

MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT ON THE SITE OF CRVENKA NEAR VRŠAC

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The site of Crvenka is situated north of Vršac, at about 2.5 km from the last houses of the town. It spreads east from the road to Vatin (Fig. 1). Together with Ludoš and At, it forms a high loess ridge spreading from Veliko Središte and Mali Žam. This loess hill represents a watershed between Great and Small boglands of Vršac belonging to the great depression of Alibunar and Vršac¹. Melioration works which, in the surroundings of Vršac, started as early as in the middle of the 18th century have completely changed the aspect of this region. Prior to these works, the space between Deliblatska peščara and mounts of Vršac was a large surface covered by the water, well-known in the Middle Ages as Igan swamp and later also as the Swamp of Alibunar². During the periods when the level of the rivers Tamiš, Brzava and their confluents was raising, this region used to be flooded, and the tops of loess ridges were the only parts which stayed out of the reach of the water, and that is exactly where permanent settlements were created.

According to individual occasional finds, Crvenka has been known as an archaeological site since the end of the 19th century³. Since then, important quantities of objects have been collected⁴.

Remains of the medieval settlement in Crvenka have been mentioned in literature several times, but without having been examined in more details⁵.

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¹ Давидовић, Миљковић и Ристановић 2003, p. 135-138.

² Györfy 1987, p. 305-306, 470.

³ Milleker 1899, p. 186-188; Барачки 1960, p. 195, footnote 1.

⁴ Рашајски 1957, p. 39-56; Симовљевић 1957, p. 57-62-66.

⁵ Милић 1976, p. 59-65; Барачки 1977, p. 16; Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, p. 85, cat. 34;

Basic data on the site itself have been followed by publishing of representative finds. The finds related to iron tools have been published within a special paper⁶.

After having followed up the works for several years, we have discovered that this settlement used to spread on a surface about 120 m long and 80 m wide. However, according to the traces found on the surface level, it is clear that it used to occupy even a larger surface. At several points there were found remains of structures belonging to the settlement where the material was collected from. Unfortunately, all the structures have been discovered in already cut sections of sand excavations so that none of them has been found as a whole. The material which has reached the City Museum of Vršac has been divided into different units and that is how it has been presented here (Figs. 5-8). The material is not backed by the appropriate documentation since it consists only in notes written down by the researchers R. Rašajski and S. Barački, and rare sketches of the registered structures found on the site, marked as houses, granaries (grain storage pits) or pits of unknown purpose. There have been found the sections of four structures identified as semi-recessed dwellings, dug at about 0, 70–0, 80 m (Fig. 2a). They had a rectangular about 4 m long ground plan. Along the walls there was a narrow earth sill about 0, 40 m wide. There have not been found any traces of wall structures, but, since a lot of remains of house daub, with traces of brushwood and thin round logs, have been found inside and outside the houses, it has been supposed that their walls were made of mud coated wattle. All semi-recessed dwellings consisted of one room and only in one of them there have been found remains of a wattle partition wall which probably used to separate the space in two parts, although those remains might also belong to a fence surrounding a kiln, to a crumbled wall or even to a wall of an earlier semi-recessed dwelling into which a more recent one was dug in⁷.

In close proximity of the settlement there were several open air kilns and fireplaces belonging to the settlement, as well as waste and grain storage pits. The most numerous are the kilns since there have been found up to thirty of them⁸. They were all dug into the earth and had circular or pear shaped ground plan with domed superstructures of different shapes and sizes. Their average

Станојев 1996, p. 90-95; Барачки и Брмболић 1997, p. 213-214.

⁶ Барачки 1960, p. 186-195.

⁷ Минић 1976, p. 60.

⁸ Барачки 1977, p. 16.

diameter is from 1 to 2 m and their height is about 1 m. The kilns dug into a very sloped terrain include fireplaces at the surface level and a smaller or bigger area covered with burned red earth which was used for ashes disposal and firing the kiln. The kilns dug into a flat surface include a smaller or larger access pit placed in front of the kiln. These pits are oval and have a flat bottom. The kilns including a pit in front of the fireplace have a pear shaped ground plan.

The floor of such kilns was made of a clay coating covering a reinforcement made of pottery fragments or stone pieces. According to the material used for the reinforcement, R. Rašajski has divided all the kilns found in the settlement in four groups: kilns with reinforcement made of medieval pottery fragments, then, those made of fragments belonging to Classical pottery, those containing both of these two types of pottery and, finally, those with smaller pieces of gneiss⁹. The type of reinforcement, that is, the material used for reinforcement, has not influenced the shape and size of the kilns. The most probably, there has been a certain time difference among the different groups of kilns, which could not have been identified on the site.

Besides the houses, there have been found other permanent structures belonging to the settlement, such as pits— storage pits intended for storage of grain and other food. Grain pits are either cylindrical or pear shaped, with narrow funnel-shaped neck (Fig. 4b). On the inside walls of four of these pits there have been found traces of fire burning, certainly for better preservation of granular food.

Mobile finds belonging to the settlement are quite varied. The most numerous are pottery shards, but there are also a lot of different objects made of bones, stone or metal. Bone objects include several skates made of horse bones. They are of different sizes and they are all well-polished on the bottom flat side, certainly due to a long use. Natural openings at the end of these bones were usually not enlarged¹⁰.

About forty stone round shaped grindstones, with an opening in the middle, have been found on the site. They were all made of gneiss originating from Vršački breg (Hill of Vršac) and, therefore, they almost certainly represent local products, although no traces of manufacture have been found on the site. A fragmented manual grindstone has been found in one of the grain storage pits, which could be evidence that the grinding process used to be performed next to the pit itself.

⁹ Рашајски 1957, р. 41.

¹⁰ Манојловић-Николић 1997, р. 156, Т.І/11.

A special group of finds consists of iron objects found in two hoards. Besides that, metal finds from the site include also an axe found in one of the pits, as well as a silver “S” earring¹¹. The first hoard was covered in 1956 and it includes different tools (three hammers, blacksmith pliers, a hoe, spade casing, four sickles, two axes, an adze, a part of scythe blade, an auger, a chisel, a knife), as well as a horse shoe and stirrup (Fig. 3). In the second hoard, discovered two years later, at a distance of about 6 m from the first one, there were found a sickle, spade fittings, as well as objects identified as two fittings and two iron levers.

The discovered tools were used for different works: blacksmith, agriculture, carpentry. The hammers differ by their size but they belong to the same type of hammer having a flat body, a shank for handle insertion in the middle part and narrow endings with small striking surfaces (Fig. 3/10). The pliers have long handles of rectangular section. The upper part of their arms are reinforced and joined by a nail (Fig. 3/4). They are bent to form a semi-circular shape and their endings are thin and buckled. The hoe has a slightly arched blade, trapezoid shaped, with a flat cutting edge on the narrower side (Fig. 3/5). The shank for handle insertion is placed on a narrow short neck. The spade casing are semi-circular and have a groove for insertion of a wooden handle along the inside edge (Fig. 3/2). The sickles from the first hoard have long and slightly bent blades forming a neck in the lower part which ends by a shank for handle insertion (Fig. 3/1). The top of the blade of one example is twisted. The sickle from the other store room is different. Its blade is semi-circular, it does not have a neck and it ends by a shank for handle insertion placed almost at a right angle. Axes have oblong blades (Fig. 3/7-8). The blade of the better preserved example is fan-shaped and has a round cutting end. The front part ends with a flat striking surface. The adze has a long and slightly rounded blade which is flat and in line with the eye on one side and conical on the other side (Fig. 3/6). The frontal part of the eye has a flat ending. The auger has a long rectangular body (Fig. 3/3). The lower part is thinner and slightly twisted with a pointed tip. The other end has been only partly preserved, but it has been noticed that it used to be strip shaped and bent. The chisels belong to different types. One of them has a long body of a circular section ending with a flat blade, while the upper part has a larger striking surface. The other chisel has a trapezoidal body of a rectangular section ending by a flat blade, while on

¹¹ Барачки 1960, p. 186-195.

the upper end it has a shank for the handle (Fig. 3/9). The knife has a straight one-sided blade and a shank for handle insertion on the upper end (Fig. 3/11).

Taking into account that varied tools have been found in the hoards and supposing that the objects identified as iron levers in the second hoard represent raw material prepared for further treatment, it has been concluded that those hoards belonged to a forger¹². Such a conclusion has been supported by the fact that pieces of iron slag have been discovered in several pits. However, we do not know whether the slag was concentrated in one place or in several different places, that is, whether there was only one forger who owned both store rooms, or there were two forgers and two blacksmith workshops.

The most numerous finds on the site are pottery shards, which are of a good quality, although they were made on a hand potter wheel, and they can be considered as a quality kitchen ware of that time. In literature already published representative pottery finds, mostly entirely preserved pots (Fig. 4)¹³. Besides the vessel fragments, pottery finds include a great number of spindle whorls. They are of different size and often of an irregular circular shape, with rough finishing. There is an interesting fact that they were all made of pottery fragments and that there were no common biconic clay spindle whorls¹⁴.

The cooking pottery consists mostly of pots, cauldrons and rarely of bowls and bottles – jugs. All pottery finds, except the bottles – jugs, are homogeneous regarding the quality of the clay they were made of, type of manufacture and ornaments. They were made of well refined clay containing smaller or larger quantities of crushed mica which gave firmness and better thermal characteristics to bowls. The presence of coarse sand is rare and it is mostly found in fragments of larger pots. They are grey, dark grey or ochre.

Among the finds prevail middle sized and smaller pots; the height of the entirely preserved finds is 20.5 cm, 17.5 cm, 14 cm, and 13.8 cm. Most of those pots have a rim of 14 to 18 cm in diameter, while pots with smaller diameters, from 10 to 12 cm, are rather rare, as well as larger pots with diameters from 20 to 22 cm. Some of them have embossed seals on the bottom, the most often in form of a cross in a circle.

Most of those items represent pots with a round shoulder and a sharp passage to a shorter rim which has different shapes. Only rare larger pots with

¹² Барачки, 1960, p. 193.

¹³ Минић 1976, p. 59-65; Барачки 1977, p. 16; Takács 1986, p. 31, 71, T. 3, 82; Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, p. 85; Станојев 1996, p. 90-95.

¹⁴ Минић 1976, p. 62.

larger openings have longer and slantwise averted rims, with slanted endings (Fig. 8/4-5). The rims can be averted slantwise and unmoulded, with slanted of rounded edges. Another variant is represented by more or less averted rims, thinned at the top and buckled upwards. The inner side contains a groove for the lid (Figs. 5/14-15, 8/1). Pots with fattened and striped rims on the outside (Fig. 8/7) or with averted rims in form of an arc and with round edges or thinned endings buckled downwards (fig. Figs. 5/11, 7/12) are rare. An exception is a pot with slantwise averted edge containing a groove on the inner side and profiled by a horizontal rib on the outside (Fig. 5/16). Parallel horizontal ribs cover the shoulder too. This pot also differs from the others by the composition of its clay which does not contain any mica and therefore certainly belongs to another workshop and it must have been brought from elsewhere.

The pots were decorated by a sharp tool, usually on their shoulders and rarely on the bellies too, by ornaments representing horizontal belts, individual lines, wavy lines and series of slanted lines, small holes or stings. The most often the motives were combined, but the prevailing ones are small holes and lines.

There are much less cauldrons than pots. Most of them are not decorated, while a smaller number of them contain decorations consisting of motives similar to those found on the pots. Ornaments consist of rows of small holes or slanted lines on the outside edge of the rim (Figs. 4/8, 6/16, 8/6), and then one or more wavy lines under the rim (Figs. 4/6, 6/8) or horizontal rows of small holes made by a serrated wheel (Fig. 6/17). Most of the cauldrons have a rim of a diameter from 30 to 36 cm, while there are only several examples of cauldrons with smaller diameters, from 20 to 24 cm.

All cauldrons have a polished surface, especially the inside one. They can be divided in several groups by types. The first group consists of cauldrons with slanted walls and horizontal rims enlarged towards the outside with vertical circular openings for hanging (Figs. 4/1, 5, 5/17-18, 6/9, 14, 7/5-6, 8, 14-15, 8/3, 6). The second group consists of cauldrons with slightly rounded walls and horizontal rims enlarged towards the inside and circular or rectangular openings for hanging (Figs. 4/6, 5/19, 7/4, 7), while the third group consists of cauldrons with horizontal rims, rectangular or circular openings for hanging and slightly concave walls with sharp passage to a rounded bottom (Figs. 4/7-8, 6/10, 7/13, 8/9).

When cauldrons are in question, the exception is a cylindrical cauldron with vertical semi-circular handles (fig.4/2). It obviously resembles to metal

examples. However, there are no data regarding the circumstances in which it was discovered and, therefore, it cannot be related to any of the identified structures. In earlier literature it used to be attributed to the medieval horizon of the site. The first one to draw attention to this object was I. Fodor who dated it in 11th-13th century and identified it, together with other examples from the site of Vršac – Strmoglavica and from Vatin, as a special archaeological trace left by the Bulgarians from the Volga on the territory of the South Kingdom of Hungary during the Arpad dynasty¹⁵. Other researchers have also dated it to the period when there was life in this medieval settlement¹⁶. However, this dating cannot be accepted as reliable. The fact is that such a cauldron has not been found at any other medieval site, in our country or abroad, where this type of vessel was used. On the other hand, there are similar finds of cauldrons with vertical handles belonging to the Late Antiquity¹⁷, so there is a possibility that the cauldron from Crvenka belongs to the same period.

There has been found a smaller number of bowls. They were made of the same clay used for pots and cauldrons, in ochre colour. There are different sizes of bowls and they are conical with more or less vertically pulled out rims (Figs. 6/13, 7/3). The diameter of the smaller bowl is 16 cm and it was decorated by short lines on the edge of the rim. The outside surface of the larger bowl is decorated by horizontal wavy lines; the diameter of the rim is 24 cm. A special variant represents a bowl with a rounded wall and horizontally cut rim of 22 cm in diameter (Fig. 6/7). The outside surface and the lip of the rim were decorated with small holes made by a serrated wheel. Unlike the previous bowls, this one was made of coarse material, with traces of coarse sand and crushed stone.

Fragments of vessels which can be identified as bottles – jugs (Fig. 6/6) have been found within the territory of the settlement. They were made on a speed potter wheel, out of refined clay with addition of fine sand. The inner side and breaks are grey, while the outside is ochre. The outside surface is very well polished. These dishes differ completely from other pottery by their material and the type of manufacture and certainly do not represent a local pottery product. They originate from elsewhere, probably from the territories south of the Danube. A fragment of a red polished bottle – jug has been found

¹⁵ Fodor 1979, p. 315-325.

¹⁶ Takács 1986, p. 31, T. 3; Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, p. 85, кат. бр. 20; Станојев 1996, p. 92.

¹⁷ Vaday 1980, p. 31-42; Трифунуовић 1990-2000, p. 66-67, 88, 90 T.IV/21, VI/1.

in Banatski Karlovac, in structure 1 dated to the first half of the 13th century¹⁸. A jug without handle, with red polished surface, has been known from the right bank of the Danube, from Braničevo, where it has been found in a house dated to the beginning of the 13th century¹⁹.

Concerning dating of finds from Crvenka, two different opinions can be found in earlier literature. In general, they used to be dated to 11th-12th century²⁰, although there are authors who date them to a later period, in the first half of the 13th century²¹. Pottery finds are the most representative finds for dating of the settlement. Since the shapes of metal tools are chronologically almost insensitive, it is difficult to determine whether the discovered store rooms are contemporaneous or there were buried with a certain time distance. In this case they are dated to the period when there was life in the settlement, maybe at the end of its existence, and they were buried due to a danger which led to the end of life in this settlement.

The discovered pottery consists of a greater quantity of crushed mica, which confirms that it was made in pottery workshops of Vršac and its surroundings, taking into account that Vršački breg is rich in mica²². In those workshops, the dishes were made on hand potter wheels, but on rather fast ones. They were made of clay with addition of smaller or larger quantities of mica. Regarding the types of dishes, most of them are pots and cauldrons and there is a smaller number of jugs distributed on the territory of the Southern Banat²³. The majority of the population of the Southern Banat in this period was of Slavonic origin and their pottery was based on earlier traditions. Such pottery was used until the mid-thirteenth century, that is, until the great devastation of the Kingdom of Hungary during the Tatar invasion in 1241. That is exactly when the settlements in the Southern Banat were destroyed and the workshops of Vršac stopped working. In the second half of the 13th century new workshops were opened but they produced different kind of pottery²⁴.

¹⁸ Пашић 2001, р. 181-183, сл. 6/7.

¹⁹ Поповић и Иванишевић 1988, р. 152, сл. 23/1.

²⁰ Милић 1976, р. 59-65; Барачки 1977, р. 16; Станојев 1996, р. 90-95, 155; Барачки и Брмболић 1997, р. 213-214;

²¹ Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, р. 85-86; Пашић 2001, р. 182-183.

²² Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, р. 62.

²³ Трифуновић 1990, р. 104.

²⁴ Пашић 2001, р. 177-187.

Pots and cauldrons of similar shape and made of similar material have been found in Dupljaja, Kovin, Dolovo and Pančevo and Opovo²⁵. They were roughly dated to the 12th and the first half of the 13th century. On the north-east edge of Deliblatska peščara, on the sites of Kinipište near Nikolinci and Kalvari near Banatski Karlovac, there have been discovered parts of a settlement from the second half of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century. By comparing the pottery on these two territorially and chronologically close settlements, it has been attempted to give more precise chronological data regarding local pottery originated from the workshops of Vršac²⁶.

The settlement in Crvenka probably did not last too long. Maybe that is why, during the visits to the site and collection of materials, there has never been identified a vertical stratigraphy, or an intersection of settlement structures. Based on the above mentioned analogies, the settlement can be dated to the first decades of the 13th century, but it can be supposed that it was founded in the second half of the previous century. The most probably, it was destroyed during the Mongol invasion in 1241, after which it has never been renewed. This sudden interruption of life has been proved by buried storages of iron objects, as well as by the fact that the structures contained a larger number of entirely preserved dishes. A similar situation has been found in Kovin, there having been found pots and cauldrons containing mica characteristic for the deposit left after the destruction by the Mongol invasion²⁷. The settlement on the site of Crvenka can be classified in a rather large group of settlements from 11th-13th century which have been found so far on a relatively small territory²⁸. Their number confirms the data from the historical sources²⁹, which testifies of a great population density in the southern part of Serbian Banat in that time.

²⁵ Janković and Radičević, p. 275-278; Зечевић 1997, p. 186-187; Батистић-Попадић 1988, p. 7-18; Манојловић 1989, p. 41-46.

²⁶ Пашић 2001, p. 177-187.

²⁷ Вуксан 1989, p. 120.

²⁸ Трифуновић 1990, p. 106; Брмболић 1991, p. 52-66; Барачки и Брмболић 1997, p. 209-228.

²⁹ Виинј 1971, p. 43-44.

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AȘEZAREA MEDIEVALĂ DE LA SITUL CRVENKA DE LÂNGĂ VÂRȘEȚ

Rezumat

Arheologii de la Muzeul orașenesc din Vârșeț au realizat în anii 1950-1960 câteva săpături arheologice modeste la situl de la Crvenka, ce urmăreau exploatarea de nisip. Săpăturile au confirmat existența unui sit multistratificat cu un orizont preistoric, clasic târziu și medieval. Cu această ocazie au fost identificate mai multe structuri ce au aparținut unei așezări medievale mai mari și a fost colectat material, în special ceramică realizată în atelierele din Vârșeț și în împrejurimile sale. Așezarea a fost datată în prima jumătate a secolului al XIII-lea, dar se poate presupune că aceasta a apărut în a doua jumătate a secolului anterior. Cel mai probabil a fost distrusă de invazia tătară din 1241 și, după aceea, nu a mai fost refăcută niciodată.



Fig. 1. Location map of the site Crvenka (scale 1:50 000).

Oblik i raspored građevine se.
 U zidovima: očišćivač vode i pećni sudovi.

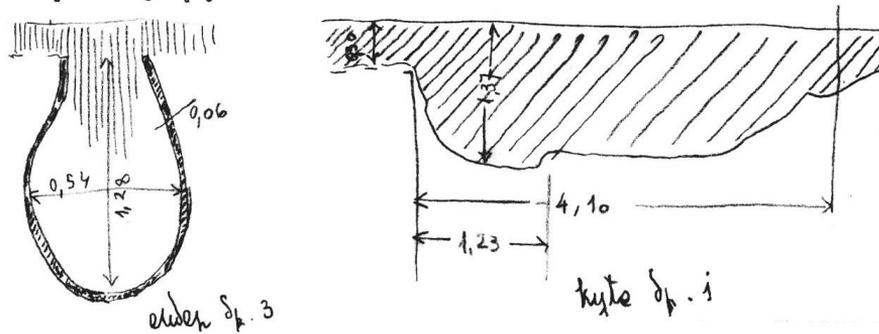


Fig. 2. House 1 and granary (pit) 3, cross-sections, terrain sketch.

Fig. 3. Hoard 1, tools and horse-trappings: sickles (1), spade casing (2), auger (3), pliers (4), hoe (5), adze (6), axes (7-8), chisel (9), hammers (10), knife (11), horseshoe (12), stirrup (13) (1-7, 9-10 after Станојев 1996, 93; 8, 11-13 after Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, 86, no scale).

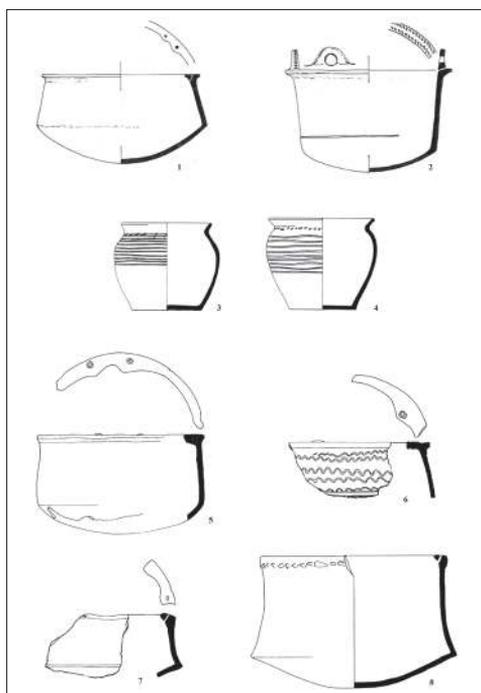
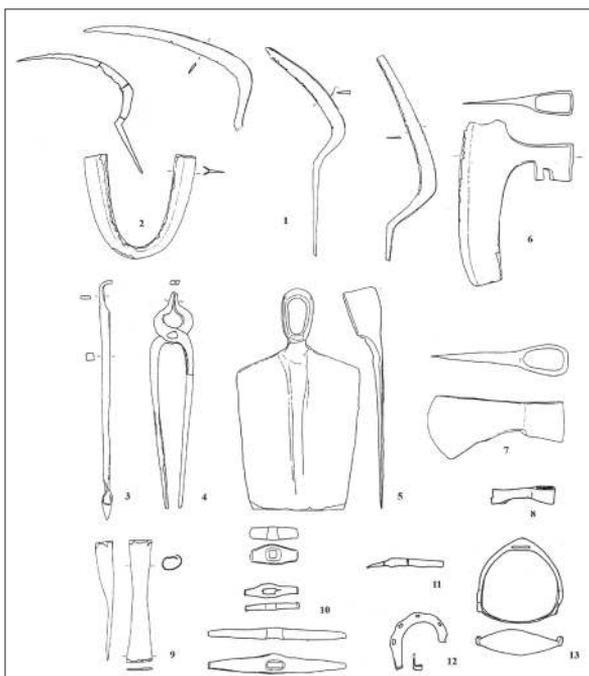


Fig. 4. Pottery (1-2 after Јанковић и Јанковић 1990, 85; 3-8 after Станојев 1996, 90, 92, no scale)

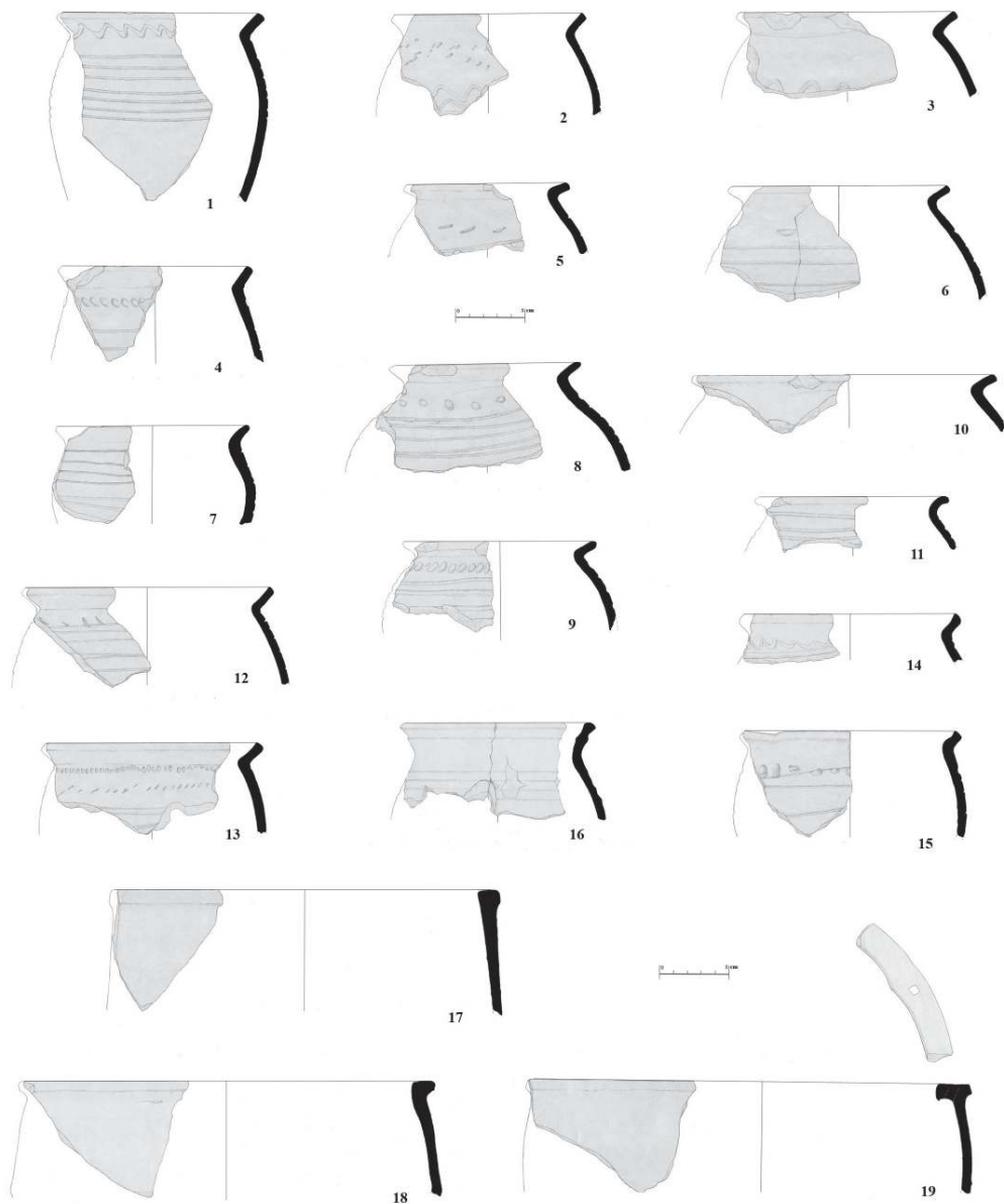


Fig. 5. Pottery, house 1 and granary (pit) 3

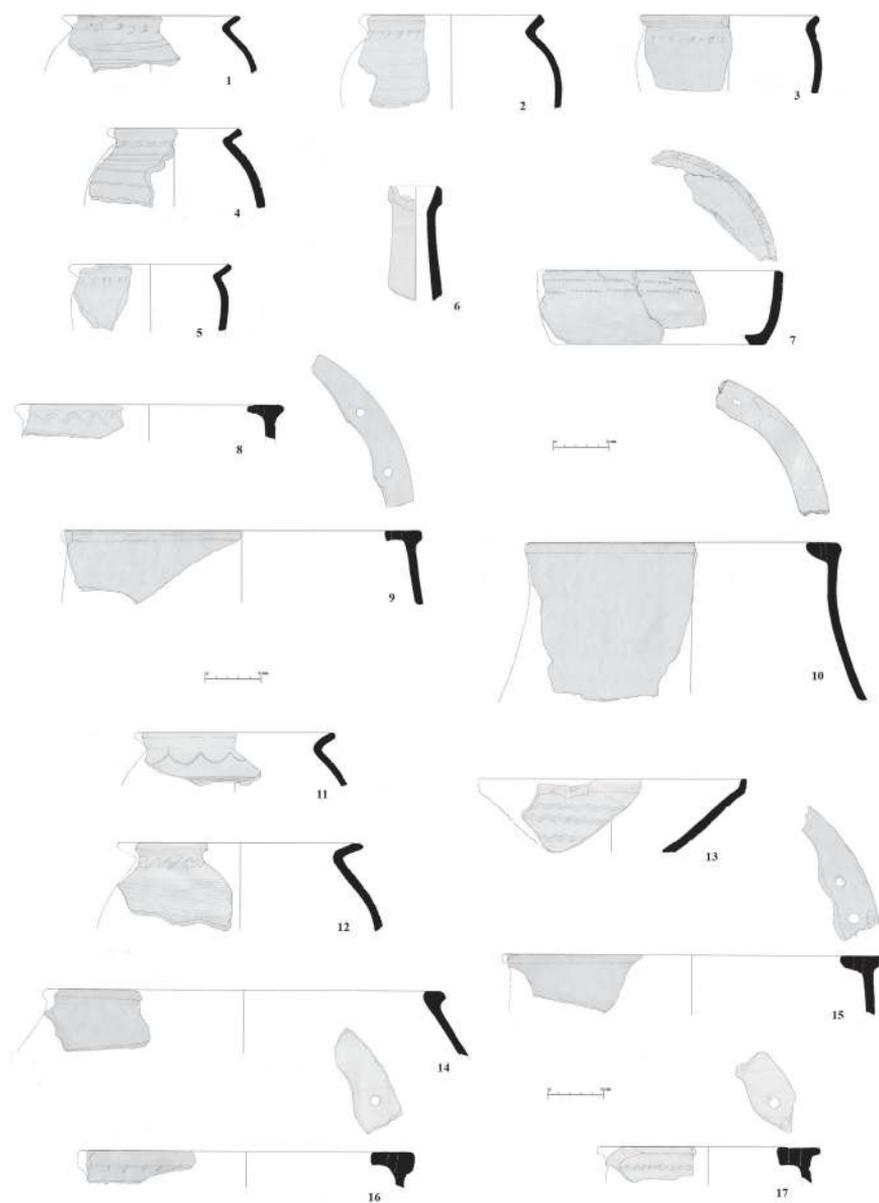


Fig. 6. Pottery, 1-10 oven 16; 11-17 oven and neighbouring pit.

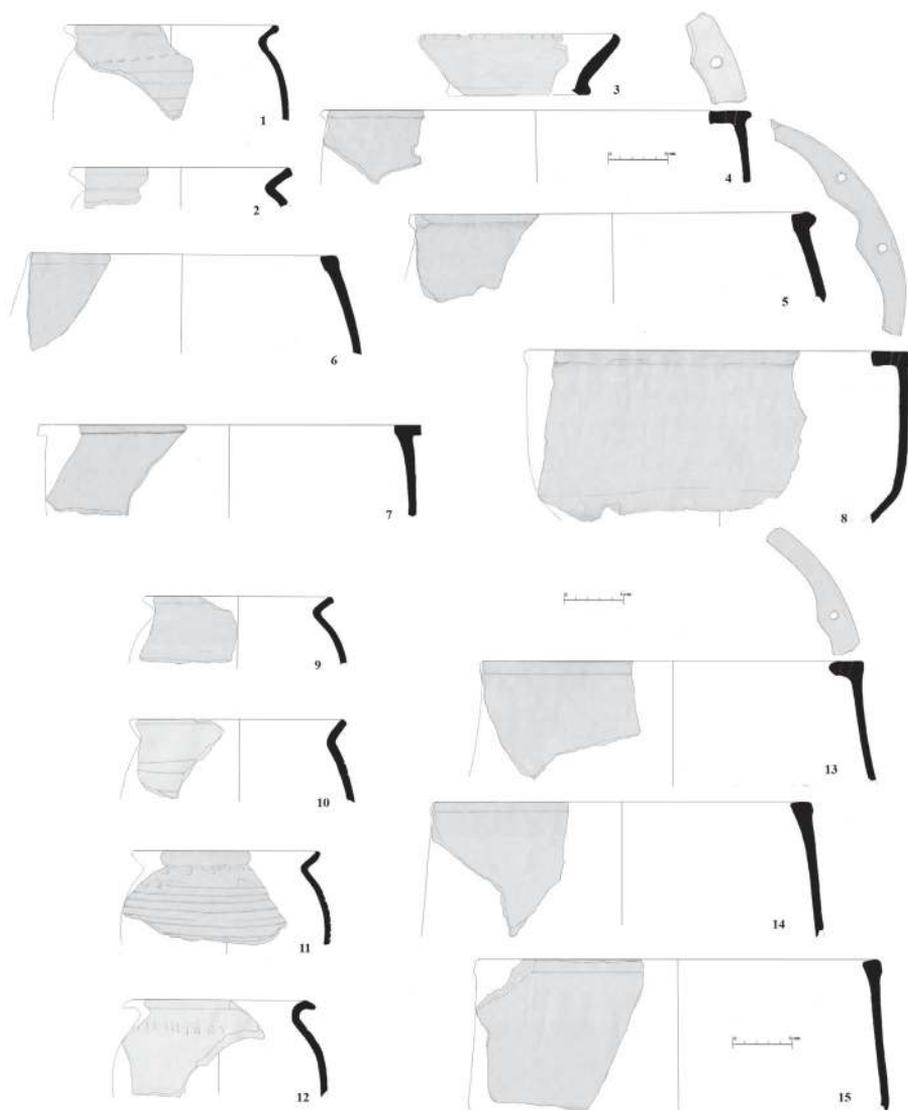


Fig. 7. Pottery, 1 pit 10; 2-8 pit 11; 9-15 pit 12.

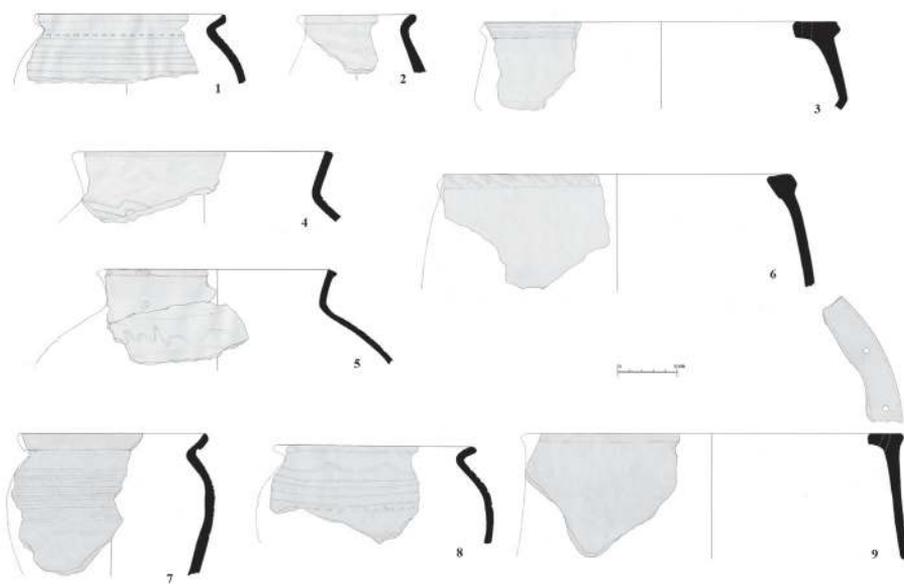


Fig. 8. Pottery, 1-6 pit 18; 7-9 pit 30.