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STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

26/1

2012



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26/1  
2012

**Editura MEGA**  
Cluj-Napoca  
2012

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In Romania, the periodical can be obtained through subscription or exchange, sent as post shipment, from Museum Arad, Arad, Piata G. Enescu 1, 310131, Romania.  
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### **ZIRIDAVA STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA**

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Layout: Francisc Baja, Florin Mrginean, Victor Sava

ISSN: 1224-7316



EDITURA MEGA | [www.edituramega.ro](http://www.edituramega.ro)  
e-mail: [mega@edituramega.ro](mailto:mega@edituramega.ro)

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# Medieval and Early Modern Military Items Discovered in the Village of Tauț (Arad County, Western Romania)\*

Anca Nițoi, Florin Mărginean, George P. Hurezan

**Abstract:** The article presents the military items discovered during the systematic archaeological excavation conducted on the site of Tauț during several campaigns. Together with data from written sources, these objects provide valuable information for the history of Zarand County during the medieval and early modern period.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages, Early Modern Period, military items, Turkish garrison.

Starting with 2002, after an initial 1999 investigation, several archaeological excavation campaigns were conducted on the medieval and early modern site of Tauț in western Romania<sup>1</sup>. The publication of the volume entitled *Medieval churches from Arad county*<sup>2</sup> was the opening for researches conducted in Tauț<sup>3</sup>, the excavation lasting from 2002 until 2009.

The village is situated in the eastern half of Zarand County, in the western part of Romania at the bottom of Zarand Mountains, on the plain of Cigher. The archaeological excavations were conducted on the peak of a hill, 500 m west to Cigher River.

The earliest reference to this place can be traced in a papal document dated 1187, where a house belonging to the Order of the Hospitallers is mentioned in Tauț. Thus, members of this order are mentioned helping to build a ship for salt transportation on Mureș River<sup>4</sup>. In 1272 the church in Tauț, called Feltót in Hungarian<sup>5</sup> is mentioned belonging to the bishopric of Várad (today Oradea, Romania). In 1334, the settlement is mentioned in the Register of papal tithes<sup>6</sup>. Still, their presence in this area is not yet sustained by any archaeological data.

The archaeological excavations were conducted in the place called by the locals the *Turkish fortress* or just the Fortress. We can state that such a name is only accurate starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the place was inhabited much sooner than this period. The researches revealed that the first inhumations along with both fazes of the medieval church were located inside the earth fortification which had an approximately circular shape. The fortification ramparts and ditches are doubled on the south, west and north and even tripled on the eastern part.

Based on researches conducted so far one can state that the earth fortification was erected prior to all others ensembles, namely the churches or the Turkish garrison.

The archaeological context and the material excavated until 2009 allowed for the setting of a relative chronology of the site between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Prior to the church, erected most probably in 12<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, the existence of an earlier cemetery was established here. This cemetery continued to function after the first phase of the church and even extended inside and around the church.

Initially, the building was constructed in the Romanesque style and was probably enlarged, since the first Gothic church was placed on its ruins. Parts of the Romanesque church, namely the nave, were included in the structure of the new Gothic building.

The local community which survived here for more than four centuries was more likely devastated or moved away after 1552. The remains of medieval Tauț were also destroyed and abandoned and the church along with it.

\* The present paper was presented during the international conference *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Wrocław, Poland, 2–4 December 2010.

<sup>1</sup> Mărginean 2007, 95–105.

<sup>2</sup> Rusu, Hurezean 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Rusu, Hurezean 2000, 142, fig. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Kovács 1980, 198.

<sup>5</sup> Kovács 2005, 24.

<sup>6</sup> DIR, C, XIV, III, 249.

A Turkish garrison is attested here between 1552 and 1595; its existence is now confirmed by archaeological data as well. Later documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> century mention the settlement without military troops. Archaeological researches conducted until now revealed the fact that a new settlement was built in the perimeter of the church and of the earth fortification (the southern area).

In her book *The Ottoman Empire in Europe*, Hungarian historian Hegyi Klára pointed out that a number of 39 persons without the officers are mentioned here in 1544. The actual number of persons could be even higher, i.e. 42 counting also the superior officers. Eight of the names were of Balkan origin. The same number remained until 1567<sup>7</sup>. In 1579 the fortification seems to have been a part of the Sangeac of Ineu.

Based on the analysis of a twelve-year period (1579–1591), the Hungarian author estimates a number of 70 soldiers stationed here. They were divided into three different categories: the *mustafizi* as the guardians of the garrison, the artillery men (mostly cannon men) as a separate part of the Kapikulu Corps<sup>8</sup> of the Turkish army and the *martalocs* mainly mercenaries, spies and Balkan volunteers. The spies are mentioned between April and October 1591 and out of 29 persons, 24 were Christians.

In the mid–16<sup>th</sup> century political context, the garrison in Tauț was included in the line of Turkish defense fortresses along those in Gyula<sup>9</sup>, Ineu, Pâncota, Șoimoș, Vărădia de Mureș, Făget and Boțsa. There were more likely control rather than defense fortresses, like the ones placed by the Ottomans on the border with the Habsburg Empire. This situation was mainly caused by the political situation of the Transylvanian principality. In fact, one cannot speak about a proper defense system, rather of a control of the main water courses like Mureș and Criș. The above mentioned situation was to change later on.

It seems that the new political context made Tauț a part of the defense system of the Ottoman Empire towards the vassal Transylvanian principality. A violent destruction of this Turkish “fortification” at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the next one was mentioned in the written sources; it can also be traced in an archaeological context. The excavations conducted here within the last years support the written sources, through the discovery of a substantial burnt level throughout the entire researched area.

Although the first researches were mainly focused on the perimeter of the medieval church with its two Romanesque and Gothic stages, the corroboration of the entire archaeological material allowed for a more complex general picture of the situation after the abandonment of the sacred space.

The Turkish settlement brought about several changes, such as the partition of the former church into living areas. Several heating systems were uncovered and researched, including stove tiles and hearths, besides floors and all other elements of material culture: pottery, iron tools, even toys. A similar situation was encountered outside the sacred space; houses made of wood and covered with mud were traced during archaeological excavations. Corroborating the fact that several leveling works were conducted on the southern part, it is highly possible that the entire area was organized systematically. Although in the inner part such works were not necessary, outside these works were mandatory. This is when the land surrounding the church was equalized; additional terraces were built on the south – eastern, southern and south-western parts. The northern part of the former fortification system remains intact. A house placed east of the church was fully researched during one of the several archaeological campaigns. It followed a square ground plan, was placed on a rock foundation, had adobe walls and was probably covered with grain or reed. The entrance was also discovered, since a brick floor was uncovered outside the house. A tile stove was placed inside the house. Two provision pits and several grinding mills were traced nearby. Several objects were found: plates, iron and bronze or bone objects, animal bones and two spurs.

Along with archaeological data, the presence of weapons and harness items, placed all over the site, could become a further evidence of the rush in which the Turkish garrison was abandoned.

The military items, as part of the archaeological material, are mainly dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, ranging from maces to spears and even fire arms.

<sup>7</sup> Hegyi 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Nicollle, McBride 1983, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Hegyi 2000, 169.

The most interesting item was a Turkish saber of the *şimşir* type.

The saber is partially preserved, having a curved blade wider on the lower part. Even this part is unfortunately preserved in a peculiar state. The edge is missing along with the grip and the cross-guard. The cross-guard is straight and formed a cross with two endings on a blade and on the grip. Due to its precarious state of preservation, specialists were unable to restore the item.

This type of saber was among the four most used oriental types of cutting-thrusting weapons, along the *kiliç* saber (which was shorter, broader and less curved), the *palyoş* (still shorter sometimes double-edged) and the famous *yatangan*, a short sword with reverse blade. The saber was often associated with a mace, a popular weapon itself. It was quite used by the troops stationed in Hungary<sup>10</sup>. The same type of weapon was found in several Hungarian sites of the Turkish period<sup>11</sup>.

This situation is fully confirmed by the data from Tauç where two types of maces were discovered in different parts of the perimeter of the Turkish garrison.

One of the items is a classical example of a 16<sup>th</sup> century four flanges mace. It was discovered outside the sacred space in the southern part of the Turkish settlement. This type of flange mace had between four, six, even up to twelve flanges positioned vertically<sup>12</sup>. The earlier types had the iron head inserted in a wooden haft. In the case of later items, the haft was also made of metal. The ceremonial maces developed from this type of weapon and were used from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Similar items were uncovered in Timișoara<sup>13</sup>.

The other mace head was discovered inside the sacred space, more precisely in the sacristy of the church. It is a club mace with 4 main knobs<sup>14</sup> in the middle register and other smaller ones placed on the lower and upper registers. It is mould-made, similar to the ones discovered not very far, in Frumușeni, on the Mureș valley. This last mace dates back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, of a type widely spread all over Eastern Europe. Bronze types are dated earlier, in the 13<sup>th</sup> or the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Other two items pertaining to the weapon category are the two spear heads excavated in different parts of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century settlement, one of them in the church and the other one outside one of the houses. The first one has a circular socket placed in a circular haft. The form appears to be one of a leaf, but due to its deterioration one cannot state this firmly.

The other spear, discovered outside the sacred space is a typical “spear or lance with a hook” type which first appeared in Central Europe sometime in the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It has a similar form to the other one and the hook placed in the lower part, closer to the socket than the edge. The measurements confirm the idea that such types of weapons were used by foot soldiers or members of the light cavalry. It was used even later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The other major category of military objects consists of harness elements. These comprise two rowel spurs, a stirrup and several harness distributors.

The rowel spurs are both preserved fragmentarily. The first preserves the rowel and the stick but not the arms for fixing the feet. The size of the kept part allows us to date to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The other is more complete, only lacking the rowel. Similar items were discovered during excavations conducted in the fortress of Bajcsa<sup>15</sup>. Based on the archaeological context, Hungarian archaeologists also date such items within the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Comparative material, consisting of depictions of Balkan soldiers from the Ottoman army stationed in Hungary, corroborates the dating of these items.

The pear-shaped stirrup with the seating part slightly curved to the inside indicates that such items were used by the light cavalry, by soldiers who wore softer footwear.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolle McBride, 1983, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Several colleagues of mine argued that this is actually a Hungarian saber with the same characteristics. The bibliography referring to such items of the 16<sup>th</sup> century can give many reasons for such motivation, still the existence of a Turkish garrison in that place along with the other military items discovered there support the argument that this might be an actual oriental weapon.

<sup>12</sup> Kálmar 1971, 174.

<sup>13</sup> Drașovean *et al.* 2007, 149–150.

<sup>14</sup> Kovács 1971, 168.

<sup>15</sup> Kovacs 2002, 147.



## Conclusions

The analysis of military objects discovered in Tauț supports their division in two categories, one from an earlier period, left on site by chance and the other from the military environment of the Turkish garrison. The presence of the latter corroborates the written evidence about the network of fortified garrison established by the Turks on the border with the Transylvanian territories.

**Catalogue of weapons and harness items.** The catalogue includes all military items discovered in Tauț during the seven archaeological campaigns conducted here between 2002 and 2009. The items are arranged and described according to their functionality, taking into consideration the following criteria: 1. Name; 2. Place of discovery, year and archaeological context; 3. Size: **L** length, **l** width, **h** height, **gr.** thickness, **g** weight, **Ø** diameter; 4. Material and manufacturing techniques; 5. Description; 6. Chronology; 7. Storing place / inventory no; 8. Illustration/plate/no.

## Weaponry

- Saber;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, discovered in the NE corner of the sacristy built during the gothic phase of the church;  $L = 94.5$  cm,  $L_{\text{grip}} = 8.5$  cm,  $l_{\text{blade}} = 3.4$  cm,  $l_{\text{edge}} = 4$  cm,  $gr. = 0.5$  cm; Iron, forging; Curved blade, Hussar saber with one cutting edge. Larger towards the edge. The edge is missing, along with the grip and the cross – guard. The cross-guard is straight and formed a cross with two endings, on the blade and on the grip. Due to its precarious state of preservation, it could not be restored. From the grip, three channels can be seen on the blade. Part of the iron rivet was also preserved; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; Complexul Muzeal Arad (henceforth C. M. A.), Inv. No. 17449; Plate 4.
- Mace;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, S34, –1.50 m;  $L_{\text{preserved}} = 27.5$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{sleeve}} = 1.9$  cm,  $L_{\text{blade}} = 15$  cm,  $l_{\text{blade}} = 5.5$  cm; Iron, forging, welding; Partially preserved mace with four flanges. The iron sleeve was destroyed to a certain degree and from the four original flanges just one was preserved. The bronze flanges were initially vertically welded. The top of the mace ends with a spherical bulge; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17450; Plate 5. 1.
- Fragment of mace head;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2006, S26, ▼ 1–2, –1.60 m;  $L = 8.5$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{socket}} = 2.3$  cm; Alloy?; Partially preserved mace head with three from the four big knobs and other eight smaller knobs placed in two registers above and subjacent the main register. Only four of them were preserved, two with marks indicating prolonged use; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17451; Plate 5/2.
- Lance head;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, S30, –0.70 m;  $L = 29.3$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{socket}} = 3.1$  cm; Iron, forging; Spear head probably of the leaf-shaped type, with a hook and a circular socket; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17452; Plate 6/1.
- Spear head;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, S31, ▼ 2, –1.13 m;  $L_{\text{total}} = 18.5$  cm,  $L_{\text{socket}} = 7$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{socket}} = 2.1$  cm; Iron, forging; Spear head fragment. It has a long spike of a square profile and another smaller one. It has a conically shaped socket; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17453; Plate 6/2.
- Arrow head;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2003;  $L_t = 4.2$  cm,  $L_{\text{socket}} = 1.2$  cm,  $l_{\text{preserved}} = 1.2$  cm,  $l_{\text{estimated}} = 1.7$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{socket}} = 0.6$  cm; Iron, forging; Arrow head that has a *rhomboidal* shape ending in a conically shaped socket; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17454; Plate 6/3.
- Arrow head;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2002, S2, ▼ 2, –1 m;  $L = 4.3$  cm,  $L_{\text{socket}} = 2.2$  cm,  $l = 2.3$  cm,  $gr = 0.1$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{socket}} = 0.7$  cm; Iron, forging; Arrow head with two extensions and a flattened blade. It has a conically shaped socket; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 16.933; Plate 6/4.

## Harness items

- Stirrup;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2006, S26, m 4, –1.60 m;  $h = 15.2$  cm,  $l_{\text{maximum}} = 14.6$  cm,  $l = 3.5$  cm; Iron, forging; The pear-shaped stirrup has the seating part slightly curved to the inside; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17456; Plate 7/2.
- Spur;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, S28, m 3, –0.60 m;  $L_{\text{total}} = 24$  cm,  $L_{\text{bar}} = 15.3$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{estimated}} = 10.5$  cm,  $\text{Ø}_{\text{rowel}} = 8.8$  cm; Iron, forging; Rowel spur with straight arms continued with a prolongation ending in a rowel; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17457; Plate 7/3.

- 10. Rowel spur;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, S28, ▼3, -0.40 -0, 50 m;  $L_{total} = 16, 4$  cm,  $L_{bar} = 10, 4$  cm,  $\varnothing = 8, 5$  cm,  $l_{arms} = 1, 9$  cm,  $gr_{arms} = 0, 15$  cm; Iron, forging; Rowel spur, partially preserved without the rowel. It has straight arms and a prolongation ending in a rowel which is missing; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17458; Plate 7/4.
- 11. Bit** – partially preserved; Tauț *La Cetate*, 2003, S11, -1.15 m; L= 8.8 cm; Iron, forging; The preserved fragment is the bar intended to fix the horse bridle. It has a conical shape, hollow on the inside; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17459; Plate 7/1.
- 12. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, S28, ▼2, -1 m; L= 8.9 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.8 \times 0.6$  cm; Iron forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a semicircular loop; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17460; Plate 8/1.
- 13. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, S31, ▼5, -0.43 m; L= 8.6 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.7 \times 0.5$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a semicircular loop for fitting; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17461; Plate 8/2.
- 14. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2003, S15, ▼1, -1.90 m; L= 9 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.8 \times 0.6$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a semicircular loop for fitting; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17462; Plate 8, 3.
- 15. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2003, S4, -0.95-1 m; L= 6.8 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.6 \times 0.35$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a semicircular loop for fitting; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17463; Plate 8/4.
- 16. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2007, -0.70 m; L= 10.1 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.6 \times 0.6$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a loop closed at a 90° angle; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17464; Plate 8, 5.
- 17. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2003, ▼5-6, -0.65 m; L= 9.6 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.7 \times 0.4$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a loop closed at a 90° angle. It was made like this in order to fit; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17465; Plate 8/6.
- 18. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, m 3, -1 m; L= 8.5 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.5 \times 0.5$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a loop closed at a 90° angle. It was made like this in order to fit; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17466; Plate 8/7.
- 19. Harness distributor;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, m 3, -1 m; L= 7.5 cm,  $gr_{bar} = 0.3 \times 0.3$  cm; Iron, forging; Harness distributor made of a square profile bar, partially preserved. It has a loop closed at a 90° angle. It was made like this in order to fit. The tube to which a tag was fixed was preserved too; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17467; Plate 8/8.

## Tools

- 20. Bullet die;** Tauț *La Cetate*, 2009, S31, 1, -0.60 m;  $L_{total} = 11$  cm,  $L_{arms} = 7$  cm,  $\varnothing_c = 1.6$  cm,  $l = 1.2$  cm; Iron; Bullet die that has two curved arms. These are crossing in a mid point and end up with a cavity (an empty space) shaped like the bullet without the back end; Second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; C. M. A., Inv. No. 17455; Plate 6/5.

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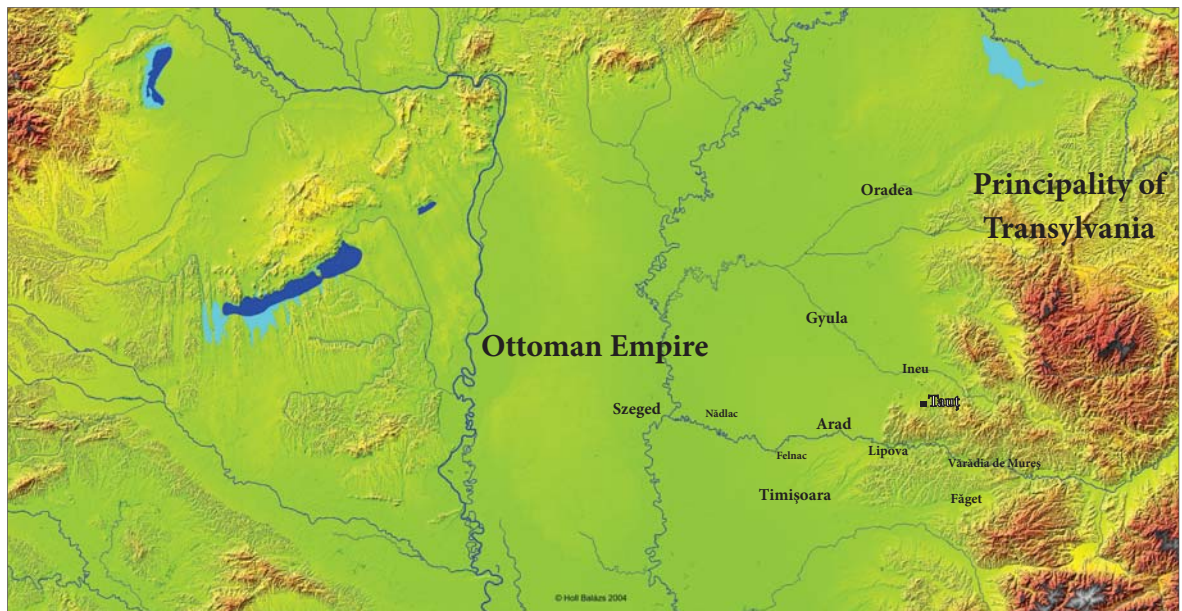
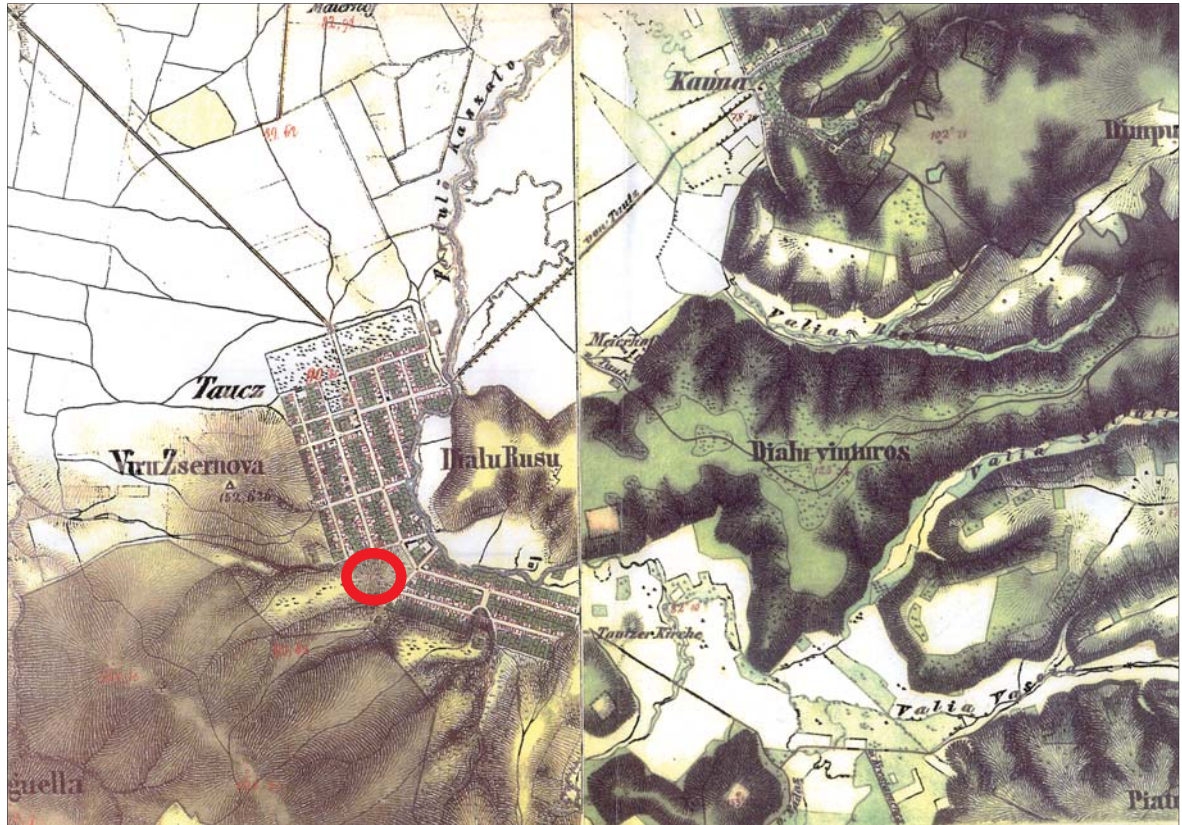


Plate 1. 1. Localization of Tauț *The fortress* on a Habsburg military map from the 19th century. 2. Tauț in the political context of the 16th century.





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Plate 2. 1. Aerial view of *The Fortress* from North; 2. Aerial view of *The Fortress* from west.

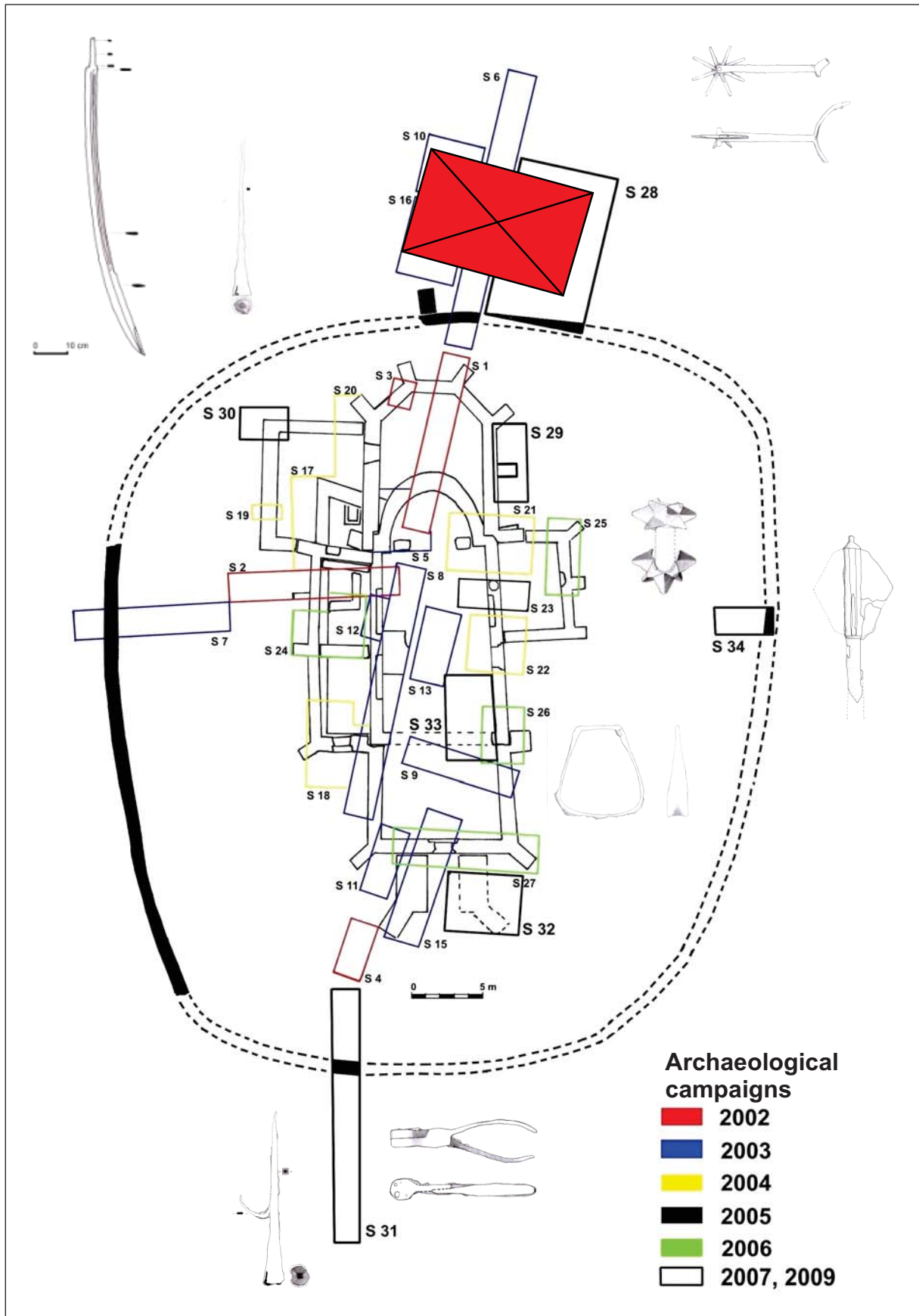


Plate 3. Presentation of the archaeological campaigns conducted in Taut along with the disposal of the discoveries of the weaponry items.

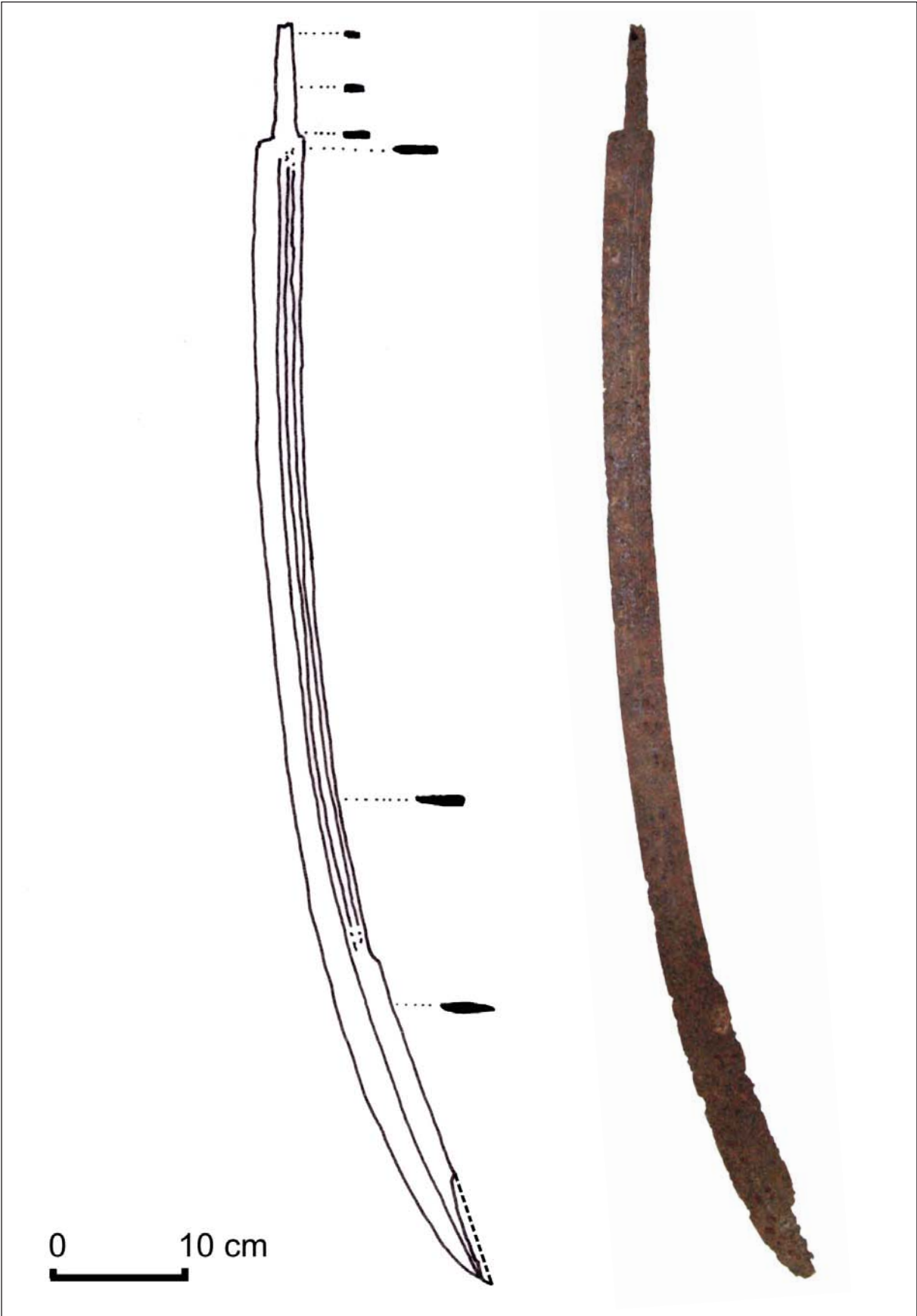


Plate 4. Weaponry item: sabre.



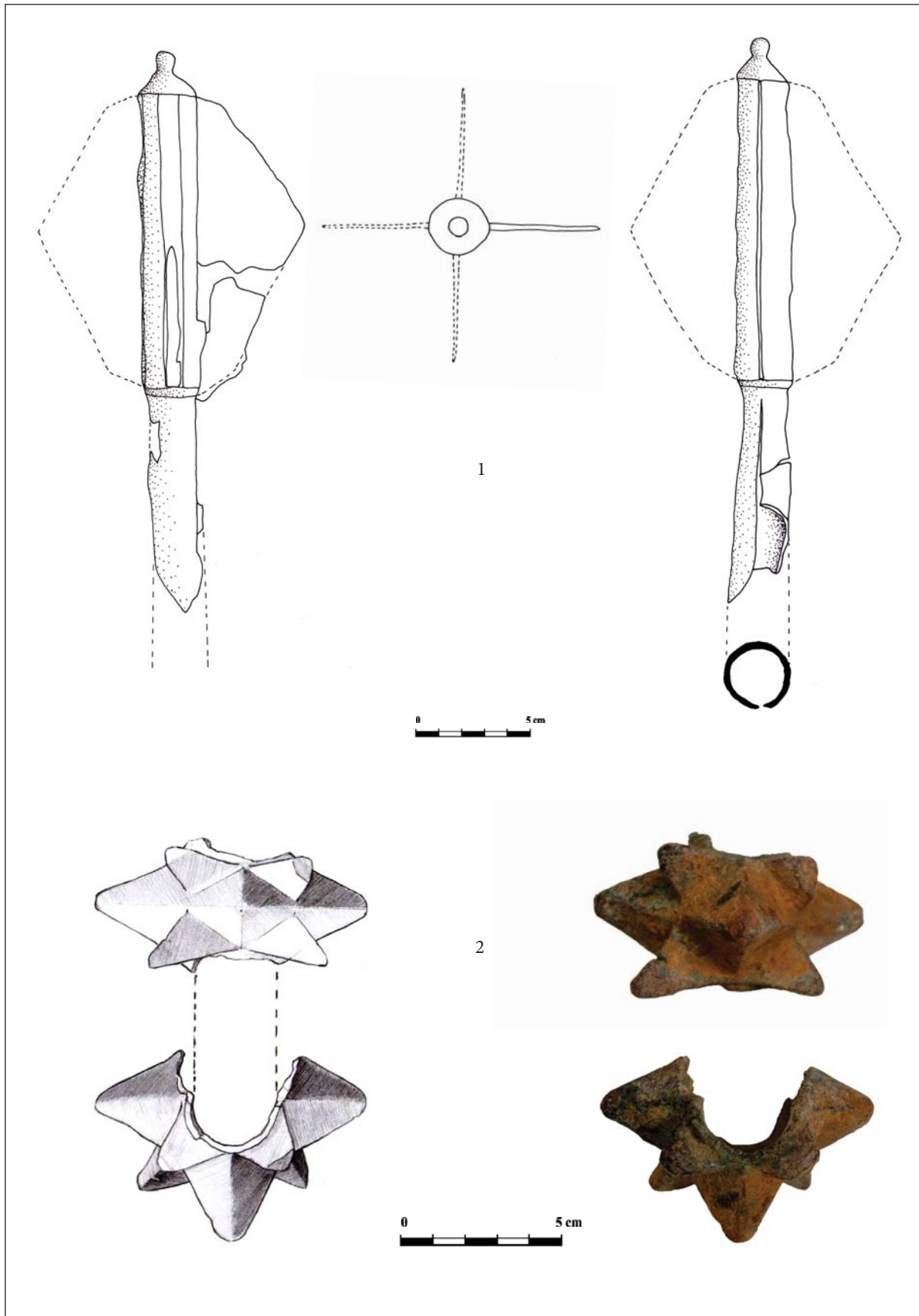


Plate 5. Weaponry items: 1. Mace- fragment; 2. Mace head – fragment.



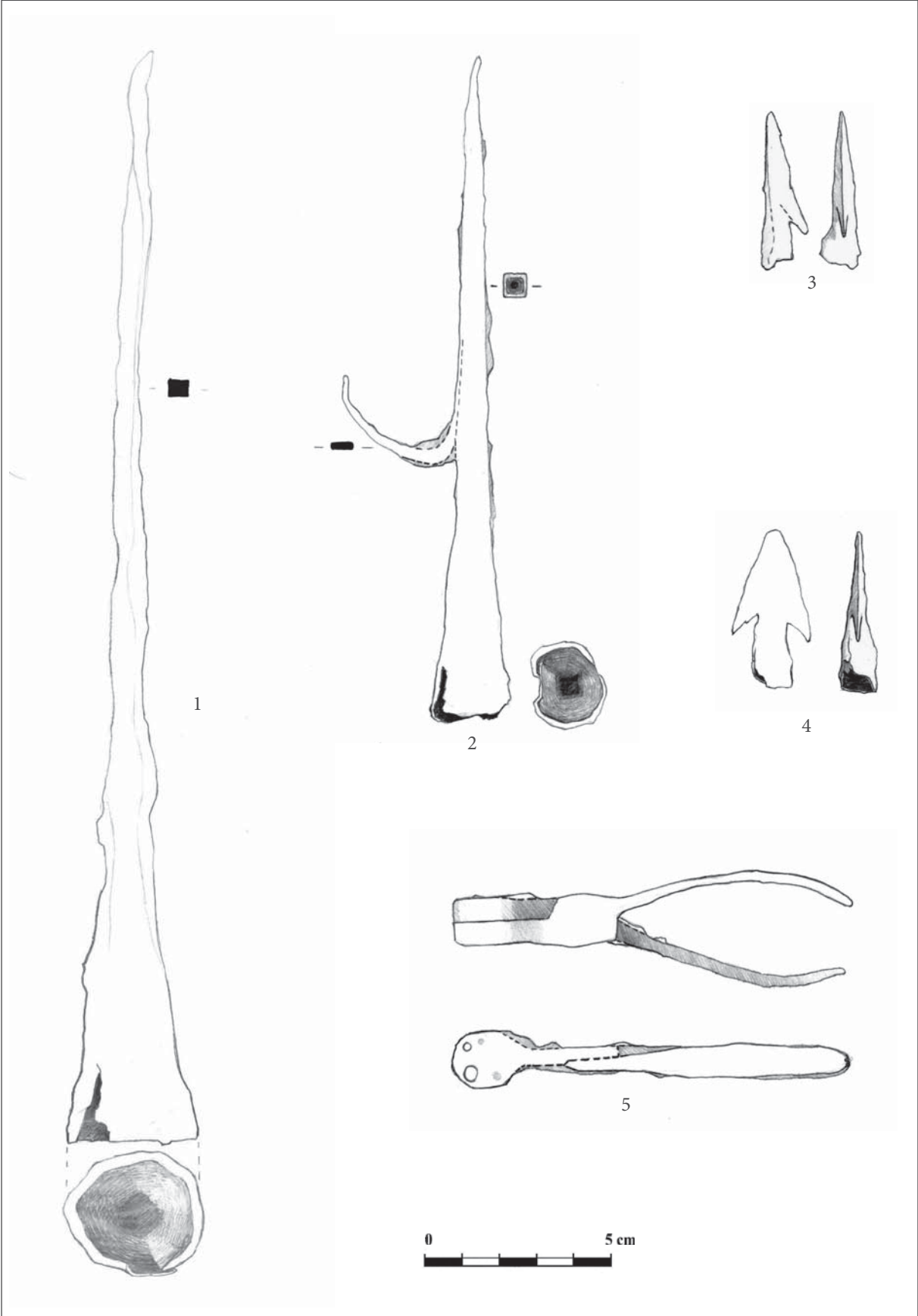


Plate 6. Weaponry and tools: 1. Lance; 2. Spearhead; 3. Arrow head; 4. Arrow head; 5. Bullet die.

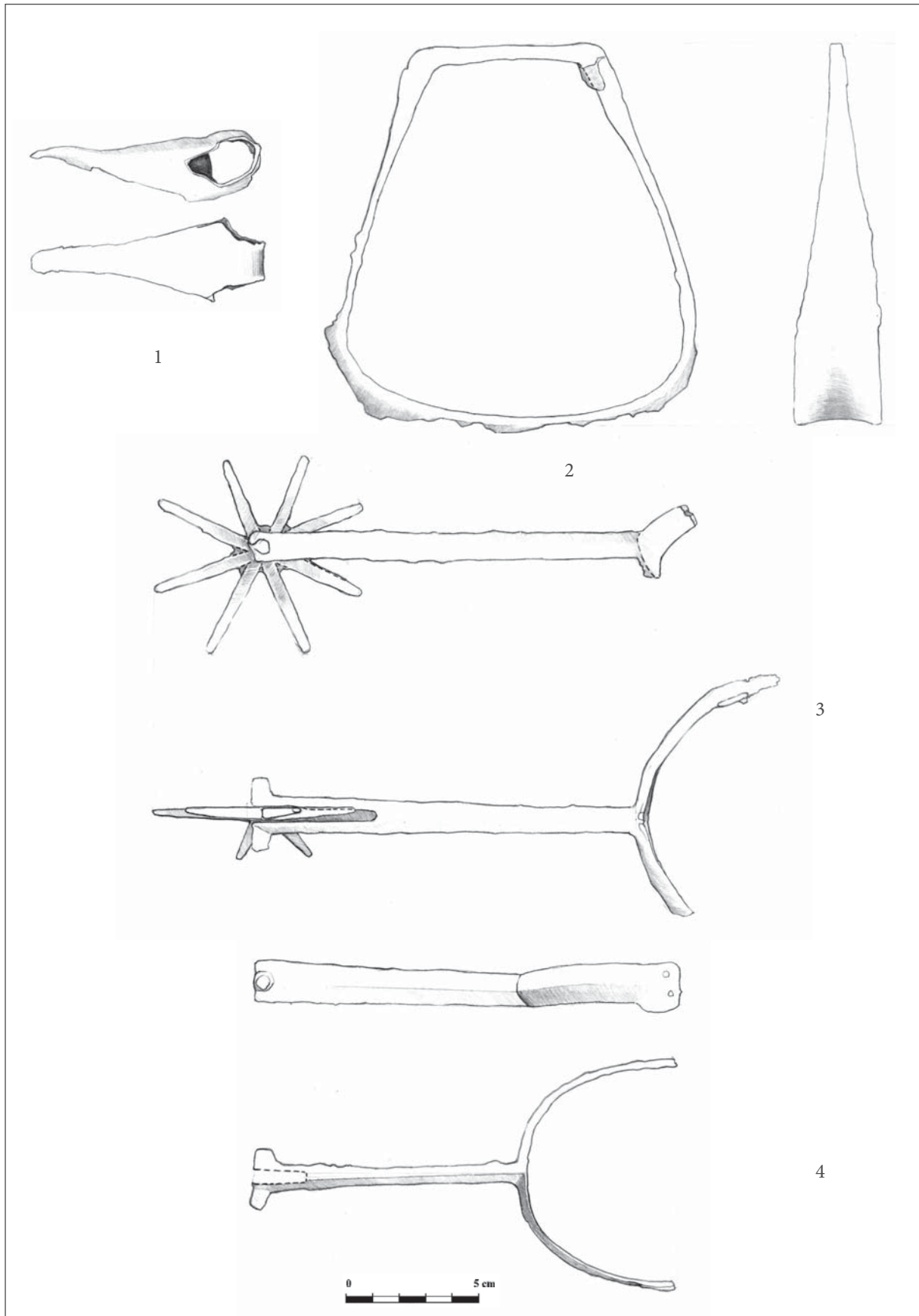


Plate 7. Harness items: 1. Bit - fragment; 2. Stirrup; 3. Rowel spur; 4. Rowel spur.

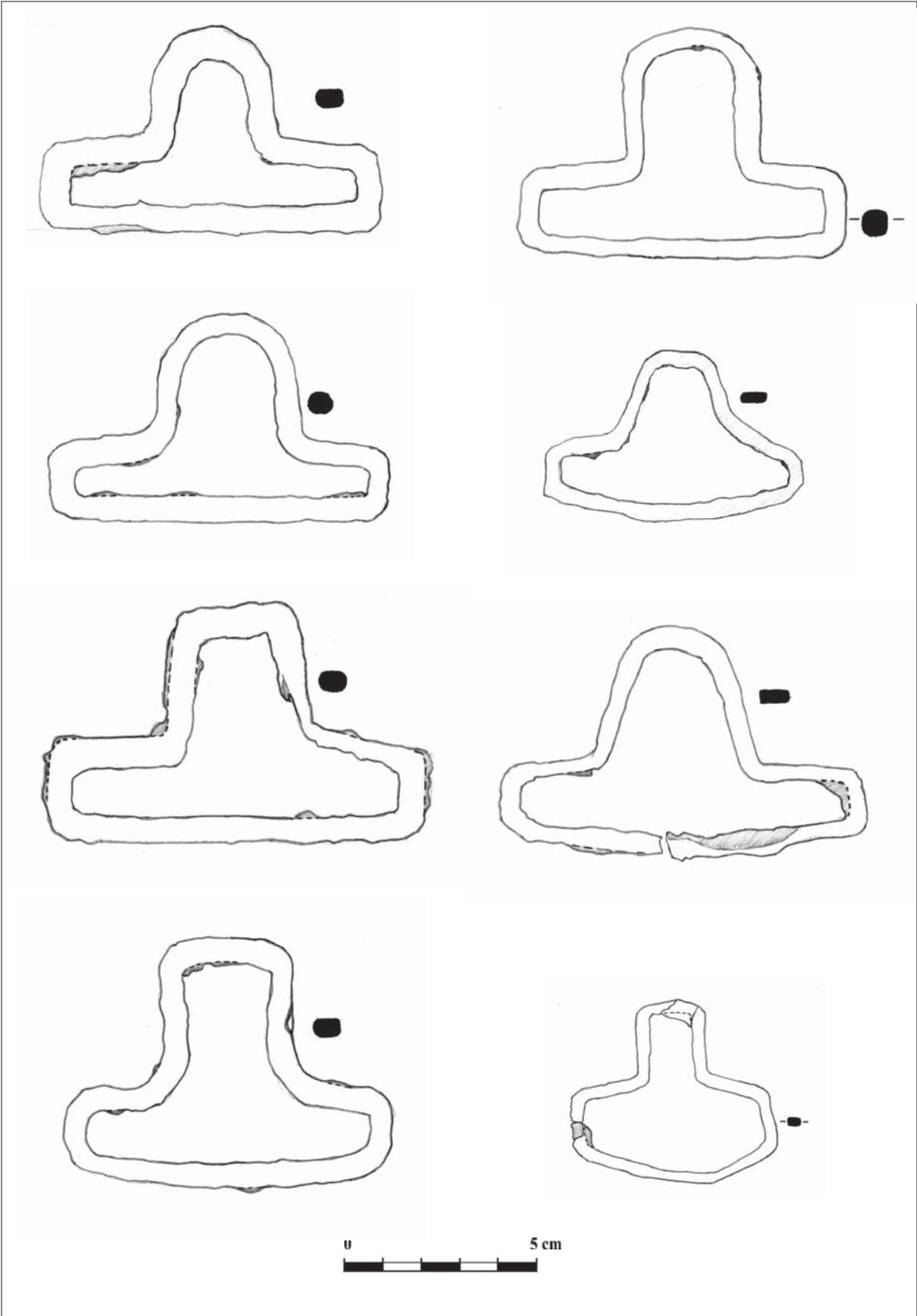


Plate 8. Harness: 1- 8. Harness distributors.





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Plate 9. General views of the excavations: 1. Dwelling on the eastern part of the medieval fortification;  
2. Aspects of excavations on the Western part of the medieval fortification.