

Copper Age Pottery from the Riparo Valtenesi, Manerba del Garda

LAWRENCE H. BARFIELD

ABSTRACT - The heterogeneous nature of the North Italian Copper Age pottery means it is unsuited for the purpose of either defining chronological subdivisions or cultural geographical boundaries. At present pottery assemblages of this period are rare, unpublished or only represented by a few sherds. The discovery of an assemblage of some one hundred and twenty five pots and sherds from the excavation of the Copper Age cemetery in the Riparo Valtenesi at Manerba (BS), is therefore of considerable significance for our understanding of the pottery of the third millennium BC in Northern Italy. We present here a summary of this material.

Key words: Copper Age, Pottery, North Italy

Parole chiave: Età del Rame, Ceramica, Italia settentrionale

Lawrence H. Barfield - Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT UK

1. INTRODUCTION

One aspect of the Copper Age in Italy that interested Bernardino Bagolini was the interpretation of the different ceramic styles of this period. Bagolini, as well as others, although recognising the difficulties involved in the definition of "cultures" in the North Italian Copper Age, nevertheless attempted to plot the geographical distribution of certain styles of that period - notably the metope and brush ("scopettato") decorated wares (BAGOLINI & FASANI, 1982; BAGOLINI, 1984) and the scale decorated ("a squame") pottery (BAGOLINI & CREMONESI, 1988). Other specialists (BARFIELD, 1988; COCCHI GENICK, 1996:192), however, have stressed the heterogeneous nature of the Copper Age pottery which means it is unsuited for the purpose of either defining chronological subdivisions or cultural geographical boundaries, as seems to be possible in other areas of Europe. This may eventually be remedied, but at present pottery assemblages of this period are rare, unpublished or only represented by a few sherds. The pottery from the famous cemetery of Remedel-

lo di Sotto, which is at present the best known assemblage of Copper Age pottery in Northern Italy comprises only nine vessels (CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971; DE MARINIS & PEDROTTI, 1997).

The discovery of an assemblage of some one hundred and twenty five pots and sherds from the excavation of the Copper Age cemetery in the Riparo Valtenesi at Manerba (BS), is therefore of considerable significance for our understanding of the pottery of the third millennium BC in Northern Italy. We present here a summary of this material in advance of the full publication.

2. THE SITE

It should be pointed out that there are three different prehistoric sites in close proximity on the main promontory at Manerba (Fig.1). These are: the Rocca (BROGIOLO, 1973; BORRELLO & BROGIOLO, 1978; BARFIELD & BUTEUX, 1998), Sopra Sasso and the Riparo

Valtenesi, below the cliff on the shore of Lake Garda (BARFIELD, 1983, 1984). These sites have produced finds from different periods and until 1997 it was thought that only the cemetery in the Riparo Valtenesi contained occupation dating to the Copper Age and that the location of the settlement associated with the cemetery was unlocated. During the excavations on the Rocca di Manerba in that year, however, Copper Age material was found on that site as well, stratified between a Late Neolithic (Lagozza) occupation and a Bell Beaker horizon (BARFIELD & BUTEUX, 1997). This latter excavation is still in progress and it is probable that the site represents the settlement related to the cemetery in the Riparo Valtenesi.

2.1. *The Riparo Valtenesi*

The first use of this rock shelter was during the Neolithic. We have first a phase from the start of the Neolithic in which Vho/Gaban pottery was associated with a flint assemblage of Late Mesolithic Castelnovian type. There was subsequently a little material from the Middle Neolithic (Square Mouth Pottery tradition), as well as a Serra d'Alto sherd (BARFIELD, 1981, fig.3:3), all unstratified, and finally a layer with Lagozza pottery.

The rock shelter is, however, above all known for the series of Copper Age wooden mortuary chambers associated with collective burials. We can assume therefore that all the pottery of Copper Age date is to be associated with burial rituals. Although it is all from a burial contexts, we can conclude that the pottery probably reflects the whole range of ceramics used by the group that used the cemetery.

The majority of the pottery was unfortunately fragmentary and derived from contexts that had either been disturbed during or after the Copper Age. Only in one context, in the burial chamber 133, do we have an intact assemblage of four vessels that had been deposited as funerary offerings.

The technology of the Copper Age pottery, both as regards fine and coarse wares, is very poor, especially in contrast with that from the preceding Lagozza period on the site, which is of a high quality. A similar contrast in quality between the two periods was noted in the settlement at Monte Covolo (BARFIELD *et al.*, 1975-76) and this phenomenon has been noted in similar, contemporary, transitions; as, for example, between Cortaillod and Pfyn to Luscherz and Horgin in Switzerland.

2.1.1. *Fine pottery*

Among the fine pottery we find, among others, two styles of closely related, decoration. These are

mainly on carinated bowls and can be considered the most distinctive decoration styles from the site. The first comprises metopes with vertical or hatched incised lines (Fig.2:1-3); the second is a zone decoration filled with hatched lines (Fig.2:4-5). A close relationship between the two styles can be deduced from the fact that both the metope and the zone decoration have sometimes been executed by using a similar, unusual technique. This involves first incising a continuous area of hatching and later partially cancelling the incision by burnishing, to produce the zones and the metopes (Fig.2:2,4).

The metope style can be compared with pottery found on other sites in Northern Italy (BAGOLINI, 1984); among these Remedello di Sotto (CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971, tab.XIV), a site, however, where do not find the zoned decoration. This zoned decoration, at first sight, is very similar to the Bell Beaker style of decoration. The technique and the vessel forms are, however, very different from the Beaker products.

One vessel from the Riparo Valtenesi, with a carinated profile is decorated with a dragged comb decoration (Fig.2:6). This closely resembles a vessel from Remedello di Sotto with a metope decoration executed with the same technique (CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971, tab.XIV:2). This technique of decoration has been found in Central Italy at Vulchi, apparently in association with Beakers (D'ERCOLE AND PENNACCHIONI, 1977, tab.17).

Another style of decoration, also found on carinated vessels, is the technique of decoration executed with very fine scratched lines producing chevrons or hatched triangles (Fig.2:7-8). Two vessels decorated with this technique were found in chamber 133, possible made by the same person, but decorated with different motifs. Direct parallels for this style of decoration are not known although a parallel for the chevron motif - in another technique - is found on a vessel from Remedello (CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971, tab.XIII:1). On these vessels we also find lugs with double perforations on the carination, and with corresponding perforations on the rim. Similar lugs and perforations are also present at Remedello on a metope decorated pot (CORNAGGIA CASTIGLIONI, 1971, tab.XII:1).

The cup with a strap handle is also present in limited numbers (Fig.3:5). Also in finer ware is a bowl with two vertical cylindrical lugs and a spout (Fig.3:7) and a vessel with a distinct neck (Fig.3:2-3). The parallels for these last two forms are perhaps with Central Italy where they are to be found in the context of the Rinaldone Culture (COCCHI GENICK, 1966, fig.106,111,113,116-117,125). We can further note the presence of Bell Beaker sherds although from disturbed levels.

2.1.2. Coarse pottery

The category can be divided into two technological groups:

1. Very simple forms with flat bottoms and vertical walls, which are distinguished by their extremely poor quality firing. Among these we find examples of White Ware, semi-perforated rims ("fori non passanti") and brushed ("scopettato") surfaces (Fig.4:1-3).

2. Vessels of better quality, well fired and with thinner walls and cordon "decoration" (Fig.4:4-5).

The pottery of the first group resembles the so-called "White Ware" at Monte Covolo, even if only a few of the sherds from Manerba are actually white (BARFIELD *et al.*, 1975-76). It is now probably opportune to redefine the term "White Ware" since the white colouring is only one trait, not always present, of a class of coarse ware, whose main characteristics are the simple shape and large filler fragments (limestone in the case of the White Ware). This type of pottery also includes the partially perforated rims such as are found at Civate and Monte Covolo. This could now all be grouped under the general heading of "Coarse Civate pottery". Partial perforations are a feature of the Horgen Culture of the Northern Alps, as well as of other contemporary groups in Southern Europe from the Iberian peninsula to the Aegean (BARFIELD, 1988; COCCHI GENICK, 1996:177-180). We should also remember that partial perforations are found at other periods and in areas not connected with our material (VENCL, 1978).

Brushed ("scopettato") pottery (Fig.4:3) is also found and is closely linked to the first group. This style has an extensive distribution, especially in Central Italy, but it can not yet be related to any specific cultural group or chronological phase (BAGOLINI, 1981; COCCHI GENICK, 1996:180-183). The difficulties in defining specific regional styles of pottery during the Copper Age is clearly emphasised by the presence, at Manerba, of a vessel with both partial perforations, typical of Civate, and a brushed surface (Fig.4:3).

The pots in the second group in a better quality ware have applied plastic decoration comprising both plain and impressed cordons which are placed horizontally as well as vertically. Among these are some very large pots (Fig.5), which can be compared with vessels recently found at the Beaker site of Gazzo Veronese (SALZANI, 1996).

3. DISCUSSION

The Riparo Valtenesi pottery, even though we can find parallels for single styles, cannot be compared closely in its totality with any contemporary assemblage.

There is no close comparison even with the pottery from the Copper Age levels on the nearby Rocca di Manerba - a site that we can suppose to be the settlement linked with the Riparo Valtenesi cemetery, and which is still being studied. Even if there are some sherds of Brushed and White Ware, the pottery from that site is on the whole of a superior quality to that from the cemetery. Plain cordons predominate here and partial perforations are not found¹. We also find fine ware with impressed dot motifs, which are not present in the cemetery.

In the Riparo Cavallino (Villanova sul Clisi, BS), a site on the western side of Monte Covolo, the pottery from the collective burial area is again different (BARFIELD, BUTEUX & BOCCHIO, 1995). Here perforated lugs are absent while handled cups - rare in the Riparo Valtenesi - are common. In Tuscany we can see how the handled cup appears to replace vessels with vertical perforated lugs (COCCHI GENICK & GRIFONI CREMONESI, 1989:116) so that we can suggest that the Riparo Cavallino, Monte Covolo may be in the main later than the Riparo Valtenesi. The introduction of the handled cup into a number of cultures in South East Europe in the course of the IVth to IIIrd millennium can also be noted, as for example in the Baden Culture and the Aegean during the Early Bronze Age.

Among the ceramic styles at Manerba we can recognise a clear Mediterranean influence, alongside traits, such as the partial rim perforations, that we can consider Alpine. As well as features already noted, that are comparable with peninsular Italy, there are close resemblances with the Sicilian, San Cono-Piano Notaro tradition, notably in the cemetery of Uditore, where we find a range of comparable traits such vertical cylindrical lugs, necked jars, handled cups and especially the very specific comparison of vessels with double vertically perforated lugs that correspond with rime perforations (CASSANO & MANFREDINI, 1975, fig.27:11, fig.19:5). Similar elements are to be found in the Early Bronze Age Aegean, EBA II, which is a traditional source for innovations in the Italian Copper Age². In this connection contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean have also been noted in the metallurgy of his second phase of Remedello Sotto (DE MARINIS & PEDROTTI, 1997:291).

Western contacts have for some time been suggested to explain the similarity between North Italian metope decorated pottery and the Southern French, Fontbouisse style. There is, however, no need to suggest a derivation for the style from Southern France given that the two phases are approximately contemporary. In this context we can, however, note the close connection between various aspects of the burial ritual in the Riparo Valtenesi and those of Southern France (BARFIELD, 1984).

We can conclude that the innovations found in

the ceramic tradition of the Riparo Valtenesi at Manerba, and indeed in other areas of Italy, do not derive from a single geographical area or cultural tradition, but can be considered the result of a convergence of different influences at a time of intense cultural interaction when an international spirit pervaded the Mediterranean. We do not recognise any continuity from the ceramic tradition of the Lagozza Culture, as was suggested by ACANFORA (1956).

4. CHRONOLOGY

It is difficult to identify a clear chronological sequence in the Riparo Valtenesi, especially since much of the site was disturbed in historical times. It is possible that the construction of the tomb chambers was progressive from the South to the North in the rock shelter, even if such a sequence is not confirmed by stylistic differences in the horizontal distribution of the finds.

Only the vessels decorated with scratched patterns perhaps show a significant concentration, in the northern area of the rock shelter. Here we in fact also have the only stratified sequence for the Copper Age development of the site.

This sequence consists of the following structural development:

1. A deposits preceding the burial chambers;
2. A burial phase, with the construction of the burial chambers;
3. The construction of a covering platform;

As regards the distinctive pottery in this sequence (Fig.6), in the level preceding the burial episode, and above a Lagozza occupation, we have a sherd decorated with metope metope. Three vessels with scratched decoration came from two of the burial chambers stratified above this, while in the platform there was a sherd with incised zonal decoration. We thus have three different decoration styles represented in three different levels. From this sequence we could hypothesise that the metope style preceded the scratched style and the zoned design appeared even later. This apparent sequence, however, should be interpreted with caution given that is based on so few pieces of pottery and it could still be possible for all three styles to be contemporary. Also whereas the metope does certainly occur before scratched ware, as grave goods, was certainly contemporary with the chambers the sherd with the zoned style in the platform might be redeposited from an earlier context.

We can never know exactly how long the site

was in use. The C14 dates suggest that the main period of use of the site was in the middle of the third millennium BC (BARFIELD, BUTEUX & BOCCHIO, 1997, fig.56). The presence of Beaker sherds, in unstratified contexts, however, indicates that the site continued in use into the second half of the third millennium. This was a period during which other funerary /ritual sites, like Sion and Aosta, also had a long period of use.

The main problem with Copper Age chronology in Northern Italy is the fact that it is a period that lasted almost 800 years, from c.3300 to 2400 BC in calibrated years without very clear sub-divisions. A subdivision into two phases (with a third if we include the Beaker phase), based on Remedello, as proposed by De Marinis, is possible, even if there are a series of typological problems to clarify (DE MARINIS & PEDROTTI, 1997; DE MARINIS, 1997)³. The metope style and the main activity in the Riparo Valtenesi would seem to relate to the second phase of DE MARINIS' proposed chronology (1997). However, if we look at the ceramic typology we can see at Manerba that the White Ware, for example, considered distinctive of the first phase of the Copper Age (3300-2700 BC) on the basis of its correlation with the Horgen Culture, actually appears to persist into the second phase of the Copper Age and in the Riparo Valtenesi is contemporary with metope-decorated ware.

On the basis of the typology of the pottery present in the pre-Beaker levels on the Rocca di Manerba (BARFIELD & BUTEUX, 1997) and the Riparo Cavallino (BARFIELD, BUTEUX & BOCCHIO, 1995) we can also postulate a third phase in our area, preceding the appearance of Bell Beakers. On both sites the increase in handled cups can be taken as an indicator of this late Copper Age stage.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Both in the Riparo Valtenesi and on other sites in the eastern province of Brescia (two at Monte Covolo and the Rocca di Manerba), the archaeological assemblages, in a relatively small geographical area, all have different characteristics but do provide us with very clear indications of a chronology beyond the suggestions we have made above. Nor do the few stratigraphical sequences, or the available C14 dates, give any clearer picture.

The impression we get from the study of individual sites and from a wider comparison of assemblages in Northern Italy, is that it is not easy to draw clear chronological or cultural boundaries.

The technology and typology of the pottery shows little continuity from the Neolithic but instead reflect

influences from a wide geographical area, especially from the Central Mediterranean and peninsular Italy, and to a lesser extent the Alps.

The data acquired from Monte Covolo and Manerba does not confirm in detail the sequence proposed by De Marinis for Remedello, even though we do not deny that some evolution did not take place during the long period of the Copper Age.

NOTES

1 - Pottery with plain cordons and straight walls, typical of the Tamins-Isera horizon, is difficult to identify as a trait distinctive of the first phase of the Copper Age in our area, as has been suggested for the Southern Trentino (DE MARINIS & PEDROTTI, 1997). In our opinion cordon decorations is too general a trait to be used as a diagnostic chronological feature.

2 - In this period in the Aegean we also find several of

these traits, such as the double perforated lugs while corresponding rim perforations, cylindrical, vertical lugs, partial perforations and brushed pottery (RENFREW, 1972, fig.10:2; KARANTZALI, 1996). We can add these to the other traits, such as askoi, double cups etc. that have traditionally been proposed as evidence of links between the Aegean and peninsular Italy in such cultures as Gaudio and Rinaldone (RENFREW & WHITEHOUSE, 1974; BAILO MODESTI & SALERNI, 1998:154-156).

3 - With regard to the chronology proposed by De Marinis for the Remedello Sotto cemetery, we maintain that some of the evidence used to construct a chronology of this site is not acceptable. In his typology of the flint daggers for example we do not accept that the leaf-shaped forms chronologically exclusive to his initial phase, since this type has been found on later sites such as in the Riparo Cavallino at Monte (BARFIELD, BUTEUX & BOCCHIO, 1995). Also in the use of the typology of the copper axes we would maintain that the axes with slight flanges, used to distinguish two phases, are too similar to be typologically diagnostic, especially since they have been produced by a simple hammer technology (BARFIELD, 1996).

SUMMARY - The heterogeneous nature of the North Italian Copper Age pottery means it is unsuited for the purpose of either defining chronological subdivisions or cultural geographical boundaries. At present pottery assemblages of this period are rare, unpublished or only represented by a few sherds. The discovery of an assemblage of some one hundred and twenty five pots and sherds from the excavation of the Copper Age cemetery in the RiparoValtenesi at Manerba (BS), is therefore of considerable significance for our understanding of the pottery of the third millennium BC in Northern Italy. We present here a summary of this material.

RIASSUNTO - La natura eterogenea della ceramica dell'Età del Rame in Italia settentrionale non consente di definire né suddivisioni cronologiche né regioni culturali. Inoltre le collezioni oggi conosciute sono poche, inedite o rappresentate da pochi manufatti. La scoperta di una collezione di circa 125 manufatti provenienti dalla necropoli di Riparo Valtenesi a Manerba (BS), rappresenta quindi una importante fonte di dati per la nostra conoscenza della ceramica del terzo millennio AC dell'Italia settentrionale. In questo lavoro verranno presentate le caratteristiche principali della collezione.

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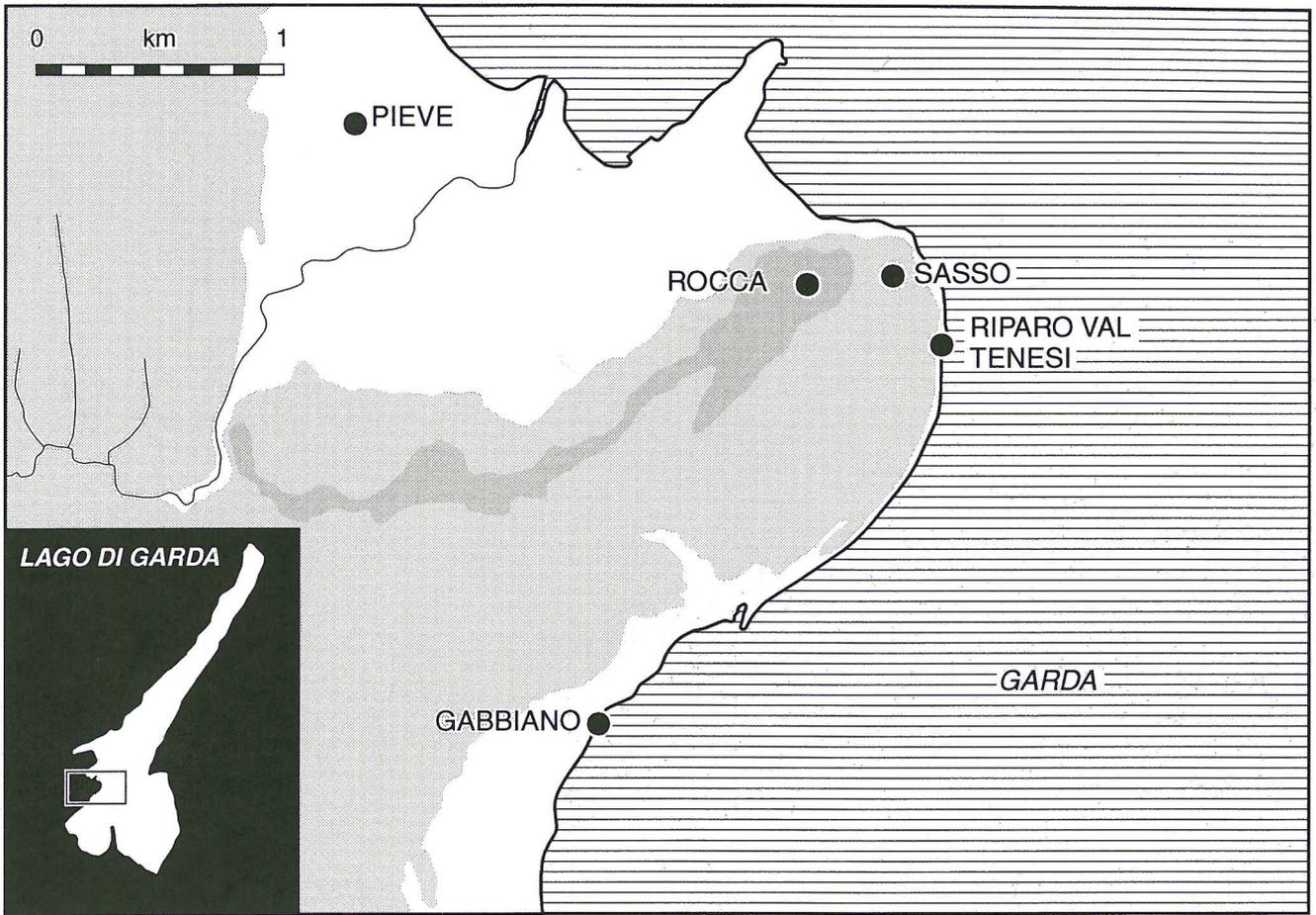


Fig. 1 - Manerba, location of sites

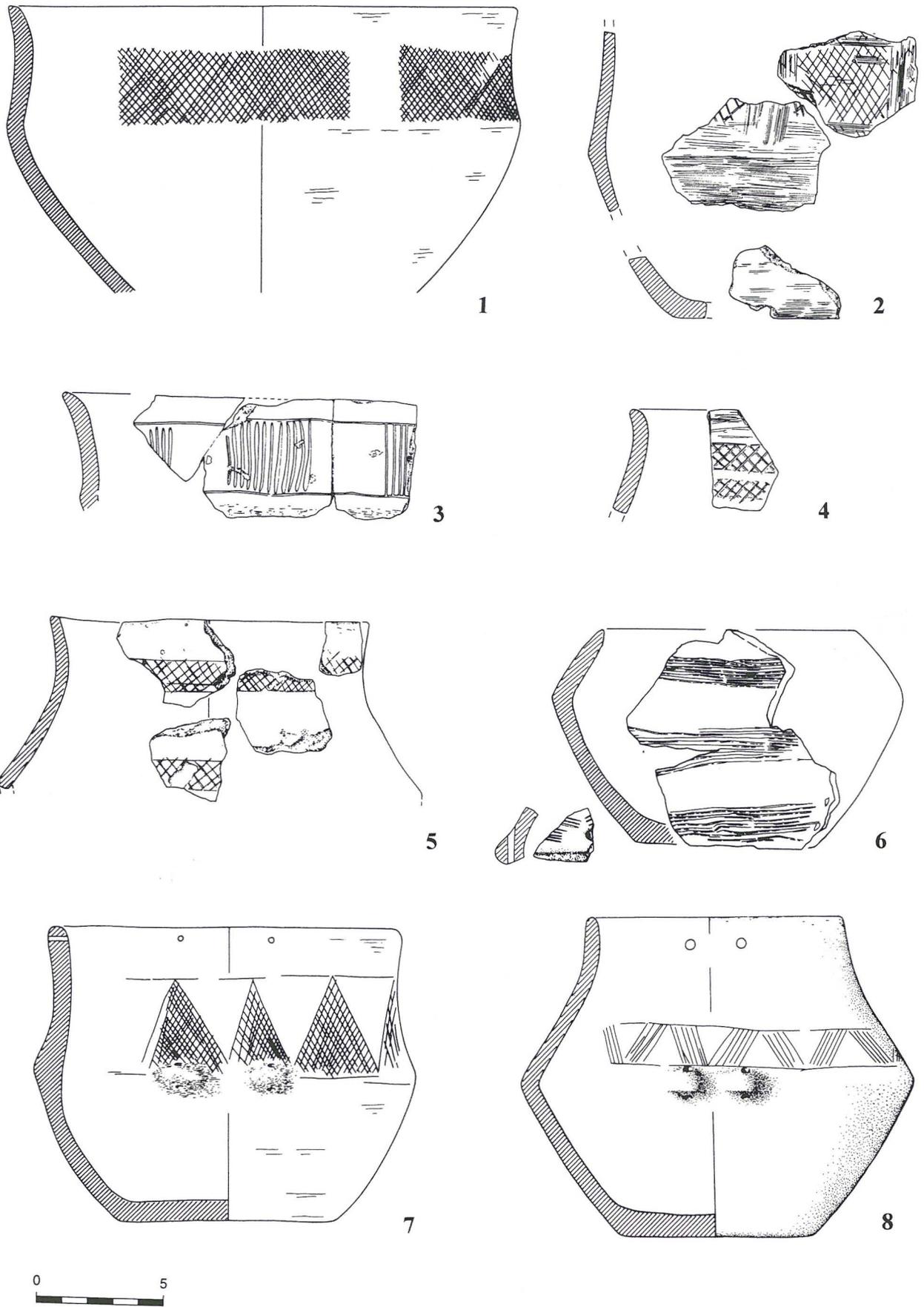


Fig. 2 - Manerba, Riparo Valtensi, fine pottery



Fig. 3 - Manerba, Riparo Valtensi, fine pottery

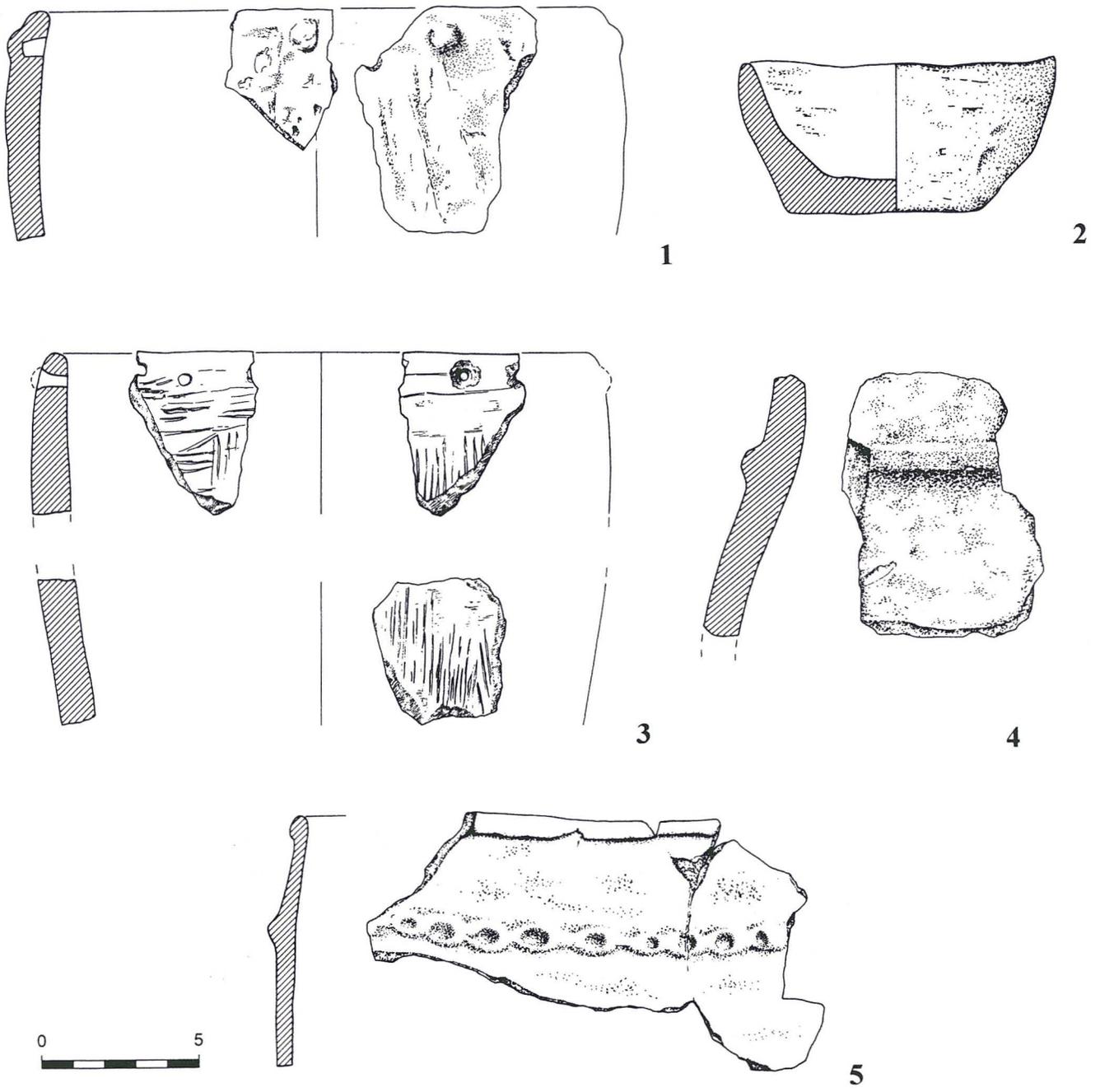


Fig. 4 - Manerba, Riparo Valtensi, coarse pottery

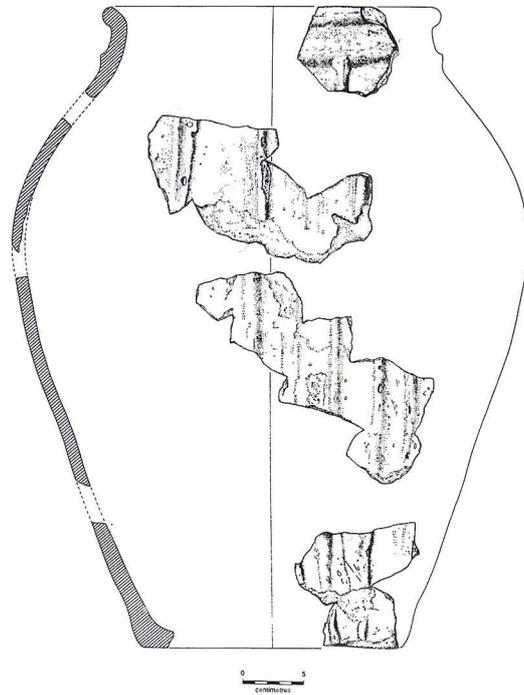


Fig. 5 - Manerba, Riparo Valtensi, coarse pottery

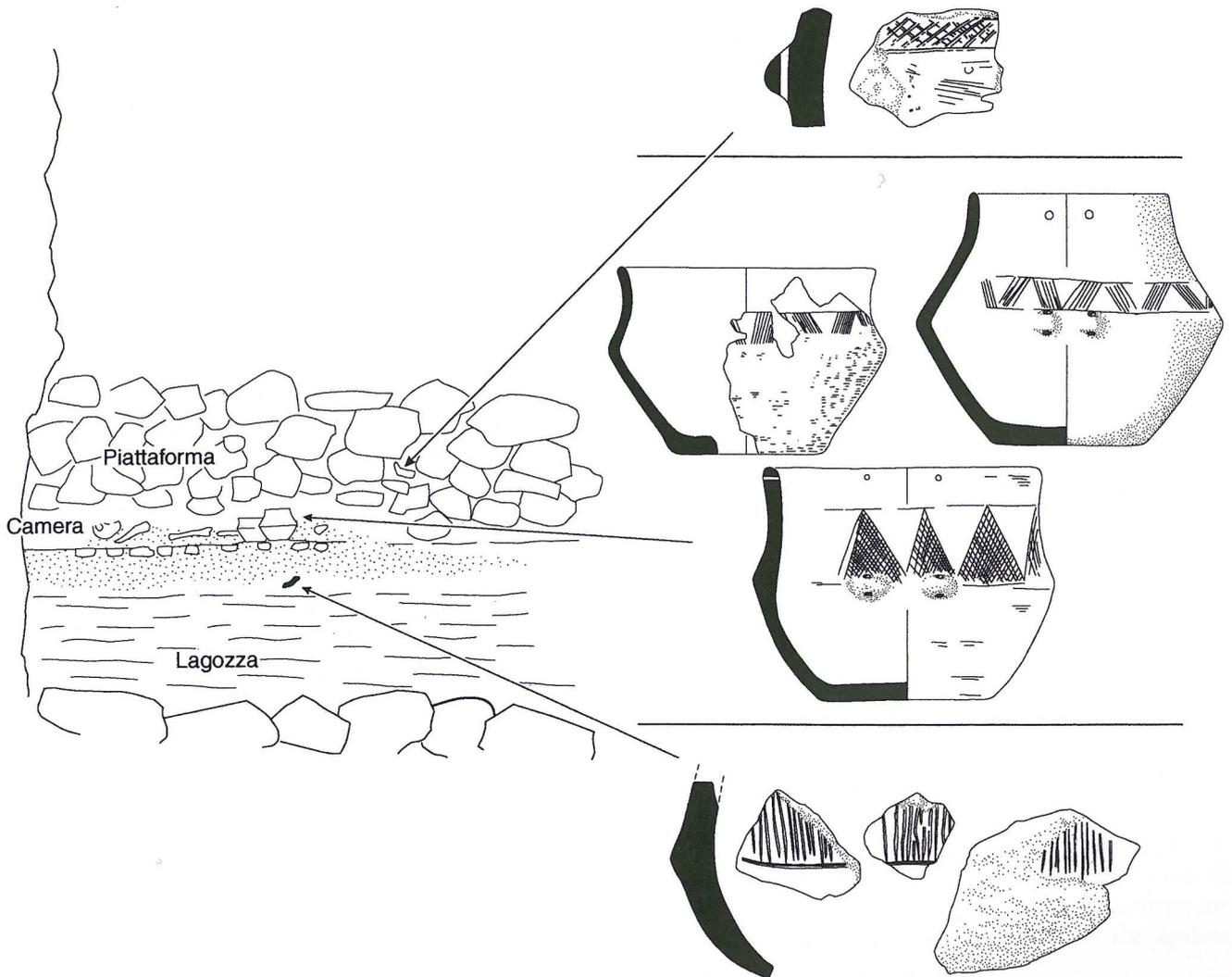


Fig. 6 - Manerba, Riparo Valtensi, schematic cross-section across area of tombs 133-136