

A Hellenistic Ceramic Deposit from the North-eastern Sector of Chersonesos

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Regular excavations have taken place in ancient Chersonesos since 1888. During this period a number of sections of the city, mainly dating from the Byzantine period have been investigated.

As to the older phases of the city, much less has been revealed, particularly when it comes to the Hellenistic period. Very few assemblages dating from this period have as yet been uncovered. However, on the basis of the few Hellenistic assemblages that have been found, an attempt can be made to build up typologies and chronological developments for a number of artefacts. This paper will present one such assemblage uncovered by the author in the north-eastern part of the city.

In 1991, during the excavations of Block 96 in the north-eastern district of Chersonesos, a cistern tightly packed with pottery debris was found, and this fill was dated to the early Hellenistic period in the preliminary report.¹

The cistern was found under the floor of a room in a house dating from the Byzantine period, the main part of which had been built directly on the bedrock. Only in the north-western part of room I, did it rest upon debris from the Hellenistic period, which turned out to be the filling of a cistern. It was later revealed that the south-eastern part of the house's neighbouring room XI also rested on the cistern (Fig. 1).

The square-shaped cistern was cut out of the bedrock. Its dimensions are 1.45 × 1.45 m with a depth of 1.90 m. These measures are compatible with 4.5 × 4.5 × 6 feet based on the Attic standard foot of 32.5 cm.²

Only the rock surface of the interior of the cistern is preserved, with no traces of stucco or stone constructions, and this was probably how the cistern was meant to be, since the rock here is very solid. The walls show traces of cutting tools such as picks, and the work was very carefully done. Part of the mouth of the cistern (30 cm) – a low and narrow ledge – is preserved in room XI of the Byzantine house.

The fill of the cistern made up about four cubic metres of tightly packed broken pottery, altogether about 3000 fragments.

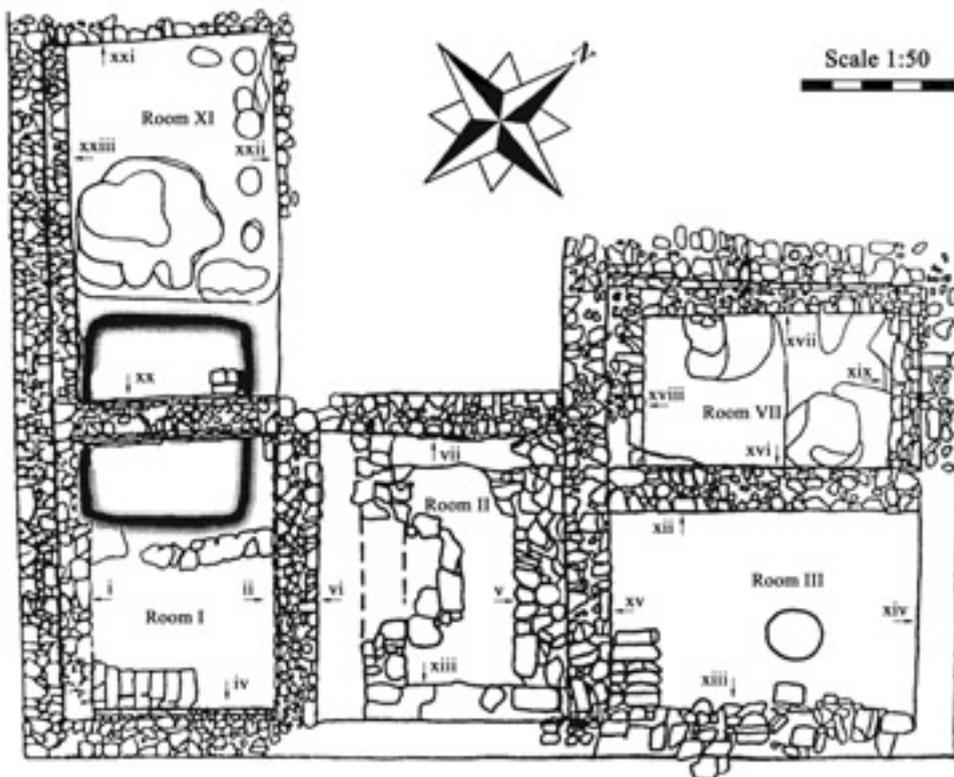


Fig. 1. Plan of the house excavated in 1991, showing the position of the cistern.

AMPHORAS

The majority of the sherds come from amphoras (898 fragments) and jugs. Of the amphora fragments, 739 can be classified as Chersonesean. Some could be restored to virtually complete vessels, but the majority come from amphora necks (Figs. 2-3). They belong to type I (variants Б-Г) as well as to the different variants of types II-IV according to Monachov's classification, and can be dated within the 3rd century BC.³

The latest specimens are toes of type II B, a type which, according to Monachov, is mostly characteristic of the second half of the 3rd century BC.⁴

The second most common group of amphora fragments derive from Sino-pean amphoras (106 fragments). According to their shape they belong to the second half of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 2nd century BC,⁵ and three peg toes from the Rhodian amphoras can be assigned to the same period.

Among the fragments are also a few dating from an earlier period: 34 fragments from Herakleia Pontike, four from Samos, three from Thasos, two from

Mende, and one from Chios. These, however, were probably already sherds when they ended up in the cistern at the time it was filled in.

Special mention should be made of the complete neck and base of an amphora from Kolchis – a rare find at Chersonesos – with the graffito “A” under the handle. The shape of the toe and neck and the proportions of the body date this amphora to the 3rd century BC. A similar vessel, also found in the north-eastern part of Chersonesos, has been published by V.V. Soznik and G.R. Cecchladze with a very wide dating (3rd-2nd centuries BC).⁶ The specimen found in our cistern can provide new evidence for a more precise dating of the amphora production at Kolchis.

An attempt to calculate the number of complete amphoras in the assemblage, based on amphora toes, provides the following result, showing the absolute predominance of amphoras from Chersonesos:

Chersonesean	36
Sinopean	8
Rhodian	3

The dating of the amphoras depends on the stamps, which are not very numerous, a total of 24 specimens, all of which are either Chersonesean or Sinopean.

The Chersonesean stamps are of two types: stamps with the names of *astynomoi*, and monogram stamps. The five monogram stamps – all flat and rectangular – are very distinct. These stamps are usually supposed to be those of the fabricants. Only in a few cases are we able to correlate specific monogram stamps with stamps of *astynomoi*: 1) if the two stamps are placed together on one handle, or 2) if an amphora has both handles preserved, one with the stamp of an *astynomos* and the other with a monogram stamp. The chronology of Chersonesean monogram stamps is still hampered by many uncertainties and thus the monogram stamps cannot be used as dating evidence for the assemblage.⁷

All but one of the Chersonesean *astynomos* stamps in the assemblage can easily be read; most of them belong to V.I. Kac’s chronological group 1. Three of them belong to sub-group 1A⁸ and include two with the name of Matris and one with the name of Nanon. The Matris stamps are from two different dies. Five stamps belong to sub-group 1B,⁹ including three of the *astynomos* Apollonios, one of Herakleios and one with the name of Theogenes. Three stamps belong to sub-group 1B: two of the *astynomos* Dioskouridas made with the same die, and one of Apolla().¹⁰

Two stamps belong to Kac’s chronological group 2: one with the name of the *astynomos* Apollas(?), belonging to sub-group A and one with the name of Matris, son of Agasikles, placed in sub-group B.¹¹ The latest of the Chersonesean stamps, i.e. of Group 2B, thus belong in the period from 272 to 262 BC.¹²

The Sinopean stamps correspond well with this date. They all belong to B.N. Grakov's chronological group IV.¹³ The stamps of the *astynomos* Aischines and the fabricant Psammis and those of the *astynomos* Aischines, son of Iphios, and the fabricant Dias both have a bunch of grapes on the right hand side of the legend, whereas the stamps of the *astynomos* Artemidoros and the fabricant Kallisthenes and of the *astynomos* Demetrios, son of Theugnetos, and the fabricant Agathon have a kantharos as their emblem. The fabricant Psammis is also to be found in Grakov's Group V, and he is therefore likely to be the latest fabricant of Group IV.¹⁴

All the Sinopean stamps recorded in the deposit probably belong to very end of the chronological group IV. As to the date of this group, it is more precisely dated than the previous groups. Assemblages of the Group-IV stamps from Elizavetovskoe are dated to the 290s – 260s BC.¹⁵ According to the Rumanian scholars N. Conovici, A. Avram and G. Poenaru Bordea, this group can be dated within a narrower time limit, from 279 to 258 BC.¹⁶

Bearing in mind that all the *astynomoi* and fabricants of the Sinopean stamps from our assemblage belong at the end of Grakov's group IV, it can be assumed that they date from the end of the 260s BC.

Thus, the amphora stamps in the fill of the cistern suggest that the closing of the deposit is to be dated to a period not earlier than the beginning of the second half of the 3rd century BC.

BLACK-GLAZED

Attic black-glazed ware (Figs. 4-8, 14.5) is also well represented in the fill of the cistern. Altogether, 606 fragments could be recorded. None of them, apart from a tiny piece, belong to the 5th or the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries. In contrast, the 3rd century is very well represented, including numerous large fragments of large fish-plates (31 pieces).¹⁷

The most frequent shape represented in black-glazed ware is the kantharos (45 pieces), some of which have decorations in thinned clay or in white paint. The glaze in some cases is dull and not of the quality found in the Attic black-glazed ware of the 5th and 4th centuries. Among the kantharoi, one of huge dimensions with fluted body and an ivy of thinned clay on the neck stands out. All the types of kantharoi represented in the cistern are well known on the Northern Black Sea littoral, in particular from the settlement of Panskoe I and the Hellenistic necropolis of Olbia.¹⁸

Small Attic black-glazed plates are also very common (66 pieces). They vary as to form and dimensions, but undoubtedly all served the same purpose. They can be divided into two main groups: plates with out-turned rim (46 pieces) and plates with incurved rim (20 pieces).¹⁹

Other shapes are represented only by tiny fragments – often difficult to identify.

Some vessels carry graffiti under the base, mainly monograms, which are difficult to decipher (Figs. 7.2, 7.6, 7.9, 8.1, 14.9). The most significant is the fragment of the body of a kantharos with a dedication, by *Matris* to an uncertain deity, incised on the outside (Fig. 14.7). The name *Matris* is well known in Chersonesean prosopography, from stone inscriptions and amphora stamps.²⁰

The fill also included some Attic black-glazed lamps with a circular opening and an elongated nozzle as well as one with a through bush in the central part.²¹ Among the finds are also a terracotta base with modelled bird's feet and two circular apertures for fixing a bird figurine of terracotta, or more probably of bronze.

COMMONWARE POTTERY

The most numerous group of finds is that of commonware pottery, representing a striking number of shapes (Figs. 9-13, 15-16). No less than 1036 pieces belong to this group, but only about 30 vessels could be restored virtually completely. All these vessels were probably produced in the pottery workshops of the city during the 3rd century BC. There are two main types: 1) a bulbous jug with flat or concave base, a short neck and a double-barrel handle and decorated with encircling red-painted bands (Fig. 9), of which 77 specimens were recorded; 2) A jug with tall neck, wide mouth, ribbon handle, and flat base. The decoration of this type of jug is more varied than that of Type 1, from encircling bands of red and white paint to garlands of ivy or olive. No less than 208 complete or partly complete vessels of this type were recorded (Figs. 10-12, 13.1-2).

To this group also belong jugs with double-barrel handles and slightly "swollen" neck, and those with a narrow-neck, as well as jugs with a loop handle rising above the rim. All these vessels are made of the same type of clay and have a decoration consisting of encircling bands of red paint.

In order to complete the description of the tableware pottery in the assemblage, mention should also be made of Chersonesean pots with flat rim and "double horned" handles; the edge of the rim is decorated with a band of thick red paint, and the bodies of the pots have floral designs in red paint. Several stemmed vessels (Fig. 14.1-4),²² the lower part of a juglet (Fig. 14.5), and a very fine lid (Fig. 14.6) should also be mentioned.

Looking at the whole group of tableware, the abundance of pieces and the diversity of shapes is impressive. However, by far the most predominant shapes are the spherical jug and the jug with tall neck.

Kitchen ware

The large, flat-bottomed vessel, the shape characterized by its spout, and usually called a *louterion*, is represented by 30 fragments (Fig. 13.5-6, 13.12). All the examples have three or four finger indentations on each side of the out-turned rim, to be used as handles, and the handles are also sometimes flat strips of clay attached to the rim. The prototype for these vessels are *louteria* from Sinope, a type probably produced in all the cities of the northern Black Sea coast.²³

The kitchenware from the cistern is represented by various wheel-made (173 fragments) and handmade (41 fragments) pots, pans, frying-pans, and tureens of various shapes. Some of these types are represented for the first time among the pottery found at Chersonesos.

In the fill were also found more than 30 pyramidal loom weights, on the upper surface of which are preserved impressions of intaglios (or perhaps finger-rings), and two fragments of small limestone altars. One of these is shaped in the form of a small Ionic capital, the other as a rectangular pyramid with profiles; only the lower part of this altar is preserved.

CONCLUSION

As to the date of the cistern and the fill, not only the evidence from the fill itself, but also the finds from the level above the cistern are important. The layer is poorly preserved, since it was destroyed during the Byzantine period. However, in room XI (see Fig. 1), this layer is actually preserved. Among the finds from the layer are some lamps dating to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC,²⁴ fragments of fish-plates of Pergamene production, with relief decoration showing animals; some red-glazed plates, probably produced in Samian workshops.²⁵ One of the plates has remains of graffiti on both the inside and outside. The layer overlying the cistern can thus be dated to the first century AD.

As to the date of the filling of the cistern, there is no piece of the assemblage that can be dated later than the 3rd century BC. Actually we can come closer to the date, since there were found practically no sherds of Megarian bowls, the production of which did not start until c. 240-220 BC.²⁶ There is very little material from the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century, and virtually all the pieces belong within the 3rd century BC. As the detailed analysis of the chronologically significant pieces, such as the amphora stamps and the Attic black-glazed pottery, has shown, the date can be narrowed down to the end of the first quarter – middle of the final quarter of the 3rd century BC.

It should be stressed that the investigated assemblage is a closed deposit. The huge quantities of archaeological material in the fill offer us a brilliant

opportunity to study the pottery production, the economy and the trade of Chersonesos in the early Hellenistic period. It should be noted that the material from the cistern is closely related to the finds from H.A. Thompson's cisterns in his already classic study "Two Centuries of Hellenistic Pottery".²⁷ I am convinced that the further studies of the finds from the cistern in Chersonesos will contribute decisively to the chronology of Hellenistic settlements in the *chora* of Chersonesos.

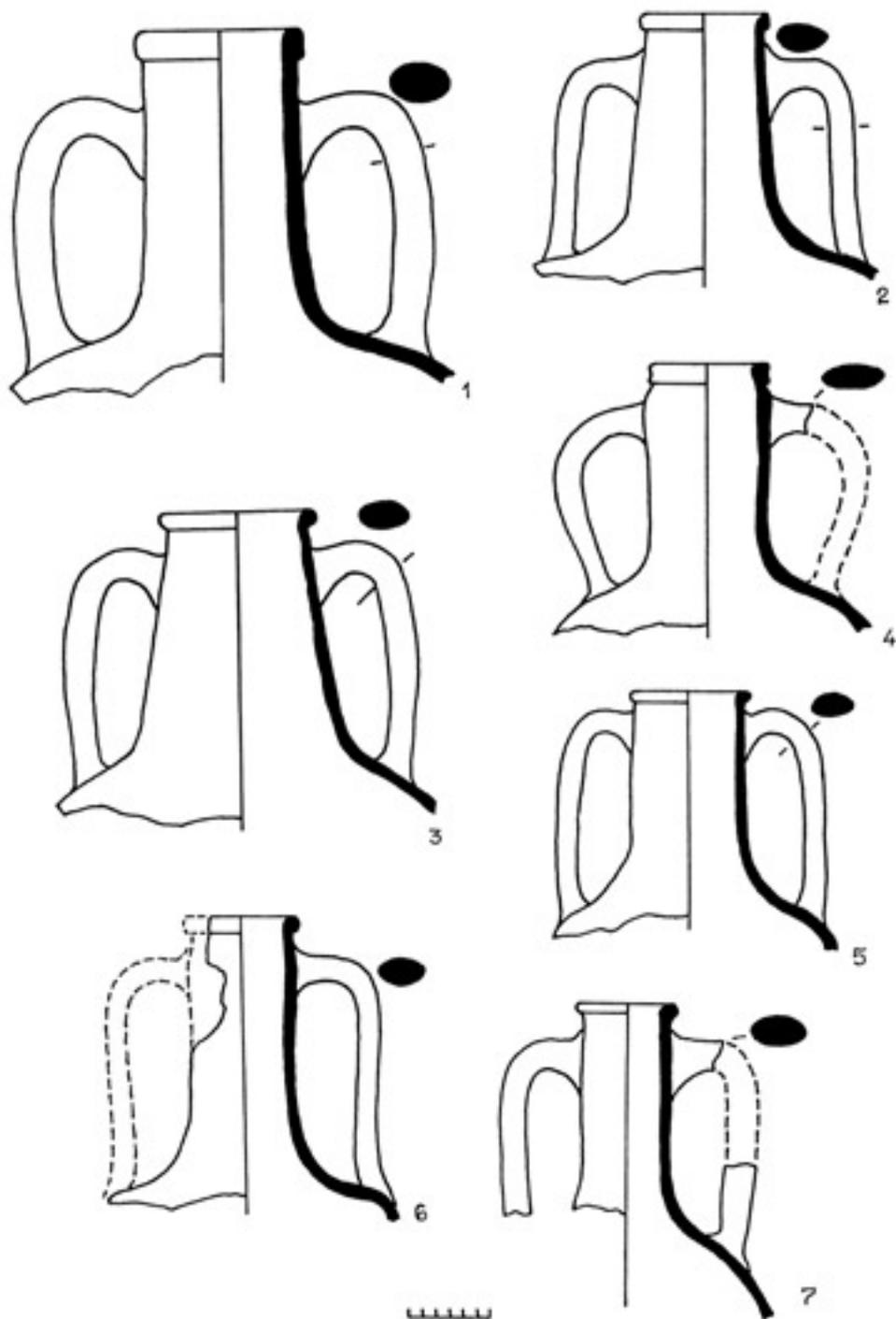


Fig. 2. Pottery finds from the cistern: amphoras.

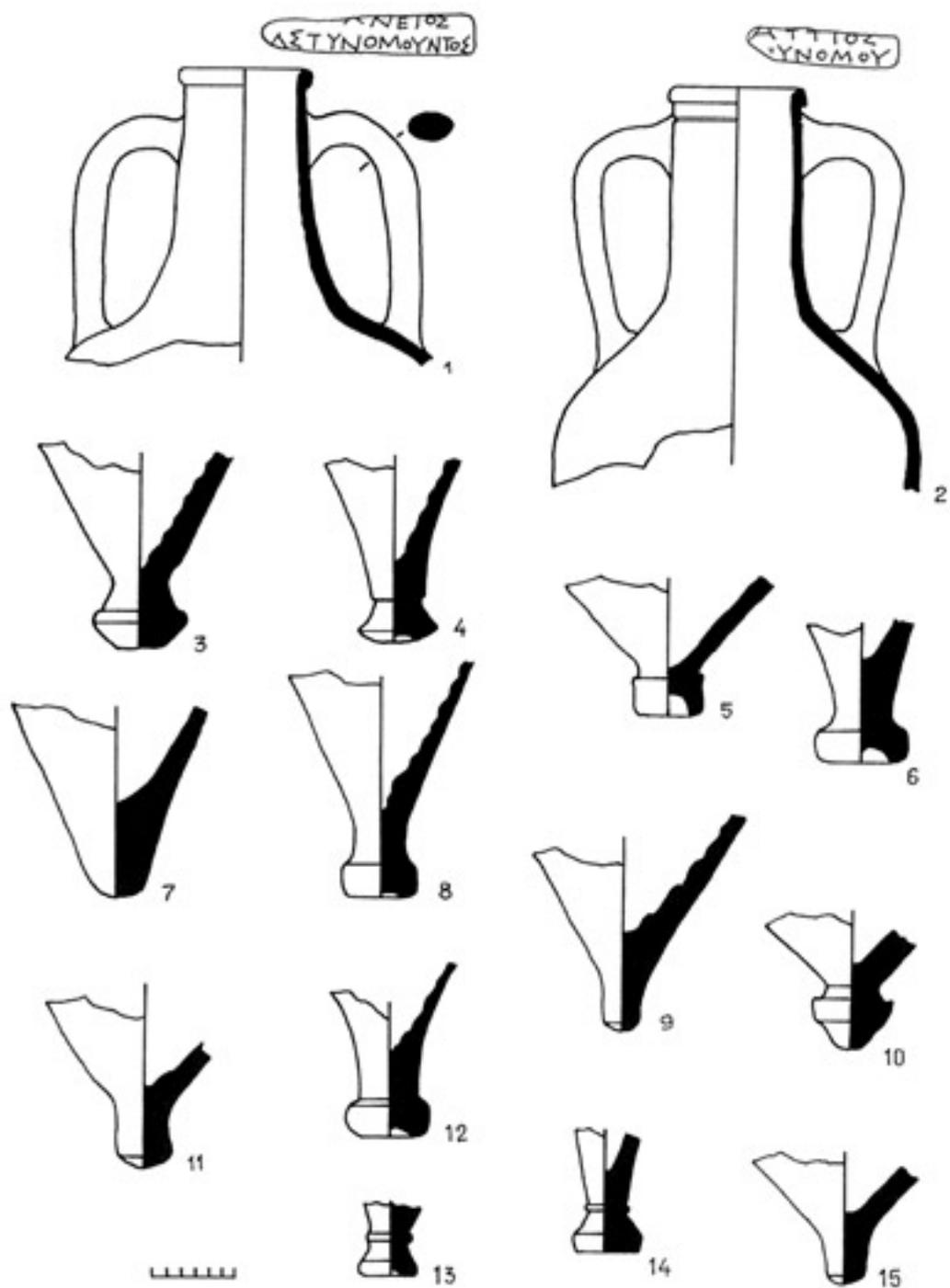


Fig. 3. Pottery finds from the cistern: amphoras.

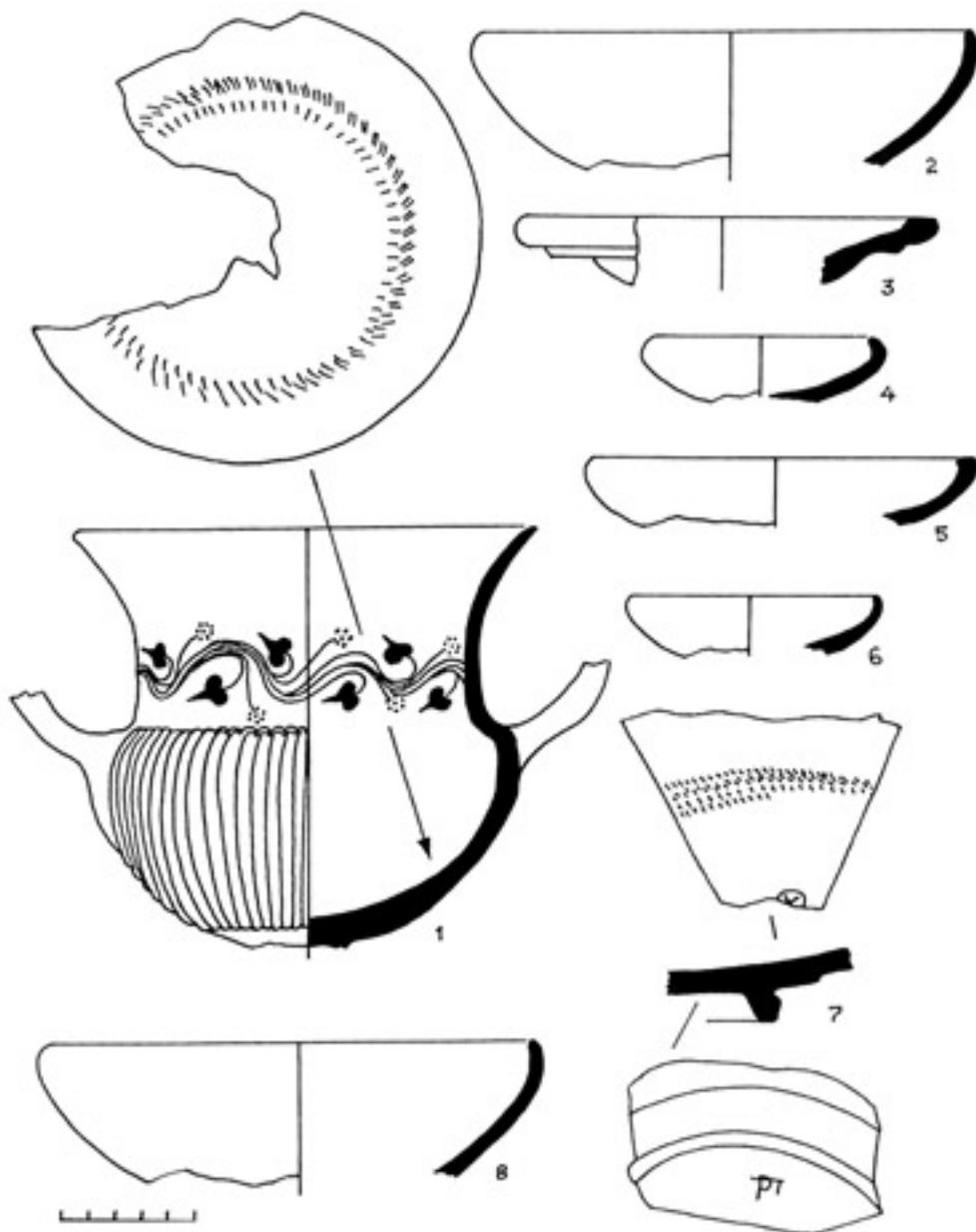


Fig. 4. Pottery finds from the cistern: black-glazed ware.

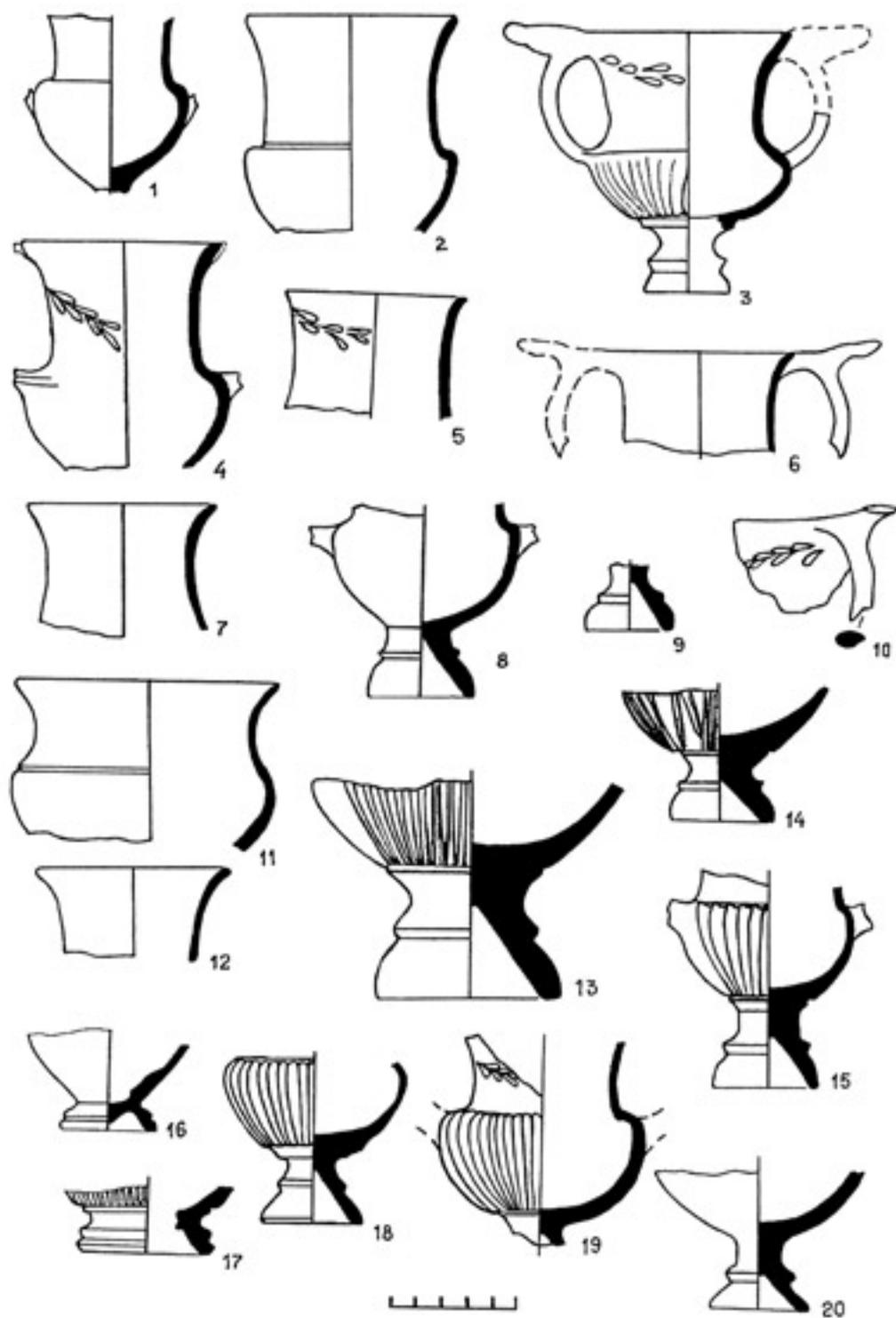


Fig. 5. Pottery finds from the cistern: black-glazed ware.

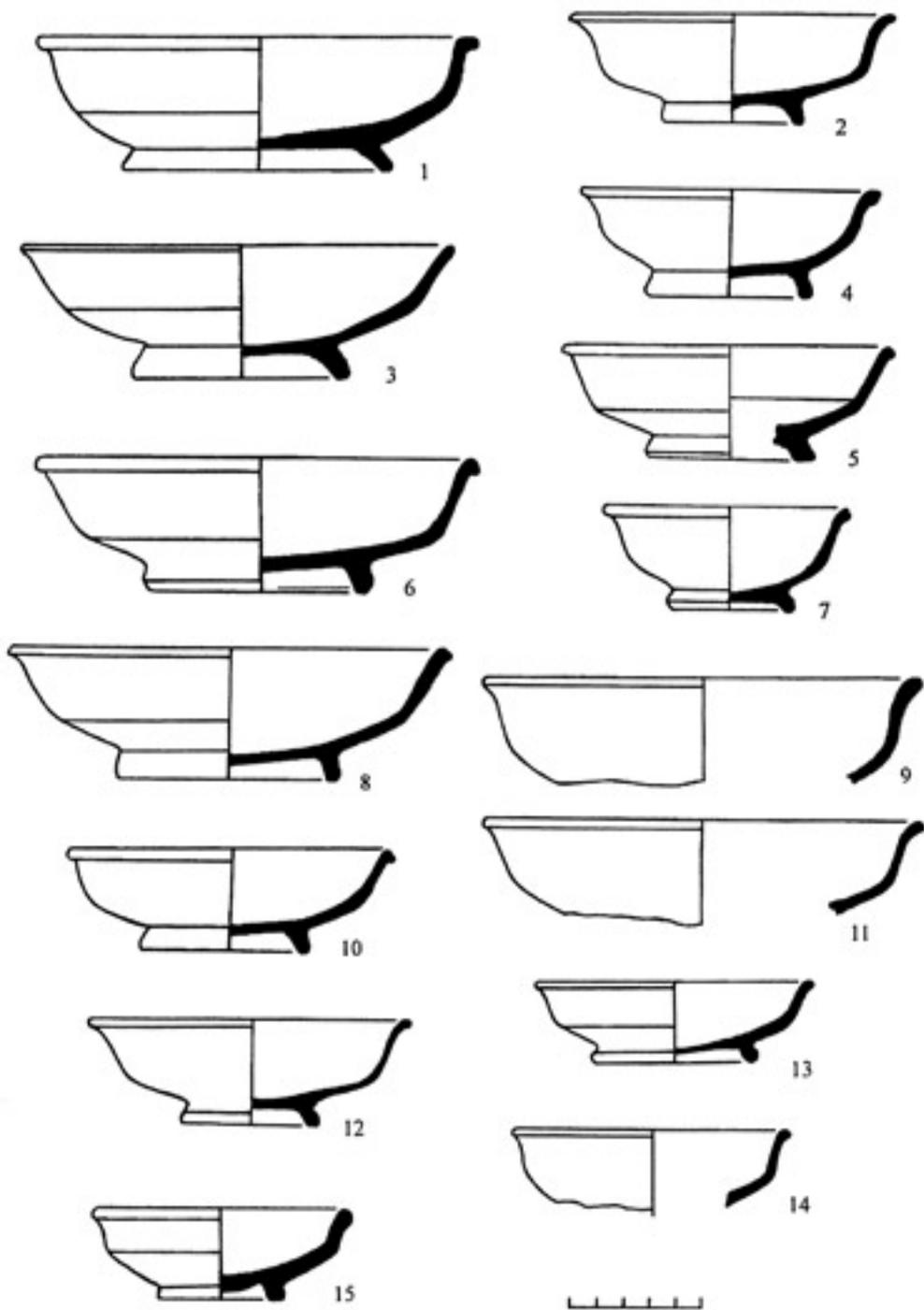


Fig. 6. Pottery finds from the cistern: black-glazed ware.

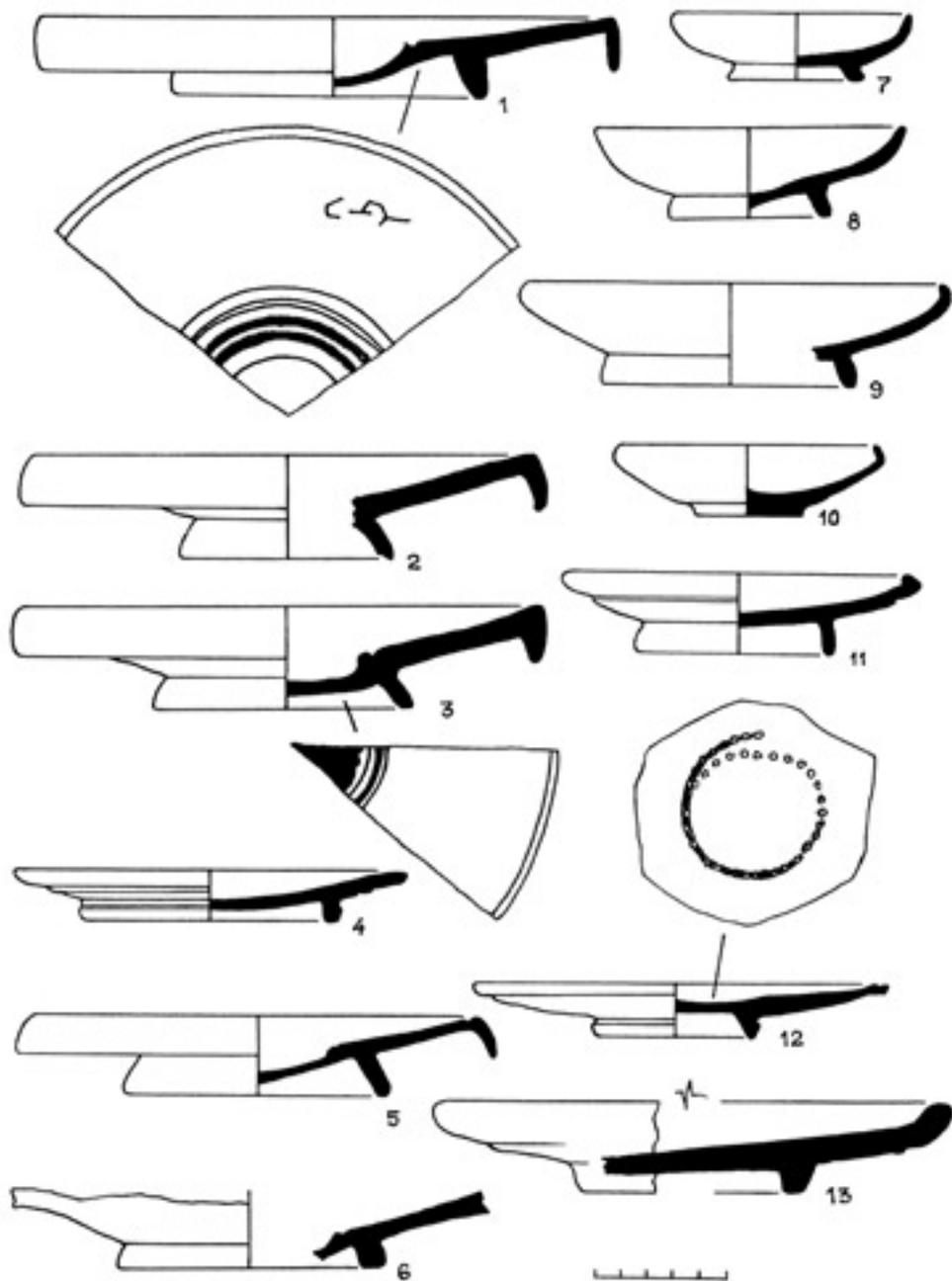


Fig. 8. Pottery finds from the cistern: black-glazed ware.

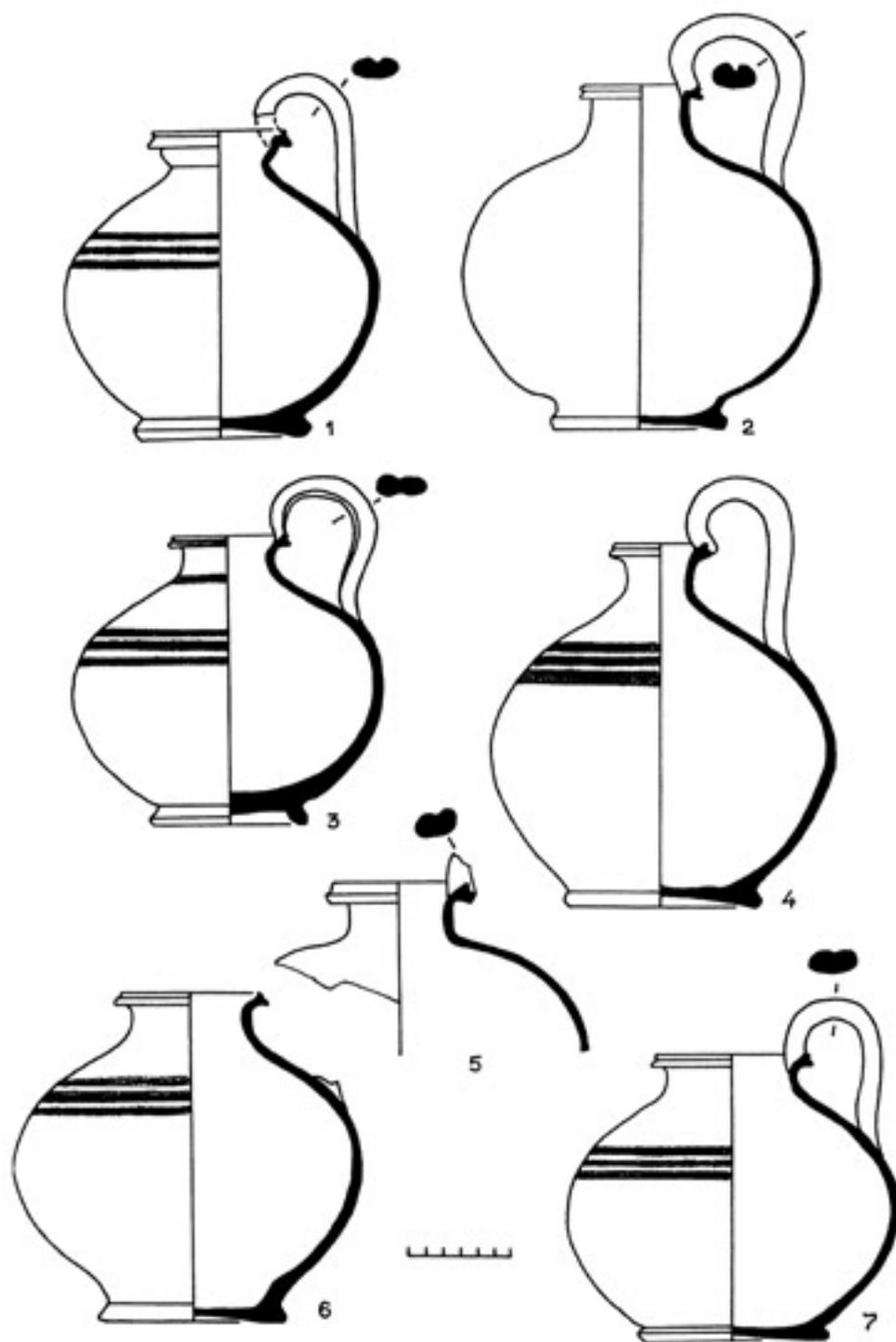


Fig. 9. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

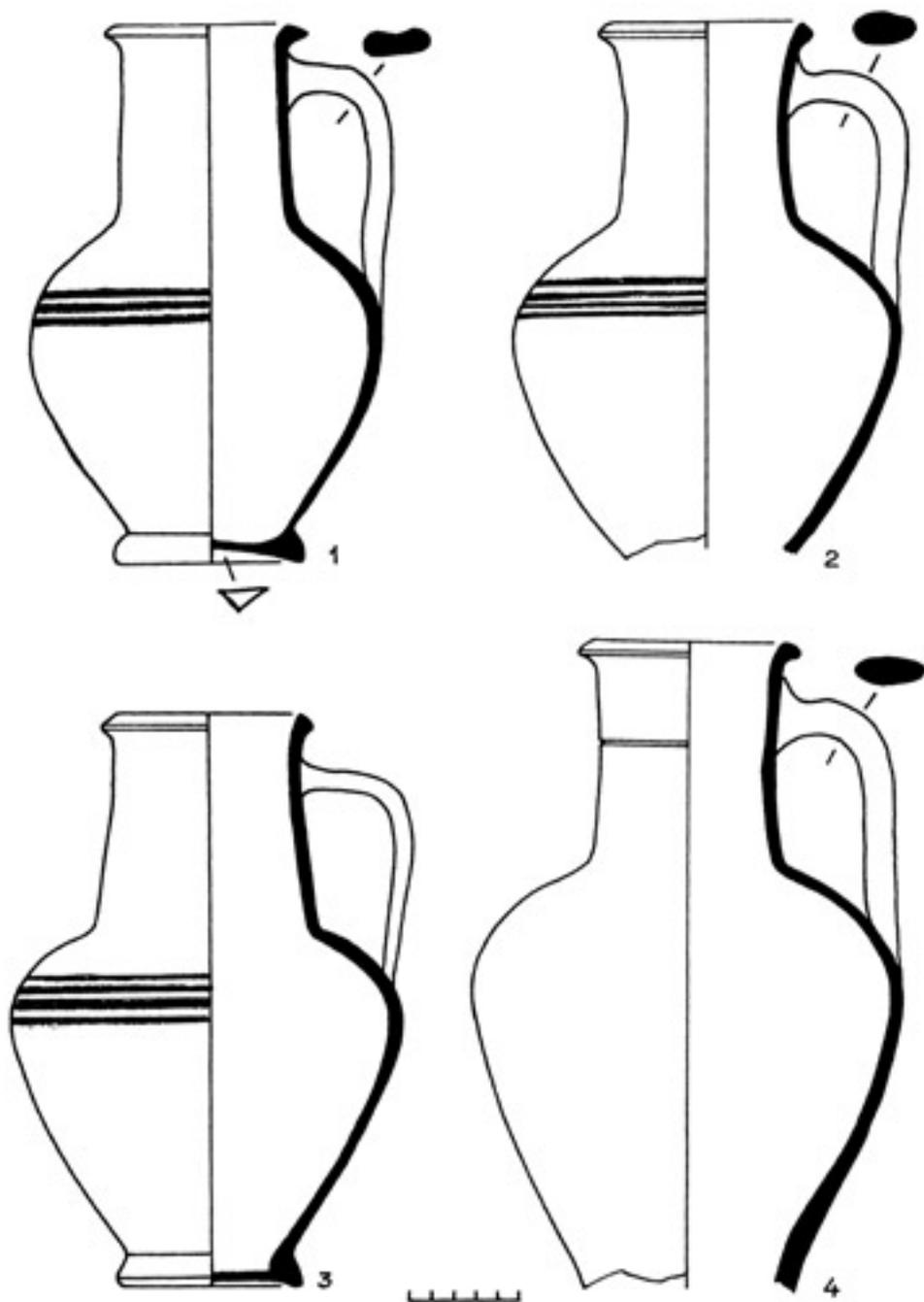


Fig. 10. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

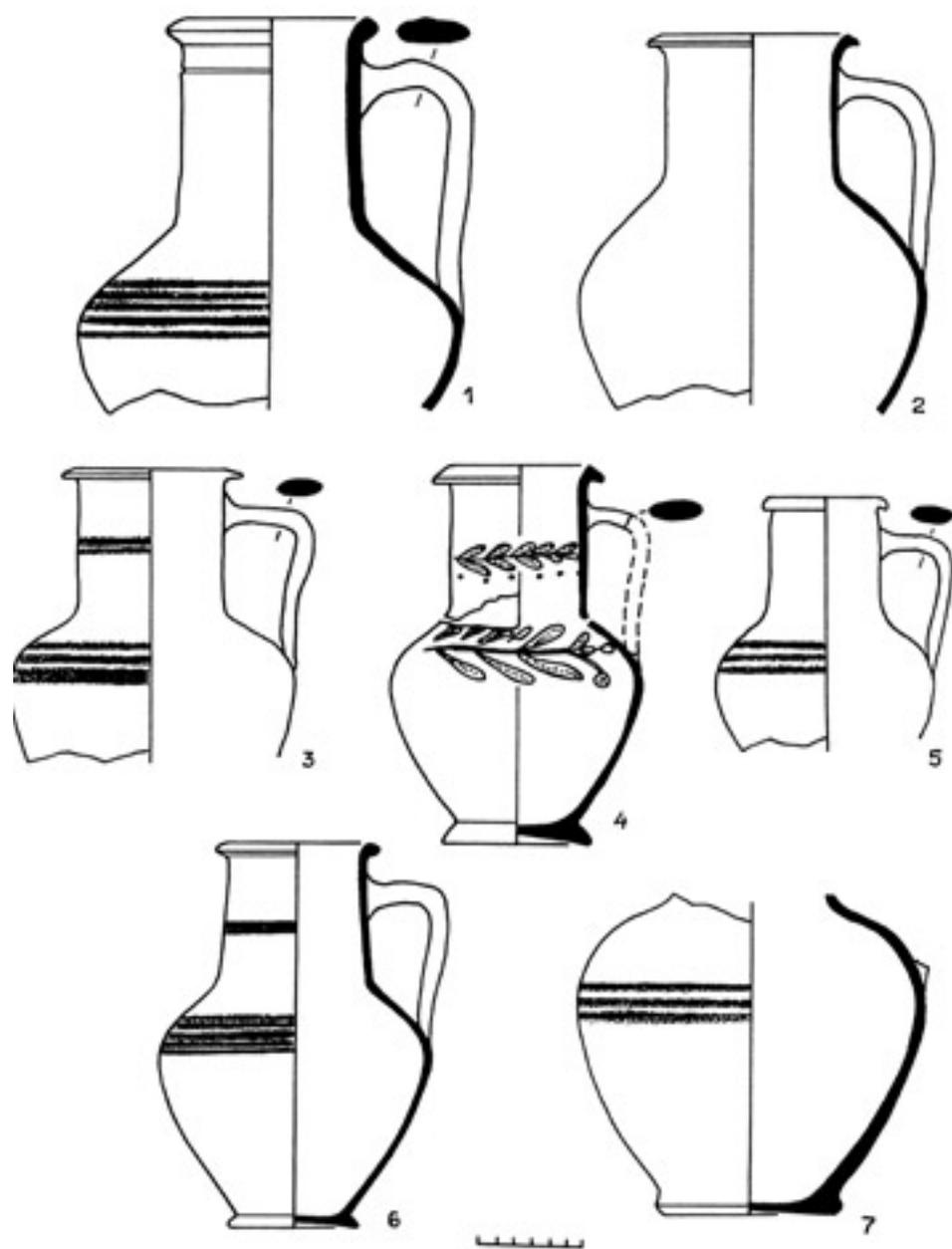


Fig. 11. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

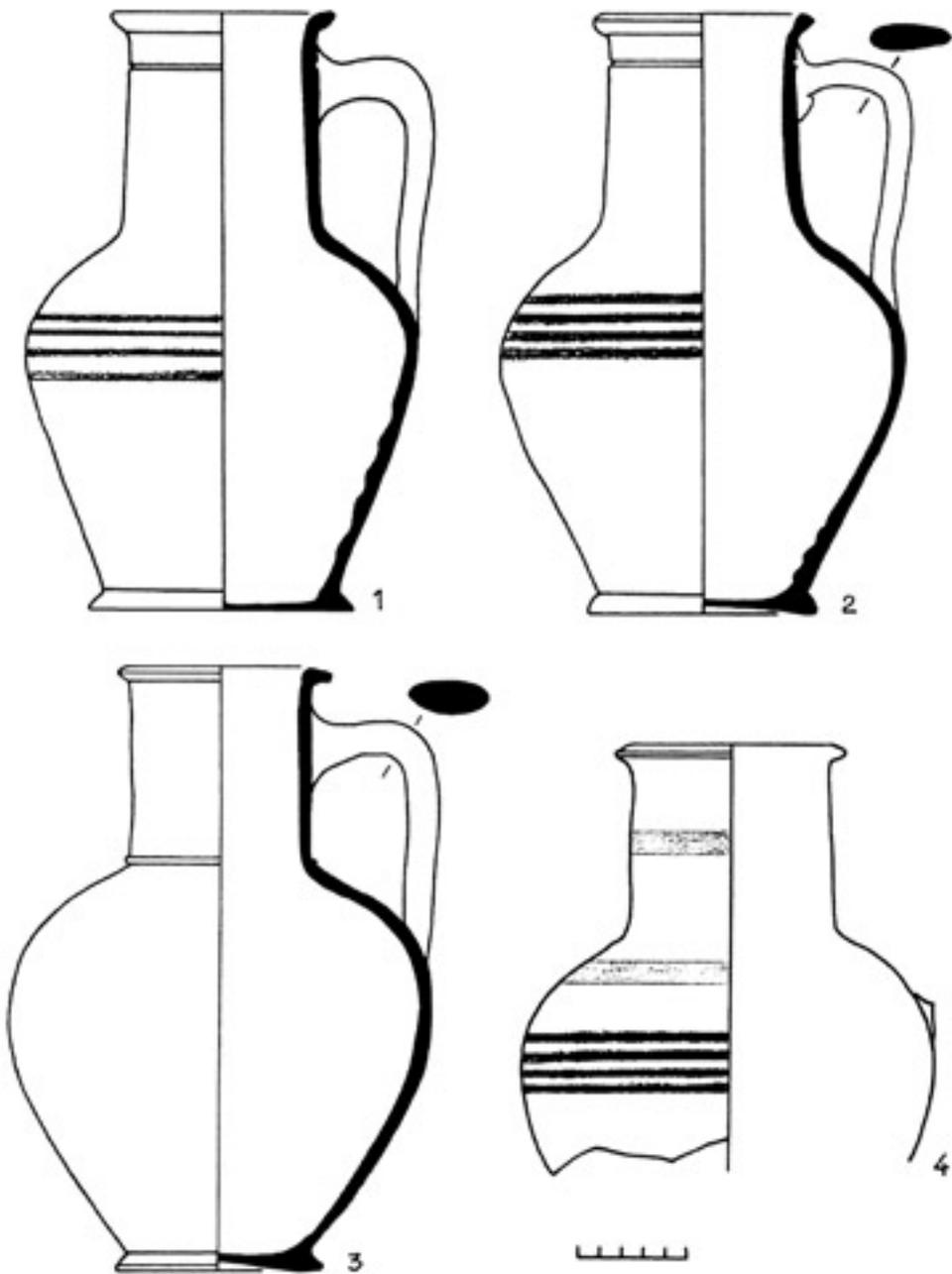


Fig. 12. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

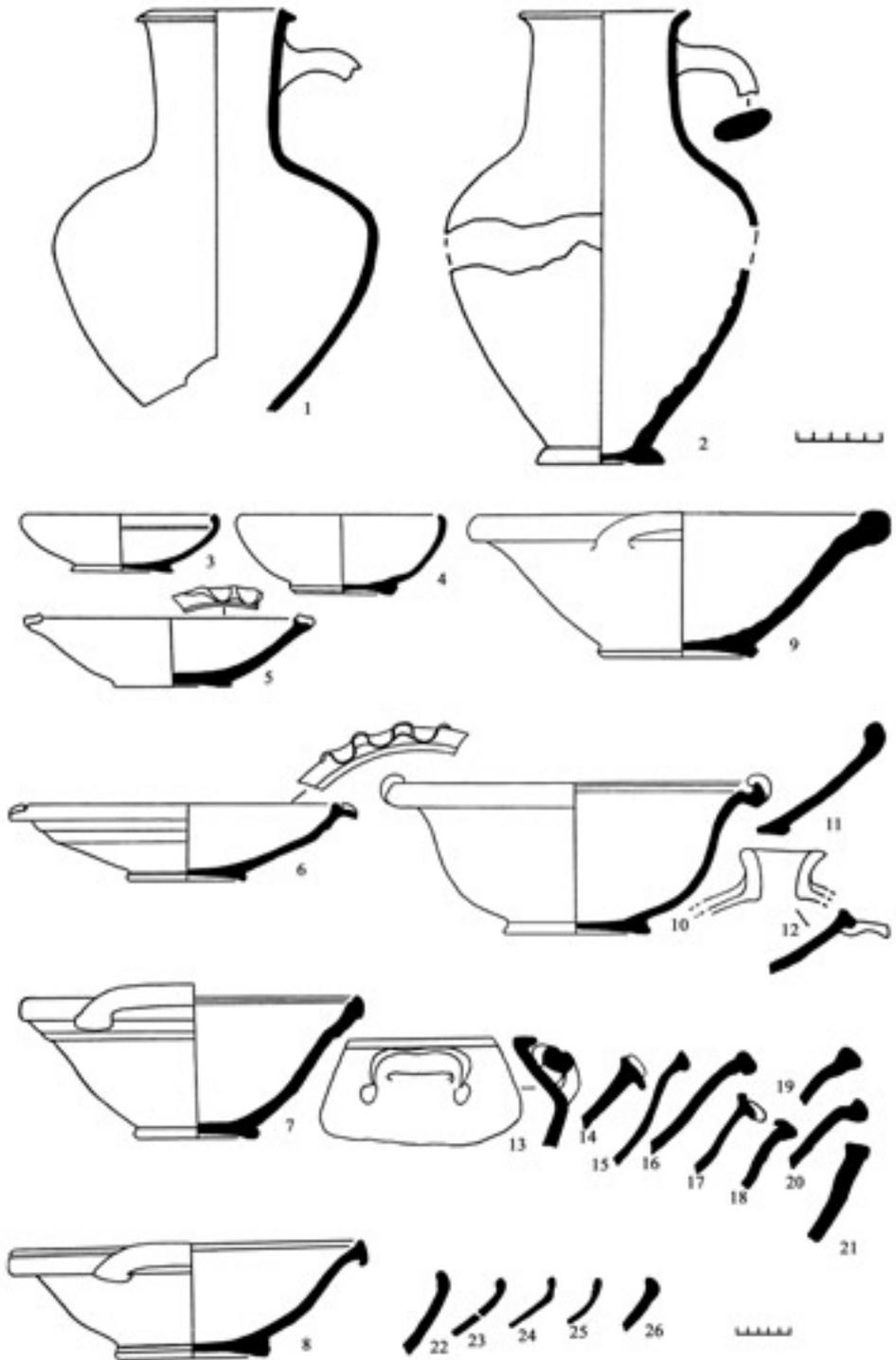


Fig. 13. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

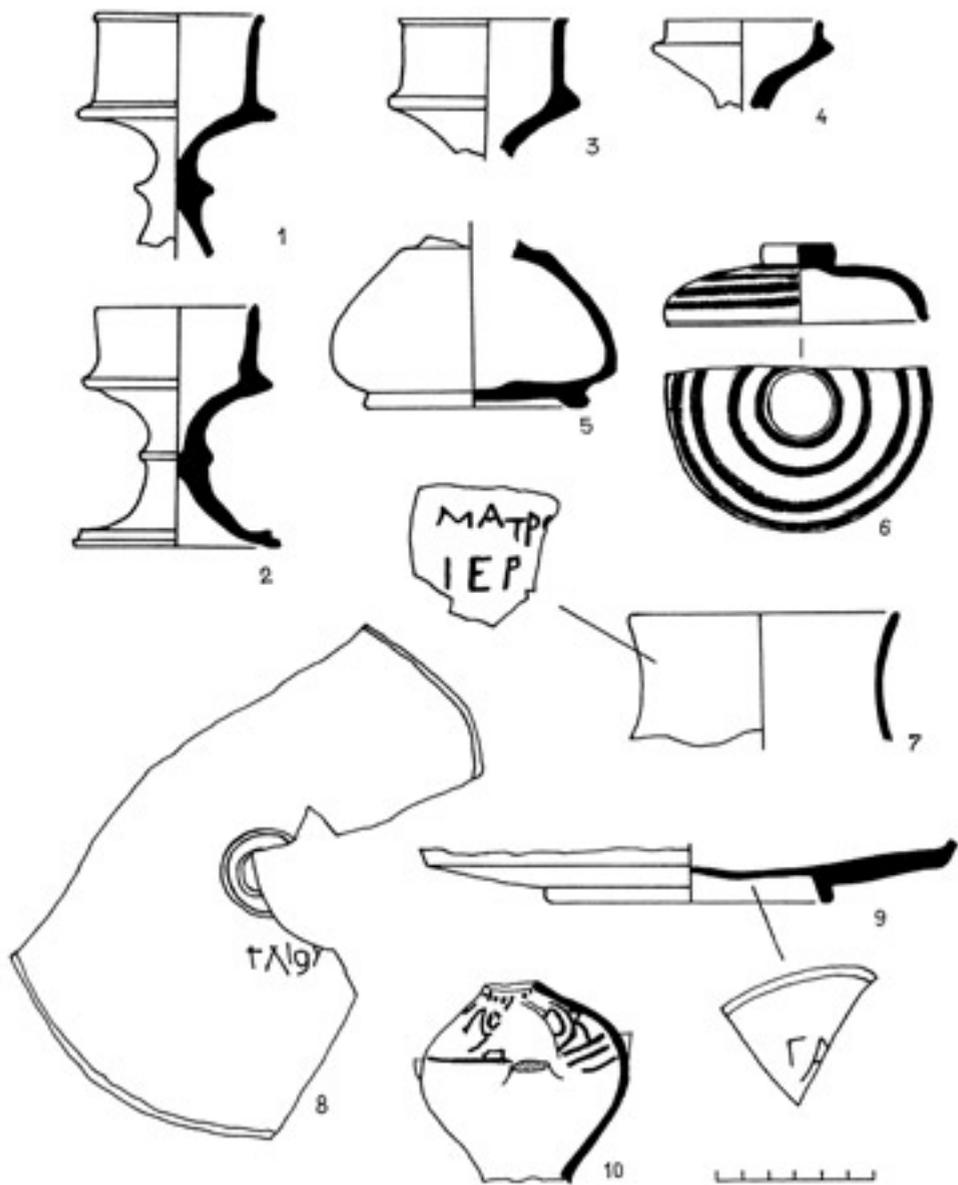


Fig. 14. Pottery finds from the cistern: thymiateria, black-glazed ware, and inscriptions on pottery.

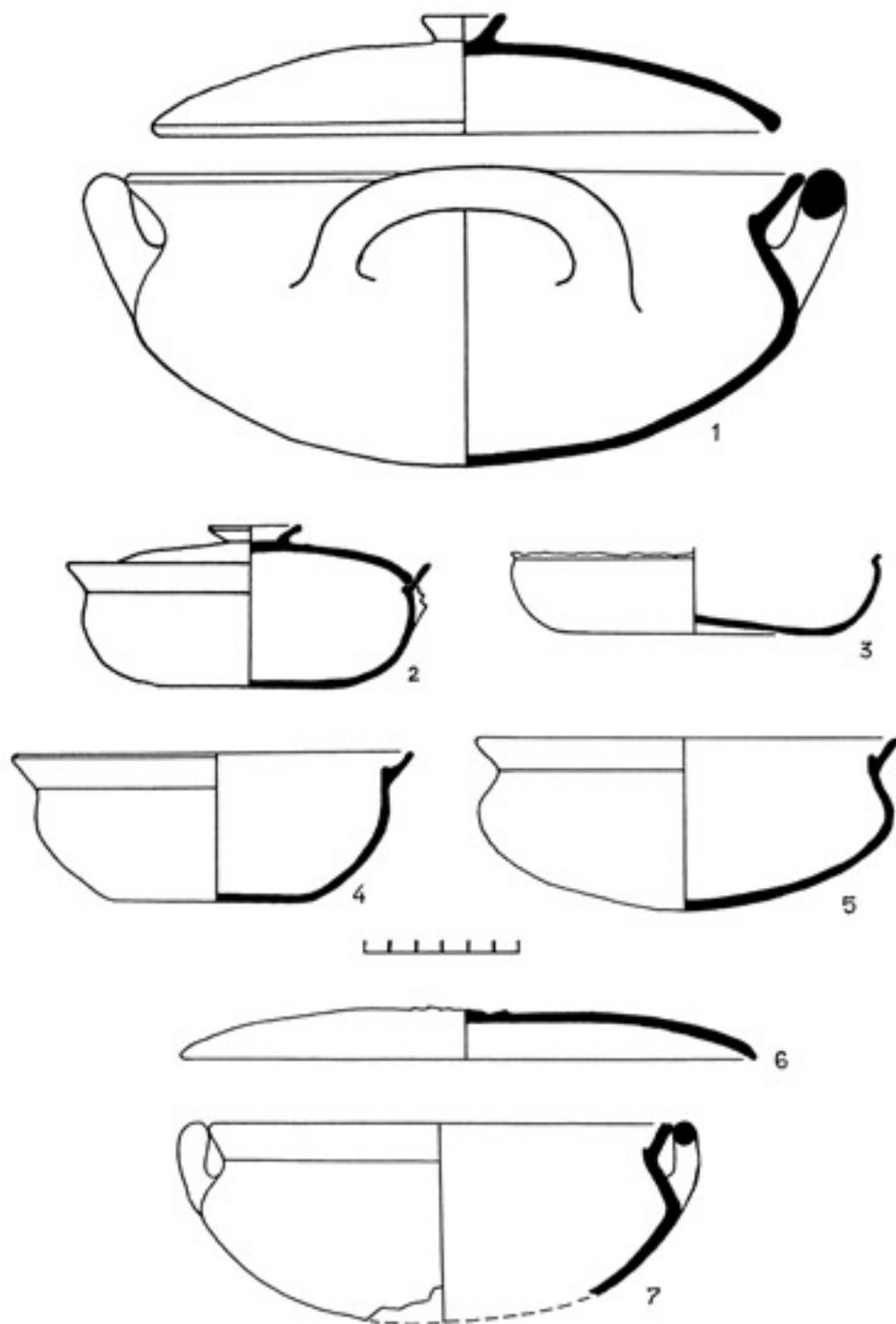


Fig. 15. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

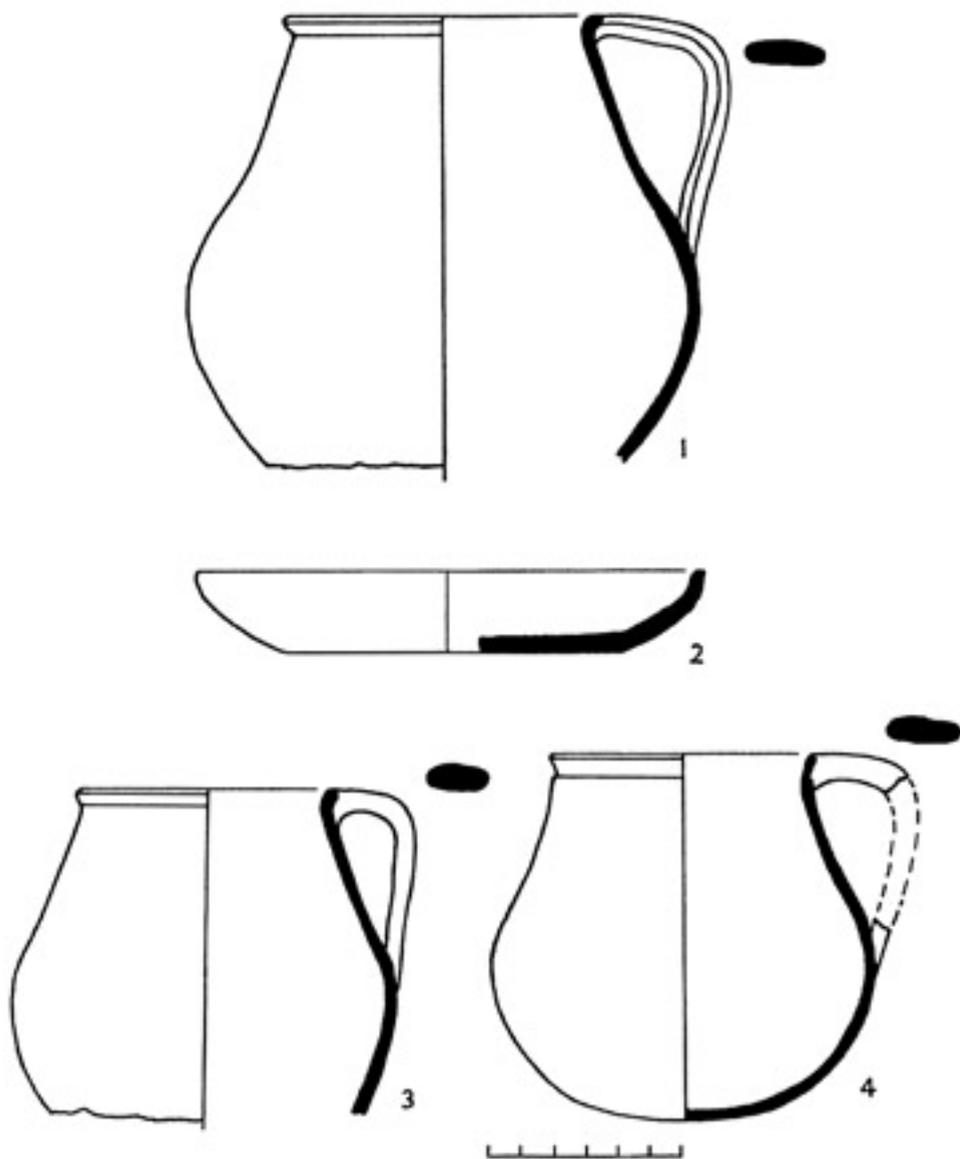


Fig. 16. Pottery finds from the cistern: commonware.

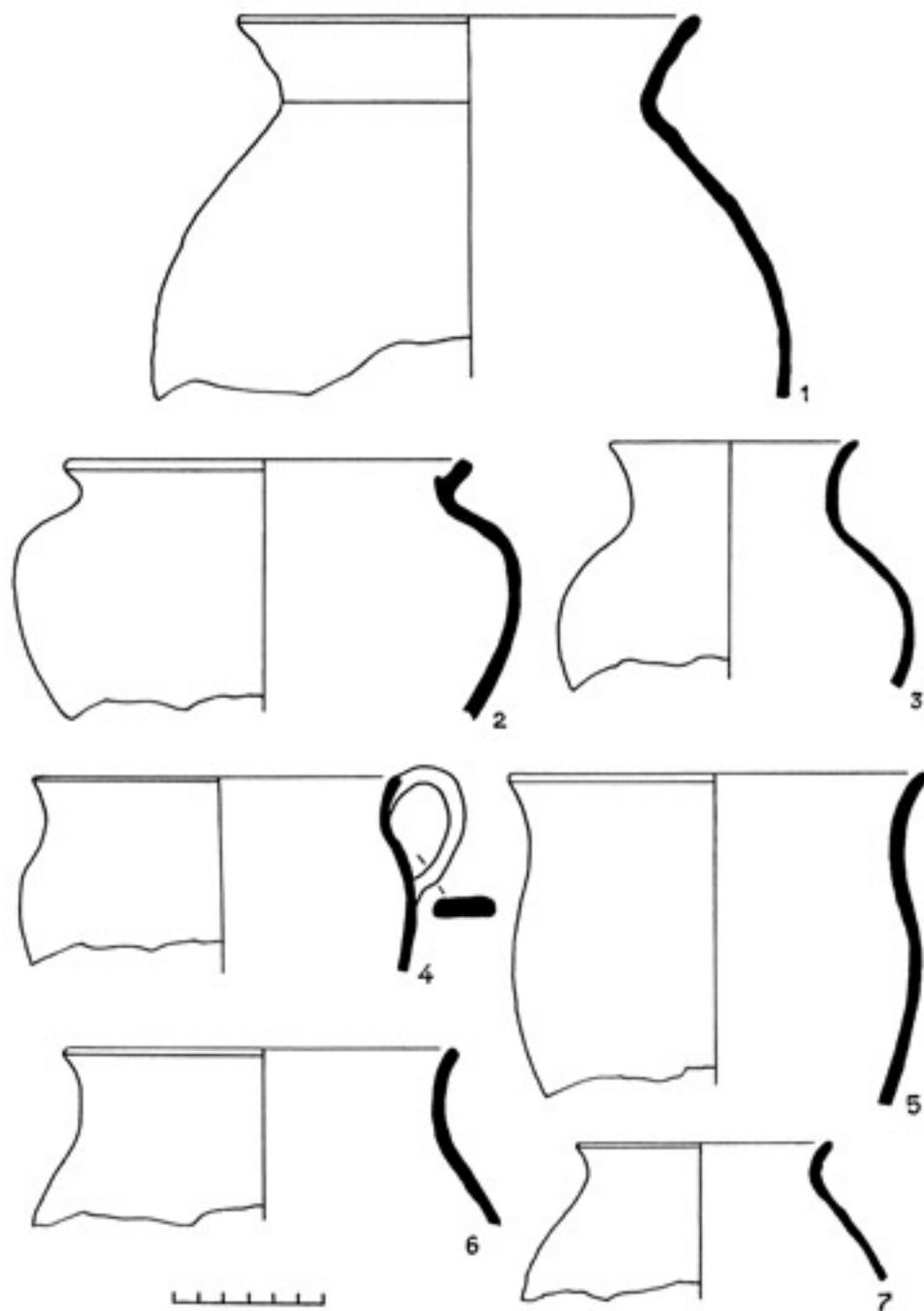


Fig. 17. Pottery finds from the cistern: handmade ware.

Notes

- 1 Zolotarev, Ušakov & Korobkov 1991.
- 2 Dinsmoor 1961, 359-360; Büsing 1982, 9.
- 3 Monachov 1989a, 51-59.
- 4 Monachov 1989a, 62-63.
- 5 Monachov 1992, 181; Whitbread 1995b, 234.
- 6 Soznik & Cecchladze 1991, 64-65.
- 7 Kac 1994, 27-37, 77-78.
- 8 Kac 1985, 108; 1994, 50.
- 9 Kac 1985, 108; 1994, 50-51.
- 10 Kac 1985, 108; 1994, 51.
- 11 Kac 1985, 110; 1994, 64.
- 12 Kac 1994, 76.
- 13 Grakov 1929, 137-141.
- 14 Grakov 1929, 140, 145.
- 15 Kac & Fedoseev 1986, 99.
- 16 Conovici 1998, 51. Cf. Conovici, Avram & Poenaru-Bordea 1989, 113, 117, where the authors prefer a somewhat earlier date (284-262 BC).
- 17 It has been possible to completely restore several of them.
- 18 Hannestad, Stolba & Hastrup 2002, pls. 62-63, 70; Parovič-Pešikan 1974, 76, 78, figs. 74-75.
- 19 Rotroff 1997a, nos. 979 (325-300 BC), 984 (310-300 BC), 1076 (325-300 BC), 1082 (300-275 BC), 1088 (275-250 BC), 885 (250-225 BC), 909 (260 BC), 911 (250-225 BC).
- 20 Solomonik 1973, 171-173, no. 166; Kac 1985, 108, 110.
- 21 Chrzanovsky & Zhuravlev 1998, 43-44 (no. 10).
- 22 For a very close parallel, see Ščeglov 2002a, 222, pls. 146-147, G 7-G 10, who calls them "portable ceramic altars" - *Eds.*
- 23 Zeest & Marčenko 1962, 157-159; KašaeV 2002, 158-160, pls. 99-101.
- 24 Chrzanovsky & Zhuravlev 1998, 57.
- 25 Zhuravlev 2000.
- 26 Rotroff 1982, 10-13; Kovalenko 1989, 21-23.
- 27 Thompson 1934.