# EVERYDAY ASPECTS OF LIFE IN LATE ROMAN A9 EDIFICE IN THE CITY OF *TROPAEUM TRAIANI*. AN *ADDENDUM*

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**Cuvinte-cheie:** *unelte, război de țesut vertical, fusaiole, accesorii vestimentare, obiecte domestice.*

**Keywords:** *tools, vertical loom, spindle whorls, clothing accessories ornaments, domestic artifacts.*

**Rezumat**: *De cele mai multe ori, publicarea descoperirii unor obiecte mărunte în timpul cercetărilor arheologice nu constituie o prioritate, în special în privința obiectelor obișnuite care reliefează viața cotidiană. Cu toate că aceste obiecte pot fi încadrate în categoria descoperirilor mărunte, ele sunt importante, oferind consistență demersului arheologic de reconstituire a contextului cercetat.*

**Abstract**: *Often the publication of the discovery of small objects during archaeological research is not a priority, especially regarding the typical objects that highlight everyday life. Although these objects can be rated as* parva archaeologica inventa*, they are important, providing consistency to the archaeological approach to reconstructing the researched context.*

The archaeological excavations from the sector A at *Tropaeum Traiani* revealed among others a residential area from which the 6th century AD final phase of A9 building was previously published[1]. Although all the pottery was published, several bone and metal objects were not taken into consideration previously and they are the subject of present article. However, the objects were discovered on the last chronologically identified layers, generally dating the layers approximately to the second half of the 6th century AD. We remark the diversity of the functionality and materials of the artifacts, as clothing accessories, tools and construction materials, finery, military equipment, entertainment.

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[1] IONESCU, GAMUREAC, DRĂGHICI 2013; GAMUREAC, IONESCU, DRĂGHICI 2016.

## Installations, tools and construction materials

The A9 edifice was built having a stone foundation and adobe structure in elevation. The elements of doors, windows and the roof were made from wood and were fixed between them with nails. As long as the wooden structure of the roof had to support the weight of the tiles, it had to be reinforced with nails. The nails are made from wrought iron, and theirs state of conservation is bad, being heavily corroded. A number of 10 nails were discovered during the excavations, and are presented in our study. Some other already has been published, but the present pieces are published for the first time (**Fig. 1.1**).

Another characteristic of the building, which could be determined, is that it had a door that could be locked. A surprisingly well–preserved element for fastening the door[2] is the latch/bolt made of a spike thrusted into the door and a bolting L–shape element[3]. The artifact is preserved over a total length of 18.5 cm and is made from three pieces of iron, combined together by forging **(Fig. 1.2**). Another fragmentary item[4] whose purpose could be similar, maybe a bolt-nail[5] or a hook, is also made from wrought heavily corroded iron, being preserved at a length of 6.8 cm (Fig. **1.3**).

A tool specialized for constructions is the fragmentary iron Roman mason`s trowel. (**Fig. 2.1**) A rare analogy can be found at Babadag – Topraichioi in a layer from the second quarter of the 5th century AD[6]. The tool is fragmentary, consisting of two main fragments, one of them preserving the handle (about 8 cm in length) and the other being formed by the (fragmentary) blade. The tool resembles a lot the modern tool and it may have been used to plaster the walls of buildings or to build walls using mortar. It should be noted that the building A9 was not plastered with mortar, but in the best case with clay or it was not plastered at all, due to the lack of the archaeological evidence. The tool proves a professional specialization of the mason, who may have been one of the house inhabitants. Anyway, we cannot determine for certain, proving only with a single artifact, if the mason, owner of the trowel, was in fact the inhabitant of the house.

Good analogies can be found for the scissor[7], this tool being used both in medical situations as haircut or cutting bandages and in domestic activities. In reality the use of the scissor is universal, and without associated artifacts, the object cannot be linked to a certain occupation[8] (**Fig. 2.2)**.

In terms of feminine occupation, there was probably a vertical loom in the house, considering the discovery of a loom weight (**Fig. 2.3**). The weight is made from a piece of Roman tile, perforated, having the diameter of 11.5 cm and the

[2] CHIRILĂ *et alii* 1972, p. 78, pl. CIV/6 and CVI/9; GUDEA 1996, p. 246, pl. LXV/1; GUDEA, BONDOC 2023, p. 219, pl. CXLVII/1506, 1510, pl. CLVII/1587.

[3] ALICU *et alii* 1994, p. 23, pl. 11/58–59.

[4] GUDEA 1996, p. 246, pl. LXV/8; COVACEF, DOBRINESCU 1999, p. 281, pl. I/1–7.

[5] ALICU *et alii* 1994, p. 23, pl. 11/60–61.

[6] OPAIŢ *et alii* 1991, p. 322, pl. 54/7, 78/9; POULTER 2019, fig. 12.3/42–43; GUDEA, BONDOC 2023, p. 222, pl. CLII/1569.7; ŠPEHAR 2010, T.XXV/432.

[7] GUDEA 2008, p. 216, fig. 76; GUDEA 1996, p. 342, pl. LVIII/7; APARASCHIVEI, VASILACHE 2012, p. 291, fig. V/13; ŠPEHAR 2010, T. XXVII/458.

[8] TIMOC 2008, p. 126, fig. 1.

thickness of 1.8 cm. Similar loom weights, being parts of the warp-weighted looms installations, have also been discovered in many Late Roman sites, such as Capidava or Ulmetum, in 6th century AD contexts[9].

Two spindle whorls, made from different materials, discovered nearby the A9 house, on the ABV4 street, complete the feminine occupational activities. The first one was made by reusing a brick fragment, is cylindrical in shape and has a diameter of 2.8 cm and a height of 9 mm (**Fig. 2.4**).

The second is a clay spindle whorl, biconical in shape, perforated, light reddish yellow color (**Fig. 3.1**). The presence of the spindle whorls is common, being also attested before at Tropaeum Traiani[10] in contexts dated to the late 6th century AD., and in many other places, attesting that some part of the household economy was dedicated to the manufacture of linen clothes and other textiles.

## Clothing items & *ornamenta*

The clothing artifacts that survive over time are metallic or made of bone, and are represented by buttons, fibulae, strap ends, buckles and so on. The strap ends discovered in the A9 building and in the immediate vicinity may be classified in the clothing accessories ornaments category. The first strap end (**Fig. 3.2**), made of bronze, is having the dimensions of 3 cm length and 1.8 cm width and it was discovered right outside of south-western corner of the A9 building. The artifact is rectangular, with a rounded end, decorated with an incised line on the lower right side and other lines linking in a triangle three round perforations and presents 9 perforations differing in size and shape. There are good parallels for this type for the end of the 6th century AD in Dobruja[11].

The second strap end was discovered on the floor of the A9 edifice, is rectangular oblong in shape with a rounded tip, presenting a hole in one extremity. The artifact measures 5.2 cm in length, a maximum 1 cm in width and a thickness of 3–5 mm. One side has three notches, and the quite complicated decoration resembles tamga motifs[12]. The Sarmatian origins of the tamga signs indicate a possible Bosporan provenance of the artifact, but in the late period, the rigidity of the tamga design disappears, and the details are changing[13] **(Fig. 3.3)**.

Another artifact (**Fig. 3.4**) also made of bronze is unfortunately in a fragmentary state, and belongs to a different type, being discovered on the ABV4 street, on the opposite side of the edifice A9. On the fragment preserved, there are two triangular and traces of four rounded perforations. On the reverse there is preserved a

[9] OPRIȘ, RAȚIU 2017, p. 124, pl. 24–25; GAMUREAC 2017, pl. VIII/49; POULTER 2019, fig 11.9/144.

[10] BOGDAN-CĂTĂNICIU, BARNEA 1979, fig. 171/10.2, NVIB.

[11] PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2012, p. 346, pl. 2/2–3, 4/2–3; PREDA 1980, pl. XXXIV/3-M 132; MOMCHILOV, DIMITROVA 2014, p. 20; NUȚU 2011, p. 189, pl. 3/37 for a belt applique having a similar decoration.

[12] PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2012, p. 346, 349, pl. 2/4, 4/4; KOZLENKO 2020, pl. 2; YATSENKO 2020, pl. 5, for the possibly provenance of the tamga signs in the previous times; KOZLOVSKAYA, ILYASHENKO 2018.

[13] SULIMIRSKI 1970, p. 152, fig. 55 for 5th–6th century AD somehow modified tamgas from Ukraine.

mounting ear[14]. The artifact may be a belt plate, fragmentary openwork with split–pelta of trefoil decoration motifs at one extremity (not preserved).

The only preserved artifact belonging to the footwear category is the stud discovered nearby the Western wall of A9 edifice[15] (**Fig. 3.5**). The object has a diameter of 1.2 cm, the upper part is a half–sphere and the rod is bent.

On the opposite side of the edifice A9, across the street ABV4, it was discovered a small glass bead, biconical in section[16]. The surface is facetted with 6 sides and circular central perforation, dark blue glass, traces of gold plating, 7 mm in diameter, 1.7 cm in lenght (**Fig. 3.6**). The large bead discovered near the A9 edifice is made of gray–dark blue glass, cylindrical in shape and decorated with a white wavering strip framed by two red strips at the median part[17] (**Fig. 3.7**).

In addition, two bronze rings were discovered, from which we did not discovered perfect analogies. The first ring, made of cast bronze, was discovered on the floor of the A9 edifice, measuring 2.3 cm in diameter and 6 mm in width[18]. It has a perforated thickening for fixing of another element (**Fig. 3.8**). The second bronze cast ring, discovered right outside edifice A9, measure 2.3 cm in diameter, is oval and it presents on the top an elevated ornament in profile. The plate of the ring is incised with the symbol of the cross, guarded at the four corners by four marks; the oval edges are decorated with small incisions (**Fig. 3.9**).

## Toilet and domestic implements

A fragment of a comb was discovered inside the A9 edifice. The artifact is preserved on a length 3 cm, and is made of bone[19] (**Fig. 4.1**). The fragmentary bone hairpin (*acus crinalis, comatoria*) was preserved on a length of 10.5 cm and it doesn`t belong to the A9 edifice, being discovered into a much deeper and chronologically older layer. We cannot fit the hair pin into a certain category due to the head missing[20] (**Fig. 4.2**).

An illustration of the Roman domestic entertainment cannot be complete without the relatively frequent discovered dice. In this case, the dice was made from a reused small part of brick, unlike other dices usually made from bone/antler[21]. It can be noted the poor execution of the object; the sides are unequal, and the small holes are made awkwardly, proving that the die was designed, probably for the children`s play (**Fig. 4.3**).

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[14] BUCOVALĂ, PAŞCA 1992, p. 249, pl. 11/M21 – belt plaque dated at the end of the 6th-beginning of the 7th century AD; PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI, CUSTUREA 2012, p. 346, pl. 2/2, 4/2; PREDA 1980, pl. XVI/M10.3.

[15] SCORPAN 1978, pl. XIII/72; CHIRILĂ *et alii* 1972, p. 67, pl. LXX/18–21; ALICU *et alii* 1994, p. 758, pl. 45/758.

[16] POULTER 2019, fig 11.12/185; BENEA 2008, pl. II/8, X.

[17] CROITORU 2011, p. 215, fig. 165/3386 bead made of glass.

[18] BOUNEGRU *et alii* 2011, p. 79, no. 113.

[19] SCORPAN 1978, pl. XXI/75; POULTER 2019, fig 13.2/38–60; COVACEF 1996, p. 115, pl. IV/6.

[20] ALICU *et alii* 1994, p. 63–65, pl. 56.

[21] ŠPEHAR 2010, T. VIII/206.

The antler object, of 9 cm in length, has a good analogy at Capidava[22] for a whip handle, also made from antler that bears the remains of a circular perforation at one of the extremities (**Fig. 4.4**).

Two examples of glass goblets[23], one discovered inside the edifice, having the base diameter of 4 cm, and the other outside (5 cm base diameter), illustrate a certain level of civilization of the inhabitants of the edifice. Even if there are just some banal utensils, it proves that the inhabitants were prosperous enough to buy commodities covering the basic needs on the market and to maintain the minimum level of civilization (**Fig. 4.5** and **Fig. 4.6**).

The Roman rectangular weight made of lead was discovered on the floor of the A9 edifice having the dimensions of 1.8 cm × 4 mm and is stamped with two marks[24]. The weight weighs 13.448 g, representing a ½ *uncia* (*semiuncia* 13.7 g) demonstrating that in this building took place commercial activities (**Fig. 5.1**). Also 3 *nomisma* (*solidus*) of 4.5 gr = 13.5 g.

## Armamentaria

The massif iron arrowhead, corroded[25], was preserved on a length of 7.2 cm. It does not belong and is not related to the A9 edifice, being discovered in the area, but into a much older layer (**Fig. 5.2**).

A bronze plate of armor, rectangular in shape, semicircular in the lower part, with two rows of two perforations each for assembling in the upper part, is preserved in fragmentary state[26] (**Fig. 5.3**). The plate was discovered on the ABV4 Street, on the opposite side of the edifice A9. Even if no military artifact was linked directly to the edifice A9, we appreciate that these objects may be associated with the presence of the city military defenders. The massive presence of the Aegean amphorae in the city, in civilian contexts[27], probably *via annona militaris* or as a side effect of the *questura exercitus* transports organization, might be the link to redistribution of goods, or to the reutilization of the transport recipients. The military equipment also can be related to *burgarii*[28] at the end of the 3rd–beginning of the 4th century AD.

## Concluding remarks

The example discussed above, of installations like the bolt shows a normal level of domestic comfort; the tools are specific, describing the occupational activities: the trowel for masculine activities and vertical loom and spindle whorls for domestic feminine activities.

[22] BELDIMAN, SZTANCS, OPRIȘ 2014, fig. 11/1.

[23] ȘPEHAR 2010, T. 1/10–37; LIBIȚ, STĂNICĂ 2023, p. 185–187, pl. 4/19–21; for the typology of the glass pieces from Adamclisi, used for lighting, after the authors, see BOȚAN, TALMAȚCHI, CRISTEA-STAN 2020, p. 278–290, catalogue no. 1–38. On the diverse origin of this artifacts, see BUGOI, PANAITE, ALEXANDRESCU 2021.

[24] LANG, CROSBY 1964, pl. 10/LW 76; CUSTUREA 2009, p. 675, no. 7; EPIPHANIUS 45b, p. 12: "but the ounce is 2 staters".

[25] ȘPEHAR 2010, T. XXXIX/696–708.

[26] CROITORU 2011, p. 49, fig. 18/545–546.

[27] GRIGORAȘ, PANAITE 2021.

[28] IGLR 1976, p. 186–187, no. 172.

Regarding the clothing items, the only artifacts identified, strap ends, concerns male clothing. Men were wearing usually, in the late period, long-sleeved, half-length tunics with skin-tight hose. The clothing was used to show social status, showing the division between those who used clothes as a status symbol, since they were not required to work, and those who had to have functional and practical clothing because they had to earn their living. The social status of the wearer was identified by elements such as: the type of clothes, the quality, the length of the tunic, the colors and if it was worn unbelted[29].

There is not enough evidence to link the Sarmatian tamga motif from the strap end to diversity of the population, considering the possibly commercial provenance explained above. All the strap ends, belt plate, bronze rings and glass beads are circumscribed to the image of common garment`s pieces for the 6th century AD, typical for the common working class.

The rest of the diverse artifacts, as the comb, dice, glass goblets, and the lead weight are all common findings for any Late Roman town, and mark the common economic and domestic life of the civilian population. To these are added the pieces of armament as the iron arrowhead and the bronze plate of armor, which demonstrate, even if partially for an earlier period, the military presence in the intramural area. The archaeological excavations conducted in the fortified annex of the city during the previous campaigns, shed a light of this aspect, being necessary to be continued[30].

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[29] CROOM 2012, Conclusions.

[30] BARNEA *et alii* 2003.

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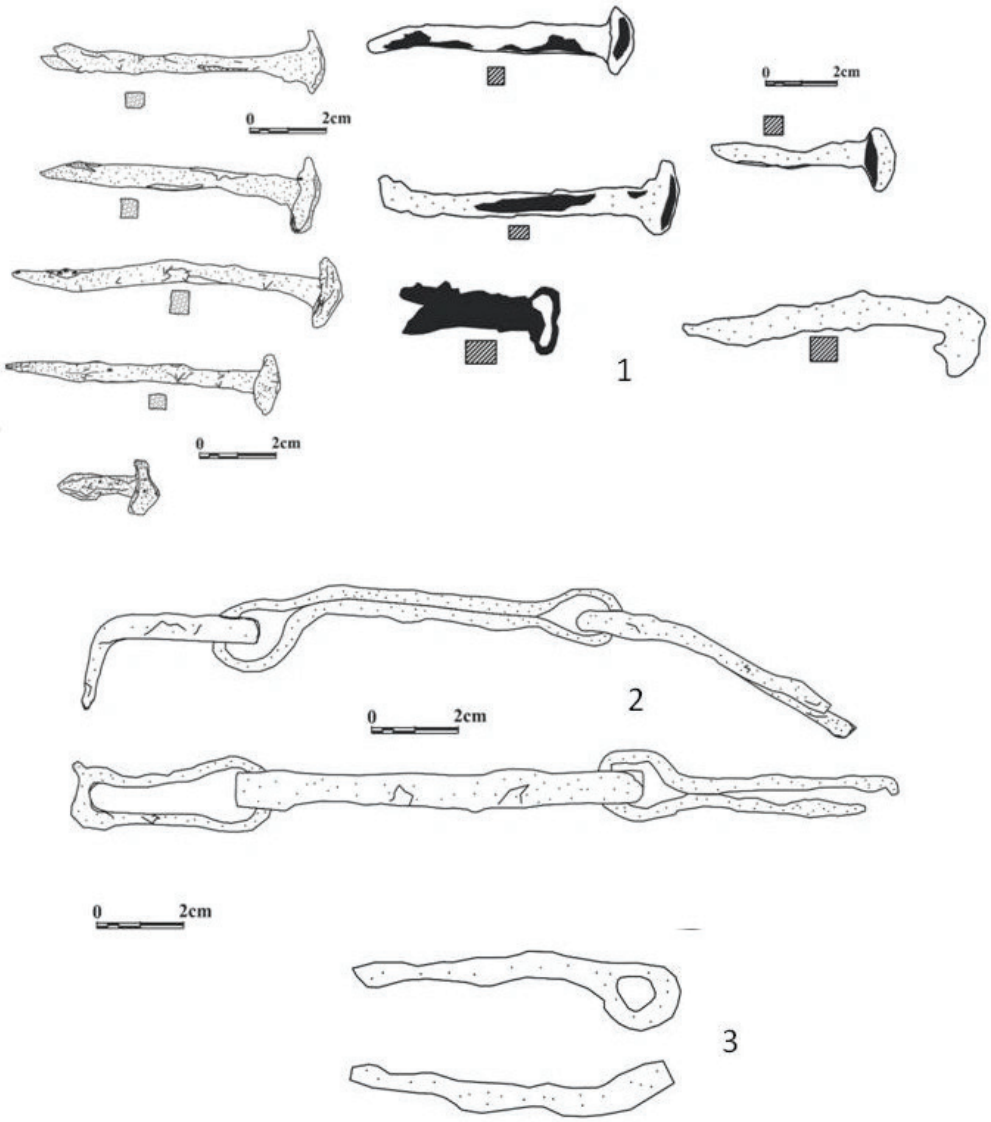


**Fig. 1.** Tools and construction materials discovered in the Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.

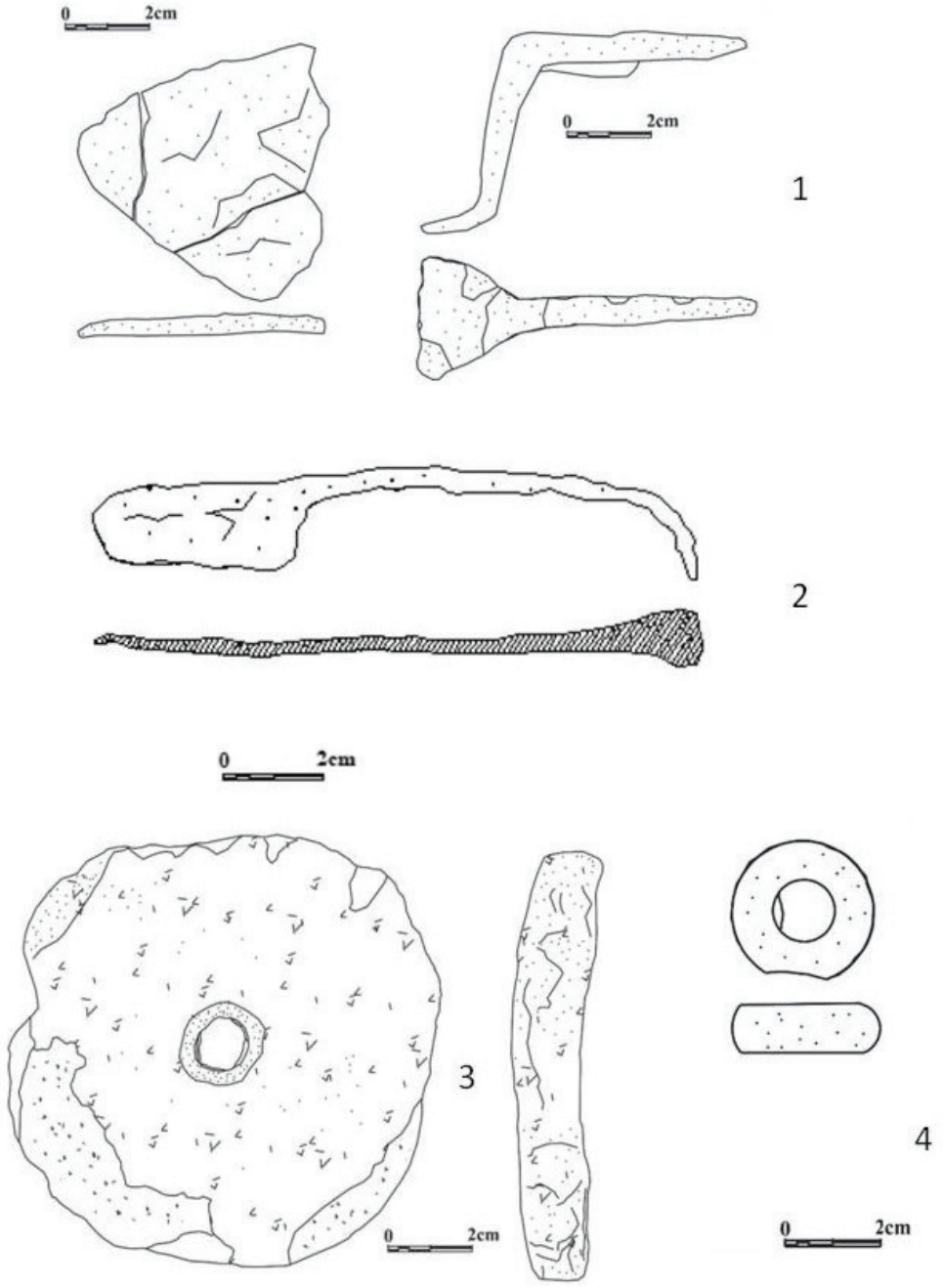


**Fig. 2.** Tools discovered in the Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.

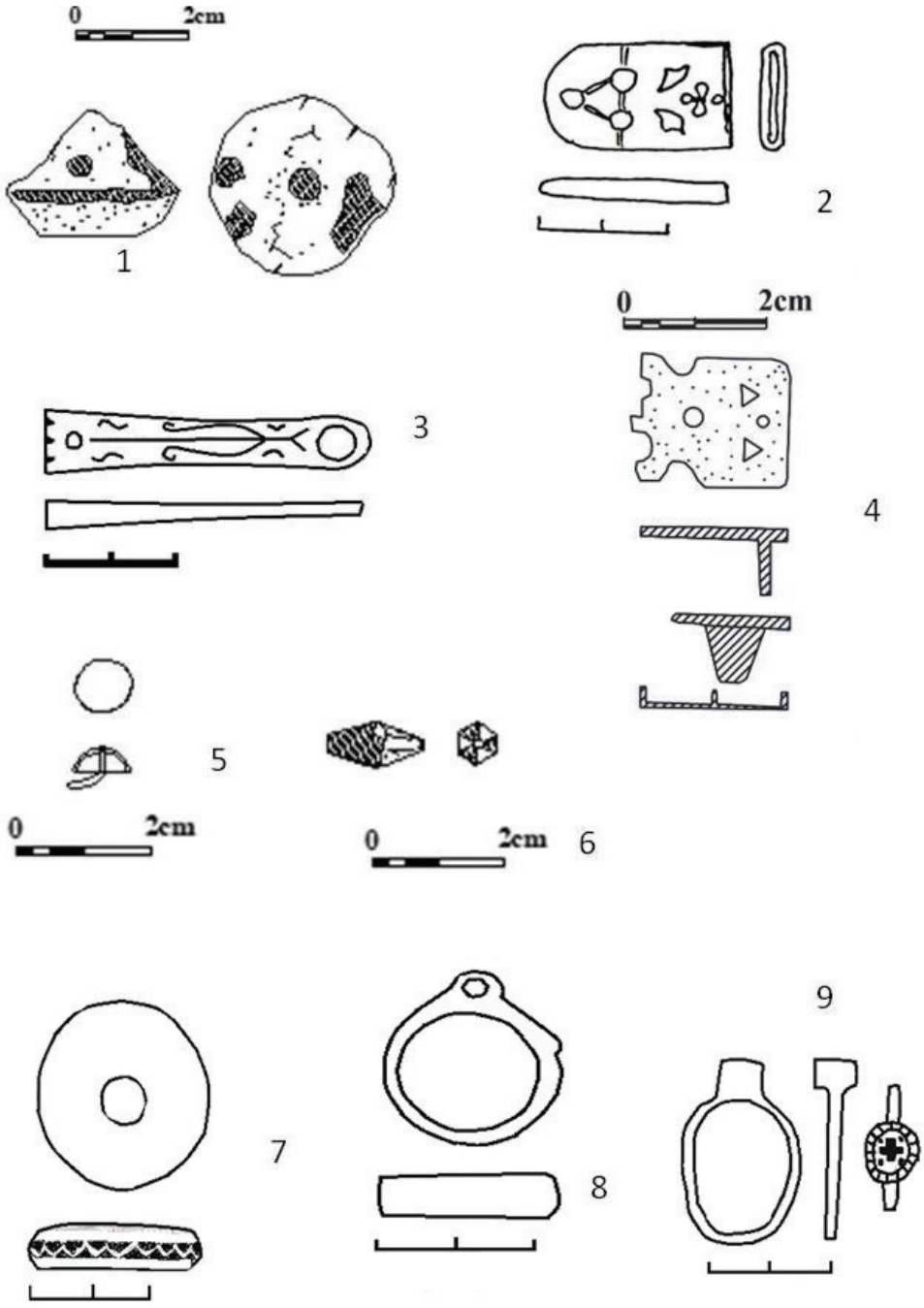


**Fig. 3.** Tools and clothing items discovered in the Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.

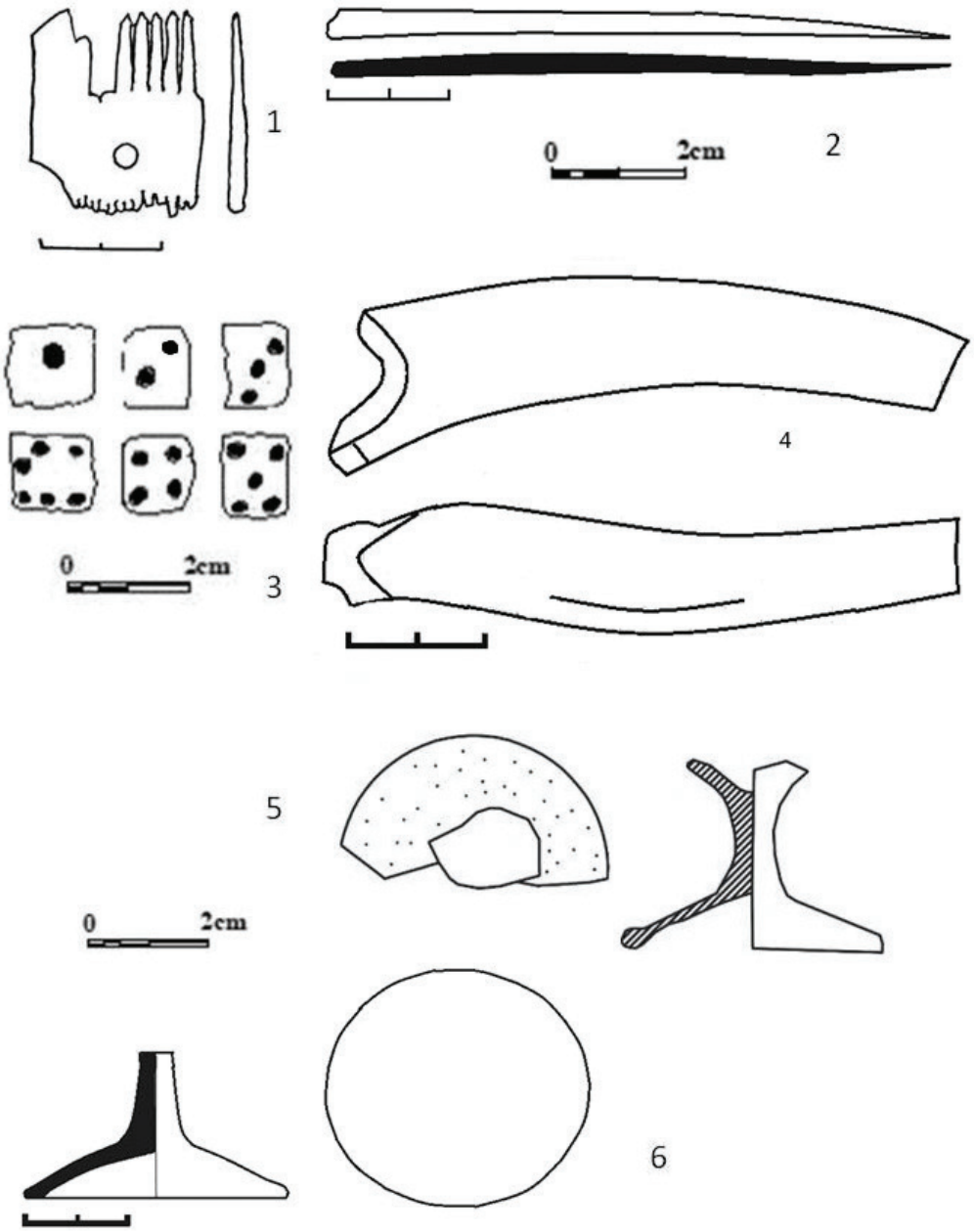


**Fig. 4.** Toilet and domestic implements discovered in the Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.

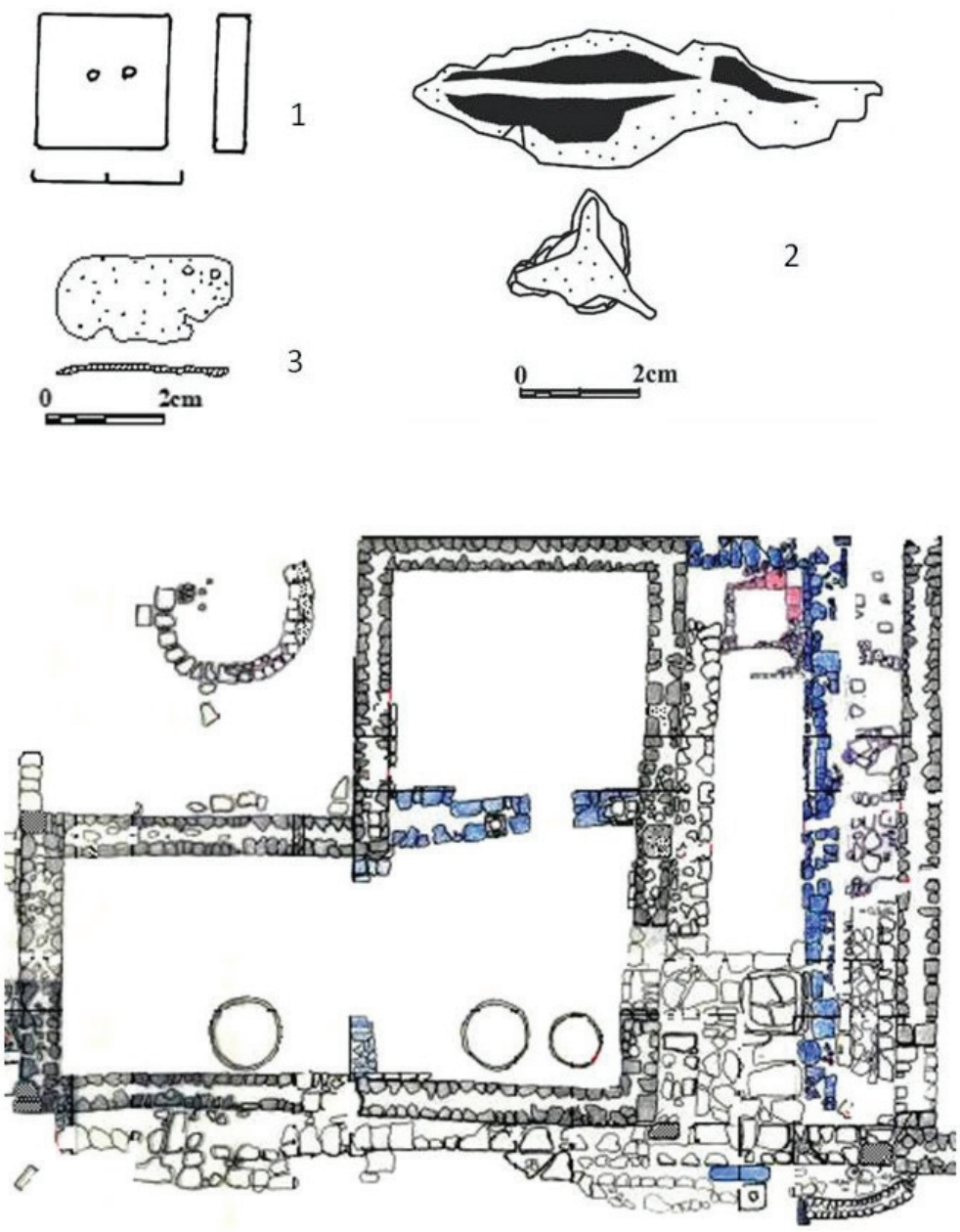


**Fig. 5.** Armamentaria/Plan of the late Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.

**Fig. 6.** Various objects discovered in the Roman building A9 at Tropaeum Traiani.