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SUMAR

ALAIN TUFFREAU, ROXANA DOBRESU, SANDA BALESCU, MĂDĂLIN CORNEL VĂLEANU, Boinești (département de Satu-Mare), Moustérien, Aurignacien et processus taphonomiques	7
ALEXANDRU CIORNEI, Petrografia silicolitelor din siturile Paleoliticului superior de pe Valea Dunării. Caracteristici și proveniență	41
MIHAI GLIGOR, MARIANA ROȘU, CĂLIN ȘUTEU, New Evidence on Burial Practices in Petrești Culture	67
CAMELIA-MIRELA VINTILĂ, CARMEN PAVEL, MARIAN NEAGU, Noi aspecte ale plasticii antropomorfe descoperite la Dunărea de Jos	83
ALIN FRÎNCULEASA, BIANCA PREDA, OCTAV NEGREA, ANDREI DORIAN SOFICARU, Cercetări arheologice în cimitirul din epoca bronzului târziu de la Câmpina (jud. Prahova) – campaniile 2011 și 2012	97
DANIEL SPÂNU, Fibule „de tip hibrid”?	145
MIRCEA DABÎCA, Noi cercetări arheologice în partea de sud a cetății Histria. Campaniile 2003–2009	157
ALEXANDRU BĂDESCU – Amfore orientale de tip Kapitän II descoperite la Histria în Sectorul <i>Basilica extra muros</i>	189
ANNAMARIA DIANA, MIHAI MEȘTER, Meeting an Early Medieval Community: A Preliminary Analysis of the Human Skeletal Remains from the Jucu Cemetery (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)	3; ;
BOGDAN CIUPERCĂ, ANDREI MĂGUREANU, EUGEN PAVELEȚ, DORIN SÂRBU, Cercetări arheologice în Curtea Domnească de la Târgșoru Vechi	219
RADU-ALEXANDRU DRAGOMAN, MIHAI FLOREA, Preambul la o cercetare arheologică a fostei colonii de muncă forțată din perioada comunistă de la Poarta Albă, România	231

RECENZII

Laurent Carozza, Cătălin Bem, Cristian Micu (eds.), <i>Société et environnement dans la zone du Bas Danube durant le 5^{ème} millénaire avant notre ère</i> , Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2011, 413 p. (Cristian Eduard Ștefan)	243
Abrevieri	245

SOMMAIRE

ALAIN TUFFREAU, ROXANA DOBRESU, SANDA BALESCU, MĂDĂLIN CORNEL VĂLEANU, Boinești (département de Satu-Mare), Moustérien, Aurignacien et processus taphonomiques	7
ALEXANDRU CIORNEI, Petrografia silicolitelor din siturile Paleoliticului superior de pe Valea Dunării. Caracteristici și proveniență.....	41
MIHAI GLIGOR, MARIANA ROȘU, CĂLIN ȘUTEU, New Evidence on Burial Practices in Petrești Culture	67
CAMELIA-MIRELA VINTILĂ, CARMEN PAVEL, MARIAN NEAGU, Several antropomorphic figurines found during the excavations on the Vidra tell	83
ALIN FRÎNCULEASA, BIANCA PREDĂ, OCTAV NEGREA, ANDREI DORIAN SOFICARU, Archaeological research in the Bronze Age cemetery at Câmpina (Prahova county) – campaigns 2011 și 2012.....	97
DANIEL SPÂNU, Fibule „de tip hibrid”?	145
MIRCEA DABÎCA, Les principaux résultats des fouilles menées entre 2003 et 2009 à Histria, dans le périmètre du Secteur sud	157
ALEXANDRU BĂDESCU – Amphoras Kapitän II discovered at Histria, in extra muros Basilica	189
ANNAMARIA DIANA, MIHAI MEȘTER, Meeting an Early Medieval Community: A Preliminary Analysis of the Human Skeletal Remains from the Jucu Cemetery (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)	3; ;
BOGDAN CIUPERCĂ, ANDREI MĂGUREANU, EUGEN PAVELEȚ, DORIN SÂRBU, Archaeological research Cercetări arheologice în Curtea Domnească de la Târgșoru Vechi.....	219
RADU-ALEXANDRU DRAGOMAN, MIHAI FLOREA, Preamble of planned archaeological research in the former forced labor camp from the communist period at Poarta Albă, Romania	231

COMPTE-RENDUS

Laurent Carozza, Cătălin Bem, Cristian Micu (eds.), <i>Société et environnement dans la zone du Bas Danube durant le 5^{ème} millénaire avant notre ère</i> , Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2011, 413 p. (Cristian Eduard Ștefan)	243
Abréviations	245

New Evidence on Burial Practices in Petrești Culture

MIHAI GLIGOR*, MARIANA ROȘU**, CĂLIN ȘUTEU*

Keywords: Eneolithic, Petrești culture, Transylvania, mortuary practices, inhumation, cist graves.

Abstract: The aim of the current paper is to present two inhumation graves belonging to Petrești culture recently discovered within the Petrești-Groapa Galbenă settlement (Alba County, Transylvania). The burial of a deceased in a cist made of adobe pieces represents an unusual funerary practice for the Eneolithic Petrești culture communities. This discovery is especially important because the current state of research related to the mortuary practices of Petrești culture bearers is not satisfactory.

Cuvinte cheie: Eneolitic, cultura Petrești, Transilvania, practici funerare, înmormântare, morminte cu cistă.

Rezumat: Articolul își propune prezentarea a două morminte de înmormântare aparținând culturii Petrești descoperite recent în așezarea de la Petrești-Groapa Galbenă (județul Alba). În mormântarea în cistă făcută din fragmente de chirpic reprezintă o practică funerară neobișnuită pentru comunitățile culturii eneolitice Petrești. Descoperirea este cu atât mai importantă cu cât stadiul cercetărilor privind practicile funerare ale purtătorilor acestei culturi este departe de a fi satisfăcător.

INTRODUCTION

Petrești culture communities, creators of an extraordinary intracarpethian Eneolithic civilization, have been individualized mostly through the painted pottery¹ attributed to them.

The Petrești habitation at *Groapa Galbenă* (the eponymous site) mainly fits with the A-B phase, a situation specific to most of the settlements within the middle Mureș river basin. Nowadays, in this geographical area we can identify no less than 36 sites or discoveries belonging to Petrești culture².

¹ Paul 1992, p. 46–97; Gligor 2007, p. 66; 2009a, p. 87–90, 173–176.

² Gligor 2004, Pl. VII.

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The pottery from Petrești-Groapa Galbenă settlement is preserved in the archaeological deposits of the National Museum of Union Alba Iulia, as a result of the taking over of old private collections. Recently, some artifacts belonging to the Turdaș culture³, the Foeni cultural group⁴, and also the Precucuteni-type excised ornamentation pottery⁵ was published.

In the summer of 2011, after almost five decades after the last research of Dumitru and Ion Berciu at Petrești⁶, Alba Iulia University has restarted the archaeological excavations at Petrești – *Groapa Galbenă* (Pl. I/2).

Petrești is now part of Sebeș town (Alba County), approximately 4 km away (Pl. I/1). The site is on the left bank of the Sebeș river, close to the the German fortified church called “Cetate” (Pl. I/2). The research was carried out as rescue excavations to build family homes.

MORTUARY PRACTICES IN THE PETREȘTI CULTURE

Extremely important for the Petrești culture is the discovery and investigation of two inhumation graves, which represent the subject of the current paper.

In the current stage of the research, knowledge about the mortuary practices of the Petrești culture is scarce, only a few funerary discoveries and no necropolis being known⁷. The archaeological data

³ Gligor 2008, p. 295–296, Pl. I–IV.

⁴ Gligor 2008, p. 3019–310, Pl. V–VII, IX–XII.

⁵ Gligor 2009b, p. 233–237, Pl. I–III.

⁶ Paul 1992, p. 8, 143–143.

⁷ Gligor 2007, p. 67; Gligor, Băcuet-Crișan 2012.

known about the Petrești culture funerary discoveries area is represented by the inhumation rite, in a crouching position, with poor funerary inventory found while researching isolated burials inside the settlements⁸.

Within the Ocna Sibiului-*Fața Vacilor* (Sibiu County) settlement was found a skeleton oriented SE-NW, lying on the left side in a crouched position⁹. A piece of sandstone was found in the neck (shoulders) area. Another skeleton in a crouched position was found at the Daia Română-*Părăuț* (Alba County) settlement¹⁰. It was lying on the right side, had its face oriented towards SE, and the bottom of the pit was partially covered with sandstone pieces. An ox jaw was also discovered close to the skeleton.

Child human remains were discovered on the hearth of a dwelling in *Tărtăria-Gura Luncii*¹¹. Part of the A-B phase of the Petrești culture, the grave is considered a ritualistic inhumation¹².

We studied the excavation (unpublished) reports of M. Rusu from the 1960-ies, from *Noșlac-Peșes* (Alba County) located close to the Petrești settlement, and they mention 6 inhumation graves belonging to Petrești culture¹³. In this site, there were 4 inhumation tombs found in a crouched position, according to I. Paul¹⁴.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF DISCOVERIES

Trench I/2011 is composed of a transverse section (Trench 1) of 10 x 1 m and 4 squares of 4 x 3.5 m, named A-D (Pl. VI/1). Within the squares C (Pl. VI/2) and D (Pl. VI/3), in the Petrești layer, the A-B phase (0.20–0.50m), we identified remains of a surface dwelling (L1/C34) consisting of massive adobe pieces, with traces of poles and twigs, as well as a considerable amount of ceramics, loom weights, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic clay figurines¹⁵.

Petrești painted pottery at “Groapa Galbenă” is typically for the A-B phase¹⁶. These artifacts are

included in the fine ware pottery category, made in an oxidizing firing atmosphere. The background of the painted decoration was well burnished. The main shapes comprised carinated bowls (Pl. II/1, 3), bowls with rounded rims (Pl. II/2; Pl. III/2), a pedestal vessel (Pl. IV/1–2; V/1–3). The decoration technique is painting, applied before firing, and only the category of bi-chrome pottery is represented. The geometric motifs are painted dark-brown and brownish, with the main patterns: thin lines (Pl. II/1, 3; Pl. IV/1–2; Pl. V/1–3), curvilinear motifs (Pl. II/2; Pl. III/1a–1b), and network patterns (Pl. III/2). At the same time, complementary pictorial motifs were applied on the inside of the vessel (Pl. III/1b, 2).

M1 (C38) In square D, after dismantling the remains of the dwelling, the first human remains were identified at a depth of approximately –0.50 m. Grave M1 (C38) was arranged as a rectangular cist, by reusing adobe pieces from dismantling the above mentioned complex (Pl. VII/1). The skeleton was found in a crouched position, lying on the left side, with a NNW-SSE orientation (Pl. VII/2).

The anatomically connected skeleton was incomplete, but not disturbed by subsequent anthropic activities. The presence of animal bones inside the cist, as well as in the feet area, could indicate that they are offerings. As funerary inventory we include a fragment of unpainted fragment of pedestal vessel, found next to the hip (Pl. VII/3). The stratigraphic context and using the remains of a burnt dwelling in the cist construction indicates the fact that the grave belongs either to the second habitation phase using remains of the first dwelling, or marks the end of the first habitation and leaving the burnt one (Pl. VIII/1).

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF M1

The anthropological analyses allowed the identification of the following skeletal pieces:

- most of the frontal squama, rebuilt from 3 conjoining fragments, where we noted the obliteration of the metopic suture (a small fragment from above the nose still persists);
- parts of the upper orbits are attached to the above mentioned fragment;
- both zygomatic bones are detached (Pl. VIII/2–3);
- the right part of the maxillary has the teeth 54–55 in alveolae. The alveolae of the teeth 51, 52, 53 are empty, with sharp edges, which denotes they fell postmortem. On the bone

⁸ Paul 1992, p. 115; Gligor, Băcuet-Crișan 2012.

⁹ Paul 1992, 115–116, Pl. LIV/2–2.

¹⁰ Paul 1992, 116, Pl. LIV/1–1.

¹¹ Horedt 1949, p. 51, Fig. 7.

¹² Paul 1992, p. 115, 159, note 41.

¹³ Gligor, Băcuet-Crișan 2012.

¹⁴ Paul 1992, p. 115, 159, note 42.

¹⁵ Will be published in the forthcoming paper.

¹⁶ Paul 1992, p. 76–90, Pl. XXIX, XXXIV–XLI; Gligor 2004, Pl. I; 2007, p. 70–71, Fig. 50–52; 2009a, Pl. CXLII–CXLIII.

fragment we notice the permanent teeth 11, 12, and 13 which have not erupted yet (Pl. VIII/4);

- in the vertex, on the left parietal, was identified a clogged fracture, approximately oval, with dimensions of 1.8 x 1.2cm in diameter (Pl. VIII/5). All the evidence indicates that the fracture had healed. The edges show a complete bone remodeling, which in turn indicate a long survival after the trauma¹⁷;
- the pelvis components were represented by the 3 bones of the right coxal (ilium, ischium and pubis), not fused with each other. We identified a left iliac bone fragment, a left ischion bone fragment, and 3 vertebral bodies. Most of the first sacral vertebra, presenting recent fusion of the lateral parts (the suture line persists). The vertebral arch and the right lateral side are missing, where the remaining area has indentations characteristic to the lack of suture (Pl. IX/2–3).
- vertebral fragments: 5 vertebral hemi-arches with indentations on the extremities, specific to the lack of suturing with the vertebral bodies; 1 vertebral body fragment, with indentations on the superior and inferior sides; 4 thoracic vertebral fragments, from which half of the vertebral arch is missing (Pl. IX/1). For 1 of the fragments, the suture line between the body and the hemi-arches still persists.

Conclusion: this skeleton belongs to an *Infans II* (4–6 years) of unknown sex¹⁸.

M2 (C45) While dismantling L1 in □C, we identified a second grave, M2 (C45) at a depth of approximately –0.60m. The complex was obviously anthropically disturbed, probably in this area being placed one of the poles of the dwelling from the upper layer (Pl. X/1).

This grave was also arranged as a cist from adobe pieces (Pl. XI/1). From the skull position, the individual was placed oriented SSW-NNE (Pl. X/2). No artifacts that can be associated with the inhumation could be identified.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF M2

The anthropological analysis allowed the identification of the following skeletal parts:

- 37 cranial fragments, from which we were able to identify the medial part of the frontal squama, of which the nasal bones are also attached; both temporal bones, the left zygomatic bone; the left hemi-mandible, with a detached condyle, having in alveolae the teeth 33, 35, 36; tooth 38 had not erupted (it is included in the alveola); the alveolae for teeth 32, 34 and 37 are empty with sharp edges, indicating they fell postmortem (Pl. XI/3); the gonion angle is approximately 135, and the prominences of the muscular insertions are well represented;
- 14 costal fragments, including almost all the first rib; the two distal thirds of the left humerus (restored from 2 fragments) with the distal epiphysis detached after the incomplete ossification (the remaining area presents indentations); the proximal half of the left ulna; the proximal half of the left radius, the head is detached due to incomplete suture; small tibia/shinbone fragment (Pl. XI/2).

In conclusion, this skeleton belongs to an adolescent/*Juvenis* (16–18 years) of unknown sex¹⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

By looking closely at the cist graves from Petrești-Groapa Galbenă, a new burial practice stands out in the Transylvanian Eneolithic. Within the settlement, 3.5 to 4 m apart from one another, two burials were arranged near a surface dwelling, previously dismantled. The lack of grave goods seems to classify in the distinguishing feature of the Petrești funerary finds currently known.

Acknowledgments

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¹⁷ Lovejoy, Heiple 1981, p. 529–541; Patton 1992, p. 11; Ogden *et alii* 1996, p. 19–52; Ortner 2003, p. 46, 119–143; Malone *et alii* 2011, p. 1123–1130.

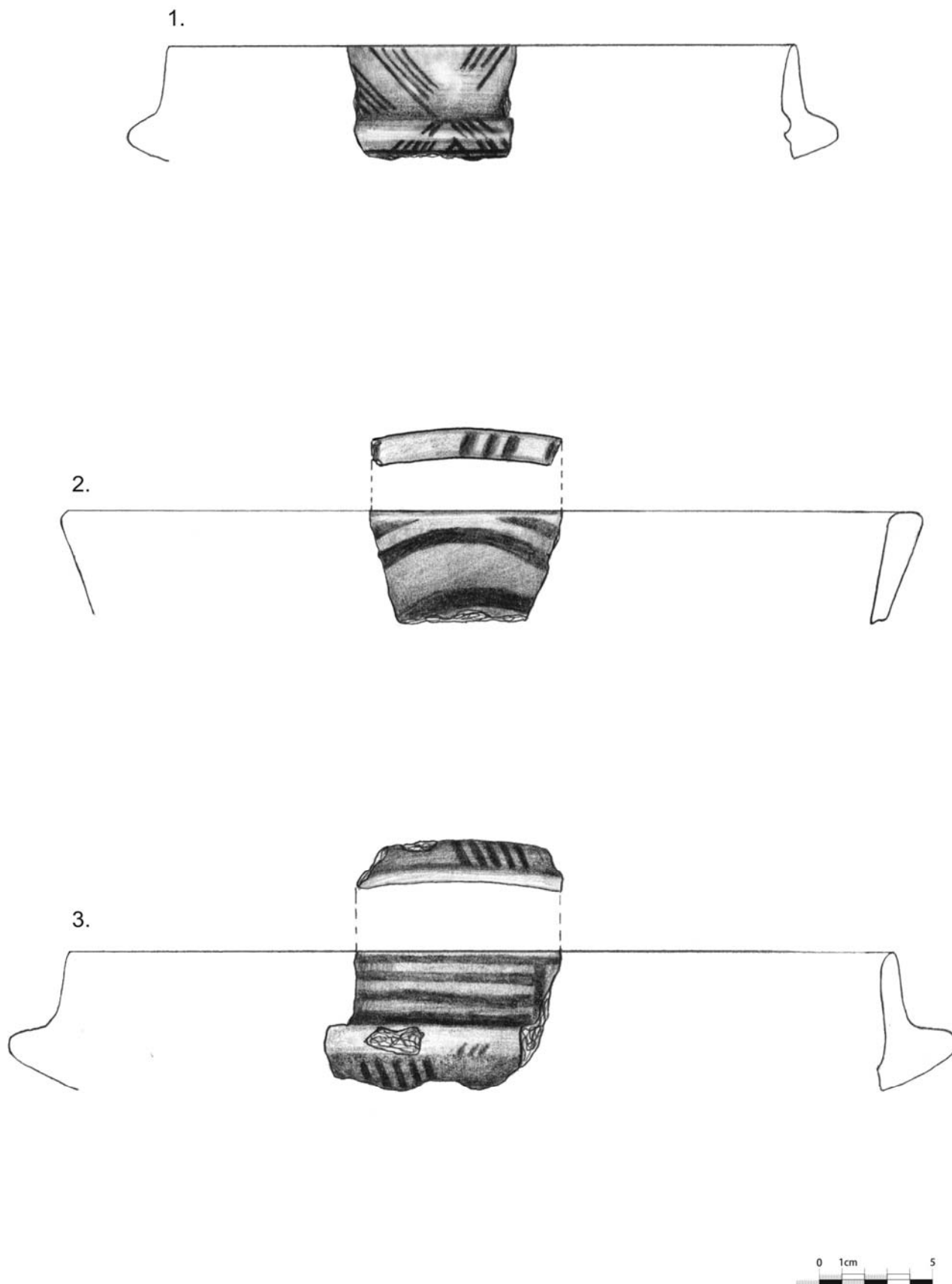
¹⁸ Lovejoy *et alii* 1985, p. 15; Krogman, Îșcan, 1986, p. 75–77; Scheuer, Black 2000, p. 205–206; Mays 2010, p. 40–90; Gligor 2012, p. 87–90; White *et alii* 2012, p. 131–145.

¹⁹ Scheuer, Black 2000, p. 205–206; Rösing *et alii* 2007, p. 75–89; Mays 2010, p. 40–90; Gligor 2012, p. 87–90; White *et alii* 2012, p. 91–95, 104–125, 184–197.

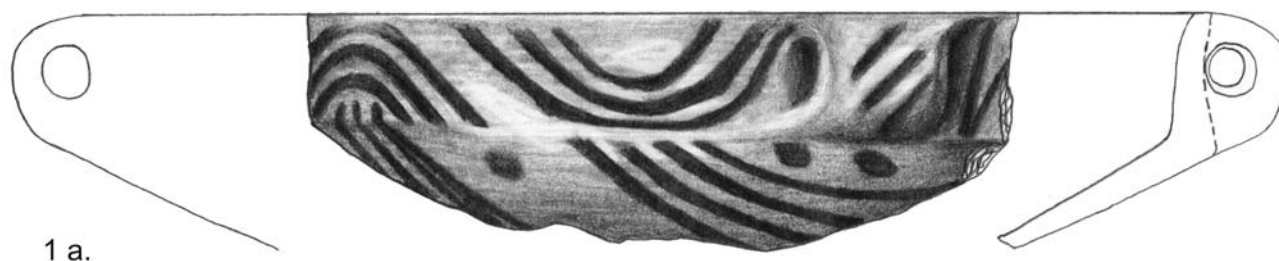
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LIST OF PLATES

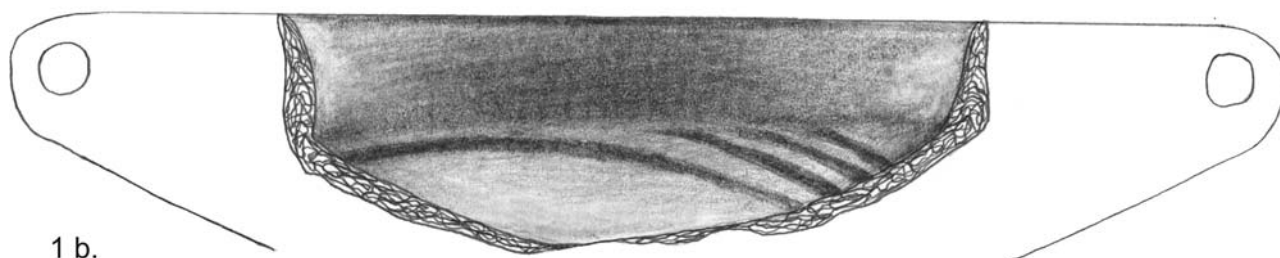
- Pl. I. 1. Map of Romania showing the location of Alba County and the Petrești-Groapa Galbenă settlement as well as the map of the Petrești village; 2. Aerial view (www.maps.google.com) showing the layout of the excavation (Trench I/2011).
- Pl. II. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1. trench 1, depth –0,40 –0,60 m (C17); 2. square A, depth –0,80 (C29a); 3. square B, depth 0,45 m.
- Pl. III. Petrești painted pottery (A-B). 1a–1b. square B, depth 0,45m; 2. square B, depth 1,30 m (C40).
- Pl. IV. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1. trench 1, depth 0,45 m (C11); 2. square A, depth 1,20m (C28).
- Pl. V. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1, 3 – square D, depth –0,30m (L1); 2 –square D, depth –0,20 m (L1).
- Pl. VI. 1. Sp. I/2011, general view during the excavation; 2–3. L1 (C34) surface dwelling in squares C-D.
- Pl. VII. M1 (C38) 1. general view of the grave; 2–3 details of the cist grave.
- Pl. VIII. M1 (C38) 1. grundriss of the grave; 2–4. skull fragments; 5. detail of skull trauma.
- Pl. IX. M1 (C38) 1–3. skeletal elements.
- Pl. X. M2 (C45) 1. general view of the grave; 2. details of the skeleton.
- Pl. XI. M2 (C45) 1. grundriss of the grave; 2–3 skeletal elements.



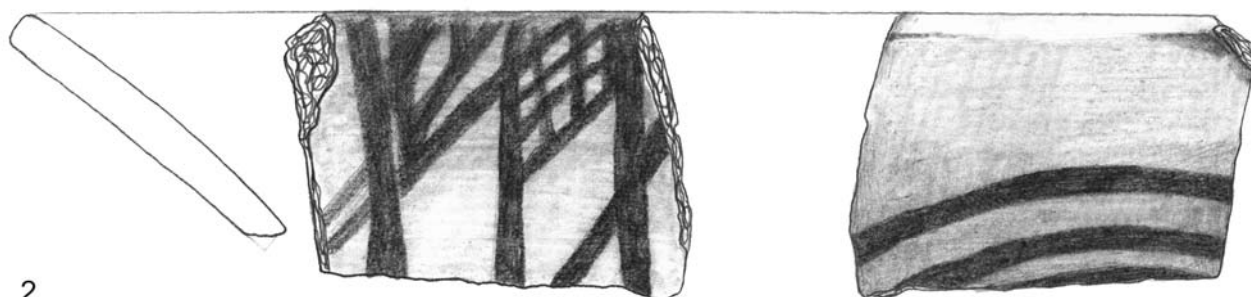
Pl. II. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1. trench 1, depth $-0,40-0,60$ m (C17); 2. square A, depth $-0,80$ (C29a);
3. square B, depth $0,45$ m.



1 a.



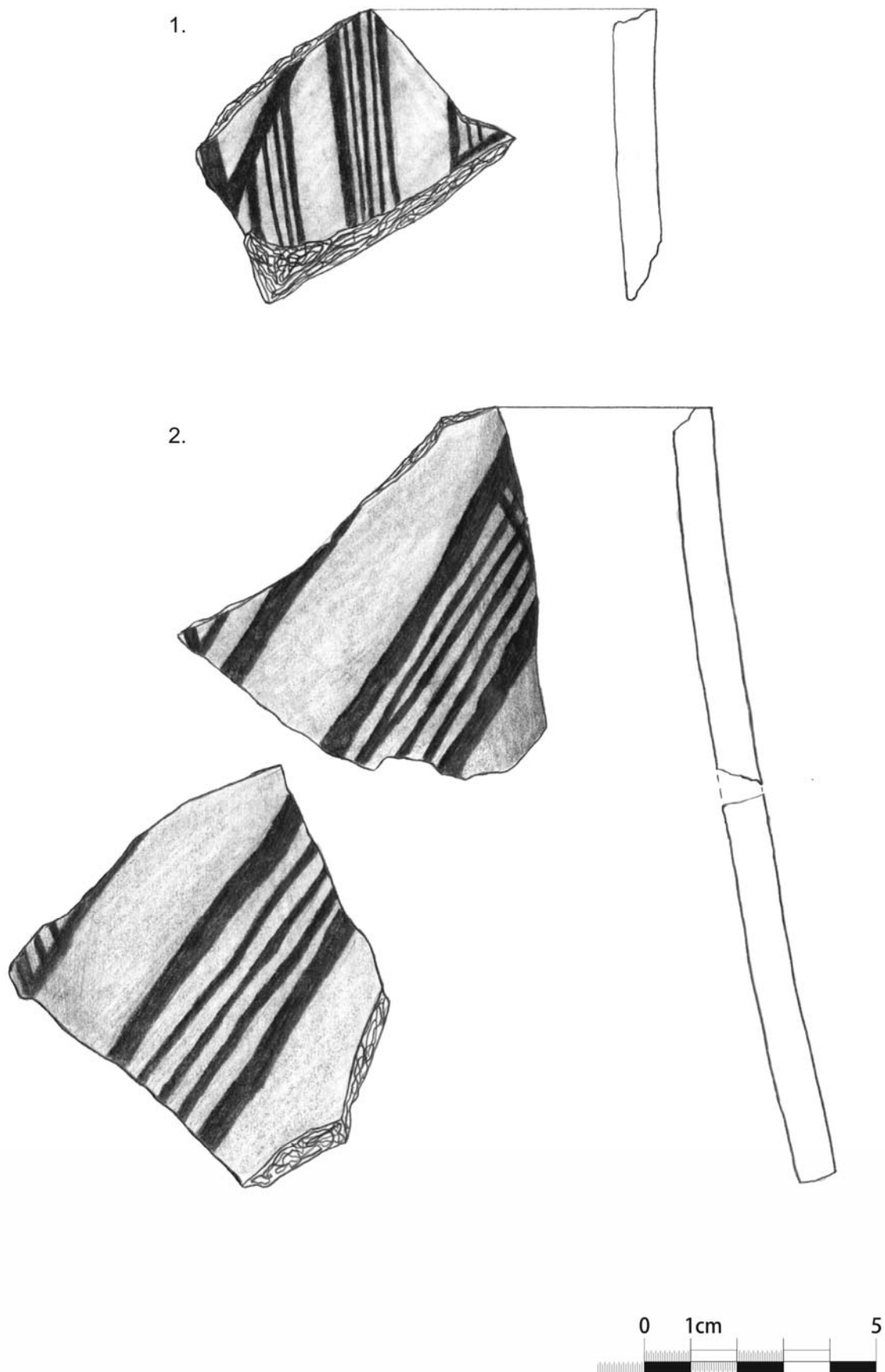
1 b.



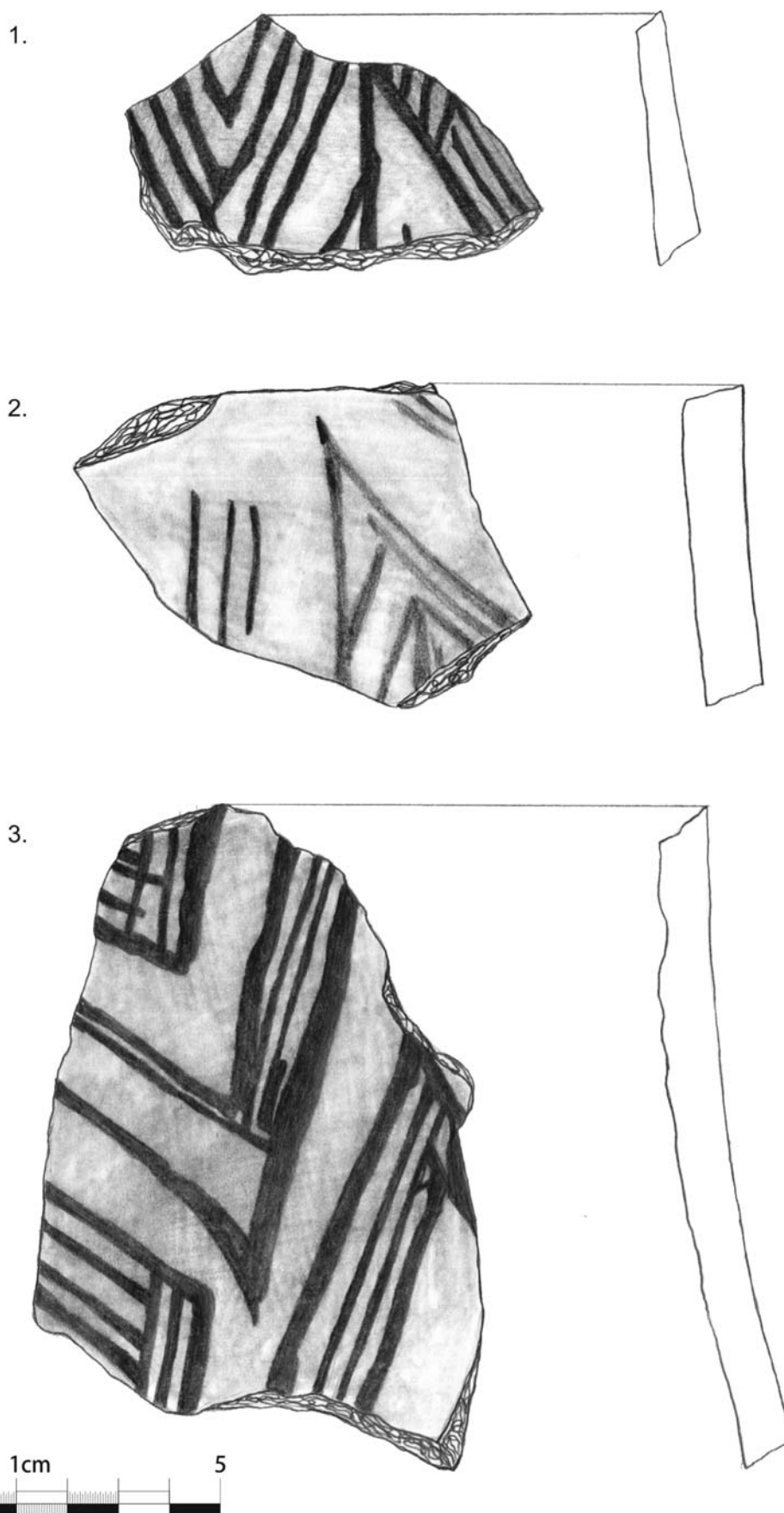
2.



Pl. III. Petrești painted pottery (A-B). 1a-1b. square B, depth 0,45 m; 2. square B, depth 1,30 m (C40).



Pl. IV. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1. trench 1, depth 0,45 m (C11); 2. square A, depth 1,20m (C28).



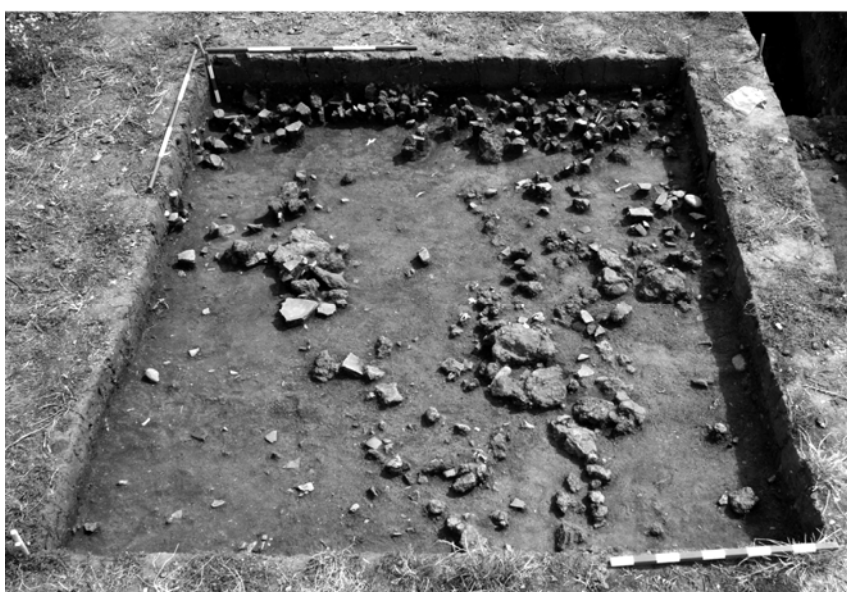
Pl. V. Petrești painted pottery (A-B) 1, 3 – square D, depth –0,30 m (L1); 2 –square D, depth –0,20 m (L1).



1.



2.



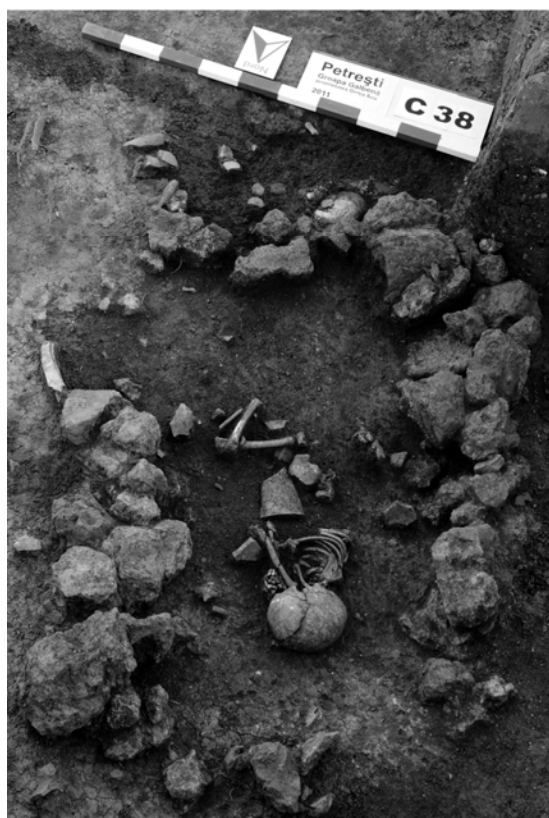
3.

Pl. VI. 1. Sp. I/2011, general view during the excavation; 2–3. L1 (C34) surface dwelling in squares C-D.



2.

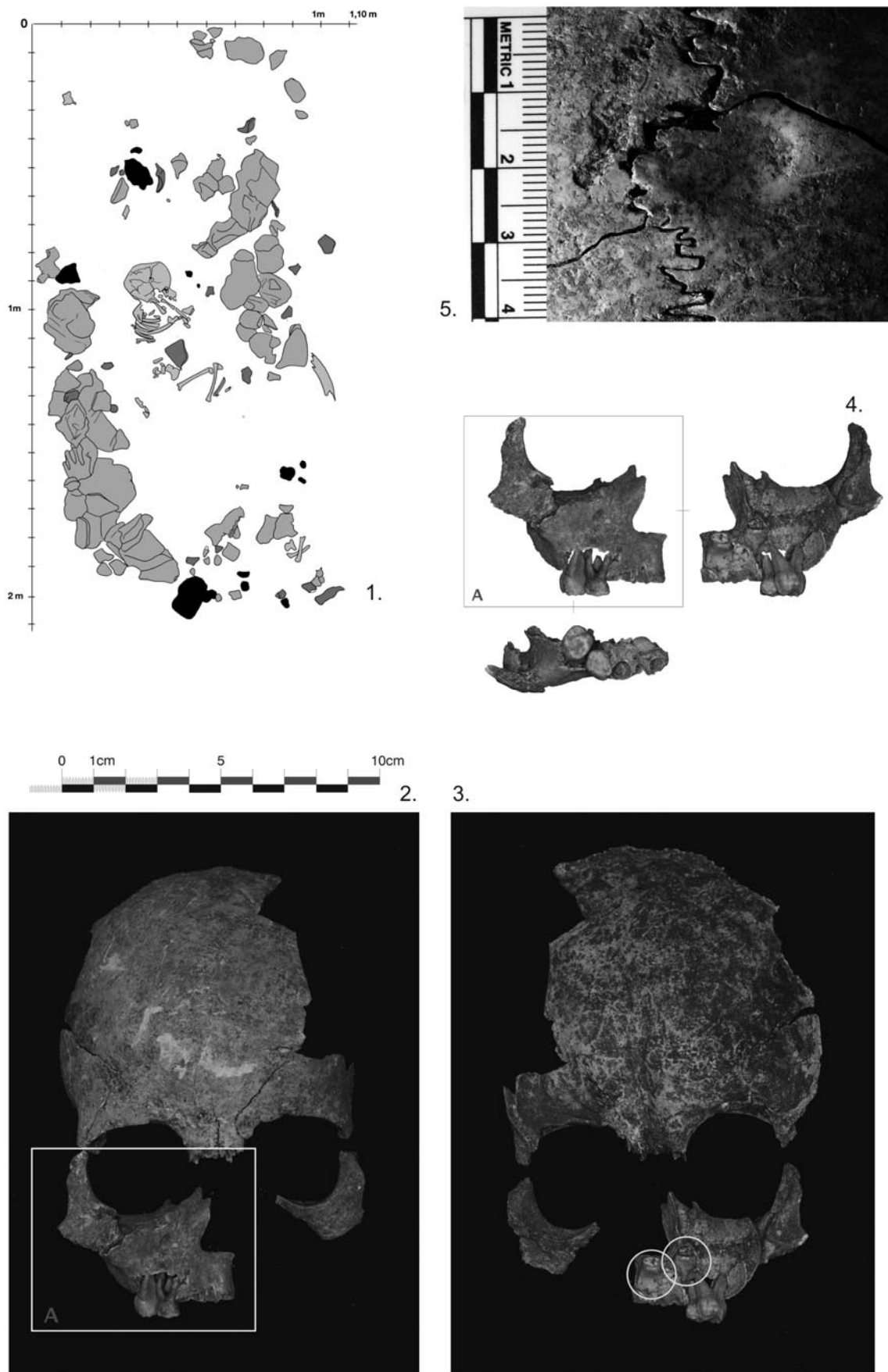
1.



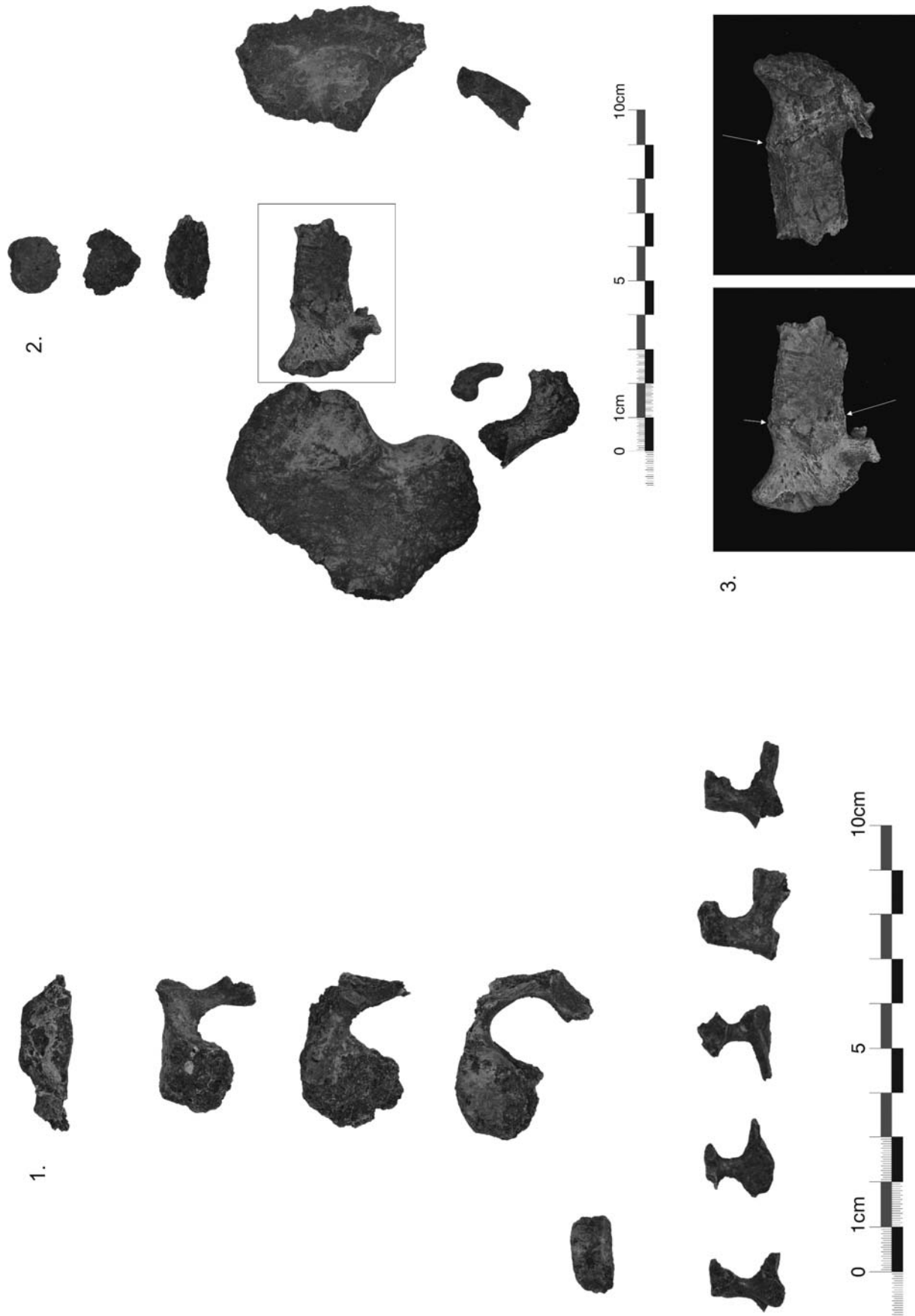
3.



Pl. VII. M1 (C38) 1. general view of the grave; 2–3 details of the cist grave.



Pl. VIII. M1 (C38) 1. grundriss of the grave; 2–4. skull fragments; 5. detail of skull trauma.



Pl. IX. M1 (C38) 1–3. skeletal elements.

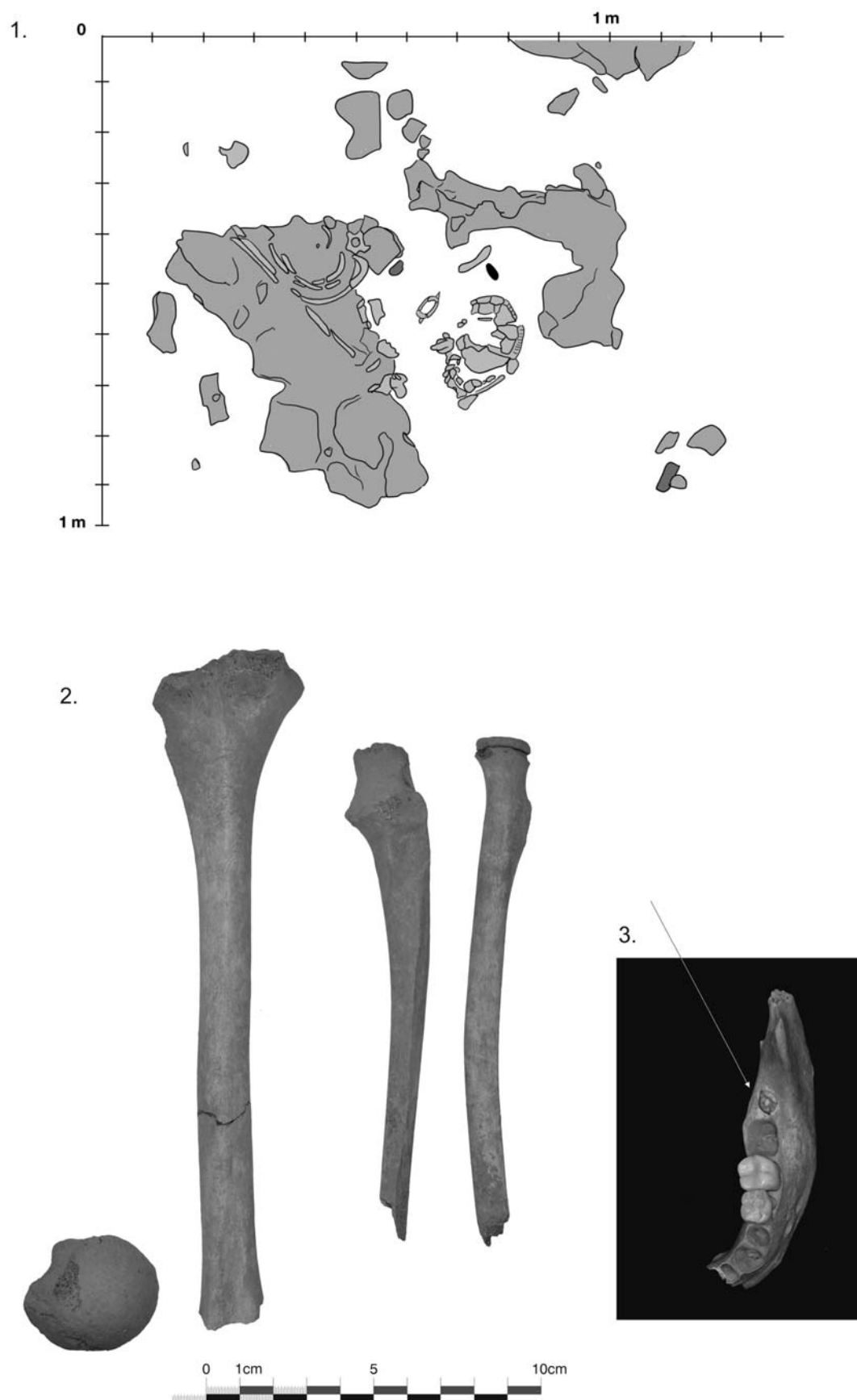


1.



2.

Pl. X. M2 (C45) 1. general view of the grave; 2. details of the skeleton.



Pl. XI. M2 (C45) 1. grundriss of the grave; 2–3 skeletal elements.

