

LATE HELLENISTIC KILNS FOUND ON THE TERRITORY OF ROUSSE, BULGARIA

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Keywords: kiln, pottery, pits, Late Hellenistic

Cuvinte cheie: cupitor, ceramică, gropi, perioada elenistică târzie

In 2015 on the territory of the late Roman fortress Sexaginta Prista in Rousse were conducted archaeological excavations in two sectors (fig. 1). Elements of the fortifying system belonging to the fortress, remains of buildings and other structures dated to different periods are unearthed¹. To the late Hellenistic period belong two kilns and 26 pits, found in one of the trenches (fig. 2). The southeastern line of the Thracian pit field is fixed – the pits take place along the ridge of the hill while down the slopes there is no record of such structures.² The area of the pit field is about 12–15 ha and up till now has been excavated about 700 sq. m³. Subject of the present article are the two kilns mentioned above – a ceramic one and another one for household needs⁴.

The ceramic kiln (fig. 3.1; fig. 6 and fig. 7) is placed over two earlier pits – № 30 and № 31. These pits are destroyed by two later ones – № 17 and № 19⁵. The upper (firing) chamber, about two thirds of the grate, the stoking channel (*praefurnium*) and the working platform are destroyed by a digging dated to the 19th c. The kiln has an oval shape with dimensions along the longitudinal axis 135 cm (E-W) to 120 cm (N-S). The combustion chamber is dug into the loess (the sterile layer) and is separated in two parts by the support for the

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¹ Русев и др. 2015, 177–214; Върбанов и др. 2016, 451–455.

² In the researched area down the slope are unearthed later in time structures (part of the late Roman fortress wall of Sexaginta Prista, buildings dated to 5th c. and 6th c. and a medieval layer).

³ see Сексагинта Приста. Тракийски ямен комплекс, том I, Кръстева 2015, 266–289.

⁴ The comprehensive variant of this article, with full catalogue of ceramic sherds and other finds is in press in “Проблеми и изследвания на тракийската култура”, VIII.

⁵ The pits are dated within the range 3rd c. to 1st c. BC (*look below*).

grate. The support is made of not processed stones cemented with clay with length 99 cm, maximum width up to 15 cm and maximum height 23 cm. The combustion chamber is entirely filled with earth: the layer up to the level of the grate has a yellowish color and a loamy nature; another yellowish in color but mixed with coal particles and bricked clay layer follows in depth; and the last one covering the bottom floor consists of ash and small parts of coal (with thickness 3–4 cm). The bottom floor is made of clay baked till it gets brown in color, plain in surface. Only part of the west wall of the dome is preserved (thickness up to 5 cm, height 10–12 cm). The maximum width of the preserved part of the grate is 20 cm and the thickness is 10–11 cm. The grate has 8 round perforations with diameter 4–5 cm.

Finds and chronology: Four small fragments of plaster and 17 ceramic fragments are found on the grate and inside the combustion chamber – coming from an intact layer of the filling of the kiln⁶. Seven of the ceramic fragments belong to one vessel (made on fast wheel) with horizontal “rope” handles beginning from the rim (fig. 4. 7). This type is known as lekane (with horizontal handles). It has an exact parallel from a pit № 76 unearthed in Rousse as well as from other sites in Rousse region dated in the period of 2^d–1st c. BC⁷. The other sherds belong to the same period (fig. 4. 9–11). Next to the north end of the support of the perforated floor, directly above the bottom floor of the combustion chamber is discovered highly oxidized bronze fibula of Thracian type (fig. 4. 8). It is dated within the range from the end of 4th c. till the beginning of the 2nd c. BC and has exact parallels from pits № 43 and № 59 in Rousse⁸. Summing up the available data the kiln can be dated in the period of 2nd–1st c. BC.

The household kiln (fig. 3.2) is unearthed at about 7,0 m southwest of the ceramic kiln. It is dug into a layer of compact brown ground with no archaeological finds. It has an oval shape with dimensions as follows: 120 cm (S-N) to 110 cm (E-W) and a maximum inner height of 25 cm. The walls are 5 cm to 8 cm thick. The dome is completely preserved. It is filled densely with brownish-gray soil mixed with small charcoal and few uncharacteristic small ceramic

⁶ 12 of the fragments are from ceramic vessels, made on fast wheel, another 5 – by hand. At the point of finding the kiln and it being destroyed by a late Ottoman pit are found 44 more fragments: one belonging to the late Ottoman period, 17 gray in color dated to late Antiquity, 5 fragments of amphorae and 21 from the Thracian period (13 of them are made on wheel and the left 8 – by hand). One of the fragments from the Thracian period has a twisted handle which fits together with a part of rim found in the kiln; another fragment belongs to a fruit bowl with polished strips (fig. 5. 6).

⁷ Върбанов 2013, 234; Върбанов, Жекунова 2015, 230.

⁸ Василева 2013, 104–105.

fragments. The entrance of the kiln is to the north and has width of about 40 cm. The kiln has had a working platform destroyed by the later pit № 22. The bottom floor has a slight incline from northwest to southeast and from southwest to northeast. It has a padding of small stones plastered well with clay, grey in color. Underneath the bottom the ground is with yellow-brown color – the sterile layer. There are no finds over the floor only a layer of ash and charcoal; similar is the situation over the working platform.

Finds and chronology: Inside the kiln are discovered few uncharacteristic small ceramic fragments which belong to the Hellenistic period. Outside the structure right next to its south wall (in the filling of its pit) is found highly oxidized bronze fibula⁹ (fig. 3.4). It is dated in the first half of the 3rd c. BC¹⁰. In an upper layer in the proximity of the kiln (to the east) is discovered an anepigraphic amphora stamp (fig. 3.3). It belongs to the period of 2nd–1st c. BC. Close parallels having similar stamps are known from Rousse (pit № 64) and Popești¹¹. It is not clear if the stamp belongs to the filling of the kiln or to the upper part of pit № 22. The dating of the kiln is the 2nd half of 2nd century BC – 1st century BC.

During the excavations in 2015 it was possible to ascertain that the Thracian chassis level in the explored area (Trench II) is about 37,10 m above the sea level (ASL) (fig. 2). The same is the altitude in sq. E where is found the household kiln. In that square also are unearthed two late Antique pits (№ 10 and № 13) and five Thracian pits (№ 8, № 16, № 20, № 22 and № 24). At 36,40 m ASL (not counting the diggings) the layer has dark-brown color with no finds¹² and at 36,10–36,0 m ASL begins the loess soil. In the next square – sq. F (fig. 2) the Thracian level is violated to a great extent by late Antiquity diggings (pits № 11, № 14/15 and № 27). Special attention deserves the situation in the northeastern part of the sq. F (at 36,22 m ASL) where a lower jaw (*mandibula*) of a grown human individual (at the age of 20–30 years) and parts of a scull¹³ are found in a layer of brown soil with coal particles, bricked clay and Thracian pottery. The next square – sq. G is almost entirely occupied by a U-shaped tower which

⁹ The end of the fibula's leg is broken which makes it difficult to determine the type. Probably it was a bilateral one with a decorative spiral at the leg, subtype I. 3 after M. Vasileva (Василева 2013, 105); but again it is possible for the artefact to belong to another type (see Anastassov 2007, 14). The chronology of the mentioned types is in the range from the end of 4th c. till the middle of the 3rd c. BC.

¹⁰ Василева 2013, 105–106; Маджаров 2015, 90; Anastassov 2007, 14.

¹¹ Varbanov 2011, 53–59; Tudor 1967, 76.

¹² This chronology is based on the fibula found in the west half of the kiln during the excavations in 2016. In the intact Thracian layers in square E (37,0–36,68 m ASL) are found 128 ceramic fragments: 54 of all are made on fast wheel; the rest 74 are made by hand.

¹³ Probably they belong to the upper part of one of the pits – № 17, № 23 or № 25.

belongs to the fortifying system of the late Roman fortress Sexaginta Prista. In this square (sq. G) is positioned the ceramic kiln which is taking the place of other three Thracian pits (№ 29, № 30 and № 31). At 36,74 m ASL next to the west profile is preserved a spot consisting of charcoal, high concentration of bricked clay and Thracian pottery. It has dimensions as follows 1,20 m (E-W) to 0,40 m (N-S); thickness of about 0,20 m and inclination toward the tower. Probably this is the upper part of a destroyed pit. In this area is found a coin of Rhoemetalcès¹⁴. The unearthened pottery can be dated within the range of 1st c. BC till 1st c. AD¹⁵ (fig. 4. 1–2, 4–5).

Below is submitted a catalogue of the pits related to the context of excavating the two kilns (fig. 3.1).

Pit № 17 (fig. 2 and fig. 3.1) takes place in the northwestern corner of sq. F. It is partly destroyed by the later pit № 11. Pit № 17 is recorded in the profile of the north/northwestern sector of pit № 11 as a dark spot in the loess soil. At 35,96 m ASL northwest of pit № 11 outlines a lighter spot marking pit № 17 with diameter 0,90 m. Going in depth (after the level of registering) the pit has the shape of a truncated cone as the walls are expanding towards the bottom which is reached at 35,12 m. The filling consists of dark-brown soil with high concentration of charcoal and lesser one of animal bones and pottery. Close to the bottom floor thin layers of ash are explored. Pit № 17 is disturbing pit № 30.

Finds: a fibula (fig. 5. 3); a fragment of oxidized bronze object (a bracelet?); 113 ceramic fragments¹⁶ and 33 fragments of animal bones belonging to cattle, swine, mussel and fish.¹⁷

Chronology: The fibula is at most similar to type 15 after A. Rustoiu dated in the second half of 1st c. BC¹⁸. Besides this similarity the fibula has some features (such as the upper bow string) characteristic to other types of brooches dated in the range from the 1st c. BC till the beginning of the 1st c. AD¹⁹.

Two of the ceramic fragments are more informative. They belong to amphorae – one is shaped as a token and the other one is a bottom (fig. 5. 4–5). Another fragment is part of a rim from a pot made by hand with polished surface (fig. 5. 6). Of interest is a fragment of miniature vessel (a fruit bowl?

¹⁴ Русев и др. 2015, 178.

¹⁵ The sherds have parallels from pits excavated previous years in the same site in Rousse (Върбанов 2013, 267, Табло II; 269–270, Табло IV–V; 274, Табло IX). Three of the fragments have decoration with polished strips.

¹⁶ 29 of them are made on fast wheel as 9 have grey surface and the rest 20 belong to amphorae; the rest 84 are made by hand (20 have polished surface).

¹⁷ The analysis of the animal bones is made by Assoc. Prof. Diana Vladova (Trakia University – Stara Zagora).

¹⁸ Rustoiu 1997, 47–48.

¹⁹ Rustoiu 1997, 158.

– fig. 5. 1). Similar ones have been found already in Rousse – in pits dated in the range 1st c. BC till 1st c. AD²⁰. Such dating (1st c. BC – 1st c. AD) have also the pots with small cylindrical handles (fig. 5. 2)²¹. Based on the analysis above pit № 17 can be dated from second half of 1st c. BC till the beginning of 1st c. AD (fig. 5. 1–2, 4–6).

Pit № 18 (fig. 2 and 3.1) takes place in the northeastern part of sq. F and is destroyed by the later pit № 11. It is registered during the excavation of pit № 11 as a dark spot in the loess soil in the north/northeastern sector. Pit № 18 is outlined at 35,95 m ASL and has diameter of about 1,20 m (E-W). The bottom floor is reached at 35,48 m. The pit has a cylindrical shape with an oval opening. The filling consists of dark-brown soil with concentration of charcoal. Pit № 18 in its turn is later than pit № 28.

Finds: two fragments of bricked clay; 61 ceramic fragments²² and 18 fragments of animal bones (from cattle, small ruminant, swine and fish).

Chronology: Although in the preserved part of the pit are found a few informative fragments one (a stem of a fruit bowl – fig. 6. 9) is dated certainly in the period 1st c. BC – 1st c. AD²³.

Pit № 29 (fig. 2 and 3.1) is excavated in the southwestern corner of sq. G, south of the U-shaped fortress tower (which in its turn is placed partially over the pit). The pit outlines at 35,62 m ASL and the bottom floor is reached at 35,41 m. The filling is characteristic with brown soil and low concentration of coal particles. The pit is stepping on pit № 30 and pit № 31. The shape is probably cylindrical and the diameter at that level is 1,0 m (N-S) to 1,05 m (E-W).

Finds: a fragment of bricked clay; 9 ceramic fragments²⁴ and one fragment of animal bone belonging to cattle.

Chronology: One of the fragments belongs to the rim of a bowl with polished surface dated in the period 1st c. BC – 1st c. AD²⁵. The same dating has the bottom of an amphora, probably pseudokosian type²⁶.

Pit № 30 (fig. 2 and 3.1) is explored in the central south part of sq. G. Pits № 17, № 29 and № 31 and the ceramic kiln take place over it. The pit outlines at 35,54 m ASL and the bottom is reached at 35,28 m. The filling consists of brown

²⁰ Върбанов 2013, 199.

²¹ Върбанов 2013, 196–197.

²² 22 fragments are made on fast wheel – one belongs to a pitoi, 12 grey ones, 9 amphorae; 40 fragments are made by hand as 15 of them have polished surface.

²³ Върбанов 2013, 235.

²⁴ 5 sherds made on fast wheel – one with grey color and 4 amphorae (1 bottom); 4 sherds made by hand – two walls with plastic band, two flat handles.

²⁵ Върбанов 2013, 234–235.

²⁶ Внуков 2003, 54–81.

soil with low concentration of coal particles, pottery and animal bones. The diameter at the bottom is 0,84 m (N-S) to 1,35 m (E-W).

Finds: three animal bones belonging to cattle and small ruminant; 4 sherds made by hand (among them the bottom part of a jug).

Chronology: The jug has no rim and handle but this type is characteristic for the period from the 3rd c. till the middle of the 1st c. BC²⁷.

Pit № 31 (fig. 2 and 3.1) is unearthed in the central part of sq. G south of the U-shaped fortress tower which destroyed about 1/3 of the pit. It outlines at 35,53 m and the bottom is reached at 34,98 m. The maximum diameter is about 1,60 m at the bottom. Pit № 29 and the ceramic kiln take place over pit № 31. The last one is stepping on pit № 30. The filling is characteristic with dark-brown crumbly soil mixed with great amount of charcoal and ash in the central part while in the western part the ground is compact with lower concentration of coal particles. The filling consists also of some animal bones, pottery and two average in size not processed stones at the bottom.

Finds: nine fragments of bricked clay (two with facial surface probably of a hearth); 88 sherds²⁸ and 34 fragments of animal bones (of cattle, small ruminant, swine, bird, mussel and fish).

Chronology: Based on the informative fragments of pottery (fig. 5. 11–18) the pit can be dated in the period 2nd–1st c. BC²⁹.

The excavated kilns can't be more precisely dated and it can't be specified if they're synchronous. They represent few of the found and examined late Hellenistic kilns on the territory of Bulgaria. Actually up to this moment is known only one similar – excavated in the Chichov elak area near the village of Krivina, Rousse region. There are unearthed two kilns – one household and the second one for pottery placed at a distance of about 6 m one from the other. They are dated in the period 1st c. BC–early 1st c. AD³⁰. Besides the fact that the kiln near the village of Krivina has the biggest dimensions among the others found in Eastern Europe (known so far) another thing of interest is that after its abandoning inside was buried a woman.³¹ As L. Vagalinski suggests this kiln is

²⁷ Върбанов 2013, 199.

²⁸ 20 fragments are made on fast wheel: 7 grey ones (one bottom and two smaller fragments of rims belonging to a bowl and jug), 13 amphorae (one rim); 68 sherds made by hand (12 with polished surface) – one wall of a pot with incised sheaf of parallel lines, another part of a wall with a handle belonging to a cup type “dacica” (on the inside it is covered with a layer of soot formation; the cross section of the handle is with square/rectangular shape with rounded edges).

²⁹ Върбанов 2013, 195–198.

³⁰ Vagalinski 2011a, 219–226.

³¹ Up to this date it is not known any other example of inhumation dated to this period (2nd/1st c. BC–1st c. AD) from the territory of northeastern Bulgaria.

made for producing big vessels. Probably the other kiln is used in the same time for making of bread³².

The ceramic kilns dated in the period of 2nd c. BC–1st c. AD excavated on the territory of Romania (known till 2006) are collected by S. Matei³³. They are 32 in number (from 24 different sites) separated in two types. The first type is a kiln with one chamber and the second one – with two chambers. The second type has two subtypes: 2 A is round and oval in shape and 2 B has rectangular form. Subtype 2 A has three versions depending on the way of maintaining the firing chamber³⁴. Mostly widespread is version 1 which is characteristic with a combustion chamber split into two by a support (made of stones and clay) for the grate – a variant observed in about 51% of the registered kilns in Romania. The kilns found in Bulgaria belong to this version.

Although about 78% of the found kilns are unearthened in settlements and only 19% come from the area outside the villages S. Matei believes that most of them were placed outside somewhere near raw material deposits. In confirmation of this statement is the fact that in only 14 of 100 excavated settlements dated to this period are found kilns. According to S. Matei the investigation of the micro region of the villages (including, of course, the identification and mapping of the resources needed for the ceramic production) will contribute to finding of such structures.

In conclusion it can be added that the kilns found in Rousse are built when the area on the hill was already used (the ceramic kiln oversteps two pits). They are dug into the loess soil and in a layer of the late Hellenistic period. Probably some of the pits nearby are dug exactly for extracting clay. The location of the pits on the hill is not contrary to its interpretation as a sacred territory. It is possible that the process of production of ceramic vessels itself is connected with the rituals practiced here.

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³² Vagalinski 2011a, 226.

³³ Matei 2007, 279–296.

³⁴ Matei 2007, 282–294, fig. 1–6.

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CUPTOARE DIN PERIOADA ELENISTICĂ TÂRZIE DESCOPERITE PE TERITORIUL ORAȘULUI RUSE, BULGARIA

Rezumat

În anul 2015 s-au descoperite pe teritoriul fortăreței Sexaginta Prista din orașul Ruse, două cuptoare și 26 de gropi din perioada elenistică târzie. Camera superioară, aproximativ trei sferturi din grătar, canalul de stocare (*prefurnium*) și placa de lucru a cuptorului pentru arderea ceramicii au fost distruse ca urmare a săpăturilor datând din secolul al XIX-lea. Camera de ardere este săpată în loess și este împărțită în două de suportul pentru grătar. Numai partea vestică a peretelui bolții s-a conservat. Pe grătar și în interiorul camerei de ardere s-au găsit fragmente ceramice și ale unei fibule de tip tracic, provenind dintr-un nivel intact de umplere a cuptorului. Sintetizând datele viabile, putem data cuptorul în perioada secolelor II–I î. Ch.

Cuptorul din gospodărie s-a descoperit la aproximativ 7,00 m în sud-vestul cuptorului de ceramică. Este săpat într-un strat compact de pământ brun, fără vestigii arheologice. Are formă ovală. Bolta este complet conservată. Conține o umplutură densă de pământ brun-cenușiu, amestecat cu mici fragmente de mangal. Ușa cuptorului este amplasată în partea sa nordică. Cuptorul a avut o placă de lucru, distrusă de groapa ulterioară Nr. 22. Fundul cuptorului are o căptușeală din pietricele lipite cu lut și este de culoare cenușie. Sub fundul cuptorului, se găsește sol virgin de culoare galben-brun. În interiorul cuptorului s-au descoperit mici fragmente atipice de ceramică, aparținând perioadei elenistice. În afara acestuia, chiar în apropierea peretelui său sudic, s-a descoperit o fibulă de bronz puternic oxidată. Cuptorul este datat în perioada secolelor III–I î. Ch.

Cele două cuptoare nu pot fi datate cu mai mare precizie. Ambele sunt dintre puținele cuptoare descoperite și cercetate, aparținând perioadei elenistice pe teritoriul Bulgariei. Au fost construite după o perioadă scursă de la locuirea inițială a zonei de deal. Unul dintre cuptoare este săpat în loess, celălalt într-un strat aparținând perioadei elenistice târzii. Probabil unele dintre gropile din apropiere au fost săpate tocmai pentru extragerea lutului. Amplasarea cuptoarelor pe zona deluroasă nu contravine interpretării acestora ca areal sacru. Este posibil ca producerea de vase ceramice să fi fost ea însăși legată de practici rituale.



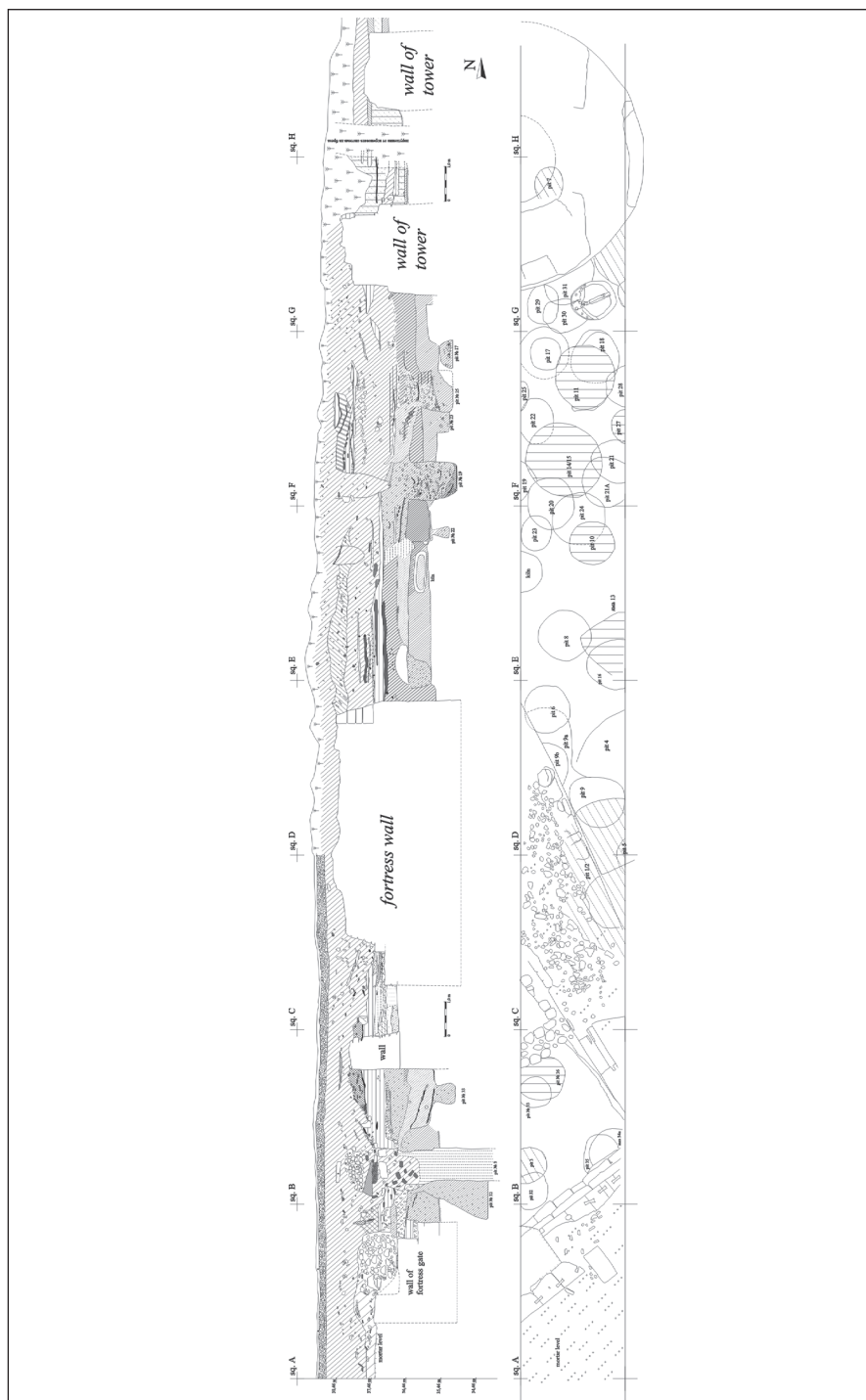


Fig. 2. Sexaginta Prista – 2015 research. Western profile and view from above /
 Sexaginta Prista – cercetarea din 2015. Profilul vestic și vederea de deasupra.

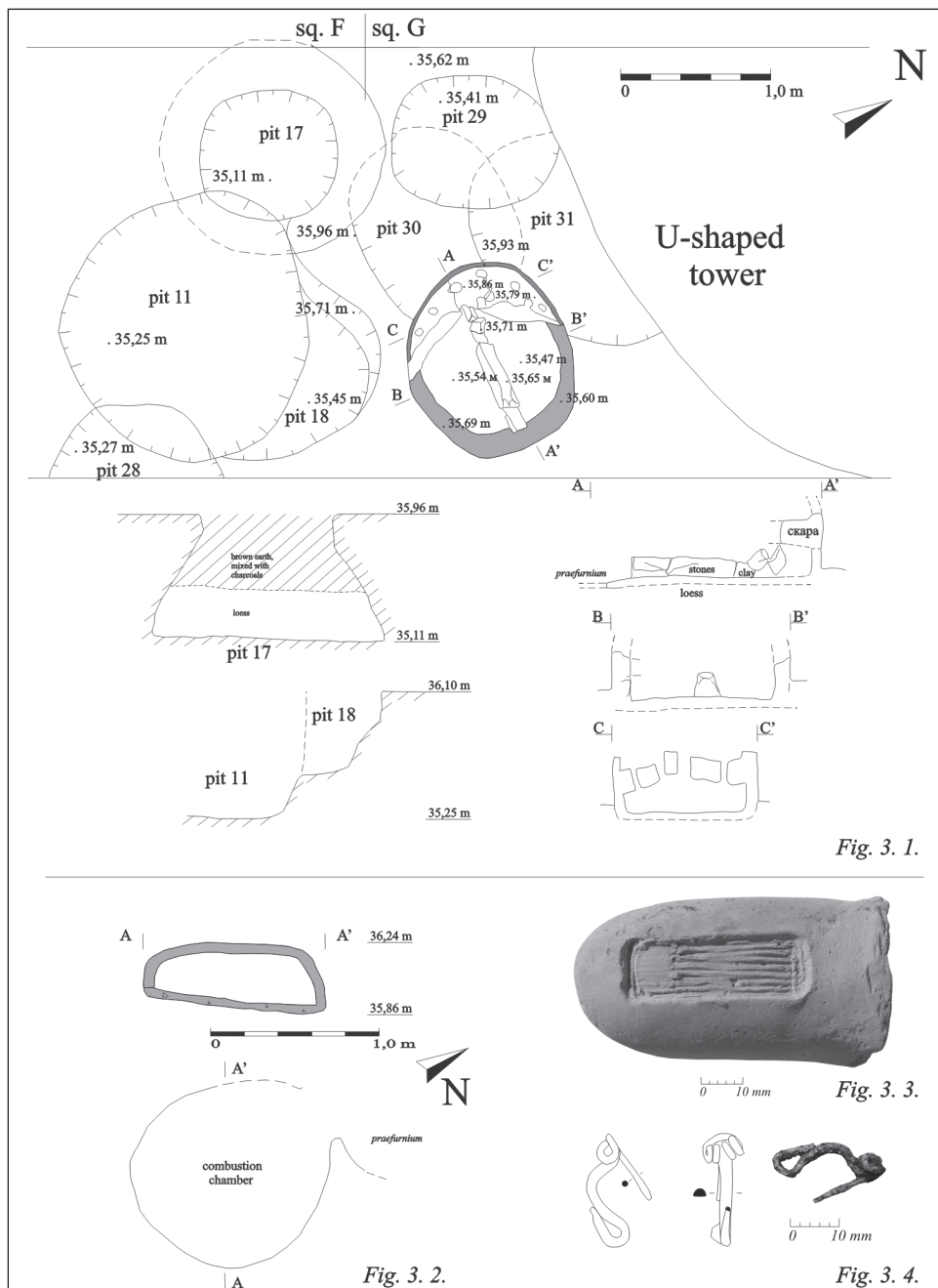


Fig. 3.1. Ceramic kiln and pits in sq. F and G / Cuptorul de ceramică și gropi în secțiunile F și G; Fig. 3.2. Household kiln / Cuptorul din gospodărie; Fig. 3.3. Amphora's handle with anepigraphic stamp / Toarta de amforă cu amprenta neinscripționată; Fig. 3.4. Bronze fibula / Fibula de bronz.

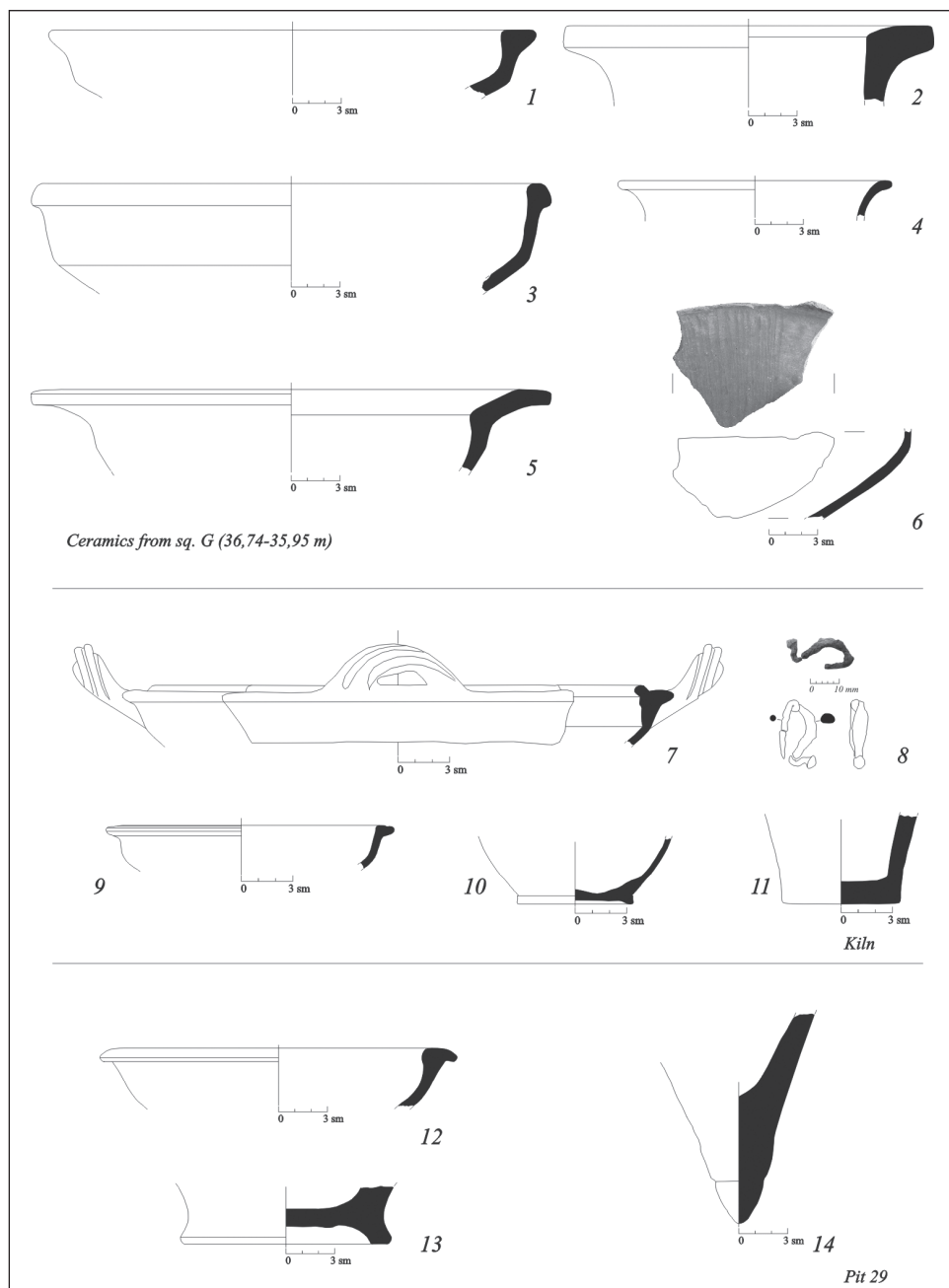


Fig. 4. Ceramic fragments from sq. G (1-6); ceramic fragments and fibula from kiln in sq. G (7-11); ceramic fragments from pit № 29 (12-14) /*Fragmente ceramice din secțiunea G (1-6) și fragmente ceramice și fibula din cuptorul din secțiunea G (7-11) și fragmente ceramice din groapa Nr. 29 (12-14).*

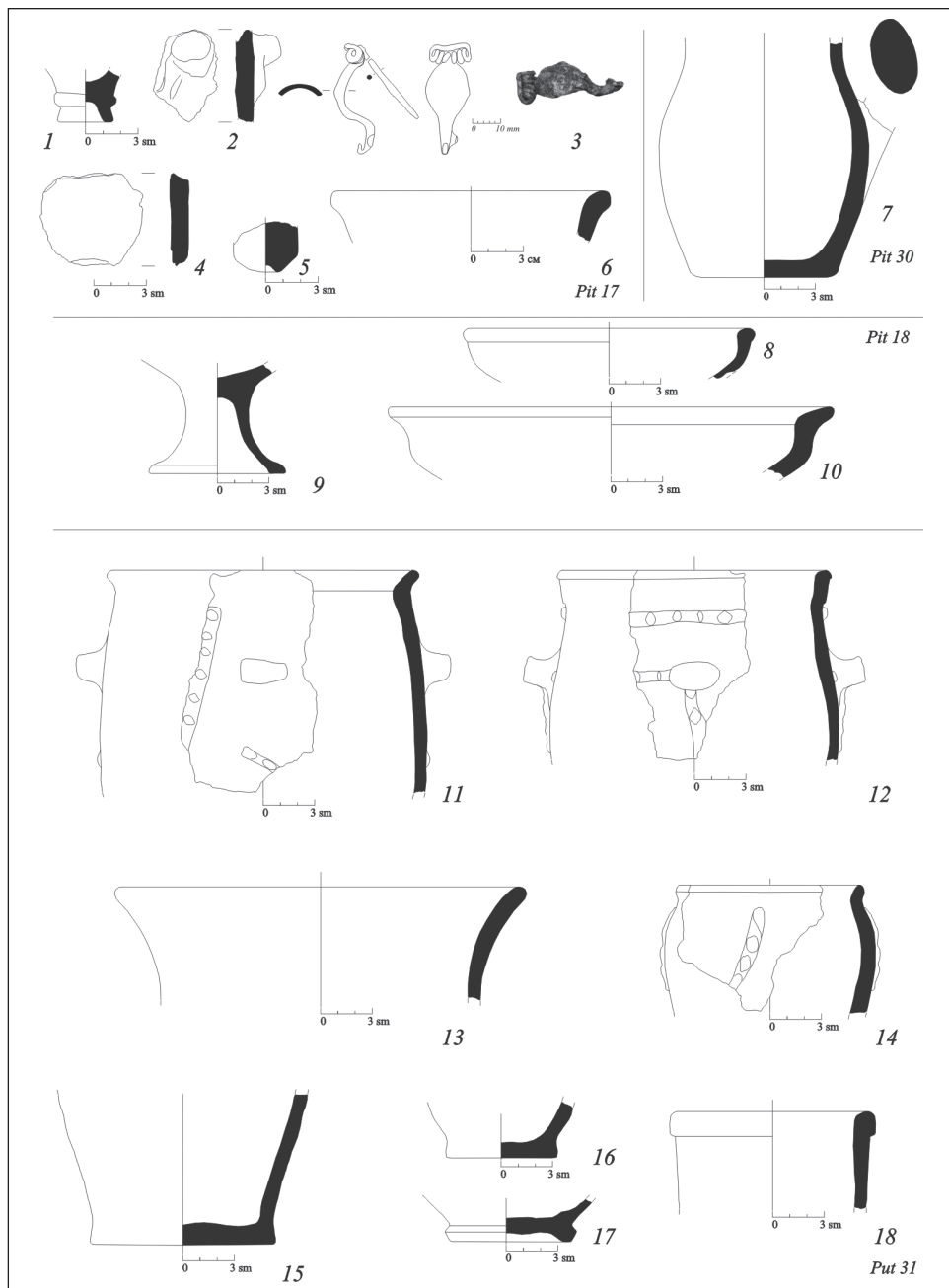


Fig. 5. Ceramic fragments and fibula from pit № 17 (1-6); jug from pit № 30 (7); ceramic fragments from pit № 18 (7, 8-10); ceramic fragments from pit № 31 (11-18) /*Fragmente ceramice și fibula din groapa Nr. 17 (1-6); urcior din groapa Nr. 30 (7); fragmente ceramice din groapa Nr. 18 (7, 8-10); fragmente ceramice din groapa Nr. 31 (11-18).*



Fig. 6. Ceramic kiln – stage of research / Cuptorul de ceramică – fază de cercetare.



Fig. 7. Ceramic kiln and surrounding pits – stage of research /
 Cuptorul de ceramică și gropi alăturate – fază de cercetare.



Fig. 8. Household kiln – stage of research / Cuptorul din gospodărie – fază de cercetare.

