

## Neolithic objects bearing incised signs on the bottom found in the carpatho-balkan area-analysis and possible significance

Valeriu SÎRBU\*  
Stănică PANDREA\*

**Rezumat:** *Obiecte neolitice cu semne incizate pe fund descoperite în aria carpato-balcanică. Analiză și posibilă semnificație.*

Vase cu semne pe fund apar în aproape toate așezările Boian-Giulești din Câmpia Brăilei, dar piese similare sunt răspândite pe spații mult mai largi, fiind descoperite în medii culturale diferite.

*Importanța acestor vase constă în semnificația lor, dar și în faptul că sunt caracteristice unui interval cronologic bine definit. Întrucât în marea majoritate a cazurilor, liniile, benzile de linii, figurile geometrice sau compoziții de linii și figuri geometrice realizate pe fundul vaselor n-au putut avea un rol decorativ și pentru că nici nu putem ști, cu certitudine, rostul lor, am preferat să le denumim "semne".*

*Vase cu semne pe fund au fost descoperite în nord-estul Câmpiei Brăilei în așezările Boian-Giulești de la Siliștea Conac, Lișcoteanca Moș Filon și Movila din Baltă, Brăilița, dar și în așezarea de tip Boian-Giulești de la Isaccea, în nordul Dobrogei. Astfel de vase, cu semne incizate pe fund, au fost descoperite în număr mare și în aria culturii Vinča, în așezările de la Parța Tell I, Zorlenț, Vrșac At, Rast și Bucovăț, fiind datate de către descoperitorii lor la nivel cronologic Vinča B și Vinča B<sub>2</sub>/C, ori au fost atribuite Grupului Bucovăț (etapa Bucovăț II). Un număr apreciabil de vase cu semne pe fund s-au găsit în aria culturii/grupului cultural Turdaș, ele provenind din așezările de la Turdaș Luncă, Deva Tăuș, Orăștie Dealul Pemilor, Alba Iulia Lumea Nouă și Daia Română Părăuț.*

*La sud de Dunăre, vase cu semne pe fund au fost descoperite la Gradeșnica în nivelul de locuire atribuit culturii Gradeșnica, precum și în așezările culturii Kalojanovec-Karanovo IV de la Kalojanovec, Obručiște și Nova Zagora Hlobopzavod. Vase cu semne pe fund, similare cu cele descoperite în ariile culturale Boian, Vinča și Kalojanovec-Karanovo IV, au mai fost descoperite în așezarea Hamangia de la Ceamurlia, în așezările culturii ceramicii liniare de la Traian Dealul Fântânilor, Glăvăneștii Vechi, Nezviško și în așezările culturii Precucuteni de la Traian Dealul Viei și Larga Jijia.*

*Din datele de care dispunem, rezultă că fundurile care poartă semne provin, în cea mai mare parte, de la pahare, cupe și străchini tronconice, lucrate din pastă fină, bine arse, cu suprafața intens lustruită și decorate cu pliseuri ori motive incizate (uneori incizate și incrustate). Vasele cu semne pe fund descoperite în așezările Boian din nord-estul Câmpiei Române seamănă, până la identitate, cu cele descoperite în ariile culturale Turdaș, Vinča, Karanovo IV și Gradeșnica. În schimb, piesele similare descoperite în mediile culturale liniar-ceramic, precucutenian și Hamangia au un aspect ușor diferit față de acela al vaselor descoperite în așezările Boian din Bărăgan fiind redată conform canoanelor stilistice proprii acestor medii culturale. Rezultă că vasele cu semne pe fund caracterizează, în primul rând, ariile culturale Vinča, Turdaș, Kalojanovec-Karanovo IV și Boian, nefiind întâmplător faptul că în așezările acestor culturi a fost descoperită majoritatea covârșitoare a acestor piese.*

*În actualul stadiu al cercetărilor, prezența vaselor cu semne pe fund, cu precădere în mediile culturale Vinča, Gradeșnica, Karanovo IV-Kalojanovec și Boian o putem explica astfel: a) datorită unui fond cultural comun; b) ca rezultat al unui impuls cultural al cărui centru îl reprezintă teritoriile din jurul Propontidei, ipoteză care ni se pare ca fiind cea mai probabilă. Încheiem problematica încadrării cultural-cronologice a acestor piese evidențiind faptul că intervalul cronologic pe parcursul căruia se datează vasele cu semne pe fund este Vinča B<sub>2</sub> - Vinča C<sub>1</sub> = Turdaș = Gradeșnica = Karanovo IV-Kalojanovec = Boian-faza Giulești = Precucuteni I-II = Hamangia III.*

*Încercările de a înțelege de ce s-au făcut aceste semne pe fundul vaselor trebuie să aibă în vedere toate realitățile arheologice: contextele, asociațiile cu alte tipuri de piese, tipul de piese pe care apar și locul unde au fost executate, tehnicile și momentul executării, valențe/nonvalențe decorative, tipurile de semne și asocierile dintre ele, repetabilitatea/nonrepetabilitatea lor în aceleași contexte, situri ori arii culturale, originea și dinamica răspândirii lor, categorii de piese pe care mai apar astfel de semne etc. Este evident că exagerarea importanței unor aspecte și eludarea altora duc la concluzii și ipoteze eronate.*

*Întrucât aceste semne nu erau vizibile în mod normal și nici nu reprezintă realizări artistice notabile, apreciem că rostul lor nu era decorativ. Descoperirile arheologice ne demonstrează că, de regulă, părțile vaselor care nu erau expuse vederii nu erau ornamentate. Mai mult, este sigur că unele semne s-au executat pe vase după o perioadă de utilizare a lor iar pe unele funduri poate chiar după spargerea vaselor. Nu credem că semnele*

---

\* Muzeul Brăilei, Piața Traian 3, 6100, Brăila.

de pe fundul vaselor au putut fi mărci de olar, atât datorită marii diversităţi de semne şi numărului mic de vase marcate, cât şi faptului că o parte din ele au fost incizate după arderea vaselor. O altă utilitate pur practică a acestor semne—eventual de marcarea a unor cantităţi sau a unor momente în folosirea lor—nu poate fi decelată din aceleaşi considerente.

Pe de altă parte, marcarea semnelor doar pe un număr restrâns de vase, relativa repetabilitate a motivelor de bază, existenţa lor pe anumite tipuri de vase şi doar pe fundul acestora, prezenţa lor numai în anumite medii culturale şi într-o anumită perioadă, le conferă un rost anume.

Dincolo de repetabilitatea unor semne de bază, impusă şi de fondul relativ redus al acestora, se observă diferenţe notabile între combinaţiile de semne specifice diferitelor culturi arheologice, dar nu putem spune dacă aceste diferenţe grafice exprimă şi "mesaje" diferite.

Desigur, se pot face diferite sugestii privind natura mesajelor acestor semne dar, în lipsa unor date complete despre toate descoperirile, ar însemna să intrăm prea mult în sfera speculaţiilor. Reţinem ipoteza distrugerii lor intenţionate: a) din motive religioase; b) din motive legate de anumite practici sociale denumite prin sintagma "the enchainement of social relations".

Faptul că aceste "semne" au fost puse pe fundul unor vase (= ascunse), că ele n-au valenţe artistice şi că s-au găsit în locuinţe obișnuite ori depuse în gropi ar putea sugera ipoteza că semnificaţia lor ar aparţine mai degrabă sferei magiei, deci unor nevoi practice ale familiilor. De aceea ne limităm la a spune că ele n-au fost elemente decorative şi, foarte probabil, nici n-au avut o utilitate practică propriu-zisă, ci au reprezentat nişte "semne" al căror mesaj poate nu-l vom afla niciodată.

**Cuvinte cheie:** vase cu semne pe fund, Boian-Giuleşti, Vinča, Turdaş, Gradeşnica, Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV, liniar–ceramic, Precucuteni, Hamangia, cronologie, funcţionalitate.

**Keywords:** vessels bearing incised signs on the bottom, Boian-Giuleşti, Vinča, Turdaş, Gradeşnica, Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV, linear–ceramic, Precucuteni, Hamangia, chronology, functionality.

Vessels bearing incised signs on the bottom were found in almost all the settlements Boian-Giuleşti of the Brăila Plain, as some objects are spread over larger and culturally different areas. This kind of objects is important for their significance as well as for their being characteristic for a period of time well defined; that's why we are going to study this category of objects.

As in most cases, the lines, the stripes, the geometric figures and the compositions of lines and geometric figures made on the bottom of vessels had no decorative role and as we don't know exactly what they stand for, we decided to name these by a neutral term, "signs".

## I. CATALOGUE OF DISCOVERIES

### 1. Boian-Giuleşti culture: Brăila Plain and Dobroudja

Such vessels have been uncovered in the Boian-Giuleşti settlements of Siliştea Conac (V. Sîrbu, St. Pandrea 1994, p. 27–62), Lişcoteanca Moş Filon and Movila din Baltă (N. Harţuche, Fl. Anastasiu 1968; idem 1976).

a) Siliştea Conac (fig. 1/1–9).

Bottoms of vases together with other pottery fragments and tools, have been unveiled in the layer but also in pits.

All the bottoms are from truncated beakers made of fine paste; they are completely fired, and the surface is well polished; most of them are decorated on the body by pleats.

There are *umbo* type bottoms and the signs are made exclusively on the outside, incised (fig. 1/1–5) as well as excised (fig. 1/8). As far as the incised bottoms are concerned for three of them, the signs have been made after the firing and even, after a use (fig. 1/1, 2, 5)

b) Lişcoteanca Moş Filon (fig. 1/10–11).

The items were discovered in pits and are from stemmed beakers broken in ancient times, made of demi-fine paste. Completely burnt and the surface very well polished. The decoration is exclusively incised, made inside the vase, before the burning, in the soft paste.

c) Lişcoteanca Movila din Baltă (fig. 2; 3/1–13).

In this settlement have been uncovered most of the objects, in pits as well as in the archaeological layer.

The Pit nr. XIII (*fig. 2/1–4*) is very interesting as in it were 10 bottoms with incised signs, together with other pottery fragments (some vessels can be completed, that is they have been either broken *in situ*, or deposited already broken).

These bottoms belong to truncated beakers (*fig. 2/1–2, 4–7*), as well as to bitruncated vases (*fig. 2/3, 8–10*). All of them are made of fine paste, completely fired and the surface well polished; the body is decorated by pleats but also motifs incised in white paste (*fig. 2/2–3*).

The large majority of these signs are incised on the bottom of the vases, on the outside, excepting one bitruncated vase where they are made inside (*fig. 2/3*); one can remark six vase bottoms with an incised decoration in the white paste.

Thirteen other objects have been found in pits and the archaeological layer, all of them in fragments and associated to other pottery sherds and tools (*fig. 2/5–10*). These bottoms belonged to truncated beakers (*fig. 2/5–10*). These vases are made of fine paste, completely fired and the surface is very well polished, while the body bears an incised decoration. The signs have been made by incision, sometimes in white paste (*fig. 3/4, 7–10*).

d) Brăilița *Vadul Catagătei* (*fig. 3/14*)

In a pit house of Brăilița settlement was uncovered a bottom of a truncated beaker, made of fine paste completely fired, well polished and decorated by thin canalling (N. Harțușe, Fl. Anastasiu 1968, p. 9).

e) Isaccea *Suhat* (*fig. 4/1*)

In this settlement have been found a number of cups and beakers, made of fine paste, well polished, and bearing on the bottom incised nets of lines and cruciforme signs (C. Micu *et alii* 2000, p. 9, *fig. 10/8*).

## 2) The Cultural Area of Vinča

a) Parța *Tell I* (*fig. 4/2–6; 10/4–8*)

The vessels found at Parța *Tell I* (Gh. Lazarovici 1979, p. 204, pl. XVIII H/5, 25–27; XXIV F/16–27; Gh. Lazarovici *et alii* 2001, *fig. 10/2; 19/11; 25/3; 46/16; 70/6; 104/6*) either were placed in Vinča B<sub>1</sub>–B<sub>2</sub> phase, or attributed to the Bucovăț Group, II<sup>nd</sup> phase).

b) Zorlenț (*fig. 10/1–3*).

The vessels bearing incised signs on the bottoms (Gh. Lazarovici 1979, p. 209–210, pl. XVIII F/53; XIX H/4–5) have been placed in the Vinča B<sub>2</sub> and Vinča B<sub>2</sub>/C phases. The Vinča settlements of this zone were closely linked to those of Serbia and their evolution is synchronous with the Vinča area, without being influenced or belated by other cultural surroundings (Gh. Lazarovici 1979, p. 136–137). We may conclude that the objects found at Zorlenț belong to Vinča settlements and are dated in the chronological period Vinča B<sub>2</sub>–Vinča B<sub>2</sub>/C.

c) Bucovăț (*fig. 10/9–10*).

The vases found here have been considered to belong to Bucovăț II<sup>nd</sup> phase, synchronous with Vinča B<sub>2</sub> (Lazarovici 1979, p. 202–204).

d) Rast (*fig. 10/11–20*)

A lot of vessels with incised signs on the bottom have been uncovered in the I<sup>st</sup> and II<sup>nd</sup> levels of the Rast settlement, belonging to Vinča culture, representative for the last stage of Vinča B<sub>2</sub> and beginning of Vinča C (Vi. Dumitrescu 1980, p. 110, pl. XXXIV/6, pl. XLV/3–17).

e) Vrșac *At*

A lot of vases have been discovered in this settlement, usually cups and beakers, well polished, bearing on the bottom incised lines nets and crosses ([www.arheologija.narod.ru/d1/ustanove/vrsac/Prehistoric.html](http://www.arheologija.narod.ru/d1/ustanove/vrsac/Prehistoric.html)). Taking into consideration the opinion expressed by Gh. Lazarovici (1979, p. 137, *fig. 12–13*) and Fl. Drașovean (1996, p. 73) we could say that this settlement belonged to Vinča C phase.

## 3. Cultural Area Turdaș.

a) Turdaș *Luncă* (*fig. 5/2–3; 9*)

M. Roska (1941, fig. XXXI–XXXIV) presented a lot of vase bottoms with incised signs collected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Zsofia Torma. The latest archaeological excavations revealed some vessels with signs incised on the bottom (S.A. Luca 2001, p. 68, fig. 33/9; 34/8).

b) Orăștie *Dealul Pemilor (X2)* (fig. 5/4–9)

The kind of vases we are dealing with were uncovered at Orăștie *Dealul Pemilor (X2)* in the two levels of inhabitation. According to the author of the excavations, this settlement is a representative one for the final stage of Turdaș culture/cultural group, being contemporary with the middle level of Turdaș, the superior level of *Tăuălaș* and is dated during the chronological horizon Vinča C<sub>1</sub> (S.A. Luca 1997, p. 77).

c) Daia Română *Părauț* (fig. 5/10)

In the settlement of Daia Română *Părauț* was uncovered, by chance, a vase with incised signs on the bottom and it was published by I. Paul (1992, p. 110–114, pl. LII/11) who considered it to belong to the Turdaș Culture, because of the decoration very similar to the one of vases of Turdaș and the plaques of Tărtăria (I. Paul 1992, p. 111). Thus, this vase could be placed in the final stage of Turdaș Culture (I. Paul 1992, p. 111–112).

d) Deva *Tăuălaș* (fig. 10/31–32).

H. Dumitrescu (1984, p. 7, 17) discovered a few vases with incised signs on the bottom, very similar to those found at Turdaș and Orăștie. The author of the excavations considered that at *Tăuălaș* we are dealing with a facies of Vinča–Turdaș culture, linked to Vinča B<sub>1</sub>–B<sub>2</sub> phases (H. Dumitrescu 1984, p. 7, 17). In 1986, Gh. Lazarovici has varied the opinion expressed by Hortensia Dumitrescu and stated that *Tăuălaș aspect* is effectively linked to Turdaș group and this one begins to exist at the chronological level Vinča B<sub>1</sub>/B<sub>2</sub>, continuing its evolution all along the stages of Vinča C phase (Gh. Lazarovici, H. Dumitrescu 1985–1986, p. 15, 21, 26).

Recently, referring to the latest discoveries made in the Mureș Valley, Fl. Drașovean (1997, p. 7–8) and S.A. Luca (1997, p. 74; 2001, p. 133) consider that there are no cultural and chronological differences between the objects found at Turdaș, Orăștie and *Tăuălaș*, thus, we could assume they belonged to Turdaș cultural area. Beyond any controversy, which is important for our approach, is the fact that the vases found at *Tăuălaș* belong to Turdaș culture and are dated in the chronological period Vinča B<sub>2</sub>–C<sub>1</sub>.

e) Alba Iulia *Lumea Nouă* (fig. 5/1)

During the excavations made between 1944–1947, in the lower cultural level [*Turdaș–our note*] has been uncovered also a fragment of vase whose body was decorated with stripes full of dots, while the bottom bore a number of incised signs (D. Berciu, I. Berciu 1949, p. 5–6, fig. 3/5).

\*\*\*

The Transylvanian archaeologists are still deliberating upon the cultural origin and the chronology of the Turdaș type objects found in the settlements of the Mureș Valley (Gh. Lazarovici 1977; I. Paul 1992, p. 117–132; Fl. Drașovean 1996, p. 93–100; S.A. Luca 1997, p. 74–75; idem 2001, p. 125–139; Z. Maxim 1999, p. 69, 80–87). Beyond these arguments concerning the genesis and the area of cultural manifestations of Turdaș type, a fact remains clear, that is the existence, either of a cultural group or a culture named Turdaș.

The Turdaș culture/cultural group was developed in Transylvania, having the Mureș river as an axis (S.A. Luca 1997, p. 76–77) by its separation from the great Vinča areal, at the chronological level Vinča B<sub>1</sub>–B<sub>2</sub> (I. Paul 1992, p. 129; S.A. Luca 1997, p. 74–75). Gh. Lazarovici (1977, p. 223) considers that this process of separation took place during the Vinča B<sub>2</sub>/C stage, while Fl. Drașovean (1997, p. 7) states that this phenomenon was later and that we couldn't speak about a Turdaș Group earlier than Vinča C<sub>1</sub>.

It is not necessary, for the time being, to continue, now and here, this discussion about the Turdaș culture/cultural group, it is important for our approach to mention that the vases bearing incised signs on the bottom discovered in the Turdaș type settlements of Deva *Tăuălaș*, Turdaș *Luncă*, Orăștie *Dealul Pemilor*, Alba Iulia *Lumea Nouă*, Daia Română *Părauț* belong to chronological horizon Vinča B<sub>2</sub>–Vinča C<sub>1</sub>.

#### 4. Gradešnica and Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV Cultures: Bulgaria

##### a) Gradešnica (fig. 10/21–30)

This kind of vessel has uncovered in the Chalcolitic layer—the B level, that B. Nikolov considers to be synchronous with Vinča–Turdaş, Karanovo V and Boian–Vidra cultures (B. Nikolov 1974, p. 28–30; fig. 48, 67, 70, 89, 110). The cultural elements of Gradešnica have been afterwards considered to be itself a culture, named Gradešnica, developed in the Northern and North–Western Bulgaria, a culture born at the outskirts of the great Vinča area, but being strongly influenced by it (Y. Bojadžiev *et alii* 1993, p. 62, 74, 75).

VI. Dumitrescu (1980, p. 102–103) considers that the materials found in the three chalcolitic levels of Gradešnica are very similar to the ones of Rast and Vinča area, but also influenced by the Marica–Karanovo V culture.

As for the chronology of the chalcolitic B level of Gradešnica, J. Makkay (1990, p. 78), agreeing with B. Nikolov (1974, p. 28–30), thinks also that the vases with incised signs on the bottom (as well as the plates) are very similar to the objects found at Turdaş and Tărtăria. He also considers that it can be dated during the chronological horizon Vinča C<sub>1</sub>. As for us, we consider ourselves that the Gradešnica settlement is closely linked to the neighbouring cultural area Vinča and Turdaş.

##### b) Kalojanovec *Goljamata Mogila* (fig. 6/1, 4–7, 9–11)

The excavations made in this settlement revealed a lot of beakers and cups, made of fine paste, with delicate grooves, and many incised or polished signs on the bottom (M. Dimitrov 1969, p. 29–33; fig. 7/1, 4–7, 9–11).

##### c) Obručište (fig. 6/2–3, 8)

In this settlements have been unveiled polished beakers and cups with incised signs on the bottom, similar to those discovered in the Kalojanovec and Nova Zagora settlements (M. Dimitrov 1969, p. 29–33, fig. 7/2–3, 8).

##### d) Nova Zagora *Hlebozavod* (fig. 6/12–13)

In this settlement were found vases bearing signs on the bottom (\* \* 1983, p. 60, fig. 51/a–b); this settlement is considered to belong to the Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV culture (M. Dimitrov 1976, p. 13–14; G. Georgiev 1983, p.17; Y. Bojadžiev *et alii* 1993, p. 68–69).

\*\*\*

The Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV culture is born in the eastern Thracia, along the middle and lower Tundža and is characterized by the appearance and spreading of the vessels decorated by excision or canalling (M. Dimitrov 1976, p. 10–12; G. Georgiev 1983, p.17; Y. Bojadžiev *et alii* 1993, p. 68–69; J. Lichardus *et alii* 2000, p. 95–96, 111–113). As far as the genesis and spreading of the Karanovo IV–Kalojanovec culture are concerned, V. Nikolov (1995, p. 69–70; 1996, p. 141–142) considers that it has developed, mainly, in the western Thracia, it was very dynamic, its main feature is the existence of the decorated vases by excision or canalling, being synchronous with Boian–Giuleşti culture (Greca stage).

The excavations made lately in the *tell* of Kirklareli *Asagi Pinar* pointed out a living level where have been found objects of Karanovo type, together with objects of classic Vinča type (<http://tayproject.eies.iti.edu.tr/KalkIng...KalkdetailEng.html>).

It is important, for our approach, to emphasize the fact that, in the eastern and southern Thracia, the vases bearing incised signs on the bottom appear in the Kalojanovec–Karanovo IV cultural level, they are associated with the vases that bear excised or canalled motifs and are contemporary with the Vinča B and Vinča C phases.

#### 5. The Area of the Linear Pottery Culture

##### a) Traian *Dealul Fântânilor* (fig. 7/5a)

Hortensia Dumitrescu (1955, p. 466; fig. 9/22) published a vase which bottom was incised with a cruciform motive, represented according to the rules of the linear–ceramic decoration.

##### b) Glăvăneştii Vechi (fig. 7/5b)

E. Comşa (1994, fig. 17/13; 33/12) published two vases with cruciform signs, similar to the one found at Traian *Dealul Fântânilor*.

c) Nezviško–Ukraine (*fig. 7/5c–d*)

In this settlement have been uncovered vessels with cruciform signs on the bottom, made similarly to those of Traian and Glăvănești Vechi (T.S. Passek, E. Černyš 1963, fig. II/7–8)

## 6. Precucuteni Cultural Area

a) Traian *Dealul Viei* (*fig. 7/5e–i*)

Silvia Marinescu–Bilcu (1974, fig. 35/1–5, 9–12) published vessel bottoms bearing signs, that belong to Precucuteni I culture, made alike, as far as style is concerned, to the discovered in the Boian–Giulești settlements of Brăila Plain.

b) Larga Jijia (*fig. 7/5j*)

In this Precucuteni II settlement was found a fragment of a vase bottom bearing signs, similar to those dated in the Precucuteni I phase discovered at Traian *Dealul Viei* (S. Marinescu–Bilcu 1974, fig. 45/1).

## 7. The Hamangia Culture Area

a) Ceamurlia de Jos (*fig. 7/1–2*)

There have been unveiled two tureens made of fine paste, well polished and decorated with impressed and canalled motifs (D. Berciu 1966, p. 202–203, fig. 104/1; 105/1). The shape and the signs incised on the vessel bottom allow us to place them in the Hamangia–phase III, as P. Hașotti proposed (1991; 1997, p. 27–28).

b) Isaccea *Suhat* (*fig. 7/3–4*)

In this Boian–Giulești type settlement were found pottery of Boian–Giulești type together with a few fragments of vases Hamangia type–phase III (C. Micu, S. Micu 1998). We must say that among these vases there are also two tureens with incised signs on the bottom (C. Micu, S. Micu 1998, fig. IV/1; VII/4). We must also remind that in the Isaccea settlement were discovered also vases of Boian–Giulești type with incised signs on the bottom (C. Micu *et alii* 1999, p. 9, fig. 10/8).

## II. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The data presented so far show that the decorated vessel bottoms come, most of them, from truncated beakers, cups and tureens, made of fine paste, well fired, with a very well polished surface and decorated of pleats and incised motifs (sometimes incised and encrusted). But these signs remain a mystery because their presence on the vessels couldn't be explained neither by a utilitarian necessity, nor by the desire of the prehistorical people to decorate the whole vase.

In order to realize a rigorous analysis we have to take into consideration the following aspects:

a) the bottoms come from fragmentary vases, which means this objects have been broken in the ancient times (another proof are the materials found in Pit nr. XIII at Lișcoteanca *Movila din Baltă*, vases broken on purpose and deposited in the pit);

b) on the bottom of certain vases the signs have been made *ab initio*, but there are also vessels used for a while before having been incised on the bottom (for example, some signs scratched, after the firing, on certain vases uncovered at Siliștea *Conac*);

c) the main technique, with a few exceptions, is the incision; on some vessels, the signs are incised and grooved, on others, the signs are excised and canalled;

d) the motif themes are quite unitarian and one can even remark a certain variety, as the main categories of signs are reconstituted and synthetically presented (*fig. 7/5; 8–10*).

It happens very seldom for a single sign to appear, because they are used in combinations of motifs like: the cross, the angle, arc of circle, circle, rhomb, spiral, linked spirals etc. One can also find the trident motif and even the net of incised lines;

Due to the fact that we are going to do the analysis of these motifs further on, we'll confine ourselves to point out some features of these signs:

a) the most frequent signs are the perpendicular lines, the "cross" (*fig. 5/2, 4–5; 6/2–3, 10, 12; 7/3, 5a–e; 8/1–15, 27, 31–32; 9/1–3, 5, 8–17, 32; 10/1, 4–9, 16–17, 20, 26–28*), the arc of circle

(*fig. 6/9; 7/5h, j; 8/8–22; 9/29–30; 10/22*) and the rhomb (*fig. 7/5f–g, i; 8/6–7, 12, 26; 9/20–21; 10/2, 19, 25, 30*);

b) in most cases, they appear in combinations, as the cross and the arc of circle (*fig. 8/5, 8–15; 9/12–13*), the cross and the rhomb (*fig. 7/5c, f–g; 8/6–7, 26; 9/14, 21*) or all the three together;

c) the cross is also associated with the right angle (*fig. 8/2–5; 10/5, 26–27*);

d) there is also a situation when four arcs of circle, symetrically disposed mark the bounds of a cross (*fig. 8/16–20; 9/29–30*);

e) the concentric circles (*fig. 8/23, 33; 9/28*) and the spiral (*fig. 8/28–30*) form a special motif; one can also observe the representation of two concentric circles and excised triangles (*fig. 8/33*);

f) the trident is present only twice (*fig. 8/26–27*);

g) the presence of the nets of lines, incised as well as excised (*fig. 5/6–9; 6/4, 7, 10–11; 7/5h–i; 8/24–25; 9/18, 24–26, 10/13–15, 23–25*).

### III. CULTURAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL SITUATION

The vases bearing incised signs on the bottom discovered in the Boian-type settlements of the north-eastern Romanian Plain are very similar, almost identical with those discovered in the cultural areas of Turdaş, Vinča, Karanovo IV and Gradešnica.

On the other hand, similar objects found in the linear pottery culture, Precucuteni and Hamangia areas are a bit different from the vases discovered in the Boian settlements of the Bărăgan Plain. We are pointing out the fact that the signs made on the objects belonging to linear-pottery, Precucuteni or Hamangia cultures are rendered according to their own stylistic rules, which make them have a different aspect.

These types of objects are characteristic for the Vinča, Turdaş, Kalojanovec Karanovo IV and Boian cultures, because they have been found, most of them, in these cultural areas.

The geographical area of such discoveries is concentrated in certain places (*fig. 12*):

1) on the middle Mureş river,

2) on the Timiş and Bega rivers,

3) on the Danube Valley,

4) on the Călmăţui river,

5) on Tundža river,

6) to all these, we must add the single discoveries made at Traian, Glăvăneşti, Nezviško and Ceamurlia.

The stage of the research can be an explanation for the big distances between these zones, but one shouldn't give up the hypothesis of population movements. J. Chapman (2001, p. 223–233) has recently explained the spreading of the objects with signs on the bottom by certain social-economic practices specific to late Neolithic and Chalcolithic in the Balkans, named by the syntagm „fragment enchainment”.

Another problem to deal with concerning these objects is about their appearance and their disappearance. In the early Neolithic and developed Eneolithic cultures, these objects with signs on the bottom are very scarce. That's why we consider that there is no gradual evolution of this category of archaeological items. The miniature vases with incised „crosses” on the bottom uncovered in some Gumelniţa A2 settlements (*Însurăţei Popina I, Taşaul La Ostrov*) don't change essentially the situation, as the period of highest development and spreading of the objects with signs on the bottom is during the Vinča-phases B and C, Turdaş, Boian and Kalojanovec-Karanovo IV cultures.

The previous data point out the fact that this kind of objects is characteristic to the southern cultures and characterizes a well defined chronological period—end of the developed Neolithic and beginning of the Eneolithic. As far as the present stage of research is concerned, we could explain, as it follows, the presence of the vases with signs on the bottom, particularly in Vinča, Gradešnica, Karanovo IV-Kalojanovec and Boian cultural areas: a) a common cultural background; b) the outcome of a cultural impulse, whose core was situated in the territories around Propontida, received by the

cultures of the late developed Neolithic between the Danube and the Aegean Sea, hypothesis that seems more likely to us.

The objects bearing signs on the bottom are dated in the following chronological period:

*Vinča B<sub>2</sub>–Vinča C<sub>1</sub> = Turdaş = Gradeşnica = Karanovo IV–Kalojanovec = Boian–Giuleşti phase = Precucuteni I–II = Hamangia III.*

## V.POSSIBLE MEANINGS

If we want to find out why these signs have been made on the vessels bottoms, we have to take into consideration all the archaeological realities: the contexts, the associations with other types of objects, the kind of vases they are made on, the place of their making, the techniques and the moment of their making, decorative/non-decorative virtue, types of signs and their associations, their repetability/non-repetability in the same contexts, sites or cultural areas, origin and dynamic of their spreading, categories of other objects on which such signs appear. It is obvious that exaggerating some aspects or even neglecting others may lead to false conclusions.

We cannot state, but very cautiously, some general or detailed remarks because there are few information regarding the archaeological contexts of the vases discovery, as well as the associations with other categories of objects. Anyhow, there is no obvious evidence of their presence in sanctuaries or cult complexes still in function. They have been mostly found in pits, huts, surface dwellings or in the archaeological layer. For some cases, one can assume that it was a ritual depositing, like in Pit nr. XIII of Lişcoteanca *Movila din Baltă* where 10 vessel bottoms with signs have been uncovered.

Most of the signs were incised on the bottom of the truncated vases (beakers) before or after their firing.

It's worth mentioning that an overwhelming majority of such signs are incised on beakers and cups bottoms that have been broken in ancient times, or even bottoms already broken, so, as J. Chapman (2001) demonstrates, there is not an incidental situation. Because the large majority of these signs are on the bottom, usually hidden to the sight and because they are deprived of artistic qualities and difficult to be seen, their purely decorating role can't be ruled out. The archaeological discoveries show us that the ancient people didn't usually decorate the parts of vases hidden to the sight. Moreover, it is certain that some signs have been incised on the objects after a period of use, and on other bottoms, even after their breaking.

There is a great variety of such marks as there is different combinations of lines, dots, angles and geometrical forms. Thus, although the basic elements aren't numerous, their association and combination led to a great variety of decorative motifs and combinations, plus the unique particular signs. The great variety of signs, the small number of marked vases and the fact that some of them have been incised on vessel after the firing or the breaking, make for arguments against interpreting them as potter trademarks.

As there is a great diversity of signs and combinations of signs we couldn't assign them a purely utilitarian role (at least, for the time being)–or even, marking some quantity, or some moment of their use. The presence of such signs on a relatively small number of vases, and only on the bottom of certain types of objects, the relative repetability of the basic motifs, their presence only in certain cultures and periods of time etc. stand for a certain purpose in making them.

These signs have been incised, mostly, on bottoms of fine objects that had previously been broken and polished. What were the reasons of all this? Their incision especially on fine, black, polished objects bottoms is explained, on the one hand, by the clear contour of the signs on them and, on the other, by their easy storing and distribution. In some museums of the southern Balkans, we saw dozens of such "stocks" of bottoms bearing incised signs, separated, obviously, from the entire object.

Certainly, when the signs have been impressed in the clay still soft, the message was meant to the time of their use, but, when it was incised on objects already broken, as it seems to be for most of them, their use as vessels, is out of question.

After the study of the signs available to us, we could presume the existence of a **corpus of signs**, bearing **a number of messages**. This hypothesis is also suggested by an inventory of signs, common to the entire Balkan–Carpathian area (*fig. 8–10*), at which we may add the particular representations of certain regions, normal, if we take into account their vast area of spreading.

The vessels bottoms have been chosen as means of diffusion because they were at hand, made of a material resistant and easy to incise/impress, then easy to stock and transport.

A number of Asian civilizations proceeded similarly, when they wrote on clay plates and cylinders.

Due to the fact that such “signs” have been put on the bottom (= hidden), they have no real artistic value, they have been found in common dwellings or in pits and not in sanctuaries, may lead to the hypothesis, not of a religious significance, but a magic one, or even of “profane” messages.

Their existence on other categories of objects with certain cult value, as well as the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statuettes, the clay plates or tables etc., all these stand for strong arguments in considering them as message bearers. Between the discoveries of this type, we'll mention the anthropomorphic figurines of Lişcoteanca *Movila din Baltă* (*fig. 11/2*), Zorlenţ (*fig. 11/7*) and Parţa (*fig. 11/3*).

Could these signs have formed a system of memory and transmission of information, consequently a communication system? Each sign represented, probably, a certain message/information, otherwise it would be difficult to believe they could constitute an “alphabet”, because of the stage of the human society evolution and the great variability of signs.

We are aware that, only a complete data basis containing all the signs known by now could bring a significant progress in the analysis and understanding of their significance.

We couldn't, for the time being, launch other hypothesis, all we could say, in this stage of the research, is that these signs were not some kind of decorative elements, but they included a number of messages that, maybe, we'll never decipher.

### Bibliography:

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| D. Berciu 1966            | <i>Cultura Hamangia. Noi contribuții</i> , București.  |
| D. Berciu, I. Berciu 1949 | <i>Săpături și cercetări arheologice în anii 1947–1949</i> , in <i>Apulum</i> 3, p. 1–43.  |
| Y. Bojadziev 1992         | <i>Hronologia na preistoriceskite kulturi na teritoriata na Dobruža</i> , in <i>Dobrudža</i> , 9.  |
| Y. Bojadziev et alii 1993 | <i>Atlas du Néolithique Européen I</i> , ERAUL, Liège.   |
| J. Chapman 2002           | <i>Intentional fragmentation in the neolithic and copper age of south-east Europe: incised signs and pintaderas</i> , in <i>Festschrift für Gheorghe Lazarovici</i> , Timișoara. |
| E. Comșa 1994             | <i>Așezarea culturii cu ceramică liniară de la Glăvăneștii Vechi</i> , in <i>Hierasus</i> 9.   |
| M. Dimitrov 1969          | <i>Novi nahodki ot neolitnata kultura Karanovo IV v Starozagorko</i> , in <i>Izvestija na Bălgarite Muzei</i> 1, p. 21–42.   |
| M. Dimitrov 1976          | <i>Za haraktera na kulturata Karanovo IV</i> , in <i>Izvestija na Muzeite ot Jugoiztočka Bălgaria</i> 1, p. 9–16.  |
| Fl. Drașovean 1996        | <i>Cultura Vinča târzie (faza C) în Banat</i> , Timișoara.   |
| H. Dumitrescu 1955        | <i>Șantierul arheologic Traian (1954)</i> , in <i>SCIV</i> 6, 3–4, p. 459–485.   |
| H. Dumitrescu 1984        | <i>Cercetările arheologice de la Tăuălaș-Deva (I)</i> , AMN 21, p. 3–44.   |
| Vi. Dumitrescu 1980       | <i>The Neolithic Settlement at Rast</i> , BAR IS 72.   |
| G. Georgiev 1983          | <i>Erforschung des Neolithikum in Westbulgarien</i> , in <i>Keramik und Gold-Bulgarische Jungsteinzeit im 6. und 5. Jahrtausend</i> , Frankfurt am Main, p. 15–19.               |

- N. Harțuche 1980 *Preliminarii la repertoriul arheologic al județului Brăila*, in *Istros* 1, p. 281–354.
- N. Harțuche, Fl. Anastasiu 1968 *Brăilița. Așezări și cimitire omenesti datând din epoca neolitică până în pragul orânduirii feudale*, Muzeul Brăilei, Brăila.
- N. Harțuche, Fl. Anastasiu 1976 *Catalogul selectiv al colecției de arheologie a Muzeului Brăilei*, Brăila.
- P. Hașotti 1991 *La culture néolithique Hamangia. Quelques remarques sur le stade actuel des recherches*, in *Le Paléolithique et le Néolithique de la Roumanie en contexte Européen*, BAI 4, Iași.
- Gh. Lazarovici 1971 *Difuziunea unor civilizații neolitice în regiunea Dunării de Jos*, in *Pontica* 4.
- Gh. Lazarovici 1979 *Neoliticul Banatului*, in *BMA* 4, Cluj-Napoca.
- Gh. Lazarovici, H. Dumitrescu 1986 *Cercetările arheologice de la Tăuălaș-Deva*, in *AMN* 22–23, p. 3–40.
- Gh. Lazarovici, M. Nica 1991 *Chalcoliticul balcano-anatolian*, in *Cultura Vinča în România*, Timișoara.
- Gh. Lazarovici et alii 2001 *Parța. Monografie arheologică. I*, Timișoara.
- J. Lichardus et alii 2000 *Forschungen in der mikroregion von Drama (Südostbulgarien)*, Bonn.
- S.A. Luca 1997 *Așezări neolitice de pe Valea Mureșului (I). Habitatul turdășean de la Orăștie-Dealul Pemilor (punct X2)*, Alba Iulia.
- S.A. Luca 1997a *Relațiile culturale de la sfârșitul neoliticului dezvoltat dintre Transilvania și ținuturile înconjurătoare-reflectarea acestora prin materialele arheologice descoperite în așezarea de la Turdaș-Luncă, jud. Hunedoara*, in *CCDJ* 15, p. 252–262.
- S.A. Luca 2001 *Așezări neolitice pe Valea Mureșului (II). Noi cercetări arheologice la Turdaș-Luncă. I. Campaniile 1992–1995*, Alba Iulia.
- J. Makkay 1990 *A tartariai leletek*, Budapest.
- S. Marinescu-Bilcu 1974 *Cultura Precucuteni pe teritoriul României*, București.
- Z. Maxim 1999 *Neo-eneoliticul din Transilvania. Date arheologice și matematico-statistice*, Cluj-Napoca.
- C. Micu, S. Micu 1998 *Ceramica culturii Hamangia din așezarea de la Isaccea-Suhat (campania 1997)*, in *Pontica* 31, Constanța, p. 25–35.
- C. Micu et alii 2000 *Așezarea neolitică de la Isaccea, punctul Suhat, jud. Tulcea*, in *Istro-Pontica*, Tulcea, p. 5–52.
- B. Nikolov 1974 *Gradešnica*, Nauka Iskustvo, Sofia.
- V. Nikolov 1995 *Notes on the Periodization and Chronology of the Neolithic in Thrace*, in *Thracia* 11.
- V. Nikolov 1996 *Neolitnata kultura v. bălgarskite zemi v konteksta na Anatolija i Balkanite*, in *Annuary of Department of Archaeology* 2–3, Sofia.
- St. Pandrea 1994 *Începutul culturii Boian Giulești în Câmpia Brăilei*, in *Istros* 7.
- T.S. Passek, E. Černyš 1963 *Pamjatniki kultury linejno-lentočnoj keramiki na terirorij S.S.S.R.I*, Arheologija S.S.S.R., Moskva.
- I. Paul 1992 *Cultura Petrești*, București.
- M. Roska 1941 *Die Sammlung Zsofia von Torma*, Cluj.
- V. Sîrbu, St. Pandrea 1994 *Cercetările arheologice de la Siliștea, jud. Brăila, campaniile 1991–1993*, in *Istros* 7.
- E. Tsvek 1996 *Contacts between the Eneolithic tribes of Europe and Eastern Tripolyan population*, in *Cucuteni aujourd'hui*, Piatra Neamț.
- \* \* 1983 *Erforschung des Neolithikum in Westbulgarien*, dans *Keramik und Gold-Bulgarische Jungsteinzeit im 6. und 5. Jahrtausend*, Frankfurt am Main.

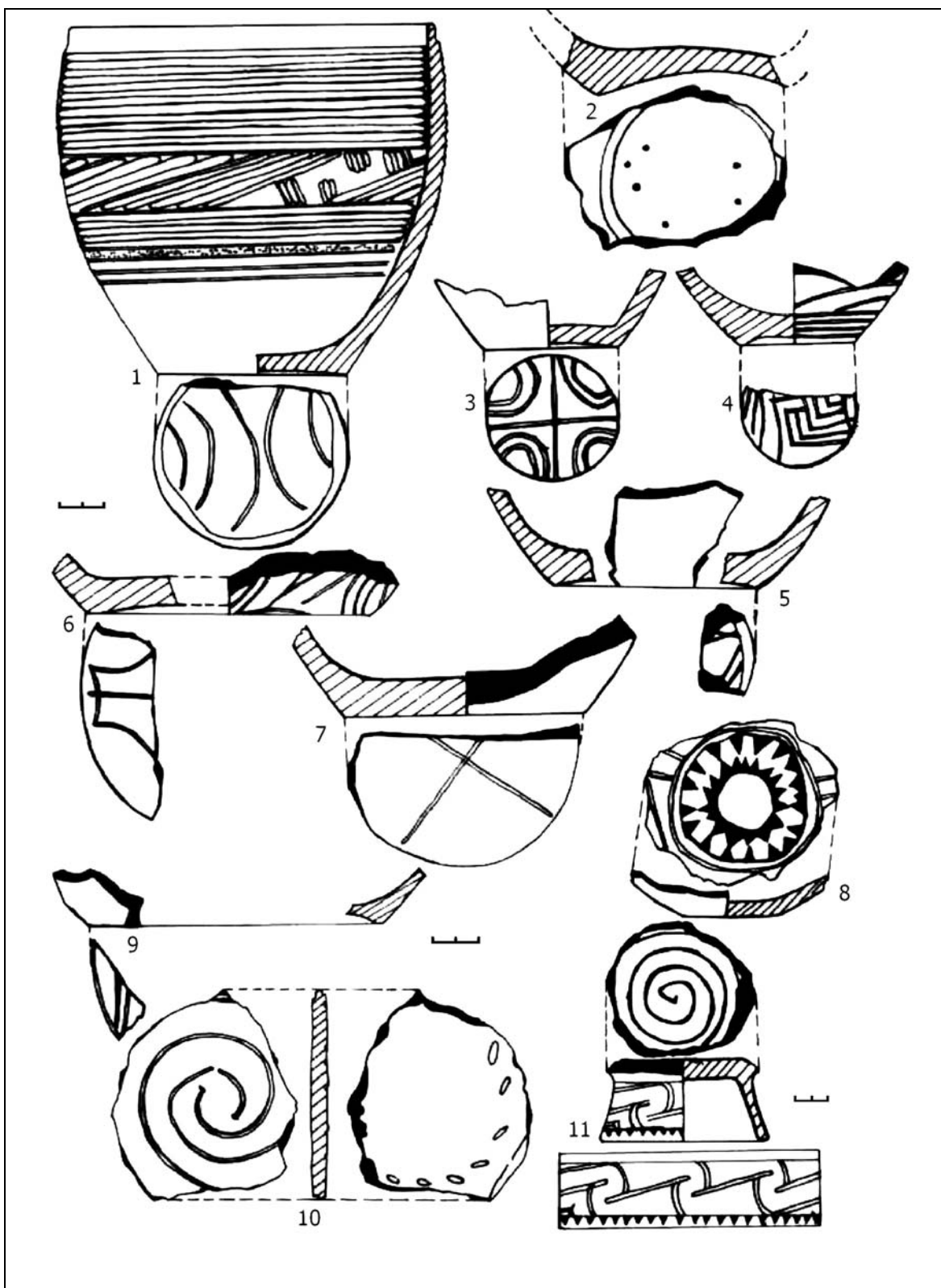


Fig. 1. 1–9. Siliștea *Conac*; 10–11. Lișcoteanca *Moș Filon*.

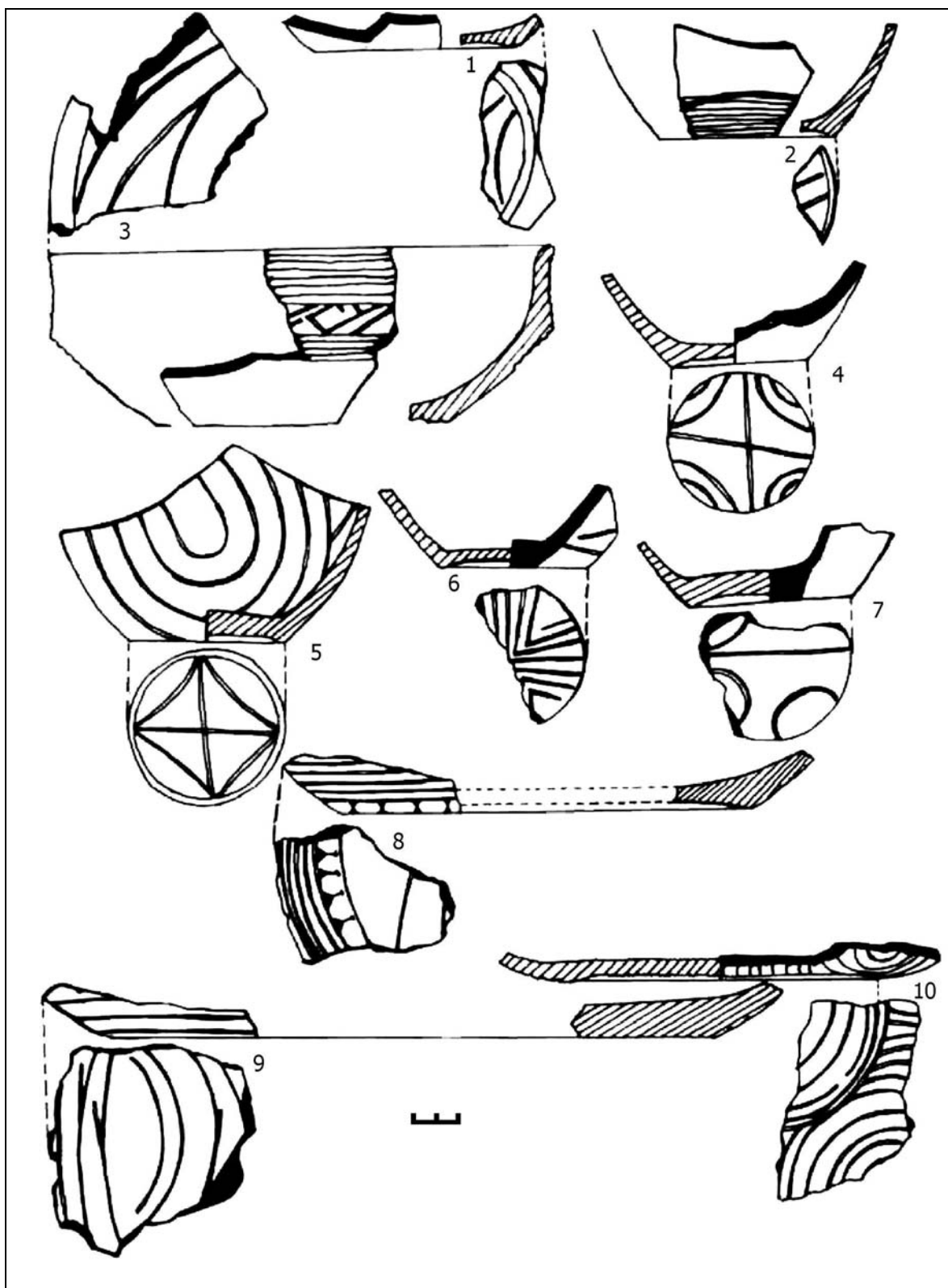


Fig. 2. 1–10. Lișcoteanca *Movila din Baltă*.

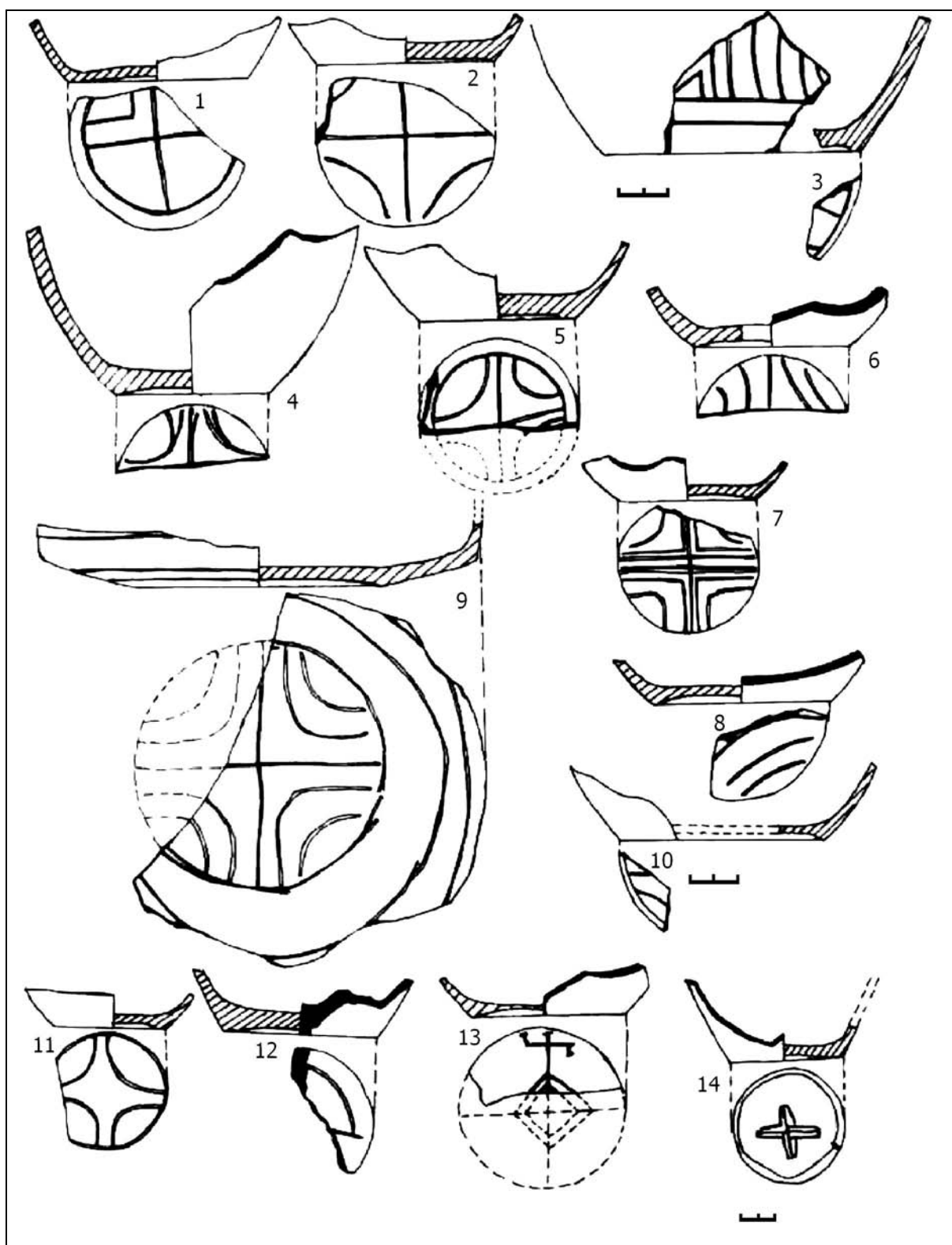


Fig. 3. 1–13. Lișcoteanca *Movila din Baltă*; 14. Brăilița.

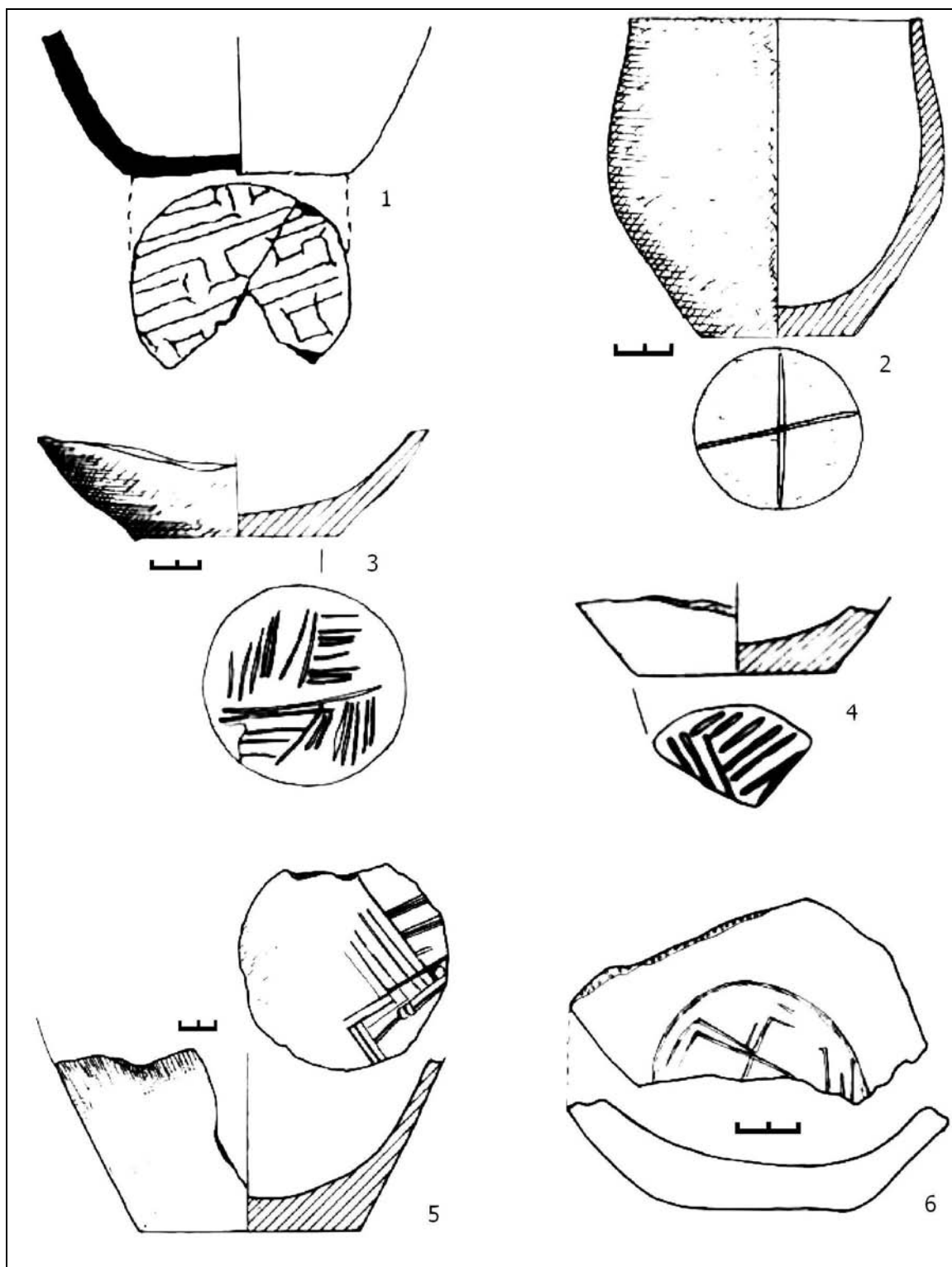


Fig. 4. 1. Isaccea *Suhat*; 1–6. Parța *Tell I.*

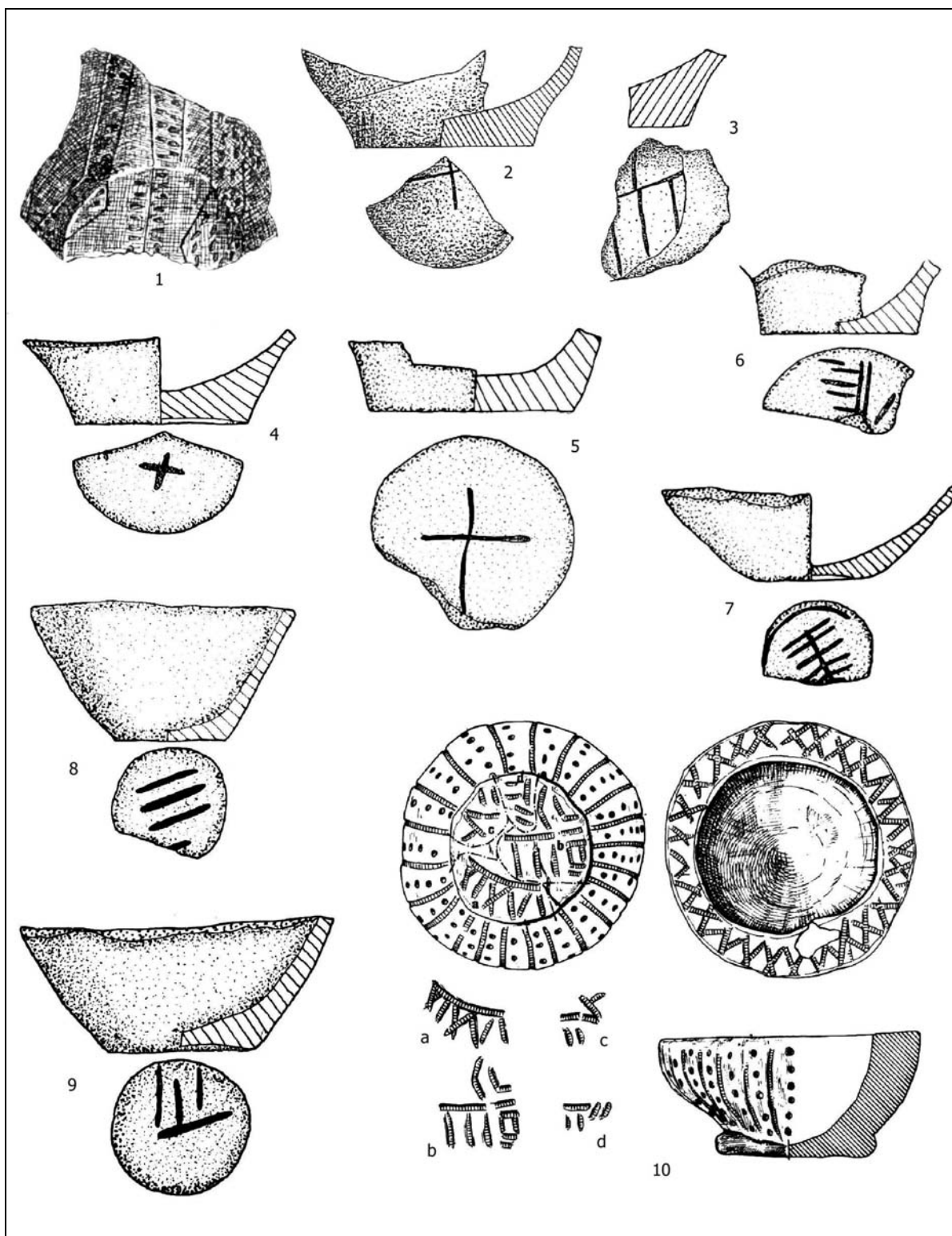


Fig. 5. 1. Alba Iulia *Lumea Nouă*; 2–3. Turdaş *Luncă*; 4–9. Orăştie *Dealul Pemilor*; 10. Daia Română *Părău*.

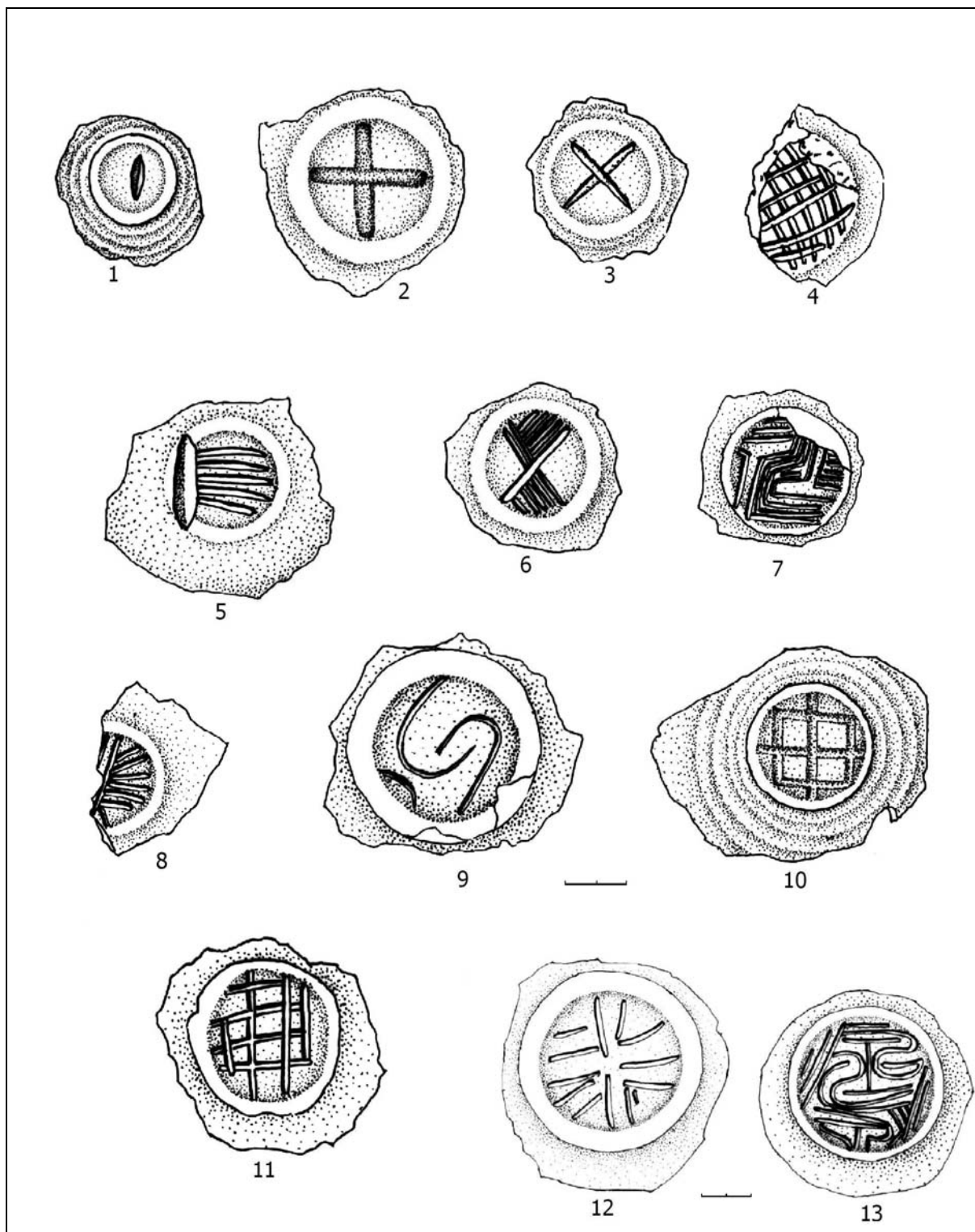


Fig. 6. 1, 4–7, 9–11. Kalojanovec; 2–3, 8. Obručište; 12–13. Nova Zagora *Hlebozavod*.

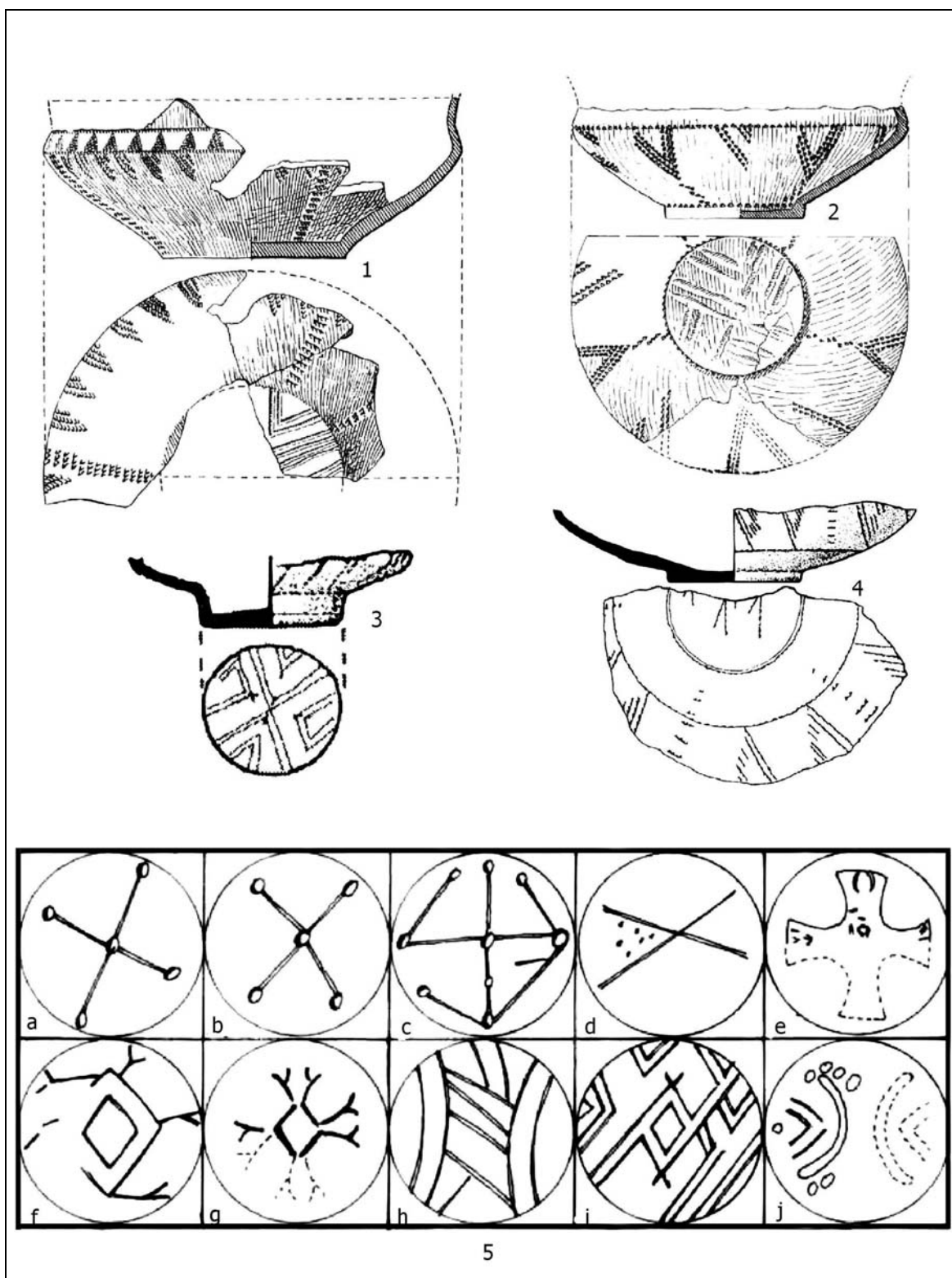


Fig. 7. 1–2. Ceamurlia de Jos; 3–4. Isaccea Suhat; 5. Catalogue of signs made on the vessel bottoms found in the linear-ceramic and Precucuteni cultural areas: a. Traian Dealul Fântânilor, b. Glăvăneștii Vechi, c–d. Nezvisko, e–i. Traian Dealul Viei, j. Larga Jijia.

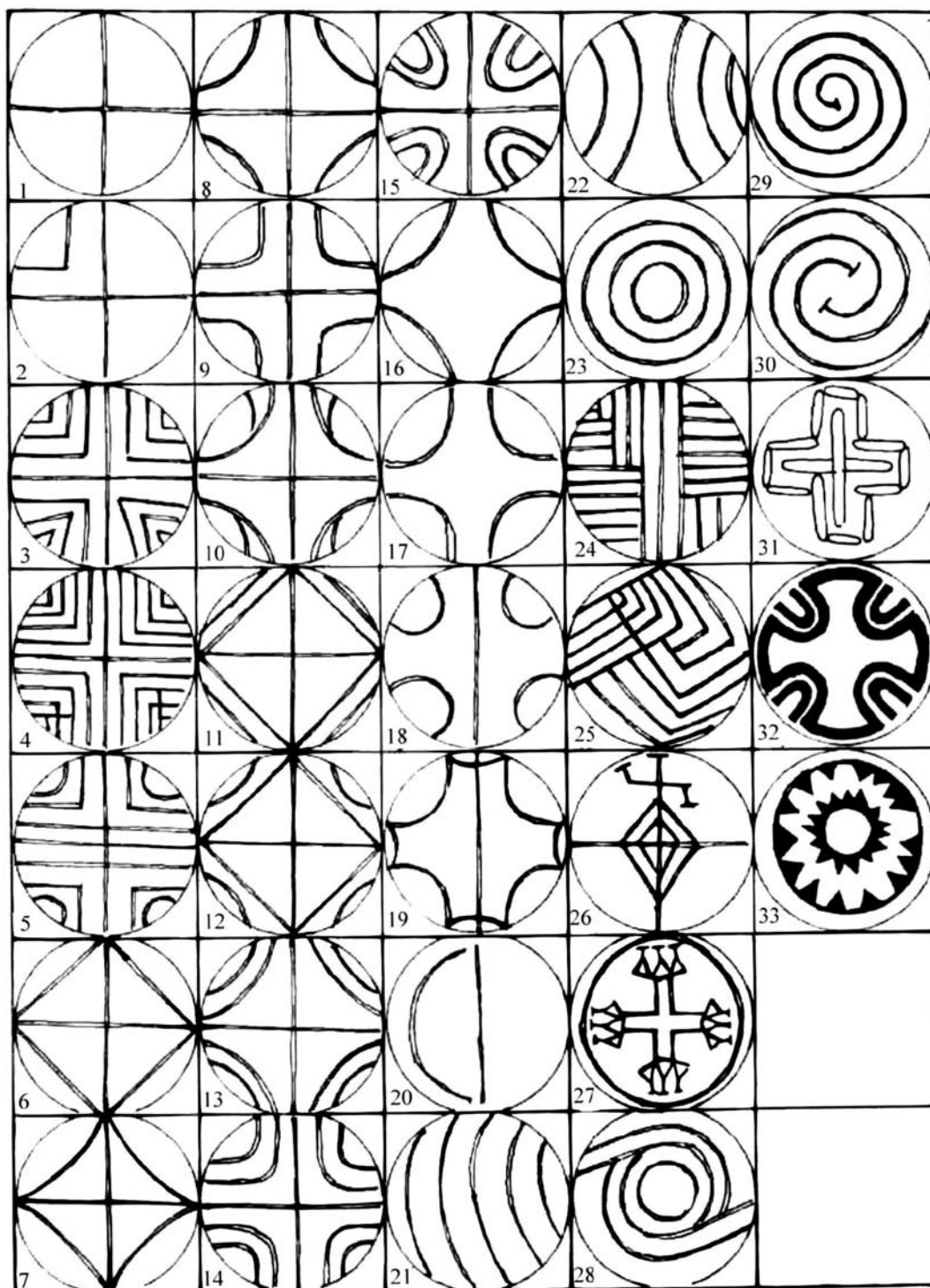


Fig. 8. Catalogue of signs made on the vessel bottoms discovered in Boian-Giulești settlements of Brăila Plain.

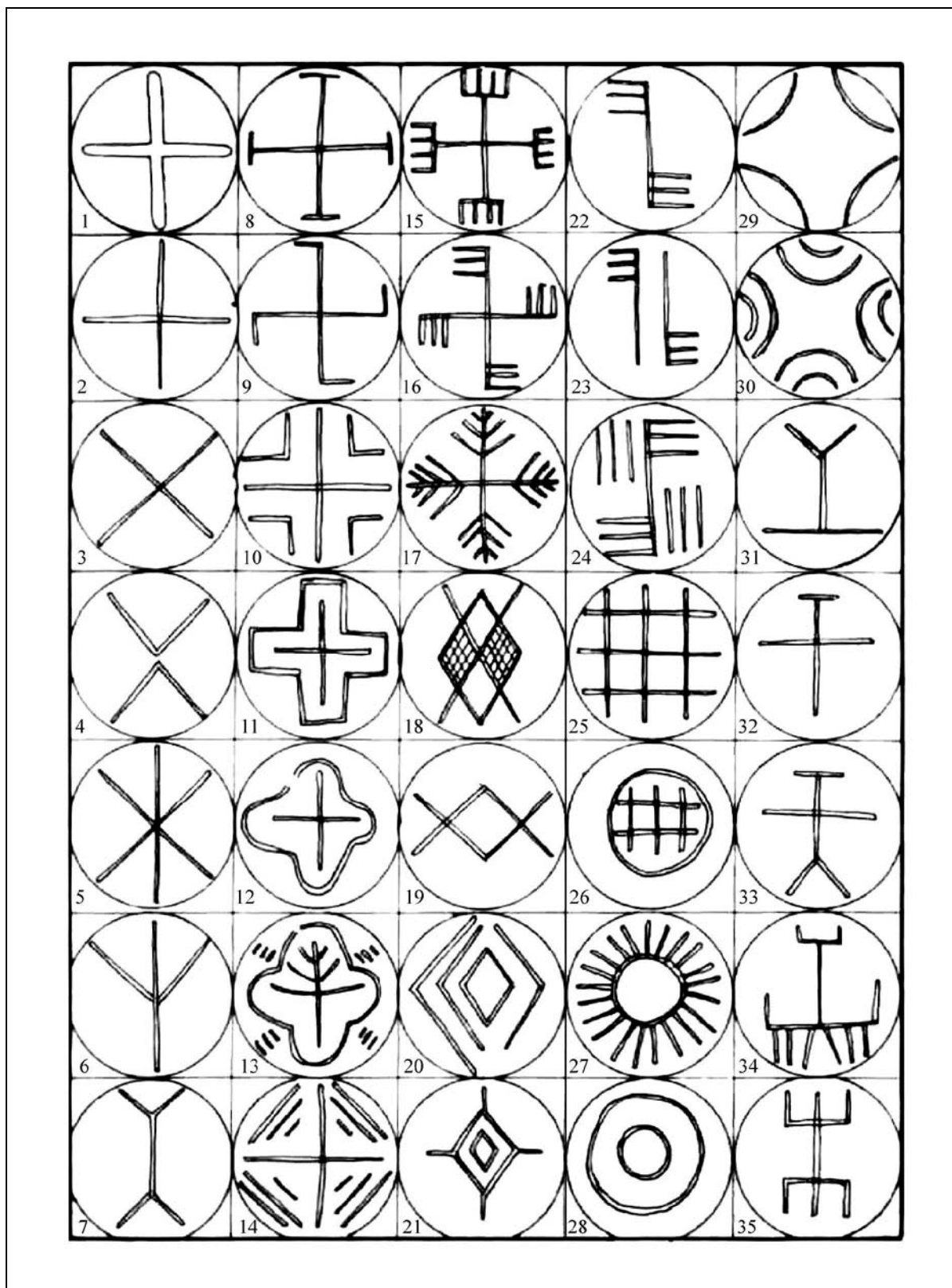


Fig. 9. Catalogue of signs made on the vessel bottoms discovered in settlement of Turdaş *Luncă*.

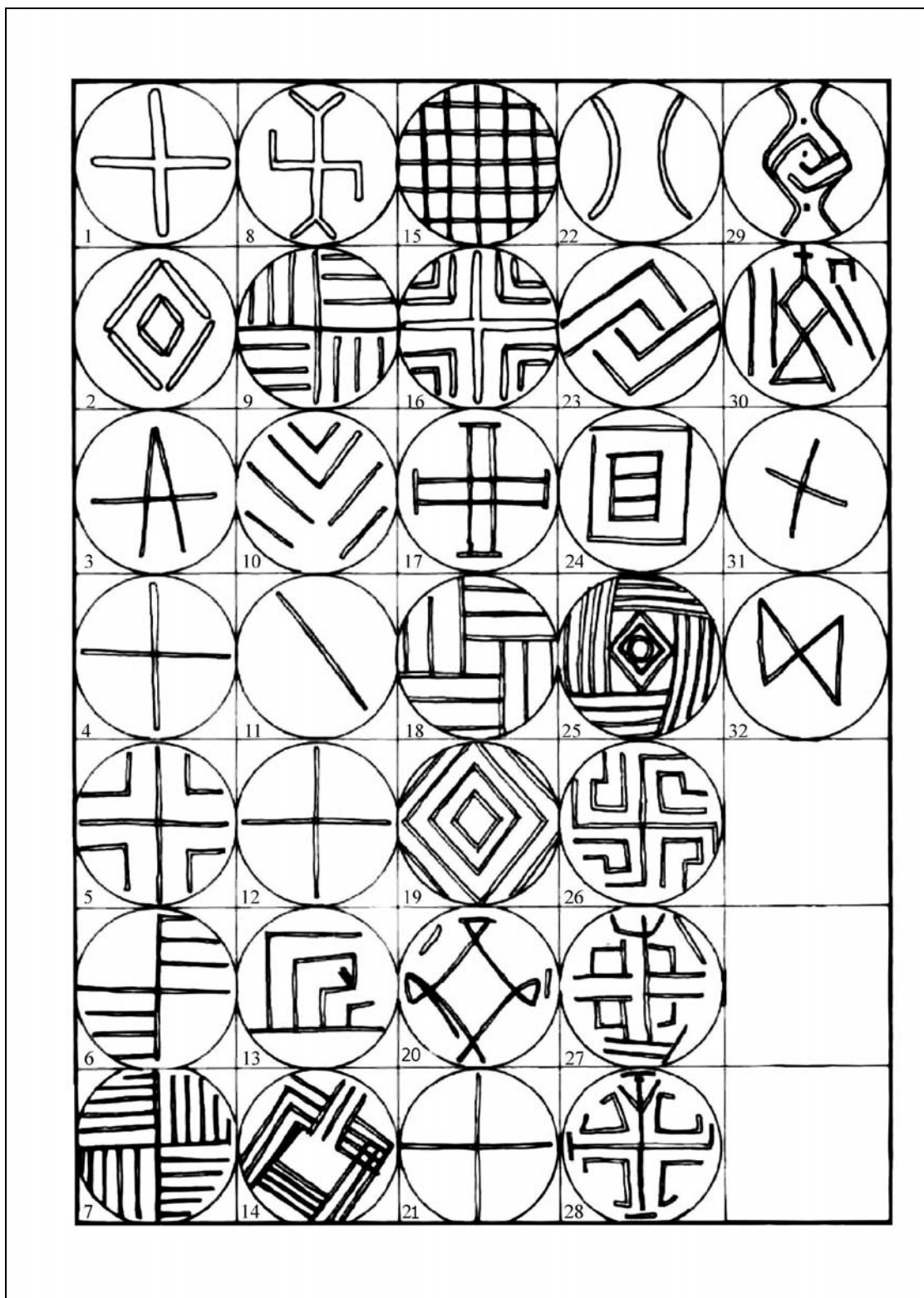


Fig. 10. Catalogue of signs made on the vessel bottoms discovered in the following settlements: 1–3. Zorlenț; 4–8. Parța *Tell I*; 9–10. Bucovăț; 11–20. Rast; 21–30. Gradeșnica; 31–32. Deva *Tăuș*.

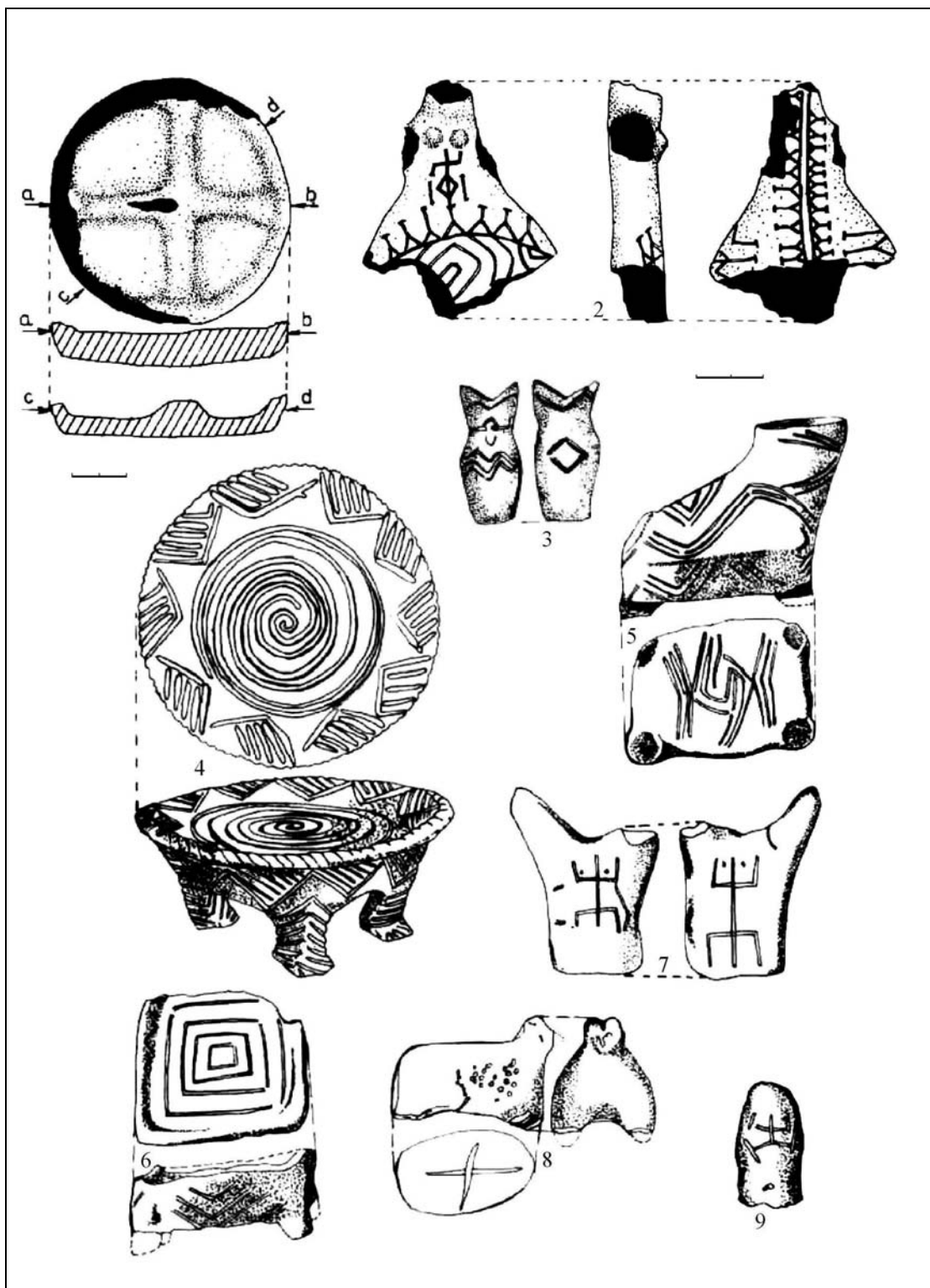


Fig. 11. Anthropomorphic figurines (2–3, 7, 9), zoomorphic figurine (8), small altars (4, 6) and clay objects (1, 5). 1. Brăilița; 2. Lișcoteanca *Movila din Baltă*; 3. Parța *Tell I*; 4. Berezovka; 5–6. Turdaș; 7–8. Zorlenț; 9. Balta Sărată.

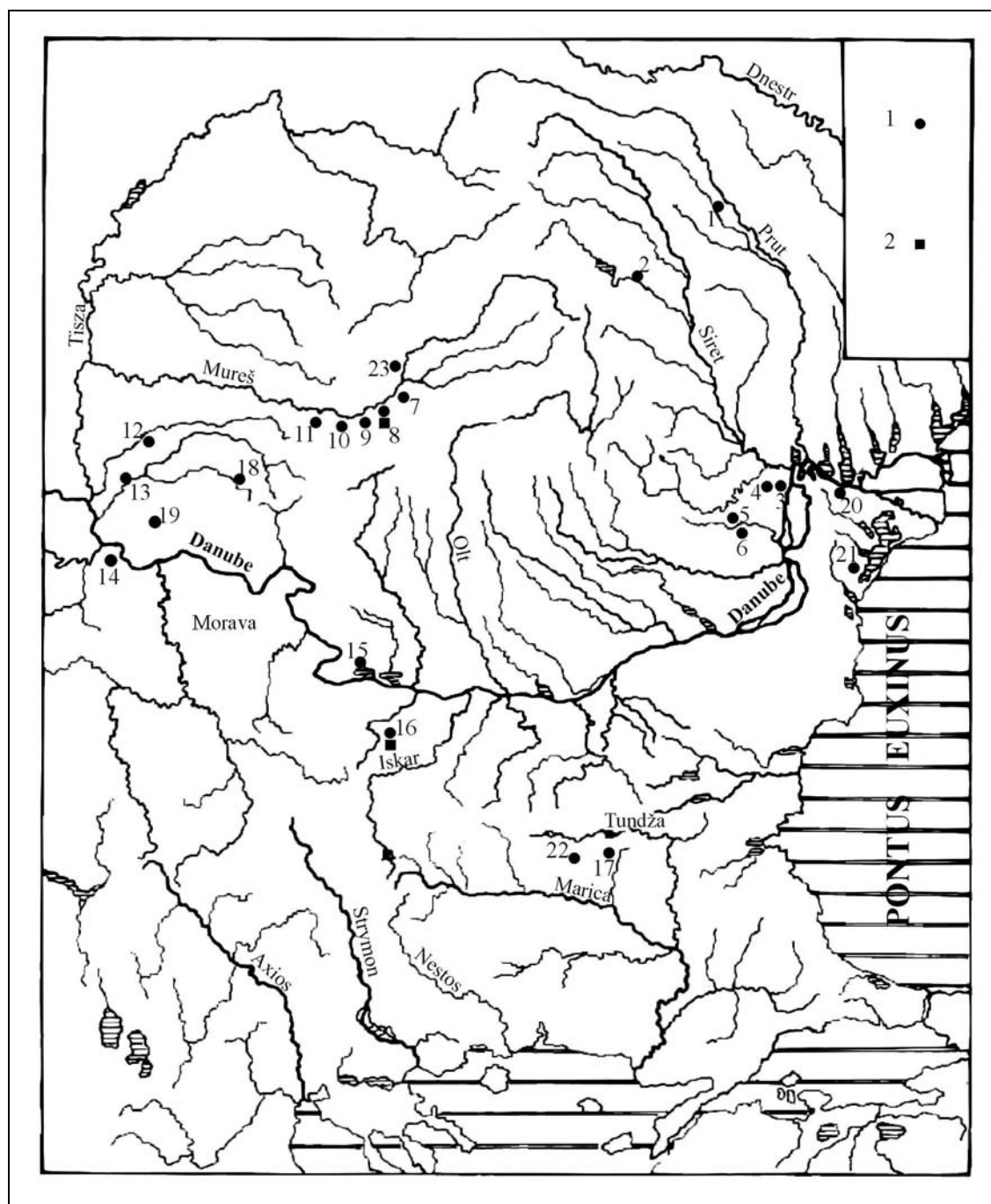


Fig. 12. Map with the settlements where were discovered vessels bearing signs on the bottoms.  
 Legend-1. vessels bearing signs on the bottoms; 2. clay plaques.  
 List of localities-1. Glăvăneștii Vechi; 2. Traian; 3. Brăilița; 4. Siliștea *Conac*; 5. Lișcoteanca *Moș Filon*; 6. Lișcoteanca *Movila din Baltă*; 7. Daia Română; 8. Tărtăria; 9. Orăștie *Dealul Pemilor*; 10. Turdaș; 11. Deva *Tăuțaș*; 12. Bucovăț; 13. Parța; 14. Vința; 15. Rast; 16. Gradeșnica; 17. Nova Zagora *Hlebozavod*; 18. Zorlent; 19. Vrșac; 20. Isaccea *Suhat*; 21. Ceamurlia de Jos; 22. Kalojanovec; 23. Alba Iulia *Lumea Nouă*.