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## LATE ROMAN POTTERY DISCOVERED AT *TIBISCUM-IAZ*, DACIA (MIDDLE OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup>–4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AD)

### 1. *Tibiscum*. General outlines

The ancient town of *Tibiscum* was located on the western border of the province of Dacia (**fig. 1,1**). The settlement started in AD 106 as a military *vicus* but at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD it became a *municipium*. Due to its geographical location *Tibiscum* held the most important role in the defensive system of south-west Dacia, and implicitly, of its capital *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*.

The ancient ruins are scattered over the present-day surface of the villages of Jupa and Iaz (Caraş-Severin County). Unfortunately a large part of the Roman ruins (over 75%) were destroyed by the fluctuating course of the river Timiş (*Τιβίσκος*). The Roman town was born on the left bank of the river (*Tibiscum-Jupa*) where there were two *castra* and initially a *vicus*. On the right bank (*Tibiscum-Iaz*), probably during Trajan's reign, another fortress was built. The latter would be abandoned during the reign of Marcus Aurelius to make room for some public and private civilian constructions<sup>1</sup>. Roman activity would last here until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

In the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD the military strategy of the Roman Empire changed. An inner defensive system was organized, with short withdrawal lines along the rivers, thus making Dacia lose its strategic role as the only province north of the Danube. The ancient literary sources talk about *Dacia amissa* during the reign of Gallienus and the final abandonment of the province under Aurelian (AD 271). The Aurelian withdrawal did not mark the end of Roman life in the territory of the former province. There were no signs of destruction at *Tibiscum*, probably a Roman (?) population still lived in the urban edifices and new ones were being built. There is evidence indicating the existence of pottery and glass workshops during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, the subject of the late ceramics from Roman Dacia (AD 225–271) or post Roman Dacia (AD 271–375) has rarely been discussed in Romanian scientific reports, and the research has mainly focused on ceramic analysis from the Roman military centres situated along the Danube Valley or the Black Sea shore, directly controlled by the Romans: *Praetorium*<sup>3</sup>, *Gornea*<sup>4</sup>, *Halmyris*<sup>5</sup>, *Sucidava*,

*Troesmis*, *Noviodunum*, etc.<sup>6</sup>. This gap in the research is due to the fact that problems still persist in dating the late phases of Roman domination/presence north of the Danube.

### 2. The local utilitarian pottery and industry

Until now eight public buildings have been excavated at *Tibiscum-Iaz*, all of them having a late phase (Benea Phase IV: middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–the 4<sup>th</sup> century = Ardeţ Phase IV A: AD 211–271 and IV B: AD 271–335)<sup>7</sup>. From this Phase IV we were able to gather 2354 pottery fragments/vessels. Although only 384 items could be classified (type and functionality), we were able to see a great variety of vessels within the utilitarian/common pottery groups (**fig. 5,2 graphic 1**). The majority consists of *vasa coquina(to)ria* (cooking vessels, terrines, lids, *mortaria*) and vessels used for transport and food storage (jugs, amphorae, *dolia*), followed by *vasa escaria* (plates, bowls), and finally drinking vessels (cups). We can distinguish a great diversity of cooking vessels, handmade (15%) or wheel-thrown (85%), and even cooking pots with two handles (**figs. 2,1–2**). Only the lids appear in the same limited shapes as during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD—first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (**fig. 2,3**)<sup>8</sup>. The shapes are similar to those found in *Pannonia Inferior* during the 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD<sup>9</sup>. The lids which are similar to shallow bowls characteristic of neighbouring provinces in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, are missing.

A diverse typology can be noticed when talking about the vessels used for serving food (**fig. 3**). The size of the plates increases (the average diameter is between 26–30 cm), they have a flat base, steep walls and a rim which is slightly thickened and rounded towards the exterior (**fig. 3,3**)<sup>10</sup>. Bowls appear in numerous variants (5 types), which are mostly red-brown in colour, sometimes decorated by stamping (in the form of a rosette)<sup>11</sup> painted or covered with a slip (**fig. 3,1**).

There are few known vessels used for serving drinks (18 pieces). An explanation could be their fragility or the existence of other recipients (made of glass for example) which served the same function. Even though there are few items,

<sup>1</sup> ARDEŢ 2009b, 15–21.

<sup>2</sup> BENEĂ 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 817–818.

<sup>4</sup> GUDEA 1977.

<sup>5</sup> TOPOLEANU 2000.

<sup>6</sup> OPAIT 2004.

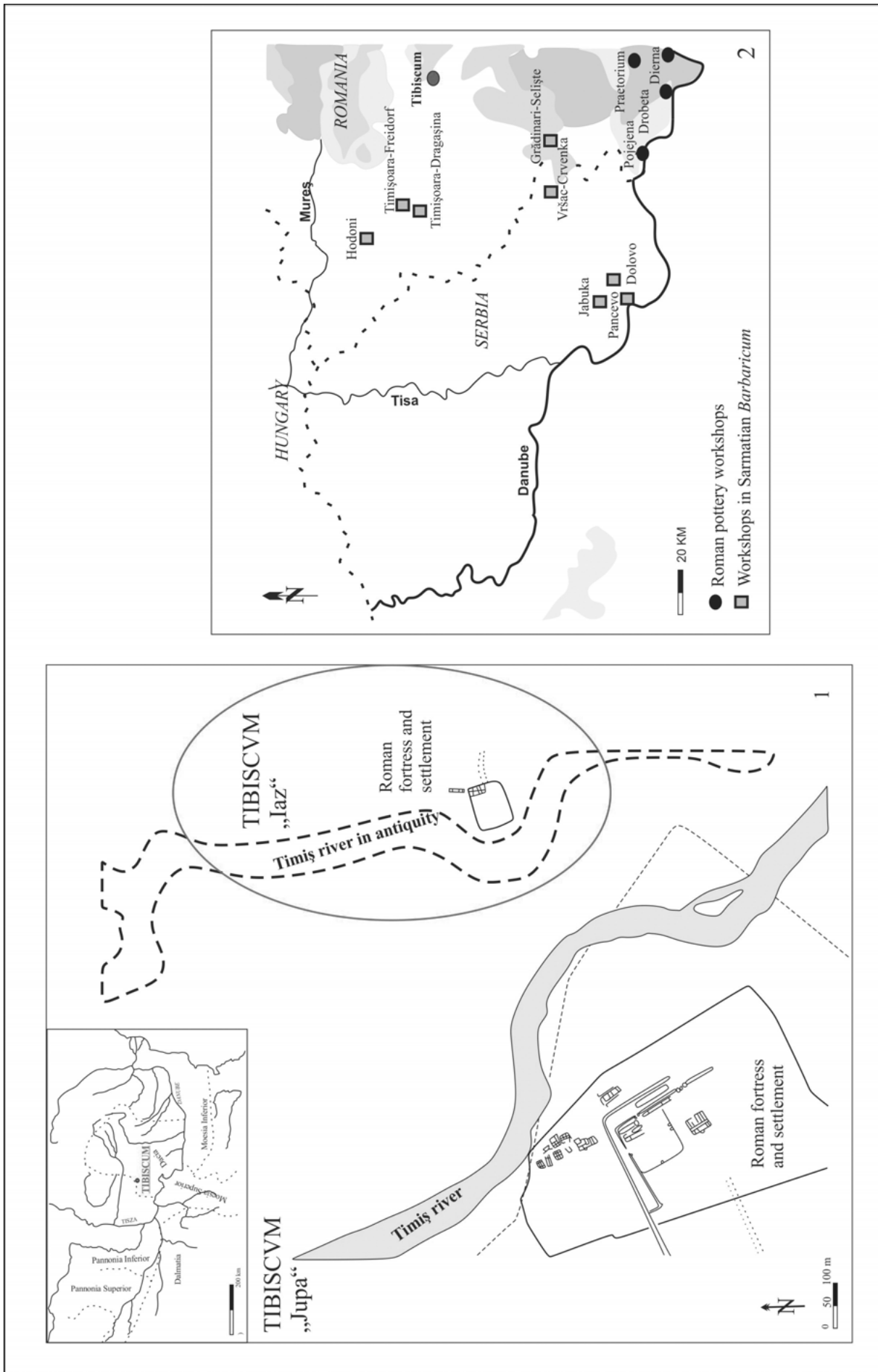
<sup>7</sup> BENEĂ 1996, 126; ID. 2000, 435; ARDEŢ 2009b, 22.

<sup>8</sup> ARDEŢ 2009b, 114; 177 pl. CXIC, 665.

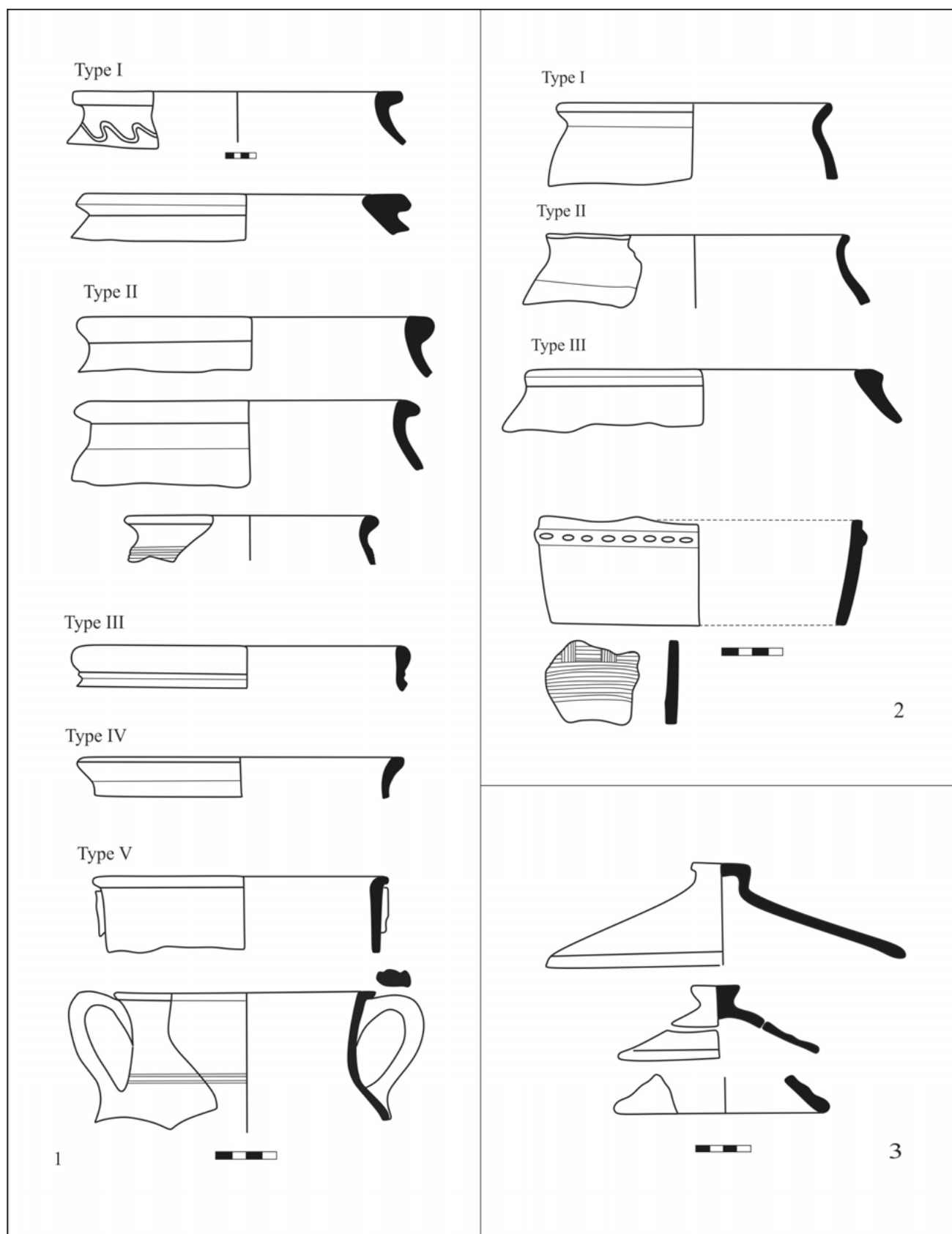
<sup>9</sup> BRUCKNER 1981, 184 T. 129.

<sup>10</sup> ARDEŢ 2009b, 115; 141–155.

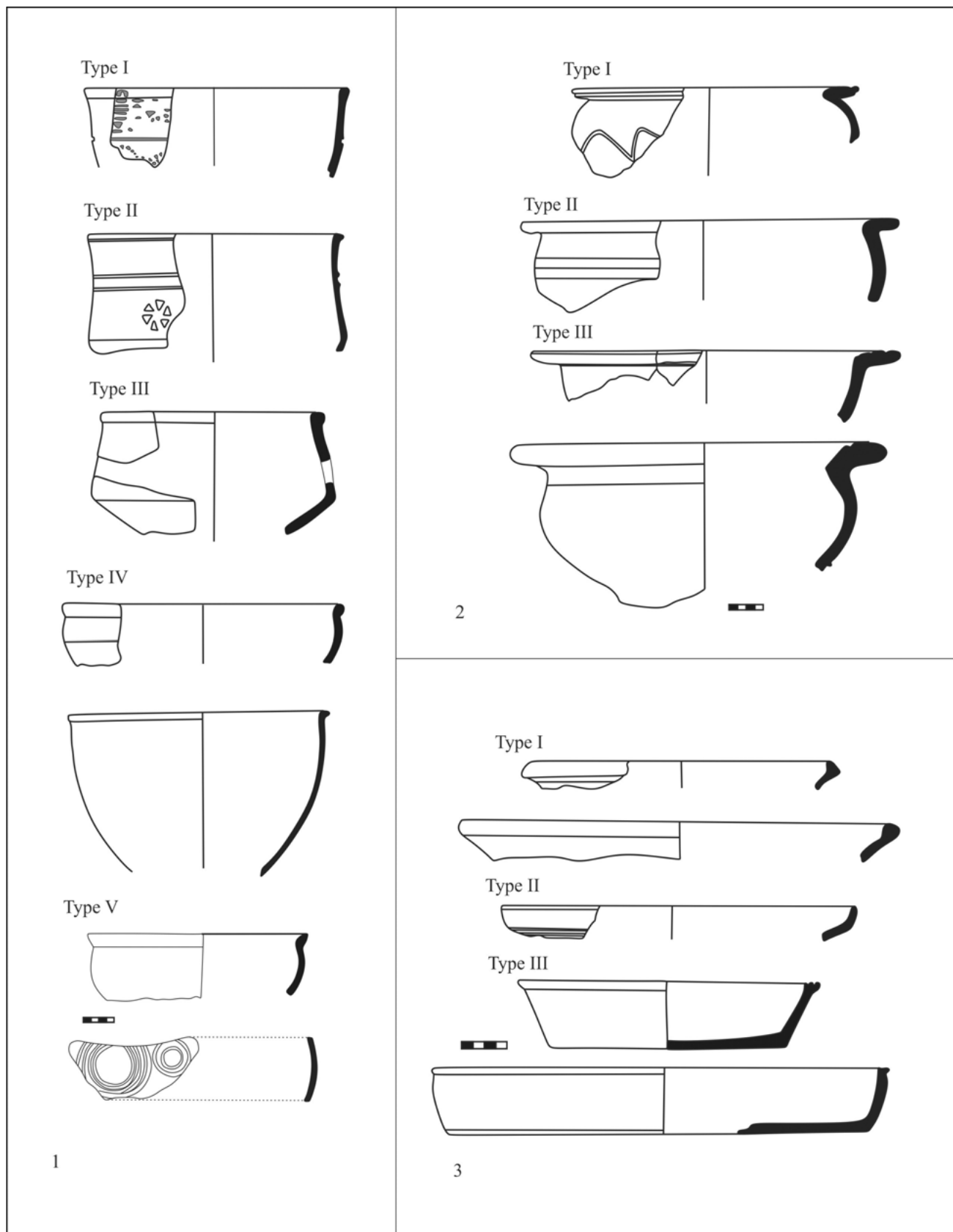
<sup>11</sup> A. Ardeţ considered them as local products (ARDEŢ 2009b, 28).



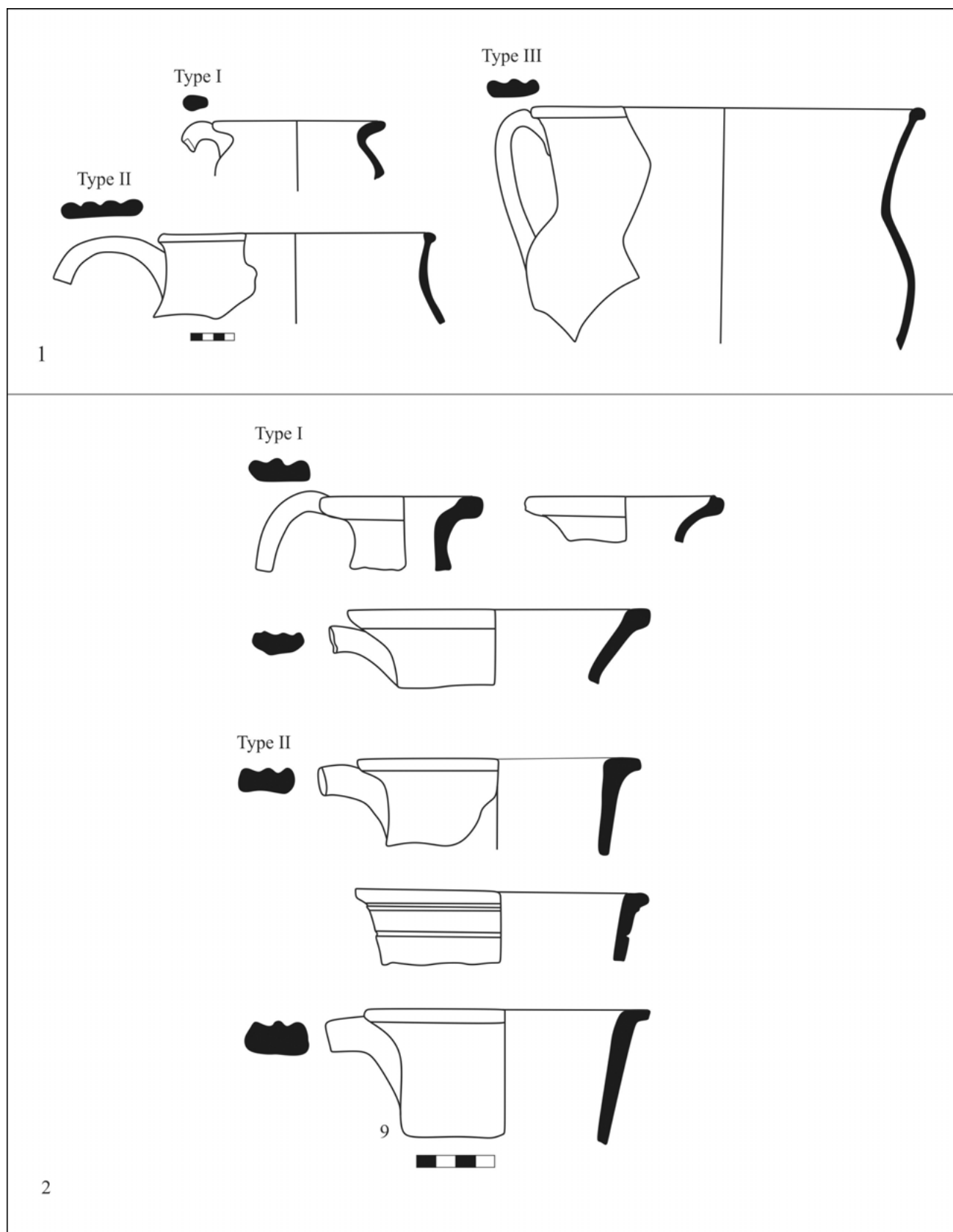
**Fig. 1.** 1 Position of *Tibiscum-laz* and *Tibiscum-Jupa*; 2 Roman and Sarmatian pottery workshops at the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century AD.



**Fig. 2.** *Vasa coquinatoria*: **1** wheel-thrown cooking pots/vessels used for cooking; **2** handmade cooking pots; **3** lids.



**Fig. 3.** *Vasa escaria*: 1 bowls; 2 terrines; 3 plates.



**Fig. 4.** Drinking vessels: 1 cups; 2 jugs.

three types of beakers can be identified (**fig. 4,1**). Jugs have the same shape as those from the previous period (**fig. 4,2**), and only few examples/fragments are known (21).

As for the cult vessels, although they appear in a quite small proportion (10 *turibula* and other fragments), they are the most numerous in this period and their decoration is made of complex patterns (**fig. 5,1**). These complex and diverse decoration methods lead to a high diversity of cultic vessels (4 types). Cups are the most numerous examples, with flaring rim thickened towards the exterior, and pinched 'pie-crust' decoration, in relief 2.2 cm wide. Similar *turibula* have been found on several sites in Roman Dacia, at *Praetorium*, *Porolissum*, *Ampelum*, *Potaissa*<sup>12</sup>, *Buridava*, *Romula*<sup>13</sup>.

The fabrics of the utilitarian pottery include mostly fine and semi-fine pottery, among which oxidized vessels are predominant. On these vessels a red slip appears on the outer surface, in some cases. Fine or semi-fine vessels made of reduced ware, sometimes with a black slip, incised or burnished decoration are less well represented (though the opposite is true of the handmade pottery, **fig. 5,2 table 1**). A coarse fabric is used both for handmade and wheel-thrown pottery, but largely without decoration or slip. This coarse fabric has different nuances, grey, red or brown, with particles of quartz, mica and small pebbles in variable sizes as temper. D. Benea registered similar statistics and findings regarding the late Roman pottery from the opposite shore of the Timiș River. Therefore, at *Tibiscum-Jupa*, both the shapes of the vessels and their fabrics are similar to ones from the previous period. One can notice, in certain cases only, carelessness in producing the fabric and a higher quantity of temper (mainly mica). Surprisingly, there is only a small quantity of handmade pottery of La Tène origin, and a high number of red potsherds. Grey pottery represents 31%, and it is typical for *dolia* and for large pots<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, at *Porolissum*, a settlement like *Tibiscum*, there is a corresponding percentage in the late period: the oxidized *Porolissum* wares are more common than the grey wares. Moreover, the native handmade pottery represents about 1% of the domestic and utilitarian pottery assemblage<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, in the territory of the former Trajanic Dacia (implicitly *Tibiscum*) the late pottery is not different from that of the early phases, regarding the method of firing (mainly oxidizing) or the majority of the vessel shapes. This proves the survival of a Roman style of life (at least from the point of view of cooking, storing and serving the food), and a Roman local pottery production.

Late Roman workshops specialised in the production of pottery have been discovered in Dacia at Dierna, *Praetorium*, and *Tibiscum*, where high quality red pottery was made<sup>16</sup>. At *Tibiscum-Jupa*, inside building no. 8 of the *municipium*, a late ceramic workshop was found<sup>17</sup>. The pottery produced

here can be included in the semi-fine, wheel-thrown, red/red-brown colour category, similar to the Roman pottery found in the earlier phases of the settlement. However, some features of this type of pottery are typical for the late period: sandy fabrics, careless finish, simple shapes, and bowls without any decoration (the only decorative elements are straight or wavy incised lines)<sup>18</sup>. Small and mid-size pots are dominant in the workshop, sometimes with incised decoration, wheel made, with spherical body, similar to the ones found at *Tibiscum-Iaz* dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Bowls are also frequent; three typological categories specific to *Tibiscum*, but also to the Lower Danube region during the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD do appear (they can be found also at *Singidunum* or in *Pannonia Inferior*)<sup>19</sup>. However, in the workshop from *Tibiscum-Jupa*, no bowls made from high quality fabric, obtained by oxidized firing and with stamped or incised decoration (rosette, concentric circles, and points) were discovered.

Another late Roman workshop (dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) was discovered at Mehadia (*Praetorium*?). There, red fine and semi-fine pottery (sometimes with slip), wheel-thrown, with a lot of mica in the composition of the temper, sometimes with incised decoration, was produced. Few fragments of grey pottery and no handmade ware were found<sup>20</sup>. Pots are dominant in the workshop from Mehadia, having the same shape and decoration as our specimens. Furthermore, here were found plates similar in shape and size to those from *Tibiscum*<sup>21</sup>.

Simultaneous with these workshops, there were kilns and other local pottery workshops in the Sarmatian Barbaricum, close to the western border of the former Trajanic Dacia (**fig. 1,2**): at Vršac-Crvenka<sup>22</sup>, Grădinari-Seliște<sup>23</sup>, Timișoara-Freidorf, Timișoara-Dragașina, Hodoni<sup>24</sup>, Pančevo, Dolovo<sup>25</sup>, Izvin and Jabuca<sup>26</sup>. Their production (similar to Roman centres) consisted in fine and semi-fine ware, wheel-thrown (less handmade), fired in a reducing atmosphere and with burnished decoration. The latter technical features make the difference between the pottery produced in Barbaricum and that in the Roman area.

### 3. Imported vessels

Concerning the imported vessels, of all the imported pottery recorded on the site, only 7% belongs to the late Roman period: terra sigillata, amphorae, glazed and fine white stamped pottery (**fig. 5,3–7**). For the fine white stamped pottery type we have only a bowl adorned with concentric circles with traces of red paint and a fragmentary two-handled cup (**fig. 5,3**)<sup>27</sup>. This type of stamped pottery with concentric circles (mainly bowls) can be found in Dacia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

<sup>12</sup> MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1996, 101–102.

<sup>13</sup> POPILIAN 1976, type 2 Pl. 61–62, 752–755.

<sup>14</sup> BENEÀ 1996, 132; 138.

<sup>15</sup> DE SENA 2010, 966.

<sup>16</sup> BENEÀ 2007, 818.

<sup>17</sup> The construction methods (made from recycled materials), its peculiar shape, context (secondary insertion of a kiln in an ancient edifice) and ceramic material documented in the warehouse of room 2 of the workshop are clues to its late dating (BENEÀ 2007, 818).

<sup>18</sup> BENEÀ 1996, 138; ID. 2007, 818; 820.

<sup>19</sup> ID. 2007, 819 with references.

<sup>20</sup> ID. 2005; 309, 313 Fig. 5,7–10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 313 Fig. 11.

<sup>22</sup> RAŠAJSKI 1957, 39.

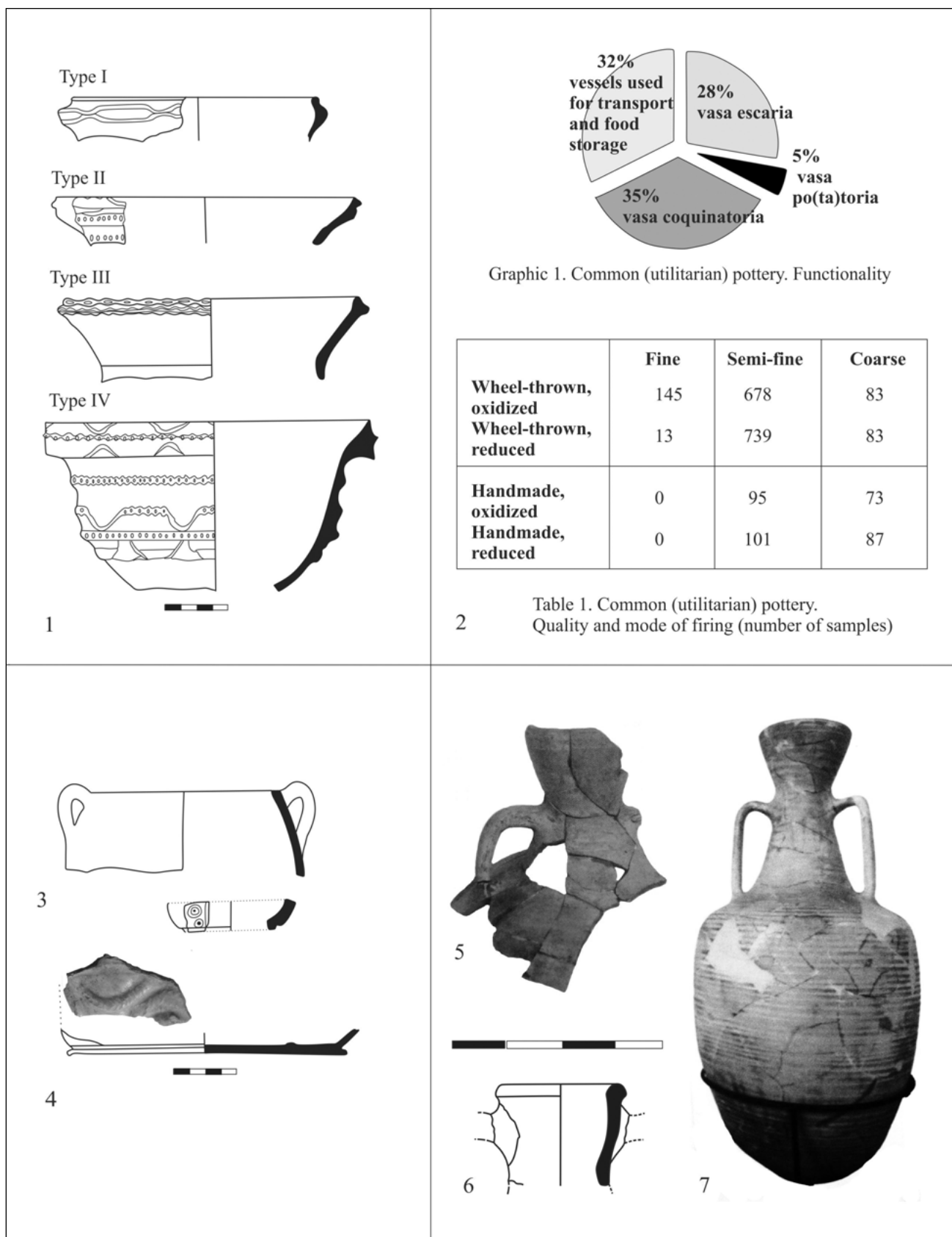
<sup>23</sup> BOZU 1990.

<sup>24</sup> BENEÀ 1996, 173–174.

<sup>25</sup> RAŠAJSKI 1957, 43.

<sup>26</sup> BENEÀ 1996, 173–174.

<sup>27</sup> ARDEȚ 2009b, 44–45.



**Fig. 5. 1** *Turribula*; **2** graphic 1: common (utilitarian) pottery. Functionality; table 1: common (utilitarian) pottery. Quality and mode of firing (number of samples); **3** white stamped pottery; **4** glazed pottery; **5** Dressel 24 similis type amphora from *Tibiscum-Iaz*; **6–7** Dressel 24 type amphora from *Tibiscum-Jupa* (after BENEÀ 2000; ARDEȚ 2009b).

AD—beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>28</sup>, and less in the late period. Glazed pottery is rare at Tibiscum even in the early phases. We know only a few pottery fragments with traces of glaze and a plate inscribed *CRISPIN(us)*<sup>29</sup>. Only few glazed bowl fragments with raised decoration (both on the interior and exterior of the vessel) date from the late phase (fig. 5,4). Late amphorae types at *Tibiscum-Iaz* are represented by the Dressel 24 similis type (fig. 5,5), dated to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>30</sup>, but found in a level dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>31</sup>. These Dressel 24 or Dressel 24 *similis* type amphorae are the most numerous categories found at Tibiscum, extending in date from Hadrian's time to the post Roman levels<sup>32</sup>. An Opaïţ 2 type amphora discovered at *Tibiscum-Jupa*, in the post Roman level, should also be mentioned here (fig. 5,6)<sup>33</sup>.

These finds show the mainly eastern orientation of the trade, which started with the Severan dynasty and extended until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The amphorae from the Black Sea area have a dominant place among the eastern imported products.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

1. During the late Roman period, we can notice a decline of the imported vessels (some fragments of glazed pottery and late Roman amphorae were discovered), but a great diversity of common pottery (especially of cooking vessels, plates or jugs), mainly produced in *Tibiscum*. These vessels (jars, terrines, *dolia* or even plates) have now a large capacity (the rim diameter is 30–50 cm).
2. The ceramic evidence indicates that the inhabitants of *Tibiscum* drew their resources primarily from the city's hinterland/city's workshops.
3. The common pottery is the most numerous category in this period (Phase IV) as well as during the years of intense development of the settlement (the years AD 118–170, Phase II). Moreover, during the late period, an improvement in the method of pottery production can be noticed.
4. Among the categories of common pottery, the highest percentage is represented by the cooking vessels, followed by those used for transporting, storing and serving food. The vessels used for drinking are fewer (5%).
5. A growth in the number of cultic vessels is noticeable during the late Roman period and post-Roman period. These were in general extremely popular among the population of Roman provinces between the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>35</sup>. The situation was different at *Tibiscum-Iaz*: during the late period, the *turibula* vessels were more numerous, a fact that suggests certain changes in rituals and beliefs.
6. The same can be said about the high number and diversity of cups, bowls or plates. The size of the plates increases, they have a flat base, steep walls and slightly thickened rim, rounded towards the exterior. The few jugs and lids found have an identical shape to those from the previous period (2<sup>nd</sup> century—first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).
7. These inhabitants (Romans or not) still had a Roman style of life which is reflected in the material culture, in this case by the utilitarian pottery. The inhabitants preferred high quality vessels, products of oxidized firing, in contrast with their neighbours, the Sarmatians, who were using a grey type of pottery with burnished decoration, imitating the Roman shapes.

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<sup>28</sup> See the case of Napoca (RUSU-BOLINDEŢ 2007, 304–305).

<sup>29</sup> BENEĂ 1996, 133.

<sup>30</sup> OPAIŢ 2007, 630–632.

<sup>31</sup> According to A. Ardeţ, even a fragmentary Carthage LRA 4 amphora was found at *Tibiscum-Iaz* (ARDEŢ 2009a, 200; id. 2009b, 137; 342 pl. 34).

<sup>32</sup> BENEĂ 2000, 437–428.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 437 Fig. 1,5.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 438.

<sup>35</sup> MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1996, 98 with references.



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