

Late Neolithic pottery from the Ancient Near East

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Exam: write an essay of minimally one page - maximally two pages about one of the following topics (you choose). Discuss at least the issues raised for each topic, try to formulate some answers. Tell me in your own words what you think and what *your* interpretations are. The essay must be concise, to-the-point, readable and presentable. No images, plain text, English (no Czech, sorry). Use your notes from the lectures and the background literature provided.

Topic 1. Earliest pottery in the Middle East

In Upper Mesopotamia the earliest pottery appears around 7000 cal. BC. Discuss the main technological and stylistic properties of this pottery. Name a few important sites. Why were archaeologists working in the region so surprised when this pottery first came to light a few years ago? What are the main subsequent developments in the pottery after ca. 6700 cal. BC? What were the functional and/or symbolic uses for the first pottery in the ancient Near East? *Why* in the name of *Jabberwocky*¹ did people adopt pottery? And, why did they invent pottery around 7000 BC instead of much earlier or much later?

Topic 2. The 'Time of Painted Pottery'

The well-known French archaeologist Jean-Louis Huot once wrote about "*l'ère de la céramique peinte*" (1994; English: "the time of painted pottery"): what does he mean with this term? Name the main culture-historical terminology and the corresponding dates for the Upper Mesopotamian pottery after 6200 cal. BC, and describe the main elements of the pottery. Name a few important sites. What do Upper Mesopotamian archaeologists mean with the term "Proto-Halaf"? Why is Reinhard Bernbeck so unhappy with this and other terms? When Nieuwenhuys enthusiastically talks about the "invention of the century", what technological innovation is he talking about? What were functions (socio-economic and/or symbolic) of the painted pottery after 6200 cal. BC? Where did the "Halaf people" come from?

Topic 3. The organization of pottery production

How did people in the Late Neolithic organize the production of their pottery? What production-related facilities and tools do you find at Late Neolithic sites? Why is the site of Tell Kosak Shamali (Syria) such an important key-site for understanding the organization of pottery production; what did the Japanese archaeologists discover there? Describe in broad outlines the *chaîne opératoire* of the Late Neolithic pottery.

Topic 4. A world of images

The later prehistoric ceramics from the Near East are famous for their intricate painted decoration. Was painting the only decorative technology employed by Late Neolithic groups after 6200 BC? Why did painting eventually prevail? What was the function or symbolic meaning of the painted decoration in the Late Neolithic? In the course we discussed several examples of important figurative scenes from the Late Neolithic: choose two of them and for each name the date, the site where it was found, who found it, and interpret what is depicted.

¹ *Lewis Carroll 1872, Monty Python 1977.*