

# THE QUESTION OF THREE JUGS – A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF GRAVE GOODS IN THE CREMATION BURIAL RITUAL

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*Keywords:* Viminacium, necropolis, grave good, jugs, Mala Kopašnica–Sase

*Cuvinte cheie:* Viminacium, necropolă, bun funerar, ulcioare, Mala Kopašnica–Sase

Research of necropolises from any period of prehistory or history, apart from the analysis of the type of grave, the type of burial and anthropological remains, also includes the analysis of the grave inventory. The objects found in the grave are, in a way, a mirror of the life not only of the deceased but also of the community that buried him. Therefore, their study can shed light on many aspects of the life of the deceased, such as gender, occupation, social status, ethnicity, or religion. It can also testify about contacts with other communities, about the exchange or import of goods from near or far countries.

As researchers of Viminacium, we were confronted with an extremely large number of graves from the Roman period. Rescue excavations of the necropolis, which began in the 1970s and continue to this day, have brought to light over 14,000 graves. At first, the southern necropolises were researched, the wide area to the south of both the city and the legionary fortress. These excavations were the first major salvage project at Viminacium due to the construction of the Kostolac B thermo-electric power plant. From the impressive number of close to 13,000 graves only the first 1,000 were published in two volumes<sup>1</sup>. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, excavations of the necropolis continued, but now to the east of the legionary fortress and, at some point, again to the south, as a result of the construction of the third block of power plant (Plate 1). Our teams returned to what remained unexcavated on the southern cemeteries, to complete and give the final picture of this part of the graveyard, since up to 95% of the area has been completely excavated in the last several years.

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<sup>1</sup> Zotović, Jordović 1990; Korać, Golubović 2009.

As it is known so far from historical sources that Viminacium was a municipium and then a colony, the strategic and administrative centre of the Roman province of Upper Moesia (*Moesia Superior*). The legionary fortress, settlement, and necropolis were founded on flat terrain, in a meander of the river Mlava, near the present-day village of Stari Kostolac. Besides the permanent garrison of the legionary fortress, the population consisted of soldier's families, immigrants from Italy and the Romanized provinces, people from Hellenized areas, immigrants from Syria and, of course, the indigenous population of Illyrian and Thracian origin<sup>2</sup>.

During several centuries of intensive life at this area, next to the settlement and the legionary fortress, several necropolises were founded, in which members of the diverse population of ancient Viminacium were buried. At the beginning of the excavations in the 1970s, researchers believed that the necropolises were distributed, according to Roman custom, in the suburbs along the communications leading to the city, but recent research shows that burials took place very close to settlements, at the edges of *fossa* in front of defensive walls, and even next to houses and villas that were still being lived in.

The Viminacium necropolis belongs to the type of bi-ritual necropolis, which means that cremation and inhumation were in use during the same period. The ratio between cremation and inhumation changed over the first three centuries, until by the fourth century inhumation completely prevailed.

In this paper, we will deal with the inventory of graves with cremation of the so-called Mala Kopašnica–Sase type (MKS), which represent the most common type of grave with cremation at the Viminacium necropolis. This type occurs in a large number of necropolises from the Roman period in Moesia, Pannonia and Dacia, and in Upper Moesia, and is considered an autochthonous burial form<sup>3</sup>.

In archaeology, this form of grave with cremation has, for decades, aroused great interest, considering that this burial custom spread over a wide area of eastern Dalmatia, south-eastern Pannonia, Upper Moesia, and parts of Dacia and Thrace in the east. It is a typical form of cremation grave that appears in the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Its beginning is associated with the end of the first century in all the provinces in which it occurred. It usually lasted until the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, with the exceptions being only a few graves dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. At the necropolises of Viminacium they are generally dated from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

It is around the characteristic red-grey burning of pit sides that several

<sup>2</sup> Mirković 1986, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Jovanović 1984, 100.

<sup>4</sup> Jovanović 2000, 209.

theories have been developed. According to one, the burned sides and bottom are the result of burning the body of the deceased on the spot, and according to another, they are the result of lustration, ie the ritual cleaning of the grave space with fire<sup>5</sup>. The burned sides were also interpreted as additional burning of the remains of the deceased in the grave itself or the placing of more hot remains from the stake into the grave. However, it turned out to be unlikely that hot remains from the pyre could burn the bottom and sides of the pit so evenly to a layer 5 cm thick. A few years ago, following doubts about the interpretation of the burned sides, an experiment was performed at Viminacium. The question was whether the cremation was performed on a common pyre at the cemetery, an *ustrinum*, or above, that is, in the grave pit itself, a *bustum*. The *bustum* variant of this burial type has been documented in all provinces and often represents a dominant variant. It is easily identified by the vast amount of ash that fills the entire burial pit. On the other hand, a number of researchers supported the opinion that it was at an *ustrinum* and that the remains of the cremated person were collected from the pyre and laid in the grave together with the grave goods. To this variant of burial belong all those graves that lack ash in any considerable quantity and where the grave was filled with clean earth. The results of the experiment coincided with this opinion<sup>6</sup>. From the results of the experiment, three phases were recognised during the burial rite, which included first the preparation of the grave pit (including the cleaning of the ash and firing remains from the pit), then the cremation of the deceased person at the common pyre and, finally, the placing of cremated remains into the burial pit, along with grave-goods that were not burned during the funeral pyre, mainly pottery and, occasionally, glass vessels, etc<sup>7</sup>. This fact that a number of grave goods were laid into the grave clean and without being burnt at the pyre supported this conclusion. The experiment also pointed out the illogicality and partially uneconomical separation of rituals on one side and the solution to the problem of the distribution of large quantities of wood across the cemetery, on the other (large quantities of wood were stockpiled on one location). During the excavation of the southern necropolis in the 1980s, the structure that confirms the theory of separate rituals was investigated, i.e. the results of experiments that prove that the ritual of cleaning the tomb was separated from the cremation of the deceased in a common pyre<sup>8</sup>.

The question of the origin of this type of tomb is still a dilemma for many researchers, many of whom have, so far, expressed different points of view.

<sup>5</sup> Jovanović 2000, 205.

<sup>6</sup> Tapavički-Ilić-Mrdjić 2015, 492.

<sup>7</sup> Tapavički-Ilić-Mrdjić 2015, 493.

<sup>8</sup> Golubović, Korać, 2008, 109–118.

Starting with Sagy who believed that the first tombs of this type appeared in the Rhineland and, as an original form, considered graves from the Late Iron Age with two levels and connected them with the Celtic tradition<sup>9</sup>, through to Srejšović and Baum who supported this thesis<sup>10</sup>, and then O. Floka, K. Horedt, M. Makrea, and M. Rusu, who considered that these were autochthonous, Daco-Gothic grave forms<sup>11</sup>. Some researchers have refrained from expressing ethnicity. Garašanin and Zotović started from the assumption that these graves appear in large numbers in the Dardanian territory, which was viewed as an Illyrian border area<sup>12</sup>.

In this paper, we deal primarily with grave goods, i.e. those graves that contain three jugs, which were considered common inventory in graves of this type. That information was provided by the first researchers and so they were generally described, guided by the experience of their own excavations. Considering that the research of the Viminacium necropolises has so far yielded the largest number of these graves, we wanted to check how often and in which combinations the three jugs appear. Mala Kopašnica-Sase type graves have been found in all the Viminacium necropolises explored so far. The size of the settlement and its duration determined the size of the necropolis, which, in each case, was adapted to the configuration of the terrain and therefore there was no strictly established rule on the internal organisation of the necropolis itself. In the southern necropolises, the graves are densely arranged, often intersecting and overlapping, while in the eastern ones this is less common. In the graves with inventory, the standard set of finds consisted of lamps, coins, ceramic, and glass vessels, while jewellery, toiletries, medical instruments, caskets, keys, seashells, or tools were adapted depending on the material condition or occupation (Plate 2a, 2b). They provide us with valuable information about how the inhabitants of ancient Viminacium lived. Generally, for Roman burials it is considered that the sex of the deceased person can be determined by the grave goods, by having fibulae, jewellery, brooches and hairpins in female graves and a set of weapons in male graves<sup>13</sup>. Imported items placed in the graves indicate not only trade but also the exchange of ideologies, which are strengthened by rituals.

Among the inventory in the tombs of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type, the artefacts that burned together with the deceased at the pyre can be distinguished from those that were laid later into the pit. Clothes, parts of clothing, jewellery, coins, and glass were burned with the deceased. Parts of clothing and jewellery

<sup>9</sup> Sagy 1954, 61–123.

<sup>10</sup> Srejšović, Baum 1959, 23–54.

<sup>11</sup> Floka 1965, 163–193; Horedt 1979, 5; Protase 1971.

<sup>12</sup> Zotović 1984, 166.

<sup>13</sup> Theuvs 2009, 287.

were buttons, bone and bronze needles, etc. Very often, wooden coffins burned on the pyre, leaving deformed parts of bronze or iron fittings, handles and nails. After the collected remains from the pyre were placed, other artefacts, most often ceramic vessels, lamps, and balsamaria, would be placed into grave pit itself. The artefacts themselves could be placed in different parts of the graves. When it comes to graves with two levels, the grave goods are usually in the lower level, rarer the shorter sides, and rarest is them having been layed on the longer sides.

Vessels that appear as grave goods can be divided into three groups:

- 1) types specifically designed for use in funerals;
- 2) vessels that were in the grave in secondary use, forms that occur much more often in other cultural strata;
- 3) vessels in secondary use as a building material from which the level of the grave was built, or the entire inner level or cremated bones were covered<sup>14</sup>.

The discovered Craft Centre<sup>15</sup> in the area of the Viminacium necropolis at the toponymous Pećine produced less than one-third of all types found in graves of the Mala Kopašnica-Sase type. It is possible that in the vicinity of other necropolises that have not been fully explored, craft centres intended for the production of vessels for putting into the graves of both cremated and inhumed deceased will be discovered. One of the forms that were certainly purposely made exclusively as grave good is a jug (Table 1.1) of medium refined clay of a red baked colour, with the outer surface painted with shades of red that are then rubbed. This form occurs in all investigated necropolises, and the most common occurrence of three jugs in one grave is related to this variant. The colouring of these jugs played a more decorative than functional role. In most cases, this colour is very unstable and easy to wipe off, but there are also specimens that do not show any traces of paint. A few more types of jugs (Table 1.2–4) are made of clay of the same composition and are presumed to have been made exclusively as grave goods. It is these types that appear in combination with the previous one. Chemical analyses show that the baking temperature of these jugs did not exceed 850° C<sup>16</sup>. Their visible porosity could be attributed to the large scale, but not excessive-quality workmanship. The volume of the jug fits into the Roman measured values, which again indicates a certain standardisation.

Jugs are the form that is most often represented as a grave good in Mala Kopašnica-Sase type graves. They are found in all variants, and from one to nine pieces (*Aquincum*) can be found in a grave<sup>17</sup>. They were also used in everyday

<sup>14</sup> Golubović 2017, 45–52.

<sup>15</sup> Raičković 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Raičković 2012, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Topal 1993, 194–195.

life, but there are several types that are represented in graves and rarely found in settlements. This indicates the fact that they were purposely produced for the needs of the necropolis and burials. The situation of the appearance of three jugs in one grave has been discussed by several authors who agree that it was probably derived from the need to provide the deceased with three important types of fluids (water, wine and oil), although whether they were mixed in a ritual that took place over the grave remains unclear. The most common form of jug that could be considered one of the “graveyard” types is (Table 1.1) with a short neck, a banded handle, and of spherical form. These jugs were made of medium refined red baking clay with the outer surface painted in red tones. Many specimens of different sizes have been found. Common for them is their frequent appearance in groups of three, or at least two, where there is a third jug of a very similar-looking or trefoil opening. Among them, there are a large number with trefoil openings, in which there are several variants of opening profiles (harder or weaker “pinched” rim) narrower or wider neck and recipient, which can be placed high, in the middle of the vessel, or low, or “baggy” (Table 1.2–6; Table 2.7). They are mostly made of medium refined clay of red baked colour, with the outer surface painted in shades of red.

The next group of jugs represents a shape with a biconical form and a vertical banded grooved handle, while their rim can be differently profiled. Two variants can be observed, in which one with a spherical form has a short wide neck and a wide opening (Table 2.8), while the other has a narrowed neck (Table 2.9). A group with a banded rim, a cylindrical neck, and spherical or ovoid form often occurs. The inner edge of the rim is mostly grooved (Table 2.10–11), and the handle is shorter in specimens with an ovoid form, and longer with a spherical one (Table 2.12), but it always starts at the neck and ends at the widest part of the body of the jug. They are made of medium refined clay and their outer surface is usually painted in shades of red, but sometimes it is only polished. This is a form of jug that often occurs in a combination of several of the same, in one grave. They are most numerous in the necropolises at Viminacium but are also found in Aquincum and Dacia, where they are dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Only a few types of jugs had some decoration on them in the form of incisions and grooves along the rim or a ribbed neck and belly. It can be concluded that no special attention was paid to decorating this form. In the necropolises where all types were found, they were determined as a product of local workshops.

Earlier authors concluded that the inventory in graves of this type is the same in all researched necropolises throughout the Empire, but it could still be necessary to make some corrections. It is certain that these graves are typical of urban necropolises and that they probably represent a combination of



indigenous and Roman practice. However, in the wide area where graves of the type Mala Kopašnica-Sase appears, various ethnic communities lived, whose influence differed from province to province. In some necropolises where a large number of graves (Intercisa) have been explored, there is a complete lack of some forms that appear in large numbers on others (plates). At the Viminacium necropolis, taking into account all that has thus far been explored, as the most common grave good, considering all the examined material (over 8,500 vessels), which is classified into 11 functional forms and over 220 types, bowls are more common in variants, followed by pots, and then jugs. Numerically, the most common are jugs, followed by pots, with bowls only in third place. Material from the Viminacium necropolis had a great influence on these statistics. This space also provided some completely new types for which closer parallels could not be found, and since it was confirmed as a large workshop complex and with the results obtained by chemical analysis, these types can be defined as its specific products. Also, anthropological analyses performed at some sites led the authors to the conclusion that the appearance of three jugs may be related to a deceased male. This conclusion does not, however, concur with the review of the latest material, as well as with the performed of new analyses, and in this case, too, there was a large percentage of residues that could not be fully determined. The appearance of three jugs also occurs with inhumed deceased (even in child graves), so it is necessary to link this grave good to the ritual itself, to the desire of those who remain to provide the deceased with everything needed, even after death, rather than to a specific ethnicity.

The arrangement of the three jugs in the tomb is not always the same. There are graves where the jugs are lowered directly to the lower level next to the cremated bones, as well as combinations with the placement of the jugs in the corners or grouping them in one place. Statistical analysis in this case does not give great results and it can only be stated that in the case of the appearance of three jugs, 78% are jugs of the same type. In other percentages, there are combinations where two are of the same type (18%) or all three are different. After analyzing all Mala Kopašnica-Sase type graves from all the Viminacium necropolises in which three jugs were found, it was concluded that they occur in 12% of the total number of graves, i.e. they were found in 272 graves out of 2,348. Considering the researched craft centre and the production of jugs dedicated to the funeral ritual, one would also expect their larger total share in the grave inventories. It is also possible that a large number of looted and damaged graves originally had jugs in their inventory.

Although we have grouped the grave goods that appear with three jugs for the entire Viminacium necropolis (Chart 1, Fig. 1), we have also given an overview of each necropolis separately (Charts 2–6, Fig. 2–6).

As a percentage, at the level of the entire Viminacium necropolis, the highest probability is that with three jugs in the Mala Kopašnica–Sase type graves, one will come across a lamp (65.44%), followed by a bronze coin (54.78%). Jugs then appear in combination with other ceramic forms, namely pots (41.18%), bowls (25.37%), incense censers (12.0%), plates (11.40%) and beakers (9.93%). Glass vessels occur in 27.94% of the graves. Other inventory consists of various iron objects (strigils, parts of casket formwork, keys, locks or shoe nails), and included under the category of miscellaneous are parts of costumes, jewellery, cosmetic and medical instruments, and parts of bronze caskets that, in 44.49% of graves with three jugs, indicate gender, social status, and/or occupation. The role of the three jugs in the funeral ritual, regardless of their frequent appearance, can still only be speculated upon. Whether there were three sacred liquids in them and what those liquids were, and whether they were poured out in a burial ritual, is not yet known to us. An analysis of the possible internal content has not yet been undertaken but, hopefully, it will occur in the near future, which will enable us to shed light on the role of the three jugs in the funeral cult.



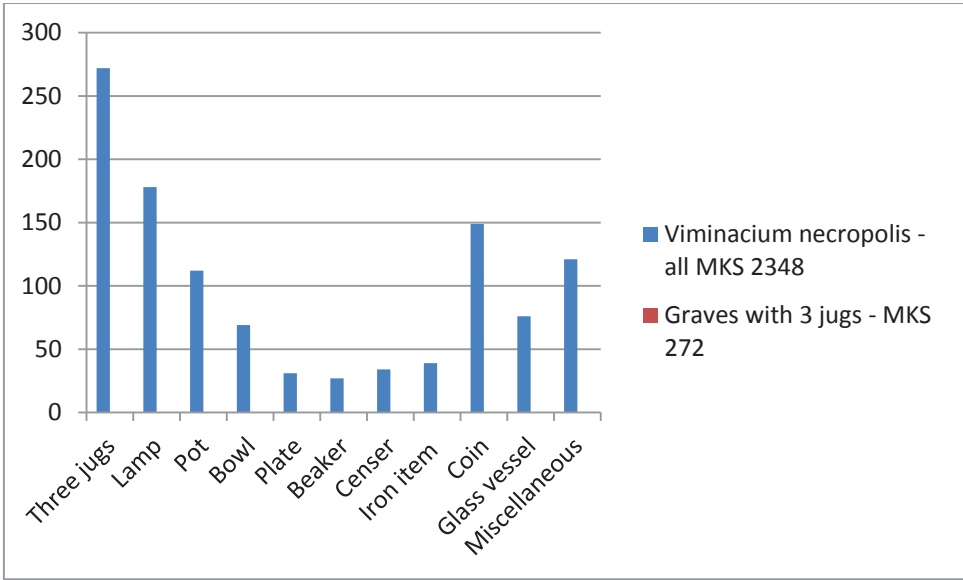


Chart 1

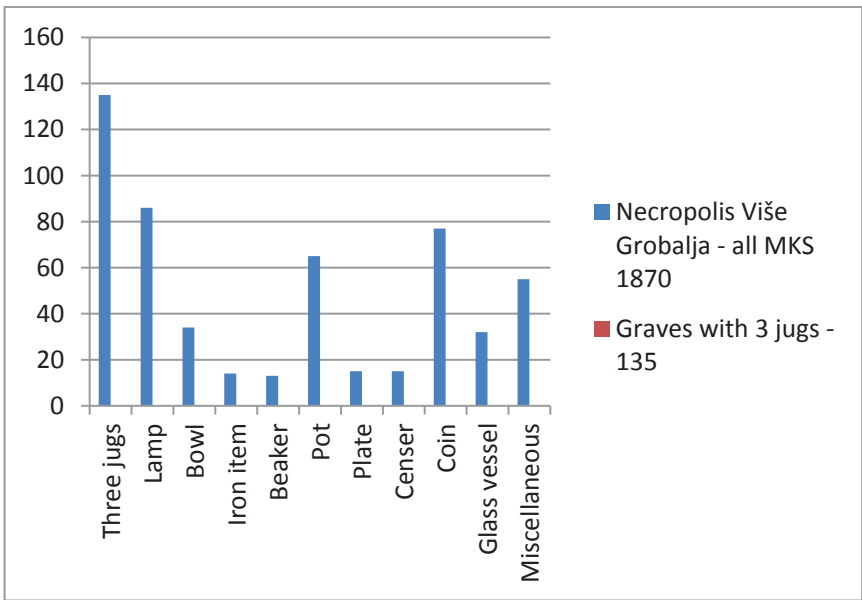


Chart 2

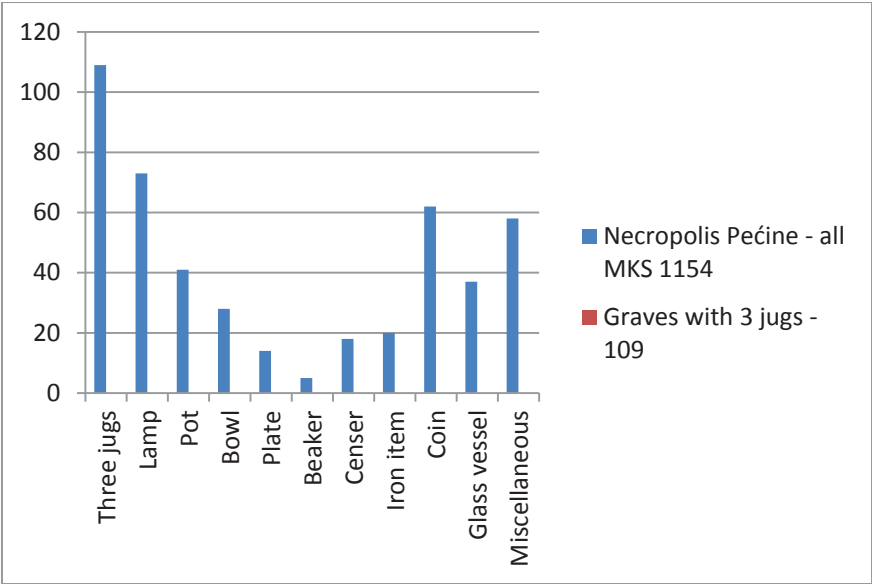


Chart 3

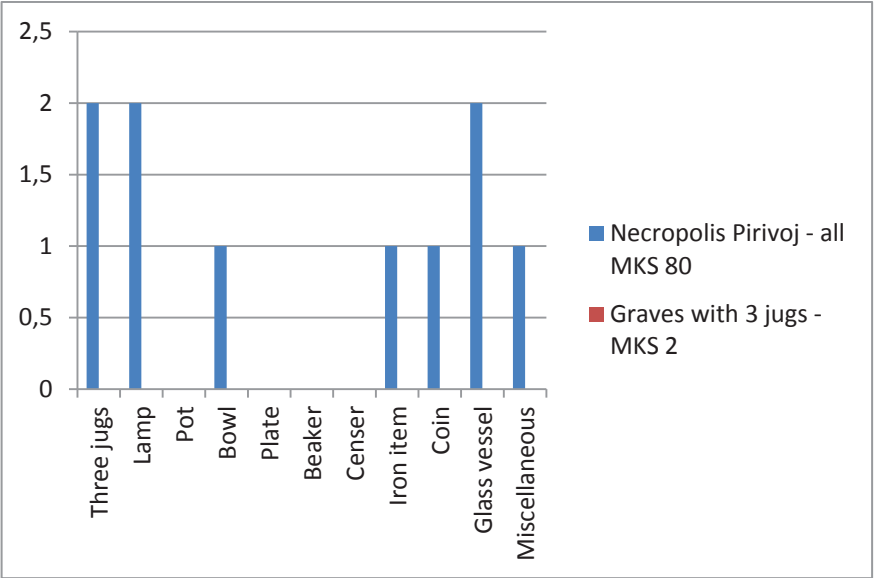


Chart 4

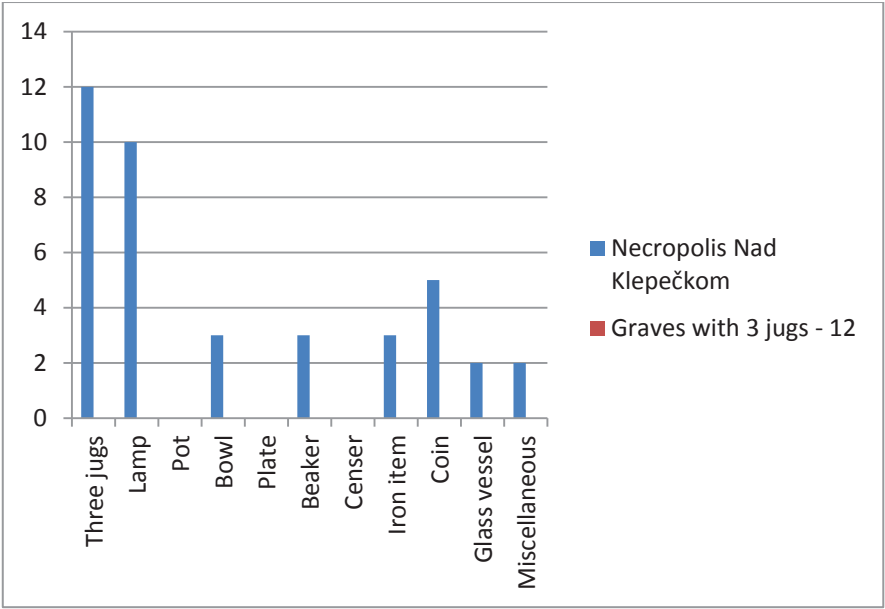


Chart 5

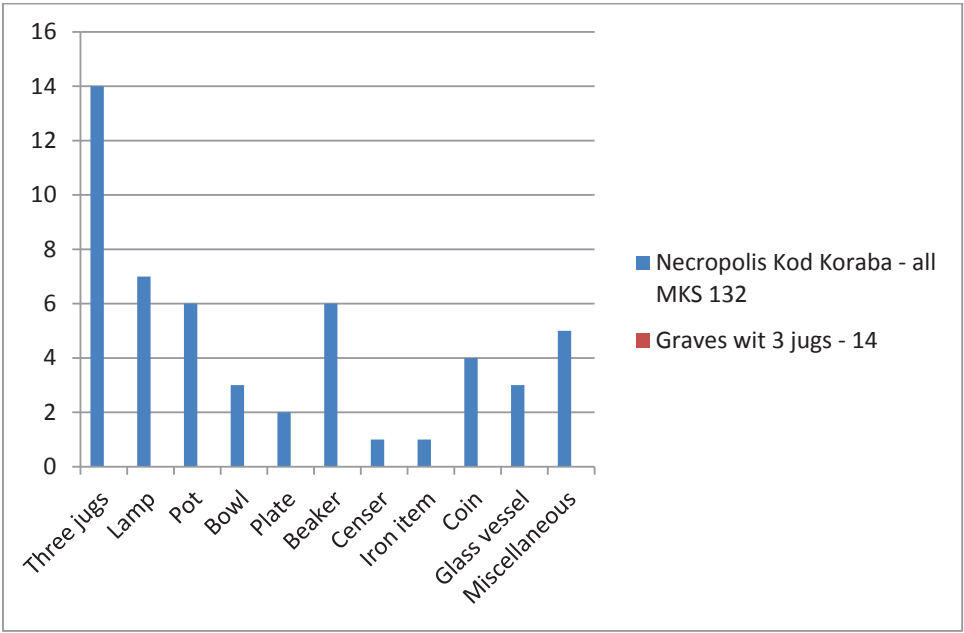


Chart 6

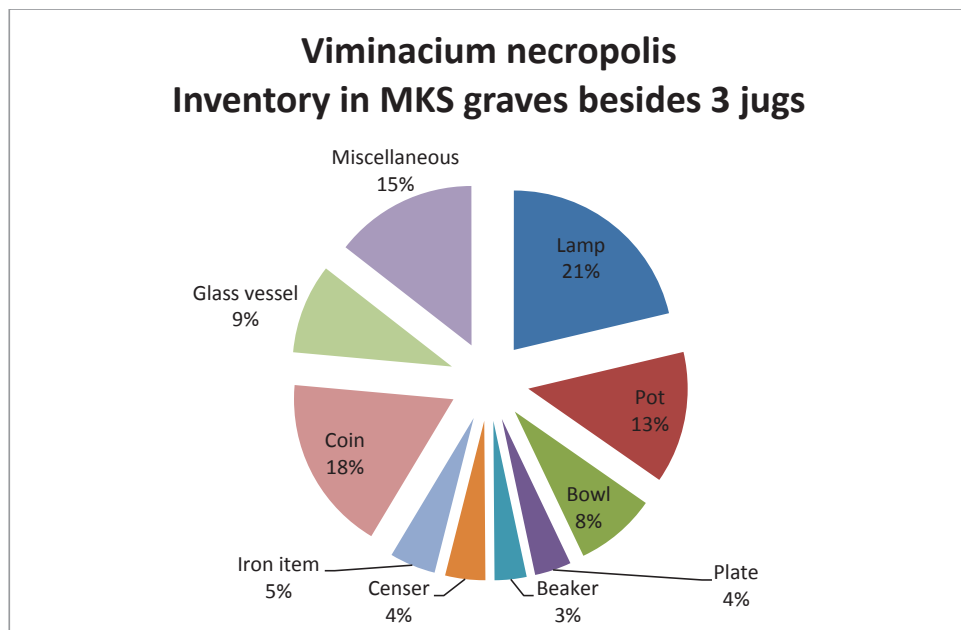


Fig. 1

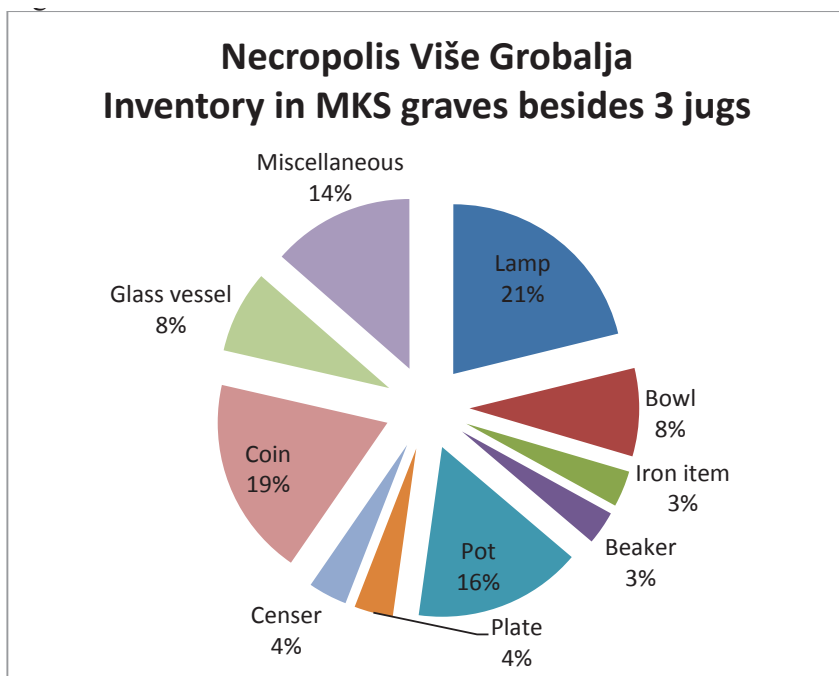


Fig. 2

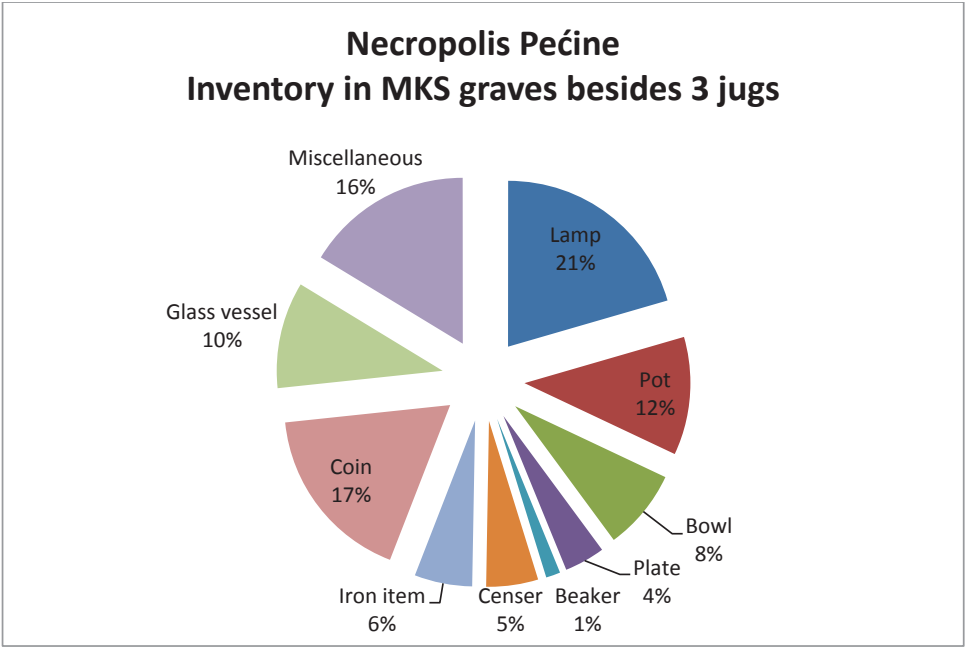


Fig. 3

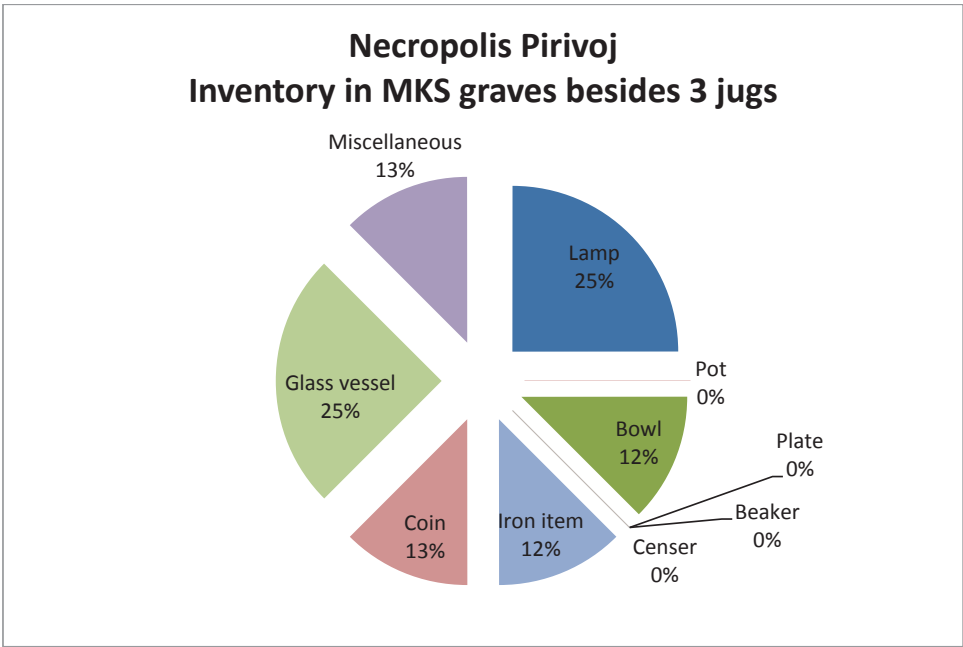


Fig. 4

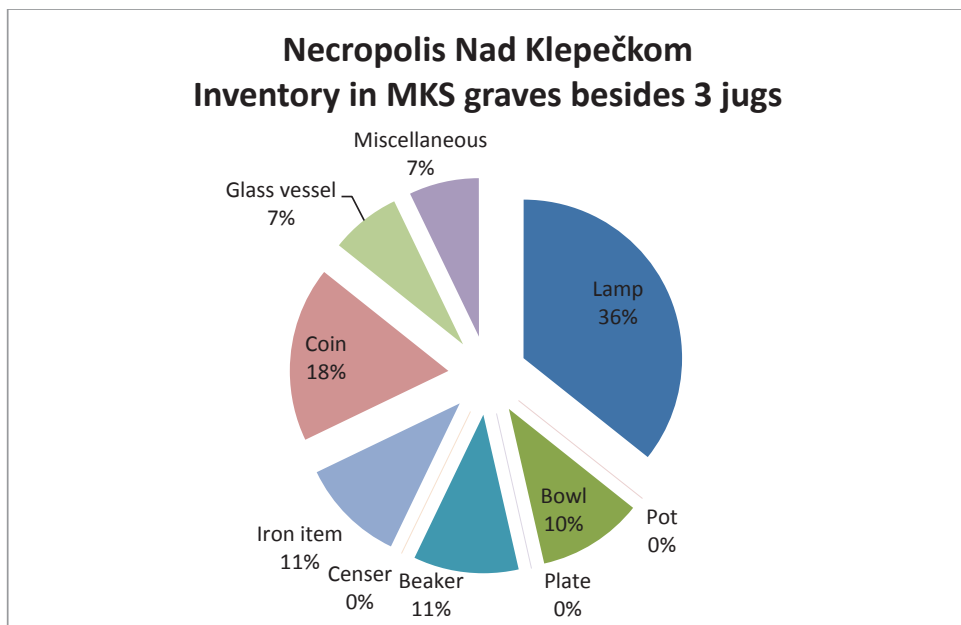


Fig. 5

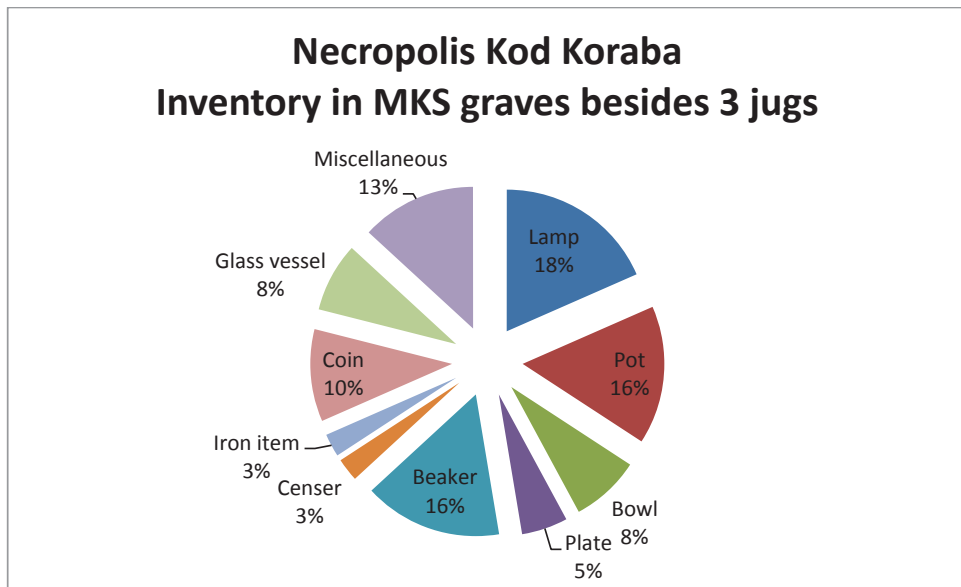


Fig. 6

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## PROBLEMA CELOR TREI ULCIOARE – O CONTRIBUȚIE LA STUDIUL BUNURILOR FUNERARE ÎN RITUALUL ÎNMORMÂNTĂRII PRIN INCINERARE

### Rezumat

După cercetarea a 14.000 de morminte la Viminacium, cercetătorii încearcă să reconstituie atât cultul funerar cât și viața în cel mai mare dintre orașele provinciei Moesia Superior, prin analiza bunurilor funerare. Articolul de față se concentrează asupra mormintelor de incinerare de tipul Mala Kopašnica-Sase și a inventarului descoperit în acestea, pe cazurile în care sunt prezente trei ulcioare. Întrebarea este la ce obiecte să ne așteptăm, într-o mai mică sau mai mare măsură, dincolo de cele trei ulcioare. Trecerea în revistă include toate cimitirele cercetate până acum, care formează necropola unică de la Viminacium.

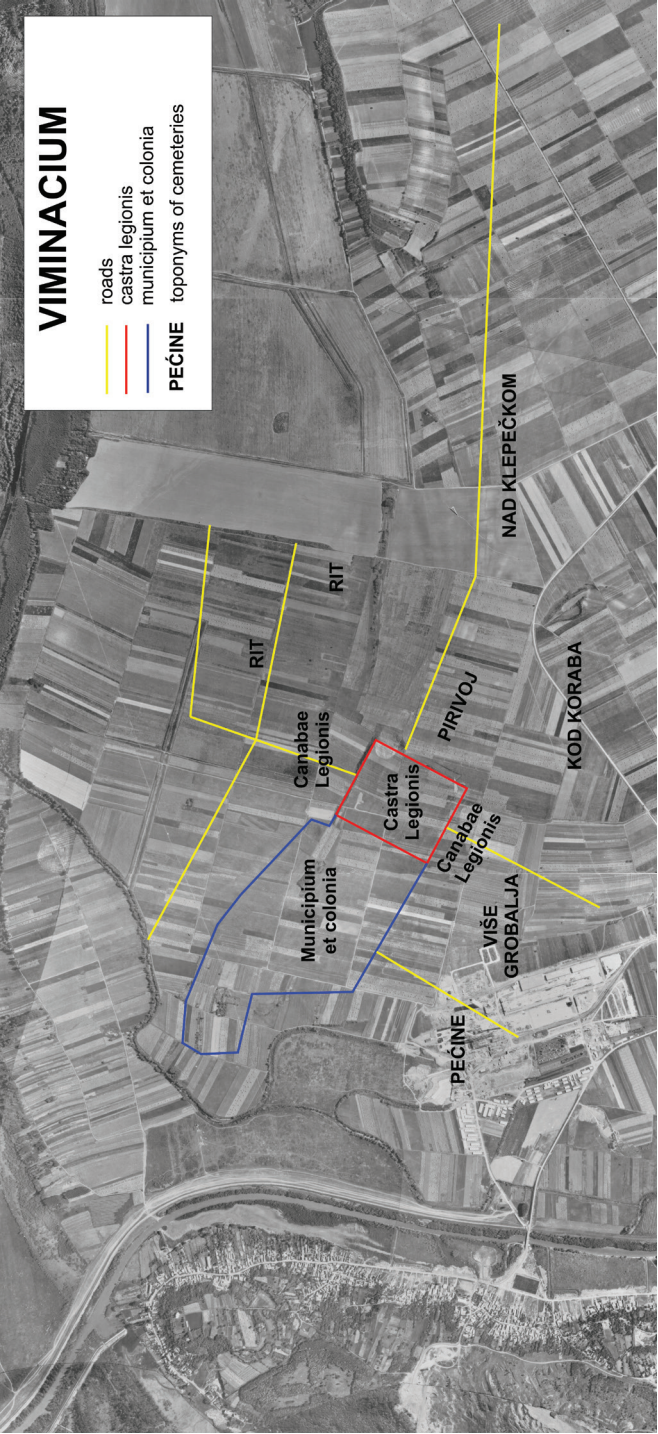


Plate 1. – Map of Viminacium with necropolises. / Harta Viminacium-ului, cu necropolele.





Plate 2 a, b. – Graves MKS with inventory. / Mormintele MKS, cu inventarul lor.

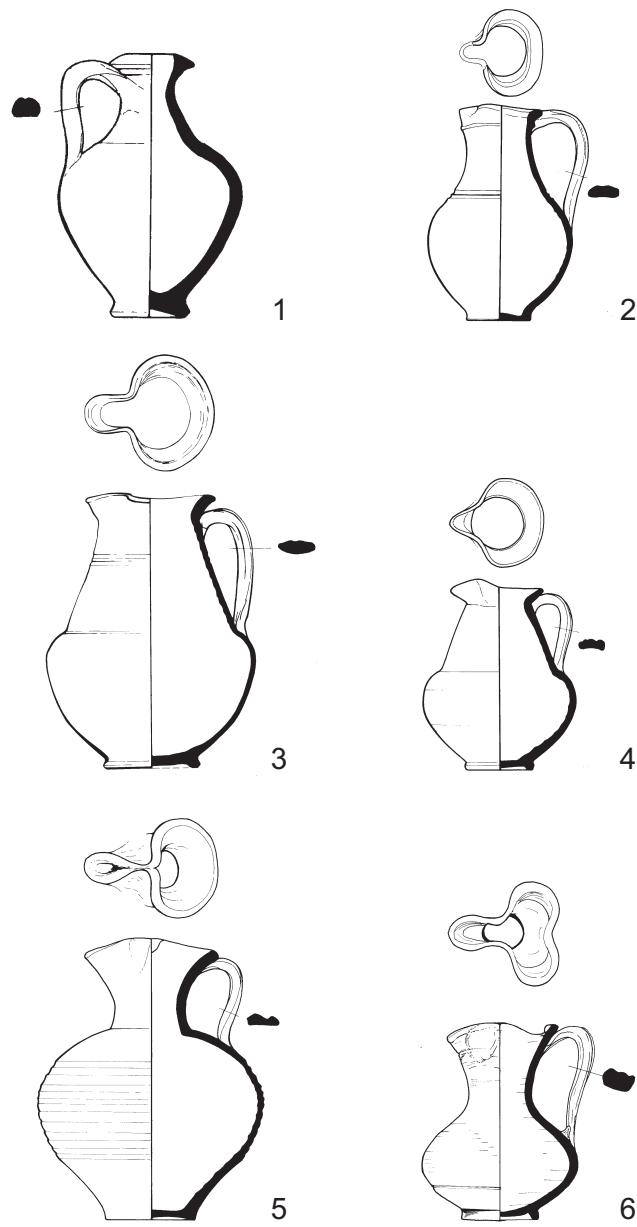


Table 1. 1-6



Table 1. – Type of jugs found in the MKS graves. /  
Tipuri de ulcioare din mormintele MKS.

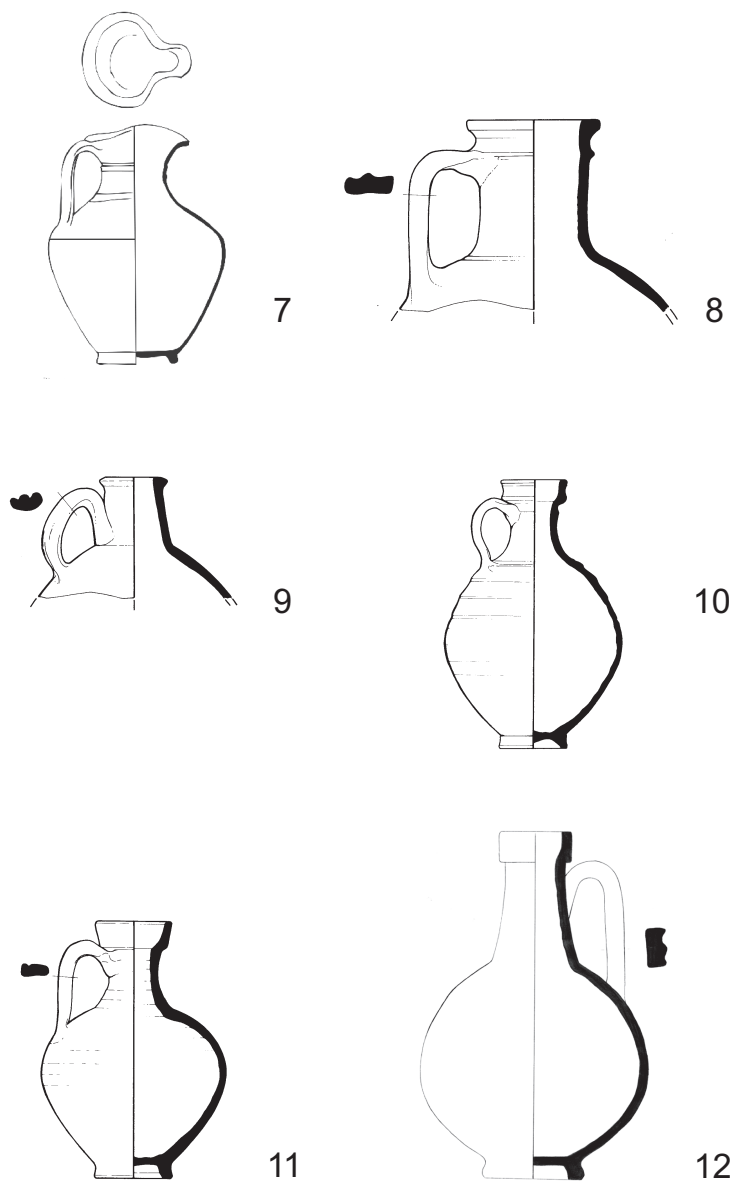


Table 2. 7-12



Table 2. – Type of jugs found in the MKS graves. /  
Tipuri de ulcioare din mormintele MKS.