

FINALLY, SLAVS! Early Slavic infiltration into the Eastern Carpathians

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The Ciuc-basin which is located by the source of the Olt river in a depression of the Eastern Carpathians (Harghita county, Romania) is missing on the maps of the early Slavic sites. (fig. 1.) Obviously this is caused not by – as it is often thought – a specific historical background or different inappropriate natural environment, but by the lack of archaeological excavations.

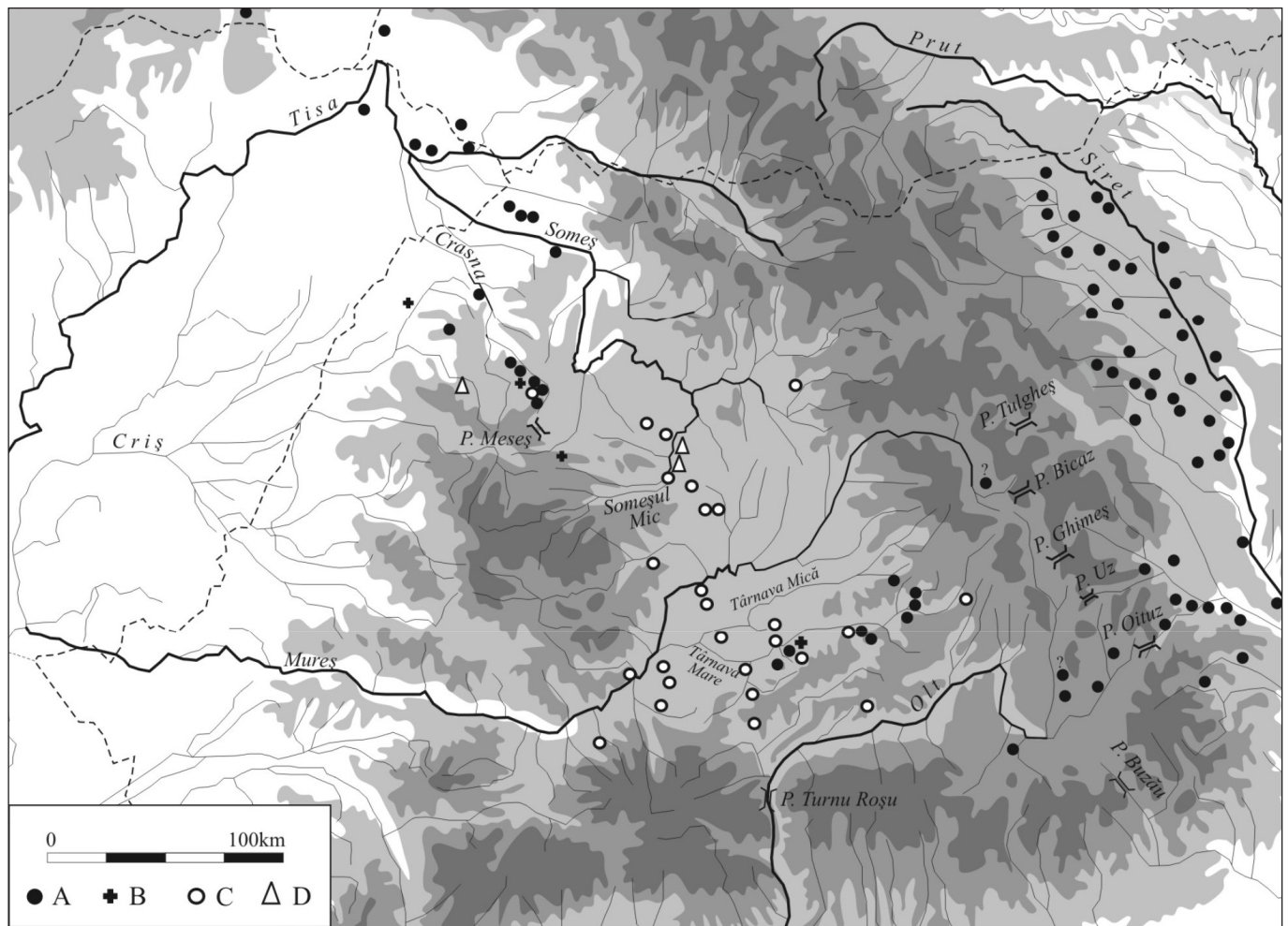


Fig. 1. distribution of the early Slavic sites in Transylvania and the Siret-valley (Moldova). (Stanciu 2015. 145/fig.25).

This fact was clearly proved by the new researches regarding the sites of the 3-4th century and Arpadian period (11-13th century). Till the recent years these periods were also almost missing in Ciuc, but in the last decade we successfully identified and documented several sites belonging to these cultural horizons. Now one can declare that in the 3th century a massive immigration connected with the Sântana de Mureș – Cerniaș culture took place into the Olt valley which was followed by a sudden and total (?) wandering of the same population in the second half of the 4th century. A wide immigration could be documented around

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the 11-12th centuries which founded the present settlement and ecclesiastical system of the region¹

Between these two major processes the archaeological situation of the 5-10th century remained unknown till the last years.² The lack of the Slavic material was specially disturbing because South and West from the Ciuc-depression such finds were known already from the 70-es of the last century.³ The exclamation from the title of the present paper is explained therefore not with a pan Slavic emotion, but rather with the satisfaction of partially solving this long lasting scientific dept. Knowing and admitting that the etno-name “Slavic” is ahistorical for the discussed period, here we won’t go further into problems of ethno genesis of the Slavs, or historical population identity issues⁴ and we will use the term “Slavic” as generally accepted in the literature to present some new data regarding this period and region.

During preventive excavations in the site Fodor-kert – Miercurea Ciuc (H: Csíkszereda) in 2011 and 2017 among several other finds six semi-sunked houses were found which can be interpreted as “Early Slavic”.⁵ (fig. 2-3.)

All of the houses were sinked more or less into the ground, the historical feet level (and real pit depths) could not be appreciated because of intensive agriculture and unknown micro morphological geological processes. All were oriented mostly to SW/NE and the majority of them had stone built ovens in the East corners (see below the plans). The pit dimensions were very alike, mostly around 3,5x3,5 m (in four cases), but in two cases the only measurable side reached the 4 and even 4,7 m. (fig. 4-6.)

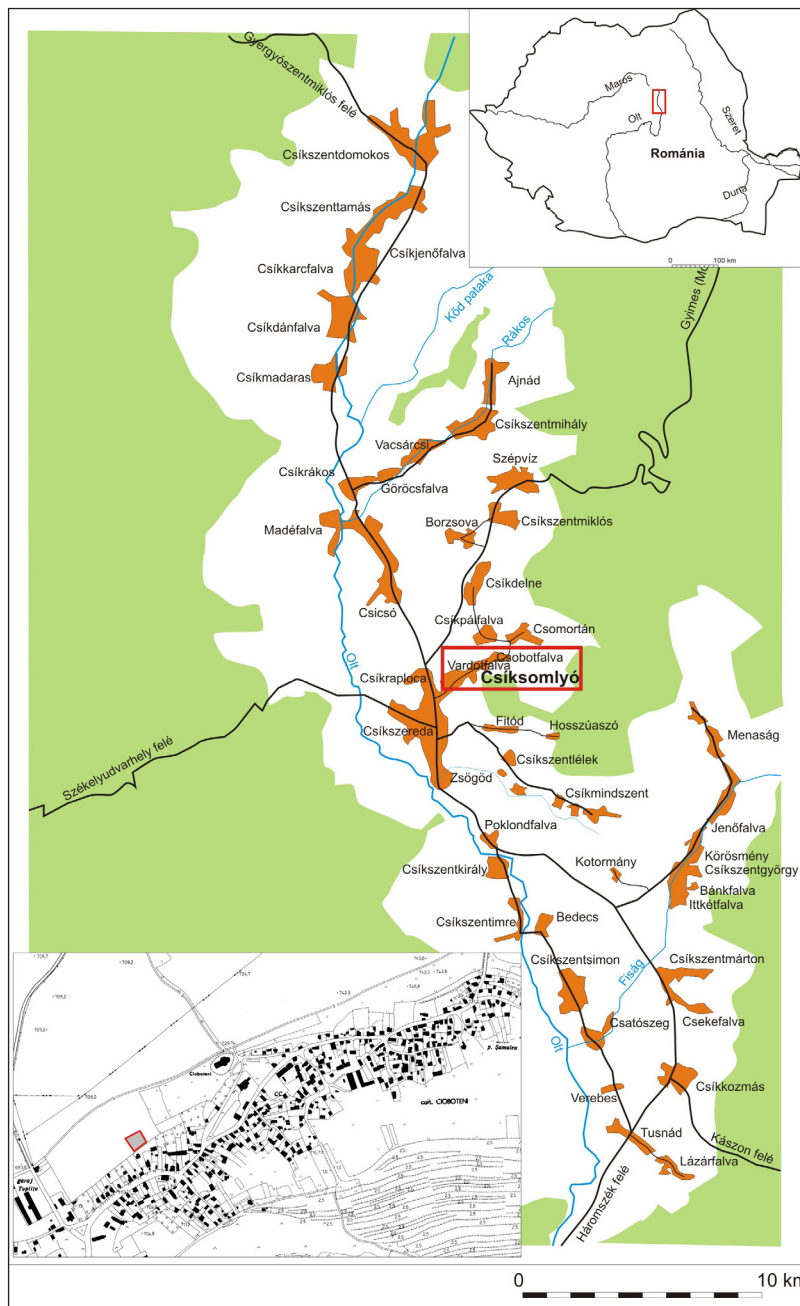


Fig. 2. localisation of the site

¹ Botár István: A Marosszentanna – Csernyahov kultúra régészeti emlékei a Csíki-medencében I. In: *Erdély és kapcsolatai a kora népvándorlás korában*. Molnár István Múzeum kiadványai 3. Székelykeresztúr, 15-38. 2011. 2015, and Botár István: A Csíki-medence középkori településtörténete. PhD disszertáció, ELTE, Budapest, 2013.

² Stanciu, Ioan: The problem of the earliest slavs in Intra-Carpathian Romania (Transylvania and the North-West vicinity). In: *Slovenská archaeológia* LXI – 2. 2013. 323-370. idem: Cei mai vechi slavi în spațiul intracarpatic al României. O scurtă examinare și contribuții la dosarul arheologic al problemei In: *Marmatia* 12., 2015., 97-162. 2015.

³ Székely Zoltán: Die frühesten slawischen Siedlungen in Siebenbürgen. In: *Slavia Antiqua* 17. 1970., 125-136.

⁴ For this see Curta, Florin: *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700 A.D.*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought., Fourth Ser. 52, Cambridge/New York, 2001., S. Paliga, E. S. Teodor: *Lingvistica și arheologia slavilor timpurii. O altă vedere de la Dunărea de Jos*, Târgoviște, 2009.

⁵ Here we will present shortly the houses, a detailed description in Romanian will be published soon.

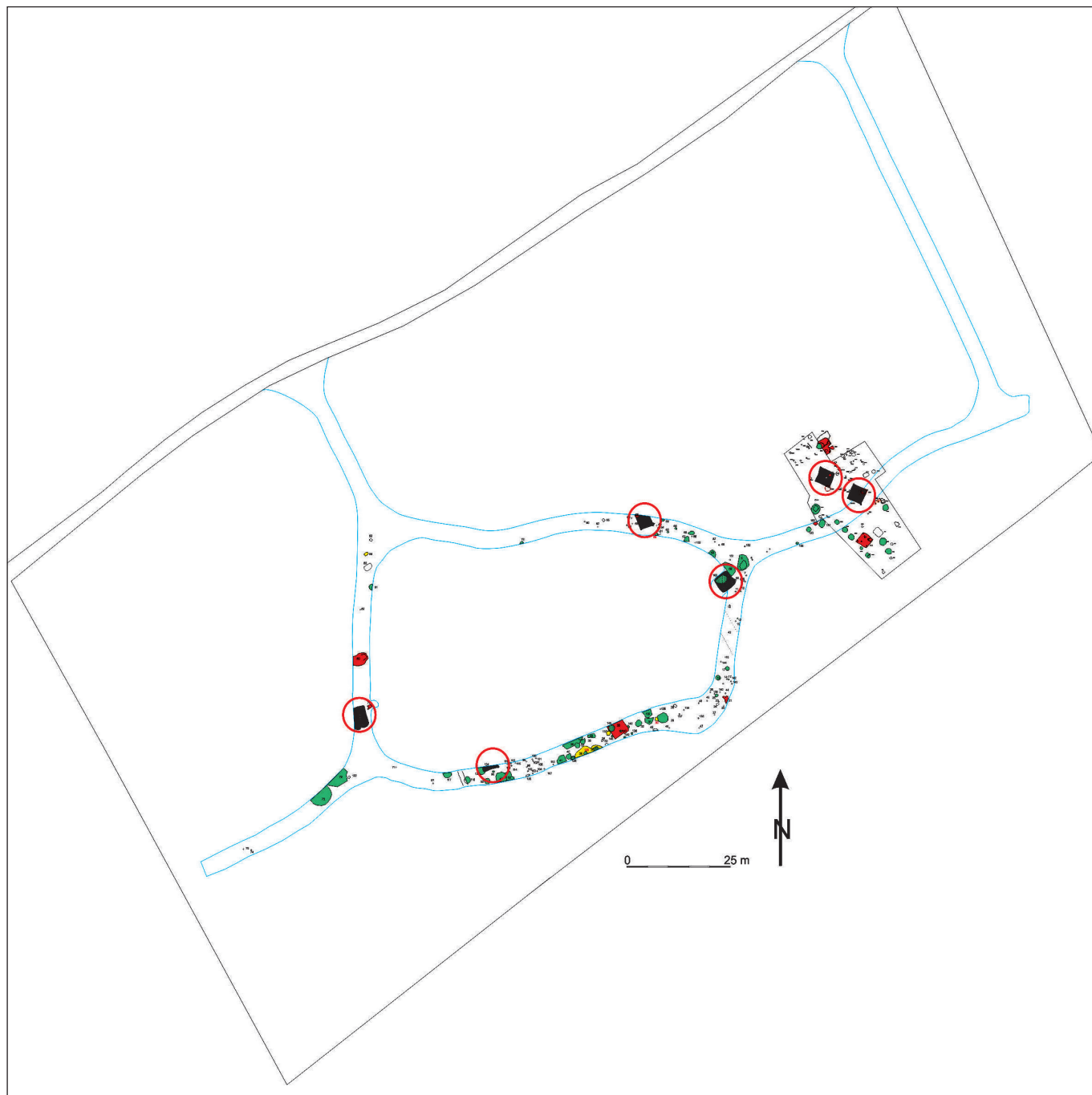


Fig. 3. plan of the excavations (2011, 2017), „Slavic” hoses marked with red circle

The plans were although surprisingly various regarding the wall and roof holding post holes in the corners: 2x2 but located inside and outside the houses pit, 3 × 3, and even without post remains, probably with sleeper. In two cases clear signs of an interior board walls could be documented (“straight” carbonised oak boards), in the third case a small, but definitely deeper ditch was observed along and under the main pit, which we presume to be a trace of an interior lining. (fig. 7.)

The archaeological material is poor composed only by vessels which are very alike: exclusively hand-made pots with very simple, often straight, vertical or slightly bent rims without any decoration and the typical circular clay pans in more dimensions. (fig. 8-11.)

Based on the total absence of the wheel made pottery and any decoration a “early” Slavic interpretation was obvious, but the local chronology of this term is still in discussion. The last papers suggest the installation of the early Slavs in the Olt valley in the second half of the 6th or even the first half of the

7th century.⁶ The Ciuc-depression is close and easily accessible from the Moldavian Slavic sites therefore we supposed that our finds may belong to the early phases of the Inter-Carpathian Slavic presence. To check this hypothesis more carbon and bone samples from Miercurea Ciuc were dated with C14 analysis.⁷ The results were astonishing. Two houses were dated (cal AD/2σ) to the „expected” periods: 2011/32: 542-625, 2017/13: 575-650, 2017/93, to a common early Slavic period between the second half of the 6th and early 7th century.

Two other houses surprisingly seem to be even earlier: 2017/93: 418-540, 2011/17-19: 428-591. This means that the first Slavic settlement here in Miercurea Ciuc could have been founded already in the middle of the 5th century or latest around the middle or the second half of the 6th century. The first (understandable) reaction is doubt: are the C14 results acceptable? Should we really rethink such a important historical process just because of some analysis? Fortunately we have some control measurements too. Beside the Slavic material we also sent samples from Sântana de Mureş –Cerniahov pits and all achieved dates were between AD: 240-390.⁸ Therefore the author’s trust regarding the C14 results is strong.

At this point the final (?) conclusion based on the present data may be the following: the first “Slavic” communities may have arrived into the Ciuc-depression and in the Eastern part of the Carpathian-basin already during the second half of the 5th century. Three other consequences may be drawn. First: the simplicity of the pottery (total absence of decoration and wheel-made pottery) suggests that this population had no or limited/short contacts with other communities. Second: if the previous hypothesis is right, the most probably emissive region (?) had to be Moldova, which naturally had to be populated by “Slavs” priory this period.



Fig. 4-6. „Slavic” houses excavated in 2011 and 2017.

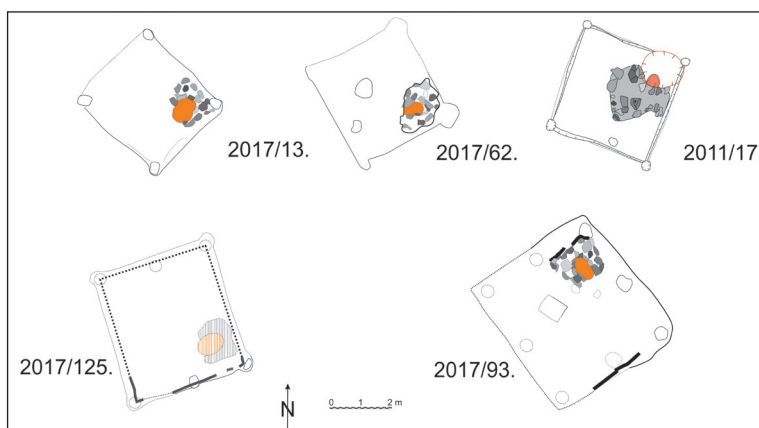


Fig. 7. plans of the excavated houses

⁶ Stanciu 2015. 102-128.

⁷ We wish to thank the support of the Harghita County Council for it’s archaeological projects. Analysis made by Isotoptech Zrt, Debrecen (Hungary). We also wish to thank Molnár Mihály for his helpfull approach.

⁸ A paper about the 3-4th century settlement will be published soon.

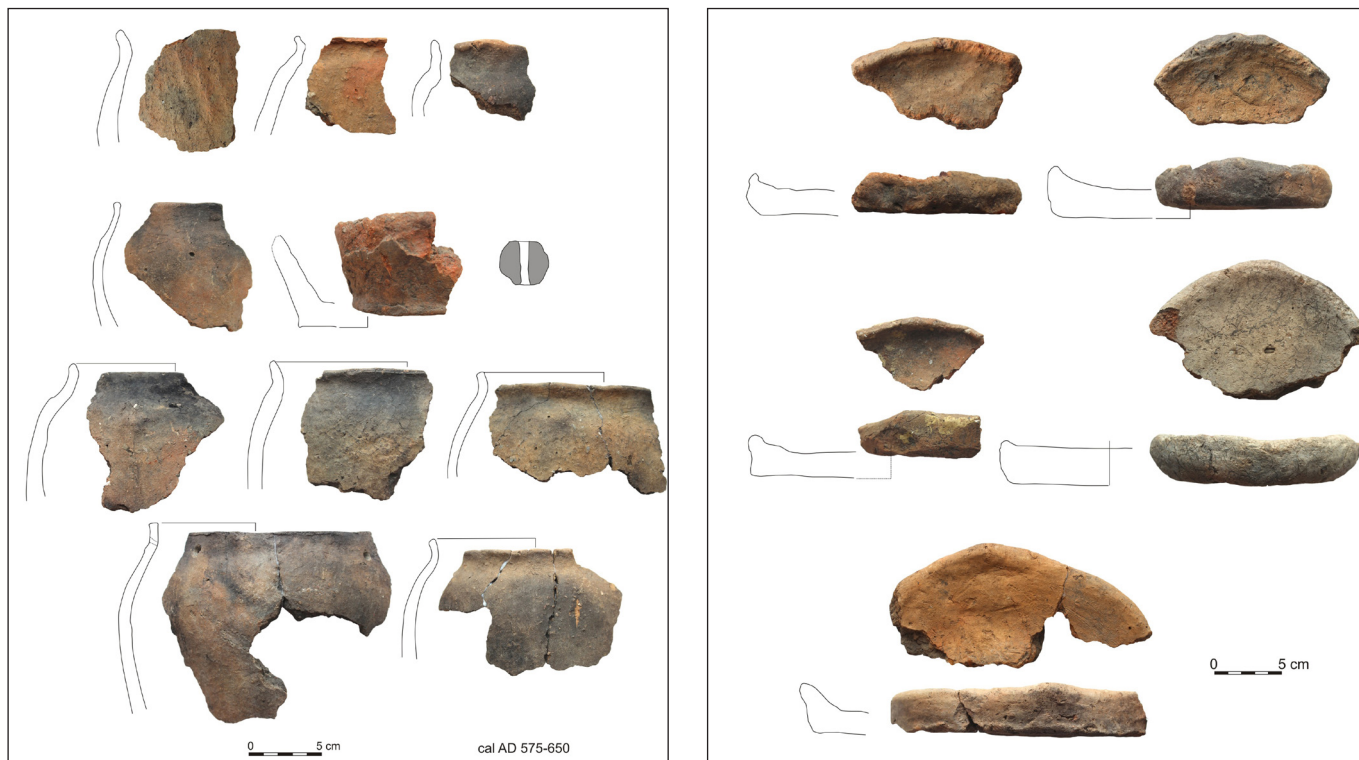


Fig. 8-9. pottery from the 13/2017. house

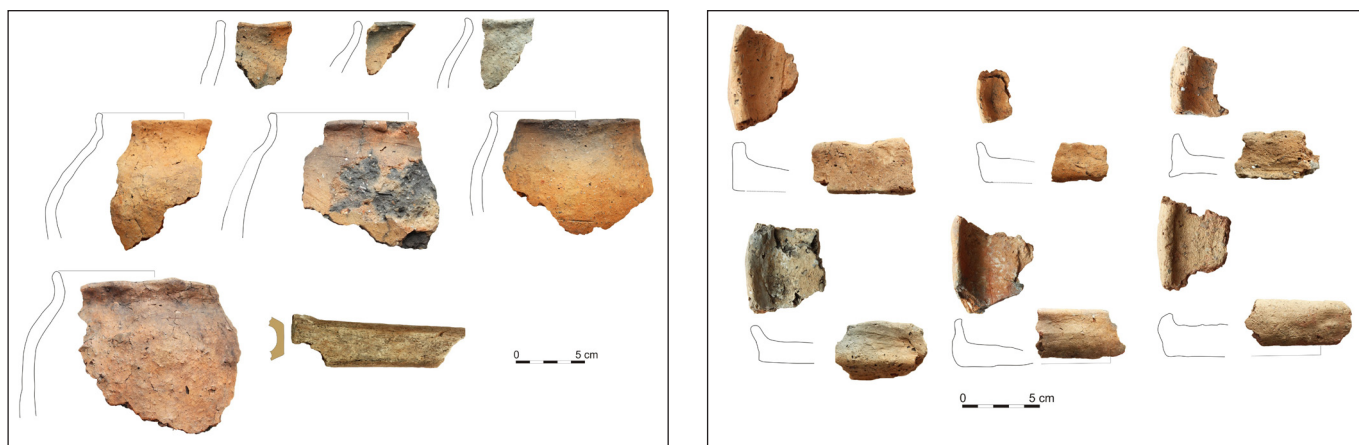


Fig. 10-11. pottery from the 93/2017. house

Finally: based on the present data it seems that the “Slavic” settlement was probably abandoned in the middle of the 7th century...

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