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PAINTED POTTERY FROM THE KRTINE NECROPOLIS IN KAŠTEL SUĆURAC, CROATIA

A Roman necropolis dating from the 2nd-5th century was found in the former Salonitan ager, at the Krtine site. Among numerous pottery, a small group of 5 vessels stand out. The colour of the pottery is light yellow, almost white (HUE 10 YR 8/3), while two cups have brown painted geometrical motifs. This is the southernmost find in the Roman province of Dalmatia. It is more often found in sites of the northern parts of Dalmatia (today's northern Bosnia) and in the southern parts of Pannonia and Moesia, both in graves and in settlements, but the workshop remains unknown. A much larger quantity and a possible workshop was found at Cioroia Noa, a site in Dacia.

The authors of this paper postulate how it got to Krtine: were they brought from the homeland of the deceased, or are they a sign of trade and a better property status of the deceased?

Painted pottery – Roman period – 3rd - 4th century – Krtine – Salonitanian ager

1. Introduction: the site

The Roman necropolis of Krtine in Kaštel Sućurac is located to the west of Salona, the capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia, in its ager. It was excavated on two occasions, in 2006 (Kamenjarin 2007: 404-406) and 2008 (Šuta 2009: 547-549). The necropolis was found by accident during the construction of a new road, during which the central part of the necropolis was destroyed. 50 graves were discovered and it can be presumed that 20 more graves were destroyed. The necropolis is laid out on a natural terrace, has an E-W orientation, and is confined by limestone ridges on its northern and southern sides (Kamenjarin 2014) (**fig. 1**).

The Salonitan ager spreads around the city itself. There is fertile land to the west, east, and south of Salona, with the largest field being the field of Kaštela. Here, we can see traces of ancient centuriation even today. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Salona has been the focus of many archaeologists and historians. However, the land around it - its ager - is only briefly mentioned. The academic Mate Suić (1955:1-36) did focus more on the ager, however his reconstruction of the centuriation of the Salonitan ager is still accepted. The archaeological excavations of the *villae rusticae* were insufficient - we can say that only two have been fully excavated, and this happened at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century: Miri (Izveštaj 1897: 140-156; 1898: 217-229) and Majdan (Karaman 1936). Thanks to new field survey conducted by the employees of the Museum of the Town of Kaštela, remains of *villas* across the whole field of Kaštela have been found. At the Sustipan site in Kaštel Sućurac, right next to the sea (**fig. 1, no. 2**), Bulić has recorded remains of Roman walls¹ (Kečkemet 1978: 26-32). To the north, approximately



Fig. 1. Position of Krtine necropolis (black square), villas rusticas Krtine (1), Sustjevan (2), red dot - Salona; red line - cardo of the ager (digitalization and drawing D. Žanić)

1 km away, lie unexcavated remains of another *villa rustica* (**fig. 1, no. 1**). Halfway between the two is an excavated necropolis, lying on the *cardo* of the ager (**fig. 1**), which connects these two villas. The deceased could belong to either of them. The graves can be dated to the period between the 3rd and the 5th century AD both according to the burial method and the grave goods. Inhumation is the most common burial method, although three cremation burials with no *ustrinum* have also been found. The soil that was removed from the area where the necropolis was devastated is black, full of soot (an oil lamp was found here and a sherd of a stone plaque), and this is located east of the excavated area. The architecture of grave burials at the Krtine necropolis is composed of graves in amphorae, with flat-roofed or gable-wise arranged tegulae, in wooden coffins and directly in the plain ground. There are examples of multiple burials in the same grave which can therefore be classified as a family tomb. In addition, there

¹ In the 1950s, a plastics factory was built over them.

are several cases of later graves destroying the preceding burials (Kamenjarin 2014: 7-10). Anthropological analysis was conducted on some of the excavated deceased.

The grave goods found next to the deceased comprise mostly oil lamps, smaller ceramic vessels (cups and small jugs), and glass bottles.

2. Painted pottery

Among the ceramic goods, we should emphasize a small group of vessels of the painted pottery variety. Five vessels come from five different graves from the northern part of the necropolis, all of which are almost perfectly lined up one after another from east to west (**fig. 2**). Anthropological analysis was conducted on three graves (Šlaus 2006). Grave 18 is a double female burial, grave 19 contained male remains, and the same is also suggested in grave 45. No analysis was conducted on graves 36 and 43, but judging by the size of the grave and the skeletal remains, we can conclude that these are small children.

These five vessels have in common their light, almost white colour (HUE 10 YR 8/3) and relatively small size

(**fig. 3-4**). They are of different shapes: two cups (**fig. 3**), two remains of a three-handled pot (**fig. 4, c-d**), and a juglet (**fig. 4, e**). So, three are complete and two are fragmented. Three vessels (the pots and the juglet) have no decorations and have mostly lost their final coating which is slightly darker than the first coating. Three have thin walls, two have thick ones.

Two vessels – the cups – have painted geometrical motifs on their outer surface. The brown colour was applied on the outer side of the wall after baking and is not stable on the vessel (it comes off easily). They share a similar shape – they both have a small round base, a slightly curved body, and an annular rim. The walls are thinly-made of finely purified clay, and the motifs cover the entire wall. The motifs are geometrical – undulating and straight lines, rectangles, and circles.

The closest analogies for this type of pottery, according to the scarce scientific literature, can be found in the north of the Roman province of Dalmatia (modern-day central Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Čremošnik 1961; 1984) and in some parts of southern Panonia, Moesia and Dardania (Dautova Ruševljan 1992; Fidanovski 1990; Brukner 1981). There is still much unknown about this type of pottery. It is rarely found, mostly as part of grave goods in burials in Dalmatia, with the largest amount found until now at Singidunum (i.e. Belgrade, Serbia),

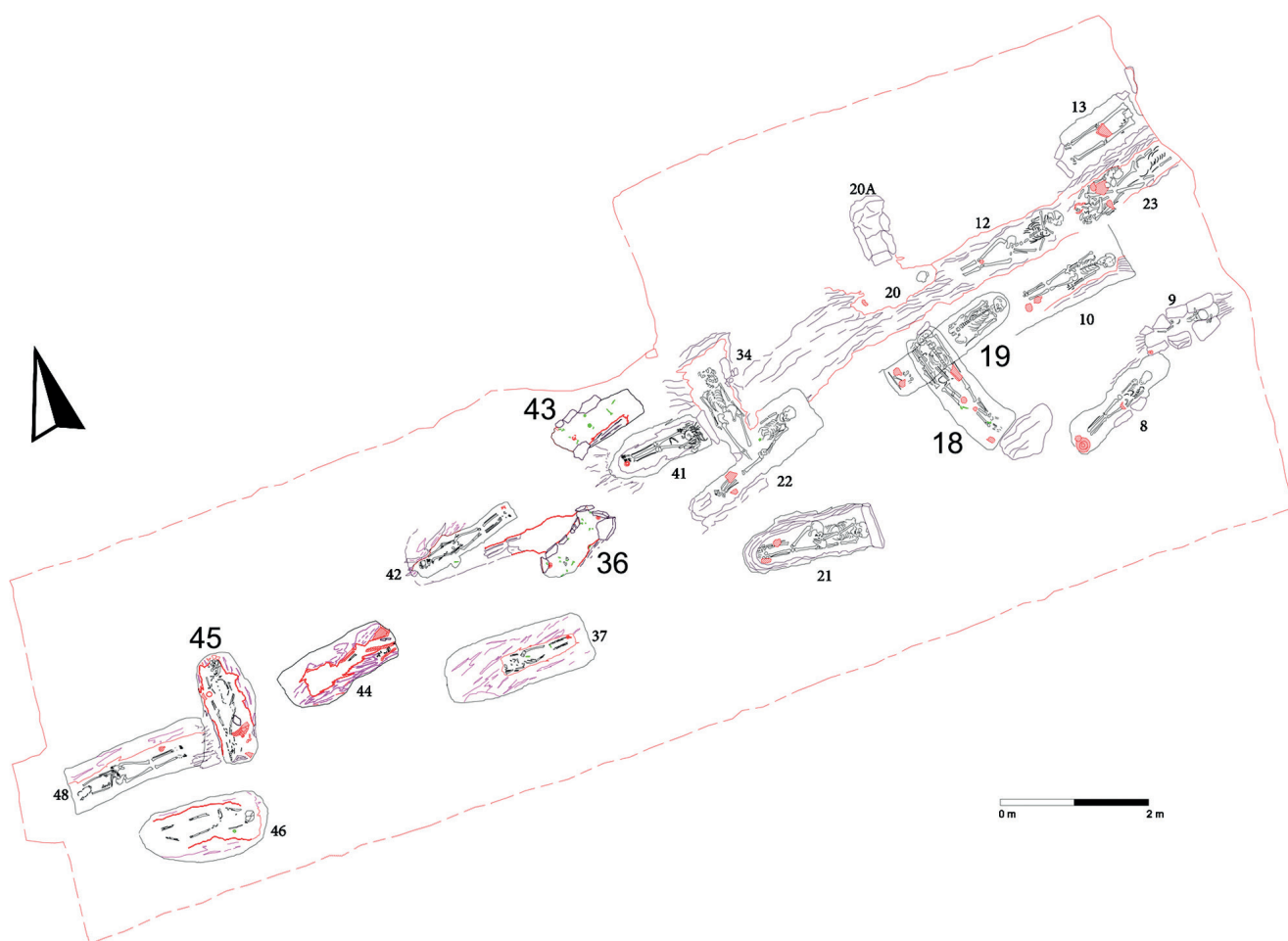


Fig. 2. Plan of northern part of the necropolis with highlighted numbers of graves with painted pottery (digitization of site plan D. Žanić).

from the settlement layer (Nikolić-Đorđević 2000). It has been found also in a settlement layer at Ulpiana² (Fidanovski 1990). In the 1960s, Čremošnik was the first to point to this type of pottery in the Roman province of Dalmatia, while she emphasizes its sporadicity, rarity, and the fact that all finds come from graves. The author concludes that this is a phenomenon that survived from the Late Iron Age since this type of pottery could have survived in rural areas which had poor communication (Čremošnik 1961: 189-202; 1984: 260-273). However, this hypothesis is difficult to accept because there is a hiatus of some 200-300 years. Brukner (1981:32-33) disagrees with the hypothesis although she does believe this pottery originates from central Bosnia and thinks that the fact that there have not been many excavations here

prevents archaeologists from pinpointing the exact location where it was produced. Nikolić has focused most on this type of pottery recently as she was analyzing pottery from Singidunum (2005:107-113). She divides them into an earlier and a later group, according to the sizes of the vessels and the pigments used to paint them. She dates the earlier group to the first half of the 2nd century AD, and this group is represented by larger pots with multiple handles, while the motifs are painted red. The later group is notable for its beakers (cups) and small jugs, painted with a brown pigment, whose fabric is yellowish-white and which date back to the end of the 3rd and the first half of the 4th century AD. She believes there to be no connections between these two groups, so we cannot speak of any manufacturing continuity in this case.

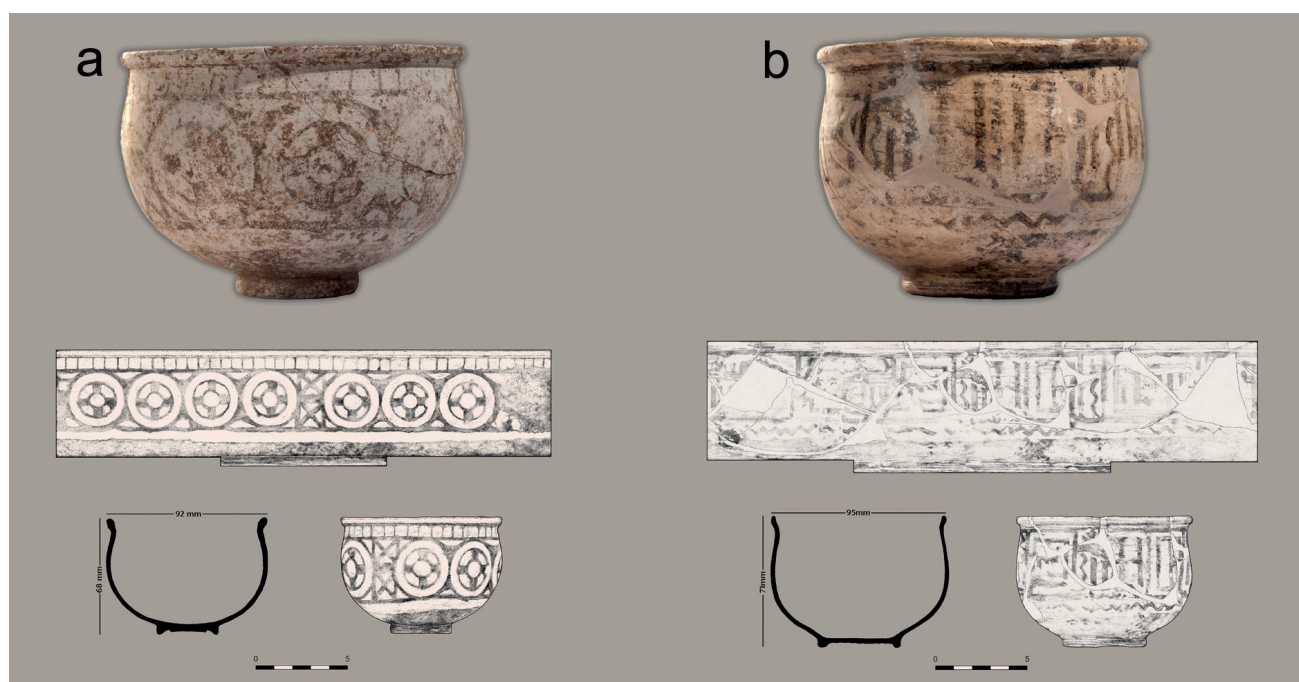


Fig. 3. Painted pottery: a) cup from grave 36; b) cup from grave 18 (drawings D. Žanić).

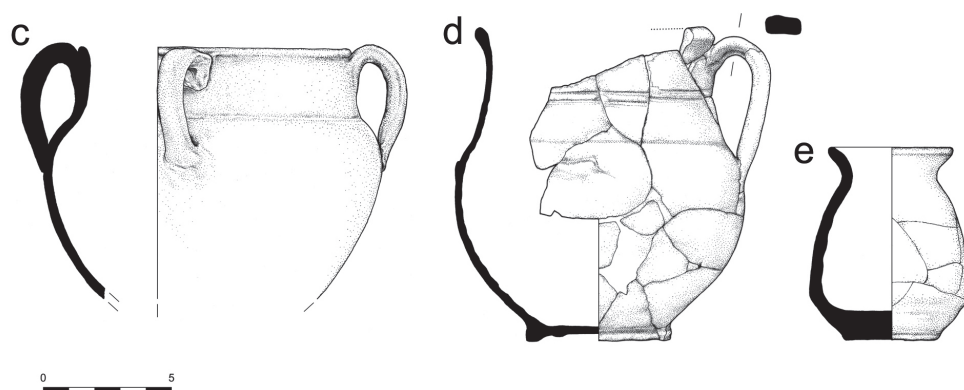


Fig. 4. Painted pottery: c) three-handle pot from grave 45, d) three-handle pot from grave 19, e) juglet from grave 43 (drawings D. Žanić).

² Priština, Kosovo.

Fidanovski made the same grouping with the pottery found at Ulpiana a couple of years before Nikolić, in his analysis of Ulpiana pottery. These pieces also came from stratigraphical layers which helps to date it better. Fidanovski states that the Ulpiana painted pottery can be dated 2nd-4th century. He also states that the later group is more diverse in types of vessels and motifs but the colour is not consistent (Fidanovski 1990: 18-22). The objects found at Krtine would belong to this later group, if we accept the classification proposed by Nikolić³ and Fidanovski.

3. Final remarks

This small pottery collection has been studied by several archaeologists, but more as a sidenote to the remainder of the collected ceramic material. However, none of them has so far been able to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of this pottery's origin. The main problem is the exceptionally small number of items discovered, both in total and at individual sites. While analyzing the material from Singidunum, Nikolić found the largest collection of specimens from a single site - sherds belonging to approximately 20 vessels in the settlement layer. The author emphasizes a general lack of comparable vessels that could be used for comparison and a lack of dating context from other sites, a situation that makes precise dating difficult (Nikolić 2005: 109). The Singidunum finds originate from a settlement, whereas other finds from the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Panonia come from or were found near graves. Earlier scholars (Čremošnik 1984; Brukner 1981) had considered them to be luxury items used only for burials.

While searching for further examples of painted pottery, we found specimens from the Cioroiu Nou site in Dacia, i.e. modern-day Romania (Bondoc 2015: 475-480). The site is approximately 20 km north of the Danube and is an important civilian but also military hub in the 2nd and 3rd century AD. For a while, Legio VII Claudia was located there (this legion was located in Tilverium in the 1st century AD, close to Salona⁴). The large amount of this type of pottery found here, considered to be the largest concentration of painted pottery in Dacia, leads archaeologists to conclude that it was produced there. Bondoc believes painted pottery is a legacy of a La Tène-period Celtic tradition which was brought to Dacia, primarily to Cioroiu Noa, by Roman colonists from northern Dalmatia and Moesia. He also connects it to Hispanic soldiers who brought their potters along with them to Dacia, and these potters then spread their tradition of pottery painting. Dacia has many sites with this type of pottery, unlike sites in Roman Dalmatia, Moesia and Pannonia Inferior. In the published literature on Salona's necropolises, there is no mention of painted pottery. There are also no sites discovered so far between Kaštela and central Bosnia with this pottery type, so we can conclude that Krtine is currently the southernmost known site in the Roman province of Dalmatia.

But two main questions still remain - what is the origins of this pottery and can we use it to deduce the origin of the deceased from Krtine?

If we accept the hypothesis of our colleagues from Romania that painted pottery was made in that country, the question is whether it arrived in Kaštela by trade. If it did, was it expensive and considered a sign of wealth and a status symbol? Or did the deceased perhaps bring it here as something to remind them of their homeland? Modern analytical methods - archaeometry - will provide more answers, but for that more pieces of this type of pottery must be found. Should the hypothesis about the connection between the Hispanics and painted pottery be proven correct, its mapping could follow the military campaigns of those parts of the Roman army that had significant numbers of Hispanic soldiers. The type could also have illustrated the movement of Dacians in the eastern part of the Empire.

The purpose of this article is to introduce scholars to this type of pottery and to advise archaeologists that there is a possibility that further similar vessels may be found. These finds will eventually provide evidence to answer the aforementioned questions.

Catalogue ⁵

1. cup, inv. no. 2455 (fig.3, b)

Grave 18 contained a double female burial. Next to the feet of one of the deceased, a painted cup was found. It has a narrow ring, while the body is slightly curved. The wall is thin and fine, with a light, almost white colour (HUE 10 YR 8/3). It was painted in brown colour, with the geometrical motifs: the vertical and undulating lines alternate within the rectangle. The motif of the wave-line stretches below the frieze, and from that point on to the bottom, everything is painted brown.

Dimensions: h. 71 mm, diameter of the opening 95 mm

Date: 3rd - 4th century AD..

2. three-handled pot, inv. no. 2547 (fig. 4, d)

Grave 19 contained a male between 30 and 35 years old, but this grave was mostly destroyed by grave 18. Next to the feet, the remains of a small three-handled pot have been found. The fabric is very fine, purified and of light-ochre colour. Traces of coating, only slightly darker, are visible, but the coating comes off easily. The ribbon of relief decoration is visible below the rim, while the neck is cylindrical and expands towards a ball-shaped belly. The ring is shallow and annular.

Dimensions: h. 114 mm, w. of the belly 100 mm.

Date: second half of the 3rd - 4th century AD.

3. cup, inv. no. 2554 (fig. 3, a)

The cover of grave 36 has not been preserved apart from a stone garland which forms an irregular rectangle. Inside were found neatly arranged nails (12 pieces in total) which are evidence of burial with a wooden casket. The skeleton

³ The dating she proposes corresponds to the dating of this necropolis.

⁴ Tilverium is today village Trilj in the hinterland. Gravestones belonging to its veterans are found all over the Saloničan ager (Tončinić 2011).

⁵ All items in the catalog were published in the catalog belonging to the exhibition Kamenjarin 2014.

was not preserved apart from a few teeth which suggests a child was buried here. An oil lamp and the remains of a glass bottle were found inside the casket, whereas on the outside was a painted ceramic cup closer to the head.

The cup has a more pronounced annular ring. The body is slightly curved at the bottom, with an annular rim. The clay is fine, the wall is thin, and the colour is light, almost white. The motifs are geometrical and organized in multiple rows. At the top there is a narrow ribbon delineated by brown lines inside of which are even vertical lines. This is followed by a series of triple circles made with thin lines. Squares are placed between the second and the third circle, which creates an impression of a cross. In the middle of this ribbon, there are two crossed squares one above the other. Below that comes a white unadorned ribbon, and the rest of the surface all the way to the ring is painted brown.

Dimensions: h. 68 mm; diameter of the opening 92 mm.

Date: 3rd - 4th century AD.

4. *juglet, inv. no. 3144 (fig. 4, e)*

Grave 43 was also a child's grave. It was partially destroyed, containing a wooden casket of smaller proportions. Remains of a small ceramic pot, light-ochre in colour, with a narrow opening, pear-shaped body and a thicker bottom with a thick, flat bottom.

Dimensions: h. 75 mm, w. of the belly 63 mm

Date: 3rd - 4th century AD.

5. *three-handled pot, inv. no. 3147 (fig. 4, c)*

The deceased who was buried here was laid into the bare ground, which destroyed the grave that had already existed here. The skeleton is in poor condition, and no anthropological analysis has been conducted. Apart from the remains of an oil lamp and a glass bottle, remains of a smaller three-handled pot were also been found next to the head. It was made of very fine clay, almost white in colour. The cylindrical neck is sharply separated from the ball-shaped body. Although almost half of the vessel is missing, the shape can be reconstructed. There are visible remains of a slightly darker coating.

Dimensions: h. 95 mm.

Date: second half of the 3rd - 4th century AD.

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