



The Early Iron Age pottery assemblage from site 1/1000 at the foot of Vrashka Chuka, northwest Bulgaria

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ABSTRACT

In the course of rescue archaeological excavations of site 1/1000 at Baba Velika locality, located at the foot of Vrashka chuka in Northwest Bulgaria, the remains of an Early Iron Age site were encountered. This paper is focused on the pottery assemblage found during the rescue archaeological excavations at Vrashka chuka. The study presents the main characteristic of the Early Iron Age pottery found in the features and the general characteristics of the pottery found in the Early Iron Age cultural layer. It also discusses the recognizable shapes and decorative motifs and points out synchronous parallels. The study of the pottery assemblage from Vrashka chuka provided us with the opportunity to shed a new light on the development of the Early Iron Age in Northwest Bulgaria, and especially the district of the modern city of Vidin. The intensive archaeological excavations in recent years have opened a new page in the studies of the Early Iron Age in this part of Bulgaria, which so far was not studied in details.

KEYWORDS

Early Iron Age; pottery; Gornea-Kalakača; Bosut; Basarabi; Vrashka chuka

Introduction

Far over the misty mountains cold

J. R. R. Tolkien

Site 1/1000¹ is situated in the vicinity of Izvor mahala village, Kula District in Northwest Bulgaria. The site is located at Baba Velika locality at the foot of Vrashka chuka. Vrashka chuka is an isolated mountain in the western part of the West Pre-Balkans at the border between Bulgaria and Serbia (fig. 1). The height consists of Jurassic limestone and has steep slopes. A low saddle (450 m) to the south connects this hill with the mountain Babin nos, and to the north a saddle of the same name Vrashka chuka (367 m) separates it from the flat watershed Bachiyata (Michev et al. 1980, 121–122).

Rescue archaeological excavations along a gas pipeline route were conducted in 2019 by Elena Vasileva. Area of approximately 12 552 m² was explored. Structures from the Middle Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Roman period and Late Medieval period were found (Vasileva, Vasileva 2020, 1284–1289).

¹ Site 1/1000 was registered in 2012 during rescue field surveys conducted by Nadezhda Kecheva and archaeologists from NAIM-BAS and RHM Vidin. AIS AKB number 10001171.



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Fig. 1.1. An overall view to the Vrashka Chuka (photo Z. Vasileva); 2. Aerial photo of site No. 1/1000 at the foot of Vrashka Chuka. View from east (photo M. Anchev)

Обр. 1.1. Общ изглед към Връшка чука (снимка Ж. Василева); 2 Въздушна снимка на обект 1/1000 в подножието на Връшка чука. Поглед от изток (снимка М. Анчев)

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To complete the current state-of-the-art regarding the Early Iron Age (henceforth EIA) pottery repertoire we will discuss the EIA pottery assemblage found during the rescue archaeological excavations at Vrashka chuka. The study will first present the main characteristic of the EIA pottery found in the features, the general characteristics of the pottery found in the EIA cultural layer, followed by a discussion of recognizable shapes, decorative motifs and synchronous parallels.

The main purpose of this paper is to present the pottery assemblage coming from the excavated EIA features. The pottery is heavily fragmented; the surface of some of the sherds is highly washed out due to the local soil characteristic. Nevertheless, based on the stylistic and typological traits of the pottery several important observations can be made.

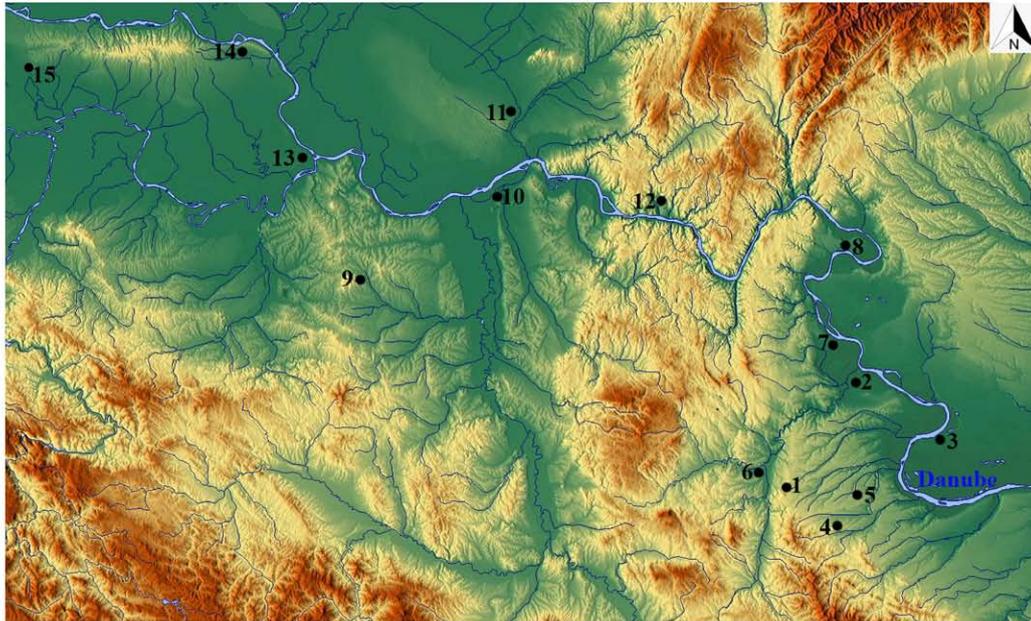
The state of research

The degree to which the EIA in Northwest Bulgaria has been studied so far underplays its significance in comparison to the other present-day Bulgaria regions, for example, north (Hänsel 1976; Antonova, Popov 1984; Shalganova, Gotzev 1995; Stoyanov 1997; Valentinova 2003; 2010; Agre 2008; Dintchev 2018; Stamberova 2020), the southwest region (Gergova 1990; Georgieva 2003; Dintchev 2008; Mihaylov 2005; 2016). The excavations of EIA sites in Thrace, south of the Balkan Mountains have led in the last 30 years to the accumulation of a solid database, especially pottery (Chichikova 1968; Gotzev 1994; Borislavov 1999; Agre 2004; Nekhrizov 2005a; 2008; Popov 2010; Bozhinova 2012; Dimitrova 2014; 2015; Nikov 2016; Nekhrizov, Tzvetkova 2018 with reference). In comparison with the rest of Bulgaria, where archaeological excavations have made possible for a much more detailed insight into its cultural and historical situation, our knowledge for Northwest Bulgaria is based on much less information.

Studies about the end of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the beginning of the EIA in the region of Vidin were launched and carried out first by Rumen Katincharov (NAIM–BAS) and Ana Yotsova (RHM Vidin) and in recent years a great contribution is made by a team from the NAIM–BAS led by Stefan Alexandrov, Tania Hristova, Georgi Ivanov and Nikolai Kazashki from the RHM Vidin. The AMS dates of the graves from the Baley necropolis span between 14th and 11th century cal BC, a period accepted to represent the LBA and the beginning of the EIA in the region (Alexandrov et al. 2013; Alexandrov et al. 2016).

Dwellings from the EIA were excavated in the Magura cave (Belogradchik municipality) located in Northwest Bulgaria. Of special interest is the pottery assemblage from the EIA. The vessels are divided into four main types: bowls, cups, deep vessels and deep thick-walled vessels. The most numerous type is bowls with inverted rim. Most of the bowls were decorated with shallow or deep channels, stamped S^{es} or combination of horizontal lines made by sharp tool. The bowls have polished black, grey-black or grey-brown surface. Only one cup with a small vertical handle has been found during the excavations. Deep vessels with cylindrical neck and slightly profiled rim are also known from the Magura cave. Most of them are decorated with wide horizontal shallow channels. As an exception, some of the vessels are decorated with repeating spirals. The vessels have well-polished surface. The deep thick-walled vessels are decorated with plastic band. The last category of vessels was used mainly to store grain and other products (Dzhambazov, Katincharov 1974, 128–129, obr. 26–31).

The unpublished materials from rescue archaeological excavation along the route of the gas pipeline near Gramada, Vidin District should also be mentioned here. The pottery sherds found during the excavations of site A10/1011 have technological, morphological and ornamental characteristics of the Basarabi culture (Ganetsovski, Miteva 2020, 406–409). A pit was discovered at site A10/1012 near Gramada, Vidin District dated in the 11th–10th c. BC (Dimitrov et al. 2020). Of special



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Fig. 2.1. Map of the main EIA sites mentioned in the text: 1. Vrashka Chuka; 2. Baley; 3. Basarabi; 4. Magura cave; 5. Gramada; 6. Felix Romuliana; 7. Prahova; 8. Vajuga-Pesek; 9. Mala Vrbica; 10. Kostolac; 11. Židovar; 12. Gornea; 13. Asfaltna baza – Zemun; 14. Kalakača; 15. Gradina na Bosutu (author Z. Vasileva; base map <https://maps-for-free.com>);

2. Feature 26 – stage of the investigations (photo M. Anchev)

Обр. 2.1. Карта на основните РЖЕ обекти, споменати в текста: 1. Връшка чука; 2. Балей; 3. Басараби; 4. пещера Магура; 5. Грамда; 6. Фелих Ромулиана; 7. Прахова; 8. Вазуга-Песек; 9. Мала Врбица; 10. Костолац; 11. Жидовар; 12. Горнеа; 13. Асфалтна база – Земун; 14. Калакача; 15. Градина на Босут (автор Ж. Василева, карта базирана на <https://maps-for-free.com>);

2. Структура 26 – етап от проучването (снимка М. Anchev)

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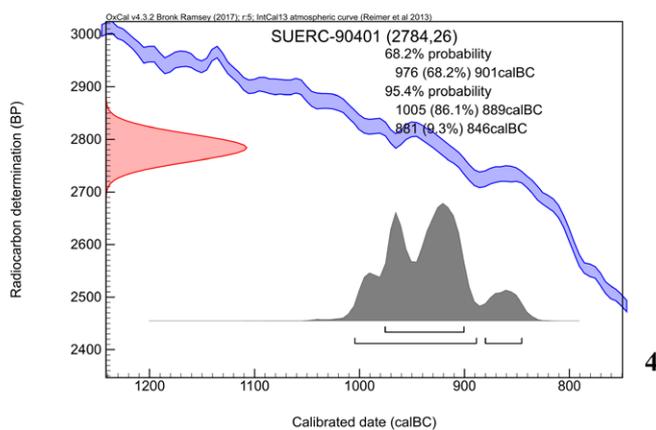
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Fig. 3.1 Feature 37 during the excavations (photo M. Anchev); 2. Detail (photo Z. Vasileva); 3. Detail (photo Z. Vasileva); 3.4. Radiocarbon date from feature 37
 Обр. 3.1. Структура № 37 по време на разкопките (снимка М. Anchev); 2. Детайл (снимка Ж. Василева); 3. Детайл (снимка Ж. Василева); 4. Радиовъглеродна дата от структура № 37



Fig. 4.1. Feature 27 during the excavations (photo M. Anchev); 2. Detail (photo Z. Vasileva); 3. Detail (photo Z. Vasileva); 4. Detail (photo Z. Vasileva)

Обр. 4.1. Структура № 27 по време на разкопките (снимка М. Анчев); 2. Детайл (снимка Ж. Василева); 3. Детайл (снимка Ж. Василева); 4. Детайл (снимка Ж. Василева)

importance are also the latest results from the rescue archaeological excavations near Sinagovtsi, Vidin region, where EIA settlement and necropolis were explored (Dimitrov, Tsvetkov 2021, 814; Dimitrov 2022, 45).

The research of the EIA along the River Danube and Oltenia was initiated by the discovery of the Basarabi necropolis published in 1968 by V. Dimitrescu (Dimitrescu 1968). The increased research interest of the EIA started in the 1970s, followed by the discoveries of numerous sites in the Central Balkan, such as Bosut (Medović 1978; Medović, Medović 2010), Kalakača (Medović 1988), Gomolava (Tasić 1988), Feudvar (Medović 1991) and Zidovar (Jevtić 1997). Later, by the excavations of the necropolis Vajuga-Pesek (Popović, Vukmanović 1998) and the settlement Asfaltna baza

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(Petrović 2010). Large number of EIA settlements are detected in north-eastern Serbia, and the Iron Gates' hinterlands belonging to the late Kalakača group and the Early Basarabi group, which has, it seems, emerged on the areas of Oltenia and the north-western Bulgaria (Vukmanović 1990, 44; Kapuran et al. 2007, fig. 2; Kapuran 2014, 84). High altitude EIA sites are detected in the vicinity of Felix Romuliana, located no more than 10 km from Vrashka chuka. A novelty in the settlement organization in the EIA in comparison to earlier periods is the groups (clusters) of, or several plain settlements dispersed at distance of around 500 m from one another, that has been characterized as a *complex of settlements* by A. Kapuran (Kapuran 2014, 76).

The territory of present-day Northwest Bulgaria is still poorly studied, and it is possible that there are more synchronous settlements to form such a settlement system. It is expected that forthcoming field surveys and analyses will probably significantly enrich the archaeological map of the EIA sites and our knowledge about this dynamic period.

The EIA features from site 1/1000

EIA materials and features were registered only in the Western sector of site 1/1000. The cultural layer from the EIA period in the excavated area has brown colour and is between 0.30 – 0.50 m thick. It is noteworthy that no architectural traces from the EIA were found on the site, no traces of ovens, thermal facilities, postholes or floors. The explored features (26, 27, 33 and 39) represent clusters of pottery sherds, no above ground features were identified. An exception is feature 37, which is the only EIA dug-into structure registered in the excavated area.

The archaeological evidence consists of pottery sherds. It is a hand-made pottery. The number of refitting sherds is very limited. Most of the preserved sherds without decoration are made of insufficiently refined clay, the surface is damaged or eroded. In the case of Vrashka chuka we encounter three main types of pottery based on texture. Coarse – high concentration of large and medium stones and sand grains. The surface of most of the sherds is damaged or heavily eroded, which has resulted in the loss of a significant part of the technological data. Semi-fine – small stones and sand grains. The surface of the vessels was smoothed or polished. Fine – made of refined clay with little concentration of sand grains.

The surface colours are in dark-red, grey-brownish, dark-brown, brownish or ochre nuances. The study of shapes is limited by the high degree of fragmentation of the vessels. The following hand-made vessels can be distinguished: cups, bowls, amphora-shaped vessels and storage vessels.

Feature 37

Feature 37 presents a pit dug into the rock terrain of Vrashka chuka. It has round shape with dimensions at the level of detection N–S 1.85 m and E–W 1.85 m; the walls are sloping; the bottom is relatively even with easy access not more than 0.40/0.45 m from the level of detection. A large fragment from a vessel containing human bone and mandible was found in the west part of the pit (fig. 3.1–3). Around them were found charcoal, stone and bone beads and pottery sherds. No other human remains were detected in the fill. The C14 date from feature 37 is 1005–889 cal BC (86.1%) and 881–846 cal BC (9.3%) (fig. 3.4).²

The pit yielded sherds from various vessels, heavily burnt house debris, stones, bone and stone beads (fig. 3), charcoal, remains of human skull and teeth (fig. 6.15).

Most of the pottery is fragmented, but there are few shapes that can be reconstructed. The surface of the vessels is well preserved in comparison with pottery from the other EIA features. The vessels were made of coarse or fine paste. The category of the coarse ware is presented by sherds from

² The 14C date from feature 37 is the only available date from site 1/1000 due to the characteristics of the archaeological materials found in the EIA features. The samples were analyzed in the laboratory of the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre, Glasgow, Scotland, UK in 2019. Radiocarbon Age BP 2784 ± 26



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Fig. 5.1. Feature 33 during the excavations; 2. Feature 33 during the excavations (photos M. Anchev)
Обр. 5.1. Структура № 33 детайл от разкопките; 2. Структура № 33 детайл от разкопките
(снимки М. Анчев)

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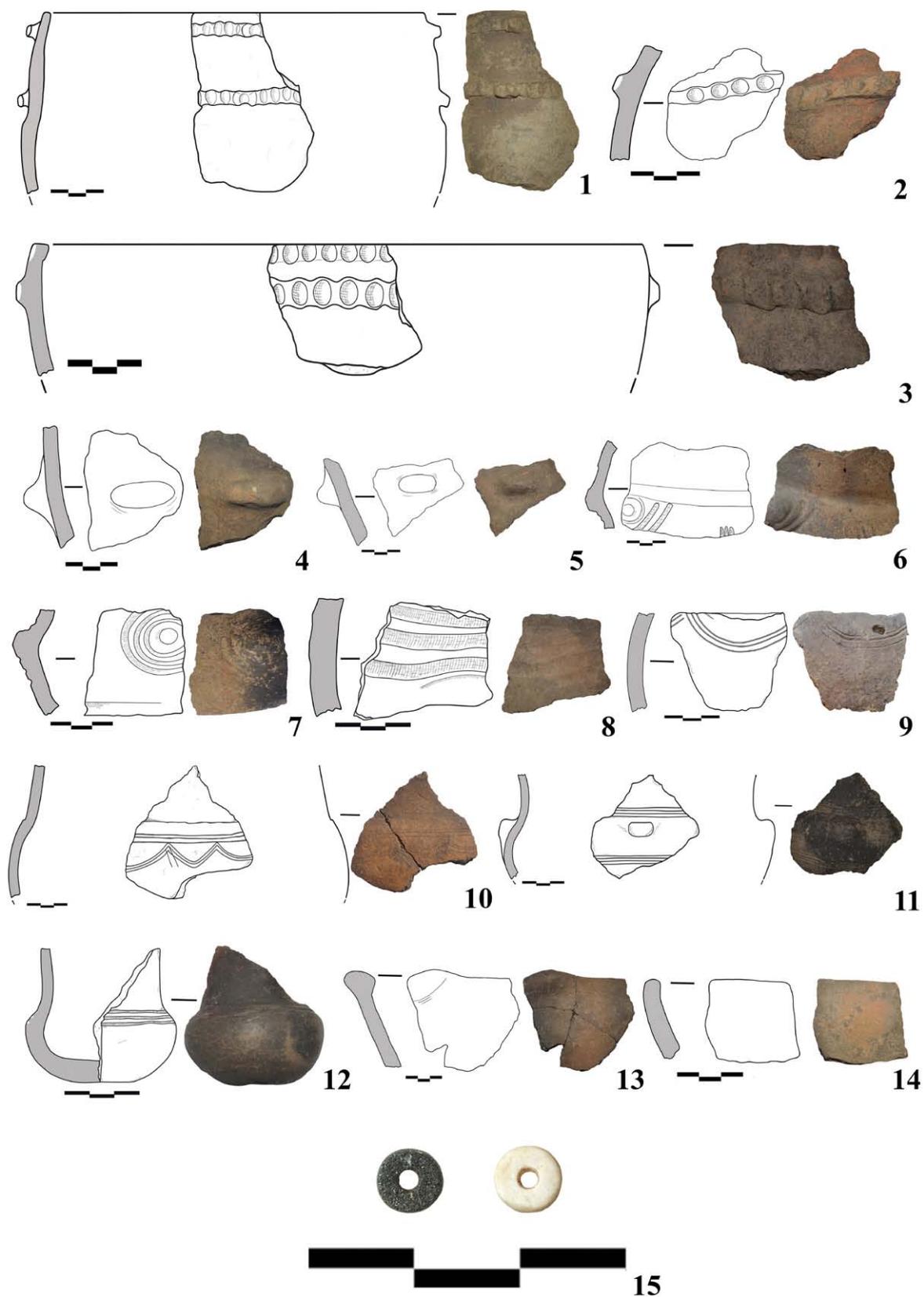


Fig. 6. Pottery sherds, stone and bone beads from feature 37 (drawings V. Georgieva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 6. Керамични фрагменти, каменно и костено мъниста от структура 37 (рисунки В. Георгиева, снимки Ж. Василева)

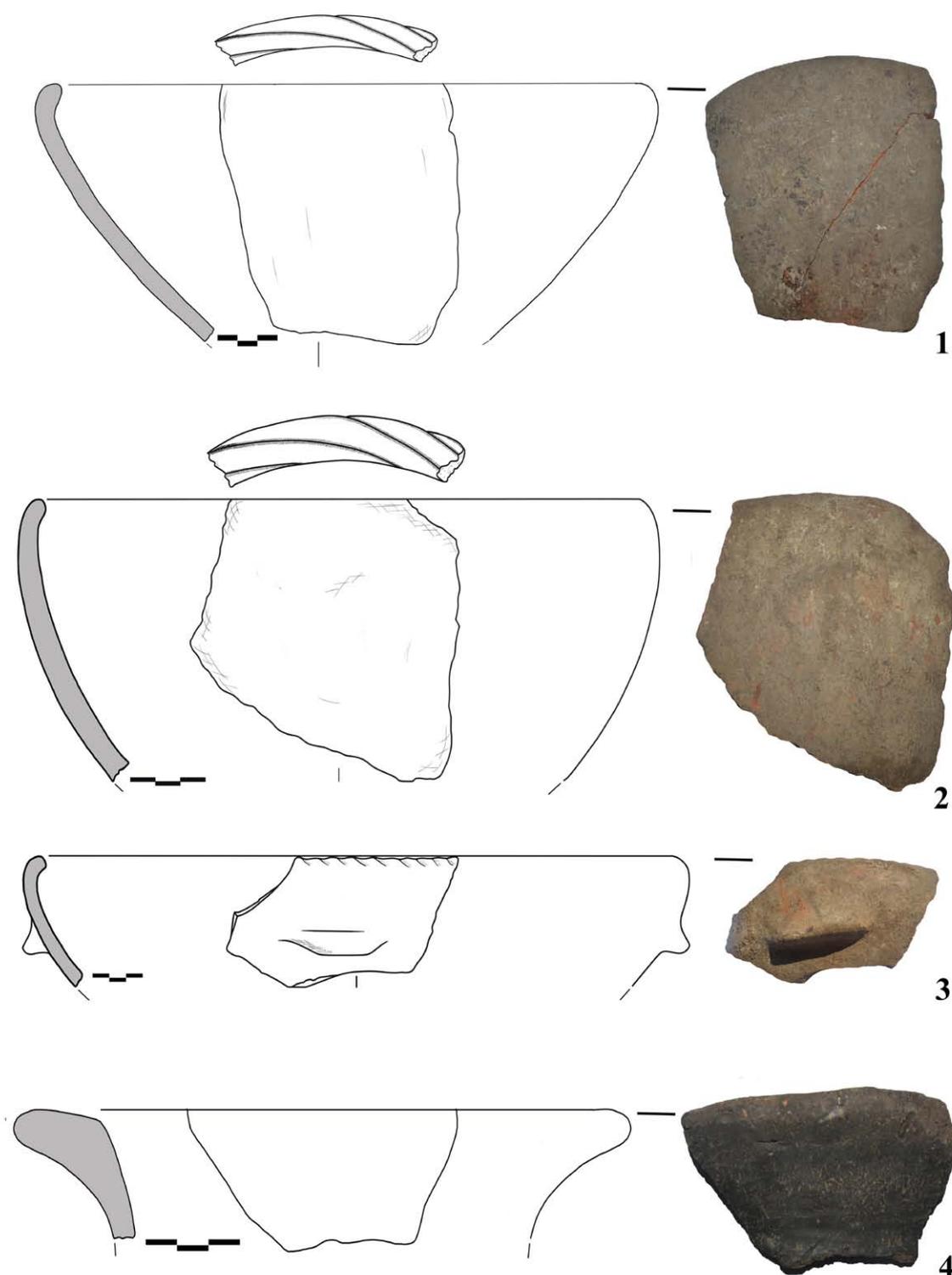


Fig. 7. Pottery sherds from feature 37 (drawings V. Georgieva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 7. Керамични фрагменти от структура 37 (рисунки В. Георгиева, снимки Ж. Василева)

storage vessels or jars, decorated with plastic band with finger impressions. The decoration is situated below the mouth or at the transition between the neck and the body (fig. 6.1–3). Tongue-shaped handles also belong to large vessels, probably storage vessels (fig. 6.4–5). Among the fragments are also sherds with buckles decorated with concentric grooves. They probably belong to amphora-shaped

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vessels made of semi-fine clay. The decoration is usually situated at the maximum diameter of the vessel (fig. 6.6–7). A fragment of an amphora-shaped vessel with everted rim and long neck is also known. The vessel was made of coarse clay with sand grains. The surface is averagely smoothened, black colour (fig. 7.4).

Feature 37 contains also sherds with engraved horizontal lines or lines arranged in garlands (fig. 6.9–10, 12). They belong to vessels made of fine paste with polished surface. To a similar vessel belongs a fragment with conical knobs and incised horizontal lines. The surface of the vessel was polished (fig. 6.11). A sherd from miniature vessel with long neck and spherical body was also found in feature 37. The transition between the neck and the body is decorated with three horizontal incised lines. The vessel is made of fine clay, the surface is dark brown, polished (fig. 6.12).

Two bowls with inverted channelled rim was possible to reconstruct. They were made of semi-fine clay; the surface of the vessels is well smoothened (fig. 7.1–2). Of special interest is the reconstructed conical bowl with inverted twisted rim. The vessel has four tongue-shaped handles (fig. 7.3).

Feature 26

Feature 26 presents a cluster of fragmented vessels. No other archaeological materials were detected during the exploration of the feature (fig. 2.2). Most of the sherds are made of a coarse clay with sand grains and gravels. The surface of the vessels is damaged or heavily eroded, which has resulted in the loss of a significant part of the technological data. The vessels were decorated with plastic bands with oblique cuts. The bands were arranged below the rim or on the transition between the neck and the body (fig. 8.1–10).

There are also small sherds that do not permit reconstruction of the entire form but have characteristic decoration: pseudo-cord motif (fig. 8.11–12), incised lines (fig. 8.13), stamped S^{es} (fig. 8.15) and incised wavy lines (fig. 8.16).

Of special interest is a fragment of an amphora-shaped vessel with everted rim and long cylindrical neck. The interior of the rim is decorated with hatched incised triangles filled with incised lines. The neck is decorated with wide horizontal grooves and short oblique incisions. The vessel is made of semi-fine clay (fig. 8.17).

Also noteworthy is a fragment of a bowl with inverted rim enlarged with one horizontal facet. The vessel is made of semi-fine clay. The surface was well smoothened (fig. 8.18).

Feature 27

Feature 27 is the largest EIA structure explored during the rescue excavations. Three levels of pottery sherds were registered. They were situated in a space surrounded by the natural bedrock (fig. 4). There are no traces of house debris, house inventory or thermal facility.

The coarse pottery category found in structure 27 is presented by sherds from storage vessels and jars. The vessels are made of coarse paste with high concentration of pebbles and sand grains. The surface of most of the vessels is damaged or heavily eroded, which has resulted in the loss of a significant part of the technological data. The vessels have horizontal and vertical plastic bands, decorated with oblique cut or finger impressions. The bands are usually arranged below the rim or on the transition between the neck and the body (figs. 9–10). Some vessels have vertical handles located on the lower part of the neck (fig. 9.1, 7). The recognizable shapes are storage vessels with conical form and wide-open mouth. Tongue-shaped handles of large vessels (fig. 9.10–11) and small vertical handles probably from beakers are also found. Feature 27 contained sherds from a small cup with one vertical handle, rising above the rim. There are traces of pseudo-cord ornament below the rim of the vessel (fig. 10.9).

Fragments of vessel with everted rim and long neck are also found at structure 27. They were made of semi-fine clay with sand grains and pebbles and probably belong to amphora-shaped vessels (fig. 10.5–7). One of them is decorated with wide horizontal grooves below which three wavy lines

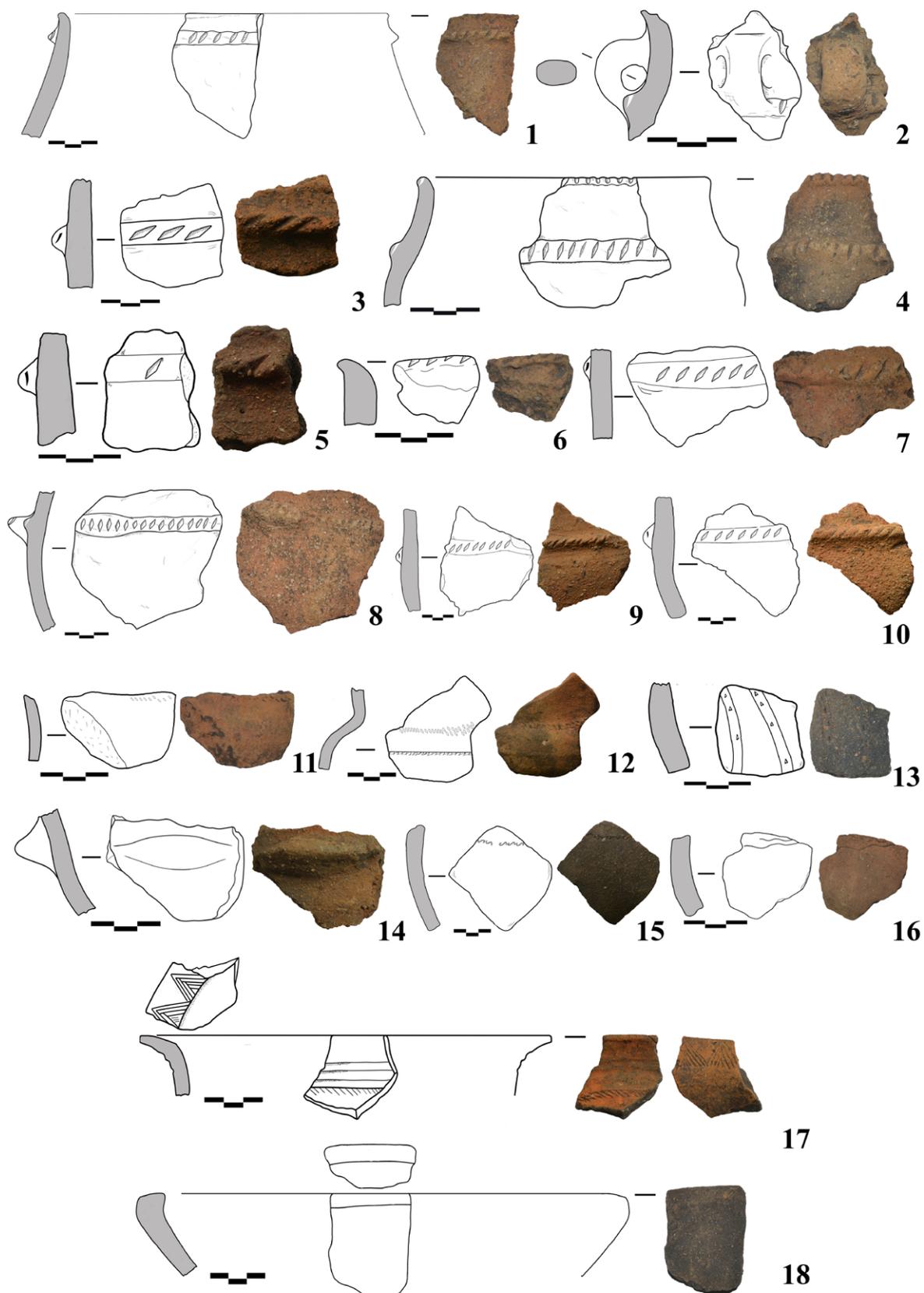


Fig. 8. Pottery sherds from feature 26 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 8. Керамични фрагменти от структура 26 (рисунки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)

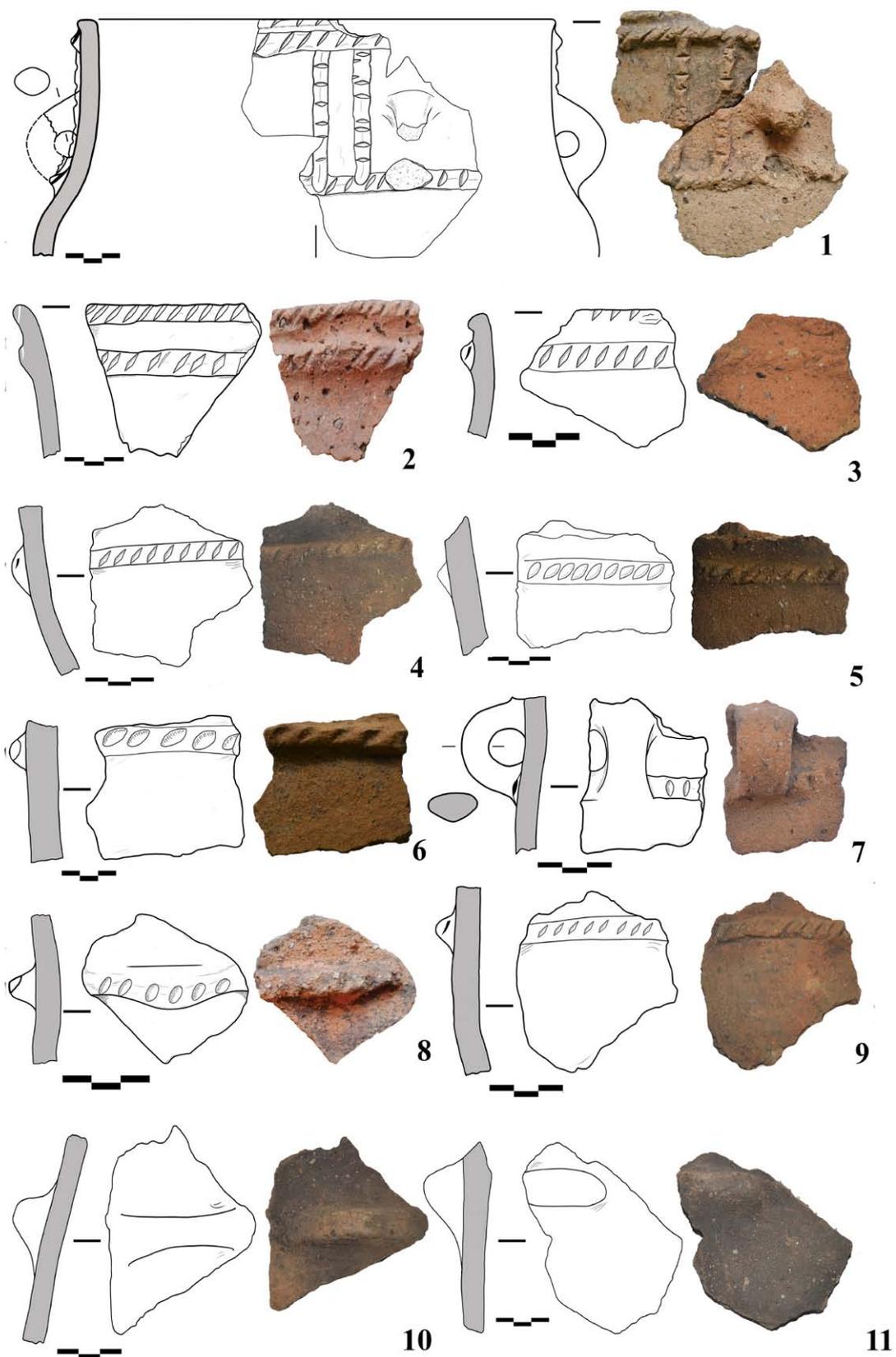


Fig. 9. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
Обр. 9. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисунки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)



Fig. 10. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 10. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисушки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева,
 снимки Ж. Василева)

are incised (fig. 10.7).

Due to the highly fragmentary state of the sherds found in the structure, most of the vessel shapes cannot be recognized. Nevertheless, the decoration of some sherds deserves attention. There are sherds decorated with incised triangles (fig. 11.1), combination of incised lines and stamped S^{es} (fig. 11.2), one or two rows of stamped S^{es} (fig. 11. 3–6), combination of stamped S^{es} and pseudo-cord (fig. 11.7–9), incised horizontal lines (fig. 12.1–2), incised lines arranged as garlands (fig. 12.3–4), incised wavy lines (fig. 12.5–10).

The most numerous accumulation of bowls with inverted rim at Vrashka chuka derives from structure 27. Sherds from at least 15 vessels are recognized (figs. 13–14; 15.1–3). The vessels are made of semi-fine clay with sand grains and pebbles. The surface of most of the vessels was polished

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or well smoothed. Of special interest is the decoration of the vessels: flutes (fig. 13.1–6), combination of flutes, stamped S^{es} and pseudo-cord (fig. 14.1–3), combination of oblique flutes and incised wavy lines (fig. 14.4), combination of oblique flutes, stamped S^{es}, incised wavy lines and conical knobs (fig. 14.5) and a bowl decorated with combination of stamped S^{es} and incised lines arranged as a ladder (fig. 15.3).

Feature 33

Feature 33 is a cluster of pottery sherds. No other archaeological materials were detected during the exploration of the feature (fig. 5). Most of the sherds belong to vessels made of coarse and semi-fine clay. The upper of the body of two storage vessels can be reconstructed. The first vessel has S-shaped vertical handles in the lower part of the neck. It is decorated with oblique incised lines over the rim, below which there is a horizontal plastic band with finger impressions and oblique incised lines. In the lower part of the neck another horizontal plastic band with finger impressions and conical knobs is arranged (fig. 16.1). The second vessel is decorated with oblique incisions over the rim. The neck of the vessel is decorated by a combination of vertical plastic bands, which are linked to a horizontal plastic band, below which two plastic bands in the form of garlands are arranged. All of them are decorated with oblique incised lines (fig. 16.2). Fragmented rims of two vessels decorated with oblique cuts on the rim also belong to the coarse ware category (fig. 16.4–5).

Among the sherds from feature 33, there are fragments of an amphora-shaped vessel with everted rim, long neck decorated with wide horizontal grooves. Between the neck and the body are placed (two or four) vertical handles, below which the body of the vessel is again decorated with wide horizontal grooves (fig. 16.3). Fragments with tongue-shaped handle and decoration of horizontal grooves and grooves arranged as garlands belong to a similar type of vessel (fig. 17.1). Fragments of a vessel with everted rim and long cylindrical neck are also found. The inner side of the rim is decorated with a row of pseudo-cord ornament. The neck of the vessel is decorated with wide horizontal grooves and rows of pseudo-cord motive (fig. 17.3). The other fragment represents an everted rim decorated with pseudo-cord ornament on the neck of the vessel (fig. 17.4).

Among the few cups identified at Vrashka chuka, the one found in structure 33 stands out. The vessel was made of fine clay with well smoothed surface. We can suggest that the sherds belong to a cup with one handle, long neck and rounded belly (fig. 17.6). Among the pottery repertoire of structure 33, there is a sherd from vertical handle, probably belonging to a beaker. The handle is decorated with two vertical incised wavy lines and vertical grooves (fig. 17.5).

The category of bowls with inverted rim is represented in feature 33 by two examples. The first bowl is decorated with a combination of oblique flutes, stamped S^{es}, pseudo-cord motives and incised hatched triangles filled with incised lines (fig. 17.7). Of special interest is also a sherd from a bowl with inverted rim and tongue-shaped handle (fig. 17.8).

Feature 39

Feature 39 is small cluster of pottery sherds, preserved in a very fragmentary condition. The recognizable forms and motives are: a storage vessel, decorated with oblique cut over the rim, a horizontal plastic band with oblique cuts below the mouth and a horizontal plastic band with oblique cuts on the transition between the neck and the body (fig. 15.4). There is also a fragment of a rim, decorated with short oblique cuts (fig. 15.5), fragment with tongue-shaped handle (fig. 15.6) and a sherd, decorated with stamped S^{es} (fig. 15.7). The sherds belong to vessels made of coarse clay with sand grains and pebbles. The surface is eroded.

Pottery from the EIA layer

The pottery sherds found in the layer have the same characteristics as those from the EIA features. There are no restorable vessels. The sherds belong to vessels made of fine, semi-fine or coarse paste. The coarse ware is presented by sherds from vessels made of insufficiently refined clay with

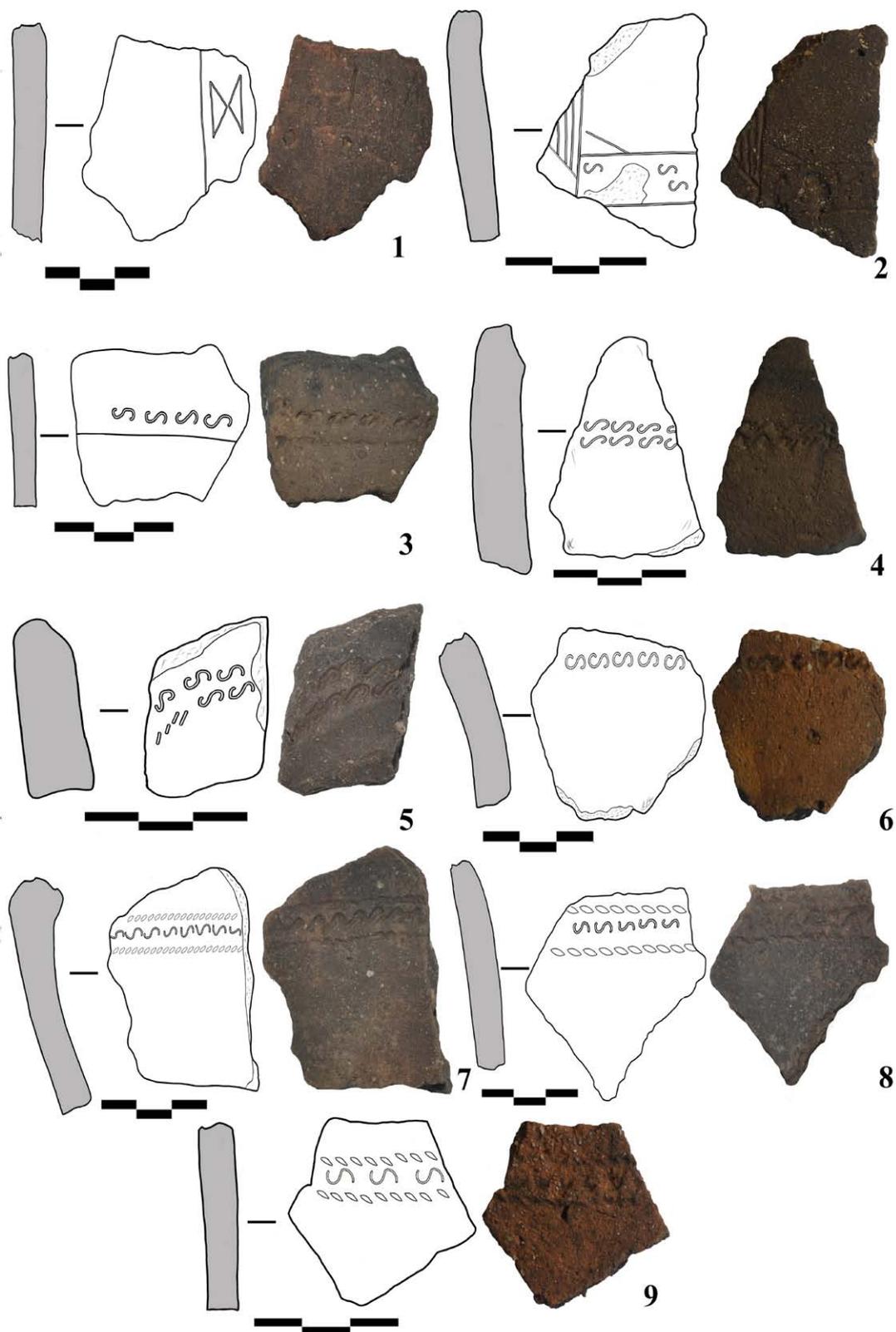


Fig. 11. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings and photos Z. Vasileva)
Обр. 11. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисунки и снимки Ж. Василева)

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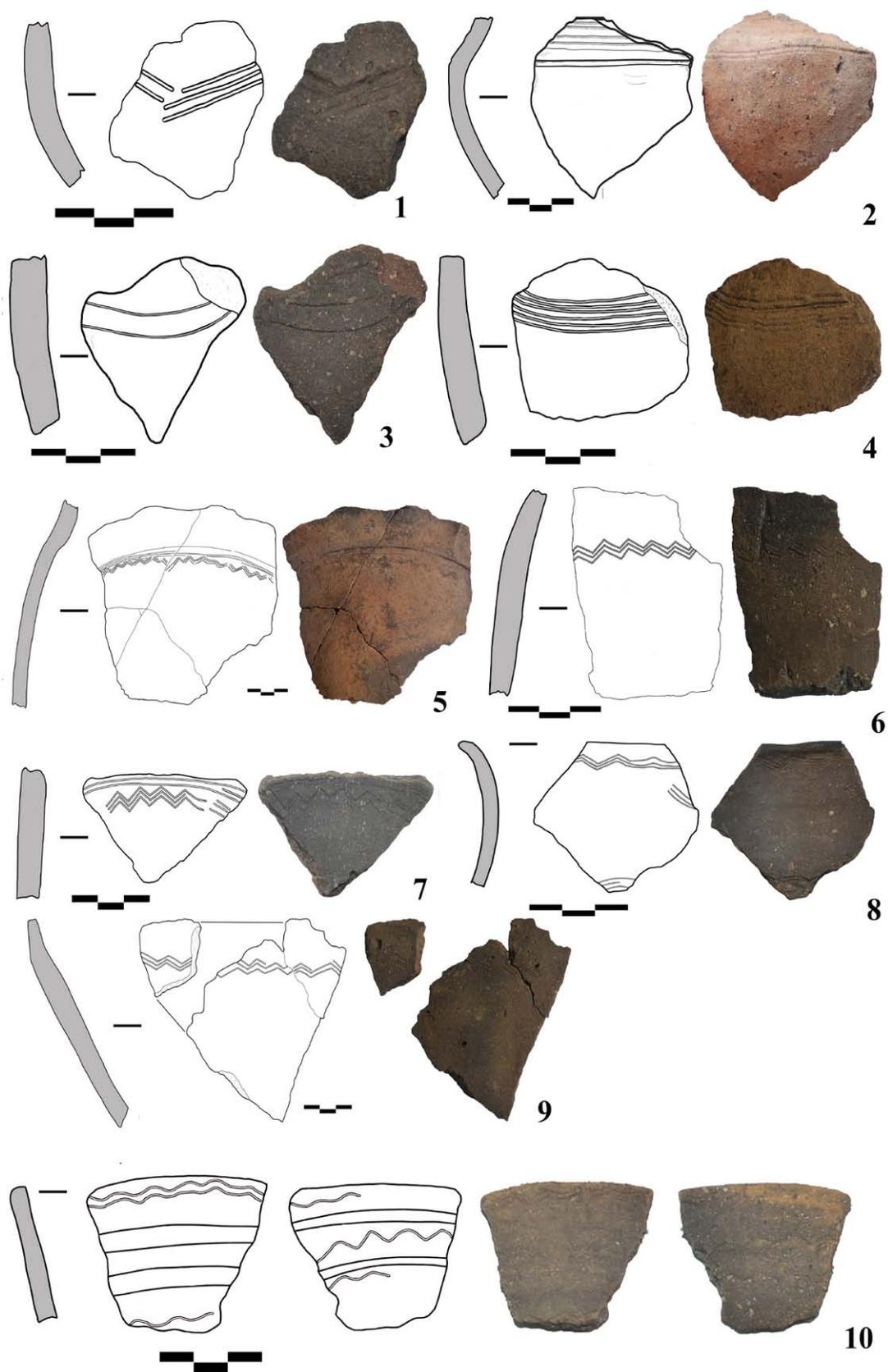


Fig. 12. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings and photos Z. Vasileva)
Обр. 12. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисунки и снимки Ж. Василева)

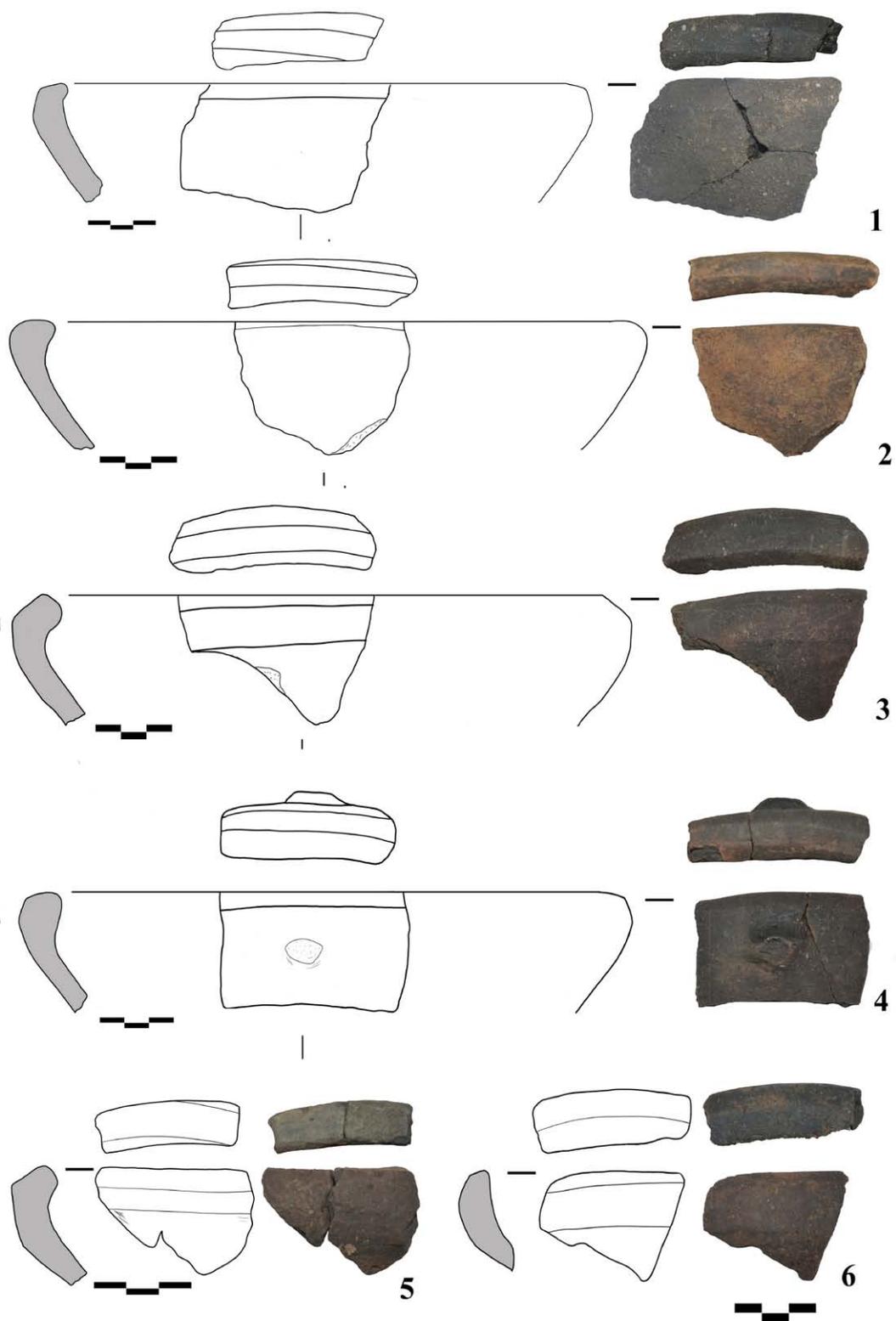


Fig. 13. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings and photos Z. Vasileva)
Обр. 13. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисунки и снимки Ж. Василева)

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sand grains and pebbles. The rim of some of the vessels is decorated with oblique short cuts or the body of the vessels has plastic bands with oblique short cuts. Most of the sherds have heavily eroded surface (fig. 18.1–8).

The decorative motifs on the sherds are presented by combination of stamped S^{es}, flutes and pseudo-cord (fig. 19.2–4), rows of stamped S^{es} (fig. 19.3), incised triangles (fig. 19.1, 6), incised wavy lines (fig. 19.5), button-shaped knobs (fig. 19.7–8). The recognizable shapes are conical bowls with inverted channelled rim (fig. 18.12–13) and bowls with everted rim, one of which is decorated with stamped S^{es} (fig. 18.11).

Characteristic vessels and parallels of the EIA pottery from site 1/1000

The best represented group of pottery from Vrashka chuka comprises of sherds from slightly conical or spherical bowls with inverted rim decorated with fluting, faceting, incised and stamped decoration. Bowls with inverted rim are among the most common shapes during the EIA. A. Bulatović described the type (IIa/turban dish) as inevitable part of the pottery inventory of nearly all cultural groups in the Balkans during Ha B-C. The author presents a map with the distribution of bowls type IIa during Ha B, including examples from Bulgaria – Tlachine, Tsepina and Pshenichevo (Bulatović 2009, see map 3). T. Stoyanov (1997, 61) and G. Nekhrizov (2008, 120 with reference) highlight that the shape is well-known during the LBA and becomes even more popular during the EIA. In present-day West Bulgaria similar vessels are known from an EIA context in the Kileria locality (Dintchev 2018, fig. 2.1–2), on the hill of Krakra, Pernik (Mihaylov 2005), Breznik (Georgiev et al. 2019, 94, fig. 3) etc.

The bowls with inverted rim are well known forms in Kalakača, Gornea–Kalakača, Basarabi and Insula Banului cultures / cultural groups (Bălan 2019, 39). P. Medović sorted this bowl type into several types: types 20–21 and 24 and 26 from Kalakača, and types 1, 22, 41–42 and 44–47 from Gradina na Bosutu (Medović 1978, T. CXX, T. CXXIV, T. CXXV).

In addition to the shape, there are wide parallels of the decorative patterns found on the bowls with inverted rim from Vrashka chuka. Bowls decorated with narrow horizontal or oblique channels are known also from Satchinez (Gumă 1993, pl. XL.2-3), Gelmar (Bălan 2019, figs. 3.12, 4.1, 5.1), Tărtăria–Podu Tărtăriei vest (Borș, Rumegea-Irimuș 2017, fig. 14.1–3), Giroc–Mescal (Gogăltan 1996, abb. 7.1–3, 8.3–4), Ravna–Bojiște and Brestovacka Banja (Kapuran 2014, tab. 25.1–2), Felix Romuliana (Kapuran 2014, tab. 25.26, 33), Gradina na Bosutu (Medović, Medović 2010), Kalakača (Medović 1978, sl. 46.3) etc. Stamped rows of S^{es} or tiny false cord ornaments, organized as oblique sheaves appeared at Giroc (Gumă 1993, XLI.1), Vajuga–Pesek (Popovič, Vukmanovič 1998, pl. 15) etc.

Another recognizable shape among the EIA pottery sherds from Vrashka chuka are amphora-shaped vessels – long neck, spherical body and handles. The sherds found in the EIA features correspond to one of the most popular shapes during the EIA used for liquids (Stoyanov 1997, 63; Nekhrizov 2008, 118–119; Dimitrova 2014, 17 with reference).

The sherds from amphora-shaped vessels from Vrashka chuka are few but their decoration is noteworthy. A close parallel to the vessel decorated with wide grooves from structure 33 (fig. 16.3) are known from the cemetery Vajuga–Pesek. According to the authors amphora-shaped vessels with high neck decorated with horizontal channels found at the cemetery are typical for the horizon Gornea–Kalakača (Popovič, Vukmanovič 1998, pl. 33.6). Of special interest is also a sherd from structure 27 (fig. 10.7) decorated with incised zig-zag lines. Similar decoration appeared at Dejani,

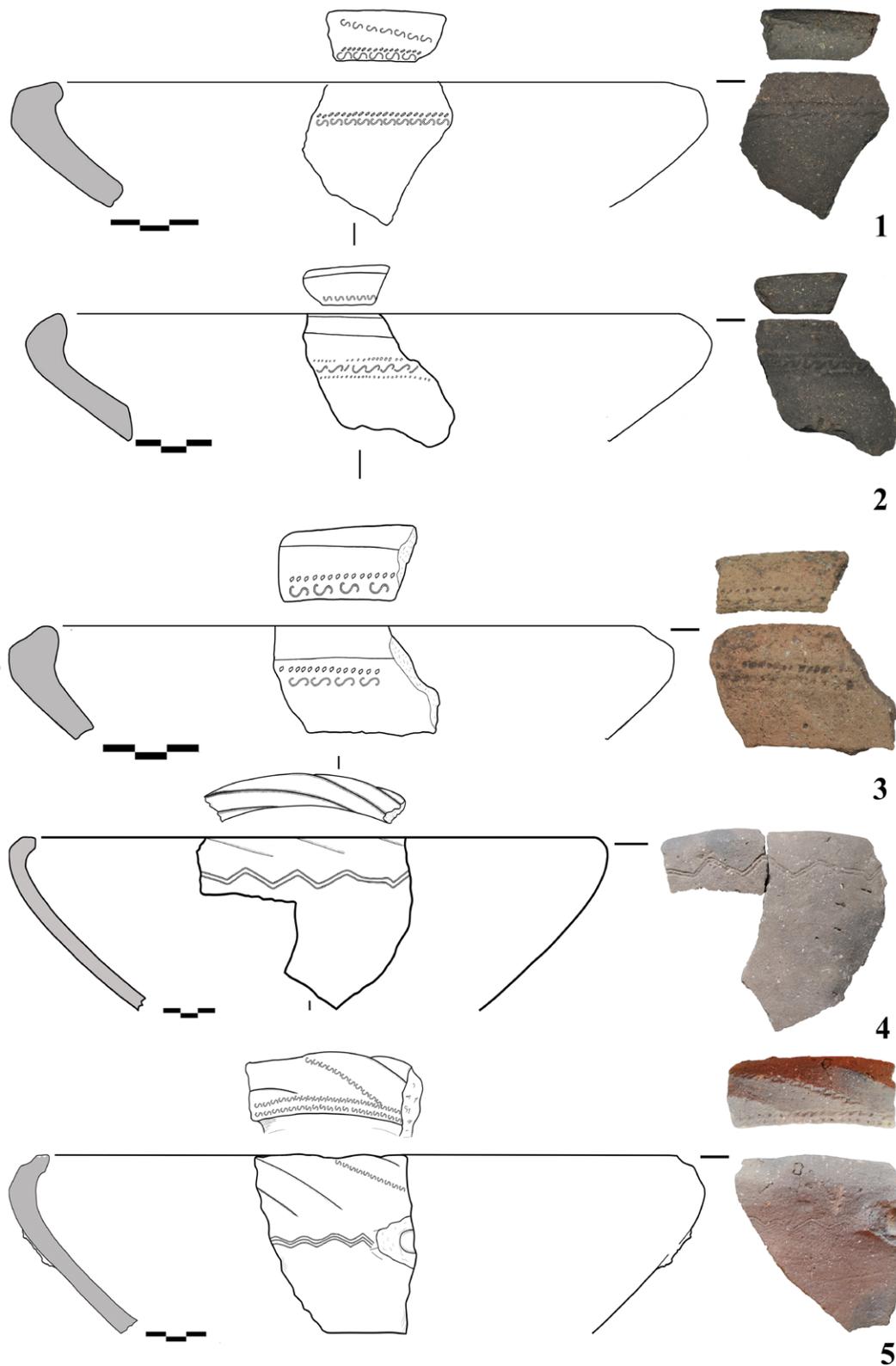


Fig. 14. Pottery sherds from feature 27 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 14. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27 (рисунки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)

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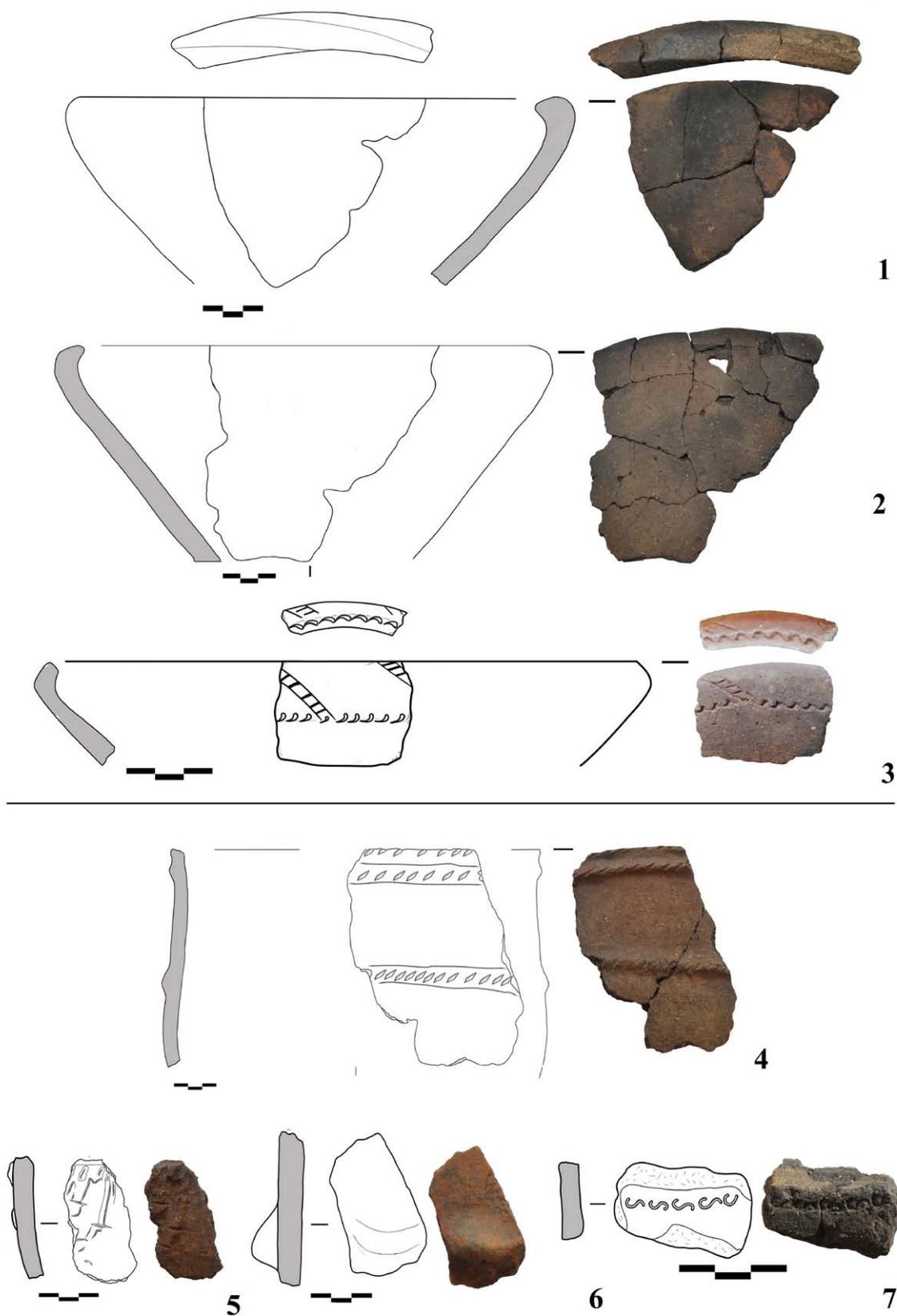


Fig. 15. 1-3. Pottery sherds from feature 27; 4-7. Pottery sherds from feature 39
(drawings and photos Z. Vasileva)

Обр. 15.1-3. Керамични фрагменти от структура 27; 14-7. Керамични фрагменти от структура 39
(рисушки и снимки Ж. Василева)

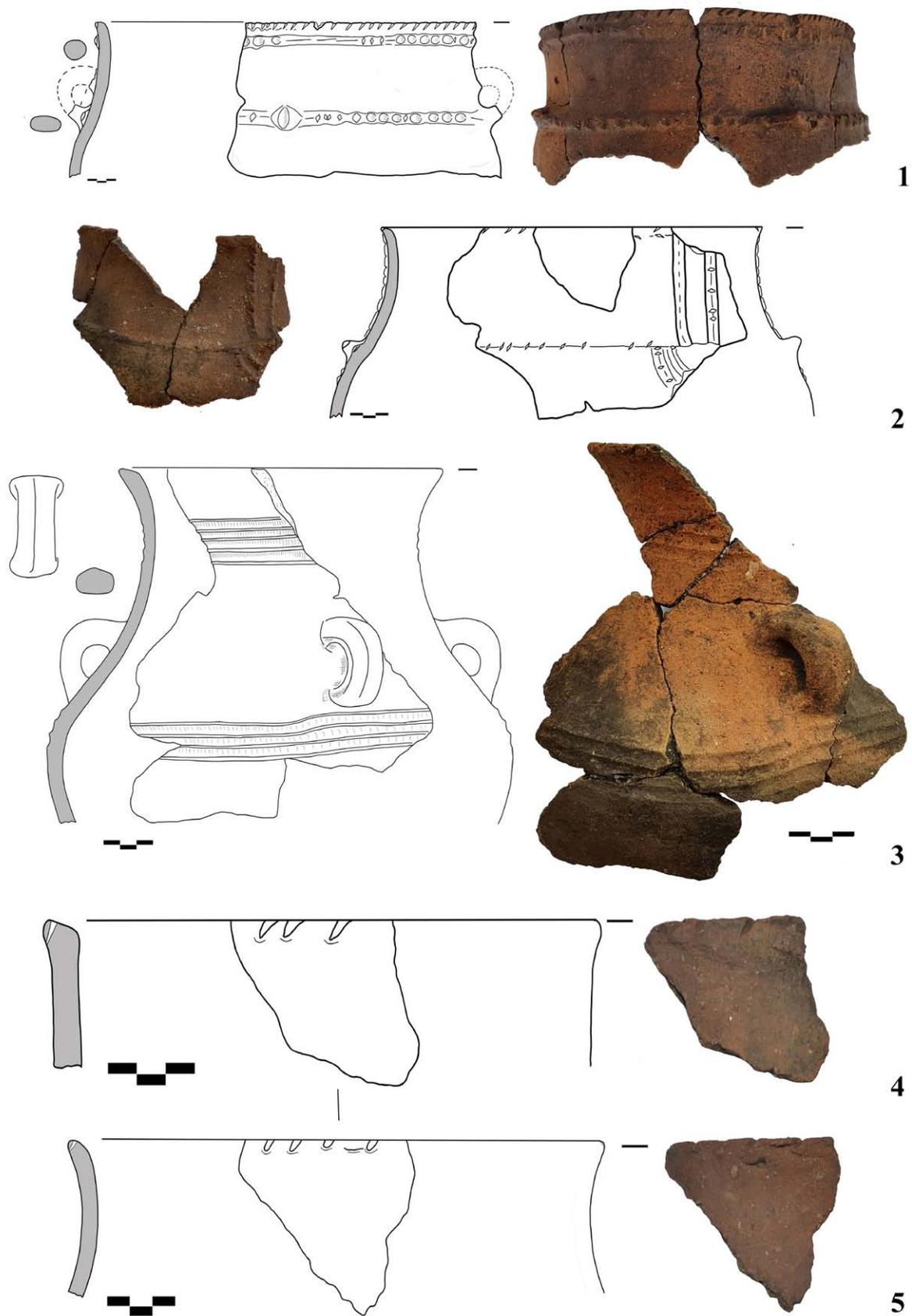


Fig. 16. Pottery sherds from feature 33 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 16. Керамични фрагменти от структура 33 (рисунки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)

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Giroc and Satchinez (Gumă 1993, pl. XL.5; XLV.2–3, 6–7), Giroc–Mescal (Gogâltan 1996, abb. 9.1), Tărtăria–Podu Tărtăriei vest (Borș, Rumega-Irimuș 2017, fig. 16.2); Kostolac (Jevtič 1983, t. II.6), Boljetin (Jevtič 1983, t. IV.7–8), Gradina na Bosutu IVa and IVb (Medovič, Medovič 2010, sl. 27b.4, sl. 78.1), Asfaltna baza (Petrovič 2010, pl. 15.5), Kalakača (Medovič 1988, figs. 28.3; 60.5; 83.1; 87.2; 142.1; 144.2, 164.1) etc.

Amphora-shaped vessel appeared also in structure 26 (fig. 8.17) and from the EIA layer (fig. 19.1) decorated with triangles, filled with oblique lines. The analogies are Felix Romuliana (Kapuran 2008, sl. 7.3), Gradina na Bosutu IVa (Medovič, Medovič 2010, sl. 27b.21), Asfaltna baza (Petrovič 2010, pl. 10.31, pl. 15.9), Kalakača (Medovič 1988, fig. 13.3), Kostolac (Jevtič 1983, t. III.1), Gelmar (Bălan 2019, fig. 5.1), Tărtăria–Podu Tărtăriei vest (Borș, Rumega-Irimuș 2017, fig. 20.1), Giroc–Mescal (Gogâltan 1996, abb. 8.1, 11.2) etc.

Pottery sherds from coarse (kitchen) ware are among the most numerous at Vrashka chuka. The sherds belong to typical for the EIA repertoire – storage vessels with S profilation or in the form of an upside-down bell. The plastic decoration is often placed in the upper part of the vessels – below the rim or at the transition between the neck and the body. It is presented by horizontal plastic band with oblique incisions (figs. 8.1–5; 9.1–9; 10.1–3; 18.1–8), combination of horizontal and vertical plastic bands with incisions (figs. 9.1; 10.3), conical knobs, included in the plastic band (figs. 8.8; 16.1) or horizontal plastic band with finger impressions (fig. 6.1–3). Similar vessels appeared at Felix Romuliana (Kapuran 2008, sl. 5.1–5), Vajuga–Pesek (Popovič, Vukmanovič 1998, pl. 14.1; pl. 32), Gradina na Bosutu IVa and IVb (Medovič, Medovič 2010, sl. 27b.4), Kalakača (Medovič 1978, sl. 80.5), Giroc (Guma 1993, XLI.4), Asfaltna baza (Petrovič 2010, pl. 28.9, pl. 59.3) etc.

Decoration patterns and parallels of the pottery from site 1/1000

The relatively modest repertoire of pottery shapes and the fragmentary condition was enhanced significantly by the various ornamental techniques and motifs (fig. 20). The decoration on the vessels at Vrashka chuka is made through incision, stamping and grooving. The incised motifs are presented by:

- (a) incised horizontal lines, usually marking the transition between the neck and the body (figs. 6.10–12; 12.2).
- (b) incised oblique lines (fig. 12.1).
- (c) short oblique incised cuts (fig. 8.17).
- (d) vertical incised lines, filled with small incised triangles (fig. 8.13).
- (e) incised wavy lines (figs. 8.16; 12.10) or zig-zag lines (figs. 10.7; 12.5–9; 19.5) and one case incised vertical lines (fig. 17.5).
- (f) triangles, filled with oblique lines (figs. 8.17; 19.1–6).
- (g) parallel lines, arranged as garlands (fig. 6.9–10).
- (h) short cuts on the rim (fig. 16.4–5).

The stamped decoration on the vessels is presented by a row of flowing unconnected S^{es} stamps (figs. 8.15; 11.6; 18.11; 19.3–4;). Pseudo-cord motifs appeared as a single row (fig. 17.3–4) or in combination with stamped S^{es} (fig. 11.7–9). It is suggested that this type of ornamentation was executed with special tool made of clay or bone (Jevtič 1993, 113) and every tool has its unique shape (Nekhrizov 2005a, 11). Tools for decoration were not found during the excavations of site 1/1000 but such kind of instruments are known from other EIA sites in Romania (Laszlo 1969, fig. 1.4; Hänsel 1976, taf. 43,1–3, 5–7; Vulpe 1986, 31, abb. 8/8; Morintz 1987, fig. 11/2), Serbia (Stojih 1980) and Bulgaria (Nekhrizov 2005b with reference).

The most numerous pottery sherds from Vrashka chuka are the sherds from slightly conical or

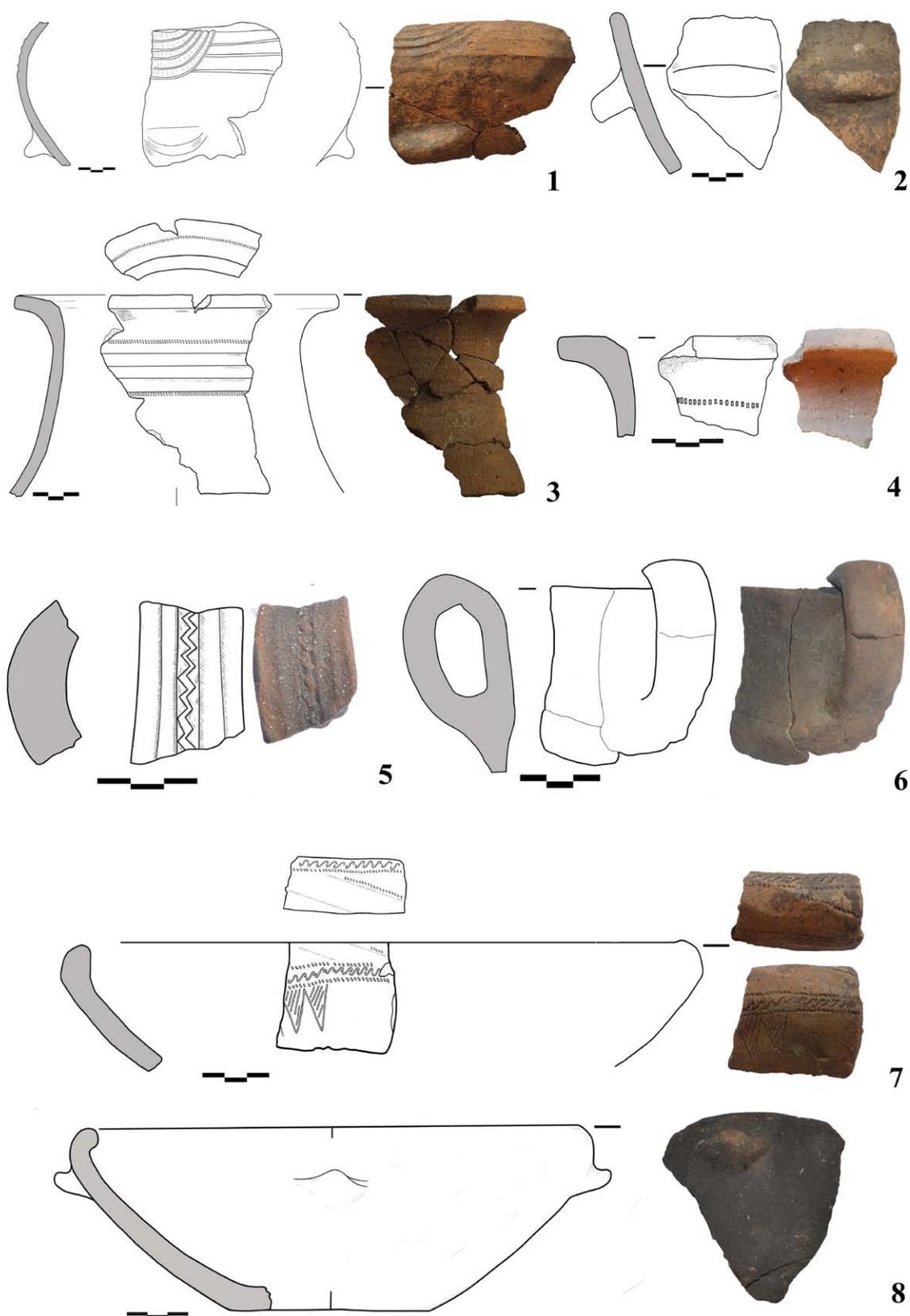


Fig. 17. Pottery sherds from feature 33 (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 17. Керамични фрагменти от структура 33 (рисунки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)

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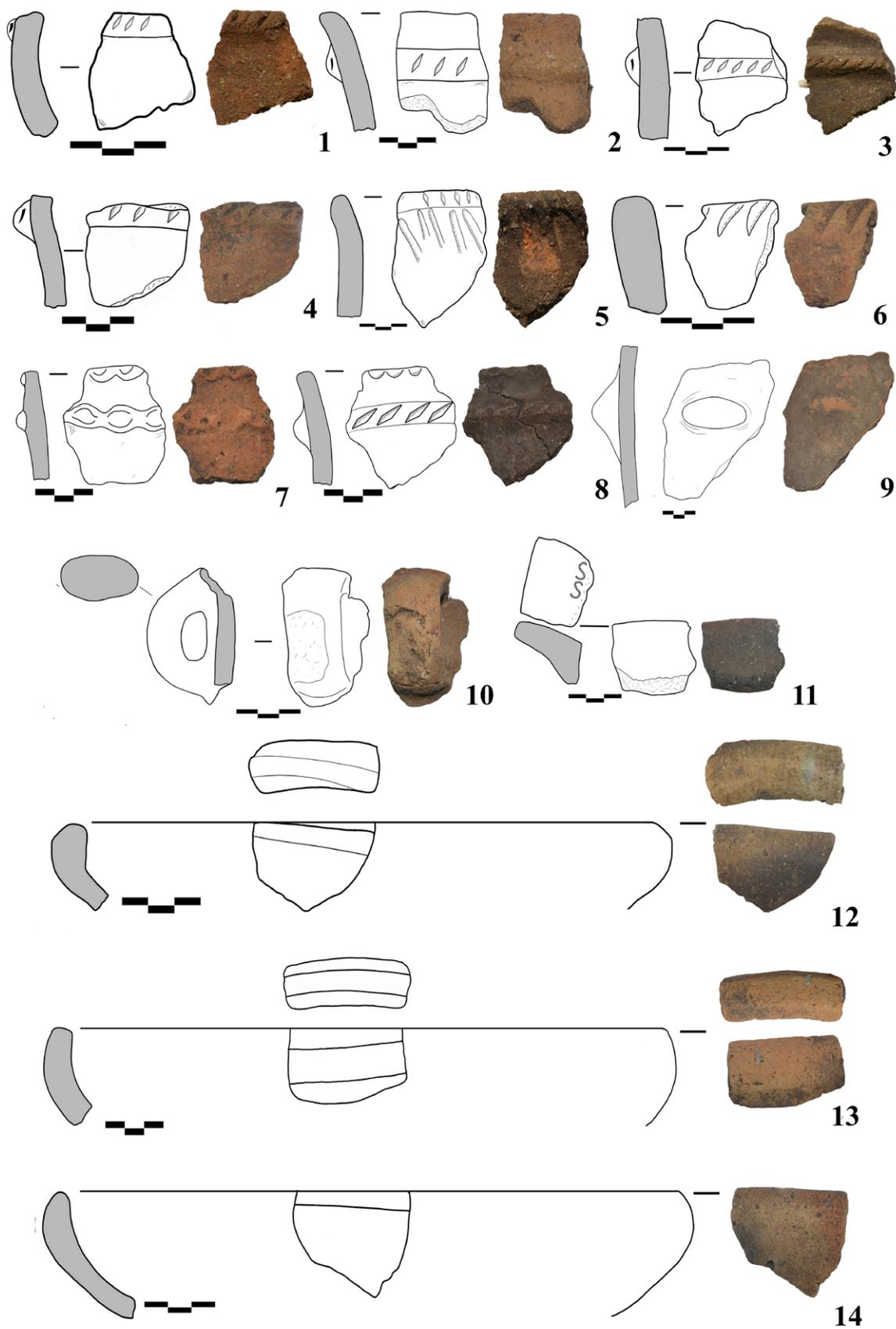


Fig. 18. Pottery sherds from the EIA layer (drawings and photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 18. Керамични фрагменти от РЖЕ пласт (рисушки и снимки Ж. Василева)

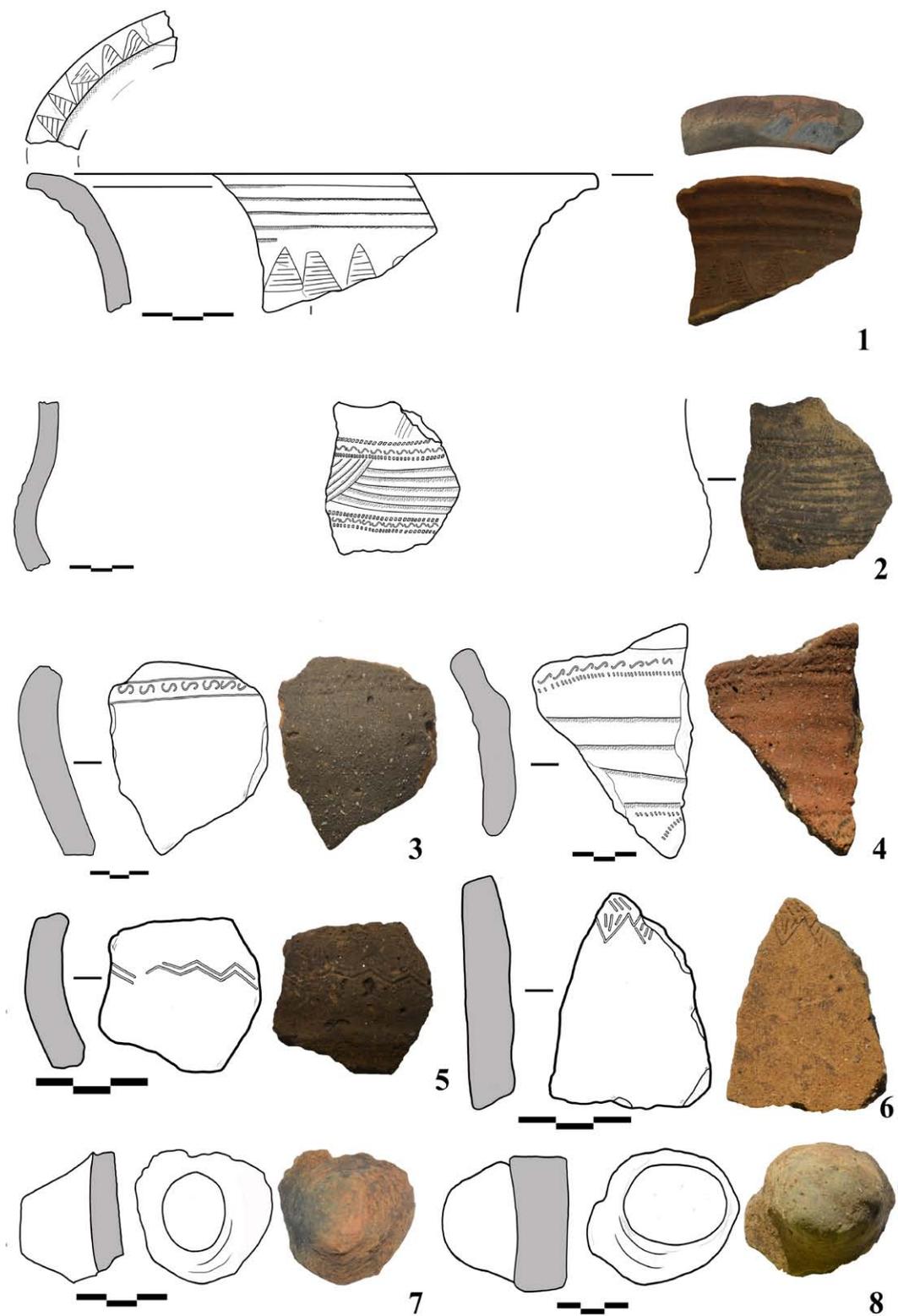


Fig. 19. Pottery sherds from the EIA layer (drawings V. Georgieva, Z. Vasileva, photos Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 19. Керамични фрагменти от РЖЕ пласт (рисушки В. Георгиева, Ж. Василева, снимки Ж. Василева)

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spherical bowls with inverted rim decorated with fluting, faceting, incised and stamped decoration. The upper part of the bowls with inverted rim found at Vrashka chuka is often decorated with:

- (a) narrow horizontal or oblique channels (fig. 13).
- (b) stamped rows of S^{es} or tiny false cord ornaments, organized as oblique sheaves (fig. 14).
- (c) channels combined with incised wavy lines (fig. 14.4).
- (d) channels, stamped S^{es} and incised wavy lines (fig. 14.5).
- (e) channels, stamped S^{es}, pseudo-cord ornaments and incised triangle filled with oblique lines (fig. 17.7).

The plastic decoration is often placed in the upper part of the vessels – below the rim or at the transition between the neck and the body. It is presented by:

- (a) horizontal plastic band with oblique incisions (figs. 8.1–5; 9.1–4, 9; 10.1–3; 18.1–6).
- (b) combination of horizontal and vertical plastic bands with incisions (figs. 9.1; 10.3).
- (c) conical knobs, included in the plastic band (figs. 8.8; 16.1).
- (d) horizontal plastic band with finger impressions (fig. 6.1–3).

Concluding remarks

Our knowledge regarding the level of organization of the settlement pattern of the isolated high Vrashka chuka is still too fragmented and far from providing complete picture about the settlement system. The archaeological excavations in the region are the first step towards addressing this issue. Together with future field surveys, the materials presented here will help to elucidate the EIA settlement pattern. Based on the features from the excavated area of site 1/1000 we suggest that the site is a single-layer settlement. The absence of thermal facilities, traces of destructions and house inventory suggests that the investigated features have seasonal, temporary characteristic. Nevertheless, we must emphasize once again that these observations are based only on the excavated area and future excavations of the site can provide more information about the habitation during the EIA.

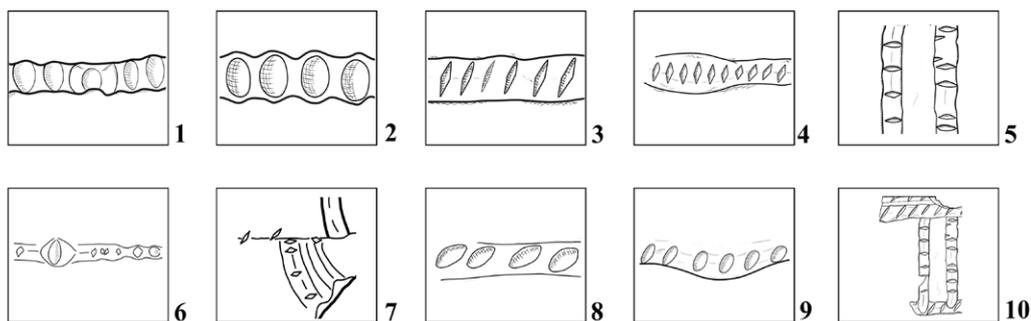
The pottery sherds from features № 26, № 33 and the only dug-into structure № 37 in Vrashka chuka bear the stylistic traits of the Gornea–Kalakača horizon. The pottery sherds from feature № 27 bears characteristics of late Kalakača group, or early Basarabi group.

M. Gumă dates the Gornea–Kalakača group to the Ha B2-B3 phases. Besides the fluted and faceted ornamentation on the turban-shaped bowls and the conical knobs, another specific element of the fine pottery of Gornea–Kalakača, according to the author, is also the incised ornamentations. During the final stage of Gornea–Kalakača some stamped ornamentations has appeared, too, due to the connections with the group of Insula Banului type, and according to M. Gumă, due to the appearance of the earliest elements of Basarabi type (Gumă 1993; 1995, 113). The research on the Basarabi phenomenon confirms the opinion of most of the researchers that three cultural traditions contributed to its formation. These are Gornea–Kalakača with incised decoration, Insula Banului with stamped decoration and Gava–Medias with plastic ornamentation (Zverev 2001–2002, 252–253).

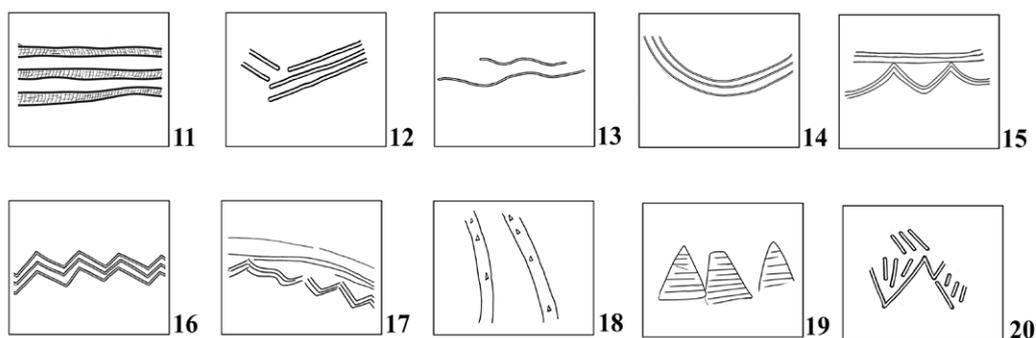
R. Vasic assumes that the Iron Age in Eastern Serbia has three phases – first, represented by the pottery of Kalakača–Basarabi group (combination of channels and S motifs with white incrustation), second, consisting of metal imitations of the Basarabi pottery group, and third comprising finds connected with the Ferigile group in Oltenia (Vasić 1997, 95). The largest number of settlements in north-eastern Serbia and the Iron Gates hinterlands belong to late Kalakača group, or early Basarabi group, which has, it seems, emerged in Oltenia and Northwest Bulgaria (Kapurana 2014, 84 and cited literature), and in the case of this study, at site 1/1000 at the foot of Vrashka chuka.

When the results from excavations and field surveys of other EIA sites are published, our knowledge about lifeways in Northwest Bulgaria during this period will be significantly enriched.

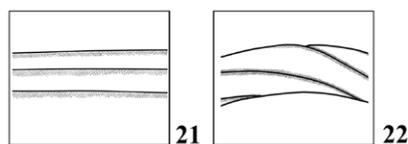
plastic



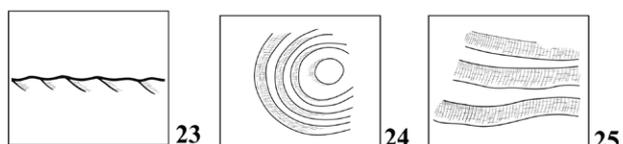
incision



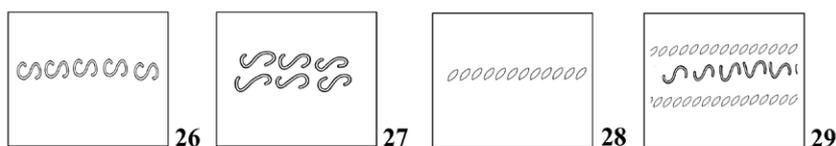
flutes



grooving



stamping



combined

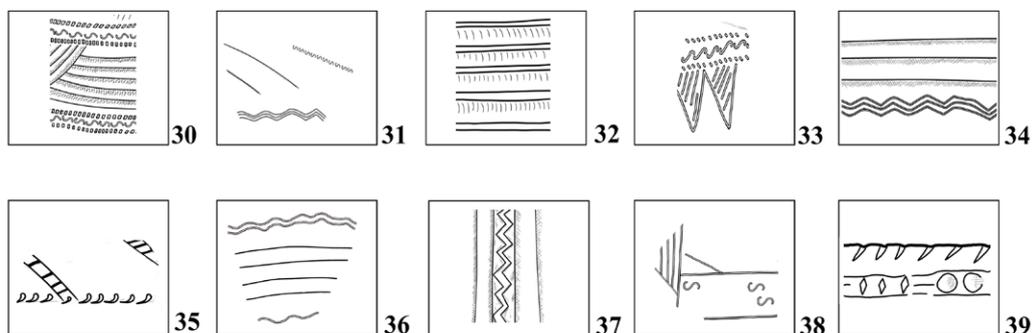


Fig. 20. Decoration patterns of Vrashka Chuka EIA pottery sherds (author Z. Vasileva)
 Обр. 20. Декоративни мотиви на РЖЕ керамични фрагменти от Врѝшка чука (автор Ж. Василева)

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The EIA pottery assemblage from Vrashka chuka sheds a new light to the studies of the EIA in North-west Bulgaria and places one so far unknown site on the archaeological settlement map.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Elena Vasileva (National Archaeological Institute with Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) for her friendship and the opportunity to work as her co-supervisor during the rescue archaeological excavations at Vrashka chuka.

I would like to express my gratitude to Violeta Georgieva for helping me with some of the drawings. My special thanks go also to Aleksandar Kapuran (Archaeological Institute, Belgrade), Assoc. Prof. Stefan Alexandrov and Assoc. Prof. Georgi Nekhrizov (National Archaeological Institute with Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) for the consultations and advice. I would like to express my gratitude also to Dr. Victor Sava (Complexul Muzeal Arad), Dr. Aleksandar Bulatovic (Archaeological Institute, Belgrade), Ivana Kosanovič (Archaeological Institute, Belgrade) and Anna Agre (Sofia University) for providing me literature on this subject.

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Керамичен комплекс от ранножелязната епоха от обект 1/1000 в подножието на Връшка Чука, Северозападна България

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(резюме)

Статията представя керамичен материал от ранната желязна епоха (РЖЕ), открит по време на спасителни археологически проучвания по трасето на изграждащият се газопровод между България и Сърбия. Обект 1/1000 в землището на с. Извор махала, община Кула, област Видин е разположен в подножието на изолираната планина Връшка чука. По време на спасителните археологически проучвания през 2019 г. са проучени структури от средната бронзова епоха, ранната желязна епоха, римски период и късно средновековие.

Статията представя керамичния материал от проучените структури (№ 26, 27, 33, 37 и 39), както и керамиката, открита в запазеният пласт от РЖЕ. Въз основа на характеристиките на проучените структури – струпвания от керамични фрагменти и камъни, липсата на запазени термични съоръжения, липсата на останки от деструкции и жилищен инвентар може да се предположи, че проучените структури са съоръжения с временен, сезонен характер.

Структура № 37 е единствената вкопана структура. Керамичният материал е представен от фрагменти от гърнета с украса от релефни ленти, паници с извит ръб на устието и украса с коси канелюри, съдове с украса от врязани линии, оформящи гирлянди. По време на проучванията е взета и 14С проба с резултат 1005–889 пр.Хр. (86.1%) и 881–846 пр.Хр. (9.3%).

Останалите структури, както и пластът от РЖЕ, са представени от фрагменти, характерни за периода късна Горнеа–Калакача – ранна Басараби. Най-често гърнетата са украсени с пластични хоризонтални или вертикални ленти с коси врязвания. Най-характерният елемент от украсата на съдовете са щамповани S-ове, самостоятелно или в комбинация с украса от псевдошнур, врязания и т.н. Често срещани са и фрагменти с врязани вълнообразни линии. Най-интересната категория съдове са характерните за цялото РЖЕ паници с извит ръб на устието. Устието на паниците е украсено от коси канелюри, в някои случаи и в комбинация с щамповани S-ове и т.нар. фалшив шнур.

Представеният в статията керамичен материал от проучванията на Връшка чука дава нова ценна информация за развитието на РЖЕ в този район, период, който все още остава слабо проучен.