

VESELY KUT, A NEW CENTRE OF THE EAST TRIPOLIAN CULTURE

BY

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The settlement of Vesely Kut situated near the eponymous village in the Tal'noye district of the Čerkassy province (Ukraine) is the largest centre of East Tripolian culture and is related to its developed (Middle) stage. The investigation of the materials of this settlement allows the study of many aspects of economic activity, social structure and ideology of the Tripolian population.

The settlement is located on a promontory of the first terrace of the Gorny Tikich river and covers an area of 150 hectares (fig. 1). It has a circular layout and a dense concentration of dwellings, sharing a network of streets. A farmstead constitutes the basic building element of the settlement. The farmstead compound usually includes several living houses and is characterised by compact arrangements of living and utilitarian buildings within the small area. This regularity as well as the archaeological materials discovered in rooms, allow us to conclude that farmsteads belonged to groups of relatives ruling jointly households. On the settlement of Vesely Kut, seven farmsteads have been investigated so far, about 70 constructions have been uncovered, and 26 buildings were completely excavated out of which 16 are living houses, and 10 represent utilitarian constructions.

The living houses discovered on the settlement are represented mainly by one storey, two room constructions, whose area ranges from 50 to 125 square meters.

Most of the houses have an extended rectangular plan. However during the construction of some other living buildings, more ancient house-building methods were employed; because of this, the above constructions got "L" – and "O"-like lay-out. Therefore, according to the type of lay-out and the number of premises, two types of living buildings may be distinguished in the settlement of Vesely Kut (fig. 2). During the investigation of the dwellings, certain design features and details of an interior were revealed, *i.e.*: floors, walls, prominence bench-like eminencies, emined altars, and stoves. The construction of a house, probably, was initialised by sectoring through the lines of stones stacked with a certain interval along the future walls or partitions. The earth floors of the constructions were sometimes covered by thin, smoothed clay layer. Along short cross walls of a house the adobe eminence which, judging by analogies, constitutes a bench – is usually constructed (Todorova 1976, p. 54).

In some buildings, rectangular adobe altars were discovered. Their houses provides evidence of dome stoves and nearby disposed pits. The walls of living premises were usually constructed of wood and clay. Many buldings had ceiling.

Various utilitarian constructions were also excavated on the settlement. Their sizes vary from 34 to 115 square meters. These buildings have a facilitated design, which the walls, mainly of framework type, are characteristic. This evidence is proved both by the rests of plaster with prints of rods, and the traces of posts and poles along the perimeter of walls. Buildings of utilitarian assignment were obligatory components of farmsteads and served for grinding and storing grain, producing flint and stone artefacts, storing food, processing leather and skin, manufacturing ceramics. A special place among the constructions of this type is occupied by the unique compound represented by two workshops with pottery kilns. The larger workshop consists in drying room, premise with two chamber-kiln for baking pottery and workplace of the craftsmen (fig. 3). The smaller workshop also includes a kiln. An altar with a binocular-shaped vessel was also discovered here.

The excavations of the settlement of Vesely Kut, where plenty of carefully planned specialised structures and construction related to various kinds of activity have been revealed, testify on the high level of economic development of the population having inhabited this settlement site.

The characteristic feature of the ceramic complex of the settlement of Vesely Kut is based on the classification proposed for the sites of the developed Tripolie of the Bug-Dnieper interfluvium (Tsvek 1987). According to

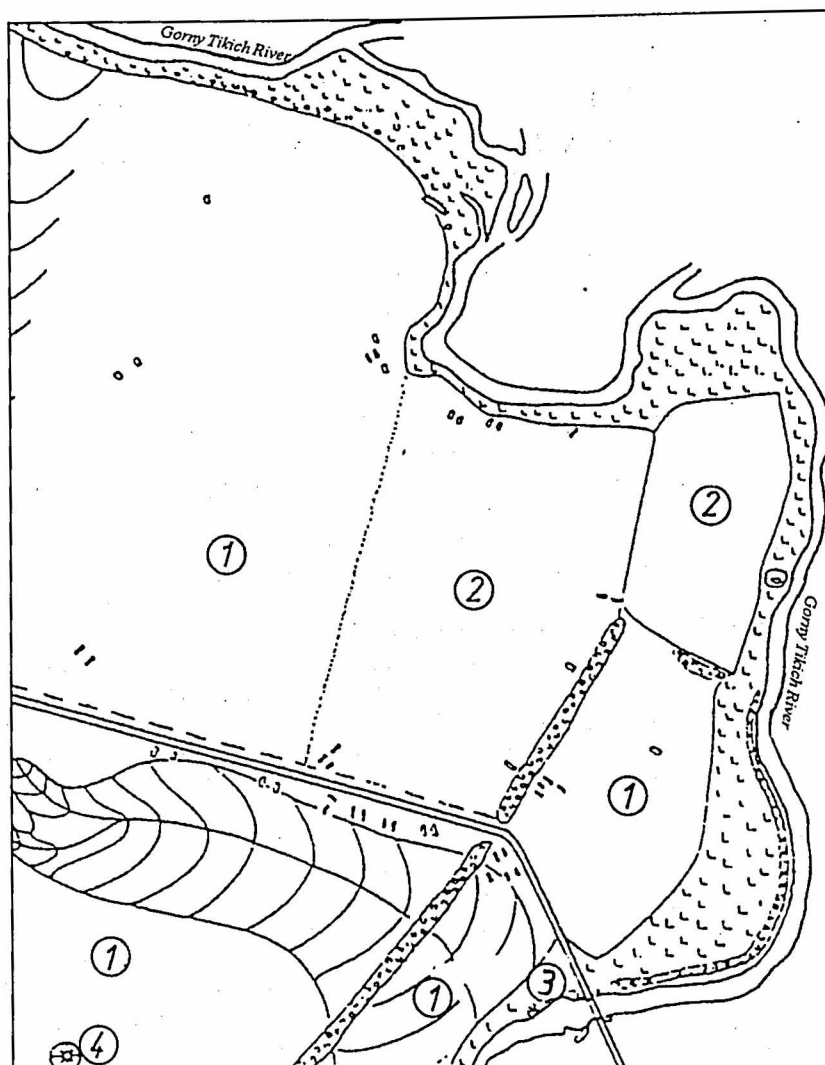


Fig. 1. Plan of the settlement of Vesely Kut.

this classification, the following categories of ceramics have been distinguished on this settlement, i.e.: I, III, IV, V. Certain types of vessels characteristic for the earlier settlements of this area are absent.

The main part of clay pottery concerns the 1st category, basically characterised by the use of carved decoration. Most of the vessels of this category are decorated by fluted ornaments (group 1). Pear-shaped vessels with lids (fig. 4/1–6), craters (fig. 5/1–3), binocular- and monocular-shaped vessels (fig. 9/4, 5), vessels with globular bodies (fig. 5/5), amphora-like jugs (fig. 5/7, 9) and bowls (fig. 5/6) are characteristic for this group.

Despite the large variety of types, the ceramics of group 1 maintains its technological and this is particularly important ornamental stylistic uniformity. The decoration of the vessels of this group is differentiated according to rhythmically zonal localisations of the decorating patterns. The principal element of the decoration is a spiral tape consisting in several furrows. This style of decorating very characteristic for East Tripolian pottery was formed during the occupation of Vesely Kut settlement and pushed out earlier decorating elements. Pottery with fluted decoration dominates within the ceramic complex of the settlement. 34.8 % of all discovered vessels belong to this group of ceramics.

Another group of vessels of the 1st category (group 2) is represented basically by jugs and bowls decorated with channels (fig. 5/6–9).

Vessels of the IIIrd category are decorated by relief stamped ornaments. The principal form of this category of pottery is a pot (fig. 6/2–3, 5–8).

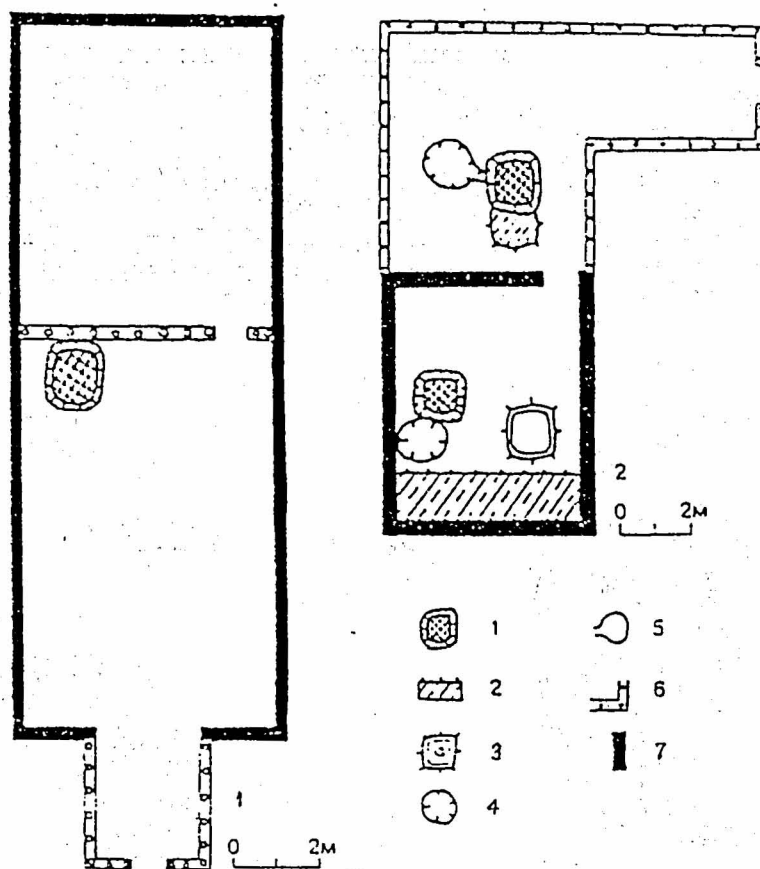


Fig. 2. Plans of dwellings. Key: 1 – stoves, 2 – eminencies made of baked clay, 3 – altar, 4 – pit, 5 – open hearth, 6 – adobe wall with wood frameworks, 7 – adobe wall.

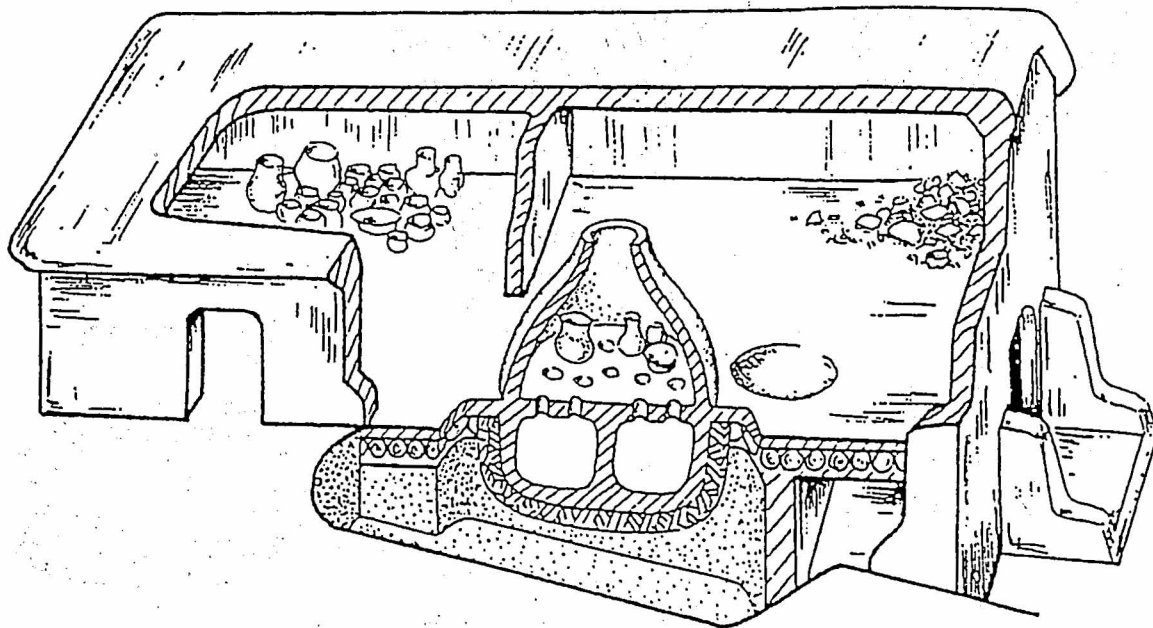


Fig. 3. Pottery workshop. Reconstruction.

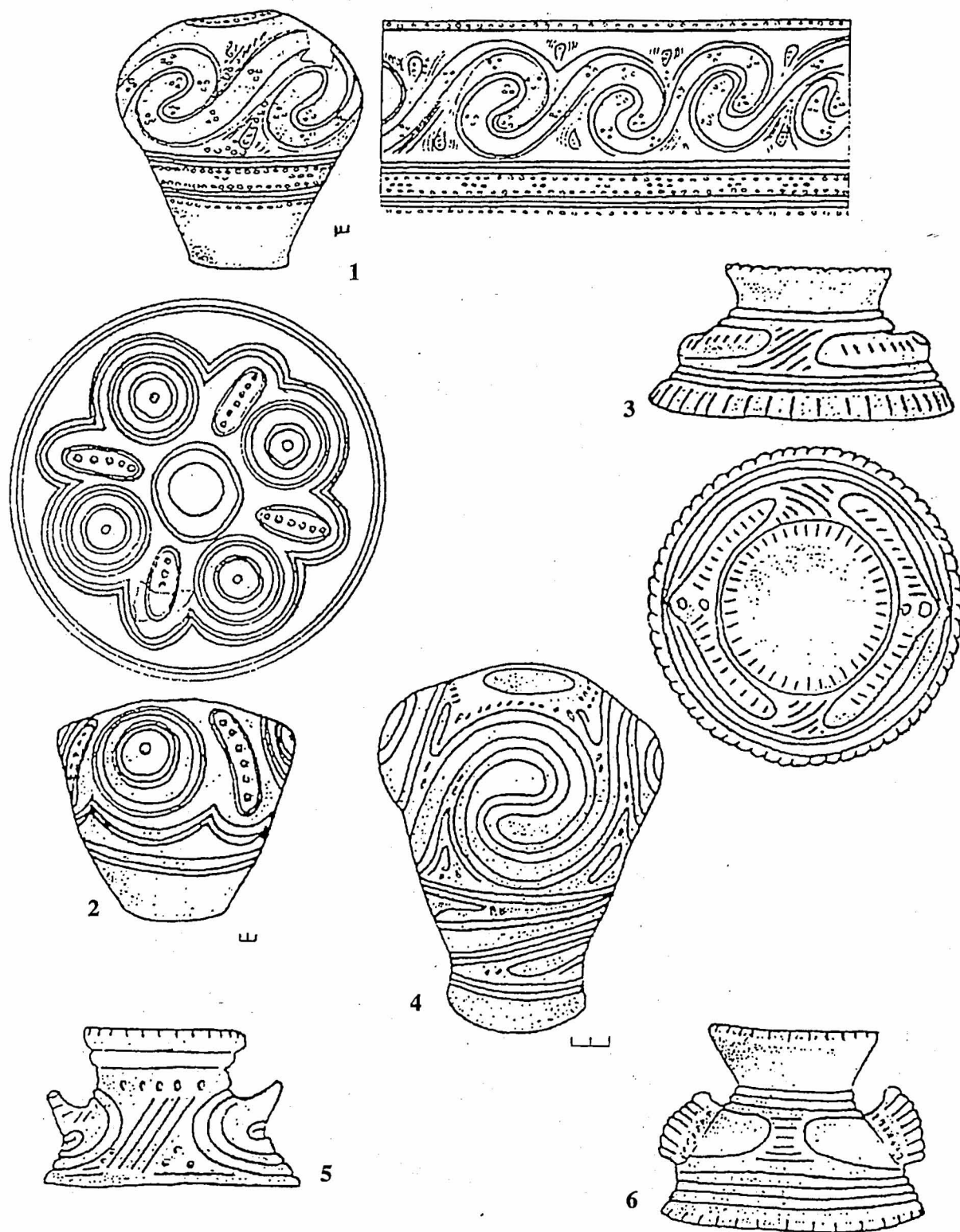


Fig. 4. Pottery with fluted decoration.

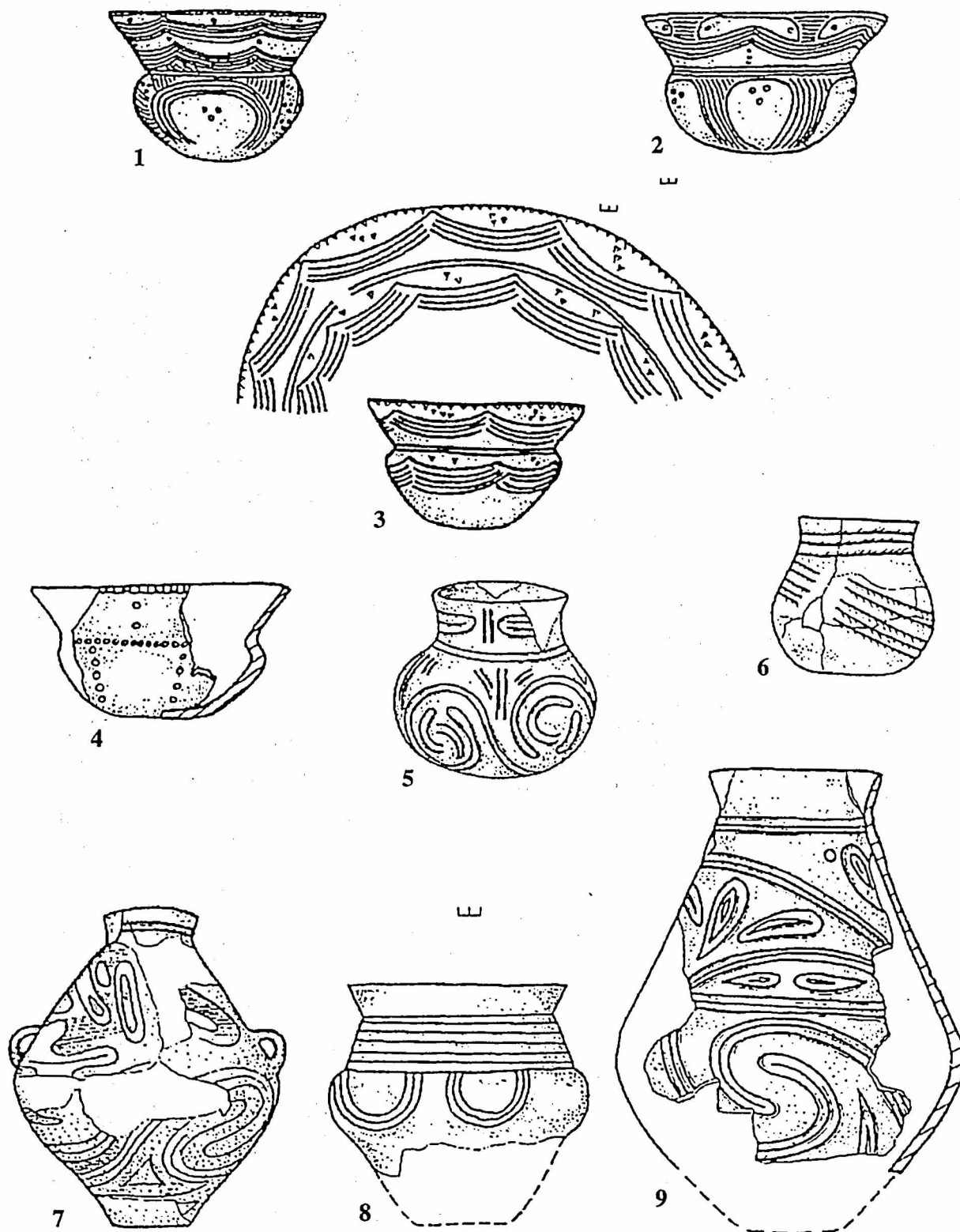


Fig. 5. Ceramics with channelled ornament.

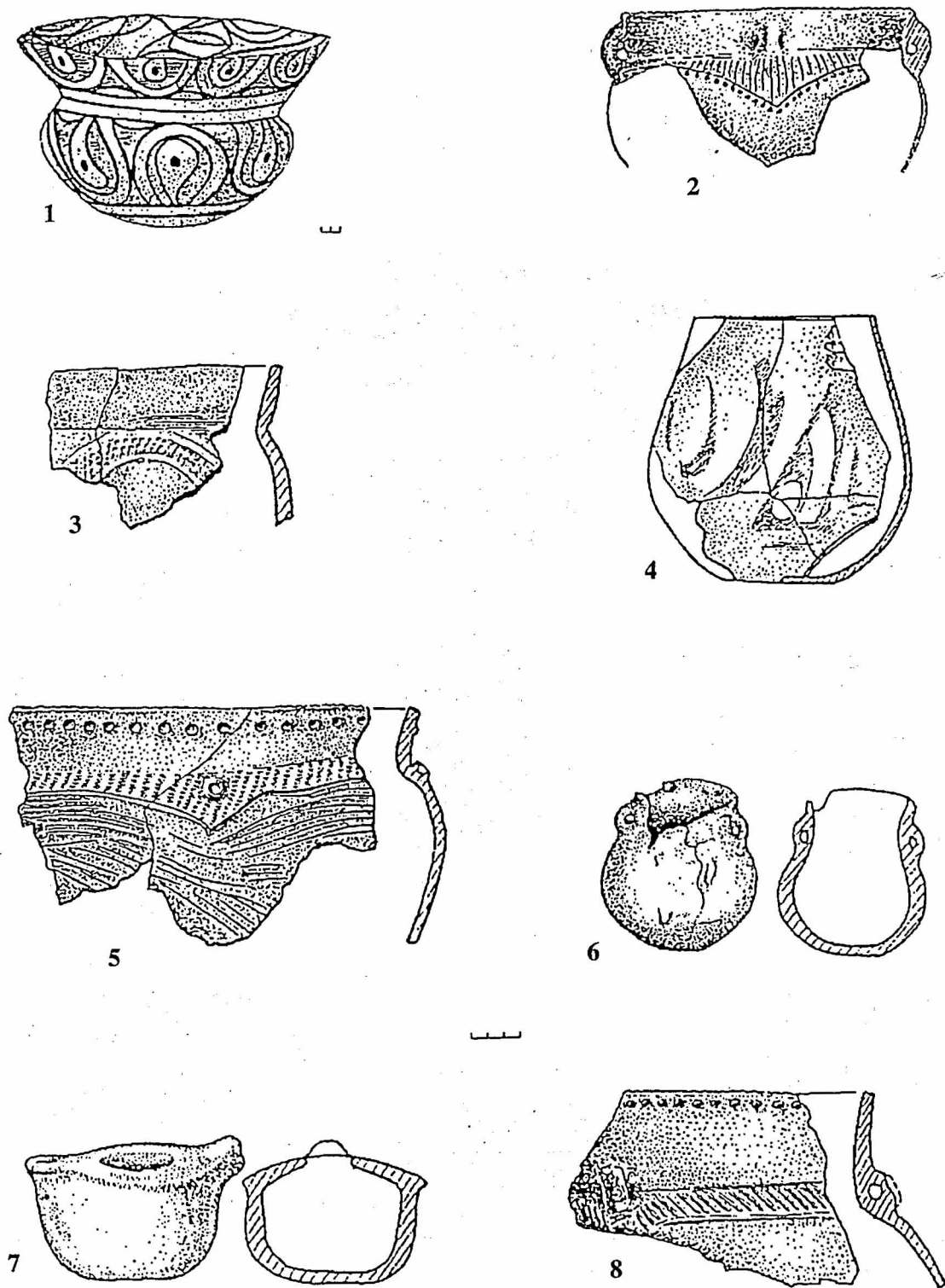


Fig. 6. Ceramics with pointed and ornament, miniature vessels.

The Vth category of ceramics includes vessels with bichrome and monochrome paintings (fig. 6/1, 4). Bichrome vessels are decorated by two paints. Full design was sometimes performed with red paint and bordered

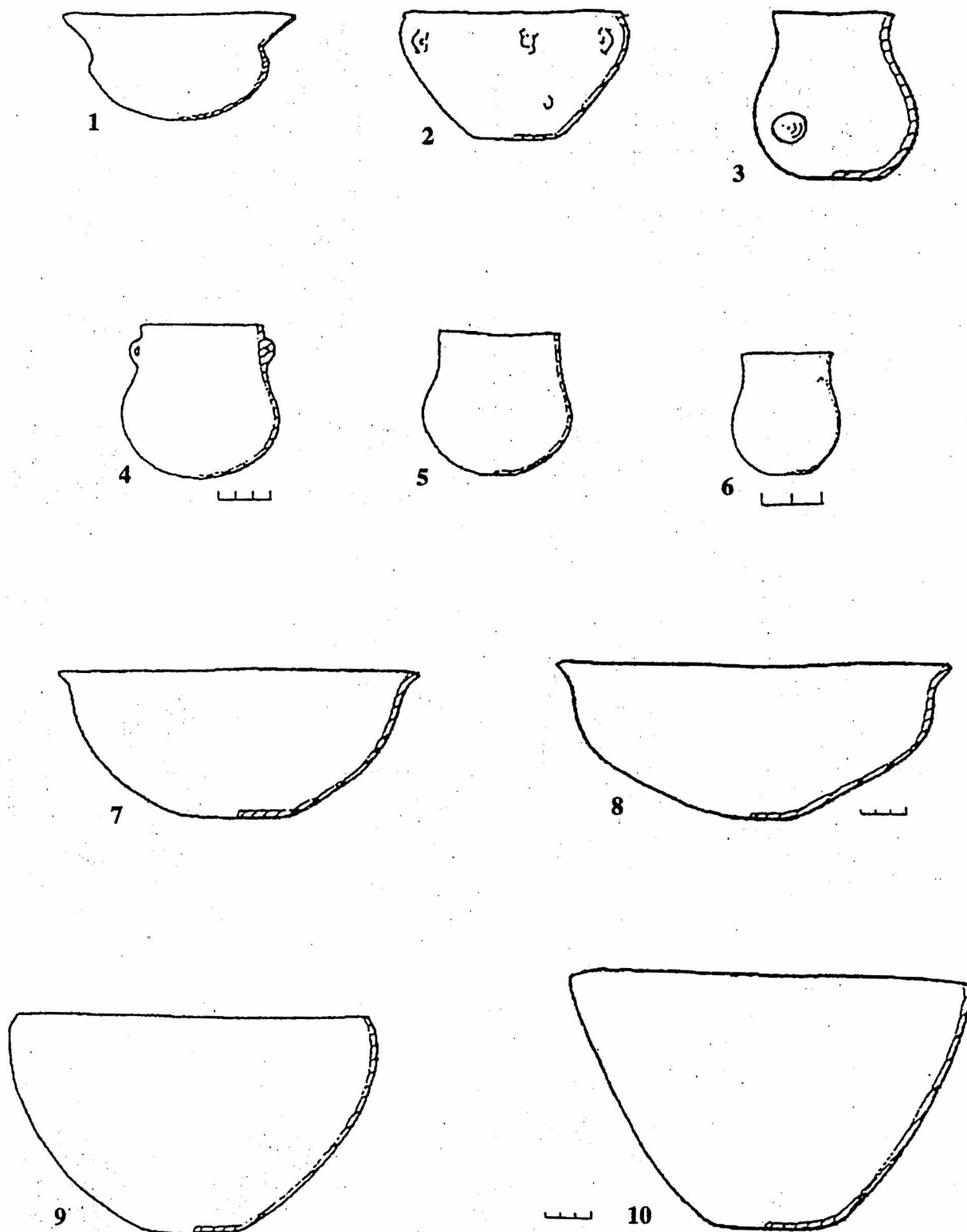


Fig. 7. Ceramics without ornaments.

by a thin black line (fig. 6/1). In order cases the subject was performed with red paint on a white background (fig. 6/4). Monochrome decorations were prepared with red paint.

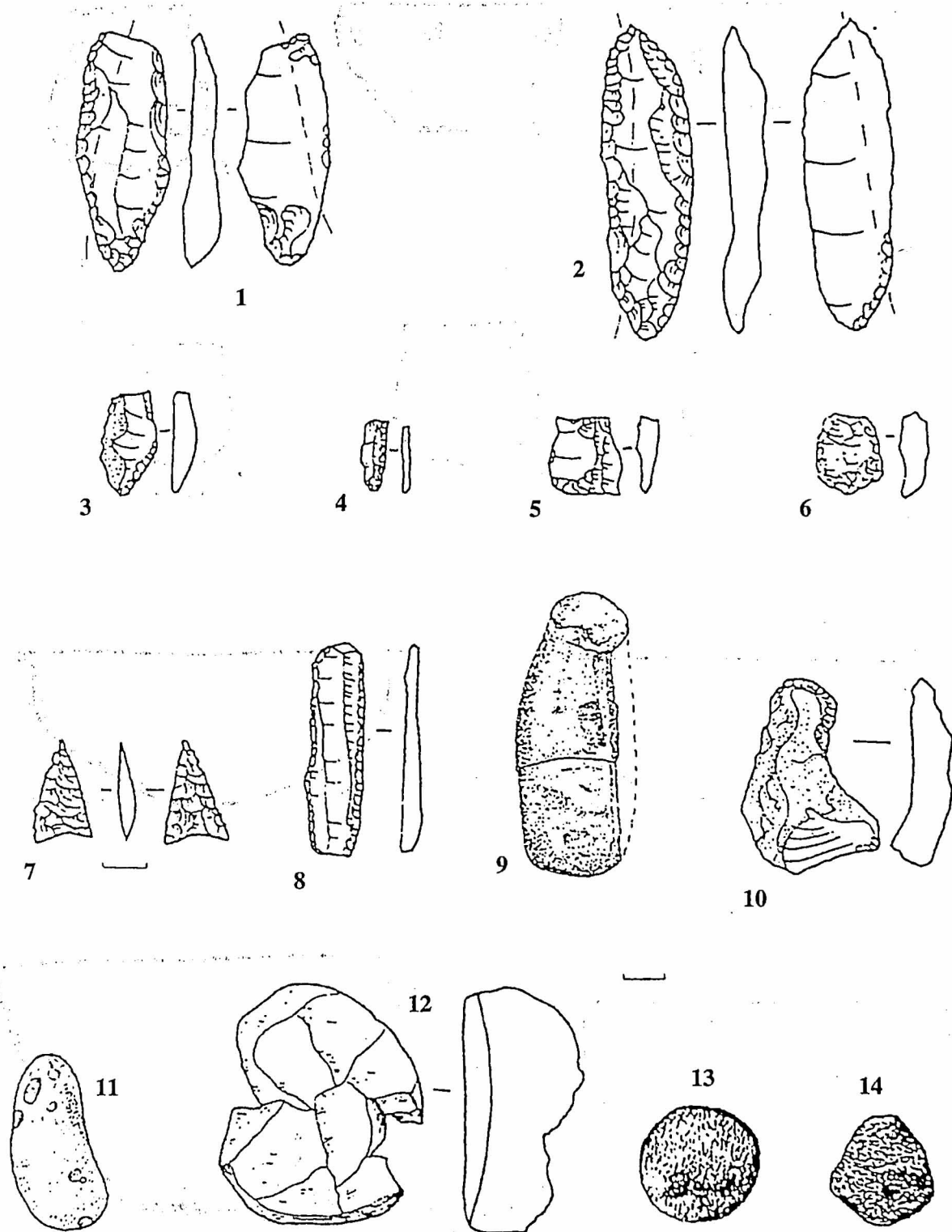


Fig. 8. Tools. Key: 1-2 - harvesting implements, 3 - pestle for grinding grain, 4 - scraper, 5 - plane, 6 - drill, 7 - chisel, 8-9 - endscrapers, 10 - arrowhead, 11 - polisher for ceramics, 12 - trowel, 13-14 - hammerstones.

The category of the painted ceramics includes mainly craters, jugs, bowls, binoculars. Some painted vessels from Vesely Kut were imported, but other were produced by local craftsmen.

In general the ceramic complex of the settlement testifies on a high professionalism of the population engaged in pottery manufacturing.

Tools of bone, stone and horns discovered in the settlement are not numerous (fig. 8). The typological and traceological study of these instruments allowed us to divide them into several groups according to the type of utilitarian operations they were used for (determination of tools was carried out by Dr. G. F. Korobkova – IIMK RAN, S-Petersbourg, Russia). A large amount of multifunctional instruments was discovered during the excavation of the settlement.

The preparation of tools made of flint, stone, bone and horn was improved during the occupation of the settlement of Vesely Kut. Implements are characterised by evolved forms, standard sizes, original working edges and surfaces, and large dimensions. The progress achieved in the manufacturing of the above tools marks a bloom of many branches of economy of East Tripolian population.

The basic activity of the settlement inhabitants was agriculture. Validity of this conclusion is documented both by paleobotany remains and by findings of special instruments.

Inhabitants of Vesely Kut cultivated three kinds of wheat, barley and leguminous cultigens. Agricultural tools, namely mattocks, sickles, grinding stones (fig. 8/1, 2, 9), were discovered in all buildings of Vesely Kut settlement. The developed level of agriculture in that part of the East Tripolian culture where the settlement of Vesely Kut is situated, allows us to suppose that its population knew the ploughing way of working the soil. Along with agriculture, cattle breeding was practised, and the basis of herd was constituted by large horned cattle. The role of hunting in the economy of Vesely Kut inhabitants was insignificant. During the excavation of the settlement, certain data indicated that fishing and gathering was also in use.

One more direction of the domestic activities of the inhabitants of the settlement is connected with building construction and manufacturing of household product. Significant variability of houses building at Vesely Kut and broad variety assortment of tools meant to perform this kind of work testify both on the high level of constructing skill (fig. 8/3–5, 10). The pottery manufacture of such a high level as the one observed in Vesely Kut, supposes complex technological process, requiring continuous efforts of craftsmen-professionals, and being performed in workshops with drying rooms and two chamber-kilns. The construction of a pottery kiln and its active exploitation was beyond the possibilities of a single family. Only community or groups of families were able to construct such kilns (Semënov & Korobkova 1983, p. 225). High professionalism of potters is testified by high art appearance of the ceramic production.

All these facts point to the bloom of pottery craft in Middle Tripolian time.

A large role in the economy of the settlement was also played by tanning and textile manufacturing (fig. 8/6, 8).

The excavation of the settlement of Vesely Kut allowed the investigation of the process of allocation of families or separate craftsmen engaged in manufacture of various production. Bloom of craft manufacture is proved by presence of pottery-making, skin-dressing and stone-working workshops. As it seems, operating in workshop, a craftsman-professional served the community with his products and the community, in its turn, provided him all the necessary (Bibikov 1970, p. 3–6; Masson 1976).

The characteristic feature of the social structure of the East Tripolian tribes is usually connected to the study of dwellings. The lay-out of the settlement of Vesely Kut and its farmstead planning points out a complex social structure of the community having occupied the site.

As a rule, the complex of farmstead aggregates several apartment-houses, utilitarian constructions, and a common courtyard. Such farmstead might be interpreted as the places of residence of extended (big-family) communities.

Multi-branched economy and complex social structure is reflected in ideological notions of Vesely Kut inhabitants. Information concerning the settlement inhabitants' view of the world can be found out by the analysis of altars, cult objects and pottery decoration. The materials available on the settlement under discussion only concern the home cults.

The rectangular altars, which are the basic elements of family sanctuaries, and ritual objects found around them, were discovered in many dwellings of Vesely Kut. A distinctive feature of the latter and other synchronous settlement of the East Tripolian culture is the limited use of anthropomorphic plastics in the religious ceremony. At the same time it is worth mentioning the wide circulation of zoomorphic images (fig. 9/2) within the settlements of that age. A central place among the beliefs of the ancient farmers of Vesely Kut was occupied by the cult of fertility (Tsvek 1993, p. 77–87). Vessels with the relief image of women breast illustrate the myth of the two mistresses of heaven (fig. 4/2). This myth is widely known among the population of this area during the whole middle stage of Tripolie. The prayer of heaven water (rain) was devoted to a deity, whose attributes were craters and binocular-shaped vessels (fig. 5/1–3; fig. 9/5).

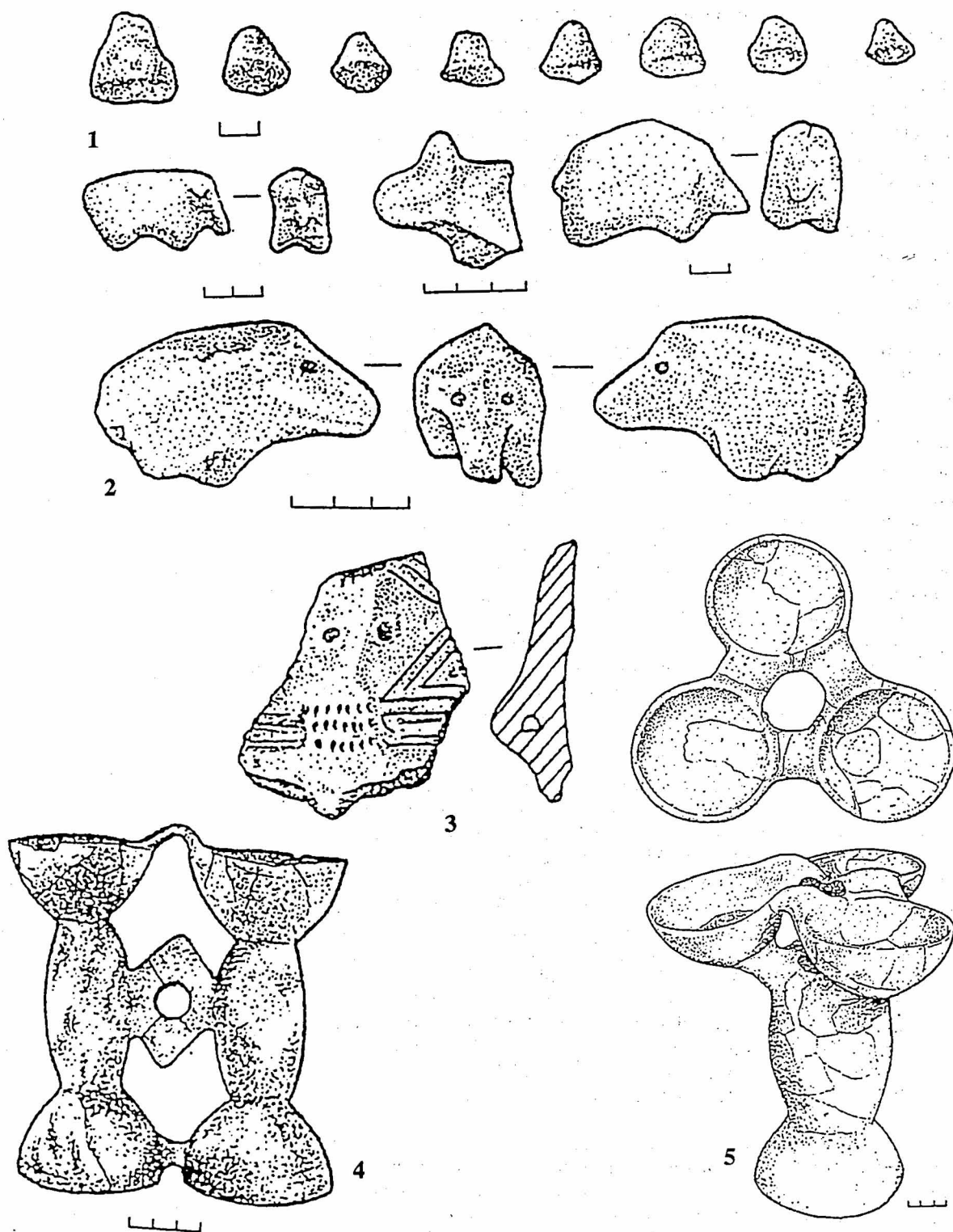


Fig. 9. Plastics objects and ritual vessels.

The finds of the constructions meant for grinding and grain storing (platform #9) witness on cult ceremony related to the fertile forces of the grain. The magic of the grain and the fertility of the fields are tightly bound to

the magic human fertility. Coupled vessels having female and male attributes (fig. 10/7), indicate the existence of the cult of divine spouses among the inhabitants of the settlement (Markovič 1981, p. 157–160).

The presence of cults related to specific manufacture (Tokarev 1964, p. 247) is registered during the excavation of the above (mentioned) pottery workshop. The construction of the pottery furnace was accompanied by a religious ceremony, as indicated by the discovery of tiny clay cones (fig. 9/1) arranged in a special system under the base of the furnace. One of the workshops had an altar, on which a binocular vessel was laid (fig. 9/4). Fragments of a bull's skull were also discovered nearby (Tsvek 1990, p. 55). Evidence of a rite connected with ceramic manufacture was also reported by other scholars (Bikbaev 1990, p. 146–152; Gusev 1996, p. 16).

Changes in the economy and progressive complication of social structure are mirrored in new beliefs and rituals (*e.g.* rites related to the reproduction of herds, developed a certain totemic colouring cult of family ancestors, etc.). The vestiges of the elements of totemic notions in the Vesely Kut population as view of the world are closely bound with other notions (*e.g.* with a cult of fertility) rooted in the thinking of the agricultural epoch. Some zoomorphic figurines are made of clay with admixture of grain. This evidence points out the process of cults synthesis. As soon as new group of population with their beliefs and cults penetrated into the area under discussion, the Tripolians' view of the world became even more complex. Triple vessels (fig. 9/5) and burials of sheep under the floors of the dwellings find clear analogies in the rites of the Lengyel culture (Svešnikov 1956, p. 57–69). The ideological notions of the inhabitants of Vesely Kut and other synchronous settlements are generically ascendant to beliefs of early Tripolian tribes, which are manifested in the mythological images embodied in the ornament design.

A group of vessels with specific shape and ornaments similar to the ceramics of the settlement sites of Verbkovice-Kostianec type (Peleščišin 1985, p. 268–273) (fig. 9/3–5) suggests contacts between the population of Vesely Kut and their Western neighbours. Though discovered at the Vesely Kut, the pottery of this type is made of local clay and its decoration clearly shows signs of local rethinking of the Lengyel patterns. The contacts of the Lengyel culture with the bearers of the East Tripolian culture are also indicated by the discovery of a copper spectacles-shaped pendant (fig. 10/3) in one of the dwellings of the settlement of Vesely Kut. Similar ornaments are known from cemeteries and settlements of the Kuyava culture, and in a treasury from Hlinsk by Lipník (Southern Czech) (Pavelcek 1979, p. 331). These evidences are dated to the period of Lengyel IV (Czerniak 1980, p. 66). No less interesting and important are the records indicating the contacts between the East Tripolian population and the tribes of the Carpathian basin. The settlements of the Vesely Kut type provide vessels similar to pottery of Tisza-Polgár and the early Bodrogheresztúr stages of the Polgar culture (fig. 10/1, 5–6) (Bognár-Kutzián 1972, p. 253; Šiška 1970, p. 269–273). The current state of the study of the Transcarpathian and Volhynian Eneolithic, unfortunately, provides no opportunity to investigate in details the character of these contacts.

Among the sites of the East Tripolian culture, a group of settlements is clearly distinguished, being characterised by a row of similar features in material culture and spiritual life, namely: economy, ideology, lay-out of settlements, methods of construction, original features of ceramic complex Vesely Kut, Penežkovo-Bugaševka, Kopijuvata, Ol'chovets I, Char'kovka, Deški, etc. are related to this group. As the settlement of Vesely Kut knew a most detailed investigation in comparison with other settlements of this group, the above mentioned sites are ascribed to "the settlement sites of Vesely Kut type" (Tsvek 1985: 37–39).

With respect to periodisation, the settlement sites of the Vesely Kut type belong to the middle stage of developed (Middle) Tripolye of the Bug-Dniester interfluvium. They are ascending generically to the settlements of the Onoprievka and Škarovka type. The period of existence of the sites of Vesely Kut type marks a bloom of the Middle Tripolian culture in the Bug-Dniester area. The rise of the economy stimulates an intensive growth of population and a tense concentration of people in certain settlements. This process results in a sharp growth of settlements, segmentation of communities, and further movement of separated collectives into new areas, first of all into the Dnieper area. In this respect, the comparison of the settlement of Vesely Kut with the sites of Veremye type seems to be valuable from a typological point of view; it is remarkable that the settlement of Vesely Kut (at Gorny Tikich) and sites of Veremye type (at Dnieper), although divided by significant distance, are in many respects characterised by identical ceramic complexes (Tsvek 1985: p. 39). Probably, the inhabitants of the Veremye settlement migrated exactly from the region where the settlements of Vesely Kut type were located.

In the Eastern area of the Tripolie-Cucuteni entity, the intensive growth of the population resulted in the formation of large settlements or in migration towards new areas. On the contrary, such opportunities were impossible in the Western area. Beneath the Prut, there were areas with high density of ancient agricultural population. In their search for new lands, the Cucuteni communities moved eastward, into the South Bug basin, and later penetrated into the Bug-Dnieper area. The earliest signs of this colonisation are known as the Southern Bug area. Large quota of painted vessels and specific plastics peculiar to the Cucuteni tribes are registered in the dwellings of Kliščev where pottery characteristic for local Tripolian communities was also discovered (Zaets 1974, p. 180–199; Zaets & Ryžov 1992, p. 177).

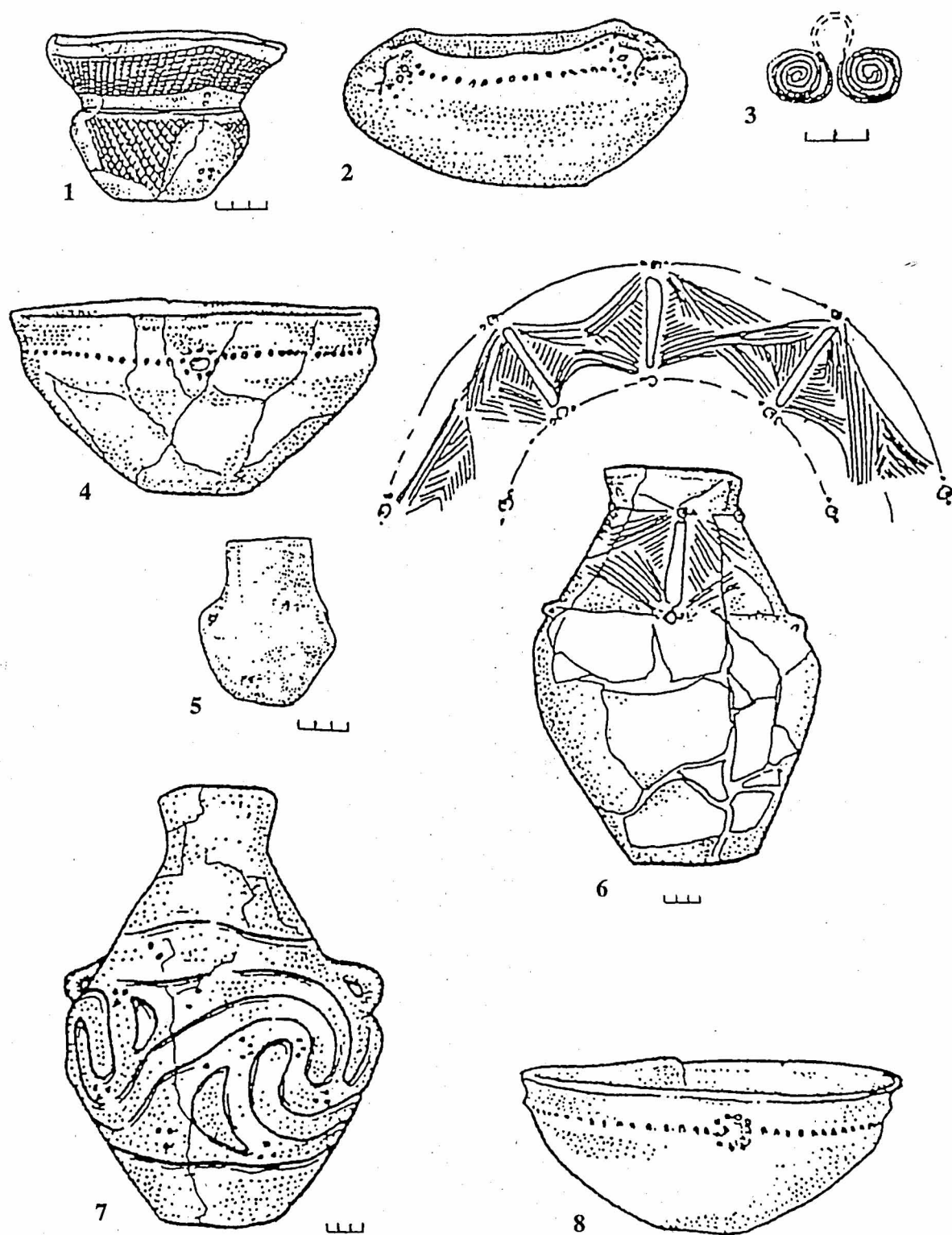


Fig. 10. Ceramics and copper artefacts.

Chronologically the evidence of a similar process of penetration of the Cucuteni communities into the Bug-Dnieper area is more recent. Materials of the final period of the settlement of Vesely Kut testify on this.

During that time only the basins of the Gorny and Gniloy Tikich rivers were reached by the Cucutenian resettles. The Eastern fringe of the settlement of Vesely Kut provides the pottery with a grey surface and dark brown painting. Later this pottery will be very characteristic for the last stage of the developed Tripolie in the Eastern area of this culture. The above data reveal a durable surviving of the settlement of Vesely Kut and allow us to distinguish the latest occupation horizon of the settlement. The introduction of the new type of pottery also testifies on the beginning of a new wave of migration from the Dniester and the Bug areas in the Eastern direction.

The sites of Vesely Kut type in the Bug-Dnieper area were replaced by sites of Miropolye and Garbuzin types belonging to the latest stage of Middle Tripolie of this region.

Synchronisation of sites of the Bug-Dnieper interfluvium with simultaneous settlements in the Dniestr and the Bug basins (Zalesčiki, Polivanov Yar II and Kliščev, Kolodistoye, correspondingly) allows us to attribute the settlements of Vesely Kut type to the second half of the transitional period BI–BII, which corresponds to the period Cucuteni AB/2.

The absolute age of the sites of Vesely Kut type is determined by means of radiocarbon and archaeo-magnetic methods (Zagnij, Rusakov 1982) (radiocarbon data were obtained in the laboratory of the Institute of the Geochemistry and Physics of Minerals of National Ukrainian Academy of Sciences; several data were obtained by G. Quitta, Berlin laboratory). Taking into account the available data it is possible to estimate the period of existence of the sites of Vesely Kut type between 3200–3100 BC (uncalibrated data) or between 4000–3900 BC (calibrated data).

The available data allow us to regard the settlement of Vesely Kut as the largest site of developed (Middle) Tripolie. This and other comparable large settlements played the role of economic and cultural centres.

The sites of Vesely Kut type indicate that in the Bug-Dnieper interfluvium, after the penetration of early Tripolian tribes, the process of rise and development of the East Tripolian culture took place as a component of the Tripolie–Cucuteni civilisation. The East Tripolian culture has high level of economic and cultural development. Settlements of Vesely Kut type as well as more recent East Tripolian sites provided the basis on which, after the penetration of new population from the West in the Bug–Dnieper area – such large Tripolian centres as Dobrovody, Kvitki, Maidanetskoie, Talianki and others could appear.

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