

SOME STRATIGRAPHIC ISSUES OF THE IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS AT ŽIDOVAR

When in 1996 we commenced new investigations at Židovar near Vršac, the stratigraphy of this multi-layered prehistoric settlement was known only in general. On the basis of the investigations of Prof. Gavela it was clear that at Židovar there were the remains of many superimposed settlements dated into the Bronze and Iron Age and that Bronze Age cultural layer was thicker and better preserved.¹ The settlements at Židovar formed in the course of the Iron Age, draw, however, more attention of the investigators² as illustrated in the short monograph on Židovar published in 1997.³

The renewed investigations at Židovar are still in the initial stage. The largest central excavation site (sector I) covers the area of ca 700 sq. meters. The intention was to cut across the Židovar plateau in the north-south direction by the system of linked block-trenches 15 meters wide. Towards the north in line with the west profile of sector I, sector II was adjoined where an old profile of Prof. Gavela, over 30 meters long and couple of meters wide, was 'refreshed'. The small stratigraphic trench (2×4 m) was also placed next to the old trench of Prof. Gavela, in the western section of the Židovar plateau. Excavations in the stratigraphic trench revealed 5 meters thick cultural layer, while in the central sector we discovered only parts of the latest settlement dating from the Late La Tène, at the depth of 0,80 to 1,00 m. In sector II, along the western profile the remains of many floors of elongated, rectangular houses from the Late and Early Iron Age were recorded.

As a contribution to the stratigraphy we should mention the test excavation of Židovar suburbium which is situated immediately next to the western slope of Židovar plateau. Židovar suburbium (site Tobolica) is almost two and a half times larger than "Gradina" and judging by its configuration it seems that it was fortified at some period of time. The suburbium as well as Židovar itself is situated at the edge of Deliblatska peščara, that is at the edge of loess floor which raises steeply for more than 30 meters above the valley of the Karaš river (Fig. 1). The suburban settlement is naturally protected from one side with deep 'surduk', that is deep valley cut into the loess that emerges towards the Karaš valley, while on the other side is a deep ravine. The remains of suburban fortification are also visible: earthen rampart on

the north side (towards the ravine) and a wide ditch (vallum) on the west, the most easily approached side. In the trench located in the southeastern section of suburbium at Tobolica and ca 120 meters to the west of the Židovar plateau, besides the layer of Vattina culture, thin habitation horizons of the Early Iron Age and Late La Tène containing the material identical with the one from Židovar were confirmed.

A few settlements at the Židovar plateau dating from the Late and Early Iron Age yielded cultural layer more than 2 meters thick (according to the situation in sector II and the stratigraphic trench). Immediately under the humus layer appears the cultural layer of the Late La Tène settlement which terminates with a well preserved house floor at the depth of 0,70 to 0,80 m. A bit older archaeological material dating also from the Late La Tène was found under the latest building horizon, at the depth of 1,00 to 1,15 m. The new positively confirmed building horizon with well burned house floors was discovered at the depth of 1,35 to 1,40 m with pottery dating from the Late Hallstatt. The other floor discovered at the depth of 1,75 to 1,85 m dates from the end of the middle Hallstatt. The earliest, clearly distinguished building phase from the Iron Age with house floors at the depth of about 2,20 m dates from the middle Hallstatt.

Material culture of the latest settlement at Židovar is, for the time being, best known as it was investigated over the largest area. Hallstatt building horizons are much more moderately investigated, first in the restricted section of sector II and also within the stratigraphic trench of limited dimension. Inconsistency in the degree of investigation of certain Iron Age settlements hinders to a considerable extent comprehension of the vertical stratigraphy at Židovar. Besides it should be emphasized that final typolo-

¹ Gavela, B. 1972, fig. 2,3.

² Medović, P. 1978; Sladić, M. 1986, 1991, 1994, Jevtić, M. 1993; 1996.

³ Uzelac, J. at all, 1997.

⁴ Gumă, M. 1993, 232; *idem*, 1995, 115.

⁵ Jevtić, M. 1997, 45, fig. 25.

⁶ Gumă, M. 1983, 136-137; *idem*, 1993, 233-235; Gumă, M. – Gumă, N. 1977, 45-68.

gical and statistic analysis of the pottery is going to be accomplished after finishing the works in the latest cultural layer.

The draft of vertical stratigraphy we should try to complement with the data from several cultural horizons distinguished primarily on the basis of the results from the stratigraphic trench excavated in 1997/98. The most interesting Bronze Age horizons like Early Bronze pre-Vattina and Late bronze post-Vattina layers we would not discuss as they are not the theme of this article.

The beginning of the Early Iron Age, that is two opening centuries of the I millenium BC, is rather dubious at Židovar. Thin cultural layer with the fluted pottery of the Gava type (which by our opinion should be rather assigned to the final phase of the Late Bronze Age then to the so-called Transitional period) is situated immediately under the habitation remains of the Bosut-Basarabi culture. Although stratigraphically indiscernible we suppose that there was a certain discontinuity of life at the Židovar plateau because the Basarabi settlement at Židovar

belongs to the classical phase of this culture. Namely to this horizon belong the finds of elaborately decorated pottery of the so-called Basarabi style (motif of the incised continuous "S" spiral in the negative (Pl. I/9), rows of small engraved S motifs (Pl. I/6), densely hatched triangles with curved sides (Pl. I/6), Maltese cross and stylized representations of water birds) (Pl. I/10). The pottery of Gornea-Kalakača horizon expected between the Gava horizon and Basarabi culture horizon is entirely missing. We consider attractive the idea of M. Gumă that in the genesis of the Basarabi culture some part was played by the black polished pottery close to the Mala Vrbica – Hinova group⁴ (which is by some assumed to be the later variant of the Gava complex), because some shapes of this culture are represented at Židovar.⁵ It is also obvious that fluted pottery is the basic trait of fine and polished ware of several Early Iron settlements at the Židovar plateau. We must admit that before investigations at Židovar we were rather skeptical concerning the possibility to distinguish clearly the latest phase of the Basarabi culture designated by M. Gumă as Basarabi III (best represented at the site Valea Timișului – Rovina).⁶

Fig. 1. Air-view of the sites Židovar and Tobolica (suburbium)



We supposed that Basarabi culture is followed by the horizon of fluted pottery of Bosut III type (according to N. Tasić) at one side and on the other by Zlot group.⁷ It is, however, stratigraphically confirmed that at Židovar existed the later settlement of Basarabi culture (Basarabi III) where only some elements of classical Basarabi decoration are preserved while blackpolished pottery decorated with fluting and facets was predominating (Pl. I/7). The blackpolished vessels are decorated with very delicate almost cobweblike dense incisions and multiple rows of tiny 'false cord' ornament with white encrustation (Pl. I/1). There are also blackpolished vessels decorated with sheaves of narrow or wide grooves (Pl. I/2). Especially popular are calotte-shaped bowls with everted rim decorated with shallow grooves or the so-called ribbed channeling on the interior side of the rim (Pl. I/3–5).

Above the latest Basarabi settlement the Bosut III (according N. Tasić) habitation horizon (the horizon of fluted pottery of the late Hallstatt) could be clearly stratigraphically distinguished. General attribution to the latest phase of the Bosut group is not controversial but this horizon is at this moment difficult to date precisely especially as the cultural deposit is thin and as it seems single-layered. Besides prevalent fluted pottery and familiar shapes of the Bosut III group there are certain elements indicating influence from the Late Hallstatt Ferigile cultural circle in the same horizon. There are, thus, small just smoothed conical bowls with inverteed often tempering rim decorated with larger or smaller protuberances on the shoulder. The bowls of coarse or fine texture are often decorated with small tongue-shaped extension modeled slantingly or vertically on the rim while other are decorated with short vertical ribs, which surpass the rim. There are also stylized bird protomes on the rims or on the top of ribbon-like handles (Pl. I/8). Smaller pots with massive tongue-shaped lugs on the shoulder and pots with horseshoe-shaped handles indicate also the influence from the north Thracian areas. According to the pottery characteristics it seems certain that there was cultural continuity between the latest Basarabi settlement (characteristics of Basarabi culture are clearly distinguishable in the early Ferigile horizon) and the Bosut III settlement. There is still an open question how long was chronological hiatus between this settlement and the earliest La Tène settlement at the Židovar plateau.

Judging by all known facts turbulent years of the Celtic arrival in the south Pannonia and Serbian Danube valley (end of 4th and beginning of 3rd century) as well as the period of stabilization of Scordisci in this territory (3rd and 2nd centuries) did not leave any traces at Židovar.

The new settlement as it seems was established only in the first half of the 1st century BC. Even though we have numerous and various finds from the Late La Tène layer, the foundation of the first La Tène settlement at Židovar is still a mystery. That is because we could not identify architectural remains belonging to this settlement. However, in the lowest layers dating from the Late Iron Age we can clearly stratigraphically determine a thin layer with gray wheel-made pottery. Predominant shapes are bowls with everted rim, mostly with S profile (Pl. II/1–3; Pl. III/2–4, 6, 7), fragments of large pots or jugs with thin molded rib on the shoulder, small cups or goblets decorated with polishing (sheaves of wide lines, wavy lines) (Pl. III/1) and so on. Among coarse pottery of particular interest are so called situla-shaped pots of small size and with thick walls, thickened rim, wide groove under the rim and dense broomstroke or comb-like ornaments on the body (Pl. II/5).

The earliest La Tène horizon at Židovar belongs probably to the short-lived settlement dating from the first half of the 1st century BC and according to the described pottery has many analogies with Scordisci settlements in the Yugoslav Danube basin (Gomolava VI⁸, Čarnok near Vrbas⁹, etc.), and also with Dacian and Celtic elements at Ajmana¹⁰ and Ljubičevac¹¹, in the Iron Gate region).

Judging by the abundant archaeological material collected in the upper layers at Židovar (a few bronze and silver coins, pair of large silver fibulae and many bronze and iron ones (Pl. III/8), many small iron implements, fine painted, thin-walled vessels made on potter's wheel, a few finds of imported Roman ceramic and so on) the new settlement seems to be established already in the middle of the 1st century BC and it probably continuously existed until the first decades or the middle of the 1st century AD. From this period date also long, rectangular houses with large domed ovens of circular or horseshoe-like ground plan. The latest La Tène settlement is considerably worse preserved because it was immediately under the humus layer. Fragments of well polished house floors and unburned fragments of house rubble suggest that this settlement was abandoned but that houses were not burnt down. It is possible that penetration of Roman troops and their campaigns against the Dacians were the main reason why Židovar was permanently abandoned.

⁷ Jevtić, M. 1994, 83–84; *idem*, 1996, 54–55.

⁸ Jovanović, B., Jovanović, M. 1988, 5–52.

⁹ Jovanović, M. 1994, 127–130.

¹⁰ Stalio, B. 1986, 30–35.

¹¹ Popović, P., Mrkobrad, D. 1986, 309–310, Fig. 7–9.

If the earliest settlement could be with utmost caution ascribed to Scordisci the other two La Tène settlements reveal very strong Dacian component. Many metal objects discovered at Židovar are identical with Late La Tène and early Roman finds from the Dacian settlements in western Romania. Dacian pottery forms seems to prevail and especially frequent are small very coarse pots decorated in the Dacian style (Pl. II/4, 6).

Besides coarse, conical so-called Dacian cups there are also fragments of 'fruitstands' (fructiera) hand-made (Pl. II/7) or made on the potter's wheel (Pl. III/5).

Settlements from the Early Iron Age and Protohistoric period at Židovar could, already in this stage of investigations, be classified among important centers at the border of Pannonian and Thracian world.

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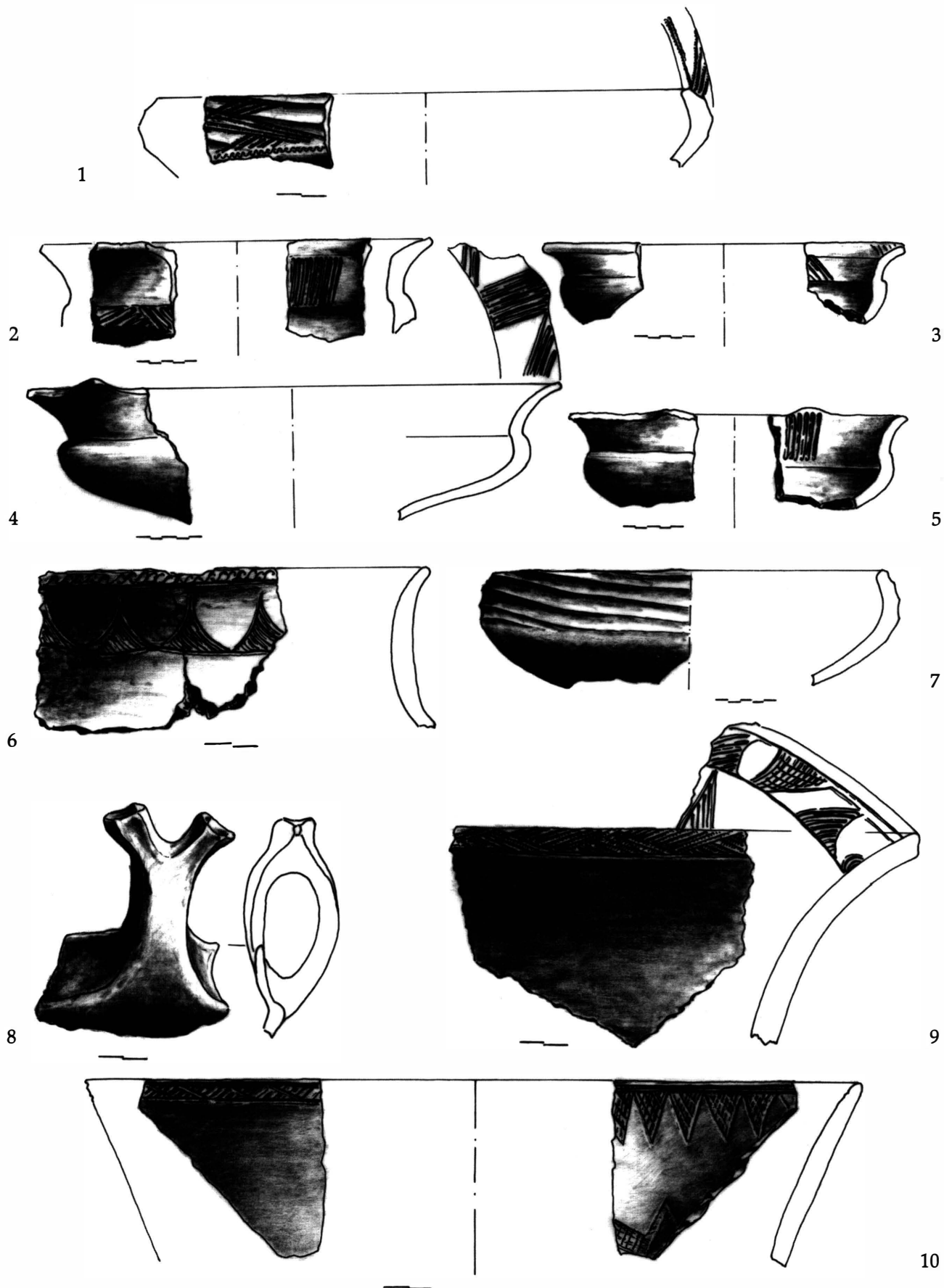
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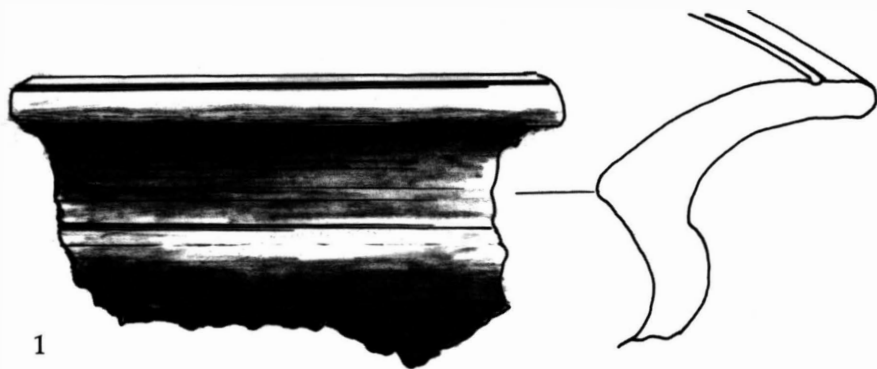
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Pl. I. Židovar. Early Iron Age pottery. Basarabi culture, Phase II, fig. 1, 6, 9, 10; Phasa III, fig. 2-5, 7; Post-Basarabi horizon, fig. 8



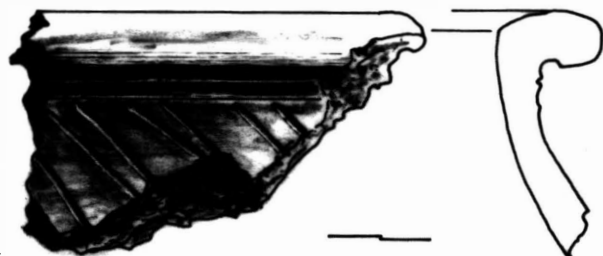
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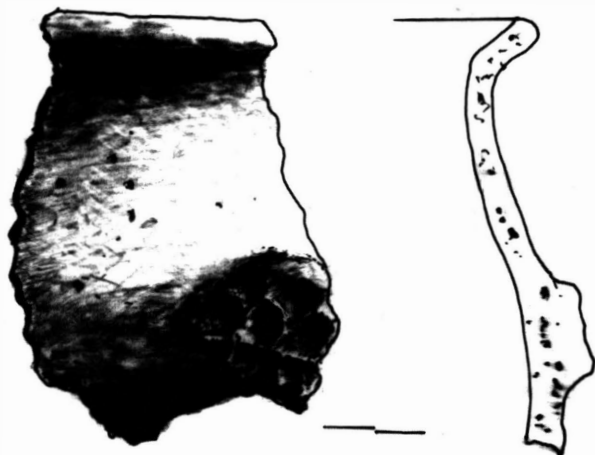
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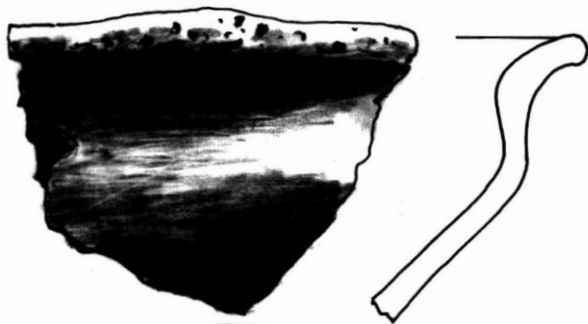
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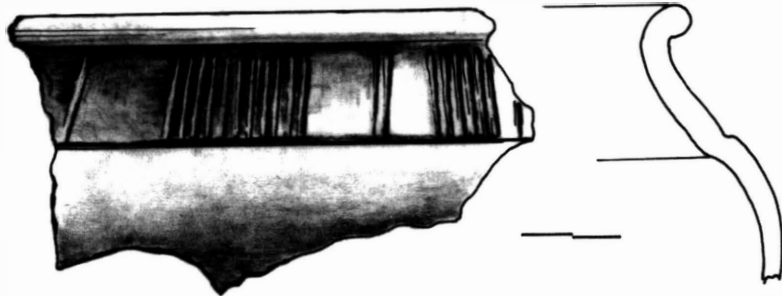
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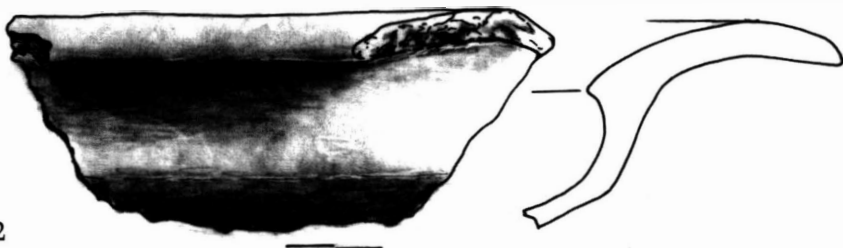
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Pl. II. 1-7 Židovar, Late La Tène (pottery)

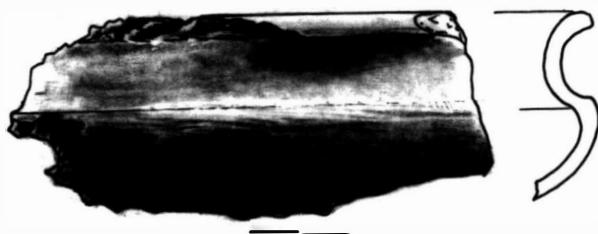
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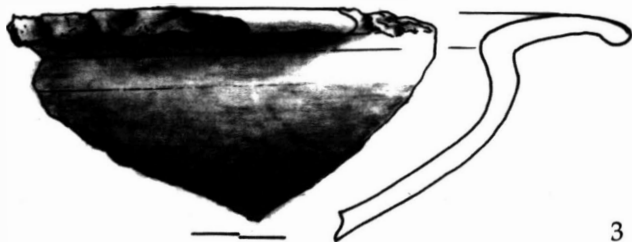
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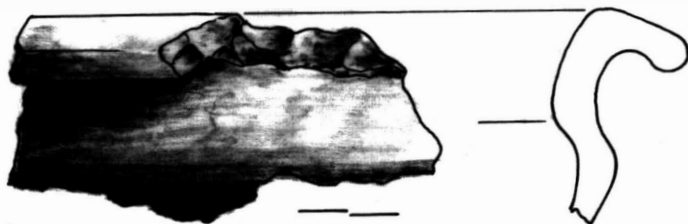
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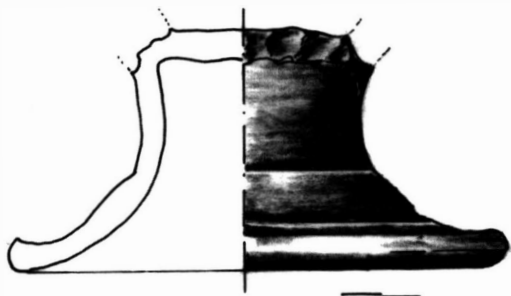
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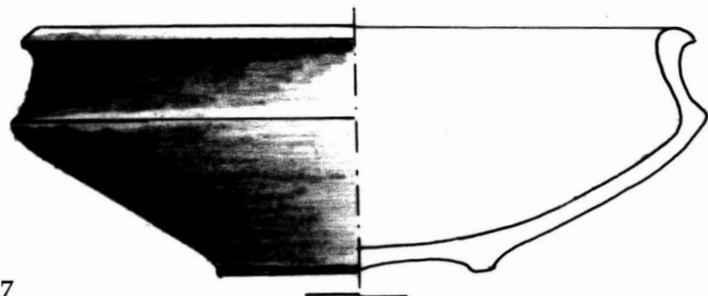
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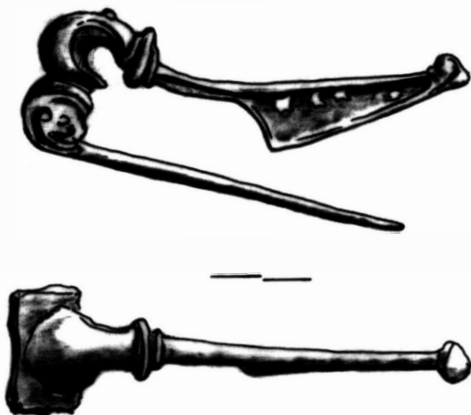
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Pl. III. Židovar. Late La Tène pottery, fig. 1–7; Bronze fibula, fig. 8