

FINDS OF DACIAN POTS FROM THE ROMAN GRAVES IN VIMINACIUM

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Abstract. The Viminacium cemeteries bore more than 13.500 graves. Still, only in a few of them, Dacian ware was found. It includes the standard repertoire of Dacian pots that appear throughout *Moesia Superior* at the turns of the Eras and during the first three centuries A.D. The graves containing Dacian ware include both skeletal graves and graves with cremations. Apart from Dacian pottery, all the other grave goods represent typical Roman items, like oil-lamps, balsamaria or coins. Coin-finds make it possible to gain precise dating for all the burials discussed, thus making it possible the date the usage of Dacian ware as grave goods.

The remains of Viminacium are lying under the modern villages of Stari Kostolac and Drmno, at the right Mlava bank, some 15 km to the east from Požarevac (Fig. 1). Viminacium was the capital of the Roman province *Moesia Superior*, and in late antiquity of the province *Moesia Prima*. It presented a significant military stronghold at the northern border of the Empire, in which the Roman legion *VII Claudia Pia Fidelis* was stationed. Owing to the rich hinterland of the Mlava valley and to the favorable position of the city itself, the inhabitants of Viminacium had well-developed economy. Merchants from the entire Roman Empire came to this city for trade (Korać 2007).

The Viminacium cemeteries, excavated during the last three decades of 20th century, bore more than 13.500 graves.

The finds of Dacian pottery presented here come from two different necropoles, Pećine and Više Grobalja, both within the Viminacium city area. (I hereby thank M. Korać, director of project Viminacium and D. Spasić-Đurić, custodian of the National museum Požarevac, for putting the here presented material at my disposal). They present grave goods discovered within both skeletal and cremated graves, showing different constructions and containing both children and adults. The only grave from the Pećine necropolis mentioned in this paper is a skeletal one. Graves from Više Grobalja that contained Dacian ware as grave goods include six skeletal graves (three of them being childrens graves), six cremated burials (three of them double-leveled) and one grave of undetermined structure.

Grave G 2931 from Pećine was orientated east-west and contained the remains of one deceased. Since several iron nails were found next to his feet and head, it can be concluded that he was buried in a wooden coffin. The deceased was buried lying on his back, in a stretched position. His arms were crossed on his stomach, his left hand placed on his right hand. Grave goods consisted of a pot, a jug and a cup, all made of very poor clay.

Next to the feet of the deceased there was a hand made brown pot (C 8315, Fig. 2). Its rim is upturned, its stomach oval and its bottom flat. Direct under the rim there is a carved double wavy line, while there is a double zigzag line on the shoulder of the pot. Within the pot, a piece of carbonated wood and several pieces of iron were found, most likely parts of the decayed coffin.

Grave G 540 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 3) is a child's grave buried in a wooden coffin. The grave was orientated east-west. The child was lying on his back, in a stretched position. His right arm lied next to his body, while his left arm was placed on his chest. Grave goods consisted

of two golden ring-shaped ear-rings, a bronze coin placed on the chest of the deceased, two shoe-nails and a pot.

The pot (C 3821, Fig. 4) is hand-made, with slightly stressed rim and shoulder. Its stomach is almost cylindrical and its bottom flat. The decoration consists of carved short diagonal lines, placed on the shoulder of the pot.

Grave G₁-688 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 5) is a double-leveled grave, with its sides and bottom burned with fire, orientated northwest-southeast. The first level measures 2.60 X 2.00 X 0.30 m. The second level, measuring 1.30 X 0.45 X 0.20 m, also possessed burnt sides and bottom. At its bottom, a small amount of cremated bones mixed with sooth was discovered. Grave goods consisted of a pyxide made of thin bronze tin, an oil-lamp, a bronze coin, three red burned and painted jugs and a red burned pot.

The red burned pot (C 5540, Fig. 6) was made of poorly cleaned clay. Its rim was upturned, its stomach round and its bottom flat. There is a line of finger shaped ornaments on its shoulder.

Grave G 1101 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 7) is a child's grave that was orientated in the east-west direction. The deceased was buried in a wooden coffin, which can be concluded according to the finds of two iron nails. The deceased was buried lying on his left side and crouched, his arms placed next to the body. Next to his legs there was the only grave-good, a grey burned pot, with lots of sooth both on the inner and on the outer side (C 6674, Fig. 8). The pot is fragmented and was made of very poor clay. The rim is upturned, the stomach is slightly round and the bottom is flat. At the upper stomach part there is a canelure with diagonal incisions.

Grave G 1135 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 9) was orientated east-west. It is a simple hole measuring 0.93 X 0.50 m, which indicates a child's grave. It was not possible to determine the position of the deceased within the grave hole. The only grave good is a red burned hand-made pot (C 6747, Fig. 10) with traces of burning. Its rim is upturned, its stomach almost cylindrical and its bottom is flat. On the stomach there is an ornament consisting of finger punctuations.

Grave G 1148 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 11), representing a simple hole, was orientated west-east and measuring 1.60 X 0.70 X 0.15 m. Remains of the skeleton were partially preserved, but it was not possible to determine the position of the deceased. The grave goods consisted of a single-handled jug and a single-handled pot placed next to the skull, while another jug, a pot and an oil-lamp were placed next to the deceased's feet.

The grey burned pot (C 6794, Fig. 12), placed next to the feet of the deceased, was fragmented. The rim is upturned, the stomach biconical and the bottom is flat. On the stomach of the vessel, there is a plastic ribbon decorated with finger punctuations.

Grave G₁-989 from Više Grobalja also represents a simple hole with burned sides and bottom. The grave was orientated north-south and measuring 1.00 X 0.40 X 0.20 m. At the bottom of the grave-hole, a small amount of cremated bones was found. The only grave-good is a red burned, hand-made pot (C 6982, Fig. 13), made of very poor clay. Its rim is upturned, the stomach biconical and the bottom flat. At the shoulder of the vessel there are several diagonally placed long incisions.

Grave G₁-1089 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 14) was actually discovered within the cultural layer. The only indication that there was a grave is a find of a pot (C 7632, Fig. 15). It is brown burned and made of very poor clay. Its rim is upturned, its stomach oval and its bottom is flat. On the shoulder of the vessel there are diagonal incisions. Since there were traces of cremated bones, sooth and ashes within the pot, it could be concluded that it represented an urn.

Grave G -1544 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 16) was orientated east-west and measured 1.20 X 0.70 X 0.10 m. Remains of the skeleton were discovered within the hole. Grave goods consisted of an oil-lamp, two bronze coins and a pot.

The black burned pot (C 9062, Fig. 17) was hand-made, with an upturned rim, convex shoulder, round stomach and a flat bottom. On the shoulder of the vessel there is a carved zig-zag line and on the stomach there is a canelure with irregular punctured ornaments.

Grave G₁-1332 from Više Grobalja is a double-leveled grave, orientated north-south. The sides and the bottoms of both levels were burnt. The upper level measured 2.50 X 1.30 X 0.30 m and at its bottom, cremated bones were found within the sooth. The lower level measured 1.50 X 0.60 X 0.15 m. The grave goods found in the first level consisted of two pots, two miniature pots, an oil-lamp and a bronze mirror. In the second level, three jugs were found, a fragmented ritual vessel, three oil-lamps, a miniature pot, a pincette, an iron key and an iron knife. Next to the grave, a pot and a miniature pot were placed.

The black burned pot (C 9138, Fig. 18), placed within the upper level, was hand-made of poor clay. The rim of the vessel is upturned; the shoulder convex, the stomach conical and the bottom is flat. At the upper stomach part there is a ribbon with an incised ornament.

Grave G₁-1406 from Više Grobalja consists of a simple urn (C 9561, Fig. 19). It is a hand-made, light brown (cream) burned pot made of very poor clay. The rim is upturned, the stomach is round and the bottom flat. Between the shoulder and the stomach there is a ribbon with diagonal ornament done with finger.

Grave G₁-1960 from Više Grobalja was a double-leveled grave, orientated east-west, with burnt sides. The upper level measured 2.20 X 1.20 X 0.60 m, while the lower one measured 0.90 X 0.60 X 0.13 m. At the bottom of the second level, within the layer of sooth and ashes, cremated bones were found. The grave-goods from the first level consisted of a bowl and a balsamarium, while within the second level, two oil-lamps, a pot and a two-handled cup were discovered.

The red burned pot (C 10.001, Fig. 20), discovered in the lower level, was made of poor clay. Its rim is upturned, its shoulder conical, the stomach is oval and the bottom is flat. At the shoulder of the vessel, there is an ornament consisting of vertical incisions.

Grave G -1884 from Više Grobalja (Fig. 21) was orientated north-south. No traces of bones were found. At the northern side of the grave, three jugs and a bowl were found. Somewhat to the side from these finds, a red burned, hand-made pot (C 10.461, Fig. 22) was found. Its rim is upturned, its body almost cylindrical and its bottom flat. At the top of the stomach there is an ornament consisting of finger prints. Traces of burning were clearly visible on the pot.

The majority of the mentioned Dacian pots from the *Viminacium* graves belong to the same pottery type. They are oval pots with slightly upturned rims and flat bases. The upper pot parts are usually decorated either with multiple waved decoration, plastic ribbon with ornaments done with finger or fingernail or with plastic button-like ornaments on the shoulders of vessels. Sometimes, combined ornaments are applied, consisting both of waved lines and plastic decoration. Such pots were never wheel made, consisting of poorly cleaned clay with admixture of quartz and mica. They are usually unevenly burned, their colour varying from grey, through brown and reddish-brown to red.

Such pots are encountered on many neighbouring sites, like *Singidunum*, *Horreum Margi* or sites in *Pannonia Inferior*. Pots corresponding to the *Viminacium* examples are classified as type II/17 from *Singidunum* but they were all found within the settlement (Nikolić-Đorđević 2000, type II/17, 73). From *Pannonia Inferior*, one example was excavated in Zemun (*Taurunum*) (Brukner 1981, Pl. III, 4; Further examples in Brukner and Dautova-Ruševljan 1992, Pl. 21/126, 130). In *Singidunum*, finds of Dacian pots chronologically belong to middle and second half of 2nd cent.A.D. (Nikolić-Đorđević 2000, 74). In *Pannonia Inferior*, the majority of Dacian ware dates back to 1st cent.A.D. (Brukner 1981, 42; Brukner and Dautova-Ruševljan 1992, 26). In *Viminacium*, Dacian ware is encountered both in skeletal graves and

graves with cremations, all of them dating back to 2nd cent.A.D. (Dating obtained from numismatic finds kindly examined by M. Arsenijević).

In Romania, such pots are described as "oale-borcan" type 1 and they were found as grave goods, for example in the Locusteni necropolis in Oltenia (Popilian 1976, 134, Pl. LXXIV, Nr. 943-947). They are dated back to 2nd and 3rd cent.A.D. (Popilian 1976, 135). Examples of such pots were also found in Muntenia. There, they represent even 40% of all the small finds (Bichir 1984, 30), dating back to the period from 2nd to 4th cent.A.D. (Bichir 1984, 33).

Of great importance is the fact that in the course of the Roman presence in Dacia, within the occupied territory such pots came out of use, i.e. their forms became romanized, due to the presence of typically Roman pottery forms. Dacian pots continue to be in use outside the boundaries of the Roman Dacia, but never within the Roman province itself (Bichir 1984, 32). They represent usual finds at the territory of the so-called free Dacians (*Dacii liberi*), in northern and western Transylvania, but also at the Carpic territory (Bichir 1973, 65-68; Popilian 1976, 135). There, they are found outside the province boundaries even after the Roman retreat in 272.A.D.

It is also rather interesting to examine the field of use of Dacian pots. Within the so-called Militari-Chilia culture in Muntenia, whose carriers were of autochthon, i.e. Dacian origin, such pots were mostly used for cooking and preparing food (Bichir 1984, 33). Although they were found both within the settlements and necropoles, they make only 10-20% of grave goods (Bichir 1984, 30). The situation is somewhat different in Oltenia, where Dacian pots were found in settlements, but more often as urns on necropoles, like the already mentioned Locusteni (Popilian 1976, 134).

In *Moesia Prima*, Dacian ware was found both within the settlements (*Horreum Margi, Singidunum*) and necropoles (*Viminacium*).

* * *

Dacian ware, consisting mostly of pots and cups, was well known and widely spread in the mid Balkans in the earlier period, i.e. at the turn of the eras and later on, during 1st and 2nd century A.D. The beginning of Dacian presence at the territories of modern Vojvodina and northern and eastern parts of Serbia proper dates back to the second half of 1st cent.B.C. The use of Dacian ware continues even after the Roman occupation of these territories, being slowly pushed back by the use of Roman pottery types. Nevertheless, the Dacian pottery types managed to survive for a long period of time, even to 4th cent.A.D. Their simple forms, sometimes simply decorated, poorly cleaned clay and simple manufacture resisted influences of the Roman potters for several hundreds of years.

Finds of the Dacian ware in *Moesia Prima* are known from the civilian settlements, military forts and from graves, where they were often used as urns. The question arises if one is here dealing with the local traditions or acceptance of local ware by the Roman military. The users of the Dacian ware found in Roman settlements or as grave goods on Roman necropoles could be of the Dacian origin.

The finds of Dacian pottery from the two Viminacium necropoles, Pećine and Više Grobalja, both within the Viminacium city area, present grave goods. They were discovered within graves of different structures: skeletal and cremated graves, some of them being double-leveled in their construction. The deceased buried in these graves were both children and adults, most likely of both sexes.

In four graves (no. G-1101, G-1135, G₁-989, G₁-1098), Dacian pots were the only grave-goods and in one case they represented an urn (G₁-1406). This fact could point that the users of such pottery were no wealthy persons. On the other hand, other graves mentioned also contained typical Roman objects, like oil-lamps, coins, balsamaria, a mirror, a pinzette etc.

This variety of circumstances in which Dacian pots were found indicates that they belonged to common objects in the every-day life that they were easily obtained, probably on the market-place of the city. In some graves, they were obviously used to contain food or drink for the deceased, standing side-by-side with typical Roman vessels. In some other graves, they served as urns. All of this indicates that the Dacian traditions in pottery making survived for a very long time (in some cases more than four centuries) within the Roman province of *Moesia Prima*. Because of their simple, easily applicable form and most likely of their low price, they were not completely replaced by the typically Roman pottery types.

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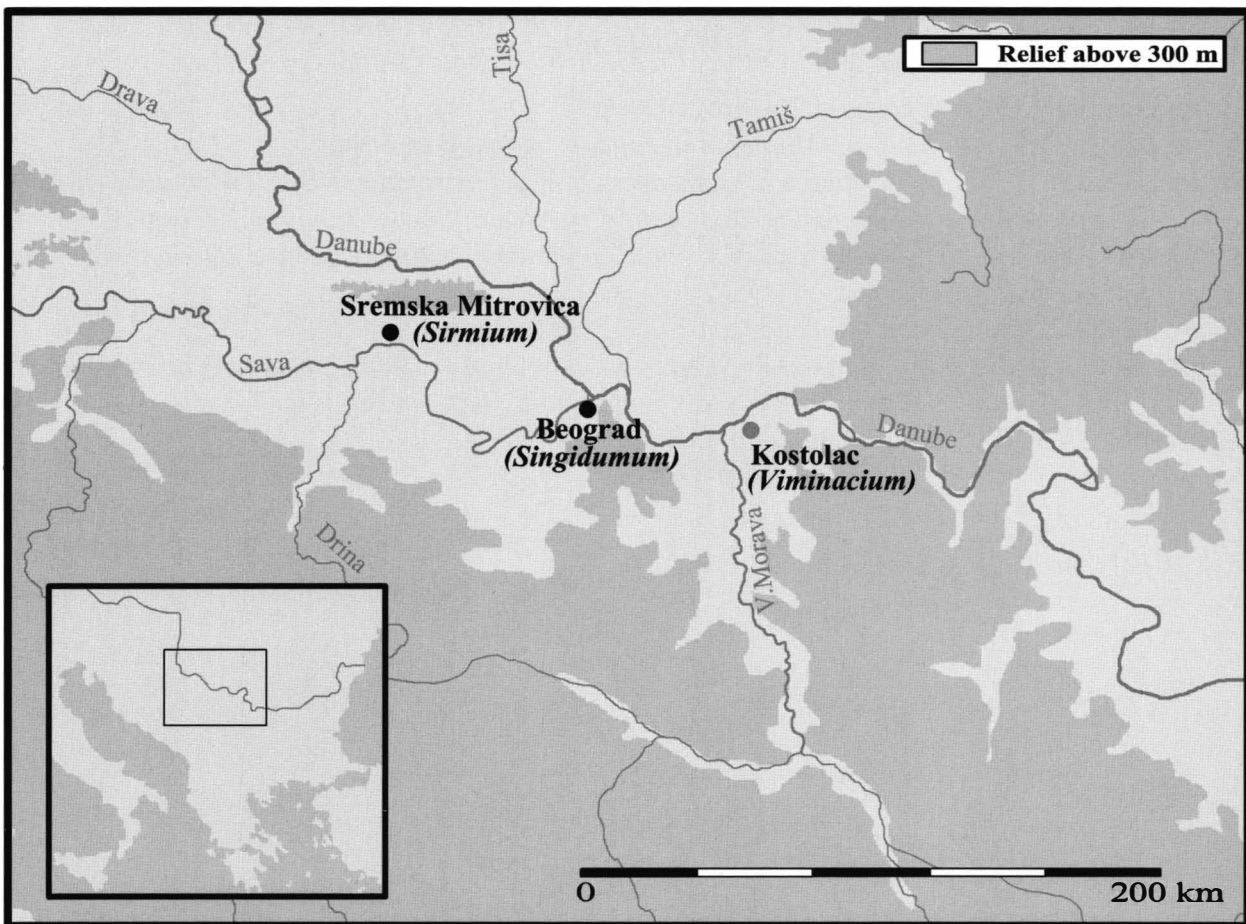


Fig. 1 - The position of Viminacium (modern Kostolac)

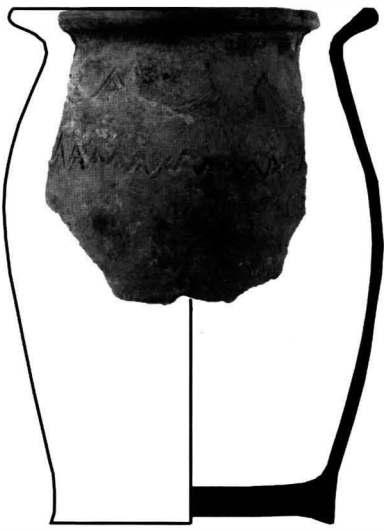
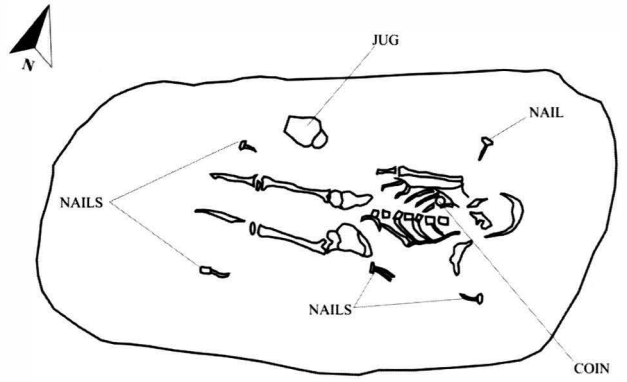


Fig. 2 Pot C - 8315 from the ^{Scale 1:2} grave G - 2931 of the Pećine necropolis



G - 540

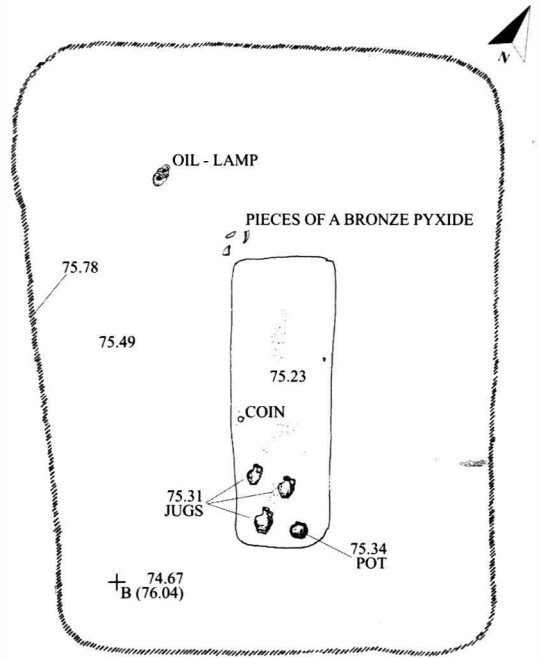
Scale 1:10

Fig. 3 Plan of grave G 540 from the Više Grobalja necropolis



Scale 1:1

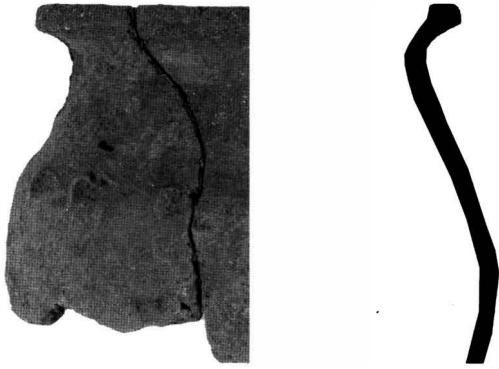
Fig. 4 Pot C 3821 from the grave G 540 of the Više Grobalja necropoli



G1 - 688

Scale 1:20

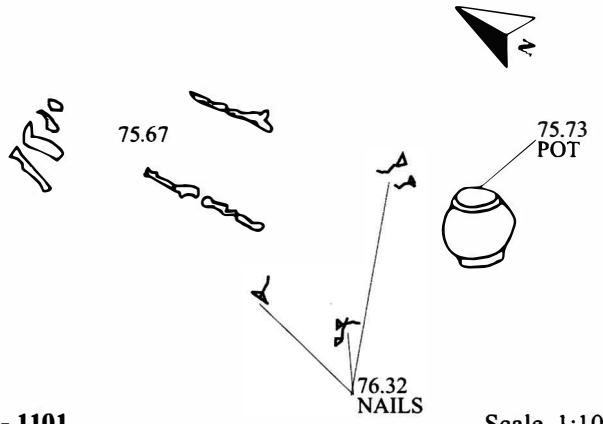
Fig. 5 Plan of grave G₁ 688 from the Više Grobalja necropolis



Scale 1:1

Fig. 6 - Pot C 5540 from the grave G₁ 688 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

G - 1101



Scale 1:10

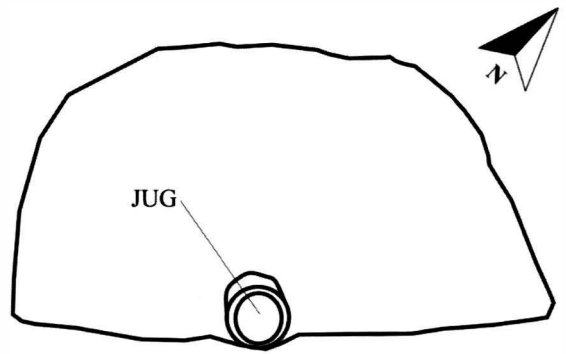
Fig. 7 Plan of grave G 1101 from the Više Grobalja necropolis



Scale 1:1

Fig. 8 - Pot C 6674 from the grave G 1101 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

G - 1135



Scale 1:10

Fig. 9 Plan of grave G 1135 from the Više Grobalja necropolis

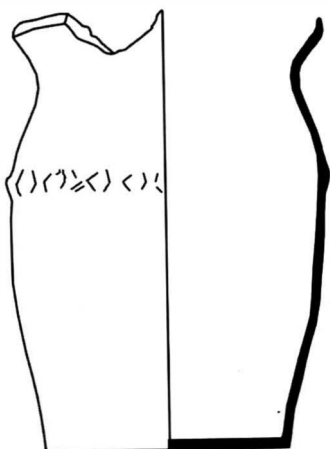


Fig. 10 - Pot C 6747 from the grave G 1135 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

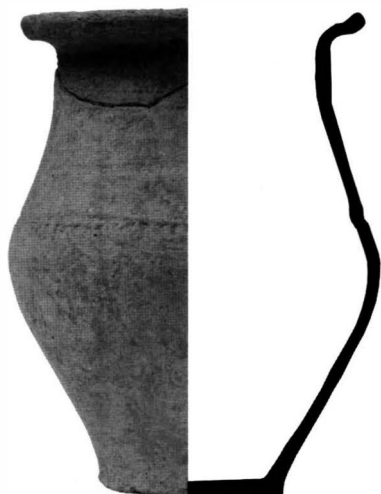


Fig. 12 - Pot C 6794 from the grave G 1148 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

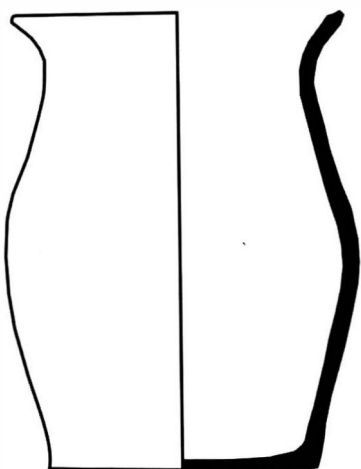
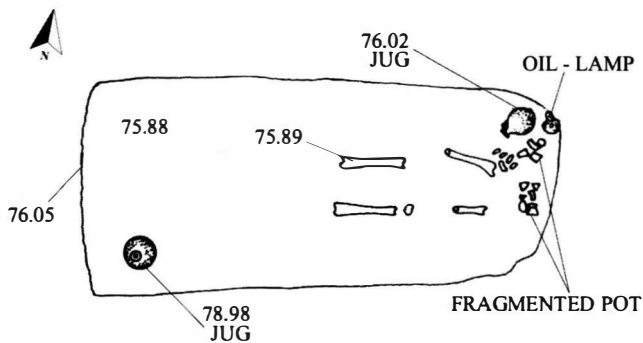


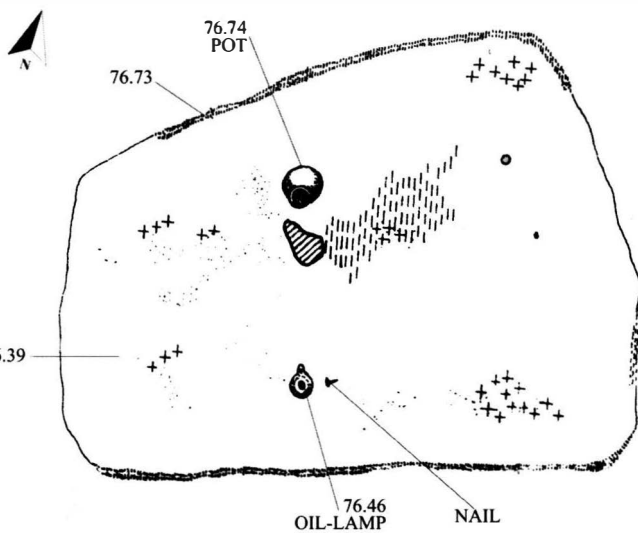
Fig. 13 Pot C 6982 from the grave G, 989 of the Više Grobalja necropolis



G - 1148

Scale 1:20

Fig. 11 Plan of grave G 1148 from the Više Grobalja necropolis



G1 - 1089

Scale 1:20

Fig. 14 Plan of grave G₁ 1089 from the Više Grobalja necropolis

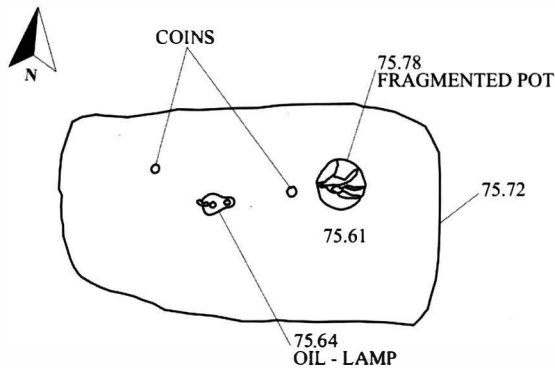


Scale 1:2

Fig. 15 - Pot C 7632 from the grave G₁ 1089 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

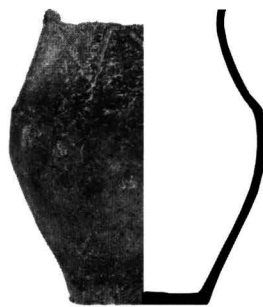
G1 - 1544

Fig. 16 Plan of grave G 1544 from the Više Grobalja necropolis

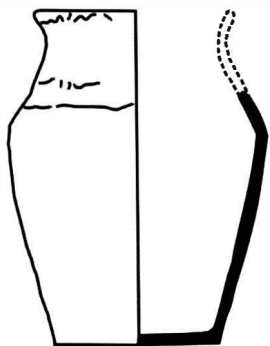


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Fig. 17 - Pot C 9062 from the grave G 1544 of the Više Grobalja necropolis

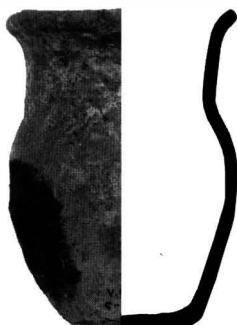


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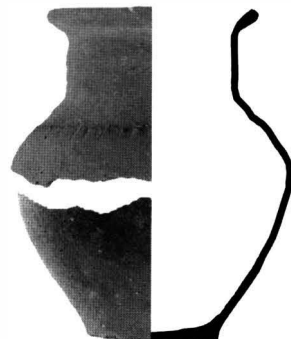
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Fig. 18 - Pot C 9138 from the grave G₁ 1332 of the Više Grobalja necropolis



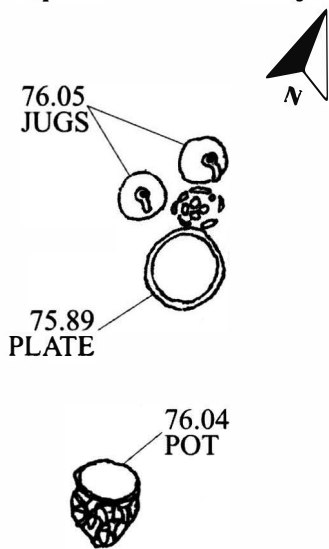
Scale 1:2

Fig. 19 - Pot C 9561 from the grave G₁ 1406 of the Više Grobalja necropolis



Scale 1:2

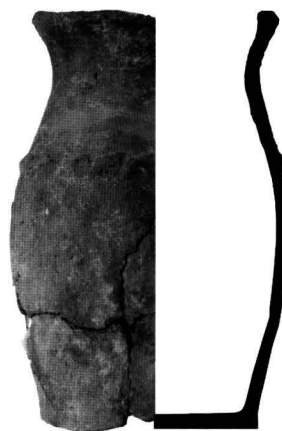
Fig. 20 - Pot C 10.001 from the grave G₁ 1960 of the Više Grobalja necropolis



G - 1884

Scale 1:20

Fig. 21 Plan of grave G 1884 from the Više Grobalja necropolis



Scale 1:2

Fig. 22 - Pot C 10.461 from the grave G 1884 of the Više Grobalja necropolis