

An imported pottery fragment of the Boian culture and its context in the Hungarian Middle Neolithic

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In my 1993 paper¹ a short reference was made to a small pottery fragment found in an initial *tell* settlement in the Körös valley (SE Hungary) in 1976. The site lies on the bank of the dead arm of the Körös River in the outskirts of Szarvas, presently belonging to the village of Békésszentandrás, called Furugy (pronounced Furudj) by the villagers.² Further details and a more thorough description then was kept for future publication. The purpose of this article is to publish the piece together with its contextual finds.

The district of Szarvas is the area where the ground reconnaissance works of the Intensive Field Survey of Hungary were made between 1974 and 1979. Good results³ of the surface sherding on site 1/28 suggested that a trial excavation was desirable if the finds from this key site were to be fully evaluated. The range of the surface fragments has provided invaluable typological connections between the Alföld Linear Pottery (abbreviated as ALP) and Szakálhát types which suggested that transitional types would be found between these two phases of the Linear Pottery. The threat to the site posed by deep ploughing made this work particularly urgent. A trial excavation was undertaken jointly by the Institute of Archaeology and the Museums of Békés County under the direction of J. Makkay. Two short seasons of excavations were carried out in 1975-1976. During the two seasons two trenches II and III (6x3.5 and 3x3.5 m² respectively, with a 30 cms wide baulk between them) were excavated in arbitrary 20-centimetre spits to archaeologically sterile soil, which lay c. 1.6-1.9 m below the modern ground surface. Later the area of excavation was extended to explore surviving remains of an oven.

As already noted above, surface survey conducted prior to excavation produced both ALP (i.e. earlier) and Szakálhát (later) varieties of Linear Pottery ware. Within two excavation seasons we established that occupation at the Furugy *tell* spanned two main periods, the Early Middle (ALP) and Late Middle (Szakálhát) Neolithic, without any further occupation.

There are obvious distinctions between the two cultural phases which manifest themselves both in vessel shapes and decorative motifs. I plan to discuss in this paper only a few instances. Both phases used globular/rounded shapes for bowls and spherical bowls for large containers. One of the main differences in pottery shapes is that as seen from above, some vessels of the ALP have a quadrangular construction: bases and rims are circular, the central body of the bowls, however, is shaped in a quadrangular fashion. This quadrangularity does not occur on the vessels of the Szakálhát group. Pedestalled bowls with mid size and very high pedestals and high and wide conical upper parts were only characteristic of the ALP types (Pl. 2,2, Pl. 3,1-3, Pl. 4,12, etc.)

and are not present in Szakálhát assemblages. Necked and high-necked bottles are common among the ALP features (Pl. 1,3, Pl. 6,1), but they rarely occur in Szakálhát contexts.

Decorative motifs of incised lines on the ALP vessels show a U in section while Szakálhát motifs are characterized by incised lines having a V-shape. The latter were made by using a sharp and pointed bone or stone tool and the lines were not polished over, while AVK-lines were made using blunt tools and were polished over and/or the excess clay was removed or smeared on the surface.

Linear decorations of vessels of ALP type frequently consist of four fields separated from each other by vertical lines or vertical fields between parallel lines. This design is not characteristic of the Szakálhát vessels⁴ which (i.e. rounded bowls with lengthened upper parts) often show the running spiral pattern (running dogs, S-spirals): unpolished fields (bands) between such parallel lines running around the body were painted red while surfaces above and below were kept unpainted and finely polished (dark grey, even blackish in colour: Pl. 2,3, Pl. 5,1,2,5,7-9, Pl. 6,1). Very rarely the opposite case can be seen: the running bands were polished and neighbouring surfaces were painted. Paint of the Szakálhát pottery was always red crusted and applied after burning while the ALP applied dark (black?) paint on brown, red or yellowish slipped background before burning. The running spiral motif is an exclusive and exquisite attribute of the Szakálhát pottery industry together with the total lack of medium high and very high pedestals. Such types are also not present in the assemblages of the genetic successor of the Szakálhát group i.e. in the Tisza culture. The densely incised meanders (Pl. 7,7-10, Pl. 8, 1-8), on the other hand, show genetic descent of the Tisza pottery from its Szakálhát predecessor.

Although the full analysis of the Furugy pottery assemblage is not yet complete, my preliminary study has identified three phases of occupation within the Middle Neolithic period. The arbitrary layers on the top between 30 and 60 cms were characterised by developed Szakálhát ware with occasional presence of ALP sherds, which can also be considered stray finds i.e. pieces in secondary position. These ALP-sherds often show somewhat distorted motifs as for example the irregular arrowhead pattern.

The second stratum of arbitrary layers lay between 60 and 90 to 120 cms including many ALP fragments as well as the distinctive Painted-Polished ware known to be Early and Classic Szakálhát in date. The assemblage therefore is of mixed character with ALP and Szakálhát types. It can be argued that the two cultural periods overlapped, but can also be seen that the number of ALP sherds gradually decreases in upper arbitrary layers. Or, in other words, the upper phases of the Furugy tell are distinguished by an increase in typical Szakálhát pottery and the gradual decrease of the ALP style.

The lower deposits below 90/120 cms revealed a surprising number of broken vessel fragments of ALP types. This assemblage includes sporadic pieces of Szakálhát vessel types, too. The incision technique of these rarely occurring sherds is of ALP character while the alternating crusted painted/dark polished bands within – and outside of – parallel lines are already present (Pl. 3,2,4, Pl. 4,2,7,9-12, 14, Pl. 5,2b). This decoration technique also appears in trench III where below a thin (2-3 cms high) yellow deposit

a heavily trampled black surface was recorded in most part of the trench with a thin ash layer on its top. Pottery below this undisturbed surface lying in a depth of 110 cms (which sealed debris between 110-170 cms) yielded characteristic ALP-fragments, but in a few cases sharply (Szakálhát-like) incised lines also appear on sherds which are decorated with the alternating painted-polished technique (Pl. 3,7, Pl. 4,2-3,12, Pl. 5,3-5, Pl. 8,2). At the same time, there are typical ALP-sherds of ALP shapes which show red crusted (i.e. Szakálhát-type) paint between meandering or parallel incised lines (Pl. 3,1-4). Fragments of a ca. 35 cm high pedestalled bowl⁵ (Pl. 2,2) also belong to this category. These two types clearly show that the origins of the Szakálhát ware go back to the pottery technology of the Middle or Developed Phase of the ALP pottery. Both the introduction and use of red crusted paint and the finely polished dark surface treatment can be correlated with the similar and contemporary pottery technology of the Vinca A period. The appearance of this technology and style could be here the result of the northern distribution of an invention of hitherto unknown origin.

Field notes and photos made shortly after the excavations record the sporadic appearance of different types of pottery: fragments of red slipped and finely polished vessels of Esztár type (Pl. 7,2-3). The Esztár pottery was a contemporary of the Classic and Late Phase of the ALP on the eastern periphery of the Great Hungarian Plain and was strongly related to its eastern neighbour and variant: the Lumea Noa painted ware in Central Transylvania. It applied fine dark red and intentionally coloured slip which usually was heavily polished, even burnished. Black painted strips were painted onto this fine surface before burning, but occasionally probably also after burning. Finely polished and black-on-red painted Esztár sherds often occur in closed ALP (and also Early Szakálhát) contexts and most (but not all!) Esztár assemblages also include typically decorated ALP-sherds. Characteristic Esztár fragments were found in trench II (in a depth of 60-90 cms), in context with Classic Szakálhát and ALP fragments (Pl. 7,2). Other pieces with worn surfaces came to light in trench III/North, 100-120 and 140-170 cms and III/South, 90-110 cms (Pl. 7,3). A small fragment from trench II (120-150 cms) is probably a part of a bowl of Bükk type as is another fragment of a paint container with traces of red paint on the inner wall. Incised decoration of further fragments strongly resemble fine ware of the Bükk culture (Pl. 8,1-7). Some painted or extremely fine polished black and dark-grey coloured fragments resemble the strange pottery excavated on a nearby site of the Körös valley in Endrod, site 36, with its fine dark grey and black polished fragments belonging to high-necked rounded bottles (Pl. 5,2a, Pl. 7,1a,4,6). As my former analysis has shown, incised and painted decoration motifs suggest a contemporaneity of this fine dark grey and black polished ware of Endrod 36 with Classic ALP and Esztár types. Curiously enough, Szakálhát fragments were not found in the assemblages of the hitherto excavated three features of Endrod 36.⁶ This means that Endrod 36 was a site with a very short duration of occupation.

The number of painted and incised types could be increased by going through all of the existing sherds, but those described above suffice to make the point that the Furugy layers represent the time of the ALP-Szakálhát transition. The position of the imported sherd can be precisely fit into this sequential transition.

The piece under discussion was found in trench II in a depth of 30-60 cms (Pl. 1,1).⁷ Unfortunately, the site supervisor for that time did not record the exact context of the discovery, but according to the field notes the excavator (J. Makkay) arriving to the site in the company of V. S. Titov unanimously approved its context with Classic Szakálhát types and related it to typically decorated Boian or Vădastra vessels. The piece is significant, because to my knowledge it is the first case when such a ceramic fragment was found in securely dated context of Neolithic pottery in Hungary: it is clearly an import from areas lying to the South of the Carpathian Range. Since this type of decoration is otherwise totally unknown on this part of the Great Hungarian Plain, it can be excluded that the piece once came into this stratigraphical position as intrusive from the uppermost (ploughed) soil. The wall fragment of a large coarse container is decorated with incrustated bead motif: a row of small plastic lentil-shaped knobs (made as a sunken relief) is surrounded with white inlay (Pl.1,2). This type is also totally unknown in the decorative repertoire of both the ALP and Szakálhát wares, therefore it can also be considered as foreign in terms of decoration.

Such ware may have been made locally by people originally from other regions, but can also be brought to the site from distant places by itinerant tradesmen. Our present knowledge cannot provide data that would be helpful in determining the region in which these vessels were made, but they seem to be of foreign origin, not locally made. The closest parallels of the piece Pl.1,1 can be found amongst similar decorated vessels of the Giulești Phase of the Boian culture.⁸ Undoubtedly, my Rumanian friends and colleagues will have the final say regarding this problem.

Chronological correlation between Classic Szakálhát and the Giulești Phase of the Boian culture suggests that this contact was the result of regular trade bringing raw stone material of N. Balcanic sources and/or worked Spondylus to the Carpathian Basin.

Notes

¹ J. Makkay: *Pottery links between Late Neolithic cultures of the Pontic and Anatolia, and the origins of the Hittites*. *Anatolica* 19, 1993, Special Issue on Anatolia and the Balkans, ed. by J. Roodenberg, 120, Fig. 1,1. This time the piece was said to have come from a Vădastra cultural milieu.

² J. Makkay (ed.): *Magyarország Régészeti Topográfiája*, a Szarvasi járás. Budapest, 1989, 76-78: site 1/28.

³ Characteristic pottery fragments of both the Alföld Linear Pottery and the Szakálhát group literally covered the surface of the site as a dense scatter.

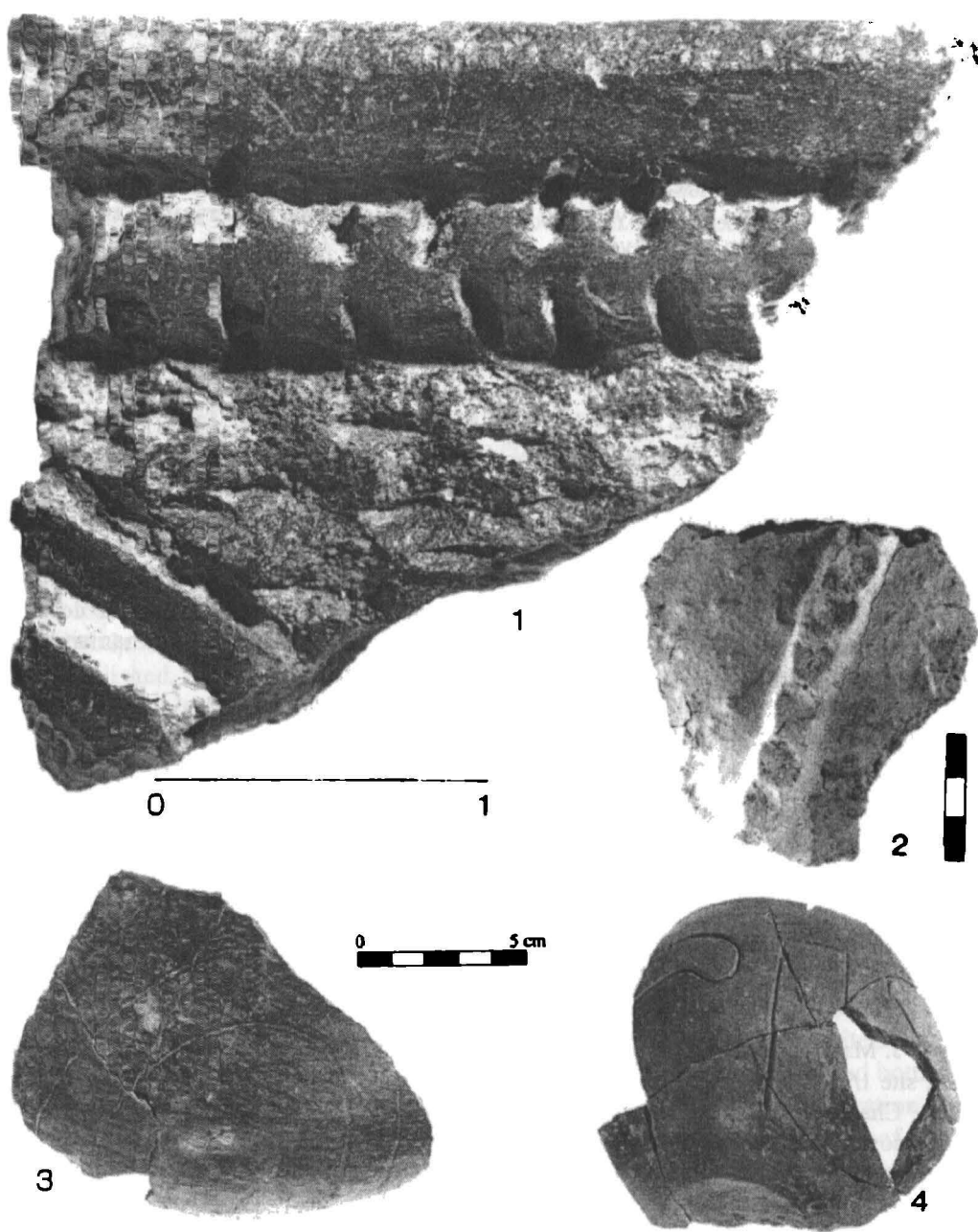
⁴ It rarely occurs that small knobs are applied at the joins of the runnign spirals. This reminds us of the original division of motifs into four fields on ALP-vessels.

⁵ Reconstructed height. The highest existing pedestalled bowl of the ALP-culture.

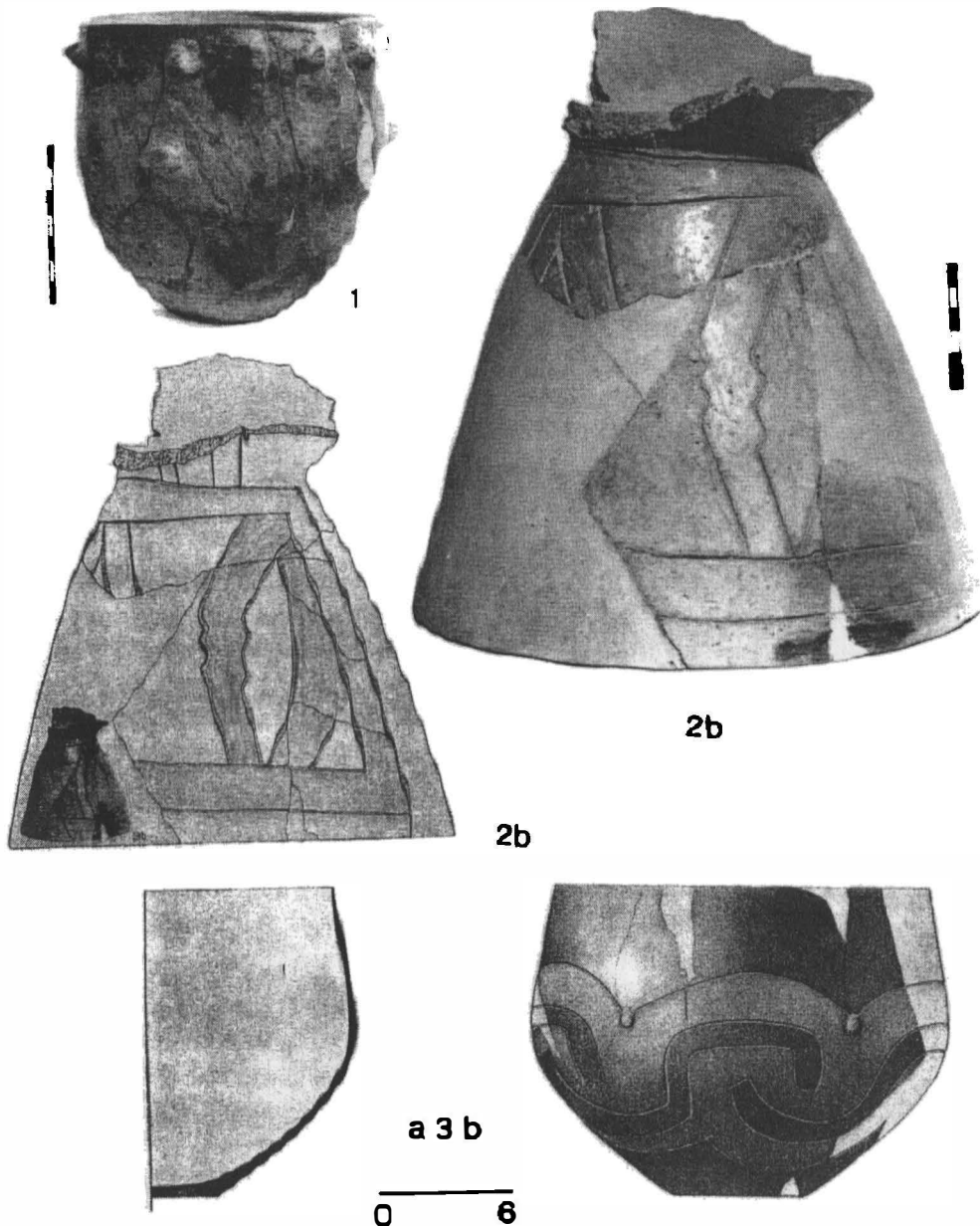
⁶ Makkay 1993, op. cit., Fig.1,4-20.

⁷ The piece unfortunately cannot be located in the collections of the responsible museums (i.e. Békéscsaba and Szarvas). As I have pointed out, the excavated material was secretly moved from the Szarvas Museum a few days before 15. May, 1979. See Makkay op.cit. 1989, 78, note 4.

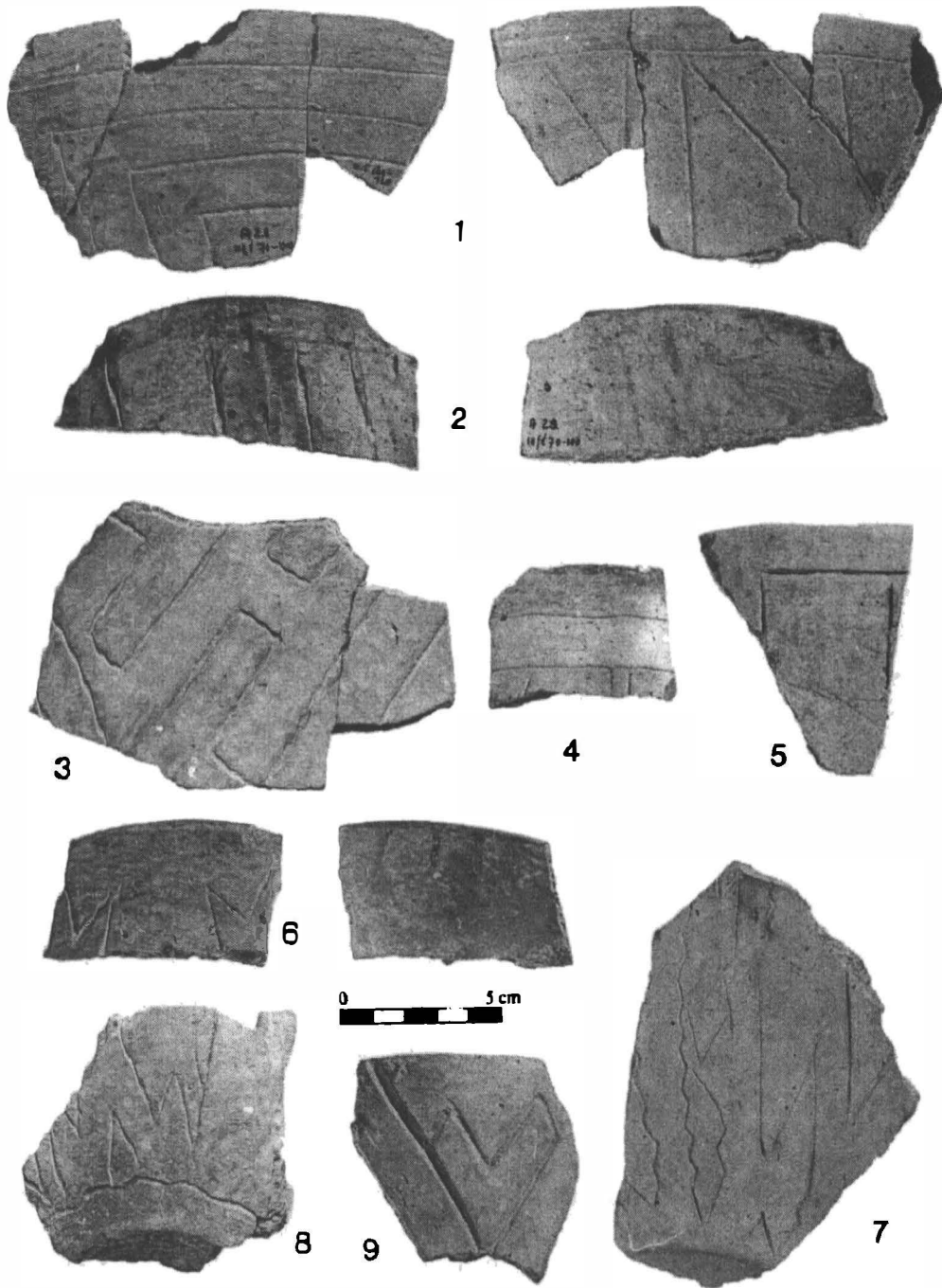
⁸ E. Cornșa: *Istoria comunităților culturii Boian*. Bucharest, 1974, Pl. 8-9, Pl. 13.



Pl. I: 1 = trench II/30-60. – 2 = trench II/30-60. – 3 = trench III/North, 140-170: outer wall was painted black between running spiral motif of Szakálhát type, incised lines are executed in ALP technique; grey polished inner surface. – 4 = trench III/North, 140-170: bowl with incised motifs of ALP-Szakálhát transitional type.



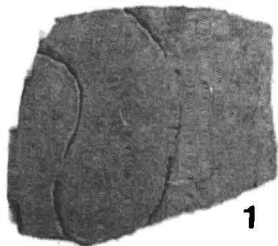
Pl. II:1 = trench III: Late ALP shape. – 2 = trench III/Southwest, 160-190: characteristic pedestalled bowl of the ALP decorated with ALP incision technique and with red crusted paint (darker stripes on the drawing: 2b, lighter ones on the photo: 20). – 3 = reconstructed bowl of Szakálhát type from trenches II-III: decorated with dark polished running spiral pattern and accompanying running spirals painted in red.



Pl. III

Pl. III:1 = trench III/North, 70-100+100-120: rim fragments of the upper part of an ALP pedestalled bowl, outside (left) and inside (right) with ALP-pattern. – 2 = trench III/North, 70-100: rim fragments from the upper part of an ALP pedestalled bowl, outside (left) incised motif with dark painted stripes in alternating fields, inside (right) dark (red?) painted stripes. – 3 = trench III/80-150: fragments from the upper part of an ALP pedestalled bowl with characteristic menadric incised pattern of ALP style, with dark paint in alternating fields. – 4 = trench III/North, 100-120: the same vessel form, with alternating field between incised lines of ALP type, painted red and polished dark (blackish). – 5 = trench III/South, 160-190, ALP pit. ALP incised fragment (from the upper part of a pedestalled bowl) with incision and red crusted paint. – 6 = trench III/North, 70-100, painted rim fragment of an ALP pedestalled bowl: incised-painted pattern on the outer wall (left) and dark painted stripes on the inner wall (right). – 7 = trench III/South, 140-170, below sealing stamped floor: the lower part of an ALP bowl with incised arrowhead motif. – 8-9 = trench III/North, 70-100: fragments of ALP vessels with incised motifs.

Pl. IV: 1 = trench III/North, 110-140: red painted spiral motif on a Szakálhát sherd. – 2 = trench III/North. 40-80: dark painted ALP rim fragment of a pedestalled bowl. – 3 = trench III/South, 140-170, below trampled floor surface at a depth of 110 cm: dark paint on the outer surface of the rim part of a pedestalled bowl. – 4 = trench III/South, 160-190, ALP pit: incised sherd of the ALP with brown paint. – 5 = trench III/North, 100-120: trench III/North, 110-140: ALP black paint between ALP incised lines. – 6 = trench III/North, 100-120: ALP sherd with red crusted paint. – 7 = trench III/South, 140-160: dark polished/red painted alternating fields between incised lines of ALP-character. – 8 = trench III/South, 140-160: rim fragment of an ALP pedestalled bowl with dark red painted stripe on the inner surface. – 9 = trench III/S, 160-180: ALP sherd with alternating dark-light fields between incised lines. – 10 = trench III/North, 110-140: characteristic Szakálhát fragment with alternating dark polished/crusted red painted running spirals. – 11 = trench III/South, 160-190: red crusted painted ALP sherd. – 12 = trench III/South, 140-170: below trampled floor at a depth of 110 cm: ALP pedestal fragment with dark (black) paint between incised lines. – 13 = trench II/31-60: fragment decorated with distorted ALP-motiv. – 14 = trench III/North, 70-100: lower part of an ALP bowl with incised ALP-type lines on the outer wall, and alternating fields of dark polished/red crusted painted fields (outer wall), while polished on the inner wall. – 15 = trench II/30-60: fragment of an ALP pedestalled bowl with incised arrowhead-motiv.



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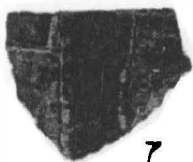
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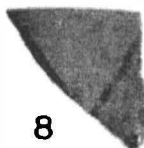
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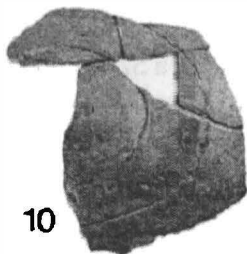
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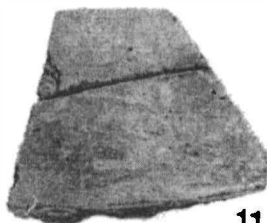
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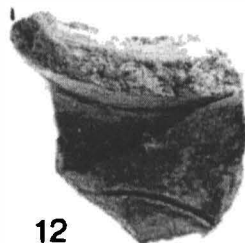
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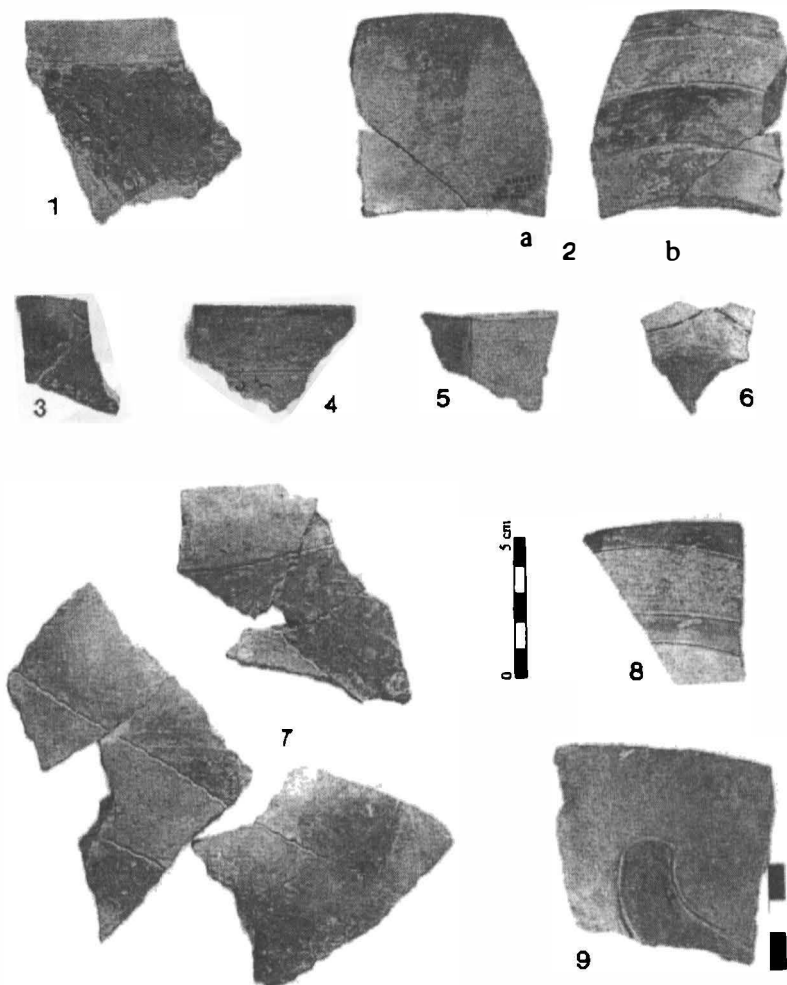
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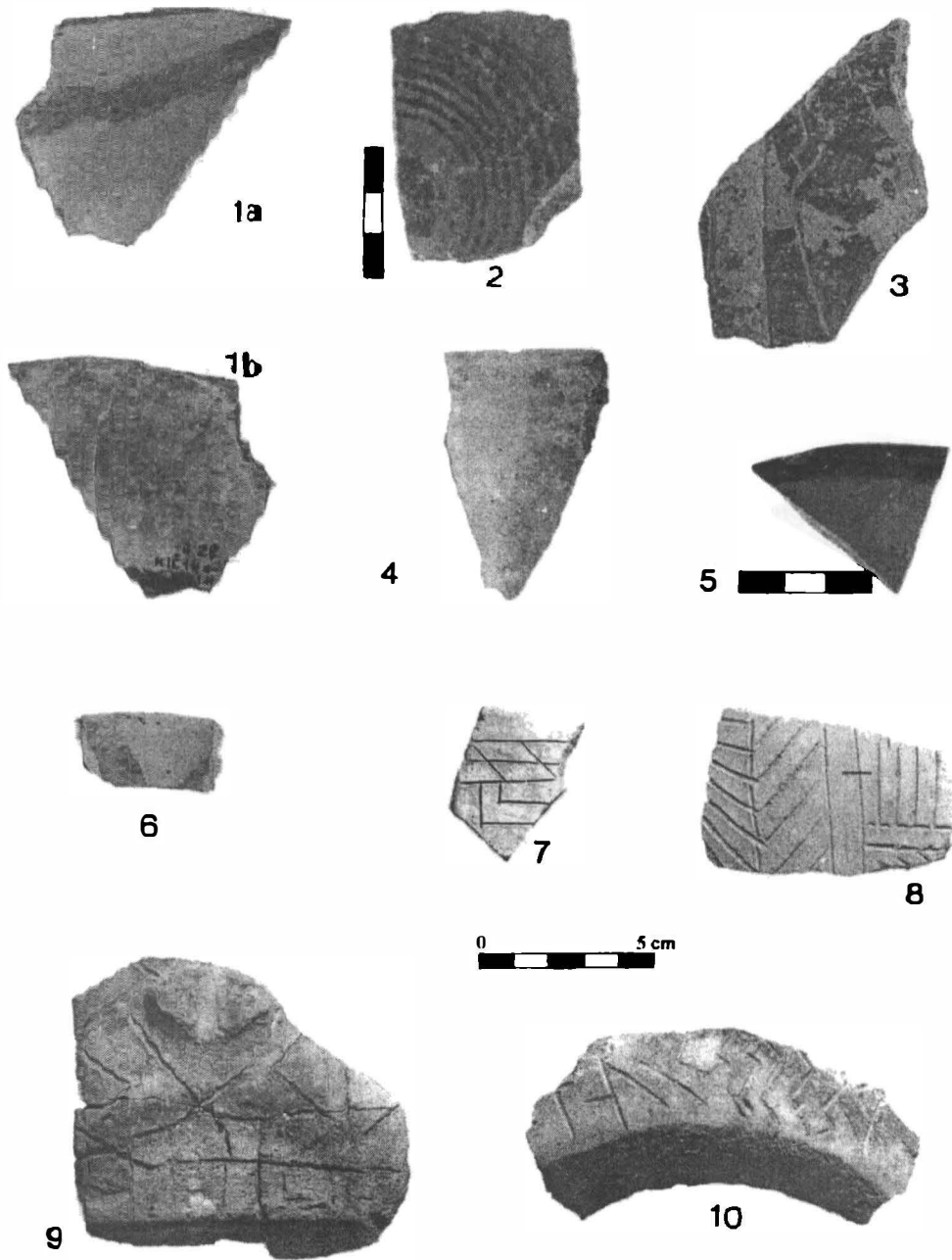
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Pl. IV

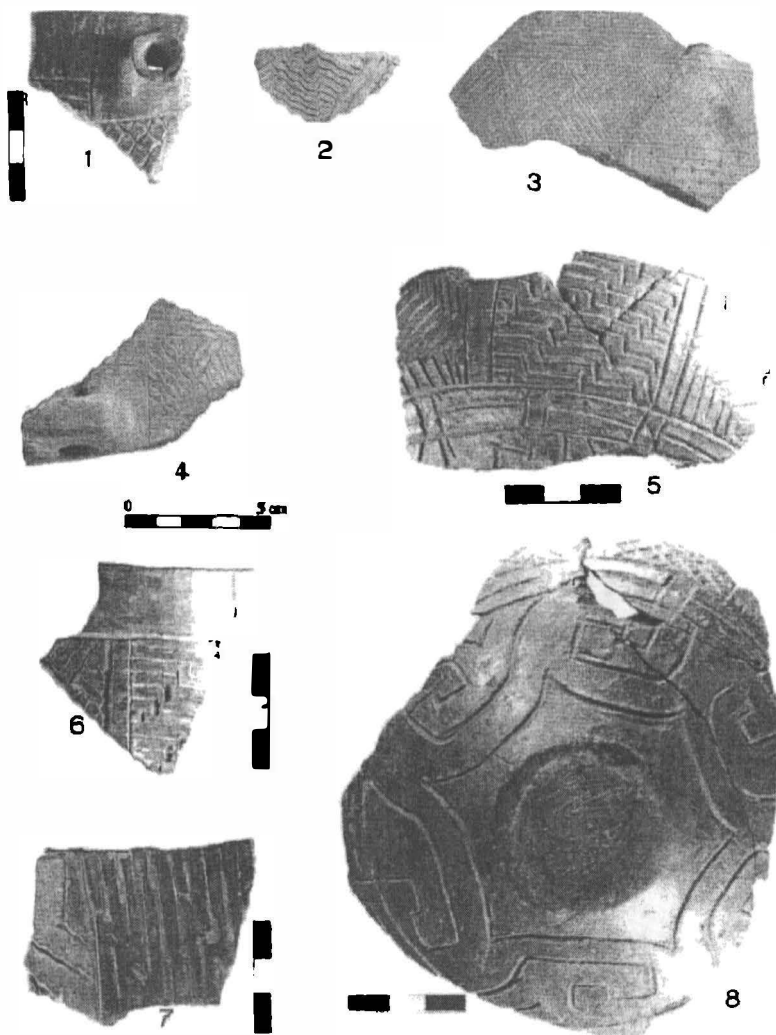
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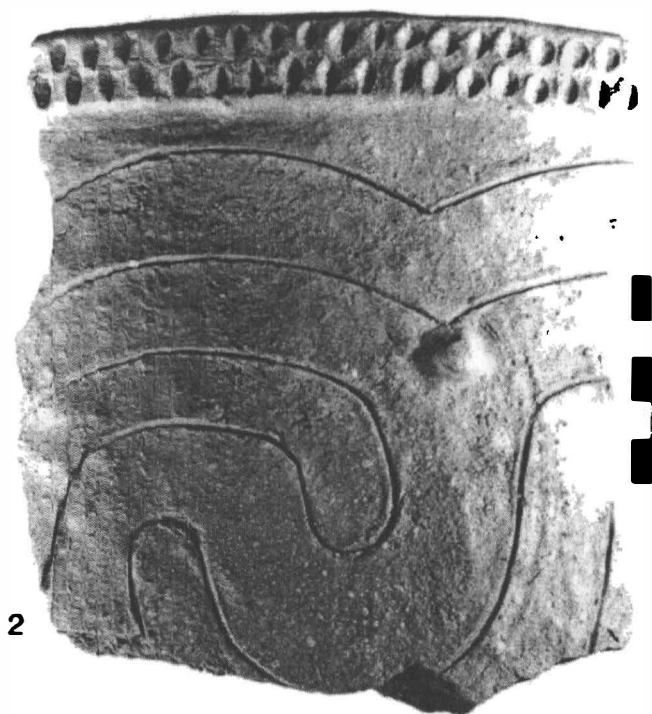
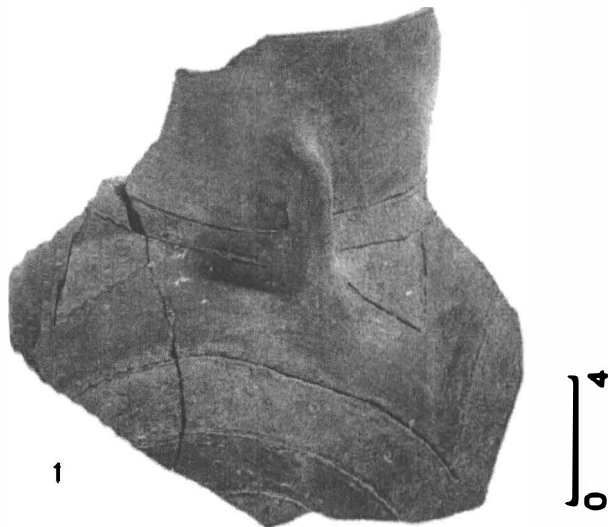
Pl. V: painted and incised fragments of transitional type. 1 = trench III/South, 160-190, ALP pit: necked bowl incised with Szakálhát-type loines, alternating black-polished and crusted red painted bands. – 2 = trench III/North, 70-100: rim fragment of the upper part of an ALP pedestalled bowl. Inside (left) painted stripes, outside (right) ALP lines, the fields between are polished or red crusted painted. – 3 = trench III/South, 120-140, below trampled floor at 110 cm: ALP incised sherd, dark paint. – 4 = trench III/Southwest, 120-140, below trampled floor at 110 cm: Szakálhát incised line, polished/red crusted painted. – 5 = trench III/South, 190-190, below trampled floor: Szakálhát-type polished/painted. – 6 = trench III/20-50: Szakálhát-type polished-painted. – 7 = fragments of a rounded Szakálhát-bowl from trench III/80-150 with alternating dark polished/red crusted painted bands on the outer wall accompanied by incised lines of Szakálhát character. – 8 = trench III/North, 40-80: see no. 2. – 9 = trench II/60-90: black polished spiral on a Szakálhát fragment.



Pl. VI: **1** = trench III/house + trench III/6a: necked bottle of Szakálhát type with handle and with polished/painted running spiral motif on the belly. – **2** = trench II/30-60 fragment of Classic Szakálhát large container without painting.



Pl. VII: 1a-b = trench III/North, 140-170: rim fragment from the upper part of an ALP pedestalled bowl with dark paint on the inner wall (a) and typical ALP incised motif on the outer (b). – 2 = Esztár-type black-on-red painted fragment from trench II/60-90. – 3 = red painted and polished Esztár-type fragment with worn surfaces and ALP incised motif from trench III/South, 90-110. – 4 = trench III/South, 160-190: ALP pit, rim fragment from the upper part of a pedestalled ALP bowl with black painted stripe on the outer wall: crusted paint. – 5 = fragment of a similar vessel from trench II/60-90: dark painted stripe on the outer wall. – 6 = trench III/South, 160-190, ALP pit: black painted stripes on both wall accompanying ALP incised lines. – 7-10 = Szakálhát-type geometric incised motifs from trench III/20-50 (7-8), trench III/North, 40-70 (9) and 20-50 (10).



Pl. VIII: 1-8 = Szakálhát sherds with incised geometric and spiral pattern from trench II, 60-90 (1, 5, 6-8), trench III/Southwest, 120-140, below trampled floor at 110 (2), trench III/North, 140-171 (3), and trench III/South, 140-160 (4).