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THE RITUAL COMPLEX OF THE WIETENBERG CULTURE, CLUJ-NAPOCA (TRANSYLVANIA)

In memoriam Mircea Rusu

The excavation works for the modernization of former Banat Street (actual C. Coposu) from Cluj-Napoca caused the discovery of outstanding archaeological complexes belonging to the Bronze Age and the Migration Age. The intervention of the Rescue Excavation Department from the National History Museum of Transylvania¹, who knew about the discovery, in 1934-37, in the same area, of a settlement and a necropolis dating from the middle, respectively the late period, of the Bronze Age², gave permission for the scientific investigation of the vestiges.

From all the complexes from the middle Bronze Age (the Wietenberg culture), unveiled in the autumn and winter of 1998, we will insist on only one, named G1. A quasi-circular pit (Pl. I - II) represents it. The opening diameter is approx. 2,10, the basis diameter is approx. 4,10 and the depth of 1,65 m. It is worth mentioning from the very beginning that the works were partially obstructed by the bad weather – snow, low temperature – and the presence of builders. Therefore, we were unable to grasp all the details of this archaeological complex. Moreover, we will present here the information in a synthetic manner, since the specific details are to be published in a special monograph.

The stratigraphy and the content of the complex. The pit (Pl. I - II), pear-shaped, was dug in a stratum of yellow clay, sterile from the archaeological viewpoint. This clay was used afterwards for filling the pit.

The pit was carefully covered with successive strata. Their description, from top to bottom, is the following: contemporary vegetal stratum, black colored, 0,20-0,25 m width; stratum of black ground melted with clay, 0,80-0,90 m width; two piled strata of yellow clay, of 0,30-0,40 m total width; clay stratum, 0,06 m width. This last stratum isolated the archaeological rests from the pit filling. It contains a sizable amount of mollusk, lamellibranch, and a shell fragment of a small gastropod (a snail).

At the lower part of the pit (Pl. I - II) were found: 25 remakeable vessels, a large number of ceramic fragments, a spoon, some fragments of fired clay melted with chaff, a significant amount of calcined seeds, three osteological fragments, several fragments of different rocks, and a lot of coal and ashes. The whole inventory presents fire traces.

¹ M. Meşter, I. Hica, M. Bodea, Z. Molnár and C. Astaliş were temporary members of the excavation team, led by Mihai Wittenberger.

² K. Horedt, *Cercetările arheologice din regiunea Hoghiz-Ugra*, Materiale I, 1953, 806; I. G. Rusu, M. Şerban, N. Motioc, T. Fărcaş, *Date antropologice asupra populaţiei vechi (epoca târzie a bronzului) din regiunea Cluj*, Morfologie normală şi patologică I, 1958, 51-58; M. Rusu, *Consideraţii asupra metalurgiei aurului din Transilvania în bronz D şi Hallstatt A*, AMN 9, 1972, 41; I. Andriţoiu, *Necropola din epoca bronzului de la Târnava (jud. Sibiu)*, SCIVA 32, 1981, 4, 559; I. Andriţoiu, V. Vasiliev, *Câteva consideraţii privind cultura Noua în Transilvania*, Apulum 27-30, 1993, *passim*; N. Boroffka, *Die Wietenberg Kultur. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Bronzezeit in Südosteuropa*. Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie 19, Berlin 1994, 31-32.

Description of inventory

1. Profiled plate (Pl. III/1), decorated on the rim with a row of simultaneous impressions, obliquely disposed; on the shoulder it is ornamented with a narrow stripe, also filled with simultaneous impressions, obliquely disposed. The interior is decorated with circumscribing rhombuses, situated on two cross-shaped axes. The spare spaces are also decorated with rhombuses, but in the negative, resulted from antithetical triangles filled with simultaneous pricks. Two incised circles mark the inside circular space. Incised bands mark the exterior space, also filled with simultaneous pricks.

2. Slightly profiled plate (Pl. III/2). The exterior part is decorated with a band filled with incised hatches that draw a meandrous decoration made up of linked T-s. The rim presents two small, adjoining lobes, and is decorated with simultaneous pricks, obliquely disposed. The inside part is covered by four running spirals, formed by incised bands, filled with simultaneous pricks, inscribed into a circle marked by a band also filled with simultaneous pricks. Four croquets fill the spaces outside the spiral. A solar motif (a circle with four beams) perfectly covers the interior delimited by spirals.

3. Accentuated profiled plate (Pl. IV). It is decorated inside with four running spirals made up of bands filled with simultaneous impressions placed in a circle, marked by a band also filled with simultaneous impressions. The interior space of the tetraskelion is covered by incisions; the exterior space is covered by two incised triangles, inscribed one into the other. At the exterior, two circles marked by incisions have their axes marked by bands filled with opposing triangles, which print in the negative two rows of enchainned rhombuses.

4. Deep and profiled bowl (Pl. V/1), with one lobe, brown-black colored, decorated with obliquely disposed grooves.

5. Profiled bowl (Pl. V/2). It is decorated on the shoulder with rows of antithetical triangles, filled with narrow bands, obliquely hatches. On the exterior side of the rim it is decorated with simultaneous pricks.

6. Profiled bowl (Pl. V/3). It is decorated on the shoulder with rhombuses filled with web-disposed hatches, bordered by two incised bands, filled with triangular impressions. On the rim there are simultaneous pricks, obliquely disposed.

7. Profiled bowl (Pl. V/4), decorated on the rim with circular impressions, and on the shoulder and neck with three registers, the exterior ones filled with antithetical triangles, obliquely hatched, and the interior one with columns and tangents, all made out of installments of incisions.

8. Profiled bowl (Pl. V/5), decorated on the rim with simultaneous pricks obliquely disposed, and on the body with metopes filled with two rows of "fir-tree leaves" or "ears" bordered by vertical strips filled with circular incisions.

9. Slightly profiled, deep, black bowl (Pl. VI/3), decorated on the rim and on the shoulder with a row of oval impressions, and on the body with obliquely disposed grooves.

10. Deep and profiled bowl (Pl. VI/4), brown, not decorated.

11. Strongly profiled bowl (Pl. VI/5), black, not decorated.

12. One-lobe bowl (Pl. VI/2), brown, decorated with obliquely disposed grooves.

13. Four-lobe bowl (Pl. VII/3), black, decorated at the upper part with five rows of bands, filled with triangles or diverse hatches. The inferior part is separated in four metopes covered by croquets made up of two continuous strips. The separating columns of the metopes are filled with incised triangles and croquets, which develop in the negative a meandrous drawing.

14. Four-lobes bowl (Pl. VIII), black, decorated on the rim with simultaneous pricks, and on the body with a double band of croquets, filled with simultaneous pricks, and with four bands covered by a meandrous band that develops through the bottom of the vase.

15. Four-lobes bowl with paired lobes (Pl. IX/1), decorated on the edge with oblique, incised hatches, and on the body with obliquely disposed grooves.

16. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. IX/2), decorated on the rim with short, oblique incisions, and on the shoulder and the body with two bands filled with web-disposed hatches, which unfold within a space marked by incised bands.

17. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. IX/3), decorated with oblique grooves bordered by an incised line.

18. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. X/1), decorated on the rim with successive pricks, obliquely disposed, bordered by a fascicle of incised lines; at the lower part, it is decorated with four running spirals, and the free spaces are covered by triangles and a rectangle with elongated angles.

19. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. X/2), decorated on the rim with two rows of circular impressions, and on the body with alternated decorated metopes (fir-tree leaves or wheat-ears) or empty.

20. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. XI/1), decorated on the rim with short, oblique incisions, and on the body, with grooves bordered by incised lines.

21. Cup with overriding ears (Pl. XI/2), decorated on the body with grooves, marked at their upper part with an incised line.

22. Small amphora (Pl. XII/3), decorated on the rim with short, oblique incisions, and on the body with running spirals made up of incised strips filled with simultaneous pricks. The free spaces of the spirals are covered by triangles.

23. Small amphora (Pl. XIII/1), decorated on the rim with rows of incisions and with a pricked row, and on the body with wide, slightly deep grooves. It presents four small ears under the rim.

24. Small amphora (Pl. XIII/2), decorated on the rim with two rows of triangular impressions and with a pricked row. On the body, it is decorated with slightly deepened grooves, bordered by a strip with triangular impressions. It presents four small ears and four conical buttons on the shoulder.

25. Small amphora (Pl. XIII/3), decorated on the rim with rows of incisions and with a pricked row. The body was probably decorated with grooves. It presents four small ears under the rim.

26. Ceramic fragments belonging to some common-use pottery. They have an S-shaped profile (Pl. XII/2).

27. Spoon with a broken vessel (Pl. XIV/3).

28. Miniature thronconic vessel (Pl. XIV/4).

29. Fragments of jar container (Pl. XIV/5).

30. Ceramic fragments from diverse vessels (Pl. VI/1-2; VII/1; XII/1).

31. Fragments from the upper and lower part of two looms weights (Pl. XIV/1-2).

32. Fragment probably belonging to a support of hand mill or a ritual-washing basin.

33. Fragment probably belonging to an oven.

34. Adobe belonging probably to a house.

35. A large quantity of burnt seeds. Preliminary analyses prove the presence of wheat and (*Triticum monococcum* L and *Triticum aestivum* L Ssp. *vulgaris*), buckwheat

(*Fagopyrus sagittatum*), sesame (*Sesamum indicum* L) and chick pea (*Cicer arietinum*)³.

36. Osteological fragments: a fragment from the brain-case of an unidentified animal and two fragments from a domestic pig (a metacarpal III from the anterior member and a mandible fragment, its forward part with four incisors in their alveoli.)⁴.

37. Several pieces of quartzite, gritstone-quartzite, fine gritstone with micaceous, gritstone with carbon-cement a micaschist, chlorous schist, schist of small dimensions, medium and large, with firing traces. The last three were brought from far away.

38. A core of obsidian from Bükk Mountains (Hungary).

Conclusions

It is clear that the G1 complex belongs to the Wietenberg culture⁵. The ceramic inventory described pledges for situating the complex in a mature stage of the Wietenberg culture, that is, its 3rd phase. The arguments for this general ascription are: the variety of ceramic types, especially plates, either simple or with lobes; the sure lines and diverse drawings of the spiraled decor; the presence of meandrous motives; the sophisticated combination of several fundamental decorative models, like spirals, meanders, cross-shaped bands, impressions and grooves, as well as the frequent use of simultaneous pricks. Comparing the data resulted from analyzing the G1 complex pottery - i. e. its technological aspects, the early variants of meandrous decoration, and its reduced frequency, the exceptional character of the ceramic inventory, including its special destination - with the data offered by the Wietenberg ceramic inventory discovered here along the years (as recipients for daily use, with usual, normal decorations⁶), we may conclude that the complex dates from the 3rd phase of the Wietenberg culture.

The spreading manner of the ceramic fragments (Pl. II) proves the orderly disposal of the recipients. Some of them were positioned upside-down. The majority, however, were disposed on their edge or in normal position. The recipients were complete or, at the most, they were deposited cracked⁷. Some others appear as being certainly only fragments. However, all vessels contain a large quantity of burnt seeds.

Stylistically, we highlight the symmetry of the decoration. The space on the pottery is admirably covered and organized. In spite of the similitude of some decorations or decorative combinations, there are no two recipients with identical decorations. The majority of the described decorative motives and their associations are well known in the Wietenberg culture⁸. Nonetheless, we also found different and new motifs, such as the metopes decorated with rows of fir-tree leaves or wheat-ears (Pl. V/5; X/2), the crochets represented by incised, continuous strips (Pl. VII/3), the rhombuses disposed in complex, cross-form decoration (Pl. III/1; IV), as well as the different associations of motives (Pl. III/1-2; IV; V/4; IX/2). The two bowls, strongly lobed, are unique through their general decoration (Pl. VII/3; VIII).

³ Analyses performed by Prof. Al. Salontai, University of Agrarian Sciences of Cluj-Napoca.

⁴ Analyses performed by D. Bindea, National Museum of History of Transylvania.

⁵ K. Horedt, *Wietenbergkultur*, Dacia N. S. 4, 1960, 107-137; N. Chidioșan, *Contribuții la istoria tracilor timpurii din nord-vestul României. Așezarea Wietenberg de la Derșida*, Oradea 1980; N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, with bibliography.

⁶ N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, pl. 61.

⁷ Restoration was carried out by the team of the Restoration Laboratory of National Museum of History of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca.

⁸ K. Horedt, 107-137; N. Chidioșan, *op. cit.*, 51-60; N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, 179-214.

All these argue for considering the material exceptionally created for a specific destination. It presents few analogies with material discovered in other settlements. Comparing these containers with those found in the present settlement proves that the former ones were created especially for this destination. The decoration and execution are specific arguments for this conclusion.

A special inquiry should be devoted to the value of decorative motifs, i. e. a purely decorative value or a symbolic one. The insistence on the quadripartite representations - the sun changes its place four times, there are four seasons in a year, there are also four moon phases -, their presence especially in religious environments, and their individualized character - all these prove that we are dealing with symbols invoking a celestial landscape. The sun often seems to be represented both in its static (simple disc, disc with beams, cross, circle, wheel) and dynamic position ("running spirals").

Several ceramic fragments preserve traces of inlays. This proves, besides their exceptional artistic effect, that many of the Wietenberg decoration techniques are just a support for inlaying.

If the wheat culture (*Triticum monococcum* L and *Triticum aestivum* L Ssp. *Vulgaris*) is documented by other Wietenberg discoveries, the present one contains seeds of sesame (*Sesamum indicum* L), buckwheat (*Fagopyrum sagittatum*) and chick pea (*Cicer arietinum* L), for the first time, not only in the archaeological complexes of the Wietenberg culture, but also in the prehistory of Transylvania.

We suggest two interpretations for the functionality of the complex. The first one is that it was the deposit or the pantry of a house (*kouloures*). The second one is that it was a cultic deposit (*bothros*). The whole content of the complex, the exceptional and obviously symbolic decoration of the pottery, as well as the manner of its depositing, pledges for a ritual pit. It might be an offering brought to an agricultural divinity by an agricultural population -, as the bearers of the Wietenberg culture are. Therefore, we argue for considering the complex a pantry dedicated to a goddess rather than to a family or a community.

The problem of the pits with a special, non-funeral character has of late been discussed more carefully in our literature⁹. However, there are not many complexes of this type known for the Wietenberg culture.

There is little published about the ritual complexes, some of them funeral, as those from Oarța de Sus-Ghiile Botii, as well as about the significance of the site¹⁰.

A pit with two recipients deposited with the opening down its bottom was found at Derșida¹¹. The offering to the divinities, heroes, dead, spirits, animals and stars, represented by water, milk, broth, blood, honey, was entirely poured into the ground, and the recipients were turned over the offering. This is a form of belief in life after death.

⁹ N. Chidioșan, *op. cit.*, 21-22; C. Kacsó, *Contribuții la cunoașterea Bronzului târziu din nordul Transilvaniei. Cercetările de la Libotin*, Thraco-Dacica 11, 1990, 79-98, with the literature; V. Vasilev, I. Aldea, H. Ciugudean, *Civilizația dacică timpurie în aria intracarpatică a României. Contribuții arheologice: așezarea fortificată de la Teleac*, Cluj-Napoca 1991, 150-152; M. Rotea, T. Fizeșan, *Groapa rituală de la Fântânele - "Dâmbul Popii"*, AMN 33/1, 1996, 223-224; N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, 108-109; Gh. Baltag, N. Boroffka, *Materiale arheologice preistorice de la Albești, jud. Mureș*, SCIVA 47, 1996, 4, 16; H. Ciugudean, *Cercetări privind epoca bronzului și prima vîrstă a fierului în Transilvania*, Alba-Iulia 1997, 65-97.

¹⁰ C. Kacsó, *Beitrag zur Kenntnis des Verbreitungsgebietes und der Chronologie der Suciu de Sus-Kultur*, Dacia N. S. 31, 1987, 69-70; N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, 108-109.

¹¹ N. Chidioșan, *op. cit.*, 21.

The same ritual is met with in the settlement at Valea lui Mihai. Here the cultural environment is different. There were discovered 28 whole recipients, disposed in a pile, and turned with their mouth upside-down. They were surrounded by calcined animal bones and a large amount of ashes¹². In the settlement of Albești research has been done on several Wietenberg pits, considered as ritual. They contain a large number of re-makeable, secondarily burnt recipients. The pits were very close to some graves¹³.

At Șimleu Silvaniei, Sălaj County, was found a cone segment pit, very probably cultic one, in our opinion. It contains special inventory: bronze drops, pottery, stone, coal and ash. At the top of the pit was found a horn deer¹⁴.

Another similar ritual is met with in the Hallstatt settlement at Teleac, where a pit contains recipients disposed upside-down¹⁵. In the same settlement there was found a pit that contained recipients, cereals and a hearth.

In all these cases the ceremonies of deposition were associated with ritual fires, their remnants being deposited next to the offerings. The passing of offerings through the flames explains the presence of calcined cereals, the secondary burning of the recipients, the ashes and the carbon pigments found in these pits.

The bearers of the Wietenberg culture developed their ritual ceremonies in different places, such as mountains, trees, springs, rivers, glades, or even settlements. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned archaeological discoveries and some other analogies¹⁶, we might affirm that all these practices, very different, were accompanied by offerings, libations, songs and ritual dances. Besides common celebrations, as sowing time, harvest time, reaping time, the leaving and returning of sheep, there was of course a yearly or multi-yearly ceremony for the whole community, or for the major part of it. This hypothesis is sustained by the discoveries at Oarța de Sus - Ghiile Botii. The divinities watching over this last space had no problems in accepting the arms, the jewelry together with the domestic offerings, as well as the ceramic, the bone-made offerings together with gold, silver and bronze. These very diverse offerings demonstrate either the worship of an all-embracing divinity, or the worship of several divinities within the same area.

¹² I. Ordentlich, *Un depozit de vase de tip Otomani de la Valea lui Mihai*, StComSibiu 1965, 181.

¹³ Gh. Baltag, N. Boroffka, *op. cit.*, 390.

¹⁴ F. Gogăltan, D. Tamba, *Materiale arheologice aparținând culturii Wietenberg descoperite la Șimleu Silvaniei*, ActaMP 16, 1992, 61-76; I. Bejinariu, *The Settlements of Wietenberg culture in Șimleu Silvaniei Area (Sălaj County) in The early middle Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin*, Alba Iulia 1998, 243-248.

¹⁵ V. Vasiliev, I. Aldea, H. Ciugudean, *op. cit.*, 151.

¹⁶ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, London 1955, passim; M. Eliade, *Traité d' Histoire des religions*, Paris 1964, passim; idem, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, Paris 1976, passim; C. Eibner, *Ein mittelbronzezeitlichen Gefäßverwahrung von Schrattenberg, p. B. Mistelbach, N.Ö., zur Interpretation der sogenannten Töpfereiwarenlager*, Archaeologia Austriaca 24, 1969, 19- 52; N. Platon, *La civilisation égéenne*, Paris 1981, passim; B. Hänsel, *Gaben an die Götter - Schätze der Bronzezeit Europas - Eine Einführung*, in *Gaben an die Götter - Schätze der Bronzezeit Europas*, Berlin 1997, 11-22, with the literature; S. Hansen, *Depozitele ca ofrandă: o contribuție la interpretarea depozitelor din perioada UFZ*, SCIVA 4, 1992, 371-392, with the literature; Idem, *Sacrificia ad flumina - Gewässerfunde im bronzezeitlichen Europa*, in *Gaben an die Götter - Schätze der Bronzezeit Europas*, Berlin 1997, 29-34; C. Kacsó, *Contribuții la cunoașterea Bronzului târziu din nordul Transilvaniei. Cercetările de la Libotin*, Thraco-Dacica 11, 1990, 97, with the literature; N. Boroffka, *Considerații asupra unor obiceiuri de depunere în epocile premetalice din Europa*, SCIVA 4, 1992, 341-252; T. Soroceanu, *Die Fundumstände bronzezeitlicher Deponierungen - Ein Beitrag zur Hordedeutung beiderseits der Karpaten*, in *Bronzefunde aus Rumänien*, Berlin 1995, 15-58; R. Georgieva, *Ritual pits in Thrace (end of 2nd - 1st millennium B. C.)*, Balcania Posnaniensia 7, 1995, 21-46; J. Brück, *Ritual and rationality: Some problems of interpretation in European archaeology*, European journal of Archaeology, 3, 1999, 313-344.

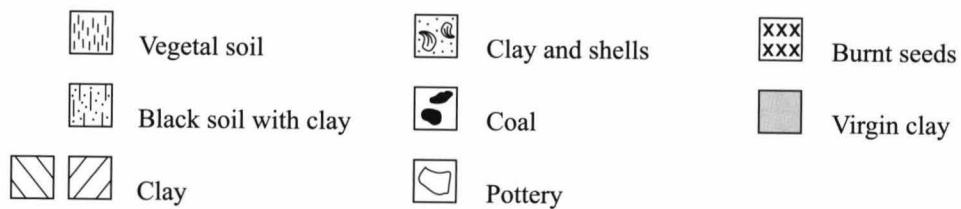
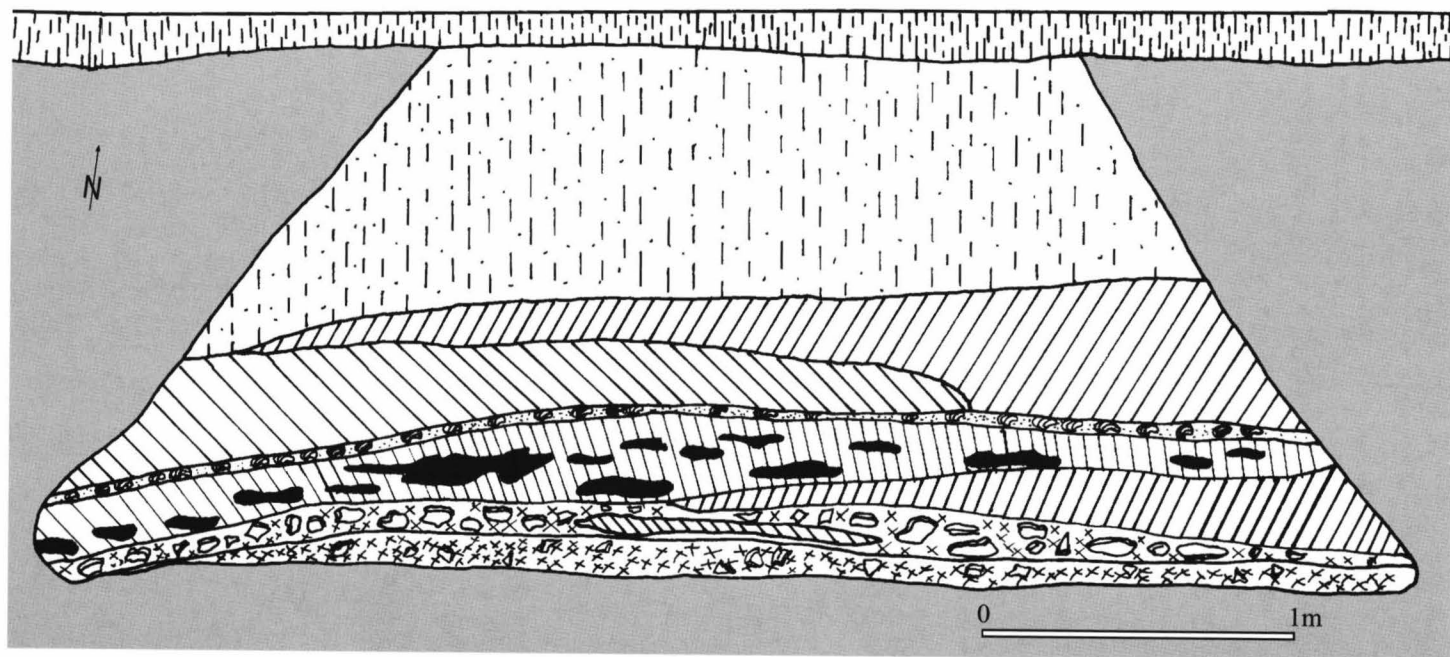
However, at the Banat Street site, in Cluj-Napoca, the discoveries are more precise, yet complex. The underground depositing of the offerings - as every received gift should be paid back - and the content of these offerings argue for an agricultural, chthonian ritual, dedicated to a fertility goddess, who watched over the richness of the harvest. This fertility goddess is Mother - Earth comprises both the human generations and vegetal germinations. Therefore, we can speak in this case about sacred agrarian rituals, also documented in the historical epochs¹⁷. These rituals inaugurated and marked the rhythm of the agrarian calendar, and also realised, through the agrarian ceremonial, the unity of Sun and Earth. The reiteration of solar motifs might express the combination of two spheres: the Earth and the Sun, feminine and masculine, static and dynamic¹⁸.

On the basis of what we now know about it, we can imagine how the complex was made: the offerings were purified on fire, somewhere near the pit; after that, the pottery full of seeds was set on the bottom of the complex, together with another inventory element and with the residue of the stake; the fill of the complex was made quickly, the throwing of the soil was made alternatively from one side and another.

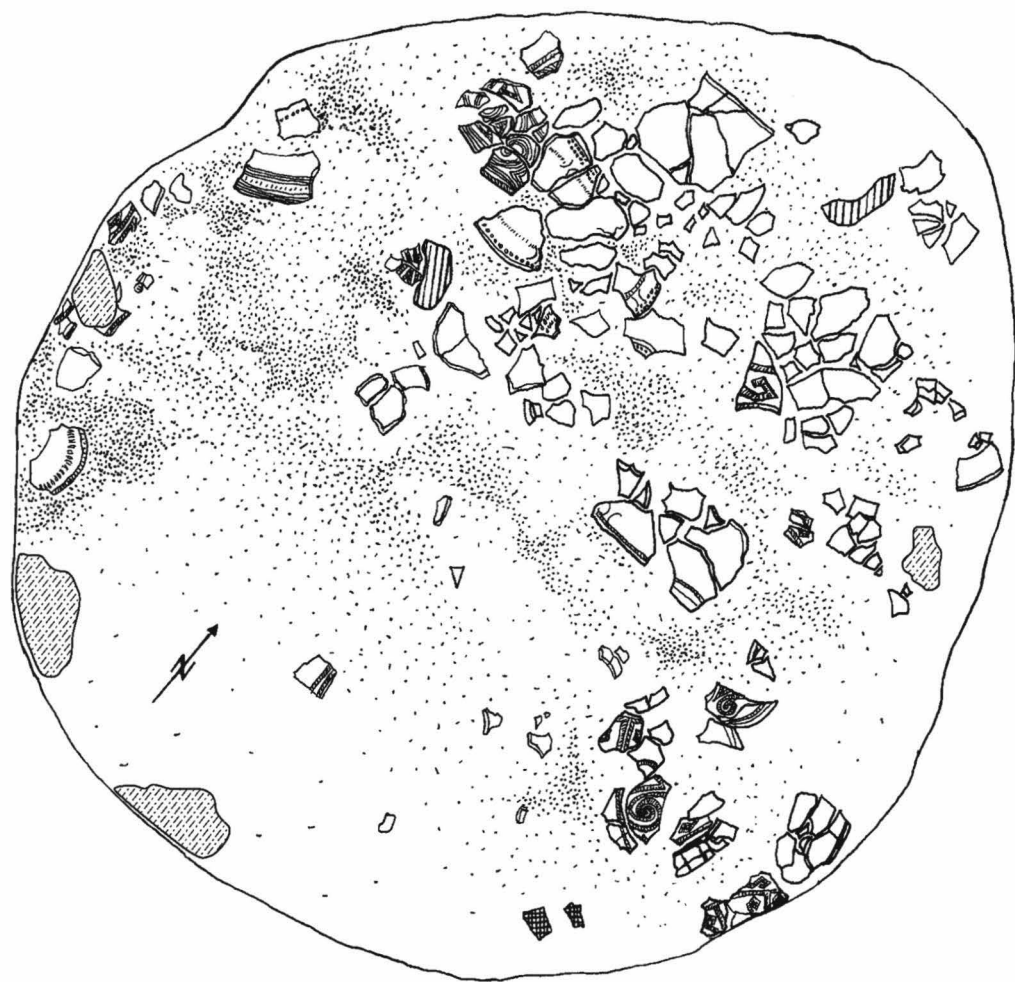
Translated and English adaptation made by Ms. Isabela Corduneanu.
Drawings made by K. Török and D. Cicios.

¹⁷ S. Eitrem, *Opferitus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer*, Kristiana 1915, passim; J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, passim.

¹⁸ J. - P. Vernant, *Myth et pensée chez les Grecs. Études de psychologie historique*. Paris 1988, with the literature.



Pl. I. Shape of G1.



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Stone



Burnt seeds



Pottery

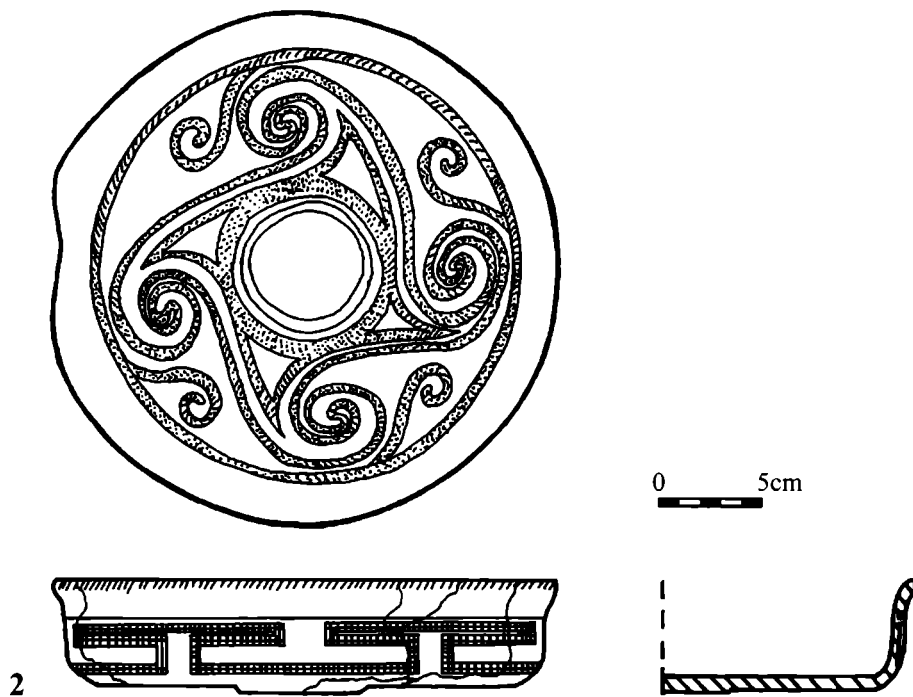
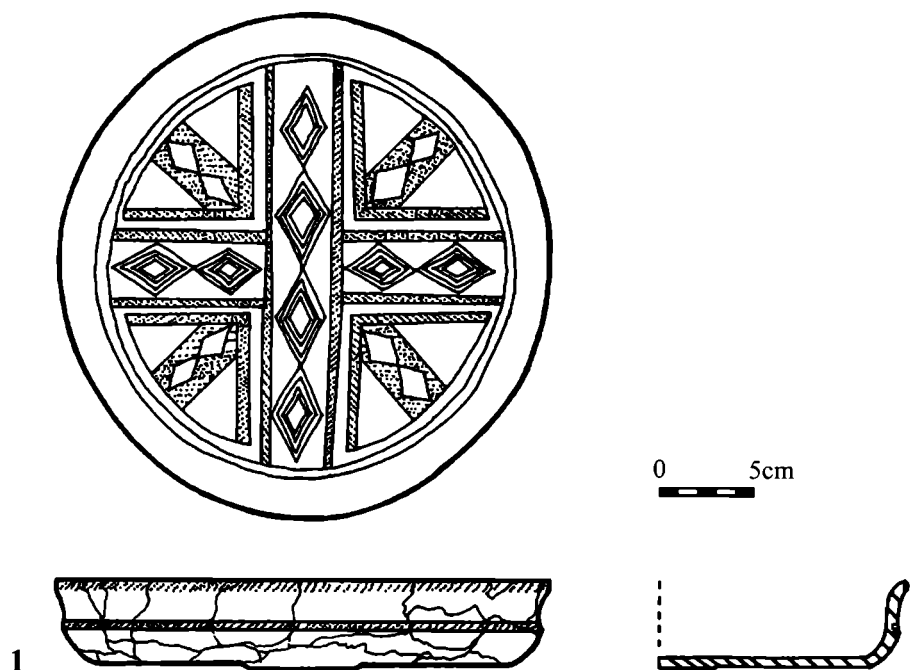


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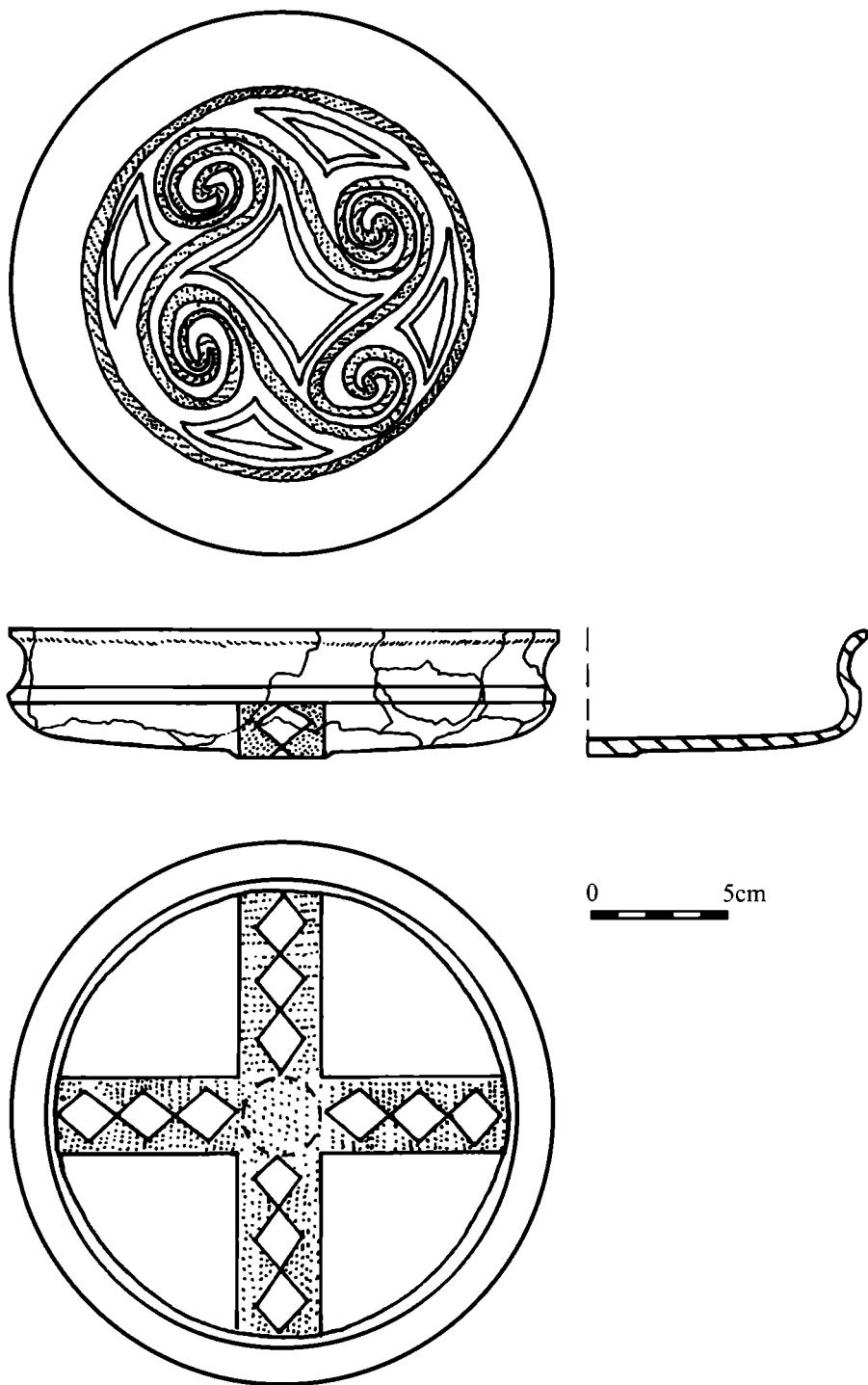


Loom weights

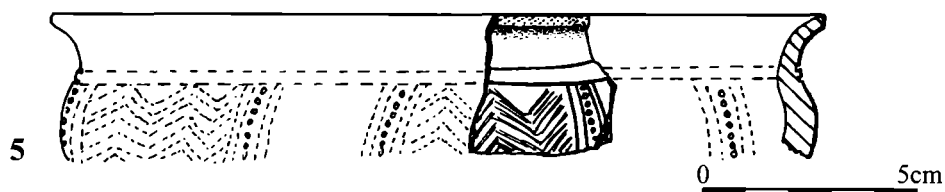
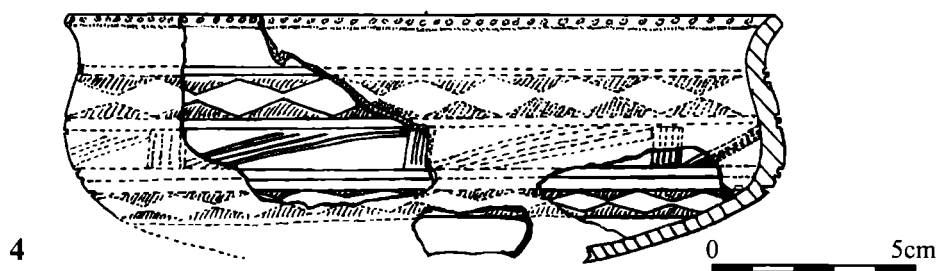
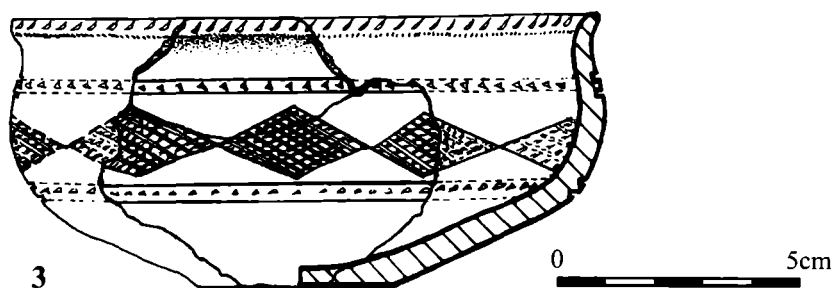
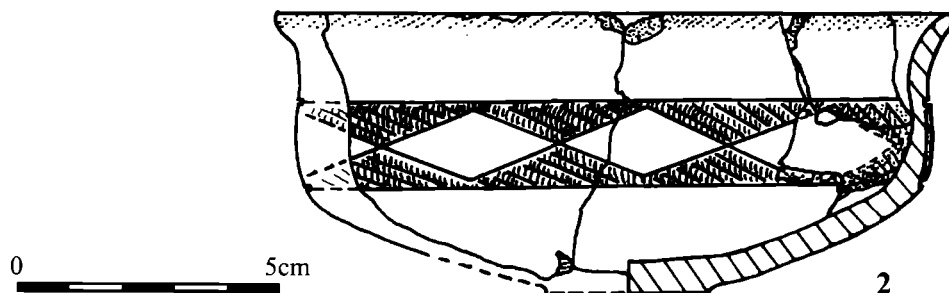
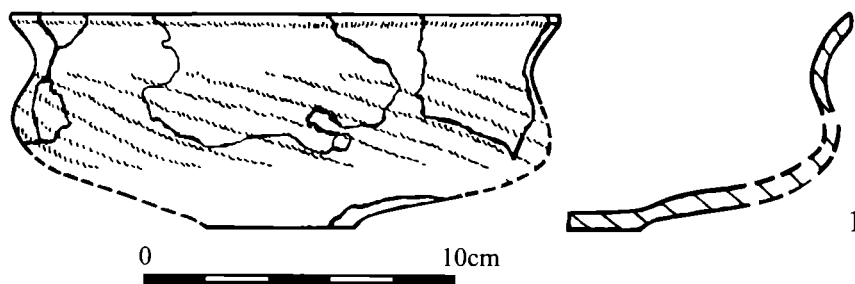
Pl. II. G1 Plane.



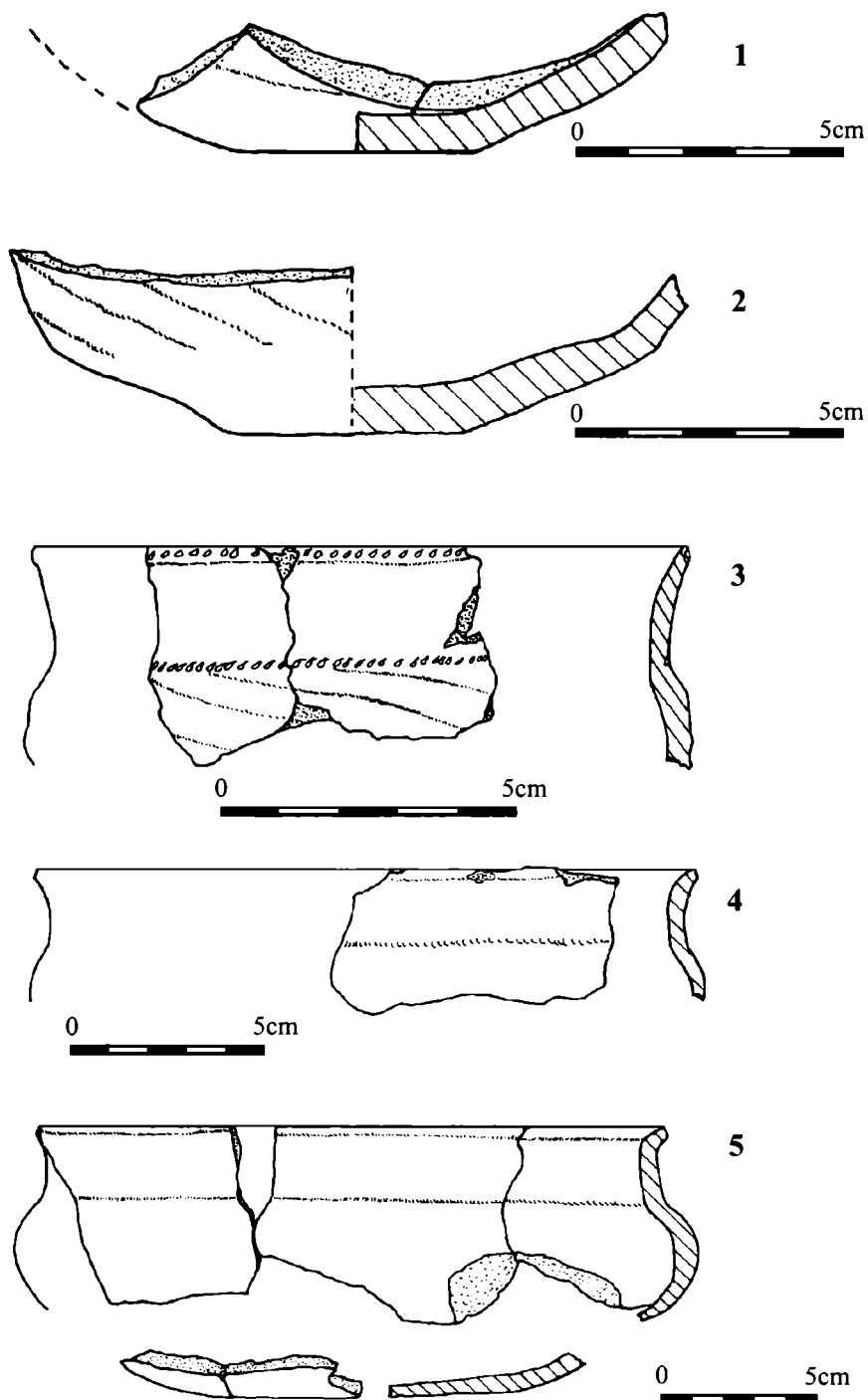
Pl. III. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



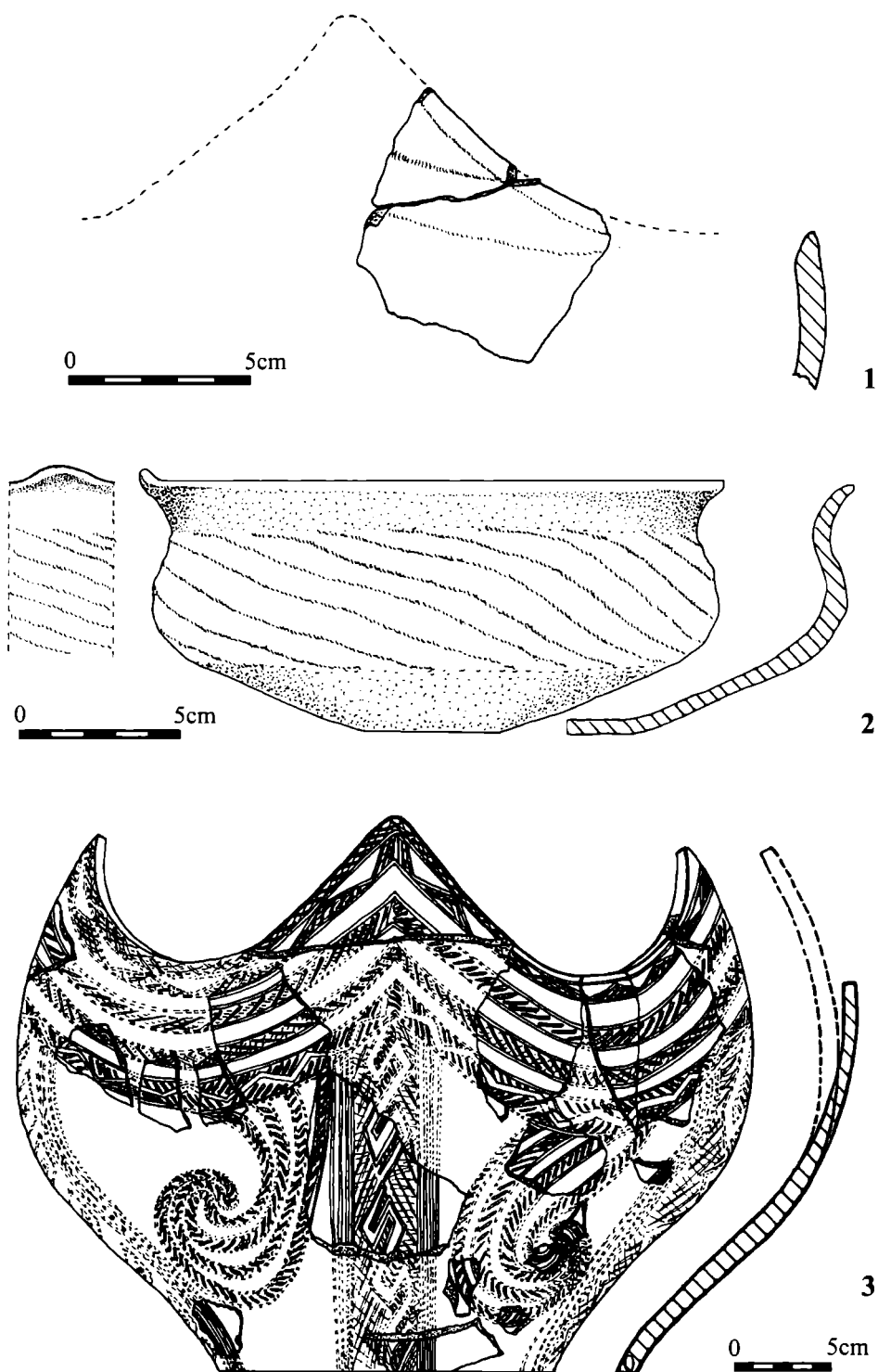
Pl. IV. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



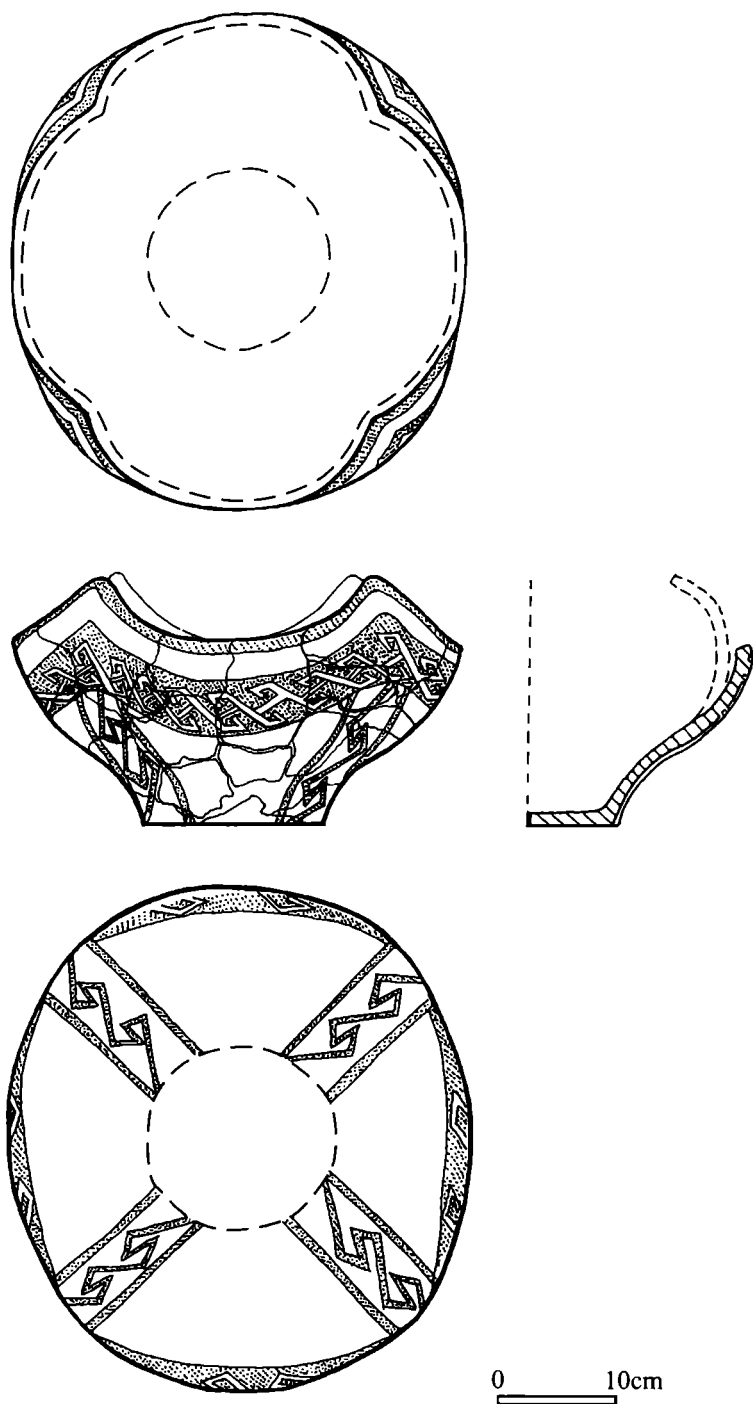
Pl. V. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



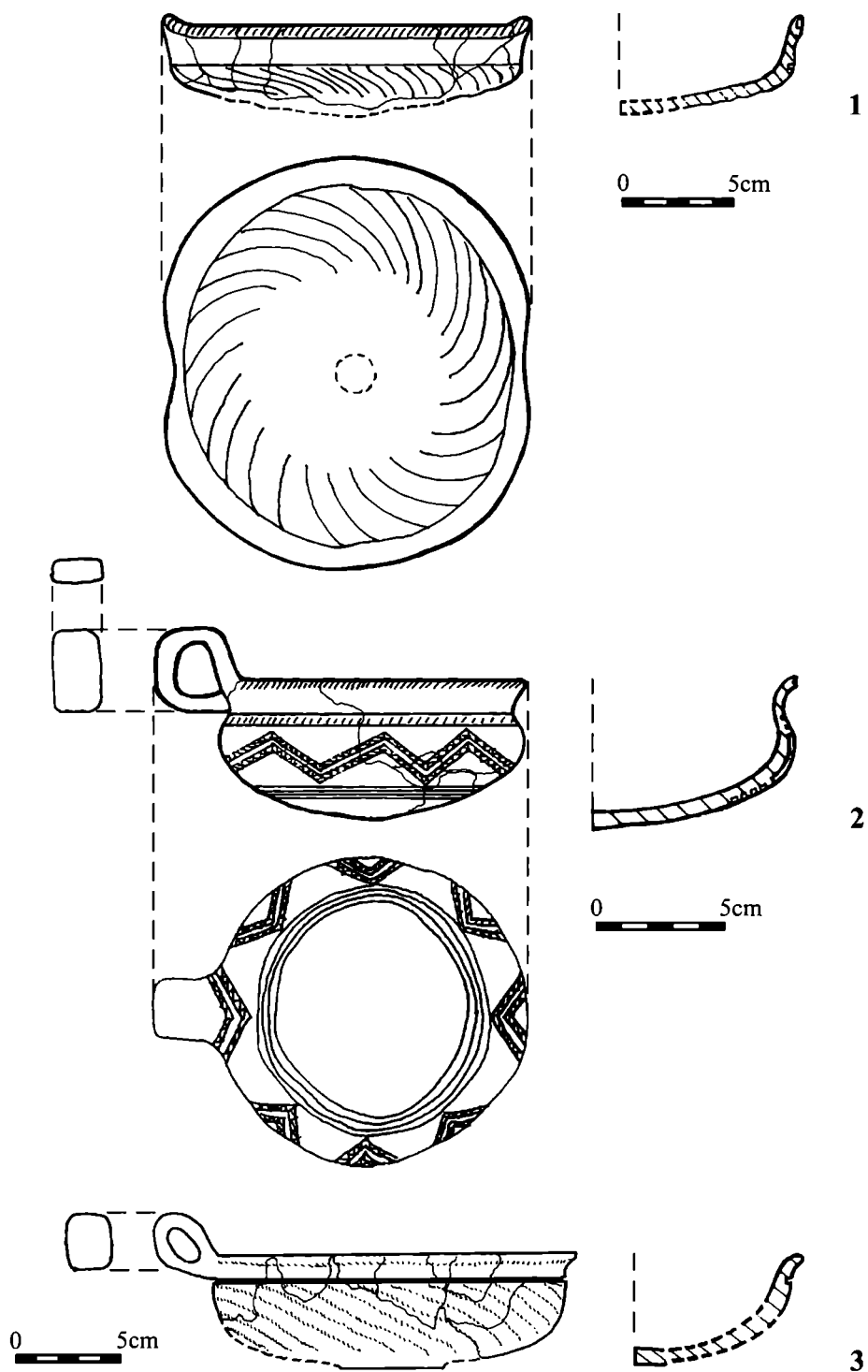
Pl. VI. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



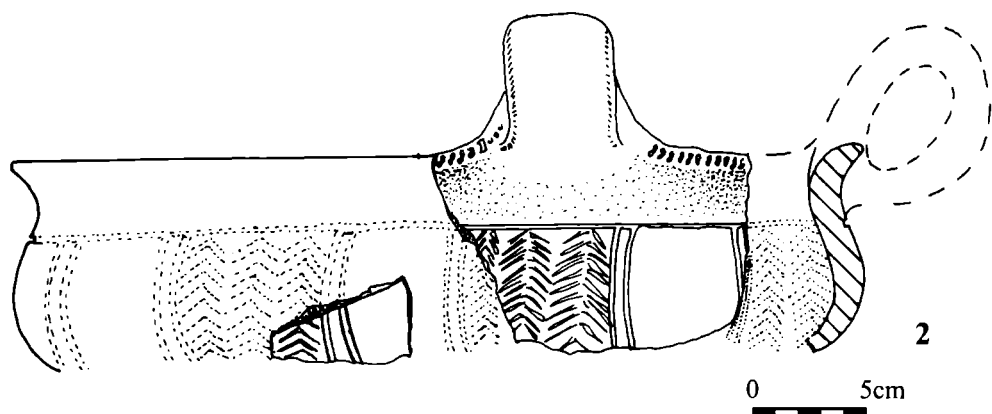
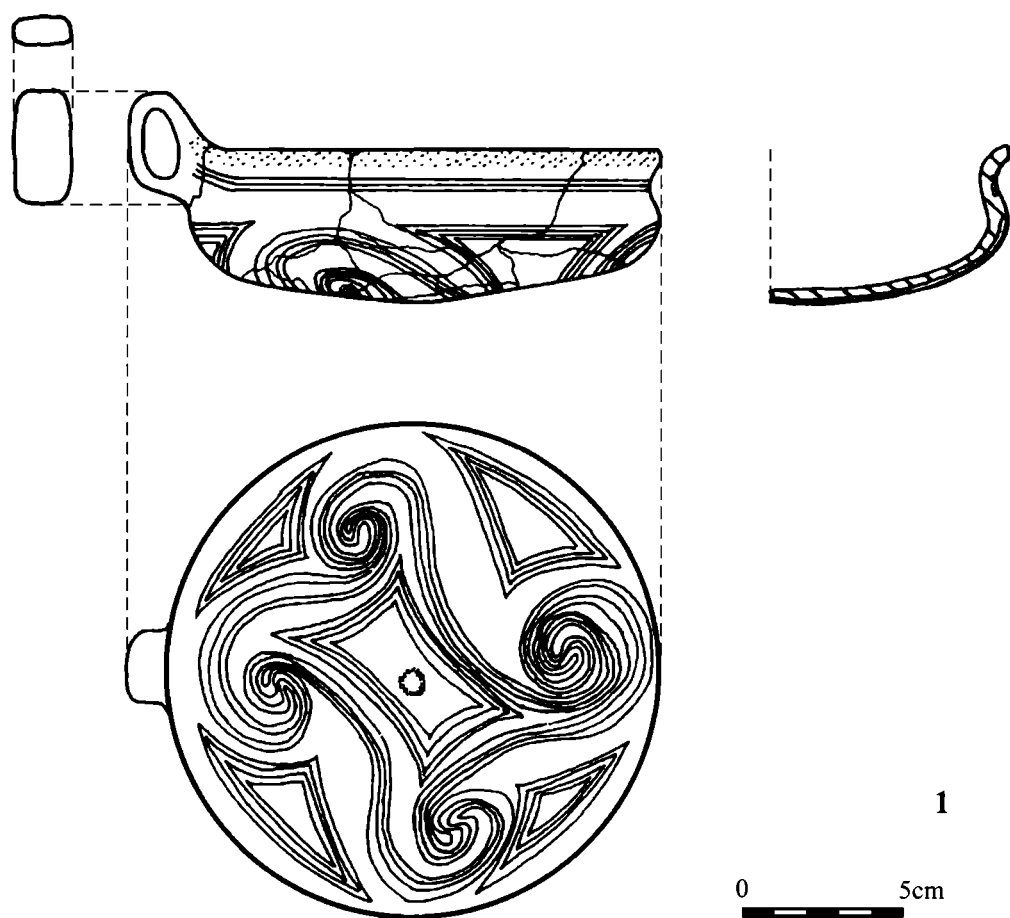
Pl. VII. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



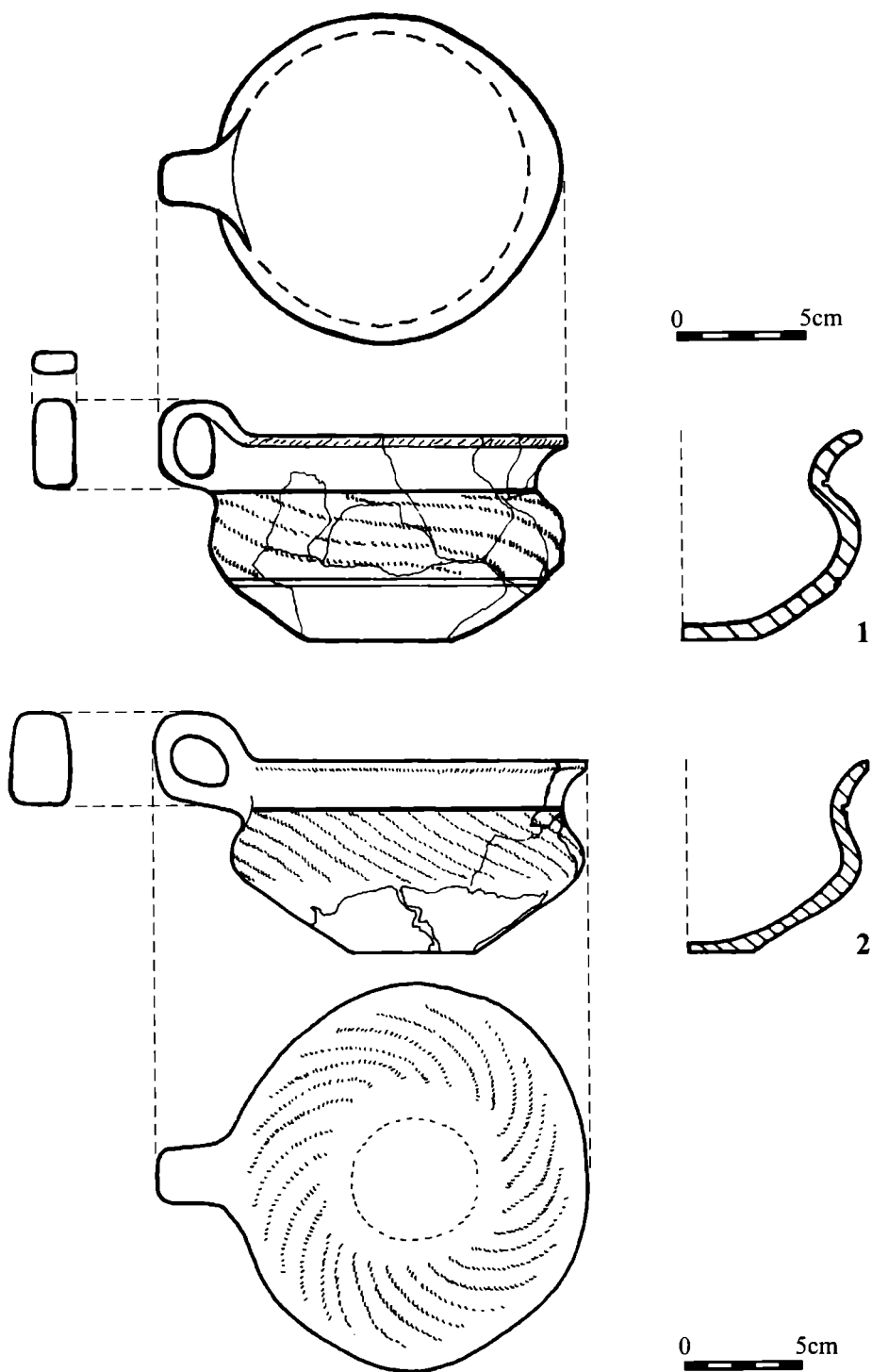
Pl. VIII. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



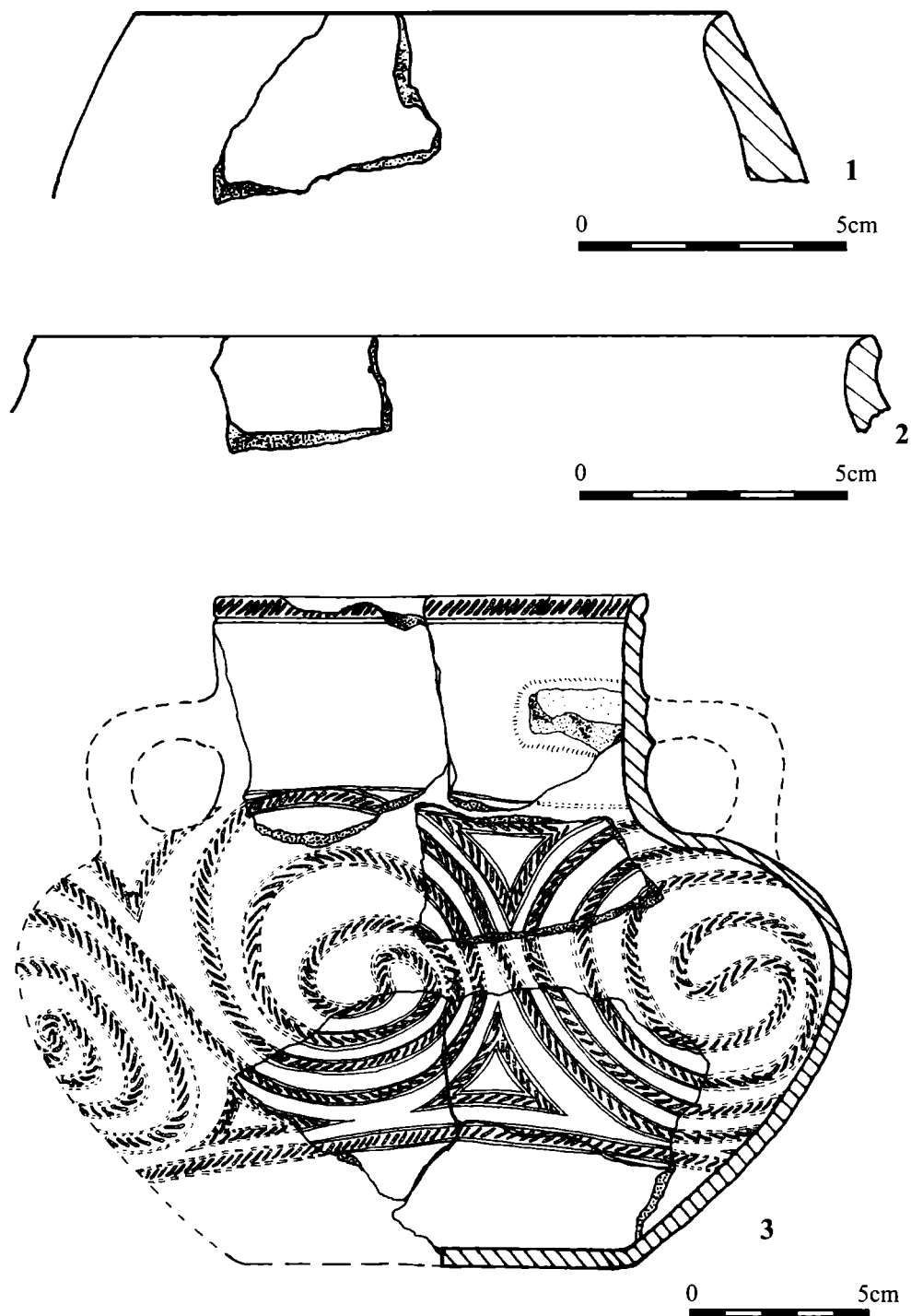
Pl. IX. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



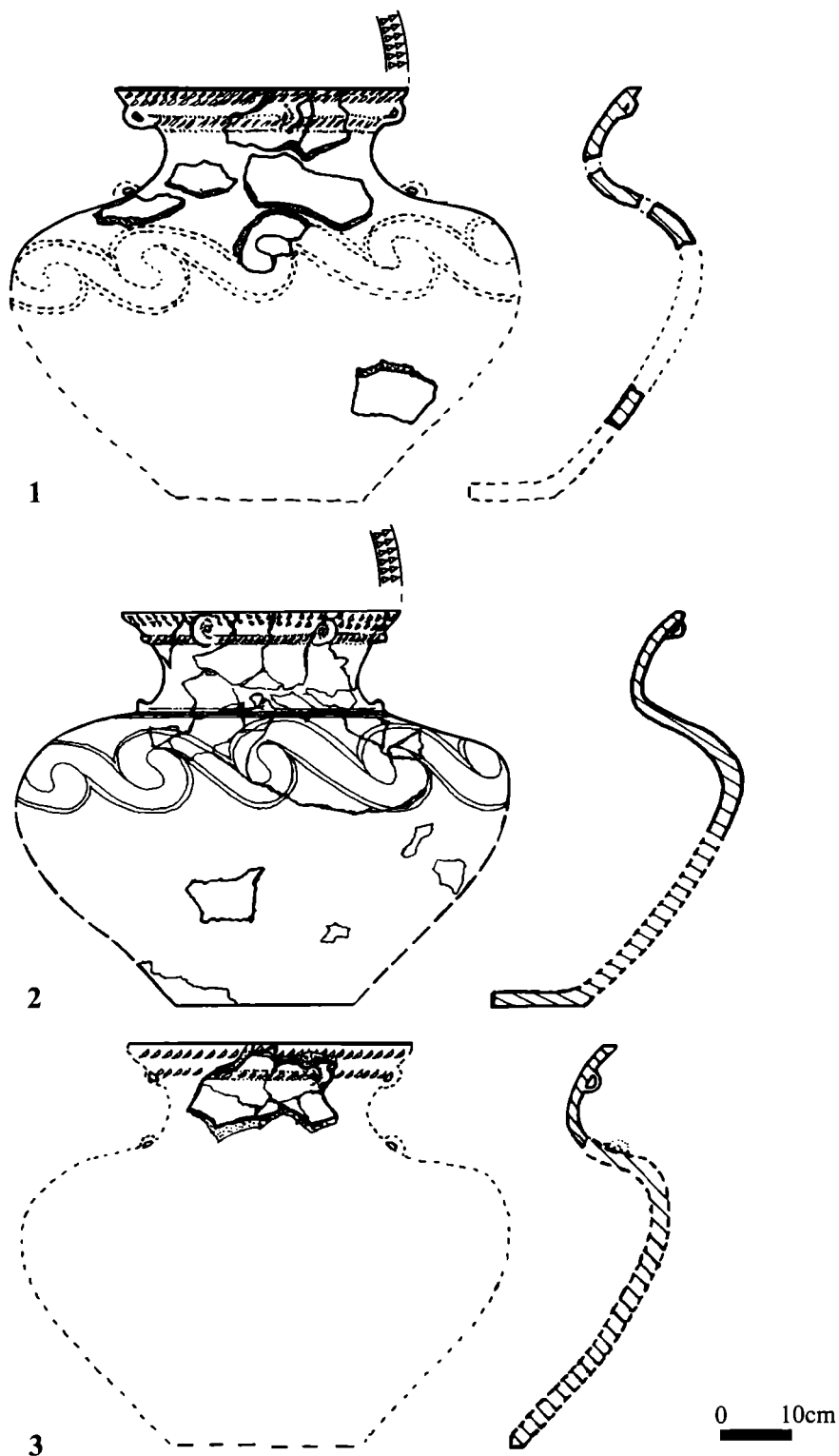
Pl. X. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



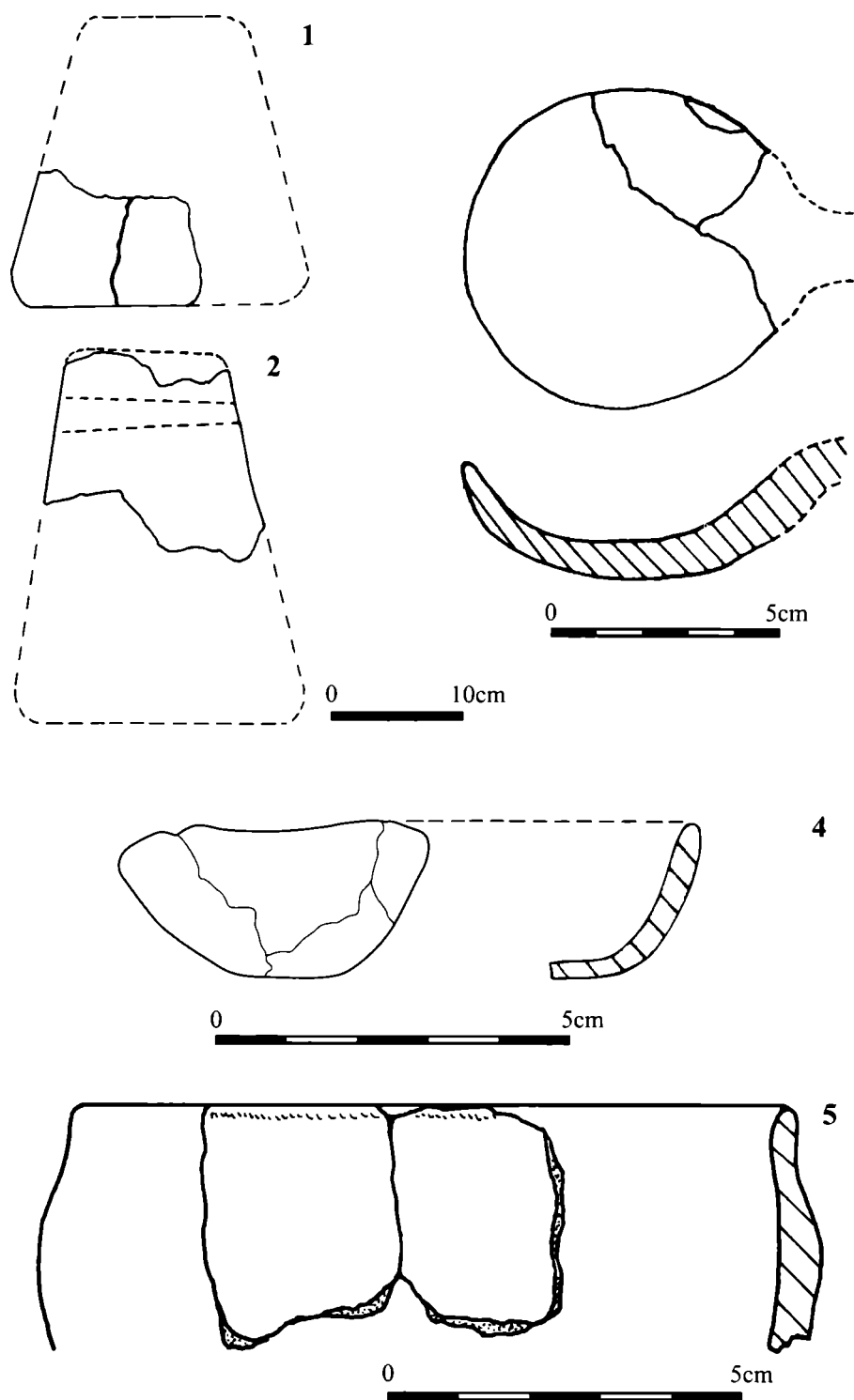
Pl. XI. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



Pl. XII. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



Pl. XIII. Wietenberg Culture pottery of G1.



Pl. XIV. Wietenberg Culture Jar Pottery and Looms weights.