

5. Early Neolithic in Thrace

If we now look at the Thracian region bordering the Aegean to the north-east, the methodological difficulty is that we can only record contacts between western Anatolia and the Aegean, on the one hand, and Thrace, on the other, after the neolithisation (Fig. 78). The problem of the general absence of Epi-Palaeolithic/Mesolithic sites has already been discussed. Directly connected to this is also the difficult question about how the neolithisation was accomplished, and, very specifically, by means of which groups it was transported. Due to the lack of information about pre-Neolithic settlement in further parts of the Balkans, in the simplest scenario it might be supposed that there was immigration of Neolithic groups from central western Anatolia. Such a stance can, however, neither be proven nor disproven. However, there is a noticeable transformation of the Neolithic package, which cannot be explained simply by a rapid adaptation to the changed geographical and climatic conditions in the areas north of the Aegean. In the Balkans, fundamentally different and much more rudimentary forms of structure appear with the neolithisation which cannot be compared to central western Anatolia's mudbrick architecture on stone socle foundations. The Balkans' environment provides the necessary building material in abundance, and such an architectural form would also be climatically sensible there. Despite this, no house types from Thrace have been found which are even remotely related to the solid house types of central western Anatolia. The clear reduction in the expenditure of labour in the erection of Early Neolithic houses in the Balkan region could either point to an earlier, local tradition involving the building of simpler houses or huts, or suggest that the settlers from western Anatolia were for one reason or another unable to import

their tried and tested construction style into the Balkans. In any case, communication within the expansion into the north must have shifted once more from a maritime network to an overland form of transmission.

5.1. The Thracian Plain and the Lower Tundzha Region

In close geographical proximity to the Marmara region, near the town of Kırklareli in Turkish Thrace, may be found the settlement mound of Aşağı Pınar. In terms of natural geography, the north-western part of modern-day Turkey already belongs to the Thracian Plain, through which the Maritsa flows. The mound of Aşağı Pınar lies on the south-western slope of the Strandzha/Istranca mountain range which marks the border with Bulgaria.

The Late Neolithic pottery from Aşağı Pınar demonstrates a highly independent character comparable with material from the site of Toptepe on the northern coast of the Marmara Sea (ÖZDOĞAN, MIYAKE, ÖZBAŞARAN DEDE 1991, 75–81). Here, large jugs with a cylindrical neck markedly offset from the body, a falling shoulder, and a conical underside may be taken to be a signature form (ÖZDOĞAN, MIYAKE, ÖZBAŞARAN DEDE 1991, figs. 20/1–3; 22/2–3, 5, 8). Specific to here is also the decoration of the vessels with linear patterns incised with a pointed implement after firing (see Chapter 3.6 with Fig. 56). Therefore, it would also be expected that the earlier material displays a connection with the finds from the Marmara region. The extensive ongoing excavations were only able to reach the Middle and Early Neolithic levels in recent years. Currently, only the finds from the upper levels of 2 to 5/6 have been published, these corresponding to the South-eastern European Late and Middle Neolithic, together with selections

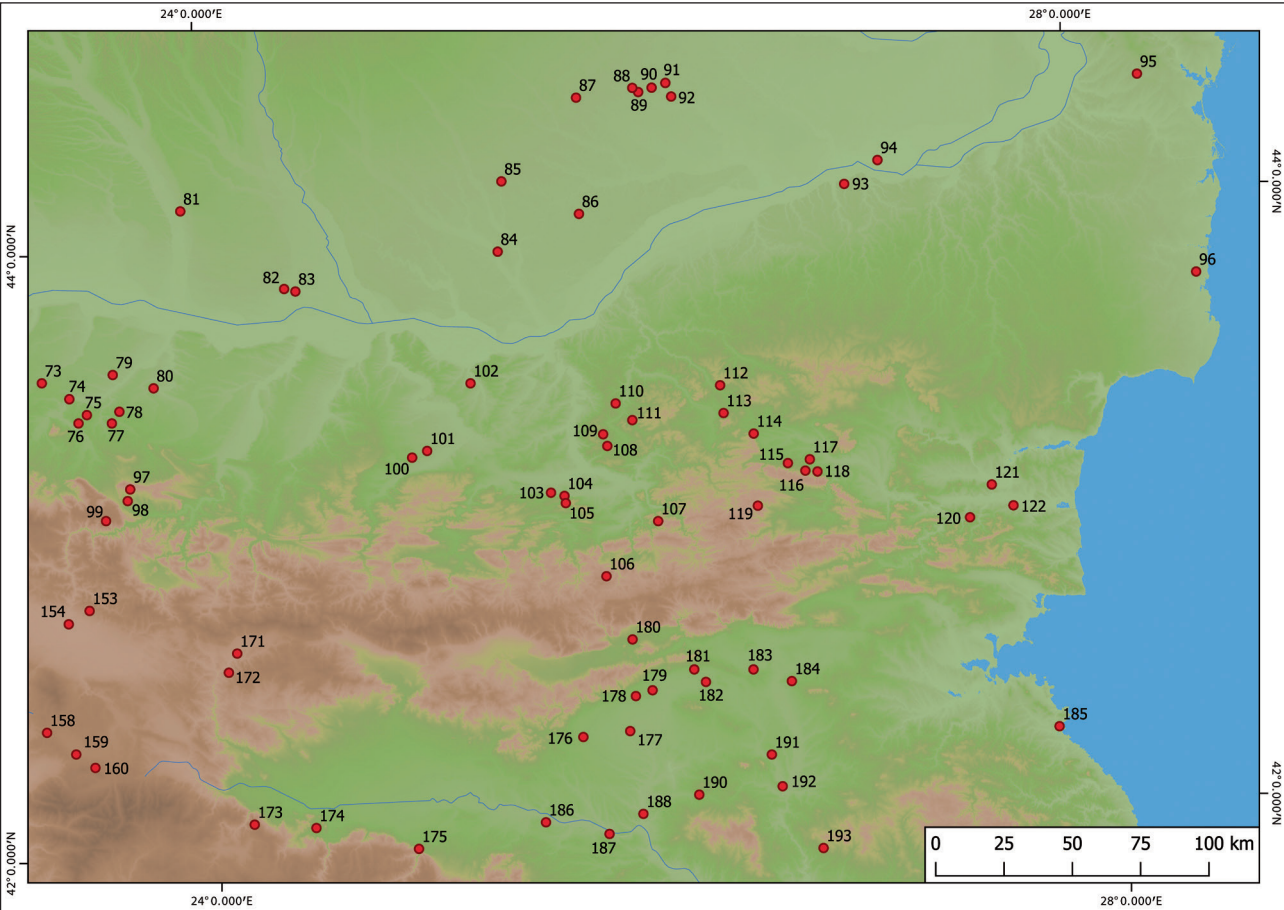


Fig. 77: Map of Early Neolithic sites in the eastern Balkans. – 73. Gradeshnitsa-Malo Pole and Gradeshnitsa-Lukanovo Darvo. – 74. Devene. – 75. Ohoden. – 76. Banitsa. – 77. Tlachene. – 78. Komarevo. – 79. Altimir. – 80. Byala Slatina. – 81. Cîrcea-La Hanuri and Cîrcea-Viaduct. – 82. Vădastra. – 83. Grădinile-La Islaz. – 84. Măgura Buduiasca. – 85. Dulceana. – 86. Drăghiceanu. – 87. Bolintineanu. – 88. Giulești. – 89. Du-dești. – 90. Malu Roșu. – 91. Fundeni. – 92. Cernica. – 93. Malak Preslavets. – 94. Boian. – 95. Medgidia-Cocoașă. – 96. Durankulak-Nivata. – 97. Zakonitsa. – 98. Beshovitsa. – 99. Rebarkovo. – 100. Devetaki Cave. – 101. Krushuna. – 102. Balgarsko Slivovo. – 103. Hotnitsa Cave, Hotnitsa Waterfall and Hotnitsa Bear’s Hole. – 104. Samovodene. – 105. Small and large caves at Preobrazhenski Monastery. – 106. Golyamata Lisitsa, Plochite and small and big cave at Veliko Tarnovo. – 107. Dzhulyunitsa. – 108. Strelets-Eren Bunar. – 109. Orlovets. – 110. Chakmaktepe. – 111. Koprivets. – 112. Pomoshitsa. – 113. Drinovo. – 114. Podgoritsa. – 115. Polyantsa-Platoto. – 116. Ovcharovo-Platoto. – 117. Ovcharovo-Gorata. – 118. Ovcharovo-Zemnika. – 119. Zelena Morava. – 120. Usoe. – 121. Dalgopol-Balkuzu. – 122. Golyamo Delchevo. – 123. Karagač-Žitkovac. – 124. Rudnik. – 125. Gladnice. – 126. Pavlovac-Gumnište and Pavlovac-Čukar. – 127. Tumba Stenče. – 128. Na Breg. – 129. Tumba Mađari. – 130. Govrlevo. – 131. Zelenikovo. – 132. Rug Bair. – 133. Anzabegovo. – 134. Vršnik. – 135. Grnčarica. – 136. Kutline. – 137. Radin Dol. – 138. Čuka. – 139. Rayc. – 140. Veluška Tumba and Porodin. – 141. Podgorie. – 142. Dunavec. – 143. Vashtëmi. – 144. Barç. – 145. Nea Nîkomedeia. – 146. Thessaloniki. – 147. Thermi. – 148. Servia. – 149. Achilleion. – 150. Sesklo. – 151. Otzaki. – 152. Argissa. – 153. Kremikovtsi. – 154. Slatina. – 155. Pernik. – 156. Priboy. – 157. Negovantsi. – 158. Galabnik. – 159. Kraynitsi. – 160. Sapareva Banya. – 161. Nevestino. – 162. Vaksevo. – 163. Balgarchevo. – 164. Eleshnitsa. – 165. Dobrinishte. – 166. Kovachevo. – 167. Toumba Serron. – 168. Sitagroi. – 169. Dikili Tash. – 170. Kryoneri. – 171. Chelopech. – 172. Chavdar. – 173. Rakitovo. – 174. Kapitan Dimitriev. – 175. Muldava. – 176. Kaloyanovets. – 177. Sarnevo. – 178. Azmak. – 179. Stara Zagora-County Hospital. – 180. Kazanlak. – 181. Karanovo. – 182. Ezero. – 183. Glufishevo. – 184. Veselinovo-Maleva Mogila. – 185. Primorsko. – 186. Yabalkovo. – 187. Nova Nadezhda. – 188. Simeonovgrad-Chavdarova Cheshma. – 189. Lyubimets. – 190. Mednikarovo. – 191. Drama-Gerena, Drama-Kayryaka and Drama-Merdzhumekya. – 192. Knyazhevo-Rovnishte. – 193. Lesovo-Spring and Lesovo-Dyadopaneva Vodenitsa (R. Krauß).

from the Early Neolithic material of Level 6 (KARUL et al. 2003. – PARZINGER 2005). Even earlier levels (7 and 8) are currently being unearthed; these levels seem to herald the beginning of the Neolithic in the region (ÖZDOĞAN 2011.

– ÖZDOĞAN E. 2011). The material from Level 6 corresponds to the mainstays of the horizon of Karanovo II, namely extensively channelled tulip beakers on high feet (ÖZDOĞAN 2011, figs. 2/5; 3–4), and vessels with strap handles applied

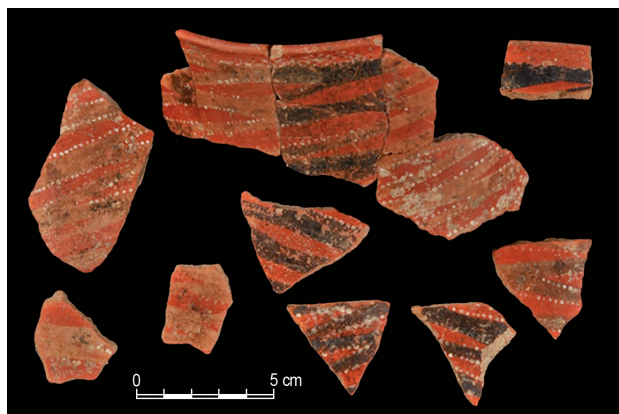


Fig. 78: Aşağı Pınar 7. Bichrome painted sherds (after ÖZDOĞAN 2011, fig. 11).

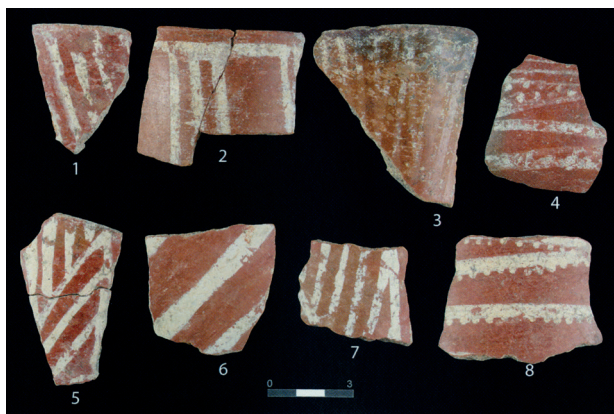


Fig. 79: Aşağı Pınar 6. White-on-red painted pottery fragments (after ÖZDOĞAN E. 2011, fig. 11).



Fig. 80: Aşağı Pınar 6. Ceramic vessels (after ÖZDOĞAN E. 2011, fig. 10).

to their sides (ÖZDOĞAN E. 2011, fig. 10/2, 4). Level 7 at Aşağı Pınar can be paralleled with Karanovo I by means of the classic white-on-red painted pottery and linear black painting with accompanying white spots (ÖZDOĞAN 2011, figs. 10–11) (Fig. 78). Nevertheless, white-on-red painting quite evidently already appears during Aşağı Pınar 7 (ÖZDOĞAN E. 2011, fig. 6) (Fig. 79). Tulip cups, various bowl shapes, and spherical jugs with a recessed cylinder neck are typical forms of the early Balkan Neolithic (Fig. 80). A black polished fabric with impression ornaments seems foreign to Thrace, and could be one of the few things adopted from the Neolithic period of the Marmara region (Fig. 81).

The finds are comparable to those of the earlier material from Koprivets in northern Bulgaria. This comprises a ware which is dark black in cross-section with various organic inclusions, the surface of which is coated with a colourful (often brown-toned) slip. Also significant are the recent finds from Aşağı Pınar 8, as no pottery this early in date has been identified within the Maritsa's entire catchment area until now. The absence of the earliest pottery within the Thracian



Fig. 81: Aşağı Pınar 7/8. Impresso decorated vessel (after ÖZDOĞAN 2011, fig. 13).

plains indicates that neolithisation travelled via the Central Balkans (TODOROVA 1990. – NIKOLOV 1990. – TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, 59–62). With proof of earlier ceramics within the Strandzha region, this picture is now being changed. Remarkably, no clear connections southwards can yet be established, with the evidence tending to point northwards, which would support the notion that this region first came into contact with pottery with the neolithisation of the Balkans. In fact, however, there is an interruption of settlement of at least 200 years between the layers AP6 and AP5, which is parallel to Karanovo II/III and early Karanovo III. The development of vessel forms from Aşağı Pınar 5 to 2 may be taken as exemplary for the entire watershed of the Maritsa, and permits a solid grasp of the typological transformations of Subphases Karanovo late III, and III/IV. Regardless, due



Fig. 82: Aşağı Pınar 5. Pottery examples (after PARZINGER 2005, pl. 134).

to its mostly uncertain find contexts, the material from Bulgaria as yet published has not been presented in differentiated enough a way that any such determination could be justified (cf. NIKOLOV 1998). The pottery from Aşağı Pınar 6 may clearly be delineated against that of the later stages, and might be parallelised with Karanovo II, where (at the very least) the pots with cylindrical necks, various bowl and pot forms, and vessels with tap-like handles as known from Ovcharovo-Gorata can be attested accordingly (PARZINGER 2005, pls. 116–117). Similarities in adornment may be noted in the characteristic bands filled with impressions (PARZINGER 2005, pls. 116/4; 117/11, 13–14) frequently found upon lid forms (PARZINGER 2005, pl. 117/11, 14).

A fragment with plissé channelling is further indicative of this period (PARZINGER 2005, pl. 117/15). Nevertheless, three fragments of vessels on tall foot-stands with white painting on a red-slipped background are to be dated somewhat earlier, with these being attributable to the horizon of Karanovo I (PARZINGER 2005, pl. 117/8–9, 12).

Aşağı Pınar 5 displays a broad spectrum of dish and bowl forms which might be associated with the late material of Karanovo III (Fig. 82). Equally significant for this chronological stage are numerous grip handles (PARZINGER

2005, pls. 101/7–12; 102/1–4), which would have belonged to characteristic Karanovo III beakers (NIKOLOV 1998, pls. 1/18–27; 2/15). Remarkable is the appearance of carinated bowls as early as Aşağı Pınar 5/6 (PARZINGER 2005, pl. 115/4–6), which are only typical at Karanovo starting from Horizon III/IV (cf. NIKOLOV 1998, pls. 16/8–13; 17). A glimpse at the statistics is instructive here (PARZINGER 2005, tab. 8) as from these it might be adduced that shallow dishes with inwardly bent and outwardly grooved rims and carinated dishes certainly appear in all levels of Aşağı Pınar, but only occur frequently in the earlier levels of 5 to 4. This example demonstrates once again how relevant not only the mere presence or absence of a ceramic form is, but also, in fact, how far more relevant its frequency within differing layers might be. The fact remains that carinated bowls are also still attested in the later levels of 2 to 3, although they decrease in favour of a variant with a more prominently exposed upper half. Until now, shallow bowls with inwards-turned, outwardly grooved rims have been taken as a hallmark of the Bulgarian Late Neolithic, a paradigm which, while not completely disproven by analysis of finds from Aşağı Pınar, is now certainly in desperate need of renewed inspection. These forms still occur during Aşağı Pınar 2 to 3, albeit their proportion within the find record generally decreases. By means (most prominently) of comparison with the settlements of Drama-Kayryaka and Drama-Merdzhumekya, the material from the latest levels of Aşağı Pınar 2 and 3 is parallelised by Parzinger with the horizon of Karanovo IV, as only heavily fragmented vessels have been uncovered from Karanovo itself, even during recent excavations.

The settlement plan of Aşağı Pınar 6 demonstrates a type which is well attested within the Marmara region: tightly constructed rows of houses arranged in a crescent. Nevertheless, the construction method is already considerably simplified (Fig. 83). The walls are of wattle-and-post construction with clay daubing, the usual building technique of the Balkan Early Neolithic. The structure can only presently be associated with the Marmara region, as such settlements formed of crescent-shaped housing rows are unknown within the Balkans. This renders the change in building technique even more astonishing. It will be extremely revealing to learn more in future about the structures within the levels of Aşağı Pınar 7 and 8. Most likely, the background for the “Marmara tradition” of settlement structure and the Balkan origins of these walls will be better understood through this.

As yet, hardly any Early Neolithic finds are known from the lowlands between the massifs of the Srednogorie and the Rhodopes. Quite evidently, find preservation has

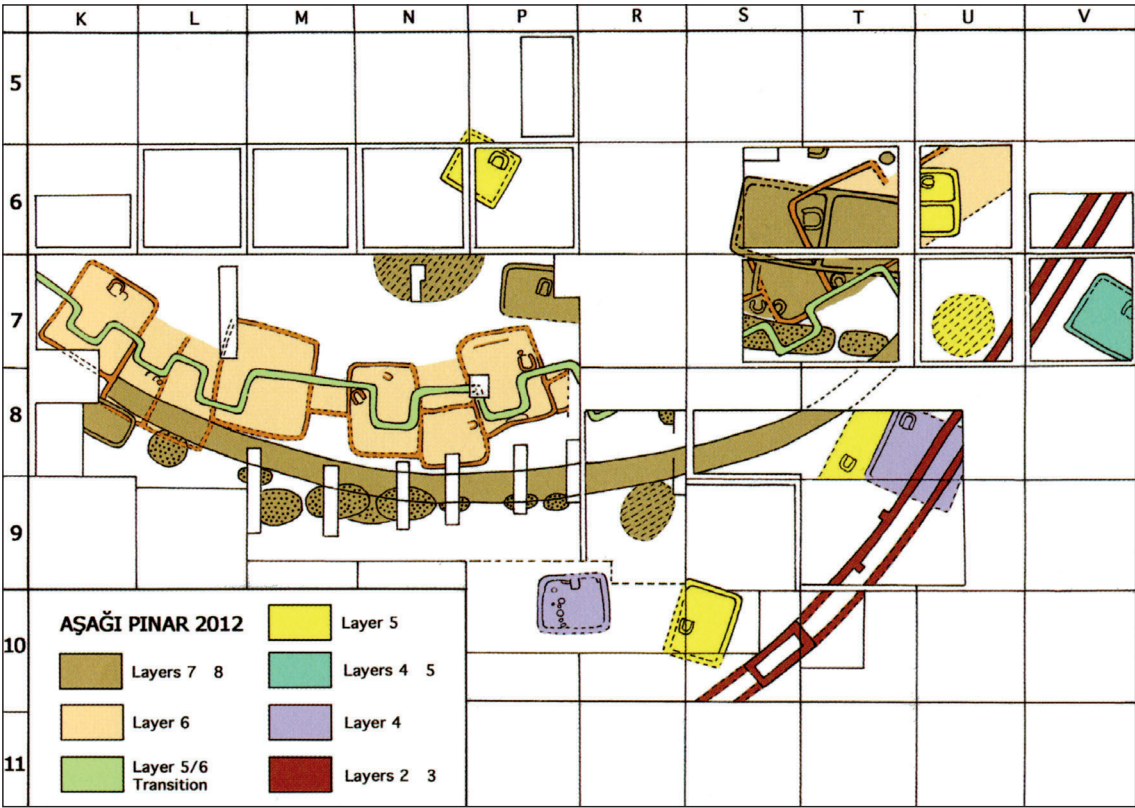


Fig. 83: Aşağı Pınar. Plan of the different Neolithic settlement features (after ÖZDOĞAN 2013, fig. 103).

been rendered more complicated by extensive sedimentation from the river Maritsa. It is only from the hilly transitional zone approaching the Strandzha Mountains in eastern Thrace that some finds are extant.

Indeed, Nikolov, for example, has reported upon finds from Mednikarovo, which he attributes to the phases of Karanovo II and Karanovo III/IV (NİKOLOV 1998, 48–49). By means of contrast, the finds from Knyazhevo-Rovnishte, a site on the lower Tundzha which was discovered by the work group centred around Jan Lichardus during long-term research in the region of Drama near Elhovo, are older (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 338, pls. 1–5). Field surveying yielded ceramics with white painting on a red background and characteristic sherds with impressed, incised and channelled decoration; these are attributable to the phases of Karanovo I and II. By means of some fragments with red-brown painting, further collected finds from the field termed “spring channel” near Lesovo could be associated with Karanovo II (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 338 and pl. 6). While the fragments from Knyazhevo-Rovnishte may, in fact, be neatly compared with those from Ovcharovo-Gorata and Karanovo II by means of their incised decorations, the published finds from the Lesovo “spring channel” can

hardly confirm this ascription due to the absence of any manner of incised or impressed decorations. It is only from the multiphase sites within the fields of Merdzhumekya, Gerena, and Kayryaka near Drama that stratigraphically significant information might be gleaned.

The earliest settlement is evidenced from Drama-Gerena A, where material from the phases Karanovo II and III was found in multiple pits (LICHARDUS et al. 2000b, 110–113). Only a small triangular miniature table with a checkerboard impasto decoration on its outer surfaces (which can be assigned to the phase of Karanovo II without difficulty) has been published from there as yet (LICHARDUS et al. 2000b, fig. 43). Two further settlements also from the basin of Gerena (B and C) yielded finds from the phases of Karanovo III and IV. Independent from observations at the mound of Karanovo, the finds of the region around Drama permit a subdivision of phases Karanovo III and IV into subphases which Lichardus, retaining the traditional Karanovo terminology, names Karanovo II/III, IIIa and IIIb, and IVa to IVc. His Phase II/III corresponds to Nikolov’s Karanovo II/III, although almost no material from this chronological horizon has been discovered in the vicinity of Drama itself (with the exception perhaps of the finds from Gerena A). Lichardus’ level of Karanovo IIIa

is considered by him to be present at the sites in the basin of Dyadopaneva Vodenitsa at Lesovo, in Knyazhevo-Rovnishte, and from Veselinovo on the Maleva Mogila. The published material from Lesovo-Dyadopaneva Vodenitsa and Knyazhevo-Rovnishte is so heavily fragmented that there are almost no forms which might be reconstructed in their entirety (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, pls. 8–9).

Perhaps characteristic is the pronounced incised decoration still reminiscent of the adornment techniques during Karanovo II. The material from the Maleva Mogila is distributed by Nikolov between his levels Karanovo II/III, III, and III/IV. Nevertheless, this find material is heterogeneous, very generally comprising of forms to be associated with classical Karanovo III (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, pl. 10. – cf. NIKOLOV 1992). Insofar, Lichardus' horizon of Karanovo IIIa remains enigmatic. His level of Karanovo IIIb is only well attested at the site of Drama-Gerena B (LICHARDUS, ILIEV 2001, figs. 8–10). Flat bowls with thickened and channelled rims, early carinated bowls, and characteristic beaker forms with broad undersides narrowing to a mouth permit a parallelisation with Karanovo III. The subdivision of the Karanovo IV phase is still not very convincing, since each individual subphase is found in different places. As a result, their relative chronological relationship remains difficult to comprehend.

A few white painted sherds from the lowest settlement level of Chavdarova Cheshma (Simeonovgrad) may be associated with Karanovo I (RADUNČEVA 2002, pls. 1–5). A Middle Neolithic settlement with typical Karanovo III material overlays these. Recently, additional finds from Chavdarova Cheshma have been published which might be connected with the later Neolithic settlement (BOYADZHIEV et al. 2008). With forms such as bowls with thickened and incised decorated rims, and vessels with tap-like handles, these support a synchronisation with Karanovo III (BOYADZHIEV et al. 2008, pls. II/1–6; III; VIII/7, 9–11, 14–18). On the other hand, the presence of numerous fragments with incised and impressed decorations in combination with plastic applications demonstrates a continuation of earlier elements already characteristic of Karanovo II (cf. BOYADZHIEV et al. 2008, pls. VI; VII/1–10; IX).

It should thus have become apparent that only ceramic adornment might be meaningfully compared. The structures of all the aforementioned settlements on the Thracian Plain consist, as far as sources are available, solely of post, wattle, and daub. Only the settlement of Aşağı Pınar 6 displays a construction plan in the tradition of the Marmara region, albeit these structures were realised by means of post, wattle, and daub techniques.

5.2. Srednogorie

Somewhat better attested is the archaeological record on the hilly northern edge of the Thracian Plain, the southern piedmont of the Balkan chain, and the Srednogorie. With a sequence of deposits some 12.40 m in height and a surface area of some 3.7 ha, the settlement mound of Karanovo is one of the largest tells in Europe. Smaller sondage excavations on the mound took place during 1936 (MIKOV 1937); thereafter the tell was extensively investigated from 1947 to 1957 by Vassil Mikov and Georgi Georgiev. A first publication of the levels identified at Karanovo was presented by Mikov in 1958. He subdivided the cultural sequence into five levels, according to which Level I should reflect the Middle Neolithic, Level II the Late Neolithic, Levels III to IV the Chalcolithic, and Level V the Bronze Age (MIKOV 1958). That the parallelisation of the levels with further sites in the Aegean and the Balkan region seems outlandish today is ultimately derived from an erroneous synchronisation between Troy and Vinča (TODOROVA 1981, 203). Karanovo became super-regionally well-known due to the presentation of the settlement stratigraphy by Georgiev at a congress on the Late Stone Age held in 1959 in Prague, published two years later (GEORGIEV 1961). While more recent research has since brought about crucial alterations in the subdivision of the phases of prehistory, the system based upon seven settlement horizons established in 1961 has essentially withstood the test of time (cf. KRAUSS 2008). The stratigraphic sequence presented a framework for the early prehistory of South-eastern Europe for the first time; prior to this, connections of European prehistory with the civilisations of the ancient Near East had only been established by means of comparative methods through sequential dating (cf. CHILDE 1929. – MILOJČIĆ 1949). Once vital discoveries from other tell settlements had been incorporated within South-eastern Europe's cultural history, Henrieta Todorova was able to order the Karanovo sequence within the broader trajectory stretching from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age. She could demonstrate that the earliest level of Karanovo I must have been preceded by a yet older Early Neolithic period to which she ascribed the finds from her own excavation at Polyanitsa-Platoto (region of Targovishte). Todorova considered the transition from Karanovo I to II to be a constant development. Thereafter, between Karanovo II and III, she recognised a first interruption of the settlement, which should correspond to an otherwise unattested level Karanovo II/III only recorded on the mound of Kazanlak (GEORGIEV 1974). The seven-stage chronological system of Georgiev was thus compromised, although the traditional seven-part nomenclature was nevertheless retained. This

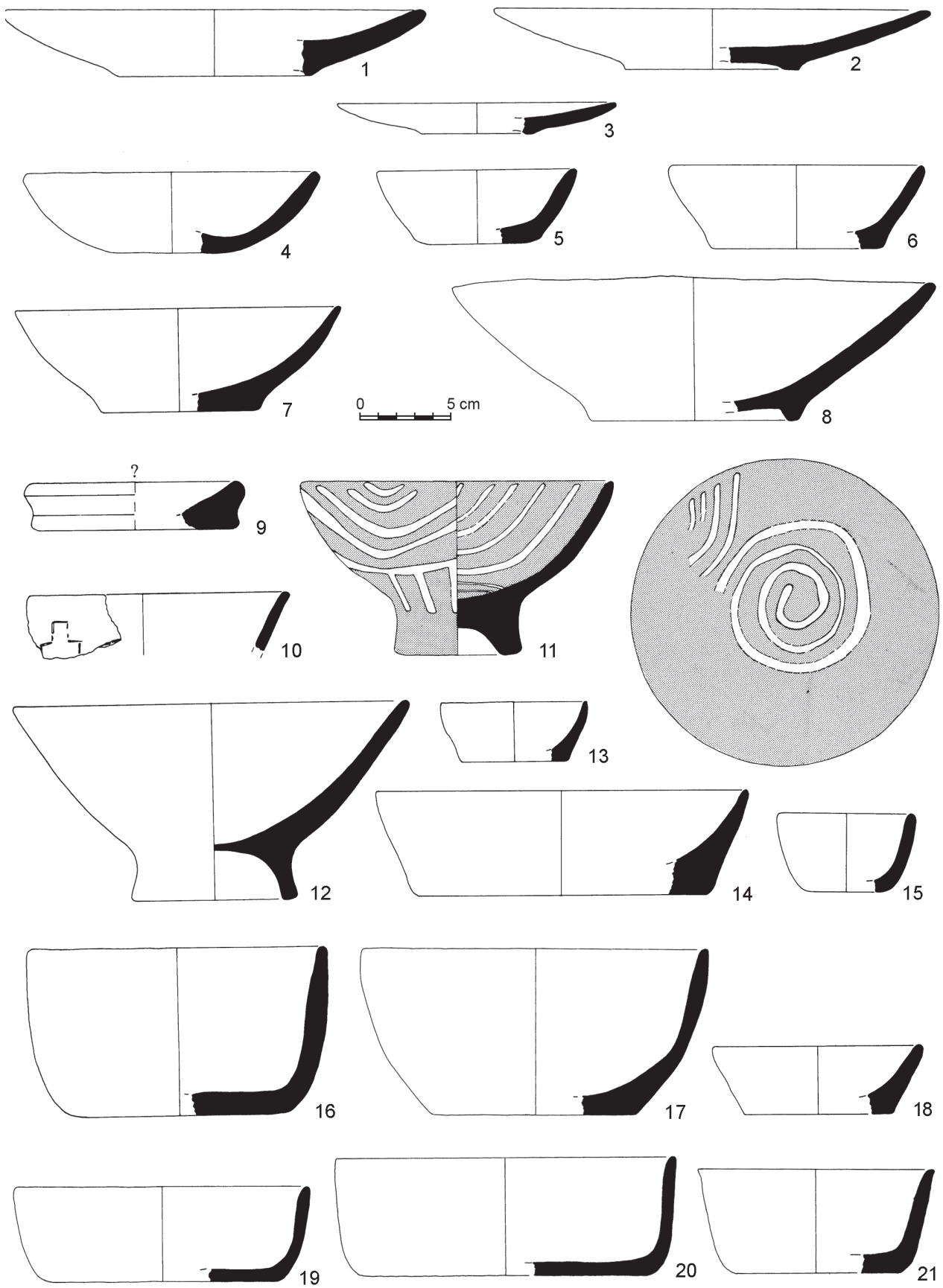


Fig. 84: Karanovo I. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 63).

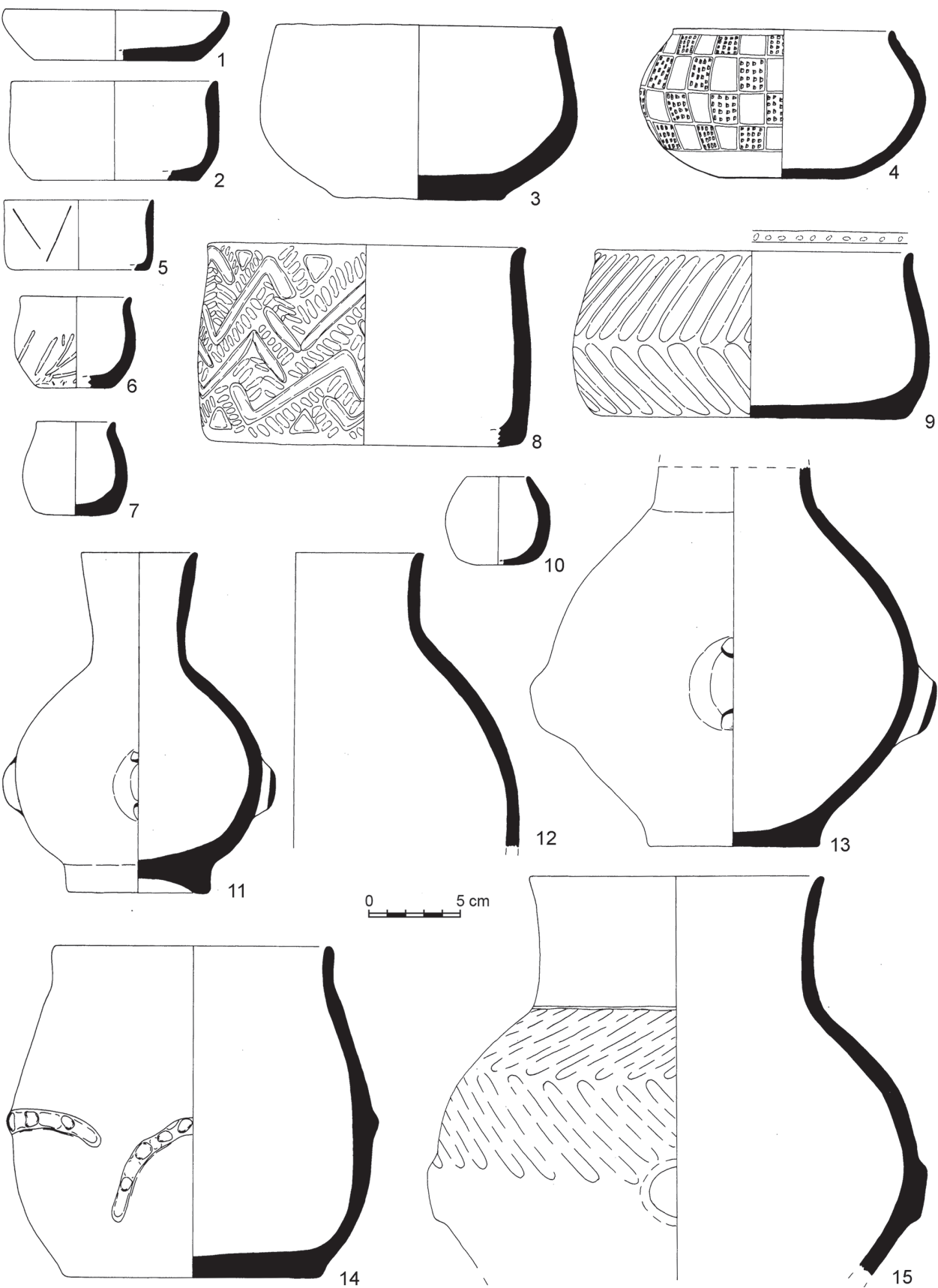


Fig. 85: Karanovo I. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 64).

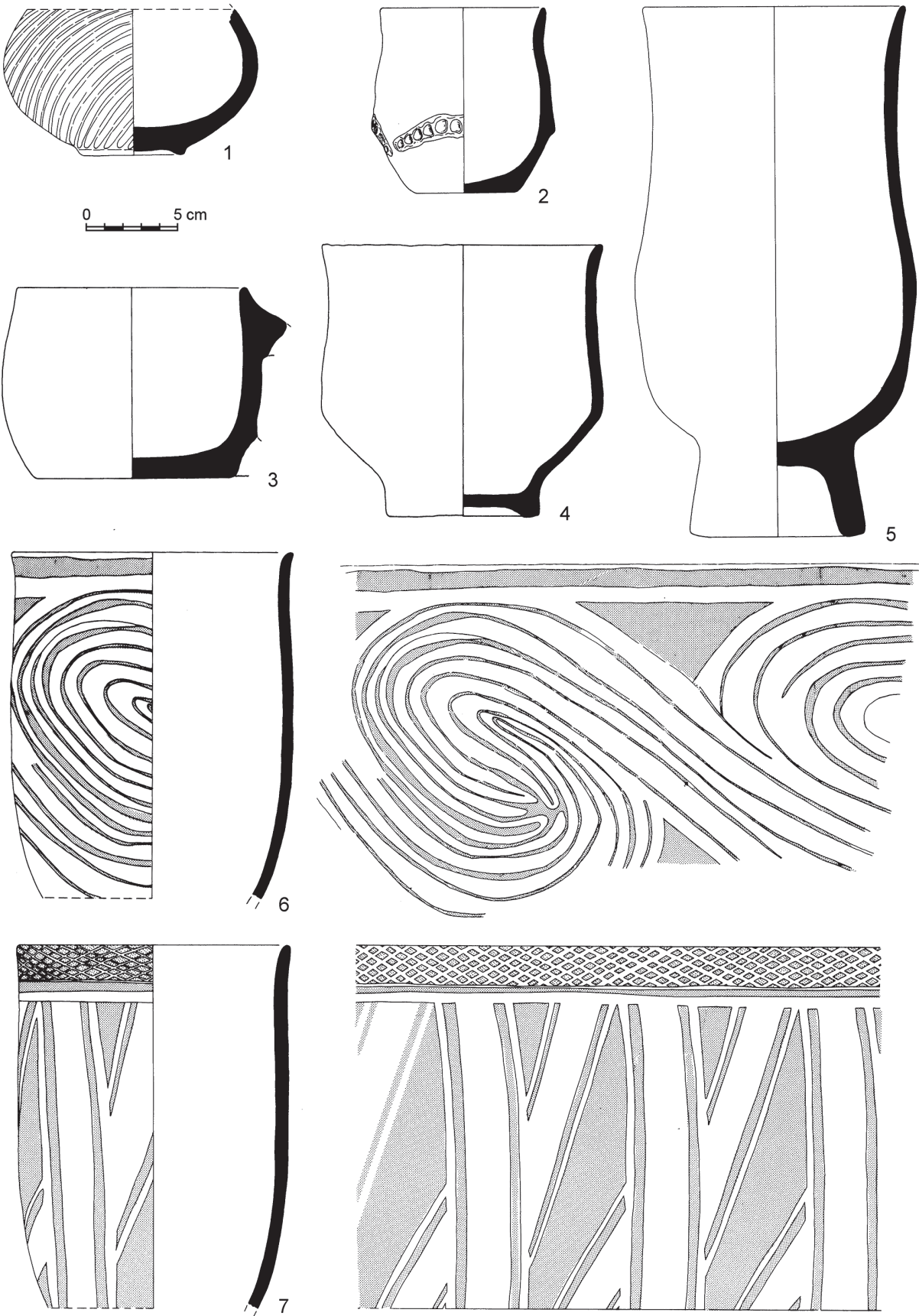


Fig. 86: Karanovo I. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 65).

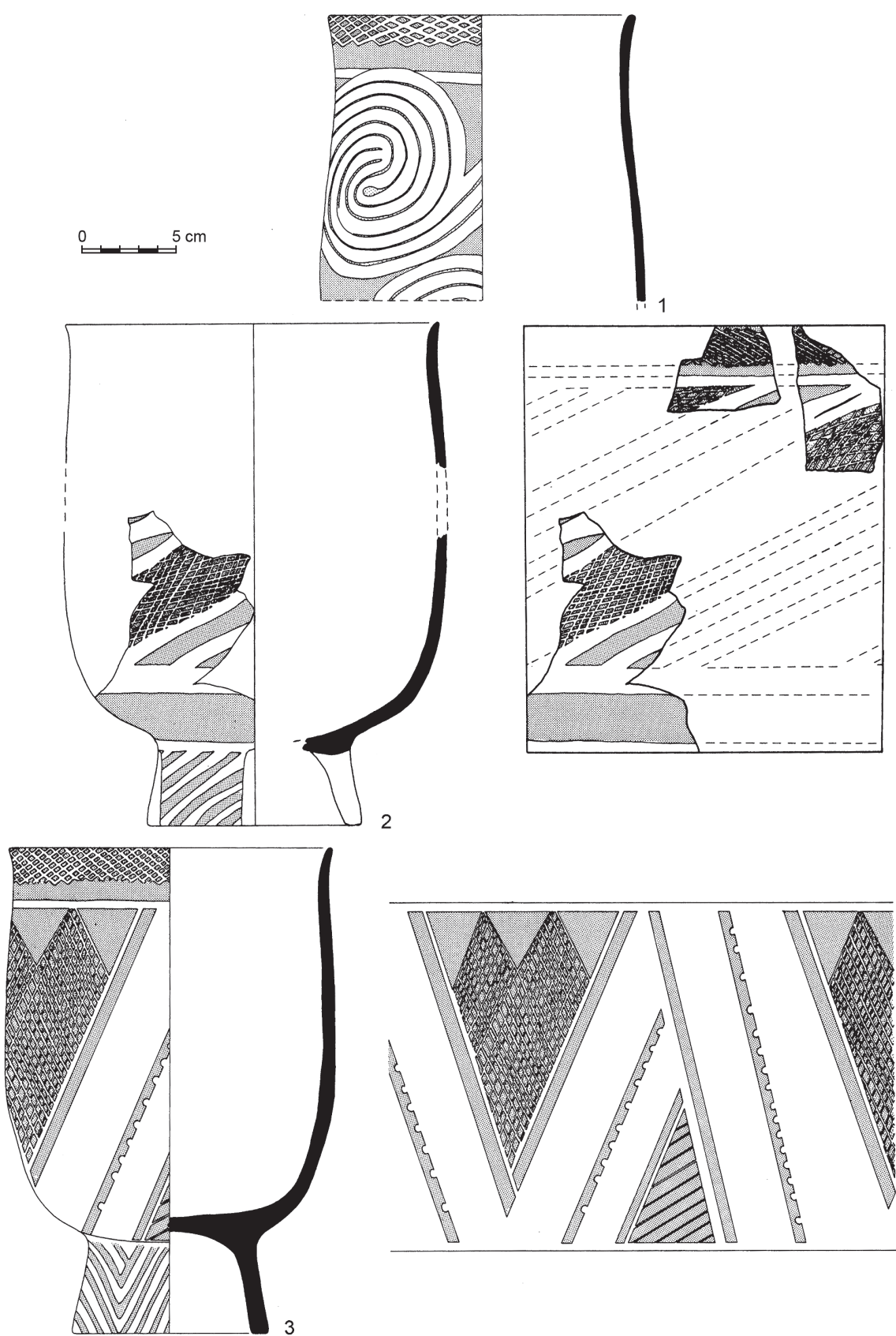


Fig. 87: Karanovo I. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 66).

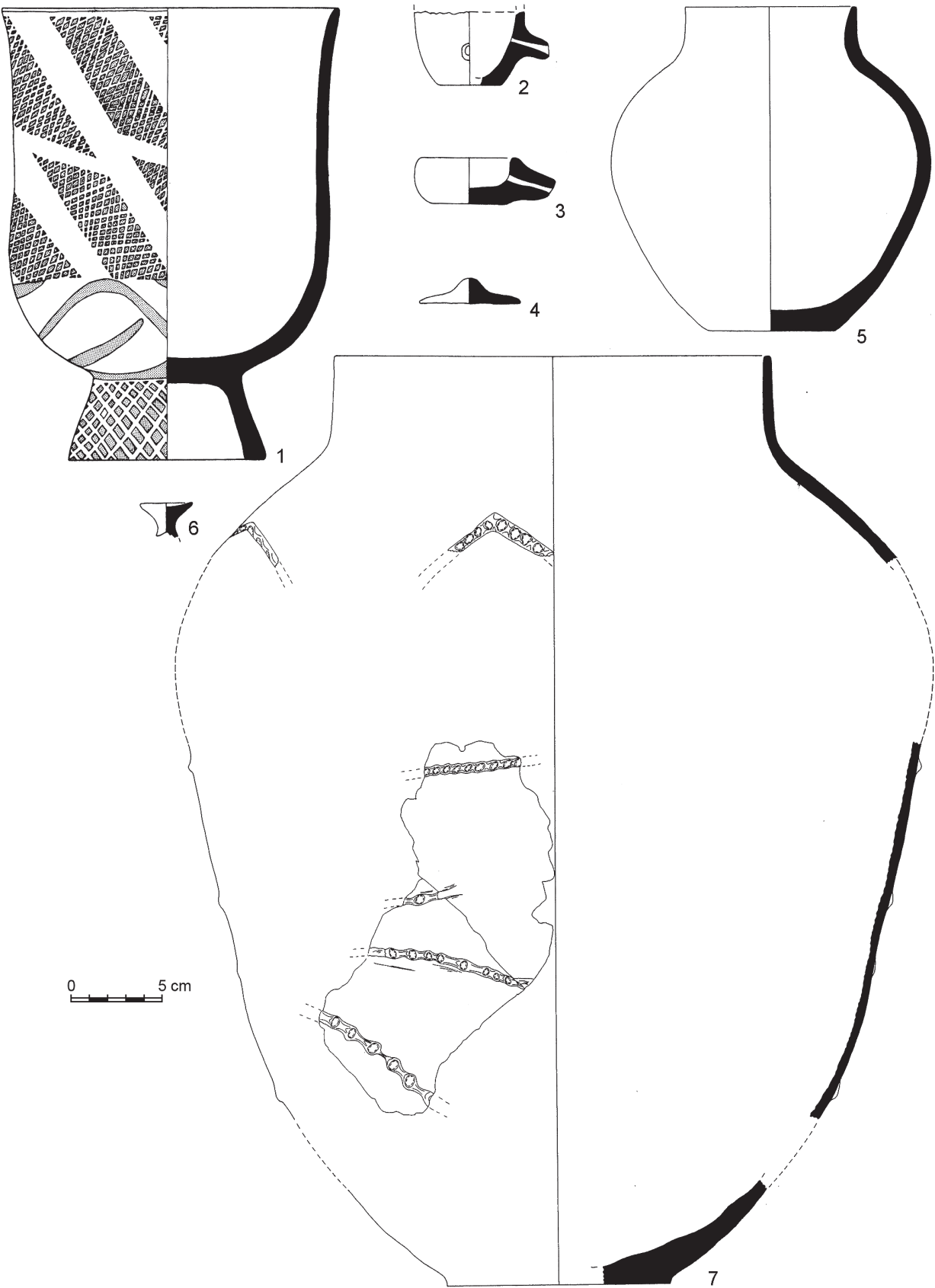


Fig. 88: Karanovo I. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 67).

was unproblematic as Transitional Horizon II/III initially did not refer to Karanovo itself, but rather solely to the finds from Kazanlak. Confusion in the designation of the horizon only arose later as Horizon II/III was attested on the mound of Karanovo (NIKOLOV 1996b, 136–141. – NIKOLOV 1998, 23–56). A continuous development could thus be assumed once again for the lowest horizons at the very least. Nevertheless, Todorova also identified interruptions between the horizons of Karanovo IV and V and between VI and VII, both of which were of considerable duration. According to Todorova, the abandonment of the mound between Karanovo IV and V corresponds to the Maritsa culture, first appearing in its latest phase of Maritsa IV on the mound as Karanovo V. The long settlement intermission following the Chalcolithic level of Karanovo VI is also generally academically accepted. Thereafter, the mound was settled again during the Early Bronze Age (Karanovo VII), and afterwards permanently abandoned. The resumption of the excavations at Karanovo between 1984 and 1999 by the Bulgarian Archaeological Institute in collaboration with the University of Salzburg led to a scrutiny and partial re-evaluation of the chronology (HILLER, GEORGIEV 1984. – HILLER, GEORGIEV 1985. – HILLER, GEORGIEV 1986. – HILLER, GEORGIEV 1987. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1988. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1989. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1990. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1991. – HILLER et al. 1992. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1994. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1995. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 2000. – HILLER, NIKOLOV 2002. – KRAUSS 2008). The modification of the traditional sequence of Karanovo I to VII by Nikolov renders the stratigraphy of Karanovo as the key sequence for the cultural trajectory on the eastern Balkan Peninsula far more complicated than previously thought (cf. NIKOLOV 1998).

The oldest settlement at Karanovo has yielded pottery that was considered the earliest ware north of the Aegean until the discovery of the horizon of Proto-Starčevo (cf. VAJSOVA 1966, 8–9). This pottery is characterised by an extensively applied red slip, and (more seldom) painting with white pigment. The majority of the ceramics are, by means of contrast, largely unpainted. Regional differences may also now be discerned in greater quantities than among the Proto-Starčevo Complex, this pertaining not only to painted patterns but also to vessel forms (Figs. 84–88). Tall, cylindrical beakers on tall, internally hollow feet (so called tulip beakers) serve as a signature form of the Karanovo style within the complete distribution of the white painted pottery (cf. HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pls. 65/5–7; 66; 67/1). By means of the pronounced positioning of the feet, the Karanovo I forms may be particularly easily differentiated from

the earlier material from northern Bulgaria such as from Koprivets and Polyanitsa. Massive feet clearly offset from vessel bodies or vessels on very tall pot stands now appear.

Some vessels also continue to stand upon a simple flattened base or a low stand-ring, as is entirely characteristic of the find horizon prior to Karanovo I. In addition to vessel painting, extensive incised and impressed decoration and applications from plastic cordons and studs now appear. In general, the pottery with white painting is most widely dispersed during the period of the horizon of Karanovo I. The Starčevo-Criş I to II complexes in the north and west are roughly contemporaneous.

Also to be associated with Karanovo I are the earliest levels at Chavdar (TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, fig. 87), Chelopech (PETKOV 1948a, figs. 3–4), and the tell of Azmak (GEORGIEV 1963, 167–168. – GEORGIEV 1965, 6 and fig. VI. – TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, figs. 102–103).

For the subsequent level of Karanovo II, the more recent excavations produced yet more copious material (HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, 117–120). The find spectrum examined develops all but seamlessly from the white painted Neolithic. This continuity is expressed most prominently in the retention of the essential vessel types (Figs. 89–90). Tulip-beakers now occur with numerous variants ranging from classical cylinder forms to embouched types (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, 117–118 and pl. 59/3–7). These correspond to Types B1 and B3 from Ovcharovo-Gorata. Also evidenced is the very characteristic variant of B2 with strap handles applied to its sides (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 59/1–2). Nikolov's "vessels with spherical bodies and long cylindrical necks" (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, 117) reflect the type group of K1 from the Ovcharovo-Gorata material (cf. Chapter 7.4). Demonstrably extant (although not treated separately) is also Variant K2 with a conical tapering neck and pierced lugs typically on the body (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pls. 36/17; 58/5–6, 9).

To these might be added the "closed, pot-like vessels" within Variant 1 with "low, approximately cylindrical necks" (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, 118). For its own part, Variant 2 from this group represents Type group T1 from Ovcharovo-Gorata. There, so-called "pot-like bowls" with rounded, carinated profiles fall into Type group T3. At Karanovo, these vessels evidently occur just as rarely as at Ovcharovo-Gorata. Pots with S-profiles (T2) are just as well attested during Karanovo II as all other variants of the bowls (S1 to S4). The precise characteristics of the "basins" described by Nikolov remain obscure on account of the unspecific nature of the images referenced (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, 119). Most likely,

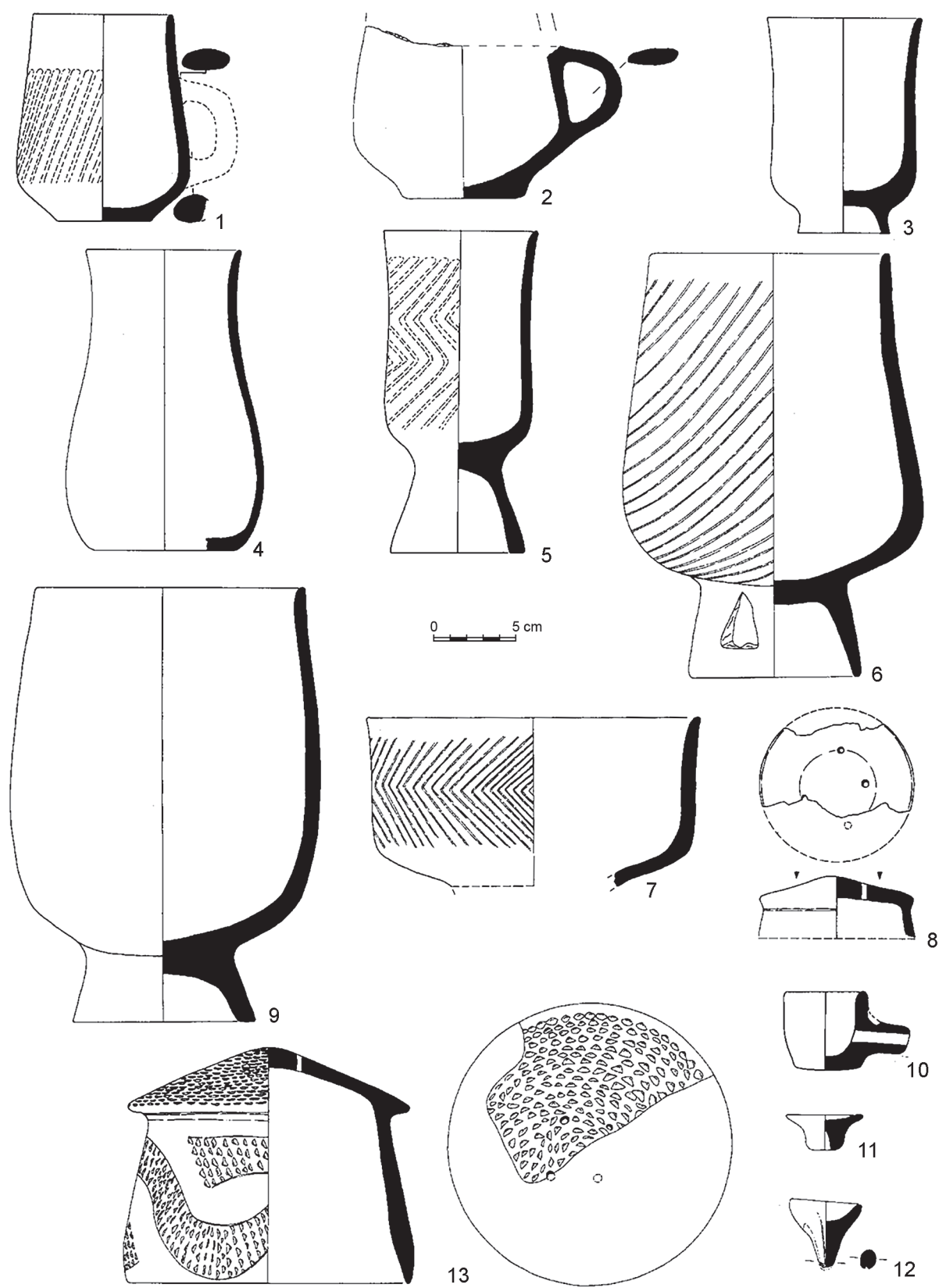


Fig. 89: Karanovo II. Pottery (after HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pl. 59).

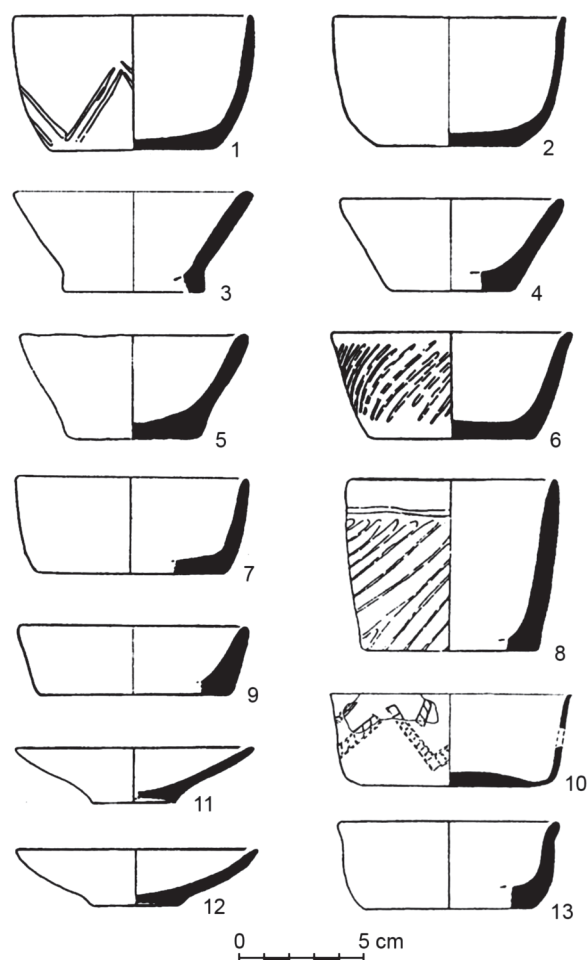


Fig. 90: Karanovo II. Pottery (after GEORGIEVA, SIMEONOV 2006, pls. 11–12).

these are simple bowls. Finally, the different lid forms are also directly comparable; these correspond in construction and decoration to Types Da to Dd from Ovcharovo-Gorata (cf. Nikolov in: HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pls. 19/17; 59/9–10). Vessel painting is no longer attested during Karanovo II.

Similar to the examples from Ovcharovo-Gorata, the incised and impressed decorations cover the vessels' walls with the exception of the lips. The plastic applications are likewise diverse. It is also there that very fine, frequently ornamental channels on the vessels first appear (cf. HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pls. 57/3, 10, 15, 18; 59/1, 5–6, 8). Thus, the parallelisation of Ovcharovo-Gorata with Karanovo II made by various authors is therefore confirmed (cf. ANGELOVA 1988, 36. – ANGELOVA 1992, 50. – TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, 134).

Nikolov attributes further unpublished finds from Stara Zagora-County Hospital to the phase of Karanovo II

(Nikolov in: LICHARDUS-ITTEN et al. 2002b, 93). Moreover, this stage of the developed Early Neolithic is not attested in northern Thrace.

A result of the more recent excavation in the southern sector is the subdivision of the classical phase of Karanovo III into three standalone chronological segments (II/III, III, and III/IV) which led to confusion in the use of the well-known Karanovo classification. Retaining the traditional horizon nomenclature, Nikolov initially introduced a phase of Proto-Karanovo III or Karanovo II/III, characteristic of which were particularly high cylindrical cups with tap-like handles (NIKOLOV 1998, 68–75). The horizon is roughly identical with the occurrence already described by Georgiev as Karanovo II/III by means of the finds from Kazanlak (GEORGIEV 1974, 6–7. – TODOROVA 1981, 204). Besides the eponymous site, Nikolov also perceives the horizon to exist at Ezero and Glufishevo (NIKOLOV 1998, 68–75). At the same time, Level II in the mound of Azmak ought also to belong to this (GÖRSDORF, BOJADŽIEV 1996, 134). This phase is accordingly somewhat devoid of material as all forms, except the high cylindrical cups, are equally well attested within the phase of classical Karanovo III. Channelled beakers may also already be evidenced during Karanovo II (NIKOLOV 1998, pl. 1/3, 5–7, 9). Present for the first time are tall beakers and pots with pronounced tap-like handles (NIKOLOV 1998, pl. 15) as were then particularly typical during Karanovo III, or also bowls with thickened rims which are frequently decorated with incisions or channels (NIKOLOV 1998, pls. 2/1–3, 5; 7/11–14) (Fig. 91). The typological proximity of the find material to the earlier and later levels hardly surprises, should a constant line of settlement on the tell be presumed. Such a strict delineation of the individual phases one from another would indeed be disconcerting and, inasmuch, this “transitional horizon” of Karanovo II/III is, in fact, but a confirmation of the uninterrupted settlement trajectory on the tell.

For the classical Phase III, forms already reproduced in Georgiev's well-known 1961 profile drawings remain typical (GEORGIEV 1961, folding pl.). Noteworthy are flat bowls with rims thickened on the interior standing on four high feet (NIKOLOV 1998, pls. 8/1–12; 9), and further forms with tap-like handles (NIKOLOV 1998, pl. 7/12–13, 20, 22–26) (Fig. 92). Here also, Nikolov was able to evaluate material from Karanovo, Ezero, and Kazanlak. To this might be added a complex from the Maleva Mogila in Veselinovo (NIKOLOV 1998, 80–104). Although the aforementioned sites lie geographically close to one another, Nikolov identifies at least two regional style groups, the variants of Kazanlak and Karanovo (NIKOLOV 2006). In particular, the separation of the material of Karanovo III

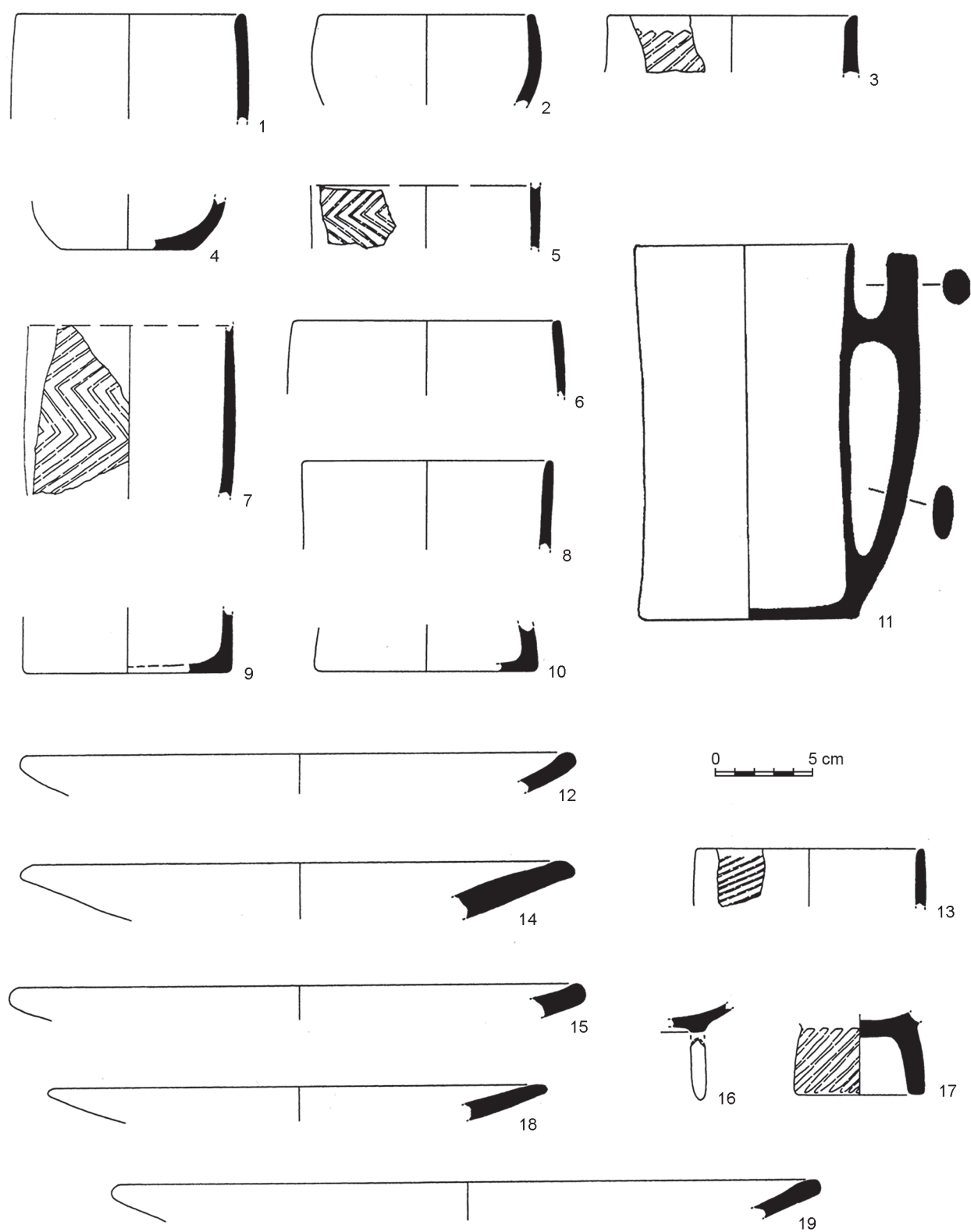


Fig. 91: Karanovo II/III. Pottery (after NIKOLOV 1998, pl. 2).

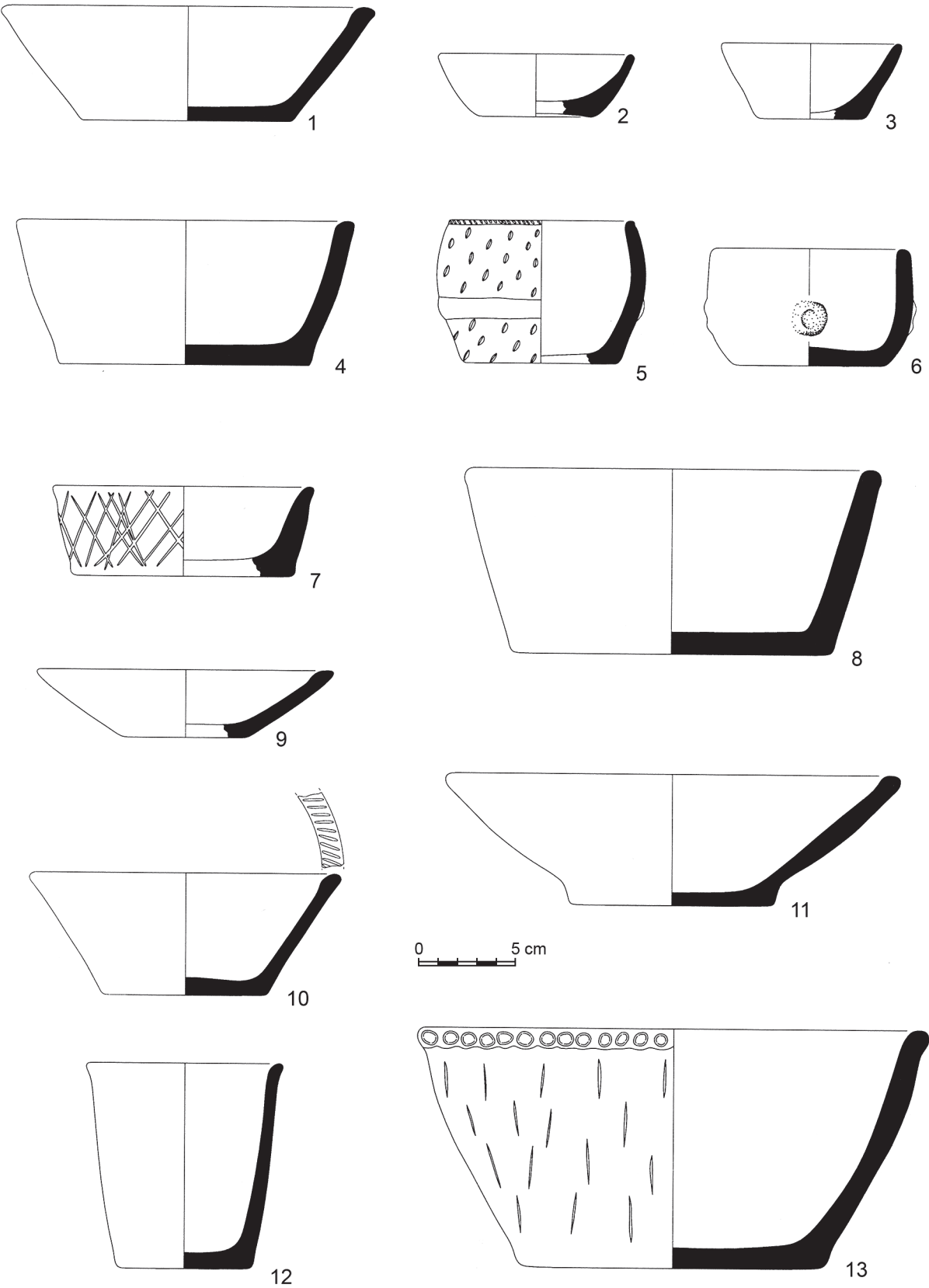


Fig. 92: Karanovo III. Pottery (after BACHVAROV 2002, pl. VI/1).

from the earlier material from Karanovo II/III is difficult to follow. A statistical analysis of the attested vessel types would be of assistance here, although this cannot be accomplished with the currently published material. As long as only a representative find corpus is published from the mound of Karanovo, and the finds from the remaining tells only appear in the discussion without images (by means of which the argumentation may be examined), then all of the syncopal shifts in the cultural sequence of Kazanlak toward the material from Karanovo undertaken by Nikolov remain impossible to substantiate (cf. NIKOLOV 1998, 138–163. – NIKOLOV 2006, tab. 1). A connection of Vinča A with Karanovo II/III and III cannot be established off-hand solely on the strength of the ceramic spectrum (cf. LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 361–365). The chain of argumentation is based here upon a parallelisation of the trajectory in Thrace in the wake of the Ovcharovo-Gorata period with the Dudești culture in Muntenia. In any case, Vinča A should rather be paralleled with Karanovo III and III/IV (see Chapter 6.4).

Following Karanovo III, the horizon of III/IV already displays high-set carinated bowls characteristic of the Late Chalcolithic, and may be clearly distinguished from the earlier material (NIKOLOV 1998, pls. 14–21). Despite this, extensive channelled decoration on individual vessels remains a key feature (Fig. 93). According to the terminology employed by Lichardus, the horizon of Karanovo III can be subdivided into the levels of IIIa and IIIb (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 345) which roughly correspond to the classical Karanovo III period and the transitional horizon of Karanovo III/IV according to Nikolov (NIKOLOV 1998, 105–137). For his period of Karanovo IIIa, Lichardus envisions connections with the north, and with the phase Dudești-Fundeni north of the Danube by means of the material from Samovodene B1. He accordingly links his period of Karanovo IIIb with Samovodene B2 and material from the phase Dudești-Cernica (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 361–364). Within its eponymous mound, the material from horizon Karanovo III/IV comprises typical transitional forms as might be expected from an uninterrupted settlement sequence. Indeed, the aforementioned carinated bowls are later also signature forms for the horizon of Karanovo IV. Here again, nevertheless, a statistical analysis would be required in order to obtain more precise conclusions. A very large amount of material comes from the recent excavations in Sarnevo (BACHVAROV, TONKOVA, KATSAROV 2017, 239–306); in addition to the pottery, figurines (BACHVAROV, TONKOVA, KATSAROV 2017, 312–315) and tripod tables (BACHVAROV, TONKOVA, KATSAROV 2017, 317–333) complement the find spectrum. Sarnevo is thus the

only site from which comprehensive material from this find horizon has been published.

Until 1957, only a few finds from fragmented vessels were known from Karanovo IV. While the more recent excavations have yielded a comprehensive find inventory, the cultural layer itself is still strikingly thin, with only a few architectural features. The Late Neolithic in the manner of Karanovo IV is hence rather more associated with the mound of Kaloyanovets in the district of Stara Zagora (NIKOLOV 1993. – TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, 124–127). Nevertheless, particularly in the case of high-set carinated bowls and expansive bowls elaborately decorated with incisions and impressions on their exterior (and frequently interior), the material comprises unmistakeable forms very widely distributed within the eastern Balkans (HILLER, NIKOLOV 1997, pls. 2–5) (Fig. 94). Taking as his point of departure the finds from the lower course of the Tundzha (to be discussed in detail later), Lichardus further subdivides the horizon of Karanovo IV into three stages of IVa to c, to which he connects the first two Boian levels, Bolintineanu and Giulești in the regions immediately north of the Danube (LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 2002, 361–365). Nevertheless, this subdivision cannot be evinced from the material from Karanovo itself.

5.3. The Rhodopes

Numerous Early Neolithic settlements have been identified within the Rhodopes and their northern piedmont. In particular, the white painted ceramic horizon of Karanovo I is simultaneously attested at multiple sites rich in finds.

Two building horizons originating from within this phase could be identified at Rakitovo; it was only following a settlement hiatus that these were overlaid by a Karanovo III level (MACANOVA 2002. – RADUNČEVA et al. 2002, 10–13). White painting found on beakers and footed bowls is characteristic of the Early Neolithic material. In addition to typical tulip beakers, low, bulbous forms (as are particularly known from the Struma Valley) are attested. Rakitovo quite evidently lies within the transitional zone between the Early Neolithic of the Thracian Plain and that of the west Bulgarian sphere. The few ceramic forms identified from Eleshnitsa, some of these white painted (NIKOLOV 1996a, figs. 1–2. – NIKOLOV 2002a, pls. 25–30), are to be assessed similarly, with Nikolov recognising an independent geographical variant of the Karanovo I culture there (NIKOLOV 1996a). While most of the material might be linked to Karanovo I by means of the linear white painting, the presence of extensive painting with spiral motifs (and particularly the occurrence of channelled decoration) indicates a somewhat later chronological ascription, roughly at the transition to

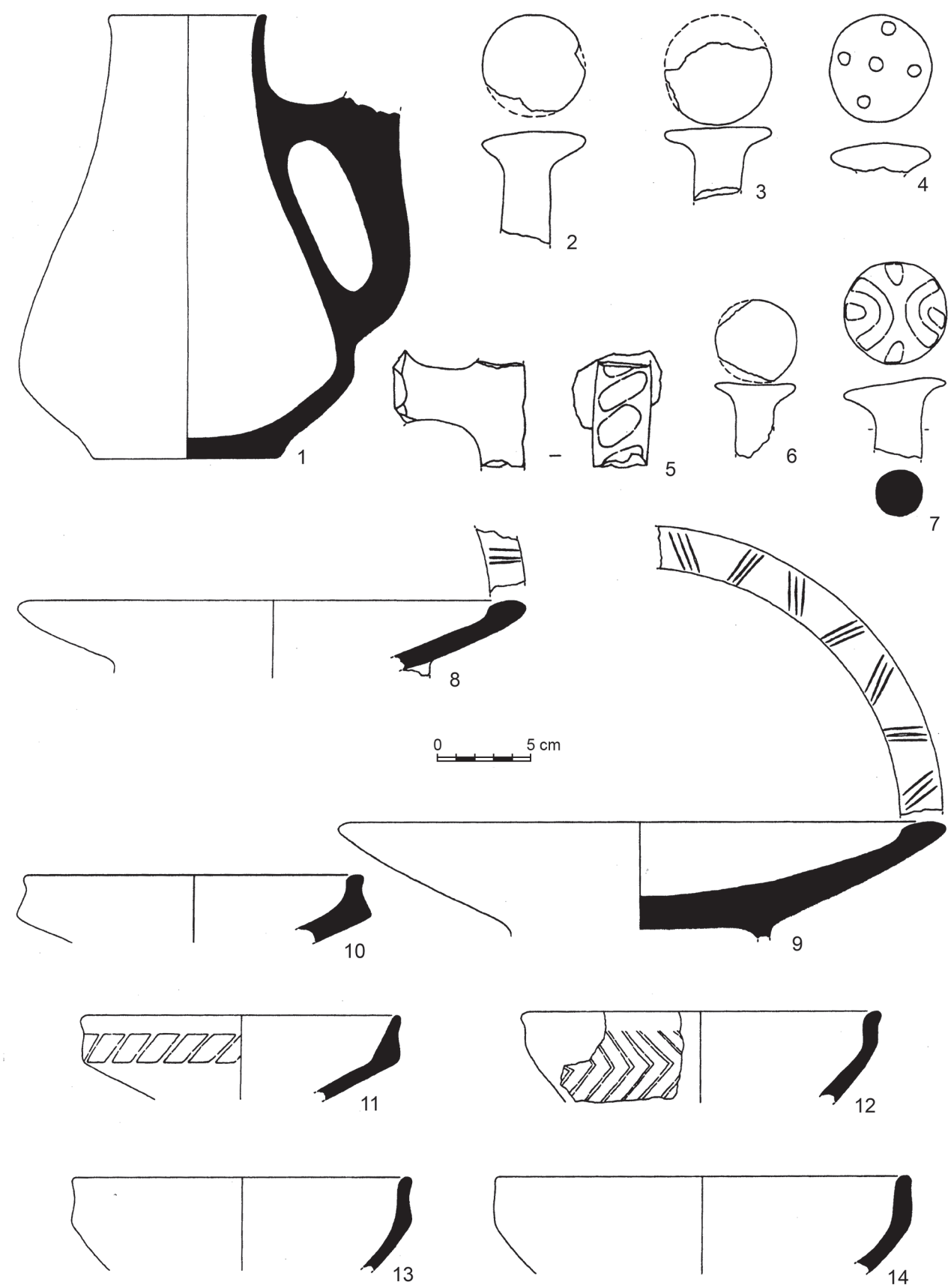


Fig. 93: Karanovo III/IV. Pottery (after NIKOLOV 1998, pl. 20).

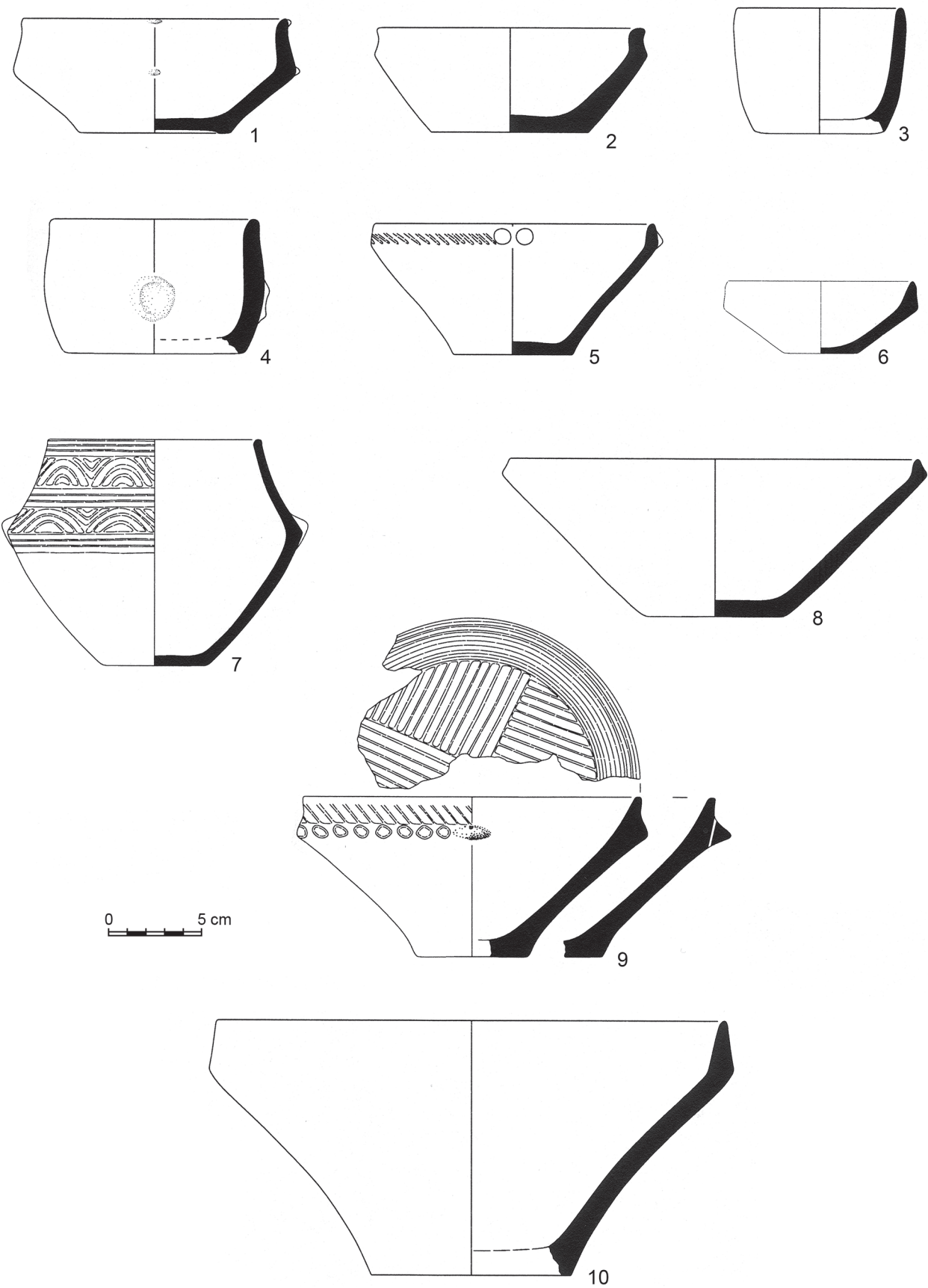


Fig. 94: Karanovo IV. Pottery (after BACHVAROV 2002, pl. VI/3).

Karanovo II. Considering that seemingly more archaic elements and typologically later material alike appear within both layers of Rakitovo, the question arises as to whether the material can be neatly divided at all, or rather as to whether this, in fact, represents mixed contexts (cf. RADUNČEVA et al. 2002, figs. 27, 39); certainly, the discovery of channelled and white-painted pottery together is at the very least unusual for Thrace. As yet, no finds have been published from the heavily damaged cultural levels of the Middle Neolithic of Eleshnitsa.

A similar stratigraphy is extant from Kapitan Dimitriev. The settlement of the tell also began during the phase of Karanovo I. Following a considerable break in settlement, the site was first resettled during Karanovo III/IV (DETEV 1950. – NIKOLOV et al. 1999). While the site is only some 20 km east of Rakitovo, the Early Neolithic find material discovered there wholly corresponds to that of the Karanovo facies with its typical tulip beakers, globular pots with cylindrical necks, and hollow footed bowls (NIKOLOV et al. 1999, pls. 1–7). White painting also serves as a signature feature here, next to which channelled vessels occur, much as at Rakitovo (cf. NIKOLOV et al. 1999, pls. 2/3–4; 4/2). Channelling is characteristic of the Karanovo III/IV material, often being found upon the upper part of the vessel. Common forms include high-set carinated bowls and bowls with straight walls decorated with incisions on their interiors. The material is typical for the Late Neolithic's onset, and may be associated with such far afield phases as Aşağı Pınar 4 in Turkish Thrace (PARZINGER 2005, pls. 79–94) and Samovodene B2–C in northern Bulgaria (cf. STANEV 2002b, pls. 9–12).

Only a few kilometres south-west of Eleshnitsa, on the western bank of the Mesta/Nestos River, may be found the settlement of Dobrinishte. The site was explored by Nikolov and Mladenka Radeva using multiple excavation trenches at some distance from one another (NIKOLOV, RADEVA 1992). The find material evidently belongs to two different phases of the Early Neolithic. Some sherds with white painting may be parallelised with Karanovo I (NIKOLOV, RADEVA 1992, figs. 7–9). Remarkably, no profiles can be found among the vessels which might be deemed tulip beakers. Rather, these comprise bulbous beakers and footed bowls particularly characteristic of the Struma Valley neighbouring to the west. Although a clear natural barrier to the Struma's valley is formed by the mountainous massifs of Rila and Pirin, and the settlement of Dobrinishte thus obviously still belongs to the Rhodopes, the course of the Mesta seems to have served as a boundary between the actual core region of Karanovo I and the central Balkan sphere of white painted pottery. It might be presumed that communication with the Struma Valley did not run directly over the Pirin range, but instead

southwards via the broad littoral of the northern Aegean, thereby still remaining within the SMAB zone. A few pottery fragments with split knobs, channelled decorations, and horizontal handles must be considered as belonging to a later horizon at Dobrinishte (NIKOLOV, RADEVA 1992, fig. 12). These fragments may be associated without difficulty with Karanovo II, and thus with Ovcharovo-Gorata. Nevertheless, the small number of published sherds and their highly broken state both present specific uncertainties in the precise parallelisation of the find material with that of Ovcharovo-Gorata.

In close proximity to the Maritsa, some 10 km west of Dimitrovgrad, lies the site of Yabalkovo, which was exposed by rescue excavations (LESHTAKOV 2006. – LESHTAKOV et al. 2007). The stratigraphic relationship of the individual finds discovered in various trenches has not been completely explained. Large parts of the find material may be associated with Karanovo I by means of characteristic beakers and bowl forms with linear white painting. Yet other features may be easily connected with Karanovo II and Ovcharovo-Gorata through their finds. Noteworthy here are bulbous beakers on very tall hollow feet (cf. LESHTAKOV et al. 2007, figs. 6/13–14, 17–18; 22/12; 23/14), some of these additionally channelled, fragments of bulbous vessels with pierced lugs of the type groups of K1 and K2 from Ovcharovo-Gorata (cf. LESHTAKOV et al. 2007, figs. 6/11, 16; 23/11), and impression-adorned lids (cf. LESHTAKOV et al. 2007, figs. 7/14; 12/4). Some of these elements are doubtless already evidenced during Karanovo I. The combination of the individual features and (most prominently) the occurrence of multiple vessels with incised and channelled decorations permits at least a portion of the material from Yabalkovo to be identified with Karanovo II. The continuation of the excavation work promises that a transition from Karanovo I to II (scarcely to be considered a neat separation) might soon be identified.

By means of the publication of numerous white painted fragments, the settlements at Krumovgrad, Muldava, and Kardzhali might be attributed to the phase of Karanovo I (PEYKOV 1972. – TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, fig. 30. – NIKOLOV 2002a, 21–27 and pls. 102–148/1–3). The painted ceramics published from Kardzhali are nevertheless exceedingly heterogeneous so that it cannot be excluded that the period prior to Karanovo I is already represented, should a fragmentary sherd painted with white spots be taken into consideration (NIKOLOV 2002a, pl. 134/2), a painting technique occurring at the onset of white painting in the eastern and northern Balkans.

Not far from the Turkish border lies the site of Lyubimets on the southern bank of the Maritsa. The site displays numerous pits interpreted as ritual in nature by the

excavator Nikolov. The currently unpublished material of the ongoing excavations is ascribed by Nikolov to the phase of Karanovo III/IV.²⁰ Some of the material such as jug-like vessels with long cylindrical necks, tapering shoulders, and conical undersides may be readily associated with the finds of the Toptepe facies within Turkish Thrace.²¹

5.4. The Plateau of Sofia

Situated between the western Balkans, the Vitosha range, and the Srednogorie respectively, the plain of Sofia forms a discrete geographic unit. By means of the Iskar's course through the Balkans and the gentle peaks of the Lyulin, natural connections existed to the north and the south. Within antique geography, the region belonged to Thrace. Certainly, Serdika (ancient Sofia) fell under the alternating influence of the Latin-speaking provinces of Moesia, on the one hand, and Greek-speaking Macedonia and Thrace, on the other, during Classical Antiquity. This serves to illustrate the liminal situation of the Sofia Plain, which, although historically belonging to Thrace, also served as a zone of transit between the Struma Valley and the Danubian lowlands. Despite its relatively high altitude of circa 500 m above sea level, the region is naturally blessed with fertile earth, lithic raw materials from the surrounding ranges, and a profusion of mineral water sources.

Within the Slatina district of Bulgaria's capital, excavations were carried out during the 1950s and again during the 1980s on a long-identified Early Neolithic settlement (PETKOV 1959. – PETKOV 1961. – NIKOLOV 1989. – NIKOLOV 1992. – NIKOLOV 2002b). According to the results of the more recent excavations undertaken by Nikolov, the site possesses four layers. Originating from the lowest two layers were only a few sherds of fine, red-slipped pottery painted with white pigment (NIKOLOV 1992, 70 and fig. 1). By means of contrast, the overlying two levels present sherds painted with wine-red, brown and (more seldomly) black colours among the painted pottery (NIKOLOV 1992, 71 and figs. 2–3). Despite this, polychrome painting is the first characteristic of the final settlement level. The relationship of the painted pottery to the monochrome wares is significant: this presents percentages of 12% white painting, 25% wine-red painting,

and 63% brown painting among 1,260 recorded sherds over all levels. Although the total sum of sherds documented is extremely low for a regular excavation lasting many years, the subdivision of the painting techniques according to levels permits the identification of certain tendencies within its development. Accordingly, during the early phase characterised by white painting, monochrome material remains predominant, while it is only with the arrival of the developed stage of the Neolithic in western Bulgaria that vessel painting of fine ceramics becomes the dominant decorative form. Focusing solely upon painted pottery, Slatina initially demonstrates the classic sequence of white-painted, then red-painted, black-painted, and finally polychrome-painted find material, with this order having been decisive for the foundational definition of the western Bulgarian Neolithic since the identification of the “western Bulgarian painted ceramic” sphere by James Gaul (GAUL 1948, 10–63. – cf. also TODOROVA, VAYSOV 1993, 64–86).

This sequence is confirmed by Georgiev's excavations in Kremikovtsi. At the site (now incorporated into Sofia), two Neolithic levels were evidenced in multiple sondages, these, in turn, overlaid by Chalcolithic and Bronze Age settlements (GEORGIEV 1975). The lowest find horizon produced a few fragments of a white painted pottery on a red background, followed by a number of layers with red-, brown-, and black-painted ceramics. The few published pieces of the white-painted pottery display hatched line patterns. Linear patterns and broadly painted bow motifs can be observed upon the dark-painted sherds (GEORGIEV 1975, figs. 7, 9–10). Among those fragments of coarse pottery illustrated are some examples decorated with impressions, plastic applications, and notched cordons (GEORGIEV 1975, figs. 4–6). Despite this, it remains unclear to which level the fragments individually belong. The tall vessel feet also attested can, nevertheless, be connected without much effort to the dark-painted pottery (GEORGIEV 1975, fig. 8/a, r).

The horizon of black-painted ceramics in western Bulgaria is generally associated with Karanovo II on the Thracian Plain. The shared occurrence of plastic cordons and impressions on the coarse pottery in addition to the dark painting does, indeed, render a parallelisation of the upper Neolithic bundle of layers from Kremikovtsi with Ovcharovo-Gorata entirely conceivable.

5.5. The Plateau of Zlatitsa and Pirdop

East of the Sofia Plain (although clearly demarcated from these by a small ridge), lies a tight valley basin between the Balkans and the Srednogorie, and, within this, the highlands around the towns of Zlatitsa and Pirdop. This geographical division is remarkable inasmuch as the river courses

20. As yet, the site has only been reported upon within the annual bookkeeping meetings of the Archaeological Institute in Sofia (NIKOLOV, NEHRIZOV, TSVETKOVA 2008). The find material remains unpublished.

21. The present author thanks Nedko Elenski, who participated in the excavation, for this information.

	white	wine red	dark brown / black	cream / light brown	polychrome
Chavdar I	10	5	2	3	6
Chavdar II	85	9	9	7	60
Chavdar III	62	10	8	8	38
Chavdar IV	70	15	4	7	52
Chavdar V	75	22	6	12	31
Chavdar VI	90	8	6	4	3
Chavdar VII	13	3	–	–	–

Tab. 1: Chavdar. Distribution of decorative types on ceramics according to layers. Indicated is the number of the respective sherds (after NIKOLOV 2002a).

springing from this region all disgorge directly to the south, and hence form a natural communication zone with the Thracian Plain, a connection also reflected in the archaeological finds. Accordingly, the tulip beaker characteristic of the whole of Thrace may be found here, despite being entirely unknown any further west, even in the neighbouring Struma Valley to the south.

From 1968 onwards, the Neolithic settlement at Chavdar within the southern part of the valley basin was extensively excavated (GEORGIEV 1981). Seven settlement horizons could be discerned in total, the uppermost of which Georgiev was able to attribute to the period of Karanovo II/III, the six levels below then ascribed by him to Karanovo I (GEORGIEV 1981, 65–68). That this nevertheless comprises material from entirely different chronological phases becomes evident after a glance at the pottery illustrated; based on this, the settlement stretches from (at the very least) the phase with purely white painting (Karanovo I) up to the phase with dark-on-light painting, fine channelled ceramics, and numerous plastic applications on the coarse pottery (Karanovo II and II/III) (GEORGIEV 1981, figs. 28–50). Nikolov was the first to study the painted pottery from Chavdar in detail (NIKOLOV 2002a, 43–51). According to him, five different painting techniques could be evidenced at the site: painting in white, wine-red, dark brown or black, and cream or light brown colour, as well as polychrome-painted vessels. The distribution of the painted vessel fragments appears as illustrated in Table 1.

Nikolov identifies a specific feature of the site, which is its overwhelming distribution of polychrome-painted vessels within Levels II to V; this is engendered by Chavdar’s situation between the spheres of influence of the Karanovo and Starčevo traditions respectively (NIKOLOV 2002a, 50). The general absence of dark-on-light painted pottery in the lowest level of VII unquestionably indicates a connection with Karanovo I in the east and Garašanin’s

phase of Anzabegovo-Vršnik I in the west. The overlying levels then correspond to the later development up to Anzabegovo-Vršnik III. The consistently high proportion of white-painted wares throughout all the layers among otherwise heavily fluctuating percentages of the remaining painting techniques may well prove to be an indication of a contamination during the division of the find material from the upper levels.

On the opposite, northern side of the valley basin may be found another multi-layer site at Chelopech excavated between 1947 and 48 by Nedelcho Petkov (PETKOV 1948a. – PETKOV 1948b). Here, three settlement phases could be distinguished. Bottommost was a level yielding painted pottery which comprised of wine-red- or black-painted fragments. The painted motifs are exclusively curvilinear (PETKOV 1948a, figs. 3–4). The presence of high, internally hollow vessel feet together with the dark painting prompt a parallelisation with the developed Early Neolithic of Karanovo II in Thrace, which corresponds to Anzabegovo-Vršnik II within the Macedonian sphere. Following this is a level with classic material from Phase Karanovo III with cylindrical beakers with tap-like handles, bowls with thickened rims, and plastically decorated coarse pottery (PETKOV 1948a, figs. 9–11, 13). Nevertheless, a few forms such as a fragment with an applied floral motif (PETKOV 1948a, fig. 9, below), a round lid decorated with impressions (PETKOV 1948a, fig. 15, above left), and a cylindrically necked vessel (PETKOV 1948a, fig. 15, below) are also reminiscent of selected forms from Ovcharovo-Gorata, so that an earlier onset of Chelopech B (roughly at the end of Karanovo II) cannot be excluded. The uppermost level of Chelopech C already belongs to the Chalcolithic.

5.6. Early Neolithic Domestic Architecture in Thrace

Mirroring the present-day border between Turkey and Bulgaria is a methodological barrier. Originating from



Fig. 95: Yabalkovo. Aerial photograph of the settlement with Early Neolithic circular ditches (after LESHTAKOV 2014, fig. 76).

Turkish territory are fewer, albeit more comprehensively investigated sites. In Bulgaria, the researcher is confronted by a large number of identified sites which are mostly poorly (if at all) published. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that insufficient information is available on the structure of settlements despite the many Early Neolithic sites excavated in Bulgaria. Indeed, Lichardus-Itten has emphatically highlighted the problems in the interpretation of the “formless tent-huts” frequently unearthed within the Balkans (LICHARDUS-ITTEN 2010, 14): she presumes them to be rectangular structures above ground accompanied merely by drainage pits. By means of good excavation methodology, even sunken buildings may be demonstrated to possess a thoroughly rectangular structure (LICHARDUS-ITTEN 2010, 14). The sole point of reference for

Thrace is the mound of Karanovo, whose more recent excavation in the southern sector has particularly contributed to an understanding of the construction techniques of the region’s settlements. A tradition begins with the earliest settlement at Karanovo I which is evidenced until the Chalcolithic. In Karanovo I, relatively disorderly, almost quadratic, freestanding houses appear with low platforms along the walls and a stove lying within the house. Unevenly distributed standing posts mark the wall and a wattle-and-post construction (HILLER 1997, 55–56). This building technique is essentially retained throughout the entire Neolithic at Karanovo. The only alteration comes in the form of houses of two to three rooms which appear from Karanovo III onwards, with these also created to be freestanding by means of wattle and post (HILLER 1997,

57–65). It is only with the advent of the Chalcolithic from the 5th millennium onwards that more complex settlement structures demonstrating conscious planning are at all recognisable (TODOROVA 1982, 22–43). Despite the less than satisfying state of the sources, a clear distinction from the settlements of the Marmara region also seems evident within this region. It is only from Aşağı Pınar 6 that a building plan closely structurally related to the settlements of the Marmara region might be discerned. Nevertheless, the extant building techniques already demonstrate themselves as very much differentiated; while air-dried mudbricks were employed within the Marmara region, the settlement in Aşağı Pınar was already composed of the wattle-and-post structures typical for the entire Balkans.

Trenches that surround the settlements represent a structural commonality. Circular ditches have been proven in almost all geomagnetic prospected Neolithic settlements, such as in Nova Nadezhda (BACHVAROV et al. 2019) and Sarnevo (TONKOV 2017). Wherever large areas have been dug, they are also visible in the archaeological findings; perhaps the best example is the multiple circular moats of Yabal-kovo (ROODENBERG, LESHTAKOV, PETROVA 2014, 223–274) (Fig. 95).

5.7. Economic Foundations

There are few economic reasons discernable for this transformation in building tradition, as the animal bone and plant remains from the settlements indicate a similar economic package to that within north-western Anatolia. For example, the Neolithic begins at Karanovo with a marked predominance of domesticated animals over game (BÖKÖNY, BARTOSIEWICZ 1997). With a very high proportion of sheep/goat, somewhat fewer cattle, and very few pigs, the distribution of these domesticated animals is also comparable to that in north-western Anatolia. Moreover, the grains cultivated at Karanovo such as einkorn, emmer, durum wheat, and barley, and also pulses such as chickpeas, peas, lentils, and ervil (THANHEISER 1997) are already evidenced in the north-western Anatolian settlement inventories. Nevertheless, the Early Neolithic communities in Thrace must already have found the means and methods by which to protect seeds and herds over the cold continental winters. While the Thracian plain's median January temperatures of 0 to +2 °C render it somewhat warmer than its neighbouring regions within the eastern Balkans (KOPRALEV 2002, figs. 2.5–6), a long-observed absolute minimum temperature of -18 °C (KOPRALEV 2002, fig. 2.16) must nonetheless have presented a genuine challenge for the early agriculturalists and pastoralists. Within this may also lie the reason why the wild grapevine only reaches as far as the region of the

southern Thracian plain from its starting point in the northern Aegean (ZOHARY, HOPF, WEISS 2012, map 16). Aquatic resources are of merely secondary importance within the Balkans. During Karanovo I, the exploitation of freshwater mussels is still tangible, but this decreases so markedly over the course of the development that by Karanovo III they are as good as absent (HÖGLINGER 1997). The best evidence for a lack of communication with the Aegean sphere is the absence of the shells of large sea bivalves such as the *Spondylus* and *Glycimeris*, as these enjoyed considerable popularity in the manufacturing of jewellery both during the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic within the Balkans. Karanovo I evidences a mere five *Glycimeris* shells, and Karanovo II a total of two (HÖGLINGER 1997, pl. 21/2).

5.8. Thrace as a Secondary Zone of Neolithisation

Travelling northwards, it is not the environment that increasingly alters but rather the winter climate, that of the Balkans roughly corresponding to central Anatolian climes. Yet, within such a climate of hot summers and cold winters which might be described as temperate continental, a purely mudbrick construction would be much more advantageous than a combined clay-and-timber construction technique. It is quite possibly the ubiquity of wood in the Balkan region that provoked such a transformation in building tradition. Regardless, it must be maintained that only indirect connections with neighbouring north-western Anatolia and the Aegean might be demonstrated within the material culture, and the settlements' building technique is fundamentally different, although the environmental conditions and economic bases of both regions are very much comparable. Proceeding from the ceramic material, it becomes apparent that no finds prior to Karanovo I have currently been identified. In turn, the ¹⁴C dates available all occur in the wake of the 6000 calBC threshold. This area is therefore well removed chronologically from the Neolithic in the neighbouring Marmara region, as the Thracian Early Neolithic (Karanovo I–II) runs parallel to the Anatolian Early Chalcolithic (Fig. 96). Close affinities in the pottery may be evidenced most prominently for the Struma Valley bordering to the west, and (remarkably) also for northern Bulgaria, in both of which regions earlier Neolithic settlement may be found. It is quite possible that the broad floodplain of the Maritsa may conceal even earlier Neolithic settlements beneath its sediment deposits. Nevertheless, according to the current state of research, Thrace is depicted as the zone of a secondary neolithisation as the regions such as the Struma Valley and northern Bulgaria evidence earlier Neolithic settlement, despite being geographically further afield. As a result, the



Fig. 96: Distribution of the main Early Neolithic cultural groups in South-east Europe (c. 6000–5700 calBC). At this point the neolithisation processes have already been completed in most areas and various regional groups are emerging (R. Krauß).

question as to the identity of the carriers of the neolithisation process into Thrace remains difficult. A direct immigration of settlers from the south seems less than likely as the earliest elements of the Thracian Neolithic may be derived almost entirely from the neighbouring regions to the west. It is only following a period of adaptation of the Neolithic package to the climatic preconditions of the Balkan region that a dense Neolithic settlement of the region might be charted. Influence from the maritime networks of the Aegean might only be indirectly identified within Thrace. A lot of evidence suggests a late immigration to

Thrace of Neolithic settlers from the west and north as late as the phase of Karanovo I. The ceramic forms such as the characteristic white-on-red painted tulip beakers are further developments of earlier forms from northern Bulgaria and the Struma Valley. Conversely, almost no direct antecedents of the earliest Neolithic pottery in Thrace may be noted. Earlier finds could well be expected beneath the colluvia of the great rivers such as the Maritsa and Tundzha. As yet, however, the situation remains as described, and the impetus originates from the west and north, but not from the south-east.