

SUSPENDING LIGHT DEVICES FROM SCYTHIA MINOR*

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Abstract. *The authors present a series of suspended light devices discovered in Early Byzantine settlements from the province of Scythia. The finds were discovered in Halmyris/Murighiol, Beroe/Piatra Frecăței, (L)Ibida/Slava Rusă, Tomis/Constanța, Capidava, Ulmetum/Pantelimonul de Sus, and Tropaeum Traiani/Adamclisi. The archaeological contexts of these finds are mostly unclear, but we believe that were used for illuminating civilian houses, military barracks, warehouses and religious places.*

Rezumat. *Autorii prezintă o serie de piese din bronz folosite pentru suspendarea pieselor de iluminat descoperite în așezările bizantine timpurii din provincia Scythia. Agățătorile au fost descoperite în fortificațiile de la Halmyris/Murighiol, Beroe/Piatra Frecăței, (L)Ibida/Slava Rusă, Tomis/Constanța, Capidava, Ulmetum/Pantelimonul de Sus și Tropaeum Traiani/Adamclisi. Contextele arheologice ale descoperirilor sunt, în majoritate, necunoscute dar considerăm că acestea au fost folosite pentru iluminatul în construcții civile, barăci militare și edificii cu caracter religios.*

Introduction

In 2011 at Thessaloniki, an ILA Round-Table⁴ took place, and an impressive catalogue of exhibition was printed with this occasion. This catalogue was prompted by a beautiful exhibition about lighting in the Byzantine age and covered the entire spectrum of lighting devices used in this period. It is therefore no surprise at all to find inside this outstanding

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catalogue⁵ a small discussion regarding the supporting and suspending light devices used in Byzantium. The overview is interesting as among the archaeological materials found inside early Byzantine settlements in Scythia, a series of suspending devices have been found and were, generally, neglected.

The aim of this paper is to present several finds discovered in the northern side of the province and in the south as well. The finds were uncovered at *Halmyris*/Murighiol, *Beroe*/Piatra Frecăței, (*L*)*Ibida*/Slava Rusă, *Tomis*/Constanța, *Capidava*, *Ulmetum*/Pantelimonul de Sus and *Tropeum Traiani*/Adamclisi (**fig. 1**). For some of the artefacts the archaeological contexts are mostly unclear, but we believe that were used for illuminating civilian houses, military barracks, warehouses and religious places.

Archaeological context of the finds

The suspending light devices found at *Halmyris*/Murighiol, on the Sfântu Gheorghe branch of the Danube, were discovered in unclear contexts (**fig. 2/2–4**). Two of them were uncovered in 1991, probably in Early Byzantine habitation levels. The character of the occupation is probably civilian, without any connection with religious usage. No suspending light devices have been reported so far during excavations inside the *Basilica with crypt* of Epictetus and Astion⁶. The third example was a stray find in the area of the “civilian settlement”, south of the fortress in 2001.

Fieldwork in 1958 and later at *Beroe*/Ostrov, on the Danube, delivered several fragmentary suspending light devices (**fig. 3/5/6**). The archaeological context is also unclear, although glass lamps’ bases were discovered inside the cemetery of the city⁷. A different situation is met in the case of ancient (*L*)*Ibida* where excavations inside the city and the monastery located three kilometres West of the city provided a series of suspending light devices. A fragmentary polyangistrion has been recently found on the Tower 8 sector on a 5th-century occupation level and is

⁵ MOTSIANOS, BINTSI 2011.

⁶ ZAHARIADE 2002-2003, 143–168; ZAHARIADE 2009, 131–150.

⁷ PETRE 1987, pl. 83/120b, grave E226.

unpublished⁸. Opaïț on the other side, mentioned several fragments of suspending light devices discovered during researches at the monastery (4th –6th centuries AD), but he illustrated a single find (**fig. 2/1**). This one is fully preserved and still retained the Maltese cross in upper side and the three-hooked arms⁹. Three types of glass lamps are also illustrated and the suspending light devices may be connected with the three-ansae variety¹⁰, while for the conical-base variety¹¹ polykandela or single lamp-holders set into the walls were probably used.

During the archaeological campaigns carried in the mosaic-floored edifice from Constanta, in the 1950s and 1960s, a various and very rich inventory was brought to light. It is now displayed in the Museum for National History and Archaeology's showcases or kept in its storerooms. Some of these discoveries have already been analysed and published in scientific studies, or only presented in papers or guides designed for tourists or for popularization purposes. Sadly, the metal objects have not been thoroughly or fully analysed yet. Only scarce information was included in general studies or more detailed and specialized in recent ones. Over 50 years have passed since their discovery, therefore today the only information we have on their discovery context comes from the Inventory Registers. For some of them there is scattered and general information included in archaeologists' field notes. These two lamp-holders (**figs. 4/8 and 5/9**) both come from the mosaic-floored edifice, but the information we have on them is incomplete, especially when speaking about the context of their discovery. One of them bears no visible inventory number. While consulting the Inventory register the possibility that both of them have the same number emerged. Unfortunately there is no exact place of discovery registered. Since they were found in 1960, by consulting the excavation notes, we can assign them to one of the following parts which were researched in that year: the upper level — mosaic floored hall — *podium* area, the southern part of the hall or the

⁸ The authors wish to thank Prof. Lucrețiu Bîrliba (Iași) for this information.

⁹ OPAIȚ 1990, 24, pl. 10/67.

¹⁰ OPAIȚ 1990, 24, pl. 10/56–62.

¹¹ OPAIȚ 1990, 24, pl. 10/63–64.

*vestibulum*¹², vaulted rooms B1 and B2, annexes in front of B1 and B2 and the debris or mixed strata in B4¹³. Even if there are no exact details regarding the context of discovery and we cannot assign them to a clear archaeological context, these artefacts are still important. Their existence there, along with other Byzantine items, confirms the fact that the edifice was still functional in this period.

During the systematic archaeological excavations, in the summer of 2014, at *Ulmetum*/Pantelimonul de Sus, in a pit (G34) found near the apsis of the basilica, a fragmentary suspending light device was found (**fig. 5/10**). The archaeological context in which the artefact was found distinguished itself by a very large capacity — about 2.50 m in diameter and a depth of -5 m from the current level. The material discovered there indicates a use of the pit in the last quarter of the 6th century AD, also sustained by the coins from the time of the Byzantine emperor Justin II (565–574 AD). In the filling top of the pit there were numerous elements that demonstrate most likely the disposal of the basilica (stones, tiles and roof tiles, glass windows). In this circumstance, we believe that the suspending light device was used for illuminating the basilica and can be dated in the 6th century AD.¹⁴

In the same year during the excavations at Capidava another fragmentary suspending light device (**fig. 6/11**) was found in the East sector of the citadel. The piece was discovered inside room C6, under the fallen roof tiles near the wall of the chamber, in a layer of rubble dated to the second half of the 6th century AD (a coin from 540 AD, emperor Justinian I's thirteenth year of rule, was found in this context). Near the artefact, fragments of wooden beam occurred, which can be associated with the bar from which the suspending light device was hanging¹⁵. On its hook, a small fragment from a glass lamp is preserved, and this is another

¹² Doina Galbenu 1960, excavation notes, inv. no. 3740, MINAC archives.

¹³ Al. Bogdan 1960, excavation notes, inv. no. 3741, MINAC archives.

¹⁴ BĂJENARU, NOPCEA, VASILESCU 2014.

¹⁵ For a reconstruction of this suspending light devices see the example found at *Novae*/Svishtov – OLCZAK 1984, 280, fig. 13.

reason we believe that it can be dated to the first decades of the 6th century AD¹⁶.

Unfortunately, the context of the suspending light device discovered at *Tropaeum Traiani*/Adamclisi (**fig. 4/7**) is lost. The rich religious and economic life in this citadel is well-known, so it is not surprising that artefacts such as these are discovered in the city founded by Emperor Trajan. In the following, we will present a catalogue of the suspending light devices.

Catalogue

1. Suspending light device — (L)Ibida 1987, monastery, quadrant C14, -0.55 m (**fig. 2/1**). ICEM¹⁷, inv. 41983.

Copper alloy. Fully preserved. Two metal strips form a Maltese cross in the upper side; three-hooked arms in the lower side. H of the cross: 4.2 cm. Bibliography: OPAIȚ 1990, 24, 27, no. 67, pl. 10/67.

2. Suspending light device — Halmyris 1991, trench 3, -2.05 m (**fig. 2/2**). ICEM, inv. 43704.

Copper alloy. Partially preserved. Central wire is preserved, ends with a hook; two other parts are interlinked. Made of circular wire. H: 13.2 cm.

3. Suspending light device — Halmyris 1991, trench 3, -2.05 m (**fig. 2/3**). ICEM, no inventory number.

Copper alloy. Partially preserved. Three parts are still preserved: the central one consists in a small hook connected with a rectangular-shaped plat ended with circular holes; in the lower part a wire is partially preserved. H: 12.8 cm.

¹⁶ With this occasion, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Tiberiu Potârniche and Dr. Constantin Băjenaru from the History Museum of Constanța for supporting us in the research, and for the useful information that they provided us on the contexts in which the suspending light devices discovered at Capidava and Ulmetum.

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4. Suspending light device — Halmyris 2001, “civilian settlement”, south of the fortress, stray find (**fig. 2/4**). ICEM, no inventory number.

Copper alloy. Lower end of a suspending device, only the terminal hook and a small fragment of the wire are still preserved. H: 6.2 cm.

5. Suspending light device — Beroe 1958, trench XV B (**fig. 3/5**). ICEM, inv. 34809-34810.

Copper alloy. Fragmentary, one metal plate is missing. Two parts of a three-hooked polyangistron. H: 27 cm.

6. Suspending light device — Beroe, on the sector III (**fig. 3/6**). ICEM, inv. 35631.

Copper alloy. Four fragments of three-hooked polyangistron. The first is a ring-ended plate with three fragments of small hooks; the other three fragments belong to the arms. Probably two different lamp-holders. H: 5–10 cm.

7. Suspending light device — Tropaem Traiani (**fig. 4/7**). MINAC¹⁸, inv. 4757.

Copper alloy. Fully preserved. Three-hooked arms. H: 28 cm.

8. Suspending light device — Tomis, “Roman mosaic edifice” (**fig. 4/8**). MINAC, inv. 20048.

Copper alloy. Fully preserved. Three-hooked arms. H: 37 cm.

9. Suspending light device — Tomis, “Roman mosaic edifice” (**fig. 5/9**). MINAC, no inventory number.

Copper alloy. Partially preserved. It was discovered with only two arms. The third arm seen in the illustration (**fig. 5/9/3**) is a modern reconstruction by the restorers from the Museum of History in Constanța. Three-hooked arms. H: 25 cm.

¹⁸ Muzeul de Istorie Națională și Arheologie Constanța / National Museum of History and Archaeology from Constanța (MINAC).

10. Suspending light device — Ulmetum 2014, south sector, inside the Basilica, G34 (**fig. 5/10**). MINAC, no inventory number.

Copper alloy. Almost fully preserved. It was found broken in a lot of pieces. A small part from one of the hooks is missing. Three-hooked arms. H: 24 cm.

11. Suspending light device — Capidava 2014, east sector, room C6 (**fig. 6/11**). MINAC, no inventory number.

Copper alloy. Partially preserved. Only one of the three arms has been discovered. On its hook a small fragment from a glass lamp is preserved. Because of the massive destruction level in which it was found, the arm is twisted. H: 12 cm.

Comments

Lamp holders of various types are frequent discoveries in early Byzantine provinces. Some finds were discovered south of the Danube, but a fairly large number of pieces were brought to light on the area of the Balkan Peninsula. As for example, one cross-shaped suspending light device was discovered at Hissar, 42 km from *Philippolis/Plovdiv*, Bulgaria, in the Basilica no. 5. The cross has the inscription ΦΑΠΙΟΥ ΓΡΕCΒΥΤΣΡΟΥ engraved on the surface and has been dated in the 5th–6th centuries AD. The basilica was built in this period, and has a central apse and a simple narthex¹⁹. Other simple lamps-holders were discovered at *Abritus/Razgrad* in Moesia Secunda, in a basilica in 4th–5th centuries AD context²⁰.

The cross-shaped suspending light device is attested at *Byllis/Vlorë* in Albania, inside the basilicas investigated here²¹. Complex-suspending devices, both with cross terminal and simple parts, were discovered on the spot in 5th–7th centuries AD contexts. This finds were associated with liturgical usage, but also with everyday life, because some were discovered inside the annexes of the *Basilica B*. Suspending common eight-shaped chain mails from chains and the inferior parts are hook-like

¹⁹ IVANOVA 1937, 232–255, figs. 211–212.

²⁰ RADOSLAVOVA, DZANEV 2007, 375, fig. 3.

²¹ NALLBANI 2002, 683, figs. 18–19.

shaped to fit the glass lamps' ears. Beside glass lamps, brass lamps were also used. One such example was discovered inside the *atrium* of the *Basilica B* and was probably used for lighting, and not for liturgical purposes.

The chronology may prolong in middle Byzantine period. Several examples are known from Preslav in 13th century AD and are similar with earlier finds²². These artefacts are pieces of glass lamps. In 10th–11th centuries AD a suspension used for polykandela was unearthed at Beycesultan, near present-day Çivril, Turkey²³. Parallels for this object are earlier, in 5th–6th centuries AD contexts, across the Byzantine world²⁴. A new find from Sulumağara, near Islahiye, Turkey, shed new light on these hanging devices used for religious purposes. This find was discovered in the choir of the church and probably hung under the ceiling of the nave²⁵.

The primarily²⁶ purpose of the suspending light devices was to secure a variable number of glass lamps. The simple ones consist in a central chain or copper alloy flattened strip with a ring on its end; three other arms were interlinked and ended with hooks for attaching to the three loops of the glass lamps. Polykandela are complex devices used for suspending a variable number of conical glass lamps.

Glass lamps were intensively used in Early Byzantine period, but their roots must be sought in the 3rd century Egypt and Levantine area²⁷. During the 4th–6th centuries, they will gradually spread across the Byzantine provinces because of a series of specific advantages. In Scythia, the excavations inside urban and rural settlements yielded a large number of glass lamps²⁸. A fine example is the glass lamp deposit discovered

²² ALADŽOV 1996, 81, figs. 4–5.

²³ WRIGHT 2000, 163, 167–168.

²⁴ For a discussion regarding suspending light devices see XANTHOPOULOU 2010, 54–56 and CHRZANOVSKI 2014, 256–257.

²⁵ FEUGÈRE 2008, 283–285.

²⁶ One can mention also another types of lighting devices or used for ritual purposes as kandelaior *thuribula*. For a discussion regarding the functionality of early Byzantine *thuribula* see PARASCHIV, NUȚU 2005, 339–349.

²⁷ MOTSIANOS 2011, 107.

²⁸ BĂJENARU, BĂLTĂC 2000–2001, with bibliography.

inside the NE annexe of the Bishopric Basilica of Histria in 1990²⁹. Conical base lamps used for polykandela prevail in large numbers inside this assemblage, followed by kandelai with a raised base and three loops for attaching, and bowls with hemispherical handles (*Isings Form 134*). In spite of the large number of glass lamps discovered at Histria, only a few fragments of suspending light devices survived over time³⁰. A production centre for glass lamps was discovered south of the Danube, at Gradishte, near Gabrovo in Bulgaria³¹. Other ubiquitous forms specific to the early Byzantine era—the stemmed goblets—were also used for illuminating, as their frequent occurrences in secular and Christian churches prove. A large number of this type of vessels is recorded in the province of Scythia³², and starting with the 5th century AD they become the main vessel-form in the Byzantine provinces³³.

The analyses undertaken in the previous pages show that during the early Byzantine period, close links existed between the material culture of Scythia and that of various areas of the Balkans and Asia Minor. Illuminating devices used in houses, in churches or military buildings were standardised and local/regional or supra-regional workshops supplied civilian, religious and military demands.

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²⁹ BĂJENARU, BĂLTĂC 2000-2001, 469–513.

³⁰ BĂJENARU, BĂLTĂC 2000-2001, 479, 481, fig. 5.

³¹ KOIČEVA 1990, 36–46.

³² BOȚAN 2008-2009, 14–15.

³³ GOLOFAST 2009, 315.

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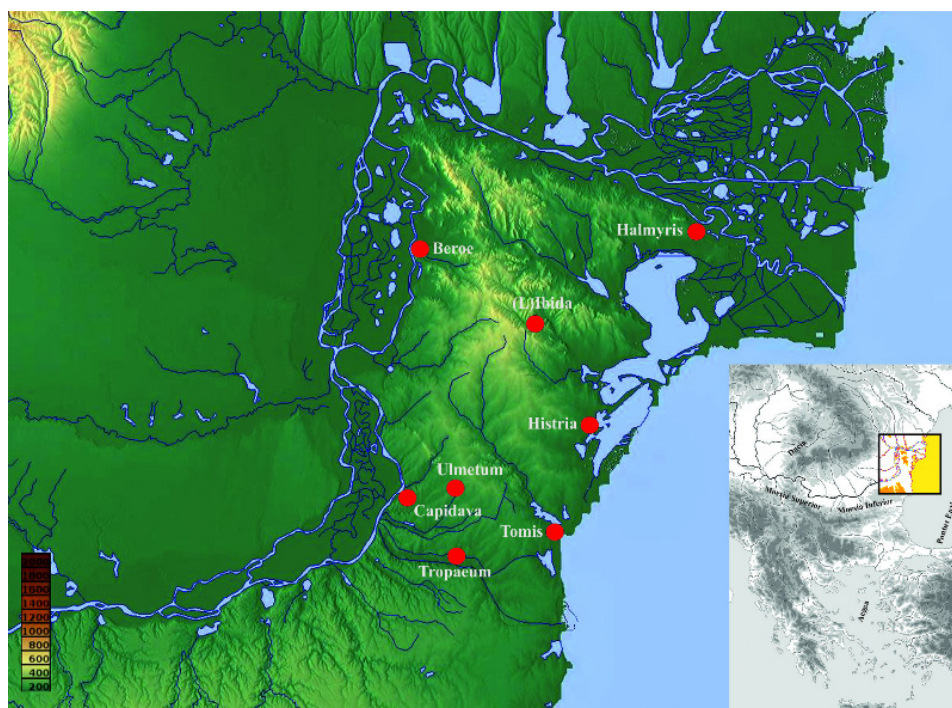


Figure 1. Distribution of the suspending light devices in Scythia



Figure 2. Suspending light devices from: 1. (L)Ibida; 2-4. Halmyris

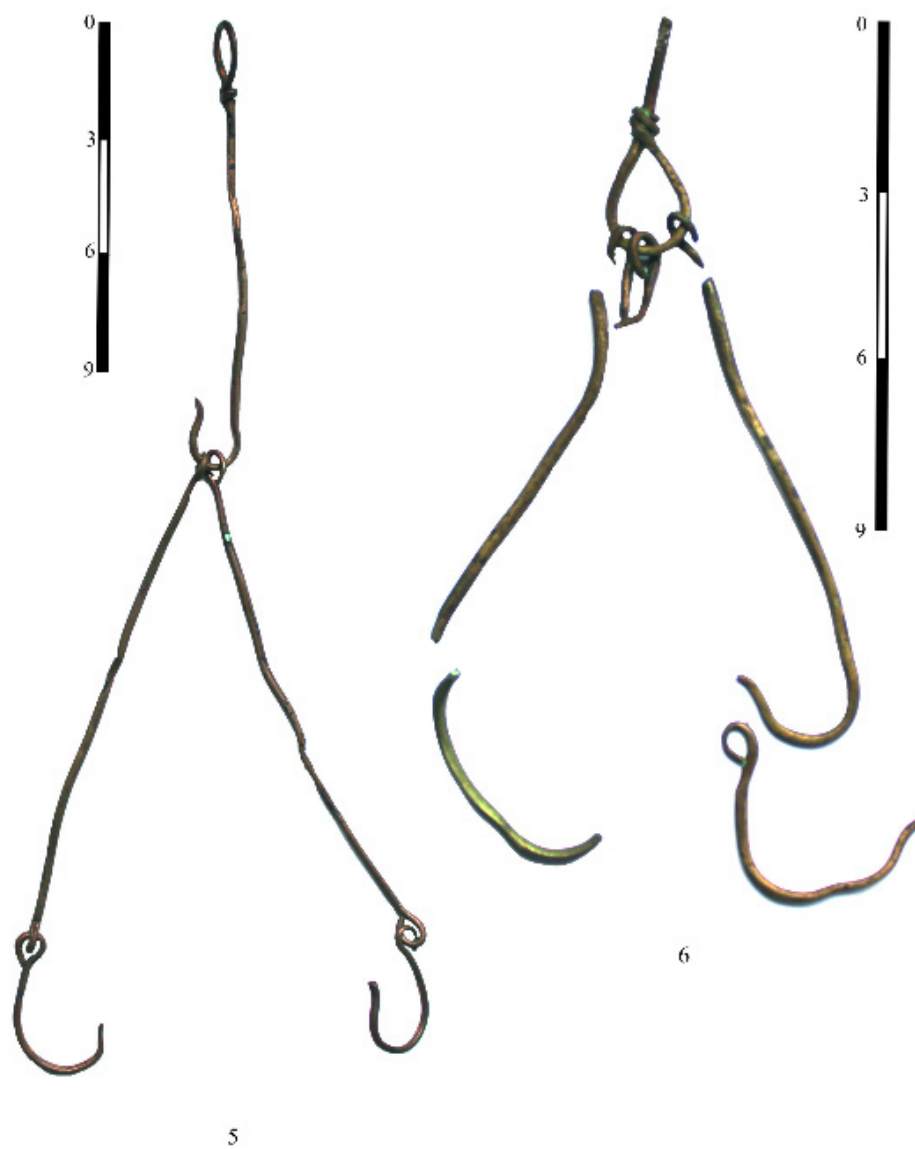


Figure 3. Suspending light devices from Beroe



Figure 4. Suspending light devices from: 7. Tomis; 8. Tropaeum Traiani

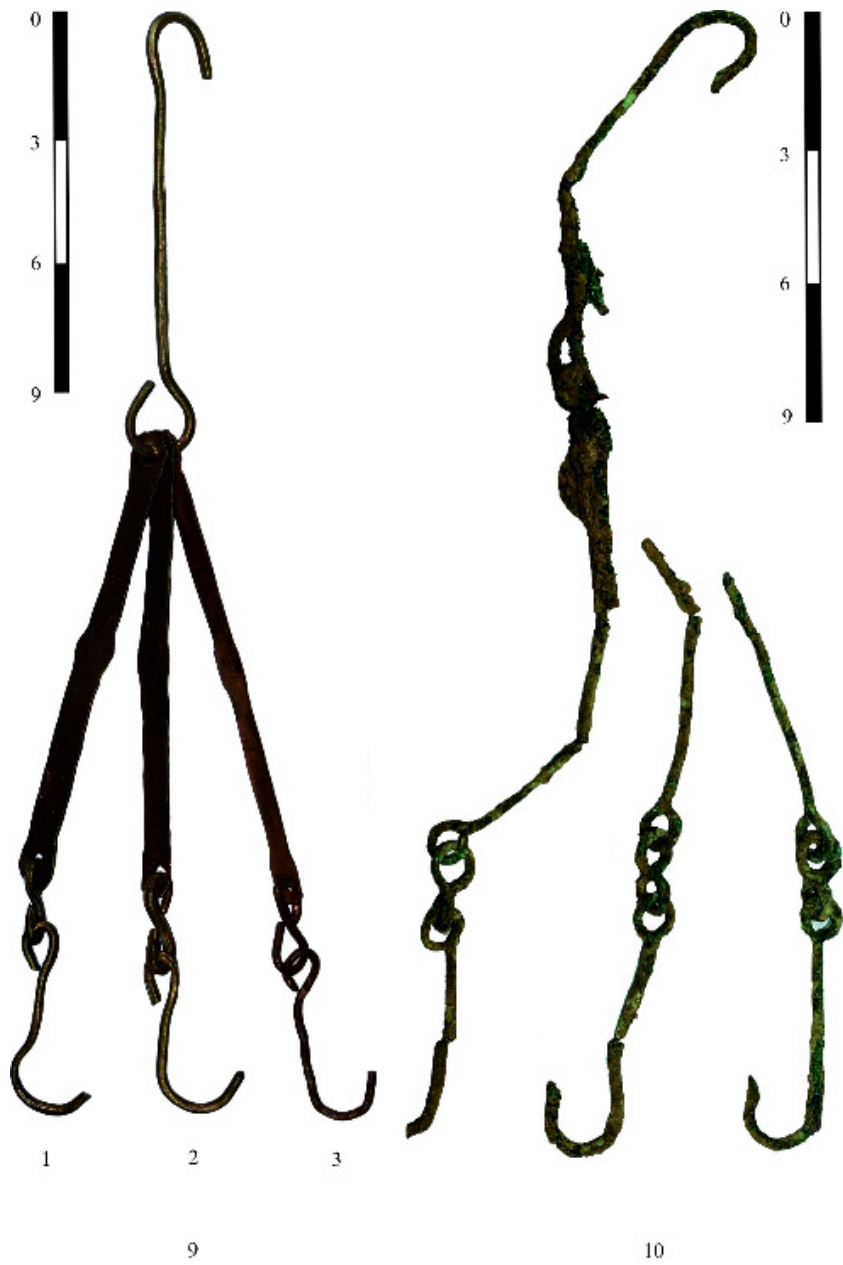


Figure 5. Suspending light devices from: 9. Tomis; 10. Ulmetum

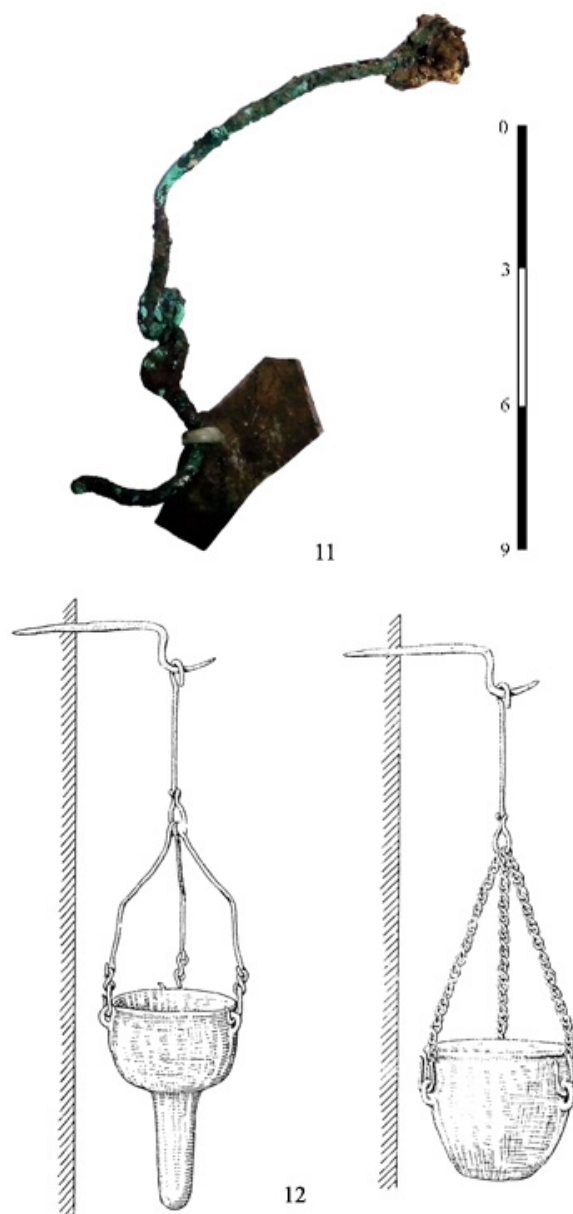


Figure 6. 11 - Suspending light devices from Capidava; 12 - Ideal reconstruction of suspending light devices from Novac 4th-6th century AD (drawing after OLCZAK 1984)