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Grave of a Celtic warrior from Magyarszerdahely (Zala County)

Between 1971 and 1975, 28 Celtic and 34 Roman graves were unearthed in Magyarszerdahely, close to a former sandpit. The results of the excavation were published in 1979 (HORVÁTH 1979). Celtic Corpus contains only partial results of the excavation (HORVÁTH 1979, 84–96, Pl. X–XIII; Pl. XIV, 10–12) because at the time of publication assessment of finds had not been finished. The western part of the former sandpit still exists. Within that area runs a telephone cable in NW–SE direction. At the time of the excavation it was not possible to excavate the western part of the sandpit precisely because of the telephone cable. In 1984 within the area a pit was dug to gain sand. In the wall of the pit a Celtic vessel was found with stamped decoration. The find was reported to the György Thúry Museum and a rescue excavation was launched to recover the disturbed archaeological feature. The excavation revealed a scattered Celtic cremation in a pit. With this grave the excavated number of Celtic burials from this site increased to 29. The grave was given a number 63 (Fig. 1). The burial produced an iron sword in its sheath and iron fibulae that have already been published (SZABÓ–PETRES 1992, 95, Pl. 51). However the circumstances of the finds have not been reported upon and the other grave goods were also inaccurately published. The illustration of complete grave goods with a short summary of the circumstances of the find appeared in print, although it is hard to access (HORVÁTH 1994, 108, 13–15. kép). This paper assesses the available information on the burial and discusses its archaeological and historical context.

Description of the grave and grave goods

The eastern side of the round-cornered rectangular grave was destroyed by works to mine sand. The grave was 135 x 110 cm and 150 cm deep. The metal goods, which were in a heap with ash and bone-fragments, were found in the northern part of the grave. There was also a razor with remains of textile on it, indicating

that the objects were wrapped in the textile. The soil with the bone fragments and the metal finds was ashy and charcoaly and might have been the remains of bonfire. Three pots were also found in the grave, placed diagonally in one line.

1. Fibula (Fig. 3, 1): Made of iron, heavily corroded and broken into several pieces. The foot was bolted backwards and decorated with one small and one larger spherical boss. The bosses are decorated with concave half-spherical impressions. Between the two bosses and at the end of the foot are small knobs. The edges of these small knobs are rimmed. The foot is bolted towards the bow. Its spring is upper corded with 2–2 division of the spring. Length: 16,2 cm.

2. Fibula fragment (Fig. 3, 2): Foot and bow fragment of an iron fibula. Its foot is decorated with a spherical boss. Length: 2,8 cm.

3. Iron sword with its sheath (Fig. 3, 3a-b; Fig. 6, 1a-b): The sword was enfolded three times prior to burial. It is heavily corroded and its end and parts of the sheath are missing. The reconstructed length of the sword is 85,5 cm including the 12,3 cm long hilt. The widest part of the sword is 4,4 cm while the widest part of the sheath is 5 cm. The hilt has two oval iron discs which indicate that the handle was made of organic material and oval in cross section. The shoulder of the sword where the hilt and blade meet has a step like edge. The front of the sheath exhibits carved symmetrical motifs that are characteristic to „Hungarian sword style“. The back of the sheath has a T-shaped suspension loop. The upper part of the back of the sheath and the suspension loop are also decorated with carved motifs. The decorations are heavily corroded and their shape is not always clear; the drawings are considered to be reconstructions. The end of the sheath is missing.¹

4. Shield boss and fragments of shield frame (Fig. 4, 1–2; Fig. 6, 3): The shield boss is raised and forms an elongated band. The band is pierced and profiled; the profiling is reminiscent of wings. The two ends of

the band are folded. Both ends of the shield boss were attached to the shield by three bolts. The remains of two bolts were also found in the grave. The shield was most probably made of wood because inside the frame remains of wood could be observed. The drawing shows the lay out of the band. Length: 47,7 cm, width: 5–6 cm.

5. Scissors (Fig. 4, 3): Made of iron and heavily corroded. One point is missing. Length: 27,6 cm.

6. Razor (Fig. 4, 4; Fig. 6, 2): Made of iron with a wide blade. It has a short handle which ends in a small spherical knob. One side of the razor has textile remains on it. Length: 13,4 cm, width: 4,8 cm.

7. Sharpening stone (Fig. 5, 1): Made from sand stone and rectangular in section. Length: 9,5 cm, width: 3cm.

8. Spear head (Fig. 4, 5): Made of iron in the shape of a willow leaf. Along the middle a sharp edge runs towards its socket. In the socket there are two holes. The end of the spear is folded. Reconstructed length: 23 cm, width: 3,3 cm.

9. Stamp-decorated vessel (Figures 5, 2a-b; Fig. 7). Dark grey wheeled pottery. Its opening was damaged during sand exploitation. A cordon on the shoulder is stamped symmetrically with crescent-shaped and angled dotted lines. The two types of decorations alternate each other forming 3–3 clusters. Below this there is a horizontal line of dotted circle decoration which does not form a continuous line around the circumference of the vessel but is symmetrically arranged in three groups. Height: 38,4 cm, orifice diameter: 14 cm, base diameter: 14,5 cm.

10. Bowl (Fig. 5, 3). Dark grey omphalic bowl with burnished surface. Height: 10 cm, orifice diameter: 24,4 cm, base diameter: 10,1 cm.

11. Mug (Fig. 5, 4). Dark grey mug made from well levigated clay. Its profile exhibits sudden changes in curvature. Height: 11,5 cm, orifice diameter: 16,4 cm, base diameter: 7,6 cm.

Discussion

Assessment of the Celtic burials within the cemetery revealed that they were situated in four clearly distinguishable groups. The above discussed burial (grave 63) belongs to the first group. The characteristics of this group are that ceramic vessels were placed in the graves and the cremated bones were carefully placed in the graves in small piles, possibly wrapped in a small piece of textile.² This group of graves contained the richest finds of the cemetery and may have occupied the central part of the cemetery. Grave 30 and an earlier found grave, that was taken to the Hungarian National Museum, were both graves of

warriors. These two graves also belong to this group. It is considered that the four groups of burials may represent burial grounds of small families (HORVÁTH 1979, 48, 52, Pic. 15). Many examples indicate the existence of grave groups from cemeteries of similar period. The graves are often found in clusters forming rows or groups. This patterning may be explained by kinship or social status of the dead.³

From the Celtic cemetery of Magyarszerdahely only two warrior graves (30 and 63) were excavated by an expert. Scattered finds of a sword and spear heads found within the territory of the cemetery suggest that there may have been more warrior burials in the cemetery than could be revealed by archaeologists.⁴ If one takes the stray finds into consideration, that may have belonged to warriors, the proportion of warriors still remains relatively low in the cemetery, comprising 8%. In grave 63 all the equipment that he used in life was placed in the grave. The finds include a sword, spear, shield and beauty equipment such as scissors, razor and sharpening stone. The fibulae were probably part of clothing. Even though vessels were also placed in the grave they did not contain animal bones. It may be assumed that only liquid was provided for the dead for the afterlife. Regarding the combination of grave goods, many well known analogies can be listed. Similar combinations of grave goods can be found within all the eastern Celtic territory from the second half of LT-B, although such combinations became more characteristic during LT-C (LORENZ 1978, 234; GUŠTIN 1984, 316, Abb. 4, 5).⁵ Jozef Bujna assessed the sociography of available Celtic cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin until 1980. He distinguished five groups according to region and the richness of burials. Had he known the cemetery of Magyarszerdahely he would have placed this cemetery to region "H" (North of former Yugoslavia, southern Transdanubia). Bujna assessed the material culture of 910 burials, considering their geographical position and the number and type of grave goods. Furthermore, in his categorization he also considered possible differences between LT-B1 and LT-C1b. Although his data was not complete his views are still valid in many respects. Grave 63 in Magyarszerdahely belongs to the first groups of burials within this cemetery, characterised mainly by grave goods of weapons and pottery. According to Bujna the number of graves with weapons within region "H" reaches its peak (40%) during LT-C1a and LT-C1b.⁶ This period of Celtic history is characterised mainly by expansion and, at a certain level, by settlement and consolidation (BUJNA 1982, 411).

According to the available literature, the material objects of grave 63 can be well dated. The decoration on the sheath is a good example of "Hungarian sword

style" and, together with the suspension loop, is so similar to the ones found in grave 2 in Brežice in Slovenia that they may have been made in the same workshop. The asymmetrical variation of the decoration on these objects was found in Šimanovci in Serbia and all these decoration types can be dated to LT-C1 (SZABÓ–PETRES 1992, 50; Cat. No. 104, 138).

The band-shaped shield boss belongs to pierced shield decorations. These pierced decorations exhibit a rib on the middle along their length and their edges are reminiscent of wings. Similar finds are known from north east Hungary such Bodroghalom, Farnos, Halmajuga, Piliny and Szob.⁷ Similar shield adornment without pierced decoration is known from upper Bavaria (Thauernhausen) along with long bodied fibulae that can be dated to the middle of LT (KRÄMER 1985, Taf. 63, 7). The shield boss from Magyarszerdahely exhibits long narrow ends which may have covered the ridge of a wooden shield. Identical finds to this shield decoration are not known in the literature but similar finds can all be dated to LT-C1. Typologically similar shield decorations south from Hungary without the distinctive rib on the middle are dated to LT-B2. The dating of the bipartite shield decorations which were found in grave 30 in Magyarszerdahely can also be dated to LT-B2 (GUŠTIN 1984, 319, 327; Beilage 1, 6). In terms of chronology the shield decorations with multi-profiled edges that form a triangular shape like the previously mentioned shield decorations, can be dated to LT-C1. This type is chronologically followed by shield adornments with trapezoid shaped profiles (BUJNA 1982, Abb. 5, 47). The dating of the shield boss has slightly been changed. The assessment of shield bosses from the sanctuary of Gournay also included the shield boss from Magyarszerdahely as an analogy (GOURNAY II, 70–71, Fig. 38, 1–3; Fig. 39) and similar shield bosses from Gournay were classified as belonging to Type III and dated to the end of 3rd and beginning of 2nd centuries BC. The long-bodied iron fibula with decorated foot also provides a good standpoint for dating, since similar finds can all be dated to LT-C1.⁸

The accompanying finds that were found in grave 63 can also be dated to the above discussed periods. The chronological importance of the accompanying finds is not discussed here in detail because they are general form types and can be dated to middle LT. The only exception is the stamped pottery. The symmetrically arranged crescent shaped and angled dotted lines forming 3–3 clusters alongside dotted circle decoration can be dated to LT-C. These types of decorations are characteristic of the geometric style of the Celts.⁹ The cemetery of Magyarszerdahely was published 26 years ago. Since then both international and

Hungarian researchers have contributed greatly to our knowledge about the Celtic period. In Hungary the corollary studies of Miklós Szabó expanded our knowledge about the Celtic period. In one of his studies, which is especially important for the present paper, he assessed the relationship between archaeological records and antique compilations about Celtic invasions between 280–277 BC in the Balkans. Miklós Szabó considered that the La Tène cemeteries and grave goods in the Middle Danube region, prior to the invasions and migrations into the Balkans provide important information about Celtic warriors (SZABÓ 1994, 40). In the light of this, the warrior in grave 30 from Magyarszerdahely is of great importance. Researchers generally agree that the first wave of the Celts appeared in Central and Eastern Europe and in Italy around the beginning of 4th century BC. At this period the cemeteries, dated to LT-B1, were located in the northern part of Transdanubia but at the beginning of LT-B2 a new population set up cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin. Miklós Szabó assessed the characteristic artefacts that are associated with warrior burials. These artefacts include early La Tène type swords and their sheaths, the sheaths having round endings with pierced decorations, suspension rings for the swords, rhomboid or leaf-shaped spearheads, two-pieced shield bosses, sometimes knives or scissors. Warriors with these types of artefacts took part in the invasion of the Balkans, and one of them was buried in grave 30 in Magyarszerdahely. For the development of relative and absolute chronology of the LT-B2–LT-C1 Miklós Szabó used the chronology of Rupert Gebhard (Table 1).¹⁰

	SZABÓ	GERBHARD
LT-B2	310–260	4. horizon 300/320–280
LT-C1	260–200	5. horizon 280–260
LT-C2	200–120	6. horizon 260–

Table 1: Comparative chronological table
Összehasonlító kronológiai táblázat

On the bases of the distribution of warrior graves Miklós Szabó came to the conclusions that: 1. The comment of Pompeius Trogus, that the Scordiscus tribe went back to their 'old land', near the Danube after defeat at Delphoi is in direct correlation with the archaeological data. 2. Prior to invasions in the Balkans the Celts were already settled in most parts of the Carpathian Basin (HORVÁTH 1997, 81–82).

In the light of this, the earliest grave of the cemetery of Magyarszerdahely is grave 30, although earlier it

was dated to the beginning of LT-C1. It must be noted that even though grave 30 was considered earlier previously it was still considered to represent the period of the unsuccessful campaign in the Balkans. Gebhard's fifth horizon of La Tène cemeteries in the Middle-Danube region can be placed between the invasion of 280/279 BC and the beginning of LT-C1. This is followed by the sixth horizon, which characterised by La Tène type objects. Grave 63 belongs to the beginning of this horizon.

In summary it is considered that the population of the Celtic cemetery of Magyarszerdahely arrived here from the west with the tribes who aimed to invade the Balkans. Many of them however did not return to the west but remained in the Carpathian Basin. Recent studies consider that the invasion of the Balkans was aimed at gaining more territory rather than as a looting

adventure (SZABÓ 1994, 40). In opposition to our previously held notions that the cemetery of Magyarszerdahely was used during LT-C2, it is considered here that it was probably in use until the end of LT-C1. According to the finds of a small number of graves there is a possibility that it was also used for a few decades longer, after the end of LT-C1. This cemetery belongs to the group of cemeteries that were established during the second migration wave of the Celts, in the end of the 4th or at the beginning of the 3rd century BC. The weaponry of the warrior in grave 63 is uniform and the northeastern and southern connections of the grave goods are remarkable. In the light of this it is considered that he was an eminent person in his community.

Translated by Eszter Kreiter

Notes:

- 1 After the published part: „Mouth. Type A₂, subcampanulate variety. Midrib. Broad. Overlaps. Back over front(?). Reinforce. T-type, on the reverse. Loop. Type Ic, arched, ornamented. Loop-plates. The upper loop-plate is arched, the lower one is shield-shaped, both are decorated. Chape-clamps, chape-bridge, chape-end. Missing. Chagrinage. Three pairs of ring punches enclosed by the pattern. Design. 2a₁ + 5; HSS.“ (SZABÓ-PETRES, 1992, 95).
- 2 This practice is not exclusive to this cemetery but similar examples can be found, for example at Farnos (Pest County): grave 2 and 3; Vác-Kavicsbánya (Pest County): graves 7, 10, 11, 12, 25, 30, 55; Bodroghalom (BAZ County): graves 12 and 15; Kistokaj-Kültelek (BAZ County): graves 18, 20, 24, 26, 27; Muhi-Kocsmadomb (BAZ County): graves 33, 35, 38, 43; Radostyán (BAZ County): graves 11 and 14 (HELLEBRANDT 1999); Rezi-Rezicséri homokbánya (Zala County): graves 6, 7, 12, 40, 47, 59. In grave 59 the cremated bones together with metal finds were packed in textile, which was placed in a vessel woven from bulrush (HORVÁTH 1987). Holiare/Slovakia: grave 186 (BENADIK-VLČEK-AMBROS 1957, 88; LORENZ 1978, 62).
- 3 Examples of burials in a row: Münsingen-Rain/Switzerland (HODSON 1968); Hurbanovo-Bacherov Majer, Kamenín/Slovakia (BENADIK-VLČEK-AMBROS 1957); Brno-Malomerice, Jenišův Újezd/Czech Republic (LORENZ 1978, Abb. 39). Burials in row and in clusters: Letky/Czech Republic (WALDHAUSER 1987); Rezi-Rezicséri-homokbánya/Hungary (HORVÁTH 1997, Abb. 1); Jászberény-Cseróhalom/Hungary (KAPOSVÁRI 1969); Mannersdorf a.L., Pottenbrunn/Austria (NEUGEBAUER 1992, 156–159). Examples of burials in clusters when men, women and children were buried in separate groups: Andelfingen/Switzerland (WYSS 1974, Abb. 1). Good examples of burials of small families: Nebringen/Germany (KRÄMER 1964); Bajč-Vulkanovo/Slovakia (LORENZ 1978, Abb. 54); Stránce, Radovesice, Dobrá Voda/ Czech Republic (WALDHAUSER 1987, Abb. 40); Vác-Kavicsbánya/Hungary (HELLEBRANDT 1999, Fig. 99); Belgrad-Karaburma/Serbia (TODOROVIĆ 1972).
- 4 SZABÓ-PETRES 1992, Cat. No. 42; HORVÁTH 1979, 45, stray find 6; HUNYADI 1957, 29.
- 5 Similar finds are known from an inhumation in Austria such as at Katzelsdorf (URBAN-TECHLER-SCHUTZ 1985, 13) and Pottenbrunn (NEUGEBAUER 1992, Abb. 17).
- 6 26 warrior burials belong to the first group which number seems too high (BUJNA 1982, 411–414, Tab. 14). In the territory of present Czech Republic warriors comprised a considerable proportion of society making up a range from one fifth to one third of the population (WALDHAUSER 1987, 63).
- 7 Bodroghalom: stray find (HELLEBRANDT 1999, 183, 194, Pl. LXII, 1); Farnos: grave 4 (HELLEBRANDT 1999, 25, 29, Pl. VII, 10); Halmajugra: stray find (HELLEBRANDT 1999, 166–167, Pl. LVIII, 10); Piliny: stray find (PULSZKY 1897, Pic. 74); Szob: stray find (SZABÓ-PETRES 1992, Pl. 62).
- 8 GUŠTIN 1984, Abb. 12, 6; HELLEBRANDT 1999, Pl. VII, 11. The analogy of the shield was actually found in grave 4 at Farnos (HUNYADI 1944, 80–81).
- 9 See SCHWAPPACH 1971, 131; SCHWAPPACH 1974, 109; ZIRRA 1978! For similar stamped decorations see SZABÓ 1971, Pic. 31, 35. Similar angled dotted lines decorate a pot from Manching (KRÄMER 1985, Taf. I, 5).
- 10 GEBHARD 1989, 74.

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Kelta harcos sírja Magyarszerdahelyről (Zala megye)

Magyarszerdahelyen az egykori homokbánya mellett 1971–1975 között 28 kelta és 34 római kori sírt tártunk fel. A két korszakban használt temető publikációja 1979-ben jelent meg. A Kelta Corpusban csak részben tehetjük közzé az ásatások eredményeit, mivel a Corpus kéziratának leadásakor még nem fejeződött be az elsődleges feldolgozás (restaurálás, rajzolás, stb.) sem.

1984 nyarán alkalmi bányászaskor egy szórthamvas sír (63. sír) pecsételt díszű edénye került elő, bejelentését követően a temetkezést feltártuk (1. kép). A sírban egy kupacban találtunk rá a fémmellékletekre (2. kép): vaskard hüvelyével; pajzdudor, a pajzs keretének töredékeivel; vas lándzsahegy; vasolló; vasborotva; fenőkő; két vasfibula (3–4; 6. kép). A pecsételt díszű edény, a tál és a csupor sorban helyezkedtek el átlósan (5; 7. kép). A temetőben korábban elkülönített csoportok (kiscsaládok?) közül az újonnan feltárt 63. sír az I. csoportba tartozik, amelyre az a jellemző, hogy a sírokban edénymellékleteket is találunk és a kalcinált csontszilánkokat gondosan kis kupacba rakták (textíliába csavarva) a fémekkel együtt. Ez a csoport a temető központi helyén volt és a leggazdagabb temetkezéseket, a fegyveres sírokat tartalmazta. A soros és a csoportos temetkezésekre számos példát lehet felsorolni a kelták lakta területekről. E mögött legtöbbször a rokoni kapcsolatok (például kiscsalád), vagy az elhunytak különböző társadalmi helyzete húzódnak meg.

A hasonló fegyverzettel és a toilette-garnitúrával (olló, borotva, fenőkő), valamint edény-mellékletekkel eltemetett halottak sírjait az egész keleti kelta területen megtaláljuk. A LT-B periódus második felétől kezdve fordulnak elő hasonló kombinációjú leletegyüttesek, de a LT-C alatt válik igazán gyakorivá. A Jozef Bujna által kidolgozott szociográfiai felosztás szerint temetőnk a H-régióba, a 63. sírunk pedig az I. cso-

portba sorolható. Ezen a területen a LT-C1a és C1b fázisok idején éri el csaknem a legmagasabb százalékot a fegyveres sírok aránya (40 % körüli).

A 63. sír leletei nagyon jól keltezhetőek a LT-C1a periódusra, abszolút időt tekintve a Kr.e. 3. század közepére. Szabó Miklós kutatásai alapján kijelenthető, hogy a magyarszerdahelyi temetőből korábban előkerült fegyveres sírba (30. sír) eltemetett egyén a Kr.e. 4. század végén, 3. század elején, tehát a LT-B2 periódusban a Kárpát-medencébe bejött törzsekkel együtt érkeztetett ide. Társai azonban tovább menve részt vettek a balkáni invázióban. Ezt a horizontot a fegyveres sírok jellegzetes mellékletei képviselik (kétrészes pajzdudor; korai LT-típusú kard és hüvely, az utóbbin áttört, kerek koptatóval; a kard viseléséhez tartozó karikák; rombusz- vagy levél alakú lándzsahegy; néha vágókés, esetleg olló). Szabó Miklós két fontos következtetést vont le az említett fegyverzettel felszerelt harcosok sírjainak elterjedési térképéből:

1. Pompeius Trogus megjegyzése, miszerint a scordiscusok törzse a delphoi kudarc után a Dunánál lévő „óházába” tért vissza, a régészeti leletek alapján hitelesíthető.

2. A kelták a balkáni invázió előestéjén a Kárpát-medence legnagyobb részén már megtelepedtek. Hasonlóan vélekedett korábban e sorok írója is.

Összefoglalva megállapíthatjuk, hogy a magyarszerdahelyi kelta temető népessége a balkáni invázióra készülő törzsekkel, népcsoportokkal együtt érkezett ide nyugatról, de jó részükkel ellentétben helyben maradt. Temetőnk azoknak a számát gyarapítja, amelyek a második hullám idején, már a Kr.e. 4. század végén, a 3. század elején létesültek. A 63. sír harcosa a helyi közösség egyik kiemelkedő személyisége lehetett, fegyverzete uniformizált, feltűnő északkeleti és a déli párhuzamai.

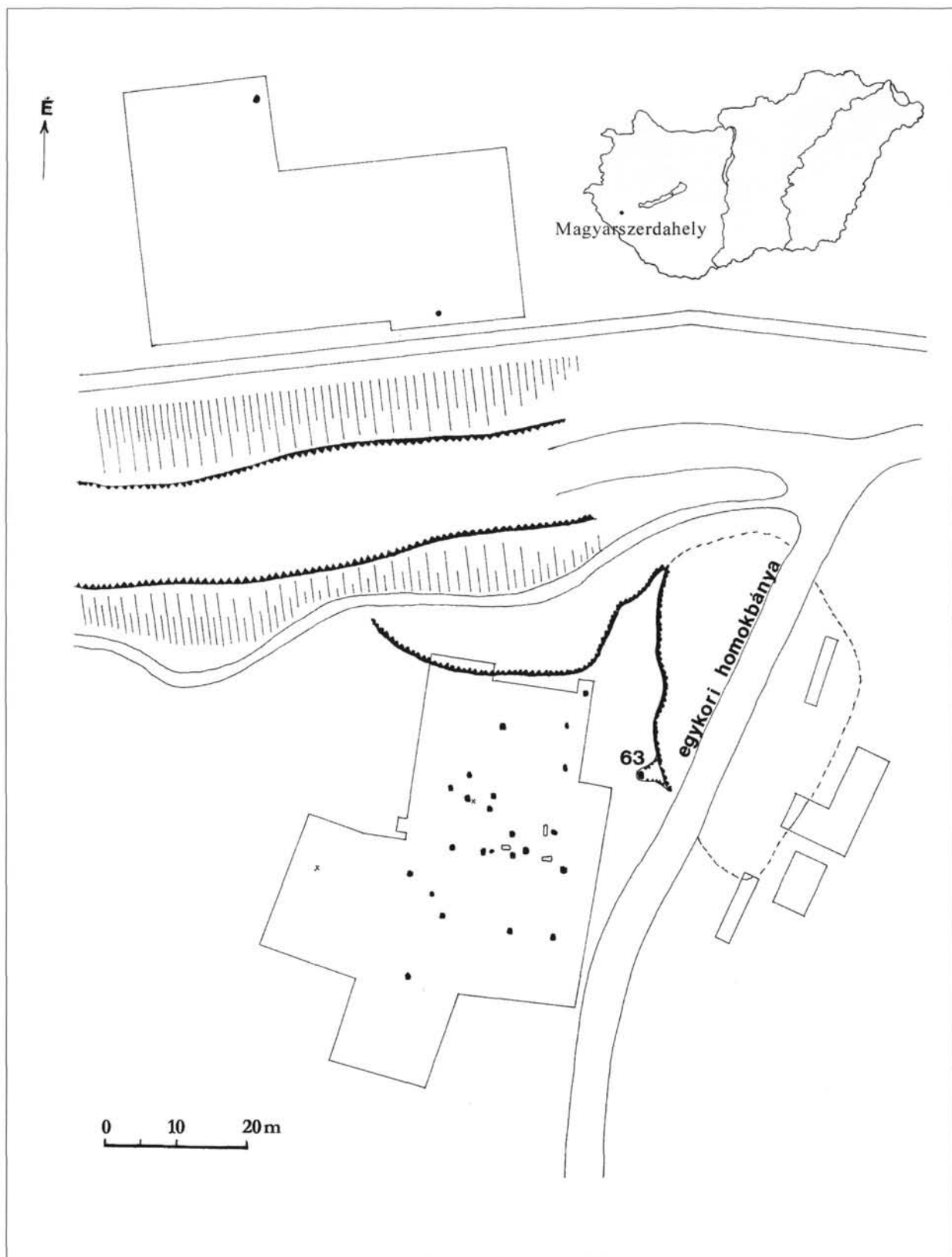


Fig. 1: Outline of the cemetery of Magyarszerdahely with grave 63
A magyarszerdahelyi kelta temető alaprajza a 63. sírral

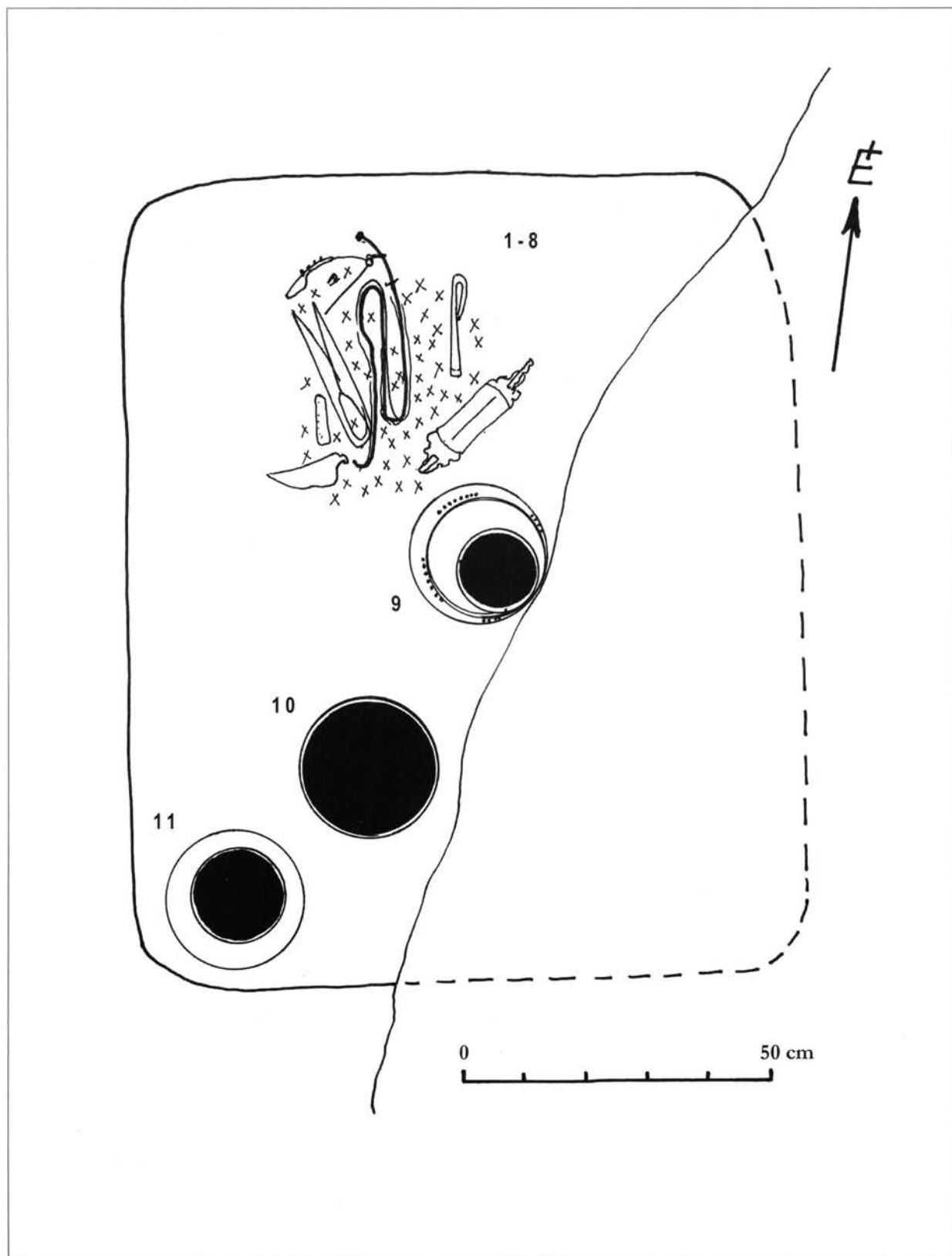


Fig. 2: Drawing of grave 63 from Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír rajza

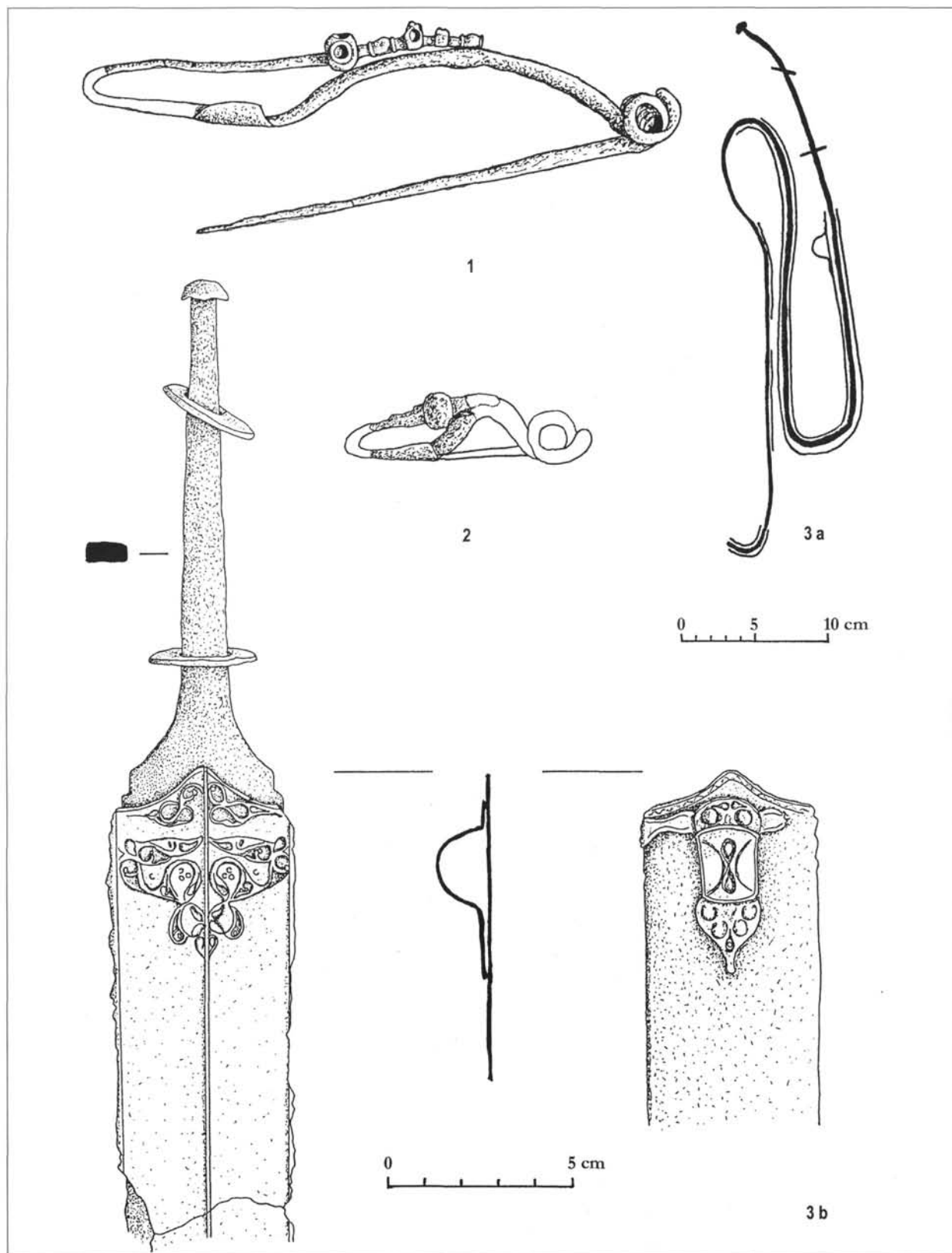


Fig. 3: Fibuale, sword and sheath from the grave. Grave 63 Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír mellékletei (fibulák, kard)

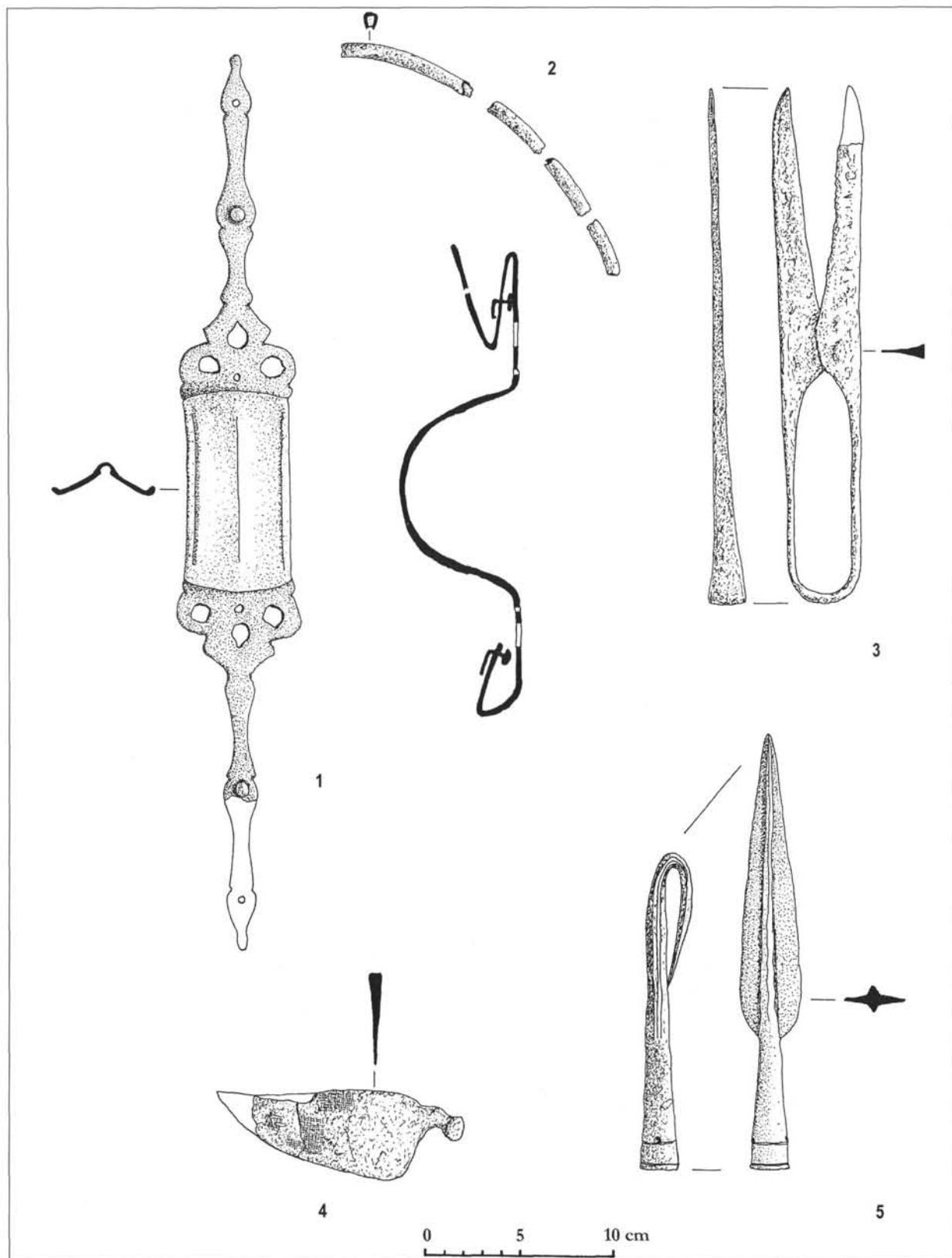


Fig. 4: Shield ornament, shield frame, scissors, razor and spear head. Grave 63 Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír mellékletei (pajzsdudor, pajzskeret, olló, borotva, lándzsahegy)

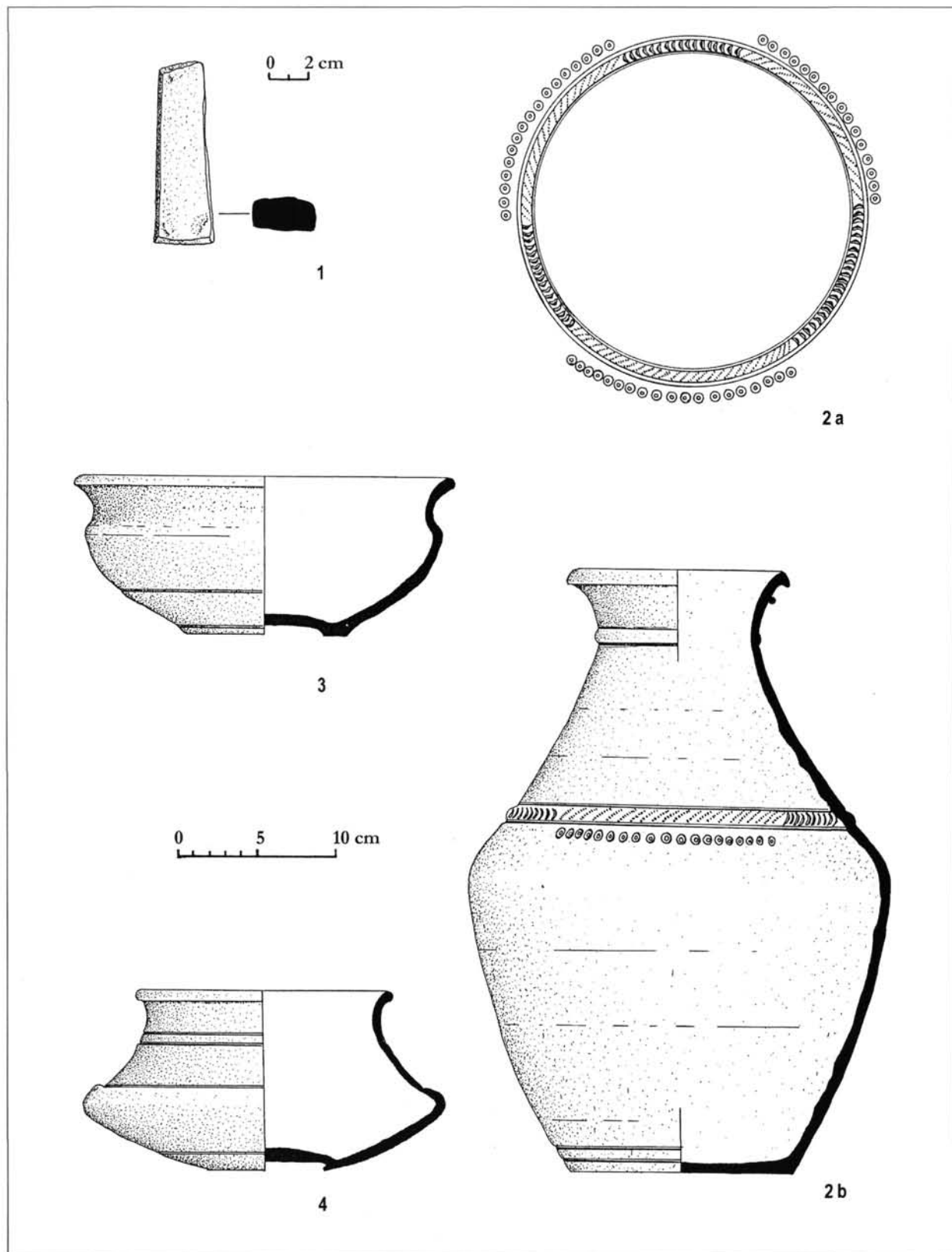


Fig. 5: Sharpening stone and vessels. Grave 63 Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír mellékletei (fenőkő, edények)

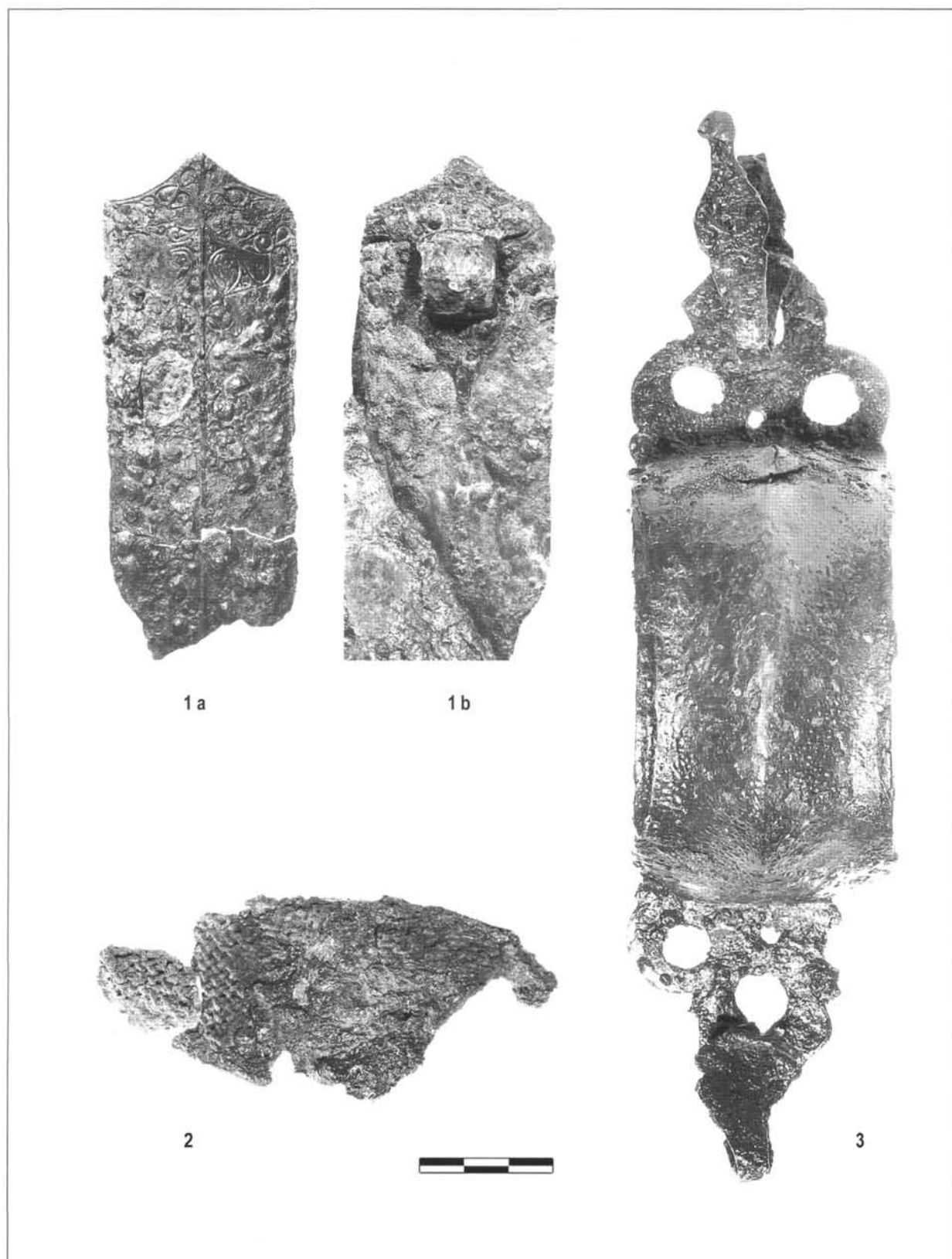
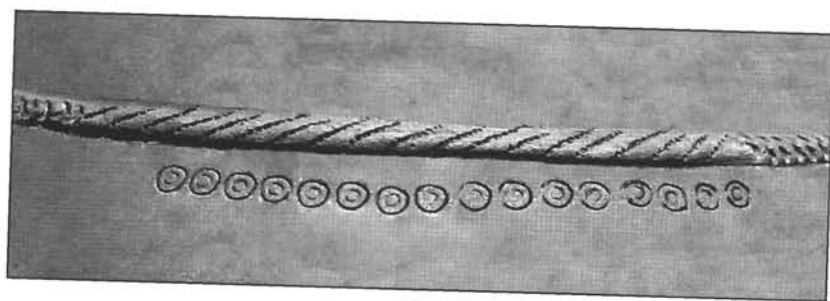


Fig. 6: Fragments of sheath, razor and shield ornament. Grave 63 Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír mellékletei (kardhüvely töredéke, borotva, pajzsdudor)



1



2

Fig. 7: Stamped pottery. Grave 63 Magyarszerdahely
Magyarszerdahely, 63. sír pecsételt díszű edénye

