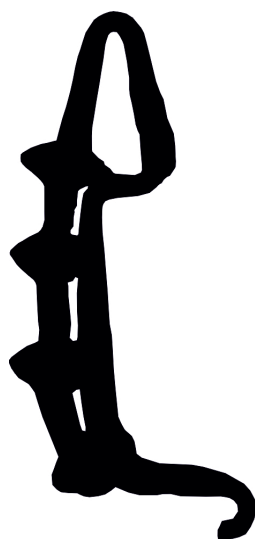


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This volume is dedicated to Tudor Soroceanu at 80 years

Acest volum este dedicat lui Tudor Soroceanu cu ocazia împlinirii a 80 de ani



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Cucuteni in northern Muntenia: archaeological research at Șoimești (Prahova)

Alin Frînculeasa, Daniel Garvăn, Octav Negrea

Abstract: It seems difficult to accept as true the association of Cucuteni with Muntenia, even the more so with Prahova County. Although the academic literature documents a few finds like for instance those of Homorâciu and Budureasca, scholars have never deemed these as relevant. Better known are the finds from the Buzău (Sărata Monteoru, Pietroasa Mică) and Brăila (Rîmnicelu) counties. Because in sites from northern Muntenia, artefacts specific to the Cucuteni culture emerge together with those believed Cernavodă I, any affiliation remained disputed. One solution was the idea of a mixed concept that would encompass the two cultural entities, termed Cucuteni B - Cernavodă I. Thus, it appeared as if the rather eccentric issue of the painted pottery culture development had been settled, the approach being related to events specific to the north-Danubian Eneolithic. The archaeological investigations carried out at Șoimești, yet also in other sites from the Buzău county, tell a story that could aid the understanding of the Cucuteni world evolution during the first part of the 4th millennium by its south-western periphery. We publish here the results of the archaeological research conducted in the site of Șoimești and integrate these finds in a narrative about Cucuteni in the Muntenia hills' area. Direct and indirect relations with the local world revealed by the late evolution of the Gumelnița communities and the start of the Cernavodă I culture, yet also the impact of the west-Pontic steppe phenomenon on the Lower Danube area are of importance here.

Keywords: Șoimești; the Cucuteni culture; burnt houses; pottery; C14 dating.

Introduction

Monday, April the 30th, 2001 is the day when I (A.F.) visited for the first time the archaeological site on hill *Merez*. In the occasion, I collected from the surface beside Bronze Age pottery fragments, pottery whose fabric contained crushed shells, which I ascribed as likely Cernavodă I. In 2003 (April 26th) I reached the same site together with D. Garvăn, while the pottery which we identified then was of Glina and Monteoru type. We retrieved the remains of a restorable orange jar associated with burnt bones and ash from a natural break in the land, so at the time we hypothesised that respective feature must have been a cremation. I (A.F.) revisited the *Merez* in December 20th of the same year. In September 9th, 2006, I (A.F.) noted that a cell tower was emplaced on the site, so we officially informed the Prahova County Culture Directorate. This resulted in a court action whose final verdict was to keep the cell tower *in situ* only to make *Merez* even more visible (Pl. 2).

The site seems to have been known as early as the beginning of the 20th century, when C. Moisil published three items of worked stone (axes) discovered by a school teacher within the range of Ceptura commune¹. Very important proved to be the information rendered by M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, excerpted from I. Nestor's prehistory classes taught with the University of Bucharest, reporting the presence within a site from Ceptura range of a Cucuteni B - Glina² stratigraphic succession. *Merez* was visited on several occasions by V. Teodorescu (1961) and D. Lichiardopol (1974), who discovered pottery dating to the early Bronze Age (Gorodsk and Glina according to their reports). Over the course of time, the site was mentioned in archaeological references by a series of specialists like V. Teodorescu³ or V. Leahu⁴.

¹ Moisil 1911, 147.

² Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1945, 211. The MNA collections comprise Șoimești pottery ascribable to the Tei culture, delivered to the History and Archaeology Museum of Prahova County in the '70s (Frînculeasa 2020, 135, fig. 4).

³ Teodorescu 1994, 281.

⁴ Leahu 2003, 25.

About the site and research

The archaeological site lies west the Șoimești village (Ceptura commune), by the northern end of Seman valley, as part of Urlați town. It is located on *Merez* hill, which belongs to the Dealul Mare-Istrița massif, the Ceptura segment (Pl. 1)⁵. With a maximum elevation of 417 m, *Merez* hill is conical in shape, having steep slopes and a ca. 90 m diameter (west-east) plateau at its top. The prehistory habitation is extended, partially covering the plateau and also areas with more or less marked slopes on its exterior. The northern part of the site had collapsed, landslides damaging both Eneolithic houses clustering in respective area (Pl. 3) as well as the Bronze Age inhabitation/archaeological depositions.

The archaeological research commenced in 2014, being furthered by yearly campaigns until 2022, but also in 2024⁶. The excavations covered an area of approximately 550 square meters. North-south, yet also a few east-west oriented trenches were excavated, while regular areas (squares) were dug where houses were identified, in order to unveil and investigate respective features (Pl. 3). The research strategy aimed at obtaining relevant information on the site and habitation as soon as possible. Because of the site's complex topography and extension, several areas were plotted, as follows: *area A* (the southern area, which today ensures access to the plateau/the top), where a burial dated to the early Bronze Age⁷, yet also a feature that could be ascribed to the Monteoru culture were identified; *area B* (in the eastern part), where we investigated the feature termed the *ash deposit* dated to the Bronze Age (Glina-Schneckenberg)⁸; *area C* (the plateau area), where Eneolithic houses were examined, yet also other Bronze Age features⁹. Each of these areas has a specific layout, which seems to have influenced habitation specificities (Pl. 1, 2, 3).

Subsequent to the archaeological investigations we identified two main habitation phases. The first is Eneolithic, clustered in the northern part of the site (*area C*). The second phase might have had three habitation episodes, which were though difficult to establish and individualise on stratigraphic profiles, yet which are marked by specific artefacts and absolute data (fig.1). The first episode, dated to the second third of the 3rd millennium, belongs to the habitation associating Schenckenberg, Glina (including *Runcuri* type) and corded pottery. The second episode is defined by finds ascribed to Odaia

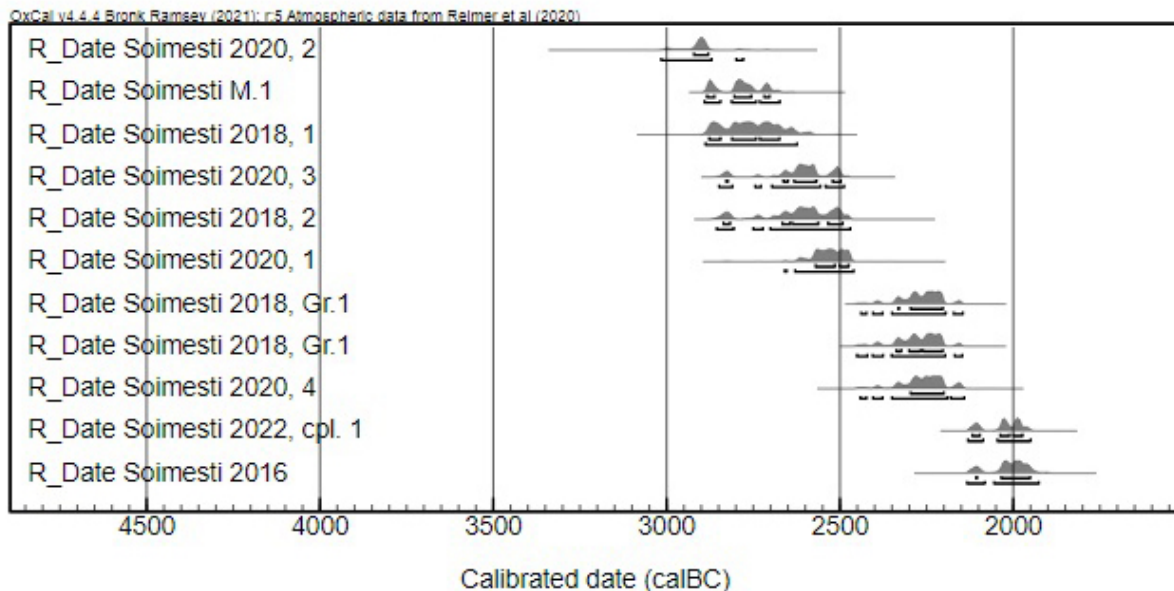


Fig. 1. Integrated AMS-C14 dates of the levels and Bronze Age grave of Șoimești.

⁵ Niculescu 2008, 58; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023a.

⁶ Information on recent research may be found in a series of articles or reports published over the last years like Frînculeasa, Garvăn 2015; Frînculeasa, Garvăn 2017; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2015; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2016; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2018; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2019; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2020; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023a; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023b; Frînculeasa 2020; Frînculeasa, Cristea-Stan 2020; Mirea, Frînculeasa 2021; Frînculeasa, Frînculeasa 2022.

⁷ Frînculeasa, Garvăn 2017; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2020.

⁸ Frînculeasa, Garvăn 2015; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2016.

⁹ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2018, 53; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023a, 568.

Turcului/Zănoaga II/Monteoru IC4, 1-2 chronocultural horizon. A few shards with specific forms and decoration, at least two archaeological features, yet also two AMS-C14 dates, may be ascribed to the Monteoru habitation, later to that of Odaia Turcului type¹⁰. To make the case even more complicated, we mention that chance finds yielded Tei pottery¹¹.

About stratigraphy and the Cucuteni archaeological features

The Eneolithic habitation level lies just below that of the Bronze Age and it was delimited in *area C*. A corded potsherd with shells in fabric comes from *area B*, from under the *ash deposit*, while from somewhat westward the feature, we recovered a footed vessel decorated with indents on the rim (Pl. 23/1-2), which did not however seem to be *in situ*. Other few potshards were discovered in 2024 west the *ash deposit*. In 2016, in S.XIV, which is the first trench where we identified the Eneolithic habitation level, the stratigraphic situation was as follows: the 0-0.15 m thick vegetal layer was continued between 0.15-0.45 m by a black, clayish layer, containing early Bronze Age, Glina-Schneckenberg culture shards. Between 0.45-0.60 m, in a clayish-yellow layer, rich in burnt adobe pigments (=L.1), were identified Cucuteni B potshards (fine, orange fabric with brown-red painting traces) associated with crushed shells mixed in the fabric pottery. There is no traceable stratigraphic *hiatus* between the two inhabitancy episodes, while in the part where these touch, materials seem mixed. In other investigated parts of *area C*, the Eneolithic-Bronze Age succession was confirmed without clear delimitation in-between on the profiles. In addition, there were discovered numerous variable size stones (ranging from 10 cm to 35 cm, sometimes even larger) that seem to directly overlap the burnt adobe of Cucuteni houses. Although they were not identified in the fire (burnt), we do not exclude that these stones had been connected to the habitation dated to the Bronze Age, circumstances noted in other sites ascribed to this period. Indirect confirmation comes from a series of features with stones discovered in areas where there are no Cucuteni inhabitancy traces (*area A*). A somewhat more complicated stratigraphic situation was discovered in S.B, where below L.2 we identified the traces of a ditch that crossed obliquely the investigated area, entering its eastern and southern profiles (the SW corner). It was 1 m wide and 0.60 m deep, without archaeological materials (Pl. 7/1, 4, 8).

A restricted number of Eneolithic archaeological features was investigated, respectively three houses/structures and two pits. All three structures appear as a mass of burnt adobe, not very compact, delimiting irregular surfaces. These are of a wooden and clay structure; we did not identify traces of floors or hearths (Pl. 4-8). Owing to the landslides affecting the hill/site, houses 2 and 3 emerge in a slight slope northwards, with even pieces that seem detached from the original nucleus of destruction being discovered. In areas delimited by burnt adobe were identified archaeological materials burnt secondarily, namely pottery, clay loom weights, zoomorphic art, flint, grinders and stone rubbers, etc. The two investigated pits are important as they preserve pottery *in situ* (Pit 1/2019; Pit 2/2018) or even mammal bones useful for obtaining absolute chronology data (Pit 2/2018).

House 1 was identified in S.XIV (2016), S.XVII/S.A (2017), S.C (2019); the relatively compactly burnt adobe covered a ca. 65 sqm area (Pl. 4, 5); the house is partially collapsed northwards due to landslides. Potshards were yielded in both the house destruction area and nearby the burnt adobe (Pl. 9-16). These are of Cucuteni tradition (Pl. 9), as well as coarse, among which *class C* potshards (Pl. 12; 16) may be noted. We mention an intact jar with incised decoration on the handle (Pl. 5/2, 4; 11/1; 14/1). The house also yielded seven clay weights, of which two have survived intact, and one fragmentary is circular in form (Pl. 24/10; 25). We further mention a fragment of a zoomorphic item, a ring-shaped adornment modelled in clay (Pl. 27/1) and a small clay cone (idol?) (Pl. 27/3). From the area of this feature were retrieved several flint blades and one lamella, yet also a worked stone chisel (Pl. 27/5). It is the house with the richest lot of pottery survived *in situ*, the feature yielding the largest quantity of Cucuteni tradition pottery in this site.

House 2 was identified in S.XVIII (2017, 2018), S.B (2018), S.D (2019); the burnt adobe, with compact areas, covered ca. 35 sqm (Pl. 6, 7). Numerous pottery fragments, of both Cucuteni tradition (remains of at least three vessels) and coarse (Pl. 17-20) were found. To these add seven zoomorphic items yielded by the burnt adobe (five in good condition) and another from S.B, linked to the same

¹⁰ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2019, 127.

¹¹ Frînculeasa 2020, 135, fig. 4.

feature (Pl. 30). There were also discovered a spindle weight fragment and one of phallus, both in clay (Pl. 27/1, 4). From the house come three clay weights, of which one is intact (Pl. 7/6; 27/7; 26/1). The same feature also yielded flint items, among which several blades, but also a lamella preserving the heel and bulb. Among potshards, we mention fragments of a painted amphoroid vessel (Pl. 17/2), a tapering deep bowl and a storage vessel made of Cucuteni tradition fabric, yet which appears to be decorated on rim with the cord (Pl. 17). The vessel identified in vertical position was found in Pit 2/2018 (Pl. 6/4-6).

House 3 was investigated in S.XIX (2019), S.E (2020), S.II (2021); the burnt adobe, relatively compact, covered an area of approximately 30 sqm (Pl. 8). In S.II/2021 there were identified burnt adobe pieces detached from the original destruction by landslides. In areas delimited by destruction surfaced potshards, a zoomorphic statuette, three clay weights, all fragmentary (Pl. 26/2), yet also flint items, among which an arrowhead stands out (Pl. 8/4). Pottery survived in small quantities, respectively fragments of four amphoroid vessels, two biconical deep bowls, to which adds a vessel with curving walls and everted rim, with indents on the rim, recipient modelled of limestone fabric used as temper (Pl. 21; 22). An impressed decoration made on the internal wall of the neck of a pottery fragment discovered nearby the house (Pl. 22/9; 23/3) is specific to the Eastern space.

Pit 2/2018 was discovered in S.B, in house 2. Its sizes were 1.30×1.08 m, descending to -1.55 m (by more than 1 m from the house's adobe level). The pit bottom was lined with ground burnt adobe and beneath there was a lens of gray earth, materials placed purposefully (Pl. 6/6-7). It was partially cut by a Bronze Age pit. It seems to have been a pit to affix a large vessel with narrow base, which required support to stand upright. The storage vessel was yellow, made of a compact fabric with orange-yellow hues in the break. It was decorated with the cord on the rim¹² and provided with eight buttons applied on the neck grouped as two (not all survived), other two elongated buttons applied on the maximum diameter line and two handles set symmetrically on the maximum diameter line (with one partially surviving). Vessel sizes are as follows: H=685 mm, mouth diameter =335 mm, rim diameter =170 mm (Pl. 17/1, 2-6).

Pit 1/2019 was discovered in S.C, north the burnt adobe area of L.1. It enters the NW corner profiles of the area, descending to -1.20 m from topsoil. Partially investigated, its filling contained the remains of three vessels, of which one restorable, and mammal bones based on which two AMS-C14 dates were obtained (tab. 1). The vessels are important as one is by shape and fabric of Cucuteni tradition, the other, coarse, modelled crudely, with small stones and crushed shells in the fabric, decorated with indentations on the rim, is reminiscent of the north-Pontic eastern space pottery. The third vessel is made of relatively fine fabric, gray (Fig. 3). This pottery class is believed a Cernavodă I element¹³.

Archaeological materials

Unlike the Bronze Age habitation, the Eneolithic level quantity of archaeological material is small. If the Eneolithic pottery is relatively easy to differentiate from that of the Bronze Age, other item classes without clear context are sometimes difficult to attach to the site's relative chronology. For instance, according to their stratigraphic location, the bone artefacts were all framed to the Bronze Age¹⁴. Those in stone, a part with common typologies during the two periods (axes, chisels, grinders, punchers) are more difficult to determine. The stratigraphic location (in the upper part) prevailed, although some were likely moved from their original position during inhabitancy. Part of the copper items (other than in Gr. 1¹⁵) were identified in the vegetal layer (including a flat hatchet¹⁶ and an axe fragment), other (a piercer tip and a dagger with tang at the handle) are connected to *area B* (the *ash deposit* area), while another tip discovered in *area A* in secondary position has tin in composition and may be connected to the Bronze Age inhabitancy. Inapproachable, by stratigraphic position yet also common typology hindering any secure cultural framing, remain a piercer tip and a knife blade, both in copper.

¹² See similar decoration at Sărata Monteoru (Nestor, Zaharia 1968, fig. 3/3) or Pietroasa Mică (Grigoraş 2021, pl. 25/1-2).

¹³ Harţuche 1980; Munteanu 2017, 46.

¹⁴ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023a, 568-569, 575; in the 2024 campaign as well, bone artefacts emerged in the upper part of the archaeological deposition.

¹⁵ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2020, fig. 2, tab. 4.

¹⁶ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023b, 23, fig. 4/1.

The pottery quantity is rather small and may be classified from the technology point of view in three, possibly even four main classes: a. Modelled of a compact, orange-red, orange or yellow fabric, of Cucuteni tradition, being identified including vessels with traces of bichrome painting (horizontal or oblique belts painted with dark-brown, orange-red); b. the (relatively) coarse class, with crushed shells or limestone/small stones, sand in the fabric and notches/indents set on the rim, rarely on vessel shoulder/body, occasionally decorated with the cord or cord imitations (Pl. 23); we mention there are vessels whose fabric contains both small stones/limestone and crushed shells; the storage vessel in L.2, which blends fabric/technology and Cucuteni tradition with the corded decoration set on the rim (Pl. 6/1, 3-5) stands out; c. the intermediary pottery class, with forms resembling those of Cucuteni, yet with gray fabric (towards orange-red owing to the secondary firing), black or yellow, with fine sand used as temperer; d. Another possible class, that of common pottery, with nut-brown, black, possibly yellow fabric and forms like jars, cups, pots, etc (Pl. 11/1-4, 7; 14).

Common forms include the amphoroid vessel, the biconical deep bowl, the tapering shallow bowl with thickened rim/upper part modelled of a Cucuteni tradition fabric, occasionally painted, yet also in the intermediary class. A cup with decorated handle (Pl. 11/1) or the tapering vessels stand out. The pottery with limestone or crushed shell in fabric has different forms compared to the other classes, respectively recipients with wide mouth, rounded shoulders and walls, bowls, yet also more particular forms like for instance a footed cup or jars/cups¹⁷, forms which are found in *type C* pottery repertory¹⁸. The most important form is that of a krater¹⁹, a vessel with *wide open mouth*, everted, marked/protruding shoulder, decorated on rim with indents or cord imitations and *smoothing* traces on body (Pl. 12/1; 16/5). One of the vessels exhibits vertical incisions set on registers in the upper part of the external wall (Pl. 12/2; 16/2). This vessel form is also modelled in the intermediary, good quality pottery. We also mention the presence of gray vessels decorated with alveoli belts set on the rim or body, occasionally on both segments (Pl. 20/4, 6).

A quantitative pottery analysis is rather irrelevant given the condition of both the site and its partially delimited houses, yet also the fact there is no stratigraphic separation from the subsequent habitation that damaged Cucuteni inhabitancy levels. The Cucuteni pottery, although represented for instance in L.1 by many fragments, belongs in fact to a restricted number of vessels (NMI=14). In L.2 were identified remains of approximately ten vessels modelled in the Cucuteni pottery tradition, while L.3 yielded fragments of at least three vessels.

The zoomorphic art is represented by a number of ten clay items (Pl. 30), to which adds a fragment of a possible stone sceptre (Fig. 2). All clay items realistically depict horned mammals. They also preserve other elements modelled in a naturalistic manner like the tail attached to the body. The fabric is well mixed, relatively compact, orange-red; no items exhibiting decoration traces could be found.

Clay weights (NMI=13) were discovered in the three houses, the majority being fragmentary, fired secondarily (Pl. 24-26). These are oval-shaped, with narrower upper part and horizontal base rounded towards the edges. One of the weights is circular, pierced midway, while at least three have a circular base and conical body. Except the circular exemplar, all display a piercing in the upper part, an element which allowed them to be hung.

Fragments of shaft-hole axes (Pl. 27/8) made of worked stone were discovered in the layer of the three houses' area, at depths that could be related to the Eneolithic level. We note the presence of a stone item, fragmentary, which could be a zoomorphic representation, respectively a sceptre (Fig. 2) with parallels in the Suvorovo milieu, the finds at Sălcuța, Casimcea, Ruginoasa, Fedeleșeni, Fitionești, Stăvărăști, to which adds the nearby area, likely Pietroasa Mică, although circumstances are insecure²⁰. There were also identified fragments of grinders, rubbers, punchers, but also finished chisels with angular active side (Pl. 27-28).

Out of flint are made approximately eighty items, mostly blades (fragments), followed by cutting shavings, nuclei fragments, but also a few lamellas and *gratoire* (Pl. 29). We mention a small *gratoire* (L=28 mm, l=12 mm; H=6 mm) with narrow body, oblique front, vertical, gray (Pl. 28/2). The lamellas exhibit adjustment traces made along the edges. A flint tip discovered in L.3 (pl. 29/1) is singular. The

¹⁷ See also at Sărata Monteoru in Nestor, Zaharia 1969, fig. 2/5, 6.

¹⁸ Dodd-Oprițescu 1980.

¹⁹ Dodd-Oprițescu 1980.

²⁰ Frînculeasa, Mirea 2007; Garvăn 2018, 134.



Fig. 2. Fragment of a stone zoomorphic sceptre discovered at Şoimeşti.

flint colour is yellow, cream, gray, yet also brown or black. Many do not have secure contexts, therefore they are difficult to ascribe culturally, yet flint industry in the Şoimeşti site may be rather linked to the Eneolithic inhabitancy layer. It is worth noting that we did not identify flint with features similar to that of *Platforma Moldoveneasă*, but seems to have an exclusive southern origin.

Fauna is represented by a small number of bones discovered in 2016²¹. From the Eneolithic level were sampled thirty-two bone remains. Out of these, eighteen are of bovidae, of which according to number, two groups may be established: fifteen of very large animals, possibly aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) and the rest of three, much smaller, of domestic cow (*Bos taurus*). A large atlas exhibits fine blade marks following skull separation from the spine. Other eight fragments belong to ovicaprids, with just one of domestic pig and four indeterminable fragments of average size animals.

Absolute chronology (preliminary considerations)²²

Three AMS-C14 dates were established for the Eneolithic habitation in the Şoimeşti site of which one from a sample taken from house 1 area and the other from Pit 1/2019 (Tab. 1). In the last mentioned feature, beside mammal bones there were also found remains of three vessels in different technological/tradition classes (Fig. 3), defining for the sites in northern Muntenia. Thus, a biconical deep bowl was made of a fabric and had a shape reminiscent of the Cucuteni pottery tradition, one consisted of a fine, gray fabric deemed a Cernavodă I element²³, while the fabric of the third was coarse, being crudely modelled and having small stones/limestone and crushed shells in the fabric, sunken/notched rim, specificities ascribed to *pottery C*. These three pottery classes are present in all examined houses. Although overlapping, the two samples taken from the same context (Pit 1) seem to mark slightly different phases. Concurrently, the earlier sample is placed approximately in the same time span with that taken from house 1 area (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. Şoimeşti, AMS-C14 dates for the Eneolithic habitation.

Lab code	Archaeological context	Sample	Date in BP years	Calibrated years, Sigma 1 68.2%	Calibrated years, Sigma 2 95.4%	Average value
DeA-14241	Şoimeşti, L.1, 2017	Mammal bone	5067±33	3946-3803	3959-3783	3869
DeA-21465	Şoimeşti, Pit 1, 2019, -1,10 m	Mammal bone	4931±33	3756-3649	3775-3644	3704
DeA-21466	Şoimeşti, Pit 1, 2019, -1,10 m	Mammal bone	5004±32	3902-3711	3945-3655	3797

²¹ Determination V. Dumitraşcu. Although few, other mammal bones have been recovered in the meantime, whose analysis is forthcoming.

²² The lack of samples in secure contexts restricted our possibility to achieve additional data for a more solid analysis base.

²³ Munteanu 2017, 46.

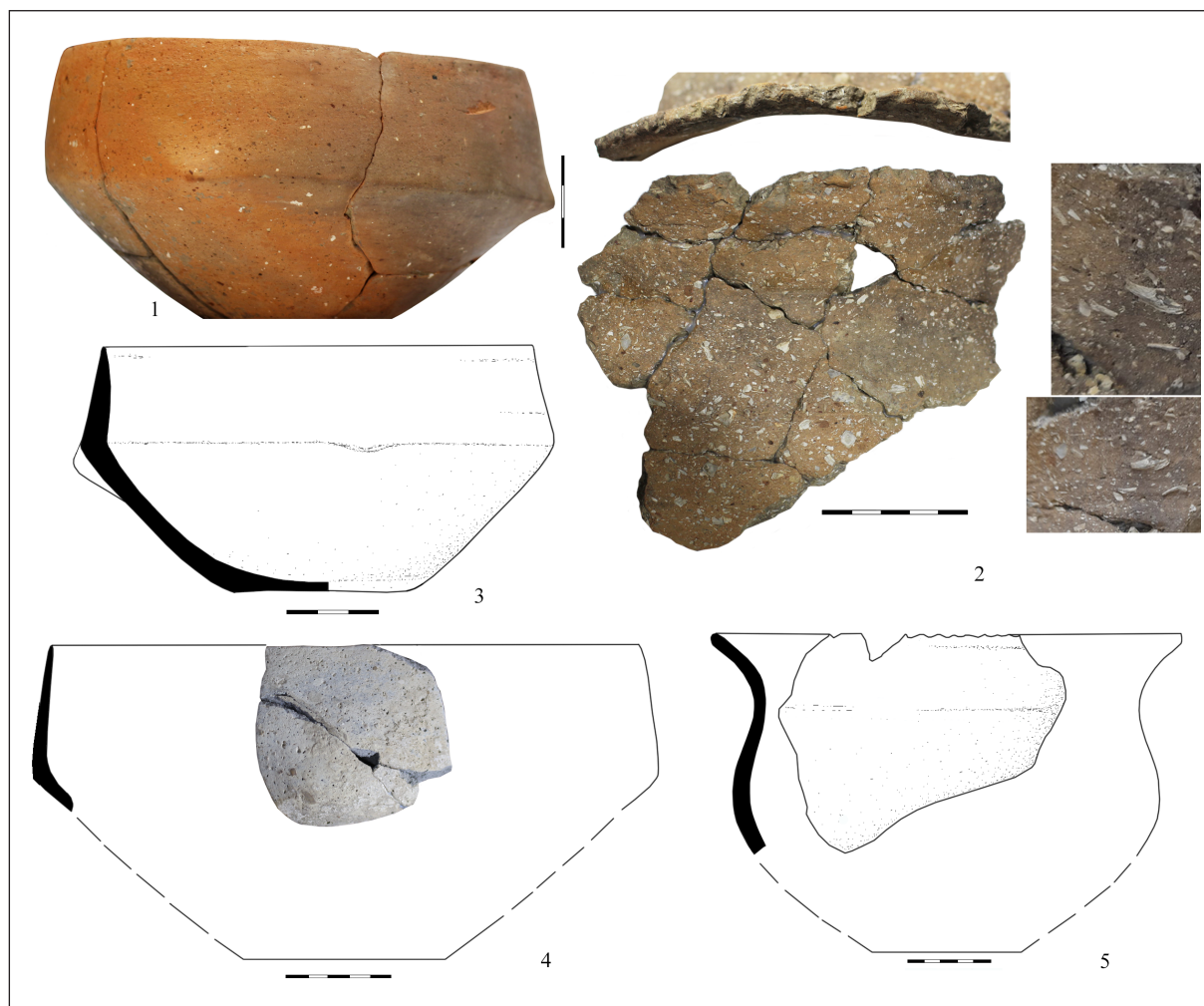


Fig. 3. Vessels from pit 1/2009 investigated at Șoimești.

The datings for Șoimești are contemporary with investigated samples originating from Cucuteni B sites east of the Carpathians like Mioveni, Poduri, Cucuteni²⁴ or Stroești-Pietrăria (5030±35 BP=3949-3711 cal BC, 4925±35 BP=3777BC-3641 cal BC), Ripiceni-Popoaia (5090±35 BP=3966-3796 cal BC)²⁵, Petreni (R. Moldova)²⁶, with some late Gumelnița (debatable), like Sultana²⁷, Gumelnița²⁸, Vitănești²⁹. Most data from Cernavodă I sites/contemporary levels (Căscioarele³⁰, Hârșova, Săveni³¹, Bucșani³²) or where these emerge associated with Cucuteni like Pietroasa Mică³³, possibly Mălăieștii de Jos³⁴, seem to converge and then are after to those of Șoimești. The Tătaru sample (Tab. 2) comes from a site where the pottery is indicative of Cucuteni traditions rather by forms than modelling technology and fabric firing³⁵. One of the extremities of 4995±20 BP= 3932-3658 cal BC (or 3794-3711 cal BC, 68.3% likelihood) from Căscioarele could evidence an early Cernavodă I horizon. A similar date (5100±34 BP = 3970-3800 cal BC) comes from *Movila II* at Ploiești-Triaj. Although published as part of the grave goods of Gr.19³⁶, the

²⁴ Popovici, Drașovean 2020, table 1; Preoteasa *et al.* 2020, 396, table 1.

²⁵ Unpublished data, information received courtesy of Andrei Asăndulesei and Felix Tencariu, whom we thank here too.

²⁶ Uhl *et al.* 2014, table 6.

²⁷ Lazar *et al.* 2015, table 1 (different data sampled from the same context).

²⁸ García-Vázquez *et al.* 2023.

²⁹ Frînculeasa 2016, tabel 3; Popescu *et al.* 2023.

³⁰ Reingruber 2015, appendix 1, no. 2, 3; Librado *et al.* 2021 (ROCAS12_Rom_m3795 = 4995±20 BP)

³¹ Preoteasa *et al.* 2020, p. 396, table 1.

³² Cucchi *et al.* 2011, 1197.

³³ Sîrbu *et al.* 2011, 53.

³⁴ Frînculeasa 2012; the same site yielded another date 5160±42 BP.

³⁵ Novel research performed in 2023-2024.

³⁶ Comșa 1989, 185.

Tab. 2. AMS-C14 date resulted from close sites (Prahova)

Lab code	Archaeological context	Sample	Date in BP years	Calibrated years, Sigma 1 68.2%	Calibrated years, Sigma 2 95.4%	Average value
Poz - 40570	Mălăieștii de Jos-Mornel, st. 15, 2011	Charcoal	4900±40	3708-3640	3778-3633	3687
DeA-12977	Ploiești-Triaș, T.II, nearby Grave 19, 1943	Deer antler	5100±34	3962-3806	3974-3797	3979
DeA-2278	Tâtaru-Ciortea, terrace I, eastern, road bank, 2023	Mammal bone	4895±20	3702-3642	3708-3638	3673

sampled deer antler has a debatable context³⁷. Likely, the absolute data of Sărata Monteoru, yet also one from Pietroasa Mică (Hd-29744), dropping to the second half of the 4th millennium, extending even into the next, may not be ascribed to Cucuteni B pottery habitation levels. The suggested solutions like delays/continuation, prolonged phenomena in the curvature area of the sub-Carpathians³⁸ remain disputed, at least until addressed by future research and investigation viable sampling.

Discussion

By the Lower Danube/the Carpathian Basin, around 4300-4200 BC, a chronological segment that marks the development peak of *Old Europe*³⁹, emerge isolate the first burials (flat or barrow)⁴⁰ linked to the direct or indirect presence of the Suvorovo/Suvorovo-Novodanilovka group communities⁴¹ or of communities located in the western sphere of the Skelia culture⁴². East of Prut examples include Lungoci⁴³, Fălciu⁴⁴, then south the Danube Casimcea⁴⁵, Gr.33/Kulevcha⁴⁶ or Gr.164 at Durankulak⁴⁷. In Transylvania, the flat cemetery of Decea Mureșului⁴⁸ is well known, yet we also mention the Șeușa settlement⁴⁹, while in the Hungarian Plain, the grave of Csongrád⁵⁰. Also important are the zoomorphic sceptres or stone club heads discovered east of the Prut/the Lower Danube⁵¹. This first episode is followed by a period of cultural destructuring, which occurs differently including at the geographic topography level of the Lower Danube and the Carpathian Basin.

A. On the map, the location of Cucuteni B finds evidences that northern Muntenia is cut off/isolated (including the Râmnicelu site) from the Cucuteni area⁵². One should not exclude entirely the state of research that could be responsible for this image of an enclave. In this picture/area are inserted the investigations at Monteoru, leading to the definition of the Monteoru variant of Cucuteni culture. Accordingly, this local evolution of the Cucuteni culture was generated by the Cernavodă I and *type C pottery*⁵³ input. The Sărata Monteoru settlement is deemed Cucuteni B2⁵⁴, whose specificity is white

³⁷ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017, 88-89, note 11.

³⁸ Munteanu 2017. For the lack of absolute data, the basis of the chronological analysis would have included parallels with published materials.

³⁹ Anthony 2007, 225.

⁴⁰ Govedarica 2016, 85.

⁴¹ Anthony 2007, 251 and subsequent; Govedarica, Manzura 2011, 46 and subsequent; Reingruber, Rassamakin 2016.

⁴² Rassamakin 1999, 77.

⁴³ Dragomir 1976.

⁴⁴ Popușoi 1989.

⁴⁵ Popescu 1941.

⁴⁶ Varžarova 1986.

⁴⁷ Manzura 2005, 51.

⁴⁸ Kovacs 1932.

⁴⁹ Ciută, Marc 2012.

⁵⁰ Ecsedy 1974. See the genetic analysis and discussion on the steppe origin of the individual in Lazaridis *et al.* 2024.

⁵¹ Govedarica 2004; Govedarica, Manzura 2011, abb. 5; Gogăltan 2013.

⁵² Monah, Cucuș 1985, fig. 3; Munteanu 2017, 48.

⁵³ Munteanu 2017 (with references).

⁵⁴ Zaharia 2013.

painting against the black background (vessel firing). We mention that at Şoimeşti, Pietroasa Mică⁵⁵ or Râmnicelu⁵⁶ white painted pottery was not discovered/mentioned, but only red, dark-brown or black painted pottery on the yellow or orange-red background of the vessel.

The analysis of the Şoimeşti site has shown that common elements are rather those local (rooted in the extra-Carpathian Eneolithic) represented there by the Cucuteni traditions. The place that the community chose for settling (a dominating/controlling hilltop) (Pl. 2), the habitation type, presence of houses with not very compact burnt adobe, the lack of special facilities (floors, hearths, etc) (Pl. 4-8) mark the period post Cucuteni A and post Gumelniţa, while the pottery specificities (lack of most *Danubian* Cernavodă I forms), numerous zoomorphic art representations (element present in settlements with Cucuteni B⁵⁷ pottery), loom clay weights present in all constructions, flint and stone items may all be characteristic to the local Eneolithic communities. The flint, by its features, is of southern origin. The *type C* pottery is a common element, evidence of a phenomenon encompassing the entire space northwards the Lower Danube. For instance, the pottery material decorated on the rim (indents, notches suggesting a crenate rim) (Pl. 12; 16/1-6) is also found in the sites of Pietroasa Mică⁵⁸, Râmnicelu⁵⁹ or Tătaru⁶⁰. Concurrently, from Şoimeşti is missing the dark gray-black or black with metal/burnished appearance pottery like at Pietroasa Mică⁶¹.

The Eneolithic habitation of Şoimeşti could be rather related to the effects of the Cucuteni culture development engaged in the dynamics by the Lower Danube once with the events (cultural, demographic, climate) occurring in the west-Pontic area. Two of the AMS-C14 dates from Şoimeşti are early compared to those known in connection with the Cucuteni B – Cernavodă I *mixture* and/or Cernavodă I (which are no older than 3800 cal BC – see Säveni, Căscioarele, Pietroasa Mică, Mălăieştii de Jos, Orlovka, Cimişlia), yet within the same margin with data from Cucuteni B1-Tripolie CI settlements, yet also with some post Karanovo VI south of the Lower Danube. A few slightly earlier/partially contemporary data come from the barrow graves of Krasnoe (T.9/Gr.16 = 5180±30/4042-3965 cal BC), Sărăteni (T.1/Gr.7 = 5140±40 BP/4041-3081 cal BC), Cimişlia (T.8, Cpl. Cult = 5060±35 BP/3958-3780 BC, wood sample, the other on human bones do not date prior 3800 cal BC⁶²). In fact, the Cernavodă I features of Cimişlia chronologically frame to the second quarter of the 4th millennium⁶³. One must mention the existence of a restricted set of absolute data framing in the 4200/4150-3850/3800 BC interval originating from GKVI sites of Sultana, Vităneşti, Pietrele, Bucşani, Gura Vitioarei, Boboci, Mălăieştii de Jos, Ovcarovo, Hotnica, etc⁶⁴. The examples of Sărăteni and Krasnoe⁶⁵, yet also the above mentioned data, seem to fill part of this chronological segment. It is still difficult to appreciate whether these mirror the presence of communities leading to the dissolution of the KGVI complex or are related to an early Cernavodă I development. Compared to absolute data obtained for samples taken from mammal bones yielded by Cernavodă I settlements, we note that their evolution reaching this chronological segment⁶⁶ is not confirmed.

B. The Cernavodă I culture (-Hadgider, added to include a series of early barrow finds located in the southern half of Bessarabia and even east of the Dniester), spans the Lower Danube (Muntenia, north-eastern Bulgaria, Dobruja, southern Moldova and the lower basins of Prut and Dniester rivers)⁶⁷. Not many settlements were discovered, the majority being located in Muntenia and Dobruja, while excavations, with few exceptions, are inconsistent⁶⁸. In the Prut-Dniester interflaves, the single known

⁵⁵ Dupoi, Preda 1977, 7-8; Grigoraş *et al.* 2018, 76.

⁵⁶ Harţuche 1980, 80.

⁵⁷ See the numerous items discovered at Pietroasa Mică (Sirbu *et al.* 2011, 50-51, fig. 19-22). In the Cernavodă I settlements, zoomorphic statuettes are missing (Vlad 2019, 171).

⁵⁸ Sirbu *et al.* 2011, fig. 15/4; Grigoraş *et al.* 2018, pl. 24/1-2; 2022, pl. XVIII/6.

⁵⁹ Harţuche 1980, fig. 32.

⁶⁰ Novel, research performed in 2024.

⁶¹ Grigoraş *et al.* 2018, 76, pl. 25-26.

⁶² Popovici, Kaiser 2020; Popovici, Ciobanu 2021, 68-69.

⁶³ Popovici, Ciobanu 2021, 74.

⁶⁴ Boyadziev 1995; Reingruber 2015; Reingruber, Rassamakin 2016; Frînculeasa 2016; Bem, Haită 2016, 63; Krauß *et al.* 2016; Tsirtsoni 2016.

⁶⁵ The premise is these data are not affected.

⁶⁶ Frînculeasa 2016, tab. 3; Preoteasa *et al.* 2020.

⁶⁷ Manzura 1999.

⁶⁸ Haşotti, Popovici 1992; Haşotti 1997; Manzura 1999; Vernescu 2013; Schuster *et al.* 2015; 2016; Vlad 2019; Preoteasa *et*

settlement is that of Orlovka⁶⁹. Radiocarbon data for Cernavodă I settlements, including Orlovka, for which the 3780-3524 cal BC⁷⁰ interval is published, which yielded Cucuteni B painted potshards⁷¹, are indicative of the 3850-3550/3500 BC evolution interval of this culture⁷². East of Prut (the Bugeac area), Cernavodă I culture has been outlined until recently only by barrow burials⁷³, believed earliest in the area⁷⁴. Remarkable is the presence, for now singular, at Orlovka, of both flat graves as well as of a settlement (with two inhabitancy levels, where emerge associated Cucuteni B painted pottery and unpainted pottery with crushed shells in fabric)⁷⁵. There were investigated thirty-eight Eneolithic graves⁷⁶, with individuals placed crouched on the side, buried at 7-10 m distance in-between, without noticeable barrow traces⁷⁷. Grave goods consist of pottery and adornment objects. The dating of seven graves in the cemetery of Orlovka indicated the early 4th millennium, which is an earlier phase compared to data originating from the settlement, possibly also due to the *fresh water reservoir effect* of the analysed samples (human bones)⁷⁸, although a part of the pottery material resulting from both sites is similar⁷⁹. The presence of a flat cemetery is for now singular in the Cernavodă I cultural environment, although a possible similar feature of the same period could be that of Săveni (Muntenia), where information reports the find of at least nine graves with crouched skeletons⁸⁰.

The Cernavodă I burial finds are represented by the Lower Danube by flat graves (the presence of barrow graves must not be excluded definitively, see Gr.21 at Brăilița), specific being the side-crouching skeletal position. In the monograph of the Brăilița site, the excavator includes with caution and reserves a number of 123 graves in the Cernavodă I culture, of which only eight in a side-crouching position, the rest being extended dorsally⁸¹. Two side-crouched graves discovered at Brăilița could be framed in culture Cernavodă I, respectively Gr.21 of a subadult placed crouched on the left side, oriented E-W, whose grave goods consisted of a vessel with crushed shells in fabric and a string composed of *spondylus* and mica⁸² and Gr.59, crouched on the left side, oriented E-W, whose grave goods included an amphoroid vessel⁸³, with good parallels in the Cernavodă I environment, for instance in the Ulmeni settlement⁸⁴ or the Orlovka cemetery⁸⁵. From Muntenia we also mention Gr.70 at Gherăseni with an oval grave-pit, where an individual was placed crouched on the right side, oriented E-W, with two vessels as grave goods⁸⁶. Amongst, one had crushed shells in the fabric, being cord decorated with 'horseshoe' similar patterns, with parallels in the Cernavodă I settlements of Chirnogi, Ulmeni, Orlovka or Derveivka⁸⁷. We also mention a grave investigated at Pietrele, with the deceased placed crouched on the left side, with a copper dagger in the lower limbs area⁸⁸ dated (4933±25 BP = 3770-3646 cal BC) to the Cernavodă I⁸⁹ culture period. In Dobruja, at Isaccea in one of the investigated

al. 2020; Garvăn 2021.

⁶⁹ Govedarica, Manzura 2011, 52.

⁷⁰ Govedarica, Manzura 2015, 442

⁷¹ Govedarica, Manzura 2015, fig. 17; Manzura 2018.

⁷² Govedarica, Manzura 2011, 51; Frînculeasa 2016, 72.

⁷³ Manzura 1999.

⁷⁴ Popovici, Ciobanu 2021, 73.

⁷⁵ Govedarica, Manzura 2015; Manzura 2018; Bruyako *et al.* 2022.

⁷⁶ Bruyako *et al.* 2022.

⁷⁷ Govedarica, Manzura 2015, 463.

⁷⁸ Bruyako *et al.* 2022, 18.

⁷⁹ Govedarica, Manzura 2015, fig. 16, 18.

⁸⁰ Babeș, Coman 2005, 139, note 2; more recently (Vlad 2019, 189), mention burials from the Eneolithic to the Bronze Age transition period.

⁸¹ Harțuche 2002, 127; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017, pl. VII/C. See the recently published absolute dates (Popescu, Lazăr 2022) which refute, as mentioned elsewhere (Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017), the framing of graves with deceased placed extended on the back to the Cernavodă I culture.

⁸² Harțuche 2002, 51.

⁸³ Harțuche 2002, 62, fig. 59/7.

⁸⁴ Manzura 1999, fig.7.28/6.

⁸⁵ Bruyako *et al.* 2022, pl. 2.

⁸⁶ Constantinescu 1994, 105-106, fig. 4/1-2,4.

⁸⁷ Manzura 1999, fig. 7.13/18; 7.26/1, 3, 5, 6; 7.27/4; 7.29/3; Bruyako *et al.* 2005, fig. 15/14; Kotova 2010, fig. 6/6; Govedarica, Manzura 2015, fig. 15/1.

⁸⁸ Hansen 2014, 255-256.

⁸⁹ Penske *et al.* 2023 (SI).

prehistory graves was discovered a cord decorated vessel, on both body and rim⁹⁰. At Luncavița - Cetățuie as well, a similar vessel was indentified, with uncertain context⁹¹. Two graves were discovered in the Cernavodă site, of which Gr.2 is partially destroyed. The deceased in Gr.1 was placed crouched on the right side, oriented SSE-NNW, while the grave goods also contained an *askos* and a biconical bowl⁹². The *askos* stands out, with parallels in a recent find from Sultana. In Gr.75, deemed Cernavodă I, with skeletal remains in a right side crouched position, oriented S-N, an *askos* (decorated) was set nearby the lower limbs⁹³. In the mean time, the grave was dated and could be ascribed to Cernavodă II culture⁹⁴. From Bulgaria we mention Gr.448 in the Durankulak cemetery framed in Cernavodă I culture. The adult deceased was placed crouched on the left side, possibly below a mound ('barrow H'), the grave goods comprising three vessels⁹⁵.

Examples like the barrow burials deemed Cernavodă I of Krasnoe, Sărăteni, Roșcani⁹⁶ are present only in southern Bessarabia (or more to the north) and in Dobruja by a few finds, some disputable (Durankulak, Baia, Anadalkioi, Agigea)⁹⁷, missing from Muntenia (with a possible exception at Brăilița, yet this also sooner in the Dobruja-southern Bessarabia-Bugeak contact area). The presence of the barrow graves east of the Prut in the same chronological interval was linked to phenomena with origins east of the Dniester, respectively the Lower Mikhailovka culture⁹⁸.

C. The pottery known in the academic literature as *Cucuteni C* is a class differentiating from the rest of the Cucuteni wares by fabric composition (crushed shells), decoration and forms. Its existence/use period is extended (from phase A until late phase B of Cucuteni culture), with a somewhat homogeneous diffusion quantitatively (below 1% of the total pottery lot in a settlement), except depositions around the salt springs, where quantities are much higher (over 10%)⁹⁹. Decoratively, there are some differences between the pottery ascribed to Cucuteni A levels and those ascribed to levels A-B and B. During the first phase, it seems to be richly decorated, in contrast with the last phase when decorative elements are restricted to rim impressions or striations on the vessel neck. At least for the last phase, the Cucuteni C pottery has no chronological relevance¹⁰⁰.

Earliest type "C" pottery elements have been identified during phase Cucuteni A3, this artefact type being regarded as allogeneic, while its origin was sought by the northern periphery of the Cucuteni-Tripolie¹⁰¹ area or in the north-Pontic steppes¹⁰². During the subsequent phases of the east-Carpathian Eneolithic culture there is a noticeable trend for change of type "C" pottery, which gradually becomes a class of Cucuteni pottery (in phase Cucuteni B)¹⁰³. It has been argued that this artefact type may represent a "technological import", being later adopted and integrated in the Cucuteni pottery repertoire. In addition, it is maintained that good parallels for the forms and decoration of Cucuteni C wares are missing and the supposed milieu of origin and large quantity in the vicinity of salt springs¹⁰⁴.

Cucuteni B and Cernavodă I materials (fine gray pottery, fragments with crushed shells or limestone in fabric)¹⁰⁵ were found associated in Eneolithic levels from Sărata Monteoru, Râmnicelu, Pietroasa Mică in approximately equal quantities. *Cucuteni C* elements were identified in each pottery class. Regarding the Cucuteni type "C" component of *Gruia Dării* pottery two entry pathways were theorised: southern

⁹⁰ Ailincăi *et al.* 2021, fig. 9.

⁹¹ Vasiliu 2002, 75, fig. 2/6.

⁹² Nestor 1937, 16, fig. 6-7.

⁹³ Andreescu *et al.* 2015, 134; Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017, pl. III/1, 3-4; according to the ritual position, grave goods, Gr. 1 in the Cernavodă site could date to the same period.

⁹⁴ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2023b, 14, nota 55.

⁹⁵ Manzura 2005, 51.

⁹⁶ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017, pl. X-XI (with related references).

⁹⁷ Frînculeasa *et al.* 2017, 82-83.

⁹⁸ Rassamakin 1994, 42, 44; 1999, 92.

⁹⁹ Munteanu, Garvăn 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Cucoș 1999, 146.

¹⁰¹ Dodd-Oprîțescu 1980, Dodd-Oprîțescu 1982.

¹⁰² Dragomir 1982; Sorokin 2002.

¹⁰³ Nestor, Zaharia, 1968; Dodd-Oprîțescu, 1980.

¹⁰⁴ Munteanu, Garvăn 2008; Garvăn, Munteanu 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Munteanu 2017, 46-47.

(Cernavodă I) and north-eastern (Cucuteni). It is believed that fabric compositions, firing types/intensity and resulted colour and decorations are indicative of entry directions, paths and phases¹⁰⁶.

Conclusions

In order to better understand the position of the Şoimeşti site in the local cultural dynamics or widely, by the Lower Danube, indirect relations with the late development of the Gumelniţa/Stoicani-Aldeni communities and the beginning of the Cernavodă I culture might be relevant. It is the period when the impact of the west-Pontic steppe phenomenon on the Lower Danube becomes significant. Northern Muntenia was previously (4350-4200/4100 cal BC) inhabited by Stoicani-Aldeni communities or some, like those of Mălăieştii de Jos, Seciu, with parallels even past the Carpathians like Păuleni-Ciuc or Bod in Transylvania¹⁰⁷. A number of AMS-C14 data like those of Gura Vitoarei (5298±20 BP=4236-4047 cal BC)¹⁰⁸, Mălăieştii de Jos¹⁰⁹, Boboci¹¹⁰, Pietroasa Mică, Finţeşti, Coţatcu, Lipia¹¹¹, Aldeni¹¹² dropping towards 4000 cal BC, seem to point to a habitation episode preceding the extension of the Cucuteni traditions south-westwards, like for instance the case with the Şoimeşti site. At another level, these data could evidence a late Gumelniţa habitation post 4200 cal BC, landmark for the disappearance of Danubian tell-type settlements¹¹³ or, more difficult to establish for now, an element indicative of a horizon (archaeologically discrete) of steppe communities leading to the dissolution of relevant constituents which defined *Old Europe* by the Lower Danube¹¹⁴.

In the Buzău-Prahova area, in similar landscapes, we note a behaviour which seems a pattern: Cucuteni pottery settlements are located at higher elevations compared to preceding Gumelniţa/Stoicani-Aldeni communities, often within the same locality or nearby (Pl. 31). There are examples like Sărata Monteoru (*Maria Săbăreanu/Monteoru II*¹¹⁵ and *Cetăţuia*¹¹⁶), Aldeni (*Gurguiul Balaurului*¹¹⁷ and *Muchea Vulturului*¹¹⁸), Pietroasa Mică (*Cămălin*¹¹⁹ and *Gruiu Dării*¹²⁰), Urlaţi¹²¹ and Şoimeşti, Tăraru and/or Budureasca/Ghinoiaca¹²². This relation could be indicative in the case of Cucuteni communities/traditions of the southward entry/descending direction. A consequence of climate changes, one should not exclude the remodelling of the economic framework, doubled by a period of insecurity/instability, circumstances which resulted in withdrawal towards areas easier to protect/isolate. Concurrently, these associations/dissociations could be indications there is no discontinued habitation of the area post Gumelniţa/Stoicani-Aldeni - Cernavodă I¹²³, but only the overlapping of local traditions arriving from the north-east with those south-east generated by a wider phenomenon with origins in the north-west Pontic area. It is the segment that chronologically extends beyond the contact 'hiatus' of north-west Pontic worlds with the Lower Danube, documented between the end of the GKVI cultural horizon and the start of the Cernavodă I culture¹²⁴.

Is there a Cucuteni settlement at Şoimeşti? According to the artefacts, accessed cultural traditions and habitation specificities there are no notable differences compared to the sites of Pietroasa Mică or Monteoru. From the view of the restricted number of available absolute data, the settlement seems

¹⁰⁶ Grigoraş 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Frînculeasa 2016.

¹⁰⁸ We thank our colleague Tudor Hila for the sample (mammal bone) offered for investigation.

¹⁰⁹ (see note 34).

¹¹⁰ Unpublished.

¹¹¹ Garvăn 2021, 102.

¹¹² Ştefan 2023, fig. 167.

¹¹³ Reingruber 2015.

¹¹⁴ Anthony 2007.

¹¹⁵ Garvăn, Ştefan 2023.

¹¹⁶ Nestor Zaharia 1968; Zaharia 2013.

¹¹⁷ Ştefan 2023 (with references).

¹¹⁸ Ştefan 1938.

¹¹⁹ Garvăn 2022.

¹²⁰ Dupoi, Preda 1977.

¹²¹ Frînculeasa 2024.

¹²² Frînculeasa 2010.

¹²³ This does not mean that we note continued Gumelniţa cultural elements in these sites. The Gumelniţa imprint seems to have been lost entirely.

¹²⁴ Rassamakin 2011, 85 and subseq; Govedarica, Manzura 2011, 51.

earlier compared to those Cernavodă I or even Pietroasa Mică and/or Sărata Monteoru. If *type C* material is relatively numerous, the corded material is present by few potshards (Pl. 23). The present zoomorphic sceptre is a late occurrence there compared to the Suvorovo development¹²⁵. The plain pottery, without crushed shells in fabric, duplicates Cucuteni forms like the amphoroid vessel or the biconical bowl. This situation is slightly visible in other sites as well like Pietroasa Mică or Sărata Monteoru. Cernavodă I forms, as found in sites from the Wallachian Plain¹²⁶, Dobruja¹²⁷, are rather exceptions/rare in the Șoimești site.

Furthermore, at Șoimești there was no stable steppe community settled in the hilly environment or a seasonal phenomenon (present houses are solid, elements specific to permanent habitation being present). Such communities inhabit/establish settlements of certain specificity, more or less similar to the steppe world or that local (prior/contemporary), after the first quarter of the 4th millennium, within what is termed the Cernavodă I culture in the flatlands located north the Lower Danube. This is likely the vicinity of the contact area which allowed a better connection between the two cultural traditions. This could be a picture where Cucuteni sites span highlands, while those Cernavodă I (with Cucuteni imports) the flatlands. For instance, although inconsistent, there are finds in the Budureasca and Ghinoiaca (Prahova) valley areas of both Cernavodă I/steppe origin (corded) pottery, yet also painted or modelled in the Cucuteni tradition¹²⁸. At Gherăseni, Însurăței¹²⁹ or Ploiești-Biserica Sf. Ilie¹³⁰ there is evidence of Cernavodă I habitations. On the Danube line, Cernavodă communities tend to preserve/assimilate part of Gumelnița attributes as indicated by the consistent inhabitancy of the Hîrșova tell¹³¹. Concurrently, it is difficult/improper to use the *import*¹³² concept when a pottery class reaches percentages of approximately 40%, like that of Cucuteni in Cernavodă I deemed settlement of Râmnicelu¹³³ or Sărata Monteoru¹³⁴. Given the previous developments in the area, the gray pottery could be a technological inheritance, yet based on which a pottery rather intermediary towards coarse is modelled, not fine like in the Stoican-Aldeni settlements (see the gray jars and bowls modelled of fine fabric, decorated with incisions, fine grooves, circular indents, white painting). In fact, in the area there is a history of mixture and assimilation of allogeneic cultural elements, of direct contacts¹³⁵.

Ultimately, it could be irrelevant whether at Șoimești there existed a Cucuteni community or one local which may be deemed post Gumelnița. Terms/concepts like associations¹³⁶, blends¹³⁷, mixed inventory/mixture¹³⁸, mosaic¹³⁹, cultural interference area¹⁴⁰, but also other¹⁴¹ seem to indicate, past any debate, the presence in northern Muntenia of communities who had access to diverse traditions (inherited/prior or contemporary), within a dynamic chronocultural milieu. If in the northern area, steppe communities enter in contact with those of Cucuteni tradition in a what seems to be a southern expansion, more to the south (including Dobruja) these interconnect with those late (possibly post) Gumelnița (see habitations with consistent stratigraphies in Cernavodă I sites).

At Șoimești, there existed a community typical to that period, whose behaviour is connected to the local natural environment, resources, technologies, cultural traditions, etc. If analysis exceeds this area with specific topography and cultural consistency, we are dealing at Șoimești with only the reflex of a wider phenomenon integrating the Lower Danube area, already rooted in the previous millennium. Not

¹²⁵ Anthony 2007.

¹²⁶ Tudor 1965; Morintz, Ionescu 1968; Vlad 2019.

¹²⁷ Hașotti, Popovici 1992; Hașotti 1997.

¹²⁸ Frînculeasa 2010.

¹²⁹ Garvăn 2021, 110, 121-122

¹³⁰ Frînculeasa 2010, 251.

¹³¹ Hașotti, Popovici 1992; Hașotti 1997.

¹³² Munteanu 2017, 46, note 12.

¹³³ Harțuche 1980, 65.

¹³⁴ Munteanu 2017, 46 (the discovered material is partially discussed).

¹³⁵ Frînculeasa 2010; Frînculeasa 2016; Munteanu 2017. A few possible Cucuteni A sites in the area were detected by field surveys or excavations (Garvăn 2022, 78).

¹³⁶ Dupoi, Preda 1977, 8; Sirbu *et al.* 2011, 52, 163; Grigoraș 2021, 66.

¹³⁷ Dupoi, Preda 1977, 8; Munteanu 2017, 52.

¹³⁸ Grigoraș *et al.* 2018, 68; Preoteasa *et al.* 2020, 396.

¹³⁹ Munteanu 2017, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Preoteasa *et al.* 2020, p. 396, 399.

¹⁴¹ Munteanu 2017, 48.

only the flatlands with their communities with specific cultural traditions and economic behaviours are involved, but also the sub-Carpathian areas, the valleys which ensured communication paths, access and resource control, landscapes known already for centuries by the local Eneolithic communities.

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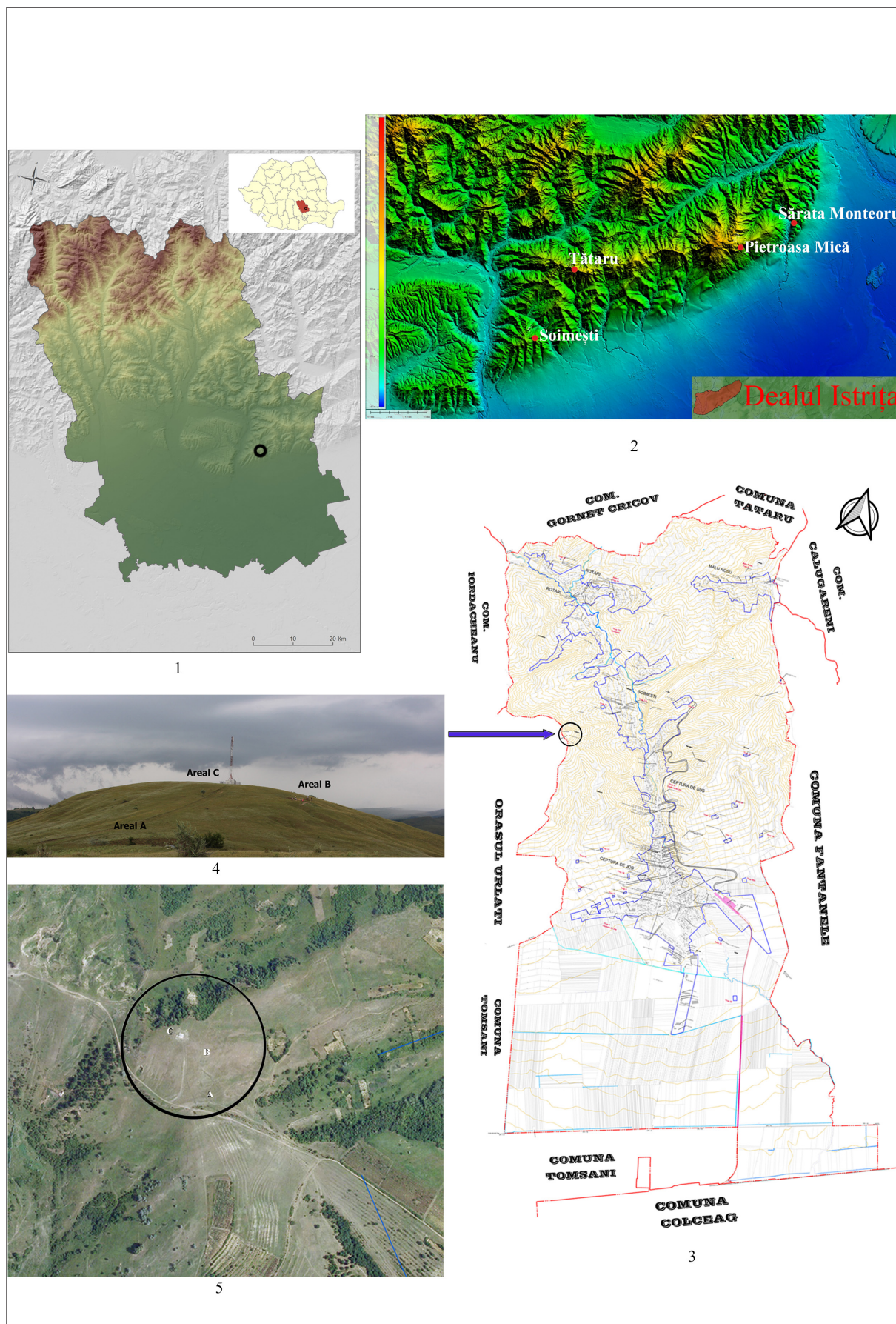


Plate 1. Location of the Șoimești site on the map of Romania and Prahova County map (1), Ceptura commune (3) and Istria Massif (2) (Digital Terrain Model - Copernicus Global Digital Elevation Model – 30 m); the Șoimești site seen from south with excavated areas (4); orthophotoplan of the site and excavated areas (5).



Plate 2. The Șoimești site and surrounding landscape (photo A. Frînculeasa).

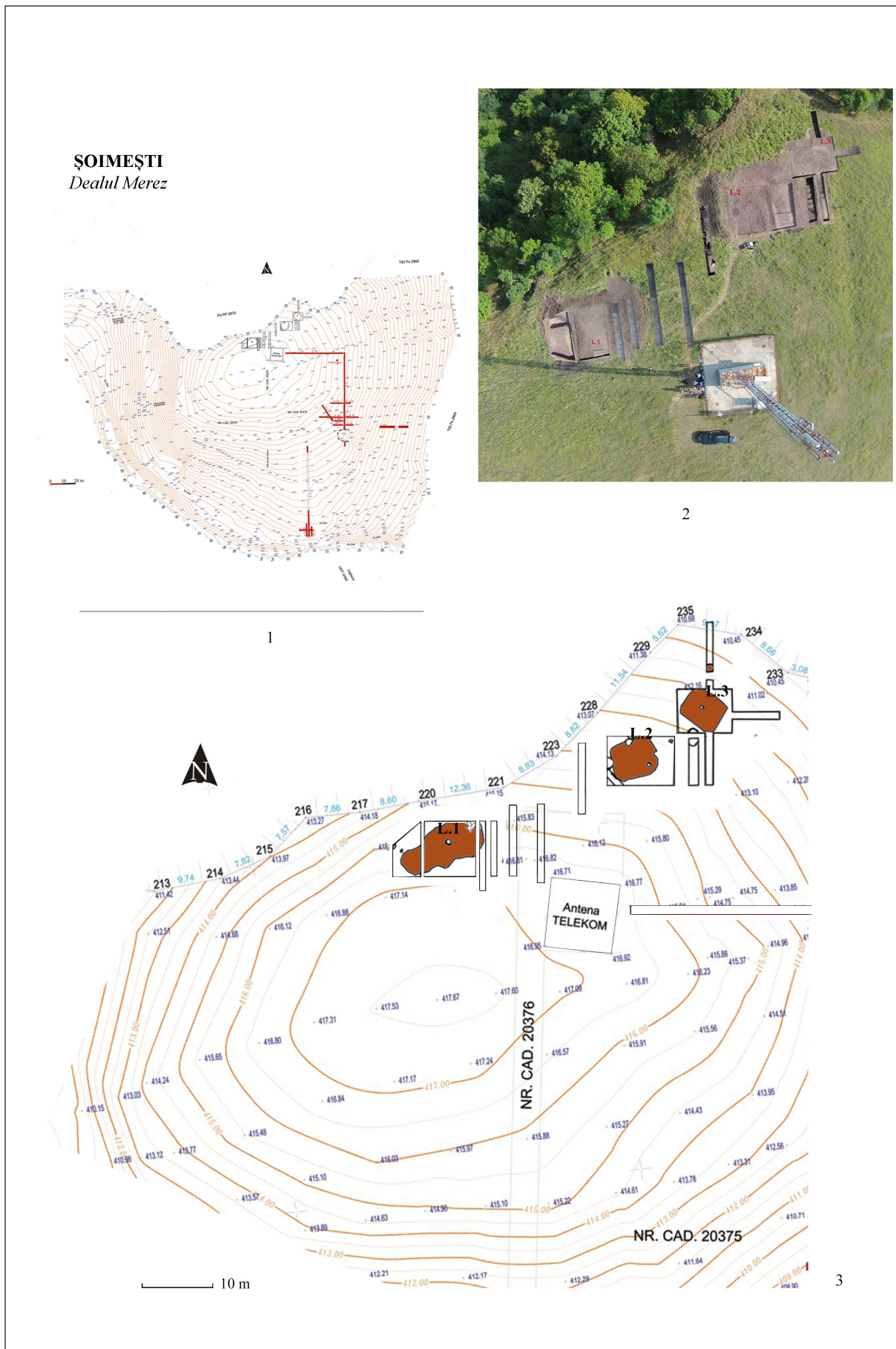


Plate 3. Șoimești, general plan with the excavated trenches and areas (partially areas A and B) (1); aerial reconstruction of excavations in area C (2) (photo O. Negrea); plan of the Eneolithic features discovered in area C (3).



Plate 4. House 1: details of burnt adobe (1-5); eastern stratigraphic profile of the excavated area (6).



Plate 5. House 1: details of pottery and loom weights *in situ* (1-5).



Plate 6. House 2: details of the burnt adobe and pottery *in situ* (1-5); Eneolithic pit (6-7).



Plate 7. Stratigraphic profiles with the western, eastern and southern profiles of the excavated area where L.2 (1-3) was located; Eneolithic ditch (4, 8); loom weights and pottery *in situ* (5-7).



Plate 8. House 3: details of burnt adobe, pottery (1-3), flint tip (4), loom weight (5), flat stone (5) *in situ*.

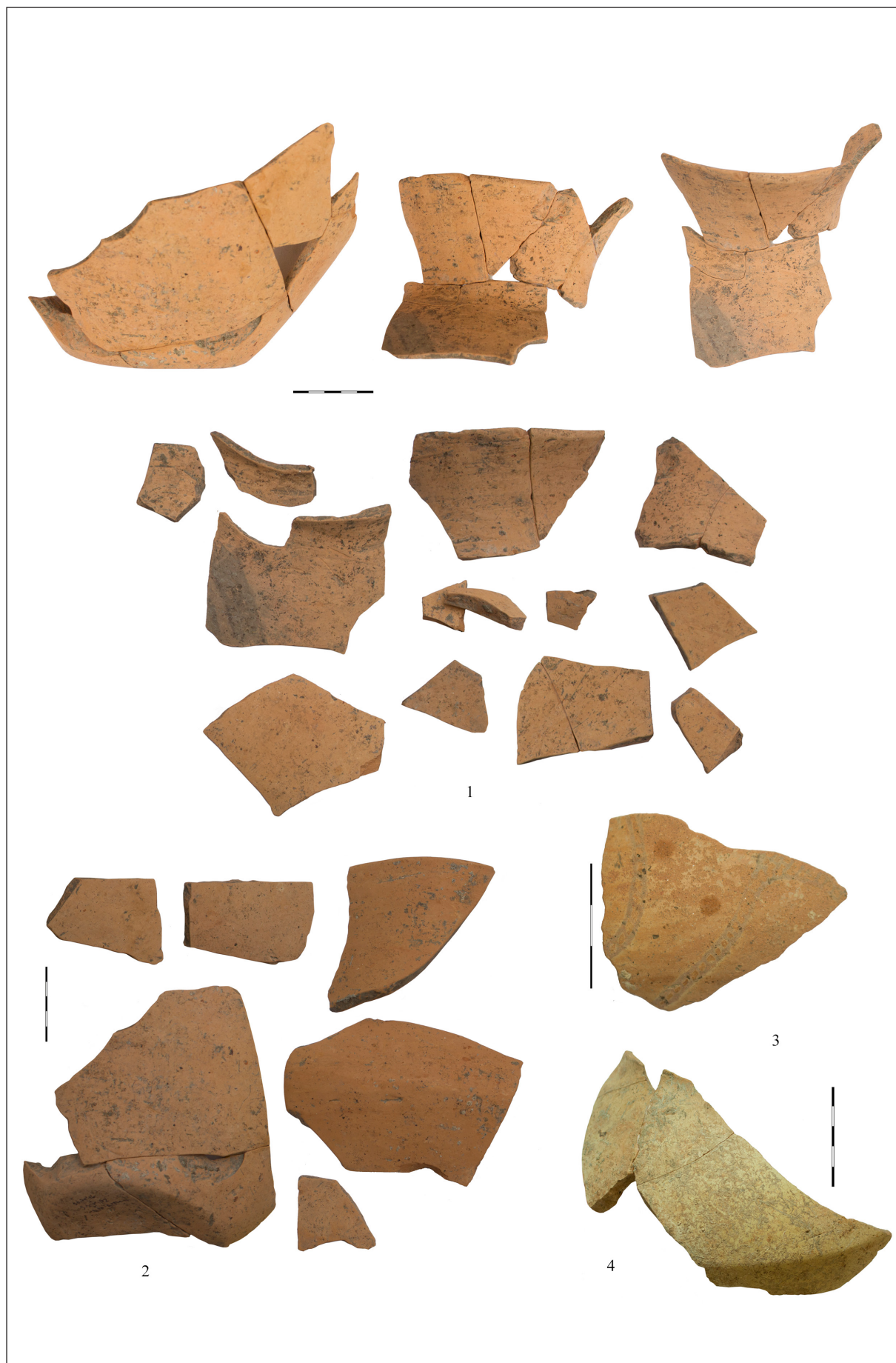


Plate 9. Cucuteni pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.



Plate 10. Cucuteni pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.

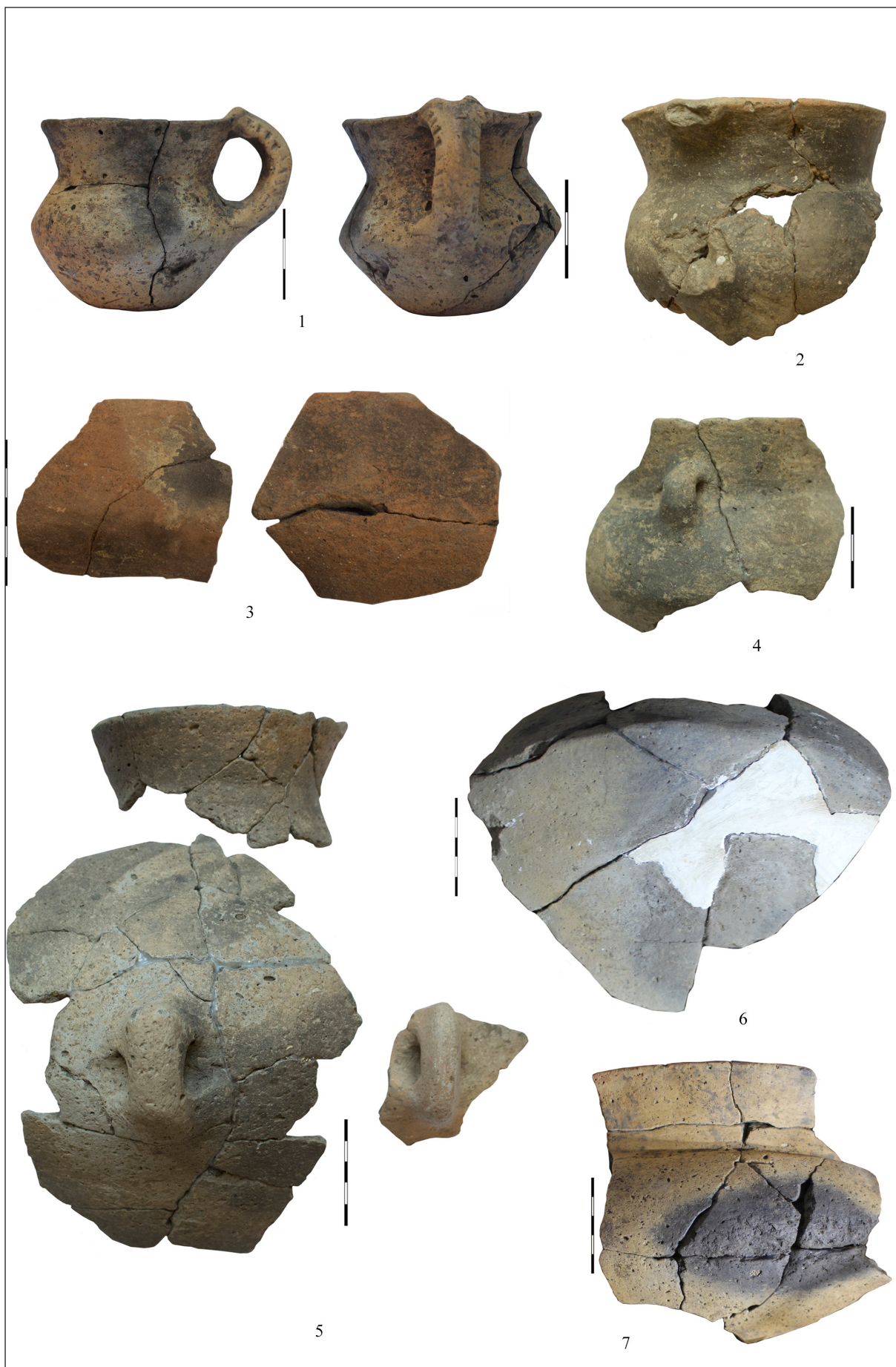


Plate 11. Common wares from L.1 at Șoimești.

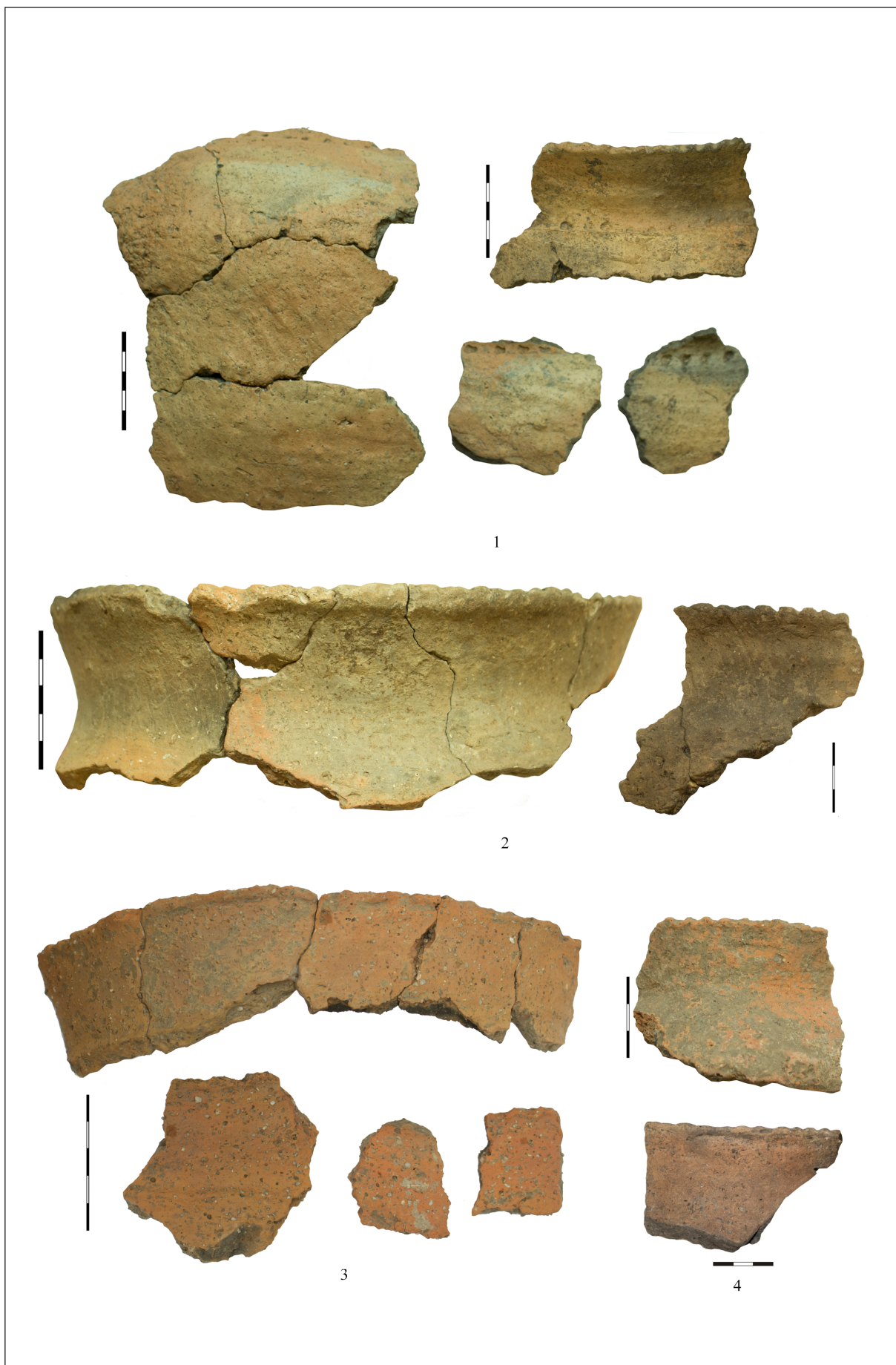


Plate 12. *Type C* pottery from L.1 at Şoimeşti.

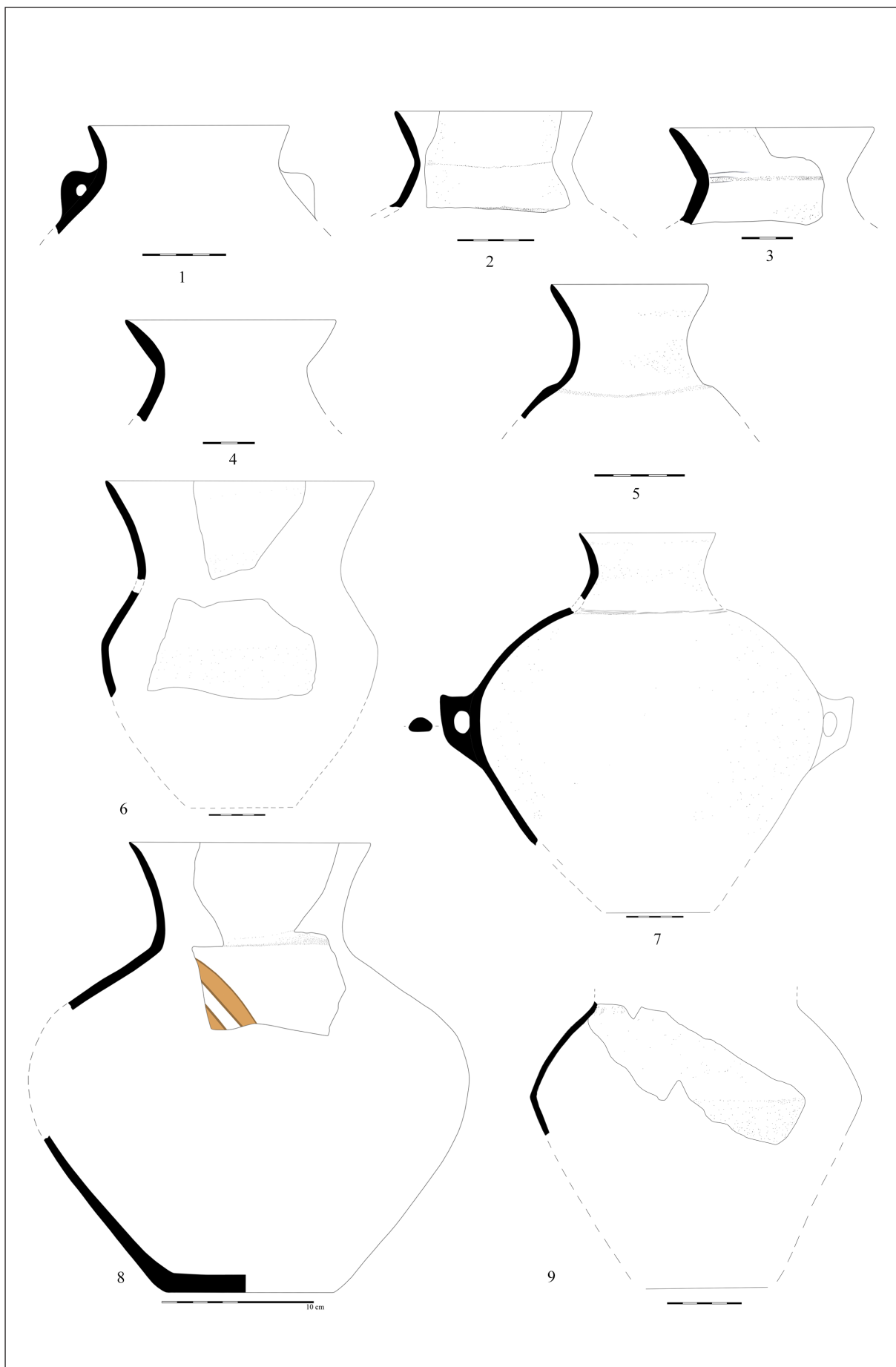


Plate 13. Cucuteni (tradition) pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.

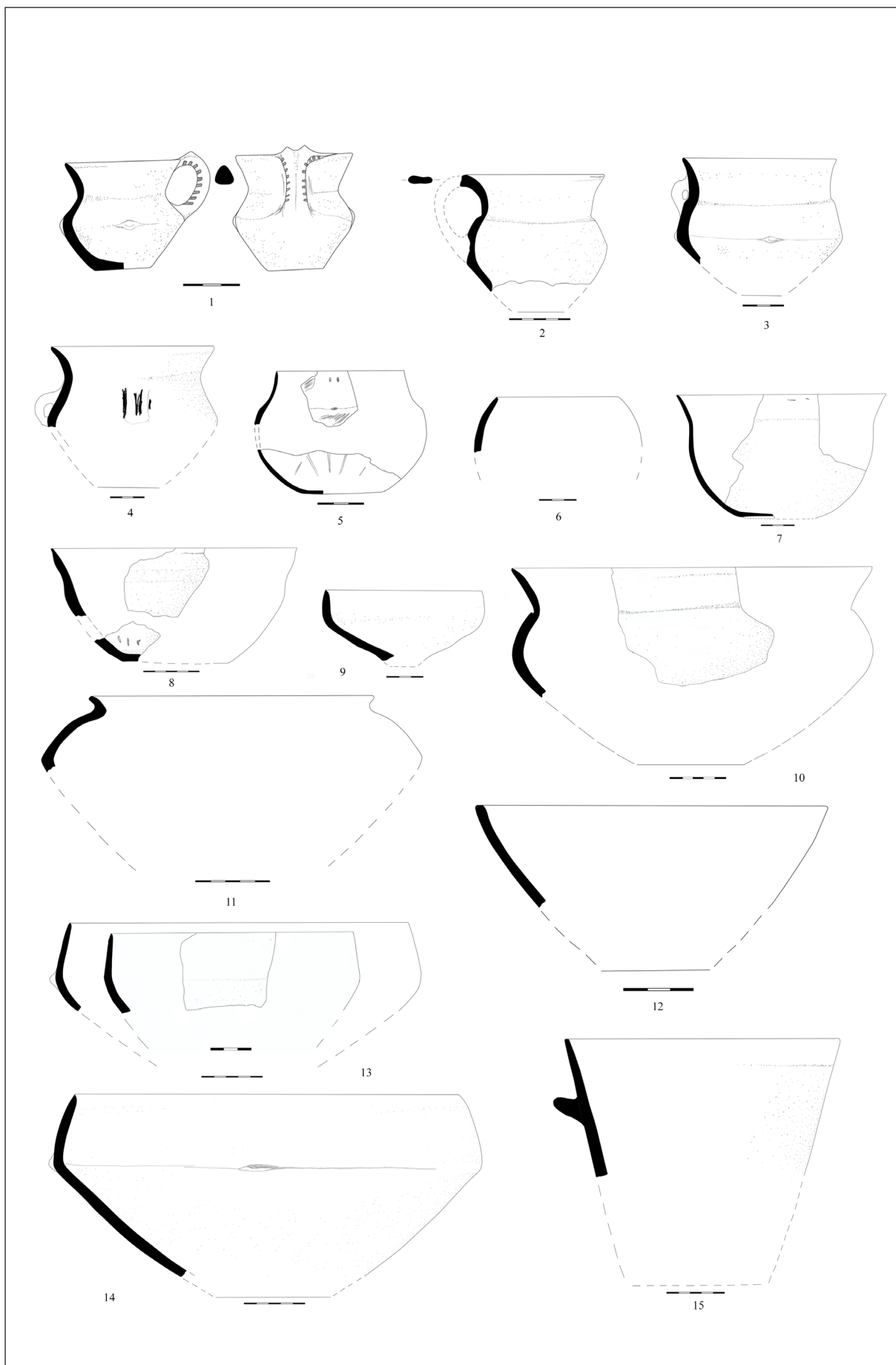


Plate 14. Cucuteni (tradition) and/or common pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.

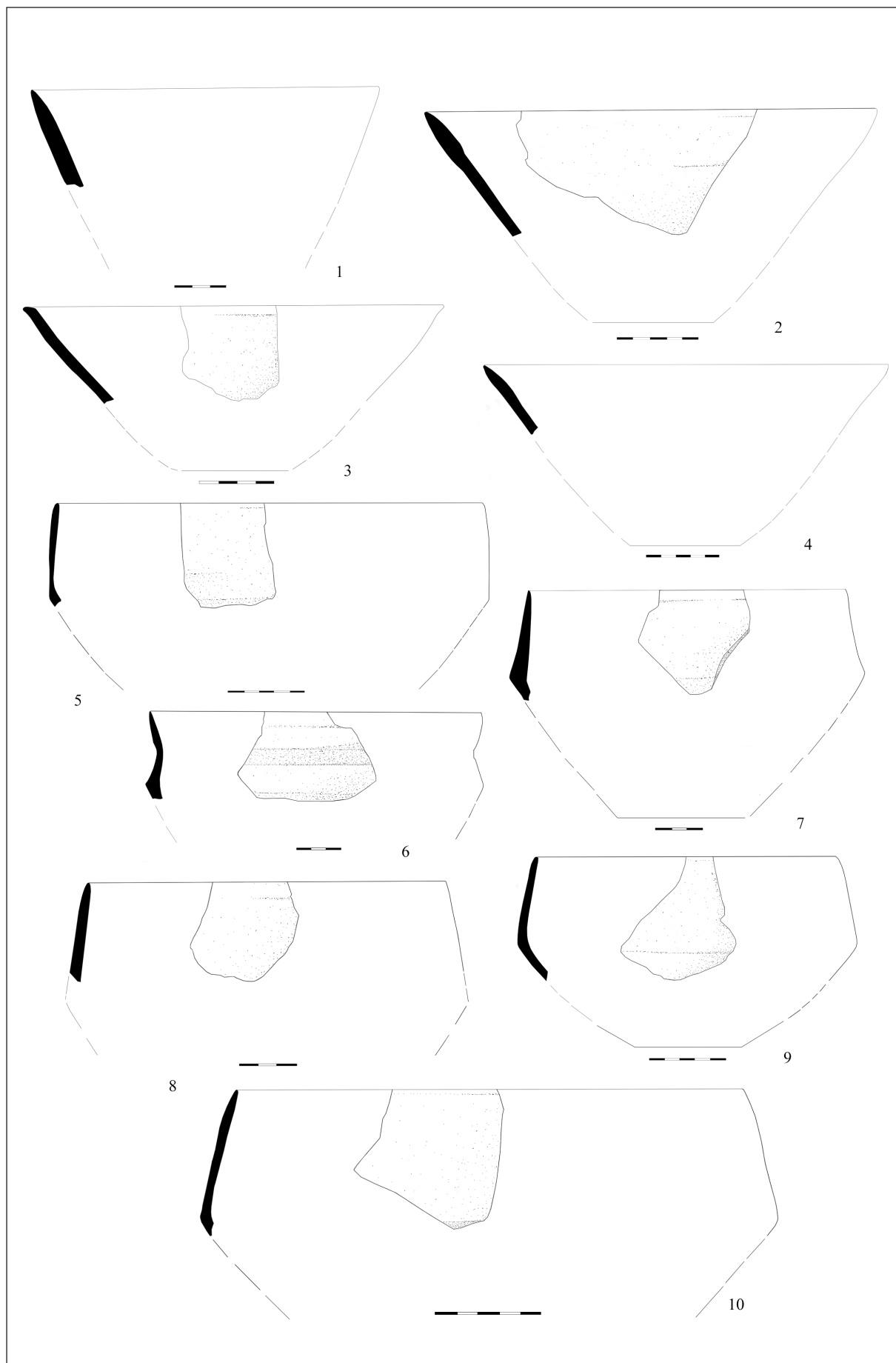


Plate 15. Cucuteni (tradition) and/or common pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.

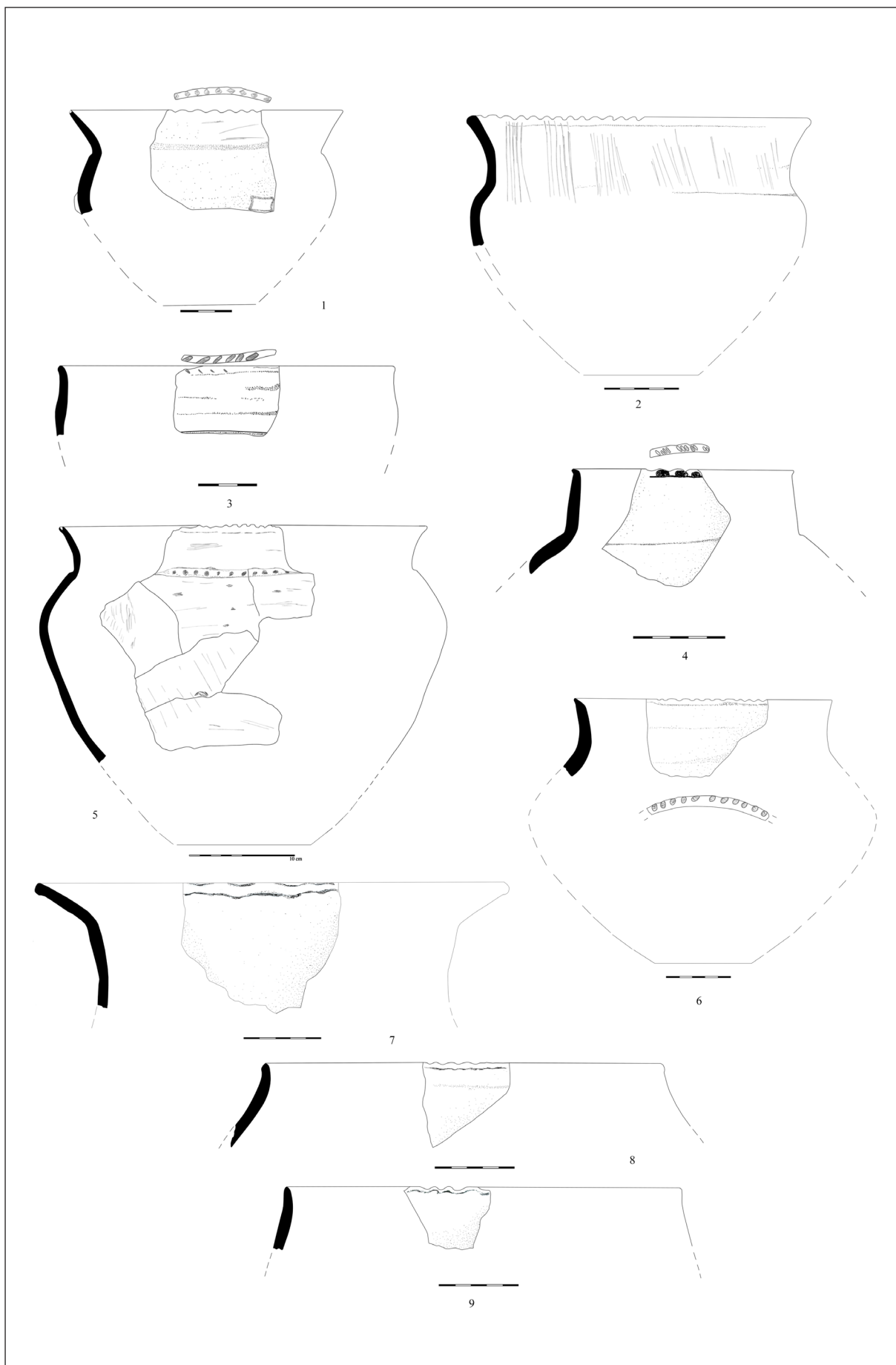


Plate 16. Type C pottery from L.1 at Șoimești.

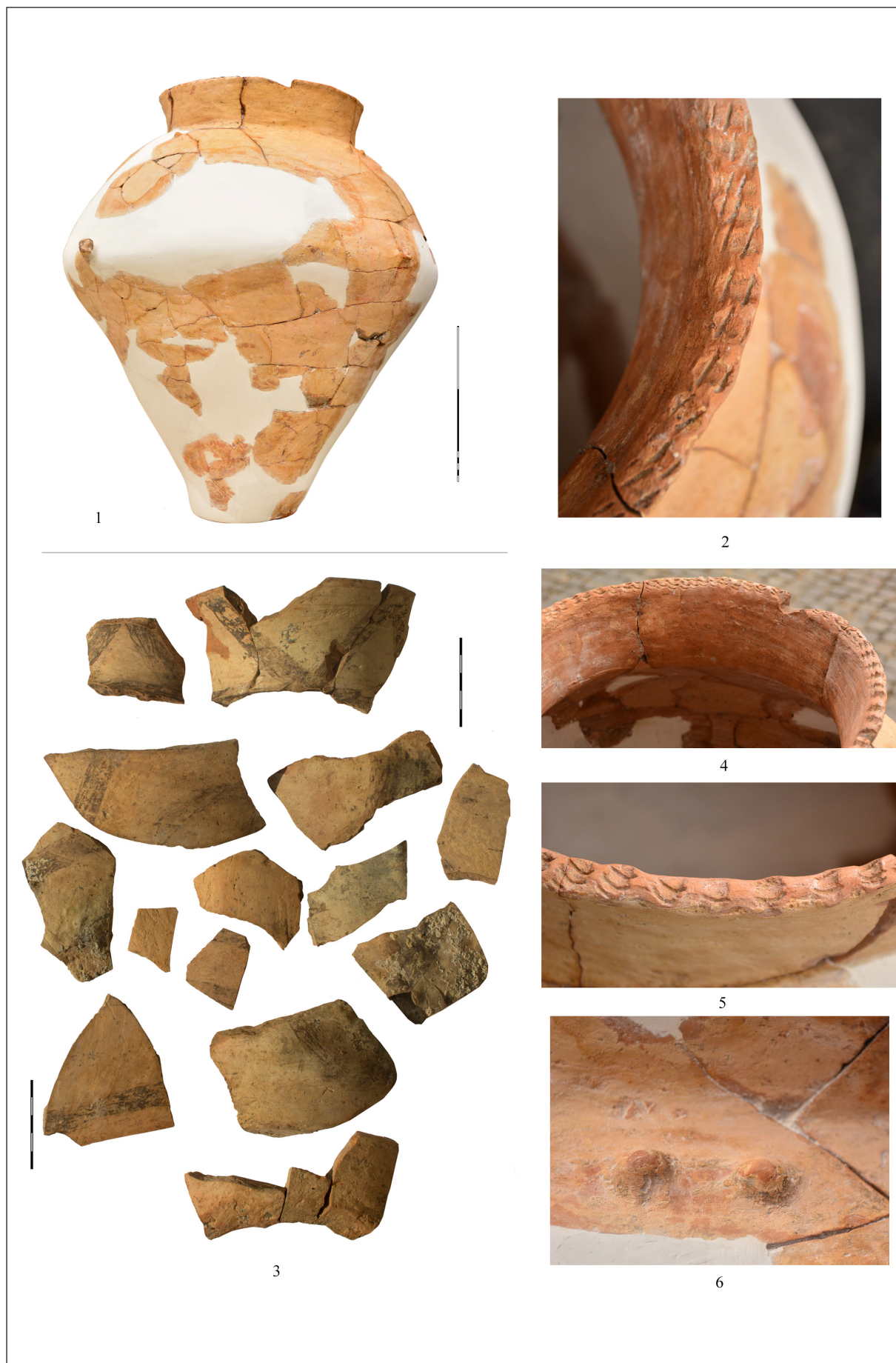


Plate 17. Cucuteni pottery from L.2 at Șoimești (3); vessel made of Cucuteni tradition fabric, with corded decoration on rim (1, 2-6).

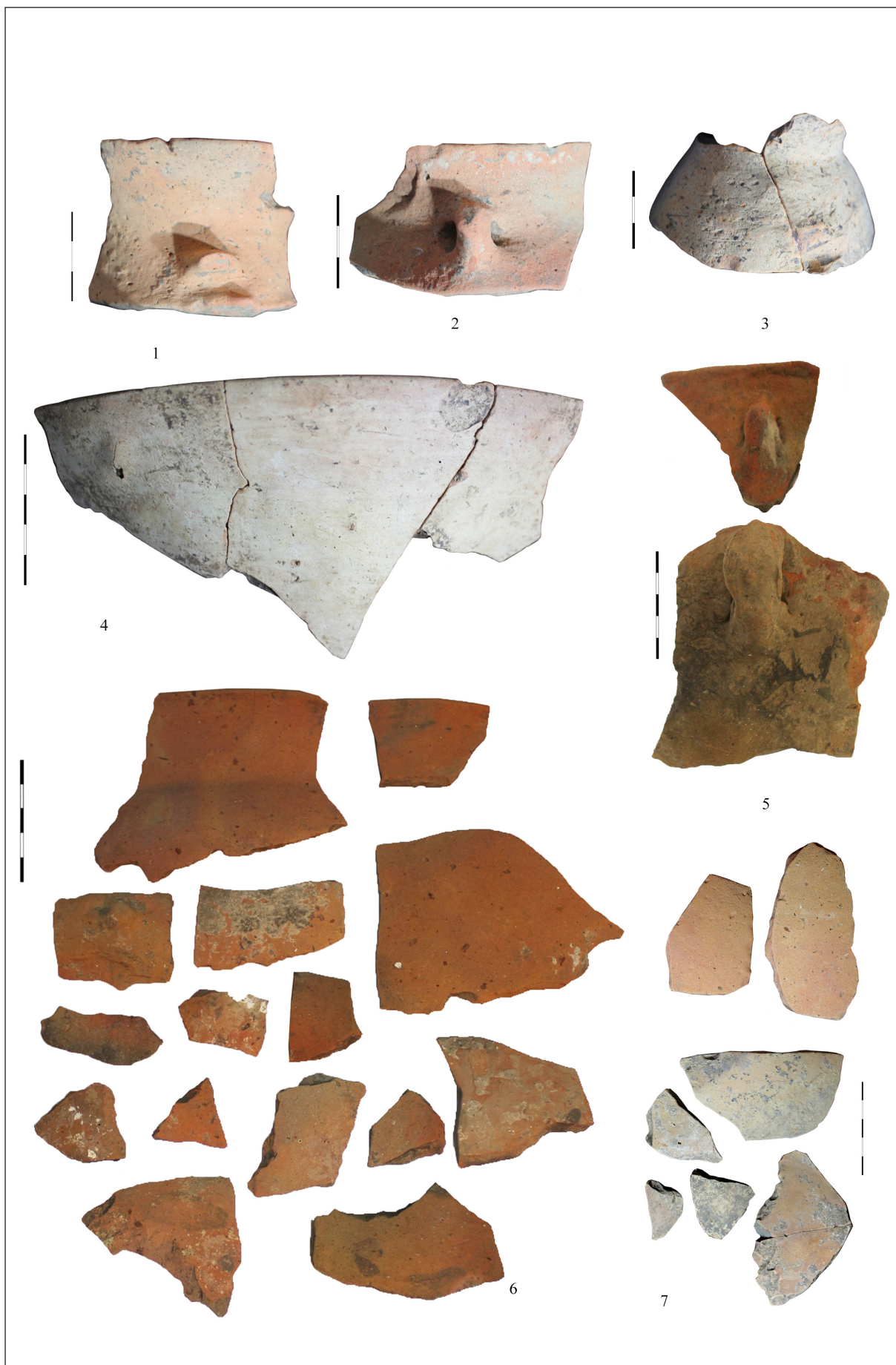


Plate 18. Cucuteni (tradition) pottery in L.2 at Șoimești.

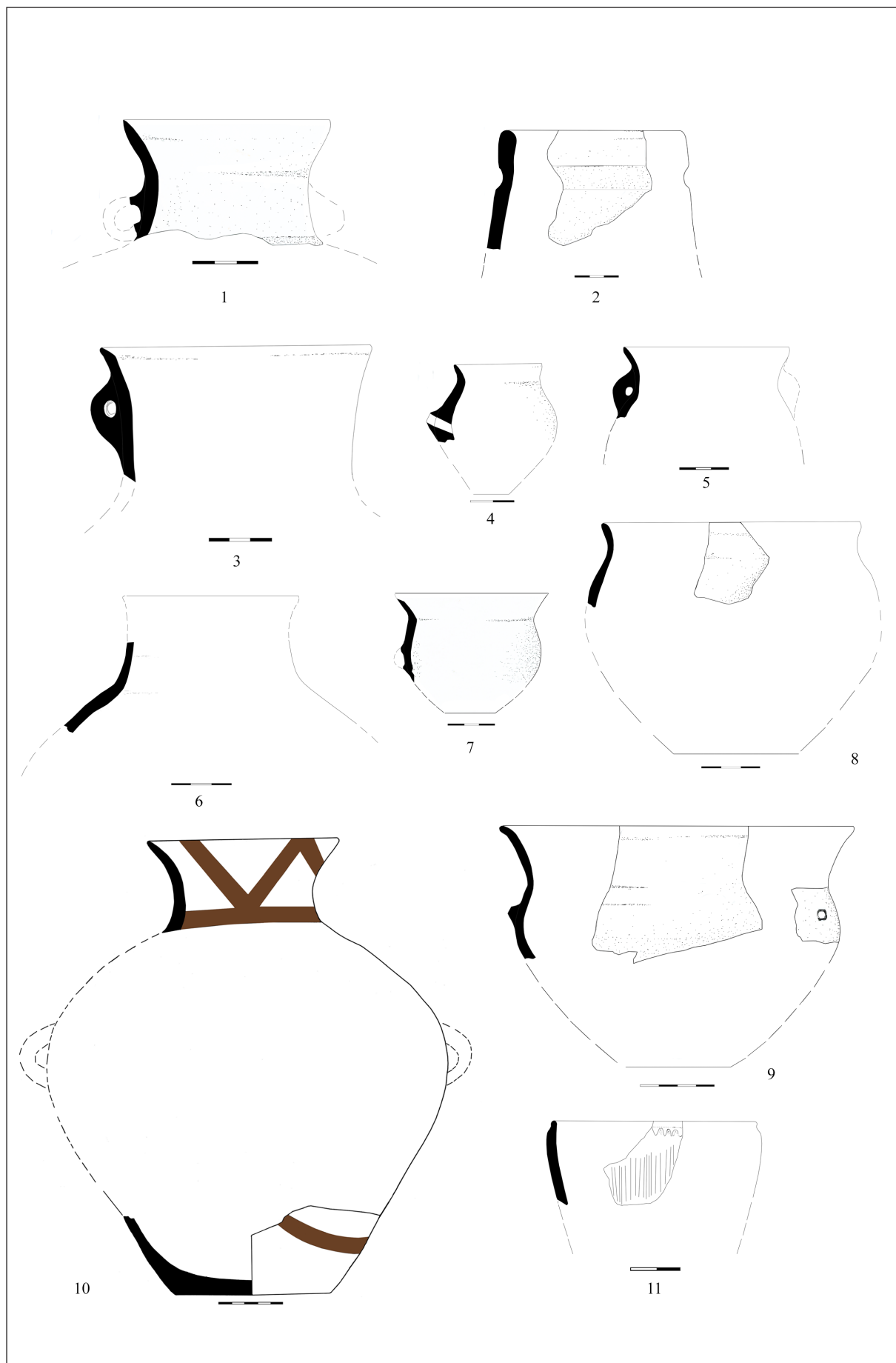


Plate 19. Cucuteni (tradition) pottery in L.2 at Șoimești (1-10); Eneolithic, local tradition vessel (11).

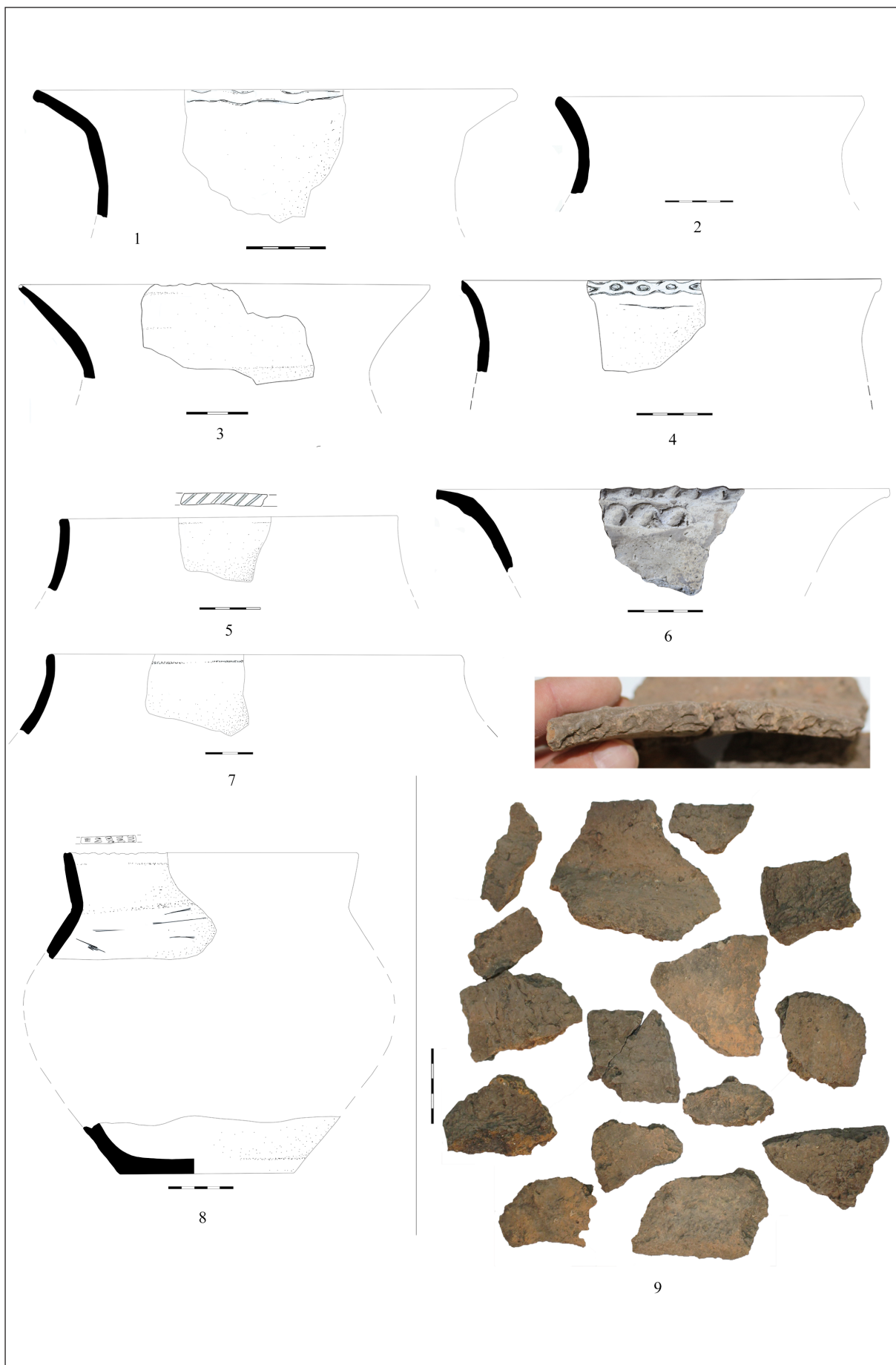


Plate 20. *Type C* pottery in L.2 at Şoimeşti.



Plate 21. Cucuteni (tradition) pottery (1-4) and of type C in L.3 at Șoimești (5-10).

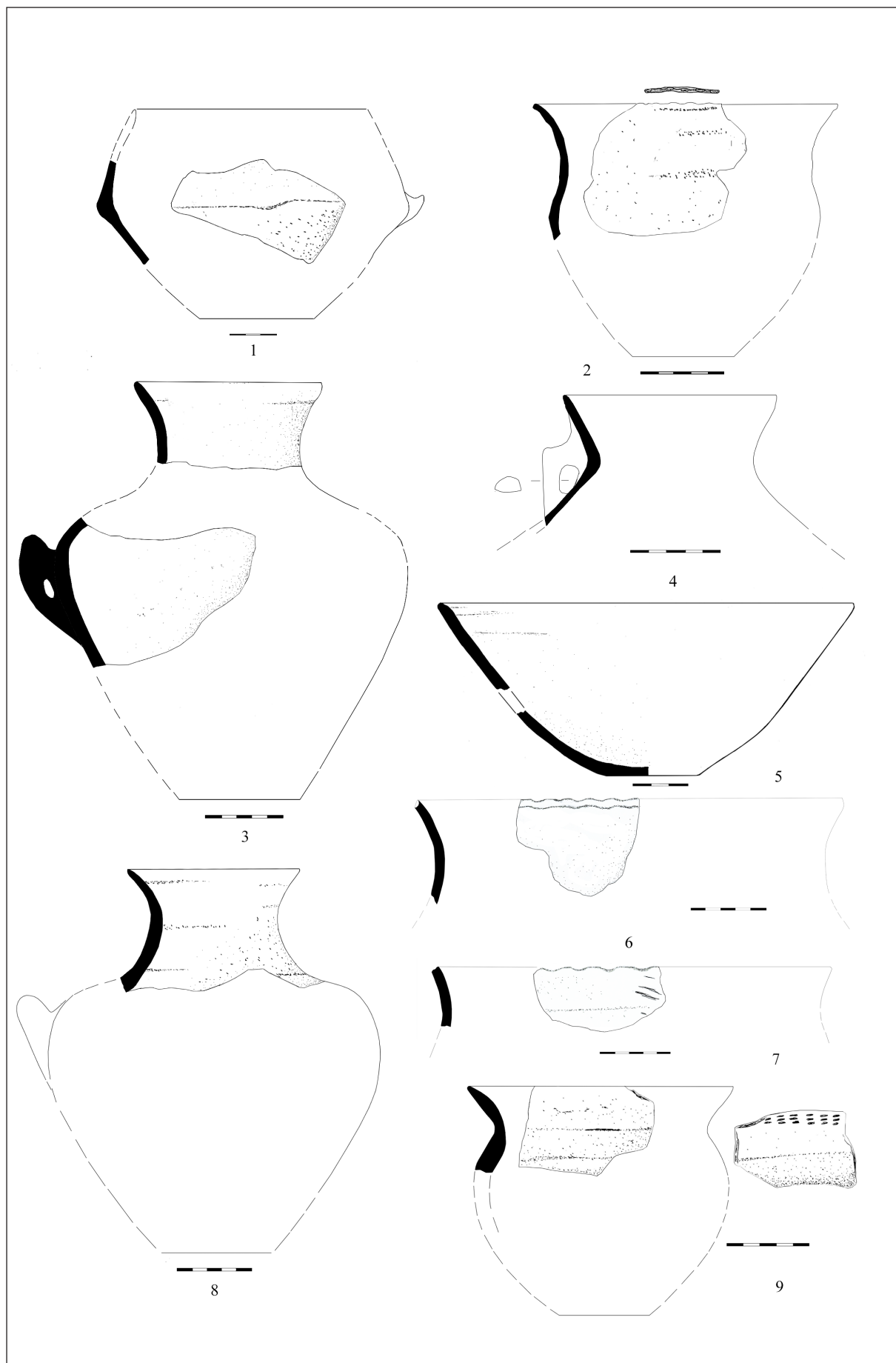


Plate 22. Cucuteni (tradition) pottery (1-5, 8) and of type C in L.3 at Șoimești (6-7, 9).

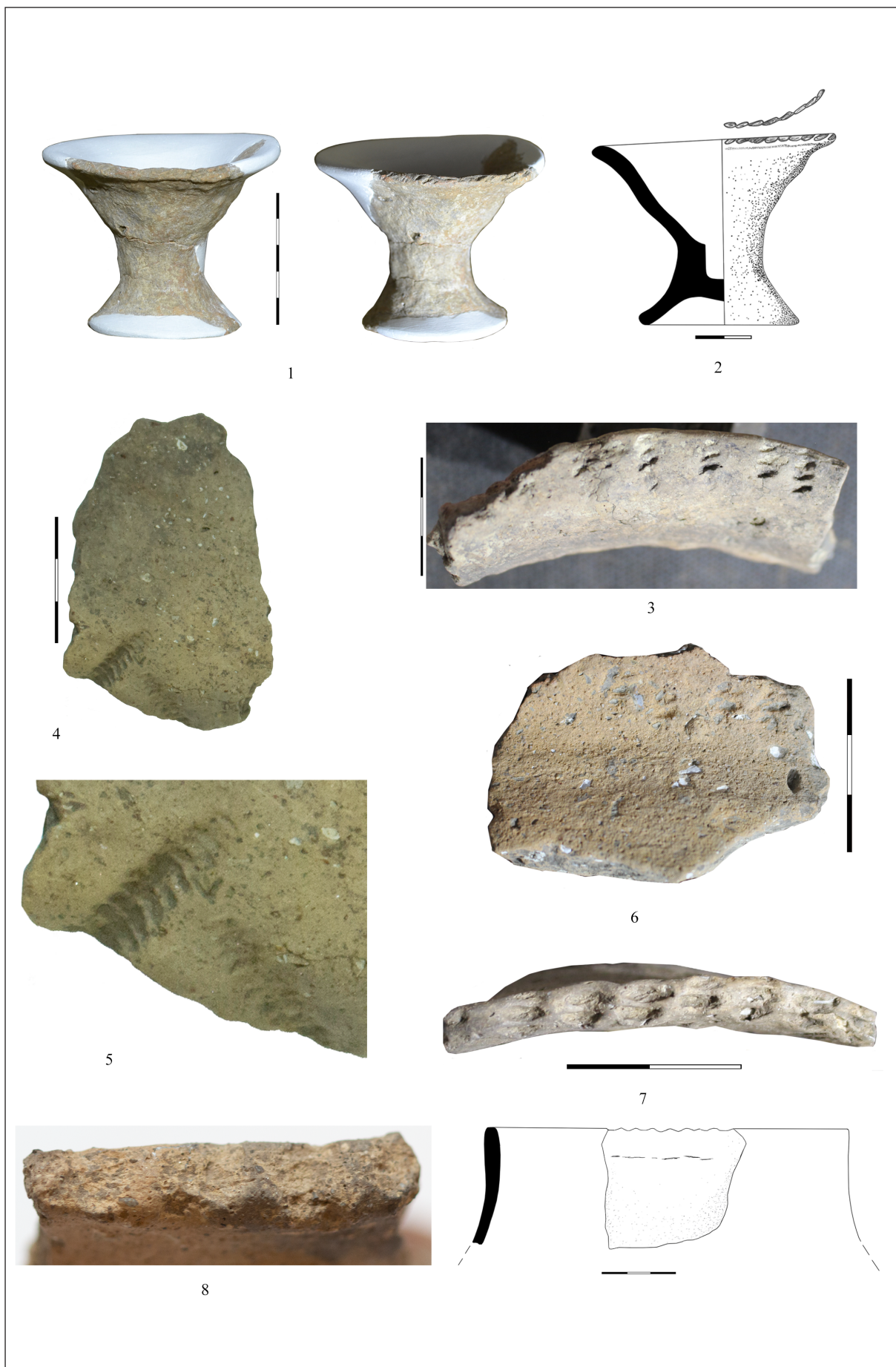


Plate 23. Corded pottery (or imitation) discovered in the site of Șoimești.

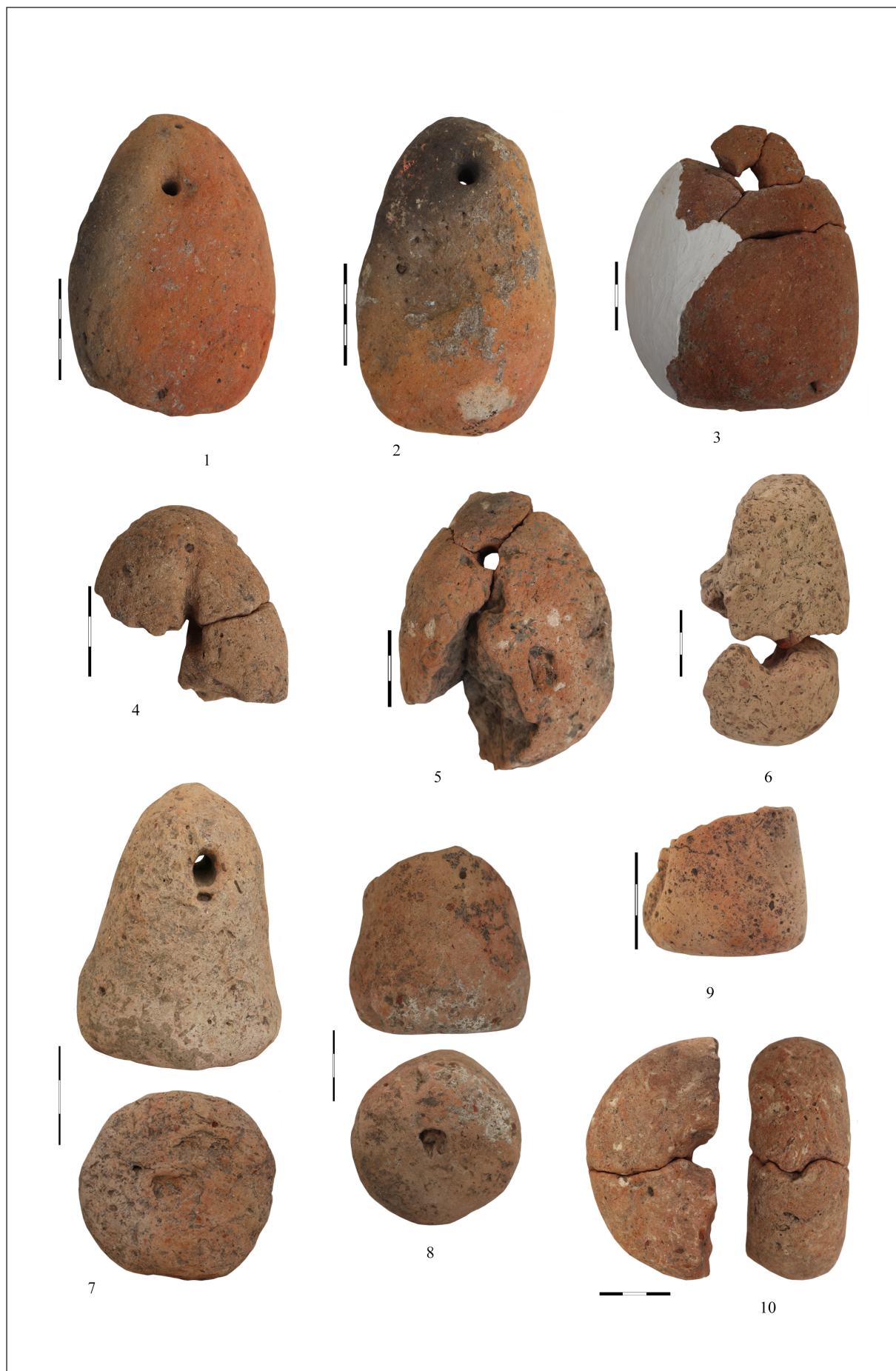


Plate 24. Clay loom weight discovered in the Eneolithic houses of Șoimești.

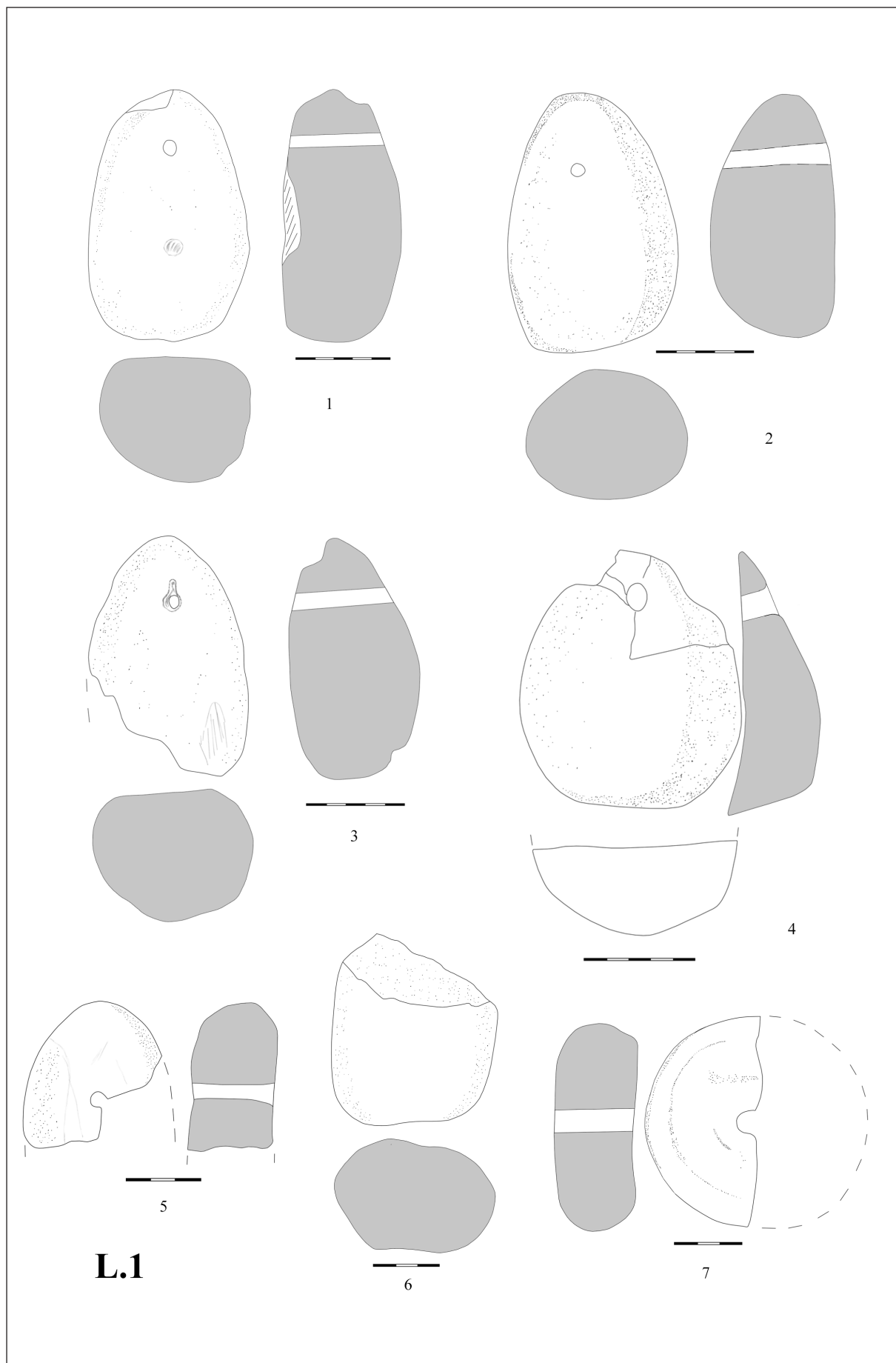


Plate 25. Clay loom weight discovered in L.1 at Șoimești.

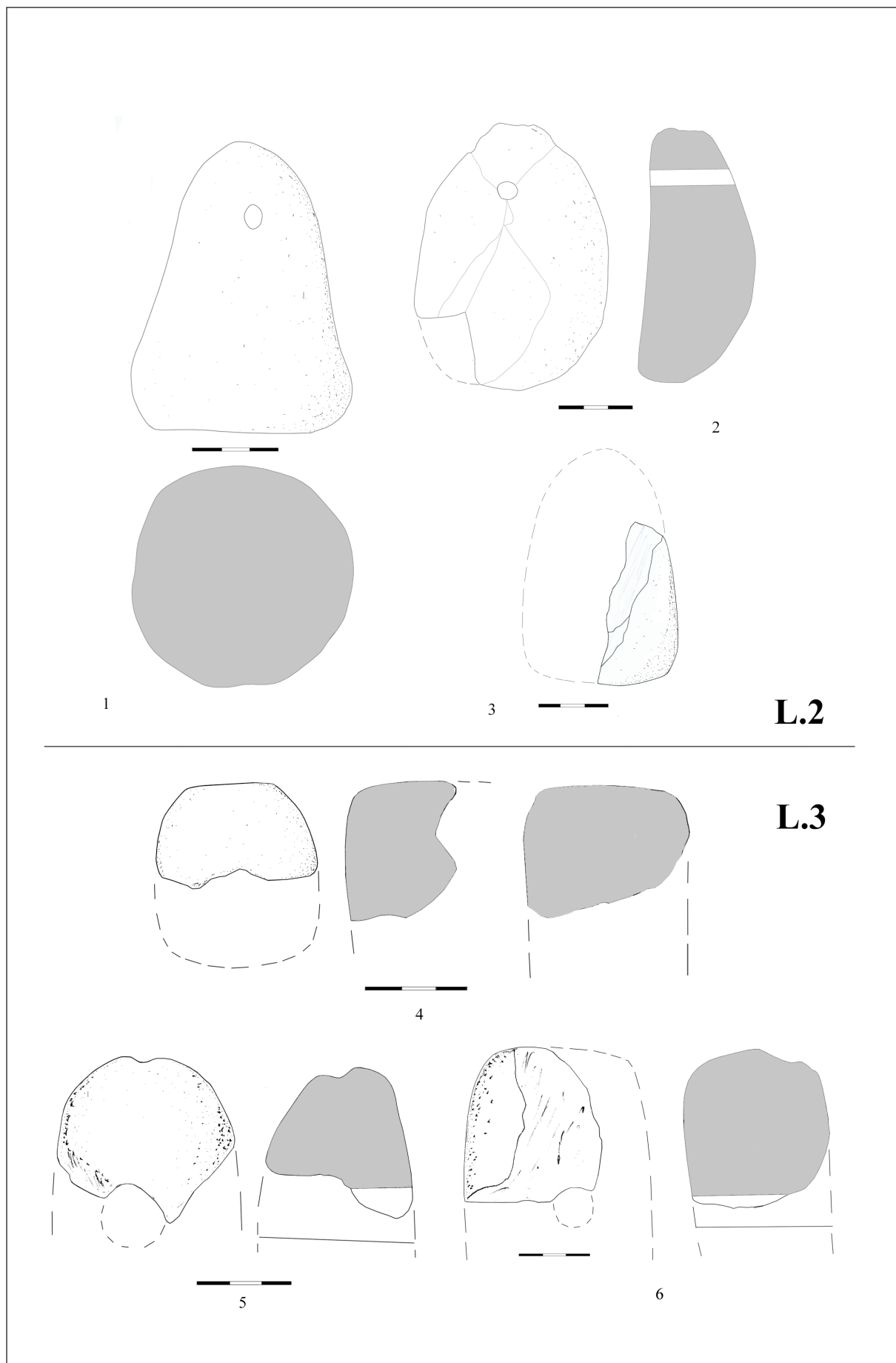


Plate 26. Clay loom weight discovered in L.2 (1-3) and L.3 (4-6) at Șoimești.



Plate 27. Clay items (1-4), stone chisels (5-7), fragment of stone axe (8) and stone pestle (9) discovered in the Eneolithic level at Șoimești.



Plate 28. Stone items (punchers, rubbers and grinders) discovered in the Eneolithic level of Şoimeşti.

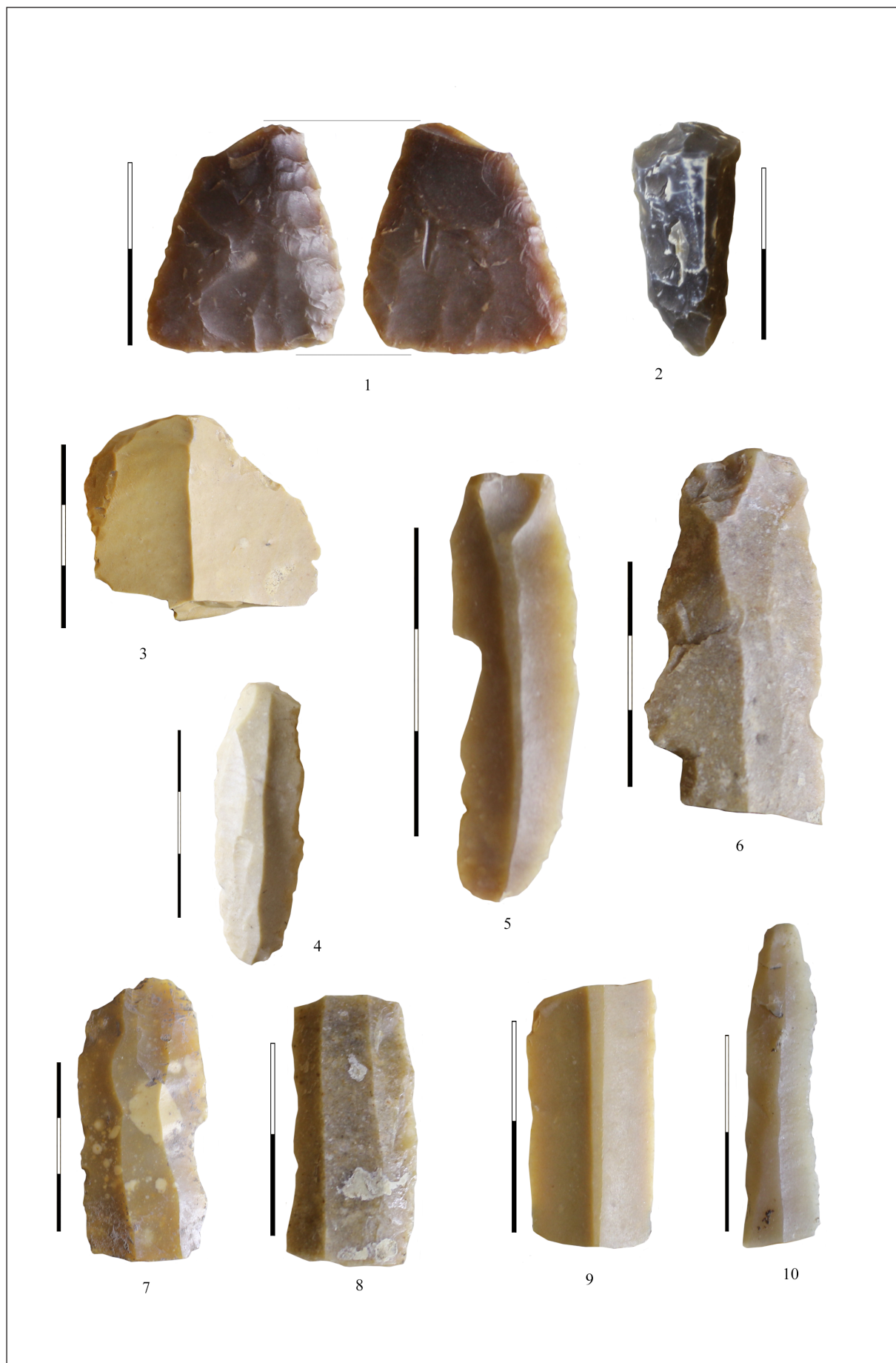


Plate 29. Flint items (arrowhead, grattoire and blades) discovered in the Eneolithic level at Șoimești.



Plate 30. Zoomorphic clay figurines discovered in L.2 at Șoimești.

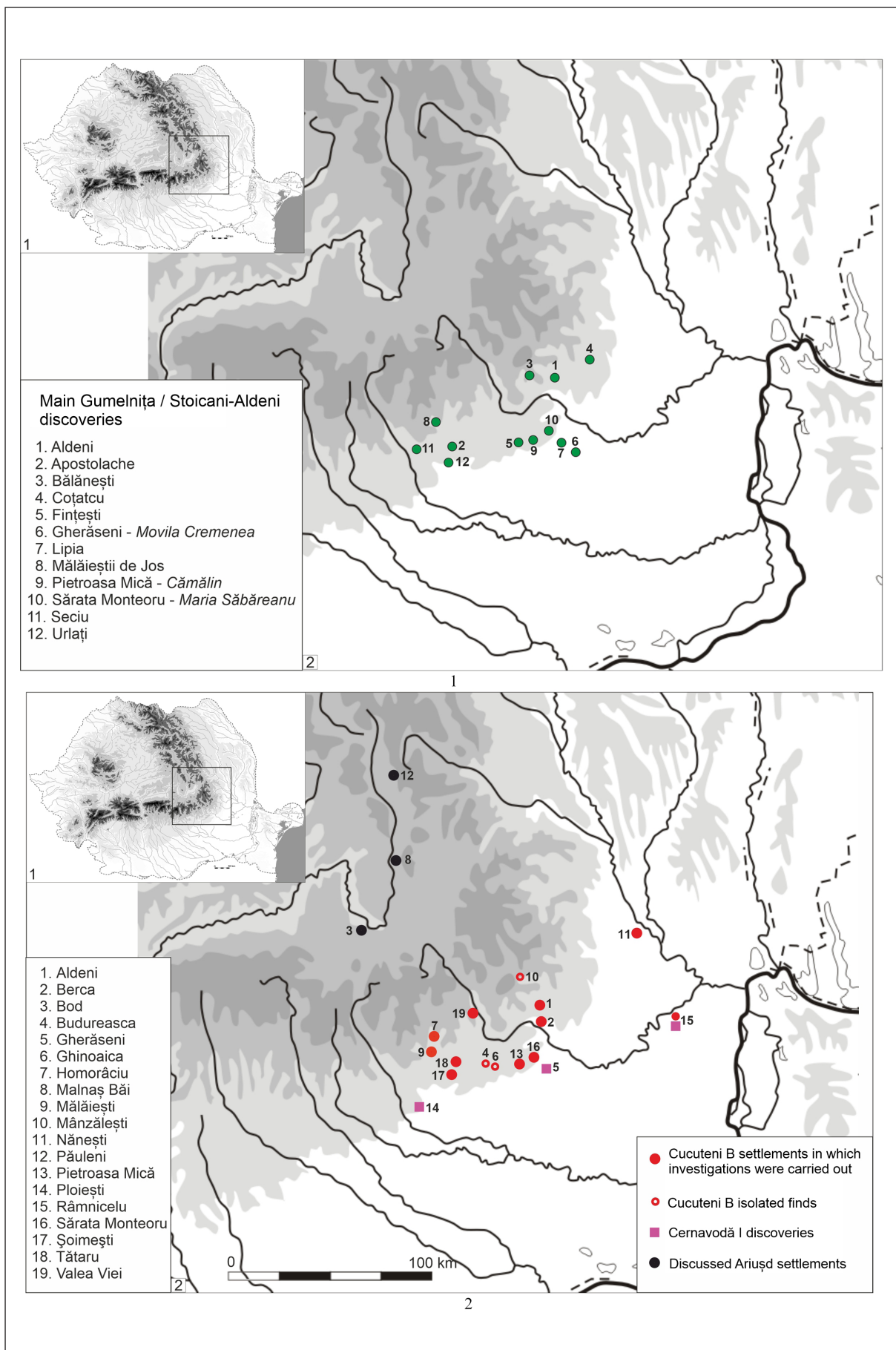


Plate 31. Main Gumelnița/Stoicani-Aldeni find from the analysed area (1); Ariușd, Cucuteni B and Cernavodă I settlements in the analysed area (2).

