

## PRELIMINARY DATA CONCERNING THE LATE BRONZE AGE-EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENT FROM GHIRODA-OBIECTIV 4 (TIMIȘ COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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### *Preliminary Data Concerning the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age Settlement from Ghiroda-Obiectiv 4 (Timiș County, Romania)*

**Abstract:** Situl arheologic de la Ghiroda-Obiectiv 4 a fost descoperit de către O. Rogoza și D. Vlase cu ocazia unui control de teren din vara anului 2018. Primele săpături arheologice au fost realizate în anii 2019 și 2020, fiind prilejuate de investițiile imobiliare din zonă. Cercetarea din anul 2019 a fost realizată în mijlocul grindului pe care se află amplasată așezarea preistorică. Cu această ocazie au fost descoperite mai multe niveluri antropice, dar și un complex arheologic. Materialul rezultat în urma acestei cercetări sugerează existența a cel puțin trei faze de locuire datând de la începuturile epocii târzii a bronzului (faza timpurie a culturii Cruceni-Belegiș), faza finală a epocii bronzului (Hallstatt A1-HaA2) și din prima epocă a fierului. Cercetarea din anul 2020 a fost prilejuită de construcția unei case în zona marginală a așezării. Cu această ocazie a fost descoperit un șanț ce delimita probabil așezarea și câteva complexe cu caracter domestic. Atât umplutura șanțului, cât și a gropilor menajere indică abandonarea acestei zone a sitului la sfârșitul epocii bronzului (Hallstatt A1-A2).

**Keywords:** *Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, settlement, rescue archaeology*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Sfârșitul epocii bronzului, prima epocă a fierului, așezare, arheologie preventivă*

### Introduction

A lot of effort has been made in the last decade to identify and thoroughly map new archaeological sites in order to provide better protection as the real-estate and infrastructure works have increased in western Romania. This in turn has increased the number of rescue excavations, providing new archaeological information.

One such case is the recently discovered site called Ghiroda-Obiectiv 4. The settlement is located near the present-day village of Giarmata Vii (Ghiroda commune, Timiș County) (**Fig. 1**) and was discovered in the summer of 2018 when O. Rogoza and D. Vlase conducted a field survey, during which pottery fragments, dated by them to the Late Bronze Age, were found<sup>1</sup>. The site is located in the low plain of the Banat Region, sitting on an alluvial hillock. The terrace borders a small stream that, at least in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was still active. During the communist period the land was used for agriculture, while today, due to its proximity to the city of Timișoara, it attracted the local real-estate developers. At the time of its discovery, the site was partially damaged by the construction of houses. The continuous development of the area threatens the integrity of the site, but it could also provide opportunities for excavating a large portion of the settlement.

The purpose of this paper is to present briefly the results of two archaeological excavations performed by the authors. Due to the fact that investigations are being carried out by several institutions, it is important that the information is made available for researchers interested in re-creating the entire history of the site. Although, not many archaeological features were unearthed during these two excavations, some preliminary data concerning the chronological frame and development of the settlement can be drawn out.

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<sup>1</sup> Rogoza *et alii* 2018, 275.

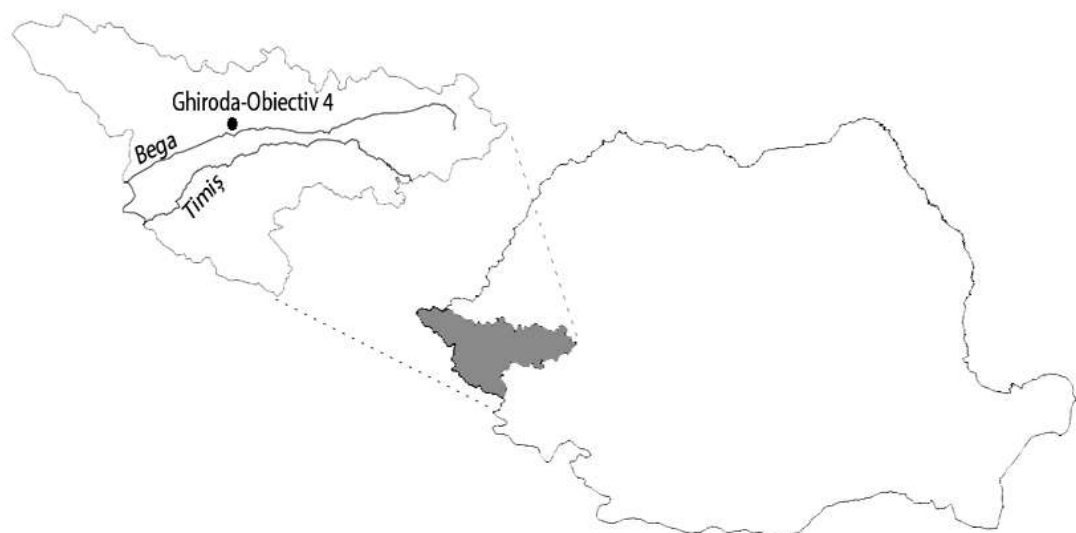


Fig. 1

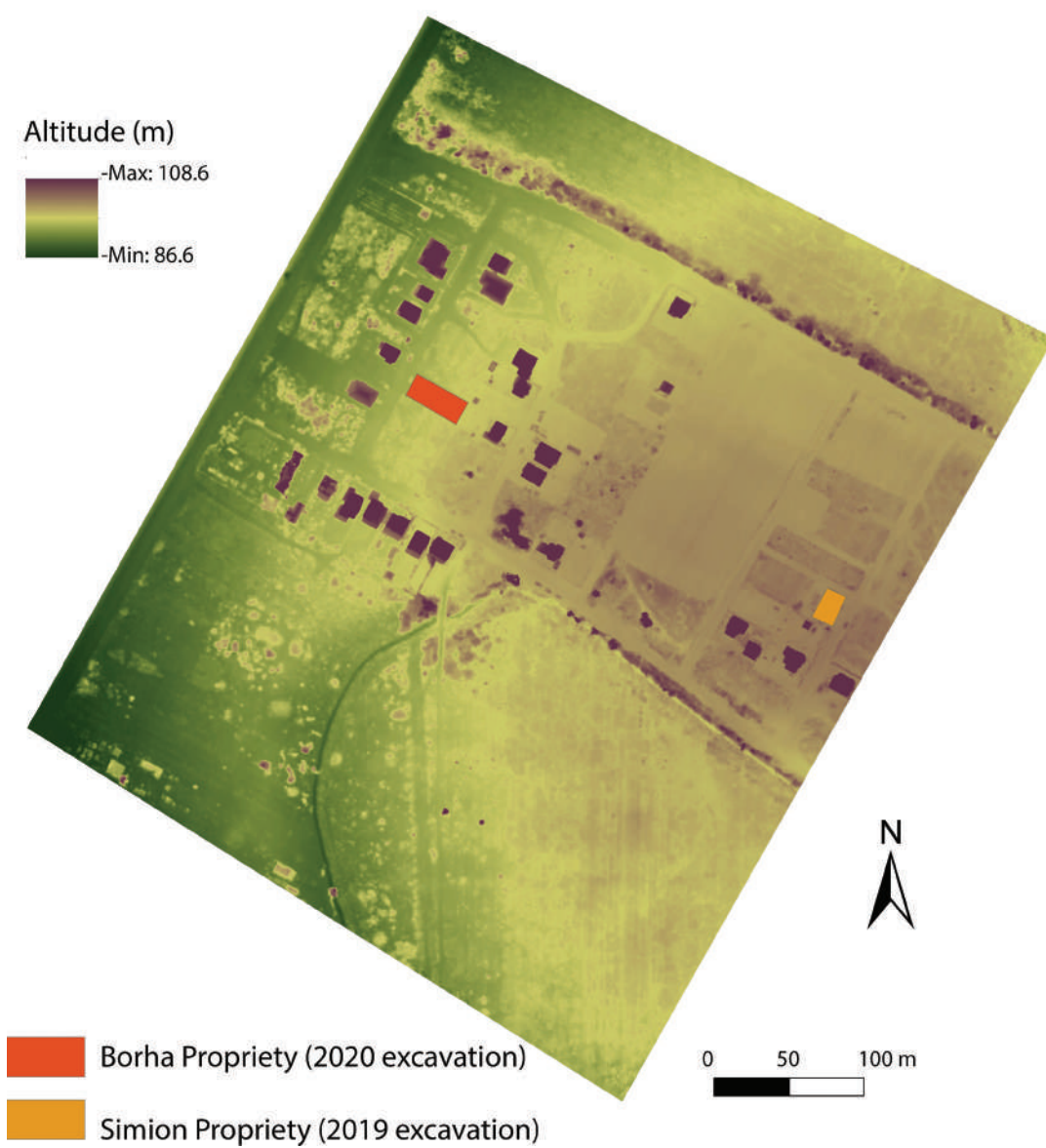


Fig. 2

## The 2019 excavation on Simion's propriety

The first excavation of the site occurred in the late fall of 2019. Due to the fact that the site was recently discovered, bureaucratic entanglements allowed the construction of concrete foundations for a future house in the perimeter of the site. Construction was halted by an inspection conducted by the Timiș County Directorate for Culture and the procedures for a rescue excavation were started.

For a better understanding of the environment in which the site has developed we decided to create a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) of the surface, prior to the excavation (**Fig. 2**). Thus we noticed that the settlement was located on a small hillock, rising only a few meters over the surroundings. The proposed excavation was place in the middle of the hillock on what seems to be the highest ground of the area.

The entire ground surface of the future house covered around 130 m<sup>2</sup>. However, research was restricted by the presence of concrete foundations. Due to this situation, we decided to excavate the larger surfaces delineated by the foundations, which would have provided the most relevant amount of archaeological information. Thus, four trenches were excavated (named S.A; S.B; S.C; S.D) covering a surface of 35 m<sup>2</sup> (**Fig. 3**).

The stratigraphy (**Fig. 4**) observed in all four trenches was similar. The first layer represents the recent period vegetal layer, disturbed by the intensive agricultural works of the past century. It was 30 cm thick and had a very dark colour. Several pot sherds and daub fragments were retrieved from this stratum. The second layer was the richest in archaeological material. It was 35–38 cm thick and had a dark-greyish colour. A large amount of daub fragments were found in this layer, some showing twig marks. Pottery was also retrieved in significant amount. The third layer had a similar structure the previous one, but with a lighter colour and less archaeological material. The fourth one had a greyish-brown colour and somewhat softer consistency then the previous. Pottery fragments were less numerous in this layer and consisted mostly of non-diagnostic sherds. Sterile soil was found at about 80 cm from the current walking surface. It had a soft, sandy consistency and yellowish colour with chalk fragments.

During this excavation only one archaeological feature was discovered in Surface D (**Fig. 4**). It was probably a storage pit that was abandoned and filled with domestic waste. It had a “pear” shape profile and circular plan. The maximum diameter of the pit was 107 cm and had a maximum depth of 70 cm. It was visible on the third archaeological level, being overlapped by layer 2. The filling of the pit was comprised from two layers. The first one was dark-greyish with lots of daub speckles, while the second one had a lighter colour and contained ash and highly burned soil fragments. Unfortunately, the material retrieved from the pit was not numerous and consisted mostly of non-diagnostic sherds.

In summary, the excavation from 2019 doesn't offer a complex image of the settlement structure but allows us to define a few landmarks for the chronological evolution of the site. In total, three anthropic layers have been found. The archaeological material discovered shows a mix of Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age shapes and decorations. Most of the archaeological material was found in layer 2, which is also the thickest cultural layer. Besides that, a large quantity of archaeological material was retrieved from the spoils resulted after the foundation ditches were excavated. Some of the earliest materials could be considered a cup fragment, recovered from the spoils, with incised arched decorations and vertical incisions (**Pl. 1/1**). A similar cup was found in the inhumation grave 67 from Pecica-*Site 14*, which was radiocarbon dated around 1620–1490 BC<sup>2</sup>. Other resembling cups were found at Șagu Site A1\_1 and were radiocarbon dated to the late 17<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>3</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>4</sup>, namely to the earliest phases of the Crucișeni-Belegiș culture. A rim fragment with incised arched decoration (**Pl. 1/5**), as well as a neck fragment from a large vessel (**Pl. 1/2**), were found in Layer 2. This type of decoration is known since the Middle Bronze Age, as it is the case with the finds from the nearby site of Cornești-Corneș<sup>5</sup>. However, incised decorations are known to have been used throughout most of the Late Bronze Age<sup>6</sup>. Another fragment which can be dated to the earliest phases of the Late Bronze Age, also found in Layer 2 is a protome (**Pl. 1/3**) that was probably attached to a small cup. Such cups are frequently found

<sup>2</sup> Sava, Ignat 2016, 185–186; Fig. 5/6.

<sup>3</sup> Sava 2019, Pl. 3/15.

<sup>4</sup> Sava 2019, Pl. 4/16.

<sup>5</sup> Radu 1972, Fig. 7/1.

<sup>6</sup> Sava 2020, 278.

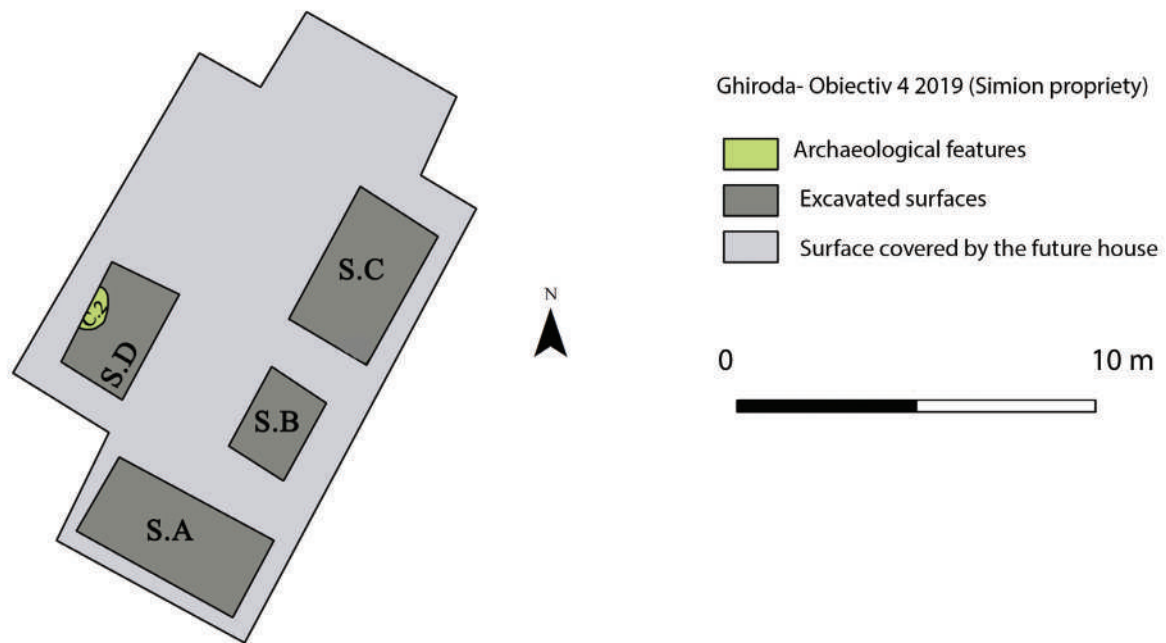
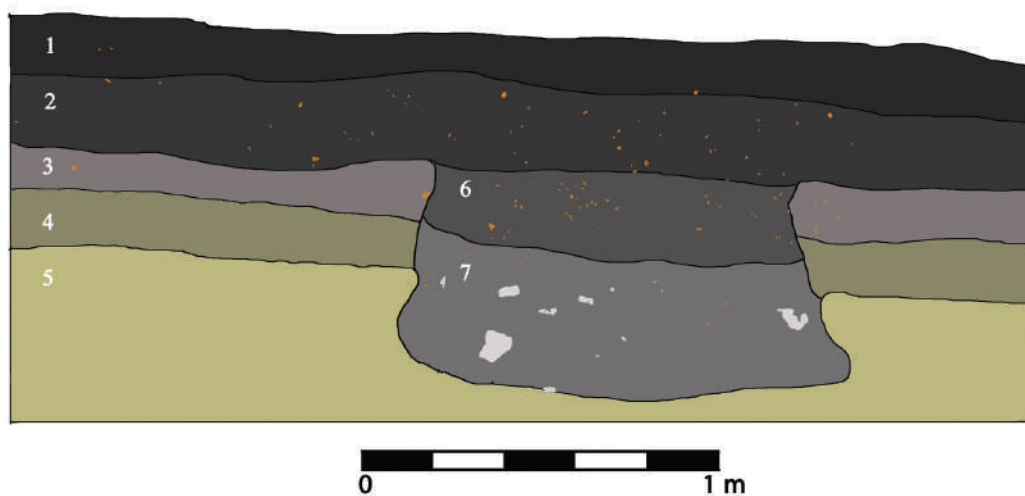


Fig. 3



1. Top soil
  2. Very dark greyish layer with numerous pottery sherds
  3. Grey layer with daub fragments and scarce pottery finds
  4. Greyish-brown layer with few archaeological remains
  5. Sterile yellowish soil with chalk fragments
  6. Filling of C.2 - greyish soil with daub fragments
  7. Filling of C.2 - greyish soil mixed with ash
- Daub  
Ash

Fig. 4



in the Late Bronze Age pottery repertoire, some of closest analogies being the cemetery from Livezile (Tolvădia)<sup>7</sup> or the settlement from Giroc-Mesca<sup>8</sup>.

Another chronological horizon seems to belong to the Hallstatt A1-Ha A2 time period (cca 1200–1000 BC). To this chronological phase we can ascribe a pottery fragment with circular channelled decoration (**Pl. 2/3**), found in Layer 2, similar to other ones discovered at Banatski Karlovac-Kalvarija<sup>9</sup> or at Opovo-Beli breg<sup>10</sup>. A rim fragment from an amphora (**Pl. 2/6**) with interior channelled decoration can also be dated to the same period, with parallels being known at Liborajdea<sup>11</sup> or Banatski Karlovac-Kalvarija<sup>12</sup>. Other evidence for habitation during this time period is represented by two bowl rims with braided-like decoration (**Pl. 2/1–2**) found both in Layer 2 and in the spoils. The nearest analogy for such bowls comes from the settlement from Remetea Mare-Gomila lui Pituș<sup>13</sup>. Finally a fragment from a protome with two arms (**Pl. 2/4**), which was found in the spoils heap, might also be included in this chronological horizon. This type of handle decoration are not often encountered with the nearest parallels being a chance find from Liebling<sup>14</sup> and one fragment from Banatski Karlovac-Kalvarija<sup>15</sup>.

The latest chronological horizon identified in the 2019 excavation seems to belong to the Early Iron Age. To this phase we can ascribe several pot fragments with linear embossed decoration and oblique incision rows (**Pl. 3**). Such style of decoration are often found starting with the earliest phases of the Early Iron Age (the so-called Gornea-Kalakača horizon), but also in the later Basarabi phases. Fragments of this type of pottery were recovered from the spoils heap, but also from Layer 2. This allows us to date this cultural layer to the Early Iron Age. Therefore, the pottery specific to the Late Bronze Age must be considered to be in secondary position. Unfortunately the other two anthropic layers identified during this excavation did not yield proper diagnostic sherds, therefore making their dating difficult at this stage.

### The 2020 excavation on Borha's propriety

The intention of building a house in the protection perimeter of the site prompted the performing of intrusive diagnosis. The test trench was excavated in the spring of 2020 and yielded the presence of a ditch with traces of prehistoric material. Thus, a rescue excavation was conducted on the surface of the future house and an ancillary building (**Pl. 4**).

The stratigraphy noticed in these trenches was somewhat different than the one found on the previous excavation. The anthropic layers were thinner and contained less archaeological material. The 2020 excavation was also located outside the main terrace, on a lower area.

One of the most important features of this excavation was a large enclosure ditch (**Pl. 7–8**). The structure was roughly north-south oriented and had a width between 3,70 m and 4,75 m. Its maximum depth was of 1,65 m from the current walking surface. The internal stratigraphy of the ditch revealed two phases of filling comprising of three layers. The first two layers represent the latest stages of ditch filling. They had a dark-greyish colour and contained numerous ceramic fragments and animal bones. During this time, it is likely that the main purpose of the ditch was abandoned and it was re-used as a waste area. The lowest layer corresponds to the natural process of alluvial filling. The soil in this layer had a clayish texture and archaeological material consists of small fragments of daub.

Underneath the earliest layers of filling from the ditch, two postholes were discovered (features C.9 and C.10) (**Pl. 6/3–4**). Feature C.9 had dark and soft filling, with numerous pottery and animal bone fragments, while feature C.10, although having a similar filling, didn't yield any archaeological material. The two postholes were found on each of the two edges of the ditch, opposed one from another. Judging from their stratigraphic position, the posts pre-date the filling of the ditch, were probably in use immediately after the excavation of the structure.

<sup>7</sup> Gogâltan 1998, Pl. VI/1–3.

<sup>8</sup> Gogâltan, Stavilă 2020, Pl. 18/3.

<sup>9</sup> Perić 1997, Abb. 5/3–4.

<sup>10</sup> Поповић 1998, Т. 1/5.

<sup>11</sup> Gumă 1993, Pl. XXX/8.

<sup>12</sup> Perić 1997, Abb. 3/14.

<sup>13</sup> Gumă 1993, Pl. XXXVI/4;6.

<sup>14</sup> Floca 2013, Fig. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Perić 1997, Abb. 4/9.

An interesting aspect is that no traces of a defensive wall were discovered. The only structure identified in the vicinity of the ditch is a possible post-hole (feature C.1). Other identified anomalies (features C2, C7 and C8) had irregular shapes and contained no archaeological material, being probably the result of bio-disturbance.

More archaeological features were unearthed in the second surface excavated, which corresponded to a future garage. Two archaeological features (C.4 and C.5) were overlapping each other, suggesting probably two phases of habitation. Unfortunately, no traces of archaeological material were found in either of them. However, two more features (C.3 and C.6) offer a few pottery fragments that are relevant for the dating of this part of the settlement. Feature C.6 (**Pl. 5**) was a storage pit that was turned into a waste pit after abandonment. The pit had a upper diameter of 2,58 m and a maximum depth of 55 cm. The filling of the pit had a dark colour with numerous pottery and daub fragments. A cup, with an “S”-shaped profile, decorated with horizontal and garland-shaped incisions (**Pl. 5/1**), might indicate that the feature could be ascribed to the so-called Bobda-Susani cultural group. Similar cups have been found in the cemetery from Bobda<sup>16</sup>, at Susani-*Grămurada lui Ticu*<sup>17</sup>, or Peciu Nou-*Bociar*<sup>18</sup>. Resembling cups have also been found in northwestern Bulgaria, at the necropolis from Baley, in a feature which was radiocarbon dated between the 13<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>19</sup>. Other pottery fragments from feature C.6 which are relevant for dating are coming from bowls with inverted rims and faceted decoration (**Pl. 5/3;5–6**). Such bowls are more frequently found in the later phases of the Iron Age<sup>20</sup>, but the earliest examples seem to stem from the Hallstatt A1-A2 period, as revealed by the examples from Susani<sup>21</sup>, Baley<sup>22</sup> or the ones presented here.

In the vicinity of feature C.6 another pit was found (feature C.3). It had a pear-shaped profile and circular opening (**Pl. 6**). The diameter at the top was 1,20 m and the maximum depth of the pit was 1 m from the current walking surface. The pit was filled with dark and yellowish, slightly burned soil, probably mixed with ash and chalk which gave it a somewhat harder texture. Although ceramic fragments were scarcely found while excavating the feature; one in particular was relevant for dating as it had garlands made from channelled decorations (**Pl. 6/2**).

The archaeological material retrieved from the ditch seems to belong to the same chronological horizon as the ones found in features C.3 and C.6. Arguments towards this hypothesis are a fragment from a bowl with inverted rim and faceted decoration (**Pl. 8/5**) as well as a fragment from a bowl with channelled garlands decorations placed both on the interior and exterior of the bowl (**Pl. 8/3**). Such pots were found at Susani<sup>23</sup> or in feature 21 from Baley<sup>24</sup>.

## Final remarks

The first excavations at the site from Ghiroda-*Obiectiv 4* revealed interesting aspects concerning the evolution of the settlement. The first trench (Simion propriety), excavated on the apex of the small hill-ock, revealed a thick anthropic accumulation spanning for at least three chronological phases from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age towards the middle of the Early Iron Age. The second trench (Borha propriety) was placed on lower ground, at the outskirts of the settlement. The stratigraphy here was different, with thinner anthropic accumulation and less archaeological material in the cultural layer. The presence of the ditch might suggest the limit of the settlement in its earliest stages. Material coming from the latter layers of the ditch suggests that it was deliberately backfilled sometimes during Hallstatt A1-A2 period. It is also worth mentioning that no fortification structures were identified. However, two postholes, found on opposite sides of the ditches slopes, dating before its abandonment, could suggest the existence of wooden structures of different purposes like, for example, bridges.

<sup>16</sup> Boroffka 1994, Abb. 1/10.

<sup>17</sup> Stratan, Vulpe 1977, T. 9/71.

<sup>18</sup> Szentmiklosi 2016, Pl. XI/2.

<sup>19</sup> Alexandrov *et alii* 2016, Fig. 6/h-j; Fig. 9/c.

<sup>20</sup> Popa, Plantos 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Stratan, Vulpe 1977, T. 10/92.

<sup>22</sup> Alexandrov *et alii* 2016, Fig. 6/a;c.

<sup>23</sup> Stratan, Vulpe 1977, T. 12/121.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandrov *et alii* 2016, Fig. 6/f;k.

The settlement from Ghiroda-*Obiectiv 4* seems cover a timeframe during which several social-cultural events took place<sup>25</sup>. The earliest phase of habitation appears to be contemporaneous with the building and functioning of the mega-fort from Cornești<sup>26</sup> (situated less than 20 km north). The second phase, in which the enclosing ditch was backfilled, is contemporary with finds from Susani<sup>27</sup> or Remetea Mare-*Gomila lui Pituș*<sup>28</sup>, while the third phase seems to belong to the middle Early Iron Age. Further research at the site should bring more valuable information concerning the changes that occur in the material culture from the end of the Bronze Age and the start of the Iron Age in the northern Banat Region, but also regarding the social transformations that took place during this period.

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<sup>25</sup> Sava 2020, Fig. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Szentmiklosi *et alii* 2011; Lehmphul *et alii* 2019.

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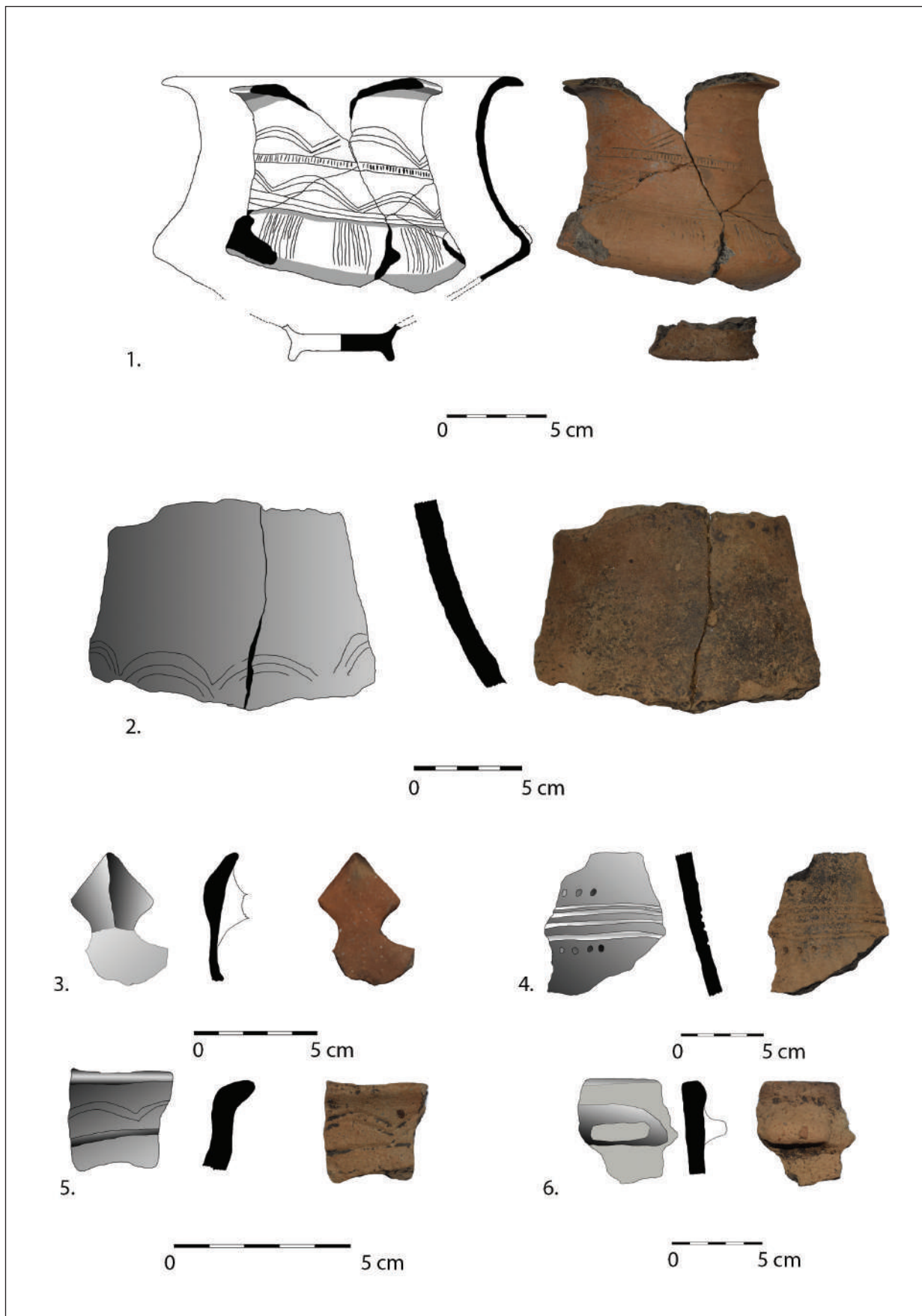


Plate 1

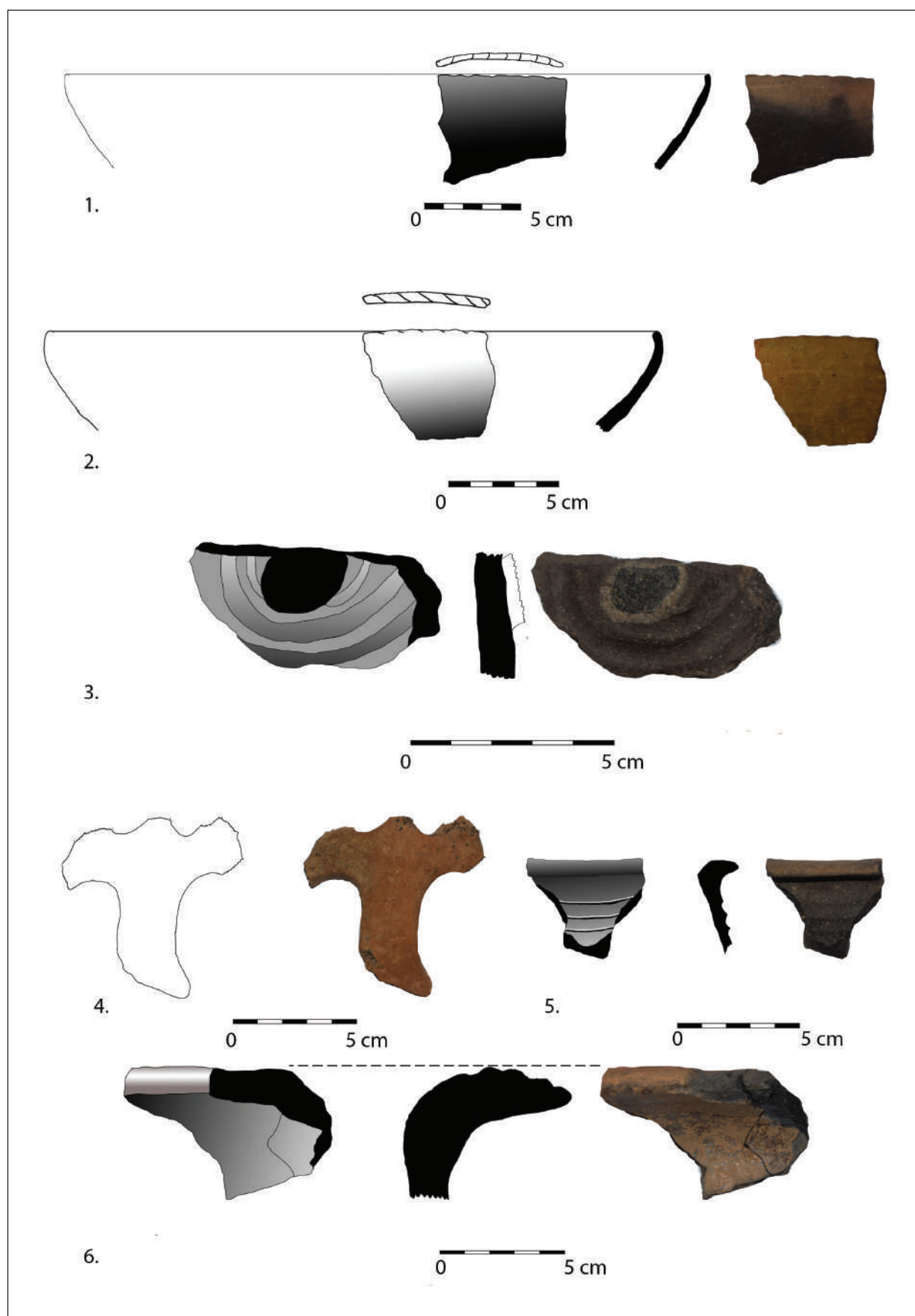


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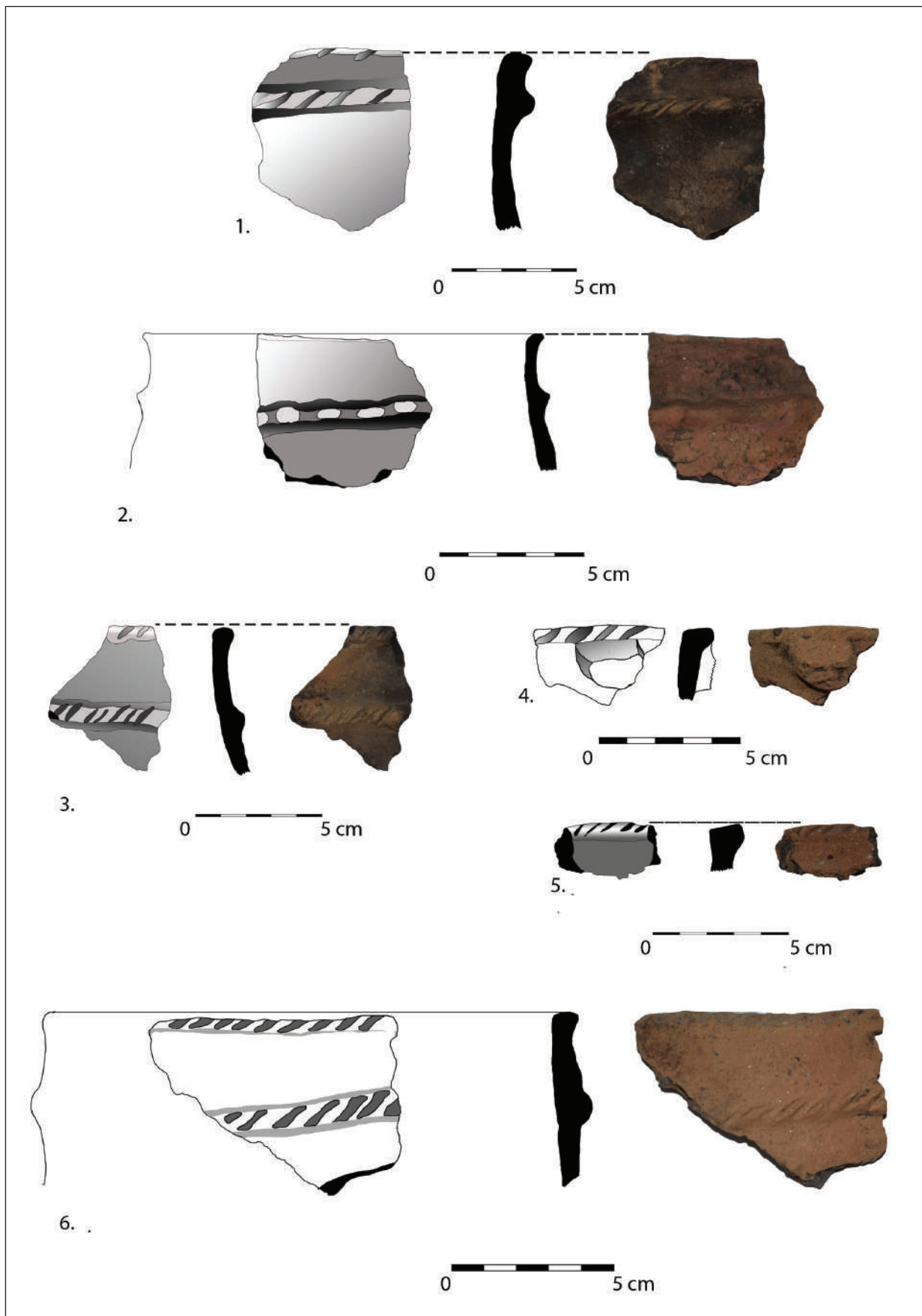
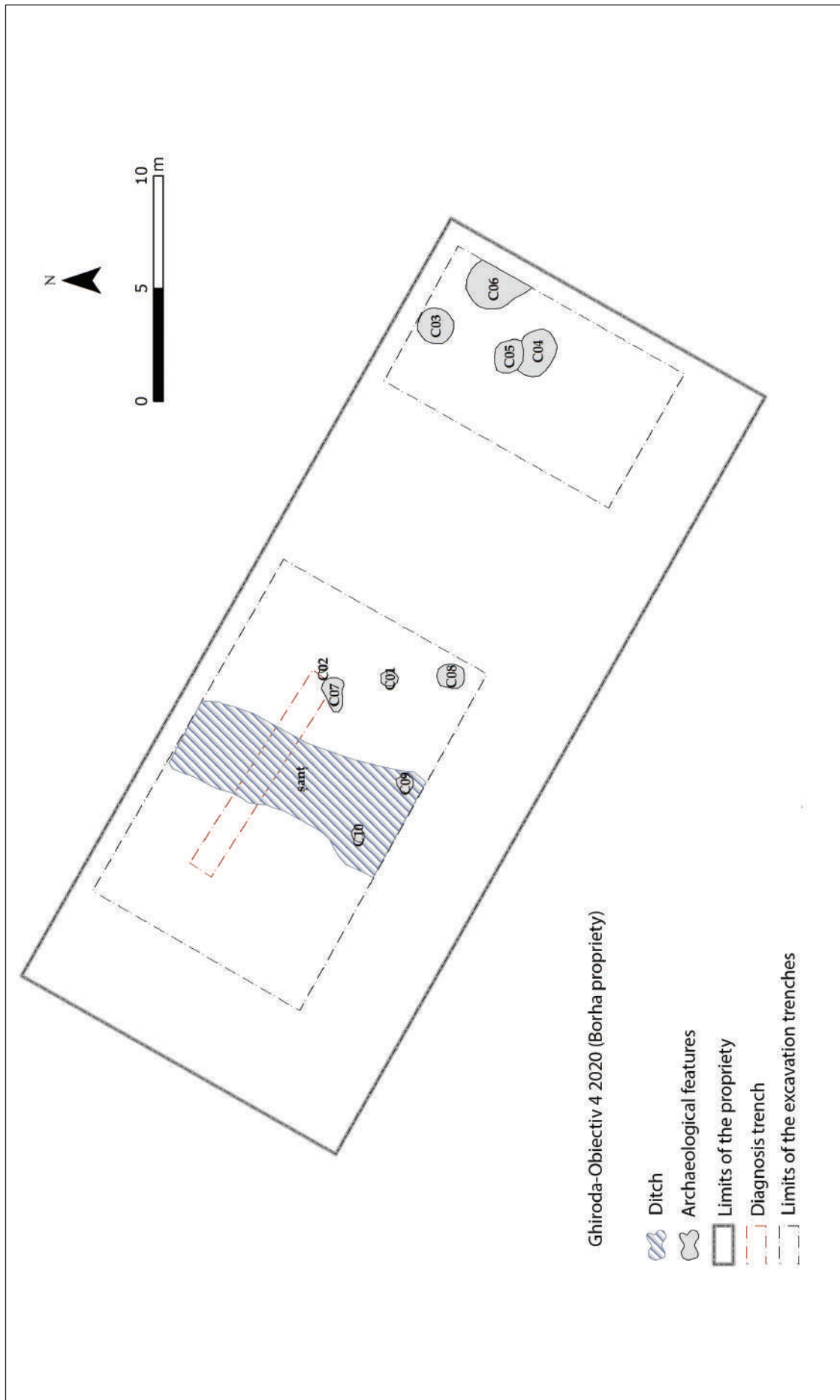
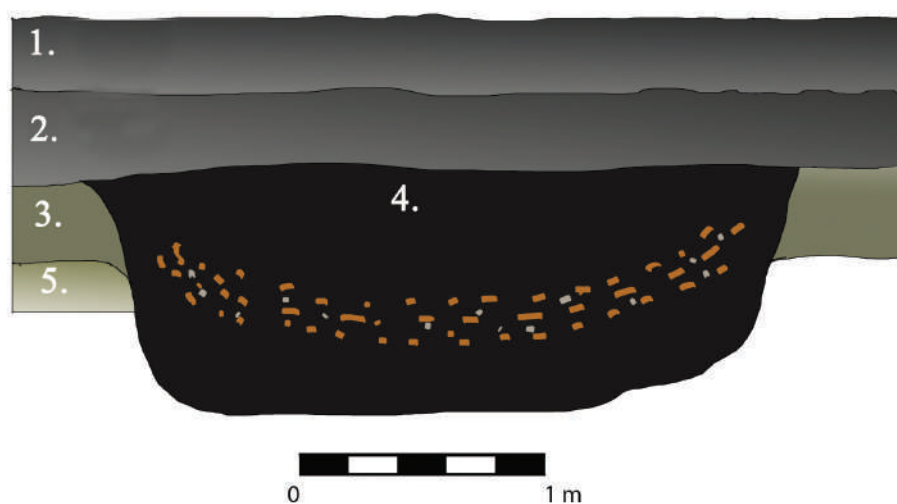


Plate 3





1. Top soil
  2. Dark greyish layer
  3. Greyish layer with chalk fragments
  4. Very dark greyish soil (filling of feature C.6)
  5. Sterile soil
- Daub  
 Bones

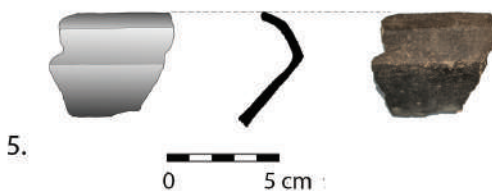
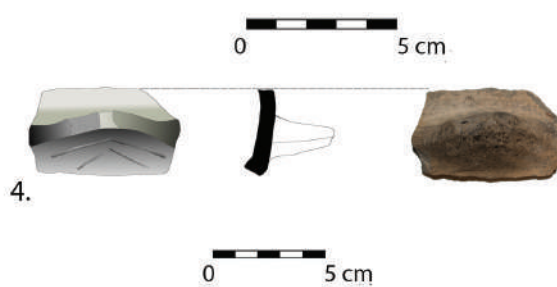
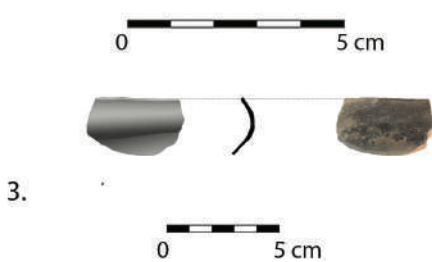
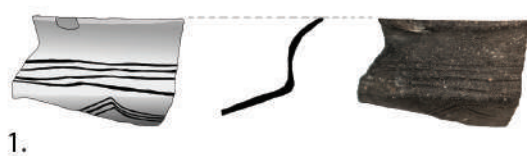
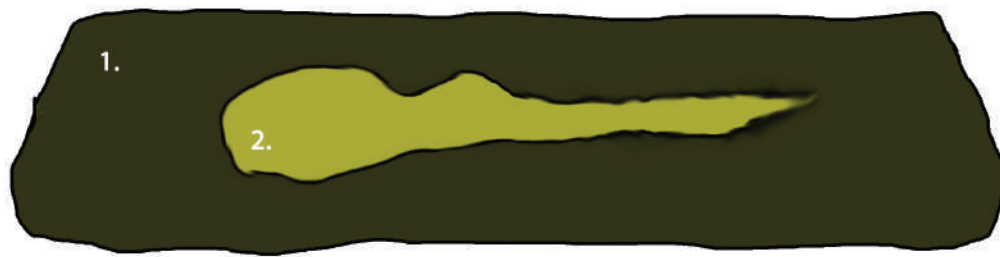


Plate 5





0 1 m

1. Dark greyish layer of slightly burned soil mixed with daub and ash  
2. Yellowish layer with daub, chalk and ash



0 5 cm



3.



4.

Plate 6





Plate 7

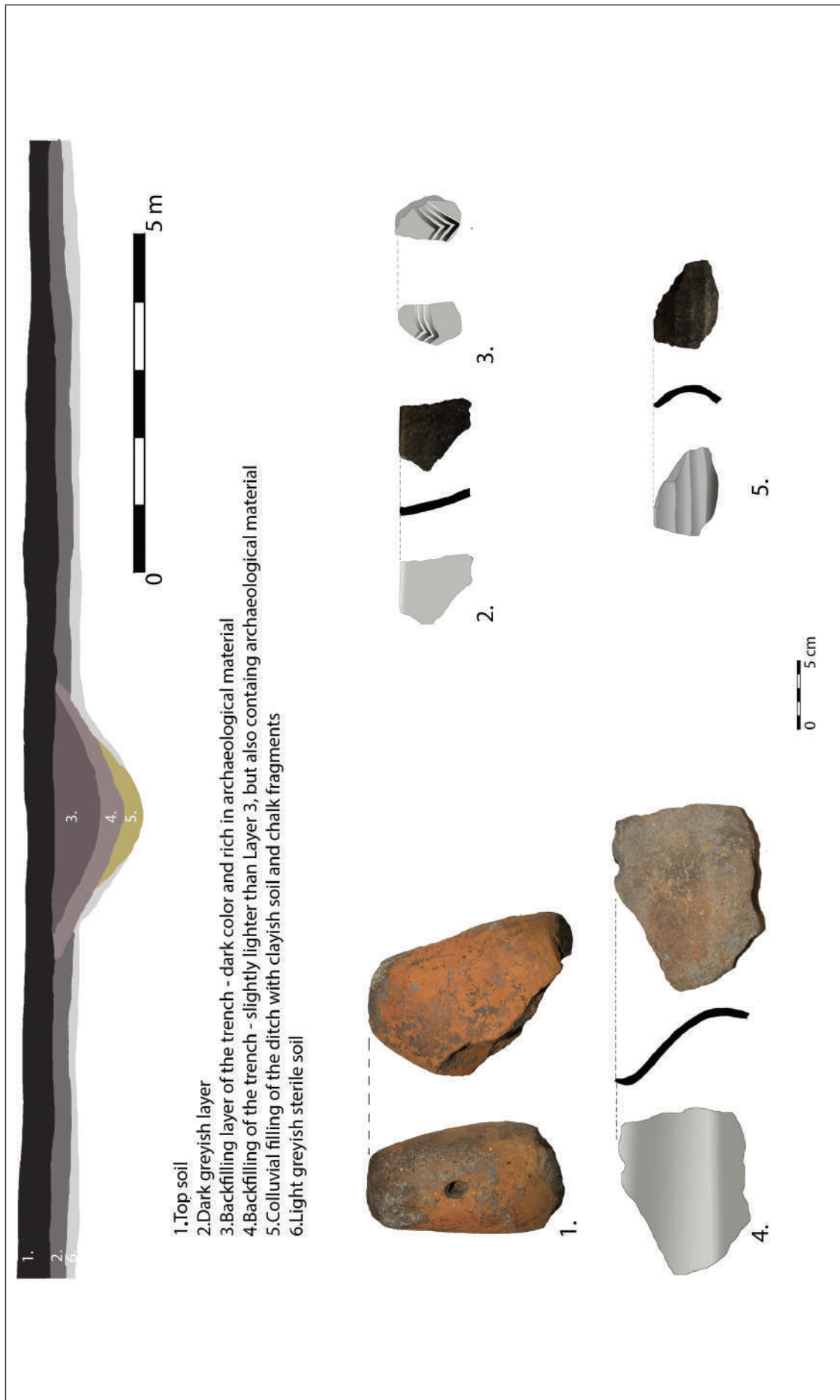


Plate 8