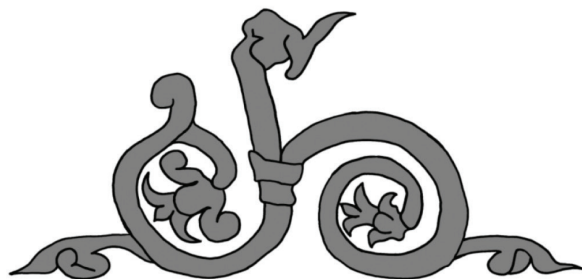


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Early Medieval Domestic Ovens Discovered in Lompirt and Pericei (Sălaj County)*

Dan Băcuet-Crișan

Abstract: A great variety (both planimetric and functional) of archaeological complexes has been identified and researched on the early medieval sites in Sylvanian Basin that were investigated through archaeological test excavations and systematic, preventive, or rescue excavations. Among these complexes one can mention open-air domestic ovens. The present initiative aims at presenting two complexes of this type that have not been published before. The two ovens were discovered in two different places: the first was found in 2007 in Lompirt (municipality of Sărmășag) and the second in 2017 in Pericei (municipality of Pericei).

Keywords: early medieval domestic ovens, settlement, Sylvanian Basin, pottery, handleless cooking pot, pot with grooved neck.

Introduction

A great variety (both planimetric and functional) of archaeological complexes, including open-air domestic ovens, has been identified and researched on the early medieval sites in Sylvanian Basin investigated through archaeological test excavations and systematic, preventive, or rescue excavations. Among these complexes one can mention open-air domestic ovens. The present initiative aims at presenting two complexes of this type that have not been published before. The two ovens were discovered in two different places: the first was found in 2007 in Lompirt (municipality of Sărmășag) and the second in 2017 in Pericei (municipality of Pericei).

The ovens and their archaeological inventories

The settlement of Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövicses” (in the municipality of Sărmășag, Sălaj County) is located in Sylvanian Basin, in the valley of river Zalău (Pl. 1). The site in Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövicses” is to be found at the entrance to the settlement of Lompirt, on a terrace on the left side of Zalău Valley (Fig. 1). Prehistorical archaeological materials (Coțofeni Culture, the Bronze Age), Roman-era materials, and early medieval materials have been collected from ground level during surface researches performed on various occasions during the last decades.

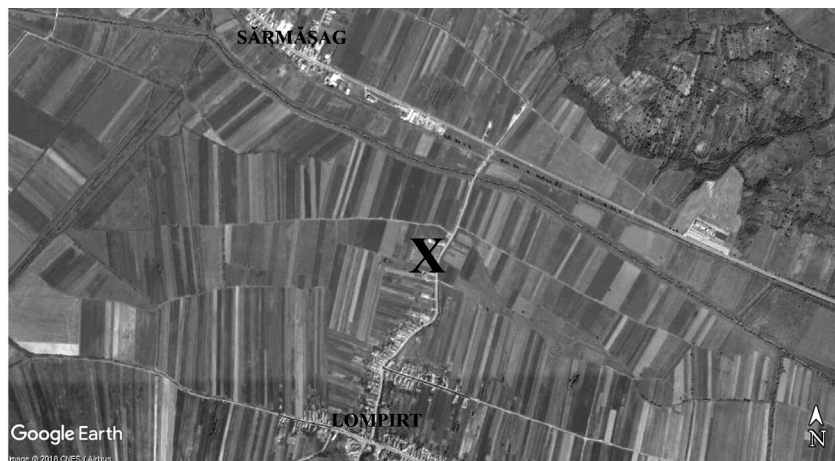


Fig. 1. Localization of the site in Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövicses” (municipality of Sărmășag) (satellite image Google Earth).

* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

An archaeological excavation was performed on 2007¹ aimed at rescuing the archaeological vestiges uncovered in the area affected by the construction of a house and its annexes. Unfortunately, a large part of the area had already been affected by the foundations of the construction by the beginning of the archaeological excavation. Thus, a complete archaeological dig could only be performed in the area where the house's terraces and annexes were to be constructed; three sections were opened there, labeled S. 1/2007, S. 2/2007, and S. 3/2007, and inside them specialists have identified and researched six archaeological complexes (two of them prehistoric and four early medieval).

In S. 1/2007 archaeologists have also identified and researched an early medieval domestic oven (C. 3/2007) dug into the sterile clay (Pl. 2–3). The oven became apparent at the depth of 0. 20 m from the current ground level. During research specialists have noted that oven C. 3/2007 had two stages of use:

- during the first stage the oven had a simple clay hearth, slightly trough-shaped (burned red, identified at the depth of 0. 35 m from the current ground level).
- during the second stage, pieces of sandstone connected with yellowish clay were placed over the old hearth. In their turn, the pieces of sandstone were covered with a lens of yellowish clay, thus completing the design of the new hearth of the oven that displayed superficial traces of burning.

The archaeological inventory of this oven consisted of two pottery fragments discovered on the hearth (Pl. 4). The pottery fragments are brown-brick-red in color with dark spots and were once part of a cooking pot modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel out of a fabric tampered with sand, gravel, and mica flakes. Both fragments are decorated through incision in the wet clay (before firing); the decorative elements are rows of straight lines associated with rows of wavy lines, all incised horizontally and parallel. No other early medieval artifacts were found in none of the three archaeological sections except for the two pottery fragments discovered in complex C. 3/2007.

Two postholes (complexes C. 1/2007 and C. 2/2007) also became apparent and were researched in section S. 1/2007 (near the early medieval domestic oven). The post holes became apparent in squares 2–3 and 5–6, at the depth of 0. 20 m from the current ground level. The fill of the two holes consisted of black soil and a lot of coal and their bottoms were identified at the depth of 0. 28 m and 0. 30 m respectively, from the current ground level. None of them contained an archaeological inventory.

Due to the fact that the two postholes (complexes C. 1/2007 and C. 2/2007) became apparent at the same depth as the domestic oven (0. 20 m from the current ground level) I do not exclude the possibility that they were part of the elevation of a shed that once protected/covered complex C. 3/2007 (the domestic oven). It is possible that pit C. 4/2007 belonged to the assembly of the same structure (shed). It had no archaeological inventory, only coal, and it became apparent in S. 1/2007, at the same depth (0. 20 m from the current ground level) as the domestic oven and the two postholes².

The settlement of Pericei “Calău/Kalló” (in the municipality of Pericei, Sălaj County) is located in Sylvanian Basin, along River Crasna (Pl. 1). The presence of several ceramic artifacts has been signaled in the S-W part of the settlement, on the spot called “Calău/Kalló” (Fig. 2). A fire installation dated to the Early Medieval Period was identified on that spot in 2017, during refreshing works of the drainage ditch of the road that cuts the terrace, in the wall of the ditch³.

Unfortunately, the largest part of the archaeological complex (labeled C. 1/2017) had been destroyed of old by the excavation of the drainage ditch; the complex had been in fact sectioned by the ditch (Pl. 5–6). Fire installation C. 1/2017 consisted of a vaulted domestic oven dug into the ground. The on-site researches have led to the conclusion that the oven was used in the open air and not inside some construction. The walls and vault of the oven (identified at the depth of 0. 25 m from the current ground level) were burned red and the burnt layer measured a maximum of 5 cm. The oven's hearth (identified at the depth 0.45 m from the current ground level) also burned red 5 cm in depth, consisted of a layer of faceted clay stretched over a bed of pottery fragments placed directly on the ground (yellowish clay, sterile from an archaeological perspective).

¹ SandaBăcuet-Crișan, Băcuet-Crișan 2008, 184–185.

² The two prehistoric complexes (dwelling C. 5/2007 and household refuse pit C. 6/2007) became apparent at the depth of 0. 40 -0. 60 m from the current ground level.

³ Bejinariu, Băcuet-Crișan 2018, 231.



Fig. 2. Localization of the site in Pericei“Calău/Kalló” (municipality of Pericei) (satellite image Google Earth).

The archaeological inventory consisted of pottery fragments discovered on the hearth (a few) and under the hearth's crust (most). The pottery fragments indicate the existence of two ceramic shapes: the handleless cooking pot (Pl. 7/1–3, Pl. 8, and Pl. 9) and the pot with grooved neck (Pl. 7/4). The fragments of handleless cooking pots (from several items made on the slow-turning potter's wheel) are brick-red in color or yellowish brick-red with gray/black spots, with the fabric tempered with sand, small pebbles, and mica flakes. The decoration consists of simple parallel wavy lines, rows of parallel wavy lines and simple parallel lines. The other identified pottery shape is the pot with grooved neck. The few discovered items indicate the presence of a single such pot (modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel), yellowish brick-red in color, with the fabric tempered with sand, small pebbles, and mica flakes.

Chronology of the vestiges. Considerations regarding open-air fire installations researched on early medieval sites (7th–11th centuries) in Sylvania Basin

From a quantitative perspective, the archaeological inventory discovered in the domestic oven (C. 3/2007) from Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövecses” is extremely small. Still, due to the characteristics of the shards but especially to the decorative elements present on the two pottery fragments, the oven can be attributed to the habitation horizon between the 7th (second half of the 7th century) and the 9th century. The absence of other artifacts prevents a narrower dating.

In Sylvania Basin, such ornaments (associations of wavy lines with straight lines that cover almost the entire body of the pot or at least all of its upper half) have been noted before on certain ceramic pots from the settlements of Bobota “Pe vale/Iertaș”⁴, Zalău “B-dul M. Viteazul, nr. 104–106”⁵, Badon “La răstignire”⁶, Popeni “Pepogor”⁷, Cuceu “Valea Bochiei”⁸, Porț “La baraj”⁹, or in the tumular incineration grave from Nușfalău “Vulpiște/Halmakpataka”¹⁰ (Fig. 3).

⁴ Băcuet-Crișan 2010, Pl. 18/1.

⁵ SandaBăcuet-Crișan, Băcuet-Crișan 2003, Pl. 45/4.

⁶ Băcuet-Crișan, SandaBăcuet-Crișan 2000, Fig. III.

⁷ Stanciu, Matei 1994, Pl. III/13; Băcuet-Crișan 2006, Pl. 5/5, Pl. 17/1.

⁸ Băcuet-Crișan 2006, Pl. 61/6.

⁹ Matei, Băcuet-Crișan 2011, Pl. 64/4.

¹⁰ Comșa 1961, Fig. 5/2–4, 6; Cosma 2011, Pl. 8/36.

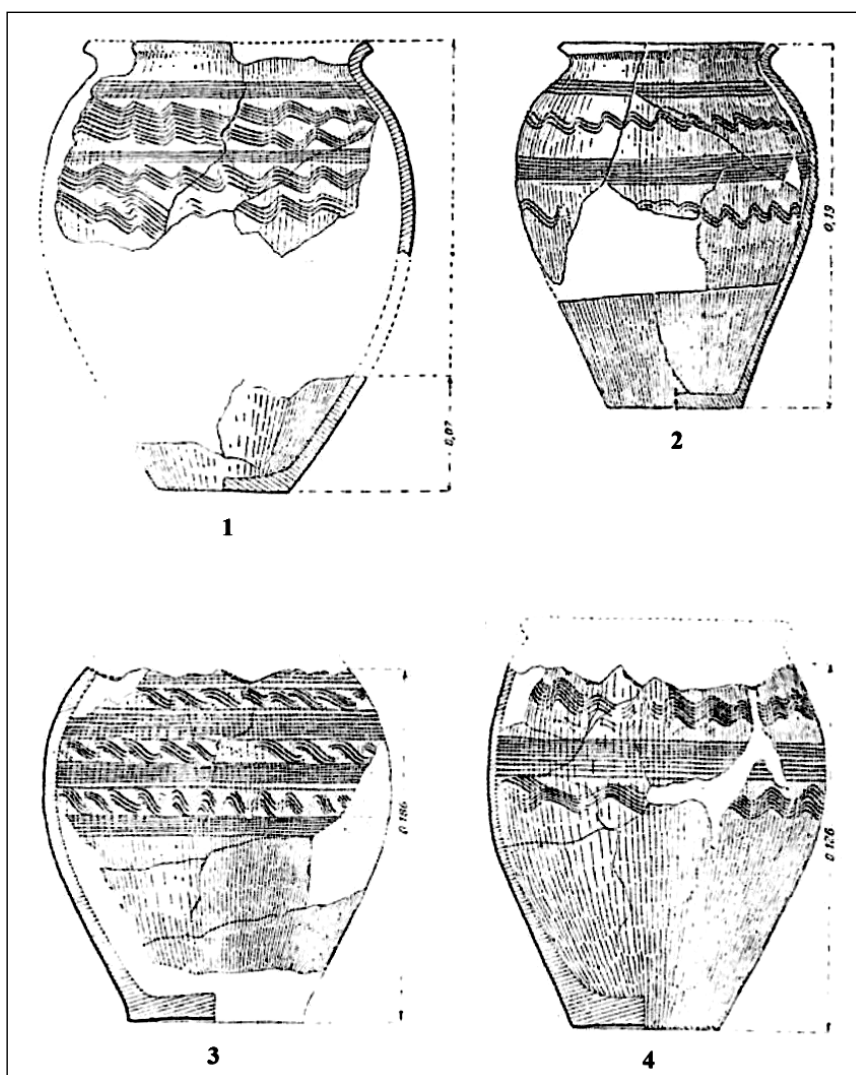


Fig. 3. Pottery decorated with rows of wavy lines associated with rows of straight lines, discovered in the tumular incineration graves from Nușfalău “Vulpiște/Halmakpataka” (taken from Comșa 1961).

For the cooking pot fragments from the domestic oven in Pericei “Calău/Kalló” I have noted several analogies in Sylvania Basin in the habitational complexes in Șimleu Silvaniei “Str. A. Mureșanu, nr. 11” (10th–11th centuries)¹¹, Ip “Dealul Bisericii” (11th century)¹², Zalău “Valea Mâții/Baza TCI” (10th–11th centuries), and Aghireș “Sub pășune” (10th–11th centuries habitation)¹³. Pots with grooved neck were introduced in this area starting with the second half of the 10th century¹⁴. This pottery shape is rarely found among kitchen wares in the habitational complexes researched in Sylvania Basin, and the same is true for the entire north-western area of Romania.

Until the discovery of the grooved pot fragment from Pericei “Calău/Kalló”, three sites were known in Sylvania Basin where the presence of this pottery shape had been identified¹⁵: Zalău “Valea Mâții (Baza TCI)” (one rim fragment)¹⁶, Șimleu Silvaniei “Cetate/Várhegy”¹⁷, and Aghireș “Sub pășune” (one pot that can be reassembled and one fragment from the mouth of a second pot)¹⁸ (Fig. 4).

¹¹ Băcuet-Crișan 1999–2000, Pl. IX–XIII.

¹² Băcuet-Crișan, Csók 2017, Pl. 5, Pl. 8.

¹³ Băcuet-Crișan *et al.* 2009, Pl. 202–204.

¹⁴ Besides, this pottery shape does not feature in Transylvania earlier than the middle of the 10th century (Băcuet-Crișan 2013, 285–286; Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 114).

¹⁵ Băcuet-Crișan 2013, 282–283; Băcuet-Crișan 2015, Pl. IV.

¹⁶ Băcuet-Crișan 2013, 283, Pl. III/1.

¹⁷ Pop *et al.* 2006, 125, Pl. 29/2.

¹⁸ Băcuet-Crișan 2013, 282, Pl. III/3, Pl. IV.

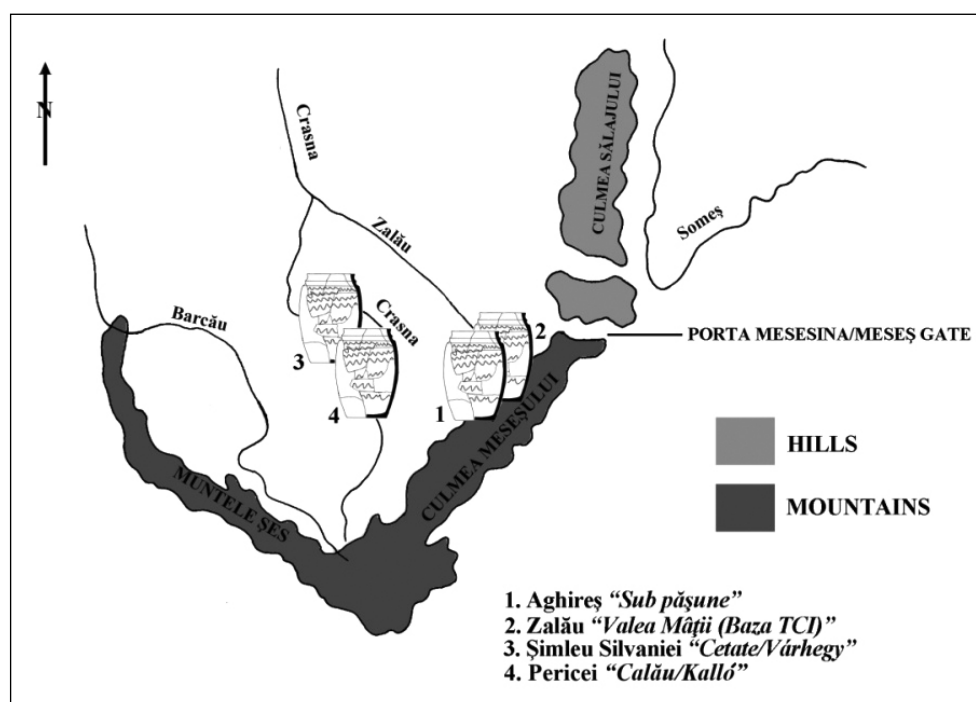


Fig. 4. Discoveries of pots with grooved neck in Sylvanian Basin (adapted from Băcuet-Crișan 2013).

A typo-chronology of the pots with grooved neck discovered so far in Sylvanian Basin was published in 2013¹⁹ (Fig. 5), and the item from Pericei might belong to Type III as it is characterized by a neck with straight walls.


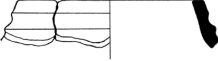


TYPE I	TYPE II	TYPE III
	Subtype II. A 	
	Subtype II. B 	

Fig. 5. Suggested typological classification of pots with grooved neck discovered in Sylvanian Basin (taken from Băcuet-Crișan 2013).

A very good analogy is a pot with grooved neck discovered in the early medieval fortification of Dăbâca (Fig. 6), a pot that has a grooved straight neck and a bulgy body²⁰. In Romanian literature, this pottery shape (mainly used during the Early Arpadian Era²¹) has rarely been the topic of typological and chronological analyses²². For example, a recent analysis has focused on the few discoveries of the kind from the former Mureș Seat²³.

¹⁹ Băcuet-Crișan 2013, 283–286, Pl. VII.

²⁰ Iambor 1985–1986, Pl. II/3.

²¹ Keve 2017, 259.

²² Iambor 1985–1986, 589–598.

²³ Keve 2017, 258–259, Table 1, Pl. 1–2.

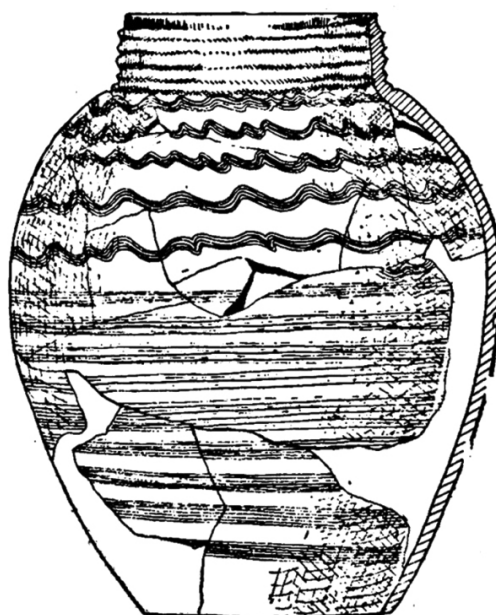


Fig. 6. Pot with grooved neck discovered in the early medieval fortification in Dăbâca (taken from Iambor 1985–1986, published without scale).

Naturally, few artifacts are available for one to establish the chronology of the vestiges discovered in Pericei “Calău/Kalló”. The noted analogies suggest a possible contemporaneity of the domestic oven in Pericei “Calău/Kalló” and some of the 10th–11th centuries sites (mentioned above) from Sylvanian Basin.

Until now, several types of fire installations set up amongst constructions (dwellings and household annexes), in open air, or sometimes protected by a roof or a shed have been identified and researched in the early medieval settlements (7th–13th centuries) in Sylvanian Basin that have been investigated through archaeological excavations (Tab. 1 and Fig. 7)²⁴.

CRT. NO.	ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE NAME	TYPES OF FIRE INSTALLATIONS SET UP IN THE OPEN AIR OR PROTECTED BY A ROOF/SHED
1	Pericei “Keller Tag”	• oven with clay vault
2	Nușfalău “Țigoiul lui Benedek”	• oven with walls made of rocks
3	Zalău “Bd. Mihai Viteazul, nr. 104–106”	• oven with clay vault • oven with clay vault (covered)
4	Bobota “Pe vale/Iertaș”	• clay hearth on a bed of rocks • oven with walls made of rocks
5	Porț “La baraj”	• rock-lined hearth
6	Aghireș “Sub pășune”	• oven with clay vault • rock-lined hearth • clay hearth
7	Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövcses”	• oven with clay vault, covered (?)
8	Zalău “Valea Miței-Livada veche”	• simple hearth • oven with clay vault • oven with clay vault, covered (?)
9	Marca “Sfârăuș” I	• clay hearth on a bed of rocks • oven with clay vault • oven with walls made of rocks

Tab. 1. Types of open-air fire installations discovered in early medieval settlements (7th–13th centuries) in Sylvanian Basin.

²⁴ A typology has been suggested for these fire installations in Sylvanian Basin; according to it, the ovens with clay vault belong to Type V (Băcuț-Crișan 2014, 61, Fig. 13).

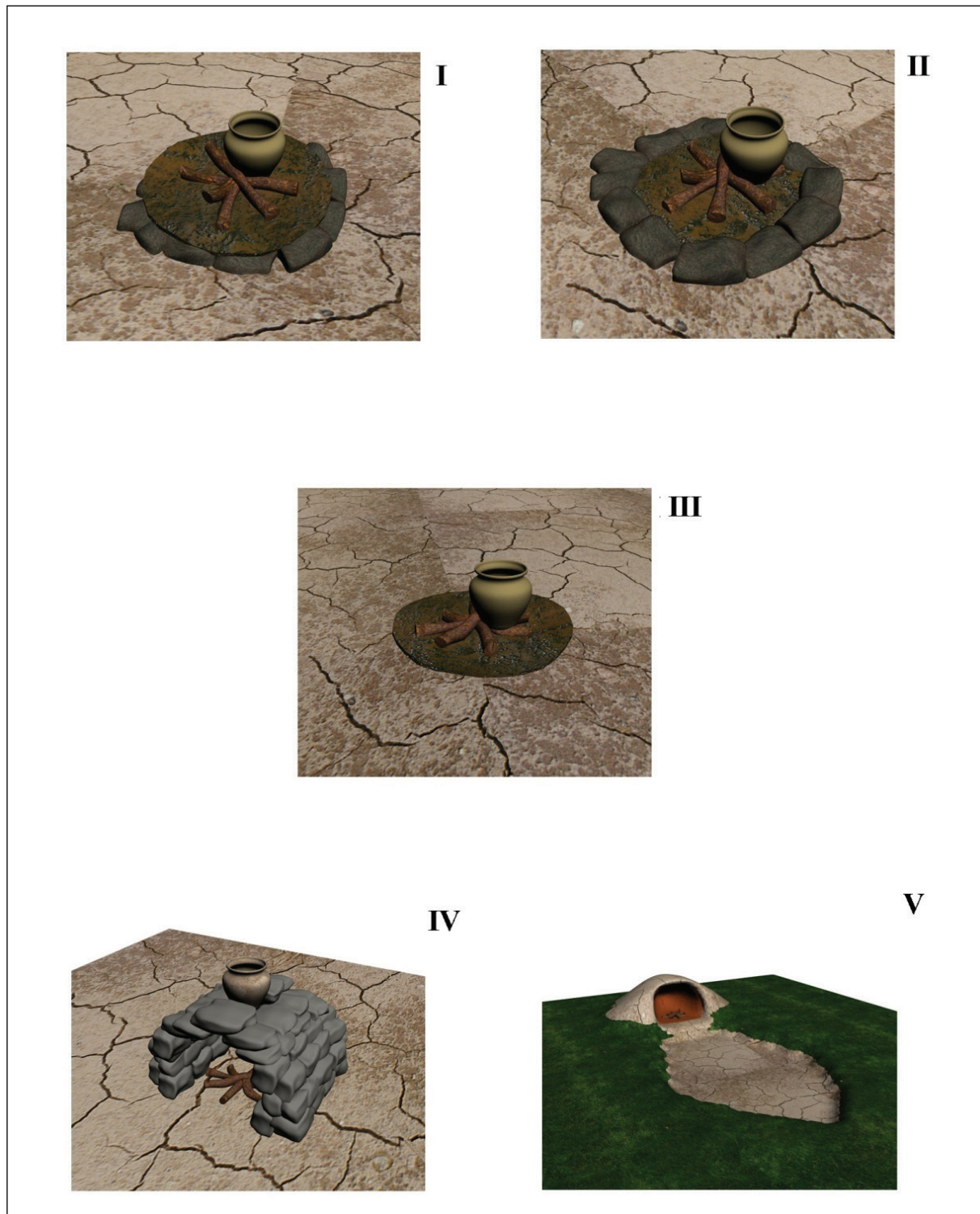


Fig. 7. Types of open-air fire installations discovered in early medieval settlements in Sălaj County. 3D reconstructions (taken from Băcuet-Crișan 2014).

As one can note from the table above (Tab. 1), ovens with the clay vault set up among dwellings and household annexes, covered or not by a roof/shed, have been identified in the majority of the objectives (6 sites) where archaeological excavations were performed. Related to the total number of open-air fire installations discovered so far in Sălaj County, one notes that these ovens with clay vault are the ones most often found (Fig. 8).

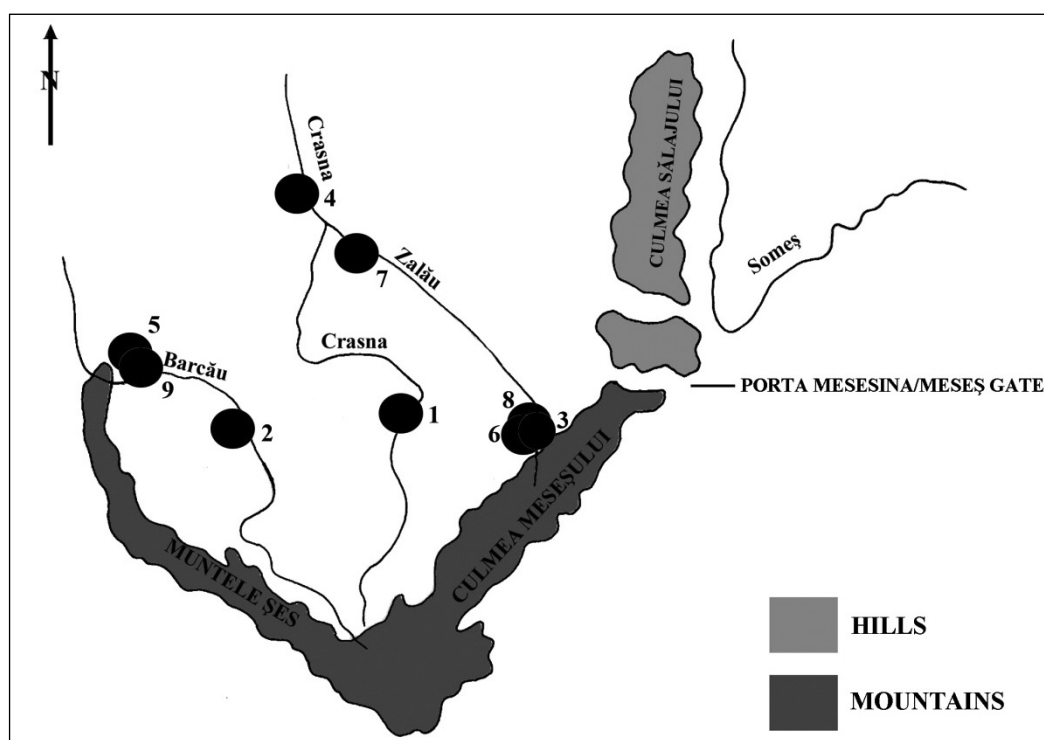


Fig. 8. Early medieval settlements in Sylvanian Basin where open-air vaulted ovens have been researched (1. Pericei “Keller Tag”, 2. Nușfalău “Țigoiul lui Benedek”, 3. Zalău “Bd. Mihai Viteazul, nr.104–106”, 4. Bobota “Pe vale/Iertaș”, 5. Poșt “La baraj”, 6. Aghireș “Sub pășune”, 7. Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövcises”, 8. Zalău “Valea Miței-Livada veche”, 9. Marca “Sfârâuaș” I).

Naturally, the chronological considerations above are not definitive, as they rely on the few data provided by the restricted researches performed so far in the two archaeological objectives under analysis. I am certain that extended archaeological excavations shall uncover more accurate pieces of information on the extent, character, and chronology of the early medieval habitations in Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövcises” and Pericei “Calău/Kalló”.

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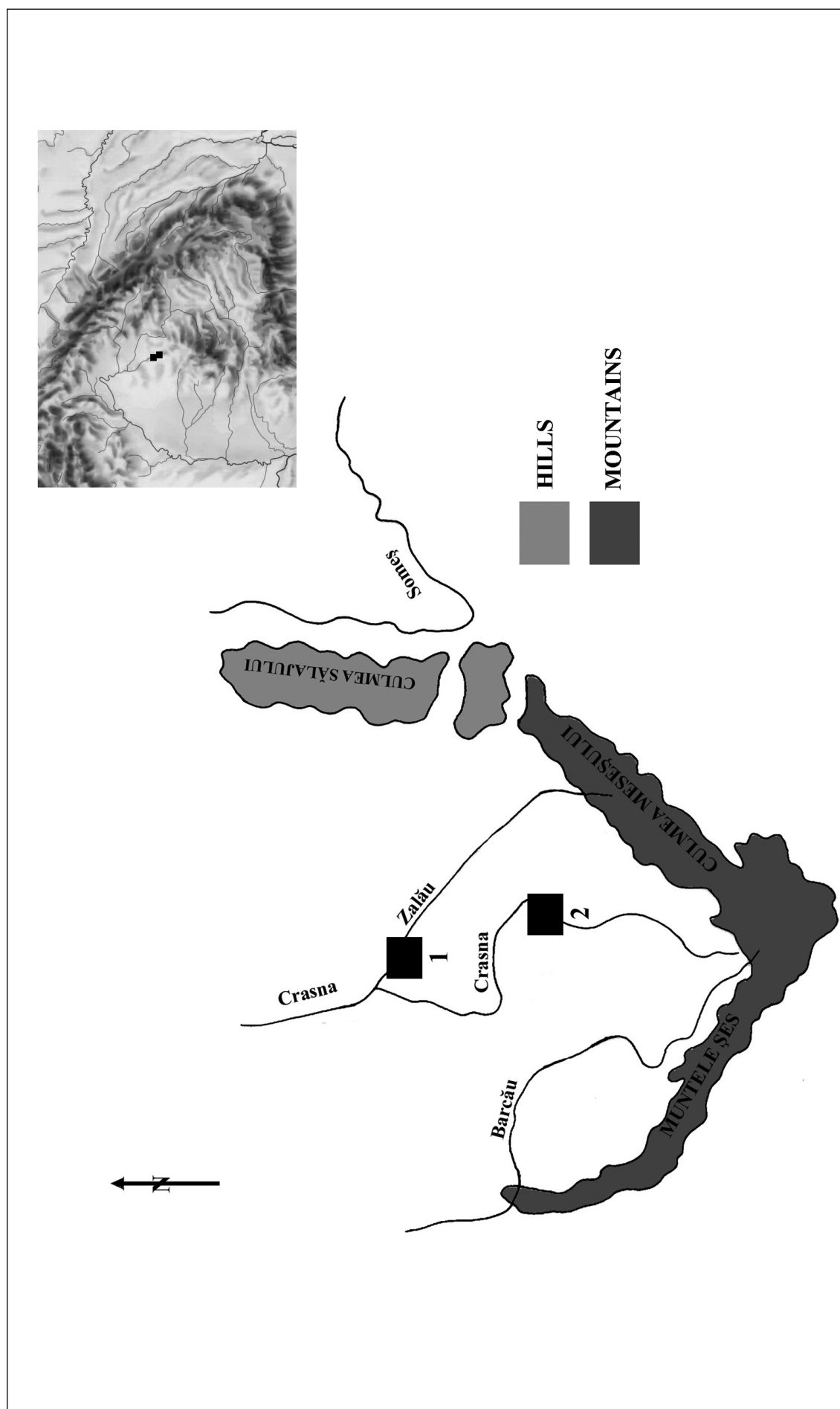


Plate 1. The location of the two sites in the Carpathian Basin and in Sylvania Basin (1. Lompirt "Pietriș/Kövices", 2. Pericei "Calău/Kalló").

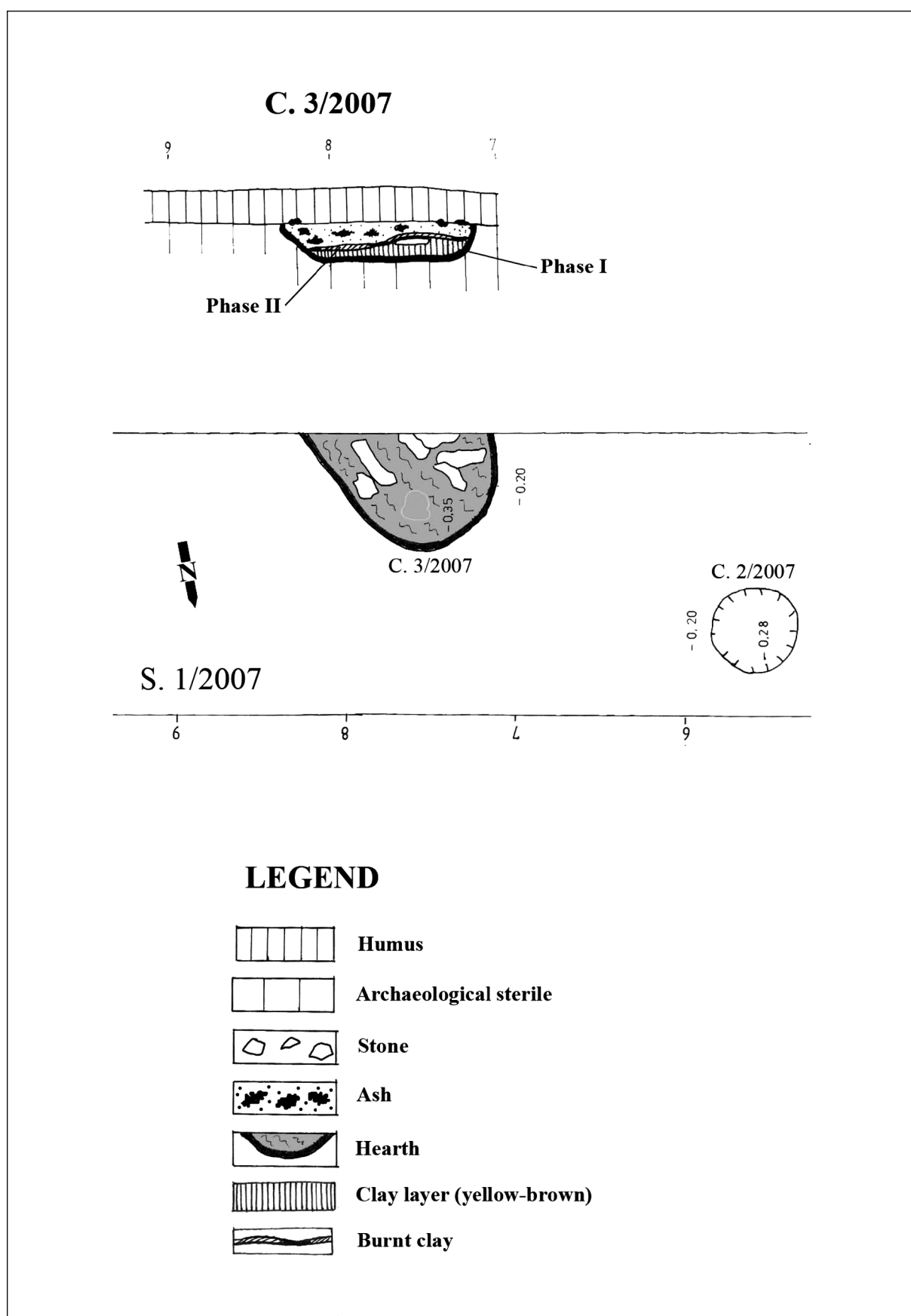


Plate 2. Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövecses”. Oven C. 3/2007 and posthole C. 2/2007.

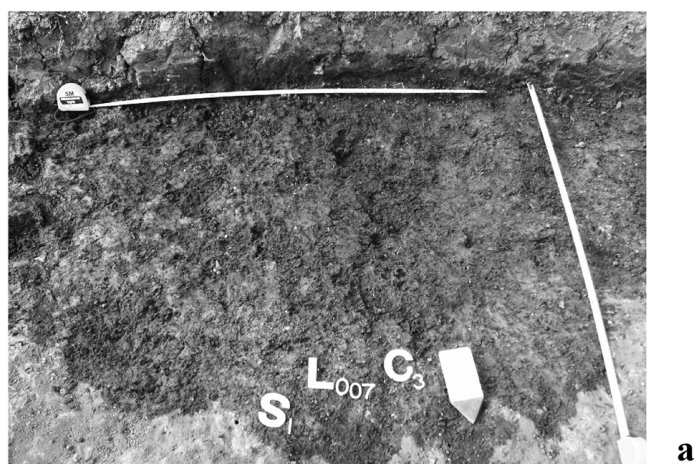


Plate 3. Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövicses”. Oven C. 3/2007.

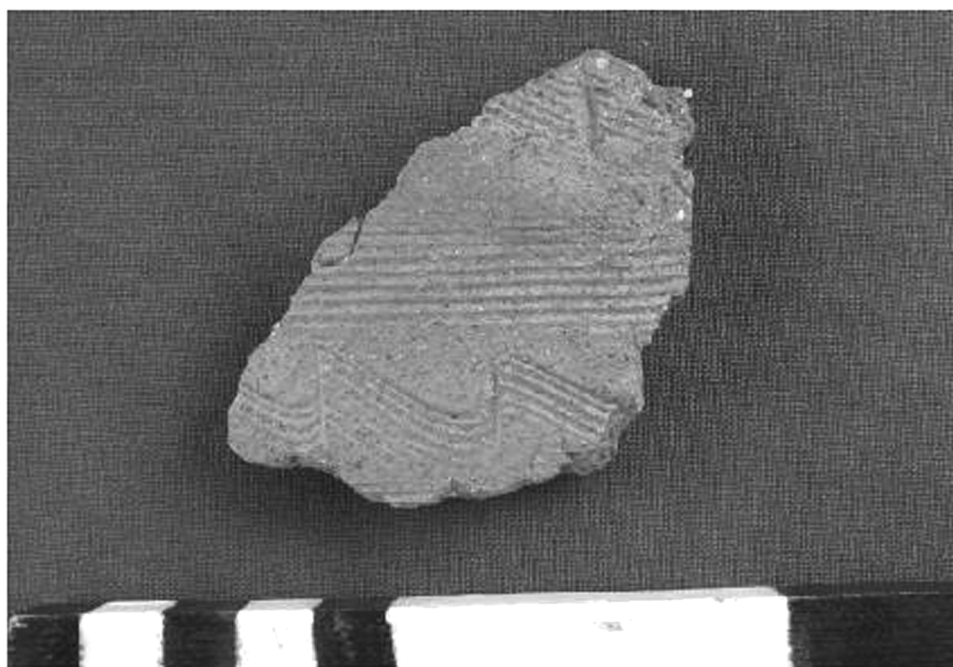
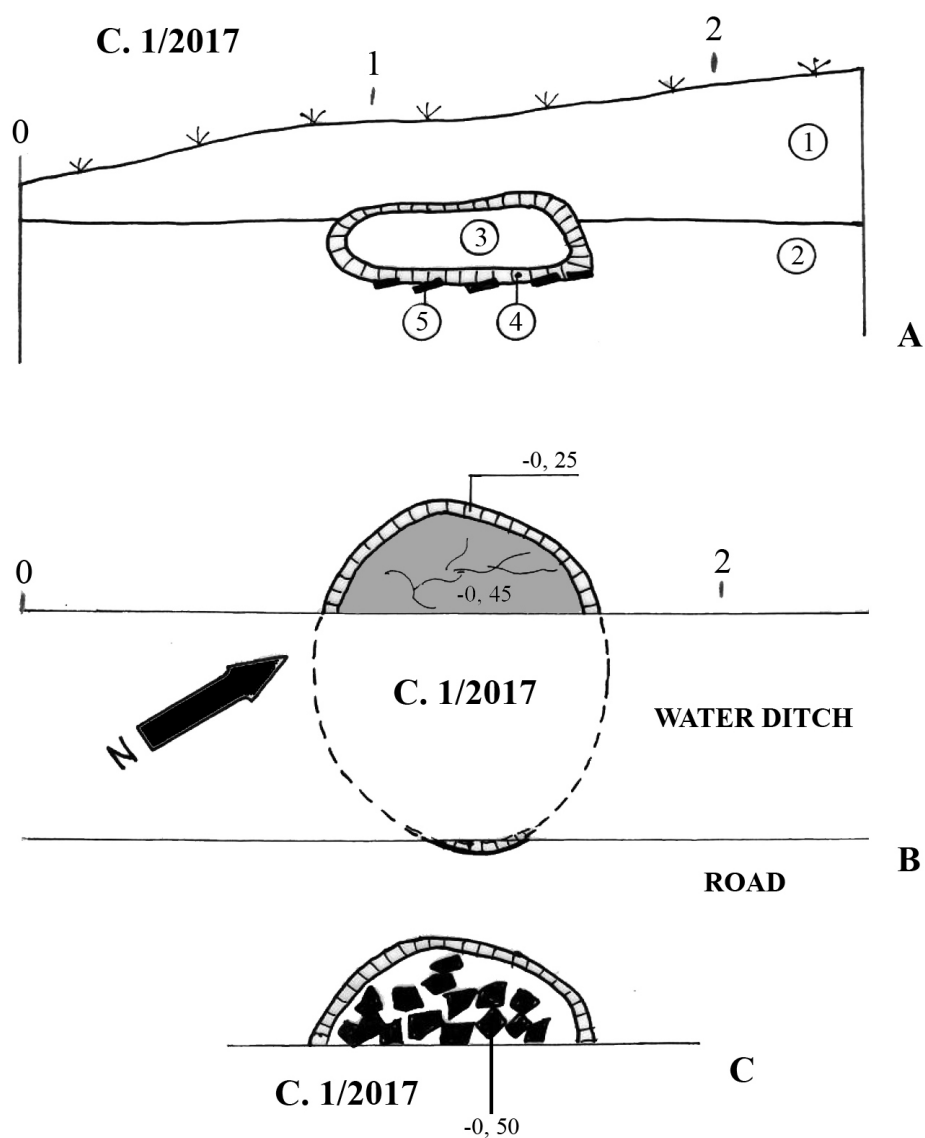


Plate 4. Lompirt “Pietriș/Kövicses”. Pottery (handleless cooking pot) modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel from oven C. 3/2007.



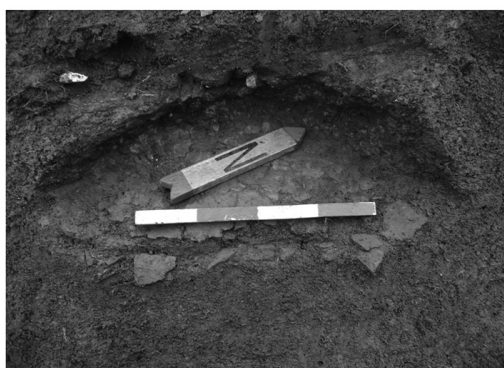
LEGEND

1. Humus
2. Archaeological sterile (yellow clay)
3. Black soil with burnt clay and charcoal
4. Hearth (burnt clay)
5. Pottery fragments

Plate 5. Pericei "Calău/Kalló". Oven C. 1/2017.



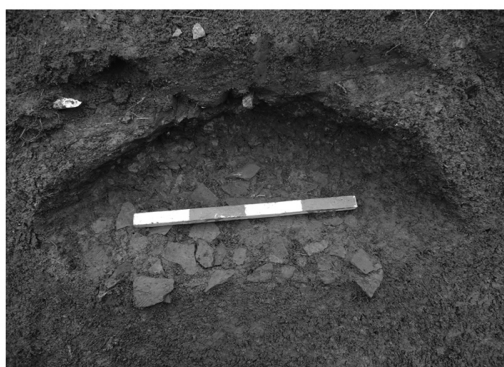
a



b



c



d

Plate 6. Pericei “Calău/Kalló”. Oven C. 1/2017.

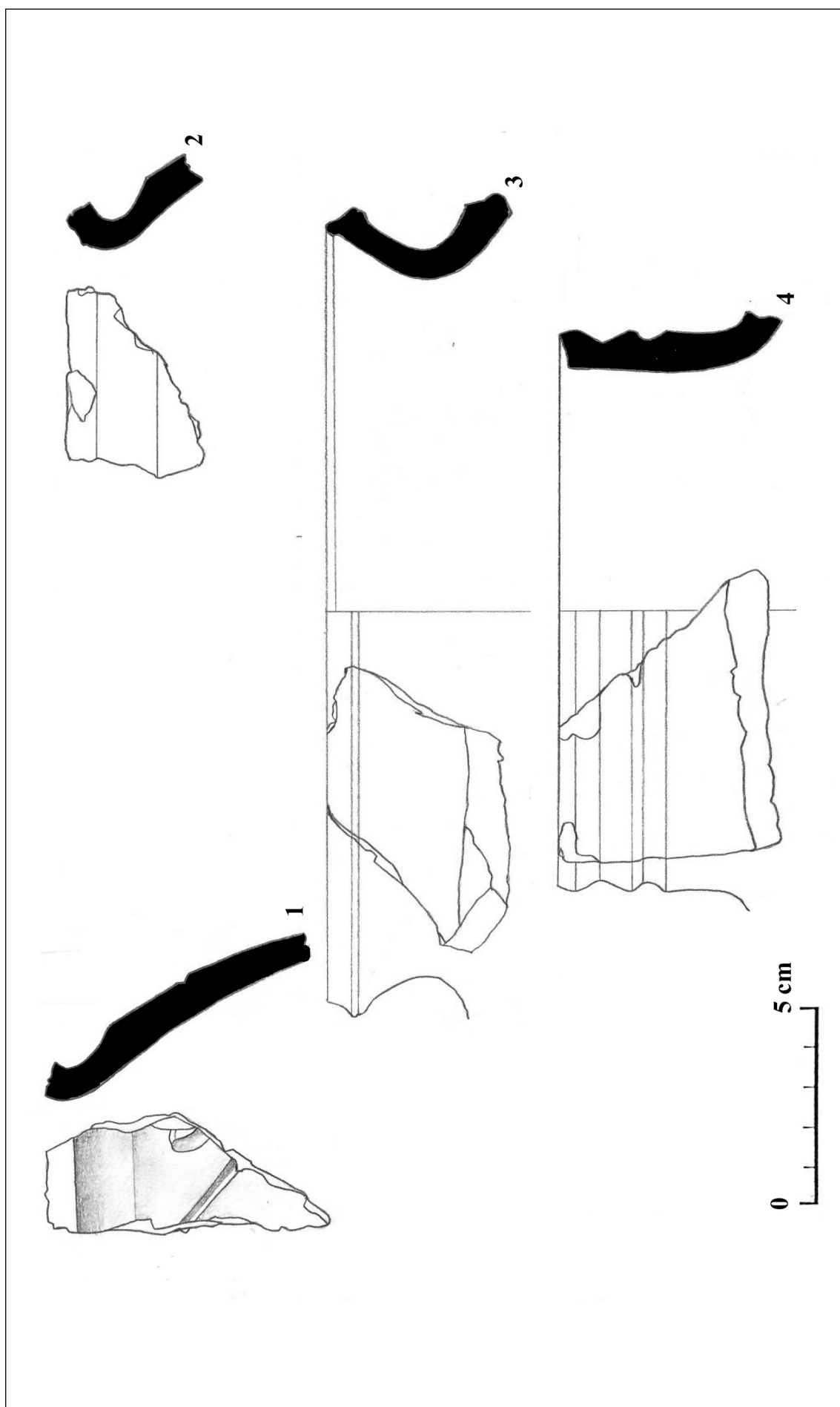


Plate 7. Pericei "Calău/Kalló". Oven C. 1/2017. Pottery modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel: handless cooking pots (1-3), pot with grooved neck (4).

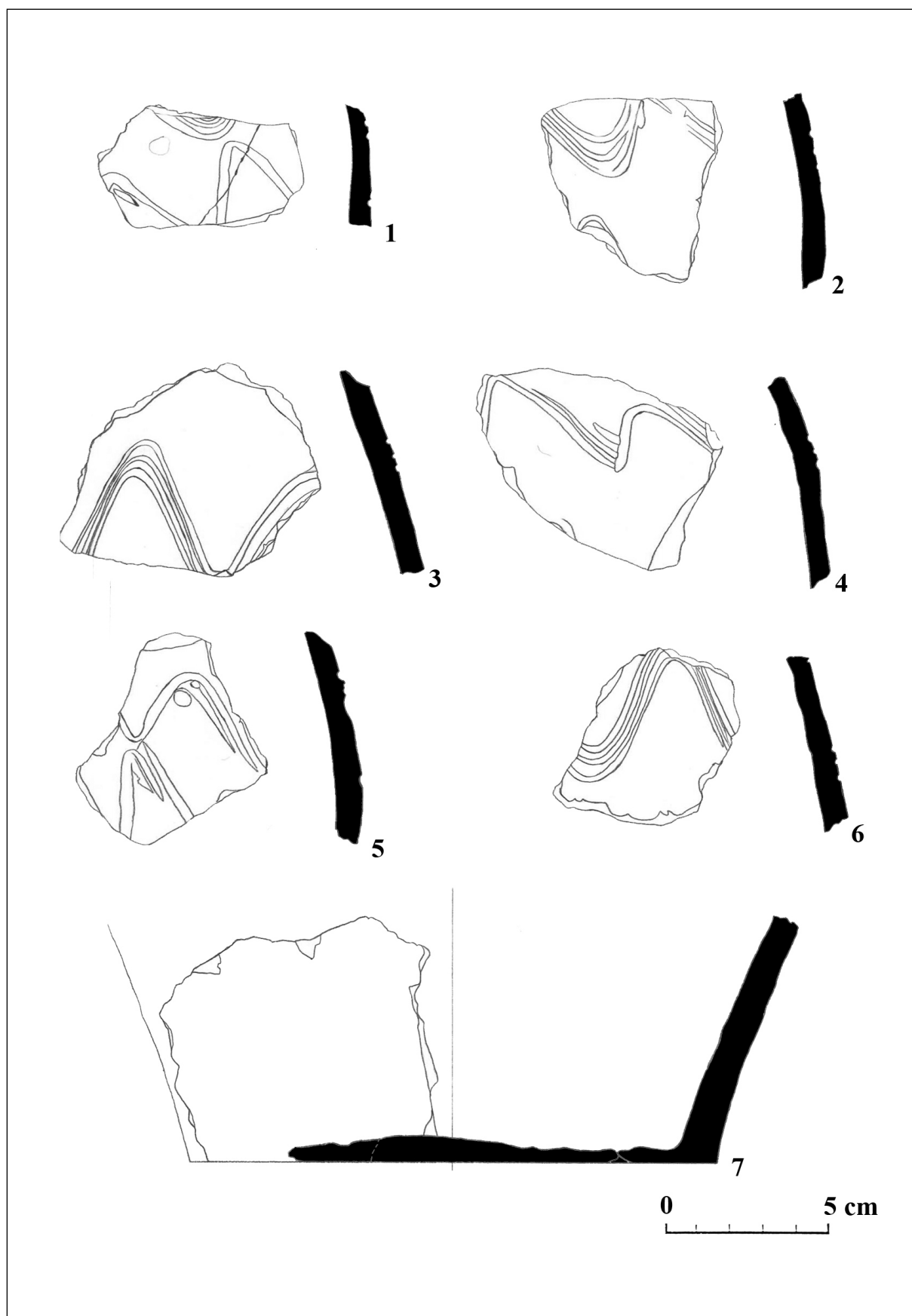


Plate 8. Pericei “Calău/Kalló”. Pottery (handless cooking pots) modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel.

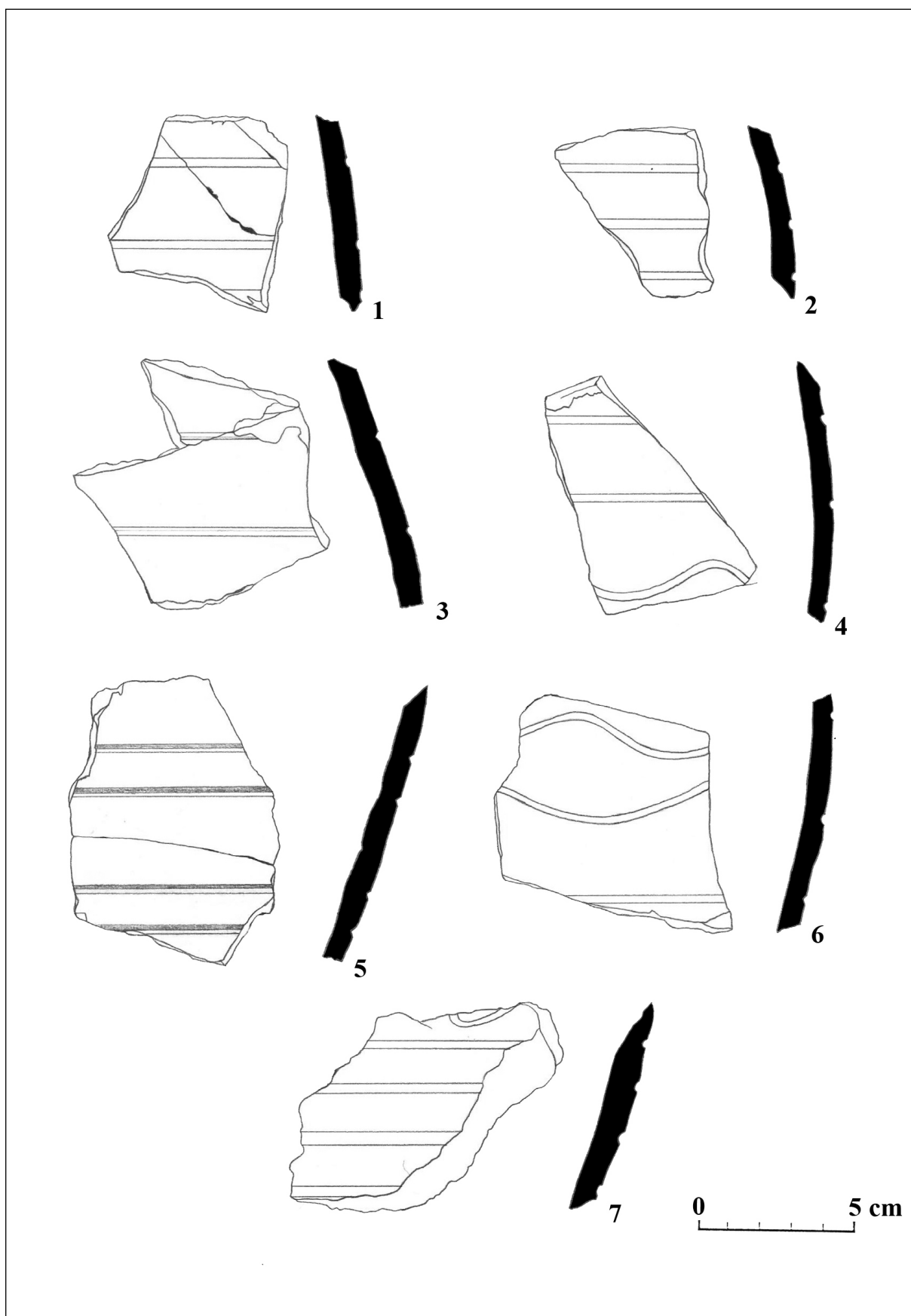


Plate 9. Pericei "Calău/Kalló". Pottery (handless cooking pots) modelled on the slow-turning potter's wheel.