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Sun, sea and spirals: early Cycladic frying pans

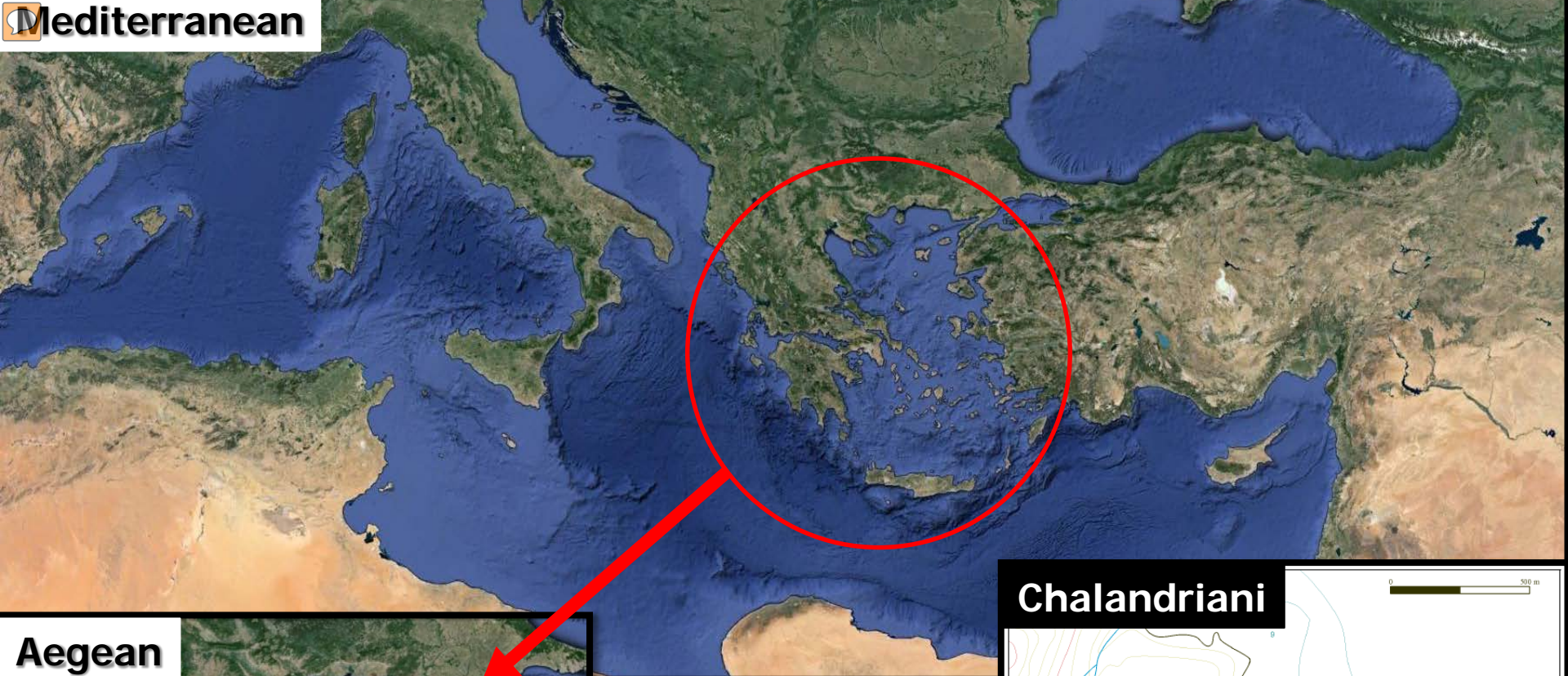


Christopher Nuttall

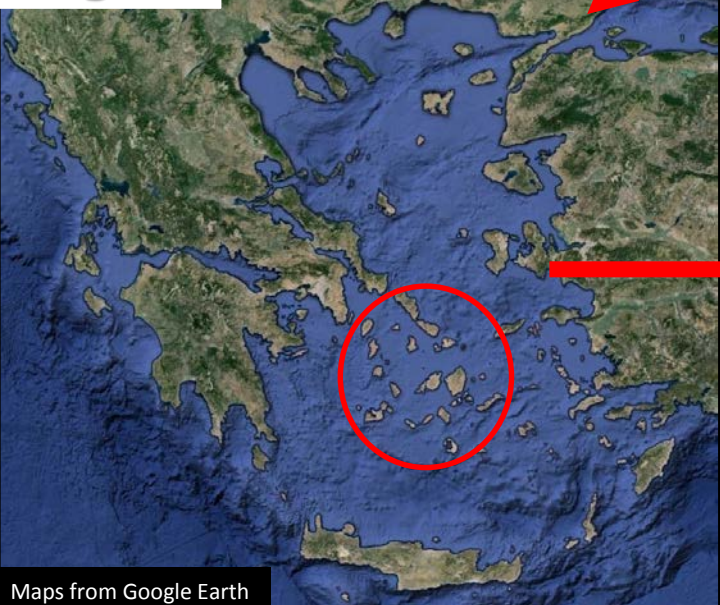
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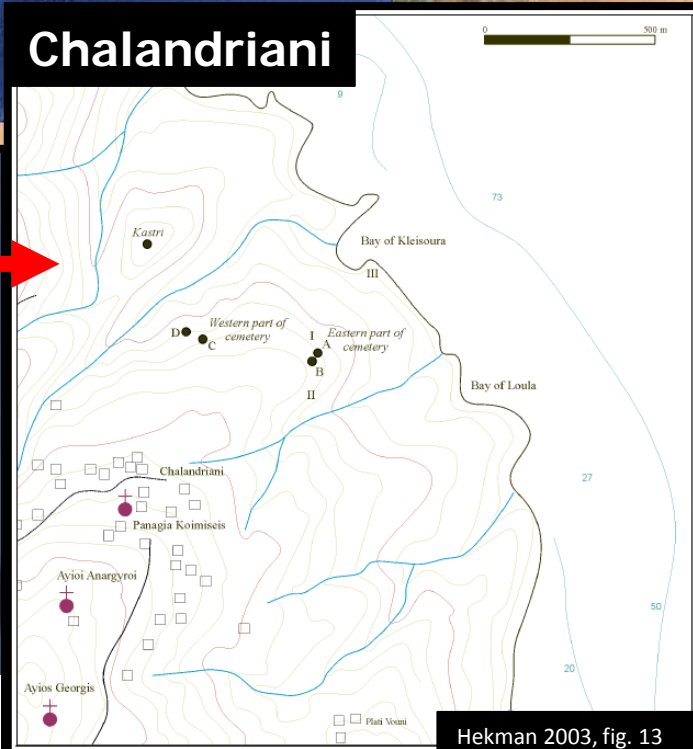
Mediterranean



Aegean



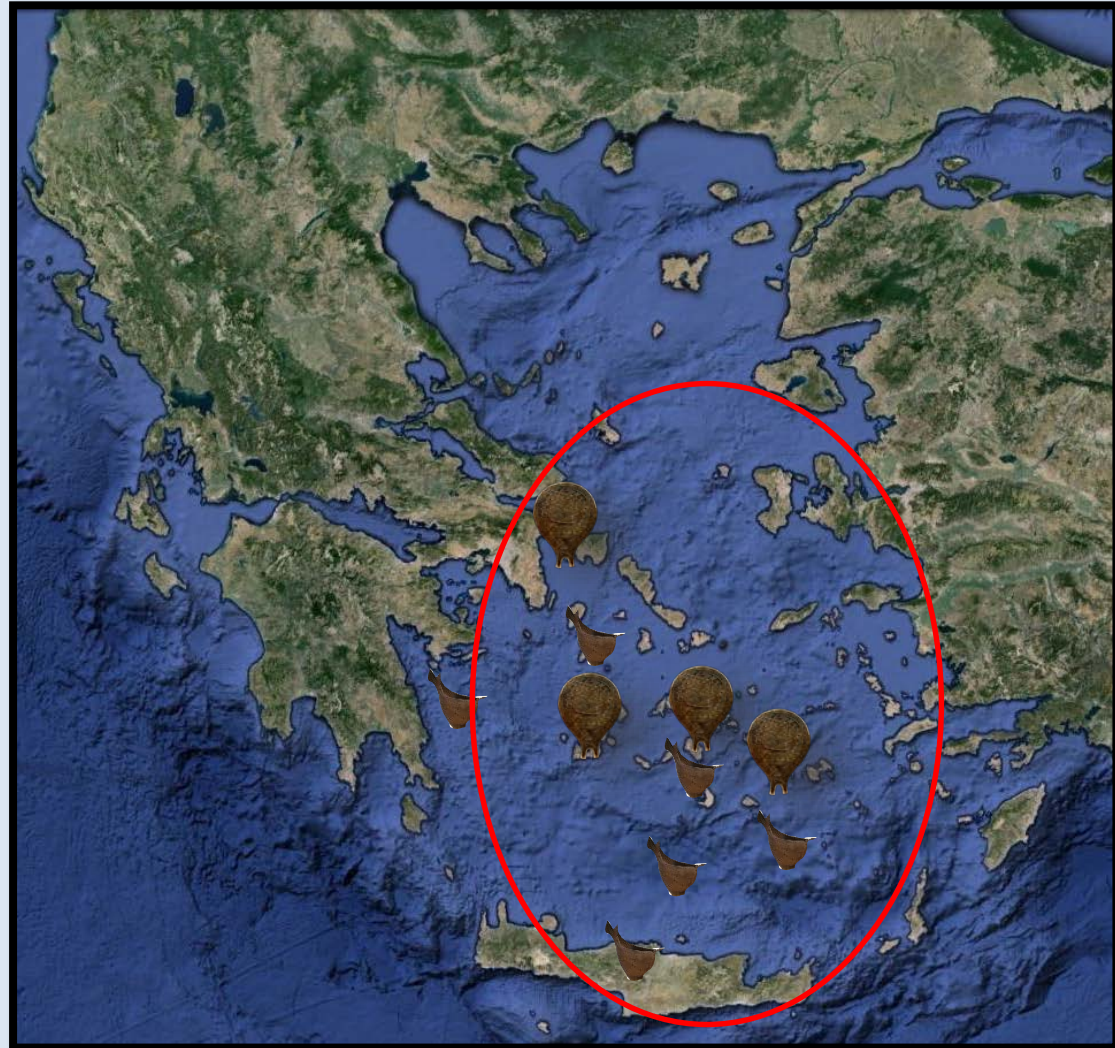
Syros





EB II: an *international spirit* or maritime spirit?

- EB II = 'Keros-Syros' culture.
- Period of high mobility.
- In Cyclades, most evidence comes from cemeteries.
- Developments in metallurgy, society and material culture.
- 'Shared' material culture across much of the southern Aegean littoral zones.
- 'International spirit' was practiced within the context of an Aegean seascape.



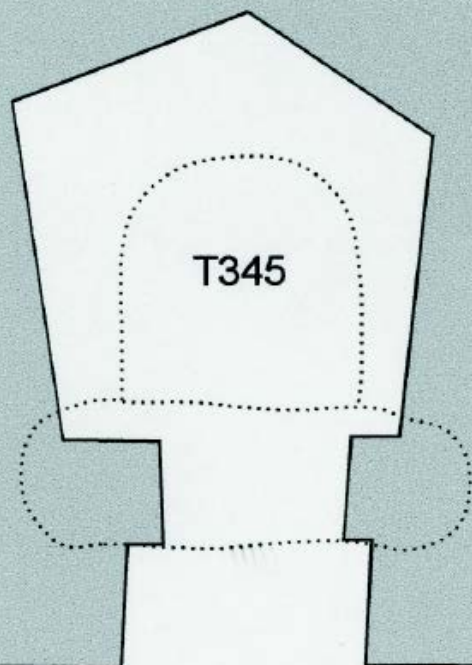


Tombs at Chalandriani

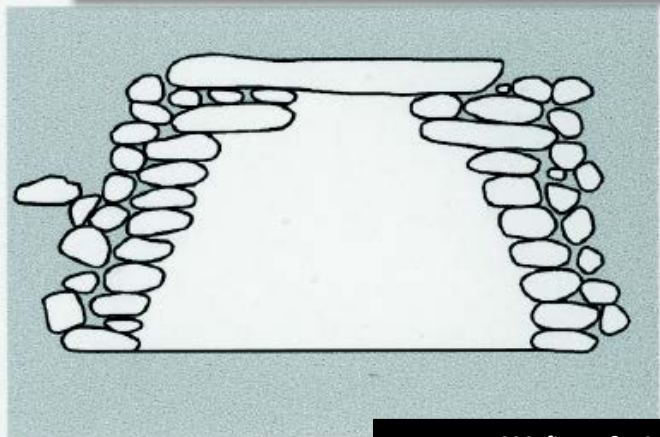
Hekman 2003, fig. 19A



T260



T345



Tsountas 1899, figs. 5 & 10

Tsountas 1899, pl. 2



Anatomy of a 'Frying pan'

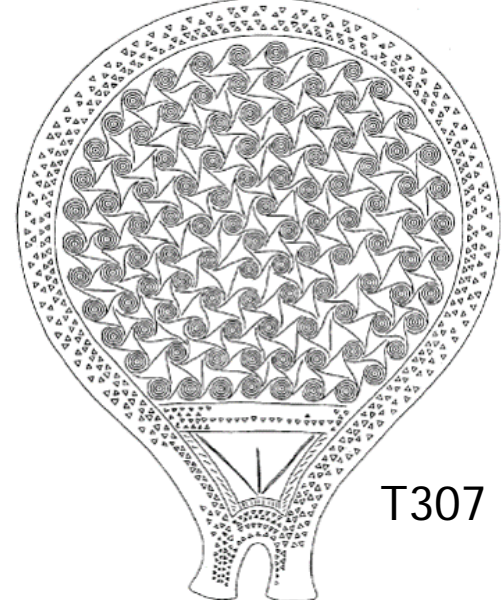
Fish
'totem' on
prow?

Interlocked spirals/
Concentric circles

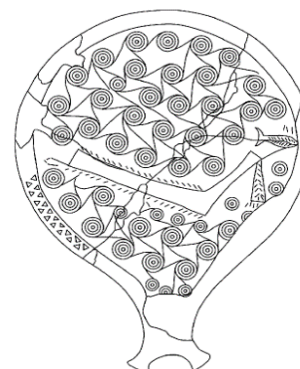
Boat
with
oars

Incised pubic
triangle

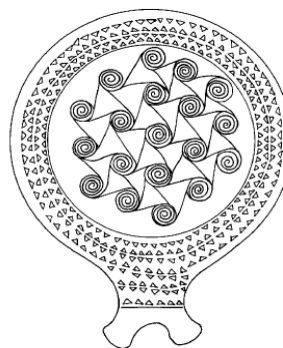
'Frying pan'
from tomb 174



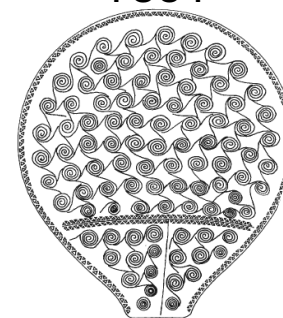
T307



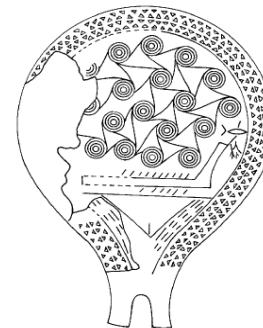
T351



T292



T239



T289



Function

- Drum?
- Libations?
- Incense burner?
- Astrolabe?
- Experimental archaeology shows they would function quite well as mirrors with 'darkened' olive oil.

Papathanassoglou and Georgouli, 2009

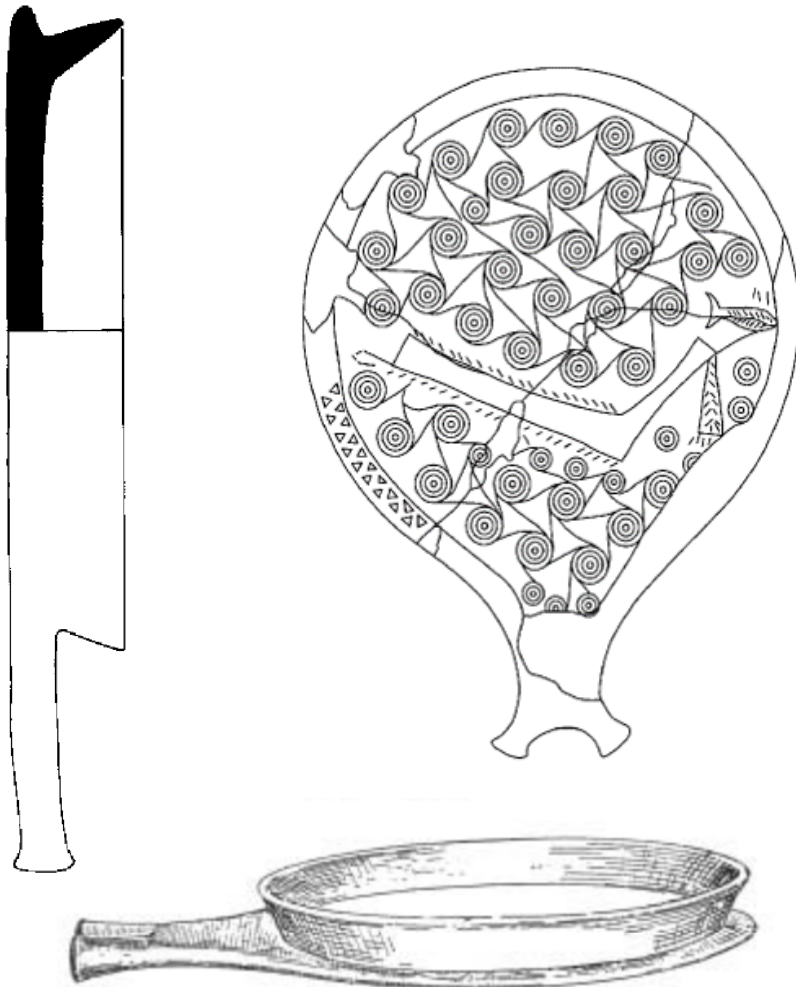
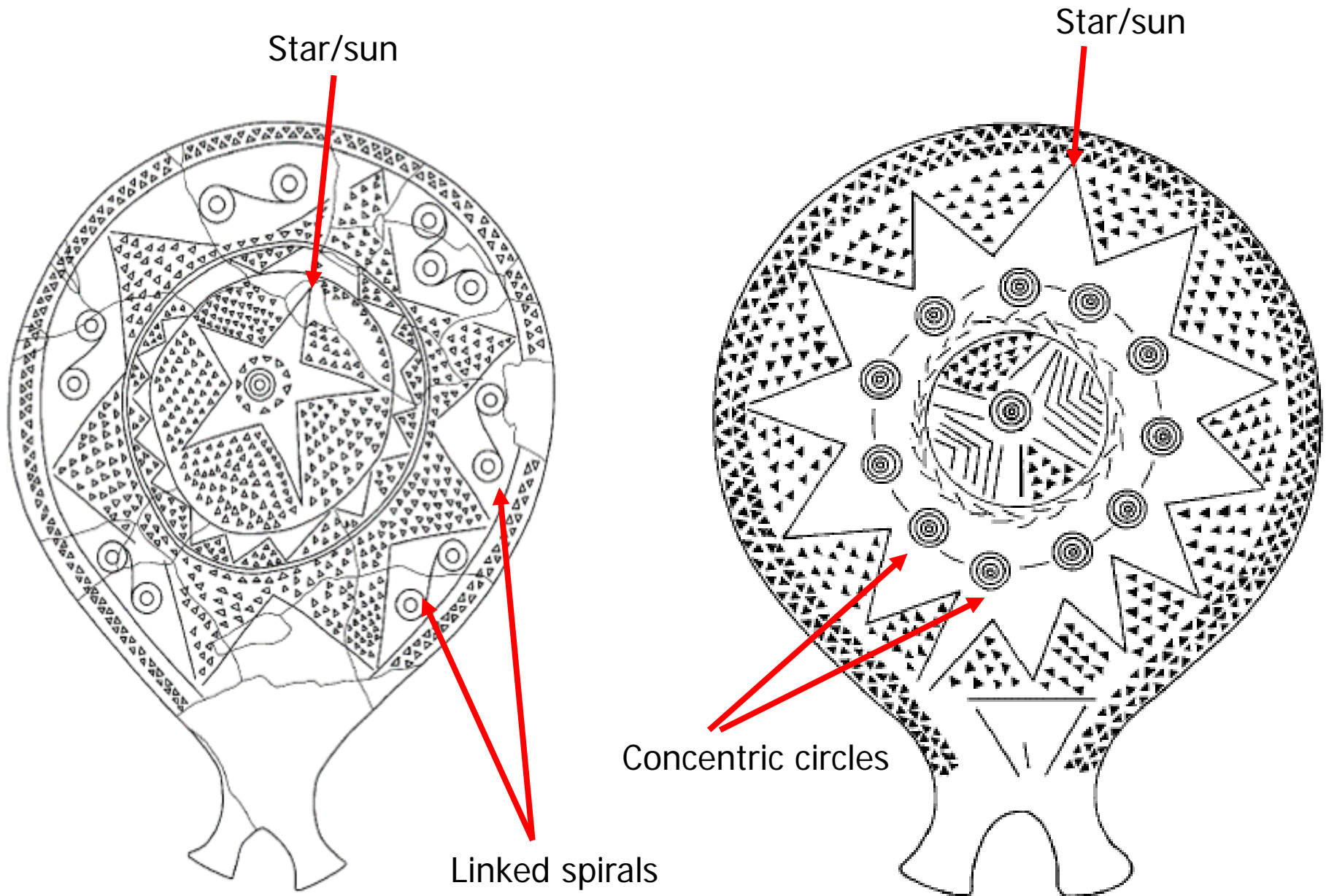


Figure 4 Photographs of the reflected image of a face in four liquid mirrors, under the same lighting conditions. The colour of the vessel is the same (dark brown) in all cases, while in (a) the liquid is water, in (b) olive oil, in (c) 'black' water and in (d) 'black' olive oil. The exposures were adjusted to obtain photographs resembling, as much as possible, the visual impression.

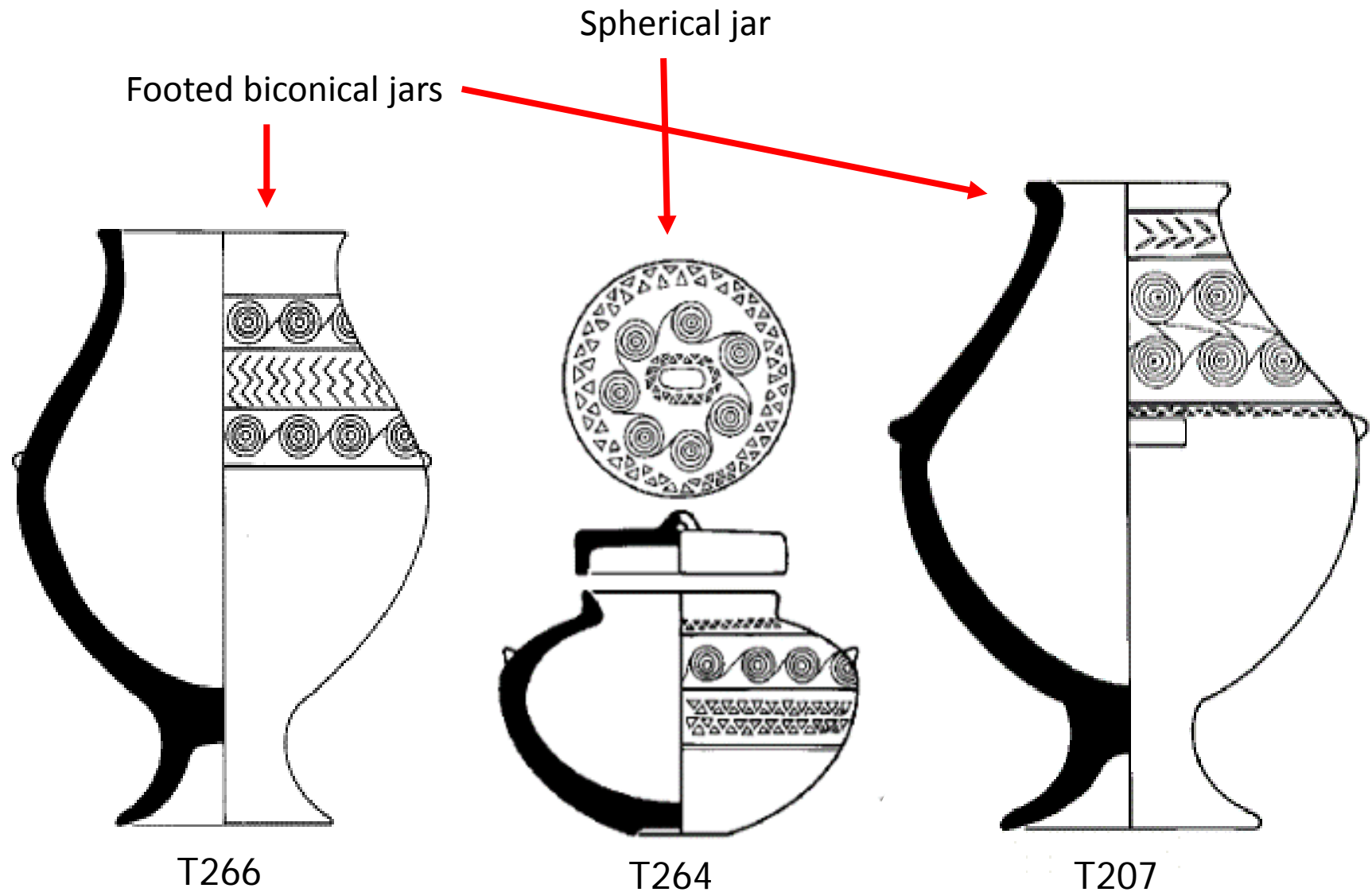


Seeing stars





Spirals/whirls on other vessel types



N.B Not to scale!

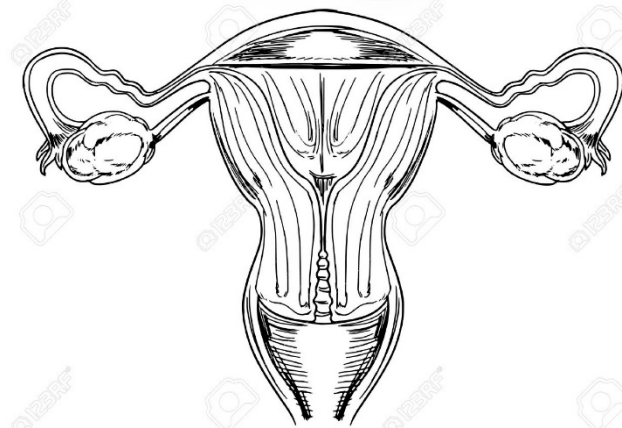
The sea as life: some thoughts

Womb?

- Fertility charm in the form of a womb? (Higgins 1967)
- Womb of the 'great goddess'? (Thimme 1964)
- Frying pan connected to fertility? (Goodison 1989)
- Representations of male desire and raiding? (Broodbank 2000; Sherratt 2000)
- Is the sea being gendered as female?
- Associated with a female deity?
- Cosmologically significant in biological reproduction?
 - The sea was a necessity for exogamy in the Cyclades – village sized communities were too small to avoid inbreeding without external contact
- Sea as an active constituent in the fertility process?
 - Yaruva of the Kimberley coast in Australia, maritime society. They believed that *spirit children* resided in the sea and a woman became pregnant once a *spirit child* entered her body.
- Sea depicted *inside* the womb – reference to the waters breaking?



Pubic triangle



BUT what of the fact that frying pans are deposited in tombs?

The sea as death: some thoughts



- Is death a watery journey?
 - Later Greek 'paying the ferryman' and Egyptian eschatological belief
 - Mabuiag islanders of Papua New Guinea believed dead souls were transported to an afterworld in the sea. Funerary rites enabled the dead to travel to the afterworld.
- Marine motifs on grave goods = desire to situate the dead in an abstract seascape on land?
- If sea = a liminal space linked to death, then those who could navigate it would have generated significant social capital which feeds into the mortuary arena.
- Evidence for body modification from tombs, i.e. shaving, scarification and tattooing. Bodies carrying a symbolic association with the sea?
- Perhaps the embodied practice of sailing and spending time away could also link to a metaphorical journey to the afterlife?





The sea and bodies in rebirth: a (tentative) hypothesis

- We have seen that sea was potentially significant in fertility.
- Sea was also an important source of social capital and a part of identity and social agency.
- Links to the sea were stressed in a mortuary context.
- Could the mixing of seascape, fertility and mortuary practices be linked to the sea as a medium for rebirth?





Problems/further work

- Did the spiral motifs (sea), boats (human interaction with sea) and female genitalia (fertility) form a package of motifs?
 - *Not all aspects are always found on together. Some just depict spirals, while others depict stars.*
- Do the spirals on other forms of vessel carry the same meaning as the spirals on frying pans?
 - *I would argue yes, though without the boat/fish motifs to conclusively indicate a marine setting, the link becomes less secure.*

To ponder:

- **What is the social significance of taking the sea onto land, in the form of sea representation?**



Tack så mycket! Any questions?