

New Perspectives on Household Archaeology

Edited by

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Between the Individual and the Collective: Household as a Social Process in Neolithic Greece

Stella Souvatzi

This essay aims to shift scholarly perceptions of the household. Instead of viewing the household as an adaptation to external forces or wider social structures, I advocate a view of the household as a process that constructs and reconstructs the wider social environment. I see the household as a producer of change rather than merely a respondent to it. Like any other social institution, the household does not exist outside society or history. Indeed, households are in a constant state of transition and it is in the continually shifting relationships within and between households that wider societal changes can be best understood. The central theoretical argument of this essay is that if we wish to problematize the social practices of the household, it is essential to consider both the interplay between the macro- and micro-levels of analysis and the dialectics between a range of sets of relationships. Social trends, norms, and relationships can be contested or inverted within the household, and thus the developments and transformations at the household level and those in wider social contexts must be examined simultaneously. To do so, this chapter understands both the household and the wider society as fluid, shifting sets of relationships that constantly validate and transform each other. It focuses specifically on the tensions or contradictions between household and community social reproductive strategies, which are variously manifest in Neolithic Greece. I begin by addressing some crucial questions of theory and approach raised during the conference that is the subject of this volume. I pay special attention to two specific theoretical issues, which, in my view, pose serious obstacles to an understanding of the household as a process. One is the stylized and thoroughly static image of the household in many archaeological studies. The other is the notion of a single-directed and uniform change from “simple” to “complex” societies and by extension from simple to complex household organization. I then proceed to an investigation of the material means and practices through which social identities and reproductive strategies were continually (re)produced in houses and settlements in Neolithic Greece, including architecture, material products, rituals, and burials. What I am especially interested to show is that the meaning ascribed to things and practices change at different scales of space and time and, perhaps more importantly, that things and practices can contain double meanings of both household differentiation and community identification.

Questions of Theory and Approach

A number of crucial questions concerning the present and future of household research were raised at the conference round-table. These include: What is the current state of archaeological household research and what should its future development and wider application be? Is it a distinct subfield, firmly embedded within the broader discipline of archaeology, or is it a marginal study not central to archaeological practice? Can household research address the “big” questions or illuminate the “big” pictures of the past?

My most inclusive response to these questions is that understanding households is important for archaeology for many reasons—historical, sociological, and intellectual—and that an archaeological approach to households is particularly crucial to an interpretive theory of social organization. As central and enduring social units, households have material components that connect them to key social phenomena and that can be traced over the remarkable scales of time and space available to archaeology. It is precisely the materiality, spatiality, temporality, historicity, and specificity of households that make them particularly appropriate analytical units for archaeologists. In fact, archaeology can expand considerably the knowledge of the diversity and multidimensionality of social units and can thus add a historical perspective to wider societal transformations. However, in order to do so, it is essential to rethink the relevance of inherited models, to explore ways of approaching households as active and dynamic social entities, and to engage in more systematic theoretical self-reflection.

While there is no doubt that “household archaeology” has contributed considerably to the understanding and systematization of the analytical utility of the household in archaeology, it has rarely overcome its original functionalist and processualist orientation (e.g., Byrd 1994, 2000, 2005; Coupland and Banning 1996; Cutting 2005, 2006; Haines et al. 2004; Hole 2000; MacEachern et al. 1989; Santley and Hirth 1993; Wilk and Ashmore 1988; Wilk and Rathje 1982). Households are often viewed through top-down perspectives as passive responses to wider longer-term social changes rather than the loci of small-scale social action that embodies the complexity and dynamics of everyday life. At the same time, many archaeological debates have moved beyond the household and toward other analytical scales—for example, of the individual or the person on the one hand, or of community or society, on the other (e.g., Canuto and Yaeger 2000; Chapman and Gaydarska 2007; Fowler 2004; Hofmann and Bickle 2009; Jones 2005).¹ In addition, a variety of interrelated social constructs (e.g., identities, gender, position, boundaries, memory, negotiation, knowledge, experience) are increasingly deployed in order to produce theories about social relations, categories, and practices from the archaeological data (e.g., Brumfiel and Robin 2008; Crown 2000; Grove and Joyce 1999; Hendon 1997, 1999, 2000, 2007; Hodder 2006; Hodder and Cessford 2004; Joyce 2000, 2007; Manzanilla 2004; Meskell and Preucel 2007).

This brings us to the question of the integration and/or the alignment of approaches and interpretation. The household exists in archaeology through a collec-

1. See also Dobres and Robb 2000 for individual agency and critical discussion in David 2001.

tion of theories, research frameworks, terms, and methods and through a growing number of works on individuals, houses, and communities. Two consequences of this are that many studies work at cross-purposes and that the examination of households has yet to be fully included in archaeology's theoretical and interpretive practice. In addition, the extent to which the chosen concepts and theories meet the specific research purposes is often questionable. We often perceive questions of methodology as theoretical and consider answers concerning the household as self-evident. We often question whether our data are appropriate for a "proper" household analysis, but we rarely question the validity of our models.

A serious obstacle to viewing the household as a process is our tendency to contemplate a stylized view of the household that is thoroughly static. In many prehistoric studies, the prevailing image has been of a stable household, firmly rooted in architecture (the "house"), land, and material possessions and developing, as a result, increasingly static and inflexible social relationships centered on a concern for greater autonomy and productivity (e.g., Bailey 2000: 269–70; Byrd 1994: 641, 643; 2000: 85, 91). Studies that privilege continuity in social reproduction and the construction of social memory also often place too much emphasis on stability (e.g., Bailey 1999; J. Chapman 1994; Hodder 2005, 2006; Hodder and Cessford 2004; Kotsakis 1999; Kuijt 2001; see also discussion in Tringham 2000). It can also be argued that research has dealt with social reproduction almost exclusively in the longer term and the larger scale, focusing on resource manipulation and "banking" and a need for intensification of production (e.g., Byrd 1994; 2000; Halstead 1989; 1999). It is perhaps images such as this that have strengthened our stereotype of the *a*-historic household and have engendered a reluctance to move beyond generalizing, all-encompassing models.

Although social reproduction is shaped by broad social structures and long-term historical processes, it could never be accomplished without small-scale agency. Households are the most important mechanisms of social reproduction, since it is there that the socialization of household members into particular rules, constraints, and dispositions is accomplished. Household agency also actively affects wider social structures through changing social relationships and variations in the degrees of integration within that wider structure. Similarly, households may place more emphasis on material and social interaction in the present than on establishing continuity of tradition and links with the past. In all, far from being static and stable, the household is fundamentally unstable and subject to continual fission.

Another serious theoretical problem is the idea that societies change from "simple" to "complex." This idea involves the emergence of specialization and hierarchy and represents the culmination of ordered progress and the apex of societal achievement. For example, the dominant ideology on Neolithic social evolution tends to see things in terms of a contrast between two main stages: earlier and later Neolithic. Earlier Neolithic is seen as relatively simple and the repository of real family and communal values; later Neolithic is seen as more complex, characterized by a new sense of household autonomy, the emergence of the individual and the erosion of collective ideals (e.g., Byrd 2000; Earle 2004; Flannery 2002; Halstead 1995, 1999; Hodder 1998; Johnson and Earle 2000). There are many limitations in using these ideas of "progress," which are deeply embedded in social evolutionism,

to develop a comprehensive archaeology of the household.² One limitation is the assumption of a teleological and single-directed view of change and the disregard of historical context. Another is the compression of the bewildering and contradictory complexity of everyday life into a few general arguments. A third is that these ideas effectively deny complexity to households of a variety of societies in which clear-cut and permanent hierarchical relationships are lacking. Yet, households in any society by definition incorporate complexity, an important part of which lies in their interaction with the continually changing social contexts and material conditions within which they exist. In using a single-dimensional framework, it is also hard to imagine households as a way in which people have integrated and differentiated themselves socially. Rather, in order to reconstruct social trajectories, we need to look into the many practices that take place in a given historical context—local, regional, temporal, spatial, social, or cultural—as well as to account for cases of discontinuity and devolution.

A preliminary task of setting some conceptual boundaries around the household is necessary before one can thoroughly address wider social relationships or systematically look for potential fields of conflict and change between households or between household and community. A concern with definitions is also fundamental to an understanding of the household as a social process that integrates complex, and often contradictory, practices (e.g., altruism and antagonism), as well as to distinguishing between different concepts (e.g., household, co-residence, house, domestic group, kinship unit, and so on).

My definition and approach derive from various approaches in the social sciences (e.g., Hart 1992; Roberts 1991; Wilk 1991; Wilk and Netting 1984). The household is a social group cooperating in a sphere of social, economic, and ideological practices consisting minimally of production, distribution/consumption, transmission, and social reproduction. This concept of “household” is broader than just a collection of relatives and/or of individuals living together and sharing meals, whereas physical (spatial) boundaries around the household are fluid rather than stable. It moves away from formalism and pre-given definitions and toward a focus on the actions and interactions of people through household co-membership and cooperation in a set of practices. This is not to say that all households cross-culturally and diachronically perform the entire set of the above activities or that these cannot take place outside of the household. Instead, household activities represent analytical mechanisms that result in existing or changing boundaries rather than cross-cultural homogeneity of households themselves. Thus, the definition of household is not an end in itself; rather, it is the first step in research on household as a social process.

In my analytical work, in attempting to provide a social context for household, and despite the fact that the Greek Neolithic is rich in architectural data, I have chosen to designate household as a shifting location of action rather than resort to ready-made social and spatial forms (Souvatzi 2007b, 2008a, 2008b). One potential methodological problem with this definition may be that households, and particularly Neolithic households, are generally associated with self-sufficiency, and thus similar patterns and kinds of activities are expected to recur across a given

2. See Souvatzi 2007a, 2008a: 40–43, 205–7 for more detailed discussion and criticism; also R. Chapman 2003 and Kohring and Wynne-Jones 2007.

site. Therefore, as a strong indication of an individual household, I considered the evidence for parallel occurrence of the aforementioned main activities or, in other words, the maximum definable number of socioeconomic and ritual activities in a certain space. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of a combination of intra-site evidence (context, architecture, material distributions, spatial associations, patterns of movement, specific clusterings of sets of items or features such as burials or specialized facilities) suggested that (a) co-occurrence of different activities was not universal at a site, (b) social entities can indeed be recognized on the basis of patterns of activities (e.g., residential/domestic or non-residential/communal), and (c) social entities were not necessarily circumscribed by the physical, architectural boundaries of buildings.

Overall, the view of household as an activity group enabled me (a) to combine all lines of available intra-site evidence, (b) to consider all patterns and features that map household space, practices, and ideologies, and (c) to consider, however imperfectly, social entities and their processes rather than architectural entities and their formal properties or material concentrations.

A final point concerns the terms used in the following sections. I use *household* to refer to the social entities identified according to the parameters/indicators outlined above, whereas *house* refers to a physical entity, a domestic building equivalent to the notion of residence or dwelling (cf. Ashmore and Wilk 1988: 6) and not to a household. A household as a social unit can, of course, be found to coincide with one house as a spatial unit, but I believe that this coincidence should not be starting point of analysis; a household can just as well be dispersed among a number of dwellings, while several households can share a single dwelling.

Neolithic Greece: A Complex and Diverse Cultural Context

The house and village community are of central importance in Neolithic Greece (ca. 6800–3300 B.C.E.; Table 1). In contrast to the hundreds of settlement sites, less than fifteen separate cemeteries have been identified to date, and no monumental architecture—ritual or funerary—is known outside the settlement (fig. 1). Houses and settlements are thus the key units of analysis in Neolithic Greece. However, this does not automatically imply that they also are the same all over Greece or that they remained unchanged through time. Instead, two key characteristics of Neolithic Greece are the complexity and diversity manifested in most types of the archaeological record, from settlement types and patterns to material culture—and from a very early stage. This section provides a framework for Neolithic Greece, directing attention to patterns of similarities and differences, to set in context the more specific examples of contradictions between household and community organization that will be presented in the following sections. I suggest that there are simultaneous levels of interaction and considerable variability in conjunction with uniformity and that households, rather than a single focus on the large scale, are the best way to examine and interpret these fluid processes.

For example, the settlements exhibit multiple principles of organization and different engagements with the physical and social landscape. They range from long-term restricted villages in the form of anthropogenic earth mounds (or “tells”) with

Table 1. Chronology and phases for the Greek Neolithic and the sites mentioned in the text.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Date (CAL B.C.)</i>	<i>Sites</i>
Early Neolithic	6800/6500–5800	Nea Nikomedeia, Servia, Makrychori, Platia Magoula Zarkou, Sesklo, Franchthi Cave
Middle Neolithic	5800–5300	Makri, Servia, Sesklo
Late Neolithic	5300–4500	Makri, Dikili Tash, Sitagroi, Promachonas-Topolnitsa, Vassilika, Thermi, Stavroupolis, Makriyalos, Servia, Dispilio, Makrychori, Mandra, Platia Magoula Zarkou, Sesklo, Pefkakia, Dimini
Final Neolithic:	4500–3500	Dikili Tash, Sitagroi, Promachonas-Topolnitsa, Palioskala, Platia Magoula Zarkou, Sesklo, Pefkakia

closely-spaced houses and successive layers of habitation—such as Dimini, Sesklo (A), Pefkakia, Servia, Sitagroi, and Dikili Tash—to relatively short-term horizontally shifting sites with widespread buildings and extensive open spaces—such as Makriyalos, Thermi, and Stavroupolis (figs. 2 and 3). Short-lived hamlets also occur, as does occupation of caves (e.g., Franchthi), although less frequently, and lake and lakeside settlements such as Dispilio and Palioskala, respectively, add yet another dimension to the picture of diversity of settlement type and location.

In addition, various household forms and spatial arrangements can be identified. Sometimes coexisting at the same site, they range from a household occupying one house to a household occupying more than two physical structures and/or external areas. Architectural properties such as the size and form of houses do not appear to have played an important role in household spatial or social definition. Among well-preserved contexts, large houses can be single-roomed and can have only a few features, and smaller houses can be two-roomed or otherwise partitioned and can contain have a variety of features. For example, the 28 complete and partial Neolithic buildings at Servia were either square or rectangular and had one, two, or three rooms. Ground plans measured from 3.5 to 5.5 m in width and from 6 to 10 m in length; interior floors were made in three different techniques; and there were, in addition, several types of features, storage facilities, and cooking structures (Mould and Wardle 2000). At the settlement of Sesklo, rectangular free-standing houses coexisted with structural complexes of several rooms or houses (see below). At Dikili Tash in Macedonia, a large rectilinear building containing three autonomous rooms of equal size, almost identical spatial organization, and having the same range of material culture seems compatible with a picture of three different households sharing the same residence.

Another important characteristic of the Neolithic in Greece is the abundance and complexity of material culture, which suggest that craft specialization and long-distance exchange had been developed at a very early stage. For example, pottery is distinguished by high proportions of fine, decorated ware, thin and complicated shapes, and an overall emphasis on skilled manufacturing and elaboration (figs. 4 and 5). Chipped stone tools and *Spondylus* and other shell ornaments suggest that



Fig. 1. Map of Neolithic sites in Greece mentioned in the text.

craft specialization was already well underway in the Early Neolithic. The chipped stone tools (blades, bladelets, sickles, and scrapers) were manufactured mostly of flint and obsidian, which come from the island of Melos (fig. 1) and involved seafaring at a time when this island was still uninhabited. The far-flung distribution as far as central Europe and the North Sea of *Spondylus gaederopus* items—bracelets, pendants, and beads—originating from the Aegean Sea also attests to an extensive inter-cultural network and to specialized production centers within Greece. These and other classes of material culture suggest the coexistence of multiple levels of techni-



Fig. 2. The settlement of Dimini. The central part is 4–5 m higher than the bottom of the outermost enclosure. In the central enclosure, the addition of the front room of the double-roomed building and the blocking of the west and east radial entrances occurred at a later stage. In the southwest segment is a workshop area with pottery-firing facility under shelter and a circular stone platform across it. The southeast part outside the innermost enclosure (bottom and center right) is unexcavated. (Reproduced courtesy of Vassiliki Adrimi-Sismani.)

cal efficiency and different modes of production and exchange (Karimali 2005; Perlès 1992, 2001: 201–10; and Skourtopoulou 1998, 2006 for lithics; Chapman et al. 2011; Miller 2003; Nikolaidou 2003; and Renfrew 1973 for shells).

A third and equally interesting characteristic of the Greek Neolithic is that the data reveal regionally distinct local trajectories that resist being enclosed within one uniform temporal sequence. For example, the absence of Early Neolithic sites in central and eastern Macedonia cannot be satisfactorily accounted for by economic factors, environmental conditions, or temporal trends (see discussion in Andreou et al. 2001: 318–19). As mentioned above, the Aegean islands were not systematically inhabited until the later phases of the Neolithic, and in southern mainland Greece, the Final Neolithic is also a period of territorial expansion that has been linked to a general shift to Aegean trade and metalworking (Davis 2001: 24). By contrast, in Thessaly, the long, stable, and dense settlement pattern broke in the Final Neolithic, when a dramatic reduction in the number of sites took place (Johnson and Perlès 2004). The development of material culture did not follow a typical evolutionary trajectory, either. Toward the end of the Neolithic, ceramic production deteriorated



Fig. 3. The settlement of Sesklo. Top: view of the tell (Sesklo A), showing retaining wall. Bottom: view of the more extended part of the site, spread below the tell (Sesklo B); in the middle: buildings Z2, Γ, and A (see also fig. 7.).

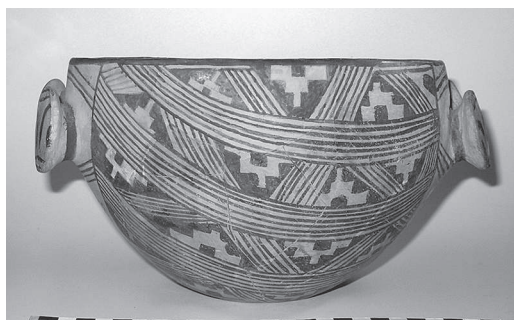


Fig. 4. Painted deep bowl (Brown-on-Buff) from Dimini with double handles bearing painted human or animal faces.

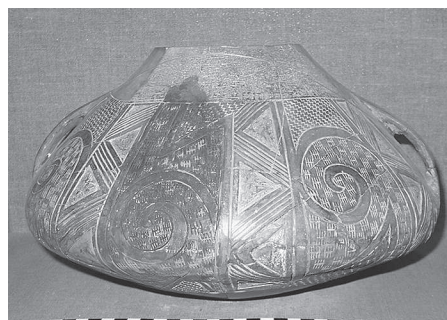


Fig. 5. Incised globular jar from Dimini with dense and highly structured geometrical decoration.

in quality, and it may be that for the first time in the Greek Neolithic “we are seeing something close to household production for household consumption” (Vitelli 1995: 58; contra: Kalogirou 1997: 15; see also Mee 2007). The evidence for chipped stone production in the Final Neolithic also points to a process from specialization to “de-specialization” (Perlès 1992; Perlès and Vitelli 1999). Similarly, by the following temporal period, the Early Bronze Age, *Spondylus* shell production had almost completely disappeared.

Significantly, different settlement and house types are developed within the same region, and new surveys have shown that soil formations do not seem to have played a decisive role in settlement location (e.g., Gallis 1992; Johnson and Perlès 2004). Technological and economic developments such as craft specialization, long-distance exchange, subsistence surplus, and settlement agglomeration, which are considered to be key innovations toward structural transformations, did not instigate any radical or long-lasting changes in the social organization of Neolithic communities. Besides, many of these are far earlier than the Late Neolithic, no matter how hard we may attempt to force the data to fit into an earlier/later Neolithic contrast.

Given the relatively small geographical area of Greece, all these phenomena make Greece’s Neolithic all the more intriguing and have a number of implications that are of particular relevance here. Perhaps the most significant implication is that the data indicate an interplay between uniformity and variability (Souvatzi 2008b), suggesting that wider organizational principles may have been realized differently at a local level. On the bigger picture, there is an overall sense of uniformity in the material culture and in ways of life. Although material culture traits show regional and temporal variations, it also shares key elements, including ceramic decoration and tool and ornament technology, which linked sites through shared systems of signification, through particular specializations and through exchange of ideas and objects. Cultural uniformity was partly maintained through settlement patterns, through a shared concern for the creation of a structured settlement space, including enclosures and ditches that surrounded the settlements (figs. 2 and 3, 6; discussed in the next section), and through similar contextual associations of people, buildings and material. At the same time, in the smaller picture, the multiple principles

of settlement and household organization and the different modes of production, distribution, and exchange of different goods, such as pottery, lithics, and ornaments, reflect considerable variation in the organization of economy, in notions of permanence and continuity, in how social groups defined themselves, and in how communities may or may not be interconnected.

In order to understand these phenomena, we ought to search for less gradualist and more fluid and discontinued models for interpretation and to look for evidence inside a social system rather than outside of it. It is also crucial to recognize and interpret difference and to consider the dialectic between stability and variability. From every point of view, it is essential to address questions at the household level. What are the purposes of diversity and homogeneity in the ways and degrees in which households interact with other social institutions and with the broader society? Was the household the only key unit in social structuring or were there other shared social and ideological structures? And how were these shaped, negotiated, or contested within the household?

Contradictions: Differentiation and Unification

This section looks deeper into the Greek Neolithic communities, embracing a view of households as composed of fluid relationships that are constantly being forged, broken, and remade in a process of social (re)production. As Joyce and Grove (1999: 4) have stated with reference to the Preclassic Mesoamerican context, “the small-scale setting of domestic life is the pre-existing context for the beginnings of all transformations that occur.” I suggest that a developing contradiction between community and household organization, located particularly in the realm of conflicting strategies of social reproduction, might be a cause of internal tension and transformation within a social system. In this section, I explore some of the many ways in which a society attempts to integrate differentiated identities and interests into a cohesive whole and which households can resist or even appropriate in order to promote their own interests and identities, drawing on four lines of evidence: (a) architecture, (b) craft production, (c) ritual practice, and (d) intra-settlement burials.

Architecture, Settlement Organization, and the Multiple Scales of External and Internal Variation

One contradiction relates to the multiple scales of architectural variation within settlements and particularly to a contrast between settlement uniformity and house/household variability. On the one hand, despite the differences in inter-settlement organization outlined above, settlements still hold many architectural and organizational elements in common. These include the ordered layouts of settlements, the common orientation of buildings within each settlement, the common construction techniques and materials for domestic and public architecture and an overall emphasis on large-scale labor-intensive architectural works such as multiple stone enclosures and ditches (figs. 2 and 3, 6). Indeed, Greek Neolithic settlements represent a great deal of effort and concern for the creation of a structured environment, where technical skills coexisted with social organizational principles (Souvatzi and Skafida 2003). For example, at Dimini, six stone concentric walls that follow the natural



Fig. 6. Concentric stone-cut ditches at Makrychori I.

contour of the mound define several habitation terraces surrounding a central courtyard (fig. 2). At Palioskala, the number of stone enclosures seems disproportionately large compared to that of the structures within, which were, unlike those at Dimini, limited to the central parts of the mound (Toufexis 2006). At Makriyalos I, two large concentric ditches, traced for a total of 470 m, surrounded an area estimated at 28 hectares (Pappa and Besios 1999). The inner and larger ditch was up to 3.5 m deep and up to 4.5 m wide. At Makrychori, three concentric ditches were cut into the solid rock (fig. 6; Toufexis 2008).

This uniformity suggests the use of architecture for the mediation of communally accepted principles of identity and order. It must have involved collective labor, planning, and decision-making, all of which imply organization at the community, rather than the household, level. It thus created a sense of wider social standards, connected different households within a settlement into a larger collective unit, and provided a mechanism for enhancing social interaction.

On the other hand, underneath this uniformity exists a remarkable lack of standardization inside buildings within a settlement, which suggests that individual households were also personal products. For example, there is considerable intra-site variation in the location, number, and type of structural features, including floor types, internal divisions, and entrance location. Furthermore, there is nothing to suggest that households within a community remained stable or that they retained

the same organization over time. Instead, there is evidence of constant alterations of flooring and construction techniques and the arrangement of structural elements in the different building phases. These characteristics are best exemplified at Middle Neolithic Sesklo (5800–5300 B.C.E.). The site is comprised of a tell and a more extended settlement spread below, named Sesklo A and Sesklo B, respectively (fig. 3; Theodoridis 1973). Sesklo A is distinguished by long and successive sequences of free-standing and vertically superimposed buildings. At Sesklo B, deposits are thinner and sometimes discontinuous, houses were less long-lived, and they were often clustered in complexes. In spite of the differences in habitation pattern (see Kotsakis 1994, 1999 for a detailed discussion), there are many architectural and organizational elements held in common between the two parts of the settlement, including the same energetic and symbolic investment in high-quality architecture, house shape and orientation, and the design principles of symmetry and geometric order inside houses and in open spaces (see Souvatzi 2008a: 81–91 for more details).

It would then appear that the Sesklo houses were stable and complied with the wider social norm, as expressed by the relative standardization and regularity in architecture. However, this regularity and the general rules of space segmentation are remarkably contrasted with the constant rearrangements of house interiors and patterns of movement over time (fig. 7). The process of structuring and restructuring house space seems to have been incessant, even though it rarely resulted in a deviation from the original, wider conventions of plan and size of houses. It included creating different types of floors, introducing new facilities and blocking or relocating entrances. In addition, space divisions alternated within the same house between buttresses, partition walls, and floor type combinations, new rooms were introduced onto or next to older ones, and features and associated material kept changing location, shifting from one section of the house to another and then back to the previous location again.

The reorganization of internal areas can imply a reconsideration of social relations, tensions, and disagreements arising, for example, over rights to property and inheritance, the fusion of new members, the negotiation of age and gender roles, relationships with neighbors, and the repeated redistribution of goods, labor and resources. A degree of instability at the household level must have also been produced by numerous other reasons. For example, to ensure the reproductive viability of local populations through “marriage” patterns, to work elsewhere and to exchange labor, goods, and visits.³ The early development of long-distance communication and exchange also suggests constant mobility of people and things. For instance, Chapman and Gaydarska (2006: 170–71) estimate that, for every *Spondylus* shell ring that traveled from northern Greece to the shores of the Black Sea, at least three different specialists were required, in addition to a long voyage and stay away “from home and hearth.” Similarly, Perlès’ (1992, 2001: 207–8) model of “itinerant knappers” of obsidian from Melos implies mobile and seafaring specialized workers and traders activated at local, regional, and interregional scales.

Overall, this mobility lies between the relative stability of the community and the contingency of the individual household. If the wider social structure represents the promotion of collective standards, then the households promoted their own in-

3. See also Halstead 2005 for subsistence failure and seasonality of consumption.



Fig. 7. Occupation phases of buildings A, Γ, and Z2 at Sesklo, showing the changes in floors and internal organization through time. Upper: first phase; middle: second phase; lower: fourth phase. (Plan redrawn from Kotsakis 1981).

dividual choices and identities, which would have partly counteracted wider social standards. In this way, every household was in a constant state of transition, creating the seeds of its own transformation as well as the seeds of contestation of the wider social structure.

Production and Distribution of Craft-Specialized Products

Another possible tension is represented by a contrast between the production and the distribution of craft-specialized products. As noted earlier, the Greek Neolithic material culture indicates the early development of craft specialization in and long-distance exchange of several material classes—including decorated pottery, shell and stone ornaments, and obsidian tools. Craft specialization and long-distance exchange suggest that some individuals or groups were involved in activities in which others were not. They entail social division of labor and differential access to production processes and possibly also to long-distance exchange networks and creates the potential for economic and social differences between households. The presence of spatially restricted workshops or production areas within settlements further increased this potential. Examples include a specialist workshop of incised pottery and *Spondylus* beads at Dimini (see below); the specialized stone axe and bead workshop at Makri (Efstratiou and Dinou 2004); the extensive pebbled yards at Thermi, Vassilika, and Stavroupolis, with their flint-knapping and crop-processing waste (Skourtopoulou 2004); the pottery-firing facility at Dikili Tash, associated with burned vessels and an abundance of tools (Treuil 1992); two pit complexes with knapped stone tools and production debris from high-quality materials at Makriyalos (Skourtopoulou 2006: 66); and the specialized workshop of cockle-shell beads at Franchthi (Perlès 2001: 223–226).

Interestingly, however, when it comes to distribution and consumption, the households within a settlement seem to contain homogeneous assemblages of material culture—in fairly stable proportions. In other words, the limited participation in the production of specialized goods is contrasted with an unlimited intra-site distribution and consumption of these goods. This means that although an unequal distribution of certain goods among sites (Perlès and Vitelli 1999: 99) may be true, given the differences in distribution of basic resources within and between regions, the same does not apply within sites. Even though limited as yet because of the relative lack of concern with extensive excavations and horizontal material distributions in Greek Neolithic research until recently, the evidence is suggestive: at all of the sites at which such questions have been addressed, consistent indications of unequal distribution of a kind that would point to social differentiation are lacking.

The even distribution of all types of material is best exemplified at Dimini, the very site that has been taken in the past to suggest the rise of economic elites during the Late Neolithic (Halstead 1995). Dimini yielded evidence for specialized production in pottery, obsidian tools, and *Spondylus* ornaments, as well as for at least one specialist workshop (fig. 2). This workshop contained a pottery-firing facility, a round stone platform, a concentration of incised pottery and *Spondylus* beads, and an abundance of tools of all kinds. Moreover, Dimini enjoyed a prominent position in exchange networks. For example, the distinctive pottery style known as Dimini Ware (fig. 4) was very influential and widely imitated all over Greece. Dimini is also thought to have been a main production center of *Spondylus* ornaments (Chapman

et al. in press; Tsuneki 1989). Last, lithic studies suggest that obsidian cores from Melos were locally prepared at Dimini and then possibly distributed inland (Karimali 1994: 378–79; 2000). Within the settlement, however, the homogeneous distribution of craft-specialized and other products suggests that they acted as symbols of collective rather than individual identity or status. Equally, in Serbia and in Dikili Tash, all houses appear to be similar in nature, containing a fair amount of features, facilities, and finds, despite variations in building techniques. At Stavroupolis, the spatial distribution of chipped stone tools is largely homogeneous across residential contexts and for both main phases of occupation, despite the variation in raw materials and technical strategies (Skourtopoulou 2004: 393–401).

In conclusion, households or individuals may have differed in economic roles and contributions to the wider economy, containing within themselves the means to create social distinctions and asymmetries through limiting participation in production, social division of labor, and variation in labor input in different processes at different times. However, the main patterns of distribution of the goods themselves and the ideological information on how to consume the products seem to have been defined by the community as whole.

Domestic Rituals and Public Rituals

The third example of a contradiction between household and community concerns domestic rituals and public rituals. Domestic rituals and symbolism were used to define households as individual groups and as ritual units. Community rituals, on the other hand, were normalizing and aimed to promote a dominant ethos of collectivity. A most interesting characteristic here is that the same or similar means and practices were used for both aims.

One means to emphasize metaphorically the social and ritual importance of the household is the production of house models and the link between domestic architecture and human and animal representation. A good testimony of this in Greece comes from Platia Magoula Zarkou in Thessaly (Gallis 1985). The interior of a house model found at the site contains a range of domestic facilities and eight human figures, identified as four children and two female and two male adults. It was found intact under the floor of a Late Neolithic house inside a pit under the hearth that was dug specially into the debris of the previous house floor. It probably reflects a foundation offering. Other such offerings include artifacts, child bones, or even animal bones found embedded under floors, walls, or permanent installations. There also are heads of animals—actual, clay, or covered with clay. At Dikili Tash, an actual bucranium, covered with raw clay, found fallen with its back up on the floor, was apparently originally attached to the interior wall of a house as relief decoration or a hunting trophy (Treuil and Darcque 1998; Treuil and Tsirtsoni 2000). Around it were preserved storage and cooking pots, domed ovens, clay platforms, and a wide range of material. As is known, bucrania occur over a very wide area, from southeast Europe to the Middle East. They frequently come from inside houses that also contain a wide range of everyday “utilitarian” artifacts, with classic examples coming from Çatalhöyük in Anatolia (Last 2006: 201–4; Mellaart 1967; Russell and Meece 2006) and from Vinča (Vasič 1936: 50–52) and Para (Lazarovici and Lazarovici 2003: 391–94) in southeast Europe. Returning to Greece, at Palioskala, three zoomorphic clay objects (probably animal heads, probably cattle) were found in the middle room

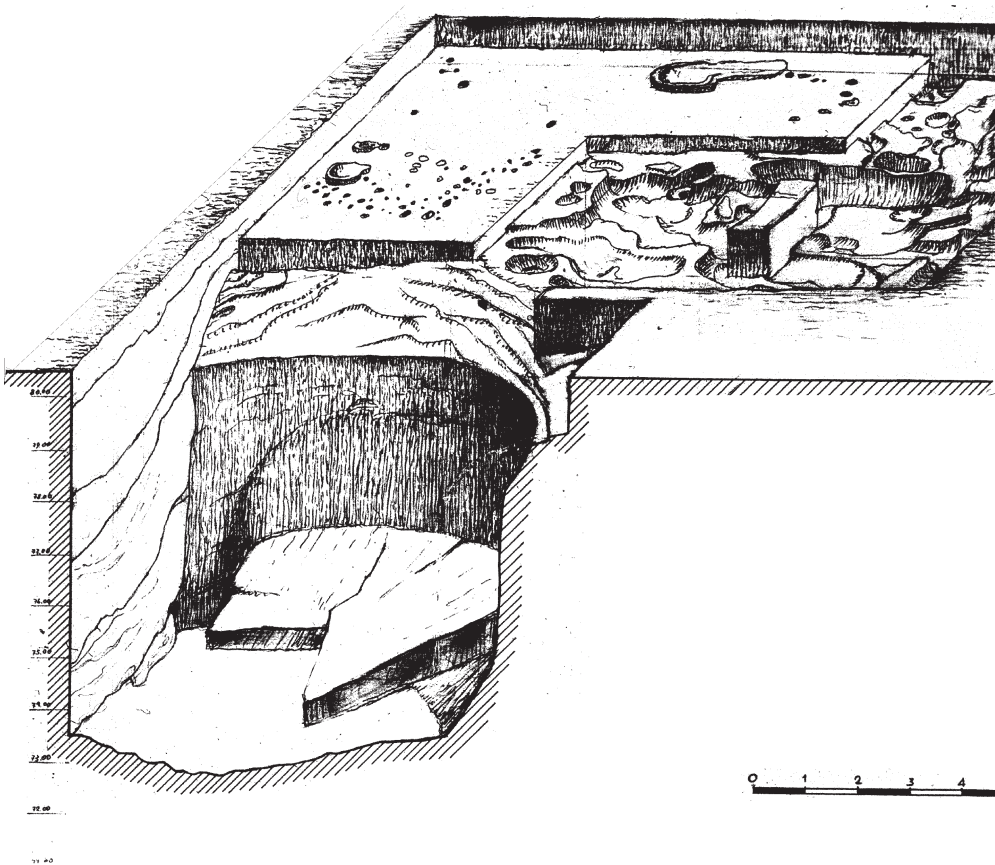


Fig. 8. Plan of the communal subterranean building at Promachonas-Topolnitsa, showing distinct differences in size and architecture from the semi-subterranean domestic buildings around it. (Reproduced courtesy of Chaido Koukouli-Chrysanthaki.)

of a tripartite building in a triangular arrangement. Their small size (14 to 15 cm high, 12 to 13 cm wide, 10 to 14 cm thick), flat bases, and partly hollow interiors suggest that they might have originally been fixed to structural elements of the buildings (e.g., the entrance, a wall, or a wooden post; Toufexis 2009). Last, several house models had bucrania sculptured in clay attached to their gabled roofs (e.g., Koukouli-Chrysanthaki et al. 2005: 100, fig. 30; Toufexis 2003: fig. 29.3).

However, the same material means and practices were also used for community ritual. A good example comes from a large circular subterranean building at Promachonas-Topolnitsa I (end of the sixth millennium B.C.E.; fig. 8). This building is clearly distinct from the small semi-subterranean domestic buildings of this phase. It was rebuilt at least two times, and there were many minor phases of maintenance and modification. Its exceptionally rich contents include more than 15 actual bucrania and several horns and skulls of other horned animals (rams and deer)—actual, clay, or modeled in raw clay; high assemblages of house models, serving pottery,

figurines, tools, and ornaments; and fragments of clay with plastic decoration. The material had been deposited in thick successive layers or floors. Each floor had been burned and then abandoned for a time before it was replaced by another. The excavators believe that this building had a communal ritual function involving offerings and food consumption (Koukouli-Chrysanthaki et al. 2005: 101). I believe that it could equally represent a cycle of ritual and collective discard, if not also destruction by fire ("ritual killing?"), of individual material possessions by the entire community. This repeated process could indicate a social need to balance competing household interests and identities and to generate and regenerate a dominant ethos of equality. The burned floors and material inside the Promachonas-Topolnica building may attest a motive similar to that explored by Cessford and Near (2006) in their study of house-burning at Çatalhöyük. They point out that although fire destroys personal histories and memories, it also has transformative, purifying, and renewing properties and can thus create new, collective memories (see also Tringham 2005: 104–8).

There is also evidence for ritual feasting at the community level. At Makriyalos, in phase I (5200–4900 B.C.E.), inside an exceptionally large pit-feature (preserved to an area of 30 by 15 m) were deposited an unusually large volume of pottery and animal bones, together with grain crops, grinding stones, and fragments of cooking facilities (Halstead 2007; Pappa et al. 2004; Urem-Kotsou and Kotsakis 2007). Most of the finds formed a layer 10 cm thick at the base of the pit and seem to have accumulated over a short depositional episode (spanning from months to just a few years). It is argued (Pappa et al. 2004: 41) that the pit represents large-scale feasting and conspicuous consumption of domestic animals as a mechanism for strengthening relationships in a regional social network. In phase II of the same site (4900–4500 B.C.E.), the stratigraphy and contents of the large and deep Pit 24 suggest formalized large-scale ceremonies involving structured deposition of impressive amounts and kinds of material, deposited there after the end of the original use of the pit as a dwelling. They include high-quality blade tools, painted pottery of Dimini Ware, stone and clay figurines, clay stamps, ornaments, charcoal, and animal bones (Skourtopoulou 2006: 68–69, 72).

Overall, the deposition of large quantities of goods in collective contexts requires us to reconsider the earlier views of what rituals occurred and what functions they served in the local and regional social network. The rituals of the household metaphorically emphasized its social importance. At the same time, the community, using similar material means and practices, apparently aimed to subdue individual interests and identities in favor of the collective. One implication here is that rituals and symbolism were a means of promoting both definitions of house and identification and membership of community.

Intra-Settlement Burials

Intra-settlement burial practices are considerably diverse. They include both sexes and all age groups; they can be primary or secondary and single or multiple; and they range from complete pit-burials to bone fragments scattered in the settlement deposits and from single cremation in pots to skull ossuaries and funerary complexes (Souvatzi 2008a: 186–93). Yet, specific manipulations of bones and bodies and the ways that material symbolism was selected and displayed indicate that burial practices were not as random as they might at first appear. Depending on

the treatment of the dead and the specific location of burial within a site, the most consistent pattern that can be detected is a distinction between children and adults, possibly corresponding to a difference between household and community social reproductive strategies.

On the one hand, there is an abundance of child burials or an overall visibility of children in more isolated burials within and around houses. They are primary and secondary and take place in floors, under hearths, in built-in facilities, in pots, or in pits. At Dimini, the presence of eight cremation infant burials inside buildings, some in pots made especially for this purpose, is contrasted with the absence of evidence for adult burial (Hourmouziadis 1978). Of interest also are two triple burials between houses at Nea Nikomedeia, one of three children and the other of a female holding two children (Rodden and Rodden 1964). Even in sites characterized by relatively uniform mortuary practices such as single pit-burials, children frequently seem to be more visible than or distinct from the adults by having been treated specially. They are often lined or covered with rocks, stone slabs, burnt or smashed painted pottery, thick layers of ash, and so on. Secondary child burials may point to rites of house abandonment or closure, because there is evidence that they were brought inside later instead of during the occupation of the house or the floor. For example, in a house at Dimini, a child skull and bones were found mixed with fallen superstructure material, implying deposition on the floor rather than interment in or under it (Souvatzi 2008a: 144–45).

Generally, the separation of children from the rest of the kin or domestic group can be seen as evidence for their special status and their intimate symbolic connection with the household.

On the other hand, there are burials not confined to an individual household but instead located in more remote parts of settlements or in perimetric ditches. These burials often contain adults and tend to be disarticulated or fragmented, though isolated, complete, and primary adult burials do occur. At Makriyalos I, the remains of at least 50 to 60 individuals, most of which were adults, were found mainly inside the large perimetric ditch (Triantaphyllou 1999). At Stavroupolis, at least 12 individuals are represented by more than 100 fragmented remains scattered in the settlement or simply thrown into shallow pits (fig. 9; Triantaphyllou 2002, 2004). At Mandra, there is a burial of an adult inside a large ditch that surrounded the settlement. The limbs of the deceased had been removed at some stage and were reburied in a small cavity on the side of the ditch dug specially for the purpose (Toufexis et al. 2009). An important characteristic of these types of burial is the difficulty to discern obvious or definite patterns of sex, age, body part representation, or degree of disarticulation. Rather, they seem to illustrate an association of bodies (and particularly of adults) with the village community as a whole rather than with individual people or households.

These patterns reveal a distinction between strategies of social reproduction at various societal levels. Specifically, the child burials within or near the spatial confines of houses may constitute part of individual household social reproductive strategies and memory construction. On the other hand, the burials in places not confined to an individual household, which more often than not belong to adults and tend to be fragmented, underline an association between a collectivity of the deceased and a collectivity of the living (Perlès 2001: 281). They might reflect a



Fig. 9. Disarticulated skeletal remains of a young male at Stavroupolis. (Reproduced courtesy of Dimitrios Grammenos.)

concern to promote shared ideals and strategies of social reproduction and memory making—for example, an idea of a collective body of community ancestors (Triantaphyllou 1999: 131).

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the relatively slow degree of social transformation during the Neolithic may explain our search for mechanisms that ensure stability and controlled change, these mechanisms become successful only through the micro-scale and short-term agency of the household. Greek Neolithic households vary considerably in the ways in which they organized their daily lives, promoted their own varied motives and goals, and expressed their identities, containing within themselves the

means to create social distinctions and asymmetries. The multiple scales of external and internal variation in architectural patterns, the different modes of production and exchange, the variable forms of ritual and symbolic practices—all suggest a great potential for tensions and contradictions between households and between household and community.

Despite this variability, an equally distinct degree of social cohesion ran within and across communities as a result of complex social interrelationships attempting to emphasize uniformity and collective identification. The dominant forms of social identification, as expressed for example, through settlement layouts and patterns of distribution and consumption of material products, appear to revolve around the village community. It seems that it is the community as a whole that displays status to the world and that sets limits on the extent of differentiation and domination of individual social units. At the same time, the households, as major keepers and transmitters of economic and symbolic capital throughout the Neolithic, were also personal products involved in the construction of their own identity and the promotion of their own concerns, thus creating the potential for the existence of groups with limited, cross-cutting, and alternative interests.

Such discrepancies between households and between household and community leave little space for stability and rigidity. Interestingly, they are materialized through largely similar and interrelated processes, revolving around architecture, economy, ritual, and burial. These processes reflect commonly accepted material means and practices within a society for achieving either individual or collective distinction, as well as conflicting strategies of social reproduction through different manipulation at different scales, contexts, and times. What we see is a complex and varied picture of a continuous tension between differentiation and unification, diversity and uniformity, and individual and collective identity.

Concepts of the household seem to have become more individualized and diverse through time, and this might have emerged as a reaction to the increase of community living and control and the ever-present forces of social integration that attempted to downplay the individual importance of the household in favor of its collective importance. The tendencies of the bigger picture from Neolithic Greece so far suggest that, during the Late Neolithic, when the contradictions between wider social stability and household contingency and diversity seem to intensify, the wider economy and consumption also become more visible, and collective practices also intensify. For example, it is in the Late Neolithic that we see more conclusive evidence for collective rituals in the form of ritual feasting and large-scale (structured?) deposition. Larger-scale, more public architectural works, such as the construction of stone enclosures, the leveling of large areas within settlements, and the undertaking of new building programs also seem to proliferate in this period.

There is no blanket application of contradictions and transformations across the regions and through time. They appear together with the first farming communities in Greece and continue until the end of the Neolithic. If there is a rule, it is one of different, and often fairly autonomous, local trajectories and cycles of change. It all depends on context, articulation, and meaning over space and time, something that we cannot understand with the rigid framework of all-encompassing typologies. Relationships between changes taking place within the household and those taking place within society cannot be explained in terms of simple and single

models. Use of the household as a means for examining and interpreting social organization from the bottom up changes our perceptions of social evolution, which has been traditionally characterized as unilinear and consistent. The “devolution” of material culture and the deterioration of its quality toward the end of the Neolithic compared to earlier phases suggest that the social values of material products had changed. Many of the earlier communities also disappear in the Final Neolithic, when, apparently, the wider mechanisms of social interaction identified above were no longer in use. Incidentally, this might help explain why the Final Neolithic or “Chalcolithic” is neither observed everywhere in Greece nor well known. The reasons for break-ups and changes in households and communities of this kind are varied and multi-causal. They can collapse for economic, social, and cultural reasons arising from developments in wider society but also for internal reasons such as the disagreements inherent in life in a community or the threat of dissolution when a group decides to leave. A need for greater social recognition and an increasing concern with individual household reproduction may both have induced rejection of community control.

The social structure arising through all these practices incorporates a tension between the community and the household in a process containing the potential for both social asymmetry and social equality and for both empowerment and resistance to power. Collective control and individual autonomy coexisted, distinctions and differences remained fluid, transient, and susceptible to contestation, and the social structure was constantly in a state of flux. Rather than fixed or objectified, social relationships between households and between household and community were a target for achievement and maintenance as well as for transformation. In this way, households acted as organizing structures for both differentiation and integration, and the very process of social reproduction incorporated the potential for both domination of and resistance to stable forms of social identification.

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