

# **EXCAVATIONS AT PERUR**

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## **PREFACE**

The Kongu region of Tamil Nadu (covering the present districts of Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Nilgiris and parts of Dindigul & Dharmapuri) has several archaeological sites belonging to the megalithic and early historical periods with well-preserved artefacts. It was famous for its mineral wealth (notably Beryl), with traders coming from as far as the Mediterranean region to buy beads made of semi-precious stones. Archaeological excavations in the region (at Karur, Kodumanal, Vellalur and Sular) have yielded thousands of artefacts, especially Roman coins (in gold, silver and copper) and gold ornaments, revealing that it was an important centre of foreign trade even during the early historical period. It is of interest to note that the Kongu region has yielded nearly eighty percent of the Roman coins unearthed all over India. The presence of Kongu Beryl beads in the pre-Mauryan stratum of Taxila excavations reveals that the Kongu region had trade contacts with North India as well.

Perur in Coimbatore district, which is mentioned in Sangam literature, is one of the old Kongu sites with continuous habitation. Its location on the ancient high way along the bank of the Noyyal River was a strategic one as far as foreign trade was concerned. Several artefacts have been reportedly unearthed by the local village folk at Perur. Although their reliability is limited since they were not found during scientifically conducted excavations and their stratigraphical relevance cannot be established, they were a pointer to the fact that Perur was a potential archaeological site. The Department of Archaeology undertook an excavation at Perur to verify the authenticity of the artefacts discovered by the local people, and in order to deepen our understanding of the history of the Kongu region.

I wish to thank the Government of Tamil Nadu for sanctioning a sum of Rs.4 lakhs under Part II scheme during 2001-02 toward archaeological excavations at Perur in Coimbatore district and Mangudi in Tirunelveli district (for which a separate report is being brought out). In particular, I would like to thank Thiru P.A.Ramiah, IAS, Secretary to Government, Tamil Development, Culture & Religious Endowments Department, and my predecessor, Dr.R.Kannan, IAS (who was the Commissioner of Archaeology then) for the efforts taken by them to get these projects sanctioned. The credit for the successful completion of the Perur excavations must go to Dr.R.Kannan.

My thanks are also due to the individuals and institutions that extended assistance in various ways while conducting the excavation and preparation of the report. The following staff members of this department - Thiru R.Poongundran, Thiru P.Gauthamaputhiran, Thiru D.Thulasiraman, Thiru T.Subramanian and Thiru R.Selvaraj - were directly involved in the excavations and deserve to be commended for their excellent work. Thiru V.Magudeswaran and Thiru K.Olimalik assisted in the preparation of the drawings and contour survey map while Tmt.S.Vasanthi and Thiru V.Ramamurthi assisted in the preparation of the report.

I also wish to thank the head of the Thavathiru Santhalinga Adigalar Mutt of Perur and the temple authorities of Arulmigu Patteeswarasamy temple for readily giving consent to conduct the excavations in the lands owned by the mutt and the temple respectively. I am thankful to the Revenue Department officials for helping us in so many ways. Dr.Shanthi Pappu, Secretary of Sharma Centre for Heritage Education, Pune, offered valuable guidance and a

suggestion regarding the methods to be followed for collecting the archaeological samples during the excavation, and the department is beholden to her. I also thank the Director General of Archaeological Survey of India for granting permission for the excavation work.

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## INTRODUCTION

Perur, a historical town, is situated 6 km west of Coimbatore on the Coimbatore -Siruvani road (10° 58' 30'' N latitude and 70° 54' 54'' E longitude). It lies on the south bank of the river Noyyal, a tributary of Kaveri.

The ancient site, locally known as 'Nattam' (meaning ancient habitation), occupies an area of about 50 hectares extending from Thirunitrumedu on the west and Perur Tamil College ground on the east. The Archaeological Survey of India under the direction of K.V.Soundara Rajan and B.Narasimhaiah excavated this site in the year 1970-71. The excavation revealed three cultural periods, each overlapping with the other and suggestive of a continuous occupation without any break.<sup>1</sup>

In the pre historic period, the Kongu region was a pastoral area, where cattle keepers had their settlements with cattle pens. Ash mounds are often associated with the cattle keepers, and Thirunitrumedu was one such ash mound. Excavations in ash-mound sites like Utnoor and Piklihal in the Deccan reflect the possibility of rituals such as fire festivals being followed by the cattle-keepers.<sup>2</sup> Such ash mounds are also found in places like Kovilpalayam in Coimbatore district.<sup>3</sup>

The cattle pens are popularly called 'patti' in the Kongu region. The famous Siva temple at Perur obviously derives its name ('Pattiswarar') from them. Even today, the ash collected from the nearby habitation mound is used as sacred ash ('Thiruneeru') in the temple.

That the site was inhabited even in the megalithic period is well established through the occurrence of the urn burials on the

south bank of the river Noyyal at Perur. Recently, many burial urns were unearthed from this site, among them was a black and red urn unearthed near the bridge of the Noyyal River.

The Cheras ruled the Kongu region during Sangam Age. After the Cheras, the Gangas occupied it. According to Arokiaswami, the early rulers of Ganga dynasty hailed from Perur.<sup>4</sup> A Jain mendicant Simahanandi had acted as the catalyst for the origin of the Ganga dynasty.<sup>5</sup> A copper plate recently discovered from Karamadai mentions Perur, Thadagam Hills and a river near Perur.<sup>6</sup> From the seventh century ACE (*N.B BCE- Before common era, ACE After common era*) onwards, the region was ruled by the Pandyas, Cholas and Cheras. Among the early Pandyas, Parantaka Neduncadaian was the first ruler who brought the whole Kongu region under Pandya control. He built a Vishnu temple at Perur, which is attested by the Dalavaipuram copper plates of 9th Century ACE.<sup>7</sup>

The Chera king Kandan Ravi, son of Kandan, is referred to in the Perur inscriptions. Viranarayanan, brother of Ravi, must have been the progenitor of Virakerala dynasty which ruled Perur and South Kongu.<sup>8</sup> A copper plate in the possession of Ramaswamy Iyer from Irugur, whose father was the priest of Pattiswarar temple, mentions about the battle between Uttamachola of Kongu Chola dynasty and Rajaraja of Virakerala dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

Among the Kongu Cholas, in the 11-12th century ACE, the inscriptions of Virachola III, (1168-69 ACE) Virarajendra, (1206-1255 ACE) Vikrama Chola II (1265-1275 ACE) and Vikrama Chola III (1275-1304 ACE) were found engraved in the Pattiswarar swami temple,

After the Kongu Cholas, the Pandyas annexed the Kongu region in the 13th Century AD. During their time, Perur advanced



significantly both in trade and agriculture. Pandya rulers encouraged irrigation works. Two reservoirs were constructed across the Noyyal River at Perur.<sup>10</sup>

From the first half of the 14th century, different parts of the Kongu region were ruled by different powers like the Pandyas (who had conquered the Cholas) the Hoysalas and the Cheras. After the Pandyas, the Hoysalas annexed the Kongu country. Many inscriptions of Viravallala III (1292 - 1342 ACE) are available. One of these inscriptions narrates the socio-political condition that prevailed during Hoysala rule and it gives the genealogy of the Hoysala dynasty.<sup>11</sup>

Kongu country was annexed to the Mysore Kingdom during the reign of Dodda Krishnarajah (1714-1732 ACE). During the rule of the Mysore kings, a tank was dug by the local chieftain, Alagarri Nayakar who was a relative of Thirumalai Nayakar of Madurai. During his rule, Kopanan Mandradiyar had built the Kanaga sabai at Perur.

During Tippusultan's (1782-1789 ACE) rule, the Pattiswarar swamy temple at Perur received a donation from Tippu as evidenced by an inscription.<sup>12</sup>

### **Archaeologically important places near Perur:**

#### **KODUMANAL**

Kodumanal village is situated at a distance of 225 kilometres to the west of Tanjore town on the northern bank of the River Noyyal. The habitation part of the site extended over an area of 15 hectares and the burial ground occupies an area of 30 hectares containing more than about 300 megalithic tombs of different types and sizes and about 100 of them still intact. The most common type of monuments is a big cist circle of about 15 metre diameter. Some of them with menhirs

and others with urn burials are found.

The Kodumanal village is historically recognised as KODUMANAM, which is referred to in the Sangam Literature.<sup>13</sup> This place was known for the manufacture of high quality gemstone jewellery. This region was under the control of the Cheras in the Sangam period. The excavation at Kodumanal had revealed many artefacts like semiprecious stone beads, shell bangle pieces, plain potshards and inscribed potshards both from the habitation and burial places of 300 BCE to 300 ACE.<sup>14</sup> A few rouletted shards and an Arretine shard of Roman origin were also brought to light from the excavation.

In the trench ZJ26 a composite burial of a couple and a child with grave goods were also found.<sup>15</sup> The names “கண்ணன் ஆதன்” “வருணிய அகல்” “கூலந்தை வம்பன் அகல்” were inscribed on the potshards.<sup>16</sup> Different burials at Kodumanal have yielded variety of carnelian beads. There were 80 to 2220 carnelian beads found in the burials. It was the first time that such a quantity of carnelian beads found in a single burial.<sup>17</sup>

The presence of a large number of cornelian beads, pearls, and the conches from Kodumanal confirms the fact that this place might have been an industrial and an active trade centre.

## **VELLALUR**

It is located on the southern bank of the river Noyyal at a distance of 5 kilometres from Perur. Vellalur was referred to as Velilur in the mediaeval period inscriptions.<sup>18</sup> Velilur can be split into ‘velil’ and ‘ur’, and means the place of settlement of the vels who were the chieftains of this area.

Many hoards of Roman coins were unearthed during British

period. The Roman Kings who ruled between first century BCE and fourth century ACE<sup>19</sup> issued these gold and silver coins. Roman ornaments were also unearthed by the local people accidentally. There were different types of gold rings with engravings of the Roman figures.

As Vellalur was located strategically, it served as a gateway to the Kongu region from Kerala through Palghat pass. It also served as a military cantonment in the western part of Kongu. The inscriptions of the medieval Cheras were found at Vellalur<sup>20</sup>. The inscriptions of the Virakerala dynasty, which ruled the southern Kongu region,<sup>21</sup> are found at Vellalur. Vellalur is also mentioned in a newly discovered copper plate inscription which was issued by the Virakerala King Rajaraja (1110- 40 ACE.) During 12-13<sup>th</sup> century ACE, Vellalur was brought under the control of the Kongu Cholas. Vellalur lost its historical importance with the end of the Kongu Chola rule. The Siva and Vishnu temples were built at Vellalur in the early medieval period and they were renovated periodically.

### **BOLUVAMPATTI**

At Boluvampatti a mound called Kottaikadu (Kottaimedu), on the western bank of Noyyal river was explored by this department in the year 1970 which extends to 54 acres of land.<sup>22</sup> According to the inscriptions found in this place, the name of the village was known as Muttam alias Amara buyangara nallur and Ravivarma Chaturvedimangalam. In ancient Tamil, the etymological meaning of the word Muttam was known as the end. Which means the end of plains. Muttam also means village situated on the foothills. At Kottai Kadu, there are temples of Siva (Nagesvaram) Vishnu (Vemkatesa vinnagaram) and Amman that are still worshipped by the local people. The inscriptions from the walls of the Nageswaram temple throw light on the political and social condition of this place.



Inscriptions of Virakeralas, Kongu cholas, Pandyas and Hoysalas refer the donations made by the kings, dignitaries and the common folk. Muttam was included in Perur Nadu during the medieval times.

This department in the year 1980 conducted archaeological excavation at Boluvanmappti. There were number of terracotta figurines, terracotta seal, big sized baked bricks found in the excavation. The terracotta figurines of Yaksha, Yakshi, Maiyteraya and head of Buddha were found in the excavation, A noteworthy finding was the terracotta seal with ancient Tamil script which reads as bud; “. . . ரண்டுகாற்றி”, with royal symbol. Another potshard with vatteluthu character reads as “ ஸகு வீற்றி குழி”. Two punch marked coins dated to 4<sup>th</sup> century ACE were also unearthed from this trench.

### **SULUR**

It is about 15 kilometres from Perur where Roman coins and Iran coins of 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE).<sup>23</sup> Megalithic monuments and a vatteluthu inscription of Viranarayana (c.900-925 ACE) were found.

### **SUNDAKAMUTHUR**

A probability of the existence of the highway was traced from the bi-script inscription that was engraved on a boulder Karradumpaari near Sundakamuttur, a small village located about 5 km south of Perur. This inscription is engraved with two types of scripts namely vatteluttu and Tamil. Which mentions that a high way was named after one Rajakesari, identified with Aditya I (871-909 ACE) <sup>24</sup> of imperial Cholas. This is the only highway inscription identified till date. The remnants of the ancient highway could be seen even now

at this place. This highway connected Kerala (ancient Cheranadu) via Palghat gap and after passing through Perur, Vellalur, Sulur, Kattankanni, Kodumanal (ancient Kodumanam), it reached Karur, the Chera capital on the bank of river Amaravathi. This highway must have been in use till the advent of British rule.

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## **AIM OF THE EXCAVATION**

The previous excavations conducted at Boluvampatti, Sular, Kaniyampundi, Perur and Kodumanal yielded cultural sequences dating back to 3rd century BCE. Among them, Boluvampatti and Kodumanal have been excavated in the post-Independence era. The excavation conducted at Perur in the year 1970-71 by the Archaeological Survey of India under the directions of K.V.Soundararajan and B.Narasimhaiah yielded three cultural periods datable from 1st century ACE to 9th century ACE.

The present excavation was planned to verify the authenticity of the more than two hundred artefacts including inscribed terracotta plates, bowls and copper plate unearthed at Perur by the local people, and to test the following hypotheses:

1. To know the cultural sequences of the site for wider comparison and classification.
2. To get a distinct chronology for the megalithic burials and the habitation.
3. To assess and fix the russet-coated pottery (which is exclusively found here) in its proper stratigraphy.
4. To confirm the stratigraphical position of the artefacts unearthed by the local people.

## **CULTURAL SEQUENCES AND CHRONOLOGY**

Totally five trenches were laid out in two segments - one on the western end of the habitation locally called Tirunitrumedu and the remaining four on the eastern end of the mound within the premises of the Perur college. The trench laid on the western end yielded only 12 black and red ware shards at the lowest level whereas the trenches laid on the eastern end yielded prodigious quantities of black and red ware, red slipped ware and russet coated ware. The absence of black and red ware and red slipped ware in the western trench clearly indicates the change in the ceramic sequences. It seems that the people who occupied the eastern part first, say in megalithic and early historic period, slowly moved towards the western part during the historical times as part of the natural expansion of the temple town.

Based on the close observance of the ceramic sequences, it can be safely placed in the following order starting from base to top, namely, black and red ware, russet coated ware, red slipped ware, brown slipped ware and black ware. The red ware existed in all cultural periods. The disturbed burial urn noticed near the bridge built across the river about 200 metres east of the habitation mound yielded russet coated ware and black and red ware. The burial urns are also located on the southern bank of the river. The graffiti marks found engraved on the russet coated ware, black and red ware and the urns, further demonstrated that this site has been in continuous existence since megalithic times.

Four cultural periods have been inferred from the above trenches - the cultural periods I and II are found in the trenches PRR-2 and 3 laid in the eastern part of the habitation mound in the premises of the Perur college, while the cultural periods III and IV are found in the trenches PRR-1 laid in the western part of the habitation in Thirunitrumedu.

### **Period I**

The 2.45 metre cultural deposit representing layers 7, 8 and 9 found in the trench PRR-2 represents megalithic and early historic culture. The ceramic tradition of this period included black and red ware, russet-coated ware, black ware, red ware and graffiti shards. In the lower level, black and red ware were found in large numbers and russet coated ware in less numbers. In the middle level both types of ware were found roughly in equal proportion. In the upper level, russet coated ware outnumbered the black and red ware. The red slipped and brown slipped wares are totally absent in this period. Other notable antiquities of this period are glass beads; hop scotches, shell bangle pieces and arrowheads with socket base.

### **Period II**

The 2.75 metre cultural deposit representing layers 6 to 1 found in the trench PRR-2 represents early historic culture. The ceramic tradition of this period included black and red ware, russet-coated ware, red slipped ware, brown slipped ware, black ware and red ware. Graffiti marks are almost absent in this period. Russet coated ware continues its domination over black and red ware. However in the uppermost layer, the occurrence of russet coated ware started reducing but the black and red ware continued without any break. The red slipped and brown slipped ware make their appearance in this period. Other notable antiquities were beads made of glass, carnelian, quartz, shell, coral, terracotta and copper beads, and terracotta objects like ear lobes, human figurines, and lamps and games man.

### **Period III**

The trench (PRR-1) laid in the western part mound yielded 2 metre cultural deposit representing cultural periods III and IV. The lowermost



80 cm cultural deposit represents period III of this site. It yielded red ware and black ware (only 12 shards). The russet coated ware, red slipped ware and brown slipped ware and graffiti marks were totally absent. However a few grooved tiles and "L" shaped roofing tiles emerged. Another notable antiquity found was a circular terracotta seal engraved with a bow, flanked by two lamps and the crescent on the top.

#### **Period IV**

The upper 1.20 metre cultural deposit represents period IV of this site. It yielded coarse red ware and black ware. Burnt bricks make their appearance in this period. However, grooved tiles and "L" shaped roofing tiles continued to occur in this period also. Fine ceramics and notable antiquities are conspicuous by their absence.

#### **Chronology**

On the basis of the occurrence of ceramic types and other associated antiquities, a relative chronology is fixed for the above four periods.

Period I : 3rd century BCE to 1st century ACE

Period II : 1st century ACE to 3rd century ACE

Period III : 3rd century ACE to 6th century ACE

Period IV : 6th century ACE to 9th century ACE

Five trenches, PRR-1, PRR-2, PRR-3, PRR-4 and PRR-5, were laid at Perur in the year 2002 as described below:

### **PRR-1**

This trench was laid at the southwestern corner of the Thirunitrumedu, located one kilometre northwest of the Siva temple Pattiswarar. The trench was oriented in a north-south direction and measured 5metres x 4 metres. The actual area taken up for digging was 4metres x 4metres., having ½metre baulk each on the western and eastern sides of the trench. It was excavated up to the natural soil and four layers were identified. These four layers were found on all sides of the trench. The first two layers were grey in colour; loose in texture and mixed with small stone pieces and potshards. The third layer was ash coloured and present only in the eastern and northern sections. It had brick-bats, irregular shaped granite stones and grooved tiles. In this layer, two post-holes were noticed on the southern part of trench and the distance between the two-post holes was 1.33 metre. The diameter of the postholes was 18cm each. At the bottom of the posthole round shaped granite stones were placed and the postholes were filled with river sand.

A few bricks with the measurement of 26.5cm x 15cm x 5cm were also collected in the third layer. The grooved tiles measuring 26cm x 15cm might have been used for roofing.

A pit was noticed in the northwest corner of the trench between the pegs 0-1. The fourth layer was of hard brownish soil and mixed with fewer potshards. The hard white natural soil (locally called odaikkal) was obtained at a depth of 2 metre.

## **PRR-2**

This trench was located at the western side of the Perur Santhalinga Adigalar Tamil college campus in an area presently used as a playground. This trench was laid on the highest point of the mound known as Kallimedu. This trench measured 5metres x 4metres leaving 50cm baulk on the western and eastern sides. Quadrant method was applied to this trench. At first, this trench was divided into four equal boxes. They were named as A1, A2, B1 and B2 respectively to the NW, NE, SW and SE quadrants. One metre baulk was left between these boxes. After excavating the boxes up to the depth of 90cm the baulk left between these boxes were removed and the whole area (4metre x 4metre) was excavated up to the natural soil level, which was obtained at a depth of 5.20 metre. In the trench, in all nine layers were exposed and three pits and a dump were also noticed. At a depth of 80 cm in the layer No 1, a dark thick tub-shaped clay patch was found in the eastern section. It would have been a rat hole.

In the layer No 1, at the depth of 2.20 metre, in between the pegs I-IV, a flooring paved with mud bricks and measuring 25cm x 19cm x 5 cm was unearthed. The binding material used in this floor was thick clay mixed with lime.

Above the natural soil in layer no 9 at a depth of 5.20metre from the surface, hard flooring made up of clay mixed with lime was noticed.

## **PRR-3**

This trench was located at the western side of the trench PRR-2. It was oriented in a north-south direction and measured 3metres x 3metres. This trench yielded five layers. In the fifth layer at a depth of 2.80 metres, two disturbed brick structures were noticed - one in



the north east corner and another in the eastern part of the trench. The structure found in the eastern part of the trench yielded three courses of brick with a small post-hole at the centre. Because of occurrence of the brick structures and mud flooring, the excavation work was stopped at the depth of 2.80 metre in this trench.

#### **PRR-4**

This trench was laid in the coconut grove about 150 metres north of PRR-2 on the bank of river Noyyal to know the extension of occupation of the site. It was oriented in an east-west direction and the actual cutting area was 3metres x 3 metres. This trench represented only two layers and yielded very less number of potshards and antiquities. The natural soil was found at a depth of the 90cm.

#### **PRR-5**

This trench was laid at the northern side of the river Noyyal. It is located on the eastern side of the road leading from Perur to Marudamalai. It was oriented in an east-west direction and measured 3metres x 3 metres. It was laid here to know the extension of the habitation deposit on the other side of the river Noyyal at Perur and also to verify the existence of inscribed clay plates mentioned earlier.

Totally three layers were exposed in this trench and the natural soil was reached at a depth of 2.40metre from the surface. Limited number of black and red ware, red ware and russet coated ware were collected. Not even a single inscribed clay plate was reported from this trench.

## **ANTIQUITIES**

The antiquities obtained from Perur excavation mostly consist of terracotta objects and the objects made out of shell, glass, lac, iron, copper, etc.

### **Beads**

More than two hundred beads were unearthed in the excavation. They were made of: (Plate No.17)

1. Agate
2. Carnelian
3. Quartz
4. Soapstone
5. Lac
6. Terracotta
7. Shell
8. Glass

### **Agate beads**

Among the distinctive type of beads, three white-banded agate beads deserve special mention.

### **Carnelian beads**

Three spherical shaped carnelian beads were unearthed.

### **Quartz beads**

Ten quartz beads of different types were found in this place. The crystal is generally free from any internal fractures and only the most transparent material is used for the beads. Beads of the following shapes were collected: spherical, long barrel, circular, long cylindrical,

hexagonal and long bicone septagonal.

Among these beads only one is of special interest. It was unearthed at the depth of 1.20 meter, which belongs to the period II. It is long, barrel shaped and is of pure material free from flaws. Two spherical beads in broken condition were also recovered.

### **Soap stone bead**

Five big-sized soap stone beads were collected. They were:

1. Long barrel elliptical and black in colour
2. Spherical and white in colour.
3. Rectangular/square shaped. A dot within the circular pattern decoration was noticed on four sides. Three decorative white coloured rounds are seen on each side.
4. Barrel triangular
5. Unfinished long barrel shaped bead.

### **Paste bead**

The total number of paste beads unearthed at Perur is 27. The long barrel shaped beads were commonly found and were red and grey in colour. A long barrel shaped green coloured bead with three sides was an interesting find from Perur.

### **Terracotta bead**

Seventeen terracotta beads were unearthed - most of them are big sized and found in between depths of 50cm and 70 cm. These beads are red, grey and black in colour. As they are baked under the high temperature, they became hard, most of them are without any slip, while a few bear a black slip. Seven spherical shaped beads were found

and out of them, four were red in colour.

### **Shell bead**

Only seven shell beads were collected in this excavation. These beads were unearthed in the period II and III. Most of the beads were barrel-shaped with variants and were

1. Standard barrel triangular
2. Short barrel circular
3. Barrel circular

### **Glass beads**

More than hundred glass beads of various colours were collected from the excavations. The occurrence of glass beads in large numbers and their different shapes, manufacturing technique and distribution shows the possibility of existence of glass bead making industry at Perur.

The beads were found in the layers belonging to periods II, III and IV only. The common shapes of the beads were spherical, oblate, hexagonal, barrel, cylinder, circular and lenticular and some of them were of assorted shapes.

Most of the glass beads were green in colour and of different shades ranging from dull green to bright leaf green. Blue, yellow and black glass beads were also unearthed.

### **Bangles**

Bangle pieces made of glass and shell were collected from the excavation. Except one, which was transparent, rest of the pieces were opaque.

Shell bangle pieces occurred in larger quantity. They were of two varieties, plain and decorated with vertical lines and geometric patterns. Full conches and sawed conch pieces were also collected from this place. This shows that this site was probably a shell bangle production centre. The thickness of the shell bangle pieces varied from 3 mm. to 5 mm, and the diameter from 10 cm to 15 cm. (Plate No.6).

The glass bangle pieces were collected from the period IV datable to 6<sup>th</sup> century to 9<sup>th</sup> century ACE. The shell bangle pieces occurred in the periods I, II and III datable from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 6<sup>th</sup> century ACE.

### **Cowries**

A number of cowries having even base were also obtained from the trenches. They might have been used as dice for playing "Thayam". (Plate No.7)

### **Stone objects**

Only a very limited number of stone objects were collected. A small round shaped grinding stone used for preparing the sandal paste was obtained from the excavation. A soapstone rod with two-line decoration was noticed and its purpose could not be identified. Another soapstone lid was also collected. A yoni portion of the miniature linga made out of black stone was collected from the level of period II (Plate No 15). According to the local tradition, such a linga is usually kept in the right palm of the deceased. Even now Virasaivas of this area follow this tradition. A broken soap stone die with peacock figure was collected from the period II.

### **Lac object**

A round shaped pendant made out of lac with a hole in the centre was noticed in the level of period II in which the figure of a flying peacock was engraved.

### **Metal objects**

Metal objects made of iron and copper were unearthed here. Most of them were found in corroded condition. Iron objects such as arrowhead, axe and sickle were collected along with the iron-ore and iron slag. The occurrence of the iron ore and iron slag shows that once the iron melting was done here. An arrowhead measuring 11.5 cm in length and 2 cm in breadth (plate No. 16) and a round shaped copper bead with 5 mm in diameter with a hole in the centre were found.

### **Terracotta objects**

The art of making terracotta objects was very popular in ancient Tamil Nadu. Almost all the excavations so far conducted in Tamil Nadu have yielded a good number of terracotta objects. Similar terracotta objects were collected in Boluvampatti excavation.

### **Mother Goddess**

In the Trench PRR-1, at a depth of 50 cm, a female figure (Mother Goddess) 3cm in height with a prominent nose, thick lips, knotted headdress and a child, on her lap was found. (Plate No 3)

### **A devotee**

In PRR-2 at a depth of 53 cm. a male figure with prominent eyes, nose, mouth opened and having knotted headdress and folded hands was found. (Plate No.3)



### **Yaksha figure**

In PRR-2 at a depth of 97 cm. a broken piece of male head with unique headdress similar to the yaksha figures collected at Boluvampatti excavations was found.

### **Spindle whorl**

The excavations yielded several terracotta spindle whorls. They were of two types. One was spherical shaped with a hole in the centre. Another type was disc shaped made out of flat potshard with a hole in the centre. The hole was made to fix the iron rod for spinning the cotton thread. It is called in Tamil as "Thakli" (Plate No.8). The earliest specimen of spindle whorl was reported from Harappa. Several excavations conducted in Tamil Nadu had yielded this type of spindle whorls.

### **Terracotta lamps**

The Perur excavations have yielded three types of terracotta lamps. The first type is of 8 cm diameter with decoration at the brim and having a single facet, the second type is of 6 cm diameter without decoration and third one are plain variety of 4 cm diameter without facet and decorations. These types of lamps are commonly used even today. (Plate. No. 12)

### **Gamesmen**

Three types of terracotta gamesmen were collected from the Perur excavations. (Plate No.4)

1. Flat circular disc base, conical top and a deep groove in the centre.
2. Barrel shape with circular disc base on both sides with a deep groove in the centre.

### 3. Circular base and a hemispherical top.

The terracotta gamesmen might have been used as coins for playing games similar to chess. The earliest terracotta gamesman was found at Harappa. Similar types of gamesmen in large quantity were collected at Boluvampatti excavation.

### **Hopscotches**

Hopscotches are flat potshards grounded in all the sides to make it circular. The children used them to play games. Hopping on one foot from one end and pushing the round object over scotches (lines) to other end is the objective of this game. These hopscotches were reported from various sites all over India right from Harappan times. Even now this game is very popular among the children of the villages and is called as Pandi vilaiyattu. 32 hopscotches were collected at various layers relating to 3rd century BCE to 9th century ACE. These hop scotches may also have been used as weights in the past. (Plate No.9)

### **Smoking pipes**

Three varieties of terracotta smoking pipes, belonging to the periods II and III (1st century - 6th century ACE) were recovered from the excavations at Perur.

1. a round receptacle with a knobbed bottom. The knob is having a circular hole for fixing a stalk which functions as a pipe for smoking.
2. a round receptacle with a flat-based knob having a circular hole.
3. a round receptacle with a square shaped flat knobbed base. They were in two colours i.e., red and black. Almost all the



receptacle portions of this smoking pipe were having decorations in the exterior. They were with three rows of circular lines with geometric and floral designs.

### **Ear lobes**

The deposits of period II and III of Perur excavations yielded ten terracotta ear lobes in different sizes. They were round in shape having a concave central fold. They were black and grey in colour. (Plate No.5)

A shell stud with convex circular edges and decorated with circular lines was also obtained from the layer belonging to the period II, of 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century ACE.

### **Seal**

A terracotta disc made out of flat potshard with symbols, engraved after firing, was collected from the trench PRR-1 at a depth of 1.03m in layer No 3 which belongs to period III. The seal has a bow flanked by two lamps one on each side, and a crescent at the top. The symbol seems to be a Chera royal insignia. It is of 3 cm diameter and 5 mm thickness. (Plate No.13)

### **Spouts**

The Perur excavations had yielded eighteen terracotta spouted knobs with different types of decorations. These knobs were found only in the coarse red ware variety. They were separately made and fixed at the shoulder portion of the vessels. These spouts were having fascinating decorations. (Plate No.11)

The occurrence of the spouted knobs in large quantity shows that the spouted vessels were widely used in ancient Tamil Nadu. Such spouts were collected from Korkai, Alagankulam, Palayarai, Gangaikondacholapuram etc.

## POTTERY

The pottery collected from the excavation can be classified into six types :

1. Black and Red ware
2. Russet coated painted ware
3. Red slipped ware
4. Black slipped ware
5. Brown slipped ware
6. Red ware (coarse variety)

The ceramic tradition of the period I included black and red ware, russet-coated ware, black ware, red ware and graffiti shards. In the lower level black and red pottery were found in large numbers and russet coated ware in less numbers. In the middle level both the wares occupied an equal proportion. In the upper level, russet coated ware outnumbered the black and red ware.

The ceramics of the period II included black and red ware, russet-coated ware, red slipped ware, black ware and red ware. The graffiti marks are almost absent in this period. Russet coated ware continues its domination over black and red ware. However in the uppermost layer, the occurrence of russet coated ware started reducing but the black and red ware continued without any break. The red slipped ware made its appearance in this period.

In the period III, red ware and black ware alone were found. Twelve black and red potshards were collected in the lowermost level. The russet coated ware, red slipped ware, and brown slipped ware and graffiti marks were totally absent.

In the period IV, coarse red ware and coarse black ware were collected.

### **Black and red ware**

Black and red ware had a highly polished and burnished surface on the exterior. It is made of fine well lavigated clay. The inverted firing technique was used for firing these kinds of potteries. The pots were kept inverted in the kiln and hence the interior and the portions around the neck were burnt under reducing conditions and became black, while the rest of the exterior was burnt in oxidizing conditions and assumed a red colour.

### **The Russet coated painted ware**

The Russet coated painted ware are found concentrated in the Kongu region. No other region in India has yielded such cultural deposit. In Perur more than two metre deposit surfaced with russet coated ware. At Kodumanal good number of russet coated potteries with inscription dated back to 3rd century BCE were found. Russet coated pottery were also found at Perur both in quality and quantity thereby showing its contemporaneity with Kodumanal. Like Kodumanal, here also these ware were mostly of tableware and the usual shapes were bowls, vases and dishes. The usual designs are criss-cross, parallel and horizontal lines, vertical bands, wavy lines, rectangular designs, etc. Most of the graffiti marks were found on this pottery. Russet coated pottery were found in period II and I only.

### **Red slipped ware**

Red slipped ware were identical to the russet coated ware except for the designs with white paintings drawn over the surface of the pottery.

### **Red ware (coarse variety)**

The red ware were mostly of utilitarian varieties like storage vessels and pots. Therefore, they were sturdy in nature and devoid of any slip. Red ware appeared in all the periods.

### **Black ware**

Black ware also appeared in all the periods, and were identical to the red ware except in colour.

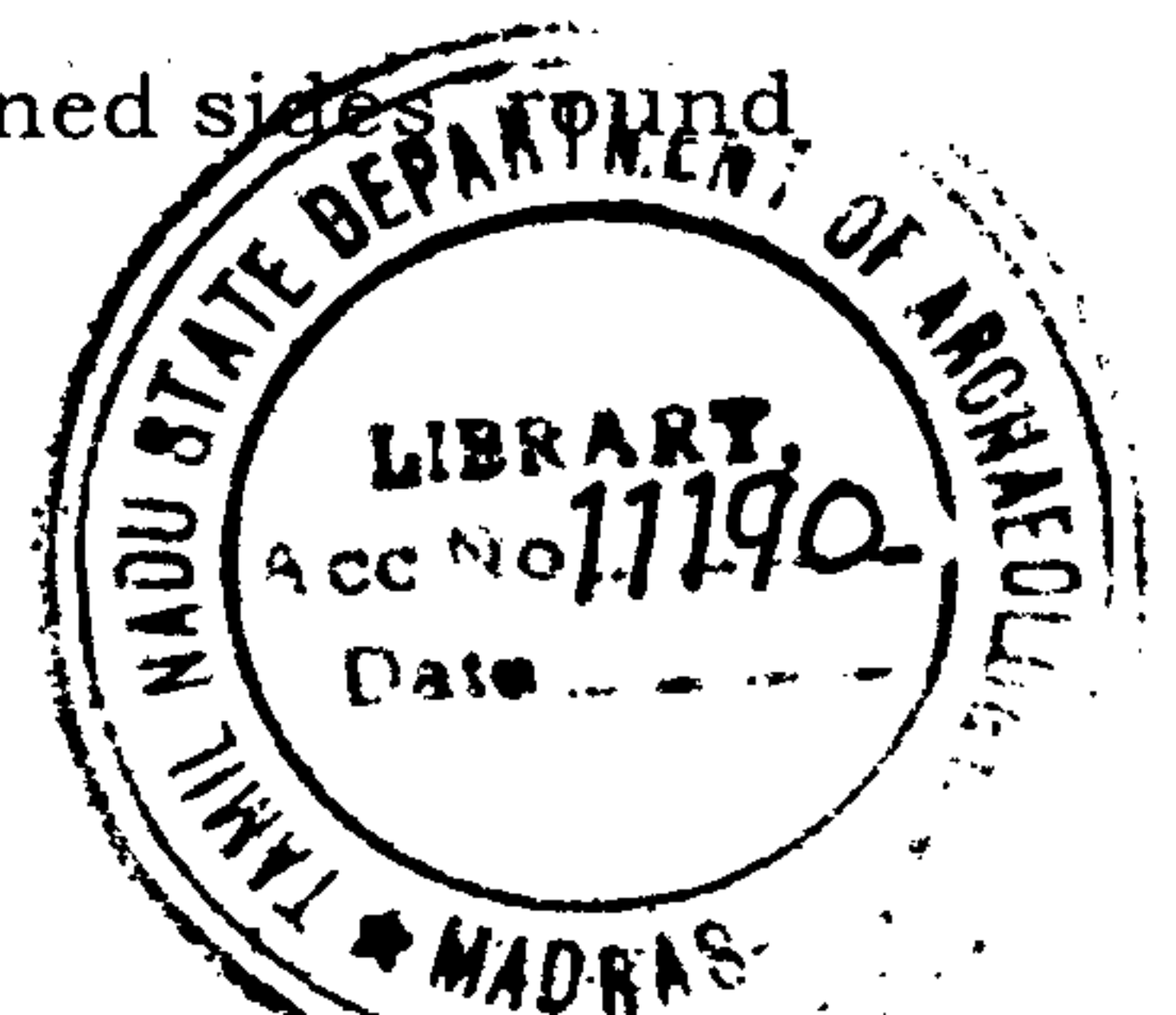
### **Pottery Description**

#### **Period I**

1. Red slipped ware deep bowl, flaring out turned rim, convex sides, round bottom.
2. Russet coated deep bowl, convex sides, medium fabric, and round bottom.
3. Russet coated ware small shallow bowl, featureless rim, and fine fabric and round base.
4. Russet coated bowl with flaring rim and medium fabric, horizontal wavy lines found in the exterior.
5. Black and red ware globular pot convex sides and fine fabric.
6. Bowl, collared, slightly inverted rim, convex sides, and fine fabric.
7. Red slipped ware pot, ill fired, oval collared rim, incurved shoulder, medium fabric and round bottom.
8. Black and red ware small shallow bowl, convex sides, fine fabric and round bottom.
9. Black and red ware deep bowl, convex sides, and medium fabric and round bottom.
10. Black and ware shallow bowl, flaring sharpened rim, convex

sides, fine fabric and round bottom.

11. Black and red ware globular pot, convex sides, out turned, flaring rim and round bottom.
12. Red slipware deep bowl, carinated, oval collared, out turned rim, convex sides, and round bottom.
13. Red slip ware, slip found on both sides, out turned rim carinated rim, flaring neck and fine fabric.
14. Russet coated small deep bowl, horizontal wavy lines found in the exterior and fine fabric.
15. Red ware globular pot, oval collared rim, high necked fine fabric and round bottom
16. Black pot with out turned oval collared rim, concave sides and round bottom.
17. Russet coated red ware vessel, three lines found in the exterior, can have sides, fine fabric and carinated.
18. Thick red slipped ware shallow disc, fine fabric, convex sides and flat base of the pot.
19. Black and red ware small vase type pot, high necked out turned, convex sides and flat base.
20. Thick red ware Shallow bowl, convex sides, carinated and round bottom.
21. Thick Russet coated ware, ill fired and vertical wavy lines found interior and found exterior, deep bowl, flaring rim and fine fabric.
22. Medium size black and red ware with flaring rim, pear shaped round bottom and fine fabric.
23. Red slip thick variety shallow bowl, out turned sides, round bottom and fine fabric.





24. Thick red slipped ware globular pot with external collared rim, convex sides and high necked and round bottom.
25. Thick Russet coated ware with nail impression in the shoulder and out- turned, oval collared rim, globular pot, convex sides and round bottom.
26. Medium sized russet coated shallow bowl, sharpened rim and convex sides, round bottom and fine fabric.
27. Red slipped ware with flaring rim and convex sides. It is fine fabric and round bottom.
28. Medium size black and red ware deep bowl with out turned rim, features less rim, convex sides and fine fabric.
29. Medium size black and red ware vase, in turned, flaring rim, high necked and flat base.
30. Thick black and red ware pot with oval collared, out turned rim, convex sides, high necked, round bottom and fine fabric.
31. All black ware shallow bowl, flaring rim, convex sides round bottom and fine fabric.
32. Russet coated thin ware and slip found both sides. Out turned flaring, sharpening, convex sides and high necked.

## **Period II**

33. Russet coated ware slip found both sides. Horizontal lines found with exterior, out turned, flaring sharpening rim of deep bowl.
34. This black ware with simple rim and concave sides. It is of medium fabric and flat base.
35. Red slipware small pot with out turned collared rim, concave sides globular pot and medium fabric.

36. Coarse red ware with out turned collared rim, concave sides globular pot and medium fabric
37. Deep bowl of thick black and red ware with hemispherical out turned external rim and ill fired. It is a medium fabric.
38. Medium fabric of a coarse red ware shallow bowl with in turned and flaring rim.
39. All black ware and black slip found both sides. Flaring rim and the fabric is well-levigated clay.
40. Small pot of a black and red ware and slip is found in the exterior. Concave sides and out turned rim.
41. Coarse black ware pot with flaring rim, convex sides and round bottom. Single groove found in the exterior, concave sides, and round bottom.
42. Coarse black ware shard with a human eye like figure is found in the exterior.
43. Russet coated ware shallow bowl and slip found both sides. Convex sides, in turned and horizontal bands found in the outer side.
44. Red slipped ware globular pot with out turned rim, convex sides, and grooves found on the exterior and round bottom.
45. Black ware small pot, three grooves in the exterior concave sides and medium fabric.
46. Red slipped ware with oval collared rim, concave sides and medium fabric.
47. Red slipped ware with out turned rim, five lines found in the body and medium fabric.
48. Globular pot of medium fabric with high necked and round bottom.

49. Red slipped ware with flaring rim and fine fabric.
50. Red ware of medium fabric with high necked and one line found in the exterior.
51. Globular pot of red slipped ware with a high necked rim and a round base.
52. Globular pot of red slipped ware with out turned rim and medium fabric.
53. Red slipped ware with oval collared rim and medium fabric of a deep bowl.
54. Decorated pottery, Thump impression found in the rim portion.
55. Vase of Black ware with oval collared rim and fine fabric of round bottom.
56. Red slipped ware of globular pot with round bottom and medium fabric.

### **Period III**

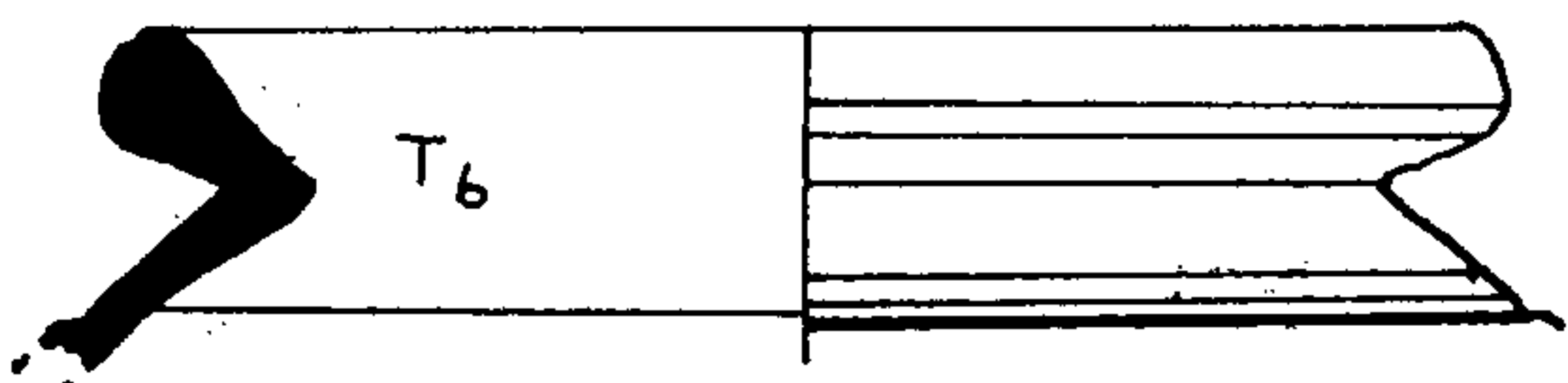
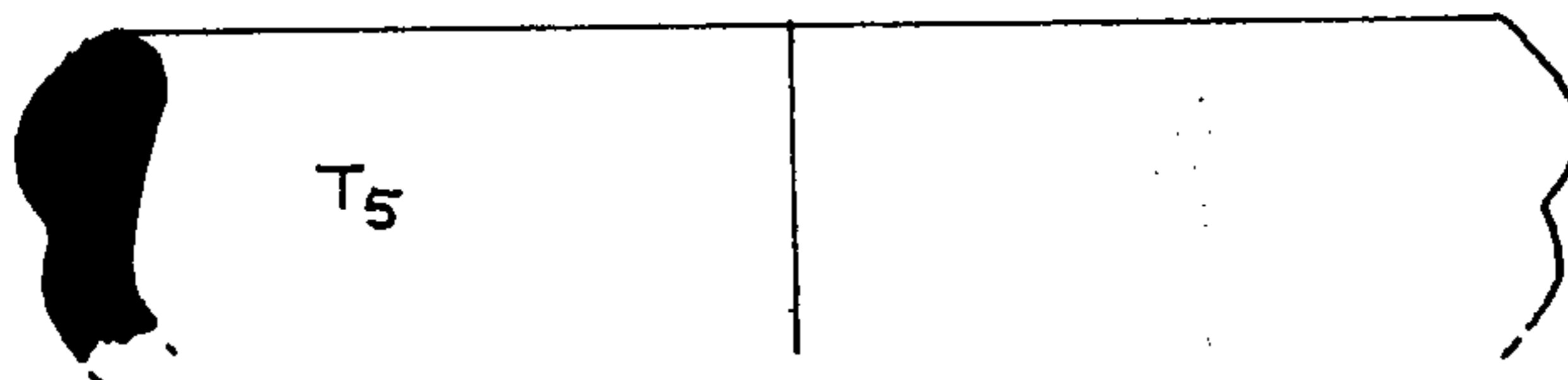
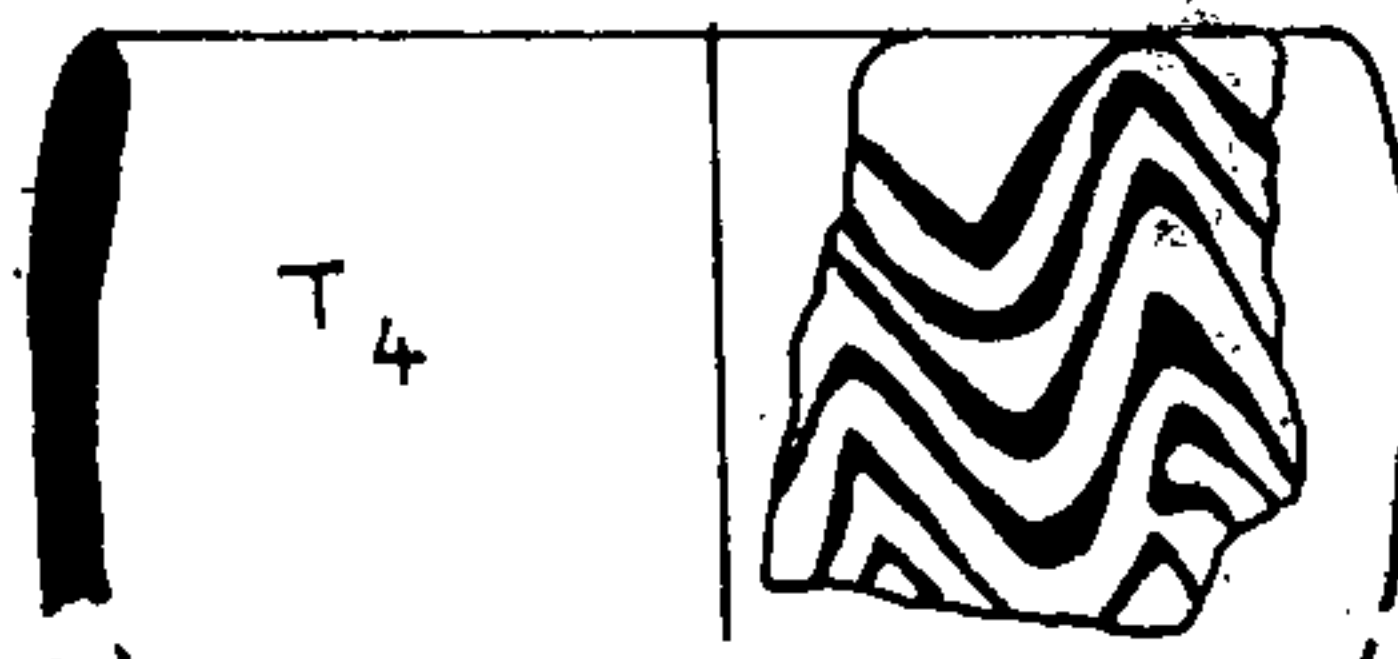
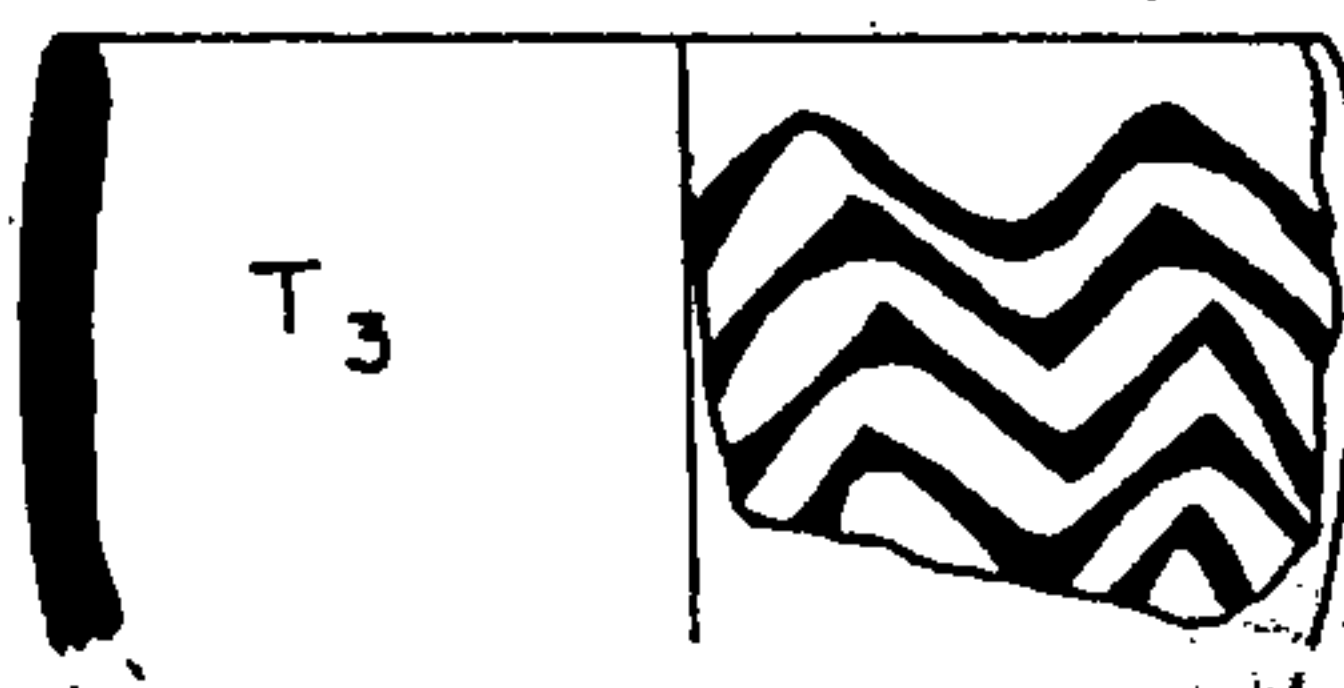
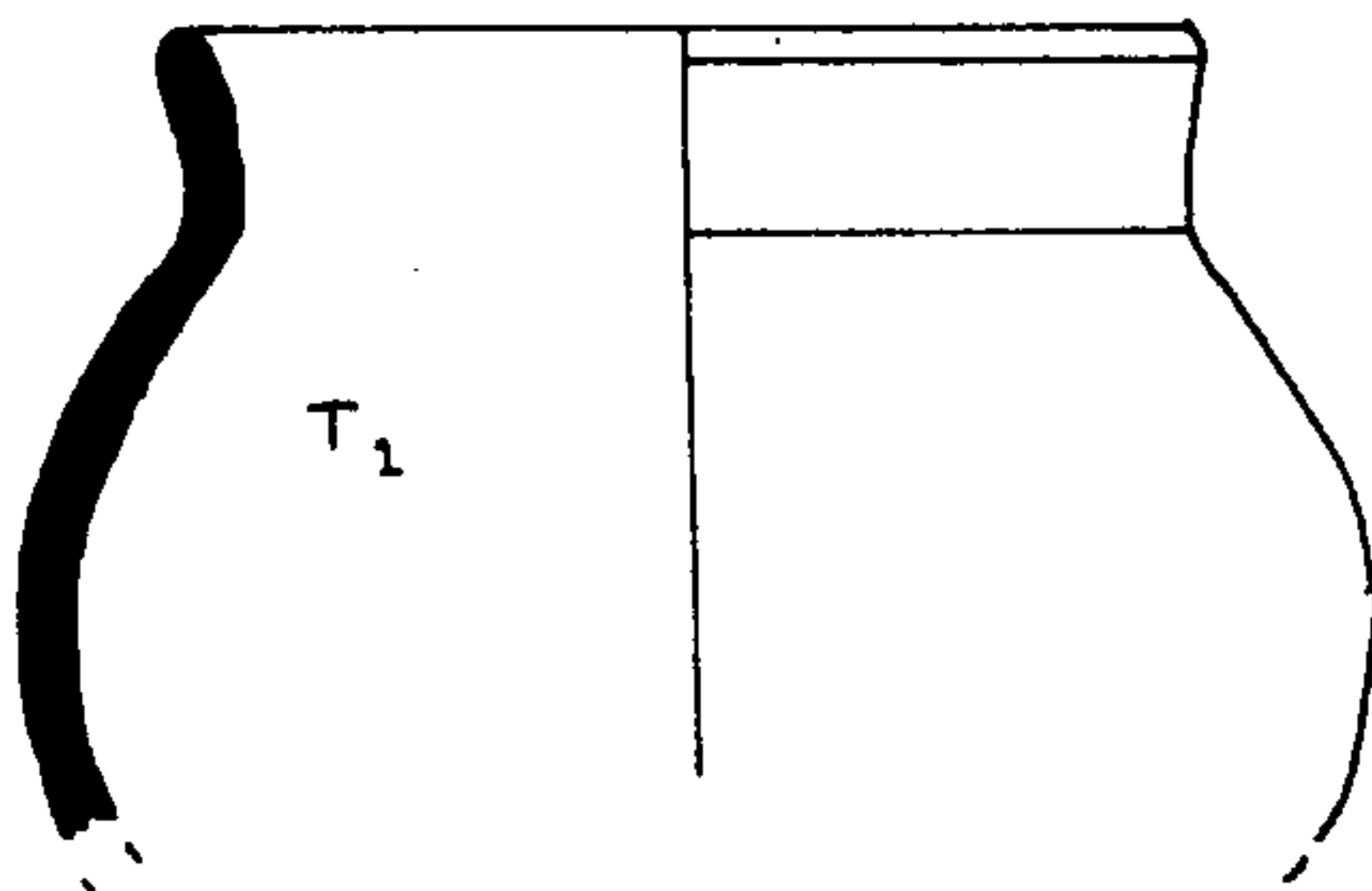
57. Red ware pot of round base and grooves found in the neck portion with medium fabric.

### **Period IV**

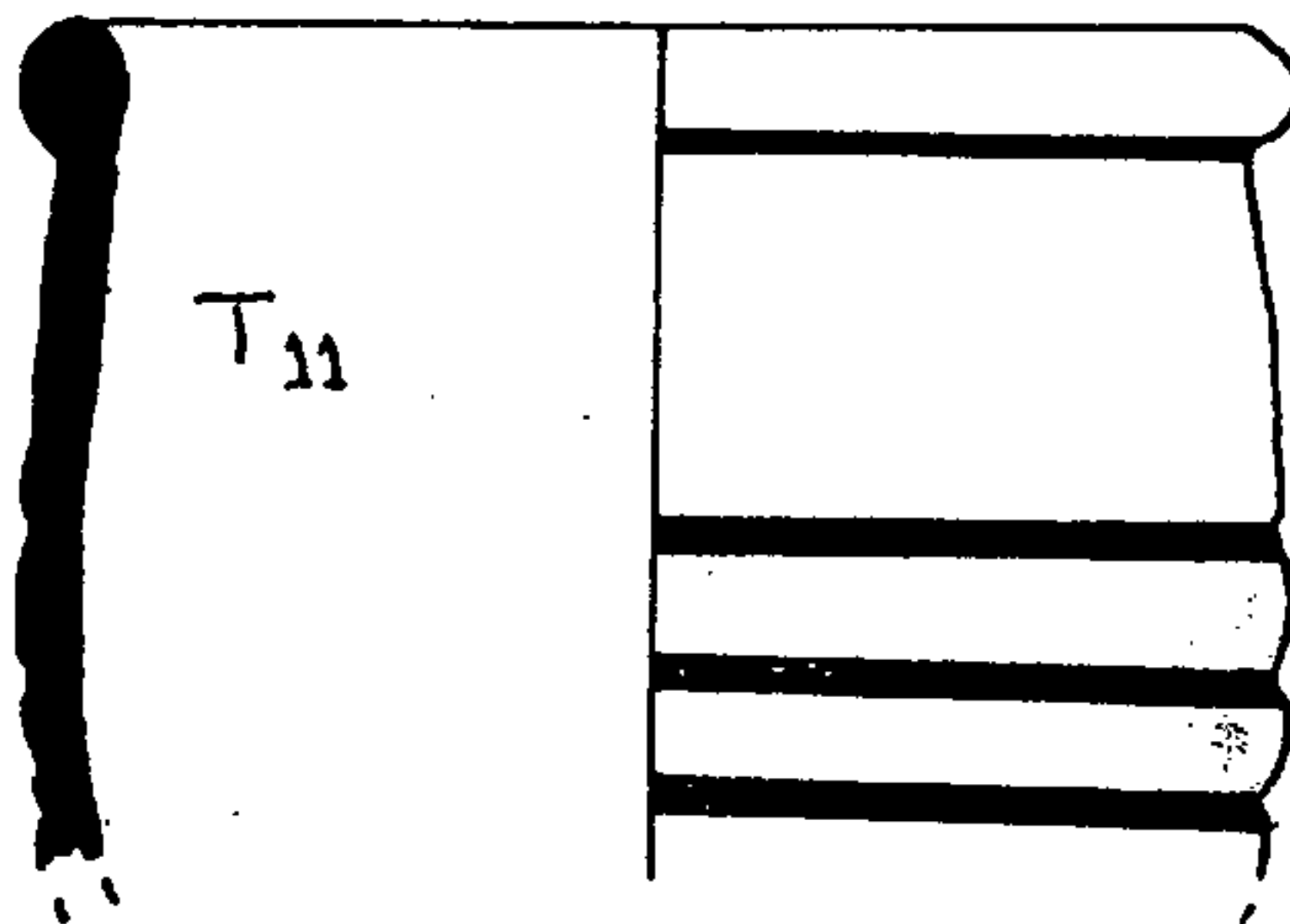
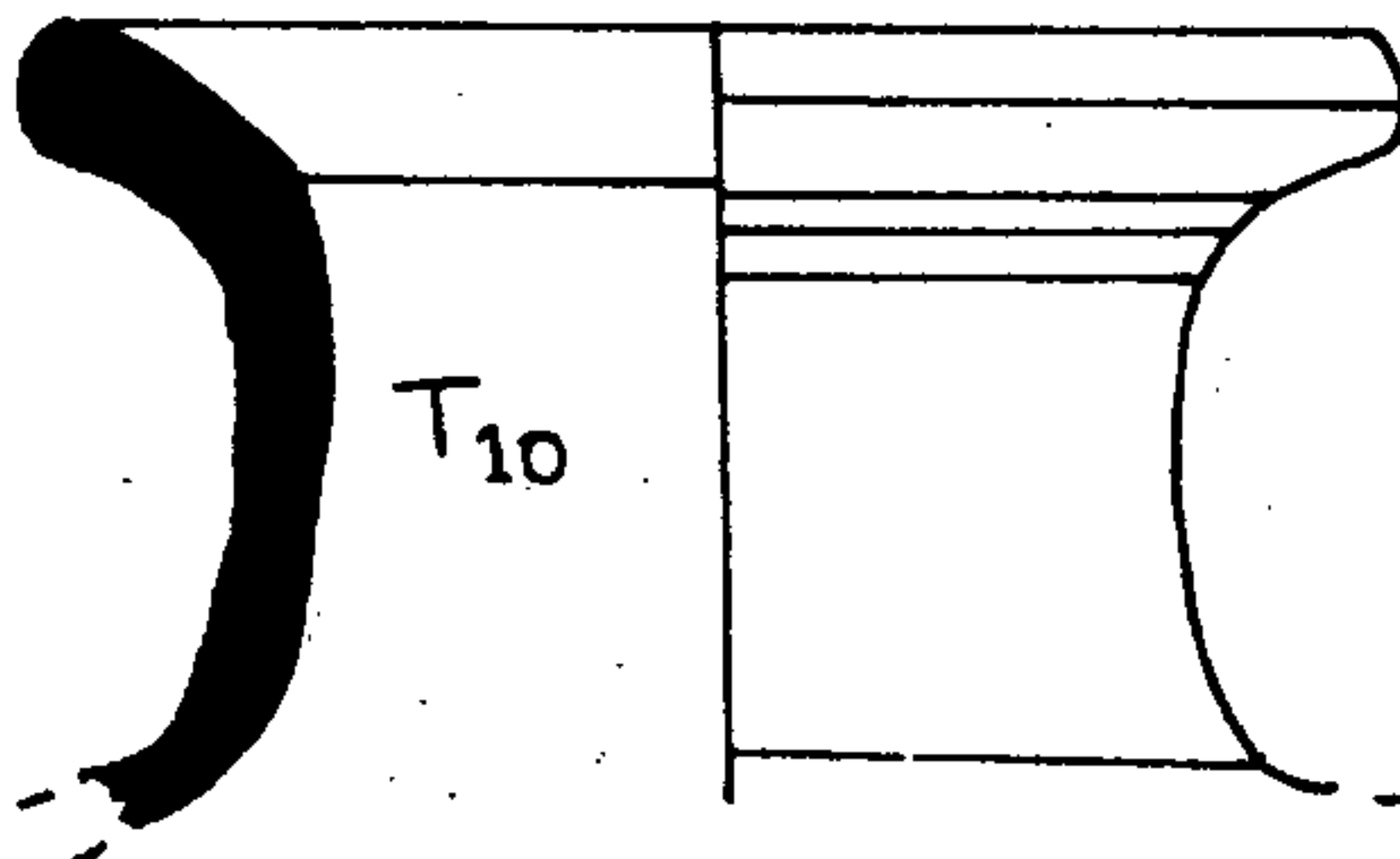
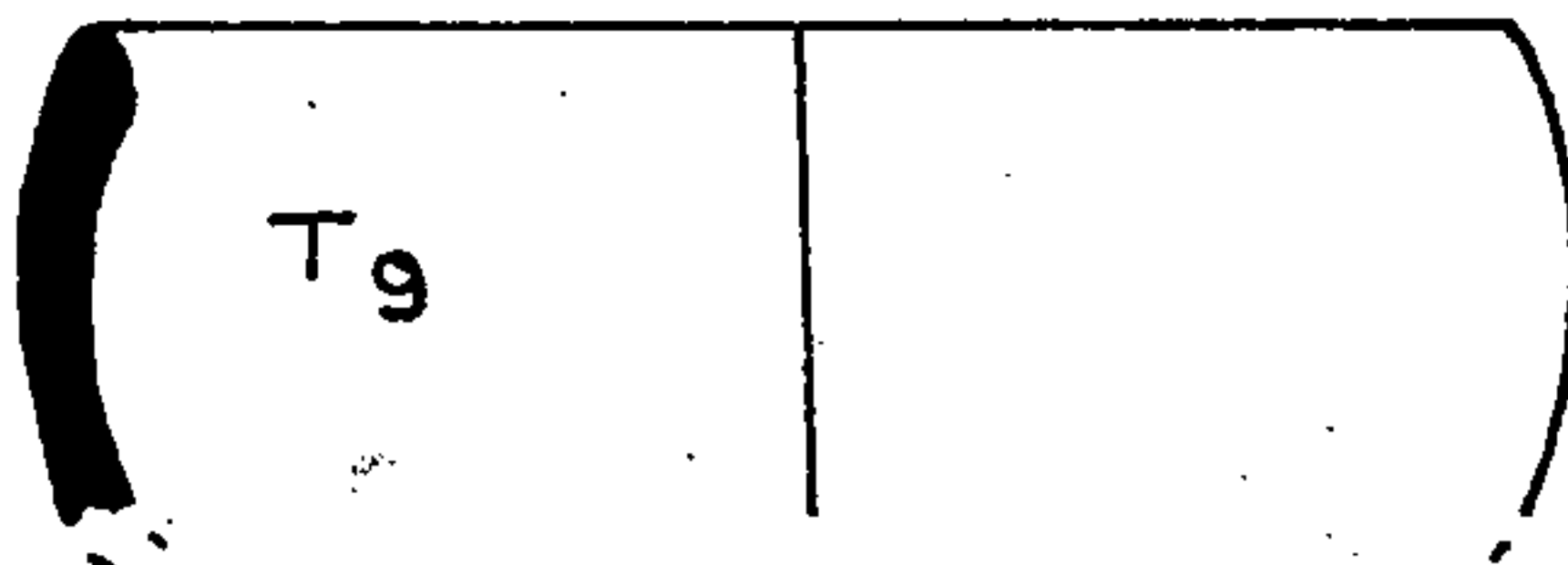
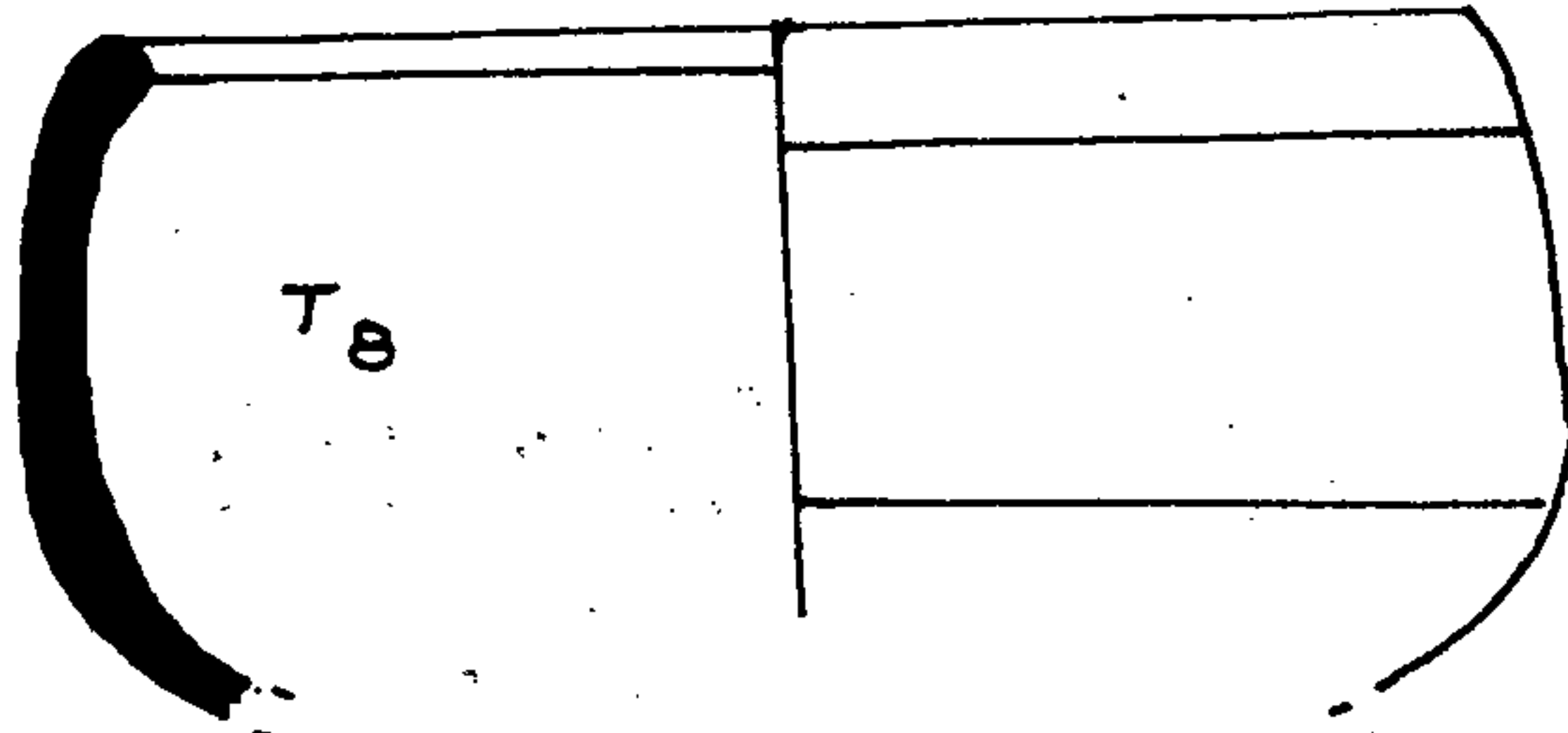
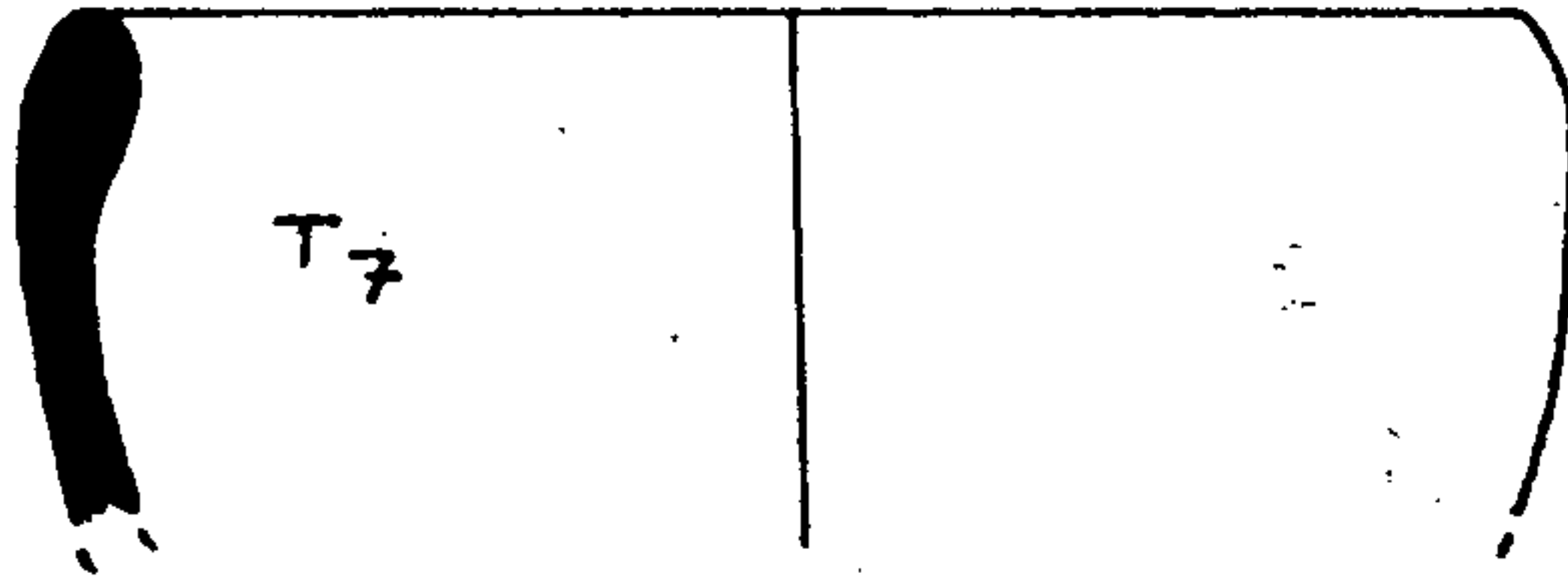
The layers of Period IV had yielded several potshards of coarse red ware and coarse black ware. They are all small pieces. Not even a single shard was found with rim portion.



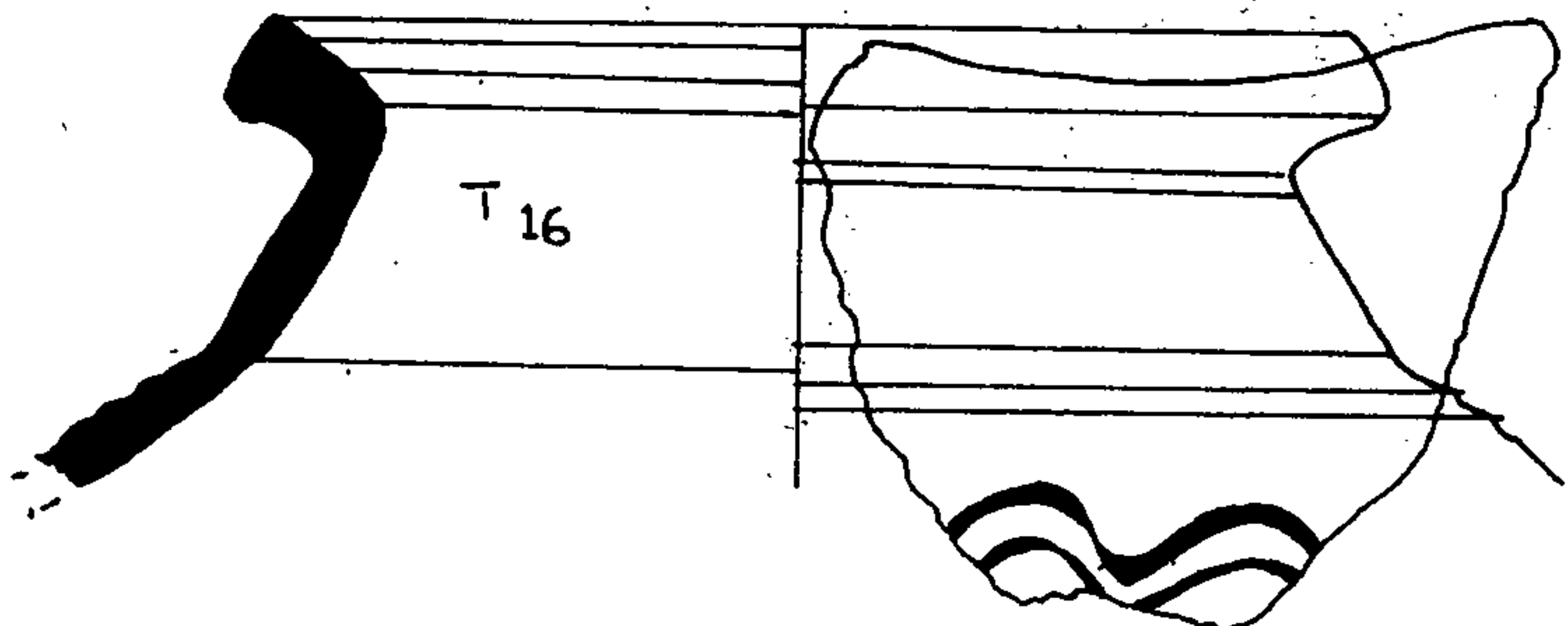
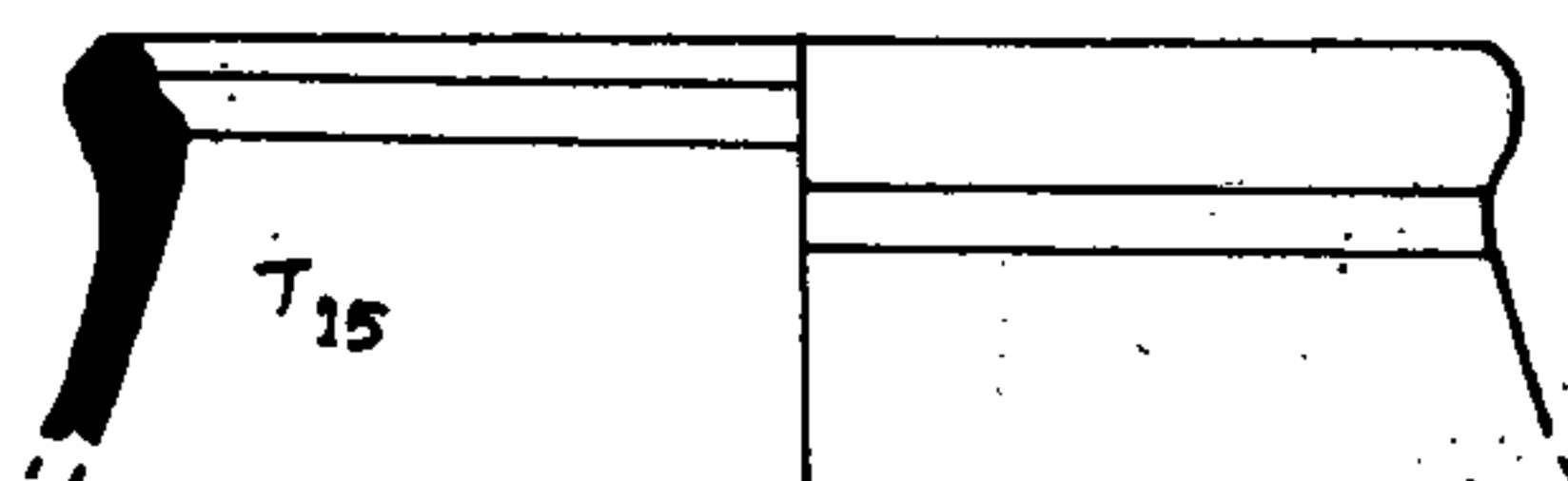
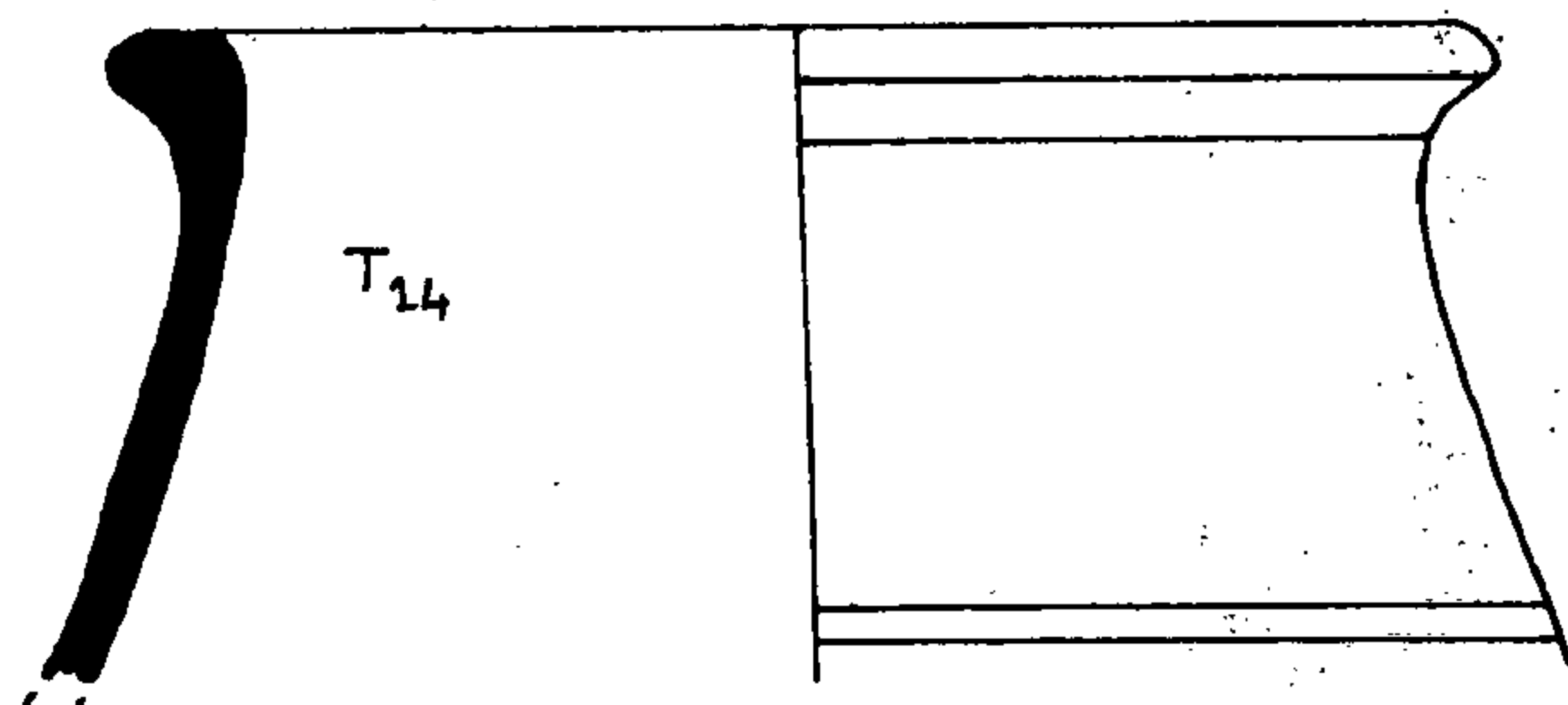
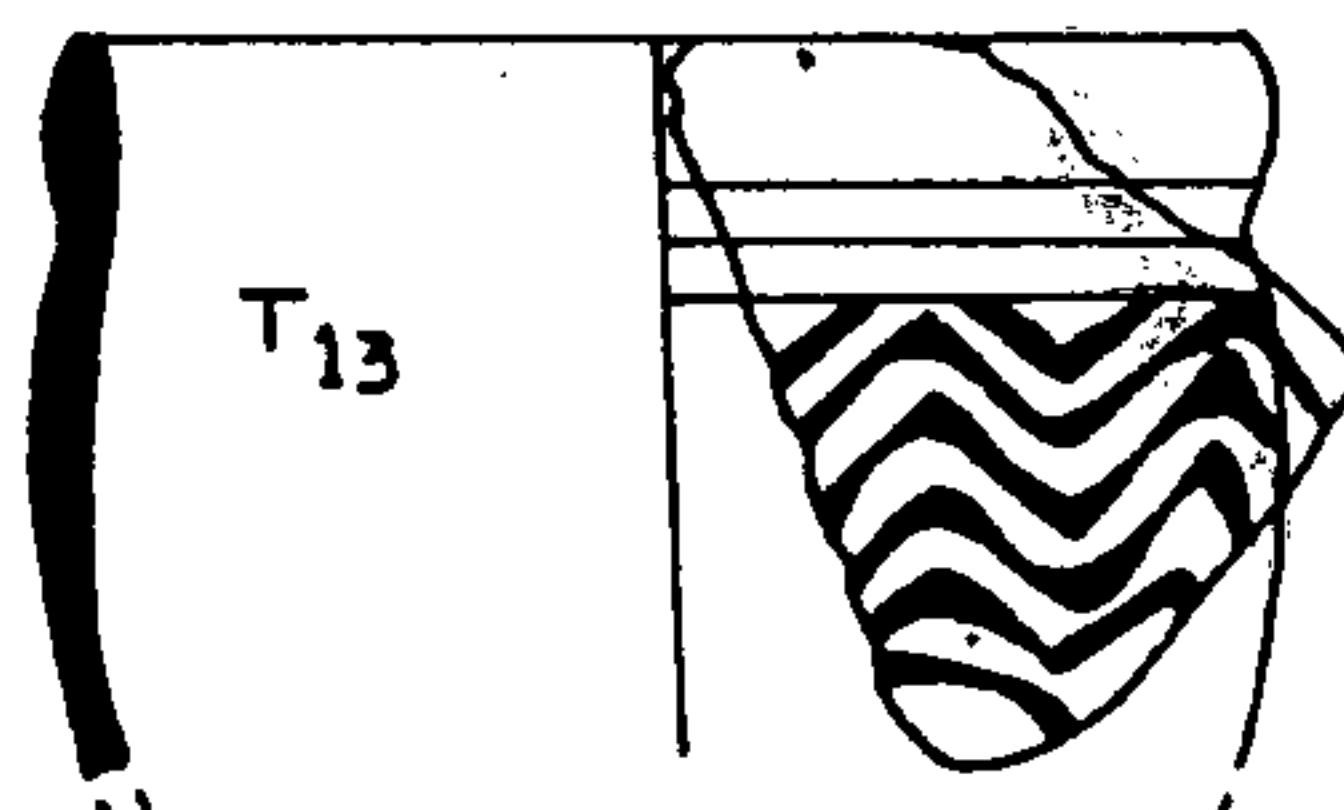
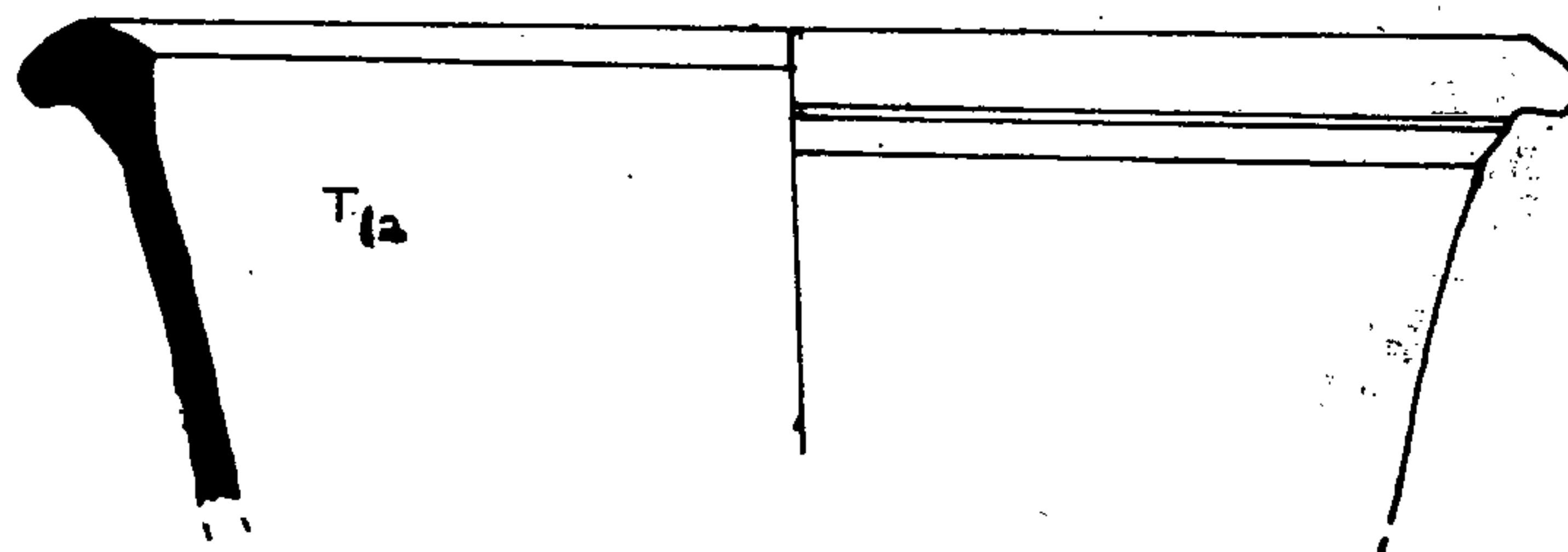
## POTTERY TYPES



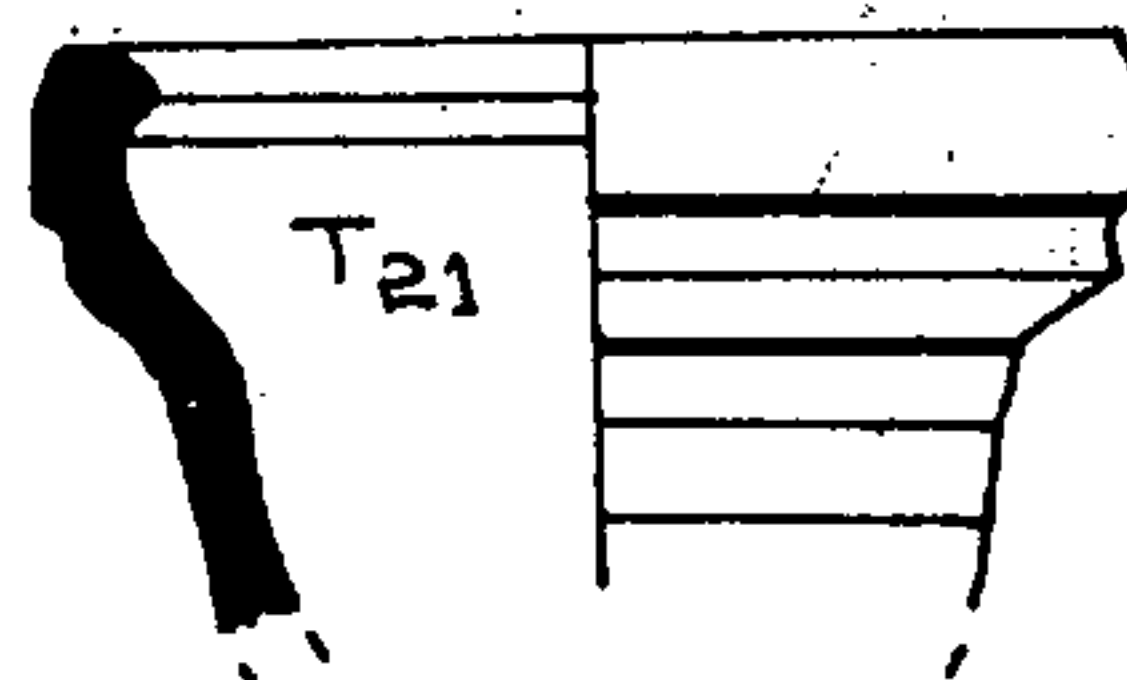
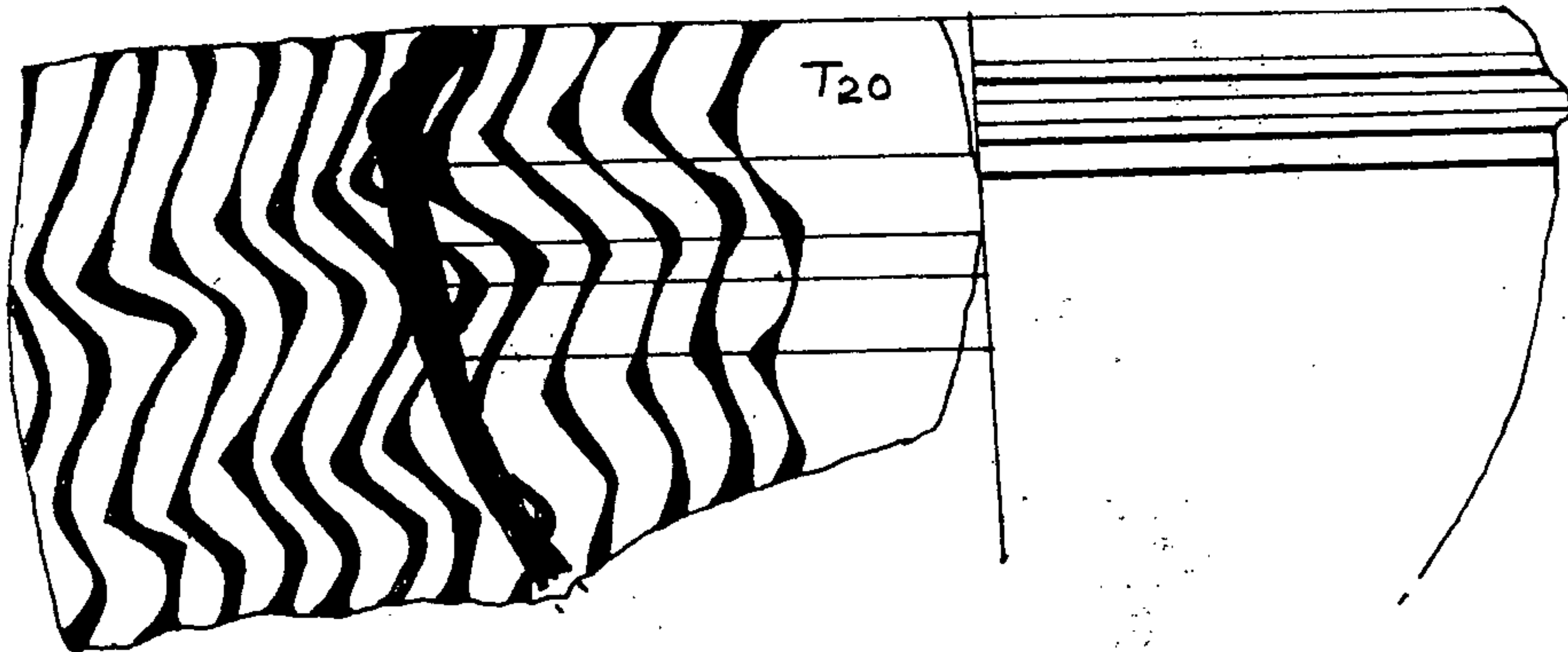
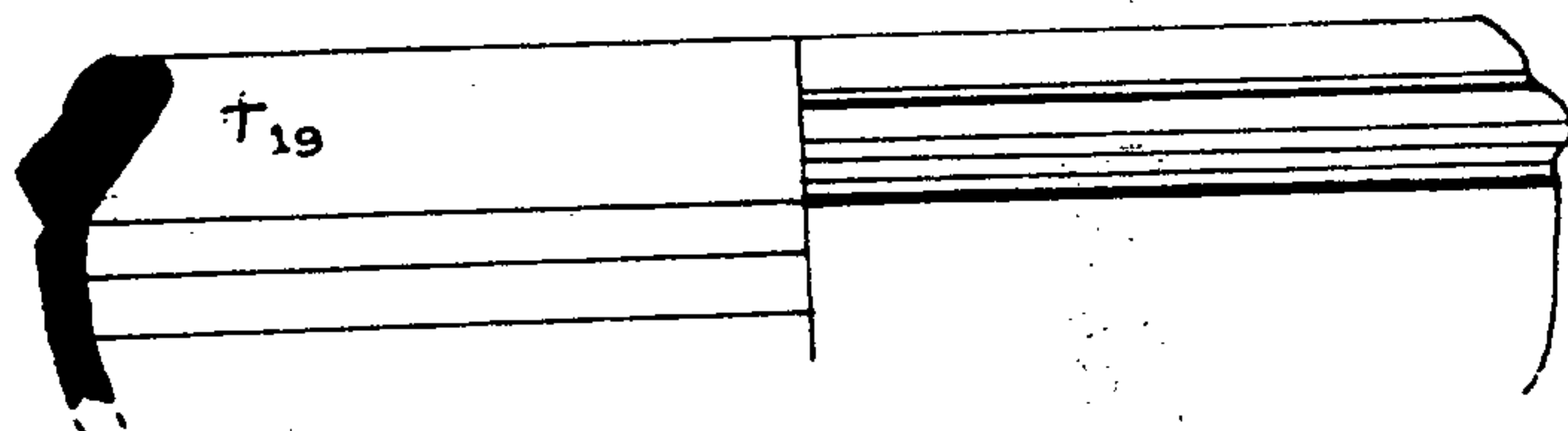
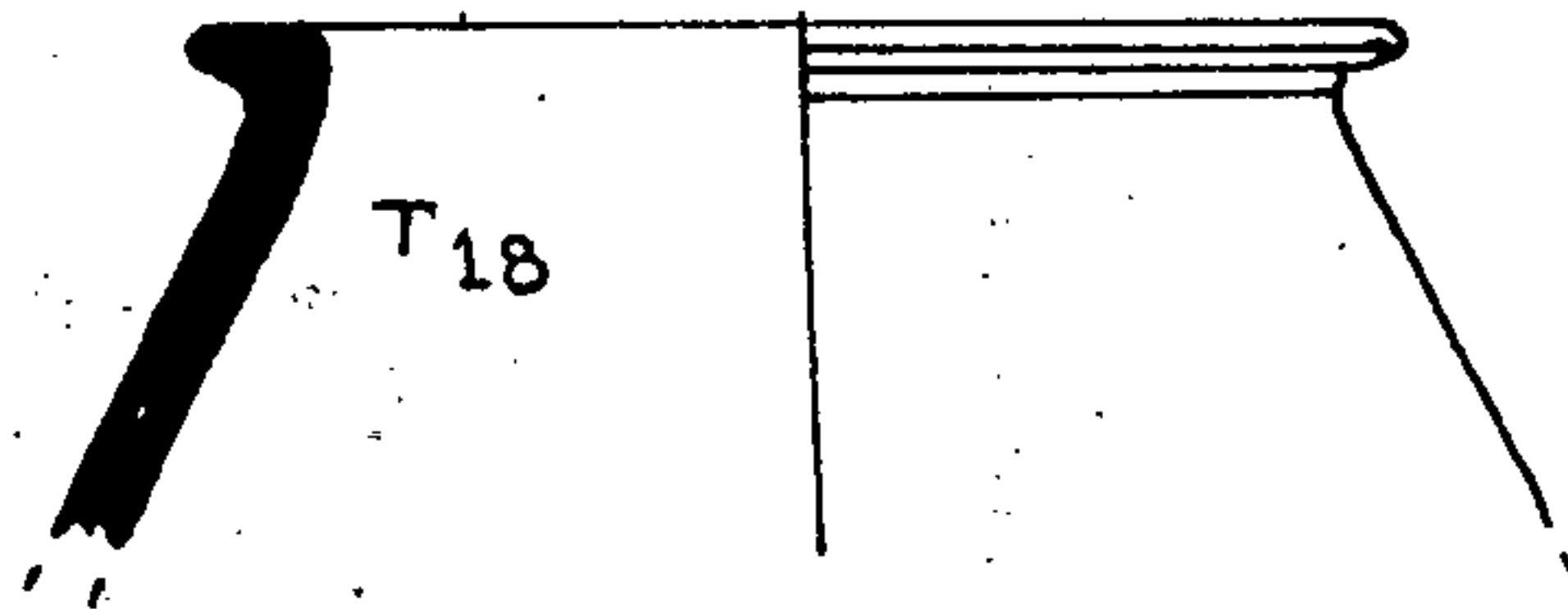
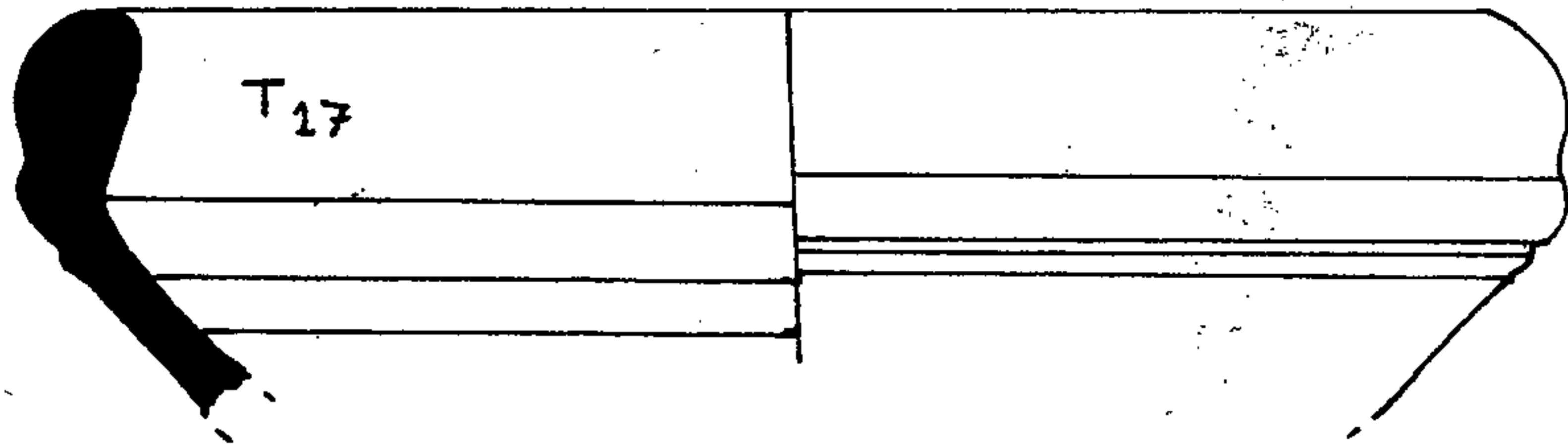
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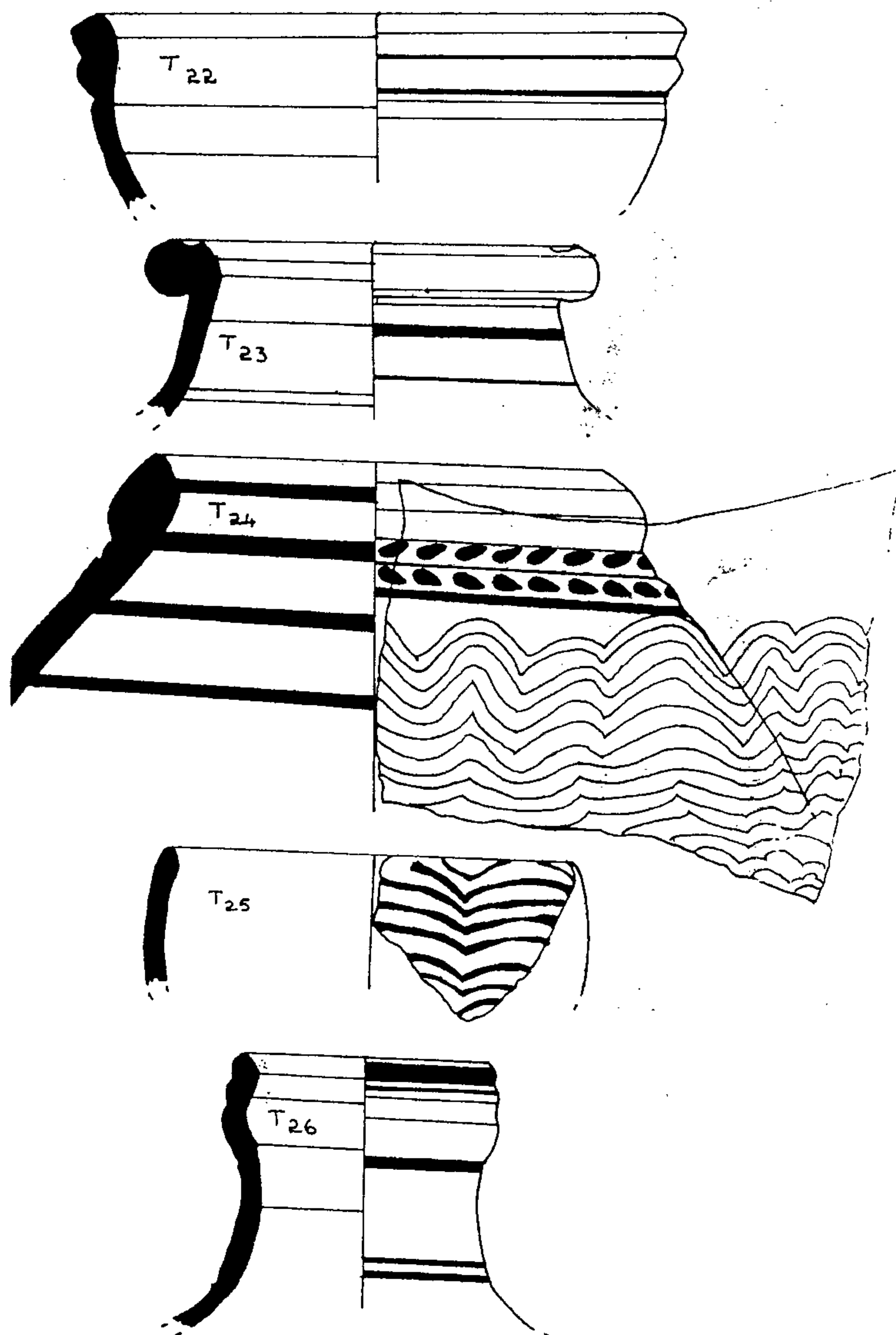
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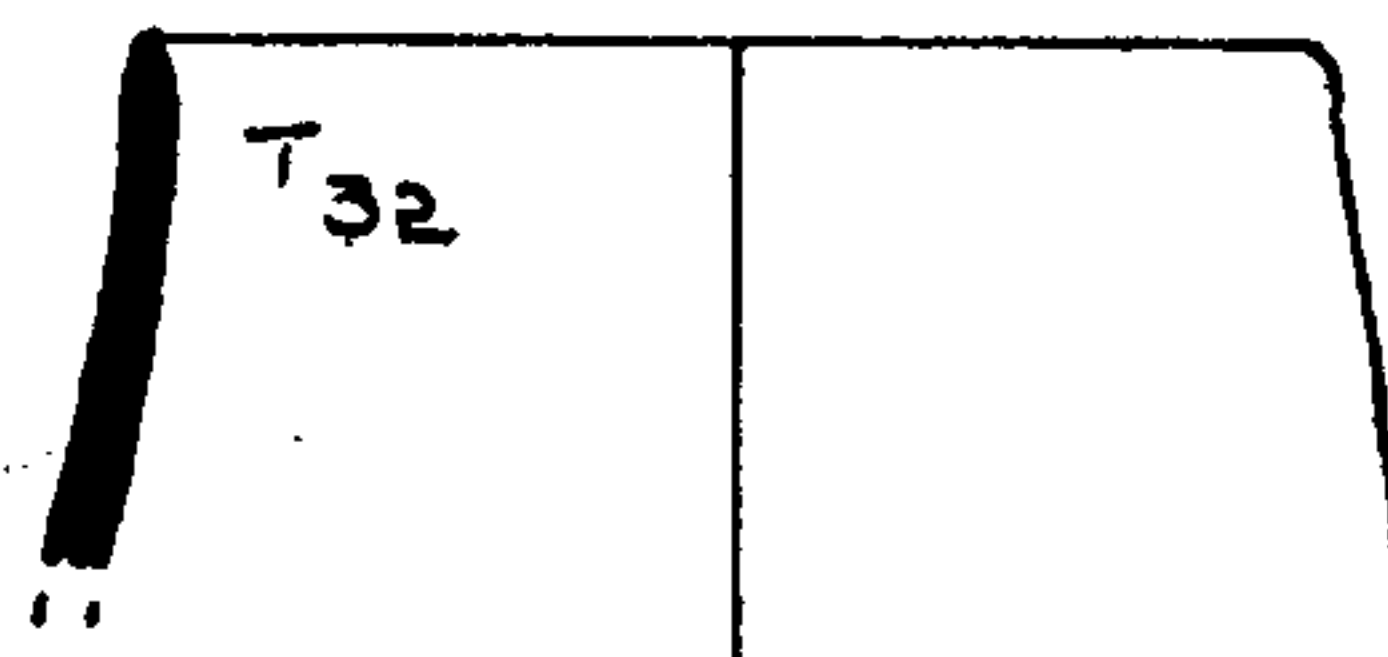
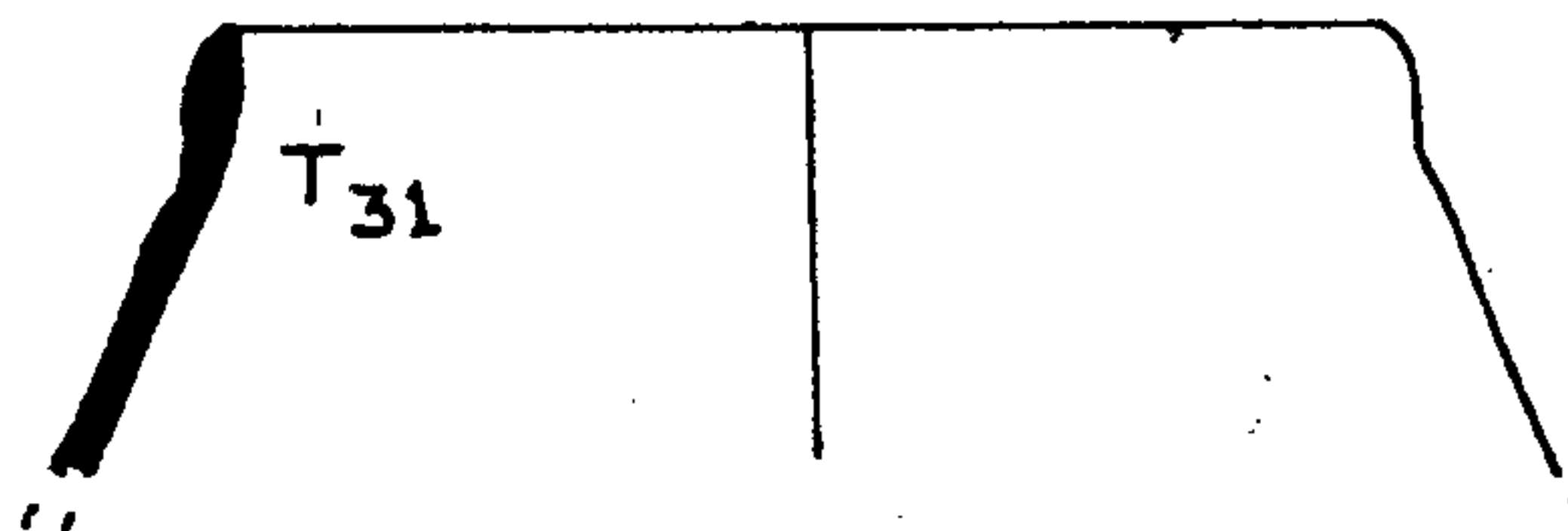
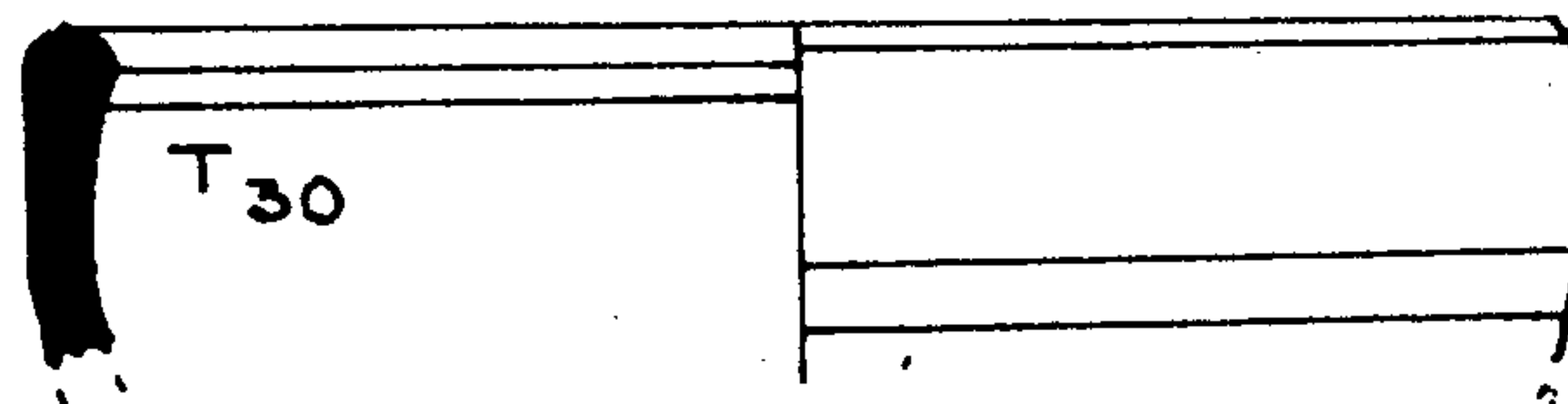
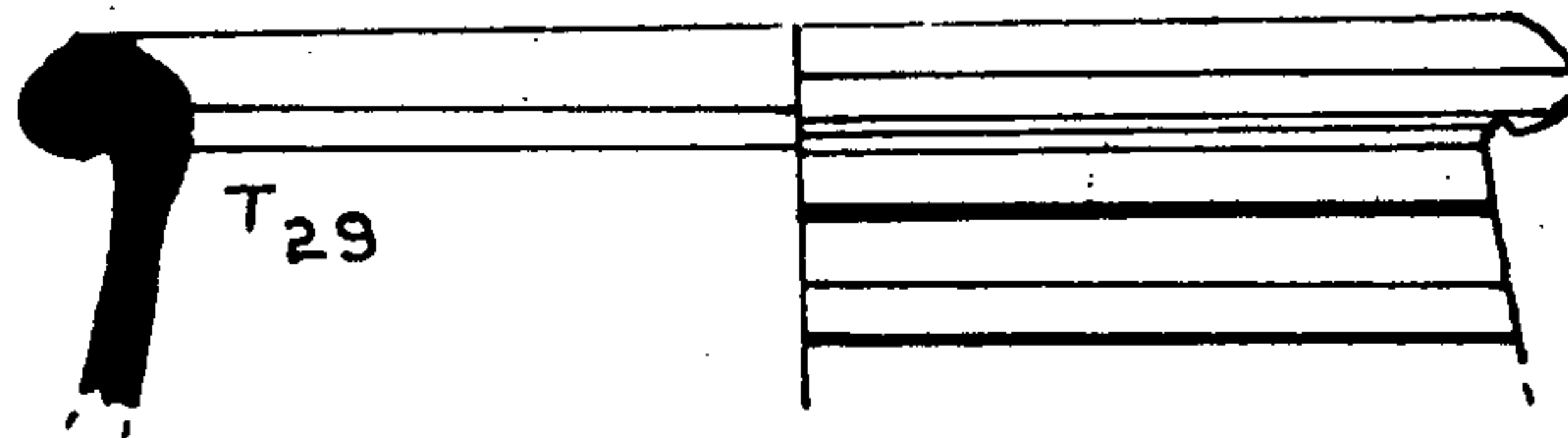
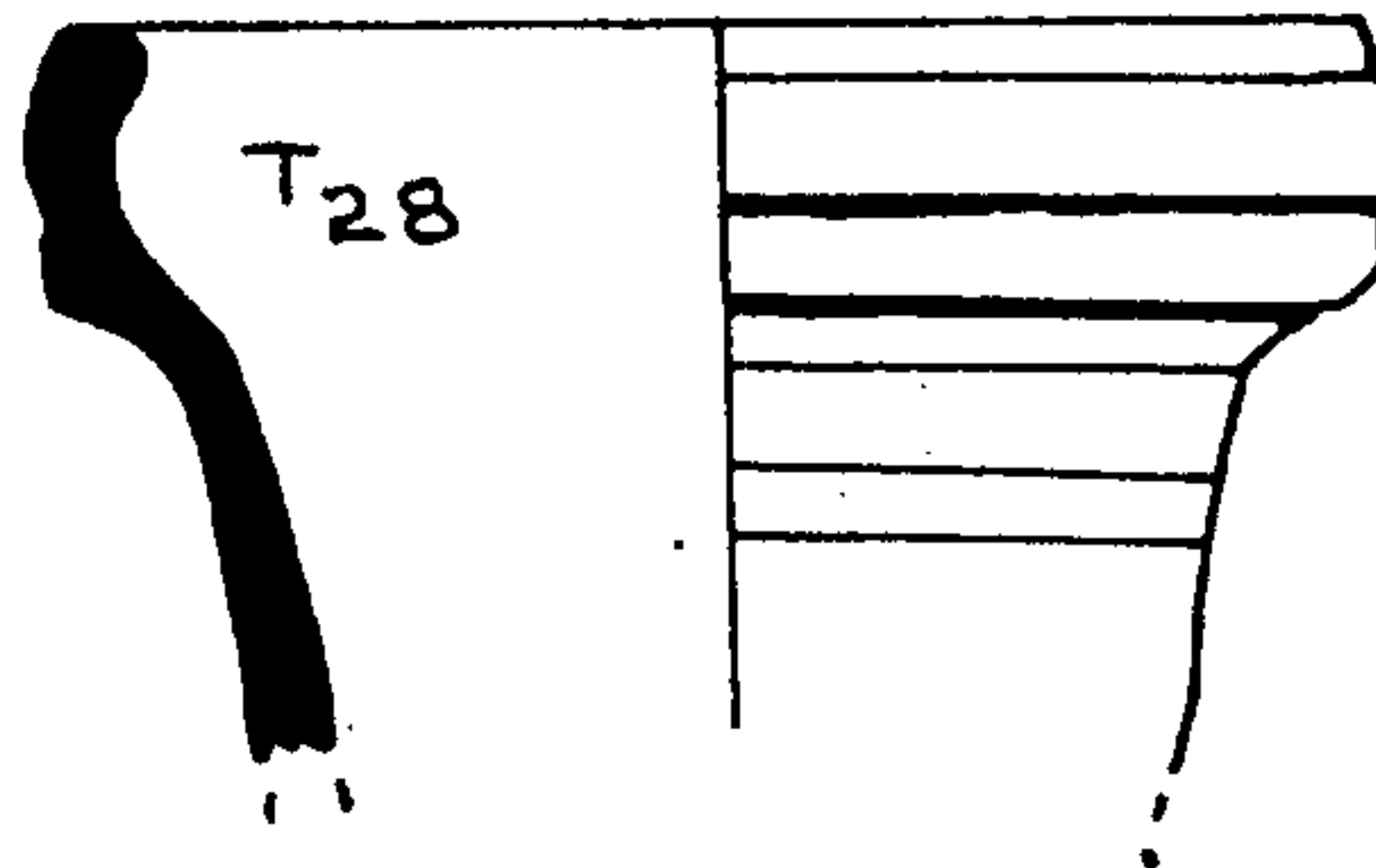
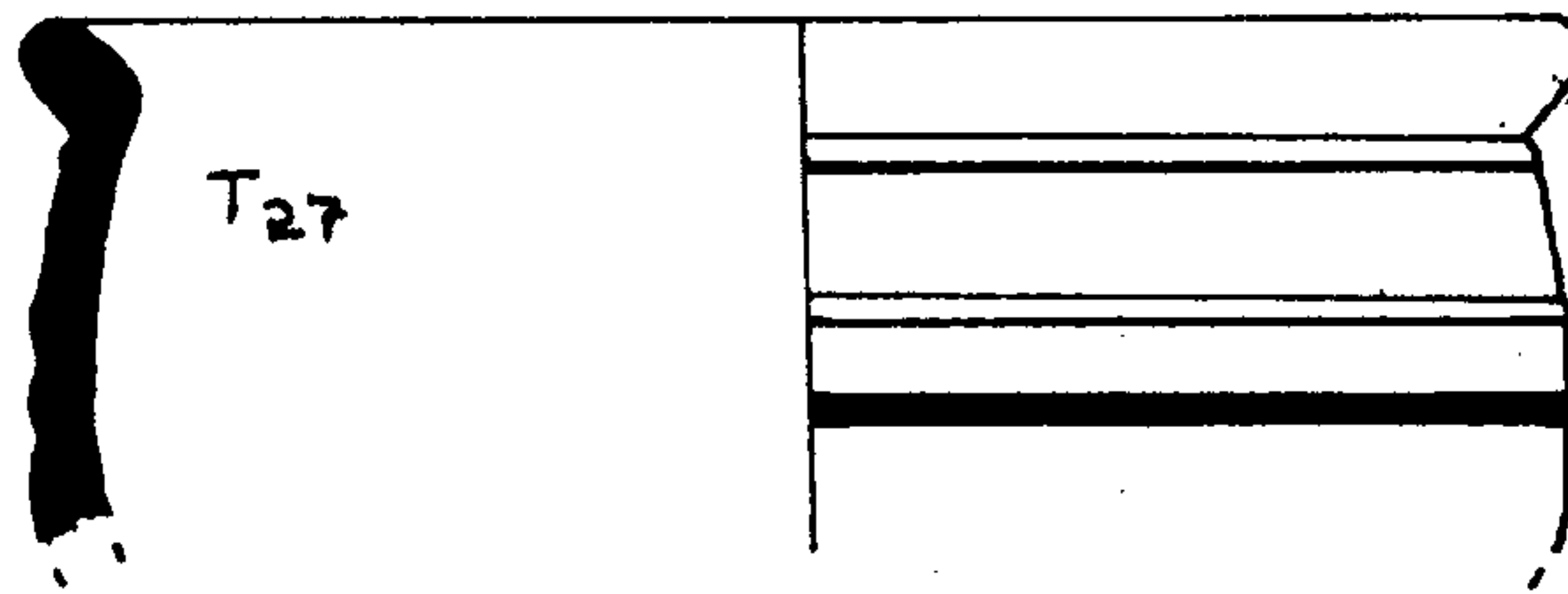


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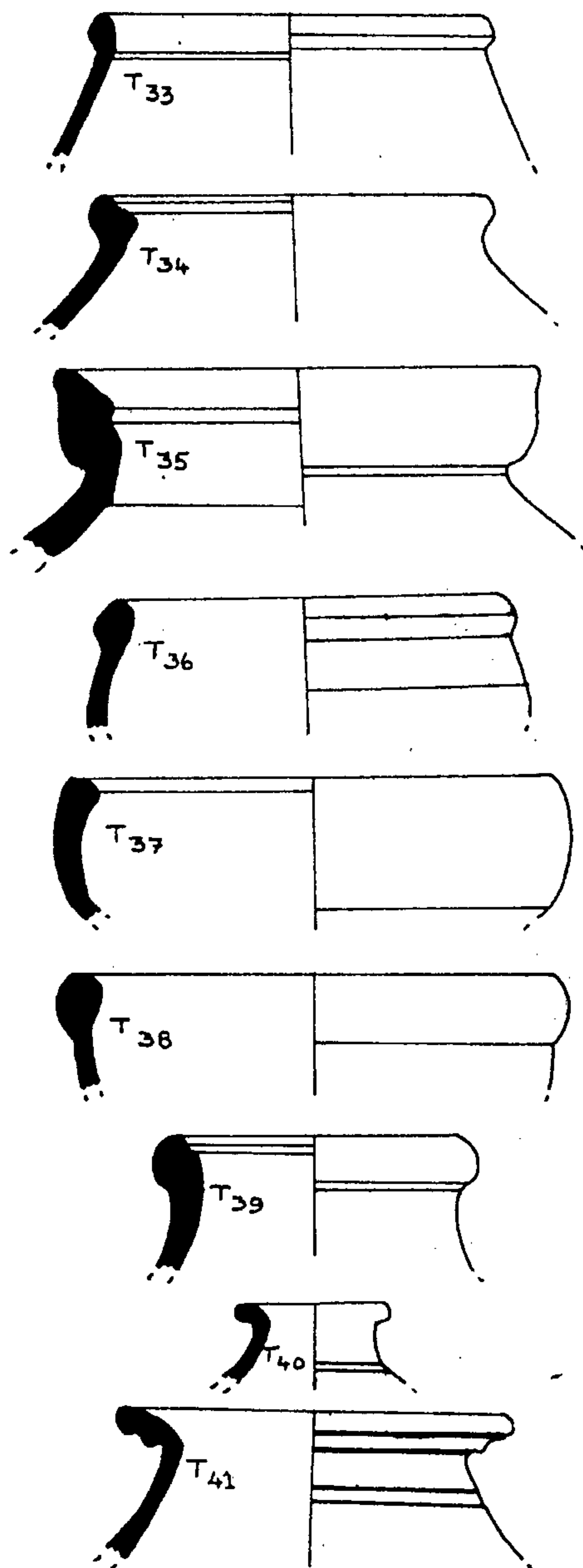




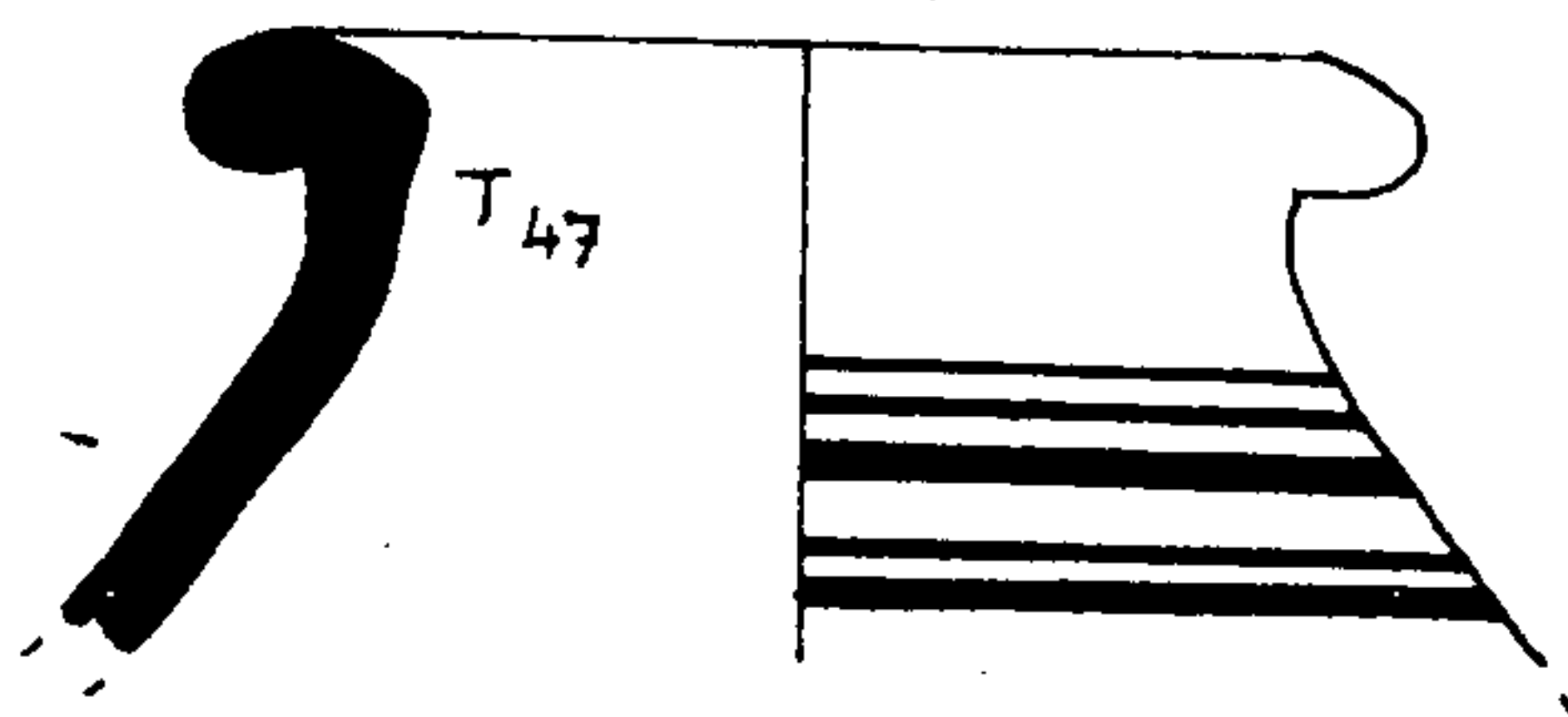
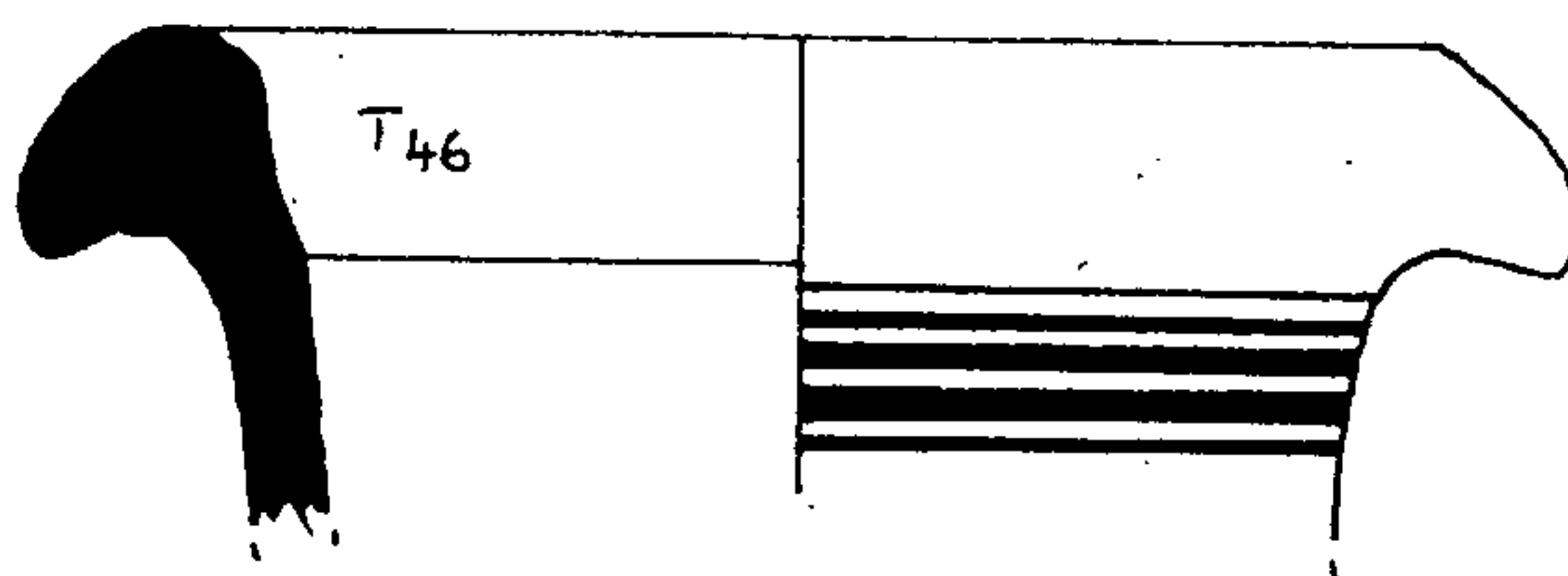
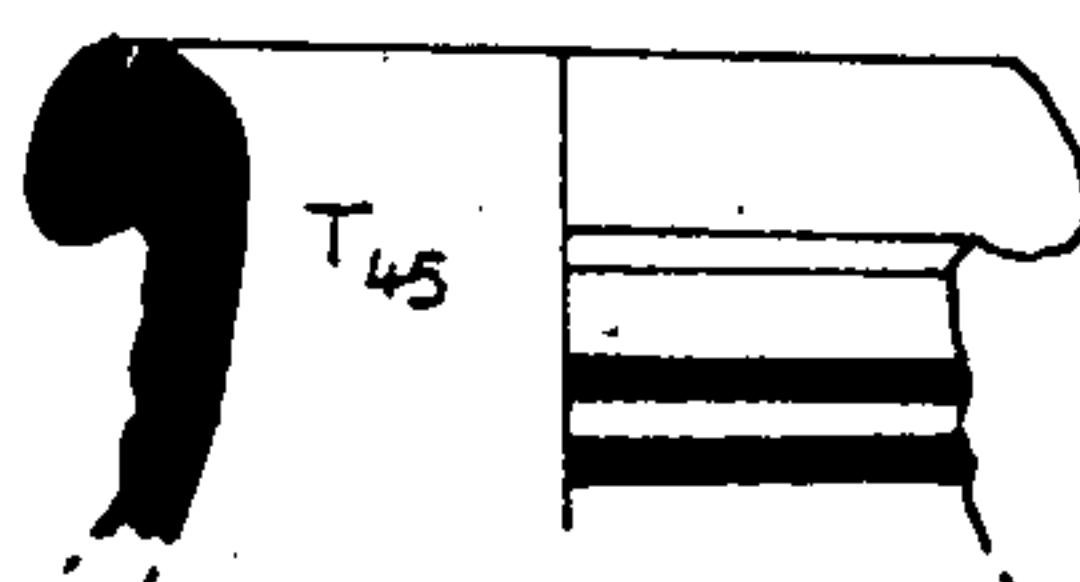
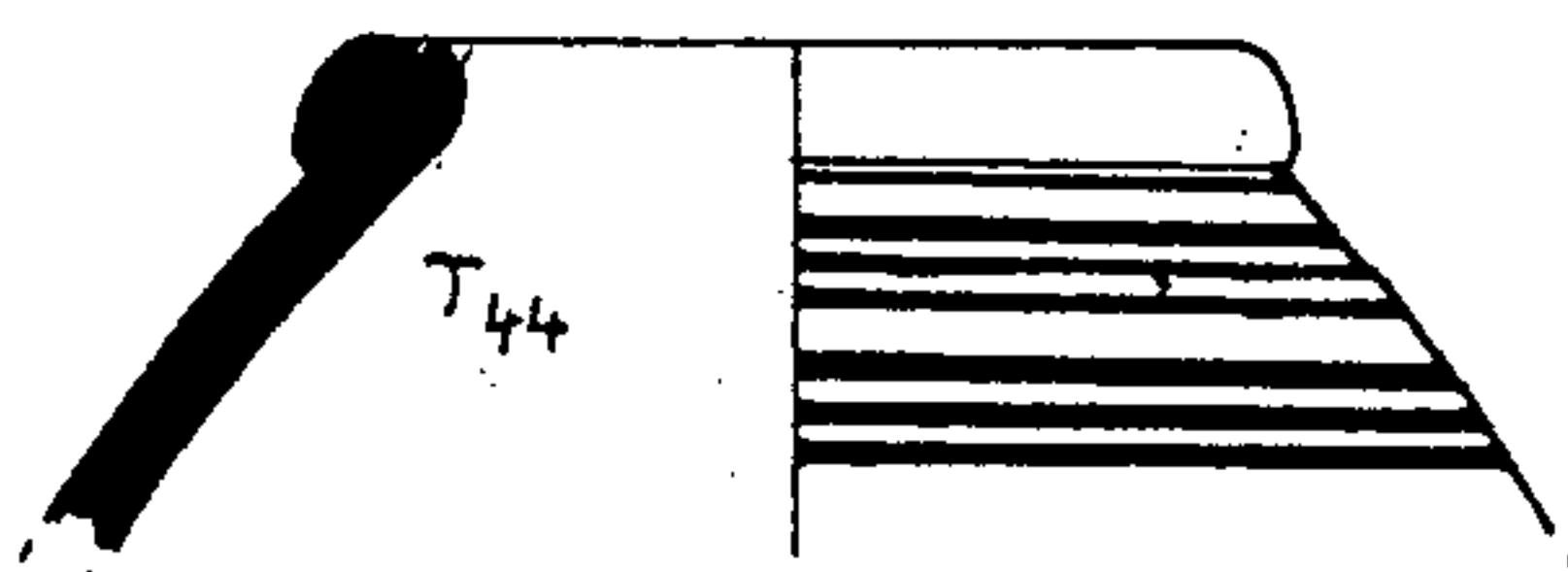
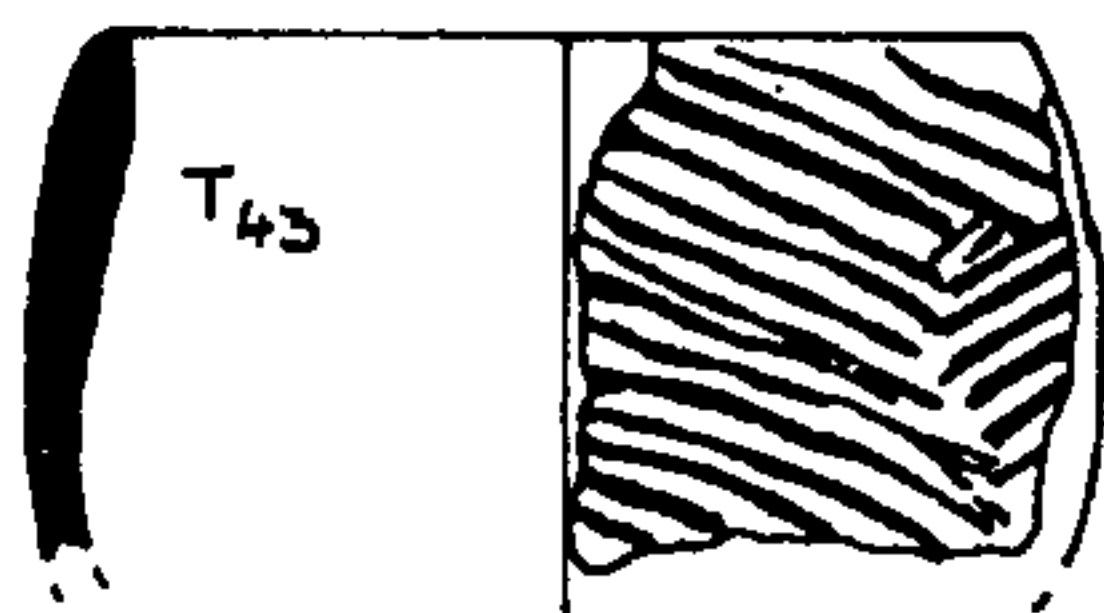
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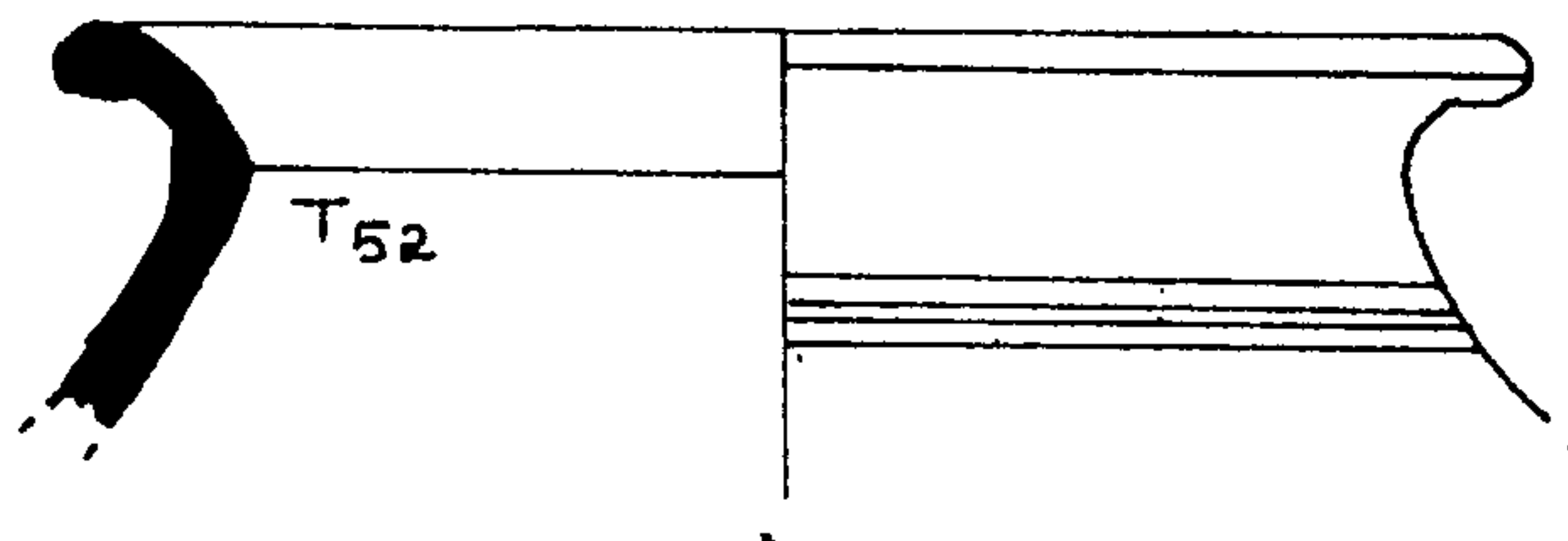
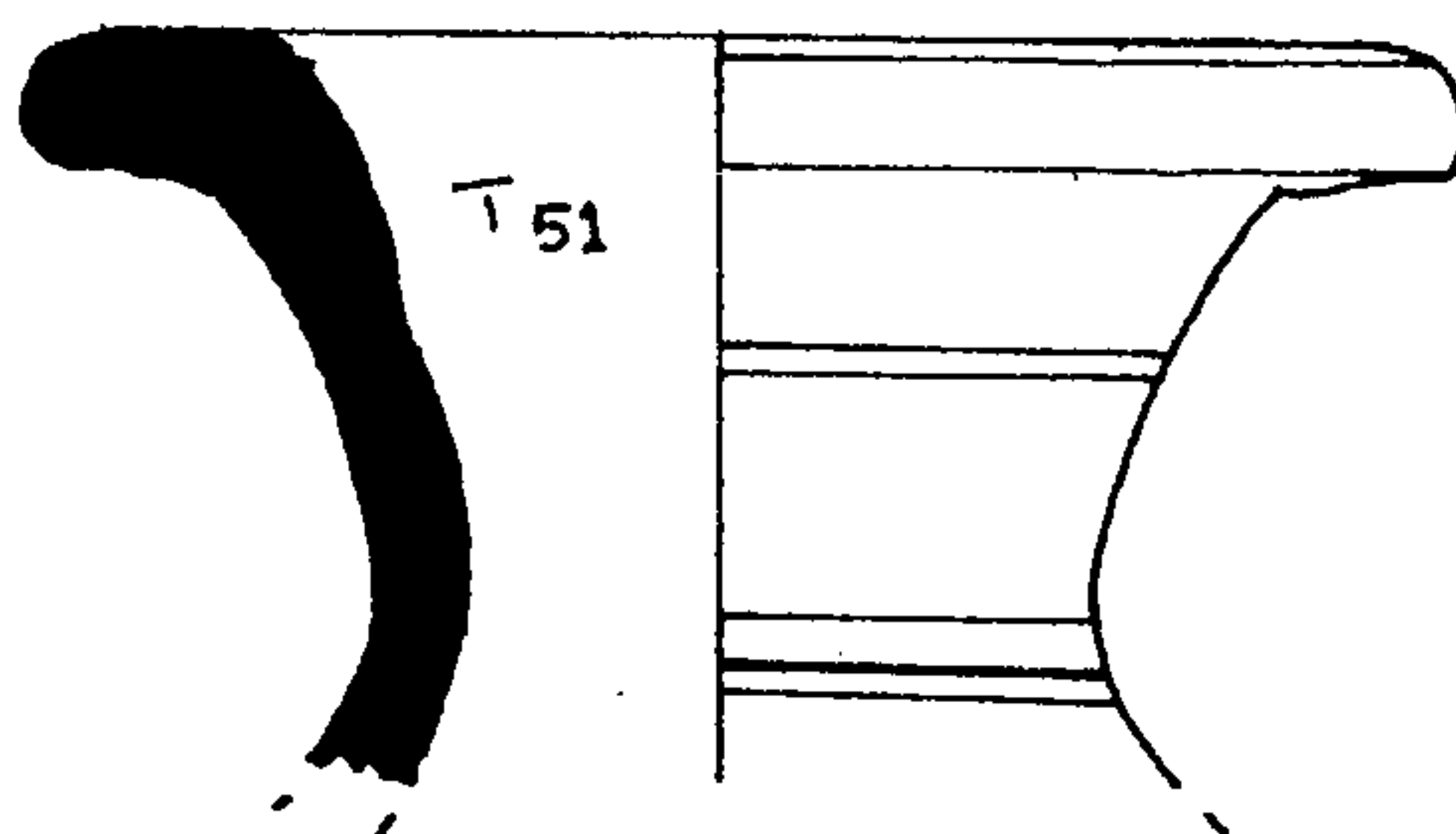
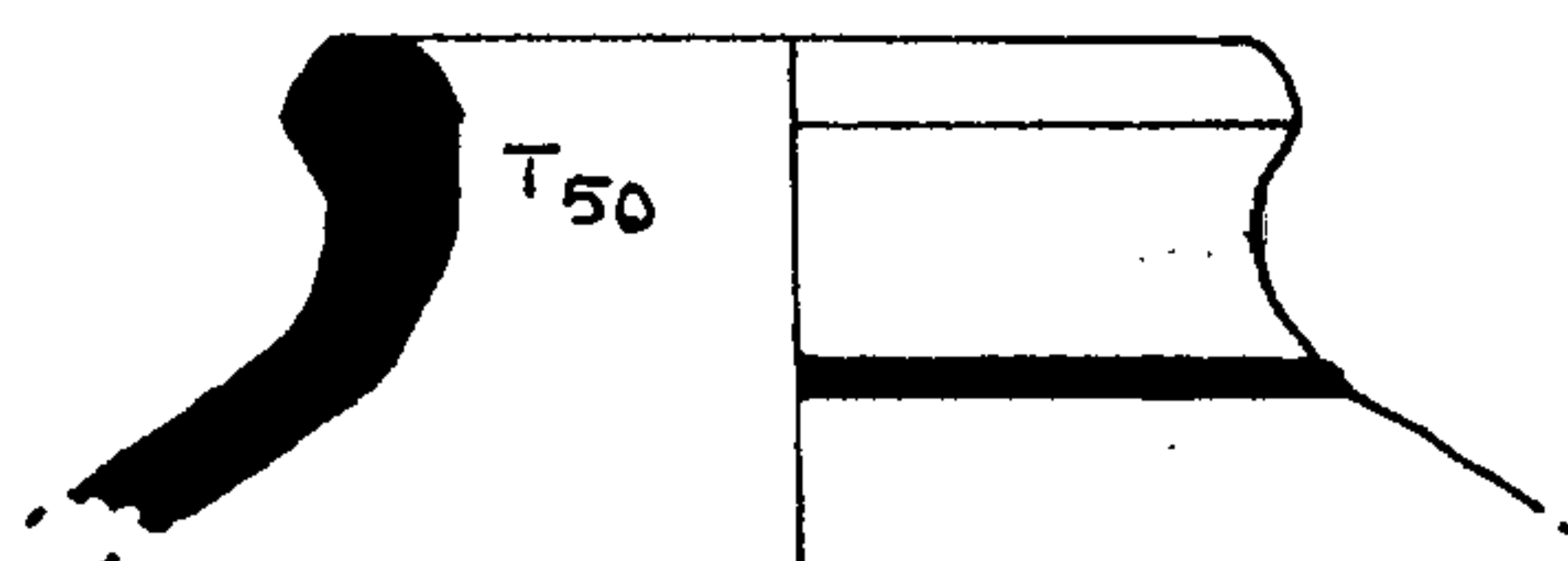
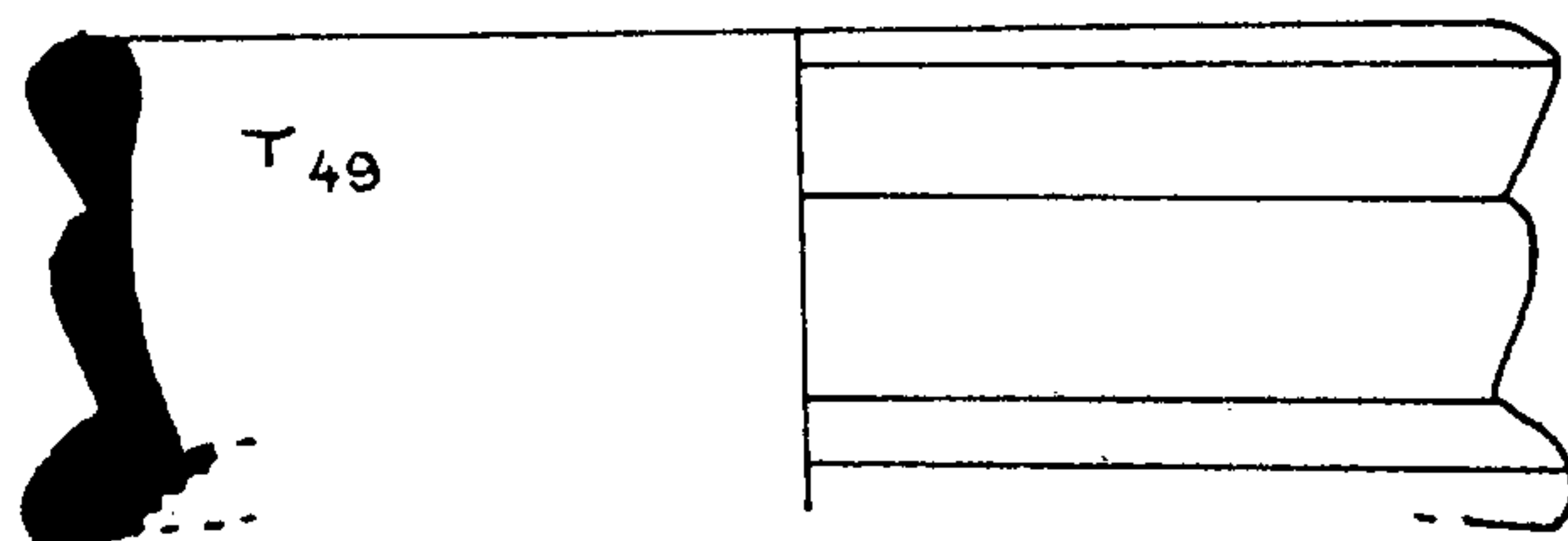
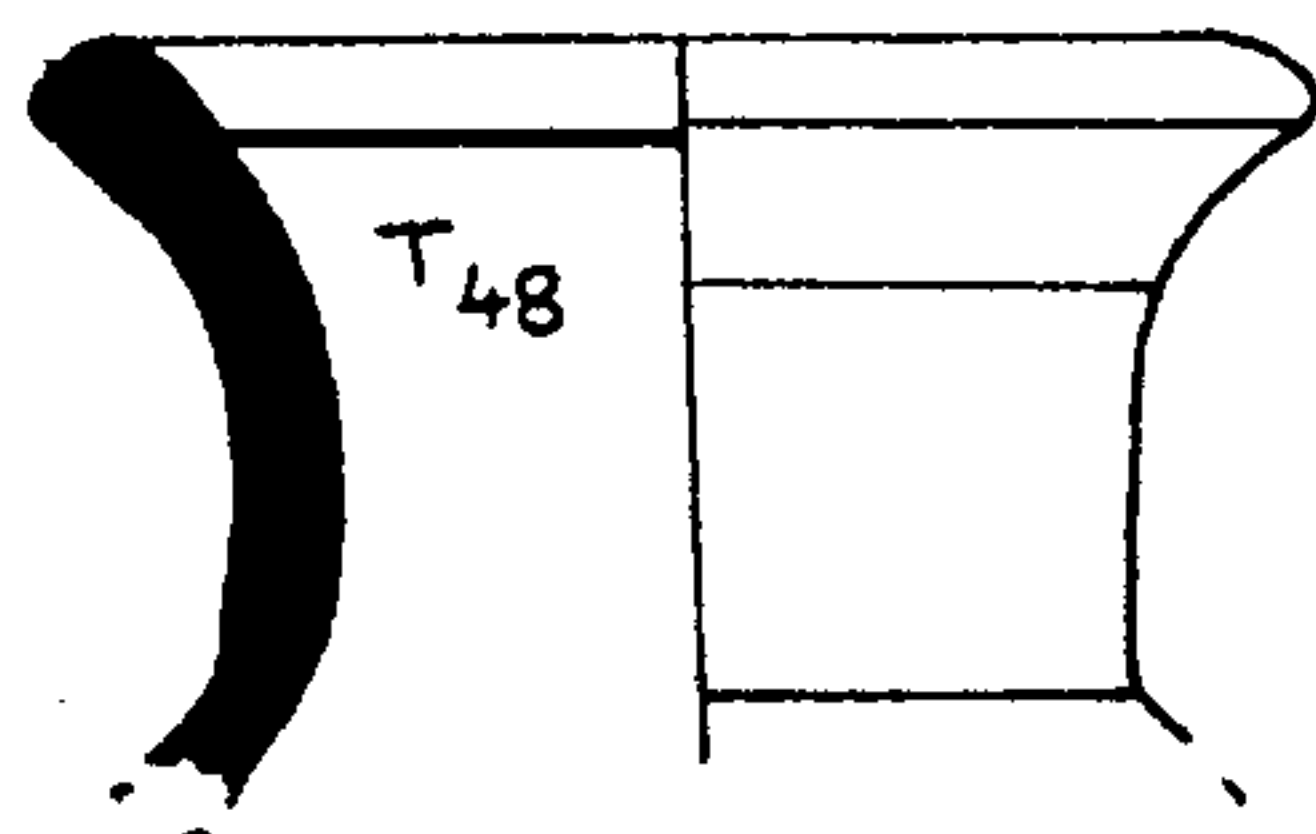
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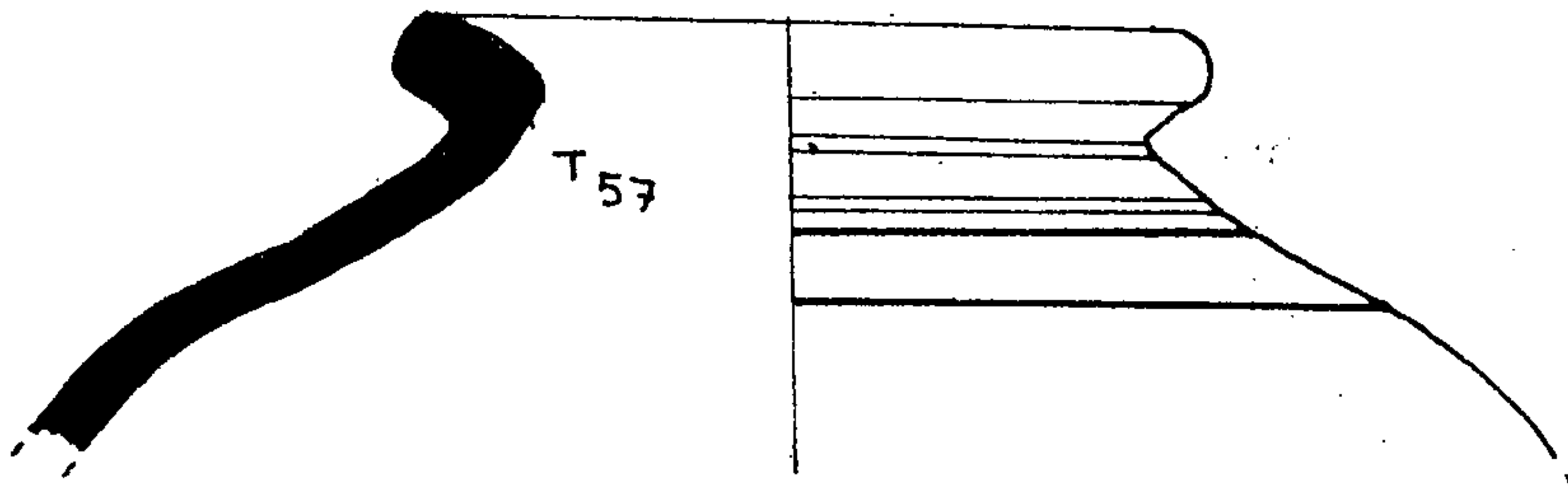
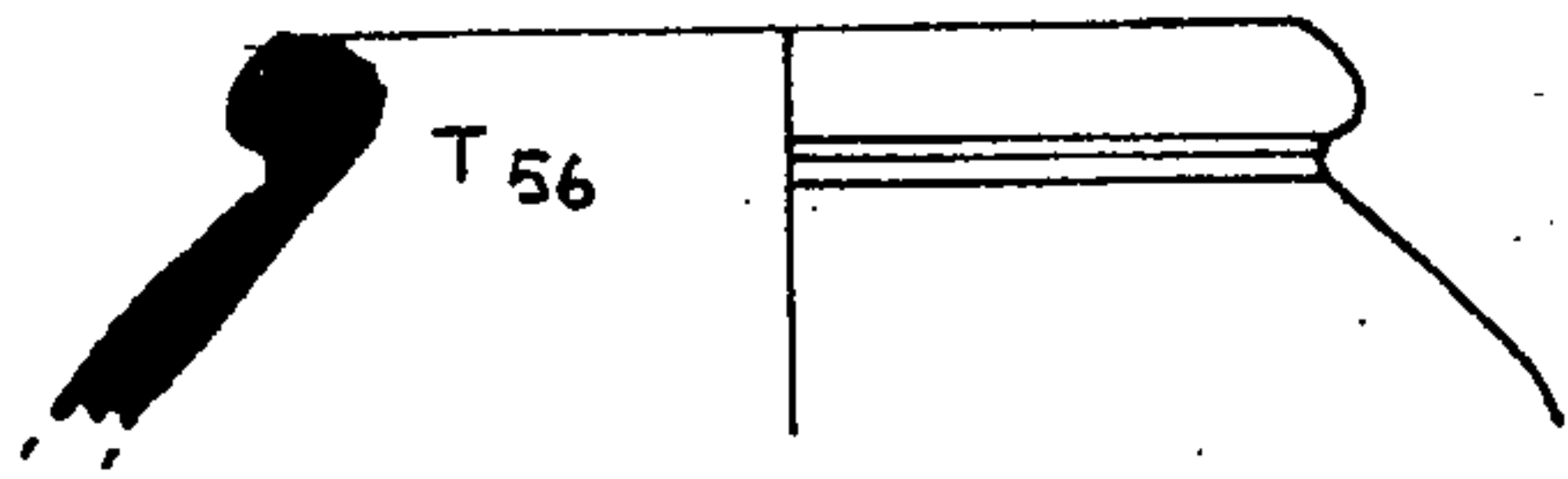
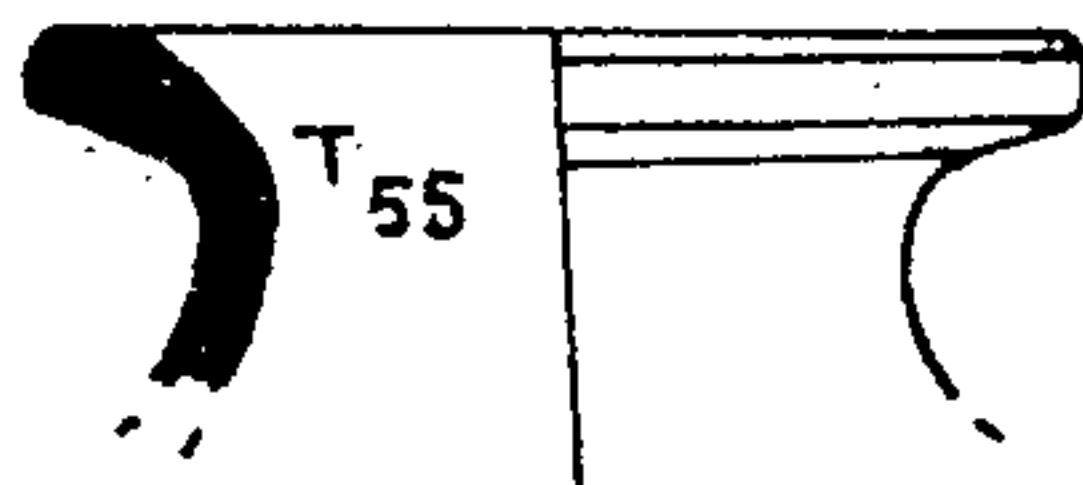
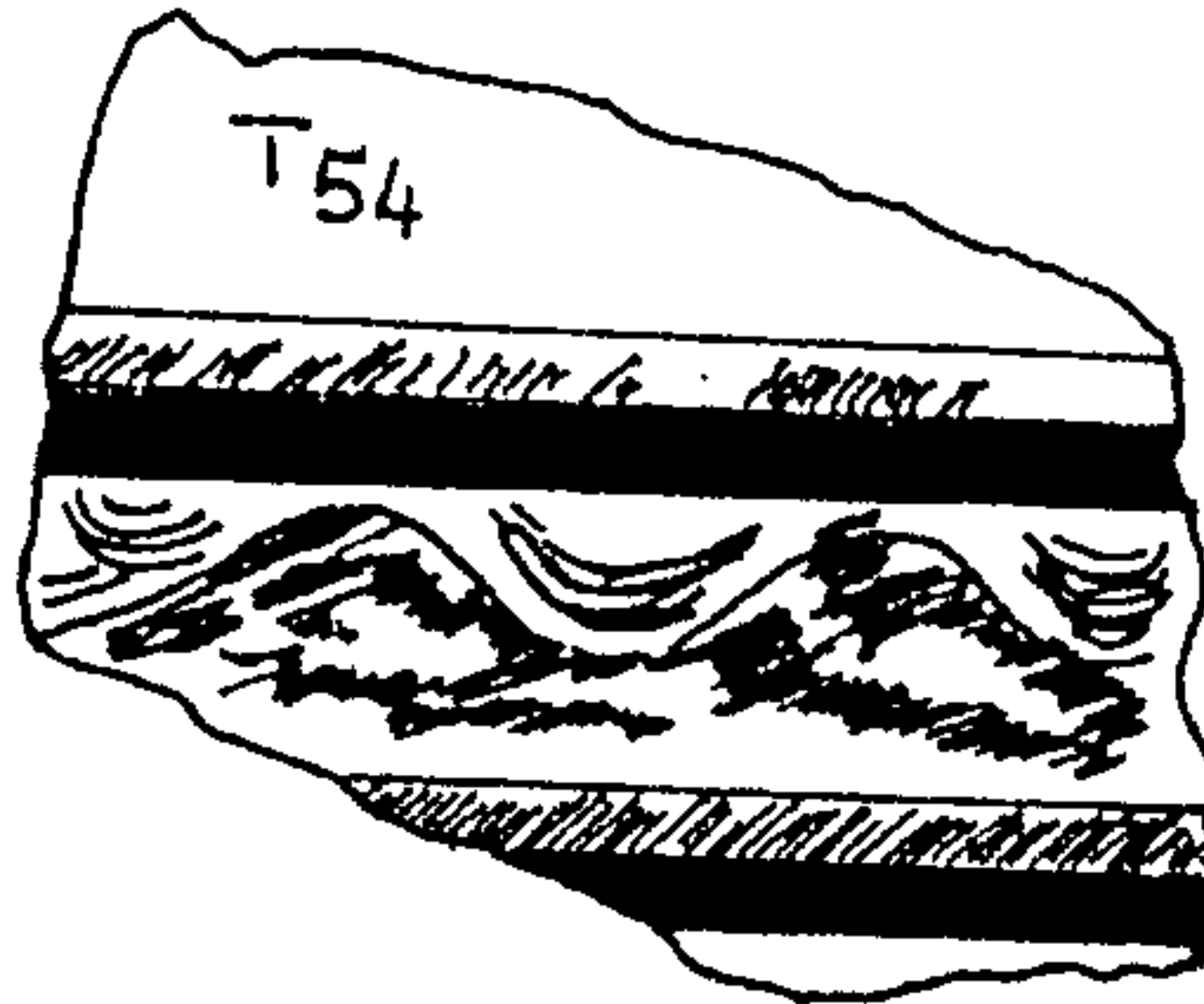
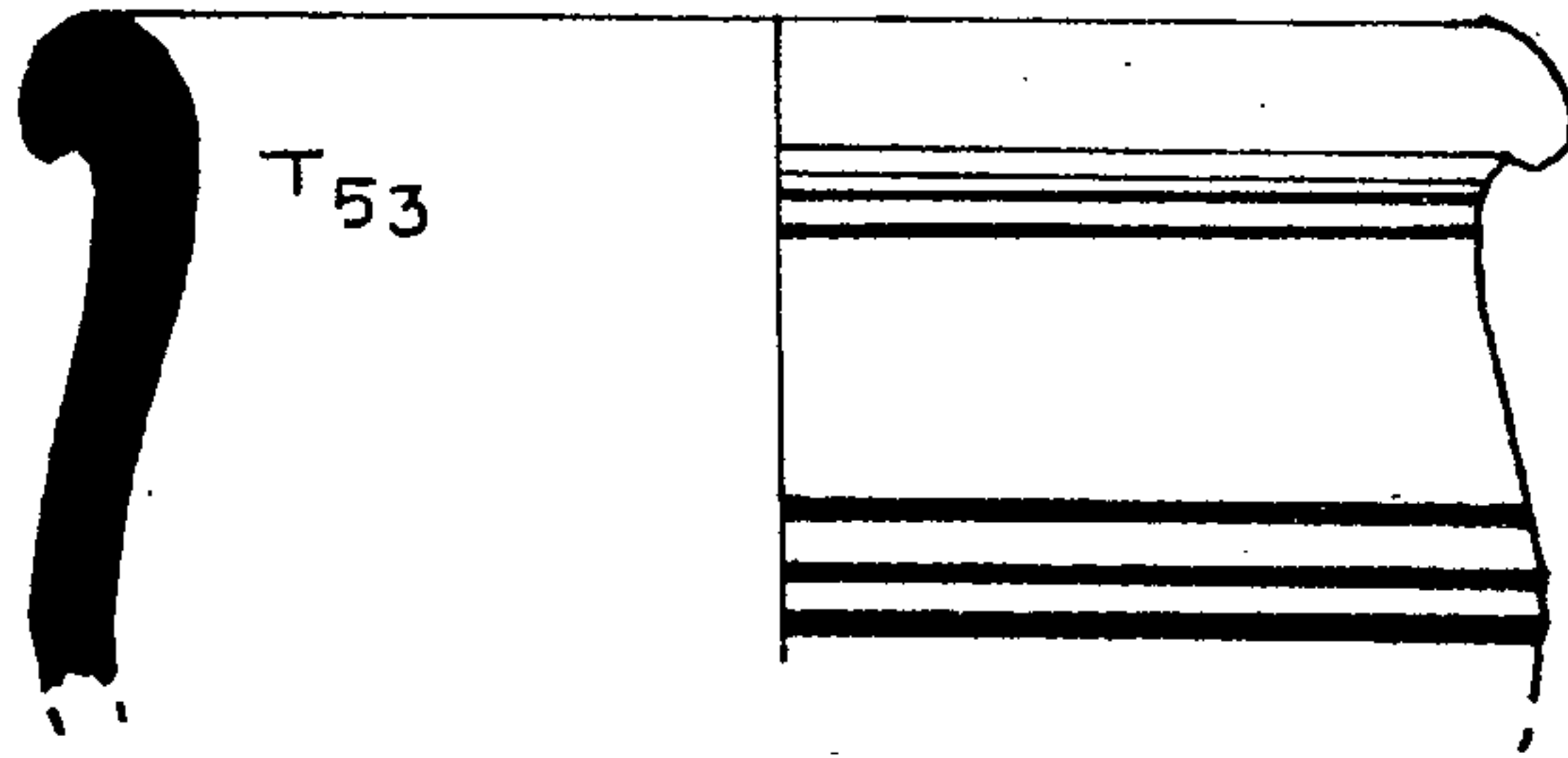
## POTTERY TYPES



## POTTERY TYPES



## POTTERY TYPES





## **Graffiti Marks**

The excavations and explorations conducted in Kongu region had yielded several potshards with graffiti marks. Perur excavations also revealed thirteen potshards with graffiti marks and without Brahmi letter of black and red ware, russet-coated ware, red slipped ware, red ware and black ware.

### **Description**

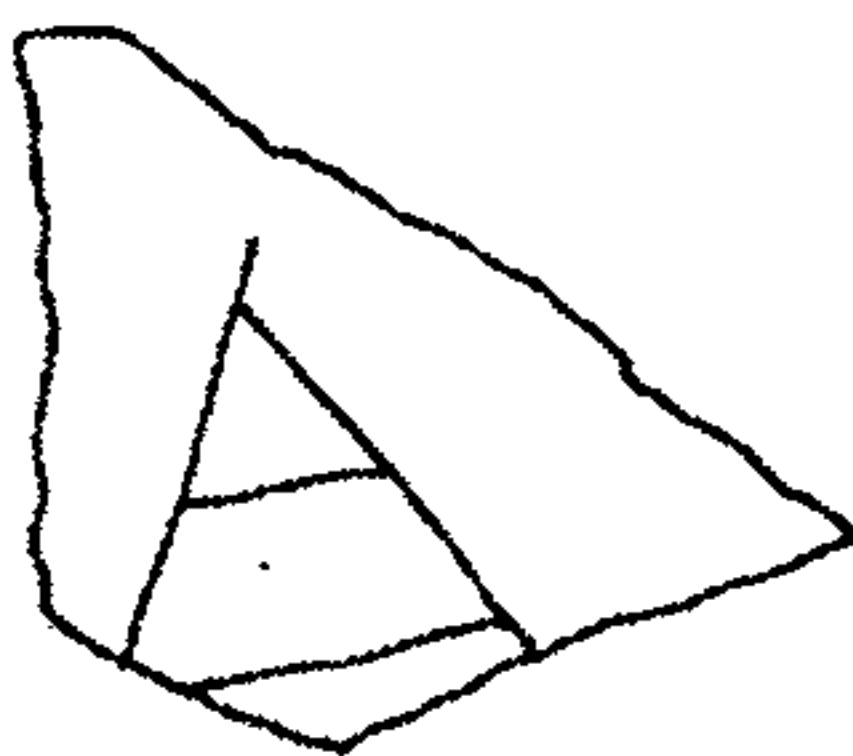
1. Black and red ware with two slanting vertical lines like “V” shape.
2. Red slipped ware with pyramid type and two horizontal lines like ladder.
3. Black and red ware with graffiti of star design, after firing.
4. Red ware with ladder shaped graffiti mark. Similar type of graffiti mark was also collected in Kodumanal.
5. Semi circular or “V” shaped graffiti mark was found below the rim portion of a Black ware.
6. Triangle or damaru mark on black ware. It may be a Brahmi letter.
7. Russet coated ware with ‘V’ shaped mark is also noticed in type-5 above.
8. Graffiti mark found near the rim portion. It looks like a boat, or an arrow symbol.
9. This graffiti mark looks like an inverted ‘V’ shaped mark on russet coated ware.

10. Russet coated ware with three horizontal lines found in equal distance.
11. Three standing or curved lines found on the russet coated ware.
12. Two vertical lines with zigzag lines on the sides that look like a saw was found on the russet coated ware.
13. Russet coated ware contains two curved lines found without connecting the ends.

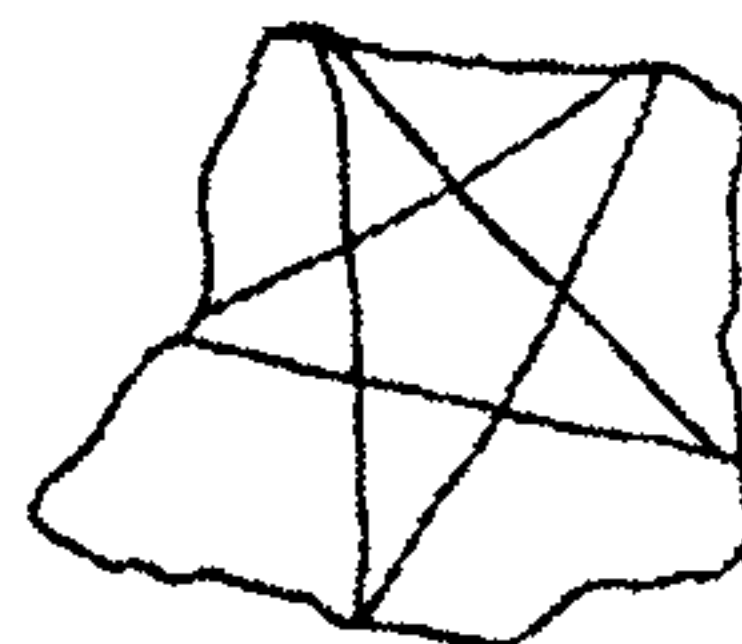
# GRAFFITI MARKS



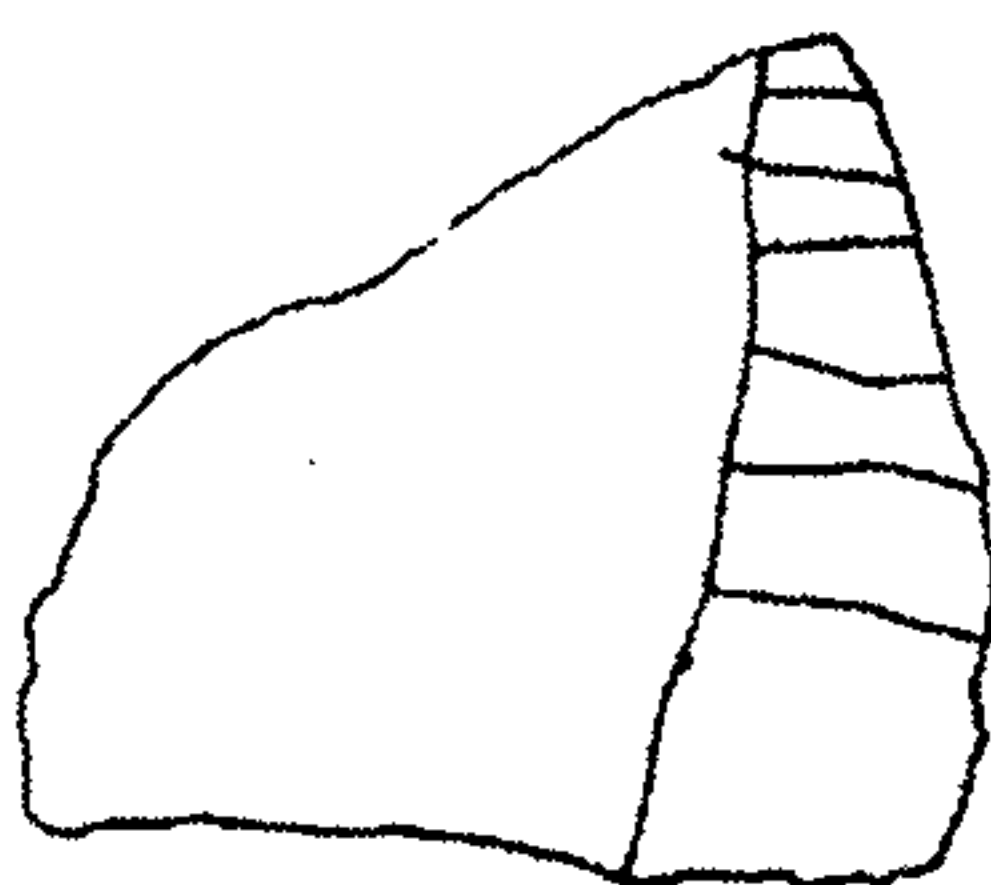
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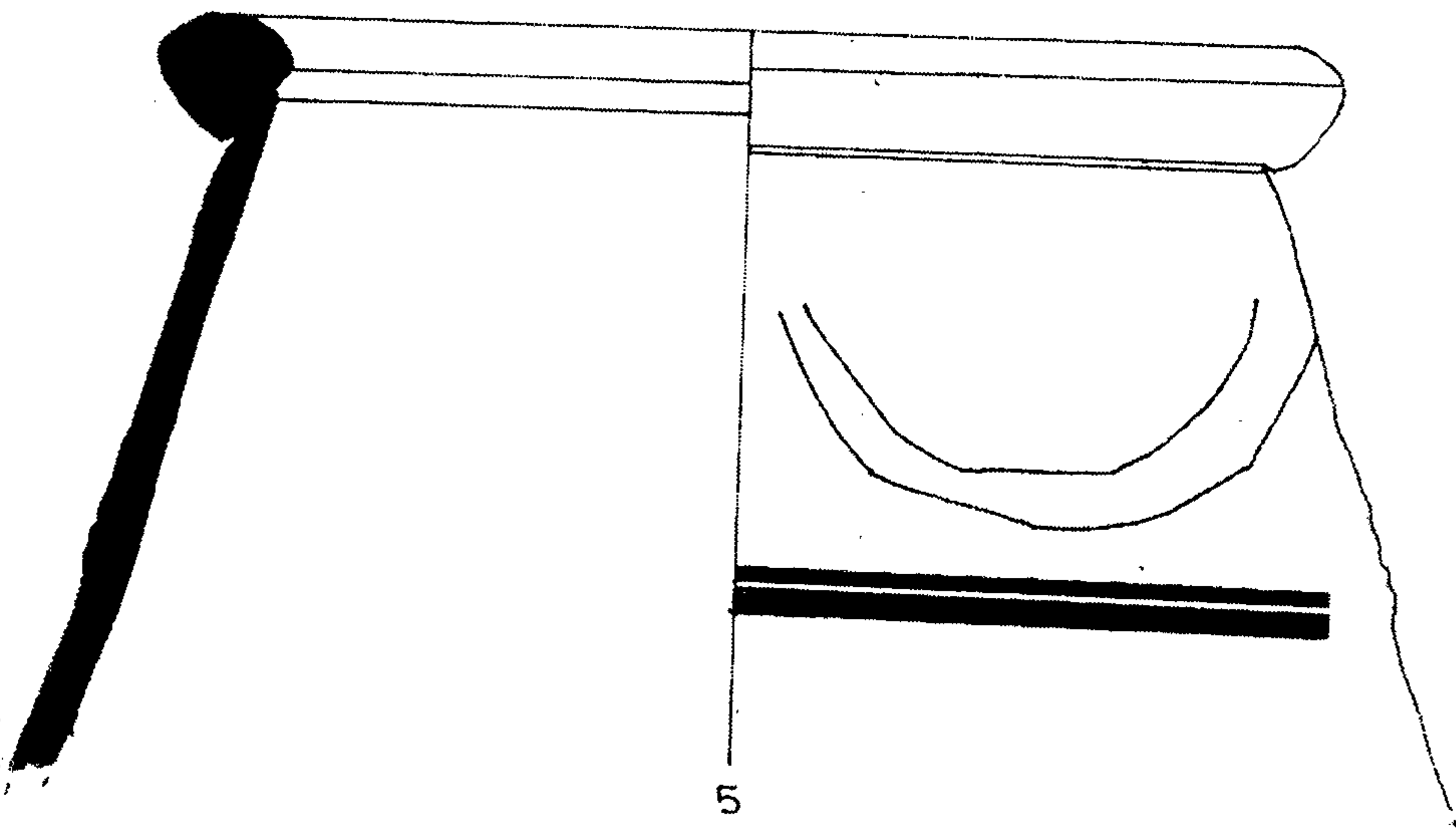
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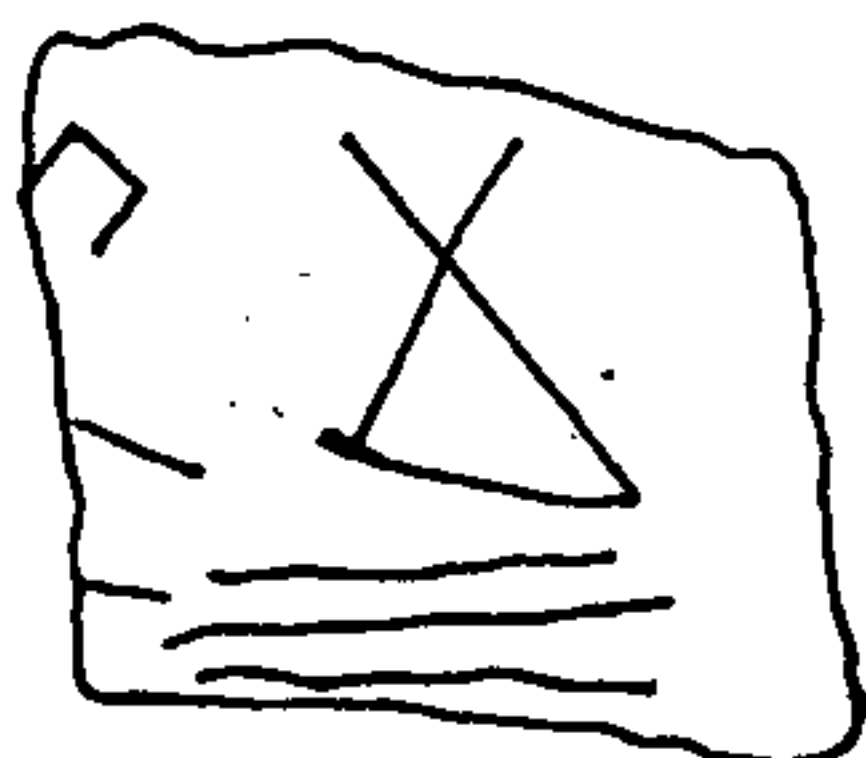


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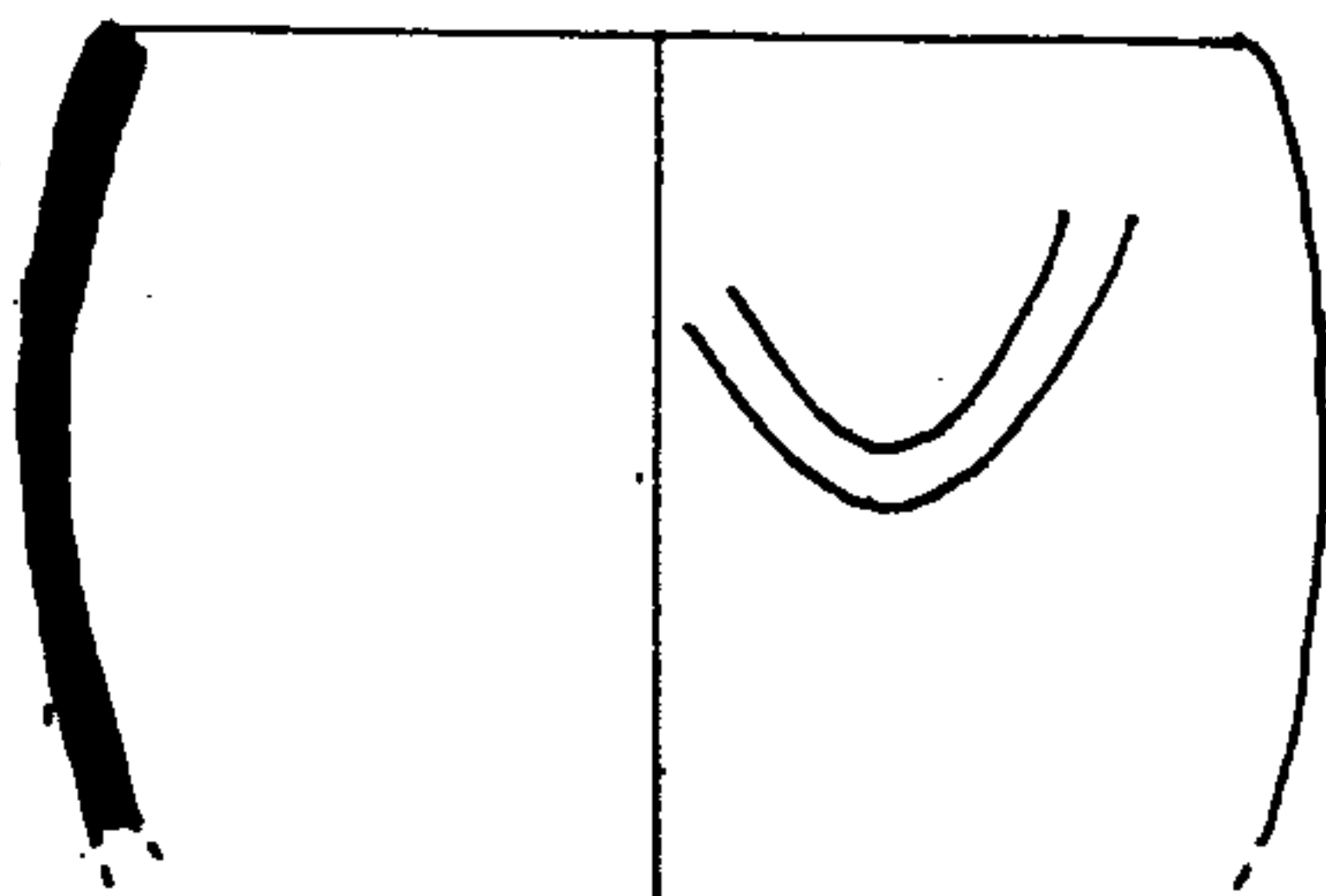


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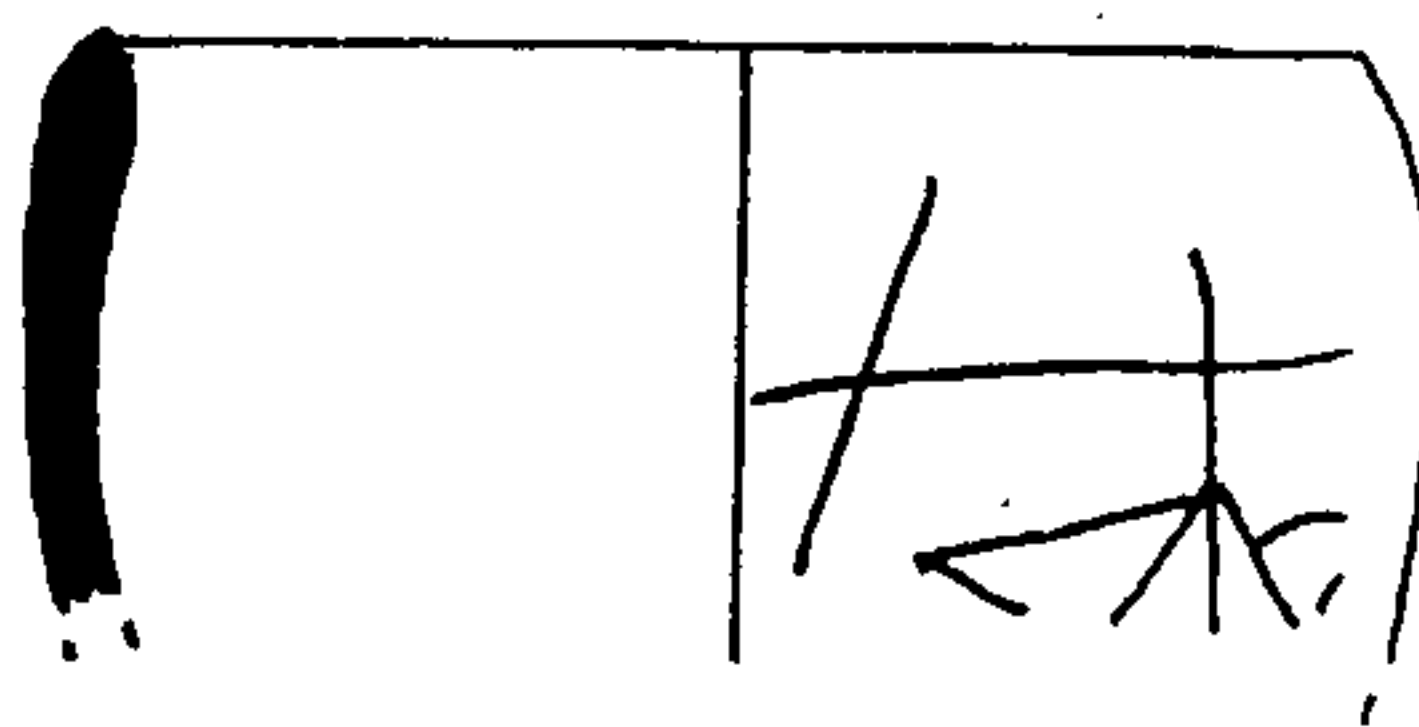
# GRAFFITI MARKS



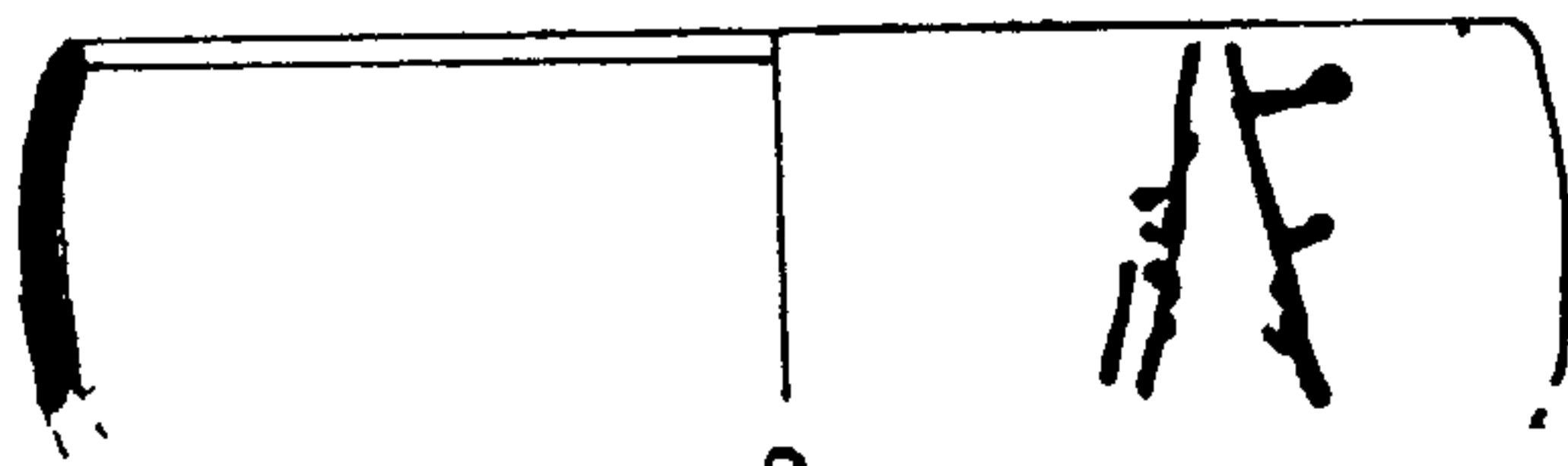
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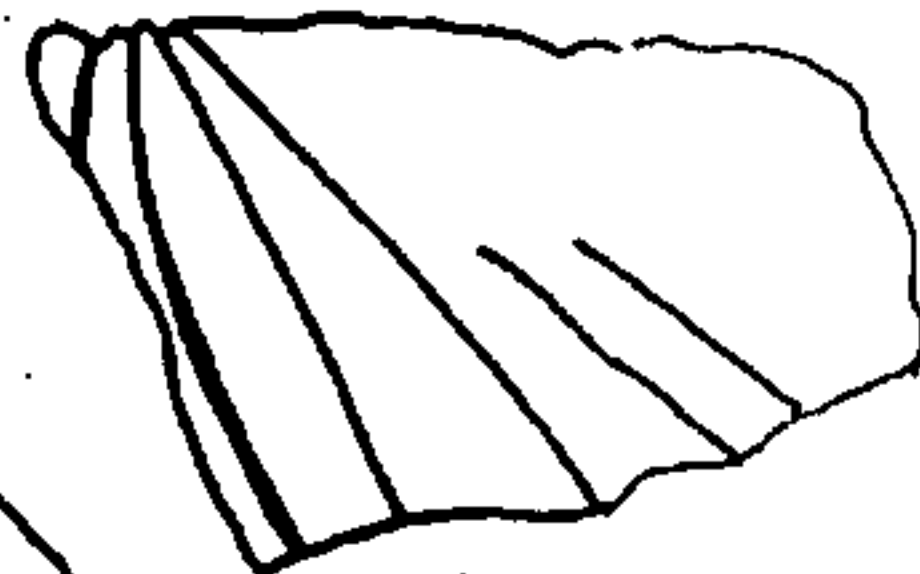
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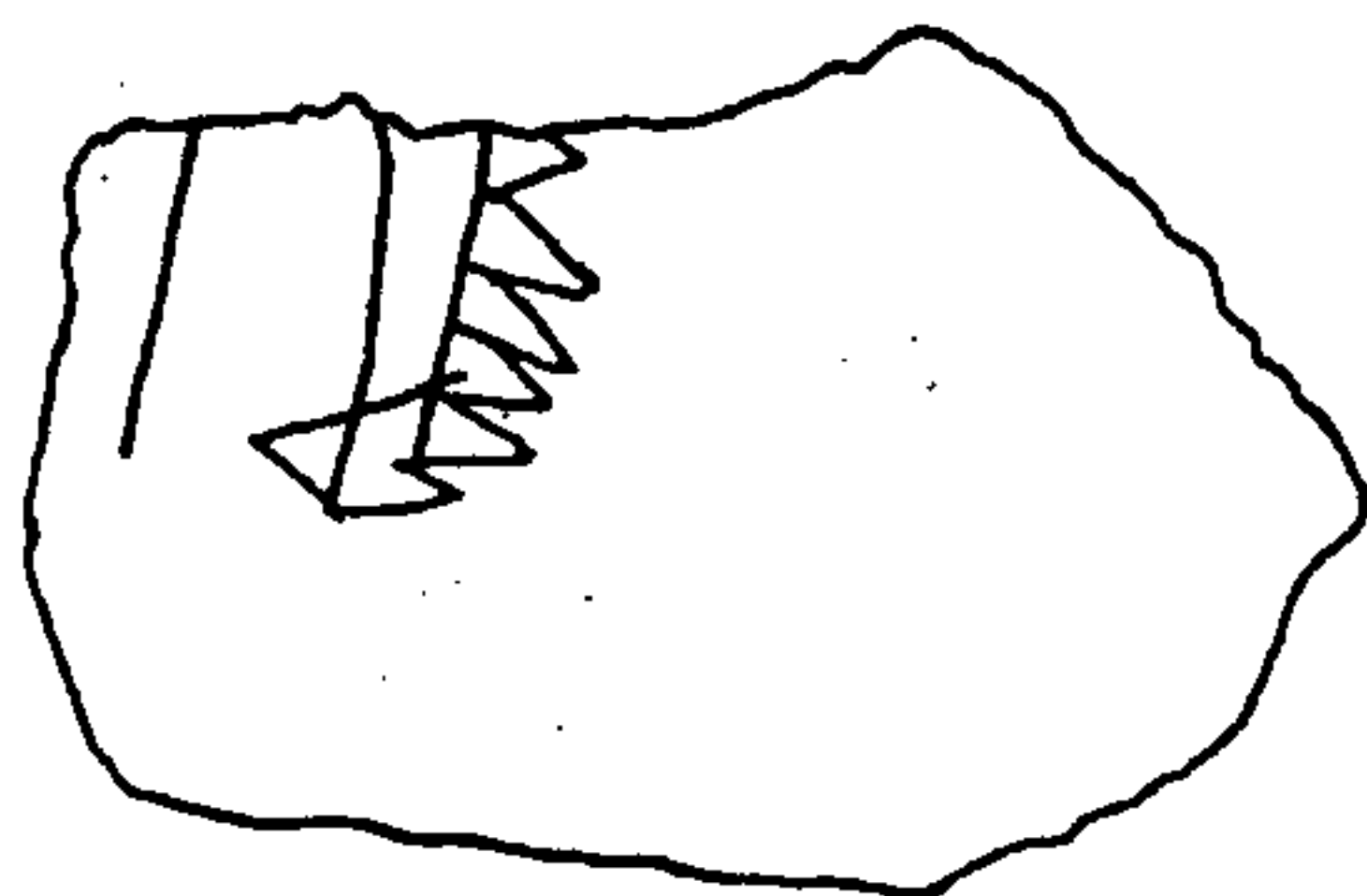
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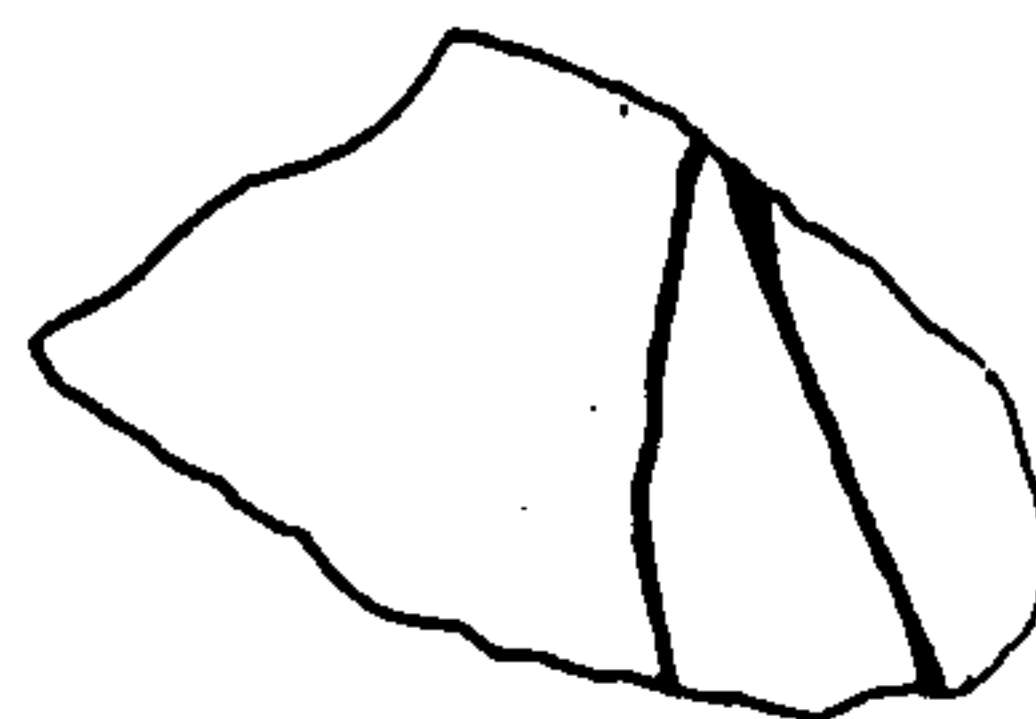
10



11



12



13

## **RESULTS**

The excavations at Perur have thrown abundant light upon the economic, cultural and religious conditions in this region. Along with the excavations at Boluvampatti and Kodumanal (ancient Kodumanam), they prove that the Noyyal basin was inhabited by a civilised group of people who engaged in extensive manufacturing and trading activities with other parts of India as well as with foreign countries. This civilisation had continued till 1400 ACE. The artefacts collected in the excavation at Perur also attest this fact.

In prehistoric times, Perur was presumably populated by the hunter-gatherer and cattle grazing people. The region had rich pasture land and many other flora and fauna thanks to the river Noyyal. Artefacts like black and red potshards, iron objects, a terracotta figurine, shell bangle pieces and others show that the region enjoyed a fair amount of prosperity from 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to 3<sup>rd</sup> century ACE and was an economically developed urban settlement.

### **Economic Conditions**

The collection of a large number of beads of different varieties collected from the excavations at Perur and also at Boluvampatti seem to indicate that a flourishing bead making industry was prevalent around Perur. These archaeological findings could be correlated with the inscriptions engraved on the wall of the Patteswaraswami temple at Perur. That an iron smelting industry was in existence at Perur is



proved by the occurrence of iron ore and slag in the excavated trenches. The textile industry seems to have been prominent even in the ancient Kongu region as evidenced by the large number of spindle whorls of different types found in the trenches. The occurrence of crucibles confirms the fact that gold and silver ornament making and coin making also existed at Perur.

### **Cultural Aspects**

The people who lived in this area were fond of wearing different kinds of ornaments made up of glass, semi precious stone beads, and glass shell bangles. The presence of a number of hop scotches and dices in the excavation is an indication of the kind of recreation the people of those times indulged in. Incidentally, some smoking pipes were also collected.

### **Terracotta Art**

The terracotta objects ear lobes and beads and figurines collected from the excavation at Perur reveal the aesthetic sense and fine workmanship of the people in this region. The occurrence of terracotta seal with the Chera royal insignia (bow) is yet another noteworthy find from this site.

### **Houses**

The excavations revealed the existence of two types of houses at Perur. There were number of postholes found in the excavation, they might have been used for planting the post; over them the thatched roofs

were made. The habitation of the people under the roof of the grooved tiles and L shaped tiles has been excavated, proved that the people had well sheltered houses between 3<sup>rd</sup> century and 6<sup>th</sup> century ACE.

### **Religious Conditions**

The occurrence of a Yaksha figurine confirms the existence of the Jainism in this region. The figurine of a mother holding the child indicates the possibility of mother goddess worship and matrilineal order of society. The small soapstone Siva Linga reveals that the people in this region were the ardent followers of Saivism.

## **CONCLUSION**

The earlier excavation at Perur by the Archaeological survey of India in the year 1970 revealed three cultural periods. However the present excavations by this department has revealed four cultural periods. They confirm the existence of a continuous civilised society at Perur from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE onwards. It is hoped that scholars and researchers would build further upon the various insights into this culture provided by the present excavation.

भारत सरकार  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

1593  
स. / No 41 / KA / PAL / SR / 23 / 31

दिनांक / Date 9.4.2003.

सेवा में / To

✓ Thiru K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty  
I.A.S.,

Commissioner,  
Department of Archaeology,  
C.I.T. Campus,  
Tharamani,  
CHENNAI-113.

निदेशक

क्षेत्रीय जीवाश्म प्रयोगशालाएँ

भारतीय भूवैज्ञानिक सर्वेक्षण,

दक्षिणी क्षेत्र, जी. एस. आई. कॉम्प्लेक्स,

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Director

Regional Palaeontological Laboratories

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Southern Region, G.S.I Complex, Bandlaguda.

Hyderabad - 500 068.


**Sample 3. A tooth excavated from Perur village, Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu.**

The specimen is an isolated lower molar of an Aegodont bovid. The tooth is narrow, hypsodont and its antero-posterior diameter far exceeds the transverse diameter. The tooth shows strong anterior folds as compared to weaker posterior folds. The ribs and the corresponding grooves extend to the base of the crown. Median basal pillar is absent. The inner and outer cusps do not show marked difference in their convexity. At the anterior end on the labial and lingual sides, there is a distinct enamel fold, the one on the labial side extends nearly two-thirds of the height of the crown. At the posterior end, there is a fold on the lingual side but none on the labial side.

(Antelopine and caprine bovids are among the genera having molars with caprine configuration. One would incline to assign the specimen to an antelopine bovid, if it were not from a megalithic site of not too distant historical period, a period during which domesticated caprine forms were known to have existed.

Specimens examined and report prepared by

Dated 7-04-2003  
Hyderabad

  
(K. Shankar)  
Geologist Sr.

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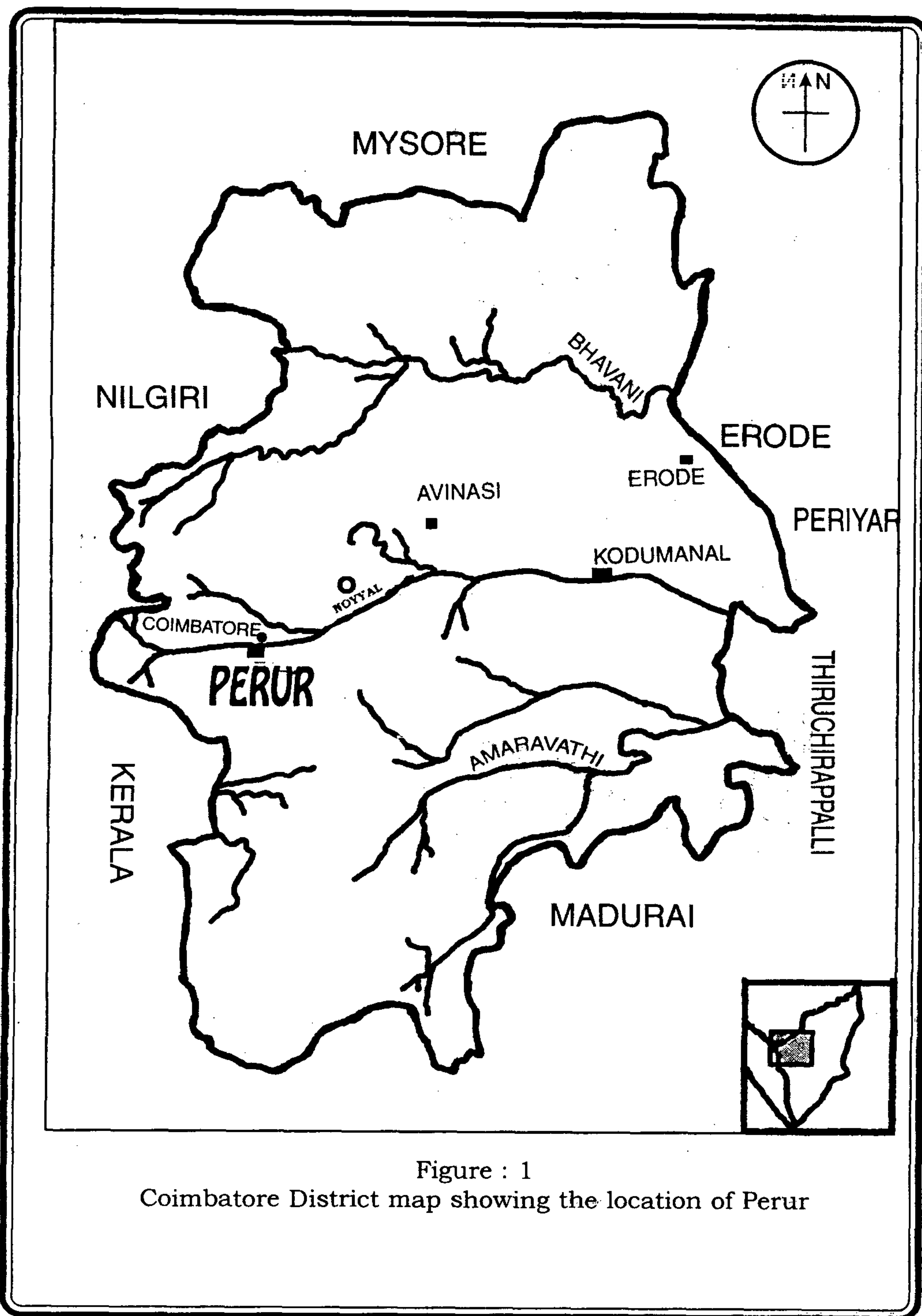


Figure : 1  
Coimbatore District map showing the location of Perur

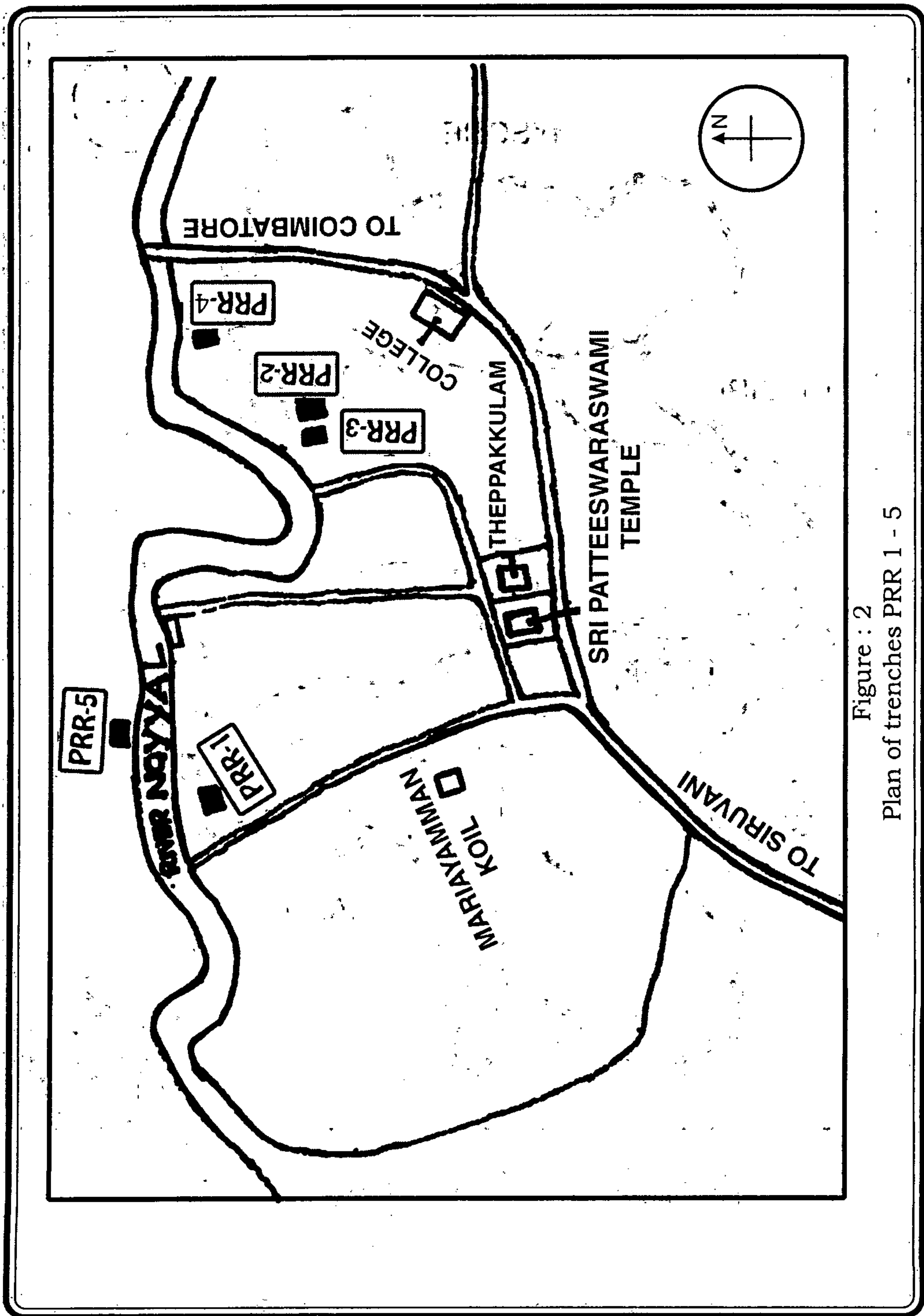


Figure : 2  
Plan of trenches PRR 1 - 5

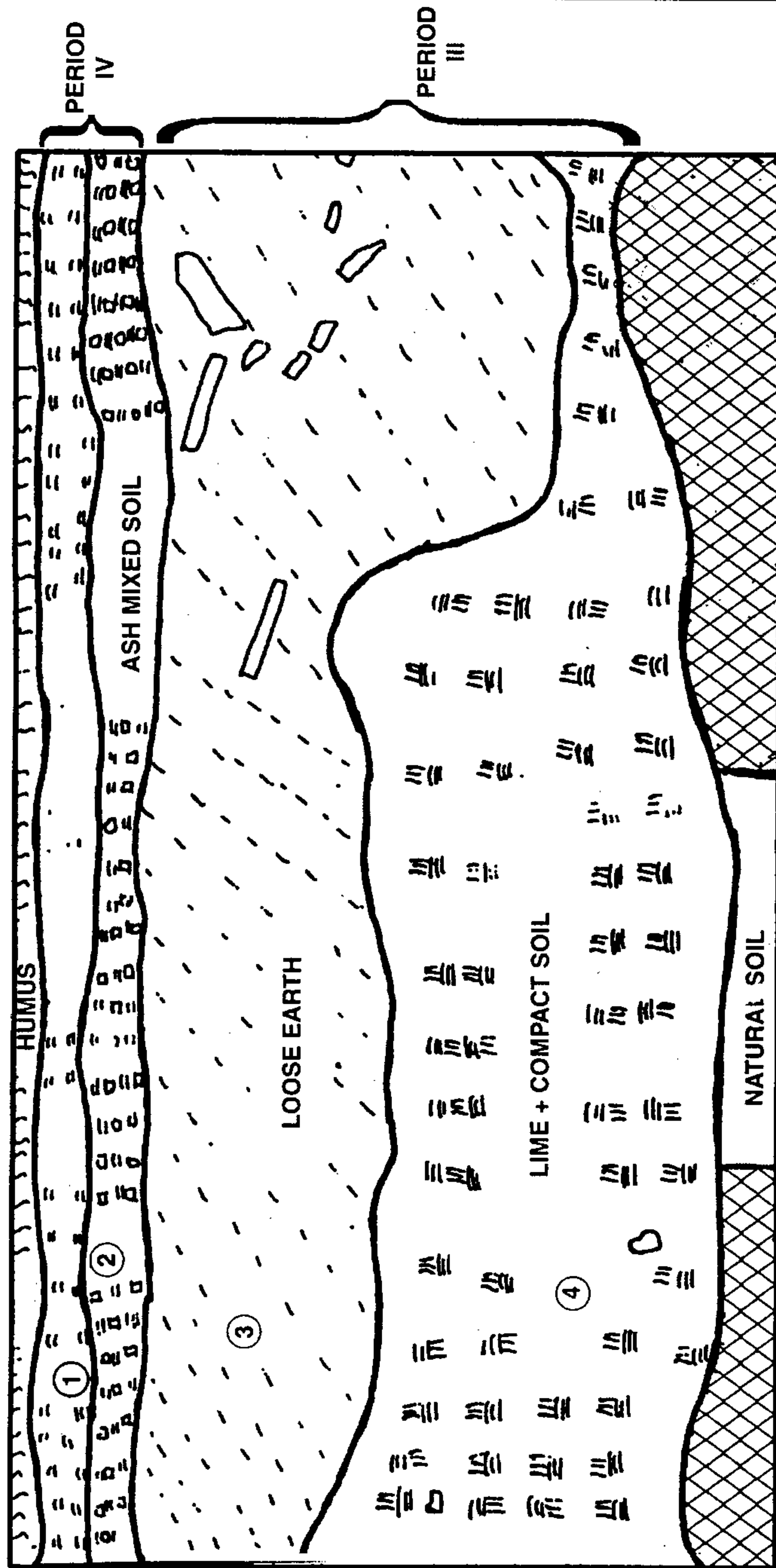


Figure : 3  
Eastern Section of PRR-1

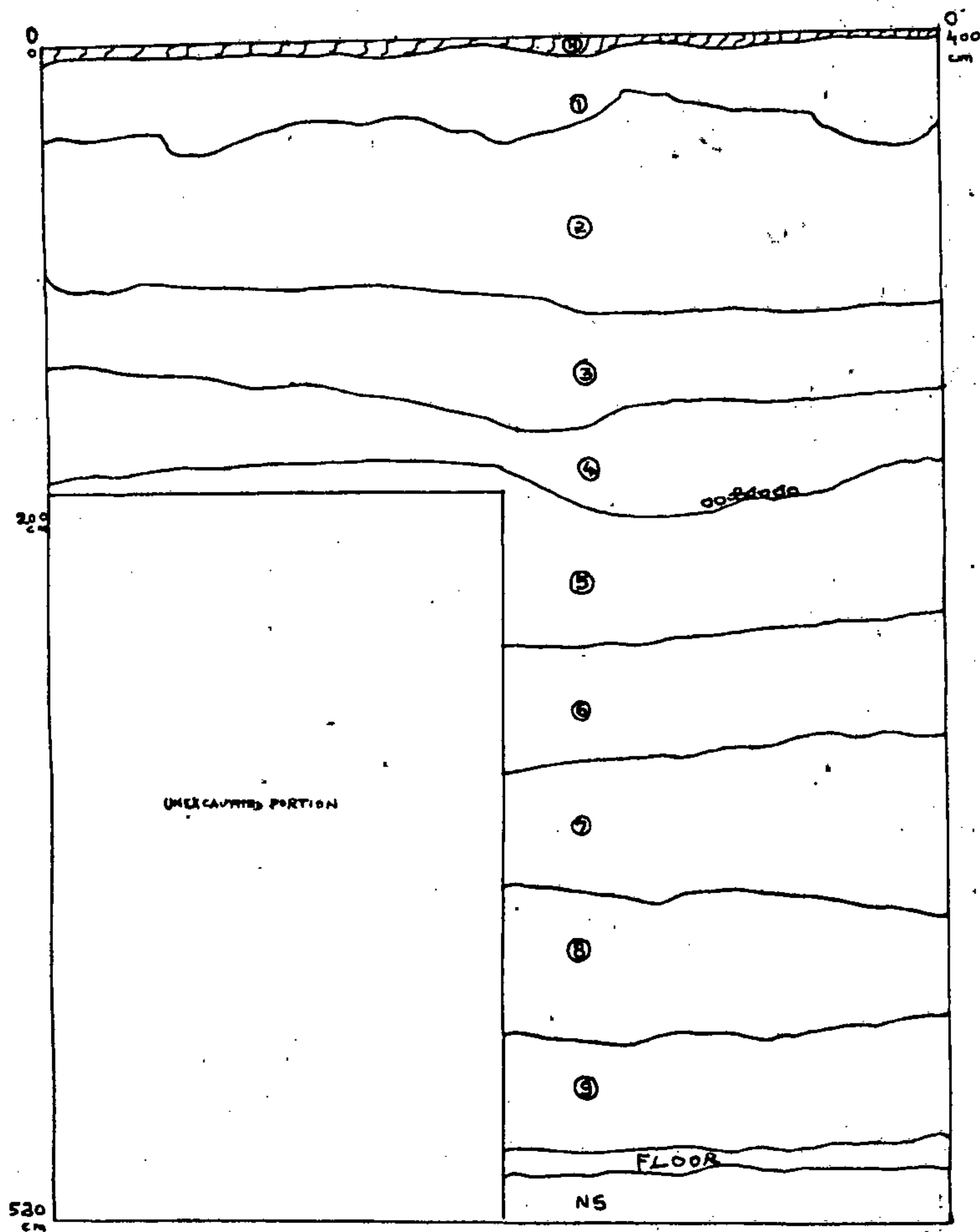


Figure : 4  
Northern section of PRR-2

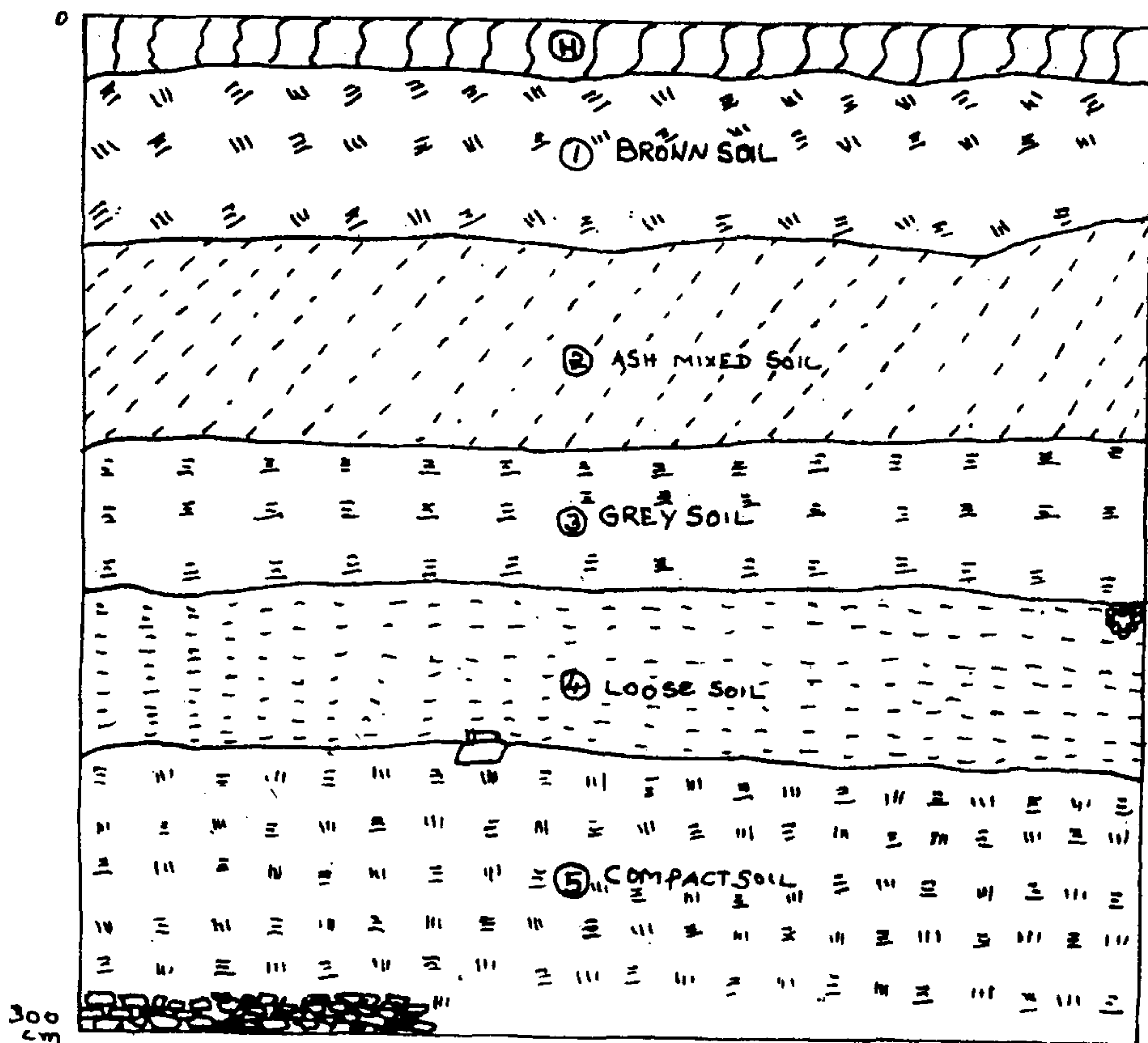


Figure : 5  
Southern section of PRR-3

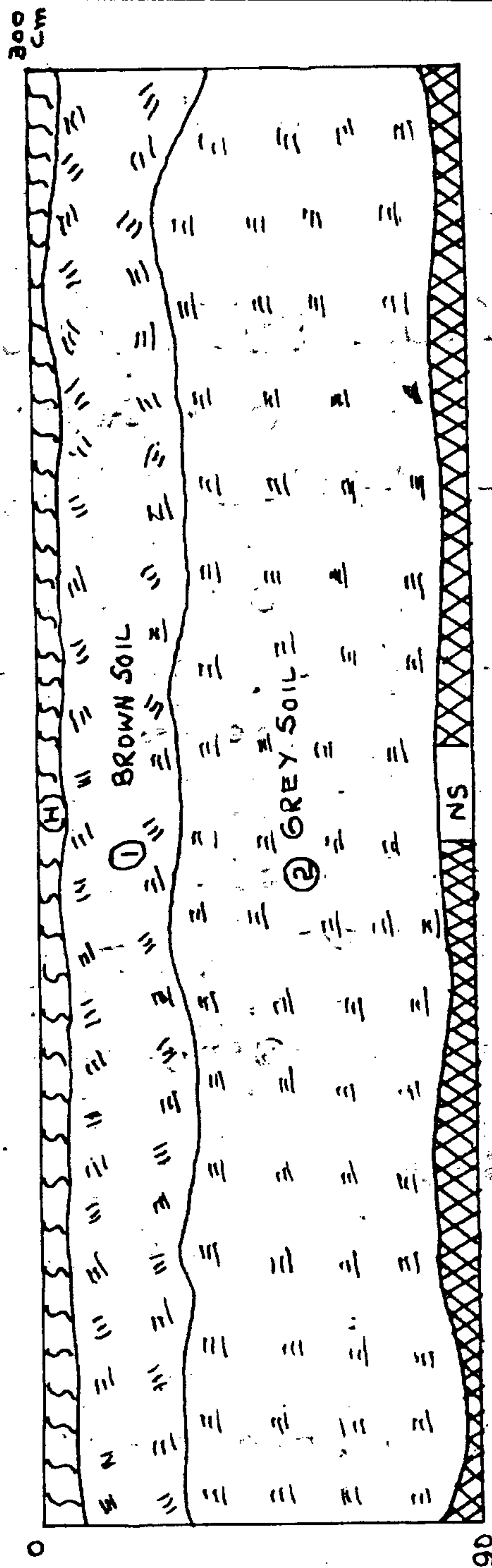


Figure : 6  
Eastern section of PRR-4



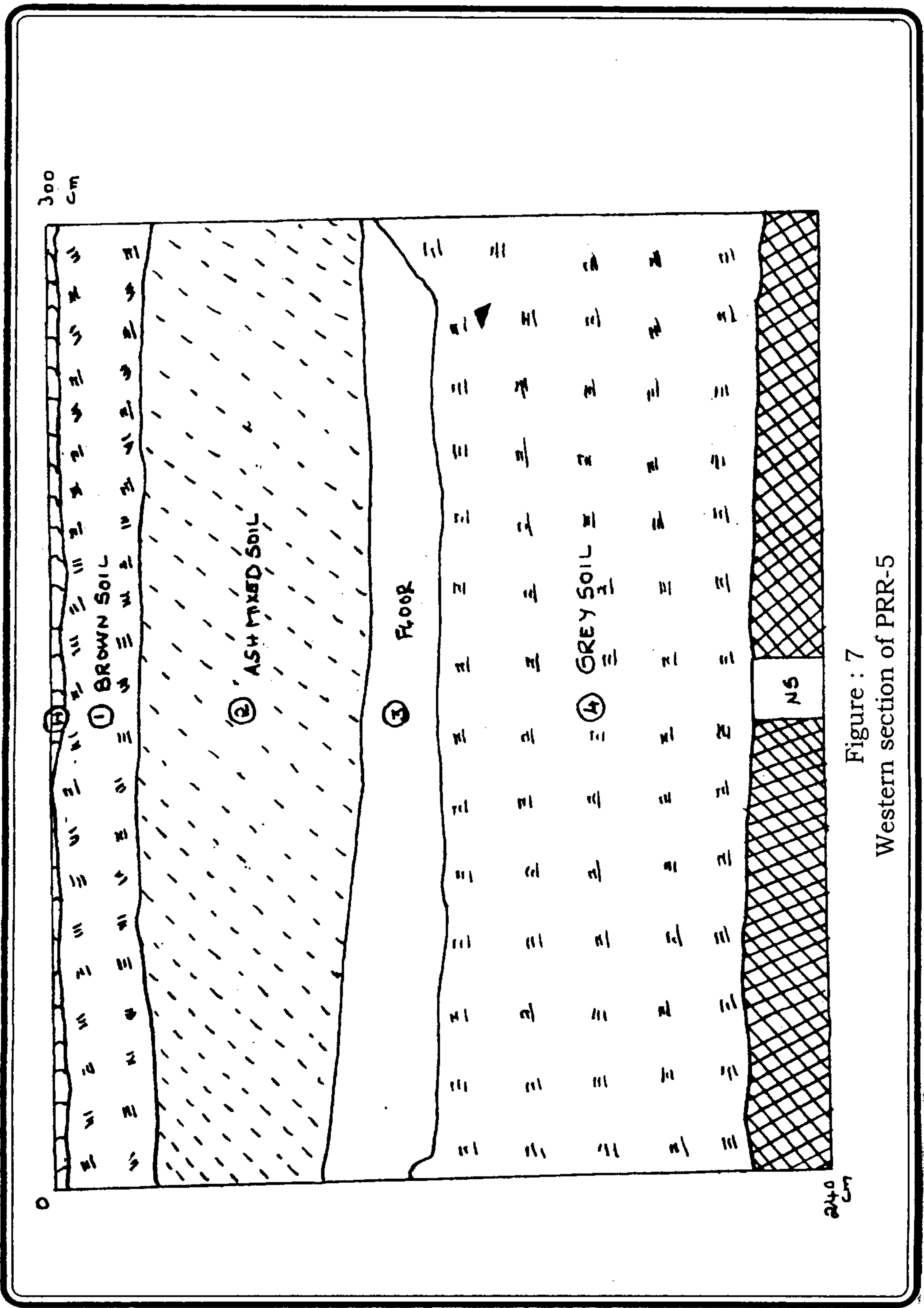
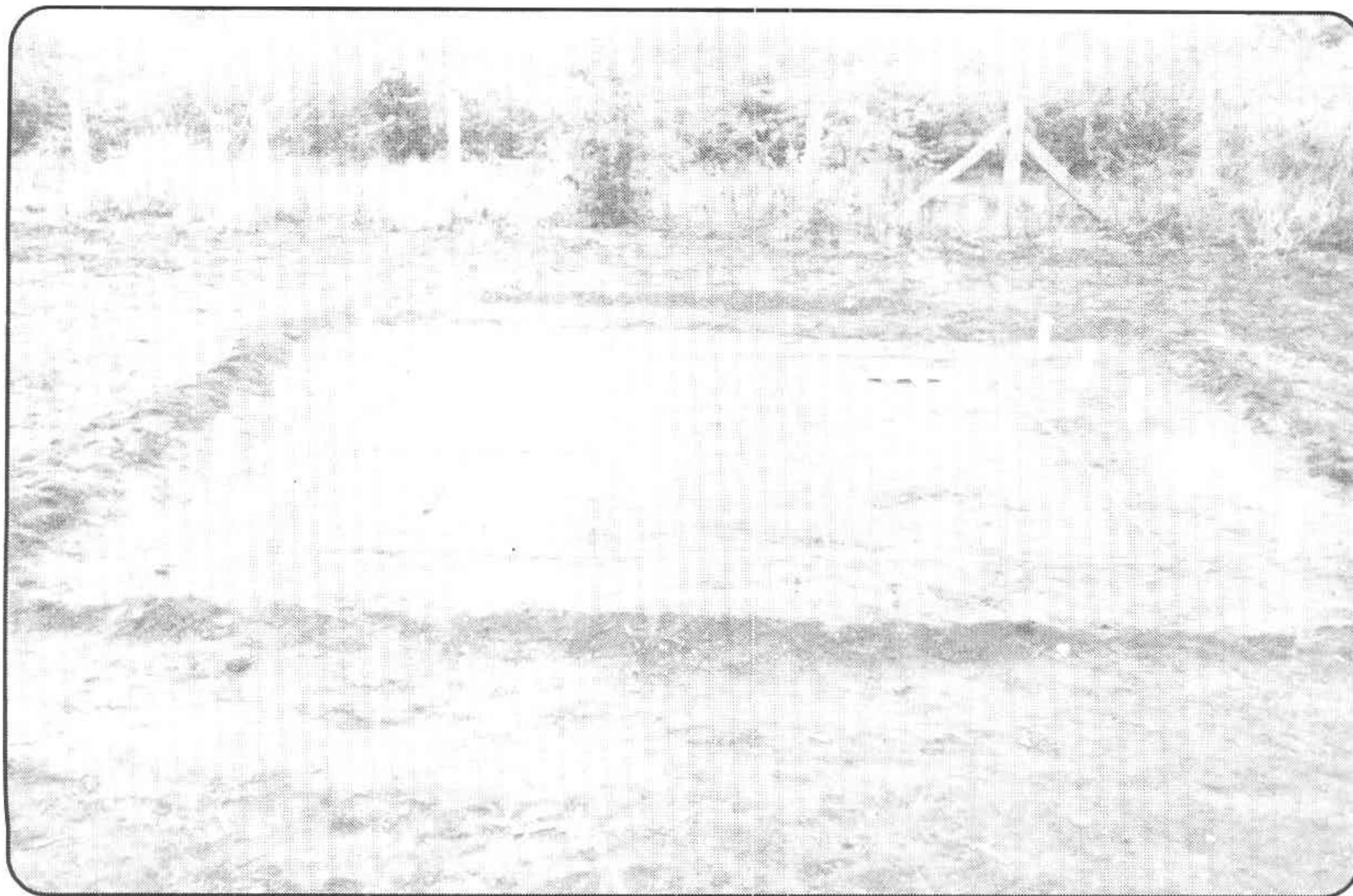
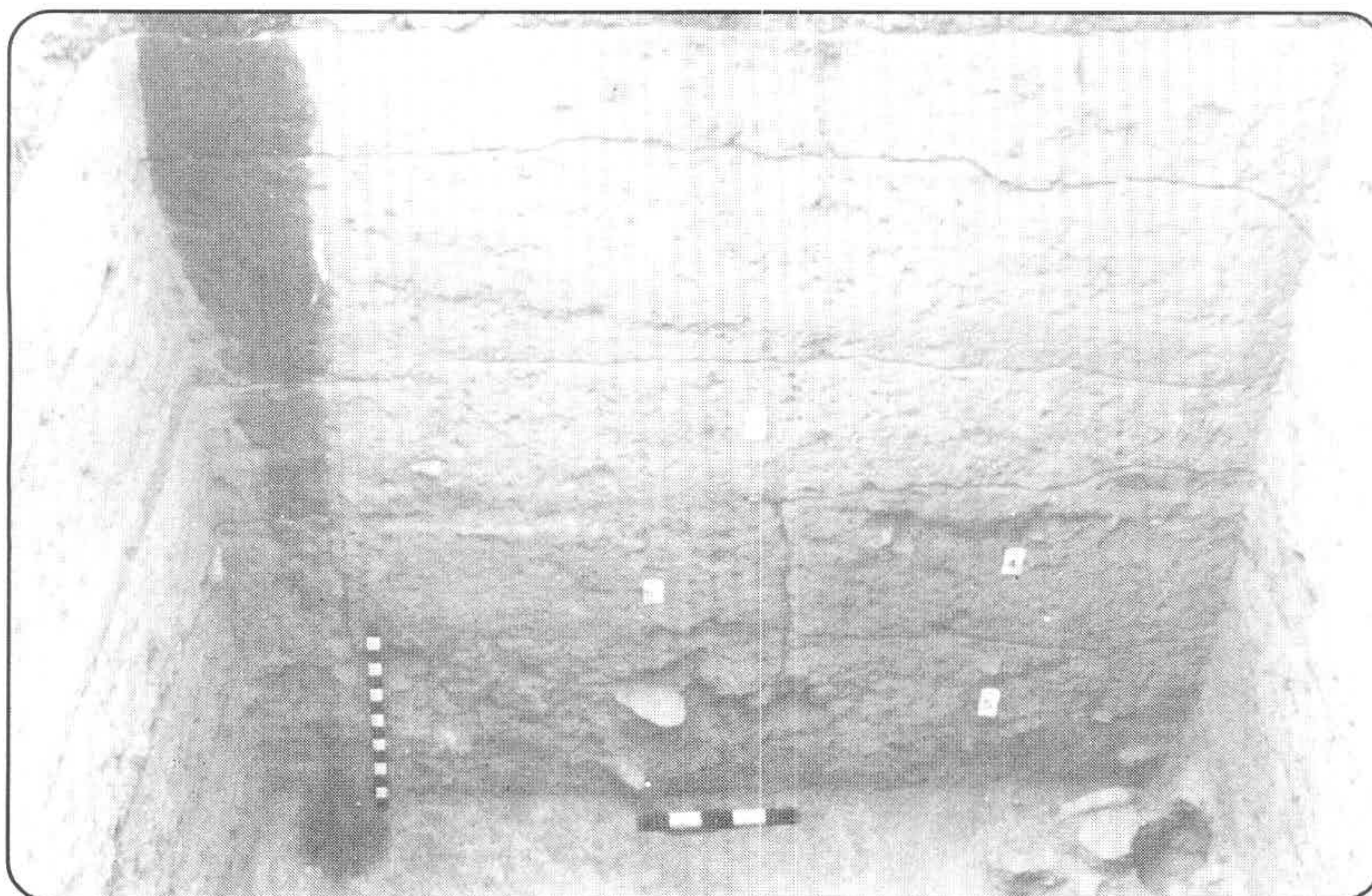


Figure : 7  
Western section of PRR-5



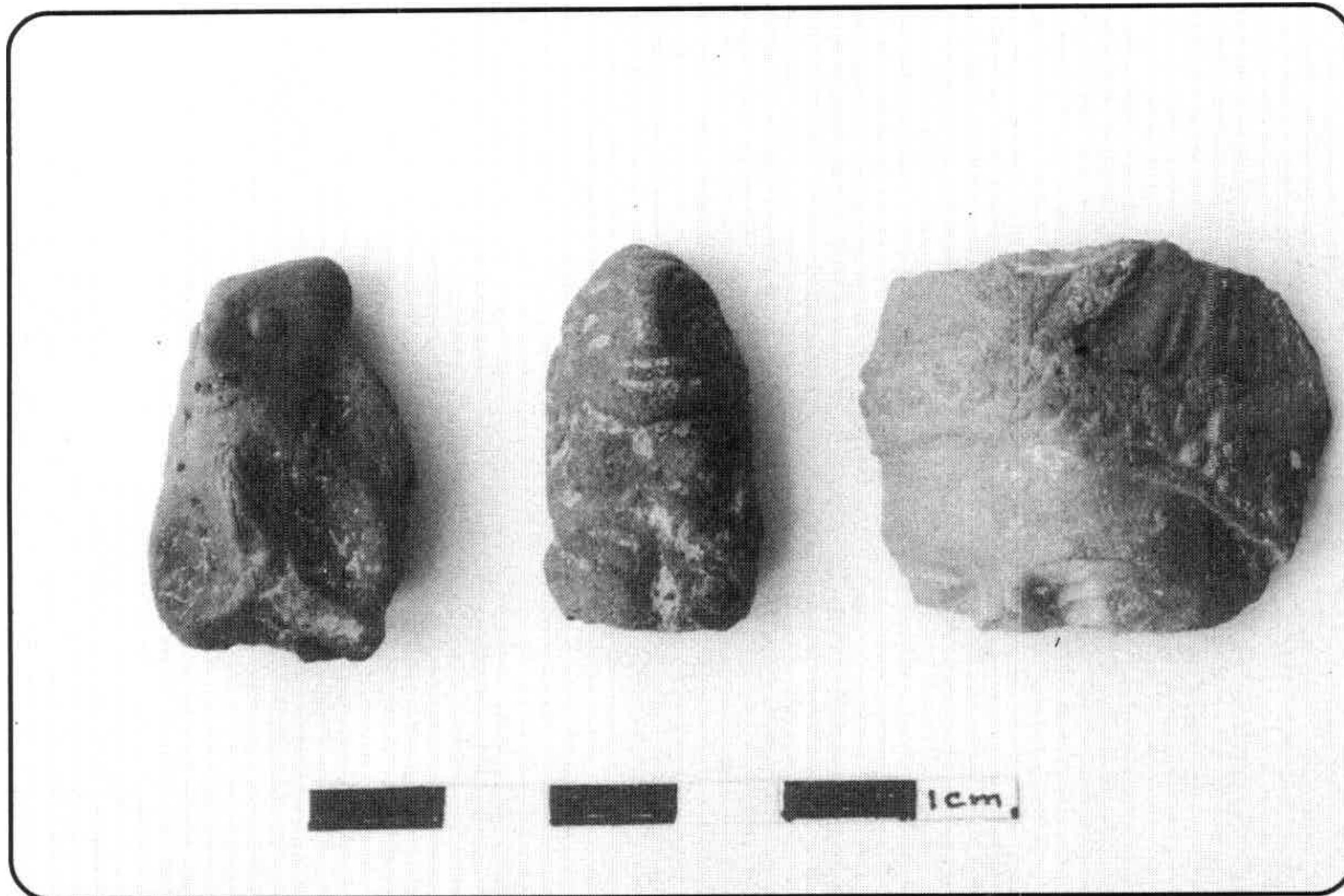


1. General view of the site

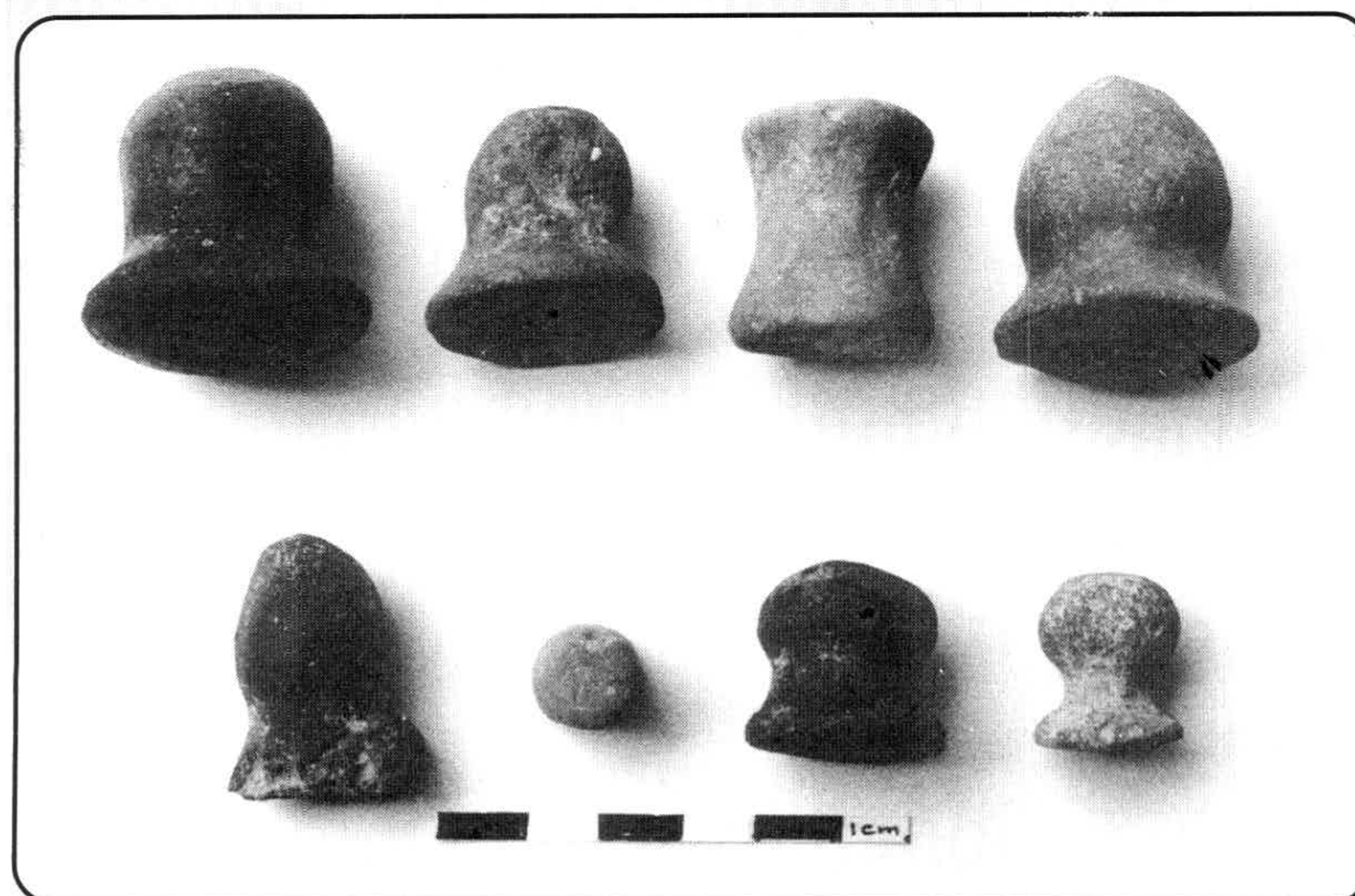


2. The excavated trench



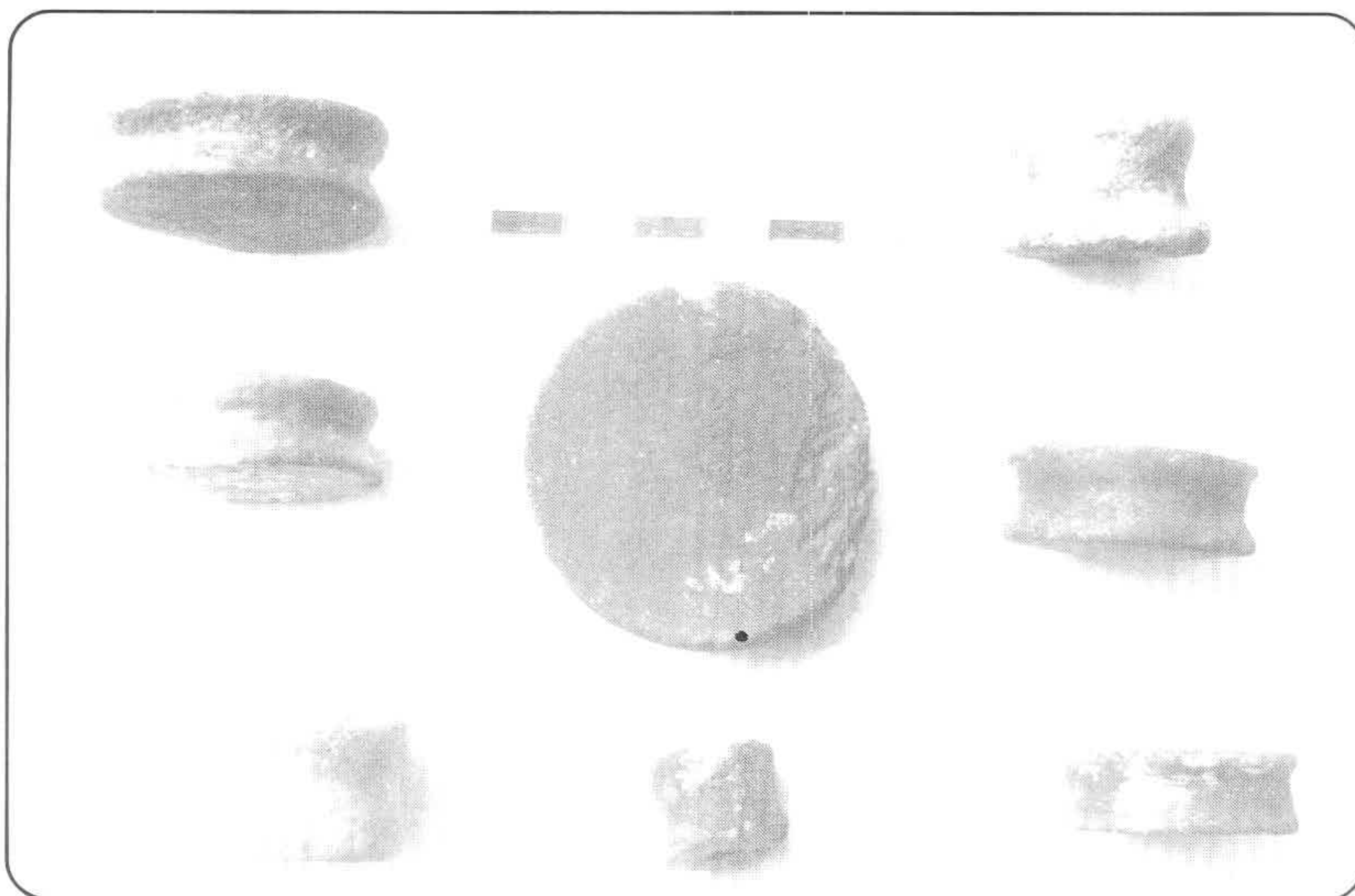


3. Terracotta Figurines

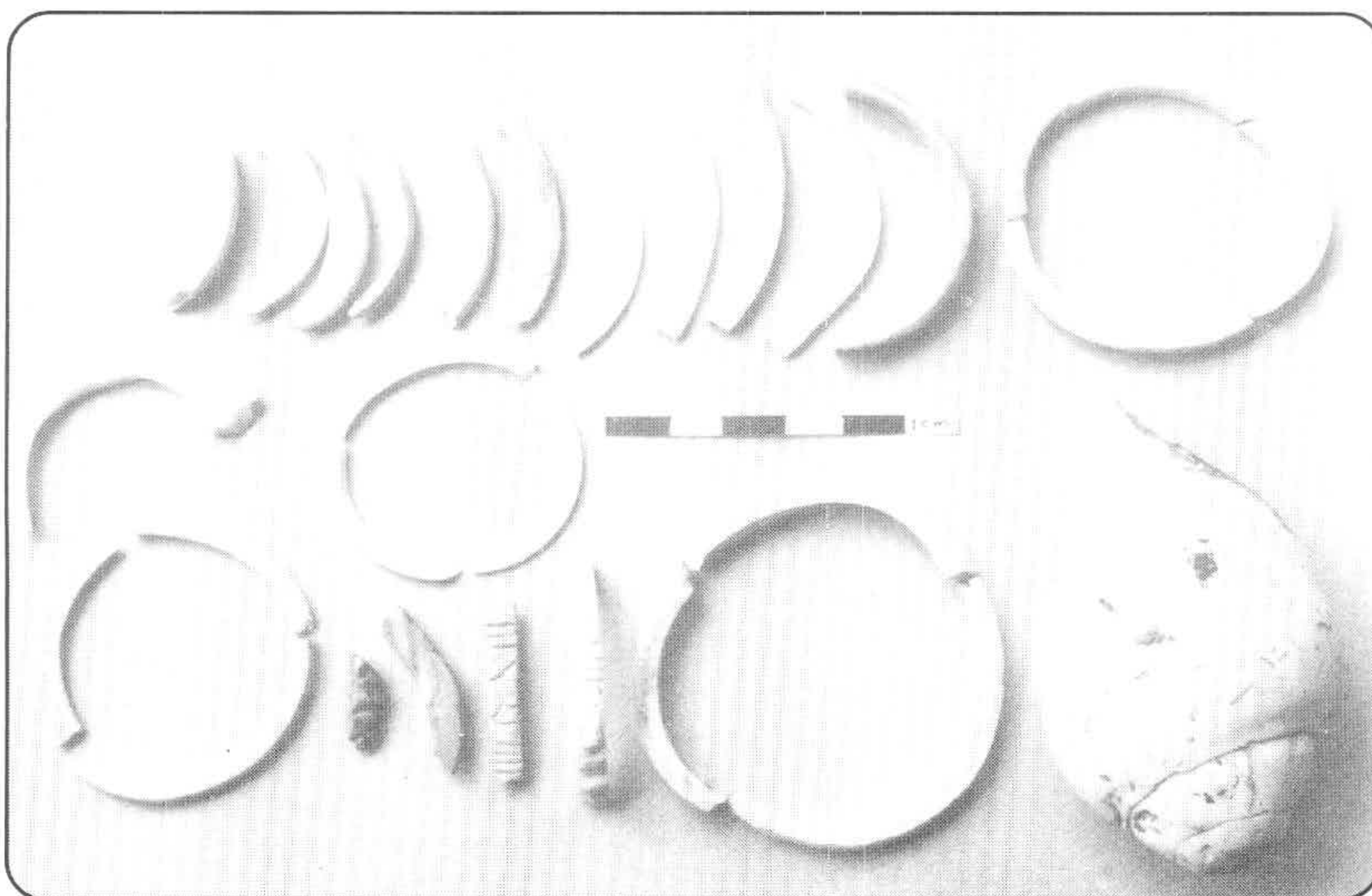


4. Terracotta Gamesman



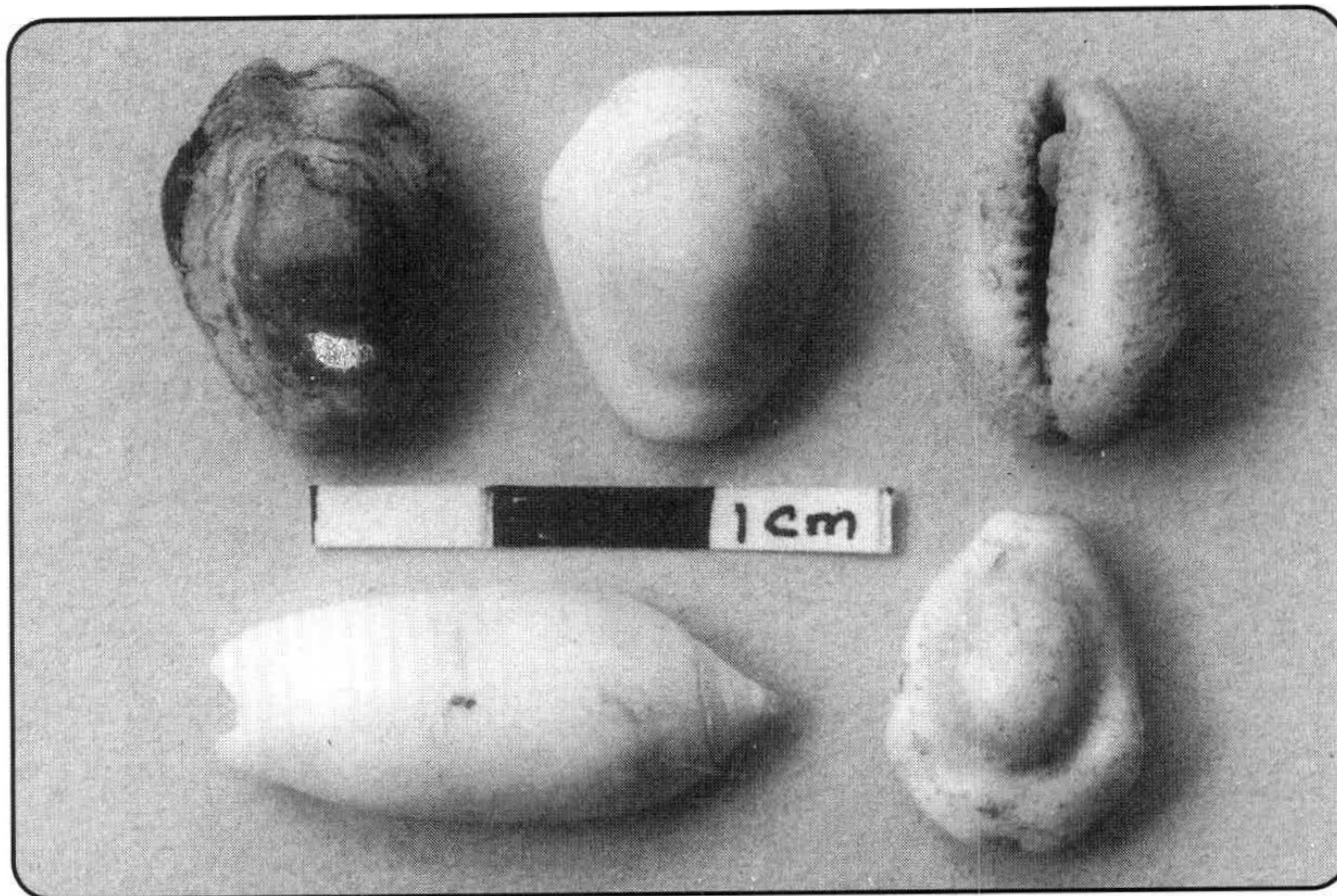


5. Terracotta earlobes



6. Shell bangle pieces



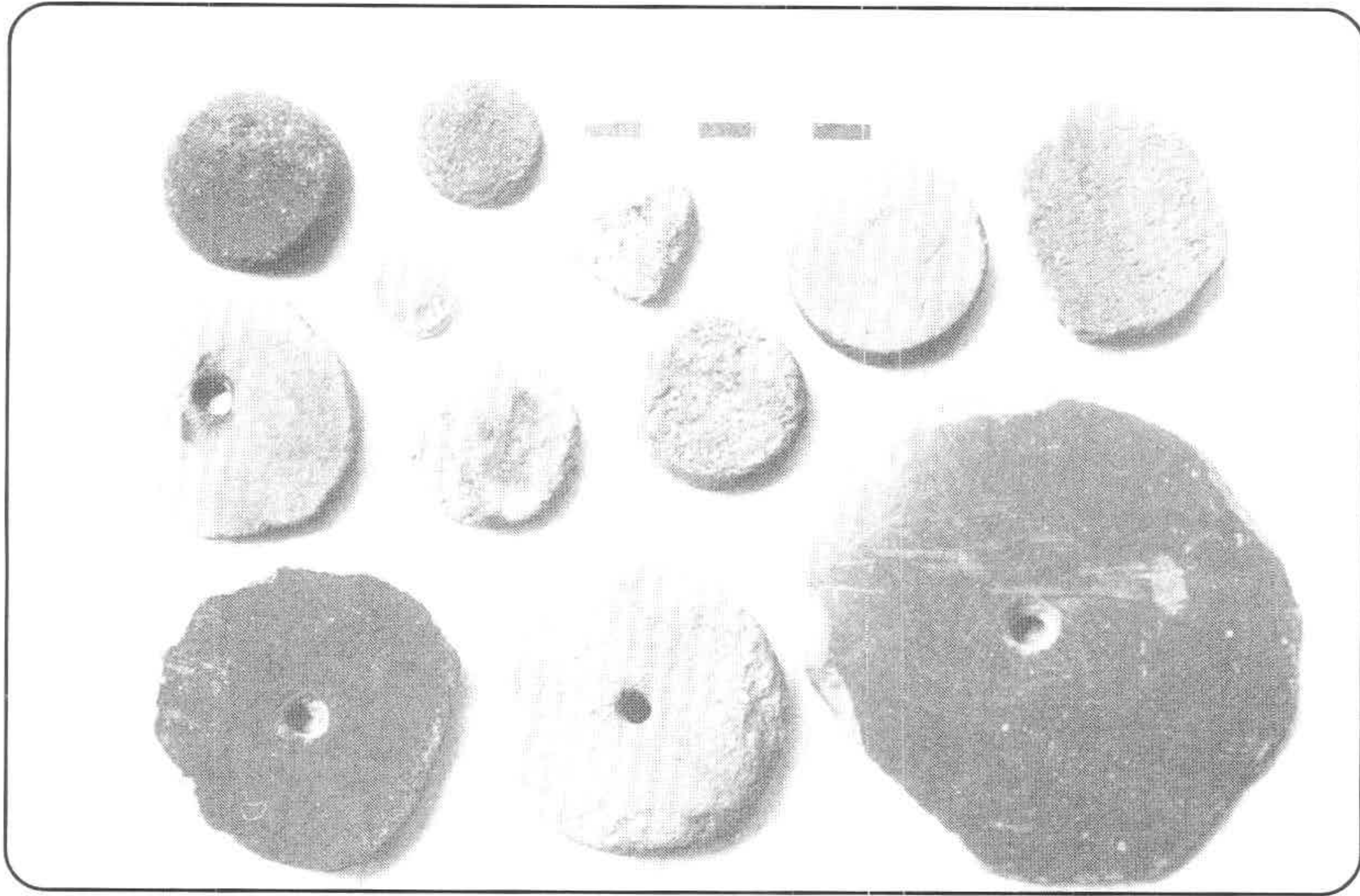


7. Cowries

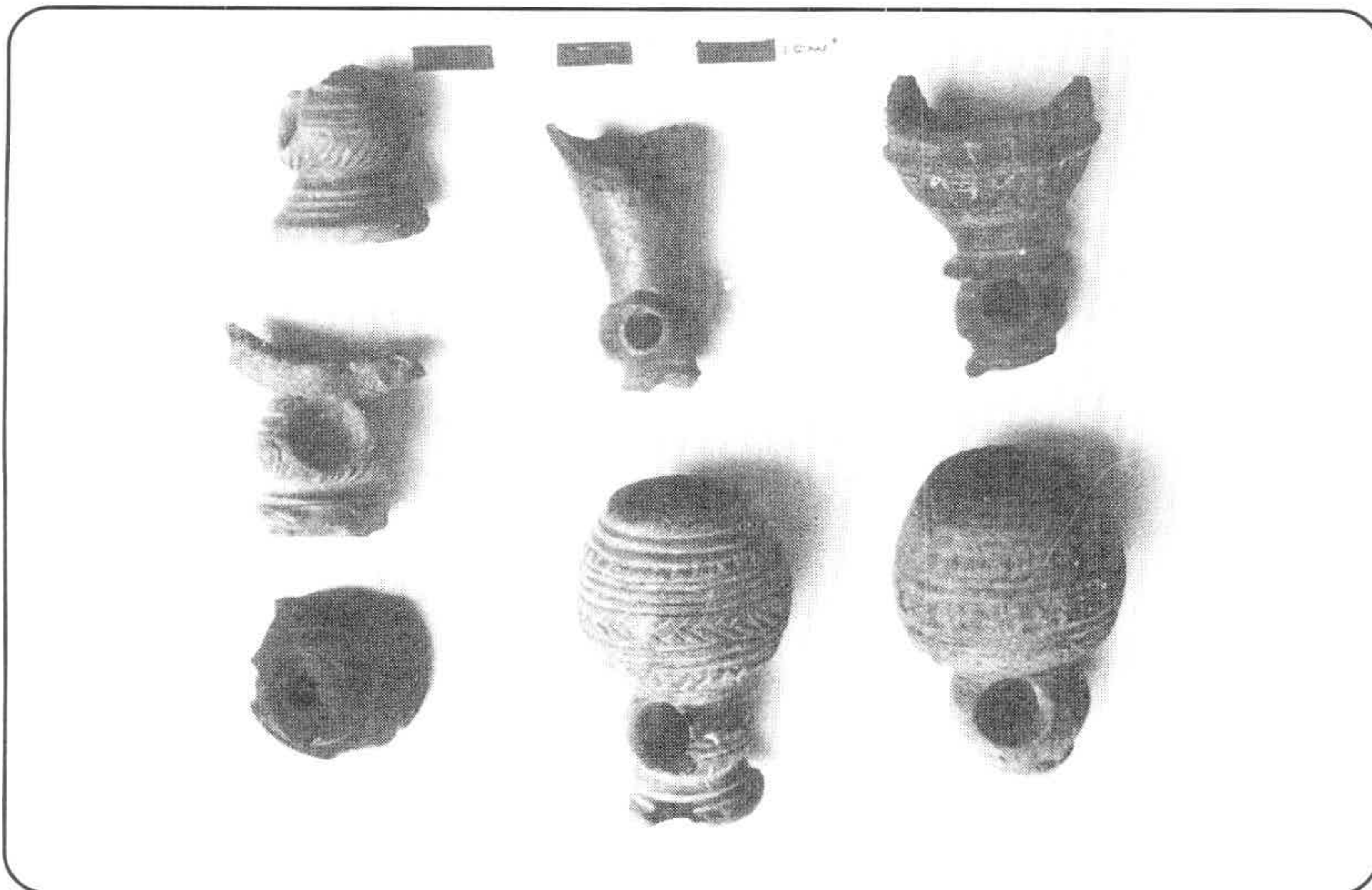


8. Terracotta spindle whorls





9. Hop Scotches

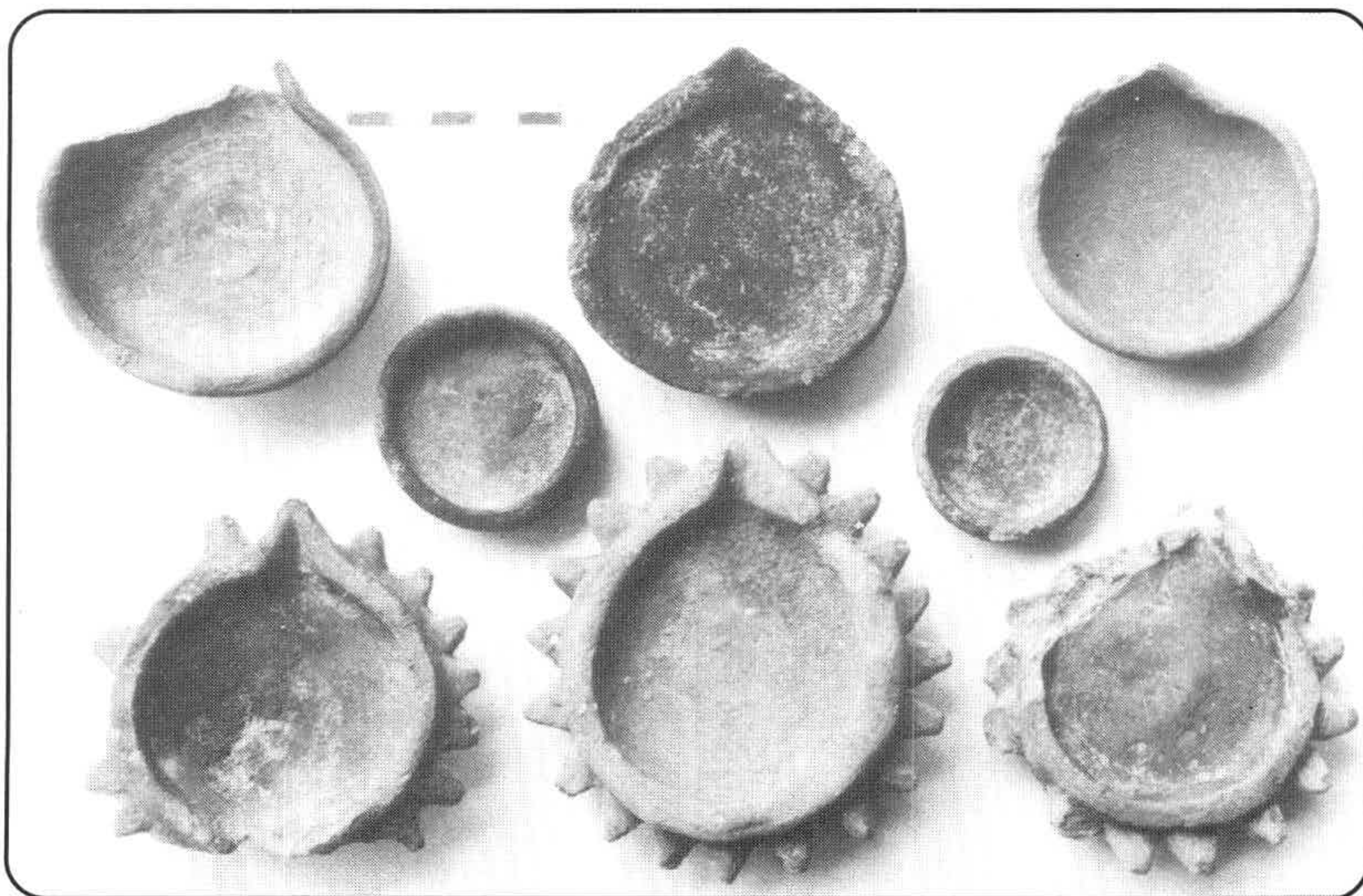


10. Terracotta smoking pipes



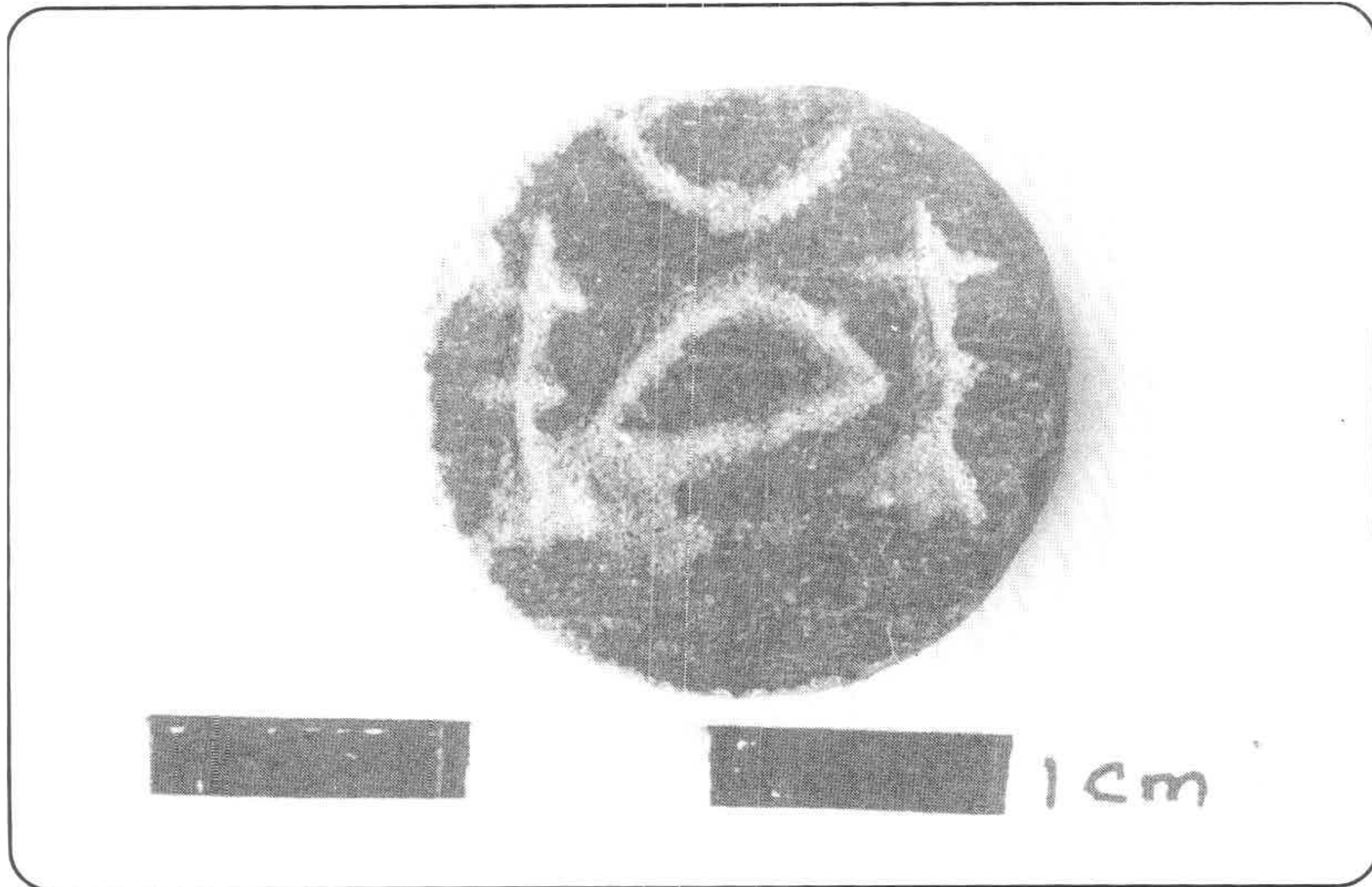


11. Terracotta spouts

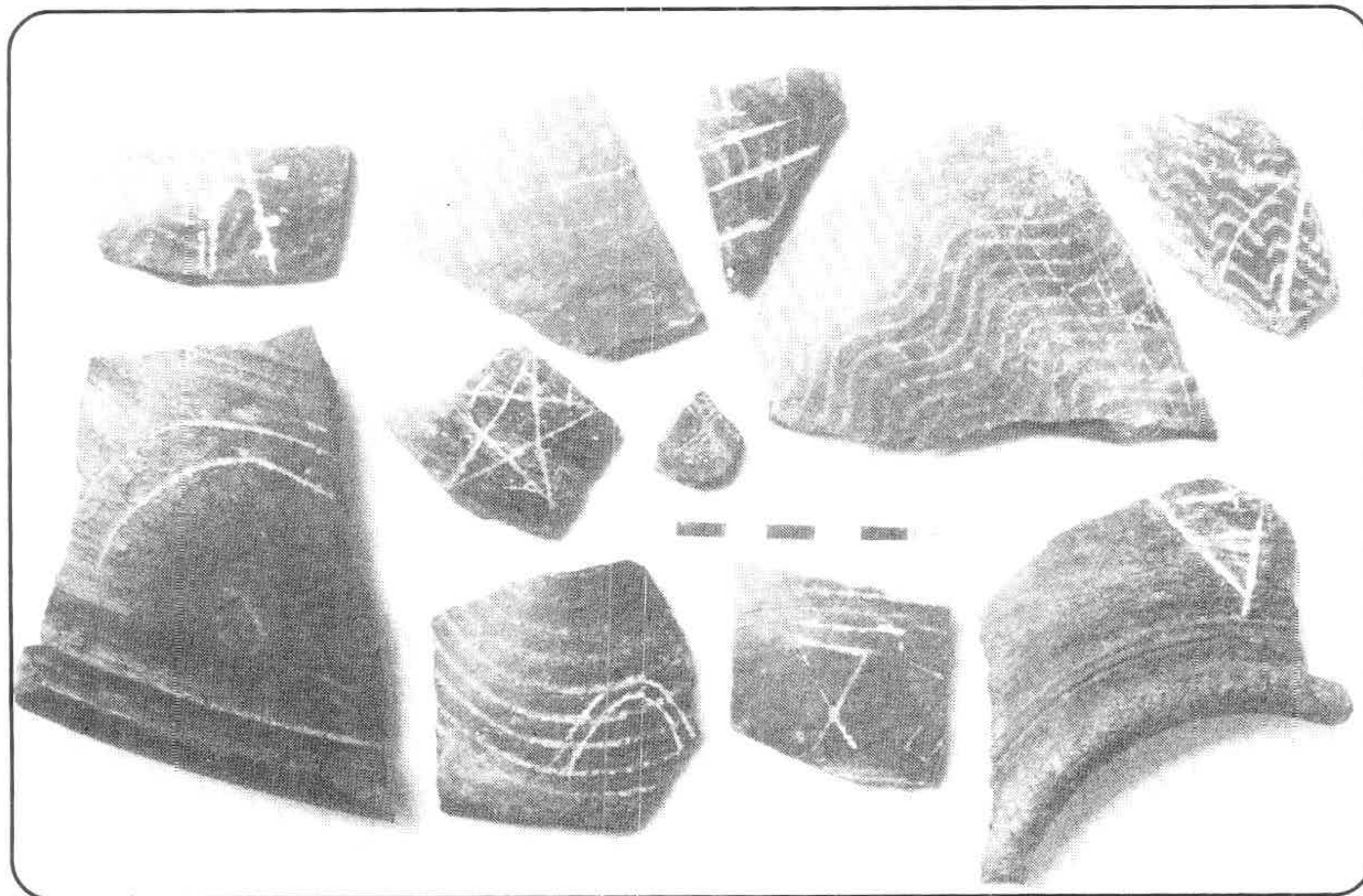


12. Terracotta lamps



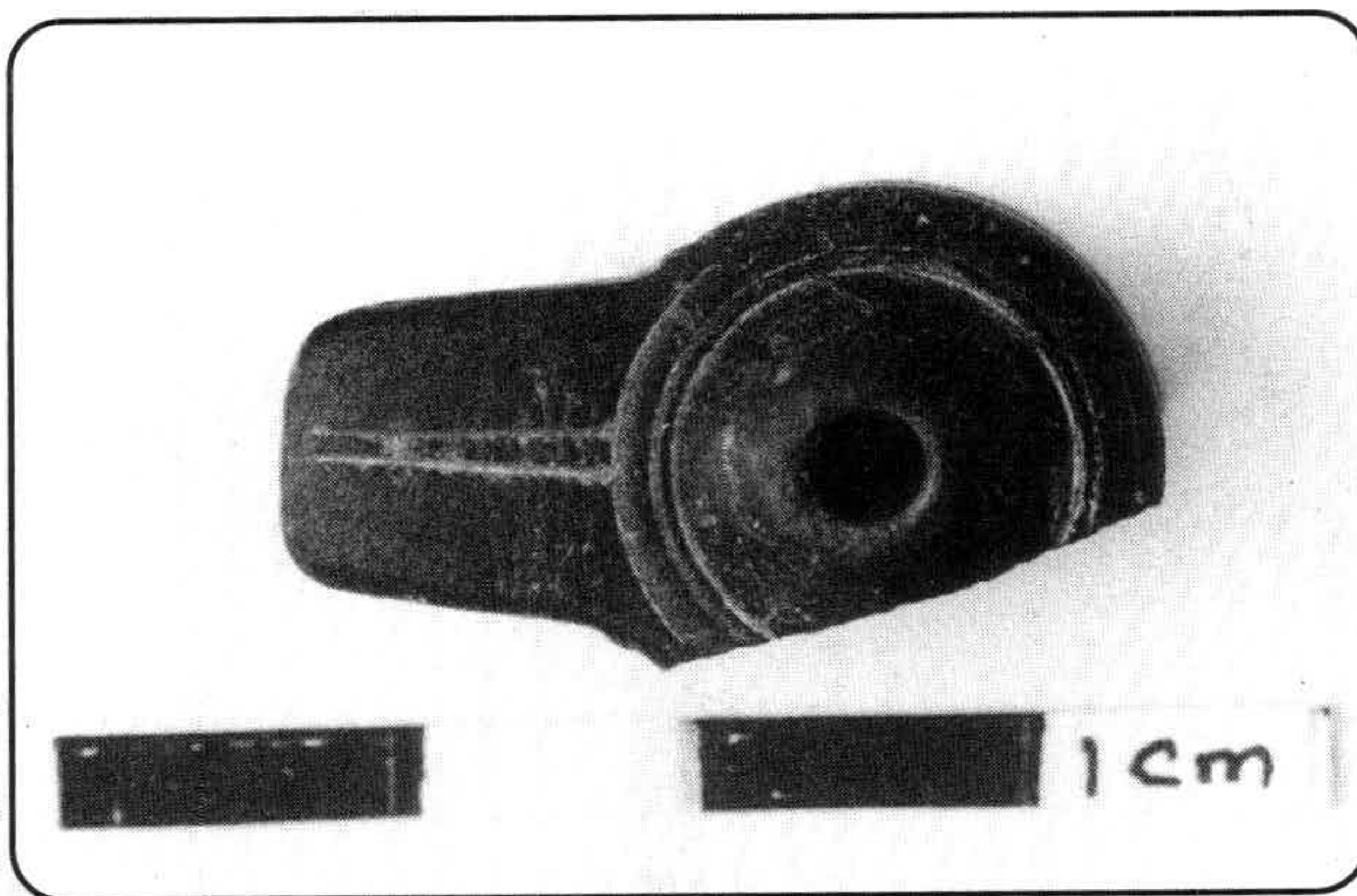


13. Terracotta Seal

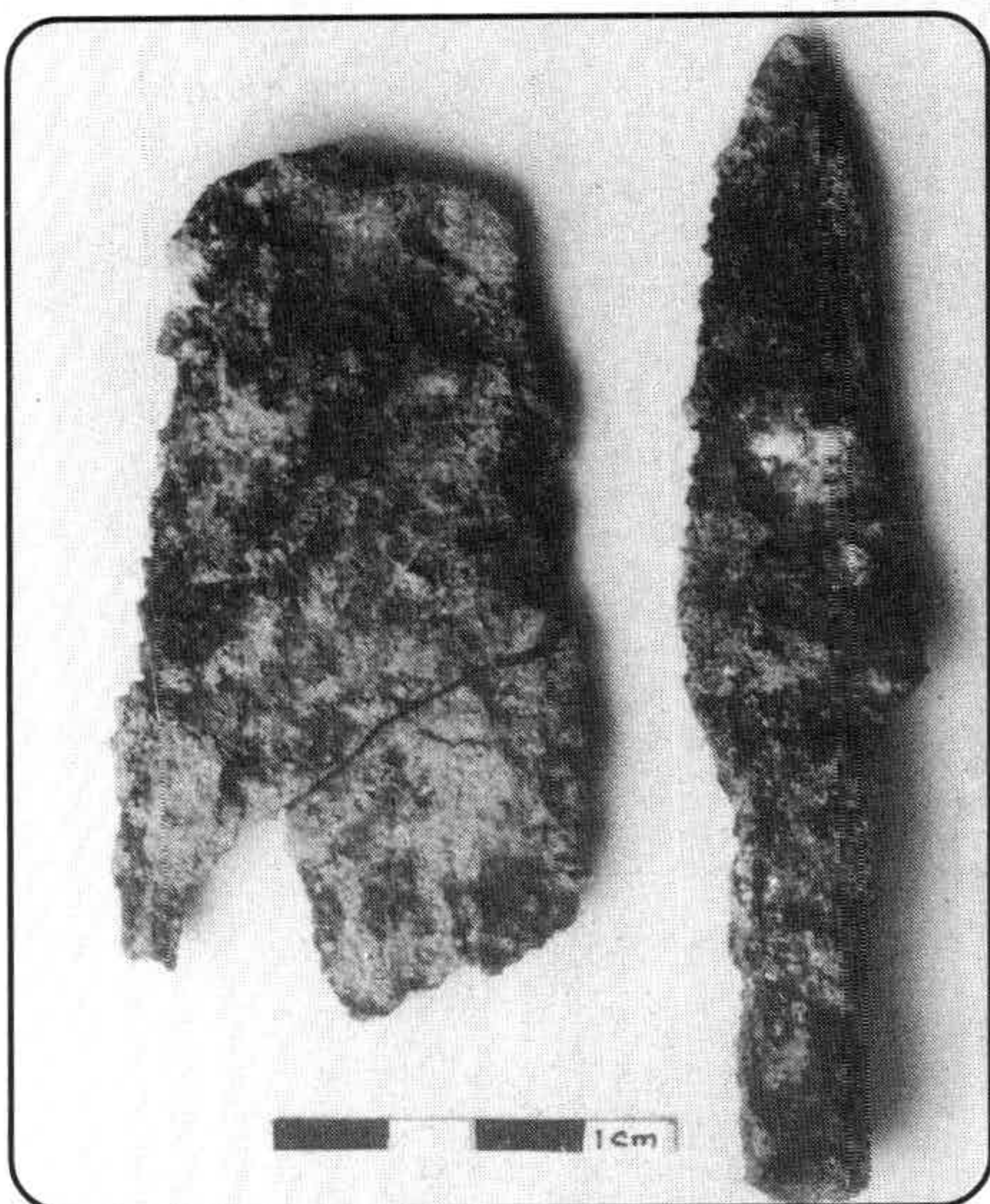


14. Potshards with graffiti marks

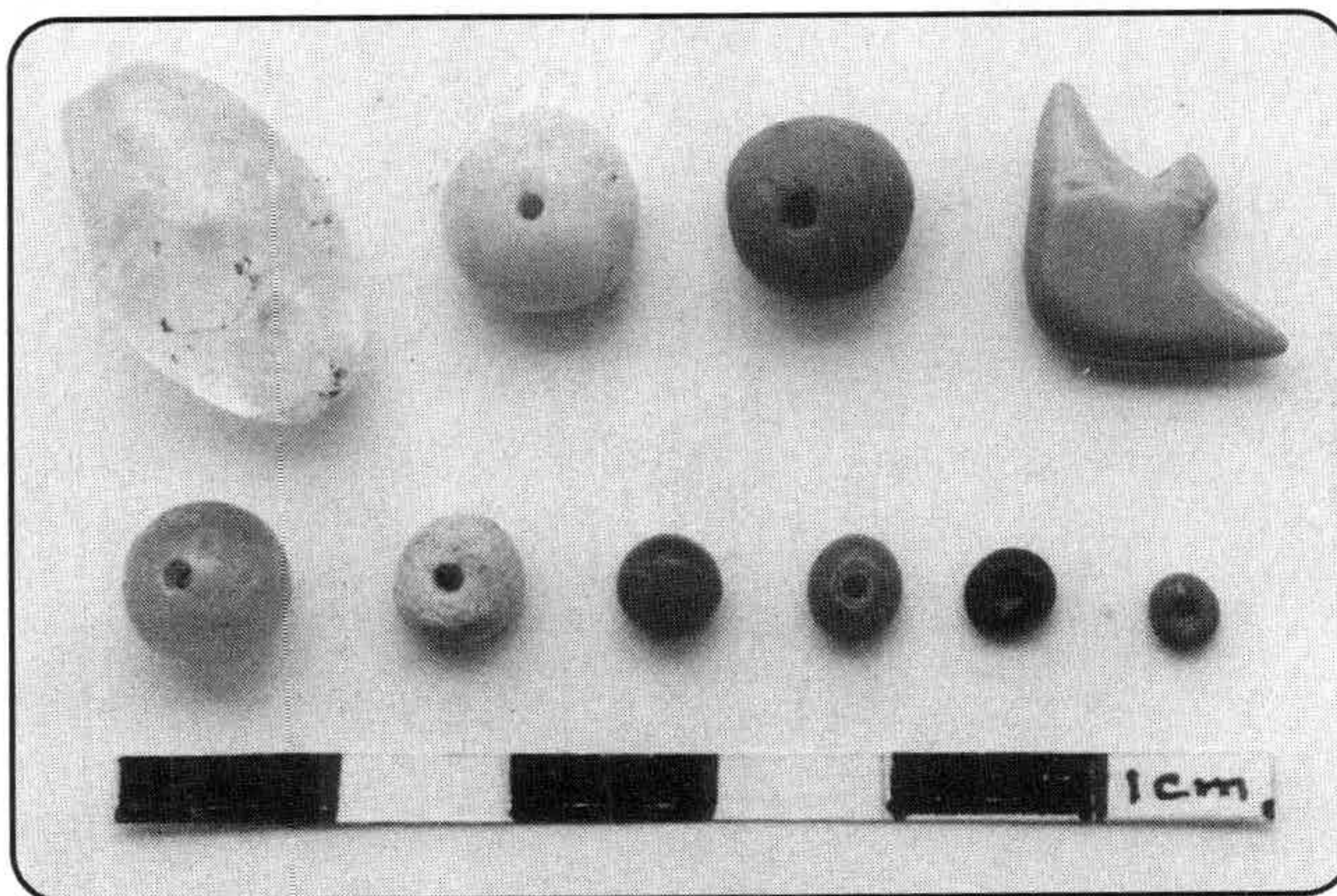




15. Black stone linga



16. Iron arrow head



17. Beads