

# CRAFTER

## Crafting Europe in the Bronze Age and Today

**A**round 4000 years ago, in the Bronze Age, some European societies underwent deep economic and political changes. Larger and more permanent settlements were established, in which exceptional crafts developed under an emerging dominant class of warriors and rulers. The sharp growth in technological transfers and mobility of artisans is most visible in metallurgy, leading to new specialised weapons, ornaments and tools, as well as pottery production. Common to these Bronze Age societies (c. 2200-1500 BCE) was the manufacture of highly burnished tableware and small drinking vessels. The placement of these vessels in single burials points to their social importance not only in the preparation and serving of foodstuffs.

The project **CRAFTER** has sought the collaboration between potters and archaeologists from Germany, Hungary, Serbia, and Spain to understand and recreate handmade pottery from four of the most outstanding European Bronze Age societies. Archaeology refers to these societies as **Únětice** (Central Europe), **Füzesabony/Otomani** (Carpathian basin), **Vatin** (central Balkans), and **El Argar** (Southeast Iberia). The exhibition features the main outcomes of this endeavour. In the film *In Their Hands*, four directors document the crafting of the pottery styles in each region, and the striking skills of past and present potters. Common traits but also regional differences in the pottery vessels and the techniques used become apparent. The recreated vessels are also displayed, allowing us to experience the aesthetic value attached to them c. 4000-3500 years ago.

**CRAFTER** has been funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. It seeks to disseminate the heritage and skills of Bronze Age societies in a broad European context, to raise awareness of the work of present-day potters—whose survival is increasingly threatened by industrialisation—and to open new venues for their craft. 🍷



Silver diadem from the princely grave of La Almoloya, Pliego, Murcia  
J.A. Soldevilla, ASOME-UAB



Sword and axes found in the deposit of Hajdúsámson, Debrecen, Hungary  
Ákos Jurás, Déri Múzeum



The Nebra Sky Disk, Saxony-Anhalt, Central Germany  
Juraj Lipták

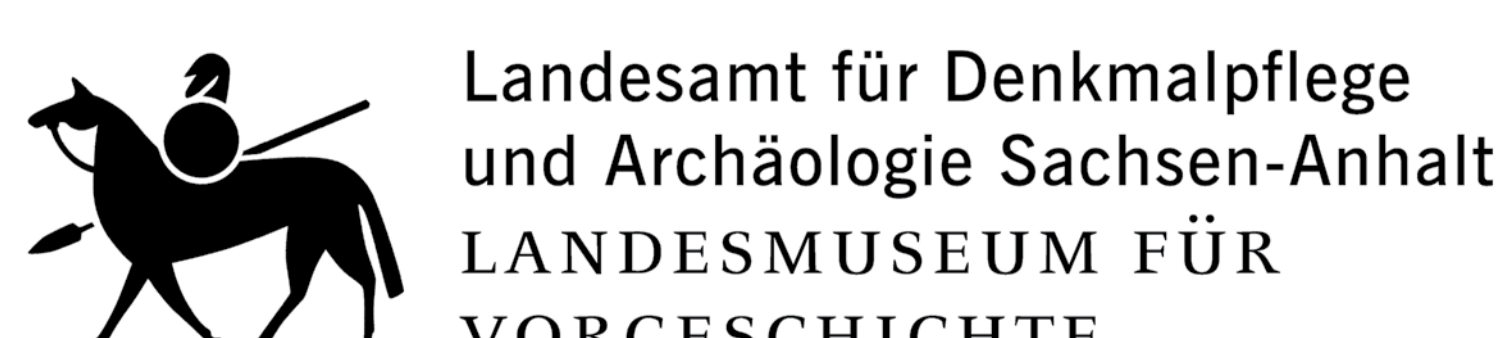


Golden neckless from Vinča, Belo Brdo, Belgrade  
N. Borić, Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade



ASOME, UAB

Bronze age societies studied by CRAFTER



# EL ARGAR

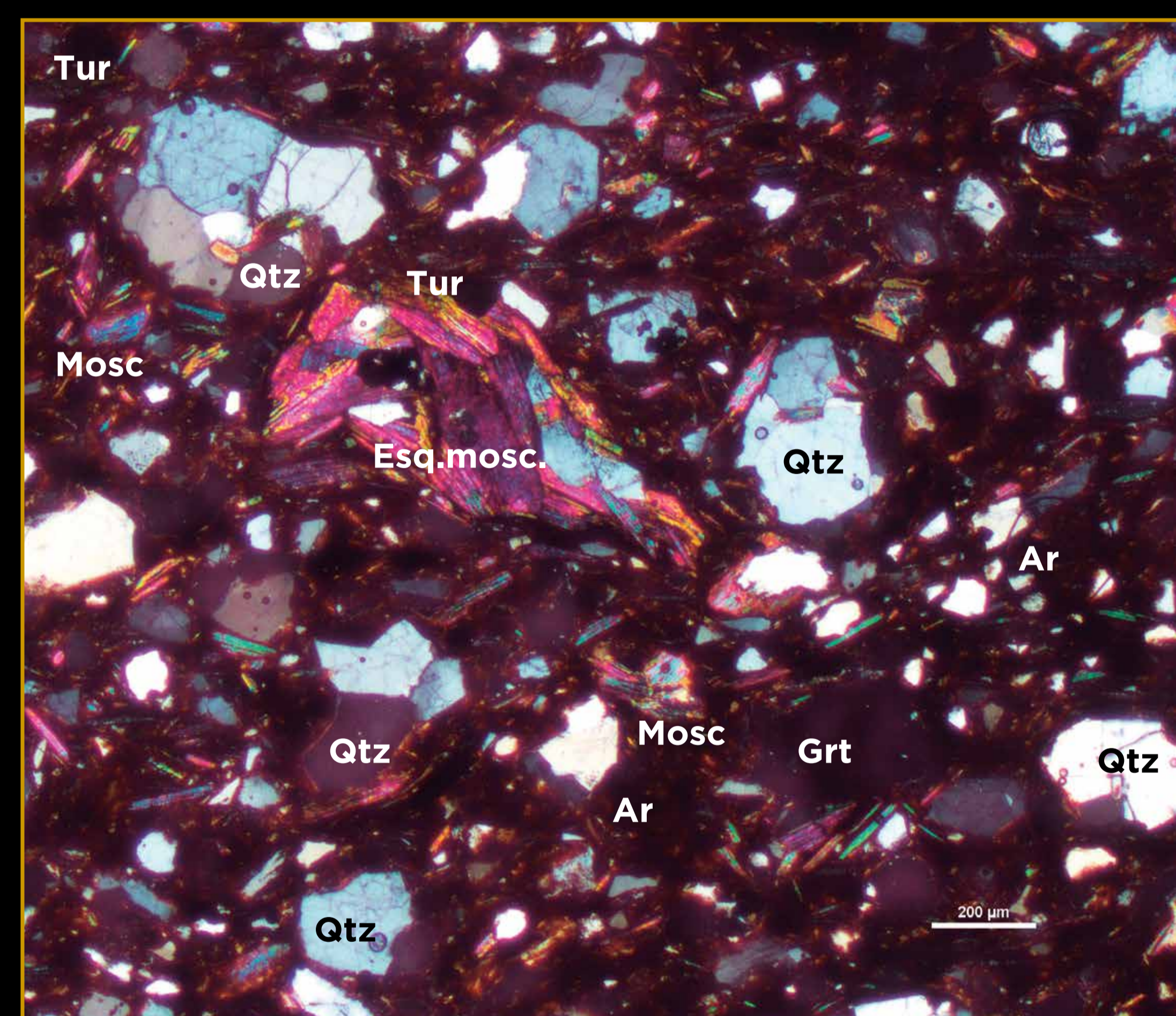
**E**l Argar defines a Bronze Age society, which spread over south-east Iberia between 2200–1550 BCE. It developed over its 650 years of existence into one of the first states in Europe, organised mainly through a network of well-protected hilltop settlements. At the height of its political and military expansion, it controlled a territory of c. 35,000 km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to present-day Belgium. The economy of **El Argar** was mainly based on extensive dry-land farming and the storage and distribution of barley in large hilltop settlements. Another feature of these settlements is a highly normative intramural burial practice. Specific grave offerings of pottery and metals were used to differentiate individuals according to their sex, age, and social class. Social inequality and political domination reached its peak around 1650 BCE. **El Argar** collapsed a century later, probably due to social upheaval.

Throughout its entire development, **El Argar** potters crafted a restricted range of pottery types: open bowls (Form 1), closed bowls (Form 2), globular vessels (Form 3), S-shaped pots (Form 4), carinated pots (Form 5), carinated lenticular vessels (Form 6), and chalice-shaped vessels with either a thin cylindrical or a wide conical foot (Form 7A & B). The conical feet of broken chalices were frequently reused as small cups (Form 8).

Characteristic of all these shapes is their well-burnished surface and, in marked contrast with the Bell Beaker pottery of the Copper Age, the avoidance of decorative motifs. During the apogee of **El Argar**, pottery seems to have been produced by highly specialised crafters, which exclusively used non-carbonated clays, mixed with a temper of ground mica schist. The spherical bases, conical bodies, and rims were probably produced and assembled in series. This led to a standardised production of pots with established volumes, including grain storage vessels with up to 300 litres capacity. Residue analyses have also confirmed the presence of animal fats, pine resins, and beeswax in the pots. 🍷



Funerary vessel of the princely grave of La Almoloya (Pliego, Murcia)



Thin section of pottery fragment seen under polarised light. Clay (Ar), quartz (Qtz), muscovite schist (Esq. mosc.), garnet (Grt), muscovite mica (Mosc), tourmaline (Tur). Graphic scale: 0,2 mm

D. Gómez-Gras, UAB



The five ha large settlement of La Bastida (Totana, Murcia) reached nearly 5 ha and a population of 1000 inhabitants

3D model D. Méndez



Chalice-shaped vessel from tomb 882 of El Argar (Cuevas, Almería)

J.A. Soldevilla



# ÚNĚTICE

**Únětice** defines an Early Bronze Age society which spread over middle Germany, southern Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Lower Austria between 2200 and 1550 BCE. Current research indicates a possible development of the **Únětice** society in middle Germany (Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia) over its 650 years of existence into one of the first states in Europe, maintained by a stratified society, sacral legitimization of the chiefs, and military power expressed in hoards of many hundreds of copper weapons, dominantly axes. Mountains and forests and the influence of different indigenous peoples preceding it furthered the evolution of regional groups.

**Únětice** economic power was mainly based on metallurgy exploiting the Slovakian mountain ore deposits, and the trade of copper artefacts and boiled salt cakes from the Halle (Saale) region. Fine copper artefacts were sold mainly to the North in exchange for amber and other unknown goods.

Increasing social inequality and political domination peaked in the advanced 18th century BCE, after which **Únětice** society declined, at least in part due to emigrations.

Throughout its development, **Únětice** craftsmanship was restricted to certain pottery types: cups of different sizes (Form 1), jugs (Form 2), beakers with lugs or ears (Form 3), bowls (Form 4), and storage vessels (Form 5). The crafting of cups culminated in elegant carinated shapes between 1975 and 1775 BCE. Thereafter a shift in pottery occurred from traditional products to new wares adopted from the Věteřov Culture, a younger offspring of the south-eastern branch of the Únětice Culture.

Because of pending mineral investigations, the process of working up the potter's clay is not yet known. Evidently the vessels are handmade, consist of fine argil, and have a smoothed and sometimes polished surface. Some sherds have been analysed for lipids: One large storage vessel of 13 litre capacity proved to contain milk and one cup pure lard. 🍵



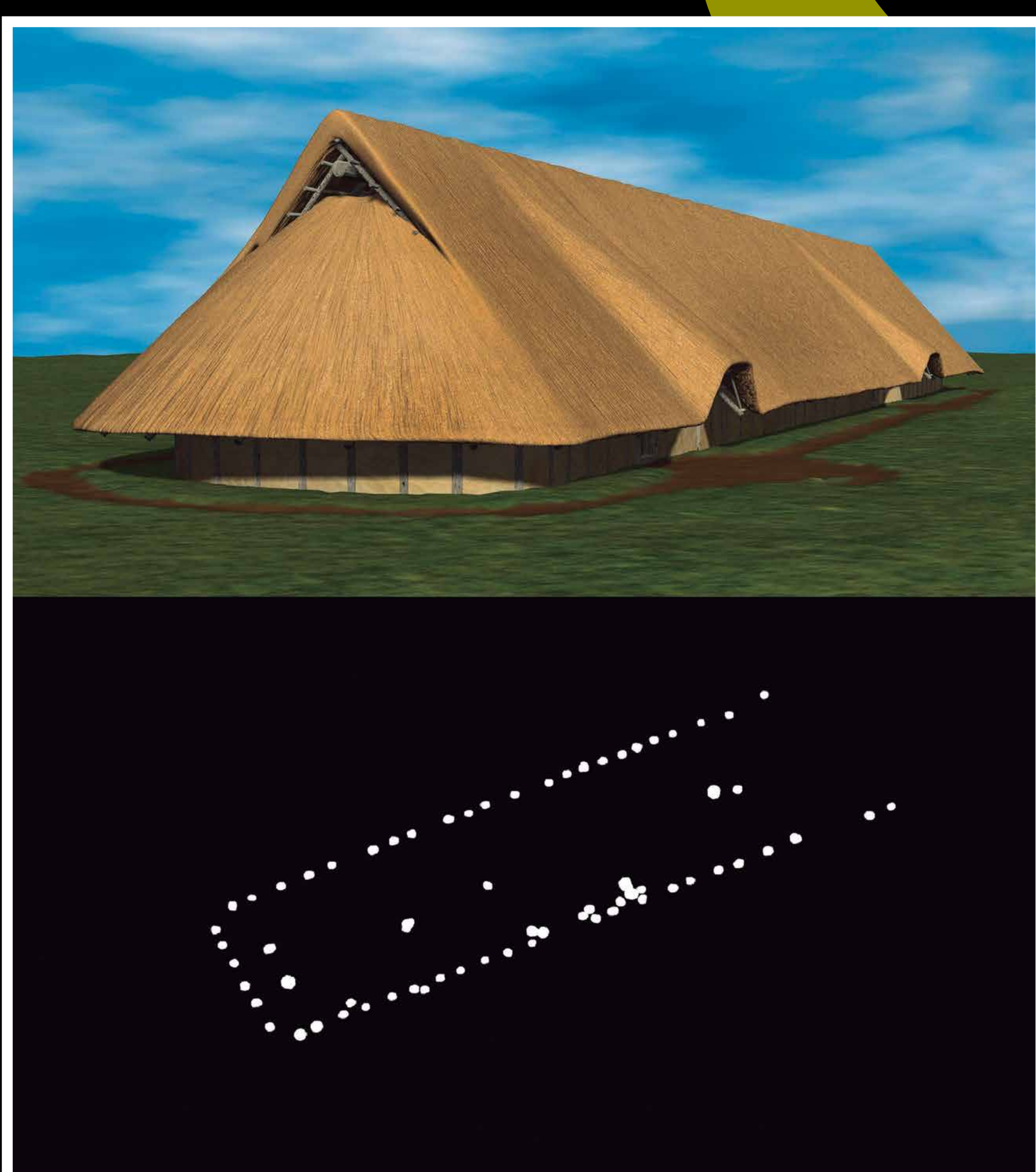
Set of Únětice vessels from seven different sites in Saxony-Anhalt which served as models for the potter

A. Hörentrup, LDA Saxony-Anhalt



The classic Únětice cups from Bottendorf, Thuringia

J. Lipták, LDA Saxony-Anhalt



Early Bronze Age long-house from Benzingerode, Saxony-Anhalt

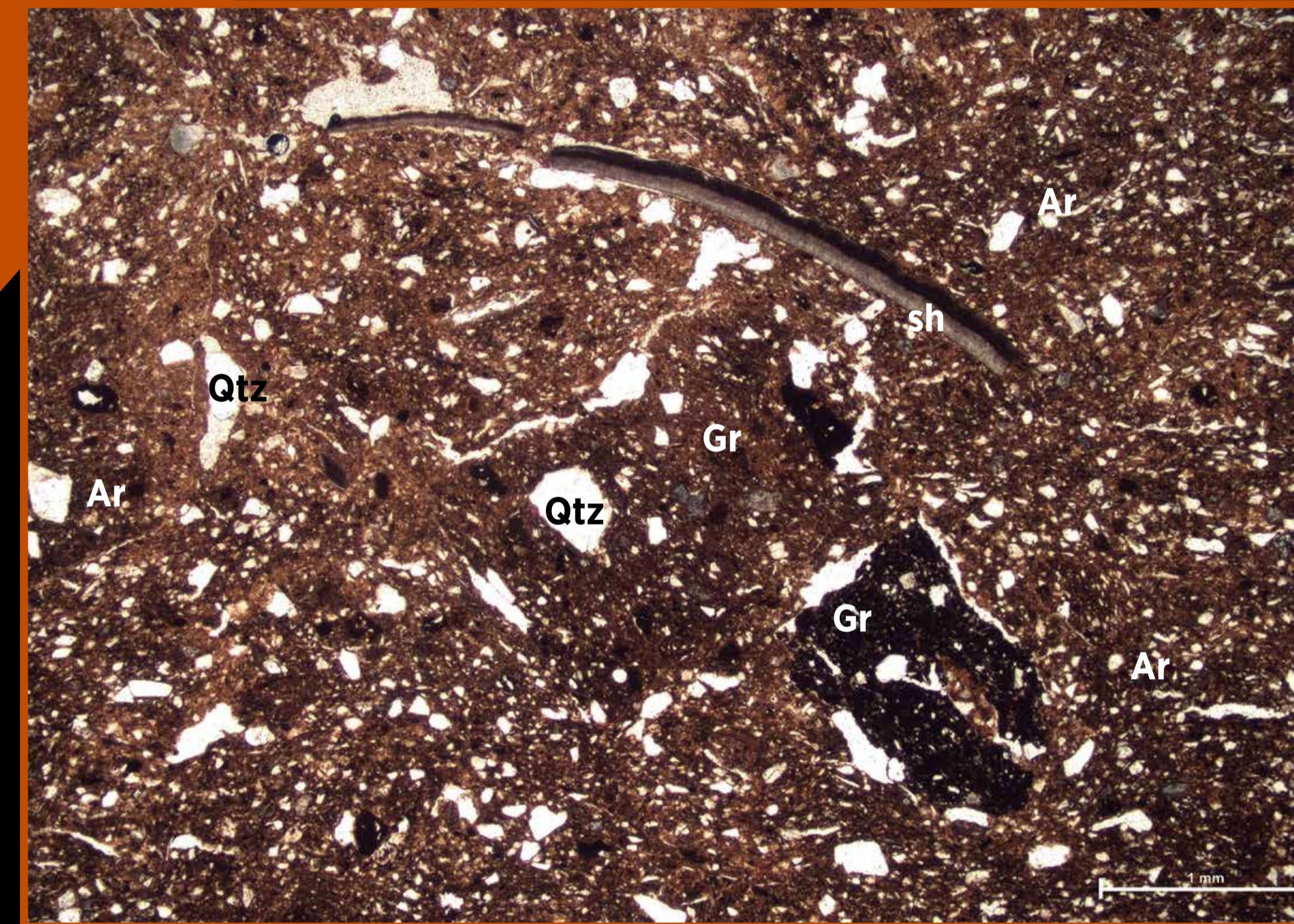
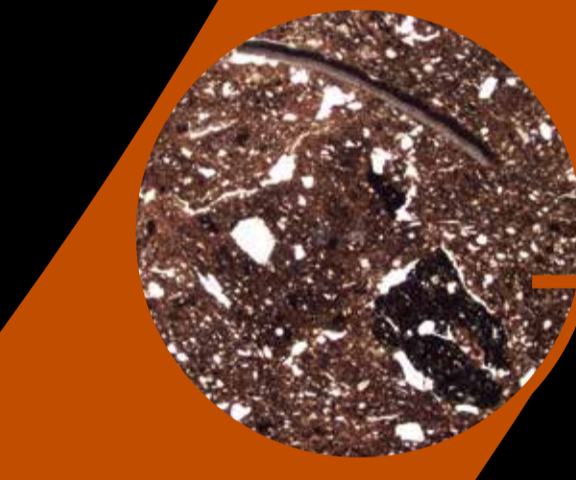
digital reconstruction J. Brauer/S. Schwerdtfeger

# VATIN

**V**atin refers to a Bronze Age culture which occupied the southern part of the Pannonian Plain, including the area along the lower Sava River and south of the Danube, between 2000 to 1500 cal BCE. It is assumed that **Vatin** developed a tribal and hierarchical social system. A network of fortified tell type settlements controlled this strategic region, which lies on the main route from central Europe to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The broad alluvial plains surrounding the broad alluvial plains surrounding the 1- to 3-hectare large tell settlements enabled a rich agriculture and husbandry. Metal finds are found in some abundance, while intensive contacts with the Aegean world between 1750-1500 BCE indicate a strong economy and circulation of goods and people.

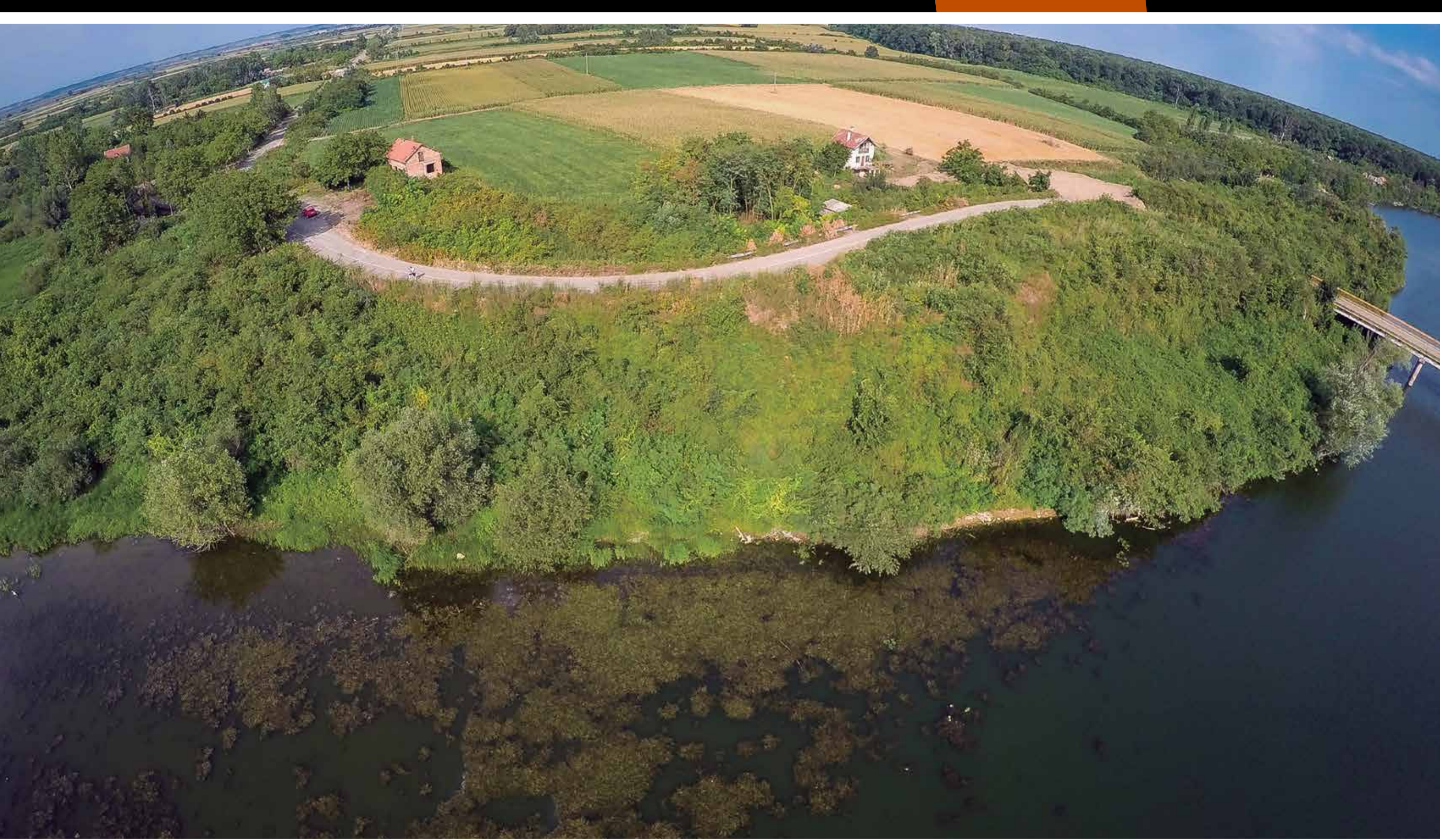
Skilled artisans produced a notable variety of vessels, characterising **Vatin** culture by their quality, shapes, and decoration. The different forms can be classified as handled or handleless beakers (*kantharoi*, jugs, and beaker-cups), bowls, small and large amphorae, pots, pithoi, double vessels, and elliptical boat-shaped vessels. Some of these vessels, such as the one- and two-handled beakers, exhibit exceptional forms manufactured by combining curved and angular shapes of receptacle and handles.

**Vatin** pottery is characterised by the use of a non-carbonated clay mixed with finely ground grog and quartz. The occasional presence of bioclasts indicates that the clays were obtained from alluvial deposits around the tell settlements. Artisans applied burnishing, incision, channelling, and imprinting to decorate their products and to give additional specificity to their beauty. Particular styles in pottery making allowed the expression of regional differences within the Vatin culture. 🐾



**Petrographic thin section of Vatin pottery from Omoljica, Serbia.** Clay (Ar), grog (Gr), quartz (Qtz) & bioclast (Sh)

D. Gómez-Gras, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona



**Vatin tell settlement of Bosut, Serbia**

A. Roman,



**Two handled *kantharoi* from Omoljica, Serbia.** They served as a model for our potter

N. Boric, National Museum, Belgrade

# FÜZESABONY

# Y

The name **Füzesabony** refers to a specific ceramic style: a combination of unique vessel forms, very rich ornamentation and a specific manufacturing technique. The style was in use from 1900-1450 BCE, covering a vast territory from the hilly Lesser Poland to the plain Bihar Region in Northeastern Hungary and Western Romania.

Following a long history of research since the first excavations at the eponymous settlement at Füzesabony, Hungary and other research at similar Romanian sites, nowadays most scholars call this whole Middle Bronze Age stylistic group “Otomani-Füzesabony Cultural Complex”.

The largest settlements of these communities were the so-called tells: multilayer sites created by a long, intensive sedentary way of life. Tell settlements situated at the chokepoints of trade routes have a fortified, stratified inner core, often surrounded by an extensive, single-layer settlement part. Houses usually had a timber-framed structure and wattle-and-daub walls.

Communities using Füzesabony pottery founded extended cemeteries with over 1200 graves. In most cases, the cemeteries consist of graves with a uniform and strict inhumation burial rite, were located within 1 km from the tell settlements, separated by natural landmarks (e.g. a brook). Cremated burials appeared in the late, so-called Koszider Period, ca. 1600-1450 BCE. The cemeteries often include extremely rich burials accompanied by gold or amber jewels, as well as bronze tools and weapons. Füzesabony style pottery was made by hand from locally available clays, with slab and coil building techniques. Fine pottery is always a highly polished, dark ware (fired under reducing conditions). The clay for such jugs, cups and ornamental bowls was tempered with grog (finely ground pottery fragments) and/or sand. Coarse ware (e.g. cooking pots, amphorae or deep bowls) are never polished. They are manufactured from clay tempered with grog.

The most characteristic feature of Füzesabony style pottery is the use of plastic, often organic, channelled or incised ornamental motifs. Pointed knobs surrounded by round channelling, or intertwined wavy lines (so-called ‘running spirals’) are typical motifs on jugs and bowls. The bottom of the ornamental bowls often display knobs with channelling in a concentric composition, which may even bear cosmological meanings. Due to the large variability of ornaments and forms, and the hand-made technique, there are practically no two identical vessels within the Füzesabony style. 🍶

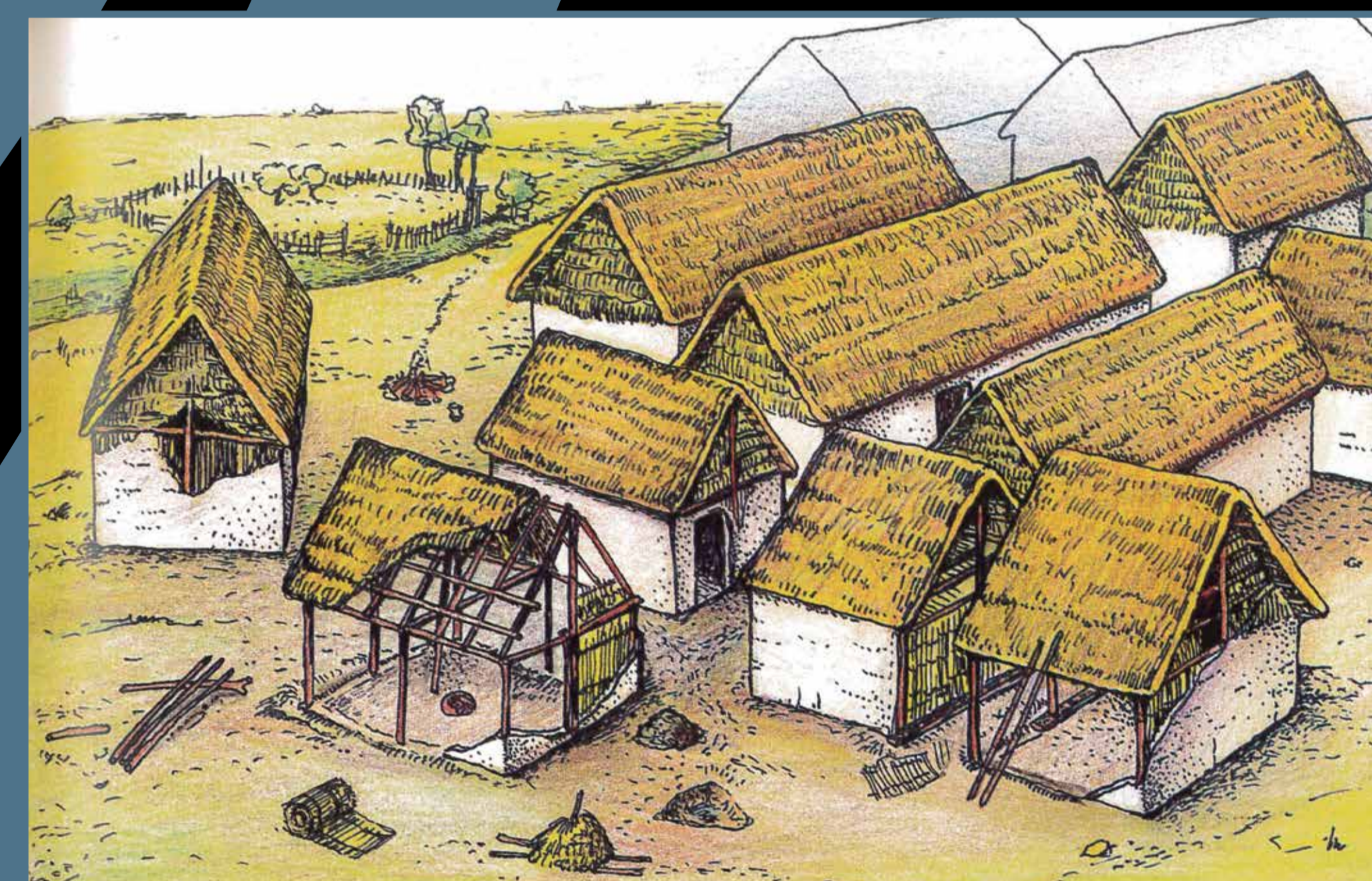


Richly decorated handled jug



Typical bowl with special ornamentation form from channelled knobs

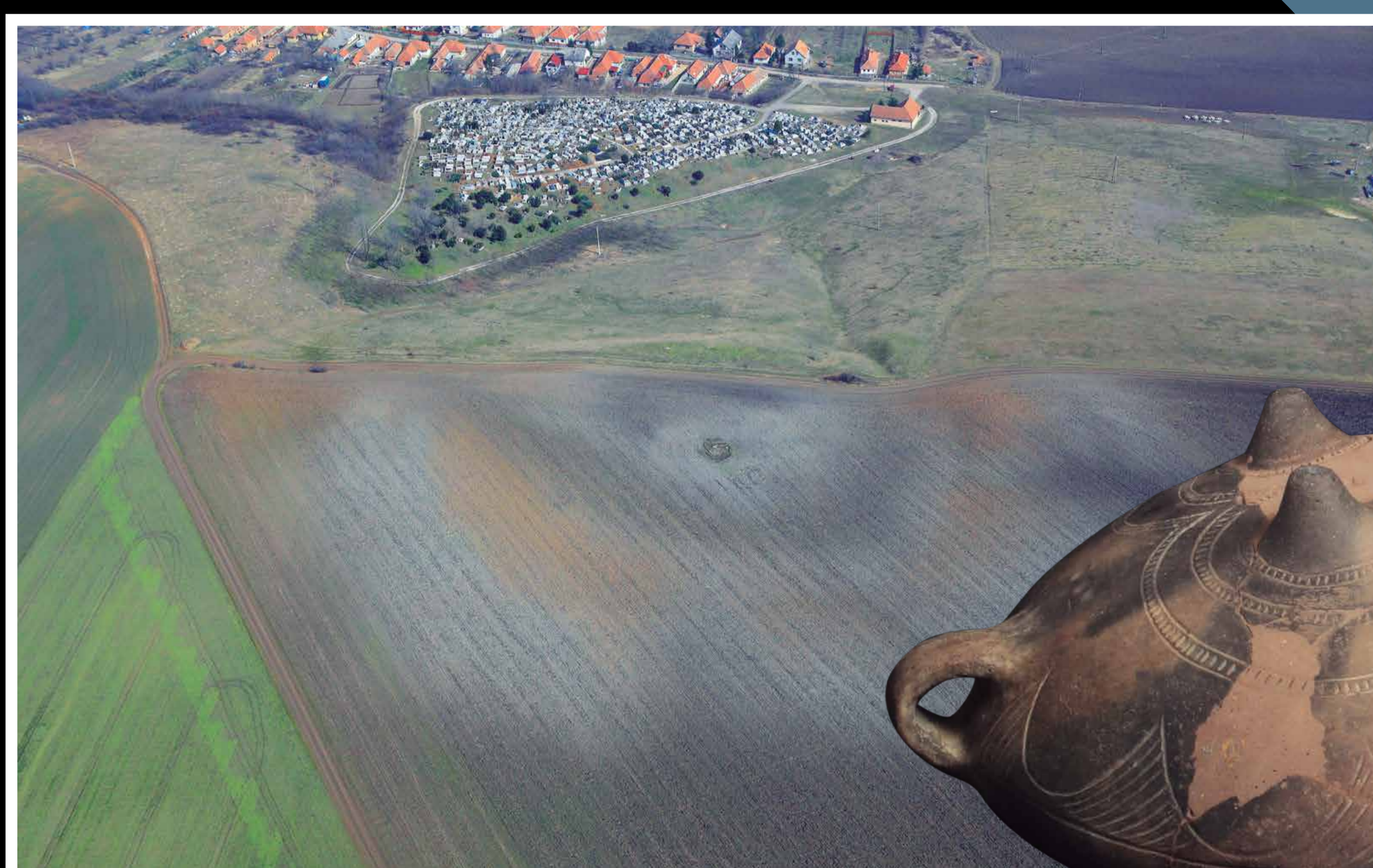
I. Czinegéné Kiss, Déri Múzeum



Reconstruction of the eponymous Füzesabony-Öregdomb tell-settlement

Made by Agoston Dékány & Márta Lacza

“Beer-mug” form decorated with channelled, incised running spirals and bowl with knob-legs and special incised ornamentation.



Aerial photo of the fortified Füzesabony tell of Tard-Tatárdomb

Made by Civertan Bt., from the courtesy of Klára P. Fischl

