EARLY FARMING COMMUNITIES.
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND VARIABILITY IN THE FORM
OF THE NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHERN BULGARIA.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA) in Black Sea Cultural studies

January 2016, Thessaloniki, Greece
I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another’s work; I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student’s Handbook.

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January 2016

Thessaloniki – Greece
ABSTRACT

This dissertation was written as part of the MA in Black Sea Cultural Studies at the International Hellenic University. For the purpose of this study English, German, Greek, French, Serbian and Bulgarian bibliography was used, as also information from the internet.

The study focus on the region of South Bulgaria during the Neolithic period, with particular reference to the settlements, their form, distribution and intra-site organization. The study aims at better understanding of the variability in the habitation patterns and the organization of the early farmers in this particular region. To this end general characteristic of the environment and the landscape will be taken into consideration. Details regarding material culture and architectural remains will be also presented. Material culture will be further examined in order to approach the issues of interaction of early farming communities on intra- and inter-regional level.

In this Master thesis general approach of the region and the introductory review of the Neolithic cultures in south Bulgaria will be followed by a detail presentation of the representative Neolithic settlements for each of the three geographical areas under study, namely south-west, south-central and south-east Bulgaria. The settlements were selected primarily according to the amount and the quality of the available published data. Finally, answering to specific queries, there will be an attempt to reach some preliminary conclusions about the development of early farming communities in South Bulgaria, their interconnections and social organization.

Keywords: Neolithic Balkans, South Bulgaria, Early farmers, Neolithic Period, Spatial patterns, Neolithic settlements.

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January 2016

Cover photograph: Griffins, 2015.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express great appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Duska Urem-Kotsou, for her priceless support. From the beginning until the completion of this effort, she was invariably available to offer her help and grant her advice. Guided by her knowledge and experience, I managed to integrate my research, about the Neolithic past of Bulgaria.

I am also greatly indebted to the scientific staff of the International Hellenic University, Professor Manolis Manoledakis, Ioannis Xidopoulos, Flora Karagianni, Helias Petropoulos, Efthimia Roupakia, Evi Baniotopoulou and Dimitris Kontogeorgis, for providing me with knowledge and interests for the Black Sea area and to the academic assistants, Georgia Aristodeimou and Georgios Antoniou for their advice, help and support in every matter that I had to deal with during my studies.

Great appreciation to the Professors Vassil Nikolov and Krum Bâčvarov of the National Institute of Archaeology and Museum and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, for their hospitality on a tour of great interest to the archaeological site of Mursalevo, in south west Bulgaria and for providing their help and the access to the information of the unpublished excavation data.

Shortly before the end of my acknowledgements, I could not overlook to express my gratitude, to my sister Pinelopi-Maria, to my father Stelios, and to my beloved friends and colleagues, Giorgos, Nikos, Georgia, Yannis, Elena, Evita and Isidora for their mental and tangible support in this attempt. Finally, I would like to expose a great desire of mine by dedicating this Thesis to my mother Dimitra.
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To the memory of my beloved mother, Dimitra.
PREFACE

The transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic period is characterized by changes in many aspects of humans life the main being the shift from hunting and gathering to farming, followed by changes in the social organization. Early farming communities formed permanent settlements and developed new relations to the landscape and the environment. The new way of life is observable in the settlement pattern, architecture and numerous aspects of material culture that points to changes in everyday practices and beliefs. The importance of the Balkans for understanding this transition and the spread of new way of life into Europe has been early recognized by Childe\(^1\) and many other scholars.

The new Neolithic way of life must have affected indigenous foragers who interacted with early farmers that settled in the Balkans. Settlements were established in different landscapes, linking communities to particular places. Variety of human activities that occurred during this period was actively involved in the formation of individual and group identities witnessed in settlement patterns, spatial organization and material culture.

There are several proposed opinions concerning the origin of the Neolithic in Europe, the ways the farming spread from Anatolia to Europe and the processes that characterize the transition from hunting and gathering to farming. Many scholars argue that considering the Neolithic expansion in more holistic way as a complex set of social practices sculptured in the landscapes, rather than simply looking for its origins could provide much better understanding of the phenomenon\(^2\). Domestication and Neolithisation took place primarily within intellectual, political and sociological contexts. Neolithisation are characterized by social, ideological, and conceptual changes clearly visible in new material culture and ritualistic elements.

It appears that early farmers have created new culture and ideologies in the emerging Neolithic world based on ancestry and memory, which is reflected in the use of space, burial practices and various forms of material culture. Settlements and

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\(^1\) Childe, 1957.
\(^2\) Kotsakis, 2014, 43.
houses became increasingly important centers of activities and social interaction. The notion of the household, which changes gradually to a significant place were ideologies and rituals owned an important role is often strongly connected with an independent production unit. The evolvement of the Neolithic settlement patterns is perhaps related to this gradual rise of autonomy of the individual households and their role in the formation of new social conditions.3

Scholars who study prehistory have applied numerous theoretical and methodological approaches in order to understand and to reconstruct various aspects of the early farmers life and the identities of the Neolithic people. These include the study of settlement pattern, architecture, burial customs, economy and material culture, which are taken as an indications of the role and the meaning of space, of various forms of interactions between early communities4 and of their social structure.

However, archaeologists who investigate early societies and cultures in the Balkans often were not interested in producing narratives which will take into account the complexity of social life of Neolithic communities, mobility and interaction of people on more local level (i.e. within and between the settlements). Various forms of material culture were merely described and were not studied and understood as an active elements in the life of early farmers.5

Farming communities in South Bulgaria show variety in spatial patterning during the Neolithic period, which might have been related to their social organization. Settlements and their organization, which is the subject of this thesis, will be examined in each particular region of South Bulgaria including its west, central and east part. Density, form, size and longevity of the settlements will be discussed and analyzed in the concept of each region. In order to better understand the variability in the form and the size of the settlements, available evidence on intra site organization of the sites will be examined and discussed, through architectural remains the form and the distribution of the houses. It has been suggested that two different but coexisting forms of Neolithic settlements in the Balkans, tell and flat-extended

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3 Kotsakis, 2014, 63.
5 Kotsakis, 2014, 43.
settlements, differ regarding the intra-site organization and the use of space, which might have been related to differences in their social organization.

This research will focus on several questions related to the following issues: Is there preferences to specific landscapes for establishing the settlements and does this change throughout the Neolithic period, in which areas we see uniformity and in which variability in the form of the settlements and how this relates to the particular landscapes and regions of South Bulgaria? What are the differences in intra site organization between the settlements of different type? Approaching the variability in the form of the settlements allows us to approach the issue of their social organization? What the material culture (e.g. pottery, lithics) tells us about the communication among the communities on intra- and inter-regional level?

Finally, there will be an attempt to reach some preliminary conclusions about the development of early farming communities in South Bulgaria, their interconnections and social organization throughout the Neolithic period.
CHAPTER I

Relations with “space” in Neolithic Bulgaria: structures, material culture and burial practices.

Between 7000 and 6500 BC the earliest farming groups appeared in the Balkans including Greece. The transition from foraging to farming was followed by changes in many aspects. This shift in economy and subsistence strategy was a catalyst for social and ideological changes. Farming communities developed new relations to the landscape and the environment. The new way of life is observable in the settlement pattern, architecture and numerous aspects of material culture that points to changes in everyday practices and beliefs.

The appearance of the first farming communities in Europe have been the subject of many debates. During the early Holocene farming and sedentism showed up in south west Asia and later diffused, through various routes, to adjacent areas. There are several proposed narratives concerning the origin and the processes of the transition from hunting and gathering to farming in the Middle East and Anatolia. The role of migration, cultural interfusion and mixture with the locals, in the early Neolithisation of Europe, remain poorly understood. More recently, the archaeologists turned to geneticists specialized in the ancient DNA and interested in the study of prehistoric population movements, to find the evidence for the spread of farming from Anatolia to Europe, taking into consideration also the Balkans as one of the routes. Other scholars emphasize the role of indigenous hunters and gatherers in due to this transition. Recent paleogenetic studies revealed significant genetic similarities between early farmers from western Turkey, Aegean including north Greece, and those from across the Europe, which support their close relationship.

7 Milisauskas, 2011, 153.
8 Hofmanova et al, 2015.
On the whole, most archaeologists agree that there is evidence for migrations during the Neolithic but they do not share the same opinion on the extent of the phenomenon and the reasons for the movement of population or groups of people. Özdoğan put forward an old issue of a Balkan-Anatolian cultural complex and the population migrations as an explanation for the spread of the Neolithic way of life, supported by strong similarities in material culture between Anatolia and Balkans from the earliest stages of the period.13 Ryan and Pitman14 supported a catastrophic flood in the Black Sea area as an impetus for dispersion of farmers. Others emphasize climatic changes in general, while some scholars relate the mobility of early farmers with the raise in population. Weninger presents the “Wave of advance” theory, supporting it with his radiocarbon dating model, which argues that the spread of farming from Anatolia to Europe consisted of constant advances of "cultural-demographic wave", with an average rapidity of almost 1 km per year.15

The beginning of the Neolithic in Bulgaria has been related to the movement of small human groups from the East to the Balkans through sea or continental routes. The 7th millennium BC maritime colonization was relied on formerly developed sea networks. During the Mesolithic period, coastal and sea networks were already well established and a high mobility existed in the Aegean and east Mediterranean seas through maritime routes.16 In southeastern Europe the appearance of the first permanent settlements has been testified in almost all regions with the earliest dated to the second half of the 7th millennium.17 Contacts and interactions with the neighboring areas in the southeast Europe are more than visible and documented in material culture18 including obsidian19 and chipped stone tools of other exotic lithics,20 *Spondylus* objects21 and others.

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15 Weninger *et al*, 2014.
16 Todorova, 2003; Reingruber, Thissen, 2005; Krauss, 2008
17 Nikolov, 2001a, 18.
18 Milić, 2014.
20 Séféridès, 2010; Bajnoczi *et al*, 2013
The transition from the Paleolithic to Mesolithic had as result the formation of more complex social structures. During the early Holocene, (at 8200 cal. BP), changes in climate conditions are observed, from warm and humid to cold. This sudden cooling has been recorded in various parts of Europe. It is widely accepted that in some parts of the southeastern Europe the new Neolithic farming economy was formed by migration of groups of early farmers. Archaeological evidence supports coexistence of Mesolithic population with newcomers, which together formed new social landscape.

Neolithisation was based on a composite transformation of societies with particular elements. Diversity in economies and material culture was not only the result of different natural landscape. With the beginning of the Neolithic way of life in the Balkans in the middle of the 7th millennium BC people started to cultivate plants and keep small flocks of domesticates. The Neolithisation process and the transition to farming economy was a process of interactions between people and plants with a more complex character than earlier suggested. The spread of domesticated crops and animals from Anatolia to Europe was connected with deep social and ecological changes. The adoption of agriculture was transformed during the movement from Anatolia to Europe and involved a complex system of interplays between indigenous and newcomers and between regional and imported plants. Recent study of archaeobotanical assemblages from Bulgarian Neolithic sites, and Thrace in particular, provides evidence on the contacts with Anatolia witnessed in the crop assemblages which correspond to the Near Eastern. Chick pea found in the site of Kapitan Dimitrievo (south Bulgaria) and dated by 14C date show that it appeared in Bulgaria during 5700–5500 BC through the cultural processes related to frequent

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22 Weninger et al, 2006.
23 Kulkova et al, 2015, 78-79.
26 The spread of farming was already persisted in Anatolia. There are various divisions of the Neolithic used by archaeologists and in each region archaeologists divide the Neolithic period according to the current evolvement. For example Todorova (2003) divides the Bulgarian Neolithic into the Monochrome Neolithic, the Classic Early Neolithic, the Middle Neolithic, and the Late Neolithic. German archaeologists have divided the Neolithic into five phases: Early, Middle, Later, Late, and Final (differentiations in the chronological frame among the regions.) (Milisauskas, 2011, 153)
27 Bailey, 2000; Reingruber, Thissen, 2005.
29 Bogaard et al, 2013.
31 Marinova, Popova, 2008; Marinova, Valamoti, 2014.
contacts with Anatolia. Further archaeobotanical study is expected to provide more evidence on the contacts with Anatolia. In addition, pottery assemblages from Kovačevo Ic and Id and other sites also points to the contacts with Anatolia. Results of these studies confirm that spread of farming from Anatolia to the Balkan did not take place not only through Thessaly, but also through eastern routes.

The interactions between people and environment are evidenced in the anthropogenic influence on the vegetation and landscape. Flora and faunal assemblages in southeast Europe indicate that early farmers worked for the preservation of long term cultivating sites and intensive herding. In addition, as Chapman proposed, apart from the “farmer” and “herder”, new other skills or specialists appeared during the Neolithic, such as the “potter” and the “polished stone tool-maker”.

Settlements certainly played a crucial role in the social organization of early farmers. Chapman describes the settlement as “a habitus of stability, and an active contribution to social identity…actively used for creating and maintaining social space for the living”. As Kotsakis refers, the term settlement in Neolithic studies is used in its general sense, as a place where human social relations, permanently transform space, in a repeated way, as a result of conscious human activity. Memory and tradition played a vital role in everyday life and are inscribed in the physical environment and concentrated in the settlement.

Neolithic societies in southeastern Europe were small-scaled and the centralized political or economic organization seems to be lacking. The settlements of first Neolithic communities must have numbered 50-300 individuals and presumably were politically and economically autonomous, while their inhabitants were connected by

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32 Marinova, Popova, 2008, 78; Marinova, Valamoti, 2014, 73.
33 Marinova, Valamoti, 2014, 73.
36 Chapman et al, 2006, 162.
family relations.\textsuperscript{40} Generally, it appears that the earliest houses were often in the form of pit-huts, \textsuperscript{41} with hearths and ovens situated in open spaces between the houses. The social roles of individuals in each community were perhaps defined on the basis of gender, age, and kinship.\textsuperscript{42} The houses must have played a significant role in the organization of the communities.\textsuperscript{43} In the later periods of the Neolithic the variability in the form of the buildings increased to include rectangular, megaroid and apsidal, some of them perhaps housing larger or extended families. In this type of houses hearths and ovens were placed indoor. Novelties are also observed in economy where specialization in the production of various forms of material culture (e.g. spondylus jewelry, marble vessels, figurines and jewelry, pottery etc.) is more evident, while at the same time network exchange was further developed with commodities traveling more distant.

Early farmers organized their communities and developed new relations with the landscape. Variations in preferences regarding landscape were people established their settlements are observed. Most of the Neolithic sites were located close to lakes, rivers and sea, or in areas close to the raw material resources and possible trade roots. Generally, two forms of Neolithic settlements were identified in southeastern Europe: tells and flat-extended sites. Tells is traditionally considered a representative form of Neolithic settlement in Bulgaria and are particularly dominated in plain landscapes. The most significant element regarding tell sites is the continuity of habitation for the long period of time and the rebuilding of the houses on the same spot, in many cases reaching the number of 40 successive layers.\textsuperscript{44} Tell settlements, created by continuous accumulation of deposits, initially appeared in Bulgaria’s Thrace from the Early Neolithic period and continues throughout Neolithic until the end of the Late Bronze age. Their height could reach 18m and their diameter 300m.\textsuperscript{45} Tell settlements also appear in northeast Bulgaria.

\textsuperscript{40} Sahlins, 1968, as cited in Milisauskas, 2011, 156.
\textsuperscript{41} Bailey, 2000, 41-42.
\textsuperscript{42} Hodder supports, that the house is "a gendered space associated with women". Hodder, 1990; Milisauskas, 2011.
\textsuperscript{43} Bailey, 2000, 268.
\textsuperscript{44} Kotsakis, 1999, 66.
\textsuperscript{45} Nikolov, 2001a, 18.
As Chapman suggests “every tell was in its beginnings a flat settlement”.46 Flat - extended settlements are characterized by dispersed and shifting habitation pattern. The continuity in habitation in flat-extended sites is attested by the displacement of residential phases horizontally.47 A variety in the form of the settlements is observed in various regions of the Balkans. There is also some evidence of differences in the distribution between flat and tell settlements. In some regions tells are more frequent, while in others flat settlements are the common form of the settlement and tells can hardly be found if at all.48

Most of the Early Neolithic settlements in Bulgaria did not have enclosures. Exceptionally, some of them were encircled by ditches and embankments behind them, or with row of pillars and other elements that defined the settlement’s territory. In later periods the enclosure of the settlements became regular.49 Various interpretations regarding enclosure structures have been suggested by scholars.50 Some scholars ascribe to them defensive role.51 Others regard them as boundaries which outline the habitation area.52 Turek53 and many others describes the enclosures “as symbols of shared identity”, underlining their symbolic and ideological significance. Nikolov mentions "high settlements", identified mostly in western Bulgaria, which are established naturally protected locations, usually on top of the hills, in the hilly landscapes. This type of settlements occurs particularly during the last centuries of the Final Neolithic period.54

Integral part of the study of Neolithic settlements constitutes a reference to their intra- and inter-community organization. The study of intra-community organization focus on the organization and use of space within each site including the form and the distribution of the buildings and various facilities (e.g. storage and cooking), building techniques and other architectural details, all of which provide evidence on the social and economic organization of the community and its members. The study of inter-

46 Chapman, 1997, 142.
48 Rosenstock, 2006, 117.
49 Nikolov, 2001a, 19.
50 Gibson, 2012.
51 Parkinson, Duffy, 2007.
52 Gibson, 2012.
54 Nikolov, 2001a, 18.
community organization could provide evidence for the social interactions between communities (e.g. networks of exchange of commodities and people etc.). In the latter is included the study of the settlement patterns and the relations with the landscape.

Ideologies and new ideas had a major role during the Neolithic transition. The Neolithic "revolution" was accompanied with deep social, ideological, and conceptual changes and reflected new ways of thinking, accompanied by new symbols and rituals. In Neolithic societies rituals must have played an important role. At household level, rituals might have been of more personal character. Agricultural activities, seasonal practices and many others may have involved the entire community and thus rituals related to such issues will be of communal character. Hodder underlines the importance of ideologies and new ideas that occurred during the Neolithic transition and envisages the Neolithisation as process of a profound social, ideological, and conceptual change. He also emphasizes the social domestication of humans and the development of “domus”, and examines the development of the ideology which prevailed at the early phases of Neolithic Europe and was characterized by symbolic meanings and practices related to the house and the settlement. Bailey developed the idea of the “living house”. The main point of his idea is that the houses were active material entities, which had a crucial role in the construction of the settlement and the creation of social identities. Other scholars focus on the settlements as a social space with important ideological background, and the household as the basic social unit of Neolithic communities.

An interesting issue with possible ideological content is the destruction of houses by fire which is a common phenomenon in Neolithic settlements of Southeast Europe including Bulgaria. Several scholars have argued that at least in some cases the houses in the Balkans were deliberately burnt down for ideological purposes. The frequency with which houses were apparently deliberately burnt in areas like the

55 Andreou, Kotsakis, 1987, 59
56 Andreou, Kotsakis, 1987, 58
58 Hodder, 1990.
61 Tringham, 2005.
Upper Thracian Plain of Southwest Bulgaria points to a common practice, or could be taken as indication of a shared practices between the so called Vinča (central Balkans) and Karanovo cultures (eastern Balkans). In both regions where this practice was regularly encountered, the phenomenon is linked to the death of the house, or otherwise marks the end of the house life. Due to its extent Tringham called this phenomenon “burned-house horizon”. Some of the sites in south Bulgaria where this practice was attested are Azmak, Kapitan Dimitrievo and Sofia-Slatina. Until recently, deliberate house burning was less evident in the Struma Valley (southwest Bulgaria). In Kovačevo only two houses destroyed by fire were uncovered, and they were seemingly constructed one above the other.

Rescue excavations carried out last year near the village of Mursalevo in the Struma valley brought to light remains of the Neolithic settlement dated to the Early and the Late Neolithic period, were at least 60 large houses were uncovered. The excavators found significant indications that some of the houses in Mursalevo, were deliberately burnt which they relate to a kind of ritual with a strong ideological content.

Archaeological evidence indicates that Neolithic societies in the Balkans had their own distinct cultural developments. Neolithic societies are often named according to their unique material culture, especially ceramic types. However, they also share common characteristics. The archaeologists in the Balkans countries often interpret similarities in the archaeological materials, pottery in particular, as an indication of interaction between the regions. Along this line, similarities in the form and decoration of the pots in various regions were also taken as an indication of a possible expansion of specific regional Neolithic cultures. Such an approach is a legacy of

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62 Brami, 2014a, 163.
63 Brami, 2014a, 162.
64 Tringham, 2000.
65 Mikov, 1959; Georgiev, 1965; Nikolov, 2000; Radunčeva et al, 2002; Nikolov, Sirakova 2002
67 Brami, 2014a, 164.
68 The excavations took place during 2014-2015, on the occasion of the construction of “Struma Highway”. (Nikolov et al, 2015a)
69 Nikolov et al, 2015a.
70 Bailey, 2000, 76.
culture-historical theoretical in the study of material culture of past societies, still quite strong in the archaeology of the Balkans countries.

Apart from pottery, characteristic forms of the Neolithic material culture figurines of humans and animals, models of houses and furniture of clear symbolic value that provide a window into their ideological world. They also made pots in human shapes or have decorated vessels with human and animal attachments or relief depictions. The earliest Neolithic figurines and pottery in Bulgaria are dated in the second half of the 7th millennium BC and were therefore integral part of the material culture of the first farmers in the area.71 Relevant to this study are also the house models which underline the ideological and symbolic importance of the house for the early farmers.72 Variety of object and tools of bone, teeth and antler, malachite and shell were inseparable equipment of the early farmers.

All those categories of material bear some meaning within the new way of Neolithic life and constitute sensible interconnections among settlers within the community and with other communities.73 As Bailey suggests “Materials and objects lead to an examination of the degrees of sedentism and the spatial contexts in which these objects were made, used and deposited”.

Neolithic burials and cemeteries can reveal and incorporate practices with social and symbolic elements, particularly with the reference to the notion of space. Cemeteries are rare in southeast Bulgaria, though not altogether unknown. In several sites cemeteries were attached to the settlements. Most of the burials were found within the settlement, beneath the houses floor, between the houses or in abandoned houses, which further suggests the importance of the settlement and the house for the early farmers, but also the role of ancestors in the shaping of their ideology.74 From this aspect it doesn't seem accidental the human representations in the form of figurines and pottery were pronounced in the early farming communities. Dwellings, vessels,

71 Bailey, 2000, 94-95.
73 Bailey, 2000, 76.
74 Brami, 2014b, 151.
figurines had meaning apparently related to the ideologies of the communities, including individuality, identity, status, or gender of both the living and deceased.\textsuperscript{75}

The majority of the burials were simple inhumations mostly in contracted position. Most of the burials had very few, if any, grave-goods. In later periods, burials were all the more often accompanied with pots or jewelry of exotic shells, copper or gold or with tools. Approximately one hundred burials from the Early Neolithic habitation layers, were recovered in Thrace, in the earlier phases of the Neolithic (pre-Karanovo I to Karanovo II phases).\textsuperscript{76} This number shows that only a small portion of the individuals have been uncovered. In Neolithic settlements selected groups of inhabitants were buried inside the settlements. It is still not clear why some inhabitants were separated from the rest. Was such practice related to a particular category of privileged individuals or people related to symbolic ideologies?\textsuperscript{77} A jar burial which contained the remains of an infant was unearthed within a house in Azmak, close to a heating structure.\textsuperscript{78} In Kovačevo all burials, seven in total, uncovered in the site belonged to children.\textsuperscript{79} It appears that young children and infants outnumber among the deceased, which may be attributed to either a high child mortality rate or the special place of this age-group within the society.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{75} Naumov, 2014, 186.
\textsuperscript{76} Băčvarov 2000; 2003, 23-98 ; Naumov, 2007, 255.
\textsuperscript{77} Naumov, 2014, 184.
\textsuperscript{78} Georgiev 1972, as cited in Băčvarov, 2004, 154.
\textsuperscript{79} Brami, 2014b, 151.
\textsuperscript{80} Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002
CHAPTER II

Settlements in South Bulgaria
Spatial organization and variability in their form during the Neolithic

Bulgaria covers the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The evolution of its prehistory is directly related to its geomorphology, which contributes to the development of contacts along the axis East - West and North - South. The territory of Bulgaria is dominated by high mountain ranges, which separate the country into comparatively varied geoclimatic areas that appears to have played some role in the formation of distinct cultural phenomena. To the South, Thrace is separated to Northern and Southern by the Rhodope Mountains. This mountain range divides the climate of the region and offers Mediterranean warmness and in the same time, protects Southern Thrace from the cold winds of the North. Rhodope Mountains were inhabited for long periods during prehistory. It can be assumed that the region of southwest Bulgaria is an intermediate between continental and sub-Mediterranean climate, while the Mediterranean climate prevails, and more continental conditions dominate in northern regions. During the early Holocene, in southwest Bulgaria, the environmental conditions transformed to colder summers, temperate winters and higher rainfalls with coniferous vegetation. These climatic conditions acted positively during the cold event (8200 cal BP / 6250 cal. BC) which took place during the Neolithisation of the Balkans and provoked aridness in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The region of Northern Thrace is located between the Rhodope’s and the Balkan mountains which form both a natural “fortified” area with cultural phenomena related to the western Bulgaria and a bridge between Anatolia and Europe. The territory of Southern Bulgaria is separated from the Northern part of the country with the Balkan range. In the West the region is open at the south through the valleys of the Mestos and Struma rivers, and enjoys sub Mediterranean climate. Due to its location Southwest Bulgaria constitutes a contact zone among the South and Northern areas of

82 Weninger et al., 2006, Kulkova et al, 2015.
83 Marinova, 2012, 413.
84 Leshtakov, 1999, 141.
the Balkans. The area shows differences in cultural characteristics and is a starting point for the comparative chronologies of the region. Southwest Bulgaria is assumed as one of the crossroads for the Neolithisation of southeast Europe due to its geographical location between the Aegean in the south, the Thracian lowlands to the east and the Danube valley to the north. The Struma valley is referred as one of the initial routes for the Neolithisation of the Balkans which according to archaeological material and 14C dates begun at 6200-6100 BC. Finally, the southeastern zone of Bulgaria includes coastal areas of the Black Sea and hinterland with large plains which were later covered by the sea that was located approximately 100 meters lower than today in some periods of the early Holocene covering every building activity. Conversely, in the estuaries, geomorphology formed differently, as alluviums contribute to the extension of the land to the sea. The fertile areas are small plains, valleys and plateaus along the river Maritsa (Evros) River in the east and in many other smaller rivers across the country.

The Bulgarian Neolithic can be roughly subdivided into two phases of the Early Neolithic (ca.6200–5450 BC), for the different regions a still-debated Middle Neolithic (ca. 5450–5300 BC) and a Late Neolithic phase (lasting until 4900 BC). It is followed by the Final Neolithic or Chalcolithic, a term used mainly in the archaeology of southeast Europe and the Near East. In Bulgaria this period corresponds to the 4900–3800 BC approximately and can be subdivided into an early and a late phase, the latter starting around 4450 BC. The territorial conjunction with the northern Aegean and Anatolia, influenced the cultural transitions in south Bulgaria, in all prehistoric periods.

The chronological sequence for the Neolithic phases in Bulgaria is closely related to cultural development (Table 1, 4). Karanovo settlement and its sequence is used as an eponym for the prehistoric cultures in Thrace and generally for the sites that will be examined below. The initial stage of the Early Neolithic, referred as Karanovo I culture, has been recorded in the Mesta Valley (e.g. Kovačevo), the eastern parts of the Sofia basin (e.g. Slatina-Sofia) and the western parts of Thrace (e.g. Tell Kapitan

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85 Boyadzhiev, 2006b; Reingruber, Thissen, 2005; Boyadzhiev, 2009; Marinova, 2012, 415.
86 Todorova, 2003, 257.
Dimitrievo). During the main period of the Karanovo I, cultural characteristics extended from the western parts of Thrace to the Tundža and from the Sub-Balkan plains to the northern foothills of the Rhodope Mountains (e.g. Tell Karanovo, Tell Azmak, Kardzhali, Tell Kapitan Dimitrievo, Kovačevo). The Early Neolithic Karanovo II culture evolved in the northeast areas of Thrace. In the other parts of Thrace, however, in this second phase of the Early Neolithic material culture of Karanovo I continued without significant changes. In some areas of Northeast Thrace the Proto-Karanovo III is distinguished, which correspond to the Middle Neolithic. In the other parts of Thrace Karanovo I culture continued to exist (e.g. Kapitan Dimitrievo, Kovačevo). The first Late Neolithic Karanovo III culture evolved in northeastern Thrace. The following Karanovo III-IV cultural phase represents the second stage of the early Late Neolithic which persists all regions of SE Bulgaria including Thrace. In particular, it is represented in Tundža Valley (e.g. Drama-Gerena), in northeast and central Thrace (e.g. Tell Karanovo, Tell Azmak, Mednikarovo), and in the western parts of region (Tell Kapitan Dimitrievo). The last Late Neolithic period in Thrace is represented by Karanovo IV culture, which developed in the eastern parts of Thrace, and Tundža (e.g. Drama-Gerena, Tell Merdžumekja), while to the west Late Neolithic with strong characteristics of Karanovo IV phase is represented in several sites (e.g. Tell Karanovo, Simeonovgrad, etc.). In the same area during this period other sites like Kapitan Dimitrievo developed their own cultural characteristics.⁸⁹

It is widely accepted that the productive stage was introduced in the sparsely populated Mesolithic Bulgaria by small groups from Anatolia or the Aegean. Together with innovations in the economy early pottery makes its appearance. Due to their common style, characterized by the lack of decoration combined with its simple shapes, the very early phase of the Neolithic in this wider area is also known as monochrome pottery phase. This phase appears to have dominated throughout the Balkans, from Thessaly (e.g. Achillion I and Sesklo I) to the Danube (e.g. Divostin in Serbia etc.), while in Bulgaria monochrome phase is mostly found in the settlements in the northern and western part, but is absent from Thrace and the western coast of

the Black Sea along the Mesta River. This phenomenon has been related to the changes in geomorphology in this area.\textsuperscript{90}

The settlements of the early Neolithic period in Bulgaria are small in size, have short longevity and are established close to the rivers. The houses are above the ground or semi-subterranean huts (pit huts) with walls made of branches and clay. Inside the houses were hearths for heating and the preparation of food though in many cases they were located in open, probably shared, spaces between the houses as the Mursalevo and Kovačevo settlements indicate.\textsuperscript{91}

At the beginning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} millennium BC, in the Thracian plain, the first settlements, which developed to a long-lived over time creating the first tells were established. Tells are a characteristic feature of the settlements for the most of the prehistory in Upper Thrace.\textsuperscript{92} Based on the characteristics of the material culture the settlements in Upper Thrace region were grouped in the Karanovo I culture. The houses are post-frame, rectangular, usually with one room, arranged in a row creating narrow streets. Inside the houses were hearths and storage spaces.\textsuperscript{93}

Southwestern part of Bulgaria which is quite mountainous, show greater variability concerning the type of settlements. In this area both long-lived and short-lived settlements coexist. The former are represented by Gălăbnik site and the latter by Slatina, Kovačevo and others (see below). In addition to the settlement variability, architectural variety is also prominent in this area. In addition to pit-huts buildings above the ground also made their appearance during the Early Neolithic. The latter often had two floors (storeys).\textsuperscript{94}

South East Bulgaria was persistently and relatively evenly inhabited throughout the prehistoric period, although a major part included the upland zones of the Eastern Rhodopes and the Strandja Mountains. Three major rivers, Maritsa, Tundža and Arda,
flow within the region and, along with their tributaries, form a large plain area known for its fertility.95

During the middle of the 6th millennium BC, the climate of the region becomes warmer and the Neolithisation process continues in areas that were previously not particularly suitable for farming. This phase of the Neolithic shows greater complexity in various aspects. In particular, the number of settlements increased as well as the size of the buildings. Also, the arrangement of the space within the buildings changed with more rooms encountered in this period.96 In general, Bulgarian colleagues label the Middle Neolithic period in South Bulgaria as Starčevo culture (in the western part) and the Karanovo II and III cultures (in the central and eastern part) of the area under study. The Middle Neolithic sites of Thrace have left thick levels of accumulated debris, indicating a great longevity in fertile, beneficial for agriculture areas.97 Many of the characteristics of architecture patterns that endured in the previous millennium, continued to exist.98

In the upper layers of the Gălăbnik tell, in south west Bulgaria, the evolvement of the first stages of Starčevo culture is observable, through pottery finds (initially red in light background and later black or brown on red).99 A rectilinear surface structure has been found at Slatina in west-central Bulgaria dating to the 2nd quarter of the 6th millennium BC. The building was constructed in wattle and daub technique and rebuilt among two phases of reconstruction, while the walls were made of small posts and with branches covered with mud and clay.100

Although the lives in the settlements of central and the west Bulgaria continued during the Middle Neolithic period, there are no sufficient archaeological data from the region of Rhodope range corresponding to this period. Significant changes occur in spatial organization during the Late Neolithic. In Bulgaria new culture groups defined by their distinctive material culture are discerned: Vinča, Kallojanovec (Thrace) and North Aegean Late Neolithic characteristics of material culture

95 Gaydarska, 2007, 1.
96 Bailey, 2000, 153.
97 Todorova, 2003, 270.
98 Bailey, 2000, 161.
100 Nikolov, 1989, 1992a, 1992b
appeared. The houses in this period were built with more resistant materials and became the epicenter of an extensive scale of activities, practiced in the same place over longer periods of time.

In south-central Bulgaria important changes are evident in spatial patterns and the organization of the space within tell settlements, which include the increase in both the size of the houses, and the number of rooms. Settlements (e.g. Azmak) were encircled by perimeter walls and embankments.

In south-western Bulgaria, in the Struma valley, the number and the size of the settlements increase. The lower and the middle Struma region were a significant route, which connects northern Greece with south-west Bulgaria. In this region during the Late Neolithic Acropotamos–Topolnica culture developed, which is characteristic for the Northern Aegean Late Neolithic culture, and is also associated with the Late Neolithic Thessaly according to Bulgarian archaeologists. In the lower Struma valley there were numerous large newly established settlements, inhabited for several generations as the successive habitation layers show. The architecture of this period in the area is represented by two storey houses, built next to each other.

In the north part of the Struma valley, continuity from the earlier settlements is observed. In the site of Bălgărčevo, four building horizons are identified. During the first half of the 5th millennium BC, the settlements which were located in the lower and middle Struma valley, seemed to have cultural relations with those in the Aegean Thrace and eastern Macedonia (e.g. Sitagroi and Paradimi) and some of the buildings were made with sun-dried mudbricks. At the end of the 5th millennium BC many more settlements were established in the Struma valley, while the buildings

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102 Bailey, 2000, 161.
103 Perničeva, 1995, 114
105 Bailey, 2000, 166.
108 Todorova 1995, 86
had rectangular or megaroid forms. Most of the settlements were newly established and situated mostly on terraces with thin cultural layers.\footnote{Pernicheva 1995, 130–1.}

Late prehistoric sites of the south east Bulgaria are mainly distributed in the valleys. Apart from the Neolithic period, the settlements were also used during the Copper Age, Late Bronze Age, and particularly Iron Age. They were also found in the Eastern Rhodopes.\footnote{Gaydarska, 2007, 1.} The Late Neolithic culture of Thrace is represented by the Kalojanovec culture. The pottery instead of painted decoration was decorated with incised ornaments and flutings. This cultural phase appears also in the Karanovo tell (Karanovo IV). In Maritsa valley, Kalojanovec culture is the predecessor of the Early Final Neolithic culture of the region. Its last phase is also known as Proto-Maritsa culture.\footnote{Todorova, 2003, 272-3.}

Following the general approach of south Bulgaria on regional level, and the introductory to the cultures of the Neolithic sites of South Bulgaria in this chapter the Neolithic sites characteristic for each of the three regions will be presented in more details. In the present study the region of South Bulgaria is subdivided into three geographic areas (Fig. 1). The first region includes the southwest part of the area under study. This area is defined to the south by borders with Greece, to the west with F. Y.R.O.M. and Serbia, and is characterized by the valleys of Mesta and Struma rivers. To the North, following the flow of Struma, the study area covers the territory up to Sofia region while to the west reaches the northern foothills of the Western Rhodopes, and the westernmost part of Thrace. The sites from this region that will be discussed bellow include Slatina, Gălăbnik, Mursalevo, Bălgarčevo, Ilindentsi, Topolnica, Kovačevo, Rakitovo and Kapitan Dimitrievo.

South-central Bulgaria comprised the second region, which covers the area of the upper Thrace to the north (Karanovo, Azmak, and Čavdar settlements), the flow of Maritsa River (Yabalkovo) and the Eastern Rhodope Mountains to the south (Kardzhali, Krumovgrad). The third region is southeast Bulgaria which will be represented by settlements in Stara Zagora District (Mednikarovo) to the north, the
Haskovo district (Simeonovgrad), the Sakar Mountain between Maritsa and Tundža rivers to the southeast (Kapitan Andreevo) and the Drama microregion in the Yambol area to the northeast (Gerena, Merdzumekja).

The settlements in all three geographical regions will be presented in alphabetical order, starting from the south-west, continuing to the south-central and ending up with south-east settlements. Examining the spatial organization and the architectural remains of each settlement, the focus will be on the size of the settlements and the houses, their density, the longevity of the settlements, and the variability which occurred in their form. In addition, the available data regarding the intra site organization of the settlements will be present including the layout of the settlements, the form of the houses, architectural details (e.g. building techniques and materials used), the distribution of some of the facilities such as cooking and storing, and the chronology.
South –West Bulgaria

Bălgarčevo

The site of Bălgarčevo is located on the right bank of Struma River, 10 km north-west from the city of Blagoevgrad, and belongs to the flat-extended type of settlements. The position of the site in a transitional area between southern and northern part of the Struma valley facilitate the communication of its inhabitants with neighboring areas and connections on wider regional level. The excavations, lasting from 1970 to 1985, revealed a long lived settlement dating from the Early to the Final Neolithic according to pottery typology. In particular, the settlement was established in the final stage of the Early Neolithic. Two habitation phases (Bălgarčevo Ia and Ib) were distinguished in the first chronological phase (phase I), which is contemporary with Karanovo II and Starčevo III phase. The next phase II (Bălgarčevo II) is dated to the Middle Neolithic and the phase III (Bălgarčevo III) in the Late Neolithic, while the phase IV (Bălgarčevo IV) belongs to the Early Final Neolithic (Chalcolithic).\(^\text{112}\)

The thickness of the cultural layer varied from 1,5 to 2,2 meters.\(^\text{113}\) Radiocarbon dates place the Early and the Middle Neolithic layers in 5713–5531 BC and 5559–5322 BC respectively.\(^\text{114}\) The architecture of the phase I is characterized by variety in building form (above the ground buildings, pit houses, dwellings with subterranean and above the ground parts), and is divided into two residential stages.\(^\text{115}\)

According to the excavators the best preserved remains of buildings were unearthed in Layer IV and partly III. The earliest period is well represented by Dwelling 1, which had a complex form. The building (Dwelling 1 – Fig. 2) was unearthed in the central part of the northern trench.\(^\text{116}\) It was rebuilt at least three times maintaining the same orientation (north – east). This early building was a semi-subterranean, which was followed by a later construction, with dimensions 8,3 x 6m. The house has a form in an almost square pit-hut, which measured about 6m on each side and occupied the main space of the building. Its north part was above the ground. The house was

\(^{112}\) Perničeva, 1995; 2002; 2011.
\(^{113}\) Perničeva, 1995, 100.
\(^{114}\) Marinova, Popova, 2008, 74.
\(^{115}\) Perničeva et al, 2000, as cited in Koromila, 2008, 47.
\(^{116}\) Perničeva, Kulov, 2011, 69.
destroyed by fire with many details preserved in situ. Its dimensions covered a surface of 28 to 51m². Fallen pieces of plasters, in various size, most of them containing timber imprints, were found in all parts of the house. 117

In particular, inside the subterranean part of the house, two ovens were constructed, with diametrically opposite entrances, spacing apart 0,85m. They were both accompanied by one clay platform each and divided the room space into two areas. A clay wall with dimensions 2,4 x 1,8 m. divided the north-west side of the subterranean part of the house, outfaced one of the two ovens. In the south-east corner, fragments of pottery and storage pots were discovered along with stone tools and 30 vessels found in the floor. 118

A clay platform which covered a wooden construction extend across the above the ground part of the house and in the north-east side of the subterranean part. It might be a part of collapsed floor, judging from the postholes found below it. Additionally, burned seeds that were found on the floor level indicate that this space might have been storage room. Charred seeds of wheat and lentils were identified among them. 119

After its destruction the house was rebuilt on the same spot. In the same location, above Dwelling 1, another building with similar dimensions and axis was constructed during the Late Neolithic period. This building was not destroyed by fire, though burnt pieces of plaster were identified in this layer. It is mentioned that those architectural materials were from an earlier period and were reused during this construction phase. This time the dwelling was built above the ground with almost the same dimensions with the earlier one. 120

Middle Neolithic dwellings (Bâlgarčevo II) were built just above the earlier habitation horizon and constituted solid constructions with similar dimensions and orientation with the precedent structures. An exception is witnessed in Dwelling 4. 121

Apparently not all the buildings from this phase were destroyed by fire. Some differentiations in the orientation are also preserved. Around the dwellings in the

119 Perničeva, Kulov, 2011, 72.
120 Perničeva, Kulov, 2011, 69.
southern trench of the excavation, household pits and oval-shaped cult pits were discovered. 122

Dwellings dated to the Late Neolithic were uncovered mostly in the southwestern part of the settlement. They were densely packed, and separated with narrow passages (not wider than 1m), of remarkable dimensions and in some cases with two or three rooms. The buildings didn’t have semi-subterranean parts or raised clay platforms and were not destroyed by fire destruction. 123

Most of the vessels of Early Neolithic period consisted of monochrome fine pottery. 124 Barbotine, painted, impressed, channeled and plastic ornamentation define the Bălgărčevo I and II periods. 125 A cultural group in the Struma River valley is named by the site of Bălgărčevo, according to the pottery assemblages. The Early Neolithic pottery from Bălgărčevo I has as common characteristic the dark-painted decoration. Bălgărčevo II culture 126 (Middle Neolithic or according to some scholars the first phase of the Late Neolithic), has as characteristic the black polished wares. Biconical, hemispherical and conical shapes prevailed. Bălgărčevo IIIA phase is also characterized by painted decoration, brown or black painted over a light surface, polychrome, red painted and painted with bitumen. In addition, black topped vessels with graphitized surface are encountered. 127

Gălăbnik

The tell site of Gălăbnik is situated in Radomi plain (upper Struma valley), on the left bank of Struma River, between the Vitosha and Rila mountains. The settlement covers 7 ha with cultural deposits reaching 4.8 m. The Early Neolithic site has three

124 Perničeva, Kulov, 2011,111.
125 Perničeva, Kulov, 2011, 117.
habitation phases (Gâlăbnik I, II and III), with 10 building horizons.\textsuperscript{128} The early habitation covers the period between 6000-5980 and 5620-5580 BC.\textsuperscript{129}

The houses varied in size between 35-74m\textsuperscript{2}, form a plan with narrow passages and streets (Fig. 3). The architectural characteristics of the houses reveal a combined building technique, due to the moist terrain, with foundation of upright posts which connected the walls with the earth (in depth about 1,20 under the surface level and 0,40m over the surface). The walls, 0,40m thick, were made by alluvial clay or soil from the site in combination with wooden constructions. They were plastered from the inner and the outer side with yellow clay of 0,06-0,10m. Close to, almost all houses, stones with variation in shapes and dimensions, were found. In some houses, usually along the southern wall there was a clay platform (0,20m high and 2,00 to 2,00 m length). Because of the raising of the underwater level, the floors in some houses of the horizon 4, had an extra paving layer of stones, ceramics or wood.\textsuperscript{130}

Ovens are often represented only by pieces scattered in the deposits of the houses, and only rarely preserved in situ. They have a U-form with 2 m. maximum length. The initial foundation material was reused in the upper horizon.\textsuperscript{131}

In all of the horizons, there was a large dwelling of 100m\textsuperscript{2}, with an inner courtyard which perhaps served for keeping domesticated animals. In this house upright posts or wall debris that could separate rooms, are not recorded.\textsuperscript{132} In the 6\textsuperscript{th} horizon, this house revealed a square storage room, built with clay, with rounded edges and dimensions of 2, 20 to 2,10m.\textsuperscript{133} Another sheltered area where the animals were kept was identified by the excavators, in a place where building remains were not found. This area was rich with organic remains and wood residues.\textsuperscript{134}

The site seems to have been pre planned and the inhabitants kept this plan in all the phases of the settlement’s habitation. It has been suggested that the orientation of the

\textsuperscript{128} The first seven habitation horizons belong to the Proto-Starčevo culture and the rest three to the Starčevo culture. (Bakamska, 2007)
\textsuperscript{129} Bakamska, 2007, 175.
\textsuperscript{130} Bakamska, 2007, 179.
\textsuperscript{131} Bakamska, 2007, 179.
\textsuperscript{132} Bakamska, 2007, 175.
\textsuperscript{133} Bakamska, 2007, 175.
\textsuperscript{134} Bakamska, 2007, 180.
houses was related to the climatic conditions (e.g. for the protection of strong wind). Nowadays the first three levels of habitation are under water, which is the reason why the wooden elements were well preserved, of the wooden posts and boards of wooden constructions (some of them parts of roofs), which constitute the remains of the architectural material of the houses.  

From the Early Neolithic pottery assemblages, which were associated to the Gălăbni group, the decoration of dots bellow the rim of the pot and triangles filled with net motif is observable. Early Neolithic sherds are also represented by white on red or black on red painted and polychrome vessels.

Ilindentsi

The settlement of Ilindentsi is located in the Struma River Valley on the western slopes of Pirin Mountain, between the villages Strumyani and Ilindentsi (Fig. 4). It covers an area of 3 ha. The prehistoric deposits were found just below the surface (i.e. on 0,10 to 0,20m depth). Ongoing excavations have uncovered remains of an Early (Ilindentsi I) and Middle Neolithic settlement (Ilindentsi II). The site is contemporary with Bâlgarčevo II phase (6000 - 5500 BC), and belongs to the so called Bâlgarčevo-Dolna Ribnitsa culture, characteristic for the Middle Struma valley during the Middle Neolithic.

The excavations brought to light remains of three houses and part of the ditch, from 1m to 2.20 m wide and 0.60m deep. Two of the houses were built above the ditch suggesting that the settlement was at least partially encircled by ditch during its earlier phase. The buildings correspond to those from the later stages of the Early Neolithic site at Kovačevo (Ic and Ib). Judging from the excavated examples, the

135 Bakamska, 2007, 175.
136 Ćrbska-Kulova examine the parallels that have been identified in the Early Neolithic site of Ilindentsi. (Ćrbska-Kulova et al, 2011.)
137 Pavuk, Bakamska, 2000; Leshtakov, 2004, 89.
140 Ćrbska-Kulova estimates that Kovačevo was most likely the center. It is possible that the settlement of Ilindentsi was founded by moving inhabitants from Kovačevo. This theory occurs by the similarities in the pottery and the architectural characteristics. In this period (phases Ic, Id), Kovačevo...
houses must have had stone foundation, walls constructed in pisé technique, and a wooden floor. One of the houses was found completely burnt with preserved in situ cooking facilities (an oven, grain-store and millstone). Apart from the houses a large number of pits is found, characteristic feature of the neolithic settlements in the region, but also of many other neolithic settlements in the Balkans. Some of the pits must have served as rubbish pits. Post-holes have also been identified suggesting that some buildings in Ilindentsi were post framed, which testify to the variability in construction and building techniques. In Trench 2 the cultural layer is 0.80m- 1.40m thick, in which, a ditch, post-holes and numerus pits were discovered.

The pottery from Ilindentsi was decorated with painted, plastic, incised, impressed and channeled decoration, but painted decoration prevails Ceramic assemblage of Ilindentsi I phase shows exceptional uniformity on painted ornaments exclusively with white paint on red, wine-red or orange vessel surface, which are usually found bellow the rim. The settlement’s pottery style shows common characteristics with pottery from Kovačevo Ic and Id, Rakitovo and Gălăbnik. Fine black and grey burnished ware characteristic for the Late Neolithic was also found. It seems however that the LN settlement was built next to the earlier phases, which indicates that the settlement belongs to the flat-extended type of sites.\textsuperscript{141}

**Kapitan Dimitrievo**

Kapitan Dimitrievo, known also as Banyata tell, is situated in the Peshtera district, 1.5 km west of the homonymous village. The settlement occupied a terrace on the east slope of the low natural hill. The tell is 13m high and its base has 140 m in diameter.\textsuperscript{142} The settlement was inhabited during the Early, Late and Final Neolithic, and the Bronze Age.

\textsuperscript{141} Grębska-Kulova et al., 2011, 46; Grębska-Kulova et al., 2011.
\textsuperscript{142} Kapitan Dimitrievo consisted a very large settlement and there was a considerable population expansion. (Grębska-Kulova et al., 2011)

\textsuperscript{142} The area covers a surface of 1.96 ha. (Nikolov, 2000, 51)
The early Neolithic occupation of tell Kapitan Dimitrievo was divided chronologically into two phases: Early Neolithic 1 and Early Neolithic 2. Early Neolithic period demonstrates its long evolvement during the first half of the 6th millennium BC. The settlement of Kapitan Dimitrievo with its two-floor houses testifies to the high level of building skills of the early farmers. White painted decorated pottery is representative for the site. Late Neolithic pottery during the second half of the 6th millennium BC is characterized by dark burnished pottery characteristic for this period.

The site was first excavated by P. Detev in 1947-1948. The excavations were limited to two trenches which gave material from all phases of the Neolithic including Final Neolithic, and the Bronze Age. In 1998 Vasil Nikolov continued the excavations of the site starting with four trenches located in different parts of the tell.

The first trench covered a surface of 15m² and was located in the east periphery of the tell. Excavations didn’t reveal architectural remains, just fragments of Early Neolithic white painted pottery of the Karanovo I culture in the lower layers, and Late Neolithic and Late Final Neolithic pots in the upper layers.

The excavations in the second trench, located in the north-west side of the tell uncovered several habitation phases. These in the older main layer (3,80m thick) are contemporary with the Karanovo I culture with which the excavator relates the settlement according to the similarities in material culture. The lower layers contained white painted pottery, polychrome pottery (brown and white) and in the upper layers white ash spots of open hearths, were recorded.

House 1 was uncovered during the excavation season 1998-1999. An oven was found inside the house, in front of the western wall, which had a U-shaped base and the platform. A grinding stone was found attached to the north wall of the oven. Overall 5 round and oval grain storage places were unearthed in situ, on the clay

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143 Radiocarbon dates from archeological material from one of the structures in Kapitan Dimitrievo: 5920–5730 cal. BC (Marinova, Popova, 2008, 74-75).
144 Nikolov, 2000, 63.
145 Nikolov, 2000, 51.
146 Nikolov, 2000, 51-52.
floor. A well preserved part of a clay roof, may indicate an existence of a second storey. Those remains were accompanied with fragments of red pottery, which according the stratigraphic data looked as they “felt from above”. One more base (only the front part) with platform and dome belonged to another oven, probably the one that was situated on the second floor of the house.

As the excavator mentions, another dwelling, named as House 2, which was also oriented in all four cardinal points, was revealed 1,8 m over the sterile sediments. Likewise House 1, it had ovens and grain storages. The second cultural layer covers a small area (0,60m thick) of the second Trench and belongs to Karanovo III and IV period, without any indications of architectural remains.147

The third trench was a dumping area. The lower layer was 0,80m thick without any indications of architectural remains. Pits with garbage and ash, and variety of pottery fragments of Late Neolithic period were identified in the trench. Trench four was situated in the highest part of the tell. Traces of the house floor and an oven from the Late Neolithic period were uncovered.148

During the 2003-2005 excavation seasons Nikolov and his team have excavated a burnt house from the Early Neolithic, which most probably belong to the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th millennium BC. It must have been of rectangular shape, quite large (11x9,5 m), with three rooms. In two of the rooms, ovens have been revealed and in the third grain storage bins. The floor was constructed with pebbles covered with clay. In the south-west room part of the house wall was found coated with white material and red paint. A large pit was found 2m from the oven and between the two posts which supported the roof (Fig. 5). The pit was full of fragments of storage bins, plaster from the walls and roof fragments. It was constructed at the same time with the floor. According to the excavator the structure comprised a complex of a central pit with three steps and a trapezoidal subterranean structure, dug beneath the house floor.149

147 Nikolov, 2000, 52.
148 Nikolov, 2000, 52.
149 Nikolov, 2006, VIII.
Numerous pits were found in the Early Neolithic phase of the settlements, both inside and outside of the houses. The pits were dug in the virgin soil. The excavator interprets them as cult pits.\textsuperscript{150} Some of them were found empty, while others contain various materials. In many of the latter animal bones and fragments of pottery, mostly white painted, prevail. In some of them anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, fragments of cult tables and flint artifacts were also found.\textsuperscript{151}

Pottery assemblages of the Early Neolithic are represented by white painted and other decorated wares, characteristic for the Karanovo I and II culture (Fig. 6), as well as typical for the period vessel shapes (bowls, cups, tulip vessels, plates etc).\textsuperscript{152} The Early Neolithic (Karanovo I) layer represents two phases. The first phase is characterised by white painted vessels, while the second phase by dark and polychrome decorated pottery. The next phase includes pottery of Early and Late Neolithic elements (Karanovo I-III- IV). The Late Neolithic (Karanovo III-IV) is represented by vessels with channeled decoration and plates on high bases, decorated with incised ornaments.\textsuperscript{153}

**Kovačevo**

The site of Kovačevo is located 3,5 km south-west from the modern village, on the southwestern slopes of the Pirin mountains, close to the borders with Greece. The settlement belongs to the flat type of sites. To the east of the site, is a gorge with small tributary of the Bistritsa. Kovačevo settlement belongs to the earliest phases of the European Neolithic and is situated on one of the possible routes of Neolithisation through Southeast Europe.

Based on the surface finds the site covers approximately 6 ha, although it is not clear whether all of this area was in use at same time. Three main periods of habitation were distinguished: Kovačevo I - Early Neolithic, Kovačevo II - Middle Neolithic and Kovačevo III - Early Bronze Age (Table 2).\textsuperscript{154} The earliest C14 dates place

\textsuperscript{150} Nikolov, 2006, VIII.
\textsuperscript{151} Nikolov \textit{et al}, 2005, 33.
\textsuperscript{152} Nikolov, 2000, 52, 54.
\textsuperscript{153} Nikolov, 2004, 19.
\textsuperscript{154} Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002.
Kovačevo I in 6159-5926 BC. In almost all excavated trenches remains of Early Neolithic period were uncovered, which the excavators parallel with Karanovo I period. In this phase, four habitation phases have been distinguished (Kovačevo Ia, Ib, Ic, Id).

The archaeological material of the first two phases shows similarity with some settlements in northern Greece (e.g. Giannitsa, Nea Nikomedia) and F.Y.R.O.M. The last Early Neolithic habitation phase, Kovačevo Id (5790 -5630 B.C.), is closely related to the Neolithic of the Thracian plain. The excavators also see some parallels with the Kapitan Dimitrievo settlement.

Certain number of dwellings was uncovered in Kovačevo, the most important aspects of which will be present in chronological order. Phase I with its four habitation phases (Ia, Ib, Ic, Id) is characterized by poor preservation of the buildings. It could be discerned, however, that the houses throughout the phase I do not show intensive shifting pattern. They must have been constructed almost one above the other, were of similar dimensions and orientation (northwest-southeast).

The buildings of Phase Ia were post-framed with walls made in wattle and daub. Houses 1714, 1730 and 2019 in sector E are the most representative examples of the settlement's phase Ia. Sector E has the most complete stratigraphic sequence with a large number of dwellings in parallel axis. The upper levels of this sector were disturbed by pits from the Middle Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age. Post holes are also found in number. Some of the shallow post-holes must belong to the later post-framed buildings. The houses have north-west/south-east orientation. House 1714 has square form, with side length 6m, and has at least five successive floors disturbed by later activities, and traces of possible thermal construction. House 1730 has also walls with length 6m, constructed in wattle and daub, with an entrance opened in the west.
wall. Close to the house, to the north-east, a large pit was found filled with variety of findings.\footnote{Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002, 112-113.}

Another pit was found below the level of the house floor filled with hard and compact material named by the excavators "beton de terre compacte". It must have been used for the construction of the building above it, which belongs to one of the later habitations phases (Ib-Id). The second phase Ib is represented by houses 907 in sector E, 1656 in sector I, 2034, 2055 and 2199 in sector K and 617, 2071 in sector M and N. In house 1656 remains of wooden floor collapsed into an underlying pit, which was located bellow the house's floor.\footnote{Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002, 111-112.}

Phase Ic is represented by houses 259, 329 and 334 in sector E. At least three levels of successive floors were identified, 0.10 m distant from one another, which represent successive renewals of the house’s floors. The walls were constructed with "beton de terre compacte". In some cases, concentrations of stones, pottery and bone fragments are revealed between the floors.\footnote{Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002, 110-111.}

House 216 in sector K represents the Kovačevo Id phase. It remains was unearthed just 0.15-0.20m below the present surface level. The house has two successive phases. The earlier building was destroyed by fire and rebuilt on the same spot. It is interesting that even the oven of the rebuilt house was constructed in the same location where the oven of the earlier house was located.\footnote{Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002, 108-109.} Near the house an infant burial was uncovered.\footnote{Lichardus-Itten \textit{et al}, 2002, 116.}

Ovens built on massive pebble foundation and hearths with or without foundation, were found inside and outside the houses of the early Kovačevo I settlement. Furthermore, in addition to the various pottery wares fragments of storage vessels (pithoi), from Kovačevo Ic and Id period, were found in various parts of the village indicating the presence of large storage containers. Some fragments of such large
vessels were reused as construction material for other structures. Rare fragments of pottery from the same period show uncommon characteristics and motifs, which are not characteristic for the pottery production in Kovačevo.

Parts of ditches were also uncovered suggesting that Kovačevo I settlement or part of it had ditch. A ditch, which crosses sectors M and N from the north-west to south-east, was reinforced by dam of "beton de terre compacte" and was apparently related to water control. Another ditch with similar characteristics, which partially crosses the sectors I, K and L is dated by pottery in Kovačevo Ic phase.

Human activity continues during the Middle Neolithic period, but the remains of the phase II are restricted to several pits dug in the Early Neolithic layers. Apart from the pottery characteristic for Karanovo I, II and III culture with white-painted (Fig. 7) and dark-painted vessels, ceramics corresponding to the periods of Karanovo IV culture testify to the habitation also in the Early Bronze Age.

As was previously mentioned, inhumations were revealed within the settlement. The body of deceased was in contracted position, placed on the right side with the head aligned to the north. A total of five infant or children were buried in ordinary pits, while two newborn babies, were placed in ceramic vessel. In one case the child was covered with a thick lid. Burials in ceramic vessel are securely dated by pottery to Karanovo I period.

**Mursalevo**

The prehistoric settlement of Mursalevo is situated on the left bank of the Struma River, in Kyustendil district, at the southern end of the village of Mursalevo. It belongs to the flat-extended type of sites and covers a total area of over 8ha. The prehistoric settlement was firstly registered during construction the railway line Dupnitsa-Blagoevgrad in the first half of the 20th century. Systematic investigation of

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166 Some pottery assemblages from Kovačevo Ic and Id may indicate early contacts between Thrace and Anatolia. (Lichardus-Itten *et al.*, 2002, 123; 2006; Marinova, Valamoti, 2014.)
the site started in 2014 on the occasion of the construction of “Struma Highway”. Geomagnetic survey, which preceded the excavations, showed that the investigated area consisted of numerous buildings and passages between them. The excavations brought to light settlement of the Early (first half of the 6th millennium BC) and Late Neolithic (end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th millennium BC). The Late Neolithic settlement is located next to the Early Neolithic, without overlapping each other. Geomorphological characteristics of the area, which enhanced the natural erosion and the human activities in the later historical periods, caused disturbances of the Neolithic deposits. In spite of this, large part of the settlement was well preserved partially due to the fire that destroyed many houses, as will be discussed bellow.

The thickness of the Early Neolithic cultural deposits ranges from 1m to 2.70 m. The earliest phase of the site dates to the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th millennium BC. The Early Neolithic village was surrounded by two deep ditches, which were filled, as a result of erosion and intense water activity of the Struma River, after the village was abandoned.

The form of the Early Neolithic settlement appears to be rectangular, and reminds urban planning with parallel roads running between the buildings. More than 60 large houses have been revealed. Most of the houses were destroyed by fire, which explain their exceptional preservation. They had two floors and were made in wattle and daub. Their size ranges from 6 x 5,20m (house 32) to 10 x 11m (house 20-24 and 21) with an approximate height of 8 meters. The house 29 (Fig. 8) characteristic for its exceptional preservation, is located in the northwestern part of the settlement. The house has a rectangular plan, two floors and dimensions 9.30 x 8 m. The entrance of the building was not found, but in all probability was from the south. All the walls have been preserved with a maximum height of 0.45 meters. Their thickness reaches 0.30 m. The house preserved rare evidence of complex structural features and the use of variety of modified wooden elements in the form of rectangular, square and round posts of different sizes and section, which testify to the high structural achievements

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170 Nikolov et al, 2015a.
171 Nikolov et al, 2015a, 45.
172 Nikolov et al, 2015a; 2015b; Vandova et al, 2015; Griffiths, 2015.
173 Nikolov et al, 2015b, 49.
of the early farmers. In the central part of the house the wall that separates the first floor in two spaces was found. Six pillars supported the second floor. The floor on the second storey was constructed with longitudinal and transverse beams, coated with clay. The floor of the ground storey was of compact whitish clay.  

Between house 29 and the neighboring house 21 part of a cobbled street 3 m wide was uncovered. Besides the numerous Early Neolithic pits of various shapes and sizes found in various parts of the settlement, a child burial was also uncovered, placed in contracted position with the head to the west.

In the northern part of the settlement a large building of 18.50 m in length (house 45-47), destroyed by a strong fire was brought to light. The house was divided by a partition wall into two rooms (north room has length 9.70m and the south one 8.80m). The walls 0.20m thick were built with small posts. The floor of the first storey was made of compact clay, while the floor of the second storey from wooden beams plastered with thick layer of clay. Various facilities for processing of grain, including fixed and portable millstones and mortars were found in the center of the first floor. The second floor was equipped with thermal construction. In the southern part of both floors were identified remains of granaries.

The Late Neolithic settlement, located next to the Early Neolithic village, was flanked from the north by the river. The northwest part of the settlement must have been encircled by stone wall. During the excavation in 2014 six Late Neolithic houses were partially or fully excavated. The houses had two storeys, rectangular plan and a long axis oriented in northwest - southeast direction. Unlike the early Neolithic houses, the Late Neolithic ones had stone foundations. The largest building, the House 13 (8.50 m x 6 m), is located in the northern part of the settlement, had two storeys and was divided into two rooms by interior wall. The floor of the second storey, was constructed by beams, and plastered with thick layer of clay.

175 Nikolov, et al, 2015a, 46.
177 An exception is the house 15 which is oriented in the northeast- southwest direction. (Nikolov, et al, 2015b, 46-47.)
Another building (House 41) was unearthed in the southern end of the excavated area. It is 6 meters long and was destroyed by fire. As the House 13 mentioned above, this house had also two floors, stone foundations, and orientation northwest-southeast. An oven with a stone base, 1.50 in length, was found resting on the east wall of the second floor. Bellow it an earlier oven of rectangular base and dimensions 1.70 x 1.60m was found.\textsuperscript{179}

Five more poorly preserved, most probably Late Neolithic two-storey houses (40, 42, 43, 44 and 49) with stone foundations were also unearthed in this area. As the other Late Neolithic houses, they were oriented in northwest – southeast direction. Their length ranges from 4.50 to 13 meters. Also, stone foundations of thermal structures, millstones, stone mortars, ceramic fragments, and loom weights have been reported.\textsuperscript{180}

In the eastern and western part of the site stone enclosure have been revealed, which was constructed of broken and slab stones of different size, covering a length of 68m. They probably constitute parts of the two fence lines. Their preserved width ranges from 0.40 to 0.80m. Seven burned dwellings have been excavated, some of which partly continue outside the excavated area. Post, planks and a massive amount of clay were used for the construction of the walls. In some parts of the walls stone foundations have been revealed. The ovens had mostly stone foundations. Near heating facilities millstones, stone mortars, integral vessels and fragmented pottery were found.\textsuperscript{181}

Outside the house 16 partially preserved foundations of heating structure were excavated. Stone must have been used for its construction. One of the facilities (structure 119) had three phases of reconstruction, which were identified by three layers of the floor. In various areas of the Late Neolithic settlement large number of pits was investigated. They range in shape from circular to oval, with size most frequently from 0.90 to 1.20 m. \textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{179} Nikolov, et al, 2015b, 50.

\textsuperscript{180} Nikolov, et al, 2015b, 50.

\textsuperscript{181} Vandova et al, 2015, 52.

\textsuperscript{182} Vandova et al, 2015, 53.
Among the artifacts found during the excavations are anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, ‘cult tables’, fragments of anthropomorphic pottery, stone, flint and bone tools. The earlier pottery assemblages have characteristic for the Early Neolithic period white-painted and impressed decoration, while in later period dark paint on red surface and plastic ornamentation, dominates.

Promachon –Topolnica

The Neolithic site of Promachon –Topolnica, is situated to the west of the Struma River, 2 km from the village of Topolnica in southwest Bulgaria and 3,5 km from Promachon village in northern Greece. The settlement belongs to a flat extended type of sites and stretches across the Greek-Bulgarian borders. The site was discovered in 1978 by B. Bacharova and was further investigated in 1980-1992 by Todorova, Boyadzhiev and Vajsov. In 1992 a joint program of Greek and Bulgarian excavation teams undertook the responsibility for the archaeological investigation of the site. The excavation area stretches across both Greek and Bulgarian territories (Fig. 9).  

The settlement was inhabited during the Late Neolithic period. The upper cultural layer (Phase III) belongs to the late phase of the Late Neolithic, beginnings of the early Final Neolithic, dating to the beginning of the second half of the 5th millennium BC (4460-4250 BC). In this layer, only few pits and destroyed architectural remains were identified. The latter were disturbed by ploughing. Pottery fragments with incised and graphite painted decoration were discovered.

Phase II is dated in the first half of the 5th millennium BC (5070-4700 BC). Archaeological deposits of this phase were found in both sectors (Greek and Bulgarian), revealing dwellings in wattle and daub with indoor hearths. One of the important finds of this phase is a building of rectangular shape with dimensions 8x5m

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184 In Koukouli –Chrissanthaki et al, 2014 the phases of the settlement are recorded as Phase I, II and III. Phase II is subdivided into IIA and IIB. In Koukouli –Chrissanthaki et al, 2007, the phases of the settlement are recorded as Phase II, III and IV and there are no further information about phase I except the fact that there was no complete set of 14C dates. In this study the phases of the site are named according to Koukouli –Chrissanthaki et al, 2014.
found in Bulgarian sector. A large post–hole was found in the center of the building which probably corresponds to a wooden pillar which supported the roof. In the east part of the house an oven was uncovered, while in its west part a bench with three relief female protomes was found. They must have been attached on the adjacent wall from which they fell down. Around the house numerous clay figurines were found indicating a possible votive deposit, which the excavators took as an indication of the particular character of the building. In one small pit that belong to the same phase, evidence of a strong fire with remains of smelting cooper were identified, suggesting that early cooper metallurgy was practiced in the settlement during the first half of the 5th millennium BC.

Phase I belongs to the early Late Neolithic and is dated to the end of the 6th millennium BC (5320-5070 BC). Pits and semi-subterranean structures comprised the architectural remains of this phase. The floor level of subterranean structures was usually at 0,60-0,70m depth, while the floor surface covered an area of 8-10m². According to the excavators those structures were houses and workshops. On the eastern periphery of the Bulgarian sector, rows of upright wooden posts were found indicating a possible enclosure.

The most important structure of this phase was the building No4 of large dimensions measuring 12m in diameter and depth of 7m. It was consisted of an elliptical or circular subterranean room, with hearth near its eastern wall. Below the hearth, another floor level was discovered, with vessels in situ and remains of wooden floor with traces of whitish material. A large hole was excavated at this level, corresponding to a wooden pillar that must have supported a wooden platform or the roof of the subterranean structure. Below this layer, many earlier floor levels covered by thin layers of white material and sandy soil were identified, revealing the continuous use of the space. In lower levels a reach assemblage of finds including fragments of pottery, figurines, tools, jewelries, clay structures, animal bones, bull sculls with horns (bucrania), and grinding stones were uncovered. Similar deposits

were excavated outside the subterranean structure indicating a contemporary use of space.\textsuperscript{190}

Rich pottery assemblages include storage vessels and tableware among which cups, flat based bowls, askoi, amphorae, pots with zoomorphic form and miniature vessels were identified. Incised, rippled or painted decoration corresponds to the early phase of the Late Neolithic in Struma valley, but also finds parallels in the northern Aegean and East Macedonia.\textsuperscript{191} The latter includes pottery of Acropotamos style A and B, vessels with bitumen painted decoration, and the Strumco type pottery. All these show that the settlement was actively involved in regional interactions.\textsuperscript{192}

**Rakitovo**

The Neolithic site of Rakitovo (Pazardzhik district) is located on the northern foothills of the Western Rhodopes. The settlement belongs to the tell type of sites and has two Early Neolithic phases. Located on the periphery of the Karanovo I cultural area and next to other cultural groups the settlement had multiple influences visible in material culture. According to the excavators, the site shows common features and strong similarities with the Starčevo culture, which relates it to other settlements in the south-western part of Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{193}

In the settlement two habitation layers dating to the Early Neolithic (Karanovo I and II) were uncovered. Both layers were destroyed by fire. Generally, the buildings in the settlement of Rakitovo were constructed above the ground and were of trapezoidal shape, which is quite uncommon. The houses where built in wattle and daub technique, were organized in groups of three or four and were divided by narrow roads.\textsuperscript{194} The finds inside the buildings were also referred as quite unusual. Buildings with similar trapezoidal shapes were found at Simeonovgrad\textsuperscript{195}, and in settlements

\textsuperscript{190} Koukouli –Chrissanthaki et al, 2007, 52.  
\textsuperscript{191} Koukouli –Chrissanthaki et al, 2007, 57.  
\textsuperscript{192} Vajsov, 2007, 80.  
\textsuperscript{193} Kamarev, 2013, 7.  
\textsuperscript{194} Matsanova, 2003, 65.  
\textsuperscript{195} Radunčeva, 2002.
Lepenski Vir and Padina in Danube Gorges (Serbia). They are also dated to the Early Neolithic.196

The settlement of Rakitovo was a residential area according to the excavator in spite of unusual finds.197 Most of the houses were with typical Early Neolithic interiors. In the upper construction horizon, three buildings (No8, 9 and 10) constructed with stone, were found concentrated in one part of the settlement. They were identified as “temple buildings” by the excavator, apparently served for ritualistic purposes. Those structures were accompanied by home altars of various shapes (anthropomorphic, cubic, etc.), related to cults of procreation and hearth. The largest part of the floor of building no. 8 (Fig. 10) had a rectangular platform with a destroyed base built with river stones and clay. The dimensions of the structure measured 1,50mx1,70m. Another structure of similar construction was found in the south side of the building. In front of the entrance 12 bull head “amulets” were found. Two anthropomorphic and several white painted vessels were also discovered inside the building. In building no. 9, except from the typical house equipment, a rectangular altar and a house model were discovered.198 According to the excavator, one specific building (building no 10) was functioning as a “community” building and mentions that possibly had a cult role.199

In the lower habitation horizon numerous domesticated objects was discovered (i.e. granaries, ovens, facilities for drying grain, altars and others). According to the excavator, one of the buildings of this horizon was used for cult practices. It is suggested that the earliest inhabitants have burned and destroyed the initial settlement, while some time later, they returned and dug pits which they filled with the remains of the old burnt houses.200 Under the floor of a house, near the western wall a jar burial with an infant, was discovered (Fig. 11a), which belongs to the Karanovo I phase. The child was placed in a ceramic pot and accompanied with flint tool and lumps of red ochre. Other three burials were discovered between the houses.201

197 Radunčeva et al, 2002.
200 Kamarev, 2013, 7-8.
Pottery represents a local variant of the Thracian early Neolithic, with characteristic for the period white painted pottery (Fig. 11b; Fig. 12). Common features are observable within the complex of west Bulgarian painted pottery, which reveal strong similarities to the Starčevo culture. The site also provides a full of palaeobotanical and archaeozoological dataset.

Slatina – Sofia

The site of Slatina is situated close to the Iskur River and the city of Sofia in west-central Bulgaria. The location is known from the 1960's, but was not excavated until 1980s. The settlement was inhabited during the Early Neolithic. Four habitation layers are distinguished. The first three were mostly destroyed. However, the fourth layer, dated to the second quarter of the 6th millennium BC, revealed an exceptionally rich and well preserved Early Neolithic house, the so called “big house”, due to a strong fire that destroyed it. The house will be described in details bellow. The excavations brought to light rich ceramic assemblages and well preserved remains of domestic activities.

The "big house" of Slatina (Fig. 13) is a rectilinear, above ground building with a large elongate room and domestic features including hearths, ovens, grinding stones and storage vessels. The building was large (12.4 x 9.4 meters) and was rebuilt two times. The structure was post-framed, with walls in wattle and daub. The estimated height of the walls is 2.2 m. The roof was gabled and was supported by three larger posts placed in the center of the floor. The floor of the building was made of plank lined with layers of clay, which has been repeatedly set on fire to calcify and isolate the clay. It was restored up to fifty times according to the number of plaster

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202 Leshtakov, 2004, 88
206 Slatina belongs to the first stage of the dynamic evolvement of the Karanovo I culture. Dating 5810–5750 BC (Nikolov, 1989).
207 Nikolov, 1992a, 86-88.
208 Brami, 2014b, 178.
209 Series of repairs or repeated episodes of reoccupation are suggested by multiple layers of clay and a wooden-based floor. (Bailey, 2000, 53)
210 Nikolov, 1989, 1992a, 1992b
211 Nikolov, 2007b, 43
layers. In the building, extensive use of wood is recorded, as the 144 posts for walls construction, 6 wooden post and 3 massive pillars that supported the roof suggest. It has also been proposed that the ‘big house’ probably had an upper room or an attic.

The building was divided into two separated spaces: a larger one in the north part of the house and a smaller one in the south part. In the center of the southern wall of the small room the entrance of the building was located. To the west of the entrance a hearth and a small pit in front of it were found, the latter apparently serving for the concentration of the ash. In front of the doorway (3m to the north) four posts were situated, which may served as a protection for the weather conditions. Two rectangular platforms (2x4m), interpreted as beds, were situated in the southern corners of the smaller room. Stones and bone tools, a footed storage pot, and rectangular clay object interpreted as a house model were found inside the room.

The larger room contained most of the finds including household equipment, constructional elements, and supply and storage spaces. In the center of the northern wall, a square domed oven (2m on a side) was attached to the floor. Near the oven was a grinding-stone which might functioned as a doorway, separating the room's space, probably for storage use. In the north-east and the north-west corner of the large room, many storage pits and multiple clay structures were found. The amount of preserved botanical material is significant. Six of the pits contained more than 200kg of seeds, cereals and legumes (carbonized wheat, barley and beans). A significant number of bone and stone tools (over 3000 stone tools), were found also in the room. The house to the north ended with a long, narrow, perhaps unroofed space. An oven is found next to the doorway of the north chamber reflecting the practical placement of the hearth close to the main doorway.

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212 Nikolov, 1989, 43
213 Nikolov, 1989, 1, 16, 8-19
214 Nikolov, 2004a, 240-243, as cited in Brami, 2014b, 179
218 Nikolov, 1989, 42, Nikolov 2007b, 76
219 Probably to prevail the possibility of heat loss in the main living area. (Brami, 2014b, 179.)
According to Nikolov, inside the Slatina building were taking place various activities and many changes occurred during its lifetime. Next to the north-west central support pillar of the large room, an empty cylindrical pit with diameter 0.40m and depth 0.70m was discovered.\textsuperscript{220} The pit was plastered with clay, which was found in situ, after the fire destruction of the house. Nikolov indicates that the pit was constructed during the floor construction and might have had a kind of ritual function.\textsuperscript{221} However, in the central Balkans pits, along with bins and pithoi, were identified for grain storage. Pits used for storage were often lined with clay\textsuperscript{222} (Tripković 2011, 2013). Similar pits within the houses were found in Late Neolithic Makri settlement, located close to Alexandroupoli in Aegean Thrace\textsuperscript{223}.

Radiocarbon 14C dates of twelve wood and seed samples place the earlier phase of the house to 5810-5660 cal BC. Pottery assemblages from the site of Slatina confirm it’s time of habitation, were a great amount of white painted sherds, typical for the Early Neolithic of the region, dominate among decorated pottery.

\textsuperscript{220} Nikolov, 2006, VI.
\textsuperscript{221} Nikolov, 2001b, 133; Nikolov, 2006, VII.
\textsuperscript{222} Tripković 2011; 2013.
\textsuperscript{223} Efstratiou \textit{et al}, 1998.
South – Central Bulgaria

Azmak

Tell Azmak is situated near Stara Zagora (25km west of Karanovo). The settlement was established in the 5th millennium, and was inhabited until 3rd millennium BC. It is situated in the fertile plain surrounded from three sides by swamp land. The tell is 7.94 m. high and is small in size covering less than 0.5ha. It was entirely excavated during the 1960's by prof. G. Georgiev. The cultural layers reach 7.5m. The first 3m of the lower part of stratigraphy belongs to the Neolithic period. Six Neolithic habitation horizons were distinguished, the five belong to the Early and one to the Late Neolithic. The archaeologists relate stratigraphic layers 1–4 and partially layer 5 with Karanovo I according to the finds. The Neolithic deposits were covered by 0.40 m sterile soil.

Calculating from the source of the virgin soil, n layer 1, with total thickness of 0.63m, more than thirteen burned structures, houses remains and thermal constructions were uncovered within a single habitation layer. Several renewals of floors with plaster were observed. It has been suggested that remains of burnt structures of Layer 1 was used as kind of drainage system and the protection from the humidity and high water level for the next settlement phase. In Layer 2, 0.58m thick, two houses are found, constructed over the debris of Layer I. One of the houses, with wall preserved up to 0.45m appears to have been reconstructed at least ones. To Layer 3, 0.49m thick, belong at least four houses, which were not destroyed by fire. Carbonized grain was found on the floor of one of the houses. Some of the houses

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224 Excavated in its totality during the years 1960–1963 the results are only published in a preliminary form (Georgiev 1965; 1967a;1967b; 1972)
225 Georgiev, 1965, 6; 1967b, 92.
227 The Neolithic deposit is overlaid by a 0.40m thick sterile layer. Consequently the site was settled again during the Karanovo V–VI periods. Thissen, 2000.
228 The altitudes occurs from the data given with the 14C samples and may serve as rough indications per structure level only, where all measurements were taken from the underground aquifer, which is 0.50m below virgin soil. The conclusion at 3.20m for Layer 6 has been estimated by the combination of the 0.40m sterile layer above Layer 6 and the lowest Final Neolithic 14C sample concentrated at 3.60m. (Thissen, 2000). See Table 3.
229 Georgiev, 1965, 7; Brami, 2014b, 91.
230 Georgiev, 1967b, 94.
have walls preserved up to 0.7m.\textsuperscript{231} Layer 4, 0.27 m thick, and layer 5 are poorly documented. Architectural remains were fragmentary, but some indications of the fire are reported. Layer 6 did not provide any architectural data.\textsuperscript{232}

The individual houses were built without any specific planning. The entrances of the houses were open upon narrow streets. The earliest had rectangular and square form. The house floors were made of clay and plant material and supported pillars.\textsuperscript{233} Below the floor level and between the houses, young infants were buried (Fig.14). A clay pot, probably buried beneath the house floor of the early Neolithic layer, containing burnt bones of a child was discovered close to the oven.\textsuperscript{234} Burials in Tell Azmak were mainly of infants and children and were found in all of the Neolithic levels.\textsuperscript{235}

After 5500 BC the settlement was encircled by perimeter walls and ditches.\textsuperscript{236} The walls in the interior of the houses (from Azmak Neolithic II and Azmak Final Neolithic IV) were decorated with geometric and curvilinear patterns (similar to ones found in Karanovo settlement). The pottery from most of the Neolithic period is painted with white geometric elements on a red surface (Karanovo I period). Small number of the Later Neolithic pottery was decorated with relief presentations.


\textbf{Čavdar}

The site of Čavdar, also known as Pirdop-Zlatica, is situated in the western part of Central Bulgaria, some 60km east of Sofia, on the bank of Topolnica River. It is surrounded by the Sredna Gora on the south and the Stara Planina to the north.\textsuperscript{237} The settlement was established at the beginning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} millennium BC. It has form of tell, with approximate height of 3.5m covering a total area of 1200m\textsuperscript{2} (0.12ha).\textsuperscript{238} The thickness of the deposit varies from 2.10 to 3.50m.\textsuperscript{239} The excavations took place from...
1968 to 1972 and revealed seven habitation horizons (Čavdar VII, VI, V, IV, III, II and I). The first six habitation horizons (Čavdar VII–II) dating to the Early Neolithic are attributed to the Karanovo I period. After a certain period of abandonment the settlement was inhabited again (Čavdar I) during the Middle Neolithic, but has shifted to the northeast from the settlement of the previous phases. According to the excavator this habitation phase is contemporary to a Karanovo II–III transitional stage.²⁴⁰ Three of the levels were destroyed by fire (Čavdar VI, III and II). The lowest layers of the site revealed deposits with a mixture of yellow and black clay layers documenting the ancient route of the river. ²⁴¹

In the VI horizon (1.70–1.20m deep), remains of three buildings have been identified. The information for the first house is very limited. However, parts of a large storage vessel and a grinding stone were unearthed. The second building was a rectangular, post-framed house measuring 9,10 x 6m. Its walls were preserved up to 0,45m, with thickness reaching 0,25m. The third building had dimensions 6 35 x 4,13m with an entrance 1 m width, and west - east orientation. An oven attached to the west wall, was uncovered within the building. The oven base and floor bear evidence of renewals.²⁴²

In horizon V (1.20–1.05m deep) two buildings with a clear plan were excavated (Fig. 15). The first had rectangular shape, with dimensions 8 x 6 m and had west-east orientation. The southern part of the building was disturbed by a refuse pit. Near the middle of the north wall was a large domed oven, with dimensions 1,5 x 1,2 m. In front of the oven’s opening there was a horizontal surface with height of 0.15 m. The oven bears evidence of plaster renewals. Near the oven intact vessels, a grinding stone and a grinder were found. Just below this oven remains of another one with similar dimensions were discovered. Outside the building, a significant number of stone tools were found.²⁴³

²⁴¹ During the first half of the 6th millennium BC the course of the river was much closer to the settlement than it is today. (Dennell, 1978, 83, as cited in Bailey, 2000, 49)
²⁴² Georgiev, 1981.
²⁴³ Georgiev, 1981, 76.
The second building in horizon V was oriented northwest-southeast. Some details regarding its architecture were reported, but not the dimensions of the building. Preserved thickness of the walls was 0,15m, and the diameter of the posts was 0,8–0,12m. The entrance was on the east side. An oven was located in direct contact with the west wall, the floor of which consisted of three separate layers. Around the oven nine stone tools were found. Generally, the number of finds from this building was not abundant. Among them were an anthropomorphic vessel and a cattle horn. The excavators mention that space between the two houses was too small to contain another structure which allows us to conclude that the buildings were close to one another. 244

The horizon IV (1.05–0.75m deep) appears to be poor in architectural remains since there is no published data regarding dwellings. This is probably due to stratigraphy and the difficulties to discern the phases of reconstruction. However, two lines of post holes at the east of the house from the level V could belong to a structure of the present level (IV). Two houses of horizon V were constructed over the burnt structures of horizon IV, apparently on the same spot and with the same orientations. Also horizon IV structures seem to have a small scale changes in relation to level V above them. 245

The houses of the horizon III (0.75–0.45m deep) are probably the best preserved in comparison to their counterparts from other horizons. One, post-framed house, which was destroyed by fire (Fig. 16), with orientation north-south, have walls in wattle and daub, preserved to up to 0,45m. The thickness of the wall was 0,16–0,26m The house had rectangular plan, and dimensions 7,7 x 4,8 m. The entrance was on the south side. Near the north wall an U-shaped oven with dimensions 1,65 x 1,2 m was discovered. The coating of its bottom was renewed three times. In the middle of the house, east of the oven, three more pillars formed a wall, which divided the space into two rooms. Grindstones and great number of vessels were found in the building. At the east wall was constructed a bench with dimensions 2.5 x 0.5-0.8 m. 246

Horizon II (0.45-0.20m below) revealed at least two houses. The first post-framed house was oriented northeast-southwest and had an entrance in the northern wall. It had

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244 Georgiev, 1981, 77.
246 Georgiev, 1981, 71 -75.
almost square ground plan with dimensions 6.5x5m. Inside the building was discovered a U-shaped oven near the southern wall, opposite to the entrance. The second house was quite fragmentary preserved. It had an oven of which the floor has been renewed two times. To the west of the oven two grinders and charred hazelnut shells were identified, while around them, two vessels, and other stone tools were found. \textsuperscript{247}

Horizon I (0.20m–top) was heavily disturbed and does not reveal specific data. However, judging from the house from horizon II that was partially destroyed by post holes of the house from this horizon I, it could be concluded that at least some post-framed buildings existed in the last habitation horizon I. \textsuperscript{248}

The architecture of all settlement phases shows strong similarities from many aspects. The building from all horizons share very similar structural characteristics. It is important to note, however, that small increase in the size of the houses is evident. Also, the orientation of the buildings is not stable among the habitation horizons.\textsuperscript{249} Pottery is representative for the Thracian early Neolithic suggesting a certain connections with the settlements in southeastern Bulgaria. Characteristic pottery includes tulip-shaped vessels, cups, plates and other typical shapes for the region. Most of the pottery from horizon IV an III, was decorated with white painted ornaments on red or wine red background, with plastic and impressed decoration. Large storage domestic pottery was identified in all the early habitation horizons.\textsuperscript{250}

**Karanovo**

The site of Karanovo is a large tell, with height of 12.5m, covering a surface of 3.7ha, situated 6 km west of the city of Nova Zagora in the Tundža valley. The site has provided a significant cultural sequence dating from the Early Neolithic to the Bronze Age, which significantly improved the knowledge of the Neolithic period in this area. It is the only site in the northeast Thrace that yielded a complete Neolithic sequence.\textsuperscript{251} The excavations of the site started by Mikov and Georgiev in 1947 and

\textsuperscript{248} Georgiev, 1981, 70.  
\textsuperscript{249} Koromila, 2008, 45.  
\textsuperscript{250} Georgiev, 1981, 84-97.  
\textsuperscript{251} Hiller, Nikolov, 1988, as cited in Thissen, 2000.
lasted until 1957. Hiller and Nikolov continued the excavations of the site in 1984. Seven cultural levels were distinguished: levels I–IV belong the Neolithic period, V–VI to the Final Neolithic or Chalcolithic, and VII to the Early Bronze Age (Table 1, Table 4). 252

Six successive habitation horizons were identified in the Early Neolithic layers (Karanovo I and Karanovo II). 253 Some 18 houses that belong to this period were revealed, all of them built above the ground and without any indication of burning (Fig. 17). One of these was of a one-room megaron type. All the other houses had rectangular or square form, were post-framed, usually with single room (or one room with an annex), exceptionally two rooms with an annex. They were equipped with domed oven built next to one of the walls of the room. Some of the annexes were also furnished with thermal constructions. The ovens had high foundations constructed with gravel and clay. 254

According to the excavators, the early buildings of Karanovo I period, were renewed and rebuilt regularly. Three building horizons were distinguished (Bauhorizont 1, 2 and 3). 255 Bauhorizont 1 comprised of three rebuilding phases, In Bauhorizont 2 four rebuilding phases were identified, and two in Bauhorizont 3. In particular, the early buildings uncovered in Bauhorizont 1 had 7-8m in length and were constructed without common orientation. They were arranged in parallel rows, spacing apart at least 5m. 256 The buildings were post-framed, with thick walls made in wattle and daub. The roof must have been of perishable material such as straw placed on a wooden construction. Floors were overlaid by wooden boards. In the second building phase (Bauhorizont 2) external hearths and new buildings, mostly with similar orientations with the earlier ones, were constructed. The next phase (Bauhorizont 3) shows some changes in the size the houses and the number of rooms. Two buildings with three rooms and a third with a partially enclosed yard were

252 Nikolov, 2000a; 2007a, 191.
253 Karanovo II occurs by the reduction of white-painted pottery and the increase in channelled decoration. Lack of indications of a stratigraphical or cultural vacuum. (Hiller, Nikolov 1989, 5)
255 The Austrian-Bulgarian excavations at Karanovo suggest the following correlation of Karanovo cultural sequence, calendar years and new building phases: Karanovo I=6000–5750 BC (Bauhorizont 1, 2 and 3), Karanovo II=5730–5500 BC (Bauhorizont 4, 5, 6, 7), Karanovo II/III=no dates (Bauhorizont 8 and 9). (Nikolov, 1997).
256 Hiller, Nikolov, 1997, as cited in Bailey, 2000, 49
uncovered. One of the three-roomed houses had a hearth in each room and two clay platforms on both sides of the door in the central room. The open space between houses was reduced and a stone and post fence was built, perhaps to separate the eastern three-roomed houses from other parts of the village. The houses plan from the previous phase suggests continuity from one phase of the habitation to the next. This tendency continued also in Karanovo II (Bauhorizont 4, 5 and 6 (Fig. 18).²⁵⁷

In comparison to the Karanovo I, the settlement in the Karanovo II period was more densely inhabited. It has also expanded to the south and west. Five houses were partially aligned along a cobbled street. Their orientation and dimensions are remarkably similar to the Karanovo I houses.²⁵⁸ In Karanovo II, a building named “Westhaus” by the excavators, with dimensions 7.4x6.8m,²⁵⁹ shows rebuilding activity on the same spot, keeping throughout similar dimensions (7x6m). In addition, house floors,²⁶⁰ thermal constructions and oven bases in the house were restored several times.²⁶¹ Another house, known as 'Osthaus', with dimensions 7x6m, had at least one renewal stage. The house seemed to be slightly later than “Westhaus” but with similar characteristics in the arrangement. The building had a smaller annex on its south side.²⁶² Finally, indications for two more habitation phases in Karanovo II level are found above the "Westhaus" and identified by two successive oven bases.²⁶³

From the Late Neolithic Karanovo III layer architectural remains testify to some changes evidenced in burnt large two-storey building²⁶⁴ with gabled roof. It was of rectangular form, with dimensions 8.2x7m and north-south orientation. The house had one room on each storey, and a total height of 7m approximately. The ground floor was of wooden structure, plastered with clay. Two storage vessels were found in the room. Next to them two small grinding stones were uncovered indicating the presence of a quern.²⁶⁵ The floor of the second storey was constructed of trunks, plastered with clay.

²⁵⁹ Hiller, Nikolov, 1988, 31f.
²⁶⁰ The floor of preceding house was at 208.05m and the latest at 08.30m (Hiller, Georgiev, 1987, 13f, as cited in Thissen, 2000.)
²⁶¹ Hiller, Nikolov, 1988, 30.
²⁶⁴ The first prehistoric two-storey building excavated in Thrace. (Nikolov, 2007a, 194.)
and was supported by the walls with the assistance of a system of seven lines of narrowly fixed posts. The central line of the posts supported the gabled roof. A domed oven was revealed on the second floor, next to the northern wall. On its eastern side several ceramic vessels were found. A millstone with clay base and a built-in grinding stone were discovered next to the oven's west side. A burnt skeleton of a small dog was detected next to the eastern wall of the room.266

The transition from Karanovo III phase to IV is not clear stratigraphically, which caused the problems in ceramic sequence on which the chronology of the site, on the one hand, and the Neolithic in the region on the other. This issue becomes even more complex by the possibility of a chronological gap between Karanovo III and IV. In the excavated part of site, the appearance of a very hard layer between Karanovo III and a layer with different colour and characteristics from Karanovo IV, lead to the assumption of chronological hiatus.267

For the prehistoric Thrace Karanovo settlement and its periodization is used to define the chronological and cultural sequence in the region, which is primarily based on pottery typology. Karanovo I (Early Neolithic) is defined by red-slipped pottery, frequently with white-painted decoration and very rarely with dark-painted vessels. The shape of the vessels is merely rounded. In Karanovo II, red-slipped and painted pottery seems to give way to the grayish-black vessels, sometimes with channeled decoration. The shapes remain similar to the previous Karanovo I phase. In Karanovo II-III phase (Middle Neolithic) (Fig. 19) the decoration of the pots remains similar, but at least three new pottery shapes appeared, which will become characteristic for the next phases. Karanovo III (Late Neolithic) is characterised by slightly biconical shapes and dark-colored vessels, and was enriched by new vessel shapes. During Karanovo III-IV (Late Neolithic), the diversity of pottery increased, with the appearance of carinated vessels with channeled decoration. Karanovo IV is defined by vessels with rich incised decoration with incrustation and with a remarkable channeled decoration.268

266 Nikolov, 2007a, 194.
268 Nikolov, 2004b, 18.
Kardzhali

The settlement is situated on the left bank of the Arda River in the Eastern Rhodopes. The settlement was found by accident in 1962, during a construction program. Small scale excavations were carried out aiming to reveal the stratigraphy of the site. The settlement was excavated again in 1970. Initially it was thought that the settlement belongs to tell type of sites. Later on, however, its was recorded as a flat, extended settlement. The site was inhabited during the Early and the Late Neolithic period.

During the excavations of 1962, the earliest habitation horizon was discovered at a depth of 2.30 to 2.10m from the top soil. It was 0.20 m thick and was covered by 0.50 m thick clay deposit. According to the pottery the first horizon is dated to the Early Neolithic period. The second habitation horizon was discovered at a depth from 1.60 to 1.20m in which parts of two buildings were excavated. A flood event probably destroyed the earlier settlement. The second horizon belongs to the Late Neolithic.

The exact extend of the site remained unclear.

During the 1970s new excavations were carried out (Fig. 20). The study area covered a surface of 1050 m². Five habitation horizons were identified with the total thickness of the cultural layer 1.35 m. The upper part of the layer, (2.40 m below the top soil), was almost destroyed. The reason that the site was initially reported as a tell settlement, is suggested by this depth of the layers but till today this proposal has lack of evidence. However, the stratigraphy of the formerly trenches of the excavation, suggest that the sequence that have been proposed by the excavators, should completed in a horizon from the end of the Early Neolithic and by one or two horizons from Karanovo III. Additionally, is notable that small scale excavations allow no trustworthy renewal of the spatial organization of the site.

271 Peykov, 1978, as cited in Leshtakov, 2014b, 99-100
272 Peykov (1978) implies that it contained 10 to 12 more horizons.
After the implementation of a deliberate burning, the area was found covered by a layer of clay, while the narrow roads between the houses were paved with gravels and pebbles. The lack of clay under the narrow street implies that the early habitants built their houses due to a preliminary site plan. Small yards have been identified in front of some of the houses. Additionally, this layout was in harmony with the north. Usually the houses were densely spaced and separated by narrow streets only. Small yards have been recorded in front of some of the buildings. The walls were made in wattle and daub. Most of the houses had rectangular plan and two rooms. The entrances were situated east or south, according to the orientation of the short side of the house although the structures with two rooms prevailed, during the next habitation horizon a trend for the decrease of the average floor surface was identified (from 8x6 m in the fifth habitation level to 6x3m in the first level).

Five human skeletons were uncovered in a small part of the settlement. The deceased were buried between the houses or under a house floor. Three of the grave pits were encircled with stones. A high level of manufacturing is referred particularly for the bone artefacts and tools that connects the settlement with the Early Neolithic of the Central Balkans. The pottery shows certain similarity with the Karanovo I wares (e.g. white-on-red decoration), but also reveals some local characteristics.

Krumovgrad

The Early Neolithic settlement of Krumovgrad was situated on a terrace on the left bank of the Krumovitsa River, a tributary of the Arda River, in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. Today it is a part of the modern city of Krumovgrad. The site was discovered in 1974 during the construction activities in the center of the town. In the Neolithic period the settlement was surrounded by light, fertile soils and spring water. The Early Neolithic layer is cut by numerous pits from the Late Neolithic period, the Early Final Neolithic and the Bronze Age. The total absence of architectural remains from the later periods was taken as an indication that short lived

274 Băćvarov, 2002, 97; 2003, 25-26, 103-117
settlements of corresponding periods existed in the vicinity of the Early Neolithic one. From this it could be concluded that the settlement belongs to the flat-extended type of sites. The total thickness of the prehistoric deposits reaches 3.35m of which Early Neolithic layer was some 1.70m thick. Six horizons have been identified in the excavated part of the site, probably in accordance to the chronological phases of the settlements. The excavations did not provide enough evidence for the reconstruction of the settlement plan even for the better documented Early Neolithic phase.

Early Neolithic deposits dated by pottery to Karanovo I period yielded parts of dwellings with plastered floors and walls made in wattle and daub. Inside the dwellings, hearths and domed ovens (one of them 1.40m in diameter) were revealed. A large ditch 4m deep has been excavated in the Central Trench of the site, which provided the main data for the stratigraphic sequence of the site. Two additional trenches confirmed the stratigraphic sequence firmly supported by parts of houses floors with hearths and ovens.

The Early Neolithic settlement revealed specific characteristics in the production of tools and cultural material. In the absence of 14C dates the settlement is dated mainly by pottery typology. Among the characteristic early finds are bone and horn tools, ceramic “cult tables”, vessels with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic relief presentations, and anthropomorphic figurines. Pottery assemblage from the Early Neolithic settlement with white-on-red painted decoration dates it to the latest period of Karanovo I culture (Fig. 21). Some of the vessels are decorated with plastic or incised ornaments. It includes plates, bowls and necked jars with vertical string-hole lugs. The fine pottery is red slipped, brown or grey-black. Certain shapes was typical for the Karanovo II period, which is taken as an indication that the Early Neolithic layer of Krumovgrad could be contributed to the second half of the Early Neolithic period in Bulgaria.

279 Kamarev, 2013, 7.
Yabalkovo

The Early Neolithic settlement of Yabalkovo is situated on the lower slope of a hill (105 to 177masl), in the hilly region of volcanic origin in the Upper Thrace. Nowadays Maritsa River runs some 1.5 km from the settlement, but in the Neolithic times the river flowed considerably closer to the site providing the area with springs and fertile soils.  

Rescue excavations were carried out from 2000 till 2012 on the occasion of the construction of the Maritsa motorway. More than 2 ha were investigated. The site was occupied during the Early and Middle Neolithic (Karanovo I-II periods), in the early Final Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age, but also in the later period including Iron Age and Medieval times. The settlement was encircled by a ditch during the Neolithic period. Ditches from later periods, which interrupt the Neolithic layers, were also explored during the excavations.

Radiocarbon dates (human bones, seeds and charcoal) show that the settlement was established by the end of the 7th millennium, beginnings of the 6th (5998-5846 BC), placing Yabalkovo among the earliest in the southern Bulgaria. Located on the right bank of the Maritsa and close to the eastern border of the Maritsa valley the settlement had a good position for the easy access to contemporaneous settlements in the northwestern part of Turkey, which would facilitates the interaction with them.

The Early Neolithic layer excavated in the northeast sector of the site, approximately 1.50 m thick, has three habitational phases. The first building level revealed destroyed dwellings and hearths. Three storage bins of oval shape were found in situ. They were built on the construction of densely placed planks with walls if clay tempered with chaff. Around them a number of artefacts including several

283 Leshtakov, 2014a; 2014b.
284 Leshtakov, 2014a, 32.
285 Roodenberg, 2014b, 447.
286 Leshtakov, 2014b, 89.
287 Leshtakov, 2014a, 32.
ceramic discs were uncovered. In the central part of this sector domestic architecture was not found. Apart from small pieces of burnt daub distributed without specific order, the deposits in this area contained only scattered small finds and stones. The area was disturbed by the Late Iron Age and the medieval structures. According to pottery unearthed among the later structures the Neolithic deposit in this area is dated to the Early Neolithic.

Hearths and ovens were often found in the open area. Ovens were built with compact material. Stones formed the substratum of the oven’s base, which were subsequently covered with the layer of clay. The floor of the oven was plastered with the layer of fine clay. In addition to these, a layer of river pebbles or horizontally placed pottery fragments was added in some cases to improve the thermal insulation.

The remains of an Early Neolithic dwelling were identified in the western part of the excavated area (Fig. 22). The building, constructed of clay in pisé technique, was destroyed by fire. Its floor was coated with clay mixed with a whitish material. The northern wall of the building was destroyed by Late Iron Age and medieval pits. In the central part of the house there was a rectangular ground clay structure, probably a granary.

Another Early Neolithic house in the northeast sector was uncovered. Its northern part was disturbed in by mediaeval activities (Fig. 23). As the above mentioned building, the house was built with pisé technique and wooden pillars, and had floor made of clay, plastered with whitish material. In the southern part of the dwelling two Early Neolithic pits were found disturbed by another two pits from later periods. One of the pits contained burned architectural remains, grinding stone and two other large stones, while burned organic material and animal bones were found on its bottom. Fragments of pottery along with other finds including two clay models of bucrania and an anthropomorphic clay figurine were found in the house.

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288 Leshtakov, 2014c, 136-137.
289 The layer surrounding the structures usually produced mixed materials including wheel-made pottery sherds. (Leshtakov, 2014c, 137-138).
290 Leshtakov, 2014c, 138-139.
291 Leshtakov, 2014c, 141- 142.
In the southwest sector of the excavated part of the settlement remains of another two Early Neolithic dwellings were almost completely uncovered. The buildings were detected at a depth of 0.50-0.60m from the topsoil and were heavily disturbed by recent farming activities. One of them covered a surface of 80m², had rectangular plan, and was oriented northeast-southwest. The walls were built in pisé technique, while the northeastern wall had a stone foundation. On the floor, made of compacted clay, broken large storage bins, grinding stones and a ceramic baking pan were discovered. The pottery assemblage from the house bears indications of secondary burning. Stone bases which may present the foundations of thermal constructions were found in the building's deposits.\textsuperscript{292}

From the second and the third building level of the Early Neolithic layer numerous dwellings, hearths, ovens, and subterranean structures were excavated. In the western part of the excavation area, two dwellings built in a pisé technique combined with a timber construction of pillars and a stone foundation of the walls was identified. The two buildings were separated by a narrow road of 1.00-1.20m wide. The houses were equipped with thermal structures, and storage clay bins built in situ. The finds from both contexts include the wealth of animal bones and broken pottery, with a vessel probably representing a bull standing out from the rest.\textsuperscript{293}

Most of the early structures in Yabalkovo show similarities in the organization of space, building techniques, architectural characteristics and other material elements. The Neolithic pottery (Fig. 24) and other artefacts confirm that the settlement was inhabited during the Early Neolithic period and has influences and parallels from Karanovo I and II culture.

\textsuperscript{292} Leshtakov, 2014c, 144 -145.
\textsuperscript{293} Leshtakov, 2014c, 148 -151.
South – East Bulgaria

Gerena

The site of Gerena is a flat, extended settlement, situated at the tributary of the Kalnitsa River and a small local stream, in the Drama microregion of the southeast Bulgaria. It is located in the flood plain surrounded by low hills to the north-east and the south-west. The geomorphology of the area allowed an easy access to the contemporary sites across the plain, which would have facilitated interaction on inter-site level. The information on the site has only partially been published by the excavators. The settlement covers a total of 300m² (0.03ha), with deposits of some 0.80m thick According to pottery typology the settlement was inhabited during the Late Neolithic, corresponding to two phases of Karanovo (III and IV). Vertical stratigraphy in Gerena was divided into three habitation periods (C, B and A). There is strong evidence of hiatus between them, as will be discussed bellow.

The earliest habitation of the site (Gerena A) is represented by three pits containing Early Neolithic material, and the traces of a house structures. The site was probably abandoned, and for some time used for cultivation rather than building activities. The characteristics the soil between the second and the third layer suggest the hiatus in the habitation of the space.

In the second habitation period Gerena B (Fig. 25) traces of at least seven rectangular houses has been excavated. This habitation period was separated in two phases: B1 and B2. The houses were destroyed by fire. The excavators posed a question on accidental or deliberate burning of these houses, a practice that has been recorded during the Neolithic in the Balkans and quite debated. They conclude that it is difficult to give a definite answer in this particular case. The settlement of this

294 Nikolov suggest that phases A and B are attributed to the Karanovo III-IV period, and phase C, to the Karanovo IV period (Nikolov, 2004,19,20)
296 Gaydarska suggest, that the material from those pits corresponds to the Early Neolithic. (Gaydarska, 2007, 155). According to Nikolov the site of Gerena, phases A and B correspond to the Late Neolithic culture - Karanovo III-IV(Nikolov, 2004,19,20)
period must have been densely inhabited, judging from the distance between the excavated houses that measure 1.5m approximately. Their dimensions were 5x10m. All the houses were built in wattle and daub as evidenced by postholes and baked daub with wattle imprints. All the houses had floors of beaten clay. In the interior of the houses ovens were situated either close to the walls or in the middle of the house.300

The last Neolithic horizon (Gerena C) was destroyed by modern agricultural activity. Traces of only two houses were excavated, but were quite well preserved due to the fire which destroyed them. The dwellings had rectangular form and floors of beaten clay. The remains of one of the two houses (House 444), has walls 7.5m in length, and provides data for the calculation of its height which must reach 2.4m approximately.301 The house walls, approximately 0.10m thick, had roughly smoothed clay surfaces with imprints of wicker and wood.302

The inhabitants of the Neolithic settlement of Gerena may have practiced a mixed subsistence economy based on hunting, gathering and farming.303 Numerous flakes were found in horizon II, which probably witness a lithic production inside the settlement by a local workshop. Besides flint artifacts, other findings such as bone tools, polished stone tools, a great amount of pottery, numerous objects to which the excavators ascribed ritual character, such as altars (whole and fragmented), figurines (Fig. 26) and ritual vessels.304 The Neolithic pits are attributed to Karanovo III period.305 Substantial differences between the habitation phases are identified. The ceramics of Gerena C can be paralleled with Karanovo IVa, Gerena B corresponds to Karanovo IIIb, while the Gerena A level to Karanovo IIIa. Gerena A deposits didn’t yield great quantity of pottery and were dated also by individual finds.306 From Gerena A, in particular, flasks with ring-shaped or cross-shaped base, and open type vessels were discovered. From Gerena B, pottery sherds are represented by grey,
brown and black polished bowls, cups and closed-shaped vessels typical for Late Neolithic. In Gerena C the repertoire of vessel shapes continues unchanged, but the profile of their form was less often circular and by far sharper. Fine pottery is decorated by “rosettes”, waves, triangles, bands and ridges.  

**Kapitan Andreevo**

The settlement of Kapitan Andreevo is situated on the very border between Bulgaria and Turkey, on the lowest alluvial terrace of Maritsa River, 2 km east of Kapitan Andreevo, in Svilengrad region. Rescue excavations were carried out, during 2012-2013, by a large team of the National Archaeological Institute and Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.  

The excavations brought to light evidence of the long period of the use of space. In particular, in the Late Neolithic transitional period to Early Chalcolithic, in the Middle Bronze Age, Early and Late Iron Age, Roman times (indicated by the section of the ancient Roman road Via Diagonalis), and in the early Middle Ages (10th c. AD). The cultural layer was up to 60 cm thick and the total excavation area was more than 3ha. A Late Neolithic sanctuary dated to 5200 BC (the site can be set into Karanovo IV culture),

According to the excavator the site at Kapitan Andreevo dated to the Late Neolithic was not settlement but ritual site with a kind of sanctuary. The excavated area dated to this period measured 600m in diameter. The site comprised of pits, subterranean buildings, and an above-ground structure, and was encircled by two parallel ditches 10-12m apart. According to radiocarbon dates the site was in use between 5200 and 4850 BC, which correspond to the last stage of the Late Neolithic, in terms of Bulgarian periodization.

A building (50m²) with possible ritual functions was situated in the center of the area. Burned remains of clay structure, which according to the excavator indicate ritual activities, and three grindstones were revealed outside the northern wall. It is

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307 Lichardus et al., 2002, 333.
308 Nikolov, Petrova et al., 2013; Nikolov, Petrova et al., 2014, as cited in Nikolov, 2015.
309 Leshtakov, 1999, 142.
310 Nikolov, 2015, 21.
311 Nikolov, 2015, 22.
suggested that the grindstones were used for the “ritual grinding of grain for bread and cooked food”. As suggested, ritual activities were carried out near the “sanctuary” building, the remains of which were deposited in circular pits, filled in within several phases. Numerous pits, 260 in total, belong to this phase. Some of them were filled with burnt architectural remains along with intact or fragmented anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels and other findings.

Most of the pits contained pottery, parts of anthropomorphic figurines, fragments of millstones, *Spondylus* pendants, and tools made of polished stone, bone and flint. According to Nikolov, the anthropomorphic vessels are of very unusual type. They reach up to 0.7m in height, have a biconical body, a stylized anthropomorphic head and incised decoration all over the body and the head. The lower part of the body has rough surface, while the upper part was polished. Nikolov particularly mentions two finds: a zoomorphic vessel with a female anthropomorphic figurine on top of it and the upper half of a female anthropomorphic vessel (Fig. 27), underlying that parallels to both of them is yet to be found in both Thrace and the neighboring regions.

A large number of bones of domesticate and wild animal, together with other archaeological material, was uncovered in most of the pits. Archaeobotanical samples of domesticated and wild plants were also identified (einkorn, hulled barley, bitter vetch, chickpea, emmer, grass pea, lentils, cherry, plums, raspberry/blackberry and grape).

Besides the two parallel ditches that surround the area, a third ditch was recorded to the west of the ritual building, which reaches the first (internal) ditch with its southern end. Remains of human bones, some of them being primary inhumations, were found in both the third ditch and in the outer one of the two parallel ditches.

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312 Nikolov, 2015, 21.
313 Nikolov, 2015, 21-22.
314 Nikolov, 2015, 21.
315 Nikolov, 2015, 22.
316 Nikolov, 2015, 22-25.
317 Nikolov, 2015, 21-22.
318 Nikolov, 2015, 21.
Mednikarovo

The site of Mednikarovo is situated on a small hilltop (5m high), on a high terrace of the river Karapelitska, in Stara Zagora district (Fig. 28). The site was initially discovered during the field survey of the Maritsa Iztok Expedition in 1987, and was registered as a tell. The eastern and the western part of the site were destroyed by modern constructions activities. Six years after its discovering, a Bulgarian-American team carried out the excavations of the site, which revealed that the settlement is not tell, but belongs to the flat, extended type of sites.319

The excavated area covered a surface of 130m². Five successive horizons were identified on the base of the changes in the deposits color and texture. Horizon 1 and 5 haven’t revealed any evidence of human activities. In horizon 2 five pits were found. Four separated layers were distinguished in horizon 4 and two in horizon 3. The stratigraphy of the site is yet to be published. According to pottery finds the Neolithic habitational phases are dated to the Late Neolithic (Karanovo III-IV) according to Nikolov.320 There are also pottery assemblages from the Final Neolithic and the Bronze Age.

The site was investigated by five excavated trenches with dimensions 12x2m. An additional trench, with dimensions 3.60x2.90m, was excavated in the south - west part of the tell. Only in trenches 2 and 3 in situ remains were found. Trench 3 revealed remains of the earliest house with Early Neolithic material. The next habitation phase, distinguished by distinct light-brown soil, contained traces of a house floor of beaten clay, with length 1.25m and 0,5-0,7m thick, and a posthole. The building is not related to any specific chronology although some pottery fragments were reported from this deposit. The following habitation horizon was dated to the Late Neolithic (Karanovo III - IV). To this belong a burnt house floor of beaten clay, with dimensions 2.27x 0,15m and 0,5m thick. The floor was disturbed by a pit from a later period. From the same period, another house poorly preserved and pits were uncovered in Trench 2. A

319 Nikolov, 1998; Lichardus et al, 2001 as cited in Gaydarska, 2007, 94. 320 Generally there is a confusion on the subject of dating. Gaydarska (Gaydarska, 2007, 94) places Karanovo III in the final stage of the Early Neolithic, and states that the final stage of the Middle Neolithic fits into Karanovo III-IV, while Nikolov suggests that the second stage of the early Late Neolithic is Karanovo III –IV cultural phase. (Nikolov, 2004b, 20) Correspondingly, this differentiation in dating, is detected also in other researchers.
house floor of beaten clay, 0.5-0.7m thick and dimensions 3.5x2m, and a base of a rectangular oven was excavated. The structures were covered with a layer of burnt architectural remains.\footnote{Gaydarska, 2007, 94-95.} 

Another Late Neolithic burnt house was excavated in Trench 3. The house floor had traces of fire but was not covered by burnt walls, which is taken as an evidence of a typical example of deliberate burning. Another house floor was found in trench 3, which didn’t bear any trace of burning, but was covered by burnt house rubble. This finds were interpreted as evidence of particular burning technique in which only the walls were burnt. However, concentration of burning remains could also indicate surface levelling. An excavated pit in Trench 3, also contained remains of burnt architectural remains.\footnote{Gaydarska, 2007, 97-98.} 

The excavators interpret abundant evidence burning of houses in Mednikarovo settlement as evidence of for deliberate burning of houses. According to them, fire has played a significant role in the settlement and points to deliberate social practice. However, accidental fires should not be excluded. 

The last Neolithic occupation was followed by some changes in the area of the settlement, which are not well documented due to intensive cultivation that has heavily destroyed it. It appears, however, that the last occupation of the settlement was characterised by temporary activities related to structured deposition, such as burials and pit-digging Findings from this phase is comprised of grinding stones, bone tools, pottery (Fig. 29), fine and coarse ware, clay objects dated from the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, but most of them were not particularly characteristic. In addition, fragments of wheel-made pottery dated probably Late Medieval period were also present.\footnote{Gaydarska, 2007, 95.}
Tell Merdzumekja is located on low hill in the flood plain of Kalnitsa River, in Drama microregion. The site was of main research interest during the excavation project in Drama region. The tell settlement of Merdzumekja was almost entirely excavated. The excavated area covered a surface of 14,000 m² (1.4ha). Remains of habitation from the Neolithic up to the Early Iron Age were uncovered. At least 61 houses were identified on the site, along with pits and a post fence. The settlement was enclosed by ditch during the phases attributed to the Karanovo V and VI period.

The earliest level of habitation dates to Karanovo IV period. The evidence from that phase are widespread and include remains of a dwelling with an oven, a fence with posts, a ditch with dimensions 20x0.40-0.55m and 0.7m deep, and numerous pits. The pottery found in the ditch is similar to Karanovo IV pottery. Closer observations in the ceramic assemblages of microregion of Drama, outline that the Karanovo IV period was divided into at least three stages. White painted pottery and large ceramic fragments of bowls, dishes and cups, with characteristic channeled or incised decoration, were discovered.

The next habitation phase is dated to Karanovo V period (end of the Late Neolithic - early Final Neolithic). Several habitation layers were identified. The houses were one roomed, of a rectangular or trapezoidal shape, with size ranging between 27m² and 94m², and with similar orientation. Interestingly, the houses had foundations in the form of shallow pit dug bellow the floor, which was filled with soil in order to serve as insulation and in the same time served for leveling the floor. The floor was made of wood, overlaid by a clay layer and paved reeds. The walls were made in

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324 According to Gaydarska, the relative chronology is based on the excavation team and does not agree to the commonly accepted chronology in Bulgarian prehistory (e.g. Karanovo V is termed “Early Final Neolithic” according to Bulgarian chronology, while in the German version it belongs to the Late Neolithic). The mentioned phases, follow the chronology of the excavation team. (Gaydarska, 2007, 157.)


326 Lichardus et al, 2002, 335.

327 See reference 324.
wattle and daub. In the interior of the houses ovens, grinding stones, post holes, pits and few pottery fragments were found, while outside the houses were storage and refuse pits. Two pits (No. 67 and 26/33) have specific content that lead the excavator to characterized them as sacrificial. Numerus small ditches of unknown function were found within the settlement. Among the finds from Karanovo V habitation phase (Fig. 30), are fragments of pithoi, various household vessels, spoons, bone tools, figurines, net weights, miniature vessels, pendants, beads, clay plaques, spondylus bracelets etc.

The next habitation level attributed to the Karanovo VI period (Final Neolithic according to the excavators) revealed 25 one-storey houses (except house N244 which was two-storey), with similar construction characteristics as the houses from previous habitation level (with Karanovo V). The only difference being a rectangular shallow pit interpreted as “cellar”. Some of them had a shelter. Most of the houses had a north-west/south- east orientation. Domed ovens and related clay shelves, storage pits and pits of other functions were found in the interior of the houses. The site in this phase was surrounded by a ditch up to 8m width, which had double palisade on the northwest side. Traces of house reconstruction, overlapping features, and dwellings whose plans were not possible to reconstruct, indicate more than one habitation phases. Inside the houses and close to the ovens large pithoi, strainers and spoons, grinding stones, scrapers and pestles were usually found. The two-storey House 244 had one ovens on each floors and contained over 200 vessels. Fine decorated pottery was situated on the second floor of the house, while cooking and storage vessels along with stone tools were found on the ground floor.

Deliberate deposition of cultural material in pits and ditches is referred in all occupational levels, from the very first one to the last occupational sequence.

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328 Lichardus et al, 2001, Figs. 32- 34, as cited in Gaydarska, 2007; Gaydarska, 2007,158.
331 Lichardus et al, 2001, Fig.19, 20, 21, as cited in Gaydarska, 2007, 159.
332 Lichardus et al, 2001, Table 5, as cited in from Gaydarska, 2007, 159.
333 Gaydarska, 2007, 163.
Simeonovgrad - Chavdarova cheshma

The area of Simeonovgrad in Haskovo district has been the subject of systematic research which shows a high density of prehistoric sites. Natural zones form separate micro-regions along the Maritsa valley. The north foothills of the Rhodopes which meet the northwest side of the Sakar Mountain play significant role in creating a closed valley. The Maritsa River with its left tributary the Sazlijka River is another natural element of crucial importance in the formation of particular environmental conditions. Such a natural setting has created a closed valley, surrounded by hills, with numerous springs and fertile soils.\(^{334}\)

The Neolithic site of Chavdarova cheshma is situated near the city of Simeonovgrad, at Zlati dol quarter, on the right bank of Maritsa River.\(^ {335}\) The site gets its name from the large spring nearby. Part of the prehistoric site is partially destroyed by modern activities. It is estimated that the total prehistoric site covered an area of 180 x 150 m (2,7ha). The excavations started in 1968\(^ {336}\) and continued from 1978 till 1982 by A. Radunčeva.\(^ {337}\) Natural depressions separates the terrace were the settlement was founded into three parts forming equal number of elevations. During the initial excavations these were named mogili\(^ {338}\) and numbered as I, II and III. Mogila I revealed mainly early Final Neolithic materials and 17 pits from the same period. The two trenches which were explored in Mogila I, had dimensions 5x15 and 25x3 mm. Mogila II was investigated by three trenches revealing a 1.40 m thick layer with building remains and material which dates it to the Early Neolithic. Finds that belong to the Late Neolithic (Karanovo III phase) were also identified at both Mogila I and Mogila II, but were not connected with a clear cultural layer. Mogila III was inhabited during the Early Bronze Age.\(^ {339}\)

New excavations focused on the Mogila II part of the settlement. The Early Neolithic phase contained three successive habitation layers. The excavator Radunčeva referred architectural remains with buildings associated with practices not

\(^{334}\) Radunčeva, 2002; Leshtakov, 2014b, 93.
\(^{335}\) Aladzhov, 1997, 226-227.
\(^{336}\) Aladzhov, 1985, 7
\(^{337}\) Radunčeva, 1996; Radunčeva, 2002.
\(^{338}\) The “tell” in Bulgarian terminology is cited as Mogila..
related to everyday activities. The buildings appear to have trapezoidal ground plan.\textsuperscript{340} According to the altars of different shape (geometrical, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic) their function were considered as "sanctuaries" (Fig. 31).\textsuperscript{341} However, their particular function remains unclear. All the buildings had one room, with the same ground plan, walls built in wattle and daub, with floor constructed with trunks horizontally placed and plastered with clay, sometimes also with white mud forming quite thick layer. Thermal constructions like hearths and ovens were not found in the interior of the buildings. \textsuperscript{342}

The building No. 1 of horizon I, was trapezoidal but had an unusual shape according to the excavator Radunčeva. This building’s form had no parallels among the Early Neolithic buildings in Bulgaria known so far.\textsuperscript{343} The entire floor is covered with a 0,10 m thick mortar, while the walls of the building were built with adobes. Some facilities, without any specification, were referred in the middle of the walls within the building, which are not found in common house suggesting particular function of the building 1.\textsuperscript{344}

The houses in horizon II were also constructed in wattle and daub and had floors of well-beaten clay. Building No 11 from this horizon has foundations built by well-beaten clay, and the walls with adobes. It was surrounded by a ditch. Its entrance was covered with white clay. The southern part of the building was covered with a relief decoration, depicting a "winged horse holding a human head in front of two shrines" (Fig. 32).\textsuperscript{345} The exception regarding the shape of the buildings in Chavdarova cheshma is a building No 7 which had a circular ground plan, which finds no parallels of its kind, in the Early Neolithic of Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{346} According to the excavator, the general construction of the buildings was unusual.\textsuperscript{347} The building No5 in horizon II has a floor with relief decoration, depicting a snake wrapped in a milestone-altar, and the building No5 has a stylized horse head in the middle of the interior floor surface.

\textsuperscript{340} Radunčeva, 2004, 325.
\textsuperscript{341} Radunčeva, 1996, 122.
\textsuperscript{342} The buildings in the site of Chavdarova cheshma, are named as temples according to the excavator.
\textsuperscript{343} Radunčeva, 2004, 325.
\textsuperscript{344} Radunčeva, 2002, 226.
\textsuperscript{346} Radunčeva, 2002, 225.
\textsuperscript{347} Radunčeva, 2002, 225-226.
In none of the three horizons were streets detected. However, open spaces in the form of narrow passages between the buildings, often disturbed by pits, were identified. Series of destroyed remains of exterior hearths were found in these open spaces. Outside the buildings, remains of strait line or circular wall, with pebble benches, were discovered.348

Above the Early Neolithic layers deposits dated Karanovo III period with numerous pits are excavated. Three of the pits contained seven vessels and milestones.349 Pottery assemblage is attributed to the Karanovo III culture, while and some Final Neolithic fragments ascribed to the Maritsa Culture (first half of the 5th millennium BC) were also uncovered. Among the findings were an anthropomorphic female figurine, fragments of terracotta cult tables, flints, stone tools, loom weights, and other artefacts. 350 Pottery characteristic for Karanovo II period were not found in the excavated part of the settlement.351

Most of the pottery sherds were miniature vessels (or of small size). Half of the pottery assemblage belongs to fine wares. Tulip-shaped vessels, cups with flat bases and conical flasks are some of the shapes identified. Decorated pottery is represented by white on red decoration with spiral motifs, volute, rectangular, stripes, or has channeled decoration impressed (punctuation) and others (Fig. 33). Fragments of spherical shaped vessels with painted decoration were also identified. According to the excavator, people from distant locations must have visited the site as particular types of pottery. Among them are mentioned wide conical flasks with white painted decoration found on both interior and the exterior walls of the vessels, with garlands, side ladder lines and other motifs, which constitute decorative elements characteristic for distinct regions.352

In 2005 small scale excavations were carried out in the site, on the occasion of the construction of Plovdiv-Svilengrad railway. Excavations brought to light remains of a 1m thick layer dating to the Karanovo III phase, disturbed by Early Iron Age and

349 Radunčeva, 2002, 228.
Mediaeval pits. Two habitation layers were identified. In the eastern area of the new excavations pottery fragments dated to the Early Neolithic were identified in almost all the trenches. The cultural layer measuring 1 to 1.10 m in thickness was disturbed to a deep of 0.50m, by pits of later period and the modern ploughing. Remains of three buildings heavily destroyed by pits of the later periods were identified. They must have been post-framed judging from the southern part of the wall. One of the structures was revealed up to 0.15m height and 0.20m width. Two pits from the same period, with several phases of filling, and walls plastered with clay were also excavated.\textsuperscript{353}

Another Middle and Late Neolithic settlement is identified along the left bank of the Maritsa, in the northern part of Simeonovgrad. No excavations have been carried out there, just surface surveys from which sporadic findings were gathered. In the same locality a Final Neolithic settlement was recorded.\textsuperscript{354}

\textsuperscript{353} Boyadzhiev \textit{et al}, 2008, as cited in Leshtakov, 2014b, 95.
\textsuperscript{354} Aladzhov, 1997, 228.
CHAPTER III

Summary and discussion

Discussing the data for the Neolithic period in southern Bulgaria and analyzing the evidence for the settlements organization a summary will be attempt with focus on the spatial patterns of the sites. The discussion of the variability of the settlements on the geographical and chronological level will be based on the presented data in the previous chapter. It should be stressed, however, that the chronology of the sites heavily relies on pottery typology, which define also “cultural groups”, a practice with deep roots in the archaeology of Bulgarian (and the Balkan) archaeology. Pottery is therefore the main form of material culture presents in some details in the publications of the settlements. However, some radiocarbon dates are available in more recent publications.

The first evidence of early farming in Bulgaria were found on the foothills around the Thracian plain and in south-western Bulgaria. It is possible that the early farmers came in southern Bulgaria from different geographic areas including both Anatolia and Thessaly. The Struma valley must have had an important role for the spread of farming from the south as the material culture, and pottery in particular, suggest. In this study south-west Bulgaria is represented by the settlements of Bālgarčevo, Gālābnik, Ilindentsi, Kapitan Dimitrievo, Kovačevo, Mursalevo, Promachon-Topolica, Rakitovo and Slatina - Sofia. These settlements provide enough evidence for the issues discussed here.

Neolithic communities in this region were more closely connected with the settlements in northern Greece, though they must have been also in some relations with the Turkish Thrace and Anatolia. An interaction between the settlements in the Struma valley and the valley of Vardar River (Axios) is also evident in pottery with characteristics of the Starčevo culture. There are significant differences in the landscape of south-west Bulgaria, which forms smaller areas with particular

355 Perles, 2001; Nikolov, 2004b
microclimate that must, to certain extent, affected the organization of early farming communities evident in the density and the life span of the Neolithic settlements. A natural border is formed in Kresna groyne, in the middle Struma valley. In this region, Neolithic cultural communities developed differently, despite the proximity of their location.\textsuperscript{356}

The region of south-west Bulgaria, during the Early Neolithic period is also related with the Early Neolithic Thrace (Karanovo I), as far as the pottery ornamentation and the typology is concerned. Parallel decorative motifs are observed, and white painted pottery marks the early chronology of the sites (e.g. Kovačevo, Rakitovo and others).\textsuperscript{357} However, in the late Early Neolithic phase typological differences and local variations of Starčevo type culture, with dark painted ware characteristic for the regions to the west (e.g. FYROM) appeared in south-west Bulgaria. Middle Neolithic is not well defined in this area due to the lack of distinguished characteristics in pottery, which results in difficulties to identify chronologically this horizons in the settlements. In some of the settlements pottery typology is more enlightening, but it cannot be utilized as mean for the chronology of the phase on supra-regional level. Furthermore, it appears that the changes widely observed in the early Late Neolithic phase had not equal intensity in all parts of the south-west Bulgaria. Many sites show strong evidence of continuity, but they provide only general information because the Late Neolithic layers are often disturbed. On the other hand newly established sites are often short lived and therefore do not provide a long sequences with associated material culture.\textsuperscript{358}

The houses in Early Neolithic period were usually one-roomed, built above the ground with simple internal layout. Pit-huts, however are not unknown. Separated spaces in the interior of the houses have also been identified (i.e. Slatina and Bălgarčevo), though they are rare in this period. Rebuilding and reconstruction of the houses on the same spot were also observed in many of the sites (e.g. Bălgarčevo, Kovačevo, Slatina, Gălăbnik etc.). It has been suggested that the persistence in rebuilding the houses in the same location may reveal the effort and the interest of the

\textsuperscript{356} Perničeva, 1995, 99.  
\textsuperscript{357} Perničeva, 1995, 106.  
\textsuperscript{358} Perničeva, 1995, 108.
individuals to maintain the existence of the house and its components in the same place. The idea of stability may reflect promotion and the reinforcing of the identities and relations between groups and individuals within the community, through the idea of generational continuity and memory.\textsuperscript{359}

Two-storey buildings also appeared in the settlements of south-west Bulgaria during the Early Neolithic (e.g. Kapitan Dimitrievo, Mursalevo etc.). Within each settlement two-storey houses usually have similar orientation and were built with similar materials as the one-floor buildings in the settlements. However, they certainly required greater skills for their construction and are more elaborate. An example of this type of buildings exceptionally well preserved is the ‘big house’ of Slatina which also might have had a substantial attic\textsuperscript{360}

The division of the interior space into two rooms by post-frame partition indicates that different activities perhaps were taking place in specific places in the houses. Judging from the finds these include storage, textile production, sleeping and cooking spaces within the house, which are separated from the exterior house activities. This finds have been interpreted as a need for more private space and the separation at least of some activities from the community eye. This is corroborated with storage, thermal and other structures and objects of the household which were found in the internal space of the early houses. Quite soon after the establishment of the early settlements the house becomes the main framework of everyday activities. The common identity of the household member is isolated from the members of other community groups.\textsuperscript{361}

Remains of less mundane practices often ascribed by the excavators to religious activities, are found in the settlements, within and outside the houses. Although someone could sometimes hesitate about such interpretations it is obvious from various forms of material culture (house and furniture models, figurines etc.) that a kind of rituality was of particular important for the early farmers. Pits have also been

\textsuperscript{359} Kotsakis, 1999, 67.  
\textsuperscript{360} Nikolov, 2004a, 240-243.  
\textsuperscript{361} Bailey, 2000, 266.
related to ritual practices in several settlements including Kapitan Dimitrievo and Slatina, though not always well supported by the finds.\textsuperscript{362}

Material culture indicate intra-regional contacts. For example, in the site of Ilindentsi pottery assemblage and architectural features from its early period were taken as an indication of social contacts with the contemporary site of Kovačevo, which according to the excavators was perhaps the center of the region between Kresna and Rupel gorges in the Middle Struma valley. Grębska-Kulova, the excavator of the Ilindentsi settlement, further suggests that Ilindentsi may have been established by "migrants" from the site of Kovačevo, which during this period (Kovačevo Ic and Id) show firm indications of population increase. The habitation area in this period in Kovačevo was much extended.\textsuperscript{363} An another example is regarded the site of Rakitovo the cultural elements of which points to firm relations to the area of Karanovo settlement during its II and III phase. However, it should be stressed that some of these elements (gray pottery, zigzag channeling, zigzag incised lines, protuberances on the handles) appear across much larger territory of the Balkans and in Anatolia. Some scholars interpret cultural similarities as an indication that southwest Bulgaria had the same rhythms of cultural development as the adjacent regions, with the preservation of local particularities.\textsuperscript{364}

The are evidence that the settlements were often surrounded by ditches already from the Early Neolithic period (e.g. Mursalevo). Major changes are reported in the second half of the 6\textsuperscript{th} millennium BC, followed by novelties in economy and an increase in population. During the second half of the 6\textsuperscript{th} millennium BC variability in preferences regarding different landscape for the establishment of the settlement is observed in the Struma River valley. New elements made their appearance in technology, typology and the decoration of pottery. The number and the size of the settlements increased and new location were included. By the end of the 6\textsuperscript{th} millennium BC the sites moved to naturally protected areas on the hilltops, and their number seems to have been notable reduced.\textsuperscript{365}

\textsuperscript{362} Nikolov, 2006, IX.
\textsuperscript{363} Grębska-Kulova et al, 2011.
\textsuperscript{364} Grębska-Kulova, 2004, 140.
\textsuperscript{365} Grębska-Kulova, 2004, 142.
The Late Neolithic site of Promachon-Toponica provides the evidence of early cooper metallurgy in the south-west Bulgaria, which is in accordance with the finds in the central Balkans (late Vinca culture), but also to the south of the region under study, in northern Greece (Sitagroi and Dikili Tash).\textsuperscript{366} The evidence of early metallurgy in the wider region of the Balkans find their parallels also further East.\textsuperscript{367}

South-central Bulgaria is represented by the settlements of Azmak, Čavdar, Karanovo, Kardzhali, Krumovgrad and Yabalkovo. Archaeological evidence from this part of Thrace indicates the grow of population in the Thracian Plain, which had as result the migration to the Rhodope Mountains, as the settling in the hilly landscape of the Rhodope is interpreted.\textsuperscript{368} Numerous tell settlements with long stratigraphic sequences are identified in this region. Tell Karanovo and its stratigraphic and cultural sequence serves for the synchronization of cultural phases in this and the adjacent areas. It is important to note that the Tell Karanovo remains the most detailed published site from this period in Bulgaria. An important element occurs from the radiocarbon dates from Tell Karanovo, which is notably similar to Čavdar and Tell Azmak.\textsuperscript{369} The creation of spatial boundaries according to the landscapes, appear to have served to delimit particular habitation areas.\textsuperscript{370}

Dennell relates the number of the long-lived tell site and their remarkable size in this area with the easy of the access to the arable land. This is also evident in the case of the settlement of Azmak, Čavdar and Karanovo, to mention some of them.\textsuperscript{371} The houses of the settlements in this area show similar features and a increase in their size and the number of rooms through time. The persistence of the tell type of sites in the Upper Thrace is taken as an indication of the importance of the ancestors and the memory. However, flat-extended sites have also been found in the south-central Bulgaria, but in its southern part. (e.g. Yabalkovo, Kardzahli, Krumovgrad). Some settlements, like Yabalkovo, had house made with stone foundations and pisée technique which appears to be more often encountered then in the south-western part of the area under study. Pottery and artefacts from the Neolithic settlements in this

\textsuperscript{366} Koukouli-Chrissanthaki et al, 2007, 50.
\textsuperscript{368} Kanchev, Chohadzhiev, 1994, 31.
\textsuperscript{369} Thissen, 2000.
\textsuperscript{370} Bailey, 2000, 50.
\textsuperscript{371} Dennel, 1978, 133, 135, as cited in Bailey, 2000, 49.
area show interaction on the intra-regional level, but also with the area of the Sea of Marmara as Krumovgrad and Kardzhali indicate.\textsuperscript{372} The settlements in the south-central Bulgaria were also encircled by walls and embankments.

South-east Bulgaria is represented by the settlements of Gerena, Kapitan Andreevo, Mednikarovo, Merdzumekja and Simeonovgrad-Chavdarova chesma. The characteristic for the south-east corner of and the west Black Sea littoral is the very scarce evidence of the early inhabitation. For that may contributed the lack of excavation and/or published data, but also the rise of the sea level that may have covered the Neolithic sites along the coast. It could also be that the environmental conditions in the littoral of the Black Sea was not considered appropriate for early farming communities in this very early period.\textsuperscript{373} However, in the western coast of the Black Sea numerous Final Neolithic sites with impressive and unique findings of the Varna culture is found.

In the south-eastern Bulgaria, in the Maritsa River valley, differences in habitation is also observed among the Early and the Late Neolithic settlements. A preference for open plains, low hills or riversides, is evidenced in the earlier period. Neolithic sites were established in the valleys of both two main rivers, the Maritsa and Arda. This tendency seems to have changed during the Late Neolithic and the sites were also situated in higher locations, on the hill slopes or between hilly surroundings, but still close to fresh water sources. In Maritsa valley most of the sites were flat, extended, which is in contrast to more frequent tell sites in south-central Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{374}

However, few tell sites have been excavated in this area. As Gaydarska suggests, the long habitation sequence in Merdzumekja tell, indicates a model of repeated social practices. The deliberate deposition of the architectural and the fragmentation of artefacts was probably a usual strategy. The House 244 in Merdzumekja was the only two-storey building accompanied with a large amount of artefacts and objects. However, there is evidence for deliberate deposition in pits and ditches in all the

\textsuperscript{372} Open rectangular vessels with incised decoration related to Fikirtepe Va and Ilipinar VIII phase (Kamarev, 2013, 7.)
\textsuperscript{373} Apostolova, 2008.
\textsuperscript{374} Leshtakov, 2014b, 112–113.
habitation levels of the Merdzumekja tell, which indicates continuity in the significance and the meanings of the disposal practice.\textsuperscript{375}

To summarize, tell settlements had a frequent occurrence in South Bulgaria, as well as flat, extended sites. Both type of settlements appeared in all three geographical regions discussed in this study. It appears that tell settlements are more frequent in the northern part of all three geographical area, while the flat, extended settlements prevail in the southern part (Figure 1.). This phenomenon might be related to the environmental factors and the social organization of the communities of two different type of sites. As Kotsakis has proposed, tells materialize an ideology of the emerging household and of its individual continuity, while the flat-extended settlements preserve an ancestral ideology of communality. Judging from the persistence of the rebuilding the houses on the same spot it does seem probable that at least in the settlements of the tell type there is an overall emphasis on the emerging household and its associated identities. The symbolic expression of the role of the house and the small social unit that it represents is also underlined by the presence of the house models. The process towards the autonomy of the domestic units and their associated social identity gradually progress through time: from the Early Neolithic to the Late Neolithic and the formation of social complexity clearly evident in the exceptional wealth of the Varna culture in the south-eastern part of Bulgaria.

\textsuperscript{375} Gaydarska, 2007, 163.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ΑΕΜΘ: Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη

ΑΟΡ: Αρχеологически Открития и Разкопки
(Archaeological Discoveries and Excavations)

BAN: Българска Академия на Науките

BAR: British Archaeological Reports

BAS: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

CSH: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

DOI: Digital Object Identifier

НБУ: Годишник на Департамент Археология
(Yearbook of the Department of Archaeology)
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<th>PERIOD PHASE</th>
<th>CULTURE NAME</th>
<th>DATE RANGE (cal. B.C.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Neolithic</td>
<td>Karanovo I - II</td>
<td>6300 - 5450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Neolithic</td>
<td>Karanovo III</td>
<td>5500 - 5100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Neolithic</td>
<td>Karanovo IV</td>
<td>5200 - 4850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Final Neolithic</td>
<td>Karanovo V</td>
<td>4900 - 4550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Final Neolithic</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4600 - 4400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Final Neolithic</td>
<td>Karanovo VI</td>
<td>4500 - 3800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional period</td>
<td></td>
<td>3850 - 3150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Bronze Age</td>
<td>EBA I - III</td>
<td>3200 - 2500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Calibrated dates for phases in Bulgarian Neolithic. (Gaydarska, 2007: 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European period</th>
<th>North Greece</th>
<th>South-west Bulgaria</th>
<th>Kovačevo</th>
<th>Karanovo</th>
<th>Bulgarian Terminology</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Chalcolithic</td>
<td>Sitagroi IV/Va</td>
<td>Radomir - Hotovo</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Early Bronze Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Chalcolithic</td>
<td>Sitagroi IIIb/c</td>
<td>Kolarovo</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td></td>
<td>Late Chalcolithic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Neolithic</td>
<td>Sitagroi IIIa</td>
<td>Slatino</td>
<td>V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Neolithic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Damjanica</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Late Neolithic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Middle Neolithic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Neolithic</td>
<td>Nea Nikomideia Gianitsa</td>
<td>Kovačevo Dobriniste Eleshnica</td>
<td>Id</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Early Neolithic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ic</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ib</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Chronological scheme indicating the various periods of habitation of the site of Kovačevo relating to neighboring regions. (Lichardus – Itten et al, 2002: 106)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Azmak stratigraphical sequence</th>
<th>Elevation</th>
<th>Thickness of deposit</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer VI</td>
<td>▼?–3.20m?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>No architectural remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer V</td>
<td>▼2.24m?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Fragmentary architectural remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer IV</td>
<td>▼2.14–2.41m</td>
<td>27cm</td>
<td>Fragmentary architectural remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer III</td>
<td>▼1.69–2.18m</td>
<td>49cm</td>
<td>At least four four houses, which were not destroyed by fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer I I</td>
<td>▼1.11–1.69m</td>
<td>58cm</td>
<td>Two houses, constructed over the debris of Layer I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer I</td>
<td>▼0.66–1.13m</td>
<td>63cm</td>
<td>More than thirteen burned structures, houses remains and thermal constructions were uncovered within a single habitation layer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIRGIN SOIL</td>
<td>▼0-0,50m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Azmak stratigraphical sequence (Thissen, 2000)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL TERMINOLOGY</th>
<th>CAL. BC</th>
<th>LOWER STRUMA VALLEY</th>
<th>SOUTH WEST BULGARIA</th>
<th>BULGARIAN THRACE</th>
<th>EASTERN EUROPE TERMINOLOGY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EARLY BRONZE AGE</strong></td>
<td>3200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karanovo VII</td>
<td>EARLY BRONZE AGE OR FINAL NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINAL NEOLITHIC</strong></td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>Acropotamos- Topolniča Phase III</td>
<td>Bâlgarčevo IV</td>
<td>Karanovo VI</td>
<td>EARLY FINAL NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4800</td>
<td>Acropotamos- Topolniča Phase II</td>
<td>Bâlgarčevo III</td>
<td>Karanovo V Kalojanovec Marica</td>
<td>LATE NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LATE NEOLITHIC</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5300</td>
<td>Acropotamos - Topolniča Phase I</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bâlgarčevo II Dolna Ribnitsa</td>
<td>MIDDLE NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kalojanovec Proto-Marica</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Starčevo IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MIDDLE NEOLITHIC</strong></td>
<td>5400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bâlgarčevo I Starčevo III</td>
<td>EARLY NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karanovo II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EARLY NEOLITHIC</strong></td>
<td>6000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proto-Starčevo</td>
<td>EARLY NEOLITHIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karanovo I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4. Chronology table of the mentioned Neolithic Bulgarian cultures*

The dates in the index, are approximate. This table was created in order to make understandable the chronological succession of cultures which developed in South Bulgaria during the Neolithic period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mikroregion Drama</th>
<th>Terminology proposal</th>
<th>Karanovo (Nikolov)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merdžumekja E</td>
<td>Post-Karanovo VI</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merdžumekja D</td>
<td>Karanovo Vib</td>
<td>Karanovo VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merdžumekja C</td>
<td>Karanovo Via</td>
<td>Karanovo VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merdžumekja B</td>
<td>Karanovo IVc</td>
<td>Karanovo IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merdžumekja A</td>
<td>Karanovo IV b</td>
<td>Karanovo IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerena C</td>
<td>Karanovo Iva</td>
<td>Karanovo IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerena B</td>
<td>Karanovo IIIb</td>
<td>Karanovo III/IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerena A</td>
<td>Karanovo IIIa</td>
<td>Karanovo III/IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** Comparison of periodization in the microregion of Drama with the mound of Karanovo. (Lichardus, Iliev, 2004: 41)