

# THE EARLY NEOLITHIC REFLECTED IN PUBLISHED CONTRIBUTIONS OVER TIME IN “ARHIVELE OLTENIEI” JOURNAL

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**Abstract:** “Arhivele Olteniei” journal (Oltenia Archives) has hosted, since its establishment, in addition to a large number of contributions that testify to a strong cultural life and numerous articles on prehistoric archaeology in the Oltenia area. It ought to be mentioned that C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, a plurivalent personality – historian, ethnographer, folklorist, anthropologist, geographer, was also a passionate archaeologist, with important contributions in the above-mentioned journal. Thus, for the period of the early Neolithic, represented by the Starčevo-Criș culture, the contributions brought by Dumitru Berciu since 1939 are significant, followed by those of Marin Nica for the Cârcea-Grădinile culture. Subsequent capitalizations of some new or less known Neolithic materials from the mentioned area are also very important.

**Keywords:** Oltenia, Early Neolithic, Cârcea, Grădinile, Starčevo

## Introduction

Our endeavour starts from the premise that the historiographical activity, the result of an intense scientific research in Oltenia, but also in the country and abroad, cannot be overlooked in the centenary year. The historiographical preoccupations, including a complex theme, especially in the humanities, but in other fields as well, materialized in the pages of Arhivele Olteniei journal, founded in 1922 by Charles Laugier and C.D. Fortunescu.

For 24 years (1922–1946), the magazine appeared annually, and, between 1946 and 1981, its publication was interrupted. The publishing activity resumed in 1981.

During the 20th century, archaeological research on the prehistory of Oltenia experienced a special magnitude (**Map 1**). The first historiographic series is mainly circumscribed to archaeological research in the mentioned area, deepening the prehistoric and ancient periods<sup>1</sup>. The results of archaeological excavations, carried out on the territory of Romania<sup>2</sup> and abroad<sup>3</sup> were not avoided.

Extremely valuable proved to be the works published by C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor<sup>4</sup> and Dumitru

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<sup>1</sup> Simu 1927, p. 194–198, Florescu 1930, p. 373–400, D. Tudor, 1930, p. 211–237, Idem 1937, p. 77–91.

<sup>2</sup> Roska 1923, p. 466–500.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1930, p. 73–74.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1922, pp. 79–81; Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1925, pp. 164–168; Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1929, p. 351–353;

Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1931, p. 400–410.

Berciu<sup>5</sup>, covering the prehistoric period of the first half of the twentieth century. The publishing activity of C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor offers general and special information on the prehistory of Oltenia. In the pages of the journal, can be found detailed specific studies on Neolithic weapons<sup>6</sup> and pottery<sup>7</sup>. Through the article published in 1925, C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor proposed a periodization of the history of Oltenia in “six ages”, starting with the Palaeolithic era, and ending with the period of migrations<sup>8</sup>.

The prestige enjoyed by C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor at international level made him collaborate with researchers from Europe. Among his collaborators, it was Henri É.P. Breuil, a well-known archaeologist and anthropologist, who published a number of works on cave art. From a letter addressed to C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, it appears that Henri É.P. Breuil came to the conclusion that cave art from Oltenia can be compared with the Eneolithic art. Based on these considerations, C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor attributed the drawings discovered in a cave in Gorj County to the Neolithic period<sup>9</sup>.

On the Neolithic period as well, there is the article dedicated to stone weapons, published in 1926 by doctor Charles Laugier in *Arhivele Olteniei*. It is about a deposit of stone axes discovered in Bratovoiești, Dolj County, which was attributed to the Vădastra culture, phase I<sup>10</sup>.

In 1932, a recent graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, specializing in History-Geography and Philosophy, Dumitru Berciu carried out field evaluations, north of the Danube, followed by archaeological excavations in Olt County at Vădastra<sup>11</sup>, Celei, Corabia, Orlea, Frăsinetul de Pădure, Hotărani, Reșca, as well as outside the built-up areas of Bratovoiești and Șimnic, located in Dolj County<sup>12</sup>.

As a PhD student, Dumitru Berciu published, in 1937, the *Bibliography of Prehistoric Oltenia*<sup>13</sup>. A year later, he obtained his PhD with the thesis *Prehistoric Archaeology of Oltenia*, published in 1939<sup>14</sup>. Through this work, Dumitru Berciu aimed to capitalize on the results of all archaeological researches carried out until then, systematizing and chronologically ordering the archaeological discoveries in Oltenia, belonging to the Neolithic and Eneolithic period. Therefore, the thesis mainly includes the analysis and interpretation of archaeological materials attributed to Vinča, Vădastra and Sălcuța cultures.

### Early Neolithic reflected in *Arhivele Olteniei* journal

On addressing the early Neolithic cultures, they were not known at that time, as stated before, researcher Dumitru Berciu mentioning only the Vinča, Vădastra (**pl. 1**) and Sălcuța (**pl. 2**) civilizations. The discoveries resulting from the archaeological excavations carried out by C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor in the area of Cleanov, Dolj County, were attributed to the Mesolithic, and published in 1931. Eight years later, in Dumitru Berciu's work entitled *Prehistoric Archaeology of Oltenia*, it is stated that the discoveries from Cleanov belong to the Dudești culture<sup>15</sup>.

During the twentieth century, the scientific research in Romania experienced a permanent evolution, which allowed the transformation of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal, from a quarterly publication, into an annual one, starting with the first issue of the new series, published in 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Berciu 1933, pp. 74–82; Berciu 1937b, p. 305–314.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1923, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1924, p. 247.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1925, p. 164–168.

<sup>9</sup> Breuil 1924, p. 551–552; Breuil 1926, p. 132–133.

<sup>10</sup> Laugier 1926, p. 427–429.

<sup>11</sup> Berciu 1939, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Berciu 1939, p. 18–34.

<sup>13</sup> Berciu 1937a, p. 314–322.

<sup>14</sup> Berciu 1939, p. 3–241.

<sup>15</sup> Berciu 1939, p. 8.

As far as the neo-Eneolithic is concerned, the archaeological research in Oltenia has developed permanently throughout the 20th century, by completing the cultural-chronological scheme with new cultures unknown until then and bringing clarifications to those already known. The results of these researches were hosted in *Arhivele Olteniei* journal. This was a publication that, at an initial stage, had a circulation of six issues per month, and then three issues, and here we are talking about the old series so that the new series, published since 1981, has an annual circulation. Archaeological research continued during the period when the journal was not published. Among the new cultures, unknown until then, there can be mentioned those of the early Neolithic, more precisely the culture named by its discoverer, Marin Nica, after the settlement near the city of Craiova, Cârcea, with its Cârcea-Grădinile group<sup>16</sup>. Part of this research, the result of the work, mainly of the archaeologist Marin Nica, was capitalized from the first issues of the new series of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal. Thus, Marin Nica publishes, in the first issue of the new series, in 1981, the results of the archaeological research from the early Neolithic settlement from Grădinile, Olt County<sup>17</sup>. It is very important that the first four issues of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal host studies about the early Neolithic of Oltenia. Thus, the settlement from Grădinile was discovered in 1976–1977 by researcher Marin Nica, during some periegeses carried out in the area. During the archaeological rescue excavations, carried out between 1977 and 1979, several housing complexes were discovered, of which we mention six dwellings and six pits (**pl. 3**). They can be stratigraphically classified to the early Neolithic, more precisely to the Cârcea and Starčevo-Criș cultures. In addition to these, some early medieval complexes were discovered<sup>18</sup>.

The research at the site of Grădinile, Olt County, has resulted in the discovery of a large quantity of ceramics and stone tools in relatively clear contexts of wooden objects, even wooden vessels. A fragmentary wooden vessel, a whole one (**pl. 4**), and a bracelet, were discovered in 1981<sup>19</sup>.

If the first two issues of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal deal with aspects regarding the early Neolithic from the settlement of Grădinile, in Olt County, in the next issue (the one from 1984), it is addressed the issue of cultural evolution in the settlement of Cârcea *Viaduct*, located in Dolj County, where over 200 archaeological complexes were discovered, demonstrating an evolution based on clear stratigraphic data, from the early Neolithic, represented by the Cârcea culture (**pl. 5**) to the developed one, represented by the Vinča-Dudești cultural aspect. Here, it was observed a Dudești hut, which overlapped, without caesura, a dwelling belonging to the Cârcea culture<sup>20</sup>.

In collaboration with researcher Elisabeth Dinan, Marin Nica would conduct a series of surveys in the early Neolithic settlements of Cârcea and Vlădilla. On this occasion, a batch of 217 lithic pieces were discovered and subsequently analysed. The results of these investigations were published in issue 10 of the new series of *Arhivele Olteniei*<sup>21</sup>.

The next two issues of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal, referring to those of 1997 and 1998, hosted the studies of archaeologist Marin Nica, conducted in collaboration with researcher Corneliu Beldiman. In the pages of volume 12 of 1997, the two authors published a study on different types of agricultural tools, discovered in several resorts of the early Neolithic in Oltenia such as: Râureni, in Vâlcea County, and Cârcea, in Dolj County. Analogies were made over wide spaces, from the Near East to Greece<sup>22</sup>.

If, in issue 10 of the journal, Marin Nica addresses the situation of lithic pieces, in issue 13 of 1998 he focuses, in an article also written in collaboration with researcher Corneliu Beldiman, on

<sup>16</sup> Nica 1976, p. 435–463.

<sup>17</sup> Nica 1981, pp. 27–39.

<sup>18</sup> Nica 1981, p. 27–39.

<sup>19</sup> Nica 1983, p. 39–48.

<sup>20</sup> Nica 1984, p. 37–45, fig.1.

<sup>21</sup> Dinan, Nica 1995, p. 3–12.

<sup>22</sup> Nica, Beldiman 1997, p. 5–12.

pieces of osseous materials industry type, that is, made of bone. The study focuses on the analysis of a piece from the mentioned category, discovered during systematic research carried out in 1971, in the early Neolithic settlement of Cârcea *Hanuri*. It seems that it belonged to the earliest level of settlement<sup>23</sup>.

The results of research from another settlement of the early Neolithic, that of Locusteni, Dolj County, also undertaken by Marin Nica, were capitalized in issue 14 of *Arhivele Olteniei* journal, published in 1999. Thus, between 1968 and 1978, the mentioned researcher carried out a series of systematic excavations in the Locusteni settlement, on which occasion several housing complexes were discovered, among which we mention two ceramic pits and a semi-buried dwelling. A stratigraphy of the settlement was established: Starčevo-Criș, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Dacian-Roman necropolis<sup>24</sup>.

Last but not least, two relatively recent contributions regarding the early Neolithic in Oltenia were made by Marin Nica in collaboration with Livian Rădoescu. Thus, the two authors approach, in issue 16 of 2002, the problems of the settlements and dwellings discovered on the territory of Oltenia, mainly those discovered in settlements of the early Neolithic. There were analysed how the first Neolithic villages were formed in the mentioned area, the typology of dwellings and their evolution during the mentioned period<sup>25</sup>. Unlike the previous issue, in issue 17 of the new series, Marin Nica and Livian Rădoescu analysed the cultural group Cârcea-Grădinile from the perspective of its cultural and chronological connections. Thus, some observations were made about its epipaleolithic traditions, various cultural and chronological links with Karanovo civilization, Starčevo-Criș culture, Macedonian Thessalo-Macedonian area, Dimini culture, Dudești culture, Anatolian space and Near East<sup>26</sup>.

No less important are the capitalization of older investigations, or even the compilation of syntheses on various issues. One of them belongs to Eugen Comșa, and includes an analysis on a number of 27 Neolithic dwellings discovered in Oltenia. Among them, there are mentioned the houses from *La Islaz* Grădinile, Cârcea *Hanuri*, Verbița etc. Generally, these are deepened dwellings, and can be framed to the Starčevo-Criș level of the mentioned settlements. Due to objective conditions, data on early Neolithic dwellings are very sketchy<sup>27</sup>.

In conclusion, it can be said that *Arhivele Olteniei* journal had an encyclopaedic character and that it has preserved the academic format throughout its evolution, hosting, within its pages, the research undertaken in the Neolithic settlements in our area, Oltenia.

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<sup>23</sup> Nica, Beldiman 1998, p. 3–5.

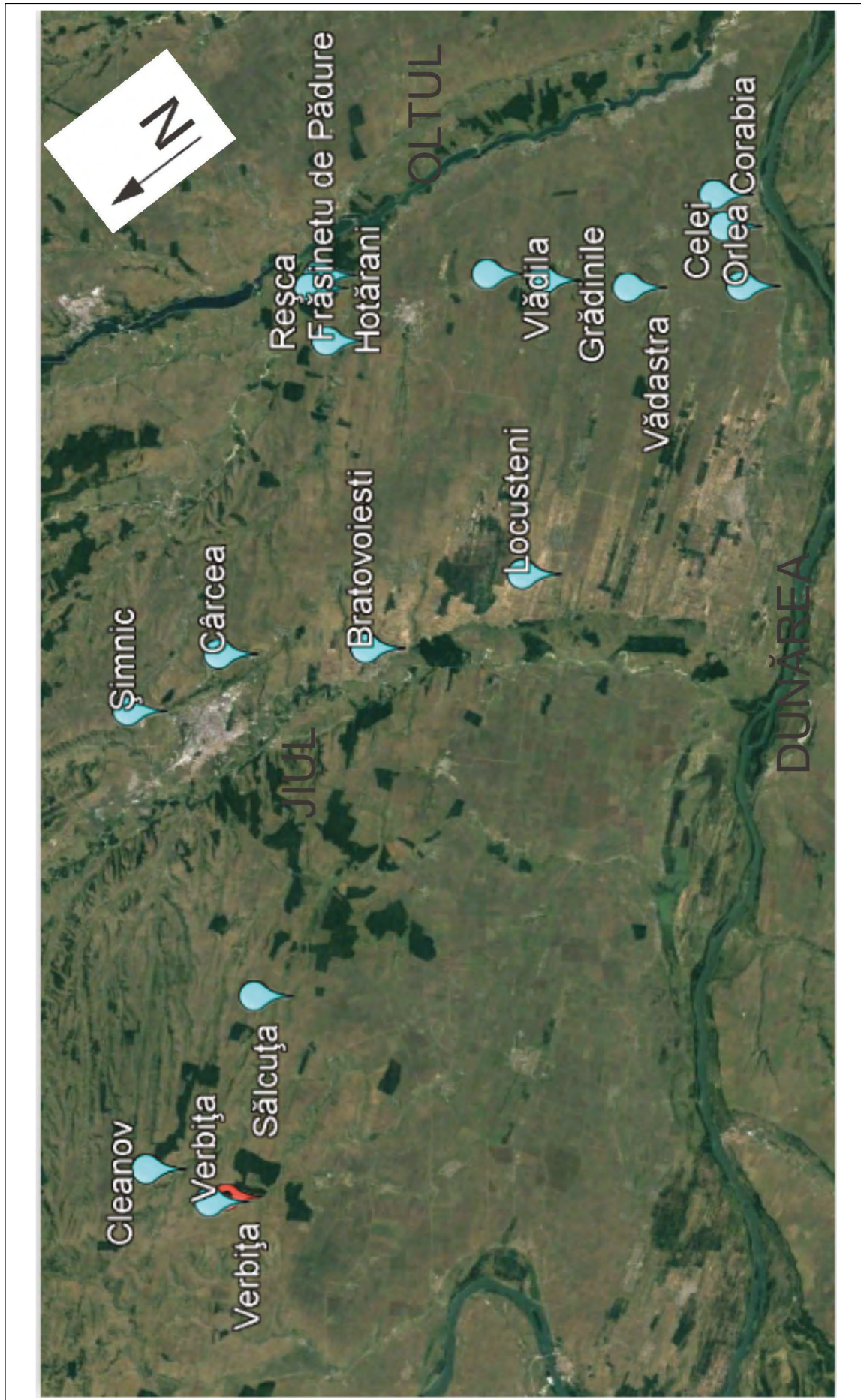
<sup>24</sup> Nica 1999, p. 3–18.

<sup>25</sup> Nica, Rădoescu 2002, p. 7–26.

<sup>26</sup> Nica, Rădoescu 2003, p. 7–24.

<sup>27</sup> Comșa 1985, p. 24–26.

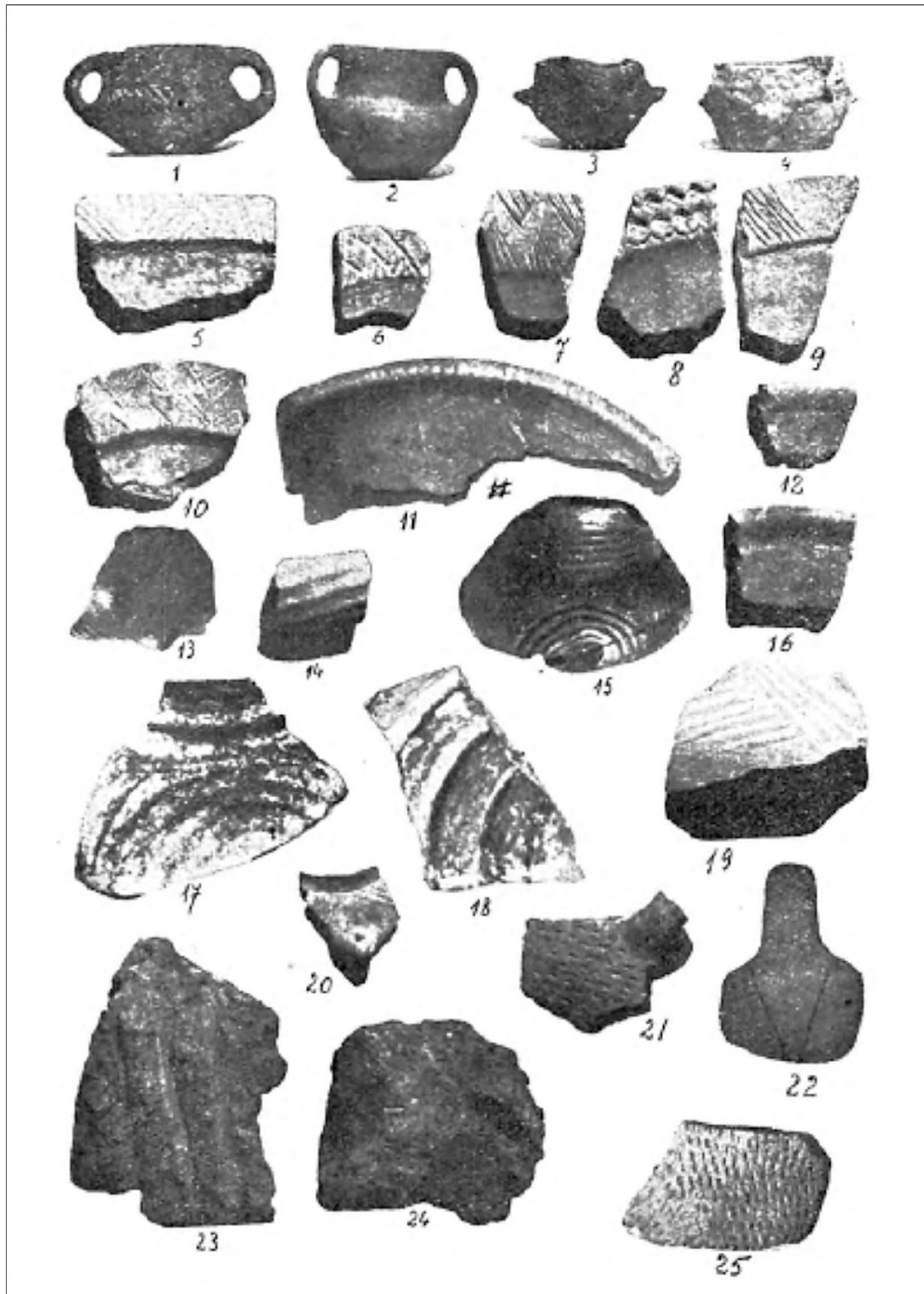
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Map 1. The localities mentioned in the text.

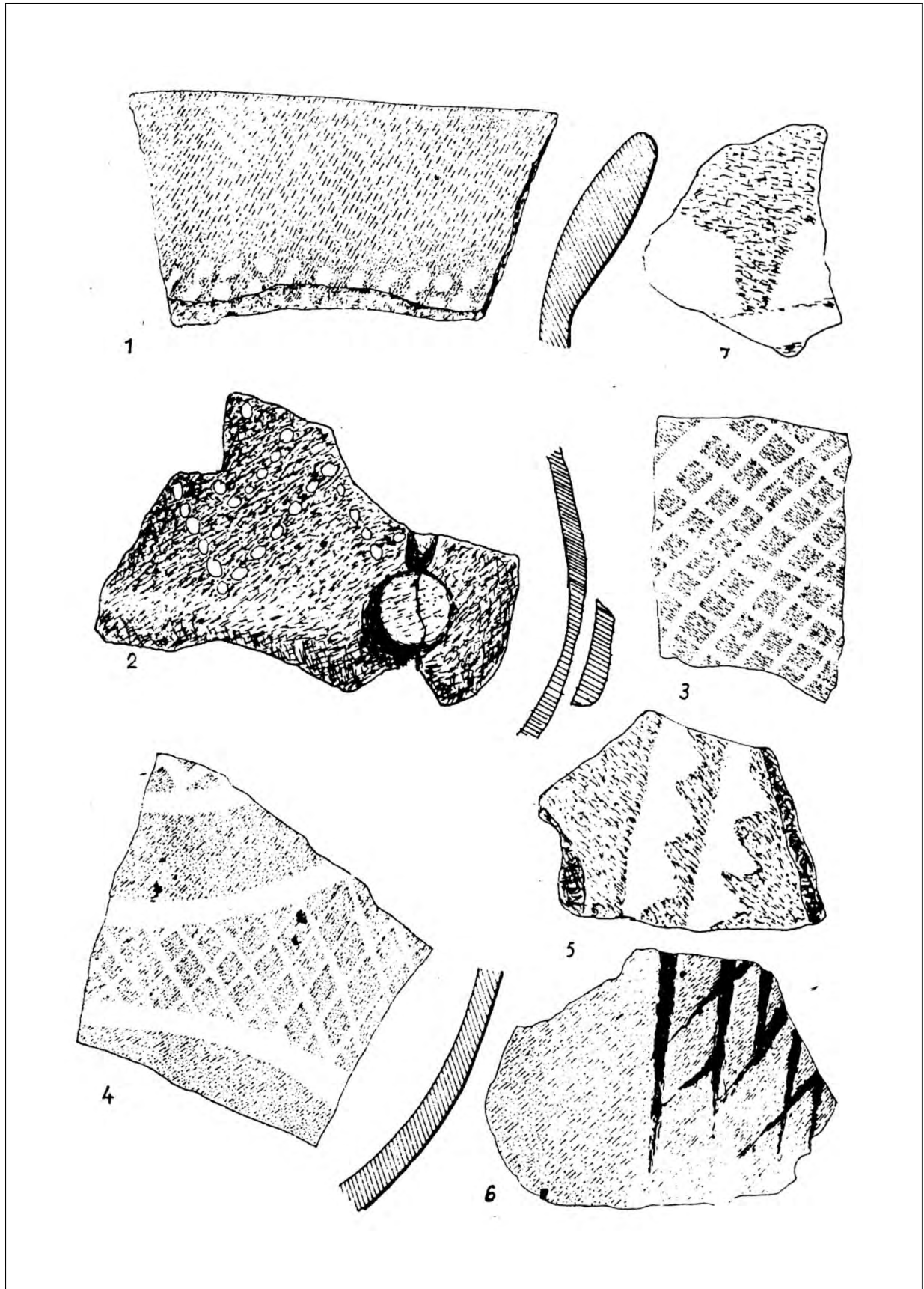


Pl. 1. Vădastra culture. Stratigraphic sounding from 1934: 1-6. Vădastra II forms and décor (according to Berciu 1939, fig. 41/3, 6; 40/1-3, 39; no scale).

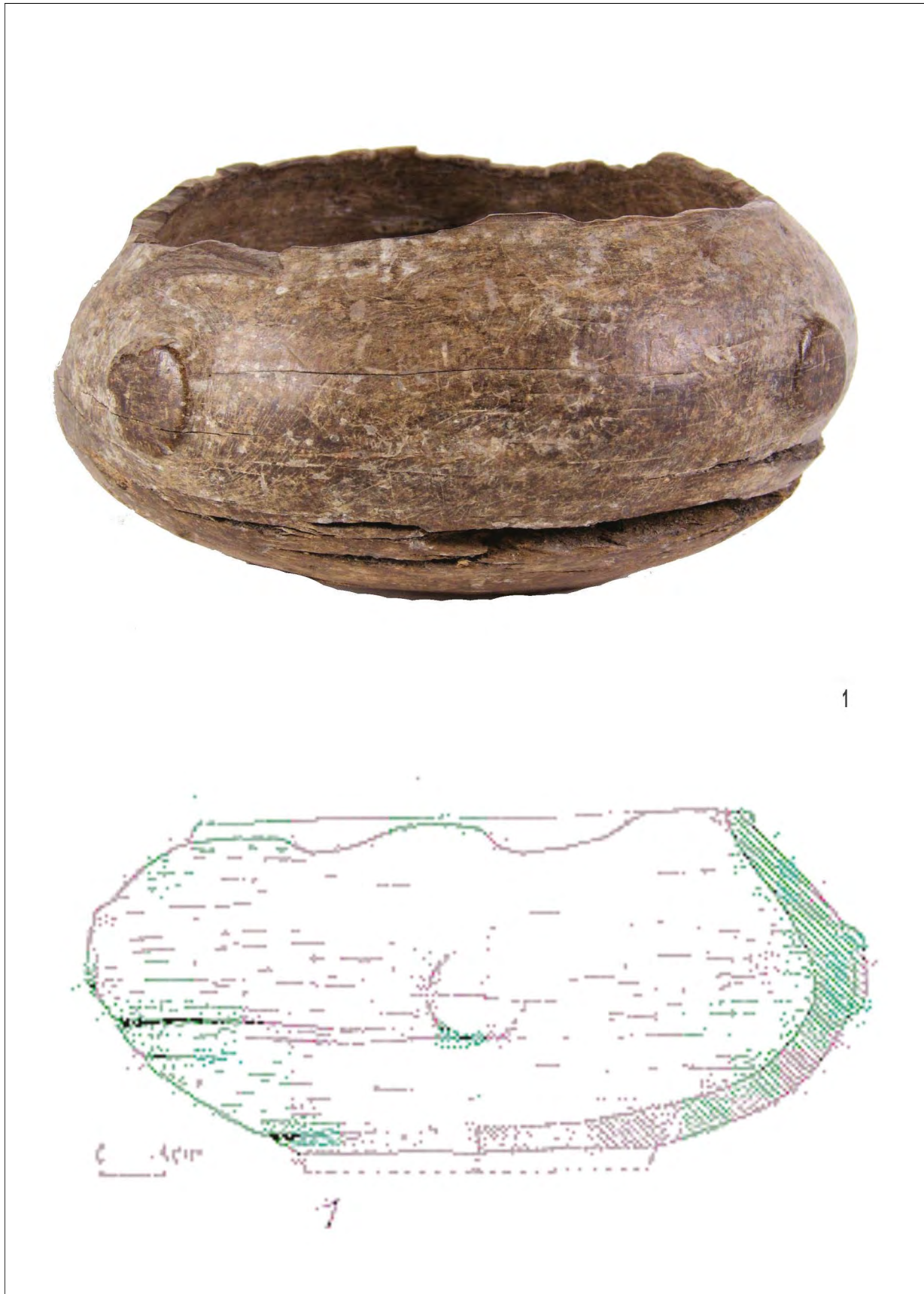


Pl. 2. Sălcuța culture. Vessels of different shapes and dimensions (according to Berciu 1939, fig. 49, no scale).

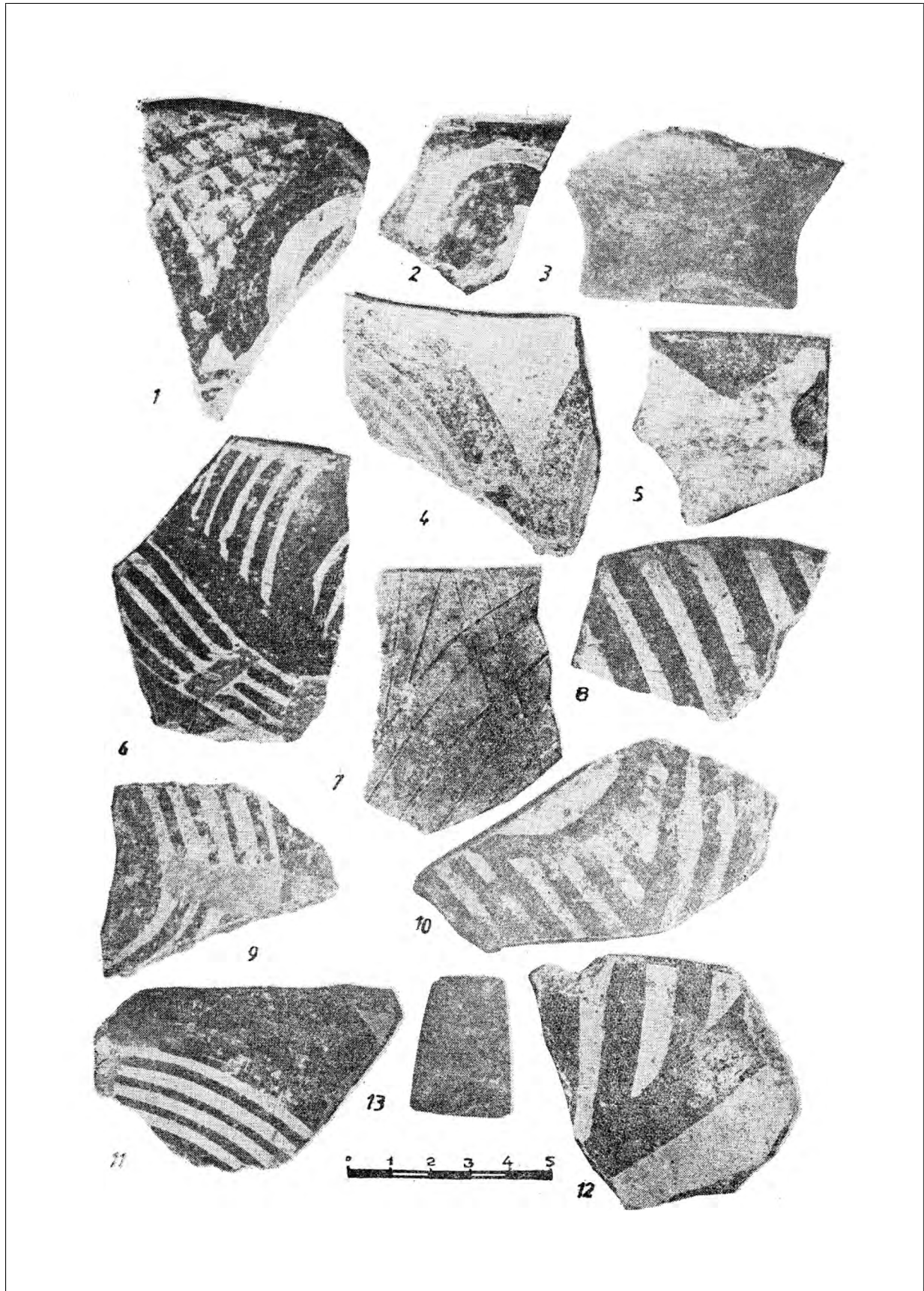




Pl. 3. Grădinile-*La Islaz*. Painted ceramics belonging to Cârcea-Grădinile cultural group (according to Nica, fig. 3, no scale).



Pl. 4. Grădinile-*La Islaz*. 1: Wooden vessel (drawing: acc. to Nica 1983, fig. 4, photo, no scale, from the Oltenia Museum collections, Switzerland Exhibit).



Pl. 5. Cârcea-Viaduct, 1-6, 8, 9-12. Painted ceramics belonging to Căcea-Grădinile cultural group, 7, small chisel (according to Nica, fig. 4).

