

## 8. SHAM WAN TSUEN EAST VALLEY

### THE SITE

The sand bar in the middle of the valley at Sham Wan Tsuen seemed to have once been part of a larger sand body, and it was thought likely that further Tang lime kiln activity deposits would be found east of the sand bar, across a small stream (see Figure 7.2). A slightly higher landform could be discerned around the canteen area (see Figure 8.2), and it was suspected that this faint shape represented what remained of the former sand bank. During the initial survey of Chek Lap Kok, augering at selected points on this former sand bank and on land slightly above the valley floor around the eastern rim of the valley revealed the presence of kiln debris in a black carbonaceous sand.

A period of several weeks was set aside for the intensive investigation of this site, since it held potential as a Tang village or habitation area, which on many other sites has been suspected to have been in the vicinity of the kilns. In addition, it was believed that Neolithic deposits might also be found closer to the hillslope, in the transitional zone from sand bank to low slope. However, no surface finds of Neolithic material had been reported, and none were found during the survey.



*Figure 8.1 -- Excavation of Square C with the top of the dark sand layer exposed.*

## EXCAVATIONS AT SHAM WAN TSUEN EAST VALLEY

A series of test pits, Squares A-E, were excavated initially. Square A consisted of fine sand with only sparse, very weathered pieces of Tang and modern pottery. Square B yielded remains of another kiln, cut on the south side by erosion and re-deposition or infilling. It seems likely that this kiln was near the edge of the former sand bar, and erosion had exposed and eroded the kiln in recent times. Some infilling had taken place, probably during the construction of a bund for a large wet field or pond to the south.

Square D revealed a small amount of kiln debris and Tang pottery, and a single piece of Han "Union Jack" ware. Another square nearby, DA, yielded several more pieces of the Han pottery, along with Tang and Sung sherds, all together in a single basal layer of coarse sand. Square DB yielded only 19th/20th century material.

Square C had more promising deposits: a black sand layer had plentiful Tang material, and a brown sand beneath it yielded a small quantity of coarse corded Neolithic sherds. Square E had a similar stratigraphy. It was decided to focus the investigation on the area to the south of Square E, close to the base of the hillslope. Squares F and G

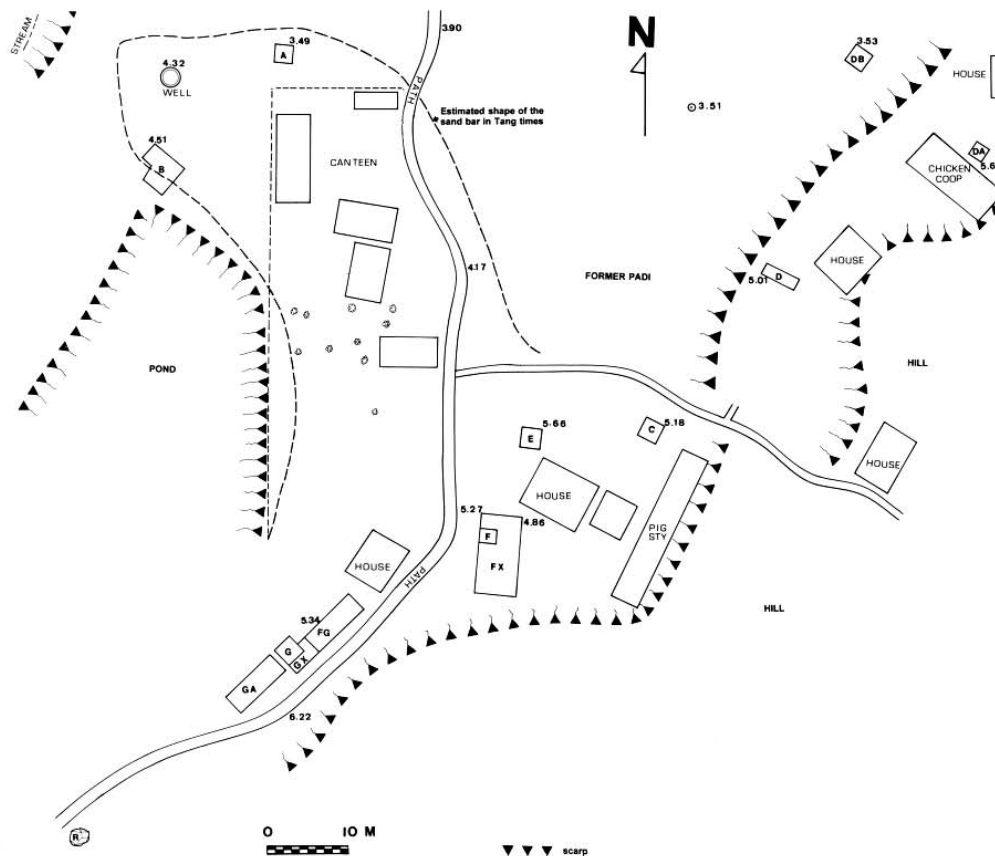


Figure 8.2 -- Excavation plan for Sham Wan Tsuen East Valley



*Figure 8.3 -- Excavation of Square FX with Late Neolithic floor exposed.*



*Figure 8.4 -- Excavation of Square G and GH.*



Figure 8.5 -- Kiln 13 in Square B.

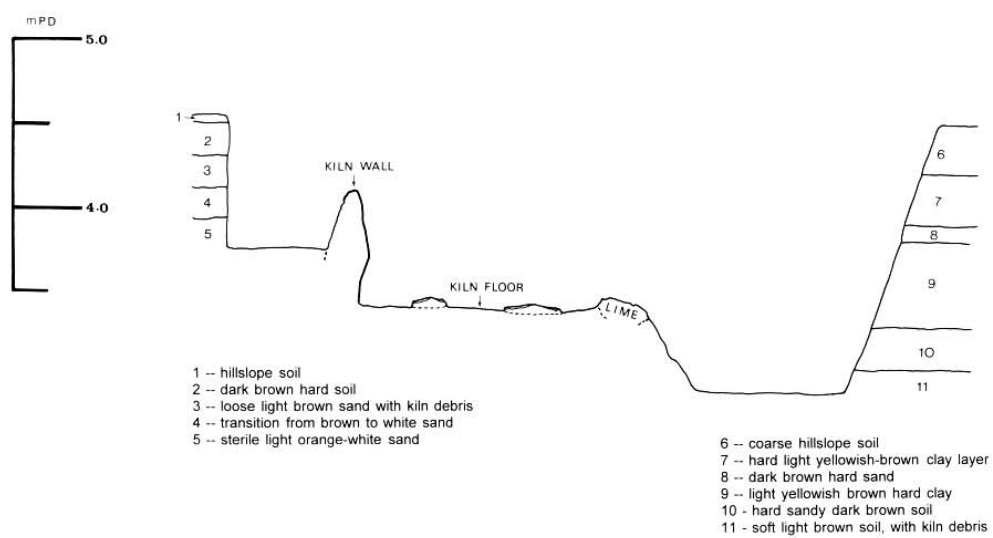


Figure 8.6 -- Northeast-southwest profile through the centre of Square B, showing sand bar layers 1-5 and infill layers 6-11.

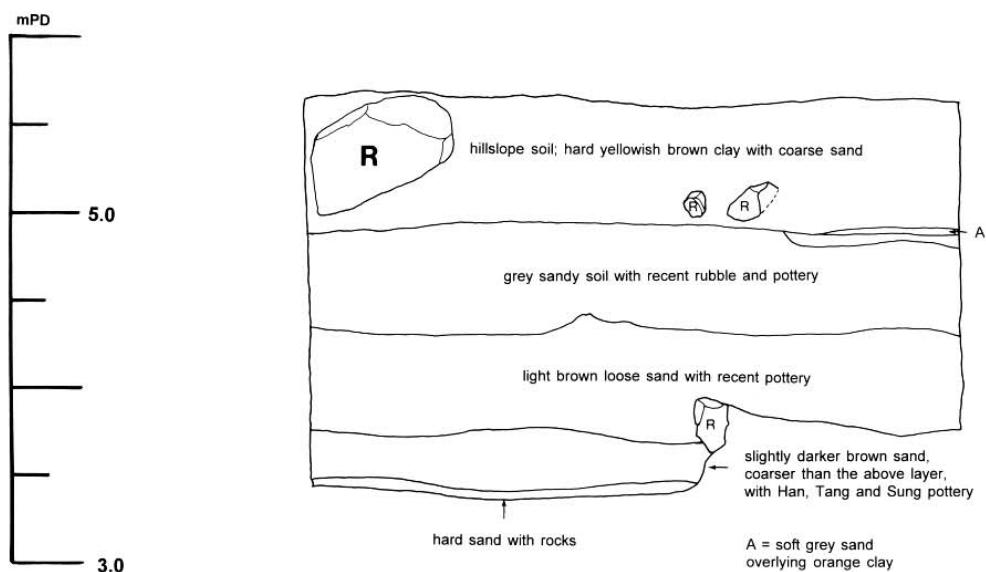


Figure 8.7 -- Profile of the northeast wall of Square DA.

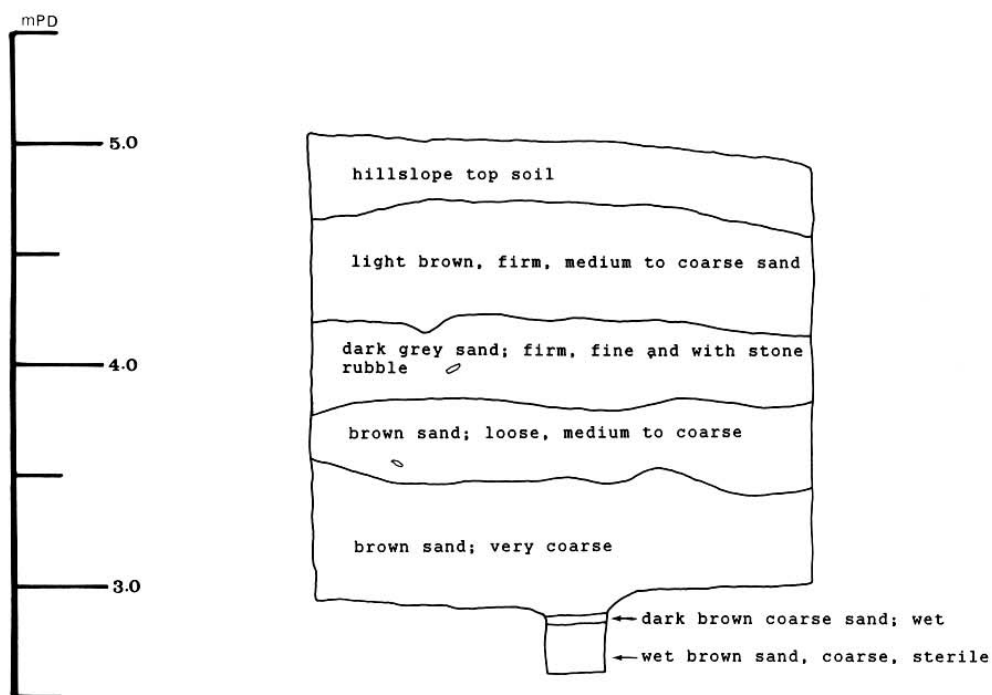


Figure 8.8 -- Profile of the northwest wall of Square E; the kiln debris was in the dark grey sand of layer 3 and the Neolithic sherds in the coarse brown sand of layer 5.

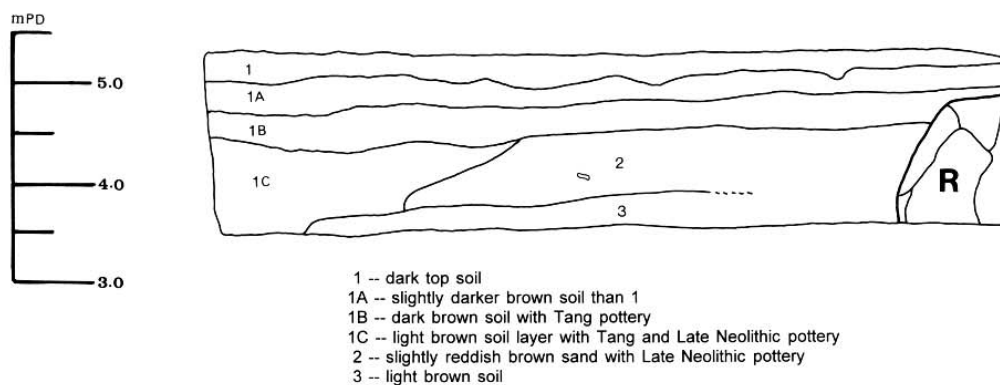


Figure 8.9 -- Profile of the east wall of Square FX.

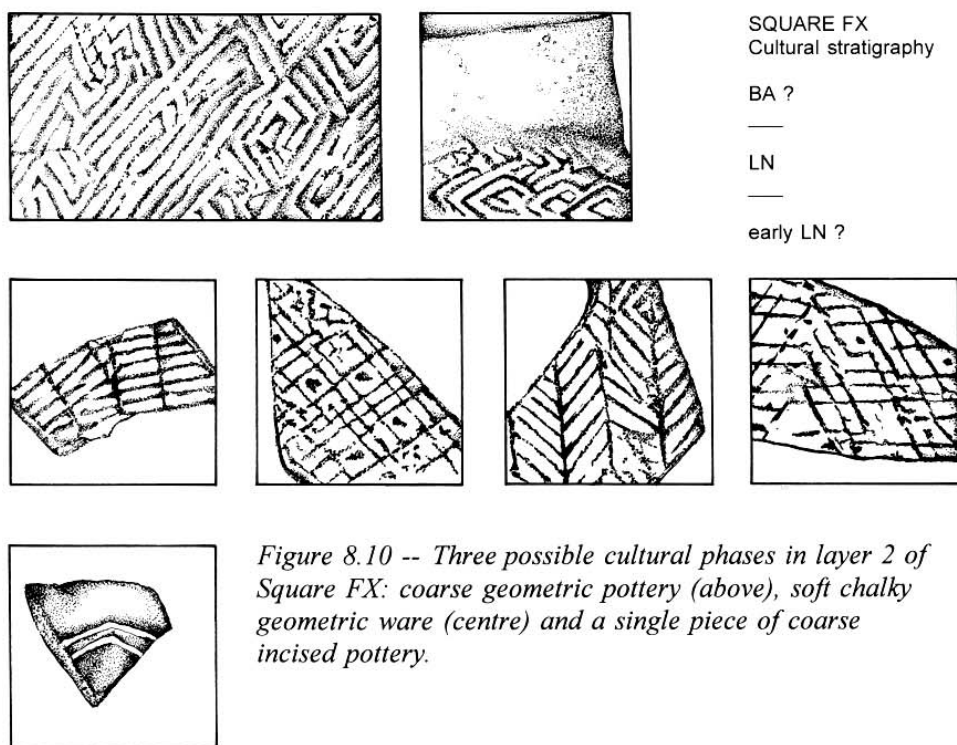


Figure 8.10 -- Three possible cultural phases in layer 2 of Square FX: coarse geometric pottery (above), soft chalky geometric ware (centre) and a single piece of coarse incised pottery.

amply rewarded this decision, with a rich Late Neolithic deposit and a few painted sherds of the Middle Neolithic, respectively.

The areas around Squares F and G were then opened up on a large scale. Square FX provided a large quantity of Late Neolithic material, but unfortunately did not have any earlier deposit, with the exception of a few pieces of non-diagnostic coarse sherds and a single piece of coarse incised pottery, perhaps marking the early phase of the Late Neolithic. Squares FG, GA and GX by contrast had relatively sparse Late Neolithic deposits, and a very restricted Middle Neolithic deposit (only found in the southwest

corner of FG, G-GX and the northeast third of GA). They did however provide clear evidence of the sequence of cultural phases within the Middle Neolithic period, with chalky white or buff yellow pottery with incised designs in the upper part of the layer, and painted pottery in the lower.

No features or postholes were discovered, nor were any charcoal samples obtained for C-14 dating. Large clusters of pottery were the only evidence for the in situ nature of the deposit.

## DESCRIPTION OF FINDS FROM SHAM WAN TSUEN EAST VALLEY

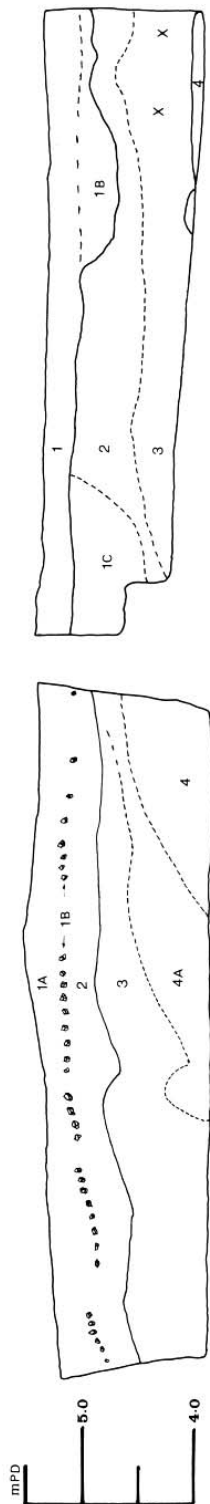
The Tang and Sung ceramics recovered were typical types, and little additional information was obtained. A *kai yuan* of the Tang period was also found. The Han pottery was significant only in representing a brief occupation of or activity in the area during the Han era.

The Late Neolithic assemblage was clearly dateable not only from its soft geometric wares, but coarse pottery types characteristic of the Late Neolithic period were also present in abundance. These included the highly everted rims, the frequent occurrence of corded bowls, spouted rims and the lack of super-incising over the cord marks or on the inside of the rims. Another artifact which seems to mark all Late Neolithic sites in Hong Kong is the coarse bar -- part of the grill of a clay oven. Several of these bars were found in Square FX. Finally, the spindle whorl and the stepped adze are still other artifact types characteristic of the local Late Neolithic.

A few potsherds at the top of the Late Neolithic layer in Square FX might represent early Bronze Age, even though no hard geometric pottery was found. The coarse pieces with stamped geometric patterns and rather thin (3-4mm) bodies were found interspersed with Tang sherds; this type has been found on other sites where both Late Neolithic and Bronze Age materials, and may be a transitional pottery type.

The Middle Neolithic pottery types (MNII and MNI) were clearly separated by stratigraphy: chalky white, greyish white or yellowish incised ware was found with super-incised corded pottery in a distinct cultural deposit above the layer containing painted pottery. A total of 56 pieces with traces of paint or slip were found; the paint was red and the slip was a dull yellowish white; the body was invariably buff red or orange. At least four different painted vessels are represented; all are bowls with footrims, some have perforations and incised grooves. Significantly, none of the corded pieces in association with the painted ware had super-incising.

Only one stone tool, a pebble grinder, was found in the Middle Neolithic deposit. The stone tools of the Late Neolithic assemblage included a fragment of perforated spear point or knife, a stepped adze, a number of small adzes, two small projectile points of rhomboid shape, concave polishing stones (but no grooved stones), pebble grinders and



- 1A -- greyish brown sandy soil with rootlets; Ching and Tang pottery  
 1B -- kiln debris in brown sand  
 2 -- brown sand with Late Neolithic potsherds  
 3 -- white sand; sterile  
 4A -- gradual transition to yellow sand; sterile  
 4 -- yellowish orange sand with Middle Neolithic potsherds

- 1 -- greyish brown topsoil with Ching and Tang pottery  
 1B -- greyish soil with Ching, Tang and Late Neolithic pottery  
 1C -- yellowish-brown sand with Late Neolithic pottery  
 2 -- slightly reddish brown sandy soil, loose and coarse, with Middle Neolithic II chalky incised potsherds; grading to 3  
 3 -- yellowish brown sandy soil with Middle Neolithic I painted pottery (X)  
 4 -- decomposed granite

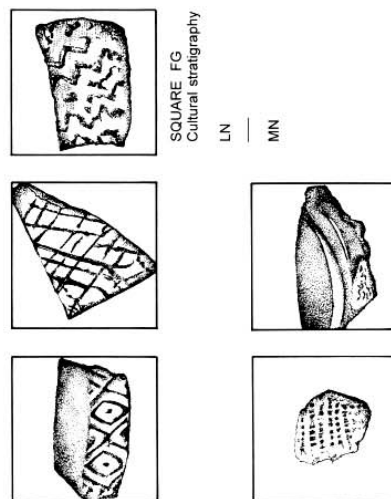
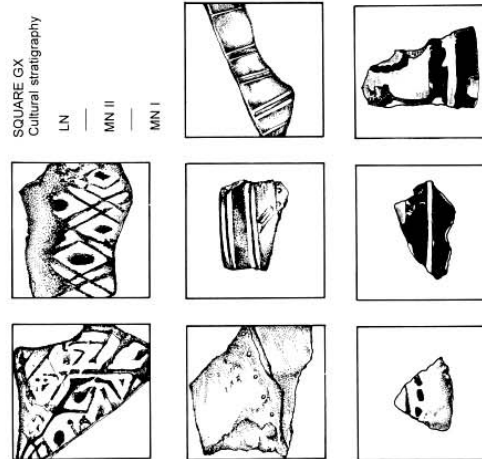


Figure 8.11 -- Profile of Squares FG (left) and GX, with examples of the pottery from each cultural phase.





- 1 -- recent fill, clay and soil with a hard clay layer at the bottom
- 1A -- dark grey soil, grading to 1B
- 1B -- brown sand with patches of grey (disturbed), with Tang and Late Neolithic potsherds
- 2 -- brown sand with Middle Neolithic II sherds in the upper part and Middle Neolithic I sherds (X) below

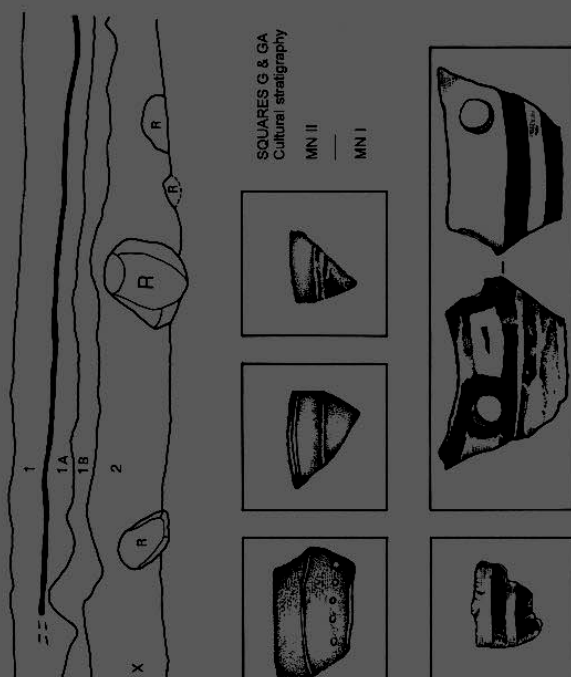


Figure 8.12 -- Profile of Square GA, with examples of the Middle Neolithic sherds from the upper and lower parts of layer 2. (The gap between GA and GX is 1 m.)



Figure 8.13 -- Han "Union Jack" sherds from Square DA.



Figure 8.14 -- Middle Neolithic I painted pottery from Squares G and GX.

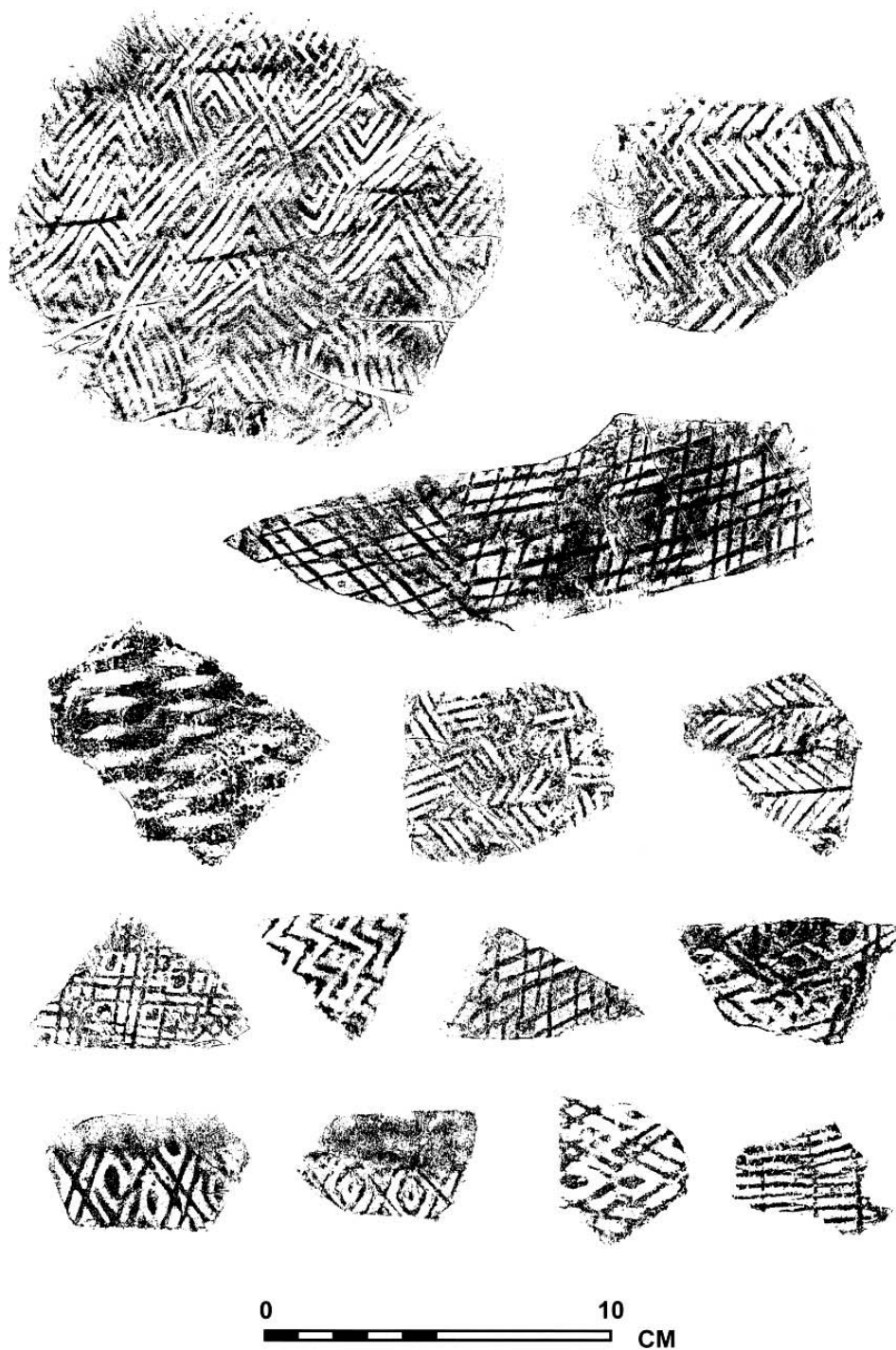


Figure 8.15 -- Patterns on soft geometric pottery and coarse geometric (top row).

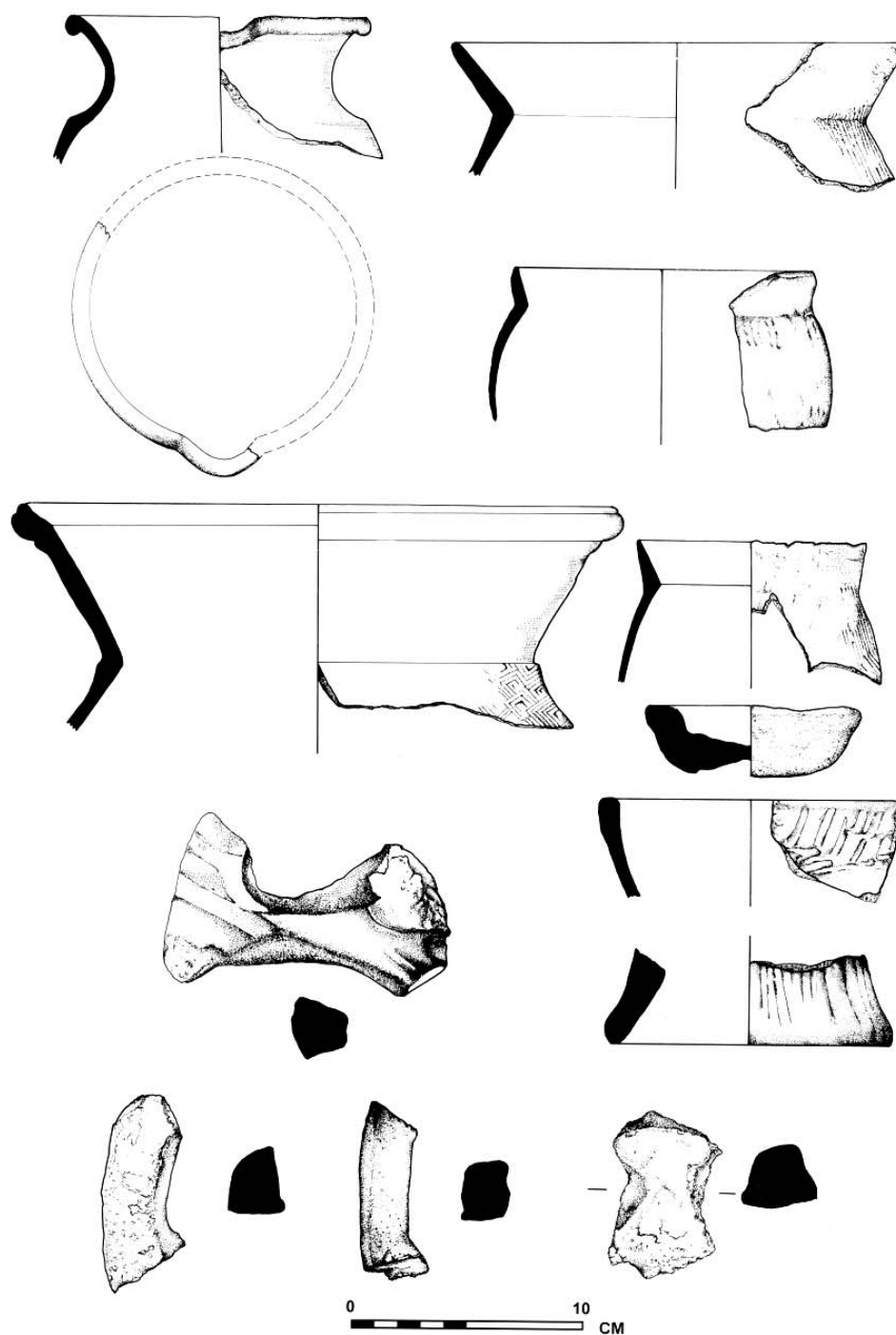
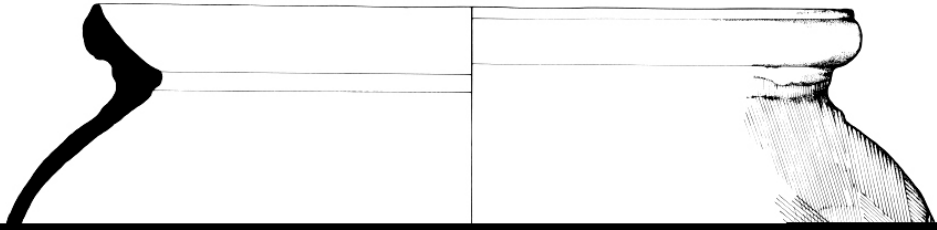


Figure 8.16 -- Late Neolithic coarse corded and plain pottery and firebars from Square FX; the coarse geometric rim at centre left may be early Bronze Age.



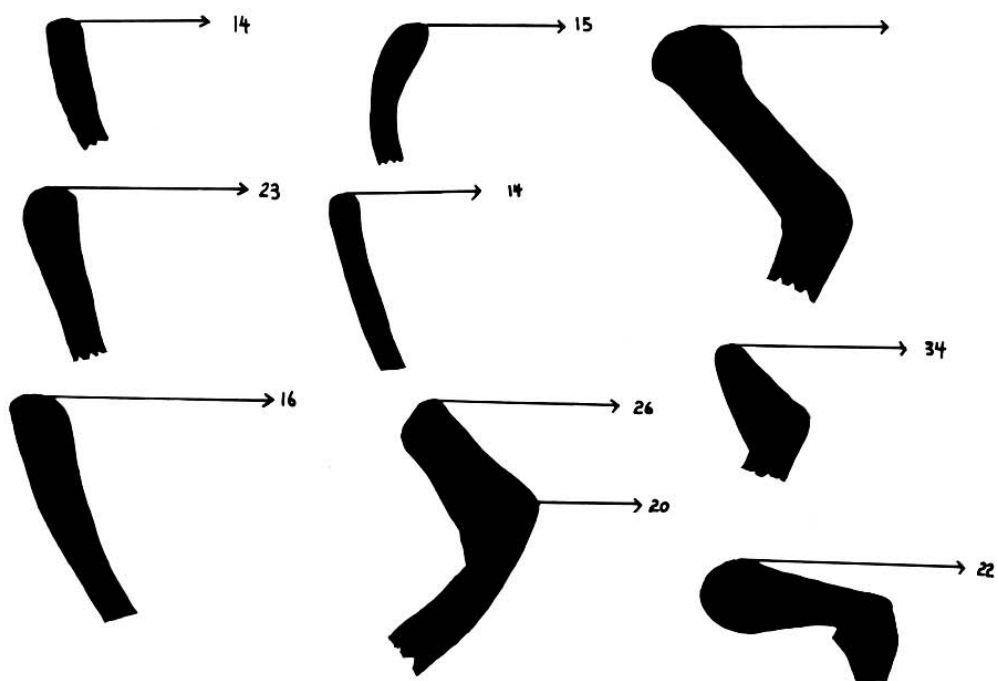


Figure 8.18 -- Late Neolithic bowl and pot rims from Square FX.

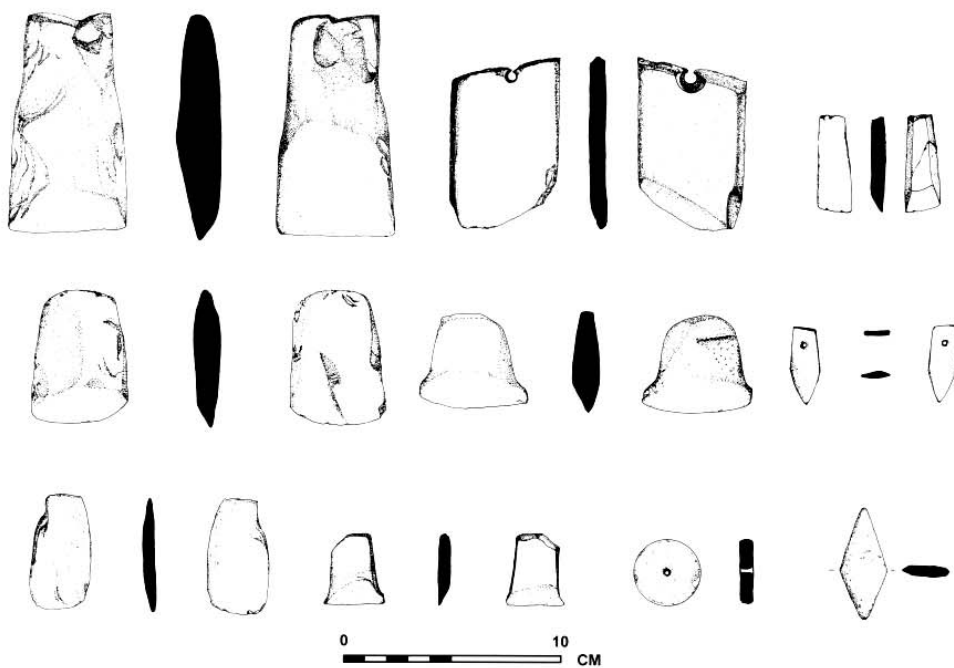


Figure 8.19 -- Late Neolithic adzes, projectile points and spindle whorl.



Figure 8.20 -- Fragment of perforated polished stone artifact, projectile point and spindle whorl.

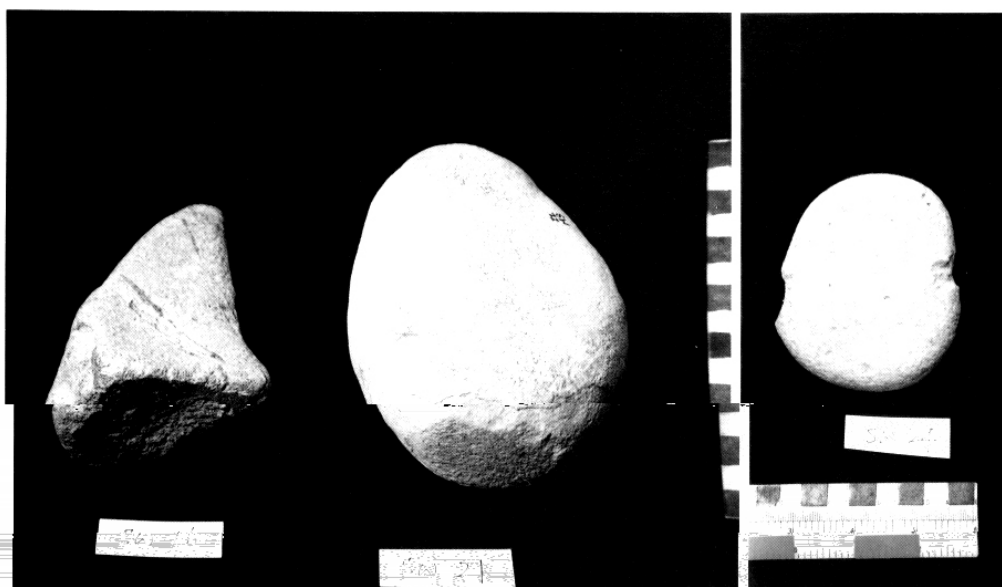


Figure 8.21 -- A pitted pebble with handle-like shape (left), a pebble grinder (centre) and a notched pebble from Square FX.

chipped pebble tools. A relatively large number (17) of notched pebbles was recovered, in contrast to the rarity of this class at the Middle Neolithic sites of Fu Tei and Kwo Lo Wan upper. Finally, a ceramic spindle whorl was found, again in contrast to the Middle Neolithic sites which did not have yielded any examples.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE SHAM WAN TSUEN EAST VALLEY SITE**

This site provided a Late Neolithic assemblage, evidence for Han presence (albeit brief) on the island, and additional data on the extent of the Tang lime kiln site. However, the most important information obtained was the clear division of the Middle Neolithic into two phases. This division had been seen previously at Hac Sa Wan in Macau (Meacham 1986:97-108), but the Sham Wan Tsuen site is the first in Hong Kong to provide clear-cut stratigraphic evidence showing that painted pottery is earlier in the Middle Neolithic (MNI) than the incised chalky ware phase (MNII). The pottery from the later MNII phase is identical to that of Fu Tei and Kwo Lo Wan upper, and neither of those sites yielded a single sherd of painted ware.

The absence of any indication whatever of Tang habitation areas is puzzling, since the site clearly had a major lime industry for at least a few decades. The Han sherds are indicative of at least a brief visit to the area.

The sequence of deposits is also worthy of note: there is a progression to older deposits as one moves south from the abandoned paddy field through the sand bank to the toe of the hill. Taking a line roughly through Squares DA, E, F and G, the dominant deposits are recent, Tang, Late Neolithic and Middle Neolithic, respectively. The oldest, Middle Neolithic deposit is restricted to a very small area (roughly 30 square metres) at the southern end of this line, furthest from the sea. The sand bank appears to have begun in the Middle Neolithic as a very small deposit above the wave zone backed against the hillslope in the area of Squares G-GX; by the Late Neolithic it had begun to form a tongue shape, and it continued to prograde during subsequent periods. There was also a small sand spit in the middle of the lagoon (now the valley) during the Late Neolithic. By Tang times the sand body was quite extensive, both as a sand bar jutting out into the lagoon and as a sand deposit banked against the hillslopes.