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DACIAN POTTERY IN ROMAN CONTEXTS. THE FORT OF CĂȘEIU (*SAMUM*)

On the northern Dacian limes, vessels of Late Iron Age tradition were found in the Roman fort of Cășeu. Relatively scarce, the vessels were mainly hand-made: bowls, cups, lids and jars. Their presence is certain for the entire functioning period of the fort, being discovered mostly in barracks. Based on the fabric, shapes and ornaments it is difficult to determine who produced and used these vessels, the Romans or the Dacians.

Dacia – *Samum* – fort – jar – lightning cup

1. *Samum*, on the northern Dacian limes

The Roman fort of Cășeu was built on the right bank of the Someș River (*Samus*), hence taking the name, *Samum*. The fort was part of the northern sector of Dacia province's defensive system (**fig. 1, 1**). Soldiers from *cohors II Britanorum miliaria* built the first fortification, after the Dacian Wars at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Probably under Emperor Hadrian this unit was replaced by *cohors I Britanica miliaria c. R. equitata* which would rebuild the fort and would occupy it until the retreat of the Romans from Dacia in the 3rd century AD (Isac 2003: 33-47).

The fort had a square shape, stone walls reinforced with buttresses and semi-circular towers (**fig. 1, 2**). In the central area, the *principia* was built directly in stone and had two courtyards separated by stone columns. The *praetorium* was placed on *latus dextrum* and it had three building phases. Between the *principia* and the *praetorium* a *horreum* was found. Two buildings were discovered west of the *principia*, one probably being a second *horreum*. Wood barracks were found in *retentura dextra*, *praetentura dextra* and *praetentura sinistra* (Isac 2003: 59-200).

2. Roman common ware

The common wares found at Cășeu were made of a relatively good quality fabric and were well burned, mostly oxidant. Wheel-thrown pots are the most numerous (about 1700 fragments were studied, representing 91% of all pottery found). The repertoire of the decorative elements is rather limited (Cupșa 2009: 383-387).

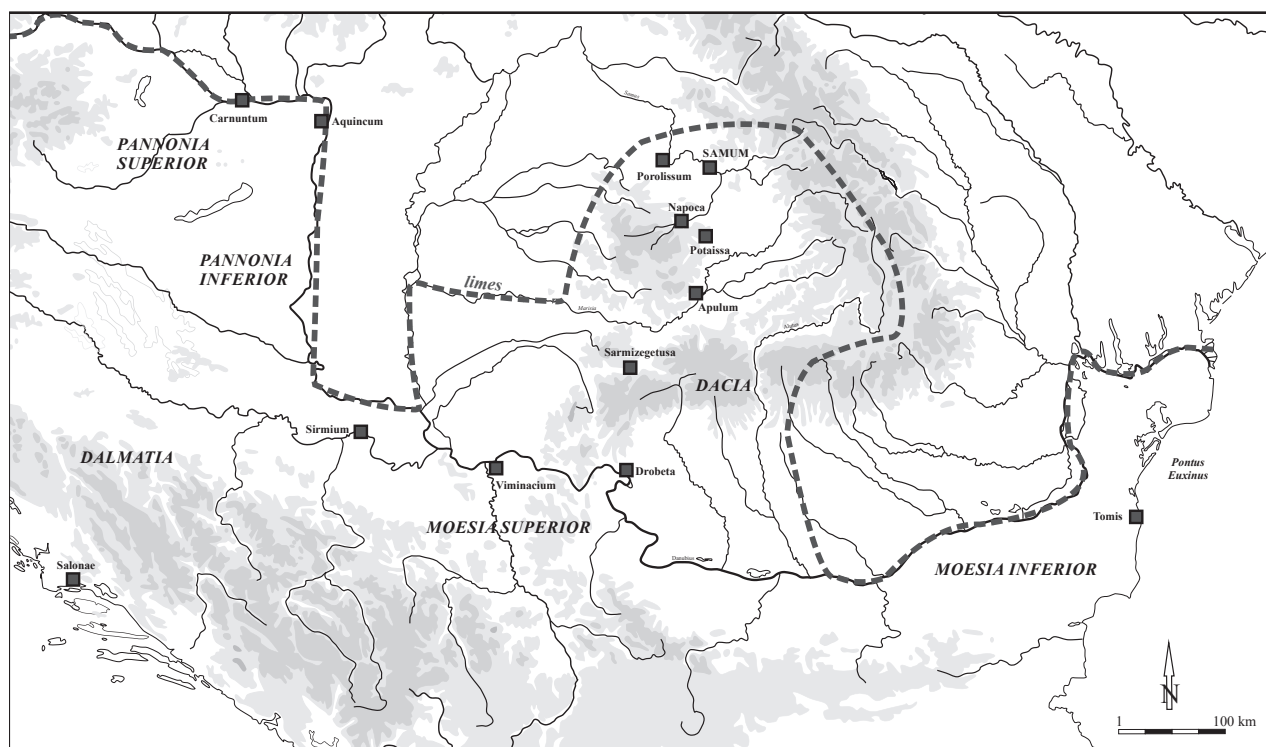
The vast majority of the vessels were supplied by the local market, the ones imported from other provinces being less

numerous. The cooking containers (pots, *patinae*, *mortaria*, strainers, and lids) represent 50% of all common vessels found in the fort. Most of these wares, especially the pots, were found in the barracks' areas. Table ware for serving food (bowls, dishes, plates) or liquids (cups, jugs, beakers) was various, representing 32% of the common vessels found in the fort. Among them, the most numerous are the bowls. The recipients for storing or transporting food (*dolia*, *urceolus*, and pots with or without handles) represent 18% of the common pottery discovered so far. In this category, the pitchers are the most numerous and varied (Cupșa 2009: 389-497).

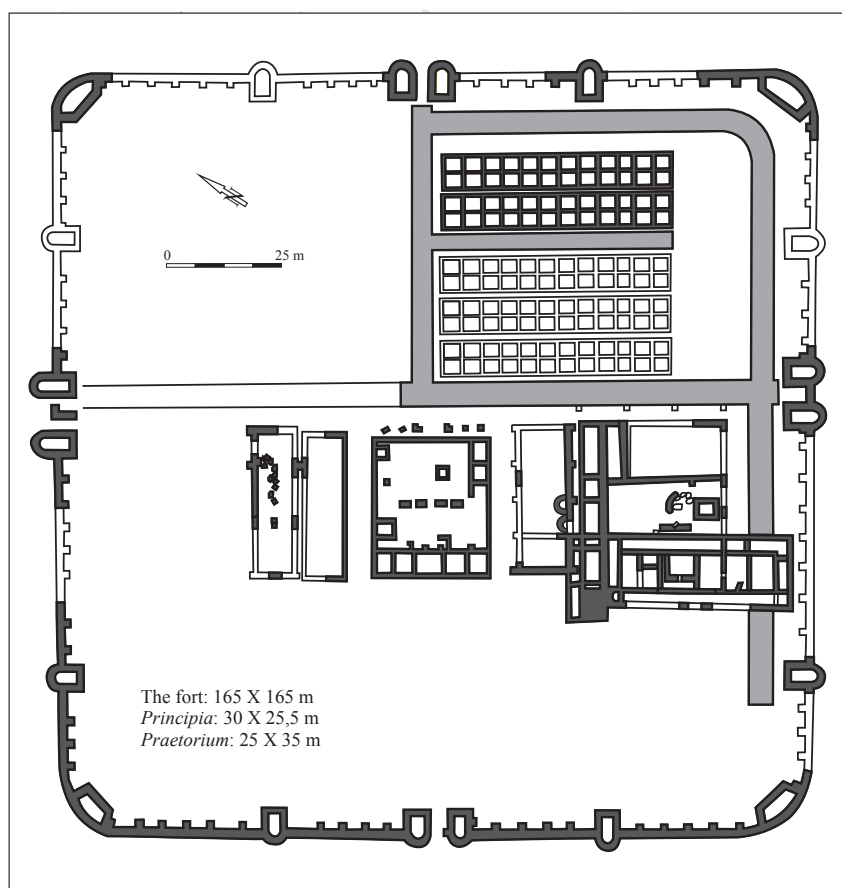
2.1. Hand-made vessels

The hand-made vessels found at Cășeu are just a few considering all the common pottery from the fort (about 160 fragments were studied, representing 9% of all pottery found). These kinds of vessels were found in all areas of the fort and are dated from the first to the last chronological phase (**fig. 1, 3**). Their fabric is coarse and the burning is mostly uneven. The vast majority are black or brown in colour. Among this ceramic category, the pots are the most numerous (85%), followed by bowls (5%), lids (5%) and cups (4,4%) (Cupșa 2009: 498-510).

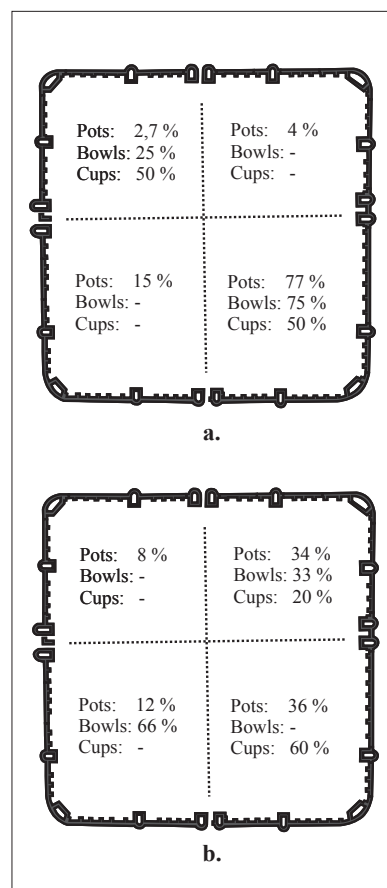
Medium sized (95%) the hand-made pots have a bi-conical shape and an everted rim. The fabric is coarse, in brownish and darkish colours. Slightly different, several types of pots fit these general features (**fig. 2**). The few decorated exemplars have round buttons, alveoli, alveolar belts and incised lines (**fig. 2, 1, 2, 4-6, 8-13, 15-17, 20-22**). The pots were mostly used for storing and cooking, some having secondary burnings on the outside walls. They have been found predominantly in barracks, but also in other areas of the fort, including the *praetorium* (Cupșa 2009: 498-505).



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2



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Fig. 1. Cășeiu – Samum: 1. Dacia and the northern limes (after Isac 2003); 2. The fort (after Isac 2003); 3. Hand-made pottery distribution: a. early layers b. late layers (after Cupșa 2009).



Fig. 2. Hand-made pottery of Dacian tradition discovered in Cășeiu fort: 1-22. pots/jars (drawings and photos by the authors).

The bowls have a truncated shape or slightly curved walls, similar to the letter 'S' (**fig. 3, 1-5**). Medium sized, the hand-made bowls were used for serving food but also for cooking. (Cupșa 2009: 505-507). With straight or slightly curved walls, the lids are also of truncated shape (**fig. 3, 6-10**). The upper button is more or less outlined. Used for covering the pots, the hand-made lids were made of a coarse fabric, in darkish colours. Such bowls and lids were found in all areas of the fort (Cupșa 2009: 507-508).

Like some bowls and lids, the cups have a truncated shape (**fig. 3, 11-15**). All of them are of small size and only one has a handle (**fig. 3, 11**). The cups have a coarse fabric, most of them being black and brown in colour. A single cup was decorated with alveoli at the base (**fig. 3, 12**). Some of the cups were used as lamps but this utility is not certain for all the found samples: less than a half (40%) present smoke traces. The few cups were found in barracks; only one was found in the *praetorium* (Cupșa 2009: 508-510).

2.2. Dacian Kingdom pottery

Some of the hand-made vessels from Cășeu imitate Roman types, usually wheel-thrown. Other hand-made vessels are of Late Iron Age tradition (Cupșa 2009: 498-510). This Late Iron Age tradition in making pots could be linked to the previous Dacian Kingdom (1st century BC-1st century AD).

The pottery of the Dacian Kingdom is various in shapes and types. Among the cooking pots, the most numerous are hand-made bi-conical jars decorated with buttons, alveolar belts or incised lines (**fig. 4, 1-5**). For liquids, the Dacians used jugs, cups and pitchers (**fig. 4, 6-10**). Usually medium sized, the jugs were hand-made and wheel-thrown, with one or two handles. The cups have curved walls and a handle. The Dacian pitchers imitated Roman forms (Crișan 1969: 161-163, 172-178), as is the case for most types of Dacian lids (**fig. 4, 11-14**) (Crișan 1969: 182-184).

Another type of the Dacian ceramic repertoire is the so called 'fruit bowl' (**fig. 4, 17-19**). This vessel has a hemispherical cup and a tall - hollow pedestal. Of different sizes, the 'fruit bowls' were used for serving food. Pedestal dishes or bowls were used in the same manner (**fig. 4, 15-16**) (Crișan 1969: 153-160, 167-170, 178-180).

For storage, bi-conical pots of large sizes were used, but also pots inspired by the Greek or Roman recipients such as *pithoi* or *dolia* (Crișan 1969: 184-186).

A special type among Dacian pottery is the lightning cup (**fig. 4, 20-24**). The fabric of this kind of cup is coarse, mostly in reddish and brownish colours. The lightning cup was hand-made and has a truncated cone shape. It has one, two or three handles; the samples without handles are rare. As the name suggest, this cups were usually used for lightning.

3. Tradition and change

Late Iron Age tradition vessels have been discovered in most of Dacia's Roman forts such as Buciumi (Gudea 1970: 299-

311), Bologa (Gudea 1969: 503-508; Cupșa 2009: 105-116), Gilău (Marcu and Țentea 1997: 221-233), Ilișua (Gaiu 2015: 65-92), Jupa - *Tibiscum* (Rogozea 1988: 165-176) or Moigrad - *Porolissum* (Gudea 1989: 501-502). These kinds of vessels were also discovered in Roman settlements and cemeteries from Dacia (Ardeț 1991: 137-142; Negru and Ciucă 1997: 23-29; Popilian 1980; Popilian 1982: 42-67; Popilian and Niță 1982: 87-92; Protase 1971: 135-160; Protase 1976; Protase 1980; Rusu-Bolindeț 2007: 102-103).

As in the case of Cășeu, the percentage of Late Iron Age tradition pottery in Roman forts is low and the types are relatively few. Also rare are the hand-made vessels in urban settlements from Roman Dacia, but they appear in a larger amount in some rural settlements and cemeteries (Gudea and Moțu 1988: 232-235; Mihăilescu-Bârliba 2009: 11-16; Negru 2003: 60; Protase 1980; Țentea 1999: 125-132; Rusu-Bolindeț 2007: 101-137).

Some general features of Late Iron Age tradition vessels and the specific decoration (buttons, alveoli, alveolar belts, incised lines and fir trees) are preserved in the Roman time. However, as shown by the vessels from Cășeu as well, some major changes are obvious from one period to another.

The Dacian origin of some hand-made pots was presumed on the basis of form and the specific decoration. The shape and decoration of some pots from Cășeu are similar to Dacian jars from the 1st century AD. But, in contrast to the Dacian jars, the hand-made pots from Cășeu have a higher quality fabric, darkish colours and few decorative motifs. Their use for cooking seems to be maintained from one period to another.

The truncated cups found at Cășeu were also made following a Late Iron Age tradition. The Dacian lightning cup keeps its truncated cone shape in the Roman period, but is smaller in size and made of a higher quality fabric in darkish colours (Marcu and Țentea 2000: 67-86; Opreanu 1993: 235-260). The most obvious transformation is the loss of the handle: a single cup from Cășeu has one. The functionality of truncated cups as lamps in Roman Dacia is highly probable, but some exemplars from Cășeu have no traces indicating such function.

The common shape makes it difficult to assign some hand-made bowls and lids to Dacian tradition. Some of the hand-made bowls from Cășeu seem to imitate rather Roman wheel-thrown bowls or *patinae* (Cupșa 2009: 507, 785). Moreover, the hand-made bowls are relatively absent in the final period of the Dacian Kingdom, during the 1st century AD, thus the local analogies are missing. Regarding the lids, the Dacian wheel-thrown samples have imitated Roman types and the hand-made ones are small in number (Crișan 1969: 178-184).

All these Late Iron Age tradition vessels from Cășeu were hand-made. No Dacian vessel made on the potter's wheel (jugs, bowls, 'fruit bowls') was discovered inside the fort. In fact, Dacian wheel-thrown pottery is almost absent from Roman Dacia sites. Such vessels were rarely found, mostly in rural settlements and cemeteries. Small in size, of grey fabric, just a few bi-conical jugs and 'fruit bowls' / bowls (?) were found in Roman Dacia (Negru 2003: 53-58).

4. Between Dacians and Romans

Based on these similarities and differences it is difficult to determine who produced these vessels and why. Some changes are related to the manufacturing technique (fabric, firing, colours). This could be the result of a Roman influence

on the Dacian craftsmen, but it could also be the result of a local influence on the Roman potters.

Vessels of Late Iron Age tradition were found in local pottery workshops, associated in the same contexts with Roman common ware. At the same time, Dacian motifs (alveoli and alveolar belts) appear on typical wheel-thrown Roman pots

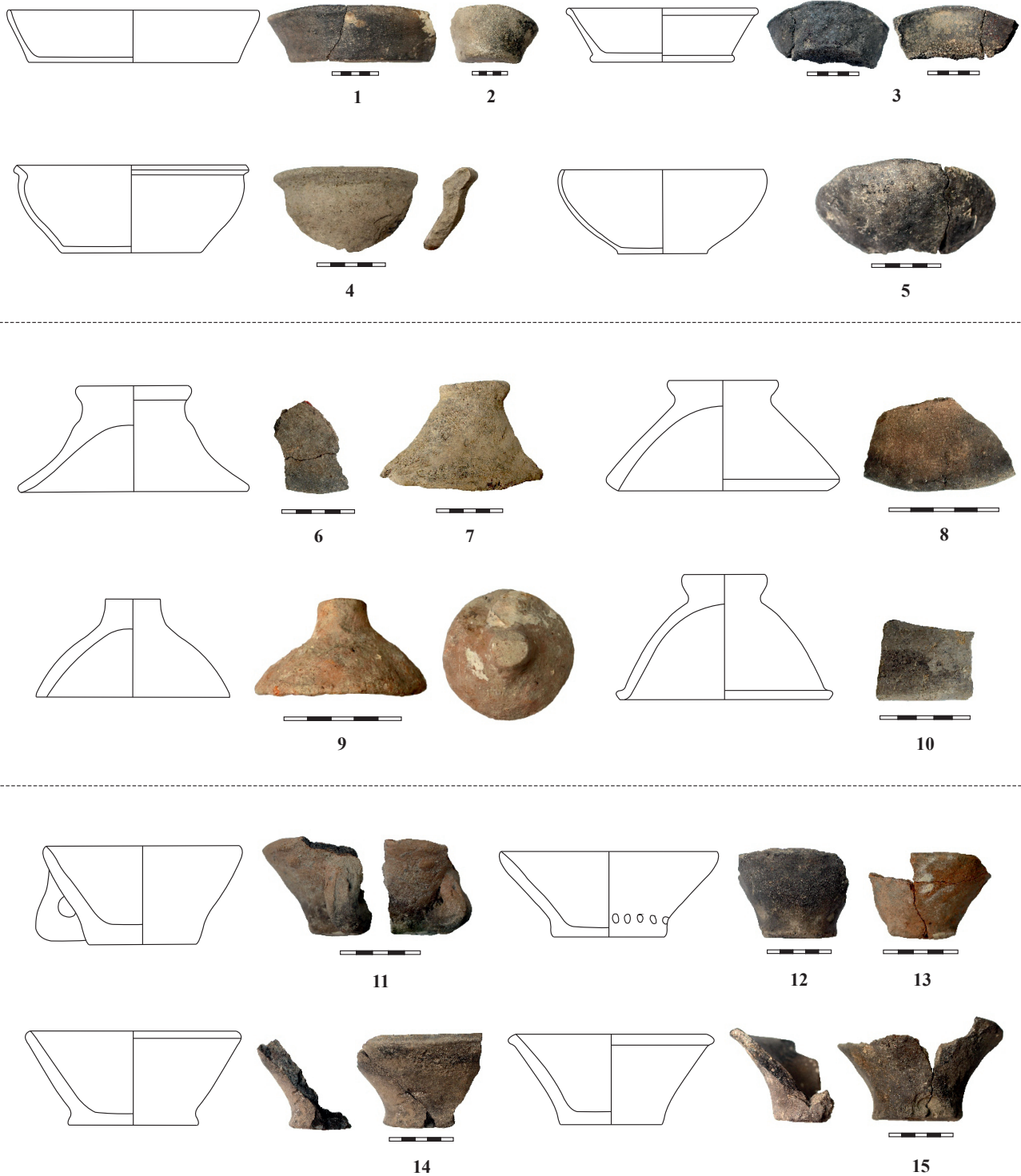


Fig. 3. Hand-made pottery of Dacian tradition discovered in Cășeiu fort: 1-5. bowls; 6-10. lids; 11-15. cups/lightning devices (drawings and photos by the authors).

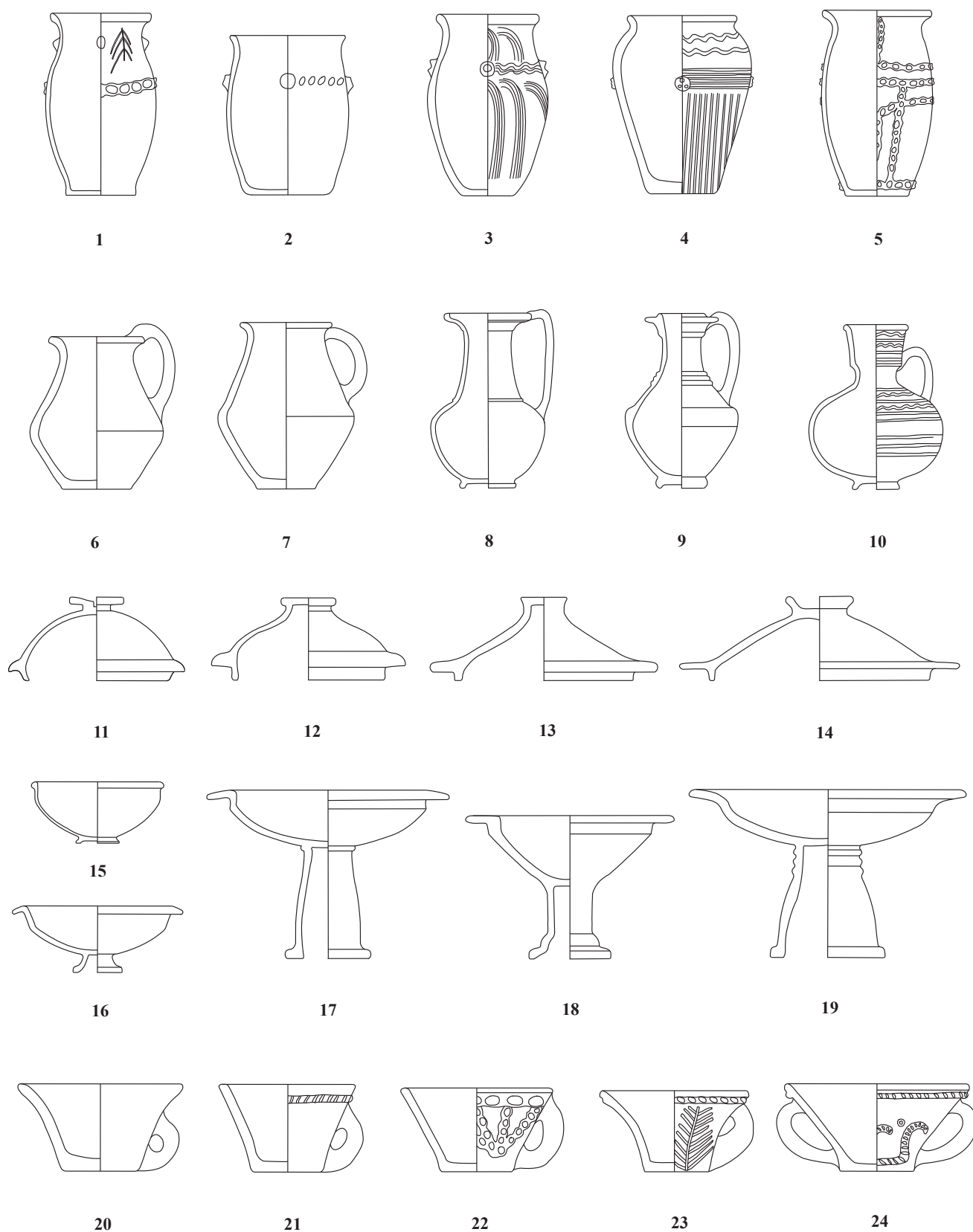


Fig. 4. Pottery categories from the Dacian Kingdom (1st century BC – 1st century AD): 1-5. jars; 6-9. lids; 11-15. jugs/pitchers; 16-17. bowls; 18-20. 'fruit bowls'; 21-25. lighting cups (after Crișan 1969: fig. 66/2; 90/3; 93/7; pl. 46/11,19; 47/11; 49/3; 50/1,5; 54/4; 60/3; 61/1; 62/7; 66/4; 72/1; 74/3,4,7; 75/1; 81/4; 83/8,11,13).

from Dacia. At Cășeu, a few Roman hand-made jugs were decorated with alveoli or alveolar belt. Also, incised lines in Late Iron Age tradition were performed on some typical Roman wheel-thrown pots (Cupșa 2009: 784). These are evidences that hand-made vessels were produced also by Roman craftsmen, as part of a wider process of acculturation in Dacia (Popilian 1976: 279-286; Țentea 1999: 126-127).

Concerning the ethnic identity of the users, they were supposed to be Dacians (Daicoviciu 1943: 104-105; Gudea and Moțu 1988: 236; Protase 1980: 152-153). However, ceramic vessels are slightly accurate ethnic indicators, much less in a diverse world like Roman Dacia. As noticed above, among the Dacian vessels from Cășeu, there are no 'fruit bowls', as they are generally missing from Roman Dacia. The presence / absence of a vessel does not necessarily indicate the presence / absence of an ethnic group. In the case of Cășeu fort, no nearby Dacian communities have been identified to provide more precise analogies (neither in the Dacian Kingdom, nor during the time of the Roman province).

Also, the link between the producer and the user is not necessarily ethnic. If the vessels were produced by a Dacian craftsman it does not mean that they were produced only for the Dacians. The same case is if the vessels were produced by a Roman craftsman. Pecuniary reasons, for example, hand-made vessels being cheaper, disregard these alleged ethnic links (Țentea 1999: 126).

Other evidences of a Dacian presence inside the fort of Cășeu are rather indirect. A fragmentary Thracian Horseman relief was found nearby the *praetorium* (Isac 1994: 55). But this cult was too generally spread to be a useful indicator in this matter. A funerary *stela*, probably from Cășeu, mentions a Dacian in the service of a Roman auxiliary unit from the province of Dacia; his wife has the same origin. The auxiliary unit could be *cohors I Britannica miliaria c. R. equitata*, but the name is not mentioned (CIL III 7635; Dana and Zăgreanu 2013: 145-159).

The Dacian tradition in making pottery was not the only Late Iron Age tradition in Roman Dacia. Barbarians from the auxiliary troops stationed in Dacia and colonists probably brought with them their own traditions. An example is the Celtic pottery, which has some similar shapes with the Dacian pottery. Biconical jars were found in the Dacian Kingdom but also in the Celtic world during the 1st century AD. If the fabric is similar and the ornaments are missing, some jars could be easily attributed to Celtic tradition in making pottery (Ardeț 1991: 140-142; Husar 1999: 173-179; Negru 2003: 10-11, 27-28, 53; Opreanu 1993: 235-260; Rusu-Bolindeț 2007: 113-116). It is a hypothesis to be taken into consideration for Cășeu, where the auxiliary troops were *cohors II Britannorum* and *cohors I Britannica*.

Beyond general occurrences such as acculturation or assimilation there are less archaeologically noticeable phenomena. Such an example could be the hybridization of culinary practices: certain type of food, certain type of vessel. This does not necessary mean just one certain type of consumer (Țentea 1999: 126).

5. A final observation

New information on the production and consumption of Late Iron Age tradition vessels at Cășeu could come from new researches, in the fort and the nearby *vicus*. As recent excavations show, the military *vicus* has two main archaeological layers. Typical Roman rectangular buildings were found in the early layer of the settlement. But, in the late layer huts with mixed ceramic material were also found, of Roman and of Late Iron Age tradition (Isac et al 1998: 14-15; Țentea 1999: 129). So, maybe the answer to the question of who produced and used Late Iron Age tradition vessels at Cășeu will be found not in the fort but in the *vicus*.

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