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Encrusted Pottery Culture ceramic imports in northwest Bulgaria

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Abstract
This paper discusses the Encrusted Pottery Culture ceramics discovered outside the Danube River strip in northwest Bulgaria. These imports, coming from 15 sites, cover the whole spectrum of the ceramic production: pottery, figurines, small finds, etc. Geographically, they are spread across the entire territory of northwest Bulgaria, reaching a distance of 40 km south of the Danube River. The imports appear in both settlements (dwellings, pits) and cemeteries. Chronologically, these finds date to the second half of the fifteenth–thirteenth century cal. BC period that corresponds to the Orsoya/Baley phase of the Encrusted Pottery Culture. Similar material north of the Danube is discussed as well. While in northwest Bulgaria, the Encrusted Pottery Culture 'imports' appear in Gamzigrad–Gramada or Zimnicea–Plovdiv milieu, north of the river they are related to Late Verbicioara sites. The nature of these intensive contacts between the 'Danubian' Encrusted Pottery Culture and 'inland' communities is also considered.

Key words: *Late Bronze Age – Lower Danube – Encrusted Pottery Culture – imports – Baley – Verbicioara – Zimnicea–Plovdiv – Gamzigrad – Bistreț.*

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Introduction

The Encrusted Pottery Culture (EPC), also referred to as 'Novo Selo – Gârla Mare' or 'Žuto Brdo – Gârla Mare' Culture, is a Late Bronze Age (LBA) phenomenon spread

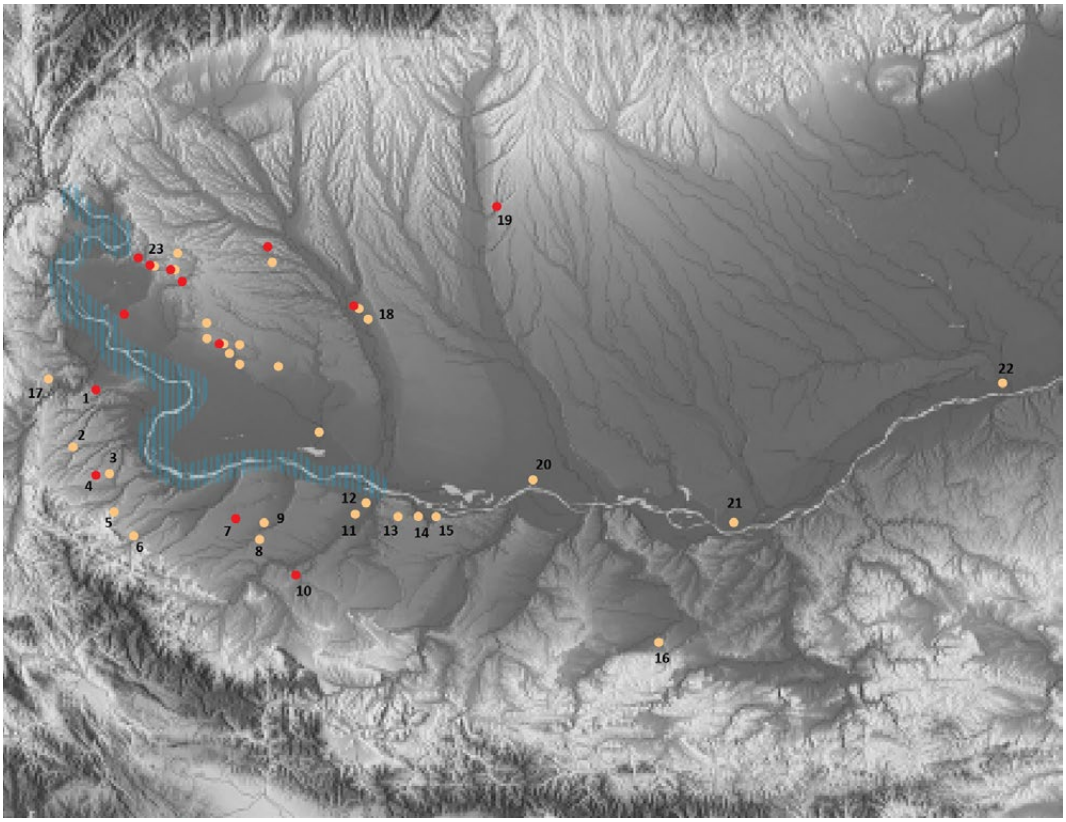


Figure 1. *Map of the sites with EPC ceramic imports in the Lower Danube: (1) Bregovo; (2) Kula; (3) Gramada–Gladnika; (4) Gramada; (5) Oreshets; (6) Ruzhintsi; (7) Rasovo; (8) Yakimovo; (9) Valchedram; (10) Gradeshnitsa; (11) Glozhene; (12) Harlets; (13) Oryahovo; (14) Oryahovo–Kaleto; (15) Ostrov; (16) Chavdartsi; (17) Rogljevo; (18) Cârcea; (19) Vultureşti; (20) Corabia; (21) Zimnicea; (22) Oltenița; (23) Oreviţa Mare. Yellow dots show EPC pottery and red dots show EPC figurines. Image credit: OpenStreetMap and the authors.*

in a thin strip along the Serbian and Bulgarian–Romanian part of the Danube River. The EPC is known mainly by its large necropolises, some of the investigated sites consisting of hundreds of cremation graves such as Cârna, Orsoya, etc. Settlements have also been explored (Ostrovul Corbului, Ghidici etc.), but the available information from these sites remains insufficient. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the EPC western border was set in Kovin (Belgrade area) while the eastern end was proposed to be the influx of the rivers Olt and Iskar into the Danube. In this long 'band' along the river, two main territorial groups were distinguished: a western one named *Dubovac* that spread from Belgrade to the Iron Gates, and an eastern one labeled *Gârla Mare* and situated east of the Iron Gates. For the eastern region, an internal division of the EPC development into three chronological phases was proposed. While the earliest was supposed to be presented at the sites of Ostrovul Corbului and Ghidici, the second (the 'classic' phase) can be

found at almost every EPC site in the region. The last phase was identified at the necropolis of Orsoya. Due the lack of radiocarbon dates, the chronological position of the EPC was established using parallels from the neighboring regions. Thus, the time-span for the existence of the EPC was set in 1650–1250/1200 BC period. In the Lower Danube area (particularly north of the river), the EPC was supposed to be followed by the Bistreț–Işalnița group that presumably ceased to exist around 1100 BC (*Şandor-Chicideanu* 2003; Crăciunescu 2022).

The EPC is instantly recognizable by its ceramics. Some of its pottery shapes as well as the anthropomorphic, ornithomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, alongside with their sophisticated encrusted decoration, are unique for the LBA Northern Balkans. However, recent investigations in northwest Bulgaria showed that the EPC phenomenon was much more complex than previously thought. The site of Baley – the only EPC complex consisting of a settlement and necropolis investigated so far – provided a compact series of radiocarbon dates that secured the timeframe of the EPC 'classic' and last phases. The coexistence of encrusted and fluted pottery styles was clearly seen in many 'closed complexes' from the site (dwellings, pits, graves), showing a fluent transition from the former to the latter decoration technique (Shalganova 2005; Alexandrov et al. 2016 & 2018). On the other hand, recent excavations at Gramada, Oreshets, Rasovo and other LBA sites in northwest Bulgaria provided, along with the 'local' ceramics, vessels/pottery sherds and figurines that could be related to or seen as 'imports' from the EPC area.

Some of these 'imports' will be presented here. It should be emphasized that subject of analyses are pottery and figurines with EPC encrusted decoration only. As mentioned above, the LBA site of Baley provided significant arguments that the Bistreț group pottery could be considered as part of the EPC development and thus, vessels with fluted decoration should be regarded as part of EPC ceramics repertoire as well (Alexandrov et al. 2016 & 2018). However, the Bistreț problematic requires more detailed and focused analyses; therefore, such ceramics will not be discussed in this paper.

From a contextual point of view, the EPC encrusted ceramics south of the Danube River could be separated into three groups: finds with secure archaeological context, finds without such context, and finds coming from surveys or 'stray' finds.

Finds with secure archaeological context

- The settlement and necropolis of *Gramada – Gladnika* seem to be very important in the present context. The site is situated at the Gladnika locality, southeast of Gramada, Vidin District, some 15 km west of the Danube River. A part of the site was investigated during a rescue project in 2019. At a surface of approximately 10 000 m², a large number of archaeological features were investigated dating to the Late Neolithic, Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Roman Imperial Age, and the Middle Ages. In the southwestern part of the area, a Late Bronze Age necropolis was discovered. Thirty-five funerary features were investi-

gated. They revealed that cremation had been practiced outside the necropolis; part of the bones were collected and buried in amphoroid or kantharoid vessels used as urns/containers. The urns/containers were surrounded and covered by stones (Alexandrov et al. 2020). Most of the graves showed mortuary practices and grave inventory (fig. 4) that have their best parallels in northeast Serbian sites (cf. Kapuran et al. 2022).

EPC pottery was found in two of the graves. In feature 3 (fig. 2), four vessels were placed near the urn: two kantharoi, a cup and a richly decorated EPC kantharos with a rectangular horizontal section (fig. 2/4). In feature 14, a severely damaged grave (fig. 3), sherds from a decorated kantharos and an EPC cup/kantharos were found near the urn (fig. 3/3). Two more sherds come from the necropolis area: from a typical decorated lobed bowl and from a cup/small kantharos (fig. 3/1 and 2).

The LBA settlement was located in the central part and north of the excavated area. Unfortunately, it was almost completely destroyed by the Roman Age constructions and the medieval cemetery. However, that area yielded at least 11 EPC sherds from large bowls with inverted rim, bowls with lobed rim, amphorae, and cups/kantharoi (fig. 5/4–14) associated with 'local' pottery decorated with linear incisions (fig. 5/1–3). A radiocarbon date from a pit was obtained, placing the LBA site in 1398–1216 cal. BC period (95.4% probability).

- *Gradeshnitsa* is the second necropolis that yielded EPC materials. It is situated at the Malo Pole locality, some 30 km northwest of Vratsa, 40 km south of the Danube River. Bogdan Nikolov (1978) excavated part of the necropolis in 1973 and published five cremation graves from the site. In graves 2–5, kantharoi were used as 'containers' for the bones, all four being covered with bowls (fig. 6/1–6). In graves 4 and 5, other vessels were also found, but only a small jug from grave 4 was illustrated (fig. 6/7). Grave 1 is of particular interest. It was discovered at a depth of 0.80 m below the ground surface. An amphoroid vessel was used as 'container' that contained 'ashes, charcoal, burnt human bones', and the upper part of an anthropomorphic figurine (fig. 6/8–10). Nikolov dated the five graves to the LBA, and mentioned some parallels in the necropolises of Cârna, Orsoya, and Zimnicea. From a culture-historical point of view, the author related the necropolis to the EPC.

  The necropolis of Gradeshnitsa was subject to multiple analyses and different approaches. Georgi Georgiev and later Ivan Panayotov and Darina Valcheva related the finds to the EPC (Georgiev 1982, 192ff; Panayotov & Valcheva 1989, 8ff). On the other hand, Tanya Shalganova believed that they should be related to the last (V) phase of Verbicioara culture, grave 1 showing their contacts to the EPC. The anthropomorphic figurine belongs to Shalganova's type III of group I that according to her is common for the necropolis of Orsoya and is to be found in the upper building horizons of the settlement of Baley, and therefore should be dated to the

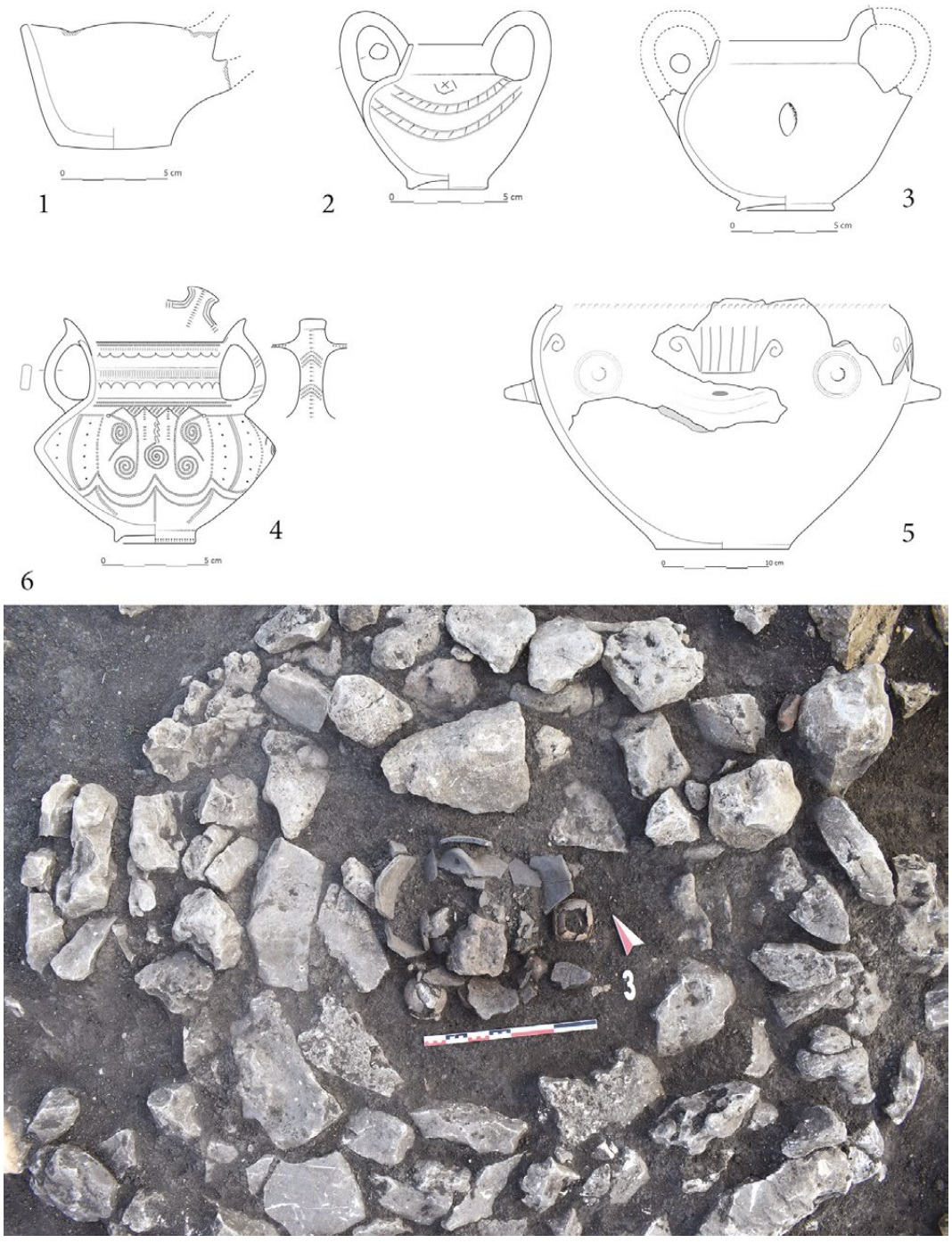


Figure 2. *The LBA necropolis of Gramada–Gladnika. Above: pottery from feature 3. Below: Feature 3, view from above. Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*

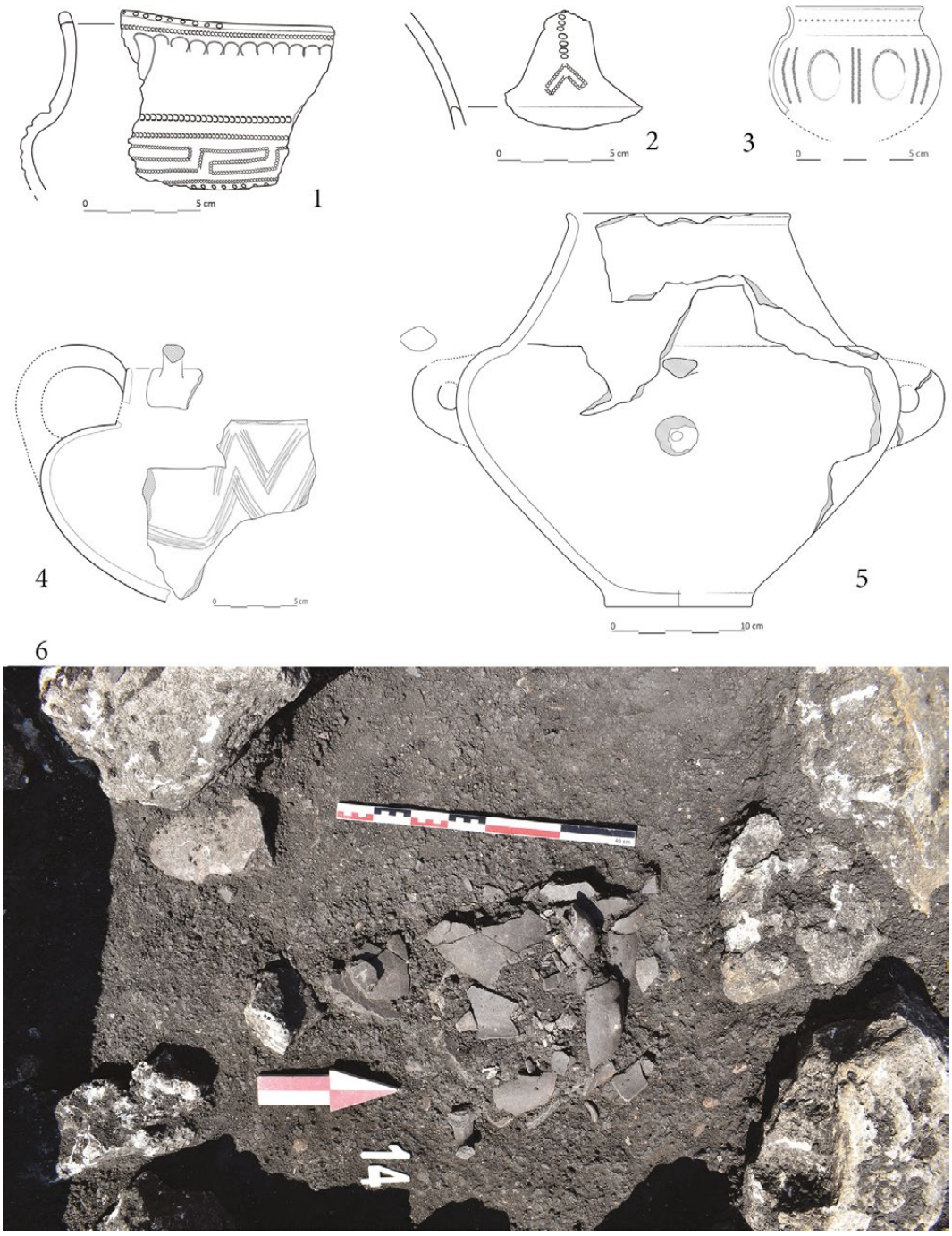


Figure 3. *The LBA necropolis of Gramada–Gladnika. Above: EPC sherds from the area of the cemetery (1 and 2) and from feature 14 (3–6). Below: feature 14, view from above. Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*

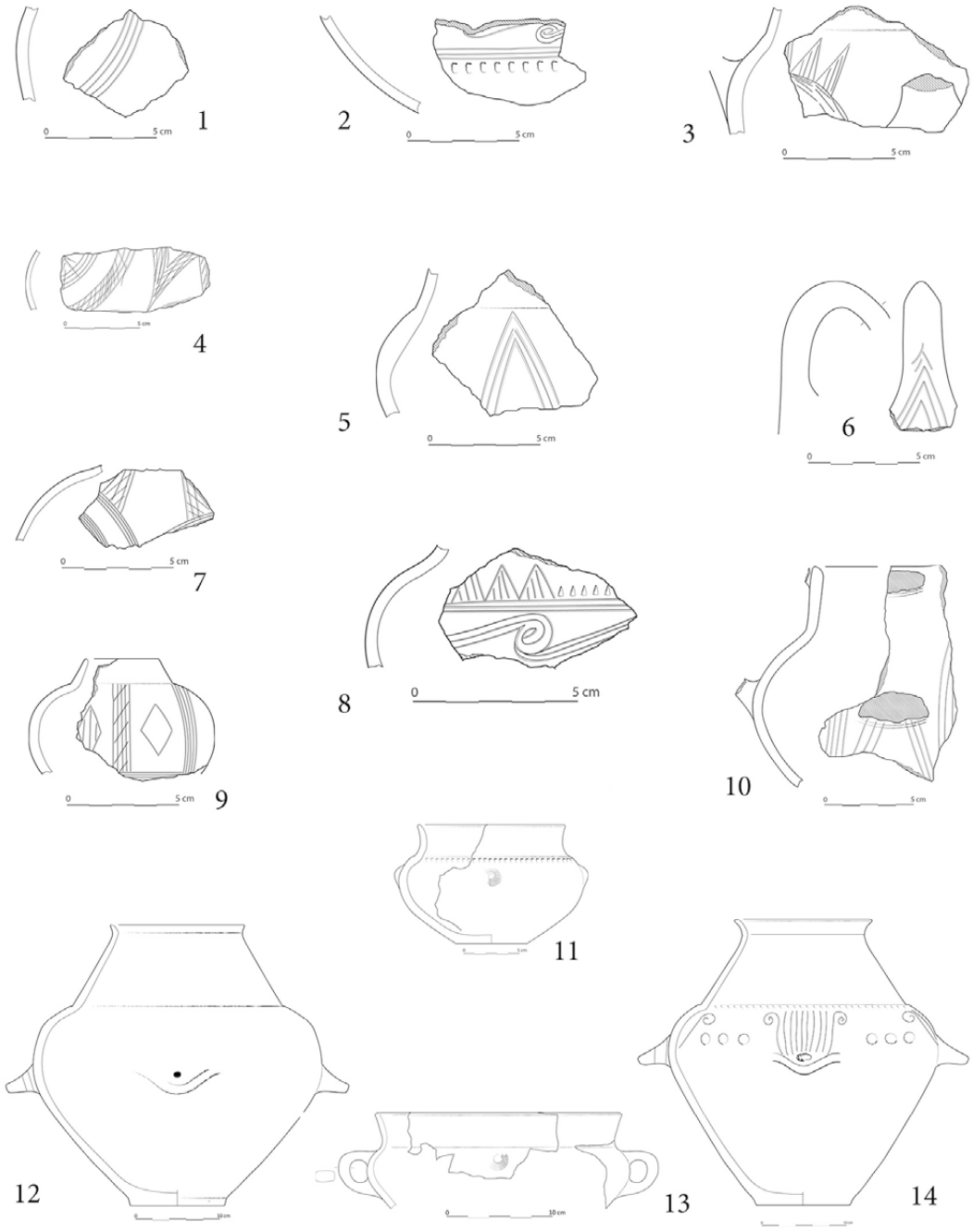


Figure 4. *Local pottery from the LBA necropolis of Gramada–Gladnika. Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*

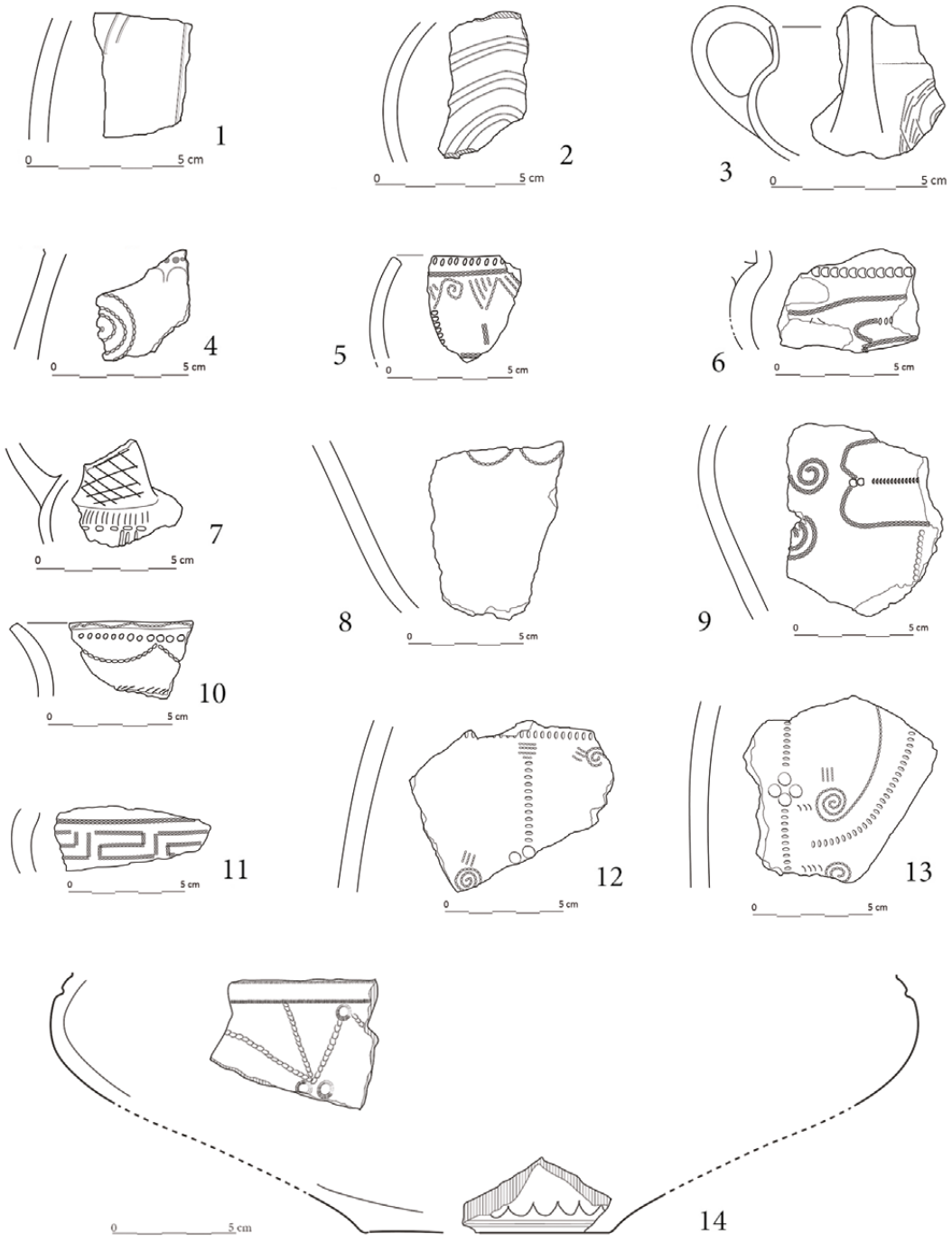


Figure 5. *The LBA necropolis of Gramada–Gladnika: local pottery (1–3) and EPC sherds (4–14). Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*



Figure 6. *Pottery from the LBA necropolis of Gradeshnitsa – Malo pole: from grave 5 (1 and 4); grave 2 (2 and 5); grave 3 (3 and 6); grave 4 (7); and grave 1 (8–10). No scale: 1–7 and 9. Image Credit: The Archives of the National Institute of Archaeology and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (1–6) and S. Alexandrov (7–10).*

last EPC phase (Shalganova 2005, 62f and 177f). Aleksandar Bonev also sought parallels in Cârna and Orsoya and, in the Zimnicea–Plovdiv phenomenon as well. He further argued that the necropolis of Gradeshnitsa shows 'interaction between two cultures: the EPC and Plovdiv–Zimnicea–Asenovets–Cherkovna' (Bonev 1988, 15). Cultural affiliation with Verbicioara IV–V for the graves of Gradeshnitsa was argued by Tanya Dzhanfezova as well (2010, 27ff).

In her typology of the EPC pottery, Monica Şandor-Chicideanu (2003, 49) assigned the amphora from the grave to type A8. Chicideanu-Şandor & Chicideanu (1990, 67ff) defined the figurine as type ΦIIC – 'Orsoya' variant that was dated to a pre-Bistreț–Işalnița period. However, Şandor-Chicideanu (2003, 109, 233, and 325) admitted that grave 1 had yielded 'typical Gârla Mare pottery'. The cemetery itself is included in Ion Motzoi-Chicideanu's (2011, 108 and 498, cat. No. 412) catalogue of EPC necropolises as well.

- The third necropolis that provided EPC ceramics is *Glozhene*, located some 10 km south of the Danube River. Rescue excavation in 2019 revealed six graves: two cremation and four inhumation burials (Zaneva & Petkov 2021). An amphoroid vessel as well as a large bowl were discovered in the two cremation graves. The inhumation burials revealed 'multiple graves' with more than three individuals buried in a single grave. Grave goods consisted of vessels that are typical for the Zimnicea–Plovdiv style (fig. 7.1–3, 5, 6, 8, and 9). Related to the topic of this article are two other vessels discovered at this necropolis.[1] These are a lower part of a pyxis and a large cup/jug, distinctive for the EPC ceramic repertoire (fig. 7/4 and 7). Several radiocarbon dates from the inhumation graves secure the chronological position of the necropolis from the second half of the fifteenth to the beginning of the thirteenth century BC.
- *The cremation necropolis of Harlets*. It is located at the Kaleto locality, beneath the Roman and Medieval fortress of Augustae, north of the modern village of Harlets, Vratsa District, some 3 km south of the Danube River. During the excavations at the fortress in 1977, three cremation graves were discovered east of its western defense wall (Mashov 1980). Three different types of vessels were used as 'containers': a two-handled amphoroid vessel in grave 1 (fig. 8/9), a bowl in grave 2 (fig. 8/6 and 7), and an asymmetrical jug in grave 3 (fig. 8/8).[2] During the 2006 excavations at the fortress, in the area of *Cardo Maximum*, two LBA vessels were found at a depth of 1.60 m (fig. 8/1 and 2). More LBA sherds were discovered mainly in the ancient fortress' southern area that could be related to the settlement of the necropolis discovered in 1977 (Alexandrov & Alexandrova 2009).

  Spas Mashov (1980, 8) dated the three graves to 'the end of the Bronze Age and

[1] A large part of the necropolis was destroyed by later, mostly Roman Age constructions.

[2] Information from the Archives of the National Institute of Archaeology and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

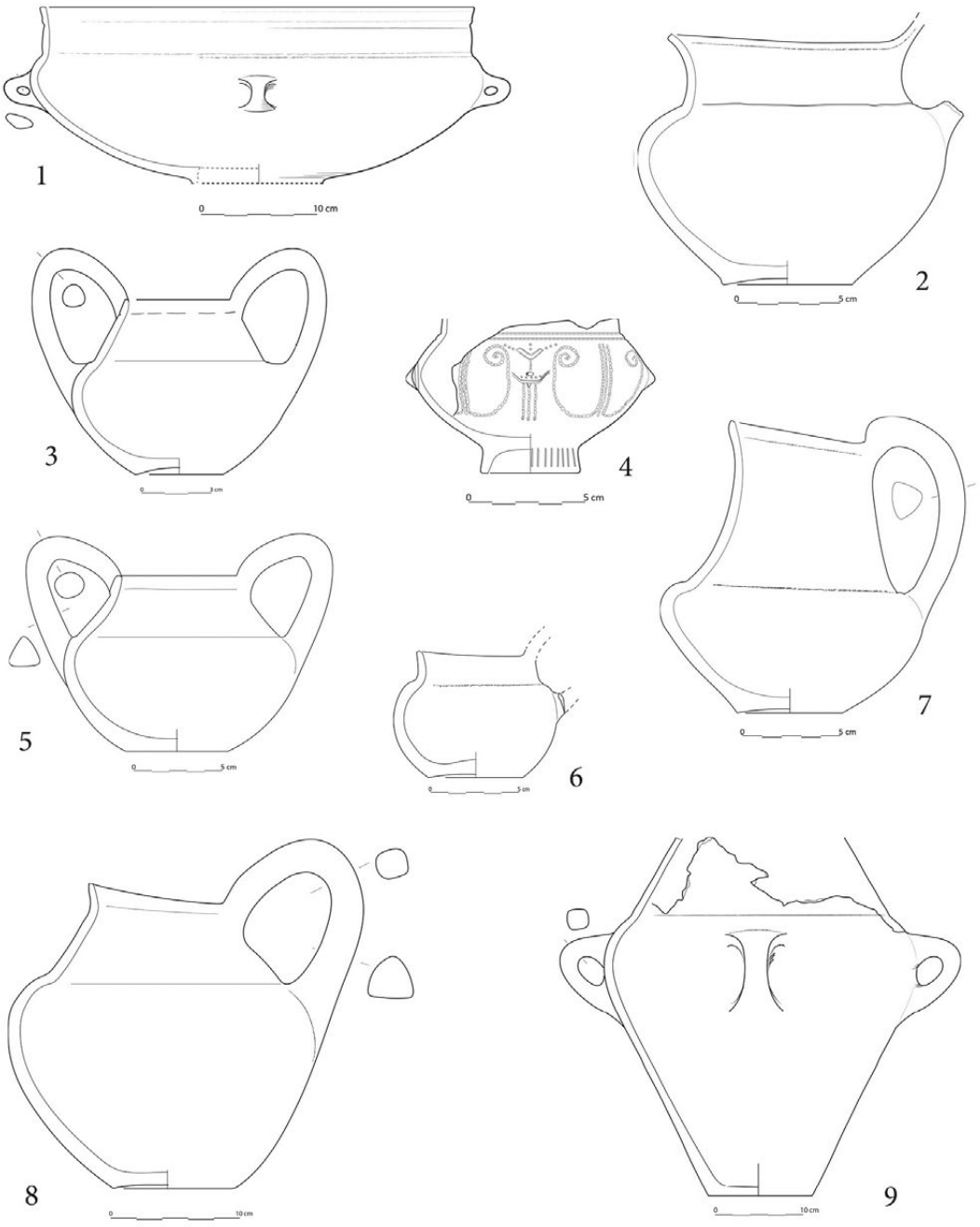


Figure 7. *Pottery the LBA necropolis of Glozhene: from graves (1, 3, and 5–9) and EPC vessels from the area of the cemetery (2 and 4). Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*

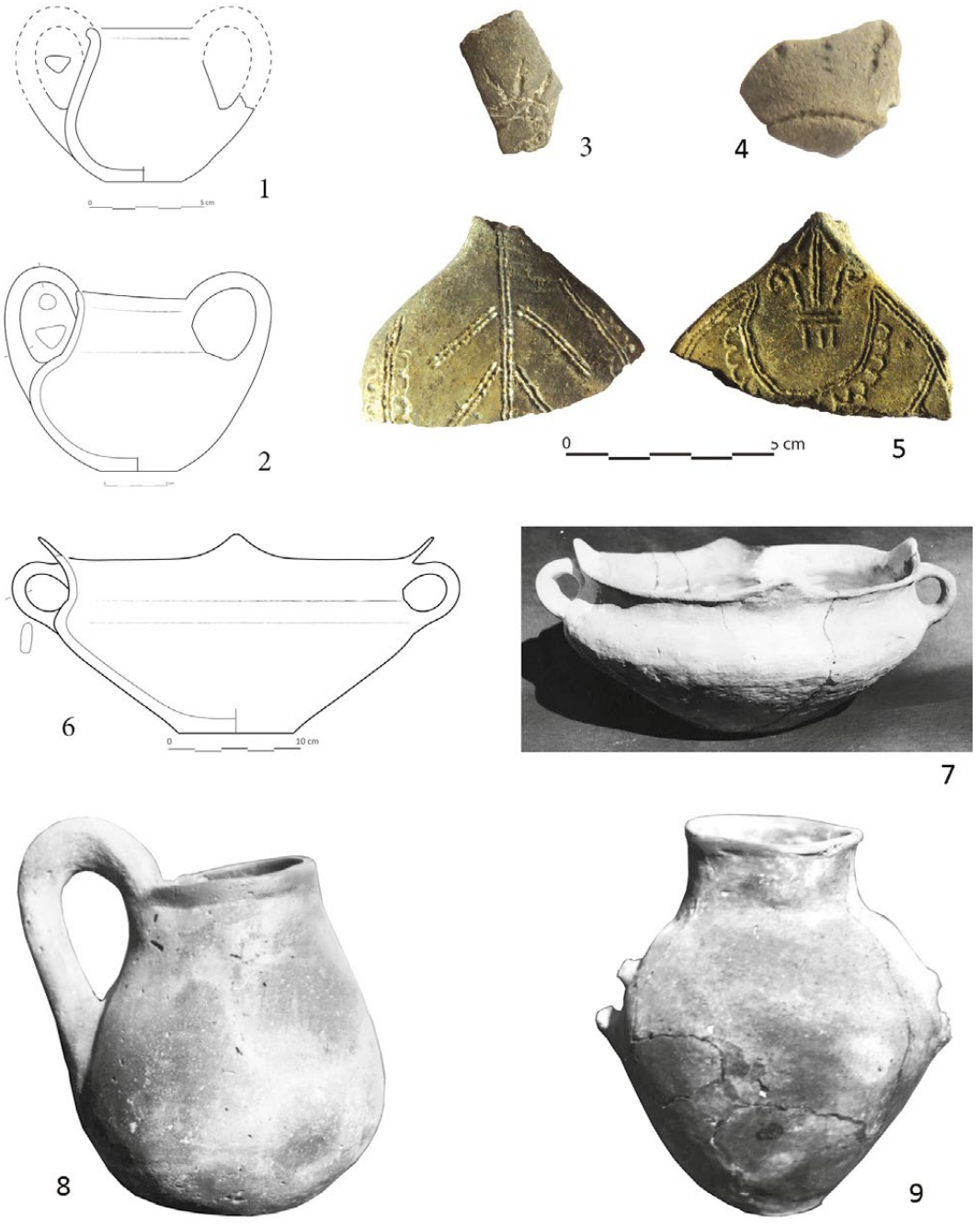


Figure 8. *Harlets–Augustae: vessels from the settlement site (1 and 2); urn from grave 2 (6 and 7); urn from grave 3 (8); urn from grave 1 (9). Gramada – Yasova bara: EPC ceramics (3–5). No scale: 3, 4, 8, and 9. Image Credit: S. Alexandrov (1, 2, and 6), G. Ganetsovski (3–5), and the Archives of the National Institute of Archaeology and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (6–9).*

the beginning of the Early Iron Age, the end of the second millennium BC'. Shalganova also discussed the finds from the necropolis. While the bowl from grave 2 was related to the Mokresh find (Alexandrov 1981, 40) and, therefore to the Bistreț–Işalnița group, the jug from grave 3 was assigned to the Plovdiv–Zimnicea–Cherkovna group. The three graves were connected to a 'contact zone with different cultural traditions' (Shalganova 2005, 178). The materials from the settlement were dated to the Zimnicea–Plovdiv chronological horizon as well (Alexandrov & Alexandrova 2009).

- The settlement of *Oreshets* is located some 30 km south of the Danube River. Rescue excavations were carried out there in 2021. They revealed a settlement site; parts of dwellings, pits, and other features were investigated. Two periods have been identified: – the first dated to nineteenth–seventeenth century BC and, the second to the fifteenth–twelfth century BC. The later material has parallels mainly at the already discussed LBA site of Gramada (Ivanov et al. in print).
  Feature 40 – a pit with burnt daub pieces, sherds, and animal bones – revealed a bowl sherd typical for the EPC based on its shape and decoration (fig. 9/7). The local pottery found in the pit includes sherds from kantharoi, cups, jugs, pyranoi, etc. (fig. 9/1–3, 5, 6, and 8). A bronze hairpin was also found there (fig. 9/4). A radiocarbon date with calibrated range between 1299–1112 cal. BC (95.4% probability) secures the chronological position of the feature.

Finds with unclear archaeological context

Four such sites provided EPC ceramics as follows:

- The site of *Gramada – Yasova bara*. It is located some 3 km west of Gramada – Gladnika. Rescue excavations were carried out in 2019. In the C area, features from the Middle and Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, the Hellenistic period, and the Roman Age were uncovered (Ganetsovski & Miteva 2020). It also yielded an upper part and another small fragment from an anthropomorphic figurine as well as a sherd from an EPC cup without clear archaeological context (fig. 8/3–5).
- The settlement site of *Ruzhintsi* is located 30 km south of the Danube River. Rescue excavations were carried out there in 2021 revealing a LBA settlement and parts of dwellings, pits, and other features (Zhivkov & Stoichkov, in print). The ceramic assemblage from the site relates to the Gamzigrad–Gramada style (fig. 10/2–7). An EPC sherd was found in the western part of the excavated area, probably from a deep lobed bowl (fig. 10/1).
- The settlement of *Rasovo* is located 20 km south of the Danube River. Rescue excavations were carried out there in 2019. A LBA settlement with a part of a dwelling as well as a LBA inhumation grave, Early Iron Age and later features were investigated there (Aladzhov et al. 2020). Along with the local LBA pottery, bowl sherds,

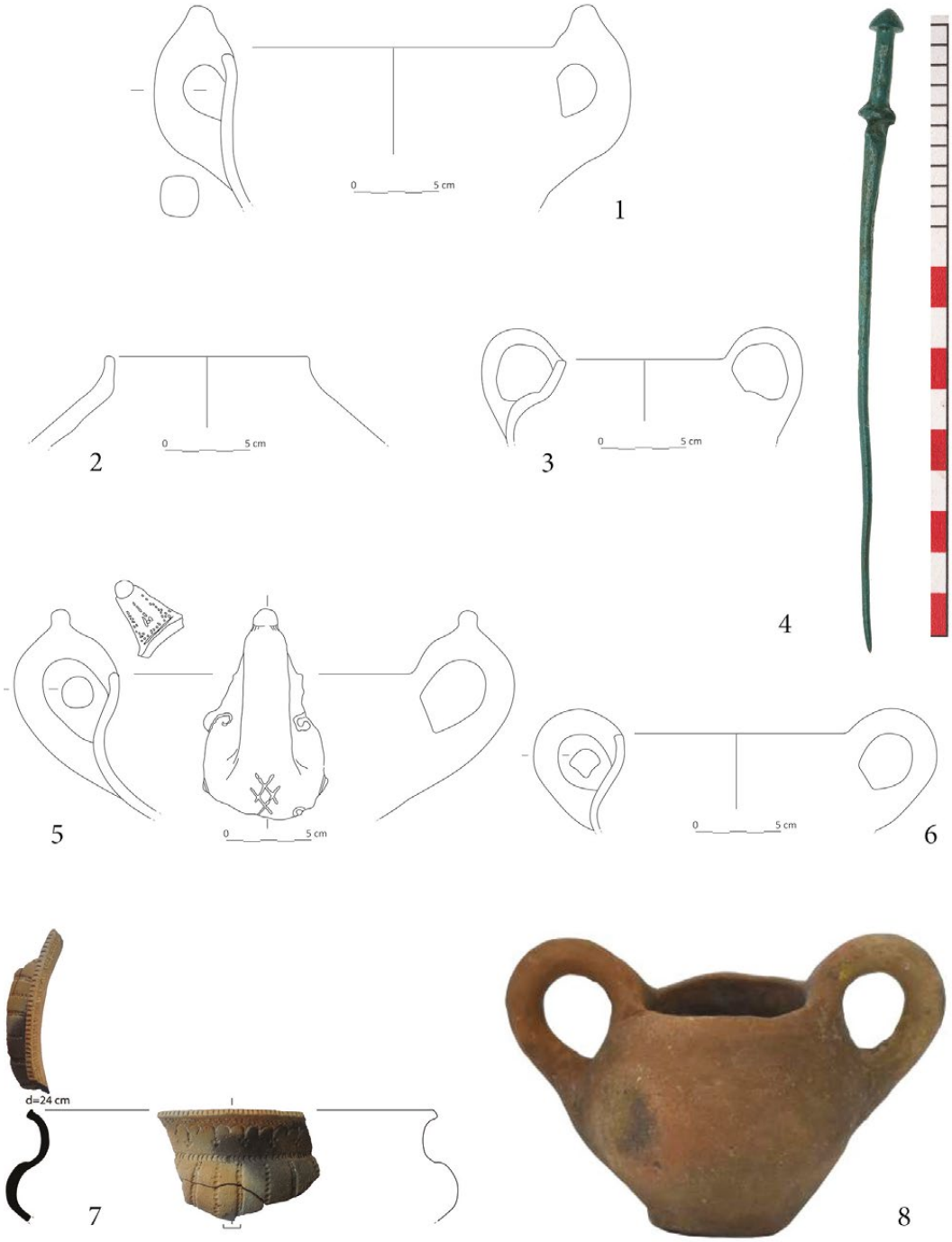


Figure 9. *Oreshets, feature 40 (pit): local pottery (1–3, 5, 6, and 8); bronze hairpin (4); EPC sherd (7). No scale: 8. Image Credit: G. Ivanov.*

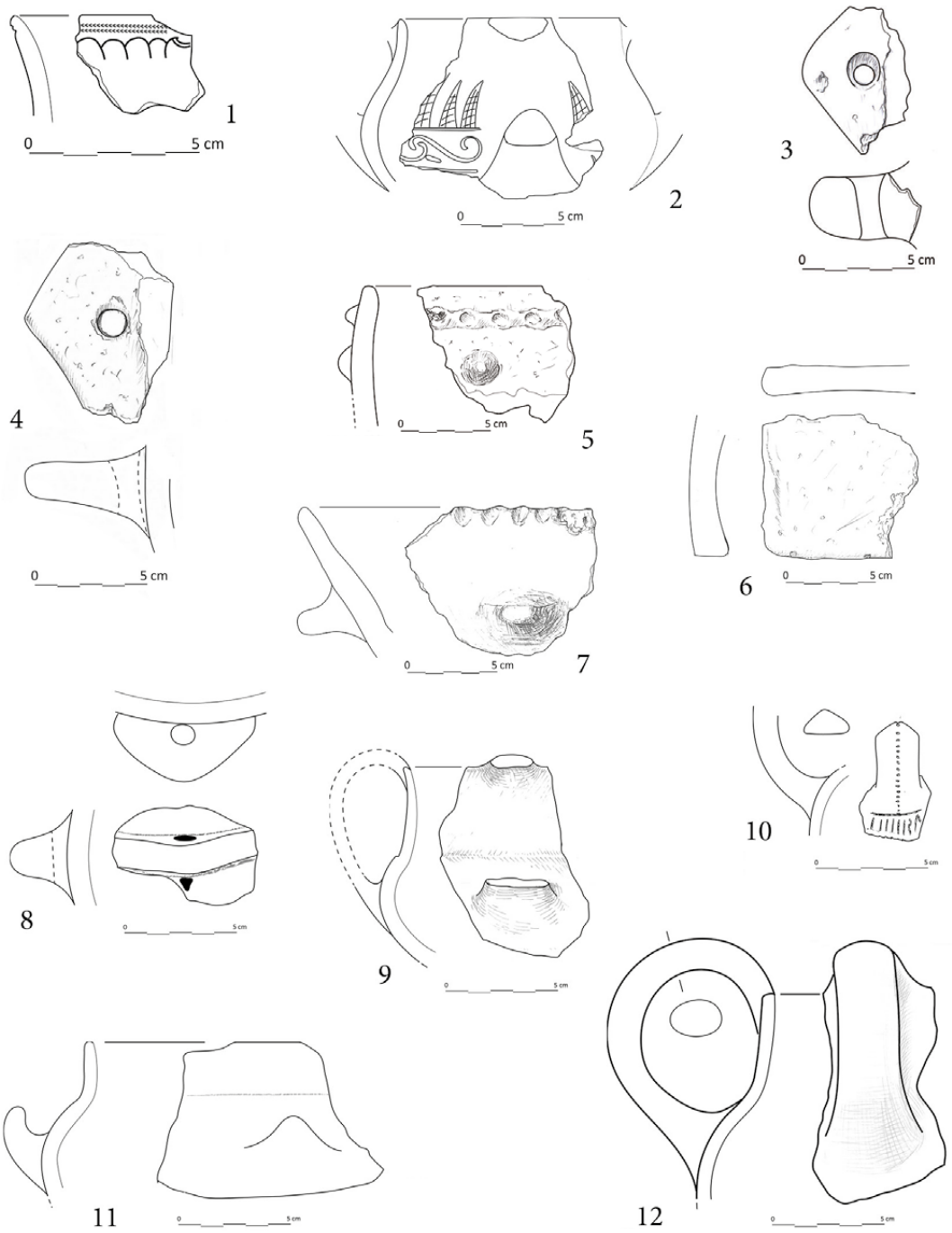


Figure 10. *Ruzhintsi: EPC sherd (1) and local pottery (2–7). Kula: local pottery (8, 9, 11, and 12) and EPC sherd (10). Image Credit: V. Danov (1–7) and S. Alexandrov (8–12).*

part of a figurine and other EPC ceramics were also found at the site (fig. 11/6).[1] A radiocarbon date from the skeleton places the LBA site in the thirteenth–twelfth century cal. BC period.

- *Kula.* Archaeological material from earlier periods was found under the foundations of the Roman fortress of Castra Martis, at a depth of 2.30–2.60 m (Iotsova 2005). Some of the sherds kept at the Vidin Museum of History, date to the LBA and are related to Gramada LBA material (fig. 10/8, 9, 11, and 12). A LBA sherd from a small kantharos/cup could be related to the EPC tradition (fig. 10/10).

Stray finds

EPC ceramics were found during surveys or are kept at museum collections from six other locations as follows:

- The necropolis of *Ostrov*. Nikolov (1964, 71ff) published four vessels from cremation graves found at the Dhzamiyskoto locality, some 3 km west of the village port. One of the pots could be dated to the Early Bronze Age (EBA; Alexandrov 1993, 47). A small jug richly decorated with encrusted patterns (fig. 11/8) is typical for the EPC (type C9/C10 in Şandor-Chicideanu's typology; 2003, pl. 195). A kantharos (fig. 11/9) has been regarded as belonging to the Zimnicea–Plovdiv–Cherkovna complex (Hänsel 1976, 78; Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, 247) or to the Verbicioara, Tei, and Cherkovna Groups (Shalganova 2005, 179). The fourth vessel dates to a later period. In fact, Nikolov (1964, 73) mentioned at least one more vessel from this site that is to be related to the EPC but it had not been illustrated. Some authors regard Ostrov as the easternmost EPC site south of the Danube River (Hänsel 1976, 78; Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, 247).
  During surveys in 1999, a Bronze Age site was discovered at the *Barza nakla/Beglika* locality, some 4.5 km west of Ostrov village. Materials from EBA (Coțofeni Culture) and LBA were recovered from the site. The LBA materials were related to EPC; a single sherd, a handle from a cup/kantharos, is illustrated in the preliminary report (Ganetsovski & Naidenova 2000, 230f, tabl. XII/3). However, the illustrated LBA pottery has morphological characteristics common for the North Balkan LBA pottery rather than to the EPC, and the relation of the site to the EPC is thus uncertain. The authors believed that this was the site of *Leskovets – Branishte*, from which Nikolov (1964, 70f, fig. 2/b and v) had published two bronze celts, and therefore they related the settlement to the necropolis discussed above (Ganetsovski & Naidenova 2000, 231).
- Stray EPC finds from several other locations in northwest Bulgaria are also known. An upper part of a plane figurine comes from *Bregovo*, Vidin District, some 10 km south of the Danube River. It was found together with fluted sherds similar to

[1] The EPC materials are still being processed.

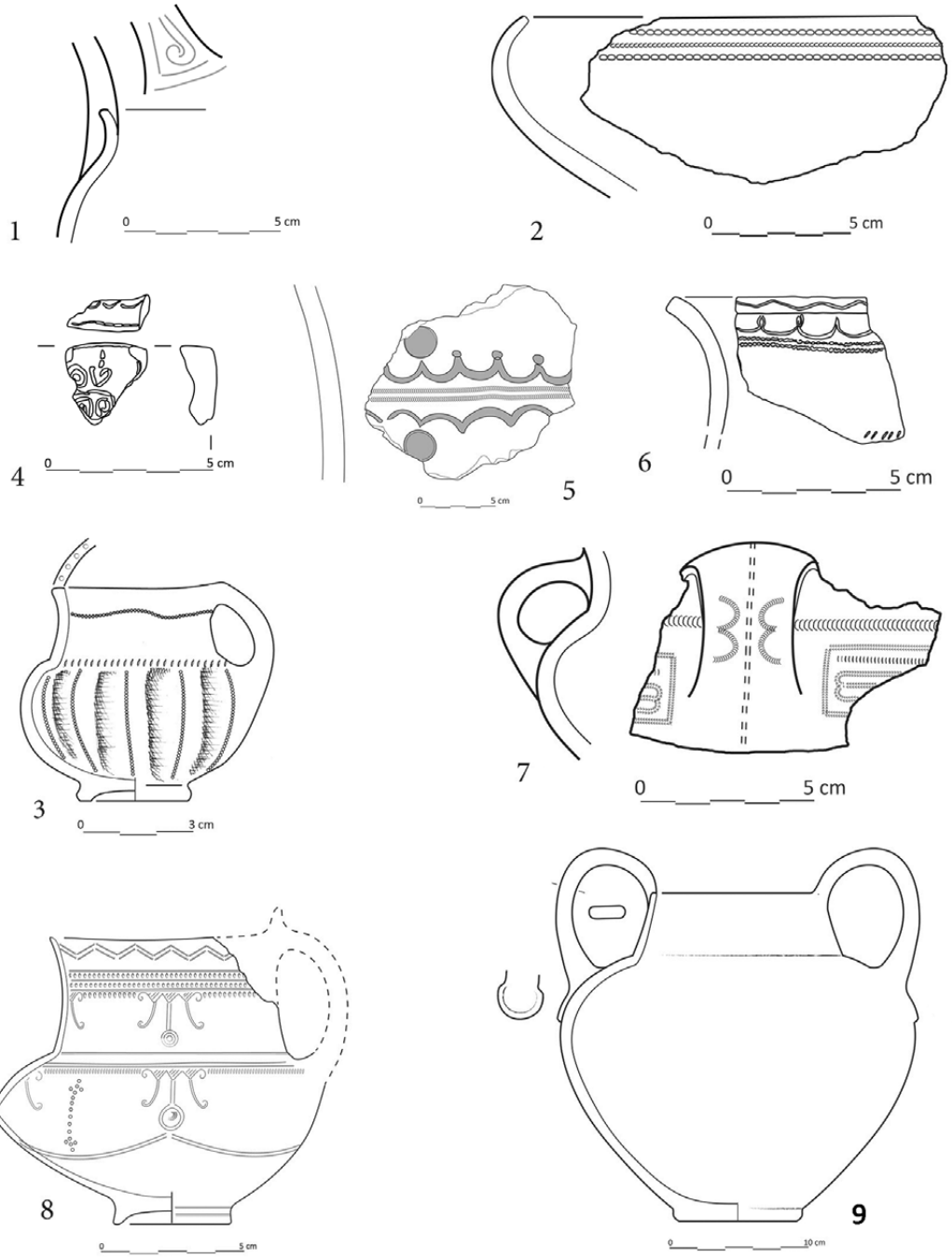


Figure 11. *EPC pottery: Valchedram (1–3); Oryahovo–Orehite (4); Oryahovo–Kaleto (5); Rasovo (6); Yakimovo (7); Ostrov (8). Zimnicea type kantharos (9). Image Credit: S. Alexandrov (1–3, 5, 7, and 8) and G. Ivanov (4 and 6).*

pottery from Baley, levels III and II.[1] In fact, the site of Baley is located some 5 km northwest of the location of the find. An EPC bowl sherd comes from *Yakimovo*, Montana District, 25 km south of the river (fig. 11/7). An EPC cup, bowl sherd and another cup were found near *Valchedram*, Montana District, 15 km south of the river (fig. 11/1–3). Vessels with Zimnicea–Plovdiv characteristics are also kept at the local collection. From the Kaleto locality (a high elevation above the Danube River), 3 km east of *Oryahovo*, also comes a neck sherd from an EPC amphora (fig. 11/5; Ganetsovski & Naidenova 2000, 220, t. II/7). Another sherd (probably from a cult table) was found east of Oryahovo, at the Orehite locality (fig. 11/4).

Discussion

So far, fifteen 'inland' sites in northwest Bulgaria yielded EPC ceramics. We can add to the list an EPC sherd, probably of a bowl, from the site of *Yarak* at Rogljevo (Negotin Municipality, northeast Serbia; Bulatović et al. 2013, 172, t. LXXXIV/2). Taking into account the site of *Chavdartsi* in north central Bulgaria, the total number of LBA sites with EPC ceramic imports in the southern part of the Lower Danube totals up to 17. 'Imports' appear at both settlements (Gramada, Oreshets, Rasovo, and Ruzhintsi) and necropolises (Gramada, Gradeshnitsa, Harlets, and probably Ostrov). In our opinion, grave 1 from Gradeshnitsa could be regarded as a genuine EPC grave.

It seems that these sites are evenly spread in northwest Bulgaria (fig. 1) but this picture could be the result of the current stage of investigations. In Oltenia, north of the Danube River, the number of the 'inland' sites with EPC ceramics is considerably higher in the regions closer to the EPC territory (*Şandor-Chicideanu* 2003; Crăciunescu 2018 & 2022). As shown in figure 1, out of over 40 sites with EPC ceramics north and south of the river, only seven are located east of the Ogosta–Jiu Rivers line. North of the Danube, these are: (1) 'Gârla Mare and Bistreț–Işalnița finds' from the necropolis of *Corabia* (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, 224); (2) an upper part of an anthropomorphic figurine from *Vultureşti* (Berciu 1976, fig. 5/1); (3) an EPC cup from grave 41 at the necropolis of *Zimnicea* (Alexandrescu 1973, 80f, pls. V/3, X/5, and XI/4); (4) an unillustrated sherd from *Popeşti–'Nucet'*, Giurgiu region (not shown in the map; Palincaş 2012, 29); and (5) a sherd of a typical EPA tiered amphora from *Oltenița*, Călăraşi region (Morintz 1978, 80f, figs. 46/1 and 47/4). South of the river, these are: (5) Oryahovo; (6) Ostrov; and (7) Chavdartsi.[2] This is an additional reason to argue that the influx of these two rivers into the Danube should be considered as the eastern border of the 'genuine' EPC area.

The distance between the discussed sites west of the Jiu–Ogosta line and the Danube River (the 'genuine' EPC area) is not longer than 40 km, a range that could be covered in a day walk. However, quite a few sites are located at a much longer distance from the nearest EPC site: Cârcea (65 km), Vultureşti (80 km), Chavdartsi (110 km), Zimnicea (130 km),

[1] Material kept at the Vidin Museum of History.

[2] A rescue operation is still in progress and the finds are unpublished.

and Oltenița (250 km), the distance for the former three sites having been calculated as the crow flies and for the latter two, along the Danube River. This raises questions about the LBA exchange or cultural contacts in the LBA Lower Danube, but they need further investigation.

The EPC 'imports' include pottery, figurines, small finds, etc., i.e., the whole spectrum of ceramic production.

Pottery

So far, seven complete vessels come from sites out of the EPC area: an amphora from Gradeshnitsa (grave 1), a lobed bowl from Harlets, a kantharos from Gramada, two large cups/jugs from Glozhene and Ostrov, a small cup from Valchedram, and a pyxis from Glozhene. EPC sherds are much more numerous: from lobed bowls (type S/ in Şandor-Chicideanu's typology); bowls with inverted rim, type S/14; cups/kantharoi, types C/7–9 and K/7; globular amphorae, etc. Most of them are richly decorated with common EPC techniques and patterns. The pottery types discussed were assigned to the 'classic' (Cârna) EPC phase (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, 184ff), but the excavation results at Baley demonstrated that they are common for the late EPC (Orsoya) phase as well. Similar picture is to be seen north of the Danube. In fact, all the common EPC shapes and decorations are represented there, at Late Verbicioara sites (Crăciunescu 2022, 201ff). Most of the pottery 'imports' north of the Danube come from settlement sites. The only published complete vessel was found at a necropolis: the already mentioned cup from grave 41 in Zimnicea. It is worth mentioning that a kantharos related to Bistreț group was also found in grave 11 at the same cemetery (Alexandrescu 1973, figs. X/7 and XI/3).

Anthropomorphic figurines

Four EPC figurines were found in the study area, from funerary context (Gradeshnitsa) or settlement sites (Gramada and Rasovo). A stray find from Bregovo probably also comes from a settlement context. Only the figurine from Bregovo is plain; the other three are well manufactured and lavishly decorated. Based on the cross-section of the figurines' 'heads', it is possible to assign all of them to Shalganova's type 3, which is considered a later development common for the upper horizons at the settlement of Baley and the necropolis of Orsoya (Shalganova 2005, 62ff).

North of the Danube, fragments from 13 figurines were found out of the EPC area, their number decreasing from west to east. Nine pieces come from Mehedinți District, three from Dolj District, and one from Olt District (fig. 1). The latter is the most distanced find of such figurines. It comes from Vultureşti located some 80 km north of the Danube (Berciu 1976, fig. 5/1). According to the publications, all of them were recovered from settlements. It is interesting to note that all are from the upper parts of the figurines (Crăciunescu 2018; Nica 1994, figs. 11/9 and 15/14 & 1997, figs. 6/22 and 9/13 and 17; Berciu 1952, 159f, fig. 18 & 1976, 171ff, fig. 5/1). Şandor-Chicideanu assigned all Romanian figurines discussed above to her types ΦI and ΦII. Since these are the most numerous figurine types in EPC, this seems quite normal. According to the same author, type ΦI is earlier (Br. B–C period) and type ΦII is later (Br. D period; Şandor-Chicideanu

2003, 101ff and 320ff).

Five out of these eleven sites were excavated. In Oreviţa Mare (Mehedinţi District, 15 km southeast of the Danube River) a Late Verbicioara site yielded two fragments of figurines as well as EPC sherds. The context of finding was not specified, but the local pottery shows Verbicioara V and Bistreţ characteristics (Crăciunescu 2018, 75, pl. VI/42–43 & 2004, 41, pls. LXX/1–5, LXXI/3 and 4, and LXXVIII/1–3). Almost nothing is known of the LBA site of Rogova – La cazărmi (Mehedinţi District) as only EPC ceramics were published from it. The site itself was dated to 'a late stage of the Verbicioara Culture' (Crăciunescu 2022, 204, pls. LXXIV/3–5 and LXXV & 2018, 75, pl. VII/44). The figurine from Cârcea–Hanuri was reported as coming from a level related to the last Verbicioara phase (Nica 1997, fig. 6/22). The one from Verbiţa was found in the plowzone. However, pits with Verbicioara material were explored there, and one of them yielded an EPC pottery sherd (Berciu 1952, 159f). Similarly, a site with Verbicioara IV–V material was investigated at Vultureşti, even though no closed complexes have yet been reported (Berciu 1976, 171ff).

Miscellanea

Several types of EPC small finds were found at the sites discussed. The pyxis from Glozhene (fig. 7/4) belongs to type P/1–2 in **Ş**andor-Chicideanu's typology (2003, pl. 195/1 and 2). Similar pyxides were uncovered in features 161 and 163 at the necropolis of Baley, radiocarbon dated to 1369–1217 cal. BC and 1378–1215 cal. BC period, respectively (68.3% probability).[1] A fragment of a cult table comes from the site of Oryahovo–Orehite (fig. 11/4). Small lids and other small finds specific for the EPC come from Rasovo.[2] Such materials were found at Late Verbicioara sites north of the Danube River as well (Crăciunescu 2022, 201ff).

South of the Danube River, the EPC imports appear at sites that yielded Zimnicea–Plovdiv or Gramada–Gamzigrad style pottery. In fact, all the excavated sites of this group yielded EPC ceramics. In those investigated at a larger area (such as Gramada–Gladnika and Rasovo), the number of imports is considerable. Based on radiocarbon dates, the discussed EPC ceramics generally appear in the second half of the fifteenth–thirteenth centuries cal. BC period. It is noteworthy, that no EPC materials were so far discovered at earlier (Verbicioara IV) or later (Vârtop) sites.

North of the Danube, such finds were reported from sites generally described as 'late Verbicioara' or 'Verbicioara IV–V'. As mentioned by Gabriel Crăciunescu, '*Žuto* Brdo – Gârla Mare materials are frequently found at the late Verbicioara settlement sites.' For the site of Oreviţa Mare, a high number of EPC ceramics was noted, one of the possible explanations being the large excavation area (Crăciunescu 2022, 204f and note 781). The very intensive relations between Verbicioara V and Gârla Mare were emphasized by Marin Nica as well (1998, 152f). In Romanian literature, the EPC relations with

[1] 2022 excavation directed by S. Alexandrov, G. Ivanov, and T. Hristova.

[2] The EPC materials are still being processed.

Verbicioara, Zimnicea–Plovdiv and Tei have been discussed, more or less, in terms of relative chronology. The relations with Verbicioara IV have been sought in material from Cârcea–Viaduct and Secu (Craiova region). However, both Verbicioara IV and V phases were identified at the site of Cârcea–Viaduct. At Secu, the EPC imports were associated with Verbicioara V material.

More reliable is the evidence from the necropolis of Cârna, where graves 104 and 18 yielded kantharoi related by most authors to Verbicioara IV or the Govora group (Şandor-Chicideanu 2003, 199ff). Moreover, a Zimnicea–Plovdiv kantharos was found in grave 33/33bis (Dumitrescu 1961, 46, pl. XLVII/121). Generally, inland ceramics has rarely been found at EPC sites. At the settlement of Baley, several sherds could be distinguished, based on their fabrics, shape, and decoration, as 'foreign' for the local ceramic production. Their shapes and decorations find parallels in Verbicioara V and Zimnicea–Plovdiv pottery (fig. 12/1–5). These sherds come from levels III–II (fig. 12/5–14). The Bayesian chronological modelling of radiocarbon dates from Baley[1] shows a 1421–1203 cal. BC range for levels III–Ib that generally corresponds to the absolute dating of the sites with EPC ceramics in northwest Bulgaria discussed here. Kantharoi from graves 25, 86, and 176 at the necropolis of Orsoya could be related to the Zimnicea–Plovdiv pottery style as well (Filipov 1976, pls. XV, XXXVIII, and LXV). According to Crăciunescu (2022, 202, pl. XIV/6), the only EPC site with inland ceramics in west Oltenia is Izvoarele where 'a half of a cup from a late Verbicioara phase' was discovered. In a monograph published in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the discussed cup was related to the Verbicioara IV phenomenon (Crăciunescu 2004, 189).

So far, the correlation between the number of sites with EPC imports as well as the number of EPC sites with inland ceramics leads to the conclusion that the direction of contacts was from the Danube River to the north and south. If these numbers are not merely a result of the current stage of investigation, we can assume that the contacts between the EPC and the inland communities were initiated and carried out mainly by the 'river' population. Such an assumption is supported by the use of EPC ceramics in 'inland' mortuary practices; grave 1 at Gradeshnitsa is, in fact, a genuine EPC funerary complex.

The intensive contacts of the EPC communities with their neighbors were not a characteristic feature for the population east of the Iron Gates only. Recent investigations revealed relations and intensive contacts of the western EPC group (Dubovac) with their neighbors to the west and northwest. The relations between EPC and the Belegiš–Cruceni phenomenon were 'observed at several necropolises and settlement sites in Banat and the Middle Danube region – Srem and Bačka' (Szentmiklosi 2006, 234ff). In fact, the northernmost Belegiš site that yielded EPC imports is Gradište Iđoš in northern Serbia located south of the confluence of the Mureş and Tisza Rivers, where two EPC sherds were found in trench 6, pit 6005. The ceramics from the pit was related primarily to the Belegiš II period. The two sherds were considered as 'imports with stamped solar motifs,

[1] Made by P. Włodarczak of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków, based on dates available until 2021.

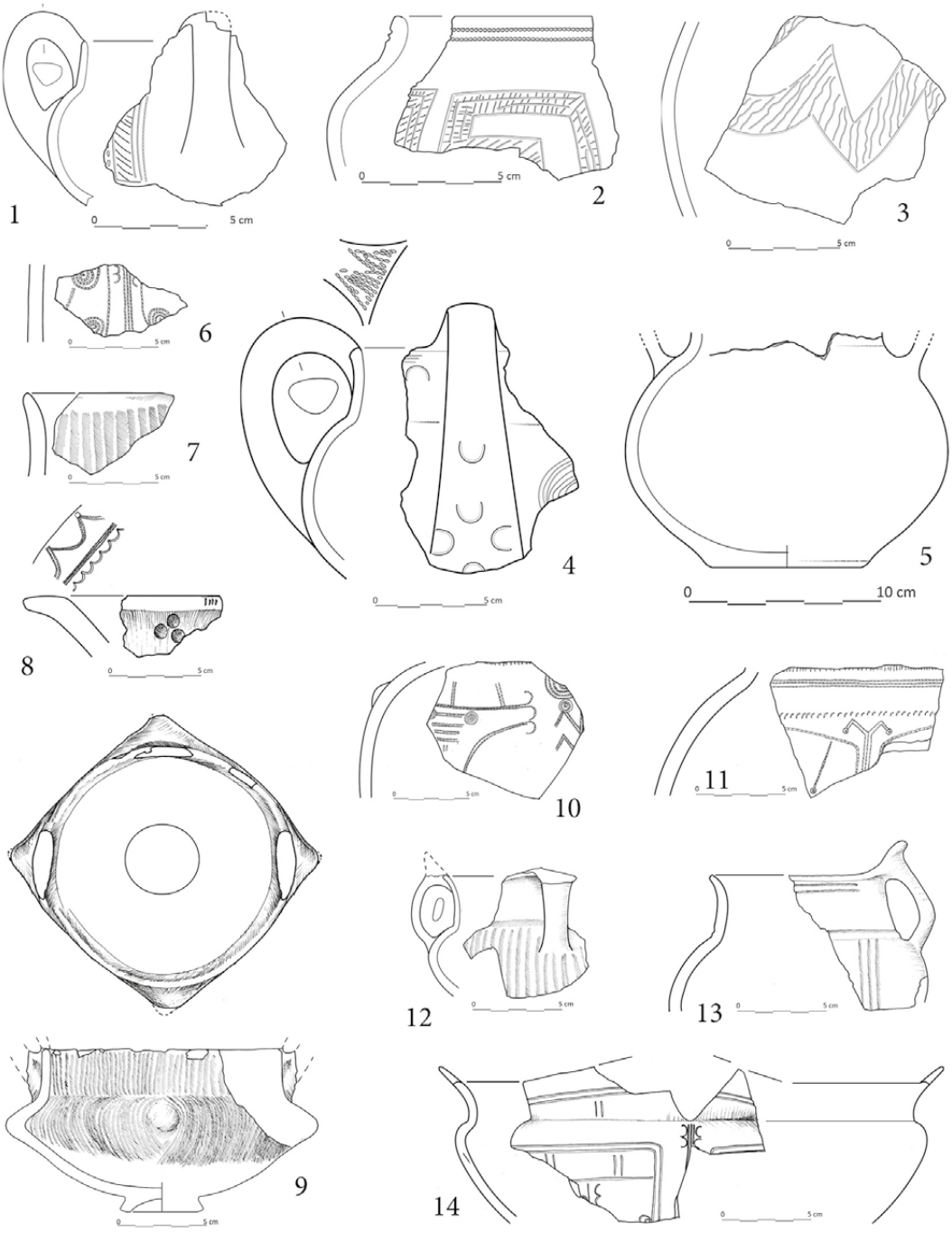


Figure 12. *The settlement of Baley, levels III and II: sherds with Zimnicea-Plovdiv and Verbicioara V characteristics (1–5); EPC pottery from level II (6–9); EPC pottery from level III (10–14). Image Credit: S. Alexandrov.*

probably coming from the south'. The two radiocarbon dates on samples from context 6006 – 1441–1304 cal. BC and 1406–1274 cal. BC (both of 95.4% probability) –secure the chronological position of the feature in the last decades of the fifteenth – the early thirteenth century cal. BC period (Molloy et al. 2020, 9f, table 3, fig. 10/M, obj. 6006).

EPC ceramics was recovered from the Middle Morava area in Serbia as well. Several sherds come from pit 128 at Panjevački rit, Jagodina region, related to the Paraćin group (Stojić 2004, 74ff and 144f, t. LIV/5 and 6). According to Milorad Stojić, a kantharos from the necropolis of Rajkinac – Lukićska Mala is decorated 'in the Žuto Brdo style.' The grave itself was related to the Paraćin and Brnjica phenomena (Stojić 1998, 84, t. IV/5 & 2004, 145). One more EPC sherd from the neck of an EPC globular amphora was found near Jagodina.[1]

Some authors have argued that these contacts reached northern Greece, as evidenced by an upper part of a figurine found at Dikili Tash (Deshayes 1970, 36, fig. 40). Although Şandor-Chicideanu (2003, 325) assigned it to her type ΦI B1, in our opinion its relation to the EPC still needs additional arguments.

Conclusion

Considering the EPC, in the LBA, the northwest Bulgaria 'inland' region showed contacts similar to what has been established for Oltenia, Banat, and Srem as follows:

- The contacts were intensive as evidenced by the ceramic imports;
- The imports cover the whole spectrum of ceramic products: pottery, figurines, small finds, etc.;
- Territorially, they cover almost entirely northwest Bulgaria up to a distance of 40 km south of the Danube River;
- In northwest Bulgaria, the EPC ceramic imports appear in Gamzigrad–Gramada or Zimnicea–Plovdiv cultural milieu;
- So far, no EPC ceramics have been found at Verbicioara IV sites in the region discussed;
- The EPC imports appear at settlement sites (dwellings, pits) and necropolises;
- Chronologically, these imports cover the second half of the fifteenth–thirteenth century cal. BC period;
- Based on the evidence from the settlement and necropolis of Baley, this period corresponds to the Orsoya/Baley phase of the EPC development;
- It could be assumed that the EPC communities initiated and carried out these contacts. Grave 1 at Gradeshnitsa could even be regarded as a genuine EPC grave;
- The existence of EPC imports at sites that are located at more than 100 km (sometimes 250 km) from the nearest EPC site raises questions related to the LBA exchange or cultural contacts in the Lower Danube.

[1] It is kept at the Jagodina Museum.

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