

LATE CHALCOLITHIC FOUNDATION BURIAL OF A CHILD AT KOSHARNA TELL

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Keywords: *Kosharna tell, Gumelnița culture, child's grave*

Cuvinte cheie: *Kosharna tell, cultura Gumelnița, mormânt de copil*

Abstract: *New discoveries from Kosharna tell archaeological investigations are analysed in this article. In 2009 a child's grave was discovered under a dwelling's floor. C14 analyses and items discovered in the corresponding layer date the whole complex to Late Chalcolithic period, Gumelnița culture.*

Rezumat: *În articol sunt prezentate noi descoperiri făcute în timpul săpăturilor arheologice desfășurate în tell-ul de la Kosharna. În campania din anul 2009, sub podeaua unei locuințe aparținând culturii Gumelnița, a fost descoperit un mormânt de copil. Încadrarea cronologică a complexului s-a făcut pe baza inventarului, dar și a analizelor C14.*

The settlement mound stands 3 km south of Kosharna village, Slivo pole municipality. The tell resembles a truncated cone, with a diameter of 66 m at the base, an average height of 5 m, and an area of 2.7 decares (Fig. 1). It is situated on a South-east facing slope, close to a small spring.

Archaeological investigations, directed by Dimitar Chernakov, began in 2007. To date, four habitation layers, dated in the Late Chalcolithic and Gumelnița culture (4500–4100 B.C.) have been studied through test trenches (Fig. 2). Destructions of several burnt dwellings have been uncovered. According to their short walls, they were north-south oriented. Fixed in the ground beams supported the wattle-and-daub structure. In certain dwellings the floor had several renovations of yellow or green clay, periodically fired¹. In 2009 a sector of a dwelling (*Building 2*) of the third habitation layer was studied (Fig. 3). Oriented in accordance with the rest of the buildings, it is 6 m wide, while the entire length

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¹ ЧЕРНАКОВ, ГИОРОВА 2008, 68–70; ЧЕРНАКОВ, ГИОРОВА 2009, 90–93; ЧЕРНАКОВ, ГИОРОВА 2010, 73–75; ЧЕРНАКОВ 2010, 55–69.

has not yet been established. Its destruction layer includes charcoals, pottery fragments, wall plaster and traces of burnt wooden construction. The eastern wall is marked by an irregular line of ten post holes with outer clay plaster. The western wall is marked by a line of five post holes. The dwelling featured at least two rooms, separated by an internal wall, executed in a similar to the outer wall manner. Three layers are distinguished on the clay floor. In the southern room two complete vessels were found (Fig. 4, 1-3), as well as stones used as ground stones. In the second room there were three vessels, two of which were fragmented during the destruction of the dwelling. One of those (Fig. 4, 4) contained a collective find of 23 flint blades, two fragments of decorative Spondylus artefacts and a river clam shell. Those finds are characteristic to the Late Chalcolithic period². The absolute date for *Building 2* is 5660 ± 40 BP/ 4548-4402 BC*.

A child's skeleton was excavated 25 cm beneath the floor of this dwelling (Fig. 5). The outlines of the grave pit could not be distinguished. The skull was crushed under the pressure of the overlying strata, and the bones of one of the hands were found under it. Animal bones (including an animal scapula) were found dispersed around the skeleton, along with a shell placed at the back of the skull. Small coals were found around the skeleton. Its length is 0.44 m³. Grey dust was spread over the skeleton. A big vessel with barboutine ornament was found near the skeleton on the same level and probably belonging to the same complex (Fig. 5, 2; Fig. 6, 2). Due to the pressure of the upper layers the vessel was in a fragmentary state. A slump and thickened part of the dwelling's floor has been detected above the sector of the skeleton and vessel. This may indicate the fact that the floor was repaired after the burial was performed.

The length of the left tibia and femur point to a neonatus (under 6 months old)**. It seems that the infant was originally lying on its back, with the left leg stretched (the left tibia and fibula were still in anatomic position). The left thigh and the whole right leg were disturbed. The left femur has been turned about 90° to the right and from dorsal to ventral so that the front side is now lying on top. The left upper arm is lying under the baby's chest and the associated forearm partly under the skull. One arm and both hands are missing, as well as the feet and the pelvis. The skull is lying on the right side, the face looking into the direction marked by the yellow arrow in Fig. 5, 1. There were no traces of violence on the human bones.

The child was buried with his head towards West (the place of the Chalcolithic necropolis). Its position (Fig. 6, 1) is right hocker with left arm flexed under the head, right arm probably stretched under the body and both legs flexed (90°) – not typical for other graves discovered in Kosharna necropolis⁴.

² CHOLAKOV, CHUKALEV 2010, 724.

* The C-14 dating of Kosharna tell was obtained in Lyon laboratory, as a part of the program "Balkan 4000"

³ ЧЕРНАКОВ, ГИОПОБА 2010, 74.

** The anthropological analysis was performed by Steve Zäner M.A. Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. I would like to express my special thanks to him.

⁴ CHERNAKOV 2011, 118 – 119.

The discovery of a child's grave in Kosharna tell proves the existence of an intramural burial tradition during the Late Chalcolithic period in the area of Gumelnița culture.

Children intramural burials have been found in other sites: Hârșova I⁵, Bordușani – Popina⁶, Bucșani⁷ – La Pod, Căscioarele⁸, Chitila – Ferma⁹, Junatsite¹⁰, Rouse tell¹¹. No child of this young age was buried in the necropolis belonging to this tell. The only example of such burial is a 5-9 years old child's grave¹². The possible explanation of this situation is that people who died at such a young age were not yet accepted in the prehistoric society and its hierarchy. Therefore they were not perceived as belonging to the community. As a result, prehistoric people believed that the dead body had to be buried under the house, so that the soul of the dead child would further protect its parents and their home. It was also thought that this practice enabled the soul to enter the body of a newly born child.

Grave inventory including animal bones and shells is typical for late prehistoric burials. We don't know if this is the result of some ceremonial act of food consumption during the funeral or a similar one of placing food close to the dead body in the grave. Animal bones placed around and among the human bones were also discovered in other sites: 2 children's graves (under 1 year old) in extramural Late Chalcolithic necropolis Sboryanovo – Demir Baba teke (graves № 1 and № 8)¹³, many graves of Durankulak necropolis, a Neolithic grave at Slatina¹⁴, an intramural burial of a 8-9 years old child in Samovodene¹⁵. Shells in funeral context were also discovered in other child Neolithic graves in Bulgaria: Ezero¹⁶, Malak Preslavets¹⁷, 11 graves of Chalcolithic necropolis of Durnakulak¹⁸.

The use of shells in funerary contexts may be a proof of a prehistoric belief that water symbolised the border between life and death, as river Stix was seen in late classic mythology. Those traces of grey dust spread over the skeleton indicate that a fire was lit up on the buried body, as part of a funerary ritual.

The existence of intramural graves in the settlement belonging to Gumelnița layer of Kosharna tell, as well as in other sites of the same period, indicates that the practice of intramural burials was still in use during the Late Chalcolithic Age. It can be seen as a reminiscence of a Neolithic practice, performed along with the use of a necropolis situated outside the settlement's borders.

⁵ POPOVICI, RIALLAND 1996, 56, Fig. 69.

⁶ MARINESCU-BÎLCU *et alii* 1997, 93-95.

⁷ MARINESCU-BÎLCU *et alii* 1996-1998, 111.

⁸ DUMITRESCU *et alii* 1983, 74.

⁹ BORONEANȚ 1987, 128.

¹⁰ МАЦАНОВА 2000, 121.

¹¹ CHERNAKOV 2010, 159 – 162.

¹² CHERNAKOV 2011, 118, 124, fig. 3.

¹³ МАТЕВА 1997, 26 – 27.

¹⁴ ПЕТКОВ 1961, 67, 73, обр. 9.

¹⁵ БЪЧВАРОВ 2003, 88.

¹⁶ ГЕОРГИЕВ *и кол.* 1979, 46.

¹⁷ БЪЧВАРОВ 2003, 95, 2.37.

¹⁸ TODOROVA 2002, 90, Tabl. 4; 96, Tabl. 26; 96, Tabl. 200; 97, Tabl. 35; 99, tabl. 45; 104, Tabl. 77; 105, Tabl. 84; 106, Tabl. 95; 107, Tabl. 99; 108, Tabl. 98; 110, Tabl. 113.

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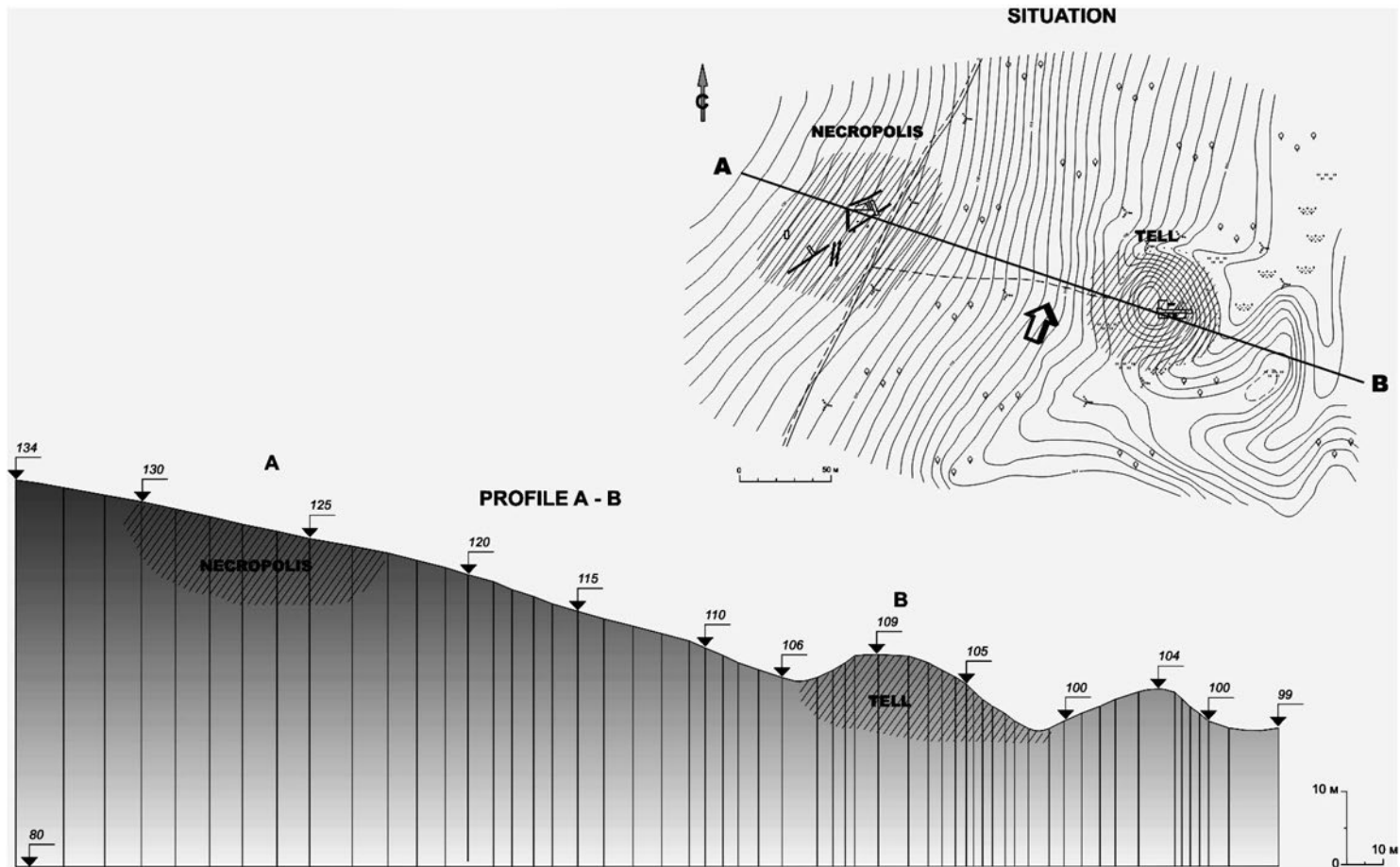


Fig. 1 - Kosharna tell with the necropolis. Profile and topographic map of the sites.

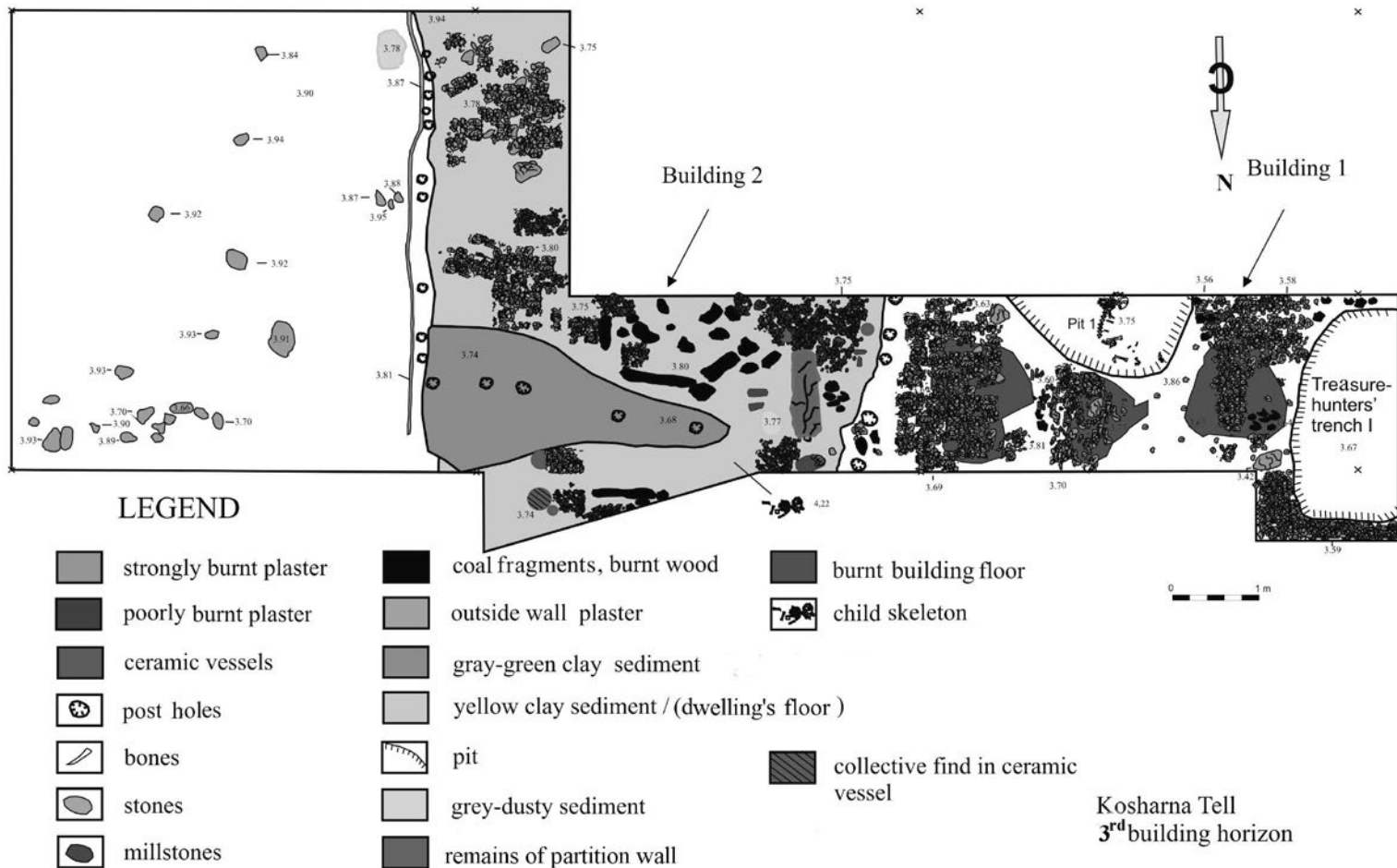


Fig. 3 - Kosharna tell. Plan of III building horizon.

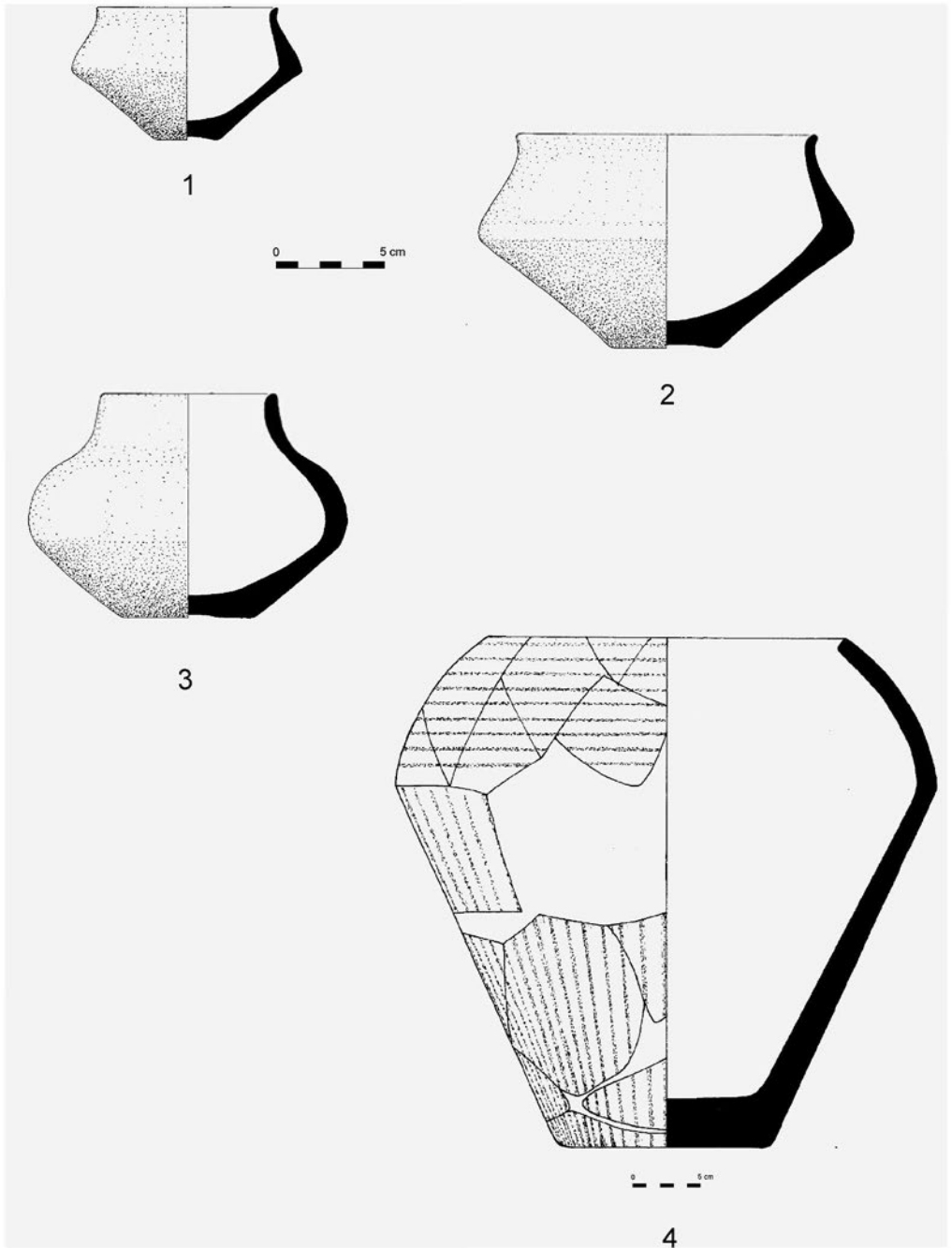


Fig. 4 - Ceramic vessels from the building № 2, III horizon.

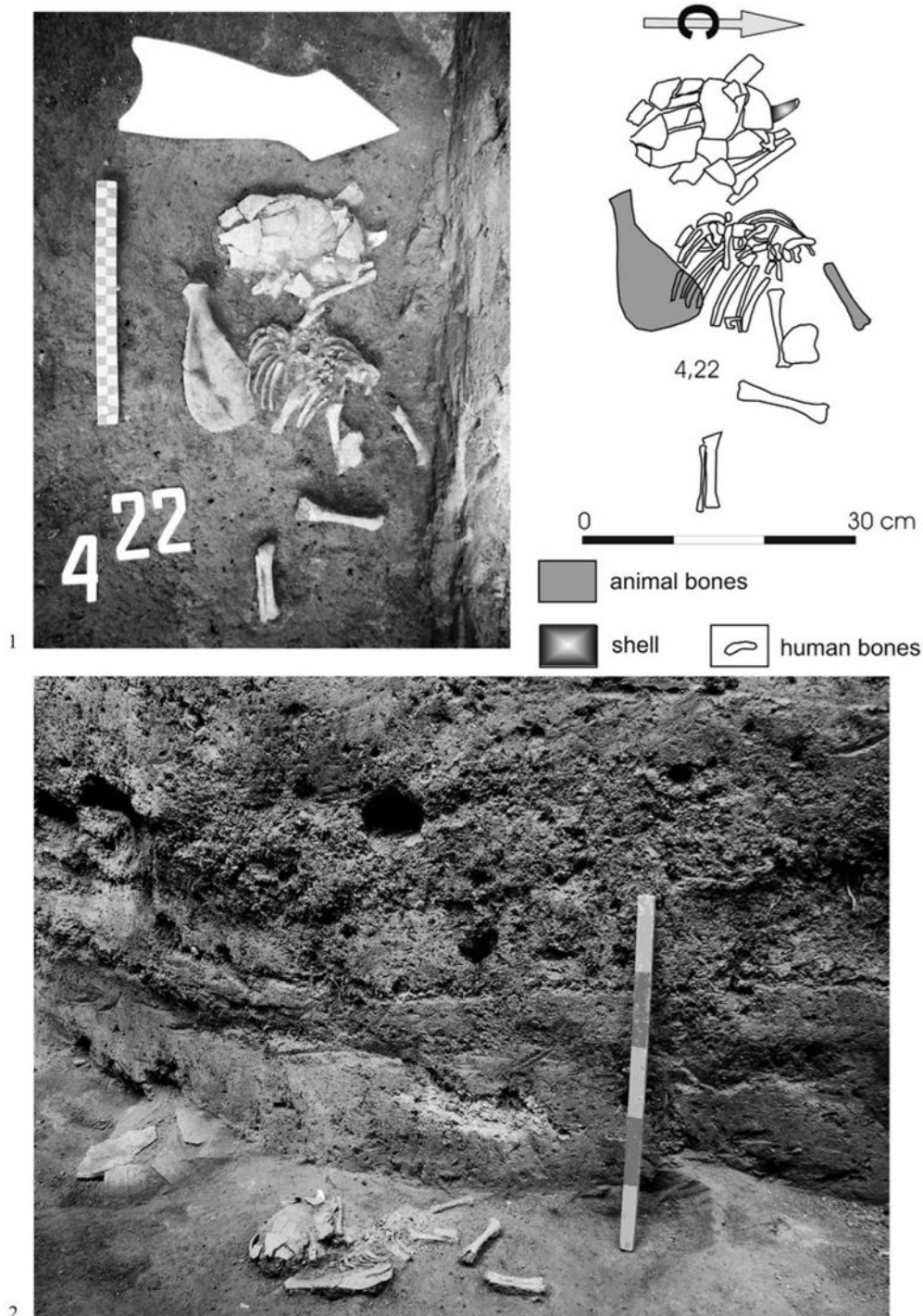


Fig. 5 - Foundation burial of a child under building № 2, 3rd horizon.

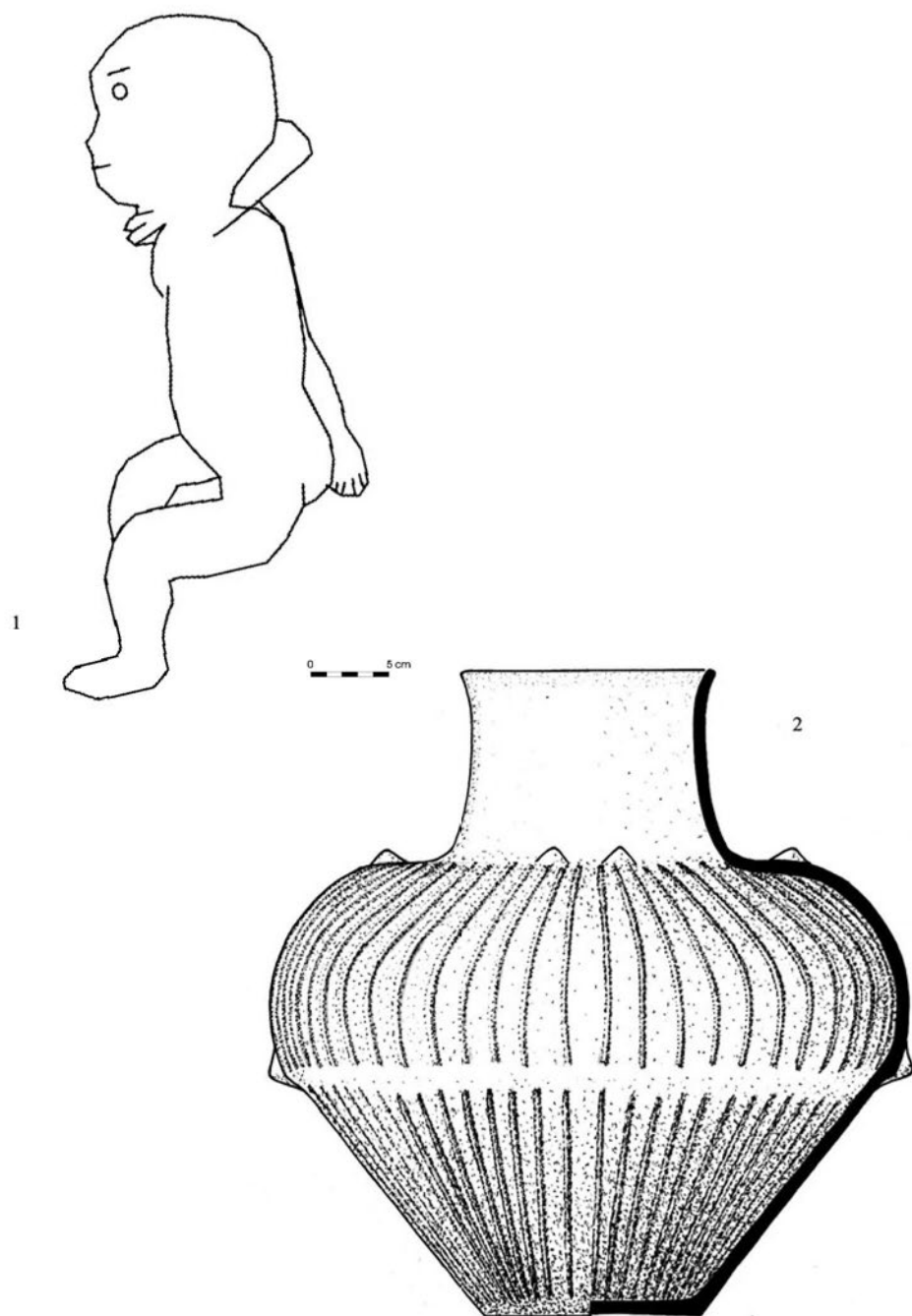


Fig. 6 - 1. Reconstruction of child's position in the grave;
2. Ceramic vessel discovered near the skeleton.