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OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN PATRIMONY IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

# ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS

VII

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FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PATRIMONY  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND VALORIFICATION OF THE  
TRANSYLVANIAN PATRIMONY IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

# **ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

## **VII**

**Proceedings of the  
International Colloquium:**

**The Carpathian Basin and its Role  
in the Neolithisation of the Balkan Peninsula**

Editor: Sabin Adrian LUCA

**Sibiu, 2008**

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TELEORMAN VALLEY.  
THE BEGINNING OF THE NEOLITHIC IN SOUTHERN ROMANIA

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**Key words:** *early Neolithic, Teleorman Valley, diffusion, white painted pottery.*

**Abstract.** *This article presents the recent archaeological researches in Teleorman Valley, focused on the Early Neolithic habitation. For first time in Muntenia the recent researches have attested traces of a habitation belonging to the Early Neolithic. Chronologically these discoveries are synchronous with discoveries from the West side of the Olt Valley from Cârcea and Grădinile.*

This paper provides data analysis about the beginning of the Neolithic in Southern Romania, focused the recent archaeological researches in Teleorman Valley.

In 1865, J. Lubbock used the "Neolithic" term by giving it a technical meaning to distinguish the Paleolithic (the chopped Stone Age) from the Neolithic (the polished Stone Age). In time, the Neolithic became an age of deep changes in human society. A new way of life appeared, the main characteristics of which represented the basis for all future societies: agriculture, crafts, permanent settlements, architecture and spiritual life.

From the archaeological point of view, this period, placed at the beginning of the Neolithic, bore different names: Proto-Sesklo, Protostarčevo, Precriș (Paul 1989, Ciută 2005), Starčevo-Criș I (Lazarovici 1984), or more specifically, the cultural group Gura-Baciului-Cârcea (Dumitrescu 1974; Vlassa 1980), Cârcea-Grădinile (Nica 1991, 1995). Every culture, every cultural group was divided in phases, sub-phases, and periods within a complex network of chronological synchrony.

The new way of life was first attested in Oltenia region, Southern Romania. The research carried out by M. Nica in the '70s and '80s revealed an area heavily inhabited at the beginning of the Neolithic (Nica 1976, 1981). The Neolithic had been brought from the South, more precisely, from Thessaly, from the Protosesklo culture area, by a population that had followed the Struma-Isker Valleys up the Danube, from where they had got in Oltenia through Jiu and Olt Valleys (Nica 1995: 11-28).

The researches from Cârcea and Grădinile revealed the first Early Neolithic settlements on the west side of the Olt River. Later, their list would be completed by other discoveries to Verbița, Vlădila, Șimnic, Studina and Banu Măracine. The author, M. Nica named those discoveries "the Cârcea cultural group", with two

variants, Cârcea, in the lower basin of the Jiu River and Grădinile in the basin of the Olt River (Nica 1991, 1995).

Cârcea “La Hanuri” (Coșoveni commune, 9 km South-East from Craiova) is placed at the border between the upper and lower Jiu River terrace, on both sides of the Cârcea River (Figure 1/2). The site was destroyed, on a surface about 30x30 m having been discovered 9 Neolithic complexes. The Neolithic level had a thickness of 50-70 cm. The Neolithic features are represented by pit-huts or agglomerations of potsherds and bones, “which might be considered as being remains of surface huts”. According to the ceramic typology, M. Nica identified three levels. The vessels were painted in white on a red background, but also they had cherry or brown colors on orange background. The decorative motifs were represented by dots, lines, networks, triangles, spirals. The ceramics was also decorated with incisions and impressions. The painted ceramics is extremely scarce (0.15% in level III) (Nica 1976).

Grădinile “La Islaz” site is placed at the basis of the little river that flows through Grădinile commune, 20 km South of Caracal town and about 15 km west from the Olt Valley (Figure 1/2). At Grădinile there have been discovered a few complexes, both pits and dwellings, in a cultural level of 40-50 cm thickness. The dwellings consist of agglomerations of potsherds, bones, stones, building material and hearth remains. The painting is white on a red background or red or black on a light background. The motifs are similar those from Cârcea, such as dots, lines, networks and triangles. There are also decorated potsherds with impressions and incisions. Fragments of small altar tables, decorated with excised triangles, incisions and applications they are present too. The typology includes semi-spherical, curved and conical shapes with annular or lobed small pedestal base, and vessels with high, outwardly tilted rims (Nica 1981).

For a long time, Muntenia (Vallachia) had been considered out of the initial Neolithic starting process, the reasons for which having been the configuration of the ancient environment, the Black Sea Neolithic transgression for Dobrogea and South-Western Muntenia or, more probably, the lack of researches. The settlements belonging to Starčevo-Criș culture appeared later in the area between the Olt and Vedea Rivers, as well as in the area of the Carpathian Hills (Teodorescu 1963). The 30 sites belong to the Early Neolithic, but not to the earliest (Cârcea-Grădinile), this one being absents so far from the territories East of the Olt River. The discoveries revaluation together with the new discoveries revealed a new image of the Early Neolithic in Muntenia (Mirea 2005).

The recent researches from the Teleorman Valley brought useful information about the beginnings of the Neolithic in Southern Romania. Those researches were undertaken within Southern Romania Archaeological Project (SRAP), an agreement between the National History Museum, the Teleorman County Museum and Cardiff University (Bailey et al. 1999, 2001) (the project has been founded by the *British Academy*, the *Society of Antiquaries of London*, the *Cardiff University*, the *Romanian Ministry of Culture* and the *Teleorman County Council* and has been directed by Dr. Douglass W. Bailey, Head of *Cardiff Archaeology*, *Cardiff*

University and Dr. Radian R. Andreescu, researcher with the *National History Museum*, Bucharest). One of the most important researched sites of this project is Măgura-Buduiasca (Figure 1/1). The site, discovered in 2001, is placed on the lower, North-Western terrace of the Teleorman River, near Alexandria town, about 60 km east from the Olt River, and about 45 km north from the Danube River. The research objective is the Neolithic habitation, belonging both to the Early Neolithic (Starčevo-Criș culture) and to the Late Neolithic (Dudești and Vădastra cultures) (Andreescu, Bailey 2002, 2004, 2005).

Recent researches attested, first time in Muntenia, traces of a habitation belonging to the Early Neolithic, chronologically synchronous with discoveries from the West side of the Olt Valley from Cârcea and Grădinile. The researched area, situated about 300 m from the actual river flow, looks like a prominence on the secondary Eastern terrace of the Teleorman River (Andreescu et al. 2007).

Few sections had been made on the Eastern side of the site (Figure 2). When archaeological features had been identified, some of the sections were enlarged. One feature is represented by the remains of a surface dwelling (Figure 3). Its dimensions could not be accurately traced because it was strongly affected by modern works. The floor, better preserved on the south side, with a thickness of 2-5 cm, had been made of little fragments of calcareous white-grey soil, directly on the yellow-grey soil, archaeological sterile. A kiln had been identified on the south side, most of which destroyed by medieval and modern pits.

The archaeological materials, like the assembly of potsherds, animal bones and stones, were massed on the north side, not directly on the floor, but about 20-30 cm above it. The deposition pattern suggests that the dwelling had been abandoned and later reused as a garbage pit. The degree of fragmentation of ceramic potsherds, the eroded surface showing a long exposure, the presence of animal bones and shells also imply this fact. Some pits of different sizes, oval shapes, are other Neolithic features. They had been used as garbage pits.

The archaeological materials are composed of agglomerations of potsherds, animal bones, shells, stones, bones and flint fragmentary tools, massed in the lower parts of the pits.

The lithic material is composed of a series of tools and flakes, most of which had been made of flint. From flint there had been made: blades, blade fragments, some having luster traces (sickle blades), and scrapers, all in a various chromatic scale: yellow-grey, white-grey, grey, brown, black-brown (Figure 4). There are also three pieces of black obsidian, two blades and a scraper. There had been found isolated pieces of quartz and quartzite.

The bone tools are represented by awls, needles, small chisels, spatulas and lutes (Figure 5).

In general, the pottery is characterized by the presence of a reduced number of vessels or complete forms. The closed forms are represented by spherical vessels, prominent in the lower part, with a square or annular bottom, of different sizes. Usually the fine category has a polished surface, in nuances of red and brownish-red (Figure 6), but also in black, black-brownish, beige or grey.

There are also fragments that come from bigger-sized vessels, meant for goods storage, which belong both to the undecorated, coarse category and to the fine one, having the surface painted in the above-mentioned chromatic nuances (Figure 7/1, 2).

The opened forms are illustrated by bowls with straight, alveolate lips. The ceramic is coarse, with a rough exterior surface, but polished and painted on the interior (Figure 7/3, 5, 6).

Quite rarely present, the decoration is made by plastic applications, vertically perforated buttons, alveolate girdles and prominences (Figure 7/4, 8/1, 2). Incised decoration can rarely be found, as well as the decoration made by impressions (Figure 8/5, 6).

The ceramics painted in white appears in a low percent, about 1%. The background color is obtained by burning or by painting. The decorative motifs are: parallel lines, lines disposed in networks or zigzags, semi-circles and points. The same white painting is to be found in every complex (Figure 9/1-9; Figure 10).

The pottery fabric analysis shows that the main mineral inclusion is the quartz in clear and milky varieties. There are, also, feldspar, iron oxide siltstone, calcareous siltstone and pyroxene (van As, Jacobs 2006).

It is interesting point out that, after the analyses on the technology of pottery fabric, analyses done on lots belonging to Măgura settlement and which also belong to the entire Neolithic sequence in the area (Starčevo-Criș, Dudești, Vădastra), we have found out a technological continuity along the time, changes having been done only with respect to the shape and the decor of the vessels (van As, Jacobs, Thissen 2004: 126; 2005: 67; van As, Jacobs 2006). Moreover, the analysis of Boian and Gumelnita ceramic sets, taken out from closely nearby settlements has proved that there are mostly the same technological elements. (van As, Jacobs, Thissen 2006: 146). In fact, the analysis of some samples (thins sections) belonging to early Neolithic Romanian settlements (Banat and Transylvania) and also from Serbia (Voivodina and Slavonia) proved that the potters manufactured the ceramics using the same "recipe": non-calcareous clay, which contains alluvial sand, with various inclusions (quartz, moscovite mica, polycrystalline quartz, feldspar, plagioclase, pyroxene) and organic material (cereals chaff). Despite the typological diversity the pottery is homogeneous (Biagi et al. 2005: 45).

A fragment of a wooden, open-shaped vessel represents a special discovery, considering the perishable material of which it was made. It is a rim fragment from an open vessel, probably a bowl (Figure 9/10).

There have also been identified fragments from rectangular "altars", with four legs, some decorated with "wolf tooth" and white filled (Figure 11/8), and others decorated with lines and incised points.

The anthropomorphic plastic art is illustrated by some fragments from different figurines (Figure 11/1-3). The head of a figurine can be noticed, with an oval shape and with medially prominent nose, while a conical prominence suggests the chin (Figure 11/1) (Andreescu, in press).



The zoomorphic plastic art is represented by some pieces, such as: a bovine figurine, almost completely preserved, another fragment of a bovine figurine of a bigger size, and an ovine head very realistically modeled (Figure 11/4, 5).

A clay labret - bucrania or zoomorphic amulet - (Figure 11/6) and a clay nail (Figure 11/7) are the indicators for this very early Neolithic horizon (Elenski 2004b).

The early Neolithic discoveries from Măgura can be inserted into a larger context of the similar discoveries from the Lower Danube. On the basis of the discovered materials, their might be connections between the lower basin of the Olt River and the basins of the Iantra and Rusenski Lom Rivers.

The researches developed, during the last decade and a half, in the north-central Bulgaria created a different image about the early Neolithic, as well as about its origin in this part of Europe. There is one hypothesis that suggested the Anatolian origin, get across through Marica Valley and Polyanyitsa Plain in the east side of the Balkans (Elenski 2004a: 71). This hypothesis contradicts the traditional one, meaning the Central-Balkan variant, which explain that the Neolithic populations, having come from Thessaly, followed the valleys of the Struma and Isker towards the North and, then, along the Danube, following its streams, reached the East, up to the Rusenski Lom basin (Figure 1/2). The penetration had been a rapid and strong one, across a large geographical area and the early settlements (belonging to the so-called Monochrome phase), even if singular and isolated, strikingly possess the same ceramics, similar from the technological and typological viewpoint (Todorova 1995: 83). In fact, the hypothesis of an extremely rapid diffusion of the Neolithic in the Central Balkans area, where the hydrographic network had played an important role, has been reiterated by recent series of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates, but also on the basis of the pottery fabric, of the presence of some specific objects: stamp seals, labrets and bone spatulas (Biagi et al. 2005: 45). Therefore we could explain, at least as a working hypothesis, according with the present stage of the researches, the early Neolithic discoveries in Măgura. Further researches, associated with multi-disciplinary studies and a series of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates, might offer new information about the beginning of the Neolithic in this part of Southern Romania.



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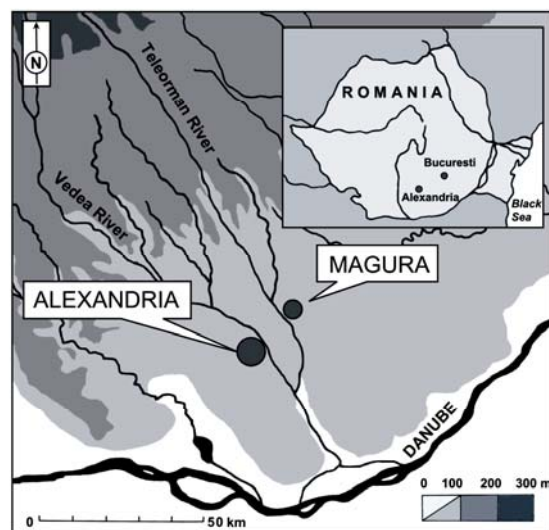
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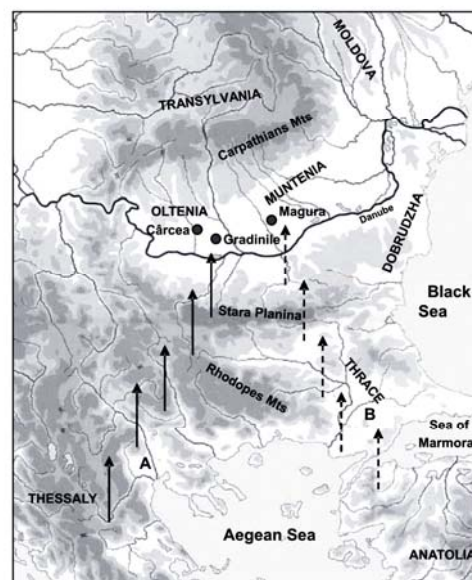
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1



2

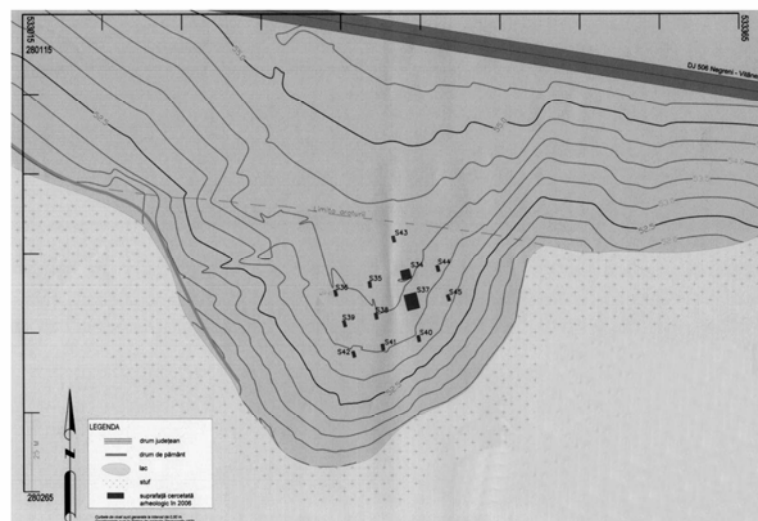
Location of Măgura settlement (1).  
The virtual ways of early neolithic communities penetration towards the Danube area (2).

Figure 1





1



2

Măgura settlement. South-east side (1). General plan of excavation from 2006 (2).

Figure 2





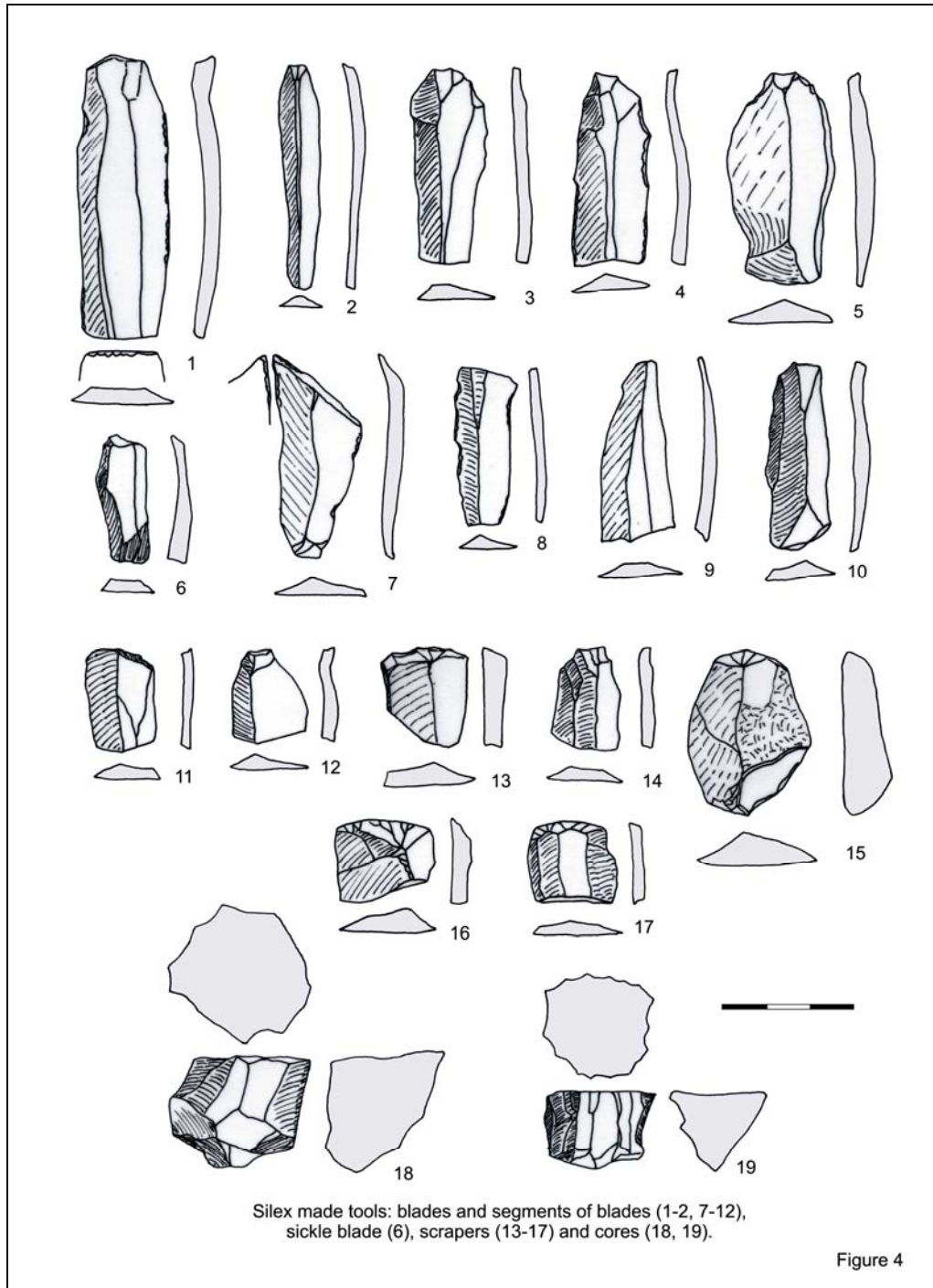
1



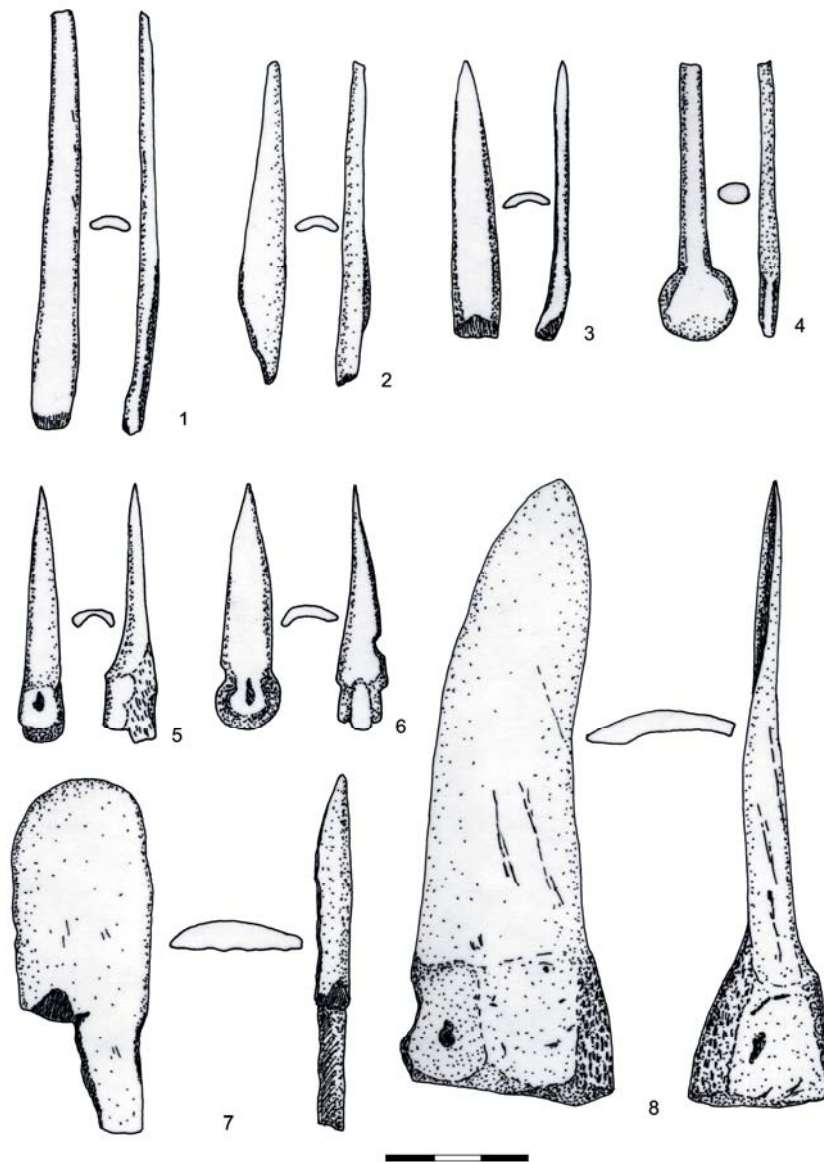
2

The remains of a surface house (1). Details with broken pots „in situ” (2).

Figure 3

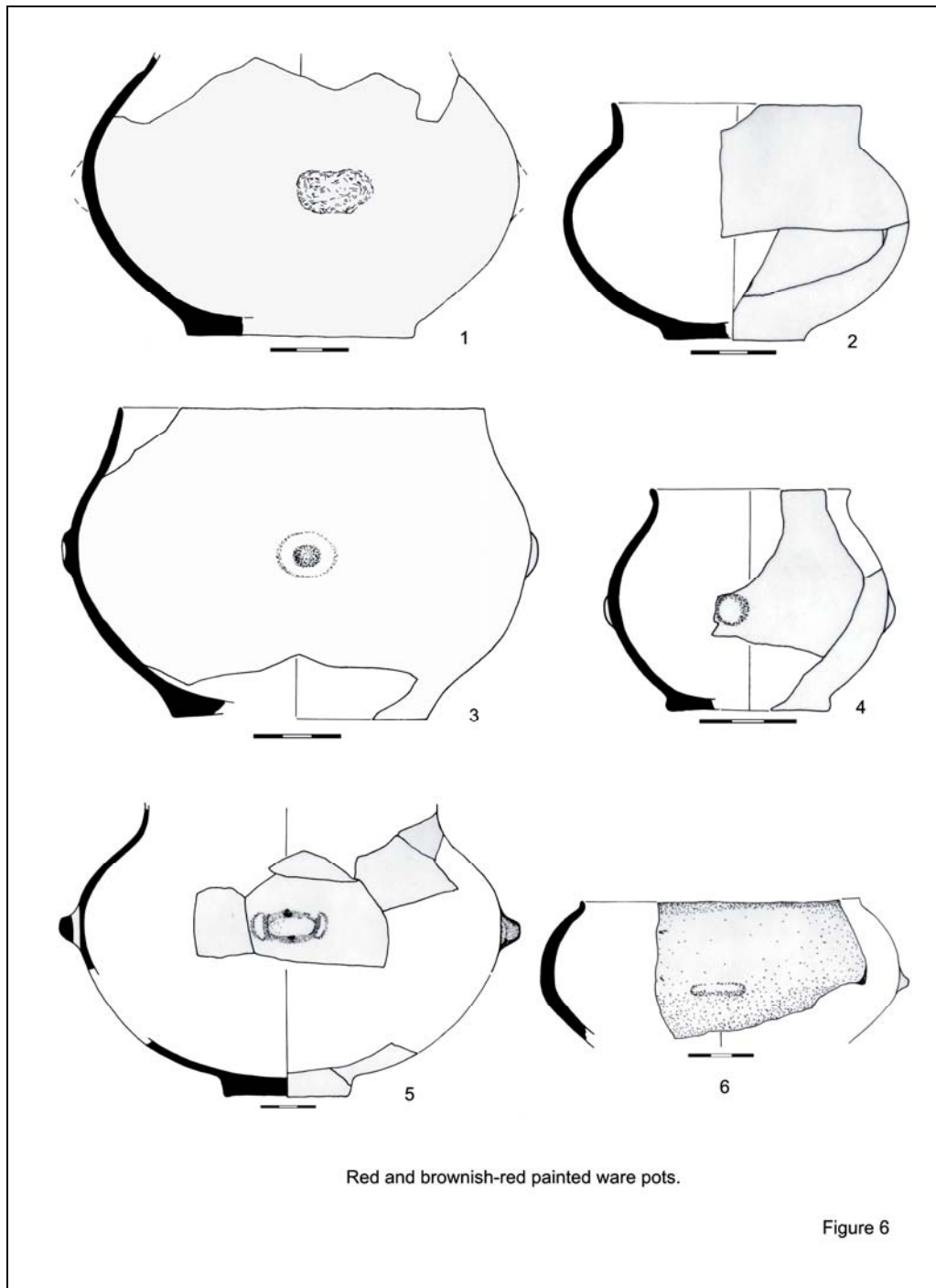




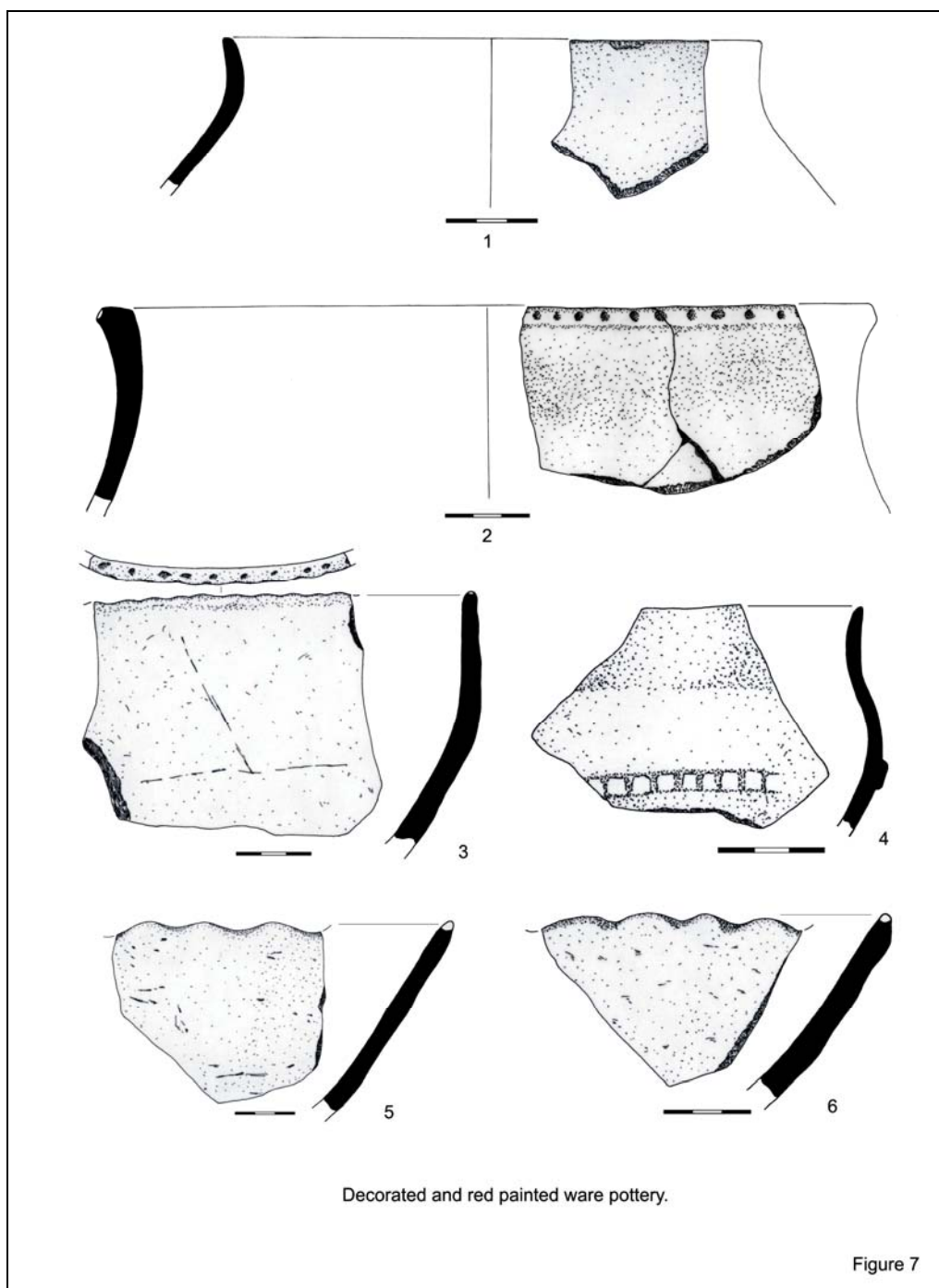


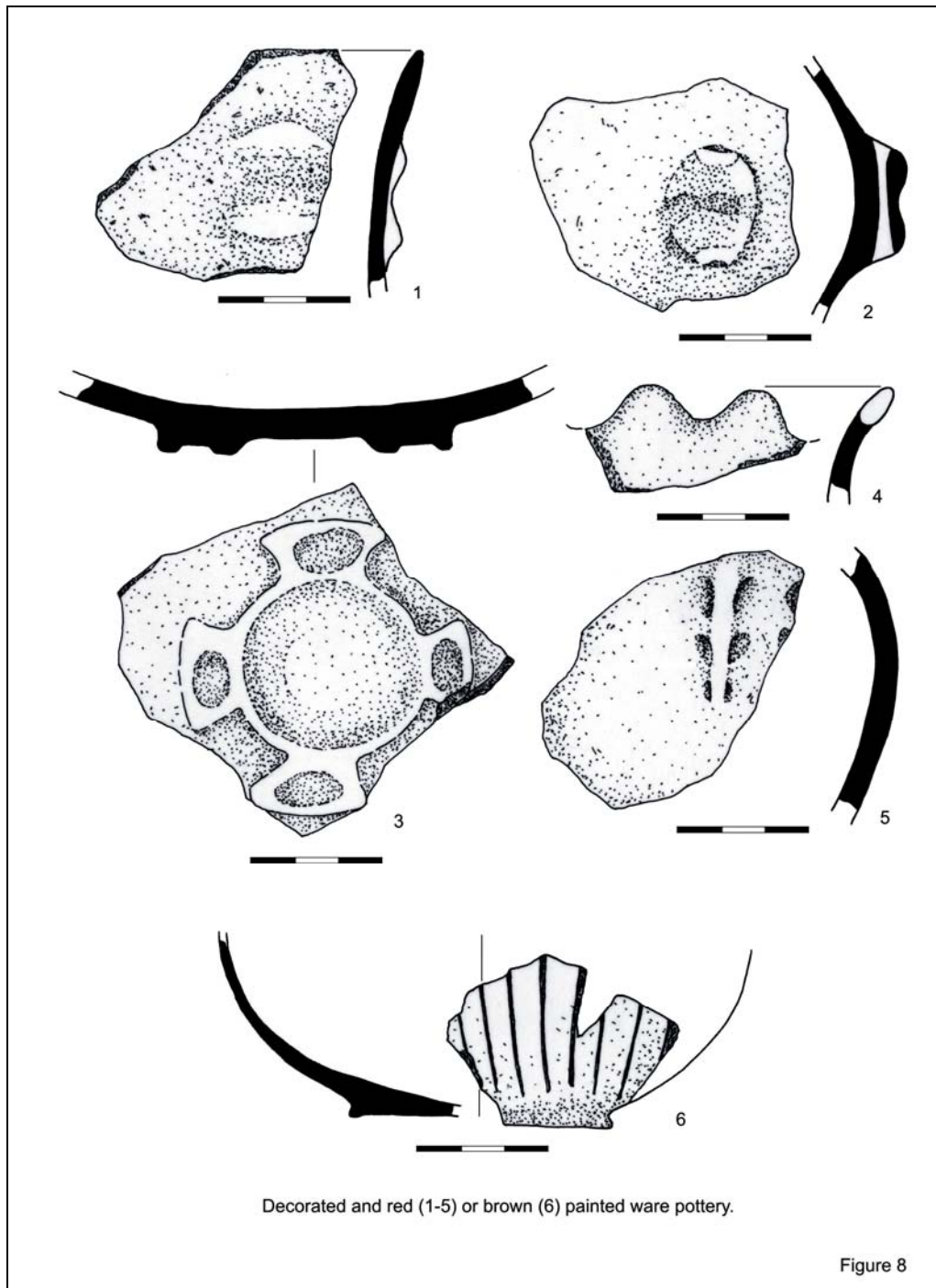
Bone made tools: pricks (1-3, 5, 6), needle (4), small chisel (7) and lute (8)

Figure 5

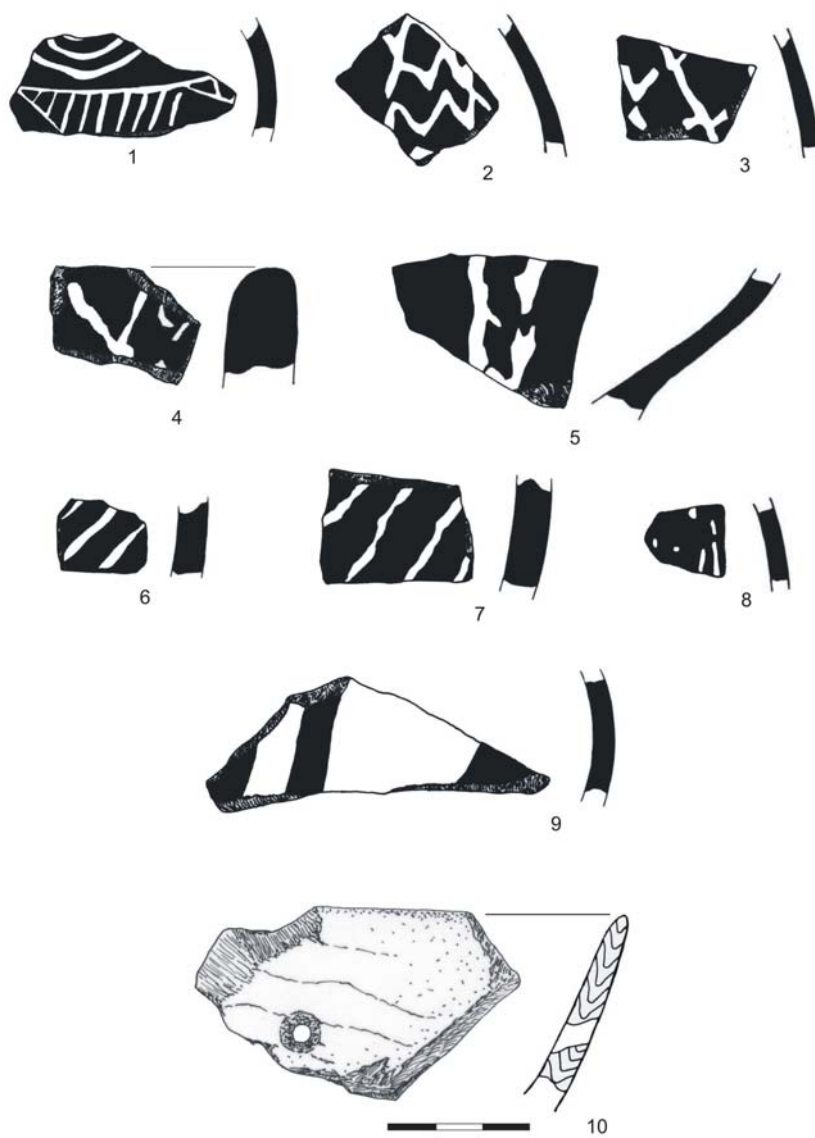






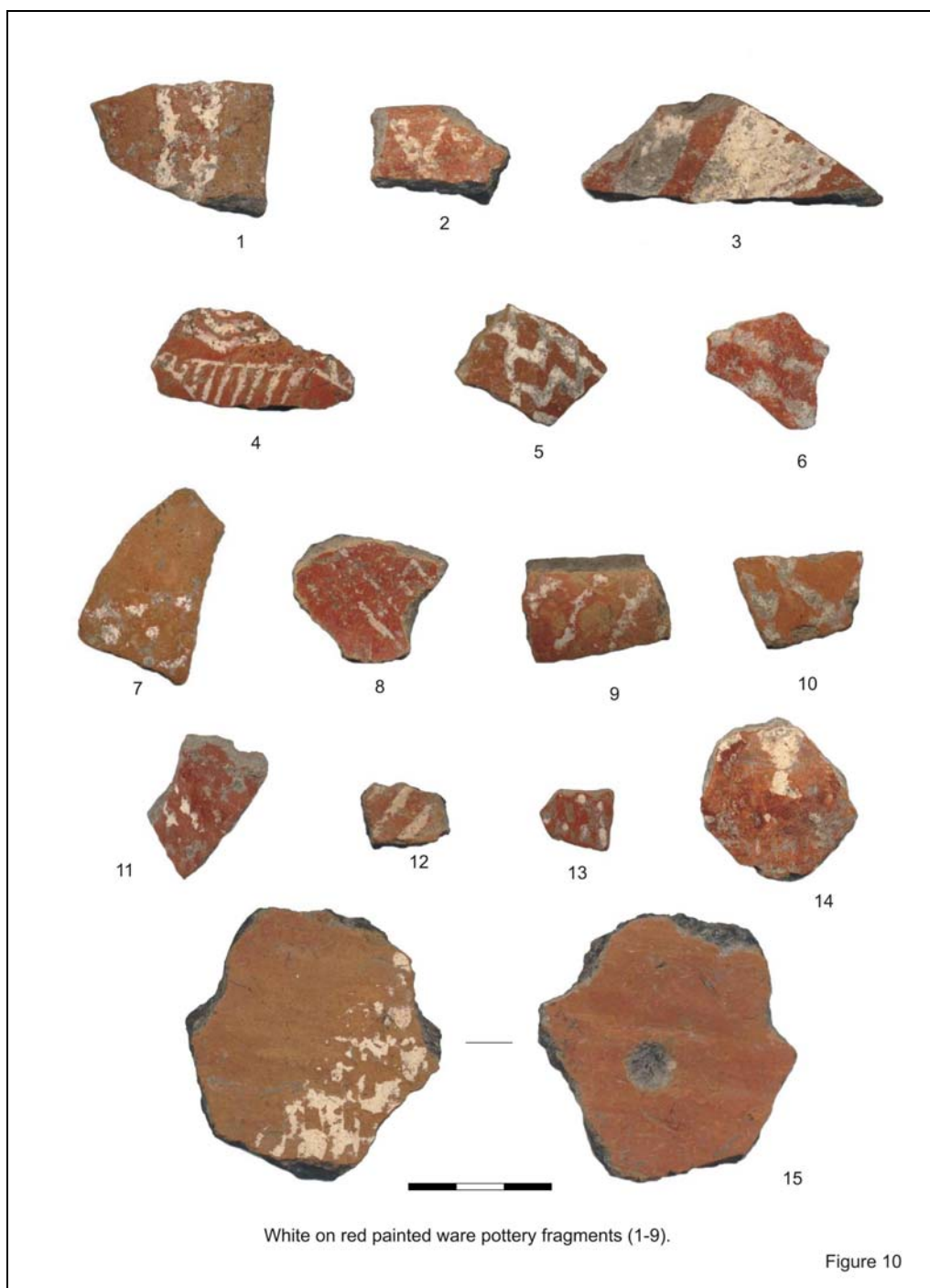




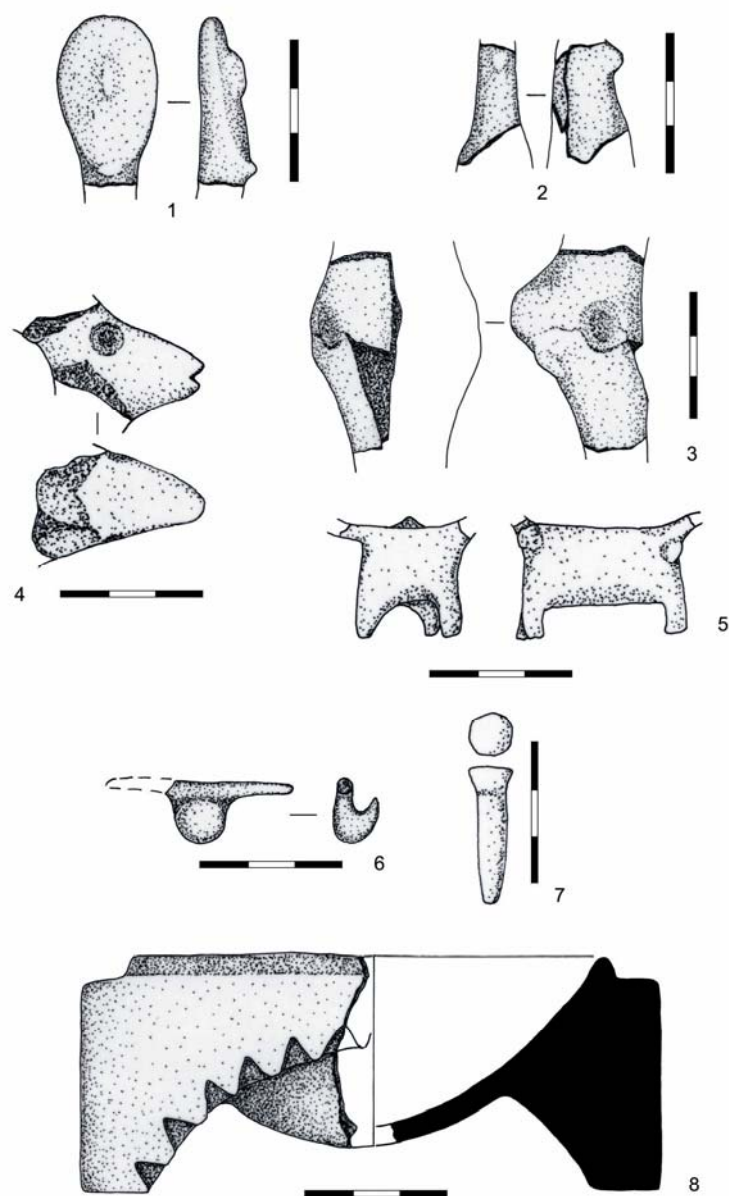


White on red painted ware pottery fragments (1-9). Wooden made pot fragment (10).

Figure 9







Antropomorphic figurines fragments (1-3). Zoomorphic figurines fragments (4, 5).  
Clay made „labret” or „bucrania” (6) and „nail” (7). Altar fragment (8).

Figure 11