

## **Late Neolithic white-painted pottery from the ritual complexes of Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, Southeastern Bulgaria**

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**Abstract.** This article presents a specific technological type of ornamentation widespread in the ceramic assemblages from the Late Neolithic complexes of Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 in Southeastern Bulgaria. This type is the Late Neolithic white-painted pottery.

On both sites, patterns with white paint have been found on various categories of ware, and most often they have been applied on the outer surface of bowls and pots. Decoration displays linear elements often forming angle-shaped, rhomboid and netlike motifs. White-painted patterns are also found combined with red-painted, fluting, stabbed or incised decoration.

There are two main areas in which white-painted ornamentation was widespread during the late 6th millennium and the early 5th millennium BC - to the south, in the region of the Aegean islands, and to the north - along the middle courses of the rivers Maritsa and Tundzha.

**Keywords:** Late Neolithic, pottery, white-painted

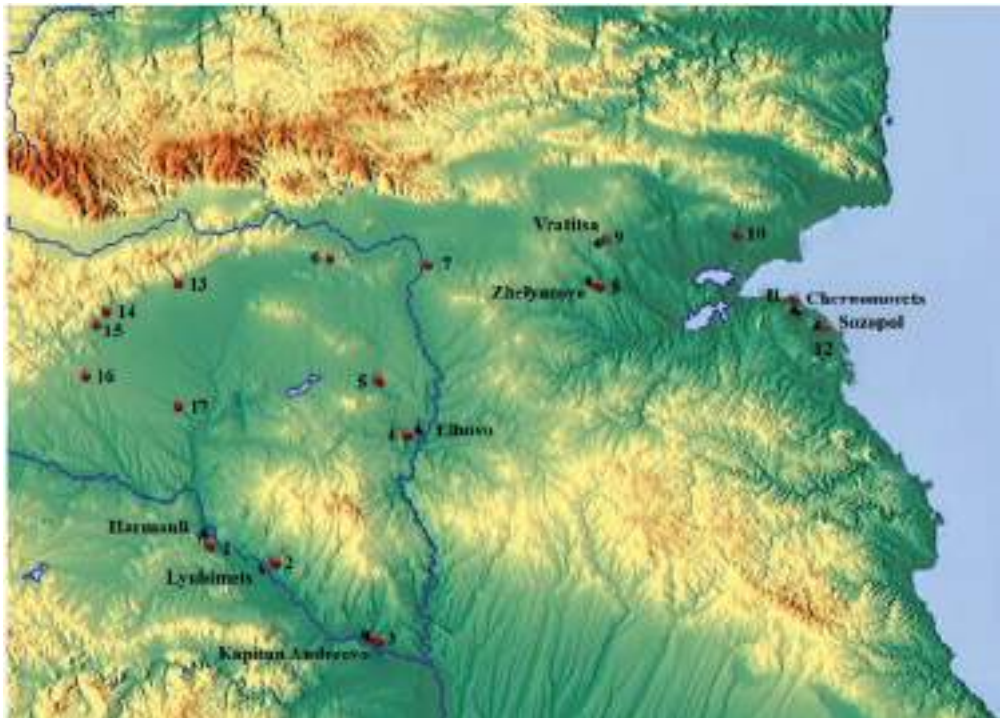
The ornamentation of various ceramic vessels is a specific element in the cultural characteristic of a particular prehistoric site or region and as such is the source of diverse chronological information. This article delivers currently available data about a specific technological type of decoration in the ceramic assemblages from the Late Neolithic ritual centres of Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 which existed at the end of the 6th millennium and at the beginning of the 5th millennium BC along the middle course of the river Maritsa<sup>1</sup>. These include diversely shaped dark ceramic vessels ornamented with white paint.

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<sup>1</sup> The ceramic assemblages from the two sites have been provided to me for research by their explorers - Acad. Vassil Nikolov and Chief Assistant Dr. Victoria Petrova to whom I am grateful for the cooperation.

The ritual centre of Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 occupies a low-lying rounded elevation sitting on a T1 terrace of the river Maritsa, about 3.5 km to the east of the town of Lyubimets (Nikolov 2002, 25), while the centre near Kapitan Andreevo is located 2 km to the east of the village of Kapitan Andreevo, Svilengrad region, and occupies a low river terrace of the river Maritsa in close proximity of the eponymous border checkpoint (Nikolov, Nikov, Hristova 2007, 51; Nikolov et al. 2013, 60).

The subject of the appearance and distribution of white-painted pottery during the last stage of the Late Neolithic is poorly represented in archaeological literature. Usually, studies only mention the presence of sherds displaying patterns applied with white paint, or as an exception - with red paint. Separate sherds have become known from the prehistoric settlements in Northern Thrace - Tell Karanovo, Kaloyanovets, Obruchishte, Tell Stara Zagora-Okrazhna



**Fig. 1.** Late Neolithic sites to the south of the Balkan Range with recorded ceramic vessels decorated with white paint: 1 - Harmanli-Karacheliya; 2 - Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2; 3 - Kapitan Andreevo; 4 - Elhovo-Turskoto kyoshe; 5 - Drama-Merdzhumekya; 6 - Hadzhidimitrovo-Tandarski bair; 7 - Malenovo; 8 - Tell Zhelyazovo-Borunkata; 9 - Vratitsa-Krushaka; 10 - Tell Burgas; 11 - Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri; 12 - Sozopol-Budzhaka; 13 - Tell Karanovo; 14 - Stara Zagora-Bereketska mogila; 15 - Stara Zagora-Okrazhna bolnitsa; 16 - Kaloyanovets; 17 - Obruchishte

bolnitsa (Bozhilov 2000, 71), Tell Stara Zagora-Bereketska mogila<sup>2</sup> and Drama-Merdzhumekya (Lichardus, Iliev, Christov 2002, 335, Taf. 20: 4, 6; 21: 7). A single exception is an article by Ilia Iliev exploring the Late Neolithic white-painted pottery from Elhovo-Turskoto kyoshe, along the middle course of the river Tundzha, in which the author conducts a more extensive analysis of pottery and finds parallels with the Eastern Aegean islands of Samos, Chios, Kalymnos and Kos (Iliev 2004, 53-57).

In the recent years, the number of sites in the Bulgarian lands where this specific technological type of decoration has been found (Fig. 1) has increased. Sherds from pottery with white paint have been unearthed in Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri<sup>3</sup>, Sozopol-Budzhaka<sup>4</sup>, Vratitsa-Krushaka (Leshtakov 2016, 27), Tell Zhelyazovo-Borunkata<sup>5</sup>, Tell Burgas<sup>6</sup> (all of them in the region of the Bulgarian Southern Black Sea Coast); Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, Kapitan Andreevo and Harmanli-Karacheliya<sup>7</sup>, Haskovo region (along the middle course of the river Maritsa); Hadzhidimitrovo-Tandarski bair<sup>8</sup> and on the site near Malenovo<sup>9</sup>, Yambol region (along the middle course of the river Tundzha).

In the pottery from the ritual complexes of Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 and Kapitan Andreevo the share of uncovered vessels and sherds decorated with white paint is considerable. The ceramic vessels on which white ornamentation has been applied are thin-walled with a black surface which is very well smoothed to the point of being polished. In rare cases, patterns have been applied to light, brown or beige-brown very well smoothed surfaces.

The vessels and sherds with white ornamentation from Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 exceed 200; they originate from bowls, pots, shoulder vessels and cups.

In the category of bowls the white patterns are found on either shallow or deep conical bowls and on shoulder bowls. White-painted decoration has been applied predominantly on the outer surface and consist of thin or medium-thick straight or broken lines sometimes combined with stabs or with incised decoration - incised lines or a netlike ornament (Fig. 2 1, 6, 12; 4 3). Among the deep bowls from Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, a group stands out with a lip thickened on the outside below the rim and also displaying specific ornamentation. Fluting motifs or dimples have been added on the modelled

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<sup>2</sup> Oral information from Petar Kalchev.

<sup>3</sup> Oral information from Petar Leshtakov and observations of the author during research of the ceramic assemblage.

<sup>4</sup> Oral information from Petar Leshtakov and observations of the author during research of the ceramic assemblage.

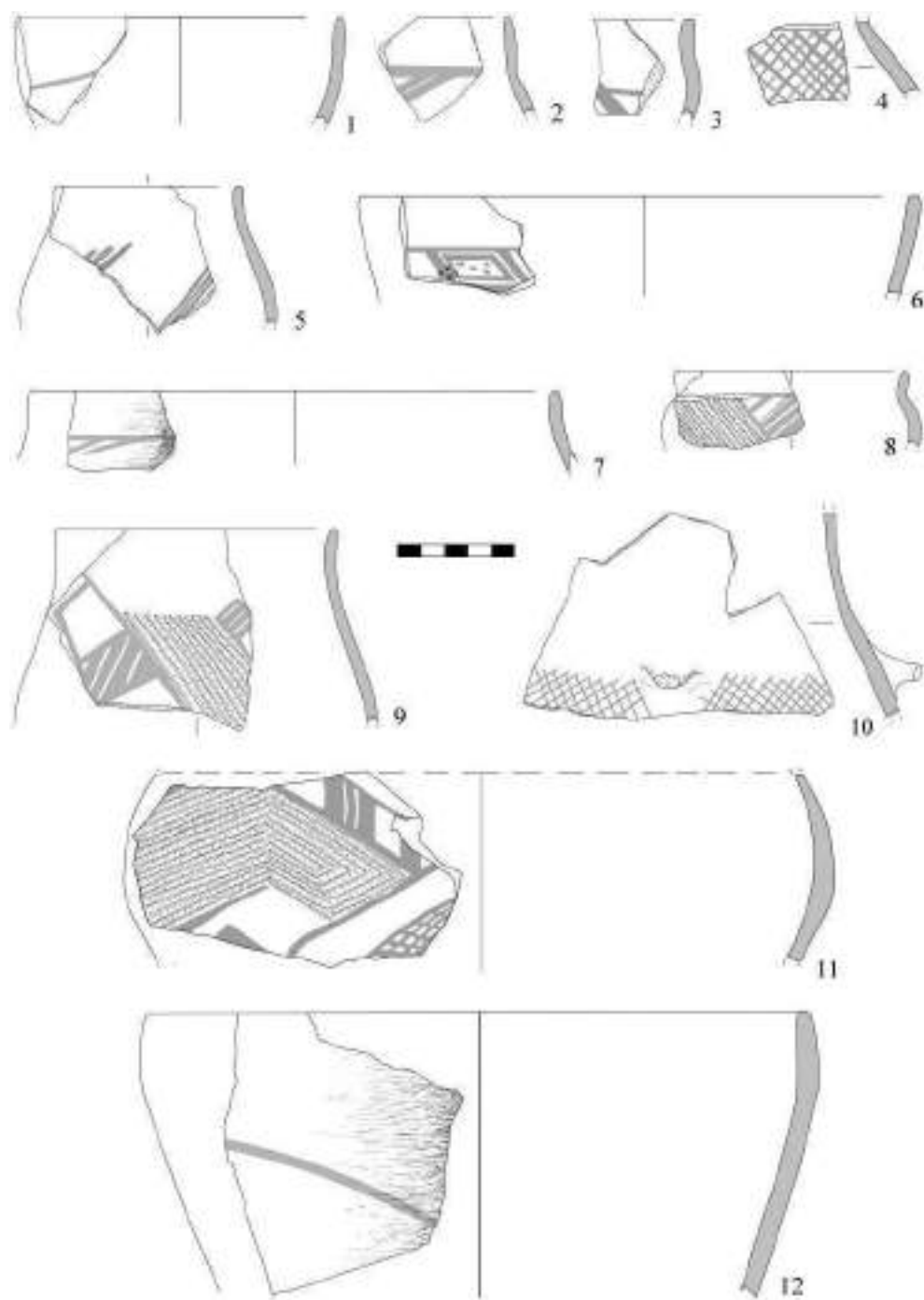
<sup>5</sup> Special thanks to Acad. Vassil Nikolov and Miroslav Klasnakov for the opportunity to study the unpublished ceramic assemblage.

<sup>6</sup> Special thanks to Miroslav Klasnakov for the opportunity to explore part of the ceramic assemblage.

<sup>7</sup> Special thanks to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Krum Bacvarov for the opportunity to explore the ceramic assemblage from the site.

<sup>8</sup> Oral information from excavation director, Chief Assistant Victoria Petrova, for which I express my gratitude. The information about the ceramic assemblage from the site has not been published.

<sup>9</sup> Special thanks to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefan Aleksandrov and Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Todorova for the opportunity to explore the ceramic assemblage from the site.



**Fig. 2.** Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2.  
Late Neolithic pottery with white-painted ornamentation

horizontal cordon, and from the cordon down - white-painted ornamentation, fluting decoration or a combination of the two (Fig. 3; 4 2, 5, 9-10) have been added. Painted decoration is presented in variants with thin, medium-thick or thick lines, as well as with rhombic and cordon-shaped elements.

Likewise, in shoulder bowls the white patterns occupy part of the outer surface under the shoulder - they include medium-thick lines spaced out horizontally or vertically, sometimes combined with stabs along the shoulder.

In the category of pots the white-painted patterns are found on three of the basic pot shapes - shallow, shoulder and carinated ones.

On shallow pots, the decoration occupies the entire outer surface and represents predominantly lineal elements (Fig. 2 2-3, 7-8). It is often coupled with very fine, narrow and shallow fluting motifs arranged quite closely; it is also found combined with stabs.

On shoulder bowls the white patterns take up the upper half of the entire outer surface and comprise narrow and medium-thick lines which outline or fill cordon-shaped sections, sometimes combined with fine, slanting flutings (Fig. 2 9).

Among carinated bowls, painted decoration has been found on only one vessel and displays thin slanted lines painted in white paint, with oval stabs applied along the shoulder.

In the category of shoulder vessels, painted decoration has been recorded on closed shoulder vessels, applied with white paint and covering the entire body or bulge of the vessel; sometimes it is combined with flutes (Fig. 2 11). Various linear motifs have been found, applied with narrow and wide lines or a netlike ornament (Fig. 2 10). Painted decoration in combination with fluting is applied to the entire body, excluding the neck of the vessel. The flutes are very fine and narrow and outline spiral meanders that are marked by white-painted thin to thick lines. One of the vessels has a netlike ornament painted in white paint.

Painted decoration is also found on the rounded carinated cups. In the bulging part of the vessel, parallel medium-thick slanting lines have been painted with white paint (Fig. 2 5).

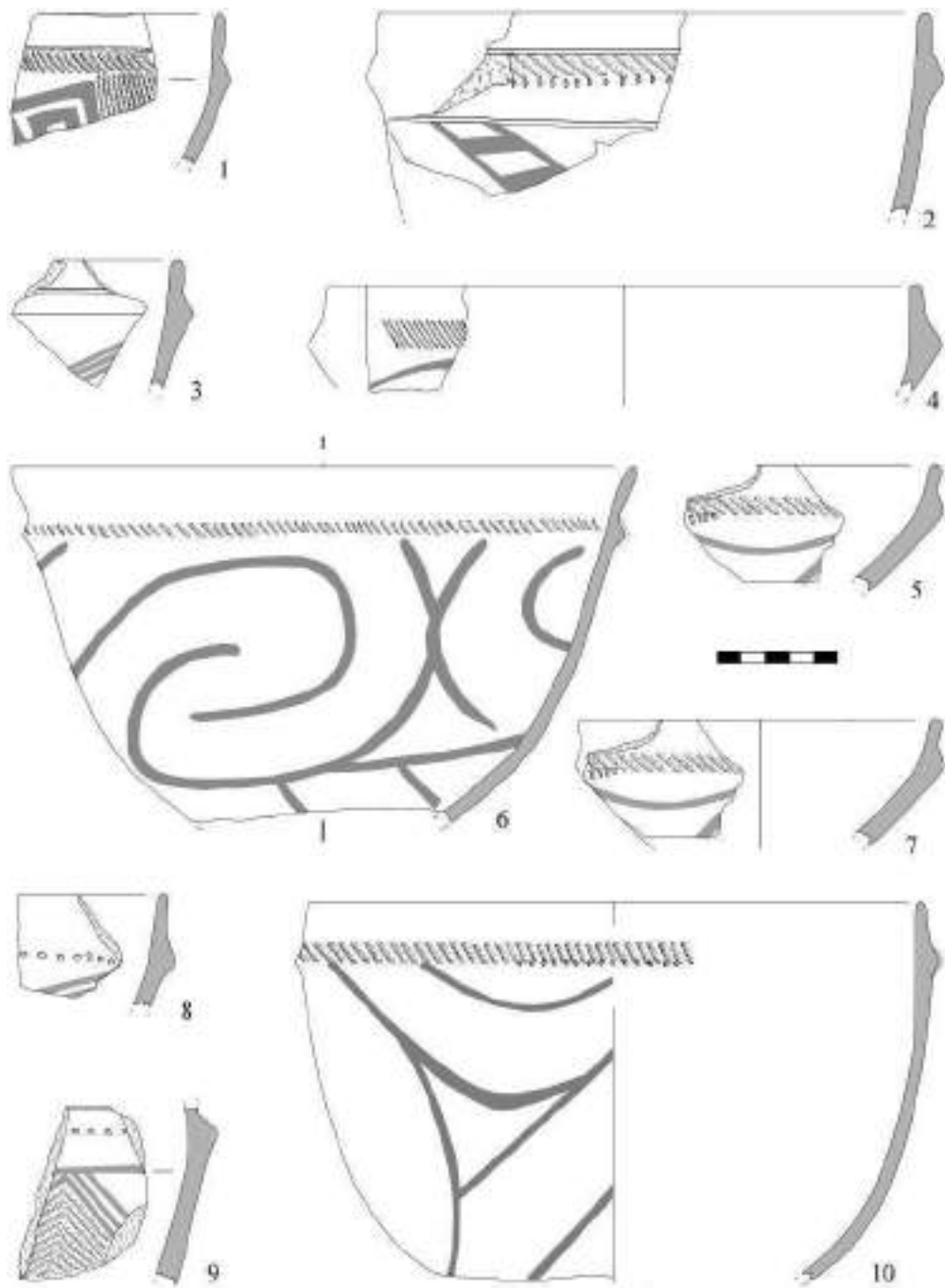
Spiral-meander motifs of one or two thin cordons with white paint inlay or solid parallel cordons have been identified on sherds with painted decoration, which cannot be attributed to a specific shape. Lines forming netlike, triangular or nested angular elements are also common. Some of the sherds display combined medium thick and thick lines (Fig. 2 4; 3 1, 4 1, 6-8).

Vessels and sherds with white patterns from Kapitan Andreevo exceed 100: these belong to bowls, pots, jugs, shoulder vessels and cups.

In the category of bowls, the white-painted ornamentation has been recorded on shallow or deep conical bowls and shoulder bowls.

White-painted ornamentation on shallow bowls occupies their outer surface and consists of thin or medium-thick parallel lines (Fig. 5 1-2). In some cases it is combined with a row of stabbed dots.

White-painted decoration on deep bowls is also quite common. It comprises narrow slanted, vertical, horizontal, arcuate and broken lines on the outer surface (Fig. 5 3; 6 5), only sporadically combined with a horizontal line of stabbed dots.



**Fig. 3.** Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2.  
Late Neolithic pottery with white-painted ornamentation



**Fig. 4.** Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2.  
Late Neolithic pottery with white-painted ornamentation

On shoulder bowls, white-painted decoration has only been recorded on double conical vessels. It is applied on the upper part of the vessel or over the entire outer surface. It comprises predominantly horizontal, slanting or arcuate parallel lines. Painted decoration is sometimes combined with stabs (Fig. 5 4).

White-painted ornamentation has been recorded also among the basic models of shallow and shoulder pots (Fig. 5 5-7). Usually, it occupies the upper section of the shallow pots. It comprises horizontal and arcuate narrow parallel lines, including one broader line just below the rim. On the rim section itself, the lines are horizontal and gradually transform into broken ones. The white-painted ornamentation has been applied also on the entire outer surface of one of the pots - one horizontal line, and below it one bending line and a section outlined and filled in with lines of white paint.

Among shoulder pots painted decoration has been recorded on a more specific group of ware with more or less arcuate protuberant walls and with an internal lug. White-painted ornamentation has been applied across the entire external surface of one of these pots - horizontal, slanted and broken narrow lines (Fig. 5 9).

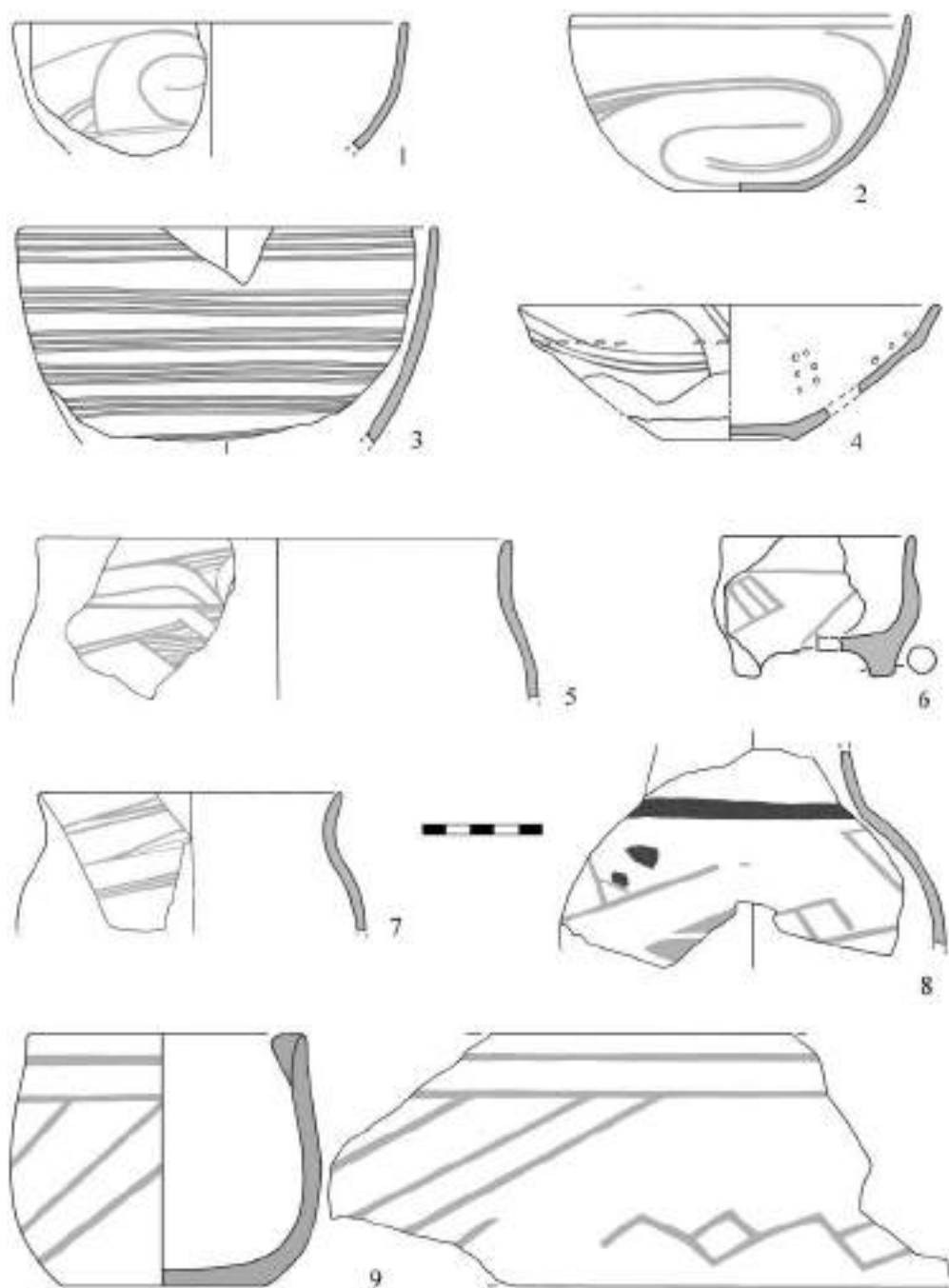
In the category of jugs, white-painted decoration is displayed on the neck of one such vessel and includes short, horizontal lines.

White-painted ornamentation has been found also on closed shoulder vessels. Ornamentation has been applied with white or red paint and comprises the whole body. It consists of straight, broken, vertical or horizontal lines which vary in length and width. In one of the cases, a wide cordon filled with red paint has been applied between the neck and the body (Fig. 5 8).

The sherds with painted decoration include ones with white or red paint, however white ornamentation is more common. The most common motifs are of the spiral-meander type made with one or two thin lines filled with white paint, sometimes combined with stabbed dots or dense parallel cordons which cover the better part of the vessel; a netlike ornament has also been found (Fig. 6 1-4, 6-8). The cordons applied with red paint are broader, either horizontal or slanting. Usually three parallel lines have been applied, with the middle one being thinner. Other common lines include one filled with white paint, forming netlike, triangular or nested angular elements.

On both sites white-painted patterns have been found on various categories of vessels, and have been most commonly applied on the outer surface of bowls and pots. Decoration mostly includes linear elements combined to form angular, rhomboid, spiral-meander or netlike motifs. The white-painted patterns are also found combined with red paint, fluting, stabbed and incised decoration. A peculiarity in the technology of applying the white-painted ornamentation in Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 is that very often, prior to laying the white line or cordon, a very thin incised line was applied aimed to mark the position of the ornamental motif (Fig. 5 1-4). The incised line was made with a fine nib. In many cases the paint has dropped off and the place where it had been applied looks more opaque or only the marking thin line has survived. The paint itself has been found in two modifications - fine or dense and crumbly, with a coarser texture. Fine paint with dense texture is the more common one.





**Fig. 5.** Kapitan Andreevo.  
Late Neolithic pottery with white-painted ornamentation



**Fig. 6.** Kapitan Andreevo.  
Late Neolithic pottery with white-painted ornamentation

Some close counterparts of the white-painted pottery from Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2 have been found in the ceramic assemblages of sites along the middle course of the river Tundzha - in Elhovo-Turskoto kyoshe and Drama-Merdzhumekya, Yambol region, and in the region of the Bulgarian Southern Black Sea Coast, with the largest number of examples seen in Sozopol-Budzhaka and Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri. The main displayed elements from the ornamental composition are similar - dense, narrow, infrequently broad, vertical parallel lines applied on predominantly fine vessels with gray-black or black very well smoothed or polished surface.

Data available so far map out three regions in the present-day Bulgarian lands with concentrations of pottery with white-painted ornamentation - along the middle course of the river Maritsa (Kapitan Andreevo, Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, Harmanli-Karacheliya), along the middle course of the river Tundzha (Elhovo-Turskoto kyoshe, Drama-Merdzhumekya, Hadzhidimitrovo-Tandarski bair, Malenovo) and in the region of the Bulgarian Southern Black Sea Coast (Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri, Sozopol-Budzhaka, Vratitsa-Krushaka, Tell Zhelyazovo-Borunkata, Tell Burgas). The highest concentrations of sherds are found in Kapitan Andreevo, Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, Elhovo-Turskoto kyoshe and Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri. All three regions have emerged as important areas of contact connecting Northwestern Anatolia and Eastern Thrace with the Southeastern Balkans.

In the north, the concentration of white-painted pottery tangibly decreases, and only separate sherds have been recorded on sites in the Stara Zagora valley - Tell Karanovo, Kaloyanovets, Obruchishte, Tell Stara Zagora-Okrazhna bolnitsa (Bozhilov 2005, 71), Tell Stara Zagora-Bereketska mogila.

The ornamentation discussed here is very typical of the region of the Aegean islands during the same chronological period. The painted elements are very similar to their counterparts in the ritual centres of Kapitan Andreevo and Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2. The white paint is dense and fine and was usually applied over a black polished surface. It is most common in the ceramic assemblages from the sites on the Cyclades and on the Southern Sporades. White-painted decoration is the main ornamental technique in the ceramic assemblage from the islet of Saliagos (Evans, Renfrew 1968). It has been recorded in various categories of ware - mainly conic bowls, pots and closed shoulder vessels (Evans, Renfrew 1968, fig. 36 7, 9-10, 12-14; 41 1-2; 6, 8; 42 13; 49; 50 1-II; 51; 52 5, 9, II; 56 19). In some cases a narrower red line has been applied over the white one. Sherds with white paint have also been found in Mavri Spilia on the island of Mikonos (Belmont, Renfrew 1964, 397), in the Cave of Zas on the island of Naxos (Zachos, Douzougli 2019, 2) and in the Cave of Antiparos on the island of Antiparos (Mavridis 2010, fig. 6). In the region of the Southern Sporades sherds with white paint have been recorded at the upper level of the Agio Gala Cave (Hood 1981, 59; pl. 7b; 10c) - mainly on pots and closed shouldered vessels, and only as an exception on bowls; as well as in the Malkayasi Cave (Peschlow-Bindokat, Gerber 2012, Fig. 43). White decoration is also found in Emporio X-VIII (Hood 1981, pl. 33c 177, 33d 178; 34 267-268), on the island of Kalymnos (Furness 1957, pl. XIX 11-17) and in Tigani II (Felsch 1988, Taf. 19 7).

Separate sherds decorated with white paint have been uncovered in Kumocağı/Avariz in Eastern Thrace - a sherd from a pot with two vertical handles, a sherd from a closed shoulder vessel and sherds from vessels the shape of which cannot be defined (Erdoğu 2001, Fig. IV.9 1). Sherds with white paint are also known from Tepeyani (Erdoğu 1995, Fig 2 1, 3), two sherds - from Toptepe (Özdoğan, Miyake, Ozbasaran-Dede 1991, Fig. 20 4-5), and a few more from Hoca Çeşme I (Özdoğan 2013, Fig. 85).

In Bithynia, white-painted decoration has been uncovered in Demirchihüyük - mainly on pots (Seeher 1987, Taf. 29 24-26). In the region of Central Anatolia, sherds with white paint have been recorded in Büyük Güllücek (Kosay, Akok 1948, res. 19; 20; Kosay, Akok 1957, res. XI) and Alaca Höyük (Kosay, Akok 1966, lev. 61 *g197*), some of them - from bowls. A sherd from a bowl originating from İkiztepe II in the Southern Black Sea region of Anatolia displays incised circles on its inner surface and white-painted decoration on its outer surface (Alkim, Alkim, Bigli 1988, Pl. XXXV).

Sherds with white patterns on black polished surface have been recorded also on the site of Limenaria on the island of Thassos (Papadopoulos, Malamidou 2008, 430).

The drawn up parallels outline another area with concentration of white-painted pottery - the Aegean islands, more particularly the Cyclades and the Southern Sporades, with a few sherds also uncovered in various parts of Eastern Thrace, Troad, Bithynia, the Southern Black Sea region, Central Anatolia and on the island of Thassos. The absence of more pottery of this type in Eastern Thrace and Troad is probably due to few excavated and large enough sites.

For the time being, there are grounds to define two main areas where white-painted ornamentation is widespread - to the south, within the bounds of the Aegean islands, and to the north, along the middle courses of the rivers Maritsa and Tundzha as well as along the Bulgarian Southern Black Sea Coast. In both areas white-painted ornamentation has been applied mainly on thin-walled pottery with polished black surface. Elements displayed are also similar - including parallel narrow or broader lines, zig-zag shaped, netlike and only sporadically, spiral-meander or nested elements.

Available data about the distribution of the Late Neolithic white ornamentation suggests that its concentration is in the southern part of what V. Nikolov has termed Northern Anatolian-Eastern Balkan or Circumpontic zone (Nikolov 1998), with two major hubs of reproduction - the Aegean islands to the south and the Southeastern Balkan region<sup>10</sup> to the north. At this stage of research, it is hard to say where the idea emerged and what direction of penetration this specific type of pottery ornamented with white patterns followed, however, the outlined area of distribution is yet another example of the existence of contacts and cultural influences within the Circumpontic cultural zone itself.

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<sup>10</sup> The name "Southeastern Balkan region" is used here as a collective name for the sites on the Bulgarian Southern Black Sea Coast, and along the middle courses of the rivers Maritsa and Tundzha.

The Late Neolithic white patterns have emerged as an important significative element for clarifying the chronological position of the sites. Based on C14 dates established so far (5200 – 5050 BC for Lyubimets-Dana bunar 2, 5100 - 4900/4850 BC for Kapitan Andreevo and 5000 - 4900/4850 BC for Chernomorets-Akladi Cheiri) and on the other vessels and shapes typical of the two sites, its emergence and use can be dated in the final stage of the Late Neolithic - reaching its end and the transition to the Early Chalcolithic in the Southeastern Balkans.

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