

THE PREHISTORIC SITE OF RADOMIR-VAHOVO: SOME PROBLEMS OF THE EARLY BRONZE AGE IN SOUTH-WESTERN BULGARIA (NORTHERN CONNECTIONS)

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The prehistoric site of Radomir-Vahovo was firstly discovered in the early 1940s¹⁾. The site is located 12 kilometers south of Pernik, on the left terrace of the Struma River. In 1991 trial excavations were made to define the size of the settlement and its stratigraphic order²⁾. While investigations of trenches NN: 1 and 2 did not reveal any clear stratigraphical data, the excavations of trenches N: 3-3A documented layers from the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages (EBA). The sequence of the EBA layers is as follows:

Level I – distinguished at 0,30 m. Fragments of pottery were found above and between middle sizes stones;

Level II – distinguished at 0,50 m by burnt plaster, clay vessels and fragments of pottery;

Level III – distinguished at 0,20 m below the plaster of layer II by clay vessels;

Level IV a great number of fragments unconnected with any construction were found between Level III and Level V;

Level V – distinguished at 1,30 m by a pit.

At present the Radomir-Vahovo site is the only EBA site with clear stratigraphical data – thus its importance for a better understanding of the EBA not only in SW Bulgaria but also in the Central Balkans region. In the present report, we shall discuss only the northern connections of the EBA levels, especially with respect to the Boleráz, Cernavodă III, Baden, Kostolac, Vučedol and Coțofeni cultures.

Level V. From the pit which marks this level comes the fragment of a lid ornamented with triangles and concentric circles (Pl. I/3). From the same site we have fragments from two other lids – one is from trench N: 1 and the other is an isolated find (Pl. I/1, 2, 4). This type of lid is characteristic for the Late Eneolithic Age in the Middle Danube region (for example – Jevišovice, Bratislava, Ketegyhaza, Brza Vrba; all of which are sites connected with the Boleráz or Cernavodă III cultures³⁾. According to the periodisation of the Baden culture proposed by Dr. Pavuková, the appearance of the lids occurs in the "b" and "c" phases of the Boleráz culture⁴⁾. An exception is the lid from Gladnica (Kosovo), which comes from a pit with Kostolac materials, but is connected by the authors with Bubanj-Hum Ia⁵⁾. Having in mind these contradictions we remain on the opinion that the Radomir lids date from the Boleráz "b-c" phases and the Late Cernavodă III culture.

Another form, a bowl with an incurved rim thickened from the outside, comes from the pit of Level V. The bowl is ornamented with grooves on the upper part of the body (Pl. 2/7). According to the Pavuková chronology this kind of bowl (H-2) is characteristic for Baden I (Boleráz) – culture. One can find exact parallels (including the ornamental scheme with grooves) in the sites of the Boleráz culture (for example at Blatne, Žlokveci

and Šturovo). Similar forms, but without grooved ornamentation, are known in the Cernavodă III culture (for example at Malu Roșu and Locusteni)⁶⁾.

A few fragments from bowls with conical or hemispherical bodies and conical necks, in some cases ornamented with grooves, also come from the pit (Pl. 2/1, 3, 4, 5). A bowl of the same type, with four relieved handles was found in trench No 1 (Pl. 2/6). This type of bowl is one of the most characteristic for the Cernavodă III culture and is found at each of its sites⁷⁾. In terms of the Baden culture it is type "J" and is more precisely dated in Boleráz in the light of the proportions of Radomir bowls⁸⁾.

Also from the pit of Level V was recovered a fragment of a pot with tunnel lugs (Pl. 2/2), which is characteristic of the Lower Danube Cernavodă III culture⁹⁾.

Following the above mentioned parallels of the materials found in the pit of Level V, we synchronize this level with the Cernavodă III and Boleráz cultures, most precisely with their latest phases.

Level IV. Between Level V and the well documented Level III a great number of materials with unclear stratigraphical context were found. Having in mind the 0,60 meters between III and V we propose the existence of another level, which we distinguish as Level IV although it has not been demonstrated stratigraphically. The material from this level contains plates and bowls with incurved rims, bowls with biconical bodies and conical necks, little pots with incurved rims, etc. (Pl. 3). The characteristic ornamentations are fine incised lines reminding grooves which form zig-zag lines or are gathered in groups of 3-5 and located below the rim or on the body. One can find parallels of this technique of ornamentation in the Orlea-Sadovec group. In some cases these parallels also include the same form and ornamental composition (Pl. 3/1)¹⁰⁾. In the same stratigraphical context were found the two fragments of bowls mentioned above (Baden bowl type "J") ornamented inside with grooves and finger-impressions on the rims (Pl. 3/11, 12). This motifs is characteristic for Baden II from the Middle Danube with parallels in Cervény Hrádok, Tekovski Hrádok, etc.¹¹⁾.

In light of the connections Orlea-Sadovec-Coțofeni I and the synchronization of the last one with Baden II, we think that Level IV at Radomir is contemporaneous with Coțofeni I and Baden II.

Level III. One of the most characteristic forms from this level is the bowl with spherical body and conical neck (Pl. 4/2). The bowls are ornamented with dots or short incised lines below the rim and with compositions of dots and incised lines on the body (Pl. 4). The nearest parallels of these forms are in the Bubanj-Hum Ib group from the Middle Morava valley (for example at Bubanj, Velika Humska Čuka, Jelenac, etc.)¹²⁾. Further north one can find parallels in level Ic from Ostrikovac (synchronized with the Kostolac culture)¹³⁾. This form is one of the most characteristic of the last culture (for example Gomolava and Pivnica)¹⁴⁾. The deep bowl with incised neck (Pl. 4/8) is also characteristic for this culture¹⁵⁾. Such forms (although with different rims and handles) are known from the Coțofeni II-III culture¹⁶⁾. The ornamental technique and motifs are also characteristic for Bubanj-Hum Ib and the Kostolac Culture. All these parallels permit

us to accept the synchronization of Level III from Radomir with the Bubanj-Hum Ib, Kostolac and Coțofeni II-III cultures.

Level II. The main forms are: cups with spherical bodies and high conical neck, decorated on the body with incised lines (Pl. 5); bowls with incurved rims, decorated below the rim with incised lines (Pl. 6/1-3); bowls with thickened rims, decorated with positive zig-zag lines (Pl. 6/4); bowls with a cut rim, decorated with negative incised zig-zag lines (Pl. 6/7, 8); pots with spherical bodies and cylindrical necks (Pl. 6/6). Unstratified fragments of biconical pots, decorated with incised lines were also found (Pl. 7/8-11).

The level II cups are known from Sremski Karlovac (Kostolac culture)¹⁷. Such forms appear at Gomolava at a Kostolac level and are also characteristic for the Vučedol one, ornamented with typical techniques and motifs for this culture¹⁸.

The level II bowls with zig-zag ornament (positive or negative), as well as those with a band of incised lines below the rim, have parallels in the Vučedol culture. Little biconical pots are characteristic of the early phase of the same culture¹⁹. In light of this material we synchronize Level II at Radomir with Vučedol A. Some of the materials from Level II have parallels with Coțofeni III from the Lower Danube and the Bubanj-Hum II group from Nišava and Morava valleys²⁰.

Level I. Materials from Level I are few in number and all have the characteristic features of the classic Vučedol culture (Pl. 8). One result of the research described above is the following synchronization of the Radomir-Vahovo EBA levels:

Level V = Boleráz "b-c" – Cernavodă III;

Level IV = Baden II – Coțofeni I (Orlea-Sadovec);

Level III = Bubanj-Hum Ib – Kostolac – Coțofeni II-III;

Level II = Early Vučedol – Coțofeni III;

Level I = Classic Vučedol culture – Coțofeni III.

In what way does the Radomir-Vahovo site contribute to a better understanding of the EBA in this region? First, it establishes the existence, south to the Balkans, of materials connected with Boleráz and Cernavodă III cultures. Radomir Level V is synchronized with Boleráz "b-c" and Late Cernavodă III (i.e. not the very beginning of the EBA). Then the appearance of materials, similar to earlier phases of the above mentioned culture are to be expected.

Is Radomir Level V evidence of a new archaeological culture or just of influences from the north? For the present, there are not enough data to confirm the existence of a new archaeological culture (although this is not so unbelievable as it may at first sight). Based on the parallels mentioned above we accept most of the Middle Danube connections (with the main road Nišava-Morava rivers) without negotiating connections with the Lower Danube basin.

A development similar to the Lower Danube (the Coțofeni I case) has to be seen in the Upper Struma valley (Radomir Level IV), with influences from the middle Danube Baden II culture. If the materials from Ostricovac level I a (which are connected with Baden and Coțofeni I) are the same as those from Radomir IV, we can speak about

a vast region of the Central Balkans (the Upper Struma, Nisava and Morava Valleys) as having a similar development at the end of the first stage of the EBA.

Materials to further clarify these problems and results will come from the publication of the results of the excavations at the Yunatsite Tell and Ostrikovac.

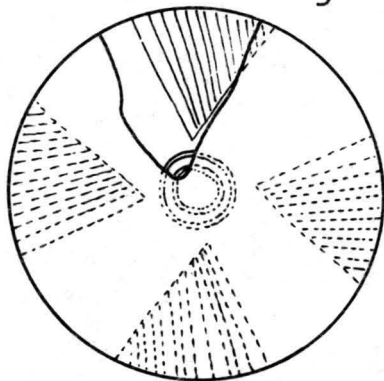
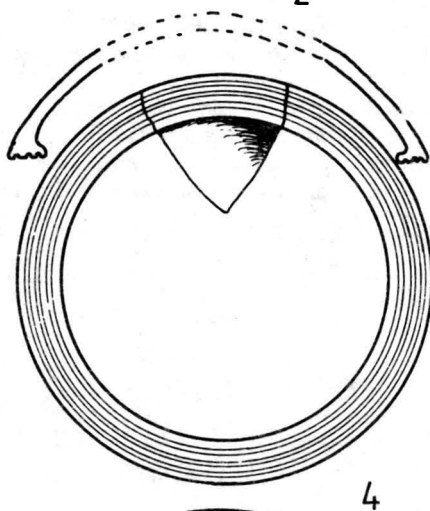
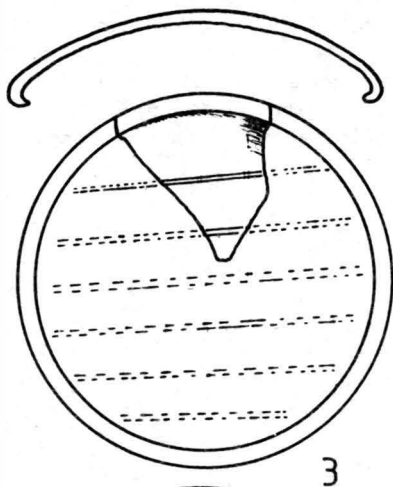
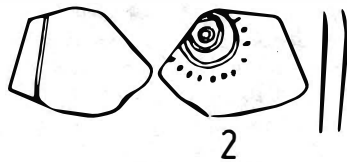
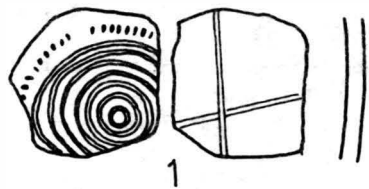
Radomir Level III and the contemporaneous Bubanj-Hum Ib represent the southern variant of the Kostolac culture which is already known from the the Pernik-Krepostta and Hotovo sites²¹). Having in mind the stratigraphical position of Level III we can confirm that the Bubanj-Hum Ib group is later than the Baden II from the Middle Danube. The question remains however whether the Bubanj-Hum Ib group is synchronous with Baden III-IV or whether there is, between levels III and IV at Radomir, a hiatus which can be synchronized with the previously mentioned phases of Baden culture. If this is not the case, then we can speak of the existence of the Kostolac culture in the Central Balkans earlier than in the Middle Danube region.

The main problem concerning Radomir, levels II-I is if these levels represent a variant of a Vučedol culture or just influences from it. The question is even more complicated if we have in mind that the materials with parallels in Bubanj-Hum II group (Pl. 7/1-7) are without stratigraphy. If they do not belong to the levels II-I, we can speak about the existence of the Vučedol culture in the region which follows chronologically the Bubanj-Hum II group – a situation we do think of being not quite so possible. Having in mind the Dikili Tash and Sitagroi sequence (where the Vučedol materials are isolated finds) we think that in the Struma-region an independent cultural development has taken place in the period under discussion, without negotiating the strong influences from north (Coţofeni and Vučedol Cultures).

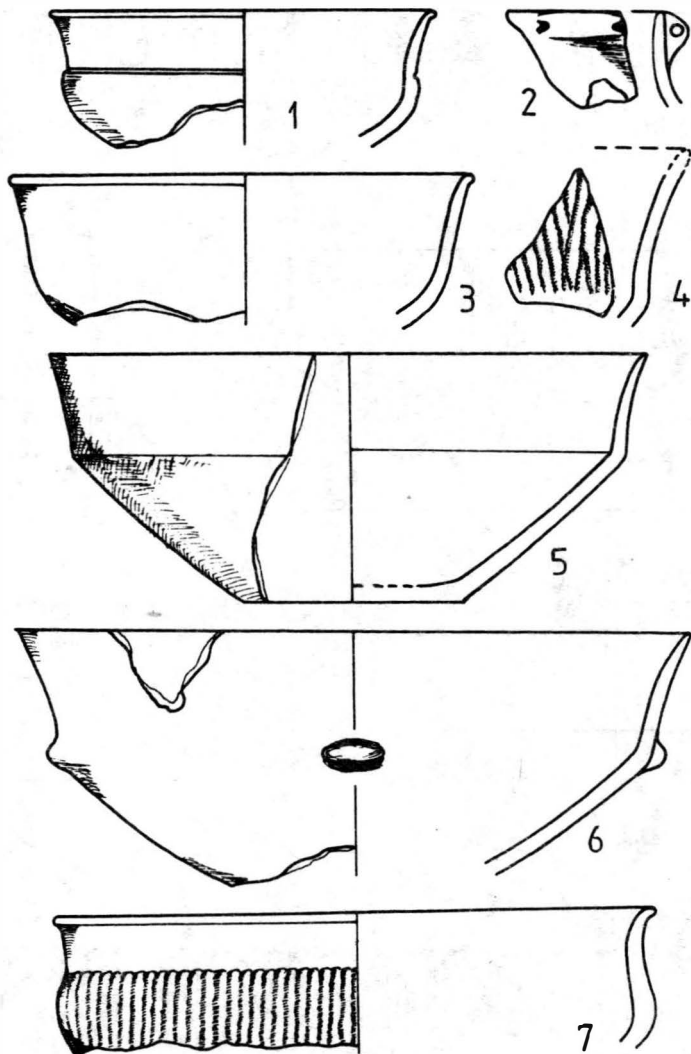
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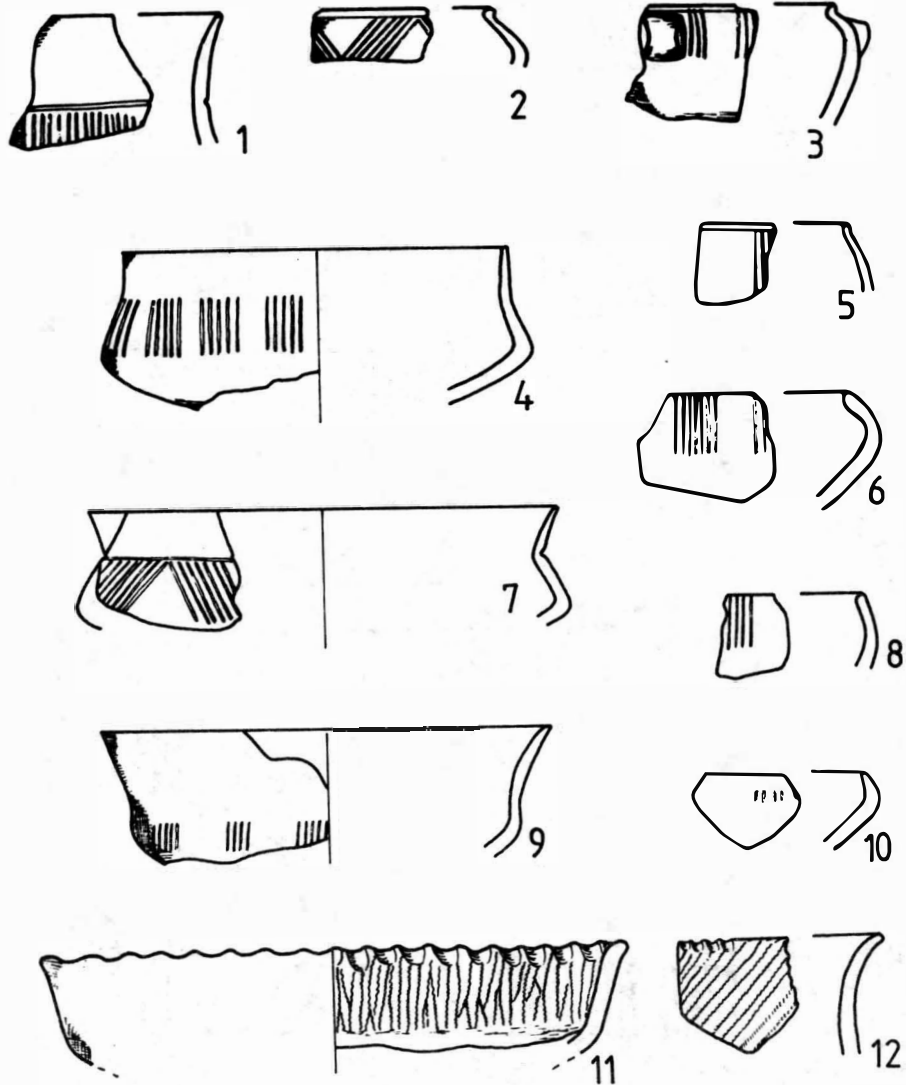
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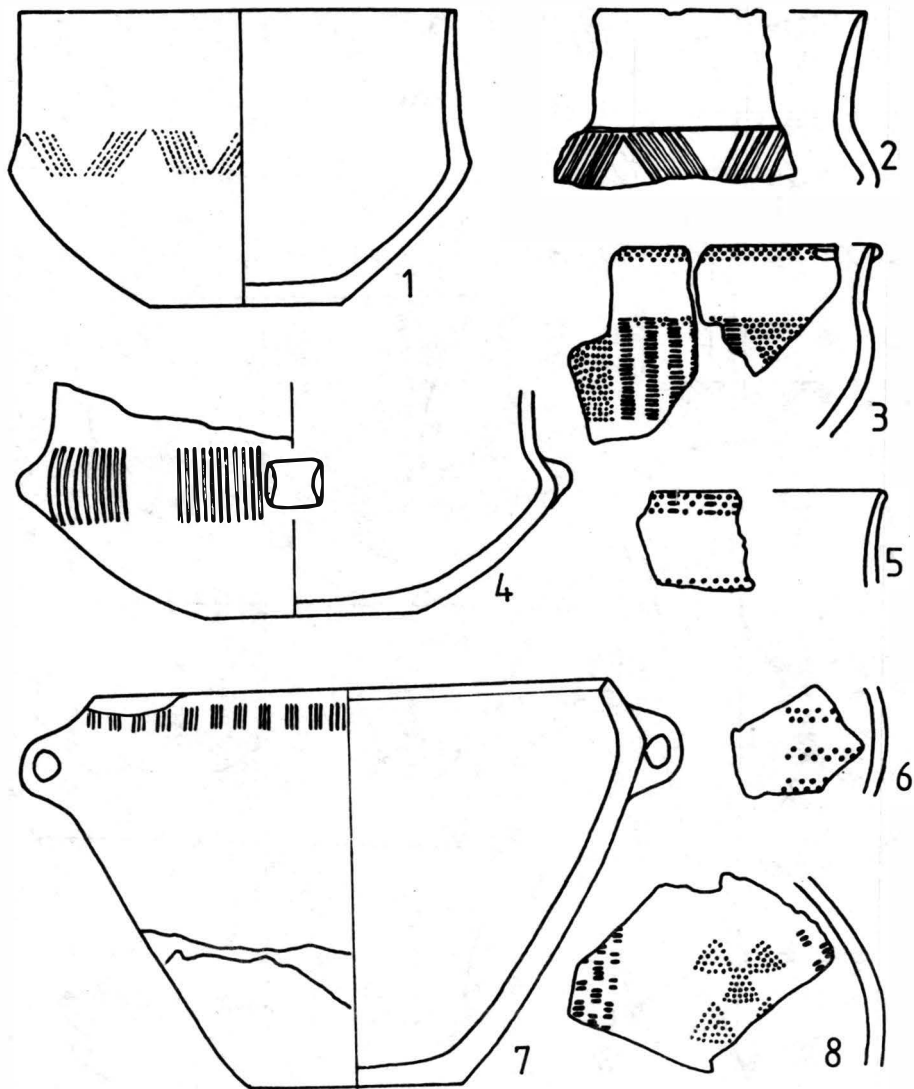
Pl. I. Level V. Pottery from the pit (3) and unstratigraphed. Scale 1:4.



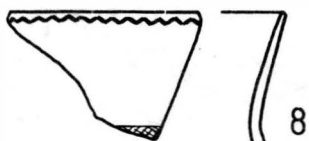
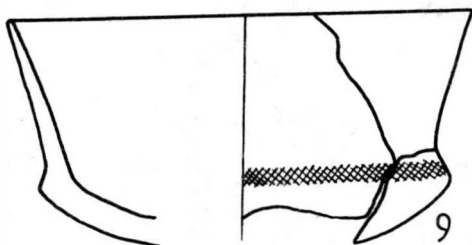
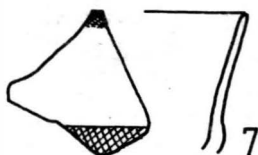
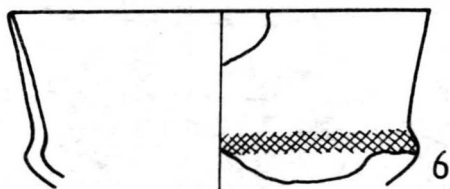
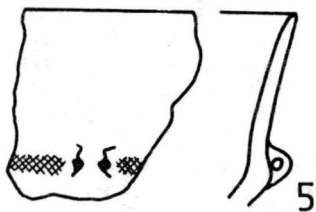
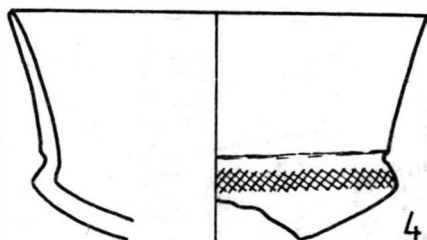
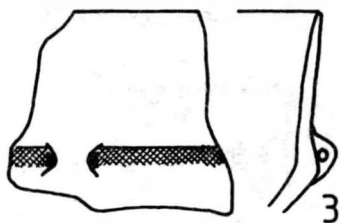
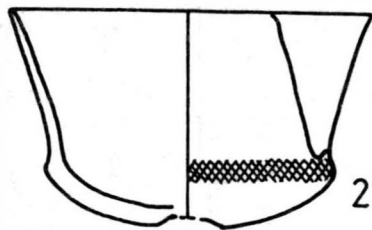
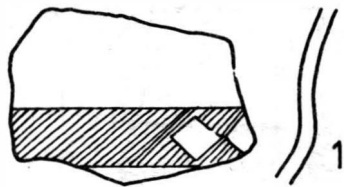
Pl. II. Level V. Pottery from the pit. Scale 1:3.



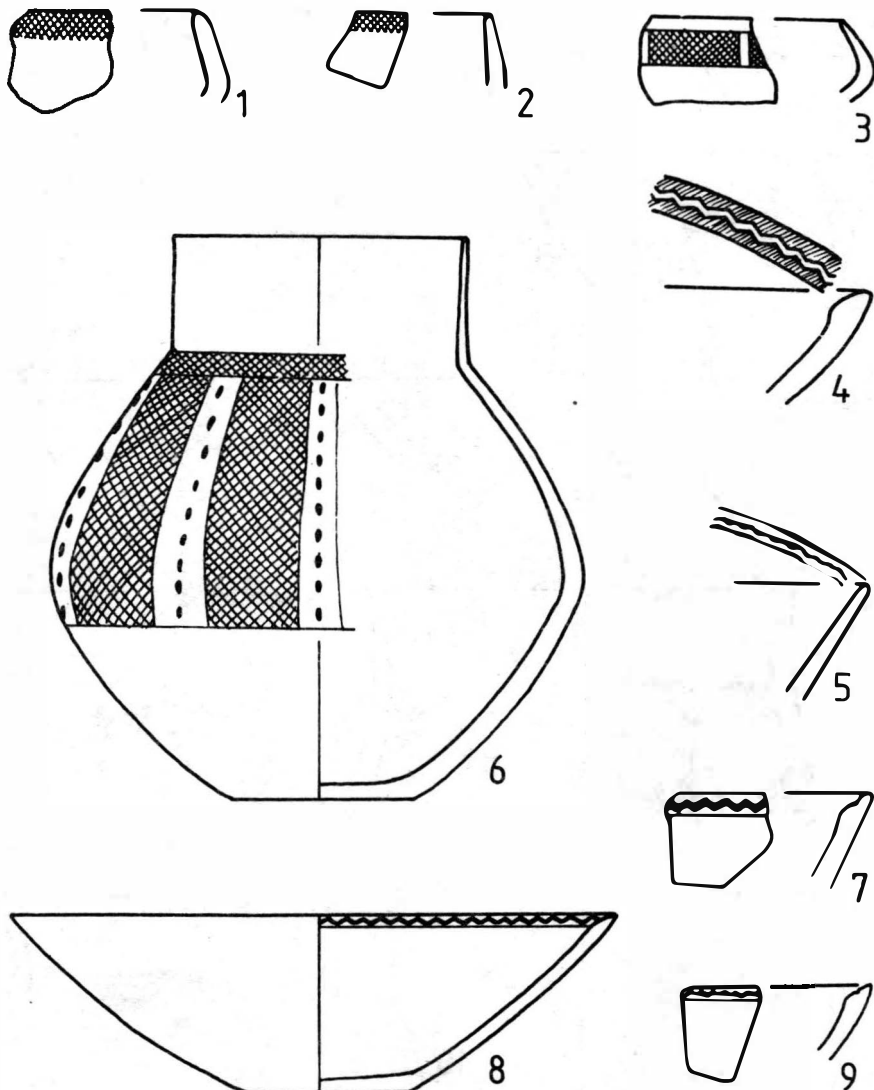
Pl. III. Level IV. Unstratigrafied finds. Scale 1:3.



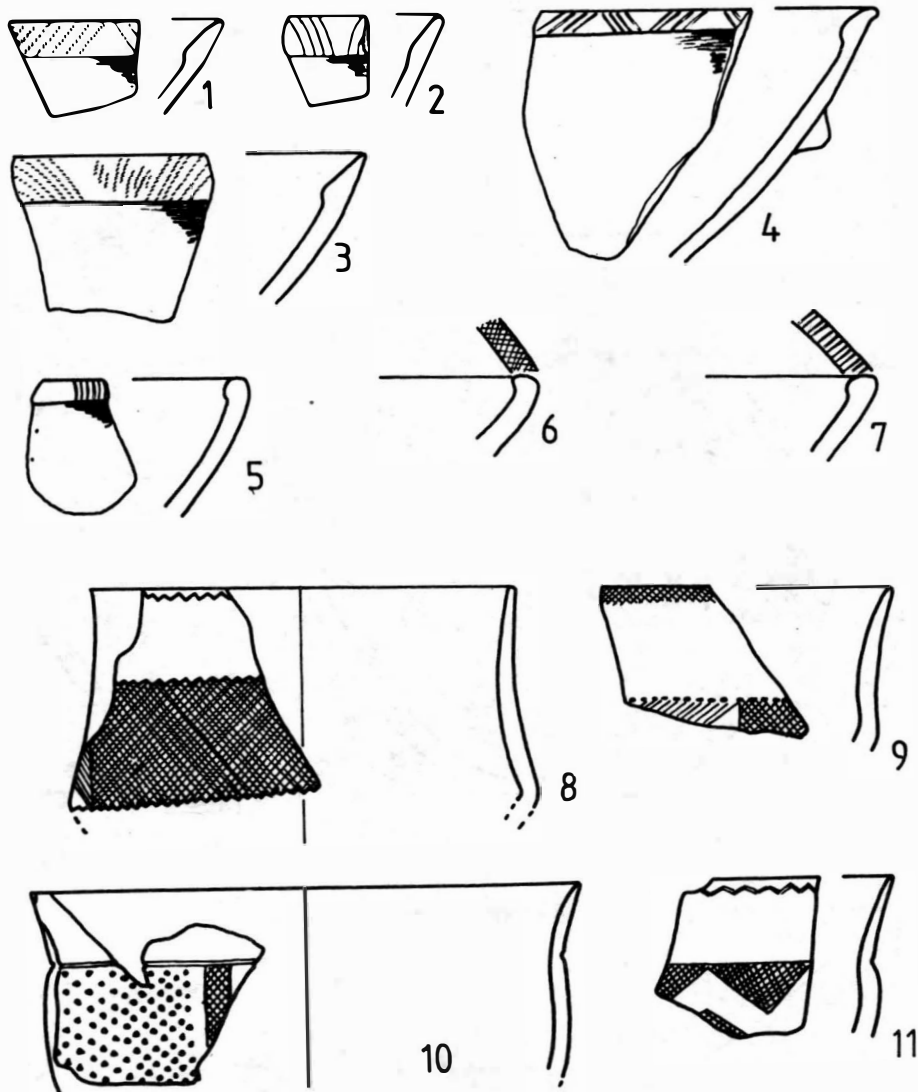
Pl. IV. Level III (1, 2, 4-7). Isolated finds (3, 8). Scale 1:3



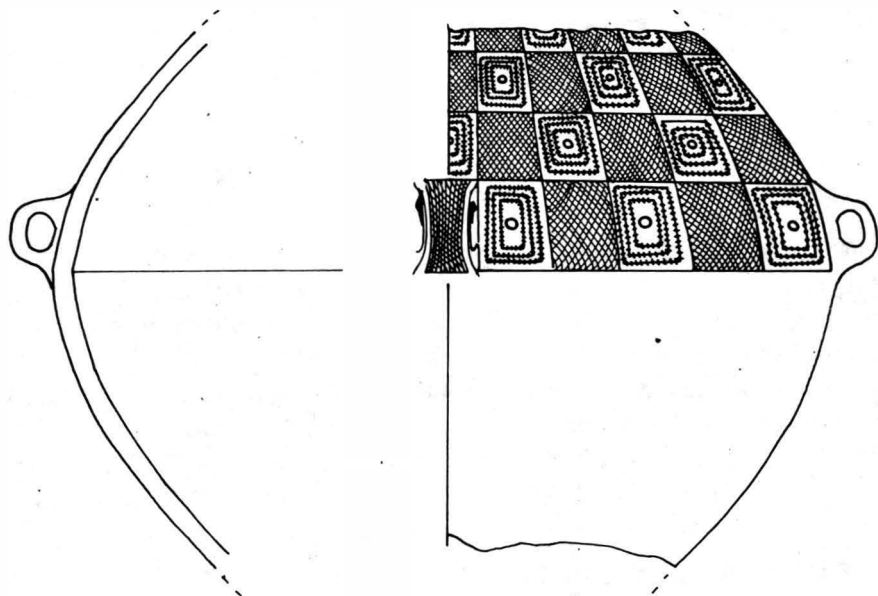
Pl. V. Level II. Scale 1:3.



Pl. VI. Level II. Scale 1:3.



Pl. VII. Unstratigrafied finds. Scale 1:3.



Pl. VIII. Level I. Scale 1:4.