

**A RECENTLY DISCOVERED SITE DATED TO THE END OF THE IRON
AGE NEAR RIBEN, DOLNA MITROPOLIA DISTRICT, NORTHERN
BULGARIA (III/II C. BC – I C. AD)
PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE POTTERY FINDS**

*Vladislav Zhivkov Zhivkov **

Keywords: *Late Iron age; Early Roman; Thracian pottery; Northern Bulgaria; Anepigraphic amphora stamp.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Epoca târzie a fierului; Roman timpuriu; ceramică tracică; Bulgaria de Nord; ștampile anepigrafice pe amfore.*

Abstract: *During the excavations of the fortified roman site near Riben, Dolna Mitropolia district in Northern Bulgaria, a destroyed layer of a pre-Roman site was partially excavated. Only pottery sherds were discovered and among them two special finds – a potter's tool (lustrator) and an amphora handle with anepigraphic stamp. The site is situated on a well-fortified hill, close to the river Vit, although without the presence of any archeological structures it is impossible precise whether it was a hill fort or a sanctuary. The lack of finds with short chronological circulation (fibulae or coins) makes difficult to establish a tight chronology. The pottery can be divided into two groups – wheel made (mostly gray ware) and handmade. They can be dated based on pottery analogies from Bulgaria and Romania to the period from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC –to early the 1st century. The site fits well within the archaeological landscape of North-Central Bulgaria where many sites and single finds are dated to this period.*

Rezumat: *Pe durata săpăturilor din așezarea romană fortificată situată lângă Riben, districtul Dolna Mitropolia din nordul Bulgariei, a fost cercetat parțial un nivel distrus, datând din perioada pre-romană. Au fost descoperite doar fragmente ceramice și pe lângă acestea alte două obiecte – o ustensilă de olar (lustruitor) și o toartă de amforă cu ștampilă anepigrafică. Situl este situat pe o colină fortificată, în apropierea râului Vit. În absența unor structuri arheologice este imposibil de precizat dacă situl reprezintă urmele unui fort sau ale unui sanctuar. Lipsa descoperirilor cu circulație cronologică scurtă (fibule sau monede) face dificilă stabilirea unei cronologii strânse. Ceramica poate fi împărțită în două categorii – cea făcută la roată (în general de culoare gri) și cea făcută la mână. Pe baza analogiilor cu ceramică descoperită în Bulgaria și România, ceramica analizată poate fi datată în perioada cuprinsă între secolele III-II î.Hr. și până la începutul secolului I d.Hr. Situl se încadrează bine în peisajul arheologic din Bulgaria centrală și de nord, unde multe situri și descoperiri sunt date în această perioadă.*

*PhD Student, Department of Classical Archaeology, National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Science.

Introduction

During systematic excavations at the Late Roman *castellum* near the roman mutatio Ad Putea (Riben, Pleven district), situated on the important road connecting the Roman camp (and later *colonia*) of Oescus and Philipopolis, a destroyed cultural layer from the end of the Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman period was partially excavated. Accessible only from the north, the site is situated on a steep, naturally fortified hill. It lies north of the present day village of Riben, near the river Vit and is well known due to its Roman finds¹. The roman name Ad Putea² derives from the three springs located east of the present day village. Systematic excavations have been carried out here since 2013, triggered mostly by the damage caused by treasure hunters³.

The site was a *castellum* during the Roman times and the Late Antiquity, and was probably also occupied during the Middle Ages (with only a few finds but no archaeological structures)⁴. The architectural details, as well as the altars recovered, strongly suggest that the site was a Roman sanctuary⁵. The considerable Roman and Late Antiquity buildings, whose foundations often cut down to the bedrock destroyed a lot of the pre-Roman site. Therefore, most of the materials come from Sector 2, on the southwestern part of the hilltop. The materials from the 2016 excavations have no secure archaeological context, but provide nevertheless an intriguing glimpse over the somewhat enigmatic period from the 2nd c. BC to the 1st c. AD on the territory of modern Bulgaria. The most typical and representative artefacts and pottery are examined below.

Archaeological finds

Only two of the recovered finds – a T-shaped tool (Pl. I/1) and an anepigraphic stamp (Pl. I/2) – can be dated to the period of interest of the present paper; they deserve special attention and will be examined separately. T-shaped tools, also known as “lustrators” and considered to be part of the potter’s tools, are quite common in Romania⁶ and elsewhere⁷, mostly during the period from the 2nd c. BC to the 1st c. AD. Their dispersal in Northern Bulgaria was recently commented on by V. Varbanov⁸. Another lustrator was discovered near Provadia in the previous year (unpublished). Such tools were identified on at least three sites in southern Bulgaria – the sanctuary of Babyak⁹ (situated in the western Rhodope Mountains, not far from the border with the Roman province of Macedonia), the necropolis of Kochan-

¹ Mitova-Dzhonova 1979, cat. 383.

² Literally “Near the wells”.

³ Banov 2014.

⁴ With two dedications – to Porobonus and Jupiter. Dated to the beginning of 3rd c. AD. Other finds from this period are an architrave and a sacrificial altar (Banov, Diakov 2016, p.443-444).

⁵ Banov, Diakov, Naydenov 2015.

⁶ Crişan 1969, p. 205, fig. 36; 113.5, 15-17; Pl. CIII; Dupoi, Sirbu 2001, fig. 49; Vulpe, Teodor 2003, fig. 68; Sirbu 1996, fig. 116-117; Berciu 1995, fig. 72.1; Ursachi 1995, Pl.18.4; 28.1,5; 38; 41.

⁷ Popović 2011, p. 154, fig. 17.

⁸ Varbanov 2013a, p. 187, cat. 2-4, Table I.1, 3, 7.

⁹ Domaradzki et al. 1999, p. 68, Table XVI.1, fig. 41.a.

Satovcha¹⁰ and a possible grave (symbolic or perhaps a cenotaph, as no human bones were discovered) from the Milcheva mound in the Brezovo necropolis, Plovdiv area¹¹. Their appearance in southern Thrace is chronologically equivalent with the period when the North – Babyak sanctuary experienced its “bloom” from the 3rd/2nd to the 1st century BC¹². Pictures or illustrations of the burial mound at Brezovo have never been published, only a short description. According to it, pottery sherds and the lustrator were discovered in an oval “hearth”, consisting of burned earth and coal¹³. As this resembles burial customs in Thrace at the end of the Iron Age (2nd to 1st c. BC), it should be noted that, in a hillfort nearby, in the Sredna Gora Mountains, a Republican Roman coin was discovered - L. Plautius Plancus¹⁴-, suggesting that the area around the necropolis was inhabited during the 2nd and 1st c. BC. M. Domaradzki also reported a third tool of this type from the Burial Mound 4 in the Kochan-Satovcha necropolis¹⁵. The whole necropolis is unpublished, but in a short report, a coin of Philip V and “Macedonia under Roman rule” were mentioned¹⁶, suggesting as a relatively precise chronological landmark the second half of the 2nd c. BC (as *t.p.q.* at least) for the Burial Mound 4. Geographically, the closest examples to Riben are the two finds from the Devetashkata Cave¹⁷.

The anepigraphic stamp is the fourteenth found in the present-day Bulgaria¹⁸. Such finds are known from Ruse, Batin, Sboryanovo, Dragoevo, Madara, the closest at Belene (the Roman Dimum)¹⁹, the Settlement II near Brestovitsa²⁰ and Gorsko Ablanovo²¹. They concentrate in the northeastern part of the country. To the knowledge of the present author, so far, there are no examples from northwestern Bulgaria, and the stamp from Riben is currently the westernmost. This geographical distribution corresponds well with their dispersal north of the Danube, mainly in Muntenia²². In Romania, over 300 local amphorae are known (a third of them stamped), coming from 20 Geto-Dacian settlements²³. According to D. Mandescu, they are about one fourth of the known amphorae (compared to *ca.* 1100 imported

¹⁰Gergova, Kuleff 1977.

¹¹Velkov 1938, p. 261.

¹²Tonkova 2007, p. 66.

¹³Velkov 1938, p. 261.

¹⁴Should be Crawford 453/?, thought I have never seen the coin. It was probably minted around 47 BC. The coin is only mentioned by Velkov 1933, p. 2. This fairly large necropolis consists of earlier (pre-Roman) and later (Roman) graves.

¹⁵Domaradzki et al. 1999, p. 31 and note 197.

¹⁶Gergova, Kuleff 1977, p. 44-45; Domaradzki et al. 1999, p. 68.

¹⁷Mikov, Dzhambozov 1960, fig. 132. The Late Iron age material is briefly published, part of it is typical for the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. I should stress the presence of a Rhodian amphora stamp of Κλευκράτης dated to 174-172 BC. See Bozkova 2008, p. 32-33.

¹⁸Besides the stamp published here, there are two other small sherds. The first came probably from the same amphora published here. The second belongs to another one, although it is only a small handle fragment.

¹⁹Varbanov 2011; Varbanov 2016, p. 103.

²⁰Madzarov 2015, fig. 2-3.

²¹See Varbanov 2013c.

²²Streinu 2016, fig. 8.

²³Sirbu 2003, p. 100-103.

ones)²⁴. At the present moment, the occurrence of local stamped amphorae in the north central region is rare, as only one another example is known other than those cited above: Belene (the Roman Dimum). The handle from Riben is probably an imitation of a late Rhodian amphora, characterized by its angular, almost horned handle²⁵ and can be dated to the 2nd or 1st c. BC, and even early 1st c. AD²⁶. Among the published Romanian stamps, that I am aware of²⁷, there are no exact parallels – although similar ornaments, but far from being identical, are known from Popești²⁸. These are set in a rectangular frame, not an oval one like the one from Riben²⁹. Hopefully, if more such stamps are discovered, future research will show whether this particular type of stamp is specific to the region of the Riben-Pleven (North-Central Bulgaria)³⁰. Their limited appearance in Bulgaria is due probably to the fact that few sites of this period have been excavated, as noted elsewhere³¹, or perhaps because such items remain ignored.

Pottery

The pottery can be divided into two major groups: wheel- and hand-made. Wheel-made pottery consists mostly of tableware; handmade pottery is used also as tableware, but predominantly for storage and cooking vessels. The second group clearly dominates in quantity, a distinctive tendency, well attested in known native sites from the entire Late Iron Age.

Wheel made pottery. Almost all the wheel-made pottery is gray ware. The paste is comparatively well sorted, inclusions consists mostly of mica and sometimes sand, and only extremely seldom, of small pebbles. With these characteristics, this ware is similar to the wheel-made pottery from the northern Bulgaria of this period. For example, the gray wheel-made pottery from the region of Sredna Gora in southern Bulgaria, (the necropolises of Panaguirski kolonii³² and Tazha³³) have a high sand content and are slightly polished, with a somewhat rough, crumbly surface. In the Upper Thrace valley, wheel-made pottery is usually red in colour during most of the Hellenistic period³⁴, unlike that of the Rhodope Mountains, where the gray pottery persists during the entire second part of the First Millennium BC³⁵, the same as in the northern parts of modern Bulgaria.

²⁴ Măndescu 2014, p.88-89, who stressed that the empiric data on the imported amphorae is too old.

²⁵ Grace 1953, p. 119-120; Monahov 2006, p. 77, 112.

²⁶ The schematization of the stamp is typical for the later development of the stamps, see Varbanov 2013c, p. 175 – 12nd c. BC – beginning of 1st c. AD.

²⁷ Sîrbu 2003, fig. 2; Tudor 1967, fig. 8-9; Eftimie-Andronescu, 1967, fig. 1-2; Rossetti 1960, fig. 4-6; Vulpe 1955, fig. 17.3; Streinu 2016, fig. 1-6; Glodariu 1972, Pl. XIX-XXI; Opait 2013, fig. 1.2, 3; 2; 3.

²⁸ Canarache 1957, fig. 79; Streiunu 2016, Fig. 2.6.

²⁹ According to Sîrbu 2003, p.100-103 the oval frames of the stamps are the most uncommon.

³⁰ As the two known from Shumen region, Dragoevo and Madara, are both with a network decoration. See Varbanov 2013c, p. 175, fig. 1a-b.

³¹ Varbanov 2011, p. 53, with possible unpublished stamps mentioned in his note 1.

³² Dimitrova, Gizdova 1975, p. 40-41.

³³ Personal observations of the pottery from the necropolis and the settlement which I examined partly in 2016. The main results and chronology of the site is published in Domaradzki 1994.

³⁴ Bozkova 2015.

³⁵ Vasileva 2008, p. 135.

The decoration has two types – burnished and incised, the former dominating. Burnished pottery has been a topic of considerable scientific interest in Bulgaria in the recent years³⁶. It has been attested so far (locations listed approximately from west to east) at Kula (the Roman castellum *Castra Martis*)³⁷, Ratiaria³⁸, Sofia – Iliantsi district³⁹, Yakimovo – Gradishteto and the Nad Urvata locality⁴⁰, Valchedram – Pechina mogila and the Armului locality⁴¹, probably at Krushovitza, Galiche and Sokolare⁴², Kozlodui⁴³, Nicopol⁴⁴, the Early Roman camps of Oescus⁴⁵ and Novae⁴⁶, Nicopolis ad Istrum⁴⁷, Ruse⁴⁸, the “Tabachka” cave⁴⁹, Transmariska⁵⁰ and Bizone⁵¹. It is very poorly attested in southern Bulgaria, only in Debrashtitza, Pazardzhik district⁵² and probably in the Harmanite district of Sozopol (the ancient *Apollonia Pontica*)⁵³. The chronology of this group in the mentioned sites starts with the late 2nd c. BC, but comes mostly from the period of the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD, with only a few examples dating to the early 2nd c. AD⁵⁴. As for the Riben materials, it is worth underlining that the decoration is somewhat simpler and more monotonous than that of other sites mentioned above – for example the typical unburnished “windows”, the “crosshatched” lines and the zigzagged motives are not attested. Also, the burnishing is executed sometimes on slipped surfaces (cat. no. 17). Bearing this in mind, the

³⁶ Kabakchieva 2000, p. 62; Kabakchieva 2005; Vagalinski 2002; 2007.

³⁷ Kabakchieva 2005, p. 96-101.

³⁸ Unpublished. Information provided by assoc. prof. Zdr. Dimitrov and N. Rusev. 1st c. AD. Recently I had the occasion to work on the materials from the excavations from the 70's and 80's. Only a few sherds of local pottery were collected (less than 10). As there is no certain data on the pre-Roman settlement, probably the burnished ware and the other sherds were contemporary with the Early Roman camp of the 1st c. AD.

³⁹ Unpublished. Information provided by assoc. prof. Zdr. Dimitrov and N. Rusev. Early 1st c. AD. Preliminary information on the site in Dimitrov, Rusev 2016.

⁴⁰ Vagalinski 2002, p. 41-44.

⁴¹ Vagalinski 2002, p. 41-44.

⁴² Luka 2012. I should note that I have my doubts on the dates, interpretations and the separation of the forms of some of the pottery from this publication. The pottery from the three sites mentioned here definitely comprises 1st c. BC to 1st c. AD burnished ware, as stated by Kr. Luka (her form 8, but not only).

⁴³ Vagalinski 2002, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Personal observations on the material, partly preserved in the Pleven museum. This group is not specified in the publication of Bonev 1999, but a burnished sherd is exemplified on fig. 1.1. There are a few more sherds with this specific decoration.

⁴⁵ Kabakchieva 2000, p. 62, cat. 76-88.

⁴⁶ Vagalinski 2002, p. 102, 125, 136.

⁴⁷ Vagalinski 2002, p. 59.

⁴⁸ Varbanov 2013b, p. 235.

⁴⁹ Varbanov 2007, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Vagalinski 2002, p. 61-63, 142.

⁵¹ Vagalinski 2007, p. 74, fig. 16-17.

⁵² Katincaroova 2013.

⁵³ Unpublished excavations of Y. Ivanov and D. Nedev, with my participation. A few sherds were found in a pithoi connected to the water-pipe. With them “Dacian” cups and other typical pottery were discovered. A brief description of the structure is reported in Ivanov, Nedev 2014, p. 275, fig. 3.

⁵⁴ Vagalinski 2002, p. 77.

Riben burnished pottery is similar to the vessel sherds of the same group from Oescus⁵⁵.

The commonest form of the wheel-made pottery is the bowl with a projecting, horizontal rim (cat. nos. 3-10, 12). It should be noted that some of the sherds come probably from fruit bowls, but the fragmentation of the material does not allow for such precise distinctions: there are two sherds from fruit bowl stools (cat. nos.3-4), both small. The second piece has the typical burnished decoration with horizontal lines on the outside surface.

The three bowls under catalogue numbers 5-7 are of a widespread and common form for the period of the 2nd and 1st c. BC. In Bulgaria they are known from Ruse⁵⁶, Cherven⁵⁷, Tsarevets-Tarnovo⁵⁸, Nicopol⁵⁹ and “Devetashkata” cave⁶⁰. Many analogies can be found in Romania, for example at Unip⁶¹, Piroboridava⁶², Zargidava⁶³ and Pietroasa-Mica⁶⁴. Similar bowls are known from the territories of the Scordisci, although this “western group” has much better expressed S-shaped profiles⁶⁵. There are examples of this form from northern Bulgaria with burnished decoration, showing its popularity during the period from the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD⁶⁶. The last bowl of this type (cat. no. 12) is burnished on the rim and on the inner surface.

The bowl with a thickened rim (cat. no. 9) is of the Vagalinski type I, variant 1⁶⁷ with good parallels at Castra Martis⁶⁸.

The *lekane* with a curvature beneath the rim (no. 10) may be a lid, but, as the base was not preserved, it is difficult to be sure. There are no traces of a handle. This type of *lekane* is wide-spread at different sites dated to the second half of the Late Iron Age: Nikopol⁶⁹, Tabachka (the Ruse District)⁷⁰, Ruse⁷¹, “Djin kale” near Krepcha (the

⁵⁵ Kabakchieva 2000, cat. E79, E80, E88.

⁵⁶ Varbanov 2007, wheel made, Table III.46, 60; Table IV. 21-25, 27.

⁵⁷ Varbanov 2011b, Table I.06, II.03-04. The site is dated to the period from the 2nd c. BC to the 1stAD. I should note that catalogue №5 with its small dimensions is really similar to the sherd on Table I.06 from Cherven.

⁵⁸ Ilcheva 2003, Table VIII.

⁵⁹ Bonev 1999, fig. 9.

⁶⁰ Mikov, Dzambazov 1960, fig. 126.

⁶¹ Berzovan 2013, fig. 12.1-2.

⁶² Vulpe, Teodor 2003, Fig. 208.5-6.

⁶³ Ursachi 1995, Pl. 135.1-4.

⁶⁴ Sirbu, Matei, Dupoi 2005, Fig. 71.3.

⁶⁵ For example, Sladić 1986, p. 64; Popović 2000. Similar shapes can be seen in northwestern Bulgaria (Valchedram).

⁶⁶ Vagalinski 2002, p. 105 (generally bowls type II).

⁶⁷ Vagalinski 2002, p.102-105.

⁶⁸ Kabakchieva 2005, Tabl. XI.54.

⁶⁹ Bonev 1999, fig. 9.

⁷⁰ Varbanov, Zhekunova 2015, fig. 16.1.

⁷¹ Varbanov 2013b Table I.23-34 (wheelmade).

Targovishte district)⁷², Tsarevets, Tarnovo⁷³. Few examples exist in southern Bulgaria: Velikan (Khaskovo district)⁷⁴ and Zlatna livada (Stara Zagora district)⁷⁵, and Serbia (at Surčin near Belgrade)⁷⁶. Similar vessels are known from Romania, at Zargidava⁷⁷ and Zimnicea⁷⁸. The form is probably of Greek origin, as similar shapes are known at least as early as the 3rd c. BC⁷⁹.

The two bowls with downturned rims (cat. nos. 12-13) are almost completely burnished on the inner surfaces. The first is probably Early Roman, with a good analogy at Castra Martis⁸⁰. The second sherd (cat. no. 13) belongs to a shape common north of the Danube – e.g. Borduşani⁸¹, Poiana⁸², Sprincenata⁸³ and Pietroasa Mică⁸⁴. The form is known at Ruse⁸⁵, although unburnished, and Zidovar II⁸⁶.

The two bowls (cat. nos. 14-15) with well-marked (T-shaped) rims are similar to Early Roman (the 1st c. AD) examples from Castra Martis⁸⁷. The rounded rim (cat. no. 14) is similar to the fruit bowl from Zargidava⁸⁸.

The upper part of a dolium (cat. 16) is of a well-known type, with a shape close to those from Yakimovo and Valchedram⁸⁹. Three sherds from the same vessel were discovered. The slipped outer surface was burnished in crude, uneven horizontal lines.

The two rims from storage vessels presented here (cat. nos. 17-18) present a real chronological difficulty. The best preserved item with a similar rim from Bulgaria is from Bukiovtsi (a neighborhood of the town of Mizia)⁹⁰, decorated with stamped rosettes, while the most famous example of the type comes from Zimnicea⁹¹. Both belong to an earlier period. Similar rim sherds were discovered at two sites in the

⁷² Torbatov 2016, fig. 8.5. The chronology of the site broadly indicates the Late Iron age, with some of the sherds typical for the period of the 2nd and the 1st c. BC to the 1st century AD. Only field surveys were conducted (no excavations), A denarius of Vespasianus was discovered – Torbatov 2016, 353.

⁷³ Ilcheva 2003, Table VIII.

⁷⁴ Unpublished excavations by Chavdar Lalov, Elena Nikolova and partly by the author. Around 10 sherds of such vessels were discovered. The site is dated between the 3rd c. BC and the early 1st AD.

⁷⁵ Tonkova, Vasileva 2015, fig. 2. The site is dated II-I c. BC.

⁷⁶ Popović 2000, Plate 6.2-3, 1st c. BC – 1st c. AD.

⁷⁷ Ursachi 1995, Pl. 153.

⁷⁸ Alexandrescu 1980, p. 48.

⁷⁹ I believe there is possible connection with the “Handleless” type of lekanis. See Rotroff 1997, p. 1259-1262. Examples are Early Hellenistic, the form reappears the 1st c. BC.

⁸⁰ Kabakchieva 2005, Table X.49.

⁸¹ Trohani 1995, 60, Fig. 6.1.

⁸² Teodor, Nicu, Ţau 2000-2001, fig. 55.2.

⁸³ Preda 1986, Tabl. XXVIII.2 – with burnished decoration.

⁸⁴ Dupoi, Sirbu 2001, Fig. 76.6. Unburnished fruit bowl.

⁸⁵ Varbanov 2013b, (wheel-made) Table IV.6-7.

⁸⁶ Sladić 1986, XXVII.3.

⁸⁷ Kabakchieva 2005, Table XIV.64.

⁸⁸ Ursaci 1995, Pl. 96.4.

⁸⁹ Vagalinski 2002, p. 127, 137 (jars type VII and dolia type IV) with parallels. Similar vessels were discovered at the unpublished site at Velikan, several of them with a “rope” stamped beneath the rib twist.

⁹⁰ Nikolov 1972, fig. 7.

⁹¹ Moscalu 1983, Pl. XVII.

Haemus Mountains. The first is “Chuchul”, near the Roman mutatio Montemno⁹². It should be noted a Weber XVI bridle from the same place, dating to the 3rd and 2nd c. BC⁹³. The second sanctuary worth mentioning is from the “Momski kamak” near Golyama Zhelyazna⁹⁴. Nearby, a coin hoard hidden during the late 2nd c. BC, was found inside a gray pitcher also containing coins of the I Macedonian region, hidden during in the late 2nd c. BC⁹⁵. The two mentioned sites (sanctuaries) are on the main road that connected Oescus and Philipopolis (as was Ad Putea, near Riben) in Roman times, but it was definitely in use earlier. I am aware of such vessels from Oltenia and Transylvania, along the rivers Olt and Mureş: Sarmizegetusa Regia⁹⁶, Sprincenata⁹⁷, “Cetate” Plateau in Vărădia de Mureş⁹⁸, and also Popeşti and Răcăţău⁹⁹. The forming of the rims on the two sherds from Riben (with three steps rather than incised lines) such as the one from Mizia, gives ground to date them to the second half of the Late Iron Age or somewhere during the period from the 3rd/2nd c. BC to the 1st c. AD.

Handmade pottery. The most typical pottery for the pre-Roman sites – handmade cooking jars – are attested by two general forms (Pl. V). The first is conical in shape with an open rim (cat. nos. 19-21) the second is more cylindrical, at least in the upper portion (cat. 23). The decoration consists mostly of applique bands with small “impressions”, aligned in horizontal and vertical lines and on several sherd as “garlands” (not illustrated here). Beside the rough hand-made vessels, sherds with well-polished, dark grey slipped surfaces are attested (cat. no. 32), common for the period around the end of first millennium BC.

Special attention is deserved by several jar sherds (cat. nos. 19-22). They all have twisted to the outside rims and widening bodies. This form is typical for the period of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. The form is well known through the Roman period also¹⁰⁰. The cylindrical “button,” the specific form, and the wavy incised decoration (on cat. nos. 20 and 22) can be found on similar vessels from the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and the 1st c. AD. Some analogies from Bulgaria can be pointed to: Yakimovo¹⁰¹, Valchedram¹⁰², Tazha¹⁰³, the “Devetashkata” cave¹⁰⁴ and outside it - Poiana¹⁰⁵, Buridava¹⁰⁶, Grădiştea¹⁰⁷ and Churug¹⁰⁸.

⁹² Hristov 2007, fig. 17-20. The site is dated from the 5th to the 1st c. BC.

⁹³ Hristov 2007, fig. 23. Those bridles are known also from LT D1 context.

⁹⁴ Hristov 2007, fig. 40. The site is dated from the 5th to the 1st c. BC.

⁹⁵ Prokopov, Hristov, 2005, 106-117. The coin hoard was hidden after 119 BC.

⁹⁶ Florea 1995, p. 79, fig. 1.1.

⁹⁷ Preda 1986, Pl. XLIII.1 and XLV.

⁹⁸ Berzovan 2014, p. 93, Pl. 4.1 – with more analogies indicated.

⁹⁹ Opait 2013, fig. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Alexandrova type I, variant 1 (Alexandrova 2013, p. 64).

¹⁰¹ Unpublished. Personal observations. Probably the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD.

¹⁰² Unpublished. Personal observations. Probably the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD. Almost all jars from this site are Alexandrova type I, variant 1 (see previous note), many with slipped and polished surfaces.

¹⁰³ Unpublished. Grave 1A, burial mound 1 and no secure context in mound 3. the 2nd c. BC/1st c. BC (LT C2/D) to the 1st AD, personal observations, dating according to M. Domaradzki 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Mikov, Dzhambazov 1960, fig. 115.

¹⁰⁵ Crisan 1969, 162, fig. 75.1. Phase IIIa.

¹⁰⁶ Berciu 1981, Pl. 86.8 – level IIa (first half of the 1st c. BC).

¹⁰⁷ Sirbu 1996, fig. 49.10, cat. 14 (the 1st c. BC).

Quite intriguing is the sherd from a small jar (cat. no. 24). It has a rather circular shape, and was decorated with vertical incised lines on the outer surface. I am not aware of other published pottery from this type from Bulgaria. The sherd is probably from a type of vessel well known to the western part with analogies at Krševica¹⁰⁹ and Churug¹¹⁰.

An easily distinguished type of the handmade group is the pitcher (cat. nos. 25-26). All items are biconical in shape. Special attention deserves a rim sherd from a rim with the handle attached on the rim ("rising the rim", cat. no. 26). This type of pitcher appears in graves in Thrace which can be dated probably to the transition between the 2nd to the 1st century BC (LT D1). Analogies are at Sofronievo¹¹¹, but with cylindrical necks¹¹². More similar (biconical) are the examples from Panagiurski kolonii - necropolis I, mound 1¹¹³ and Brestovitza, mound 4¹¹⁴. They are also known at Bagachina (Staliiska mahala)¹¹⁵, Nikopol¹¹⁶, Demir Baba teke, near Sveshtari¹¹⁷ and Yakimovo¹¹⁸. Similar vessels are well known from Romania¹¹⁹. In Bulgaria at least, they seem to decrease in popularity during the second half of the 1st c. BC, disappearing completely during the Roman period.

Besides the pitchers, the handmade tableware is well represented by bowls (cat. nos. 27-31), none decorated, except one (cat. no. 27) which has a protuberance on the outer surface. All the bowls are conical or hemispherical in shape. This form has a wider chronology in the Iron Age, although I should stress that it is attested during the last centuries BC: at Ruse¹²⁰, Štrbincima near Đakova¹²¹ and Transylvania¹²².

The last bowl (cat. no. 32) has a more complex profile. The form is common for the Geto-Dacian tribes, but probably of Greek origin. Earlier analogies can be pointed to in Satu Nou¹²³. Several sherds from similar bowls were discovered in

¹⁰⁸ Trifunovich, Pasich 2003, Pl. 5.3 (second half of the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD).

¹⁰⁹ Central Balkans 2011, cat. 123-124; Popović 2011, fig. 19.12-13. The end of the 2nd c. BC to the beginning of the 1st c. BC.

¹¹⁰ Trifunovich, Pasich 2003, Tabl. 5.8-9.

¹¹¹ Nikolov 1965, 193, Abb. 38.a. Flat grave.

¹¹² Several sherds from the neck of such pitchers were discovered at Riben, but are not illustrated here.

¹¹³ Dimitrova, Gizdova 1975, Tabl. I.3.

¹¹⁴ Stanchev, Varbanov 2016, fig. 8.5. Dated from the second half of 2nd to the first half of the 1st c. BC.

¹¹⁵ Bonev, Alexandrov 1996, Tabl. XXVIa, in the upper left. The site was published without a precise chronology of the particular finds; the pitcher is surely from the "late" period (the 2nd c. BC – to probably the 1st c. AD).

¹¹⁶ Unpublished. Personal observations.

¹¹⁷ Balkanska 1998, Table I.1.

¹¹⁸ Unpublished. Excavations of At. Milchev. The pitcher was complete and is currently at the Sofia University.

¹¹⁹ Sirbu 1996, 21-22, fig. 19.5, found with a Pergamon skyphos, with more analogies cited.

¹²⁰ Varbanov 2013b, Tabl. IX.1-17 (hand-made).

¹²¹ Dizdar 2013, Tabl. 4.3.

¹²² Pupeză 2010, p. 137-138, Pl. VIII.

¹²³ Irimia, Conovici, Ganciu 2007, p. 88, Fig. 6.10.

Valchedram¹²⁴ which show its continued use from the end of the Iron Age to the beginning of the Roman period.

This general survey of the finds from Riben allows me to suggest as an occupation of the site from the 3rd c. BC to the early 1st c. AD, with a well-marked 2nd-1st c. BC component when probably the occupation was most intensive. Anything closer is, at present, impossible because of the lack of finds with a narrower chronology, such as the fibulae or the coins. I should note the absence of several common types of pottery here – the Dacian cups, the local bowls with relief decoration – known from at least two sites nearby (Nikopol and Zgalevo), the different types of pre-Roman and Roman painted ware (although they are extremely rare in Bulgaria and probably restricted to the area closer to Danube, at Bagachina, Nikopol, Ruse¹²⁵, Krivina-Chichov elak¹²⁶ and the Roman Oescus¹²⁷).

Conclusions

The archaeological material and the site of Riben discussed above are very much what might be expected for north central Bulgaria. Although the general development of the region is a topic for another research, several sites and finds can be mentioned here to demonstrate the development in the region during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and the early 1st c. AD.

Probably one of the most important sites is Nikopol. Sadly, the period of interest here is published only briefly¹²⁸. From this site comes a rich collection of locally produced relief decorated pottery, burnished grey ware and typical types of vessel – fruit bowls, strainers, bowls with inverted rims, long-necked pitchers etc. Painted pottery is also reported¹²⁹. Another site with “luxury items” (mostly imported amphorae) is located south (or even beneath) the roman Dimum (the present-day town of Belene)¹³⁰. These two sites – given the lack of specialized research on the period in the region – appear to be the richest and most important settlements or sanctuaries of the present day Pleven district. Their position on the Danube bank should be noted. Not far to the east, another site existed at the modern town of Svishtov¹³¹.

Generally, the period between the 2nd/1st c. BC and the 1st century AD is well attested in north central Bulgaria, although systematical and well targeted archaeological research never took place. In particular many coin hoards, which consist mostly of Roman republican denarii, tetradrachms of the Macedonian I merid and drachms of Apollonia and Dirachium in the region should be mentioned –

¹²⁴ Unpublished. Personal observations. Probably from the 1st c. BC to the 1st c. AD, following the chronology of indicate by other finds.

¹²⁵ Varbanov 2013b, p. 235, 237, Table (wheel-made) II. 32, III.29.

¹²⁶ Vagalinski 2005.

¹²⁷ Kabakchieva 2000, p. 62, cat. E74-75.

¹²⁸ Bonev 1999.

¹²⁹ Bozkova 2008, note 4; Vagalinski 2005, note 1.

¹³⁰ Unpublished, only mentioned in Mitova-Dzhonova 2003, p. 47. Also from the destroyed grave came a *sica* and a spearhead (Stefanov 1929, p. 320, fig. 185), probably from the preRoman necropolis of Belene. The items are now in Svishtov.

¹³¹ Unpublished. Briefly mentioned in Chichikova 2013, p. 242.

Gulyantsi (IRRCHBulg 27), Trastenik (IRRCHBulg 130), Riben itself (IGCH 497), the neighbouring Bozhuritza (IGCH 490), Gortalovo (IGCH 495), Yasen (IGCH 491), Gorni Dabnik (IGCH 490), Koilovtzi¹³², Oryahovitza¹³³ and probably Brestovets¹³⁴. There are also two coin hoards of Roman republican denarii of unknown provenance, now in the Pleven museum, but originating somewhere nearby (IRRCHBulg 50-51). An Early Roman coin hoard was found near Belene, the ancient Dimum, with the latest emissions from M. Antonius, Augustus and Tiberius (IRRCHBulg 73)¹³⁵. For the 1st c. AD, a mask from a cavalry helmet found nearby should be mentioned¹³⁶. An extremely interesting find was reported from the village of Bukovlak (situated nearby to the south of Riben, next to Pleven), where a complete handmade jar and a biconical krater-shaped vessel were discovered, with a coin from Germanicus found inside the jar¹³⁷. As earlier finds exist¹³⁸, the settlement is likely to have existed since pre-Roman times (maybe the 2nd and 1st centuries BC). I should also note that some of the names, known from the Roman period, are clearly of pre-Roman origin. The best examples are Giridava - nowadays Pelishat - and the epithet of the goddess Diana (Artemis) – Germethita - known from an inscription found at Kaylaka, near Pleven¹³⁹.

Probably the most fascinating find from the period of the late 2nd and 1st centuries c. BC is the Bohot Hoard¹⁴⁰ with imported late republican Eggers of 20 *situla*¹⁴¹ - an extremely rare find (currently the only one) in Bulgaria.

Not far from Riben, near the village of Gorni Dabnik, a grave was destroyed. From the partly lost inventory a silver fibula Rustoiu's type 1¹⁴² which can be dated to the late 2nd and 1st c. BC (LT D1) was recovered. A contemporary grave (or more probably graves) was destroyed during the construction of the Pleven prison¹⁴³.

This roughly outline of sites and coin hoards testifies to the intensive occupation of north central Bulgaria (the Pleven region being mainly discussed here) during the 2nd and 1st c. BC and the early 1st c. AD, basically at the eve of the Roman

¹³² Prokopov, Kovacheva 2006, p.97-99.

¹³³ Prokopov, Kovacheva 2006, p. 104-129.

¹³⁴ Prokopov, Kovacheva 2006, p. 34.

¹³⁵ All coin hoards from the period of the 2nd to the 1st c. BC and the early 1st c. AD, including the chance finds of single republican denarii were examined, and published in Prokopov, Kovacheva 2006.

¹³⁶ Kovacheva 1992.

¹³⁷ Trifonov 1933, p. 6-7. The coin is dated to the year 19 AD. I believe it is possible that it was actually minted in Claudian times, though I have never seen the coin. Nevertheless, a 1st c. AD settlement existed there. Remains of later Roman buildings were also reported. The two vessels are now in the Pleven museum under the inventory numbers 38 and 44.

¹³⁸ Todorovic 1968, p. 31. Unpublished, only mentioned. No excavations were carried in the village or its area.

¹³⁹ Deanae (sic!) Germetithae sacrum M. Julius Niger voto posuit (Deane 1921, p. 290). A votive tablet of the same goddess (Artemis-Diana) was reported in Kazarow 1934, cat. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Venedikov 1961, p. 355-358.

¹⁴¹ For this type of situla in the Lower Danube basin see Rustoiu 2009. This is the only known example from Bulgaria, although not all bronze vessels from the period are published, but all will probably prove to be imported.

¹⁴² Rustoiu 1997, p.32, fig. 80.2.

¹⁴³ Popov 1929, p. 274-280, fig. 136-140.

conquest¹⁴⁴. Its fate during the arrival of the Romans and especially during the campaigns of Marcus Licinius Crassus in 29 and 28 BC is currently unknown because of the lack of publications and materials that would permit a more precise dating. Placing these campaigns as the *terminus ante quem* is tempting and was used in the Bulgarian archaeological literature. However I should note that according to Cassius Dio, Crassus with “conviction, threats and force subordinated all, except very few”¹⁴⁵. Probably this testifies that at least some of the population of Moesia recognized the new realities and the Roman political and military hegemony in the northern Balkans during the late 1st c. BC. Thus, this conquest should not be considered a full and complete collapse of the pre-Roman settlement system in northern Bulgaria, at least until more materials are recovered, published and commented upon. However I find strange the absence of Early Roman imports if the mutatio of Ad Putea¹⁴⁶ (probably established in the Neronean times) existed nearby. Hopefully, future excavations at Riben will shed light on this less known period and the many questions it poses. Currently, the chronological frame of the occupation of the site indicates the period between the 3rd / 2nd c. BC and the (early) 1st c. AD.

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I must apologize to the reader for the many references to the “unpublished” sources. I am aware that their inclusion requires a “blind” belief that the pointed analogies from Bulgaria actually exist. Hopefully, these materials will be published in

¹⁴⁴ Zhivkov, *Thracian Pottery from Nicopol and Present day North Central Bulgaria on the Eve of the Roman Conquest (II c. BC – early I c. AD)*, forthcoming.

¹⁴⁵ Dio.LI.25.1.

¹⁴⁶ From the Riben region a bronze lamp (chance find), probably Early Roman was reported. See Velkov 1929, p.370, fig. 236. The item can be dated to late 1st to early 2nd c. AD.

the near future. The chronology and interpretation proposed here, for Riben and the unpublished sites and finds are entirely my responsibility.

CATALOGUE OF FINDS

The reconstructed diameters of the sherds in the catalogue are abbreviated Db (diameter bottom) and Du (diameter upper = rim). The numbering of the catalogue follows the illustrations on Plates I-V.

SPECIAL FINDS

1. Pottery tools. T-shaped, pottery. Brown colour, damaged upper part (handle). The lower surface is heavily -abraded. Length: 11 cm, height 5.5 cm, maximum width 5.6 cm.

2. Amphora handle with anepigraphic stamp. Light brown colour, homogenous brown in section. Inclusions of mica and sand. Diameter of the handle 2.8 cm, stamp dimensions: 3.2 cm x 2.5 cm.

WHEEL-MADE POTTERY

Bowls and fruit bowls.

3. Fragment of fruit bowl stool. Light gray surface, with burnished lines on the outside. Well sorted dough – small pebbles, mica and sand as inclusions. Db=9 cm.

4. Fragment of fruit bowl stool. Brown-gray smooth surfaces. Well sorted dough, with inclusions of sand and mica. Probably on slow wheel. Db=11 cm.

5. Dark grey outer surface, brown inner surface. Well-polished. Three compound section – brown in the middle, gray towards the surfaces. Du=18 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near Roman wall.

6. Brown-gray surface (spotted), well-polished surfaces, slipped. Homogenous, brown in section. Few and fine inclusions. Du=31 cm. Context: Sector 2, premise 4, pit-west.

7. Brown-gray surface (spotted), well-polished surfaces, slipped. Homogenous brown section. Few and fine inclusions. Du=30 cm. Context: Sector 2, premise 4, pit-west. There are two more rim sherds from the same vessel.

8. Brown-gray surface (spotted), well-polished surfaces, slipped. Few and fine inclusions. Three compound section – gray in the middle, brown towards the surfaces. Probably on slow wheel (?). Du=35 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 3, installment in the corner.

9. Light gray surfaces, smooth. Well refined paste. Homogenous, gray, in section. Du=26 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, depth. 76.60-75.80 cm.

10. Lekane (or lid?). Gray, well-polished surfaces, slipped. Few and fine inclusions, mainly mica and sand. Homogenous in section. Du=24 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, pit-west.

11. The outer surface is brown-gray in colour, well-polished, slipped. Inner surface is gray, slipped, burnished in horizontal lines (on the rim as well). Three compound

sections: grey in the middle, gray-brown to the periphery. Du=28 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 3, depth 77.20-77.00 cm.

12. Gray surfaces, well-polished, the inner displays with horizontal burnished lines. Well refined paste. Du=31 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, depth 77.60-75.80 cm.

13. Gray slipped surface, burnished horizontal lines on the inside. Inclusions of small pebbles and sand. Homogenous grey in section. Sector VI, sq. B3, II-III layer.

14. Gray surfaces. The outer surface is slipped and burnished. Few and fine inclusions. Homogenous grey in section. Du=21 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, depth 77.60-75.80 cm.

15. Gray surfaces. Burnished outer surface (and on the rim). Few and fine inclusions. Du=30 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, depth 77.60-75.80 cm.

Storage vessels.

16. Dark grey surfaces, burnished on the outside. Inclusions of small stones, sand and mica. Du=28 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall. Three sherds came from the same vessel.

17. Gray surfaces. Few and fine inclusions, mainly mica. Homogenous, gray in section. Du=29 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, depth 76.80-76.80 cm.

18. Brown surfaces. Inclusions of sand and mica. Three compounds in section – gray in the middle, brown towards the surfaces. Du=28 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 4, near the Roman wall.

HAND-MADE POTTERY (AND SLOW WHEEL)

Jars

19. Brown-gray outer surface (spotted), decorated with applique bands with circular alveoli, slipped. Brown inner surface, well-polished (only on the inside). Three compounds in section: gray in the middle, brown towards the surfaces. Du=25/26 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 3, depth 77.20-77.00 cm.

20. Brown-gray in colour, rough surfaces (spotted). Wavy incised decoration. Three compounds in section: gray in the middle, brown towards the surfaces. Du=*ca.* 12 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

21. Brown-gray surface (spotted), slipped outer surface, decorated with an applique band with circular alveoli. The inner surface is brown and well-polished. Three compounds in section – gray in the middle, brown towards the periphery. Du=25/26 cm. Context: Sector 2, premise 3, depth 77.20-77.00 cm.

22. Body-herd. Brown-gray, rough surfaces (spotted) with wavy incised decoration and cylindrical walls. Three compounds in section: dark gray in the middle, brown towards the periphery. Pebbles and organic inclusions. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

23. Brown-gray surfaces, rough (the outer is poorly polished). Wavy incised decoration and applique band with circular alveoli, cylindrical walls. Three compounds in section: dark gray in the middle, brown towards the periphery. Pebbles and organic inclusions. Du=16 cm. Context: Sector 2, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

24. Light brown smooth surfaces, decorated with vertical incised lines. Sand and mica inclusions. Homogenous, light brown in section. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

Pitchers

25. Brown-gray surfaces (spotted). Homogenous in section, gray. Polished surfaces. Inclusions of small pebbles and mica. Made on the slow wheel. Du=10 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

26. Brown-gray surfaces (spotted). Homogenous in section, gray. Polished surfaces. Inclusions of small pebbles and mica. Slow wheel. Du= 9 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

Bowls and/or cups

27. Outer surface is gray-brown in colour, slipped, smooth; the inner surface is brown, slipped, smooth. Three compounds in section: gray in the middle, brown towards the periphery. Pebbles and mica inclusions. Du=16 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

28. Dark gray surfaces, smooth. Homogenous, gray in section. Mica and small pebbles inclusions. Du=15 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

29. Dark gray surfaces, slipped, polished. Inclusions of small pebbles, mica and sand. Du=15 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

30. Gray surfaces, slipped, polished. Inclusions of small pebbles, mica and sand. Du=15 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

31. Gray-brown surfaces (spotted), poorly polished. Inclusions of small pebbles, mica and sand. Du= 15 cm. Context: Sector II, premise 2, near the Roman wall.

32. Light gray surfaces, slipped, well-polished. Homogenous dark gray in section. Sand, mica and pebbles inclusions (visible mostly in section). Du= 29 cm. Context: Sector 2, premise 3, depth 77.20-77.00 cm.

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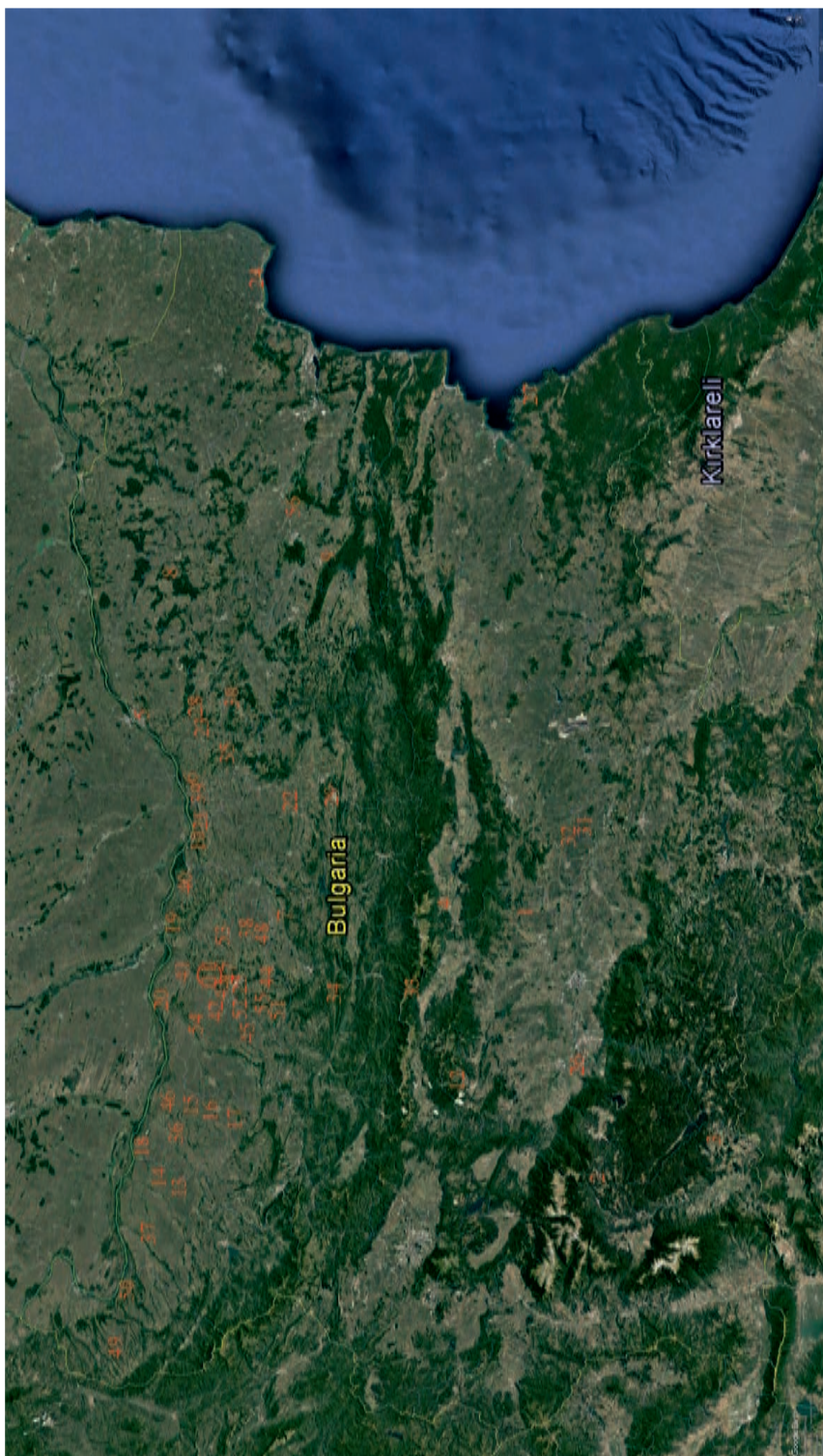
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Planșa V. Ceramică făcută la mână. 19-24. Borcane; 25-26. Ulcioare; 27-32. Castroane și cupe.

Map 1. Commented sites in present day Bulgaria.

1. Brezovo (probably settlement – hill fort and necropolis)
2. Babyak (sanctuary)
3. Kochan (necropolis)
4. Tazha (settlement and necropolis)
5. Ruse (pit sanctuary)
6. Batin (settlement)
7. Devetaki (inhabited cave)
8. Sboryanovo (settlement and sanctuary)
9. Dragoevo (settlement – hill fort)
10. Svishtov (settlement)
11. Riben (settlement or sanctuary)
12. Panagiurski kolonii (necropolises)
13. Yakimovo (settlement)
14. Valchedram (settlement)
15. Krushovitsa (settlement?)
16. Galiche (settlement?)
17. Sokolore (settlement?)
18. Kozlodui (settlement?)
19. Nikopol (settlement – hill fort or sanctuary)
20. Gigen, Oescus (Early Roman castra)
21. Novae (Early Roman castra)

22. Nikiup, Nicopolis ad Istrum (Roman municipium)
23. Tabachka (cave sanctuary)
24. Bizone (settlement)
25. Pleven, Storgosia (settlement? with necropolis, Later Roman mutatio)
26. Debrashtitza (sanctuary)
27. Sozopol, Apollonia (Greek apoikia)
28. Cherven (settlement – hill fort)
29. Tarnovo (settlement – hill fort?)
30. Krepcha (settlement – hill fort)
31. Velikan (settlement or/and sanctuary with necropolis)
32. Zl. Livada (sanctuary)
33. Montemno (preroman settlement or sanctuary, Roman mutatio)
34. Golyama Zhelyazna (sanctuary)
35. Brestovitsa (settlement with necropolises)
36. Sofronievo (necropolis)
37. Bagachina (sanctuary)
38. Zgalevo (settlement or sanctuary)
39. Krivina (production site, probably part of settlement nearby)
40. Belene, Dimum (preroman and roman settlement, Early Roman castrum)
41. Gulantsi (coin hoard)
42. Trastenik (coin hoard)
43. Bozuritsa (coin hoard)
44. Bohot (hoard of metal vessels)
45. G. Dabnik (single grave and a coin hoard)
46. Mizia (single grave – Early Hellenistic)
47. Bukovlak (settlement)
48. Pelishat, Giridava (settlement and sanctuary)
49. Kula, Castra Martis (Early Roman settlement)
50. Archar, Ratiaria (Early Roman castra or castellum).
51. Gortalovo (coin hoard)
52. Yasen (coin hoard)
53. Koilovtsi (coin hoard)
54. Orehovitsa (coin hoard)
55. Brestovets (coin hoard)
56. Madara (settlement or sanctuary)



Map 1. Approximate locations of the commented sites in Bulgaria.



Plate I. Special finds. 1. T-shaped tool; 2. Amphora handle with anepigraphic stamp.

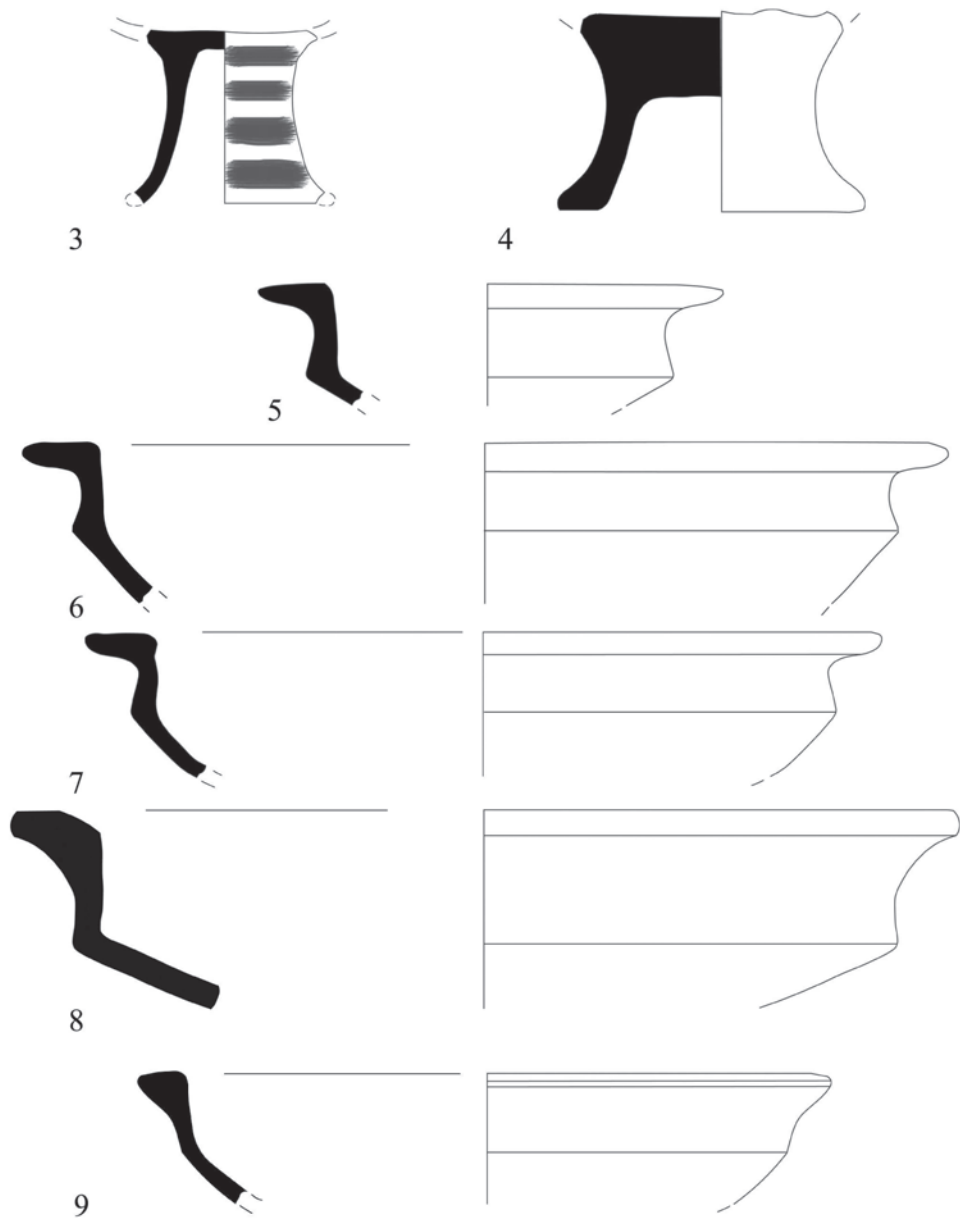


Plate II. Wheel made pottery. 3-9. Fruit bowls and bowls.

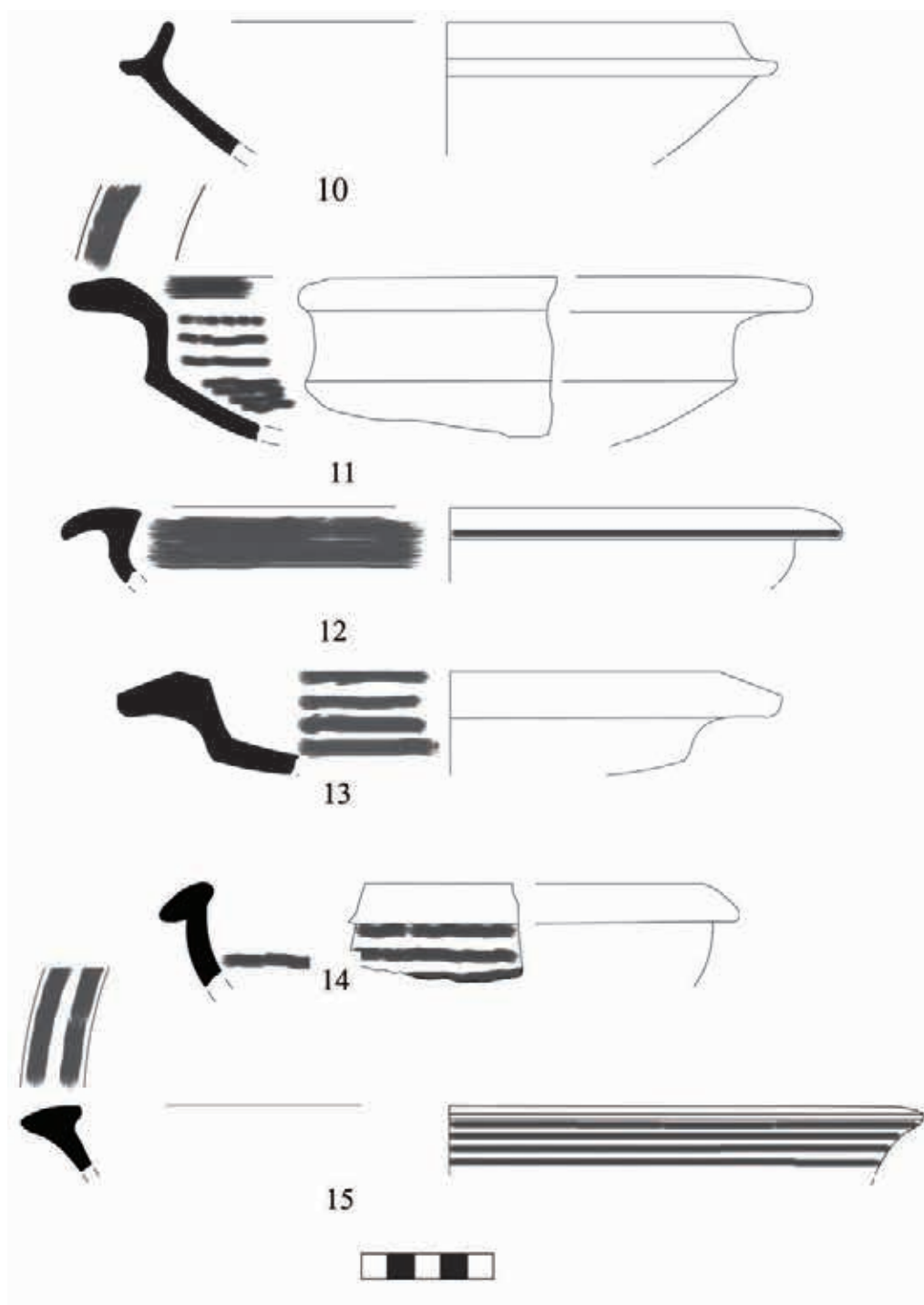


Plate III. Wheel made pottery. 10-15. Bowls.

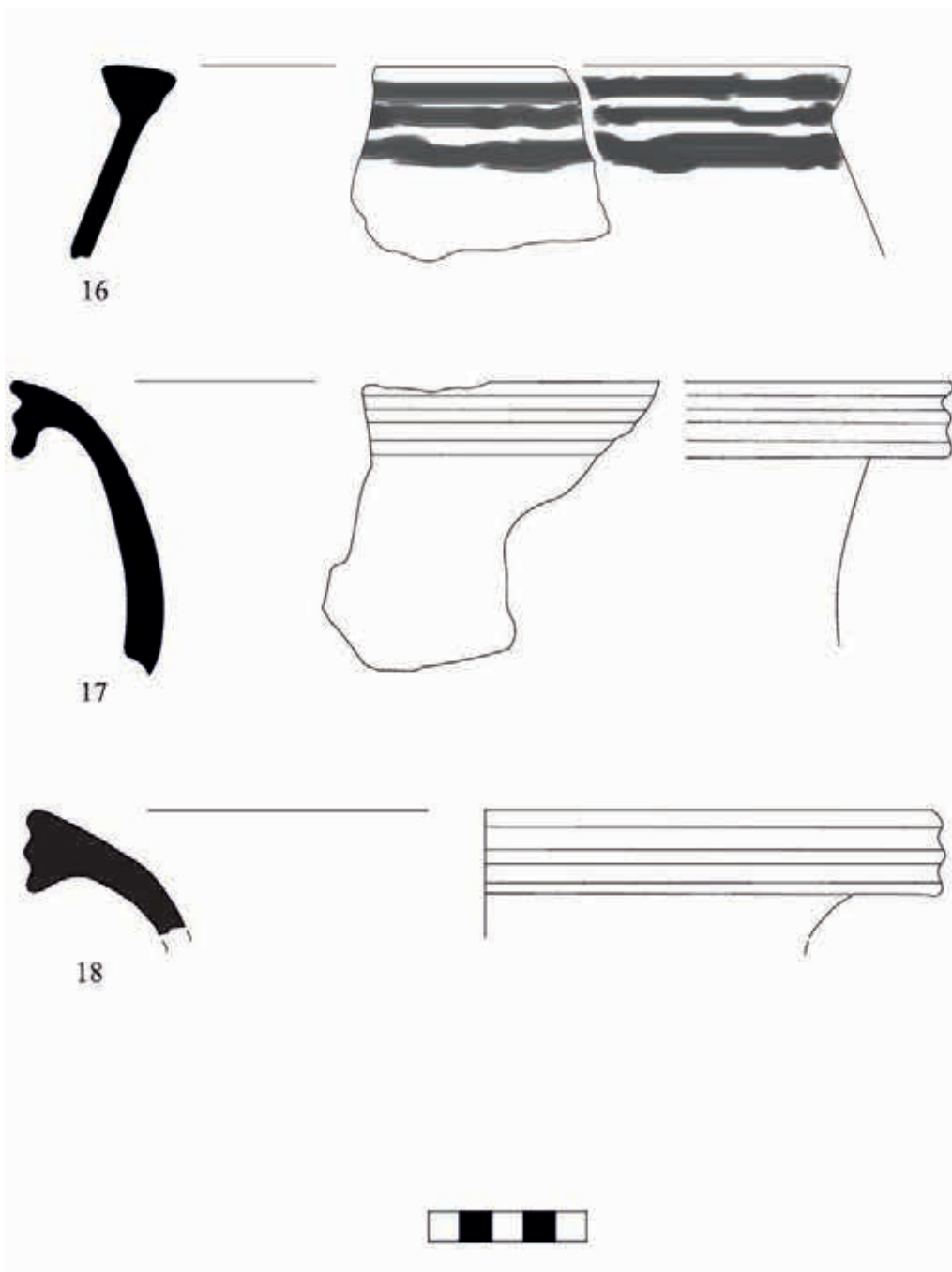


Plate IV. 16-18. Storage vessels.

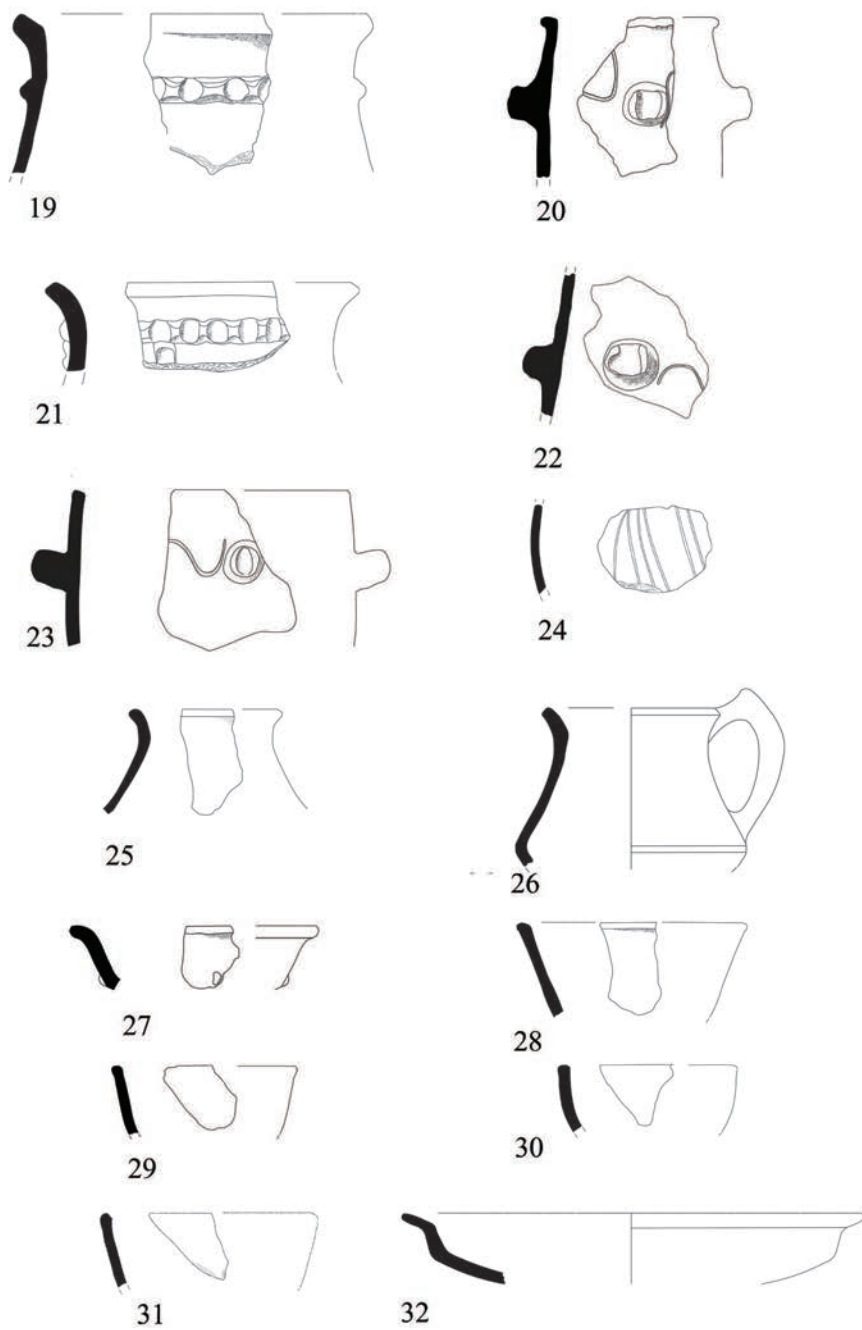


Plate V. Handmade pottery. 19-24. Jars; 25-26. Pitchers; 27-32. Bowls or cups.