

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NEOLITHIC OF CRIȘANA

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The geographical area we are dealing with is bordered at South-South East to the limits of the Bihor and Sălaj counties. Its western boundary is the Romanian-Hungarian border, the North-East limit is the Somes river and its eastern boundary is the line between Ciucea and Zalau towns (I. O. Berindei, Gr. P. Pop, 1972).

Three important geographical units are present in the above mentioned area: The Western Plain, The Western Hills and partially the Northern Mountains.

The mountain area is represented by the Bihor Mountains and a stream of less higher mountains, with altitudes around 1000 meters, as follows: Codru Moma, Pădurea Craiului and Muntele Ses.

The hilly area spreads around the mountains, and the hills are divided by large valleys and terraces. Their altitude decreases from 600 meters in the vicinity of the mountains, to 200 meters near the plain of the Cris rivers.

Along the main valleys, Barcău, Crisul Repede and Crisul Negru, there are seven levels of terraces, with an altitude decreasing towards the plain of the Cris rivers.

The first three terraces are slowly sinking, becoming part of the plain surface. In the Barcău and Crisul Repede valleys, the terraces are more developed on the left side of the valleys, while in the Crisul Negru valley, they are more developed on the right side.

The plain area consists of two distinct units:

The High Plain and The Low Plain (I. O. Berindei, Măhăra, 1971).

The High Plain is the consequence of the accumulation and erosion processes at the level of the terraces. The relief is in fact an inclined surface, starting at an altitude of 200 meters in the vicinity of the hills, until 110 meters altitude near the low plain.

The Low Plain is the result of the accumulation and erosion processes developed in the hydrographic systems of the Crasna, Erul, Barcău, Crisul Repede and Crisul Negru rivers. Their riverbeds are winding, unstable, and shallow and are not bordered by terraces. The easily flooded low areas of the valleys of Erul, Barcău, Crisul Repede and Crisul Negru are humid and partially muddy.

The damming of the main rivers and the excavation of canal systems have affected and in some cases completely destroyed the prehistoric sites.

The natural subsoil resources have been located and exploited since the prehistory. Various rocks, like: diorite, gritstones, rhyolite, granite, andesite, porphyry, shale and many others have been processed in numerous Neolithic settlements of the Bihor county. The deposits of bituminous sands from Derna and Suplacu de Barcău have been also known and used by the Neolithic communities for domestic purposes but also for painting the ceramics.

The local fauna and flora provided the vital supplies for the human communities starting with early antiquity.

I. The oldest archaeological finds of the Neolithic epoch from the Bihor county belong to the Starcevo-Cris culture. It had a primitive agricultural feature, and it was spread almost all over the country.

In the geographical area we are dealing with, bearers of this culture occupied the plain (Oradea, Sântandrei, Sânicolau Român, Fughiu, Santău Mic, Biharea, Valea lui Mihai, Văsad), but also the hilly region (Misca, Suplacu de Barcău, Râpa).

The settlements were established on rather low terraces (Suplacu de Barcău, Râpa, Biharea, Misca), or even on the river banks, being partially washed away later by the floods (Fughiu, Sântandrei).

The caves were used as temporary shelters (Vadu Crisului, Câmpani).

A number of 14 Neolithic settlements belonging to Starcevo-Cris culture have been discovered until now (Ignat, 1978).

Only three settlements have been systematically excavated: Râpa (Dumitrascu, 1972), Suplacu de Barcău (Ignat, 1978, 1983) and Fughiu (Ignat, 1979).

All the settlements located until now consist of a single habitational level, and all start their evolution with the 3rd phase of the culture (Lazarovici, 1979).

The dwellings are of three types (Ignat, 1983, 14-16).

1. Pit-houses
2. Semi-dug houses
3. Surface houses

These three house types have no chronological or evolution meaning, some of them being encountered in the same settlement, belonging to the same level.

The pit-houses, dug deep into the soil, are generally characteristic to all the Starcevo-Cris culture phases (Vlassa, 1976). Their presence in the North-West Romania presumably indicates the cultural similarity with the settlements from Transsilvania (Lazarovici-Maxim, 1995), Oltenia (Berciu, 1961) and Banat (Lazarovici, 1977). Such dwellings were not uncovered in Hungary.

The semi-dug houses are partially dug into the soil and they are very frequent even in Moldavia (Ursulescu, 1984).

The surface houses consist of a rectangular platform, covered with daub and ceramic accumulation. Such platform-houses are frequent in Transsilvania (Lazarovici-Maxim, 1995), Banat (Lazarovici, 1977, p. 20), Oltenia (Berciu, 1961), and Moldavia (Popusoi, 1980).

The lithic assemblage of these settlements is generally scarce and consists of polished stone chisels, flint and obsidian flakes, small scrapers and nuclei of the same rocks.

The ceramics

The usual ceramics has thick walls, and the clay is mixed with hashed vegetal components and rough sand. The fine ceramics is made of a homogenous clay, mixed with fine sand and fragments of mica. Some of the fine pots were covered with a red slip on both the inner and outer surfaces. The most common shapes are: **large storage vessels, legged-cups, globular dishes** with short rim, **bowls, frying-pans** with thick and short walls.

The ornamentation is typical for the Starcevo-Cris culture: pinched ornaments made with the nails, incisions in zigzag pattern, "spike-shaped" ornaments.

The plastic ornamentation generally consists of female statuettes, common for all the Starcevo-Cris culture. Most probably, they were used in connection with the magic and religious practices of the fertility cult.

The economy of the Early Neolithic communities was productive, based on primitive agriculture, as documented by the presence of large storage vessels, stamps of cereals in the pot walls and daub. Therefore, the settlement pattern is obviously sedentary.

The animal breeding is documented by house-keeping waste which indicates the presence of: *Bos taurus* L., domesticated *Sus scrofa*, *Capra hircus* L.

Hunting also completed the food reserve, as indicates the presence of Capreolus capreolus L. and wild boar bones.

The Middle Neolithic

II. In the North-west of Romania, the Starcevo-Cris culture was the local background for the development of the Middle Neolithic. Archaeological research indicates the existence of a civilization which produced painted ceramics, spreading on a large area, in Transsilvania (Ignat, 1987).

The great dimensions of its territory, not enough studied yet, are responsible for the appearance of local groups, on narrower geographical areas, which benefited from the influence of other neighboring groups or cultures.

Although there is no direct continuity from between the Starcevo-Cris painting and that of the Middle Neolithic, some of the steps are already confirmed.

At the present state of research, for the above mentioned area, we can establish three local groups with painted ceramics (Ignat, 1987), as follows:

1. The Sântandrei- Oradea- Iosia, Săcuieni, Vărzari group in West, North

and East of Crisana, spreading over the plains and hills (Ignat, 1977; 1987, p. 38-40; Comsa-Nanasi, 1971, 1972).

2. The group located in the Crisul Repede-Pestis narrow path of the Apuseni mountains (Ignat, 1973).

3. The Oradea-Salca group, situated at the eastern edge of Oradea, on the higher terrace of Crisul Repede.

The Sântandrei- Oradea- Iosia, Săcuieni, Vărzari group is connected to the painted ceramics groups from Transsilvania, but its shape and temper reveal a local evolution. The painted ceramics from Vărzari, belonging to a single feature - a pit - has analogies with the Piscolt group from North-west of Romania (Ignat, 1982; Lazarovici-Nemeti, 1983).

The painted ceramics from Vărzari is made of brown or brown-reddish clay, mixed with fine sand (for the coarse ceramics) and mixed with silt (for the fine ceramics). Both categories are covered with a fine slip, applied in a rather thick layer.

The painting, applied before the burning of the pots, consists of wide black stripes which follow the rim or the neck of the pot, wide stripes in angular or curved patterns bounded by fascicles of narrower stripes, parallel lines framed by other oblique lines.

There is only one pot ornamented with arches on fine slip, bordered by a dotted line. The interior of the arches is filled with pairs of curved lines. The pattern is distributed in eight simetrical metopas (Pl. II, fig. 4).

The group from the Crisul Repede-Pestis narrow path is known through the materials from the "Devent" cave, frequently mentioned in bibliography, but lacking the stratigraphical context . The archaeological excavations from Pestis "Piatra Jurcoaiei" also belong here (Ignat, 1973, p. 480). The above mentioned group is linked to the great cultural complex known as Cluj-Cheile Turzii-Lumea Nouă- clod.

As we know so far, both already mentioned groups used to bury the death in crouching position, accompanied by ceramic inventory. Two child burials from Săcuieni (Comsa, Nanasi, 1971) and Pestis (Ignat, 1973, p. 490) certify this theory.

The Oradea- Salca (Herpaly) group is better known due to extended excavations on the large settlements located eastwards of the Oradea town and on the Salca terrace (Ignat, 1981).

As compared to the whole "Herpaly group", the painted ceramics from Oradea-Salca has specific decorative motives (Pl. VI, fig. 1, 2, 5, 9; Pl. VII, fig. 1-4, 9,10). Other motives are rare (Pl. VIII, fig. 6-7, 11-13), while some are typical "Herpaly" (Pl. VI, fig. 3, 6; Pl. VII, fig. 6).

The fragmentary condition of the ceramic material does not allow a complete reconstruction of the painted ornaments. However, two legged cups display an almost complete ornamental pattern.

- Legged cup made of a brown, well burnt clay (Pl. X, fig. 1). A wide black stripe separates the leg, belly and rim. The painted area is divided into four registers ornamented with oblique angular lines, separated by a fascicle of straight lines, each being interrupted by two perforated knobs, inscribed in a square. In the next register, a zigzag thick line separates other oblique lines.

- Legged cup (Pl. X, fig. 1), also made of brown clay, has the rim, belly and bottom marked by wide black stripes; the upper part is decorated with angular lines and parallel lines, cut by other oblique lines. On this motif a plastic knob stands. The leg is also divided into four registers, ornamented with two distinct motives: criss-crossed oblique lines, cut by a vertical stripe which is bordered by three vertical lines, and small painted knobs. The other register is filled with net-like oblique lines, bordered by vertical lines and painted knobs.

The archaeologist Nicolae Vlăssă used to say "...the originating place of the Herpaly group seems to be somewhere near Oradea (the great settlements from Oradea-Salca and many small sites in the Bihor county) and in Hungary the sites belonging to this cultural group are located near the border with Crisana, and they are not to be found westward of the Debrecen surroundings" (Vlăssă, 1970).

The recent research highlighted the specific painted ornamentation of the Oradea- Salca group which are partially exported to the neighbouring areas, and so confirmed the intuitive theory of the lamented researcher Nicolae Vlăssă.

The zoomorphic idols uncovered at Oradea- Salca have analogies at Turdas (Vlăssă, 1970). They stand as proof of the Turdas influence, which is quite normal, because this group is related with the "Lumea Nouă" cultural unit, and elements belonging to the last mentioned group were discovered in Turdas settlements, in the Vinca B level.

The common feature of these groups which make painted pots is the fact that they use a black, bitumen paint, which is extracted even today at Derna and Suplacu de Barcău (Ignat, 1987, p.46). The Late Neolithic Suplacu group originates in the above mentioned groups (Ignat, 1988).

III. The Late Neolithic starts with the Suplacu cultural group, which continues the local Neolithic entity and finally becomes the generator of the Aeneolithic in this geographical area.

The main specific features of this cultural group, as internal chronology, spreading, connections with surrounding cultures, have been already established (Ignat, 1998).

Synthesising the scientific data, the following ideas can be highlighted;

- the following house types have been uncovered:

- a. Pit- houses, belonging to the 1st level

- b. Surface houses

- b1 - simple daub accumulations with burnt, beaten floors

b2 - houses with daub platform placed above a well beaten layer of pebble

b3 - houses with daub platform laying on a structure of chopped wooden planks

The absence of the post-holes is certainly related to the technique of building the house on a wooden platform.

– The eponymous settlement of Suplacu de Barcău is the first settlement in Romania and neighboring territories specialized in processing polished stone tools for local use, but also for trade with other communities.

– The typology of these tools (506 complete pieces and 426 fragmentary) can be used for the analysis of similar tools from other sites (Ignat, 1981-82).

New data improved the knowledge of polished stone tools processing, leading to the reconstruction of all the techniques (Ignat, 1989).

– The ceramics - as main vestige for studying the Neolithic, has been classified according to typology, to stylistic and statistic criteria. The future discoveries will be easily gathered into synoptic tables, created for a better comparative research.

The very numerous painted ceramics differs from that of the Middle Neolithic, both through ornamental patterns and pot shapes.

– In the Suplac group settlements (Suplacu de Barcău, Tăsad), the first cremation burials dating from the Romanian Neolithic have been uncovered (Ignat, 1985, 1987).

Later on, new discoveries of the Suplacu group and also earlier discoveries (Lazarovici - Maxim, 1995, p.120) have revealed the fact that cremation was practiced in North-west of Romania, starting with Neolithic.

The economy of these communities is similar with that of the Iclod group and other Late Neolithic groups, based on same food supply, craftsmanship and industrial activities. The productive nature of the economy is revealed by animal breeding, agriculture, pottery, but especially by the polished stone industry.

Hunting and fishing were practiced on a large scale, as palaeofauna analysis indicates.

Cultural and chronological connections

The discoveries of Suplacu are part of a much larger cultural complex, known as the Carpathian- Pannonian Late Neolithic. Its origins derives from the Middle (or Developed) Neolithic elements, which preceded it in the region. The above mentioned cultural complex appeared soon after the extinction of the Devent cave and Pestis genetic area, and also the slightly different materials from Varzari.

The Suplacu group painting has sometimes a Middle Neolithic tradition.

The ornamental incisions originate from the great cultural complex gravitating around the Apuseni mountains, known as the Cluj – Cheile Turzii – Lumea Noua – Iclod (CCTLNI) complex, and has analogies in the Tisa I culture. The

“Tisa-like “ elements are specific to quadrangular pots, made of a clay mixed with sand and organic components, which generically belong to the late phase of the Tisa I culture. As the local chronology is concerned, the Suplac group is connected to the IC phase of the Tisa culture.

In the late phase of the Suplac group (III B), influences of the Oradea-Salca (Herpaly) group and of the Petresti culture occur. Yet, the most dominant influences of the Petresti culture affect the antropomorphic idols of the Suplac group.

Gheorghe Lazarovici and Zoia Kalmar from the National Museum of Transsilvania in Cluj-Napoca have prepared a table of the statistic seriation for the incised ornaments:

Stațiuni/motive/decorative	LC	EH	KO	LG	LJ	LL	OH	OK	OL	LA	OM	14
Cluj-Ștefan cel mare	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iclod, zona B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Zau de Câmpie-Sat	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suplacu de Barcău - Corău I	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0
Tăuilaș	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	0
Pața	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Turdaș	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Suplacu de Barcău - Corău II	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Zau de Câmpie- Grădinița	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table. Seriation of the incised ornaments (rows – related sites; columns – ornament according to Iclod catalogue.

The analysis of the whole Suplac group archaeological material suggests an evolution of it towards the Tisapolgar culture of the Aeneolithic.

The end of the Suplac cultural group is accelerated due to the emergence of the Petresti culture elements which induce cultural motions on a large area, concluded with the genesis of the Tisapolgar culture (Kalmar, 1990-1991). The ending of the painted pots cultures in Neolithic Transsilvania coincides with the development of the most beautiful painted ceramics, belonging to the Cucuteni culture, in the Oriental Carpathes and Moldavia (Nitu, 1987).

These contributions to the knowledge of the evolution of human communities in the Neolithic of NorthWest Romania are validated and highlighted through the most recent archaeological discoveries, coming from numerous sites belonging to the same cultural horizon.

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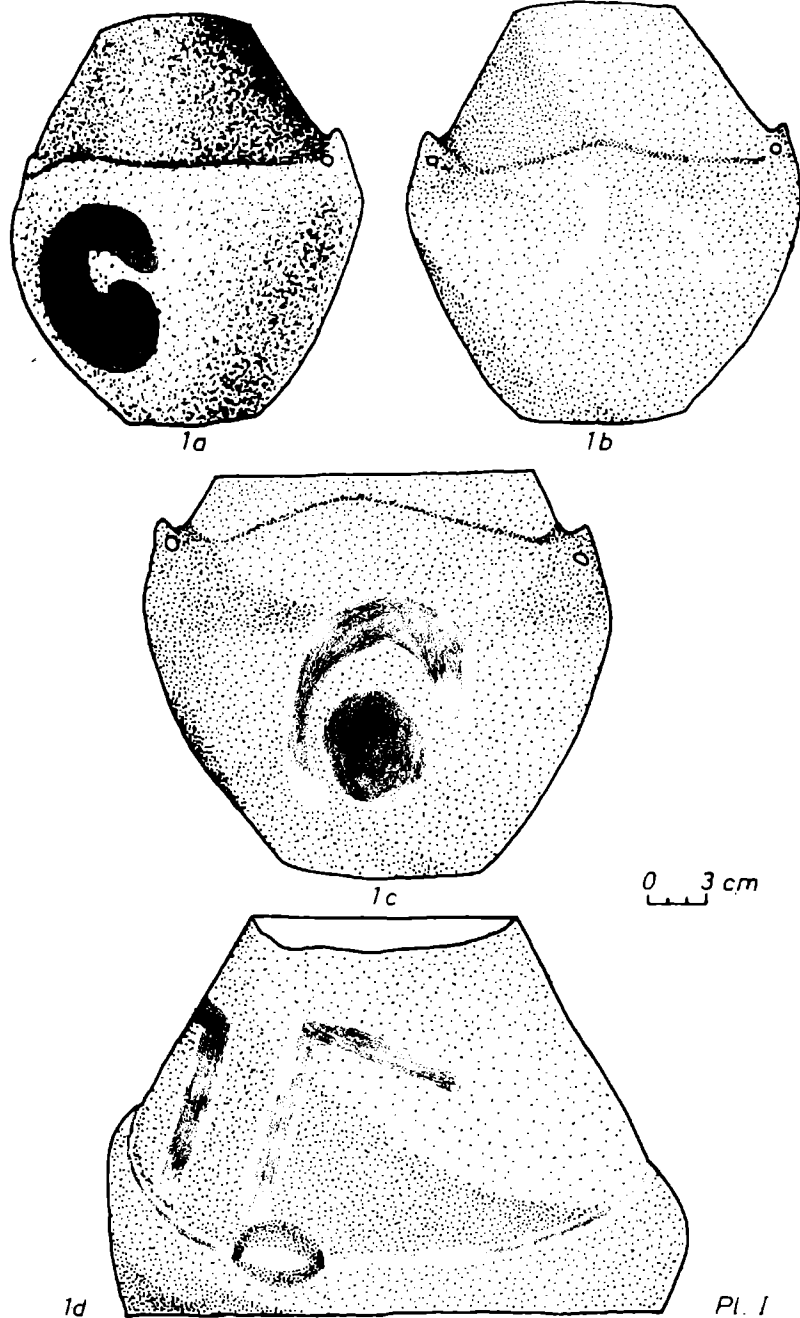


Table I. Ceramic pot from the child grave of Pestis, detail of the painting tracks.

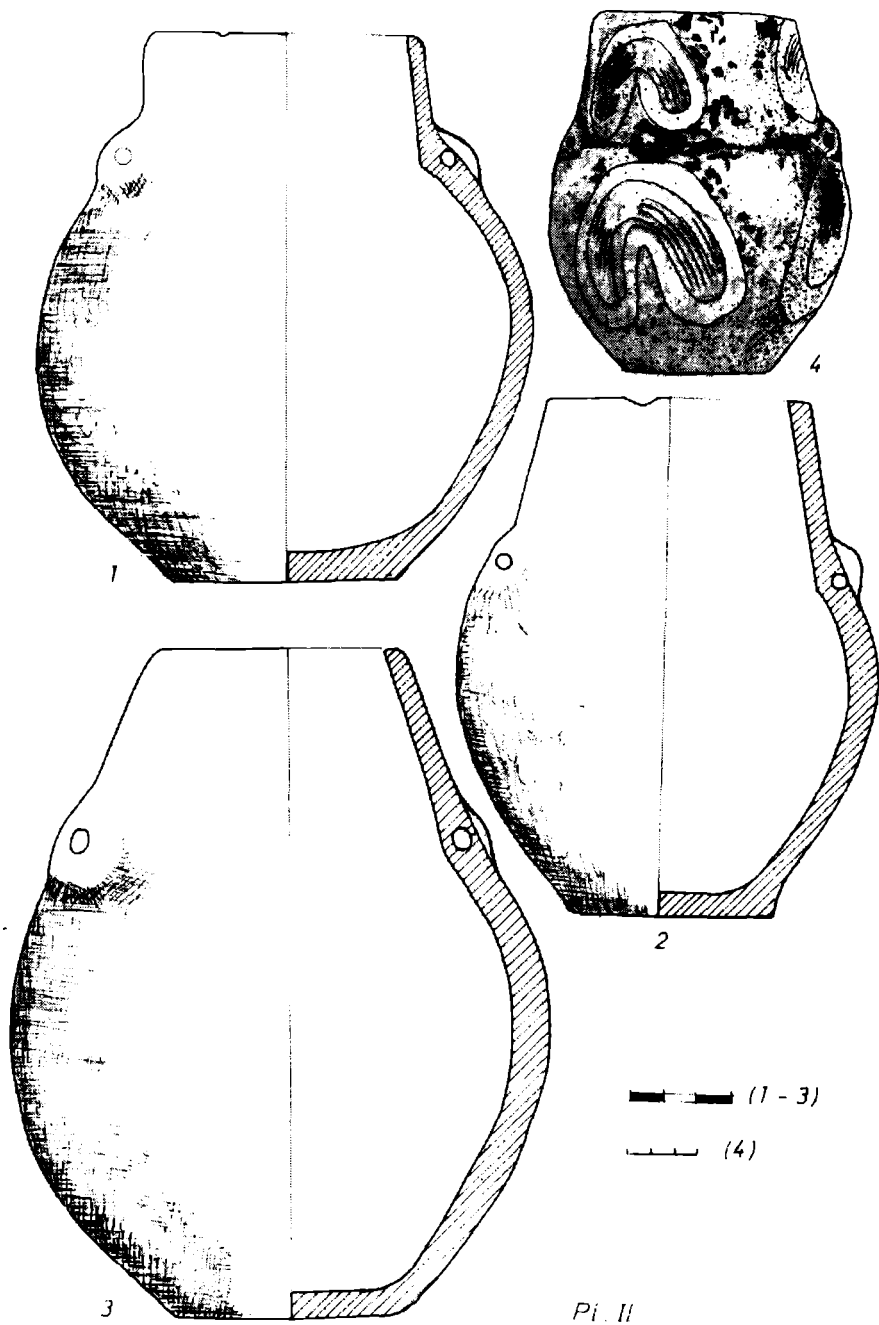
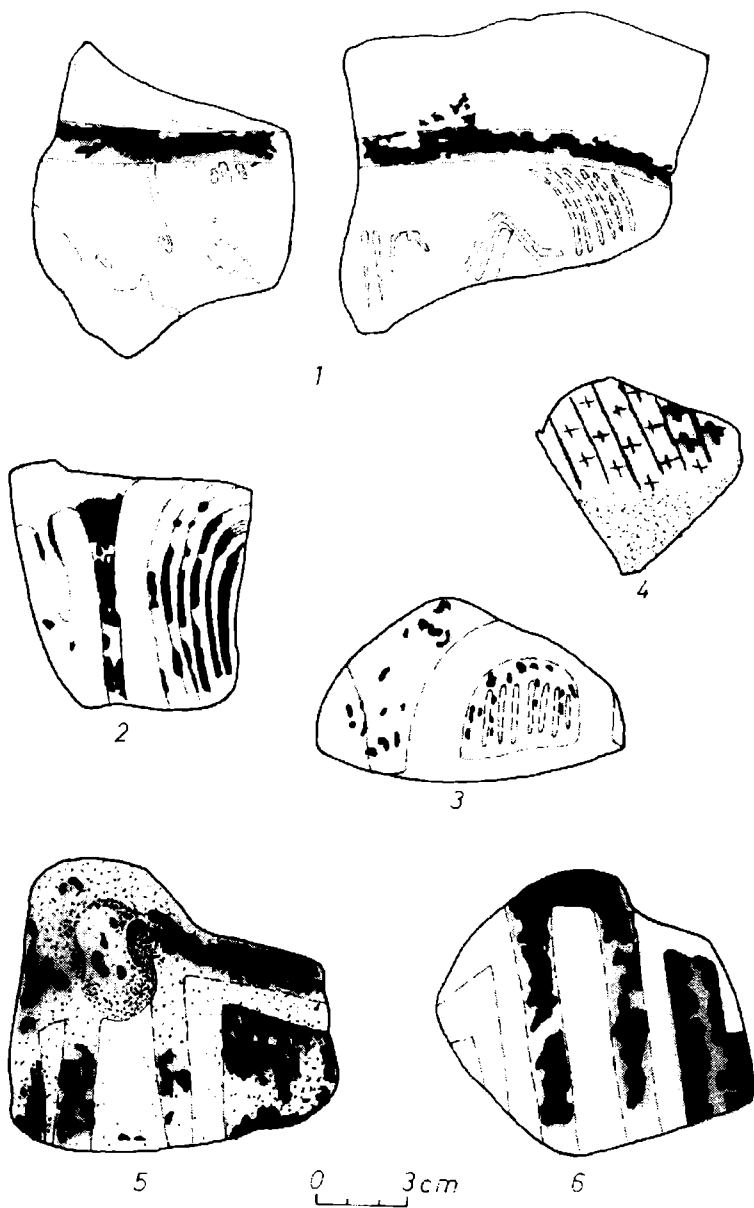


Table II. Varzari, pit nr. 1, ceramic shapes with painting tracks, fig. 1-3; painted pot, fig. 4.



Pl III

Table III-V. Varzari, pit nr. 1, painted sheards.

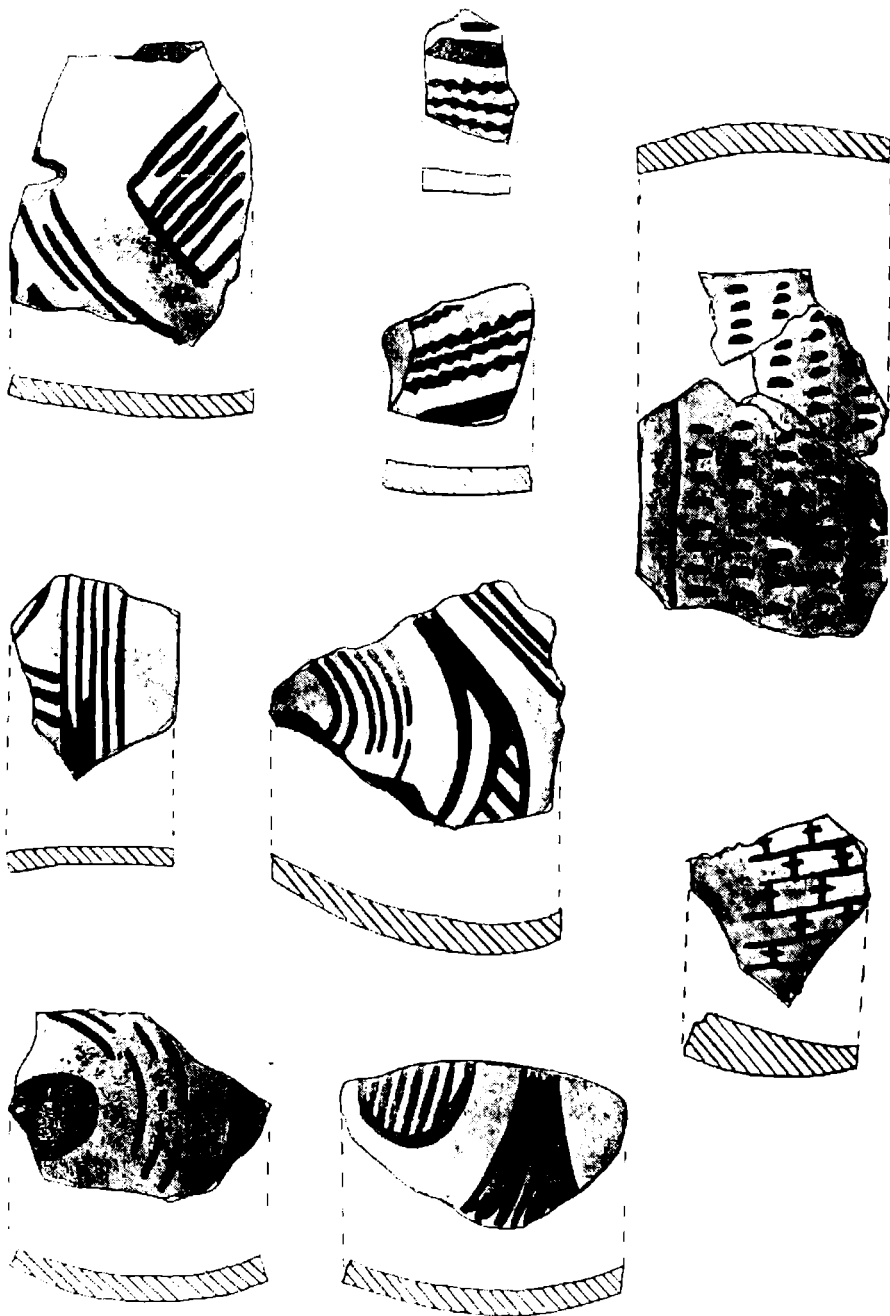
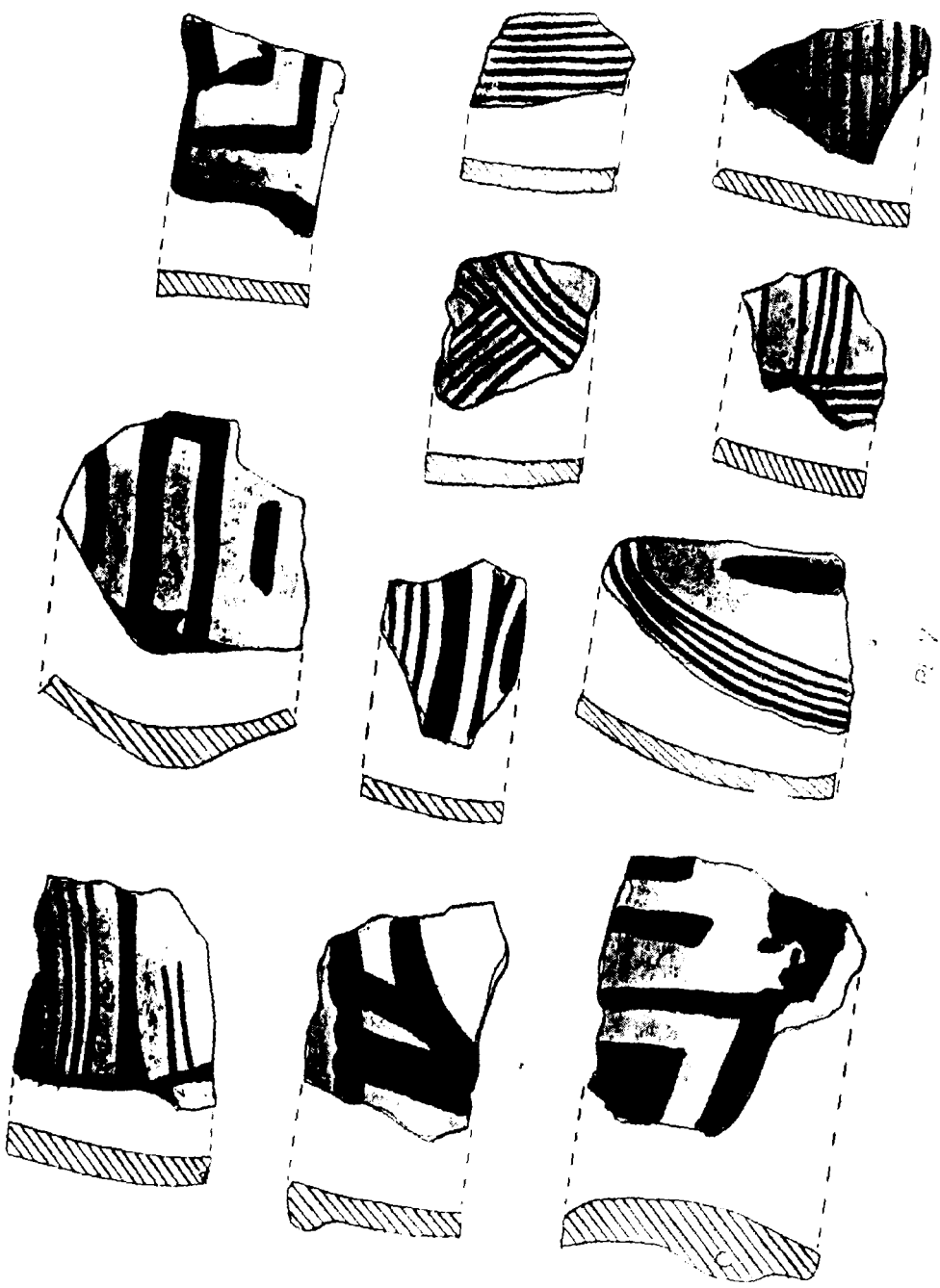
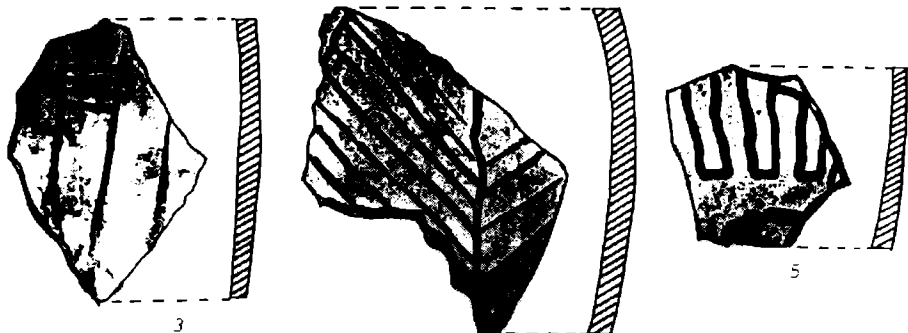


Fig. 10



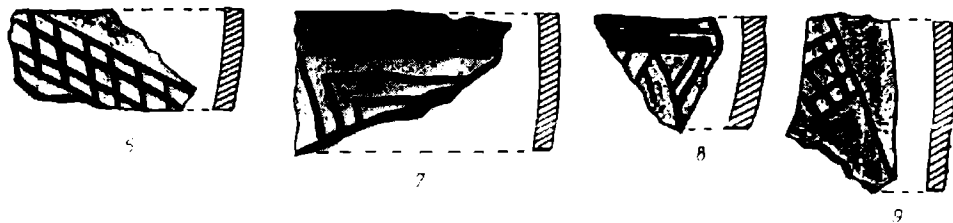


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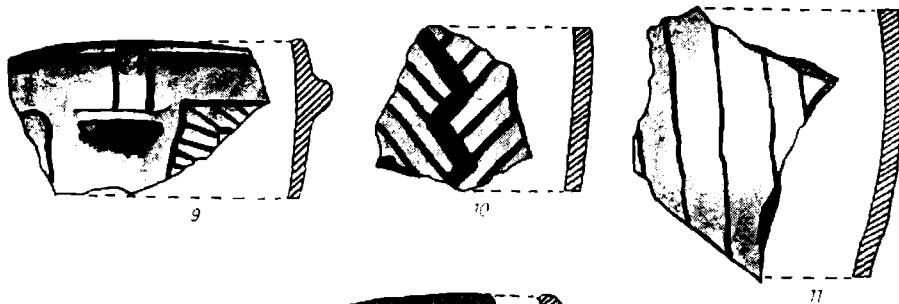
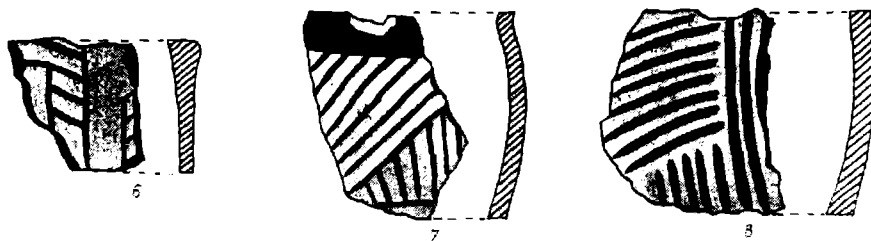
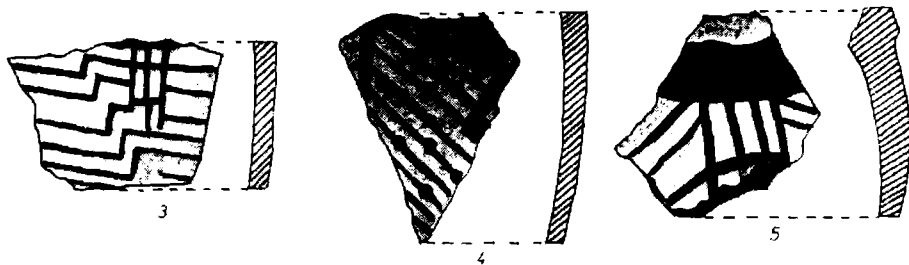
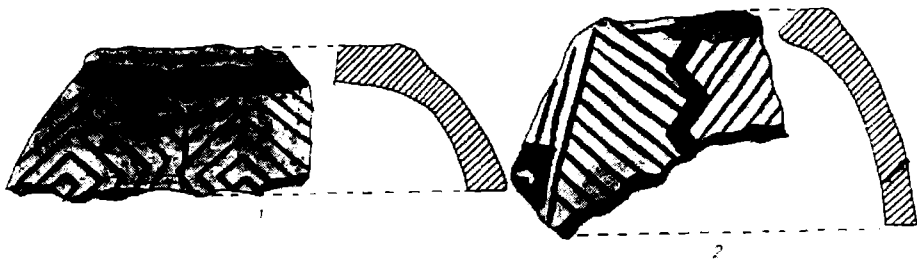
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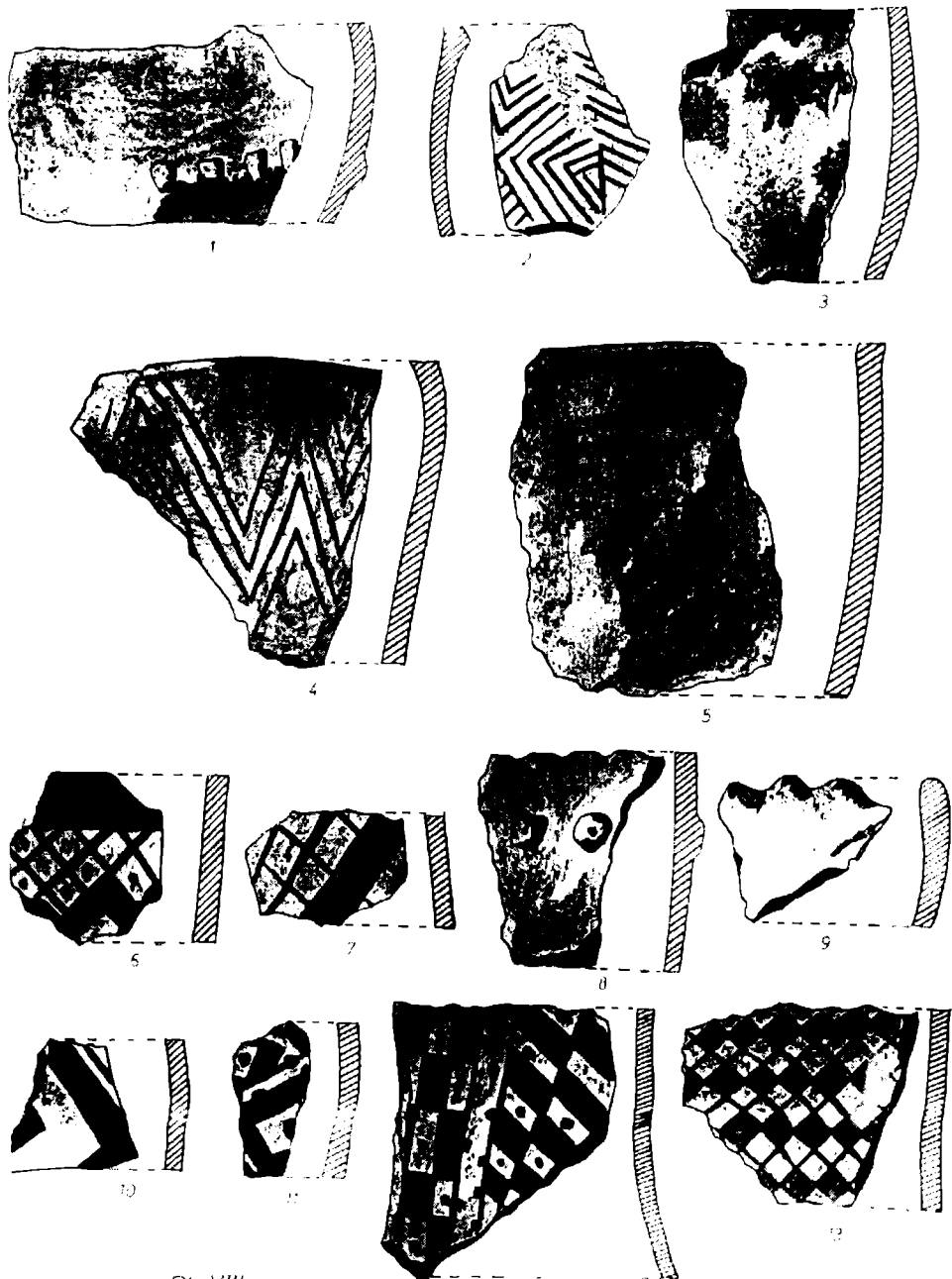
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Pl VI

Table VI. Painted ceramics of Oradea-Salca type (fig. 1-2,5,9; Herpaly type fig. 3,6).



Pl VII



Pl VIII

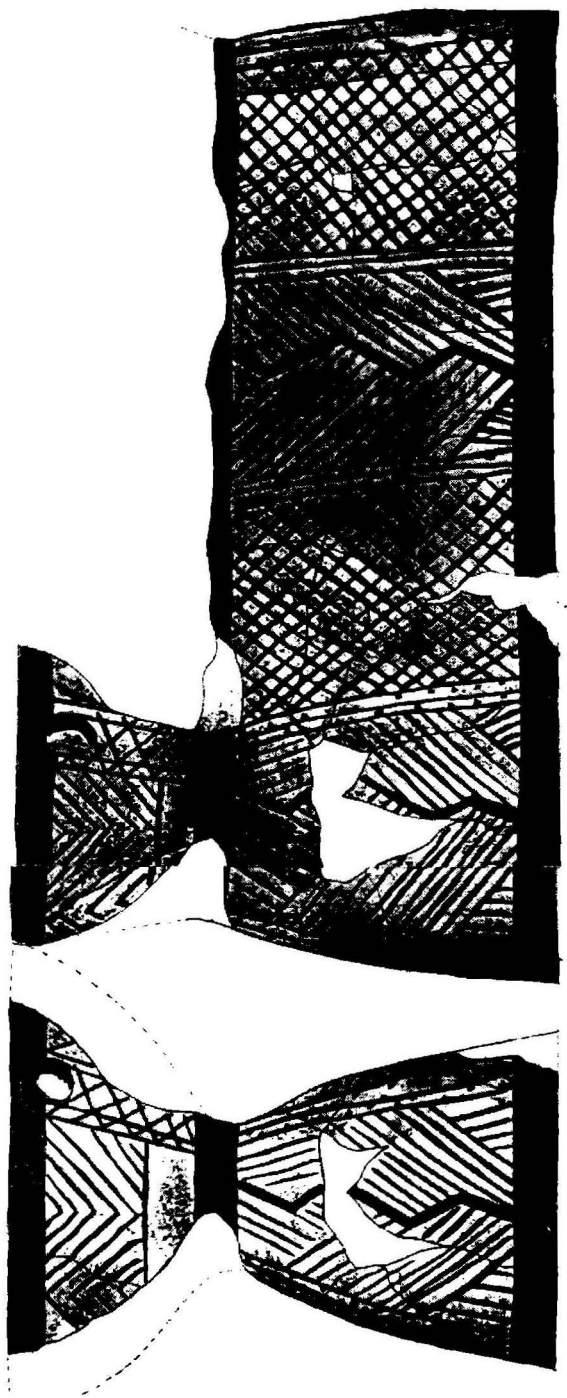
Table VIII. Painted ceramics from Oradea-Salca, with lesser frequent decorations.



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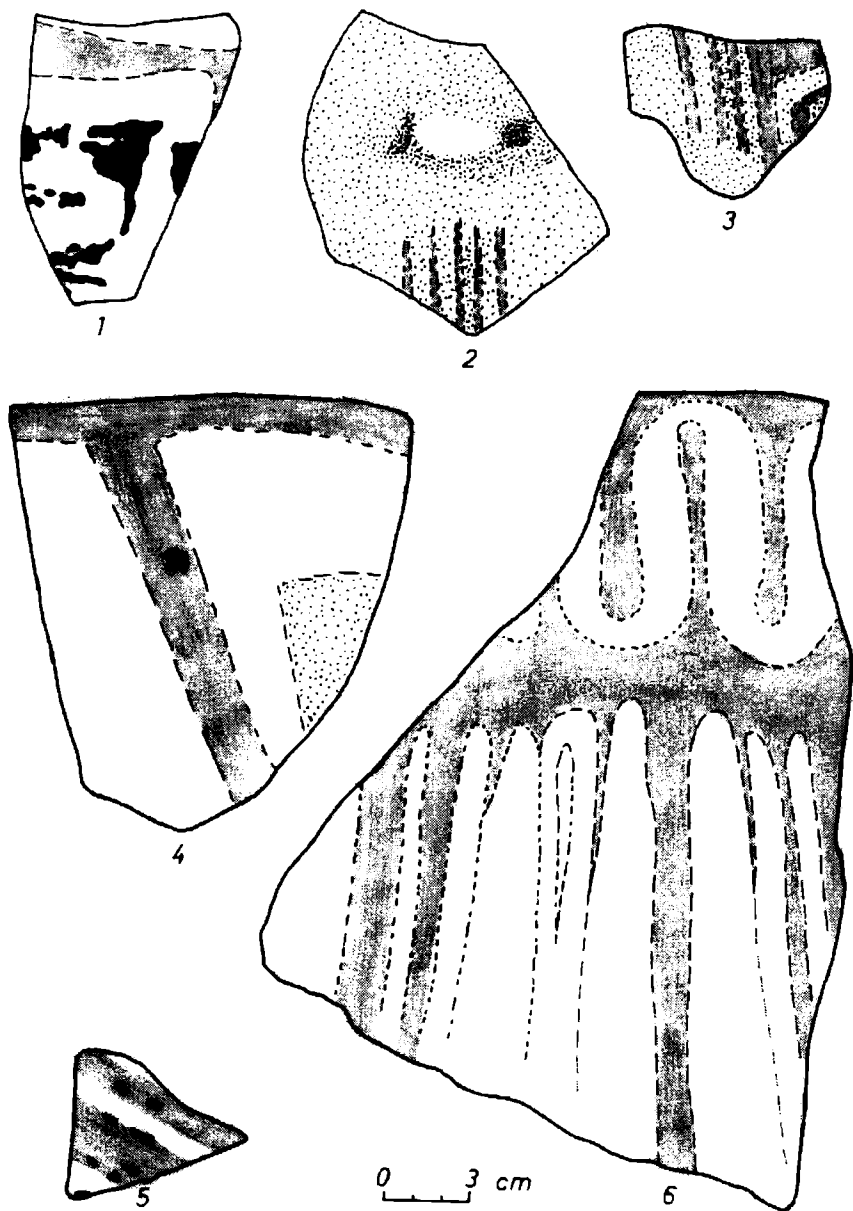
Pl IX

Table IX-X. Pedestal- bowls from Oradea –Salca.



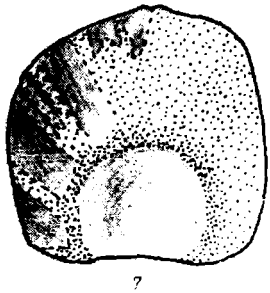
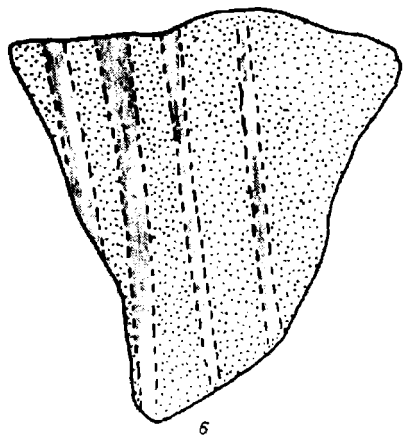
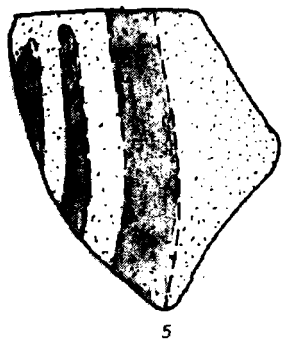
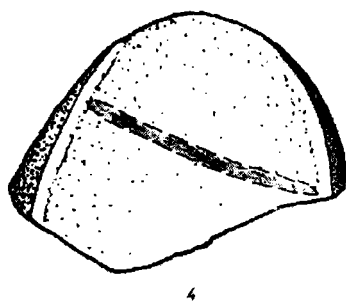
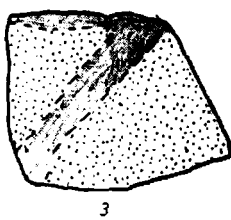
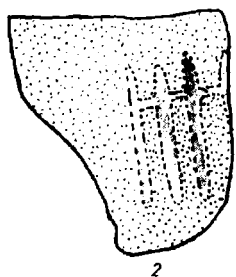
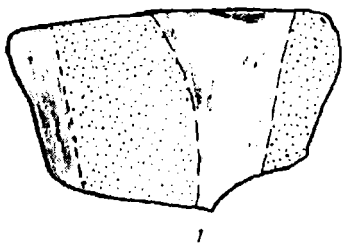
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Pl X



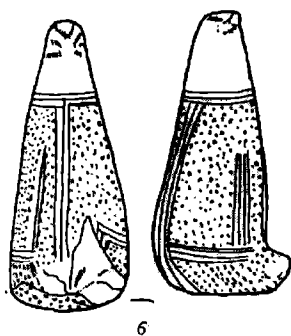
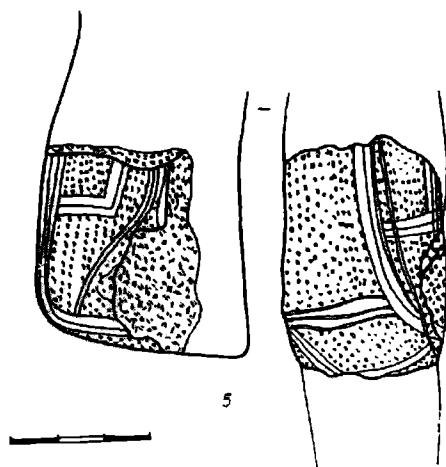
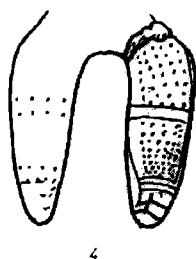
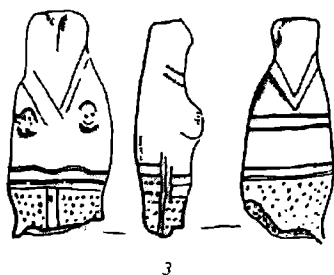
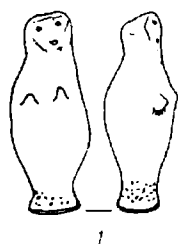
Pl XI

Table XI-XII. Painted ceramics belonging to the Suplacu de Barcău cultural group.



0 3 cm

Pl. XII



Pl. XIII

Table XIII. Anthropomorph idols belonging to the Suplacu de Barcău cultural group, with Petresti culture influences.

