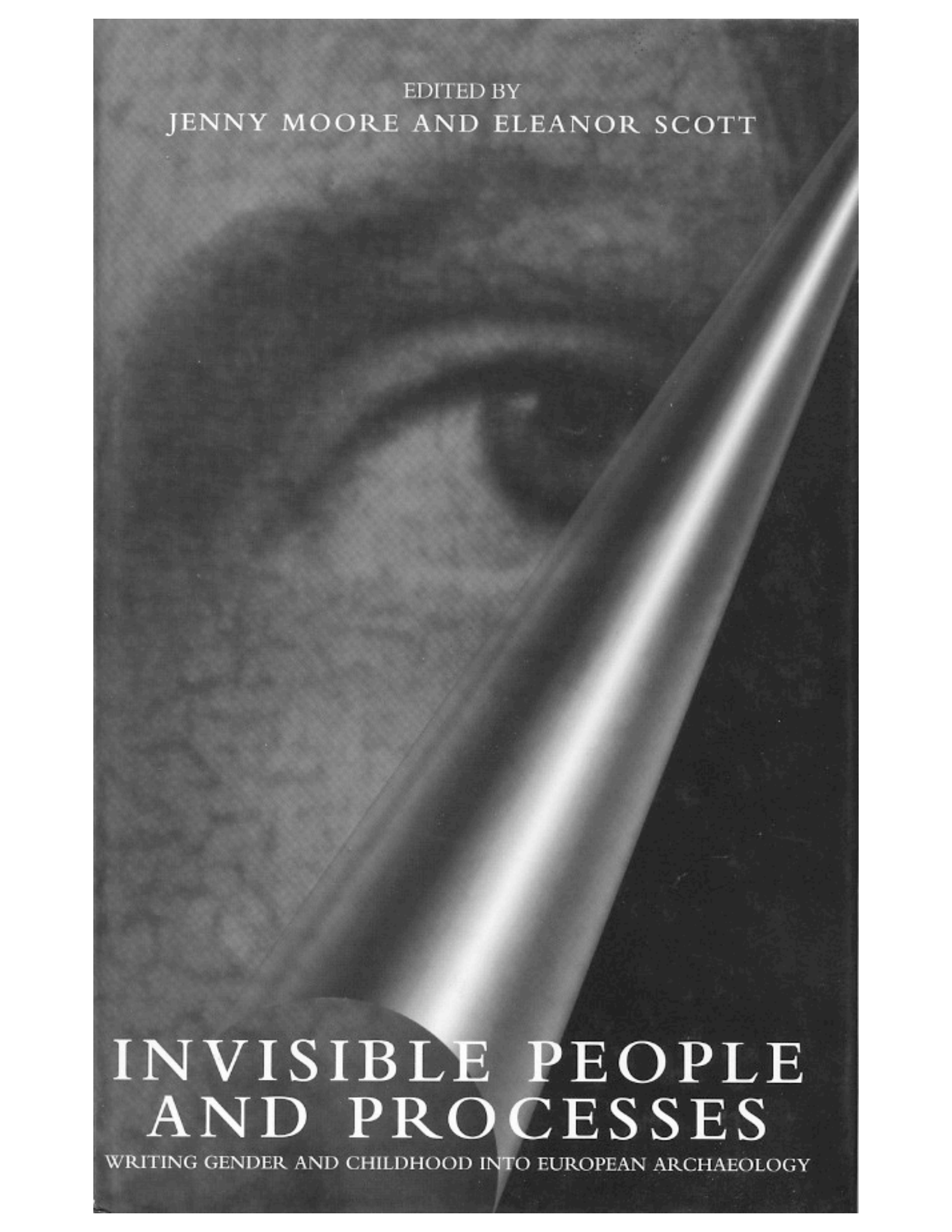




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JENNY MOORE AND ELEANOR SCOTT

INVISIBLE PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

WRITING GENDER AND CHILDHOOD INTO EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

8 Body imagery in the Aegean Neolithic: ideological implications of anthropomorphic figurines

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The problem of ideology is central to historical – as to all social – understanding. If men govern the rest of nature in virtue of their reason and technological power, they are themselves governed by their beliefs. All human action ... belongs to a frame of reference, however, unconsciously formulated. It is this framework of assumptions and intentions, habits and ends, interests and ideas, values and knowledge which constitutes an ideology.

(Leff 1969: 155)

Introduction

Ideologies, active in many aspects of cultural reality, are especially manifest in the ways that power is established and negotiated in a society. The issues of power and ideology are, in turn, closely related to the construction of gender. Feminist research over the last decades has drawn attention to the fact that cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity are both parts of and preconditions for the creation of power relations (for example, di Leonardo 1991; Gero and Conkey 1991; Moore 1988; Walde and Willows 1991). As an important parameter for understanding power, gender can, therefore, be best considered by reference to specific ideological contexts. From the archaeological point of view, a gender-aware study of material culture and art has the potential of illuminating ideologies and the concomittant social relations (Braithwaite 1984; Conkey 1991; Hodder 1984, 1991a). The study of human representations, in particular, may be expected to provide important information on how people of the past understood their gender identities and manipulated associated roles and interaction.

This chapter addresses the above issues with focus on anthropomorphic figurines of the Aegean Neolithic. Although these artefacts have been frequently dealt with by archaeologists, little attention has been paid so far to their possible ideological role for the construction of gender and the interplay of power relations in the Neolithic communities of the Aegean region.

We begin with a brief presentation of the archaeological evidence, namely the figurines and their findcontexts, and an overview of the interpretations suggested so far about the meaning of this material. In the discussion that follows we argue for gender-specific ideological implications of these statuettes, and for their ritualized functions, by paying closer attention to:

- (i) their style and iconography
- (ii) the loci of discovery
- (iii) their systemic context
- (iv) ethnographic examples.

The concluding section stresses the role of body imagery as an organizing principle in the conceptual frameworks, communication systems, symbolic behaviours, and social negotiations of Neolithic peoples in the Aegean.

The archaeological evidence

The figurines

Figurines dating from all phases of the Neolithic period (c. 6500–3000 BC) are found all over the Aegean, including mainland Greece, the Cyclades and other islands further north, and Crete (Aslanis 1992; Chourmouziadis 1994; Gimbutas 1991; Marangou 1992; Talalay 1993; Theocharis 1973; Ucko 1968). Small in size and relatively easy to make (see Talalay 1993: 29–33), they are mainly manufactured of clay, while various stones (marble, alabaster, steatite, river pebbles), shell, bone, and probably wood were occasionally used. A special category consists of the so-called 'acrolithic' figurines, that is idols with a clay body and an inserted head of other material, usually stone. A large number of figurines depict humans, female and male, as well as children and figures of indeterminate sex. Other pieces, very rare ones, show hermaphrodite or hybrid beings with zoomorphic features. Several curious fragments of what have been termed 'split-leg figurines' (Talalay 1987) have been found in the Peloponnese; these are half-fragments of the lower body including leg and buttock, and it is suggested that they were originally attached to complementary and matching halves (Talalay 1987, 1993: 45). Effigies of animals (Toufexis 1990, 1994), models of houses and ovens, loaves of bread, and miniatures of furniture and utensils (Marangou 1992; Theocharis 1973) are also present. Figurines are usually free-standing and modelled in the round, but anthropomorphic or zoomorphic relief attachments on pots are not uncommon either, and vessel parts like the neck or the handle sometimes assume a plastic quality as well.

Although the above range of plastic forms is present all over the Aegean and Helladic area, there are considerable regional differences in typology and style as well as in the frequency of certain types. To give an example, the 'split-leg figurines' seem to be restricted to the north-eastern Peloponnese (Talalay 1987), while comparable isolated legs are far less common further north (see Chourmouziadis 1994; Gimbutas 1986, 1989a; Marangou 1992). On the other hand, an ongoing study of a large body of Thessalian figurines strongly indicates that anthropomorphic imagery in this particular area of mainland Greece is clearly distinct from equivalent creations in other regions, like Macedonia, the Cyclades or Crete (Gallis and Orphanidis 1994).

Concerning the typology and style of anthropomorphic figurines, we must note the numerical preponderance of the female among the examples that can be

safely sexed, although the male-female ratio can vary regionally or chronologically. Women are portrayed standing, seated or reclining, often with accentuated sexual features. Representations of women holding babies (so-called *kouro-trophoi* in Greek), or being involved in everyday tasks such as carrying items or preparing food, are known as well, albeit sporadically. Male imagery is similarly varied, despite its comparatively limited occurrence: characteristic types include men seated on a stool, standing figures dressed or naked, phallus-shaped objects, and a few examples of ithyphallic idols. Anthropomorphic idoloplastic throughout the Neolithic is characterized by the co-existence of abstraction and 'naturalism'; a third tendency consists in the exaggeration of the prototype in the form of overemphasized bodily parts and/or facial features. In Thessaly at least, researchers have recognized a general preference for naturalistic or exaggerated representations in the Early and Middle Neolithic, whereas the advanced phases of Middle Neolithic see the beginnings of stylization which can reach great schematism during the Late Neolithic phase (see Gallis and Orphanidis 1994). The modelling of figurines is often enriched with painting, incisions and plastic additions to point up anatomical or decorative details, or to denote dress and ornaments.

Find contexts and proposed functions

In the excavations figurines are usually retrieved from habitation deposits associated with dwellings: they occur either inside the house or in pits and yards outside domestic structures. In southern Greece they are usually found singly, whereas further north groups of statuettes are often recovered from a single context, as for example at Achilleion, Tsangli and Rachmani in Thessaly, Nea Nikomedeia and Sitagroi in Macedonia, in a fashion similar to the Balkans (for Balkan examples see Gimbutas 1991; Marangou 1992).

Already in the Early Neolithic settlement of Nea Nikomedeia in West Macedonia (late seventh and early sixth millennia BC) a large central building with a tripartite arrangement of parallel rows of heavy timbers yielded five steatopygic female effigies. Along with these was found a number of special artefacts including two outsize greenstone axes, two large caches (of hundreds) of unused flint blades, two gourd-shaped ceramic vessels and several hundred roundels of baked clay (Rodden 1962: 285–6, 1964: 114, 1965: 88–9). Based on the substantial construction of the building itself and the exceptional nature of the objects, the excavators described the area as a shrine which contained representations of the Goddess of Fertility (Rodden and Rodden 1964). In Thessaly similar assemblages are known from Early and Middle Neolithic houses at Achilleion (seventh and early sixth millennia BC, Gimbutas 1989a: 171–227) as well as from the Middle Neolithic House T at Tsangli (Wace and Thompson 1912: 115–17, 123–4). The Achilleion finds have also been associated with the cult of the Goddess, and a sacred character has been ascribed to the buildings with which they were associated (Gimbutas 1989a: 171–227).

During the Late Neolithic (c. 5300–4500 BC) figurines still occur in domestic contexts. That at least some of these images could have had a ritual function is

hinted at by a foundation offering underneath the floor of a house at Plateia Magoula Zarkou in Thessaly. The find consists of a baked clay model of an unroofed structure which contained eight human effigies, adult males and females as well as children (Gallis 1985, 1990: 17–19). Although several house models are known from Greece, in no other case is a whole 'scene' with figurines in a building depicted, nor are there other clear examples of foundation offerings. The find from Plateia Magoula, unique for the Aegean Neolithic in terms of its iconography and context, can best be paralleled with plastic groups and foundation deposits from the Balkans (for the latter see Gimbutas 1991: figs 7.53–59).

Towards the end of the Neolithic period, in the phase known in the Balkans as Final Neolithic or Chalcolithic (c. 4500–3200 BC), there appear remarkable regional differences in terms of the find context. Central and northern Greece, on the one hand, continue the long tradition of domestic associations of the figurines. Again they occur either individually, or in groups as, for example, at Rachmani in Thessaly (Wace and Thompson 1912: 39–41). On the other hand, new patterns of distribution are evident further south, with human idols accompanying burials at Kephala on the Cycladic island of Keos (Coleman 1977). Based on ethnographic parallels Talalay (1991: 49, 1993: 74–5) argues that the latter practice alludes to some kind of ancestral cult. We may interpret the contextual variability in the figurine corpus as part of a general trend towards cultural diversity that has been recognized in the distinct social trajectories which are evident among different regions of the Aegean at this time (Demoule and Perlès 1993: 406–7; van Andel and Runnels 1988).

The problem of meaning(s)

There has been a long discussion in the archaeological literature concerning the use and meaning of Stone Age figurines in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The proposed interpretations range from religiocentric views at one end of the scale to scepticism as to any cultic purpose at the other (see review in Talalay 1993: 37–44). Even more, the interpretive value of these portrayals has been challenged as a whole (Hayden 1992: 38).

The greater number of female as compared to male idols initially led to the hypothesis that the former, in particular those with overemphasized sexual features, are early indications of a religion which focused on the worship of the Great Mother Goddess or Fertility Goddess, known from later textual and archaeological documents of the Near East. The Great Mother model has been widely used to designate a variety of divinities and symbols connected with life-giving and regenerative forces such as fertility, sexual union, birth, nurturing, and the growing cycle (see especially Gimbutas 1982, 1986, 1989a and b, 1991). The belief in the Mother Goddess archetype was deeply influenced by psychoanalytic theories which have been rejected (Bailey 1994a), perhaps too dogmatically, as having absolutely no relevance to what the archaeological record may reveal about the beliefs and rituals of Neolithic people. Certainly we should not underestimate Gimbutas' pioneering research on the symbolic potentials of

prehistoric art. Nevertheless, her decontextualized arguments, especially the uncritical association of Neolithic imagery with the so-called prehistoric matriarchy, have rightly been challenged as archaeologically untenable (Barnett 1992; Chourmouziadis 1994; Fagan 1992; Hayden 1986; Marangou 1992; Talalay 1991, 1993).

Current scholarship has adopted a broader perspective and applied a multiplicity of working hypotheses for 'reading' this category of Neolithic art. Specifically, attention has been drawn to a number of variables which can help establish a rigorous approach, namely to the figurines themselves, their archaeological and systemic contexts, as well as ethnographic analogies (Talalay 1991: 49, 1993: 44). From this standpoint there would be no incompatibility with parallel or cross-cutting uses and meanings of these early images including symbolic signification, ceremonial or cultic content, decoration or even daily use. Instead of the all-encompassing and thus problematic Mother Goddess theory, a range of alternative functions and symbolic values has been suggested on the basis of the morphological, typological, stylistic, and thematic variability of the figurines. These have been collectively considered as ritual and magical objects, teaching devices, charms, tokens, toys, and ornaments (Talalay 1993; Ucko 1962, 1968); portraits of prehistoric individuals (Bailey 1994a; Gallis and Orphanidis 1994); depictions of personal desires or even rudimentary signs of a 'proto-script' (Chourmouziadis 1978: 50–1, 1994).

Discussion

Allowing for a 'multivocal' character of the anthropomorphic figurines, we have chosen in this chapter to treat them as material symbols of a complex of notions and values interwoven with gender arrangements. In the following sections we will discuss possible uses of these artefacts which, we think, may shed some light on the ways that Neolithic peoples in the Aegean perceived, shaped and 'acted out' their genders.

Depicting the body: 'archetypes', 'portraits' and ambiguous forms

Many figurines, both 'naturalistic' and abstract, provide evidence for a selection of, and emphasis on, certain aspects of femininity and masculinity (Hodder 1990: 60–70). Specifically, a consistent concern for the erotic and reproductive areas of the human body can be recognized in both cases. To begin with 'naturalistic' representations, a group of corpulent female images are characterized by an exaggerated modelling of the breasts, belly and buttocks (Figure 8.1), whereas the facial features are not executed in detail or may even be missing. Frequently the very posture of the statuette, holding or supporting her breasts with her hands (Figure 8.2), is suggestive of a special meaning ascribed to this part of the body which is closely connected with nurturing and sexuality. Indicative are also some figurines in what can be interpreted as a birth-giving position, from Achilleion (Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.46, p.1.7.11) (Figure 8.3) and Sitagroi (Gimbutas 1986: figs 9.51, 9.146–9). On the other hand, even in cases

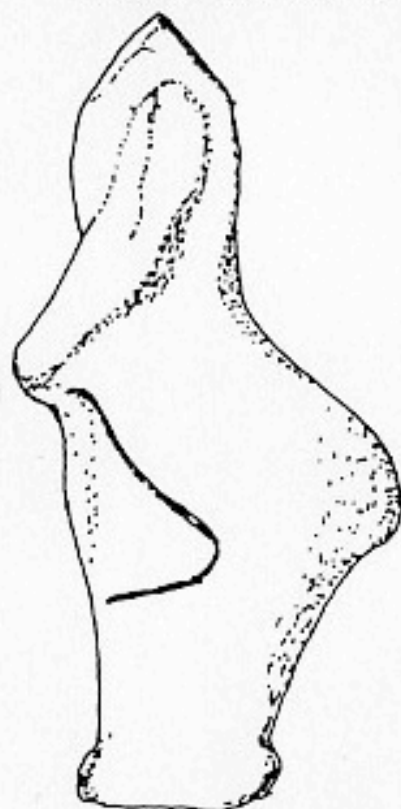


Figure 8.1 Female figurine. Early Neolithic, Prodromos, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 27)

of considerable schematization the pubic triangle (Figure 8.4) or the breasts are often clearly shown. As far as the male body is concerned, it is the phallus that receives similar attention (Marangou 1991). In several abstract examples it is the only anatomical feature depicted, while in more 'naturalistic' pieces it constitutes an explicitly marked trait; characteristic are figures of either style which are shown touching their genitals. The phallus is also modelled as an autonomous form (Figure 8.5), or attached on pots, and the whole body of some idols has a phallic shape (Figure 8.6).

The above examples of what may be described as an 'iconography of sexuality' seem to echo an attempt of Neolithic people to understand and interfere symbolically in the phenomenon of fertility. We can imagine that the very experiences, anxieties, and wishes of everyday life would have inspired the themes and aesthetics of Neolithic idoloplastic (Chourmouziadis 1994: 222–31), as well as they would have been felt in the ritual sphere (Barrett 1991) with which several of those effigies were possibly associated. The woman's body, in particular, is likely to have been envisaged as participating in a more obvious and essential way in the creation and sustaining of life (Chourmouziadis 1994: 82). This may be one of the reasons that the female image is most 'visible' in the art of this period.

A peculiar manifestation of the interest in the mysteries of human biology may be recognized in a series of women's statuettes with emphasized breasts and/or buttocks and a phallus-shaped neck (Figure 8.2). Although an elongated,

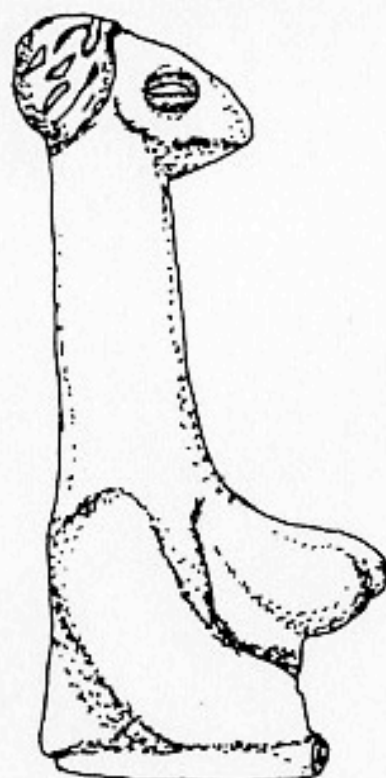


Figure 8.2 Torso of a woman supporting her breasts with her hands. Early Neolithic, Ayia Anna, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 39)

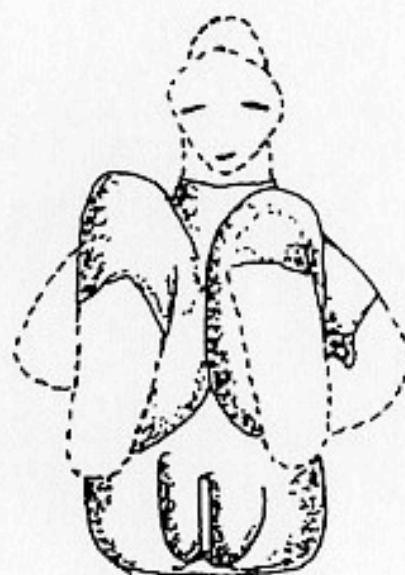


Figure 8.3 Female figurine in a birth-giving posture. Early Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.46(1))

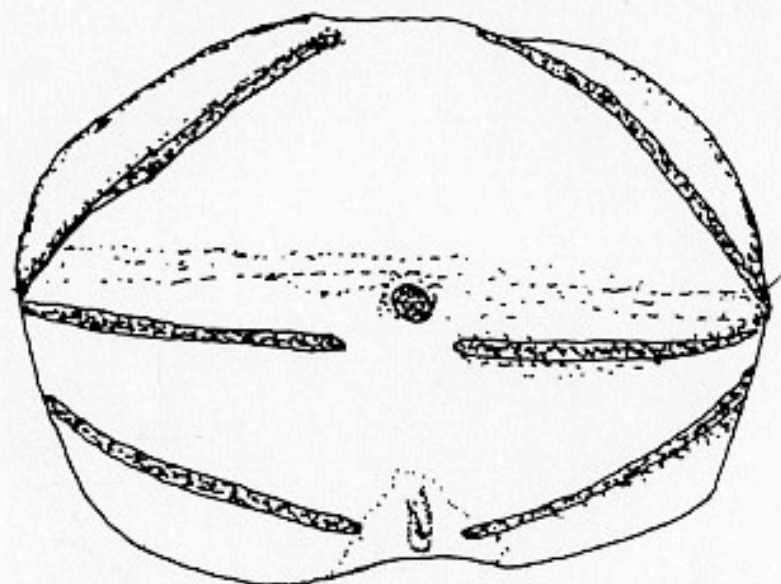


Figure 8.4 Schematized figurine with emphasized pubic area. Early Neolithic, Prodromos, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 11)



Figure 8.5 Painted phallus. Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 2 low left)

phallic-looking stem is often used as neck in figurines of both sexes (see Chourmouziadis 1994: 197–8), in this particular group of expressly 'female' representations such an iconographic convention could perhaps be 'read' as an amalgamation of reproductive qualities within the body of the woman-mother. Female fertility symbolically transgresses, we suggest, the boundaries of sexual dimorphism and the division between 'man' and 'woman'. In other words, it rises to the level of an 'archetypal' image, an epitome of Neolithic people's ontology which was deeply embedded in the agricultural mode of life.

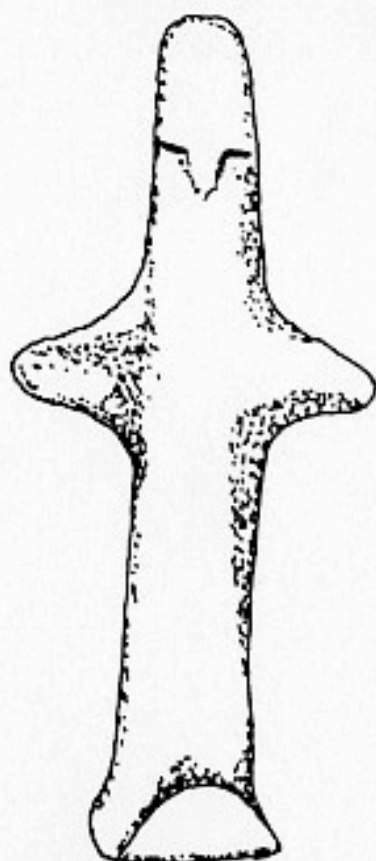


Figure 8.6 Phallus-shaped figurine. Early Neolithic, Prodromos, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 3)

Far beyond biological determinants, human procreative capacities embrace cultural phenomena, especially notions of sexuality, personal identity, child care, social organization of power (see Bolen 1992; Chourmouziadis 1994: 135–6). In early farming communities, reproduction and maternity could be metaphorically parallel to agriculture, both phenomena consisting in the dramatic transformation of natural elements into life by human – biological *and* cultural – interference. This idea is suggested, among other things, by the occurrence of several female figurines within or near hearths and storage spaces (Marangou 1992: 222–3; Papaefthymiou-Papanthimou 1987: 175). Moreover, the rendering of the eyes of some female figurines in the shape of corn grains (so-called ‘coffee-bean eyes’) (Chourmouziadis 1994: 93; Theocharis 1973: 67) (Figure 8.2) might echo similar symbolic associations, even if such plastic modelling of the eyes is not limited to ‘naturalistic’ female images (see Chourmouziadis 1994: 93). Interestingly the idol of a seated woman from the Early Neolithic site of Prodromos in Thessaly preserves an impression of wheat grain on its shoulder. This find led the excavator, G. Chourmouziadis (1994: 70–3), to the hypothesis that many figurines were originally decorated with real grains which would in other cases be imitated by clay pellets that were applied as eyes or as decorative elements on the body and head of several statuettes (Figure 8.7).

The emphasis on the reproductive functions of the human body is counter-



Figure 8.7 Fragments of figurine decorated with grain-shaped pellets. Middle Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.37(1))

balanced by two other iconographic types of Neolithic idoloplastic which point to different avenues of communication via anthropomorphic imagery: (i) the so-called 'portraits', a series of realistic heads, each one of particular style and morphology that can be taken as representations of actual persons (see especially Gallis and Orphanidis 1994), and (ii) the a-sexual or ambiguous images, namely idols with no clear indication of sex or of a totally abstract form.

(i) A considerable number of broken realistic heads have come to light in Thessaly. In these faces we may recognize a purposeful deviation from the standard modelling of the human image. The makers chose instead 'to convey age, physical deformation or the facial expressions of real persons' (Gallis and Orphanidis 1994: 159; cf. Chourmouziadis 1994: 212). These creations raise puzzling questions: what are the reasons for this interest in realistic imitation? What was so special in the persons portrayed to deserve depiction? Many heads are characterized by an outstanding plastic quality and such an expressive power that they have been tentatively interpreted as portraits of important members of Neolithic society (Gallis and Orphanidis 1994: 156). This may be true but then we must realize that 'importance' does not seem to exclude ugliness. Indeed the range of portraits suggests that wrinkles, wounds, or even physical deformities might stimulate as vivid an interest as faces of outstanding expressive strength; the so-called 'hydrocephalous' (Chourmouziadis 1994: 212) or 'mongol child' (Theocharis 1973: 80) provides a striking example of the former group. Unfortunately, most of the heads do not preserve their body so that it is not possible to reconstruct the original image. There are, however, a few better preserved figurines that show a comparable interest in the deformities of the body: women with 'humps' are known from Kara Moular and Stefanovikion, while the so-called 'old woman' from Tzani Magoula depicts a body and face that have suffered from age and/or some anatomical problem (Chourmouziadis 1994: 27; Theocharis 1973: figs 203, 205). Would such images have been made in a mocking mood or as an expression of awe? It is impossible to tell. It may be helpful to note that several of the 'portrait'-heads were perhaps originally attached to large vases or placed on top of house models that would be similar to the models surmounted by anthropomorphic heads from Porodin and other Balkan sites (Chourmouziadis 1994: 212; for Balkan examples see Gimbutas 1991: figs 7.53–56).



Figure 8.8 Acrolithic figurine. Final Neolithic, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 64 upper right)

(ii) The type of a-sexual figurine occurs all over the Aegean, and the earliest examples already date in the Early Neolithic (for example, Talalay 1993: 12, 23–4). In the later Neolithic phases there are two characteristic variations of schematic acrolithic figurines with no indication of sex. The first includes stone cross-shaped forms, head and torso that end in a pointed protuberance by means of which it was probably inserted into a clay core (Theocharis 1973: figs 208, 227). The second variation consists of stone triangular, oval or trapezoidal heads that were inserted into a roughly shaped clay body (Gallis and Orphanidis 1994: figs 19–21; Theocharis 1973: fig. 198). How are such utterly simplified forms to be explained? The expressive abilities of Neolithic idol-makers, evidenced in the ‘portraits’ as well as in the large number of ‘naturalistic’ figurines discussed above, do not allow for the hypothesis that people switched to abstract representation because they did not know otherwise. For instance, in the Late Neolithic we also have examples of acrolithic female figures from Mandalo in West Macedonia with very eloquently modelled buttocks and pubic area (Papaeftymiou-Papanthimou 1987: figs 1–5). Indeed the co-existence of naturalistic ‘gendered’ images and abstract a-sexual figures throughout the Neolithic, suggests that we should consider the latter as deliberate a choice as the emphasis on gender and sexuality might have been in the former case (Talalay 1993: 12). In other words, schematic images may have been intended to convey the general concept of human without further specification (Chourmouziadis 1994: 190–1). In fact several of them are characterized by technical competence in execution and by a particular aesthetic quality: the cross-shaped torso is sometimes brilliantly decorated (Theocharis 1973: fig. 227) while the many stone geometric heads can have facial features vividly painted in a highly stylized fashion (for example, Gallis and Orphanidis 1994: figs 19–20) (Figure 8.8). In the painted heads the face again becomes the focus of interest and formal

elaboration (Chourmouziadis 1994: 211), in a way comparable with and yet radically different from facial treatment in the 'portrait' series examined earlier. Whatever reasons may have dictated the concentration on the human face in some figurines – while lively preoccupation with the 'sexual' and 'gendered' human body is apparent in others – are not easy to decipher from the available data. At the moment we can only assume that both phenomena allude to important concepts and ideals.

Neolithic households: symbolic elaboration and social reproduction

As has already been noted, the majority of the figurines derive from habitational contexts. In Achilleion, for example, they were 'omnipresent in human activity areas inside and outside the house' (Gimbutas 1989a: 213): within the houses they were recovered at or on benches, or in areas used for food preparation, pottery-making and other workshop activities. In open-air courtyards they occurred at the extended platforms of ovens or hearths, and on benches adjoining these constructions. Several came from pits some of which Gimbutas has described as ritual, others as garbage. Figurines were often found in groups of as many as 14 pieces, while a single house yielded a total of 30. Together with these statuettes was found a whole array of artefacts ranging from plain and decorated pottery; bone awls, querns, and chipped stone tools, the latter including a lot of obsidian blades; stone palettes; clay utensils, such as ladles and discs; spindle whorls and spools; zoomorphic figurines, anthropomorphic vessels, and other fragmentary plastic forms; models of furniture and ceramic axes; and an alabaster seal (Gimbutas 1989a: 213–18). The figurines from the earliest strata at this site (c. 6300–6200 BC) provide 'the earliest evidence so far in Europe for the association of figurines with the house, oven and bench' (Gimbutas 1989a: 214).

Figurines from systematically excavated floor layers, like those at Achilleion and other comparable contexts (see review in Talalay 1993: 72–9), support the idea that these items were primarily associated with the *domus*, to use Hodder's term (1990: 38). He defines the *domus* as involving, on the one hand, a range of practical activities carried out in the domain of the Neolithic household, the basic social unit. These include the construction of dwellings and domestic facilities; storage, processing, serving and consumption of food acquired through agricultural production and animal herding, as well as fishing, hunting, and gathering; the manufacture of bone and stone tools, such as awls, spatulae, querns, and blades; various crafts, like spinning and weaving, basketry, mat-making, hide-processing, ceramic production, and ornament-making. On the other hand, the symbolic connotations of such practices have been stressed: the house has been treated as a focus for symbolic elaboration and as a metaphor for social and economic strategies and relations of power (Hodder 1990: 44–5).

It is reasonable to assume that negotiations of time, space, resources, energy, and knowledge would be required in order to carry out the productive tasks of Neolithic domestic economy and to manipulate their end products. Negotiations would have involved decision-making on an intra-household, intra- or



Figure 8.9 Human face attached on a vessel. Middle Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.54)

inter-community level, affiliations between individuals and social groups, inter-marriages, the exchange of raw materials, goods, information, and expertise. Accordingly we may argue that the Neolithic household would have provided an appropriate framework for the materialization of ideologies, including gender roles, both among its members and between the various household-based groups (families?) in the community and beyond (Chapman 1991; Tringham 1991). The available archaeological data allow the hypothesis that such strategies of social reproduction would not rely on the fulfilment of social duties alone, but also on the integration of daily practices into a symbolic framework of references, including cosmological beliefs, ritual performances, and the production and use of art forms (Conkey 1991). We might then imagine that Neolithic men, women or children created and used their material symbols, including figurines, within the context and as a key element of the *domus*-centred action and interaction. The foundation offering from Plateia Magoula Zarkou, recovered under a house floor and possibly depicting adult and younger members of the same family (Gallis 1985), indeed points to this direction.

The evidence discussed so far suggests that the cosmological perceptions of Neolithic people were inextricably linked with the daily experience of transforming natural resources into cultural benefits. Thus, the depiction of the human body in its sexual and procreative capacity is likely to have acquired ideological importance. Such an idea is suggested, among other things, by the depiction or attachment of human forms upon ceramic vessels (Figure 8.9), a category of artefacts closely connected with basic practices of Neolithic domestication, like storage and food serving. Sometimes the whole pot is made in the shape of a figurine. Talalay (1993: 35) has drawn attention to possible conceptual links between Neolithic pots, figurines and the human body, which can be deduced from the use of the same decorative motives on pottery and figurines as well as the incorporation of anthropomorphic elements in vessel forms; Gimbutas (1989a, b) has discussed further the ritual and symbolic implications of such metaphoric links. It is interesting to note that anthropomorphic attachments appear on a variety of pots, ranging from storage jars to serving receptacles to what has been described as 'social ceramics' (Elster 1986), namely plastic vessels and tripods of probable ceremonial function.

A powerful imagery: figurines and social negotiation

Having thus far argued for the symbolic significance of anthropomorphic figurines in relation to the *domus*, we can now turn to their rôle in the construction of power within the household and beyond. We would like to propose that the visual emphasis on the female element may be interpreted as a possible source of power. Ian Hodder has remarked that representation, whether overt or muted, can itself be a form of power (Hodder 1991a: 14). Such a symbolically encoded power, as we may recognize with regard to female figurines from the Aegean, should be understood as power from within, or, to use Miller and Tilley's (1984: 5) definition, as 'power to'. They discuss this form of power as an integral and recursive element of social interaction: it is only manifested through its effects on individuals, groups and institutions, and therefore should be distinguished from 'power over' which involves coercion and asymmetrical forms of social domination. This does not mean, however, that 'power to' is not subject to challenges and does not need reconfirmation. On the contrary, in studying prehistoric ideologies we should be alert to '... different types of power which overlap and conflict and are continually being negotiated between different interest groups. Power is not simply a "reality" of force but is also linked to meanings, values and prestige' (Hodder 1991b: 170).

From this perspective the central symbolism of the feminine in Neolithic idoloplastic should not necessarily be taken as an implication of women's authority (Bailey 1994b). Instead, we should allow for the possibility that certain aspects of femininity were conceptually central, and as such they could have become appropriate vehicles for the communication of important cultural information and ritual knowledge. As suggested earlier, the transmission of such messages may often have been a matter of negotiation. If we accept Bender's argument (Bender 1985) that control of ritual knowledge lies at the roots of social differentiation, we begin to appreciate the ideological significance of figurines, especially of female imagery, as material symbols in the power dynamics of the household and by extension of Neolithic society as a whole (Chapman 1991).

Other aspects of power discourse can perhaps be discerned in a group of seated figurines of both sexes. Commenting on male figures seated on a stool (Figure 8.10), researchers chose to view them as depictions of resting farmers (Chourmouziadis 1994: 91) or 'images of social power' (Chourmouziadis 1994: 82), namely representations of esteemed members of the community (Marangou 1991: 19). Both 'readings' are plausible, although images of women seated on the ground or on a stool (Figure 8.11) have also to be taken into account if we hope to understand why certain figurines are shown in a seated posture. What we find more difficult to be reconciled to is the idea of Gimbutas (1982) that those male figures represent leaders, priests or gods. Social organization in the Aegean Neolithic world, as can be traced in the archaeological record, does not appear to have been based on any type of institutionalized authority (Demoule and Perlès 1993: 406). Consequently, the notion of an official, fully developed pantheon cannot be substantiated, for such a form of religion is

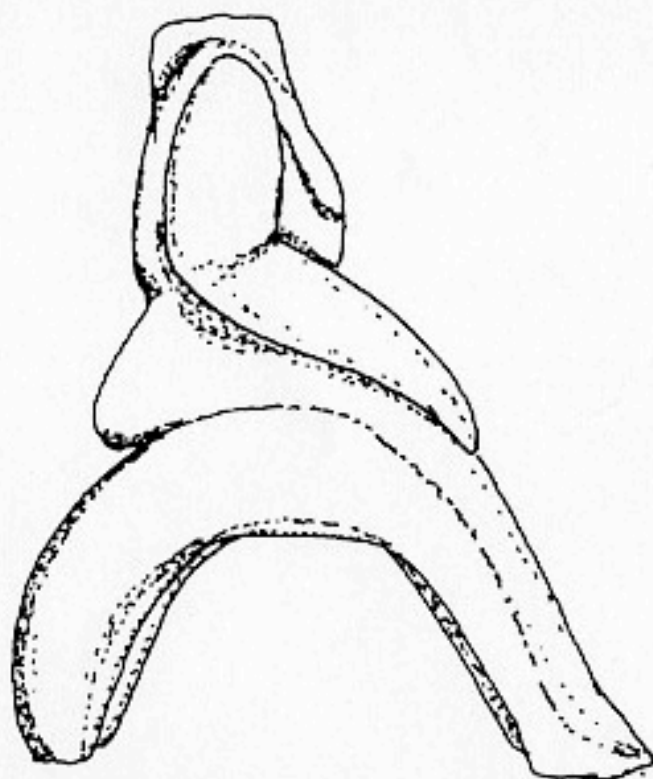


Figure 8.10 Male figurine seated on a stool. Pyrassos, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 8)



Figure 8.11 Figurine of a seated woman. Middle Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.38(1b))

connected to a social order more complex than that prevailing in the period under consideration. Instead, Neolithic cult would have been primarily domestic and pretheistic (Theocharis 1981: 63), focused on ancestral veneration and permeated by beliefs in general superhuman and supernatural forces rather than personified deities (Anati 1986; Talalay 1993: 75). Be that as it may, figurine

groupings in certain areas of Thessalian and Macedonian sites (Achilleion, Nea Nikomedeia, Tsangli) imply the existence of special ritual loci within the village. This possibility is reinforced by Balkan parallels where similar concentrations of statuettes have been interpreted by Chapman (1989) as marks of areas which housed communal gatherings or ceremonies of primary ideological importance. Some forms of ritual control and 'centralization' seem to have operated further north in the Balkans (Whittle 1985), but it is still hard to reconstruct similar processes for the Aegean cultures with equal confidence. However, we should not preclude any form of social differentiation within Aegean farming communities either. It is not unlikely that 'hierarchies' related to individual or family position, gender, age, and experience were at play. It might not be accidental that representations of elderly individuals of both sexes do occur throughout the Neolithic: they are portrayed seated or standing, dressed or naked, with fleshy but not so firm bodies and faces sometimes marked by wrinkles and other signs of advanced age (see Chourmouziadis 1994).

Possible functions

The material discussed above allows us to view Neolithic idoloplastic in its iconographic variety as a material code of communication through which people tried to represent and shape cultural realities (cf. Talalay 1993: 50). As essential components of this communicative apparatus, the depictions of men and women would have encompassed and, in turn, produced concepts and values embedded in social and gender identities. Consequently, the ideological role of these artefacts should have involved a diversity of meanings and possible functions. An interesting function of figurines as tokens has been proposed with regard to the 'split-leg figurines' from the north-eastern Peloponnese. Because they have been found only in a limited number of settlements not very far from each other, it is believed that these detached half-fragments were used as symbols of recognition by trading or other partners, each partner keeping one of the two matching halves (Talalay 1987, 1993: 45-6).

As indicated by ethnographic data, figurines can have various uses ranging from initiation ceremonies to magic. At the 'mundane' end of the scale they are simply toys. They can also serve as pedagogic items in puberty rites, with the aim of explaining the biological functions of the human body. It is likely that the Neolithic statuettes with accentuated sexual features, as well as the effigies of pregnant women, of women in the posture of giving birth or of others holding babies (*kourotropoi*), and the phallus-shaped objects were especially appropriate for this purpose. In addition to these categories, messages relating to social roles may have been conveyed by means of seated or reclining figures (Figure 8.12) and those involved in daily tasks (Figure 8.13). Furthermore, figurines bearing dress (Figures 8.14, 8.15) and head-dresses (Figure 8.16a and b), ornaments (Figure 8.17), or tattoos (Figure 8.18) on their bodies and faces may denote individual styles, or else could have helped impart a communal ethos both on an intra- and an inter-site level. The evidence for dress, adornment and bodily decoration (Figure 8.19) of Neolithic figurines is quite varied, possibly alluding

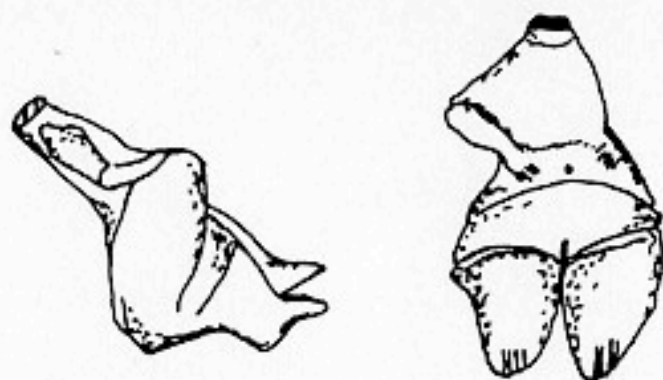


Figure 8.12 Figurine of a reclining woman. Middle Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.35(1))

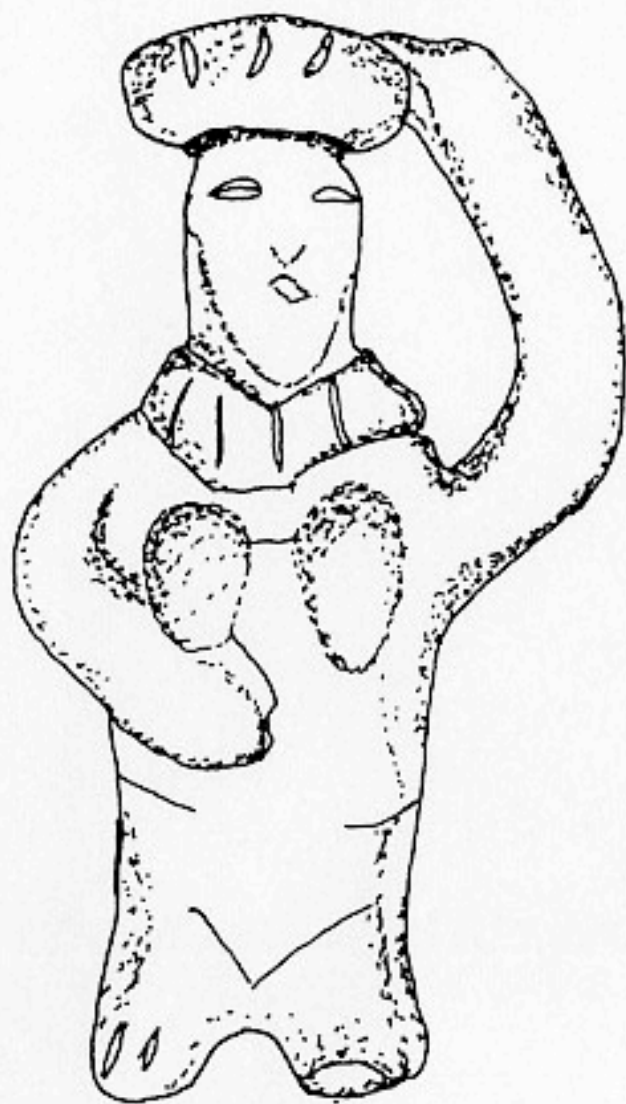


Figure 8.13 Female figurine carrying a loaf of bread (?). Early Neolithic, Prodromos, Thessaly (after Chourmouziadis 1994: pl. 81)

to a multiplicity of cultural messages, and certainly deserves a future comprehensive study.

Equally, figurines may depict mythical personages or ancestors (Chapman 1991). In the realm of sympathetic magic they were possibly employed in order to enhance human procreation and the fertility of nature or as apotropaic amulets. Noteworthy is a group of phallus-shaped pendants, some of them modelled in a very 'naturalistic' fashion, which have been interpreted as erotic charms (Chourmouziadis 1994: 87–9). Finally, ethnographic reports (Talalay 1993: 40–4) warn us that a single figurine can have multiple functions, according to its context of use.

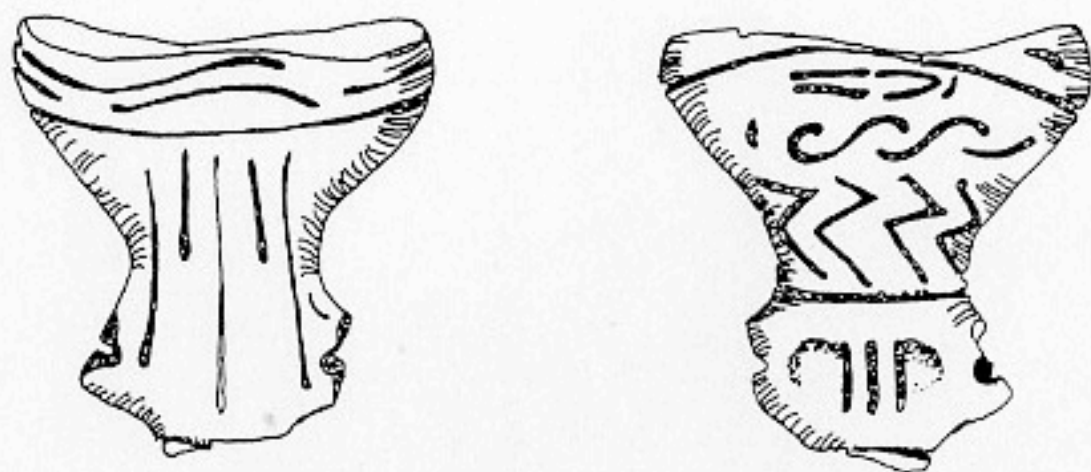


Figure 8.14 Female figurine with incisions possibly indicating dress. Late Neolithic, Sitagroi, Macedonia (after Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.12)



Figure 8.15 Female figurine with incisions possibly indicating dress. Late Neolithic, Sitagroi, Macedonia (after Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.21)

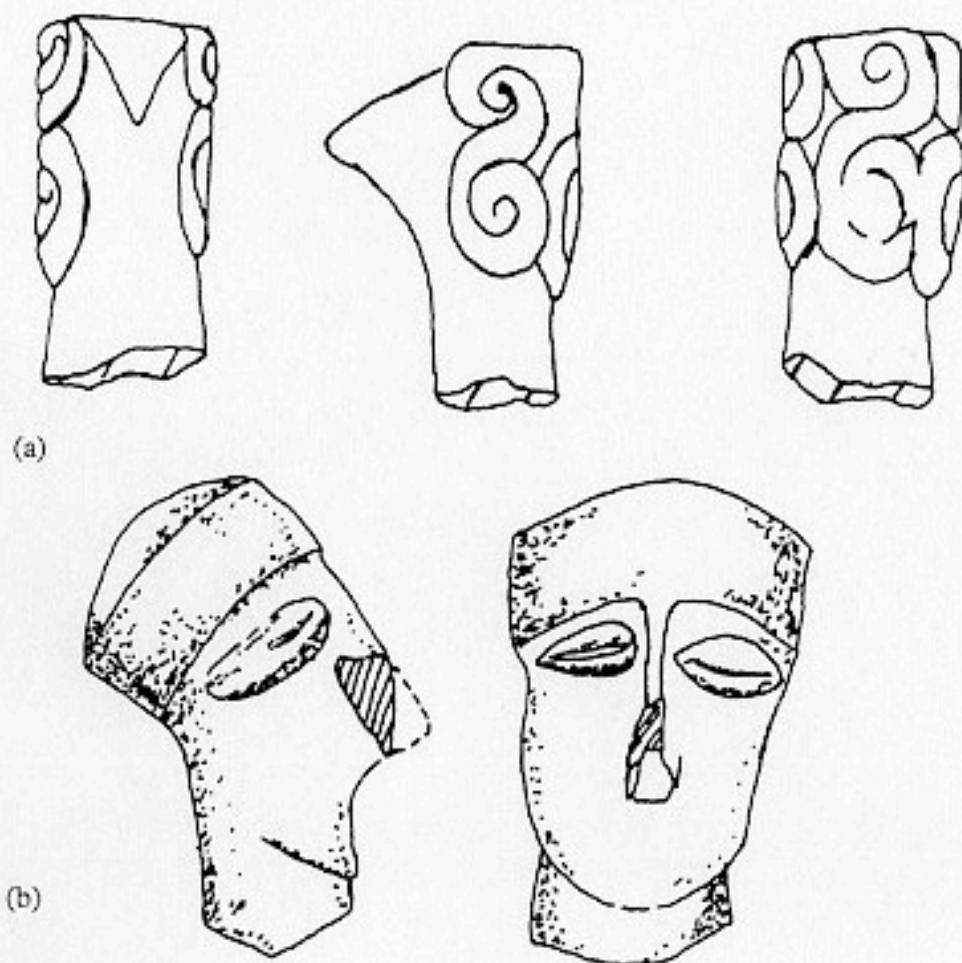


Figure 8.16 Figurines with head-dresses from Sitagroi (a) and Tsangli (b) (after Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.24 and Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.22(2) respectively)

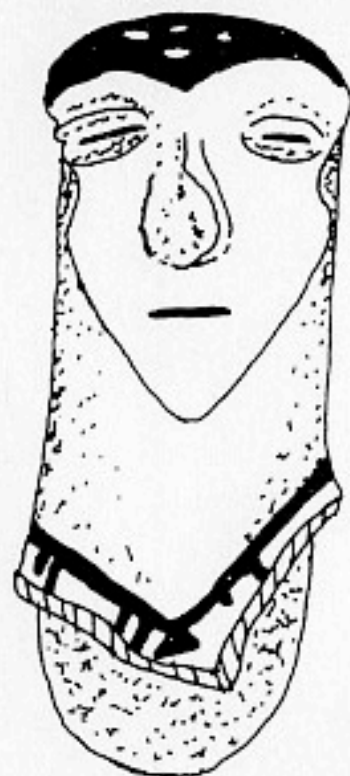


Figure 8.17 Phallus-shaped head wearing necklace. Middle Neolithic, Achilleion, Thessaly (after Gimbutas 1989a: fig. 7.51 right)

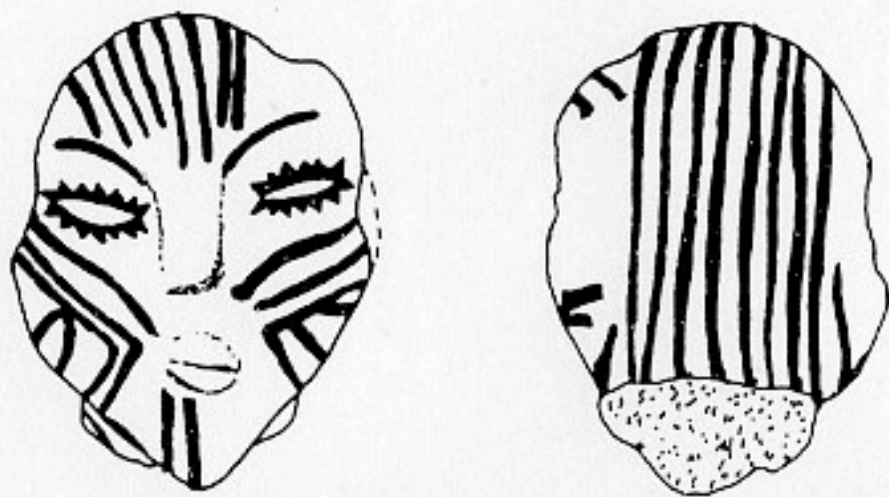


Figure 8.18 Figurine head with tattoo. Late Neolithic, Sitagroi, Macedonia (after Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.27)

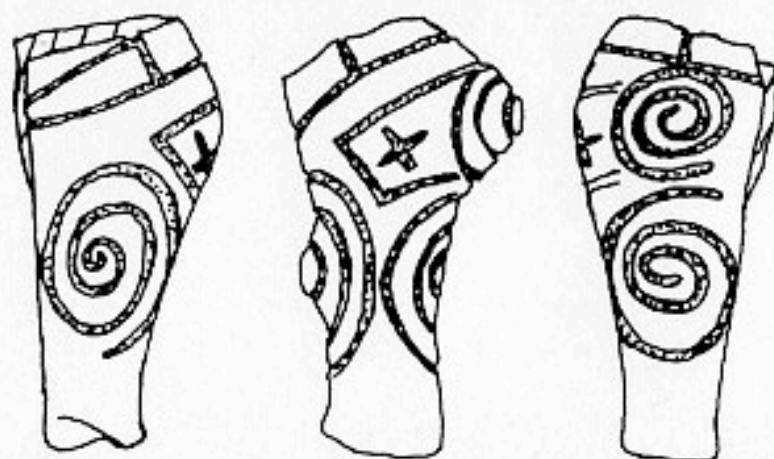


Figure 8.19 Figurine fragment with rich incised decoration on the legs and buttocks. Late Neolithic, Sitagroi, Macedonia (after Gimbutas 1986: fig. 9.18)

Conclusion: depicting the body, constructing ideologies

We have attempted to outline the gender and other social implications of anthropomorphic idolo plastic in the Aegean Neolithic. We have proposed that the human body may have functioned as one of the organizing metaphors by which the world of Neolithic people was ordered and understood. In concluding, we wish to argue that this category of material culture possibly operated within a framework of symbolically and ritually encoded behaviours, on a collective or a personal level. Following Bell (1992: 182–223), ritualization of social practices can be best considered as a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relations, which makes it ideologically effective. Accordingly, we suggest that Neolithic body imagery was perceived and used within an ideological setting which underlies the construction of gender identities, the performance of cultural roles, and the creation of social bonds among Neolithic people.

Admittedly, the current state of Neolithic figurine studies, as outlined in this chapter, does not yet provide definite answers to basic questions related to the manufacture and use of these images. By whom were they produced, and for whom? Where, how, and why were they made? How was shared information attested by stylistic similarities in the figurine corpus of different geographical regions transmitted? Who was controlling the production of figurines? Who was organizing the ritual events in which they may have been used? Was production and/or use gender-, age- or otherwise-specific? Was figurine-making always as purposeful as we imagine, or should we also allow for humorous moods and last-minute decisions to account for the production of at least some figurines in moments of leisure? Puzzling as these issues may be, we can still suggest some symbolic content for these artefacts and explore their ideological implications in the social context of the Aegean Neolithic. Far from being exhaustive, our discussion has hopefully highlighted some of these implications which are now beginning to ripen for future research.

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