

GONUR-DEPE 1 (MARGIANA, TURKMENISTAN): THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE GRAVEYARD. PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 1994 EXCAVATION CAMPAIGN.

SANDRO SALVATORI

The third joined excavation campaign of the "Centro Studi e Ricerche Ligabue" and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkmenistan at the large graveyard which stretches to the west of the protohistoric site of Gonur-depe 1 (Fig.1), has been carried out between August 24th and October 8th 1994 (1).

The main aims of this field season were:

- 1) the location of the graveyard southern edge;
- 2) to check on a larger base the scale of the looting practice we have found particularly limiting our previous excavation seasons;
- 3) the search for data helping in determining the date of that almost systematic grave pillage.

To address the above mentioned goals we have opened six excavation trenches:

a) two large areas (A2 and A 3) to the east and south of the main 1993 (A 1) trench respectively (Figs. 2-3).

b) three small trenches (Area 500: 500A = 10x6 m; 500B = 5x5.50 m; 500C = 10x5 m) at ca. 250 m to the Southeast of the main extensive operation (Fig. 4). These trenches were opened to study the stratigraphic relationship, if any, of the graveyard area with some production fire installations (small furnaces) on the top of a low artificial mound covered by a large amount of pottery sherds datable to the Late Bronze Age (Namazga VI).

c) A long and narrow northeast-southwest oriented strip located ca. 50 m to the south of the small trenches described above, toward the edge of the takir formation which stretches away to the west of the Gonur 1 South settlement. Such a trench was opened to verify the southern edge of the graveyard.

The two larger operation at point a), as referred above, are southern and eastern extensions of the main 1993 trench. They cover a surface of 435 and 700 m² respectively (Figs. 2-3). We located here some 92 graves, mostly looted in antiquity as proved by the easily detectable presence of the secondary, looting pit generally placed inside the perimeter of the original dromos of catacomb graves. Only eight graves were found intact, representing ca. 10% of the total. Such a percent figure is largely confirming the

evidence from the previous campaign (Salvatori 1994) and can be assumed for the entire graveyard.

The three small trenches (on the whole: 135 m²) described above (Fig. 5) have been opened not far from the southern edge of the graveyard in an area morphologically marked by a low artificial mound spotted by small furnaces possibly used in faience items production as seems to be pointed out by the presence of amorphous burned materials and artefacts (Fig. 23). Just below the loose anthropic deposit of the furnaces area we located several looted graves (Tab. 1:1). Such a stratigraphic evidence not only helps to date the graveyard systematic pillage during the Namazga VI period but it is an additional argument to an earlier, Namazga V, dating of the graveyard, as previously suggested on the base of the grave furniture (Salvatori 1993; 1994). In the three small trenches we located only two undisturbed graves, a catacomb (G. 500) and a simple pit one (G. 501). The latter was a small, round shaped low pit with the poorly preserved bones of a new-born inside.

Finally a long trench opened at ca. 50 m to the south of operation 500, at the edge of a takir formation, allowed to fix there the southern edge of the graveyard. The southern limit corresponds with the course of a palaeochannel, well detectable on aerial photographs, which flowed between the two mounds of Gonur 1 (Gonur North and South) (Cremaschi 1994: Fig. 6).

To test in an ultimate way the graveyard potential so heavily affected by the ancient cultural disturbances, we dug 29 graves of different typology: 20 catacomb graves - 9 of which intact and 11 looted - and 9 simple pit graves all looted with the exception of Grave 501.

GRAVE CATALOGUE

GRAVE 82

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: north-south

The secondary pit was placed outside the perimeter of the *dromos*. No remnants of grave

furniture nor of human bones have been found in the grave filling, but we have to single out that the secondary pit was not excavated.

GRAVE 84

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: north-south.

Very few fragments of human bones and a single pottery vessel were found in the pit filling.

1- Pear shaped beaker. Buff ware, light red inside. Cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 15; Ø at the mouth cm 8.4; Ø at the base cm 5.3; Ø max. cm 11.5 (Fig. 9).

GRAVE 87

Looted catacomb grave (Fig. 6).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

The chamber closing was made by an unfired mud-brick undisturbed wall. The looting pit, placed inside the *dromos* perimeter, was lowered to a level below the wall base, than entering the chamber without interfering with the closing wall. We found only the legs of the inhumed, a very sturdy male adult. Bones from two human skulls were found scattered in the filling of the pit together with several post cranial fragmentary bones. The same pit was also utilised by the looters to explore the chamber of the close Grave 88 and that's why we found bones pertaining to two individuals mixed together. Five pots have been found *in situ* in the northern section of the chamber not attained by the secondary pit.

1- Ovoid jar with high cylindrical neck and slightly everted rim. Cream ware. Flat base; string detachment; slightly risen foot. Wheel made. H. cm 25.3; Ø at the mouth cm 9.3; Ø max. cm 21; Ø at the base cm 7.7 (Fig. 9).

2- High biconical beaker on solid flaring foot. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 24; Ø at the mouth cm 10.7; Ø max. cm 15; Ø at the base cm 7 (Fig. 9).

3- Truncated conical bowl on flaring foot; vertical, slightly concave neck. Light red ware with light cream wash. Wheel made. H. cm 10.7; Ø at the mouth cm 17.5; Ø at the base cm 5.5 (Fig. 9).

4- Idem. Proper shape warped in baking. Surface polished by means of a stick tool. H. cm 9; Ø at the mouth cm 17.5; Ø at the base cm 4.8 (Fig. 9).

5- Truncated conical bowl on low sub cylindrical foot, vertical concave neck; rounded rim. Green colour due to overfiring. Traces of a light cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 5.6; Ø at the mouth cm 18; Ø at the base cm 3.5 (Fig. 9).

GRAVE 89

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 6).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast.

The chamber was sealed by a single unfired mud-brick (cm 40 x 20 x 15; the usual mud-brick size). A ca. 6 years old child was lying crouched on the right side. The right arm was flexed and the hand was placed under the right parietal. The left arm was flexed at 45°. The bones turned out to be very badly preserved being very brittle. The grave furniture was made up by a single pottery beaker placed to the north close to the inhumed's head.

1- Sub cylindrical beaker on a flat base. The surface and breaking colour was green due to overfiring. Wheel made. H. cm 12.7; Ø at the mouth cm 8; Ø the base cm 4.4 (Fig. 10).

GRAVE 91

Looted catacomb grave.

Dromos orientation: north-south.

The secondary pit, dug in the *dromos* perimeter, caused the almost complete destruction of the mud-brick chamber closing wall. The looters were apparently disturbed during their work because they left in the grave some metal and stone objects together with the unvalued pottery vessels. In fact on the border between the *dromos* and the chamber, to the north, an alabaster vessel, a bronze compartmented seal, a miniature jar and another alabaster object have been recovered. In the pit filling several sherds, some complete pots and thousand of faience beads were scattered. Very few human bone fragments have been collected in the secondary filling.

1- Bell shaped cup on high flaring foot. Vertical rim. Cream to light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. Fragmentary. H. cm 19; Ø at the mouth cm 19.5; Ø at the base cm 6.7 (Fig. 10).

2- Truncated conical bowl with vertical, concave rim. Very low foot. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. Fragmentary. H. cm 9.2; Ø at the mouth cm 19.6; Ø at the base cm 5.4 (Fig. 10).

3- Biconical beaker on low sub cylindrical foot. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 13.9; Ø at the mouth cm 7.5; Ø max. cm 10.9; Ø at the base cm 5 (Fig. 10).

4- Biconical beaker on slightly risen foot. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. Fragmentary. H. cm 13.6; Ø at the mouth cm 8.8; Ø max. cm 12.9; Ø at the base cm 5 (Fig. 10).

5- Globular miniature jar with constricted neck and everted rim. Light red ware; whitish internal and

external wash. Wheel made. H. cm 5.7; Ø at the mouth cm 4.2; Ø max. cm 6.2; Ø at the base cm 3.5 (Fig. 10).

6- Sub cylindrical vessel with concave profile and everted rim. Slightly convex inside bottom. Fragmentary. Variegated alabaster. H. cm 11.3; Ø at the mouth cm 16; Ø at the neck cm 12; Ø at the base cm 16 (Fig. 10; Tab.1:2).

7- Truncated conical object (sceptre head ?). Conical hole at the base. Fragmentary. Variegated alabaster. H. cm 3; Ø max. cm 5; Ø min. cm 0.6 (Fig. 10).

8- Biconical spindle-whorl or bead. Variegated alabaster. Bipolar hole. No wear traces were visible at the hole extremities. H. cm 1.8; Ø max. cm 2.8; Ø of the hole cm 0.6 (Fig. 10).

9- Bronze compartmented and ajouré, stamp seal. Geometrical motive (star-shaped). Rectangular suspension loop on the back. Ø cm 3.1; th. cm 0.6; h. of the suspension loop cm 1.5 (Fig. 10; Tab. 1: 3).

10- Several hundreds of cylindrical faience beads of various colours (light-blue, dark brown and green) plus few tens of discoid faience and gypsum beads (Tab. 1: 4).

GRAVE 94

Looted catacomb grave.

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

The secondary pit was placed outside the limits of the *dromos*, to the Southwest, living undisturbed the unfired mud-brick wall closing the chamber. The mud-bricks, vertically set, were well flanked each other and made a homogeneous wall in front of the chamber. The secondary pit entered the chamber from the Southwest without reaching the northern portion where some pottery vessels have been found *in situ*. Not a single fragment of human bone was there recovered.

1- Biconical jar with lower concave and upper convex profile. Cream ware, cream slip. Wheel made and moulded base. Intentional breaking of a rim section. H. cm 27; Ø at the mouth cm 13.4; Ø max. cm 26.5; Ø at the base cm 13.5 (Fig. 11).

2- Ovoid jar on low ring foot. High sub cylindrical neck with slightly everted rim. Shoulder/neck junction marked by means of a stick tool. Cream ware and cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. Fragmentary at the rim. H. cm 23; Ø at the mouth cm 9.5; Ø max. cm 18.8; Ø at the base cm 8.7 (Fig. 11).

3- Biconical jar with lower concave and upper convex profile. Low concave neck and everted

warped rim. Green colour due to overfiring. The slip also turned to a greenish colour. Wheel made and moulded base. H. cm 18.5; Ø at the mouth [warped]; Ø max. cm 21.5; Ø at the base cm 11.7 (Fig. 11).

4- Bell shaped bowl, formerly on high foot. Cream ware, cream slip. Burnished external surface. Wheel made. H. cm [12]; Ø at the mouth cm 17.7 (Fig. 11).

GRAVE 404

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: north-south.

A single secondary pit served to pillage two contiguous catacombs (G. 404 and G. 405). Several pot fragments have been found scattered in the pit filling and it is problematic to assign them to a specific grave. It seems possible that the Grave 405 chamber has been disturbed by the excavation of the grave 404 *dromos*. Several human bone fragments were scattered in the filling.

1- Hemispherical basin with lower sand-blasted concave section. Slightly everted and externally thickened rim. Cream ware, greenish surface. Moulded and wheel made. H. cm 19.5; Ø at the mouth cm 34.5; Ø at the base cm 14 (Fig. 12).

2- Biconical beaker with slightly everted rim. Cream ware. Wheel made. Detachment technique not determinable. H. cm 16; Ø at the mouth cm 10; Ø max. cm 13.2; Ø at the base cm 5.2 (Fig. 12).

3- Lower half of a biconical beaker. Cream ware; greenish surface. Wheel made. Knife detachment. [not drown]

4- High sub cylindrical stand with flaring base possibly from a bell shaped bowl. Red ware. Wheel made. [not drown]

5- Fragment from a truncated conical bowl with vertical, slightly concave rim. Cream ware; greenish surfaces. Wheel made. [not drown]

6- Fragments from a truncated conical bowl with vertical, slightly concave rim. Green colour due to overfiring. Wheel made. [not drown]

7- Two not contiguous fragments from a bone hair pin. [not drown]

GRAVE 405

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: north-south

Cf. Grave 404

GRAVE 410

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: north-south

Only half of the *dromos* have been excavated.

1- Biconical beaker on low, slightly flaring foot and everted rim. Light red ware; light green slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 14.5; Ø at the mouth cm 11.8; Ø max. cm 14; Ø at the base cm 5.4 (Fig. 12).

2- Lower section of a sub cylindrical beaker. Cream ware. Wheel made. String detachment. [not drawn]

GRAVE 412

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 6).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

The chamber was sealed by an unfired mud-brick wall. The inhumed, a sub adult, was lying crouched on the left side. The human bones were very badly preserved because in a matrix of a very hardly packed mud deposit. The only furniture was a pottery beaker placed at the north-western corner of the *dromos*.

1- Biconical beaker on low sub cylindrical foot. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 11.5; Ø at the mouth cm 8.3; Ø max. cm 11.5; Ø at the base cm 4.3 (Fig. 12).

GRAVE 414

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 7).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Chamber sealed by an unfired mud-brick wall. The inhumed, an adult male, was lying on the right side. The human bones were completely included in a termitarium. The grave furniture - four pottery vessels - was placed to the north of the inhumed head. At the inhumed neck an alabaster cigar-shaped bead has been recovered.

1- Biconical bottle on low conical foot. Slightly everted rim. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 25.5; Ø at the mouth cm 10.7; Ø max. cm 13; Ø at the base cm 6.4 (Fig. 12).

2- Biconical beaker on low conical foot. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 17; Ø at the mouth cm 8.8; Ø max. cm 12.6; Ø at the base cm 6 (Fig. 12).

3- Truncated conical bowl with sub vertical, slightly concave rim and slightly risen flat foot. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 8.4; Ø at the mouth cm 21.7; Ø at the base cm 5 (Fig. 12).

4- Idem. H. cm 7.5; Ø at the mouth cm 23; Ø at the base cm 4.8 (Fig. 12).

5- Cigar-shaped bead. Variegated alabaster. Bipolar hole. L. cm 4; Ø max. cm 1; Ø min. cm 0.6; Ø of the hole cm 0.4 (Fig. 12).

GRAVE 417

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 7).

Dromos orientation: north-south

Chamber sealed by an unfired mud-brick wall. The inhumed, an adult female, was lying on the back with legs crouched on the right. The grave furniture was placed to the north and northeast of the inhumed head.

1- Biconical jar on sub cylindrical foot. Cream ware; greenish surfaces. Wheel made. Polished base. H. cm 22.5; Ø at the mouth cm 11; Ø max. cm 14; Ø at the base cm 6.5 (Fig. 14).

2- Biconical beaker on sub cylindrical foot. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 11.5; Ø at the mouth cm 7.4; Ø max. cm 9.4; Ø at the base cm 4.6 (Fig. 14).

3- Miniature sub cylindrical jar on large, flat base. Concave neck and everted rim. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 8.3; Ø at the mouth cm 5; Ø max. cm 8.3; Ø at the base cm 6.4 (Fig. 14).

4- Miniature small jar with everted rim. Cream ware. Hand made. H. cm 5; Ø at the mouth cm 3.6; Ø max. cm 5; Ø at the base cm 3.5 (Fig. 14).

5- Biconical spindle-whorl with cylindrical piercing hole. Calcite. H. cm 1; Ø cm 2.3; Ø of the hole cm 0.6 (Fig. 14).

6- Hair pin with zigzag incised decoration at one end. Bone. L. cm 13; Ø max. cm 0.5 (Fig. 14).

GRAVE 419

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 8).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Chamber sealed by a mud-brick wall. The inhumed, a female (?) of 8 to 10 years old, was lying crouched on the right side. The grave furniture was placed at the north of the inhumed head.

1- Sub globular jar with concave, sand-blasted lower section. High everted neck. Cream ware; whitish slip. Wheel made. Moulded and wheel made. H. cm 21; [H. of the lower moulded section cm 4.4]; Ø at the mouth cm 9.7; Ø max. cm 18.6; Ø at the base cm 7.5 (Fig. 15).

2- Ovoid jar with rounded shoulder. High sub cylindrical neck and slightly everted rim. Slightly risen flat base. Light green ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 20.3; Ø at the mouth cm 9.5; Ø max. cm 17; Ø at the base cm 5.2 (Fig. 15).

3- Biconical beaker on a low foot. Green colour due to overfiring. Worn away surface. Wheel made. H. cm 14.5; Ø at the mouth cm 9.2; Ø max. cm 14.2; Ø at the base cm 4.7 (Fig. 15).

GRAVE 427

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 6).

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Chamber sealed by a mud-brick wall. No traces of human bones were recognisable in spite of the fact that the chamber walls and the *dromos* deposit were undisturbed. The grave furniture, three bowls and two beakers, was placed in the centre of the chamber. Along the chamber's southern edge we have found four flint transverse arrowheads.

1- Truncated conical bowl on low sub cylindrical foot; vertical, slightly inverted concave rim. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 8.5; Ø at the mouth cm 16.5; Ø max. cm 17; Ø at the base cm 4.5 (Fig. 16).

2- Idem. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. H. cm 8; Ø at the mouth cm 18; Ø max. cm 18.6; Ø at the base cm 4.9 (Fig. 16).

3- Idem. H. cm 8.3; Ø at the mouth cm 20.6; Ø max. cm 21.2; Ø at the base cm 5.4 (Fig. 16).

4- Biconical beaker on low sub cylindrical foot. Slightly everted rim. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 14; Ø at the oval-shaped mouth cm 8/8.5; Ø max. cm 11.2; Ø at the base cm 5.4 (Fig. 16).

5- Idem. H. cm 15.5; Ø at the oval-shaped mouth cm 8.4/8.8; Ø max. cm 12.5; Ø at the base cm 5.1 (Fig. 16).

6- Transverse trapezoidal arrowhead with baked edges. Blond flint. H. cm 1.7; L. cm 1.3; th. cm 0.2 (Fig. 16).

7- Idem. Brown reddish flint. H. cm 2; L. cm 1.8; th. cm 0.3 (Fig. 16).

8- Idem. Dark green flint. H. cm 2.4; L. cm 1.6; th. cm 0.5 (Fig. 16).

9- Idem. Dark green flint. H. cm 2.6; L. cm 1.9; th. cm 0.4 (Fig. 16).

GRAVE 428

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Secondary pit placed inside the *dromos* perimeter. No human bones have been recovered. Pottery vessel fragments have been collected in the secondary pit filling.

1- Ovoid small jar with rounded shoulder; sub cylindrical neck with concave profile and everted rim. Light red ware; whitish slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 9.3; Ø at the mouth cm 6.4; Ø max. cm 10.2; Ø at the base cm 4.8 (Fig. 17).

2- Grey burnished ware sherd. Indeterminable vessel shape. Hand made. [not drown]

3- Wall fragment from a globular small jar. Burnished grey ware. Hand made. [not drown]

4- Fragments from a high cylindrical beaker with everted (45°) rim. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. [not drown]

5- Fragment from a clipped rim bowl. Cream ware; cream slip. Wheel made. [not drown]

6- Fragments from two truncated conical bowls with vertical, concave rim. Cream ware; cream slip. [not drown]

GRAVE 429

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Secondary pit dug inside the *dromos* perimeter. Several human bone fragments were scattered in the pit filling.

1- Truncated conical bowl on low cylindrical foot; vertical, slightly concave rim. Light red ware; cream internal surface; external whitish slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 8.8; Ø at the mouth cm 20.3; Ø at the base cm 4.5 (Fig. 17).

GRAVE 430

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Secondary pit dug inside the *dromos* perimeter. No human bones and only a single fragmentary pottery vessel have been recovered in the deposit.

1- Biconical beaker on low conical foot. Green colour due to overfiring. Fragmentary. Wheel made. H. cm 17.2; Ø at the mouth cm 10.2; Ø max. cm 14; Ø at the base cm 5.6 (Fig. 17).

GRAVE 431

Looted catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: northwest-southeast

Large *dromos* with the evidence of two secondary pits, one to the south, the other to the northwest. The southern pit seems older than the other, it was very deep and reached the grave chamber. Its filling was made by alternating layers of grey sand and mud. In the filling some of the long bones of an adult individual have been found and two complete mud-bricks pertaining to the chamber closing. The second, north-western, pit was filled with a rubified sand cup. It had only a vertical chimney. At its base we meet with a badly preserved human skull apparently not *in situ*. Several pottery fragments and complete vessels have been collected in the northern half of the *dromos* disturbed deposit.

1- Large ovoid jar with lower section concave and

sand-blasted. Low sub cylindrical, concave neck; everted and externally thickened rim. Cream ware; cream slip. Fragmentary. Moulded and wheel made after rolls building. H. cm 34; Ø at the mouth cm 12; Ø max. cm 30.2; Ø at the base cm 13.8 (Fig. 18).

2- Truncated conical basin with lower section concave and sand-blasted. Thickened rim. Light red ware; cream slip. Moulded and wheel made after rolls building. H. cm 17.7; Ø at the mouth cm 30; Ø at the base cm 11.6 (Fig. 18).

3- High sub cylindrical beaker with flaring everted (45°) rim. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. Fragmentary at the rim. Some impressed signs on the base. H. cm 22.5; Ø at the mouth cm 10.3; Ø at the base cm 7.8 (Fig. 18).

4- Conical foot possibly pertaining to a bowl on stand. Fragmentary. Light red ware. Wheel made. [not drown]

5- Fragments from a truncated conical bowl with vertical, concave rim. Cream ware. Wheel made. [not drown]

6- Idem. [not drown]

7- Splinter of bronze lamina from an indeterminable object. [not drown]

GRAVE 432

Undisturbed catacomb grave

Dromos orientation: Northwest-southeast

The chamber was still only partially closed by few residual mud-bricks. Other mud bricks have been found inside the chamber, perhaps as consequence of a fall due to some kind of disturbance or dynamic collapse. We didn't noticed any disturbance in the *dromos* deposit, other than normal pedogenesis, and in the chamber walls. In the northern sector of the chamber eight pottery vessel were recovered lying *in situ*, while from the southernmost bowl four spherical faience beads were likely rolling out. No traces of human bones have been recorded.

1- Pear-shaped bottle with constricted neck and everted rim. Low conical foot. Light green ware; greenish slip. Wheel made. Knife detachment. H. cm 26.5; Ø at the mouth cm 5; Ø at the neck cm 2.5; Ø max. 15.2; Ø at the base cm 6.6 (Fig. 19).

2- Ovoid small jar with flat base; high and constricted sub cylindrical neck with everted rim. Light red ware; light cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 17.5; Ø at the mouth cm 3.7; Ø at the neck cm 2.7; Ø max. cm 15; Ø at the base cm 5.7 (Fig. 19).

3- Biconical beaker. Cream ware; whitish slip. Wheel made. String detachment. Reassembled from

several fragments; it was found crushed and warped by the earthen deposit. H. cm 15.1; Ø at the mouth cm 8; Ø max. cm 11.6; Ø at the base cm 4.7 (Fig. 19).

4- Idem. Green colour due to overfiring. Wheel made. H. cm 14.3; Ø at the mouth cm 8.5; Ø max. cm 12.2; Ø at the base cm 4.3 (Fig. 19).

5- Bell shaped bowl on high conical foot. Green colour due to overfiring. Wheel made. H. cm 16.5; Ø at the mouth cm 16.3; Ø at the base cm 5.6 (Fig. 20).

6- Truncated conical bowl on slightly flaring foot. Vertical concave rim. Light red ware; cream slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 8.8; Ø at the mouth cm 17.7; Ø at the base cm 4.5 (Fig. 20).

7- Idem. Vertical, slightly concave and everted rim. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 7.2; Ø at the mouth cm 17.2; Ø at the base cm 4.4 (Fig. 20).

8- Idem. H. cm 7.7; Ø at the mouth cm 18.3; Ø at the base cm 5 (Fig. 20).

9- Ring-shaped bead. Faience. H. cm 0.5; Ø cm 0.8 (Fig. 20).

10- Spherical bead. Faience. H. cm 0.9; Ø cm 1.1 (Fig. 20).

11- Spherical bead. Faience. H. cm 0.8; Ø cm 0.9 (Fig. 20).

12- Spherical bead. Faience. H. cm 0.8; Ø cm 0.9.

GRAVE 500

Undisturbed catacomb grave (Fig. 8).

Dromos orientation: Northwest-Southeast

Chamber sealed by an unfired mud-brick wall. To the south-western corner the *dromos* was cut through by the grave 503 *dromos*, living the chamber of grave 500 undisturbed. The inhumed, a female adult, was lying crouched on the right side. The grave furniture was made from three pottery vessels placed to the north of the deceased's head. The skeletal remains were found in a very good state of preservation lying in a sandy deposit.

1- Biconical beaker on low cylindrical foot; vertical rim. Cream ware; greenish slip. Polished external surface. Wheel made. H. cm 16.2; Ø at the mouth cm 8.8; Ø max. cm 12; Ø at the base cm 4.7 (Fig. 21).

2- Truncated conical bowl on low risen foot. Vertical, concave rim. Cream ware; whitish slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 6.4; Ø at the mouth cm 17.3; Ø at the base cm 4.5 (Fig. 21).

3- Hemispheric bowl on high sub cylindrical applied foot broken before the placing in the grave. Slightly everted rim. Cream ware; white slip. Wheel made. H. [cm 11]; Ø at the mouth cm 18; Ø of the foot body cm 3.5 (Fig. 21).

GRAVE CHANNEL 7

We are here following the numbering assigned to the materials collected in the channel dug in 1992 to the west of the excavation area A (Salvatori 1993). Traces of a catacomb grave have been recognised along the channel thanks to the presence of residual mud-bricks badly disturbed by a recent (1994) enlargement of the channel.

1- Pear-shaped beaker on a low ring base. Cream ware; light green slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 14.5; Ø at the mouth cm. 9.2; Ø max. cm 10.8; Ø at the base cm 6 (Fig. 22).

2- Biconical jar with concave upper profile and low foot. Inverted cone shaped neck. Cream to light red ware; white slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 15; Ø at the mouth cm 12; Ø max. cm 17.5; Ø at the base cm 7 (Fig. 22).

3- Sub cylindrical jar with applied tubular pouring. Concave neck and everted rim. Concave lower profile. Light red ware; whitish slip. Moulded and wheel made. H. cm 21; Ø at the mouth cm 10; Ø max. cm 17.8; Ø at the base cm 9 (Fig. 22).

4- Truncated conical bowl on high sub cylindrical concave foot. Vertical, slightly concave rim. Red ware; cream slip. Polished external surface. Wheel made. H. cm 24; Ø at the mouth cm 24.3; Ø max. cm 25; Ø at the base cm 8.4 (Fig. 23).

5- Biconical jar with convex profile. Constricted neck with everted rim. Light red ware; whitish slip. Wheel made. H. cm 17.5; Ø at the mouth cm 4; Ø max. cm 18.7; Ø at the base cm 5.7 (Fig. 23).

6- Rim and wall fragments from a truncated conical bowl with vertical, concave rim. Light red ware. Wheel made. [not drawn]

Area 500

From the archaeological deposit linked with the small furnaces described in the first section of this paper.

1- Sub cylindrical bowl with concave profile and low cylindrical foot. Light red ware; red burnished external slip. Wheel made. String detachment. H. cm 9.8; Ø at the mouth cm 10.7; Ø max. cm 12.8; Ø at the base cm 7.2 (Fig. 23).

2- Discoid bead with denticulate edge. Faience. Th. cm 0.5; Ø cm 1.9 (Fig. 23).

Among the eight simple pit graves excavated this year (Graves 43, 402, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 501) only one (G. 501) was found undisturbed. As anticipated above the poorly preserved remains of a new-born were recovered inside, below the reddish cup which

characterised this kind of graves (cf. Salvatori 1993; 1994).

COMMENTS

With the 1994 excavation season we gathered what we think to be a consistent body of data concerning the three main questions we should like to answer.

We can now assume, with a good margin of confidence, that grave pillage concerned the entire graveyard and had a systematic character. Future work shall be planned taking on account that 90%, and perhaps something more, of the graveyard has been violated. On the other side we have to point out that looted graves too can contribute to the knowledge of the Middle Bronze Age Margiana material assemblage. In fact, robbers were not interested in pottery vessels as shown by the numerous robbed graves which gave back fragmentary or complete vessels, some time lived *in situ*.

More puzzling is to give an explanation to this almost systematic grave profanation. An important result has been reached by operation 500 with reference to the problem of such a violation date, now fixed to the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. Nevertheless it is hard to decide if that practice was only a treasure hunting activity or a culturally oriented one. Anyhow even if it could be thought as an environment purification practice some observed recurring behaviours need to be explained. First of all the highly selective grave furniture removal. It is clear from the excavated sample that profaners regarded pottery vessels as unvalued items. In fact we have often found pottery vessels still on place or discarded after removing. On the other hand, metal and stone objects are never lived in the profaned graves except the case of Grave 91. This leads us to think that a good motive for grave profanation was the desire to seize on the precious metals (golden, silver and bronze objects have been recovered in undisturbed graves during the 1993 excavation campaign) and valuable semiprecious stones. It is interesting to note that many stone columns have been found in the Central Building at Togolok 21 (NMZ VI context). Among a number of complete examples, several were cut and broken in an area which could have been a stone cutting workshop (Sarianidi 1990, Tab. LXXXIX; Hiebert 1994a, p. 381). It is than possible that objects from Middle Bronze Age cemeteries were used mainly as row materials during the following Namazga VI period.

From a more general point of view, it is ascertained that burying practices from one period to the other didn't changed as much as a Zoroastrian hypothesis would like. The Namazga VI people settling the Gonur South fortified town buried their dead on the top of the Gonur North mound both in simple pit graves and more formally built structures as mud-brick lined chambers (Sarianidi 1990). This is in strong contrast with practices involving the open air exposure of the dead.

Moreover we noticed an unpatterned behaviour as to the human bones. In fact we recorded a range of situations from the complete lacking of residual bones to the presence of large skeletal portions both *in situ* and discarded in the fill of robber pits. Such an unpatterned behaviour seems to me hardly consistent also with the environment purification hypothesis. Nevertheless a complete survey of the available literature on the several Central Asia pillaged graveyards of the III and II millennium BC is highly recommendable to understand the phenomenon in its proper setting.

Finally some of the objects recovered during the 1994 campaign deserve more comments. First of all the bronze compartmented seal from Grave 91 which, as those from the 1993 campaign (Salvatori 1994) fits well in the series of geometrical compartmented seals from Bactria and Margiana (Ligabue & Salvatori 1988, Tabs. 49-57; Sarianidi 1977, Figs. 48-49; ID. 1990, Tab. XXXVI) well datable to the Middle Bronze Age (Salvatori 1995). Together with this seal, a cylindrical alabaster vessel with everted rim was found. The type is well attested in the Near and Middle East during the IIIrd millennium BC (Casanova 1991: Type IVc1, pgs. 39-40 and n. 57).

Since now very few specimens, mainly rim fragments, are known from Bronze Age Margiana sites as Kelleli (Masimov 1979, Fig. 12:14), Togolok 15 (Sarianidi 1990, Tab. XXVII:2), Togolok 1 (Ibidem, Tab. XXVII:1) and Gonur South (Hiebert 1994b, Fig. 9.10:7). Living aside the surface findings, it seems that the production of the type have to be dated to the Middle Bronze Age, the only exception being the fragments Hiebert assign to a Gonur South context. Nevertheless an alabaster vessel production is well attested from Margiana Middle Bronze Age contexts as documented by the twin vessel from the Gonur Graveyard (Salvatori 1993, Figs. 9, 12:G.C.2/12), of a cylindrical bowl on high stand from the contemporary graveyard at Takta Bazar (Udeumuradov 1993, Fig. 34) and of a similar vessel from the Gonur North palace (Sarianidi 1990, Tab.

IV:2 room 22). Cylindrical alabaster vessels with everted rim are well represented among the robbed graves of Bactria (Pottier 1984: Figs. 26:203-204; 27:205; Tabs. XXV:203; XXVI:207). As for the Margiana specimens, Bactria vessels show the presence of a quite distinctive trait like the internal convex or umbilicate bottom. Such a trait is again present on a low sub cylindrical alabaster pot from the Namazga IV Grave 843-845 at Altyn depe (Kircho 1988, Fig. 4:7). Though typical of a central Asiatic production, it is known on Mesopotamian imported specimens dating from Early Dynastic III to the Akkadian post-sargonid period. This is the case of an ED III pot from Ur (Heinz 1989, fig. 11) and of similar vessel also from Ur bearing dedicatory inscriptions of Rimush and Naram-Sin qualifying them as from the booty of their military campaigns to the east (Potts 1991 Figs. 1, 6, 11).

While the umbilicate or convex bottom is entirely unknown to the Sistanian production as shown by the Shahr-i Sokhta and Gardan Reg materials (Ciarla 1979; 1981; Fairservis 1961, Fig. 29) it is known on a possibly imported cup on high stand from Shahdad (Hakemi n.d.) and on a sub cylindrical pot from the ED IIIb "Vase à la Cachette" at Susa (Amiet 1986, Fig. 96:7 and p. 125). To judge from the evidence at hand this very distinctive trait seems to be confined to a central Asiatic production centre possibly active between 2500 and 2150 BC, a time range which can be assumed as well for the alabaster cylindrical pots with everted rim (Casanova 1991: n. 57 at p. 39). The assumed life span of the type covers the terminal Namazga IV and the Namazga V periods of the Turkmenistan piedmont belt and it is in full accordance with the first C14 determination we can produce from the Gonur graveyard. The charcoal sampled comes from the deposit of the simple pit Grave 4 and has a laboratory date (GX-20645) of 3880 ± 95 bp or cal. 2400-2334 BC. The latter date is also consistent with the emerging picture of the Margiana Middle Bronze Age as a cultural period paralleling, in chronological terms too, the Namazga V period of southern Turkmenistan piedmont (Salvatori n.d.). If future researches will confirm such a hypothesis we could reach a clearer perception of the very important cultural developments interesting the whole Middle East from mid III millennium BC onwards.

*Soprintendenza per i Beni Ambientali
e Architettonici del Veneto Orientale - Venezia*

Notes

1) With the author the following people took part in the 1994 campaign of the "Centro Studi e Ricerche Ligabue" Italian Mission: Dr. Donatella Usai (Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), archaeologist and designer; Mr. Gabriele Rossi-Osmida (Centro Studi e Ricerche Ligabue- Venezia) responsible for logistics; Prof. Marat Durdiev, Turkmenistan Ministry of Culture representative.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA.VV. 1994: AA.VV., *Archaeological Map of the Murgab Delta. Report in Progress, September 1994*, Rome.

AMIET 1986: P. AMIET, *L'âge des échanges inter-iraniens. 3500-1700 avant J.-C.*, Paris.

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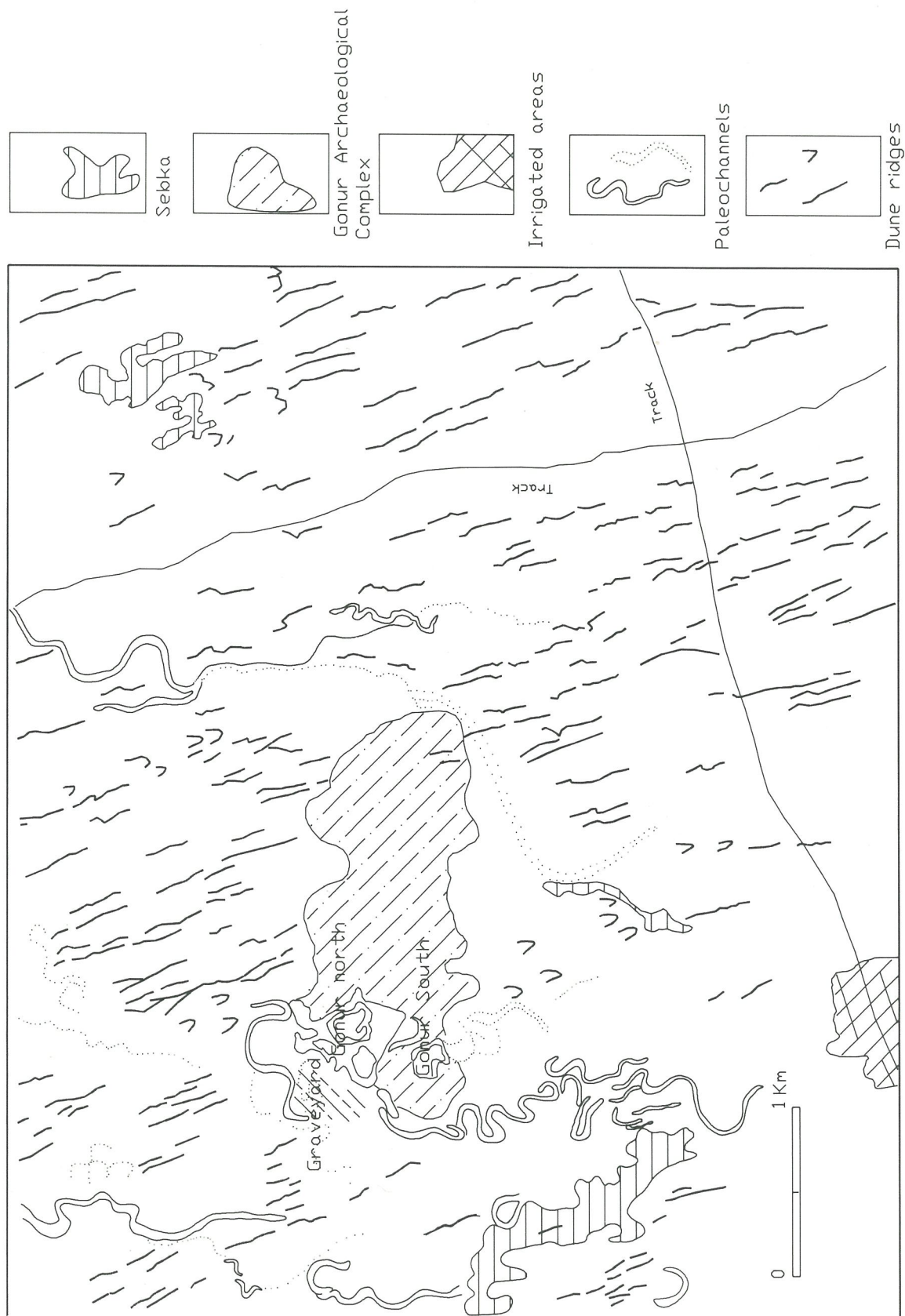


Fig. 1 (Redrawn from Cremaschi 1994, Fig. 6)

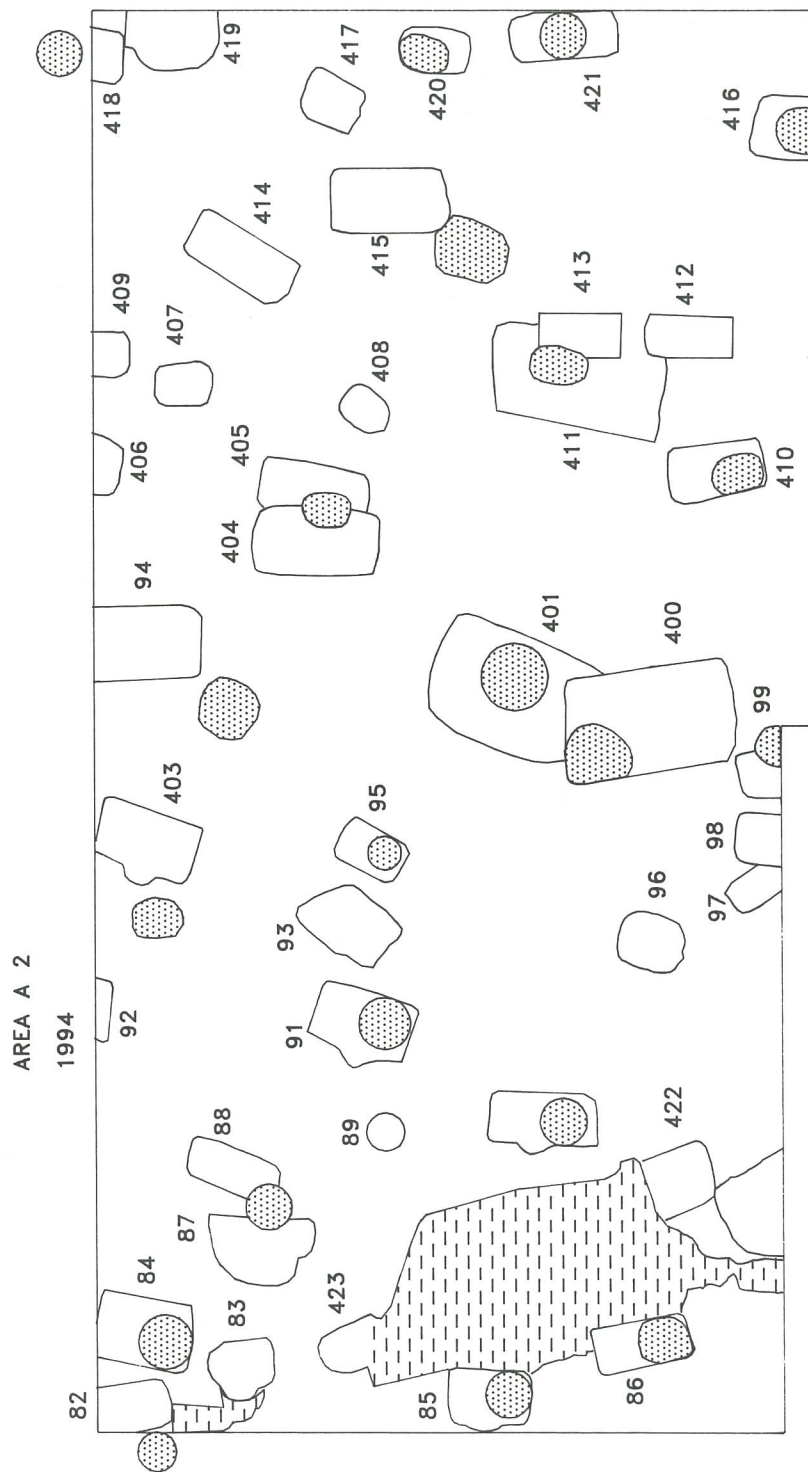


Fig. 2

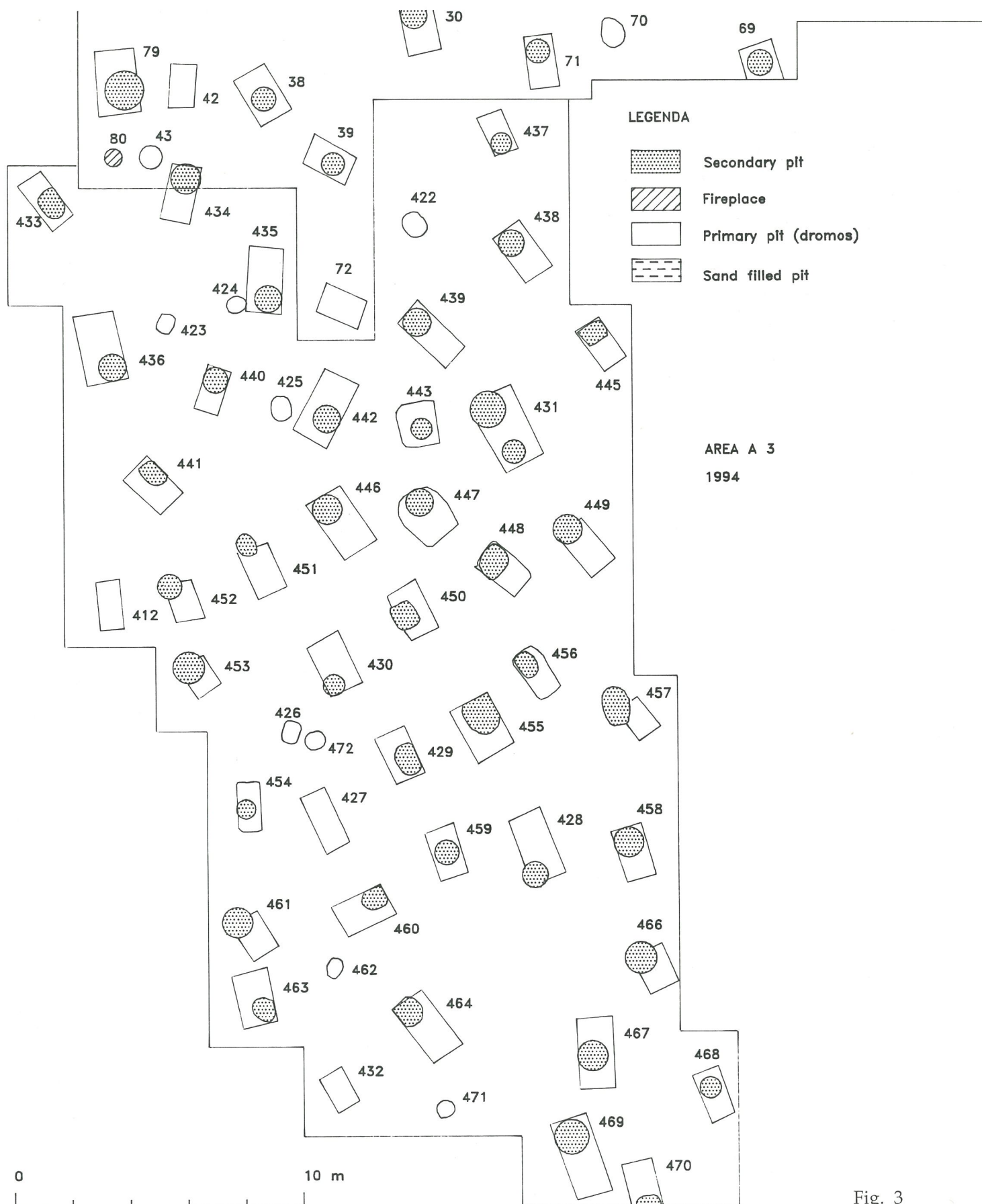


Fig. 3

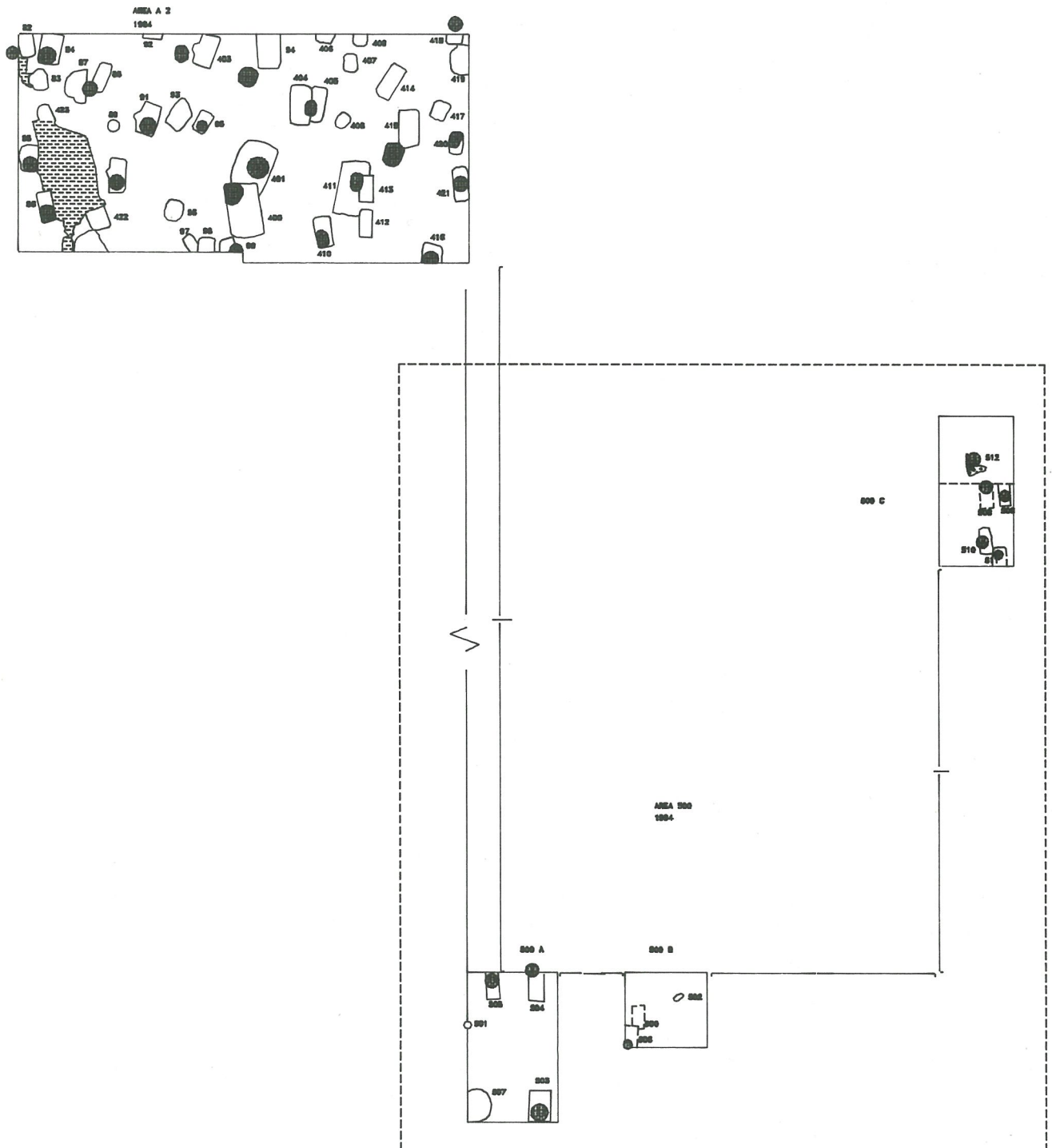


Fig. 4

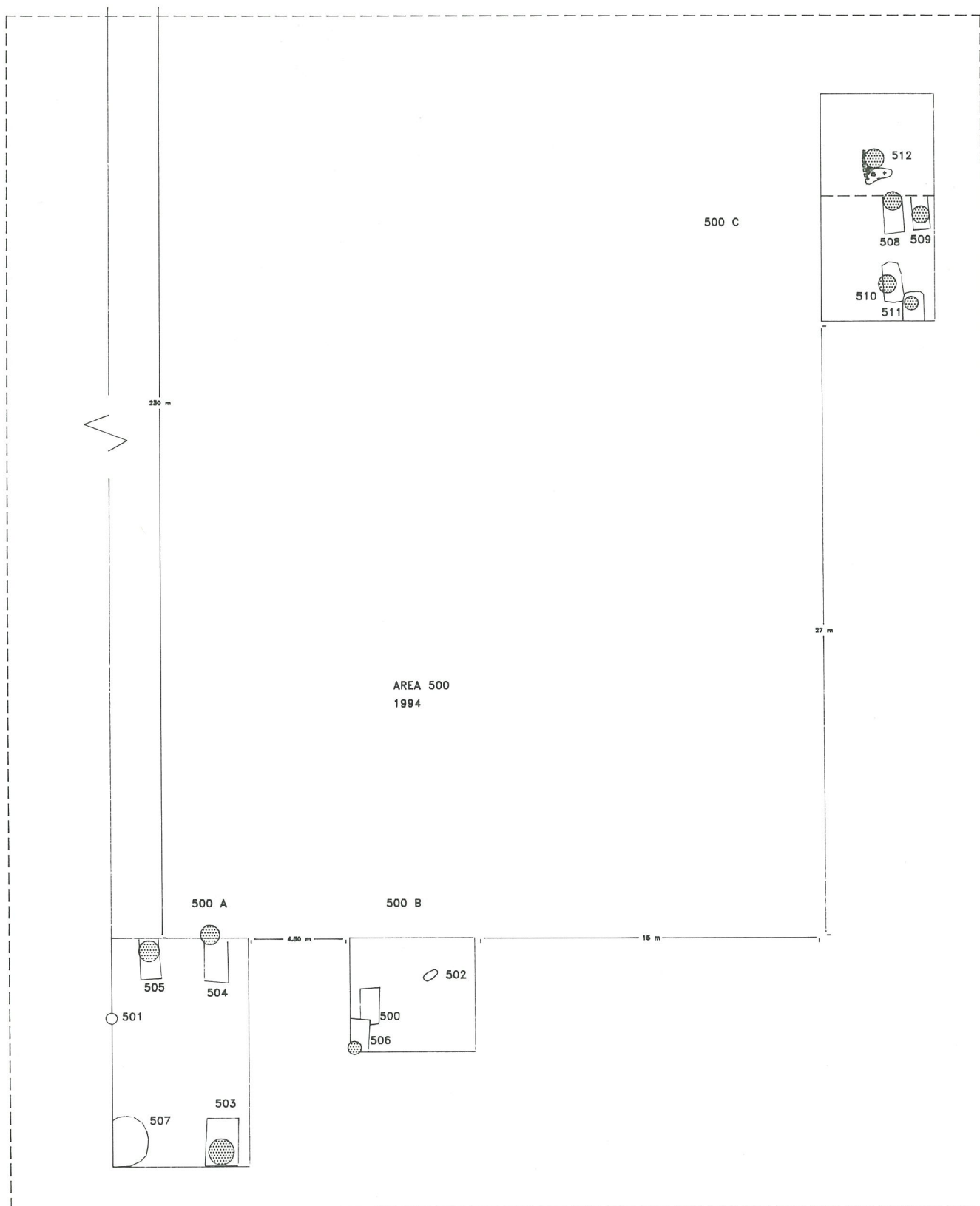


Fig. 5

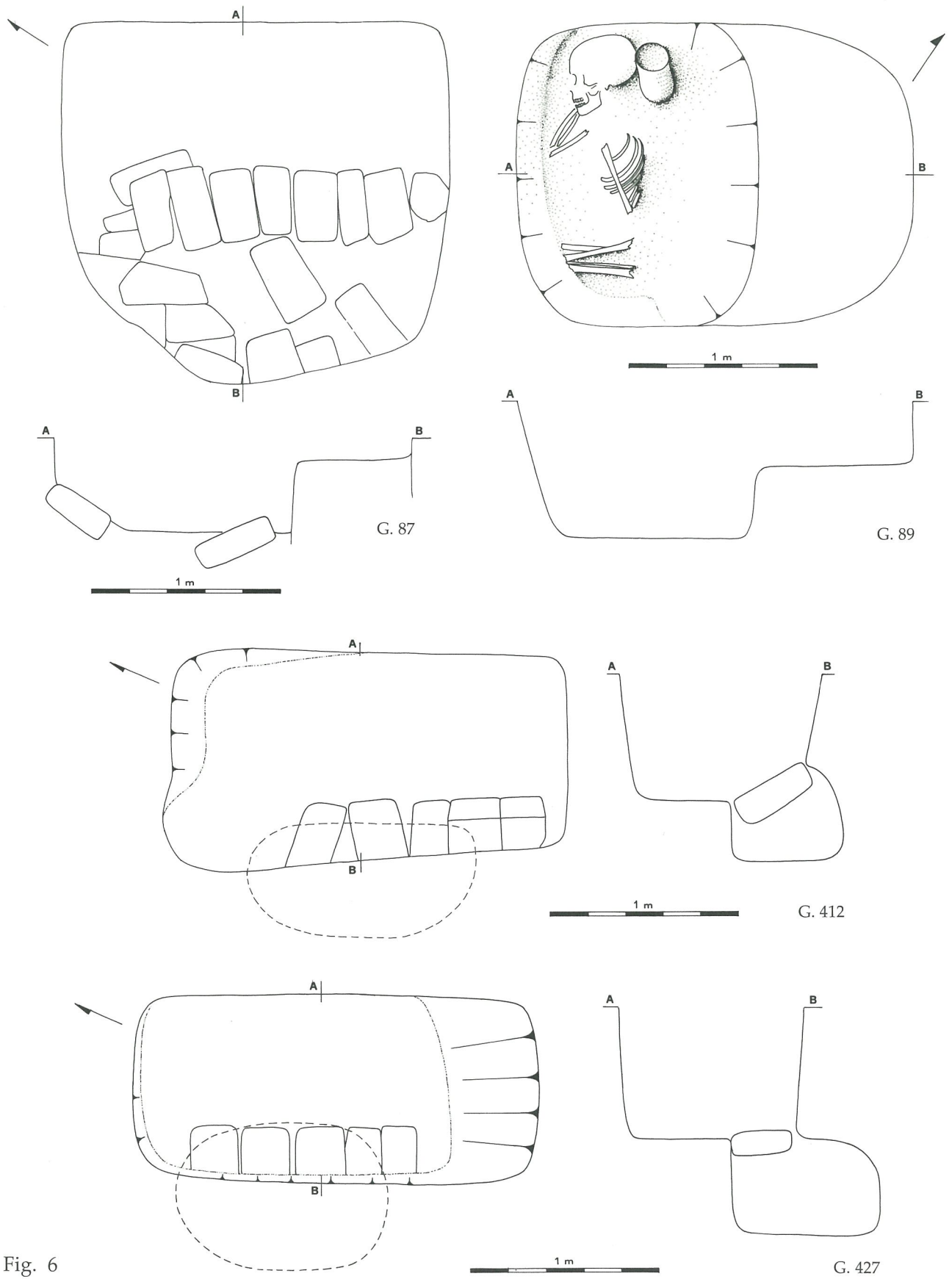
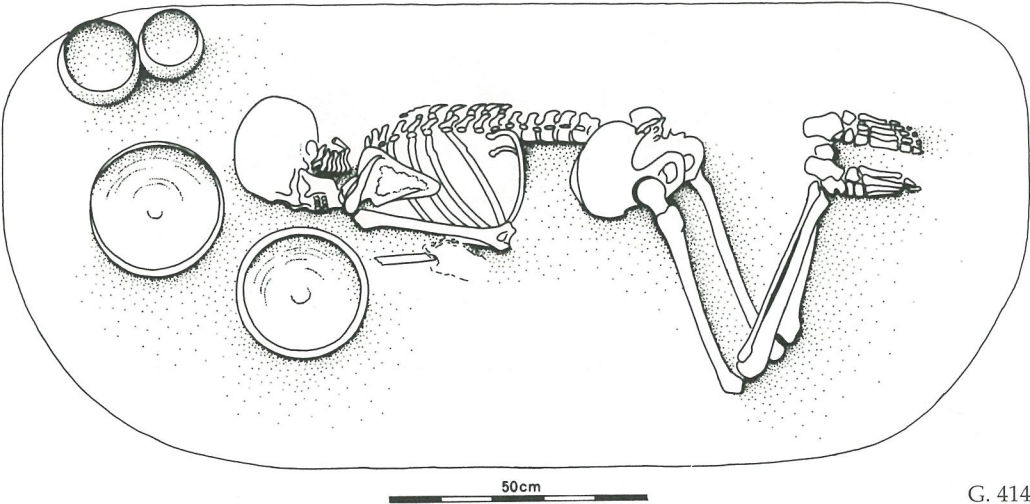
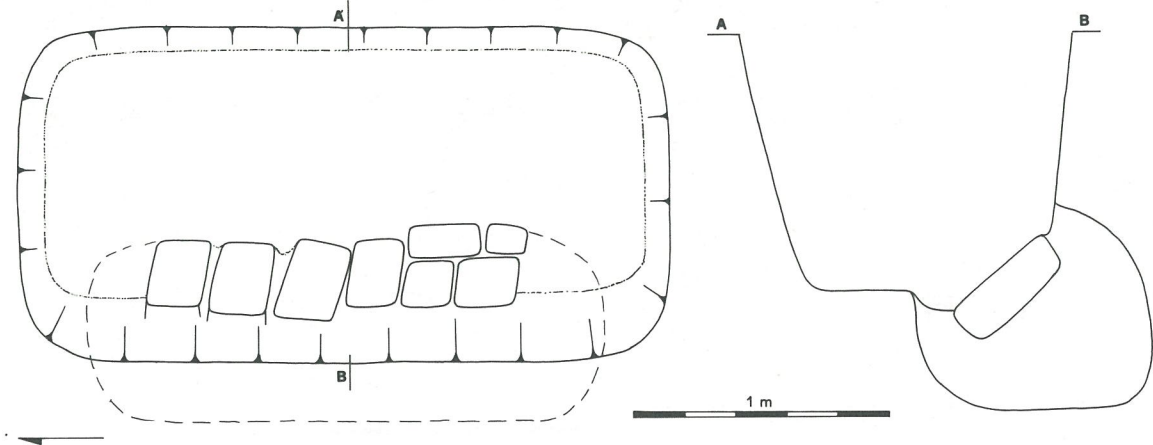
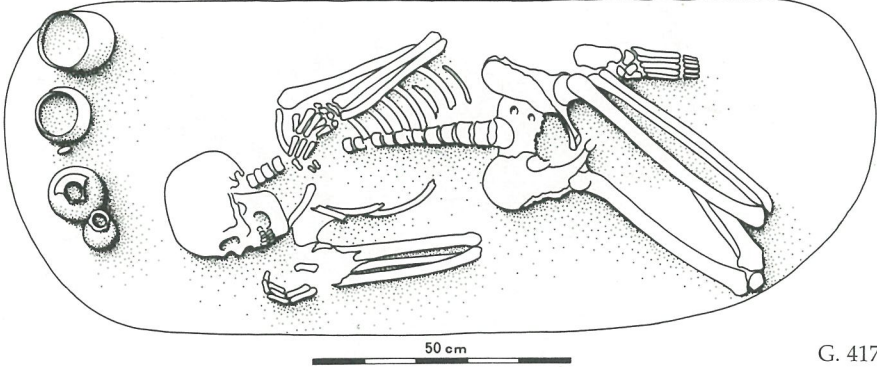
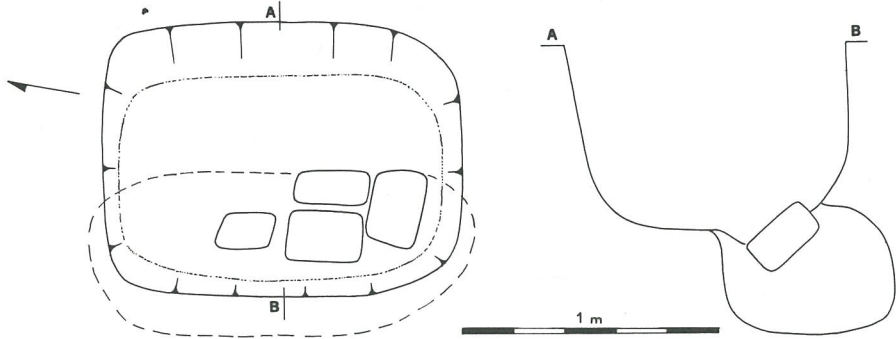


Fig. 6

G. 427

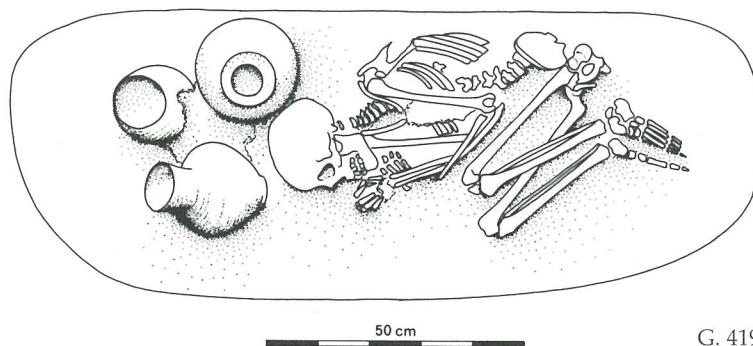
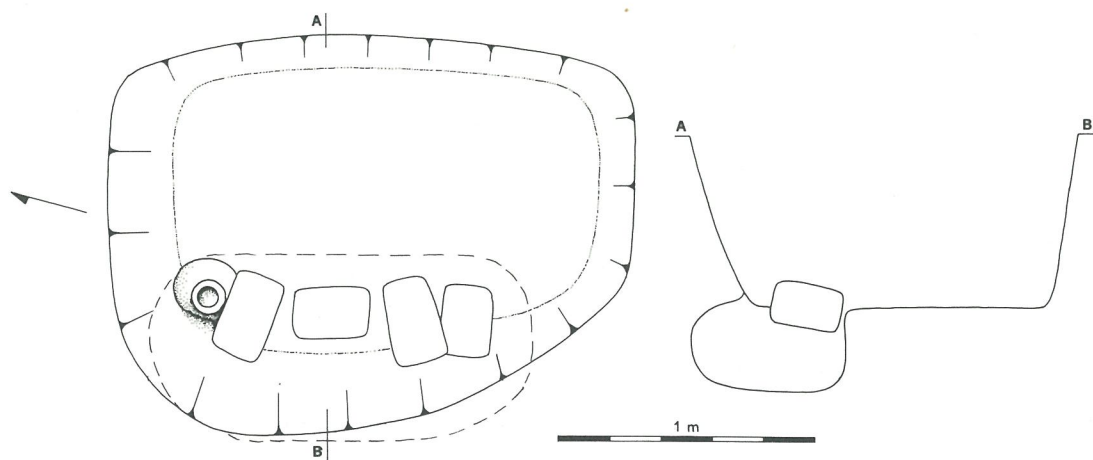


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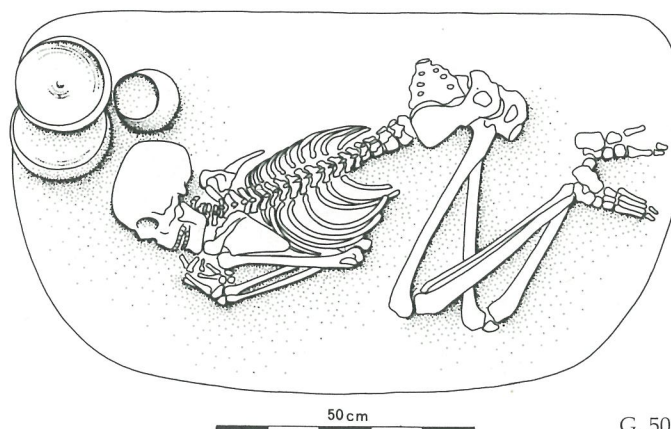
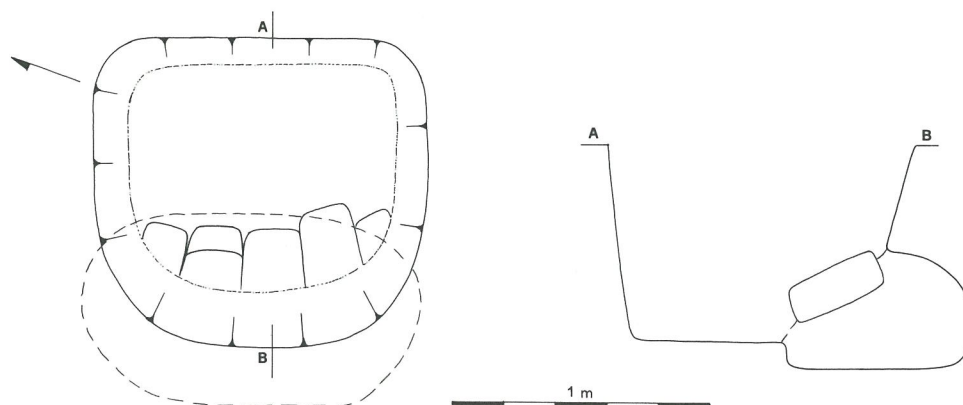


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Fig. 7

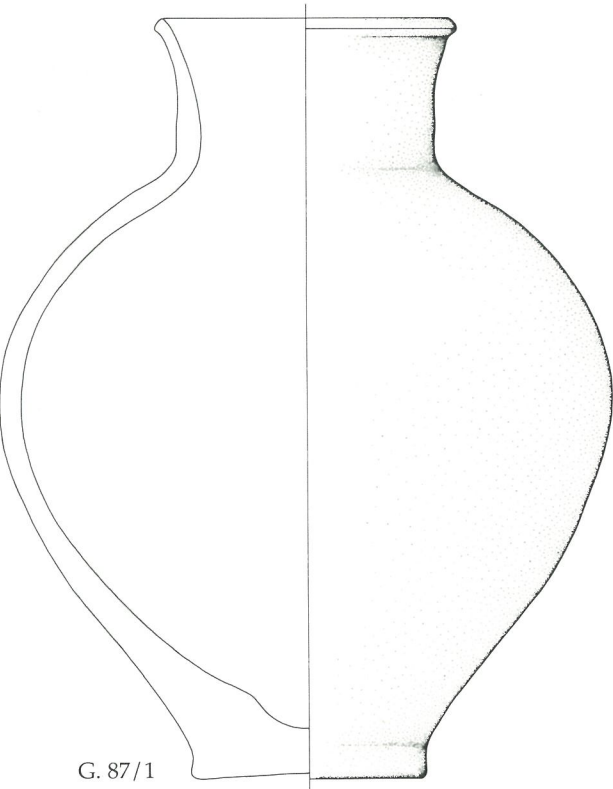


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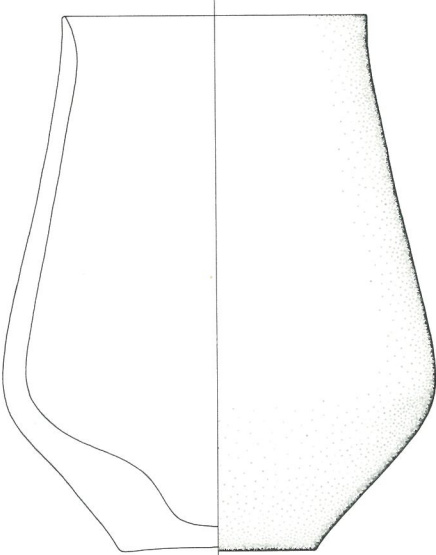


G. 500

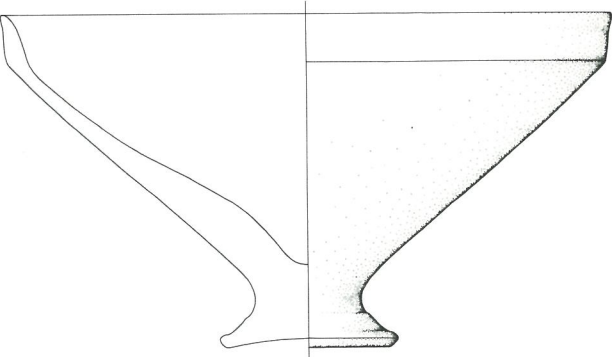
Fig. 8



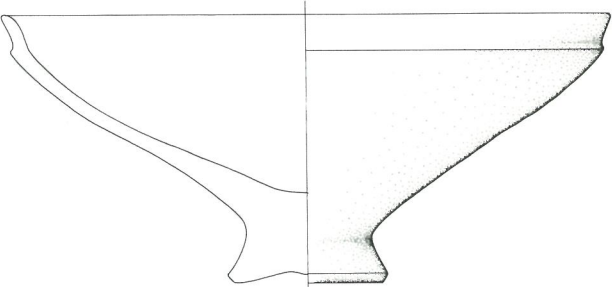
G. 87/1



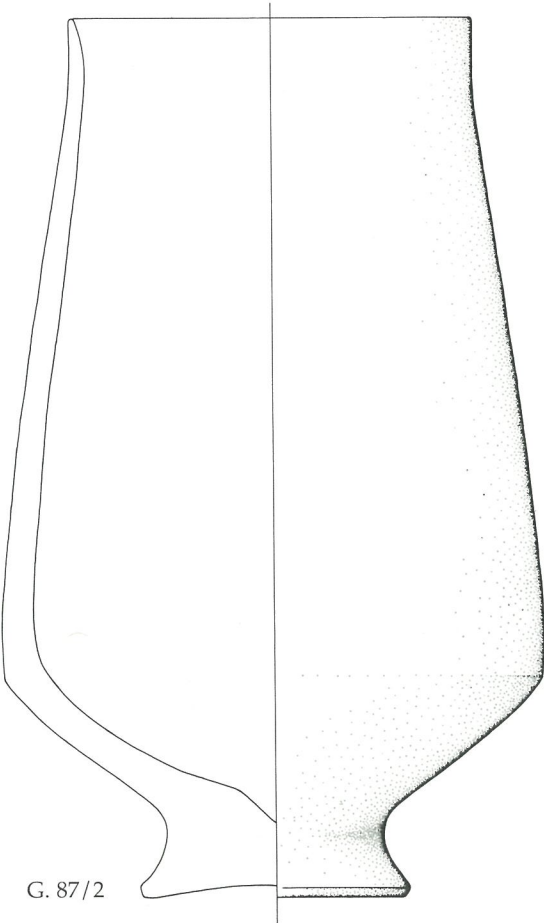
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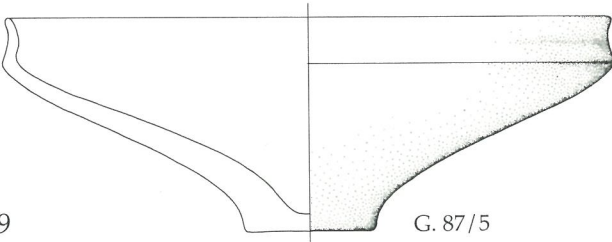
G. 87/3



G. 87/4

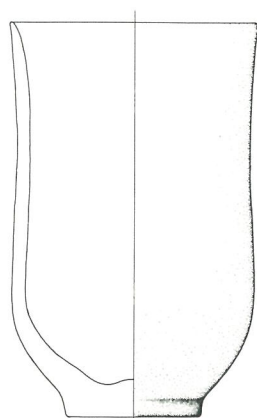


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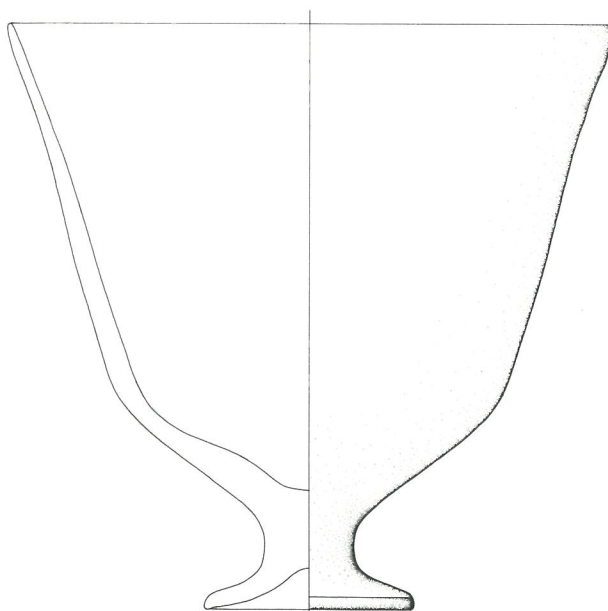


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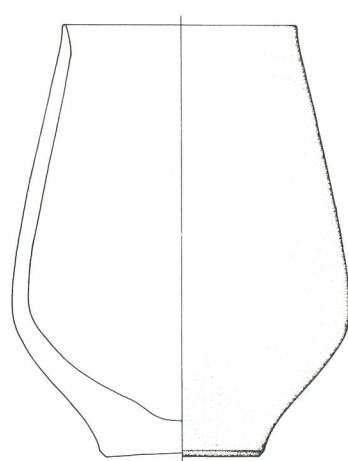
Fig. 9



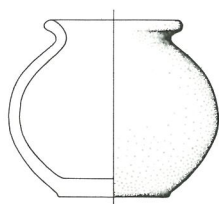
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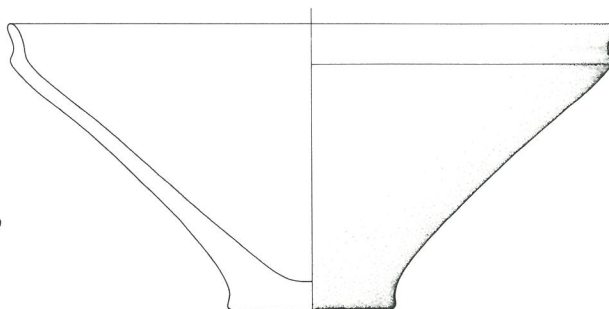
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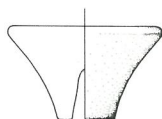
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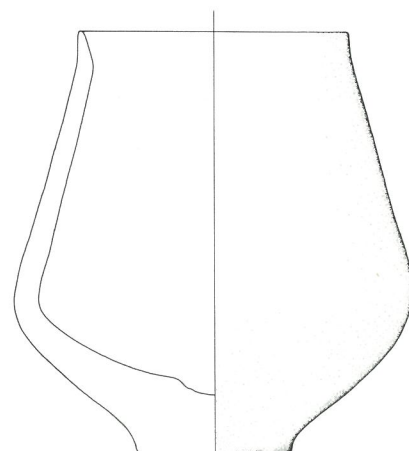
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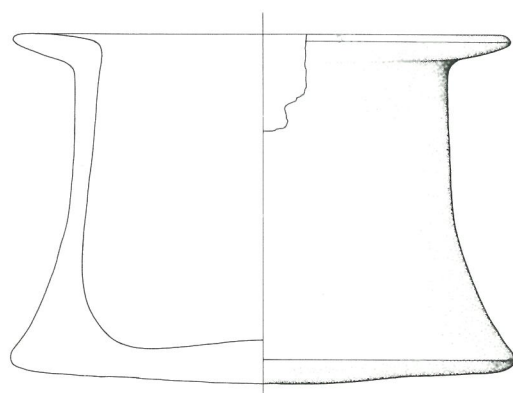
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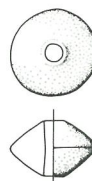
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G. 91/4



G. 91/6

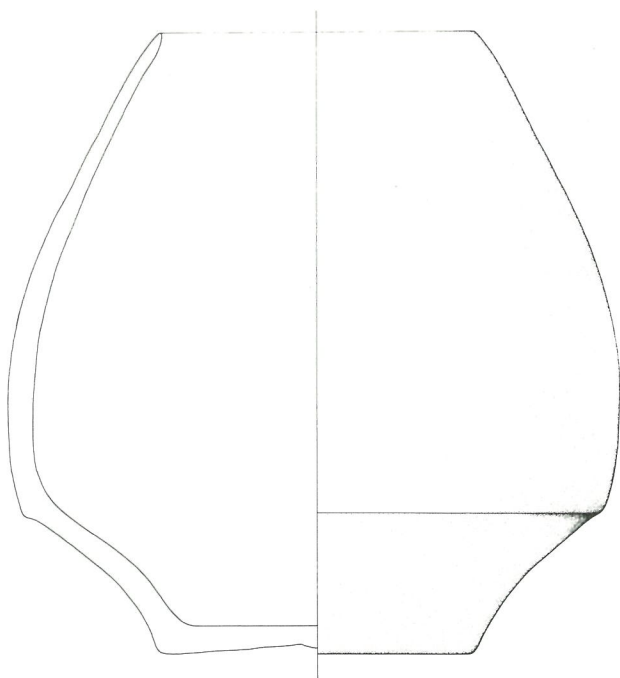


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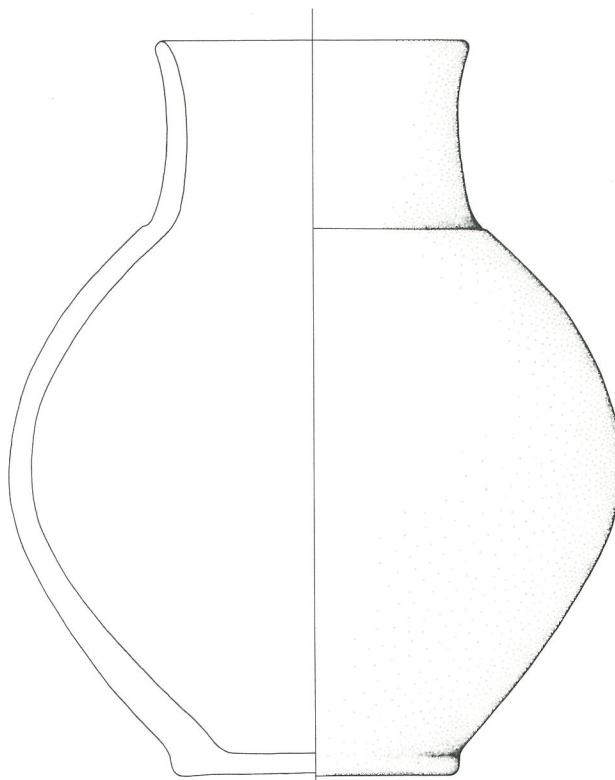


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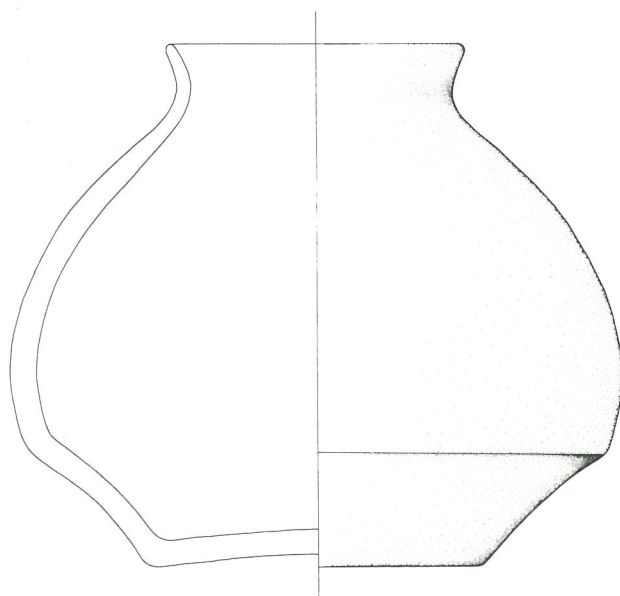
Fig. 10



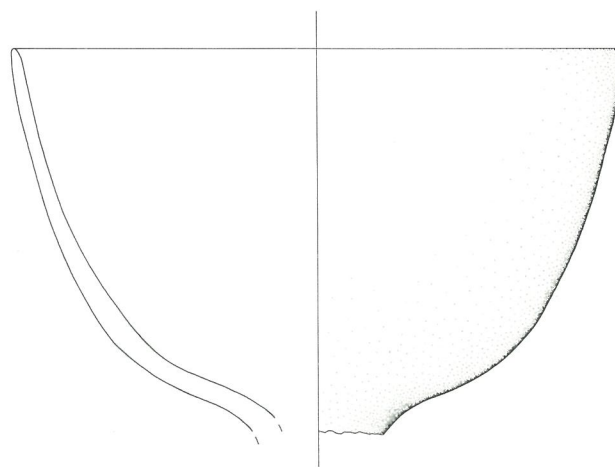
G. 94/1



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G. 94/3



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Fig. 11

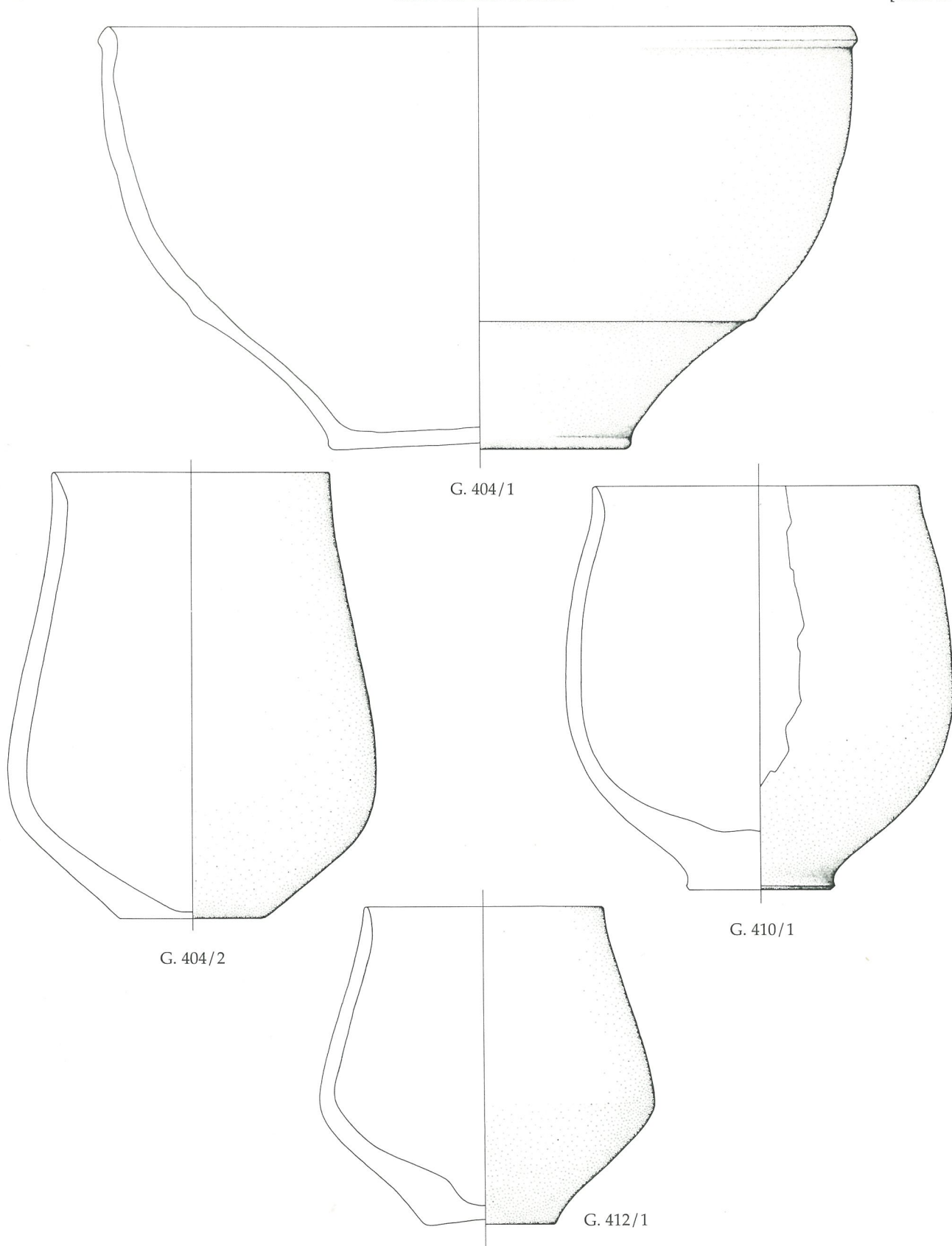


Fig. 12

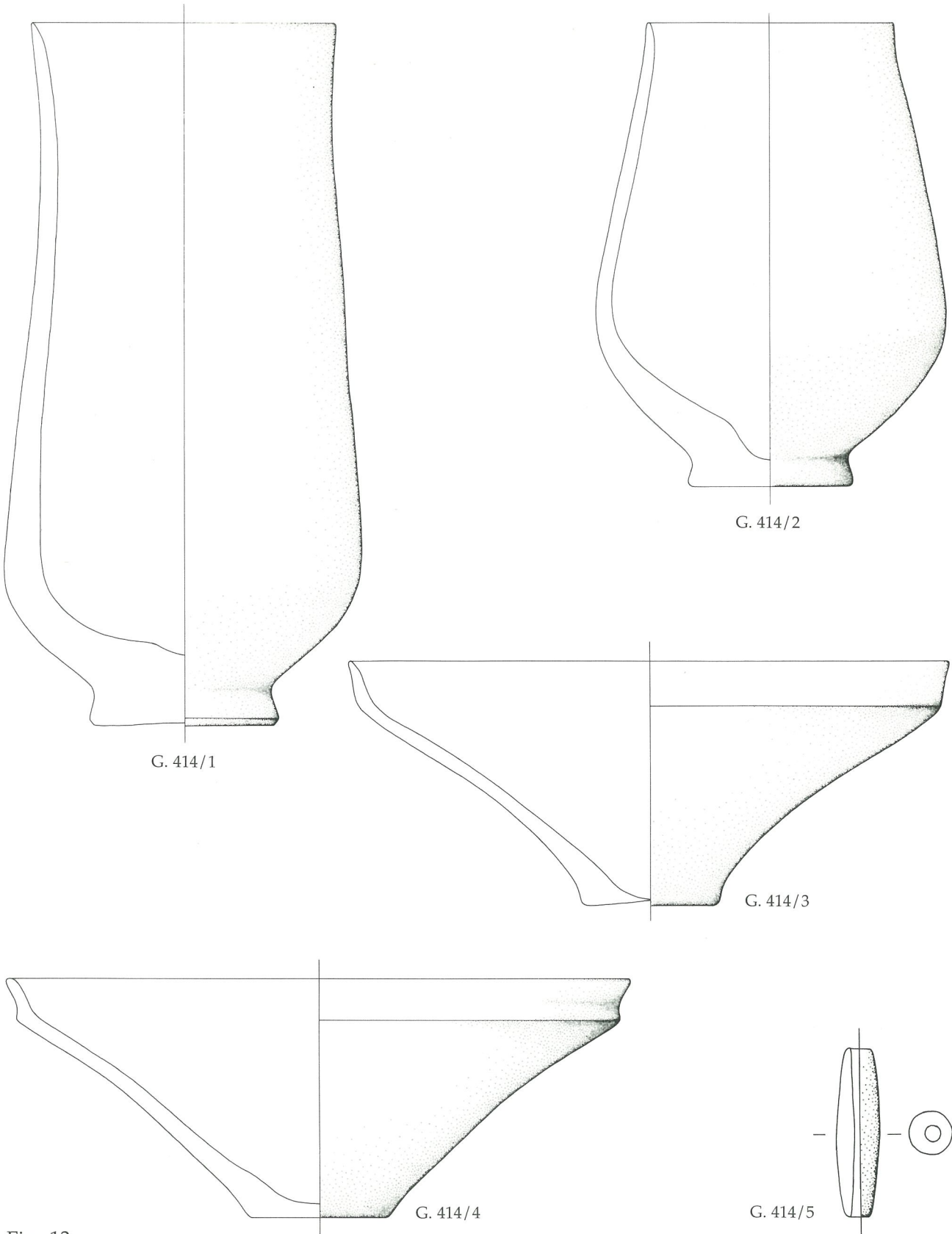


Fig. 13

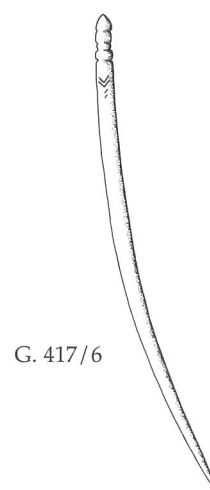
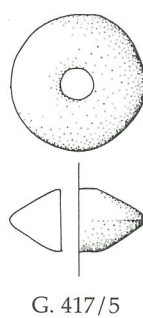
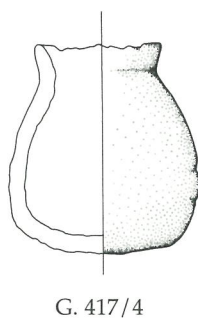
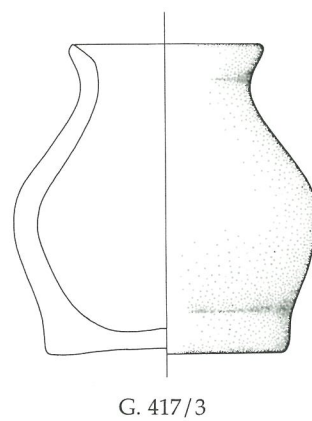
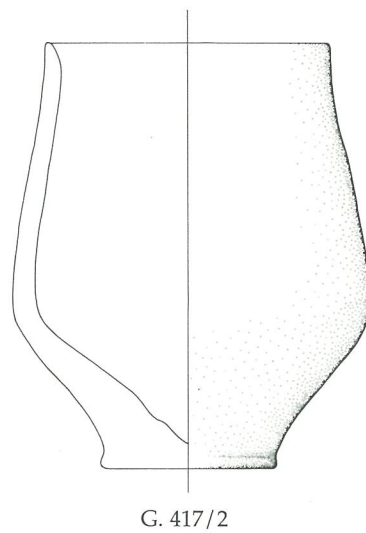
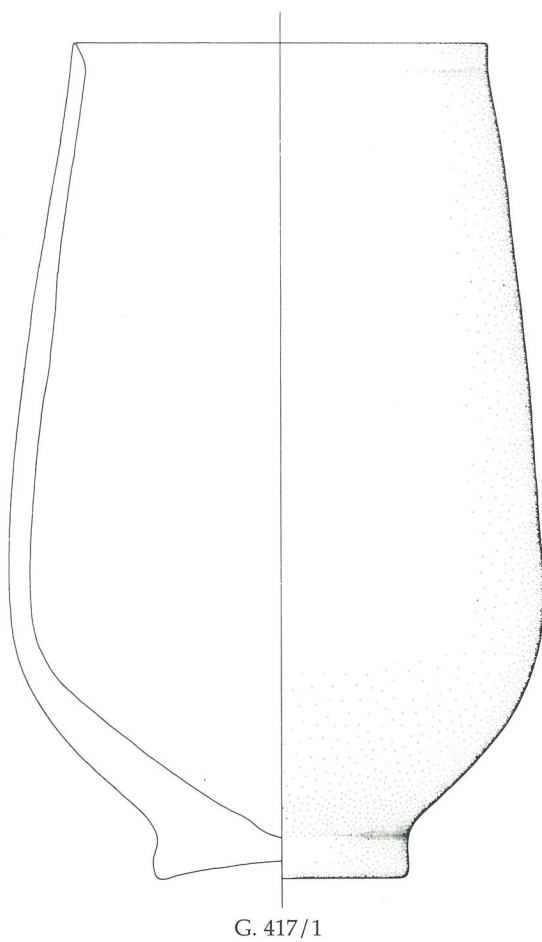
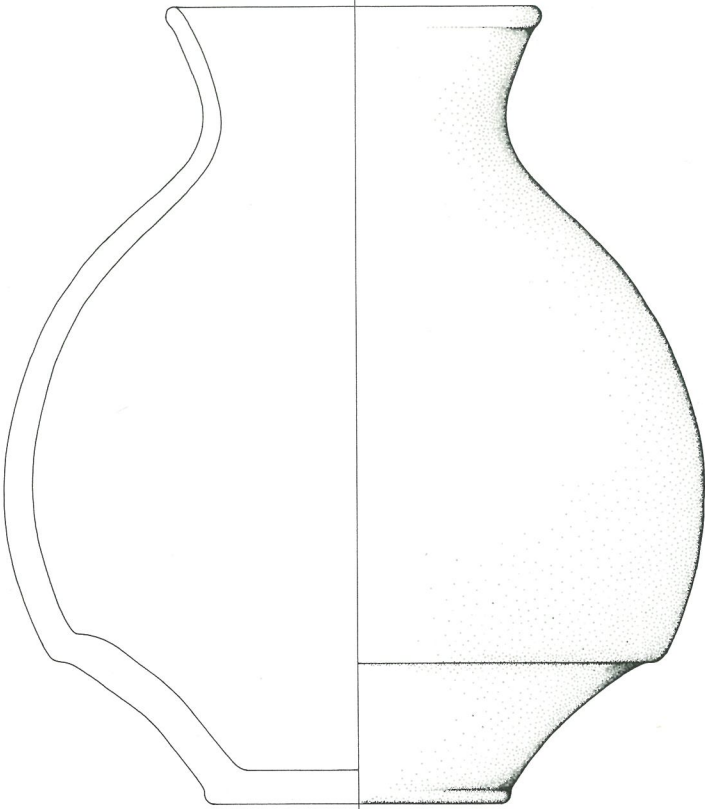
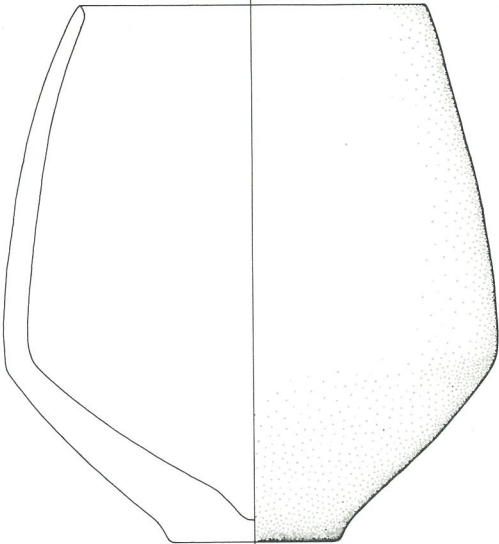


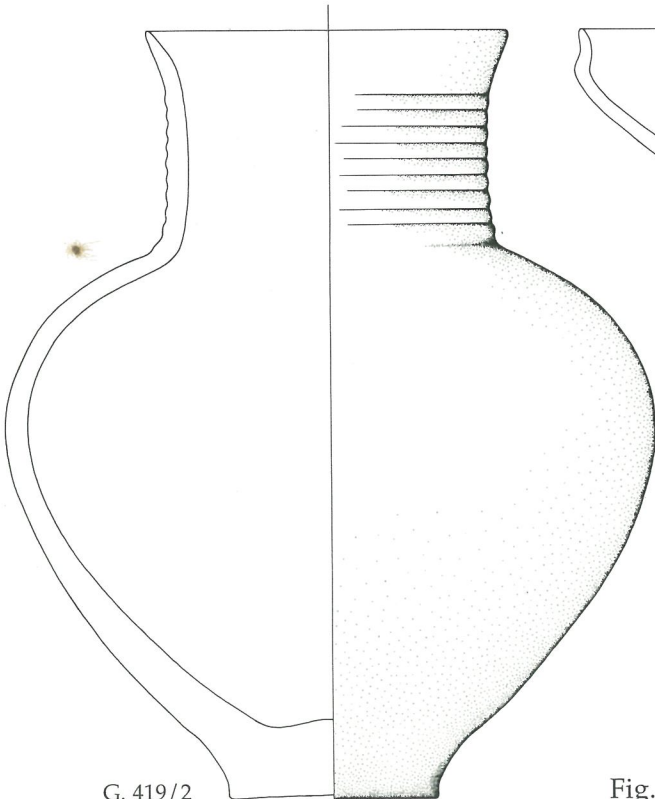
Fig. 14



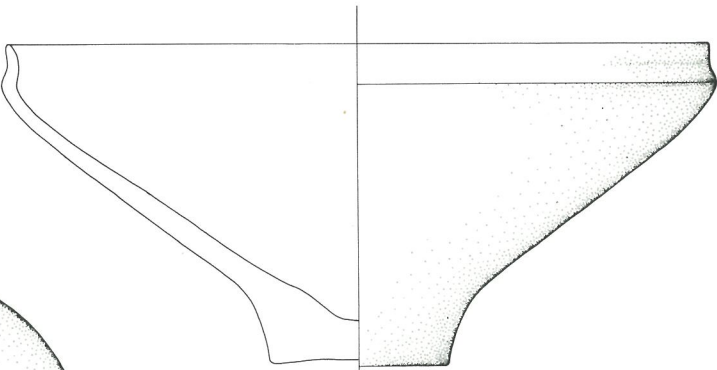
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G. 419/3

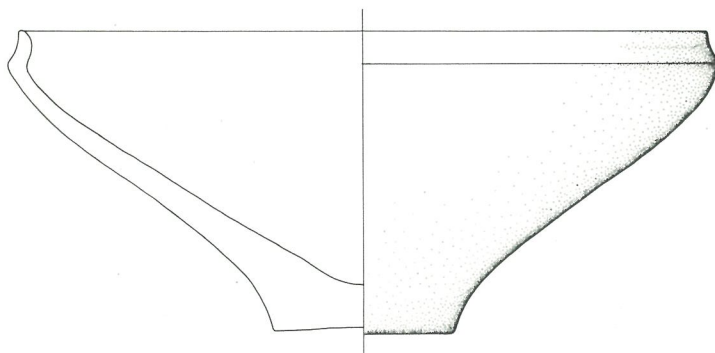


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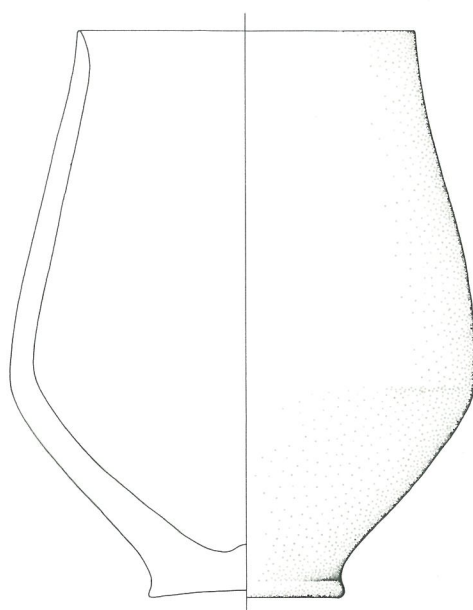


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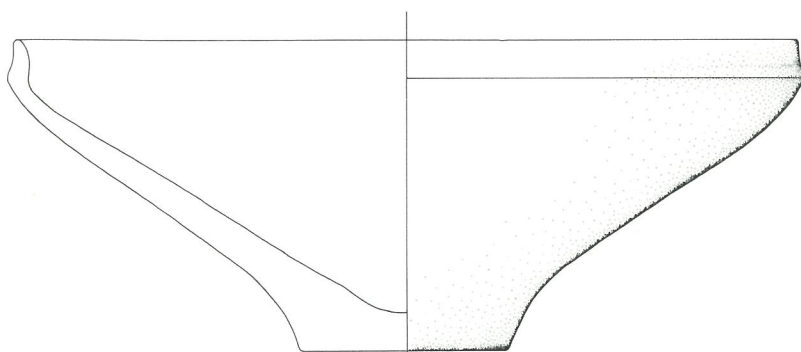
Fig. 15



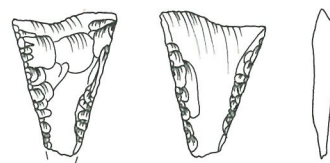
G. 427/2



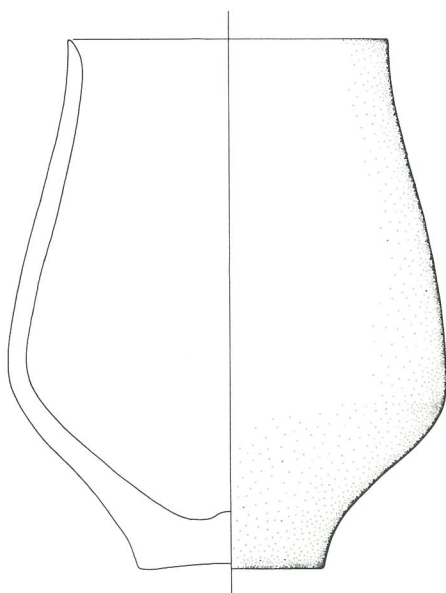
G. 427/5



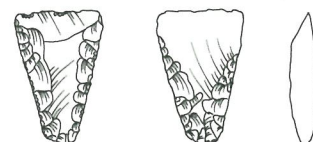
G. 427/3



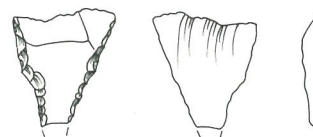
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G. 427/4



G. 427/7

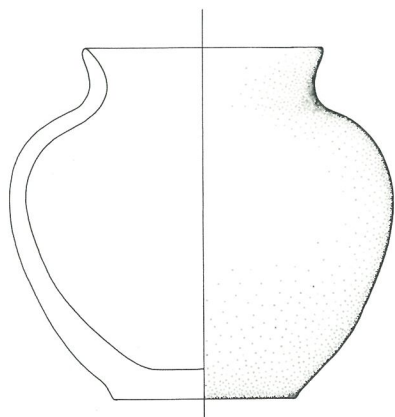


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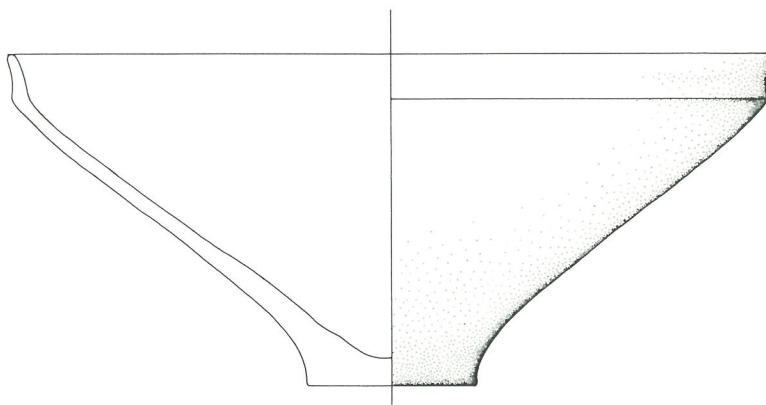


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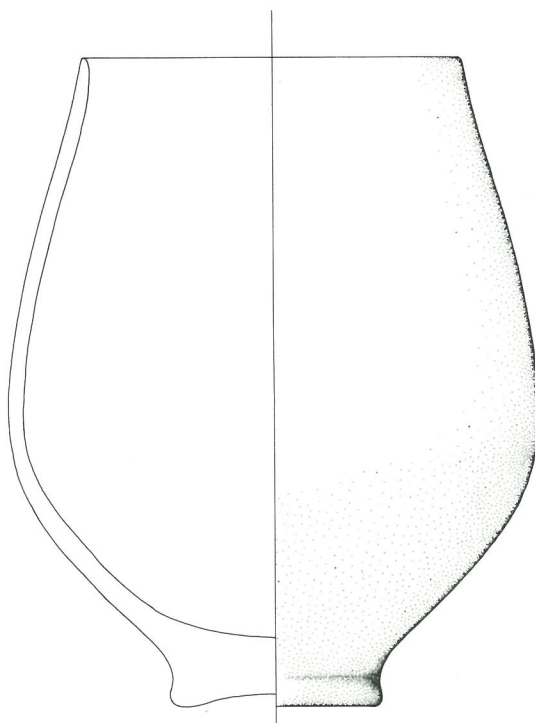
Fig. 16



G. 428/1



G. 429/1



G. 430/1

Fig. 17

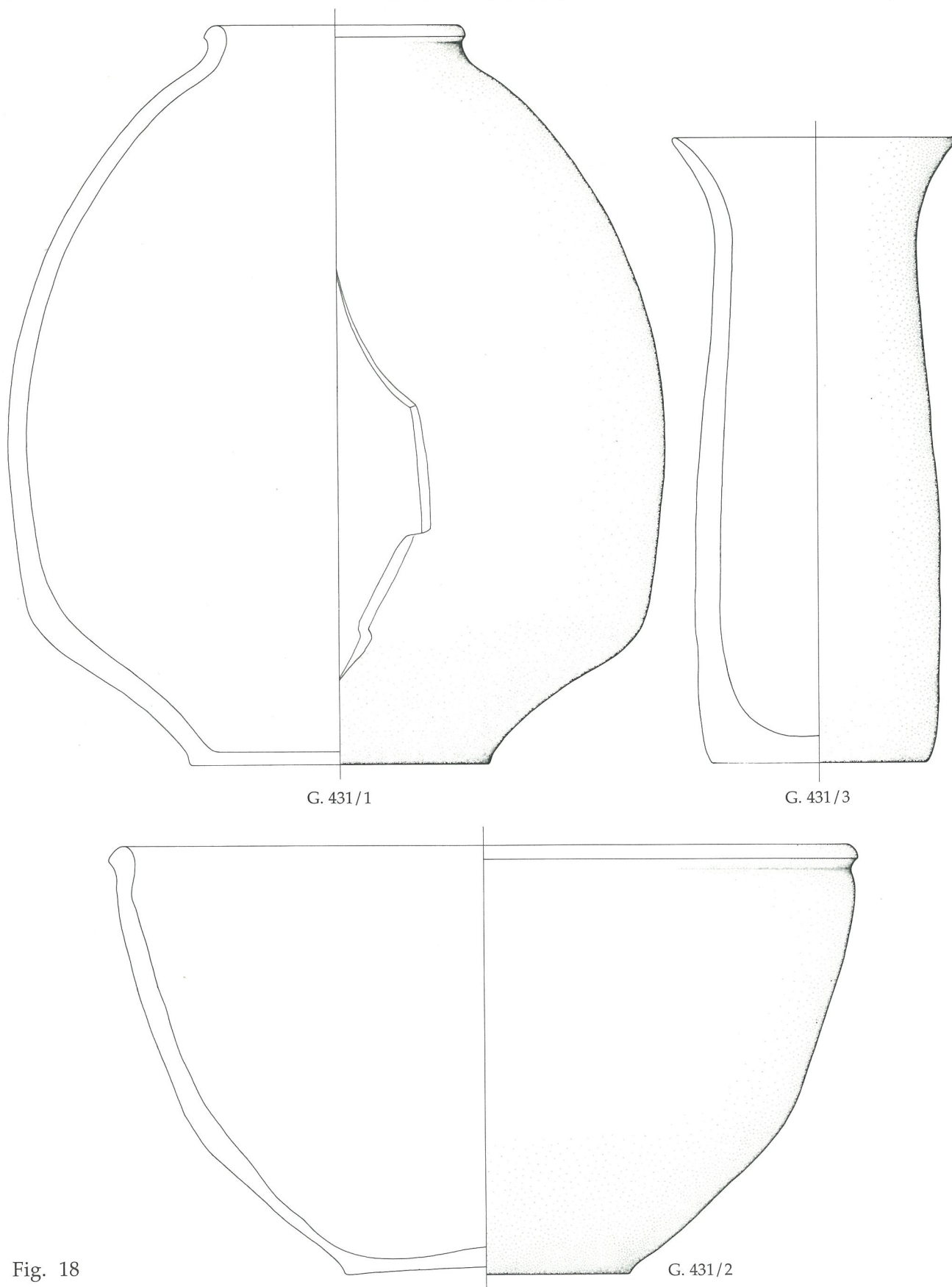


Fig. 18

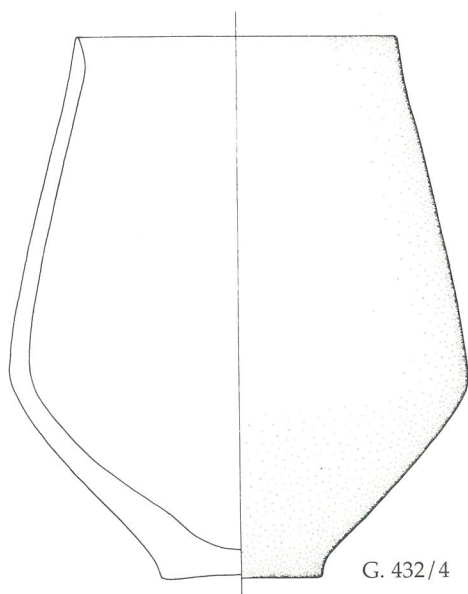
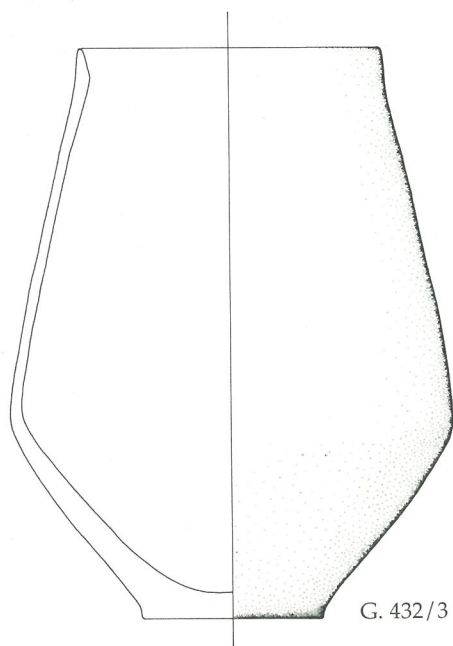
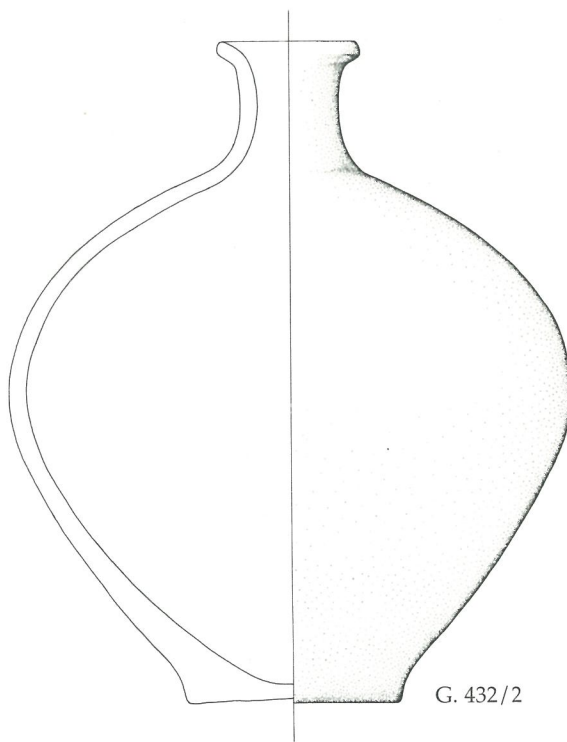
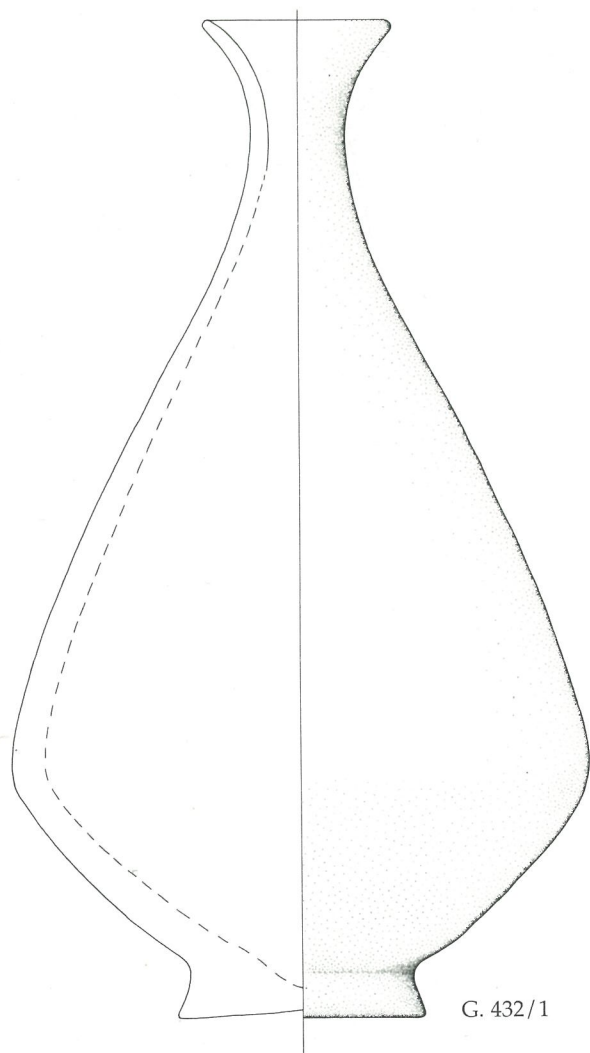
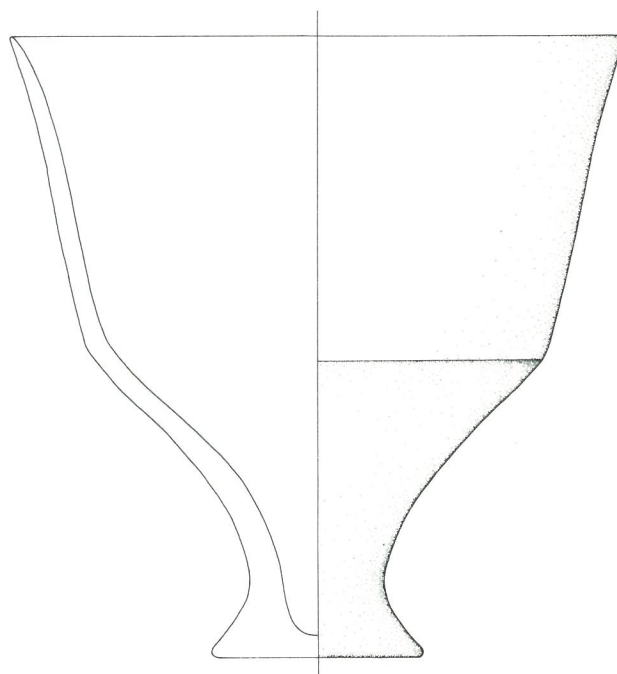
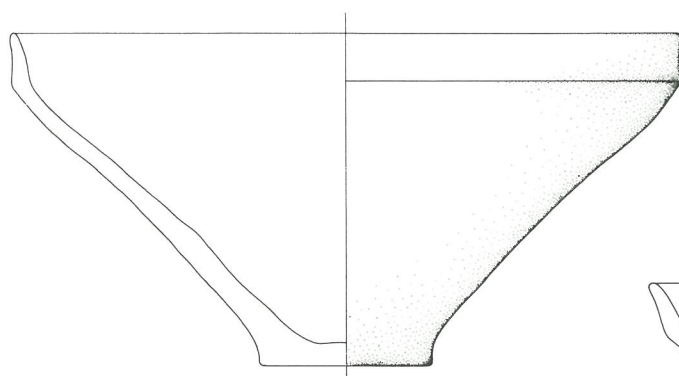


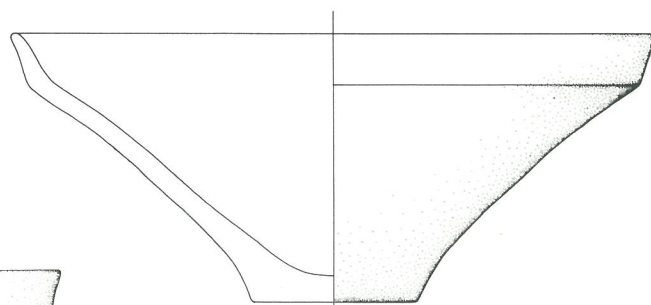
Fig. 19



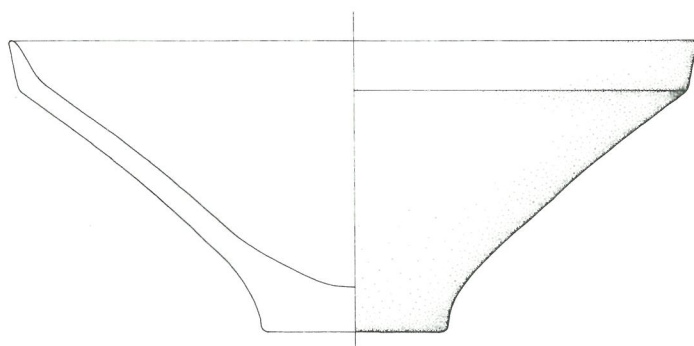
G. 432/5



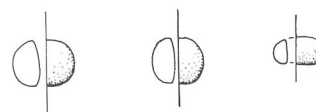
G. 432/6



G. 432/7



G. 432/8



G. 432/9-11

Fig. 20

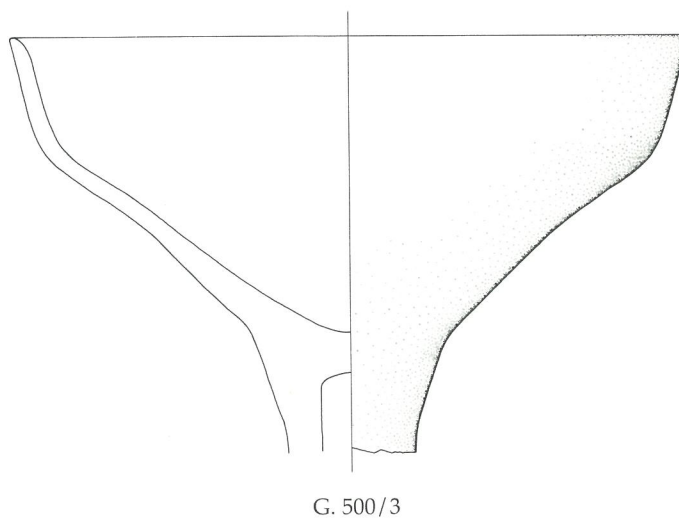
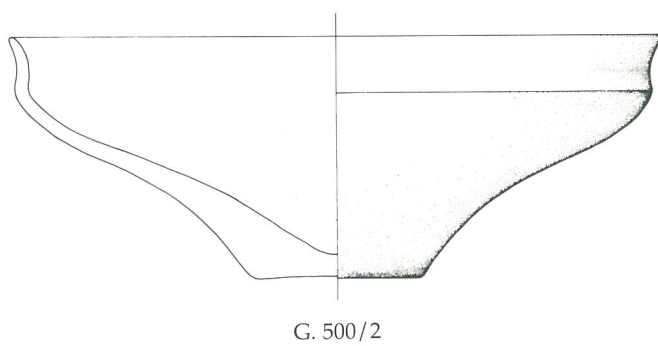
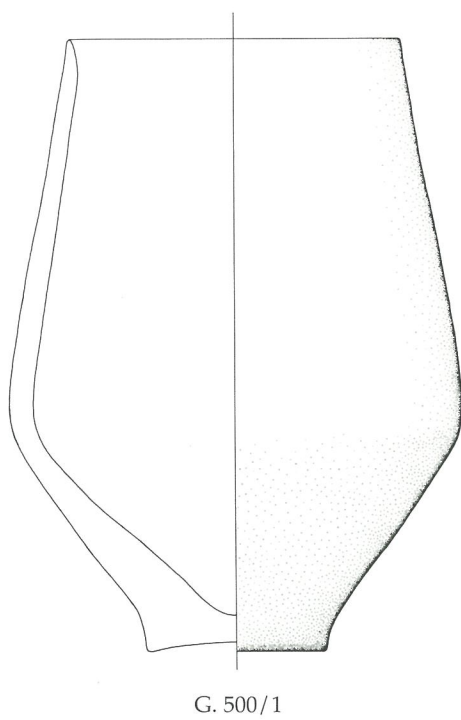
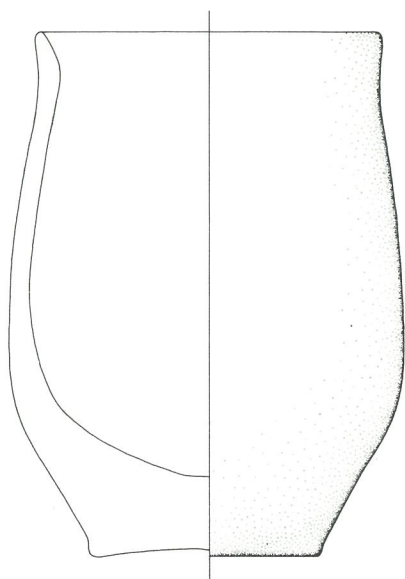
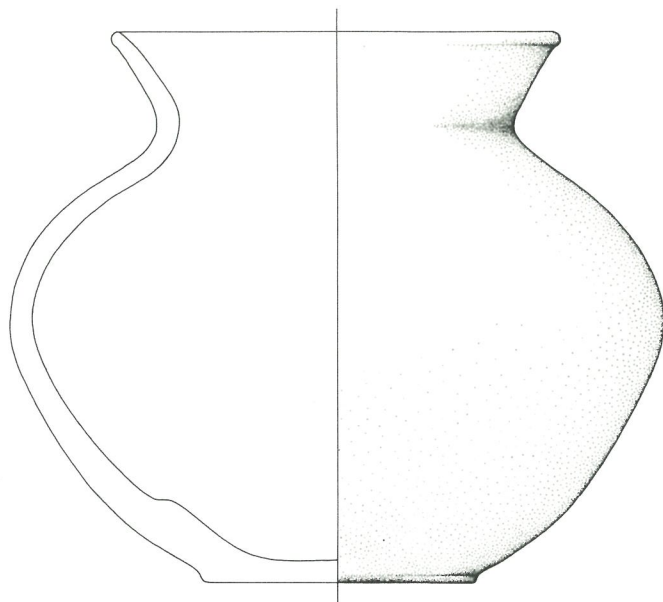


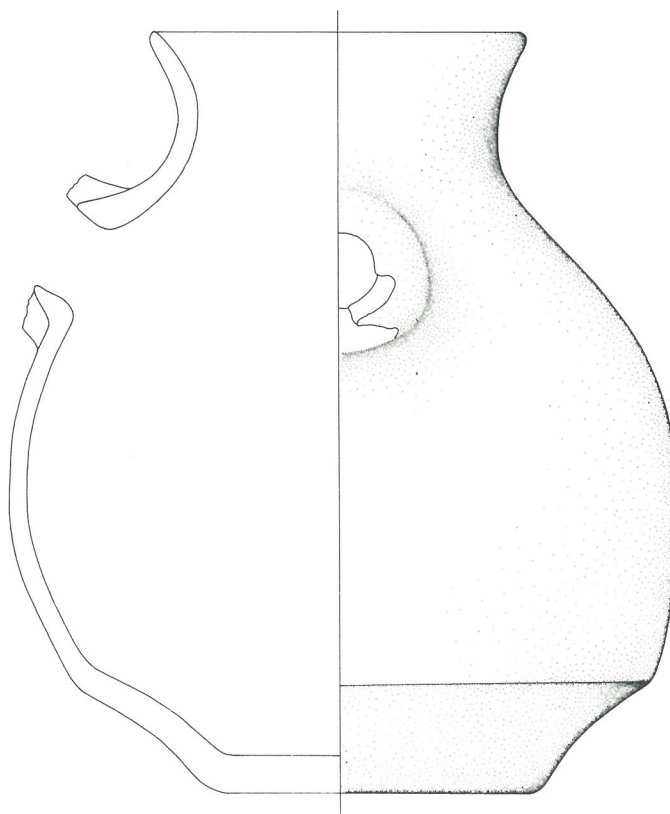
Fig. 21



G.C. 7/1

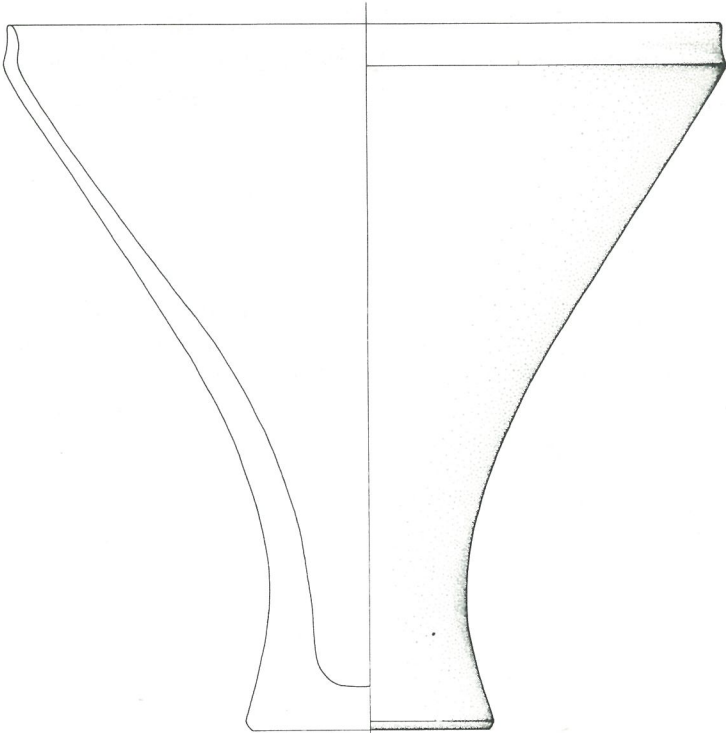


G.C. 7/2

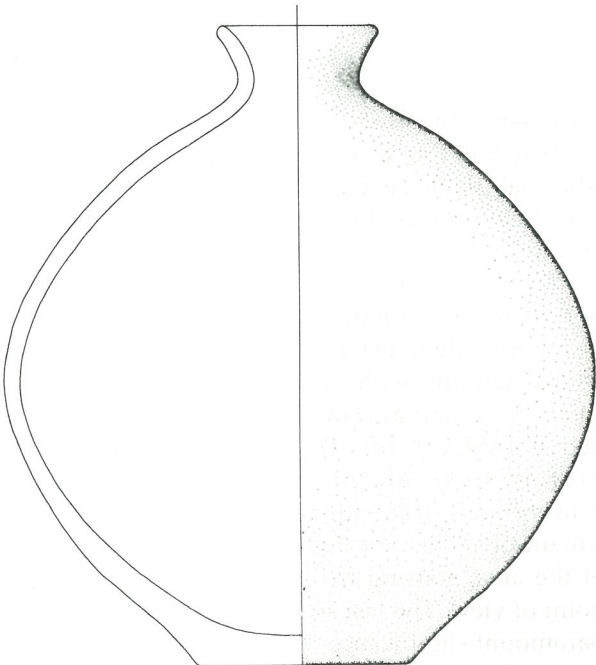


G.C. 7/3

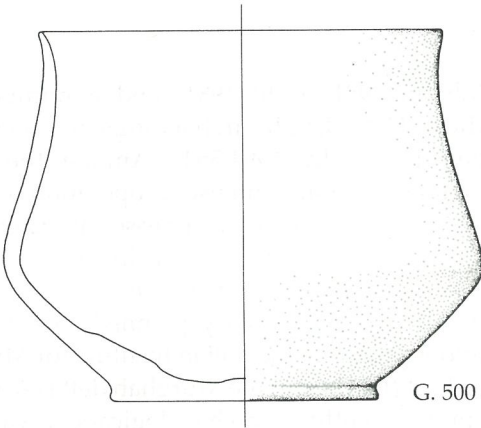
Fig. 22



G.C. 7/4



G.C. 7/5



G. 500 a/1



AREA 500 c/1

Fig. 23