

# A mass grave and other contexts containing human remains discovered in the Hallstatt-period site at Tărtăria – Podu Tărtăriei vest (Alba County)

Luciana RUMEGA-IRIMUȘ\*

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**Abstract:** *The First Iron Age (Hallstatt period) in Transylvania, as well as in the territory of nowadays Romania, is less understood from the perspective of the funerary phenomena. The main reason is determined by the rarity, in some cases (areas) even the absence of investigated graves from approx. the 12<sup>th</sup> c. to the 8<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. The necropolises of this period are located mainly at the periphery of the geographic space bordered by the Carpathians and Lower Danube. A new funerary find made in 2012 at Tărtăria – Podu Tărtăriei vest brought new evidence in regard to this topic. Within a very specific type of site, a mass grave was uncovered – six skeletons laid in various positions and orientations, as well as a human skull. Other parts of human skeletons were uncovered in the southern delimitation ditch of the site, as well as in one of the pits (6 archaeological contexts in total, with fragments from 9 individuals). The unusual character of the site is also suggested by the discovery of two ditches marking the southern and eastern limits of the site, and two bronze hoards (comprising 400 bronze and iron objects, dated to the Ha C<sub>1</sub> period – the Bălvănești-Vinț series, 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE), as well as by a large quantity of Basarabi-type pottery (numerous complete vessels) and metal objects. The grave goods related to the six skeletons and the skull consisted of three small cups, characteristic to the Basarabi ceramic style, as well as certain small (adornment) objects made of bronze and iron. As mentioned, five other archaeological contexts were also investigated, containing parts of human skeletons associated with Basarabi-type pottery. In the current stage of the research on the site it is rather difficult to conclude on the purpose and meaning of such a burial and deposits. Nevertheless, this discovery provides new elements for analysing and understanding the funerary phenomena along the First Iron Age in Transylvania, especially for the so-called Middle Hallstatt period (the Basarabi culture).*

**Rezumat:** *Prima epocă a fierului (perioada hallstattiană) în Transilvania, ca de altfel în mare parte a teritoriului actual al României este mai puțin înțeleasă din perspectiva fenomenului funerar. Acest fapt se datorează rarității unor asemenea descoperiri, iar în unele cazuri (zone) chiar absenței unor morminte cercetate, databile din perioada sec. XII–VIII/VII a. Chr. Necropolele acestei perioade sunt în general situate la periferia spațiului delimitat de Carpați și Dunărea de Jos. O nouă descoperire funerară a survenit în anul 2012, în cadrul sitului Tărtăria – Podu Tărtăriei vest, aceasta aducând noi date asupra fenomenului funerar hallstattian în aria intracarpatică. În cuprinsul acestui sit cu specific aparte, a fost descoperit un mormânt colectiv conținând 6 schelete (dispuse în varii poziții și având orientări diferite) și un craniu. Alte fragmente de schelet uman au fost descoperite în șanțul sudic de delimitare al sitului, precum și în inventarul unor gropi. Caracteristicile aparte ale sitului în discuție sunt determinate de descoperirea a două șanțuri de delimitare situate în zona sudică și estică a sitului, precum și de două depozite de bronzuri (conținând peste 400 de obiecte din fier și bronz, databile la nivel de Ha C<sub>1</sub> – seria Bălvănești-Vinț sec. VIII a. Chr.); de asemenea, au fost descoperite o mare cantitate de ceramică de tip Basarabi (numeroase vase întregi și întregibile) și obiecte din metal. În cadrul mormântului colectiv au fost descoperite 3 mici vase specifice ceramicii de tip Basarabi, cât și mici obiecte de podoabă din bronz și fier. După cum s-a menționat, au mai fost cercetate alte 6 contexte arheologice conținând resturi osteologice umane (de la 9 indivizi) asociate cu ceramică de tip Basarabi. În stadiul actual al cercetării cu privire la situl în discuție este dificil de concluzionat cu privire la scopul și semnificația acestei înmormântări și al celorlalte depuneri. În mod cert, această descoperire aduce noi elemente pentru analiza și aprofundarea fenomenului funerar de-alungul perioadei*

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\* “Vasile Pârvan” Archaeological Institute, Bucharest; National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest; e-mail: luciana\_dr@yahoo.com.

*hallstattiene în spațiul intracarpatic, în special în ceea ce privește perioada mijlocie a primei epoci a fierului (cultura Basarabi).*

**Keywords:** *Tărtăria, middle period of the first Iron Age (Middle Hallstatt), Basarabi culture, mass grave, archaeological context with human bone remains associated with Basarabi type pottery.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Tărtăria, perioada mijlocie a primei epoci a fierului (Hallstatt mijlociu), cultura Basarabi, mormânt colectiv, contexte arheologice cu resturi osteologice umane asociate cu ceramică de tip Basarabi.*

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## ◆ Introduction

The Middle Hallstatt period in Romania is equalled with Ha B3 and Ha C in Central Europe according to Müller-Karpe system that tries to offer absolute chronology for the Iron Age. This period is also equalled with the manifestation of the Basarabi culture, the most representative cultural phenomena in the carphato-danubian area. The Middle Hallstatt period starts around 850/800 and lasts until 650 B.C., although in some regions the evolution of some Early Hallstatt period cultures continues (A. László 2010, p. 290-294). This period was defined especially on the characteristic of the ceramics.

Funeral practices of the Basarabi period are known only by a handful of isolated inhumation or incineration graves and tumulus. Necropolis have been researched only in the south-west area of the Basarabi culture, along the Danube River, all of them being tumulus discoveries. These funerary finds are very rare in comparison with the large number of settlements.

## ◆ Site location

In 2012, during the construction of highway A1: Orăștie – Sibiu, segment Orăștie – Sebeș, large-scale preventive archaeological research was undertaken, which led to the identification of a new Hallstatt-period site (pertaining to the Basarabi culture), located near Tărtăria, Alba County (C. Borș *et alii* 2013, p. 9–102).

The Hallstatt-period site is located on the second terrace of the River Mureș (actually, geologically, the earliest terrace), on the river's left bank, South of road DN7 (at the present moment North of the above-mentioned highway) and West of road DC705E (fig. 1/1-2). The archaeological diagnosis works and preventive archaeological research were undertaken by a team of archaeologists from the Romanian National History Museum, in the framework of the National Research Program "Autostrada" ("The Highway").

The site's area was first delimited between km 14+100 and km 14+500 of the future A1 highway's trajectory, with the archaeological vestiges concentrated between km 14+240/250 and km 14+540. We have identified and investigated 269 archaeological contexts and complexes, on a surface of approximately 2 ha. Among these we mention 7 contexts containing human bone remains (entirely or partially preserved), belonging to at least 16 individuals (fig. 1/3). In two cases we can consider that the deceased were found in funerary contexts (CPL 114/114B and CPL 186), with the skeletons in an anatomical position, the rest of the cases presenting uncertain situations.

In the following pages we will present the conditions for the discovery of the mass grave and the other 6 archaeological contexts in which human bone remains were discovered, as well as the ceramic material they were associated with.

### ◆ The mass grave

**Complex CPL 114 (“the mass grave”) / Individual 1 to Individual 7** (fig. 4/1–2). Initially the complex appeared as a large ( $D_{\max} = 3$  m), relatively circular darker (dark brown) area, with pottery and wattle and daub fragments on the surface, around 8–9 m N of the site’s southern delimitation ditch. It was identified in S III, south from km 14+410 (highway’s axis), a few metres away from what used to be a ravine in the Basarabi period, according to the general stratigraphy of the S III surface (fig. 2).

At the beginning we thought it could have represented the ruins of a semi-buried dwelling, and therefore opted for sectioning it on an E – W axis. Immediately after sectioning it, in the pit’s northern half, at a depth of around -0.15 m from the level the context was identified at, we discovered a small bronze object (pendant). On the same level we also discovered a small, simple bronze link.

At a depth of -0.20 m from the level the context was identified at we discovered several extremely friable bone fragments. After a careful analysis we discovered that these were human bones, belonging to 5 individuals, with the skeletons in an anatomical position, laid in different modes and with different orientations.

In order to obtain a general image of this special archaeological situation, we carefully investigated the pit’s entire surface between -0.30 and -0.40 m from the level on which the complex has been outlined. Thus, we identified 6 human skeletons *in situ*, which were registered Individual 1 to Individual 6. The human bone remains were preserved in a very bad state, many of them very friable, and in certain cases only their traces were visible. From the beginning of the research on the human skeletons we noticed that the individuals were laid in a pit and not randomly.

In the complex’s southern part, after excavating the first 6 skeletons and cleaning the lower part of CPL 114, we noticed the presence of another oval pit (registered as CPL 114B, L=1.75 m, l=1.05 m), oriented E – W, on whose surface we uncovered a seventh skull, accompanied by a fragmentary small cup set very close to its SW limit. The skull was not in an anatomical connection to the other bone remains, and the mandible was missing. In this second pit’s fill, no other human bone remains were discovered but only fragments of animal bones. The last skull was registered as Individual 7 and represents the first deposit in the funerary context CPL 114. Another small and circular pit was identified on the same level as CPL 114B, this time in the central-northern part of CPL 114 and was registered as CPL 114C. This was (most probably) a pole pit ( $D = 0.4$  m), that went approx. 0.40 m deeper than the lower level of the pit where Individual 1 – Individual 6 were laid and had the same dark fill with intrusions as the rest of the complex, but with no archaeological material.

The fill of pit CPL 114, as well as the one of CPL 114B and CPL 114C, is made up of black sediment with traces of wattle and daub, but with a larger amount of archaeological material. Therefore, the first pit was dug up in the SE part of the mass grave and in here was deposited the skull of Individual 7, together with two small mugs and a circular stone. This pit was soon after leveled with the same soil with inclusions similar to the one covering Individual 1 to Individual 6. In the upper level, over the one where the skeletons were laid, in the fill, several pottery fragments were discovered and, scattered among them, a series of fragments from the upper half of a mug (partially preserved body, neck, rim and handle) with decorations specific for the Basarabi pottery. Among the Individual 1 – Individual 6 skeletons, the number of pottery fragments was much smaller than on the previous level.

**Individual 1** (fig. 3/1–2) – was laid in a dorsal position, slightly bent from the pelvis northwards (towards its left side), so that its right leg superposed the left one at knee level.

The skull rested on its left side, facing NE. On the maxilla were identified six teeth, and on the mandible another six. The skull and upper thorax of Individual 1 were superposed by Individual 2's right foot, which was bent near Individual 1's right collarbone, so that Individual 2's lower right leg pointed westwards and was located approx. 10 cm from the occipital area of Individual 1's skull. At the same time, Individual 2's lower left foot superposed Individual 1, so Individual 2's left femur was lying over Individual 1's right arm's joint and was bent over the thorax. Both Individual 2's right patella, as well as Individual 1's right shoulder, was slightly moved from the initial position when research on the complex first started. Individual 2's left arm superposed Individual 1's lower part, the pelvis area respectively. Individual 2's right arm was bent similarly to the left one, slightly more to the E (towards Individual 1's lower legs), but was in a very bad state of preservation. The legs were lying on the side, the right one superposing the left. Only after excavating Individual 4 we noticed, in the area around Individual 1's lower legs, the presence of both calcanei and the traces of the metatarsi and phalange, all in a very bad state of preservation. In the area around the lower right leg we discovered a small bronze object (twisted wire, D=1.92 cm). Since no anthropologist was present during the excavation of the mass grave, parts of the skeleton had to be measured (by the archaeologists) *in situ* (tab. 1) as correct as possible (due to the poor state of conservation of the bones) for further use on the post-excavation analysis. When excavating the lower part, to the E, we discovered under the right femur several small bone fragments, initially mistaken for phalanges. Under the left tibia and peroneus we discovered a long bone, better preserved, possibly from an adult, positioned on a SW – NE direction. The phalanges of the left arm were lying under Individual 2's right humerus, and could only be seen after the latter was excavated. In the current state of the post-excavation and anthropological analyses (G. Vasile, M. Ilie 2015), 9 teeth seem to belong to an individual, other than Individual 1 – Individual 6, estimated to be around 6-7 years old. This individual was later marked (during the anthropological analysis) as Individual 17.

In the area between Individual 1 and Individual 2 we discovered, in the pit's fill, traces of charcoal, small calcined bones and several pottery fragments, mostly atypical with the exception of a handle with decoration typical for the Basarabi culture.

**Individual 2** (fig. 3/1, 3) – was located in the centre of the complex's NW quadrant, between Individual 1 and Individual 3. It was laid in a crouching position, on its left side, facing W. The body seems to have been deposited after Individual 1 and Individual 3, which it partially superposed. The skeleton has an approximate SE – NW orientation. We noticed that part of the spine and of the mandible were missing, which we explained through the bad state the skeletons were found in. Many of the bones, especially in the area around the lumbar vertebrae, were only preserved as an imprint. The skull was twisted facing down, to the left or W respectively. On the right side of the thorax we identified nine ribs, on the left only eight, the latter being partially superposed by the former. The right arm was bent towards the skull, apparently with the phalanges laid in the occipital area. The left arm was bent at a 90° angle over Individual 1's pelvis. From the latter only the left part seems to have been preserved, and we only had the imprint in the ground left from the right part. The legs were bent and superposed Individual 1's upper part, so that Individual 2's right leg touched Individual 1's scapula, and Individual 2's tibia and fibula superposed Individual 1's skull longitudinally. The left leg was bent in the area of Individual 1's thorax, with the tibia and fibula parallel to Individual 1's right humerus. As far as the funerary inventory directly associated with Individual 2 is concerned, we mention a simple bronze link, located in the right part of the skull. After excavating Individual 2's skull, under it to the left we discovered another small

fragmentary bronze object, probably also a simple wire link. In the area of the right humerus we found a small iron link, and in that of the thorax half of another small bronze link.

**Individual 3** (fig. 3/1, 4) – the skeleton was lying on its left side, facing W, in the NW quadrant of CPL 114, with its legs touching the pit's limit. The skeleton was oriented SE – NW. The mandible and maxilla were superposed by the right humerus, and only some teeth were discovered. The spine seemed to be slightly moved between the cervical vertebrae and the rest of the spine. At a first glance, Individual 2 seems to have been laid with the thorax facing downwards, so that the left humerus was lying on an E-W direction down to the thorax, and the left arm's ulna and radius (including the phalanges) superposed the right ulna and radius. They seemed "torn" from the elbow and bent sharply inwards. The left arm's phalanges were superposed by the right humerus and went under the thorax. Six–seven ribs from the left side and 8 from the right side were discovered. The vertebrae's imprint in the ground was all that was preserved from the spine. The pelvis was lying on the left side and superposed the left femur. The right femur superposed the left leg's knee, with both legs' lower part parallel on a SE – NW direction. After excavation, under the lower left leg we discovered a long bone, probably animal, with no anatomical connection with the rest. Between Individual 2's and Individual 3's skulls, approx. 3 cm from the front of skull Individual 3, we discovered another fragmentary bronze small ring, representing the funerary inventory of the deceased.

**Individual 4** (fig. 5/A) – was laid almost in the centre of complex CPL 114, with a SE – NW orientation, the skull facing E. The skull was laid on the side and was in anatomical connection with the spine. The thorax was laid in a dorsal position; the arms were bent towards the skull. We discovered the phalanges on the right, towards the mandible's base, under the humerus. Apparently the right arm was sharply bent backwards, with the palm set downwards, under the ribs. The pelvis was laid on the right side and was sharply bent eastwards from the left hip. This part of the skeleton was badly damaged. The legs were also sharply bent, so that they were parallel to the spine. The left femur was the uppermost bone in the legs' area, with the rest sharply bent under the former. The legs were bent under the pelvis, and the lower part of the right leg was located towards the sacral area.

**Individual 5** (fig. 5/B, 1–2) – was laid on its right side, in a semi-crouching position, in the NE quadrant. The skull was to the W and was facing SE, and the legs were towards the E. The lower part of the legs touched the eastern extremity of the pit. The left ulna and radius were superposed by Individual 6's left arm. The phalanges of Individual 5's right arm were reaching towards the skull, under Individual 6's left leg. Near the right leg's patella, Individual 5 superposed Individual 6's left side of the pelvis. The skull touched the phalanges of Individual 6's left arm and was laid on the right side. The body was laid on the right side slightly bent from the pelvis southwards. Only the bone imprints were preserved from the spine and left ribs. The right leg was more sharply bent than the left one. The right calcaneus touched the base of the pelvis. The left leg was bent at 45° from the knee, so that the tip of the lower bones were pointing E. As funerary inventory, discovered at the base of the left leg was a spherical bronze bead (slightly flattened), and in the area around the chest another very small bronze conical object, preserved only partially. During the excavation, on the right side of the thorax small, unidentifiable iron fragments appeared, set 5 cm from one another.

**Individual 6** (fig. 5/B, 2–3) – the upper part of the body was laid in a dorsal position, down to the pelvis, with the legs sharply bent to the right, in an abnormal position (they seemed broken). The skeleton was laid in the SE quadrant of complex CPL 114, with the skull located approximately in the middle of the pit. The skeleton's orientation was SW – NE. The lower part of the legs touched the pit's eastern limit. The spine seemed broken in the cervical

area. The skull was facing NE and had the mouth open (most probably due to the movement of the mandible by the earth's pressure in time). The left arm was sharply bent towards the left scapula, so that all the bones of the arm were approximately parallel to one another, with the phalanges touching what seemed to be the left collarbone. The right humerus was parallel to the body, the arm bent over the pelvis at an angle larger than 100°, with the phalanges set over the coccyx and the pelvis' left side, covered, in their turn, by Individual 5's right leg's knee. The left leg was accidentally affected during the research in the northern half of the archaeological complex, so that the left femur, tibia and fibula were cut in half. Only the imprint in the ground was preserved from the left leg. The latter, bent at 45°, superposed the right leg, which was laid in a similar position, with the knees pointing S. From the right leg were missing the lower bones and only the calcaneus was preserved. We suppose the phalanges were pointing E. The body was not accompanied by an inventory. This seems to have been the largest of all the skeletons.

**Individual 7** (fig. 6/1-2) – was identified in the SE part of the complex, after excavating skeletons Individuals 1 – 6 when, in order to reach the pit's final depth, the excavation reached a second, oval pit, CPL 114B, that went deeper than the level where the others were buried. Here we discovered a human skull, missing the mandible. The skull was facing E. Very close to the SSW we discovered a mug broken on the spot (fig. 6/3), with a missing handle, as well as a circular stone to the SW. Therefore, Individual 7 seems to have been the first to be *deposited*, before the other 6 skeletons. There is no evidence that CPL 114B was dug up long before CPL 114. Most probably, CPL 114 B represents a deeper part of CPL 114, made to deposit the skull with its funerary inventory (as a special funerary practice of the community), and on top of it the other 6 skeletons were laid carefully.

Individual	Skeleton length cm	Humerus cm	Radius/Ulna cm	Femur cm	Tibia/ Fibula cm	Pelvis cm	Palm cm	Foot cm
1	144	28	21	37	34-35	18	22	21-22
2	116	27	25	36	33-34	22	?	?
3	115	34	?	45-46	45	23	?	15
4	64	19	15-16	26	18	12	?	?
5	117	30	29	38	36	26	26	20
6	115	32	28	42	36	?	12	?
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Tab. 1.** Preliminary measurements taken *in situ* on the preserved bone fragments.  
Măsurătorile preliminare *in situ* ale resturilor osteologice conservate.

The fill of pit CPL 114 B was made up, as well, of black earth with traces of wattle and daub. Under skull of Individual 7 other pottery fragments were discovered, as well as animal bones and molars of *Sus scrofa/Sus domesticus*. Among the pottery fragments was identified a second mug, associated to Individual 7 (fig. 6/4). The rest of the material found are inclusions and can not be directly associated with any of the individuals deposited here.

As far as the pottery in the fill of pits CPL 114 and CPL 114B is concerned, 162 pottery fragments were identified, 130 of which are atypical, the other 32 having different decoration elements specific for the Basarabi culture or elements that identify the type of pot they were part of. Among these we have to mention handle fragments (fig. 7/1-3), generally from raised

handles, decorated (with rows of continuous "S"s and/or a row of oblique imprints. The handles in this archaeological complex's inventory have either an oval or a crescent cross section. We must also mention the basic handles (fig. 7/4, 6), simple, oval or with alveolae, the latter being part of a jar-type pot decoration. Generally, the decoration of the pottery fragments in this context is represented by bands with alveolae or indentations (fig. 7/12; fig. 8/1), horizontal grooves (fig. 7/8, 10), as well as elements typical for the Basarabi culture. We come across such geometrical motives made of hatched triangles (fig. 7/7) or decorations made by alternating rows of "S"s (fig. 7/11) with rows of oblique indentations (fig. 7/9).

The types of pots that were found in this complex have the shapes usually found in the Basarabi culture. Most seem to be tronconical pots with a highly protruding rim, sometimes decorated (fig. 8/2–3), both on the outside and on the inside. Some rim fragments, as well as bases, suggest the presence of the jar-type pots (fig. 8/1, 4–5) that, unlike the ones mentioned above, are generally made of a coarser paste. On the latter, the only decoration is made up of bands with indentations or alveolae, indentation on the rim and, in this case – protrusions. Another four rim fragments certainly come from pots with an inwards protruding rim (fig. 8/6–9). These could come from bowls, generally undecorated, or from plates decorated with horizontal or oblique grooves in the pot's upper part. Among the pottery fragments described above, fragments from the upper part of a mug typical of the Basarabi culture were discovered (fig. 9/1).

In the case of Individual 7, we can consider that the two small pots (cups) were directly associated with the burial of the skull. The cup closest to the skull has an oval mouth; the only decoration elements are two shallow grooves, located on the pots' maximum circumference (fig. 9/3). The second cup associated with Individual was found near the W limit of pit CPL 114B (fig. 9/2). The cup's shape is similar to the one previously described, but the decoration is this time typical for the Basarabi decoration. Apart from these fragments typical for the Basarabi culture, two other fired clay objects were discovered. One is a clay ball ( $D_m=2.8$  cm) (fig. 9/4), and the second is an unidentifiable, rectangular fragmentary object, slightly arched and with a tear-shaped cross section (fig. 7/5), both of them could have been part of the funerary inventory.

#### ◆ Human remains found in non-funerary contexts

**Individual 8.** At the base of trial trench CPL 004F<sup>1</sup>, dug on the trajectory of the site's southern delimitation ditch, registered as CPL 004/118, several bone fragments were

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most important observations that can be made in this stage of the excavation is the one about the existence of a ravine in the S part of the site, a natural structure with anthropic interventions, which was (preliminary) interpreted as a delimitation ditch of the prehistoric area of habitation. This is the south limit of the site, with a V-E direction on a distance of over 250 m. Initially this structure was identified in the W part of the original area of research, and was marked as CPL 004. Afterwards, in the SE corner of this initial area of research another linear structure was noticed. This was marked as CPL 118. In the context of the research it was clear that CPL 004 is continued by CPL 118, but taking in consideration the fact that in its eastern part the structure was affected by modern industrial constructions, we chose to keep both markings. Given the dimensions and the characteristics of the structure, the work calendar and the logistics at our disposal, transverse trial trenches were made: in the eastern part (CPL 118) where the presence of the archaeological material was increased, 9 trial trenches were made and in the western part (CPL 004) where the archaeological material was significant 23 such trial trenches were made. These transverse trial trenches were made with mechanical and manual resources. To these we added two

discovered on a surface of  $3.5 \times 2$  m, as well as pottery shards, small bronze objects, wattle and daub fragments and stones (fig. 10/1–2). Among them we identified a human skull, laid on its left side facing SE. Approximately 0.30 m E of the skull were discovered several fragmentary long bones, seemingly human (at least a femur fragment, tibia/fibula). These were not in an anatomical position. Other bone fragments were also scattered in the above-mentioned surface, but their bad state of preservation prevented a clear identification (animal or human). The presence of these human remains at the base of the trench is difficult to be understood, being difficult to conclude if this is a result of an intended deposition or the result of an unintended human action. The bronze objects were found 0.40 m S and 1.20 m SE from skull Individual 8, and they are a simple link and a multi-spiral hair pin with an “8”-shaped ending.

From the area where human bones registered as Individual 8 were found, approximately 370 pottery fragments were collected, 20 of which are typical (fig. 11/1–15). Three of them represent broken (initially raised) handles, one with a triangular cross section with a central groove and the others with a hexagonal cross section (fig. 11/1–3). Other pottery fragments have a decoration specific to the Basarabi culture (fig. 11/5–9). None of the pottery fragments mentioned above can be directly associated with the human remains identified as Individual 8, and in the absence of complete/completable pots we should rather consider them as being part of the archaeological complex's fill, as well as the other objects.

**Individual 9.** In the W end of excavation unit S IV we excavated the transverse trial trench CPL 004H using mechanical means under archaeological supervision. In its eastern half, at approx. -1.45/-1.55 m below the present day surface, bone fragments from at least one human skull were discovered. They were registered as Individual 9. Later we started a larger excavation unit at the trial trench's lower level and identified remains from two other human skulls and several – possibly human – bones at the base of the trench on the same level with Individual 9. Later on, these remains were marked as Individual 11. All the remains were found on the bottom of the trial trench.

**Individual 10.** Human bones were discovered near the lowest level in transverse trial trench CPL 004K from excavation unit S V, open at a right angle on the site's southern delimitation ditch (CPL 004/118), in its centre, at a depth of approx. -1.60 m from the current surface. Here were discovered several ribs and long bones fragments (possibly from the arms) in a very bad state of preservation (fig. 12/1). The bones' dimensions could not be established. Apart from the bones we discovered a handle fragment with a triangular cross section. At approx. 1.50 m W of the human remains, near the trench's western profile, we identified a fragmentary mug (under restoration<sup>2</sup>), laid on its side, its mouth to the S (fig. 12/2), and under it a bone (animal?), but these were not directly associated with Individual 10.

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main sections, S<sub>003</sub> north and S<sub>008</sub> south, both of them were crossing – almost perpendicular – CPL 004. Beyond this, on the plateau towards the village of Tărtăria, inside the limit of expropriation of the highway no indication of the presence of archaeological potential was noticed. The southern delimitation ditch of the hallstattian site represents a structure with particular characteristics, both in terms of natural (the presence of numerous springs) and archaeological (votive deposits dated in the period of the Basarabi culture / HaC – bronze hoards, metal artefacts, pottery and fragments of human remains) aspects. There are also two later discoveries in the superior part of this structure: a coin hoard from the Latène period and a bronze fibula from the Roman period.

<sup>2</sup> Restoration of the pottery discovered during the preventive archaeological research at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest*, undertaken in the laboratories of the National History Museum of Romania – Department of Restoration by Ms Gabriela Dragomir and Ms Ileana Zaharia, is almost complete.

**Individual 11 – Individual 13.** Three human skulls were discovered in the lower part of transverse trial trench CPL 004H, dug at a right angle on the site's southern delimitation ditch CPL 004/118 (fig. 13/1–2). The human bones were found almost in the centre of the transverse trial trench, near its NE profile, all at the same level, with no traces of a pit. Their presence at the base of the trial trench can not be interpreted as a funerary deposition.

**Individual 11** consist in an isolated skull, and it was located in the E part of the complexe. It was facing down, pointing slightly eastwards. Near it were discovered several bone fragments, possibly in connection to it, as well as pottery fragments.

**Individual 12** was located between Individual 11 and Individual 13, at approx. 1 m W from the first and 0.30 m SSE from the latter. Only several fragments from the upper skull were preserved, and badly, and they could not provide information on the skull's orientation. Three stones were found around it.

**Individual 13** contained the trace of an upper skull and several badly preserved bones from it, representing the westernmost remains from the group of skulls discovered at the base of transverse trial trench CPL004H. As with the previous case, the skull's orientation could not be established.

None of the three skulls had directly-associated archaeological inventory, and in the absence of other bone remains/skeleton parts their presence in the lower part of the southern delimitation ditch is not entirely clear.

171 pottery fragments and several wattle and daub fragments were collected in the area around Individual 11 – Individual 13. 41 of them are typical fragments (fig. 14/1-15), many of which have a specific Basarabi culture decoration. The only pottery fragment with a zoomorphic representation discovered in the site comes from this complex. This is a fragment of protruding rim, with a horse drawn on the inside, using incised lines for the contour and a hatch for the surface (fig. 14/15).

Even if no complete/completable pots were discovered in the area of Individual 11 – Individual 13, there we identified the upper part of a bitronconic pot with a highly protruding rim and a decoration specific to the Basarabi culture (fig. 13/14). Other shapes are protruding rim pots, pots with the rim turned inwards (bowls, plates), including a fragment perforated in its upper part. We also identified eight fragments from the bases of medium or small pots.

**Individual 14.** The second complex with human remains in an anatomical position was identified in excavation unit S IV, at the base of CPL 004/118's southern delimitation ditch, in the N part of transverse trial trench CPL 004R. This pit was marked as CPL 196. At a depth of -1.60 m we identified a black, elongated oval complex, on whose surface one could see several bone fragments (fig. 15/2). Thus, in the complex's NE half we identified from the beginning the remains of a human skull facing downwards, partially affected by the excavation using mechanical means, as well as another long bone along and S of the skull, (fig. 15/4). Several pottery fragments were discovered on this level, but to the pit's southern limit. This skeleton was registered as Individual 14.

After excavating the bones and collecting the pottery on this first level, we noticed that the pit extended to the NE, beyond the western profile of CPL 004R. We decided to excavate using mechanical means the western part of the trench, and were therefore able to see the pit's final contour. On the same level with the above-mentioned bones we found the bones of the left arm and both legs, without the femurs though, all in anatomical position (fig. 15/5). The rest of the bones were missing, and not even their imprint in the ground could be found. Thus, Individual 14 was laid in a crouching position on its left side and had the skull moved post-mortem, oriented W - E. The arm was bent from the elbow, with phalanges pointing NNW.

The upper part of the humerus was accidentally affected during research on the complex. The left arm was located W from the skull. Several measurements were taken *in situ*: the ulna and radius measured 24 cm from the elbow to the carpians, and the tibia and fibula approx. 33 cm from the knee to the calcaneus. The legs were on the left side, to the N, and almost parallel. The tip of the legs was pointing NNE. The bones of Individual 14 were in a better state of preservation than those of Individual 1 – Individual 7. Even the calcaneus, metatarsians and phalanges from both legs were preserved, as well as the arms' phalanges and carpians. Between the bases of the two legs we discovered two other bone fragments, phalanges, most probably moved there from the right leg. Approx. 0.20 m E of Individual 14, adjoining the complex's limit, we found an oval stone.

As far as we could establish, Individual 14 was laid in a rectangular pit (CPL 186) with rounded corners, measuring 1.40 × 0.90 m (fig. 15/1,3). It was oriented W - E and reached the depth of a maximum of 0.15 m from the complex's upper level. The fill was made up of black-grey earth, with yellow intrusions.

Individual 14 had no "funerary" inventory apart from 37 pottery fragments scattered in the fill of the pit, of which only eight are typical (fig. 16/1–8). The most important pottery fragment is the upper part of a bitronconic pot with a typical Basarabi decoration (fig. 16/1 – a, b).

Apart from the two funerary contexts with human remains in an anatomical position (Individual 1 – Individual 7 and Individual 14) and the five cases (Individual 8, Individual 10 and Individual 11 – Individual 13) discovered in the lower part of the transverse trial trenches excavated on the trajectory of CPL 004/118's southern delimitation ditch, human bones were also discovered in the fill of other archaeological complexes, initially considered to be domestic pits. In none of these cases was a skeleton in anatomical position discovered, only scattered bones, mixed with other archaeological material (pottery and wattle and daub fragments).

**Individual 15.** In the site's eastern part, when starting the dig in excavation unit S XII, square 6, we identified the contour of an oval complex, 2.26 m long, with a S - N orientation and its E half affected by the mechanical excavation, so its maximum width could not be established (fig. 17/1-4). It was named CPL 242; the pit was dug in a sandy yellow-grey soil, with dark soil intrusions (animal trenches?). In the complex's S corner one could see, even as the excavation was starting, the remains of a skull, a mandible fragment and several postcranial fragments located approx. 0.50 m to the NW and slightly less deep. These were named Individual 15. The human bone fragments were in a medium state of preservation. In the pit's compact, black fill, along with wattle and daub and small charcoal fragments, we discovered several pottery fragments, burnt clay and animal bone fragments.

As far as the pottery is concerned, we discovered 194 fragments, 54 of which are typical: handles with a triangular cross section (fig. 18/1–4), fragments decorated with stamped (fig. 18/5–9, 12, 15) or incised (fig. 18/11, 14) patterns, grooves (fig. 18/8, 10–13), applied bands with indentations or alveolae (fig. 18/16–20), simple or decorated protruding/turned inwards rims (fig 19/1–2), with patterns specific to the Basarabi culture, as well as indented patterns, with different accessories (handles), rims turned inwards from undecorated bowls or from bowls decorated with grooves, protrusions, incised or stamped patterns (plates) (fig. 19/3–7) and pot bases of medium dimensions. The pottery fragments along with the other materials, including the human remains, can all be considered intrusions in the fill of the pit CPL 242.

**Individual 16.** These human bone fragments were identified during post-excavation processing, among bone fragments coming from CPL 199's pits fill, and were not initially classified as being human. The complex was first identified as a black spot with several pottery

fragments visible on the surface, as well as traces of wattle and daub and charcoal. The pit was oval (1.90 × 1.40 m), with tronconic walls and a flat base (fig. 20/1–2).

Due to the large quantity of fragmentary and diverse archaeological material, the complex can be considered a domestic pit. Several fragmentary pots were identified, including a large bulging pot, with a tall neck and four sharp protrusions facing upwards, set at the base of the neck, a mug with decoration specific to the Basarabi culture (fig. 21/1) and a plate with a highly protruding rim, with similar decoration (fig. 22/1–5). Other typical or atypical pottery fragments were discovered, as well as consistent fragments of fired clay/adobe, different size fragments of charcoal, well preserved animal bones, fired on non-fired, as well as three fragments from two processed antler objects. Among the animal bones, which in the case of the complex under discussion were found in a significant quantity compared to other complexes discovered on the site, were discovered during post-excavation processing<sup>3</sup> several human long bones. These were registered as Individual 16.

The pottery material is made up of 156 atypical and 72 typical fragments (fig. 20/3–13). The shapes of the pots whose fragments were “thrown” in this pit are typical for the Basarabi culture. They are bitronconic pots, some with a rich decoration, others with a much simpler decoration, jar pots with incised or alveolated rims and bands, pots with inward-turned rims such as bowls (undecorated) or plates decorated especially with grooves on the rim, as well as with incised patterns, a pot made of coarse paste, with circular and oval protrusions on its body (fig. 21/2), a mug with decoration specific to the Basarabi culture (fig. 21/1). Other types of pots are represented mainly by fragments of their walls, stamped (including ones inlaid with a white paste) or incised, and often grooved. We also discovered bases of small pots, most probably cups, with no decoration.

### ◆ Discussions and conclusions

The phenomenon of laying human bones inside settlements is documented for the Hallstatt period especially in the Babadag culture. For the Basarabi culture such discoveries are much less common and documented.

The best analogy for the mass grave at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest* is a similar discovery at Gomolava, in Vojvodina region (Serbia). Here were identified and researched two pits containing many more skeletons (mass graves), attributed to the Bosut III horizon, which is largely contemporary to the Basarabi-type discoveries on the territory of present-day Romania (N. Tasić 1972, p. 27–32).

More burials inside settlements are known from the Babadag culture. Chronologically, the closest discoveries are those from the third phase of the Babadag culture, namely: several pits in the settlement at Babadag (S.C. Ailincăi *et alii* 2007, p. 80–84), Enisala – *Palanca*, Izvoarele – *Biserica satului* (M. Irimia 2003, p. 254–255, fig. 1), Novosel'skoe – *Teraphont* (I.V. Bruiako, E.J. Novițkii 1997, p. 117–121), Orlovka – *Cartal* (V.P. Vančugov *et alii* 1999, p. 137), Rasova – *Malu Roșu* (M. Irimia 1974, p. 124–125) and Revărsarea – *Cotul Tichilești*.

As far as the Hallstatt period in Transylvania is concerned, pits containing human bones were discovered at Baci (Z. Kalmar 1987, p. 166–168), as well as in the fortified settlement at Teleac (V. Vasiliev *et alii* 1991, p. 42–43). At Alba Iulia – *Lumea Nouă* (Al. Vulpe 1965, p. 132, no. 54; H. Ciugudean 1976, p. 13–14, no. 3; Al. Vulpe 1986, p. 51, no. 2; V. Moga,

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<sup>3</sup> The archaeozoological study of the discoveries at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest* was undertaken by Adrian Bălășescu and Valentin Radu from the National History Museum of Romania and is ongoing.

H. Ciugudean 1995, p. 29, no. 6/1; Ciugudean 1997, p. 138, no. 3; Ursuțiu 2002, p. 82, no. 1) and at Iernut – *Casa Vlăsa* (Ciugudean 1976, p. 14; Al. Vulpe 1986, p. 58, no. 83a; V. Lazăr 1995, p. 154, no. XLVII; H. Ciugudean 1997, p. 142, no. 25; A. Ursuțiu 2002, p. 90, no. 35) were discovered pits with ceramic pots, but the context of these discoveries is unclear, so some specialists consider them possible cremation graves, even if in none of the situation could one find traces of burn or cremated bones, while others say these are just pottery deposits. We must mention that pits with pots deposited inside, the so-called pottery deposits, were found in several contexts in the site at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest*, but there is no indication to suggest that they could be considered funerary deposits.

Even if the typological and chorological analysis of the ceramic material discovered at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest* is still in an early stage, we must mention that the shape of the pots in the discoveries at Alba Iulia and Iernut is also common in the Basarabi pottery, and some of them have analogies even in the mass grave at Tărtăria (mugs, cups or bitronconic pots), even if the decoration is different.

Also, in the River Mureș Valley we must mention the discoveries at Berghin – *Lascău* (V. Moga, H. Ciugudean 1995, p. 55, no. 5; H. Ciugudean 1997, p. 138, no. 6; A. Ursuțiu 2002, p. 83, no. 8) and Chendu Mare – *Podu* (I.H. Crișan 1965, p. 134–135; V. Vasiliev, A. Zrinyi 1983, p. 172–173; V. Vasiliev, A. Zrinyi 1987, p. 91–116; H. Ciugudean 1997, p. 139, no. 11; A. Ursuțiu 2002, p. 86–97, no. 17), where Basarabi cremation necropolises are thought to have been identified. At Berghin surface research was undertaken in 1977, following which were collected pottery and burnt bones from a settlement dated to the Middle Hallstatt, namely the Basarabi culture; in the absence of proper archaeological research and published material, attributing a cremation necropolis remains uncertain. At Chendu Mare a cremation grave was discovered by chance, containing six pots (chronologically attributed to the period HaC – HaD). In 1979–1980 archaeological excavations were undertaken nearby, but no other graves were found, only the traces of a Hallstatt settlement contemporary to the one discovered in 1961. The shape of these pots is common to the ones we find in the Basarabi culture, but the decoration is different. This discovery is considered more likely to pertain to a late phase of the Basarabi culture, contemporary to an early phase of the Ferigile group at the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE (Al. Vulpe 1986, p. 55, no. 36a).

These discoveries at Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest* bring into attention certain different manners of treating the deads in comparison with the data known up to now from the Basarabi-age necropolises. First of all, this mass grave (CPL 114) is until now the only case known to the Basarabi environment on nowadays Romania's territory. The rest of the discoveries of human remains from Tărtăria (Individual 08 to Individual 16) indicate a particular manner of treating of deceased individual within a habitation area, being possible to represent non-funerary contexts.

Up to the present moment the mass grave and other contexts containing human bones represent a special discovery for the Basarabi culture, and force us to reconsider the study of the funerary phenomenon in the first Iron Age in the area inside the Carpathian arch and in the Lower Danube basin area.

#### ◆ Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ms Corina Borș, from the National History Museum of Romania – Department of Archaeology, scientific coordinator of the archaeological site

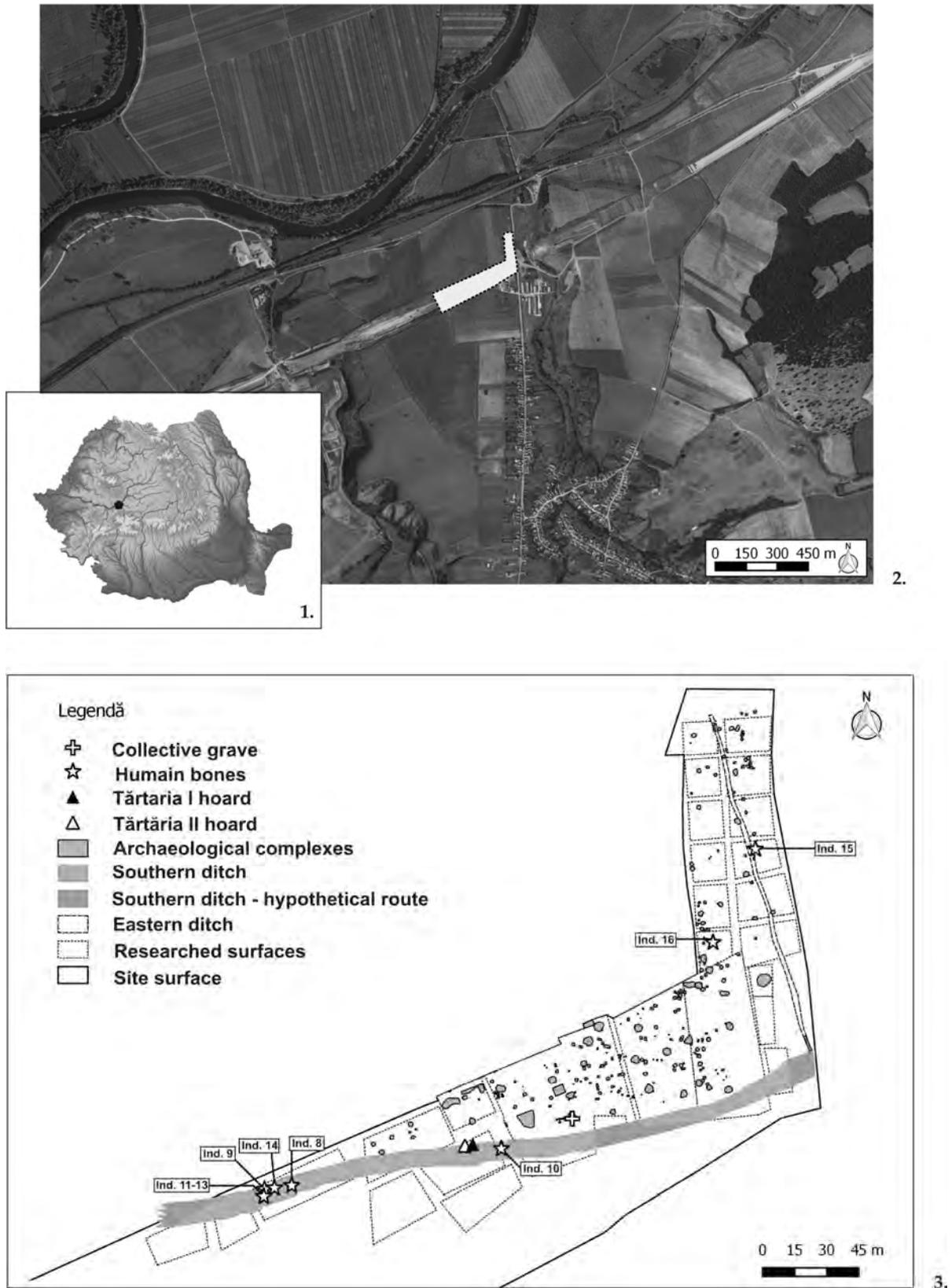
Tărtăria – *Podu Tărtăriei vest*, for allowing me to study and publish these discoveries. Also, I would like to thank Mr Valentin Bottez for the English translation of the current article.

This paper was published as part of the research financed by the “MINERVA – Cooperare pentru cariera de elită în cercetare doctorală și post-doctorală”, project, contract code: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/137832, project co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectorial Operational Program and Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

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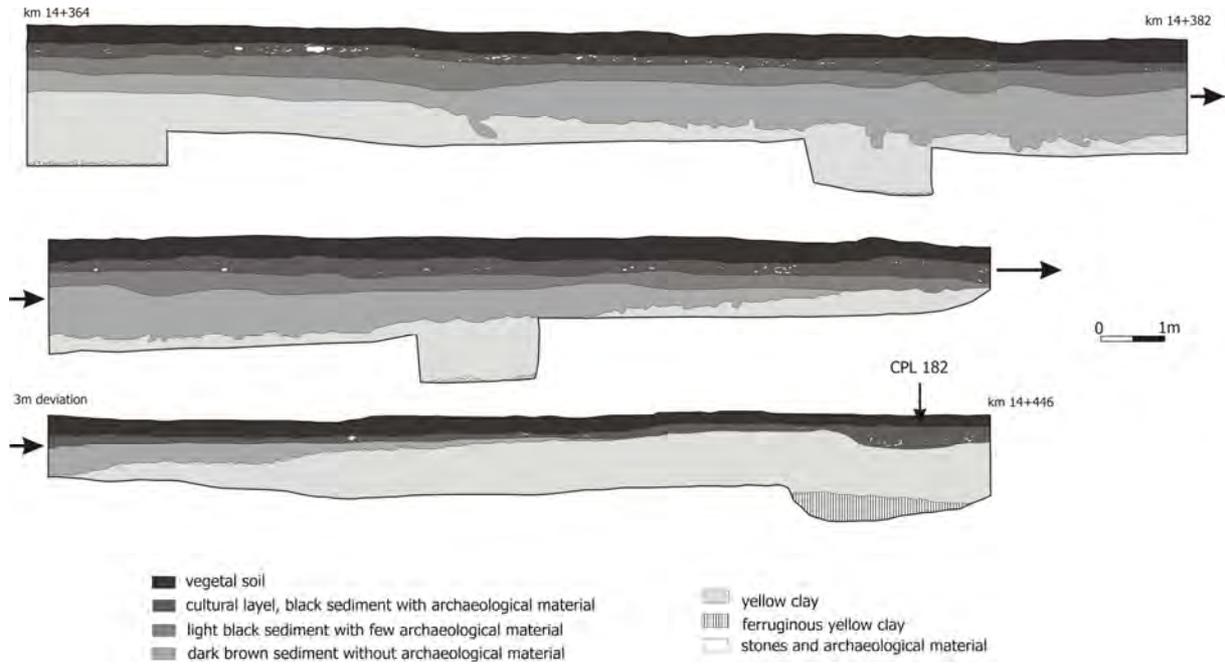
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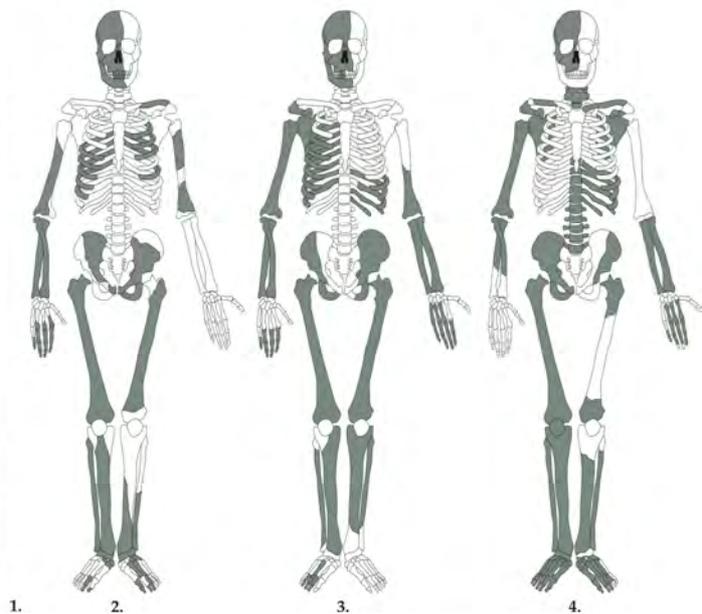


**Fig. 1.** 1. Location of the site in Romania. 2. Location of the site on the orthophotoplan. 3. Location of the archaeological complexes containing human bones.

1. Localizarea sitului în România. 2. Localizarea sitului pe ortofotoplan. 3. Localizarea complexelor arheologice cu oseminte umane.

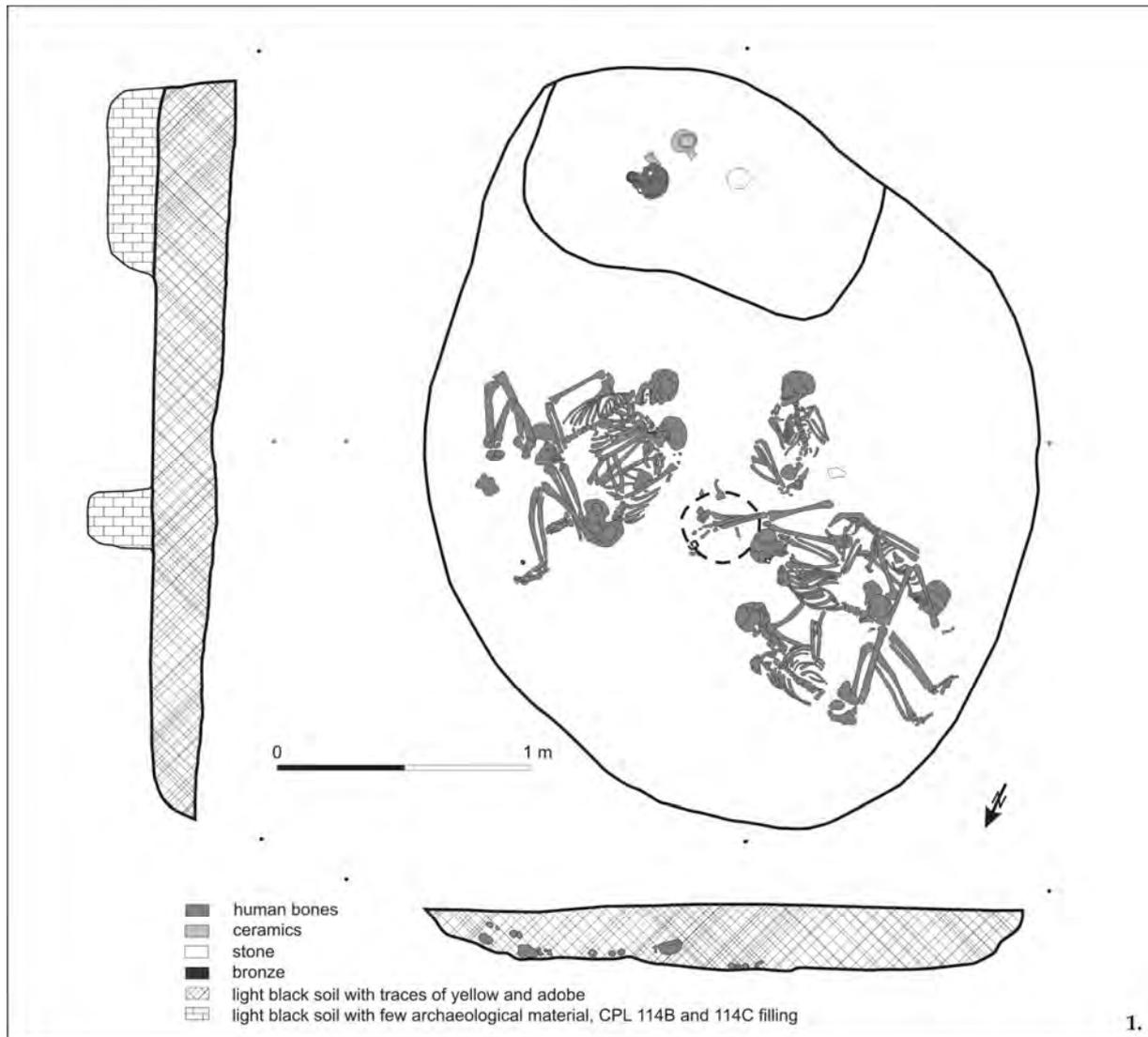


**Fig. 2.** Section S III – north profile.  
Secțiunea S III – profil magistral de nord.



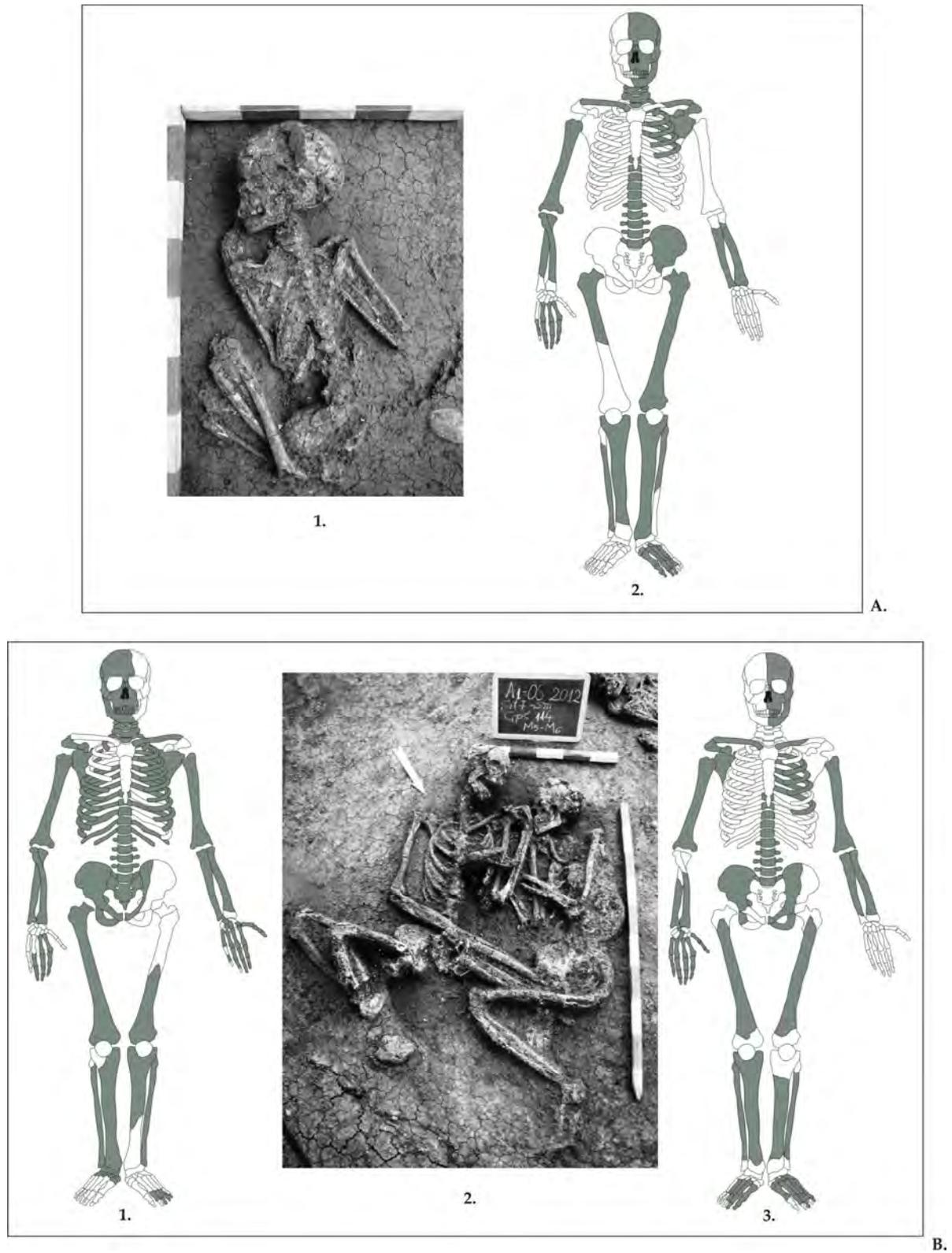
**Fig. 3.** Detail of Individuals 1 (upper right), 2 (centre), and 3 (lower right). Parts of the skeleton *in situ* in an anatomical position: 2. Individual 1; 3. Individual 2; 4. Individual 3.

1. Imagine detaliu Individ 1 (dreapta sus), Individ 2 (centru), Individ 3 (stânga jos). Părți schelet observate *in situ* în conexiune anatomică: 2. Individ 1; 3. Individ 2; 4. Individ 3.



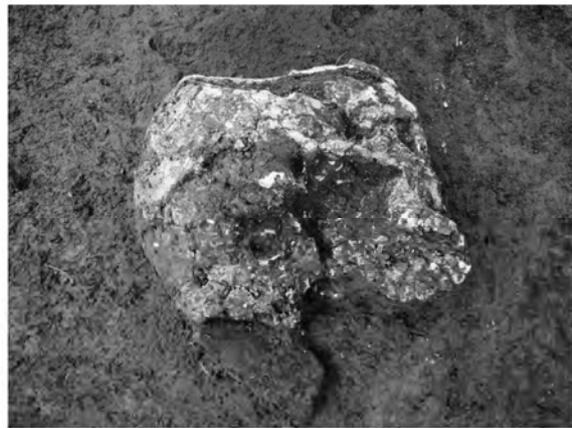
**Fig. 4.** CPL 114 and CPL 114B (mass grave): 1. Plan and profile; 2. Image taken during the research of the complex.

CPL 114 și CPL 114B: 1. Plan și profil; 2. Imagine din timpul cercetării complexului.



**Fig. 5.** A) 1. Detail of Individual 4. 2. Parts of the skeleton seen *in situ* in an anatomical position. B) 2. Detail of Individual 5 (left) and Individual 6 (right). Parts of the skeleton *in situ* in an anatomical position: 1. Individual 5, 3. Individual 6.

A) 1. Imagine detaliu Individ 4; 2. Părți de schelet observate *in situ* în conexiune anatomică.  
B) 2. Imagine detaliu Individ 5 (stânga) și Individ 6 (dreapta). Părți de schelet observate *in situ* în conexiune anatomică: 1. Individ 5, 3. Individ 6.



**Fig. 6.** CPL 114B (lower level of the mass grave): 1. General view of Individual 7 and pottery; 2. Detail of skull Individual 7; 3. Detail of ceramic pot 1; 4. Detail of ceramic pot 2.

CPL 114B (nivelul inferior al mormântului): 1. Imagine ansamblu Individ 7 și vase ceramice; 2. Detaliu craniu Individ 7; 3. Detaliu vas ceramic nr. 1; 4. Detaliu vas ceramic nr. 2.

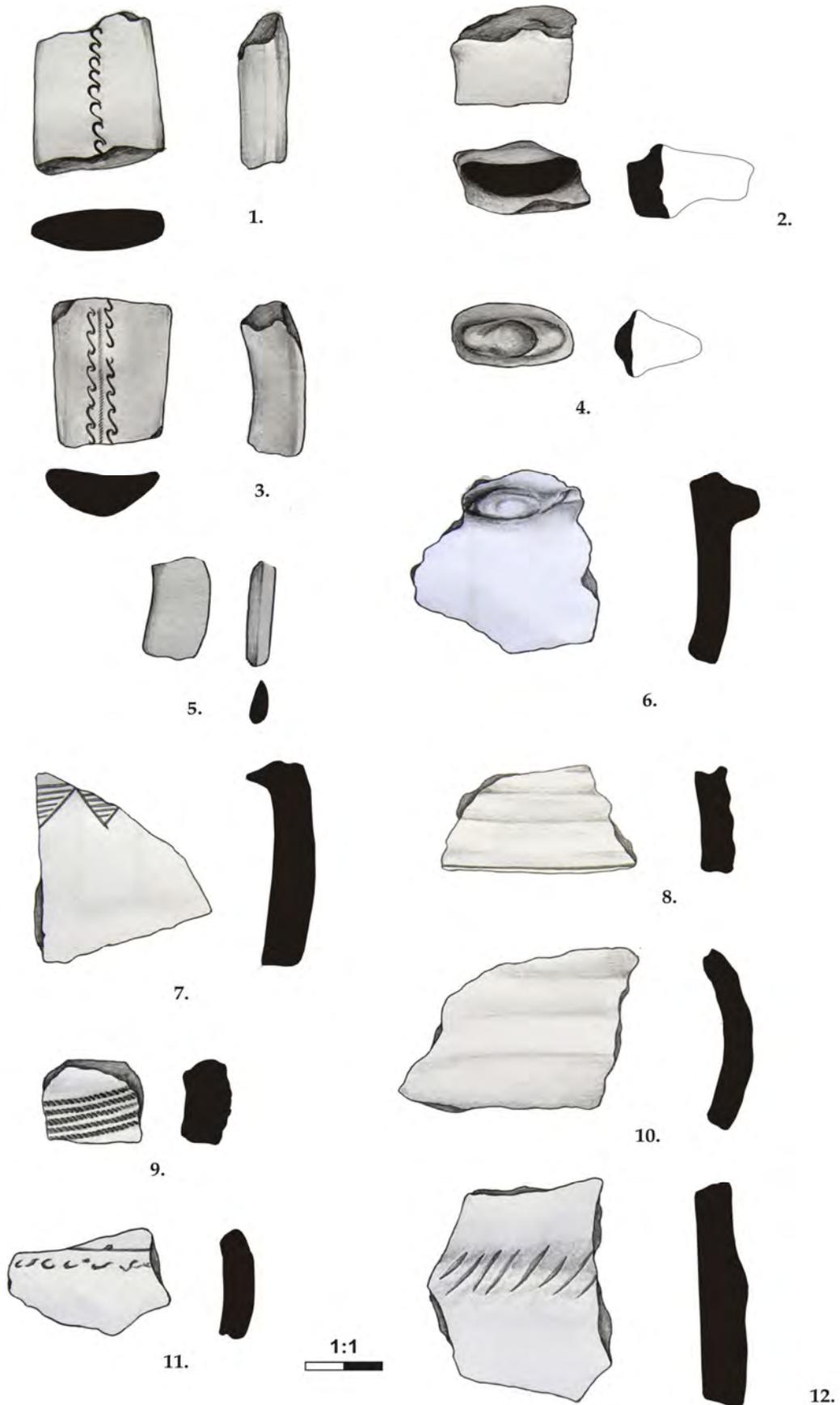
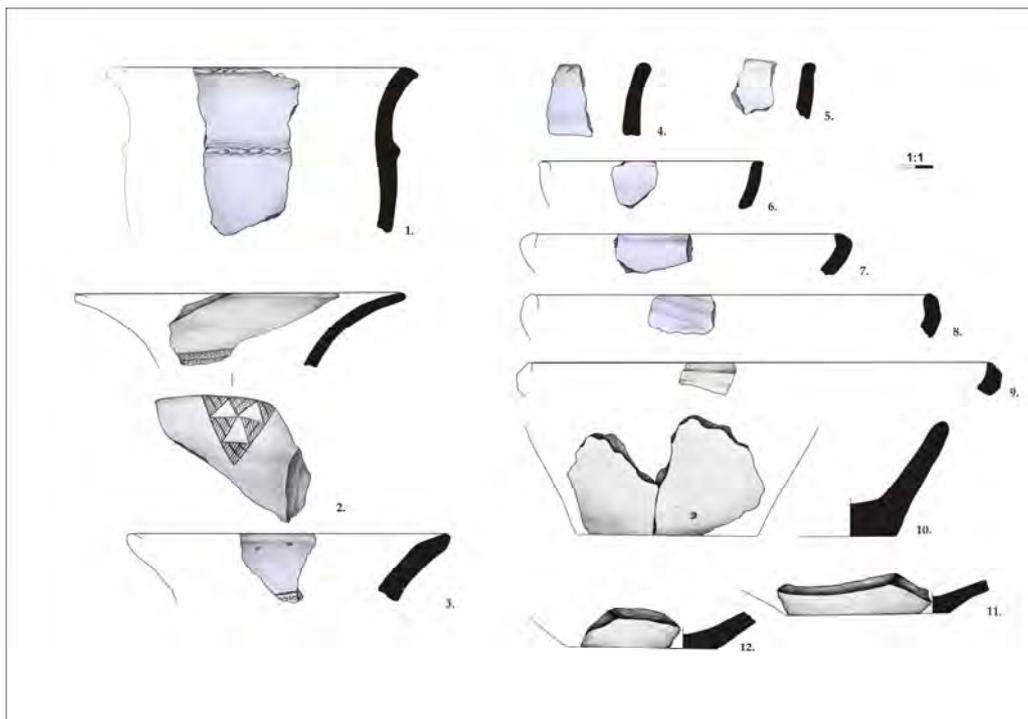
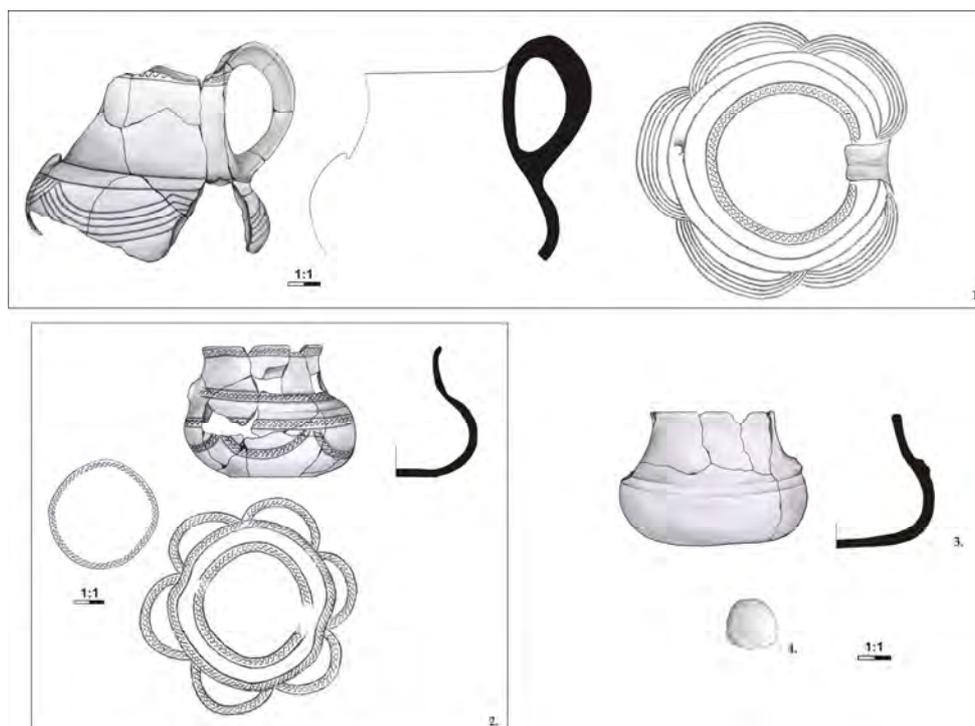


Fig. 7. CPL 114 and CPL 114B: 1-12. Specific ceramic material. Scale in cm.  
CPL 114 and CPL 114B: 1-12. Material ceramic tipic. Scara în cm.



**Fig. 8.** CPL 114 and CPL 114B: 1–12. Specific ceramic material.  
CPL 114 and CPL 114B: 1–12. Material ceramic tipic.



**Fig. 9.** CPL 114: 1. Fragmentary mug (with the decoration represented unfolded). CPL 114B: 2. Fragmentary cup (with the decoration represented unfolded, on the outside and the inside – the pot-s rim); 3. Fragmentary cup; 4. Clay ball.  
CPL 114: 1. Cană fragmentară (cu reprezentarea decorului desfășurat). CPL 114B: 2. Cească fragmentară (cu reprezentarea decorului desfășurat, respectiv exterior și interior – marginea vasului); 3. Cească fragmentară; 4. Bilă de lut.

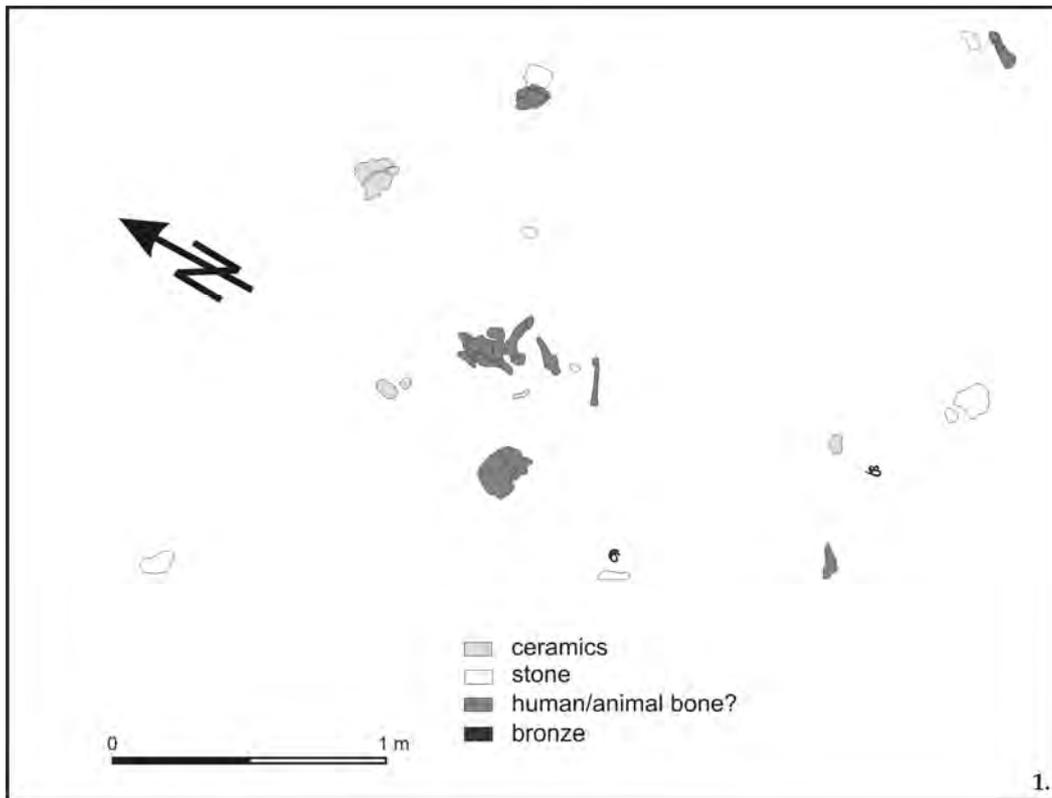
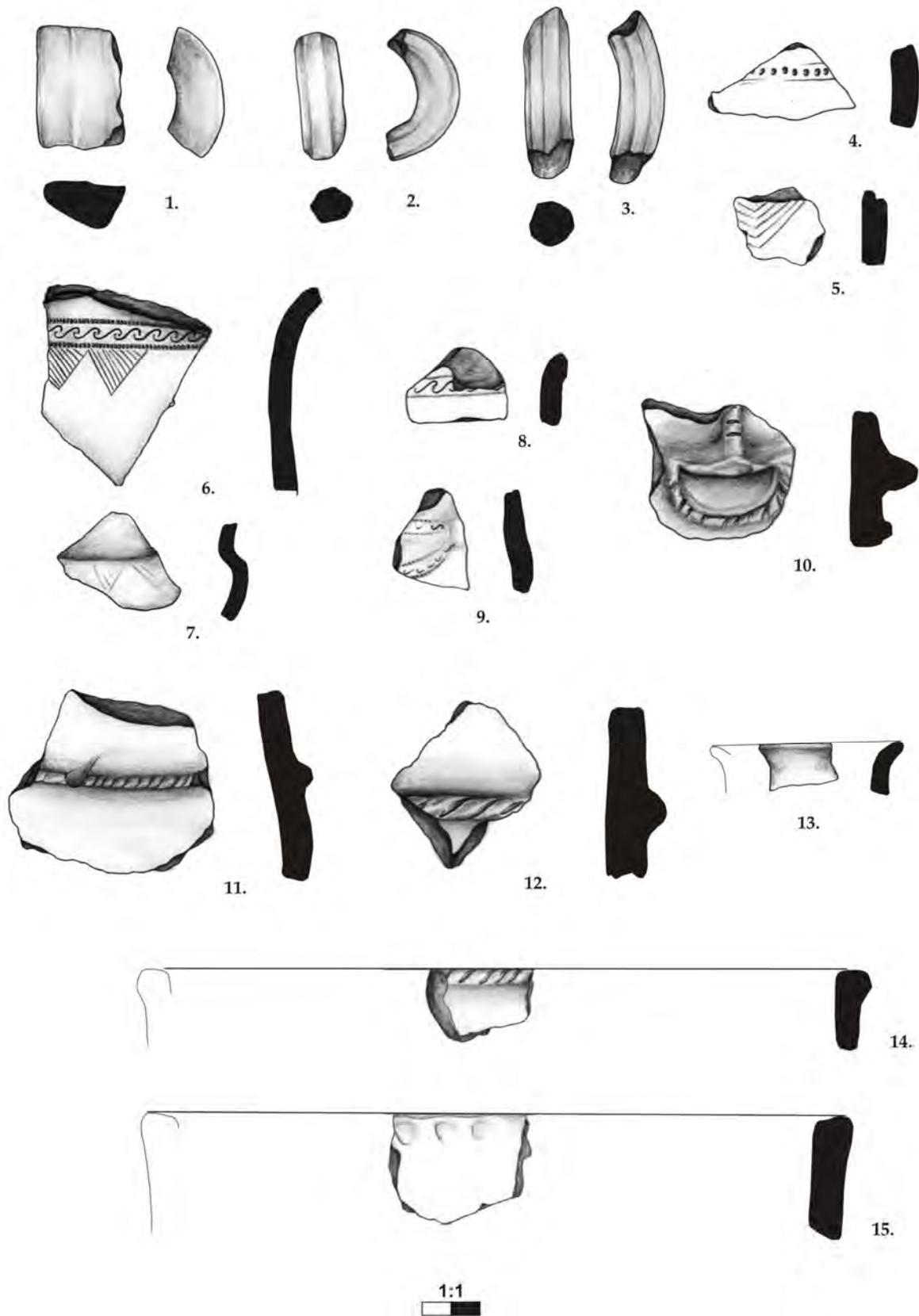


Fig. 10. CPL 004F, detail of Individual 8: 1. Plan; 2. Image from the research of the complex.  
CPL 004F, detaliu Individ 8: 1. Plan; 2. Imagine din timpul cercetării complexului.



**Fig. 11.** CPL 004F (area Individual 8): 1–15. Specific ceramic material.  
CPL 004F (zona Individ 8): 1–15. Material ceramic tipic.

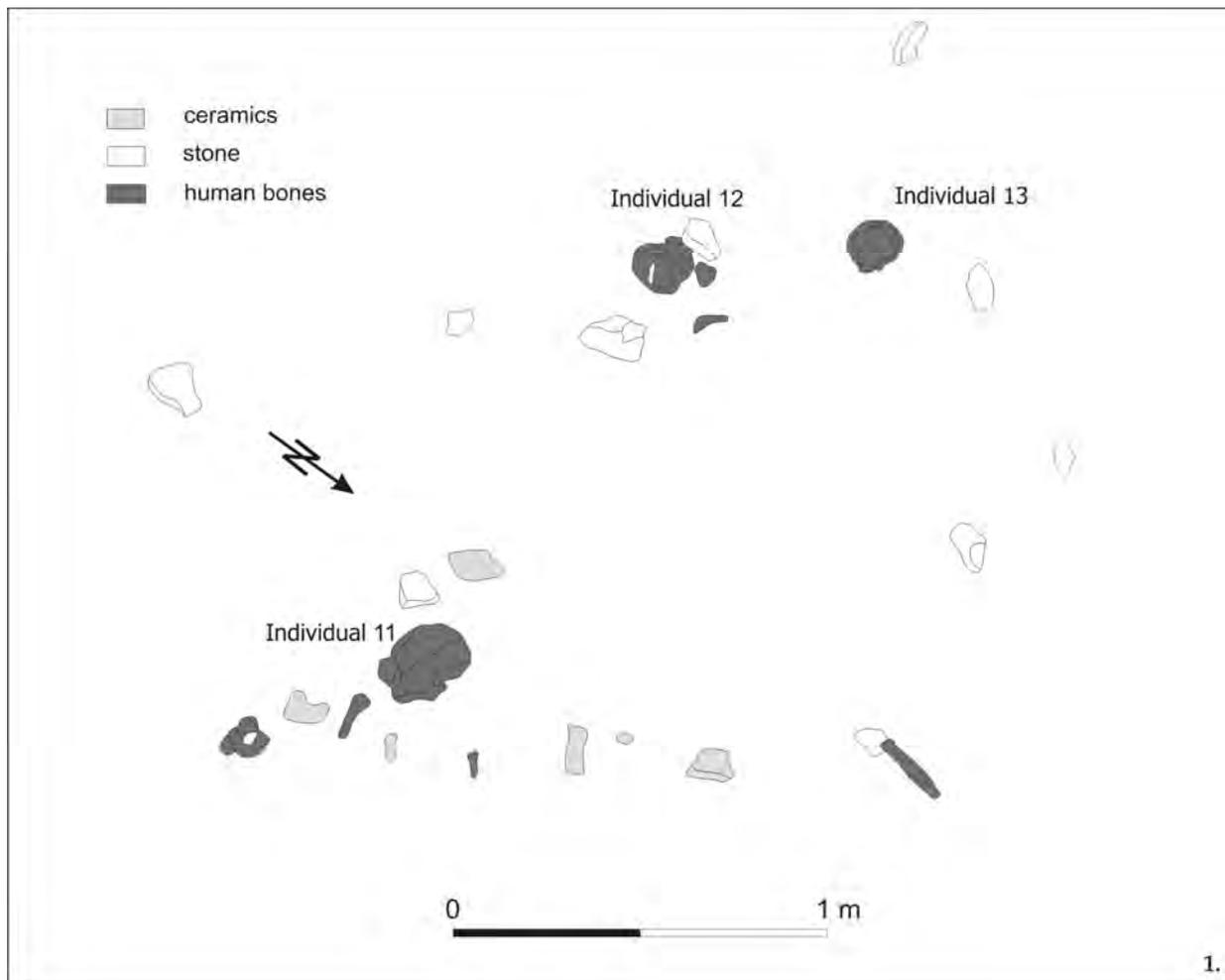


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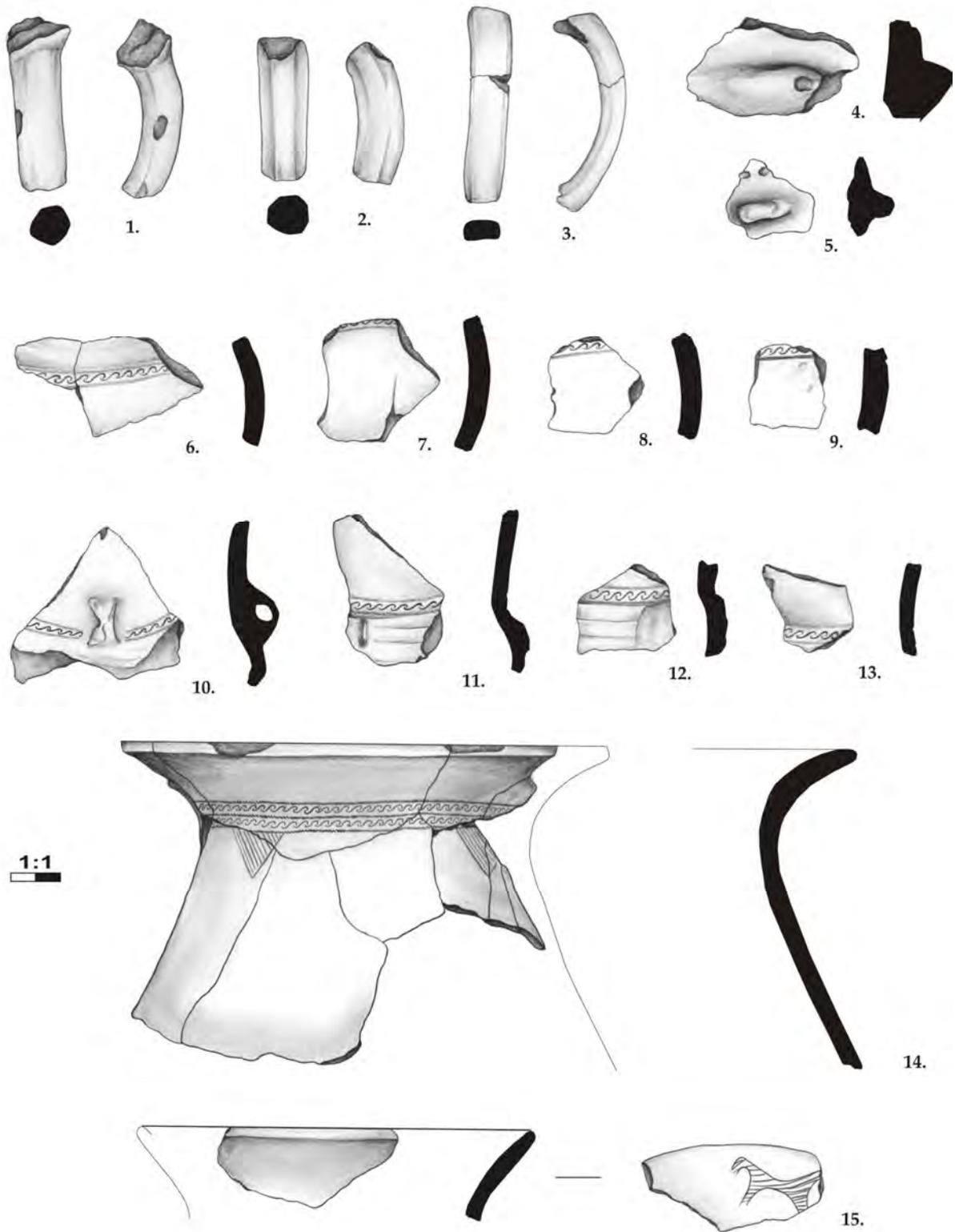


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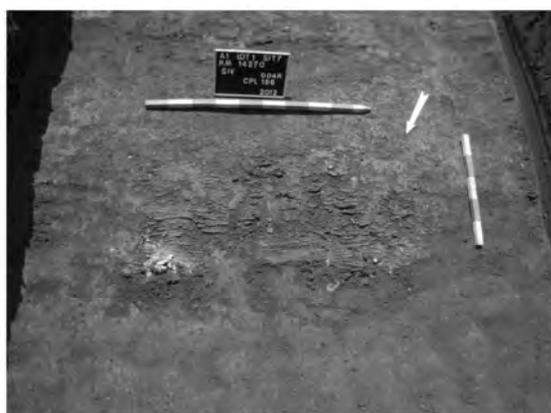
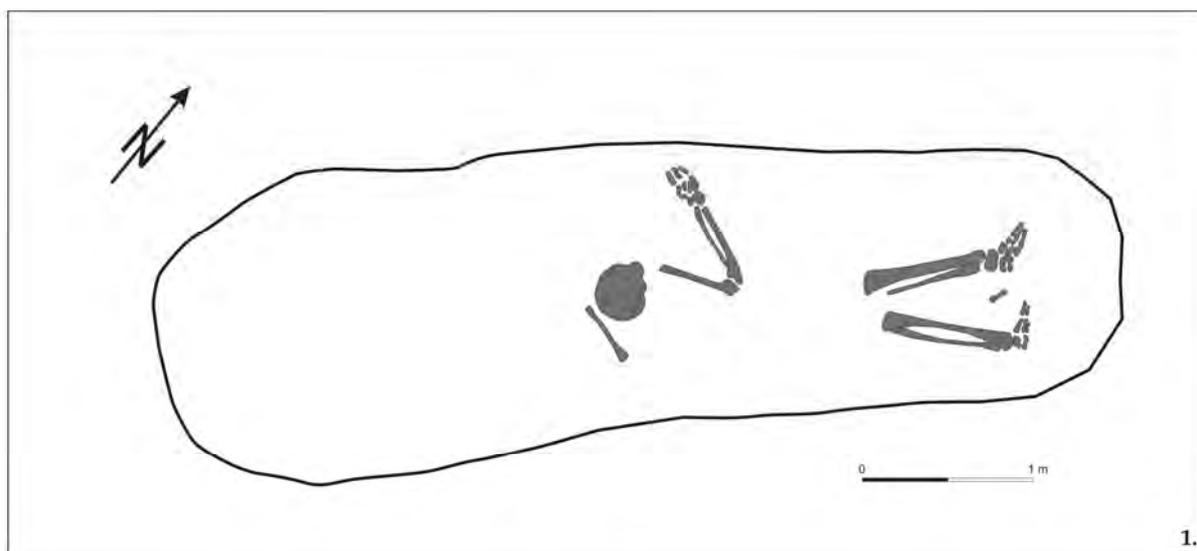
**Fig. 12.** CPL 004K/118, detail of Individual 10: 1. Human bones; 2. Pot broken on the spot.  
CPL 004K/118, detaliu Individ 10: 1. Fragmente osteologice umane; 2. Vas spart pe loc.



**Fig. 13.** CPL 004H, Individuals 11 – 13: 1. Plan; 2. Image from the research of the complex.  
CPL 004H, Individzii 11 –13: 1. Plan; 2 Imagine din timpul cercetării complexului.



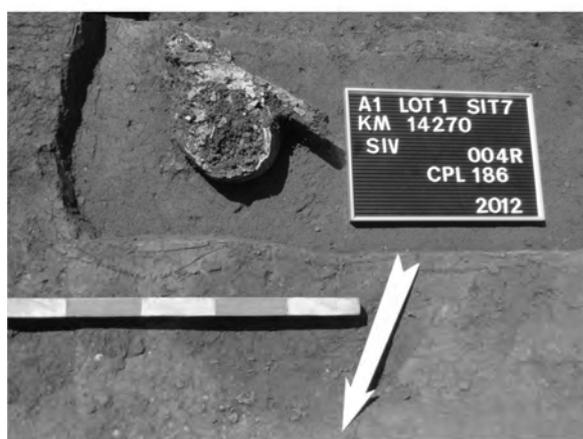
**Fig. 14.** CPL 004H (area Individuals 11 –13): 1–15. Specific ceramic material.  
CPL 004H (zona Indivizilor 11 –13): 1–15. Material ceramic tipic.



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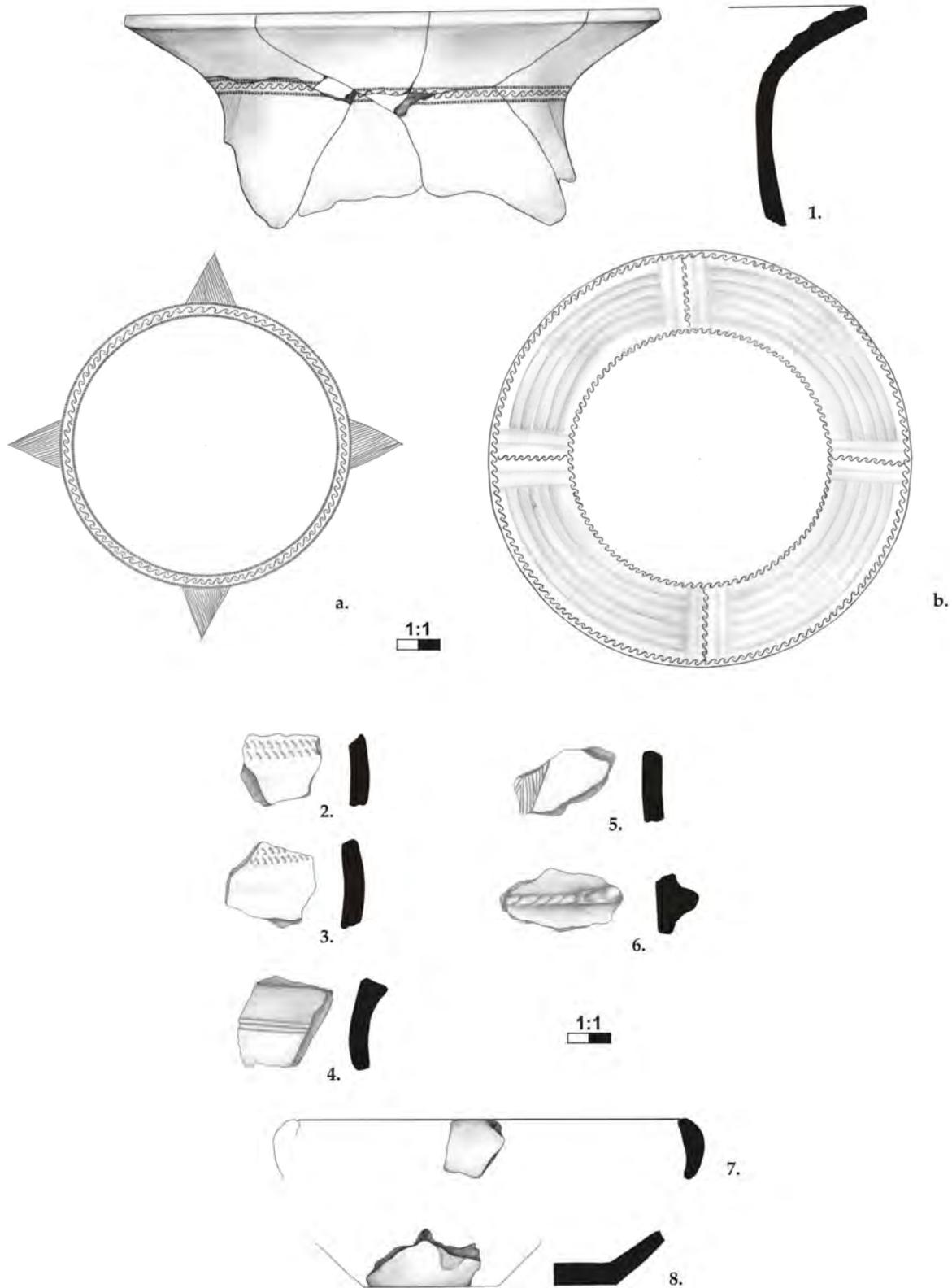


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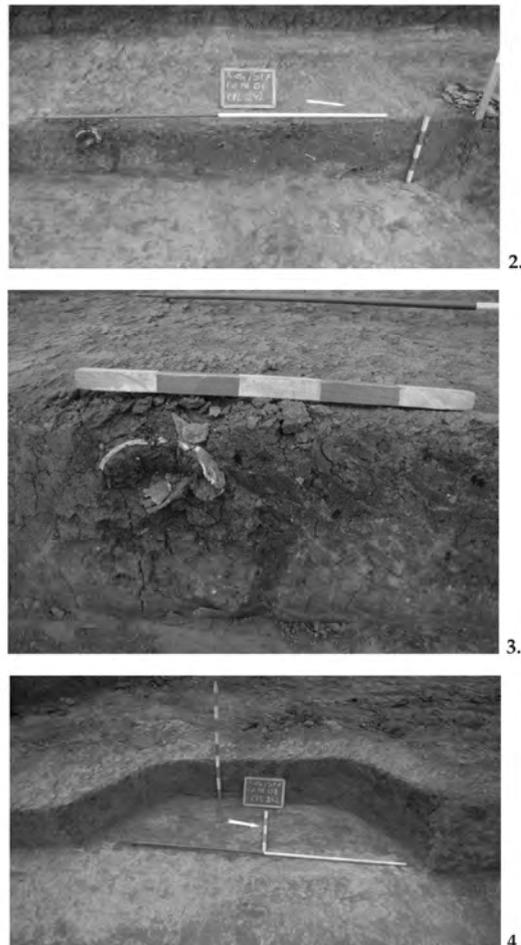
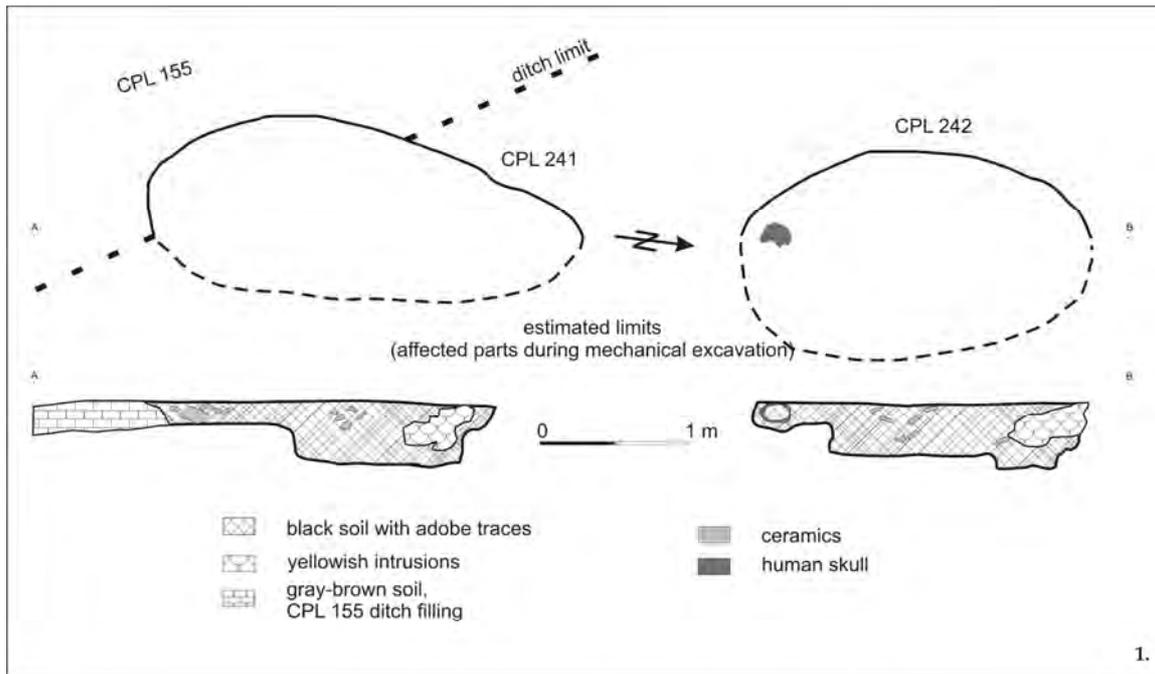


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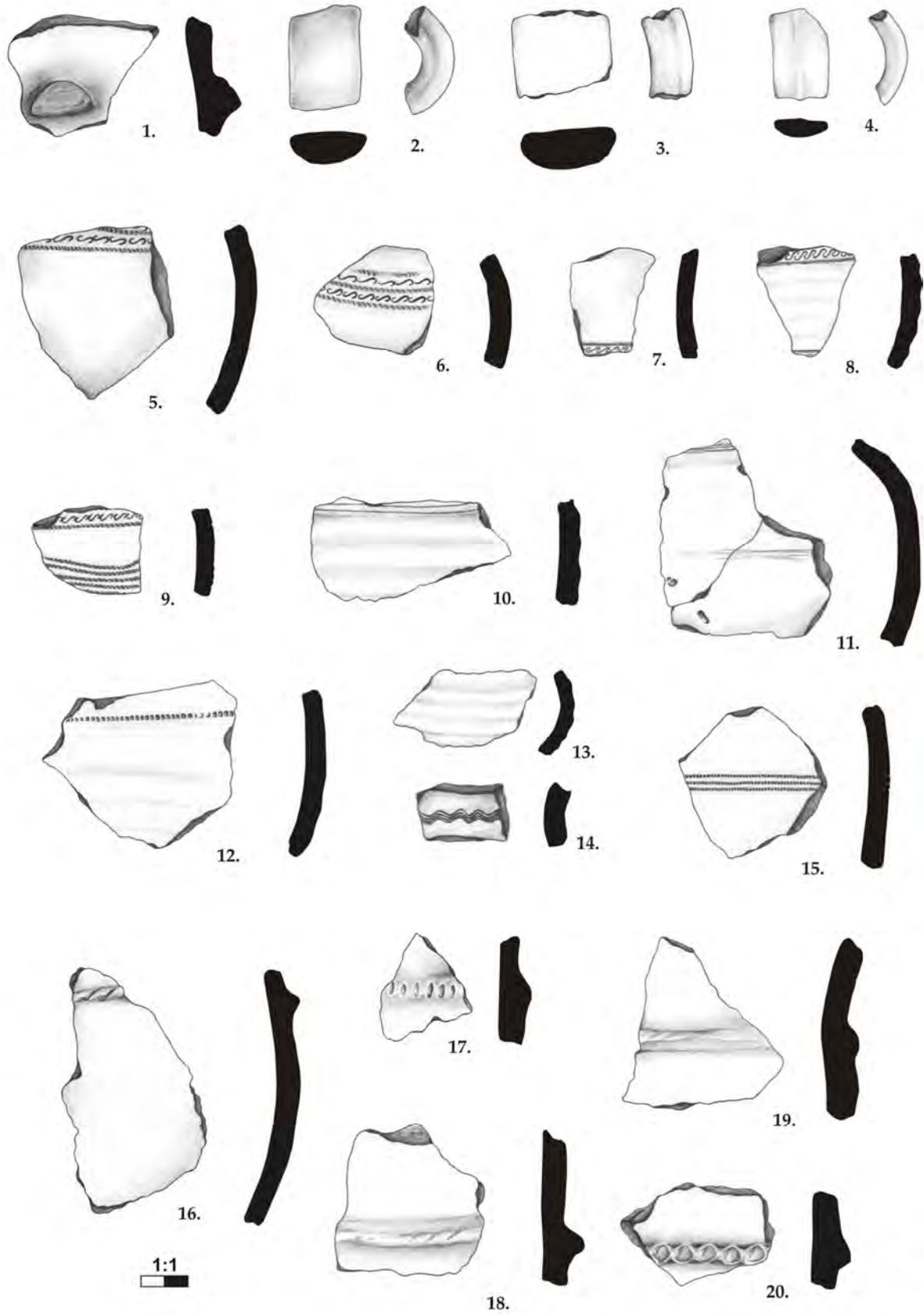
**Fig. 15.** CPL 186 / 004H, Individual 14: 1. Plan; 2–5. Images from the research of the complex.  
CPL 186 / 004H, Individ 14: 1. Plan; 2–5. Imagini din timpul cercetării complexului.



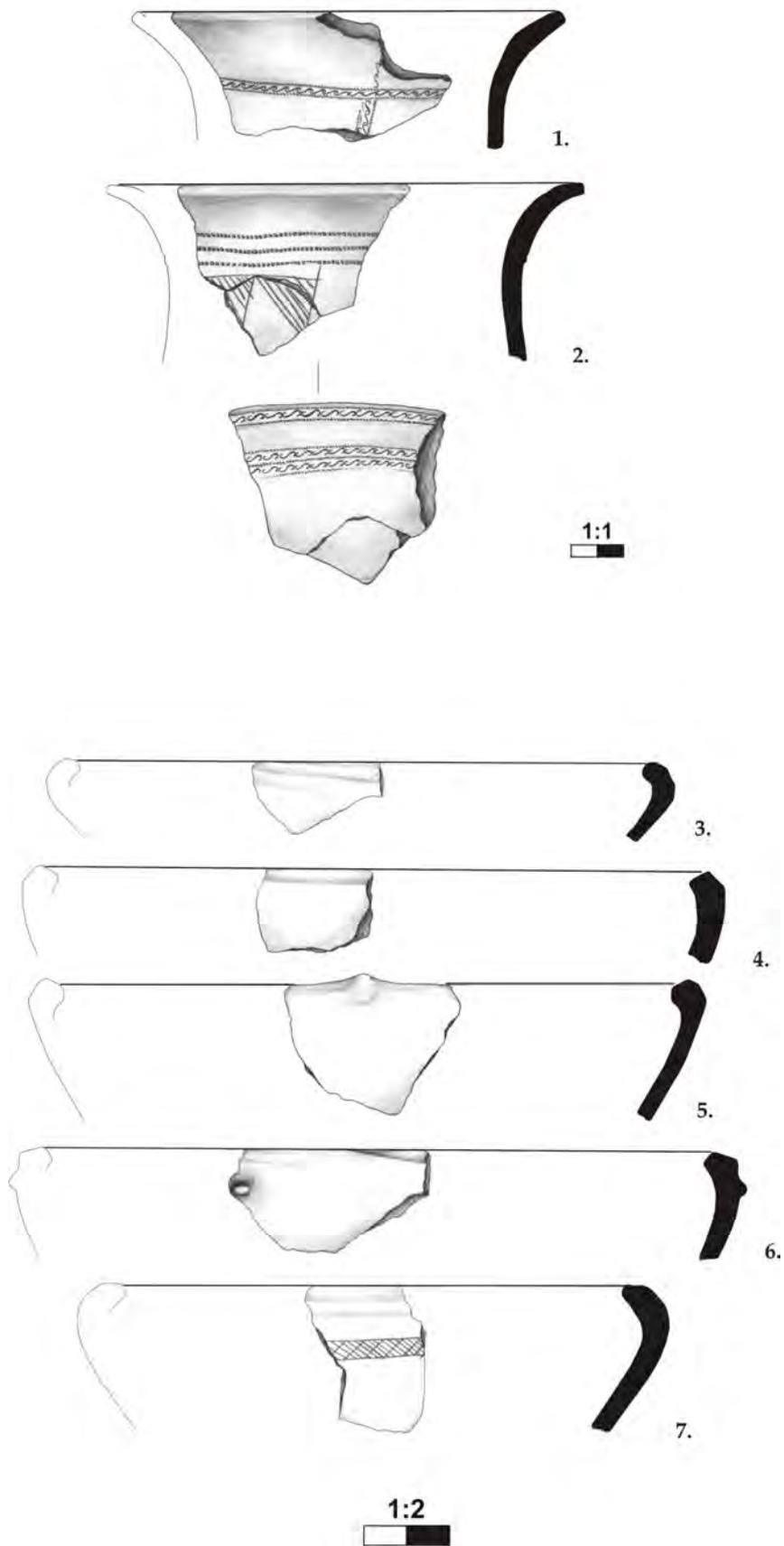
**Fig. 16.** CPL 186 / 004H (area Individual 14): 1. Fragmentary pot (with the decoration represented unfolded, a – outside and b – inside, pot’s rim); 2–8. Typical ceramic fragments.  
 CPL 186 / 004H (zona Individ 14): 1. Vas fragmentar (cu reprezentarea decorului desfășurat, a – exterior și b – interior, marginea vasului); 2–8. Fragmente ceramice tipice.



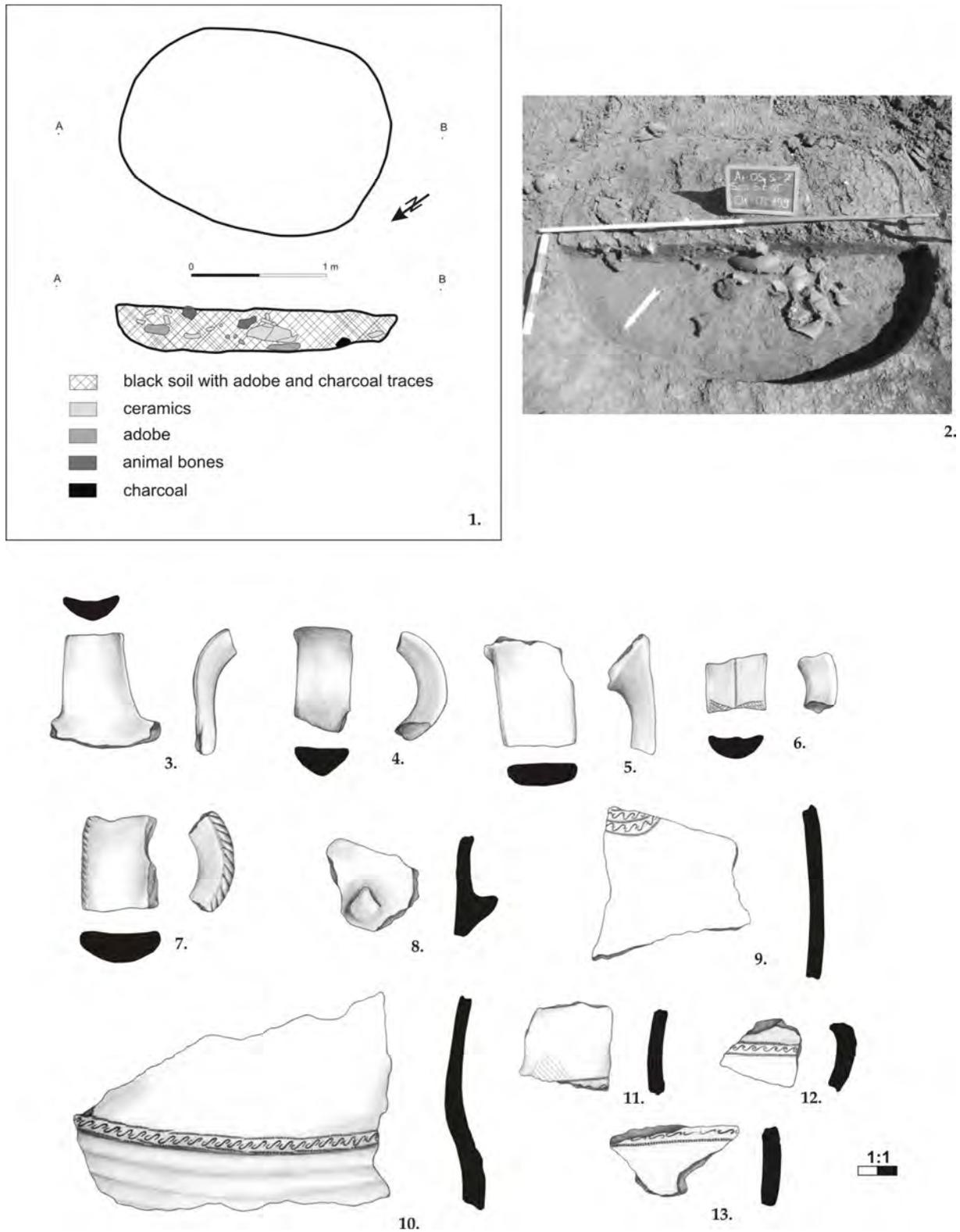
**Fig. 17.** CPL 242 (area Individual 15) and neighbouring complexes (CPL 155, CPL 241): 1. Plan. CPL 242: 2–4. Image taken during the research of the complex.  
 CPL 242 (zona Individ 15) și complexe învecinate (CPL 155, CPL 241): 1. Plan. CPL 242: 2–4. Imagini din timpul cercetării complexului.



**Fig. 18.** CPL 242 (area Individual 15): 1–20. Specific ceramic material.  
CPL 242 (zona Individ 15): 1–20. Fragmente ceramiche tipice.

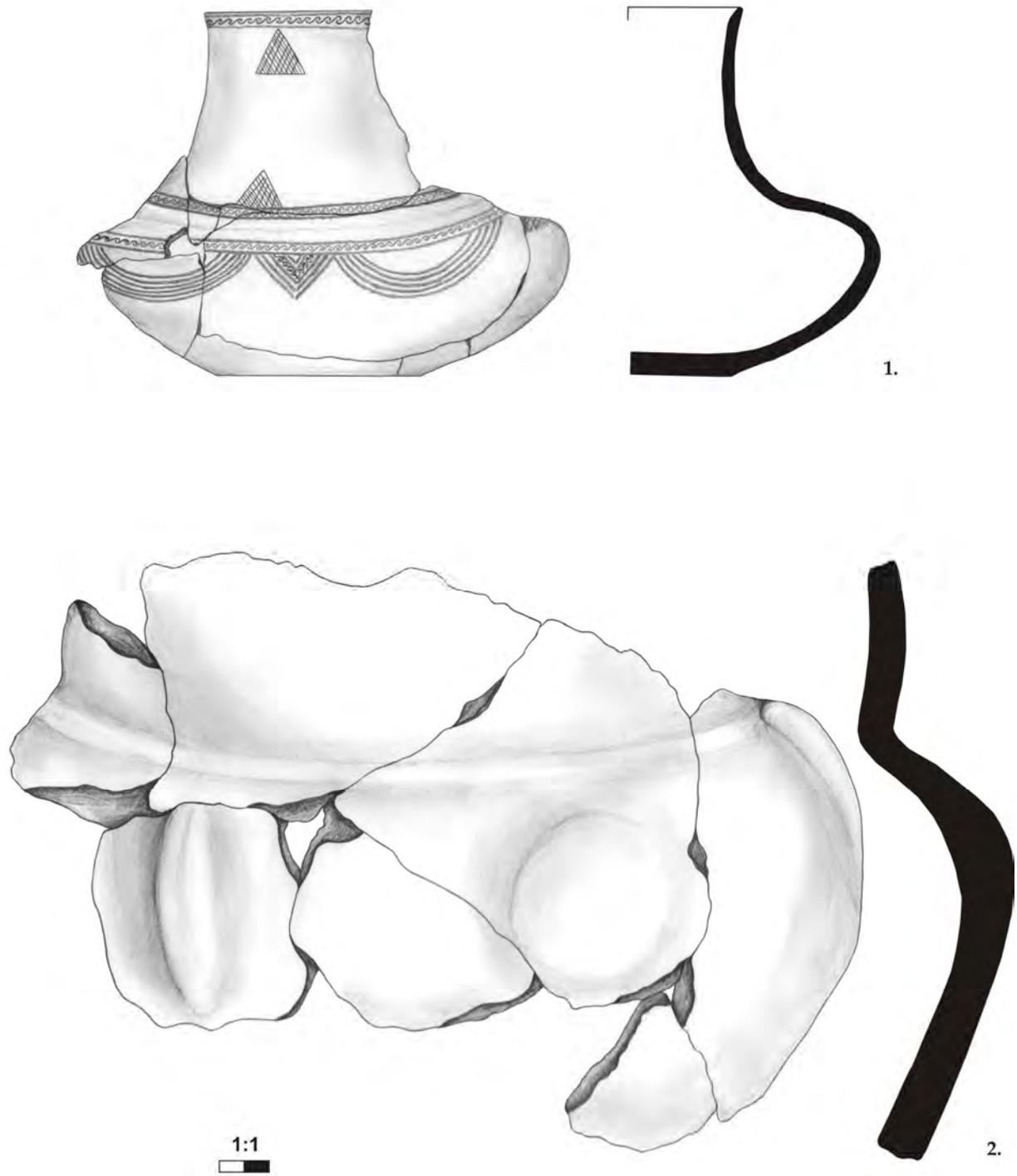


**Fig. 19.** CPL 242 (area Individual 15): 1–7. Specific ceramic material.  
CPL 242 (zona Individ 15): 1–7. Framgente ceramiche tipice.

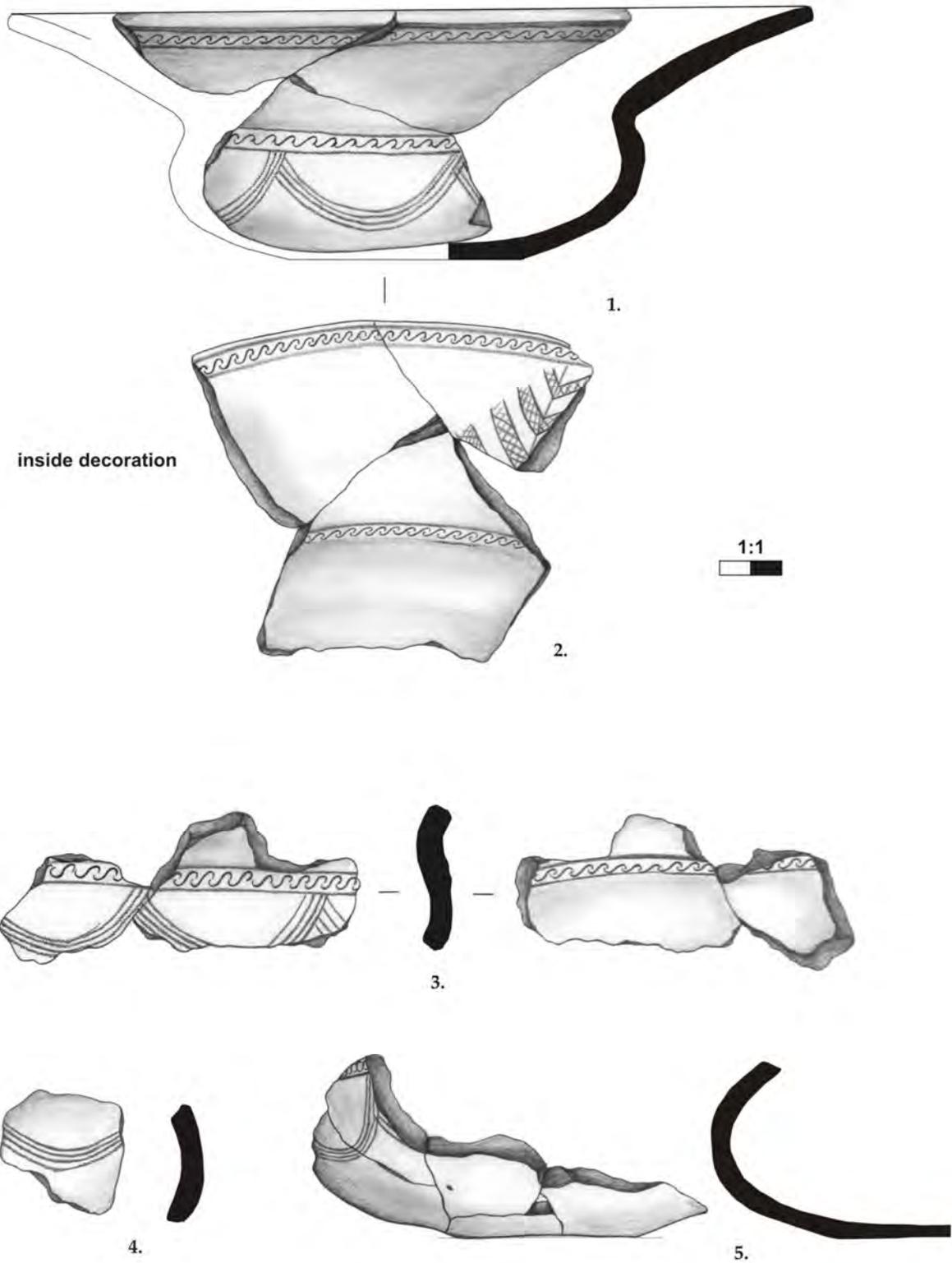


**Fig. 20.** CPL 199 (area Individual 16): 1. Plan; 2. Image taken during the research of the complex; 3–13. Specific ceramic material.

CPL 199 (zona Individ 16): 1. Plan; 2. Imagine din timpul cercetării complexului; 3–13. Material ceramic tipic.



**Fig. 21.** CPL 199 (area Individual 16): 1-2. Fragmentary pots.  
CPL 199 (zona Individ 16): 1-2. Vase fragmentare.



**Fig. 22.** CPL 199 (area Individual 16): 1. Fragmentary pot (partially restored); 2–4. Other fragments from the unrestored pot.

CPL 199 (zona Individ 16): 1. Vas fragmentar (restaurat parțial); 2 – 4. Alte fragmente ceramice din vasul nerestaurat.