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ADDITIONS TO THE HISTORY OF THE “SÁNDOR-MANOR” OF VĂCĂREȘTI (VACSÁRCSI) – Based on historical sources and the 2013 archaeological campaign¹

LEVENTE MÁTYÁS SÜKET*

The article discusses the history and archaeological evidence related to the property that houses ruins in Văcărești. Based on historical sources we presented the possible owners of the plot during the time of the Transylvanian Principality. Excavations revealed in 2012 a large stone building with a cellar that was deepened during communism for storing crops, and in 2013 sections were opened around the cellar. This contributed to the dating of the building, and also determined its exact floor plan. The finds and the surveys also reveal that the property was relatively well-developed, implying the existence of several buildings.

I. INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on the site known as the “Sándor” mansion of Văcărești (Vacsárcsi), Harghita County, Romania. The plot is situated at the eastern edge of the village, north of the “Rákos” brook, on a small plateau. Unfortunately, the site’s buildings were used as a stone quarry, but multiple structures have survived indicating one-time foundations and cellars that pertained most probably to an estate dated to the second half of the 16th century.

A combined research team excavated the foundations of a building with a cellar. The building was preceded by two timber frame houses, one dating to the 12–13th century, the

other to the 15–16th century. The latter reached its final form sometime after 1594, but it remains unclear when the first constructions in stone began. In our opinion, the building must have belonged to the farmyard of the manor house and did not serve a representative purpose. Hence the main buildings had to be west of the aforementioned stone building, near the road where today’s houses stand. This presumption is bolstered by ground penetrating radar surveys, but it is clear that further archaeological and archival research is needed for unraveling the history of the manor.



Fig. 1: Location of the site. Based on Google Earth satellite images.

¹ I would like to thank István Botár for making the results of the research group available to me and for allowing me to process them.

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II. RESEARCH HISTORY

Fortunately, there is a long tradition of research into Transylvanian manor houses. However, there still are gaps in our knowledge. We owe this to the harsh environment that characterized Transylvania and Székely Land in the early modern, modern and post-war periods. Due to the hot foreign and domestic political conditions of the past, the archives of most Székely families living in the area were left to perish.² The manors mentioned by 18th century sources have not been spared by history either. In most cases the families who owned them have either disappeared over the centuries or moved away in the preceding century, leaving the noble residence to the passing of time. It is therefore particularly important to carry out archaeological research in our region in order to gain a better understanding of the manor houses of Székely Land that have either disappeared or have been forgotten, if still standing.³

Interest in our site began with Balázs Orbán, who was the first to mention it in his 1869 “A Székelyföld leírása” (Description of Székely Land). He identified it with the ancient mystical nest of the Sándor family, who claimed to be the descendants of the fictitious rulers of the Székelys, called Rabonbanes. Thanks to Orbán the plot became known as the site of the dilapidated castle of the Sándors, where the fake chronicle was claimed to have been written in 1533. In 1905, Professor Lajos Szádeczky-Kardoss inspected the supposed “ancient fortress” of the Sándor family in order to challenge the infamous “Csíki Székely Krónika” (Székely Chronicle of Ciuc). He also made a schematic survey of the best-preserved tripartite building on the site, which could not have been anything other than the building researched in 2012 and 2013. In addition to the surveys, he also interviewed local residents. The oldest resident of the village was able to

name the Daczós and Máthés as former owners of the building surveyed. The elder noted that Daczó had been the lord of the manor for so long that even his own great-grandfather only knew about him from stories. The residents also claimed that they had not heard about the Sándor family. Thus Szádeczky proposed the Lázárs as the real owners of the 16th century estate. Like Szádeczky, András Jósa also traveled to the site in order to demonstrate the monumental nature of the ruins and the claims of the Chronicle. Despite his far-fetched ideas about the chronicle’s veracity, Jósa had the great merit of having produced much more elaborate plans than Szádeczky. Several buildings are visible in Jósa’s survey, including the excavated one (see Plate II./1). It was also Jósa who provided the information that walls two fathom high had still been standing on the edges of the plot at the turn of the century, but were demolished by locals for building material.⁴

After Szádeczky and Jósa, there was no identifiable interest in the site for at least 100 years. Elek Benkő mentioned it fleetingly in the book “Középkori udvarház és nemesség a Székelyföldön” (“Medieval manor and nobility in the Székely Land”) that he and Attila Székely⁵ co-authored, and like Szádeczky-Kardoss, attributed it to the mighty Lázár family.⁶

The end of the communist regime did not immediately bring any changes in the research of the Ciuc Basin mansions. It took a decade for excavations to start in the early 2000s. It is the credit of the staff of the Székely Museum of Ciuc, (CSSZM) especially Lóránt Darvas and István Botár, who led several excavations. Excavations at Vacărești began in 2012, but those findings have already been published. Our aim is to present the findings of the 2013 archaeological excavations, jointly carried out by the Museum of Ciuc and the students

² ENDES 1994 35–36; 98–100.; JAKÓ 1997 7–32.

³ BOTÁR 2013, 8–9.

⁴ SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS, 1905, 20–21; JÓSA 1910.

⁵ BENKŐ–SZÉKELY 2008, 62–63.

⁶ SZÁDECZKY-KARDOSS 1905, 21–22.

of Eötvös Loránd University led by professor Maxim Mordovin.⁷

As mentioned before, in-depth research into the subject came about with the archaeological campaigns of 2012 and 2013. A couple of publications and a book chapter by István Botár presented the findings of the 2012 excavations.⁸

Botár's articles came to the conclusion that the estate was more likely the Fejér family's property, hence no written evidence supports the presence of the Sándors, nor the probable ownership of a large estate in the village by the Lázárs.⁹

III. WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF VĂCĂREȘTI

On the basis of the sources we can assume that the property which houses today's ruins used to belong to the Fejérs.¹⁰ At the time of the first princely donation in 1566, they were the ones to obtain a significant number of serfdoms in the village.¹¹ At that time, the Lázárs and the Sándors had no significant property in Văcărești. The Lázárs appear with a few serfdoms in the tax censuses from 1576 onwards, while the Sándors seem to possess significant wealth in the neighboring Mihăileni (Csík-szentmihály) all throughout the period. It has also been suggested that the Fejérs may have lost their estates in the village in 1575 due to a bad political move, as a nobleman from Ciuc named Pál Fejér rebelled against the prince alongside Gáspár Bekes.¹² This was clarified in a court document dating from 1579, in which Máté Fejér, György's nephew and the brother of

the rebel Pál, was in conflict with András Lázár. The latter had claimed half of the bounty of the deceased György Fejér, which he had received as a donation from the princely court, while Máté considered it unlawful that the inheritance reverted to the court, since it had been acquired “in perpetuo” by György, who had died without a son. Hence rebellion was no cause of loss for the Fejér family.¹³

The Fejérs of Văcărești continue to appear in documents.¹⁴ Between 17–23 February 1614 the census of the Székely heads of families took place in the Seat of Ciuc, by orders of prince Gábor Bethlen. Máté Fejér himself was responsible for the large-scale census in the region. He must have been an old man by this time, because next to his name in the list of Văcărești nobles stands the adjective “debilis”.¹⁵ The last mention of Máté Fejér is from 1618, and the

⁷ BOTÁR 2012b; BOTÁR 2019.

⁸ BOTÁR 2013, 10, 27, 44–53; BOTÁR 2019, 607–611.

⁹ BOTÁR 2014, 153–154.

¹⁰ SzOkl. I, 68.

¹¹ SzOkl. I, 209.

¹² BARABÁS 1880, 648; BOTÁR 2019, 607.

¹³ The Latin reads: *Andras hunc Lázár filium fuisse Emerice Lázár de csicsó, testantur literae ai 1579, sub authentia in Archivo Camerae, R. Hungarico Aulicae Budensi reperibiles, quae Regestro dicti Archivi his verbis illatae, habentur: “adjudicatorae sententiales Octavium judicorum Trannicorum, in processu causae inter Andream filium Emerici Lázár de Csicsó ut auctorem, et Matheum Fejér velut Ictum, ex contradictione statutionis quoad integram decem sessionum jobbagionalium in possessione Vocharchy, sedeque siculicali Csik habitatum mediatem opposita ventillato, et in quantum actionatae sessiones avitae essent, ideoque per partem incti, divisioni substerni petebantur, simpliciter absque ullo onere, judicialiter sopito, atque condescendo; in quantum autem eadem litigiosae sessiones antelato actori, juxta ejusdem assertionem, per defectum seminis Georgii condam Fejér, praevia illarum ad rationem fisci Vajvodalis occupatione, colatae fuisse raelenderentur, e contra vero secundum partis inclae allegata, eidem necnon fratri ipsius carnali Paulo Fejér, ac dicto condam Georgi a similiter Fejér, jam per Joan- nem II. Regem collatas, atque ab ipsis certo tempore possessas exstitisse adstrueretur, praeterea super facto quoque verberationis famuli dicti Mathaei Fejér, per memoratum actorem attentatae, ad communem inquisitionem rejecto expeditae anno 1579. sub authentico Vajvodali sigillo.” Vide Regest. Arch. III. p. 167.; LÁZÁR 1858, 29. I owe a debt of gratitude to Emőke Gálfi for deciphering this difficult Latin text.*

¹⁴ ENDES 1994, 94; SzOkl. V, 225–226; SzOkl. (ús) II, 259.

¹⁵ SzOkl. (ús) IV, 488–514; LÁZÁR 1858, 32.

name comes up no more in the village.¹⁶ After the passing of the last Fejér, no property acquisition was mentioned for a long time. We assume that the estate was taken over by the princely court, and stayed in its management for a long time, being taken care of by the administrator of the Mădăraş hammer mill. In a document from 8 July 1662 the princely court pledged half of the Mădăraş (Madaras) hammer mill and several estates, among them a mill and an estate from Văcăreşti, to János Daczó,¹⁷ lieutenant of Ciuc at the time, in exchange for 1000 tallers.¹⁸ However, Daczó could not enjoy his new income for long, as he was arrested on suspicion of conspiracy. In a desperate attempt he offered all his immovable goods in Ciuc to General Mihály Teleki to act in his interest, but

on 4 May 1687 his property was confiscated nonetheless.¹⁹

János Daczó did not succeed in changing his fate with his offer to Mihály Teleki, but the property ended up in the Teleki family's possession anyway. A letter written by Mihály Bere-thei in Valea Strâmbă (Gergyótekerőpatak) on 27 January 1692 informs the widow of Mihály Teleki about the estate in Văcăreşti. Márton Bíró, a local noble was the caretaker of the estate and the report also reveals that the property was relatively well developed, with an outer agricultural yard and an inner representative courtyard, which certainly implies that there were several buildings. In addition, he also notifies us that around 120 kg of iron were used for the probable renovation of the manor house.²⁰

IV. INTERPRETATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

Archaeological evidence clearly shows that the land on which the mansion stands was used in prehistoric times. It was later uninhabited for a while and used again only in the Árpád era, being occupied in one way or another from the 12–13th century until the early modern period.

The excavation of the cellar (Plate I), earlier surveyed by Jóna and Szádeczky (Plate III) was started in 2012. Unfortunately, the cellar was deepened during communism for storing crops, and another cellar room was converted into a cistern. The former was even filled with a layer of waste more than 1 meter thick. In 2012, 6 further sections were opened around the large cellar in question, and a section numbered 7 was also marked out on the northern edge of the mansion site in the hope of finding some

sort of fence. This yielded no results apart from small fragments of prehistoric pottery. In 2013, 7 further sections were opened, most of which were placed to the west of the excavated area, close to the cellar (Plate II). Thanks to these, new structures emerged and the exact dating of the building was possible.²¹

The excavations soon confirmed the accuracy of the Jóna survey, as building number III on the map was detected immediately in section 1: two rooms were found, the southern one with a larger floor plan and the northern one with a smaller square floor plan. These two were adjacent to the large vaulted cellar that is visible to this day. The room with the square plan must certainly have been the first stone building on the excavated site. When the exposed walls were

¹⁶ SzOkl. IV, 199–200.

¹⁷ János Daczó rose steadily in rank during the reign of Mihály Apafi (1632, 1661–1690). His rise was greatly helped by his brother-in-law János Nemes whose sister Elisabeth Daczó had married. Apafi sought loyal noblemen of the same denomination as his, and curtailed the power of the old elite. Although Daczó stayed out of the conspiracies of Pál Béli, Apafi became weary of him. Miklós Bethlen remembers János Daczó as “...a man who longed for rank, dignity and goods even in his death.... He was a poor old man in exile in Wallachia.” BALOGH 2017, 8.

¹⁸ KEMÉNY, *Töm XIV f. v.* 219.

¹⁹ Tüdös 2003, 379; SÁNDOR 1914, 146–147.

²⁰ SÁNDOR 1914, 150–151.

²¹ The field notes, drawings and photographs, as well as the finds of the 2013 campaign were provided by archaeologist István Botár of MSC.

uncovered, it became clear that the ascending walls of the buildings were of the same quality and had been woven together. The stone foundations revealed even more about the construction of the building. The foundation walls of the larger rectangular structure were dismantled to allow the basement foundation walls to be added from the west and to the north, respectively. The smaller rectangular structure was also added to the building complex and it was built along with the stone cellar. In section 5, it was observed that a wide cornice was created, which was found in section 6. These extensions can be explained by the new ascending walls of a different width.

The building may have been entirely stone walled, but there is also the possibility that it was a timber-framed house with stone foundations. We consider it more likely that the ascending walls of the building were laid with river stone and lime mortar, similarly to the basement walls. The building was probably plastered, since the interior wall of the smaller room was. No plaster was observed in the cellar and the adjoining hatch (For the plan of the sections, see Plate II).

The fact that two wooden buildings predated our stone building should also be mentioned. Both had the exact same orientation, and the subsequent stone building also followed it. The first and earlier building appeared in sections 3, 4 and 6, where remains of stone rows and wooden beams were found, suggesting the existence of timber-framed houses. The orientation of the walls of our excavated cellared building followed the tapped foundations of the wooden building. Unfortunately, we cannot tell this wooden structure's full extent to the east and west, because the 16th century building works have certainly disturbed the site. There was also a fireplace inside the building and two layers of adobe, which suggests that the house was either an adobe house or its wooden walls were plastered with clay. The building was found in a layer containing 15th-century

pottery and a spiked spur that is generally dated to the 9–13th centuries.²² The respective layer also yielded 15th-century pottery and a forked arrowhead. The full extent of the wooden house is not known, but there is a possibility that it continued east and west and was a two or three room building with several compartments.

South of the cellar, in section 9, a compact row of stones perpendicular to the side wall of the cellar was found. Unfortunately, the dimensions of the section did not allow us to map the full extent of this north-south aligned foundation. Had the section extended northwards to the cellar wall, it would have been easier to establish with certainty the chronology between the cellar and the foundation.

The tamped foundation was laid on a layer containing late 15th century pottery²³ (SNR 244). Above, there were two layers: SNR 218 and SNR 246. Finds from these layers can be dated to the 16th-early 17th century. Two iron decorative pegs, an iron eyelet and a finely decorated copper plate were recovered from SNR 246. Layer SNR 218 yielded late medieval and early modern pottery, and a coin that was minted in 1594. Above the copper plaque, construction layer SNR 215 was observed, which was created when the cellar area was excavated. Thus we can state with certainty that the excavated building reached its final outline sometime after 1594, but it had a rectangular enclosure that we can date to the second half of the 16th century, somewhere between 1566 and 1594. 1566 is when the Fejérs may have acquired the plot of land (See Plate VII/1).

The excavated building must have been a farm building, because its layout is very different from the mansion floor plans published in the literature. It lacks the elements that characterize noble dwellings of the period, and its look must have been dominated by the structure that covered the entrance to the cellar. The economic character of our building is also confirmed by the fact that the longest stone structures from the Jósa surveys, which very well could've been

²² DZSEMBASZ 1999, 276–277; ISTVÁNOVITS 2003, 351–352.

²³ Our dating of pottery is based on the typological and chronological observations of Elek Benkő: BENKŐ 1992, 305–343; BENKŐ ET AL. 1997 54–71, 163–184.

the bigger and more representative buildings, are situated east of our building. The inner courtyard, mentioned in the late 17th century text, is probably entirely covered by plots of today's houses. We think that the land surveyed by the ground penetrating radar (GPR) team mostly belonged to the economic outer courtyard. The GPR surveys indicated three more probable stone structures (Fig. 2.: Sections

2,3,6,7). There are three more cellars on the plot, two east of section 5 and one in a local's garden, east of the excavated building.

Those buildings are presumed to be somewhere underneath current houses, but they did once belong to the so-called inner courtyard and served for housing and representation (See Plate V for the findings of the survey).

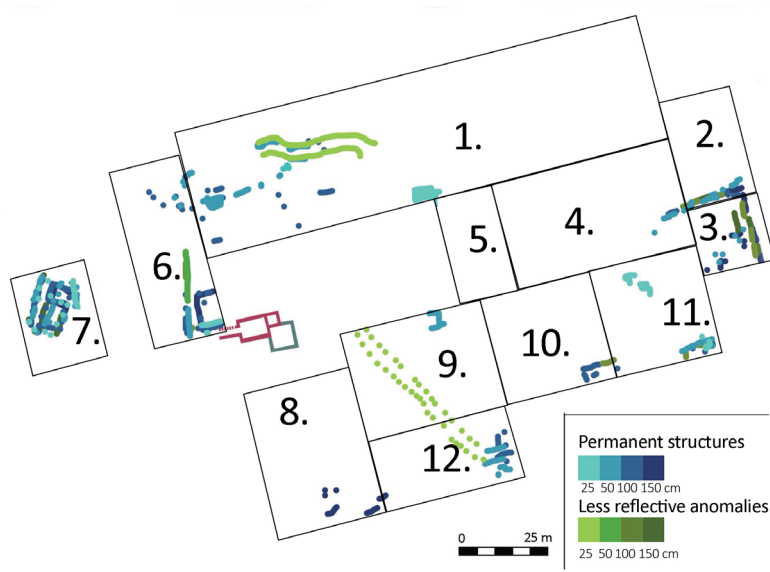


Fig. 2. Interpreted results of the radar survey, conducted in the summer of 2012, by Geoservice LTD.

V. FINDS

Although undisturbed Árpadian-era layers were not found in 2013, a significant number of Árpád-period pottery dating to the 13th century²⁴ emerged during the 2012 excavations. On the other hand, 2013 excavations yielded late 16th century and early 17th century earthenware, these were most commonly fired to a gray to dark gray color (for example Plate X). Most of them are bulky, but some very fine examples were observed too, having but a few millimeter thick walls (Plate XII/2.b, c). Glazing or white paint was not uncommon among red fired pieces (Plate VIII. a.; XI h, i) which must have come from the workshops of the Székely market towns. Graphite earthenware were found too

(Plate XI), indicating larger scale commercial relations. Stove tiles were scarce, but present, and all of them are red fired, unglazed pieces. Some were made on the potter's wheel (Plate VI/1.a, b) and some were pressed into a negative pattern dated somewhere from the mid-16th century to its end (Plate IX.d; XI.a).

Some form of iron manufacture might have functioned somewhere in the vicinity, as indicated by the melted slag and the pieces of molten and bubbled up iron remains (Plate VI/1.d; IX.r, s). A good number of shingle nails, boot fittings, and iron hoops were found, as well as knife fragments, knife holsters, all of these characteristic to the manor houses of the period

²⁴ BOTÁR 2013, 48.

and the region. An object that seems to appear frequently in the first decades of the Principality, namely the Jew's harp,²⁵ was also discovered, along with a six-pointed stirrup star (See Plates VI/2., IX, XII, XIII/1). Only three metal objects were found, two from the same SNR 218 context. These, namely the silver coin bearing

the Hungarian crest, and the Virgin Mary on the reverse, and a finely incised copper plate that must have belonged to a chest of some sorts, dated the last phase of the constructions (Plate VII/1, 2). A spent, small caliber lead bullet was found along with late 16th century pottery (Plate XI).

CONCLUSIONS

A more detailed analysis of written sources confirmed the previously established fact that, contrary to popular belief, the mansion could not have belonged to the Sándor family. The idea that the Lázárs owned significant property in the village was also rejected. The building most probably belonged to the Fejér family of Văcărești since 1566. Sometime after 1618, when the family died out, it probably passed to the princely court, and later to János Daczó of Sfântu Gheorghe. At the end of our period it was the property of Mihály Teleki's widow.

Excavations revealed two buildings with wooden plinths. One of these can be dated to the 14–15th centuries and the other to the 16th

century. The orientation of the wooden houses was identical with that of the three-room stone building dating from around 1594. The stone structure in question consisted of three rooms, that evolved most likely in two stages: at first it was but a square stone compartment of 6 × 6 meters. A larger, 8,5x 6-meter room with a ~1,9 m deep vaulted cellar was added later. The cellar was accessible via a stone entrance, contemporary with the cellar. The compartment of ~3 × 3 meters was added subsequently. Given its odd plan, Jósá's survey, and the mention of an economic and an inner courtyard, it most likely did not serve for permanent housing or representation.

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²⁵ Two were found at the Becz manor in Cozmeni (Csíkkozmás) in 2011, and one was found in the completely destroyed village called "Cibrefalva", near Mihaileni in 1984. Objects from the deposit of the MSC.

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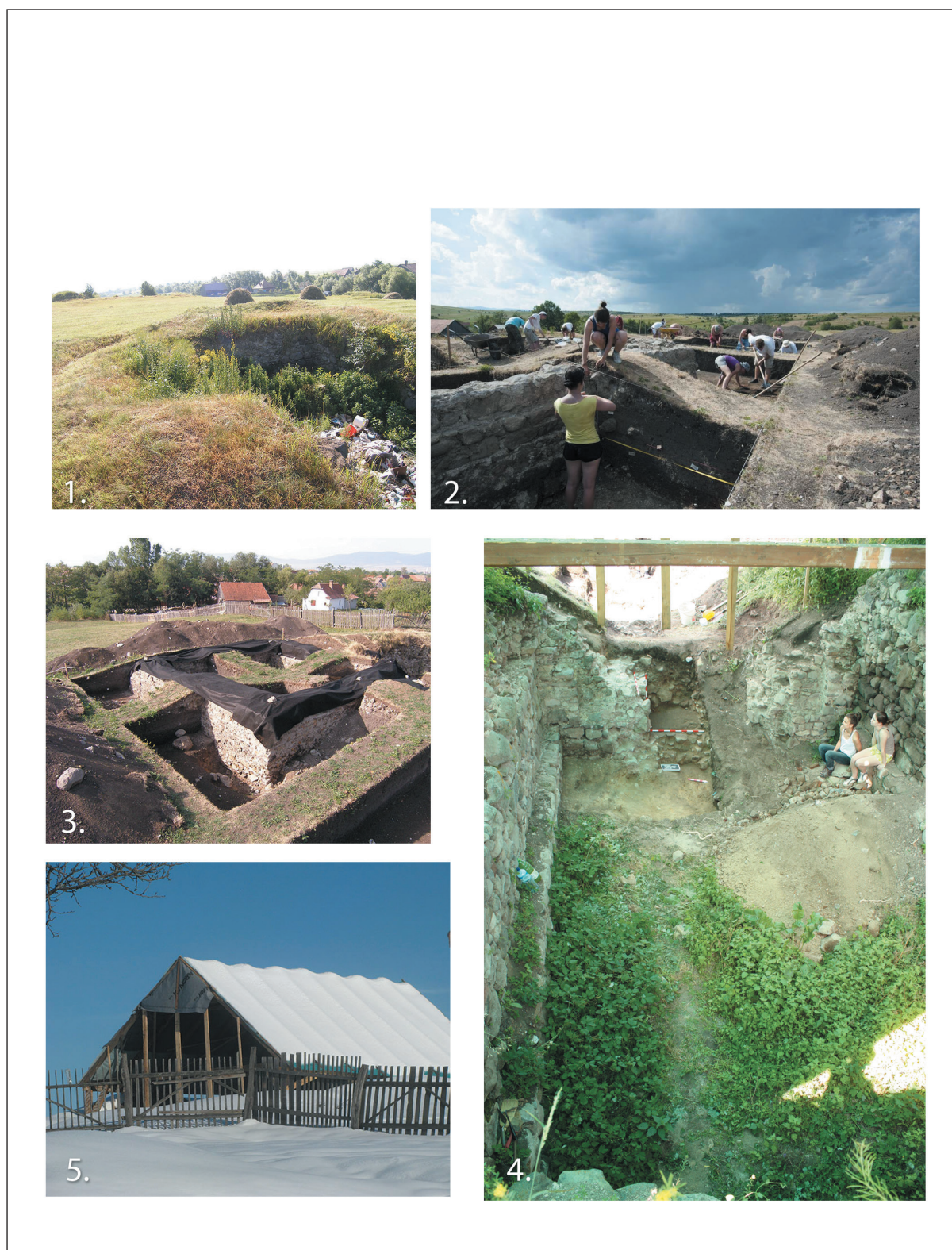


Plate I. 1. The excavated building's cellar in the summer of 2012 filled with waste; 2. The excavation of S2.; 3. The excavated foundations in 2012; 4. S12 and the interior of the cellar; 5. Picture of the saddle roof with tarp, erected in 2012 to protect the cellar. (Nowadays it's heavily damaged, and serves no practical purpose.) Photographs by Botár István: 1, 3, 5.; Mordovin Maxim: 2, 4.

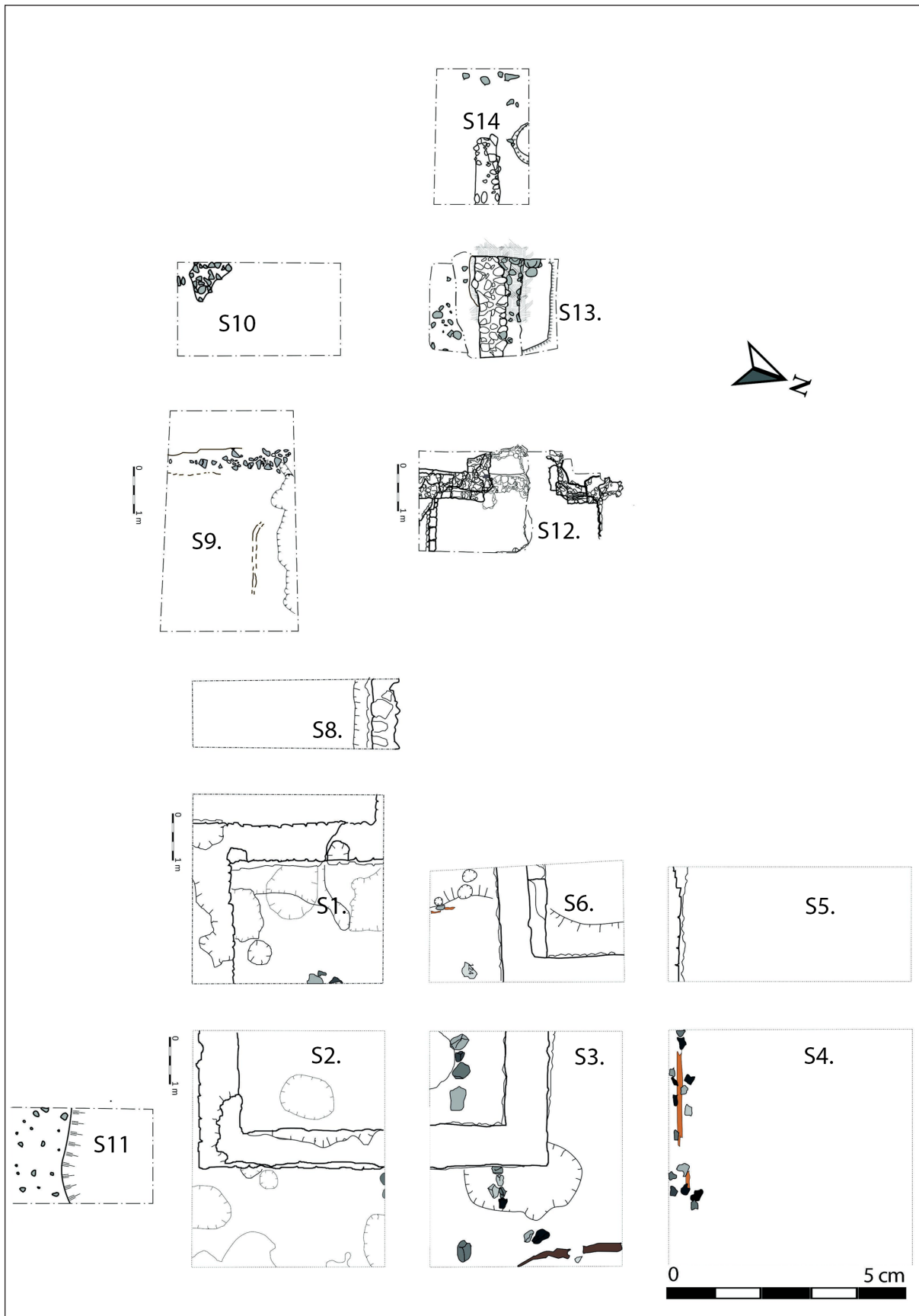


Plate II. Plan of sections.

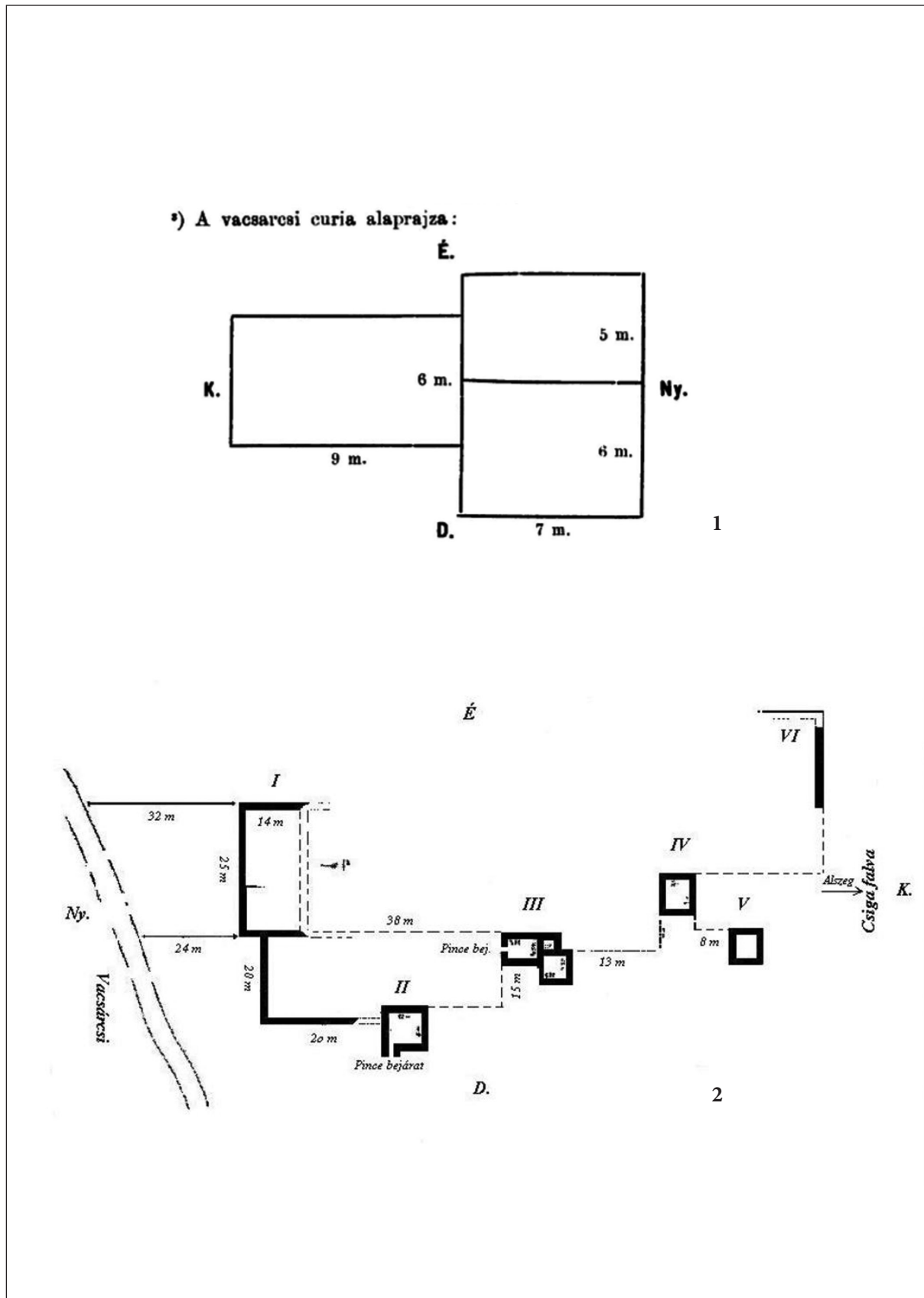


Plate III. 1. Survey of the excavated building by Szádeczky-Kardoss from 1905; 2. Survey of the manor by Jósza from 1910.

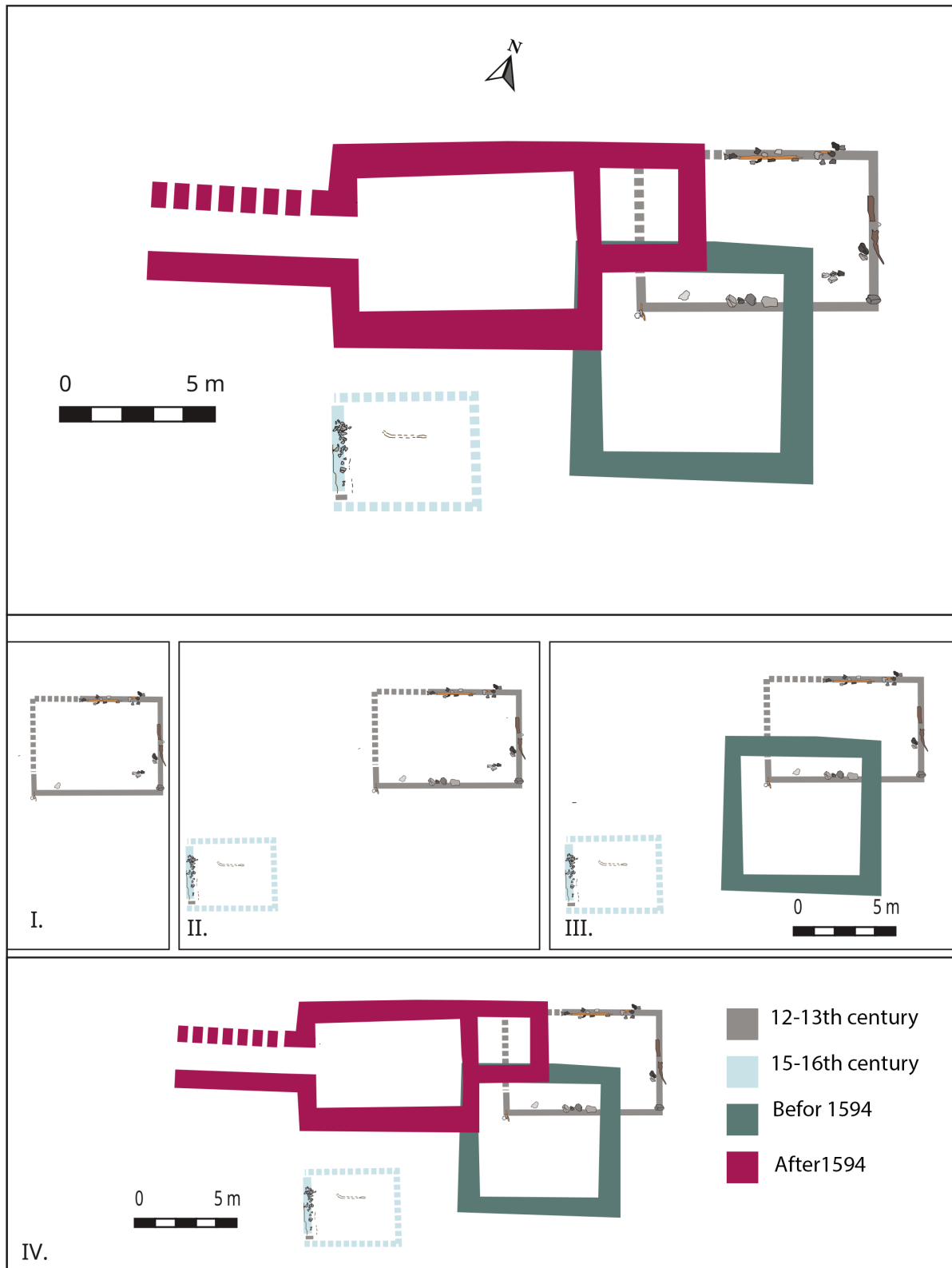


Plate IV.

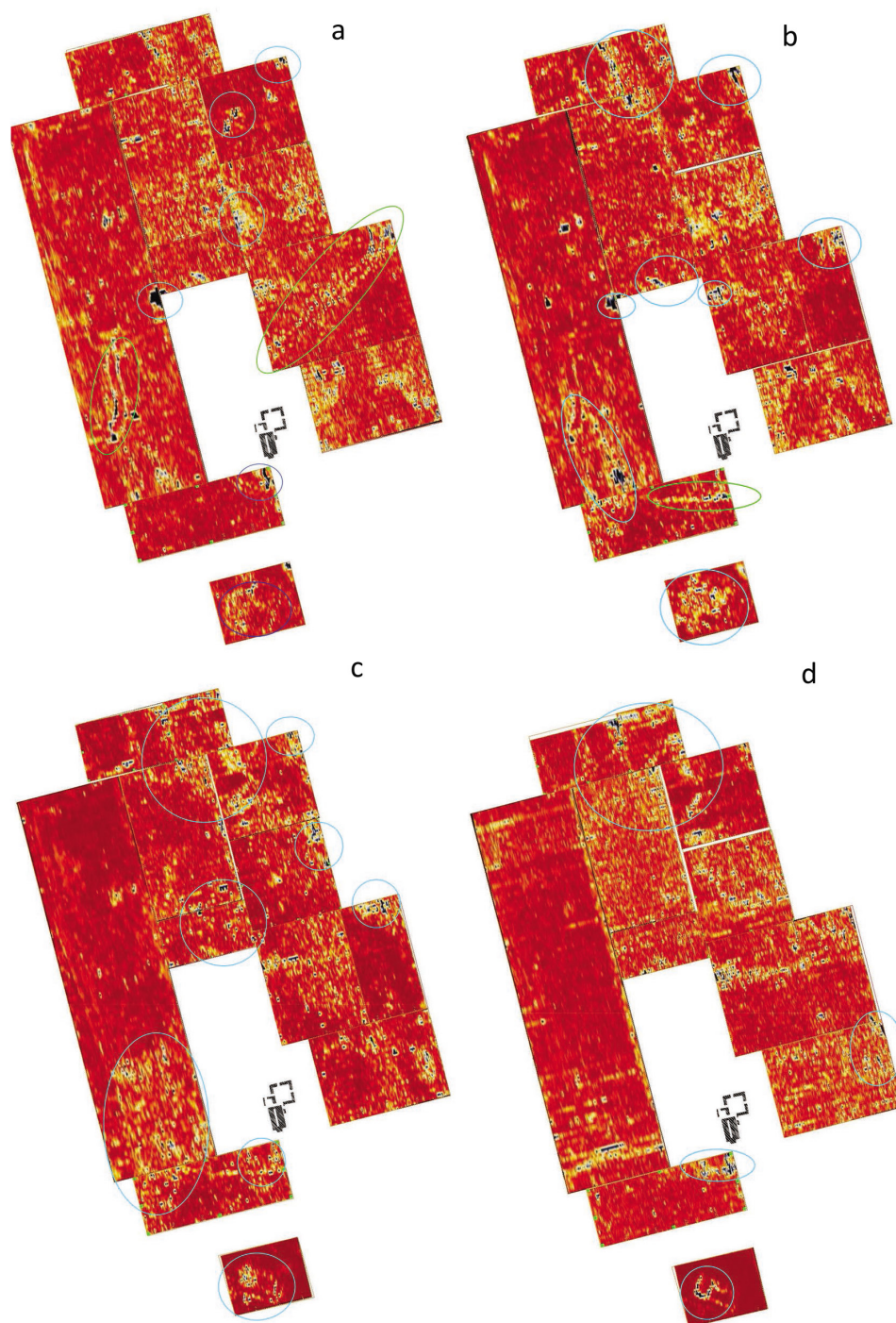


Plate V. Geophysical survey of the plot from a. 25, b. 50, c. 100, d. 150 cm depth.

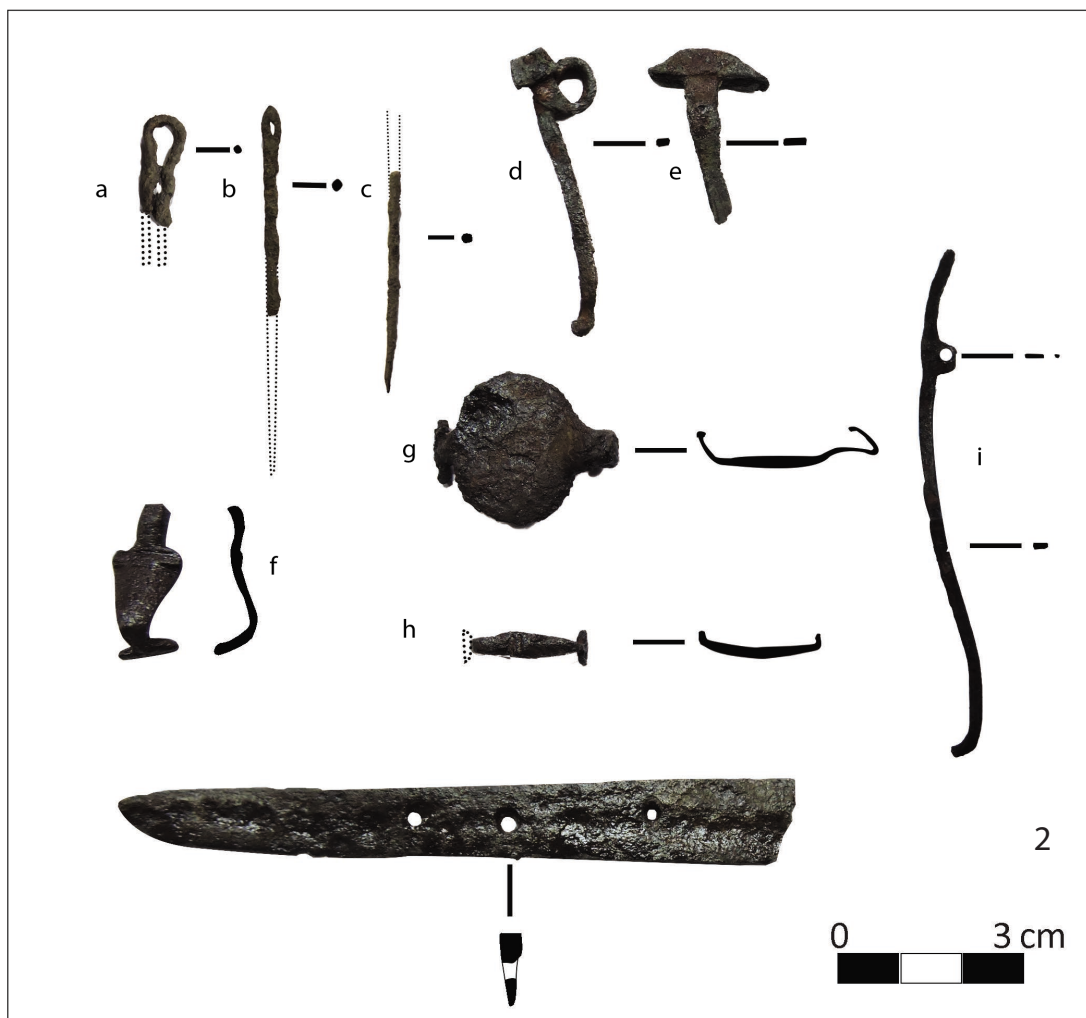
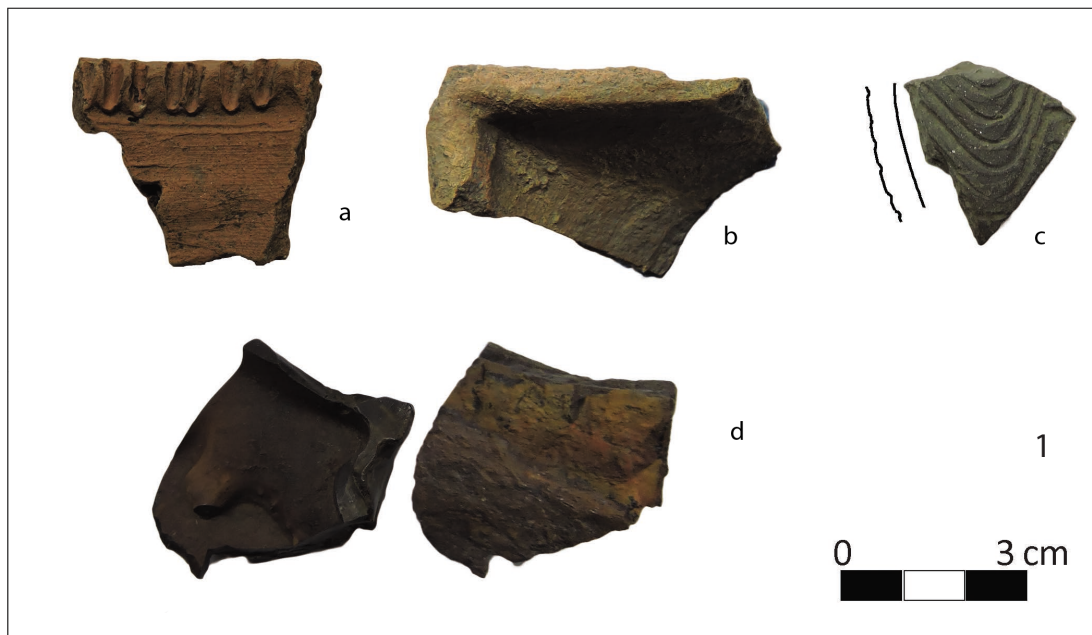


Plate VI. 1: SNR 208; 2: SNR 218.



Plate VII. 1: SNR 218; 2: SNR 218; 3: SNR 228.

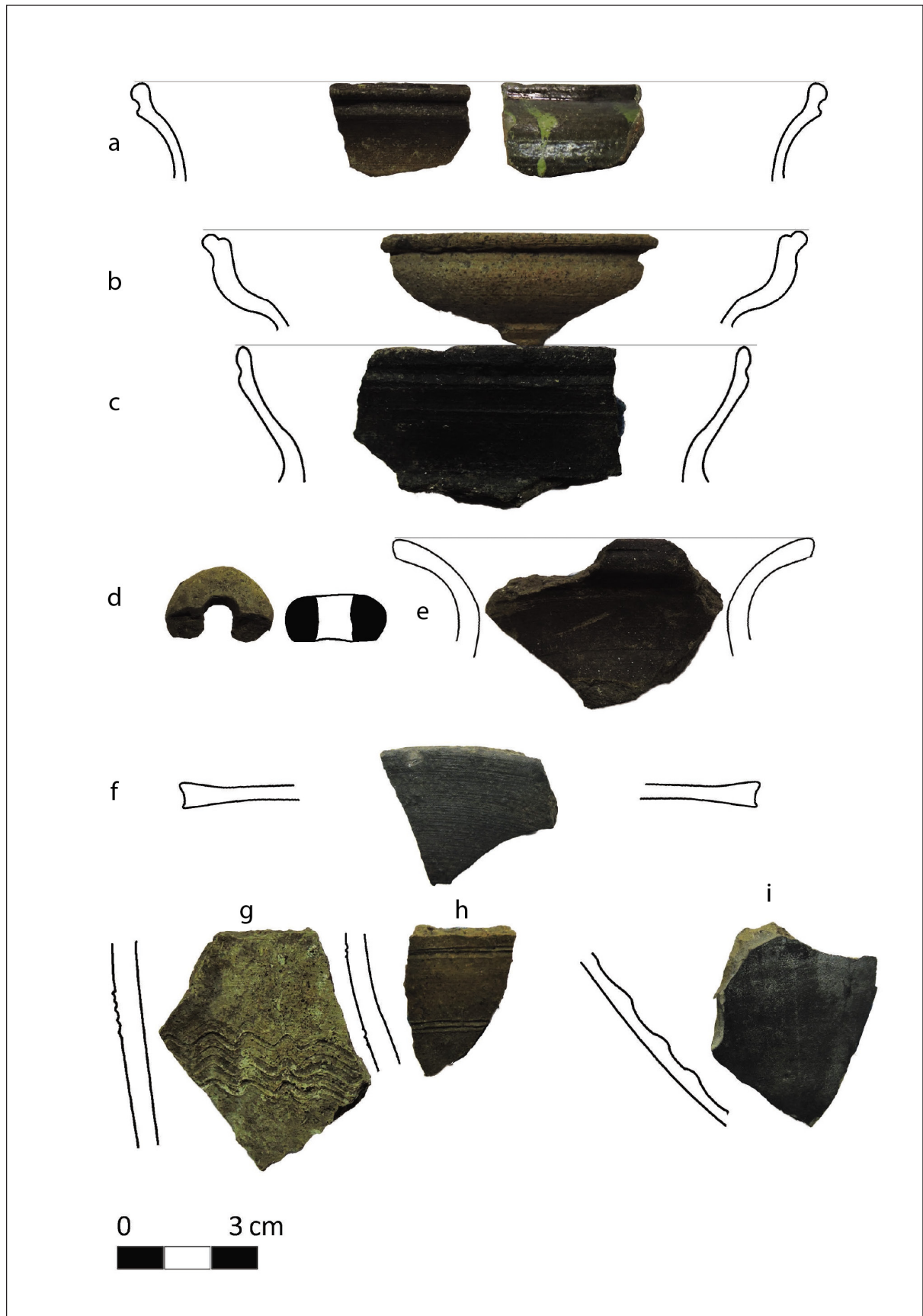


Plate VIII. a-i: SNR 218.

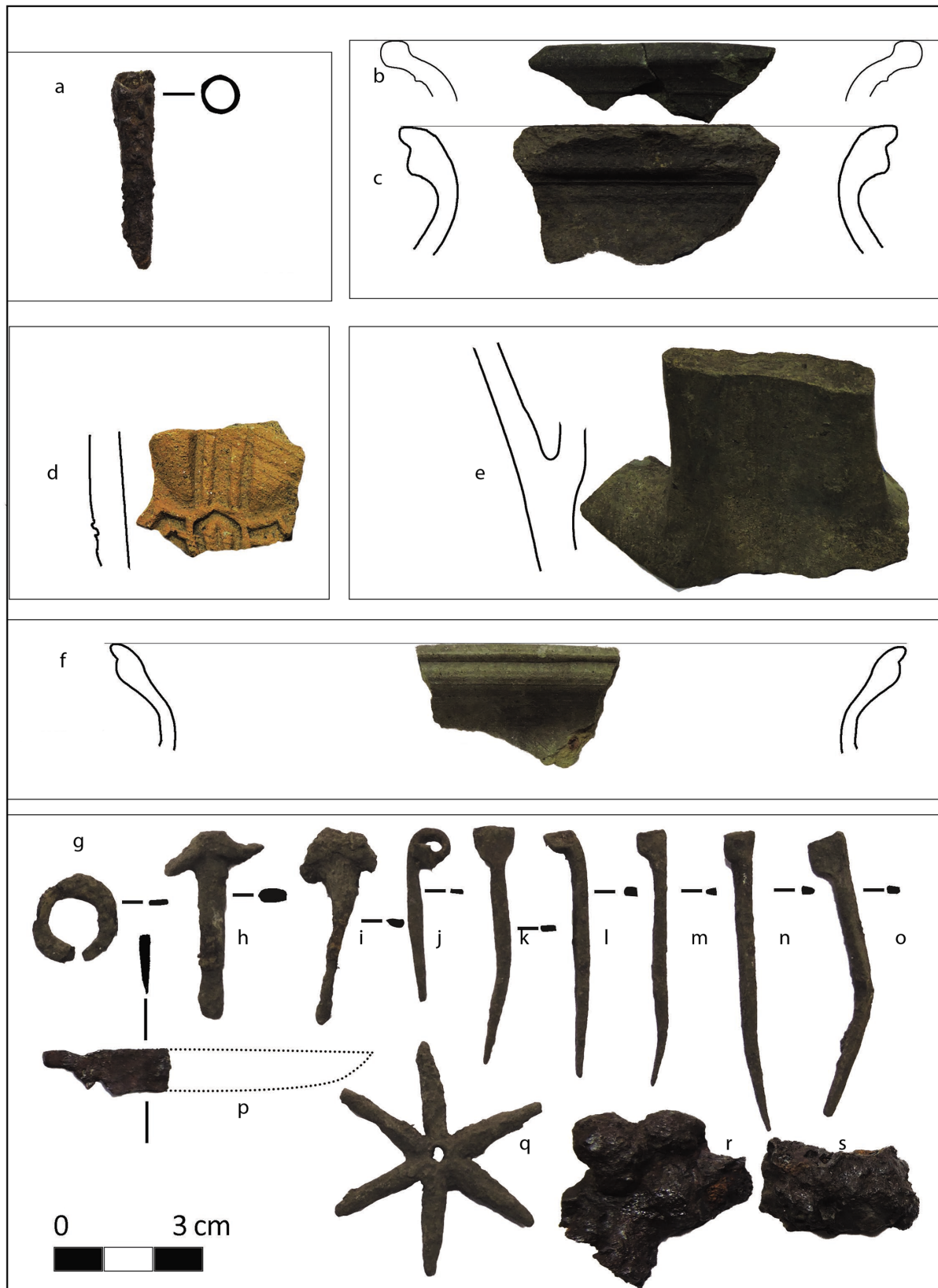


Plate IX. a: SNR 226; b-c: SNR 245; d: SNR 213; e: SNR 221; f: SNR 222; g-s: SNR 237/238.



Plate X. a-j: SNR 237/238.

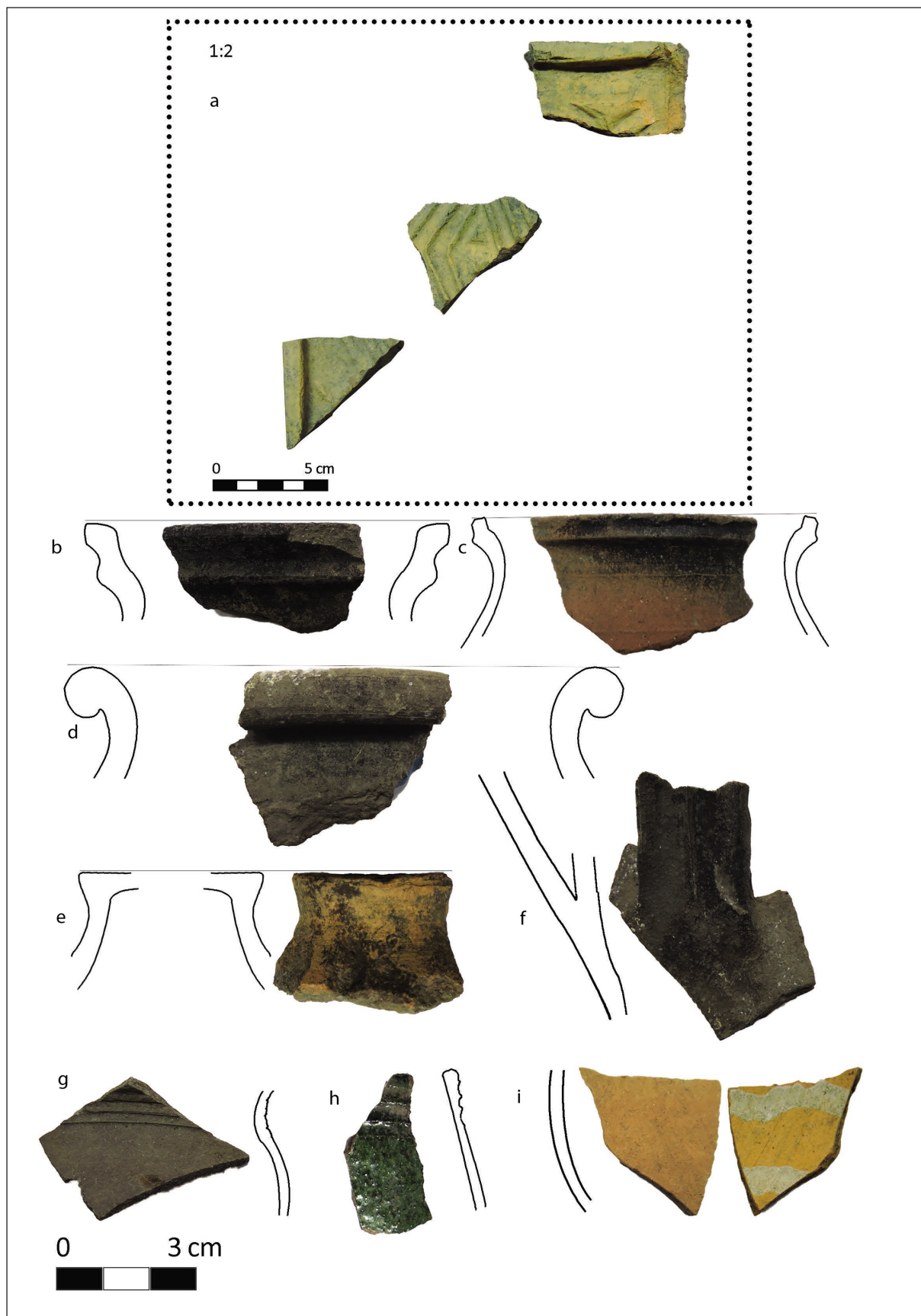


Plate XI. a-i: SNR 244.

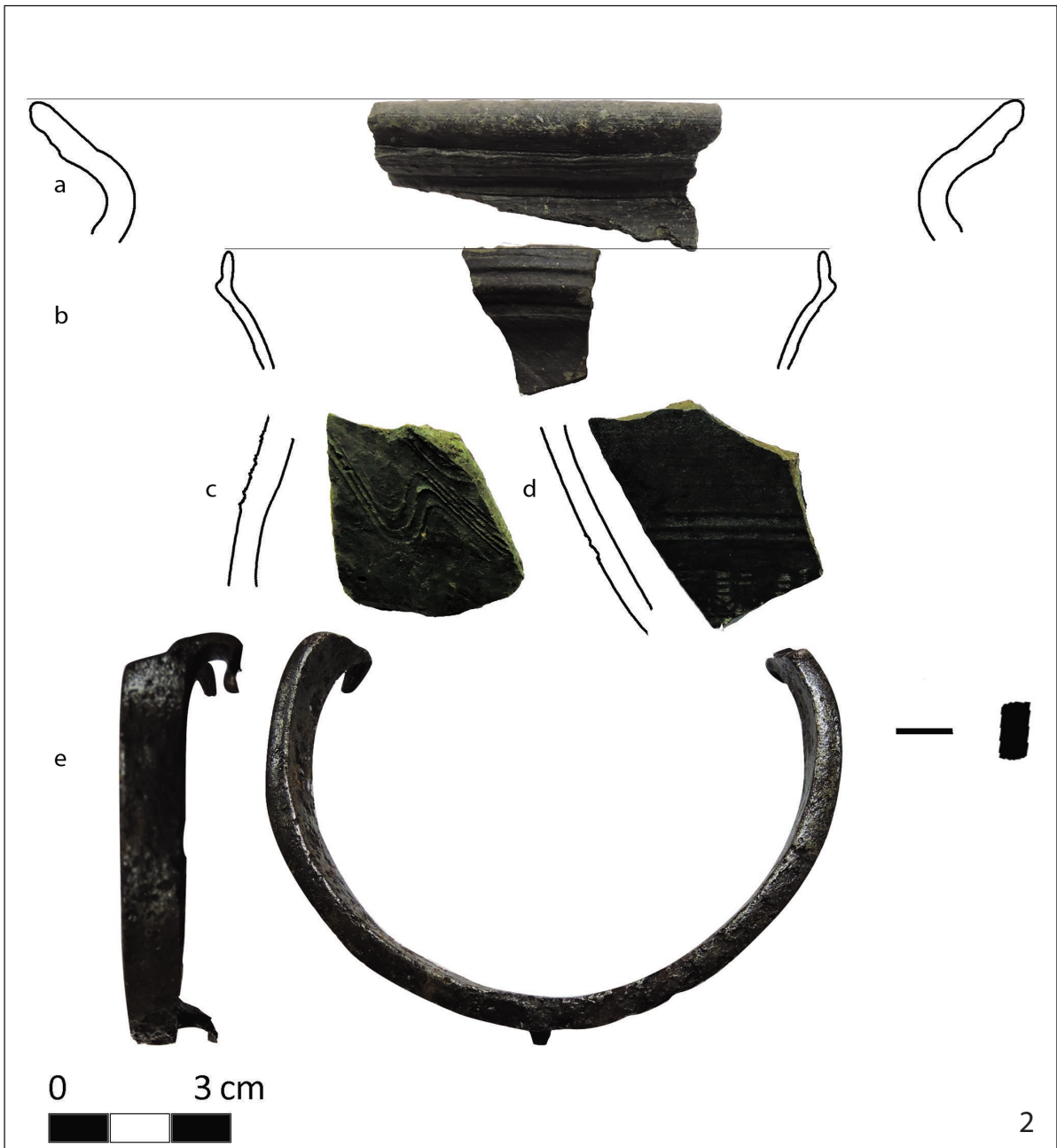


Plate XIII. 1: SNR 297/250; 2: SNR 217.

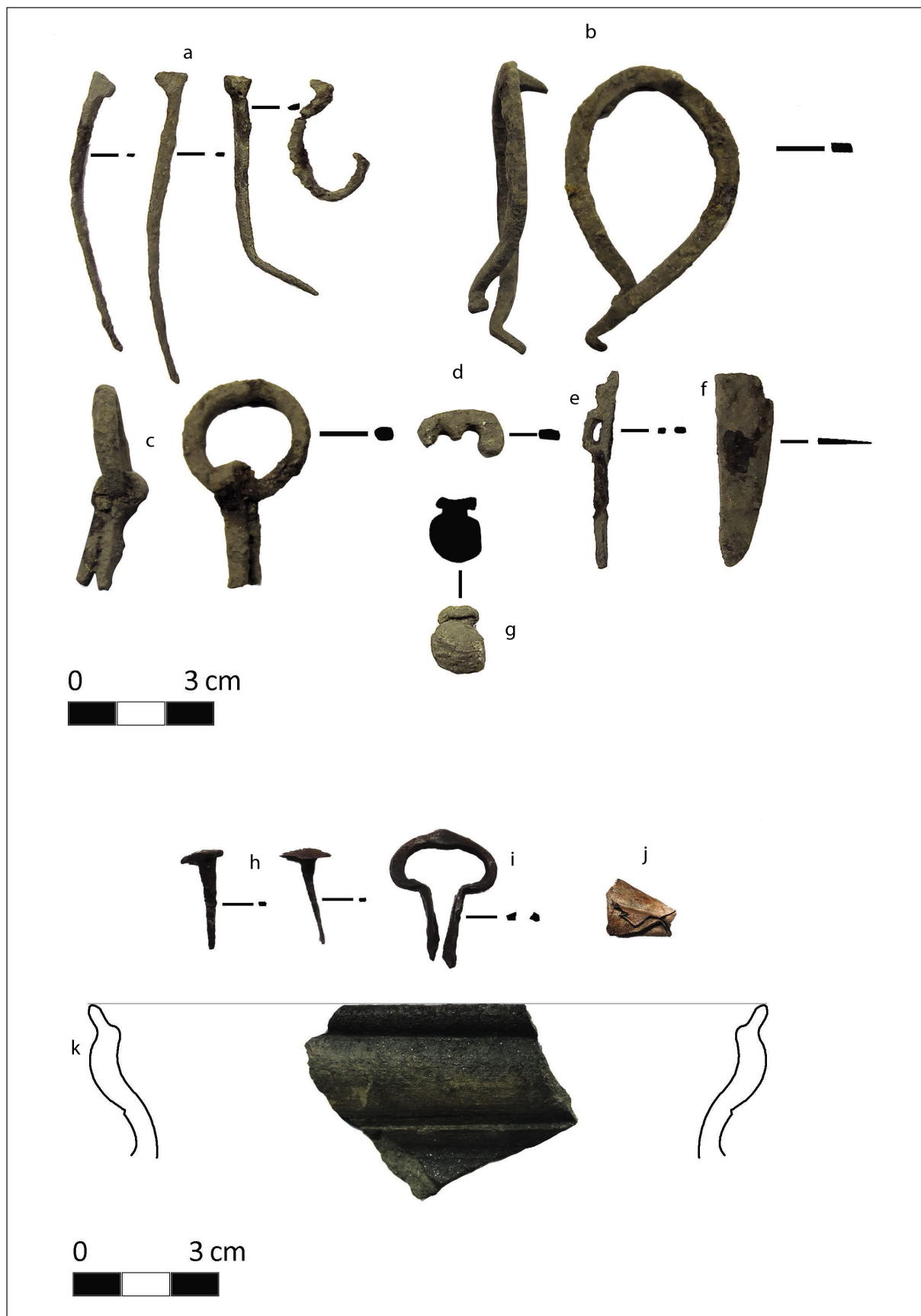


Plate XII. a-g: SNR 244; h-k: SNR 246.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AASzeged</i>	Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica
<i>Acta MN</i>	Acta Musei Napocensis
<i>Acta MP</i>	Acta Musei Porolissensis
<i>AJug</i>	Archaeologia Jugoslavica
<i>ArchÉrt</i>	Archaeologiai Értesítő
<i>ArchHist</i>	Archaeologia Historica
<i>AnB (S.N.)</i>	Analele Banatului
<i>Apulum</i>	Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis
<i>APregl</i>	Arheološki pregled. Arheološko društvo Jugoslavije
<i>ATr</i>	Ars Transsilvaniae
<i>AVFSL</i>	Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde
<i>Balkanica</i>	Annual of the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade
<i>Balcanoslavica</i>	Balcanoslavica. Centar za istraživanje na staroslovenskata kultura
<i>BCȘS</i>	Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studentești
<i>BAR (-IS)</i>	British Archaeological Reports (-International Series)
<i>BudRég</i>	Budapest Régiségei
<i>Crisia</i>	Crisia. Muzeul Țării Crișurilor
<i>Dacia (N.S.)</i>	Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, I–XII (1924–1948), Nouvelle série (N. S.): Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne
<i>DolgKoložsvár (Ú.S.)</i>	Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, (új sorozat, 2006–), Kolozsvár
<i>ErdMúz</i>	Erdélyi Múzeum
<i>EphemNap</i>	Ephemeris Napocensis
<i>GPSKV</i>	Grada za proučavanje spomenika kulture Vojvodine
<i>Istros</i>	Istros. Buletinul Muzeului Brăilei
<i>Marisia</i>	Marisia (V–), Studii și Materiale
<i>PBF</i>	Prähistorische Bronzefunde
<i>REByz</i>	Revue des études byzantines
<i>RMV (=RVM)</i>	Rad Muzeja Vojvodine/ Rad Vojvodjanskih Muzeja. Vojvodjanski muzej u Novom Sadu
<i>Sargetia (N.S.)</i>	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis
<i>SCIA-AP</i>	Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Seria Artă plastică
<i>SCIV(A)</i>	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie 1974–)
<i>Starinar</i>	Starinar. Arheološki Institut Beograd
<i>ZborRadBeograd</i>	Zbornik radova Vizantinološkog instituta Beograd Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines
<i>ZfB</i>	Zeitschrift für Balkanologie
<i>Ziridava</i>	Ziridava. Studii și cercetări
<i>Ziridava–StArch</i>	Ziridava. Studia Archeologica