

On the genesis and periodisation of the Basarabi Culture in Serbia

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The complex questions on the genesis, development and decline of the Basarabi culture are still important today, even if they were clearly formulated in the first monograph devoted to the problem thirty years ago (A. Vulpe, 1965). Included in the great complex of pottery ornamented in so-called Basarabi-style, the limits of the Basarabi culture are not clearly discernible. The numerous finds of the Basarabi culture in Serbia, especially in the Iron Gates, Ključ, Srem, southern Bačka, Banat and the Velika Morava valley, have contributed to the attitude that this area was the original area of the western part of the Basarabi complex. The very intimate connection existing between the Basarabi culture and the Bosut group, the leading culture of the Early Iron Age in these parts is the precise reason for which the debate is very rare on genesis and the possibilities of internal division of the Basarabi culture in Serbia. The existence of the Bosut-Basarabi horizon at the settlements of the end of the early and during the middle Hallstatt, defined in the beginning of the seventies (N. Tasić, 1971), is registered at more than a hundred sites in the wider zone of the Yugoslavian Danube valley and the northern part of the Central Balkans (M. Jevtić, 1992). The conditions under which the Bosut group developed into the western variant of the Basarabi culture make for a complex question, not receiving a satisfactory answer for the time being. The solution to the question of the peaceful coexistence of the two neighboring culture groups during the entire period of the Early Iron Age and their merge during one phase of the development in a unique cultural horizon will be approached more clearly after the detailed analysis of some of the multi-layered settlements, above all Gradina at Bosut, Feudvar and Židovar.

After the detailed works of Alexandru Vulpe (1981, 1986), who until the end of the nineties carefully monitored the investigations into the Basarabi culture and collected all the relevant data, there is not much to add about its genesis. The new contribution to the solving of the Basarabi culture genesis was offered by Marian Gumă, in his investigation of the position of the Basarabi in the Romanian Banat (M. Gumă 1985, 1993, 1995). A certain reevaluation in this new approach by M. Gumă concerning the groups of fluted pottery of Gava type, especially the defining of the Hinova-Mala Vrbica group in the Iron Gates, seems especially interesting. The horizon of fluted pottery of the Mala Vrbica-Hinova-Balta Verde type, dated according to the numerous metal objects into the end of the Bronze Age, avoiding the somewhat vague term "transitional period" (M. Jevtić, M. Vukmanović 1996), indeed forms the basis upon which the Basarabi culture is formed. It suffices to compare the shapes of pottery of these two groups, often present together in the same sites, to establish their association. Naturally, the problem remains of the origins of the rich repertoire of the Basarabi ornaments and the position of the Insula Banului group related to it. The question is posed to what extent the Insula Banului group may be considered independent and therefore apt to inherit the stamped motifs of the Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare group. The organization of some motifs on the vessels of the Basarabi complex, such as "S" - motif and false cord ornaments, may especially be associated to the ceramics of Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare (Pl. I, 7, 8). A similar combination of the stamped motifs, however, may be seen in the cultures Tei and Wietenberg, as was demonstrated by Vulpe on several occasions (A. Vulpe 1965, 1986). The shapes of the vessels of the culture Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare, as well as the contemporaneous neighboring cultures of the middle and beginning of the late Bronze Age, are negated by the "new fashion" of black varnished ware, often executed after the models in metal. Similar to the opinion of Marian Gumă (1995, 110-115), we

hold the stance that the solution to the problem of the genesis of the Basarabi culture should be sought for in the area of southwestern Rumania, especially Oltenia, southeastern Serbia, and southwestern Bulgaria. It is highly probable that the so-called Basarabi style in pottery decoration generated there, thus forming the nucleus for the Basarabi complex. The base consists of the local, autochthonous culture of fluted pottery (a part of the wide complex of Belegiš II-Gava-Mediaş), and from the association of the stamped pottery of the Insula Banului type (a part of the wide complex of the lower Danube valley and eastern Balkans: Pšeničevo II-Babadag II-Cozia-Brad-Saharna-Solonceni) and the incised pottery of the Kalakača-Gornea type from the west, the Basarabi culture most probably originated. Regarding the settlements of the Early Iron Age in the Yugoslavian Danube valley, the impression is gained that the early horizon of the Bosut group (phase Kalakača-Gornea) is much more dense than the horizon of the Insula Banului group, consequently it may have lasted longer. As opposed to more than a hundred settlements of the early Bosut group (horizon Kalakača) in Serbia, there are only about thirty sites with the pottery of the Insula Banului type (M. Jevtić, 1994; M.Gumă 1995). Furthermore, some of the sites of the Insula Banului type are determined solely on the basis of several pottery fragments, so it may not be considered as an independent cultural group, especially not the one that, according to some authors, lasted for almost three centuries.

In an article concerning the beginning of the Basarabi culture in Serbia (M. Jevtić 1994) we tried recently to show how some of the important elements of Insula Banului group could be recognized. On that occasion we did not include the map showing stamped decoration of Insula Banului type in the territory of former Yugoslavia and we are presenting this map here (Map 1). For some sites in the Nišava valley we are not sure whether they belong to the Insula Banului or Pšeničevo group. It would be useful to compare these motives with Insula Banului (Ostrov) group motives from the sites recently mentioned by M. Gumă (M. Gumă 1995, 114-115, Pl. XVIII), and especially from the settlement sites in NW Bulgaria dating from the Early Iron Age (T. Šalganova 1994; T. Šalganova, A. Gotzev 1995.).

We must admit that Insula Banului group finds seem to us rather insufficient basis for the formation of the Basarabi culture. It seems as if there are some elements missing, (or we can not recognize them for the time being) elements which probably came from the east, possibly with first westward intrusions of enigmatic Thrako-Cimmerian bronzes. In our work on metal finds of Basarabi culture in Serbia we reactualized the idea of N. Tasić that Thrako-Cimmerian horizon is closely related with the early Basarabi culture (M. Jevtić 1993). Recently published material from the Moldova Veche tunuli (M. Gumă 1993, 220-223, Pl.XCIX-CIII) especially a pair of double-looped fibulas with iron core covered with bronze and decorated with few pendants representing waterbirds are almost identical with a specimen from Novi Banovci attributed to the Thrako-Cimmerian finds. (N. Tasić, 1983, p.112-113, fig.73/a)

Investigating the beginning of Basarabi culture we assumed that it was monocentric and that in its early phase should be recognized by elements of Insula Banului type. Basarabi culture developed in the Iron Gates, Oltenia and NW Bulgaria before the creation of the strong Basarabi complex which includes the Bosut group, that is before the intrusion of Kalakača-Gornea elements towards east. Along the Danube the elements of the early Bosut group, distinguishable mostly as simple incised geometric motives, reached Boljetin and Gornea settlements. Recently published material from Krivelj near Bor (M. Jevtić 1994, Pl.VI; idem, Zbornik Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu, Festschrift V. Kondić, in print) is also interesting for this horizon. We are showing here two fragments of pithoi from Krivelj (Pl. II, 1,2) which according to strict division of decorative motives and techniques show the attributes of Insula Banului group, early Hallstatt fluted pottery and Kalakača-Gornea types. These are just the characteristics which we consider should be attributed to the early Basarabi culture. Following stamped motives of Insula Banului group westward, settlement Dmno-Lugovi (M. Jevtić, D. Šljivar 1986) is of particular importance. In the upper layers on this site, above the horizon with fluted pottery and violin bow fibula, we distinguished elements of

Kalakača-Gornea and Insula Banului type. It is interesting that at Drmno, in spite of the fact that excavated area was more than 1000 m², we could not distinguish the horizon of classic Basarabi culture. Among stamped ornaments the prevailing motives are individual "S" motives and of particular interest are the motives of small stamped circles with the point in the middle organized in "hanging triangles" (Pl.III/7) which is similar to the motives on one vessel from Kalakača (Pl.II/7) and from the cemetery Dalj-Busija (Pl.I/6). Together with these stamped motives on the vessels from Kalakača and Dalj there are also rows of "S" motives outlined with false cord and these motives are also known from rather distant territories mostly from southeast Alpine Hallstatt area (Ormož, Dobova, Kranj, Sopron, Kleinklein, Frögg etc.) but also in central Bosnia (Pod near Bugojno, level B). Distinguishing of these finds as the pre-classic phase of Basarabi culture or the early Basarabi, solves also the problem of their early dating, in the end of Urnfield culture (Ha B2-B3). (Cf. K. Metzner-Nebelsick 1992; B. Teržan 1995). Only few vessels from Sopron and one amphora from Poštela (B. Teržan 1990, fig.65/1)(Pl.V/5) could be attributed to the classic Basarabi culture.

Excavations at Feudvar offered significant informations for the solving of the problem of Basarabi culture periodization. P. Medović mentions that at the end of Kalakača horizon and in the transitional Kalakača-Basarabi horizon there were together with old Kalakača motives also some bowls decorated with rows of "S" motives and isolated rows of false cord ornament (Pl.I,1,2) (after Hänsel, Medović 1991, 146, Taf.51/1-3). This is the confirmation that contacts of early Basarabi culture (Insula Banului type) date from the end of Kalakača phase.

This time we are not going to discuss classic phase of Basarabi culture, which in Serbia could be rightfully called Bosut-Basarabi complex. We would only like to emphasize once again well known fact that Basarabi pottery is characterized mainly by rich engraved geometric decoration with few popular motives like "running S spiral" in the negative, dense rows of fine false cord, smaller "S" stamped motives and not very often stylized animal representations (Pl.V, VI/5-7; VIII/3,7)

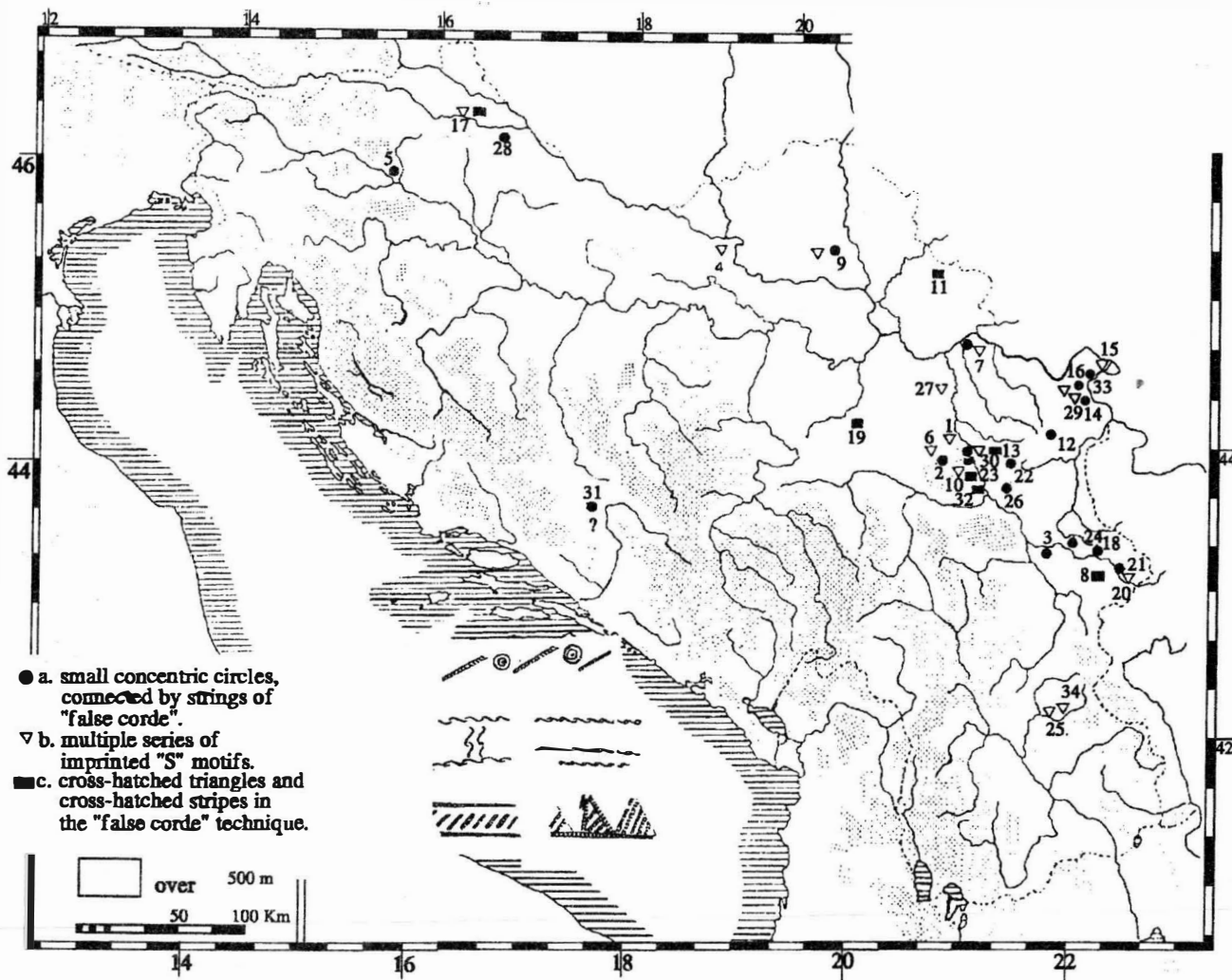
Special problem is the distinguishing of the latest phase of Basarabi culture. Material similar to the one that M. Gumă denoted as the third phase of Basarabi culture at Valea Timișului (Pl.VII/6) was also found at Feudvar and Židovar (Pl.VIII). These are simply the elements of post-classic Basarabi culture that is in Serbia called Bosut III, or the horizon of late Hallstatt fluted pottery.

We are fully aware that we only raised some questions related with the genesis and internal division of Basarabi culture and that, for the time being, we do not have appropriate answers.

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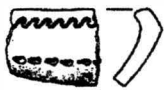
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Map. 1. Stamped pottery of the Insula Banului type in former Yugoslavia.

Lists of the sites:

1. Bagrdan (Ćeramidište)
2. Belica (Igralište)
3. Brzi Brod (Mediana)
4. Dalj (Busija necropole)
5. Dobova (Urnfields, grave 182)
6. Dragocvet (Vrbica)
7. Drmno (Lugovi)
8. Gornji Striževac (Berbeč)
9. Gospodjinci (Ada)
10. Kolare (Ljuba vode)
11. Konak (Brdenjak)
12. Krivelj (Staro groblje)
13. Lanište (Gradac)
14. Mala Kamenica (Ruženka)
15. Mala Vrbica (Kurvin grad)
16. Mihajlovac (Kula)
17. Ormož (Gradina)
18. Osmakovo (unknown site.)
19. Petnica (Naselje ispod pećine)
20. Petrlaž (Petrlaška pećina)
21. Poljska Ržana (Selo)
22. Popovac (Petrus)
23. Potočac (Momčilov grad)
24. Prekonoga (Prekonoška pećina)
25. Rugnice (Velja strana)
26. Ruište (Crnokalačka bara)
27. Saraorci (Majdan)
28. Sigetec Ludberški (Loka)
29. Slatina (Ušće Slatinske reke)
30. Svetozarevo (Sarina medja)
31. Varvara (settlement, Level C (?))
32. Varvarin (Ruski spomenik)
33. Velesnica (Biljevina)
34. Vrgudinac (Blidiž)



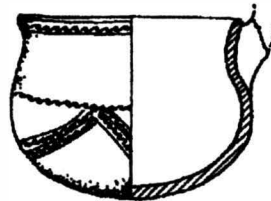
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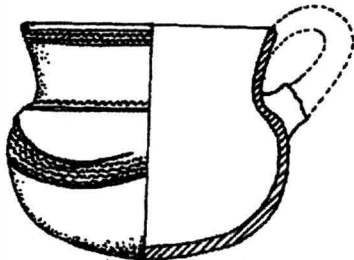
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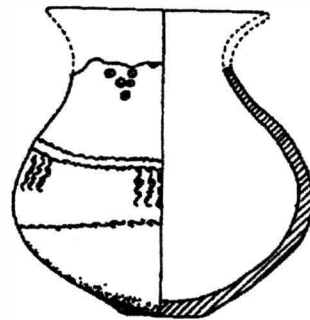
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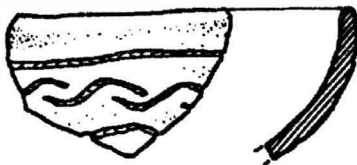
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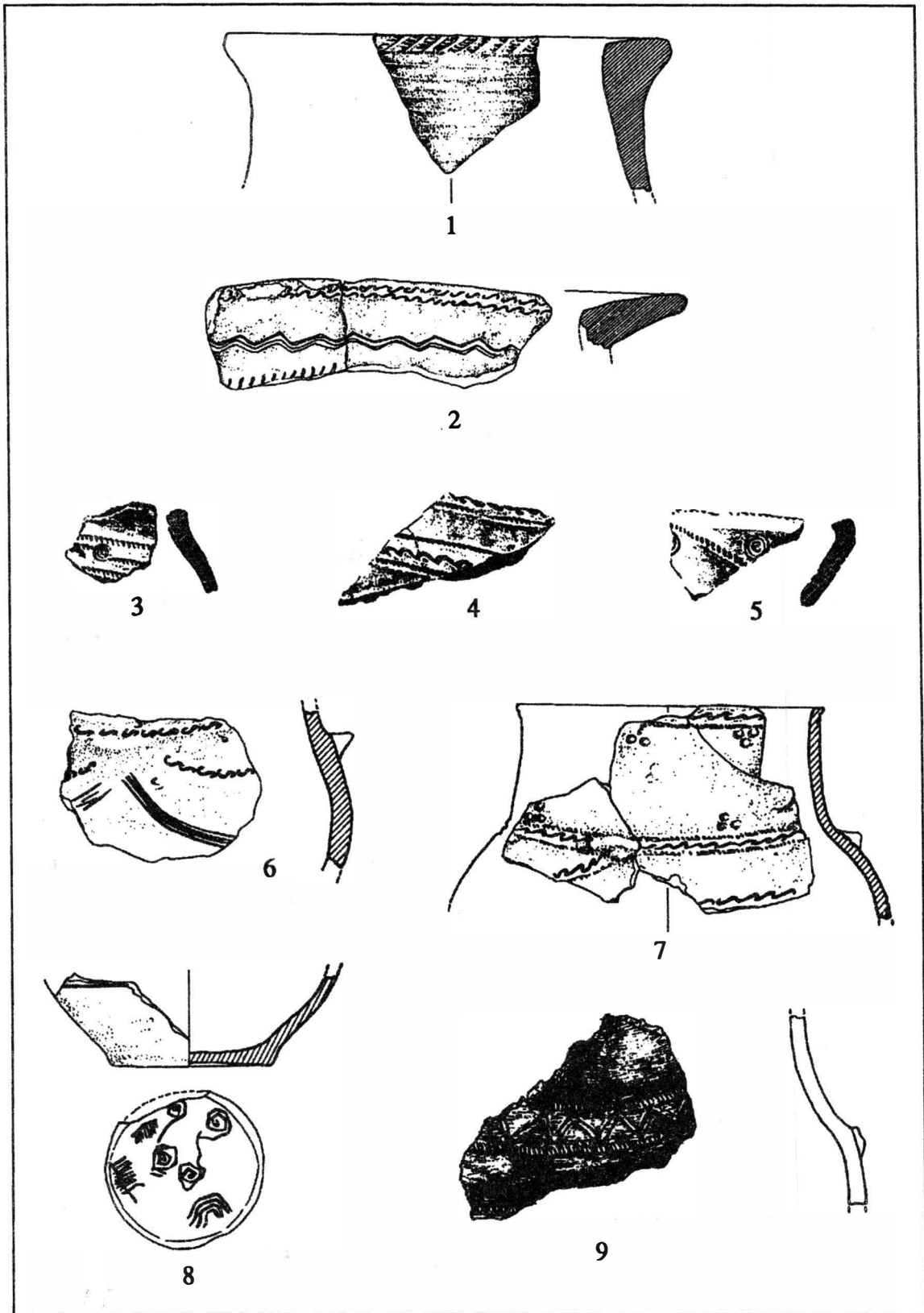


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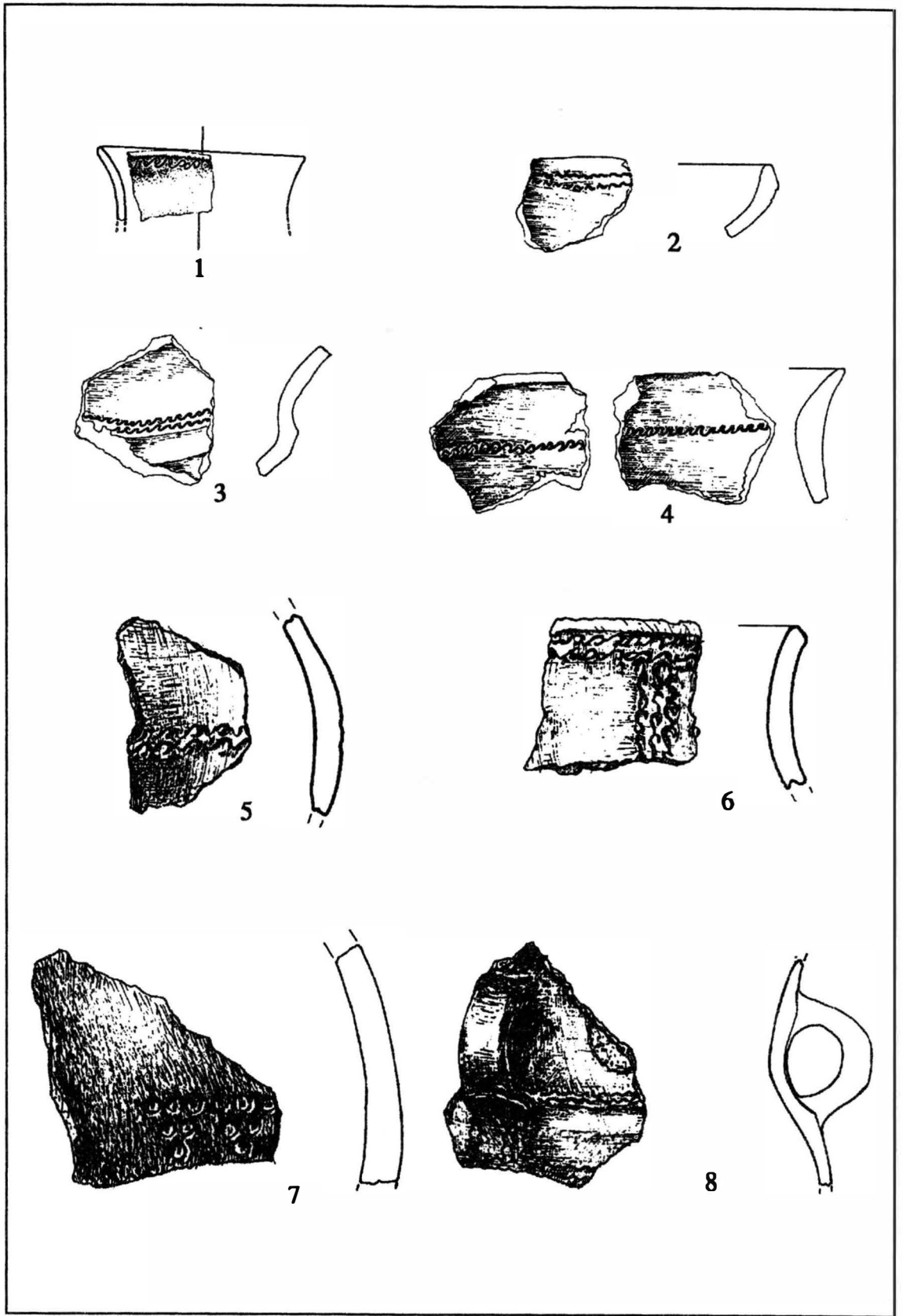


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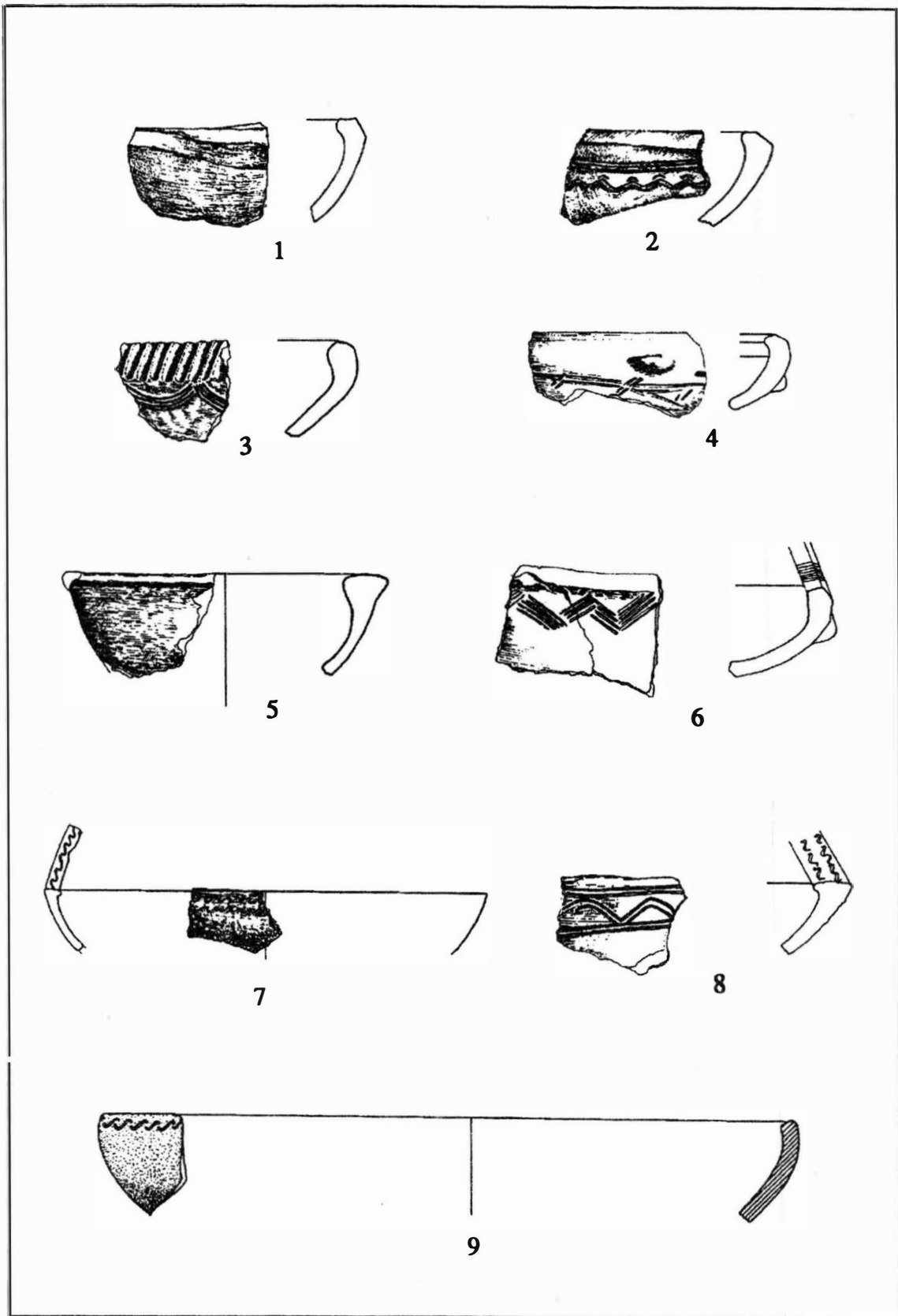
Pl. I, fig. 1, 2. Feudvar (after Hänsel, Medović 1991, T. 51/1, 3), fig. 3. Drmno - Lugovi;
4 - 6. (V. Hoffiler, 1938), 7. Ušće Slatinske reke, 8. Orsoe (necropole, grave 59), after
T. Filipov (1976), fig. 1, 2 M. 1:3; 3, 7 M. 1:2; 4-6, 8 (after foto).



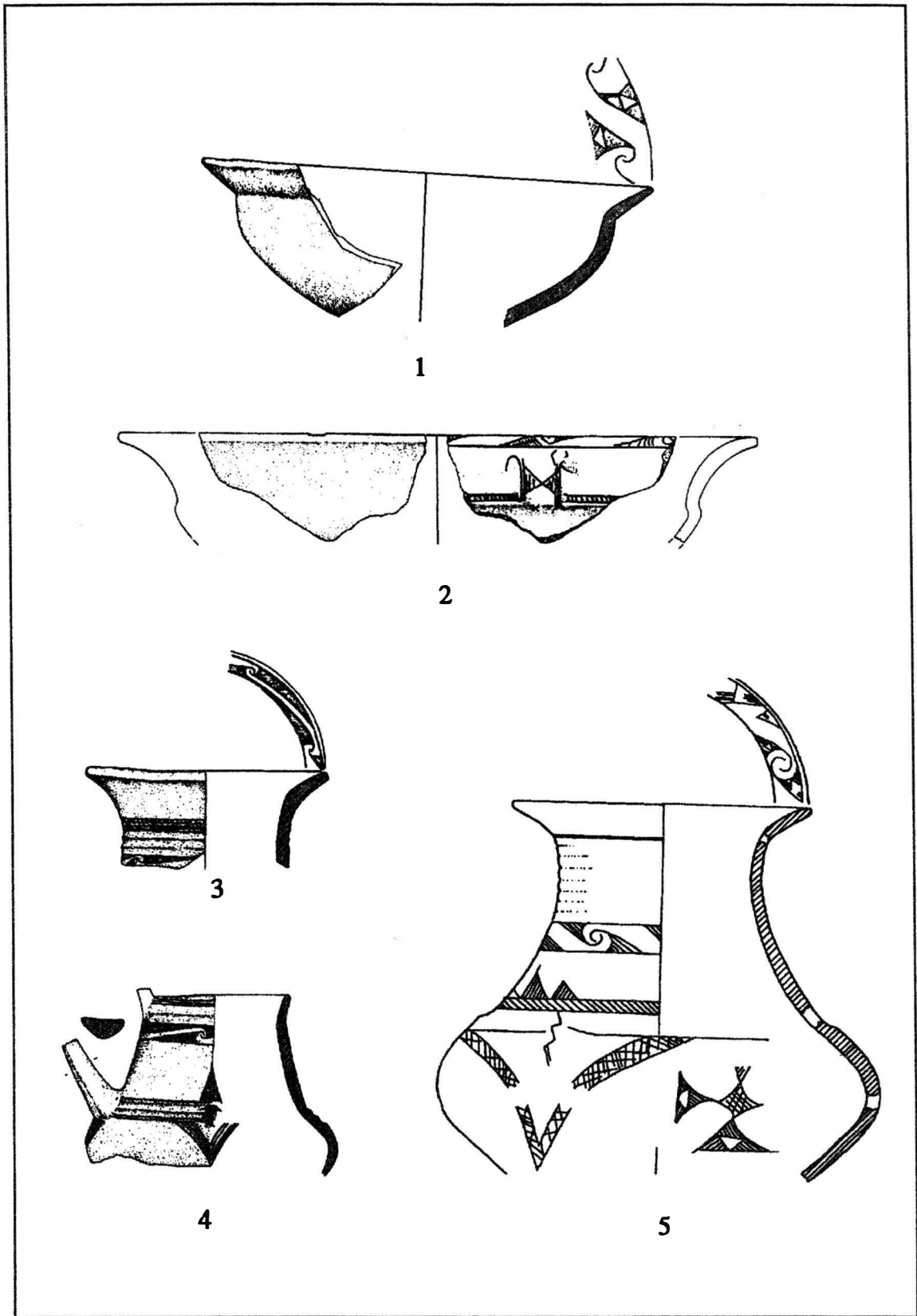
Pl. II. fig. 1, 2. Krivelj, 3 - 5. Mediana (M. Garašanin, 1983, T.CVI/9, 11, 12), 6-8 Kalakača (P. Medović 1988) M. 1:2.



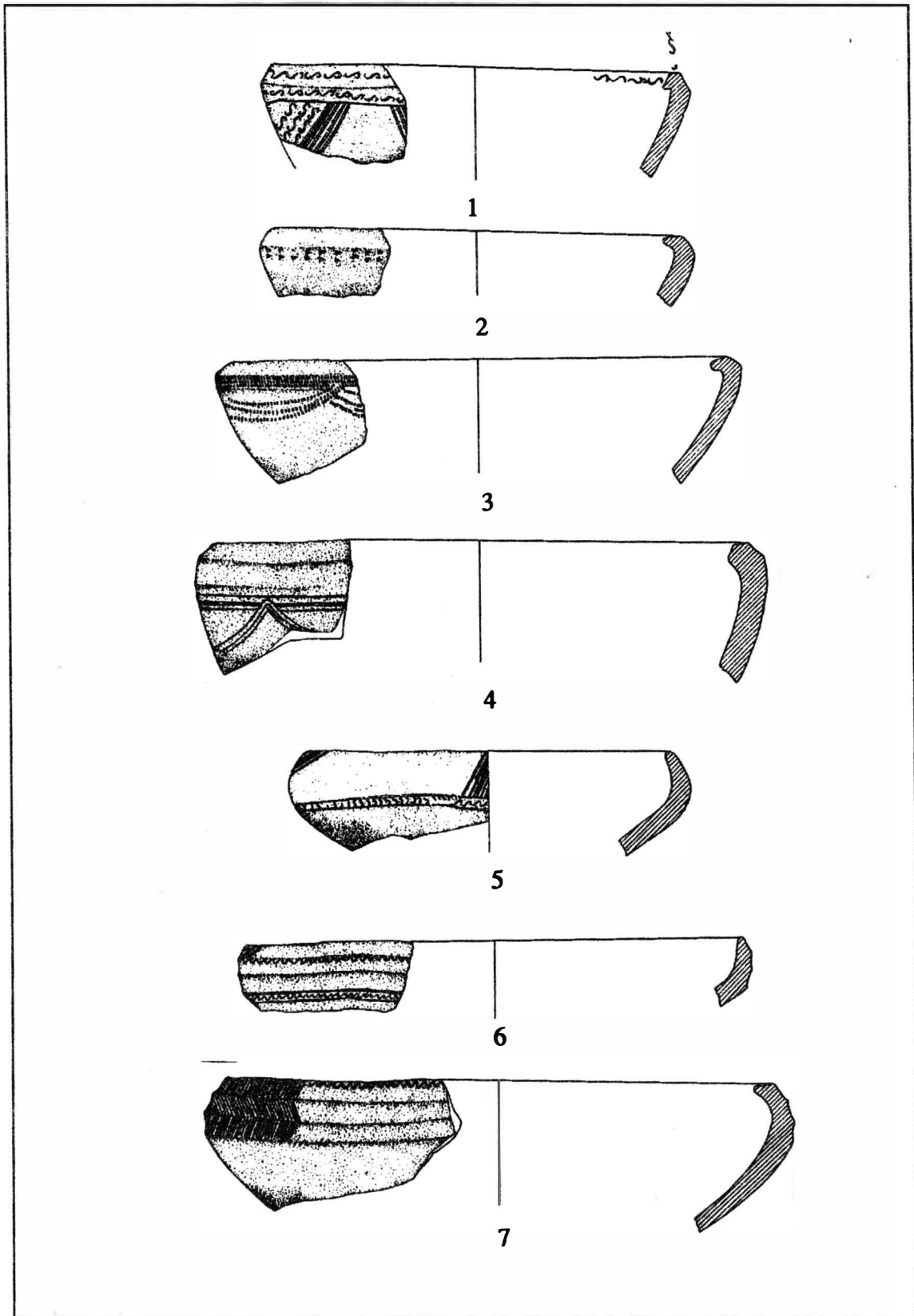
Pl. III, fig. 1 - 8. Drmno-Lugovi, 1-4, 8 M. 1:2, 5-7 M. 1:1.



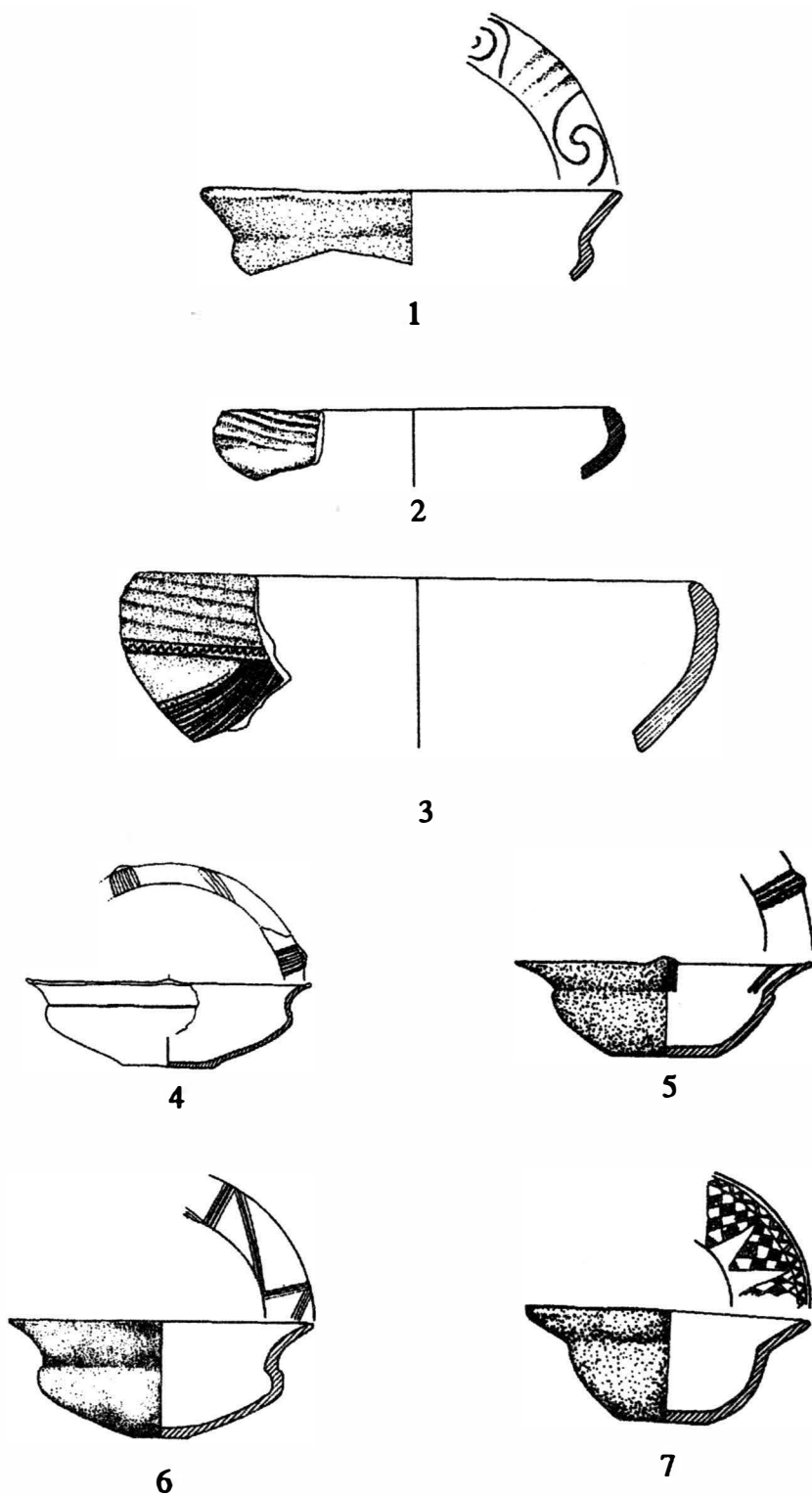
Pl. IV, fig. 1-9 Drmno-Lugovi; fig. 1-6, 8-9 M. 1:2; 7 M. 1:4.



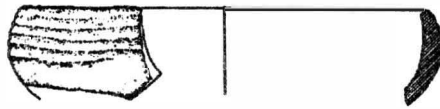
Pl. V fig. 1, 3, 4 Židovar, 2. Feudvar (Hänsel, Medović 1991), 5. Poštela (Teržan 1990)
 fig. 1, 3, 4 M. 1:4; 2, 5 M. 1:3.



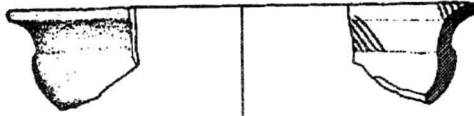
Pl. VI fig. 1-7 Boljetin (Lepena) M. 1:2.



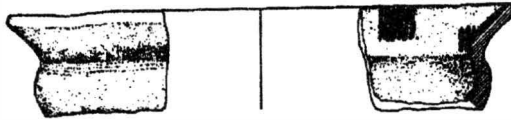
Pl. VII, fig. 1. Ferigile (Vulpe 1967), 2. Židovar, 3. Boljetin, 4. Feudvar (Hänsel, Medović 1991), 5, 7 Basarabi (Vulpe 1965), 6. Valea Timișului (Gumă 1985) fig. 2 M. 1:4; 3 M. 1:2.



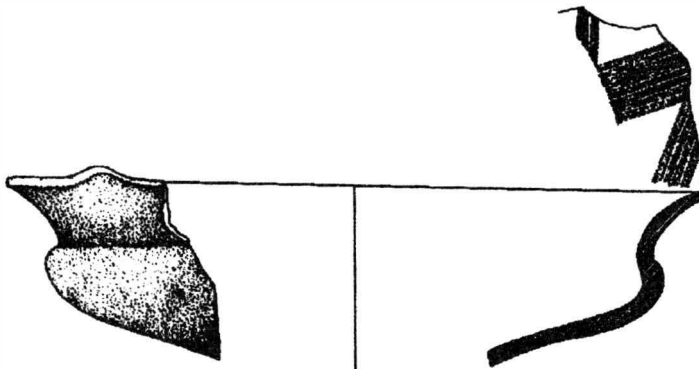
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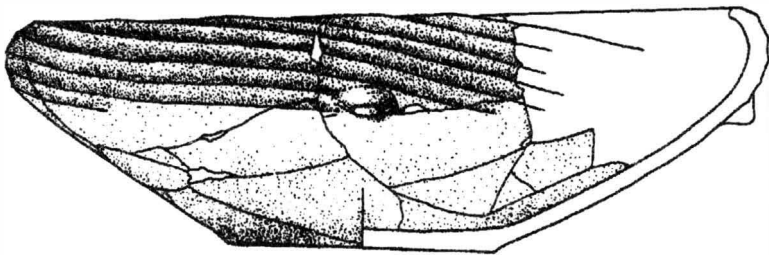
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Pl. VIII fig. 1-4 Židovar; 5 Feudvar (Hänsel, Medović 1991) fig. 1-4 M. 1:4; 5 M. 1:3.