

GOLDEN HORDE POTTERY DISCOVERED AT ISACCEA, TULCEA COUNTY

Aurel Stănică

Abstract: *In this note we are presenting 7 fragments of ceramic moulds, an ellipsoidal vessel, a bowl (prepared for glazing) and 9 tripods that the Museum of History and Archaeology of ICEM Tulcea purchased in 2006 from a man from Isaccea. These ceramic items from Isaccea have common traits with similar finds from the centers of the Golden Horde - Sudak, Orheiul Vechi, Costesti, Akkerman, dated to the 14th century. The discovery of specific Golden Horde pottery proves not only the existence of a strong economic center in Isaccea, where a pottery workshop was operational, but also the presence of specialized craftsmen.*

Key words: *pottery, Golden Horde, Isaccea*

Cuvinte cheie: *ceramică, Hoarda de Aur, Isaccea*

The Tatar invasion in Central Europe in 1241-42 has strongly marked the history and evolution of northern Dobrudja. In the 13th century, the region from the mouth of the Danube became an active area of international trade, especially after the Golden Horde settled here.

The Tatars' presence at the mouths of the Danube is a topic investigated by many Romanian historians, but it is still far from being clarified¹, due to the limited number of historical sources, and to the lack of archaeological research, with the exception of some discoveries that have been reviewed and ascribed to the Golden Horde².

Thus, the archaeological research from Tulcea³, Revărsarea–Dealul Tichilești⁴, Enisala⁵, Nufăru⁶, Păcuil lui Soare⁷, the random discoveries from Jurilovca, Slava Rusă and Babadag⁸ have revealed yellow, reddish or grey ceramic fragments, decorated with the wheel; they are typical to the material culture of The Golden Horde from the 13th-14th centuries⁹.

The money circulation at the mouths of the Danube in the 13th -14th centuries is the most eloquent testimony of the Tatars' presence in this area. Undoubtedly, at present the coins still

¹ For this issue, see: Brătianu 1935, 53-78; Brătianu 1999, 296-310; Spinei 1970, 607-610; Spinei 1975-1976, 34-37; Spinei 1982, 168-177; Spinei 1994, 253-255; Spinei 2006, 319-366; Papacostea 1993, 90-125; Ciocâltan 1998, 13-16; 129-259.

² Archaeological investigations at Tulcea, Revărsarea–Dealul Tichilești, Păcuil lui Soare, Enisala, and accidental discoveries at Jurilovca, Slava Rusă and Babadag revealed yellowish, reddish or gray pottery fragments decorated with the wheel, which are typical to the material culture of the Golden Horde in the 13th-14th centuries. Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1997, 93-94, 2; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003, 67-68, note 2.

³ Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 1983, 453, fig. 10/6.

⁴ Simion 1998, 231-238.

⁵ Unpublished materials, courtesy of O. Damian, to whom we express our gratitude.

⁶ Unpublished materials, 2009 investigations, courtesy of O. Damian, whom we thank.

⁷ Diaconu, Baraschi 1977, 65-66, fig. 46, no. 1-7.

⁸ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003, 67-68, note 2. In the collection of the Museum of Archaeology and History of ICEM Tulcea, we identified materials found in Tulcea and Slava Rusă.

⁹ It was V. Spinei who correctly identified the origin of this pottery. Spinei 1982, 44-48, 196-197; some materials have been published in: Spinei 2006, 348-349, fig. 8-9; 686, fig. 2; Spinei 1994, 253-255, fig. 36, 38, 39, 47.

represent the main documentary source for understanding the evolution of events and socio-economic area from the mouth of the Danube during the Tartar domination¹⁰.

In order to better understand the specific material culture of the Golden Horde, we should note that the medieval settlement of Isaccea was located on a promontory in the northwest of present-day town and very close to the well-known ford of the Danube from Isaccea to Orlovca.

Both Isaccea District, represented by the nowadays town, and the bordering area, which represented the administrative territory is known for housing remains assigned to different historical periods because the area was a crossing ford intensely used along history by various groups of people who came by.

The settling and control exercised by the Golden Hoard over the area from the mouth of the Danube were certainly complex, with different steps marked schematically by the literary and cartographic sources.

The monetary discoveries remain for now the main source of historical information on the Tatars, as well as on the political events and socio-economic development of the area at the mouth of the Danube during the Golden Horde's rule.

For the topic in question, two important archaeological points of interest are known: the fortress of Noviodunum and the city's north-eastern area.

In 2006, the Museum of History and Archaeology of the Eco-Museum Research Institute Tulcea purchased from Manea Mihai, resident of Isaccea town, his collection of archaeological and numismatic objects. Among the objects offered for acquisition there were 7 pieces of ceramic moulds, a vessel of ellipsoidal shape, hemispheric bottom, a bowl-vessel (ready for glazing) and 3 tripods. According to the person who collected these objects over a period of 10 years, they were found on his property:

- oval-shaped vessel, probably a pitcher, hemispheric bottom, reddish paste subjected to oxidizing firing, decorated with rosettes, missing the top; angoba, glazed in the upper half with white pearlescent enamel with greenish reflections. Diam. – 15.8; h – 9.5 cm;
- Ceramic mould (7) fragments, semicircular, rosettes
Preserved L – 11.1; cm h – 8.5 cm;
Preserved L – 10.2; cm h – 9 cm;
- bowl, reddish-yellow paste, angoba, prepared for glazing, stylized decoration: flower petals, tendrils.
- Tripods – 9 items.
- Coins – 3 items.

The pitcher is cast in compact, good quality mould paste and burnt in an oxidizing atmosphere. The moulds are also made of ceramic.

Both the patterns and the vessel present similarities regarding the decoration, with spheroconical vessels dated to the 13th-14th centuries, found in Tulcea County¹¹. The decoration

¹⁰ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1985, 585-590; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1987, 245-258; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 121-129; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1993, 291-304; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 2003, 69-102. For the reassignment of Saqçy-Isaccea workshop, see: Nicolae, Costin 2003, 175-187.

consists of rosettes, obviously done by patterns. For analogies, similar discoveries from Crimea are known, where they discovered a number of patterns (published)¹², vessels (unpublished but mentioned and described by authors), Orheiul Vechi, Costești¹³ and Cetatea Albă¹⁴.

In the historical literature, especially in the Russian one, this ceramics category is called stamped pottery. This kind of pottery¹⁵ was also found on Romanian territory. Thus, at Coconi¹⁶, Baia¹⁷, Curtea de Argeș¹⁸ there are some vessel fragments made in moulds, dated to the 14th century.

The existence of vessels prepared for glazing indicates the performance of the pottery masters from Isaccea who knew this technique. In the absence of other elements that could offer us more clues regarding the dating of the ceramics found at Isaccea, we indicate a date sometime in the 14th century. The reddish-yellow ceramics was produced in Tatar centers in north-eastern Moldavia, using the existing prototypes in the lower basin of the Volga and in Crimea or other regions of the Golden Horde. Due to its qualities, this type of pottery became superior to the local one and in the 14th century its used spread up to Bârlad basin, which marked the western limit of Mongolian territory.

The existence of a workshop for producing ceramics and the presence of specialized craftsmen in the workshop at Isaccea points to the existence of a strong political and economic center under Mongol control. We wanted to draw attention to the presence of this type of ceramics at Isaccea, and to the existence of a workshop producing these ceramic types, hoping that in the future archaeological discoveries in this area will provide new information regarding the presence and the material culture of the Golden Horde at the Danube mouth. We hope that future archaeological research will bring out new data regarding the presence of Tatars at the mouths of the Danube.

¹¹ Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 1984, 364, 719, pl. 4/1-3, 723, pl. 8/4-7.

¹² Dzanov 1998, 84.

¹³ Bârnea, Scerbakova 1973, 203-204; Spinei 2006, 734, 764, fig. 13; courtesy of E. Nicolae and E. Abâzova, whom we thank.

¹⁴ Courtesy of L. Bacumenco, whom we thank.

¹⁵ Species of non-glazed vessels with stamped motifs, probably originated from Central Asia, where it was wide-spread. Spinei 2006, 722.

¹⁶ Constantinescu 1972, 124-128, fig. 56, 57. The artefact from Coconi probably comes from a workshop at the mouth of the Danube.

¹⁷ Neamțu, Neamțu, Cheptea 1984, 207, 210, fig. 88/6.

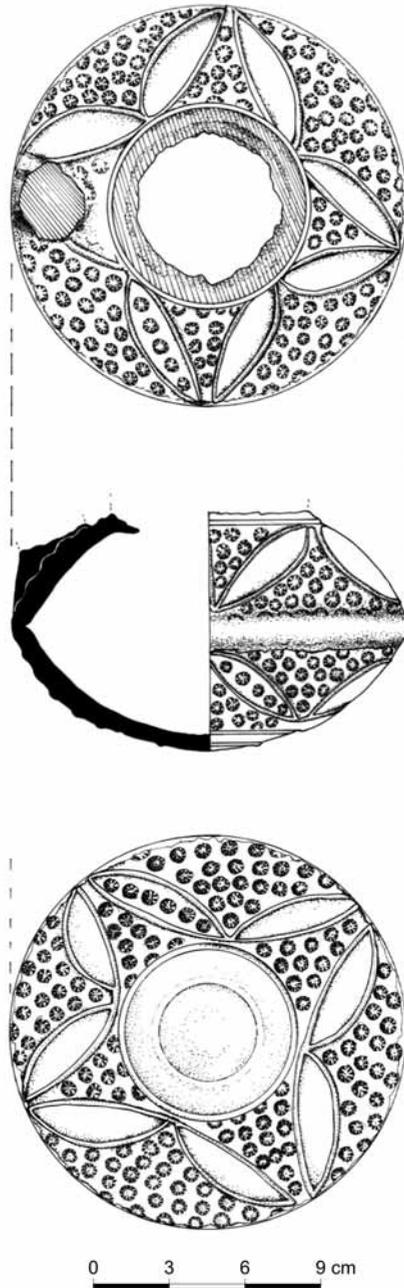
¹⁸ Constantinescu 1984, 124.

Bibliography

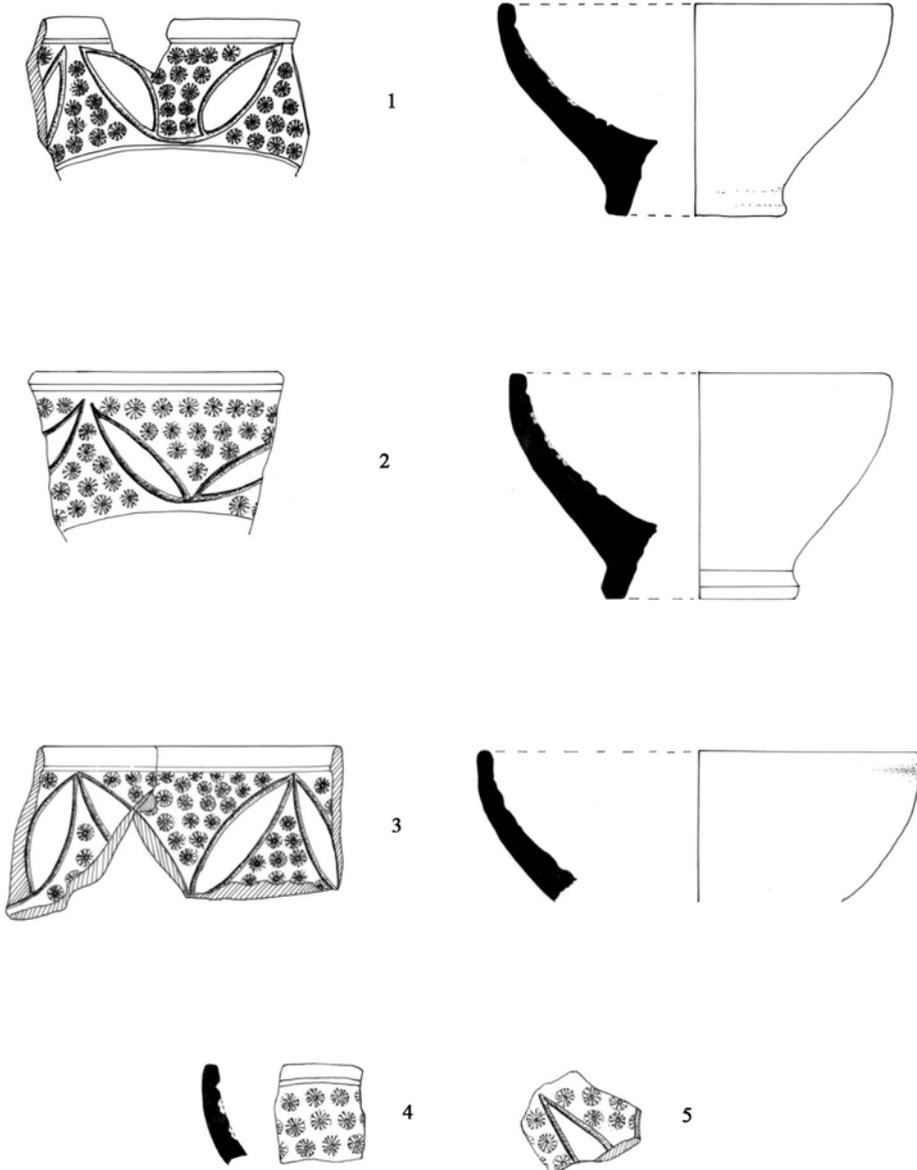
- Bârnea, P. P., Scerbakova, T.A. 1973, *Kratkie itoghi arheologyceskyh issledovanija v Starom Orhee v 1971g in Arkheologiceskie issledovanija v Moldavii v 1979-1971 gg.*, Kysinev.
- Brătianu Gh. I. 1935, *Recherches sur Vicina et Cetatea Albă – Contributions a l’histoire de la domination byzantine et tartare et du commerce génois sur le littoral roumain de al mer Noire*, Bucharest.
- Brătianu, Gh. I. 1999, *Marea Neagră. De la origini până la cucerirea otomană*, Iași
- Ciocâltan, V. 1998, *Mongolii și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII-XIV. Contribuția cinghizhanizilor la transformarea bazinului pontic în placă turnantă a comerțului euro-asiatic*, București.
- Constantinescu, N. 1972, *Coconi. Un sat din Câmpia Română în epoca lui Mircea cel Bătrân*, București.
- Constantinescu, N. 1984, *Curtea de Argeș (1200-1400). Asupra începuturilor țării Românești*, București.
- Diaconu, P., Baraschi, S. 1977, *Păciiul lui Soare. Așezarea medievală (secolele XIII-XIV)*, II, București.
- Dzanov, A. V. 1998, *Goncharyne pechi XIV–XV vv. na remeslennom posade Sugdei, în Istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi Prichernomor'ya i Sredizemnomor'ya X–XVIII vv. po materialam polivnoi keramiki*, Simferopol.
- Mănucu-Adameșteanu, Gh. 1983, *Considerații finale asupra locuirii medievale (sec. XIV-XV) de la Aegyssus, jud. Tulcea*, Materiale 17, 2, 439-454.
- Mănucu-Adameșteanu 1984, *Din nou despre vasele sferoconice în lumina descoperirilor din nordul Dobrogei*, Peuce 9, 363-374.
- Neamțu, Eugenia, Neamțu, V., Cheptea, S. 1984, *Orașul medieval Baia în secolele XIV-XVII. II. Cercetări arheologice din anii 1977-1980*, Iași.
- Nicolae, E., Costin, B. 2003, *Monede din secolele XIII-XIV descoperite în Dobrogea*, BSNR, 92-97 (1998-2003), 175-187.
- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 1985, *Documentele numismatice privind relațiile spațiului est-carpatic cu zona gurilor Dunării în secolele XIII-XIV*, AIIAI 22, 585-590.
- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 1987, *Numismatical contributions to the history of south-eastern europe at the end of the 13th century*, RRH 26, 245-258.
- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 1989, *Noi descoperiri de monede emise în zona gurilor Dunării în secolele XIII-XIV*, SCN 9, 121-129.
- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 1993, *Un atelier monétaire inconu de la Hoarde d'or sur le Danube: Saqçy-Isaccea (XIII^e - XIV^e siecles)*, în *Actes du XI^e Congrès International de Numismatique organisé à l'occasion du 150^e anniversaire de la Société Royale de Numismatique de la Belgique, Bruxelles, 8-13 septembre 1991*, III, Louvain-la-Neuve, 291-304.
- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 1997, *Începuturile prezenței tătarilor în zona gurilor Dunării în lumina documentelor numismatice, în Originea tătarilor. Locul lor în România și în lumea turcă*, București.

- Oberländer-Târnoveanu, E. 2003, *Începuturile prezenței tătarilor în zona Gurilor Dunării în lumina documetelor numismatice*, în *Tătarii în istorie și în lume*, București.
- Spinei, V. 1970, *Unele considerații cu privire la descoperirile arheologice din Moldova din secolul al XII-lea*, SCIV 21, 4, 595-618.
- Spinei, V. 1975-1976, *Aspekte der politischen Verhältnisse des Gebites zwischen Donau und Schwarzen Meer in der Zeit Mongolenherrschaft (XIII-XIV Jahrhundert)*, Dacoromania 3, 34-37.
- Spinei, V. 1994, *Moldova în secolele XI-XIV*, Chișinău.
- Spinei, V. 2006, *Universa Valachica. Românii în contextul politic internațional de la începutul mileniului al II-lea*, Chișinău.

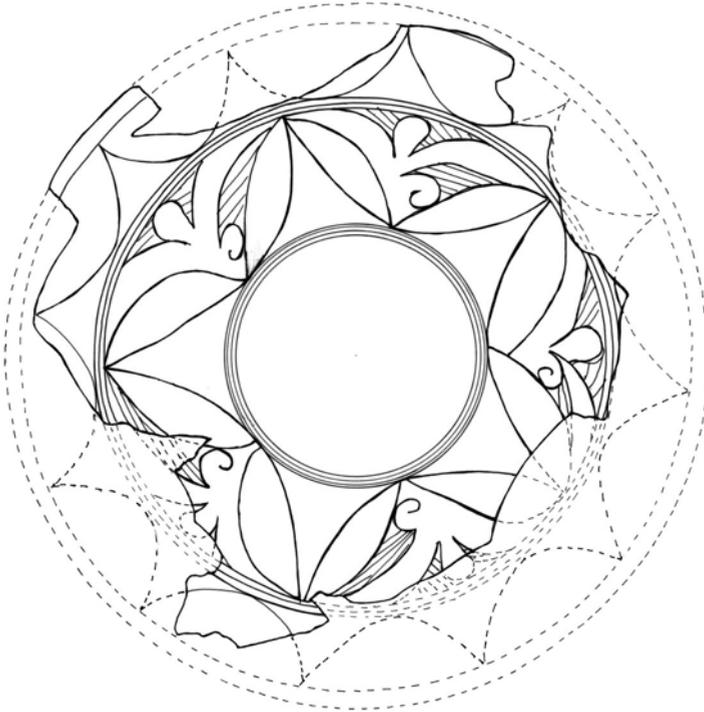
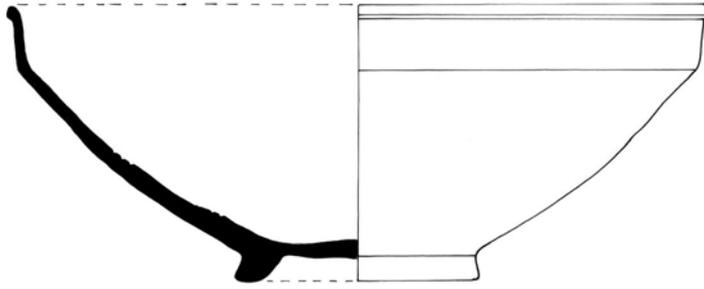
Aurel Stănică
Institutul de Cercetări Eco-Muzeale,
Str. 14 Noiembrie, nr. 1 bis,
820009, Tulcea,
România



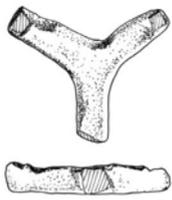
Pl. 1. Ellipsoidal shaped vessel.



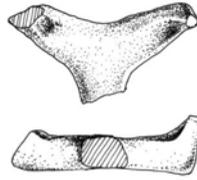
Pl. 2. Ceramic moulds.



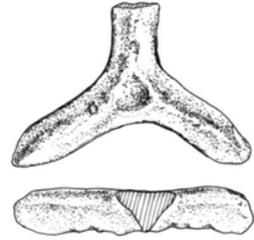
Pl. 3. Bowl (prepared for glazed).



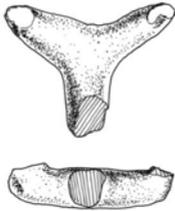
1



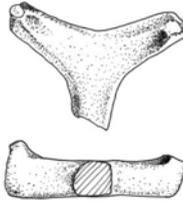
2



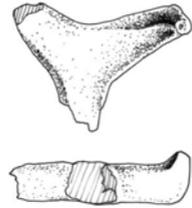
3



4



5



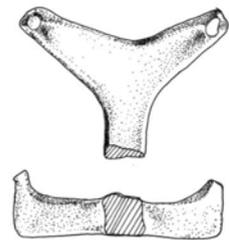
6



7



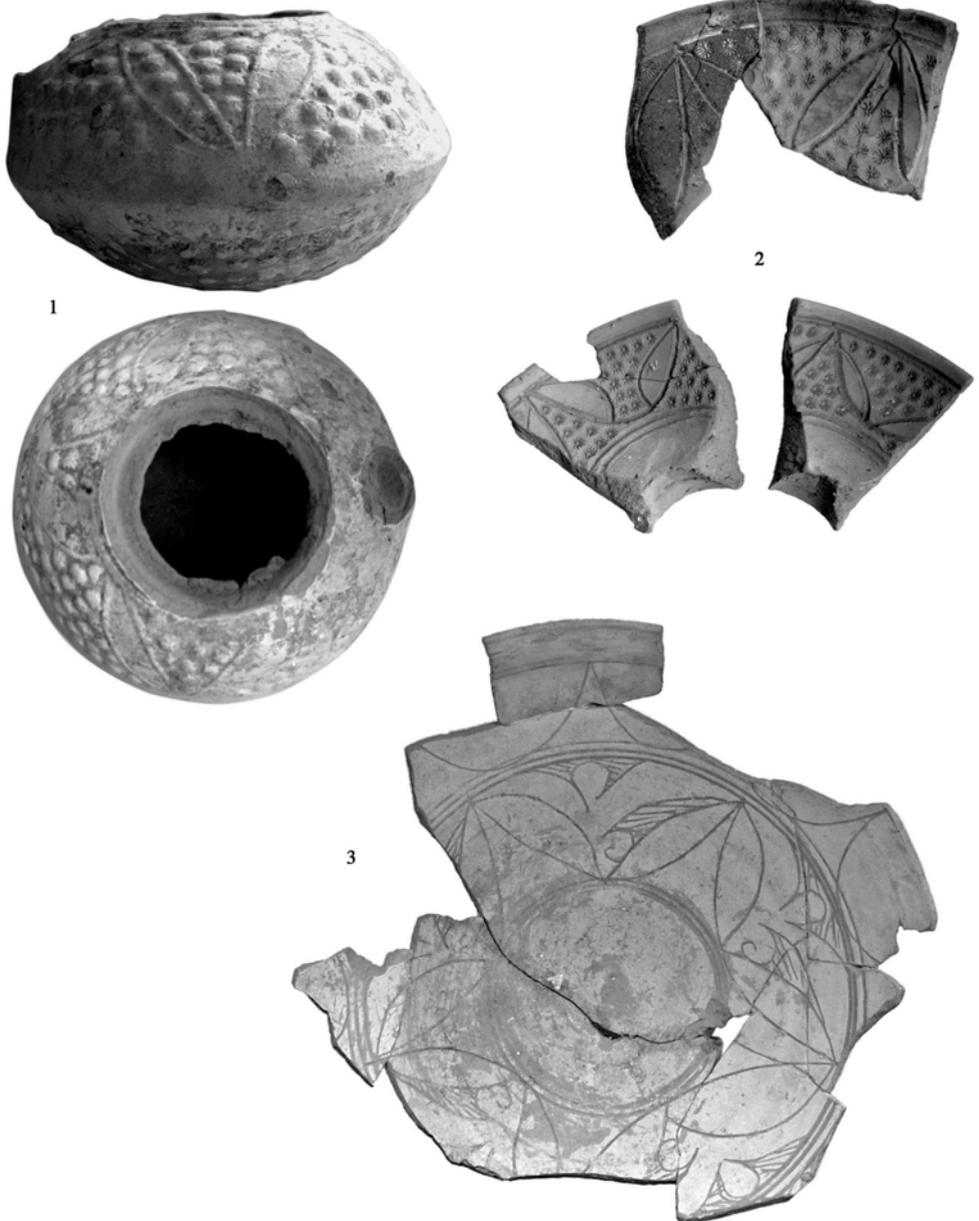
8



9



Pl. 4. Tripods.



Pl. 5. 1 – Ellipsoidal shaped vessel; 2 – Ceramic mould; 3 – Bowl (prepared for glazed).