

# THE STRONGHOLD FROM DUPLJAJA, A MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY

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Dupljaja is a small village from the south-east part of the serbian Banat, being located between Bela Crkva and Vârșeț (Fig.1). In the archaeological literature it is well known due to the accidental discovery of the „Dupljaja carts” (Dpljajskih kolica) – an exclusive discovery dated in the bronze period of two carts with a divinity dragged by two wading birds. Even if the conditions of the discovery are unknown, it is believed that they were found in the place named „Grad”, at approximately half a kilometer west of the village. Thus, the village of Grad is registered in the special literature first with a prehistorical discovery, then with an archaeological locality with several horizons of culture and only lately as a great medieval stronghold.

The locality is situated on the dominant boundary of a loess platform, 30m above the left side of river Caraș. On the outer side of the river, there are the sandy dunes from Deliblata, which are 50 – 100 m higher than the locality. At the base of the dunes, in alignment with the locality of „Grad”, there is the village of Grebenăț-Grad, another medieval stronghold (Fig. 2:2). These two boroughs controlled the important way of communication that followed the valley of the Caraș river<sup>1</sup>.

The oldest sketch of the citadel of Grad, with the adequate kerfs, was published in 1905 (Fig. 3)<sup>2</sup>. The locality consists of two parts – the fortified stronghold and the city (the civil settlement from the place called Vinogradi – Fig. 4). The stronghold has an irregular shape and it occupies a surface of over five hectares. It is defended by two dikes, being surrounded on three sides by the Caraș river, while on the fourth side, the eastern one, there is a deep and dry furrow. Towards east, covering a surface of approximately 7 ha, there lies the city (civil settlement), that might have also been defended by a few weaker fortified constructions. The most recent researches have proved the existence of the place named Pod grăgia (under-borough), that

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, at the outflow of river Caraș, there was situated the Sapai stronghold and also the Roman-Byzantine boroughs from Banatska Palanka and Lederata.

<sup>2</sup> G. Téglaș, *A Temesváraljai (Duplaji) Grad-Cetate nevű földvár (Három ábrával)*, in *Archaeologiai Értesítő XXXV*, Budapest, 1905, p. 218-221.

lies south of the stronghold along Caraș' bank on a length of 1km. It is located towards Grebenăț-Grad and it can be the location of the old medieval road and of a bridge over the Caraș river.

The archaeological excavations from the locality of Grad took place in 1972<sup>3</sup>. At that time, inside the stronghold, there was discovered the cemetery, which dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century, while the section dug on the dike revealed the carbonized remains of a wooden construction<sup>4</sup>.

New excavations began in 2002 and had the purpose of establishing the basic characteristic of the settlement, its shape, surface, layers and its dating (Fig. 5)<sup>5</sup>.

The cultural layers have an average depth of 1m. Besides the medieval cultural layers, dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century, there are also layers from other archaeological ages. At the surface there were found fragments of Neolithic, Roman and early Byzantine ceramics. The existence of a certain point from the middle period of the Brazen Age in the stronghold is proved by small fragments of ceramics that do not belong to the entirety, while the traces of a settlement from the Brazen Age were discovered in the town of Rivace, in the town's (civil settlement) area, in the immediate proximity of Caraș' bank. In the place named Vinogradi there have been discovered parts of a wall made of stone and roman bricks which might indicate the existence of a Roman villa. Also, to the east of this place, there have been gathered pottery fragments, which can be dated back to the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the beginning of the most recent researches it has been worked also on a section of the stronghold's dike, but this section has not been finished because of the dike's height that reaches up to 6m (Fig. 6). It was built by bestowing the loess that was excavated while digging the dry ditch from the east, on a frame of wooden beams. This layer has been dated with the help of the coins back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> S. Barački, *Jugoistočni Banat u ranom srednjem veku*, exhibition catalogue, Vârșeț, 1977, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> According to D. Madas, *Nalazista i arheoloski lokaliteti teritoriji opštine Bela Krkva*, Pančevo, 2001, p. 24-25, at the local antiquities collectors there is a rich Hungarian silver coins collection, but also other medieval coins and a collection of Byzantine coins (skifați). Beside this, the collectors own other objects especially from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, among which a Byzantine lead seal.

<sup>5</sup> The researches are organized by the City Museum of Vârșeț, with the financial means provided by Vârșeț and The Teritorial Secretariat for Culture. The researches are led by dr. G. Jnakovici with his coworkers, while M. Aralica, archaeologist custodian at the City Museum of Vârșeț, is responasable with the supervision of the workings.

In the closed layers near the dike there have been discovered several semi-deepened dwellings, with earth-furnaces at different depths. They were covered with gravel that is also on the dike, thus they can be dated back to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Outside the stronghold were discovered houses dug not too deep, with dome-shaped furnaces, which belong to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, latest at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Through the mobile archaeological material, the most numerous are the pottery fragments (Fig. 7). The flattened and annealed ones are dated in the first quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 7:1,2). Other pot fragments are encrusted with the comb (Fig. 7:3-6). In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century there can also be dated other pots and bowls encrusted with a sharp object, with horizontal lines with small pits or waves close to the upper side (Fig. 7:7-11). There have also been discovered metallic objects (nails, knives, scissors, bolts etc.), ceramics as well as fragments from glass bowls and bracelets made of the same material.

Based upon the excavations from 1972 it has been concluded that somewhere inside the stronghold there were a church and a cemetery near it. In determining its position, contributed the excavations from August and September from 2005 (Fig. 4:1). It is about a part of the stronghold where there have previously been found on the surface several tomb stones as well as fragments of bricks, some used for adorning the frontage. Due to those final excavations, it appeared that the south-eastern corner of the church has been discovered, respectively the corner between the eastern wall and the beginning of the southern side – part of the apse. Future research must establish its shape, the objective being dated back to year 100, according to the layers and the ceramics from the proper stratum.

At the eastern outskirts of the settlement (locally known as Veliki Prokop), there probably is a prehistoric knob 3m high, above which there has been built the medieval church of this borough (Fig. 4:2). To the west, there is the stoop that has not been yet entirely revealed. The church kept the foundation of battered clay, while the walls appear to be made of brick and stone pasted with lime mortar.

Around the church there was attested the existence of a cemetery whose orientation is the same as the church's (Fig. 8). People were buried in this cemetery for centuries. Based upon the discoveries from the graves, the oldest burial layer belongs to the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century. It has been determined with the help of bronze earrings, which end in an "S" – shape, earrings with a strawberry-like shape, a necklace made of snails shell and a bronze ring made of stranded wire. That tomb horizon lies around the knob on an area of

at least half a hectare. The later cemetery stratum belongs probably to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The age determination was made based on the coins and the rare artefacts of that period.

Approximately 400m north of the church, in Veliki Prokop there is a small knob containing pieces of bricks and clods of lime mortar and it may be assumed that here, there are the remains of another church (Fig. 4:3). In the same place there is also a tomb stone from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but without the necessary diggings, it is impossible to determine the age of this church<sup>6</sup>.

The obtained results show that this stronghold near Duplijaja, may be biggest archaeological discovery from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century from Banat. The size of the entire site, the existence of more churches and also the discovered objects prove the importance of this place. Here might have been the administrative centre of a bigger territory. The destination of this stronghold was questioned, due to the fact that this territory belonged to Bulgaria – here might have been an important military centre of Glad knez, which had an important role against the Hungarian expansion. The Banatian strongholds from that period are not yet systematically explained. The discovered mobile inventory offers the possibility of a concise presentation of the cultures from the territories south and north of the Danube, the territory at that time of the southern Banat. This church is special because are not too many data about the religious monuments anterior to the Tartar invasion. The future researches will definitely offer some needed answers.

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<sup>6</sup> The situation is alike with the cemetery which has been discovered in the north-west of Vinogradi (Fig. 4:4). In that part of the site 8 tombs were explored, but no funeral inventory was found, thus only the future researches will be able to establish its chronology.

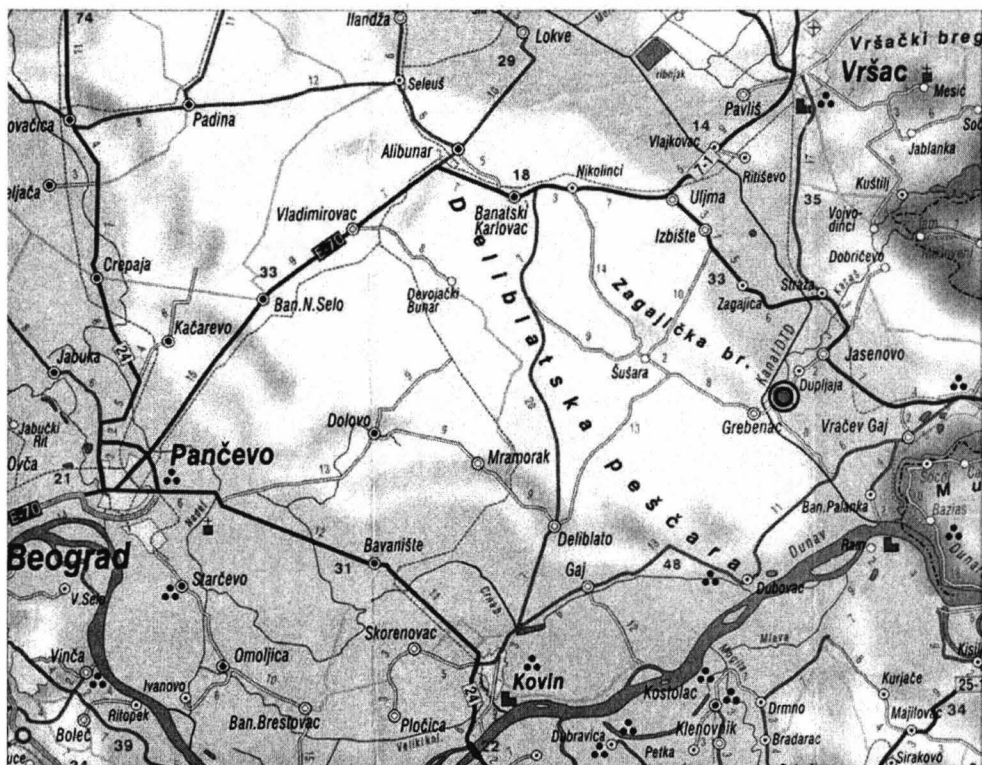
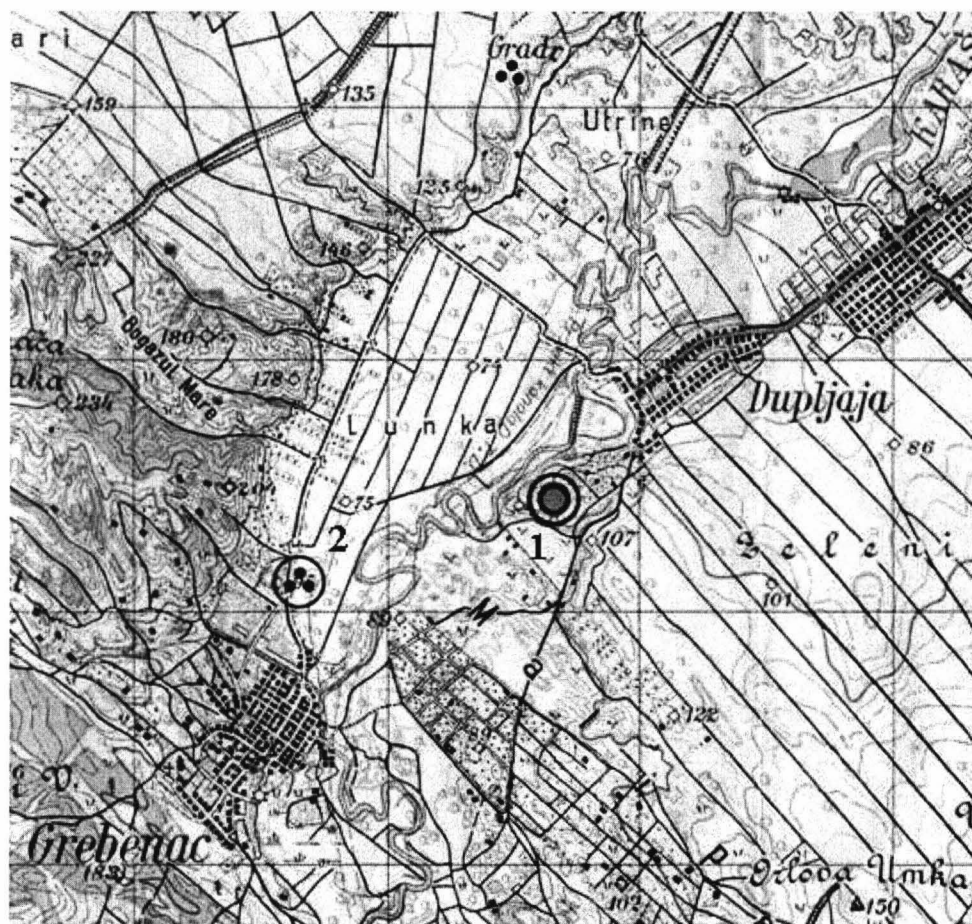
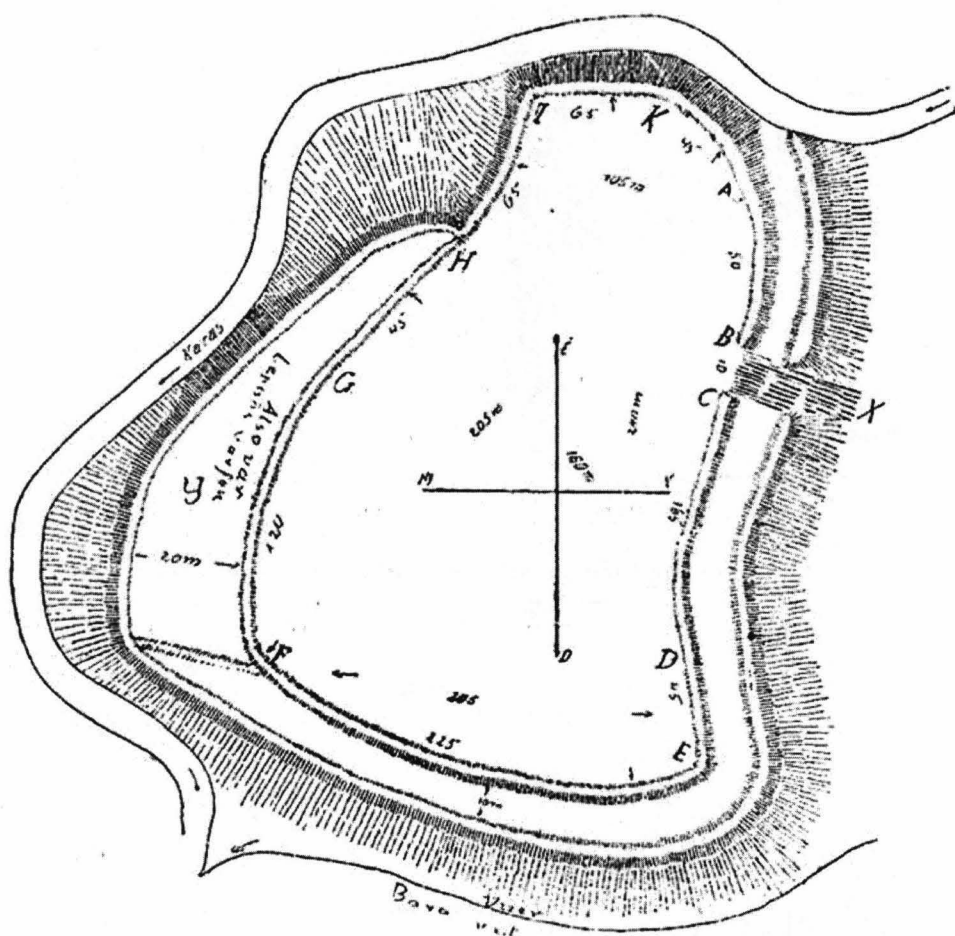


Fig. 1. A map with the placement of the Dupljaja-Grad settlement.



**Fig. 2. Topographical map with the localization of the Dupljaja-Grad and Grebenac-Grad.**



I. A TEMESVÁRALJAI GRAD-VÁR (CETATE).  
 x ujabbkori bejáró. y lépcsős várfok.

Fig. 3. The plan of the *Grad*-settlement (according to G. Téglás 1905, 218-221).

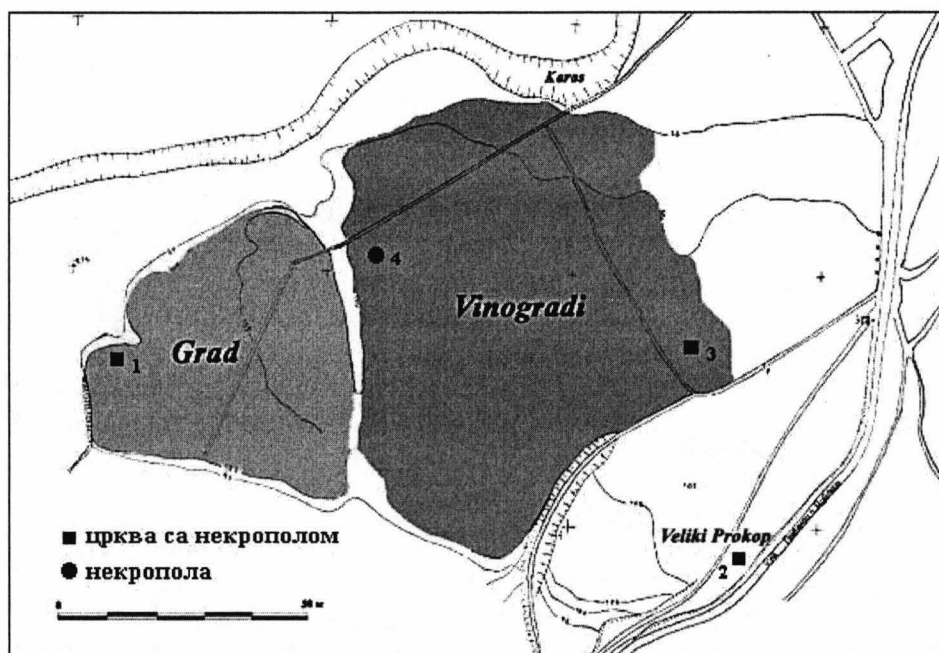


Fig. 4. Dupljaja-Grad, the settlement's and necropolis' plan.

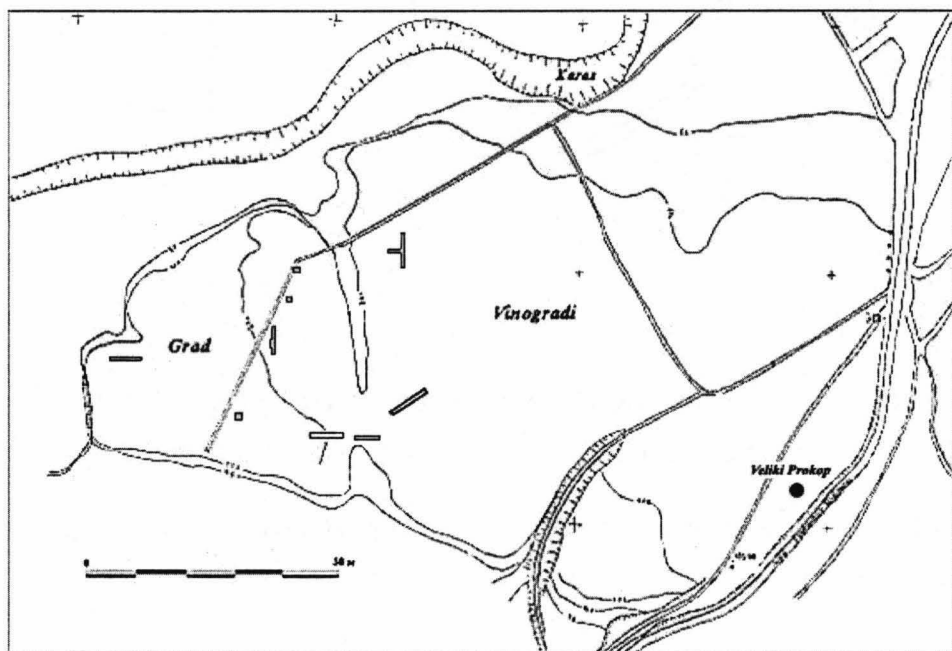
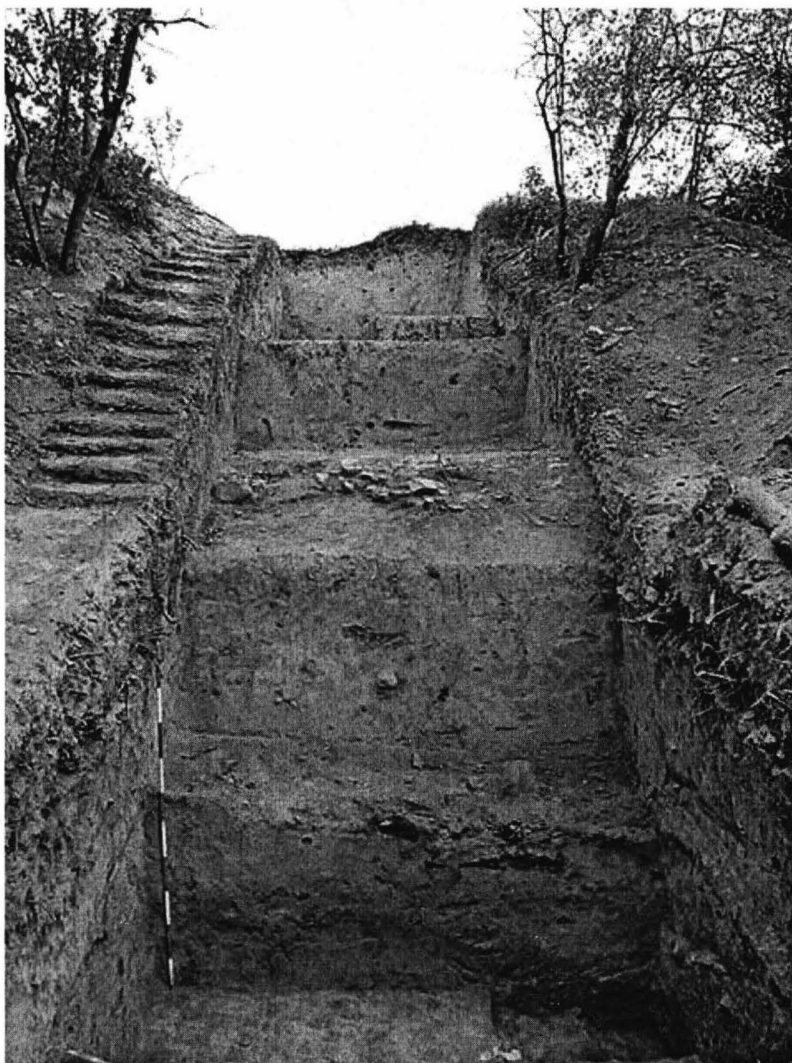


Fig. 5. Dupljaja-Grad, the area in which surface searches took place.





**Fig. 6.** *Dupljaja-Grad*, cross section of the eastern ripple.

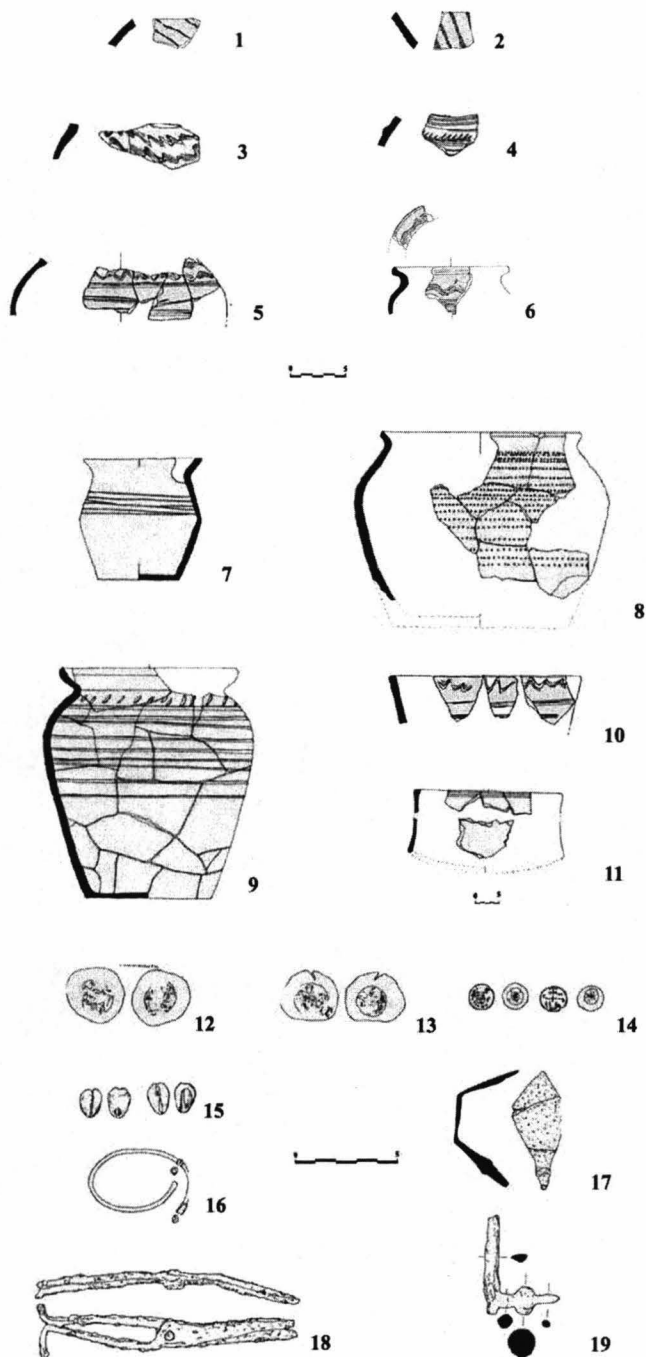


Fig. 7. Dupljaja-Grad, mobile inventory.

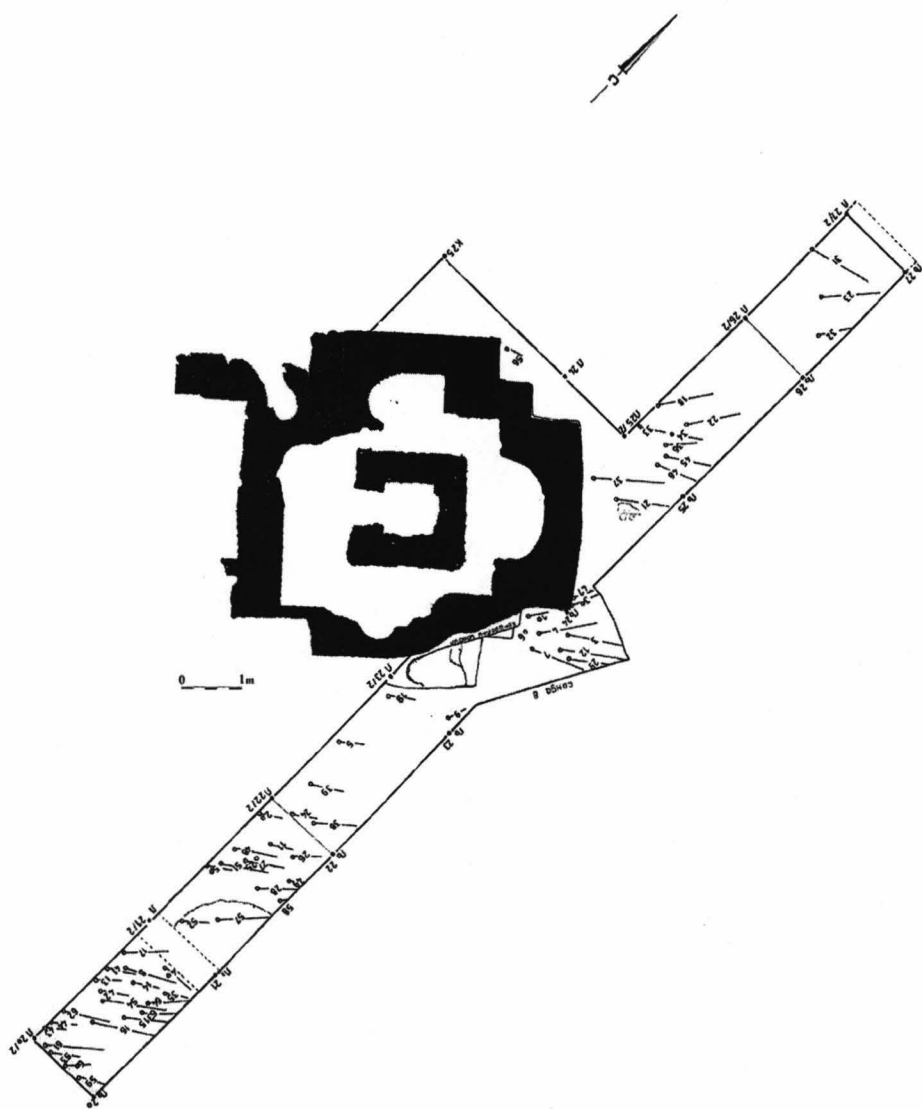


Fig. 8. Dupljaja-Grad, the church and the unexplored part of the necropolis.