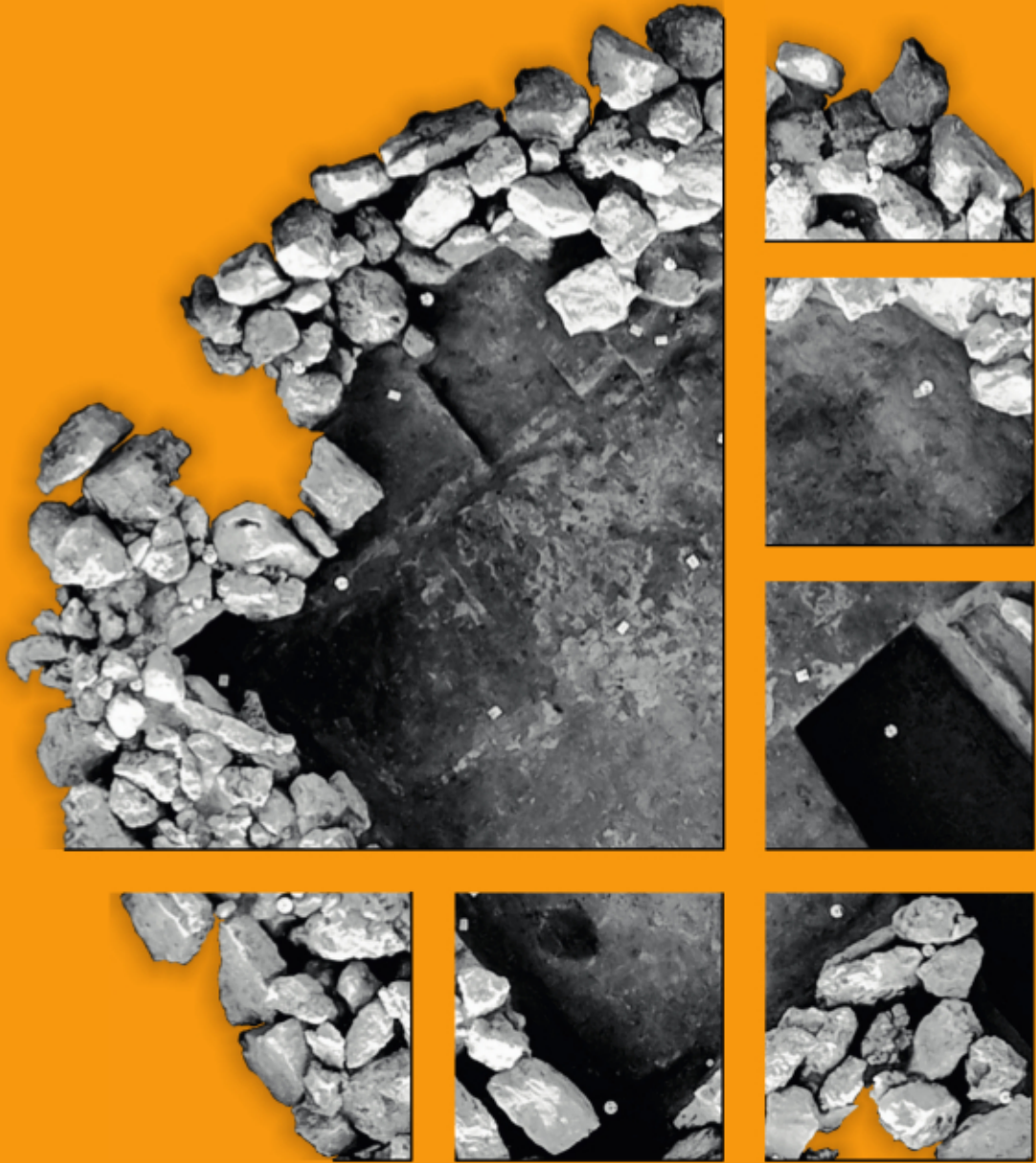


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ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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Secondary use of base rings as drinking vessels in Aquincum

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Abstract

The purpose of this short paper is to discuss evidence concerning the secondary use of a few glass vessels from Aquincum, and to draw attention to an interesting burial custom. When looking at burial patterns and grave goods in Aquincum, an interesting phenomenon can be observed. In some of the graves separately blown base rings of glass vessels were deposited next to the legs of the buried individuals. These objects were originally separately blown, and they most probably belonged to pitchers, but could also be parts of deep bowls of larger capacity. Since the sides are missing, the form of the original vessels remains indefinite. Certainly not all of them belonged to the same category: this is apparent from the sizes of the rings, which are roughly similar, but not entirely the same. Careful excavation of the graves did not yield other, similarly thick pieces of glass – for example fragments of handles and mouth rims of jugs – which should have been otherwise relatively better preserved. It seems that the sides of the vessels were carefully cracked off the base rings, as there are no sharp edges left, however there is no sign of grinding/polishing either. The method of their deposition is also characteristic: they were placed in the graves upside down, which clearly suggests that they were intended as grave offerings, to serve as replacements of glass cups.

The occurrence of such finds was first noted by Paula Zsidi in her report on the excavation of the Kaszásdűlő-Raktárrét cemetery. The site of Kaszásdűlő-Raktárrét lies northwest of the *canabae*, and was used as a cemetery from the 2nd century onwards, but it also includes burials from the 4th century, among them several early Christian graves. However, by the end of the 4th century it was probably already abandoned.¹ The first excavation campaign was conducted by J. Hampel.² In 1978–81, Paula Zsidi excavated 387 graves in total, half of which had no grave goods.³ The earliest graves were dated to the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, but most of them date from the period between the turn of the 2nd/3rd centuries and the end of the 4th century.⁴ Altogether, there were 32 glass objects found in 26 graves in the excavated part of the cemetery.⁵ Base rings were found in three of them (graves no. 230, no. 275 and no. 294), described by P. Zsidi as follows: „As for cups, the following three vessels can be mentioned, which were originally base parts of larger, apparently more decorative vessels, and when the upper parts had been damaged the bases could be still used as cups. Apparently, an effort was made to

1 TOPÁL 2003, 164; ZSIDI 1996, 17–48.

2 HAMPEL 1891, 48–80.

3 ZSIDI 1996–1997, 41.

4 ZSIDI 1996–1997, 41.

5 ZSIDI 1984; ZSIDI 1990.

*make them safe for use, by cracking the sharp splinters off the base.*⁶ Among the three vessels mentioned hereby, one is from a grave of a subadult, the second is from a burial of a female and the third is from the grave of a male individual. In the first and second cases, the objects were placed next to the leg. In the third case, the base ring was found on the hip of the skeleton.⁷

The western cemetery of the *canabae* is situated at no. 271 Bécsi Street. Part of it was found in 2007 during a rescue excavation conducted by T. Budai-Balogh, bringing to light altogether 40 inhumations.⁸ In a brick-walled grave of a 25–29 years old male individual two base rings were detected next to the left foot. The *terminus post quem* of this burial is established by a *foliis* of I Constantinus, dating from 314 – so this was a Late Roman grave.⁹ The base rings were placed in the grave upside down (*Fig 1.1*), so they were clearly meant to replace a cup-offering. No other fragments of of these vessel were found, but the removal of further segments by cracking them off the base could be again clearly attested.

In 2005–2007 G. Lassányi conducted rescue excavations during the construction works of the Graphisoft Park in the area of the Óbudai Gázgyár, where the eastern cemetery of the civil town of Aquincum was situated.¹⁰ In 2006, 860 burials were excavated, 491 of which were inhumations, with a high frequency of superpositions due to long term use.¹¹ In the next season another 302 graves were unearthed, of which 133 were inhumations.¹² The new results considerably enlarged our knowledge concerning the eastern cemetery of the civil town.¹³ On the whole more than 1330 graves came to light. Most of the burials can be dated to late 1st–3rd century AD, and only few graves can be dated later than the late 3rd–early 4th century AD.¹⁴ The analysis of these graves is underway, but according to the collected data, the Late Roman burials with grave goods can be dated latest back to the second half of the 3rd century and possibly to the beginning of the 4th century.¹⁵ In the area of Graphisoft Park four base rings were found in three graves (no. 27, no. 741, no. 1317) (*Fig 2.5*). Again, it was clear that only the base parts of the vessels were put in the graves. All of these graves belonged to subadult individuals.

In the grave no. 27 two base rings were found (2005.6.222. and 2005.6.919.). One of them was made of green glass (2005.6.919) (*Fig 2.3, Fig 4.1–3*), and was of good quality. It is a separately blown base ring of a pitcher, used in a secondary context as a drinking cup. The sides of the vessel were not cracked off the base carefully enough. There is also a pontil mark at the bottom of the base (diameter: 1,09 cm). Other measurements are as follows: diameter (at the bottom): 7,9 cm; height:

6 ZSIDI 1984, 250.

7 ZSIDI 1984, 116, 134, 145.

8 BUDAI BALOGH 2008, 40–56; BUDAI BALOGH 2009, 93–100. With sincere gratitude, I hereby thank the field archaeologist for allowing me to examine the finds.

9 I thank T. Budai-Balogh for providing me the data.

10 LASSÁNYI 2007; LASSÁNYI 2008; LASSÁNYI 2010. I hereby thank G. Lassányi for allowing me to process the finds. Numerous excavations were conducted from 1997 to 2001 on this territory in parallel with the constuction of Graphisoft Park. ZSIDI 1997; 1998; 1999; 2001.

11 LASSÁNYI 2007.

12 LASSÁNYI 2008.

13 Funded by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA) in the framework of the project „The Study of Archaeological materials from the Eastern cemetery of the Civic Town of Aquincum” (OTKA K100956, lead researcher: G. Lassányi).

14 LASSÁNYI – VASS 2015, 172.

15 LASSÁNYI – VASS 2015, 174.

5,2 cm; diameter (at the top): 7,22 cm. The other base ring (2005.6.222.) was of colourless, good quality glass. The measurements are as follows: diameter (at the bottom): 4,27 cm. The second example is very small and flat. These base rings were not intended to be used as drinking vessels, therefore their function is problematic. The burial of a subadult individual contained two base rings, which were placed in the grave upside down nearby the right feet with a terracotta mould negative for making votive figurine (Fig 3.3–4).

The other two objects (2006.5.4208. and 2006.5.4213) too are of colourless blown glass, and are also of good quality (Fig 2.1–2, Fig 5.1–4). These other base rings also belonged to pitchers, and were used in a secondary context as drinking cups: the side walls were removed from the ring carefully. The rings were separately blown, and they have a tubular shape. The bottoms are concave, and have a pontil mark (diameter: 1,238 cm). Measurements: 2006.5.4208: diameter (at the bottom): 6,75 cm; height: 5,2 cm; diameter (at the top): 6,2 cm. 2006.5.4213: diameter (at the bottom): 6,6 cm; height: 5,4 cm; diameter (at the top): 6,1 cm. Grave no. 741 contained these two, above mentioned separately blown base rings next to the left leg bones together with two small unguent bottles. The grave of a 4-5 years old infant individual (girl), the base rings were placed in the grave upside down (Fig 3.1–2). There also was a relatively rich burial (grave no. 788) with four glass vessels and plenty of opaque glass beads, as well as a bronze bracelet and an antoninian bronze coin. Grave no. 741 lay transversely with grave no. 788, containing rich find material, for example a North African red slip jug, a fine glass jug with oval body and also two unguent bottles.¹⁶ It seems that these two graves belong to the same horizon of the second half of the 3rd century.

Grave no 1317. also yielded a separately blown base ring (Fig 2.4, Fig 4.4–5). The grave contained the body of a child lying flat on its back (Fig 3.5–6). The base ring laid at the right foot and under the glass object two bronze rings were found. The base ring was of colourless, bad quality glass (2010.7.11). The sides of the vessel were carefully cracked off the base ring used in a secondary context as drinking cup. The measurements are as follows: diameter (at the bottom): 7,8 cm; height: 5,61 cm; diameter (at the top): 7,2 cm. There is also a pontil mark at the bottom of the base (diameter: 1,1 cm).

Separately blown base rings of large jugs were undoubtedly suitable for secondary use: to be used as glass cups (since they had a capacity of about 0,1 l), but it may also be supposed that their re-use was only intended for funerary practices, as a 'cost-efficient' solution. Furthermore, we may assume that this practice basically occurred in children's graves, however there are also many examples from the graves of adults. This point is illustrated by the abovementioned example from the western cemetery of the *canabae*, where two such base rings were found lying next to each other beside the legs of a male individual – again, these were the only parts of the vessels found in the grave.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that similarly detailed observations are only possible when appropriate archaeological recording techniques are applied, which is more often the case recently. As for past excavations, fragments of glass objects were not collected systematically, some could have been disposed and only larger or more characteristic pieces were kept.

¹⁶ LASSÁNYI – VÁMOS 2011, 150–157.

¹⁷ BUDAI BALOGH 2009, 93–100.

In summary, the above described examples of separately blown base rings were all deposited in secondary contexts: they were used as drinking vessels and placed in graves as funerary objects. There are altogether nine of them (from seven graves) illustrating that this phenomenon became a custom in Roman Aquincum. Previous assumptions that these objects occurred only in children's graves cannot be confirmed, though four graves out of seven including base rings belonged to subadult individuals. However it can be demonstrated that the custom appears in Late Roman times, as all of our examples date from this period (principally the second part of the 3rd century, probably the first half of the 4th century). The reuse of broken items for funerary purposes is indicative of this period, when placing more expensive glass cups in the graves became more and more unaffordable. One may conclude, that the custom developed as a cost-efficient – and undoubtedly very practical – funerary practice in the cemeteries of Aquincum, and became characteristic in Late Roman times due to deteriorating economic conditions. In the case of two graves there were two examples of separately blown base rings in the same burial. This is a very interesting custom, however the reason for it is not clear.

In order to properly observe and compare these findings, new well-documented excavations are necessary. During earlier research only the most characteristic parts of vessels were preserved. In certain graves thick and solid bases of long, narrow, pipette shaped unguent bottles (*Fig 1.2*)¹⁸ can be found without any sharp edges on the body. These round, solid bottoms might have had a secondary use as stoppers.

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18 BARKÓCZI 1988, Form 103; ISINGS 1957, form 105; GOETHERT-POLASCHEK 1977, Form 85; COOL-PRICE 1995, Fig. 86; HARTER 1999, D18b; DE TOMASSO 1990, Tipo 57.

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Fig. 1. 1. Separately blown base rings from 271 Bécsi street, Aquincum (Photo: P. Komjáthy). 2. Solid bases of long, narrow, pipette shaped unguent bottles (Photo: K. Dévai).

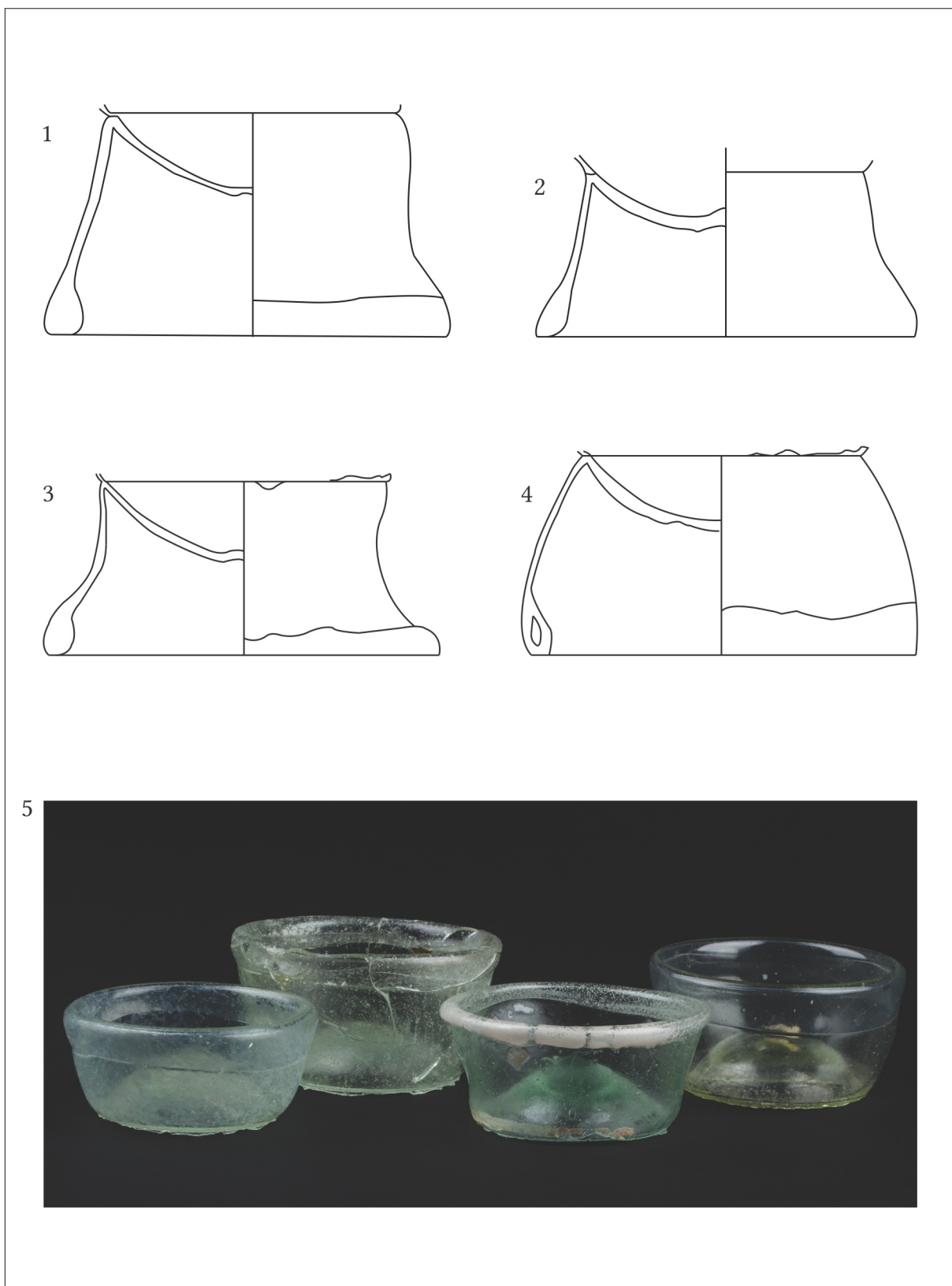


Fig. 2. Separately blown base ring from the cemetery of Aquincum, Graphisoft Park. 1. Inv. no.: 2006.5.4208. 2. Inv. no.: 2006.5.4213. 3. Inv. no.: 2005.6.919. 4. Inv. no.: 2010.7.11. 5. Separately blown base rings from the cemetery of Aquincum, Graphisoft Park (Photo: N. Szilágyi).



Fig. 3. Separately blown base rings from the cemetery of Aquincum, Graphisoft Park. 1–2. Grave 741 (Photo: Gábor Lassányi). 3–4. Grave 27 (Photo: G. Lassányi). 5–6. Grave 1317 (Photo: G. Lassányi).

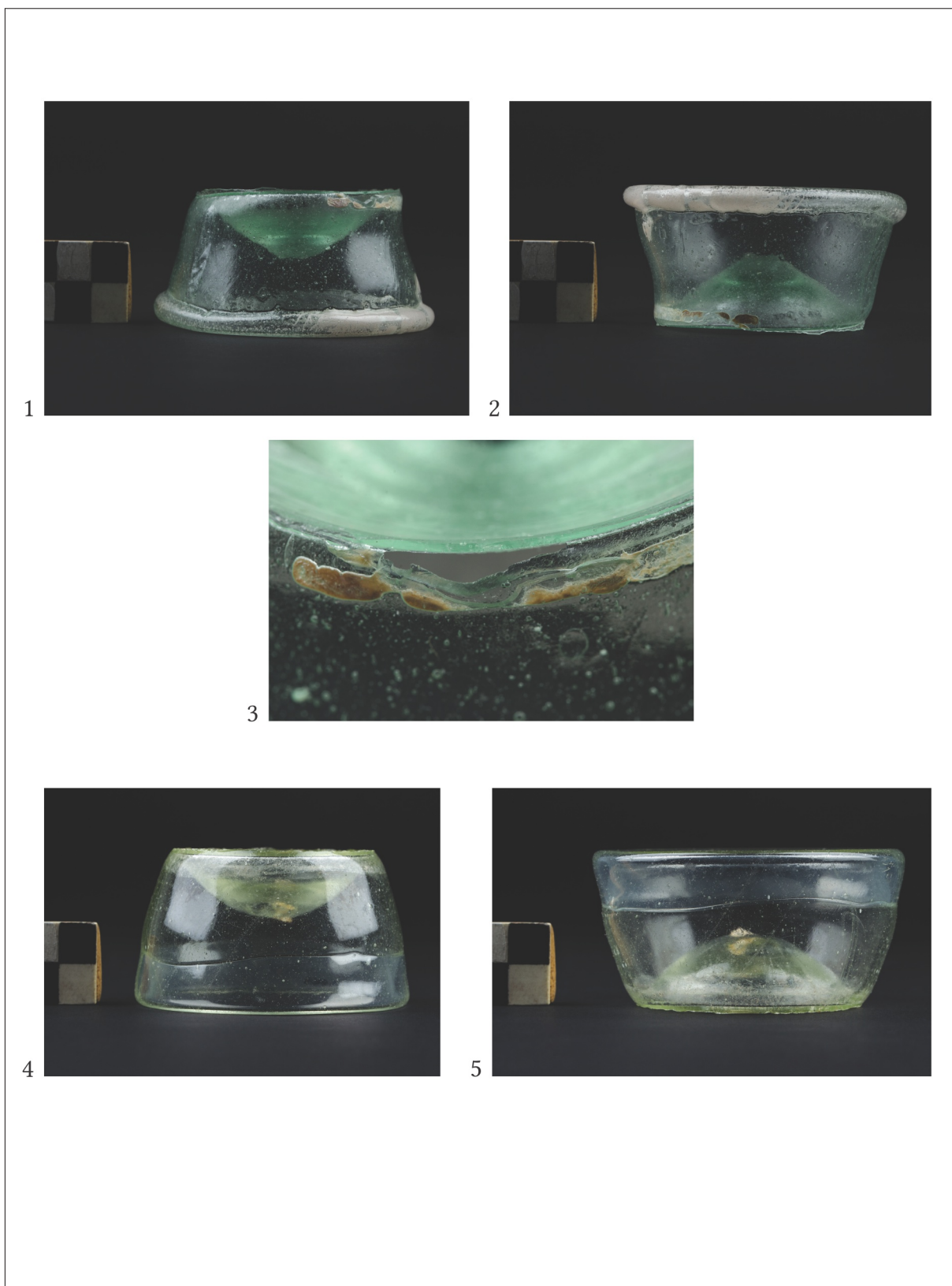
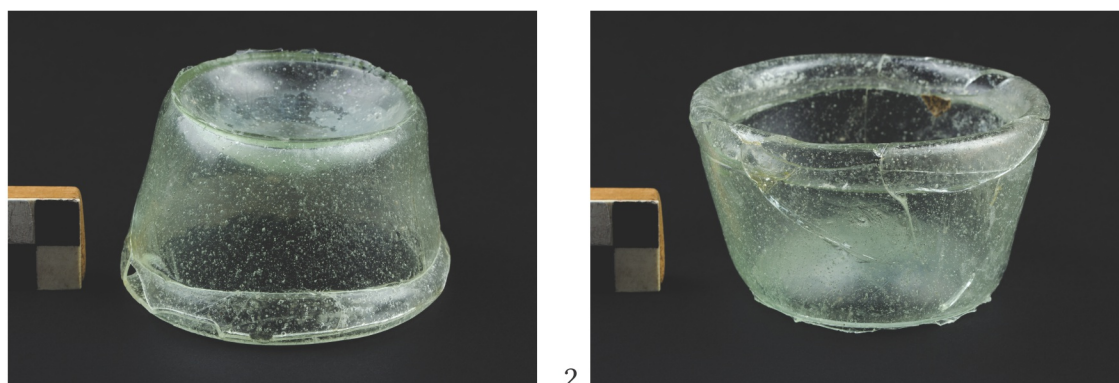


Fig. 4. Separately blown base ring from the cemetery of Aquincum, Graphisoft Park. 1–3. Inv. no.: 2005.6.919 (Photo: N. Szilágyi). 4–5. Inv. no.: 2010.7.11 (Photo: N. Szilágyi).



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Fig. 5. Separately blown base ring from the cemetery of Aquincum, Graphisoft Park. 1–2. Inv. no.: 2006.5.4208 (Photo: N. Szilágyi). 3–4. Inv. no.: 2006.5.4213 (Photo: N. Szilágyi).