

A RARE WALL-PAINTED DECORATION FROM YABALKOVO An Early Neolithic Site in Upper Thrace

K. Leshtakov

The site of Yabalkovo is situated in the central part of Upper Thrace, in the valley of the Maritsa River. Since 2000 we have carried out salvage excavations here and managed to reveal the general contours of the big open-air settlement with very rich materials. Only brief information about the wall-painting decoration is given as an announcement here¹, due to its importance for the Neolithic studies in Anatolia and the Balkans.

The destroyed dwelling from the first building level, sq. G-F₁₇₋₁₈, Northeast sector, was immediately beneath the arable land, and formed massive debris up to 0.70 m thick. The house was only partially explored as the south area was beyond the zone of excavations (Fig. 1.1). The walls were made of hard beaten clay; the floor was plastered with fine whitish limestone substance, covered by organic matter – carbonized mat or carpet. The foundations of the north wall were badly disturbed by later pits but it had obviously collapsed in south direction after a strong fire. The wall-pieces covered a clay beaten structure, probably a grain-storage chamber, situated in the eastern part of the dwelling. Westwards a massive heap of burnt clay pieces was cleaned, and many pieces were patterned with relief decoration. We collected over 10 hard-burnt pieces, about 20 by 40 cm in size, mostly facing up (Fig. 1.2). Because of the poor preservation we could neither reconstruct the decorated structure *in situ*, nor to decide positively whether these pieces belong to the north wall or to an internal walled structure; beyond any doubt the patterns do not cover the entire surface of the wall. We could consider them as a special part of the building decoration connected with the grain-facility nearby. The patterns consist of meanders and zigzag motifs arranged in vertical panels separated by wide grooves. The positive parts of the ornaments are red and black, the negative ones creamy-white. The Neolithic inhabitants used mineral dyes, which were fresh for only a few minutes after unearthing, but after that they faded away. The reconstruction reveals an elaborated geometrical composition, whose dimensions are not definable (Fig. 1.3).

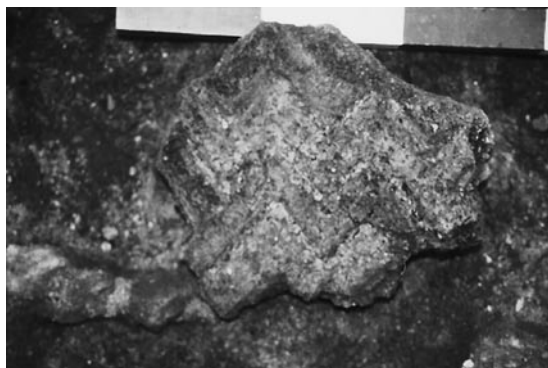
The dwelling and the very rare for the Balkan Neolithic wall painting are dated to the Early Neolithic period – ca. the end of the 7th/very beginning of the 6th millennium BC, according to the pottery (including white-on-red painting) and the small finds, found *in situ*. There is no place here to discuss the parallels of the wall decoration here; however, the general idea is obviously extracted from Anatolian traditions. In addition to this line of speculation it should be pointed out the common Yabalkovo practice of colouring the floors and the inter-dwelling areas by red-ochre, which also has old Anatolian parallels².

¹ A more extensive field report will take place in the next issue of ANATOLICA. I would like to express here my gratitude to J. Roodenberg for his kindness of publishing this short communication.

² For the general parallels cf. Özdoğan, M. and N. Başgelen (eds.) 1999 – Neolithic in Turkey. The Cradle of Civilization. New Discoveries. Arkeoloji ve Sanat yayınları, İstanbul, Plates: 97, Fig. 14; 123, Fig. 5 – a-ceramic Aşıklı; 133, Fig. 3 – Çatalhöyük layer 7.



01-a



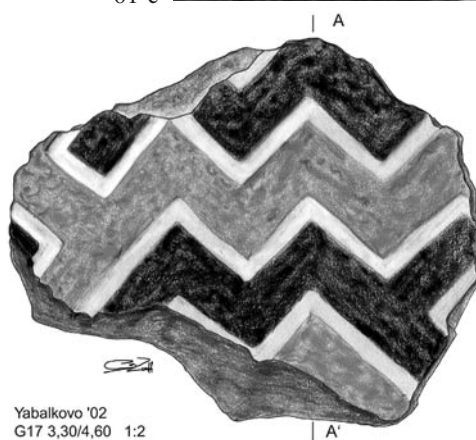
01-b



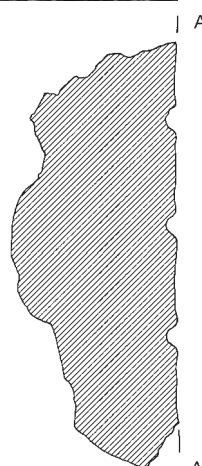
02-a



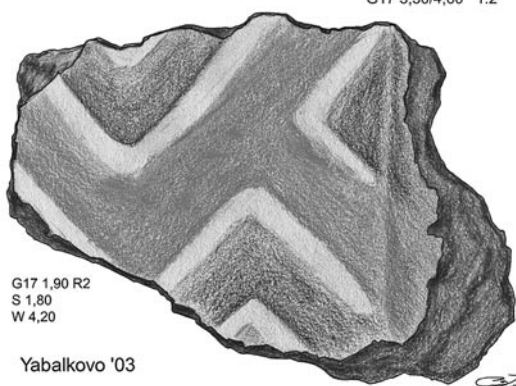
01-c

Yabalkovo '02
G17 3,30/4,60 1:2

02-b

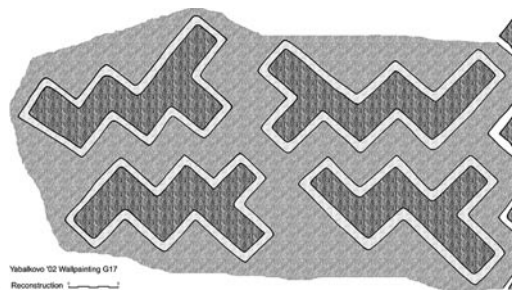


02-c

G17 1,90 R2
S 1,80
W 4,20

Yabalkovo '03

02-d

Yabalkovo '02 Wallpainting G17
Reconstruction

03