

# A few Considerations on the Funeral Rite and Ritual of the Early and Middle Bronze Age in the Oltenian Area\*

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The funeral rite and ritual of the Early and Middle Bronze Age are aspects which have been less studied and less known for the territory between the Meridional Carpathians, the Olt river and the Danube. Due to this situation, we shall try to emphasize these aspects or the adjacent ones (magico-religious beliefs concerning the burials) and less those of the chronological framing, cultural evolution, etc.

The first cultural manifestation which has been attributed to the Bronze Age, is represented by the tumular group of Miloștea<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that in the tumuli there has not been noticed osteological remains, probably the rite practised by the community was inhumation (having in view the size and the forms of the pits). It seems that on the defunct or nearby, stone boulders were piled, and the massive rest of coal from tumuli 2 and 3, suggest a possible wood cover for the skeleton. The inventory is relatively poor: a vessel in tumulus 2, a cup and a piece of copper bracelet in tumulus 3, atypical pottery fragments. The boulders of big sizes from the appropriation of some tumuli, show, probably, the existence of some demarcation signs. The framing of these monuments by the discoverers (Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe) at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age has been done on the basis of the observations in tumulus 6 (there has been noticed a stone ring) and of the vessel in tumulus 2, which are analogical in the cordceramical cultures of Central Europe<sup>2</sup>. The chronological framing of the Miloștea's discoveries is not accepted by D. Berciu, who considers them belonging to the Coțofeni culture on the basis of the discoveries made at Ocnița<sup>3</sup>. The classical culture of the Extracarpathian Early Bronze Age is the Glina culture, whereto the three tumular graves of Verbița belong<sup>4</sup>.

The Verbița tumuli are middle sized (bore of 16-20 m), are not tall, have the graves in not very deep pits in comparison with the ancient soil, with skeletons laying on the back side, tight legs and probably later falling on the right side due to the earth's weight. The orientation of the skeletons is North-South. A little ochre has been noticed and, as regards the pottery inventory, two vessels laying at the feet of each skeleton. Besides, in tumulus 2, a child's skeleton has been discovered, a thin silver wire ring near the right hand of the skeleton, and little pieces of coal surrounding this, as well<sup>5</sup>. However a question arises - if these little coal pieces are not connected to the

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sacred fire, purifying, associated with the deceased child's purity. It could be the space of the pit purified by fire. Starting from these observations and from the studies of I. Bona<sup>6</sup> and H. Ciugudean<sup>7</sup> as well, we shall divide the tumuli dated in this period (end of the eneolithic-beginning of the Bronze Age) in two large categories:

a) The tumuli which belong to the steppe populations of the north-pontic area. These have large size and, generally, an east-west skeletons' orientation; they contain ochre and, many times, wood constructions, as well. To this category belong the tumuli of Plenița<sup>8</sup>, Rast<sup>9</sup>, Câmpia Turzii<sup>10</sup>, Gurbănești<sup>11</sup> etc., Hungary<sup>12</sup> (Karhozotthalom, Balazshalom, Dunahalom, etc.), the former Yugoslavia<sup>13</sup> (Japina Koliba, Vljakovac, Perlez, Vojlovica), Bulgaria<sup>14</sup> (Tsarevbrod, Gehanovo, Goran Slatina). The tumuli of this category belong to the same area of the burials with ochre from southern Russia and Eastern Europe<sup>15</sup>.

b) The tumuli which belong to the local populations. To this category also belong the tumuli discovered at Verbița, and those at Livezile<sup>16</sup>, Vălișoara<sup>17</sup>, Cheile Aiudului-Dealul Velii<sup>18</sup>, Ampoița<sup>19</sup>, Petreștii de Sus<sup>20</sup>, Tureni<sup>21</sup>, as well as the Belotic Bela-Crkva type<sup>22</sup>, and Vinkovci-Somogyvár type<sup>23</sup>, Mala Gruda<sup>24</sup>, etc.

Within these two large categories of tumuli, there are many varieties (tumuli with or without stone cover, with rich or poor inventories, with skeletons in different positions). Despite this large variety, all the tumular graves preserve, in a larger or smaller proportion, the common elements with having roots in the north pontic area. Thus we believe that this could explain, for the discoveries of Verbița, the maintenance of the idea of tumulus as the "dead house" and at the same time a distinctive sign for the dead, as well as the presence of weak traces of ochre, and the position of the skeletons, considering the strong steppical component of the Glina culture<sup>25</sup>. As regards the skeletons' orientation we can find analogies with the stone graves from northern Muntenia<sup>26</sup>.

As regards the Middle Bronze Age on the territory of Oltenia, we shall present firstly, the funeral rite and ritual belonging to the Verbicioara culture, which is unfortunately less known. Nearby the eponimic settlement, at Verbicioara, has been discovered an inhumation grave, with the skeleton on the left side laying, in crouched position, with the head orientated to south, having the face to sunset<sup>27</sup>. The inventory of the grave consisted of a Cypriot needle and two bronze rings. The chronological framing has been settled to phase 1 of the culture<sup>28</sup>. The defunct's facing west suggest that death was compared to the sun's disappearance from the canopy of heaven, so prevalent with the existence of a "shadows' land" whereto the deceased was going.

At Verbicioara there have been discovered two other graves<sup>29</sup>; this time one of urns of incineration, dated to phase 2, eventually to the beginning of phase 3 of the culture<sup>30</sup>. It has to be noticed that beginning from this moment, the rite of incineration was adopted (it is also possible that the two rites coexisted). The question which arises: which was the reason of the ritual's change? One reason could

be the fundamental changes of the religious concepts. We believe that the changes occurred under the Vatina and Gârla Mare cultures' influences, cultures having as funeral rite the incineration<sup>31</sup>. We based this affirmation on the study of M. Nica<sup>32</sup>, in which the researcher presents the influences of the two cultures in Verbicioara medium, beginning with phase 3 (phase 2 after M. Nica). Thus the cup with the bulging body and the tall neck is approaching as form, the cups from the first level of habitate of the Ghidici "Balta Țarova"<sup>33</sup> settlement. The deep bowl in the shape of a biconical body as a certain type of dishes are of an obvious Vatina origin. Some typical vessels for phase 3 (phase 2 after M. Nica) are the cups with spherical body and over highed ears, finished with lunatae proeminences, typical for Gârla Mare and Vatina cultures<sup>34</sup>. Which was the form under which the Vatina and Gârla Mare cultures penetrated into the Verbicioara medium, we cannot release yet. It is sure that members of those two communities entered in the row of the Verbicioara tribes.

The last cultural manifestation we are dealing with in this paper is the Gârla Mare culture, as the most eastern of the urn fields. Necropoles belonging to this culture have been discovered at: Ostrovul Mare-Bivolarii<sup>35</sup>, Balta Verde<sup>36</sup>, Ghidici\*, Bistret<sup>37</sup>, Cârna-Grindu Tomii<sup>38</sup> and Cârna-Ostrovogania<sup>39</sup>. These are constituted of plane graves of incineration with rests of incineration deposited in urns but also with rests deposited directly into the pit. The funeral inventories are distinctly by sex and age, by social rank of the defuncts. Besides the funeral urns, as usually an amphora or a kantaros and its lid - a bowl or a cup - had been deposited also some other vessels (after the above mentioned criteria), one or two figurines of clay, too. In M. Nica's<sup>40</sup> opinion by the community of Ghidici, the vessels used as urns were prepared especially for the defunct and were less used for common purposes. Considering that the graves, generally, have not been disturbed by the subsequents, it is possible that those were marked with different "funeral constructions" (stone boulders or wood pillars). The incineration rite used exclusively in the whole area of spreading of the Gârla Mare culture, could be connected to a certain "privilege" granted to the defuncts, exactly that of the union with the fire sacre and purificator, pre-eminently<sup>41</sup>.

Due to the reduced number of funeral discoveries belonging to the Bronze Age on the territory of Oltenia, the exposed conclusions have a limited character; they are going to be completed and diversified through subsequent researches and discoveries.

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\* Informations from Dr. M. Nica, to whom our thanks are due.

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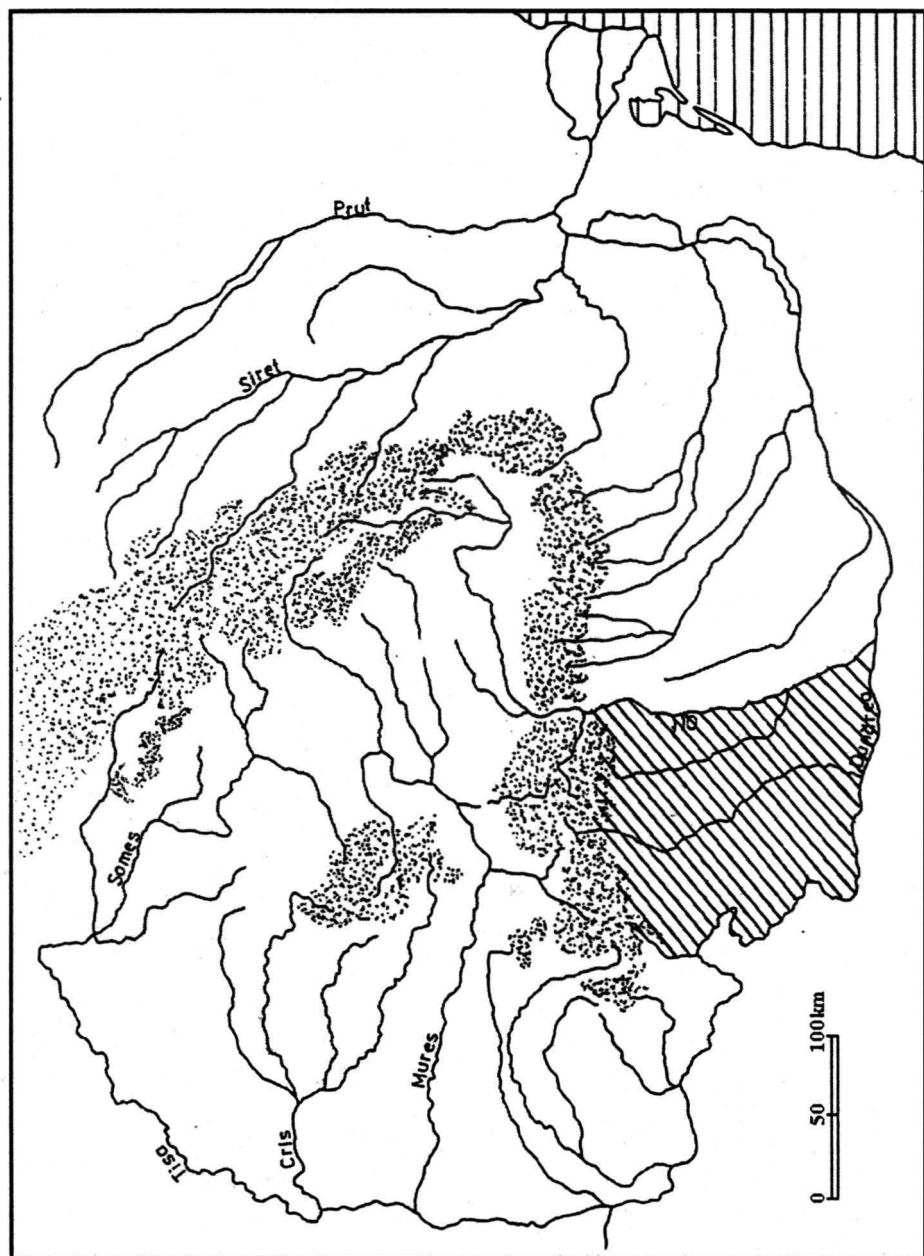
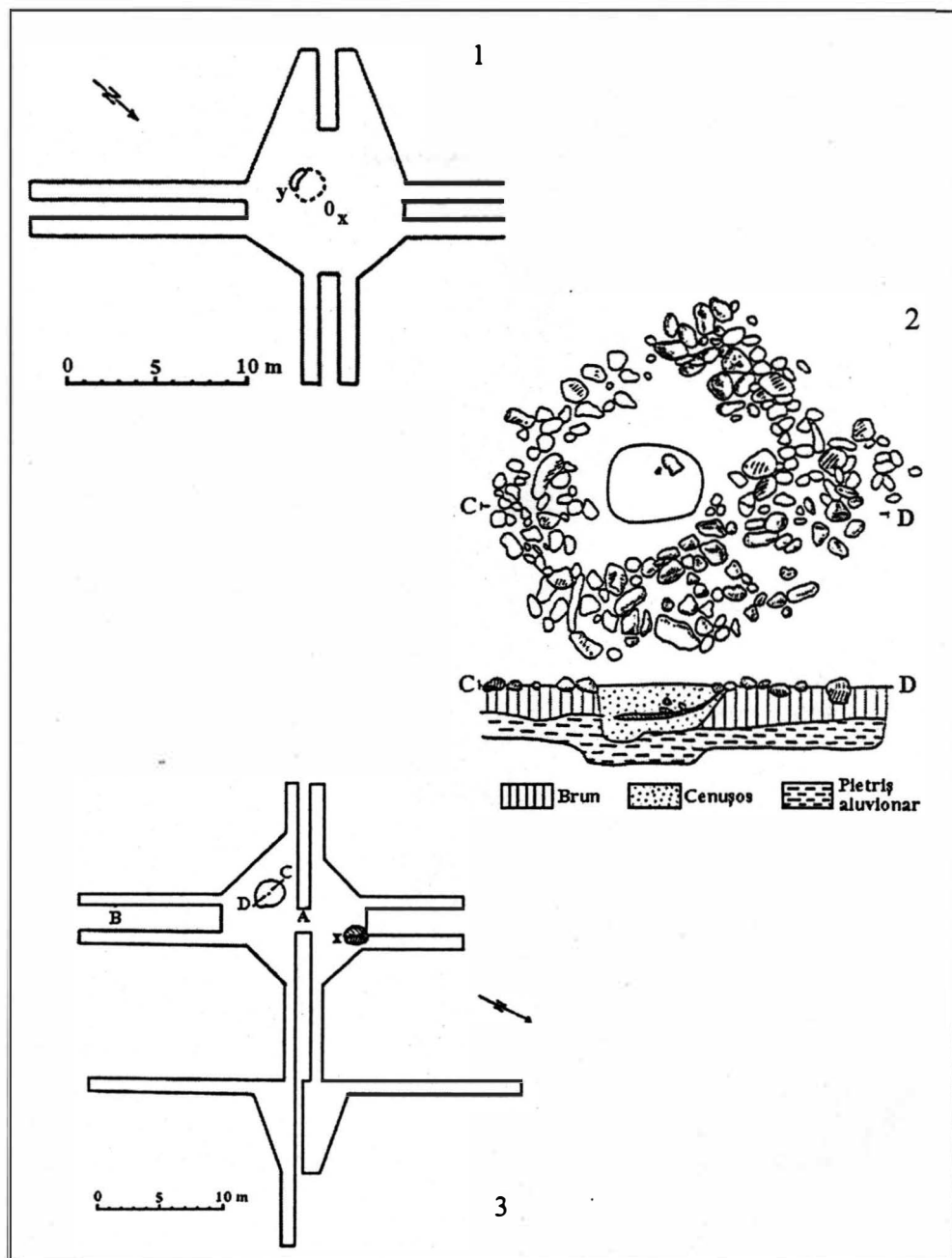
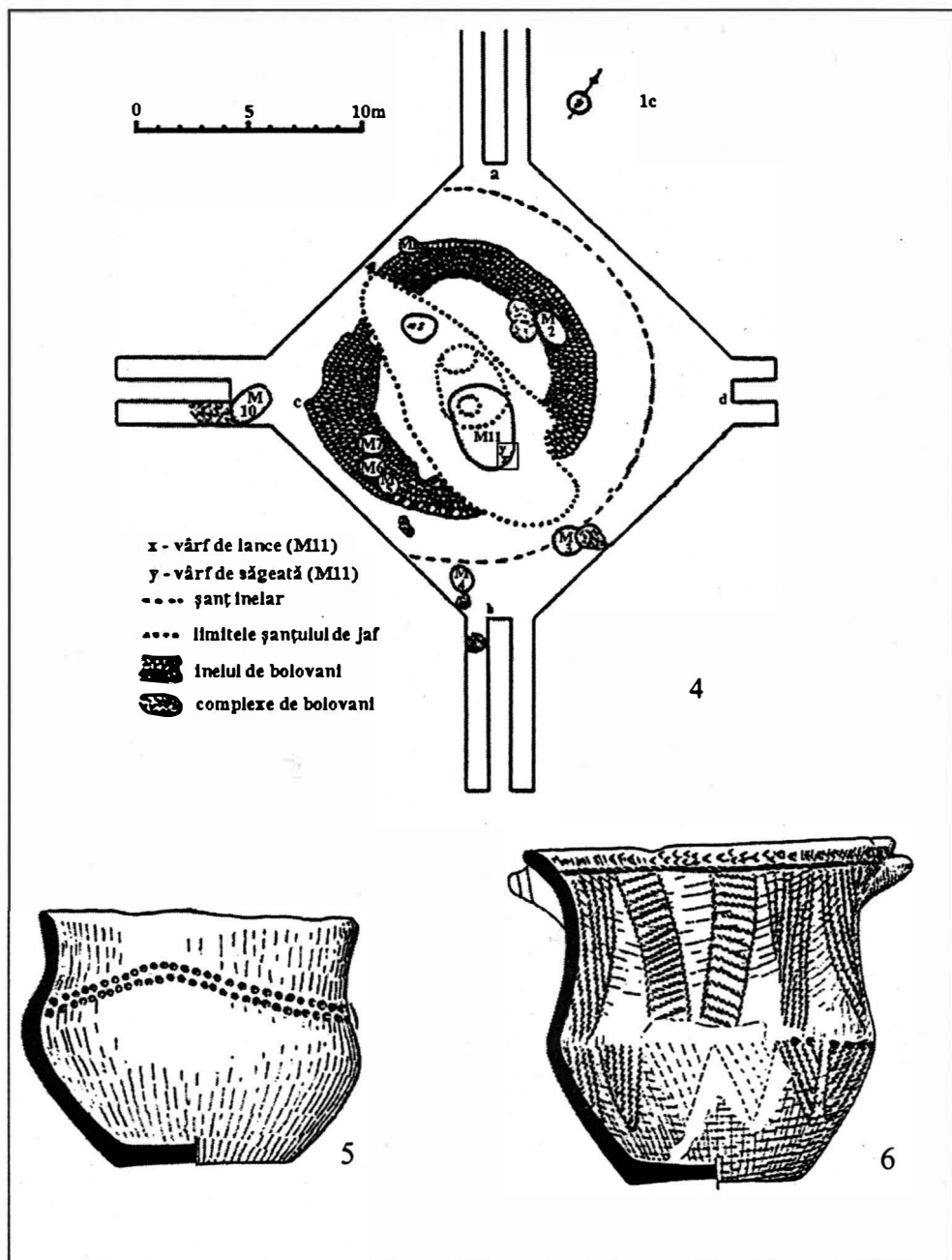


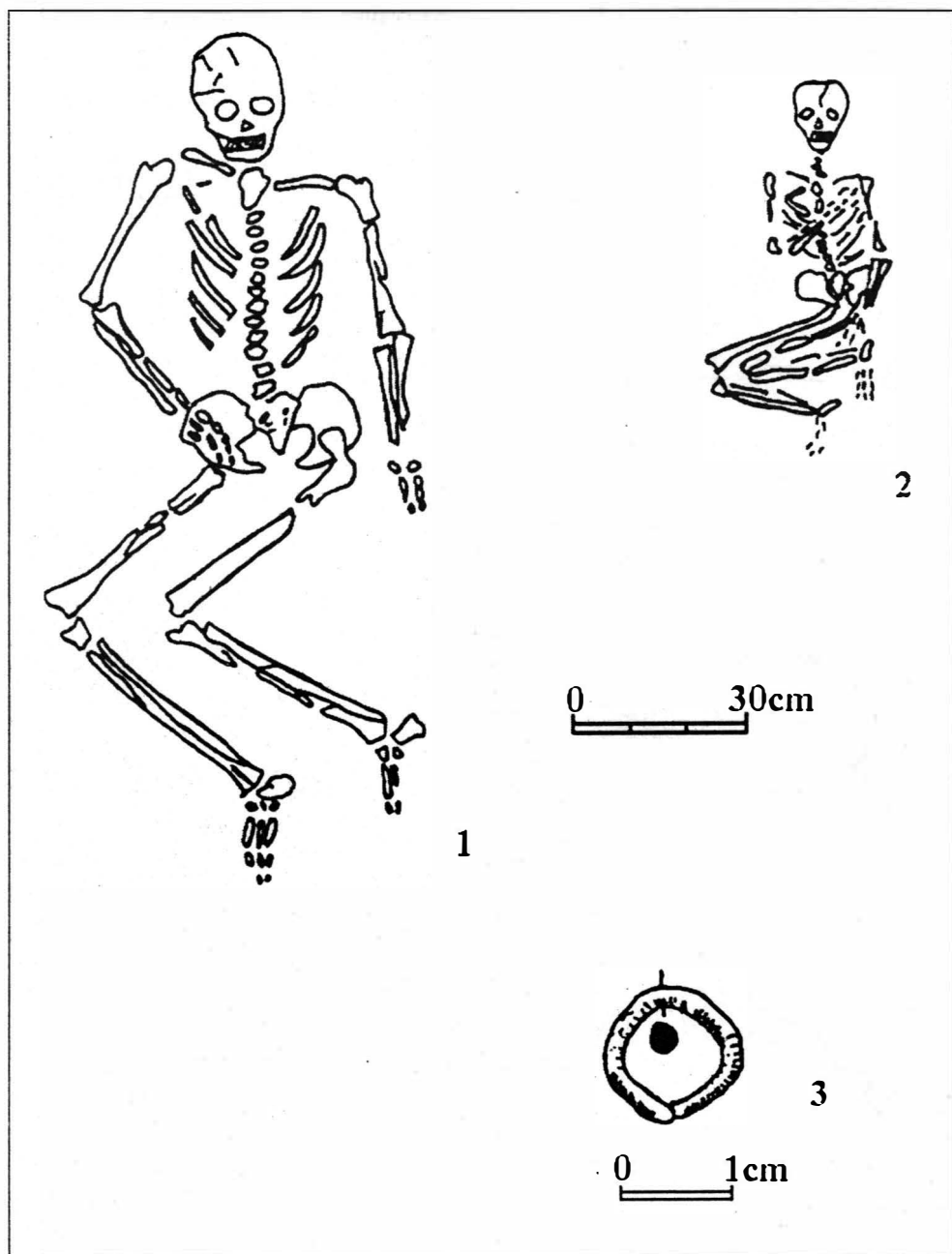
Fig. 1: The Oltenian area.



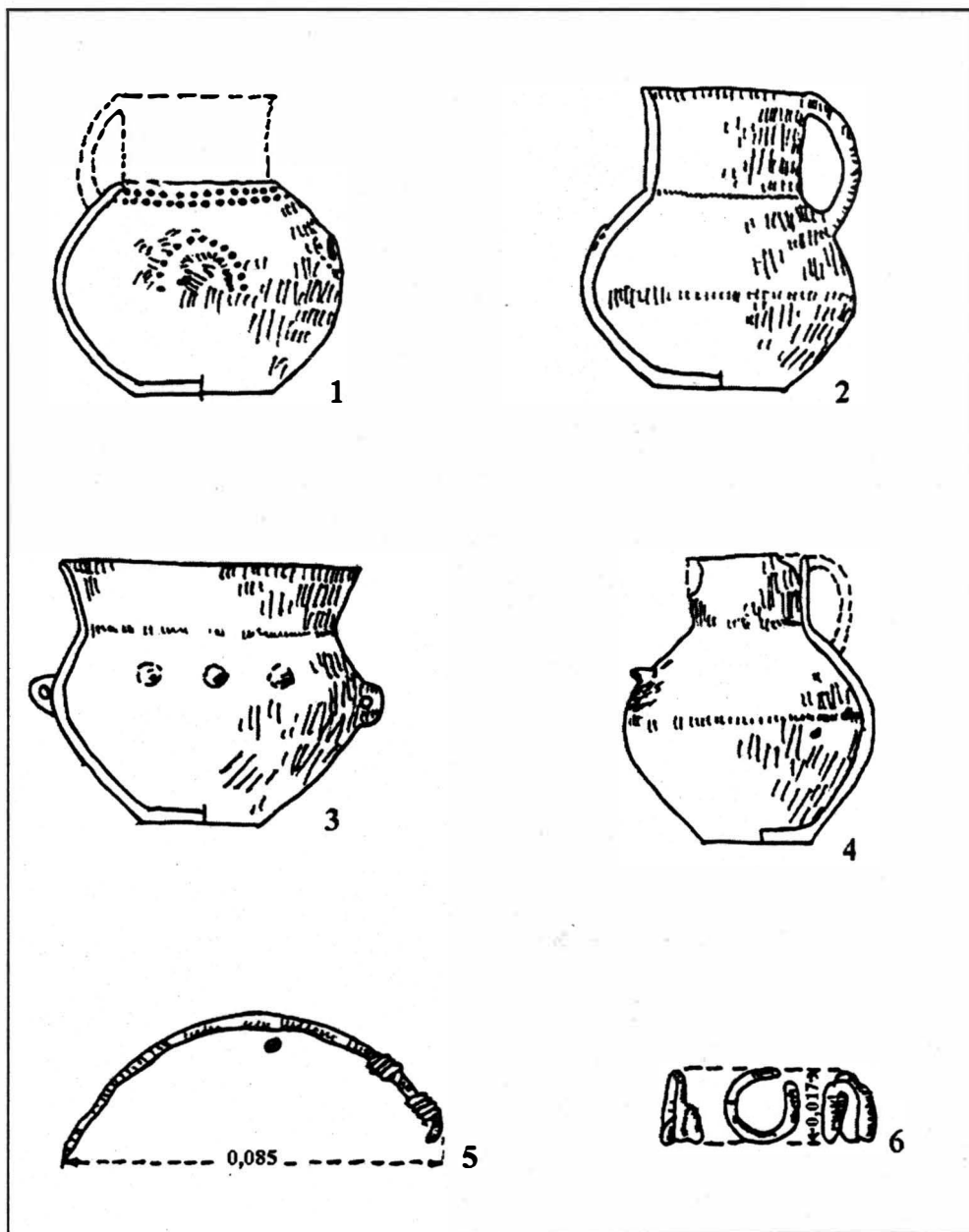
Pl. I: 1 The plane of tumulus 2 (after Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe).;  
 2 The plane of the grave from tumulus 2 (after Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe);  
 3 The plane of tumulus 3 (after Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe).



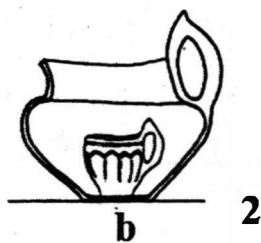
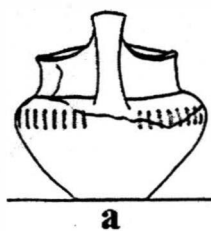
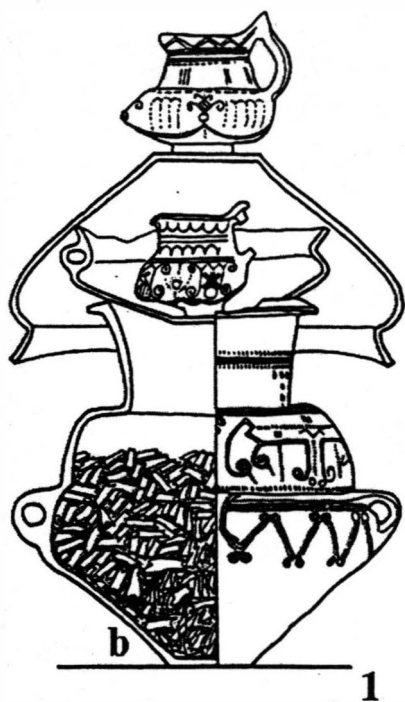
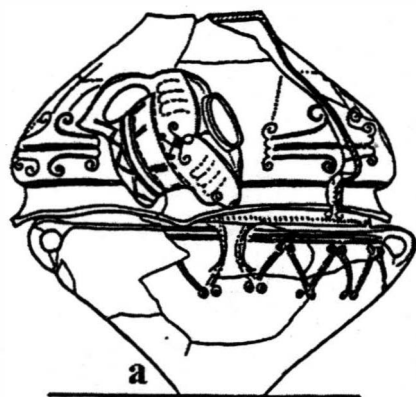
Pl. I: 4 The plane of tumulus 6 (after Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe);  
5, 6 The vessels from tumuli 2 and 3 (after Eugenia Popescu and Al. Vulpe).



Pl. II: 1, 2 The skeletons from tumuli 1 and 2; 3 The silver ring from tumulus 2  
(1, 2, 3 after D. Berciu and P. Roman).



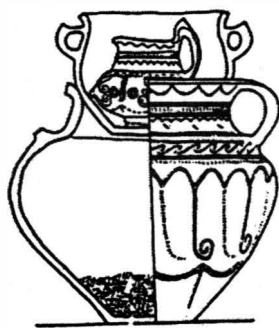
Pl. III: 1, 2, 3, 4 The vessels from tumuli of Verbița (after D. Berciu and P. Roman); 5, 6 The inventory from the inhumation grave of Verbicioara (after D. Berciu)



Pl. IV: The graves from Cârna (after Vl. Dumitrescu).

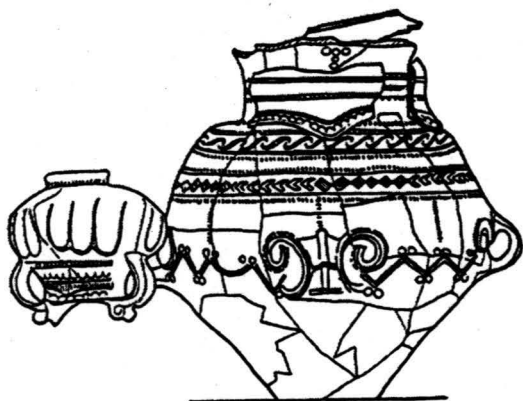


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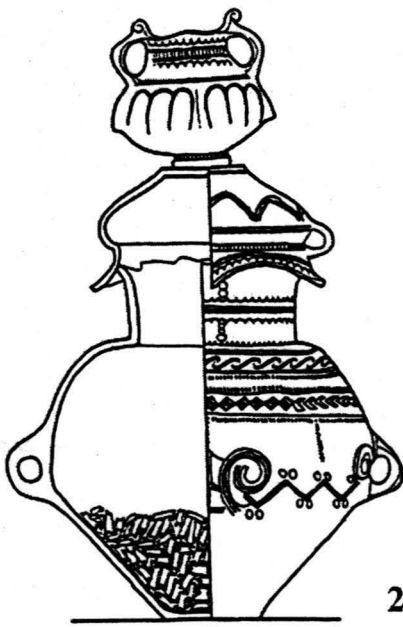


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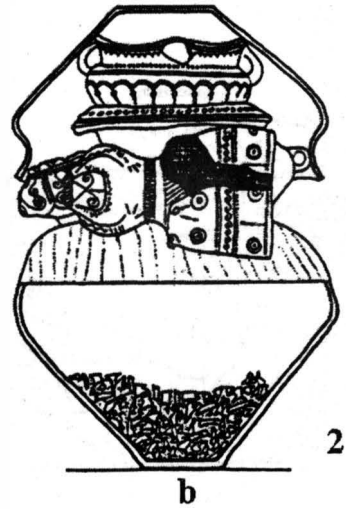
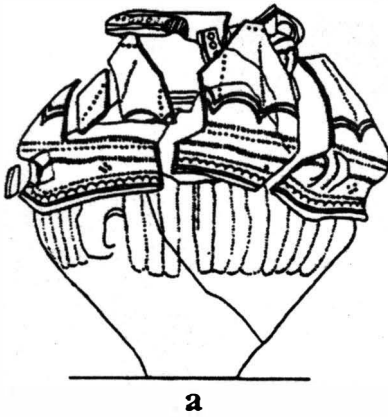
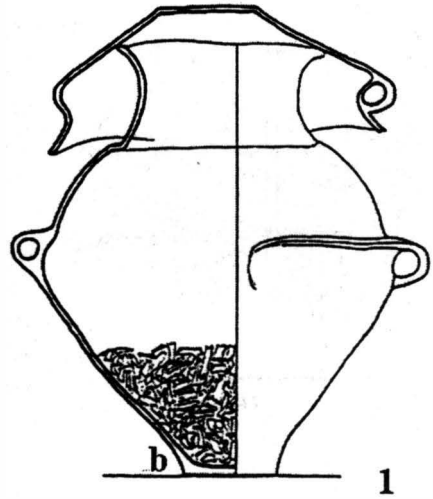
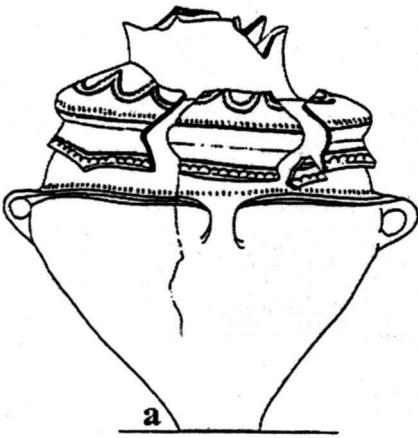
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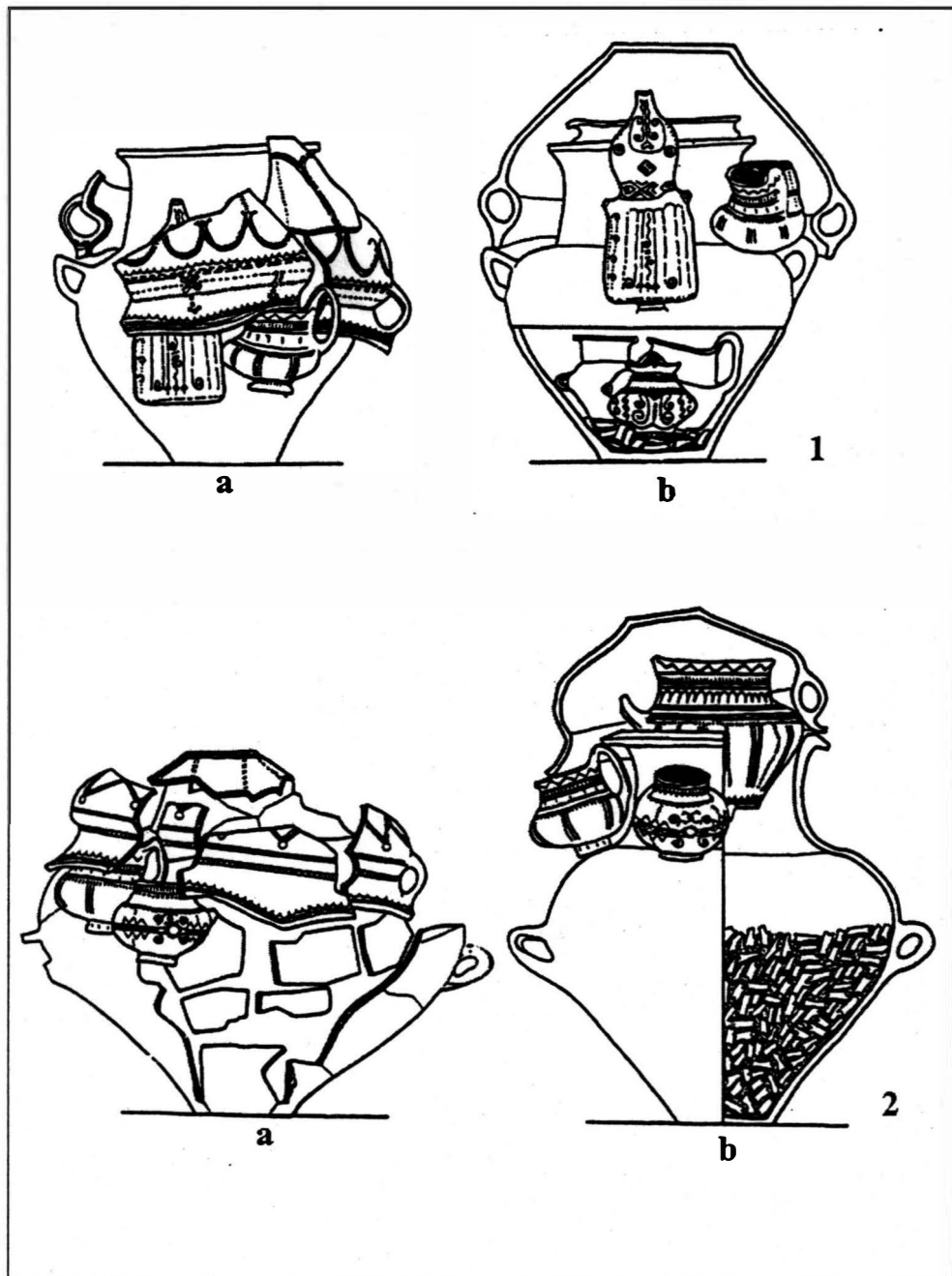
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Pl. V: The graves from Cârna (after Vl. Dumitrescu).



Pl. VI: The graves from Cârna (after Vl. Dumitrescu).



Pl. VII: The graves from Cârna (after Vl. Dumitrescu).