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## “BRUSSELS SPROUTS AND POST-NEOLITHIC ARCHAEOLOGY”: THE METAL AGE SETTLEMENT AT FOENI-SALAŞ

**Abstract:** Systematic archaeological excavations at the multiphase site of Foeni-Salaş in the Romanian Banat were conducted during the first half of the 1990s. The site was inhabited during the Early Neolithic, Copper, Bronze, Early Iron, Late Antique and medieval ages. This paper presents a description of the deposits and the most important ceramic finds that represent the Metal Age cultural horizons at the site. This is the first time that the finds from the Metal Age deposits at the site have been published.

**Keywords:** Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Pottery.

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### Introduction

We present this paper in honour of our good friend and colleague, Petar Popović. Haskel first met Petar in 1977 during a visit to the site of Gomolava. He was a gracious host to a lowly student, at the time. In the ensuing years, he mentored myself and many others in the Iron Age of the region. Most of all, I valued his friendship and cooking (hence the title of this paper – he will understand). Aleksandar spent 10 years with Petar on the excavation of the Kale-Krševica site in southern Serbia. We also worked together in the Institute of Archaeology as associates on the Metal Ages Prehistoric Project, and spent every Saturday lunchtime with Aca Đorđević and Mihailo Milinković in the Brankovina Tavern.

The site of Foeni-Salaş in south-western Romania near the border of Serbia is known for its Early Neolithic occupation, which has been reported upon elsewhere (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, Greenfield and Jongsma 2008, Greenfield and Lawson 2020). In this paper, we present never before published data on the Metal Ages (or post-Neolithic periods) excavated at the site. First, the location and environment surrounding the site of Foeni-Salaş are described. Second, the history of research and methods of excavations are presented. Third, each period and the associated loci and pits

are described to provide a sense of the history of post-Neolithic settlement at the site. Fourth, some of the important ceramic finds from the Metal Age deposits are presented and described. Finally, the role of Foeni-Salaş in the region is discussed.

### Site location and environment

The site of Foeni-Salaş is found in the Romanian Banat, about 45 km southwest of the city of Timişoara, and c. 3 km north of the modern village of Foeni and the Romanian border with Serbia (20°51'32.05" long. east, 45°31'13.76" lat. north, and 80 m ASL) (Fig. 1A). It is located in the midst of a broad alluvial plain between the Timiş and Bega rivers, on the right bank of the Timişat stream. Low lying wetlands and old stream meanders and channels surround the site. The soils in the surrounding plain are mostly sandy loamy clay superimposed over Pleistocene loess. They were heavily affected by a fluctuating water table until the modern drainage system was created (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 47). The surroundings have little to no natural or indigenous vegetation since the region was drained of wetlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modern agriculture and forestry further transformed the nature of vegetation in the region. According to the landowners, the site has

been continually under cultivation for several generations (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 46). The current climate is warm continental with hot and wet summers and cold and drier winters. The winter is relatively warm because of damp warm winds from the Mediterranean offset the cold and dry winds from the east and north (Pounds 1969).

The site is on a slight natural rise above the surrounding plain, with a slight dip between the north-eastern and south-western parts. The accumulation of superimposed strata is reminiscent of larger tell sites in the region. It gently slopes down to the plain to the north and west and more rapidly into an old river channel to the south. The site itself is c. 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> in size (Fig. 1B).

### History and nature of research

Florin Draşovean was the first to investigate the site when he noticed two concentrations of surface remains: 1) Metal Ages and 2) Early Neolithic Starčevo-Criş (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994: 48). Haskel Greenfield, in collaboration with Florin Draşovean, directed a large-scale spatially-oriented excavation at the site from 1992-1994 to investigate the Starčevo-Criş settlement at the site. A consequence of this excavation was the discovery of many deposits from later periods. This report describes them for the first time, with a focus on the Iron Age remains.

Several techniques were used to discern the extent of settlement in each period, including surface collection, auguring, geomagnetic survey, and excavation. They allowed the nature and extent of each occupation to be captured without completely excavating the site. They demonstrated the presence of Modern, medieval (10-11th and 14-15th cent. AD), Daco-Roman (2-5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD), Early Iron Age (Hallstatt B and C), Middle Bronze Age (Verbicioara), Eneolithic (Černavoda III – Baden and Kostolac), and Early Neolithic (Starčevo-

Criş) deposits. All deposits, except for the Early Neolithic, were dated with respect to the local culture-historical sequence (Dumitrescu 1983, Luca, Suci, and Dumitrescu-Chioar 2011).

The site was excavated in a 1x1 nested quadratic block system (Fig. 1C). Each block was divided into 5x5 m trenches and assigned a letter (A-P), beginning in the northwest corner and moving left to right. These trenches were divided into 1x1 m units (quads) and numbered 1-25, starting at the northwest corner and moving left to right. Each 1x1 m unit could be identified to an exact spatial provenance. For example, unit 150C2 represents Block 150, Trench C, and Quad 2. Each quad was excavated down to sterile soil. The heavily disturbed plough zone was shovelled, as cultural debris was mixed and the primary context lost.

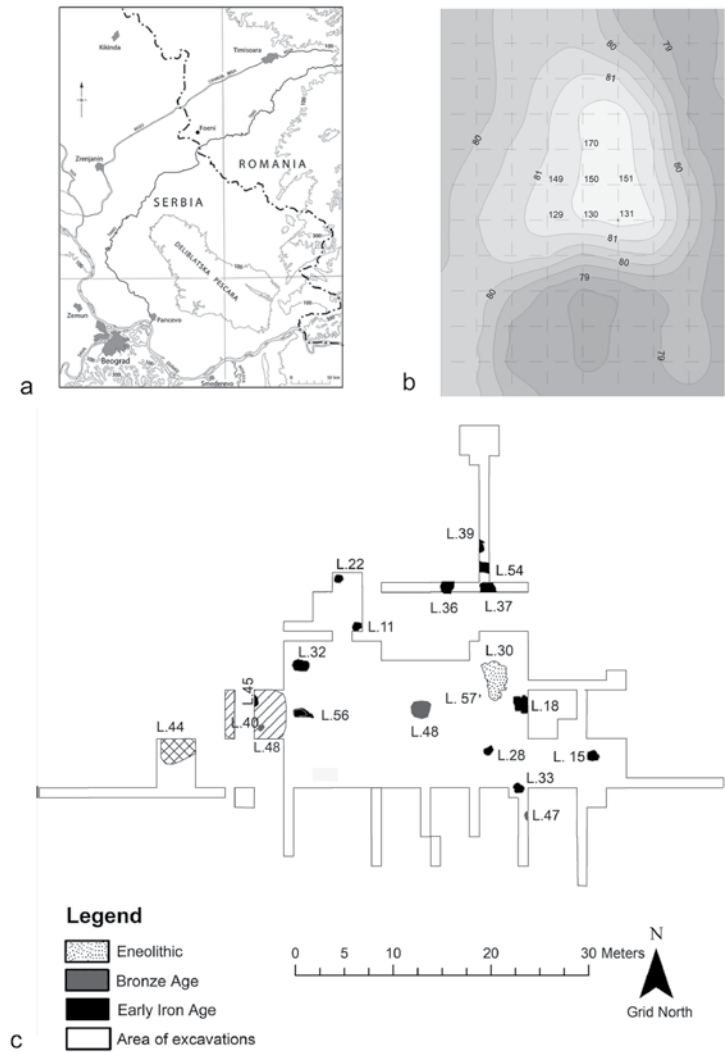


Fig. 1. a) Position of the Foeni- Salaş site; b) Topographic map of the site; c) Location of excavated Metal Age features across the site.

Natural, undisturbed soils were excavated using trowels. Excavators followed the natural stratigraphy as much as possible, but used arbitrary levels when soil changes could not be discerned or where deposits became too thick. Artefacts were pedestaled *in situ* as much as possible and were collected only after having been drawn and photographed. Soils were dry sieved using a 0.5 cm mesh (1992), but this was later replaced by a larger 1 cm mesh (1993-1994) since the soil was very clayey and clogged the smaller mesh. Soil samples were taken for flotation, particularly when charcoal and ash were noticed.

### **Site taphonomy**

A major source of disturbance at the site was rodents. All loci had evidence of extensive rodent activity, especially those with high organic content. For the most part, rodent disturbances were recorded and artefacts disturbed by rodents removed from the analysis (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 56). The second major disturbance was modern and ancient ploughing, which extended to 30 cm below the surface, and levelling of the mound conducted during the 1970s. While these activities were carried out for agriculture purposes, they destroyed and/or disturbed much of the existing Metal Age deposits at the site that were on a higher level of the tell. The deeper Early Neolithic cultural layer was fortunately mostly undisturbed by such activities. The *in situ* archaeological material from the Metal Ages was preserved as concentrations that were just beneath the plough zone in the form of storage and/or midden pits and pit houses that were excavated deeper into the mound (Fig. 1c) (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 57, 60-63). The third major disturbance source was later occupations. Later pits intruded into and destroyed parts of earlier deposits (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 71-72).

### **Metal Age cultural horizons**

There are five pan-site loci in descending order from the surface: Locus 1 (plough zone), 4 (medieval), 2 (Early Neolithic Starčevo-Criş), 5 (post-Pleistocene humus), and 12 (sterile loess)

(Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 62-64). The thick (30 cm) plough zone (Locus 1) is a mixture of cultural debris from all periods present at the site (Greenfield and Jongsma 2008). We will focus on the Metal Age horizons.

#### *Early Iron-Age (Hallstatt) (Fig. 1C)*

The Early Iron Age occupation is represented by the Hallstatt B culture complex (1000-800BCE). It extended across the entire southern half of the site. The tops of many of the pits were cut off by Locus 4, a medieval plough zone. The pits that disturbed the underlying Early Neolithic horizon included some Starčevo-Criş ceramics

*Locus 11* is a small storage pit. A large ceramic vessel was found in the bottom.

*Locus 18* is a possible pit house. It has a floor that appears to be divided into two sections. It is associated with a storage pit (Feature 3).

*Locus 22* is a small pit. Its function is ambiguous.

*Locus 28* is a small circular storage pit surrounded by postholes. The postholes indicate that it may be the superstructure of a small building. There are few ceramics in this locus.

*Locus 30* is a large pit house dug into the centre of a Starčevo-Criş pit house (Locus 24). It is filled with occupational debris (ceramics, bones, grinding stones, etc.).

*Locus 31* is a small bell-shaped storage pit with mostly carbonised remains.

*Locus 32* is a small oval storage pit with very few remains associated with it. There is darker coloured soil in this locus.

*Locus 33* is a small oval storage pit filled with Hallstatt remains. Only the base remains. The top was disturbed by ploughing.

*Locus 36* is a very small oval and shallow pit with few remains.

*Locus 37* is a small pit with few remains.

*Locus 39* is a small circular midden pit filled with an assortment of different artefact types including wall daub, animal bones, Hallstatt ceramics, and a small grinding stone.

*Locus 40* is a large pit house with several associated postholes, an oven, and concentrations of wall and floor daub (Jongsma 1997). This locus is cut by Locus 8, the medieval fortification ditch. While there are mostly Hallstatt remains in this locus, there are also a number of Starčevo-Criş

ceramics. This locus was divided into 2 sub-loci. *Sub-locus 40.1* is the upper stratum, possibly wall and roof spills, and light-grey in colour. *Sub-Locus 40.2* is the lower stratum and floor level. The remains of collapsed (wall?) daub separates the two sub-loci.

*Locus 44* is a large pit house. As with Locus 40, there are some intrusive Starčevo-Criş remains as a result of disturbing an underlying Starčevo-Criş deposit (Locus 41). There are two sub-loci: *Sub-locus 44.1* is the upper and is probably the remains of the fallen roof and wall. *Sub-locus 44.2* is the basal fill. The loci are separated by fallen wall daub.

*Locus 45* is a small storage pit cutting into Locus 40. There are few remains and it is likely a slightly later storage pit.

*Locus 47* is a midden pit found beneath the pit house and pre-dating Locus 40.

*Locus 48* is a small pit that extended down from the base of Locus 40.2. It is likely a storage pit associated with the overlying structure.

*Locus 54* is a small ellipsoid storage pit with a concentration of ceramic and animal bone remains.

*Locus 56* is a small pit filled with burnt debris (ceramics, animal bone and charcoal) that extended down into the underlying Starčevo-Criş deposit (Locus 23). It is interpreted as a fire pit.

*Feature 3* is the bottom of a very large Hallstatt *pithos* (large storage jar). The base was dug into the ground for stability. It is associated with Locus 18, to the east of Feature 3.

#### *Middle Bronze-Age (Fig. 1C)*

Only a single locus contained any Bronze Age materials. *Locus 15* is a small Middle Bronze Age pit that extends down through the earlier Early Neolithic deposits (Locus 7) and into the Pleistocene loess (Locus 12) (Fig. 4). It was sealed by Locus 4. White, ashy clay lines the inside of the pit. Carbonised animal and plant remains indicate that it was used for heating objects to high temperatures.

#### *Eneolithic (Fig. 1C)*

The Eneolithic is represented by a few ceramic remains of the Černavoda III–Boleráz complex. Some scattered remains were found in Loci 1 and 4. Only one small feature was eventually identified and excavated - *Locus 57*. It is a small Černavoda

III–Boleráz pit in the northwest peripheral corner of Locus 30 (Fig. 6), which was identified during post-excavation laboratory analysis of the cluster of distinctive ceramic finds. No sedimentary distinction could be made from the surrounding soils.

### **Metal Age ceramics**

In this section, the important ceramic finds from the Eneolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages are presented and discussed.

#### *Eneolithic*

According to the stylistic and typological characteristics of the Eneolithic pottery at the site of Foeni Salas, the Cernavodă III–Boleráz and Kostolac cultures are the most represented. Certain difficulties regarding the cultural attribution of the finds are the significant similarities in forms and decorations of the aforementioned cultural manifestations. Considering that none of the most characteristic elements of the Baden culture vessels were found in the assemblage (e.g., amphora-shaped *pithoi*, one-handled cups with an emphasised lower portion of the recipient (onion-shaped) or vessels such as *sosieras* or *askoi*), we consider that the material is from the second phase of the Eneolithic at the site (i.e., the Kostolac culture).

The ceramics of the Cernavodă III–Boleráz culture at the site are represented by globular cups with one handle that can be decorated with vertical or oblique channels and incised lines (Fig. 2/1, 2, 6, 7). Cup handles are commonly rectangular in cross-section and undecorated. One almost completely preserved cup represents a typical example of vessels common for the culture (Fig. 2/4) (Ecsedy 1978, taf VII/1, taf. XI/2, Tasić 1995, 48, XV/3). Besides the cups, finds of storage pots represented by amphora-type pots and S-profiled *pithoi* are also characteristic for the Cernavodă III–Boleráz cultural group (Fig. 3/1, 2). The *pithoi* are usually decorated with cork-like applications and modelled bands decorated with incisions or *impresso* ornaments (Fig. 3/1, 2, 8). Among other finds common for the Cernavodă III–Boleráz culture are tunnelled handles that can be either undecorated or decorated with grooves (Fig. 3/3, 7). Biconical bowls with a thickened (Fig. 2/11) and wide everted rim are uncommon and, unlike the

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examples typical for the Černavodă III–Boleráz horizon, do not possess an inner surface decorated with vertical channels (Fig. 2/11) (Krstić 1986, 150, fig. 10). Biconical bowls with wide everted rims usually possess an emphasised junction of

cones on the belly (Fig. 2/8-10). Bearing in mind that the decorated vessels are more suitable for cultural attribution, the number of bowls decorated with imprints on the rim or on the junction of cones is higher (Bulatović and Milanović 2020, fig. 189).

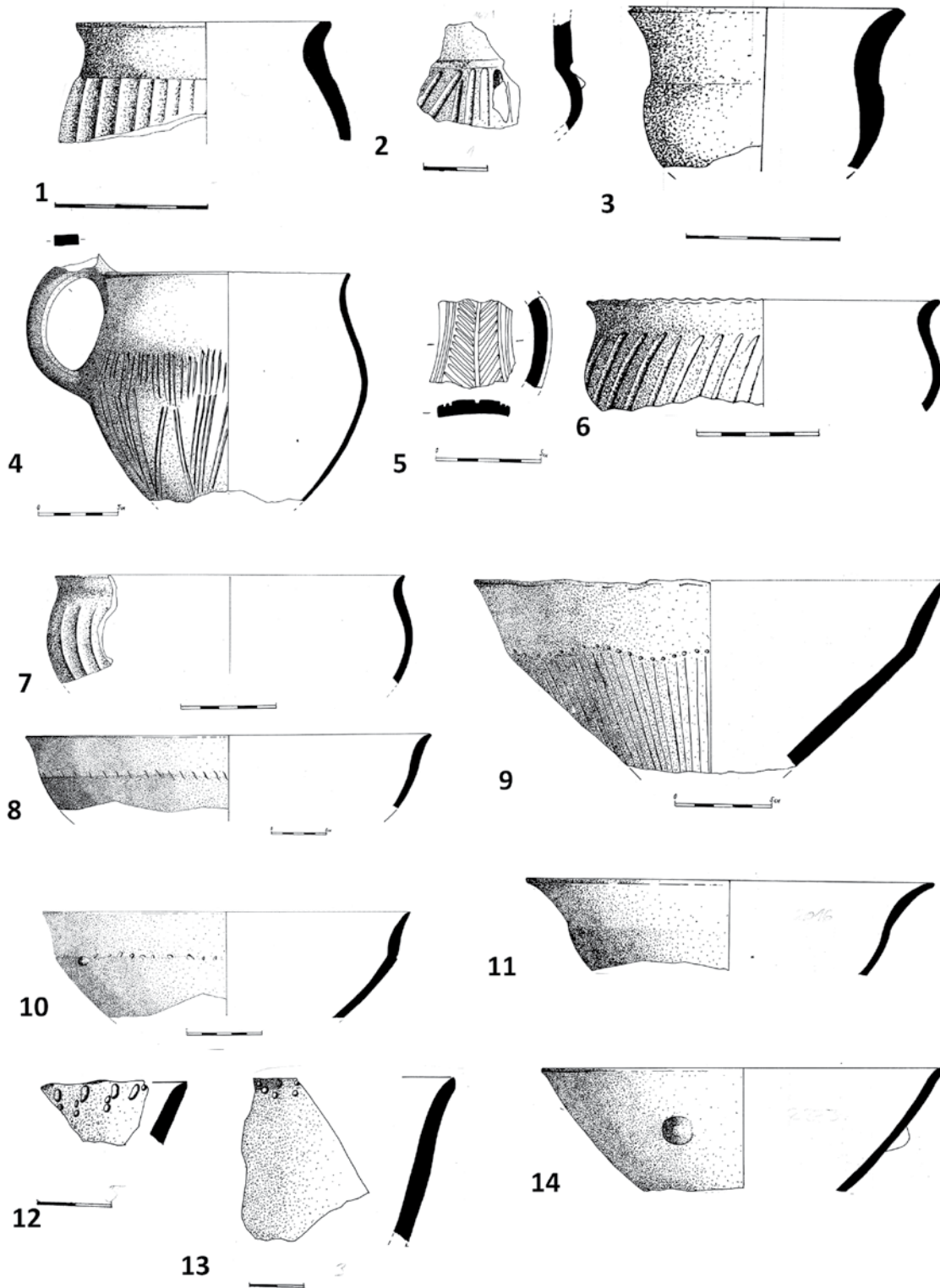


Fig. 2. Examples of Černavoda III–Boleráz pottery (1-11) and Kostolac pottery (12-14) found at Foeni-Salaş.



Such bowls are characterised by the decoration of the lower cone with vertical strips of incised lines (Fig. 2/11) (Tasić 1983, сл. 3/6).

The second phase of the Eneolithic at Foeni-Salaş is represented by finds attributed to the

Kostolac culture, such as vessels decorated with pricks or incisions filled with white incrustation (Fig. 2/12, 13). According to the decoration, those are scarce potsherds decorated with zig-zag grooving, an incised net-shaped motif, or the so-called

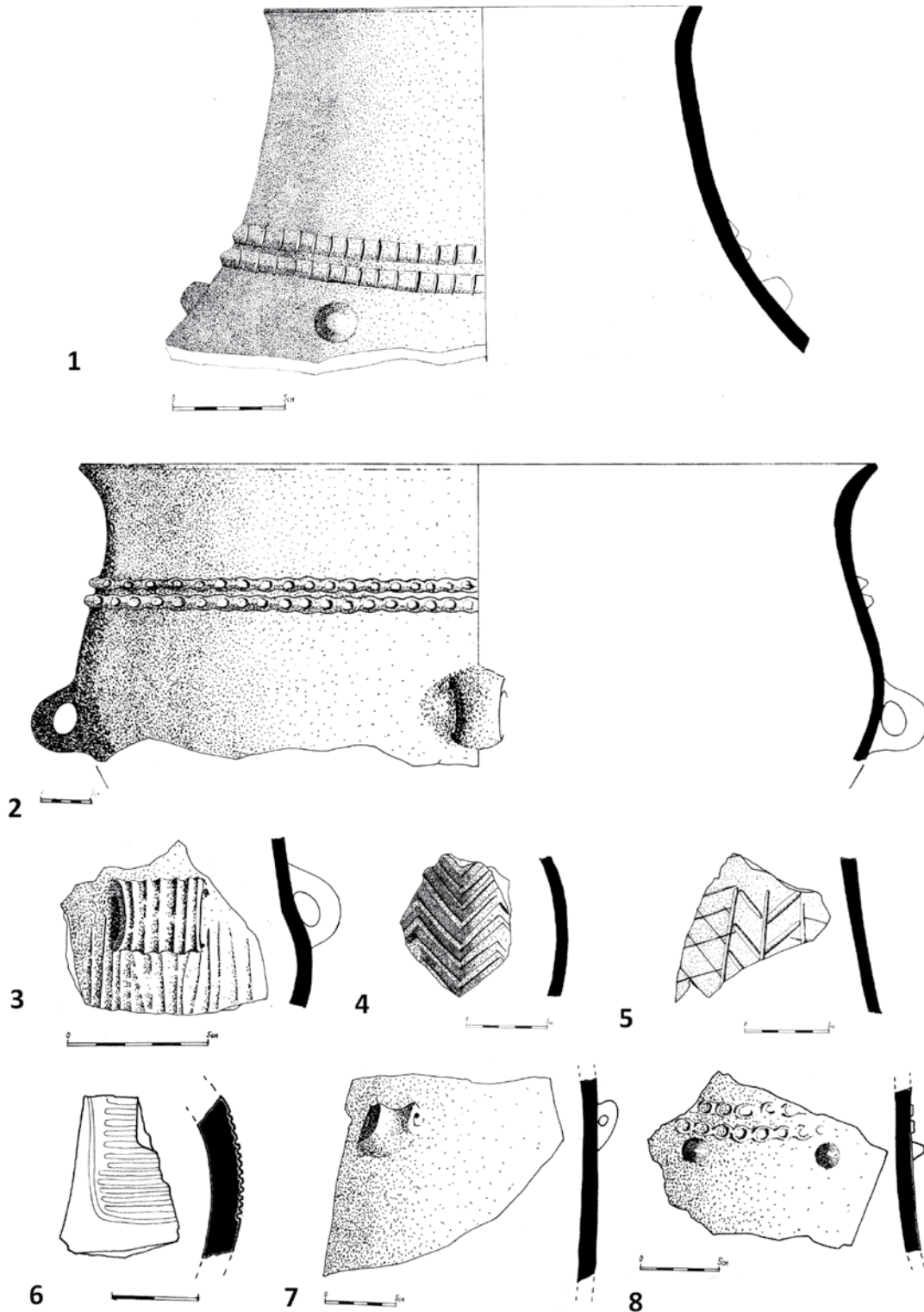


Fig. 3. Examples of Černavoda III-Boleraz pottery (1-3, 8) and Kostolac pottery (4-7) found at Foeni-Salaş.

pine-twig motif (Fig. 2/5; Fig. 3/5), which possesses analogies found within the preceding Cernavodă III–Boleráz-Baden culture (Uzelac 2002, T. 48/4; T. 25/1,3,4). The decoration characteristic of the Kostolac culture is rectangular metopes filled with horizontal rows of incised lines (Fig. 3/6). Additionally, a small and sharp S-profiled cup is typical of the Kostolac culture (Fig. 2/3).

#### *Bronze Age*

The following Metal Age cultural horizon is represented by a small number of finds characteristic of the Early and Middle Bronze Age. In previous reports, the ceramics from this horizon were originally identified as being from Vatin culture (Greenfield and Draşovean 1994, 64). However, we now think that it is more appropriate to assign this material to the Verbicioara cultural complex. Some of the Bronze Age pottery shards were found in a small circular pit (Locus 15) dug into the northern end of a Starčevo pit house (Locus 7) (Greenfield and Jongsma 2008, fig. 10). Other finds lay mixed into the Metal Age cultural layers on the site. Those are represented by potsherds with a characteristic manner of decoration found on Bronze Age ceramics. For example, a fragmented conical bowl is decorated both on the inner and the outer surface (Fig. 4/1, 3) with motifs that are well known from the Early Bronze Age Makó culture (Kalicz 1984, 96, taf. XX). There are also parts of vessels whose shape suggests that they were lids of urns for the incinerated deceased, typical of the Late Bronze Age (Kapuran 2019, 15). These vessels are decorated with incisions and one of the most dominant motifs are hatched triangles (Fig. 4/1, 3). The remaining Bronze Age finds are represented by atypical potsherds decorated with rows of incised lines (Fig. 4/2) and finger imprints (Fig. 4/3).

#### *Early Iron Age*

The final pre-Classical Metal Age period at the site is represented by Hallstatt origin finds of the Early Iron Age Gornea-Kalakača cultural group. Coarse ware vessels and pottery with highly polished surfaces are particularly noticeable. The pottery of the Kalakača group is primarily characterised by fine ware decorated with channels or a combination of channels and incised motifs (Fig. 4/13). In terms of types of vessels, conical bowls

with an inverted rim decorated with channels are dominant (Fig. 4/1, 11), followed by pots decorated with channels on both the outer and the inner surface (Fig. 4/9, 13, 14), incised decoration, and handles decorated with channels (Fig. 4/7, 8). The coarse ware pottery is represented by bell-shaped pots decorated with incisions (Fig. 4/5) or modelled and decorated bands (Fig. 4/6). A large pot is decorated with four tongue-shaped handles on the lower cone (Fig. 4/12).

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The Cernavodă III–Boleráz culture, which Nikola Tasić considers the substrate for the later development of the Baden culture (Tasić 1983, 30), is found across a broad swathe of central and south-eastern Europe. Its disposition in the Vojvodina region extends across the eastern parts of the Serbian Banat region to the Romanian border, which is in direct proximity to the site of Foeni-Salaş. To a certain degree, the culture existed in the central Bačka and Srem regions (Tasić 1983, 31). Medović is one of the pioneer researchers of this culture in Serbia, as a result of his research at the settlement site of Brza Vrba near Kovin (1969-1971). This initiated the discovery of several finds attributed to this culture in the storage of the Vršac museum (Medović 1976, 105 abb. 1, Uzelac 2002, 55).

Besides the Vojvodina region, finds attributed to the Cernavodă III culture have also been recorded in the Iron Gates, in Korbovo (Krstić 1986), the site of Bujanj-Staro selo near Niš (Bulatović and Milanović 2020, 168, Milanović 2013), and Kosovo (the site of Gladnice near Priština). The new phase of research at Bujanj (2008-2014) resulted in the *in situ* discovery of a completely preserved Cernavodă storage pot in Cultural Horizon IV, possessing characteristics of the Cernavodă III–Boleráz-Baden culture (Bulatović and Milanović 2020, fig. 158/1), which is almost identical in size and decorations to the example from Foeni-Salaş (Fig. 3/1). The absolute dates for this phase of the eponymous site are c. 3400 BP (Vander Linden and Bulatović 2020, 240, fig. 220, tab. 16). Aside from the territory of Serbia, this cultural group extended across the Romanian Banat, the lower Danube region in northern Bulgaria, and the Struma Valley (Alexandrov 1995, 253-254).

The small number of finds and few intact deposits at Foeni-Salaş that can be attributed to the cultural horizon suggests that there was no significant occupation at the site. It was probably visited a few times as pastoralists moved across the region

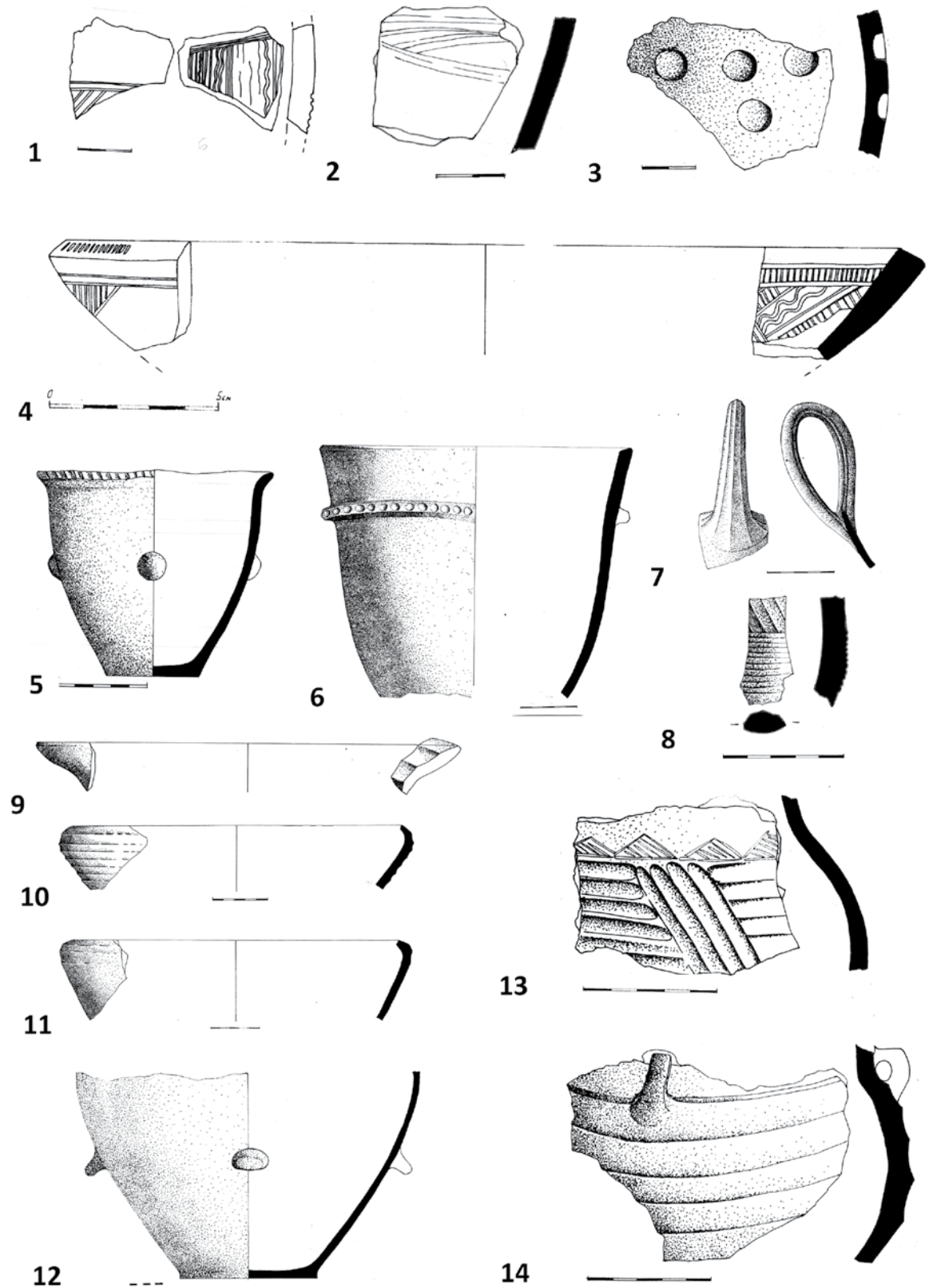


Fig. 4. Examples of Verbicioara pottery (1-4) and Kalakača pottery (5-14) found at Foeni- Salaş.



during their seasonal rounds. Although it was considered that the Baden and Kostolac cultures represent mutually related manifestations (Garašanin 1973, 234), Nikolić suggests that they are quite different in terms of material culture (Nikolić 2000, 80). Within the Balkan Peninsula, the Kostolac culture encompasses the regions to the west (the courses of the Drava, Sava, Danube, Great, and South Morava rivers), while the Coțofeni culture encompasses the areas farther east (Transylvania, Banat, Oltenia, and parts of Muntenia) (Roman 1976, 70). At one point during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, the bearers of the Coțofeni culture began settling in the region that extended from Transylvania to the south-eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin and north-eastern Serbia (Boyadziev 1988, 360). Tasić considers the territory of north-eastern Serbia as the point of symbiosis between the Kostolac and the Coțofeni cultures (Tasić 1982, 27). However, as previously noted, the small number of potsherds that could be attributed to both cultures recorded at the site of Foeni-Salaș does not provide sufficient evidence for a precise attribution to either the Kostolac or Coțofeni culture.

A similar situation is recorded for the Middle Bronze Age, as only a few potsherds were recorded. These are most likely attributed to the early phase of the Verbicioara culture. While Gumă considers that the Verbicioara culture from the Middle Bronze Age is undefined in the Banat and that it most likely represents a variant of the Crvenka-Cornești or Vatin culture (Gumă 1997, 120-121), our opinion is different. We think that there is a cultural connection between Phase II of the Verbicioara culture (Crăciunescu 2004, 216-218) and the Iron Gates Region and its hinterland, especially with the regions of the Negotin and Timok river valleys (Kapuran 2009). For example, an almost identical bowl decorated with incised motifs both on the inner and the outer surface was recorded at the site of Kot I in Metovnica near Bor (Kapuran and Jovanović 2013, 4, сл. 3/2), while the finger impressed decoration and decoration with rows of incised lines is quite common for the Timok valley during the Middle Bronze Age (Kapuran, Živković, and Štrbac 2016, t. 3/5,7; 5/9).

The last prehistoric Metal Age cultural horizon is from the Early Iron Age. It is represented by finds attributed to the Kalakača culture. Forms

and the manner of pottery decoration suggest that the genesis of the Kalakača culture is based on pottery in the Late Bronze Age Gava culture complex (Медовић 1994, 46). Tasić considers that the origin of the Kalakača cultural complex came from the Thraco-Cimmerian influence from the East (Tasić 1983, 114-115). Kalakača settlements are found in the territories of Srem, south-western Bačka, central and southern Banat, Iron Gates, and part of the Serbian Danube region (Medović 1988, 429). The finds from Foeni-Salaș indicate it was most likely part of the Kalakača cultural complex. In Serbia, the complex is characterised by the appearance of cross-shaped axes (Ärmchenbeil) made of iron and the emergence of new technologies in the production of iron objects (iron axes within a mass grave at the site of Gomolava and Layer IIa at the site of Bosut-Gradina) (Медовић 1990, 27). The Iron Age settlement at Foeni-Salaș covered most of the southern half of the mound. Some of the deeper pits and pit houses filled with ceramics, animal bones and grinding stones escaped destruction by modern and medieval ploughing.

In conclusion, we express our profound gratitude to Dr. Petar Popović whose research in the region of the Iron Gates has made a significant contribution to understanding the development of the Bronze and Iron Age Cultures in the prehistory of Southeast Europe. His research on the Bronze and Iron Age necropolis issues has secured him a place among the important scholars in Serbian, in particular, and Central Balkan archaeology in general.

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