

## STOLNICENI – A NEW ASPECT OF THE FUNERARY RITUAL AT THE GETIC POPULATIONS

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During the past few decades, the archaeological monuments of the Late Iron Age on the territory between the Carpathian Mountains and the basin of the Dniestr river, had taken the benefit of a notable scientific research and valorification. Therefore, by surveys, soundings or systematic excavations, more than 600 archaeological objectives could be investigated, being certainly assigned to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium B.C.<sup>1</sup> In this context, a special care was given to the investigation of the fortified settlements, most of them located in the Central Moldavian Highland, with large depressions, plateaus or foothills of the upper terraces of the Siret, Pruth, Dniester and their tributaries. Here were identified and partly investigated the fortified monuments from Saharna<sup>2</sup>, Hlingeni<sup>3</sup>, Butuceni<sup>4</sup>, Moşna<sup>5</sup>, Arsura<sup>6</sup>, Cotnari<sup>7</sup> etc., which provided important information, for a better knowledge of the history of culture and civilisation of the North Thracians, east of the Carpathian Mountains. Among the archaeological monuments of major interest we could also mention the one situated near the Stolniceni village, Hânceşti County, Republic of Moldova. This is a fortified precinct, located in the meridional part of the High Central Moldova, which is characterized by high, narrow and elongated hills, alternating with deep valleys, steep slopes, numerous pot-holes, precipices and flat bottom wide dales. Quarternary Age terraces are placed upon forest grey soils and clay, with sand insertions. On one of these terraces, 2 km south-east of Stolniceni, a precinct delimited by a defensive system, consisting in two moats and one ditch was found. Its height, with a maximal quota of 348 m, is part of the meridional extremity of the Codrilor (Forests) and was called „Fortress” (fig. 2-3). By the locals This is delimited by a hillock from the Cogâlnic valley and by the valey of the Vişina creek, whose waters run along the western slopes where the precinct is located. Given the free access from the south-south-eastern and north-north-eastern sides, it was mandatory to raise another defensive system, shaped as a semi-circle<sup>8</sup>. Excepting a small portion on the western side, the surface of the terrace is covered with more than 20 mounds, with a height which varies between 40 and 70-80 cm (Fig. 1/ 1, 4-5). One of them was investigated, according to the information provided by P. Constantinescu-Iaşi, even since 1933 (Fig. 1/4). The sounding done by the up mentioned specialist was traced out upon two directions and was focused upon one of the central mounds, reaching up to the depth of 1,5 m. Among the vestiges found there, some hand-made ceramic fragments, sherds and handles, traces of a various pottery, with different

<sup>1</sup> I. Niculiţă, *Severnnye frakijcy...*, 1987, p. 7-9; S. Teodor, *Regiunile est-carpaticice...*, 1999, p.....; T. Arnăut, *Vestigii...*, 2003, p. 13-33.

<sup>2</sup> G. D. Smirnov, *Otčet...*, p. 9-33; T. Arnăut, *Aşezarea...*, 2000, p. 93-94; I. Niculiţă, A. Zanoci, A. Niciu, *Les monuments...*, SAA IX, 2003, p. 241-252.

<sup>3</sup> N. Gol'ceva, M. Caşuba, *Glinjeny...*, 1995, p. 6-10.

<sup>4</sup> I. Niculiţă, S. Teodor, A. Zanoci, *Butuceni* ..., 2000.

<sup>5</sup> A. Florescu şi Gh. Melinte, *SCIV* 19, 1968, 1, p. 129-134.

<sup>6</sup> S. Teodor, *MCA* 10, 1973, p. 53-60.

<sup>7</sup> A. C. Florescu, *CI*, S.N. II, 1971, p. 108-111, 111.

<sup>8</sup> V. Sârbu, T. Arnăut, *CAAN-T* 1, 1995 p. 381-395.

levels of burning were mentioned. There were also found two amphora fragments, belonging to distinct vessels, which are evidences for the existence of some Greek imports<sup>9</sup>. In the years after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, the soundings had been resumed, first by G. D. Smirnov and then also by G. B. Fedorov, being meant to identify the character of the monument. It was finally concluded that it was a fortified settlement, which functioned between the 4th-3rd centuries B.C.<sup>10</sup>

The importance and special features of the site near the Stolniceni village had enabled us to undertake systematic excavations. Two of the mounds have been studied by now.

### **Mound no. 2**

It has a diameter of about 24 m and a height of 40 cm. In all, 17 skeletons had been unearthed, being buried according to the funerary inhumation rite. They were detected at various depths, between 0, 24 cm and 0,50 cm. Among these, 7 skeletons (burials no. 2,3,5,6,11,16 and 17) were in anatomical connection, while in others, the bone position had undergone changes. This fact could be explained either by the action of the roots, given that the site is located in the forest, or by the intervention of the looters, as the case of the skeleton from burial no. 7. In 8 cases we have the deposition of the dead in a supine position, with the following orientations: burial no. 2 – east; burials no. 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 – south-east; burial no. 16 – north-east; burial no. 17 – north-west. The skeletons in burials no. 5 and 6 were laid in a flexed position, with their face to the right, namely to the west, with a northern orientation. In the case of the funerary complexes no. 8 and 15, just the human skulls had been detected. In any of the investigated burials could be defined the outline of the funerary pit. There are interesting the individuals in burials no. 10, 11, 12, 13,14, which were grouped together, from north to south, one near another (Fig. 2/1-2).

### **Archaeological inventory**

Out of the inventory discovered in the mantle of the tumulus we could mention a large number of burnt clay pieces. They formed few agglomerations, which were put on the plan and counted. Seemingly, they were fragmentary hearths made of yellow clay, with sand and limestone as non-plastics. Due to their oxidant burning, they turned into red-red-brown color. Most of the fragments have a smooth surface, with a crust of white-yellowish color (with a thickness of 2-3 mm). It is interesting to note here that in the case of burials no. 2 and 7, the dead were partly laid upon the hearth agglomerations (no. 1 and 3). But, this time, the hearth fragments had their crust downwards.

Among the discovered artifacts we could mention the three-winged arrow points of Scythian type<sup>11</sup>, made of bronze, harness pieces, like the link of a horse bit, knife and sickle blades, items made of animal antler, spindle-whorls but also and anthropomorphic statuette made of clay (Fig. 3/1-14; 4/1-7).

The pottery is rich in fragments of hand-made vessels, of clay paste mixed with chamote and sand. Among the basic categories and forms we could mention the truncated dishes with straight or slightly inverted rim, some of them bearing a handle shaped as a saddle or torsioned as a semi-circle. There are frequent fragments of pots, whose profile suggest the *bell* or *jar*-shape, with a straight or slightly inverted or everted rim. Most of the fragments are decorated with prominences shaped as a tongue or knob. As concerns the decoration, the majority of the cases bear a simple, alveolary or a notched belt. In general, we could talk about elements specific to the pottery of the archaeological monuments of the 7<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C., discovered east of

<sup>9</sup> P. Constantinescu-Iași, *Basarabia arheologică și artistică*, Chișinău, 1933, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> G. D. Smirnov, ANM, t. 3330, d. 87, p. 9-33. G. B. Fedorov, *Otčet ...*, 1950, p. 45-47.

<sup>11</sup> R. Vulpe, E. Vulpe, *Dacia III-IV*, 1927-1932, p. 332, fig. 113/1-14, 16, 30; S. Teodor, M. Nicu, S. Țau, *AM XXI*, 1998, p. 88, fig. 40/1, 8.12, 15; T. Armut, *Vestigi ...*, 2003, p.120-121.

the Carpathian Mountains, like the settlements from Butuceni<sup>12</sup>, Poiana<sup>13</sup>, Stâncești<sup>14</sup>, Saharna<sup>15</sup> etc.

There were also found wheel-made ceramic fragments, of dark-grey color, made of a clay paste and sand as non-plastic, with a burning reach in oxygen. They come from handled cups. In the group of the wheel-made pottery we have also included the luxury imported ware, covered with black firmis, but also the amphora fragments of Tasoss, Sinope și Heracleea Pontica. Out of the former ones come two neck fragments with englyphic stamp, which, according to the typological series, could belong to the 4th century B.C.

### **Mound no. 3**

In mound no. 3, with a diameter of about 26 m and a height over 80 cm, 14 skeletons could be found. Among them, one belonged to an infant child. The child skeleton and the one from burial no. 9 were laid in a flexed position, with a western and respectively south-western orientation. The skeletons in burials no. 4, 5, 9 and 14 were displaced. As in the preceding situation, the dead had their head to the north (skeletons no. 7, 8, 10 și 11). The deceased in burials no. 12 and 13 had their head to the south-east; those in burials no. 1 and 2 had a western orientation, while the one in burial no. 6 an eastern one (Fig. 6/1-4). Even this time, the deceased individuals were found at variable depths, between 0, 25 m and 0, 58 m, namely in the upper chernozem, without being possible to identify the outline of their pit. Towards the center of the tumulus, a layer of clay and sand could be traced, which also contained small particles of burnt matter. The respective layer had a diameter of 12,8 m (fig. 5/1). In its turn, it overlapped, another layer, this time comprising ash, mixed with soot. Inside it, at the depth of 88/92 cm and 1,12 m distance south- south-west from the central axis of the tumulus, the hearth no. 3 was detected. Above it a clay layer burnt to red was found, with a thickness of 5-7 cm. The hearth is a compact mass of clay, with sand and intensely burnt pebbles as non-plastic, with a brick-like color. Its surface has a crust of 4-5 cm, of the same color. In plan, the installation has a rounded shape, with a diameter of 1,20 m. Upon its surface, 138 hand-made ceramic fragments were found. Hearth no. 4 was detected at the depth of 90-92 cm. Its surface represents a crust with a thickness of 3-4 cm, whose color, as a result of organic components burning, had a variable gamut of white and grey nuances, reaching up to the blue. Beneath the crust, the hearth, made by a mixture of clay and sand, after burning, had taken the color of red (Fig. 5/2).

### **Archaeological inventory**

The inventory found in the context of the mound no. 3 is varied, being represented by three-winged arrow points made of bronze, knife and sickle blades made of iron. We could also notice the gritstone for sharpening. There were also found glass beads, spindle-whorls, roundels, three-lobed clay items etc. (Fig. 7/1-3).

The ceramic material is represented by various categories of dishes and *bell-* or *jar-* shaped vessels, ornamented with an alveolar belt, interrupted by flattened prominences shaped as a tongue, all being specific to the pottery found in various monuments from the circumpontic space and chronologically assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. The truncated dishes, with a more or less flattened profile, with a straight or slightly inverted or everted rim, resemble those from the monuments of the same cultural range (Fig. 7/ 4, 6-9).

The receptacles coming from the vessels of grey color are also diverse, being mostly emphasized the category of the cups with band-like handle and ring-shaped bottom. There are also categories and forms of local pottery, of the 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. The imports are

<sup>12</sup> I. Niculiță, S. Teodor, A. Zanoci, *Butuceni ...*, 2002, p. 213-215, fig. 87-89.

<sup>13</sup> R. Vulpe, S. Teodor, *Piroboridava ...*, 2003, p. 622, fig. 143, p. 627, fig. 148.

<sup>14</sup> A. Florescu, M. Florescu, *Cetățile ...*, 2005, fig. 81-87.

<sup>15</sup> I. Niculiță, A. Zanoci, T. Arnaut, *Tyragetia*, 2008, p.....

represented by amphora from Heracleea Pontica, Tasos and Sinope<sup>16</sup>. A special interest is stirred by a fragmentary handle, with a stamp of the *astynom Poseidonius* and with the eagle upon a dolphin, as an emblem. Such stamps belong to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Fig. 7/5).

### Conclusions

At the level of the recentmost research, carried out in the precinct from Stolniceni, the following thoughts still stand: the dead individuals from the two mounds (no. 2 and no. 3) were usually laid, at variable depths, between 0,25 cm and 0,56 cm, namely in the surface layers; in several cases, the skeletons had traces of old fractures; the sounding done in the intertumular space did not make possible the find of the habitation complexes; the inventory discovered there belonged to the 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C., fact which points to the co-existence of all investigated complexes. The task of the following research is to establish the character of the mentioned precinct, which initially might have been a fortified settlement, thereafter being transformed into a cemetery, or fitted from the beginning as a space of sacred character.

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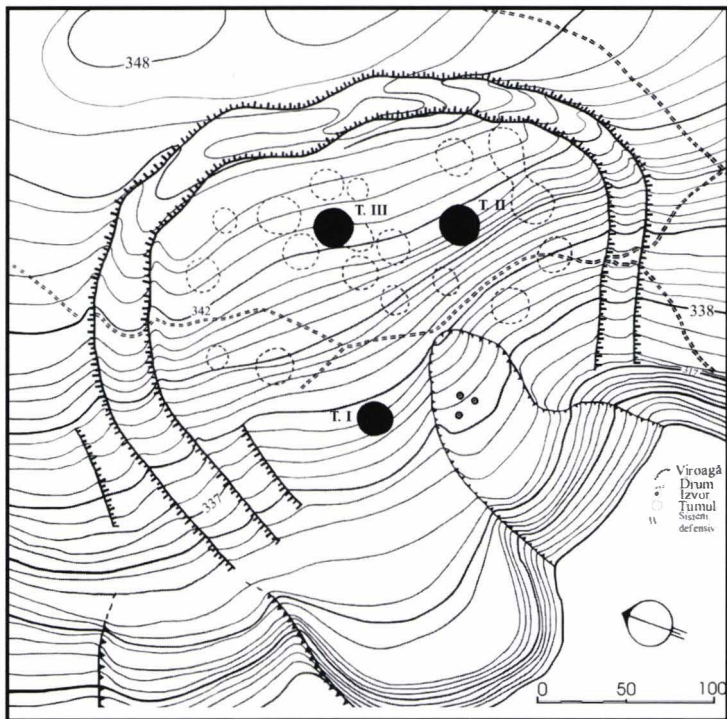
<sup>16</sup> N. Mateevici, *Amforele grecești ...*, 2007, p. 63, 70, 79.



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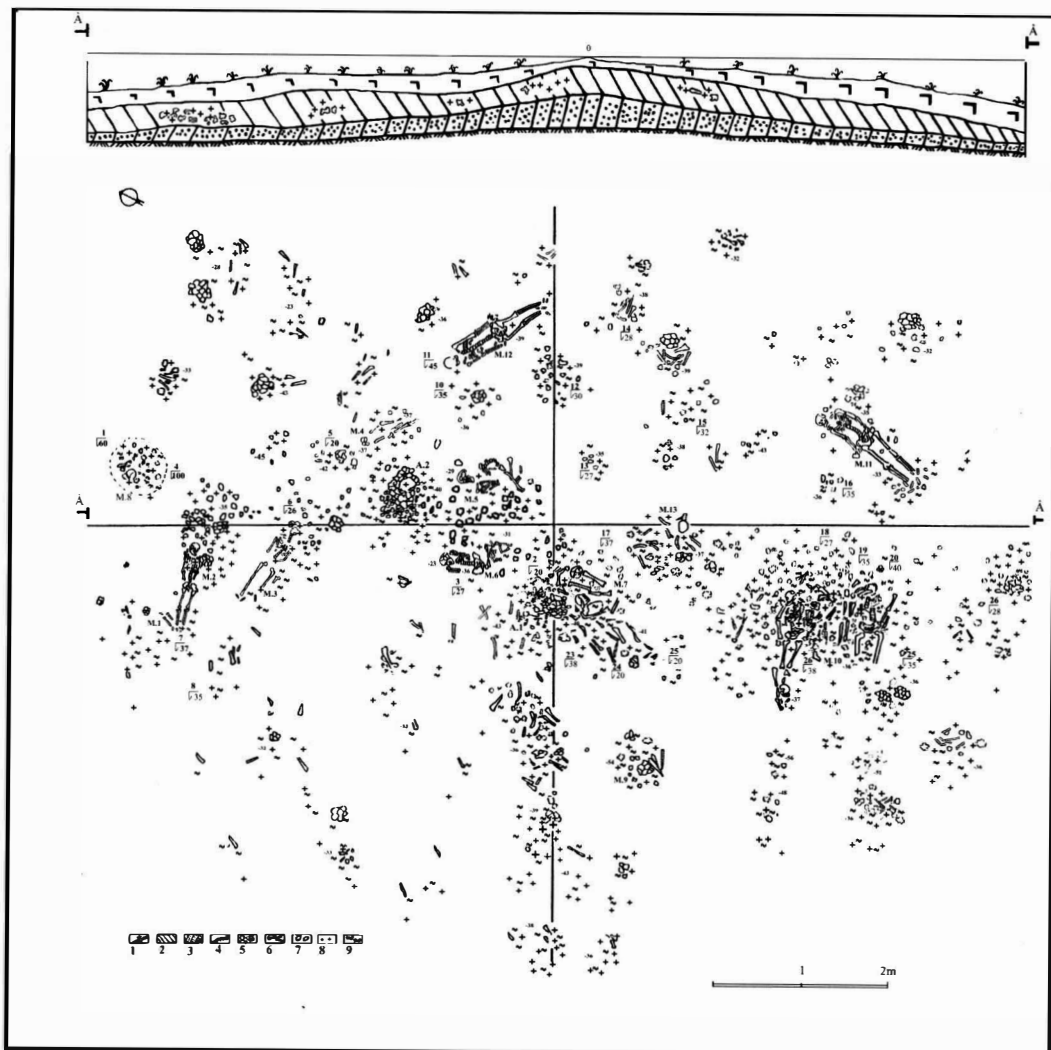


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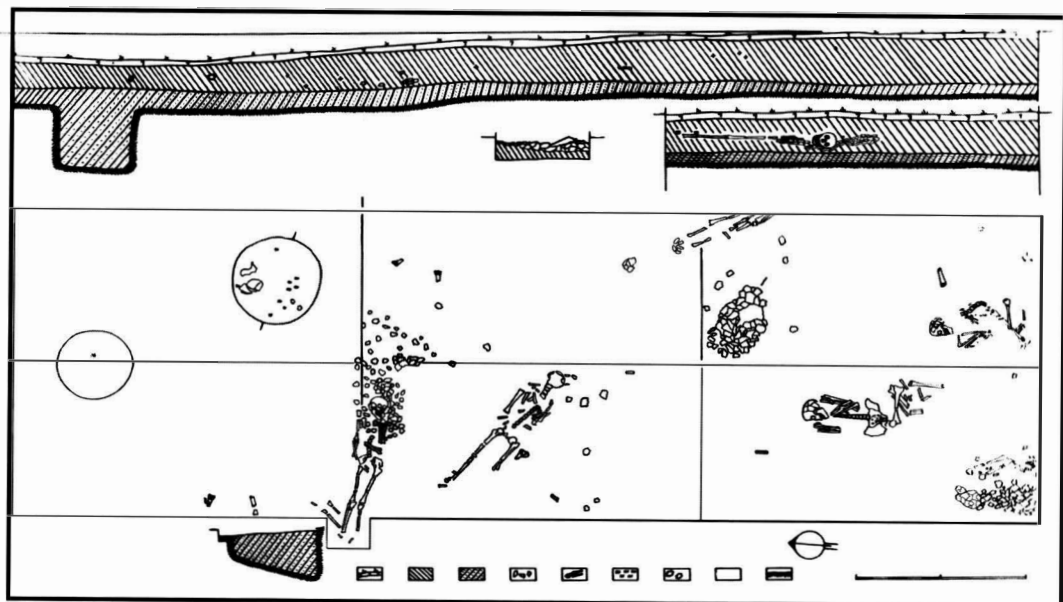


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Fig. 1. Stolniceni-Cetate. 1- topography sketch; 2,3 - Western photo; 4 - photo tumulus I; 5 - defensive sistem's photo.



1



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Fig. 2. Stolniceni - Cetate. 1,2 - the II tumulul's plan and profile.

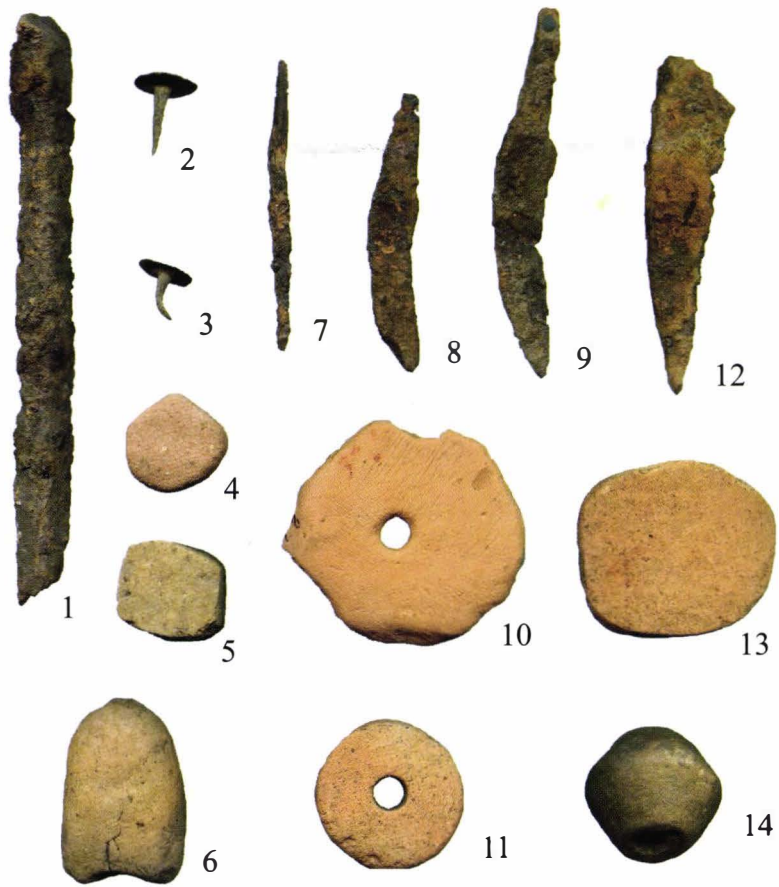
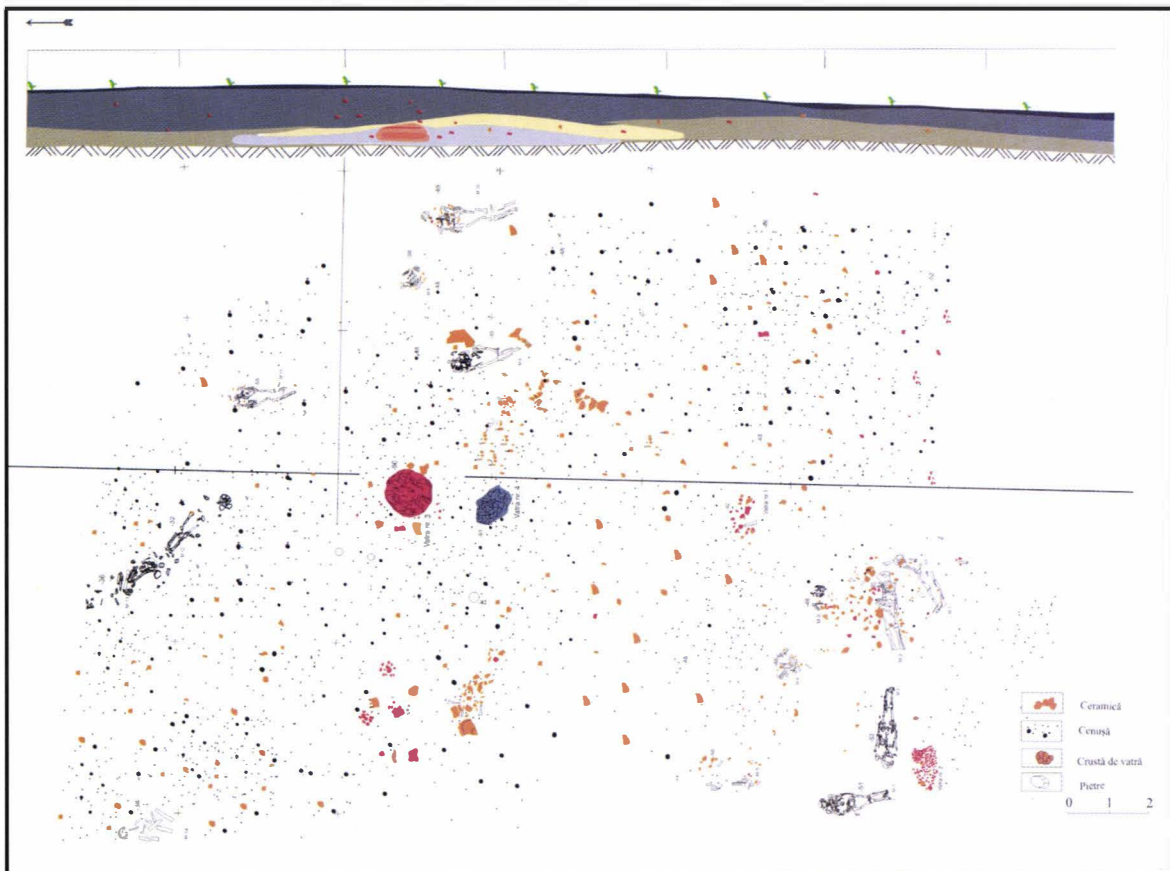


Fig. 3. Stolniceni-Cetate. 1-14 -the second tumulus's inventory.



Fig. 4. Stolniceni-Cetate. 1-7 - the second tumulus's inventory.



1



2

Fig. 5. Stolniceni - Cetate. 1 - the III rd tumulus's plan and profile; 2 - the hearth 3 and 4.





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Fig. 6. Stolniceni -2006. 1-4 the burials 1-4 from tumulus III.

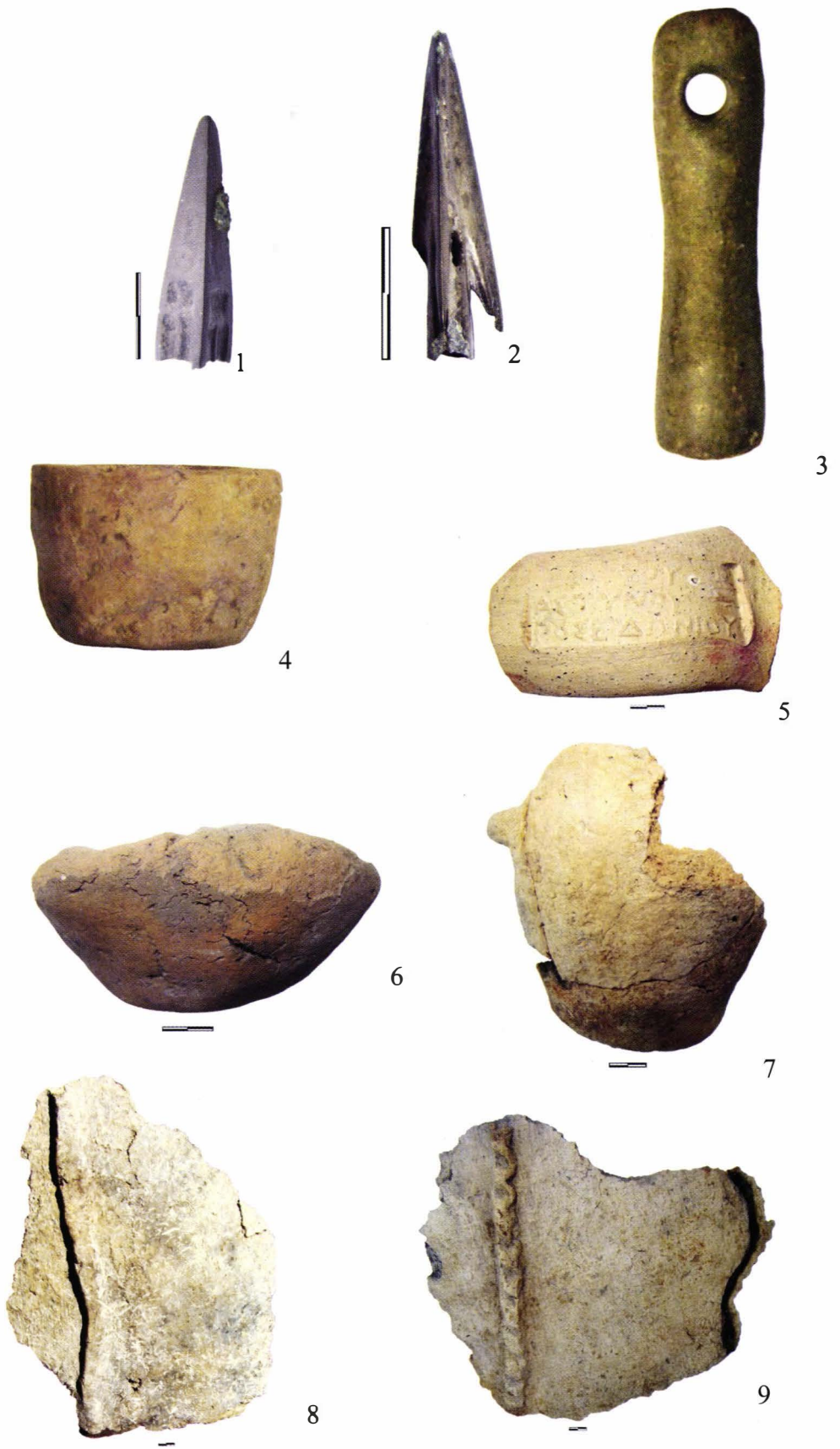


Fig. 7. Stolniceni - Cetate. 1-9 the inventory from tumulus III.