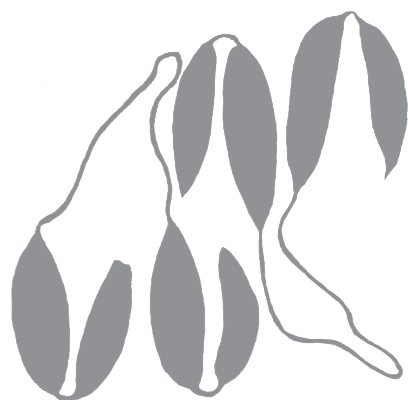


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Layout: Francisc Baja, Florin Mărginean, Victor Sava

ISSN 2392-8786



EDITURA MEGA | www.edituramega.ro
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The Kaolin Clay Medieval Pottery of *Măgura Hill* Moigrad (Sălaj County). A Few Notes on Finds of the Type from Transylvania and the Banat*

Dan Băcuet-Crișan, Horea Pop, Timea Keresztes

Abstract: The archaeological site that yielded the pottery discussed here lies on a volcanic origin hill (*Măgura Hill*) located within the boundaries of the place at Moigrad. Among discovered medieval potshards also count a few exemplars of kaolin clay fabric. Regrettably, the pottery dealt with here is not available in large quantities, while intact specimens are missing. Since only vessel fragments (of various sizes) were discovered, identification of pottery forms was difficult in this case rather. As previously mentioned no intact vessels are available, while the formal features of the discovered pottery fragments (mouth diameter, mouth/rim and wall mouldings, base diameters) seem to evidence the following pottery forms: pots, jars and cups.

Keywords: kaolin clay medieval pottery; fabric; temper; pottery forms; pot; jars; cup.

a. Site location and history of research

The archaeological site where the pottery discussed here was identified lies on a volcanic origin hilltop (Fig. 1) (*Măgura Hill*) situated within the boundary of the place at Moigrad (Fig. 2 and Pl. 1/A). This archaeological site is known in the academic literature owing to the fortified Dacian settlement discovered on the upper plateau of the volcanic cone¹ (Pl. 1/B).

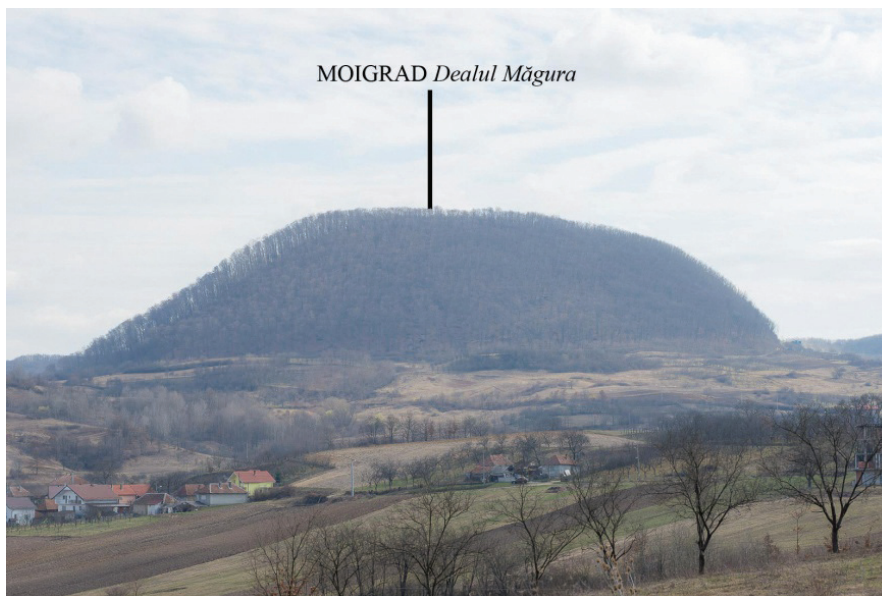


Fig. 1. *Măgura Hill*. Moigrad

In what the medieval period is concerned, on the *Măgura Hill* upper plateau were identified features and artefacts datable starting with the 11th century².

* English translation: Gabriela Safta.

¹ Matei, Pop 2001, 253.

² Matei, Pop 1995, 55; Băcuet-Crișan, Ciorba 2004, 358; Csók 2010, 644; Băcuet-Crișan 2015, 56; Băcuet-Crișan 2020, 66.



Fig. 2. The place of Moigrad on the first Austrian military survey. Location of the *Măgura Hill* Moigrad site (marked with X).

b. Find contexts

Although respective site was archaeologically investigated over the course of several excavation campaigns, very few medieval date artefacts have been published insofar (early medieval pottery in 2004³, medieval pottery and metal artefacts in 2016⁴).

Among discovered medieval ware fragments (mostly oxidised or reduced) also count a few white (kaolin clay) exemplars. With one exception only (a fast wheel-thrown jar with lobate mouth⁵), the kaolin clay pottery in this site has never been discussed before.

The majority of the kaolin clay vessel fragments were identified in archaeological strata (S. 3/1984, S. 2/1989, trenches 3 and 4/1989, S. 1/1991, trenches 2 and 3/1993, S. 1/1993, trench 3/1993, S. 1/1998, trench 9/2001), with only a few fragments originating from archaeological features: medieval oven/1989, medieval house L. 5/2002.

c. Formal and technological specificities

Unfortunately, the pottery analysed here was discovered in small quantities, while intact exemplars are missing, vessel fragments (of various sizes) making identification of pottery forms in this particular case rather difficult.

With respect to the modelling technique, firing (colour), fabric composition and wall thicknesses, we note a series of interesting aspects/variations:

- The internal surface of the discovered pottery fragments shows that vessels were modelled on the slow or fast – turning wheel.
- In certain cases, the used fabric is very fine, while the composition of other exemplars contains pebbles, hence the coarse appearance upon touch.
- In some vessels, a certain “crudeness” may be noted (an “archaic” manner) in walls’ “design”. On the internal surface of some vessel walls are present “attached/glued” kaolin pieces used to “adjust” the vessels prior firing, thus leaving the impression of a piece-by-piece modelling of the constituent parts (base separately from vessel walls) (Fig. 3/A-B and 4/C).
- In terms of vessel colours, some are white (both on the interior and the exterior), other are grayish-white on the exterior and white on the interior, while the remaining are yellowish-white/orange on the interior and white on the exterior.

³ Pottery datable to the 11th century (Băcuet-Crişan, Ciorba 2004, 358, Pl. IV/1).

⁴ Culic 2016, 35.

⁵ Culic 2016, 35, Fig. 13; Băcuet-Crişan 2020, 68.

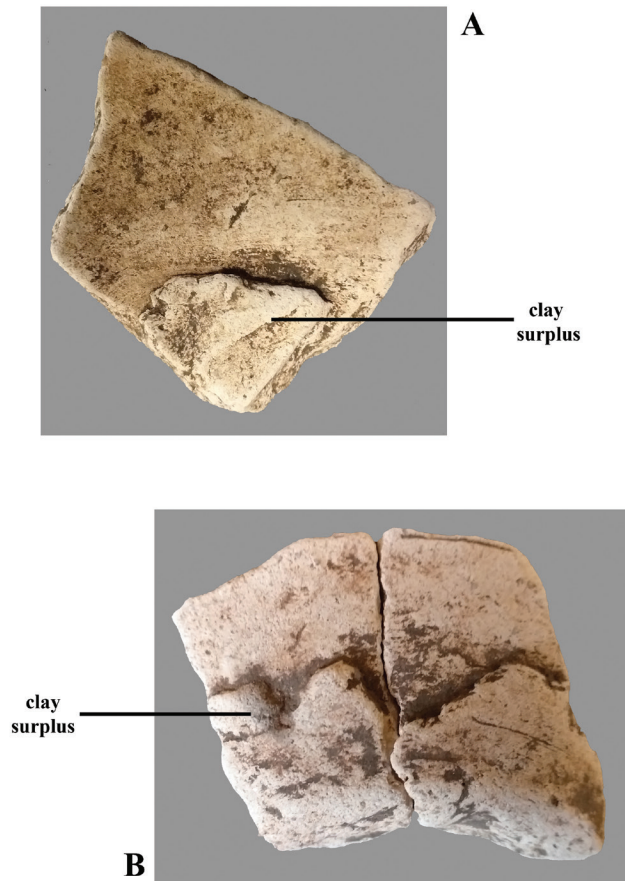


Fig. 3. *Măgura Hill Moigrad*. Aspects regarding the “crude”/ “archaic” modelling of kaolin clay vessels.

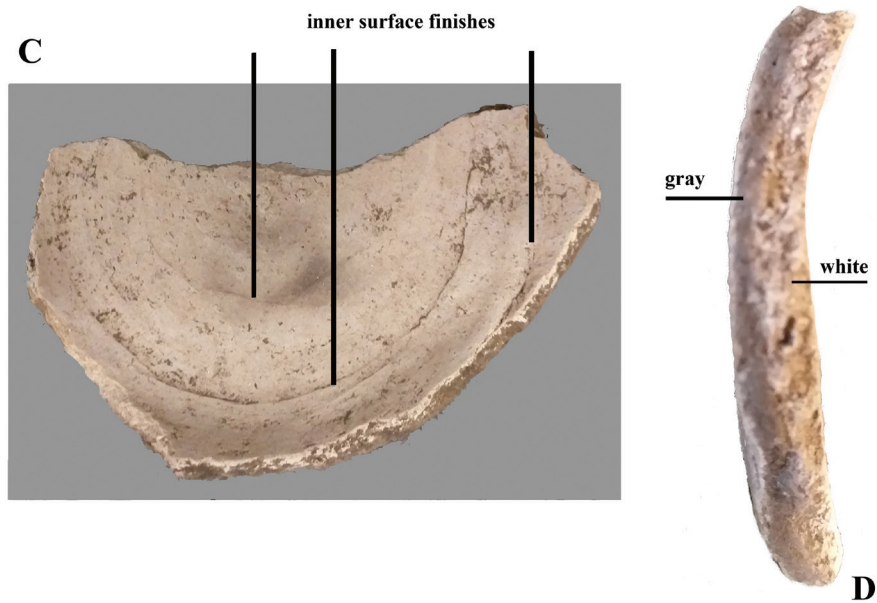


Fig. 4. *Măgura Hill Moigrad*. Aspects regarding the finishing and firing of kaolin clay vessels.

- Wall thicknesses vary from one pottery form to another, such thickness variations being also noticeable in vessels that belong to the same pottery form.
- Some vessels exhibit deformation occurred during modelling (or kiln firing).
- Some pottery fragments (seen in cross-section) evidence that firing was homogenous (white colour of the fabric core) or uneven (the fabric colour “layering”: gray on the exterior, white on the interior) (Fig. 4/D).

As previously specified, no intact vessels could be identified, while the formal specificities of the discovered pottery fragments (mouth diameter, mouth/rim and wall mouldings, base diameters) seem to be indicative of the following pottery forms: pot, jar and cup.

Pot (Pl. 2/1, 3; Pl. 3; Pl. 4; Pl. 5/5). The discovered fragments originate from several slow or fast wheel-thrown pots. They colour is white or grayish-white (with black stains in the mouth, walls and base areas), of fine or coarse fabric upon touch (the fabric contains pebbles). The decoration is incised and consists of parallelly set straight horizontal lines (Pl. 3/1–2). In a single case, traces of red paint drops are visible on a pot neck (Pl. 4/1).

Jar (Pl. 2/2; Pl. 5/1–4; Pl. 6/1–1a). The discovered fragments seem to originate from at least three vessels of the sort. From a first jar survived only the handle (Pl. 2/2), while from a second, the wall fragments and its handle (Pl. 5/1–4). Both jars were modelled on the fast-turning wheel of fine fabric, their colour being yellowish-white. The second jar is decorated by reddish paint covering both the body (straight wide horizontal and wavy lines) and the handle (wavy, wide and short lines). In addition, on the jar shoulder were applied two horizontal stripes/belts (parallel) decorated with lines of thick and fine notches (Pl. 5/2). Most part of the third jar survived (lobate mouth, walls, base), thus making its graphical reconstruction possible (Pl. 6/1a). This jar was modelled on the fast – turning wheel of fine white fabric. It is decorated by painting (reddish paint) with straight lines that form a network/net decoration type (Pl. 6).

Cup/beaker (Pl. 2/4). This form is present in a single pottery fragment (base fragment). The cup/beaker was modelled on the fast – turning wheel, of white fine fabric.

d. The finds of Măgura Hill Moigrad and certain aspects related to the discussion of kaolin clay pottery in the Romanian scientific literature

Finds of the sort identified in Transylvania were included in the class of imported articles, without yet discounting the possibility of operating local production centres⁶. The repertory of kaolin clay pottery forms discovered in Transylvania and the Banat (in various pottery lots) includes for instance the jar, bowl, cup/beaker (in the case of the pottery from the Huniade Castle in Timișoara)⁷, the ovoid jar and beaker (in the Oradea fortress)⁸, the cup/beaker and jug (in the pottery lot discovered at the Franciscan monastery of Târgu Mureș)⁹. Regarding the Sălaj area, the archaeological excavations conducted in various medieval sites (especially in the Sylvania Basin) resulted in the identification of such pottery, some of these finds being recently discussed¹⁰.

Admittedly, the forms of kaolin fabric tableware became standard, the listing of formal parallels for the fragments discovered in the analysed site being needless, however, we shall specify certain formal parallels for two of the vessels found at Măgura Hill Moigrad:

- *Jar decorated by painting with network/net set lines* (Pl. 6). A jar with similar decoration was discovered at Timișoara street E. Ungureanu, no. 2¹¹ as well, chronologically framed to the 16th–17th century¹². Similar decoration (network/net) was also identified on certain kaolin clay vessels discovered at Buda (the 12th – 14th century)¹³. The decorated jar of Măgura Hill Moigrad was firstly published in 2016 (being chronologically framed to the 14th century)¹⁴, the start date of medieval inhabitancy in this archaeological site being placed in the 11th century, while its cease sometime in the 13th – 14th century¹⁵.

- *Jar with (parallel) horizontal stripes/belts decorated with lines of thick and fine notches* (Pl. 5/1–4). A

⁶ Kopeczny 2010, 56; Drașovean *et al.* 2018, 18 (footnote 7).

⁷ Kopeczny 2010, 52–54; also, still from Timișoara (from the rescue archaeological excavations conducted on street E. Ungureanu, no. 2) come kaolin clay vessels in the following forms: jar, beaker, candlestick (?) (Drașovean *et al.* 2018, 23, 27, 40, 44).

⁸ Rusu 2002, 136.

⁹ Bencze 2010, 133.

¹⁰ Băcuet-Crișan 2020, 65–78.

¹¹ Drașovean *et al.* 2018, Pl. XXI/4.

¹² Drașovean *et al.* 2018, 43.

¹³ Szilágyi *et al.* 2010, 157, 2 Ábra.

¹⁴ Culic 2016, 35, Fig. 13.

¹⁵ Csók 2010, 644; Băcuet-Crișan 2015, 56.

jar provided on the neck with two stripes decorated with painted oblique notches is also known in the site of Muhi *Templomdomb*, which belongs to the inhabitancy stage of the first half of the 14th – early 16th century¹⁶.

In the north-western area of Romania, the single artefacts of kaolin fabric discovered in contexts datable prior 1000 are the spindle weights. Such exemplars were yielded by the archaeological investigations conducted in several early medieval settlements dated to the 7th – 9th century¹⁷. Pottery of kaolin fabric (jugs and pitchers)¹⁸ was produced by the Lower Danube as early as the late 9th century, nonetheless, never in the same numbers as the orange “classic” pottery (the majority).

The Romanian archaeology (we evidently reference here that dealing with the Middle Ages) has not yet succeeded to draw up a unitary system (standardized) of analysis, classification and cataloguing of pottery forms, which resulted in instances where the same vessel emerges under several names¹⁹. The same issue may be noted in the case of formal classifications of kaolin fabric vessels²⁰ too, reported in the Romanian literature elsewhere²¹.

In the Kingdom of Hungary, such pottery was produced under the *Árpád dynasty* as early as the 12th century²², only to be massively produced (already in local workshops) by late 13th century. At the beginning, vessel decoration was only incised, the use of painting as ornament being noted in archaeological contexts dated throughout the 13th century. Recently, it was hypothesised that the *beige-type pottery* group is the forerunner of the *yellowish-white pottery*²³.

With respect to the “birth” areas of the medieval kaolin clay pottery, in the Romanian academic literature it was specified these may be identified in sites investigated in Slovakia and Hungary²⁴, such pottery undergoing (alike other classes) transformation/evolution stages²⁵. It is known that in their early stage, vessels of kaolin fabric were decorated by incising exclusively. With respect to vessel painting, in the Romanian scientific literature it was ascertained that painted decoration is specific to the 14th – 15th century²⁶, however, recent studies have shown that use of painted elements occurred as early as the 13th century²⁷!

Regarding the modelling technique of certain vessels of kaolin fabric, the “crudeness” in the “design” of walls (noted in the case of some pottery fragments from *Măgura Hill Moigrad*) was reported in other pottery lots as well, these being believed surviving examples of archaic modelling techniques²⁸.



Fig. 5. *Măgura Hill Moigrad*. Kaolin pot base with smoking traces.

¹⁶ Laszlovszky *et al.* 1997, 150, 197/Fig. 8.

¹⁷ Băcuet-Crișan, Csók 2011, 264–265, Pl. VII-VIII; Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 75, Fig. 28.

¹⁸ Comșa 1963, p. 109, Pl. II; Talmațchi 2019, Plate 6.

¹⁹ Băcuet-Crișan, Bejinariu 2020, 69.

²⁰ An example of vessel termed differently: cup (Bencze 2010, Fig. 4a), bowl (Kopeczny 2010, Pl. 5/4, Pl. X/1).

²¹ Băcuet-Crișan 2020, 68.

²² Szilágyi *et al.* 2010, 153; Simonyi 2012, 342–343.

²³ Complete discussion on this pottery class (emergence, development, diffusion, precursors) in Simonyi 2012, 343.

²⁴ Rusu 2002, 137.

²⁵ Rusu 2002, 136–137.

²⁶ Rusu 2002, 137.

²⁷ Simonyi 2012, 343.

²⁸ Holl 1956, 189, 7–9 Kép; Drașovean *et al.* 2018, 72 (footnote 56).

Vessel colours and fabric compositions also drew attention. Similarly to the pottery lot of *Măgura Hill* Moigrad (white, greyish-white, yellowish-white/orange pottery), colour variations were noted in the case of other pottery lots too, like for instance at *Timișoara Str. E. Ungureanu, no. 2*, where very finely crushed pottery fragments (oxidised) were present in the kaolin fabric (yellowish-white vessel)²⁹, at Oradea, white and yellowish-white fabric³⁰, grayish-white fabric, yellowish-white³¹ at *Komlóska Pusztavár* in Hungary and so on. The find in various geographical locations of kaolin vessels with varied fabric colours (white, gray-white, yellowish/orange-white) suggests there existed pottery groups among these wares. It is possible that such colour variations of the fabric had been caused by the different composition of the kaolin clay, possibly even by the local aesthetic choices.

Another aspect is that of kaolin fabric vessels' use, the Romanian academic literature including this pottery class in that of tableware, namely wares that have no direct contact with fire, being used to serve food only not for cooking/boiling. In this context, in the pottery lot of *Măgura Hill* Moigrad stands out a pot base (slow wheel-thrown), which, on the external surface exhibits strong smoking traces (Fig. 5), evidence of its use directly on fire/oven. Given this example, one may agree that at least part of the kaolin clay pots had also been used in the cooking/boiling process of food, similarly to the common wares.

Obviously, the kaolin pottery lot discovered at *Măgura Hill* Moigrad is insignificant from the quantity point of view, nevertheless, by its specificities, it adds information on certain less discussed aspects. On the other hand, this pottery lot completes the image on the diffusion of white fabric (kaolin) vessels in the Silvania Basin, the finds at *Măgura Hill* Moigrad together with those published in 2020³² representing the basis for future discussions that would value all finds of the sort from north-western Romania.

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²⁹ Draşovean *et al.* 2018, 44.

³⁰ Rusu 2002, 136.

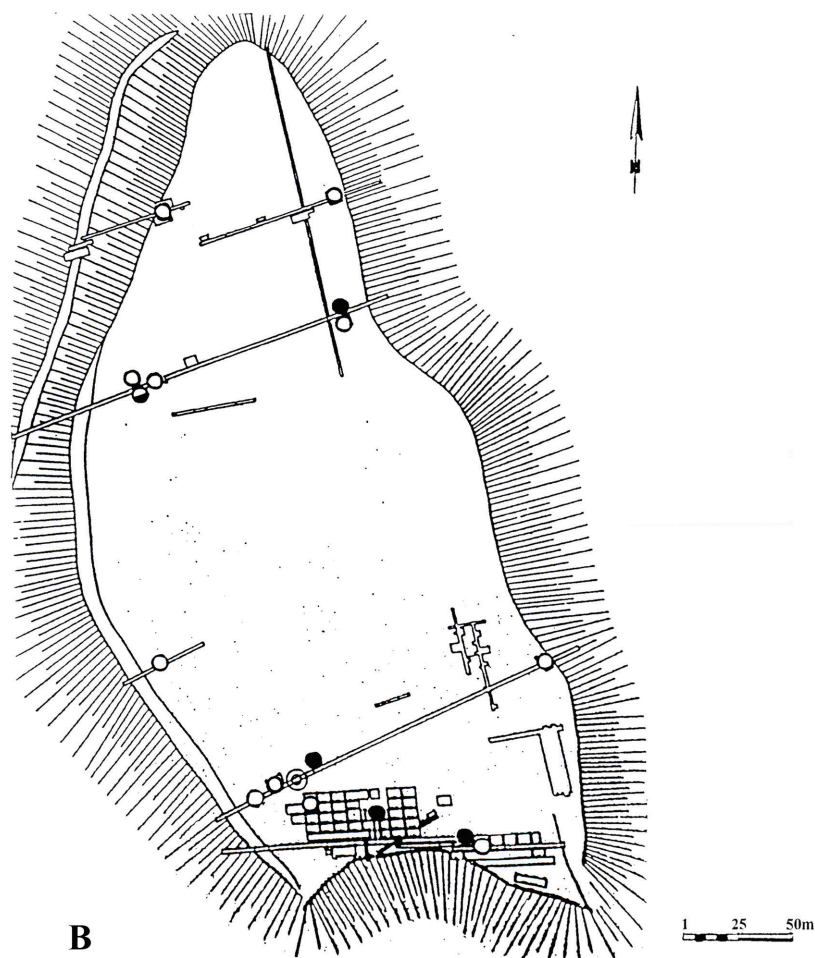
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A



B

Plate 1. Location of the site at *Măgura Hill* Moigrad (Google Earth satellite image) (A). Plan of the archaeological excavations at *Măgura Hill* Moigrad (after Matei, Pop 2001) (B).

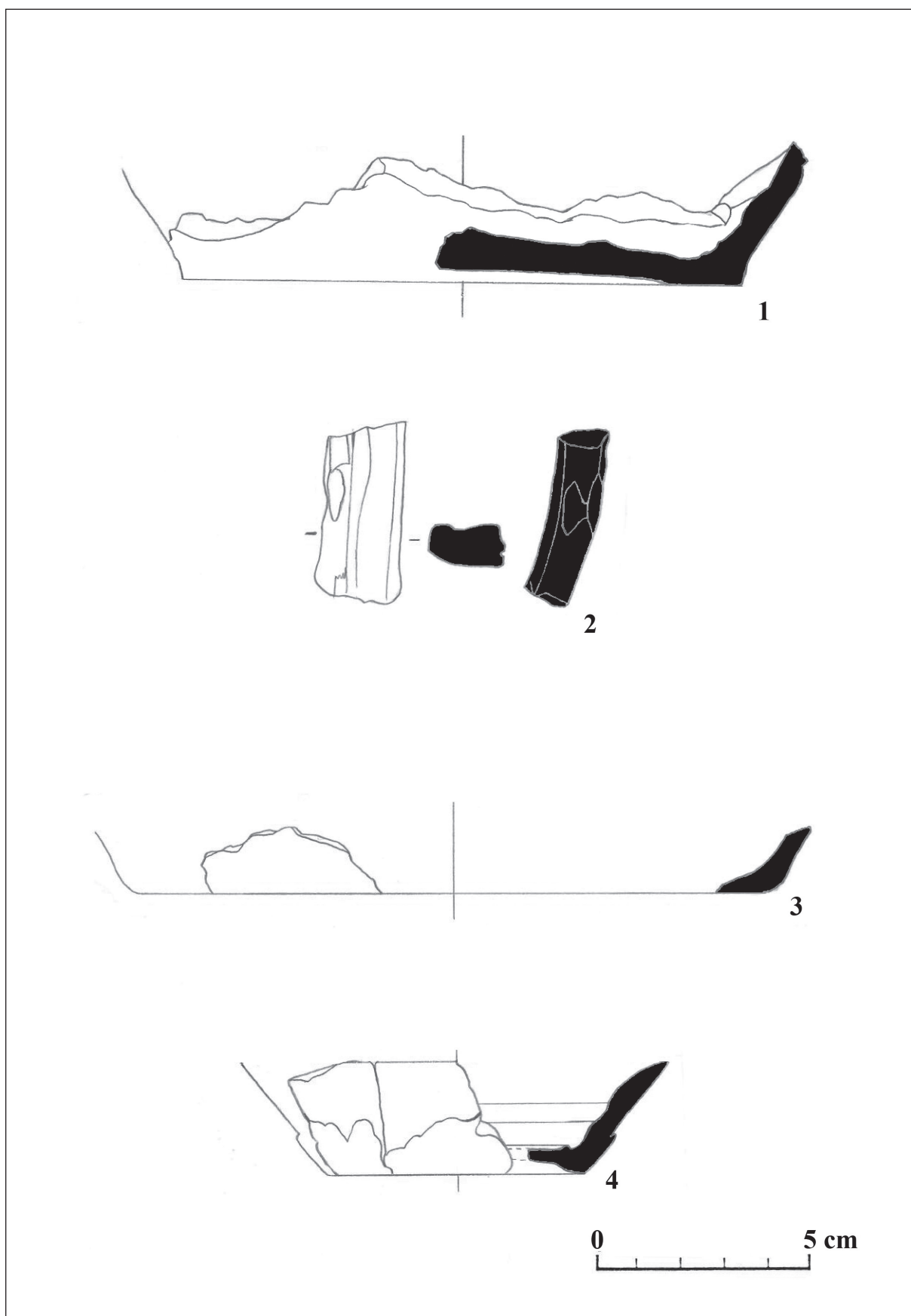


Plate 2. Măgura Hill Moigrad. Kaolin clay pottery.

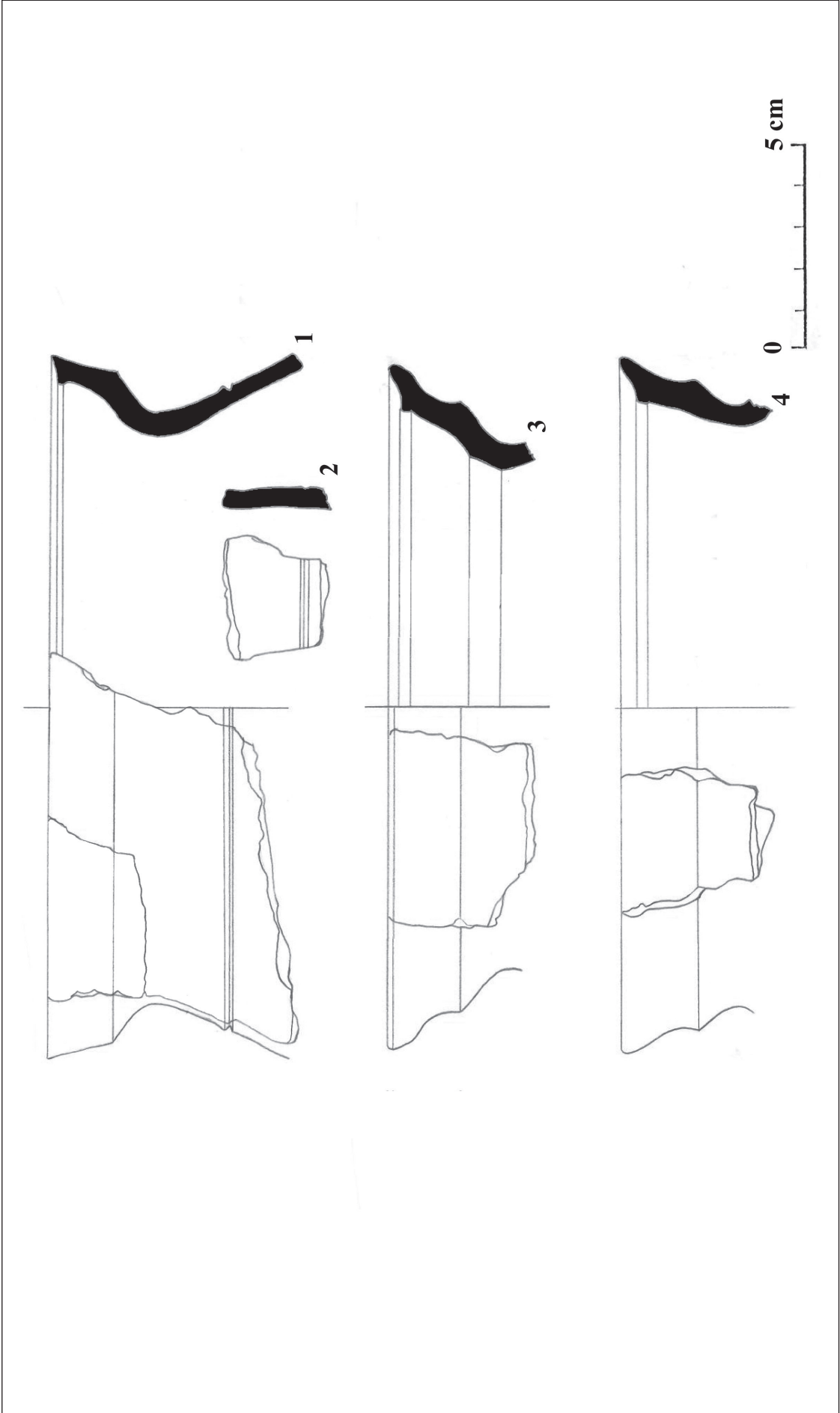


Plate 3. Măgura Hill Moigrad. Kaolin clay pottery.

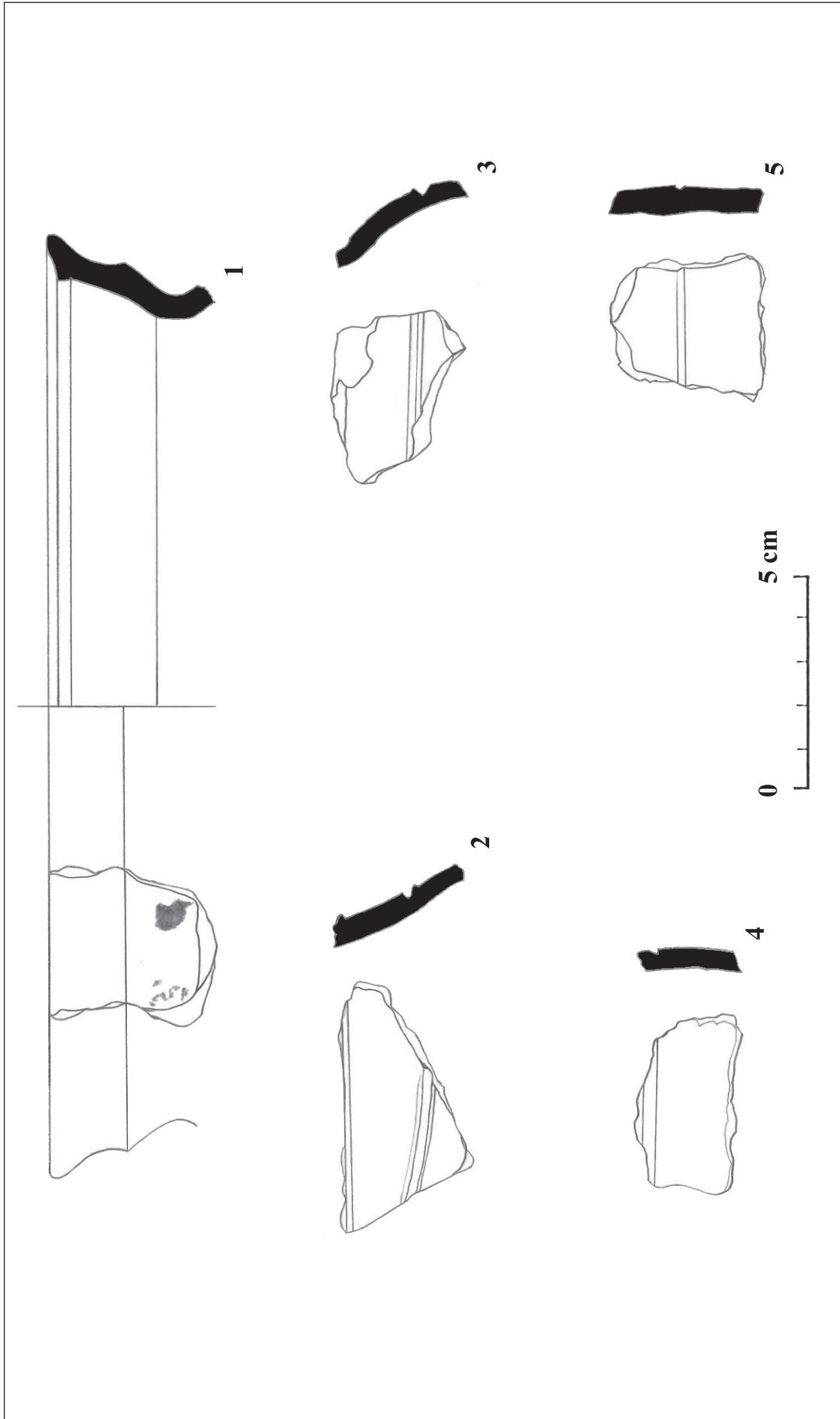


Plate 4. Mägura Hill Moigrad. Kaolin clay pottery.

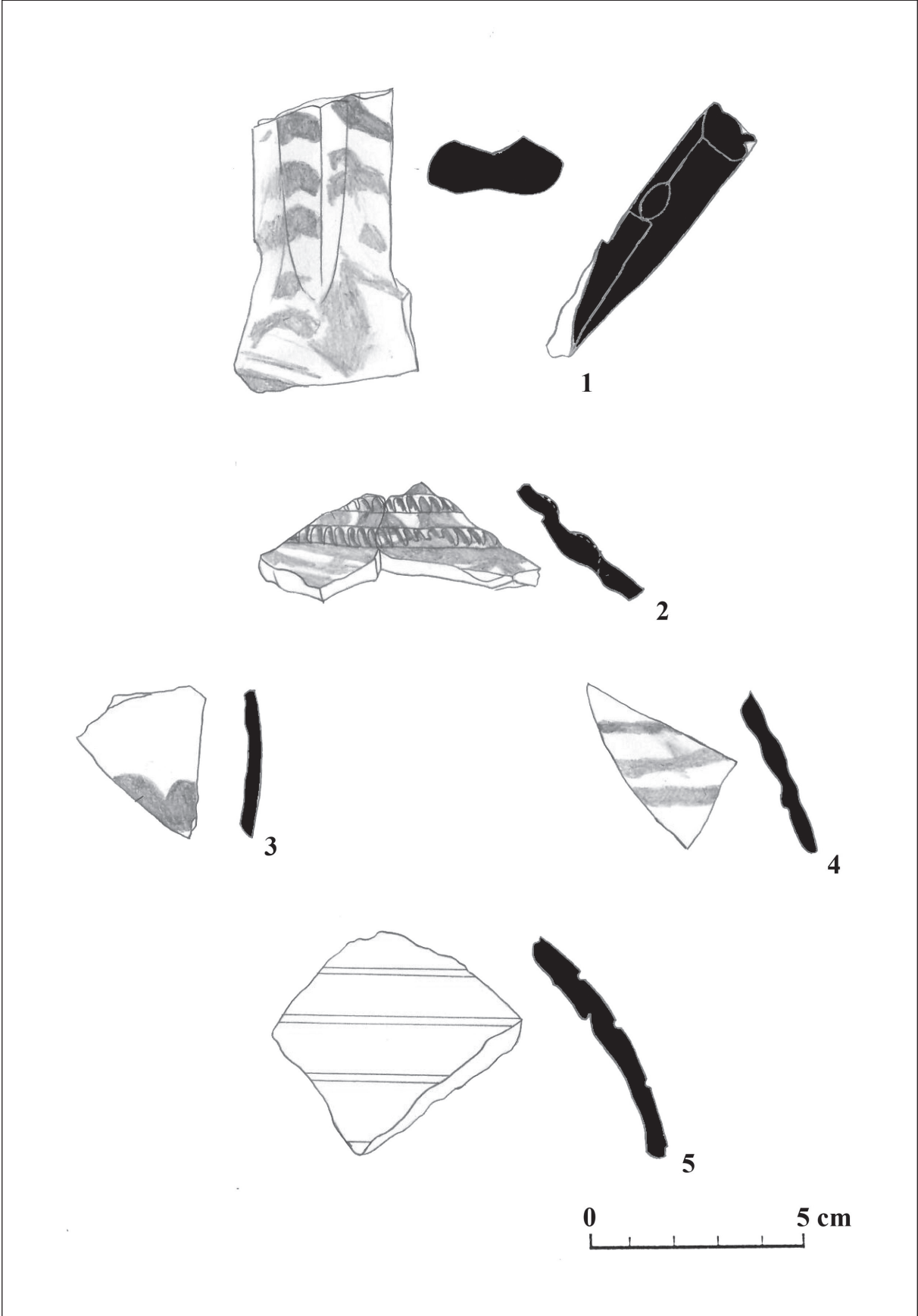


Plate 5. *Măgura Hill* Moigrad. Kaolin clay pottery.



Plate 6. *Măgura Hill Moigrad*. Fragment of a kaolin clay jar, painted with network lines (after Culic 2016) (1) and reconstruction suggestion (1a).

Abbreviations

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| AEM | Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn, Vienna. |
| AM | Arheologia Moldovei, Iași. |
| AMN | Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca. |
| AMP | Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău. |
| AMV | Acta Musei Varnaensis, Varna. |
| Angustia | Angustia. Revista Muzeului Național al Carpaților Răsăriteni, Sf. Gheorghe. |
| Anuarul MJIAP (S.N.) | Anuarul Muzeului de Istorie și Arheologie Prahova, Serie Nouă, Ploiești. |
| Antiquity | Antiquity. A review of world archaeology, Durham. |
| Archaeological Journal | Archaeological Journal. New Series. Chișinău. |
| ArchÉrt | Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest. |
| ArchPol | Archaeologia Polona, Warsaw. |
| ArchRozhledy | Archeologické Rozhledy, Praha. |
| ASM | Archaeologica Slovaca Monographiae, Bratislava. |
| BAR (Int. S.) | British Archaeological Reports (International Series), Oxford. |
| Biharea | Biharea. Culegere de studii și materiale de etnografie și artă, Oradea. |
| BMG | Bibliotheca Musei Giurgiuvensis, Giurgiu. |
| BMJT | Buletinul Muzeului Județean Teleorman. Seria Arheologie, Alexandria. |
| BMM | Bibliotheca Musei Marisiensis, Târgu Mureș. |
| Budapest Régiségei | Budapest Régiségei Régészeti és Történeti Évkönyv. Budapest. |
| CA București | Cercetări arheologice în București, București. |
| CCA | Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice, București. |
| CIL | Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Berlin. |
| CsSzME | A Csíki Székely Múzeum Évkönyve. Csíkszereda. |
| Dacia (N.S.) | Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne. Nouvelle serie. București. |
| Dolgozatok | Dolgozatok a Magyar Királyi Ferencz József Tudományegyetem Archaeológiai Intézetéből. Szeged. |
| EphNap | Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca. |
| Erdély | Erdély. Turistai, fürdőügyi és néprajzi folyóirat, Cluj-Napoca. |
| FontArchPrag | Fontes Archaeologici Pragenses, Prague. |
| Földtközl. | Földtani közlöny, Budapest. |
| HOMÉ | A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve, Miskolc. |
| ILD | C. C. Petolescu, <i>Inscripții latine din Dacia</i> , Bucharest 2005. |
| JAHA | Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology, Cluj-Napoca. |
| Jahrb. RGZM | Jahrbuch des Römisch Germanischen Zentralmuseums zu Mainz, Mainz. |
| JAMÉ | Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve, Nyiregyháza. |
| Karpatika | Karpatika, Uzhorod. |
| LMI | List of Historic Monuments, updated 2015. |
| Marisia | Marisia. Studies and Materials. Archeology. Târgu-Mureș. |
| MCA (S.N.) | Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice Serie Nouă. București |
| MemAntiq | Memoria Antiquitatis, Piatra Neamț. |
| NNA | Nordisk Numismatisk Årsskrift, Stockholm. |
| PAS | Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa, Rahden/Westf. |
| PAT | Patrimonium Archaeologicum Transylvanicum, Cluj-Napoca. |
| Paléo | PALEO – Revue d'archéologie préhistorique, Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil. |
| Pallas | Pallas. Revue d'études antiques, Toulouse. |

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|-------------------|--|
| PNAS | Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, Washington. |
| PZ | Prähistorische Zeitschrift. Berlin. |
| RAN | National Archaeological Repertory. |
| RM | Revista Muzeelor, București. |
| Sargetia | Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis, Deva. |
| SatuMareSC | Satu Mare Studii și Comunicări, Satu Mare. |
| SCIV(A) | Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie, București. |
| SCȘMI | Studii și Comunicări Științifice ale Muzeelor de Istorie, București. |
| SIB | Studii de Istorie a Banatului, Timișoara. |
| SlovArch | Slovenská archeológia, Nitra. |
| SP | Studii de Preistorie, București. |
| St.Cerc.Antropol. | Studii și Cercetări de Antropologie, București. |
| StudUBB-G | Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Seria Geologia, Cluj-Napoca. |
| ZborníkSlovNMA | Zborník Slovenského Národného Múzea. Archeológia, Bratislava. |
| ZSA | Ziridava. Studia Archaeologica, Arad. |
| ИАИ | Известия на Археологическия Институт при БАН, София. |