

PONTIC NOTES

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Abstract: *This note is in two parts. The first contains comments on a recent article on the Protohistory of Istanbul, the discovery there of a „Phrygian”/„Thraco-Phrygian” settlement, and its suggestion that the history of Istanbul begins in the Neolithic Period. The Second parts considers the recent publication of pottery assemblages from the Nemirov settlement in the hinterland of the Ukraine, discussing how Scythian this settlement was.*

Thracian/Thraco-Phrygian Settlement in Istanbul?

Most recently, Şevket Dönmez published an article entitled „The Protohistorical Times of Istanbul in the Light of New Evidence”¹. This is based on recent excavations in Istanbul and aims to prove that the history of settlement there started in the Neolithic period, not from the time it was colonised by the Greeks. To publish material from the Neolithic to the Iron Age indeed provides a more or less clear picture of what was going on in Istanbul over time. The article is divided into sections on the Neolithic, the Chalcolithic, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. All the material considered had come from rescue excavations undertaken in connection with the Marmaray Metro project in certain parts of Istanbul: the Old Prison of Sultanahmet, Yenikapı, Beşiktaş and Hagia Sophia flats.

In the present note² I shall concentrate on the Iron Age. It is dated by Dönmez to 1200-800 BC³, which in Western literature roughly coincides with the

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¹ DÖNMEZ 2017.

² Here, I shall cite only basic literature. More extensive bibliographies will be found in TSETSKHLADZE 1999; 2000; 2005; 2007a; 2007b; 2012a; 2012b.

³ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 108.

Early Iron Age, the term I shall use here⁴. The main aim of his section is to provide evidence of the so-called Phrygian migration from the Balkans/Thrace. According to him:

*The people in Anatolia and close vicinity experienced a really difficult period especially in the second part of the 13th century BC because of changing climate conditions, famine, drought and the repeating earthquakes of 7.5-8.5 magnitude which occurred in a wide area including Greece to Middle Anatolia and from Crimea to Egypt. For the mentioned difficulties, the Thracians who used to live especially in Macedonia and Western Thrace and the Phrygians who were used to be called as Phrygians by Herodotus (6.45; 7.73, 85) in their homeland Macedonia has started their so-called Thraco-Phrygian migrations of approximately 150-200 years towards the Anatolia. The mentioned migration took place through the Bosphorus as well as the Dardanelles (the Çanakkale Straits)*⁵.

There are some difficulties with this. First of all, if there were earthquakes, famine, drought and climate change in the 13th century BC, why and how did the Thracians move from the Balkans to middle/central Anatolia, where they would find the same dramatic conditions as those they had left behind? The various natural disasters in the passage cited are considered to encompass the whole ancient world from Egypt to the Crimea. Of course, this is an exaggeration: if these things happened, they did not happen at the same time and they happened locally, i.e. they did not simultaneously strike the Crimea and Egypt, if any struck either. Furthermore, only Herodotus 7.73 mentions Thracian migration; his other passages say nothing about it. Another author who does is Strabo (7.3.2), but he mainly repeats Herodotus' information.

It must be understood that Thracian culture was not monolithic. According to Herodotus (5.3), they were the largest nation in the world after the Indians, and they had many names, each tribe according to its region⁶. The exact number of these tribes is not known: Strabo (7. Fr. 47 (48)) gives it as 22, whereas Pliny the Elder (NH 4.11.40) wrote that Thrace was divided into 50 administrative units, and Ptolemy (3.11.6) that it was divided into 14. Whatever the number, the Thracian tribes formed quite a diverse group and it is rather difficult to identify them archaeologically, especially in the Early Iron Age⁷.

Dönmez believes that proof of the migration was found during construction of the foundations for a new annexe to Istanbul Archaeological Museums in the form of Thracian pottery:

The color of the paste is dark gray and it has thin and medium mineral and medium plant tamper. The outer layer has the same color with the paste. Some handmade modifications are observed on outer surfaces and the clay that is medium fired. One of the

⁴ Some Turkish colleagues also use the term, and are criticised by Dönmez for doing so (DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 105-106) – though he himself uses the term Early Iron Age in the captions to figs. 23 and 24 on p. 106.

⁵ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 105.

⁶ On Herodotus' information about the Thracians, see ASHIERI 1990.

⁷ On Thrace, see MIHAILOV 1991, (597-607 for a lengthy discussion about Thracian tribes and their geographical distribution); ARCHIBALD 1998. On recent developments in the study of Thracian Iron Age archaeology, with bibliography, see TSETSKHLADZE 2000; THEODOSSIEV 2011; and see now VALEVA *et al.* 2015.

relief pieces is a rim of a jug which has a rope figure in relief. The other one is a piece of a bowl's body which does not have any figure decoration but has similar technical features with the first one⁸.

The „Thracian pottery“ in question is just three pieces, and the fragment of a jug with a rope figure in relief is definitely neither Thracian nor Early Iron Age (**Fig. 1**): in his Fig. 22, the caption states that it is Early Bronze Age⁹. The other two pieces might be Early Iron Age but they are definitely not Thracian (**Figs. 2, 3**). Thracian Early Iron Age pottery was handmade (**Figs. 6-8**)¹⁰; these two look to have been wheel-made.

Furthermore, according to Dönmez, the Thracians started to settle in the area of the Sultanahmet-Hagia Sophia flats, but he produces no evidence¹¹.

A small quantity of pottery and a very limited stylistic range leave open the way to all manner of speculation about its origin. Two studies deserve mention, and both reach conclusions similar to mine. H. Genz believes that the Iron Age pottery traditions of central Anatolia have earlier local origins and bear only a very superficial resemblance to Balkan material¹². It is obvious that new cultural elements appeared in Early Iron Age central Anatolia, including Boğazköy; Genz shows that these could be linked to the Kaska of the Pontic region but discounts the possibility. M. Vassileva has made a special study of handmade pottery from Gordion, comparing it with that of Thrace and Troy¹³. She concludes that the assemblages do not provide direct support for the written tradition of Phrygian migration from the Balkans but point to a culturally similar environment for which the term „ethno-cultural community“ is appropriate.

Excavations conducted in Hagia Irene in 1945 and 1946, the results mentioned briefly in 1954¹⁴, identified a layer containing grey pottery as Phrygian:

*The excavations reached the bedrock and revealed the layer on the rock as a Phrygian layer. Ruins of a wall which had similar technical and material features with the Phrygian walls in Boğazköy. The revealed pottery had light gray color and simple features*¹⁵.

It is very difficult to comment. One cannot understand what is meant by Phrygian walls in Boğazköy. And grey pottery is not only Phrygian. Nevertheless, the interpretation of this layer as Phrygian in conjunction with the discovery of the so-called Thracian pottery forms the basis for the existence of the „Phrygian“ settlement in Istanbul. Offered in confirmation of this is a single Phrygian bronze fibula of the Middle Iron Age discovered at Sultanahmet (**Fig. 4**)¹⁶, but it is to be doubted that a single piece, which could have arrived here for many reasons and in many ways, can underpin the existence of a Phrygian settlement.

⁸ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 106.

⁹ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 106, fig. 22.

¹⁰ ARCHIBALD 1998, *passim*.

¹¹ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 107.

¹² GENZ 2005.

¹³ VASSILEVA 2005.

¹⁴ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 107: Dönmez was not permitted to study this material himself as he states there.

¹⁵ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 107.

¹⁶ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 110, fig. 28.

Considering all the sources mentioned above from Sultanahmet (the Hippodrome) and Hagia Sophia, Dönmez concludes that Thraco-Phrygians settled at Istanbul in the „Dark Age“ (1200-1000 BC). Further evidence is supplied by a wattle-and-daub dwelling found in the Phrygian level¹⁷. But this kind of dwelling cannot be used to indicate migration: it is known universally in the ancient world, including Anatolia, as a form of simple construction.

Dönmez believes that proof of a Thracian presence was discovered in 2017 during excavation of Beşiktaş: 6-7 m below the modern surface, several kurgans were found, their circular stone masonry constructed of rubble:

The Late Bronze-Early Iron Age pottery which is encountered with the cremation, the bone and ash remains of the burned bodies found in the simple stone boxes placed in Kurgan tombs, which is a tradition of a wide geography spanning Balkans, Thrace and even in Ukraine without question proves that the said tombs belonged to Southeastern Europeans, Eurasians, Cimmerians or maybe even Thraco-Phrygian peoples. The similar pottery to the Beşiktaş kurgans are already known from Turkish Thrace, Sultanahmet, Troy and Gordion (Ankara-Polatlı) which later became the capital of the Phrygian Kingdom. It has proven that the Thraco-Phrygian Migrations (1250-900 BC) which was a contributing factor of the collapse of the Hittite Great Kingdom has happened through the Bosphorus, Dardanelles and the Marmara Sea. According our recent observations the encounter of the cremation burial in the earlier examples of the Gordion and Ankara tumuli (kurgans) which was built 300-400 years later than the Beşiktaş Kurgans which in turn can be dated to 1300-1000 BC, clearly proves the connection between the Thraco-Phrygian Migrations and the Phrygian Kingdom even at this early point of the research. At this context, it seems that the missing-link of the Phrygian tumulus tradition which is yet to be understood by the way it arrived to Anatolia, can be found in Beşiktaş kurgans¹⁸.

This raises many questions. First of all, the usage of the term „kurgan“. Kurgans are a type of burial found in the Eurasian steppes, including the Ukraine. They belong to the rulers and elites of local society. They were constructed with the burial itself in a rectangular pit that was then covered and a mound of earth and large stones formed above and around it. Some kurgans have a *crepidoma*. The largest kurgans are 10 m or more high and 50-100 m in circumference; the smaller, 5-7 m in height and 20-30 m round. I doubt that such constructions were what was found in Beşiktaş. In any case, kurgans are not known in Thrace or the Balkans. Early Iron Age Thracian burial constructions varied from region to region¹⁹. Inhumation and cremation were practised alongside each other, very often in the same cemetery. Cremation, either in an urn or below a tumulus, arose in the Late Bronze Age, whilst inhumation continued. The Bronze Age tradition of crouched inhumations in flat graves and under tumuli persisted in north-eastern Bulgaria and in the eastern part of the central plain. Double graves, especially of two women buried simultaneously, are characteristic of several regions (Fig. 9). Many tumuli in the western Rhodopes were used for multiple or secondary

¹⁷ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 109.

¹⁸ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 109.

¹⁹ ARCHIBALD 1998, p. 48-53.

burials²⁰.

If we turn to elite burials, Herodotus (5.8) tells us what he saw in his own time:

They lay out the dead for three days, then after killing all kinds of victims and first making lamentation they feast; after that they make away with the body either by fire or else by burial in the earth, and when they have built a barrow they set on foot all kinds of contest, wherein the greatest prizes are offered for the hardest fashion of single combat.

These tombs, which resemble kurgans but are smaller, are known as Thracian royal and elite stone chamber tombs. They date to from the establishment of the Odrysian kingdom and especially the 4th century BC.

Thus, the Istanbul „kurgans“ cannot be used as evidence of migration in the Early Iron Age.

The existence in Istanbul of Thrakion/Thracian Square in Sultanahmet-Hagia Sophia Flats is considered to be further proof in a later period of a Thracian presence, like the name Thracian Gate²¹.

Dönmez concludes that before the foundation of Byzantium, a Thraco-Phrygian settlement existed here. His article writes a new page in the history of Istanbul before the coming of the Greeks (Fig. 5). Without it, we would not have this new information. The difficulty, as I have tried to show, is with interpretation and contradictions – such as the chronology for migration and the establishment of the settlement.

Why would Thracians migrate to the site of Istanbul. They had no need. They were not only in the Balkans but in Turkish Thrace, next to Istanbul. The indication of this is Enez (*Ainos*), which has yielded not only Thracian pottery but a carved stone relief of a Thracian horseman. I have seen it myself in the course of travels along the Turkish Black Sea coast²².

In conclusion, the supposed migration of the Phrygians from Thrace to Central Anatolia should be mentioned briefly. This has been considered many times and a large body of literature exists²³. The theory has its proponents and opponents; I consider myself one of the latter. Whatever Herodotus and Strabo write, the archaeological evidence contradicts them. The main argument of the supporters is the existence in both Thrace and Phrygia of rock-cut tombs, altars and other features²⁴. Do these really demonstrate migration? First of all, it is impossible with any accuracy to date them. Most of them could belong to the Roman period. Secondly, the landscape in both places is rather similar. People adapt to their environment, and different peoples in similar ways to similar environments, without migration. I will give only one example. In eastern

²⁰ See TSETSKHLADZE 2007a (with references). Tumuli are known from the necropolis of Greek Histria (see ALEXANDRESCU 1966). In the Bosporan kingdom, Scythian kurgans were situated next to Greek colonies, and kurgan-type burials also belonged to local peoples other than the Scythians, especially in the Taman peninsula. Furthermore, real kurgans exist not far from Samsun. Kurgan-type tumuli are situated in the vicinity of Kastamonu in the Ağlı district (YILDIRIM 2015).

²¹ DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 110.

²² TSETSKHLADZE 2007b (with exhaustive bibliography).

²³ TSETSKHLADZE 1999; 2000; 2007a – all with extensive bibliographies.

²⁴ VASSILEVA 2012.

Georgia, where there are mountains and rocks, man-made caves, altars, even churches and whole cities are built into the rock – but nobody has suggested that the Phrygians migrated from or to ancient Georgia²⁵.

How Scythian was Nemirovo City-Site?

With the publication of an article by M.T. Kashuba and M.Y. Vakhtina we now have a clearer idea about Nemirov/Nemirovskoe city-site²⁶. This large settlement on the Southern Bug was one of the political centres of the local chiefs. It occupies a plateau and the adjacent flat territory, overall 110 ha, all surrounded by a ditch and rampart up to 9 m in height/depth, 32 m in width and extending to 4.5-5.5 km (**Fig. 10**). Investigation of the site began with excavations in 1909 and 1910; the last period of excavation was 1946-48. Much material and documentation were lost. Surviving finds are kept in the State Hermitage; and documentation in the Institute for the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg²⁷.

The site is known primarily for the discovery of *ca.* 100 fragments of Greek Pottery (tableware and amphorae)²⁸, the vast majority of it from the 6th century BC, with the early pottery dating from the last third/last quarter of the 7th century (**Fig. 11**). The production of the North Ionian centres is represented, while the amphorae are from Aeolia, Chios and Clazomenae. The pottery was found in pit-houses 1 and 2 (**Figs. 12, 13**); altogether three pit-houses are known²⁹. It is

²⁵ Rescue excavations in Istanbul also yielded fragments of Greek pottery from the middle of the 7th century BC onwards. They come from Yenikapı (Theodosian Harbour) (GÜN İŞİĞİNDA 2007, p. 180-181, 248, 272; ASAL 2010, p. 157); excavations in Üsküdar between 2004 and 2008 brought forth so much East Greek and Attic pottery, a fragment of a 6th-century marble stele, *kouros* and tiles that the excavators proposed the existence of an Archaic cemetery on the slope descending behind modern-day Sultantepe - it is believed that the *kouros* and stele are Ionian-type and that Üsküdar is ancient Chrysopolis (GÜN İŞİĞİNDA 2007, p. 32-37, 70-73, 144-145; KARAGÖZ 2010, p. 85-93); and Sirkeci also produced material of Classical, Hellenistic and later periods (GÜN İŞİĞİNDA 2007, p. 110-115).

It is commonly the case that local peoples formed part of the population of Greek colony from their foundation: this is known for the western (GIMATZIDIS 2017), eastern and northern coasts of the Black Sea, as well as for the Mediterranean; and the same situation is to be found in the southern Black Sea, as we know from Amisos and, most recently confirmed for Sinope (REMPEL & SHERRATT 2017). It would be no surprise to find that this was the case in Istanbul, especially since it is situated next to Turkish Thrace.

²⁶ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017.

²⁷ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 211-212.

²⁸ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 216-222. See also VAKHTINA 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2009; VAKHTINA & KASHUBA 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2012; TSETSKHLADZE 2012b. By way of comparison, Belskoe city-site yielded more than 7000 fragments of Greek pottery, including 50 dating to the end of the 7th-6th century BC (KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 220). It is the largest site in European archaeology: it occupied 4020 ha, had a defensive perimeter of 25 km and an estimated population of 4000-5000. The ramparts were 9 m high and ditches over 5 m deep. It included three other smaller settlement – western (72 ha), eastern (65.2 ha) and Kuzeminskoe (15.4 ha), each with its own fortifications – and about nine other populated places.

²⁹ The pit-houses were of circular type with diameters of 5.5-6, 5.5-6.2 and 4.4-4.8 m and areas of 26, 28 and 17 m² respectively, sunk 1.2-1.3 m into the ground. Nos. 2 and 3

interesting that there is a complete lack of Attic pottery at Nemirov. This can be explained by the city-site existing from the end of the 8th to the beginning/first third of the 6th century BC.

The late keeper of Nemirov materials at the State Hermitage, G.I. Smirnova, began the study of the local pottery; this has been continued by Kashuba while Vakhtina has focused on the Greek pottery, further investigation of local and foreign handmade pottery produced 15 complete and archaeologically complete vessels, as well as over 4000 fragments. In studying the pottery the new Hallstatt chronology suggested at the turn of the present century was used. The archaeology of Nemirov has now been divided into two main phases: pre-colonisation and colonisation period.

There are 17 main types of vessel – I shall not go into detail. Smirnova had identified 19 different sub-types. Some pottery is close to the Chernolesk and Zhabotin cultures of the middle Dniester and middle Dnieper regions³⁰. There is locally produced pottery as well, showing different cultural influences, especially Hallstatt (**Fig. 14**); further pottery which, according to typology and production technology, is actual Hallstatt (end of HaB-HaC) of the burial grounds of eastern Austria and adjoining regions of Hungary and Slovakia; and another type of pottery resembling Carpatho-Danubian Hallstatt (pottery of the Basarabi and Bîrseşti-Ferigile cultures)³¹. It is believed that pottery of the so-called Early Scythian culture has also been found. This culture, of the middle Bug region, is divided into three phases: beginning, pre-colonisation and colonisation. No Early Scythian pottery is published or discussed in the article³².

There is some confusion in this and other publications on Nemirov. The site has been variously dated and described as Early Iron Age, period of Early Scythian Culture, Early Scythian and Scythian. This can be explained by the very complicated ethnic situation on the site. What is meant by Early Scythian culture or the beginning of Scythian culture? How Scythian are these periods? The Scythians³³ were nomadic at the time that this settlement was established and existed; and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to identify nomadic cultures archaeologically. In this period there were, as we know, no Scythians on the Ukrainian steppes; the terms Pre-Scythian and Early Scythian are coinages of modern scholars. As I and others have noted, to identify this period a very simple logic has been adopted. The Cimmerians lived in the Ukrainian steppes and they were forced out by the Scythians, moving to the Near East. Thus, after the Cimmerian period must follow the Scythian (divided into Early and High periods). Nomadic Scythians appear most probably by the middle of the 7th century BC, after they had returned from the Near East. In general, the Archaic Scythians lived on the steppes of the northern Caucasus and Kuban regions; they

revealed two construction phases, two floors with individual hearths and, from the second phase, a central pole to support the roof (KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 215).

³⁰ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 221-222.

³¹ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 224-225.

³² It will be included in a book on Nemirov to be published by the end of 2018. I thank M. Vakhtina for this information.

³³ On the Scythians, see TSETSKHLADZE 2011 (with references).

did not move or become semi-sedentary or sedentary until the beginning/middle of the 5th century BC. This is when they moved to the steppes of the Ukraine³⁴. In general, so many aspects of Scythian history in the Archaic period are unknown that it is called the „Dark Age” of Scythian history³⁵.

To return to how Scythian or Early Scythian Nemirov might have been. It existed for a relatively short period, from the end of the 8th to the beginning/first third of the 6th century BC, as a centre of local chief-men. According to Kashuba and Vakhtina, it belongs to the Early Scythian period and represents one of ‘the administrative, economic and ideological centres of European Archaic Scythia’³⁶. The materials known so far do not confirm that it was Scythian in general, let alone Early Scythian. It is obvious that it was a hub of different cultures; perhaps those of peoples of the Early Scythian period, peoples that were not Scythian, were included in this hub. If not Scythian, what kind of settlement is it? It reminds me very closely of large Hallstatt settlements that were also the political and economic centres of different chief-men. The most striking parallel is the Hallstatt hilltop settlement of Heuneburg³⁷, with a large amount of Greek pottery, even Greek craftsmen living there (which can be proposed for Nemirov as well), Greek-type mud-brick fortifications, etc. The only difference is that dwellings and public buildings in Heuneburg have wooden superstructures, whereas in Nemirov the dwellings are subterranean. Thus, it would not be a mistake to consider Nemirov a Hallstatt settlement.

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³⁴ On so-called Cimmerian culture and Scythia, see TSETSKHLADZE 1991 (with references); 2011 (with exhaustive bibliography).

³⁵ ALEKSEEV 2003.

³⁶ KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 225.

³⁷ KIMMIG 2000; ROLLEY 2003; KURZ 2007.

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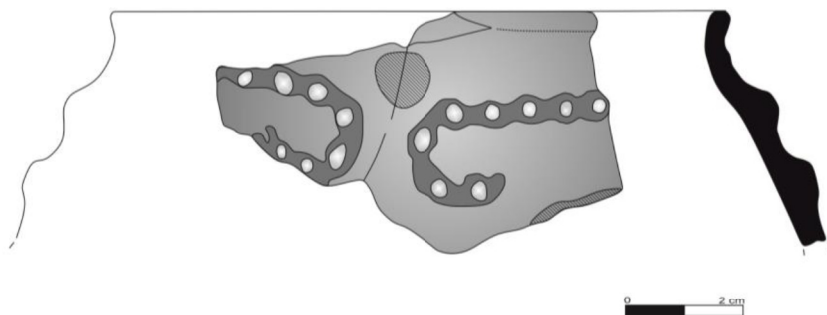


Fig. 1. „Thracian” pottery from Istanbul
(after DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 106, fig. 22; courtesy, Şevket Dönmez).

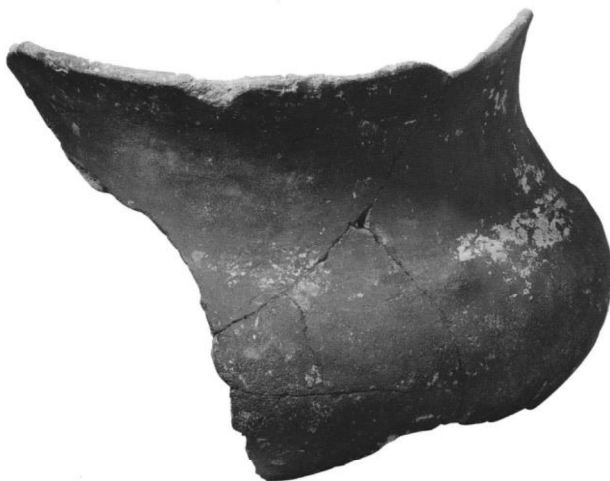


Fig. 2. „Thracian” pottery from Istanbul
(after DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 106, fig. 23; courtesy, Şevket Dönmez).



Fig. 3. „Thracian” pottery from Istanbul
(after DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 106, fig. 24; courtesy, Şevket Dönmez).



Fig. 4. Phrygian fibula from Istanbul
(after DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 110, fig. 28; courtesy, Şevket Dönmez).



Fig. 5. Iron Age finds in and near the Historical Peninsula, Istanbul
(after DÖNMEZ 2017, p. 96, fig. 1; courtesy, Şevket Dönmez).

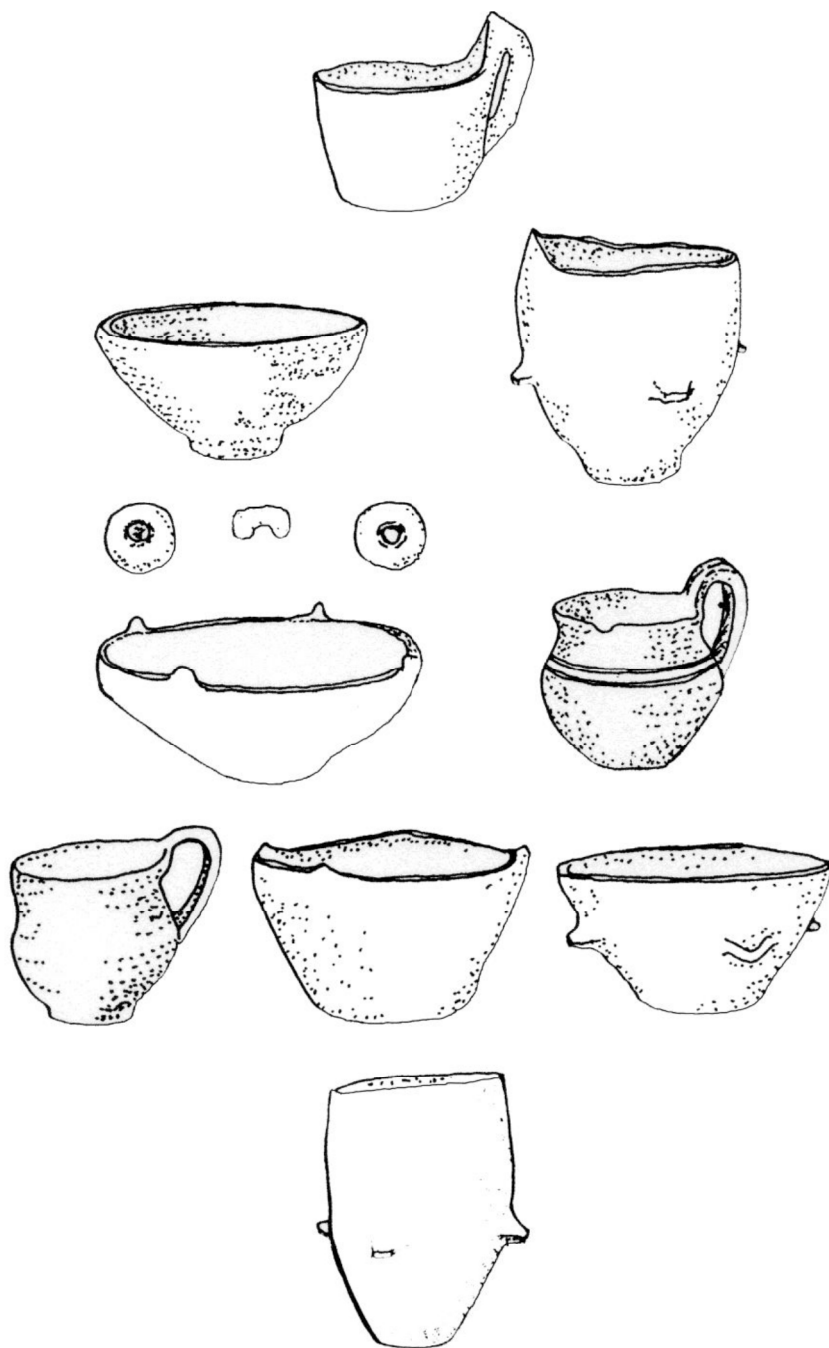


Fig. 6. Early Iron Age pottery from cremation graves, Ravna, Varna district, Bulgaria (after ARCHIBALD 1998, p. 60, fig. 2.9).



Fig. 7. Early Iron Age pottery from cremation graves, Raban, Varna district, Bulgaria (after ARCHIBALD 1998, p. 59, figs. 2.7-8).

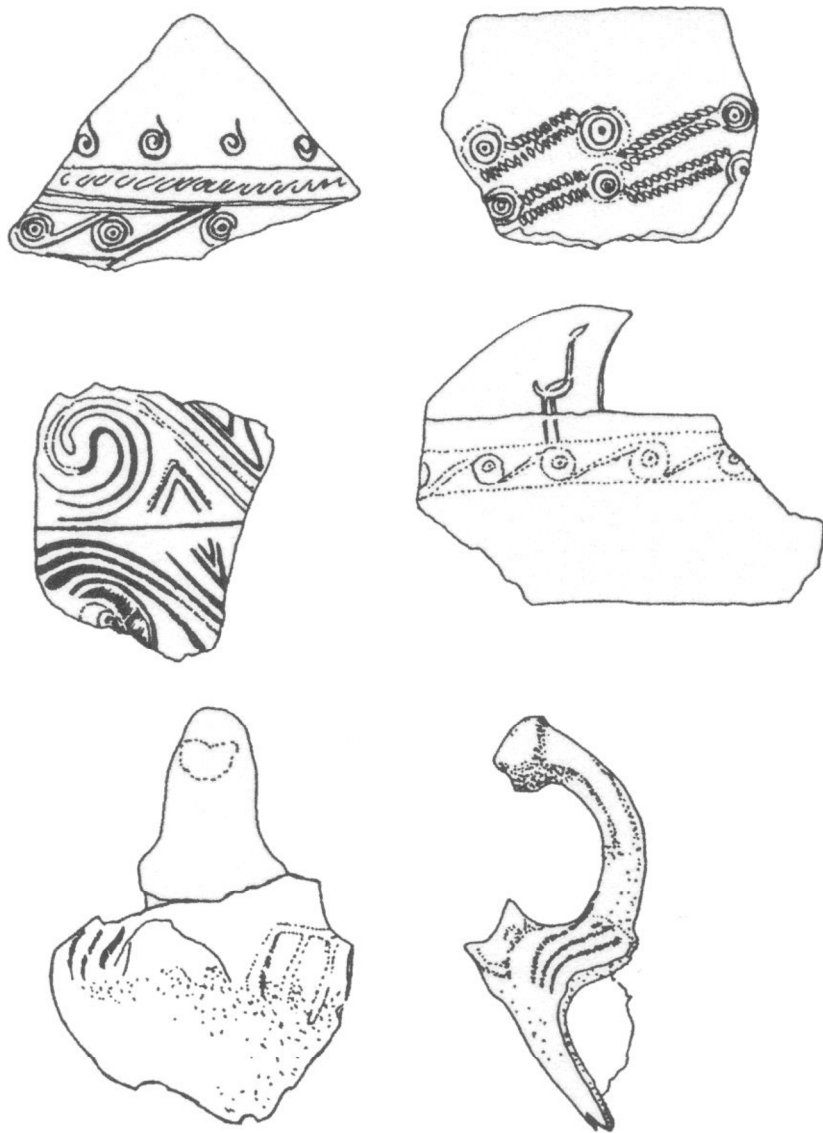


Fig. 8. Patterns on Thracian Early Iron Age pottery
(after ARCHIBALD 1998, p. 29, fig. 1.4).

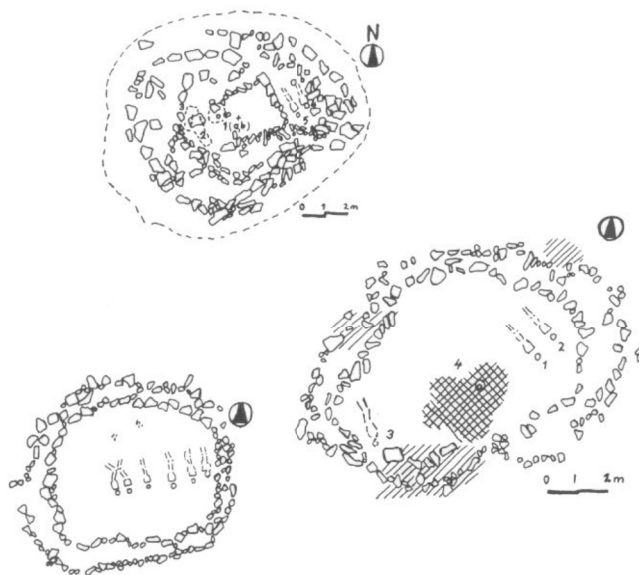


Fig. 9. Early Iron Age tumuli, Sboryanovo, Bulgaria
(after ARCHIBALD 1998, p. 49, fig. 2.1).

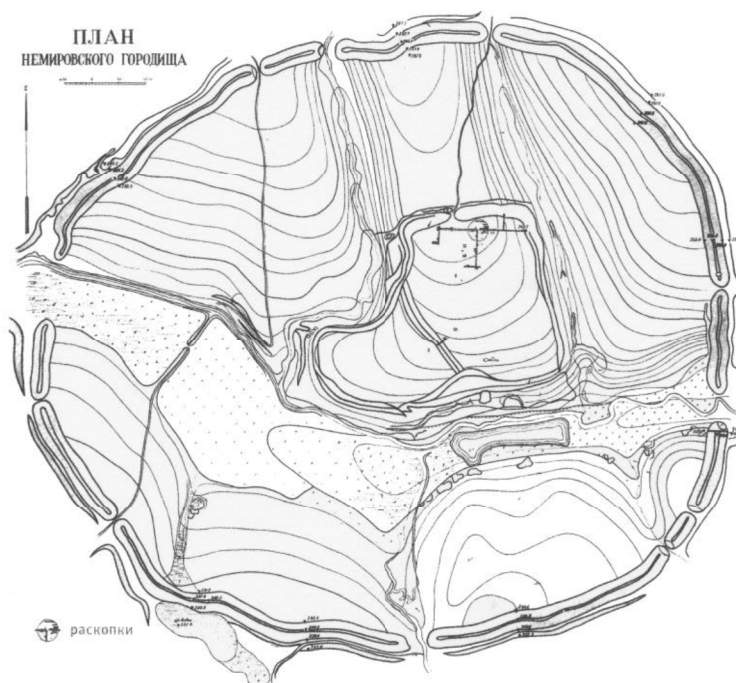


Fig. 10. Plan of Nemirov
(after KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 214, fig. 3).



Fig. 11. East Greek pottery from Nemirov.

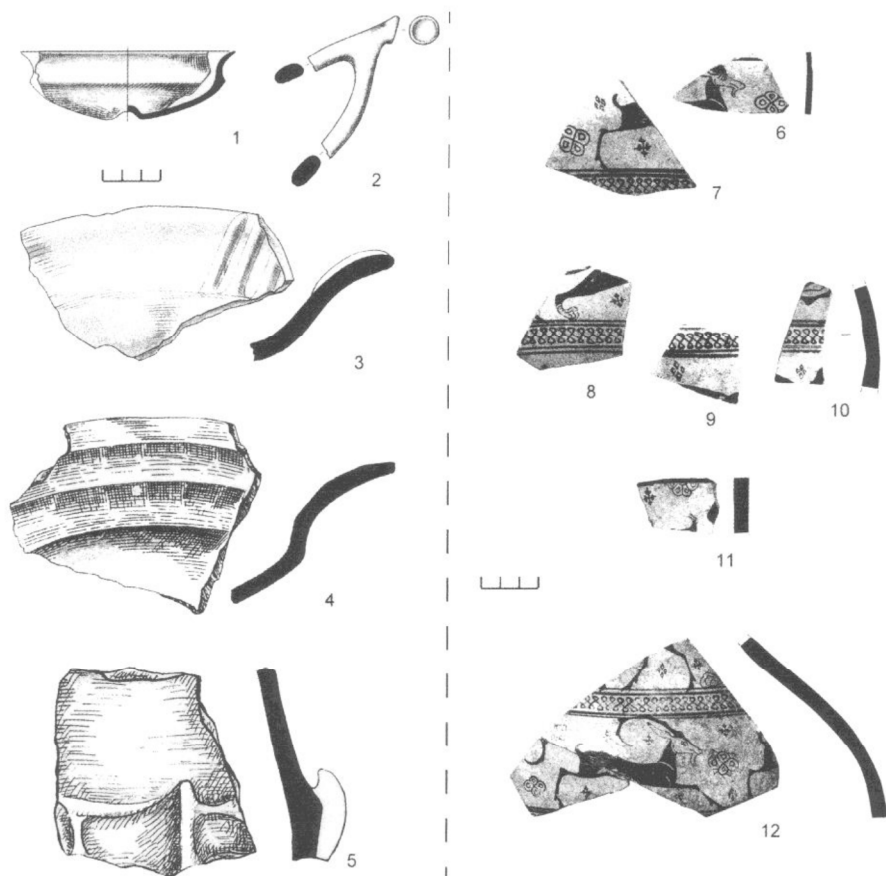


Fig. 12. Nemirov fortified settlement, pit-house no. 1. 1-5 – high quality burnished ware; 6-12 – selected samples of Greek pottery (after KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 217, fig. 5).

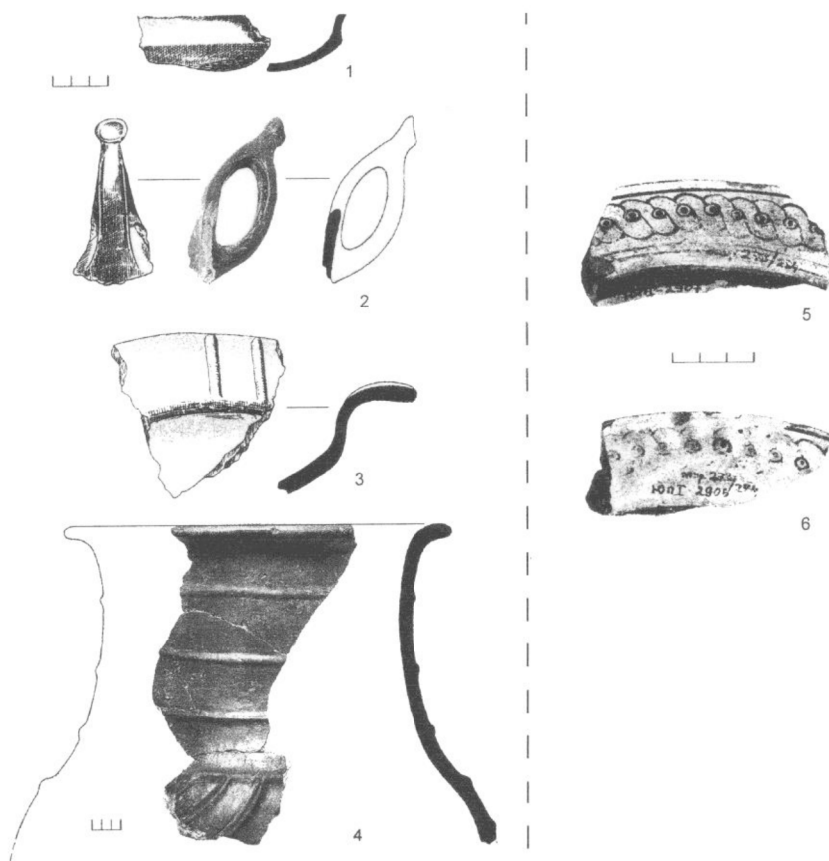


Fig. 13. Nemirov fortified settlement, pit-house no. 2. 1-4 – high quality burnished ware; 5-6 – selected samples of Greek pottery (after KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 218, fig. 6).

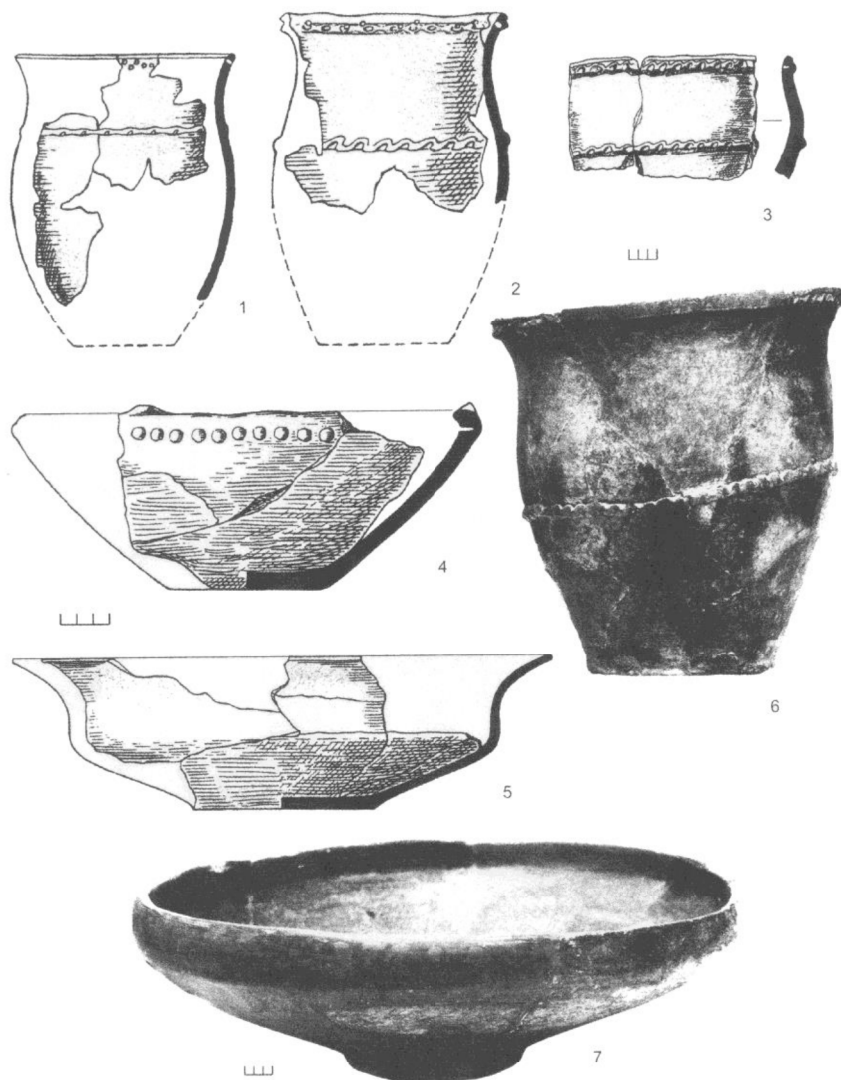


Fig. 14. Nemirov fortified settlement. 1-3, 6 – local (barbarian) plain pottery; 4, 5, 7 – selected burnished pottery. 1-2 – vessels of Nem-1 type; 3 – vessel of Nem-4 type; 4, 7 – bowls of Nem-9 type; 5 – bowl of Nem-10 type; 6 – vessel of Nem-2 type (after KASHUBA & VAKHTINA 2017, p. 223, fig. 9).