

# MARISIA

**Studii și materiale**

**XXX**

**Arheologie**

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The fibula from Suseni (Photo: B. Rezi)

Back cover:  
The brick kiln from Cristești, Mureș County (Photo: C. D. Crișan & D. Cioată)

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# MARISIA

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# THE COȚOFENI SITE FROM ȘINCAI-CETATEA PĂGÂNILOR (MUREȘ COUNTY). THE 1996–1997 CAMPAIGNS\*

ÁLDOR CSABA BALÁZS

“1 Decembrie 1918” University, Alba Iulia

**Keywords:** Eneolithic, Coțofeni Culture, settlements, pottery

The Transylvanian Plateau is the zone with the highest density of Coțofeni communities. In this area is located also the site which makes the subject of this study, *Cetatea Păgânilor* (*Pagan Fortress*) near Șincai, Mureș county (Pl. 1). Already mentioned in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Károly Benkő,<sup>1</sup> Balázs Orbán<sup>2</sup> and then by Gábor Téglás, the site was investigated first time by Endre Orosz in 1895. He is the first who considers the finds (among with a cross-shaped copper axe) coming from the Eneolithic.<sup>3</sup> J. Könyöki and G. Nagy, I. Marțian, B. Pósta, M. Roska, H. Schroller, I. Nestor, Al. Vulpe, Petre Roman are also referring to the artefacts found at *Cetatea Păgânilor*.<sup>4</sup>

Many artefacts that have appeared on the surface as a result of works carried out here by locals and those collected after several non-systematic, random excavations, by I. Gorjan (the principal of the school from Șincai), gradually formed a school collection.<sup>5</sup> After some field work and studying the finds from the school's collection, the late Valeriu Lazăr carries out systematic excavations here in 1974–1977<sup>6</sup> and then in 1996–1997,<sup>7</sup> to establish the stratigraphy, structure, and cultural content of this important archaeological objective. He wanted to find the limits of the settlement, and to see if this occupied also the secondary hillock, stretched towards SE, to study the stratigraphic traces of the Eneolithic dwellings and to confirm their horizontal expansion. A suspected third terrace of the settlement also had to be confirmed.<sup>8</sup>

Before discussing the last campaigns, we consider it's necessary to clarify a few details about the earlier ones (1974–1977), as we have identified some inconsistencies and deficiencies

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\* The site was researched by Valeriu Lazăr. The archaeological materials from these campaigns are in the deposit of the Mureș County Museum. We would like to thank to Dr. Sándor Berecki for offering the material for study.

<sup>1</sup> Benkő 1869, 348.

<sup>2</sup> Orbán 1870, 201.

<sup>3</sup> Orosz 1898, 322–330.

<sup>4</sup> Könyöki–Nagy 1905, 287; Marțian 1920, I. nr. 452; II. nr. 215; Pósta 1903, 11; Roska 1929, 271; Schroller 1933, 74; Nestor 1933, 94, fig. 20; Vulpe 1973, 224, 227; Roman 1976, 85.

<sup>5</sup> Lazăr 1977, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Lazăr 1977; 1978; 1995.

<sup>7</sup> The 1989 campaign mentioned by V. Lazăr in the Mureș County archaeological repertory is not enumerated in the chronicle from 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Lazăr 1995, 251–252.

in the published results. In the D section,<sup>9</sup> extended by two squares to the north (F of  $7 \times 7$  m and  $F_1$  of  $5 \times 5$  m), and another two squares to the south (G of  $7 \times 7$  m and  $G_1$  of  $7 \times 5$  m),<sup>10</sup> two dwellings were revealed. The traces of the first dwelling ( $L_4$ ), partially disturbed, were revealed also in the squares  $F_1$  (south-western corner) and  $G_1$  (east side). It was a large, surface house, probably with two rooms, divided by a large, 2.50 m rectangular shaped stone block (a possible threshold?). Unfortunately the  $F_1$  and  $G_1$  squares were not extended to uncover the entire dwelling. We believe that it would have been particularly useful to extend the  $G_1$  square to south-west. Judging by the limits of the adobe outlined in the section D, and square  $G_1$ , a considerable part of the dwelling has remained untapped, and the stone slabs under the 30 cm thick house floor, the 2.5 m long shaped stone threshold, the rich and diverse inventory suggests that this was a particular, large house.

In the south-eastern corner of the  $G_1$  square, the remaining of an inhumation grave ( $M_1$ ),<sup>11</sup> oriented NE–SW, was discovered. But, because V. Lazăr mentioned the tomb as being “disarranged in ancient times”<sup>12</sup> without giving any other details, and since the skeleton lacks anatomical connection, the possibility of a misinterpretation is to be taken into account. Reburial or pre-burial excarnation procedures with subsequent burial of the disjointed skeleton should also be carefully considered. The scattered human bones discovered on the platform of three surface houses and in a pit-house from the settlement are suggestive of such a funeral rite. V. Lazăr believes it might be a magic-religious practice of slashing corpses or anthropophagism.<sup>13</sup> Up to the present moment we know only from the *Igrița Cave* (Peștera Igrița) certain Coțofeni burials with disjointed skeletons.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately no anthropological analysis were performed, which could confirm or rule out completely that the disjointed and fragmented condition of the bones discovered in this settlement was caused by mutilation or intentional chopping right after the death or partially maybe even before.

The second surface dwelling ( $L_5$ ), cut by the D section and marked also by the large quantity of burned adobe, was also completely unveiled. Its northern limit was noticed in section F and its southern limit in section G. The finds from the D section and from the lateral squares, other possible dwellings or houses, made V. Lazăr to open in 1976 two more sections here, at the southernmost extremities of the G and  $G_1$  squares. Noted  $G_2$  and  $G_3$ , the sections were  $30 \times 1.5$  m NE–SW orientation, and parallel.

In the  $G_2$  section in the yellow clayey layer, which overlaps the marl layer, numerous pits of different sizes and shapes were found, with various archaeological materials. Compared with the other sections, this contained modest traces of culture, except the earlier mentioned pits. In the parallel section, both the yellow sandy layer that overlaps the marl layer, and the silty yellow layer above are rich in archaeological materials. It was necessary to open six more squares here, laterally, and in the extension of the  $G_3$  section to fully unveil the surface dwellings found here. But the exact position of these squares is unclear in the campaign report published by V. Lazăr, while there is a discrepancy in the dimensions of the squares, and the original drawings made by the author.<sup>15</sup> To determine the exact position of these, we have made a reconstruction based on the original sketches from the 1974–1977 campaign (Fig. 1).

<sup>9</sup> About the section I, opened in the top of the plateau in 1975, we have only stratigraphic data, V. Lazăr gives no information about the findings.

<sup>10</sup> Lazăr 1977, 25.

<sup>11</sup> The later mention of this grave (Lazăr 1995, 252), as being discovered in section D, is obviously an error.

<sup>12</sup> Lazăr 1977, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Lazăr 1982, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Emődi 1984, 406–407.

<sup>15</sup> Lazăr 1977, 22, pl. I; VII.



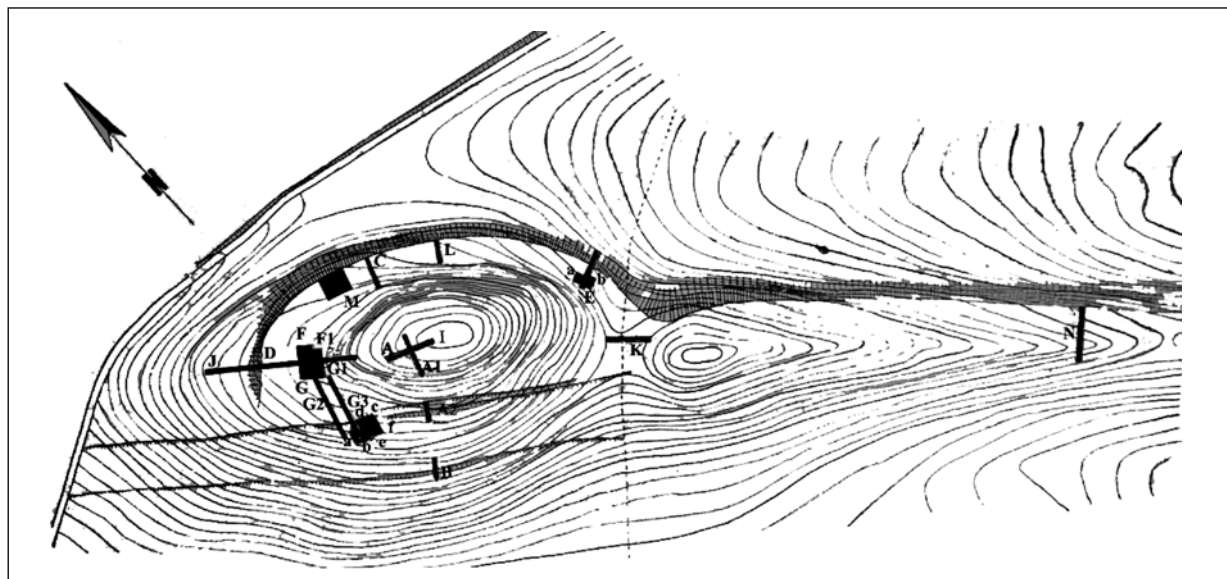


Fig. 1. The plan of the 1974–1977 and 1996–1997 campaigns (after V. Lazăr).

Thus, in the southern extremity and western side of the section  $G_3$ , a square “a” was opened, measuring  $7.50 \times 5$  m. This was later extended to the north-east, to fully uncover a pit (Gr. 20).<sup>16</sup> To east from square “a”, the  $2 \times 6$  m square “b” was opened,<sup>17</sup> to uncover the  $L_8$  dwelling. This square had to be extended later, by square “e”, measuring  $6 \times 3$  m, to find the limits of the dwelling. It was also necessary to open two more squares, “c” and “d”, of  $5 \times 2$  m and  $6.80 \times 2$  m, to north from squares “b” and “c”, perpendicular on the east wall of the  $G_3$  section. The purpose of these was to completely uncover the  $L_9$  dwelling.

Adjacent to the “c”, “d” and “e” squares, in the campaign from the next year they have opened the square “f”, to investigate the  $L_{10}$  dwelling, partially uncovered in the east corner of square “d”. The real dimensions of this square are different from the data published by V. Lazăr, who mentions this as measuring  $12 \times 1.50$  m,<sup>18</sup> enlarged to 3.50 m from m 3.50. In fact this square is  $12 \times 1.80$  m enlarged to 3.80 m (according to the original drawings), and crosses the south-east extremity of square “d” (Fig. 2). Here a new surface

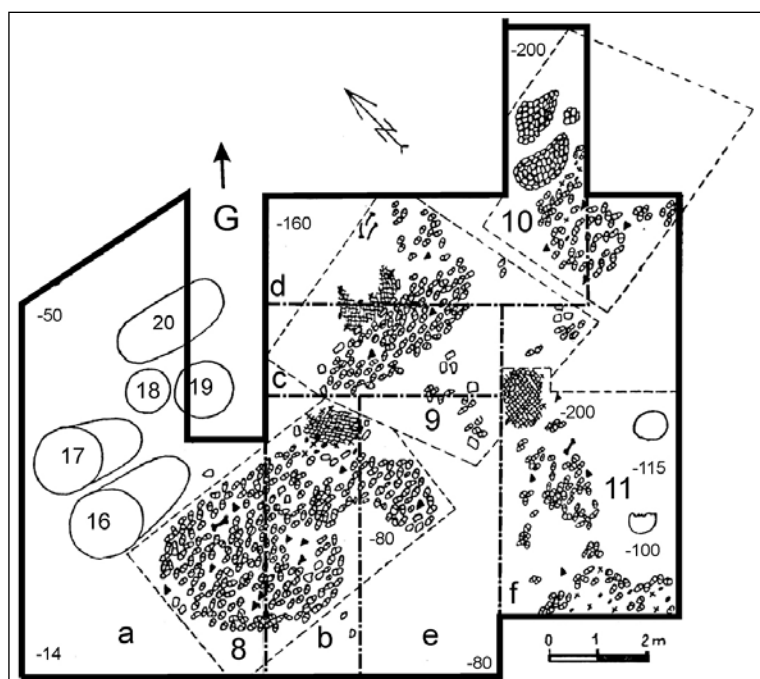


Fig. 2. The surfaces a–e, f with the dwellings 8–11 and the pits 16–20 (after V. Lazăr).

<sup>16</sup> The size of this grid is incorrectly published as being  $5 \times 4.50$  m. In the original plans, hand-drawn (probably) by V. Lazăr, the grid is mentioned as measuring  $7.50 \times 5$  m. These are the correct dimensions, which match the plates published by V. Lazăr in 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Published by V. Lazăr as measuring  $6 \times 2.50$  m, which based on his drawings, is incorrect.

<sup>18</sup> Lazăr 1977, 22.

dwelling ( $L_{10}$ ) was partially revealed, with burned adobe floor, smoothed with a thick clay layer. It could have been fully unveiled by enlarging the square “f”, or opening new squares.

As we have very few information about the 1996–1997 campaigns, only a short report on the website of the Institute for Cultural Memory (CIMEC), and a few words about the artefacts,<sup>19</sup> we’ve considered important to publish these campaigns, and the findings. The 10 × 10 m section opened in 1996 on the lower terrace of the settlement, to north, was noted M (Fig. 1). It was parallel to the C section opened in 1974, and it was gridded from 2 to 2 m, from north to south (grids 1 to 5) and east to west (grids A to E). Geologically, the structure of this section is identical with the one from the section C: at the surface (top soil) we have the vegetation layer (0–0.30 m), which overlaps in sequence, a yellow silty layer (from 0.30 to 1.00 m) and a yellow sandy layer (1.00 to 1.60 m) below which is marl.

Archaeological deposits are in the yellow silty layer, but they were also noticed in the yellow sandy layer. They belong to the Coțofeni culture (Copper Age, Eneolithic), and the Schneckenberg culture (Early Bronze Age). On the entire surface of section, below the top soil, there were unearthed pottery fragments, which judging by their profile belonged to cups, pots, amphorae, tempered with sand and gravel, decorated with patterns in relief (“lentil grains”, short horizontal belts on the rim), but also in other techniques (incision, successive pricks or “Furchenstich” and impressions).

In the grids A2–B2–4 and C4 at 0.70 m a surface dwelling was found with hearth and a pit. The rectangular-shape dwelling was built on a burned compact adobe (floor), with a thickness ranging between 9 and 12 cm. It was built on a wooden structure and wattle plastered with adobe. A small adobe fragment with incised ornaments (Pl. 7/8), found in the remaining of the dwelling, suggests that its walls were ornamented. Judging from the coal, ash, and collapsed walls, the dwelling probably burned down.

The 80 cm diameter hearth was found at 0.55 m, in the south-western corner of the dwelling, and the pit to south (C4), at 0.80 m. The hearth had straight walls, coated with a smoothed layer of yellow clay, deepening in the yellow sandy layer to 1.40 m. The pit was grasped at 0.80 m, and had a rich inventory, what we could reconstruct from a few hand-written notes which accompanied the findings. In the filling of this pit bone remains, potshards, two large restorable vessels (Pl. 3), a stone axe fragment (Pl. 7/6), and a fragment of a grinder (Pl. 7/5) was found.

On the platform of the dwelling there were potshards, few flint and stone tools (blades, chisel fragments, grinder fragments), and bone tools (awls). Another two pits were found in the E2 and E5 grids. Near the dwelling, in grid D5 an inhumation grave was found in an oval pit (1.80 × 1.20 m). Disturbed already in ancient times, the grave was of a child buried in contracted position. Near the grave, in the pit there were slabs of stone (sandstone) and grey, restorable vessels, decorated with ornaments in relief (conical knobs, round buttons, indented, oblique or vertical applied jagged belts), impressions.<sup>20</sup> The burial had a rich inventory, with several restorable vessels, from the Schneckenberg culture.<sup>21</sup> Considering also the several potshards from the same culture, found in the cultural layer, in all levels, we can suspect here a later Schneckenberg settlement. As the shards were found mixed with Coțofeni materials in all layers,

<sup>19</sup> In the Chronicle of Archaeological Research in Romania, 2000, the campaign is dated as taking place in 1996. According to some original hand-written notes accompanying the findings from the archaeological excavations, stored at the Mureș County Museum, the research of the area took place in 1997, too.

<sup>20</sup> CIMEC (<http://www.cimec.ro/scripts/arh/cronica/detalii.asp?k=436>).

<sup>21</sup> We wish to thank dr. Berecki Sándor from the Mureș County Museum for this information. The artefacts found in the Schneckenberg burial will be the subject of another article.

and without having any clear stratigraphic data,<sup>22</sup> we have to take into consideration also the possibility of the layers being disturbed in the past.

The archaeological material mostly consists of fragmentary pottery, out of which we have analyzed the well-defined forms, and the fragments with characteristic decorations (about 20% of the total number of potshards). Regarding the composition of the paste and surface treatment, they can be classified in coarse ware (common use vessels, the highest number of potshards belongs to this category), and fine pottery (just a few fragments).

The coarse ware (Pl. 4/1, 3; 6/13; 9/7–9; etc.) represents the most common type. Their surface is poor or medium smoothed, made of a coarse, porous, unevenly burned paste, tempered with gravel, chaff, crushed shard, chopped straw, mica and rarely crushed shells. Their colour is sometimes uneven, resulting from the poor quality burning. Most of them are red (brick coloured), brick-greyish, and a few black, black-greyish, grey, or brown. The fine quality ceramics are rare (Fig. 3), only a few shards found, all dark-coloured (Pl. 6/4–6). Only two large vessels could be restored: one amphora,<sup>23</sup> Vb-Roman,<sup>24</sup> Vb-Ciugudean (Pl. 3/1), Ic-Lazăr type, with analogies from Boarta,<sup>25</sup> Șeușa–Gorgan,<sup>26</sup> Peștera Moanei;<sup>27</sup> and one large vessel for supplies, of XIII-Roman type<sup>28</sup> (Pl. 3/2), both found in the pit near the dwelling. This amphora type is characteristic for the third phase of evolution of the Coțofeni culture.<sup>29</sup> There is also one restorable vessel, a jar (Pl. 4/4), XIIb-Roman, Iib-Ciugudean type, with analogies from Bratei–Nisipărie.<sup>30</sup> The potshards belong to amphorae (Pl. 5/1–2), storage vessels (Pl. 5/4), pots (Pl. 4/1–3; 5/3, 6/8, 11–12), shallow bowls (6/9; 9/4, 8, 12), deep bowls (Pl. 7/12; 8/2; 9/10, 13), jugs (Pl. 9/1, 3) and cups (Pl. 6/1, 4–6; 8/6, 10). We have a VIIc-Roman, VIIc-Ciugudean or VB-Méder type cup fragment (Pl. 6/4), with analogies from Ogra,<sup>31</sup> Deva<sup>32</sup> or Turia–Cimitirul romano-catolic.<sup>33</sup> This form appears in the second period of evolution of the culture. The Ia4-Roman, Ia2-Ciugudean type bowl (Pl. 8/2) has good analogies from Sebeș–Râpa Roșie.<sup>34</sup> The decorated, B1-Roman, wide flat handle (Pl. 6/10) found on the platform of the dwelling belongs to a large pot or storage vessel, with a close analogy from Basarabi.<sup>35</sup> For the amphorae fragments we have analogies from Unirea–Dealul Cămării.<sup>36</sup>

The most common decoration type is made by incision. There are “deepened triangles” (Pl. 4/3; 5/4; 6/1, 9; 8/3, 12), incised bands (Pl. 3/1; 6/10; 8/1; 9/2), incised “fish skeleton” motives (9/3), incised “trestle” motives. The Af-Roman type motive of “deepened triangles” in Central Transylvania is specific to all three periods of the culture, with analogies from Bocșa Montană–Colțan,<sup>37</sup> Gornea

<sup>22</sup> We have no diary for the 1996–1997 campaigns, no plans, the only information we could work with, come from the few notes of the findings stored in the Mureș County Museum.

<sup>23</sup> Two amphorae of this type were found at Șincai also in the 1974–1977 campaigns.

<sup>24</sup> Roman 1976, 21, pl. 23/3; 85/2.

<sup>25</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 85/2.

<sup>26</sup> Ciută–Gligor 2004, pl. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Ghemiș–Sava 2006, pl. V/2

<sup>28</sup> Roman 1976, 23, pl. 31/1.

<sup>29</sup> Ciugudean 2000, pl. 146.

<sup>30</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 55/4.

<sup>31</sup> Berecki 2006, pl. 2/2.

<sup>32</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 26/8; 46/9.

<sup>33</sup> Méder 2004, 38, pl. I/10–11; 2/5–6.

<sup>34</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 12/16.

<sup>35</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 49/2.

<sup>36</sup> Ciugudean 2000, pl. 53/1–2.

<sup>37</sup> Ciugudean 2000, pl. 100/4–5.

and Herculane–*Peștera hoților*.<sup>38</sup> The “trestle” motive, according to P. Roman, is characteristic for the third phase,<sup>39</sup> but was noticed also in phase I at Cefa.<sup>40</sup> The “fish-skeleton” motive, for which we have analogies from Sibiu,<sup>41</sup> Basarabi, Bistreț, Cluj-Napoca, Livezile,<sup>42</sup> is considered by P. Roman as specific for the two last phases, but at Micești, Vinerea and Uioara de Jos they were noticed in the first phase as well. The “deepened triangle” motives are common in all the phases of the culture.

The impressions are also commonly used, we have hatched bands (Pl. 3/2; 8/2, 5), impressions with successive stitches, “Furchenstich” (Pl. 6/4, 5; 8/6; 8/10). The impressions organised in lines (Pl. 8/2), La-Roman type ornament, in Transylvania was dated in all three periods of the culture, with analogies from Bernadea,<sup>43</sup> Cașolt–*Poiana în Pisc*,<sup>44</sup> Petrești,<sup>45</sup> Bratei–*Nisipărie*, Leliceni–*Locul oprit*.

There were just a few shards with relief decoration (Pl. 7/16, 19; 8/7, 9), and the roughening of the surface with barbotine was noticed on a few vessel fragments. No incrustation decoration could be observed. The majority of them are brick-coloured (Fig. 3), with secondary burning noticed only in the case of about 2% of the fragments. The only recipients which had a direct contact with the fire in the moment of their usage, come from the platform of the surface dwelling (8 pot fragments). The others show the traces of the secondary burning from the period when the potshard had been broken, or are the result of a deficient burning.<sup>46</sup> 41% of the pottery is moderately smoothed, 37% well-, and 15% superficially-smoothed. Only 6% of the pottery was polished (Fig. 4). The burning is almost exclusively oxidizing. Regarding the temper, a variety of combinations were observed, the materials used was sand, gravel, crushed shards, crushed shells, chaff, and in two cases crushed limestone (Fig. 5).

Other clay objects were also found, four spindle whorls (Pl. 7/1–4), scattered in the layers from 0.30 to 1.60 m. These are found often in Coțofeni settlements: Vinerea–*În deal*,<sup>47</sup> Sebeș–*Râpa Roșie*,<sup>48</sup> Reghin,<sup>49</sup> and a high number were found at Șincai also in the previous campaigns,<sup>50</sup> which with the loom-weights, show intense textile production. Considering the typology of the forms and ornaments on the pottery found in the site, we consider that the presented material belongs to the second and third phase of the Coțofeni culture, in line with the previous findings from the site. We don't have enough information, and the findings are too fragmentary to be able to make a more exact chronological framing of the surface dwelling uncovered in this campaign.

The five campaigns have uncovered 80 m<sup>2</sup> of the first terrace, and 460 m<sup>2</sup> of the second terrace. This represents only 6.40% and 5.19% of the entire surface of the two terraces. Therefore, we have now a good image about the importance of the site, the culture of the settlement from

<sup>38</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 62/11; 65/10.

<sup>39</sup> Roman 1976, 26, fig. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Crișan 1988, 339–351.

<sup>41</sup> Luca–Boroffka 1995, pl. 78/4.

<sup>42</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 41/1–16.

<sup>43</sup> Ciugudean 2000, pl. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Paul 1960, 114, fig. 7/1–6; Roman 1976, 157, 57/8–10.

<sup>45</sup> Roman 1976, 153–156, pl. 53–56.

<sup>46</sup> Lazăr 1978, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Popa 1998, pl. XXII/3.

<sup>48</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 52/34.

<sup>49</sup> Moldovan 2006, pl. II/3.

<sup>50</sup> Lazăr 1978, pl. XVIII.

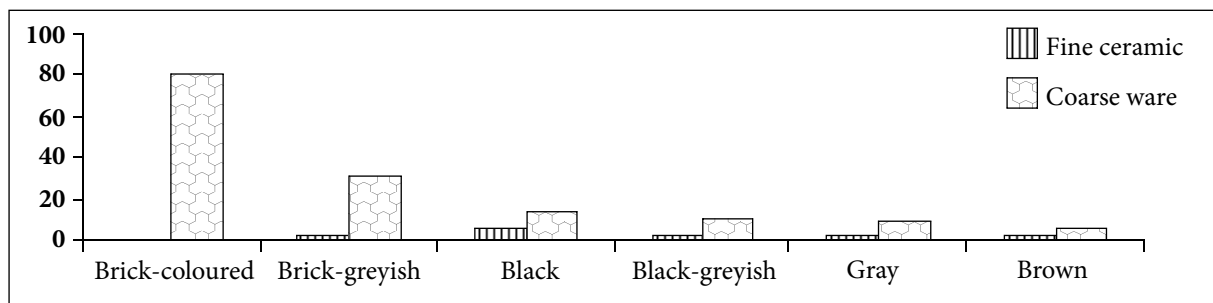


Fig. 3. Ceramic colour based on ceramic categories.

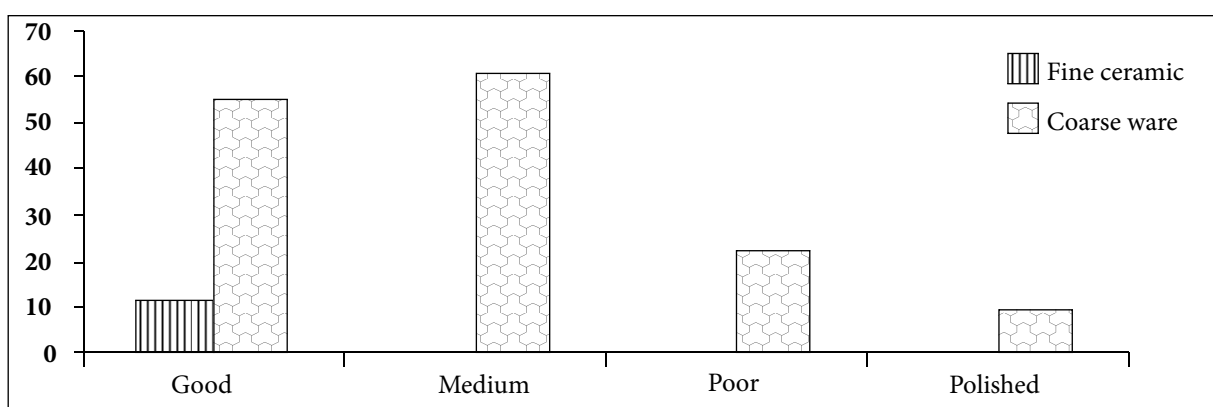


Fig. 4. Surface treatment based on ceramic categories.

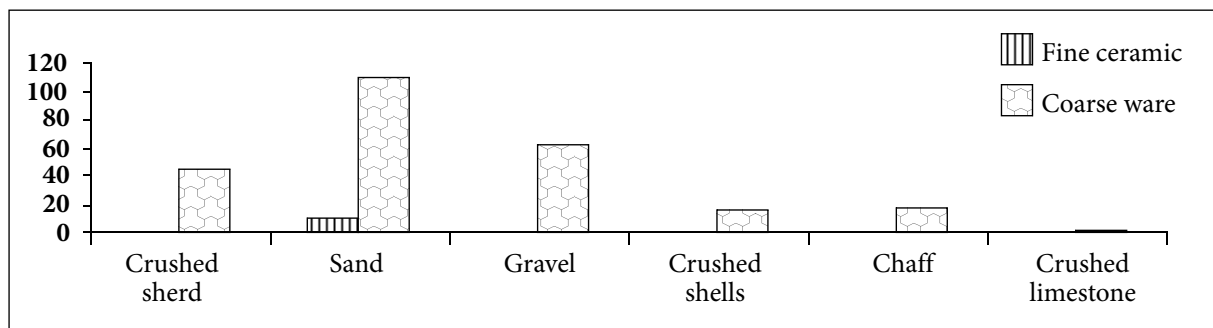


Fig. 5. Temper distribution based on ceramic categories.

the *Cetatea Păgânilor*, its dating, we can estimate its expansion and limits, we have information about its structural characteristics, the position of the dwellings in the investigated surfaces, but could not gather sufficient data for a reconstruction. The research is fragmentary, incomplete at certain points, and does not seek to fully reveal the surface complexes (some complexes are only partially grasped). The collected material is also insufficient for us to be able to draw some conclusions about the micro- and macro-regional interdependence. To study this aspect we would need much more archaeological materials, in which to identify external elements.

The excavations revealed 12 surface dwellings, 4 pit-houses, a stove, several hearths, several waste or storage pits, and one grave.<sup>51</sup> They have also confirmed the number of the terraces, their structure, and proved that both were inhabited, with higher density on the north-west, and west

<sup>51</sup> Considering only the findings belonging to the Coțofeni culture, though the dating of the grave is equivocal.

side of the lower terrace. Here, in certain points two levels of habitat were observed. The surface dwellings and the pit-houses had their walls on the limits of the terraces.

The richness and diversity of the findings, makes this site one of the most important and representative Coțofeni settlements. It was possible to establish a typology for the ceramic vessels based on their forms, and a table of analysis for the main ornament types used. For the five pieces of metal found in the site a metallographic analysis was carried out, which showed that they were locally made, from native copper.<sup>52</sup> The inventory of the findings showed that the members of the Coțofeni community from Șincai–*Cetatea Păgânilor* practiced a mixed economy, as farmers, animal breeders, craftsmen and hunters. The thickness of the Coțofeni layer proves that this was a long-lasting settlement.

We believe that the site still has significant potential, and new research based on modern methods could provide valuable data which may clarify some still unclear issues regarding the Coțofeni culture. The aerial topography research conducted in 2009–2010 by the Mureș County Museum with the Archaeological Institute of Eötvös Lóránd University (ELTE, Budapest, Hungary) has identified several potential external objectives: tumuli graves located at E–SE from the Fortress (Pl. 2). It seems that these were observed also by V. Lazăr, as there are several photos made in the 1974–1977 campaigns (unpublished), on which the shape of these tumuli can be noticed. Since then, these were much flattened by the three decades of farm work. The investigation of these tumuli could provide very important information regarding the funerary rite and ritual of the Coțofeni culture, about which we know so little at this moment, as we have over 1500 sites with findings, but only 14 burial sites which can be definitely attributed to this culture.

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<sup>52</sup> Lazăr 1978, 56, note 6.

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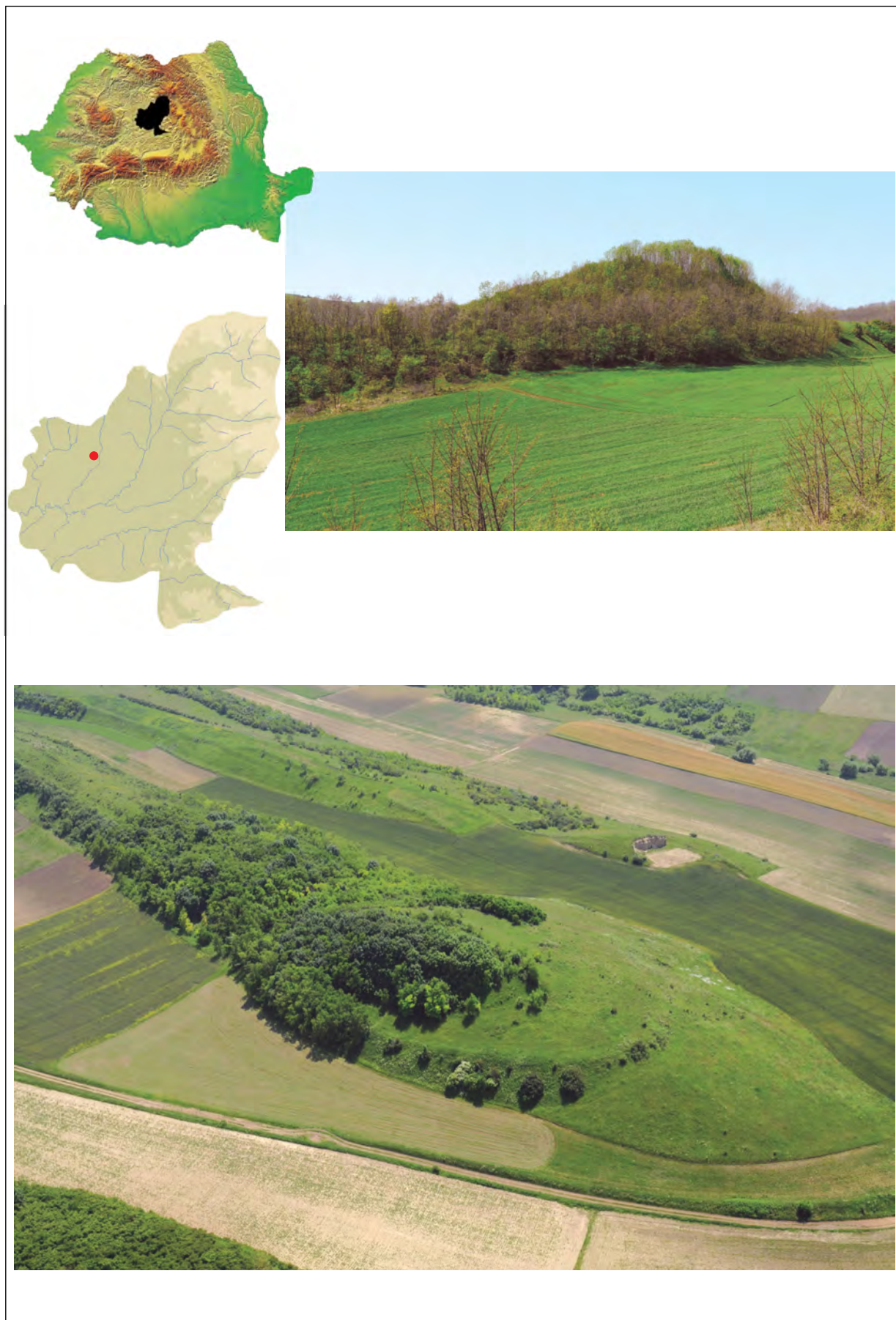


Plate 1. Şincai–Cetatea Păgânilor  
(Photo: Zoltán Czajlik © Hungarian Scientific Research Fund IN 77325).



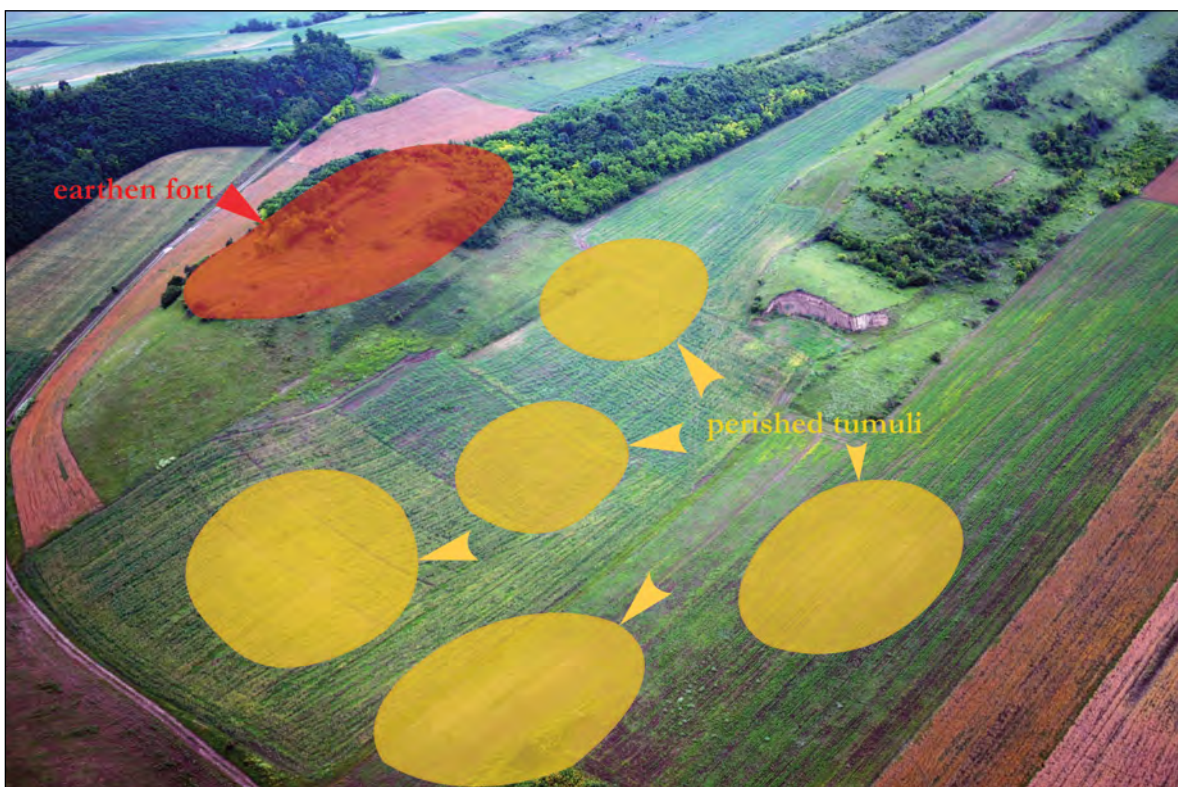
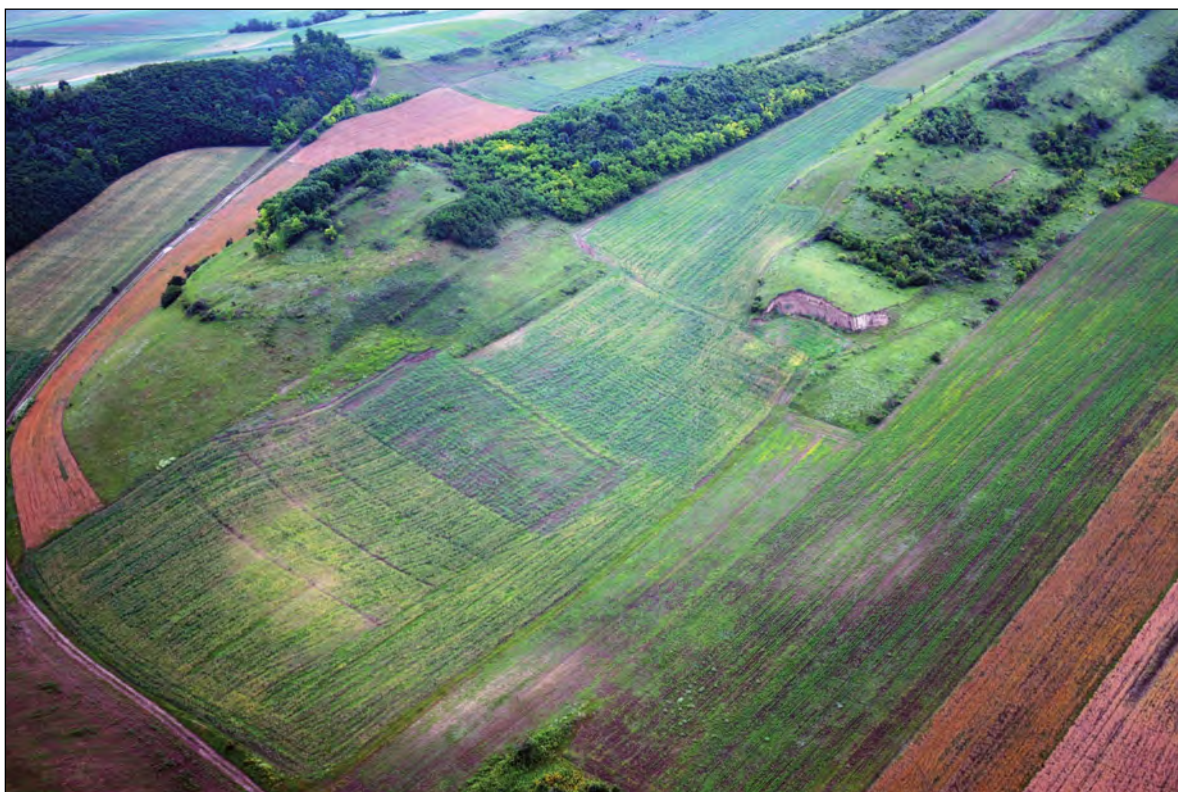
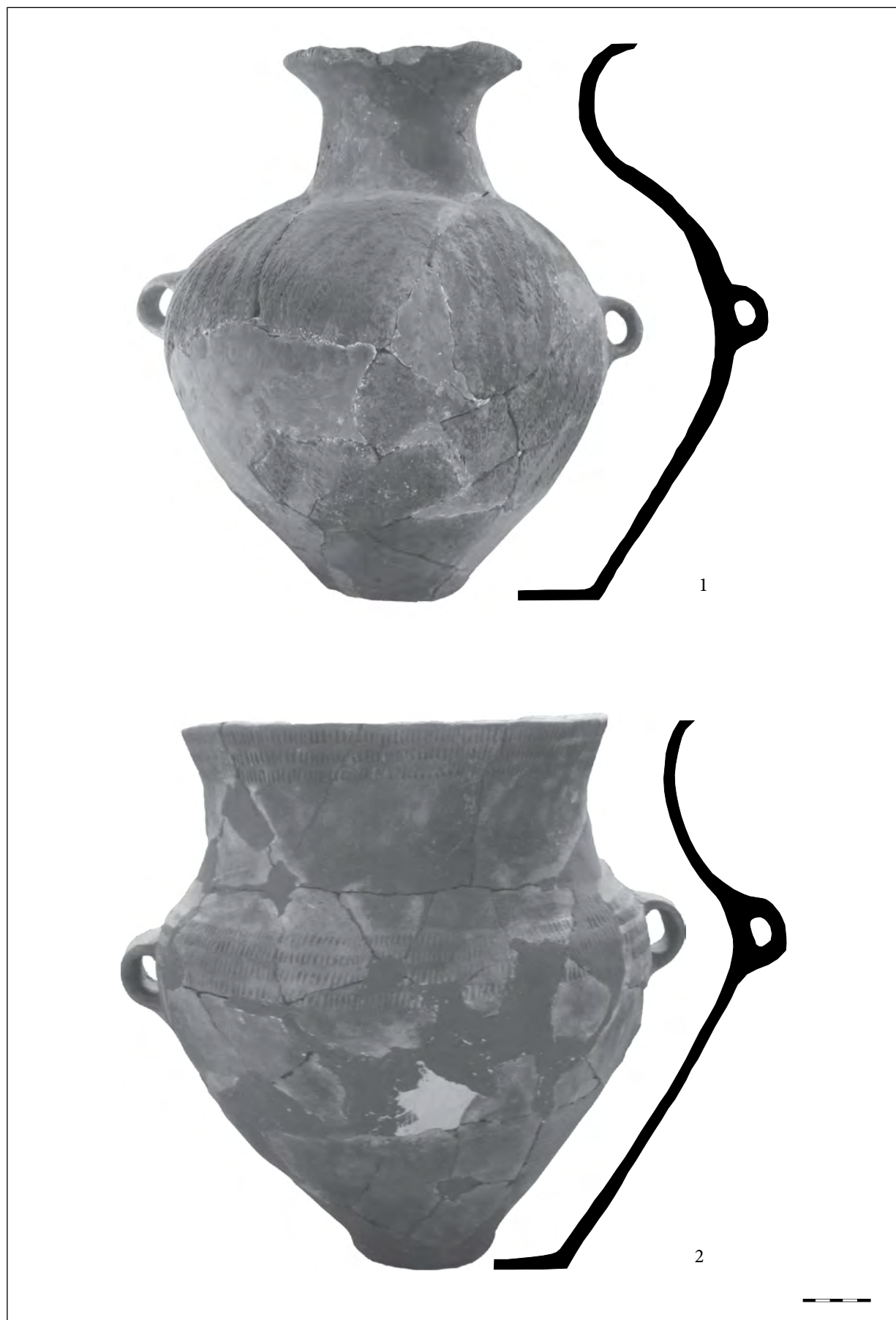


Plate 2. Potential external objectives  
(Photo: Zoltán Czajlik © HSRF IN 77325).



Pl. 3. Șincai–Cetatea Păgânilor. 1. Amphora; 2. Large vessel.

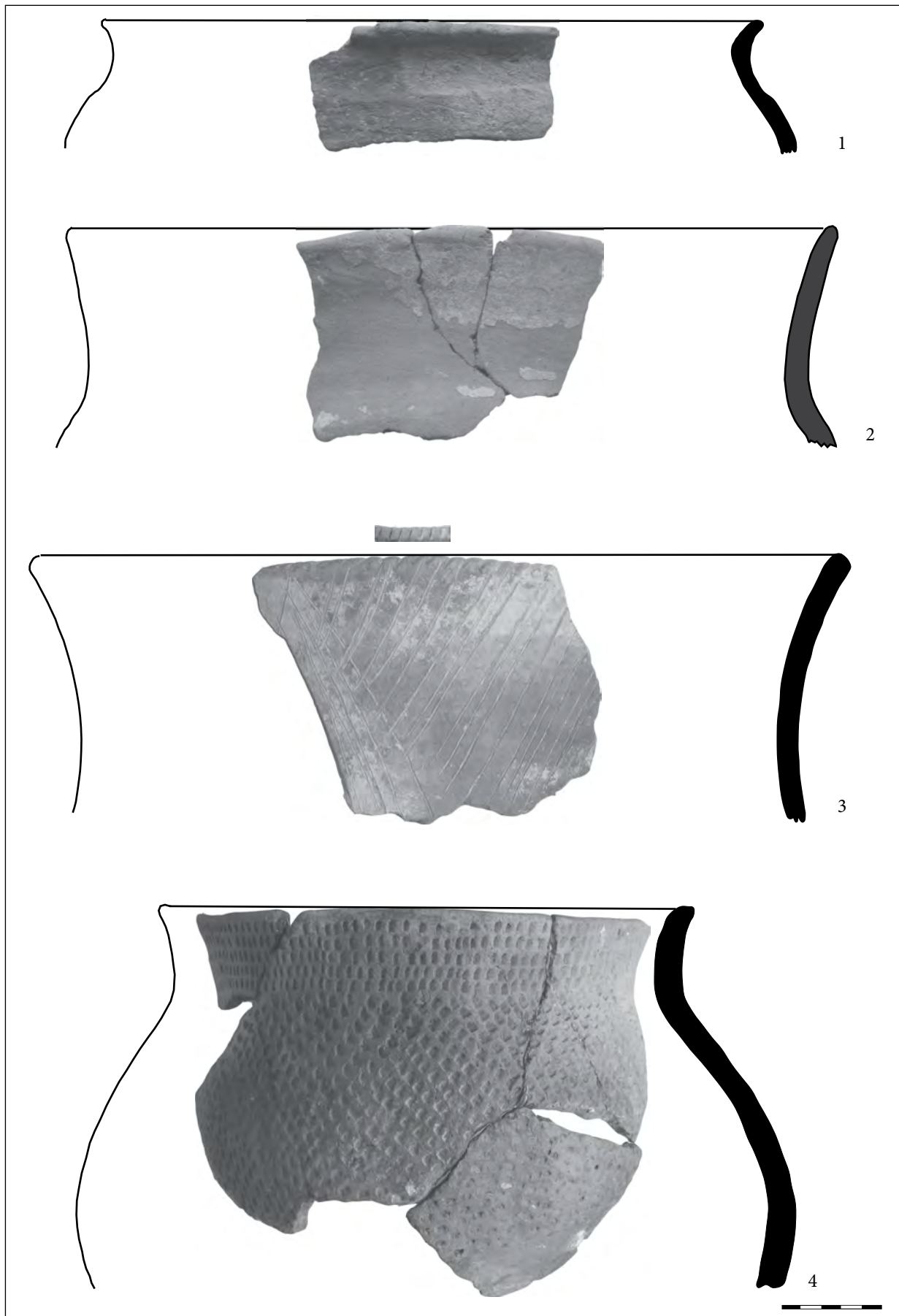


Plate 4. Șincai–Cetatea Păgânilor. Pottery.

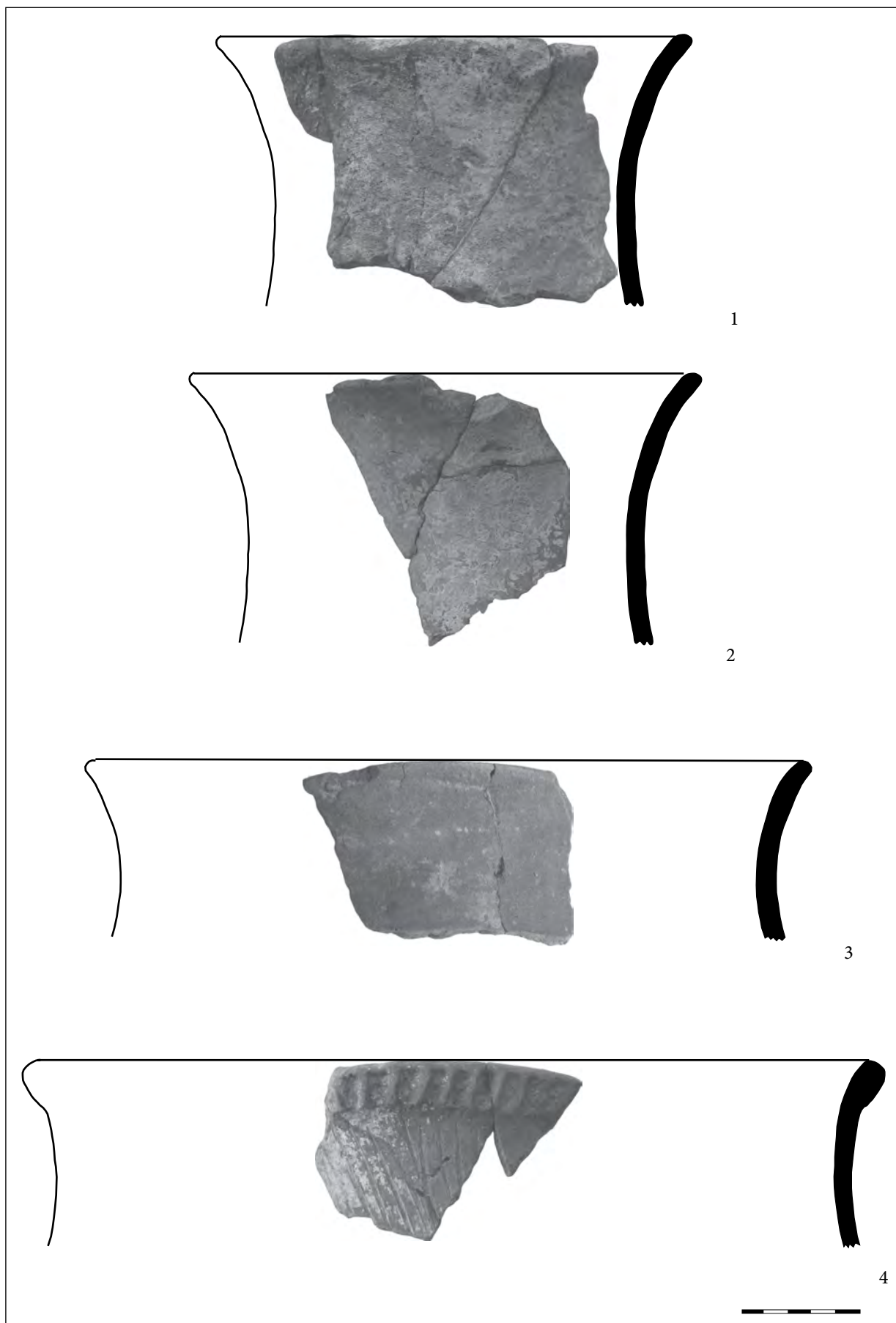


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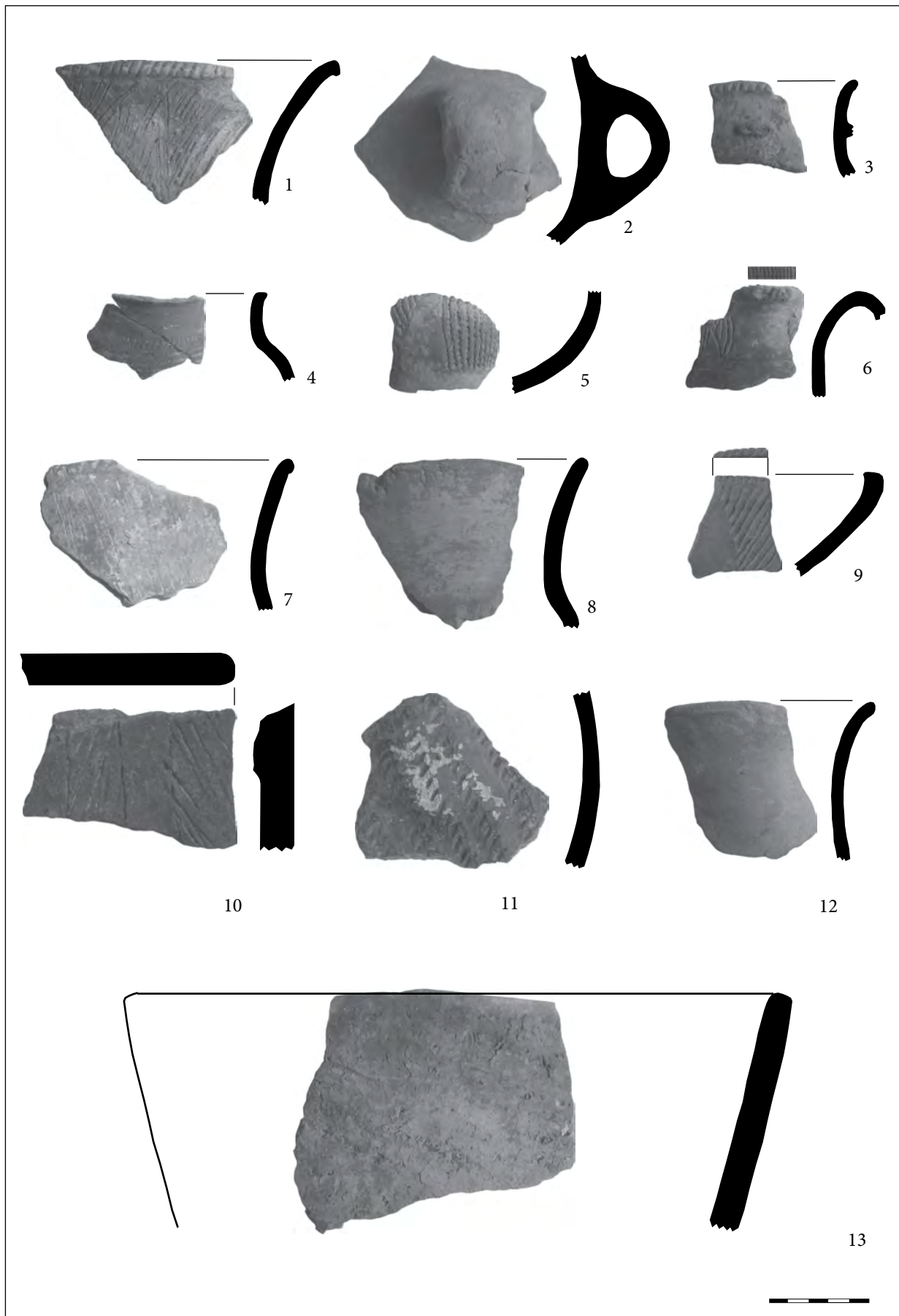


Plate 6. Șincai–Cetatea Păgânilor. Pottery.

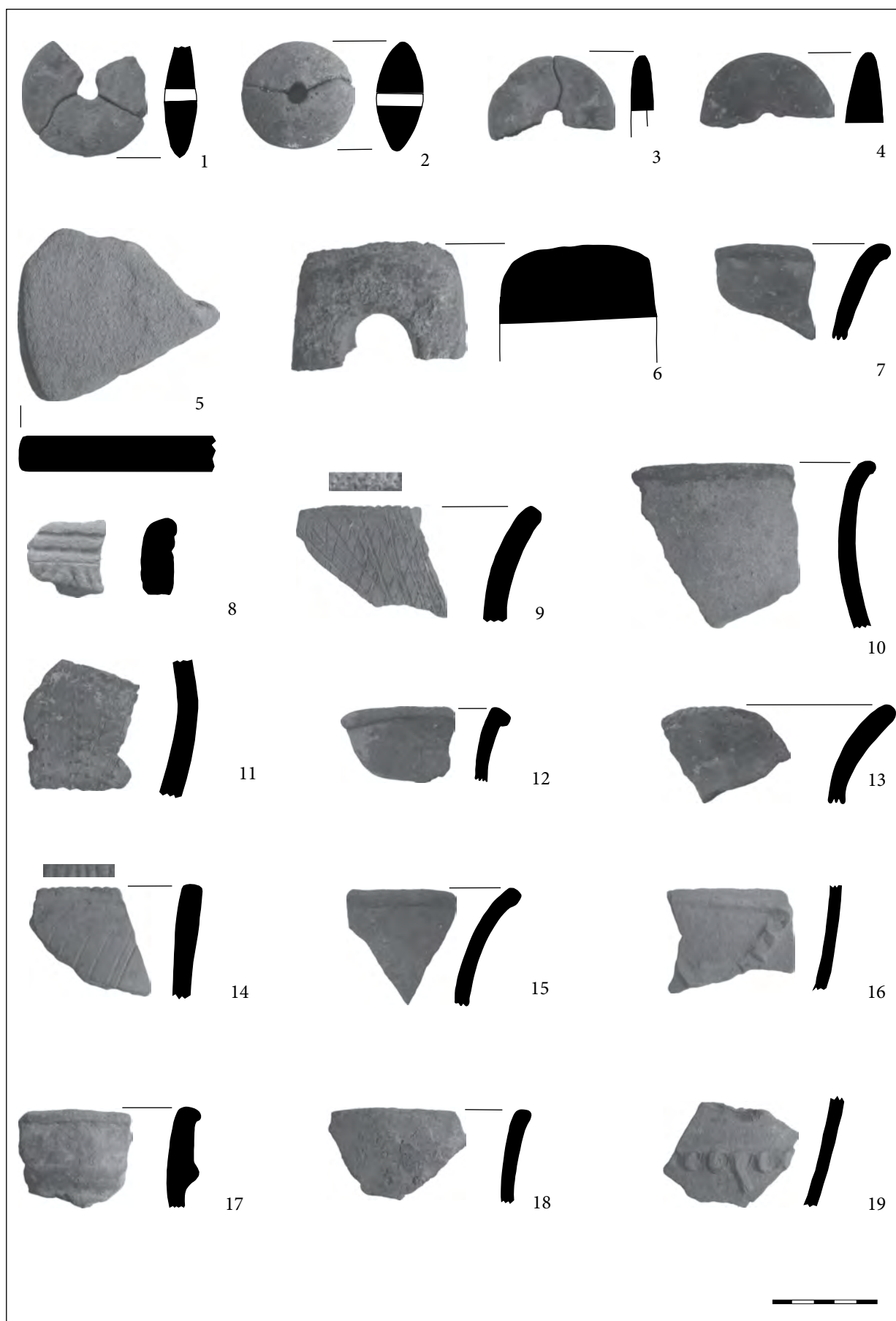


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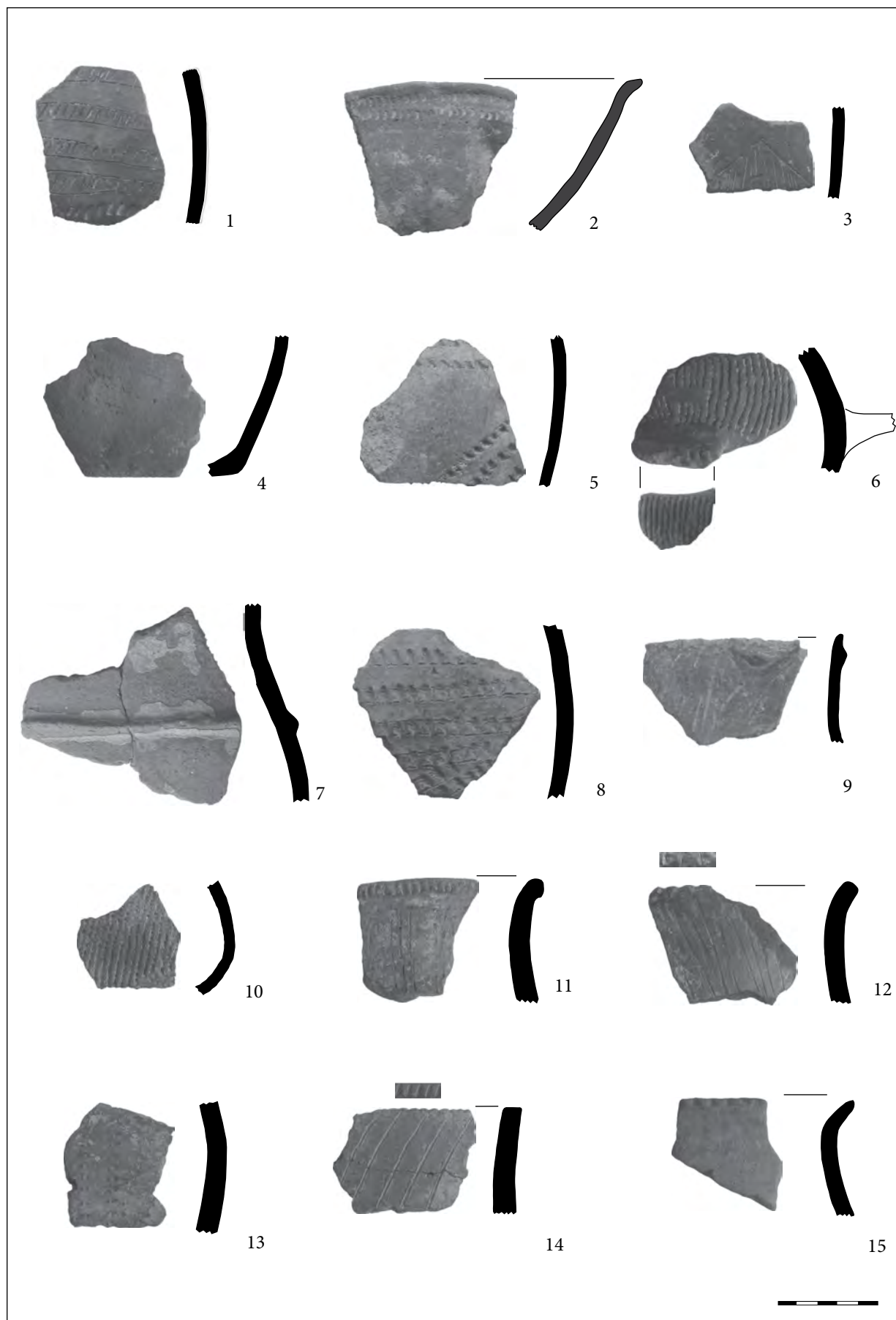


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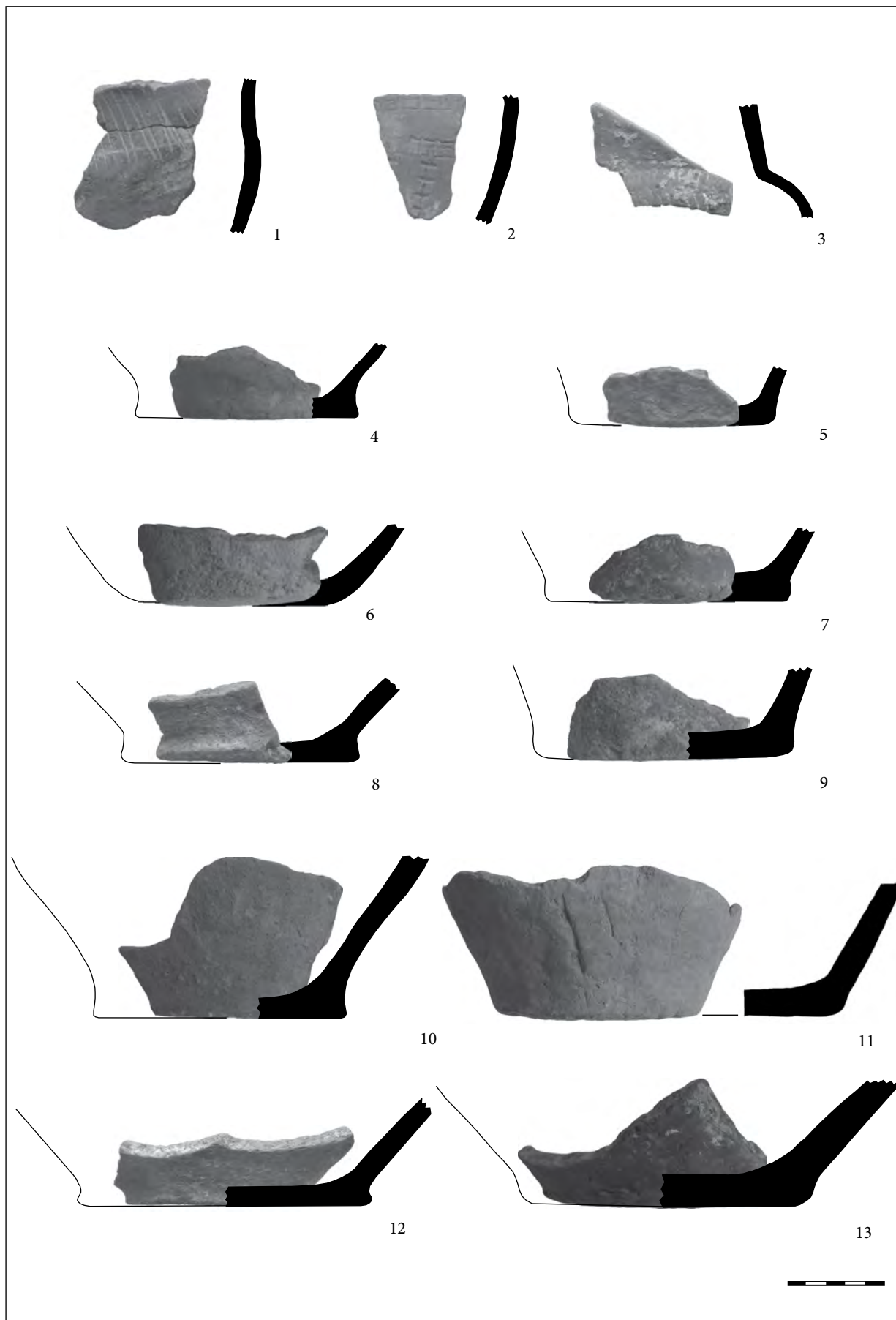


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