

Mala Vrbica, Vajuga and the beginning of the Iron Age

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Within last few years rather large amount of archaeological material from excavations and reconnaissance related to the problem of Basarabi culture, complex or Basarabi style had been published. We would like to discuss here some new data from the investigations conducted in the last decade along the Danube, in the Ključ region.

Near the village of Mala Vrbica, at the site called Livade there are habitation remains covering rather large area. We excavated almost 1000 m² and discovered material dating from Br C to Ha B1 that is Verbicioara III, Žuto Brdo and horizon with fluted pottery.¹ The settling in this area was not continuous but the inhabitants used this location successively but with some intervals. The latest horizon of the settlement is characterized by sparse pottery fragments decorated like the material from Insula Banului. On the other hand, the only complete vessel dug into the cultural layer is of large size and belongs generally to the shapes typical of Kalakača-Gornea horizon.² The settlement was not restored on this site after that and was later covered with thick layers of sand. From the investigated area there were only a few tiny pottery fragments of Basarabi type. Some more fragments of Insula Banului and Basarabi pottery were discovered in the course of earlier reconnaissance along the eroded Danube bank.³

At the site called Konopište, on the elongated terrace about 200 meters from the river, there is a cemetery partially synchronous with the settlement. We discovered 29 incinerated burials with vessels belonging to Žuto Brdo and fluted pottery (Br C - Ha A).⁴ In one of the graves there was just one large cup with fragmented handle, containing cremated human bones. Bottom of the vessel was decorated with Insula Banului motives and in the same technique. (Pl. 1/1)⁵ From the same, latest horizon, dates small section of a platform made of pebbles, while larger portion was destroyed during the construction of Roman structures. Among the stones we discovered fragments of a large bowl decorated with Insula Banului motives, fragments of one undecorated bowl and a large pot with a cordon under the rim (Pl. 1/2). The group of pottery sherds and pebble platform resemble, at first glance, the platforms at Vajuga-Pesak cemetery. The cemetery at Konopište is only partially explored but according to the present data the interment was not resumed until late La Tène.

Vajuga-Pesak site is a sandy terrace extending about 1500 meters along the Danube bank. It is already known for many finds, especially cemeteries dating from Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, late La Tène and the Middle Ages. In 1980 small pebble platform with Basarabi pottery was discovered close to the river bank.⁶ In the following years we explored an area of 3000 m² and uncovered few pebble platforms. In all cases but one, under the first layer of pebbles we discovered 22 inhumation graves, numerous metal objects and many vessels of Basarabi type.⁷ The monograph on Vajuga-Pesak cemetery is in preparation and on this occasion we would like to speak of a few groups of pottery which we consider important for the earliest types discovered at this site.

As an example we refer to some vessels discovered in the rather restricted area and few meters far from the nearest graves. By the eastern pebble platform we discovered close together large vessel decorated on the shoulder with indented implement and a rather small pot with slanting rim and a cordon under it. (Pl.2/1; 4/6) Slightly farther, in an area of 15 m² and under the first layer of pebbles we discovered many fragmented vessels. First group consists of one vessel with arched flutes, one with horizontal flutes and stamped ornament on the rim, large vessel decorated with combination of horizontal and vertical flutings and stamped motives on

the shoulder and a large pot. (Pl. 3/2,1; 2/2; 4/1). All these vessels show some resemblance with the pottery of Kalakača-Gornea type as well as with local traditions of Late Bronze Age of this part of Serbian and Romanian Danube valley. The most of analogies are with Gornea and some sites on the Yugoslav bank (Pl.7)⁸ The second group consists of four fragmented vessels: two pots and two beakers with ribbon-like handles. Both later specimens are elaborately decorated in various techniques and typical for the pottery of Basarabi type. (Pl. 5) In most cases the pottery was in such a fragmentary state that it was not possible to distinguish groups precisely, so we treat them only from the typological aspect. It is interesting that these vessels, besides typological and chronological differences, distinguish also by their size. It is only too obvious that specimens from the earlier horizon are considerably larger than vessels of Basarabi type in the Vajuga-Pesak cemetery.

On the north platform, in the area between two burials, there was a group of seven vessels lying in situ one after another. Group consists of two fragmented pots, vessel and cup with fluted decoration, bowl and two vessels of Basarabi type (Pl. 6). Vessel with fluted decoration is very similar to the one with arched flutes from the group on the eastern platform. (Pl. 6/4; 3/2) Other vessels, except the cup, correspond to the numerous finds from this cemetery or, generally speaking, to the Basarabi horizon. In this case it might be significant that vessels decorated with flutes are present also in the "classic" Basarabi phase or at least in its earliest period.

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The pottery from the Insula Banului settlement⁹ because of wide repertory of decorative motives, various models and local origin raises many questions not all of them being chronological. However, on this occasion, we would like to deal only with some problems of continuity and discontinuity of the pottery of Insula Banului - Basarabi type. Except on the eponymous site the pottery of Insula Bonului type was discovered on many sites along the Danube but almost as a rule the amount of finds is rather small.¹⁰ Most frequently it was discovered on the settlements with horizontal stratigraphy, thus we do not know how much and what kind of undecorated pottery corresponds to these finds. According to the available data it could be concluded that this horizon was of very short duration or, in any case, much shorter than "classic" Basarabi phase. The best examples are the finds of Basarabi pottery which are much more abundant in the same area and under the same conditions and taking into account only the pieces with easily recognizable decoration. It is obvious that in that period the settlements were rather short-lived and that inhabitants changed places without staying longer on particular site and after some time they returned on convenient locations, even couple of times. During perpetual moving along such communication as the Danube was, this "sedentary nomads" played significant part in gradual transmitting of different influences and spreading of certain shapes, motives and techniques. When vertical stratigraphy is missing, the intensity of these finds in a wider area can be significant for the chronological relations of certain pottery types.

The cup from the grave at Konopište could be recognized as the last horizon of urnfield cemeteries of the Late Bronze Age and it corresponds to similar finds at Insula Banului settlement. It is possible that insula Banului material from settlement at Livade also belongs to the same horizon. This pottery is based on Late Bronze Age tradition and specific decoration taken over from the cultures by the Lower Danube.¹¹ The eponymous site itself is situated in the boundary region of two peripheral zones and its inhabitants had active contacts with their neighbours around Middle and Lower Danube respectively. At first the influences came from the east to the Ključ region and the result was strong but rather short-lived horizon with pottery of Insula Banului type. Then, from the west and the Middle Danube came impulses visible in the occurrence of Kalakača-Gornea pottery and which, coming closer to Djerdap and Ključ frequently got mixed with local forms decorated with flutes, incisions and stamped motives.

Thus on the eponymous settlement was a considerable horizon dating from the end of Bronze Age but enriched with new decoration. The pottery of Kalakača-Gornea type and mentioned hybrid shapes belong to somewhat later and much poorer layer. As a parallel we mention situation on the site Livade. There, the surface layer yielded sparse material of Insula Banului type, Kalakača-Gornea and Basarabi. Very similar situation is on some other sites, like for instance Mihajlovac-Kula.¹²

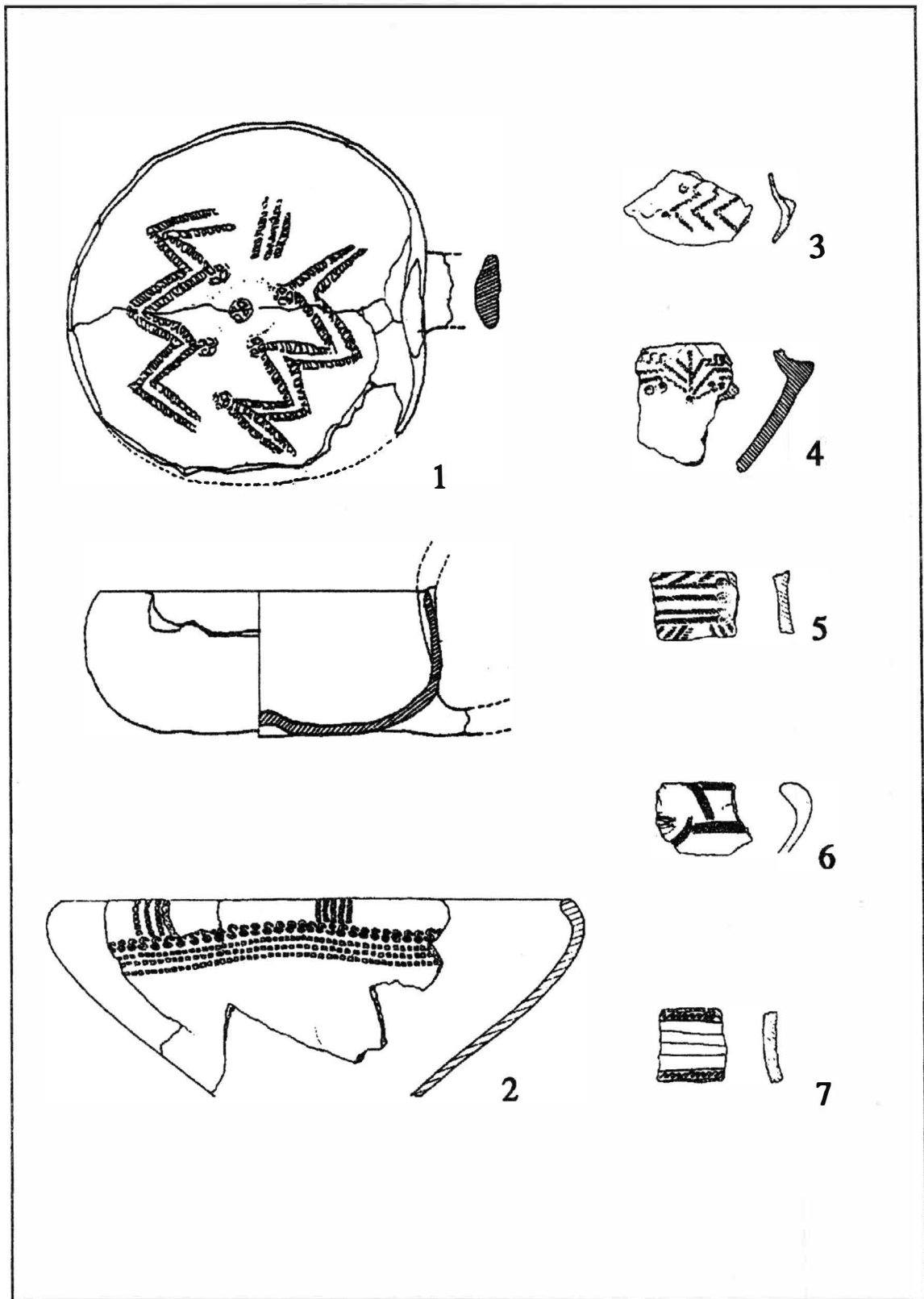
Partially preserved pebble platform at Konopište could indicate different way of interment. Among the pottery sherds discovered were fragments of a bowl of poor fabric and decorated similar to the Insula Banului technique. However, the shape of the bowl and ornamental composition seem to be slightly closer to the shapes and decoration of Basarabi type pottery. It seems that at this moment in the process of formation of Basarabi style from Insula Banului through Kalakača-Gornea and local components, a few links are still missing in our attempt to explain the genesis of a phenomenon which is of great importance for the beginning of the Iron Age. Against that background the horizon with classic variant of Insula Banului should be dated into 10th-9th centuries transition while Kalakača-Gornea is somewhat later, that is, it extended over the 9th century.

At Vajuga-Pesak there was not a single fragment of Insula Banului type and for the beginning of inhumation at this cemetery most significant are few vessels which generally correspond to the Kalakača-Gornea horizon. Other material mostly belongs to typical, so to say, "classic" Basarabi phase. In that case and according to the recent periodization of Basarabi culture this cemetery should be dated between early (I) and middle (II) phase.¹³ On the one hand, the shapes are much less typical for the I phase and much more for the II but there are also some shapes that does not fit in. Except for the above mentioned earlier horizon, all other pottery is very elaborately decorated, without noticeable crossing types but on the other hand some objects are missing, like T-shaped swords or pendants of Ghidici type. It only means that every new group of objects, especially from burials, gives new elements for more precise dating. And, finally, we may say that for solving the chronological problems of the Early Iron Age of this section of the Danube valley we depend to the greatest extent on the data from the cemeteries which, for the time being, yield the only reliable facts.

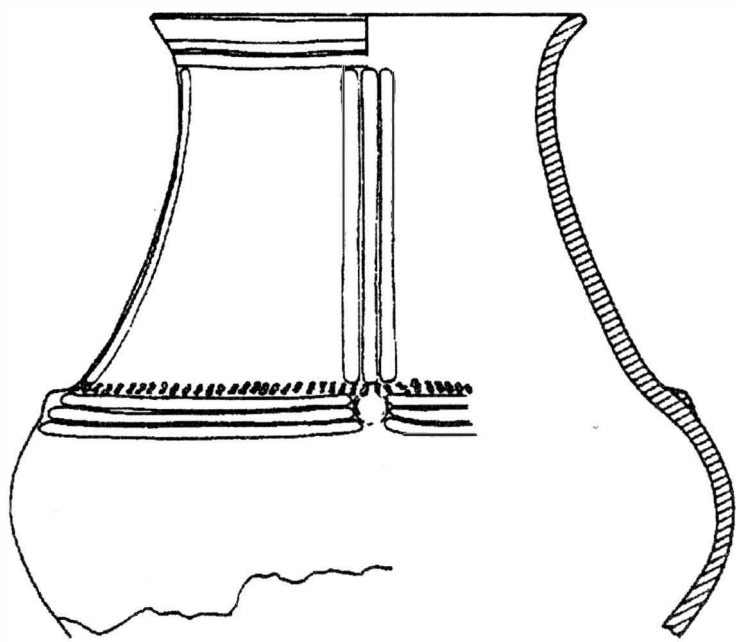
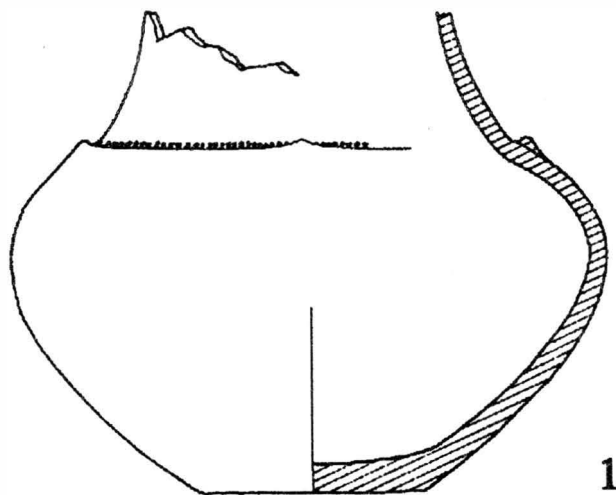
NOTES:

1. M. Vukmanović, P. Popović, *Đerdapske sveske* 3, 1986, p. 7 sqq.
2. *Ibid.* Fig. 12.4-9, 11.13.
3. R. Vasić, Đ. Janković, *Arheološki pregled* 13, 1971, p. 108, T. 60.5-6; R. Vasić, *Materijali SADJ* 19, Novi Sad, 1981, p. 126, Abb. 4-5.
4. P. Popović, M. Vukmanović, N. Radojčić, *Arheološki pregled* 29/1988, 1990, p. 82 sq.
5. Cf. M. Jevtić in *The Early Hallstatt Period (1200-700 B. C.) in South-Eastern Europe*, H. Ciugudean & N. Boroffka eds., Alba Iulia, 1994, p. 130, Pl. 3.1.
6. A. Premk, P. Popović, Lj. Bjelajac, *Đerdapske sveske* 2, 1984, p. 122, Fig. 89, 90, 103.1-3; P. Popović, M. Vukmanović, N. Radojčić, *Đerdapske sveske* 3, 1986, p. 170 sqq.
7. P. Popović, M. Vukmanović, *Arheološki pregled* 26/1985, 1986, p. 77 sq.; *Ibid.* *Balkanica* 23, 1992, p. 359 sqq.; P. Popović in *The Early Hallstatt Period (1200-700 B.C.) in South-Eastern Europe*, H. Ciugudean & N. Boroffka eds., Alba Iulia, 1994, p. 143 sqq.
8. M. Gumă, *Banatica* 5, 1979, p. 115 sqq.; *Idem.* *Civilizația primei epoci a fierului în sud-vestul României*, București, 1993, p. 194 sqq.; D. Jacanović in *Arheološka radionica* 2, Paraćin, 1995, p. 72 sqq.
9. S. Morintz, P. Roman, *SCIV* 20.3, 1969, p. 394 sqq.
10. M. Jevtić, M. Vukmanović in *The Yugoslav Basen and the Neighbouring regions in the 2nd Millennium B.C.*, ed. N. Tasić, Beograd, 1996, p. 289 sq.

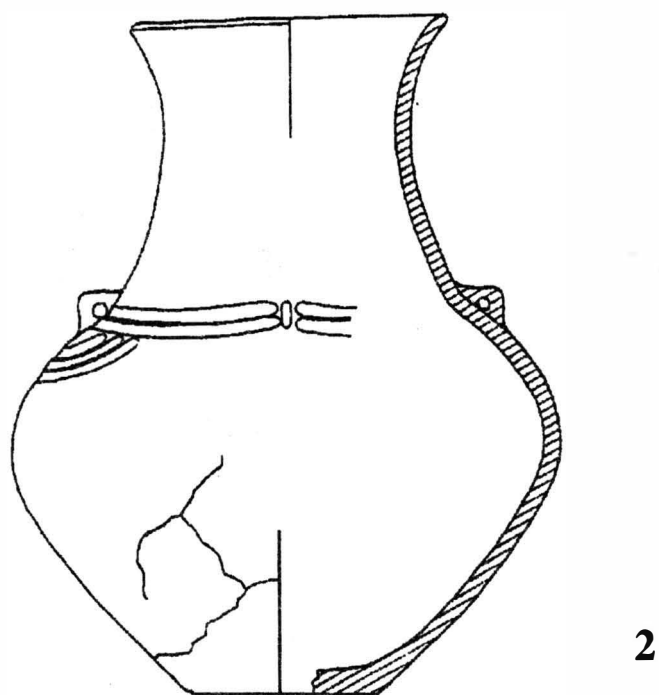
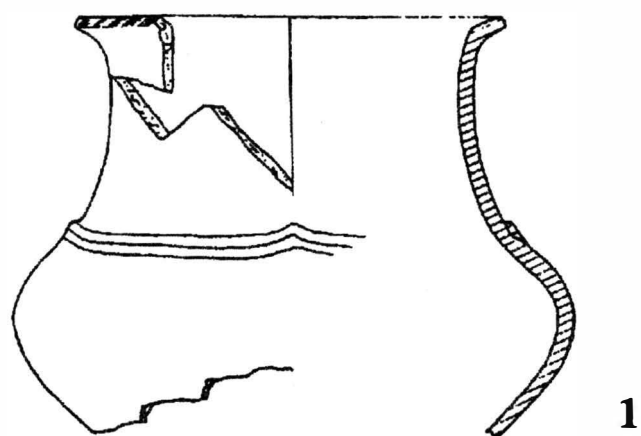
11. M. Gumă, *Thraco-Dacica* 16.1-2, 1995, p. 144 sq.
12. M. Sadić, *Đerdapske sveske* 3, 1986, p. 433. Fig. 8-9.
13. M. Gumă in *The Thracian World at the Crossroads of Civilisations*, Bucharest, 1996, p. 284 sqq.



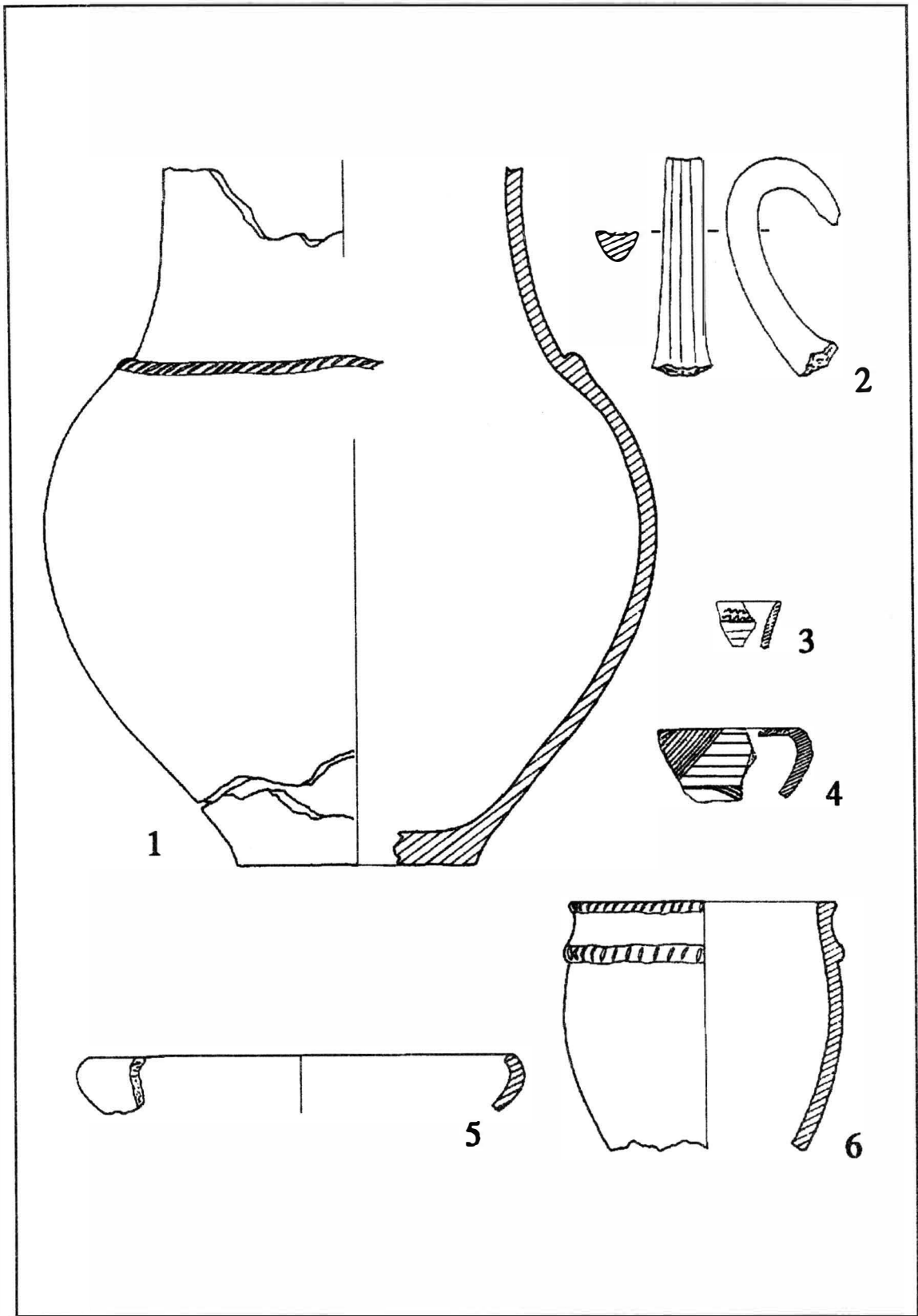
Pl. 1. Mala Vrbica: 1 - Konopište, grave 7/1988; 2 - Konopište, pebble platform; 3-7 Livade
 (Scale 1 (1:2); 2-7 (1:4)).



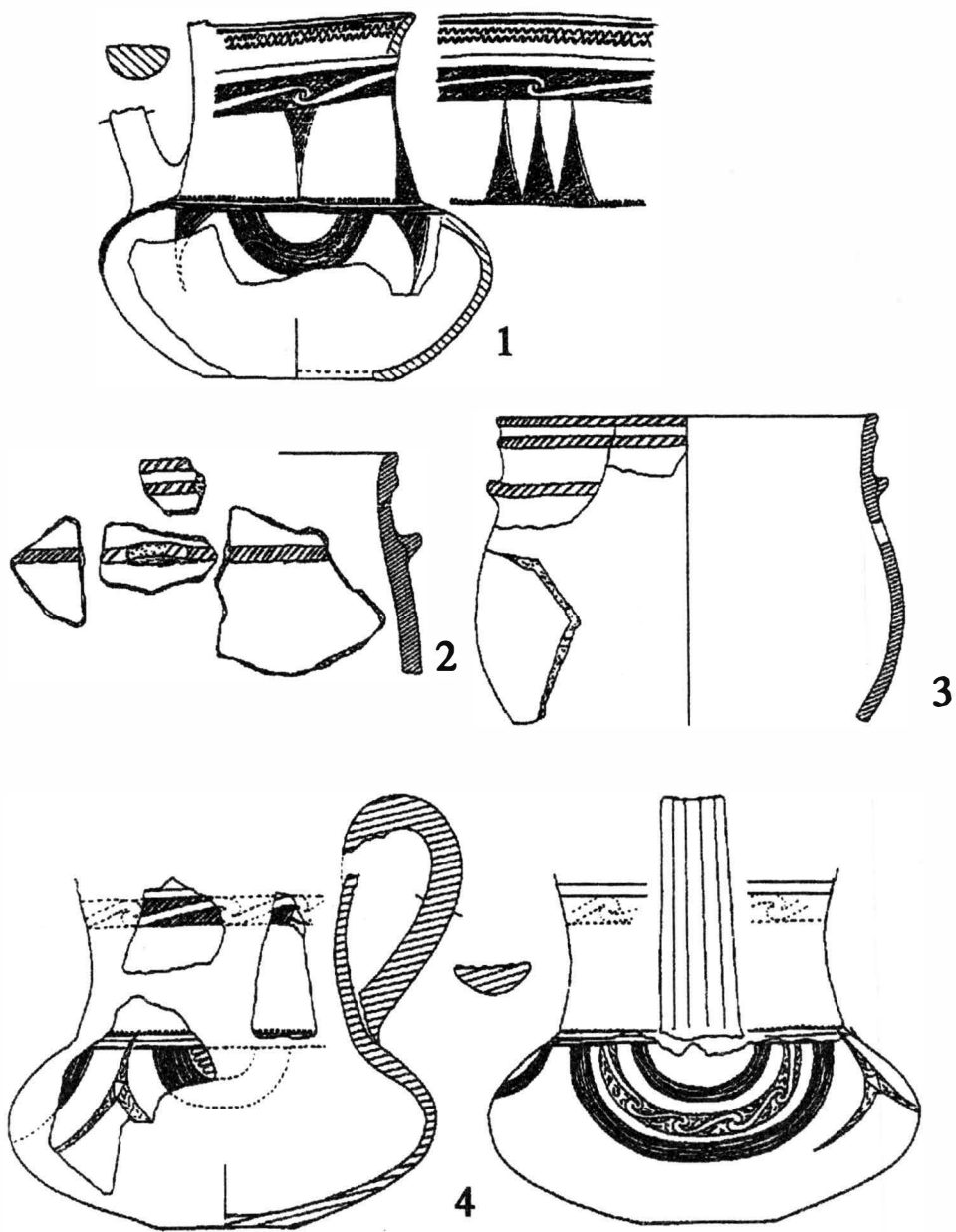
Pl. 2. Vajuga-Pesak cemetery: 1-2 eastern platform (Scale 1:4).



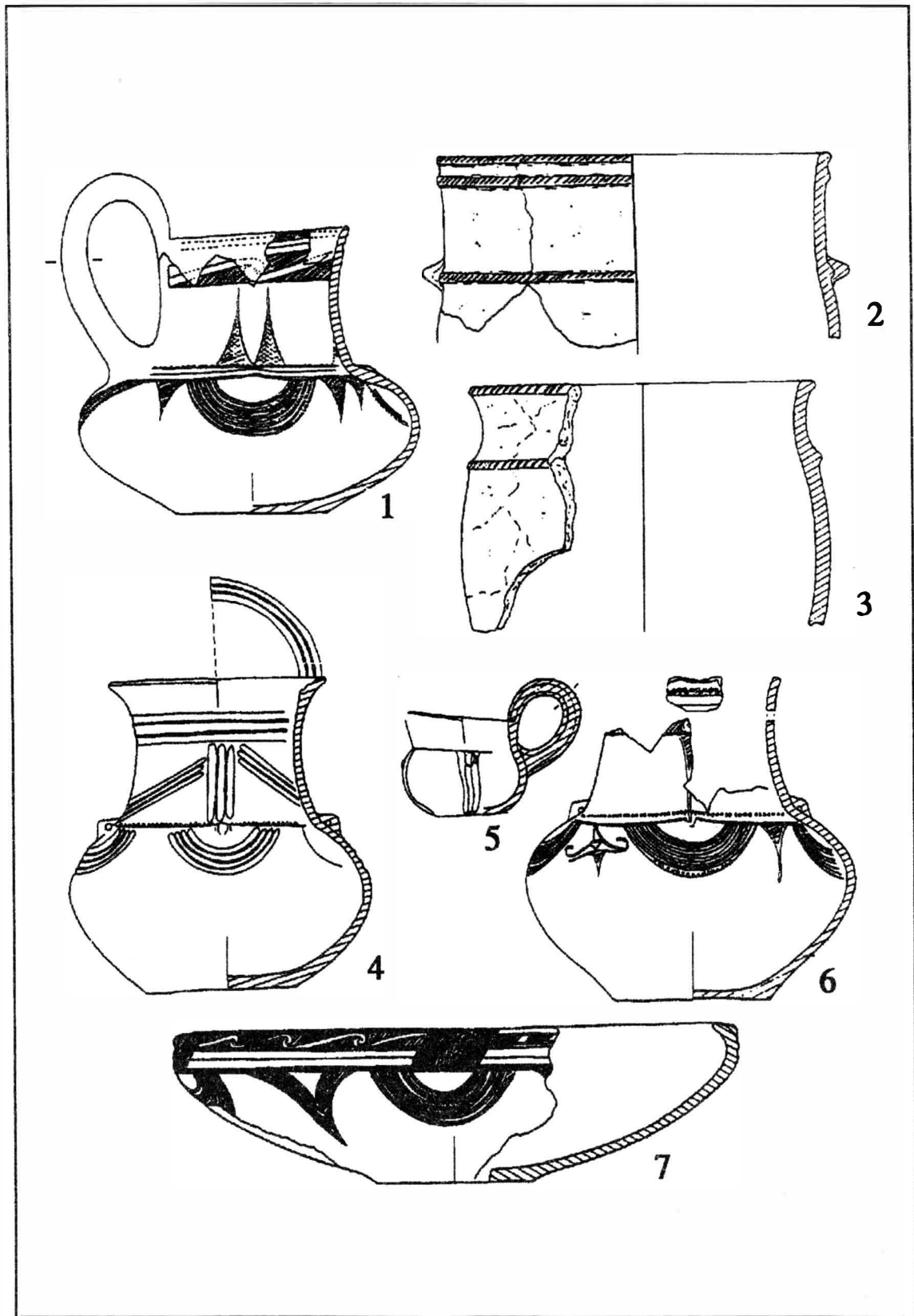
Pl. 3. Vajuga-Pesak cemetery: 1-2 eastern platform (Scale 1:4).



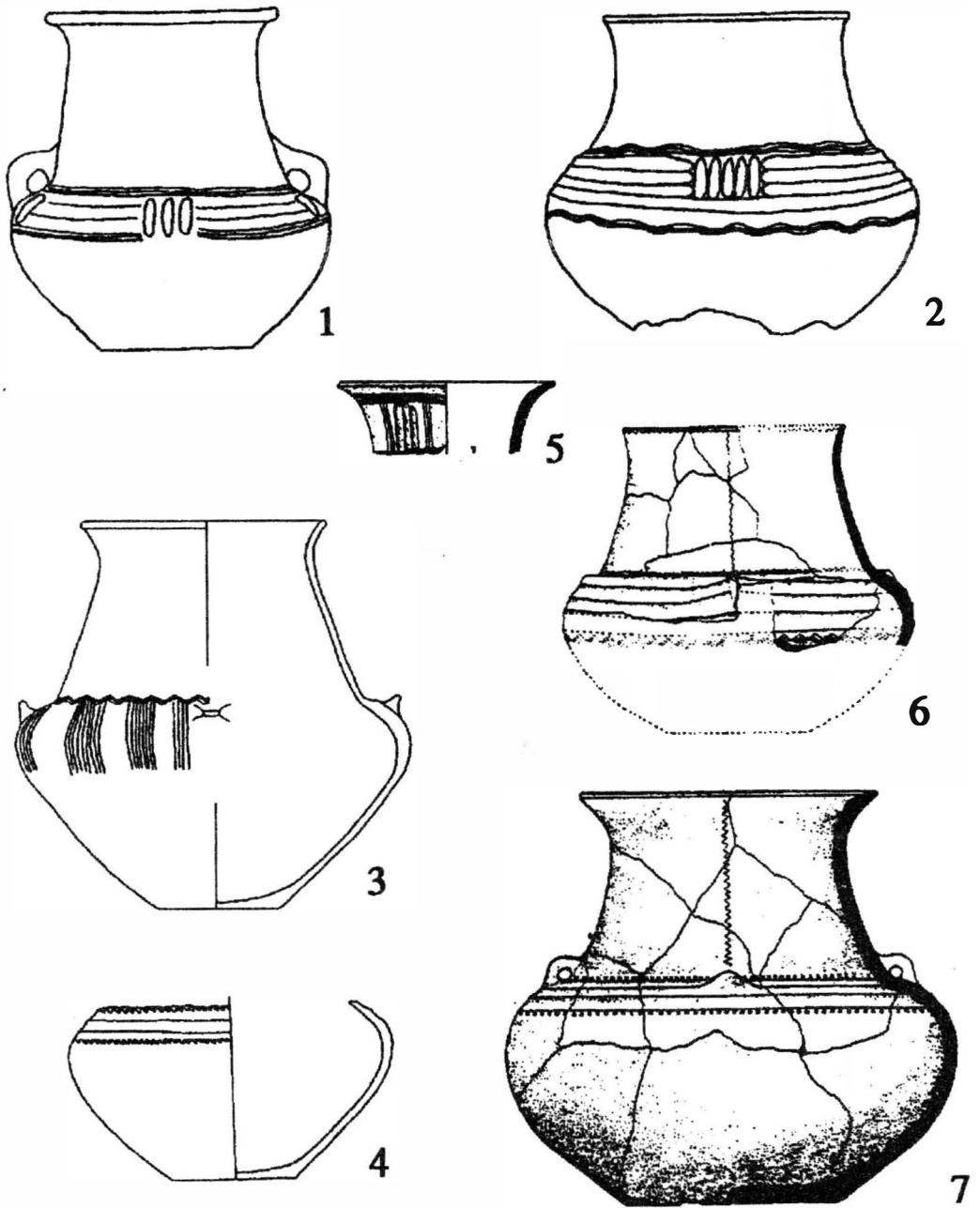
Pl. 4. Vajuga-Pesak cemetery: 1-6 eastern platform (Scale 1:4).



Pl. 5. Vajuga-Pesak cemetery: 1-4 eastern platform (Scale 1:4).



Pl. 6. Vajuga-Pesak cemetery: 1-7 northern platform (Scale 1:4).



Pl. 7. 1-2 Ušće Tumanske reke, 3 Gradac-Požezena, 4 Kličevac (after Jacanović 1996); 5-7 Caunița de Sus-Gornea (after Gumă 1979) (Scale 1:4).