

POTTERY PRODUCTION IN THE LATE ANTIQUE PORT TOWN AT CAPE SVETI ATANAS NEAR BYALA, REGION OF VARNA – BULGARIA (5TH-6TH C. AD)

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Cuvinte-cheie: *Bulgaria, coasta Mării Negre, Byala, oraș antic târziu, producția de ceramică, cuptoare, ceramică de uz casnic, opaițe, matrițe.*

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Rezumat: *Orașul din perioada antică târzie cu nume necunoscut din apropierea localității moderne Byala, regiunea Varna, Bulgaria, a fost înființat la sfârșitul secolului al IV-lea sau la începutul secolului al V-lea și a fost locuit continuu până la începutul secolului al VII-lea p. Chr. Este situat la capul Sveti Atanas, unde săpătura arheologică sistematică, condusă de autori timp de un deceniu, a ajutat la dezvelirea unei mari părți a unui oraș-port fortificat necunoscut până atunci, datând din perioada antică târzie/bizantină timpurie. În timpul săpăturilor în interiorul și în jurul așezării s-au găsit dovezi ale activităților artisanale de diferite tipuri, care s-au desfășurat timp peste două secole, de-a lungul a două perioade de locuire a orașului. Majoritatea activităților se desfășurau în oraș. Unul dintre meșteșugurile atestate pe scară largă a fost producția de diferite tipuri de ceramică de uz casnic și mai puțin de articole de lux, opaițe, capace și materiale de construcții. Cuptoarele și o serie de descoperiri izolate legate de producția de ceramică datează din secolul al V-lea p. Chr. și mai ales din secolul al VI-lea p. Chr.*

Abstract: *The Late Antique town of unknown name near the modern day town of Byala, Region of Varna, Bulgaria was established in the late 4th or in the early 5th c. and was occupied continuously until the beginning of the 7th c. AD. It is situated on Cape Sveti Atanas, where the regular archaeological excavation, conducted by the authors over a decade, helped to reveal a large part of an unknown so far Late Antique/Early Byzantine fortified port town. During the excavation in - and around the town, evidences for*

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artisanal activities of various kind have been found, which continued over two centuries: through the two periods of town occupation. Most of the activities were carried on within the town. One of the widely attested crafts was the production of various forms of household pottery and less of fine ware, oil lamps, lids and construction ceramics. The kilns and a number of isolated finds connected to the pottery production are dated in the 5th c. AD and mostly in the 6th c. AD.

Since 2009, the authors of this study started excavation of an unknown so far by name Late Antique town located on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast near Byala, Region of Varna and the work is still in progress. The ancient town is situated near the modern one, on the high cliff of Cape Sveti Atanas. During the past nine years of research, within the fortified living area there have been excavated tens of houses, some shops and workshops, wineries, a bath and a very interesting Early Christian compound that consists of a church, two baptisteries (of different construction periods) and the residence of the priest or *chora*-episcopo, etc.¹.

There are a number of structures of various function excavated in- and outside the Late Antique town and some of the most interesting ones are the pottery kilns that have been discovered (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Excavated areas of the Late Antique port town at cape Sveti Atanas near Byala until 2017 with location of the discovered pottery kilns.

¹ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013.

There are four kilns for production of household ceramics and one for construction ceramics (pipes), which are located in three different areas in the town (see the description and discussion about the construction of these kilns in the article of V. Yotov and A. Harizanov published in this volume). There was discovered also a large kiln for producing construction ceramics: bricks and roof tiles and possibly for some other specific ceramic items, which is located outside the town, south of Cape Sveti Atanas. It was dated in the 6th century AD and has been already published². Because of that and having in mind its location, it is not included in our study.

Kiln no. 1 (Fig. 2)

Kiln no. 1 is situated immediately next to the north wall of baptistery no. 2. It has an oval horizontal cross-section and an almost rectangular stocking channel facing south. In front of the channel a large irregular-oval stock stock-pit was discovered, which contained various production wastes and other items: a number of after firing discarded pottery fragments; more or less preserved pottery, etc., mixed with charcoals and fragmented remains of previous



Fig. 2. Pottery kiln No 1.

destructions of the kiln vault. In the pit also two fragments of different form oil lamps were found, which however were not produced there. Inside the stocking channel an entirely preserved jug was discovered too. The collection of pottery production wastes included fragments of both larger and middle size household ceramics.

The research of these finds revealed a large list of various in shape and function vessels and other ceramic objects, which have been fired in the kiln. They included the

following types and forms produced in the workshop, which that kiln and maybe kiln no. 2 belonged to and was situated maybe somewhere near them.

I. Table amphorae (Plate I: 1-2)

The amphorae were of at least two different types. Only a few little fragments have been found, which did not allow a sure reconstruction of the original shapes and sizes of these storage vessels.

1. Two of the fragments belong to a globular in shape amphora probably of medium or smaller (?) size which has a cup-like mouth and two short, curved and flattened handles (**Plate I: 1**). The original fabric was most probably brown with a lot of sand inside but now because of over-firing in the kiln, the fragments have a

² YOTOV & HARIZANOV 2017, p. 487-496.

dark grey/black color. There is no data available about the bottom of the vessel. I have found no exact parallel of that amphora in the province of Moesia Secunda but in Iatrus (Krivina), Bulgaria there is a similar type although of smaller size³. Another one similar vessel comes from the province of Scythia, maybe also of smaller size than that from Byala. It is a variation of type II called by A. Opaïț “*lekythos* type jug”, which was supposedly used as container for olive oil⁴. A half-preserved and rather similar vessel was found in Murighiol, Romania, the difference being (as well as by the one in Iatrus) the handles, which are fixed on the shoulders and not on the mouth of the amphora⁵. Therefore we may suppose that the amphorae, which were produced (fired) in pottery kiln no. 1 in Byala were of a locally invented form (?) after a similar Early Byzantine prototype but this suggestion needs more proofs.

2. Five handles (**Plate I: 2**) discovered in the stock pit belonged definitely to medium in size table amphorae, produced by using clay of same color, fabric and consistence. Three of them were of oval cross section and slightly curved, while the other two have almost circular cross section and have twisted ribs. Fragmented table amphorae of medium size and ring-shaped base with similar or almost same handles have been attested in some sites in the Province of Scythia like Tomis (Constanța), Toprachioi etc. in Romania⁶. It seems that these characteristic vessels were used for decanting wine from transport amphorae and served as table ones during eating.

II. Jugs (Plate I: 3-4)

Four fragments of upper sections (**Plate I: 3**) and one entirely preserved jug (**Plate I: 4**) were discovered during excavation of kiln no. 1.

The well preserved one was discovered in the debris of the combustion channel of the kiln. It has a slightly flattened globular body, almost flat bottom, short cylindrical neck and a cylindrical mouth with rounded rim and has a rib beneath it. The handle is flat, ribbed and fixed under the mouth and on the shoulders. It is made of fine fabric of orange-red clay with very small inclusions of sand in it. In the stock pit, among the wastes two more fragments of similar jugs were found, which have now dark-gray color of the fabric due to over firing in the kiln. One of them has a mouth of same form like the jug and the other three present part of the body with handle and a small section of the mouth.

The type is well known in Moesia Secunda and Scythia and it has been suggested that it derived from bronze and glass vessel forms. Finds of such jugs in Moesia Secunda and Thracia are described as Type I, variation 1⁷. Very similar in shape jugs are known from Peychinovo, Region of Ruse⁸ and in the Late

³ BÖTTGER 1982, p. 56, no. 388, pl. 31.

⁴ OPAIȚ 2004, p. 70.

⁵ OPAIȚ 2004, p. 70, type II, pl. 48/ 8.

⁶ OPAIȚ 2004, 91, pl. 4/ 1-4.

⁷ KUZMANOV 1985, p. 28 and bibliography.

⁸ KUZMANOV, 1985, p. 29, pl. 17, K-26.

Antique town Iatrus (Krivina), Region of Ruse, both in Moesia Secunda⁹. In Scythia they belong to the group of jugs type II-B, which however have usually a ring-base¹⁰, the best parallel being one vessel from Histria¹¹.

III. Cooking pots (Plate II-III)

The largest amount of discarded pottery, which was produced somewhere near to kiln no 1 and fired inside it, belongs to cooking pots. All of them were found in the stoke pit, which was situated in front (south) of the kiln. Among them there are two-handled pots and possibly one-handled ones too. We were able to reconstruct entirely or to a great extent the forms of certain cooking pots using the discovered fragments of some of these vessels while most of the other finds are a number of fragments of both finished vessels, which were broken for some reasons as well as pottery wastes.

1. Two handled cooking pots

They have a globular body sometimes decorated by shallow horizontal ribs and with either flat or rounded bottom. The mouth is wide, with rounded or straight shaped rim, having inside a rib for fixing the lid. The handles are flat, rounded outside and usually ribbed but there are also plain ones. They are fixed either on, or right under the rim of the pot. The fabric is either of brick-red or gray color with a lot of sand (silicate) inside, which helped to prevent the leaking of liquid food during the cooking process. Two sizes can be distinguished: one larger and one smaller. If there was a one-handled variation of these pots (which is very possible but we have no real proof about that) they have been made with the same clay and in the same form.

These cooking pots are very typical for the Late Antique/Early Byzantine period on the Balkans and namely in Moesia Secunda, Thracia and Scythia provinces of the empire. In Moesia Secunda and Thrace they have been described as Type II¹² while the one-handled pots belong to Type I¹³. In Scythia similar cooking pots Type III¹⁴ and some of them but of smaller size than those from Byala and having flattened globular body have been described as casseroles Type VII¹⁵.

2. Cooking pot without handles

Only one fragment of such a pot has been found in the waste containing pit in front of Kiln no. 1. Nevertheless it gives that such type of pots was in the list of the local producer who used that kiln. The fragment shows a larger in size pot

⁹ BÖTTGER 1982, p. 124, pl. 29, no. 364.

¹⁰ OPAITJ 2004, p. 60.

¹¹ OPAITJ 2004, p. 60, pl. 46/ 9.

¹² KUZMANOV 1984, p. 50-51, pl. 30, Г-33-40; 44.

¹³ KUZMANOV 1984, p. 47-50, pl. 29, Г-21; 26; 29

¹⁴ OPAITJ 2004, p. 45-46, pl. 37/4-7.

¹⁵ OPAITJ 2004, p. 56.

with probably globular body with ribbed decoration on the lower side of the shoulders and extended, almost flat rim (**Plate IV: 2**). The fabric is finer than the previous one, orange-red in color and also with sand inside. In Moesia Secunda they have been described as pots of Type V¹⁶. Very similar and entirely preserved ones have been discovered in Iatrus (Krivina). There they have been listed by B. Böttger as Type V of the pottery discovered during excavation of that site¹⁷.

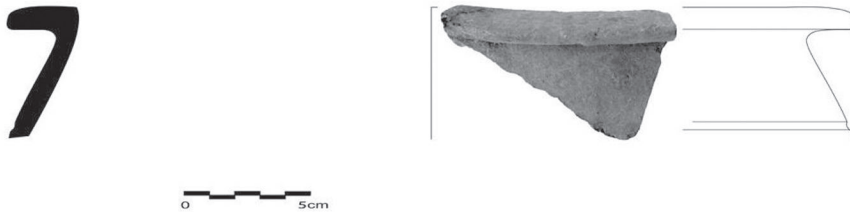


Fig. 3. Fragment of a discarded cooking pot without handles.

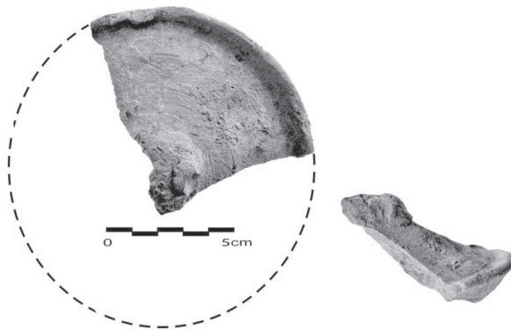


Fig. 4. Ceramic lid discarded after firing process discovered in the stock pit next to the kiln

The form of this pot resembles also the cooking pot found in Tomis, in Scythia, but its fabric is black with white mica and fine quartz. It has been supposed that it was an import to the ancient city and has to be dated maybe in the 4th c. AD¹⁸, which is too early for the pot from the site near Byala.

If this is really so, the vessel in discussion may be considered as a local version of imported pots, which have reached the market of the Late Antique town located on Cape Sveti Atanas. On the other hand, several

similar cooking pots discovered in the late Antique town near Iatrus/Krivina¹⁹ is a good indication about a larger local production of that type of cooking vessels in Moesia Secunda.

IV. Lids (Fig. 4)

In the stock pit where the waste production and other pieces out of use were stored, a fragmented ceramic lid was found damaged during the firing process. It is relatively well made and has a conical shape with uplifted rounded edge and a

¹⁶ KUZMANOV 1984, p. 54-55, pl. 31, Г-52.

¹⁷ BÖTTGER 1982, p. 67, pl. 47, nos. 496-497.

¹⁸ OPAIŢ 2004, p. 47, type VII.

¹⁹ BÖTTGER 1982, p. 67.

little irregular bulb-like handle on top. The clay it was made of was buff and most probably light brick-red colored, which due to over-firing became greyish. Only about one third of the lid survived with a diameter of 5.2 cm and maximum thickness of 0.5 – 0.6 cm.

The size of the lid helps to assume that it was designed and used to cover cooking pots (and maybe table ones too) of smaller size. In some of the excavated houses of the Late Antique town on Cape Sveti Atanas many fragments of similar in size pots have been discovered like the entirely preserved one, in which seven gold coins of Justinian I (527-565) and Justin II (565-574) were deposited²⁰.

V. Vessels for eating

Among the pottery wastes discovered in the stock pit of kiln No 1 there were discovered also a few fragments, which belong to various forms of vessels used in everyday life in the town for eating.

1. Flattened, almost spherical bowl (Plate IV: 1)

The only fragment found in the stock pit of kiln no. 1 represents a cup of flattened cylindrical body with an extended horizontal and flat rim, which most probably had a flat bottom. The fabric is now dark grey-black but maybe originally it was brown or dark brown and it has some sand inclusions. In Scythia Minor similar in shape vessels belong to the distinguished type II of the so-called local fine wares with fine dull brown color, which have a rather large mouth: between 18 and 26 cm²¹.

The fragmented bowl from kiln no. 1 is evidence for the production of similar in shape bowls in this workshop here too but maybe in limited series, although in many houses of the town a number of similar in size and shape bowls have been found as well as larger ones (see down here). They must have been produced in other, still not discovered pottery workshops.

2. Deep hemispherical bowls (Plate IV: 2-3)

Another one single fragment of a deeper bowl represents a hemispherical body with slightly extended rounded rim and two grooves underneath it represent another type of vessels used for eating (**Plate IV: 2**). The fabric is crude of brick-red color and has some inclusions of fine sand inside. The bowls of that shape were large (maybe of about 0.20 m in diameter) and have had obviously a flat bottom. They resemble very much (except of the groove under the rim) the bowls of Type II in Moesia Secunda, which have been produced in a long period: from late 4th c. AD up to early 7th c.²² In Scythia similar ceramic vessels described as deep dishes of Type I have been found²³.

²⁰ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 74.

²¹ OPAIȚ 2004, p. 72, type II.

²² KUZMANOV 1984, p. 40-41, pl. 24/II-29; pl. 28.

²³ OPAIȚ 2004, p. 73, type I.

There is another fragment of a deep bowl discovered in the stock pit, which was also made in kiln no. 1 as we can judge by the fact that it was over-fired. It has a hemispherical body with a flat rim turned inwards and there are two grooves outside under the rim (**Plate IV: 3**). We were not able to find an exact parallel to that bowl and this is the reason to suppose (with a big caution!) that this form was invented by a local potter as far as in the town there have been discovered more fragments of similar in shape bowls.

V. Storage vessels (*pithoi*) of little or medium size

In the stock pit of kiln no. 1, there have been discovered several fragments of storage vessels (*pithoi*). They belong to little or close to medium size vessels. Most of the fragments are from discarded jars (due to over-firing) but there is also one larger fragment of a finished one as well.

Storage vessel (*pithos*) of medium size (Plate IV: 4)

It has probably a pear-shaped body (0.06 to 0.07 cm thick in the survived fragment) with a curved-out and lowered rim. The fabric of the jar is brick-red, dull, with a lot of sand and even with some very little round stones inside. The five discarded after firing fragments discovered in the stock-pit belong to the upper and middle part of the container. They show a pear-shaped body (?) with a decoration of "pinched" band in relief applied around it about its middle or a bit higher. There is no data available about the bottom of the *pithos*. Judging by the dimensions of the preserved fragments and having in mind the diameter of the kiln where these jars were fired, one may suppose that the height of that container jar did not exceed 0.80-0.90 m and it must have had a diameter of about 0.60-0.70 m. This fact approves the possibility that the containers produced in kiln no. 1 were of relatively little, or close to medium size.

There is no exact published parallel to the *pithoi* from the site in Byala. All published storage jars of two types of discovered in Iatrus are much larger and they have usually an extended, horizontal and flat above rim²⁴. The container jars from Scythia (Type I) are also quite large and have a distinguished horizontal and flat on top rim²⁵.

So far, nowhere else in both mentioned above Late Roman provinces there have been found any real evidence about local production of *pithoi* despite that it seems obvious because of the number of finds of that type for the 4th-6th c. AD all around the region. That is why the finds from Kiln no. 1 must be acknowledged as an important addition to the list of pottery types produced in Moesia Secunda. The unusual shape of the rim speaks in favor of a locally invented type, which was made probably by a potter who at certain later period, in the 6th c. AD lived and worked in the Late Antique town on Cape Sveti Atanas. We have to admit, that he was not the only producer of similar ware, because also fragments of other

²⁴ BÖTTGER 1982, p. 69-70, pl. 50.

²⁵ OPAIT 2004, p. 2-3; see also the discussion there.

types of medium-size and mostly larger storage jars have been found. The fact that during the continuous excavation of the site conducted by the authors during the last nine years over one hundred entirely or partially preserved large *pithoi* of various sizes and much less smaller ones have been discovered is an important evidence about the mass production of such terracotta storage jars in the town and in its vicinity. The larger ones were used as containers for grain (in two of them charcoaled oat was found), water and mostly for wine. The reason to believe the latter suggestion about the function of these containers is because in the ancient town four large wineries²⁶ have been discovered so far and there are traces of at least two more, which are still not excavated.

VII. Vessel support used during firing process (Fig. 5)

In the debris filling the stock pit of kiln no. 1, also an important evidence for the way some of the pots were fired in that kiln was discovered. This is a fragment of about one third of a solid made ceramic support in circular shape. Its wall has an elongated triangular form with rounded upper edge and flat, slightly extended inwards base. The support is made of buff clay with many inclusions of sand and very small stones and has now dark grey color. The general shape and size of the piece as well as the estimated diameter of about 15-18 cm of that special device suggests that it was used as support for medium in size amphorae with rounded bottom. Generally thinking, this support may have been used for the same purpose, for similar in size table amphorae with little flat or ring base (see above I) or larger cooking pots with rounded or smaller flat bottoms (see above in **Plate II: 1-2**). There is no doubt that this support was made by the same potter, who has used kiln no. 1 for firing some vessels of his diverse production (maybe amphorae?).

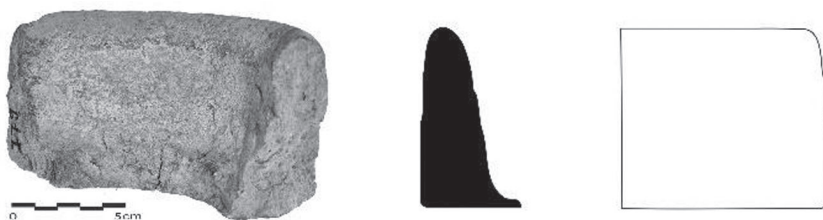


Fig. 5. Fragment of a clay support used in the firing process of kiln No 1.

In ancient times, similar rings have been often used for setting over them of freshly produced pots for a while, in order to dry before they were deposited in the upper camera of a kiln for firing them. A ceramic ring of the same type but of slightly smaller dimensions was discovered next to the pottery kiln in a ceramic workshop. It was excavated in the ancient city of Marcianopolis (nowaday Devnya, Region of Varna, Bulgaria). The workshop produced both household- and fine table ware of various types as well as ceramic lamps. It is dated to the

²⁶ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 41-44.

late 4th – early 5th c. AD and along with a kiln for brocks and roof tiles evidenced, about a wide range of local ceramic production in the city during Late Antique period – mostly 4th-5th c. AD but also earlier and later²⁷. The ring that was discovered in Devnya was used during preparation of some pots for firing, after they were covered by green glaze. This fact has been proved by drops of green glaze found on the ring as well as by fragments of discarded green-glazed vessels found in the vicinity of the kiln²⁸.

In the Late Antique town on Cape Sveti Atanas, several other ring-shaped supports for ceramic pots with slightly different forms of their walls have been found too. They came to light in 6th c. AD houses ruined by fire mostly in the early 7th century (see later in this article: *Isolated finds*, **Fig. 10: a-c**).

VIII. Lamps (Figs. 6-7)

In the stock pit and in the stocking channel of the kiln, two fragments of Late Antique terracotta lamps were also found. One of them (**Fig. 6**) presents the rare side of an obvious local imitation of lamps produced in Asia Minor during the 5th-7th c. AD, which are well known in the provinces of Moesia Secunda and Scythia²⁹, no. 128 with extended bibliography). The upper part of a mold for producing similar lamps was found in Negovantsi village, Region of Vratsa, Bulgaria, now in the collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia³⁰.



Fig. 6-7. Fragmented lamps used by the potter, discovered in the stock pit.

The other lamp find is the lower part of the body of a small lamp of a type, which under circumstances could not be distinguished (**Fig. 7**) and thus it can offer no information about its dating. However, it seems that these single pieces have found their way to the places they were discovered by chance and were not produced in the kiln. Most probably, they were used by the potter during his work at night and after they were broken, the fragments were thrown away.

²⁷ MINCHEV & GEORGIEV 1991, p. 223-227, figs. 1-2.

²⁸ MINCHEV & GEORGIEV 1991, p. 225-226, figs. 35-37.

²⁹ KUZMANOV 1992, p. 41, no. 299 and bibliography; ICONOMU 1967, p. 25-26, type XXVIII, figs. 49-50 (dated to the 6th c. AD); TOPOLEANU 2012, p. 213-214.

³⁰ KUZMANOV 1992, p. 56, no. 451.

Therefore they should not to be considered as finds directly connected to the kiln production.

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Let us discuss in short the dating of kiln no. 1. Most, if not all pottery types found in the stock pit, are forms which have been produced for a long time, the starting point being maybe the late 4th – early 5th c. AD, while the final period is ca. late 6th – early 7th c. AD. That is why very important for the study is the archaeological situation between the kiln and the building next to it, where baptisteries nos 2-3 are situated. It has been established that the town basilica situated on top of the cape was erected originally in the late 4th or very early 5th c. AD and then it has a baptistery located in the narthex. The church (as well as the town) was destroyed most probably during the invasion of the Huns in AD 446/7. The basilica was re-erected in the same general layout sometime in the second half of the 5th c. AD³¹. Then, the old partially destroyed baptistery was covered by a new floor tiling and a chapel was designed over its original place. At the same time, for the purpose north of the church, a new baptistery building was erected, where until the early 7th c., a baptismal font was located³². It is important to underline that the stock pit of kiln no. 1 was dug-out immediately next to the north wall of the building, which during the discovery was still blacked with smoke. This is an indication that the kiln was in function until the end of the building and respectively the town: i. e. in the 6th – very early 7th c. AD.

Kiln no. 2 (Fig. 8)

It is situated about 3 m south-west of kiln no. 1 and it is very little. It has an almost rectangular form and was discovered heavily destroyed and seems to have functioned for a very short time. No pottery fragments were found in or around the kiln, which makes its dating very problematic. The observation that in its construction deformed and fragmented ceramic bars like the ones used in kiln no. 1 were re-used lead to the conclusion, that kiln no. 2 was constructed after the first one was built and has already functioned for a certain period (for details on the construction of both kilns see the article of Yotov & Harizanov published in this volume).



Fig. 8. Kiln No 2.

³¹ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 68; YOTOV & MINCEV 2015, p. 123.

³² YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 59-65.

The little dimensions of kiln no. 2 is an indication that it served maybe for producing only small and/or some special pottery items like for instance melting pots for color metals or similar in size ones. Several little pots of that type and other traces of metalwork have been discovered in the town on cape Sveti Atanas in buildings, which served as workshops. They all belong to its second phase of existing of town existence: i. e ca. the second half of the 5th c. AD – early 7th c. and most of them could be dated to the 6th c. AD³³. In the kiln some other smaller ceramic objects like little fishnet weights, spinning whorls used for making the wool strings and other ones may have been produced too.

Kilns nos 3-4 (Fig. 9)

They must be described and discussed together because kiln no. 3 overlapped kiln no. 4 and they obviously served for producing the same type of pottery items. Both kilns were discovered near the presumable center of the Late Antique town, very close to the excavated public bath and next to a house with a little private bath constructed inside it³⁴.



Fig. 9. Kilns Nos. 3-4.

Both kilns have a rectangular plan of the combustion camera (Fig. 9) and probably there was a rectangular stocking channel from south (for details of the kilns' constructions see the article of V. Yotov & A. Harizanov in this volume). In the debris of the kilns many fragments of deformed during the firing process terracotta pipes were discovered including one more or less well preserved (Plate V). Pipes like these were used frequently in both phases of the town occupation. They served for various purposes: for constructing of water conduits (pipelines), canalization, etc. Very close to the place where both kilns are located, in north-south direction runs a water pipeline made of pipes of similar size³⁵. Besides, there must have been a water supply system, through which water

³³ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 47, fig. 31.

³⁴ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 30-37, fig. 31-33.

³⁵ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 28-29, fig. 17.

was brought to the Late Antique public bath situated near the kilns as well as to the little private one, discovered in a house next to it. Both belong to the first phase of the town occupation (i.e. – to the late 4th/ early 5th – mid-5th c. AD) and after their destruction, which happened most probably during the invasion of the Huns in mid-5th c. AD, they were never reconstructed again. This fact gives additional evidence about the dating of kilns nos 3-4 in the first half of 5th c. AD.

In these two, and/or in similar kilns also the tubes used for the hypocaust system of the public bath and for the private one, which belong to the same period, may have been produced (fired)³⁶.

The house, next to which both kilns were located was constructed during the second phase of the town occupation (in the second half of the 5th – or in the early 6th c. AD) and actually it partially overlaid the earlier one (no. 3), which as well as no. 4 by that time were obviously out of use. Therefore, this situation confirmed the dating of kilns nos 3 and 4 in the first half of 5th c. AD. Their discovery enlarged the list of terracotta items produced in the Late Antique town near Byala with these specific ceramic items.

Kiln no. 5 (Fig. 10)

The kiln was discovered south of the House of the priest and close to the nowadays end of the cape. It was dug out rather deep in the ground and has an oval shape of the compulsion camera, which is well preserved (for details of the



kiln construction and its size see the article of V. Yotov and A. Harizanov in this volume). It was built next to a stone foundation of a building and underneath the foundation of another – large one, which was constructed in the second half of the 6th c. AD. This gives an idea about an earlier in time dating of that kiln.

Fig. 10. Kiln No 5.

In the debris inside in the kiln almost half of one deformed during the firing process plate was found. It is made of relatively fine brick-red clay and it seems that originally it was covered partially by very poor red slip, of which only traces are available now. The dish has a semi-conical, rather deep body, with prominent carination of the vertically raised rim, which is almost not elevated and a ring-shaped base (**Plate VI: 1**). Most probably,

³⁶ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 30-37, fig. 18, 21.

this vessel belongs to a series, which was produced in the kiln sometime in the second half of the 5th or the first half of the 6th c. AD (the first period being more possible).

It seems that this dish is a local imitation of LRC pottery of Hayes form 3, which was originally produced in Asia Minor and was a rather popular import in Moesia Secunda and Scythia between ca. 450-600 AD³⁷.

In the compulsion camera thirty eight ceramic fishnet weights of rather unusual shape were discovered. They are irregular, often oval in cross section and almost rectangular in shape, with rounded ends, having two holes close to each end. Their size vary too: they are between 8 and 10 cm long and 2-2.4 cm wide (**Plate VI: 2**). There are no other fishnet weights of that type found in the town at cape Sveti Atanas so far, nor have we come across similar published objects in Bulgaria and beyond. Nevertheless, their form and size suggest that they belong to a fishnet. It was obviously of smaller size and was used maybe for fishing in rivers or at the sea shore but not in deep sea.

There is no doubt that the fishing net weights were not produced in that kiln, because they are too small and may fall through the holes of the firing camera down to the compulsion one. Besides, the way they were found, in an almost compact group, helps to assume that these weights belonged once to a fishing net, which was out of use, and thrown down by the owner in the already abandoned and partially ruined pottery kiln. On the other hand, such small objects may well have been produced in little kilns like the described kiln no. 2, discussed in this article before.

It was already mentioned, that based on the circumstances of the discovery of kiln no. 5, it must have functioned in the period between the second half/late 5th and the 6th c. AD. It served for producing fine ceramics and maybe in the same time also for household pottery (?). If this was the case, the owner of the kiln has responded to the diverse needs of local citizens and maybe of people who lived in the vicinity and had different possibilities to pay for the pottery, which he used to produce.

Isolated finds related to pottery production in the town

Apart from the discussed pottery kilns, during the last ten years of regular excavation in the Late Antique port town at cape Sveti Atanas, several ceramic items have been discovered, which have direct connection to the local pottery production. Some of them were found out of a secure context but others were discovered in houses, well dated by coins and other finds.

1. Ceramic mold (lower part) for making large lamps (Fig. 11)

It was found in building no. 21 and is made of not very fine clay with small sand inclusions, which due to the strong fire it was in, has now a dark grey-black

³⁷ MINCHEV 1983a, p. 194-201; see also lately OPAIT 2004, p. 76, with extended bibliography.

color. The mold has a pear-shaped body with narrowing and extended front side. A small part of its rear side is missing but now it is restored. The mold was used for producing larger in size pear-shaped ceramic oil lamps, which had an elongated oval base, elevated decorated or sculptured handle and flat disc with decoration of various geometric patterns in relief. During the 6th c. AD they were very popular in Moesia Secunda and Scythia and especially their larger version is typical for the second half of that century and the very beginning of the 7th c. AD³⁸.



Fig. 11. Lower half of a mold for making oil lamps (restored).

Two lower parts of molds similar in shape and size made of brown and beige clay (one of them fragmented) have been discovered along with a number of other upper parts of molds used for producing the same type of ceramic lamps and several other tools of a potter. They were all deposited in a tower of the Late Antique fortified town Cranea, now Kranevo, Region of Dobrich, Bulgaria³⁹. The town was devastated, set on fire and ruined during one of the last Avars and Slavs ride in the Balkan that took place at the end of the 6th c. AD. All found molds belonged to a ceramic workshop specialized in lamp production,

which was located maybe not far from the place where that deposited "treasure" of a local potter was discovered. The time when the molds and the tools were deposited shows clearly that the workshop in Cranea has functioned in the last decades of the 6th c. AD. This must be also the dating of the mold from the Late Antique town near Byala but it may have been in use some time later: up to the beginning of the 7th century. An indication about that is the fact, that the mold was discovered in a house ruined by fire in the early 7th century but surely before AD 610-615/616, which is the date of issue of the last coins discovered in the town⁴⁰.

2. Circular ceramic stands for pots (Fig. 12)

In a house ruined also by fire by the end of occupation of the Late Antique town at cape Sveti Atanas (i. e. in the first one and a half decade of the 7th c. AD), about half of a solid ceramic ring was discovered. It is made of relatively fine orange-beige clay. The ring has a bi-conical shape with flat rim and base. It is decorated by a relief band about its middle and a shallow groove under the rim.

In another house, which was abandoned in a hurry and later devastated and set on fire at the same time, two more similar rings were found (also fragmented),

³⁸ KUZMANOV 1982, тип XXXVIII, nos. 315-319; ICONOMU 1967, p.147-153, type XXXIII, nos. 764-805, etc.

³⁹ TONCHEVA 1953, p. 86-87, fig. 129-130.

⁴⁰ YOTOV & MINCHEV 2013, p. 76, coin time plate 2.

along with plenty of various pottery (including a few imported LRC ones), amphorae and *pithoi*.

The second ceramic ring is made of fine beige-orange clay and has a quasi-conical form with thin rounded rim and a flat base. Only about one third of the ring was found but it is now reconstructed.

The third ceramic ring is made of clay similar as consistence and color, but has a bi-conical form with rounded rim and flat base. Only about a quarter of it was discovered (now also reconstructed).

The heights of these ring supports vary between 6.7 and 9.1 cm, but maybe there were some larger ones too. We suppose that the three rings were produced

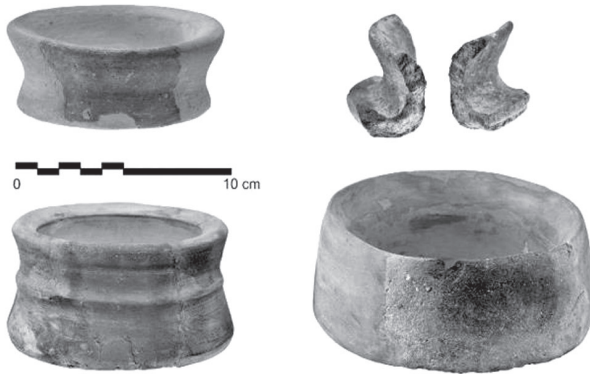


Fig. 12. Ceramic supports for amphorae and other pots.

with the intention to be used in a pottery workshop, as the one discovered in kiln no. 1. Of course, it should not be excluded that these particular ones have been used in the houses they were found in, as normal stands for amphorae or other household pottery. We must underline though, that these containers or pots must have been of middle size and with rounded bottom. These rings are also suitable as supports for various other vessels, which

were regularly used either in the kitchen or in the household in general as well as by some craftsmen during work. This is the reason to believe that they and similar ring shaped supports have been produced mostly in local ceramic workshops.

In the town, in and outside other houses several fragments of similar clay supports of various sizes have been found. However, they are too small and do not allow the reconstruction of their original forms (see an example on **Fig. 12** the right upper corner). There is no doubt that they have all served the same purposes as the ones described here and that on **Fig. 5**: for firing vessels in kilns and for domestic needs.

3. Ceramic lid for cooking pots (Fig. 13)

In another house of the Late Antique town a ceramic lid of medium size was discovered. It is made of buff brown clay (now dark gray due to over-firing in the kiln) and has a conical form with protruding handle on top. The lid was deformed a little during the process of firing but nevertheless, the fact that it was found in a house means that it was used in the household. The lid was discovered in the last layer of occupation of the town devastated by fire (late 6th – early 7th c. AD), which means that it was produced sometime in the late 6th c. AD.



Fig. 13. Ceramic lid for cooking pots.

produced in that ancient city too⁴². In Istanbul (Constantinople), there is data about the use of similar conical ceramic lids in the early 7th century too⁴³. These facts support the dating of the ceramic lid from the ancient town near Byala suggested by the present authors.

4. Mold for lids with decoration in relief (Fig. 14)

In a house located in the eastern part of the town near Byala, there a fragmented mold for producing ceramic lids with decoration in relief on its top side was discovered. It is made of light brown buff clay mixed with a lot of straw and some sand inclusions inside. The mold has a circular form but only about one third has survived. The actual size of the fragment is: 11.4 cm long and 8.1 wide,

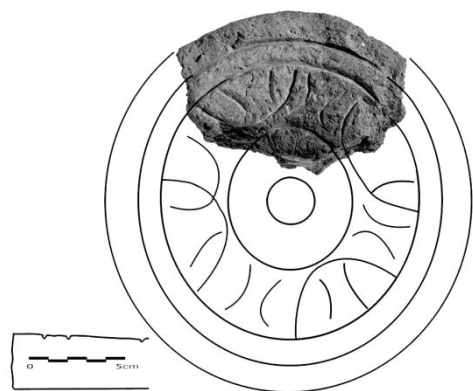


Fig. 14. Ceramic mold for making lids with relief decoration (fragment with reconstruction by drawing).

with a reconstructed original diameter of about 18 cm. The outer surface of this rare piece is roughly flattened, while the inner one is convex and surrounded by a not very high and rectangular in cross section edge. Inside the mold, there is a shallow incised decoration made of mostly intersecting, irregular arch-shaped and irregular in size and position lines, which are surrounded by a circle. Actually, the general design is rather crude and not very attractive. On the inner surface of the mold, there is a large black flake, which appeared obviously due to the fire in which the house was burnt to ashes. The dark flake covers also the broken edge of the mold, which

⁴¹ DONCHEVA 1982, p. 105; 111, nos. 10-14, pl. V/1-5.

⁴² MINCHEV 1983b, p. 11, no. 11, pl. III/2; VI/1.

⁴³ HAYES 1968, p. 214, no. 106, pl. 6.

means that during the fire it was already fragmented and therefore out of use. Nevertheless it is clear, that for a certain time this mold was used for the purpose it was designed and made: to produce a specific type of lids, maybe by the owner of the house (?).

Molds of that shape were used in the Late Antique period for forming a special type of flat lids designed with decoration in relief on top, which had usually a quasi-cylindrical handle in the center. These lids often have geometric decoration, which vary in motifs used and is usually depicted in one or more circles. Sometimes, the geometric pattern of the decoration is combined with images of various animals or birds and occasionally with crosses and/or Early Christian inscriptions. The inscriptions are not always readable, which means that some of them are imitations, which have been written by illiterate potters.

A few fragments of similar ceramic lids with relief decoration on top were discovered in front of the already mentioned large kiln for producing construction ceramics, which is situated immediately south of cape Sveti Atanas and was dated in the 6th c. AD⁴⁴. It is quite possible that these pieces have been produced in this kiln as by-products to the bricks and roof tiles usually made there. If that is true, there must be no doubts that these lids were made with the intention to be sold in the Late Antique town on the cape as well as in the settlements in the vicinity and, why not beyond, that area too.

In the mentioned large Late Antique settlement (town?) with unknown name, located near the village of Odartsi, Region of Dobrich (located in Scythia province), several other lids of the same type were discovered and published which have various decorations in relief. They were dated to the 6th c. AD⁴⁵. Many more lids similar in shape and decoration were found in other sites of Scythia [Minor] and they were dated to the 5th-6th c. AD⁴⁶.

In the region around Byala, at various ancient sites located north and south of the Late Antique town several other molds for producing similar in shape lids with relief decoration have been discovered. Most of them are not known yet to the scholarly world but two of them were published. One of them belongs to the already mentioned late 6th c. AD "treasure" of potter's tools and implements found deposited in a fortification tower of the Late Antique town Cranea (Kranevo), Region of Dobrich⁴⁷. The other similar mold was discovered in Marcianopolis (Devnya), the capital of Moesia Secunda. It came to light in a house burnt in the first half of the 5th c. AD⁴⁸. It has been proved by coin finds that this has happened during the invasion of the Huns in AD 447, when their army captured, plundered and burned to ashes the ancient city⁴⁹. The well dated mold from Marcianopolis is good evidence that similar flat lids with decoration in relief have been produced already in the early 5th c. AD or maybe even a few decades earlier.

⁴⁴ YOTOV & HARIZANOV 2017, p. 492, fig. 4.

⁴⁵ DONCHEVA 1982, p. 105; 111-112, cat. 15-21, pl. I, 8-11.

⁴⁶ BARNEA 1965, p. 407-417, figs. 1-4.

⁴⁷ TONCHEVA 1953, 76, fig. 133.

⁴⁸ MINCHEV & GEORGIEV 1991, p. 226, fig. 39 and bibliography.

⁴⁹ GEROV 1975, p. 49-75 and bibliography.

Apart from these three molds, there are several more (unpublished), which were found also in cities located on the Western Black Sea coast. Two similar in shape ones as well as lids with various decoration in relief dated to the 6th c. AD have been discovered in Odessos/Varna, which are not yet published. Several more molds came to light in the ancient town Naulochos (nowadays Obzor), which is located in the Eastern part of Moesia Secunda and its vicinity. The objects in discussion are mostly chance finds and should be dated generally in the 5th – 6th c. AD. They are all housed now in the collections of Varna Archaeological Museum and of the Town Historical Museum of Obzor (Bulgaria). Maybe there are more in other local museums, which have collections of pottery from other ancient sites that belonged to the province of Moesia Secunda.

*

All these finds are an important indication that during the 5th – 6th centuries (and maybe sometime earlier – since late the 4th c. AD?), in this province there was a continuous production of similar flat lids with decoration in relief. Their size shows that they may fit well on top of some of the most used Late Antique cooking pots with one or two handles of medium and smaller size (all of them coarse wares), which have a distinguished edge turned inwards. This fact helps to assume that the decorated lids have been made maybe exactly for that purpose: to cover such cooking pots but maybe also similar table ones. Why they have a decoration and sometimes inscriptions in relief is a theme, which needs a deeper discussion and is out of the topic of this study.

All molds mentioned above were discovered in Late Antique / Early Byzantine towns located in the province of Moesia Secunda. However, having in mind the large number of lids with decoration in relief, which have been found in many Late Antique sites of Scythia⁵⁰, we believe that it is just a matter of time similar molds to be found in this province too.

Conclusion

This preliminary study on the pottery production in the Late Antique port town near Byala reveals that during the 5th and 6th c. the site emerged as an important center of pottery production. The five kilns discovered so far (six with the large one for construction ceramics excavated out of the fortified area but rather close to the town) along with all other single finds, supplied evidence for the wide range of local pottery produced in the town. We may assume that the pottery production here was enough to fulfill a large part of the needs of most local citizens of household pottery and maybe partially of finer table ware. This explains why the number of imported fine wares, expensive for the region, like LRC and ARS ceramics types and oil lamps found in the town is rather small. We have to say that in most of the excavated houses and other buildings quite a few imitations of these fine pottery were found, part of which may have been produced here too (unpublished materials). We must assume that some of the pottery and construction ceramics like roof tiles, bricks and pipes used for various

⁵⁰ BARNEA 1965, p. 407-417, figs. 1-4.

purposes, made in the town and its immediate vicinity, as well as ceramic oil lamps made here, were transferred by road for sale to other smaller settlements located in the area around and farther in the hinterland of the region. We should not exclude the possibility that some of the local production of similar goods may have been exported, sent by sea to the largest market of the Early Byzantine Empire: Constantinople. The imperial capital lays less than one day sail by ship from the town located on cape Sveti Atanas and in their every day life its over a million citizens have used an enormous number of pottery and lamps. Maybe a part of these goods have been delivered there from the Late Antique town at cape Sveti Atanas. This may have been one of the reasons for the prosperity of the local citizens during the 5th – 6th centuries AD because otherwise the town is average in size for that time and had a little port with rather poor facilities for mooring ships.

In any case, the excavation of the site near Byala produced important evidence about the diversity and rather large pottery production in a provincial Late Antique town of Moesia Secunda. This activity was supported by the large deposits of very good clay and abundance of fresh water near the town and inside it.

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Plate I. Pottery finds from kiln No 1; 1. Discarded table amphorae fragments from the stock pit; 2. Discarded amphora handles from the stock pit; 3. Discarded jug fragments from the stock pit; 4. Jug found in the compulsion camera of the kiln.

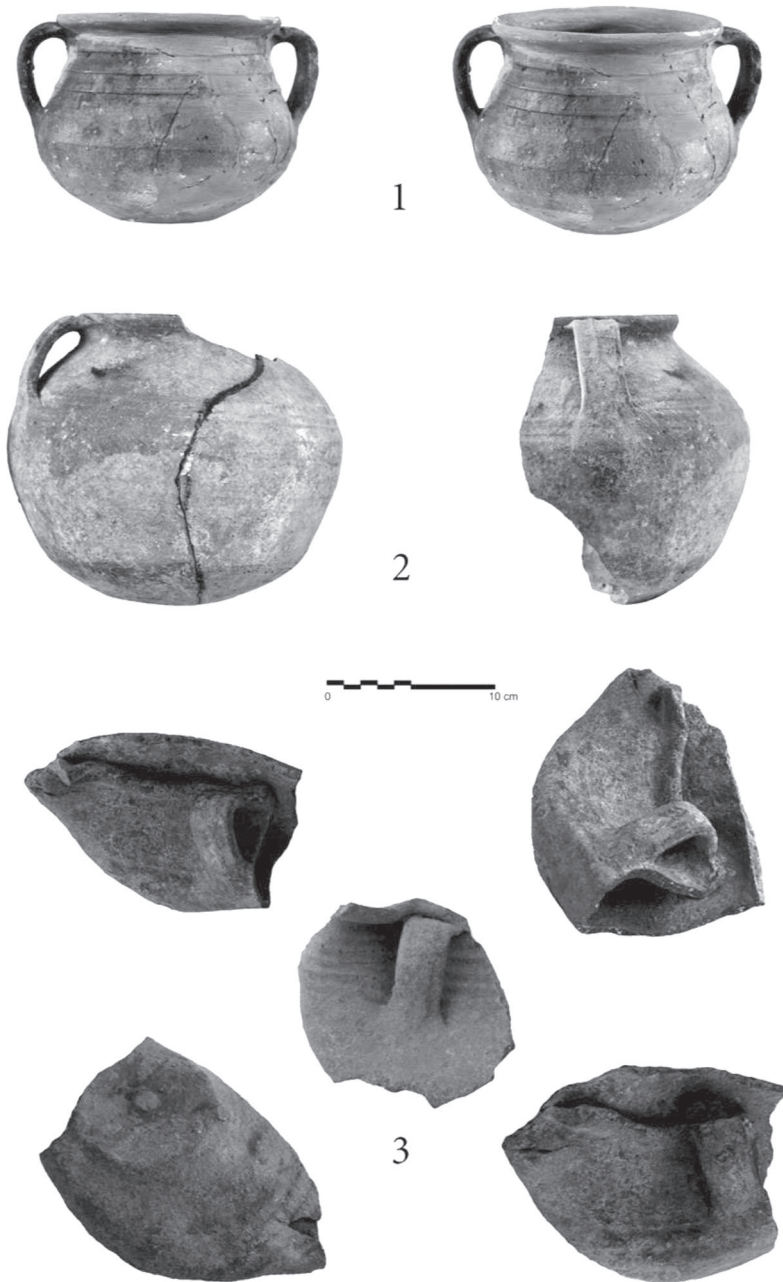


Plate II. Pottery finds from stock pit of kiln No 1; 1-2. Cooking pots having two handles; 2. Discarded fragments of similar cooking pots.



Plate III. Fragments of cooking pots from the stock pit of kiln No 1.

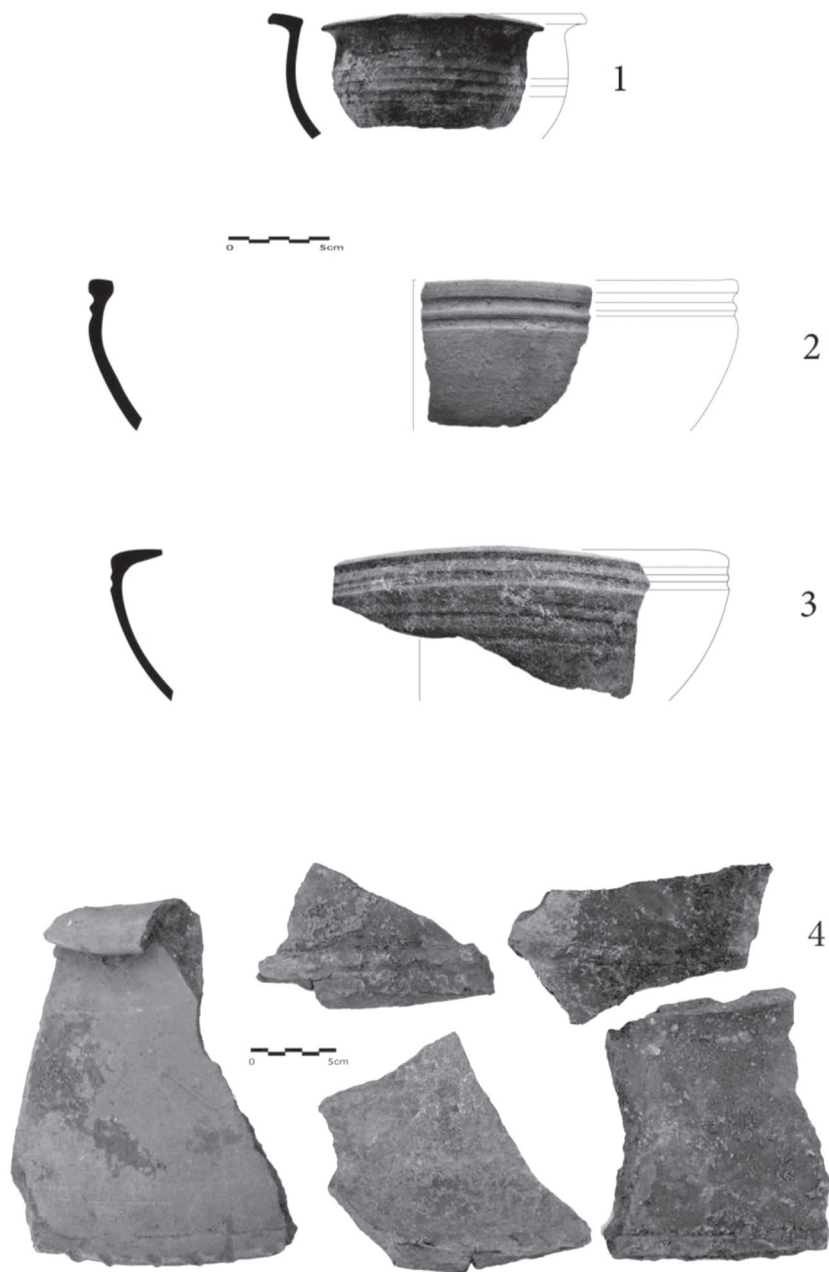


Plate IV. Pottery finds from stock pit of kiln No 1; 1. Fragments of a flattened spherical bowl; 2-3. Fragments of hemispherical bowls; 4. Fragments of medium size storage jars – *pithoi*.



Plate V. Fragments of discarded pipes (tubes) from kilns Nos. 3-4.

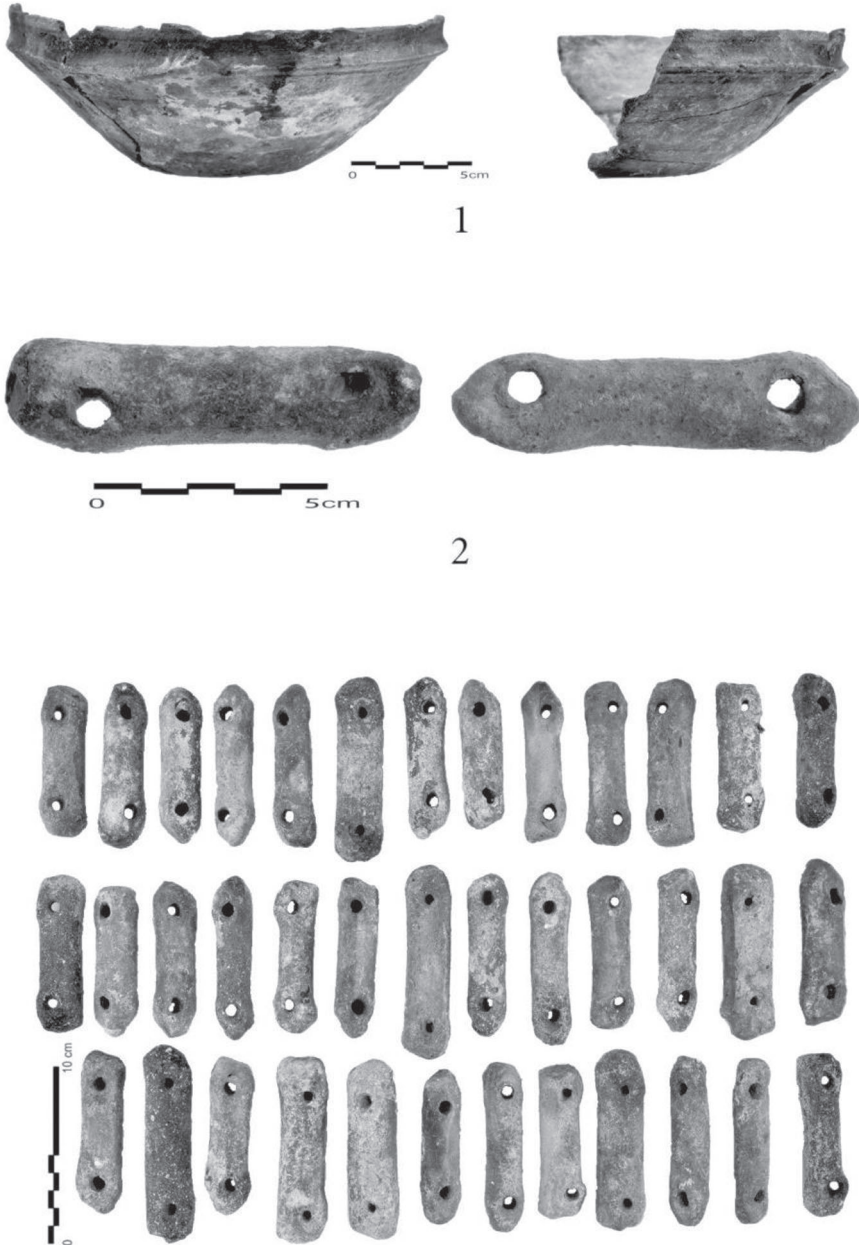


Plate VI. Finds from kiln No 5; 1. Fragmented deep plate – imitation of LRC table ware;
2. Ceramic fishing net weights.