

# ROMAN GLASS VESSELS FROM THE “PE HILL” CASTRUM AT RUPEA-UNGRA, BRAȘOV COUNTY. 2022 CAMPAIGN

BY  
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**Abstract:** *The present material analyzes the Roman Glass discoveries from the relatively unknown Roman camp from Rupea-Ungra, Brașov County. During the 2022 archaeological campaign conducted by members of the Institute of Archaeology in Iași, some 42 glass fragments were uncovered, mostly in the area of the second-phase stone wall. Among the most interesting finds, we can mention a fragment of a Hofheim Cup, fragments of prismatic bottles, colorless mold-blown beakers and numerous fragments of window-panes. All these finds are common for the military environment during the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.*

**Keywords:** *Rupea-Ungra, Brașov County; Romania; Roman glass vessels; drinking-ware; Roman military camp; 2nd-3rd centuries AD; limes Transalutanus.*

The military fortification from Rupea-Ungra is located on the high terrace of the Homorod River, on the right bank of Olt River, at the point called “Pe Hill”, about 5 km N-V from the Roman camp of Hoghiz (Pl. I.a). The site has been discovered quite recently, during field research conducted by Silviu Gridan and Olimpia-Mary Gridan in 2015. Subsequently, a research team composed of Silviu Gridan, Alexandru Hegyi, Petru Urdea and Radu Zăgreanu conducted, between 2017-2018, invasive and non-invasive research in the perimeter of the camp.<sup>1</sup> Geo-magnetic research has highlighted the outline of the fortification walls and excavations on the north side of the camp (S1 surface in 2018) have resulted in the identification of a wooden phase, two defense ditches and probably a stone-wall phase, as well as a habitation after the desertion of the camp.<sup>2</sup>

In order to fill in the lack of information about the evolution and role held by the fortification within the Roman province of Dacia, in 2022, a team from the Institute of Archaeology in Iași led by dr. Ștefan Honcu began systematic research.<sup>3</sup> Thus, on the eastern side of the fortification, an area of 10 x 5 meters conventionally called S2 was excavated, five stratigraphic units being investigated (Pl. I.b - II.a). On this occasion, among the various archaeological finds, 42 fragments of glass vessels were uncovered. Most of them come from US 0004 (a stratigraphic layer in which an Almgren 7 Series 1 fibula was also discovered, datable approximately between 150-320 AD) but a few fragments were also discovered in US 0003 and US 0005.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GRIDAN, URDEA, HEGYI 2017: 851-883.

<sup>2</sup> GRIDAN, HEGYI, ZĂGREANU 2018.

<sup>3</sup> We express our gratitude to our colleague, Ștefan Honcu for the information on the archaeological excavation and finds.

<sup>4</sup> HONCU *et alii* 2023: 439-440.

Most of the fragments are in a poor state of preservation, which is also the main reason why we could not establish a precise typological identification for several fragments. A summary analysis and identification point out the preponderance of window-pane fragments (20 fragments, almost half of the total pieces discovered) followed by fragments of drinking cups (15 fragments). Poorly represented, with one item each, are the beakers, the prismatic bottles, the vials, and adornment objects (a bluish tubular glass bead). Also, two fragments, impossible to identify, show strong burn marks, having been partially melted.

However, the glass finds also highlighted some interesting discoveries. The first is a hemispherical cup base attributed to Isings 12 type,<sup>5</sup> light bluish, made of a good quality glass paste (Pl. III.3; IV.1). Also known as Hofheim Cups, after the name of the military Castrum in the Rhine area where numerous specimens were discovered,<sup>6</sup> these drinking cups are characterized by the wide, incised groove on the body of the vessel.<sup>7</sup> Occasionally, some specimens were painted with various vegetal or animal motifs, or even decorated with incised patterns.<sup>8</sup>

Hofheim cups appeared during the reign of Augustus, spreading under Tiberius, and experiencing their greatest popularity in the Claudio-Neronian era.<sup>9</sup> Around 70 AD their numbers begin to diminish, against the general background of changing the preferences of the clientele for colorless glass vessels with thinner walls.<sup>10</sup>

These vessels are present mainly in the western half of the Empire, in the area of military settlements, but we cannot clearly link them to western workshops, especially since they also appear in the East and especially in Cyprus.<sup>11</sup>

As we pointed out in a relatively recent study, Hofheim cups are well represented in the Danubian military settlements, with specimens discovered at: Carsium<sup>12</sup>, Capidava, Durostorum, Novae and Oescus, to which can be added two whole vessels, originating from the Tomitan necropolis, and widely dated in the 1st-2nd centuries AD.<sup>13</sup> After the manner of execution and the color of the vitreous paste we can attribute our fragment to the late series of such bowls, dated from the middle of the 1st century AD. As we have seen, they are frequently found in the military environment and the discovery from Rupea makes no exception.

Discovered here also is a small fragment of beaker similar to Isings 21 type vessels (Pl. III.1; IV.4). Unfortunately, the extremely small dimensions of the fragment do not give us any indication of the presence of decorative patterns. Made of slightly greenish glass paste of good quality, the glass fragment is typical of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Moreover, the almost colorless vessels, mold-blown and sometimes decorated with incised or cut geometric motifs are extremely well represented in the Roman castra of Dacia after the reign of Trajan and until the first half of the 3rd century AD.

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<sup>5</sup> ISINGS 1957: 28.

<sup>6</sup> PRICE 1998: 72.

<sup>7</sup> LAZAR 2003: 87; PRICE 1998: 72.

<sup>8</sup> CHIRIAC 1999: 78.

<sup>9</sup> RAVAGNAN 1994: 184; DUSENBERY 1998: 1081.

<sup>10</sup> TEODOR, CHIRIAC 1994: 188; PRICE 1998: 72. Occasionally, these vessels appear until the beginning of the 2nd century AD, subsequently ceasing their production.

<sup>11</sup> VESSBERG 1952: 132-133, Nos. 18-25, Fig. 42.

<sup>12</sup> The discovery from Carsium was dated by the author on the mid-1st century AD, during the early stages in the development of the Roman fortification, see CHIRIAC 1999: 73.

<sup>13</sup> For a general overview, see BOȚAN 2019: 112.

Finally, we can also mention here the presence of a small fragment of a prismatic bottle made of bluish coloured glass (Pl. III.2; IV.2). These vessels were used to store and transport liquids, such as wine or olive oil, and are found mainly in the military environment.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these vessels had the name of the manufacturer printed on the base, as is the case with *Sentia Secunda* of Aquileia or *Frontinus* in Gaul.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest such vessels occur at Magdalensberg in Austria dated to the end of Augustus' reign<sup>16</sup> spreading rapidly across the western half of the Roman Empire by the middle of the 1st century AD.<sup>17</sup> From the second half of the same century prismatic containers become a constant presence being encountered in this shape until the 3rd century AD.<sup>18</sup>

Prismatic bottles are a constant presence in the area of the Danubian *limes*, in the military settlements<sup>19</sup> but also in the castra of the Dacian Province, as we can see from the discoveries made at: *Ulpia Traiana*,<sup>20</sup> *Apulum*,<sup>21</sup> *Napoca*,<sup>22</sup> *Potaissa*,<sup>23</sup> Bologa or Gherla.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, at Apulum, 16 moulds for making these bottles were discovered, suggesting that they were also produced locally.<sup>25</sup>

Glass window-panes are, as we have shown, the most numerous (Pl. III.4,10; IV.3). They vary both in thickness, color and manner of execution and emphasize the importance of natural lighting in the edifices of the Roman period of the Principality era.<sup>26</sup>

The few glass fragments presented in this short note, although not spectacular in shape and decoration, represent a noteworthy contribution to the study of roman glass in military camps. The discovery of the Hofheim Cup, datable to the second half of the 1st century AD in the filling layer of what appears to be the later stone-wall phase, might suggest that it belonged to the first phase of the military settlement, somewhere at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. As we have seen, these cups are scarcely encountered among the glass finds in Dacia (due to their earlier usage in the 1st century AD) and are mainly western products so we might ask ourselves where was it made, whom did it belong and when was it brought to Rupea, as the glass vessels do not tend to remain in use for a long time due to their fragility. The prismatic bottle and also the supposedly Isings 21 beaker are common finds in the military environment, so their presence comes as no surprise. The vast majority of the finds are concentrated in the area of the stone wall, being found among the stones, iron nails and other debris, and might suggest their usage, as filling rubble, in the construction of the second phase stone wall (Pl. II.b). Thus, they might have been in use in the first half of the second 2nd century AD, possibly when the camp was founded. What troops stationed here and what might have been their daily life 2000 ago are questions that we are looking forward to solve in future archaeological campaigns.

<sup>14</sup> ISINGS 1957: 63-69, types 50 a, b and 51 a, b; See also CHARLESWORTH 1966, for a general overview of the type.

<sup>15</sup> See FOY, NENNA 2006; FROEHNER 1879; TOLGA-TEK 2001.

<sup>16</sup> CZURDA-RUTH 1979: 135-136, Nos. 1020-1022.

<sup>17</sup> WHITEHOUSE 1997: 183; LAZAR 2003: 155.

<sup>18</sup> CHARLESWORTH 1966: 30; TEODOR, CHIRIAC 1994: 191; INGEMARK 2014: 131.

<sup>19</sup> BOȚAN 2019: 116.

<sup>20</sup> ALICU *et alii* 1994: 122, No. 896.

<sup>21</sup> PÁNCZÉL 2011: 175-187.

<sup>22</sup> BOLINDEȚ, POPESCU 2012: 246.

<sup>23</sup> PÁNCZÉL 2006: 514, No. 2.

<sup>24</sup> PROTASE, GUDEA, ARDEVAN 2008: 103-104, Pl. LXXVII.2 and LXXIX.6.

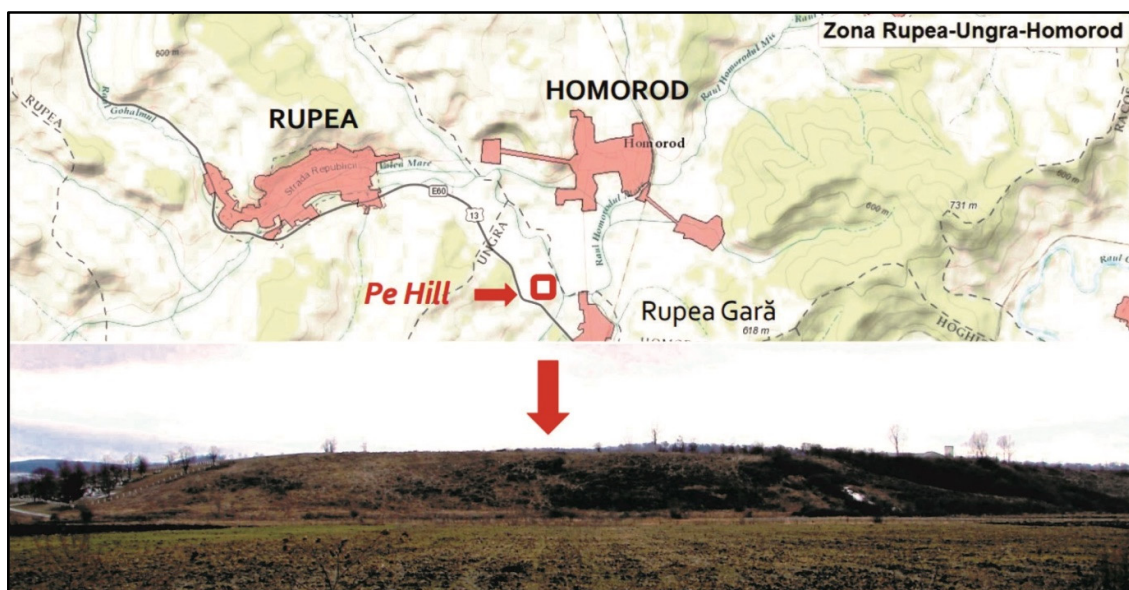
<sup>25</sup> PÁNCZÉL 2011: 175-187.

<sup>26</sup> See BOȚAN 2021: 292, for some considerations regarding the glass window-panes in Late Antiquity.

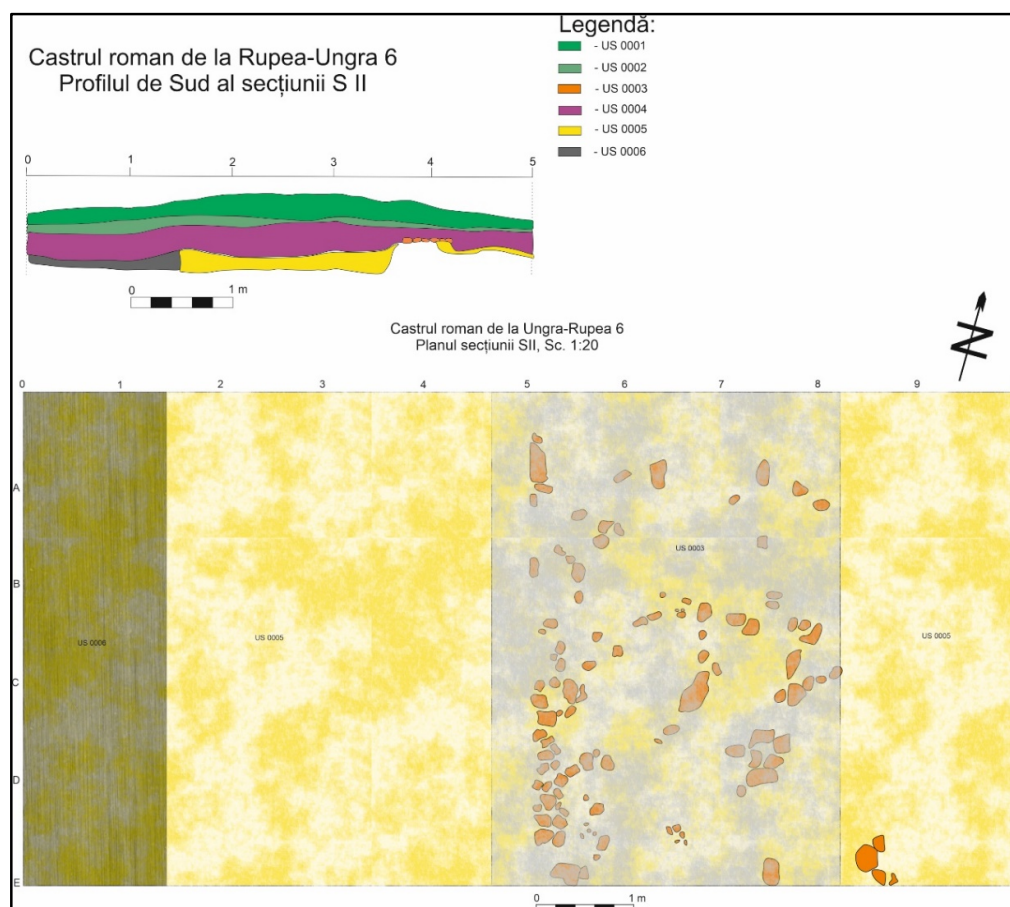
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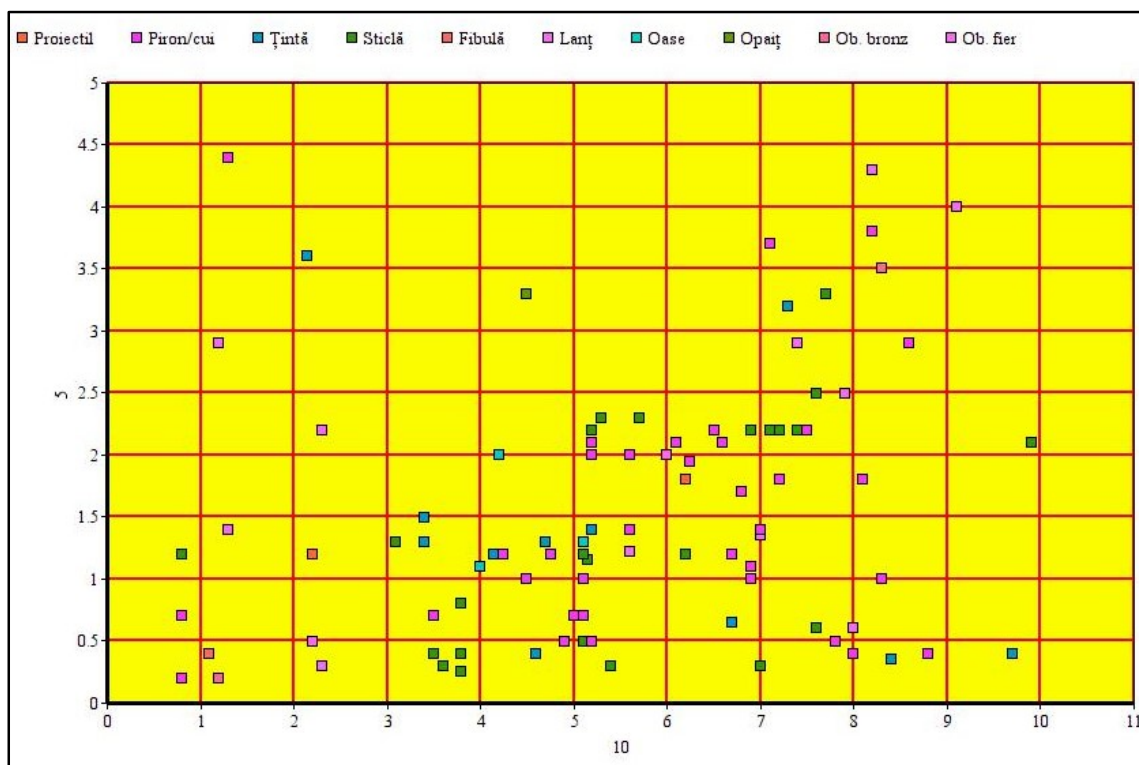
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Pl. I. a. The position of the Roman Castrum from Rupea-Ungra 6 and a panoramic view of the site.  
 b. stratigraphical layout of the Southern profile and the general plan of the excavated area.





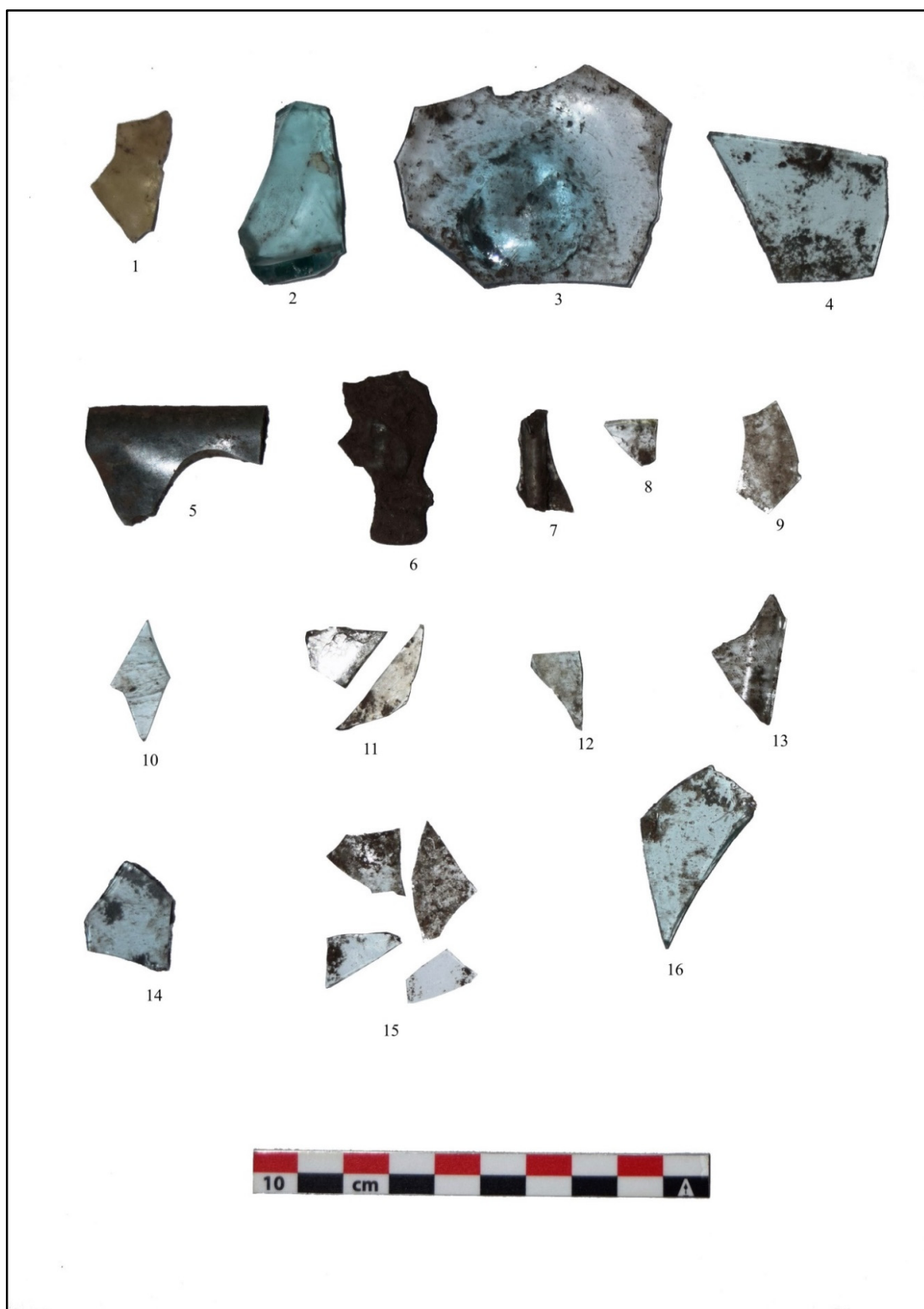
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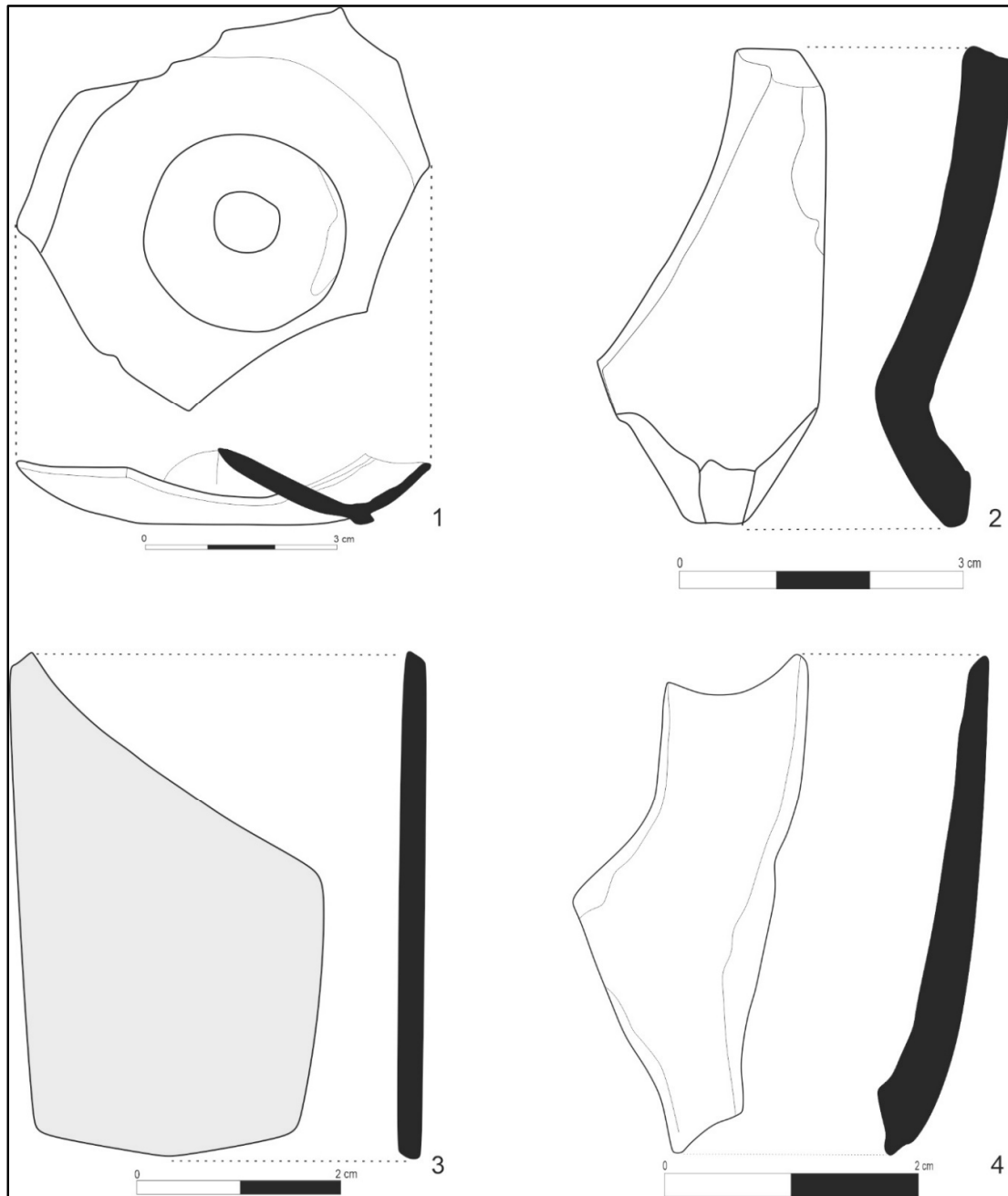
Pl. II. a. Aerial view of S II area during excavations.

b. The distribution of archaeological finds with glass objects represented with green colour.



Pl. III. Some glass finds from the Rupea-Ungra 6 Castrum.





Pl. IV. Some glass finds from the Rupea-Ungra 6 Castrum.



Pl. V. Fragment of glass found *in situ*.