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HOME SWEET HOME: NEOLITHIC ARCHITECTURAL REMNANTS FROM CERJE – GOVRLEVO, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

*Ljubo Fidanoski**

Keywords: Neolithic architecture and culture, Neolithic Houses, Neolithic Households, Cerje – Govrlevo, Republic of Macedonia

Cuvinte cheie: Arhitectura neolitică, case neolitice, Cerje – Govrlevo, Republica Macedonia

(Abstract)

The Neolithic site *Cerje – Govrlevo*, Republic of Macedonia, is well known in broader public by the ceramic fragmented sculpture (torso) of man, so-called *Adam from Govrlevo* found in 2000. It is a Neolithic settlement at which several houses dating from Early and Middle Neolithic were excavated. These houses built with great architectural skills are typical for the Balkan Neolithic and they are consecutive proof of the grand Neolithic intellect. In their interior various movable and unmovable artifacts were documented, which altogether highlight the high intellectual, economical, social, and cultural achievements of the Neolithic communities who lived at this site.

The Site and its History of Research

Cerje – Govrlevo is situated on the south slope of Vodno mountain (Karšijak), 15 km south-west of Skopje, 1.5 km south-east of the village Govrlevo and 2 km south-west of village Dolno Sonje, at an altitude of 500 m (Георгиев-Билбија 1984, 39; Bilbija 1986, 35) (Fig. 1). The site covers a flattened terrace (agricultural land at present) in the area called Cerje, outspread in a smaller valley surrounded by low hills, covering about 15 ha (Fig. 2). The northern side of the terrace ends in the slopes of Vodno, the western and the eastern sides are closed by lower hills, while the south side is almost completely open. To the east and west of the terrace, onto which the site is situated there used to be two smaller rivers in the past – Čiflički and Cereški. This gives the name of the site “Cerje” meaning “between rivers”. This natural “amphitheatre” today houses several villages: Dolno Sonje to the north-east, Čiflik to the north, Barovo and Sveta Petka to the north-west and Govrlevo to the west. In the south edge of the site there is a curative spring known from long ago,

with a small church dedicated to the Holy Healers Cosmas and Damian, and over the terrace onto which the site lies, in the area Brzovec is the monastery St. Tryphon.

The site was accidentally discovered by Z. Georiev in 1975, when during a well excavation, in the profile he noticed Neolithic artifacts (Георгиев-Билбија 1984, 39). In 1981, he together with M. Bilbija performed a field survey of the terrain, whereupon they determine the boundaries and the characteristics of the site (Bilbija 1986, 35). The following 1982, M. Bilbija, within the project “Systematic Archaeological Research of the Neolithic and the Metal Age Cultures in the Skopje Valley”, began the archaeological research of the site (Bilbija 1986, 35) (Fig. 3). In the period from 1982 to 1985, 5 Latin-enumerated squares with dimensions 4×4 m with total amount of 80 sq. m were open in plot 1455, whose space was given a working title – trench I (Fidanoski-Tomaž 2010, 62–63; Фиданоски 2011a, 54) (Fig. 4). This research gave the preliminary image of the site – its stratigraphy, features, as well as its temporal and spatial frame.

In this early period of excavations the first conclusions and ideas about the site were established. It was a Neolithic settlement with cultural manifestations from the Neolithic, Chalcolithic,

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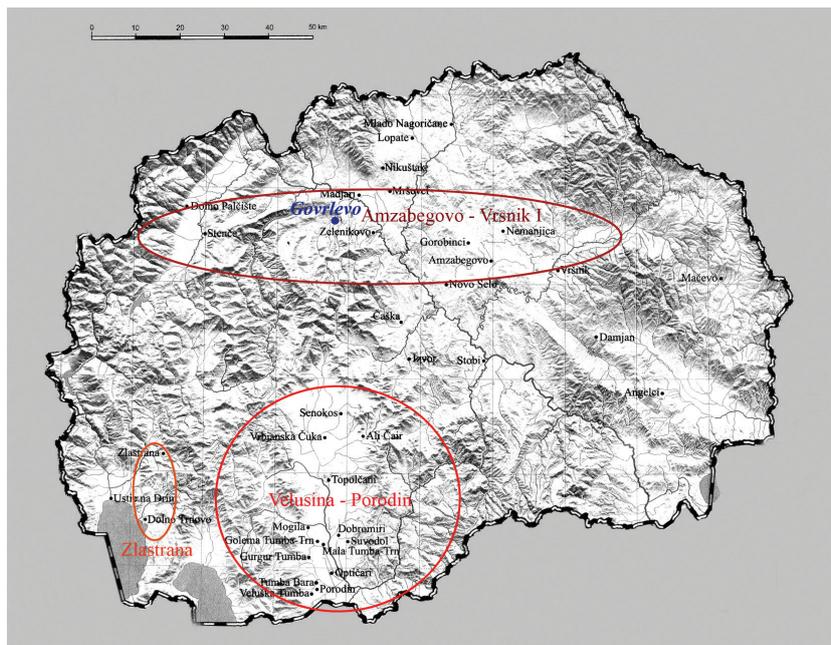


Fig. 1. Map of the major Neolithic sites and cultures in Republic of Macedonia.



Fig. 2. Panorama photo of Cerje – Govrlevo.



Fig. 3. Position of the trenches.

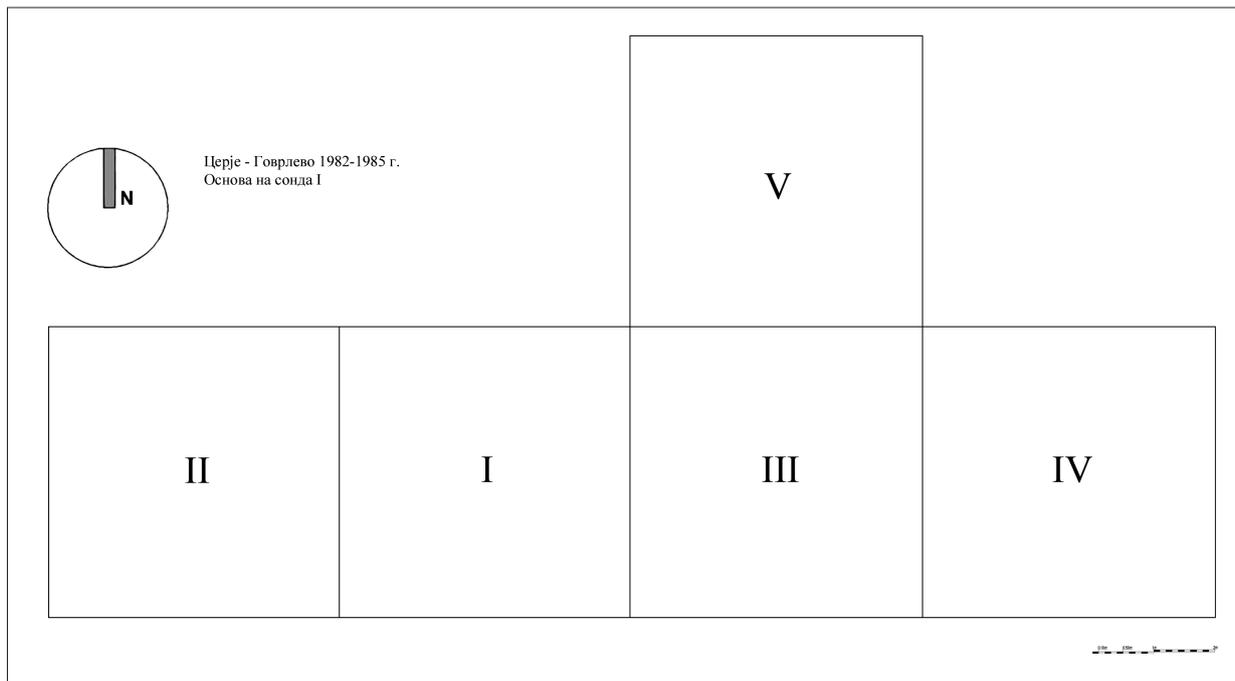


Fig. 4. Ground plan of trench I, opened in 1982.

the Bronze and the Iron Age. Namely, under the humus layer and in the first, most shallow cultural layers the presence of ceramic material from all of the aforementioned periods was noticed which, most probably, was owing to the penetration from later prehistoric periods and the contemporary agricultural activities in the Neolithic settlement horizons. On the basis of the discovered material of the Neolithic period the site was attributed to the Amzabegovo – Vršnik culture.

Within this first phase of archaeological research (1982–1985) large number of movable and unmovable archaeological finds were found – as the well known ceramic artifacts: a stamp with ideogram representations, an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic head and an anthropomorphic house model (also known as Great Mother) (Pl. 1, 1–3). In other words, based on the actual archaeological methodology in that time, Miloš Bilbija, excavating in trench I found three houses: houses no. 1 and 2 from the Middle Neolithic, chronologically synchronous with phases Amzabegovo III and II, and house no. 3 from Early Neolithic, chronologically synchronous with Amzabegovo I phase, according to the chronology of M. Gimbutas (1976, 29).

During 2000, within the project “Systematic Archaeological Research of the Neolithic Settlement Govrlevo”, under the guidance of M. Bilbija and in organization of the Museum of the City of Skopje, 6 Latin-enumerated squares with dimensions 4×4 m were opened in the neighbouring

plot 1452, and the research area was called trench II. The dimensions of the trench upon opening were 8×12 m, and with the widening from 2004, with dimensions 1.5×4 m (squares VII and VIII) on its eastern side and the weather effects, it enlarged to approximately 9.5×13 m (with total amount of around 120 sq. m) (Fig. 5). This research was carried out in the period 2000–2002, 2004 and 2008–2010 (Fidanoski-Tomaž 2010, 63; Фиданоски 2011a, 54). In 2003 the cooperation between the Museum of the City of Skopje and the Primorska University in Kopar (Slovenia) was made official, and the project became a partnership between the two institutions. The monograph edition *Govrlevo Will Not Die* was published within this project, a large study on the ethnological characteristics of the present-day village of Govrlevo (Hristova-Namičev 2004). In 2004 the archaeological excavations were improved through the implementation of stratigraphic units (loci) for every occurrence in the field. Mechanically, in the field itself, it was carried out by means of regular scraping of the working areas, thereby clearly registering all changes and occurrences in the trench area. During the research attention was paid in terms of their mutual relation, as well as their vertical and horizontal stratigraphic order. The photographing was carried out with a digital camera, while the technical drawings of the situations, i.e. the plans, the bases and the sections were computer processed and digitalized. Every occurrence in the field has its own number of stratigraphic unit, as

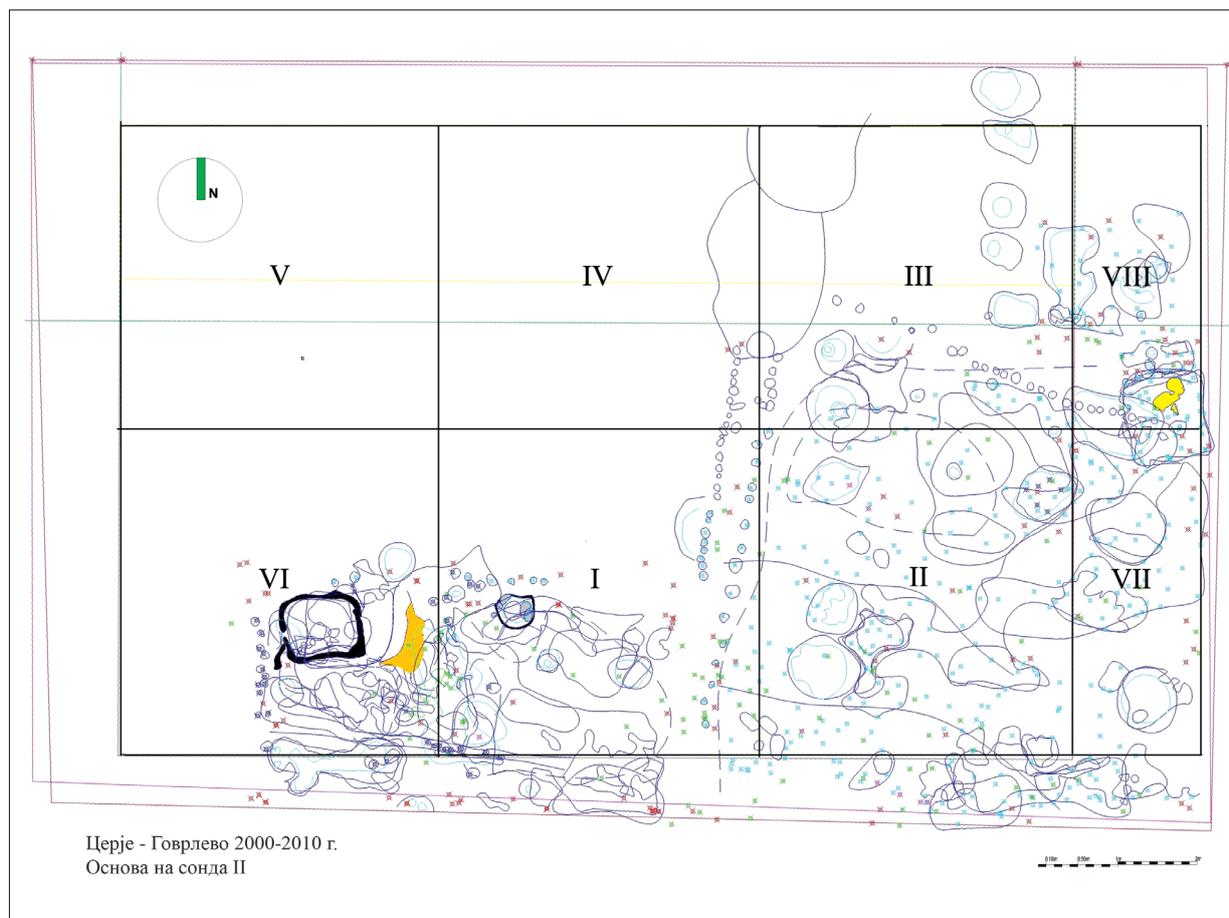


Fig. 5. Ground plan of trench II, opened in 2000.

well as a separate list in the basic form (journal) of the research. Correspondingly, for every stratigraphic unit the list is filled in with a description of the occurrence, its span and contents, the photos and technical drawings made for it, as well as with the field inventory. In the end, the stratigraphic unit was inserted in the basic plan of the trench, in order to obtain a clearer image of its spatial span. The research from 2008 onwards included one more element from the contemporary methodology of documenting, a total unit, with which all archaeological contexts are immediately placed in absolute geographic coordinates (latitude, longitude and altitude), which contributes for greater precision when placing the site in its geographic surrounding and its absolute positioning.

The second phase of research, the period after 2000, in trench II a large number movable and unmovable archaeological artifacts were found from which a very special find was unearthed – a fragmented sculpture (torso) of man, so-called *Adam from Govrlevo* (Bilbija 2001) (Pl. 1, 4). Within this archaeological research three more houses were excavated: houses no. 1 and 2 from

the Middle Neolithic, chronologically synchronous with phases Amzabegovo III and II, and house no. 3 from Early Neolithic, chronologically synchronous with Amzabegovo I phase, according to the aforementioned chronology.

This two phases of research at the Neolithic settlement Cerje – Govrlevo besides other typical archaeological occurrences (layers, deposits, pits, etc.) six houses in total (three in every trench) were documented: two from Early Neolithic phase (synchronous with Amzabegovo I), two from the early phase of Middle Neolithic (Amzabegovo II), and two from the later Middle Neolithic phase (Amzabegovo III) according to the same chronology (Fidanoski-Tomaž 2010, 66). It is very interesting that in both trenches – above the Early Neolithic houses with minimal spatial deviations the Middle Neolithic houses were built which indicates a continuous life at the same place within the same settlement – a state documented at several multi-layered Neolithic sites in Macedonia (Симоска-Санев 1975, 34–44, 71–77; Китаноски 1977, 27; Санев 1994, 30; Санев 1995, 28, 38–39; Sanev 2004, 38; Tolevski 2009, 37–38).

“In order to obtain insight into the stratigraphy of the settlement in Govrlevo we will pay attention to the eastern profile in square II. According to the profile, containing all cultural strata up to the subsoil, the following layers and horizons have been singled out:

layer 1 – ploughed area with relative height 0–24 cm;

layer 2 – ruins from objects from horizon I with relative height 0.24–0.44 m;

horizon I – remnants from house 1;

layer 3 – stuffing under horizon I with relative height 0.44–0.97 m;

layer 4 – ruins from horizon III with relative height 0.97–1.57 m;

horizon II – remnants from house 2;

layer 5 – substructural sediments on horizon III with relative height 1.57–2.10 m;

horizon III – remnants from house 3;

layer 6 – lying on subsoil, initial layer for the formation of cultural strata onto the proto-humus with relative height 2.1–2.6 m”.¹

Stratigraphical data obtained from the excavations in trench II show differences, to some extent, with the stratigraphy of trench I. These are not

significant differences especially in terms of the so-called horizons of living i.e. the stratigraphy of the houses, but they show different deposit and layer characteristics – their span and depth, which probably is a result of different layer properties in one space (trench I) and other space (trench II), and probably, to some extent, they are a consequence of different excavation and documentation techniques, and methodology. A direct product of the use of modern archaeological methodology since 2004 is the much more precise detection, excavation and documentation of all archaeological occurrences and stratigraphical changes (pits, deposits, layers, etc.). Therefore, within excavations in trench II a much larger number of pits and layers regarding earlier excavations in trench I were processed.

Generally in trench II the stratigraphy is more complex and depends on geomorphological configuration of the terrain itself as well as deposition due to the long lasting successive use of the settlement (Tomaž 2009; Tomaž 2010; Fidanoski-Tomaž 2010, 65–66). Namely, during excavations it became clear that thickness and position of different layers varies considerably in a very small area (Figs. 7–10). In the northwest corner



Fig. 7. Northern section of trench II.



Fig. 8. Southern section of trench II.

¹ Unpublished manuscript of M. Bilbija, entitled as *Zelenikovo and Govrlevo as Neolithic Settlements in the Skopje Valley* (published posthumous in Fidanoski 2012, 112–122).



Fig. 9. Eastern section of trench II.



Fig. 10. Western section and ditch in trench II.

of the trench sterile geological basis was registered only 0.4 m under the present day surface, while in the opposite corner (south-east) it was detected in a depth of more than 4.5 m. In this small distance it can be seen, that in this part of the site the slope was pretty steep, accordingly the remnants of the houses testify that they have been constructed on the slope. The geomorphological conditions influenced the formation of the thickest layer deposits at the southern and eastern side of the trench where the slope of the original field is greatest.

The complexity of the stratigraphy in this area of the trench/site in brief can be seen by the layer deposits and the chronological/stratigraphical character of the found houses remnants, especially in squares I and II. Under the topsoil layer, a brownish-grey layer with 0.1 to 0.3 m varies

in depth, than two relatively homogenous layers with brown color and filled with large number of small stones, ceramics and animal bones, in some areas highly destroyed by later pits and plowing intrusions vary in depth between 0.3 to 0.8 m. In square II fragments of wattle and daub house remnants were found – remnants of a house (no. 1 of trench II). Below them a thick horizon of living was documented in some areas with depth from 0.8 to 1.3 m in which a small part (edge) of north wall of a Middle Neolithic house (so-called house no. 2 of trench II, neighboring and contemporary house of house no. 2 of trench I) was detected and excavated, where among fragments of orange-yellowish wattle and daub house remnants three almost complete askoi were found (Figs. 11a, 11b). In the course of excavations in depth between 1.3



Figs. 11a, 11b. Remnants of house no. 2 in southern section of trench II, squares II and VII.

to 2 m, in southern section of squares II and VII, fragments of yellowish wattle and daub house remnants – an edge of north wall of a probably Early Neolithic house (neighboring and contemporary house of the houses no. 3 of trench I and II). Remnants of this house and inventory were never excavated so its relation with other houses and chronological character could not be precisely set, and therefore it is excluded in this analysis.

As it was documented in the research from 2002, in the following excavation campaign, in squares I–III, and later on in squares VII and VIII, under the thick (varies between 0.1–0.6 m) grayish-brown layer at 2 m depth another house was expected. In the research 2004, a small part of the thick aforementioned layer was removed and part of the northern side of the house (no. 3 of trench II) was found. In squares I and VI, at the southern side of the trench, at depth between 1.8 to 2.5 m, a very thick dark grey layer deposit filled with large quantities of pottery fragments, stones and animal bones, with span within and around the house was documented. This deposit covers the whole area of squares I and VI, and within research it was noted that its thickness enlarges towards south, which was another confirmation of the great fall of the field towards south-east. In square VI in the same layer a large animal bones, ceramic and

stone material deposit was documented. In this area close to the material deposit in the same layer, a unique partial burial of human mandible with two fragmented ceramic vessels and stone axe were found (Fig. 12). This occurrence is maybe a ritual deposition of partial human remnants in shallow pit, which is a rare case in Balkan Neolithic sites (Naumov 2009, 132).

With the removal of the same dark grey layer deposit and right below the aforementioned occurrences, in square VI and in the bordering area with Square I, at depth between 2 to 2.5 m a complex of four ovens was unearthed (Figs. 13–17). At relatively uneven terrain, in hard, dense, clayish and dark brown layer deposit with no artifacts in it, three ovens were found. The ovens were made with different construction techniques, as well as, with different dimensions and forms. Namely, in the clayish layer deposit, at the beginning of the removal, at depth of around 2 m the smallest ellipsoid oven (no. 1) m was found. It was built over several tamped layers consisted of small stones and enclosed with slightly larger stones and it had dimensions of 0.3×0.5 m (Figs. 15, 16). The remnants of the oven demonstrated traces of high temperature during its use – the founding and enclosing stones, as well as, soil around were highly burnt bearing reddish-orange coloring. At



Fig. 12. Partial human mandible burial in pit in trench II, square VI.



Fig. 13. Complex of four ovens in trench II, squares I and VI.

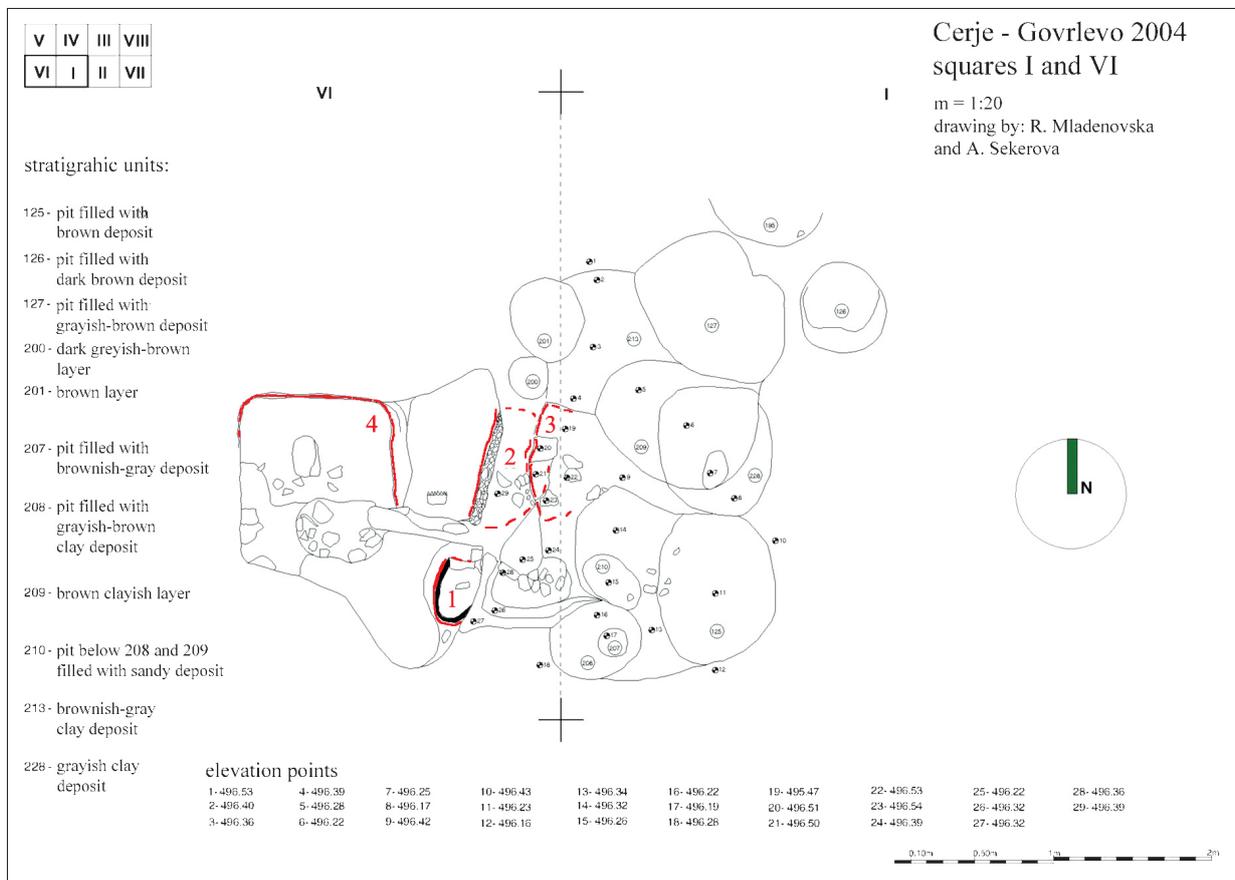


Fig. 14. Complex of four ovens in trench II, squares I and VI, drawing.

almost same depth, right to the first oven to its northern side another oven (no. 2) was excavated. Its form could not be documented because it was largely destroyed by a later pit. Its frontal side with length of around 0.5 to 0.7 m remained relatively well preserved by which it was suggested that it had probably the same form as the previous oven. On the foundation of the former oven, another oven (no. 3) was excavated (Fig. 16). This object was made in the same technique as the former one, and unfortunately this oven too was destroyed by the same pit. These ovens were positioned on the edge of the clayish layer, and below them, at their whole western side/line, at depth of 0.6 below their level, a larger dig was documented (Fig. 13). It had irregular square form widened and slightly curved at its eastern side. At its western side (or the square form of the dig) another oven (no. 4) was excavated (Fig. 17). Unlike former ovens, this one was not founded on the clayish layer – it was directly dug inside the dig, thus forming its square form part. This oven is a typical Balkan Neolithic calotte oven. It was built directly on the bottom of the dig, in the same time using its western, northern and eastern side as a backing for the calotte. The oven's bottom and walls were made of several moist clay layers (later by intensive firing hardened) smeared directly on the dig – a technique which provided long term use of the oven. Thanks to this, its well preservation (its height was preserved up to 0.4 m) should not surprise us. Unlike former ovens, this ones foundation did not have small stone layers as foundation. In terms of chronology, stratigraphy and use, these ovens were simultaneously used, and if not, they were probably used in very close time interval. This context suggests that the oven complex belonged to some kind of a workshop in which specialized resources preparations were made. They are not inventory of any house which additionally emphasizes their uniqueness in terms of use and function. After the complex removal, in the layer beneath them imprints of thinner wooden beams (0.05 to 0.1 m in diameter) were uncovered which suggests that it was covered by a light rooftop construction, or it was fenced, or a combination of both light constructional elements. Does the oven complex have direct connection with the house (no. 3 of trench II) from the earliest horizon of living (even though the multilayered stratigraphy in this area is very complex) we can not be sure, but it can be assumed that the complex is rather earlier than the house. Outside the calotte oven and dig, at their western side (square VI) the same aforementioned dark grey layer deposit

continued, and in this area of the trench it had its highest depth of 0.7 m, altogether meaning the deepest elevation point in the trench of 2.8 m. The basic property of the layer was documented again – it was full with animal bones and other material, and in its deeper parts was consisted of moist greenish-grey lines which suggested constant exposure to water. After the removal of this thick layer deposit and the house (no. 3 of trench II), in the whole southern length of trench II (in squares I, II, VI and VII), at depth below 2.8 m from the western section to the eastern section, and with high fall of the field towards south-east within the excavations in 2010, an unusual archaeological occurrence was unearthed. It was a ditch extending in the west-southeast direction with a length of approximately 10 m, an average depth of around 1 m and width from 1.5 to 2 m (Fig. 10). Its origin and purpose remain unclear. In this way the cultural layer from trench II were depleted.

A part of the chronological image of the site was confirmed by the obtained ¹⁴C dating from the Leibniz Laboratory for Radiometric Dating and Stable Isotope Research, within the Christian-Albrechts University (Kiel, Germany)² (Fidanoski and Tomaž 2010, 72; Bilbija 2011, 32; Fidanoski 2012, 46). Sample 1 corresponds to the Early Neolithic and belongs to the time interval 5893–5728 BC (calibrated value), sample 2 corresponds to the Middle Neolithic belonging to the interval 5814–5714 BC (calibrated value), while sample 3 corresponds to the end of the Middle Neolithic and belongs to the interval 5714–5228 BC (calibrated value).³

House no. 1 – trench I, 1983

Within excavations in 1983 remnants of destroyed orange hued wattle and daub house fragments and a small area of a house floor were discovered (Fig. 18). Research has verified that these were remnants of a Neolithic house, probably with a square or slightly trapeze basis. Unfortunately the precise ground plan and size could not be established due to the shallow depth in the field it was severely (secondary) destructed by latter Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Age intrusions, as well as, contemporary agricultural activities. The remnants of the house were documented at depth between 0.2 to 0.5 m within the so-called horizon of living I. It may be assumed that in the interior a

² Leibniz-Labor für Alterbestimmung und Isotopenforschung Christian-Albrechts-Universität, Kiel.

³ The samples originated of carbonized organic material are gathered from different cultural layers.



Fig. 15. Detail of the complex of four ovens in trench II, squares I and VI, photographed from west.



Fig. 16. Detail of ovens nos. 1 to 3 of the complex of four ovens in trench II, squares I and VI, photographed from west.



Fig. 17. Detail of the calotte oven (no. 4) of the complex of four ovens in trench II, squares I and VI.

calotte oven was constructed, although none remnants of such were documented. A large number of fragmented and complete ceramic vessels were found, as well as, ceramic anthropomorphic house models (also known as Great Mother), and stone tools (Pl. 2). Bearing in mind the fabric and colour of the floor it was concluded that the house was destroyed by fire. According to the uncovered movable material in its ruins and the surroundings, this settlement horizon belongs to the later phase of the Middle Neolithic in Macedonia, i.e. in the Amzabegovo III phase, according to the aforementioned chronology.

“As previously said, the research of horizon I in Govrlevo (1983) discovered the remnants of a house, which due to the large damaging could not be connected into a single unit, nor give more detailed information. Another, well-preserved house is located under this house, marked house 2, which will be discussed in more detail later”. (See footnote 1)

House no. 2 – trench I, 1984

In 1984 the intensive archaeological excavation at Cerje – Govrlevo provided one of the best preserved Neolithic houses in Republic of Macedonia (Bilbija 1986, 35). The house had an irregular, slightly trapeze basis with dimensions: southern wall 4.5 m, western wall 4.5 m, northern wall 4.7 m and eastern wall 4 m, positioned in cardinal directions (Fig. 19). The remnants of the house were documented at depth between 1 to 1.6 m within the so-called horizon of living II.

It was constructed on the basis of an earlier (Early Neolithic House no. 3 – trench I) with a typical Balkan Neolithic technique of house building (wattle and daub) – wooden construction covered with several layers of moist clay. The house floor had an orange-red colour, and was made above a thick clay deposit and tamped clay finishing (Fig. 20). At the corners, as well as, at half distance between opposite walls (at around 2 m) large wooden beams (0.1 to 0.2 m in diameter) were founded and they were the key construction elements. In the central part of the house an imprint of large wooden beam was documented which probably kept the rooftop and attic construction, and in the same time it divided in half the inner area of the house. The walls were made of thin wooden beams (up to 0.1 m in diameter) covered by thick moist clay layers (up to 0.3 m) on inner and external side. Due to multilayered character of the site their remnants, as well as, rooftop remnants were poorly preserved. The roof was probably founded on the

corner and central wooden beams, and it can be assumed that the roof construction was of gable type probably covered with thin wooden branches and other natural materials. House windows, or more correctly window openings are plausible since natural light is needed in every household (although none architectural remnant was found). Bearing in mind the openings of ceramic anthropomorphic house models and other various house models from Macedonian and broader Balkan Neolithic it can be supposed that they had square, rectangular or ovoid forms (Tolevski 2009, 40–41). According to the researcher of this site, M. Bilbija, the door of the house was probably at the eastern side (See footnote 1).

In the interior two unmovable clay objects were found – calotte oven and grain grinder erected directly on the house floor at the north-western house corner (Figs. 19–23). The oven in its original form had a calotte roof and a small ellipsoid opening at the eastern side (Fig. 23). It was well preserved and its size was 0.9×0.95×0.6 m. At its southern side a grain grinder (also known as a form of house altar) with a rectangular-ellipsoid (curvilinear) form was attached with dimensions of 0.8×0.8 m (Figs. 22a–23). It was made as a platform for grinding bounded with short socle, except on its eastern side where the object was used. Next to the grain grinder three grinding stones were documented which probably were an integral part of this household utilitarian area where food was prepared. Furthermore directly on the house floor other grinding stones were found; large number of fragmented and complete ceramic vessels with various forms: plates, bowls, jars, askoi; fragments of ceramic anthropomorphic house models; ceramic loom weights; stone and bone tools; etc. (Pl. 3). A very interesting and specific artifact was found – a large bull’s bucranium which was probably placed at one external side of the house walls. This house also suffered fire according to house floor colour and in some extent the ceramic material. According to movable material in it and the corresponding stratigraphic layers confirmed one more (earlier) Middle Neolithic settlement horizon corresponding to Amzabegovo II, according to the aforementioned chronology.

“The research in 1984 began with clearing square III and the south half of square V, from point height 497.21 m. In 1983 remnants from a house were noticed in these squares, in horizon II. Technical and architectural and photo recording was performed after the detailed clearing of the wattle and daub residue. For easier monitoring

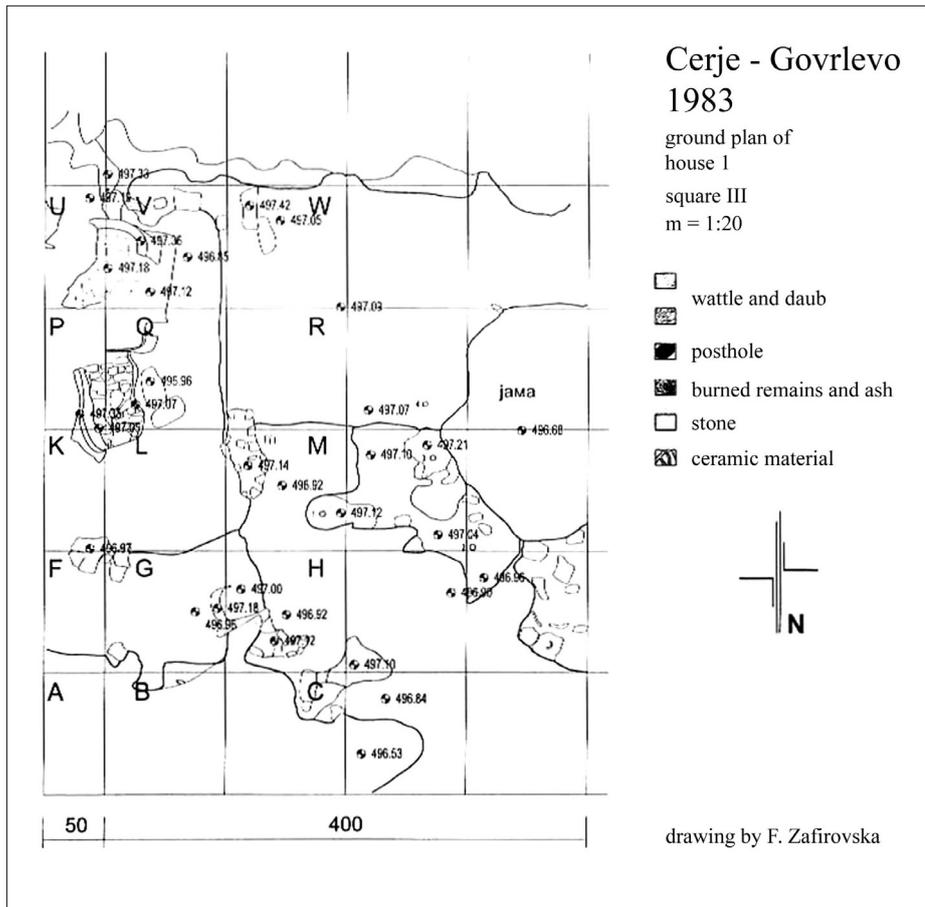


Fig. 18. Ground plan of House 1 – trench I.

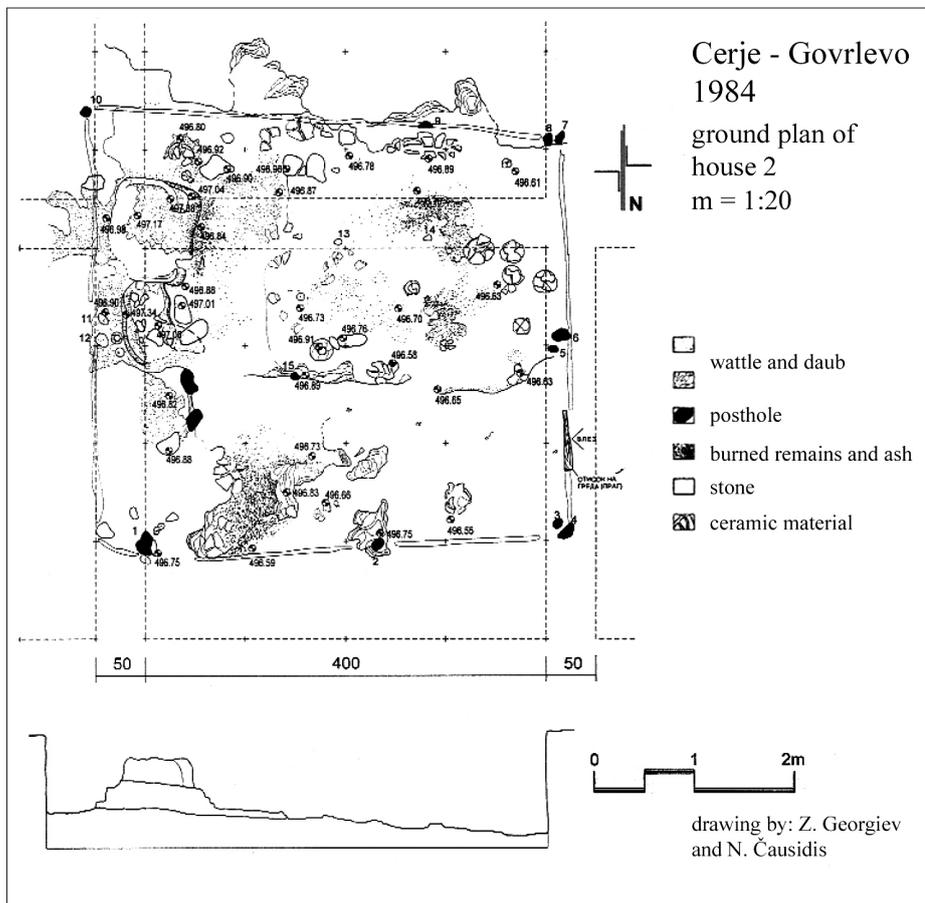


Fig. 19. Ground plan of House 2 – trench I.



Fig. 20. Remnants of House 2 – trench I and its inventory, photographed from east.

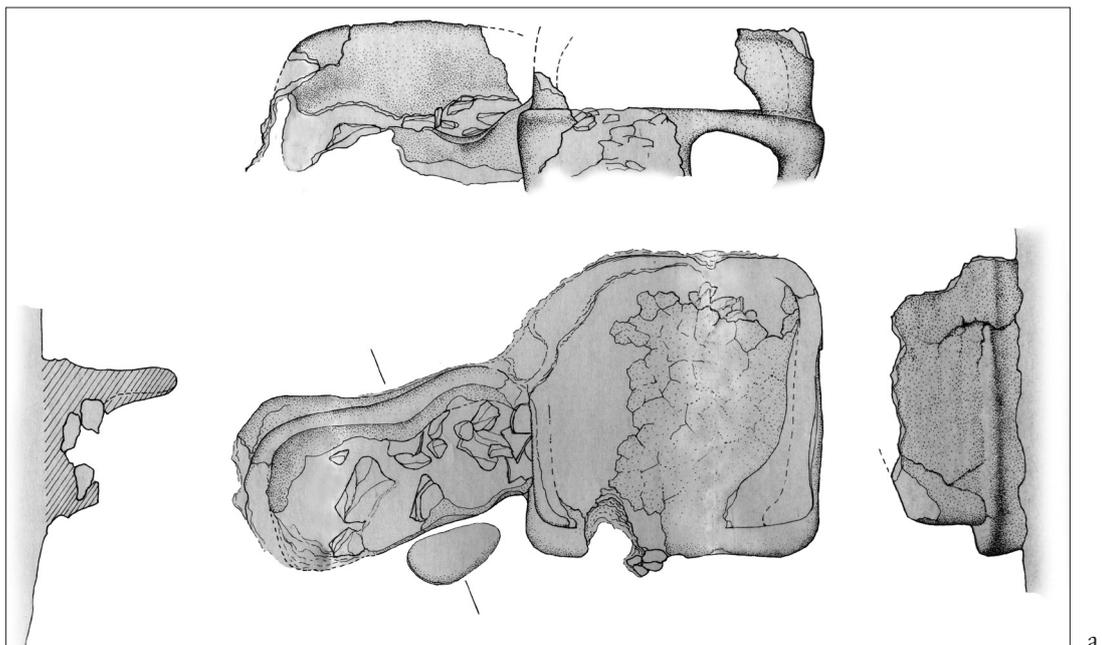


Fig. 21. Remnants of calotte oven and grain grinder in House 2 – trench I, photographed from north-east.

during clearing and movable material collection, the area of the house base was divided in 20 squares measuring 1×1 m each, labelled with the alphabet from left to right, starting from corner C. The uncovered movable material was left in place until the research of the house was completed. The removal of the entire crushed wattle and daub fragments was followed by detailed sketching, photo recording and description of each square separately.

The house is of the above-ground type, with foundation in the ruins of an object located in the

next horizon III. Its base has a quadrangular form measuring 4.5×4.5 m, and is situated along the axes E-W, that is N-S. The walls were made of a frame made of beams (confirmed in 15 points) and clay brick, daubed in mud, mixed with chaff and straw (this is confirmed by the imprints from the construction elements inside and onto the blocks of plaster). We have also registered the bearings of 15 beams dug into the substructure, that is, in the ruins from a previous phase, which seems not to be the most appropriate manner of fixation, since



Figs. 22a, 22b. Drawings of calotte oven and grain grinder in House 2 – trench I.

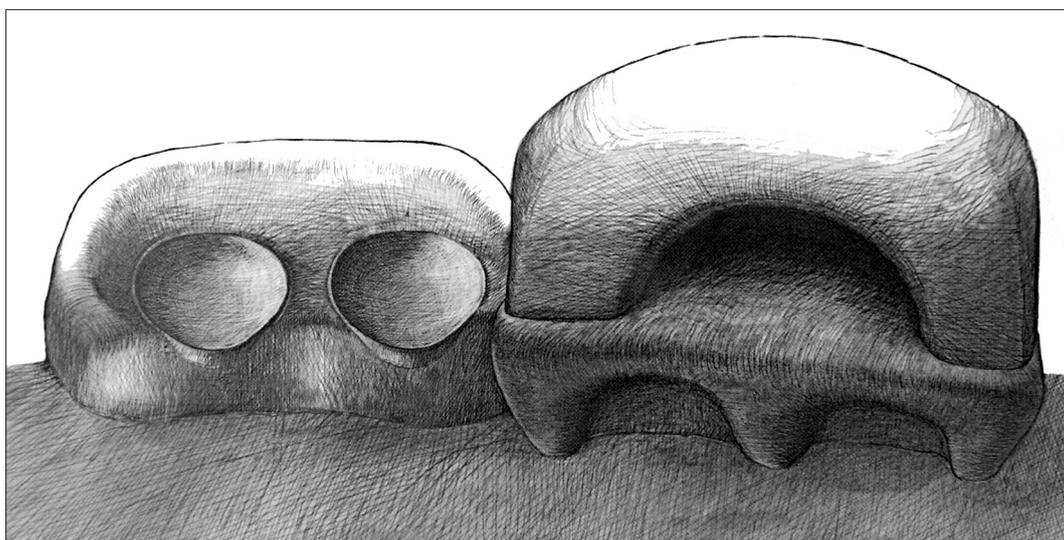


Fig. 23. Graphic reconstruction of calotte oven and grain grinder in House 2 – trench I.

they are quite loose, so that in some cases stone was used as an additional fastening, as was the case with beam no. 1 in the southwest corner of the house. We have also noticed separation of beams 3–8, 11 and 12. The role of beams 13–15 is insufficiently clear; it seems that, after all, they too had certain function in arrangement of the inner space. As far as the shape and the size, the cross-sections of the beams vary from thin and circular with a diameter of around 6 cm (just as beams 13 and 14), to triangular, quadrangular and semi-circular (stakes 4, 7 and 9), while beam 6 is largest in diameter of 20 cm.

The aforementioned dimensions of the house, 4.5×4.5 m, were measured along the axis N-S, between beams 9 and 2, and along axis E-W, between beams 9 and 12. This proportionality of dimensions, in itself, has suggested a quadrangular basis of the house, but if we analyse the relation between the grid stakes, we can notice small divergence in the north wall, while the northeast and the southwest angles are indistinct, which leads us to the thought that they were rounded off.

Concerning the entrance or the door, it is our opinion that it can be located on the eastern wall, i.e. at beams 3 and 4, where imprints from some kind of a beam 70 cm long were registered, which could be the threshold. The location of the entrance in that part is also suggested by the rammed floor which here lacks coating, as well as the absence of ceramic vessels which are located in large numbers all over the house.

Now let us look at the interior and the floor of the house. The house was divided, approximately along the axis E-W, by a parapet wall made of pisè, containing a large quantity of chaff and having bright yellow colour. It can be observed in the plan that it went along a curve and from square O moved towards beam 5. Apart from these two rooms, inside them there are partially

separated areas, regardless of whether this was achieved by placing certain objects or by elevating the floor level. When it comes to the floor level, we immediately point out that it was found in the form of a thick screed, in the wattle and daub technique and in the same line towards south. Another variant was a thin coating with which the northeast quarter of the house was covered, while the southeast part, which is much lower, has only rammed surface...” (See footnote 1)

House no. 3 – trench I, 1985

In the course of the last research campaign, i.e. in 1985, the remnants of another house were discovered in trench I. Unfortunately, this house was only partially preserved due to strong destruction, and according to the discovered remnants, its basis was most probably rectangular or slightly trapeze, whereat the western and the eastern walls were at least 7.6 m long, and the northern and the southern were more than 6 m (Fig. 24). The remnants of the house were documented at depth between 1.6 to 2.1 m within the so-called horizon of living III.

This house was largely destroyed due to later house (no. 2) and only fragments of the house floor were partially documented. For the first time at this site a new technique in floor foundation was made. It was of tamped clay, on top

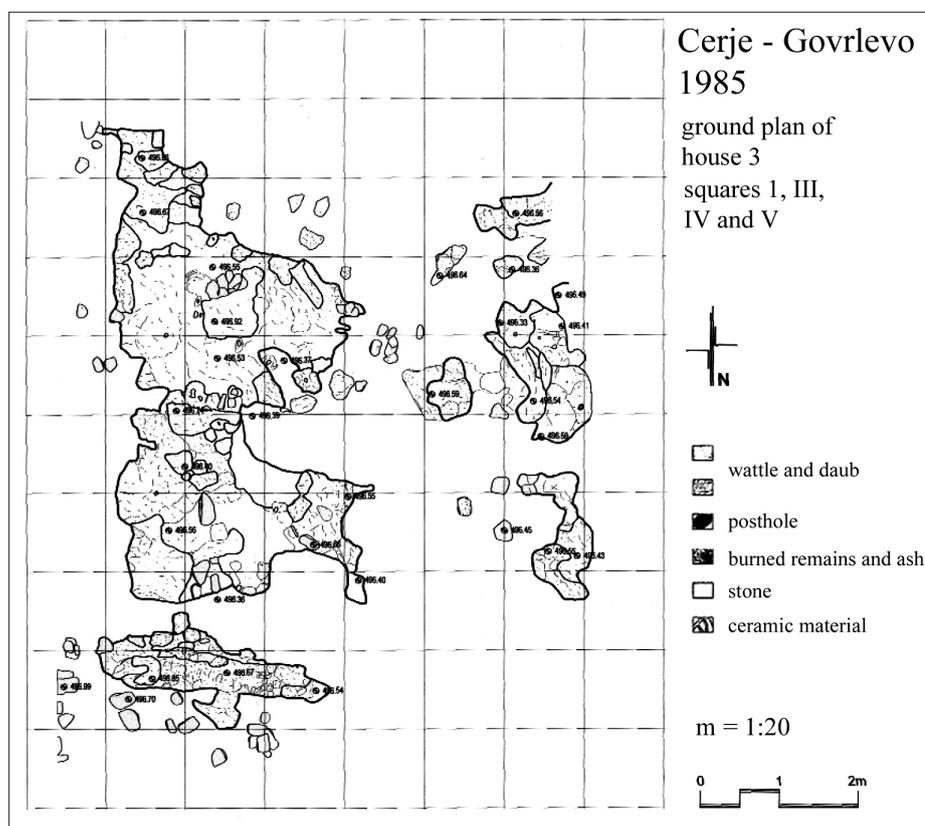


Fig. 24. Ground plan of House 3 – trench I.

of which semi-circular logs were placed, covered with multiple layers of clay (Fig. 25). Remnants of the roof, walls or oven were not found. In its interior and the corresponding layer large number of fragmented and complete ceramic vessels, ceramic anthropomorphic house models, ceramic loom weights, as well as, stone and bone tools were documented (Pl. 4). The colour and state of the floor and ceramic material suggests that this house too was destroyed by fire. This settlement horizon was determined as Early Neolithic and corresponds to the Early Neolithic phase Amzabegovo I, under the chronology used above. With this research the squares of trench I were completely exhausted of cultural layers and at a depth of approximately 3 m

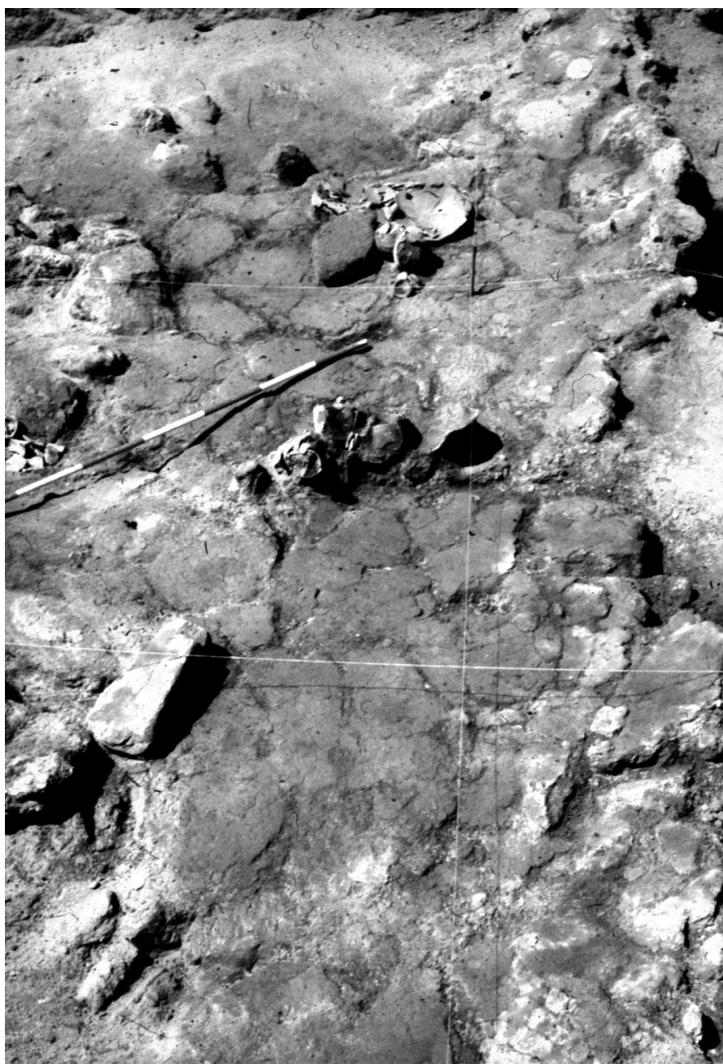


Fig. 25. Remnants of House 3 – trench I, and its inventory, photographed from south-east.

the subsoil was documented.

“The house was discovered under the latest horizon subject to our research in the last year. It has been determined that the upper part was constructed out of clay bricks (intertwined twigs

covered with mud), the same as the house we discovered last year. However, we were greatly surprised by the manner in which the floor was constructed. We have uncovered remnants and traces of a net of horizontally placed logs, covered with a special mixture of soil and chaff in several layers. The last one was the strongest and was waterproof, and in order not to come off in scales, it had a red glazing. The net of criss-crossed wooden logs had a specific purpose, as it was extraordinarily connected to the vertical beams, which served for the walls. Man in this region, which since time immemorial was quite active seismically, even this early tried to defy the destructive force of earthquakes, so he synthesized in one place most of the exceptionally important elements. The manner in which the Neolithic man prepared the “mortar” for the floor, walls and the ceiling confuses archaeologists. The strongest one was incorporated into the floor and the walls, while the lightest one was in the ceiling. So far, the materials have been unknown, and more will be revealed after the laboratory analyses. (...) The house measured 7 × 7 m and is to the millimetre orientated according to the sides of the world. It is divided in two parts – one for work and the other for sleeping. Remnants of a oven and a grinder were uncovered in the first part, even with remnants of bones found in the ceramic vessels. The house most probably burned down, since it is obvious that the dwellers abandoned it abruptly”.⁴

House no. 1 – trench II, 2001

Archaeological research on the site in 2001 and 2002 are continuity of the excavations. Within these excavations in square II remnants from a Middle Neolithic house were found at depth between 0.4 to 0.9 m. Although the basis was not precisely determined due to severe destructions from the later Prehistoric times, as well as, modern deep plowing it is probable that this house like the others had a rectangular or slightly trapeze basis (Fig. 26). Within its ruins

large quantities of orange and yellowish wattle and daub fragments, fragments of ceramic vessels,

⁴ Conversation between I. Kočan and M. Bilbija, entitled as *Seismologists from the Neolithic* published in the daily paper *Novosti*, 5 July 1985 (republished in *Fidanoski* 2012, 80).



Fig. 26. Remnants of House 1 – trench II, photographed from north.

anthropomorphic house models, figurines, bone and stone tools were found (Pl. 5). According to the stratigraphy and relative chronological properties of the movable material this house was contemporary to the house no. 1 of trench I, which belongs to the Amzabegovo III, Middle Neolithic phase by aforementioned chronology.

House 2 – trench II, 2004

Within the excavations in 2004 a small part i.e. northern side (edge) of a Middle Neolithic house was documented in the south section of squares I and II. It was found at depth between 0.8 to 1.3 m, a couple of meters southern of the former house (no. 1 of trench II), and founded in earlier horizon of living (Figs. 11a, 11b). Its remnants were documented in the section and due to that we are limited with data about its basis, construction techniques, inventory, etc. However, the thickness of the yellowish-orange floor and parts of the walls was registered – 0.2 m. In this small part of the house a small quantity of ceramic vessels were found, except for three complete (fragmented) askoi which were unearthed in the section – slightly deformed by the deposit and house fragments pressure (Pl. 6). This house probably belongs to the earlier Middle Neolithic phase – Amzabegovo II, according to the already used chronology, and it

is contemporary to the best preserved house at this site – no. 2 of trench I.

House 3 – trench II, 2009

In the research in 2008, and especially 2009 in square I another house with its inventory was unearthed at depth between 1.8 and 2.5 m. It is a relatively well preserved house with square basis, 5.5×5.5 m, positioned in north-south direction with a slight declination to southwest (Fig. 29). The house foundation was made of very thick layer of tamped clay with depth of 0.5 m, and unlike the other houses, except one example – house no. 3 of trench I, the floor was made of tamped clay, on top of which semi-circular logs (0.1–0.15 m in diameter) were placed, covered with multiple layers of clay (Fig. 27). At the northern and western side of the house imprints of thin wooden beams with diameter between 0.06 and 0.1 m with 0.15 to 0.3 m distance between them. The imprints at the western side of the house are very interesting – they are doubled in row, a relatively rare technique of house foundation and walls building (Fig. 30). That Neolithic architect from Cerje – Govrlevo had good knowledge on object construction and architecture is confirmed also by the placement of this house stability even made on a very steep slope of the terrain and on an earlier ditch (see details in the chapter *Archaeological Features and*

Site Stratigraphy) (Fig. 10). Also, very interesting occurrence was documented with the removal of the house remnants where below its foundation a human burial was found – an inhumation in foetus position (Fig. 28). The Neolithic house builders completely ignored this burial and destroyed it, while only fragments of the skull, upper extremities and larger part of the chest were preserved. Unfortunately, besides large quantities of yellowish wattle and daub fragments which originated from the house walls, remnants of the roof were not registered. Like the previous houses it can be assumed that the roof was of gable type. The presence of windows/openings is also uncertain, but it is very plausible that the house/s had this practical daylight and air refreshment features with various numbers, positions and forms. The door position also is not clear, and it was probably constructed in optimal position regarding microclimate conditions. Concerning this house inventory, in south-western corner a calotte oven with rectangular basis (0.7×0.9 m) was documented (Fig. 31). The oven was partially preserved – the upper calotte part and parts of the foundation were destroyed due to later pit intrusions (and also this area of the house itself was destroyed) (Fig. 29). The oven's frontal part or its opening was probably faced to east, and the construction technique used is typical for the Balkan Neolithic objects – founded directly on several layers of small stones and small ceramic shards (B. Николов 1992, 82; Тодорова-Вайсов 1993, 160; Перничева 2000; Стојанова Канзурова 2008). Following its western side, in close vicinity of the south-western corner of the house two pits, one by another, with irregular circular form, diameter between 0.7 and 0.9 m and depth of 0.6 m were detected. Actually these are the pits which partially destroyed the ovens and small area of the house. Right beside them, at the very south-western corner of the house, turned upside down, three grinding stones were documented. Similar situation was registered in the north-western corner of the house where two grinding stones, also turned upside down, were recovered. Besides these movable finds next to the oven an anthropomorphic house model was found, as well as, smaller amount of fragments and complete ceramic vessels (Pl. 7). Bearing in mind that Neolithic house inventories have larger quantities of movable archaeological material, the small quantity in this house is atypical not only for the site, but also for the Balkan Neolithic. On the other hand, like the other houses from this site,

this one too was destroyed by a fire. This house is contemporary with house no. 3 of trench I, and belongs to Early Neolithic phase – Amzabegovo I by the already used chronology.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

“Four Neolithic sites, actually multilayered Neolithic settlements have been discovered in the area of the Skopje Valley in the last ten years. These settlements were formed by above-ground type houses, evidenced in Zelenikovo, Madžari, Govrlevo and Mrševci. The occurrence of above-ground houses is characteristic for all three phases of the Neolithic – the Early, the Middle and the Late one.

Usually, they have quadrangular foundation and were built in the wattle and daub technique. The most significant items inside them were the calotte oven and the sacrificial altar-grinder. These objects have a significant function in the family life organization and represent a strong proof of a certain independence the families has within the larger tribal structure.

The movable household inventory also represents the structure of the tribal organization. Moreover, the occurrence of the houses as the basic object of the settlements marks the socio-anthropological aspects of the inhabitants. One of the Neolithic innovations was the building and technological procedure used in their construction. Also, elements were noticed in their interior which conditioned the socio-anthropological restructuring at a certain phase of the Neolithic revolution.

The appearance of the Neolithic house as the basic object of the settlement strongly influenced the genesis of man, causing far-reaching consequences. With its exterior and interior architecture, the house was characterised, above all, with outstanding functionality. The Neolithic constructors made the first building steps, with such ingenuity nonetheless, that even today we admire their work, which is not only a simple sum of rectangular walls and a roof.

The Skopje Neolithic house, with its quadrangular form, had a gable roof and smaller in dimension ($25\text{--}35$ m²). The interior, both constructionally and functionally, was usually divided in two rooms, living quarters and pantry, and the communication between the two was conditioned by the fire-place, the bread oven and the sacrificial altar-grinder. Actually, this organization of the space is directly connected to the aforementioned static objects.

Fig. 27. Foundation of semicircular logs of House 3 – trench II.

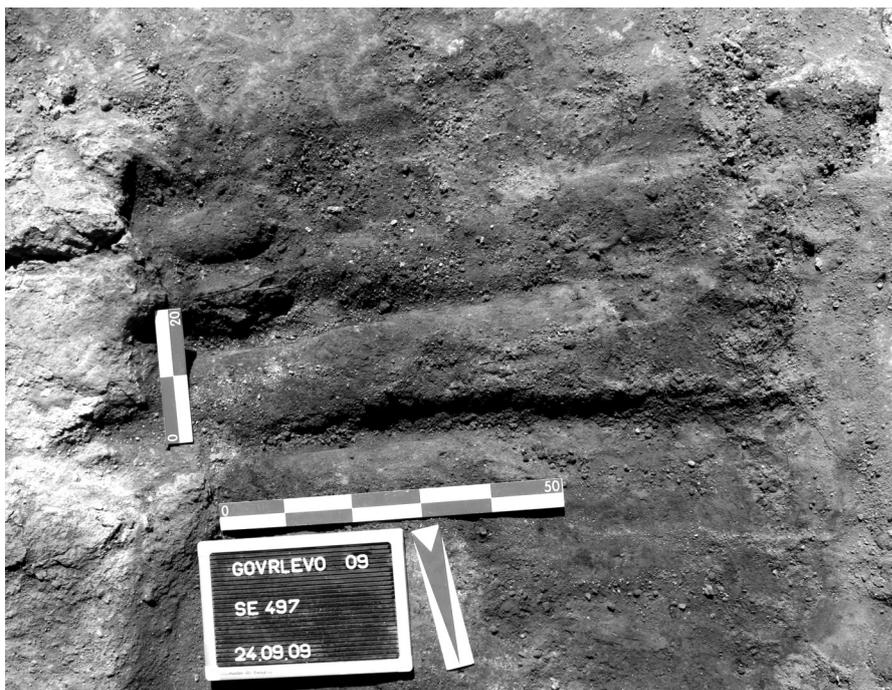
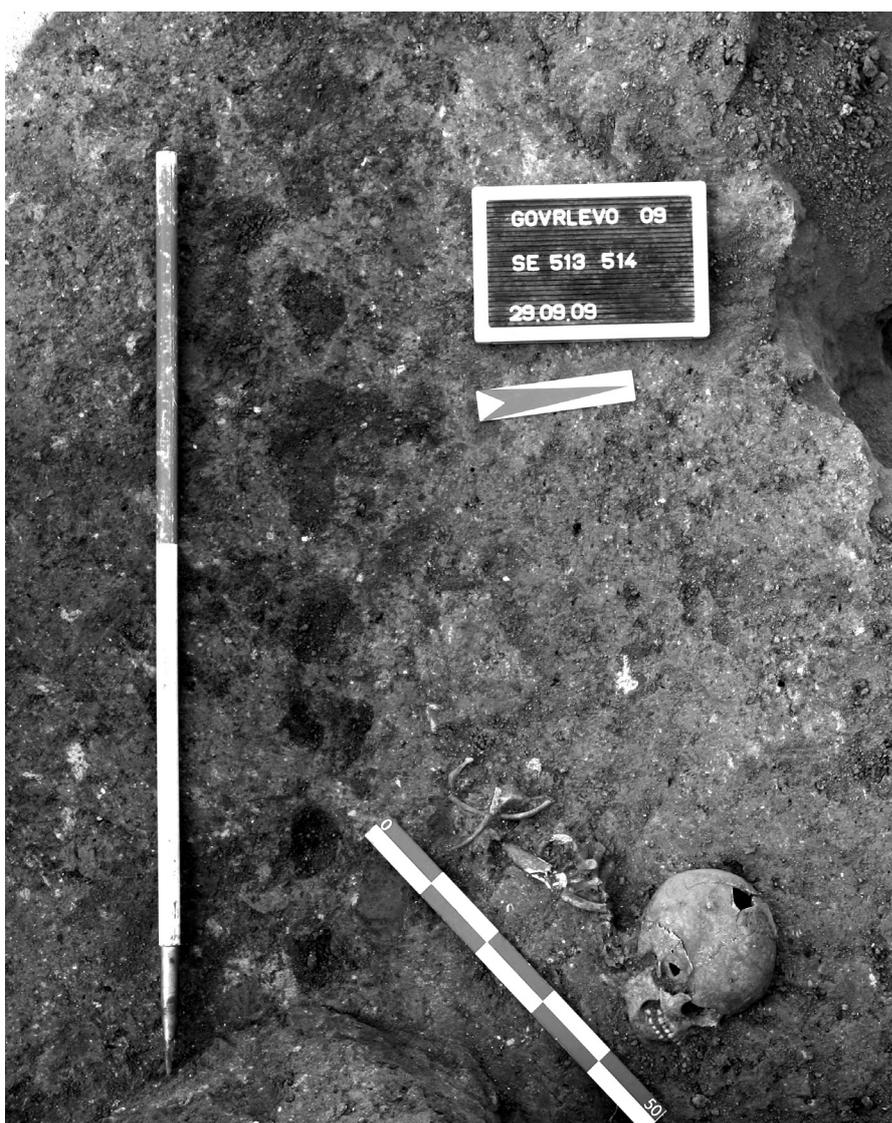


Fig. 28. Human burial destroyed by House 3 – trench II.



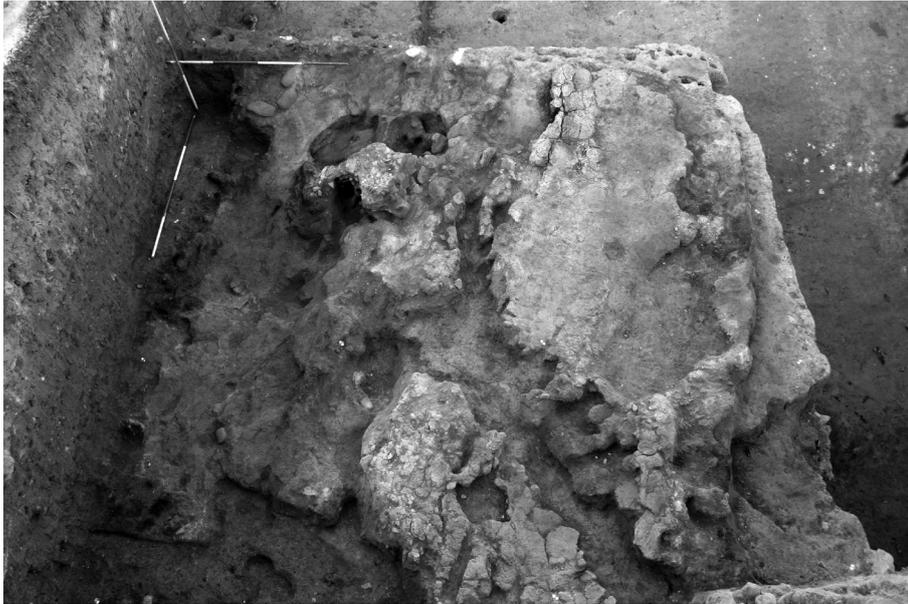


Fig. 29. Remnants of House 3 – trench II, photographed from east.



Fig. 30. Remnants of double row of wooden beams imprints at western side of House 3 – trench II.



Fig. 31. Remnants of calotte oven of House 3 – trench II, photographed from south.

The occurrence of these objects, especially the sacrificial altar-grinder and oven complex are a characteristic of the Skopje Neolithic. Apart from their functionality and building innovativeness, they are also a significant element in the Neolithic agrarian revolution”.⁵

To date in Cerje – Govrlevo, in two trenches comprised of several squares, a total of six houses were registered; two belong to the Early Neolithic phase (Amzabegovo I), two to the earlier sub-phase of Middle Neolithic (Amzabegovo II), and two to the later subphase of Middle Neolithic (Amzabegovo III), corresponding to the aforementioned chronology. In both trenches by three houses within three horizons of living were documented. According to the site stratigraphy the houses, with slight deviations in position, were built one above other, thus paying respect to the space of living and providing long continuity of the settlement. Unfortunately, only two houses (house no. 2 of trench I and house no. 3 of trench II) were well preserved – with their, more or less, complete inventory; three were partially (houses nos. 1 and 3 of trench I, and house 1 of trench II) preserved due to secondary, destructive intrusions, and one (house no. 2 of trench II) was almost completely unexcavated (only three almost complete askoi and several shards were unearthed).

The houses were built according to well known Neolithic construction techniques in Macedonia and in Balkans – wooden construction covered with several clay layers – a sort of wattle and daub technique (Grbić *et alii* 1960, 28; Корошец-Корошец 1973, 15; Симоска-Санев 1975, 44; Китаноски 1977, 27; Китаноски и др. 1978, 21; Китаноски и др. 1987, 9; Bilbija 1986, 36; Гарашанин-Билбија 1988; 33–36; Кузман 1990, 48; Санев 1994, 29; Санев 1995, 28–30; Јовчевска 1993, 33; Миткоски 2005, 33–35; Tolevski 2009; Bailey 2000, 43–59; Perles 2001, 184–193; Тодорова-Вайсов 1993, 158–166; Чохаџиев 2007, 63). The foundation of the houses in Cerje – Govrlevo is consisted of thick clay layer and over it tamped soil layer, covered by several thin clay layers. Only in one example (house no. 3 of trench II, as it was already stated), between the clay layer and the tamped soil layer semi-circular logs were placed (in diameter between 0.1 and 0.15 m). This rare case of floor and house foundation was registered at two other sites

⁵ Unpublished manuscript of M. Bilbija, entitled as *Neolithic Houses in the Skopje Valley and Their Influence on Restructuring of Tribal Communities* (published posthumous in Fidanoski 2012, 110–112).

– Veluška Tumba and Porodinska Tumba, which unlike Cerje – Govrlevo, they belong to a different Neolithic culture in Republic of Macedonia, Velušina – Porodin culture. Within this house, on its western side, the wooden construction had a double row of wooden beams for wall strengthening, which altogether with its slightly trapeze basis is similar with the Neolithic architecture in Pelagonia (Grbić *et alii* 1960, 19; Симоска-Санев, 1975, 44). Concerning the issues in construction techniques the house walls were made of thick rows of relatively thin wooden beams (in diameter between 0.06 to 0.1 m) well tamped in the clay foundation, and on both sides (inner and outer) covered by several moist clay layers, in some case thick up to 0.3 m. House no. 2 of trench I had a construction strengthening by larger wooden beams (in diameter between 0.1 and 0.2 m) placement at the house corners and house central point. The aforementioned techniques of house construction were documented at several sites in Republic of Macedonia, such as: Barutnica – Amzabegovo, Mramor – Čaška, Slatina – Zelenikovo, Zlastrana – Sredoreče, Radin Dol, Čuka – Topolčani, Vrbjanska Čuka – Slavej, Porodinska Tumba, Veluška Tumba, etc.

Concerning house windows or window openings not much can be said. Remnants of these house elements were not registered, but according to ceramic anthropomorphic house models and other house models found at Cerje – Govrlevo and other Neolithic sites in Republic of Macedonia, it can be assumed that they had square, rectangular or ovoid forms. Also, remnants of the rooftop were not found at the site, but it is suggested that they were of gable type. It was probably a grid of wooden beams covered by branches and other natural materials layer, and my opinion is that they were covered by thin clay layer/s as a better isolation solution. The question of chimney also is opened – especially remnants of these house elements were not registered at the site. Again, according to the cylindrical upper part of the ceramic anthropomorphic house models it can be suggested that chimneys were constructed at some Neolithic houses.

As an integral part of the houses inventory at Cerje – Govrlevo are calotte ovens. Although not documented in all of the houses presented above (probably due to the later destructions and intrusions remnants of ovens were not found), the calotte ovens were always made directly on the house floors. Their foundation was always consisted of thin layers of small stones mixed with ceramic

shards, covered by several thin clay layers. The forms of the basis of these house objects is usually irregular square or rectangle, its basis in most of the cases was tall up to 0.2 m thus creating a flat platform onto which a domed roof was placed – the calotte. A unique situation was unearthed at the best preserved house at Cerje – Govrlevo, where in house no. 2 of trench I a complex of calotte oven and clay grain grinder was documented. The oven has its typical, aforementioned form, and next to it, more precisely attached to its southern side the grain grinder was constructed. These objects were made in the same technique used for oven construction, and they were constructed simultaneously – and probably they should be perceived as one multifunctional object. The grain grinder is actually a platform erected in the same height like the oven – 0.2 m above the house floor with a rectangular-ellipsoid (curvilinear) form. This complex object – an oven and grain grinder probably had utilitarian functions, but also a symbolic role was attributed to it.⁶ Similar, but in this case decorated, clay grain grinder was registered at the nearby site, Slatina – Zelenikovo (Гарашанин-Билбија 1988, 34). One can assume that these complexes within a house are typical for the local Skopje region, where this unique occurrence was documented, and they are a sign of special (local) utilitarian and symbolic ideas. In that sense, activities connected with simple household processes – at first place, food preparation, then baking and finally the result – meal, are logically the result of a mental and symbolic activities very important in the Neolithic culture, globally – to eat you have to prepare the meal, to prepare the meal you need to prepare the food, and to have food you need to produce it.

Bearing in mind the nature of the material, from architectural point of view the houses were built very solidly. The high achievements accomplished by Neolithic architects at Cerje – Govrlevo are unquestionable – the statics and terrain properties knowledge which can be seen by the house foundation techniques, as well as, the wooden walls and roof construction. From thermal isolation aspect, especially the floor and walls were well built bearing in mind the thick clay (ranging between 0.1 to 0.3 m) covering consisted of several thin clay layers. The same can be assumed for the

calotte oven's position in houses, as in the example of the best preserved houses (no. 2 of trench I and no 3 of trench II) – the western side of the house which, colds fastest due to low sun exposure during daytime. Therefore the Neolithic architect and builder from this site was very well aware of natural elements properties, geomorphology, statics, various architectural solutions, protomathematics, and so on, thus mentally erecting and splitting from the animal kind.

The movable archaeological material recovered in the houses usually is represented by large quantities of fragmented and complete ceramic vessels, and lower amounts of ceramic objects as: anthropomorphic house models, figurines, altars; as well as, stone, bone and antler tools, and other artifacts (Pl. 1–7). In the later category – other artifacts, various objects were registered in the house inventories: ceramic loom weights, spindle whorls, ceramic and stone discoid plates, ceramic “breads”, as well as, ceramic, stone and shell jewelry objects. Often these artefacts were found in close vicinity of house's area where most important household activities had taken place – near the ovens.

Exception of this is the Early Neolithic house no. 3 of trench II which is characterized by low quantity of artifacts (only four complete ceramic vessels, one fragment of ceramic anthropomorphic house model, one ceramic “bread”, five grinding stones, and around 50 fragments of animal bones). The material “emptiness” and the presence of five grinding stones, all of them turned upside down, show an unusual archaeological context. According to the yellowish-orange colour of the wattle and daub house remnants, and the traces of fire onto the movable material the house had suffered fire. Two hypotheses can be suggested for this “house emptiness”: a) the inhabitants deliberately burned the house – probably as a symbolic act (for example acts like house closure/sealing, abandonment of this specific house due to various socio-cultural occurrences, etc.), and b) the house was abandoned because of the fire. I favour the first theory, because: 1. the five grinding stones were deliberately turned upside down; 2. large fragment of an anthropomorphic house model (the upper part of the object was recovered right to the oven – the anthropomorphic head, and the lower part or the actual house model was never found); 3. the four complete vessels and the ceramic “bread” were deliberately “left for the house” in the fire. Bearing in mind that the other houses at this site had large quantities of different material this house is a

⁶ The symbolic role of the objects was mentioned in the Conversation between M. Paroški and M. Bilbija, entitled as *5000 Years old Script* published in the daily paper *Nedeljni Dnevnik*, 25th of November 1985 (republished in *Fidanoski* 2012, 74–76).

special case. However, there is one aspect which is common for all houses at the site – they were all destroyed in fire. Maybe this household at Cerje – Govrlevo is an example of burial of a house with its grave goods.

The large amount of movable material in house inventories and house destructions by fire in Macedonian Neolithic are well documented at several sites within both aforementioned Neolithic cultures: Barutnica – Amzabegovo, Slatina – Zelenikovo, Mramor – Čaška, Veluška Tumba, Mala Trnska Tumba, Radin Dol and Vrbjanska Čuka – Slavej (Санев 2009, 40; Корошец-Корошец 1973, 17; Гарашанин-Билбија 1988, 33–36; Јовчевска 1993, 35; Симоска-Санев, 1975, 43; Симоска-Санев 1977, 223; Китаноски и др. 1987, 9; Китаноски 1989, 47). Similar situation is attested at several Neolithic sites in the Balkan Peninsula: Divostin, Grivac, Gradešnica, Bългарčevo, Rakitovo, Karanovo (Bogdanović 1988; Bogdanović 2004a, 31–33; Bogdanović 2004b, 157–164; Б. Николов 1975; Perničeva *et alii*. 2000; Радунчева 2002a, 11; Nikolov 1997). It should be pointed that like in Cerje – Govrlevo, at some sites where typical house destruction is fire, have houses with large amounts of movable material, but also one or two cases with the so-called “house emptiness”, like: Divostin, Grivac, and Rakitovo (Bogdanović 1988, 40; Bogdanović 2004a, 32; Радунчева 2002b).

The tendency of deliberate destructions fire and/or house closure/sealing – “closure and negation” as Bailey points (2000, 268) in Balkan Neolithic houses is addressed by several authors (Tringham-Krstić 1990, 115; Tringham 1991; Tringham 1994; Stevanović 1997; Bailey 2000, 164–165, 267–270). In my opinion this situation is confirmed at Cerje – Govrlevo and by that, this site/settlement belongs to the Balkan Neolithic horizon of deliberate house destructions, by/or one or more generations, in one or more subphases, and the houses again to be rebuilt, more or less, above the destroyed ones. Therefore, the Neolithic house “creator” and in the same time its “killer”, in this

socio-cultural equation he tends to be the absolute power, but he knows he is only a mere executor of symbolical or practical ideas, he is the one which tries to control an unit of the settlement (or whole settlement), but in the same time he knows he is only a witness of the natural cycle of life and death. That is the same “creator” which uses the Neolithic products – sedentary life, domestication, and agriculture, by which architecture, settlements, their geographic and demographic structures are linked. This “creator” in its attempts to tame the nature understood that that is impossible, but with its interference in the natural process – the deliberate termination of the life cycle of an object, house or settlement, from symbolic point of view, at least in specific part of the time within one or more units of the community (one or more houses, one or more animals or plants, etc.), could manage and control the basic natural cycle of life and death. If this theory is correct, or near the real ideas of the Neolithic “creator” behind the discoveries at Cerje – Govrlevo and many other sites in Balkan Neolithic, then the Neolithic “home sweet home” is not only a household, but it is something much more – a beginning and end of a cycle, and even a beginning and end of a life.

“The emergence of houses was a significant development. It represented the creation of tangible, physical, impermeable and relatively permanent boundaries around a group of people and their activities, be they mundane activities of biological existence, such as eating and sleeping, or more social role-related activities noted above. Regardless of the daily, or long-term, movements of people in and out of the bounded space of the house, the physical presence of a structure containing people’s objects, food, activity areas and tools served to lock that particular group into a fixed place within a village community. (...) The intentional destruction of houses by burning, suggests that houses (and households) were social entities important enough to require deliberate acts of closure and negation as well as of creation and maintenance.” (Bailey 2000, 268)

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Pl. 1. Ceramic stamp with ideogram representation 1, anthropomorphic or zoomoprphic head 2, fragmented sculpture (also known as Adam from Govrlevo) 3, and anthropomorphic house model (also known as Great Mother) 4.



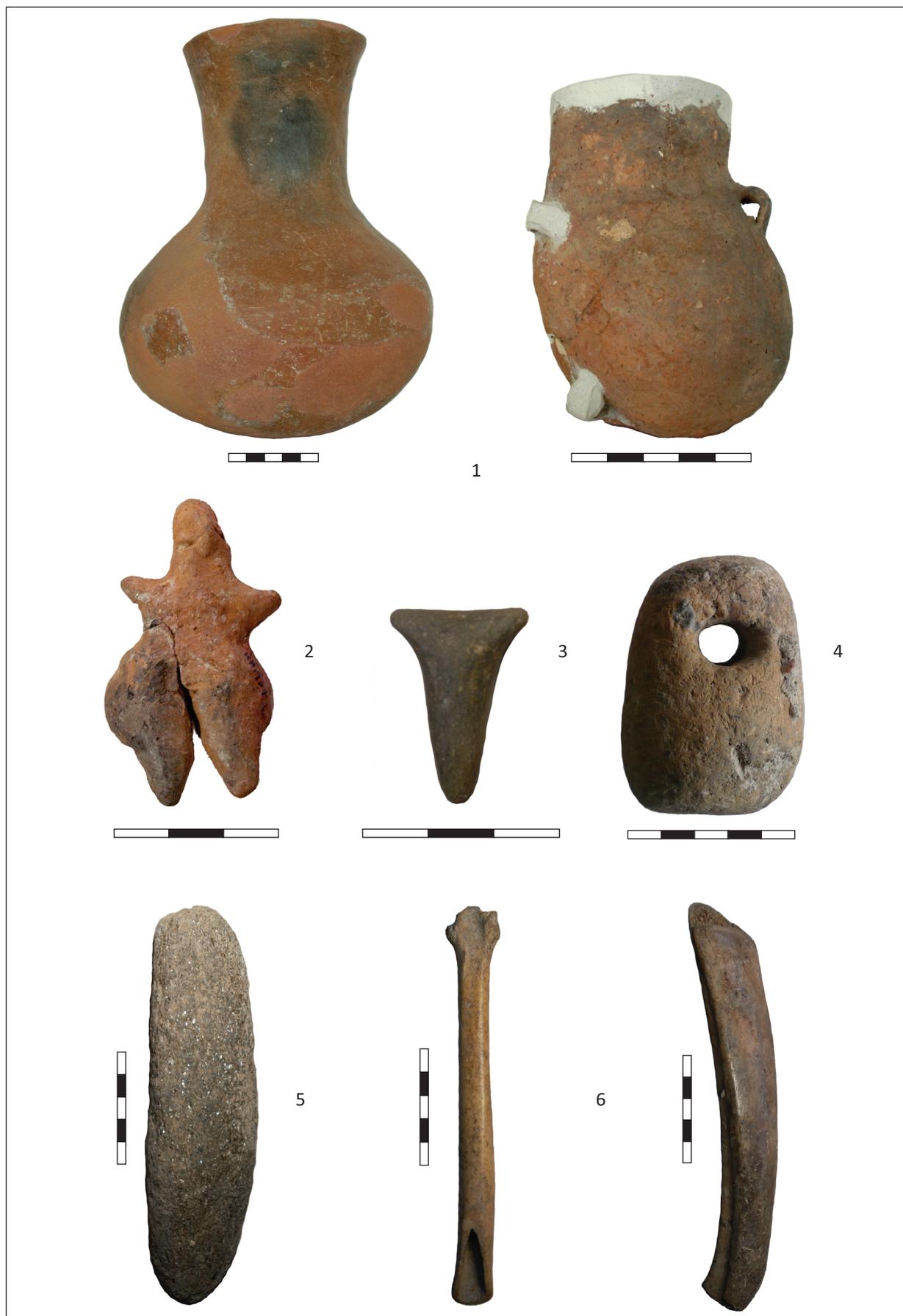
Pl. 2. Some of the material found in House 1 – trench I, ceramic vessels 1, and ceramic loom weights 2.



Pl. 3. Some of the material found in House 2 – trench I, ceramic vessels 1; altar 2; figurine 3; “bread” 4, and stone axe 5.



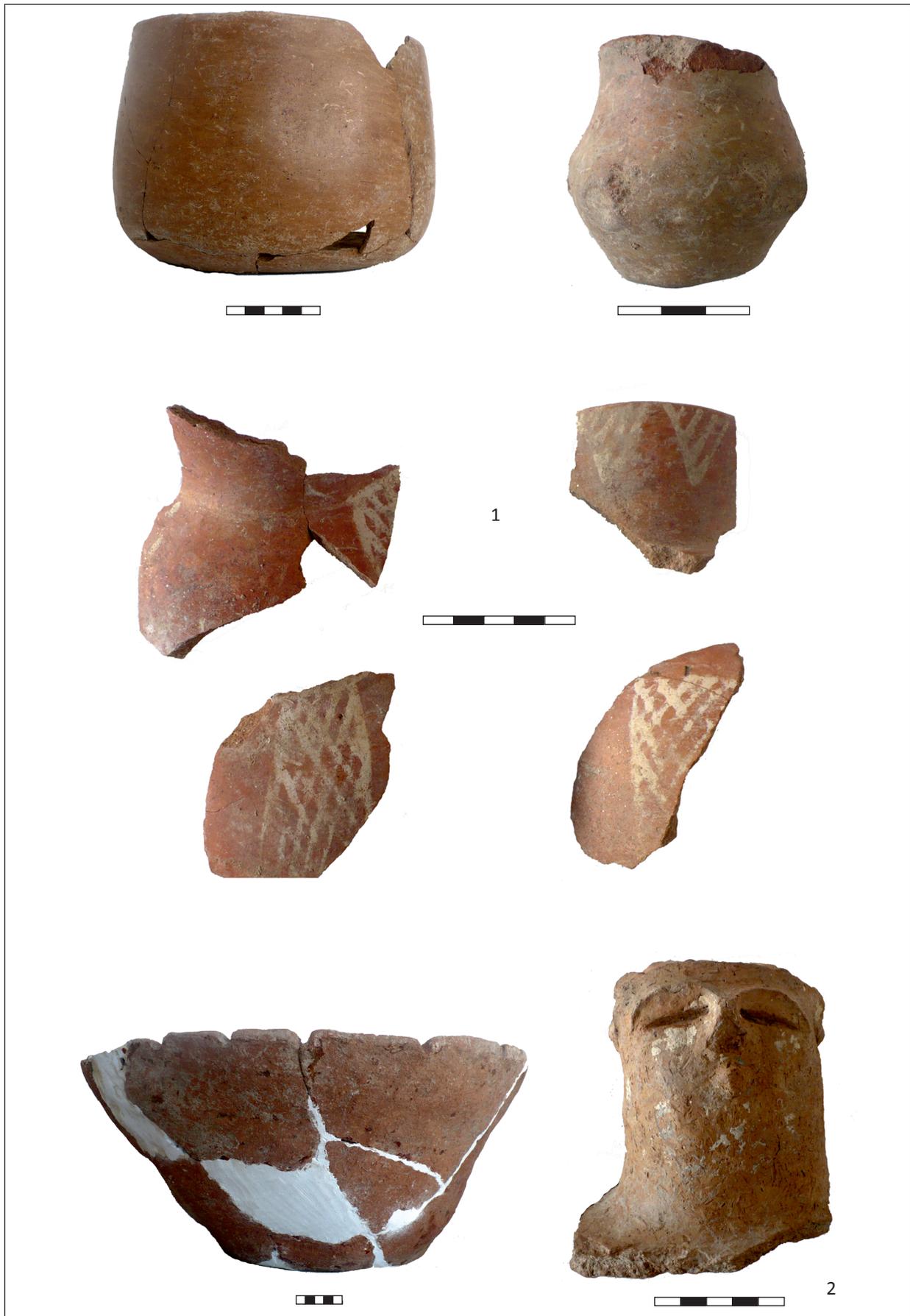
Pl. 4. Some of the material found in House 3 – trench I, ceramic vessels 1, and stone tools 2.



Pl. 5. Some of the material found in House 1 - trench II, ceramic vessels 1; figurine 2; labret 3; loom weight 4; grinding stone 5; and bone tools 6.



Pl. 6. The askoi found in House 2 – trench II.



Pl. 7. Some of the material found in House 3 – trench II, ceramic vessels 1, and anthropomorphic house model 2.