

REMARKS ON THE ROMAN POTTERY FROM SLĂVENI FORT. REPORT OF THE POTTERY DISCOVERED DURING 2008 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

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Rezumat: Investigațiile arheologice realizate de dr. Dorel Bondoc în 2008 în împrejurimile fortificației romane de la Slăveni au condus la descoperirea unor fragmente ceramice romane comune. Informațiile oferite de descoperirile arheologice aduc elemente privind calitatea și cantitatea bunurilor produse de olarii romani și despre activitățile comerciale ale acestora în mediul militar roman.

Abstract: Few common pottery fragments were discovered during the archaeological survey conducted in 2008 by Phd. Dorel Bondoc at surroundings of Slăveni Roman fort. The information provided by the archaeological discoveries offer some elements concerning the quality and quantity of the goods produced by the Roman potters and their commercial activities in the Roman military environment.

Cuvinte-cheie: ceramică, roman, fortificație, tipuri, producție.

Key-words: pottery, Roman, fortress, types, production.

The Slăveni Roman fort and the civilian settlement are situated near the Olt river at 15 km south-east of *municipium* and later *colonia* Romula, the capital of Dacia Inferior province. The archaeological excavations, officially started in 1893 by Gr. G. Tocilescu and P. Polonic, revealed the Roman fort built by the *cohors I Flavia Commagenorum*, *CIB* and possibly *A(la) Cl(audia)* in the 2nd century AD, but other units from *legio V Macedonica*, *legio XI Claudia* and *legio XIII Gemina* were present in the fortification during the time¹.

The civilian settlement partially excavated by D. Tudor and G. Popilian² stretched 1 km along Olt river and the Roman road. The main edifices were the *thermae*, pottery workshop, Mithras temple and other constructions and facilities, along with the roman necropolis and the road to Romula. The road was an important component of the *limes Alutanus* also having a communicational and commercial use.

The archaeological findings allowed the dating of the fortification in the 2nd – 3rd century AD. The civilian settlement was partially excavated and there is no sufficient evidence about the end of the habitation in antiquity. It may be assumed a habitation including the 4th century AD in the light of special archaeological circumstances, as the use of a kiln built over the drain of *thermae*. Also the literature and many authors are making a strong case in proving not only the Roman habitation in the 4th century AD but also the return of the Roman rule for a limited area North of the Danube³.

The aim of the present paper is to bring into the scientific circuit a few common pottery discoveries from 2008 archaeological excavations at Slăveni Roman fort. Considering that the old and new archaeological discoveries and researches have been already collected, interpreted and published in the latest monographic volume⁴ dedicated to this important archaeological site, our aim is to complete this approach by signaling some pottery forms which were not included in the previous publications, alongside other well known forms.

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¹ Tudor *et al.*, 2011, pp. 24-25.

² Tudor *et al.*, 2011, p. 49.

³ Tudor, 1942; Petoescu 1995, p. 165; Bondoc 2009a, pp. 160-167.

⁴ Tudor *et al.*, 2011.

The conditions of the discoveries are limited at the archaeological excavation from 2008⁵ in the area of South-West tower of the Roman fort, which is in a state of poor preservation because of the modern interventions and the insufficient protection and implication from the local authorities⁶. The local pottery workshop, the trade network at long and short distance and the types of pottery imported and local imitations are little known yet. In the absence of the analysis in petrography for the Roman pottery from Slăveni, it is clear that the comparative method of analyses for the local production of pottery is almost impossible, excepting the shards discovered in the area of the pottery workshop. In that field, the absence of the petrography and chemical analyses make impossible the method of pottery classification for the examination of the different groups of pottery and for determination of their provenience. In the absence of these analyses, the typological study of the pottery was complemented by a macroscopic description of the fabrics with a special attention to their color, type of firing and inclusions.

Despite the limitations, it was possible to classify the fabrics in two main categories. The first is specific especially for the jar-pots: gray coarse reductive fired fabric with sand, limestone particles and silver mica. Some of the analogies were discovered in the area of the pottery kilns at Slăveni, proving the local producing. The second category may be described as red/reddish semi-fine oxidative firing with silver mica and small limestone particles in composition. These are the characteristics of the pots with two handles, also attested in the area of the local pottery kilns.

The 34 pottery fragments presented in the catalogue are in a fragmentary state of preservation, limiting the possibility to identify in all cases the exact type of the vessels. As preliminary remarks, the limited size of the lot doesn't provide examples for all categories of the common Roman vessel that is usually encountered in this kind of sites. Considering the state of preservation, the shards were classified in the following categories: vessel for cooking (jar-pots, pots), vessel for storage (pots with two handles), vessel for eating (bowls) and amphorae. One fragment of base may have come from a pitcher or a jug (drinking vessel) but the fragment is too small for certain identification.

The important representation of the jar-pots in the main vessel type implied in food preparation (*vasa coquinatoria*) does not suggest a general preference for boiled meals, since our small analyzed lot is not representative for the entire pottery discoveries from Slăveni. The analysis of the Slăveni old and new pottery discoveries, presented in the monographic volume, also reveals the existence of some forms used for frying or baking, indicating the Roman way of food preparation.

The vessel for eating (*vasa escaria*) is represented by two bowls fragments, a small fraction from the types of bowls discovered during the time at Slăveni. It is also important to remark that this type of bowl is common in Dacia Inferior⁷ but not to be found until now in the published exemplars from the monographic study at Slăveni.

Even if it is hard to establish accurately the place of origin in all cases of pottery discoveries, at least we can estimate the possible origin of some types of vessel, according to the previous studies and other observations.

A number of 5 pottery kilns were discovered until now in the area of the civilian settlement at Slăveni, near the thermal edifice⁸. According to the scholars, the kilns were used during 2nd – 3rd centuries AD, but the further continuation of producing pottery here in the 4th century is also presumed⁹. It is also important to mention that according to the authors of the archaeological excavations the Roman fort was destroyed by the Carpic invasion at the middle of the 3rd century

⁵ The archaeological excavation was conducted by dr. Dorel Bondoc from Museum of Oltenia Craiova. Unfortunately, this was the last archaeological excavation at this site until now. I am grateful to dr. Dorel Bondoc for giving me the opportunity to publish Roman pottery from Cioroiu Nou (2012), Răcari (2015) and now Slăveni in this journal.

⁶ Bondoc, 2009b.

⁷ Popilian, 1976, p. 122, type 1, pl. LXVI/806.

⁸ Tudor et al., 2011, pp. 54-56.

⁹ Popilian, 1981, p. 46.

AD and never reconstructed¹⁰. There are no shards in our lot that can be dated later than 3rd century AD. The ethnic origin of some of the potters can be supposed from oriental Romanized area, as prove by a fragment of pottery (discovered in the civilian settlement during 1976 archaeological excavations campaign) inscribed with the name [M]αρτείνος¹¹ using Greek characters before firing¹². It is possible that this person to be a *peregrinus* from the category of *nuda nomina*, coming from the modest social class. In this state of research there are no indications about dating the vessel in relation with *Constitutio Antoniniana* from 212 AD and the status of *civis* of the potter¹³, and one simple Roman name does not prove the Roman citizenship. Also the Dacian local origin of some other potters can be proved by the pottery produced here in Dacian tradition¹⁴.

We think that the jar-pots (catalogue n° 1-10) have strong origins in Romula potters workshops tradition of 3rd century AD, but their presence at Slăveni, especially in the context of the pottery kilns in the civilian settlement near Roman fortress suggest that the local potters imitate this type, or some potters from Romula produced vessels in local factories at Slăveni. This is not unusual in Roman world, as long as the potters, their agents or traders are interested in finding new markets for their products. Considering that Slăveni is situated at a small distance of Romula, the capital of the Dacia Inferior province, and a pot was very cheap, the necessary production of this kind of vessel was great, in order to assure the minimum for daily life of the producer.

The pot with two handles, produced in the first half of 3rd century AD, (catalogue n° 15-20) also represents another type of pottery produced at Slăveni, some examples being discovered in the area of the kilns in the civilian settlement¹⁵. This type of pots with ring foot shows no traces of secondary burning, not being used for cooking in contact with fire, and the semi-fine or fine red color fabric as well as the elegant shape place them in the category of the vessels for storage of food (solid or liquid). This type is also known in other sites from Dacia Inferior, including variations in other important centers as Cioroïl Nou¹⁶. There are two variants at Slăveni, one with flat, undecorated rim and another with flat rim, decorated with grooves.

None of the amphorae handle could be identified by typology. Excepting one example (catalogue n° 31) all the amphorae handles are decorated with 3-4 grooves, presenting great variations in size, color, types of firing and fabric.

All the base fragments from lids come from one single type that can be described as presenting a curved edge to the inside. One explanation may be given by the necessity of fixing the lid above the vessel during food preparation in a oven, but most probably this type of lids were used for covering pans or trays (*patella*) (?)¹⁷, a simple way of baking bread in open fire. Even the secondarily burning traces on the rim and the quality of the coarse fabric indicate that this vessels were used for cooking in contact with fire, the shape of the lids, having in many cases a flat superior part which may qualify for occasionally using as plates for eating. One fragment of lid (catalogue n° 25) presenting a button in the superior part, belongs to another type.

¹⁰ Tudor et al., 2011, pp. 45-47.

¹¹ Tudor et al., 2011, pl. XX/78.

¹² Tudor, 1966, p. 597, no. 7, fig. 3/1; Florescu, Petolescu, 1977, 543 p. 213: [M]ARTEINOC.

¹³ Rizakis, 1996, p. 21.

¹⁴ Tudor et al., 2011, p. 58, about pottery production at Slăveni in Dacian tradition. Popilian, 1981, pl. 8.

¹⁵ Tudor et al., 2011, no. 98-100. Popilian, 1976, p. 92, type 4, first half of the 3rd century AD.

¹⁶ Gămureac, 2011-2012, pp. 91-113. The pots with two handles from Cioroïl Nou represent a variant of this type, presenting a vertical rim instead of horizontal as usually. Popilian, 1976, p. 92; Brukner, 1981, T. 103/2, 5.

¹⁷ Junkelmann, 1997, p. 130.

Catalogue

Jar-pots

The fragments have the following characteristics: the lip thickened outwardly rounded edge, a groove on the inside, the neck is short or non-existent and in certain cases the vessels are decorated with one or more grooves on the shoulder. Popilian 1976 jar-pots type 2 p. 87, pl. XXXIII-XXXIV/325-331 (first half of the 3rd century AD); Popilian 2012, jar-pots type 1, p. 56-57, p. 128, pl. XII/M.71/1, M70/1-2, pl. XXII/M49 (Dioști); Popilian, Bondoc, 2013, fig. 29/18 (Locusteni); Tudor, Popilian, Bondoc, Gudea 2011, p. 173, pl. XXI/81-82; Popilian, Bondoc 2012, p. 218, pl. CXXXV/3 (Sucidava).

1. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 5 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, semi coarse dark gray fabric with silver mica, limestone and lithic fragments, beige slip on the inside and outside, Munsell¹⁸ 1 for Gley 4/dark gray and the slip 10YR 5/2 graish brown
2. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 3 cm, rim diameter 16 cm, gray coarse fabric with fine sand and silver mica sparkles, gray slip, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 5/ gray
3. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,8 cm, rim diameter 16 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand, limestone particles and silver mica, secondarily burned on the inside and outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 4/1 dark greenish gray
4. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 16 cm, bluish gray semi-fine fabric with limestone micro-particles and silver mica in composition, slip on the same color, Munsell 2 for Gley 6/1 bluish gray
5. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, S2, h-0,80 cm,¹⁹ preserved height 1,5 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 5/gray
6. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 3 cm, rim diameter 17 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand and silver mica in composition, Munsell 2 for Gley 5/1 bluish gray
7. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 16 cm, gray semi-coarse fabric with limestone particles and silver mica, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 5/gray
8. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, gray, coarse fabric with sand particles and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 10R 4/1 dark reddish gray
9. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 3 cm, rim diameter 21 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand and silver mica particles in composition, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 2 for Gley 4/1 dark bluish gray
10. Jar-pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 5,5 cm, rim diameter 24 cm, coarse bluish-gray fabric with limestone, sand and silver mica particles, porous, slip of the same color, the diameter is bigger than usually, Munsell 1 for Gley 6/gray

Pots with rounded rim on the inside

Tudor, Popilian, Bondoc, Gudea 2011, p. 174, pl. XX/94; Popilian, 1981, p. 33, pl. 3/8

11. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 21 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand limestone particles and silver mica, slip of the same color, Munsell 1 for Gley 4/ dark gray
12. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2 cm, rim diameter approximately 14 cm, coarse gray fabric with sand, limestone and silver mica particles in composition, secondarily burned on the inside and outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 5/gray

¹⁸ Munsell Soil Color Chart 1994 Revised edition.

¹⁹ Some additionally information concerning the place and depth of the discovery were noted by the author of the archaeological excavation.

Pots with flared rim

Popilian 1976, jar-pot type 11, p. 89, pl. XXXVI/365-369 (end of the 2nd century AD); Popilian 2012, p. 52-53, pl. X/M. 62/1-2 (Dioști); Popilian, Bondoc, 2013, fig. 30/6-8 (Locusteni); Tudor, Popilian, Bondoc, Gudea 2011, p. 174, pl. XXII/87, 92; Bondoc, Gudea 2009, p. 164, pl. XXXVII/167, pl. XXXIX/174; Brukner 1981, T. 113/53; Popilian, Bondoc 2012, pl. CXXXV/1 (Sucidava).

13. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 20 cm, reddish-gray coarse fabric with sand, limestone particles and silver mica sparkles, secondarily burned on the outside, slip of the same color, Munsell 10R 5/1 reddish gray

14. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,2 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, beige coarse fabric with sand particles and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the outside, Munsell 10 R 5/3 weak red

Pots with two handles

Popilian 1976, p. 92, type 4 pl. XXXIX/399-404 (first half of 3rd Century AD); Tudor, Popilian, Bondoc, Gudea 2011, p. 175, pl. XXIV/98-100

Variant with undecorated flat rim

15. Pot, fragment of rim, S2, h-0,80 cm, preserved height 3,8 cm, rim diameter approximately 20 cm, semi-fine red fabric with limestone small particles, the rim is flat on the top, the core is gray, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red

16. Pot, fragment of rim, S2, h-0,80 cm, preserved height 2 cm, rim diameter 17 cm, semi-fine brick color fabric with silver mica in composition, porous, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red

17. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 3,8 cm, rim diameter 15 cm, semi-fine beige-gray fabric with silver mica in composition, porous, slip of the same color, Munsell 5YR 6/2 pinkish gray

Variant with flat rim, decorated with grooves

18. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 1,7 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, reddish-gray semi-fine fabric with micro-particles of limestone in composition, Munsell 7.5 YR 7/4 pink

19. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 3,7 cm, rim diameter 18 cm, brick color semi-fine fabric with silver mica in composition, Munsell 5YR 7/4 pink

20. Pot, fragment of rim, preserved height 1,7 cm, rim diameter 19 cm, semi-fine brick color fabric with silver mica in composition, slip of the same color, Munsell 5YR 7/4 pink

Lids

Popilian 2012, (plate ?) p. 71, pl. XVII/M.102/3 (Dioști); Popilian 1976, p. 125, (plates, type 5 ?) pl. LXIX/850-855; Klenina 2006, pl. 19/127-128, pl. 24/150-152 (Novae); Brukner 1981, T. 131/30-34

21. Lid, fragment of base, the edge of the base is curved to the inside, preserved height 3,5 cm, base diameter 26 cm, dark gray coarse fabric with sand and silver mica particles in composition, porous, the slip is gray, Munsell 2 for Gley 4/1 dark bluish gray

22. Lid, fragment of base, preserved height 4,5 cm, base diameter 28 cm, light gray semi-coarse fabric with fine sand and silver mica in composition, slip of the same color, Munsell 1 for Gley 5/1 greenish gray

23. Lid, fragment of base, preserved height 3 cm, base diameter 26 cm, the fabric is gray, coarse with sand and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the inside and outside, Munsell 1 for Gley 3/ very dark gray

24. Lid, fragment of base, preserved height 2,5 cm, base diameter 28 cm, light gray coarse fabric with sand in composition, Munsell 7.5YR 5/1 gray

25. Lid, fragment of the top, S2 h-0,80 cm, preserved height 1,8 cm, button diameter 4,5 cm, dark gray coarse fabric with limestone particles and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on

the inside and outside, the slip is of the same color, Munsell 1 for Gley 3/very dark gray. Popilian 1976, p. 128, lids type 3 pl. LXXII-LXXIII/906-926; Popilian 2012, p. 72, pl. XVII/M.107/1; Sultov 1985, p. 86, pl. XLIV/4 (type 2, Nicopolis ad Istrum), Fidanovski 1990, T.34/9-11; Brukner 1981, T. 131/22-29

Bowls

Popilian 1976, type 1, p. 122, pl. LXVI/806; Brukner 1981, T71/22

26. Bowl, fragment of rim, preserved height 2,5 cm, rim diameter 24 cm, reddish semi-fine fabric with silver mica in composition, traces of red slip on the inside, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red

27. Bowl, fragment of rim, preserved height 3 cm, rim diameter 15 cm, light red semi-fine fabric with silver mica particles, slip of the same color, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red

Amforae

28. Amphora, (?) fragment of rim, preserved height 3,5 cm, rim diameter 12 cm, brick color fabric with sand, limestone, iron oxide particles and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the inside and outside, Munsell 2.5YR 6/4 light reddish brown

29. Amphora, fragment of handle, brick color fabric with small particles of limestone and silver mica, the handle is oval in shape and decorated with two grooves, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red

30. Amphora, fragment of handle, S2 h-0,80 cm, gray coarse fabric with sand particles and silver mica in composition, secondarily burned on the outside, the handle is oval in shape and is decorated with 3 grooves, Munsell 1 for Gley 6/gray

31. Amphora, fragment of handle, preserved length 11 cm, reddish semi-fine fabric with small black particles and silver mica in composition, the angobe is white, circular shape in section, Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red, and the angobe is 2.5YR 8/2 pinkish white

32. Amphora, fragment of big handle, preserved length 12 cm, dark gray fabric with small limestone particles and silver mica in composition, dark brick color angobe, the handle is oval in section, Munsell 1 for Gley 3/very dark gray, and the angobe is 5YR 5/4 reddish brown

33. Amphora, fragment of handle, preserved length approximately 10 cm, dark gray fabric with limestone particles, the handle is oval in section, decorated with 3 grooves, Munsell 1 for Gley 3/very dark gray

Drinking vessel

34. Fragment of base, possibly from a pitcher or jug (?), preserved height 1 cm, base diameter 5,2 cm, brick color, semi-fine fabric with silver mica in composition, ring foot, Munsell 7,5YR 7/2 pinkish gray

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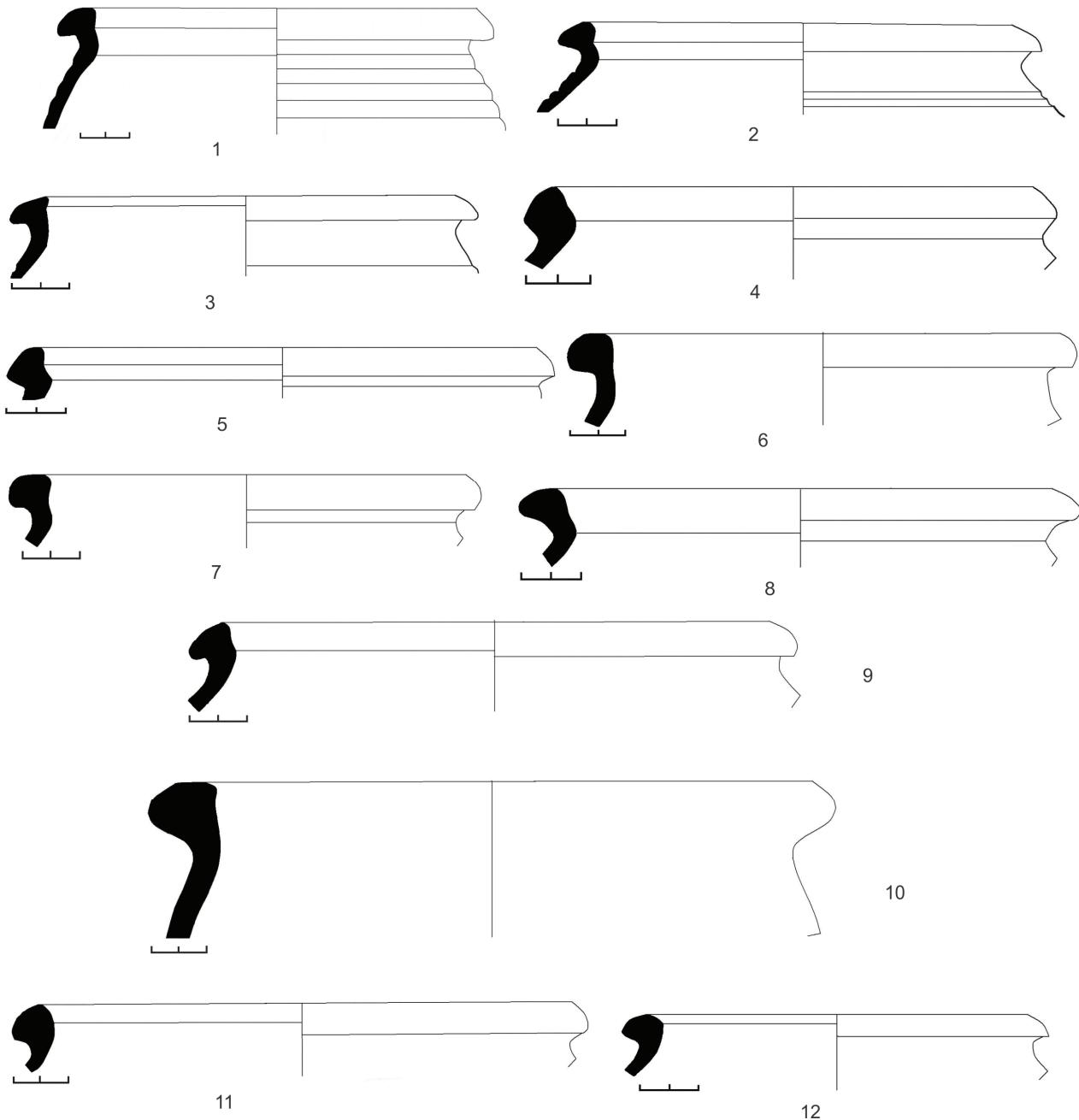


Plate I

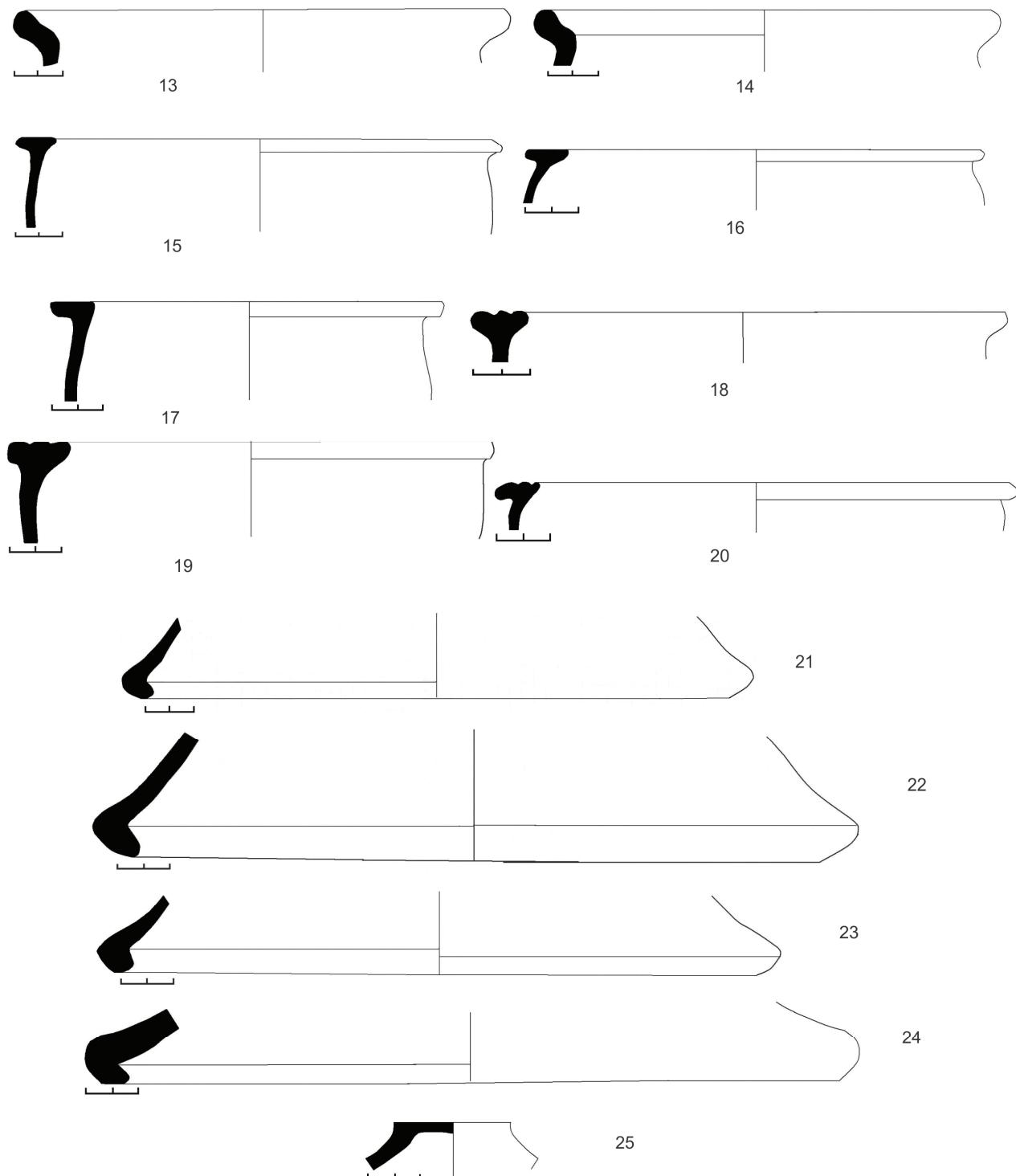


Plate II

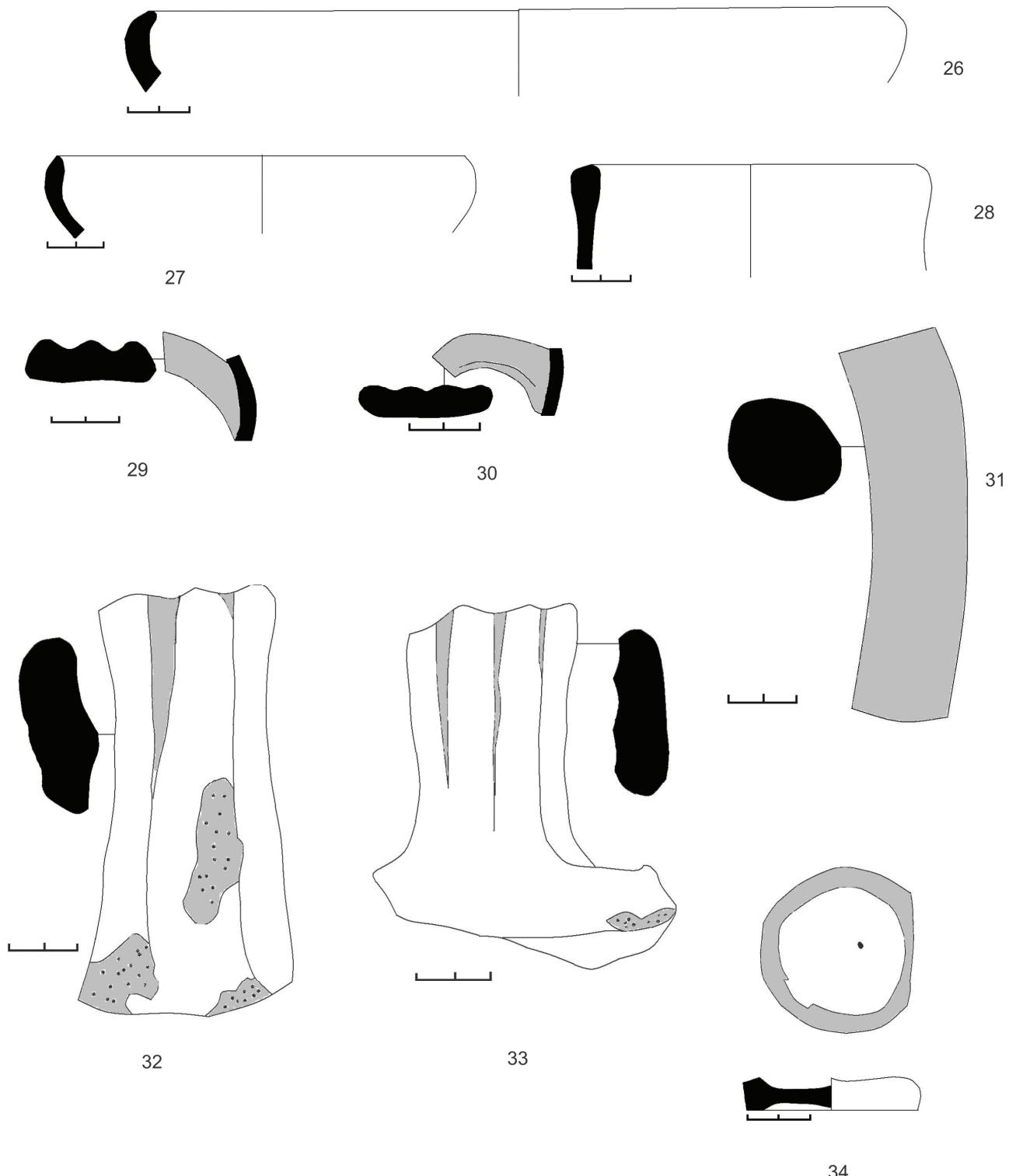


Plate III