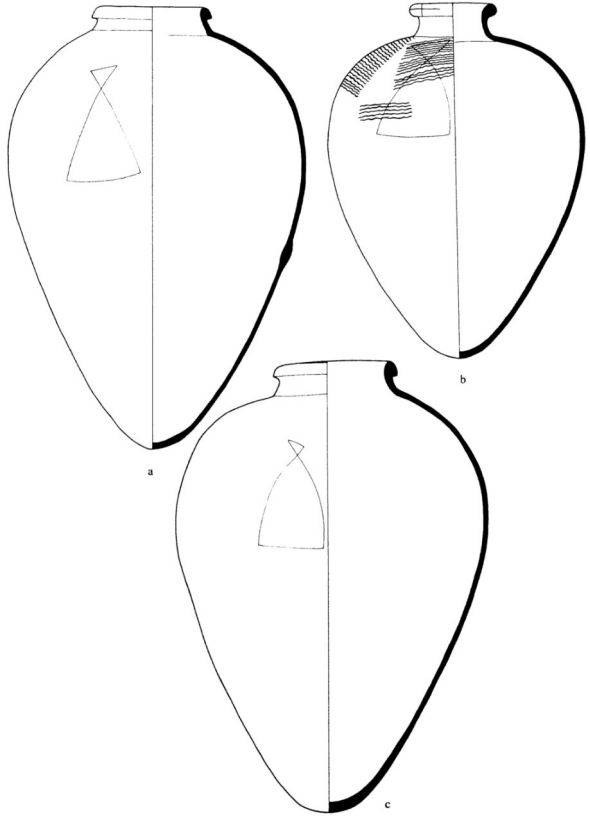




Predynastic Sayala: Ceramics from Qustul







Script Development in Predynastic Upper Egypt

- **Naqada I and II**
  - Many communities, many producers and consumers
  - Fertile landscape for development of linguistic encoding
  - Attribution/tagging and modifications of signs in place to construct new semantic/linguistic value
- **Naqada II:**
  - Narration as guide deconstruction semantics and record specific messages
  - Signs were calibrated, functioned independent of context, and had specific meaning
  - Logograms and semantic classifiers indistinct, reading order fixed
  - Linguistic encoding was local, resulting in a great diversity of similar-looking systems
- **Naqada III:**
  - Audience of these systems merged with their employment under a growing ruling elite
  - Acrophony (*ḏw, bꜣ, st, ꜣb*) in one elite system started to dissolve multi-dialectic ambiguity