

## Dancing and the Beginning of Art Scenes in the Early Village Communities of the Near East and Southeast Europe

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*Dancing is depicted in the earliest art of the ancient Near East. It appears in many variations from the ninth to the sixth millennium BP over a vast geographical range. This article discusses the dancing performance, the social context of the dance and cognitive aspects of the dancing scenes. Ethnographic observations are used in order to gain a wider view of dancing and dancing scenes in pre-state societies. A correlation can be observed between art, symbolism, religion and social organization.*

Ethnographic observations on the ritual and religious activities of pre-state societies emphasize the importance of speech, singing and dancing. Bloch wrote of this situation: 'I very much doubt that an event observed by an anthropologist which did not contain these three elements would ever be described by him as a ritual. In other words these phenomena have been implicitly taken as the distinguishing marks of ritual' (Bloch 1989, 21). In the case of pre-historic pre-state societies, speech and singing are lost for ever, but some evidence of dancing has survived through art objects. The earliest scenes of interaction between people in the ancient Near East depict dancing. From the ninth to the sixth millennium BP this subject appears in many variations, covering a vast geographical expanse: the Levant, Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, the Balkans, Greece, the Danube basin of southeastern Europe and Egypt.

Dancing has been described as:

rhythmic movement having as its aim the creation of visual designs by a series of poses and tracing of patterns through space in the course of measured units of time, the two components, static and kinetic, receiving varying emphasis and being executed by different parts of the body in accordance with temperament, artistic precepts, and purpose. (Webster's Dictionary 1965)

Elsewhere dance has been defined as a complex form of communication that combines the

visual, kinesthetic, and aesthetic aspects of human movement with (usually) the aural dimension of musical sounds and sometimes poetry. Dance is created out of culturally understood symbols within social and religious contexts, and it conveys information and meaning as ritual, ceremony, and entertainment. For dance to communicate, its audience must understand the cultural conventions that deal with human movement in time and space. (Kaepler 1992, 196)

Dancing is an activity which is not limited to humans. As a means of communication it has been observed in insects (the bee dance: Frisch 1967), and in the courtship interaction of birds and various mammals' courtship interactions (Wilson 1975, 176–241, 314–35). In human society, dance is a cross-cultural phenomenon which has been observed all over the world (Sachs 1952; Kraus 1969; Lange 1976; Bland 1976; Blacking & Kealinohomoku 1979; Clarke & Clement 1981). It has been suggested that dance, as a medium of non-verbal communication, was already practised during the Lower Palaeolithic (Blacking 1976; McNeill 1995, 13–35).

In this study discussion will be limited to the evidence for dancing activities in a specific chronological/geographical/socio-economic milieu, i.e. the village communities of the Near East and southeastern Europe, from c. the ninth to the sixth millennium BP. The term 'village communities' refers to what are

commonly called the Natufian, Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. At this stage of human history the Palaeolithic way of life based on small bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers disappeared, but cities and states had not yet developed.

### Earliest art scenes of the Near East

Before presenting and analyzing the depictions of dance, the context of these scenes within the development of symbolic expressions should be examined. The nomadic hunter-gatherer societies of the Upper Palaeolithic and Epi-Palaeolithic in the Near East hardly produced artistic expressions, and only isolated art objects have been reported from this region. With the establishment of sedentary settlements in the ancient Near East the situation changed completely. The earliest permanent villages were built in the Natufian culture of the Levant, dated as early as the twelfth millennium BP. Natufian sites are characterized by rich symbolic artworks, including anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines and items engraved with geometric patterns (cf. Perrot 1966; 1979; Belfer-Cohen 1991; Cauvin 1994).

In the tenth millennium BP, the period commonly designated Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA), the corpus of symbolic depictions unearthed includes anthropomorphic figurines, zoomorphic figurines and various stone objects engraved with geometric patterns (cf. Noy 1989; Cauvin 1994).

In the next chronological stage, the late tenth and ninth millennia BP, the period commonly designated Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB), there is a rapid growth of symbolic expression (cf. Rollefson 1983; 1986; Cauvin 1994; Garfinkel 1995). Rollefson suggested subdividing these art objects into two groups based on their size (1983; 1986):

1. small anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, usually smaller than 10 cm. These were used by individuals and reflect household cults.
2. large anthropomorphic statues, plastered skulls and masks, usually larger than 20 cm. These were used on more public occasions and reflect rituals performed at the community level.

All these items, however, are isolated art and cult objects. Even when found in groups, like the plastered skulls or anthropomorphic statues (Garfinkel 1994), they do not represent a scene, and no interdependence between the items can be observed. Thus the scenes recently reported from two Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites in the Levant — Nevali Çori and Dhuweila (see below) — present a most dramatic change. This aspect has been summarized by

Renfrew & Bahn as follows:

Painting, drawing, or carving on a flat surface in order to represent the world offers much more scope than the representation in three dimensions of a single figure. For it offers the possibility of showing relationships between symbols, between objects in the cognitive map (Renfrew & Bahn 1991, 368).

Scenes, as opposed to figurines, are rather rare in the proto-historic Near East. They can be divided into three main categories:

1. the Çatalhöyük wall-paintings and reliefs, a unique assemblage which has been discussed on various occasions (Mellaart 1967). Another example of a wall-painting depicting a scene has been reported from Umm Dabaghiyah (Kirkbride 1975, fig. 7a).
2. pottery vessels depicting human figures together with animals or architectural elements. This rare category has been reported from only a few sites (see, for example, Oppenheim 1943, fig. LX; Ippoliti-Strika 1990; Breniquet 1992a; Tobler 1950, pl. LXXVIII:a-b; Amiet 1979, figs. 15-17).
3. scenes depicting dancing figures. This is the largest category, in chronological duration, geographical distribution and the number of examples reported.

It is therefore rather surprising to see that dancing scenes have never been the subject of a comprehensive analysis, and that only some aspects of them have been discussed (Herzfeld 1941, 29-42; Mesnil du Buisson 1948, 23; Parrot 1960, 44-6; Gulder 1960-62; Vanden Berghe 1968; Nitu 1970; Marinescu-Bilcu 1974a; Meyerhof & Mozel 1981; Yakar 1991, 314; Esin 1993; Mantu 1993; Matousova 1993). The aim of this work is to describe the dancing scenes and to discuss various aspects of this phenomenon.

### Methodological remarks on the depiction of dance

Prehistoric depictions of dance raise all kinds of methodological problems, some of which are specifically derived from the subject of dance, while others are related to more general concerns of archaeological analysis. Dance experts argue about reliable methods for identifying dance versus other possible bodily activities (Hanna 1979). If there are problems with recognizing dance when it is actually in progress, problems with recognizing depictions of dance are even more complicated since dance activity is not always self-evident. Can one suggest objective criteria for the identification of dancing scenes? This issue should be tackled on both the theoretical and the

practical level.

*The theoretical level*

Dance is created out of culturally understood symbols within social and religious contexts. Are we capable today, thousands of years later, of recognizing and understanding all of the cases in which dance is expressed in art scenes?

*The practical level*

The talent and executive ability of the individual artist to express the motif, the items' state of preservation, as well as the style and raw material used affect our ability to identify a depiction as representing dance.

In order to overcome these and other problems the following methodological remarks are in order.

*1. Dance, dancing scenes and the decorated items*

The first point which needs to be clarified methodologically is that three totally different subjects are involved in this study.

*The dance*

Dance is a cross-cultural phenomenon which has been observed in every human organization. In traditional communities it bears various social and religious functions. Unlike ritual paraphernalia, however, which are a direct product of rituals and religious ceremonies, dancing does not leave direct evidence in the archaeological record.

*The dancing scenes*

This is an artistic motif which depicts the activity of dance. In some periods dancing scenes were very popular while in others they were neglected. The case of the Bushmen of South Africa shows that there is no direct correlation between the importance of dance in daily life and the importance of the dance motif in the symbolic expression of the same communities (see below).

*The decorated items*

An object decorated with a dancing motif had a function of its own, over and above the dance and the dancing scene. Moreover, alongside the items decorated with depictions of dance, identical items appear in the archaeological record which are decorated with other motifs, or left undecorated.

There should therefore be a clear division between the items decorated with dancing scenes, the

dancing scenes and the dance; each subject has to be analyzed separately.

*2. Depiction of movement in a static medium*

When dealing with the depiction of dance in painting, plastic representation or carving, a fundamental difficulty must be taken into account. 'Dancing is, in and of itself, a dynamic activity performed at a certain time and place, while painting and carving are, by their very nature, static. How can one document movement in a static artistic medium?' (Bellugue 1963).

Documenting dance is a difficult task:

An adequate system of dance notation, which is one kind of permanent record, must deal successfully with three different elements: movement through space, movement through time, and the stylistic variations and idiosyncracies that comprise what we may call 'performance' (Royce 1977, 39).

These difficulties exist today, even with the development of modern choreography (Hutchinson 1954; 1984; 1989; Eshkol & Wachmann 1958) and the use of advanced filming techniques (cf. Royce 1977, 54-5; Brooks 1984; Morphy 1994). They were much more severe when the media chosen were painted pottery vessels or engraved stone objects. Thus, there was no intention of notating dance at all, and it seems that the aim of a dancing scene was to provide a memory-aid for those who already knew the style and sequence of the movement. Indeed, in many of the items presented below, no attempt was made to represent dancing situations realistically. On the contrary, the artists pursued a minimalist approach, using the three stylistic categories defined below as: naturalistic, linear or geometric. All three approaches concentrate on expressing a small number of characteristics which represent dance.

*The circle*

The archaeological examples show a clear preference for round objects when portraying dancing scenes. Only in very few cases were other objects used, such as stone slabs, walls, or stamp seals. On pottery vessels and cylinder seals the figures were arranged around the perimeter in one line, parallel to the rim — not at random or freely all over the surface. Whether dozens of figures are represented, or only two, they are organized in a circle around the vessel.

Arranging the figures in a circle like this creates a symmetrical pattern, usually described as an 'endless motif'. When the components are geometric,

zoomorphic or floral the arrangement is merely decorative (Wickede 1986). When the 'endless motif' is composed of human figures presented in a dynamic posture or holding hands, however, it cannot be considered as merely decorative any longer, but represents a circle of dancing figures. Moreover, the dancing figures were sometimes drawn on the inner rim of jars where they are not easily visible. These cases emphasize that the dancing figures convey a more complex message than the zoomorphic or floral endless decoration.

#### *Direction of movement*

In the archaeological examples, the movement of the dancers in each scene is always uniform and all figures always turn in the same direction, thus strictly regulating the direction of movement.

#### *Rhythm*

The effect of rhythm, so essential to dance, is achieved in each scene by the arrangement of the figures at constant distances from each other.

#### *Body position*

In many examples of the naturalistic and geometric styles, the dancers' bodies are represented with the limbs bent — the part nearer the body horizontally and the further limb part vertically, with the arms turned upwards and the legs downwards. This is not a static standing or sitting position, but rather a dynamic one requiring great effort. In addition, despite the schematic representation of the figures, fingers were also depicted in some cases. Hand and finger movements constitute an important component in various forms of dance and this may be the reason for their inclusion in the dancing scenes, despite the fact that fingers are usually absent in schematic depictions of human figures.

### *3. Depicting the richness of dance in limited conditions*

Dance is usually characterized by a plethora of details: the position of the body and limbs, various articles of dress such as hats or coiffures, ribbons at the back of the neck, belts and special shoes. Some figures appear to be wearing masks. The drawing or carving of such details, particularly when executed on a miniature scale, are inevitably limited. How can one document the richness of dance with extremely limited means of expression? The artistic solution in this case, as can be seen from the examples presented below, was to select only one or two of the

above-mentioned elements for a specific scene. Many details have been deliberately omitted, so that only a segment of the entire dance and dance decoration is expressed in the depictions.

### *4. State of preservation of items*

When dealing with items 9000 to 5000 years old made on breakable materials such as pottery vessels, we do not usually have complete objects at our disposal. In many cases only fragmentary parts have been preserved. Since this study concentrates on dancing scenes, a single dancing figure on a pot sherd raises a problem, as it may imply two different situations:

- these items could come from vessels bearing several such figures, and could thus be fragments of a larger dance scene.
- these items could come from vessels on which only one figure was depicted, and would thus not be fragments of a dance scene.

Items of the first type may be included in the assemblage while items of the second type should not be. However, almost all examples of complete vessels or large sherds which have been preserved show two or more identical dancing figures. Thus the decision was taken to include sherds with a single dancing figure in this study.

### *5. The relevance of the dancing scenes to the study of dance*

The dancing scenes are not direct products of dance activity but are an artistic transformation of reality into depiction. This situation has been described by Longstreet:

The skill of the eye and fingers of the artist does not merely try to capture reality — for reality is far from the purpose of the dance — but the impression, the fleeting stop-motion of an intricate spin or turn . . . the dance becomes the memory of a line, a form, a color; and a drawing an impression, an expression, usually abstract (Longstreet 1968).

Taking into account these limitations, it is clear that not every question concerning the dance can be answered. Only a rough general outline can be reconstructed, while the minor details are not retrievable. In order to verify the relationship of the dancing scenes to the study of dance, it is important to establish who produced the items decorated with depictions of dance, and who were the intended audiences of these scenes. Most of the items in the early village communities were pottery vessels made by local

potters to be used by members of the same communities. In order for the dancing scenes to communicate a message they should deliver a meaningful image, i.e. be understandable by the inhabitants of the early villages. This implies that the dancing scenes were comprehensible representations of dance activity.

### 6. Categories of dance analysis

The analysis of dancing scenes can be supported by the discipline of dance research. Beside numerous case studies, there are specific works that have been devoted to a more general level of dance analysis (cf. Sachs 1952; Rust 1969; Lange 1976; Royce 1977). This rich reservoir of resources should be integrated in any study that deals with depictions of dance. Dance activity is composed of individuals who are acting together. Thus there are two levels of analysis: the individual on the one hand and the community on the other.

### 7. Assemblage analysis

The focus of analysis should be the assemblage of dancing scenes rather than individual objects. Isolated scenes, when examined alone, cannot produce much information owing to the difficulty of expressing the richness of dance by minimal schematic means of expression. Only the combination of all the relevant data, when bits and pieces are placed one alongside the other, can produce meaningful analysis. A critical mass is needed in order to produce a multiple effect.

#### The dancing scenes

In my study over 300 examples of dancing scenes, discovered at some 140 sites, have been recorded. In this preliminary presentation only a few examples are presented, due to space limitation. One can summarize the main features relevant to the origin and distribution of the dancing motif in the ancient Near East and southeastern Europe as follows.

#### *Ninth millennium BP (Pre-Pottery Neolithic B)*

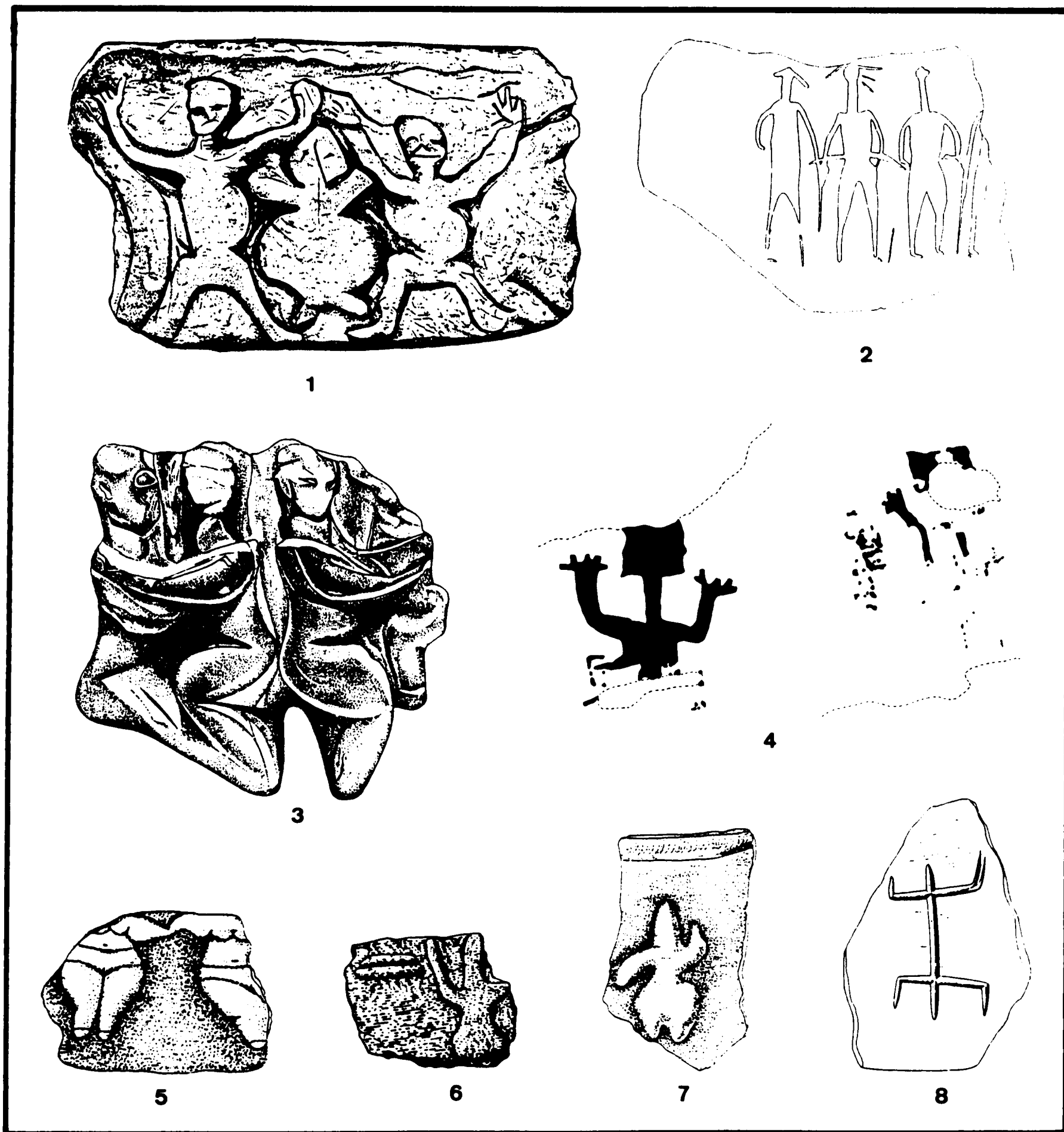
At this stage the earliest evidence for the dancing motif comes to light at two sites in the Levant — Nevali Çori and Dhuweila. Nevali Çori is located in the middle Euphrates region in southeastern Turkey. A large Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) village was unearthed, including rich assemblages of art objects (Hauptmann 1991–92; 1993; Yakar 1991, 65–8; 1994, 13–21). One outstanding find was a large

public structure with benches, two monumental pillars and a niche. A collection of life-size anthropomorphic stone statues was unearthed inside it. This building is one of the earliest examples of a temple in the ancient Near East. An item of special interest from this site is an engraved fragment of a rounded stone basin (Bienert & Fritz 1989; Yakar 1991, 315; Hauptmann 1993, fig. 27). It bears a scene depicting three complete figures presented *en face* in line (Fig. 1:1). At the broken edges traces of additional figures can be seen but their nature remains unclear. The two outer figures are clearly human. They resemble each other, and both are larger than the figure in the centre. Many details of the human body are shown: head, face, two hands, fingers, torso, legs and toes. The arms are bent upwards and the hands clearly end in fingers. The legs are separate, also shown partly horizontally and partly vertically, and end with feet and toes. This is a very dynamic representation of the human body, clearly expressing a dancing position.

The character of the central figure is less clear since it was schematically engraved. The head is shaped like a rhombus with two eyes. The body is rounded in a very exaggerated way. Two arms rise diagonally, and two short legs extend diagonally downwards. When published, this figure was identified as a turtle (Bienert & Fritz 1989; Hauptmann 1993). But it has no tail or chequered shell. It seems that the central figure should rather be interpreted as a woman, or as a scene representing a family celebrating a new birth (Uzunoglu 1993, 43, item A-43), and a 'tortoise-like pregnant figure' (Yakar 1991, 315). Similar depictions of the female body can be found at the site of Köşk Höyük in Anatolia (Fig. 1:5). A scene of two dancing men flanking a woman also appears on a stamp seal from Tepe Giyan (Fig. 6:2), dated to the sixth millennium BP (Herzfeld 1933, fig. 25; Barnett 1966, fig. 1:16, pl. XXIII:2). A rounded body was used as a gender characteristic signifying a female figure, and does not necessarily indicate pregnancy, as suggested by Uzunoglu.

The Nevali Çori basin fragment is one of the earliest art objects in the Near East depicting a scene which represents men and women dancing together.

Dhuweila is a small camp site located in the Eastern Desert of Jordan. Several rock carvings were found in a Pre-Pottery Neolithic B layer (Betts 1987). One basalt slab bears a row of four human figures presented *en face*, standing in a line, and holding hands (Fig. 1:2). The bodies are relatively thin and tall with elongated necks, quite similar to each other. No specific gender characteristics are shown, but the



**Figure 1.** Near Eastern Neolithic dancing scenes: 1) Nevali Çori, c. 19 × 13 cm (Hauptmann 1993, fig. 27); 2) Dhuweila, c. 9 × 7 cm (Betts 1987, fig. 2); 3) Çatalhöyük, c. 11.5 × 11.5 cm (Temizer 1981, fig. 22); 4) Kalavassos-Tenta, c. 120 × 60 cm (Todd 1987, fig. 39); 5) Köşk Höyük, c. 16 × 11 cm (Silistrelı 1989, fig. III:1); 6) Tell Sotto, c. 9 × 7 cm (Bader 1993, fig. 3.6); 7) Köşk Höyük, c. 19 × 11 cm (Silistrelı 1989, fig. II:1); 8) El Kowm 2, c. 12 × 18 cm (Cauvin 1994, fig. 64:2).



general impression is that they are all males.

Each figure's head is portrayed somewhat differently. The head of the figure on the left is elongated like an animal head. The head of the second figure from the left seems to have a hat or a coiffure. The third has a very small head, and the head of the fourth figure has unfortunately been broken off. The heads are very small in proportion, and give a generally non-human impression. Configurations of human bodies with non-human heads in the art of the protohistoric Near East have been described as: 'demons' (Herzfeld 1941, 30), 'demons with ibex horns' (Porada 1965, 32), masked persons (Barnett 1966; Kaplan 1969) and 'bird-headed men' (Fukai *et al.* 1974, 51). It seems to me that rather than being mythological demons, the figures at Dhuweila represent masked individuals. Masks have been discovered at contemporary Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites in the Levant (Bar-Yosef & Alon 1988, pl. X; Nissen *et al.* 1987, fig. 16:1).

#### *Early eighth millennium BP*

The dancing motif becomes common throughout a broader geographical expanse, including northern Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Cyprus. The best examples include applied plastic decoration on a pottery vessel from Köşk Höyük (Fig. 1:5&7), a carved stone slab from Çatalhöyük (Fig. 1:3) and a painted fresco at Kalavassos-Tenta (Fig. 1:4).

One item from Köşk Höyük includes the lower part of two identical figures presented *en face*, holding hands (Fig. 1:5). The breasts, the emphasized pelvis and the fat folds indicate that only women are participating in this dance. The figures are arranged in a horizontal line on the shoulder of a closed vessel. On another item from this site a single figure has one arm bent upwards and the other bent downwards (Fig. 1:7). The arm positions indicate a dynamic dancing pose, which is clearly emphasized in the first example in which two figures are holding each other.

Çatalhöyük is one of the most famous Neolithic settlements in the Near East, located on the Konya plain in Anatolia (Mellaart 1967; Todd 1976; Yakar 1991, 201–18). From Layer VI, dated to the first half of the eighth millennium BP (Waterbolk 1987), came an engraved plaque described as follows (Fig. 1:3):

On the left a couple of deities are shown in embrace; on the right a mother holding a child, whose head is unfortunately lost. It is possible, if not probable, that the two scenes relate a succession of events; the union of the couple on the left and the intended result on the right. The goddess remains

the same, the male appears either as husband or as son (Mellaart 1963, 148, pl. 83).

These four figures, however, are rather similar to one another, and bear no gender characteristics. It is impossible to decide whether they are males or females, which makes Mellaart's interpretation groundless. The two couples are clearly presented in a dynamic position, embracing and with bent legs. The pelvises are at the two extreme ends of each composition rather than touching one another. This is not necessarily a 'union' (Mellaart 1963, 148) or 'copulation' (Todd 1976, 93) but could be interpreted as a dancing posture. I therefore suggest that the plaque depicts the performance of a 'couple dance'.

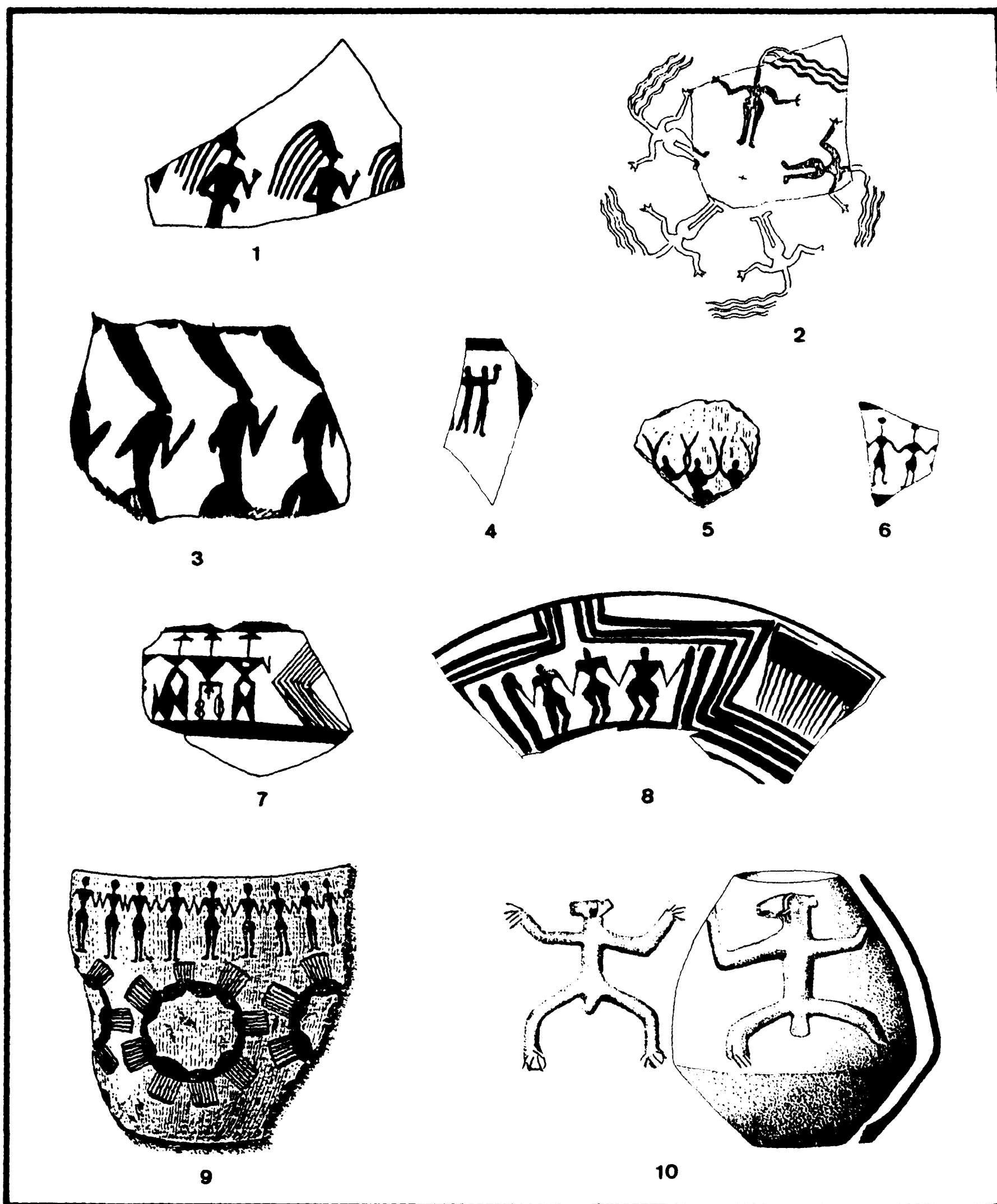
Kalavassos-Tenta is an aceramic Neolithic village site in Cyprus (Todd 1987). In one of the houses a wall-painting in a fragmentary state of preservation was unearthed. Two human figures are shown with arms upraised (Fig. 1:4). The figures in this wall-painting share basic similarities with figures discovered in a number of protohistoric sites in the Near East: Nevali Çori (Fig. 1:1), 'Ein el-Jarba (Fig. 2:10), and Tall-i Bakun A (Fig. 4:8). In these cases the figures were depicted in the same position:

- *en face* pose;
- the arms are bent upwards, partly horizontal and partly vertical;
- the legs are spread apart, their upper part horizontal and their lower part vertical, and
- an identical figure is depicted again, side by side with the first one.

In spite of its fragmentary state of preservation, the item from Kalavassos-Tenta falls within a common and well-documented class of motif from this area and period: that of dancing figures.

Further examples of dancing figures from eighth-millennium BP sites have been discovered at Tell Sotto (Fig. 1:6), El Kowm 2 (Fig. 1:8), Umm Dabaghiyah (Kirkbride 1973, pl. III) and Kuruçay Höyük (Duru 1988, fig. 14:1). The item from El Kowm 2 bears an incision showing a very schematic anthropomorphic figure presented *en face* (Fig. 1:8). The arms are bent upwards and the legs are bent downwards. The line of the torso projects down between the legs and seems to indicate the male sex organ. This is the earliest example in the assemblage with such a degree of abstraction of the human body. The tendency towards abstract figures becomes stronger in later chronological stages (Figs. 4–5).

*Late eighth millennium and early seventh millennium BP*  
At this stage the distribution of the motif expands



**Figure 2.** Near Eastern dancing scenes from late eighth and early seventh millennium BP: 1) Tell Sabi Abyad, c. 9 × 6 cm (Akkermans 1989, fig. IV.43:349); 2) Samarra, c. 5 × 5 cm (Herzfeld 1941, fig. 36); 3) Tell Halaf, c. 9 × 6 cm (Oppenheim 1943, pl. LX:2); 4) Tepe Djowi, c. 3.5 × 6 cm (Dollfus 1983, fig. 31:18); 5) Khazineh, c. 3 × 2.5 cm (Gautier & Lampre 1905, fig. 255); 6) Tepe Sabz, c. 2 × 3.5 cm (Hole et al. 1969, fig. 63:n); 7) Choga Mami, c. 8 × 6 cm (Ippoliti-Srika 1990, fig. P); 8) Djaffarabad, c. 24 × 9 cm (Dollfus 1971, fig. 9:1); 9) Khazineh, c. 6.5 × 6.5 cm (Gautier & Lampre 1905, fig. 254); 10) 'Ein el-Jarba, c. 27 × 23 cm (Kaplan 1969, fig. 7:1).



considerably. It is evident at most of the Halafian and Samarran sites in northern and central Mesopotamia (see Figs. 2:1–3, 7 & 4:1–3). In western Iran the motif is found on the Deh Luran plain (see Figs. 2:5–6, 9 & 4:8–9) and the Susiana plain of Khuzistan (see, for example, Figs. 2:4, 8 & 4:4, 10). Various decorative styles can be noted. In Mesopotamia and Iran the motif is presented through pottery painting. Three basic styles of painting appear simultaneously: naturalistic (Fig. 2), linear (Fig. 4:2–4) and geometric (Fig. 4:1, 8–10). Several local linear and geometric styles developed, of which the most common are the following:

- in the Halaf culture, the common linear style depicts the human figure with a triangular head, two or three vertical lines representing the body and two diagonal lines marking the arms (see Fig. 4:2).
- at sites of the Samarra culture a more abstract linear style is common in which the head is totally absent and the human figure is composed of a number of vertical lines representing the body, while diagonal lines represent the arms (see Fig. 4:3).
- on the Susiana plain, the body of the human figure is represented by one exceptionally thick line (see Fig. 4:4).
- in western Iran, the human figure is represented in geometric style in the form of a triangle, set in vertical rows (see Fig. 4:8–10).

In contrast to the painting technique which was preferred in Mesopotamia and Iran, relief representations were often used in the western and northern regions of the Near East, from the Levant to Anatolia and Armenia, as at 'Ein al-Jarba (Fig. 2:10), Korucutepe (Brandt 1978), Tülintepe (Esin 1993, fig. 84), Norşuntepe (Hauptmann 1976, fig. 48:6), Imiris Gora (Masson *et al.* 1982, fig. XXXIX:17) and Arukhlo (Chataigner 1995, pl. 45:1a–b).

Further north and west, similar examples have been discovered in Greece, the Balkans and south-eastern Europe (see below).

#### *Late seventh millennium BP*

In Iran the motif spreads northwards and eastwards and appears at various sites on the Iranian plateau and in Fars and Kerman; the easternmost example comes from Mehrgarh in Pakistan. Local styles became common in Iran, the most characteristic features being:

- a naturalistic style, common at sites on the Iranian plateau (Tepe Sialk, Tchechme Ali and Qabrestan), which includes a row of tall figures in

profile, very carefully delineated (Fig. 3:2–3, 5–6);

- a geometric style, present in the Susiana plain, Fars and Kerman, which includes a row of rhombuses covered by a net pattern (Fig. 4:5–7);
- a 'cubist' style, found at the site of Tall-i Bakun A (Fig. 3:8).

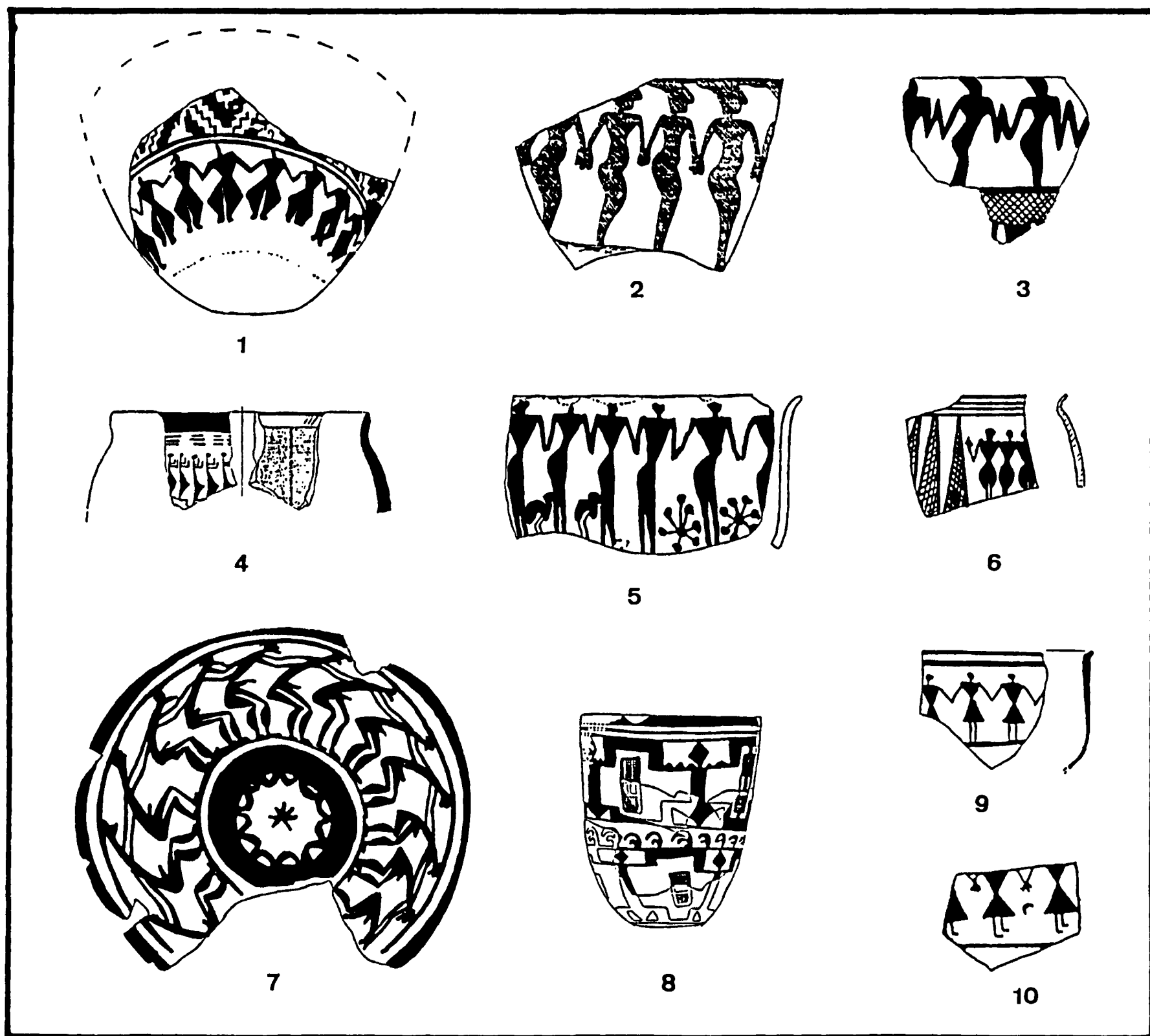
In Mesopotamia and Iran, with the appearance of stamp seals depicting scenes — as opposed to the earlier seals which were decorated mainly with geometric designs — the dance motif has been reported from Tepe Gawra (Fig. 6:3), Tepe Giyan (Fig. 6:2) and Telul eth-Thalathat (Fig. 6:4). At this point the motif reaches its widest geographical distribution, but in the centre, i.e. Mesopotamia, there is already evidence that its popularity is on the wane.

#### *Southeast Europe*

The early agricultural communities of southeast Europe in the eighth, seventh and sixth millennia BP produced large quantities of art and cult objects: figurines, statues, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic jars, architectural models and decorated pottery vessels (Dumitrescu 1974; Gimbutas 1982; 1989). Dancing figures are a common motif on decorated pottery and have been reported from quite a number of sites (Gulder 1960–62; Müller-Karpe 1968, 307; Nitu 1970; Dumitrescu 1974; Marinescu-Bilcu 1974a,b; Dragomir 1987; Mantu 1993). From a technical point of view, most of the examples from southeast Europe were decorated with plastic applications. Only a few items were incised or painted. Usually broken sherds with one figure have been reported. The better preserved examples, however, bear the following characteristics:

- more than one figure is depicted on the item's perimeter;
- the figures on a particular vessel are usually identical;
- the figures are portrayed in a dynamic posture, usually with bent arms and legs;
- no other scenes depicting interaction between people have been reported.

These features suggest that a single anthropomorphic figure on a sherd should be interpreted as part of a dancing scene, originally with several identical figures depicted around the vessel. It is also clear that the scenes represent ordinary human beings in dancing positions and not supernatural powers, as has sometimes been suggested — e.g. 'male gods' (Kalicz 1970, 52, pl. 52); 'the great goddess' (Mantu 1992, 315); or the female pantheon created by



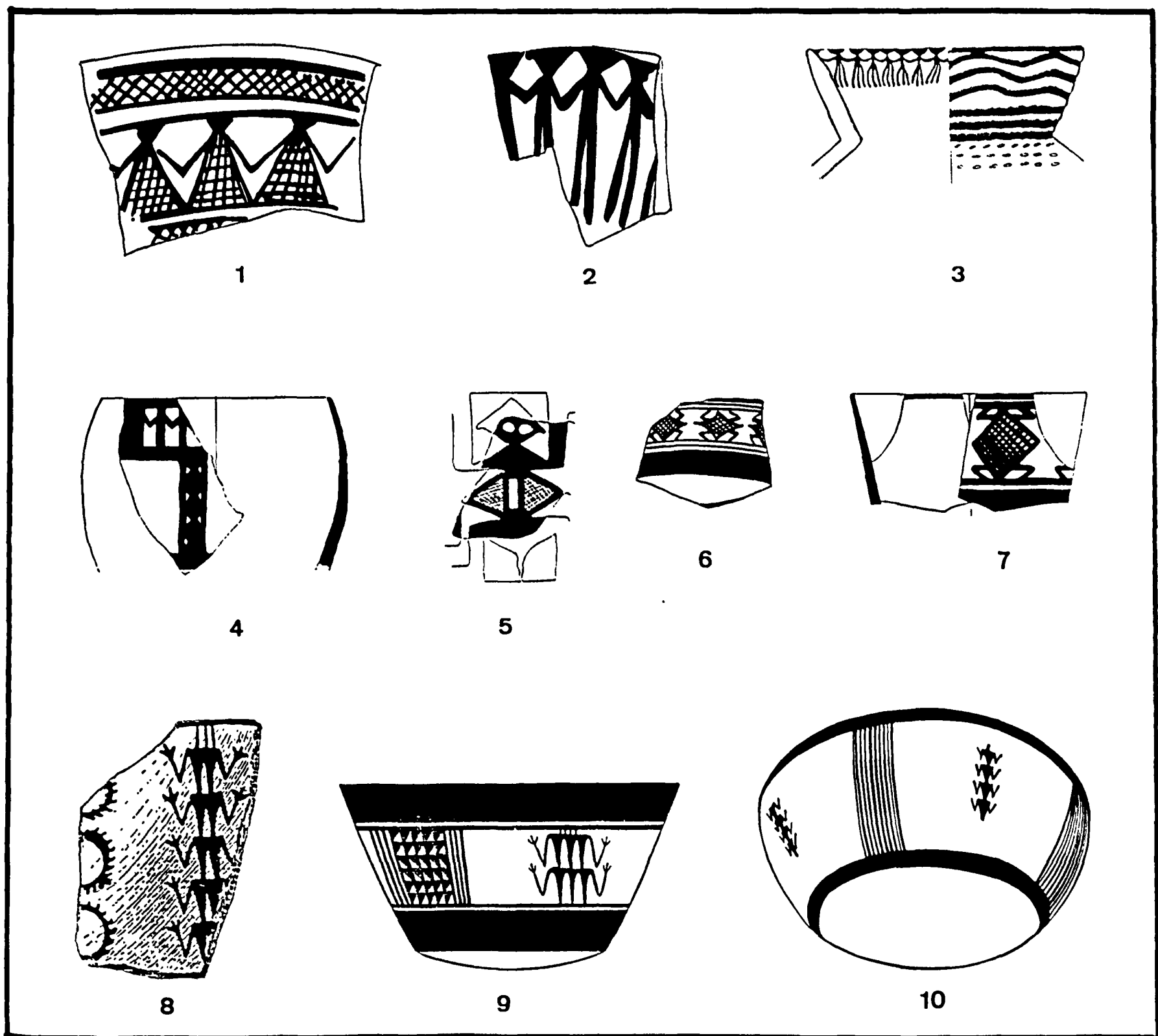
**Figure 3.** Dancing scenes from Iran and west Pakistan: 1) Chigha Sabz, c. 10 × 12 cm (Schmidt et al. 1989, pl. 67:a); 2) Tchechme Ali, c. 11 × 8 cm (Mecquenem 1928, fig. 24:1); 3) Qabrestan, no scale published (Negahban 1976, fig. 21); 4) Qal'eh Rostam, c. 4.5 × 6.5 cm (Bernbeck 1989, fig. 29:c); 5) Tepe Sialk, c. 7.5 × 4.5 cm (Ghirshman 1938, pl. LXXV:1); 6) Tepe Sialk, c. 10 × 9 cm (Ghirshman 1938, pl. LXXXd:10); 7) Tall-i Jari A, c. 19 cm diameter (Vanden Berghe 1966, pls. 50 & 52a); 8) Tall-i Bakun A, c. 12 × 13.5 cm (Langsdorff & McCown 1942, pl. 67:13); 9) Mehrgarh, c. 6 × 5 cm (Samzun & Sellier 1983, fig. 1); 10) Surab region, no scale published (Dani 1988, fig. 11).

Gimbutas, with her 'birth-giving goddess' (1982, 176, fig. 128), 'birth-giving goddess in the shape of a toad' (1982, 177, fig. 131), 'bee goddess' (1982, 184, figs. 142–4), 'bird goddess' (1989, 17) and 'snake goddess' (1989, 170, fig. 169).

Close connections existed between the Near Eastern and European artistic traditions, as already

emphasized by Nitu (1970):

- The dancing figures appear in that part of Europe closest to Anatolia.
- This motif appears in the seventh millennium BP in both regions.
- In this period both regions underwent a similar socio-economic development — the process of



**Figure 4.** Near Eastern examples of highly schematized dancing scenes from late eighth and seventh millennium BP: 1) Tell Halaf, c. 6 × 5 cm (Oppenheim 1943, pl. XCI:1); 2) Tell Halaf, c. 5 × 6.5 cm (Oppenheim 1943, pl. XC:14); 3) Tell es-Sawwan, c. 13 × 5 cm (Breniquet 1992b, fig. L:1); 4) Djaffarabad, c. 20 × 11 cm (Dollfus 1975, fig. 25:1); 5) Tall-i Bakun A, c. 12 × 13 cm (Langsdorff & McCown 1942, pl. 67:13); 6) Tall-i Skau, c. 12 × 10 cm (Stein 1936, pl. XXIV:5); 7) Tepe Yahya, c. 8 × 7.5 cm (Lamberg-Karlovsky & Beale 1986, fig. 4.20:x); 8) Khazineh, c. 4.5 × 6.5 cm (Gautier & Lampre 1905, fig. 262); 9) Khazineh, c. 14.5 × 8 cm (Gautier & Lampre 1905, fig. 264); 10) Chogha Mish, no scale published (Kantor 1976, fig. 6).

'neolithization', i.e. the adoption of subsistence strategies for food production and the agglomeration of large communities into village-type settlements.

- In stylistic terms, many of the European figures appear in the same dynamic postures used in

the Near East, and in cases where large parts of the vessels have been preserved, more than one figure appears.

On the basis of these points, it seems that the dancing motif should be interpreted similarly both in the Near East and in Europe. During the process of

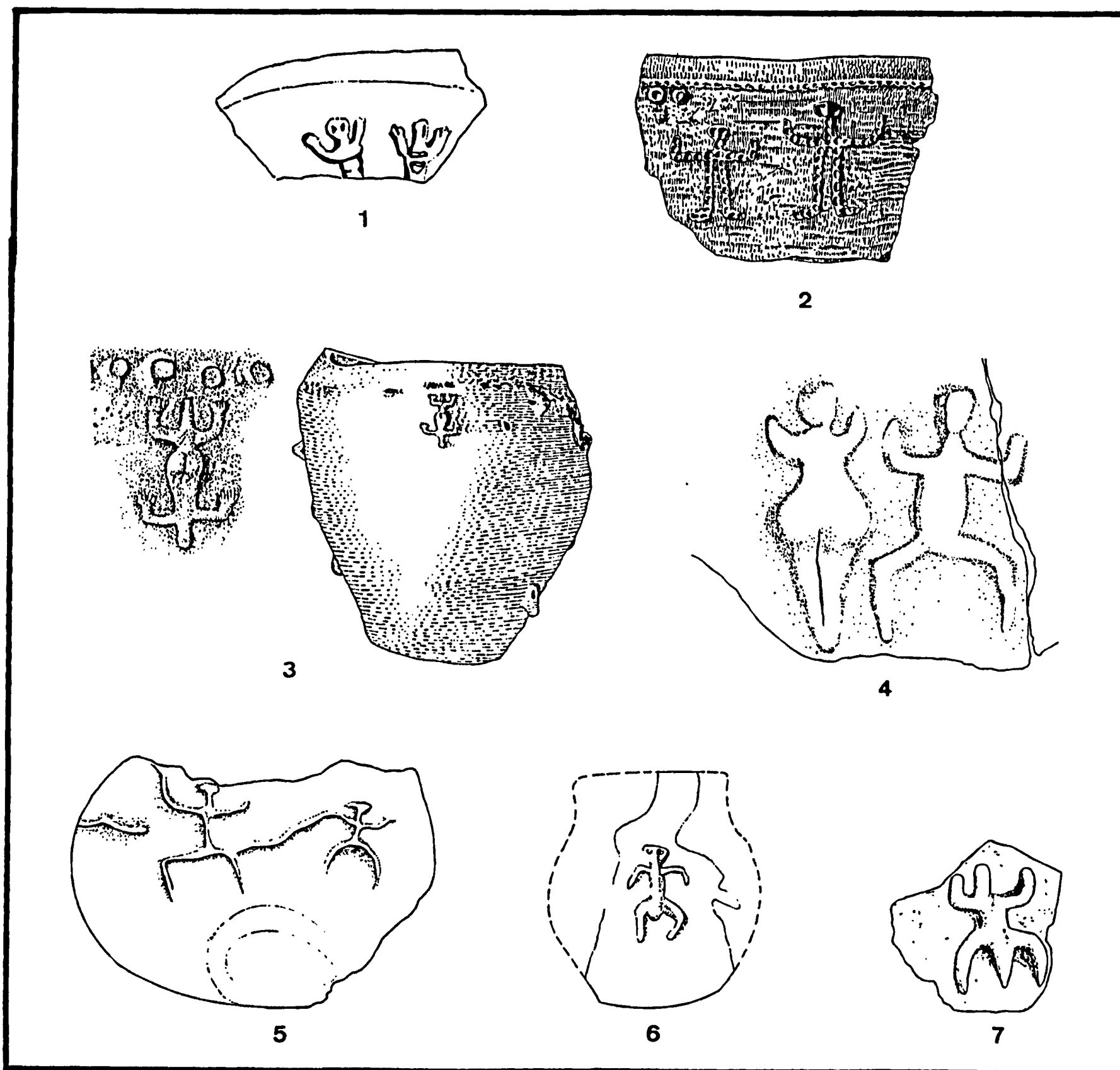


Figure 5. Southeast European dancing scenes: 1) Szegvár-Tüzköves, c. 6 × 3.5 cm (Korek 1987, fig. 24); 2) Gumelnita, c. 37 × 26 cm (Ionescu 1974, fig. 1:1); 3) Trusesti, c. 65 cm (Müller-Karpe 1968, pl. 172:1-1a); 4) Dumesti, c. 10 cm high of figures (Maxim-Alaiba 1987, fig. 13); 5) Gomolava, no scale published (Gimbutas 1982, pl. 172); 6) Tell Azmak, c. 16 × 8 cm (Georgiev 1965, pl. 6:d); 7) Trusesti, no scale published (Gimbutas 1982, fig. 144).

'neolithization', some Near Eastern myths and religious practices were adopted by European communities (Garfinkel 1994); the dancing figures motif is one aspect of this complicated and protracted development.

Figure 5 presents examples from the following sites: Szegvár-Tüzköves (Fig. 5:1), Gumelnita (Fig.

5:2), Trusesti (Fig. 5:3, 7), Dumesti (Fig. 5:4), Gomolava (Fig. 5:5) and Tell Azmak (Fig. 5:6).

#### *The sixth millennium BP*

In Mesopotamia, Iran and Anatolia the dancing motif becomes less widespread both in scope and quantity, appearing more rarely in archaeological

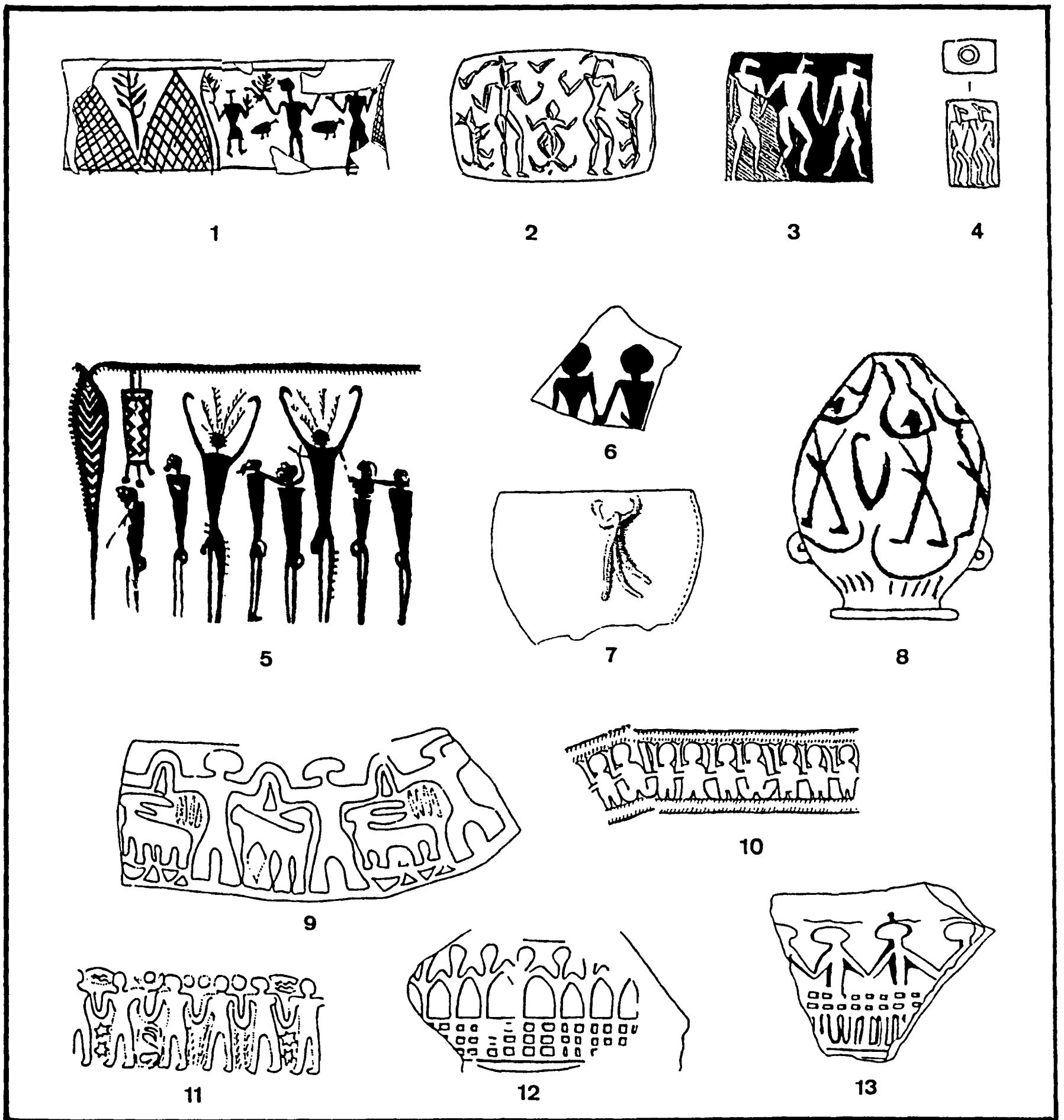


Figure 6. Later examples of dancing scenes from the Near East: 1) Tepe Gawra, c. 9 × 9 cm (Tobler 1950, pl. CXLV:398); 2) Tepe Giyan, c. 4 × 2.5 cm (Herzfeld 1933, fig. 25); 3) Tepe Gawra, c. 2.5 × 2.3 cm (Tobler 1950, pl. CLXIII:92); 4) Telul eth-Thalathat V, c. 2 × 1 cm (Fukai et al. 1974, pl. LX:10); 5) Egypt, unknown provenance, c. 29 cm high (Baumgartel 1955, fig. 14); 6) Hemanieh, c. 5 × 5 cm (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928, pl. LXX:6); 7) Mostagedda, c. 15 × 15 cm (Brunton 1937, pl. XVIII:41, pl. XIV:802); 8) Naqada, c. 18 cm high (Petrie 1921, pl. XXXVII:77); 9) Hama, c. 8 × 3.5 cm (Ben-Tor 1978, fig. 22:1); 10) Byblos, c. 1.7 × 6 cm (Dunand 1950, 201, fig. 209); 11) Syria, unknown provenance, c. 5 × 2 cm (Ben-Tor 1978, fig. 22:4); 12) Bab edh-Dhra', c. 8 × 8 cm (Lapp 1989, fig. 5); 13) Rosh ha-Niqra, c. 4.5 × 5.5 cm (Ben-Tor 1978, fig. 9:60).

assemblages. It is found on a small number of cylinder seals and their impressions, mainly from Ur (Legrain 1936, nos. 327–9), Chagar Bazar (Herzfeld 1941, fig. 142), Nippur (Amiet 1961, pl. 18:298), Nineveh (Collon 1987, 153, fig. 677) and Susa (Amiet 1972, pl. 17:678). At the same time, many scenes now concentrate on different topics altogether: war, animal herds, people at work, cultic rituals, etc. In Egypt, dancing scenes appear for the first time on a few vessels, in the applied technique (Fig. 6:7), as well as in painting (Fig. 6:5–6, 8).

#### *The third millennium BC*

In this period the dancing motif is confined to sites in the Levant and is found mainly on cylinder seals (see Fig. 6:9–13). A unique style develops which spreads from Rosh ha-Niqra in the north to Bab edh Dhra' in the south (Ben-Tor 1977; 1978; Lapp 1989).

To summarize, the dancing motif first appeared in the Levant in the ninth millennium BP. During the eighth and seventh millennium BP it spread eastwards to Mesopotamia and Iran, as far as Mehrgarh in western Pakistan. Simultaneously it spread to the west and to the north — to Anatolia, Armenia, Greece, the Balkans and southeast Europe. In the seventh millennium BP the dancing motif reached its zenith both geographically and quantitatively. In the sixth millennium BP the motif made its appearance in Egypt, but in Mesopotamia and Iran it lost its dominance. From this point on its popularity declined, until in the third millennium BC the Levant was the only area still using it as a major motif for the depiction of interaction between people. At its peak, the motif was represented in almost every form of artistic expression in use in the protohistoric Near East: carving on stone slabs and stone vessels, plastic representation on pottery vessels, pottery painting, stamp seals and frescos. By the third millennium BC the dancing motif was almost exclusively restricted to cylinder seals.

#### Structural analysis of the dancing scenes

Analyzing the form and style of the performance in early village communities represented by dancing scenes contributes to the field of dance history, which, in studies of antiquity, usually concentrates on Greek vases. The history of dance has attracted the attention of scholars, both on a general level (cf. Sachs 1952; Kraus 1969; Menil 1980; Clarke & Clement 1981; Anderson 1986) and for specific time periods (cf. Evans 1930, 66–80; Dolmetsch 1949; 1954; Brunner-

Traut 1958; Lawler 1964; Wood 1964; Prudhommeau 1965; Gruber 1981; Goodison 1989). In her study of the history of dance research A.P. Royce gave the following description:

Structure and function represent perspectives which produce very different kinds of information, hence their utility in studies with a specific focus. Structural studies of dance traditionally have been concerned with producing 'grammars' of dance styles. Functional studies, on the other hand, have concerned themselves with determining the contribution of dance to the continued well-being of a society or culture (Royce 1977, 65).

The following aspects of the depictions are relevant to the dance performance, and should be the subject of detailed examination:

- the location of the figures on the vessel;
- the presentation of the figures: whether *en face* or in profile;
- the position of the body, especially the arms and legs;
- costumes, objects and animals which accompany the dancers;
- gender analysis;
- direction of movement: clockwise or counter-clockwise;
- the relationship of the figures to each other;
- architectural or other elements depicted in the dancing scene.

Here we shall concentrate only on one aspect — the spatial organization of the community at the time of dance. Three different types of use of space by the community can be distinguished:

#### *Circle dance*

The basic spatial organization of dancing seen in the archaeological examples is that of a circle. On rounded pottery vessels and cylinder seals the figures were arranged around the perimeter in one horizontal line, parallel to the rim. Circle dance has many advantages (see below p. 227; Lange 1976, 83–4).

#### *Line dance*

Line dance may be represented in two different groups of painted items.

1. In a few items from western Iran the figures were arranged in vertical lines on the vessels, and not horizontally as in most cases (Fig. 4:8–10). This spatial organization is completely different from that of a circle and seems more suitable for portraying a line dance.
2. The dances performed in front of structures do



not form a closed circle. Such items have been reported from southern Mesopotamia and Iran (Figs. 3:6 & 6:1). The question in these cases is whether the scenes represent a line dance, or whether the introduction of the structure created technical difficulties for the depiction of a complete circle.

#### *Couple dance*

This is the rarest type of dance in the archaeological inventory. I have suggested that the engraved plaque from Çatalhöyük (Fig. 1:3) should be interpreted as representing two couples in a dance, and there is another schematic representation of couples from Trusesti in southeast Europe (Fig. 5:3).

Most dancing scenes were arranged around the circumferences of clay vessels or cylinder seals. Items which are not round, such as stone slabs, wall-paintings or stamp seals, were only rarely chosen for decoration with dancing figures. This is clear evidence of the way the nature of the depicted motif (dancing in circles) dictated a preference for the specific shape of the substrate (round objects).

#### **The cultic aspect**

The structure of the dancing scenes of the early village communities demands strict adherence to discipline, dictating the form of the performance. The posture of all the figures is the same. All figures are dressed identically or they are all nude. When holding objects, such as sticks, all the figures hold identical objects. All figures turn in the same direction. The distance between one figure and the next is uniform. Such requirements are typical of religious rituals, which demand a strict repetition of verbal pronouncements, movements, costumes, time and place of performance. Such requirements are often described in ethnographic observations concerning rituals, as noted by Bloch:

the formalization of body movement implies ever-growing control of choice of sequences of movement, and when this has occurred completely we have dance. We therefore find dance, as well as formalized body movements, typical of religion. The implications of this transformation from ordinary bodily control to dance are the same as they are for language: argument and bargaining with bodily movements are replaced by fixed, repeated, fused messages. The acceptance of this code implies compulsion. Communication has stopped being a dialectic and has become a matter of repeating correctly (Bloch 1989, 37–8).

Other scholars do not place so much emphasis on the repetitive elements of the ritual, though the importance of dance in the process is not overlooked, as expressed for example by Turner:

Ritual, in tribal society, represents not an obsessional concern with repetitive acts but an immense orchestration of genres in all available sensory codes: speech, music, singing, the presentation of elaborately worked objects, such as masks; wall-paintings, body paintings; sculptured forms; complex, multi-tiered shrines; costumes; dance forms with complex grammars and vocabularies of body movements; gestures, and facial expressions. Ritual also contains plastic and labile phases and episodes, as well as fixed and formal ones (Turner 1984, 25).

In any case, the dancing motif does not reflect a simple pastime but rather religious rituals. The major role of the dance in rituals has been explained in the new *Encyclopaedia of Religion* as follows:

The power of dance in religious practice lies in its multisensory, emotional and symbolic capacity to communicate. It can create moods and a sense of situation in attention-riveting patterns by framing, prolonging, or discontinuing communication. Dance is a vehicle that incorporates inchoate ideas in visible human form and modifies inner experience as well as social action (Hanna 1987, 203).

The same author has also described the various multisensory aspects in an earlier work:

The dance medium has communicative efficacy as a multidimensional phenomenon codifying experience and directed toward the sensory modalities — the sight of performers moving in time and space, the sounds of physical movement, the smell of physical exertion, the feeling of kinesthetic activity or empathy, the touch of body to body or to performing area, and the proxemic sense — has the unique potential of going beyond many other audio-visual media of persuasion (Hanna 1979, 24).

The dance experience is therefore a religious experience, in which the individual expresses his or her worship, adoration and respect towards the supernatural powers. The influence of this activity on the individual has been described as follows:

To the participant it is a vehicle for self-expression and a release of inner tensions. This psychic outpouring restores vitality and refreshes the whole person. This effect was evident in the behavior of people after a ceremony was over. The completed event had a psychological effect on all present and there was a prevailing sense of deep satisfaction (Moore 1979, 308).

Another aspect of the dance, usually associated with rhythmic movement in a circle, is the transformation of the mind into various stages of trance and ecstasy. Lange provides a convenient summary:

Dance as a means of achieving trance has a physiological effect on the brain of the performer and thus promotes dissociation. (Hyperventilation, exhausting, whirling, turning, circular, rotational movements — all affect the sense of balance and equilibrium, and eventually cause dizziness.) It must have been early on that 'primitive' man discovered the trance-like property of dance if performed in particular circumstances (Lange 1976, 66–7).

With the introduction of various stages of trance, the participants in the ceremonies feel that the supernatural powers actually participate in the dance. The 'other' world and this world are thus combined together in the dancing circle.

We do not know which religious rituals are expressed in the dancing scenes of the early village communities, but from ethnographic observations one can observe that dancing activity is attested in a variety of contexts, including *ad hoc* occasions. They include medicine dances (healing), fertility dances, initiation dances, marriage dances, funeral and scalp dances, war dances, astral (moon, sun, rain) dances (Sachs 1952, 62–77, 124, 131), and calendrical rituals. It seems that with the increase of social complexity the *ad hoc* rituals were transferred to the household or the family level, while on the community level calendrical ceremonies were emphasized (Rappaport 1971; Flannery 1972b, 401–12). In any case, dance played an important part in the ritual in both *ad hoc* and calendrical rituals. Such extensive use of dance was not integrated into the official religious ceremonies of western civilization:

The European has lost the habit and capacity to pray with movement. The vestiges of such praying are the genuflexions of the worshippers in our churches. The ritual movements of other races are much richer in range and expressiveness. Late civilisations have resorted to spoken prayer in which the movements of the voice become more important than bodily movements. Speaking is then often heightened into singing. (Laban 1971, 5)

At this point, wall-paintings from Çatalhöyük which were described as 'dance of the hunters' and 'hunting rites' (Mellaart 1967, 174–5), should be re-examined. In some of them human figures are seen skipping around an exceptionally large animal. The way the figures are shown differs from the other figures discussed so far:

- There is no uniformity in the presentation of the figures. They are portrayed at different sizes.
- The body motions are not uniform. Some of the figures are presented in a dynamic position indicating running or jumping, others stand or lie down.
- The dress is not uniform. While most of the figures are wearing a loincloth, some are not.
- There is no uniform direction of movement, and the figures are not arranged in circles. The figures face various directions simultaneously.
- There is no attempt to express rhythm, for example by placing the figures at uniform distances from each other.

In the scenes from Çatalhöyük there is no strict organization of posture, nor of the direction of movement. There is none of the formalization so typical of rituals. These paintings thus probably represent hunting scenes — another aspect of interaction between people. The subject in this case emphasizes virility and not religious ceremony.

#### Linguistic aspects

The circle is the basic dance structure that appears in the early dancing scenes of the Near East. Dancing is a typical cultic activity, and it is interesting to see that in some Semitic languages of this geographical region there exist semantic fields which include circular and other ceremonial activities.

#### Hebrew

In Hebrew the word *hag* covers a semantic field which includes:

'Festival'. In the Old Testament the term *hag* is restricted to the festivals associated with the pilgrimages. In association with the Temple in Jerusalem the term *hag* is used for Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost (Loewestamm 1965). The term *hag* is also mentioned in relation to other cultic centres: Shiloh, where it is associated with dancing activities (Judges 21:19–21) and Beth El (1 Kings 12:32–3).

'Go in a circle, creating a circle'. The concepts of festival and creation of a cycle are covered by the same semantic field. Two roots are involved here, *hwg* and *hgg*, both morphologically and functionally close. It has already been suggested that this linguistic situation indicates that in early times the festival was celebrated by circle dances (Mandelkern 1896, 369; Loewestamm 1965). The archaeological finds presented in this work support the linguistic observation. Thus the language preserves an ancient stratum

of the concept. The festival day is the day of dance, when all the community gathers together in a common circle.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the three festivals designated *ḥag* in the Old Testament are calendrical rituals associated with the most basic agricultural activities: Tabernacles is the gathering-in festival (*ḥag ha-assif*), the end of the fruit harvest as well as the time for ploughing and sowing for the next agricultural cycle; Passover is associated with the beginning of the barley harvest; and Pentecost with the beginning of the wheat harvest. This indicates a strong link to agriculture in general and to two cereals (wheat and barley) in particular. In the context of Judaism these festivals were also given historical significance, but the agricultural background fits well into the simple Neolithic agricultural context, rather than urban or pastoral contexts.

#### *Aramaic*

In Aramaic, as in Hebrew, the word *ḥinga* covers a semantic field which includes both circles and festivals (Jastrow 1903, 458).

#### *Arabic*

In Arabic the term *ḥajj* is used to describe a man who goes on pilgrimage to Mecca. What is the origin of this word? The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* suggests that 'probably the root *ḥwg*, which in north as well as South Semitic languages means "to go around in a circle" is connected with it' (Wensinck 1986). The special activity carried out by the pilgrims in Mecca is the circling of the Ka'aba and its holy stone seven times. Since the entire pilgrimage seems to be named after this circling activity, that must be the most central part of the process. It thus seems that the semantic uniqueness of the word *ḥag* both in biblical Hebrew and in Arabic reflects ancient traditions which combined pilgrimages to holy places and cultic dances performed there.

#### *Syriac — dancing and mourning*

In Hebrew the root *rqd* is used to describe dancing activity. In Syriac it is used to describe the activity of mourning (J. Greenfield, pers. comm.). The juxtaposition of dancing (*mēlultu*) and mourning (*sipittu*) appears also in ancient Mesopotamian texts (W. Hallo, pers. comm.). The common semantic field demonstrates that in the ancient Semitic milieu, funeral services included dancing. This is not a unique phenomenon. Mourning dances have been reported in ethnographic observations (cf. Sachs 1952, 74–5;

Morphy 1994) and were depicted on ancient art objects. In ancient Egypt mourning dances appeared on wall-paintings in graves (Brunner-Traut 1958, 61). In Mycenaean and Philistine contexts in the second half of the second millennium BC, mourning female figurines were attached to the rims of round clay vessels (Iakovidis 1966; Dothan 1982, 237–45). A few such figures were applied around the edge of each vessel, indicating that the ceremony was carried out in the form of a circle dance. These items come from graves (Iakovidis 1966). The archaeological evidence also includes a number of items discovered in graves which depict dancing ceremonies: a holemouth jar from 'Ein el-Jarba (Fig. 2:10), a fenestrated pedestal bowl from Tall-i Jari A (Fig. 3:7) and a jar from Naqada (Fig. 6:8). The find spot of these items may indicate that the dances shown were mourning rituals.

#### Functional analysis of dance

The function of dance within its social context in traditional communities has been addressed by many scholars:

The dance . . . is essentially a joint and not an individual activity and we must therefore explain it in terms of social function, that is to say we must determine what is its social value (Evans-Pritchard 1928, 446).

The purpose of dance can be understood also in terms of the larger social structure, the standardized social form through which conceptualization and action occurs. This relates to the nature of participation criteria and the dancer's relations to, and means of coping with, the broader social structure. Dance is part of networks of social stratification and other processes that organize interconnected activities of the members of a society (Hanna 1979, 23–4).

Dance is not an entity in itself, but belongs rightfully to the wider analysis of ritual action, and it is in this context that one can approach it analytically and grant it the attention it demands. In a very important sense, society creates the dance, and it is to society that we must turn to understand it (Spencer 1985, 38).

The dancing scenes should be understood against the background of their social context, i.e. the village communities of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Ethnographic observations can be used to gain a wider view of dancing in pre-state societies. Many of the observations carried out by modern anthropolo-

gists in traditional societies are devoted to dance. There is a vast literature on specific case studies, as well as works devoted to the anthropology of dance within a wider theoretical framework (cf. Rust 1969; Lange 1976; Royce 1977; McNeill 1995). The question is not why people dance, but rather why dancing was used so often as an artistic motif by the early village communities.

Of special interest to our study are observations on the Bushmen of South Africa, since there exists abundant documentation of both the dancing (Marshall 1969; Biesele 1978; Katz 1982) and artistic symbolic expressions of this people (Vinnicombe 1976; Lewis-Williams 1981; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989). In Bushmen societies, dance is extremely important in daily life:

!Kia, and its setting of the !kia dance, serves many functions. It is the !Kung's primary expression of a religious existence and a cosmological perspective. It provides healing and protection, being a magicomedical mode of coping with illnesses and misfortune. The !kia at the dance also increases social cohesion and solidarity. It allows for individual and communal release of hostility. Finally, the dance alters the consciousness of many members of this community. As individuals go into !kia, others at the dance, participating in various ways and to various degrees, themselves experience an alteration in their state of consciousness. An atmosphere develops at a dance whereby individual experiences of !kia can have a contagious effect on others (Katz 1976, 286).

On the other hand, dance is not a major motif in Bushman artistic expressions (Vinnicombe 1976, 307–19; Lewis-Williams 1981, 19; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989). Compared to the art of the early village communities of the Near East and southeast Europe, two points are apparent.

#### *The subjects depicted*

Various forms of interaction between people are depicted in Bushman art. A quantitative analysis from two different areas produces the following results.

- In the Drakensberg region of Natal, out of 4530 documented scenes the following activities were noted (Vinnicombe 1976, 363, table 2): hunting (8 per cent), dancing (5 per cent), fighting (3 per cent), other (5 per cent), and uncertain (79 per cent). When the recognized scenes alone are taken into account the dancing scenes constitute about 20 per cent.
- 'In all the samples so far available from the South Eastern Group there is a clear but not overwhelming emphasis on human figures and so-

cial activities. At Giant's Castle 59.8% of the total sample of 1,335 representations are of human beings (this figure includes therianthropes); at Barkly East, 53.9% of the representations are of human beings. Most of these human figures are depicted in social groups, walking, running, sitting, dancing, fighting and hunting; the lone human figure is comparatively rare' (Lewis-Williams 1981, 19).

Dancing here is just one motif among many others, and it is by no means the dominant one, as it is in the case of the early village communities.

#### *Uniformity of figures*

In Bushman dancing scenes there is no uniformity in either the shape or function of the figures. Paintings may represent complex cultic scenes with figures of different sizes performing different tasks (Vinnicombe 1976, 307–19; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989, figs. 14, 15, 17–18). From ethnographic information, these pictures are interpreted as religious ceremonies with a shaman officiating (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989, 30–36). Some Bushmen claim that the paintings were drawn by shamans (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989, 36).

Thus we have, on the one hand, an example of the Bushman, where equality is not expressed on art objects, and on the other the early village communities of the Neolithic which were undergoing rapidly increasing social stratification, while their symbolic expression emphasized egalitarianism. This clearly indicates that we must examine not only the social context of the dance but also the social context of the dancing scenes.

Why were dancing scenes the most popular, indeed almost the only subject used to describe interaction between people in the protohistoric period? And why did they lose their prominent position with the rise of urban societies? In the Near East and southeast Europe the dancing motif predominated in a period in which large village communities, based on food production, were developing. Archaeological evidence shows that this was a period when concentrations of population of unprecedented size emerged, accompanied by social stratification. It became necessary to create leadership and decision-making apparatuses, and at the same time it was essential to tie the community together and strengthen the individual's sense of belonging, so that the community would not disintegrate.

Two books published in the last decade — *The Domestication of the Human Species* (Wilson 1988) and

*The Domestication of Europe* (Hodder 1990) — deal with the process of 'Neolithization'. They emphasize the importance of the house, each from a different point of view. Wilson states that: 'the separateness and privacy of the household is a source of aggravation, stress, and divisiveness. Can this inherent 'contradiction' in domesticated society be countered?' (Wilson 1988, 168).

Hodder, on the other hand, ignores the tension between individual houses and the society:

The household is a production unit and it is through that production that the larger social unit is to be constructed . . . Any social conflict, whether between men and women, old and young, local group and local group, could be negotiated in terms of the need better to control 'the wild' by bringing it within the control of 'the domus' (Hodder 1990, 38–9).

It is not clear how the dwelling units, the activity areas of individuals, were developed into symbols of the 'domestication of the society'. Hodder discusses the house/domus as an isolated phenomenon, but houses do not stand alone. They are organized together in villages. The village stands for the community while the house stands for the individual. The omission of the term 'village' from the index in Hodder's book, and the omission of Flannery's classic article on the village in the Near East and Mesoamerica (1972a) from the bibliography best symbolize Hodder's weakest link. The house is the individual's territory within the village. The walls not only symbolize the individual, but actually separate him or her from the community. By closing the door the individual physically disconnects him- or herself from the rest of the village.

Increasing individuality is a process that has been reflected in architecture. Some early camp-sites represent a 'bee-hive' (communal) pattern of settlement, like the Natufian settlement at Hayonim Cave (Bar-Yosef 1991, fig. 1), or Pre-Pottery Neolithic B desert camp-sites such as Wadi Tbeiq (Bar-Yosef 1982) and Nahal Issaron (Goring-Morris & Gopher 1983). The early village settlements of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A are characterized by individual round household structures (Flannery 1972a). With the development of a more complex economy and social organization in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B villages, the individual houses became more and more elaborate in shape, size and building materials. The round shape was replaced by a rectangular outline (Flannery 1972a). House size increased from c. 20–30 sq.m in Pre-Pottery Neolithic A to 60–100 sq.m in Pre-Pottery Neolithic B. Lime plaster become an important

component of Pre-Pottery Neolithic B building, regardless of its complex production and redistribution (Garfinkel 1987).

The development of the private dwelling was not a process which took place in isolation. It was part of a larger development (ignored by Wilson) which may explain the individual's focus on his or her private abode. This process (in the Natufian and Neolithic periods) was the concentration of large groups of people together on an unprecedented scale. In the Upper Palaeolithic and the Epipalaeolithic periods we are familiar with hunter-gatherer sites whose size does not exceed several hundred square metres. In the Natufian period we find for the first time camp sites of several thousand square metres. In the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period sites appear whose size exceeds ten thousand square metres, such as Jericho (25,000 sq. m), Netiv Hagdud (18,000 sq. m) and Gilgal (10,000 sq.m). In Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, sites over a hundred thousand square metres in area are known, such as 'Ain Ghazal and Basta. A steep growth in the size of the human group dwelling together at the same site can be observed. Population growth supercedes the intimacy found in small-scale communities. Society becomes more formalized. Alienation, as well as competition and suspicion, is felt by many individuals. Individuals react to this situation by focusing on the personal dwelling, in which they can find a means of escape from society at large.

To counter these segregation tendencies at the individual level, two kinds of community-level cohesion activity can be distinguished in the archaeological record of these early village communities.

*Construction of public buildings.* The best examples are the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A tower and walls at Jericho (Kenyon 1981, pls. 203–6), the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B wall and Building 8 at Beidha (Kirkbride 1968; Byrd 1994, fig. 7), the skull house at Çayönü (Ozbeck 1988) and the temple building at Nevali Çori (Hauptmann 1993). These examples, however, are limited to a small number of sites.

*Public religious ceremonies.* These are reflected in various finds which make their first appearance in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period:

- large art and cult objects including plaster and limestone anthropomorphic statues, masks and plastered skulls;
- construction of public religious structures like the above-mentioned temple at Nevali Çori and the skull house at Çayönü;



- transformation of burial customs from the individual level to the community level. In the first early village communities, care of the dead was part of the household duties and burial took place near to or under the floors of the dwelling units. Later on this duty became a community responsibility with the appearance of the skull house at Çayönü and formal cemeteries located outside villages.
- dancing scenes, the visual expressions of such ceremonies. By dancing, holding hands and moving in a circle, the individual is physically fused into the group, which becomes one entity.

The greater attention paid to the individual level, reflected in the dwelling units, is paralleled by increasing attention to the community level, as seen in public religious ceremonies. The process reached its peak in the ninth millennium BP, when dwelling structures became extremely elaborate with rectangular plans, large dimensions and plastered floors. This is exactly contemporary with the formative period during which the basic cultic and religious concepts of the ancient Near East were crystallized (Garfinkel 1994). While band societies are characterized by *ad hoc* rituals, basically consisting of *rites de passage* and successful hunting and healing ceremonies, more complex social organizations of tribes and chiefdoms perform calendrical rituals (Flannery 1972b, 411–12, fig. 1). It seems that the appearance of large cult objects such as anthropomorphic statues, masks and plastered skulls at Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites was not only associated with public rituals (Rollefson 1983; 1986), but was more specifically connected with calendrical rituals. Dancing, an activity performed at the community level, was emphasized during these developments and became a common artistic motif.

Since dancing is a public activity, it requires a degree of co-ordination and formalization:

**Time.** The community must gather at a time which is acceptable to all.

**Space.** An acceptable location must be selected.

**Dance decoration.** All participants are required to equip themselves with uniform dress and accessories. In this way the appearance of equality of all members of the community is achieved.

**Posture.** All are obliged to perform the same combination of bodily signs in the same order.

**Direction of movement.** All participants are obliged to

move in the same direction, whether counter-clockwise or clockwise.

**Rhythm.** All are obliged to move at the same tempo.

Dance is thus an activity through which society instills collective discipline in its members. The participant in the dance accepts the rules of the community. This provides a means of internalizing discipline in a period without police, army or prisons. Internalization was achieved not through fear but through bodily activity — a form of group therapy. The tremendous energy brought together was a tool for unity and the creation of ethnic identification. It is thus a dramatic and ecstatic experience, sometimes heightened by the use of special dress and face coverings, and sometimes by stripping. The message conveyed is at group — or community — level rather than focused on the individual. This situation has been described by Rappaport:

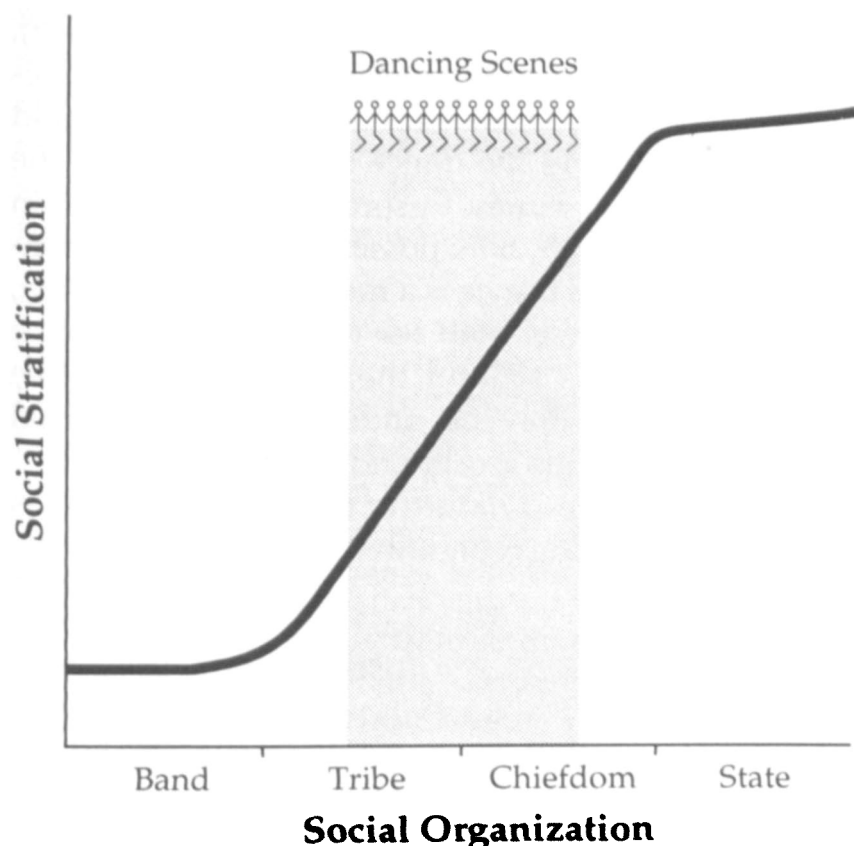
The virtue of regulation through religious ritual is that the activities of large numbers of people may be governed in accordance with sanctified conventions in the absence of powerful authorities or even of discrete human authorities of any sort. As such, it is plausible to argue that religious ritual played an important role in social and ecological regulation during a time in human history when the arbitrariness of social conventions was increasing but it was not yet possible for authorities, if they existed at all, to enforce compliance (Rappaport 1971, 38).

It thus seems that dancing scenes appeared in the ancient Near East at a time of tribal social organization, and gradually fell out of use with the development of the state (Fig. 7).

With the foundation of states at the end of the sixth millennium BP, art was integrated into the lifestyle of the élite, and was used as a tool for enhancing authority, political propaganda and economic interests (Winter 1987; Porada 1986; Larsen 1979, 297–390). Dance, which was no longer the main tool for promoting community cohesion, was removed from the agenda of the upper classes, and almost disappeared from the artistic record. The process of social and economic change, to which dance is subject has been described by Lange in relation to the modern world, but the same observation might be made for the ancient Near East at the rise of the first states:

As soon as the cultural integrity of a human group splits, the traditional dance becomes lost, because it ceases to retain its vital social significance. The





**Figure 7.** Correlation between social organization, social stratification and the appearance of dancing scenes in early village communities.

urbanised type of life requires new media, and the intruding new elements cannot be absorbed quickly enough. There is no longer time, place or need to follow the old patterns of dance. Nor may dance respond to the demands of the new situation (Lange 1976, 111).

### Cognitive aspects of the dancing scenes

There is now a growing archaeological literature on issues such as ritual and cultic performance. These works deal mainly with the analysis of cult objects and temples, i.e. the material remains of ritual activities. Marcus and Flannery, for example, combined three methodological approaches when dealing with ancient Zapotec ritual and religion: (1) the direct historical approach; (2) the analysis of public space and religious architecture; and (3) the contextual analysis of religious paraphernalia (Marcus & Flannery 1994, 55). Evidence for dancing, however, is totally different, since we do not have direct remains of such activity. What we do have in hand from the past are depictions of dance which are not 'objective' photographs, but the results of cognitive processes which function as filters, eliminating the less important aspects of an event and emphasizing its essence (Fig. 8). This is where cognitive analysis comes in, focusing on the process that transfers real-

ity into depiction.

Cognitive archaeology is the study of past ways of thought from material remains (Renfrew *et al.* 1993; Renfrew & Zubrow 1994; Zubrow 1994). The importance of pictorial relationships has been summarized as follows:

We can obtain the greatest insight into the cognitive map of an individual or a community by representation in material form of that map, or at least a part of it . . . But the more general case is that of depiction, where the world, or some aspect of it, is represented so that it appears to the seeing eye very much as it is conceived in the 'mind's eye' (Renfrew & Bahn 1991, 363).

The foregoing analysis of dancing scenes has emphasized that they depict public religious ceremonies. They thus open a window as to the cognitive map of early village communities.

Dance symbolized rituals in the cognitive map of these early village communities. Religious experience was obtained through the ecstatic, high-energy activity of dancing. Furthermore, the most commonly depicted elements of the dance are not related to costumes or body positions, but rather to:

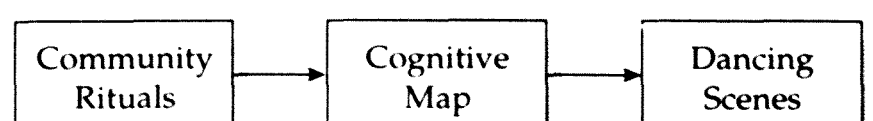
- a) the arrangement of the figures around the circumference of round objects (pottery vessels and cylinder seals), and
- b) the identical appearance of the figures in a scene.

### The circle

The importance of the circle in dancing has been emphasized throughout the presentation of the data and its analysis.

- Most of the scenes were depicted around the circumference of round items, such as pottery vessels or cylinder seals. This type of 'endless motif' creates a circle of dancing figures.
- The identity of dancing circles with religious ceremonies is apparent from linguistic evidence. The term *hag* covered both meanings in some Semitic languages: 'festival' and 'going in a circle'.

Ethnographic observations emphasize the importance of dancing in pre-state societies. In such societies dancing is usually carried out in circles.



**Figure 8.** The cognitive map as a filter between the community rituals and the dancing scenes.

These points demonstrate that in the cognitive map of the early village communities the most important aspect of the religious experience, the core of the ceremonies, was the dance circle. The circle could be interpreted on different levels.

*The individual level*

Each participant builds the circle with his or her own body. By performing in the circle, each individual expresses worship, respect and adoration of the supernatural powers to whom the ritual is dedicated. The torsion, rhythmical and ecstatic movement is the contribution of each individual to the religious ceremony. This behaviour is the equivalent of the prayers and animal sacrifices that appear later in complex societies.

*The community level*

The circle is created by the arrangement of people at the same time and place, moving in the same direction. The circle thus symbolizes the community. Beyond the realm of symbols, the circle is also the community itself at the time of its congregation.

*The cosmological level*

Cosmological components tend to have a cyclical appearance, like the four seasons, the moon, seed-time and harvesting, etc. The circular movement imitates these cyclical events.

The circle is a powerful structure, and has the potential to fulfil all the four main components of ritual summarized by Renfrew & Bahn (1991, 359).

*Focusing of attention.* In the circle, people are arranged around the circumference and all look to the centre.

The centre of the circle is the focus of which the dancers are very aware . . . the natural point of attention, and for this reason it has been used so often as the site of the symbol around which the dance takes place, e.g. a fire, killed animal, offering, altar, newly-wed couple, maypole, etc. (Lange 1976, 84).

The circle, like a temple temenos, delineates a territory, and the participants are disconnected from the outer world, focusing solely on the religious ceremony. This point is especially relevant for the early village communities which had not yet constructed large cultic buildings.

*Boundary zone between this world and the next.* The rhythmic movement in the circle can alter the state of consciousness and propel the mind into various

stages of trance (Ludwig 1969, 11; Lange 1976, 66–7). The implications of trance for dance have been described as follows: 'In their ecstasy they literally stand outside. Frequently the dance stretches beyond the immediate social milieu to some higher association with spiritual beings, who possess the dancers' (Spencer 1985, 28). Thus trance is a metaphysical situation, a mystic experience, both for the persons in trance and the observers around them. From a cognitive point of view it may be understood as an actual contact between this world and the other.

The widespread nature of this phenomenon has been studied by Bourguignon:

The presence of institutionalized forms of altered states of consciousness in 90% of our sample societies (N=488) represents a striking finding and suggests that we are, indeed, dealing with a matter of major importance, not merely a bit of anthropological esoterica. It is clear that we are dealing with a psychobiological capacity available to all societies, and that, indeed, the vast majority of societies have used it in their own particular ways, and have done so primarily in a sacred context (Bourguignon 1973, 9–11).

*Presence of the deity.* The circle can be organized around sacred items, such as divine symbols, holy trees, or any other cultic objects.

*Participation and offering.* The circle is the 'activity area' where the ritual is actually performed.

Taking into account all these aspects, it is not surprising that in the cognitive map of the early village communities the circle of human figures was identified and used as the symbol of public ritual.

*Uniformity of the figures*

Another phenomenon repeated in the dancing scenes is that the figures in each scene are uniform, with the exception of rare cases in which males and females are portrayed together and the differences are gender-related. This uniformity created equality between all members of the community. There are no individual features. No figure is emphasized over and against another. This conception is crystallized in the Halafian and Samarran painted linear style (Fig. 4:2–3), in which the individuals are so schematic that the main emphasis is on the circle itself. This approach differs from artistic expressions in state societies, where the king or priest is depicted larger than other figures surrounding him. On the other hand, the South African Bushmen, one of the best exam-

ples of an egalitarian society, also produced dancing scenes in which the participants are not uniform in size, dress or posture. The uniformity apparent in early village community dancing scenes is thus outstanding and unique. It seems that both social and functional aspects are involved here.

#### *The social context*

The dancing scenes express an ideology of equality between all members of the community. In reality, however, this was a period in which revolutionary changes took place in the social organization of human societies, with increased stratification. The final result of these processes was the establishment of states, with formalized kingship, aristocracy, priesthood, bureaucracy, army and police, supported by a sophisticated system of documentation made possible by the invention of writing. Both hunter-gatherer societies and urban societies maintained a relatively static relationship between different segments of the community. In the millennia in which social organization developed from egalitarian to the state, however, relationships were dynamic with an acceleration of inequalities among different members of society. It is exactly at this stage, no earlier and no later, that the participants in dance scenes are always shown as being ideologically equal (Fig. 7).

In the dancing scenes of the early village communities of the Near East and southeast Europe, we perceive that the ideology reflected in cult and art reverses the social processes which were occurring. There exists a clear polarity between reality and the ideology reflected in the art objects. Marxist archaeology offered the following interpretation of such situations:

The social order must be legitimized and the principles upon which control is based justified. One of the most powerful means of achieving this is the active production of a normative consensus naturalising and misrepresenting the extant nature of asymmetrical social relations so that they appear to be other than they really are. (Miller & Tilley 1984, 7)

According to this definition, the dancing scenes of the early village communities can be described as a means of screening and masking the growing social stratification.

In the Levant, in contrast to Mesopotamia and Egypt, smaller social units continued to exist, even when city states began to emerge in the Early Bronze Age (third millennium BC). Urbanization in this region was not accompanied by the construction of public structures on the scale known from Mesopo-

tamia, by writing or monumental art, or by extremely rich tombs like the royal cemetery at Ur or the pyramids of Egypt. Perhaps for this reason, the dancing motif continued in this region into the third millennium BC as the main representative of interaction between people, although other scenes were added (Beck 1995).

#### *The ceremonial context*

The uniformity of the dancers in size, dress, body position, direction of movement and accompanying objects suggests uniformity in the function of the participants in the ceremony. All fulfil exactly the same function and none can be pointed out as having a special role. Even in a scene from Egypt, in which notable differences between the figures are visible (Fig. 6:5), all the men are portrayed identically, as are all the women. The differences result from differences in gender. In this the dancing scenes differ from examples from other social contexts, such as urban societies in the Near East (cultic scenes from Mesopotamia from the third millennium BC in which different participants perform different tasks: Amiet 1961, pl. 17:282; pl. 102:1353-5); or hunter-gatherer societies in South Africa (complex cultic scenes with figures of different sizes performing different tasks: Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989, figs. 14-15, 17-18; perhaps with a shaman officiating: Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989, 30-36). From the cognitive point of view, the functional uniformity of all the participants in each scene indicates the equality of their contribution to the ritual process. Each individual is on the same level of importance, with no indication of priests, shamans, or other such persons. Does the uniformity of the dancing scenes illustrate the theological concept that all members of the community are equal in the eyes of the gods?

#### *Communication aspects*

The dancing scenes clearly have communicative value, i.e. function as a means of information exchange. This concerns not the dancing activity represented, but the function of the objects on which it was depicted. Pottery vessels were the commonest medium. The function of pottery decoration as a means of information exchange has attracted much scholarly attention (cf. Wobst 1977; Pollock 1983; David *et al.* 1988; Conkey & Hastorf 1988; Braun 1991). In analyzing the communicative value of the dancing scenes, the basic questions to be asked are 'Who drew these scenes?' and 'Who were the

intended audiences?'. The limitations of the archaeological data prevent a direct answer to these questions, but certain observations can be made.

#### *The type of vessels*

The vessels chosen for dancing scenes are usually small or medium-sized: cups, small bowls, pedestal bowls and medium-sized jars. These are fine and delicate 'table ware' vessels, not outstanding cultic items. The pottery assemblages at the sites where these items were found also included coarse, undecorated vessels which could have served for cooking and storage.

#### *The context*

In most cases the vessels were unearthed in domestic activity areas and not in ritual contexts such as temples. A few items were discovered in graves. Furthermore, when the items decorated with dancing scenes went out of use, probably when broken, they were simply discarded. Such items were never intentionally buried, as were cultic items of these periods (Garfinkel 1994). Thus the vessels did not serve as containers for gifts presented to supernatural powers in religious ceremonies.

#### *Geographical distribution*

The dancing scenes have a wide geographical and chronological distribution and dominate the scenes depicting interaction between people.

#### *Quantitatively*

Pottery vessels decorated with dancing figures are rare at each specific site. In Halafian sites, for example, most of the pottery decoration is geometric. Thus some scholars who analyzed the Halafian painted style overlooked the dancing scenes (Le Blanc & Watson 1973; Wickede 1986). The vessels were not produced on a large scale.

What can be deduced about the communication role of these vessels from these four observations? Delicate small and medium-size vessels which were not produced on large scale were obviously not for daily use. It thus seems that these vessels were used on special occasions, but since they are found in domestic contexts they may have served for meals associated with religious ceremonies. The vessels could have been manufactured before the main calendrical rituals as part of the preparations. They were used as a means for increasing awareness within the community.

These vessels were intended to emphasize the

importance of the dance and the activities associated with it — congregation and public ceremonies — for the members of the community. As Royce explains (1977, 154), dancing in non-literate societies fulfills the functions of writing: transmission of information, teaching, documentation, etc. Thus dancing activities, and the vessels decorated with dancing scenes, functioned as a means of enhancing social structures in early village communities. An alternative Marxist interpretation could suggest that the dancing scenes were a weapon in a social struggle between different segments of society. The manufacture of the decorated vessels could have been controlled by the élite, emphasizing equality and egalitarianism, and masking the ever-increasing social stratification.

#### **Duration of the motif**

One of the amazing things about the depiction of dance in early village communities is that it maintained its importance as the dominant motif for describing interaction between people for almost 4000 years. In the Levant this dominance lasted even longer down to the third millennium BC.

The long duration of the dancing motif is not an isolated phenomenon. Other symbolic expressions that developed in these early village communities had a similar or even longer duration. As data accumulates, it becomes increasingly clear that the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period was a formative era for the cult and mythology of the ancient Near East. The following examples emphasize this point:

- anthropomorphic statues, perhaps related to the myths of human creation in the Sumerian and biblical traditions (Amiran 1962);
- plastered skulls and the depiction of death using plaster on the skull and tooth removal, reminiscent of the Canaanite Poem of Aqht from Ugarit (Margalit 1983);
- deliberate burial of cultic objects (Garfinkel 1994);
- the earliest appearance of cult structures (temples) from Nevali Çori. The Çayönü 'skull house' can be understood as a public ceremonial building functioning as a 'death temple';
- the earliest appearance of building models (temples?) at Jericho and Çayönü;
- the use of standing stones, the biblical *masseboth*, at Jericho;
- the earliest appearance of masks from Nahal Hemar Cave and Basta;
- the earliest appearance of monumental art objects, such as anthropomorphic statues, at Jericho,

'Ain Ghazal and Nevali Çori;

- the earliest appearance of cattle figurines at sites such as Jericho, Munhata and 'Ain Ghazal;
- so-called 'coffee bean' eyes, a well-known artistic motif on anthropomorphic figures in the protohistoric Near East, appear at Jericho on a plastered skull and on an unpublished anthropomorphic statue (Garfinkel 1995, 31–2);
- dancing motifs, as discussed in this work;
- the first appearance of seals, a very characteristic example of the ancient Near Eastern artistic tradition, at Jericho, Ugarit and Bouqras (Wickede 1990, 40–49).
- To complete the picture, mention should be made of suggested continuity from the Neolithic onwards in the cult of fertility and 'Great Mother Goddess' worship. This approach seems too general, since on one hand, every female figurine can be associated with such a concept, and on the other hand, female figurines appear in the archaeological record before the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period.

The appearance of all these aspects together clarifies that we are looking at a cognitive system in which the dancing motif is not an isolated phenomenon. The basis of this system was congregational ceremonies in which entire communities actively participated in dancing.

Why does Pre-Pottery Neolithic B appear to be the formative era, rather than an earlier or a later period? Unlike Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, which was still a period of 'trial and error', the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B saw the foundation of well-established villages with rectangular architecture (Flannery 1972a; Redman 1978, 142–76). Village communities remained the basic type of settlement in the Near East for some four thousand years (Redman 1978, 177–213; Nissen 1988, 39–64). Only in the second half of the sixth millennium BC did urban societies and state-level communities start to develop in Mesopotamia. This process, popularly designated 'the urban revolution', depended heavily upon the food-producing economy and the social organization founded in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period: 'Although the formation of cities and states has produced spectacular material and written evidence, the earlier organizational innovations of prehistoric villagers created the structure that enabled later civilizational developments' (Redman 1978, 213). Since the symbolic expressions referred to here were formulated in Pre-Pottery Neolithic B along with new socio-economic structure, they survived as part of the same system for several thousand years.

## Conclusions

The principal strategies used in the Near East and southeast Europe from the ninth to the sixth millennium BC to promote the bonding of individuals into communities, and of individual households into villages, were public assemblies for religious ceremonies. The archaeological examples discussed in this article are pictorial expressions of this activity and shed light on it. The importance of these ceremonies is also borne out by ethnographic observations of pre-state communities, in which dance is indeed the most important component in religious ceremonies.

In periods before schools and writing, community rituals, symbolized by dance, were the basic mechanism for conveying education and knowledge to the adult members of the community and from one generation to the next. The lengthy duration of dance depiction as a dominant artistic motif, together with its penetration across wide geographical areas (from west Pakistan to the Danube basin) testify to the efficiency of the dancing motif as a powerful symbol in the evolution of human societies.

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