Beginnings – New Research in the Appearance of the Neolithic between Northwest Anatolia and the Carpathian Basin

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Stellerloh 65 · D-32369 Rahden/Westf.
Tel: +49/(0) 57 71/95 10-74
Fax: +49/(0) 57 71/95 10-75
E-Mail: info@vml.de
Internet: http://www.vml.de

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This is a brief observation of some of the results of archaeological research into the Neolithic in the Republic of Macedonia from 1990 till today. It aims to present the most impressive discoveries and to underline their importance in terms of prehistory in the Republic of Macedonia. However, a major handicap to this is the fact that most of these results have never been published. Thus, in our observations, we draw upon our research performed in Tumba Mađari in the last several years. Nevertheless, basing our statements on our own observation of the material, and on partial research in Pelagonia, Cerje, Govrlevo, Kumanovo and other places, we can establish the following:

1) According to our analyses, the process of Neolithization in what is now the Republic of Macedonia moved from Thessaly, northern Greece and Pelagonia towards the Skopje valley and Polog. Then it moved north toward Pannonia and east down the middle Struma River valley. This direction is reflected in the eponymous sites of Anzabegovo and Vršnik, Mamutčevo on the western verge of Ovče Pole, then Anzabegovo and further to Grnčarica and Vršnik down the Bregalnica River valley. The most southern sites of the Anzabegovo Vršnik cultural group is Damjan, which has a horizontal stratigraphy dating back to the Early, Middle and Late Neolithic; and Angelci near Strumica, from the Late Neolithic. Tumba Palčište is located in the west, below Šar Mountain, whereas Tumba Stenče is situated above the left bank of the Vardar River. This is in brief the territory on which the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group developed during the Middle Neolithic period. The most significant progress of this group was in the Middle Neolithic; in the Late Neolithic, the territory remains the same, but only some of the sites feature Late Neolithic cultural strata. Out of all the sites explored so far, the biggest stratum was found in the site known as Stranata, located in the village of Angelci, southeast Macedonia (Fig. 1).

2) The process of Neolithization in the Skopje valley moved from Pelagonia (Pešterica near Prilep), the oldest settlement in the Treska River valley being Govrlevo. The oldest stratum features fine red (wine sediment color) pot-
tery with white painted triangles and angles similar to the ones found on plates from Veluška Tumba in Pelagonia.

3) Altar houses from the Velušina-Porodin group (Vrbjan- ska Ćuka, Ćuka Tpopolčani) with simple cylinders have also been found in Tumba Stenče, dating back to the Early Neolithic. Also, some other types of altars from Pelagonia have been discovered in other settlements of the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group. The altars of the Great Mother cult discovered on the territory of the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group originated in Pelagonia, where the predominant role is given to the house, with man represented only schematically, as a mask. Altar images of the Great Mother show her with various hair-styles and eyes, or pregnant (Govrlevo) (Fig. 2). Worthy of note, however, is an impressive male torso discovered in Govrlevo. The date established in a C14 laboratory (Kiel, Germany), is 5500 BC.

4) During the VI–V millennium BC, the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group existed on this territory, using its natural resources and the creative energy of the group leaders. In terms of material culture, especially pottery production, the main features are stylized floral ornaments, presented best in Tumba Mađari.

**Tumba Mađari, Skopje**

**Chronological and Cultural Determination**

The first archaeological excavations of the Tumba Mađari site – Skopje, were conducted in 1978 by the Museum of Macedonia. Research conducted so far confirms that this is a settlement from the Middle Neolithic, with three stages of existence. The site is part of the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group, which belongs to the Balkan-Anatolian cultural complex. The oldest stratum discovered so far is chronologically compatible with Anzabegovo-Vršnik II; the second/middle stratum corresponds to Anzabegovo-Vršnik III, and the third/last one is from Anzabegovo-Vršnik IV, i.e. Zele nikovo II. The major economic and cultural flourishing of this group is in the Middle Neolithic period (5800–5200 BC), i.e. Anzabegovo-Vršnik II–IV cultural group. The excavations also proved the existence of fragments of white painted pottery which may indicate it began at the end of the early Neolithic.

**Construction**

In the period between 1981 and 2000, a total of eight houses with different inventories of movable and immovable objects were discovered. Of those, seven chronologically belong to the third cultural stratum, whereas the house discovered in 1988 belongs to the second cultural stratum (Fig. 3).

The houses were built from wood, reeds, and hay and coated in mud and straw according to Neolithic architectural traditions. They are massive, solid and spacious. They usually have square or rectangular foundation whose area varies from 16 to 80 m², and are oriented according to the points of the compass, with small deviations. The roof has two slopes and consists of a wooden frame and a layer of wood and straw. This building tradition persisted until the mid-20th century when the nearby village of Taor was destroyed.

Neolithic builders paid significant attention to the appearance of external walls, but also to the internal supporting walls. Fragments of mud and straw coating were also discovered, decorated with incised handmade lines and plastic ornaments – mostly triangles and spirals. These are the favorite motives also found decorating pottery vessels.

The internal organization of houses was individual, according to the inhabitants’ personal wishes and needs, not following a general rule. Almost all buildings discovered include fireplaces and furnaces. Part of the immovable inventory are items made of mud and straw in the shape of an irregular triangle or square, whose working title is ‘tubs’. They may be model ovens. These types of objects were discovered at the sites in Želenikovo, Stenče, Mramori – all belonging to the Anzabegovo-Vršnik cultural group.

The results from excavations conducted in 1981–1982 from house 1, which the researcher defined as a sanctuary, are also known. It has a square ground plan of 8 × 8 meters. The interior of the house is divided with a thin supporting wall that actually divides two ovens constructed next to it. A wheat mill set upon a small cylindrical pedestal made of earth was discovered in the central eastern part of the house.

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1 Research in the period between 1978 and 2000 was managed by Vojislav Sanev, archaeologist at the Museum of Macedonia.

2 Information on the results from the Tumba Mađari archaeological excavations was obtained from the reports by Vojislav Sanev (Sanev 1988).

3 Sanev 1988.
Among the items discovered in the house were a total of 45 whole vessels and many fragments of pottery. These were amphorae, cups with a small cone-like leg, fruit-stands and a small pyxis. Various cups, pithoi with barbotine ornaments, plates and small vessels were found next to the walls. A major specificity of the Neolithic period in the Upper Vardar region and Tumba Mađari site were the askoi – water vessels. These were first discovered in Tumba, and moreover, in their classic form. Compared to askoi from other sites, these are the most beautiful both in terms of shape and manufacture (Fig. 4).

Especially noticeable are the fragments of cups and amphorae painted with dark brown color on a red/ochre background, with stylized floral ornaments – motives which further enrich the artistic repertoire of the pottery from Tumba Mađari discovered so far (Fig. 5a, b).

However, what makes this house, and Tumba Mađari, famous, is the ceramic representation of the Great Mother. Its impressive dimensions of 39 cm in height, its calm air of belonging to the house, and watching over its hearth, make this terracotta figure unique. It will later be discussed as a key feature in the spiritual life of Neolithic man in Macedonia (Fig. 6).

This repertoire of various movable pottery artifacts including the terracotta figurine of the Great Mother, but also the impossibility of drawing an adequate analogy, led the researcher to define this building as a public one, i.e. as a Neolithic sanctuary. In later research conducted in other
houses, similar fragments of anthropomorphic cylinders, and various-sized models of houses were also discovered. Vessels identical to the amphorae, cups and askoi, with the same decorations, also appear during later excavations. This is in line with the observation according to which every home had its own domestic sanctuary, i.e. place for the exercise of cult and religious practices. Taking this into consideration, we believe that this was a residential house situated at the periphery of the settlement.

**Anthropomorphic Sculpture**

The most common representation in anthropomorphic plastic art in Macedonia, in almost all Neolithic settlements, is the woman. In the Middle Neolithic stages, female figurines are steatopygic (or pear-shaped idols, as they are often called), made in two halves which were afterwards joined. The head is usually missing. Sexual characteristics are accentuated with an incised triangle. One of the figurines found in Tumba Mađari is sculpted from white stone, with an emphasized steatopygia, small breasts, thin neck and clutched arms; the head is missing. It dates back to Anzabegovo-Vršnik II (Fig. 7a). A small white stone head with an emphasized nose was also discovered at this site. The sculptor exploited the natural shape of the stone. It is well formed, featuring a large nose, and a very small, barely distinguishable, trace of red paint on the forehead. At first sight it bears a formal resemblance to the later Cycladic idols, dating back to Anzabegovo-Vršnik IV (Fig. 7b). In the Late Neolithic, statuettes appear to be thinner, and secondary sexual characteristics are represented. The shapes are elongated, with accentuated sexual characteristics and grey color. The hairstyle is usually represented artistically and in detail.

**Zoomorphic Sculpture**

This category of cult pottery is represented in all areas of the site. These are mainly animal representations of sheep, goats and oxen which in some cases have bowls set on their backs (Fig. 8a). We believe that these were used to offer sacrifices to ensure the wellbeing of the family.

As a random finding from Tumba Mađari, we would mention a piece of pottery representing the head of a ram (Fig. 8b). With life-size dimensions (32–33–27 cm), and openings which probably served to accommodate real horns, it suggests the cult of the ram or bull. Since the back is com-
Funerals

The only information regarding the funeral ceremony of the inhabitants of this settlement dates back to 1985 when the remains of a child/baby, buried in a sleeping position, were discovered next to the southern wall of House 6. Also, the rooms in the other houses contained scattered children’s bones. During the latest excavations conducted in 2008, the jawbone of a woman in her forties was discovered. This information is however insufficient for us to draw conclusions on the funeral ceremony.
Excavations 2002–2005

Archaeological excavations from 2002 to 2005 continued within the framework of the international project of the CNRS and the Museum of Macedonia. The results from these excavations indicate the existence of new buildings whose parameters cannot yet be defined or isolated. Out of the movable artifacts, the most recognizable one is a fish hook made of horn, unique when it comes to Neolithic sites in Macedonia (Fig. 9a). It confirms the thesis that Katlanovo Lake Šamak and Ajvatovo swamp Blatija played an important role in the everyday life of the region’s Neolithic people. Such big fish hooks were discovered at Neolithic sites in the Derdap gorges. Several stone legs, bone needles and spatulas, and a small pintadera were also found. According to our findings, it is unique in terms of size and function – with a hole for a fishing-line. It features a double S spiral in the negative, well carved (Fig. 9b).

Among the items excavated was a cylinder made of clay, 14 cm tall (Fig. 10), from a Great Mother altar.

Excavations in 2007

Archaeological excavations in 2007 are a continuation of the 2004 research. The excavations took place in an area of 13 × 10 m uncovering an 80 cm thick layer from the second cultural stratum of the settlement. What marked the excavations in Tumba Mađari was the archaeological situation in KV, G1, H2. At a depth of around 40–50 cm, 10–11 small immovable items of mud and straw were found, built one beside the other in an area of 3.50 × 1.50 m. Some of them are square, and others round. Due to the fragility of the mud and straw mixture it was difficult to determine the exact number of these items, and their shape. The dimensions vary from 37 to 60 cm. The wall height is 5 to 17 cm. A well smoothed bottom is visible in the better preserved items. However, they did not contain any remains of vegetable or animal origin, or fragmented pottery (Fig. 11). After these so-called tubs stopped being used, in the second construction stage of the southern part, they were covered with a platform of fine gravel and fragmented pottery. A fireplace was built on the

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9 Project managers are Dr. C. Comange from the French CNRS and D. Zdravkovski, MA, from the Museum of Macedonia.
10 Information on the archaeological excavations was obtained from relevant archaeological reports.
12 Results from the latest archaeological excavations (2007–2008) were presented by E. Stojanova Kanzurova at the 20th symposium of MANO, 3.12.–6.12.2008, held in Kicevo, Republic of Macedonia. The publication of this presentation is underway.
platform. Near the fireplace, remains of ashes, pottery vessels and animal bones were also discovered.

What makes this site unique is the discovery of a rare altar of what is known as the Great Mother type, excavated at the bottom of the abovementioned fireplace which was cut in order to observe its structure (Fig. 12). Only the lower part of the altar was preserved (height: 11 cm). The upper part (cylinder), was not preserved and for the time being we can only assume what it looked like. All four corners of the house-shaped altar feature small openings which gradually become smaller on the inside. These were probably used to insert a rope with which the altar was suspended on a wall or from a rafter of the house. All sides of the house-altar have elongated irregular openings on their base. The altar is unique due to the way it is sculpted as a house with foundations. The bottom contains two openings one next to the other, which surely have a symbolic meaning. The altars of this type discovered so far (in the Republic of Macedonia), the bottom contained only one opening. This altar is an older variant of the famous Great Mother altar discovered at this site in 1981.

A similar system of so-called tubs is also found in the southern KP of KV H2. Among the remains of mud mixture three (possibly more) immovable items were discovered, which resemble the tubs from KV, G2 and H2. One of the partially damaged items is round with a cone finish. The other two are rectangular and round, respectively, and are considerably damaged. As with the previous items, the function of these three also remains unknown.

Excavations in 2008

In 2008, six additional squares in the second cultural stratum were opened, and the area of excavation reached 15 × 20 m. The emphasis was placed on the clarification of the archaeological situation in KV, G2 and H2 with the system of immovable artifacts – the so-called tubs (Fig. 13). During the excavation, a statuette was found in one of them, rather different from the ones discovered so far (Fig. 14). The unusual feature of this small statue in a sedentary position is the fact that it was formed from two materials, bone and clay, easily available to the sculptors. The Neolithic artist made this piece of art in clay, around the femur of a bird. Only the most important female attributes and features are emphasized. The statue is of a seated woman of elongated vertical shape. Unfortunately, the head is broken off, but our assumption is that it was quite schematically sculpted, without any details. The neck is long and transforms into a torso with small emphasized breasts. The hands are emphasized. The torso is thin and flattened and continues into a well-shaped round bottom, with short stumpy legs. The only accentuated part of the figurine is the bottom, with prominent steatopygia, from which the legs derive. Since it was found in an in situ position, this points to the possible purpose and function of these tubs.

There are, however, not many analogies to this system of tubs. In house 6, excavated in 1988–1990, an immovable object was discovered, consisting of several small but deep tubs, covered on the inside with several thin layers of stirred clay. Its function could not be determined. The analogy suggested by the researcher is the one of organized ‘cassettes’ within the altar found in Vrbjanska Čuka.
Partial analogies were found in Tumba Stenče, Porodin, Zelenikovo and particularly Vrbjanska Ćuka in Pelagonia (Fig. 15).

The western part of this system contained a pintadera with a long, oval form and a small pierced vertical handle. The sides feature incised vertical lines, and a long wavelike line is carved on the head. An attractive necklace composed of 19 beads was discovered in the northern part of this system (Fig. 16). The beads are made of various stones, and two of them are made of animal bones. Most of them have an elongated bi-conal shape, whereas the others are round. The length of the largest beads is up to 1.8 cm, and the smallest ones range up to 4 mm.

In the KP between KV I2–3, an oven with several stages of usage and refurbishment was found. It has an irregular round shape, with dimensions of 1 x 1 m and height of 36 cm. An immovable rectangular object was discovered on the eastern side of the furnace. The dimensions of this irregular rectangular object are 70 x 75 cm. Due to the lack of elements and adequate analogies, the function of this object cannot yet be defined. These two objects are connected by a channel in the southeast part of the oven. The side of the oven facing south contains preserved fragments of mud and straw mixture from another immovable rectangular object whose purpose has not yet been identified (Fig. 17).

As for the movable archaeological material in the northern excavated area (KV F2), a rare bone amulet with a length of 7.5 cm was found (Fig. 18). The amulet is a masterpiece by a Neolithic artist. According to one’s personal perception, various Neolithic animal forms can be distinguished on the amulet. The closest analogy is found in the settlements from the Dardap complex, in particular Lepenski Vir. In KV F3, a square altar with high walls was excavated. The preserved corners finish in small hemispherical humps.

According to the pottery found, the most common type is rough and medium pottery. Fine pottery is rarely present. Medium pottery is made of purified clay and it is well fired in red and ochre color. Pottery fragments come from medium
to small vessels, rarely from bigger ones such as pithoi. The most frequent forms are plates, cups and a few askoi. They are decorated with barbotine, various impressions made with nails, bones or other objects, and strips in the form of wreaths. The rim is often flat, sometimes slightly pulled outwards and the handles are strip-like.

The proportion of fine pottery is considerably smaller. Its external and internal polishing is of high quality. The most frequent fragments are of cups red in color and with a small ring-like hollow leg. Almost all painted motives characteristic for all stages of the Middle Neolithic are present. These are: vertical triangles beginning at the rim which is slightly pulled outwards, small triangles on the rim itself, small diagonal lines on the rim, with grouped lines down the entire body underneath, cross-hatched triangles, spirals and web-like ornaments painted in brown. Some shallow diagonal fluting characteristic for the end of Middle Neolithic also appear.

In the lower strata, 4–5 fragments of white painted pottery related to the end of Early Neolithic were also discovered. Such fragments were excavated in recent years, which is an indicator that this settlement existed in the Anzabegovo-Vršnik I phase.

Fig. 14 Female figurine, Tumba Mađari, 2008.

Fig. 15 System of “tubs”, Vrbjanska Čuka.

Fig. 16 Necklace, Tumba Mađari.
Cult Altars
The most commonly found fragments of cult altars are legs of the table type, in different variants, as well as fragments from the Great Mother-type altars (Fig. 19a, b).

Fig. 17  Oven, Tumba Mađari.

Fig. 18  Bone amulet, Tumba Mađari.

Fig. 19a–b  Fragments of cult altars, Tumba Mađari.
Tools

The entire area of excavation contained a considerable number of tools made of various animal bones and stones. Different types of bradawls, needles and spatulas were made of bone, as well as some other tools whose purpose has not yet been identified. The items made of stone were mostly mashingers, planes, sharpeners, mills for grain, hatches, chisels and knives.

According to their chronological and cultural value, parts of the movable material from the 2007 and 2008 research corresponds to the forms and decoration of the Anzabegovo-Vršnik III cultural group. However, some shapes of pottery production, globular vessels, half-globular vessels and the two female figurines point to an older phase of this cultural group, i.e. Anzabegovo-Vršnik II.

The few fragments of white painted pottery can be related to the end of the Early Neolithic.

Excavations in 2009

The excavations were conducted in order to define the vertical stratigraphy of the area which was partially excavated in 2007 and 2008. The tubs discovered in the last campaign...
Fig. 22a–b  The Neolithic village at site Tumba Mađari, 2009.
were removed so that they could be conserved and re-constructed prior to presentation. A small sounding area (1.5 x 1.5 m) was opened at the location of the tubs. The investigation of this area finished with a sterile layer of clay and water. This meant that the end of the cultural stratum of this Neolithic settlement had been reached.

Houses as complete entities could not be defined during the research. With regards to movable material, especially pottery, the same forms as in the previous excavations were found, with the exception of painted decorations. The vessels were mostly decorated in the impresso technique, barbotine, and in some cases with wreath-shaped strips. Most of the pottery was of a red color – rarely gray.

In the area between KP X3–I3, a small stone object similar to the ›horns of consecration‹ was found, without an apparent archaeological context (Fig. 20). Two similar objects were found in Tumba Madari, but made of clay. Analogies can be found in the early Neolithic settlement of Rakitovo in Bulgaria, where 33 similar pieces made of clay were discovered. Some of them were interpreted as phalli or bucrania. Out of the items made of animal bones, one unusual one is a fragment whose purpose is unknown.

**Cult Altars**

Out of this group of cult altars, a very small number of fragments of the Great Mother type and table type in several variants were discovered.

Most of the newest archaeological material corresponds to the shapes and decoration motives of Anzabegovo-Vršnik II. However, some forms of pottery production, such as several fragments of painted cups, as well as fragments of altars of the Great Mother type, point to the Anzabegovo-Vršnik III cultural group. The excavations in the second cultural stratum partly complete the image of the urban, economic, spiritual and cultural evolution of this settlement.

**Neolithic Village of Tumba Mađari**

The Tumba Mađari site, with its artistic and aesthetic values of material and spiritual culture, was recognized by archaeologists; but regretfully, in this last decade, due to lack of funds and inadequate institutional and local care, it was turned into a dump and slowly fell into oblivion.

In this period when caring for cultural heritage is one of the highest national priorities, an archaeological project for the reconstruction of the Neolithic village of Tumba Mađari was presented and unconditionally supported. The aim of this idea to reconstruct Tumba Mađari was twofold – to revitalize the site and to develop among members of the public an appreciation of the earliest cultural achievements of our ancestors.

The reconstruction of Neolithic houses in Tumba Mađari was based on relevant sources: archaeological findings; the appearance of pottery models – altars – houses from the Neolithic, the Anzabegovo-Vršnik and Velušina-Porodin cultural groups, as well as houses in the surrounding villages, which retain their building traditions for a very long time, practically millennia (Fig. 21).

So far, three Neolithic and several other buildings intended for visitors have been constructed. The construction of one more Neolithic house is also planned. The houses are built in the spirit and style of Neolithic architecture, using natural materials (clay, wood, straw, hay). Their interiors contain copies of the movable and immovable objects discovered by archaeologists, as well as representations of people going about their everyday activities (Fig. 22a, b).

**Gmčarica Site, near the Village of Krupište**

The Gmčarica archaeological site is situated southeast of the village of Krupište, in the Bregalnica river valley, on a slightly flattened plain, and an area of around 1 ha. It was subject to research in 2007 and 2008. The results have not been systematized yet, but the preliminary conclusions obtained from researchers point to the following: the site has a very thin cultural layer of 0.25–1.30 m with two phases: the more recent one dating to the Roman period, and the earlier one belonging to the Early Neolithic, i.e. Anzabegovo-Vršnik I phase. The Neolithic settlement is of the river terrace type with one cultural horizon. Architectural remains are very modest because they were severely damaged by farming. Many postholes have been discovered, as well as rubbish pits. Many artifacts made of local stone were also found. Some of the items excavated were a fireplace and an oven set in soft sandstone. According to the researchers and our examination of the pottery found, it can be concluded that the most characteristic are monochrome vessels of globular shape and with pierced vertical handles, and large plates with a smooth surface and red color (Fig. 23a–d). Barbotine and impresso pottery are less well represented. In spite of the size of the excavated area, no painted pottery was found. As regards plastic art, only one fragmented female figurine was discovered. The remains of an adult male were also found, set in a shallow pit in a rock, without any grave goods (Fig. 24).

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19 Radunčeva 2002, 33: 142, Fig. 22.
20 Authors of this project are E. Stojanova Kanzurova and D. Zdravkovič, PhD, archaeologists from the Museum of Macedonia.
21 More information on the site and the Neolithic village in Tumba Mađari can be found on the website <http://www.tumbamadzari.org.mk>.
22 Report on the Completed Protective Archaeological Excavations at the Sites Threatened by the Construction of the Multipurpose Hydro System Zletovica, 2008. The project manager is T. Nacev, MSc from the Institute and Museum Shtip. The manager of Gmčarica site is T. Jovčevska from the Museum in Veles.

Pod Selo-Tumba Stenče, Tetovo Site

The archaeological site of Pod Selo-Tumba is located on the right bank of the Vardar River near the village of Stenče, Tetovo. The movable and immovable archaeological material from the seven soundings conducted demonstrated that this is a Neolithic site with a long chronology, dating back to the Early (white painted pottery) up to the end of the Middle Neolithic (brown painted pottery). The Late Neolithic stratum has been partially destroyed. In some soundings on the periphery of the settlement, finds were present in situ. Four soundings resulted in the discovery of the remains of a house built in a manner typical for Neolithic architecture in the region. The house has not yet been fully researched. Its interior contained an oven for baking bread, in a hemispherical shape. This sort of oven is found in the settlements of Tumba Mađari, Slatina-Zelenikovo, Mramor, village of Čaška, Cer-
Researchers interpreted some of these immovable objects as cult objects – altars. An immovable artifact was found in House 1 – a so-called tub made of mud and straw mixture with a smoothened top.

Among the remains of the house, dating back to the early Neolithic, an altar was discovered which represents an older form of the prehistoric cult of the Great Mother as the guardian of the home and family\(^{29}\) (Fig. 25). It is a cylinder set as a chimney over a rectangular shaped base representing the house. The sides feature openings – two rectangular and two in the shape of the letter M. Two plates discovered belong to the Early Neolithic stratum, with analogies to Pelagonia, as well as one round vessel in a reddish-brown color and with bead-like handles.

The most impressive layer is the one from the Middle Neolithic, characterized by various stone and bone tools and pottery products. The latter are vessels for everyday use, both of rough and ›luxury‹ make. The most frequent forms are cups, askoi, pots, plates etc. An interesting category of objects are statuettes and fragments of anthropomorphic altars of the Great Mother type, well known from the Middle Neolithic in Tumba Madari, Skopje. Pottery makers from the Middle Neolithic in the Pod Selo settlement present the anthropomorphic nature of this altar with many different modern hairstyles, including the afro. Excavations showed that the Great Mother cult was the main cult of Neolithic people living in the settlements of the Skopje region and Polog valley. This cult was also recognized in the Tumba settlement of Dolno Palčište in the same northwestern part of Macedonia\(^{31}\).

In the devastated strata, fragments of finely-made pottery vessels painted in white color on a red background were discovered.

The stratum from the late Neolithic period is partly destroyed, and in situ is present in some soundings at the periphery of the settlement. Two very well preserved cups belong to this period. One of them is of shiny grey color with fluting on the shoulder. The second one is brown in color. The fluted cup continues to exist as a form during the Early Neolithic period, which is proved with the cup found in Markova Sušica near Skopje, belonging to the Early Neolithic according to the graphite decoration of its inside (Fig. 26a, b).

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29 Bilbija 1986, 35 f.
30 Zdravkovski 2005, 27.
Excavations in 2007

New excavations in 2007 were conducted in order to complete the research and monitor the situation from 2000. Two soundings were opened in the immediate proximity to the ones from 2000\textsuperscript{32}. They contained remains of mud and straw with regards to immovable inventory, two objects were discovered — an oven with a hemispherical base and, on its southwest side, a rectangular object of the type we have called a tub. The two items were part of the food preparation process. In this archaeological campaign, the foundation of the house has not been fully excavated.

As for movable materials, besides fragments of various pottery vessels, several fragments of white and brown painted pottery are recognizable, fragments of anthropomorphic altars similar to the Great Mother altar from Tumba Mađari, table altar fragments, bone tools, stone tools, pottery utility items.

The results of these excavations enable this settlement to be culturally and chronologically related to Pelagonia in its later phase. The subsequent phases are related to Anzabegovo-Vršnik II—IV cultural group, i.e. to relate it to the relevant settlements from the Skopje region, with which it had intensive communication thanks to the easy passage from one valley to the other.

Džuniver Site, near the Village of Izvor, Veleš

Džuniver site is located near the village of Izvor and the town of Veleš. According to the results from several years of excavations (1999—2001), this site was identified as a Neolithic settlement with a period of existence from the Middle to the Late Neolithic\textsuperscript{33}.

So far, the only information available is only on the object that the researcher defined as an altar. The researcher bases her arguments for this on the absence of immovable items (ovens, fireplaces) and movable goods for everyday use.

There are several archaeological situations and objects intended for cult purposes. A terracotta bucranium (bull) without horns was found in a central location. The sanctuary also contained an arrangement of three stones with different dimensions and forms, related to the fertility cult\textsuperscript{34}.

Near this entity and in the southern part of the sanctuary, several small stylized female figurines were discovered. Near the entrance, in the northern part of the sanctuary, carved rock crystal was found. The crystal and its symbolism additionally enrich the repertoire of movable artifacts in the sanctuary.

The traces of ash in the pits are related to the act of purifying and illuminating the earth. Setting up a fire in the pit relates to the life created in a mother’s womb – a reference to the Mother Earth cult.

All these observations, supported by findings, allow the researcher to identify this building as a place for rituals related to the fertility cult, which was of great importance to the Neolithic community.

Kutline Site, near the Village of Rakle, Prilep

Kutline site is located near the village of Rakle in Pelagonia\textsuperscript{35}. According to its shape, this settlement is of the ‘garden’ type, spread on a natural terrace and distinguished from the usual type of prehistoric settlements of the ‘tumba’-type in Pelagonia\textsuperscript{36}. An area of 23 m\textsuperscript{2} has been excavated, with stratigraphic data defining two horizons of the settlement. The modest results do not offer sufficient data on the architecture of the settlement.

The predominant archaeological material consist of pottery vessels of average make, a smaller number of fine pottery vessels, and very rarely, roughly-made vessels. The predominant pottery vessels are black, brown and occasionally red in color (Fig. 27a–c). Typical are black vessels whose surface has been given an almost metallic finish through polishing. In the analysis of pottery, researchers defined sixteen types of vessels\textsuperscript{37}. Most frequent shapes are cone-shaped and bi-conal-shaped plates with various typological specificities. Several types of handles with triangular, strip- and tunnel-like shapes have also been identified. The manner of decoration features linear motives made by incision, the so-called plastic rib, decorated with nail incisions.

Plastic art features anthropomorphic figurines representing a woman in the late stage of pregnancy, figurines consisting of two parts, and prosopomorphic figurines. Two sculptures were randomly discovered by farmers – a pillar-like head with a detailed bird face, and a female figurine consisting of two parts, with a flattened body and clothes emphasized by means of incisions and round plastic applications. Particularly interesting are two terracotta fragments of realistically represented fingers.

The Kutline site existed in the time of the Late Neolithic presented in Anzabegovo-Vršnik IV cultural group.

34 Jovčevska 2006, 44.
35 In 2002, the Institute and Museum of Prilep performed archaeological soundings in order to determine the chronological and cultural framework of the settlement.
36 Temelkoski – Mitkoski 2008, 93.
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Address of the authors:
Elena Kanzurova – Dragiša Zdravkovski
Museum of Macedonia
Kurčiska b.b.
MK-1000 Skopje
(dragicez@yahoo.com.mk)
(elena_mk2004@hotmail.com)

Fig. 27a–c  Pottery vessels, Kutline.