

# The Cimmerian Antiquities in the North-Western Black Sea Region

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The archaeological excavations during the last 20 years in the North-western Black Sea Region have completed a historical data base in the study of the later pre-Scythian periods. There are around 20 Cimmerian sites which were found between the South Bug, Dniester and Danube<sup>1</sup> rivers area and had been published in A.I. Terenožkin's collection (1976), but now these are known more than 60. There are graves in barrows (56) and single finds.

Some main scientific works refer to the chronology and genesis of the Northern Black Sea Region sites of the later pre-Scythian periods. Terenožkin's chronological examining is more well-grounded. There are two chronological stages: the Černogorovsk culture (the 9th - mid 8th c. B.C.) and the Novoščerkassk one (mid of the 8th - first-part of the 7th c. B.C.)<sup>2</sup>. These conclusions are based on the differences of the bits of bridle of two types, the weapons and other indications. Lately, the cultural-chronological problem ratio of the Černogorovsk's and Novoščerkassk's antiques has attracted attention again, as a result of new archaeological finds. And now the scholars try to define a new position in this problem of the classification and historical interpretation of Northern Black Sea Region Cimmerian sites in the light of a modern conception about the historical process at the end of the 2nd - the beginning of the 1st millennia B.C.<sup>3</sup> Terenožkin's chronological sequence of the Černogorovsk and Novoščerkassk stages in the Cimmerian culture, is now disputed. The researchers assume a synchronism of these cultures<sup>4</sup>. Some of them distinguish a separate Černogorovsk culture<sup>5</sup>. Others deny a possibility of identifying any archaeological sites with the Cimmerian culture<sup>6</sup>.

The Cimmerian graves revealed in the north-western Black Sea Region are concentrated in three areas, generally: on the Lower-Danube left bank, on the Lower Transdnier (great number), and on the Lower Bug (fig. 1). These rarely have been found in the steppe or at the boundary of the forest-steppe zone. The Cimmerian graves in a barrow cemetery nearby Suvorovo village, the separate barrows at Petrodolinskoe, Slobozia, and Cotiujeni were excavated in recent times. Others are secondary inhumations in the earlier more ancient barrows. These graves are characteristic of the burial constructions of different forms, with considerable differences in funeral rite, skeleton's orientations, and grave-goods, which differ from the foregoing Belozersk culture. They are very rarely accompanied by weapons and the bridle pieces are absent particularly. These facts complicate the classification of the North-western Cimmerian graves too.

We have the data, from the 46 graves, about their pit grave constructions. There are: 22 inhumations in rectangular-plane pits; 6 - in oval ones; 18 - in pit-grave recesses, 14 of these were log-covered; 2 - beam-covered; 4 - with log walls and 3 - stone-beam walls. The pit-grave recesses were blockaded with slabs in their passages (fig. 2; 21). Four skeletons only were slightly covered with ochre. In 53 graves the skeletal position and orientation were defined. The 24 inhumations of these graves were contracted on their sides or backbones, and 29 ones - had extended supine position. From the contracted skeletons, 10 were with southern orientation, sometimes with deviation to W or E; 12 oriented to the east, with a deviation to S and N; 2 oriented NW. The orientations of extended supine skeletons are: W - 13 graves; S - 4; N - 6; E - 6 ones. It is suggested that, for the great number of contracted burials (associated with more archaic grave-goods), the southern orientation is connected to the previous Belozersk culture burials, but strictly differs from the grave group which orientation is of W and NW. For the extended supine inhumations the western orientation was more popular. These orientation differences of the contracted and extended supine burials are connected with more strict grave-goods differences, which help to state a funeral rite development from contracted to extended positions, and suggests that the contracted position is one of the archaic indications of the Cimmerian burials<sup>7</sup>. However, we have grounds to divide in the North-western Black Sea Region Cimmerian graves into three chronological groups (using the positions, orientations and grave-goods complex data).

1. A Suvorovo barrow cemetery is one of the earlier highlight sites of the Cimmerian culture. It was located on the eastern bank of the Katlabukh lake (Odessa region). There is a small Cimmerian barrow, with a diameter of 15-30 m, placed near ancient Bronze Age barrows. On this site 7 burial mounds of this group with 8 graves<sup>8</sup> have been explored. The archaeological investigations of these barrows have given very important matter characterising a transitional period from the Bronze Age final stage to the Early Iron Age. The Suvorovo cemetery became the culture-chronological point between the two epochs of the Belozersk and Cimmerian cultures in the Northern Black Sea Region. In the funeral rite and grave-goods of this site are traces of the last-age heritage, as well as a new cultural phenomenon. The contracted skeletons (4 of 6 inhumations are crouched), their southern orientation (2 of 6 skeletons oriented southwards), the shape and construction of the large rectangular pit-graves having log-walls, and, especially, ceramics are genetically connected with the Belozersk culture. The pottery complex consists of: beakers, large jars, bowls, etc., and their decorations can be identified completely with those of the Belozersk burials (fig. 2; 2-7). The golden spiral adornments and a bronze armlet which were found in the Suvorovo cemetery, are analogous to the Belozersk type (fig. 2; 13, 15, 16). Other metallic grave-

goods: a bimetallic dagger having bronze pommel and iron edge (fig. 2; 8), open work pendant-case (fig. 2; 9), bronze tripartite lunula-pendant (fig. 2; 12), which characterize a culture of early nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes. There is a new phenomenon, the appearance of the extended supine skeletons and their disordered orientation. Terenožkin thought that the Suvorovo cemetery is an earlier Černogorovsk stage site of the pre-Scythian period and beginning of the 10th and the 9th c. B.C.<sup>9</sup> We assume that many Belozersk culture features of the funeral ritual and grave-goods in Suvorovo allow us to date them not later than the end of the 10th - 9th c. B.C. This dating of the cemetery is based, on the one hand, on its connection to the Belozersk burial complexes, on the other hand, there are great differences from other North-western Black Sea Region Cimmerian burials. The above mentioned peculiarities of the Suvorovo cemetery served for the distinction (by some scholars) within it, of the Belozersk and Cimmerian graves (barrow 5, graves 1 and 2)<sup>10</sup>. In our opinion, however, this cemetery's burial complexes represent the earlier contacts of the Late Bronze Age local population which inhabited the Black Sea Region (Belozersk culture) with the early nomadic tribes which came from the Eurasian steppes. The first signs of these contacts with the strangers date from the end of the Belozersk period, through the find of a bronze sword having a cruciform guard and mushroom-shaped pommel which was found near the Gerbino village of the Odessa region (fig. 2; 1) - one of the earliest weapons of the '*karasuk type*' in the Northern Black Sea Region. Probably, the several contracted and extended supine skeletons in the pit-graves and pit-grave recesses, associated with funerary ceramic material similar to the Belozersk type, can be connected with the Suvorovo barrow cemetery, as one group. To these belong: a grave 1 in barrow 5 at Gura Bâcului (fig. 2; 18-20)<sup>11</sup>, a grave 7 in barrow 1 at Krasnoe<sup>12</sup>, a grave 7 in barrow at Trapovka (fig. 4; 2).

2. The contracted and extended supine inhumations, with funeral ritual and grave-goods resembling those of the Černogorovsk stage sites, represent a next chronological group. There are 22 inhumations, 8 of these were disposed in pit-grave recesses. *Grave-goods*: wooden vessels, rim overlaid with bronze (fig. 2; 24-26), bronze feet (fig. 2; 23; fig. 3; 12), bronze head-rings, stone cylindrical and rectangular into their cross-section grindstones, bone arrow-heads (fig. 3; 3, 14, 15). *Pottery*: moulded beakers, large beaker-form vessels, large jars, ladles decorated with a broad incised or impressed ornamental band, sometimes with an alternating relief one. *Decoration*: shaded zigzags, triangles, crossed lines forming rhombs, crooked and check-like incised lines, cogged and S-shaped stamps (fig. 3; 7-16). These include: graves 5 and 11 in barrow at Velikodolinskoe (fig. 3; 8, 9), Vinogradnyj Sad (fig. 3; 7)<sup>13</sup>, Congaz (fig. 3; 10), Semenovka (fig. 3; 13), Krasnoe barrow 5, grave 3 (fig. 3; 14-16)<sup>14</sup>, Chircăiești barrow 4, grave 3 (fig. 4; 7), Căușeni (fig. 4; 13), and so on. A group of Saharna-Solonceni sites, in the forest-

steppe Moldova, have pottery resembling the latter group. Now these have been dated at the end of the 10th - the first-half of the 8th c. B.C.<sup>15</sup> Hence, we date the graves in steppe area, having analogous ceramics, by the 9th - 8th c. B.C. Not many inhumations associated with rich burial gifts, belong to this group. In the burial complex of barrow 2, grave 1 at Kalinovka, a large biconical black burnished vessel, a wooden vessel overlaid with bronze and gold, a bronze knife, a cylindrical hammer, and a grindstone were found (fig. 2; 21-28)<sup>16</sup>. Also, a central Cimmerian rich warrior's inhumation in the barrow at Slobozia, now is singular in the North-western Black Sea Region. It had the following *grave-goods*: an iron sword (fig. 4; 11), bronze single-ringed bits of bridle, bone curb bits, bronze and golden adornments<sup>17</sup>. This analysis of this complex shows that the Belozersk cultural components were not dominant in the 2nd group formation. The funeral rite and grave-goods main elements are evidence of the mass penetration, within this stage, of a new culture-carriers, representing the so-called '*proto-Scythian culture*', in the North-western Black Sea Region. These are cardinal changes of the cultural-historical situation in this region<sup>18</sup>. Some of the above-mentioned Cimmerian complexes (Kalinovka, Slobozia), as we are aware, had the archaeological materials which were connected through their genesis with the Northern Caucasus (the bronze equipment of the bridle, the hammer), as well as with Central Europe (an iron sword, pottery).

In this group there have been distinguished graves of a small group associated with typical Thracian pottery. There is a jug ornamented with incised and impressed pattern of white inlaid work in grave 13 of barrow 10 found at Sărata. It is typical for the Basarabi culture (fig. 3; 3). A two-handled bowl (fig. 3; 3) found in barrow 9-b at Parcani. Grave 2 of barrow 4 at Cotiujeni and grave 4 of barrow 3 at Roșcani had, by the skeletons, jugs of the Șoldănești type (fig. 3; 1) and relates to this group too. There is an interesting pottery complex of the Thracian kind revealed in a destroyed grave 1 of barrow 4 at Divizia. This consists of: a biconical vessel, beaker-form vessel, and cylindrical one having a spout (fig. 3; 4-6). Analogous vessels characterize the early Thracian sites in the Lower-Danube area, where these date from the 8th to the beginning of the 6th c. B.C.<sup>19</sup> We have noticed that, in funeral ritual, these inhumations are not differed from the Cimmerian ones.

3. There are the extended supine inhumations in the rectangular-oval pit graves (including 8 inhumations in pit-grave recesses), which represent a later group of the Cimmerian burials in the North-western Black Sea Region, resembling the Novoșčerkassk stage. There are 20 of that kind. The graves are generally characterized by western orientation. *Grave-goods*: rare iron knives (fig. 4; 10), bronze rhombic-pointed arrow-heads (fig. 4; 5, 6), wooden vessels, and grindstones. Pottery represented by the tulip-shaped vessels (fig. 4; 8), but generally - beakers, beaker-form vessels, ladles decorated with the incised ornamentation

upon broad band (fig. 4; 1, 3, 4, 14-17). The form and decoration of these vessels, however, help us to identify them with the late stage of the Černyj Les culture ceramics in the Dnieper right bank forest-steppe area, dated by the second-half of the 8th - the first-part of the 7th c. B.C.<sup>20</sup> Numerous concentrations of these were located in the Lower Dniester area such as Maiaki, Sukleja, Dal'nik II, Petrodolinskoe, Markovka, Limanskoe, and so forth. A small number are placed in the Southern Bug area. One grave in barrow at Bereska, equipped with an iron dagger of the Novoščerkassk type (fig. 4; 12), a hoard containing iron weapons and pieces of bridle at Purcari, of the Novoščerkassk type too<sup>21</sup>, also a stone anthropomorphic stele with carved belt, dagger, and quiver from Olbia (fig. 4; 18). In the North-western Black Sea Region the Cimmerian funeral rite and grave-goods reflect a difficult process, implying relations of local and strange populations in the 9th - 7th c. B.C. There are two basic population groups: the locals are connected with the previous Belozersk culture traditions; the easterners are from uncertain centres of Central Asia and the Caucasus; there are strong influences from neighbouring settled tribes, generally from the early Thracians in the Carpathian-Danubian basin.

The settled population of the North-western Black Sea Region steppe zone complexes serves as evidence for the complete desertion of this area during the 9th - 8th c. B.C., compared to the foregoing Late Bronze Age. There is complete lack of settlements till the beginning of the Greek colonisation period. The more real presence of the settled population has been traced at Orlovka and Novosel'skoe, located on the Lower Danube left bank. In 1963, during the excavations of a multi-layered site at the well-known settlement on the Kamennaja Gora place at Orlovka, it was established that the layer of the 8th - 7th c. B.C. belongs to the Basarabi culture, which was overlapped by the later layers<sup>22</sup>. In 1989, near Orlovka (15 km further, at another point), signs of settled population were found. This is a husbandry-complex, containing several cooking pits and other objects, representing a Novosel'skoe II settlement. Its pottery has preliminarily been dated by the 8th - 7th ce. B.C., that is in connection with the Basarabi culture, or the Babadag late phase<sup>23</sup>. This site is the prospective field for future research of the ancient Thracian tribes which lived on the Lower Danube left bank.

The later Černolessk-culture sites (the 9th - 8th c. B.C.) were disposed in the forest-steppe southern boundary, between the Southern Bug and Dniester. There is the small pottery complex of the Černolessk-culture from the excavations by F.A. Kozubovskij (1933) at the Kremenščuk settlement on the Southern Bug. This fact had synonymously demonstrated a sporadic penetration of those tribes into the steppe areas along river valleys.

We should pay attention to the topography of the sites which were left by the settled population during the 8th - 7th c. B.C. in the North-western Black Sea

Region. The Orlovka settlement, placed on the so-called Kamennaja Gora, is washed by water around its three sides and dominated over the whole district. Kremenščuk I is analogous, and was located on a difficult rock (height of 42 - 43 m from the river level) having only one passageway into this settlement. This topography of the Basarabi and Černolessk-cultures settlements testify that the settled population penetrated into the North-western Black Sea Region periphery areas, with close contacts among the neighbouring nomadic tribes, but, nevertheless, they did not feel totally safe in the Cimmerian steppe.

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## NOTES

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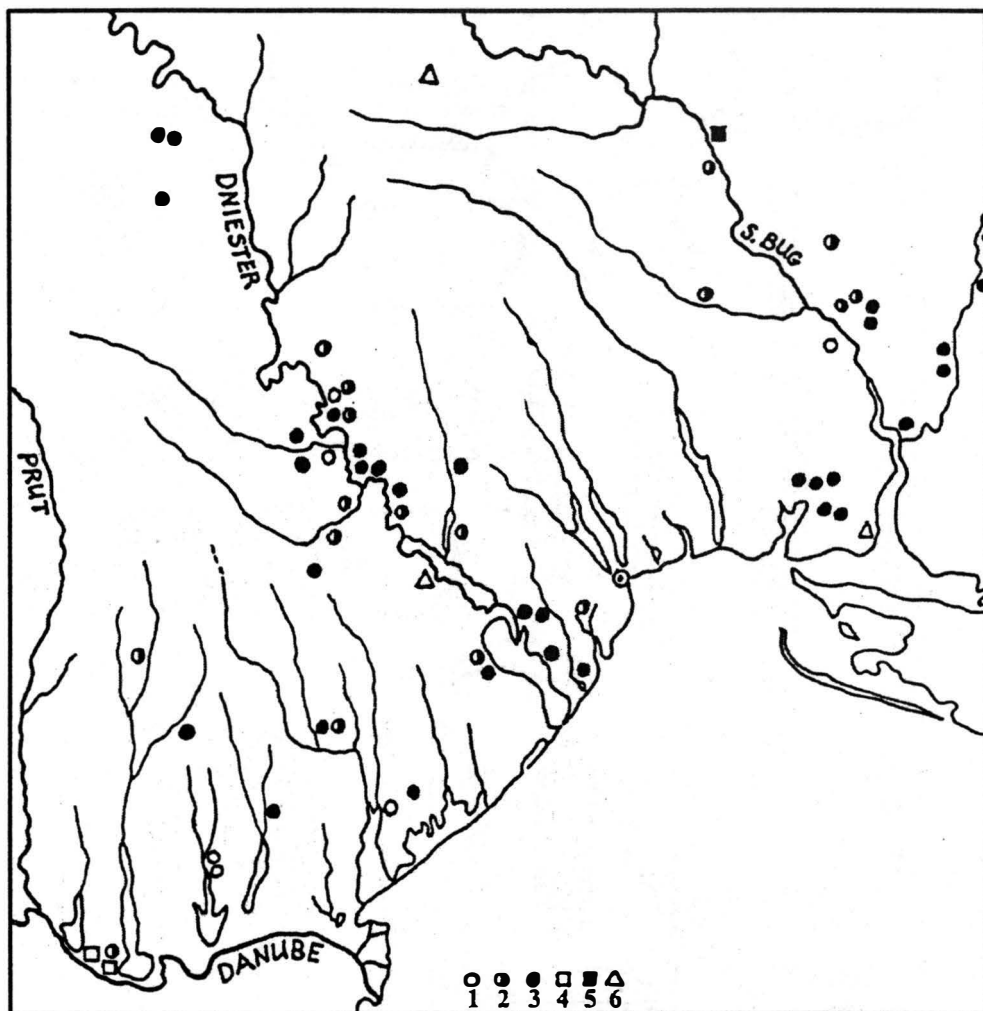


Fig. 1 Map of the sites of the end of the 10th - 7th c. B. C.

Key: 1 - The barrows of the end of the 10th - 9th c. B. C.,  
 2 - The barrows of the 9th - 8th c. B. C.,  
 3 - The barrows of the 8th - 7th c. B. C.  
 4 - The Basarabi culture settlement,  
 5 - The Černyj culture settlement,  
 6 - The separate finds.

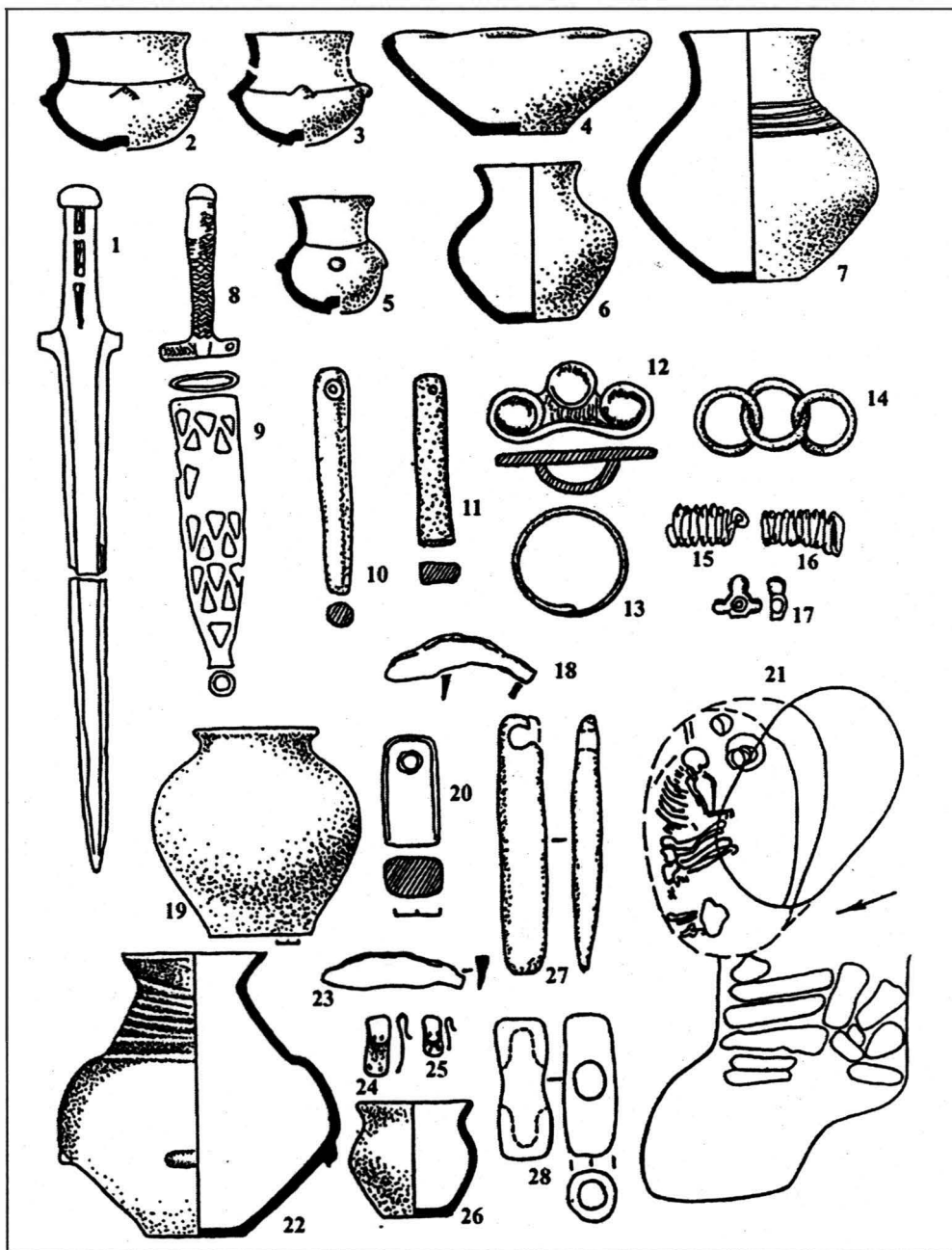


Fig. 2: 1 - Gerbino; 2-17 - Suvorovo; 18-20 - Gura Bâcului (after V. A. Dergacev); 21-28 - Kalinovka (after Ju. S. Grebennikov).



Fig. 3: 1 - Roşcani; 2, 11, 12 - Sărata; 3 - Parcani; 4-6 - Divizia; 7 - Vinogradnyj Sad; 8, 9 - Velikodolinskoe; 10 - Congaz; 13 - Semenovka; 14-16 - Krasnoe (1 - after I. Borzjak, 3, 10 - after A. I. Meljukova, 7 - after Ju. S. Grebennikov, 1984, 14-16 - after N. L. Serova, E. V. Jarovoj).

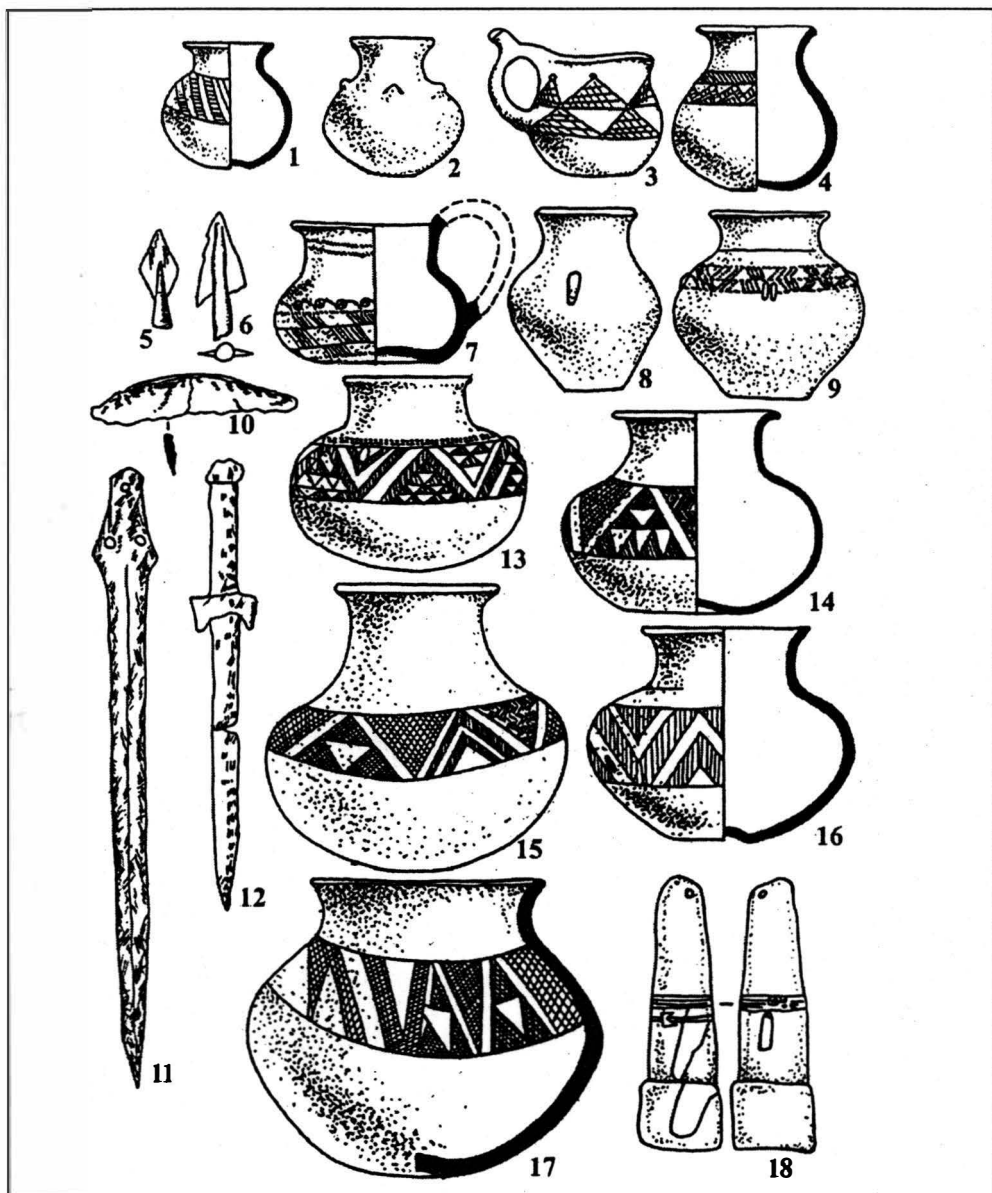


Fig. 4: 1 - Ivanovka; 2 - Trapovka; 3 - Petrodolinskoe; 4 - Novaja Odessa;  
 5 - Parcani; 6 - Holmskoe; 7 - Chircăiești; 8 - Kostychi; 9 - Sukleja; 10 - Krasnoe;  
 11 - Slobozia; 12 - Berezki; 13 - Căușeni; 14 - Dal'nik 2; 15 - Maiaki;  
 16 - Ogorodnoe; 17 - Pivdennoe; 18 - Olvia, (1, 4, 8 - after Ju. S. Grebennikov, 5,  
 9, 13 - after A. I. Meljukova, 10, 11 - after N. L. Serova, E. V. Jarovoj, 12 - after  
 V. L. Lapușnjan).