

VIVERE MILITARE EST

FROM POPULUS TO EMPERORS - LIVING ON THE FRONTIER
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CERAMIC VESSELS AS GRAVE GOODS IN THE NECROPOLISES OF VIMINACIUM*

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ABSTRACT

During the decades-long research of the Viminacium necropolises, numerous ceramic vessels were discovered in graves of cremated and inhumated individuals. Their research helps to a better understanding of not only funeral rituals, but also the everyday life, customs and economy of the ancient population. The wide repertoire of discovered vessels indicates developed trade links with other parts of the Empire. The majority of these vessels represent local products, which indicates the inventiveness of domestic potters who supplied all of the Viminacium necropolises with their products. The paper presents an overview of the most common forms and types of vessels discovered in Viminacium graves and whose timeframe covers the period from the 1st to the 4th century AD.

KEYWORDS. – CREMATION, INHUMATION, GRAVE, NECROPOLIS, POTTERY VESSEL, BOWL, POT, PLATE, GOBLET, CENSER, ANTIQUITY, VIMINACIUM.

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Ceramic vessels discovered across Viminacium's necropolises provide us with information of great significance in the understanding and grasping of not only the idea of the afterlife of its residents at the time, but also their daily life, economic status and ethnicity.

Through the change in form, ornamentation and workmanship techniques, as well as the chemical composition of the ceramic, it is possible to track the development of the material culture of Roman provinces. The abundance of such material has been unearthed during the decades-long research of Viminacium, its necropolises and the settlements east of Viminacium. As grave goods, ceramic vessels have been registered in large numbers. The research of the crafts centre in the southern necropolises confirmed the location from which they were supplied with the ceramic grave goods and from which the local population obtained pottery necessary in daily life.

The largest portion of the discovered vessels has analogies in form and usage across the Roman Empire. According to them, a clear picture of their usage, ubiquity and frequency is obtained. Modern petrological analyses can determine the common characteristics of the vessels, as well as their differences. We are now able to track the routes of distribution of the final products to other parts of the Empire.

Depending on their function, ceramic vessels can be classified as tableware, storage, transportation or cooking vessels, and special-purpose vessels. The reliably dated forms from the archaeological units, the graves in which these vessels were discovered, together with certain forms of jewellery and, most importantly, coins, are of greatest significance in establishing their chronology. Not all of the shapes found in the graves have been confirmed in the settlement layers. Although most of the graves were looted during the period of Antiquity or in modern times, or damaged by machinery prior to the discovery of the sites, the ceramic material still appears in quantities large enough to give us an idea of life in those times. The most common grave goods belong to tableware and cooking vessels. The vessels used for transportation most often functioned as urns, mostly in the form of a recipient for laying an infant in, while they rarely appear as grave covers (Fig. 1). The types of ceramic vessels used for storage appear in tombs as grave goods least frequently.

What is typical of the vessels discovered in graves, whether in inhumation or cremation burials, is that they are mostly the products of local craftsmen; there are few imported, luxurious vessels. Occasional finds of *terra sigillata* vessels are



Fig. 1. Amphora with the role of a grave cover

an exception, not a regular occurrence in Viminacium's necropolises. With the formation of the settlements, the population became more diverse in terms of the existing occupations; primarily, there appeared tradesmen who supplied the settlement with their goods, while *canabae*, where the soldiers' families were lodged, began to emerge around the military camp. Hence, different types of burials interweaved in the necropolises of Viminacium.

The economic crisis following the Marcomannic wars is reflected in the decline in production; however, it is not noticeable in the ceramic material from Viminacium. A rise in local production occurred at that time, due to the shortage of quality vessels. Around the end of the 2nd and during the 3rd century, there occurred a rapid development of crafts in Viminacium. Having met the needs of the local population, the craft centres began to further distribute their goods to other regions and provinces, while the proximity of the Danube facilitated the transportation.

Since the necropolises surrounding Viminacium emerged at different times and functioned over shorter or longer periods, a wide variety of ceramic vessels has been unearthed in them, encompassing the period from the 1st until the end of the 4th century.

The foundation of the castrum in Viminacium is associated with the arrival of the VII *Claudia* legion in the 70's of the 1st century. The earliest period of the necropolises in Viminacium was confirmed by the coins of Augustus, Nerva and Vespasian. Coins of several emperors appear in the graves, indicating that not only the currencies of the time, but also earlier ones were laid in the graves as grave goods. There are even graves in which that span stretches across 300 years (G1-337 from Više grobalja). The most common chronological framework observed in the graves with currencies from different periods encompasses a span of 50 to 100 years.¹ Though scarce, the luxurious *terra sigillata* forms of bowls, plates and goblets represent the earliest phase of the necropolises with vessels. These are the Drag. 35 and Drag. 36 forms (Drawing 1), and their local imitations appear even in this early phase. Drag. 33 (Drawing 2) forms from the necropolis of Više grobalja also belong to the last quarter of the 1st century.² There is also an unusual find of an imported plate, from an inhumation burial, dated to the second half of the 1st century and made using the *terra sigillata* technique, the Drag. 17b type. (Drawing 3) The influence of Aquileia and Emona is noticed in the vessels that remind of the imported ones by their form (Više grobalja, C-7479 G1-1068). Such bowls appear from the end of the 1st to the middle of the 2nd century. Bowls decorated with marbling, which imitate the forms of glass and marble vessels, also appear. Thin walled bowls with a calotte-shaped recipient are the most typical vessels of the earliest period of Viminacium's necropolises. There are several types of bowls and goblets made of highly refined clay and decorated with barbotine patterns (Drawings 4, 5 and 6). One of them is an ovoid goblet with a slanting, ribbed rim and a ring-shaped profile at the base. They were made of medium-refined red fired clay, with the outer surface painted in red tones. The decoration is made with barbotine and a pounce wheel. Then, there are goblets with a thin walled spherical bowl, and a slanting, short stem, made of highly refined white fired clay. Such goblets are decorated by either faceting or barbotine (Drawing 7). The ornamentation can appear in the form of stylised leaves. Although they are a local product, the influence of Pannonian products is noticeable.³ The appearance of three jugs in cremation burials is registered as early as with Domitian's coins. This custom of depositing three vessels of the same shape was retained in later

1 Vojvoda, Mrdić 2015, 19.

2 Bjelajac, 1990, 134.

3 Brukner 1981, 36.



Fig. 2. Example of three jugs in the grave

periods, too, throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Fig. 2). Tombs with two ceramic pitchers and one ceramic or glass balsamarium have also been registered; over time, glass grave goods began to exceed the ceramic ones in quantity. Biconical pots with a narrow neck and a short, horizontally flared rim, made of grey fired medium-refined clay and with an untreated outer surface have been discovered in cremation burials together with Trajan's coins. In the necropolises, the 1st century is primarily characterised by fragments of amphorae. These are forms with a bell-shaped mouth, classified as Western Mediterranean amphorae (Dressel 6B). The rim fragment with an OFF DAS stamp and a *hedera* motif (G1-151 Više grobalja), which has frequent analogies in Pannonia, belongs to this type.⁴

During Hadrian's reign, in the course of his travels from Syria to the Danubian regions, in 117, Viminacium gained the status of a municipium with the official title *Municipium Aelia Viminacium*, it became a legal municipality of Roman citizens, and there are several different ceramic forms from that period in its necropolises. The form of bowls appears at that time, and lasts not only during the entire 2nd century, but also until the middle of the 3rd century, while some even last until the middle of the 4th century, with only slight changes in the basic form. In

⁴ Bjelajac 1996, 18.

terms of the various types of pottery, there are bowls made of refined clay after the model of the imported *terra sigillata*, primarily the forms Drag. 24/25 and Drag. 25 (Drawing 8), dated to the end of the 1st and the first half of the 2nd century, as well as the most frequent one, Drag. 37 (Drawing 9). Smaller, thin walled bowls without an accentuated rim and with a calotte-shaped “belly” ending in a base which can be flat or ring-profiled also appear around the beginning of the 2nd century. Such bowls were made of medium-refined red or grey fired clay, while their outer surface was painted in hues ranging from brownish red to grey and black. They were often polished and varnished. These vessels are very durable, so they can even be found around the beginning of the 4th century, and similar bowls (Drawing 10), only with an inverted rim, appear from the end of the 2nd until the middle of the 3rd century (Drawings 11 and 12). Among the calotte-shaped bowls, there is also a type with a vertically profiled rim on a narrow foot. They also appear from the first half of the 2nd century. From south Gaulish workshops, among the calotte-shaped vessels, here appear those with an arched, flared rim, made after the model of Drag. 35. Although this form appears in the import workshops as early as in the 1st century, in Viminacium it has been found in the layers from the beginning of the 2nd until the middle of the 3rd century. These bowls have a barbotine decoration on the rim, and vegetal ornamentation- motifs of vine, lilies or heart-shaped leaves. The inside of these vessels is occasionally decorated with a series of incisions made with a pounce wheel, while the base can be decorated with stamped leaves, placed facing one another. Specimens made by the local craftsmen, but after the model of the imported thin walled bowls with a narrow base, have been discovered in cremation burials. They are dated to the first half of the 2nd century (Drawing 13). The volume of these small bowls rarely exceeds 200 ml. The imported vessels predominantly come from South Gaul (Drawing 14) (Pec C-7603, G1-690). Certainly, the most common and long-lasting form of bowls in both cremation and inhumation burials is that with a biconical recipient which has an accentuated plastic strip on the juncture of the belly. They are made of the same type of clay as the other vessels of this period (Drawing 15). Besides these, tableware is also represented by the larger calotte-shaped bowls with a thickened rim made of medium refined red fired clay. One of the most frequent forms of tableware pots from the second period of production is the two- or three-handled example with a horizontal rim, cylindrical stem and a spherical belly placed on a

ring-shaped heel (Drawing 16). Such pots appear in all dimensions and with diverse decoration: painting, faceting, incision, while certain specimens with snake representations appear within a cult.⁵ Their common characteristic is that they are made of medium-refined red fired clay, and their outer surface is painted in red tones, the paint being more or less durable. In tiered tombs from the beginning of the 2nd century there also occur goblets with exceptionally thin walls, an unaccentuated, slightly slanting rim and a biconical recipient. Such vessels are made of highly refined white or grey fired clay, and their outer surface is polished. They are a local product (Drawing 17). The conical shapes of goblets appear in specimens made of sandy clay, fired grey, and with an untreated outer surface. Their rim is made in the form of a strip, with a groove on the inside (Drawing 18). In this period, there also appear biconical and spherical goblets with a grooved rim and two handles on a narrow ring-shaped foot. They are mostly fired red and painted in tones of the same colour. Among the spherical specimens, there are also those that are painted in grey tones (Drawings 19 and 20). Pottery used for cooking is mostly represented by pots of the La Tène form, with arched rims. They are made of medium-refined or sandy clay and fired grey. Of the same fabric, there also appear deep bowls of various profilation types with a grooved rim, highly placed belly and short foot with a narrow base (Fig. 3). They appear from the first half of the 2nd century (in Kod Bresta necropolis) until the first half of the 3rd century (in Pećine necropolis) (Drawing 21). In this period, there are forms made without the use of a potter's wheel, handcrafted pots with a slightly flared rim, curved belly walls and a flat base. Their fabric shows traces of sea shells and snail shells, and they are fired brown to greyish-brown. Their outer surface is occasionally decorated with fan-shaped ornament or punched decoration. Such forms show certain traces of the Dacian tradition, although they are a local product from the beginning of the 2nd century (Drawing 22). In tombs that contain coins spanning across a century, there also appear goblets made of medium-refined clay, mostly fired red and painted in the same tones. These spherical goblets with one handle, an intensely or slightly flared rim and an accentuated, flat or narrow base, appear from the third decade of the 2nd until after the middle of the 3rd century (Drawing 23).

Censers, as a specific ceramic form, are a local product. They are characterised by a tall, hollow foot, most often with a calotte-shaped or, in rare cases, conical

⁵ Jovičić, Bogdanović 2017, 36.

3. Hearth baked forms of pottery cooking ware



recipient and intricate ornamentation, with strips or incisions arranged in various patterns, and they are engobe coated. They have been found in both cremation and inhumation burials and, recently, their number has increased with a discovery in the settlement layers (Drawing 24). Since the first half of the 2nd century, there also began to appear “S”- profiled bowls with a polished grey surface (Drawing 25). Curiously, they appear only in cremation burials. From the middle of the 2nd century, numerous forms made of the so-called “kaolin” clay, yellow-whitish specimens of bowls, pots and pitchers, appear in large numbers as grave goods. Kaolin was predominantly used for making pots with a grooved, everted rim, a rib-profiled belly and a narrow, flat base with an accentuated edge and one or two short, wide strip-shaped handles beginning from under the edge of the base. Such pots are the most frequent grave goods in cremation burials and, most often, they functioned as urns. There are two phases of these vessels, where the specimens with an indented base belong to the older one (Drawing 26). These pots appear in the necropolises of Viminacium until the end of the 3rd century. In tombs dated to the beginning of the 2nd century, among the vessels which functioned as urns, there are also forms

with a horizontally shaped rim, slightly curved around the ends, an accentuated short neck and an elongated belly ending in a flat, unaccentuated base (Drawing 27). A calotte-shaped bowl made of *terra sigillata*, type Drag. 41 (Drawing 28) (VG, C-5897, G-942), and decorated with vertical incisions which create a vegetal, vine ornament, belongs to the second half of the 2nd century. This is evidently an imported specimen, which is a very rare find in graves. Among the imported material from the last third of the 2nd century there are also conical bowls with a ring-profiled rim and a slanting foot, types Drag. 18/31 and Drag. 31. Very often, they have craftsmen's signatures on the inside. The vessels which also appear with a signature stamp are smaller conical bowls of type Drag. 33 (Drawing 29), which confirms that goods were also imported from middle Gaulish workshops, Lezoux (VG, G -1018, C-6311).⁶ Such bowls have also been discovered in the local production, and the circumstances of the finds moved the period of their appearance to the beginning of the 2nd century. A form with craftsmen's signatures, Drag. 32, is also present, and comes from three workshops- Rheinzabern, Lezoux and Westendorf.⁷ In inhumation burials, the second half of the 2nd century is represented by locally produced shallow, calotte-shaped bowls with an unprofiled edge of a flat base. They are made of clay common in this period (Drawing 30). The most frequent forms of plates in inhumation burials are the forms with a flared rim and profiled walls which slant down to a ring-shape profiled base. They are made of medium-refined clay and painted in red tones. Their surface is often polished (Drawing 31). The diameter of these plates ranges from 17 to 35 cm. Plates made after the model of form Drag. 32 (Drawing 32) with an unprofiled, slightly inverted rim and slanting walls of the belly on a narrow, ring-shaped base, also belong to the same chronological framework. The most frequent grave goods are certainly one-handed pitchers, with a conically profiled grooved rim, narrow neck and spherical belly. They are made of medium-refined clay, fired red, with the outer surface painted in red tones, and the colour often wipes off (Drawing 33). Besides this type of pitchers, the ones frequently of the same fabric are the two-handed forms, with a grooved rim, a strip-like profilation of the outer edge, biconical or ovoid belly on a ring-profiled foot (Drawing 34). In the south-eastern necropolises of Viminacium, three pitchers commonly appear within the one-handed type

⁶ The stamp of the craftsman CRACVNA °F published in Bjeljac 1990, 133,134.

⁷ Bjeljac 1990, 132 and 134.

of smaller dimensions, with a ring-profiled rim, short neck and spherical belly on a ring-profiled foot. They are made of medium-refined red fired clay, with the outer surface painted in the same tones (Drawing 35). Pitchers with one handle and a strip-profiled outer edge of the rim, a long, narrow neck, spherical belly and a ring-profiled foot (Drawing 36) are also frequent in this same necropolis. The type of pitcher with one handle and a wide mouth with three spouts, conical neck and spherical belly (Drawing 37) is also frequent.

During the reign of Septimius Severus and his dynasty, Viminacium went through a phase of a flourishing economy, and most of the ceramic material discovered in the graves comes from this period. Besides the standard ceramic forms, there also appear some unusual ones. A time-measuring vessel – a clepsydra (G1-15, C-656, the site of Kod Bresta), mould-made and decorated with a frieze of running wild boars, is an exceptionally interesting find. The entire vessel is coated with a yellowish-green glaze. On the base of the vessel, there are seven round perforations, forming a grid for drainage. On the upper part of the handle, there is a small round opening.⁸ Such types of vessels appear very rarely, while in the graves in the necropolises of Viminacium this is a unique specimen, classified as a local product by the technique of decoration. A small three-handled pot (G-51, C-786 lok. Kod Bresta) was decorated using the same technique of glazing, but the colour of its glaze is olive-green. Such specimens with strip-shaped, fluted handles and a grooved neck decorated with two plastic ribs and without glaze predominantly appear with two handles, although there are also specimens with three handles. Tableware is primarily represented by “S”- profiled bowls with slanting, flared rims, an accentuated shoulder and a ring-profiled base. Goblets with an unprofiled rim and slanting walls of the bowl on a narrow ring-profiled foot belong to the most frequent grave goods. They appear in Viminacium from the end of the 2nd century until the first half of the 3rd century, while the earliest ones have been discovered with Nero’s coins at other sites (Drawing 38). Conical goblets with an unprofiled rim and a ring-shaped foot, made after the model of the Drag. 64 form, appear in both inhumation and cremation burials. In cremation burials, they are dated to the second half of the 2nd century, while those discovered with skeletal remains are dated to the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century (Drawing 39). Plates which appear in inhumation burials together with the coins

⁸ Spasić 2015, 48.

of Septimius Severus are the forms of shallow plates with an unprofiled rim, slanting walls of the recipient and a ring-shaped foot. They have a groove on the inside of the rim. These plates are made of medium-refined clay fired red or grey, and painted in red or grey tones, while their surface can be glazed or varnished (Drawing 40). During the 3rd century, ovoid goblets with a grooved rim and flat base also appear in the graves. They are made of medium-refined clay fired red or grey. They are equally frequent in both inhumation and cremation burials (Drawing 41). Cooking vessels are present in the graves in the forms of biconical pots with a strip-profiled rim with a flat edge, grooved on the inside (Drawing 42). The strip-like handle begins from under the edge. Besides these, pots with a spherical belly with a ring-profiled rim, grooved on the inside, are also frequent (Drawing 43).

Under the rule of Gordian III, Viminacium gained the status of a colony. With the arrival of the veterans, there occurred mixed influences. The fifth decade of the 3rd century in the necropolises of Viminacium is represented by numerous finds of all forms of vessels. The most frequent forms of bowls are the calotte-shaped ones, with different profilation of the rim (Drawing 44). In a grave with a cremated decedent and Gordian's coins, a calotte-shaped bowl with a plain rim and base was discovered; it is made of medium-refined clay fired grey, and its outer surface is untreated (VG G1-1375, C-9370). The most common forms of plates are the Pompeian types of various dimensions, and there also appear specimens of simpler forms, with slightly inverted rim edges, slanting belly walls and a flat base, as well as those made after the model of luxurious forms, with a flared or arched rim, slanting belly and ring-shaped foot. Occasionally, such plates have a painted and also varnished surface, and the decoration sometimes occurs in the form of stamped ornament, most often stylised leaf motifs or *planta pedis*. These forms remained in use for a long period of time. Cooking pots are the most frequent grave goods in the graves from this period, functioning as urns. These are the forms with a horizontally flared rim grooved on the inside, which goes down to the highly placed belly and a flat base. They are made of medium-refined clay fired grey or brownish-grey, and their outer surface is untreated. Occasionally, the upper part of the belly is decorated with grooves. Their volume ranges from 1,700 to 3,800 ml (Drawing 45).

In the 3rd century, the techniques typical of the Early Imperial period still occurred, but were of considerably poorer workmanship. The number of vessels made of sandy clay increased, and eventually, this type of fabric became predom-

inant in the 4th century. The La Tène forms of biconical bowls, as well as the variants of bowls produced in the sophisticated techniques of the Early Imperial period survive, even in this kind of fabric. Numerous vessels with a glazed surface appeared as a novelty in the 4th century (Fig. 4). The surface treated with olive-green, green-yellowish or brown glaze is most frequent in bowls and pitchers, although it appears in other forms, too. They are local products. The impoverished repertoire of forms in the second half of the 3rd century is also noticeable in the settlement layers. The increasing usage of glass vessels could be one of the reasons for that.

In the earliest graves in Viminacium's necropolises, there are coins of Constantius Chlorus, Constantius II, Valentinian I, Valens, Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I. Grey sandy fabric, more or less finely grained and with a rough outer surface is predominant in this period. Red and brown vessels, fired to lighter or darker tones, were produced of medium-refined clay or fine-grained sandy clay. Forms of cooking pots appear in this fabric most frequently. A small, spherical pot with a slanting, flared rim and narrow, accentuated flat base, which was discovered in the necropolis of Pirivoj, in an inhumation burial with coins dated to 324- 330, is like this. Forms of smaller biconical pots with a slanting rim, whose edge is triangle-profiled, with a narrow, flat base, have been registered at the same necropolis (Drawing 46). Glazed pot specimens appear as biconical forms with a short, grooved rim and a flat base (Drawing 47). One-handed glazed goblets with a slanting rim also appear in this same shape, only their dimensions are smaller. They have a flat base and ribbed belly (Drawing 48). A glazed goblet with two strip-like handles which exceed the edge of the rim in height was registered in the eastern necropolis of Viminacium (Drawing 49). The second half of the 4th century is represented by the calotte-shaped bowls with a flat, unaccentuated or slightly accentuated base, found in inhumation burials (Pirivoj C-650, G-217). The horizontally shaped rim is decorated by grooving or punching. The outer, sand-like surface of these bowls most often has an olive-green glaze (Drawing 50). They are not common as grave goods, since they are far more numerous in the settlement layers of Viminacium.

Viminacium, as the capital of Upper Moesia, occupied an area at the crossroads of essential communications of the ancient world with its geographical position. This led not only to the development of trade, but also to the fusion of ethnic structures in its very centre. What resulted from this can be seen in the



Fig. 4. An example of a glazed bowl

variations of grave goods discovered within the Viminacium necropolises, which were in use for more than four centuries, thus suggesting connections to all parts of the Empire (Fig. 5).

The material of the 1st century, from the Flavian period, points to the presence of the army and the migration of the Italic peoples. In the 2nd century, local workshops for ceramic production were strengthened, and imports arrived from the workshops of Rheinzabern and Westendorf. All decorating techniques that would suggest high product quality were used. In the 3rd century, the influence of the Danube trade with the Black Sea coast was great. From the 4th century, ceramic production was largely subordinate to the needs of the army, and the quality of the products was in sharp decline.

By analysing the grave goods, it was determined that there were numerous jugs, pots and bowls, but the largest number of typological variants was linked with bowls. Variations in grave goods can differ not only in the type of burial (cremation/inhumation), but deviations in the number of ceramic items in the graves can also be visible within the necropolises.

This paper presents a review of the most frequent forms of ceramic vessels which appear in inhumation and cremation burials in Viminacium. The largest portion of the grave goods was produced locally, which once again highlights the

Fig. 5. Forms of the most common pottery vessels as grave goods



importance of their production centre discovered within the southern necropolises. The innovative spirit of the craftsmen is remarkable, as is the wide variety of raw materials that were available to them.

*Translated by Jelena Mitić
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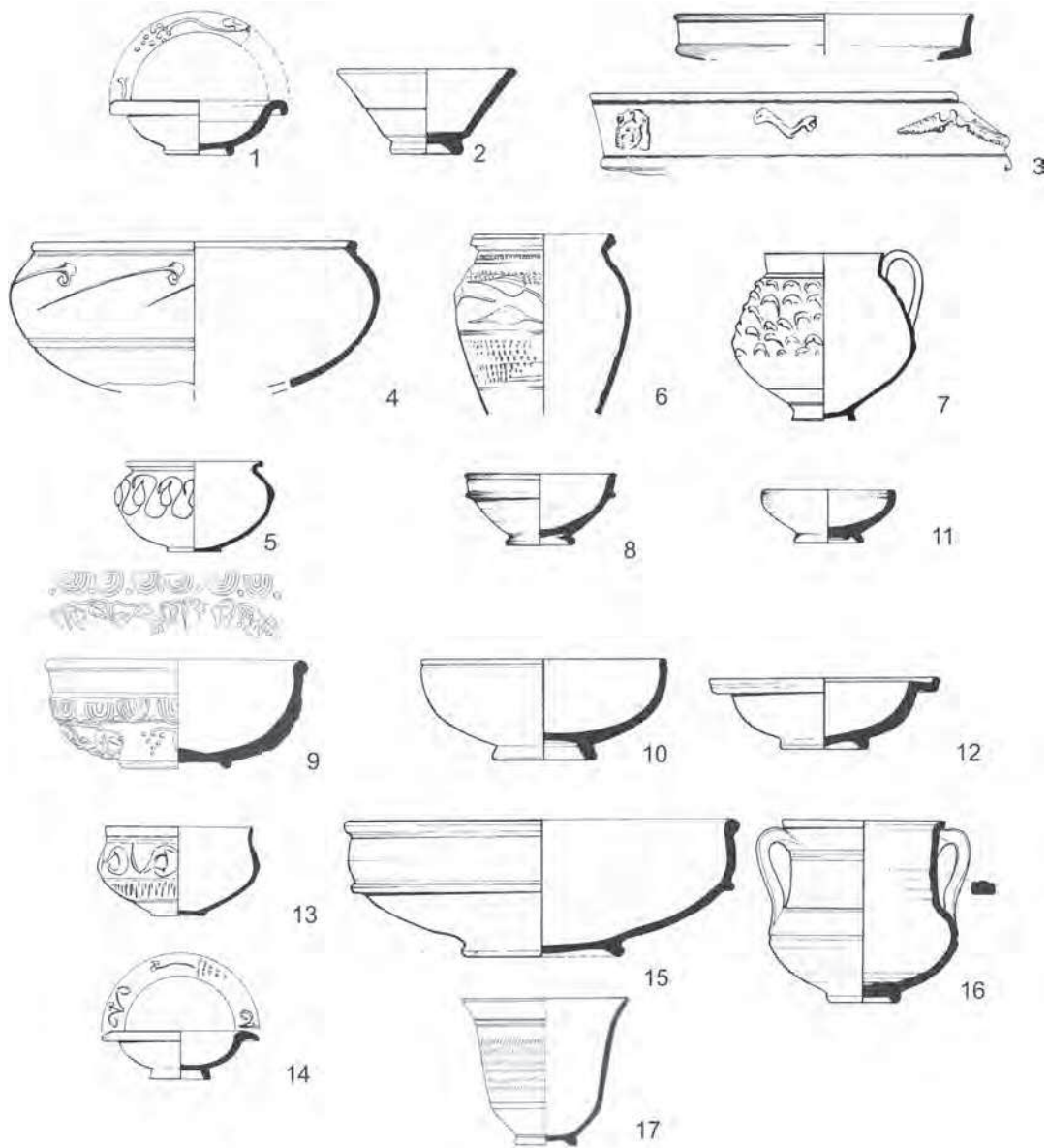
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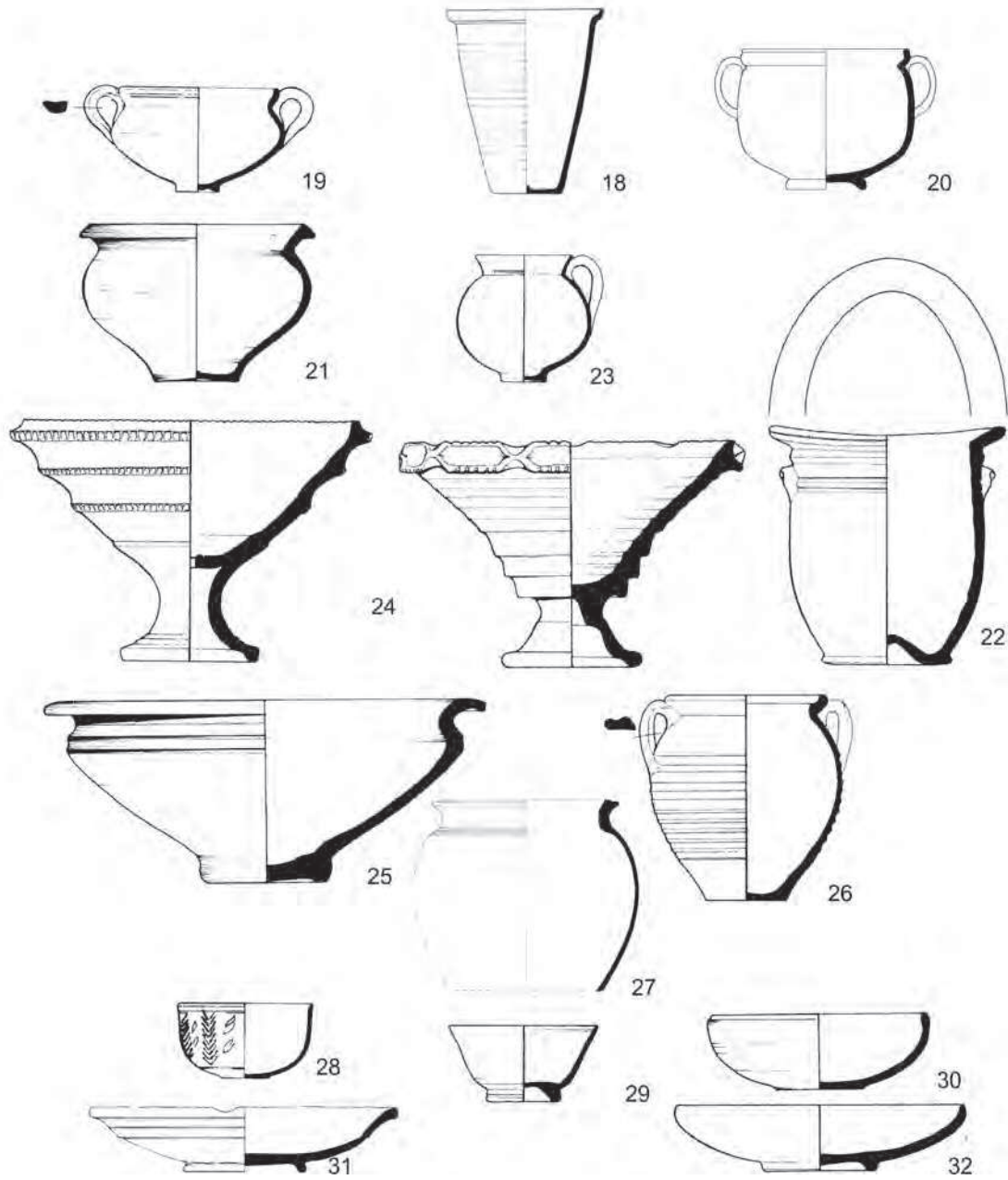
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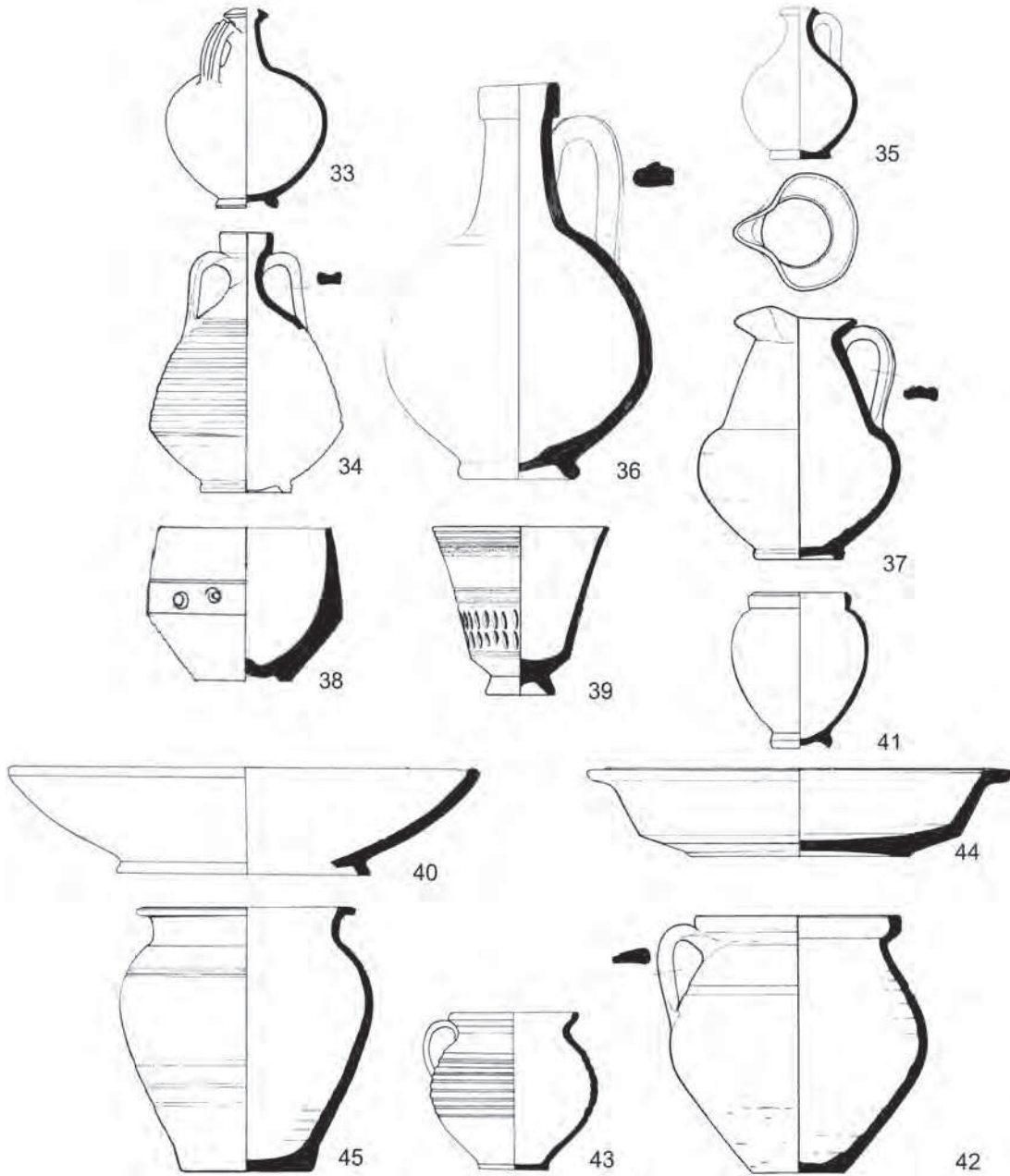
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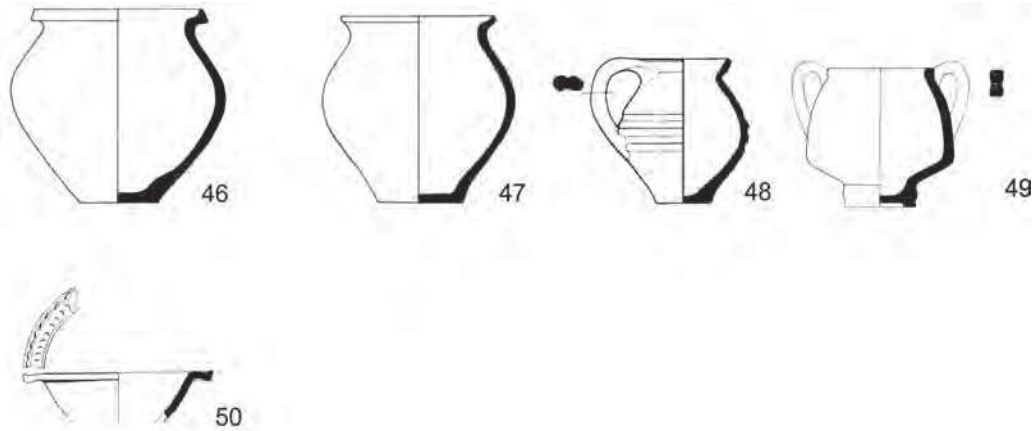
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drawings 33-45 R=1:4



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