

PRELIMINARY REPORT FROM THE NEW EXCAVATION IN BABA CAVE, GRĂDINA VILLAGE, CONSTANȚA COUNTY

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In July 2008 the Baba Cave also known as “La pământul galben” (see BORONEANȚ 2000, p. 52) was excavated (Fig. 1-3).

The Baba Cave is, in reality, a large rock shelter, 13 meters long, corridor – shaped, ending in a round wall. The width of the cave oscillates between 1,20 to 2,65 meters. Its entrance (Fig. 3), narrow, low and east facing, is in the calcareous Cheile Dobrogei hills, about 100 meters above sea level, near the valley of Cheia River (Valea Seacă) which is a tributary of the Casimcea River. This zone is very rich in caves and rock shelters (see BORONEANȚ 2000, p. 52-53, PĂUNESCU 1999).

Only one excavation in the Baba Cave, occasioned by the Paleolithic research in Dobrudja was realised in 1957 by Alexandru Păunescu and Nicolae Harțuchi (NICOLAESCU-PLOPȘOR, PĂUNESCU, HARȚUCHI, 1959, p. 48). Unfortunately, the authors had only written very short reports without a plan of the cave and not detailing the place where the archaeological trench was located. According to Păunescu's and Harțuchi's report, there were three levels with fireplaces found in the cave. Two of them were connected with the Gumelnița Culture and the other had later chronological position. Pottery dating to the Roman and the medieval period was also found. In further papers, written by N. Harțuchi (1973, p. 248 and 1976, p. 18) the chronology of the levels from the Baba Cave has been precised. The author dated the levels to the Gumelnița I C – II A phases and also provided information about the fragments of pottery ornamented with the cord specific to Cernavoda I, and about the level from the 2nd and 3rd c. AD (HARȚUCHI 1976, p. 18, Fig. 5). The profile published in 1976 of the archeological trench made in the Baba Cave in 1957 did not, however, mark in the plane of the cave and so it is very difficult to verify (see HARȚUCHI 1976, Fig. 5).

The excavation in 2008 has verified the oldest data and has also yielded new and unexpected results. In the largest part of the cave there was lodged a rectangular trench with dimensions of: 2,80 x 1,60 meters. In the lower part of the trench (0,80 meters) an edge of the excavation from 1957 was found (Fig. 4). After

the finish of the rectangular trench, a small part of the cave in the northern area was excavated. The trench was documented with three cross sections (profiles), drawings and photos. Observations at levels between 10-15 cm have also been documented with plans, color drawings of cross-sections and photos. Stone, iron and bronze artifacts were localized in the distinguished layers. Pottery, animal and human bones as well as charcoal were separately documented from different fireplaces. The earth from the fireplaces and grave pit was sieved.

The stratigraphy of the excavated part of the cave is as follows (see profile A-A' - Fig. 5): the bedrock was about 1,70 meters below point "0" (ground surface) located in the upper part of the trench; in the gaps between the big stones from (1,70 – 1,45 m) - culturally sterile deposits of the yellow loess with small stones and fossils; this layer was overlain by the next one, 0,55 – 0,60 m (1,45 – 0,90/0,85 meters) thick, rich in Neolithic micro levels and the fireplace cultural levels (Fig.5); in the following level, 0,10 – 0,15 m. (0,90/0,85 – 0,80/0,70 meter) thick, the different size stones, with pottery and animal bones between them, were found (Bronze Age, Hallstatt); the next level (0,80/0,70 – 0,30 meters) which is partly destroyed by the medieval or modern pits, had a fireplace with Roman pottery (0,60 m) and there was evidence of Romano-Byzantine pottery (0,45 m); the upper levels close to ground surface were composed of thin micro-levels 0,45 m (0,45 – 0 m) thick which can be dated to late medieval and modern times.

The Neolithic level with its fireplaces was very rich in pottery. The chronological stages are as follow: Hamangia culture pottery, Gumelnița culture pottery and in the same level Cernavoda pottery and Cucuteni C. Stone artifacts; an axe (Fig. 7/1), a basalt mallet with ochre traces (Fig. 7/2), a longitudinal pendant (Fig. 7/3) and stone tools such as retouched blades have been found. The presence of human hand bones was observed as well animal bones and a small amount of shells. In the upper part of this Neolithic level, close to the level with stones, one piece of pottery with cord was found. The Neolithic materials correspond with the finds from "La Izvor" Cave and the site located in Cheia village (Hartuchi 1976, p. 17, Fig. 8/5-7; VOINEA, DOBRINESCU, 2002-2003, p. 9-22; VOINEA, DOBRINESCU, NEAGU, BĂLĂȘESCU, RADU, 2006-2007, p. 10-11). Hamangia pottery (with black engobe and ornamented with vertical equal rows of dots) can be dated to III phase of the Hamangia Culture (Fig. 8/1, VOINEA, NEAGU, 2006, 12-13). Gumelnița pottery forms are analogical to the following types: open forms: - I. 2 (dishes), closed forms - II. 15 (bowls) II. 16 (bi-tronconical vessels with an inward rim) and 31 (lids) according to Valentina Voinea's typology, and can be dated to Gumelnița A1 and A2 (Fig. 8/2-5; VOINEA 2005, p. 37-39, see tables with pottery forms).

In the stone level the animal bones, Bronze age and Hallstatt pottery were found. The fragments of the thick hand made pottery with the plastic strip are especially interesting. An analogical vessel – *phytos* – has been found in close vicinity to Baba Cave in Grădina (IRIMIA, BARDAC 1995-1996, p. 13, Fig. 1, Fig. 3/1). According to the authors this vessel can be connected with the Sabatinovka culture and dated to the late and middle Bronze Age (IRIMIA, BARDAC, 1995-1996, p. 14, 20-21). In "La Izvor" Cave and in the vicinity of Cheile Dobrogei, other materials dated to the Late Bronze Age and Hallstatt have been found

(HARTŪCHI 1976, 17; ALEXANDRESCU *et alii*, 1986, 244, Fig. 6; IRIMIA 2003, 37-38, Fig. 4).

It was partly in this level, in the upper part of the northern zone of the cave that an inhumation grave was unearthed (Fig. 4,9). The skeleton, partly preserved - no legs from the knees down - was located from 50 cm to 80 cm below the ground level. Typical nomadic grave goods were found in the grave pit, listed as follows: one iron stirrup, bone elements from a bow, two bronze buckles, steels (a device for kindling fire), iron, simple pieces of belts, knives and a partly preserved horse bit. Also found in the grave was a partly preserved saber. The skull was deformed. Based on preliminary analysis of the metal, the finds can be connected with early medieval nomadic period.

The upper levels dated to the Roman and Romano-Byzantine time had two fireplaces which have been partly destroyed by younger pits. In these pits Bronze Age, Hallstatt, Hellenistic and Romano-Byzantine pottery was observed. In the microregion Cheia, traces of intensive Roman, Romano-Byzantine and Early Middle Age settlements were observed (HARTŪCHI 1976, 17, ALEXANDRESCU *et alii*, 1986, 244-247, Fig. 4).

The 2008 campaign has brought forward new data about Neolithic cultural differentials of the presented zones. It is confirmation of the presence of the Cernavoda pottery and Cucuteni C (Fig. 8/6) – unknown before in the analysed zone. People who used the shape in style Cucuteni C are related to communities settled in the northern periphery of Cucuteni-Tripolye and moved south under the pressing of another population (DODD- OPRÎTESCU, 1980, 554). The closest finds are known from the excavation realized by dr. Valentina Voinea on the “La Ostrov” Island on Taşaul Lake (MARINESCU-BÎLCU *et alii*, 2000-2001).

The most surprising discovery was, however, the nomadic grave. This is the first inhumation grave found in a cave in Dobrudja which can be dated to the Early Medieval period (compare SPINEI 1999, Fig. 33). It is the first archeological find of a nomadic grave in the aforementioned territory. A detailed analysis of the grave is in preparation.

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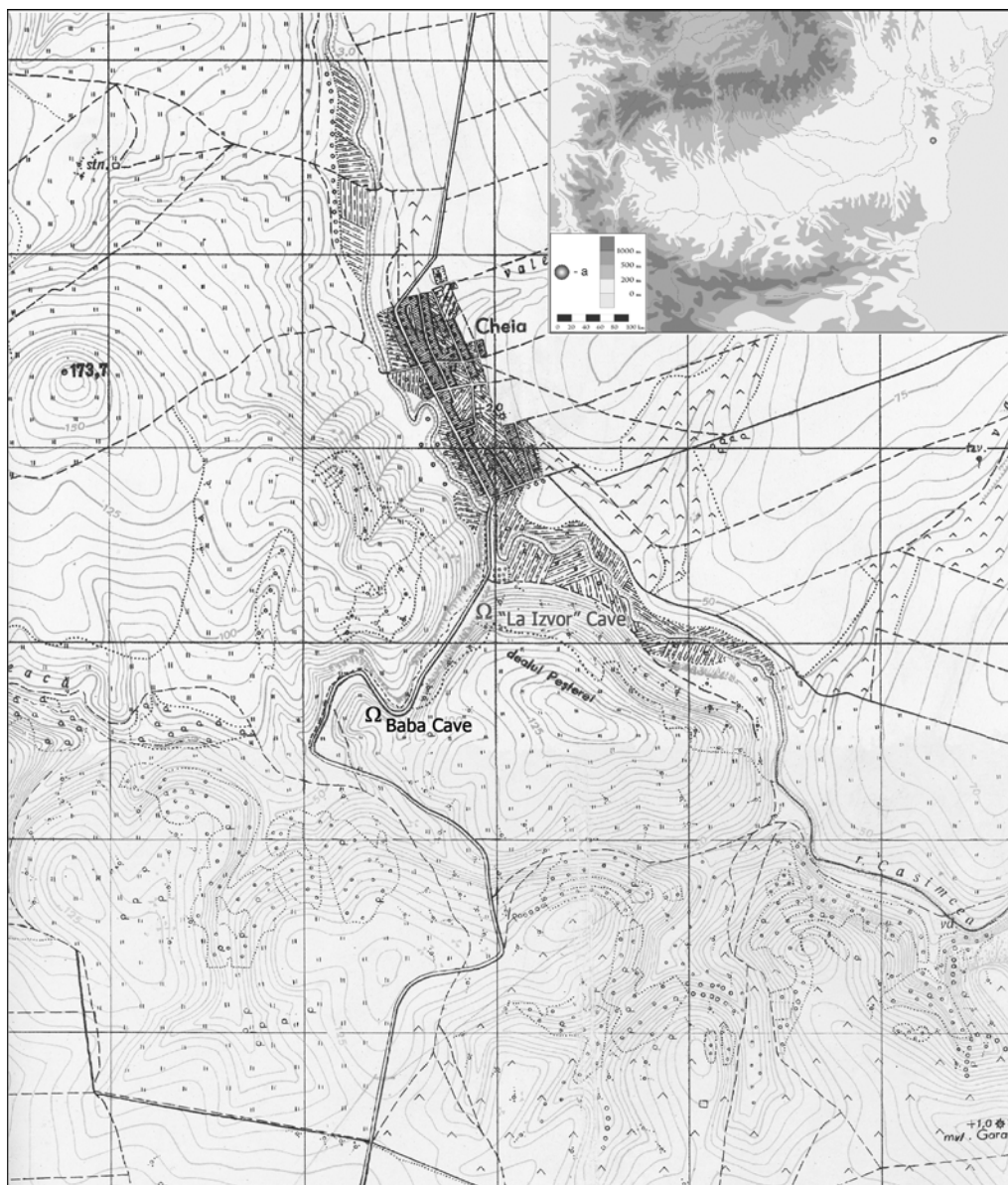


Fig. 1 – Location of the Baba Cave.



Fig. 2 – General view of the Baba Cave area.

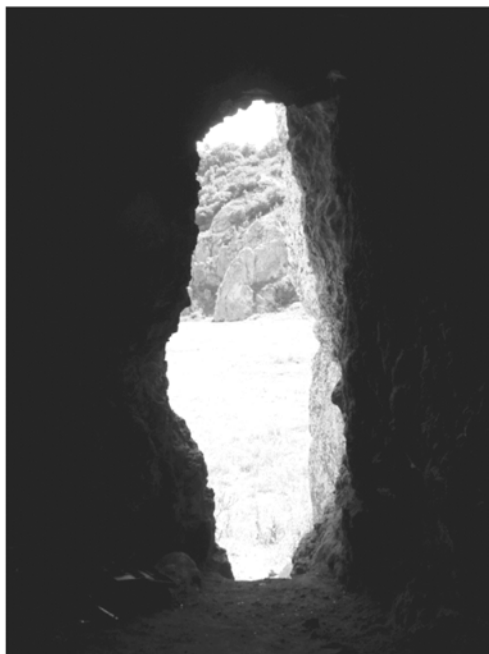


Fig. 3 – The Baba Cave – a) General view; b) The entrance – view from outside; c) The entrance – view from inside.

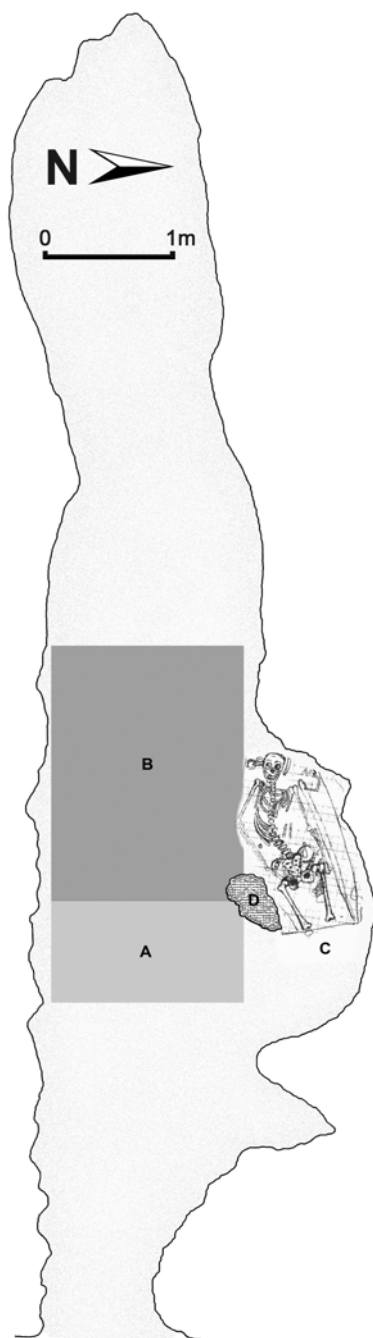


Fig. 4 – The plan of the Baba Cave: A – Part of the old archaeological trench made in 1957; B – The new archaeological trench; C – The nomadic inhumation grave; D – Large piece of rock.

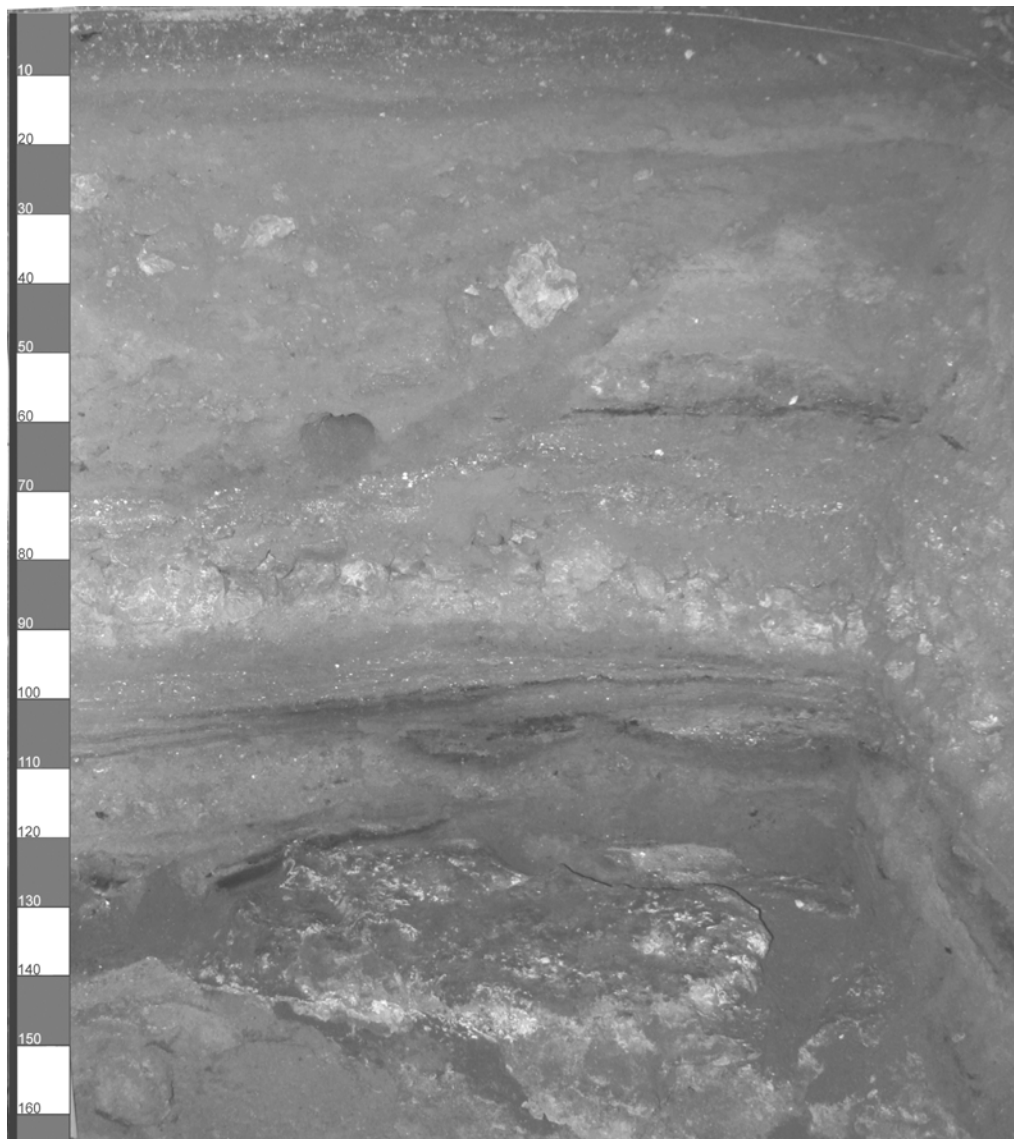


Fig. 5 – Cross section A - A`.

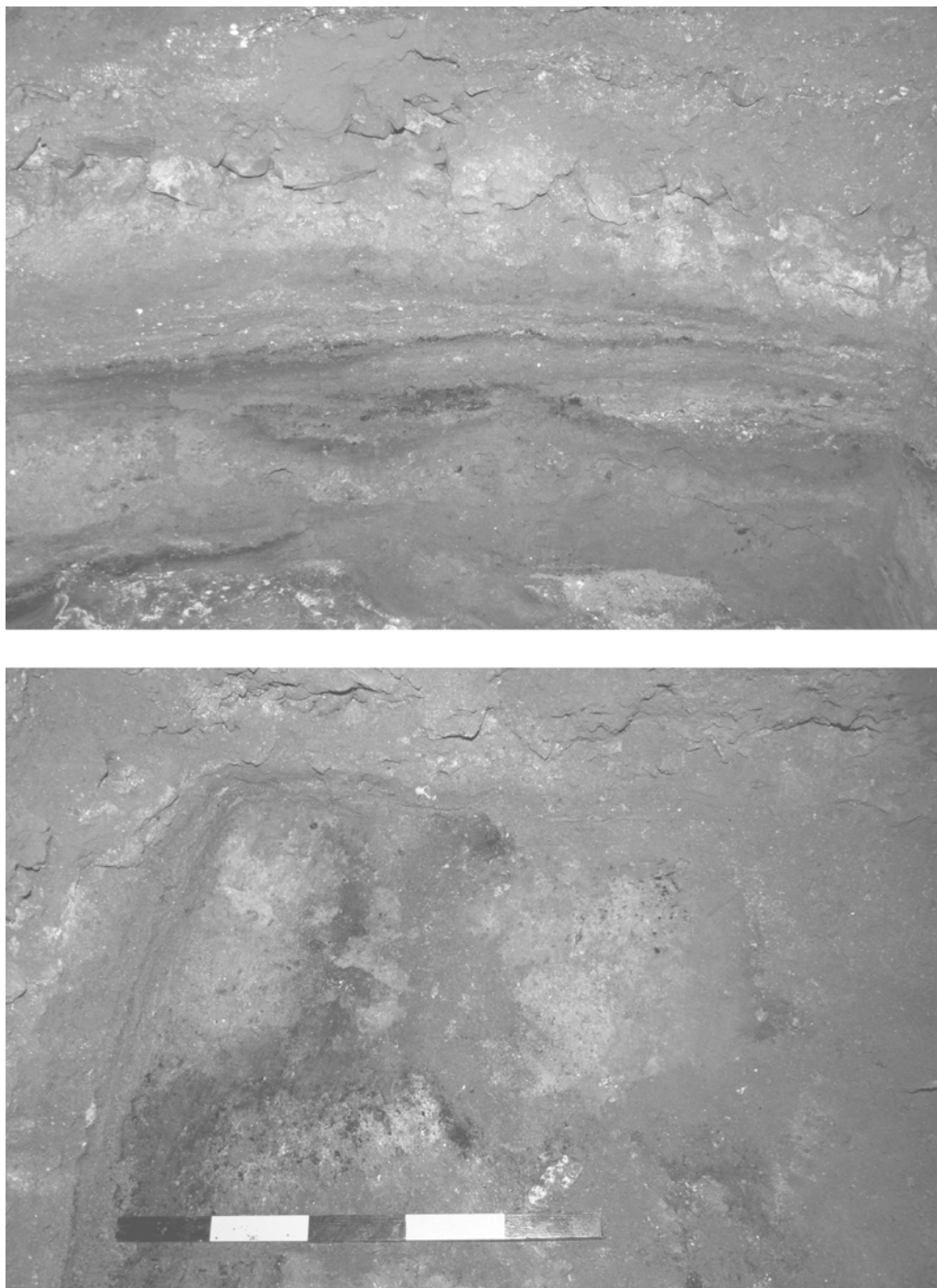
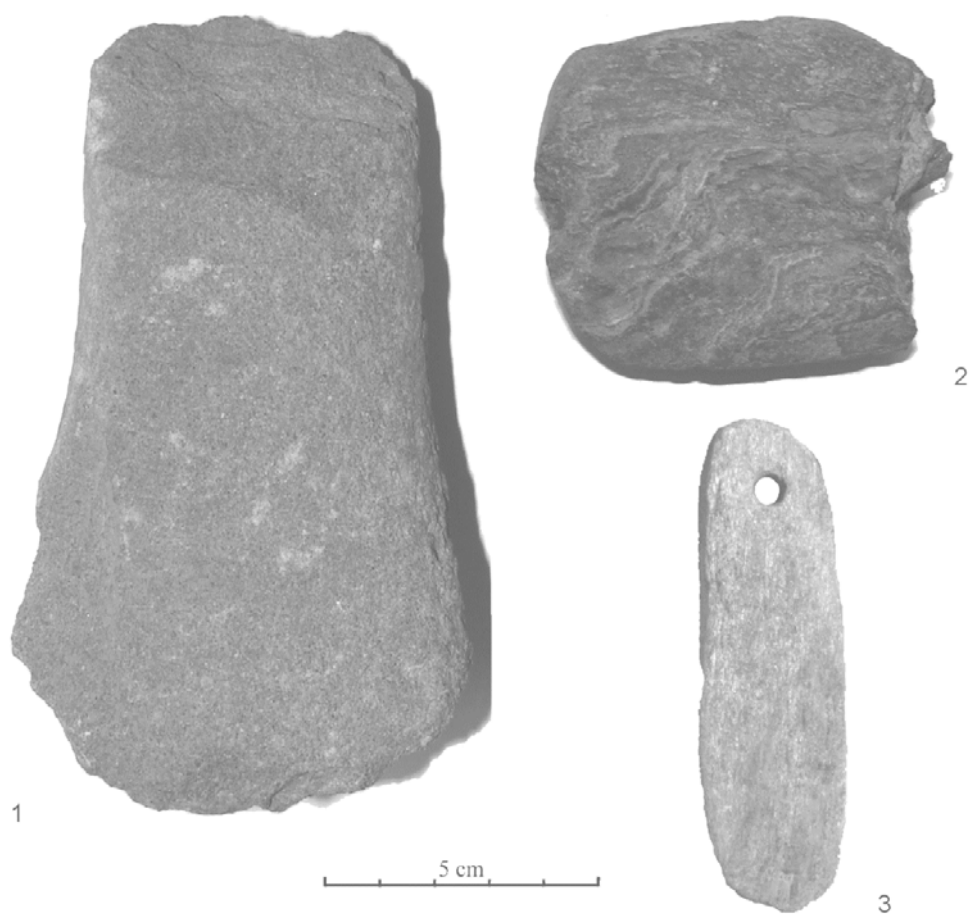


Fig. 6 – Remains of the Neolithic fireplaces (details).



**Fig. 7 – Stone artifacts from Neolithic level: 1- axe,
2 - basalt muller, 3 - pendant.**

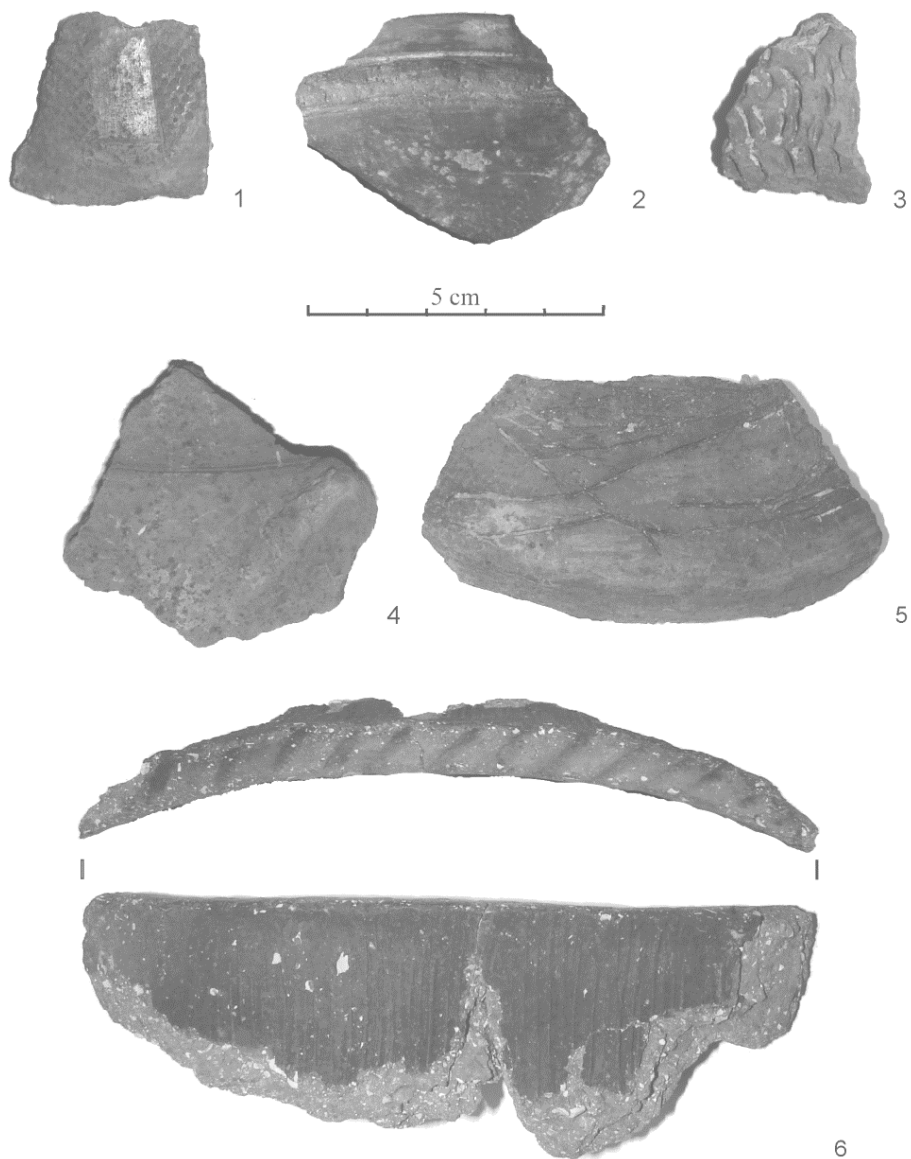


Fig. 8 – Pottery from Neolithic level: 1 - Hamangia culture,
2-5 – Gumelnița culture, 6 - Cucuteni C.



Fig. 9 – The nomadic inhumation grave.