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Source: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Apr., 1987), pp. 161-169

Published by: Archaeological Institute of America

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Rethinking the Function of Clay Figurine Legs from Neolithic Greece: An Argument by Analogy*

LAUREN E. TALALAY

Abstract

Prehistorians have long asserted that Neolithic figurines from Greece should be identified with an ancient cult of a Great Mother Goddess. Although concerns with fertility, both human and vegetational, were no doubt of paramount importance to emerging agricultural communities, recent research suggests that small, portable figurines were not a unifunctional class of objects but may have served a variety of purposes. This article reassesses the possible function of 18 unusual clay legs which have been traditionally interpreted as parts from female figurines of the Great Goddess.

Inspired by both ethnographic and historical analogies, the author proposes that these leg fragments functioned as special contracts or identifying tokens symbolizing social and economic bonds among five Middle Neolithic communities in the northern Peloponnese. The objects are seen as useful devices marking regional ties in a preliterate society. The discussion underscores both the importance of reanalyzing the function of prehistoric figurines as well as the potential value of ethnographic analogies in interpreting past behaviors.

During the last few decades, excavations at five

Neolithic sites in southern Greece have recovered 18 very similar and unusual clay fragments which appear to represent individual female legs. Dating to the Middle Neolithic,¹ these legs have been traditionally interpreted as stray pieces from completed "Mother Goddess" figurines. It is suggested here, however, that these body fragments functioned not as fertility symbols but rather as special identifying devices or contracts employed among five Neolithic communities in the Peloponnese. The argument hinges on three separate pieces of evidence: the construction of the legs (i.e., the archaeological evidence), ethnographic and historical analogues, and recent interpretations of socioeconomic patterns in Middle Neolithic society.²

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The class of objects studied here is currently confined to five settlements in the northern Peloponnese: Franchthi Cave, Corinth, Lerna, Akratas, and Asea (fig. 1).³ The first four are located close to the sea, the

* I am indebted to a number of people for insightful and substantive comments on an earlier version of this article. In particular, I would like to thank Anselm Talalay, who first suggested the idea for this paper, and Thomas W. Jacobsen, who has been a continual source of constructive criticism for my ideas on prehistoric figurines. Dr. Jacobsen also generously granted me access to unpublished material from Franchthi Cave. Both Charles Williams and the late John Caskey kindly allowed me to examine the entire corpus of published and unpublished figurines from the sites of Corinth and Lerna, respectively. Finally, I am most indebted to Michalis Fotiadis, Steven C. Bank, Lila Freedman, and an anonymous *AJA* reviewer. Their comments and suggestions proved invaluable.

This article was written while I held an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship. A summary of the paper was delivered at the 84th General Meeting of the AIA (1982): *AJA* 87 (1983) 264.

¹ Determining the precise chronological span of the Middle Neolithic in southern Greece is hampered by a lack of radiocarbon dates. On the basis of more than a dozen samples from Franchthi Cave (5568 half-life), the Middle Neolithic would seem to span at least the first half of the fifth millennium. For radiocarbon dates, see B. Lawn, "University of Pennsylvania Radiocarbon Dates, XIV," *Radiocar-*

bon 13 (1971) 363–77; "University of Pennsylvania Radiocarbon Dates, XVII," *Radiocarbon* 16 (1974) 219–37; "University of Pennsylvania Radiocarbon Dates, XVIII," *Radiocarbon* 17 (1975) 196–215; T.W. Jacobsen, "Excavations in the Franchthi Cave, 1969–1971: Part I," *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 45–88; "Excavations in the Franchthi Cave, 1969–1971, Part II," *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 253–83; "New Radiocarbon Dates from Franchthi Cave, Greece," *JFA* 4 (1977) 367–68.

² It is only in the last few years that careful attention has been given to elucidating socioeconomic patterns in the Greek Neolithic. Three recent dissertations have contributed substantially to our understanding of Neolithic society and I have relied on these works to provide a general picture of the social and economic behaviors of the fifth millennium: C.N. Runnels, *A Diachronic Study and Economic Analysis of Millstones from the Argolid, Greece* (Diss. Indiana Univ. 1981); M. Fotiadis, *Economy, Ecology and Settlement Among Subsistence Farmers in the Serres Basin, Northeastern Greece, 5,000–1,000 B.C.* (Diss. Indiana Univ. 1984); T. Cullen, *A Measure of Interaction Among Neolithic Communities: Design Elements of Greek Urfirmis Pottery* (Diss. Indiana Univ. 1985).

³ For excavation reports and summaries of the various sites, see: T.W. Jacobsen, "Excavations at Porto Cheli and



Fig. 1. Middle Neolithic sites in the Peloponnese with "split-leg" figurines

last in the uplands of Arcadia. Like other Middle Neolithic communities in southern Greece, these sites appear to be small, fairly autonomous villages dependent on hoe-based agriculture, herding, some foraging, and limited hunting. Although population estimates vary, none of the settlements are likely to have been inhabited by more than 200 people at any one time, and individual households probably formed the basic production units within these "egalitarian" communities.⁴

Distances among the five villages vary: the two closest neighbors, Franchthi and Lerna, are only 45 km. apart, whereas the two most distant, Akratas and Franchthi, are separated by 110 km. of rugged ter-

rain. Given the topography in this region of Greece, traveling time between any two settlements probably entailed a half to several days journey by foot, boat, or a combination of both. Despite the obstacles of both terrain and distance, it is argued below that a number of benefits would have accrued from regular and occasional contact among all five settlements. In all likelihood, Franchthi, Corinth, Lerna, Asea, and Akratas were part of a larger network in which goods, finished products, raw materials, information, and people circulated.

To date, no settlement has yielded a large corpus of these unusual clay legs. Four were recovered from Lerna (one left, one right, one attached set), two from Franchthi Cave (one left, one right), two from Asea (one left, one right), two from Akratas (one left, one right), and seven from Corinth (six lefts, one right).⁵ The small size of the sample probably reflects the limited exposure of Middle Neolithic levels at each site, but it is also possible that the numbers indicate restricted usage of these objects by a particular segment of the population. Until larger horizontal areas of Middle Neolithic occupation are excavated, however, such inferences cannot be substantiated.

Although most of the legs are unpublished (and unavailable for illustration), the collection exhibits a set of attributes readily discernible in the few examples reproduced here. Without exception, the pieces are well-made, care having been given to the modeling, the surface treatment, and the decoration. Ranging in height from 3.7 to 9.6 cm., all figurines are made of

Vicinity, Preliminary Report II: The Franchthi Cave, 1967–1968," *Hesperia* 38 (1969) 343–481; supra n. 1 (1973); "17,000 Years of Greek Prehistory," *Scientific American* 234 (1976) 76–87; "Franchthi Cave and the Beginning of Settled Village Life in Greece," *Hesperia* 50 (1981) 303–19. J.L. Caskey, "Excavations at Lerna, 1952–1953," *Hesperia* 23 (1954) 3–30; "Excavations at Lerna, 1955," *Hesperia* 25 (1956) 147–73; "Excavations at Lerna, 1956," *Hesperia* 26 (1957) 142–62; "Excavations at Lerna, 1957," *Hesperia* 27 (1958) 125–44. J.C. Lavezzi, "Prehistoric Investigations at Corinth," *Hesperia* 47 (1978) 401–51. E.J. Holmberg, *The Swedish Excavations at Asea in Arcadia* (Lund 1944). A quick salvage operation was launched in 1967 by the Greek Archaeological Service at Akratas before the site was totally obliterated by the construction of the new Patras highway. For a study of the ceramic material, see W.W. Phelps, *The Neolithic Pottery Sequence in Southern Greece* (Diss. Univ. of London 1975).

After this article was submitted, a clay figurine leg was discovered in the Nemea Valley during surface survey in the summer of 1986, in an apparently Middle Neolithic context. That piece will be discussed at a later date.

⁴ Population estimates in the Aegean are a subject of debate. For various methods and arguments, see P. Halstead,

"Counting Sheep in Neolithic and Bronze Age Greece," in I. Hodder, G. Isaac, and N. Hammond eds., *Pattern of the Past: Studies in Honour of David Clarke* (Cambridge 1981); T.W. Jacobsen 1981 (supra n. 3); C. Renfrew, "Patterns of Population Growth in the Prehistoric Aegean," in P.J. Ucko, R. Tringham, and G.W. Dimbleby eds., *Man, Settlement, and Urbanism* (London 1972) 383–99. Cullen (supra n. 2, 37–39) estimates on the basis of settlement size that populations at Asea, Lerna, Franchthi, and Corinth were below 200. Estimates for Akratas are difficult as a result of the nature of the excavations (supra n. 3).

⁵ The distribution of lefts and rights at each site except Corinth is symmetrical. While probably accidental, it should be noted that bilateral emphasis and concerns with the notion of halves are a global phenomenon among primitive societies. A curious collection of half-body pendants from Franchthi Cave may reflect an ancient ideological interest in opposition and division. For a discussion of these half-bodies, see M.C. Schaeffer, *An Attribute Analysis and Formal Typology of the Ornaments from Franchthi Cave, Greece* (M.A. thesis, Indiana Univ. 1977), and L.E. Talalay, "The Case of the Silent Figurines: Interpreting Human Images in Prehistory," Paper delivered at the Sixth Annual Eastern European Archaeology Meeting (1984).

clay and appear to represent either a left or a right leg usually broken at the waist. In only one instance, L7.46 from Lerna (fig. 2), have two legs remained attached at their inner or medial sides.

Common to almost all examples are protruding buttocks, a painted or incised pubic triangle, scars or incisions indicating a hand on the upper thigh, and painted linear decoration (typical of Middle Neolithic ceramics). The painted elements—primarily chevrons, horizontal lines, vertical stripes, and occasional dots—reflect the makers' preference for a decorative repertoire limited in terms of individual motifs as well as overall composition. Considerable variability exists, however, in the execution of the designs, the surety of the artists' lines, the spacing of the elements, and the density of the general pattern. Given this variability as well as the very small size of the sample, it is difficult to assess which of the legs are closest stylistically or if any were produced by the same hands.

The waists on these pieces are exceptionally narrow; examples for which measurements are available range from 1.5 to 2.0 cm. Although traditional Western biases lead one to assume that these legs were once attached to upper bodies, no appropriate torsos have been unearthed. Moreover, one of the sites, Franchthi Cave, has produced finished, three-dimensional objects of clay and stone fashioned into dismembered body parts. These anatomical oddities, which are broadly contemporary with the clay legs, include several pendants in the shape of legs or lower bodies and two nearly intact figurines representing, respectively, a torso and a buttock.⁶ In light of this unusual evidence from Franchthi, it is conceivable that the clay legs under study were never attached to upper bodies but had, instead, only a small projection above the waist which has since broken off.

That each of the legs was once attached to another, complementary half is, however, demonstrable. Although separate but matching legs have yet to be recovered, a number of factors suggest that each leg was originally designed as part of a set: the attached set of legs from Lerna (fig. 2); a clear break through the middle of a separately attached pubic triangle on a leg from Franchthi (FC 68, figs. 3–4); the remainder of part of a second and still connected leg from Franchthi (FC 124, figs. 5–6); and the occasional appearance of very shallow ridges following the outer edges of the medial surfaces.

If these legs were originally attached to matching halves, the treatment of the inner or medial sides is

anomalous. This area is invariably very flat and well-smoothed; occasional burnishing gives the sides an appearance of an intentionally prepared and finished surface. Such preparation makes little sense, however, since it is along the length of the medial side that the matching leg of the figurine would have been placed. Given the properties of baked clay (of which the makers were no doubt aware), such a flat, well-smoothed, and regular area of contact would not have guaranteed the long-term adherence of the legs. Had the makers wanted to preserve the integrity of the two attached legs, they probably would *not* have treated the connecting surface in this manner. Smoothing, flattening, and occasionally burnishing the surface would have weakened the bond between parts, ultimately facilitating the splitting of the legs. It is entirely possible, therefore, that these "split-leg" examples were deliberately designed so that, at some point, the two attached halves could be easily separated. The distinct painted design on each half would facilitate realignment of both sides, if the need arose.

If this proposal is correct, explanations accounting for the use of such split objects among Neolithic inhabitants of the northern Peloponnese are required. In order to generate possible explanatory hypotheses one would hope to find, at the very least, suggestive evidence from the archaeological contexts of these fragments. Unfortunately, the contextual data are singularly uninformative: most legs derive from contaminated contexts, unknown deposits, disturbed units, or fill. Very occasionally a piece is reported from a rubbish pit (e.g., Lerna) and only once (i.e., Franchthi Cave) from a habitational deposit yielding an ash layer (hearth?) and millstones. In short, the function

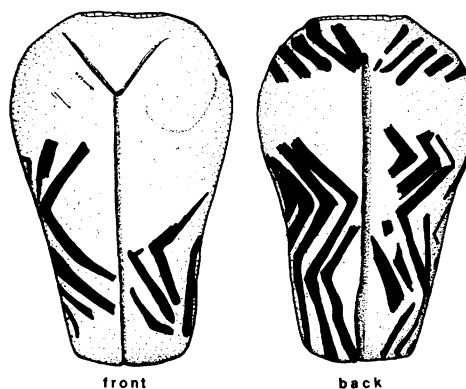


Fig. 2. Figurine L7.46, from Lerna. (After J.L. Caskey, *Hesperia* 27 [1958] pl. 36d–e)

⁶ Schaeffer (*supra* n. 5); Talalay (*supra* n. 5).

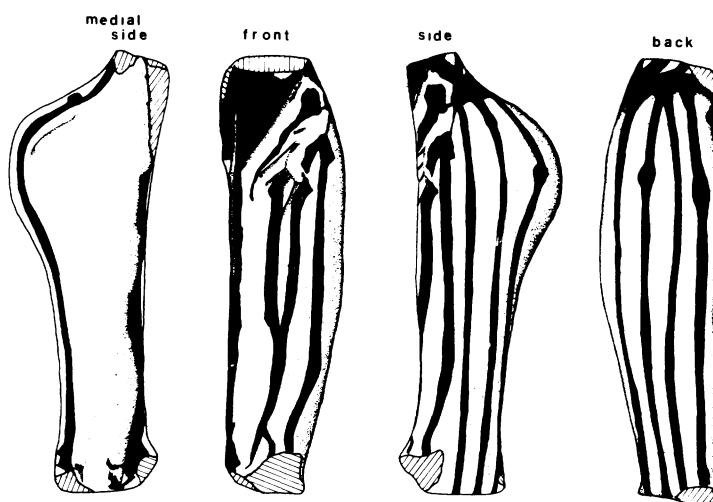


Fig. 3. Clay leg FC 68, from Franchthi Cave (2:3)

of these split figurines cannot be readily inferred from their contexts.

As neither the figurines themselves nor their contexts offer a sufficient basis for interpretation, other sources of inspiration must be sought. Ethnographic and historical analogues on the purposeful splitting of objects provide the most profitable avenue of thought.⁷

THE ETHNOHISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Documentation from Classical times to the present reveals that the intentional splitting of objects most often serves either as a form of identification or as an agreement between two people or two parties. Examples from the Classical world are mentioned by a

number of authors including Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, Euripides, Cicero, and Plautus.

Several Greek texts employ the word *σύμβολον* when referring to a split object or token which can be used to seal a contract. Loosely translated, *σύμβολον* means simply a tally, but one of its more specific meanings is defined as "each of two halves or corresponding pieces of an *ἀσπράγαλος* or other object, which two *ξένοι* or any two contracting parties broke between them, each party keeping one piece in order to have proof of the identity of the presenter of the other."⁸

Aristotle employs the word metaphorically when discussing the two complementary agents of air,

⁷ The use and application of ethnographic analogues is a source of much debate in the anthropological and archaeological literature. A good range of references on both early as well as more current arguments would include: R. Ascher, "Analogy in Archaeological Interpretations," *Southwest Journal of Anthropology* 17 (1961) 317–25; A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Les religions de la préhistoire* (Paris 1964); P.J. Ucko, *Palaeolithic Cave Art* (New York 1967) 150–65; "Ethnography and Archaeological Interpretation of Funerary Remains," *World Archaeology* 1 (1969) 262–80; L. Freeman, "A Theoretical Framework for Interpreting Archaeological Materials," in R.B. Lee and I. DeVore eds., *Man the Hunter* (Chicago 1968) 262–67; L. Binford, "Smudge Pits and Hide Smoking: The Use of Analogy in Archaeological Reasoning," in L. Binford ed., *An Archaeological Perspective* (New York 1972) 33–51; R.A. Gould, "Beyond Analogy in Ethnoarchaeology," in R.A. Gould ed., *Explorations in Ethnoarchaeology* (Albuquerque 1978) 249–93; R.A. Gould, *Living Archaeology* (Cambridge 1980) 29–47; P.J. Watson, *Archaeological Ethnography in Western Iran* (Tucson 1979) 1–9, 300–301; P.J. Watson, "Theory and

Practice of Ethnoarchaeology with Special Reference to the Near East," *Paleorient* 6 (1980) 55–64; B. Orme, *Anthropology for Archaeologists* (London 1981); R.A. Gould and P.J. Watson, "A Dialogue on the Meaning and Use of Analogy in Ethnoarchaeological Reasoning," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1 (1982) 355–81; A.M. Wylie, "An Analogy by Any Other Name Is Just as Analogical," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1 (1982) 382–401; A.M. Wylie, "The Reaction Against Analogy," in M.B. Schiffer ed., *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 7 (New York 1984); W.H. Shaw and L.R. Ashley, "Analogy and Inference," *Dialogue* 22 (1983) 415–32. For a lucid discussion on the use of analogies in the sciences, see E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York 1961) 107–17. In many of the scientific cases analogies are used not only for heuristic purposes but also as one of the grounds for the belief in the newly proposed theory. For that aspect of analogical reasoning, see P.R. Thagard, "The Best Explanation: Criteria for Theory Choice," *The Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978) 76–92.

⁸ LSJ 1676.



Fig. 4. Clay leg FC 68, from Franchthi Cave (2:3). From left: medial side, front, and side view. (Courtesy Franchthi Cave Photographic Archives)

namely moist and hot.⁹ His use is again symbolic when speaking of two opposing forces which seek a unity or middle ground.¹⁰

Herodotos, on the other hand, refers specifically to a tangible object with quasi-legal and official uses. One of his stories relates that like or split tokens are to be used to seal an agreement between a certain man of Miletos and Glaukos of Sparta.¹¹ Three possible examples of such official *σύμβολα* were excavated in the Agora. They consist of small clay plaques cut in half along an irregular line which is designed in such a way that any given half could join only its original mate.¹²

In a less official vein, Euripides mentions the use of *σύμβολα* as guest tokens in his *Medea*. Jason offers guest tokens to Medea so that, once in exile, she can use them to find friends who will recognize the tokens as agreements of old bonds.¹³

Presumably, the guest tokens in Euripides' *Medea* are comparable to the Latin *tesserae hospitalis* mentioned by Cicero and Plautus. Both authors employ the term when referring to tallies which were divided between two friends. These split objects guaranteed that the friends or their descendants could always recognize each other. In *Pro Balbo*, Cicero offers to pro-

duce an old *tessera hospitalis* as documentation that a contract of friendship existed between the people of Gades and Rome.¹⁴ Plautus has Hanno present the same kind of tally when he is seeking the aid of old friends to find his lost children.¹⁵

In another context, it is reported that *tesserae* were employed in the early mystery religions where fitting together two halves of a pot or sherd provided a means of recognition among initiates.¹⁶

The use of split tokens in the ancient world is not confined exclusively to Western cultures. A similar custom is documented among the Japanese. "Warifu," a word seldom used by modern Japanese, originally referred to the splitting or tearing of material or paper into two halves to signify an economic transaction. Each party or person involved in the transaction kept one half of the material in order to have proof of the event and his part in it. "Warifu" eventually gained meaning as a bill of exchange or money order, but its original intent literally translates as a split sign.¹⁷

A different use of halved objects is found among the ancient Chinese where it is reported that certain groups cast bronze figures, such as lions and cats, in two parts and used them to identify messengers. The system worked in the following manner. The emperor

⁹ Mete. 360a.26. ὥστε καθάπερ ἐκ συμβόλων . . .

¹⁰ Eth. Eud. 1239b.31. ὡς σύμβολα γὰρ ὁρέγεται ἀλλήλων διὰ τὸ οὕτω γίνεσθαι ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἐν μέσον.

¹¹ Hdt. 6.86.β1. σὺν δὴ μοι καὶ τὰ χρήματα δέξαι καὶ τὰδε τὰ σύμβολα σῶζε λαβὼν ὃς δ' ἂν ἔχων τὰτα ἀπαιτή, τούτῳ ἀποδοῦναι.

¹² H.A. Thompson, "Excavations at the Athenian Agora: 1950," *Hesperia* 20 (1951) 51–52.

¹³ Eur. Med. 613. ὡς ἔτοιμος ἀφθόνως δοῦναι χερὶ ξένους τε πέμπειν σύμβολ', οἳ δράσονται σ' ἐν.

¹⁴ Cic. Balb. 41.

¹⁵ Plaut. Poenulus 958.

¹⁶ J. Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. A. Wilden (Baltimore 1968) 101, n. 32.

¹⁷ Sekai Dai-hyakka Jiten 32 (1972) 618–19.

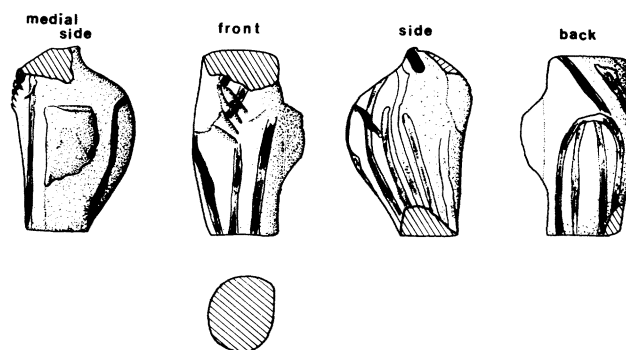


Fig. 5. Figurine fragment FC 124, from Franchthi Cave (2:3)

or leader of one group kept half of a cast figure and gave the other half to the head of another group. When communications were sent between the two groups a messenger was entrusted with one half of the figure which was keyed to fit the other half. The tally thus served as evidence of the messenger's *bona fides* and thereby legitimized his communication.¹⁸

The practice of intentionally splitting objects is also mentioned in a number of Far Eastern fairy tales and dramas. The stories usually center upon children separated at birth, each of whom is given half a unique object. Later, in their adult lives, they are reunited (usually under strange or dramatic circumstances) and prove their identity by presenting their halves of the token.

Finally, the practice of splitting paper or objects to symbolize an economic transaction allegedly exists today in the American underworld. Bills of large denomination, each with a matching set of serial numbers on either half, are torn in two. Each partner in the "deal" retains half as a promissory note that the transaction will be completed at the appointed time and place.

These examples demonstrate that the purposeful splitting of objects has had a long history in a variety of contexts. In each instance, the object served either as a contractual device or as an identifying token between individuals or groups, symbolizing an agreement, obligation, friendship, or a common bond. Given these examples, it is reasonable to ask whether the 18 split-leg examples found at the five Middle Neolithic sites in the northern Peloponnese could have had comparable functions. Are the Greek *σύμβολα* and the Latin *testerae* vestiges of much earlier practices in the Mediterranean? Specifically, can it be convincingly argued that these Neolithic legs acted as devices which identi-

fied individuals (or groups) for participation or membership in various activities or organizations common to these five Middle Neolithic communities?

In order to present a compelling argument, one should, ideally, frame a working hypothesis with specific expectations and questions about the find-spots, design, morphology, and distribution of such devices in the Neolithic. For example, where should archaeologists expect to find (or not find) contractual devices or identifying tokens within sites? At which sites might they reasonably occur? Why would they be present at only a few but not all of the settlements in the northern Peloponnese? How many examples should one expect per site? Should the pieces all look alike, or should considerable stylistic variability be expected? What explanations might account for the explicit sexing of such devices?

Despite the soundness of this approach, a number of obstacles are encountered when attempting to pursue this line of reasoning. Such fine-grained questions cannot be answered readily on the basis of our limited understanding of human activities and behavior in Middle Neolithic society. Furthermore, replies to these queries will vary, depending on which purpose of the token one endeavors to isolate. A different set of expectations will be generated if it is proposed that the items functioned as part of a marriage contract, rather than as emblems for membership in non-residential sodalities or as symbols identifying individual trading partners. The list of potential and plausible uses in Middle Neolithic society is enormous and until the range of possibilities can be reasonably narrowed, attempts to generate these kinds of test implications may be a futile exercise.

On a more positive note, however, a critical first step can be taken to grant this analogically inspired hypo-

¹⁸ Personal communication, Roy Sieber, 1980.



Fig. 6. Figurine fragment FC 124, from Franchthi Cave (2:3). Left: front view; right: side view. (Courtesy Franchthi Cave Photographic Archives)

thesis a degree of credibility. If these devices, in fact, symbolize social, economic, and/or political agreements or commitments among selected communities, then the existence of an interactive context for these five Neolithic villages must be demonstrated. The circulation and use of such tokens would only make sense in a sphere of regional integration where literacy was not yet available to render explicit a range of obligations or ties among separate but interdependent settlements. The following section will, therefore, consider the likelihood that these five settlements were bound into a larger, interactive, and supralocal unit.

THE SOCIOECONOMIC EVIDENCE

Our picture of social and economic organization in the Neolithic of southern Greece is a matter of some debate, depending as much on archaeological data as upon anthropological models of modern "tribal" behaviors. While the current understanding of Middle Neolithic society and economy is admittedly limited, recent research is beginning to provide new insights into some of the complexities of fifth-millennium patterns of behavior.

It is usually assumed that most Middle Neolithic communities in southern Greece (at least 30 sites) were small, food-producing villages that were fairly self-sufficient in procuring their subsistence requirements. Dependence on local horticulture is underscored by the fact that most villages appear to be situated close to arable soils and good sources of water. Defensive sitings and proximity to trade routes were,

apparently, not primary factors in the site-selection process.¹⁹ Since farming and domestication usually demand a relatively high degree of sedentism and commitment to scheduling requirements, it is probable that most Middle Neolithic settlements were occupied year-round and that such ties encouraged strong residential affiliations and territorial control over localized lands.²⁰

To date, there is no evidence for full-time labor specialization or for social ranking in Middle Neolithic settlements. Individual households seem to form the basic production units, with family members undertaking varied tasks. Although individual proficiency in one craft or another is likely to have evolved, it is unlikely that village members were released from other responsibilities in order to pursue an area of full-time expertise. A case for full-time specialization can usually be made when the archaeological record shows, among other things, separate craft areas, specially oriented channels for the dissemination of products, a large market of potential customers, and social differentiation within society. None of these criteria seem to prevail during the Middle Neolithic in southern Greece. In particular, there is no evidence for institutionalized differences in (inherited) wealth or status; village members appear to have equal access to important resources. Sociopolitical distinctions were in all likelihood based on age, sex, kin, and personal achievement, much as they are today among egalitarian societies.²¹

Despite the seeming self-sufficiency and autonomy

¹⁹ See J. Bintliff, *Natural Environment and Human Settlement in Prehistoric Greece 1* (BAR Suppl. Series 28, 1977) 115.

²⁰ This generalization is based on modern, cross-cultural studies among "tribal" societies. The two classics on primitive social organization are M.D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1968) and E. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Account* (New York 1971).

While both books are still considered standards in the field, some of the premises have been challenged or refined. See, for example, D.P. Braun and S. Plog, "Evolution of Tribal Social Networks: Theory and Prehistoric North American Evidence," *American Antiquity* 47 (1982) 504-25.

²¹ For a more complete discussion of Neolithic ranking and craft specialization, see C. Renfrew, "Trade and Craft Specialization," in D.R. Theohares ed., *Neolithic Greece*

of these five villages, the very limited transport technology available during the Middle Neolithic, and the ruggedness of terrain in the northern Peloponnese, evidence of intersettlement contact is clear. None of the five villages should be viewed as part of a closed system. The material remains from all five sites exhibit strong similarities suggesting ongoing (and perhaps regular) communication, while the existence of nonlocal materials (e.g., obsidian, marble, andesite, and exotic flints) indicates travel and contacts well beyond the immediate confines of each individual village.

One of the more striking similarities in the material culture of the sites is documented in their pottery. A recent study on a sample of patterned Urfinis ware from four of the settlements revealed a very close stylistic coincidence between the assemblages from Franchthi and from Corinth, and less marked though equally significant similarities among those from Lerna, Asea, and Franchthi.²² The ceramic homogeneity observed among a number of sites in the northeastern Peloponnese has been tentatively attributed to exogamous policies. Women are presumed to have been the main potters within each village and their relocation accounts, in part, for the stylistic consistency in the region. The manner in which elements of Middle Neolithic Urfinis design are combined and elaborated is sufficiently complex that replication may have depended on face-to-face observation. Moreover, the rather sophisticated technological procedures involved in Urfinis production probably required instruction, not only the observation of finished objects. The circulation and relocation of women in an exogamous system would have provided the necessary mechanism for interaction and instruction among potters from various villages.²³

The proposal of exogamy finds additional support from other evidence. Simulation models and ethnographic research indicate that small bands or tribes with populations of less than 200 are not biologically viable when committed to the isolating practice of endogamy.²⁴ If population estimates on the five sites under study are indeed correct (see above), each of the communities must have practiced some degree of set-

tlement exogamy. At least some marital partners must have been sought from beyond the confines of the individual residential unit. The five sites discussed here were probably close enough to provide an accessible pool for marital exchanges, and dependencies or alliances between groups that supplied partners would form. Such practices are common among egalitarian societies which, like Middle Neolithic villages, are not characterized by intensive production, inherited wealth, or a strong social hierarchy.²⁵

Overlapping alliances among all or some of the five settlements could have developed for reasons other than biological ones. Periodic failures in food supply due to climatic fluctuations, intermittent drops in population caused by disease, or occasional scarcity of valued resources are very real concerns among small, food-producing villages. Commitments to intersettlement cooperation (continually reinforced during the "good years") can be called upon during the "lean years" to alleviate stress and thereby enhance chances for group survival.²⁶ Such obligations help to ensure survival in an uncertain environment. The apparent degree of sedentism, the commitment to localized territories, and the lack of large-scale storage facilities at Middle Neolithic villages in southern Greece suggest that relatively immobile communities such as Franchthi, Corinth, Lerna, Asea, and Akratas were not well prepared internally for coping with productive variability. In view of the lack of such internal safeguards, external or supralocal mechanisms may well have been relied upon to minimize the effects of periodic productive failures and scarcity. The relative proximity of the five sites in this study would have been advantageous in times of crisis: the settlements were close enough to provide food or resources to one another, yet far enough apart to guarantee variation in the particular catchment area or microenvironment of each village.

Finally, alliances or bonds among these villages may have developed for reasons not exclusively tied to matters of survival. The appearance of nonlocal materials at these sites such as obsidian, marble, andesite, and exotic flints testifies to both long- and short-

(Athens 1973) 179–91; T.W. Jacobsen and T. Cullen, "Mortuary Practices in Neolithic Greece," in S.C. Humphreys and H. King eds., *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology of Death* (London 1981) 79–101; Cullen (supra n. 2) 37–51.

²² Cullen (supra n. 2).

²³ K.D. Vitelli, *The Greek Neolithic Patterned Urfinis Ware from Franchthi Cave and Lerna* (Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania 1974); K.D. Vitelli, "Greek Neolithic Pottery by Experiment," in P.M. Rice ed., *Pots and Potters* (Los An-

geles 1984) 113–31. See also Cullen (supra n. 2) 350–52.

²⁴ H.M. Wobst, "Boundary Conditions for Palaeolithic Social Systems: A Simulation Approach," *American Antiquity* 39 (1974) 147–78.

²⁵ Service (supra n. 20) 30–32, 101.

²⁶ P. Halstead and J. O'Shea, "A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed: Social Storage and the Origins of Social Ranking," in C. Renfrew and S. Shennan eds., *Ranking, Resource and Exchange* (Cambridge 1982) 92–99.

range transport of goods and/or raw materials. Most of the obsidian derives from the island of Melos, which is 150 km. by open sea from Franchthi and significantly further from Akrotas.²⁷ Substantial sources of marble are almost unknown in the Peloponnese and the best outcrops are, again, in the Cyclades. While the modes for acquiring and transporting these exotica are unknown, at least half a dozen possibilities have been suggested, including "home-base reciprocity," "down-the-line trade," "middleman trading," and "central-place exchange."²⁸ All these mechanisms would have functioned most efficiently where conditions did not threaten the movement of goods and people, where strangers were not viewed as trespassers.²⁹ Indeed, excavations at Middle Neolithic sites in the northern Peloponnese suggest a picture of peaceful regional communication; evidence for fortifications, defensive sitings, moats, or extensive burning has not been uncovered.

In sum, alliances among the five settlements of Franchthi Cave, Corinth, Lerna, Akrotas, and Asea are likely to have existed during the Middle Neolithic period. Such alliances may have been critical for group survival, or may have provided a valuable mechanism for the transport or exchange of goods. Although further work is needed to clarify the exact mechanisms of exchange and communication, a general picture of regional ties and cooperation among the five sites finds some support from the archaeological record. Given that scenario, contractual devices or identifying tokens could well have been used in a

variety of contexts. They may have been employed by individual trading partners in a down-the-line mode of exchange, as tokens to identify messengers between villages (particularly in times of crisis), as symbols of future obligations among groups or individuals, as emblems of membership in sodalities, as signs of non-residential family ties, or as markers of intervillage marital connections.

Despite the general credibility of this model, specific questions still remain: Why are all the clay legs sexed as female? Why are they found at only these five sites in the northern Peloponnese and not at others which would have benefited equally from regional networks? And where, indeed, are the matching halves? Although these unanswered questions underscore the interpretive hurdles still to overcome, the first steps in understanding these unusual fragments have been taken. While more suggestive than conclusive, a model now exists that can be refined and tested as new data are marshalled. More importantly, this work, in addition to other research conducted on the Greek Neolithic, suggests that the early agricultural communities in southern Greece were not completely autonomous, self-sufficient units. Rather, their spheres of interaction and interdependence may have been more complex than previously assumed. Future researchers may find it profitable to explore more deeply the nature and extent of those interactions.

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²⁷ For studies on Mediterranean obsidian, see J.R. Cann and C. Renfrew, "The Characterization of Obsidian and Its Application to the Mediterranean Region," *PPS* 30 (1964) 111-30; C. Renfrew, J.R. Cann, and J.E. Dixon, "Obsidian in the Aegean," *BSA* 60 (1965) 225-47; J.R. Dixon and C. Renfrew, "The Source of the Franchthi Obsidians," in T.W. Jacobsen 1973 (supra n. 1) 82-85.

²⁸ In home-base reciprocity the consumer travels to the source or workshop in order to acquire the product. In down-the-line trade the commodity travels across contiguous territories through successive exchanges, and individual

trading partners would be found in that mode of exchange. Central-place market exchange requires that producer and consumer meet at a third location, often a market. Middleman trading involves the transport and exchange of goods from the producer to the consumer by a third party. For a more detailed discussion, see C. Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilisation* (London 1972) 440-75.

²⁹ R.I. Ford, "Barter, Gift, or Violence: An Analysis of Tewa Intertribal Exchange," in E.N. Wilmsen ed., *Social Exchange and Interaction* (Ann Arbor 1972) 21-45.