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STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

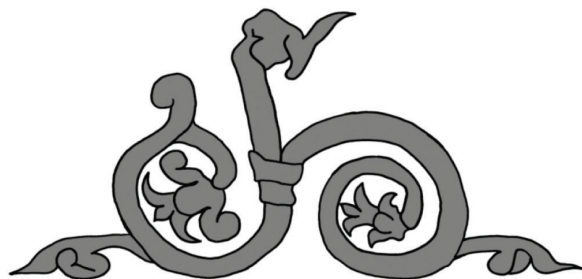
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# Horses, Dragons, and Rituals: Three Vessels from Arad County\*

Lavinia Grumeza

**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to discuss three vessels discovered in Arad County (in Pecica, Arad, and Moroda) that belong to the so-called Sarmatian Period and that are remarkable through their complex decorations, created through burnishing, incision, and perforation. The decorations are probably symbols of an imaginary and of a property system that were known starting with the first half of the first millennium BC among the several Iranians groups. Censers, vessels, and other ceramic items decorated with *tamgas*, sun symbols, or with horses and riders have analogies in the nomadic environment north and east of the Pontus. However, such items were apparently made in local intra-Carpathian workshops, according to 'Eastern tastes' and frequently deposited in female graves.

**Keywords:** decorated vessels, brand and *tamga* signs, Arad region, *Sarmatia*.

The aim of the paper is to discuss three vessels discovered in Arad County that belong to the so-called Sarmatian Period<sup>1</sup> and that are remarkable through their complex signs and decoration, created through burnishing (depictions of 'dragons'/*Drachendarstellungen* and *tamga/nishan* symbols), incision, and perforation. Starting from the analysis of these elements of decoration I attempt to find and interpret similar motifs in the neighboring Sarmatian and 'barbarian' environments.

Russian scholars have published the most exhaustive analyses of Sarmatian signs<sup>2</sup>. Recent studies are part of this new trend, i.e. the analysis of the functional aspects and less of the formal aspects of the *tamga* signs. I believe that N. Manassero's observation is relevant on the matter: *'They [the Russian scholars] have stopped speculating merely on what objects are or "might be" depicted; rather they are concerned with learning about their contexts of use and their circulation and historical implications. This must be the agenda for future studies on tamgas. Scholars may reach better answers if they focus on the functions and the evolution of tamgas in time and space, in order to track the movements of people and increase our understanding of events about which there are no written sources'*<sup>3</sup>.

## 1. The horses

**Vessel no. 1** (Arad Museum Complex, inv. no. 92); Pl. 1/1; Pl. 2.

**Place of discovery:** Pecica-*Șanțul Mare*, 1898 excavations L. Dömötör.

**Description of the vessel:** cup missing the handle, with tall and narrow neck, everted rim, rounded belly, straight bottom; the pot is modelled on the potters' wheel out of fine fabric, tempered with sand; oxidation firing; weak red in color (Munsell 10R, 5/4<sup>4</sup>); Dr = 4.2 cm, Db = 4.8 cm, Dmax = 8.3 cm, H = 9.1 cm<sup>5</sup>.

**Description of the decoration:**

**Neck:** a series of horizontal grooves (four of which are more prominent) created after firing through both burnishing and incision; another set of three vertical parallel lines also feature in the upper part.

**Belly:** two distinct ornaments have been burnished on the upper half of the vessel: 1. cross-shaped decoration

\* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

<sup>1</sup> The so-called *Sarmatenzeit/Szarmatakor* – period of time detailed for the first time by the Hungarian archaeologist M. Párducz (Párducz 1941; Párducz 1944; Párducz 1950). The chronology in question was based on the orientation of the graves, the type of the cemeteries, as well as observations concerning the rite, ritual and the funerary inventory.

<sup>2</sup> Solomonik 1959; Drachuk 1975; Yatsenko 2001; Ol'khovskii 2001; Voroniatov 2014a; Voronyatov 2014b (selective bibliography).

<sup>3</sup> Manassero 2013, 67.

<sup>4</sup> To determine the colors I used Munsell Soil-Color Charts 2009.

<sup>5</sup> I use the following abbreviations: Dr = rim diameter, Db = diameter of the bottom, Dmax = maximum diameter, H = height.

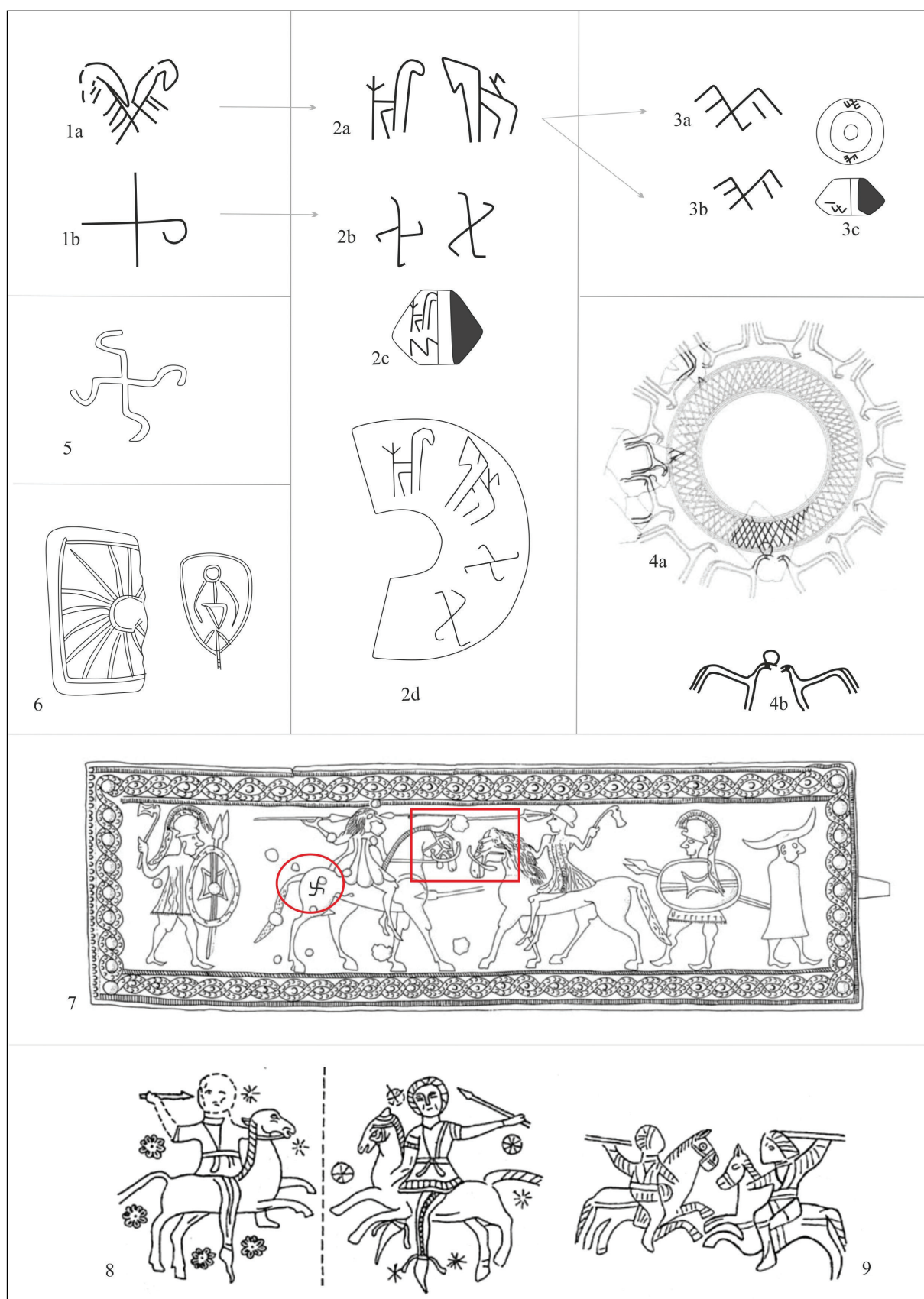


Fig. 1. 1a/b. The signs on the vessel from Pecica-Șanțul Mare; 2a-d. The signs of the spindle whorl from Csongrád-Határ út (redrawn after Vaday, Medgyesi 1993; Párducz 1944); 3a-c. The signs of the spindle whorl from Nagyszénás-Vaskapu (redrawn after Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006); 4a/b. Decoration of the vessel from Magyarszerdahely (László 2005); 5. The swastika on the vessel from Timișoara-Cioreni (redraw after Benea 1995–1996); 6. The Sun and a female silhouette on the vessel from Kovačika (redraw after Vaday 2002); 7. Belt buckle from Vače (Turk 2005); 8–9. Detail of the phalera from Krivaya Luka IX and the belt buckle from Nyzhni Sirohozy (Yatsenko 2000).

with the right side curved and bend downwards; 2. two stylized horse silhouettes (?) facing in opposite directions but merged at chest level. Numerous vertical incisions/scratches feature over the entire body of the vessel, but one cannot decide if they were created during Antiquity or accidentally during the discovery of the item.

**Bottom:** the bottom is marked through incision before firing with concentric half circles.

**Observations:** the pot is mentioned in D. Budihală's unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled *Influențe romane pe Valea Mureșului Inferior (Sec. II-IV p. Chr.)*. Cluj-Napoca 2012, p. 93, but the drawing on pl. XIII/6 is incomplete.

**Dating:** probably during the early 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD

If the first sign (Fig. 1/1a) makes one think of the silhouettes of two horses (an 'ornamental decoration'), the second sign (Fig. 1/1b) seems to be a *tamga*. The first question one must ask is thus if the cross-shaped sign (Fig. 1/1b) is a *tamga*-type sign of Oriental origin or not. If it is, what does it represent: identity, status, or a divine mark? The vessel's context of discovery cannot be included in the argumentation as the item was found during a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century archaeological excavation that was poorly documented<sup>6</sup>.

In the literature, this cross-shaped sign (Fig. 1/1b) is known as a 'frawahr symbol' or a 'two-legged Ankh'. Multiple interpretations have been put forward: from a human silhouette, to an investiture loop (*Investiturschleife*)<sup>7</sup>, but it is generally believed that this is an 'identity mark, a *tamga* in all respects'<sup>8</sup>. Still, one notes the atypical position of the presumed *tamga* on the vessel from Pecica, namely on the item's body<sup>9</sup>. Also, in most cases the signs are made through incision and not burnishing (as in the case of the vessel from Pecica), while those made through incision are predominant both in the Carpathian Basin and in the Sarmatian world north and east of the Black Sea.

There are very few artifacts with *tamga* signs in the Carpathian Basin (not more than a dozen in all). They were found in the following locations: Csongrád–*Határ út*, grave 11 (on a spindle whorl)<sup>10</sup>, Nagyszénás–*Vaskapu* (on a spindle whorl)<sup>11</sup>, the grave in Dunaharaszti (on a gold plaque)<sup>12</sup>, Gyula–*Szeregháza* (on a rectangular vessel)<sup>13</sup>, Gyoma–*Ailer téglagyár*, Site 133, pit 23 (on an astragalus bone)<sup>14</sup>, Dunaújváros/Dunapetele (on a pendant)<sup>15</sup>, Şiria (on a storage pot)<sup>16</sup>, and on a mirror with unknown place of discovery<sup>17</sup>. Miniature rectangular vessels with different incised decorations (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and vegetal) were discovered in Timișoara–*Cioveni*<sup>18</sup>, Sarkad–*Körös-hát*<sup>19</sup>, and Kovačika<sup>20</sup>.

Surprisingly, these *tamgas* are made preponderantly on smoking/ritual vessels considered of Oriental origin, associated with women's role as priestesses<sup>21</sup> or with the Sun cult practiced by the

<sup>6</sup> The information that we have about Dömötör's excavations is quite limited. We know that in 1898 he made a long section (50 × 5.70 m) at an unknown spot on the plateau. He found materials dating from both the Dacian period (second century BC – first century AD) and the Bronze Age (see Berzovan 2017, 105–106 for a recent discussion on Dömötör's excavations in Pecica–*Şanţul Mare*). Although the vessel seems to be locally made and dated around the second or third century AD, it cannot rule out the possibility that it belonged to a Dacian environment, as the large storage vessel decorated with *tamga* signs discovered in Şiria (see Berzovan, Pădureanu 2010), or as the one attested east in pre-Roman Dacia (see Beldiman 1990).

<sup>7</sup> See Manassero 2013, 65–66 for a recent discussion.

<sup>8</sup> Manassero 2013, 66.

<sup>9</sup> In Asian *Sarmatia* property marks mostly feature on the bottom of the pots (for example the silver vessel from Porogi (Simonenko, Lobaj, 1991, Photo 35–36) or the gold one from Olbia (Voroniatov 2014 A, Pl. II) – usually vessels made of precious metal, from rich graves.

<sup>10</sup> Párducz 1944, 56, T. XXXII/1; Vaday 2002, 218, Fig. 4/2–3.

<sup>11</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 176, Fig. 2/5.

<sup>12</sup> Vaday 1989, 129, Abb. 1/5.

<sup>13</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 79, Fig. 4/4.

<sup>14</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 176, Fig. 2/3.

<sup>15</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 176, Fig. 2/6.

<sup>16</sup> Berzovan, Pădureanu 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 176, Fig. 2/1. See Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2017, 243–244 (Fig. 190–192/1–2) for a more recent catalogue of all these discoveries.

<sup>18</sup> Benea 1995–1996, 371–373, Fig. 1a-b. One of the symbols represents a swastika with extremities ended in hooks (Fig. 1/5), but the author inaccurately considers that the vessels could have also a Christian origins – see Benea 1995–1996, 383: 'eine Koexistenz der christlichen und heidnischen Vorstellungswelt'.

<sup>19</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 87, Fig. 4/1–3.

<sup>20</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 83, Fig. 14/2a-c.

<sup>21</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2011, 203: 'Judging from a Herodotus' locus (IV.74–75) considering Scythians, we may suggest that incense burners served for smoking or spreading drugs, which has been a widely known way of using them almost up to our days in many societies practicing shamanism'; see also Vaday 2002, 218.

Sarmatian groups between the Urals and the Carpathians<sup>22</sup>. A single object with a *tamga* sign can be attributed with certainty to a North-Pontic ruler, i.e. a gold plaque from Dunaharaszti (Pest County)<sup>23</sup> decorated with three wolves and the mark of king Farzoios (?)<sup>24</sup>.

Transposing the cross-shaped signs in question here into the Eastern Sarmatian world, one notes that the analogies feature in very distant geographic environments. It appears for example on two ceramic pots found in the settlement of Semenovka (East Crimea, European Bosphorus), on a site dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>25</sup>. The stylized depiction of horses – that features in the most schematic manner on the spindle whorl from Nagyszénás (Fig. 1/3) – has analogies on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, in the area of the Caucasus (Pl. 7)<sup>26</sup>. Other similarities for the cross-shaped sign can also be found around the Caspian Sea, in the ‘nomadic kingdom’ from South Kazakhstan/North Uzbekistan, in one of the great collections of Kangju signs dated between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century pottery from the settlement in Altıntobe (Arys’ Basin, Otrar Oasis) and partially on the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries pottery from Kultobe (Turkestan, Yassy)<sup>27</sup>. Such signs can even be encountered later in the same cultural and geographic tradition (7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) on the pottery from the sanctuary in Post-Kangju Sidak (Turkestan Oasis)<sup>28</sup>. Also, one can find in the Late Scythian cemetery from Bel’bek IV (south-west Crimea) the habit of decorating the spindle whorls with animal motifs, such as stags (grave 283, 223; Fig. 2/3–4)<sup>29</sup> or dogs (grave 242; Fig. 2/5)<sup>30</sup>. In addition, this cemetery had the largest collection of *tamga* signs from Eurasia, with analogies in Central Asia<sup>31</sup>.

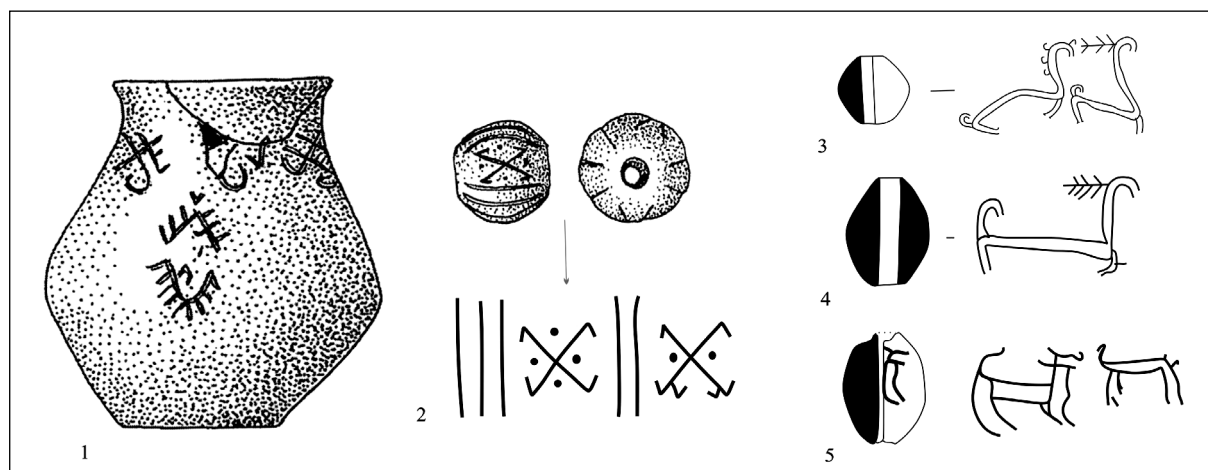


Fig. 2. 1–2. Decorated ceramics from Scythian cemeteries at Tiszaöl–Vásárhalm, grave 1 and Mátraszele, grave 2 (Kemenczei 2009); 3–5. Decorated spindle whorls from the Late Scythian cemetery of Bel’bek IV, graves 223, 283, 242 (redraw after Gushchina, Zhuravlev 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 177–178, 186; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2017, 244–246. The occurrence of this *tamga* sign west of the Carpathians, within a male grave, has a double meaning in the interpretation proposed by E. Istvánovits and V. Kulcsár: ‘1) it can be a proof of the fact that the incoming lazygians belonged to the Alan or to the Aorsian tribal alliance; 2) or it may indicate a very early Alan immigration’ (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2006, 178, 186).

<sup>24</sup> However, the *tamga* symbols on the plate at Dunaharaszti differ from the *tamga* symbol of king Farzoios known from the coins issued by the Olbian mint; see a recent discussion in Bărcă 2014, 66–67, especially p. 66: ‘The *tamga* symbols with certain deviations from those on the coins are deemed to belong to other individuals, likely to persons in the entourage or within the group led by this king [Farzoios and Inismeos]. In our view, the plate [from Dunaharaszti] likely reached the Great Hungarian Plain sometime towards the end of the 1st century AD (perhaps in the 80s) when another Sarmatian migration occurred in the region’.

<sup>25</sup> Yatsenko 2001, fig. 6, no. 71.

<sup>26</sup> This is not surprising, since: ‘Now we know also that the “Middle Sarmatians” and the early groups of “Late Sarmatians” were connected with the most powerful state in the western part of Central Asia – the Kangju “nomadic empire” of South Kazakhstan and Northern Uzbekistan’ – information provided by S. Yatsenko (see also Yatsenko 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Yatsenko 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Yatsenko 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Gushchina, Zhuravlev 2016, Tab. 193/5, 152/28.

<sup>30</sup> Gushchina, Zhuravlev 2016, Tab. 168/27, 27a.

<sup>31</sup> These 29 symbols appear on mirror-pendants belonging to mature married women and S. Yatsenko considers that these *tamga*s are brands of the clan in which the exogamous brides were born (see Yatsenko 2016, 218).

Returning to the discoveries from the Carpathian Basin, I wish to stress the fact that the decoration of the vessel from Pecica (both the presumed *tamga* and the decorative ornaments) has similarities in the Sarmatian environment from the Carpathian Basin on the spindle whorls discovered in Csongrád–Határ út, G 11 (Fig. 1/2) and in Nagyszénás–Vaskapu (Fig. 1/3), but also on an earlier Scythian ceramic vessel discovered in Tiszalöl–Vásárhalom (Fig. 2/1), belonging to the so-called Alföld-Gruppe<sup>32</sup>. A. Vaday and P. Medgyesi describe the decoration of the items from Csongrád–Határ út thus: '[spindle whorl] decorated with two schematic horses and two swastika-like carved motives, the latter ones can even be interpreted as tamgas'<sup>33</sup>. Still, M. Párducz, who has published the grave in Csongrád–Határ út for the first time, believes that the decoration consists of two men and two horses, but also mentions a zigzag line under the horses: 'An seinem unter dem Bauch [Spinnwirtel] befindlichen Teil ist eine Zickzack-Linie sichtbar. Über der Ausbauchung sind, zwischen zwei schematischen Menschengestalten zwei, sich gegenüberstehende Pferde'<sup>34</sup>.

It is possible that the scenes incised on the artifacts from Csongrád–Határ út, Nagyszénás–Vaskapu, and Pecica–Șanțul Mare render the same mythical or real story that is much more stylistically depicted on the phalera from kurgan 1/17 in Krivaya Luka IX (in the region of Astrakhan; Fig. 1/8)<sup>35</sup> or on the belt buckles from Nyzhni Sirohozy (the region of Kherson; Fig. 1/9)<sup>36</sup> and Vače (Slovenia; Fig. 1/7)<sup>37</sup>. In the case of the belt buckle from Vače one notes two riders, facing each other, in battle positions, accompanied by pedestrian soldiers and another character, bearing no weapons, which seems to be leaving the confrontation<sup>38</sup>. Not only the position of the horses reminds us of the decoration of the pottery items described above, but it seems a great coincidence that one of the horses (the one on the left) is marked, in the upper part of the leg, with a swastika-shaped *tamga*, identical to the one in Csongrád–Határ út and similar to the one in Pecica. Even if the item in Vače is dated to an earlier period (6<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC)<sup>39</sup>, C. Pare believes it to be of Eastern influence: 'Eastern relations of early Celtic art'<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, the origin of this iconography (the duel of two heroes) is to be found to the north of the Black Sea, born under the direct influence of the nomadic world and not of the Greek environment<sup>41</sup>. S. Yatsenko believes that this 'cult of the Barbarian rider' – a topic from a Sarmatian myth – became an official cult in the North-Pontic area sometime during the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC<sup>42</sup>.

The motif of the affronted riders, guided by the sun/swastika but accompanied by a goddess, was to become very popular during the first centuries of our era as well, especially in the Roman provinces at the Middle and Lower Danube, in the depictions and in the cults of the Danubian Riders, of *Domna/Domina* – *Domnus/Dominus*, or of Mithras<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> T. Kemenczei believes that this vessel had a cultic function and the signs could symbolize fertility: 'Den kultischen, magischen Hintergrund der eingeritzten Zeichen auf der skythenzeitlichen handgemachten Keramik veranschaulicht der Topf aus der in Tiszalök ausgegrabenen Bestattung (Taf. 99/1) ausgezeichnet. Die mit Strichelung gefüllte Rautenform am Bauch des Gefäßes kann die Fruchtbarkeit symbolisieren. Diese Zeichenelemente waren in ihrer Gesamtheit die Symbole einer Glaubenswelt, die in der ersten Hälfte des ersten Jahrtausends v. Chr. bei den Völkern mehrerer Kulturkreise bekannt war.' (Kemenczei 2009, 107).

<sup>33</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 63. See also Vaday 2002, 226, Fig. 4/2 where the swastika carved motives are called 'Sun-symbols'.

<sup>34</sup> Párducz 1944, 56, T. XXXII/1. The inventory of this grave also included a miniature vessel and 237 beads made of glass, chalcedony, and stone.

<sup>35</sup> Yatsenko 2000, 257, Fig. 2/1.

<sup>36</sup> Yatsenko 2000, 257, Fig. 2/2.

<sup>37</sup> Turk 2005, 39, Fig. 58.

<sup>38</sup> See Turk 2005, 38–39 for a much more detailed description of this complex scene.

<sup>39</sup> Turk 2005, 38–40.

<sup>40</sup> Pare 2012. In this context I wish to stress certain details noted by P. Turk on this belt buckle:

– 'The world depicted by the scene on the belt buckle is a primarily male world, a world of boasting and rivalry and depicts some actual event, whether real or mythical' (Turk 2005, 38).

– 'The left rider is bareheaded and has long hair, but the left horse has short mane' (Turk 2005, 39).

– 'Show a duel between an Etruscan or Venetic immigrant, accompanied by a dignitary in a hat, and Lower Caniolan warrior/inhabitant of Vače' (Turk 2005, 40).

<sup>41</sup> Yatsenko 2000, 259.

<sup>42</sup> Yatsenko 2000, 259.

<sup>43</sup> The bibliography of these religious cults is very rich, and the present study does not follow these aspects exhaustively. I only wish to mention in this context A. Szabó's recent work on the cult of *Domna et Domnus* and of the Danubian Riders – cult 'which fuses indigenous and Roman themes in a strikingly original manner' (Szabó 2017, 9).



## 2. The dragons

**Vessel no. 2** (Arad Museum Complex, inv. no. 12899); Pl. 1/2; Pl. 3/4–6.

**Place of discovery:** Arad–*Fabrica Teba*; excavations made by E. Dörner 1955; this vessel, together with other entire and fragmentary pots, was found in a household refuse pit (H = 1.20 m, D = 0.60 m), researched on the occasion of excavation performed for creating a ditch.

**Vessel description:** cup with handle (part of the rim and neck missing), slender body, flattened on the side opposite the handle (during production); the middle is strongly bellied, the handle displays one vertical groove that extends from top to bottom, the base is flat, ring-like; the vessel has been made on the potter's wheel out of fine fabric tempered with sand; reduction firing; light gray in color (Munsell 2.5Y, 6/1); Dr = 7.5/14 cm, Db = 6 cm; H = 18 cm; Dmax = 13.2 cm.

**Description of the decoration:** in the upper part (around the neck), the vessel is decorated through burnishing in two rows with meander-like motifs, containing the following elements:

Row 1 (upper): oblique lines become wider towards the belly and arch – similar to meanders; on the outside these double triangles are cut by small, almost perpendicular lines (spike-like). There is a burnished horizontal groove under this row, separating it from the subsequent one.

Row 2 (lower): the oblique lines (present in row 1) that formed triangles arch inwardly in the lower part.

**Observations:** the refuse pit in question had also revealed three other entire or almost entire vessels: one bowl (inv. no. 12912), one cup (inv. no. 12902), and one storage pot (inv. no. 12905) – all grey in color, modeled on the potter's wheel (Fig. 3). The museum register also mentions other pottery fragments found in the household refuse pit, all gray in color, most light gray, more rarely dark grey-black<sup>44</sup>. E. Dörner speaks of 'at least 10 different pots, all grey and wheel-thrown. The shape of two almost intact vessels, among which one jug that was deformed at the neck during firing and a cooking pot of which the upper part is missing, makes us think that the items in this lot were failed products that ended up in a garbage pit. The shape and technique of the vessels support their dating to the third-fourth century AD'<sup>45</sup>. The pot under discussion is also mentioned in D. Budihală's unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled *Influențe romane pe Valea Mureșului Inferior (Sec. II-IV p. Chr.)*. Cluj-Napoca 2012, p. 95, pl. XVI/15.

**Dating:** late 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century AD

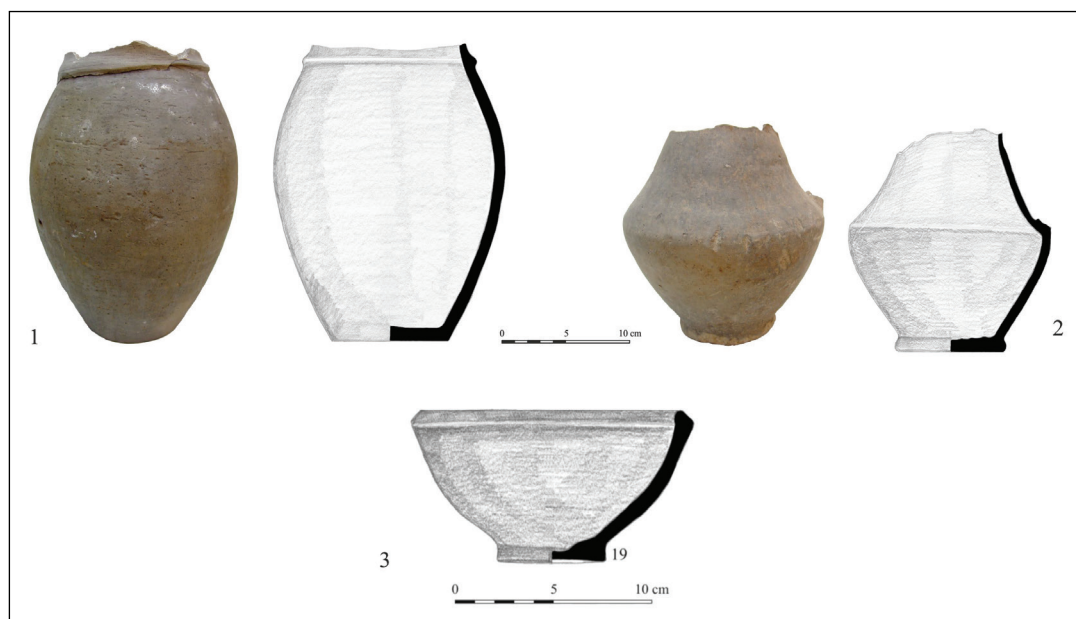


Fig. 3. Wheel-thrown gray pots discovered together with vessel no. 2 in the pit in Arad–*Teba*.

A wide variety of pots decorated through burnishing are found in the center and southern parts of the Great Hungarian Plain among the Late Sarmatian material. The most common manner of decorating their surface is with wavy line designs/*Wellenlinie*, but there are also net designs/*Netzmuster* consisting of dense oblique lines that intersect each other forming lozenges and burnished vertical bands. In some cases, one even encounters combinations of these motifs on one and the same pot.

K. Sóskuti and Sz. G. Wilhelm have collected the pots decorated with spiral meanders (*Gefäße mit*

<sup>44</sup> All these pots and fragments found during the archaeological excavations in Arad–*Teba* are recorded under numbers 12.899–12.913.

<sup>45</sup> Dörner 1968, 26.



*Mäander-Spiralverzierung*) from the Carpathian Basin known until 2006<sup>46</sup>, while in a recent study I have analyzed this type of pots from the region of Banat<sup>47</sup>. The vessel from Arad–*Teba* is to be included in the category of pots with burnished figurative decoration consisting of two or more wavy stripes that meet forming the depiction of a lizard-like animal (*Drachendarstellung*)<sup>48</sup>. These pots have been fired in reduction atmospheres exclusively (as they are grey or grey-black in color) and are made out of fine fabric; from a functional perspective, most of them are bowls (Pl. 4/3–5)<sup>49</sup>. Thus the vessel discovered in Arad cannot be included beyond doubt in the typology suggested by K. Sóskuti and Sz. G. Wilhelm.

The decoration of the vessel is also unique, but with the closest similarities in Deszk, Szőreg–*Homokbánya*, Szőreg–*Iván-téglagyár* and Foeni–*Selište*, where one encounters these meanders completed with ‘spikes’ (Pl. 4/3, 6, 8). In the case of the pot fragment from Foeni the spiral meander also features in the lower row, similarly to our vessel<sup>50</sup>. These pots were probably made in the same workshop<sup>51</sup> that was active during the late third–fourth century AD somewhere in the south/south-eastern part of the Hungarian Plain.

Another vessel that must be taken into consideration for the present analysis was found in Magyarszerdahely, Zala County (Fig. 1/4; Pl. 4/9–11), and dated to Late Antiquity (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century–beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD)<sup>52</sup>. Fortunately, the decoration of this vessel is better preserved and L. László has described it thus: ‘*The neck of the jar was decorated with vertical burnished lines, whilst the shoulder was decorated with diagonal grid motifs under which a procession of horses could be seen. The central figures of this procession are two horses facing each other. One of them exhibits a sun-disk on its head. Another horse, quite uniquely, seems to be ready for mating*’<sup>53</sup>. Again, one notes the end of a procession of horses, two affronted horses of which one has a stylized sun above its head, a sun that could replace a swastika.

### 3. Rituals

**Vessel no. 3** (Arad Museum Complex; recently donation); Pl. 1/3; Pl. 3/1–3.

**Place of discovery:** Moroda–*Selište* (at the south-eastern edge of the village, on the bank of River Cigher); the vessel was discovered by chance by a local inhabitant.

**Description of the vessel:** miniature pot, in the shape of a truncated cone, with a flat bottom and a body that widens towards the rim (similar to a bowl); the rim is everted and rounded towards the inside; the pot has been modeled by hand out of coarse fabric (inside the fabric one notes, besides sand, pebbles and pottery fragments), oxidation firing, uneven color with numerous nuances of light brick-red and dark brick-red/grey; Dr = 6.5 x 6.8 cm; Db = 4 cm; H = 4.5 cm.

**Description of the decoration:** the vessel displays numerous incisions, almost circular, both on the inside and on the outside, performed before firing. Even if the perforations are made superficially (the walls of the vessel are not entirely perforated, thus the smoke cannot go out from the vessel), its shape, size and texture is identical to so-called ‘Sarmatian censers’.

**Dating:** 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (?)

In the entire area inhabited by the Sarmatians, from the region of the Caucasus to the Hungarian Plain, such types of vessels are associated with the beliefs of the Sarmatians. They are called either ‘*smoking vessels*’<sup>54</sup> or ‘*censers*’<sup>55</sup> / ‘*kuril’nitsi*’<sup>56</sup> and are interpreted as ‘*typical cultic objects from Sarmatian*

<sup>46</sup> Sóskuti, Wilhelm 2005; Sóskuti, Wilhelm 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Grumeza 2016.

<sup>48</sup> As they were first called by Vaday 1982, 126; see also Sóskuti, Wilhelm 2005, 53; Sóskuti, Wilhelm 2006, 11: ‘*Sárkányok az Alföldön*’.

<sup>49</sup> Sóskuti, Wilhelm 2006, Fig. 25–28.

<sup>50</sup> Also, one cannot help but note the similarities between the decoration of the ‘dragon’ on the vessel from Arad–*Teba* and the decoration of the presumed ‘horse’ from Pecica, previously described: both are burnished and show meanders provided with ‘spikes’ (Pl. 4/1–2).

<sup>51</sup> See Vaday 1982, 127–128 for a similar opinion.

<sup>52</sup> László 2005, 84.

<sup>53</sup> László 2005, 84.

<sup>54</sup> Vaday 2002, 223, Fig. 1, Fig. 2; Istvánovits, Pintye 2011, 99.

<sup>55</sup> Khrapunov 2013, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Simonenko, Lobaj, 1991, 33, Fig. 23.

*female burials*<sup>57</sup> and ‘placed into the graves of priestesses, women dealing with cultic activities’<sup>58</sup>. These types of vessel are exclusively hand-modelled, exhibit traces of secondary burning on the inside (sometime also on the outside), and have mostly a rectangular shape. They are found in *Sarmatia Asiae*, starting with the earliest times of Sarmatian history<sup>59</sup>. However the closest parallels for the vessel discovered in Moroda are to be found in Porgi barrow 2, grave 2<sup>60</sup>, Neyzats, graves 355, 390<sup>61</sup>, and Bel’bek IV, grave 176<sup>62</sup> – dated mainly in the mid Sarmatian period, east of the Carpathians. For the Carpathian Basin, I am aware of only three such tronconic miniature smoking-vessels with circular perforations, found in Jászberény–Mészhomok brick factory (Fig. 4/2), Alsónémedi–Kenderföldék, grave 21<sup>63</sup>, and Nyíregyháza–Felsősim, Gyebrás-tanya, Motorway M3, site 161, grave 119 (Fig. 4/1)<sup>64</sup>. These miniature vessels / smoking-vessels were either of Eastern origin or they were made in local workshops but according to Eastern tastes<sup>65</sup>.

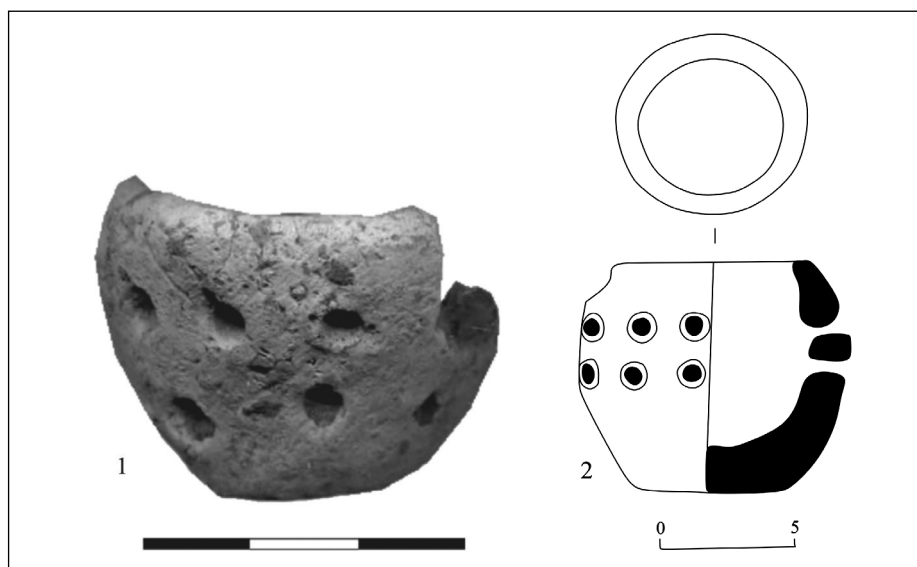


Fig. 4. 1. Nyíregyháza–Felsősim, Gyebrás-tanya, Motorway M3, site 161, G 119 (redrawn after Istvánovits, Pintye 2011); 2. Jászberény–Mészhomok brickfactory (redrawn after Vaday 2002).

The ritual vessels are not distributed in the entire Great Hungarian Plain. Probably not all populations held such rituals<sup>66</sup>. The discoveries, extremely rare in the center and northern parts of the Carpathian Basin are very frequent in the cemeteries of Banat and Bačka, where one also encounters the highest concentration of pottery with complicated figurative ornaments and the habit of depositing more than one vessel in a grave<sup>67</sup>. A. Vaday and P. Medgyesi date all these funerary discoveries in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>68</sup>, but one now knows that they also feature earlier, in cemeteries dated at least during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (if not even sooner)<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2011, 202, Fig. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Vaday 2002, 217.

<sup>59</sup> See a typology in Smirnov 1973, Fig. 1–3 and a discussion of items similar with one discovered in Moroda in Bărcă, Simonenko 2009, 115–116 (the discoveries from Porogi, barrow 2, grave 2 and Mocra, barrow 2, grave 2 – dated in mid Sarmatian period).

<sup>60</sup> Simonenko, Lobaj 1991. 33, Fig. 23/2; 55, Fig. 29; Photo 30.

<sup>61</sup> Khrapunov 2012, 26, Fig. 13/5–7.

<sup>62</sup> Gushchina, Zhuravlev 2016, Tab. 230/6.

<sup>63</sup> Vaday 2002, 217, n. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Istvánovits, Pintye 2011, 102, Fig. 44, 103. E. Istvánovits and G. Pintye include the vessel from Nyíregyháza to the category of smoking-vessels: ‘incense-burners, similarly to the small bowls with perforated walls. We suggest that they can be related to the use of narcotics (cannabis) known in the world of beliefs of Sarmatians (Herod. IV,74–75)’ (Istvánovits, Pintye 2011, 111).

<sup>65</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 88.

<sup>66</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 87.

<sup>67</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Vaday, Medgyesi 1993, 83; Vaday 2002, 218.

<sup>69</sup> Grumeza 2014, 137.

Another category of items similar to these miniature vessels consists of pots modeled also by hand but rectangular in shape, decorated through incision with double or triple circles (Pl. 6/1–3, 7). These were exclusively found (as far as I am aware) in graves attested on the present-day territory of Banat. Two vessels, with almost identical decoration (double or triple circles incised with a circular tool) have been attested in Újszentiván–Téglagyár, in an unknown funerary context (Pl. 6/1) and in Vršac–Crvenka, grave 1 (Pl. 6/2–3)<sup>70</sup>. It is possible that these decorations of the rectangular vessels in Újszentiván and Vršac were figurative – as in the case of the vessel discovered in Moroda. However they could symbolically replace the perforations that feature on the common smoking-vessels<sup>71</sup>. I do not exclude the possibility that these rectangular vessels were used as *pixidae* in which the deceased women kept various paints<sup>72</sup>.

#### 4. Some further remarks

On the basis of the previous studies published by E. Istvánovits, V. Kulcsár, and A. Vaday (mentioned in the text) and on my own observations, I can note the following phenomena in the Carpathian Basin:

1. Miniature or rectangular vessels, censers, ceramic wares decorated with *tamga* signs or other ornamental signs were found in women's graves and belong to the 'female sub-culture'<sup>73</sup>. In this context I wish to invoke S. V. Voroniatov's conclusions for the Sarmatian discoveries from the forest area of Russia: *'The penetration of the Sarmatian tamgas and anthropomorphic images to the forest zone [Late Dyakovo and Moschino cultures areas] might have been a result of matrimonial ties between the nomads and the sedentary tribes. It is supposed that the Sarmatian women, who had to live in the archaic society of the Late Dyakovo culture, could contribute to the formation of new religious beliefs and other elements of the Late Dyakovo cult complex'*<sup>74</sup>. Thus, it was especially women who transmitted (and performed) the rituals, the beliefs, and the myths among members of their own groups or in the new tribes they joined through marriage or in order to strengthen inter-tribal relations.

2. It is possible that the incisions that are similar to swastikas and silhouettes of horses/riders preparing for battle render male archaic scenes, connected to certain heroic rituals or *rites de passage* that we shall never fully understand. Their depictions were preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next (mainly by women), often in much simplified manners of representation that did not diminish their significance<sup>75</sup>. Thus, certain signs (which specialists nowadays interpret as property signs) may originate in mythical scenes, fantastic or sacred figures, whose image has evolved to simplification and stylization over the ages.

3. It is often impossible (both to the east and to the west of the Carpathians) to state the function of the so-called *tamga* signs, especially if they feature in funerary female contexts or in commemorative rituals<sup>76</sup> and not on weapons, luxury wares, coins, jewelry items, etc. This has also been noted for Asian *Sarmatia* where, besides ownership marks, these *tamgas* also embodied certain religious, magic, or ritual concepts – especially if they featured on certain categories of objects such as astragalus bones, whetstones, or terracotta figurines (that were subsequently deposited in graves)<sup>77</sup>. S. Yatsenko concluded that: *'Besides the defense of property the images of the signs (nišan/gakk) marked the participation*

<sup>70</sup> See Vaday, Medgyesi 1993 for further discussions.

<sup>71</sup> Vaday 2002, 218.

<sup>72</sup> K. F. Smirnov has also noted the difficulty of making a clear distinction between smoking vessels and cosmetic vessels (Smirnov 1973, 166–179), see for example the typology he has suggested in Fig. 1–3: *'Kuril'nitsy i tualetnyye sosudiki sarmatov'*.

<sup>73</sup> Term also employed by Voroniatov 2014 B.

<sup>74</sup> Voroniatov 2012, 412.

<sup>75</sup> These scenes/myths circulated in the Barbarian mentality just like the funerary motif of the Mother-Goddess sitting on a throne and welcoming a rider – a depiction encountered in the nomadic world between Central Asia and the North Black Sea (from Pazyryk to *Panticapaeum*), see Yatsenko 1995. In this case as well also one speaks of more than a millennium during which the scene and the legend behind it have circulated.

<sup>76</sup> Voroniatov 2014 A, 29: *'Commemorative libations might precede the filling of the grave pit and the construction of the barrow. For the performance of the ritual they might incise the tamga of the one being buried on valuable vessels, and after the commemorative rites could place the vessels in the tomb'*.

<sup>77</sup> See for example the child's grave in Kerch containing a terracotta figurine depicting a bull marked with a *tamga* sign (see Voroniatov 2014 A, 32 with the bibliography).

of members of the clan in collective actions (concluding treaties, religious ceremonies in sanctuaries, fraternization, taking part in public building)<sup>78</sup>.

4. In the Carpathian Basin, even if these types of vessels (miniature in size, rectangular or tron-conic, 'ritual' in function, smoking-vessels, wares decorated with *tamga* signs or complex signs) seem to date mainly to Late Antiquity, one cannot ignore the earlier discoveries either, those from the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD<sup>79</sup> or the fact that there is, as yet, no up-to-date *corpus* of all these special vessels, a *corpus* that would allow for the formulation of more observations.

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<sup>78</sup> Yatsenko 2001, 187.

<sup>79</sup> For example Foeni–Cimitirul Ortodox, G 2, 18, 15, 14 (Grumeza 2011), Füzesabony Kastélydűlő I, G 140 (Farkas 2000) and even the early grave in Sânnicolau Mare–Seliște (Bejan et al. 2011) –that contained vessels that did not receive due attention in specialized literature. This woman's grave in Sânnicolau Mare (M7/2007), dated to the end of the first century/beginning of the second century AD had an inventory consisting of two small cups from the Late Bronze Age (Sava, Ignat 2014, 190). I do not believe that these vessels were just stray finds 'recycled' by the Sarmatian community, but that they were also given magical significance, 'were moved from the daily practical domain to the magical one' (Rustoiu 2005, 248).

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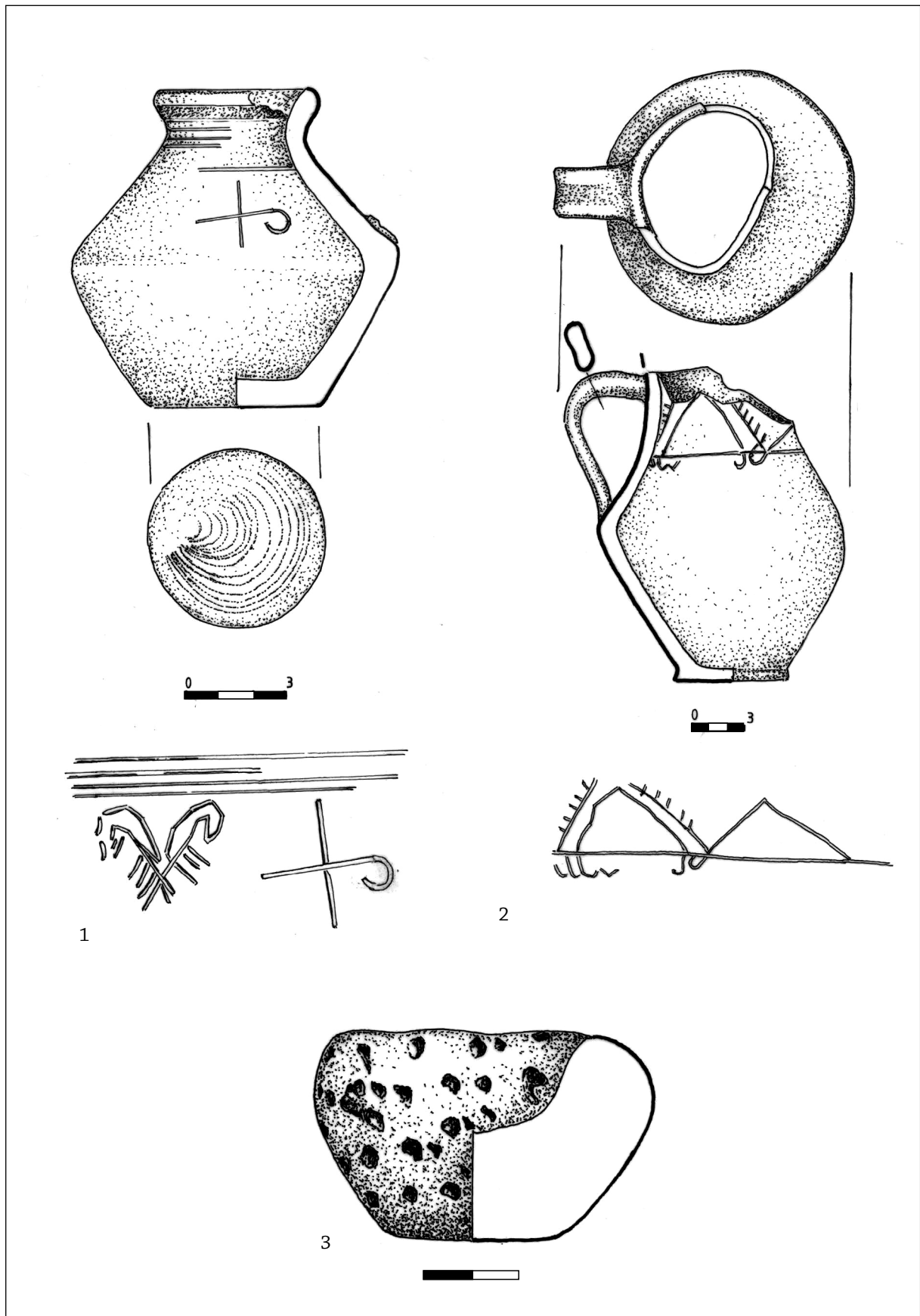


Plate 1. 1. The vessel from Pecica-Şanţul Mare; 2. The vessel from Arad-Fabrica Teba; 3. The vessel from Moroda-Selişte.



Plate 2. The vessel from Pecica-Șanțul Mare (2-4. Details, without scale).





Plate 3. 1. The vessel from Moroda–Seliște (2–3. Details, without scale); 4. The vessel from Arad–Fabrica Teba (5–6. Details, without scale).

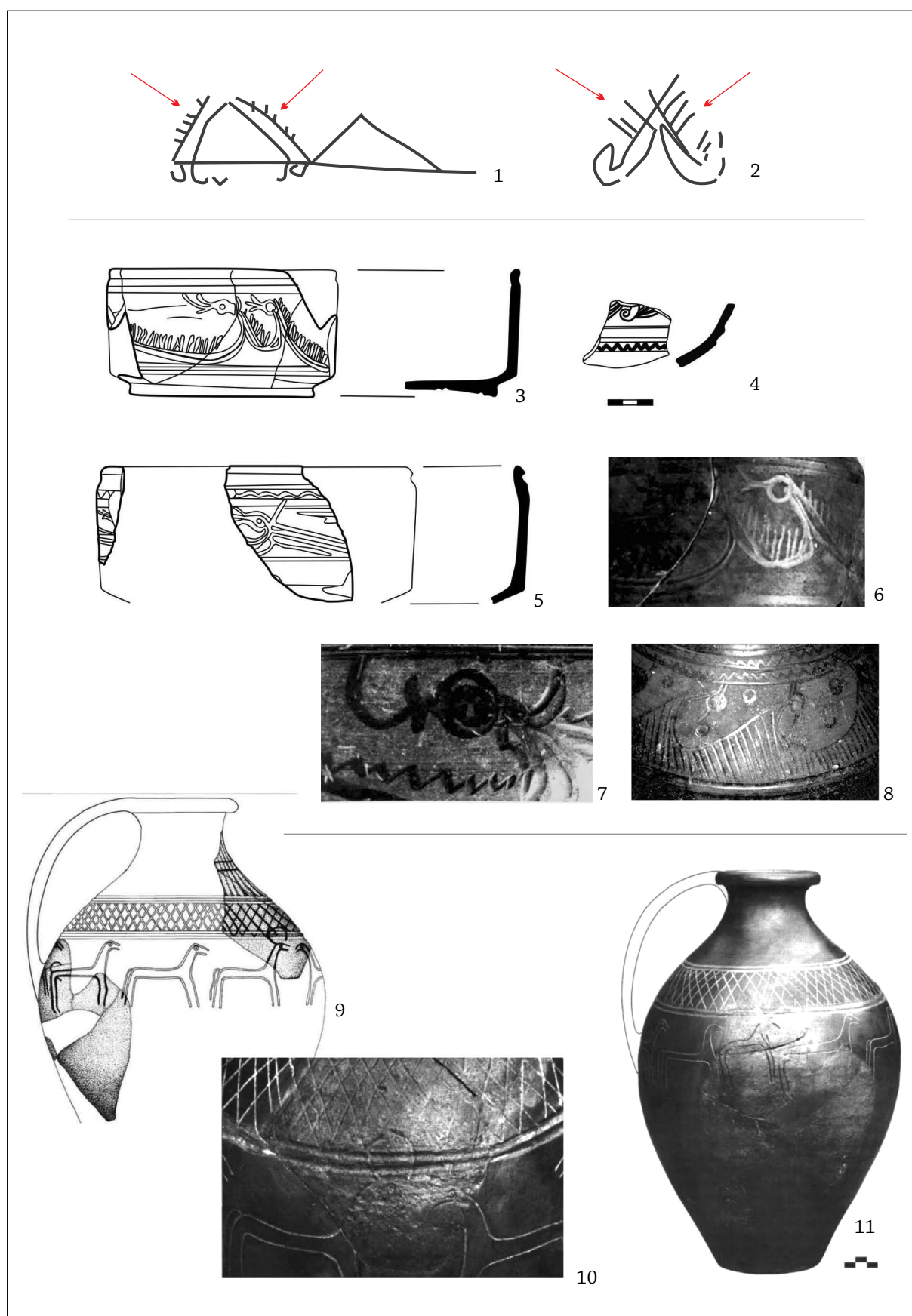


Plate 4. Figurative decorations: 1. Arad–*Fabrica Teba*; 2. Pecica–*Șanțul Mare*; 3. Szőreg–*Homokbánya* (redrawn after Sósuti, Wilhelm 2006); 5. Szőreg–*Iván–tégtagyár* (redrawn after Sósuti, Wilhelm 2006); 4. Foeni–*Seliște* (redrawn after Szentmiklosi, Timoc 2005); 6–8. Details of the burnished decorations on pots from the Hungarian Plain (photo: K. Sósuti); 9–11. The vessel from Magyarszerdahely (László 2005).

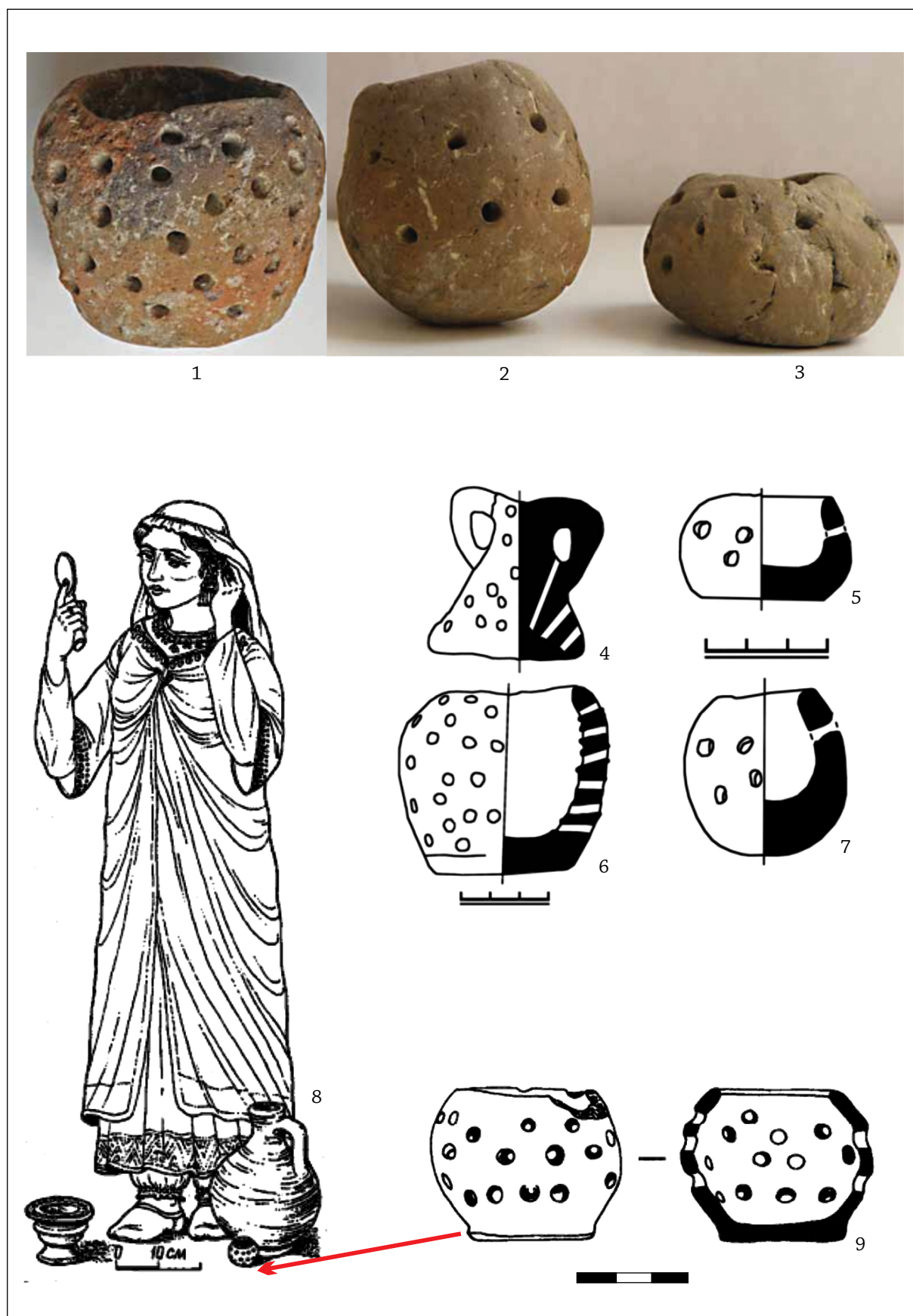


Plate 5. Smoking-vessels from the cemetery in Neyzats, Crimea: 1, 4, 6 – G 355; 2, 3, 5, 7 – G 390 (Khrapunov 2012, 2013); 8–9: Smoking-vessels from a woman's grave in Porogi (Simonenko, Lobaj 1991; Bărcă, Simonenko 2009).





Plate 6. 1. Miniature vessel from Újszentiván–Téglagyár (redrawn after Vaday, Medgyesi 1993); 2–3 Miniature vessel from Vršac–Crvenka, grave 1 and the inventory (4–6) associated to this grave (Grumeza 2014); 7. Miniature vessel from the collection of the Museum in Vršac (courtesy of the Vršac City Museum); 8. Detail G 18 Foeni–Cimitirul Ortodox (Grumeza 2014, photo: F. Drșovean).

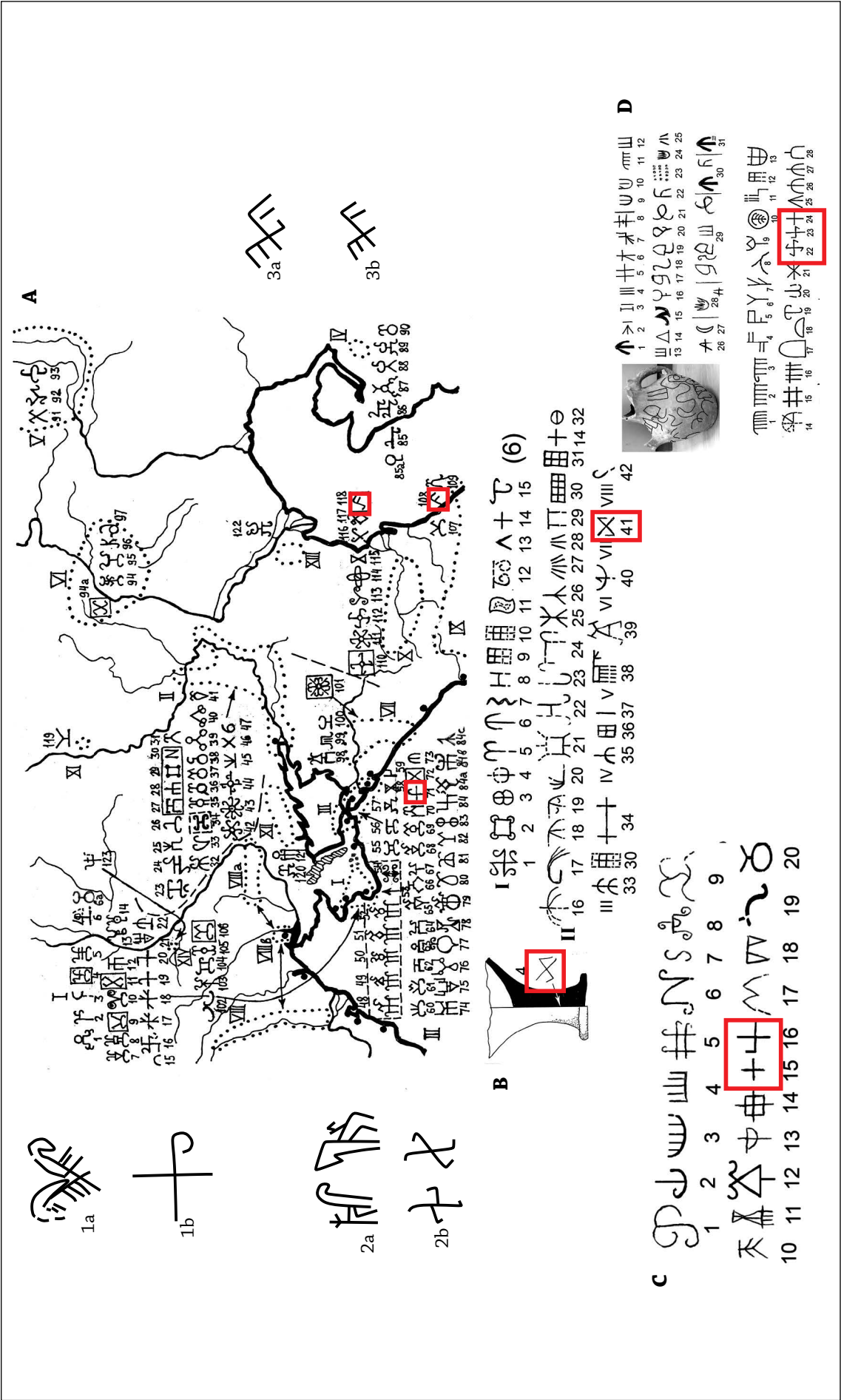


Plate 7. A. Regional signs specific to Asian Sarmatia from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD until the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (after Yatsenko 2001; with additions); B-D. Signs specific to central Asia (Yatsenko 2018).

