

A CUCUTENI A₃ SETTLEMENT AT POCREACA, IAȘI

CONSTANTIN ICONOMU¹

Keywords: Neolithic settlement, Cucuteni A₃ culture, painted ceramics, flint tools, idols.

Abstract: *We present the results of the archaeological investigations carried out in the Neolithic Cucuteni A₃ settlement from Pocreaca–Cetățuia site, Schitu Duca commune, Iași county. The excavations unearthed a house platform of fired clay, alongside flint and polished stone tools, tri-chromatic painted and unpainted pottery, and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic idols.*

Rezumat: *Sunt prezentate rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice din așezarea neolitică Cucuteni A 3 de la Pocreaca, punctul „Cetățuia”, comuna Schitu Duca, județul Iași. În cursul săpăturilor a fost descoperită o platformă de locuință din lut ars, unelete de silex și piatră șlefuită, ceramică pictată tricromă și nepictată, idoli antropomorfi și zoomorfi.*

Between 1991 and 1994, during four excavation campaigns, archaeological investigations were carried out in the village of Pocreaca, commune of Schitu-Duca, Iași County, at the site called ‘Cetățuia’ , in order to study the existent fortification with earth walls. This archaeological site had been signalled since the 1950s, when the archaeologists conducted surface investigations in this area collected ceramic fragments belonging to the A phase of the Cucuteni culture, as well as to the first Iron Age². In 1966 Adrian and Marilena Florescu carried out a survey whose results remained unpublished. The site was later registered in the Archaeological Repertory of the Iasi County³, in A. Laszlo’s work dedicated to the beginning of the first Iron Age on Moldavian territory⁴, and in the Repertory of Cucuteni Settlements⁵. Because my investigations concerned the fortress belonging to the first

¹ Institute for Archaeology Iași.

² NESTOR et alii 1952, 45, fig. 5.

³ CHIRICA, TANASACHI 1985, 357-358.

⁴ LASZLO 1976, 73.

⁵ MONAH, CUCOȘ 1985, 130, nr. 783.

Iron Age, the Cucuteni material discovered remained unpublished; I hereby present it for English-speaking readers ⁶.

The Neolithic settlement is located at the north-western edge of the Pocreaca village, on a 40-meters high promontory, oriented S-SE and N-NW, delimited in the lower section by the Pocreacă brook to the West and the Nemțoaica lake to the East. The promontory, flat on its upper part, has a length of 200 meters and a width varying between 70 and 100 meters. At the S-SE end of the plateau, there are the earth walls and ditches belonging to the Cozia-culture fortress. The fortification of the Neolithic settlement could not be observed during the surface investigations or during the diggings, because it was destroyed by the settlement from the first Iron Age. The promontory on which the two sites are found, as well as the surrounding area, has been constantly affected by land slides, which changed the terrain configuration and affected the Neolithic settlement as well.

The archaeological investigations carried out during the four campaigns were intended to examine the first Iron Age fortress, but identified compounds belonging to the Cucuteni culture. On this occasion it could be noticed that the adobe platforms of the Neolithic houses were dismantled by the members of the Cozia culture, who used the debris as reinforcement for the earth walls, situation best observed in wall no. 2, dismantled during the modern age.

The 1993 campaign partially uncovered the platform of a house, while in 1991 a refuse pit was emptied. It had 3 meters in diameter at the mouth and was 1.40 m deep, full of Cucuteni ceramic fragments. The Neolithic archaeological material was collected both from the layer of the Cucuteni settlement and from other few smaller pits.

In the above mentioned compounds, a house with earth platform was revealed between wall 1 and wall 2 of the Hallstattian fortress, in the V-SV corner of the station, at a depth of 0.85 meters under the vegetation and Cozia layers. The platform, of irregular shape, oriented S-SE and N-

⁶ For the fortress of the first Iron Age, cf. ICONOMU 1996, 21-56. We have also published in Romanian a first extended version about the Neolithic settlement: ICONOMU 2012, 191-219.

NW on its longer axis, has the maximum dimensions of 2.60 / 2.30 m, without being completely uncovered. Because the earth platform has not been dismantled, we do not know whether it was built directly on the ground or on a substructure of tree trunks, as it is customary for Cucuteni houses. We should however mention that the remains of burnt adobe and of wall pasting discovered in the reinforcement of wall 2 of the fortress from the first Iron Age bears the print of wooden trunks and straws, which proves their use in the infrastructure of the platforms and of the walls of the houses. Moreover, several garbage ditches were identified and they contained painted and unpainted pottery fragments, animal bones, idols and tools.

The Pocreaca site, due to the small dimensions of the settlement and the limited investigations, produced few carved and polished stone tools; from among them, we mention first the carved flint tools, the blades which are not retouched, the blades retouched on one or both sides, the scrapers, the piercers, and the spearheads. Among the carved stone tools, we mention two polished sandstone axes and a fragmentary double-edged sandstone axe.

The flint tools found in Pocreaca belong to the category of small and medium pieces, obtained from the raw material coming from the middle Prut River area or the Carpathian piedmont, namely the area between the Eastern Carpathians and the Siret River⁷. Among the group of 52 flint pieces, there are: 31 blades, 3 arrowheads, a spearhead, 3 piercers, and 14 grinders. The blades used for cutting and scraping are the most numerous and they were processed in the very settlement (fig. 1-2). As for polished stone tools, their number is limited: there are only two trapezoidal axes and a fragmentary double-edged axe, used as rubber (fig. 3).

In the Cucuteni settlement of Pocreaca, pottery fragments, from which only few vessels could be reconstructed, are present both on the layer and in the pits. Ceramic fragments with tri-chromatic painting or with no painting at all came to light, both categories being affected by the

⁷ ȚURCANU 2009, 198.

acid soil on the Cetățuia hill. All ceramics are characterized by a good quality paste of well selected and kneaded clay with oxidizing firing at high temperatures, thus turning to a brick or yellowish colour, rarely grey.

From the category of painted ceramics, there are only tri-chromatic vessels, with negative painting, while the deepened, incised and grooved decoration of Precucuteni III tradition is completely absent. We will present the types of vessels that could be completely or partially reintegrated and which form a relatively rich repertory of shapes and decorations.

A first category consists of jars, from among which two almost complete pieces stand out, with tri-chromatic decoration of spirals, heart-shaped motifs and engravings (fig. 4/4-5). Other types of vessels, of which only fragments have been preserved, are: pear-shaped vessels with tri-chromatic decorations consisting of spiral stripes with convoluted ends, plus a fragmentary frustoconical vessel with flared rims decorated with spiral strips with convoluted ends, with the interspaces filled with short lines and incisions. The pots and the bowls are represented by a few fragments with tri-chromatic painting of spirals applied both to the outside and the inside.

Several fragments from the category of support vessels have been preserved. One of them stands out, which was successfully reconstructed; it has a conical base and mouth, and a cylindrical body, convex in the upper part. The tri-chromatic painted decoration covers the entire surface of the vessel, being composed of angular spirals separated by vertical white stripes (fig. 5/2).

Another type of vessel, a combination between a support vessel and a bowl, has tri-chromatic painted decoration on the outside and on the inside, the main motif being the spiral, sometimes the angular spiral (fig. 5/1a-b).

Another vessel with high stem is represented by a bi-frustoconical piece with flared rim. The tri-chromatic decoration consists of spirals that are distributed over the entire surface of the vessel, on five registers separated by horizontal black lines (fig. 5/3).

In the category of painted pottery we should also mention a knobbed lid and a protome fragment in the shape of a horned animal head with pointed snout and stark eyes (fig. 6). Many such protomes are found in all phases of the Cucuteni culture; the most representative ones for the Cucuteni A₃ sub-phase are the pieces from Trusești, Hăbășești and Hoisești⁸.

The unpainted pottery is the most numerous at Pocreaca, but the vessels are highly fragmented, so that only very few of them could be reconstructed. From among these we mention a medium-sized fragmentary jug with large lip and circular bottom, having in the upper part a row of large flattened pellets, alongside a small bowl (fig. 4/2) and a small conical vessel (fig. 4/3).

From the category of unpainted pottery, an *askos*-type vessel stands out (fig. 4/1); made from porous paste, it's coarse reddish in colour. The vessel has a vertical mouth and a wide handle located on its back. The artefact from Pocreaca shows similarities with a double *askos* from Ulmeni-*Tăușanca* belonging to the Cernavoda I culture⁹. So far it has been assumed that the latter exerted its influence on the Cucuteni culture starting with the A₄ sub-phase¹⁰, but the Pocreaca find allows establishing this presence as early as the Cucuteni A₃ sub-phase.

Only 43 anthropomorphic idols have been found at Pocreaca-*Cetățuia*, because of the Neolithic settlement has been little investigated. Only two of them are complete, the rest being in a fragmentary condition. Of the 43 specimens, 4 idols are upright, 15 horizontal and 7 are too fragmented to determine their position.

According to Dan Monah's classification, the idols can be divided, according to their position, into upright or seated¹¹. Of the 4 fragments of upright idols, 3 represent feminine deities with decoration of incised parallel lines arranged in diamonds, plus groups of oblique parallel lines

⁸ PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA et alii 1999, 417; DUMITRESCU et alii 1954, pl. CXIII, CXIV; BODI 2010, 201-203, pl. 57-64; 204-211.

⁹ MORINTZ, ROMAN 1968, 66, pl. 15/4; 65.

¹⁰ HASOTI 1988-198, 20.

¹¹ MONAH 1997, 55-76; MONAH 2012, 87-90.

(fig. 7/1,3). The second category, of seated idols, is the most numerous one, with 15 pieces of which 8 are decorated with incisions while the remaining 7 artefacts do not have any decoration at all. The ornament of the decorated ones is similar to the upright idols, consisting in diamonds and groups of incised parallel lines (fig. 7/5). A great artefact is represented by an undecorated torso lacking its head (fig. 8/5), which belong to the mobile-head figurine type that represent an influence of the Cernavoda I culture¹², together with the *askos*-type vessel found in the settlement¹³.

Another category is represented by anthropomorphic male idols. Only two fragmentary specimens of this kind are attested at Pocreaca, both in a sitting position and without decoration (fig. 10/2-3).

A special category includes conical sexless idols of which two complete pieces have been found. The first has a cylindrical-conical shape which narrows towards the head, while the body is slightly curved forwards. The face features and the back, coarsely rendered, were made by pressing the clay between the fingers. The idol rests on a flat circular base (fig. 8). The second piece, complete and undecorated, is represented by a yellow-paste idol sitting on a conical base that extends and narrows towards the elongated head made by pressing the clay between the fingers in such a way that the idol has three faces¹⁴. This artefact, as the previous one, does not have any elements to represent the sex (fig. 9/1).

A special category of pieces is represented by cones of clay, artefacts whose use is a controversial topic among archaeologists. Only four pieces have been found at Pocreaca. They are made of yellowish-grey paste, with flat or slightly concave base and have a diameter ranging between 1.5 cm and 2 cm, and a height between 0.6 and 1.7 cm (fig. 7/2,4; 9/3-4).

To conclude the section on the idols from Pocreaca, most of them are female and of the seated type, this position meaning that their trunk is leaning slightly backwards. Also, more than half of the female idols are

¹² BERCIU 1966, 156.

¹³ HAȘOTTI 1988-1989, 20.

¹⁴ MONAH 1997, 91-92, fig. 22/3; MONAH 2012, 115, fig. 23/1-5, 8; MANTU 1993, 62, pl. 61, fig. 6/7-10.

decorated with incised motifs, the rest being undecorated, a peculiarity that can be observed in male idols as well. More than once it has been noted that the number of female idols found is overwhelmingly higher than that of male idols, since the former are related to the cult of fecundity and fertility¹⁵. Like in other Cucuteni settlements, the statues of Pocreaca were ritually broken, discarded and found in various places without any significance¹⁶. It should also be noticed that most of the idols are missing the upper part of the body or only the neck and head. This could mean either a ritual peculiarity, or that these thinner parts deteriorated easier.

From among the figurines from Pocreaca, the cylindrical-conical shape vertical pieces stand out. They have only one anatomic detail, the head, rudimentarily represented, while the sex is not suggested by any anatomical element. These idols were found complete, which leads us to the interpretation that they were used in religious practices in which the idea of sacrifice does not exist.

It should also be noticed that the vertical cone-shaped asexual idols remind of clay cones discovered in large numbers in Cucutenian settlements. These cones, in the opinion of the late M. Petrescu-Dimbovita, could schematically represent anthropomorphic statuettes¹⁷. In accordance with the findings from Trușești, Scânteia, Vermești, Pocreaca it is possible to establish the origin of the clay cones as developing from conical asexual idols of high shape¹⁸ (fig. 11).

From the category of fired clay idols, the zoomorphic idols could not be overlooked. They are stylized bovine, ovine and canine representation, in a smaller number than the anthropomorphic idols¹⁹. As far as we could establish, among the zoomorphic idols from Pocreaca only

¹⁵ MONAH 1997, 92; MONAH 2012, 116.

¹⁶ MONAH 1997, 69; MONAH 2012, 91; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 7-15.

¹⁷ PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA et alii 1999, 539.

¹⁸ MONAH 1997, fig. 23/1-3; MONAH 2012, 297, fig. 23/1-3; PETRESCU-DIMBOVITA ET ALL 1999, fig. 377/1-2; MANTU 1993, pl. 6/7-10, 61; POPUȘOI 2008, 16-24.

¹⁹ PETRESCU-DIMBOVITA & ALL 1999, 533-534.

domestic animals are represented, connected to the cult of fecundity and fertility²⁰ (fig. 12).

Under the category of cultic representations also falls the model of a log boat, reflecting the interest of the inhabitants of the Neolithic settlement of Pocreaca in sailing and fishing²¹ (fig. 10/1).

The settlement of Pocreaca-Cetățuia, with a single level of Neolithic occupancy, belongs to the Cucuteni A₃ sub-phase and shows strong analogies with the settlements of this culture attested and archaeologically investigated east of the Siret River. We have to point out that in the Cetățuia settlement there were not found ceramics with incised grooved and deepen decoration of Precucuteni III tradition, which illustrates here the end of the Cucuteni A₃ stage with similarities in the settlements of Scanteia, Dumesti and Hoișești²².

The Neolithic settlement of Pocreaca, although it has not been subject to extensive research, has provided interesting archaeological material consisting of stone tools, pottery and idols specific to the Cucuteni A₃ sub-phase from the Central Moldavian Plateau.

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²⁰ PETRESCU-DIMBOVITA & ALL 1999, 534-538.

²¹ ICONOMU 2006, 199-201; HOCKMANN 2007, 41-47; SCHUSTER, MORINTZ 2006, 34-36.

²² MAXIM ALAIBA 1983-1984, 99-148; ALAIBA 2007, 81-113; BODI 2010, 225-227.

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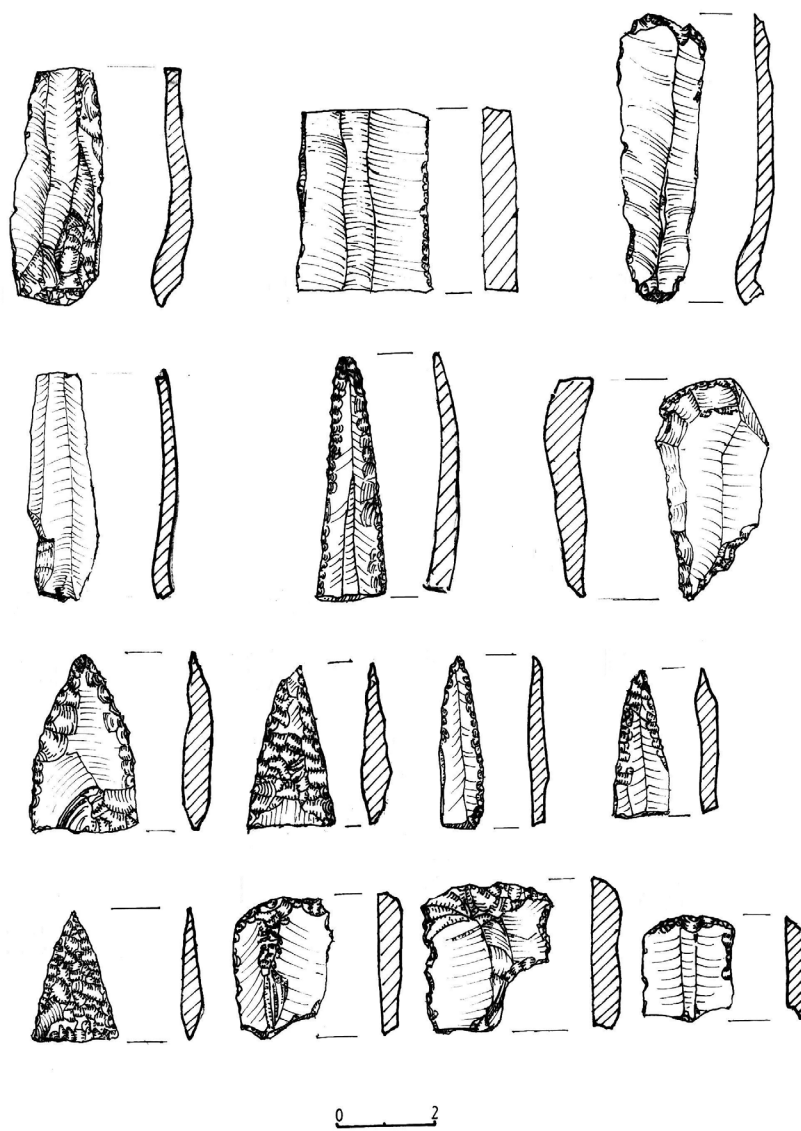


Fig. 1. Knapped flint tools

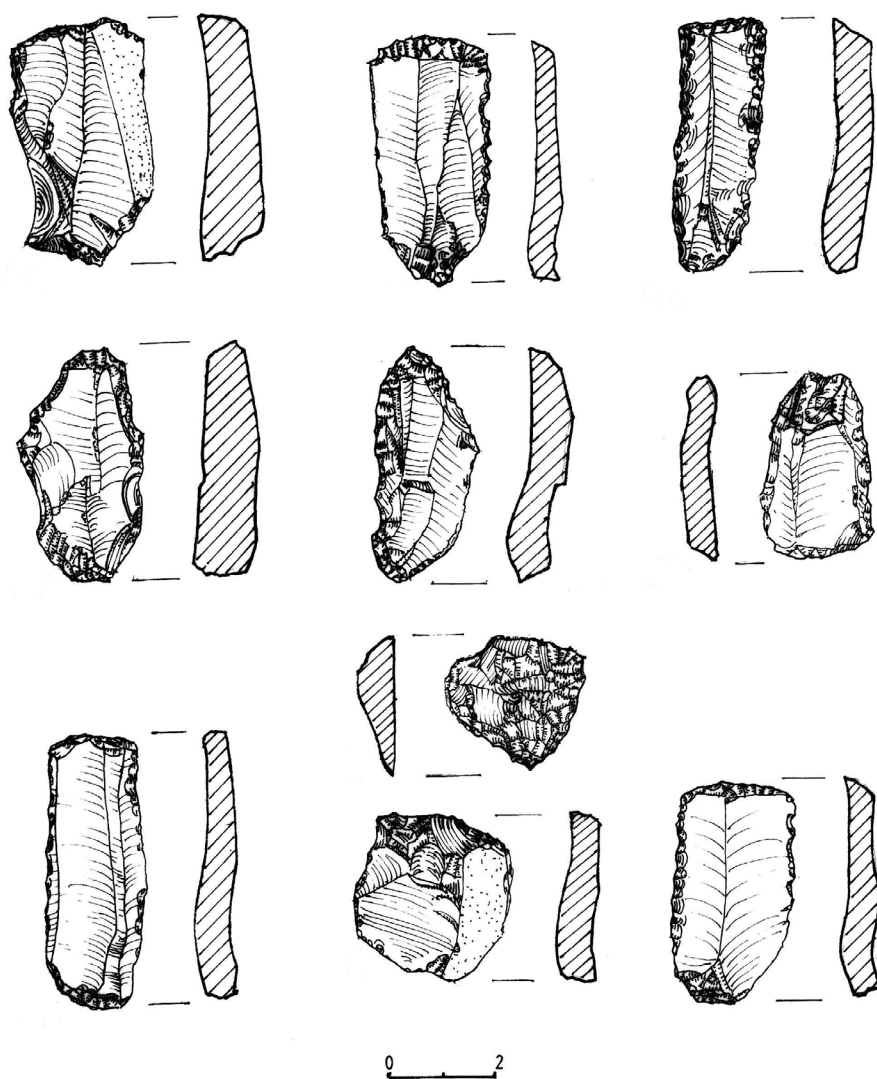


Fig. 2. Knapped flint tools

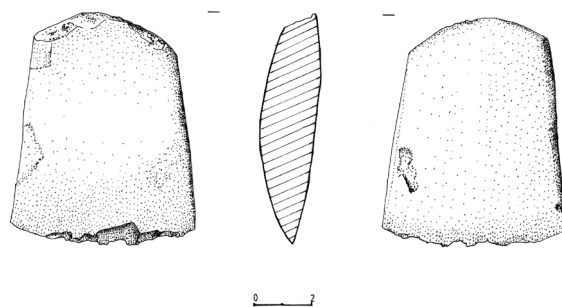


Fig. 3. Polished gritstone trapezoidal ax

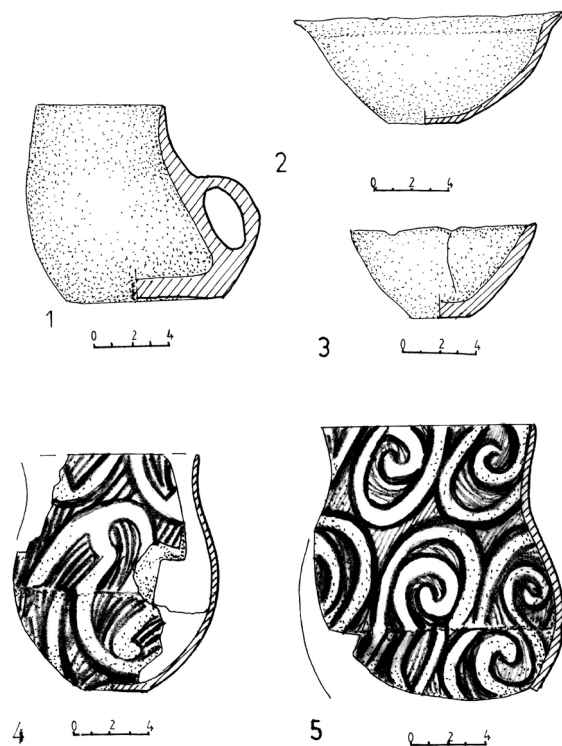


Fig. 4. Cucuteni A3 ceramics. 1. Askos. 2-3. Small bowls. 4-5. Glasses

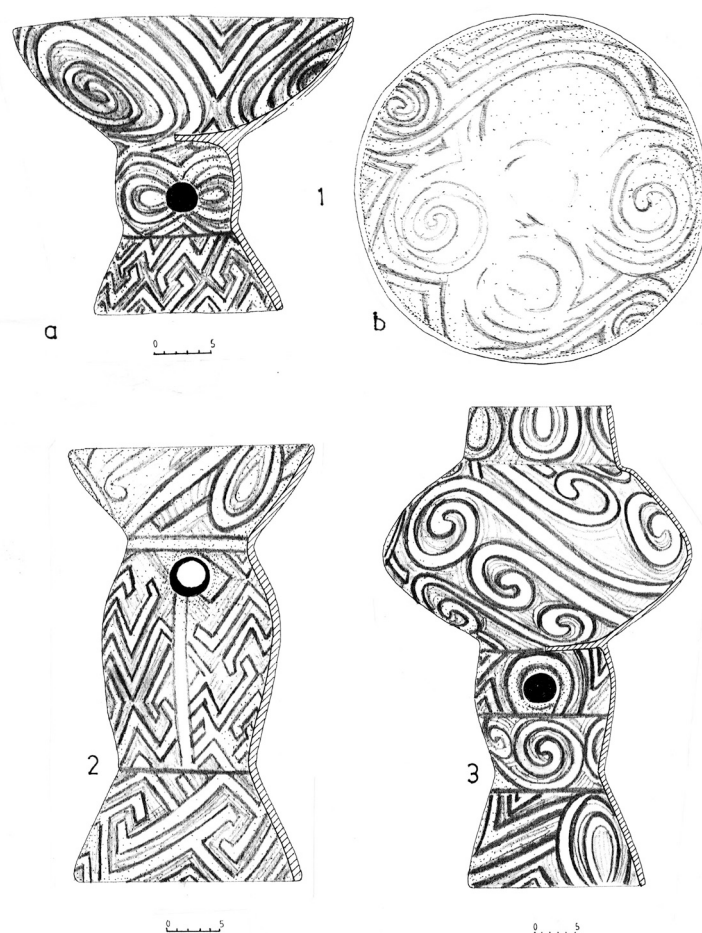


Fig. 5. 1a-b. Bowl with high foot. 2. Support vessel. 3. Bi-truncated cone-shaped vessel with high foot



Fig. 6. Fragmentary painted vessel with zoomorphic protome

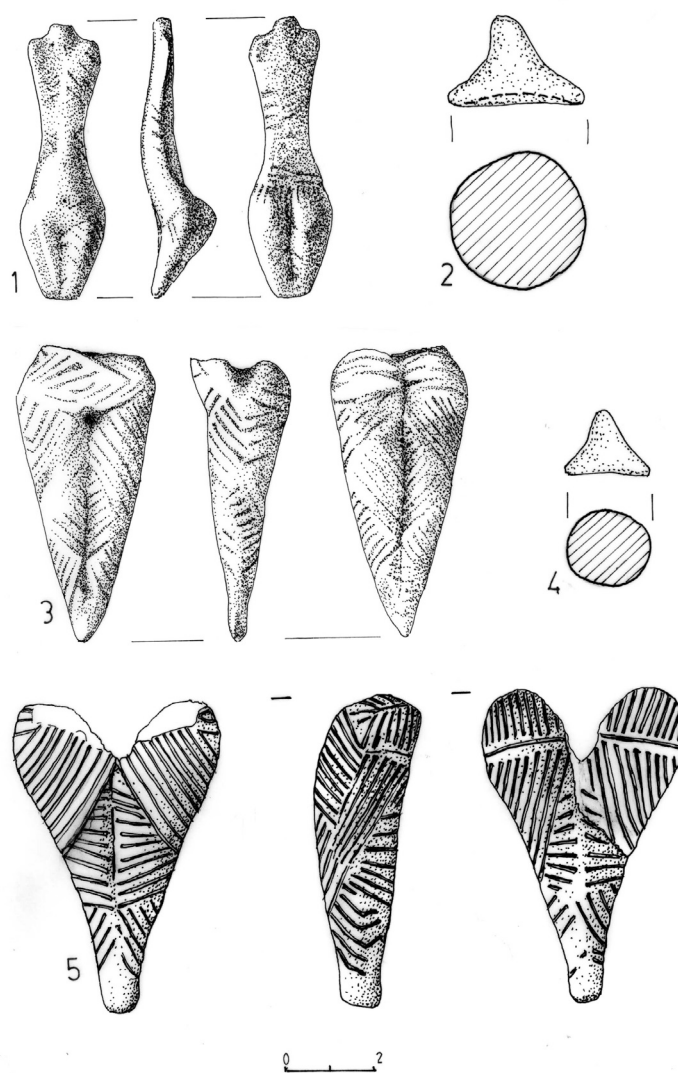


Fig. 7. 1, 3. Vertical anthropomorphic feminine idols. 5. Seated anthropomorphic feminine idol. 2, 4. Clay cones.

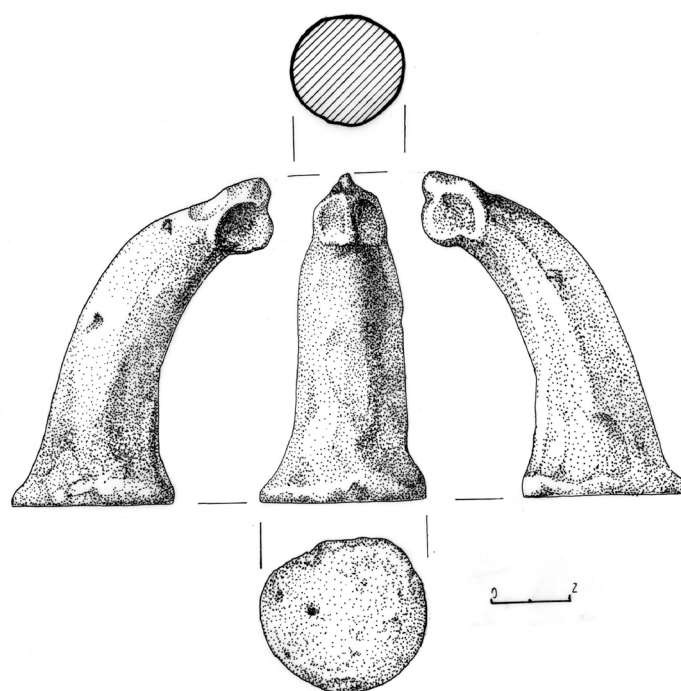


Fig. 8. Anthropomorphic asexual idol

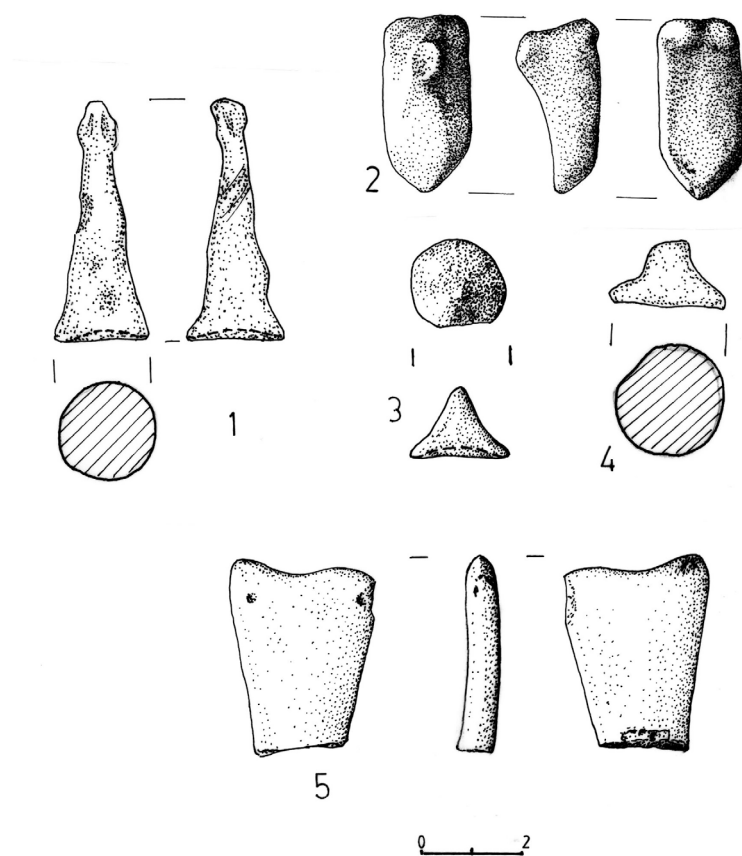


Fig. 9. Cone-shaped asexual idol. Idol foot with footwear. 3-4. Clay Cones.
5. Idol with mobil head

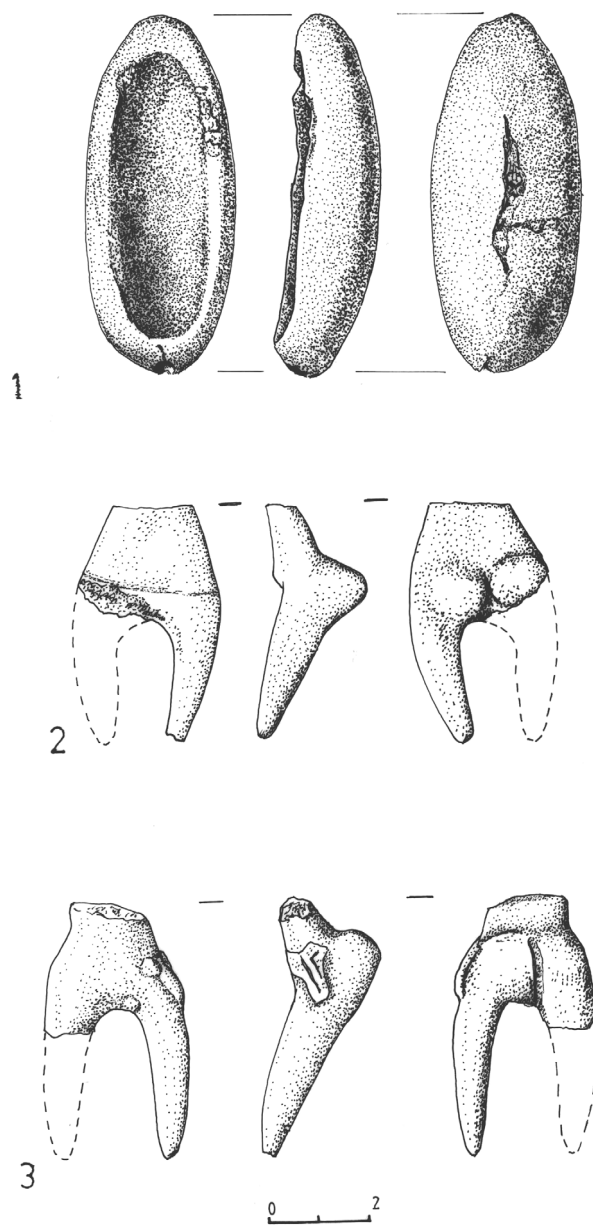


Fig. 10. 1. Boat model. 2-3. Anthropomorphic masculine idols

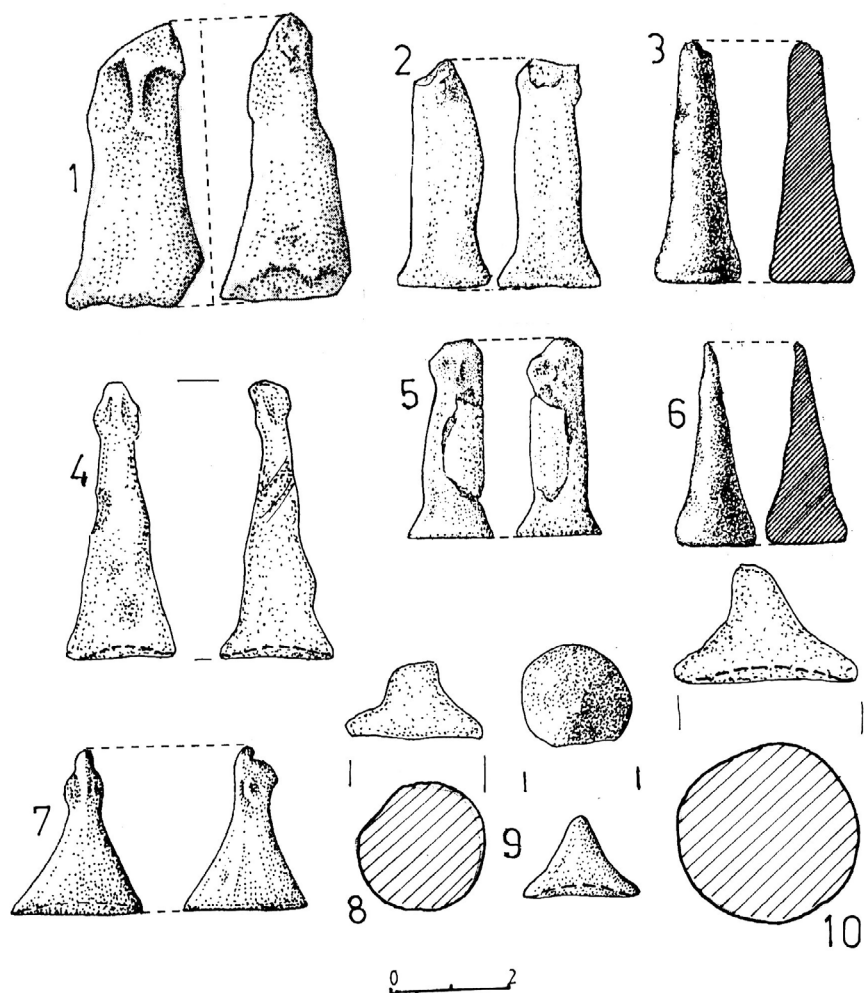


Fig. 11. Evolution scheme of the cone-shaped asexual idols

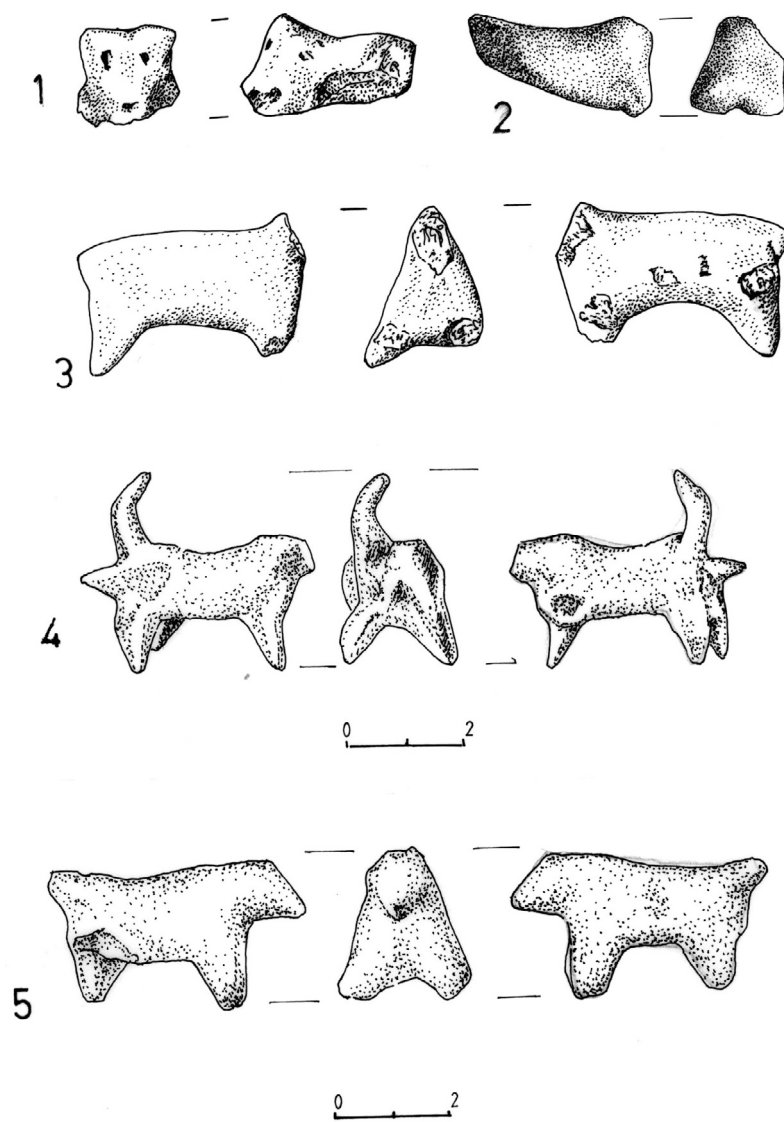


Fig. 12. Zoomorphic idols