

## FRAGMENTS OF HELMETS FROM THE ROMAN FORT AT JIDAVA

The auxiliary fort at Jidava (Câmpulung Muscel town, Argeş County) was located on the frontier of Dacia Inferior, south of the Southern Carpathian mountains, about 20 km from the Bran Pass.

The first systematic diggings at the Jidava fort, led, in 1901, by Gr. G. Tocilescu, produced a lot of fragments of helmets (nos 1-15)<sup>1</sup>.

Piece no.1 represents a fragment from the top of the bowl of an iron helmet still retaining the two reinforcing bars fixed to it by means of bulky cone shaped rivets. The standing crossed bars of narrow rectangular section have central square extensions where are placed the slots used for bonding them together.

Reinforcing bars of this characteristic shape are met only with helmets of the Niederbieber type, which came into use during the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., and was widespread in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, until A.D. 260/70<sup>2</sup>. It results that no. 1 belonged to a helmet of the Niederbieber type and was used in the period of time extending from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. until the end of Roman Dacia.

No. 2 is a piece from the middle of the back of an iron bowl right above the neck-guard with the lower part of a rectangularly sectioned bar attached by a conical headed rivet. It is a fragment of a helmet with the bowl extending down to the base of the neck and fully developed cross-bars which are distinctive features of the Niederbieber type examples. Nos 1 and 2 are parts of helmets of the same type. Both are iron made, have reinforcing bars and their attaching rivets, as well as strong similarities in shape, standard of work and state of preservation, i.e. the same degree of burning and corrosion. They may have belonged to one helmet only.

Nos 3-14 are all made of bronze.

The neck-guard no. 3, which is oblique lengthwise and curved sidewise was probably also part of a Niederbieber type helmet.

Nos 4-11 are fragments of reinforcing bars characteristic of the Niederbieber helmets. Nos 4.1 and 4.2 seem to be parts of the same transversal reinforcing bar. As all the fragments were cut with a chisel, and some are so heavily burnt that they are partly smelted and distorted (nos 9-11) there are no clean fractures at their ends and consequently it is no longer possible to ascertain if any of them are in fact parts detached from the same bar. Yet, given the number of pieces still retaining their ends and the central extension (nos 4.1- 4.2, 5 - 6) it may well be that at Jidava there are components of the bars of at least two and at most five helmets.

The ear-guard no.12 is so heavily broken up that it is difficult to identify, and the small pieces from the brow-guard no.13 and the cheek-piece no. 14 prevent

<sup>1</sup> D. Tudor, *Oltenia romană\**, Bucureşti 1978, 281; D. Tudor, *Arme și diferite obiecte din castrul Jidava*, BCMI 37, 119-122, 1944, 79-81, figs 3/2-7, 12; 4/1-2.

<sup>2</sup> G. Waurick, *Römische Helme*, in *Antike Helme. Sammlung Lipperheide und andere Bestände des Antikenmuseums Berlin*, RGZM-Monographien 14, Mainz 1988, 338-341, for the characteristics and the dating of the Niederbieber type; J. Curle, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People. The Fort of Newstead in the Parish of Melrose, Glasgow 1911*, pl. 35/8, reinforcing bar from Newstead dated in the Antonine period; I. Jütting, *Die Kleinfunde aus dem römischen Lager Eining-Unterfeld*, BVbl 60, 1995, pl. 8/49-51, bars from Eining-Unterfeld dated A. D. 171/172-179.

reconstruction of the items they belonged to. However, nothing contradicts their possible assignation to the Niederbieber helmets.

No. 15 is a fragment of the front part of an iron bowl or helmet mask. Behind the plain rim of the piece there is a band of embossed curlings bordered towards the top of the bowl by a plain surface. In the middle of the rim there is a small tube representing the central part of a hinge for attaching the mask to the bowl. Consequently, no. 15 belongs to a mask-helmet. While reconstruction of its exact shape has been impossible, this bowl should have been similar to the one from the Straubing hoard<sup>3</sup>.

In 1982, C. C. Petolescu discovered in the fort at Jidava six fragments of bronze bowl/s of mask-helmet/s decorated with engraved (and embossed ?) hair (no. 16). As the fragments are very small and I have only seen drawings of them and not the objects themselves, I am not in a position to say whether they are parts of only one or more helmets.

In the Jidava fort there have so far been unearthed fragments of at least three different war helmets, all of them of the Niederbieber type, among which one of iron and two of bronze, a part of an iron cavalry sports helmet and six small pieces belonging to one/several bronze sports helmet/s.

Tocilescu has discovered the top of the iron bowl (no.1), at least two fragments of reinforcing bars including the one still preserving its attaching rivet (no. 4.1) and, probably, the neck-guard (no.3), in the western tower of the *porta praetoria*<sup>4</sup>. The findspots of the other parts of helmets are not stated explicitly but he mentioned that in the same tower were found other helmet pieces and many fragments of iron and copper plates<sup>5</sup>. Thus it appears that all the fragments of helmets produced by the 1901 excavations come from the same gate-tower. If one takes into account that among the objects found by Tocilescu there is an iron lock-plate of a chest<sup>6</sup> it seems reasonable to assume that the helmet fragments have been stored in one chest placed inside this tower.

The condition of these items, upon recovery, explains why they were stored there. All of them were heavily broken and the bronze reinforcing bars were cut in pieces of different sizes, sometimes really small. Hence it is obvious that in the western tower of the *porta praetoria* were stored unserviceable iron and bronze objects including military equipment items which were prepared for recycling, i.e. remelting in order to re-use the metal they were made of.

The pieces, most of them heavily burnt, were found at the base of the tower in a layer rich of charcoal and ashes<sup>7</sup>. As the fort had a single phase ending in a big fire around 250 A. D., the only one attested at Jidava<sup>8</sup>, it means that the burn traces on the helmet fragments originate in that fire. Consequently it appears that the pieces of helmets were deposited in the period of time immediately preceding the abandonment of the fort.

The bronze fragments of sports helmets (no. 16) were discovered by C. C. Petolescu in or near the buildings from inside the fort and hence cannot be directly

<sup>3</sup> J. Keim, H. Klumbach, *Der römische Schatzfund von Straubing*, MBV 3, München 1951, 17-18, pls 12; 13/1-3, piece no. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Gr. G. Tocilescu, *Săpăturile de la Jidava*. Unpublished provisional reports. Manuscrisele Academiei Române, vol. 5134, 1901, 208, 231.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Unpublished. Kept at MNA-Bucuresti, without inv. no.

<sup>7</sup> Gr. G. Tocilescu (n. 4), 208.

<sup>8</sup> Em. Popescu, C. C. Petolescu, T. Cioflan, *Distrugerea castrului roman de la Câmpulung (Jidava)*, St.Com.Câmpulung 3, 1984, 15-17.

linked with those from the gate-tower. However, as they were also found in the burnt level dating to the end of the fort, they should have the same chronology as the fragments unearthed by Tocilescu.

If all the helmets were deposited shortly before c. 250 A. D., it follows that they were used more or less simultaneously during the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., when the garrison of the fort was made up by *cohors I Flavia Commagenorum*, which was probably *equitata sagittariorum*<sup>9</sup>. Thus, at Jidava we have a sample of the helmet equipment of a specialized auxiliary unit in a period of time of about half a century. Significantly, at least after 200 A. D., the Oriental archers from Jidava were wearing the Niederbieber helmets and not the simple conical bowl lacking a neck-guard, that is associated by many archaeologists with the *sagittarii*, which brings evidence for the use between c. A.D. 200-250 of the same type of helmet in all kinds of infantry and cavalry units of the Roman army<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the cavalry sports examples seem to have been as well shaped according to the current fashion. It is also worth mentioning that if standardized in shape the helmets of the period were made indiscriminately of bronze and iron.

The hoard of scrap metal including unserviceable military equipment from the gate-tower of the fort at Jidava is so far without close parallels in Dacia. However, two other Dacian hoards, dated c. 250 A. D., at the Slăveni fort<sup>11</sup> and Gherla<sup>12</sup> are totally or partially made up of damaged arms. One can expect that in the near future the growing interest in archaeology characteristic of our times will considerably increase the number of arms hoards. The abandonment of the Dacian forts and of the entire province in A. D. 250/70 seems to have created a hoards horizon similar to those found in other frontier provinces, especially Raetia. Consequently Bishop's assertion about the concentration of finds of military equipment in the periods before the abandonment of the forts is valid not only for the western provinces in the first century A. D.<sup>13</sup> but also for 3<sup>rd</sup> century Dacia.

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## CATALOGUE

### Abbreviations.

L = length; W = width; T = thickness; D = diameter. The measurements are made in mm.  
MNA-București = Muzeul Național al Institutului de Arheologie București (National Museum of Antiquities of the Institute of Archaeology Bucharest).

<sup>9</sup> C. C. Petolescu, *Die Auxiliereinheiten im römischen Dakien*, AMN 34/1, 1997, 92.

<sup>10</sup> See also M. C. Bishop, J. C. N. Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome*, London 1993, 209, for the disappearance at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century of the difference between legionaries and auxiliaries.

<sup>11</sup> L. Petculescu, *Bronze Spearheads and Spear Butts from Dacia*, JRMES 2, 1991, 35-58.

<sup>12</sup> J. Garbsch, *Römische Paraderüstungen*, München 1978, 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> M. C. Bishop, *The Military Fabrica and the Production of Arms in the Early Principate*, in M. C. Bishop (ed.), *The Production and Distribution of Roman Military Equipment*, BAR S 275, Oxford 1985, 18; M. C. Bishop, *The Distribution of Military Equipment within Roman Forts of the First Century A. D.*, in *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III*, Stuttgart 1986, 721-722.

Excavations led by Gr. Tocilescu in 1901. Kept at MNA-București, without inv. nos.

1. Bowl (fragment). The western tower of the porta praetoria. Iron. L 130; W 110; W (bar) 40. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 79, no.15, fig. 4/3.
2. Bowl (fragment). Iron. L 93; W 75; W (bar) 12; T 1,5. Unpublished.
3. Neck-guard (fragment). The western tower of the porta praetoria (?) Bronze. L 195; W82; T 1. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no.22, fig. 4/1.
4. Reinforcing bar (2 fragments). The western tower of the porta praetoria. Bronze. 1. L 115; W 24; T 3-4; rivet L 27; D 12,7. 2. L 110; W 24; T 3-4. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/2.
5. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L c. 120. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/6.
6. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L 103; W 22; W central 33; T 2-3. D. Tudor, CMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/4
7. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L c. 50. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/3.
8. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L 68; W 21; W central 27,5; T 2-2,5. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/7.
9. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L 79; W 14; T 2-3. Unpublished.
10. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L 86; W 18. Unpublished.
11. Reinforcing bar (fragment). Bronze. L 73; W 18; T 3-4. Unpublished.
12. Ear-guard (2 fragments). Bronze. L 110; T 1. Unpublished.
13. Brow-guard (fragment). Bronze. L 47; l 37; T 2. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 81, no. 23, fig. 3/5, wrong identification.
14. Cheek-piece (fragment) (?). Bronze. L 45,5; W 31; T 0,6. Unpublished.
15. Mask-helmet (fragment). Iron. L 155; W 60; T 4. D. Tudor, BCMI (n. 1), 79, no. 18, fig. 3/12, wrong identification.
16. Bowl/s of mask-helmet/s (6 fragments). Excavations led by C. C. Petolescu in 1982. Bronze. Kept at Muzeul Jidava-Cîmpulung Muscel, without inv. nos. Unpublished.

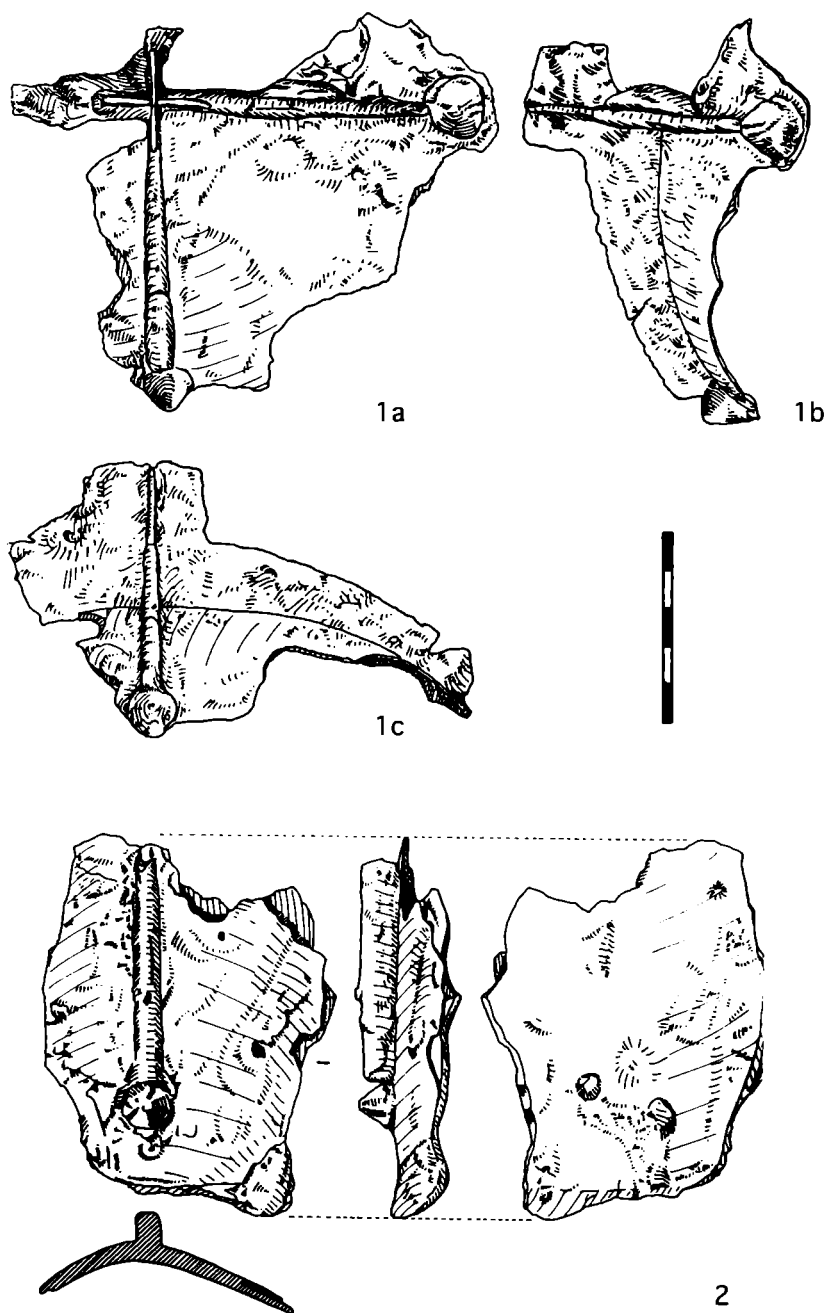


Fig. 1. 1-2 iron. Scale 1:2.

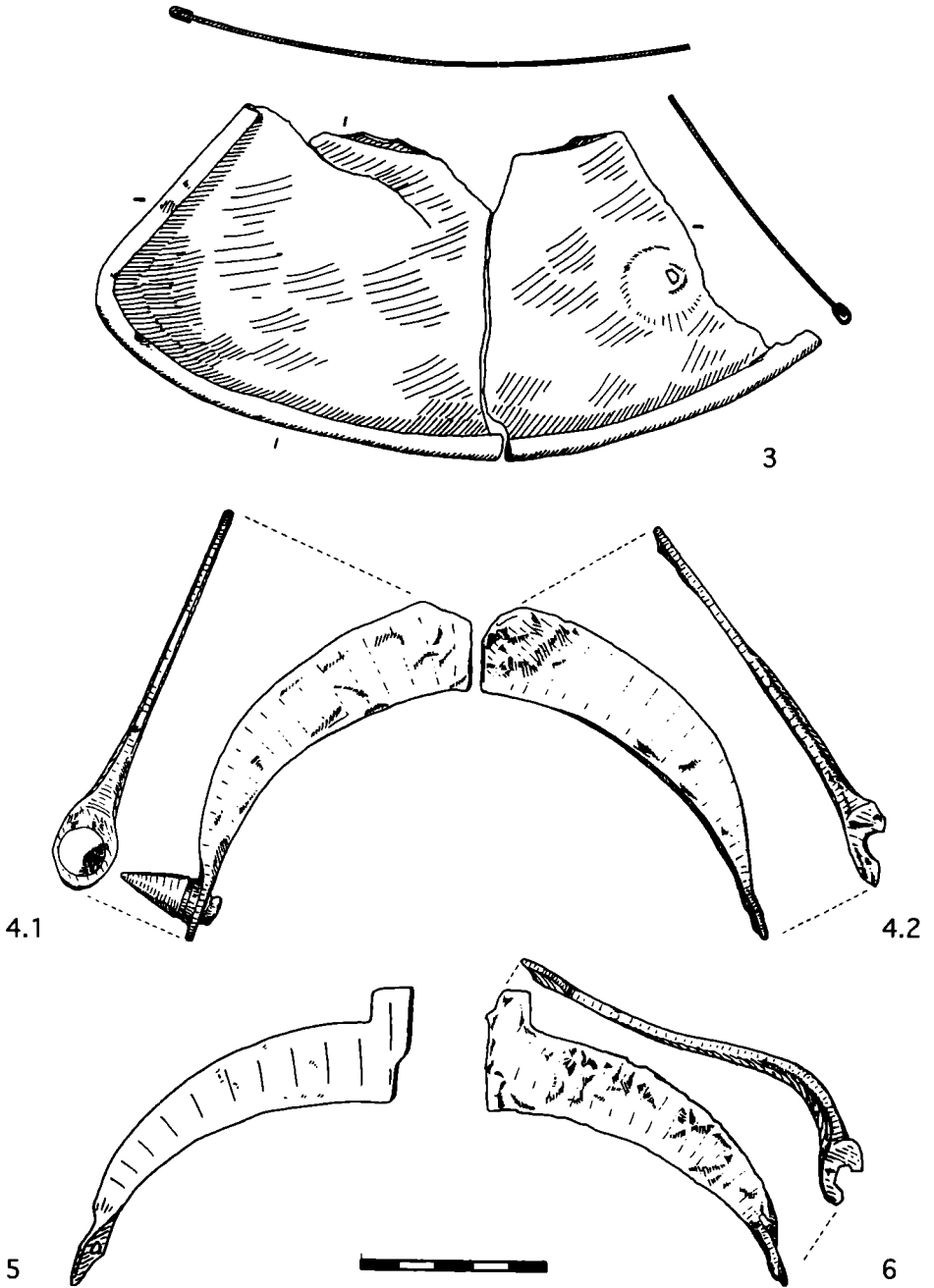


Fig. 2. 3-6 bronze. 5 after Tudor 1944. Scale 1:2.

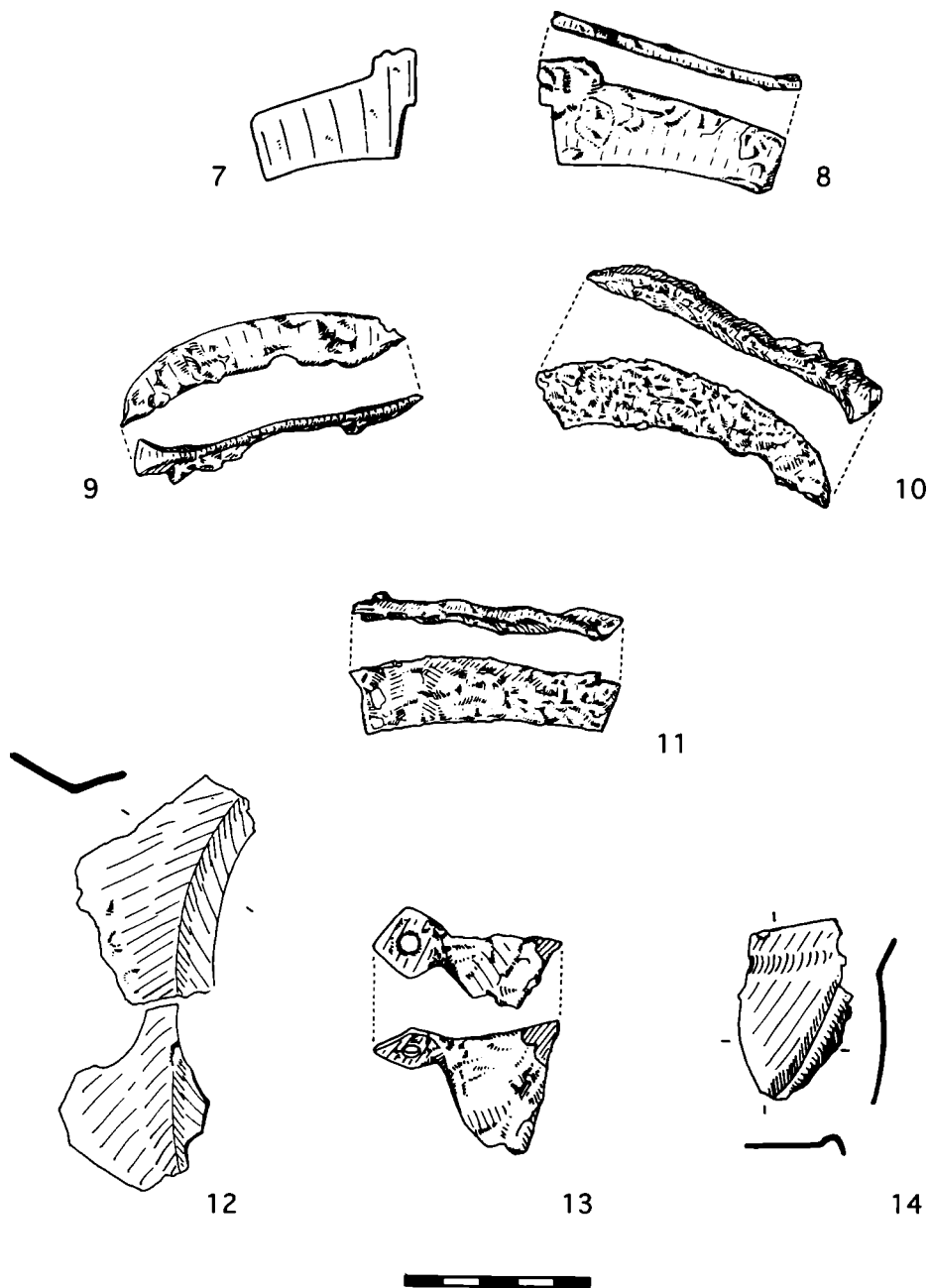


Fig. 3. 7-14 bronze. 7 after Tudor 1944. Scale 1:2.

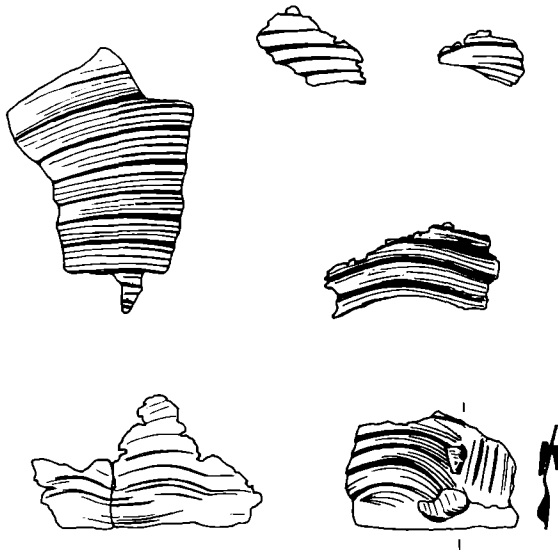
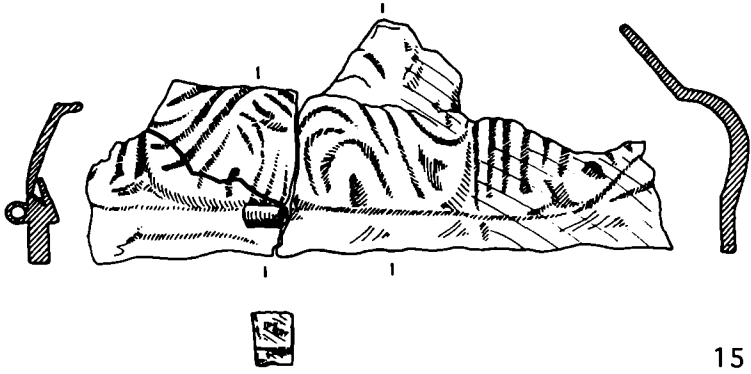


Fig. 4. 15 iron; 16 bronze. Scale 1:2.