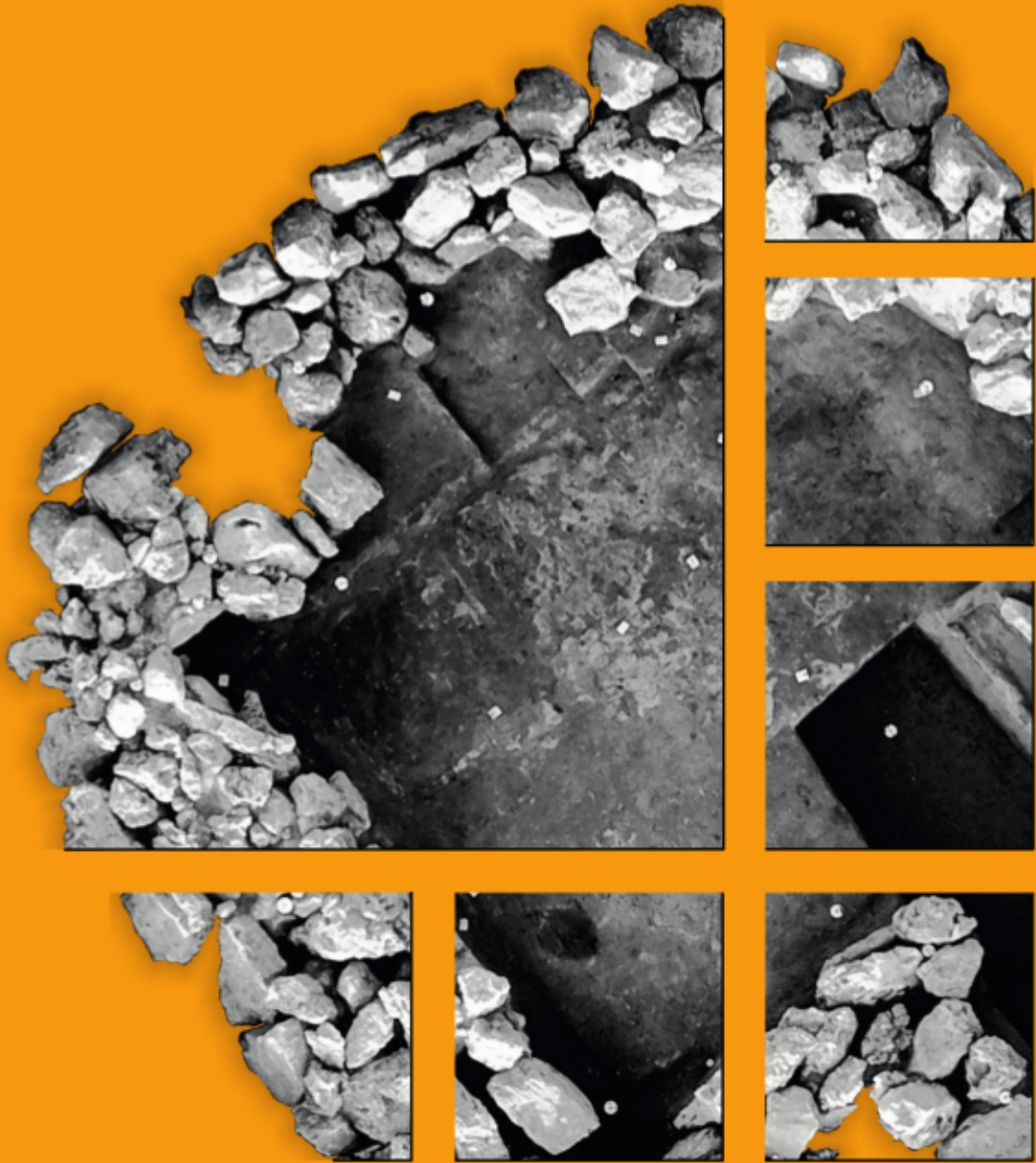


DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 4. | 2016

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The first season of the excavation of Grd-i Tle

The Post-Medieval Settlement at Grd-i Tle (Field 1)

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Abstract

The most important result of the first season of the excavations at Grd-i Tle was the revealing of a significant late post medieval settlement within the presumably earlier ramparts. The three levels of the settlement existed in the 18th and 19th centuries and undoubtedly can be connected with the local Kurdish population of that time. However, the function of the site is not yet clear.

Introduction

Field 1 situated on the edge of the upper plateau of the Grd-i Tle archaeological site had as a goal to create a stratigraphical sequence of the ceramic from the latest phases of the inhabitation. The first season of excavations at *Field 1* at Grd-i Tle revealed an intensive post medieval settlement within the stone ramparts. Present paper gives a preliminary overview only of the research carried out on the settlement features within the ramparts discussed in a separate article.¹ Works here were led by Maxim Mordovin and Zsófia Masek.

The intramural part of the settlement was excavated in two trenches: eastern and western, 4 m wide each (*Fig. 1*). The reached depth significantly differs due to more intensive stratigraphic situation in the western part. The deepest point reached in the western trench (from the present day level) is 1.2 m; in the eastern trench is 1.5 m. Since the connection of the particular features in the two parts of the excavated area was clearly observable, in the following their description will be given together.

The most important discovery at this location was the appearance of a mortar stone rampart wall, in average 0.8 m thick having at least three building phases (*Fig. 2, 4–5*). The dating of the construction of the wall cannot be yet clarified but according to the documented stratigraphy this wall strongly defined the latest building activity of the spot. However, it is undoubted that the excavated wall is part of a fortification. The military character of the structure is emphasised by a semi-circular tower excavated in the east-northern part of the trench (*Fig. 6*).

1 See article of T. Dezső and M. Mordovin in the same volume.

Chronological Levels

Altogether three main settlement levels could have been separated, each of them consisted of several stratigraphic units. The character of all these levels is very similar, which fact refers to their chronological closeness.

The uppermost level (*Level 1*) is the most damaged one. It is compounded of two layers, including the upper one (**SNR-001; SNR-003–004**) and some hardly identifiable walls (**SNR-044**). In some cases traces of hearths and possible ovens were observed. The layers were composed of greyish brown earth with mortar debris and burnt daub fragments. The relatively high amount of stones most probably should be interpreted as foundations of walls destroyed by the recent anthropogenic activities at the site. There is no possibility to reconstruct in details the former layout for this level but at least two things can be stated. The first is, that the walls were most probably built of daub or mud bricks on stone foundations with no mortar. The last can be confirmed by the fact that no layer of stone and mortar debris has been identified in this area. And the second is that the walls were built arranging to the fortification line (**SNR-002** and **SNR-022**) undoubtedly being later than that.

The second level (*Level 2*) survived much better than the upper one being only covered and not disturbed by the most recent features. It consisted altogether of three or sometimes four layers, the upper part of which was the filling or levelling layer above the lower former surface (**SNR-027; SNR-134**). Four stone foundations can be connected to this strata. All of them are very similar to those from the latest phases. The foundations usually were built of two or three, but no more than four rows of stones without mortar, and in average were 50–60 cm wide. All excavated foundations were strictly aligned to the outer fortification line being parallel or perpendicular to it. One of the walls at this level coated the main fortification from the inner side. Very close to the eastern edge of the western trench, an approximately 80 cm hiatus was observed in the coating wall, and at the same place the curtain wall of the site was broken through. The hiatus and the breach in the outer wall were connected and seemingly created a narrow doorway to the tower excavated in the north-eastern part of the *Field 1*. Since the presumed entrance remained unexcavated under the balk, the situation cannot be clarified yet. However, the fact that both the tower and the curtain wall were built using mortar, while the coating wall was not, the documented entrance cannot be the original way to the tower.

Several ovens and hearths associated with this level were found. Some of the ovens – locally called *tannurs* – survived relatively well (**SNR-010-14; SNR-030; SNR-031; SNR-041** etc.). In at least two cases clear superpositions were observed showing renewal of the ovens (*Fig. 7–8*). In the south-eastern corner of the eastern trench a pile of ceramic fragments from two or three vessels were documented lying on the contemporary surface of the *Level 2*. In the south-western corner of the same trench, and beside the eastern section of the western trench the original surface was paved with larger stone slabs (**SNR-034; SNR-050** and probably **SNR-115; Fig. 9**). Presumably these two parts are connected under the unexcavated balk. Since the stone “floor” is not surrounded by any traceable walls, what is more, several foundations were laid on it, its function is hard to interpret yet.

The third level (*Level 3*) was investigated only in the eastern trench. Its character is almost identical with that of the *Level 2*. Three main components can be mentioned: stone foundations

of walls (**SNR-121**), ovens and smaller hearths (**SNR-117-119**: *Fig. 8*), and relatively thick filling layer (**SNR-116**).

Only fragmentary architectural features can be assigned to *Level 3* (**SNR-121**). The few dry stone wall foundations were arranged according to the outer fortification line. All of them were only 2–4 stone rows (30–40 cm) thick and 60–80 cm wide. It seems that they were placed directly on the surface with no foundation trenches.

The surface of the *Level 3* was traced in 1.6 m depth from the present day level. It was harder than the filling layer above, in some places it was slightly burnt by occasional fires (hearths) and large *tannurs* were built upon it. Altogether three ovens have been excavated (**SNR-117-119**, *Fig. 8*), two of them in superposition. The filling layers of this level were similar to those in strata above. They consisted of greyish brown earth with charcoal debris and burnt daub fragments with relatively high quantity of pottery sherds and archaeozoological material. The filling most probably originated from the wattle-and-daub or simply daub walls used to stand on the excavated stone foundations. During their destruction and levelling some stones were scattered in the filling. Noteworthy that the walls of the *tannurs* survived in remarkably good condition implying to a relatively fast process of filling up. At the same time several traces of thin hearths with ashes and charcoal refer to that it was not done at once but gradually, presumably in some weeks or months.

The surface of this level at the largest part of the excavated territory was simple rammed, hard earth differing from the neighbouring layers in larger amount of scattered pottery sherds, archaeozoological remains, irregularly lying stones. Many hardly observable occasional sites of fire (shallow hearths) were seen on this surface.

Walls and Foundations (*Fig. 2, 4–5*)

As it has already been mentioned, all walls excavated within the ramparts were built on shallow stone foundations with wattle-and-daub or mudbrick technique. Since all of them were systematically demolished and levelled, their former structure cannot be clarified until a luckier stratigraphic situation. Anyway, the surviving foundations give sufficient amount of information concerning the main settlement phases and construction periods. According to the basic stratigraphy three main levels have already been distinguished. This should be adjusted to the overall 12 excavated walls or wall fragments. The superpositions and depth data narrows the number to three phases. At the present stage of the research only one wall (**SNR-121**) can be associated with the *Level 3* and thus can be regarded as the earliest (excluding the curtain walls).

The *Level 2* includes at least five features mostly superimposed on each other. Basing on the stratigraphy the two coating walls on the inner side of the fortifications (**SNR-120** and **SNR-002a**) and the stone pavement of the surface can belong to the earliest strata of this level (**SNR-034** and **SNR-050**, maybe also **SNR-115**: *Fig. 9*). The pavement might have been connected with the entrance identified in the **SNR-019/020** wall, situated directly on the stone surface and therefore may be contemporary. The next phase is the wall **SNR-113**, perpendicular to the curtain wall. It cuts the wall **SNR-020** while another smaller one is attached west of it (**SNR-110**).

Some of the inner walls from the *Level 2* must have remained visible in the time of *Level 1*. Unfortunately this uppermost level was seriously damaged, consequently only one of the more or less identifiable four walls survived all along the excavated area. The **SNR-009/021** wall is the most significant stone foundation except the curtain walls. It is 80–90 cm wide and 40–50 cm deep. It covers at least three features from the *Level 2* and it was repaired around the very end of the traceable existence of the site (**SNR-021a**). The two surviving sections of another wall (**SNR-049**) were perpendicular to the curtain wall and most probably divided the area along the fortifications to smaller rooms or courts.

Ovens and Hearths

The most frequent archaeological feature at the *Field 1* was oven or hearth. Sometimes it was hard to decide whether the excavated remains belonged to a simple hearth or were lowest fragments of a heavily damaged oven. Altogether at least 23 such features were documented, 11 of them undoubtedly could have been identified as ovens.

Ovens at Grd-i Tle are slightly narrowing, cylindrical structures made of clay heavily tempered with pebbles and organic materials, usually on a wattle frame. The latter disappeared during the first firing but its traces often remained visible on the inner surface of the oven. All the abandoned ovens have similar fillings: the lower quarter is consisted of ashes with charcoal, and the upper rest is identical with the overall filling layer of particular level.

Ovens may differ in sizes: the smallest one is 38–40 cm in diameter and 20–25 cm high (**SNR-123**; *Fig. 10*), while the largest known is 60 cm in diameter high (**SNR-010** and **SNR-117**, *Fig. 7–8*). Most of the ovens, however, belong to the larger type.

From the eleven surely identified ovens seven survived with significant surviving details. In two cases the ovens were found “in pairs”, where one was cut by another, obviously being replaced (**SNR-010–011** and **SNR-117–118**; *Fig. 7–8*). Another two *tannurs* presented special, very interesting details. First of them was found in the western trench, just beside its eastern section, situated on the stone surface (**SNR-030**; *Fig. 9*). Only with the surviving lower part this is the only one with a rounded hole just above the surface. This might have enabled the circulation of the air inside the oven. Also notable feature that this oven contained fragments of a large, turquoise-glazed jug.

The second oven is a bit simpler but really “mysterious” (**SNR-123**; *Fig. 10*). It has double shell filled with earth in between. This may imply to a renewal and thus to the importance of this particular oven, since in all other cases – as it can be seen in “oven pairs” – the older one had been simply partially destroyed. The most important feature of this oven is the incised decoration consisted of vertical lines and circles on its inner surface (*Fig. 11*). This is the only such known example not only at Grd-i Tle but also at all published other excavations in the region. The facts that the decoration was made intentionally in a relatively small oven, and that it could not be seen while the oven was in use, make it really intriguing, undoubtedly having some hidden symbolic meaning for the person who made it or for that who was using it (if that was not the same). Unfortunately, there is not enough data to even try to explain this decoration.

Pottery

The most important and yet the only dating group of finds from this part of excavation is pottery. The preliminary evaluation of the ceramic finds has not been finished on the spot due to the unexpected complexity of the stratigraphic situation. The uppermost layers proved to be very mixed including fragments originated from several much earlier levels. These fragments represent a broader spectre of ceramics starting from Neolithic painted ware, throughout Hellenistic-Parthian wheel-turned pottery up to the Late Islamic production. This character of the layers undoubtedly implies to a larger extent of damage of the earlier strata. The evaluation of the ceramic material of the site is based on the distinction both of the material-technological groups (e.g. tempering, technology, firing, surface treatment) and their physical characteristics.

The overall analyses of the ceramic assemblage of the site have to be prepared only in an inclusive way that is the whole chronological spectre of the pottery should be evaluated simultaneously, while the establishing and closer defining of chronological groups within the diagnostic material will be outlined and refined gradually getting lower and acquiring additional information from well stratified closed assemblages.

According to the present stage of the evaluation relatively small amount of the ceramic material can be associated with the latest phases of the site. Fragments of heavily tempered, hand-formed, oxidation-fired jugs, occasionally with incised decoration were scattered throughout the upper layers. Beside the foundation of the tower, in the layer **SNR-045** larger parts of a hand-formed pot with a handle were found (*Fig. 13.6*). A heavily-tempered, crude, hand-formed storage jar was documented lying on the surface (**SNR-027**) of the latest phase (*Fig. 12*). Fragments of several wheel-turned, turquoise-glazed jugs were collected from the Late Islamic features, including the filling of an oven (**SNR-030**).

A special group of ceramic finds of the site is represented by terracotta tobacco pipes. Altogether several dozens of such pipes have been collected so far, showing several types (*Fig. 13.1–5*).

Conclusion

The observations confirms existence of at least three main habitation strata all datable to the so-called “Late Islamic” period. The finds of lead bullets and – most of all – particular types of pipes enable to define this period to the 18th and early 19th century. The excavated location in the *Field 1* seems to have been a domestic part of the latest fortification complex. This is confirmed by the large number of bread-baking ovens observed on every settlement strata. The presence of the bullets at the same time unambiguously refers to somewhat conflict in that time explainable later in context of local history.

Evaluating the latest phases of the settlement, more exactly the reusing of the earlier fortifications during the 18th-19th centuries it can be clearly stated that the inhabitants can be identified with the local Kurdish population. Even the possibility of the Kurdish origin of the mortar walls cannot be excluded but this can be clarified via further excavations.



Fig. 1. Overall layout of the excavated features (Zs. Masek).

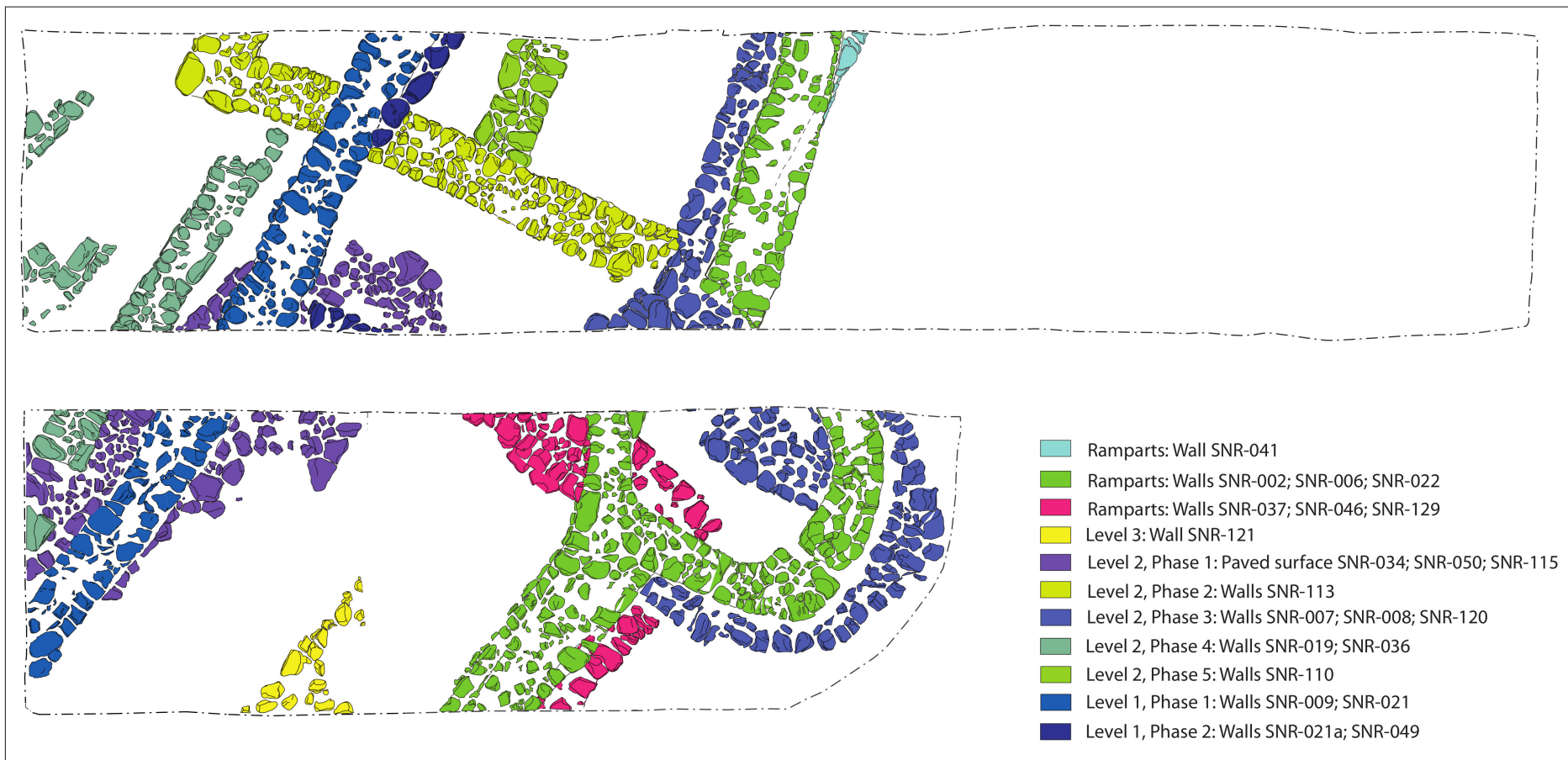


Fig. 2. Layout of the excavated architectural remains showing their relative chronology (Zs. Masek – M. Mordovin).



Fig. 3. Overall view of the excavated settlement within the ramparts (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 4. Excavated curtain walls of the site (SNR-022; SNR-120) (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 5. Excavated curtain walls of the site (SNR-022; SNR-120) (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 6. Foundations of the main walls (SNR-002; SNR-006) and coating walls (SNR-007; SNR-008) of the tower (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 7. Ovens SNR-010 and SNR-011 from the Level 2 (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 8. Ovens SNR-117 and SNR-118 from the Level 3 (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 9. Oven SNR-030 and the paved surface SNR-050 in the Level 2 (M. Mordovin).



Fig. 10. Small, decorated oven SNR-123 from the Level 2, overview (Zs. Masek).



Fig. 11. Decoration of the oven SNR-123 (Zs. Masek).



Fig. 12. Fragments of a storage jar *in situ* on the contemporary surface (SNR-027) of the Level 2 (M. Mordovin).

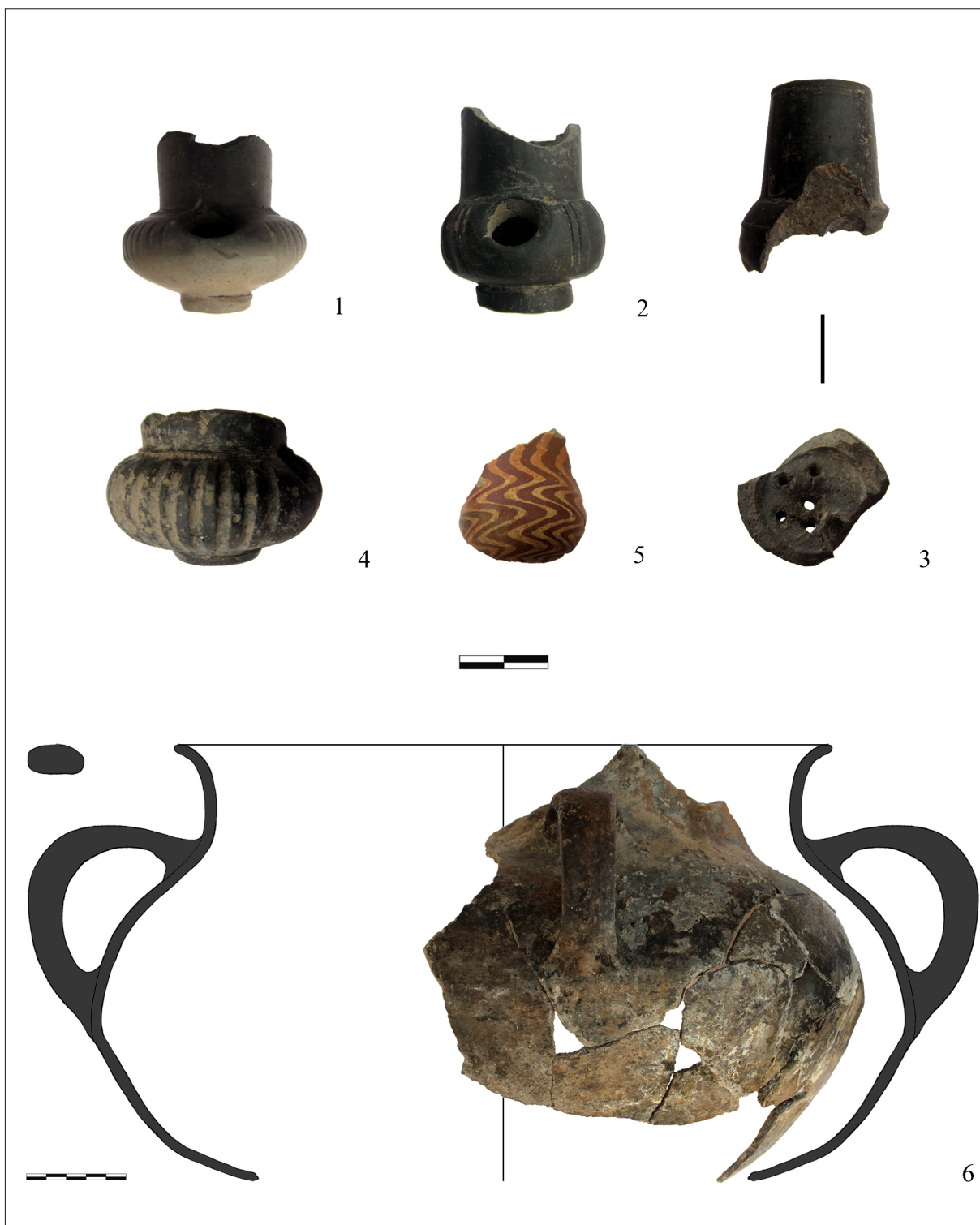


Fig. 13. Some ceramic finds from the settlement: 1-5. terracotta tobacco pipes; 6. hand-formed pot (Zs. Masek).