

NEW EVIDENCE ON THE EARLY CHALCOLITHIC IN THE LOWER YANTRA VALLEY: THE SITE OF ORLOVETS – PAPAZ CHESHMA, VELIKO TARNOVO DISTRICT

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Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary results of the 2020 rescue excavations that took place ahead of pipeline construction near the village of Orlovets, Veliko Tarnovo District, at a multi-period site situated on the southern slope of an elevated terrace near high flow rate springs, in an area characterized by a density of prehistoric sites. The earliest occupation of the site is represented by a series of features dated back to the first half of the fifth mill. BC. The paper aims to introduce the newly obtained empirical data as a small contribution to the general picture of habitation and diversity of the activities of the ancient communities. The Chalcolithic features include large cut features (or dug-in parts of more complex features), simple single pits and large storage vessels. The available evidence suggests a small-sized and possibly short-termed or occasional recurrent occupation in the area. The presentation of the ceramic assemblage is focused on steady and repetitive combinations of shapes and decoration techniques common for the site while the regional characteristics of the pottery style and the diagnostic chronology of certain elements are briefly addressed. Based on pottery evidence, at least two main episodes of occupation could be distinguished: an earlier phase in the beginning of the Early Chalcolithic that is related to most of the excavated features, and a later phase represented by a single feature dating to the Middle Chalcolithic.

Keywords: Chalcolithic – Yantra River Basin – cut features – human occupation – settlement pattern – ceramic assemblage – pottery style.

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Introduction

This paper presents the major results of a recently excavated Early Chalcolithic site near the village of Orlovets in the Lower Yantra Basin, with an emphasis on the field evidence and recovered materials. As the data collection is still under study, the observations and conclusions given here should be considered preliminary. For the same reason, in-depth discussions and analyses remain beyond the scope of the paper.

Cultural environment (fig. 1)¹

The village of Orlovets is well known in prehistoric studies due to the long-lasting efforts of a local archaeologist, Petar Stanev. Besides the excavations at the eponymous Neolithic site in the Ada Kuzu locality, he also initiated extensive field surveys and provided the first archaeological map of the lands of the modern village, with the location of sites and monuments spanning from the Neolithic to the Late Middle Ages (Stanev et al. 1994; Stanev 2008). He mentioned for the first time a prehistoric site situated in the Papaz Cheshma locality (Turkish for ‘the priest’s fountain’), immediately east of the fresh-water springs and the stone fountain that gives the name of the whole vicinity (Stanev et al. 1994, 89ff; Stanev 2008, 167).² According to the published information, the earliest material there dates back to the end of the Early or the beginning of the Late Neolithic. The Neolithic site (ca. 4 ha) is partially overlapped by another one (ca. 3 ha) whose surface finds have been dated to the Early Chalcolithic.³ Thus the site in question appears to be the nearest more or less contemporary presumed settlement to the Chalcolithic features excavated on the route of the pipeline in 2020 and reported in this paper.

Another Middle Chalcolithic flat site was investigated by small-scale excavations made in 2003–04 in the Erendzhika locality situated on the right bank of Lanalan Dere, a right tributary of the Yantra, ca. 2.6 km west of the modern village and 3.6 km north of the site of Papaz Cheshma (Chohadzhiev et al. 2005; Chohadzhiev, S. 2021). Possible connections between the two sites will be examined in detail further in the text. Here it is noteworthy to draw attention to the fact that the site of Erendzhika remained unnoticed by the early field surveys and was localized only after some heavy machine digging that took place there in the mid-1990s.

In the environs of Orlovets, two possible tell sites were identified at a distance of 260 m from each other, in the Bakardzhy Alan locality, some 2.5 km north of the village.

¹ The information for four of the sites shown on the map comes from the Archaeological Map of Bulgaria Automatic Information System and was kindly provided to the authors by Alexander Chohadzhiev: two tell sites, Petko Karavelovo – Manastira (registration card No. 0700127) and Lozen–Chiflika (registration card No. 10007420); and two sites in the vicinity of the village of Lozen, Doynoolu (registration card No. 0750031) and Balinovo (registration card No. 0750030).

² The site excavated in 2020 is situated in the same locality but the one identified by Stanev et al. is located on another terrace to the southeast; a small gully separates it from the excavated area.

³ The site was visited again in 2011 during field surveys along the route of the Nabucco Pipeline Project, and the provisional determination of a Neolithic/Chalcolithic site with horizontal stratigraphy was confirmed (Chukalev et al. 2012, 589).

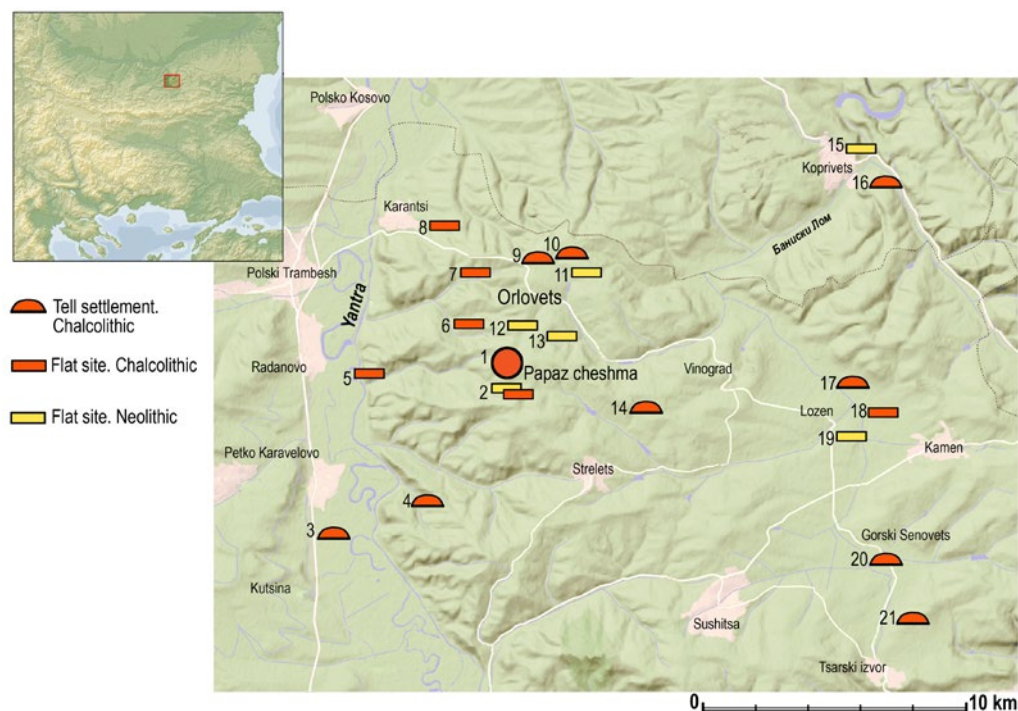


Figure 1. Map showing the major Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in the area: (1) Orlovets – Papaz Cheshma 1; (2) Orlovets – Papaz Cheshma 2; (3) Tell Petko Karavelovo; (4) Petko Karavelovo–Manastira; (5) Radanovo – Beli Bryag/Kurta; (6) Orlovets–Domuzluka / Manda gyol; (7) Orlovets–Erendzhika; (8) Karantsi–Glava; (9) Orlovets – Bakardzhy Alan Tell 1; (9) Orlovets – Bakardzhy Alan Tell 2; (11) Orlovets – Ada Kuzu; (12) Orlovets – Stopanski Dvor; (13) Orlovets – Dyado Genova Cheshma; (14) Vinograd–Klisedzhik; (15) Koprivets–Pchelina; (16) Tell Koprivets; (17) Lozen–Doynoolu; (18) Lozen–Balinovo (19) Lozen–Chiflika; (20) Gorski Senovets – Mogilata; (21) Tsarski Izvor. Image Credit: Encarta 2008 & Google Maps and the authors.

Both yielded Early Chalcolithic surface material, while the larger one provided also material suggesting longer occupation extending into the Late Chalcolithic (Stanev et al. 1994, 92; Stanev 2008, 166). A third Early Chalcolithic tell (?) site was localized by P. Stanev in 2001 in the Manda Gyol locality, 2.5 km west of the modern village, close to a modern spring water fountain (Stanev 2008, 167).¹ In the absence of further investigations, the nature of these three sites remains questionable; still, they do suggest the existence of a network of more or less contemporary sites and hence a rather dense Early Chalcolithic occupation in the area. The list of Chalcolithic sites in the environs of Orlovets can be tentatively extended with two sites identified so far only by the field surveys in the Yantra Valley made by S. Stefanov from 1928–1950. The first one is a flat site located ca. 1 km

¹ Approximately in the same location, Early/Middle Chalcolithic pottery from a looters' trench was collected in 2005; it is shown on the map in figure 1 as Domuzluka.

east of the neighboring village of Karantsi, in the Glava locality less than 3 km NW of Orlovets-Erendzhika (Stefanov 1956, 40f, fig. 34; Leshtakov 2005, 38). The second site was localized based on scattered surface material of presumably Early Chalcolithic and Bronze Age date in the southern foothills of the so-called Bely Bryag/Kutra hillfort, the ruins of which were still visible at the time of the survey some 2 km NE of the modern village of Radanovo, at the confluence of the Yantra and Lanalan Dere, ca. 3.2 km west of Orlovets-Erendzhika (Stefanov 1956, 39).

Beyond any doubt, the most important Chalcolithic site in the area is the tell site of Petko Karavelovo located on the left bank of the Yantra, some 8 km southwest of Orlovets – Papaz Cheshma (Chohadzhiev, A. 2021, with ref.). The long uninterrupted stratigraphic sequence spanning from the Early to the Late Chalcolithic, the regular systematic investigation and the large series of radiocarbon dates (cf. Chohadzhiev, this volume) altogether provide a steady basis for correlations and comparisons and demonstrate the significance of Tell Petko Karavelovo as a key site for our understanding of the Chalcolithic in the Middle/Lower Yantra Basin.

The site: location, natural environment, excavations, general information

The village of Orlovets is located in the easternmost part of Polski Trambesh Municipality and the northeastern part of Veliko Tarnovo District, north central Bulgaria. It lies on the Yantra-Rusenski Lom watershed, the natural border between the central and the eastern part of the Danubian Plain. The archaeological site in the Papaz Cheshma locality is situated ca. 3.2 km and 214 degrees southwest of the center of the village. The landscape is dominated by hilly plains cut by a network of river valleys, deep ravines and gullies running east–west towards the Yantra River.

The site is located on the southern slope of an elevated terrace surrounded from the south–southwest by the steep scarps of a small stream that sheds its waters into the Sardere, a right tributary of the Yantra (fig. 2). According to local informants, the whole area was covered in the past by thick deciduous vegetation, dominated by *Quercus*, *Carpinus* and *Tilia* sp., preserved nowadays on the gentle hills rising along the right bank of the Yantra. Today the area of the site is arable land with a thin layer of eroded grey forest soil covering a thick loess horizon. Beneath the loess deposits, the bedrock geology around Orlovets is relatively uniform, consisting of clayey and siliceous limestones and marls of the Aptian (early Cretaceous) Kovachevets formation (Hrishev et al. 1993). Indeed, the excavation exposed outcrops of layered bedrock marls and limestone rocks on the southwestern edge of the terrace. The area of Orlovets is well-supplied with groundwater. Freshwater sources are available in the immediate proximity of the site, captured in the past in a stone fountain, the remains of which are still visible on the ground.

The archaeological investigation took place in the spring and summer of 2020. Based on the scattered surface materials, the site has a horizontal stratigraphy and a tenta-



Figure 2. Aerial images of the site and its vicinity: (1) view prior to excavations; (2) panoramic view from the southwest. Image Credit: A. Chohadzhiev.

tively estimated total area of more than 17 acres. The full-scale salvage excavation covered an area of 3.2 acres and revealed a multi-period site with more than 170 features of diverse nature, dating from the Early and Final Chalcolithic, the Late Bronze and the Iron Age, as well as sporadic remains of occupation in the time of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (thirteenth century AD) and the early twentieth century (fig. 3; Petrova et al. 2020 &

2021). The aim of the paper, as it was stated in the beginning, is to present the major data related to the earliest period of occupation and settling of the site, the first half of the fifth mill. BC or the Early Chalcolithic according to the chronological scheme generally accepted in Bulgarian prehistory. However, an overview of the scope, parameters and the main results of the excavations is necessary in order to clarify the context and the state of preservation of the earliest features and material remains. The excavated area was limited to a strip measuring 35 m wide and 370 m long (that is, the zone affected by the pipeline construction), following the west–southwest oriented curve of the slope. Thus, the investigated area comprised two joint projections: one stretching east–west on a south facing slope, and another going down in a southwest direction on an east–southeast facing slope. The elevation range is ca. 20 m, with the highest point of 282 m.a.s.l. in the northern part and the lowest point of 262 m.a.s.l. in the southwestern part of the explored area. Hence, the surface of the explored area is sloping in more than one direction, with the slope's angle varying in the range from 4 to more than 11 degrees (fig. 2). The complicated topography, combined with deforestation and subsequent intensive tillage of the land pre-determined the poor state of preservation of cultural deposits over large parts of the area, which was affected by severe soil erosion and subsoil exposure and other natural hazards, e.g., landslides, formation of loess gullies and sediment deposition at the foot of the slope. However, the longevity of site use is combined with a certain pattern in the spatial (zonal) distribution of features pertaining to each period (fig. 3). This ultimately led to the fact that the remains of the different occupation phases are affected by varying degrees by the aforementioned negative factors.

Only ten features could be positively assigned to the Early Chalcolithic (fig. 3). Almost all of them were located over a rather limited area (ca. 200 m²) occupying the middle part of the slope (features 2, 62, 74, 75, 120, 130, 131, and 159). Besides topography, they all yielded roughly contemporary archaeological material, which allows them to be considered a unit/complex. The only exceptions are the 'isolated' feature 63 and the minute remains of feature 174, both situated at the foot of the slope. The former may be considered an 'outlier' also in terms of relative chronology, providing distinctively later ceramic material compared to the main complex, and will be described separately.

The Early Chalcolithic complex in the middle part of the slope

The available evidence (though limited by the spatial boundaries of the project) suggests a small-sized and possibly short-termed occupation of this particular area.

Noteworthy is the fact that no Early Chalcolithic ceramic material has been identified among the surface finds collected during the preliminary field survey (Chukalev et al. 2013, 595).¹ During the excavations, stray Early Chalcolithic pottery sherds were

¹ The proximity of the prehistoric site on the neighboring terrace south of the gully raised some doubts about the stated absence of similar material on the route of the pipeline. However, the same negative observation was confirmed on our first visit to the site.

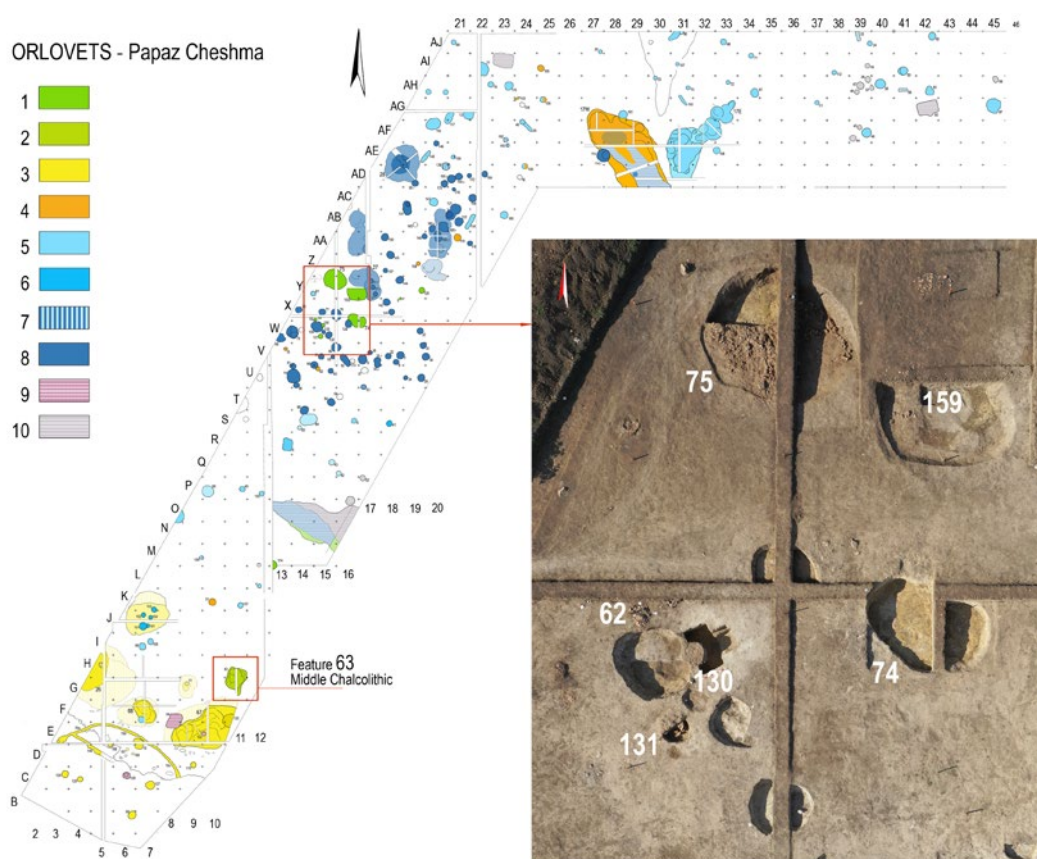


Figure 3. General layout of the site and an orthophoto of the area of the Early Chalcolithic complex: (1) Early Chalcolithic; (2) Middle Chalcolithic; (3) Final Chalcolithic; (4) Late Bronze Age; (5) Early Iron Age; (6) Early Iron Age (Basarabi); (7) Early/Late Iron Age (?); (8) Early/Late Iron Age transition; (9) Middle Ages; (10) twentieth century (1912). Image Credit: the authors & A. Chohadzhiev.

identified in the lower part of the cultural deposit exclusively in the small area outlined by contemporary features. However, no discernible cultural deposit can be securely associated with the Early Chalcolithic. Both anthropogenic and natural factors such as intensive Iron Age occupation of the same area as well as modern ploughing and erosion resulted in the obliteration of above-ground remains from this early period.

Thus, no proper dwelling remains could be identified within the explored area. All Early Chalcolithic features could be classified into three main types: large cut features (or dug-in parts of more complex features), simple single pits and large storage vessels. The latter can be subdivided into two groups: storage vessels (containers) in small pits dug especially for the purpose, and large vessels, fragmented *in situ* and partially dug into the ancient terrain.

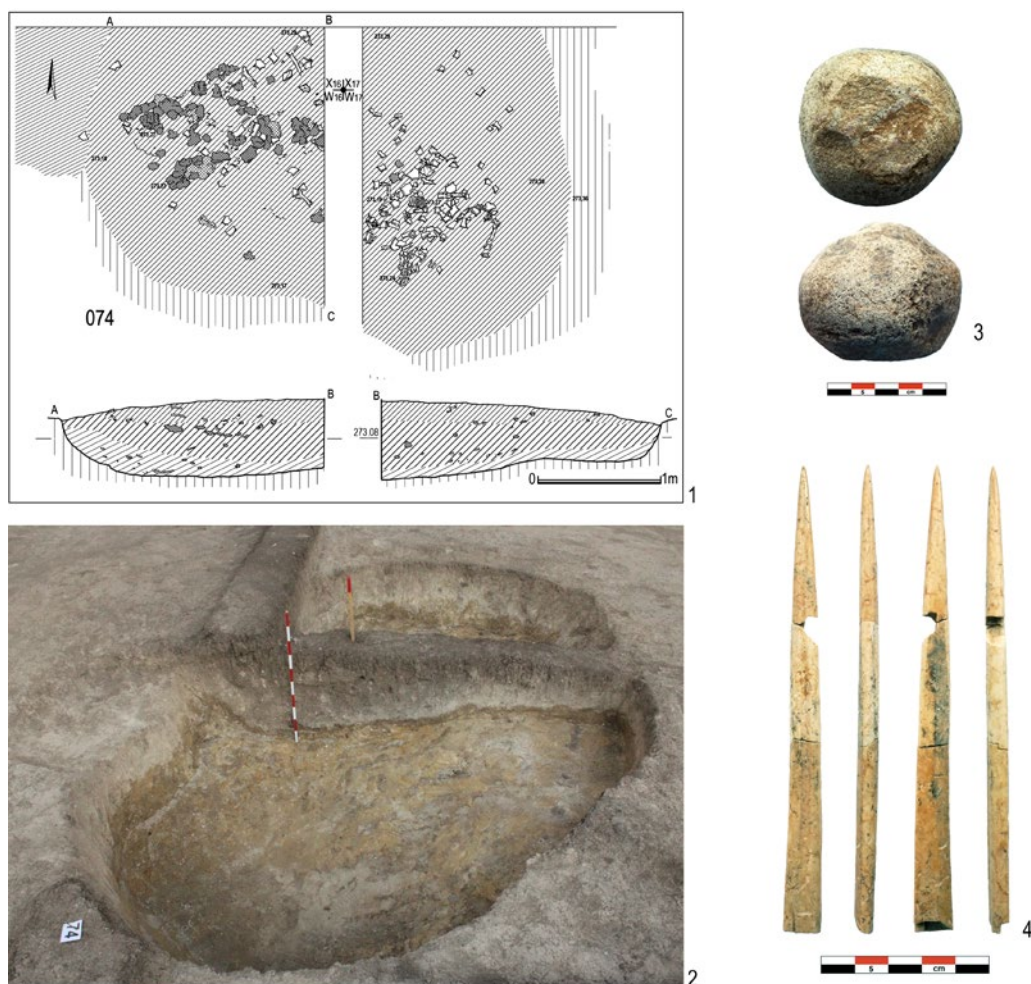


Figure 4. Feature 74: (1) layout and profile; (2) view from the west; (3) stone pestle; (4) bone projectile point. Image Credit: the authors.

The first group comprised three cut features (Nos. 74, 75, and 159), all located within an area of ca. 100 m² (figs. 3–5). All three shared some common features such as the irregular oval outlines and the large size (up to 14 m²), however, they also contained certain peculiarities, briefly described below.

Feature 74 (fig. 4). It is a large cut feature of sub-oval layout measuring 3.10 to 2.40 m, with steep sides and a fairly flat bottom, slightly deeper in the middle part. It was initially identified as an accumulation of debris lying in the lower part of the brown cultural layer. The outlines of the feature became visible at a depth of 0.40 m below the top surface (273.40 m.a.s.l.) as a darker spot against the light grey-yellowish background of the virgin soil. The maximum depth of the feature varies from 0.65 m in the eastern part to 0.85 m in the western part. Three main layers were distinguished in the fill. The upper fill was

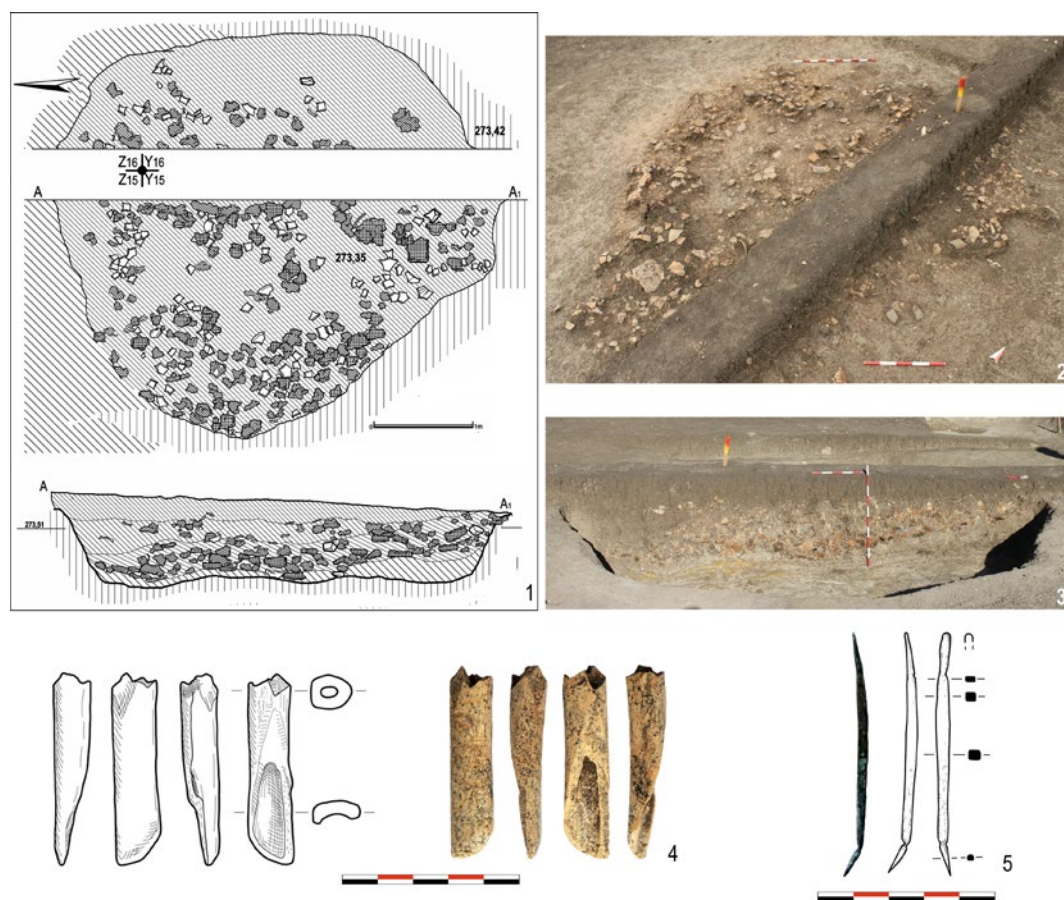


Figure 5. Feature 75: (1) layout and profile; (2) view from the southeast; (3) profile from the west; (4) bone tool; (5) metal awl. Image Credit: the authors.

of darker brown-greyish color and coarse texture, and a maximum thickness of 0.20 m. It is associated with the top accumulation of debris, comprising burnt clay rubble in the western part and scattered pottery sherds and animal bones concentrated mainly in the eastern part of the feature. An intact ceramic vessel (fig. 9.1) found upside-down is also associated with this layer. The main fill was of lighter grey-brown color and fine texture. It was comparatively abundant in pottery sherds and animal bones, however, without visible concentrations. The lowest fill was of light-mottled beige-grey sediment, accumulated mostly around the periphery of the walls.

Feature 75 (fig. 5). It was situated ca. 15 m NW of the previous one. Initially, it was identified as a large spot of compactly accumulated burnt clay rubble and ceramic sherds, all bearing fire traces. The topmost material was exposed at the basis of the brown deposit. However, the outlines of the feature became visible only after reaching the level of the light

virgin soil, ca. 0.10 m deeper. Similar to No. 74, this feature had a sub-oval layout measuring 4.5 x 4.0 m (ca. 14.5 m²), with gently sloping sides and a fairly flat bottom reached at a depth of 0.90 m. The main fill was composed almost exclusively of heavily burnt clay rubble. The top layer displayed evident signs of *in situ* weathering and abrasion. Most of the rubble can be identified as wall daub, yet only a small portion bore readily visible imprints of wooden construction. Wide and flat wooden imprints prevailed, yet examples of wattle were encountered as well. A large number of pottery sherds (with many refits) were found scattered among the clay debris. The composition of the assemblage shows equal portions of fine and kitchenware, as well as many sherds belonging to large clay containers. Almost without exception, the ceramic material bore clear signs of fire. Besides pottery, feature 75 yielded only a few other artifacts including bone (fig. 5.4) and stone tools, flint artifacts and broken grinding stones. Of special interest is the discovery of a small awl (fig. 5.5) made of copper alloy, found among the top layer of burnt debris and initially associated with the Early Chalcolithic feature (Petrova et al. 2021, 403). However, the XRF analysis indisputably proved that the artifact is made of tin bronze and should be considered intrusive.¹

Feature 159. This is the last example in the group of large pits located immediately to the southeast of No. 75. Its fill demonstrates certain similarities with feature 74 but was re-cut and badly disturbed by two large pits from the Iron Age (fig. 3).

The simple pits are represented by a single example, feature 120, located ca. 15 m east of the large cut features. The area is severely affected by soil degradation and exposure of subsoils. Thus, the remains of the pit were identified immediately below the plowzone, on the level of the virgin soil as a hardly discernible spot with circular outline, 1.1 m in diameter. The excavation revealed a shallow pit, semi-circular in section and 0.35 m deep. A few Early Chalcolithic sherds found in the topsoil nearby suggest that the upper part of the pit was destroyed by erosion and modern agriculture. The pit fill contained light grey-brown sediment, a modest amount of pottery sherds, and a poorly preserved horn tip.

The last feature type containing large storage jars is represented by four examples. One of them, feature 2 (fig. 6.1 and 2) was registered during the evaluation dig and together with feature 120 marked the easternmost point of Early Chalcolithic occupation within the explored area of the site. The remains of a large storage vessel (a thick-walled holemouth jar) were unearthed on the level of the virgin soil, immediately below the plowzone. Only the base of the vessel was preserved *in situ* and dug into the virgin soil. Rim and body parts were found fallen in the interior while a small scatter of sherds in the topsoil around the vessel suggested that the upper part of the feature was destroyed by recent ploughing.

The rest of the features were found next to each other in a small area of about 15 m² and could be regarded as a complex. One of the vessels (feature 62) was discovered frag-

¹ The contents of Sn is more than 32 percent.

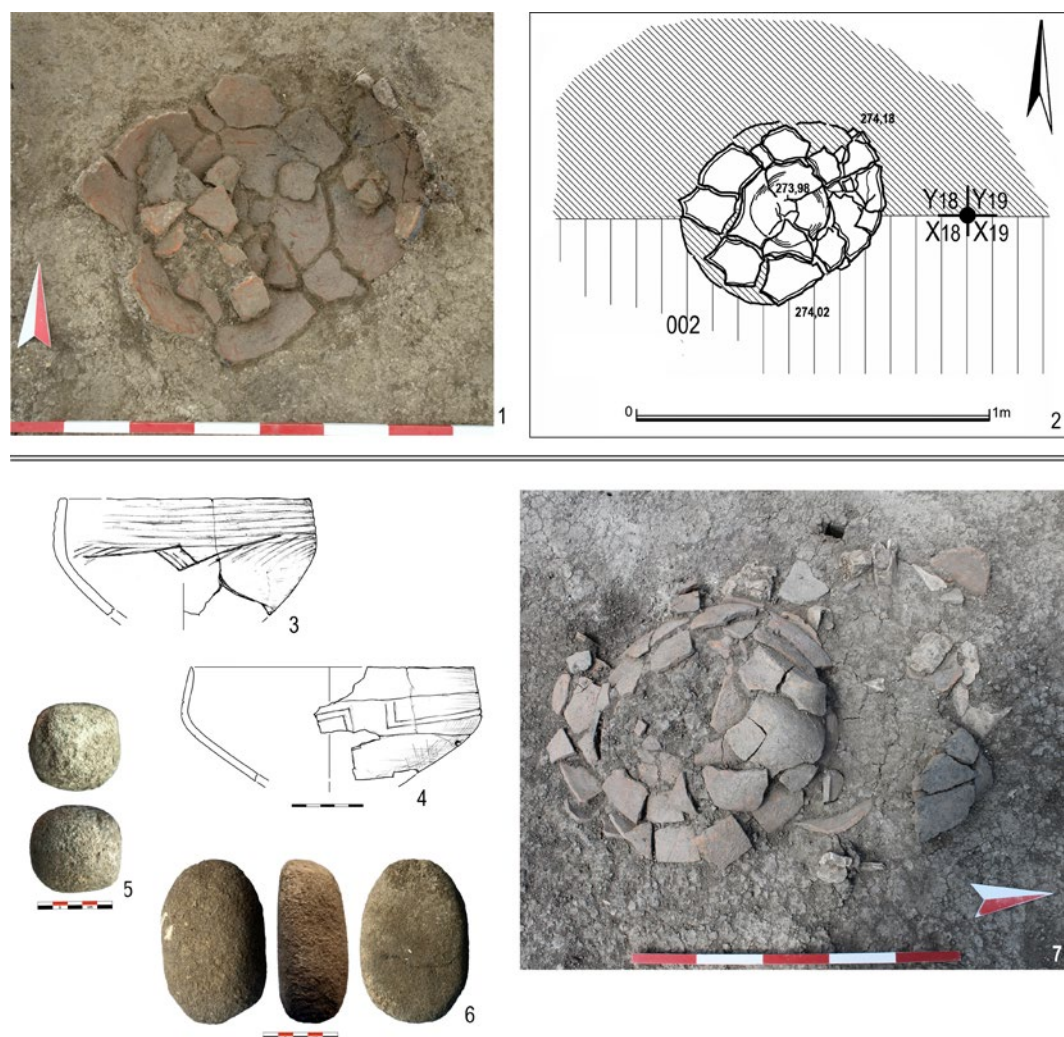


Figure 6. Features 2 and 62: (1–2) feature 2, the lower part of a storage jar dug into the virgin soil; (3–4) bowls with channeled and incised decoration from feature 62; (5–6) stone pestles, feature 62; (4) storage jar slightly dug into the subsoil, feature 62. Image Credit: the authors.

mented *in situ*, with the lower part slightly dug into the subsoil level (fig. 6.7). Both the position and the shape of the vessel are similar to that of feature 2. However, among the fragments of the vessel were discovered also refits of fine ware (fig. 6.3 and 4), cattle bones, and two stone pestles (fig. 6.5 and 6).

Of special interest are the other two features (130 and 131) registered on the same level south of feature 62 (figs. 7 and 8). Feature 130 contained a richly decorated thick-walled pithoid jar put in a small pit especially cut for the purpose (fig. 7.2–4). Its position suggested that the mouth of the vessel was originally visible above the surface. The fill of

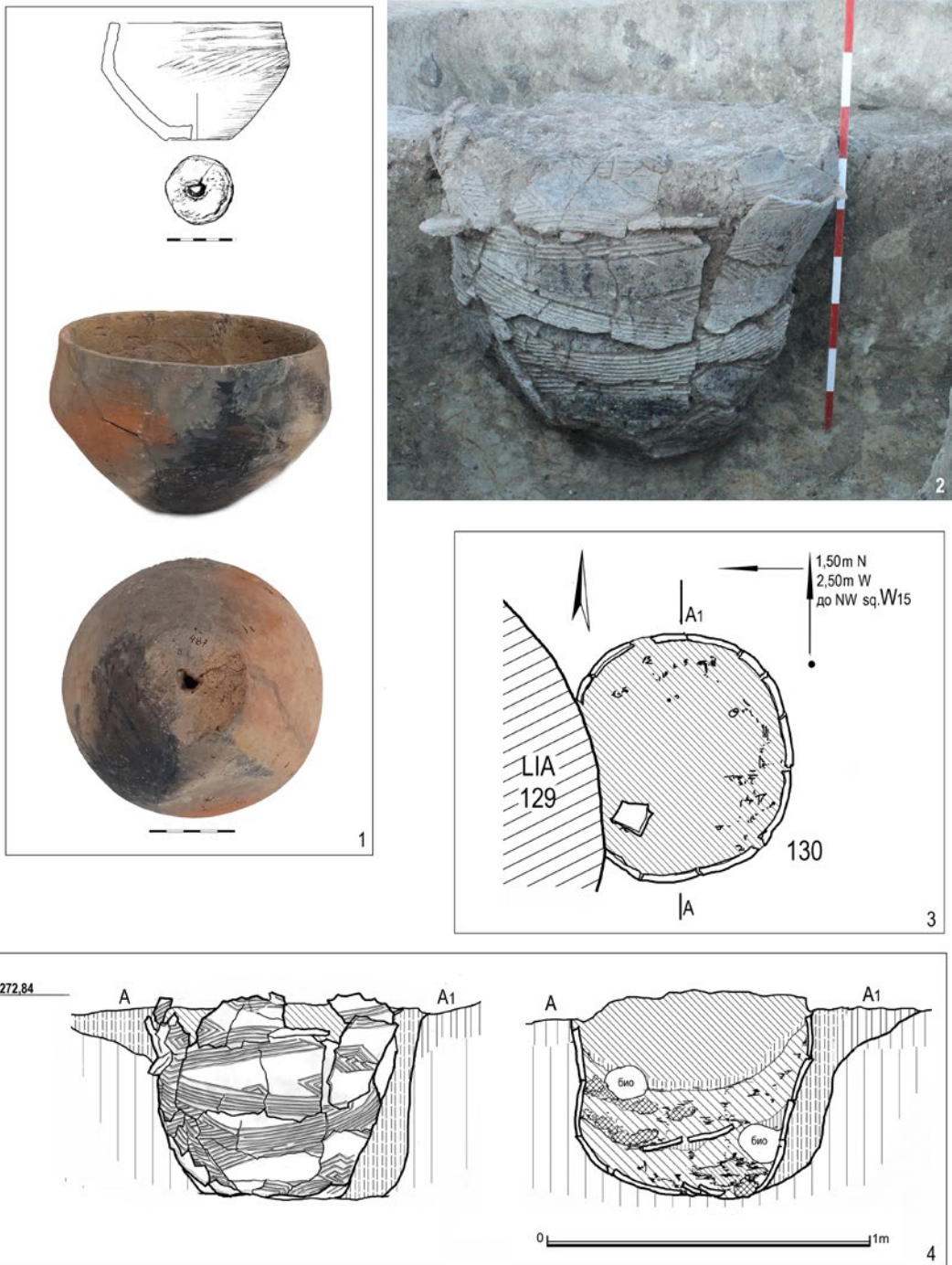


Figure 7. Feature 130, ceramic container in a pit: (1) ceramic vessel found on the bottom of the container; (2) the container, view from the east; (3–4) layout and profiles of the pit and the container. Image Credit: the authors.

the container reminds of a typical ‘household waste’: burnt clay rubble, small charcoals, animal bones, small pottery sherds, and the rim parts of the container itself. However, a small ‘deposit’ was discovered on the bottom of the container comprising the broken parts of a complete fine bowl (fig. 7.1) with a perforated base and several knucklebones that provided evidence for intentional deposition.

Feature 131 (fig. 8) was identified 1.20 m south of the previous one as a small compact heap of burnt rubble. It turned out to seal a small pit containing a second, smaller in capacity, richly decorated container (fig. 8.1). Unlike the first one, the pit was slightly larger than the vessel itself. The fill of the pit and the container was soft grey-brownish sediment, rich in burnt clay rubble and the fallen parts of the container (fig. 8.2 and 3).

Ceramic assemblage

The pottery collection from the Early Chalcolithic features uncovered in the middle section of the excavated area is still in the process of recording and analysis.¹ Hence, the paper presents an overview of the main data and the observations made should be regarded as preliminary and subject to revision. Detailed comparative analysis is beyond the scope of the study and the parallels were limited mainly to neighboring sites with well-established stratigraphy and chronology.

Technological groups and fabrics

The assemblage comprises the three main categories traditionally designated as fine or tableware, kitchenware (semi-coarse pottery), and storage jars or containers (thick-walled vessels of significant size and capacity).

The bulk of the material is highly fragmented. In most cases, the surface of the vessels is abraded to varying degrees, while a large part of the sherds bears traces of moderate to strong exposure to secondary firing. Thus, the original appearance of the vessels is only very rarely preserved, hindering the proper assessment of important criteria like fabric color, surface treatment and especially the presence or absence of additional surface coating/slip.

As a whole, the surface of most of the fine ware is carefully treated and well smoothed. Pottery fabric can be defined as ‘soft’ in touch and appearance. The paste is fine to semi-fine, tempered with tiny mineral inclusions, mainly fine-grained sand, mica and chamotte.² A small part of the analyzed sherds is in a better state of preservation and bears traces of fine slip and burnishing; it is possible to assume that similar surface treatment was common for the fine ware as a whole.

¹ Some of the pots, namely the large storage vessels, are still undergoing restoration. A detailed analysis of the whole assemblage will be the subject of a separate publication.

² Similar observations were made by P. Leshtakov when analyzing the Early Chalcolithic fabrics from Kachitsa (Leshtakov 2010, 41). In both cases, the ‘soft’ appearance of the fabric is not necessarily related to low firing temperature but might be also the result of specific post-depositional processes and/or conditions.

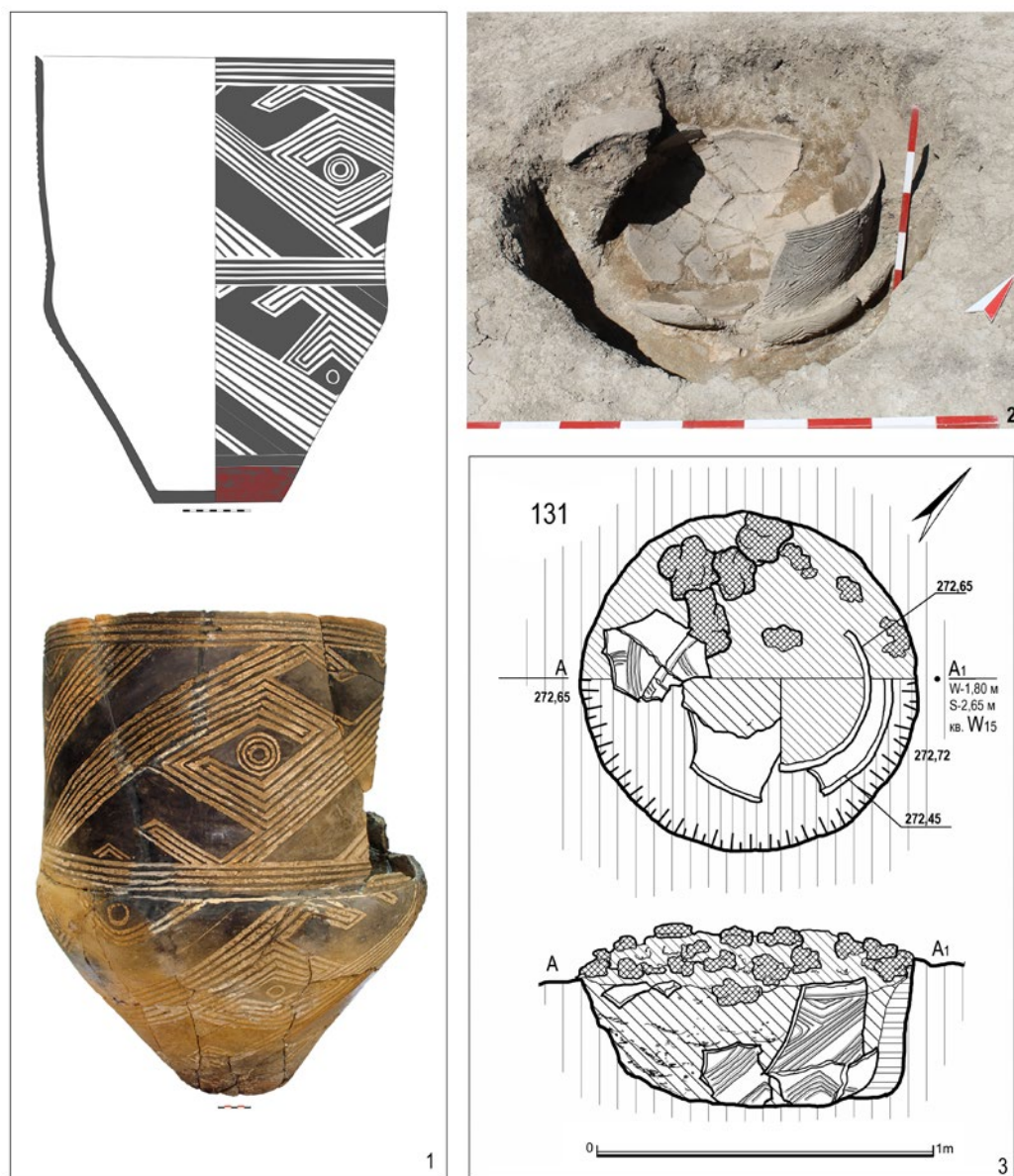


Figure 8. Feature 131, ceramic container in a pit: (1) the decorated container; (2) the vessel in situ; (3) layout and profile of the pit and the container. Image Credit: the authors.

Shapes and decoration

The complex is dominated by vessels of rounded and smooth curvilinear profiles. Sharply carinated biconical or cylindrical–conical profiles are virtually absent. Pot bases are usually flat and relatively wide. Simple open shapes are the majority in all categories, demonstrating a high diversity of proportions and profiles, yet forming readily recognizable groups based on form–capacity–function criteria (figs. 9–12).

The assemblage shows a high percentage of decorated vessels. Main ornamental techniques include channeling, incision and excision, the latter combined with white in-crustation (figs. 9.4; 10.12; 11.12 and 14; 12.5–6, 8, and 10). Graphite painting occurs only in a few cases (fig. 9.12); however, this might be a consequence of conflagration and/or post-depositional processes. Plastic decoration is relatively common, yet the type range is limited to horizontal cordons with finger impressions (figs. 10.8–10), rows of shallow impressions (figs. 10.7; 12.1 and 3), and small oval or round plastic knobs (fig. 11.6, 8, and 11). Several steady and repetitive combinations of shapes and decoration techniques are observed within individual categories and will be discussed in detail below.

One of the main shapes within the group of fine ware is represented by numerous examples of cylindrical–conical or slightly biconical bowls with gentle carination and tapered, rounded rims. Despite the small variations in the curve of the profile, the visual similarity is due to the almost identical manner of decoration, combining delicate horizontal channeling on the upper part of the body with strips of oblique channeling below the carination (fig. 9.2–3 and 5–6). A distinctive decorative element present on several

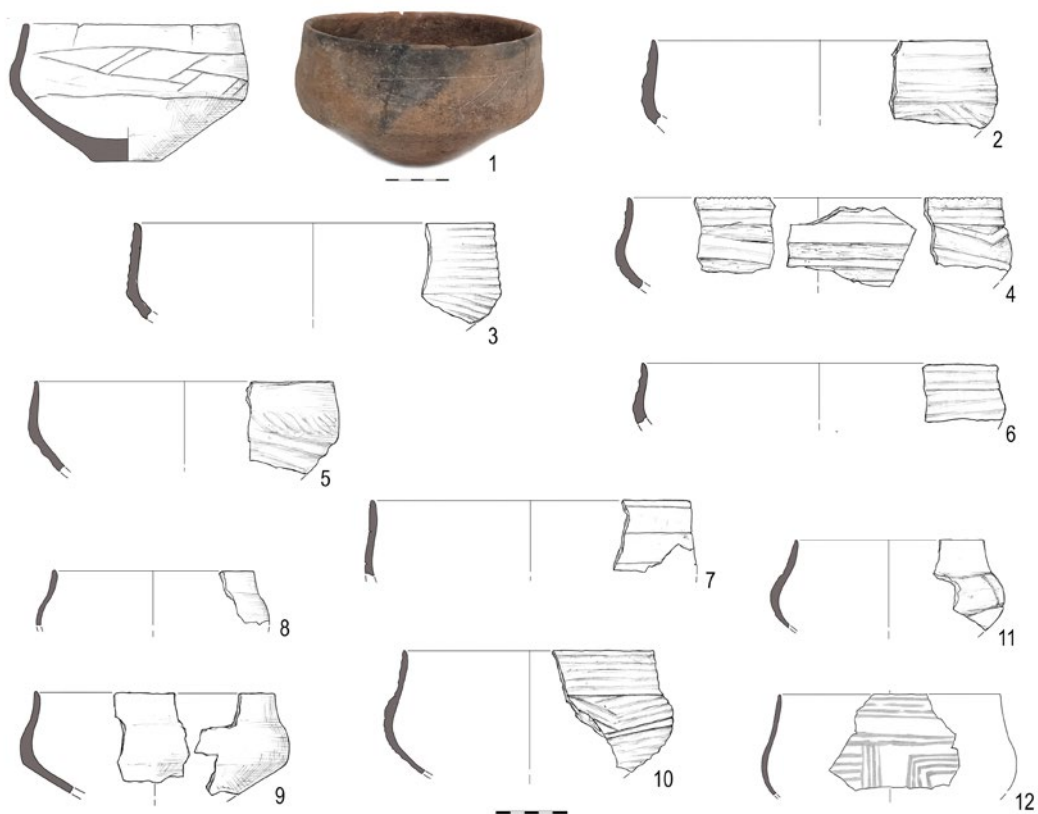


Figure 9. Pottery from feature 74. Image Credit: the authors.

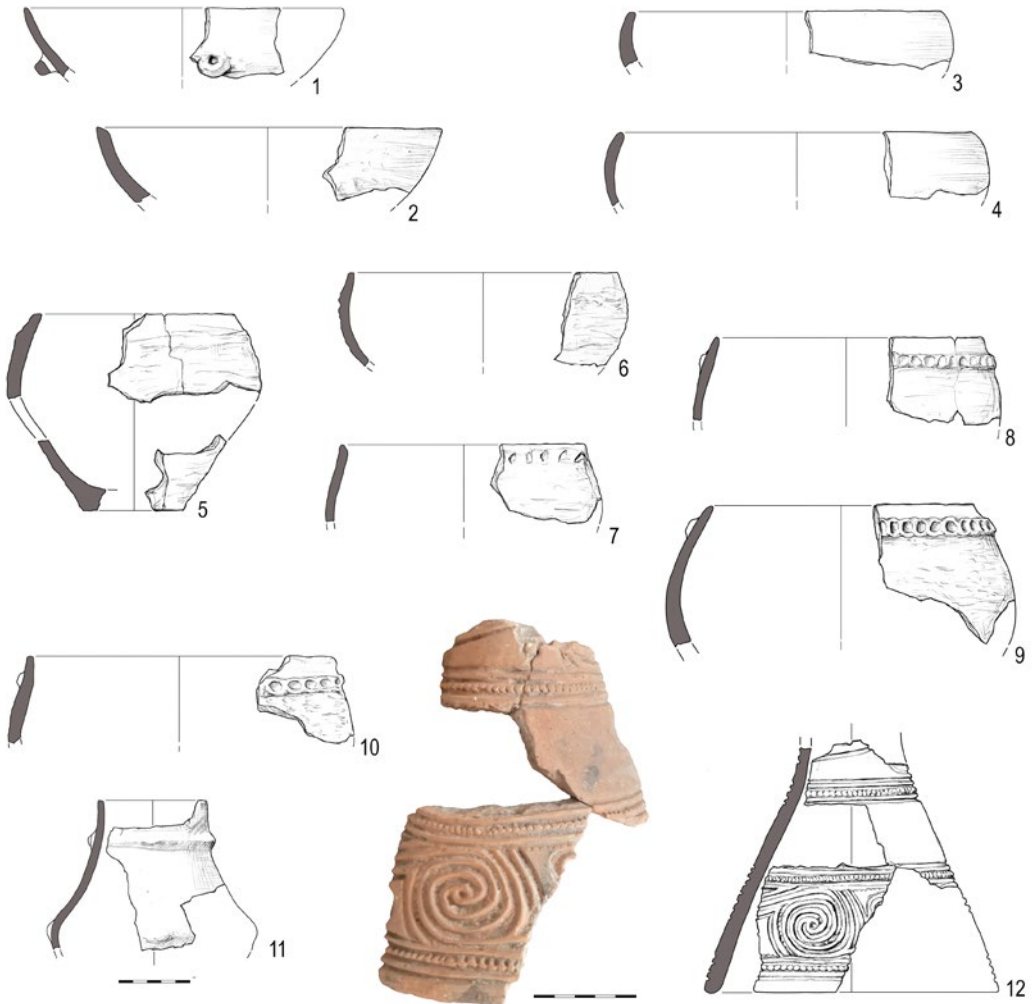


Figure 10. Pottery from feature 74. Image Credit: the authors.

vessels of the same group, is the use of fine and carefully made incisions. As a rule, the incisions outlined diamond-shaped or angular linear motifs on the upper part of the body. Fine incisions are frequently combined with channeling (the examples come exclusively from features 62 and 75; figs. 6.3 and 4; 11.10 and 11) or are used separately (fig. 9.1). In several cases, the channeling is combined with wide, finely executed shallow strips and diamond-shaped ornaments organized in angular meanders (figs. 9.4; 11.12 and 14). The decoration could be supplemented by fine notches on the rim tip (fig. 11.14).

The combination of shape and decoration should be considered a chronologically diagnostic trait; the manner of application as well as the organization of the channeled

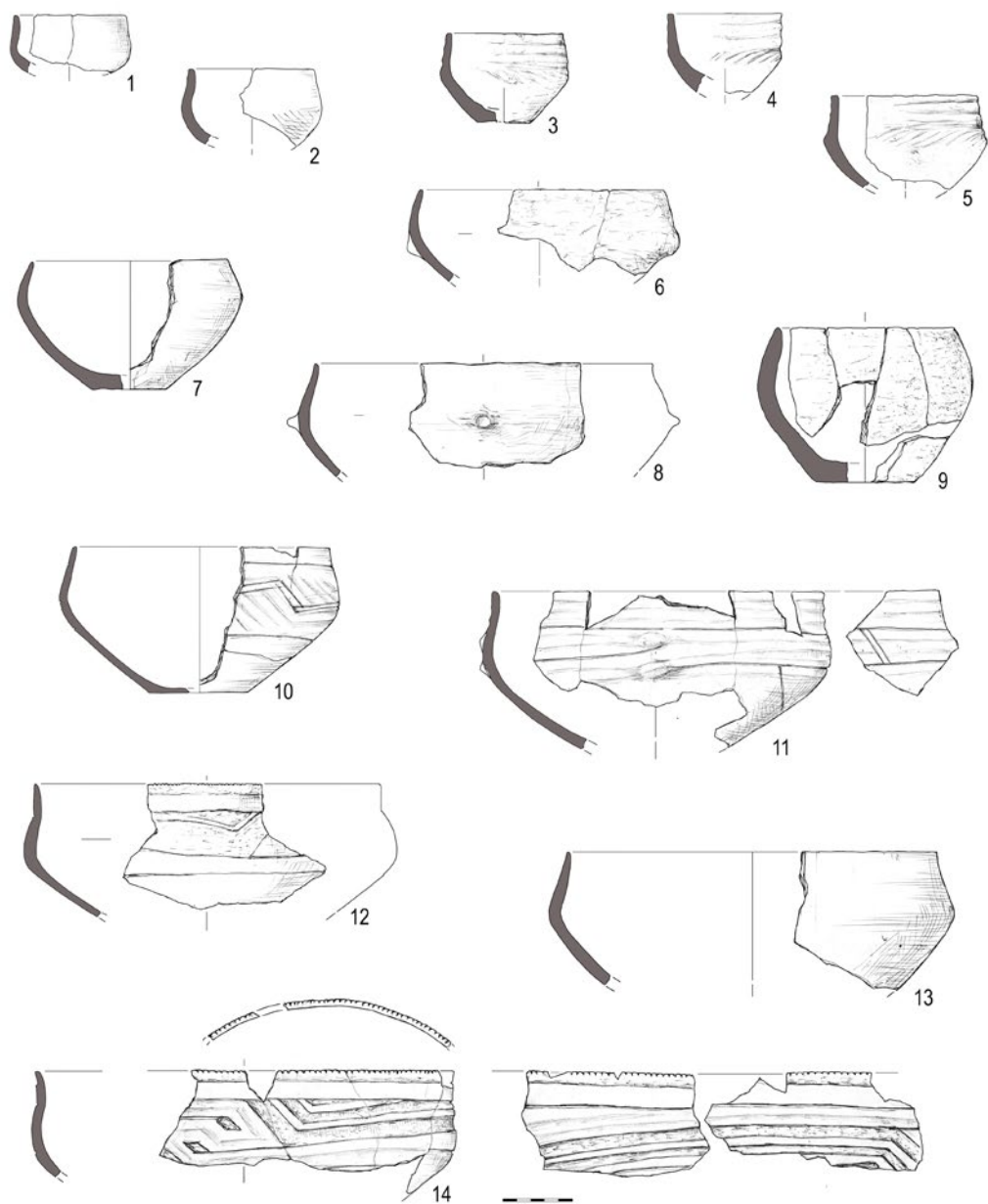


Figure 11. Pottery from feature 75. Image Credit: the authors.

decoration is reminiscent of ‘archaic’ (Late Neolithic) decoration traditions. Certain parallels originate from the early occupation levels of Tell Petko Karavelovo and from the cut features associated with the lowest stratigraphic level XVIII of Tell Ruse (Popov 1998, 186f). North of the Danube, similar fine incisions are attested in ceramic assemblages

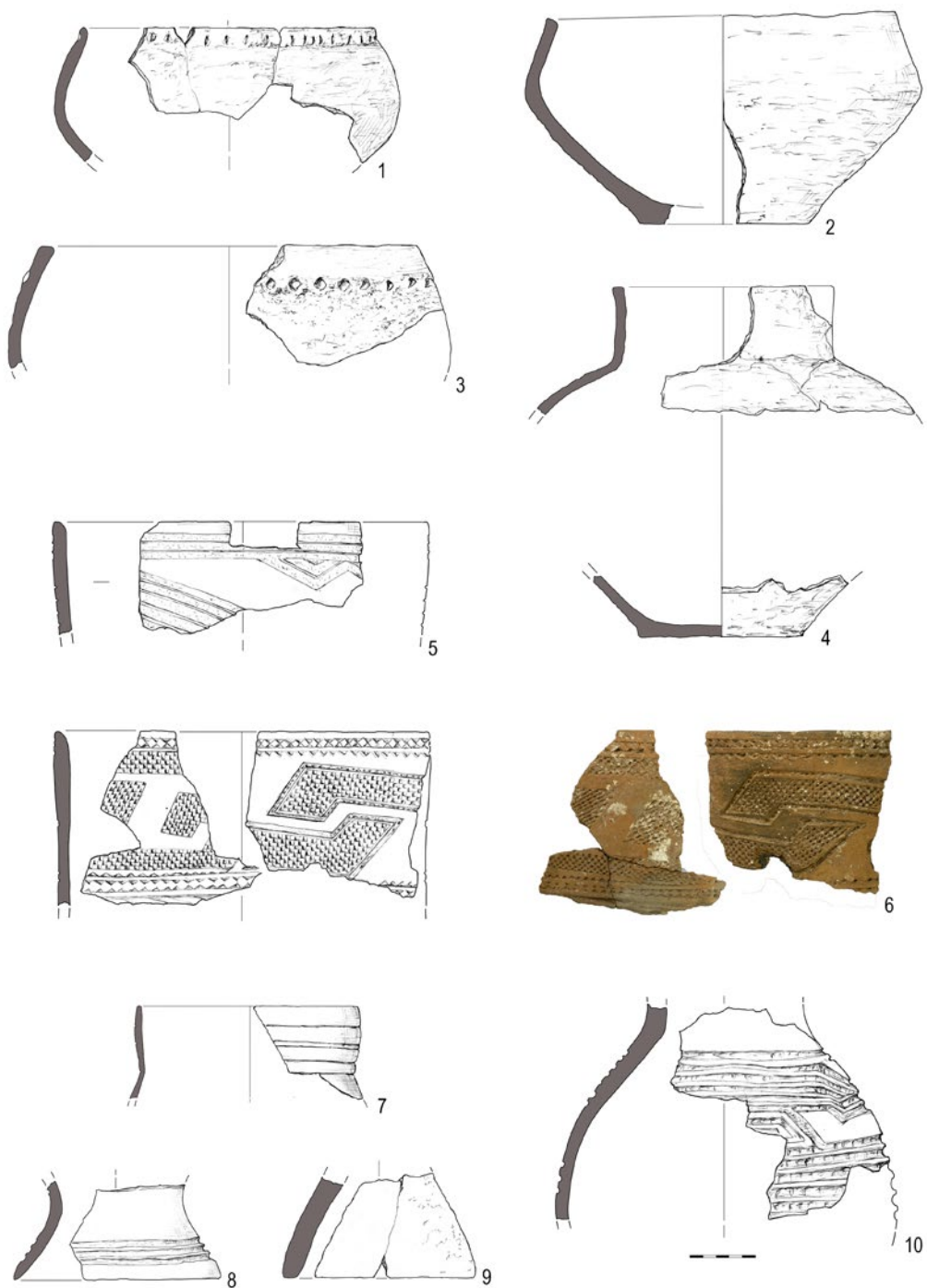


Figure 12. Pottery from feature 75. Image Credit: the authors.

associated with the Bojan-Giulești cultural tradition (Comsa 1974, pl. 15, 2–9; Zaharia 1967, 10, Abb. 4, 1, 4–5).

Another, more heterogeneous group identified mainly among the material from feature 74, incorporates similarly shaped but smaller vessels, often with a more distinctive transition between the upper and the lower part of the body. This group comprises both plain vessels (fig. 9.8 and 9) and examples of incised (fig. 9.11) and channeled decoration (fig. 9.10), as well as a single example of well-preserved graphite painting (fig. 9.12).

A recognizable group was recorded exclusively in the assemblage from feature 75 comprising small bowls/cups of cylindrical–conical form and gently curved profile. The inner surface always is irregular and roughly treated, which allows their alternative interpretation as small lids. All are of similar size, either plain (fig. 11.1 and 2) or decorated with the typical combination of horizontal and oblique channeling (fig. 11.3–5).

One example with an identical shape but of larger size deserves attention (fig. 7.1). The outer surface is smoothed and decorated by channeling while the inner surface and the base are left untreated. The base has a small central perforation made during manufacturing. The pot was found in a large container (feature 130), in a context suggesting intentional deposition (*vide supra*). The perforation points to some purpose of the vessel other than ordinary tableware, yet the precise function remains unknown. A similarly perforated base has been published among the fine ware from the eponymous site of Giulești in Muntenia (Comşa 1974, pls. 14 and 12).

Shallow bowls represented by hemispherical examples with either inverted or slightly everted rim (figs. 10.1–4 and 11. 6–9) occur in both fine and semi-coarse (kitchenware) groups.

The main types identified within the semi-coarse (so-called kitchenware) category demonstrate certain standardization in terms of both shape and decoration. Bowls and deep bowls (jar-like vessels) are of hemispherical or rounded biconical shape. Besides plain vessels (figs. 10.5 and 6; 11.9; 12.2 and 4), decorated examples include mainly vessels with barbotine or rusticated surface demarcated from the smoothed and burnished upper part by a horizontal plastic band or a row of shallow impressions (figs. 10.7–10; 12.1 and 3).

Closed shapes are underrepresented in the current study, mainly due to the high level of fragmentation. Common forms include medium-large jars with a straight cylindrical neck (fig. 12.4 and 7). An unusual shape is a small-sized biconical thin-walled jar with an elongated upright neck decorated with a plain plastic band under the rim and traces of graphite painting (fig. 10.11).

We have to mention also a group of large plain holemouth vessels with elongated bodies and massive bases, most probably used for storage. Both vessels found in features 2 and 62 belong to this category (fig. 6.1–2, 7).

Storage vessels/containers

Most of the thick-walled pottery recovered from the site belongs to the group of rich-

ly decorated storage vessels or containers regarded as diagnostic elements in the Early Chalcolithic pottery repertoire of the area. The sherds recovered during the excavations are usually decorated body parts providing little or no information about the shape of the vessels or the ornamental composition. Decoration techniques include groups of parallel wide and deeply cut excised strips/grooves with white incrustation, organized in meander-like angular motives. On the basis of diagnostic fragments, the shape of the vessels could be defined as cylindrical in the upper part and conical in the lower part; the bases are more often flat and heavy (figs. 8.1; 12.5–6, and 10). In most of the cases the inner surface is roughly treated.

Two complete or near-complete examples were found in feature 130 and 131 (figs. 7 and 8). The container from feature 131 (fig. 8.1) is of cylindrical–conical shape and has a rounded carination; the base is flat and heavy.¹ Traces of red ochre coloring are visible in a 5.5 cm wide strip near the base. The height of the vessel is 65 cm and the rim diameter is 55 cm. A tentative estimation of the volume gives ca. 120 l/cm³ at full capacity. The excised and incrustated decoration is finely executed and finds its best parallels in the lower levels of Petko Karavelovo.² An almost identical container was found there, deposited (as a foundation offering?) under the wooden platform of a dwelling dated to the beginning of the Early Chalcolithic (Chohadzhiev et al. 2019, 46). Similar, though not identical parallels are known from the flat site of Shtraklevo in the Rusenski Lom Valley dating to the Bojan-Vidra phase (Popov 1992, 26, fig. 12.6). However, the published vessels are smaller in size and have hollow pedestals.

Less frequent in the assemblage is the combination of excised strips and chessboard decoration organized again in angular meander-like motifs (fig. 12.6).

A distinctive shape is the example of a high conical pedestal excessively decorated with deep incisions outlining spiral-shaped motifs (otherwise not common for the assemblage, which is dominated by angular ornaments) combined with strips of small, deeply cut zigzags reminiscent of the Vadastra decorative traditions (fig. 10.12).

Later Chalcolithic features

Feature 63 (figs. 13 and 14). As mentioned above, one of the Chalcolithic features demonstrates a clear deviation from the rest in terms of both topography and chronology. It was situated in the southwest part of the excavated area and at a lower elevation. It was a large cut with a sub-oval outline measuring 5.80 x 4.5 m, with steep sides and irregular, 0.85 m deep bottom. A shallow step-like cut was annexed to the south. The separate fills were observed in the cut section (fig. 13). The uppermost is of a very dark, grey silty sediment accumulated most probably by natural processes. It overlaid the main fill of greyish

¹ The second container is still waiting for restoration, yet it seems to be of the same or very similar shape but larger in size and capacity (the rim diameter is ca. 65 cm).

² According to A. Chohadzhiev (pers. communication), at Petko Karavelovo, the same technique is applied in a visibly different (less careful) manner. This observation might be important, taking into account the small distance between the two sites.

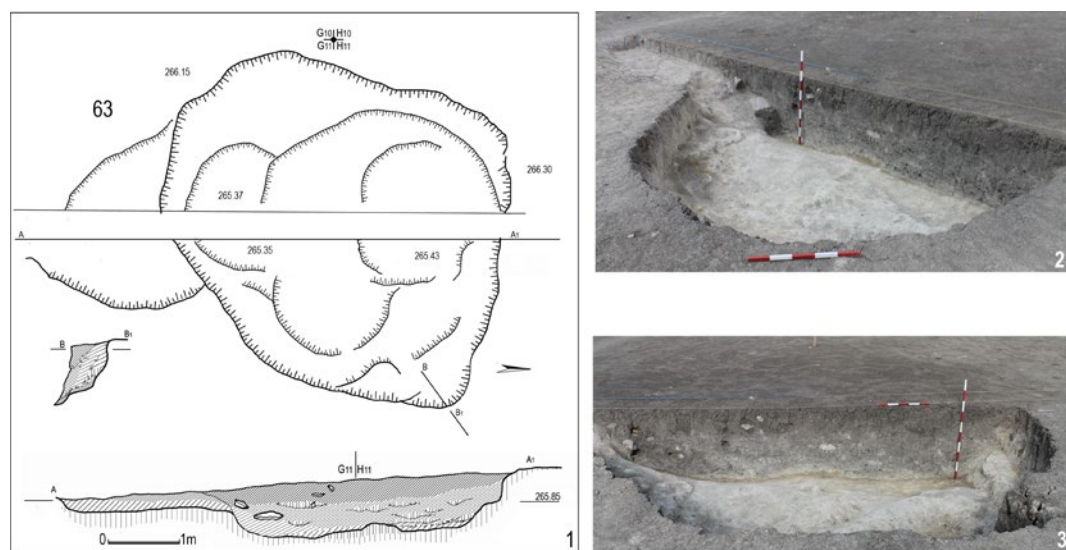


Figure 13. Feature 63. Image Credit: the authors.

sediment, which yielded a modest collection of highly fragmented pottery and a few animal bones.

Despite the paucity of material, the assemblage demonstrates distinctive morphological differences. The pottery is highly fragmented, yet the surface of the sherds is much better preserved. The surface of the thin-walled vessels is slipped and burnished. Surface colors tend to be dark, varying from dark grey-brown to almost black. Diagnostic sherds are rather scarce (fig. 14). The main decoration technique comprises finely executed horizontal channeling. It covers the upper parts of thin-walled biconical bowls with sharp carination and almost uniform size (fig. 14.2–3, and 5). The channeled bowls find several fine parallels in the recently published ceramic assemblage of Orlovets–Erendzhika (Chohadzhiev, S. 2021, figs. 14.8; 17.4, and 5; 18.3). A similar shape of coarser fabric is decorated with vertical incisions (fig. 14.4). Graphite painting is preserved only on very small, atypical sherds (not illustrated).

In the group of kitchenware, we should notice the single example of a completely preserved profile. It is a medium-sized and thick-walled shallow bowl of truncated conical shape with a wide flat base (fig. 14.1). Diagnostic is the combination of the rusticated outer surface and large lugs, indicating the primary function of the vessel for food preparation. The parallels of this simple and common shape are widespread and numerous. Again, it is worth noting the number of parallels published from the neighboring site of Erendzhika dating to the Middle or the beginning of the Late Chalcolithic (Chohadzhiev, S. 2021, 196, 204–205 with ref.). Other diagnostic shapes include fragments of bi-cylindrical bowls (fig. 14.6).

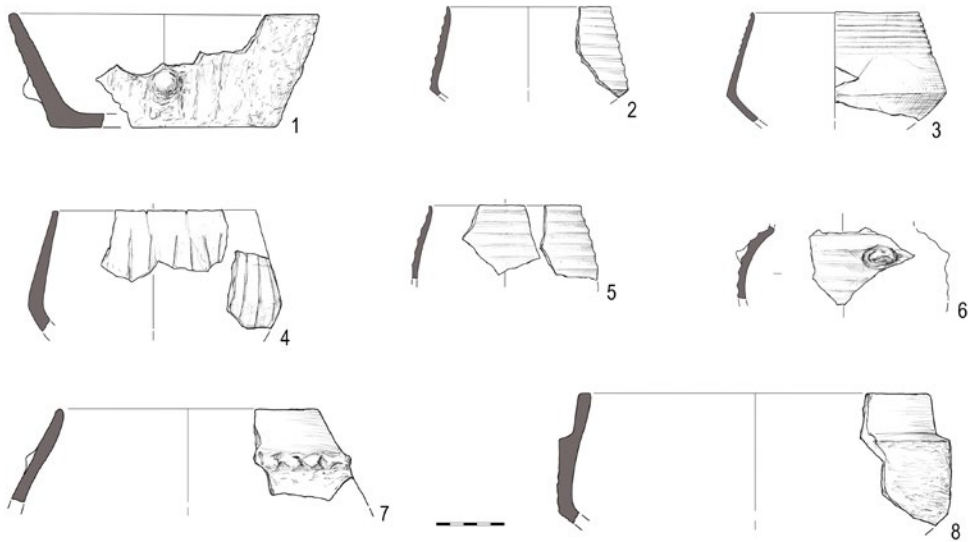


Figure 14. Pottery from feature 63. Image Credit: the authors.

Relative and absolute chronology

The results from the study of the pottery assemblages of Orlovets allow some preliminary observations on the relative chronology of the fifth millennium BC occupation at the site. Although the main ceramic assemblage is limited in range and selective in origin, it seems fairly homogeneous in composition. Taking into account the short distance between the two sites and the long stratigraphic sequence of Petko Karavelovo, it is not surprising to find there the best parallels of the assemblage discussed here. Minor differences, therefore, are more probable to reflect micro-regional variations rather than chronological issues. According to preliminary observations, the pottery assemblage of Orlovets – Papaz Cheshma is best compared to the pottery from the earlier occupation levels (i.e., Petko Karavelovo A; see Chochadzhiev, A., this volume). The early dating is further supported by the comparison of Orlovets and the material from the cut features of the earliest (XVIII) building level of Tell Ruse (Popov 1998, 186f). A later (episodic?) occupation of the site is attested in the pottery material from feature 63. Based on the few diagnostic elements, it could be tentatively compared to the ceramic complex of Orlovets–Erendzhika and dated to the Middle Chalcolithic.

So far, only two radiocarbon dates are available for the site (table 1). The first date was made on a cattle bone found in the fill of feature 74, and the second one is on a cattle tooth from the later (?) feature 63. The number of dates is insufficient if we want to set the absolute chronological limits of the separate features and the site as a whole. Moreover, the two dates yielded almost identical values, which contradicts the relative dating suggested by pottery analysis. The ^{14}C date for feature 74 seems later than expected,

especially when compared to the sequence of calibrated dates for Petko Karavelovo (cf. Chochadzhiev, A., this volume).

Lab No.	Feat. No.	Species dated & sample type	BP value	δ13C	δ15N	C/N ratio	Calibrated date (BC) 95.4% probability
SUERC-97023	74	<i>Bos taurus</i> , radius	5822±25	19.7	7.7	3.5	4784–4556
SUERC-97024	63	<i>Bos taurus</i> , molar	5807±24	20.1	6	3.4	4724–4551

Table 1. Radiocarbon dates from Orlovets.

Plant remains

Despite systematic sampling of sediments from the fills, charred plant macro-remains appeared to be scarce in the Early Chalcolithic contexts. Most common finds comprise charred wood macro-remains, belonging mainly to *Quercus* sp. and sporadically to *Alnus* sp. (feature 74). Well-represented are also fragments of charred Cornelian cherries, providing evidence that these wild fruits were gathered and stored for consumption. However, maybe due to taphonomic processes, no cultivated crops have been identified in the sampled contexts, with the prominent exception of the later feature 63. Although in minute quantities, its fill yielded a variety of staple crops, including einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*), emmer (*Hordeum vulgare*) and lentils (*Lens culinaris*), as well as some wild plants as wild blackwheat (*Polygonum convolvulus*).

Faunal remains

The study of the faunal remains from the site is still ongoing and will be published elsewhere. Hence, we can only mention here the preliminary observations made on the Early Chalcolithic assemblage both in the field and in the lab. In terms of taxonomic diversity, the complex is rather homogeneous, dominated by cattle (*Bos taurus*). Cattle bones have been identified in all Early Chalcolithic features studied so far, occupying more than 90 percent of the total assemblage. The share of small ruminants (*Ovis/Capra*) and domestic pigs is equally insignificant. Faunal remains found in features 62 and 75 bear traces of thermal treatment (scorching and probably roasting). Wild species are underrepresented, especially in comparison with the Final Chalcolithic and Bronze Age assemblages from the site. Noteworthy is the high number of hare remains; however, most of the bones actually belong to the incomplete skeleton of a single individual found in feature 159. Some of the long bones bear light traces of modification (polishing), while two metapodials (hind foot) with pierced distal parts were most probably designed to be used as pendants/ amulets.¹

¹ Feature 159 was intersected by two Iron Age pits, which casts doubt on the context of the hare bones. However, hare bones and similarly pierced metapodials are not uncommon in the Early Chalcolithic faunal assemblage from Petko Karavelovo (A. Chochadzhiev, pers. communication).

Conclusion

The rescue excavations at Orlovets – Papaz Cheshma led to the accidental discovery of a new prehistoric site with short-term occupation in the Early Chalcolithic and sporadic traces of human activity tentatively dated to the Middle Chalcolithic. The area of the Early Chalcolithic settlement is probably less than 0.5 acre, though the estimation is only tentative due to the low visibility of surface material. Factors like natural erosion, intensive later activities and modern agriculture led to severe obliteration of the original Early Chalcolithic remains and made it impossible to distinguish a cultural layer explicitly dated to this earliest period. However, indirect evidence for the existence of above-ground residential structures comes from the burnt clay rubble, found in the fills of pits and cut features. Large dugouts or cut features similar to those investigated at Orlovets are not unknown in the region. A short review of the published data reveals a number of close parallels in terms of shape and size, dating from the earliest Early Chalcolithic phases south (Popov 1992) and north of the Danube (Stefan 2010). In the majority of the sites assigned to the Bojan–Giulești cultural tradition, cut features are the dominant evidence of human occupation, sometimes accompanied by the remains of above-ground structures (Stefan 2010, 8, fig. 3, pl. I). Thus, the features at Orlovets made no exception. On the other hand, the exceptional discovery of two pits with richly decorated pithoid jars seems to add important new evidence in relevance to the vast and ongoing discussion on the interpretation of prehistoric pits and pit sites (Boyadzhiev 2006; Nikolov 2011; Boyadzhiev 2013; Bacvarov & Gorczyk 2018).

The brief overview of ceramics from the site emphasized the role of regional variability and local peculiarities in the study of ceramic assemblages.

The glimpse offered by the prehistoric map of the area shows both the density and the diversity of human occupation remains during the 5th millennium BC, with a settlement pattern range comprising large permanently inhabited tell-sites, smaller tell-like settlements, and flat sites of various sizes. However, the current state of research and the available data are insufficient to solve the problems of relationship and synchronicity, i.e., whether the distribution of sites reflects a dense network of contemporary habitation places or, more likely, it reflects certain dynamics in the human-environment interactions. Sites like Orlovets-Papaz Cheshma and Eréndzhika seem to provide arguments in support of the latter. In any case, the available data points to the co-existence in the region of tell-settlements and a variety of nearby sites indicating human presence and activities, a fact already discussed in the literature (Leshtakov 2005, 38, 41-42).

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