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A NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT FROM ERNEI

Sándor BERECKI* Sándor József SZTÁNCSUJ**

The rescue surveys carried out in 2015 at Ernei–Köles-kert resulted in the discovery and unearthing of a large archaeological site, inhabited over several millennia, from the Neolithic to the Migration Period. The traces of the Neolithic settlement, consisting of shallow pits and stone and pottery platforms were found in the southern part of the site, on the first terrace of Mureş River. The finds comprise mainly pottery fragments and it can be assigned entirely to the Early Neolithic Criş culture, most probably to its III^{rd} or IV^{th} phase.

Keywords: settlement, Early Neolithic, Criş Culture, rescue excavations **Cuvinte cheie:** aşezare, neoltic timpuriu, cultura Criş, săpături preventive

Site 7 from Ernei-Köles-kert was investigated in 2015, on the occasion of the archaeological rescue surveys of the Târgu Mureş bypass (Corunca-Ernei). The site is located south of Ernei (Hungarian Nagyernye), on the left bank of the Mureş River, at approximately 3 km east from the present watercourse, on the first terrace of the river, respectively on the right bank of the Trebici/Terebics-Creek, a tributary of the Mureş River (Pl. I/2-3). The 335-337 m high plateau has gentle slopes towards south and good visibility on the Mureş valley. In the vast area of nearly 3 hectares archaeological remains of several ages came to light, from the Neolithic until the Migration Period. A number of 9 graves belonging to the Late Bronze Age Noua culture were discovered, as well as a Middle Bronze Age feature (Wietenberg culture), settlement remains of the Early Iron Age Gáva culture. Further sporadic finds dated from the Roman Age and a cemetery

from the Migration Period AD 5–6th century with 72 graves was also unearthed.¹

Compared with the discoveries from later periods, the Neolithic finds were much poorer. The traces of the Neolithic settlement consisted especially of pottery and stone platforms and some deepened features (Pl. I/1). They were found only in the southern part of the site, on the gentle slope of the terrace from the right bank of the creek. The habitation from this part of the plateau was not intense, the archaeological features are few and dispersed (Pl. I). The pits (Cx. 6; CX. 9; Cx. 18) were round or oval, with a diameter of 0.50-0.90 m, and a depth of 0.15–0.60 m from level of the sterile, yellow clay (Pl. II/1-4). Their fill consisted of dark brown and greyish-black soil with traces of charcoal and small adobe fragments. In one of the oval pits having a diameter of approximately 1 m (Cx. 36 partially damaged by the mechanical scaling)

^{*} Sándor Berecki. Mureş County Museum, Târgu Mureş, RO, sberecki@yahoo.com

^{**}Sándor József Sztáncsuj. Székely National Museum, Sfântu Gheorghe, RO, sztancsuj@gmail.com

¹ For further details see BERECKI ET AL. 2016.

animal bones were discovered grouped in the south-eastern part of the pit (Pl. II/4). On the western side the feature was slightly deeper; from this part only several stones were recovered.

One of the Neolithic pottery and stone platforms (Cx. 3) had an irregular shape of approximately 3.70×2.40 m. From this surface together with more than 120 potshards a fragmentary chipped flint tool was found (Pl. II/5). For the surroundings of the platform further potsherds were recovered. The feature was close to the surface and it was damaged by plough and erosion, for this reason the margins of the feature could not be clearly delimited. Another pottery agglomeration (Cx. 4) with the dimensions of 1.90×2.10 m also had an irregular shape and it was found north-east from the earlier one (Pl. II/6).

The oval-shaped feature Cx. 25 was 3×2.30 m. The pit with greyish-black fill was deepened 13-22 cm into the sterile layer of yellow clay and gravel (Pl. III). Outside the pit, around the feature several irregularly dispersed, approximately 0.25 m deep post-holes were observed. In the fill of the feature several potsherds, adobe and a few stones were found.

Neolithic pottery fragments were also found in secondary position in later features, like Roman period pits Cx. 1, Cx. 2 and Cx. 11 (Pl. 1/1). Other fragments – sometimes in great number, like in the case of Cx. 28 – were found in the afferent stratum.

The nature of the archaeological features, their relative location, and the fact that no traces of dwellings have been discovered in original position suggests that the excavation only affected the edge of the Neolithic settlement. The investigated features are probably the traces of some household complexes. The rest of the settlement was probably lying somewhat westward, on the lower terrace of the Mureş River, but its exact location was not accurately determined because of the built-in area or the density of the plant cover. The scattered pottery found in secondary position proves that the human activity of later (especially modern) ages probably destroyed some parts of the site. The vast majority of finds recovered from the Neolithic site are generally small pottery fragments (Pl. IV-VI) and some tiny pieces of wattle and daub. A single fragment of a flint blade came to light from Cx. 3. The pottery can be assigned entirely to the Early Neolithic Criş culture.

In general, most part of the material is rather poor. The fragmentation of the pottery is very high and there are no intact or reconstructed vessels, therefore it is difficult to accurately determine the shapes of the vessels. The ratio of the decorated and unornamented pottery is 6.15 % vs. 93.85 %. In terms of the technical characteristics of the pottery, it is generally of medium quality. The hand-formed vessels were predominantly manufactured from wellwashed clay, tempered with chaff and, in much less frequent cases, with sand or waster. Pit kiln firing on low- or medium level resulted usually in light red, maroon or light brown vessels with dark (grey or black) cores. The most common pottery forms are the globular vessels with wide shoulders, short cylindrical neck, outcurving rim (Pl. IV/5; VI/1, 2) and large, barrel shaped pots with slightly inverted rim (Pl. IV/9; VI/6, 7). Several thickened bases belong also to these types of vessels (Pl. IV/8; V/8). Storage jars of different forms are represented by several large, thick walled pottery fragments (Pl. IV/2, 3; V/7; VI/9). Other typical forms are conical (Pl. V/9) or biconical (Pl. IV/1) bowls, although they occur rarely. The carinated vessel with slightly profiled rim from Cx. 2 (Pl. IV/1) is a typical form for the Criş culture.

The pottery from the site is also poorly decorated, ornaments consist especially of simple, oval-shaped knobs (Pl. IV/5), barbotine-like, finger-impressed knobs (Pl. V/2, 5), double knobs (Pl. IV/6), finger-impressed ribs (Pl. V/9), nail impressions (Pl. VI/4, 5), finger impressions (Pl. V/1; IV/5), or pinched decoration (Pl. V/3, 9; VI/9). Sometimes the applied ornaments are combined with impressed decoration. A globular vessel is decorated with finger impressions on the upper side of the rim and an oval-shaped knob on the neck (Pl. IV/5) while a conical bowl is ornamented with pinched motifs and a fingerimpressed rib (Pl. V/9). Applied barbotine is also present in a small proportion (Pl. V/7; VI/8). No traces of painted ceramics could be documented from this site.

Most of the vessels described above, as well as their decorative procedures and motifs are common forms in the contemporary settlements of the Starčevo-Criş-Körös cultural complex, in the territory of the Carpathian Basin and its neighbouring regions as well. As analogies we can mention the globular vessels and storage pots discovered in the Körös-sites in Eastern Hungary: Ecsegfalva-Site 23,2 Endrőd-Site 3/119,3 Hódmezővásárhely-Kotacpart-Vatatanya,4 Szarvas-Site 8/23,5 etc. and Western Romania at Dudeștii Vechi.⁶ Similar Criș settlements can be mentioned in Transylvania from Gura Baciului, Let-Várhegy, Morești-Podei, 9 Ocna Sibiului-Triguri, 10 Orăștie-Dealul Pemilor,11 Şeuşa-La Cărarea Morii,12 Turia-Silók;13 in Banat at Cuina Turcului III¹⁴ or in Moldova at Trestiana,15 Valea Lupului,16 etc. Their spreading usually is not related to a certain chronological or evolution phase. Conical bowls are also characteristic forms in all stages of the culture (see for example Ecsegfalva-Site 23,17 Hódmezővásárhely-Kotacpart-Vata-tanya,18 Morești-Podei,19 Ocna Sibiului-Triguri,20

Ostrovu Golu II–III.²¹ Due to their general spread, these forms do not have a more accurate dating value. Byconical and carinated vessels are an exception, since they are more typical for the younger stages.²² The biconical bowl with slightly profiled rim (Pl. IV/1) has analogies especially in settlements like Let-*Várhegy*,²³ Orăștie–*Dealul Pemilor*,²⁴ Trestiana,²⁵ etc. assigned to stages III–IV of the Starčevo–Criş culture from the Eastern Carpathian region.

Finally, a special find, a fragment of a so-called altar or clay lamp can be mentioned. The fragment has a shallow bowl shaped upper part and remains of two cylindrical, truncated feet. The vessel was modelled briefly from thick paste tempered with sand and waster. This artefact is also a leading form, with several variants, in the Starčevo–Criş–Körös complex,²⁶ although larger versions similar to the variant from Ernei are not too common. Parallels can be mentioned from Endrőd–*Site 3/39*²⁷ or Imeni.²⁸

According to the most widespread chronology of Gh. Lazarovici²⁹ which is based on

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<sup>2</sup> Oross 2007, fig. 27.2; 21; 23.
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³ Makkay-Starnini 2008, fig. 311-314.

⁴ Kutzián 1944, pl. XXI/3-5; XXII/2, 3; XXIX/6, 7.

 $^{^{5}}$ Makkay–Starnini 2001, fig. 46; 61; 67/1; 69/1.

⁶ Kutzián 1944, pl. XXI/1, 2.

⁷ Сіитă 2005, pl. LX/1–4.

⁸ Zaharia 1962, fig. 14/19, 20; 15/6-8.

⁹ LAZĂR 1995, pl. XLVIII/2, 9, 12, 13.

¹⁰ Сіцтă 2005, pl. XXXII/7; XXXIII/1; XXXVII/1-5.

¹¹ LUCA-PINTER 2001, Taf. 3/5-7; 5/3, 6/1, 2.

¹² Ciută 2005, pl. LXXV/5-12.

¹³ Ciută 1997, pl. XI.

¹⁴ Lazarovici 1979, pl. VII/B-5.

¹⁵ Popuşoi 2005, fig. 83–84; 96, 98, 108–111, 115.

¹⁶ Marinescu-Bîlcu 1993, pl. 3/5.

¹⁷ Oross 2007, fig. 27.12/1, 3.

¹⁸ Kutzián 1944, pl. XXI/4.

¹⁹ Lazăr 1995, pl. XLVIII/3, 6.

²⁰ Сіитă 2005, pl. XXXIV/2, 3.

²¹ Lazarovici 1979, pl. VII/A-2-4, 10-15; VIII/A-1, 2, 5, 8-10.

²² Lazarovici 1993, 245.

²³ Zaharia 1962, fig. 5/15; 6/8–14.

²⁴ Luca-Pinter 2001, Taf. 4/6.

²⁵ Popuşoi 2005, fig. 59/1-3, 5; 68/2; 98a/3, 8; 98b/1-5.

²⁶ Oross 2007, 509.

²⁷ Makkay-Starnini 2008, fig. 89/1; 90/1.

²⁸ Unpublished find in the collection of the Székely National Museum.

²⁹ Lazarovici 1969; 1977; 1979.

Vl. Milojčić's system,³⁰ the development of the Starčevo-Cris culture in Romania is divided into four phases, each of them having further subphases.31 While the initial stages (Starčevo-Criș I and II) are present mainly in the western part of Romania (especially in Banat, Oltenia and Western-Transylvania), starting with the IIIrd stage the culture expanded to the Eastern Carpathian region as well. This expansion is linked to the appearance of the early Vinča culture, the effect of which can be demonstrated also on the archaeological heritage of the Starčevo-Criş communities.³² Late Starčevo-Criş settlements, dated to phases III and IV, appeared along the upper course of Mureş and Olt rivers (Eastern and North-Eastern Transylvania) as well as in Moldova, on the outer side of Eastern Carpathians.33 In terms of the absolute chronology, subphase IIIB is set between 5800-5500 BC, while the entire length of the late IV phase is estimated to cca. 5500-5100 BC.34 Most likely the small settlement of Ernei-Köles-kert could be established during these latter stages of development. Because of the small amount and often sporadic

nature of the material, as well as the lack of more precise dating the site cannot be accurately dated. Probably this settlement dates from the end of the IIIrd phase or the beginning of the IVth phase of the Criş culture. This dating is suggested by the biconical and carinated forms, the frequency of nail impressed and pinched decoration and the presence of sand in the clay used as tempering material. In the narrower geographic area most of the known settlements date from the same period.

From the Upper Mureş region several – unfortunately usually only broadly investigated and published – Criş sites contemporaneous with the Ernei–*Köles-kert* settlement are known, like the ones from Batoş–*Gledinel*, ³⁵ Cipău–*Dâlma*, ³⁶ Iernut–*Bideşcutul Mare*, ³⁷ Morești–*Podei* or Târgu Mureș–*Fortress*. ³⁹ According to the available data, these sites date from the late phases of the Criş culture. Thus, despite the low number and poor character of the finds, the Early Neolithic site from Ernei–*Köles-kert* brings new relevant data regarding both the geomorphology and the character of the settlements from this period on the upper course of the Mureş River.

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³⁰ Milojčić 1949.

³¹ For a general overview see LAZAROVICI 1993, 244–247; LUCA ET AL. 2011, 7–16.

³² Ursulescu 2000, 15–18.

³³ Lazarovici 1993, 245; Marinescu-Bîlcu 1993, 192–194.

 $^{^{34}}$ Luca et al. 2011, 13–15.

³⁵ Lazăr 1995, 65–66.

³⁶ Vlassa 1959, 450.

³⁷ Vlassa 1966, 17.

³⁸ Lazăr 1995, 264.

³⁹ See in this volume.

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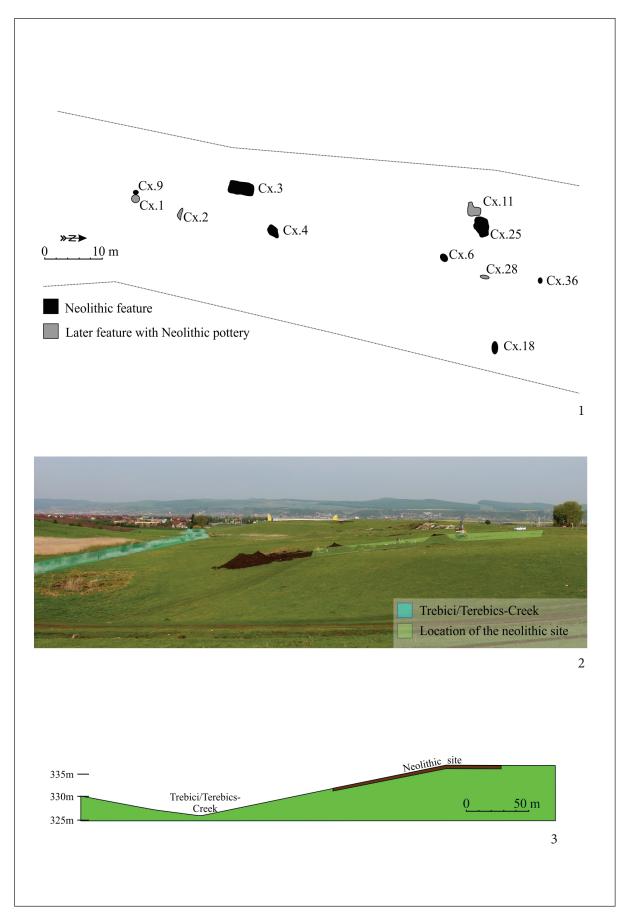


Plate I. Ernei–*Köles-kert*. 1. Features with Neolithic finds; 2. View of the site from East; 3. SW–NE section of the Trebici/Terebics-Creeck's valley.

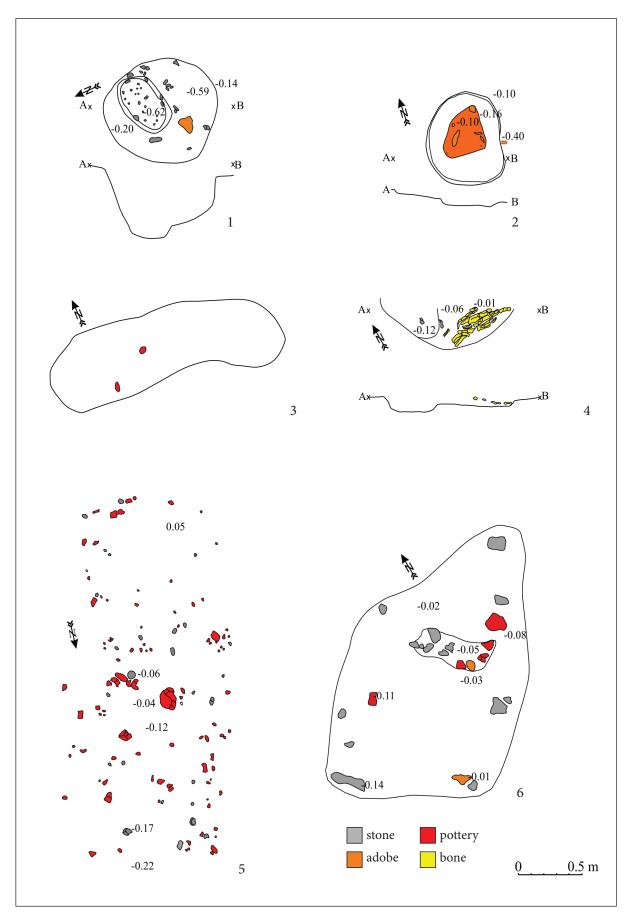


Plate II. Ernei–*Köles-kert*. Features with Neolithic finds: pits (1: Cx. 6; 2: Cx. 9; 3: Cx. 18; 4: Cx. 36) and platforms (5: Cx. 3; 6: Cx. 4).

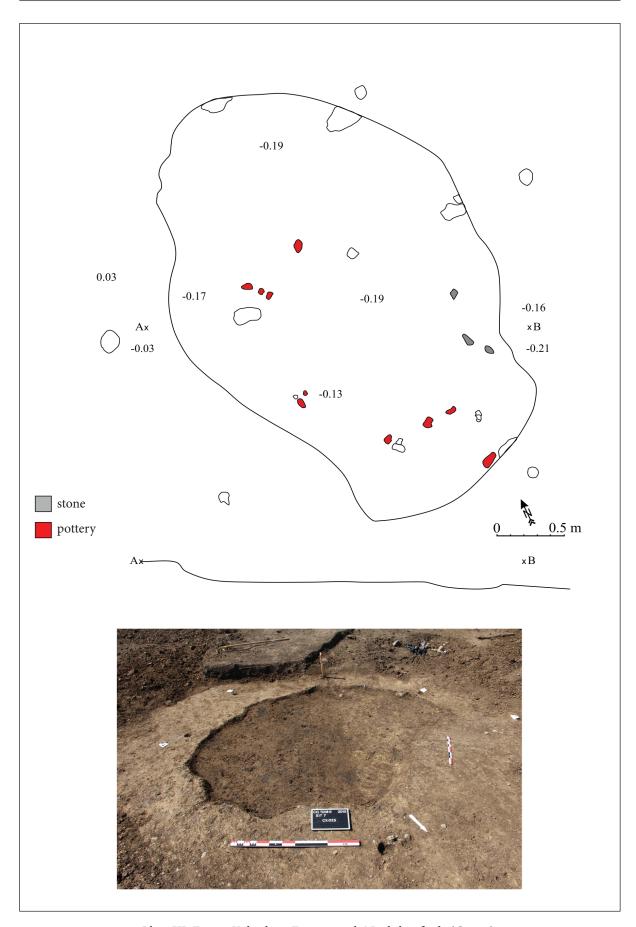


Plate III. Ernei–*Köles-kert*. Feature with Neolithic finds (Cx. 25).

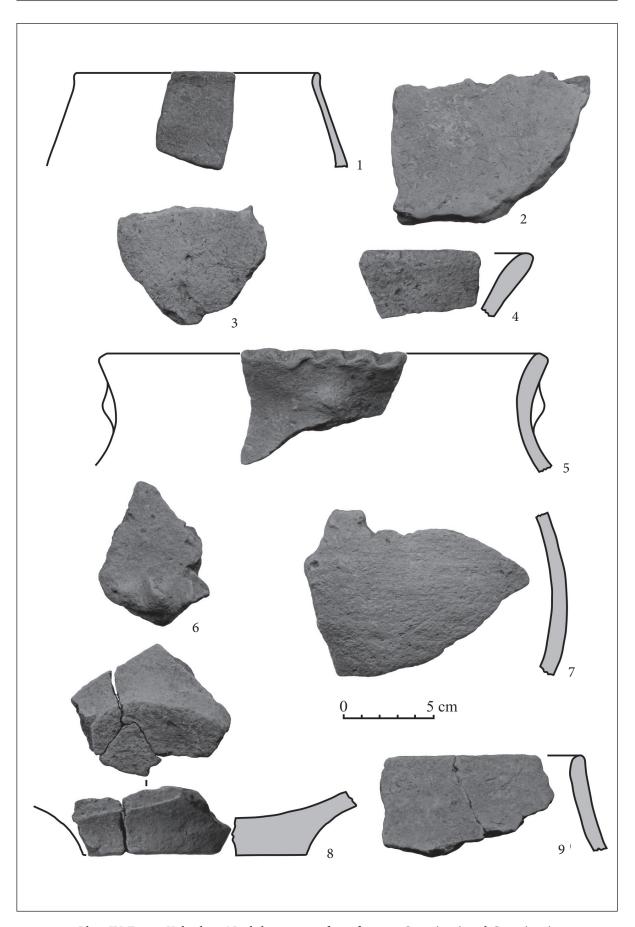


Plate IV. Ernei–*Köles-kert*. Neolithic pottery from features Cx. 2 (1, 2) and Cx. 3 (3–9).

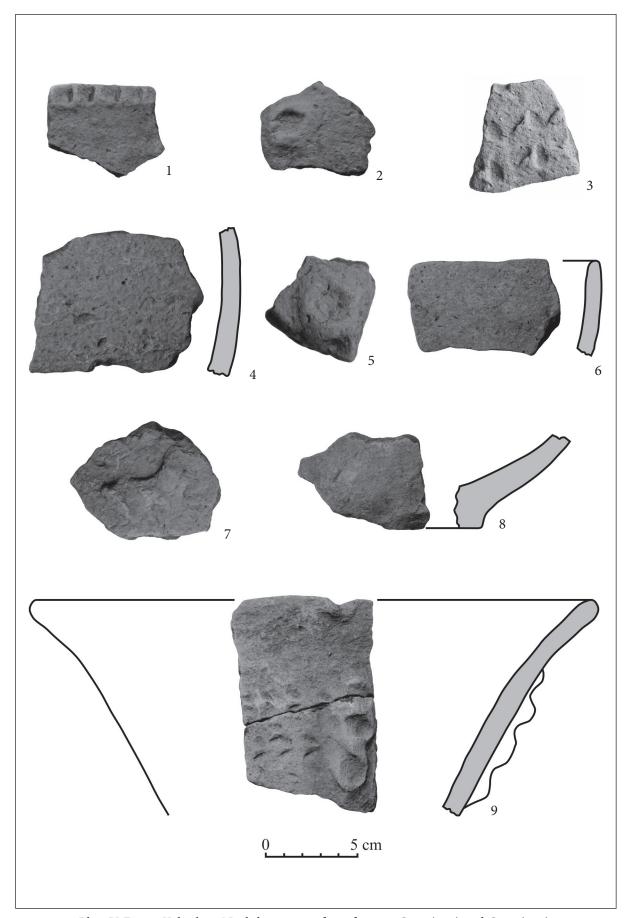


Plate V. Ernei– $K\"{o}les$ -kert. Neolithic pottery from features Cx. 3 (1–3) and Cx. 4 (4–9).

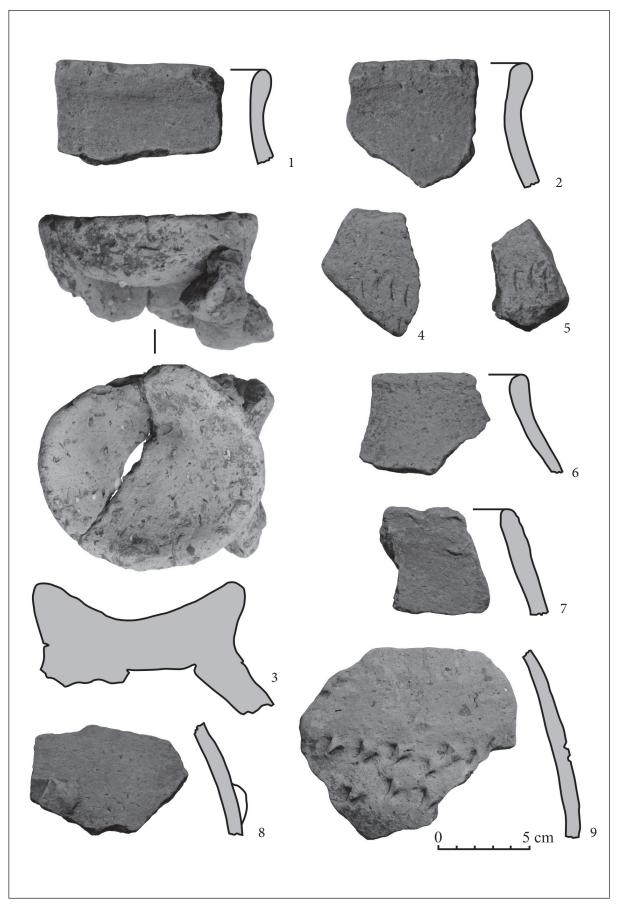


Plate VI. Ernei–*Köles-kert*. Neolithic pottery from features Cx. 4 (1, 2), Cx. 6 (3), Cx. 28 (4, 5) and stray finds from the site (6–9).

ABBREVIATIONS

AA Archäologischer Anzeiger. Beiblatt zum Jahrbuch des Archäologischen Institut,

Berlin

Acta (Siculica), Muzeul Național Secuiesc, Sfântu Gheorghe

Acta Archaeologica Carpathica, Academia Scientiarum Polona Collegium

Cracoviense, Kraków

ActaMNActa Musei Napocensis, Cluj-NapocaActaMPActa Musei Porolissensis, ZalăuActaTSActa Terrae Septemcastrensis, Sibiu

Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica, Alba Iulia Angustia Angustia, Muzeul Carpaților Răsăriteni, Sfântu Gheorghe

Antaeus Antaeus. Communicationes ex Instituto Archaeologico Academiae Scien-

tiarum Hungaricae, Budapest

Apulum, Acta Musei Apulensis, Alba Iulia

Archért Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest

Archkorr Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt, Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmu-

seum, Mainz

ArhMold Arheologia Moldovei, Iași
ASZ Agrártörténeti Szemle

AttiSocFriuli Atti della Sociéta per la preistoria e protostoria della Regione Friuli – Venezia

Giulia

AVSL (NF) Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, (Neue Folge),

Hermannstadt

BAI Bibliotheca Archaeologica Iassiensis, IașiBAM Bibliotheca Archaeologica Moldaviae, Iași

Banatica, Muzeul de istorie al județului Caraș-Severin, Reșița

BAR British Archaeological Reports, International Series / British Series, Oxford

BCMIBuletinul Comisiei Monumentelor IstoriceBMABiblioteca Mvsei Apvlensis, Alba Iulia

BMM Bibliotheca Mysei Marisiensis, Archaeologia, Târgu Mureș / Cluj Napoca

BMN Bibliotheca Mvsei Napocensis, Cluj-NapocaBMP Bibliotheca Mvsei Porolissensis, Zalău

Budapest Régiségei, Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, Budapest

CA Cercetări Arheologice, București

CCA Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, București
CMM Catalogi Musei Marisiensis, archaeologia, Târgu Mureș
ComArchHung Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae, Budapest

Cumidava, Anuarul Muzeelor Brașovene
CsSZMÉ Csíki Székely Múzeum Évkönyve, Csíkszereda

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EJA European Journal of Archaeology
EMúz Erdélyi Múzeum, Kolozsvár

EphemNap Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca

ESzNMJ Emlékkönyv a Székely Nemzeti Múzeum 50 éves jubileumára

FK Földtani Közlöny, Budapest

HesperiaHesperia, the American School of Classical Studies at AthensHydrobiologiaHydrobiologia. The International Journal of Aquatic SciencesJAMÉA Nyíregyházi Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve, Nyíregyháza

JQSJournal of Quaternary ScienceJRAJournal of Roman Archaeology

Lymbus Lymbus. Magyarságtudományi Forrásközlemények, Budapest

Marisia (V–), Studii și Materiale, Târgu Mureș MCA Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București

MIMK Molnár István Múzeum Kiadványai, Cristuru Secuiesc/Székelykeresztúr

MNy Magyar Nyelv, Budapest

Művészet, Országos Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat, Budapest

NK Numizmatikai Közlöny, Budapest

NyIK Nyelv- és irodalomtudományi közlemények

NumZ Numismatische Zeitschrift, Wien

RevBis Revista Bistriței, Complexul Județean Muzeal Bistrița-Năsăud

RevIst Revista Istorică, București

Sargeția, Buletinul Muzeului județului Hunedoara, Acta Musei Devensis, Deva

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Terra SebusTerra Sebvs, Acta Mvsei Sabesiensis, SebeşVAHVaria Archaeologica Hungarica, BudapestWMMÉWosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve, SzekszárdZiridava (StudArch)Ziridava (Studia Archaeologica 2010–), Arad