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STORAGE VESSELS FROM POMPEIOPOLIS

Storage containers, used during an important phase in the long course of processing food, have been badly neglected by archaeologists. Today, however, more scholars are becoming aware of their importance in understanding human behavior, especially as they reflect cultural and social identity, diet, and economic practices. The widespread presence and large variety of pithoi, vats, and storing pots testify to the important place of this activity in the economic life of Pompeiopolis. Their use from late Hellenistic to Medieval times shows the continuity and intensity of agricultural activities that took place at this site.¹

Storage containers play an important role in the long “*chaîne opératoire*” of food production, storage, preparation, and consumption. Stocking surpluses guaranteed social and political stability, avoiding social unrest. Unfortunately, such vessels have received far less attention in comparison with so called fine ware, probably due to the influence exercised by the traditional art historical approach of classical archaeologists. Today, more and more scholars are becoming aware that a detailed study of coarse ware will provide insights into human behavior related to cultural and social identity, economic practices, as well as the increasing craft specialization of a society.¹ Recent excavations undertaken at *Pompeiopolis* (Paphlagonia) attest to the vast and well-organized system of storage that existed in the city.

In spite of the large typological variety of storage containers discovered at the site, we will limit ourselves only to few pottery types for reasons of space. Pithoi are by far the most common containers at this site, probably due to their thick walls and resistance to physical shocks. The huge number and vast diversity of shapes and sizes of these pithoi attest to an increased craft specialization of the local potters. They belong to two main types, both having Hellenistic roots, but well attested until the late Roman period.² The first type

has a massive rim, an ovoid body covered by symmetrical, prominent bands, and a small, discoidal base. The rim may have different forms, such as rectangular, truncate conical, and triangular. They exhibit a range of dimensions, with heights varying between 80 and 170 cm, and rim diameters between 33 and 59 cm, while the thickness of the walls varies between 2 and 6 cm. Their capacities also vary considerably; our mathematical calculations show capacities of 123, 378, 540, and 994 liters (**figs. 1–4**). Occasionally some have graffiti on the rims, incised after firing, which might indicate the content or quantity stored at one time in that pithos (**fig. 5**). Such pithoi (fabric 1) mainly have a coarse metamorphic (phyllitic) fabric, with iron-rich inclusions and microfossils, poorly sorted and probably added as temper, which suggests a high firing temperature (**fig. 6**).³ The use of these aplastic inclusions would increase the firing-strength of these vessels, but phyllite is not beneficial for thermal shock resistance,⁴ so we find phyllites only in storage containers and not in cooking vessels.

The second type of pithos has a flange under the flat, horizontal rim. Occasionally, two massive handles are attached to the flange and maximum diameter of the body (**figs. 7–8**). Although we could not find any complete example, perhaps due to the thinness of the walls relative to the first type, they might also have an ovoid body with a wide, plane base. Lids are usually ceramic or stone. Painted bands, incised lines, and relief decorations were often applied to their surfaces, with a clear intention of display. For the second type, we do not have completely preserved vessel but their dimensions and capacities are close to the small size of the first type. They are mainly made in an ophiolitic and quartz fabric with abundant mica and pyroxenes (fabric 2) (**fig. 9**).

¹ For a comprehensive discussion see A. VILLING/M. SPATARO, Investigating ceramics, cuisine and culture – past, present and future. In: M. Spataro/A. Villing, *Ceramics, cuisine and culture* (Oxford 2015) 1–26.

² They were present basically in every Hellenistic and Roman site such as Pergamon: A. VON SZALAY/E. BOEHRINGER, *Die Artillerie von Pergamon*. In: *Altortümer von Pergamon 10: Die hellenistische Arsenal* (Berlin 1937) 37–39 pls. 32–33. – *Samos*: R. TÖLLE-KASTENBEIN/R. FELSCH/U. JANTZEN, *Das Kastro Tigani. Die Bauten und Funde Griechischer, Römischer und Byzantinischer Zeit* (Bonn 1974) Z 123. – *Thasos*: F. BLONDÉ, *La céramique*. *Bull. Corr. Hellénique* 113, 1989, 541 fig. 4, 26. – *Chersonesos*: G. M. NIKOLAENKO, *Metki na antichnyh pifosah*. In: *Hersones Tavricheskiiy. Remeslo i Kultura* (Kiev 1974) 25–29; G. M. NIKOLAENKO, *O Gerakleiskom pifose iz 'Starogo Chersonesa'*. *Kratkie Soob.* 156, 1978, 78–80. – Murighiol and Histria: A. OPAÎ, *Local and Imported Ceramics in the Roman Province of Scythia (4th–6th Centuries AD)*. *BAR Internat. Ser.* 1274 (Oxford 2004) 2–3 pl. 1. – *Callatis*: C. IONOMU, *Cercetări arheologice la Mangalia și Neptun*. *Pontice* 1, 1968, 235 fig. 1. – *Pessinus*: G. DEVOS/P. DE PAEPE/F. VERMEULEN, *The Pithoi from the Ancient Anatolian City of Pessinus*. *Bull. Ant. Beschaving* 74, 2005, 79–110.

³ The petrographic analysis has been made by M. A. Cau Ontiveros & L. Fantuzzi, Barcelona University.

⁴ N. S. MÜLLER/V. KILIKOGLU/P. M. DAY, *Home-made recipes: tradition and innovation in Bronze age cooking pots from Akrotiri, Thera*. In: M. Spataro/A. Villing (note 2).

Vats

Although there is a large variety of vats, none has been completely preserved. Our typology is therefore based only on the upper parts. Their main characteristic is a large rim and a tapering or hemispherical body ending, perhaps, in a large, flat base. All belong to the late Roman period.

One type preserves a massive rectangular rim with a rim diameter of 98 cm, a container of large dimensions. The exterior is decorated with ovules applied. It was manufactured in fabric type 1 (fig. 10). Other variants have smaller diameters: 60 cm and 68 cm (figs. 11–12). Their surfaces are less decorated and they are made in fabric type 1.

Another type also has a massive rim but of trapezoidal shape, while the body is hemispherical (inv. 452). The rim diameter is 80 cm. The lavish relief decoration in meanders or vine leaves and the painted red dots and wreaths point to a different workshop than that of the vat detailed above, as does the fabric. It was built in sections and the joins are covered by narrow bands. Its shape and decoration suggest a possible use in the wine industry for fermenting must. It was manufactured in fabric type 2 (figs. 13–14).

Storage bin

A vessel fragment with an outturned, thickened rim belongs to a storage bin of much smaller dimensions (P13-O1A-104, inv. 128). The body was perhaps ovoid or globular. The rim diameter is 19 cm (fig. 15). Its fabric, rich in white inclusions (lime?) and less so in quartz, suggests an import (fig. 16). This type of vessel seems to be less common at Pompeiopolis as only a single fragment has been discovered at this site so far.

Storage pots

These vessels differ from bins because they are smaller, with thinner walls. In fact, their morphology does not differ too much from a cooking pot but their dimensions are larger. In addition, they lack traces of soot and the surface is decorated. They were used for temporary food storage.

One type strongly resembles a cooking pot, as it has an everted and thickened rim and a broad, heavy, strap handle attached to the rim and at the maximum diameter of the body (fig. 17). The rim diameter is 25 cm and the handle 5.6 × 1.2 cm. Similar vessels are also known from the lower Danube in the 5th century AD at *Iatrus* and Murighiol.⁵ This curious linkage with the lower Danube suggests an unforeseen connection between these two regions realized either through commercial ties or by peripatetic potters.

Another type has an outturned rim that continues directly with the body. The strap handles are attached directly under the rim. The rim diameter is 20 cm and the handle 4 × 1.5 cm. The walls are quite thin (c. 0.4–0.5 cm). The exterior is covered by a whitish wash and red and white bands and waves. (figs. 18–20). Although this shape is identical to some kitchen-ware vessels, the presence of decorations shows a clear intention of display. They could be used for storage of a solid and also liquid products such as milk or yogurt. The fabric of type 2 and the decoration point to a workshop specialized in this type of decorated vessels. They have a local origin; this shape has been found at Pompeiopolis from the early Roman until the early Byzantine period.

Conclusions

The great variety of large, medium, and small storage vessels from *Pompeiopolis* testifies to the existence of an organized system of collecting and storing agricultural products, able to satisfy either individual households or city and governmental authorities. Their morphology reflects different influences that had persisted in this region since the Hittite, Phrygian? and Hellenistic periods. The presence of pithoi from the Roman period to the 9th–10th centuries shows the continuity and intensity of agricultural activities that took place at this site. They also testify to the existence of a tied administrative control over the agricultural resources in the community. Their frequent presence also suggests a high agricultural output available for the payment of taxes and for trade. Economic prosperity, implied by the agricultural production, is shown also by the presence of private and public luxury buildings, monetary circulation, and by the increased volume of trade with very specialized, but far away, regions such as the Aegean, the Levant, and North Africa. That the area of *Pompeiopolis* played an important role in the economy of the Roman empire is also demonstrated by the revival of this settlement, probably of far modest dimensions, during the 10th or 11th century, as some pithoi found *in situ* and imported ceramics and amphorae attest. It is also demonstrable that this inland region, in spite of the political and economic turmoil suffered by the empire, coped better than coastal or southern, Mediterranean zones of the empire during the late Roman, early Byzantine and Medieval periods.

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⁵ B. BÖTTGER, Die Gefäßkeramik aus dem Kastell *Iatrus*. In: *Iatrus-Krivina. Spätantike Befestigung und Frühmittelalterliche Siedlung an der unteren Donau 2. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1966–1973* (Berlin 1982) 137 pl. 50, 515. – A. OPAIT, Ceramica din aşezarea şi cetatea de la Independenţa (Murighiol), sec. V î.e.n.–VII e.n. *Peuce* 10, 1991, 259 no. 143 pl. 48, 6.

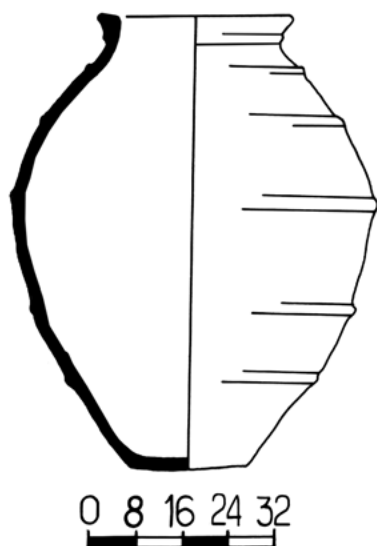


Fig. 1. Pithos type 1, small size.

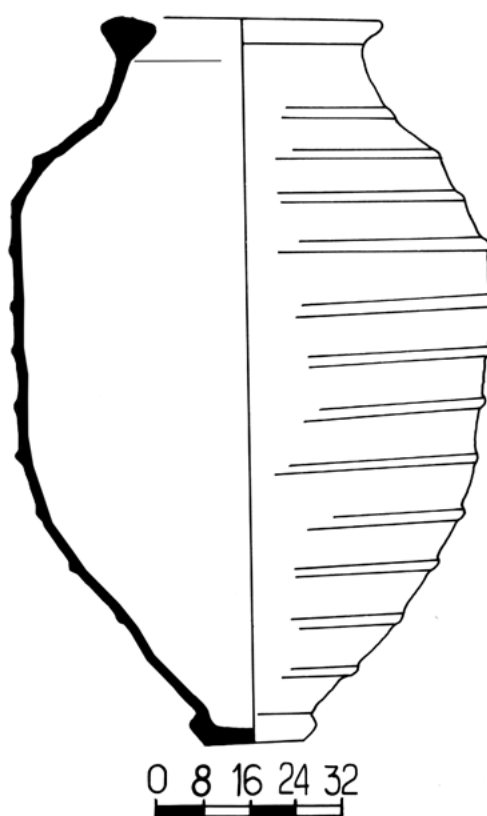


Fig. 2. Pithoi type 1, medium sizes.

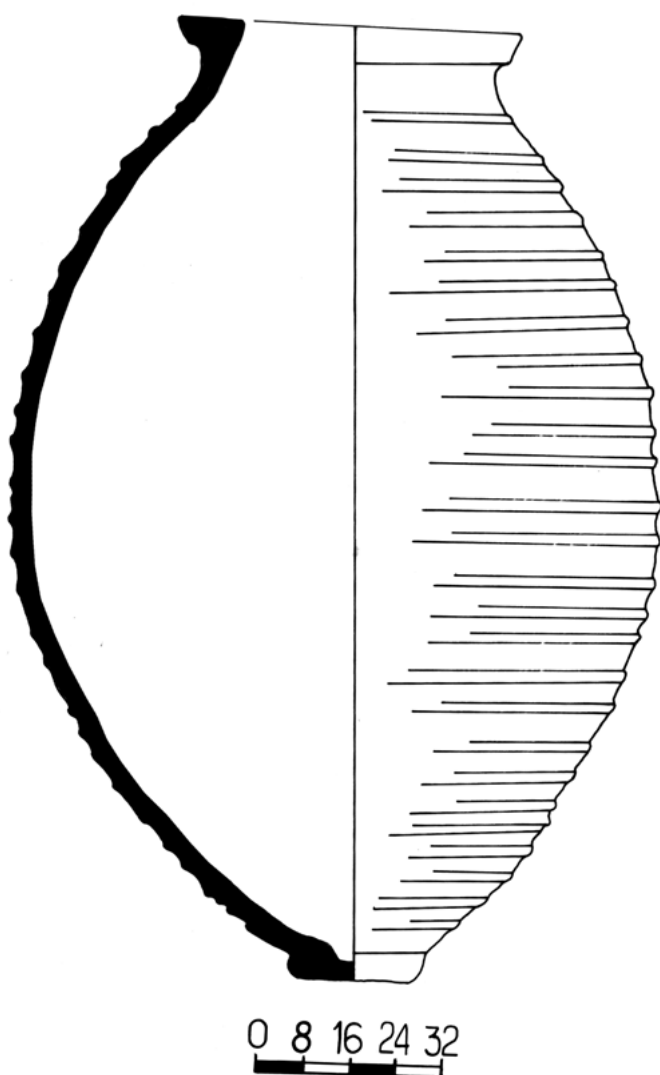


Fig. 4. Pithos type 1, large size.

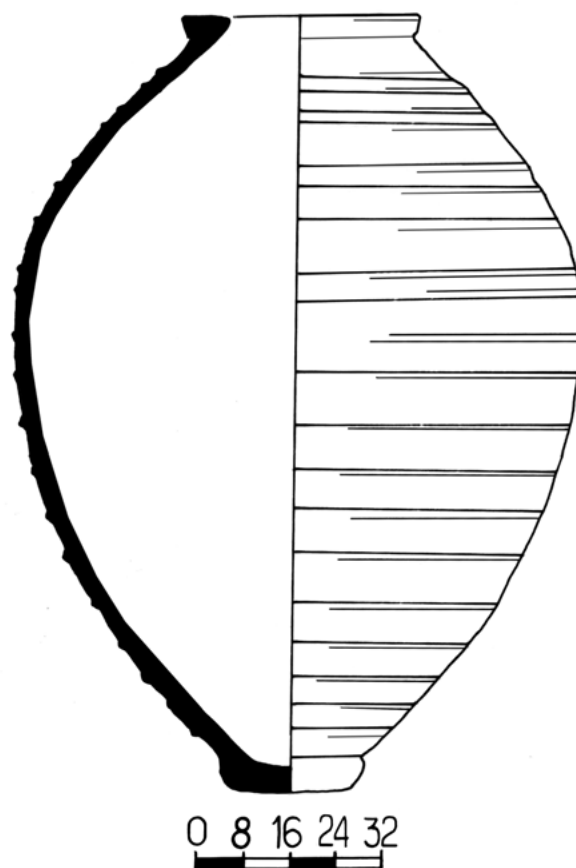


Fig. 3. Pithoi type 1, medium sizes.

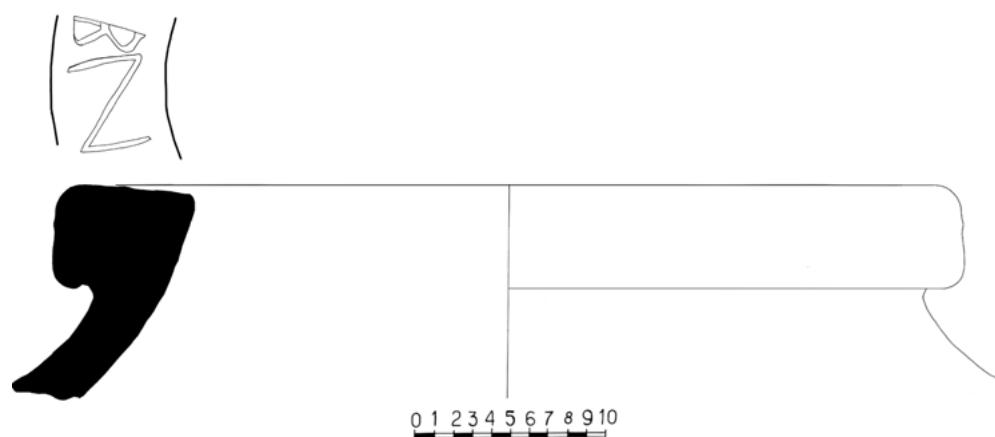


Fig. 5. Pithos type 1 with graffiti.

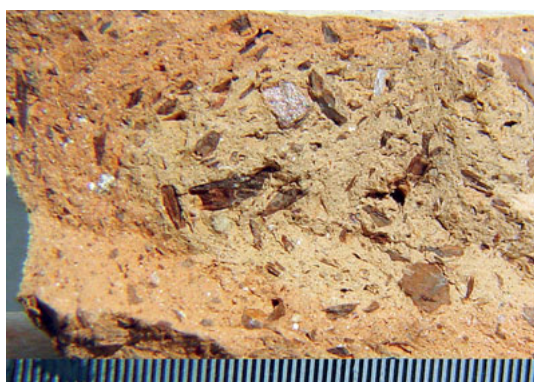


Fig. 6. Fabric type 1.



Fig. 9. Fabric type 2.

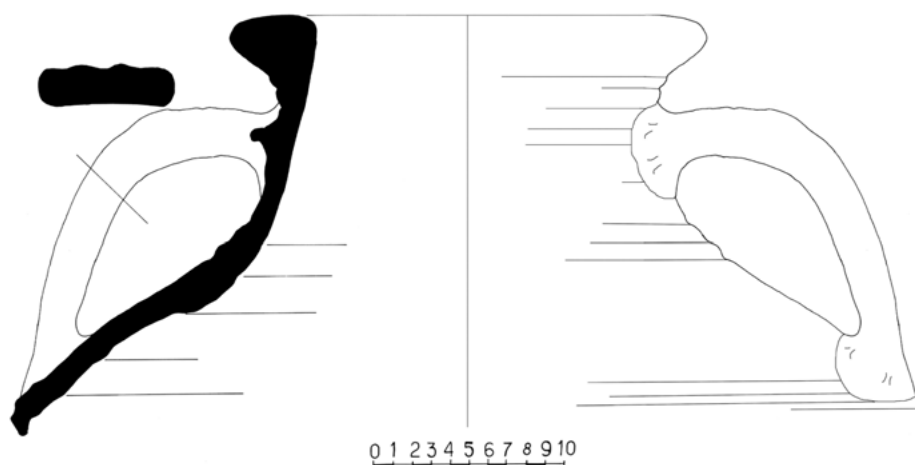


Fig. 7. Pithoi type 2.

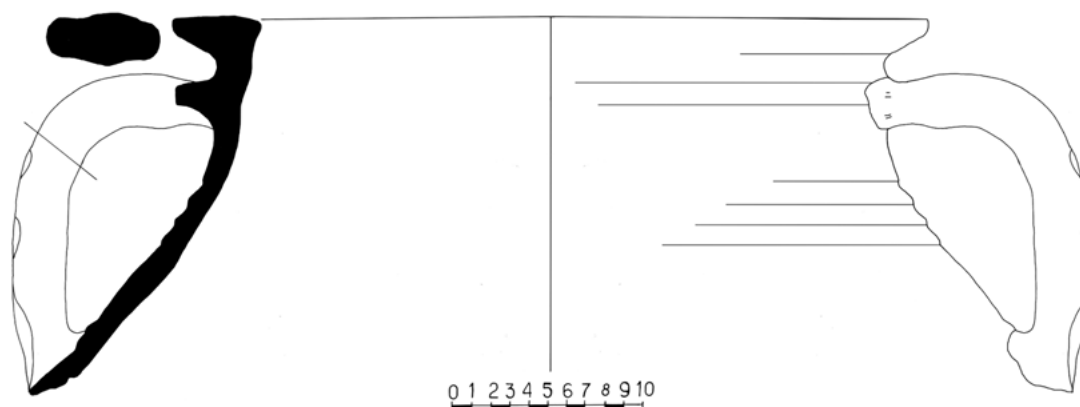


Fig. 8. Pithoi type 2.

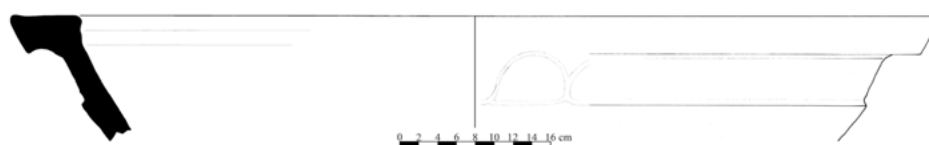


Fig. 10. Vat type 1.

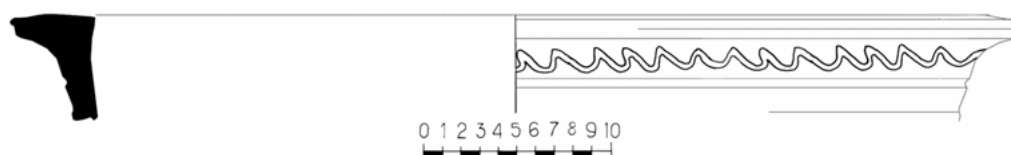


Fig. 11. Vats type 2, variants.

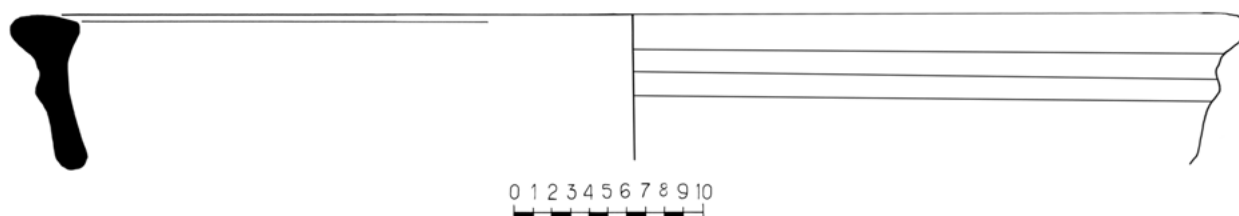


Fig. 12. Vats type 2, variants.

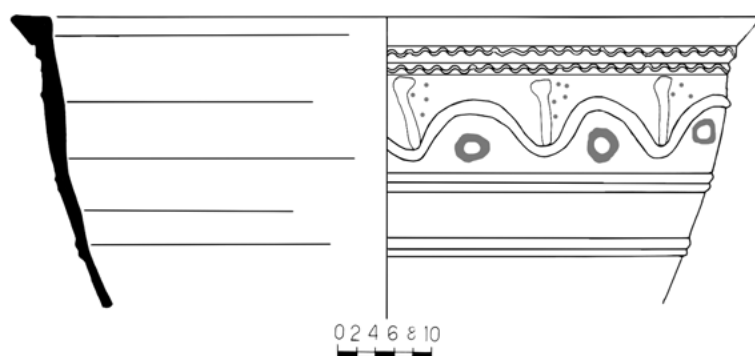


Fig. 13. Vats type 2.



Fig. 14. Vats type 2.

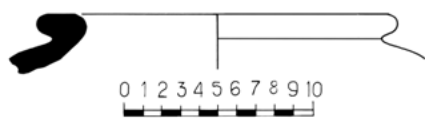


Fig. 15. Storage bin.



Fig. 16. Storage bin, fabric.

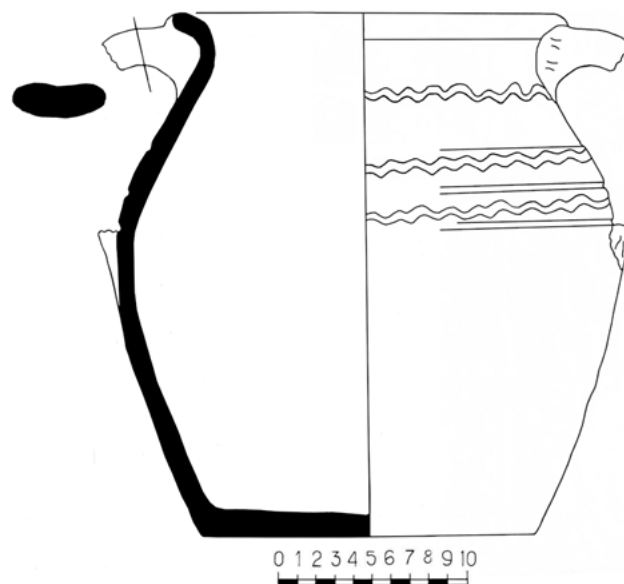


Fig. 17. Storage pot type 1.

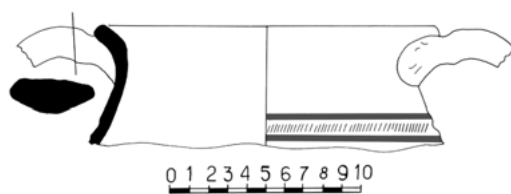


Fig. 18. Storage pot type 2.



Fig. 19. Storage pot type 2.

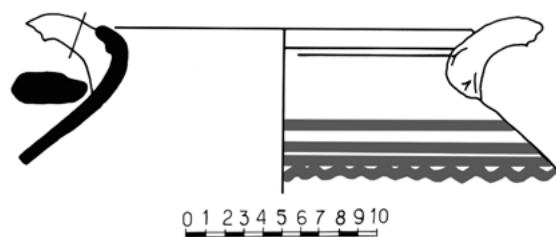


Fig. 20. Storage pot type 2.