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Building biographies and households

Aspects of community life in Neolithic northern Greece

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns the built landscape of Neolithic Thessaly and western Macedonia, Greece, and the identities that may have been constituted through its inhabitation. It focuses on the buildings as material entities and it specifically attempts to highlight the bearings of buildings upon people's lives, tracing the invocation of their materiality in the discourse of architecture and beyond. It is suggested that in this way we leave open the possibility that structures different from our own were performed in the past.

KEYWORDS

architecture • community • household • identity • object biography

■ INTRODUCTION

In the continuous effort to interpret Neolithic material culture in Greece, much emphasis has been laid on architecture and spatial organization, particularly within settlements (Halstead, 1989, 1999, 2006; Hourmouziadis,



1979; Kotsakis, 1994, 1996a, 1999, 2003a, 2004, 2006; Nanoglou, 2001). In this context the household was and still remains the main analytic construct. Arguably, the increasing frequency with which it has been used is due to a reaction to problems concerning the use of the concept of the family in archaeology. Most likely it is also due to the concept's material connotations, namely its relation to the notion of the house. From the point of view of archaeology's interest in the study of the materiality of life, the relation between house and household has important implications for the uses and meanings of the household as an analytical concept (see Hendon, 1996: 47). Thus, investigation concerning the possible ways in which buildings were implicated in social life should begin with their constitution as material entities.

■ BUILDINGS AS CONSTITUENTS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES

The majority of archaeologists working in Greece have treated the household as a self-evident term, and they have focused mainly on the economic viability and independence of the social unit to which it corresponds (Tomkins, 2004; see also Düring and Marciniak, 2005, for comparable observations regarding Neolithic Anatolia). Generally, the household has been used as a synonym for a family, the members of which share one roof on a relatively permanent basis (Gallis, 1985: 23, 1996: 35; Halstead, 1989, 1999: 79; Perlès, 2001: 184). The identification between household and family has had important consequences for the reconstruction of social life and especially for the understanding of relations of production in the past (Düring and Marciniak, 2005, commenting on Flannery, 1972).

In recent decades household studies has emerged as an independent field of inquiry, especially in the context of Mesoamerican archaeology (Robin, 2003). Drawing mainly on this field, Souvatzi (2000, 2003, 2005) has suggested that attention to the household may yield important insights in the study of Neolithic Greece. Attempting to arrive at a cross-cultural definition of the household as a social group, Souvatzi has argued that the ways in which households *act* are more important than their morphology (2005: 57). However, the practices Souvatzi attributes to the household (production, redistribution, transmission and reproduction – 2003: 335, 2005: 59–60) are not necessarily distinctive to it as they may well concern the whole village within which the household is encompassed, or any other social group for that matter. While attending to social practices is indeed promising, the fact that Souvatzi downplays the material aspects of the household and the spatial coordinates of social activity forecloses the possibility of considering the household as a subject of a specific identity or as a site for specific identifications. Paradoxically, although Souvatzi explicitly

argues for an analytic distinction between household and house, in her own case study, Dimini, she implicitly conflates the two (2003: 335, 2005: 60).

My aim here is to address the issue of identity constitution as a process that is mediated by the use of buildings as material entities situated in social space (Hodder, 1998: 85), rather than to sort out the ways in which identities already formed are expressed and negotiated through the use of material culture (as in Bailey, 2000; see Nanoglou, 2005: 148). In doing so I do not assume that the household as it is currently defined constitutes the sole or the fundamental unit of social structure. In other words, I consider material entities as active mediators of social relations rather than passive reflections of them. Approaching spatial organization and building construction as a 'practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 104)¹ enables one to appreciate that buildings not only have profound consequences for people's understanding of their world, but they also take an active part in the constitution of specific subjectivities. The material world into which people are born and which they inhabit is also the framework within which they try to make sense of themselves and their relation to the world (Barrett, 1987, 1994). Such sense-making always entails the reiteration of practices monitored on various occasions. It is by being repeatedly reiterated in relation to one another that practices become self-evident, mandatory parts of the discourses by means of which people situate themselves in the webs of social relations in the context of which they perform their subjectivity (Butler, 1993: 2). The repeated articulation of material culture and hence the actions related to it empower a certain interpretation of the world, one that performatively constitutes the subjects that engage in these practices. Hence, the crucial question concerns the kinds of subjectivities a particular articulation of buildings has enabled and the bearings of a particular architectural framework upon social life (Jones, 2005). More specifically, it is important to examine whether an identity anchored to a particular kind of building may be traced outside the field of sociality within or for which the building stands. What I am after then is evidence suggesting that people's relation to particular buildings was a significant part of the identities they assumed as they moved between various social fields; in other words, evidence suggesting that people referred to and cited their relation to particular buildings performing an identity that was centred around these buildings, making them the primary foci of reference for their practices. Whether this identity is to be called 'household' is not that important, although I think this is as near as we can get to a meaningful implementation of this term in prehistoric archaeology; that is, I am suggesting that household be used not as an empirically observable analytical unit but rather as a possible outcome-reification of certain practices that were deployed in relation to a building. In this respect the endeavour comes close to the one envisaged by Carsten and Hugh-Jones,



building on the concept of 'house-societies' introduced by Levi-Strauss (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Joyce, 2000).

In exploring the relation between people and buildings in the Greek Neolithic, I focus on Thessaly and western Macedonia, the two regions which have provided most of the findings which have generated discussion on the notion of the household (Figure 1). In the current research context my principal aim is to reformulate this discussion rather than to provide an exhaustive description of every settlement and every building in the area under discussion, and thus I stay on a generic level of interpretation. Assuming that social values and meanings are negotiated and re-negotiated over time, I try to reconstruct the life course or biography of buildings (Bailey, 1990; Gosden and Marshall, 1999), which starts with their



Figure 1 Map of northern Greece with sites mentioned in the text. 1 Giannitsa B; 2 Nea Nikomedeia; 3 Servia; 4 Makriyalos; 5 Revenia; 6 Otzaki; 7 Argissa; 8 Palioskala; 9 Sesklo; 10 Dimini; 11 Achilleion

construction and includes their destruction and transformation into ruins. However, in looking for evidence suggesting that the materiality of the building was a reference point in people's lives which played an important role in the formation of social practices, I also pay special attention to the distribution of social activity around buildings.

■ BUILDING BIOGRAPHIES

In northern Greece, the earliest remains of constructions with standing walls, quadrangular or other in plan, are dated towards the end of the seventh millennium BC. For the period before there is little evidence of open-air features. Between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, evidence of inhabitation is almost exclusively limited to hearths inside caves or right outside them (Galanidou, 1997). Possibly, older Neolithic buildings or habitation constructions are yet to be unearthed (Kotsakis, 2001, 2003b, 2005). Most evidence of early Neolithic building activity comes from settlements displaying a long sequence during the Neolithic. It is possible that they represent the more successful attempts of inhabiting the landscape, while less fortunate cases have escaped (Kotsakis, 2005). If this is so, we have missed the first steps of a discourse that was articulated along with other changes in the life of inhabitants of seventh millennium northern Greece, namely the domestication of plants and animals or the production of pottery.

Although detailed studies of particular buildings dated to the seventh or the first half of the sixth millennium BC (i.e. the Early and Middle Neolithic of Greece, hereafter termed earlier Neolithic) are lacking, one finds hints regarding their construction in the general literature. Thus, the earlier Neolithic tell settlements were dominated by one or two room quadrangular buildings with a single door (e.g. Sesklo A, Figure 2) (Kotsakis, 1996a; Milošević, 1983; Milošević-v. Zumbusch and Milošević, 1971; Nanoglou, 2001: 306; Pyke, 1996; Ridley et al., 2000; Tsountas, 1908; Wace and Thompson, 1912). In another recently identified type of settlement (Andreou and Kotsakis, 1987; Kotsakis, 1999, 2004) – flat and extended – buildings seem to be circular in plan (as in Giannitsa B – Chrysostomou, 1991), but little else is known about them (e.g. the newly excavated Early Neolithic site of Revenia – Besios and Adaktylou, 2004). In fact, interpretations of these settlements are greatly influenced by research on the Late Neolithic (second half of the sixth to first half of the fifth millennium BC) flat extended site of Makriyalos (Figure 3) (Pappa and Besios, 1999, and later). The case of the earlier Neolithic Sesklo, with the contemporaneous tell and flat settlement, both consisting of rectangular buildings, is unique so far (Figure 2) (Kotsakis, 1994, 1996a, 2006). Again, on the tell, i.e. Sesklo A, all

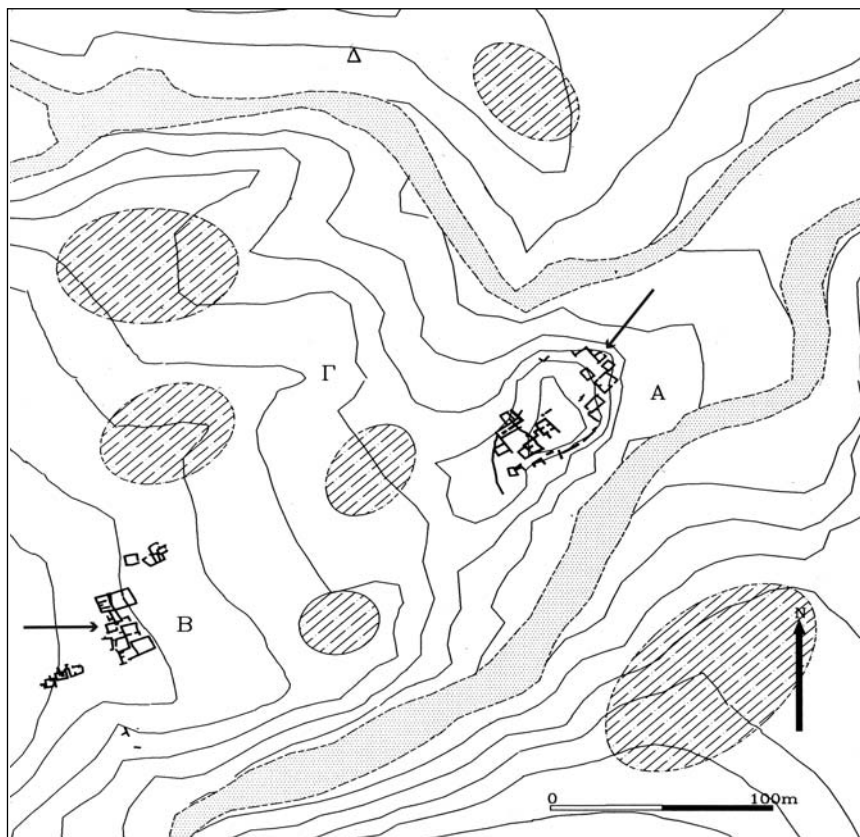


Figure 2 Plan of Sesklo A (the tell) and B (the extended settlement). Arrows point to buildings 37 and A in Sesklo A and B respectively. After Kotsakis, 1994: Fig. 3

buildings are detached and, having only a single door, they may be regarded as coherent, distinct units (Nanoglou, 2001: 306). However, not all buildings share these traits (see the case of buildings 37 and A in Sesklo – Kotsakis, 2003a; Nanoglou, 2001: 308–9, and below) and we should not conflate ‘dominant in area usage’ with ‘dominant in social value’. Nevertheless, these buildings do take up much of the settlement areas, and arguably they hosted much of the daily life of their inhabitants. Their quantitative predominance and their approximate uniformity in plan suggest that they were the principal foci of more or less similar practices in which various groups engaged. While this may not be proven, there are no indications of differences (i.e. excluding the above-mentioned case of buildings 37 and A in Sesklo), on the basis of which they might be assigned to different

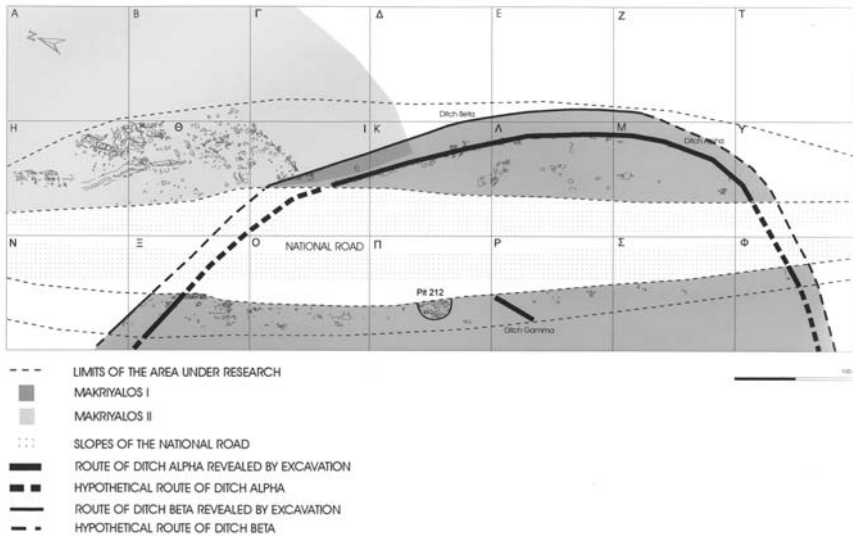


Figure 3 Plan of Late Neolithic Makriyalos. Courtesy of Maria Pappa

categories (e.g. a ‘storage area’ or a ‘community building’). In any case, similar practices need not mean that each and every building was used in the same way as the next, but that buildings were not reserved for special purposes (Lane, 1994).

To investigate the bearings of these buildings upon the constitution of people’s identities we have to review their life in the course of time. This is not easy, since current published reports are either too general (e.g. Pyke, 1996, for Nea Nikomedeia) or they concern very small excavated areas (e.g. Gimbutas et al., 1989, for Achilleion). It is generally held that in Thessaly buildings had stone foundations and were made of mudbricks, whereas in Macedonia they were made of wattle and daub (although detailed studies in Serbia have not recognized wattle as a construction material – Ridley et al., 2000). The quantity of materials and energy resources used was big (Stevanović, 1997) and the actual construction process probably lasted for a considerable period of time. The task required the concentration of quite a few people and the coordination of their actions for a rather lengthy period of time, and in this sense it constituted an event situated in a specific time and place (a spacetime in Munn’s 1986 terminology), but also one that may have been remembered or even commemorated afterwards (Munn, 1986; Nanoglou, 2006).

Every event relating to the building meant new experiences and memories to which participants might refer in the future. ‘Events’ need not be exceptional in character, since all social activity may leave traces. However, special events may have been singled out and referred to



consciously and in detail in narrative or ritual, so as to commemorate them as valuable moments in the structuring of social relations, like 'social events' are celebrated in contemporary society. On the other hand, routine events were certainly cited, even if only by virtue of their reiteration, the constant rehearsal through which they became naturalized. Albeit less pronounced perhaps, cleaning, heating, fixing and other maintenance activities also constituted spacetimes in the course of life and constantly reaffirmed people's relation to the building. I suggest that it was precisely through the reiteration of such practices that the boundaries of the groups that could claim a special relationship with the building materialized (Hodder, 1998: 85, and below).

The available research on Greece provides little information on practices situated around buildings. Reports refer to findings of hearths, pottery, tools and other artefacts or plant and animal remains, but in a generic way (see Ridley et al., 2000, for the most detailed report up to now, although the distribution of the finds is to be commented upon in the second volume of the publication; for the hearths, see later). Moreover, studies like the one conducted by Stevanović (1997) in Opovo have not been undertaken in Greece and practices involved in the destruction of buildings remain more or less unknown. However, some inferences may be drawn from studies concerning the rebuilding of structures within the limits of the settlements.

Because of the influence of western European archaeology on Balkan and Greek archaeology, there has recently been an emphasis on the issue of monumentality, on the differences between tell and flat extended settlements, and on the specific ways buildings were rebuilt in each case (Bailey, 1990; Chapman, 1989, 1997; Kotsakis, 1994, 1999; Nanoglou, 2001; Sherratt, 1984). For my purpose here, the relevant issue of this discussion is not the eventual formation of a tell or a flat settlement, but the different choices involved in reconstruction. Indeed, we can distinguish two general modes of habitation: intensive and extensive. The former refers to the construction of buildings on top of previous ones and on the basis of the original plan (Bailey, 1990; Kotsakis, 1999). The latter refers to the relocation of buildings near or far away from previously existing ones (Chapman, 1989; Nanoglou, 2001: 311). The point of referring to the habitation practice instead of the eventual form of the settlement (tell or flat-extended) is that, although tells were formed through intensive habitation, not all intensively rebuilt settlements necessarily turned into tells, as perhaps is the case in Kovačevo, south-western Bulgaria (Lichardus-Itten et al., 2002). For the moment, what is important is that, through their emphasis on different aspects of the history of a building, these different practices enabled the materialization of different identities. The relocation of buildings within the settlement enabled practitioners of extensive habitation to renegotiate their relationships materially, by rearranging the relations between different buildings in space (Nanoglou, 2001: 311). On the contrary, the rebuilding of

structures on tells alludes to a continuity (Bailey, 1990; Kotsakis, 1999), but one that leaves no physical trace other than the heightening of the ground. The material remains of the buildings are not available as rubble for anyone to see. They are hidden under the newly erected buildings. It is a practice that resembles the sacrifice of the New Guinean images known as *Malanggan*, a ritual act that enables the continuation of the image as memory (Kühler, 2002), but at the same time gives people the opportunity to manipulate the unseen, according to their interests (Nanoglou, 2001: 313). Arguably, the discrepancy between intensive and extensive habitation corresponds to different options regarding the relationship between people and buildings. A fluid yet tangible structure in extensive settlements and a fixed, constant arrangement with an elusive past in intensive settlements probably amounted to different frameworks for social activity.

Here Lane's work among the Dogon (1994) and his emphasis on the uses of the remains of uninhabited buildings is relevant. On the basis of his observations it may be suggested that inhabitants of Greek Neolithic settlements also used the remains of old buildings in different ways. It is likely that the significance of the past in extensive and intensive regimes was different. Possibly, lineage was more easily monitored in extended settlements (Jones, 2005: 215). Moreover, whereas intensive regimes projected an unchanging reality (Lane, 1994: 210–11), perhaps the visibility of remains in extensive settlements enabled inhabitants to relate specific ruins to specific events. The case of abandoned pits that were sealed with pebble-floors in Thermi B (Pappa et al., 2001: 275) may point to the latter situation, while on a long-term basis the fixing of spatial organization in tells and the absence of tangible evidence of previous buildings perhaps evoked a feeling of unchanging continuity. I emphasize the 'long-term', because most likely settlements were not renovated in toto, but partially over the years (see Ridley et al., 2000, for a telling case of settlement renovation through the different phases). Yet, eventually old ruins were covered by new buildings, reconstituting a rigid picture of the settlement.

■ FOOD IS WHERE THE HEARTH IS

Having sketched the biography of Greek Neolithic buildings, we can extend our investigation to their surroundings. One of the issues dominating discussion of buildings and households in Neolithic Greece is the reconstruction of a trajectory from sharing in the earlier Neolithic to hoarding in the later Neolithic and the Bronze Age (Halstead, 1995; Tomkins, 2004), and to the gradual isolation of the household (Halstead, 1989, 1995, see also below). In this context hearths are especially important as places for cooking food (Andreou et al., 1996: 559; Düring and Marciniak, 2005;



Halstead, 1989, 1995). Halstead has argued that cooking outdoors would 'arguably [have] forced sharing of cooked food at least among neighbouring households' (1989: 74) and that such sharing was important for the viability of the household. Indeed, cooperation among the inhabitants of any community would have been inescapable, if survival was in order, but the actual issue here is whether these strategies materialized the identity of the household. According to the argument, the actual existence of households is beyond doubt, and it is also certain that, irrespective of the viability of specific arrangements, the household was an independent unit of production (Halstead, 1989, 1995, 2004). So, discussion of sharing is based on the assumption that what was shared was produce owned by the household. However, since there is no evidence of property rights this assumption is unwarranted and, possibly, a projection of modern structures into the past (Tomkins, 2004: 42).

Even if hearths are indexes of sharing cooked food, it is difficult to interpret this practice as predicated on household individuality. Moreover, the data on outdoors cooking is rather ambiguous. For example, in Middle Neolithic Otzaki there is just one hearth in an open-air yard, whereas there are at least six within structures (Milojčić, 1983). Needless to say this may be due to differences in the size of built and unbuilt areas uncovered. At Early Neolithic Nea Nikomedeia the place of hearths is unclear, but it seems that most of them were indoors (Pyke, 1996: 51). The exact opposite is the case in Middle Neolithic Serbia, where most hearths were found outdoors (Ridley et al., 2000: 92–5). Theocharis states that, in Sesklo, hearths, which were a scarce find (1971: 17), were almost always situated inside buildings (1980: 12).²

So, the picture is too complex for a generalizing interpretation (Perlès, 2001: 194–6). Arguably, hearths played a vital role in the negotiation of community relations, but this hardly amounts to tension between the 'household' and the 'community'. Food sharing was perhaps an important aspect of people's lives, but it is far fetched to assume that it involved the ad hoc suspension of property rights which were taken for granted at all other times.

To complicate the picture further, Kotsakis (2003a) has brought forward a fairly distinctive building in Sesklo A, building 37 (Figure 2): it is rather small, has three doors, and its greater part is occupied by a hearth. The fact that a similar building probably existed in Sesklo B (building A, Kotsakis, 1981; see Figure 2) perhaps suggests a pattern. According to Kotsakis, 'essentially the building housed a great hearth' and therefore it could not have been a house or a warehouse (2003a: 158). It seems rather arbitrary to speak of 'individual' or 'household' rights over such a building. Moreover, comparison of this building (and possibly building A in Sesklo B too) with the known building-models from Neolithic Thessaly suggests that it must have had a symbolic significance not shared by other common

built structures (Nanoglou, 2001: 308–9). If this hearth (or hearths, if we include building A) was the focus of communal practices, its being situated inside a building is significant, because in this way the building cannot be reserved as a reference point for an identity in opposition to the community.

■ CITING BUILDINGS

My focus on the organization of space through architecture is perhaps inevitable given the reliance of our own research tradition on space as a firm ground for social action. Most importantly, if we are to follow the trace of an identity anchored on the building in other strands of social life, we need to get a clear idea of the ways this identity was performed. To infer the exact identity that was materialized through the use of buildings we would need to know the temporality of this use (Lane, 1994; Rappaport, 1990: 15). Yet, by and large, we cannot infer this temporality. Exclusive use of a building by a certain group would certainly have nominated this group as a kind of household, as long as the reiteration of the people's actions would have performatively produced such an identity.

For the moment we can only suggest that free-standing buildings do emerge as significant foci of activity in the settlements of the earlier Neolithic, but not necessarily as foci in opposition to the community. We could interpret the majority of these buildings as houses, but at the same time we should be careful not to identify the practice of building detached structures with the reification of a specific infra-community identity, because there are indications that at least in some cases buildings were used by larger groups. If we accept that building-models referred exactly to this latter kind of building (Nanoglou, 2001: 309), then it was such communal use that exceeded the discursive field of architecture and was invoked in various other contexts.

If we run through other practices investigated in Neolithic Greece (pottery making, lithic procurement, bead production, etc.), then it is clear that, at least on present evidence, none invoked the free-standing building as a reference point in the earlier Neolithic. Instead, some of these practices were pursued at a communal or supra-communal level (Tomkins, 2004: 46; see Perlès and Vitelli, 1999, for a summary of the evidence). On the other hand, storage facilities were distributed all over the settlements and their location within buildings may indeed imply specific rights over the products stored there (Halstead, 1995: 16). For the moment, however, this cannot be resolved. Thus, while the importance of buildings as reference points is undeniable, most likely, an identity based on the exclusive use of a building had not been reified and extended to other realms of social life.



■ COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE LATER NEOLITHIC

It is more or less accepted that the later Neolithic witnesses the institutionalization of the household as an identity or, put another way, 'a more independent household' (Tomkins, 2004: 50; see also Halstead, 1989, 1995). This argument has been based mainly on the evidence concerning a) an apparent colonization of not so optimal areas at higher altitudes, b) some important changes in subsistence regimes and c) the architectural segregation of settlement space in the later Neolithic (Halstead, 1995, has the most concise presentation of the argument). Since I am concerned specifically with buildings, I limit myself to the third aspect and its potential value for the argument. Since the argument was put forward before any significant information on extended settlements was published, I start with the tells.

The information we have is actually not concerning tells, because little is known of 'proper' later Neolithic tells (but see Servia – Ridley et al., 2000: 44–54). The two settlements on which most of the discussion has focused, Sesklo and Dimini (Figure 4), are actually 'pseudo-tells': their Late Neolithic phase was not part of a gradual trajectory from the Middle

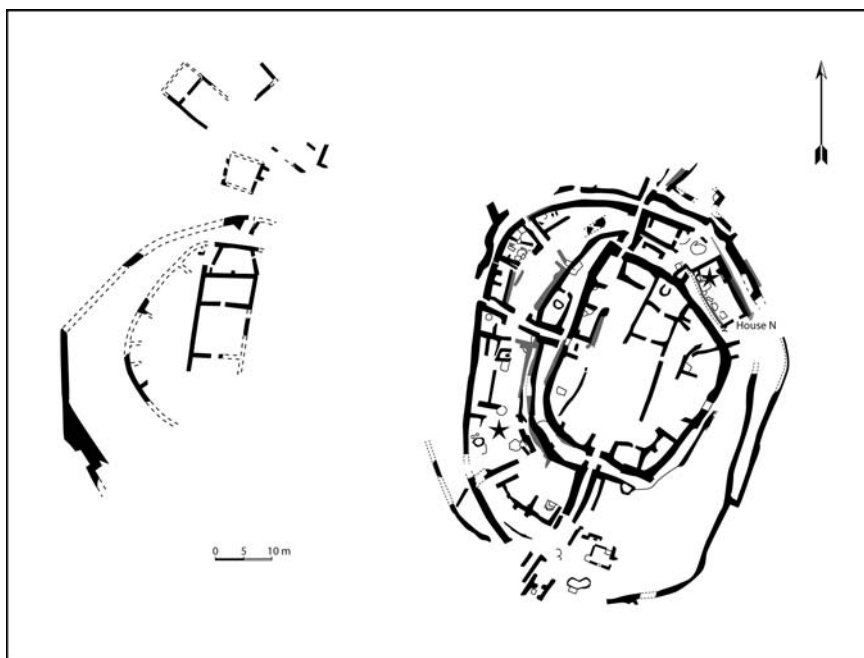


Figure 4 Plans of Late Neolithic Sesklo (left) and Dimini (right). The stars in Dimini pinpoint the areas where the greatest concentrations of *Spondylus* shells were found. Adapted from Theocharis, 1973: Fig. 177, and Hourmouziadis, 1979: Fig. 2

Neolithic, but a fresh inhabiting action on a prominent hill, an action which I have suggested aimed to imitate a tell (Nanoglou, 2001: 313–4). So, in these two settlements (and perhaps other similar ones, like Palioskala in eastern Thessaly, recently discovered – Toufexis, 2006), space was organized on the basis of planning undertaken before inhabitation, though this is not complete and detailed. Such planning practice is indeed indicative of communal level cooperation, which probably constituted the basis of a communal identity.

Within the settlements there is an obvious segregation of space and a concomitant strict regulation of movement (Nanoglou, 2001: 308, 2005: 151). Even more importantly, the actual image of a detached and to some extent independent building has dissolved (Nanoglou, 2001: 308, 2005: 151). This is in accordance with changes observed in later Neolithic building-models, which do not focus any more on the exterior (Nanoglou, 2001: 309; Toufexis, 1996: 161). So the frame of reference within these settlements is different from the one suggested above in relation to earlier Neolithic settlements. The organization of pseudo-tells in concentric circles and the existence of streets going directly to the centre built on top of an intentionally constructed ‘tell’ point to a planning at the level of the community, but a community identified with its centre, in relation to which the rest of the structures constitute a periphery.

A different picture emerges in extended settlements. Late Neolithic Makriyalos in Pieria has been the source of most theorizing on extensive habitation and thus it is pertinent to have a closer look at it (Pappa and Besios, 1999). What characterizes the use of space in Makriyalos is pit-digging. Three types of relevant ‘structures’ exist in Makriyalos: a) subterranean rooms (i.e. basements) for up-standing buildings, b) ditches that circumscribe or cut through the settlement, and c) refuse pits that sometimes are filled under special circumstances (see below) (Figure 3). There are three ditches in the first phase along with numerous pits of various size scattered within the area of the settlement. Importantly, pits associated with buildings were abandoned and buildings were relocated within the settlement, while the ditches were renewed at various instances (Pappa and Besios, 1999: 181). This recurrent use of the ditches could suggest that they were a significant and long-standing concern for people in Makriyalos. Along with evidence presented below, this also suggests a communal identity (Kotsakis, 1999: 74).

■ A FEAST TO REMEMBER

Although commensality as a practice was also invoked in the case of earlier Neolithic communities, indexing its presence from the distribution of hearths within the settlements (Halstead, 1989, 1995), its prominence has been reinforced by an extraordinary find from Makriyalos, namely Pit 212 or Pit ‘Pi’,



dating from the first phase of the occupation at the site, Makriyalos I (Figure 3; Pappa and Besios, 1999). So far this is indeed a unique context where meat, particularly large mammals, and other food were consumed in a short duration of time (Pappa et al., 2004). The accumulation of the material, counting hundreds (even thousands) of animals and a vast amount of pottery along with many and various other artefacts, has been rather quick, perhaps taking only months or a few years (Pappa et al., 2004: 22). The authors convincingly argue that these were the remains of a fairly large communal practice, one that definitely enabled and probably necessitated the renegotiation of communal relationships in Neolithic Makriyalos (Pappa et al., 2004; see also Halstead, 2004). Yet what is important for the argument put forward in this article is that, apart from this communal identity, the authors envisage other levels that might have been followed, namely the 'individual' and the 'household' (Pappa et al., 2004: 39). While they anchor the negotiation of an 'individual' identity on discarded 'individualized' cups (Pappa et al., 2004: 36–7), there is virtually nothing to suggest the invocation of a 'household' identity in the context of this discarding. It is assumed again that animals were the property of households (Halstead, 2004: 157; Pappa et al., 2004: 39–40). However, this is somewhat paradoxical as Halstead states that animal remains from Neolithic Greece suggest an 'emphasis on the *raising of large carcasses for consumption*' (2004: 157, emphasis in the original), which means that animals were owned by 'households' in order to be collectively consumed. Given that viable herds exceeded the capabilities of any single household, as defined by Halstead, and that regular 'reciprocal exchanges between households' must be assumed (Halstead, 1992: 23), there is no point in suggesting that the animals were owned on a household level. The reiterated practices of some sort of collective herding and consumption would have imposed a collective 'ownership'. There is no reason to suggest that there was another collectivity, i.e. the household as defined by Halstead, which was constituted alongside and in spite of these practices. So, Pit 212 does support a communal context of consumption, but not one that contrasts with the household, at least not from what we can infer from the remains in the pit. It is likely that it was a context where the identity of a large group of people was constituted and where the inclusion or the exclusion of certain people was negotiated. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that this group would have been identified with the community (Pappa et al., 2004: 39–41).

■ TRACING THE BUILDING BEYOND ARCHITECTURE

The situation with non-architectural practices appears more complex in the later Neolithic. Pottery wares were produced and circulated under different

regimes (Kotsakis, 1996b) and the same was true regarding chipped stone tools (Perlès and Vitelli, 1999; Skourtopoulou, 1999). So, a number of identities must have been constituted in relation to these practices (local and expedient, regional and specialized, etc.), but none seems to invoke the building as a specific activity area within the settlements. The reconstruction of the production chain of *Spondylus* artefacts in Dimini suggests a community-wide practice (Halstead, 1993; Kotsakis, 1996b: 169). Accordingly, the production and circulation of materials and artefacts in later Neolithic Thessaly and western Macedonia do not seem to have invoked activity areas other than the settlements, one's own or 'others'.

Halstead has argued that the case is different when it comes to the consumption of artefacts, particularly the *Spondylus* artefacts from Dimini (Halstead, 1993). The finished artefacts were deposited principally in two specific areas of the settlement, one of which was inside a building and one in a yard (Figure 4; Halstead, 1993: 604). Most of them were burnt and, judging from the fact that they were found in contexts with other unburnt materials, they must have been deliberately burnt (Halstead, 1993: 607–8). Even more, almost all the *Spondylus* rings were broken (Halstead, 1993: 606). It is rather difficult to assess the temporality of deposition of these artefacts, for there is no known detail of the contexts of their discovery (but see Souvatzi, 2000). Hourmouziadis' report on House N (the one of the two areas where a big concentration of artefacts was found, see Figure 4) is quite sketchy (1979: 149–51). Taking into account that House N is a building with a long occupational history (1979: 149) and the fact that Halstead speaks of more than one cache (1993: 607–8; as does Souvatzi, 2000), it is impossible to determine the exact ways in which these artefacts were deposited. The same is true regarding the other context, the yard in the south-western part of the settlement (Hourmouziadis, 1979: 156–7). Nevertheless, the mere fact that the two principal areas of concentration were of a different character speaks against interpreting the deposition of these artefacts as invoking the building.

Admittedly, these arguments are rather inconclusive as to the activity areas that were invoked in each context where pottery, stone tools or other artefacts were used. It could have been the case that the household loomed large over these contexts, especially if it was by then an established identity, as has been argued (Halstead, 1989, 1995, 2004, 2006; Kotsakis, 1999; Tomkins, 2004). But this is not easy to substantiate. As I have argued above, in pseudo-tells at least, although space was further segregated and restricted areas were multiplied, the image of a spatially independent building dissolved and architecture imposed a rather different discourse (Nanoglou, 2005: 151). Dimini and Sesklo (and Palioskala – Toufexis, 2006) give a picture of coherent wholes, of compact units, and not just visually. The presence of paths that converge to the top of the hill, to a central area occupied by a central building, give the impression of one central reference



point rather than of various independent ones. It seems that in the case of pseudo-tells, instead of witnessing the strengthening of independent households, we see a central building identified with the heart of the settlement, perhaps identifying the identity anchored on it with the communal.

As far as extended settlements are concerned, the presence of ditches in Makriyalos, where indeed most inhumations took place (Pappa and Besios, 1999; Triantaphyllou, 2001), and the definition of contexts of discard like Pit 212 (Pappa et al., 2004) highlight the constitution of a rather communal identity. For the moment it seems that the notion of community stands for different things in the two kinds of habitation, perhaps because of the different practices we have invoked in the discussion: the use of permanent architecture in Sesklo and Dimini as opposed to the intermittent digging and filling up of ditches and pits in Makriyalos. So, even if there are several issues to be resolved before we can proceed further with the reconstruction of the interplay of spacetimes bearing upon identity constitution and negotiation in these settlements, it seems that the building as a coherent and independent unit was not the primary reference point of the discourse by means of which identities were spatialized. This does not mean that there was not an internalization of practices during the later Neolithic (Nanoglou, 2001), but rather, that this internalization did not reinforce the image of the building as a nodal point in the constitution of subjects.

■ CONCLUSION

I have tried to present an alternative approach concerning the ways in which architecture and spatial organization was invoked in the negotiation of social relations, one that does not attempt to find social units in the past, but rather to situate people within a material world which had to be understood and interpreted. This is in keeping with the view that in reconstructing the past, one should be cautious not to resort to assumptions that seem self-evident in the present. In the particular case I set out to examine, the approach advocated here leaves open the possibility that, engaging in different practices, the inhabitants of Greek Neolithic settlements invoked buildings in ways that differed drastically from our own. For the moment it seems that in earlier Neolithic Thessaly and western Macedonia the free-standing building must have been a reference point in people's experience of living among others. However, this type of building is less pronounced in the later Neolithic. In the end, it is important to note that this was not an evolutionary process that unfolded along a predetermined set of stages, but a constant negotiation of social relations contingent upon the various spacetimes where the lives of people and material culture, and even animals, plants and other entities, converged.

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Notes

- 1 In this formulation, discourse is 'the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 104) and there can be no distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 107).
- 2 Theocharis is a bit confusing here, perhaps due to the fact that his 1980 'paper' is not a proper paper but one of his notes, published after his death. He says that modern huts with outside hearths do not differ much from a Neolithic house, but he goes on: 'And in the neolithic house we have: Ipnous (that is ovens or braziers) *inside* the houses' (1980: 12, my italics). I leave out the case of Achilleion (Gimbutas et al., 1989), because its excavation is fraught with problems of interpretation and reconstruction and no valid argument can be based on its current publication (Nanoglou, 2001: 317, note 2; Perlès, 2001: 194).

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