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# A 7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WARRIOR HOUSE AT IERNUT/ SFÂNTU GHEORGHE (MUREȘ COUNTY)\*

Călin Cosma<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The present study analyzes a dwelling identified inside the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries settlement at Iernut – Sfântu Gheorghe, containing a series of artefacts which can be related to the presence of a warrior. The archaeological site at Iernut – Sfântu Gheorghe village (Mureș County) is positioned at the eastern limit of the modern village, in a place called “Pe Șes” by the locals. The site displays a sequence of inhabitation starting from prehistory and continuing during the Roman period and the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig. 1.1–2). Dwelling no. 1/1994 was discovered inside surface S1, it measured 3.00 × 3.10 m and it was orientated W-E. An almost completely destroyed oven (Fig. 2.1–2) was identified near the south-eastern corner and the whole structure was affected by a strong fire. The inventory of the dwelling consists of pottery fragments and iron objects: a spur, a bit, an arrowhead and a spearhead (Pl. 1–7). The majority of the archaeological finds, displaying strong traces of secondary burning, were collected from an ash layer overlapping the floor and not from the upper layers related to the abandonment of the dwelling. Thus, the context of the discovery indicates with certainty that the finds were used during the last phases of function and they did not arrive inside the structure after its destruction. Dwelling L. 1/1994 from Iernut – Sfântu Gheorghe can be dated during the 7<sup>th</sup> century with the possibility of narrowing down the period of its existence in the second half of the same century. The archaeological finds argue for the identification of the structure discovered at Iernut – Sfântu Gheorghe with a 7<sup>th</sup> century dwelling belonging to a warrior.*

**Keywords:** *Early Middle Ages, dwelling, warrior, weapons, pottery.*

Our goal herein is to present a novel house, discovered in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries' settlement at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, whose inventory contains a series of warrior specific metal artifacts.

## Topographical specifications

At Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe (Mureș county), by the eastern village boundary, in the place the locals call “Pe Șes”, stretches an archaeological site where settlements overlap: from prehistory to Dacian and Roman and to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The place “Pe Șes” is a high terrace of Mureș river in Sfântu Gheorghe village that belongs to Iernut town (Mureș county). It is located by the foot of a hill onto which today lies the monument for the heroes of WW II, known as the Monument of Oarba de Mureș (Fig. 1.1–2).

After the first research of 1954, the archaeological site was recorded by the literature as “the settlement at Cipău-Sfântu Gheorghe”<sup>2</sup>. Later, following the archaeological excavations

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<sup>2</sup> HOREDT 1955, 661–662, pl. IV, fig. 3/6–16.

of the 90'ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the archaeological site was located at Iernut/Sf. Gheorghe or Iernut/Cătunul Sf. Gheorghe<sup>3</sup>. For avoidance of any doubt, we shall preserve the place of Iernut/Sf. Gheorghe, site “Pe Şes”, as the location of the archaeological site (Fig. 1.1–2).

### Stratigraphical specifications

The research carried out on the Mureş river terrace, named “Pe Şes”, yielded houses, ovens, storage pits etc., as well as a rich archaeological material consisting of pottery and various iron objects, dating to various periods, from prehistory to the Middle Ages. The excavations were performed by the terrace edge, towards Mureş river, in the central part of the plateau, on the N-S coordinates (Fig. 1.2).

In 1994, two parallel squares, with the long sides oriented E-V, sized each 10 × 5 m and a 1 m separating wall in-between (Fig. 1.2, 2) were excavated in the southern terrace part. There, the land is slightly sloping compared to the northern part, where the plateau is higher. In this southern part, inhabitancy was not that intense as in the northern part of the terrace, where the vertical stratigraphy of archaeological remains reaches at some points even -2.00 m deep, and where a large number of archaeological assemblages from prehistory to the Middle Ages clusters.

Compared to the northern part of the terrace, in its east the archaeological sterile is higher. It emerges at -0.75 m. Culture levels are located very high, starting from the archaeological sterile to the current surface level of the terrace. Therefore, each most recent ancient or medieval habitation level wiped out almost entirely the traces of the preceding settlement level. In other words, the older settlement was destroyed by the following, which at its turn was removed by the following settlement of a more recent phase. Three habitation levels are recorded: -0.10 cm -0.30 cm, medieval level dated to the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries; -0.30 cm -0.50 cm, culture level with materials from the 8<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The level dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries emerged between -0.50 cm and -0.75 cm deep. In this last level, we identified in square S. 1, by the yellow clay level (-0.75 cm deep), a rectangular house with fire installation. In addition, we also found the traces of a supposed circular pit, having a 0.80 cm diameter (Fig. 2. S.1). In square S. 2, in the western part, we identified the bottom of a pit, likely a storage pit, used subsequently as waste pit (Fig. 2. S.2). The eastern part of this surface was completely destroyed by a contemporary pit to the archaeological sterile level (Fig. 2.3).

In the two squares excavated in the eastern part, in the level dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries we noted, on its entire thickness, consistent ash traces in the culture layer, which certify a fire datable sometime to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, possibly even early 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### Description of the house and the archaeological material. Chronology

#### House 1/1994 (Fig. 2)

House 1/1994 was discovered in square S. 1. The house outline was identified at -0.75 cm deep (depth where the sterile emerges). The pit of the archaeological assemblage deepens up to -0.85 m in the sterile. The house was sized 3.00 m × 3.10 m, with the long axis oriented V-E. The house had no postholes in the corners or by its mid sides. The assemblage corners are slightly rounded. Near the south-eastern corner of the assemblage, we found a completely destroyed oven. Most likely, it was a clay-walled kiln. Few wall pieces were found fallen over the fireplace. The oven hearth, placed by the house floor surface, was rectangular and sized 0.40 cm × 0.20 cm, with the long axis oriented V-E. The lower part of the oven was formed of a burnt clay outer layer, 0.6 cm thick. Over this burnt hearth, lay collapsed the clay

<sup>3</sup> The excavations at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe after 1990 are mostly novel. For information see CCA 1991–2000, the Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe archaeological site.

walls broken to pieces. In front of the oven, in the northern corner, was placed the fuel hole of the fire installation. It was rectangular, sized  $0.45 \times 0.20$  cm and long axis oriented V-E. It was dug in the house floor, the pit bottom being found at  $-1.15$  cm deep (Fig. 2.1–2).

Very likely, it was a sunken house, with the walls and roof supported by timber runners<sup>4</sup>. The oven's preservation state yet provides few details on the fire installation type. Possibly, it was a clay-walled oven. In the upper part, it must have been provided with a portable clay grate<sup>5</sup>.

Also, it must be specified that the house was strongly burnt. The fire must have occurred during the life of the assemblage and not later, in a different chronological sequence. This is supported by the very much ash and burnt adobe, coming from the clay-bound timber structure of the house, which we identified in the house pit. The artifacts discovered at the house floor level had strong secondary burning prints, owing to contact with a strong fire source.

A thin ash layer was in fact discovered on the entire surface of S. 1 and S. 2, which we already mentioned, suggesting a fire at the level of the entire space around the house, either incidental or intentional (Fig. 2.3). The fact that the fire occurred when the house was still dwelled is proven by the fact that over the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries' culture layer, which contains very much ash, lay the culture layer where 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century materials were discovered (Fig. 2.3).

Even though a series of constructional technical details of the discussed archaeological feature are missing, one may argue that both the house shape and its supposed timber structure as well as the presumptive fire installation are archaeological assemblages found typologically in a geographical area closer or farther from the site at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe. Chronologically, analogies cover a broader time period, being found inclusively in the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>.

In the house pit were discovered potshards and iron objects that include a spur, a horse bit, an arrowhead and a spearhead. Most of the archaeological inventory, showing strong secondary firing traces, was identified in the ash layer, on the house floor and not in the filling or at the level where the assemblage emerged. This excludes the possibility that the archaeological material could have reached in the house at a date subsequent to the discontinuance of the assemblage.

#### Iron spur (Pl. I.4)

The spur is shaped as letter "D" in plan. The bar of which it was made is oval in section. The two bars extremities are bent outwards, twisted upwards and have thickened ends. The spike, made of the same bar as the body, is vertical and rectangular/rhomboid in section. The spike tip is pyramidal. The item has traces of secondary burning. Its size are as follows:  $H_{\text{total}} = 7.5$  cm;  $H_{\text{spur without spike}} = 4.9$  cm;  $H_{\text{spike}} = 2.6$  cm;  $l_{\text{maximum of the bars}} = 1$  cm; storage: the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Cluj-Napoca (Pl. I.4).

The spur in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe has analogies in Transylvania at Breaza and Medișorul Mare<sup>7</sup>. The three spurs at Breaza, Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe and Medișoru Mare

<sup>4</sup> For various constructional systems found with Early Middle Age houses see for instance: CHAPELOT/FOSSIER 1985, 33–135; COSMA 1996, 264–274, with bibliography; PLEINEROVÁ 2000, 35–40; ŠALKOVSKÝ 2001; COSMA 2002, 28–33, with bibliography; TÓTH 2006; KUNA/PROFANTOVÁ 2005, 324–329; HARHOIU/BALTAG 2006, 19–25; VIZAUER 2008, 19–118; STANCIU 2011, 110–163.

<sup>5</sup> For various Early Middle Ages ovens see for instance: COSMA 1996, 264–274, with bibliography; PLEINEROVÁ 2000, 35–40; ŠALKOVSKÝ 2001; COSMA 2002, 28–33, with bibliography; TÓTH 2006; KUNA/PROFANTOVÁ 2005, 324–329; HARHOIU/BALTAG 2006, 19–25; VIZAUER 2008, 19–118; STANCIU 2011, 110–163.

<sup>6</sup> For instance: CHAPELOT/FOSSIER 1985, 33–135; COSMA 1996, 264–274, with bibliography; PLEINEROVÁ 2000, 35–40; ŠALKOVSKÝ 2001; COSMA 2002, 28–33, with bibliography; TÓTH 2006; KUNA/PROFANTOVÁ 2005, 324–329; HARHOIU/BALTAG 2006, 19–25; VIZAUER 2008, 19–118; STANCIU 2011, 110–163.

<sup>7</sup> COSMA 2013, 82–83.

are relatively simple as object type. It is found in a relatively long period of time (during the Dacian period<sup>8</sup> and to a certain extent among the German spurs dated until the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>).

For framing the spurs at Breaza and Medişoru Mare to the start period of the Early Middle Ages pleads the inlay decoration technique of the items, with bronze in the first case, respectively silver in the second. Compared to the period until the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>, the above procedure is very often found on broad areas in the Early Middle Ages Europe, without yet being a very fine chronological criterion during the specified period<sup>11</sup>.

According to the spike shape and sizes of the spurs at Breaza, Medişoru Mare and Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, the three artifacts belong to a period previous the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Until the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the spike is not very long<sup>12</sup>. Starting with the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and then in the following period, the spike length increases substantially, which provides a real element of chronological delimitation of the spurs<sup>13</sup>. Within the same context one may specify that the spike of the spurs at Breaza, Iernut and Medişoru Mare was made of the same metal bar as the body, which in certain cases indicates a later dating of these items, sometime in the interval between the 6<sup>th</sup> century and early 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>, compared to the spurs with attached spike, dated earlier. In addition, during the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the oval spurs gradually disappear from various areas of Europe, being replaced by the long, “U”-shaped spurs<sup>15</sup>.

In the north or north-east of Europe, there are spurs with the extremities ending in exterior hooks, even though one of them, due to corrosion, appears as a bulb<sup>16</sup>. The specimens in the areas above, dated starting with the 7<sup>th</sup> century, offer good analogies for the body and spike shape with the three spurs at Breaza, Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe and Medişoru Mare<sup>17</sup>. There are though artifacts, like the spur discovered in Bohemia at Toušeň, item dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, whose ends are thickened, in the shape of small bulbs<sup>18</sup>. Other such like artifacts have the extremities bend in coil shape, bound to the bar. They were discovered in Bavaria<sup>19</sup>. The spurs in the last mentioned area, discovered at Moos-Burgstall, are deemed a derivation of the “Hakensporen” type and are dated to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely towards the end of this century<sup>20</sup>. The items in Bohemia and those in Bavaria are the closest analogies for the spurs at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, Medişoru Mare and Breaza.

Consequently, the most plausible dating of the spur at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century with a possible extension of the dating to also the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>8</sup> For instance see: GLODARIU/IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 126–127, fig. 73/13–16, 18–20, 25–26; URSACHI 1995, 145–146, pl. 49/1–5, 247/1–8.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance: ŽAK 1959, 88–105, fig. 1; GODŁOWSKI 1994, 169–178; KAZANSKI 1994, 430–435.

<sup>10</sup> To this effect see: ŽAK 1959, 88–105, fig. 1; GLODARIU/IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 126–127; GODŁOWSKI 1994, 169–178; KAZANSKI 1994, 430–435; ISAC 2006, 446–448, fig. 5/2a-b.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance: ŽAK 1959, 88–105; MOOSBURGER-LEU 1971, 114–117; RUTTKAY 1976, 344–352; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 103–160; ŽAK/MAČKOWIAK-KOTKOWSKA 1988; PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 60–85; KIND 2002, 283–299.

<sup>12</sup> ŽAK 1959, 88–105; RUTTKAY 1976, 344–352; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 103–160; WACHOWSKI 1986–1987, 52, fig. 6–7; ŽAK/MAČKOWIAK-KOTKOWSKA 1988; PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 60–85.

<sup>13</sup> HILCZERÓWNA 1956; WACHOWSKI 1986–1987, 52, fig. 6–7; KIND 2002, 288–289.

<sup>14</sup> ŽAK 1959, 88–105; RUTTKAY 1976, 344–352; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 103–160; WACHOWSKI 1986–1987, 52, fig. 6–7; ŽAK/MAČKOWIAK-KOTKOWSKA 1988; PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 60–85.

<sup>15</sup> ŽAK 1959, 88–105; RUTTKAY 1976, 344–349; BIALEKOVÁ 1977, 135–138; WACHOWSKI 1986–1987, 51–53, fig. 3; WACHOWSKI 1987, 523–528, fig. 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, an item discovered at Wilno in Lithuania: ŽAK 1959, 95, no. 21, fig. 2g.

<sup>17</sup> ŽAK 1959, 88–105; POLESKI 1992, 168–170, fig. 3/6–10; POLESKI 1992a, 317, fig. 1/6–10.

<sup>18</sup> PROFANTOVÁ 1994, 64–67, fig. 5.3.

<sup>19</sup> FREEDEN 1987, 522, pl. 46/11–12.

<sup>20</sup> FREEDEN 1987, 522, 559–561, pl. 46/11–12.

**Iron mobile horse bit** (Pl. I. 1a-c)

The two snaffle bars are shaped as a funnel. The snaffle bars were made of two metal sheet pieces. Both are rectangular and equal in length. They were bent in shape of a funnel, resulting a space hollow on the inside. The outer ends have larger diameters compared to the inner ends. The outer ends were cut and bent inward forming two loops in the shape of hooks, aimed at supporting the hackamores. The inner extremities also end by loops in the shape of joining hooks. By joining, a horse bit body with broad outer ends and narrow midst resulted. No parts of the two hackamores survived. The item exhibits traces of secondary burning. Sizes:  $L_{\text{of the two bars}} = 16.3$  cm;  $D_{\text{large}} = 2.5$  cm;  $D_{\text{small}} = 0.6$  cm; Storage: Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Cluj-Napoca (Pl. I. 1a-c).

Horse bits like that at Iernut/Sf. Gheorghe were also discovered in a grave in the cemetery at Devínska Nová Ves, in Slovakia<sup>21</sup> and at Săcueni (Bihor county)<sup>22</sup> only. The latter is a chance find (likely, it was part of a destroyed grave).

The three horse bits at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, Devínska Nová Ves and Săcueni, are identical typologically, differentiating by only the material of which they were made (iron those in Transylvania, bronze that in Slovakia) and sizes. A specific note of this horse bit type is given by the hackamore, detail which was preserved only with the item at Săcueni. It is of metal in the shape of a ring provided with a fan-shaped plate. Likely, similar hackamores also had the horse bits at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe and Devínska Nová Ves.

The horse bit at Devínska Nová Ves had a clear find context, which allowed its dating to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. By analogy, in the same period may also be dated the two artifacts at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe and Săcueni. The dating to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and possibly early 8<sup>th</sup> century of the horse bit at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is reinforced as well by the spur chronology with which it associates in the house, item which dates, as already noted, to the mentioned period.

**Iron spearhead** (Pl. I. 2)

The spearhead has a wide blade shaped as a pear leaf with convergent sides, oval in section. The tubular socket is everted towards the end. The socket is separated from the blade by a short neck arched outwards.  $L_{\text{total}} = 14.7$  cm,  $L_{\text{blade}} = 8.7$  cm,  $l_{\text{maximum blade}} = 3.5$  cm,  $L_{\text{socket}} = 6$  cm,  $D_{\text{socket}} = 2.2$  cm. The item exhibits secondary burning traces. Storage: Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Cluj-Napoca (Pl. I. 2).

The spearhead at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe has analogies among such like artifacts in the Slav world, including in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>23</sup>. In addition, the item at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is very similar to the spearheads, yet with pierced blade, discovered in the Avar cemetery at Gâmbaş dated to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup>.

**Tubular socket iron arrowhead** (Pl. I. 3)

The arrowhead has the blade in the shape of pear leaf with convergent sides, oval in section. The tubular socket is everted to the end. Its termination is broken. The socket is separated from the blade by a short neck marked by the strong arching of the blade sides outwards.  $L_{\text{total preserved}} = 6.3$  cm,  $L_{\text{blade}} = 3.2$  cm,  $l_{\text{maximum blade}} = 2$  cm,  $L_{\text{preserved socket}} = 3.1$  cm,  $D_{\text{preserved socket}} = 1.2$  cm. The item exhibits traces of secondary burning. Storage: Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Cluj-Napoca (Pl. I. 3).

Socketed arrowheads and leaf-shaped blade like that at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, or similar, are present in the Gepid cemeteries of Transylvania<sup>25</sup>. They are found in the late German

<sup>21</sup> EISNER 1952, 38, M. 113, pl. 29/5.

<sup>22</sup> COSMA 2002, 222, no. 176, pl. 221/1.

<sup>23</sup> KAZANSKI 1995–1996, 199, fig. 1/2–3.

<sup>24</sup> HORED T 1958, 60–91, 96, 99, fig. 9a/10, 14/13.

<sup>25</sup> BĂRZU 2010, 118; DOBOS/OPREANU 2012, 46–47.

environment of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries in the south-eastern area of Transdanubia<sup>26</sup>. The arrowheads with the blade shaped as a leaf were taken over by the Avars from the Germans and used especially during the early Avar period<sup>27</sup>. Even though they are not many in the post-Gepid period, the leaf-shaped arrowheads with tubular socket are marked as separate type within the arrowhead typology present in the Slav-Avar cemeteries of the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the Mid Danube river basin, west the Danube, to the left and right of the river<sup>28</sup>.

## Pottery

The pottery in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is quantitatively few and fragmentary. Depending on the production technique, three pottery types were identified: handmade pottery; grey fast wheel-thrown pottery; coarse pottery, fired in reducing atmosphere or oxidised, decorated, made by the average and fast potter's wheel<sup>29</sup>, (generically also termed "Danubian"<sup>30</sup>).

### Handmade pottery (Pl. II–III)

The fabric of which the pots were modelled is consistent. It was tempered especially with micro gravel and in only a few cases with macro gravel<sup>31</sup>. The pots were well fired, their walls being very hard. The firing was performed in reducing atmosphere, homogeneous, the pots being grey-coloured. None of the handmade potshards exhibit decorations (Pl. II–III). The inner walls of a potshard preserves the traces left by the spatula or fingers, in the form of vertical stripes, as a result of the pot finishing (Pl. I.2). All potshards display strong secondary burning traces.

The entire handmade pottery, discovered in the house, is represented by pots without handle. The pots body is symmetrical. They had ovoid or truncated cone body. Depending on the upper part, two types may be distinguished: the first is represented by pots with short neck, strongly arched outwards, almost obliquely, and rounded rim. The mouth diameter of this type varies between 10.3 cm and 12 cm (pl. II.2–4); the second type is represented by a small size pot with elongated neck and slightly reverted rim, cut straight. The mouth diameter is of 9 cm (Pl. II.1).

Some of the pot bases are much thickened compared to the upper part (Pl. III.1–2). With others, the lower part walls' width is not thickened, which proves that the same wall thickness of from rim to base was intended (Pl. III.3–4). In most of the pots, the angle connecting the base to the wall is straight. Some pot bases have the outer part flat (Pl. III.2). There are also pots exhibiting a slight concavity of the base inwards (Pl. III.1, 3–4). The walls of the handmade pot bases have a smaller (Pl. III.1) or larger (Pl. III.2–4) opening towards the upper part.

Based on the production technique, the handmade pottery in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe has analogies in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>32</sup>. The evolved shape of the upper part of the pots (well delimited neck, reverted rim), supports, according to the typological correspondences, a dating of the pottery to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, possibly even the second half of the respective period<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> KISS 1992, I, 52, Liste 7, Karte 5, Taf. 1/3; KISS 1996, 236; BĂRZU 2010, 118; DOBOS/OPREANU 2012, 46–47.

<sup>27</sup> KALMÁR 1944–1945, 291; KISS 1992, 52, Liste 7, Karte 5, Taf. 1/3; KISS 1996, 236; BĂRZU 2010, 118.

<sup>28</sup> KALMÁR 1944–1945, 291; ČILINSKÁ 1973, 24; SÓS/SALAMON 1995, 73–74; ZÁBOJNÍK 2004, 48, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Concerning the terminology see: COSMA 2011, 51–52.

<sup>30</sup> STAŇA 1995, 85–95.

<sup>31</sup> Concerning the terminology see: COSMA 2011, 51–52.

<sup>32</sup> TEODOR 1978, 43–45; VIDA 1999, 137–147; KUNA/PROFANTOVÁ 2005, 338–342; HARHOIU/BALTAG 2006, 41–353; COSMA 2011, 52–61; STANCIU 2011, 171–245.

<sup>33</sup> VIDA 1999, 147, type III.D9, fig. 59.

**Grey fast wheel-thrown pottery (Pl. IV–VI)**

The fast wheel-thrown pottery discovered in the house displays inner grooving resulted from the fingerprints left during the fast turning process of the potter's wheel<sup>34</sup>. The pottery fragments include walls from the upper part of the pots, walls and bases. Almost all are thin walled (Pl. IV–VI). Most of the pots were made of a rather fine fabric, tempered with sand (Pl. IV; V.1, 3–4, 6; VI.1, 3–4). There are also a few potshards with thicker walls, made of a fabric tempered with micro gravel (Pl. V.2, 5; VI.2). All potshards exhibit strong traces of secondary burning.

The pottery was fired in a reducing atmosphere. The pots are grey-coloured. Decoration appears only on the upper part of the pots. A first ornament consists of lines, incised by a sharp tip, vertical and parallel to the pots' body (Pl. IV.3; V. 5). Another ornament is represented by wide grooving, vertical and horizontal to the pots' surface, impressed by finger (Pl. IV.1; V.3, 5) and spatula (Pl. IV.2; V.4).

Typologically, potshards coming from the upper part of the pots belong to barrel (Pl. V.3) and pear-shaped pots (pl. V. 1–3). The bases belong to both barrel and pear-shaped pots (Pl. V. 1–2; VI).

The fine or coarse grey fast wheel-thrown pottery like that in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe has analogies in the Gepid period<sup>35</sup> or the Merovingian civilisation<sup>36</sup>. The presence of the fine or coarse grey fast wheel-thrown pottery in second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Transylvanian archaeological sites still poses many questions. The record at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe of this pottery type associated with "Danubian" pottery<sup>37</sup> supports the idea it survived the disappearance of the group of Band-Noşlac type Gepid cemeteries.

**Coarse pottery, fired in either reducing atmosphere or oxidised, decorated, made on the average or fast potter's wheel (generally also termed "Danubian pottery"<sup>38</sup>) (Pl. VII)**

Of this pottery type survived only pot walls, without neck and rim as well as two bases. Almost all potshards come from average/slow wheel-thrown pots (Pl. VII.1–6)<sup>39</sup>. A single pot base was fast wheel-thrown, as recorded by the inner grooving left by fingers during the fast turning process of the wheel (pl. VII.7)<sup>40</sup>. Regardless the model of the potter's wheel, the pots were made of a fabric tempered with sand, resulting a rather fine mixture. The pottery was very well fired, almost entirely in a reducing atmosphere. The potshards are grey-coloured, including the pot core. A single fragment is semi-oxidised. The outer side is dark orange. The entire pottery bears strong secondary burning marks.

The pot walls are decorated with horizontal stripes of waving lines interlaced with straight line stripes (Pl. VII.4–5). Another ornament is formed of waving horizontal line stripes, intertwined in "meshes" (pl. VII.1). There are also fragments decorated with only stripes of horizontal striations (Pl. VII.2) or wide horizontal grooves (Pl. VII.3). The lower part of the pots is undecorated (Pl. VII.6–7).

The slow and fast wheel-thrown pottery, either undecorated or decorated, coming from the north-western area of Romania, dated to the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>41</sup>, provides no typological analogies for the pottery at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, yet evidences the presence of

<sup>34</sup> Concerning the terminology see: COSMA 2011, 51–52.

<sup>35</sup> BÓNA/NAGY 2002; CSEH ET ALII 2005; TÓTH 2006; BÂRZU 2010, 53–72; DOBOS/OPREANU 2012, 54–56.

<sup>36</sup> SCHNITZLER/ARBOGAST/FREY 2009.

<sup>37</sup> STAŇA 1995, 85–95.

<sup>38</sup> STAŇA 1995, 85–95.

<sup>39</sup> Concerning the terminology see: COSMA 2011, 51–52.

<sup>40</sup> Concerning the terminology see: COSMA 2011, 51–52.

<sup>41</sup> STANCIU 2011, 245–254.

the potter's wheel as early as the first decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The phenomenon thus offers technological analogies also for the geographical areas close to the north-west of Romania, like the Transylvanian plateau. Nevertheless, in Transylvania, the average wheel-thrown pottery like that at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, dates no earlier than the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, being specific especially to the following centuries. Chronologies are established based on the dating of the pottery identified in cemeteries<sup>42</sup>, but also at the level of a few Transylvanian settlements<sup>43</sup>. The fast wheel-thrown pottery like that pot base identified in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe (Pl. VII.7), is found in Transylvanian cemeteries dating only starting with the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>44</sup>.

The pottery types discovered in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe overlap at a certain point in time, which allows the chronological framing of the entire pottery lot in the respective archaeological feature to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, possibly only the second part of the specified period. The association of the three pottery types (handmade; grey fast wheel-thrown; coarse, decorated, wheel-thrown) was in fact noted as early as 1954, following the first archaeological research on the "Pe Seș" plateau at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe. Since circumstances are not very clear stratigraphically, the association of the three pottery types was not much exploited scientifically. However, even then, the archaeological assemblage or culture level where the three pottery types were discovered was dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>45</sup>.

Quantitatively, the grey fast wheel-made pottery of German origin is superior by 50% compared to the handmade pottery with 30% and the coarse wheel-thrown, the "Danubian" pottery with 20%. Without being a very accurate or absolute dating criterion, the statistics above also pleads for the chronological framing of the entire pottery in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe to the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>46</sup>.

### Final considerations

Based on the above presented, it may be concluded that house L. 1/1994 at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe frames chronologically to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. We do not exclude a possible restriction of the house functioning to only the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The discovered artifacts support the conclusion that the archaeological assemblage at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe may be deemed a house where a warrior resided.

To the archaeologist, the circumstances when a house inventory includes several metal objects that may be assigned to a warrior are exceptional, for the simple fact that such finds like those at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe are lacking from Transylvania of the Early Middle Ages.

We believe that the find at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe rejects all speculation related to the connection between the items, warrior and the archaeological assemblage. The fact that objects specific to a warrior were identified in the house may be related to a powerful fire which destroyed the house. This, proven by the large ash quantity discovered in the assemblage pit as well as the culture level, to which add the metal pieces and the pottery (all with strong secondary burning traces) found on the house floor and not at the level where the assemblage emerged,

<sup>42</sup> HORED T 1976, 35–57; HORED T 1979, 385–394; HORED T 1986, 60–66; HORED T 1987, 12–14; COSMA 2011, 61–102.

<sup>43</sup> ZAHARIA 1994–1995, 301–314, 321–328; STANCIU/MATEI 1994, 140–148; COSMA 2002, 35–37, 39–42; STANCIU 2011, 247–250.

<sup>44</sup> COSMA 2011, 102–108.

<sup>45</sup> HORED T 1955, 661–662.

<sup>46</sup> For the dating of the Early Middle Ages pottery based on the criterion of quantitative ratios from the pots production technique view (handmade, fast wheel-thrown pottery and average wheel-made pottery discovered within a closed assemblage or archaeological site), see: STANCIU/MATEI 1994, 135–155; STANCIU 2000, 127–191; COSMA 2002, 35–42.

was very likely the reason that prevented the rescue of the weapons and horse bit. The fire might have been incidental. Yet, it is possible that the fire occurred following an enemy attack.

It is difficult to specify whether respective house was the warrior's permanent or temporary habitat. The house is common for the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is no different than the other assemblages in the Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe settlement. Should no metal artifacts assignable to a warrior be discovered, the assemblage might have been framed in the category of houses used by some of the common members of the community. However, the weapons and harness items found there support the presence of a warrior in the 7<sup>th</sup> century settlement at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe.

The house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is difficult to assign to any of the ethnicities succeeding on the Mureş river valley during the Early Middle Ages. The horse bit identified in the archaeological assemblage is an item which still cannot be assigned with certainty to any cultural environment of the Early Middle Ages. It may belong to either the Slav as well as the Avar environments. The handmade pottery belongs to the same Slav cultural environment. The arrowhead is specific to the German and Avar cultural worlds. The grey fine fast wheel-thrown pottery in the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is found in German settlements. The spearhead is found as type in both the Slav and Avar worlds.

We believe that the specific ethnicity of the individual using the weapon and harness items discovered in the archaeological assemblage at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is not highly important. The evidence, though, recording the presence of a warrior in a house within an Early Middle Ages settlement on Mureş river valley, is.

Weapon or harness items discovered in Transylvanian settlements datable to the 7<sup>th</sup> century are very few. Those few discovered come especially from the culture level of the settlements. An example to this effect is a series of spurs discovered in Transylvania<sup>47</sup> or arrowheads datable to the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>48</sup>. Weapon or harness items are neither found in Gepid settlements<sup>49</sup> nor in those dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century from Hungary<sup>50</sup>. However, in Serbia, a series of harness pieces datable to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>51</sup> were discovered within settlements.

There are exceptions, though. In the settlement at Medişoru Mare (Harghita county), in a 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century common house, were identified a spur and a hackamore. The spur, plated with silver leaf, may be assigned to a warrior, possibly a Slav chieftain<sup>52</sup>.

The fact that in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century settlements, including from Transylvania, there are no weapons or harness pieces, or they are very few in their culture level, is rather usual for the respective period. The explanation is that the military and political chieftains of the Early Middle Ages and the military entourage accompanying them, including common warriors, proved their social status by placing the entire panoply of rank insignia, including weapons and harness pieces, into their graves. The successors of the deceased deposited in the grave all the objects (jewellery, dress accessories, weapons or harness pieces, in many cases also pottery), which had belonged to the deceased during his life<sup>53</sup>. It is thus natural that such archaeological materials are missing from the settlements. Those found there, yet, are either lost objects, or for various causes, impossible to recover. The lack of weapons and harness pieces from the settlements could be also due to other causes, like for instance those related to social ranking within the communities of the time. Therefore, the question of how did a warrior's house in Early Middle Ages Transylvania look like remains.

<sup>47</sup> COSMA 2013, 79–102.

<sup>48</sup> BÂRZU 1994–1995, 260–261.

<sup>49</sup> TÓTH 2006.

<sup>50</sup> BÓNA 1973, 58–79.

<sup>51</sup> BAVANT 2012, 143–144, 152–153.

<sup>52</sup> SZÉKELY 1988, 170–171, fig. 20.1; COSMA 2013, 89–90.

<sup>53</sup> COSMA 2011, 121–133; COSMA ET ALII 2013.

At this point of the approach, we should emphasize the importance of house L. 1/1994 at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe comprising archaeological inventory specific to a common warrior. Its importance derives from the simple fact that for the 7<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania, the respective assemblage is definitely the habitat of a warrior. Circumstances at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe are singular for Transylvania at the level of 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century settlements.

Most likely, the warrior lived on a permanent basis in the Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe settlement. He might well have been even a village chieftain, a representative of the community in relation to the central authority. His presence there may also be due to a control or surveillance mission in the area. He must have fulfilled that mission in the name of a central authority, which, for the geographical area of origin and the time to which the house dates, could be no other than the Avar authority. The Avar elite clustered in small power centres located all over Transylvania, controlled and surveilled the Transylvanian plateau via Avar and other origin warriors<sup>54</sup>.

The archaeological assemblage at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is a first landmark referring to the way a house in the Transylvanian plateau was used by common warriors of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century. Very likely, military chieftains, high ranking warriors, their wives and concubines, as well as the notables in the military entourage of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania lived in larger spaces, better equipped, superior from the point of view of the interior comfort (however, undiscovered until now). In their case, one may be also take into account the mobile yurts, provided with all the necessary comfort, yet which once moved left not much detectable traces behind.

The houses of the common warriors and their families were much more modest compared to those of the elites. The existence of yurts in their case as well may not be dismissed either. Yet, common warriors entered in direct contact with the population in the Transylvanian villages, with the aim of controlling them in the name of the central authority. It is thus expected that those common warriors adapted and adopted the living conditions of the communities they controlled.

The house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe is an example to this effect. It was a modest house, sunken and equipped with fire installation, alike any other house within the settlement. We do not believe we should expect that common warrior had lived in highly sophisticated houses, of large sizes or with special facilities in the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century villages of Transylvania. The reverse is not excluded though in the case of chieftains and military entourages.

The humility of the house at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe, architecturally or from the point of view of the interior design, without special comfort elements, shows that common warriors were used to modest living conditions and minimum comfort specific to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century communities of the Transylvanian plateau.

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<sup>54</sup> COSMA ET ALII 2013.

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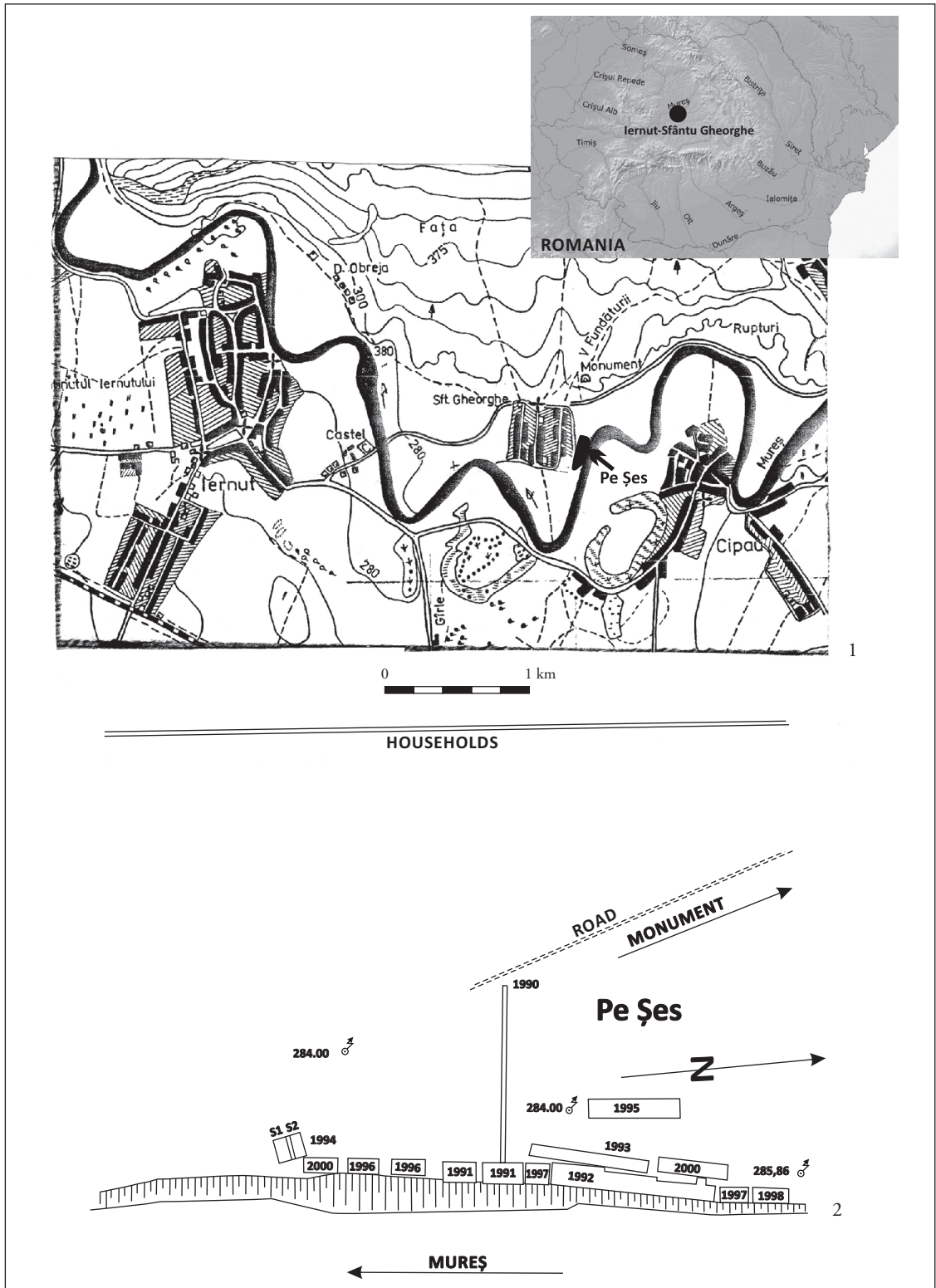


Fig. 1. 1. The geographical position of the site at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe; 2. Positioning of the archaeological trenches at Iernut/Sfântu Gheorghe.

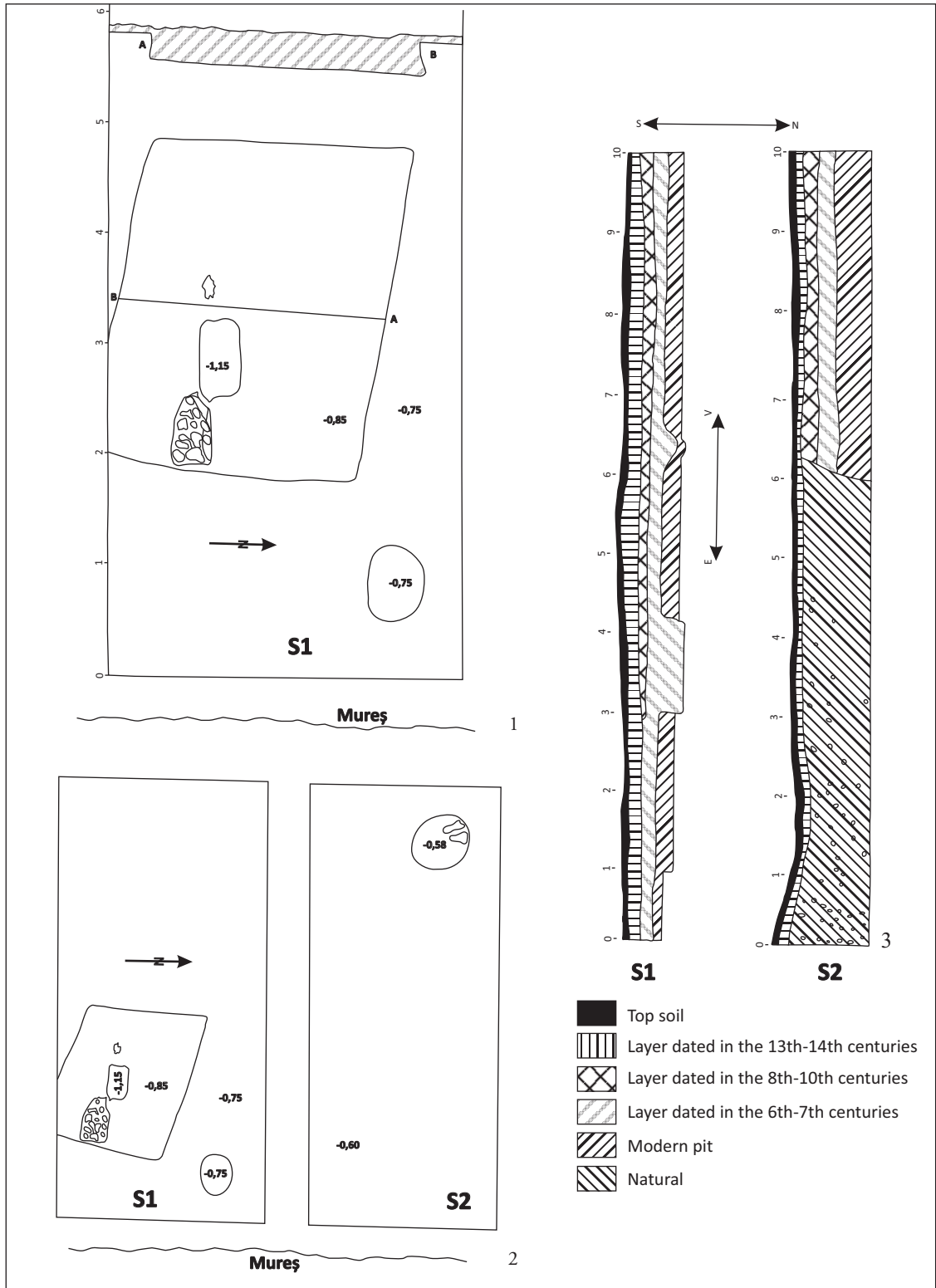
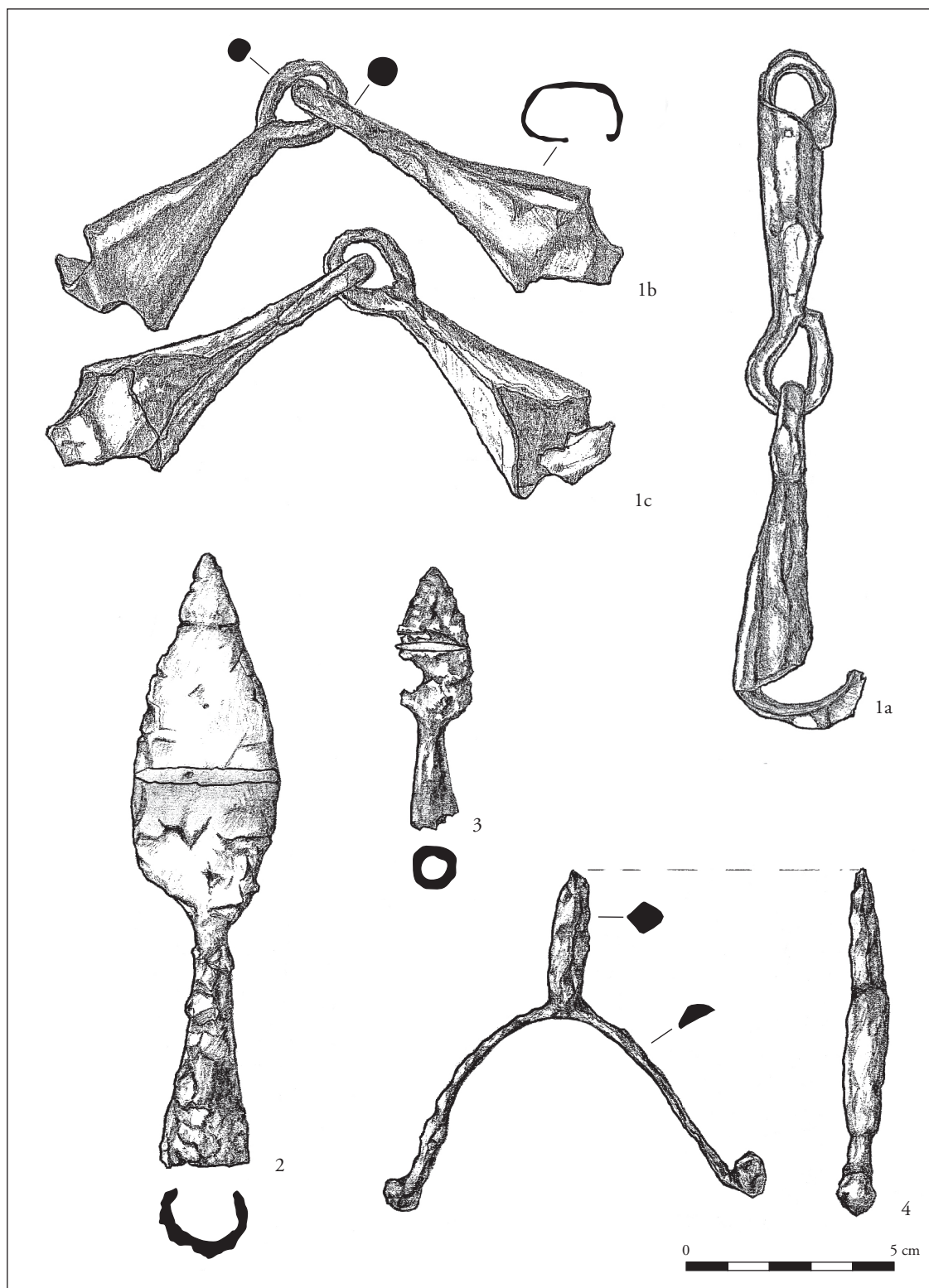
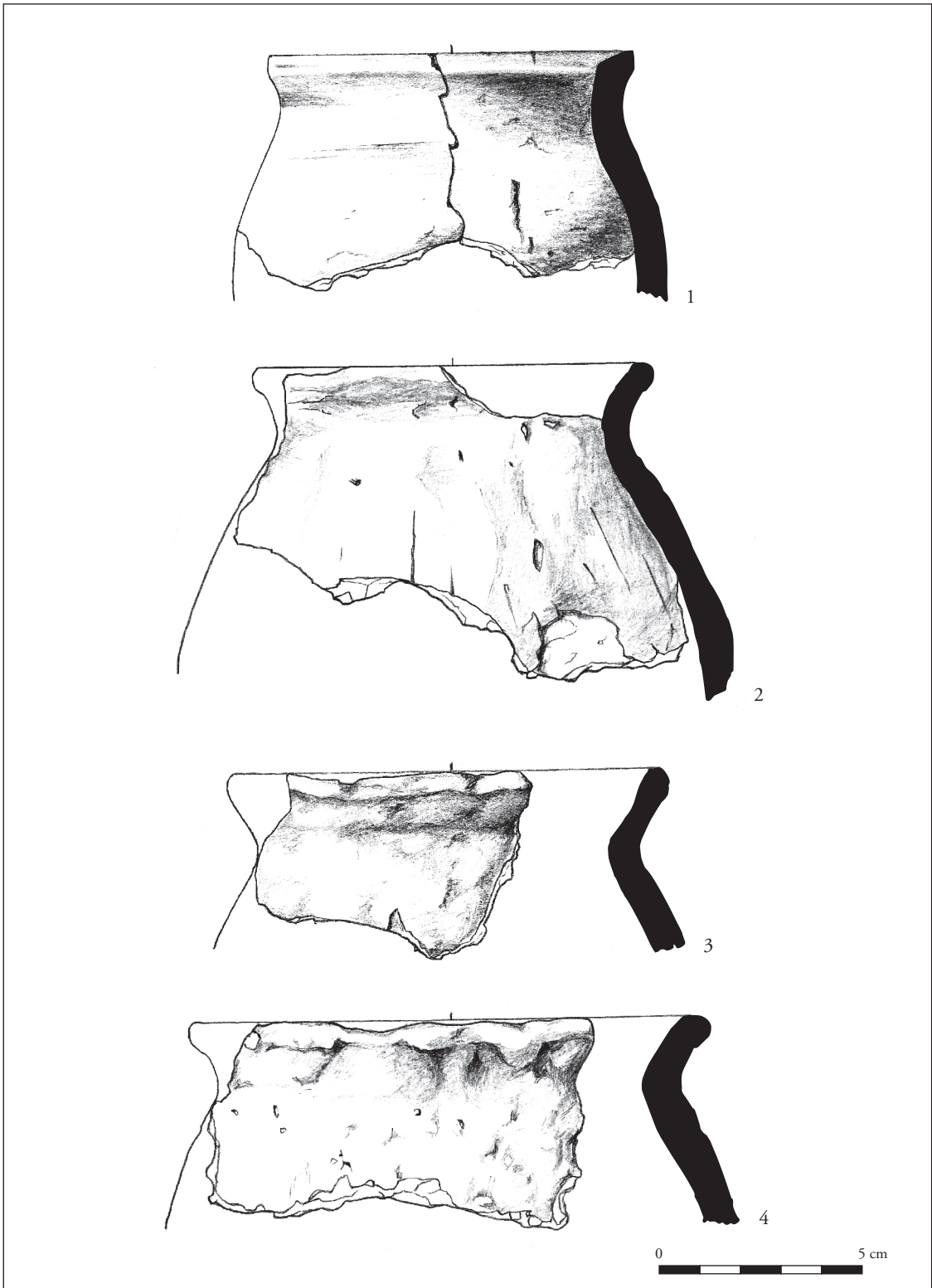


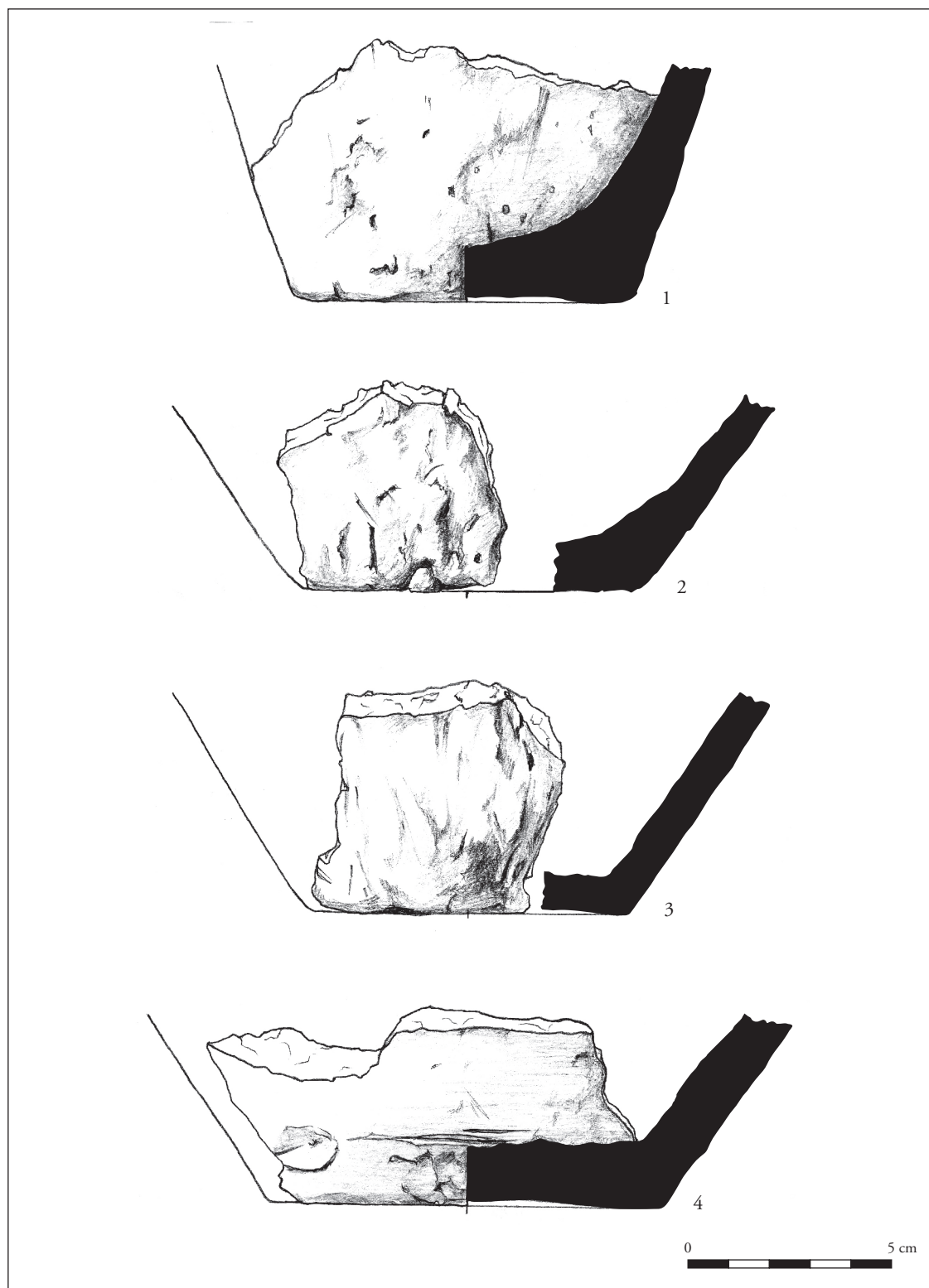
Fig. 2. 1. Plan of House no. 1/1994; 2. Trenches S1-S2/1994; 3. Profile of trenches S1-S2/1994.



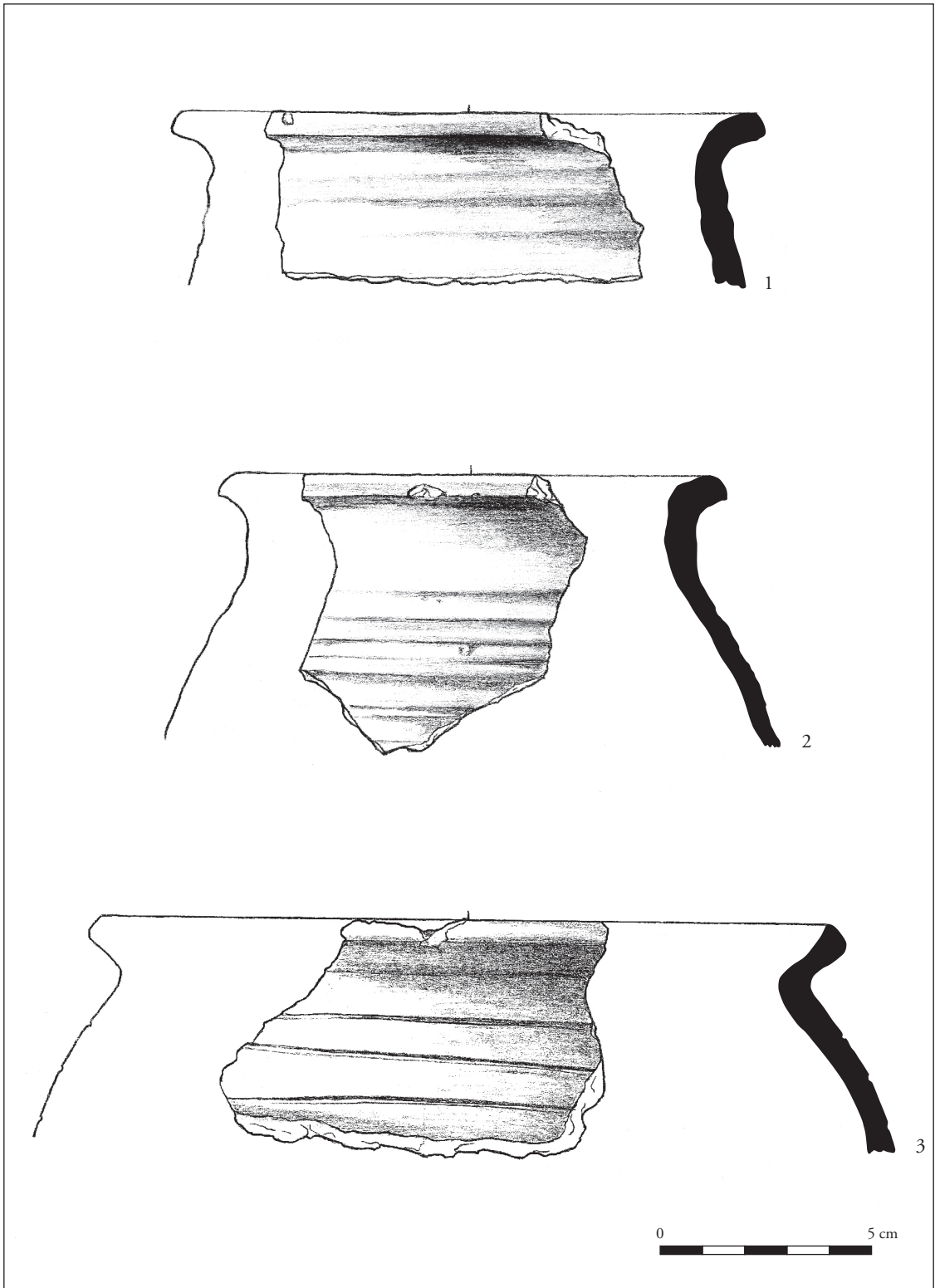
Pl. I. 1–4. Finds from House no. 1/1994: 1a-c. Iron bit; 2. Iron spearhead; 3. Iron arrowhead; 4. Iron spur.



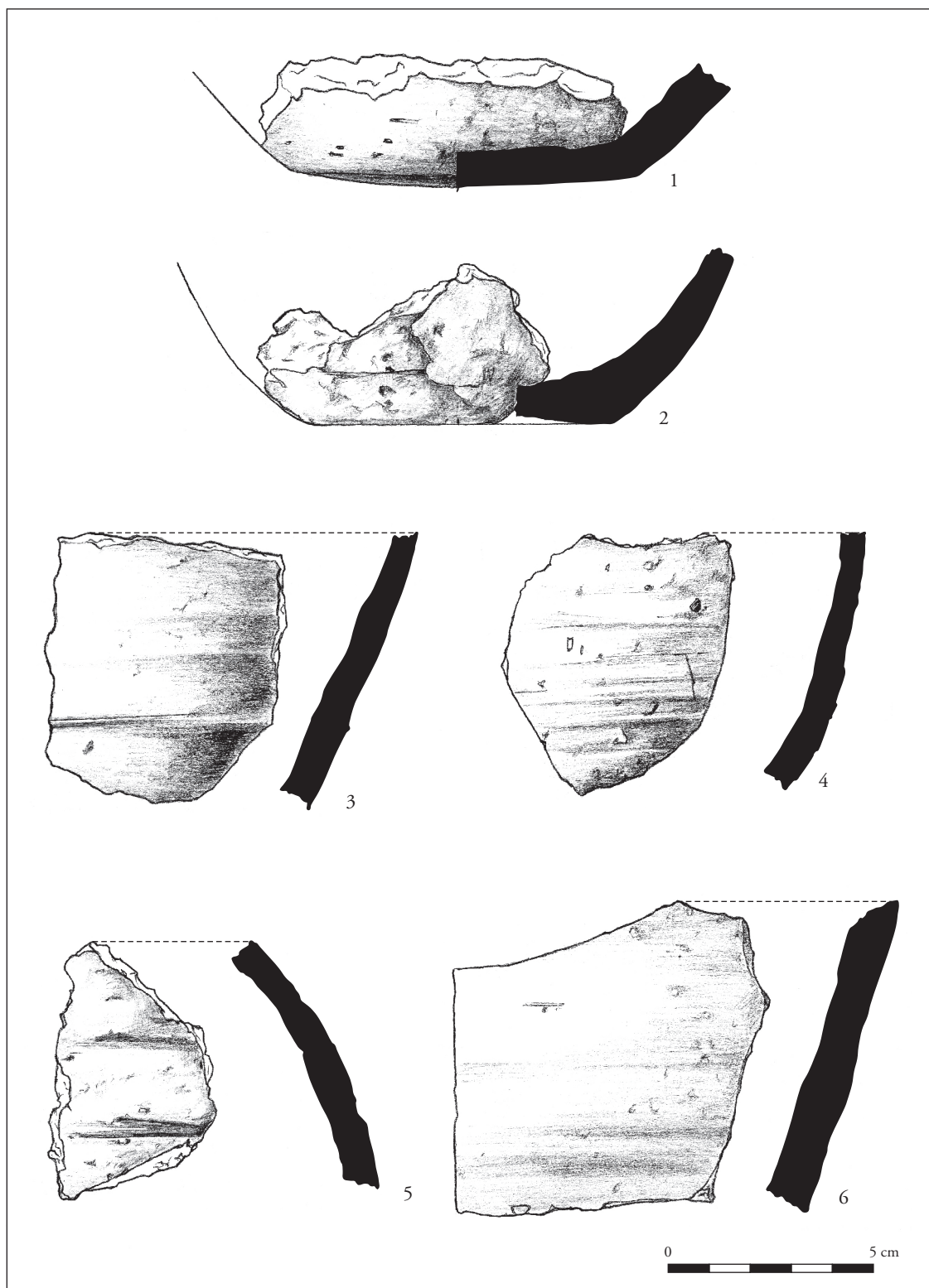
Pl. II. 1-4. Hand-made pottery from House no. 1/1994.



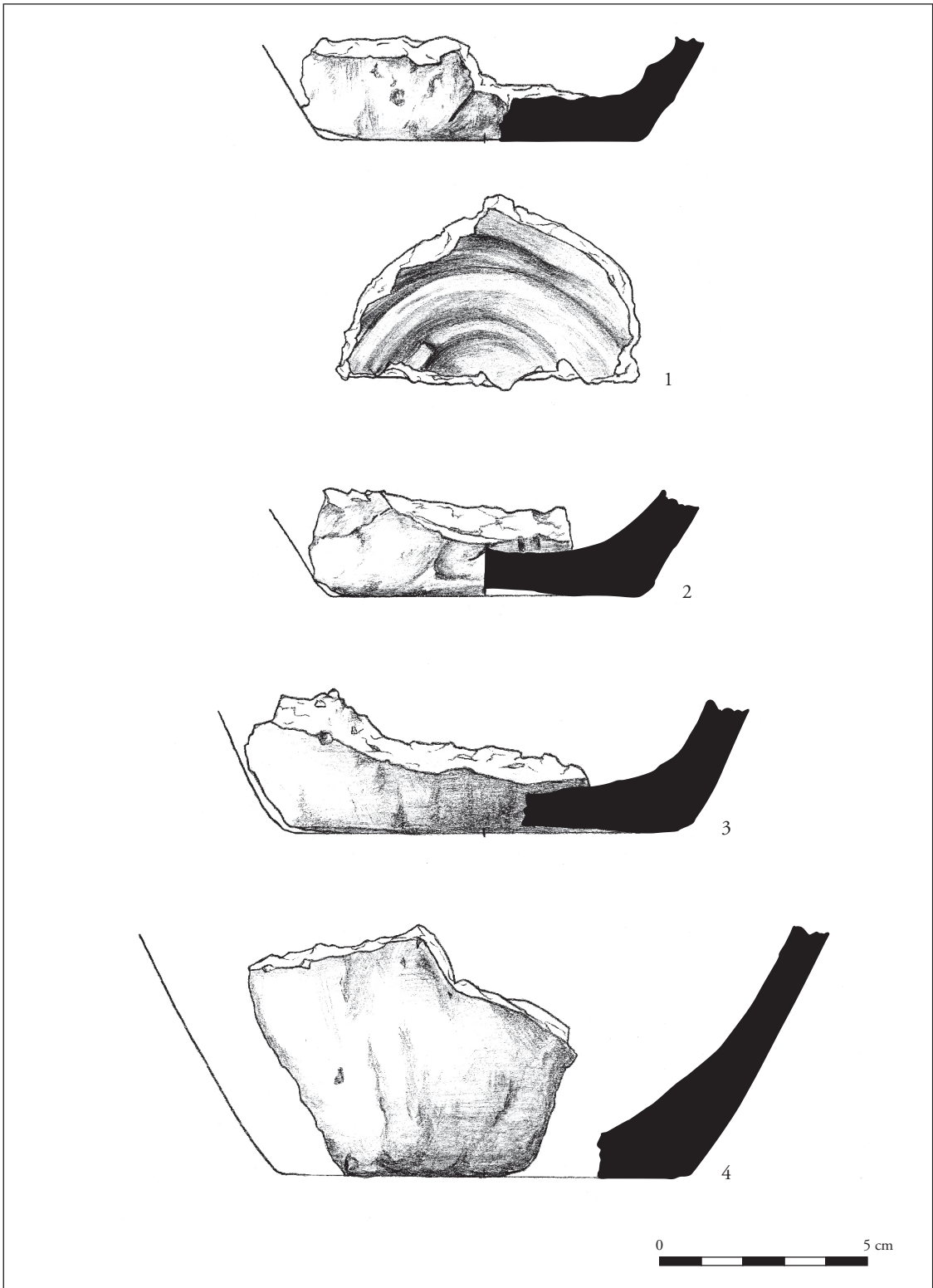
Pl. III. 1–4. Hand-made pottery from House no. 1/1994.



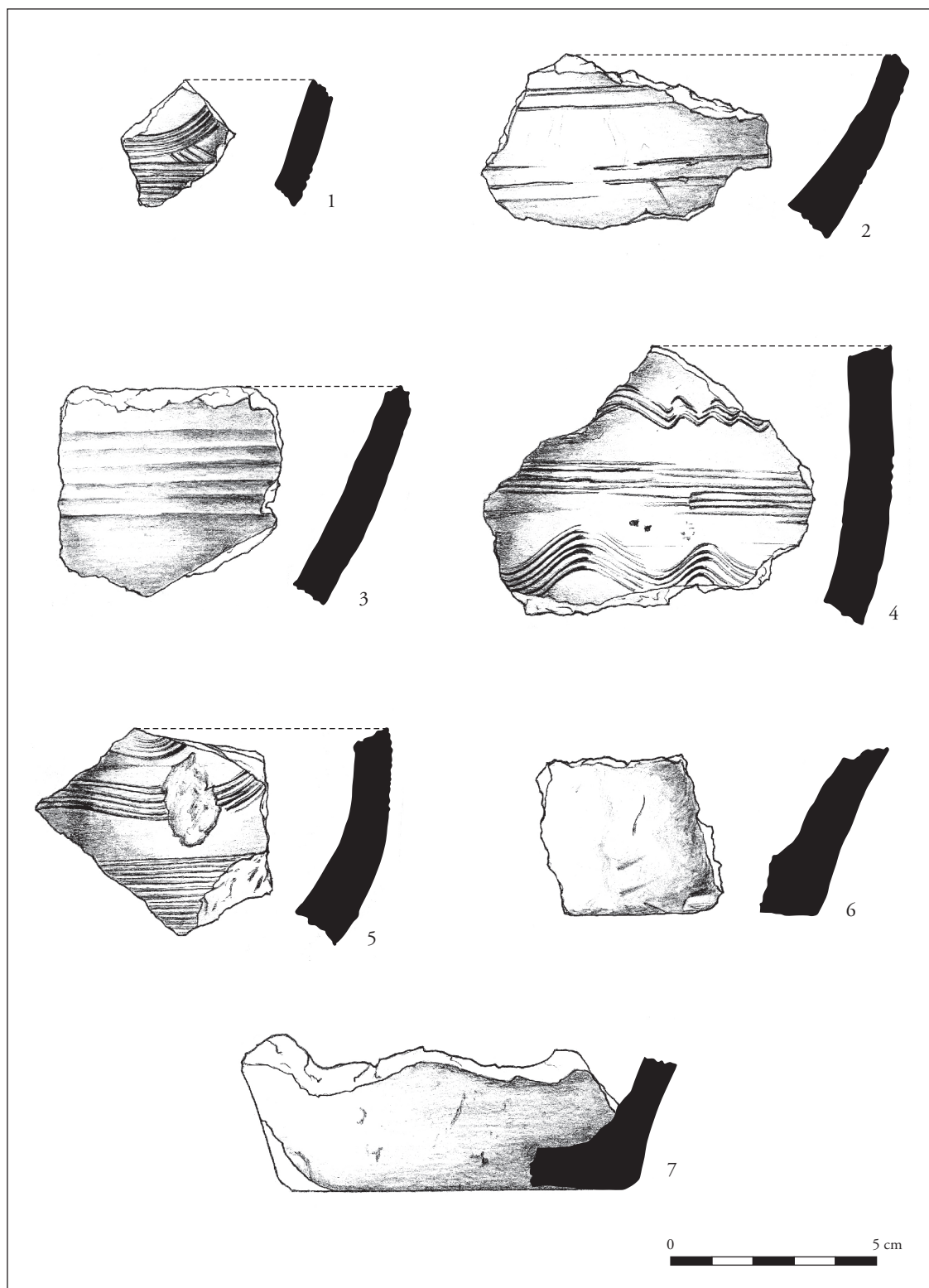
Pl. IV. 1–3. Grey pottery with fine fabric made with fast wheel from House no. 1/1994.



Pl. V. Grey pottery made with fast wheel from House no. 1/1994: 1, 3-4, 6. fine fabric; 2, 5. coarse fabric.



Pl. VI. Grey pottery made with fast wheel from House no. 1/1994: 1, 3–4. fine fabric; 2. coarse fabric.



Pl. VII. "Danubian" type pottery from House no. 1/1994: 1-6. made on slow wheel; 7. made on fast wheel.