

Introduction

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The core of this volume is comprised of a selection of papers presented at the Alexander von Humboldt Conference held in Thessaloniki in 2014. In addition to the works presented at the conference, several chapters that represent new excavation finds and up-to-date synthesis of archaeological investigations at a wider geographical level, including the regions of northern Greece and the central Balkans, were added as invited contributions to this volume. The aim of the volume is to bring together and present new data on the Neolithic of south-eastern Europe, emphasising the organisation and use of space within the regions of Northern Greece, the Balkan hinterland and north-western Turkey, their sub-regions and more specific geographical niches in this area. To this end, the individual chapters in this book focus either on the intra-site organisation of individual settlements that have recently been excavated or provide a review on the regional level, combining old and new evidence.

There have been several volumes which extensively cover the Neolithic of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia or Turkey, dealing with phenomena on a regional level rather than taking a supra-regional perspective, which would aid in the formation of a more coherent picture of the Neolithic period in this important geographical area and in understanding the processes of the Neolithisation of Europe. In addition, the results of excavations and detailed analyses of material remains from these regions are often published in local outlets and languages, while traditional archaeological approaches to various forms of material culture are still descriptive, and the finds are seldom studied and tackled as active elements in the life of early farmers. Consequently, much of the recent work, which does also include some important applications of new analytical methods on local levels, is still unknown to the wider scholarly community. The diachronic engagement of generations of people with their landscapes, and their attitudes towards the understanding and treatment of space and deciphering patterns, which can significantly further our understanding of the period, can only be assessed

by interdisciplinary research on a major scale, as the contributions to this volume show.

The Mesolithic/Neolithic transition had brought major changes in numerous aspects of human life, one of the most far-reaching being the shift from foraging to food production and sedentism. Settlements and houses, with their social and physical environment, were crucial components in the formation of Neolithic ways of life. The importance of SE Europe, including the North Aegean and western Anatolia, for understanding this transition and the spread of a new way of life into Europe has been recognised since Gordon Childe¹ as the bridge between the Fertile Crescent and Europe, across which the Neolithic innovations were transmitted. This region has drawn much attention since that time, and has yielded hundreds of Neolithic sites, which show remarkable variety in spatial patterning during the Neolithic period. Dynamic interactions between communities inhabiting the area covered by the geographical scope of this volume have been confirmed by the properties and material culture matrices discovered on dozens of sites throughout this vast region.

Early farming communities in this geographical area, almost as a rule, formed permanent settlements and soon developed mindsets towards landscape and environment that differed from those of the Mesolithic foragers that preceded them. Diverse habitats and landscapes were settled, from coastal to freshwater locations and fertile basins to mountainous localities, which would have required different adaptations and treatment of space,² which eventually associated communities with a particular place. Settlements and houses were active and crucial components in these processes, as they became increasingly important centres for activities and social interaction. By using and reusing the space in the context of their daily lives, members of Neolithic farming communities created living space where people, animals, objects and things were entangled in and engaged with inhabited space. As the contributions in this book clearly

demonstrate, archaeological investigations in this area testify to temporal intra- and inter-regional diversity in social organisation, everyday practices and beliefs, and show changes on various scales over the three millennia of the Neolithic, which formed a diverse and rich cultural landscape, expressed in settlement organisation, architecture and numerous aspects of material culture.

The long period of the Neolithic, including its final stage, which is in some regions labelled as the Eneolithic or Final Neolithic, and in others as the Chalcolithic, was a time of thorough transformations not only in cultural landscapes and settlement organisation, but also in animal and plant management, dietary habits and the production and circulation of material culture. The detection and evaluation of contacts between the regions and the study of the dynamics of transformation of populations within their chosen geography is therefore of great importance for understanding this period as a whole. The authors of the contributions to this volume present new data and draw their conclusions from the contextual examination of material culture recently discovered on numerous sites throughout the area, which contribute significantly to the understanding of the cultural landscape of early farmers in this geographical area.

Since social relations are entwined in the intra- and inter-site organisation of villages, the study of the density, form, size and longevity of settlements, architecture, burial practices, economy and material culture ensures a more holistic approach to the role and the meaning of space, and of various forms of interactions within the social structure of early farming communities. Some analytical tools applied in the study of the Neolithic in the area for this purpose include the analysis of aDNA and isotopic signatures in the skeletal remains of humans and animals to identify the diet and mobility of humans and herds, and analysis of archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological remains and of food residues in pottery for diet and farming practices, together with mainstream technological and petrographic analysis of pottery and stone tools. This interdisciplinary approach has the potential to reveal more details on the engagement of people with the landscape and with objects, animals, plants and other resources, as several chapters in this book clearly demonstrate.

A growing body of data uncovered in the last few decades shows striking diversity in settlement organisation, from single-layered, short-lived sites to long-lived tell settlements with densely packed houses, located in different geographical settings. In addition, small sites (e.g. 0.5 ha) and extended settlements with shifting habitation patterns and dispersed houses also appear in most sub-regions. The observed variety has been related not only to the specifics of the natural environment, but also to the social organisation of Neolithic communities, as shaped through everyday practices. Settlements and houses were dynamic social spaces where different aspects of everyday life (and death) formed built space, which was modified

according to social (and cultural) changes that took place within communities in each sub-region.

This book is comprised of 17 chapters, which are organised regionally, covering a broad set of geomorphological and environmental features and their niches. It includes fresh interdisciplinary insights from present-day Albania, northern Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Turkey. The chapters follow geographical order, starting from the west, and moving through the north Aegean and the Balkan hinterland to north-western Turkey.

The volume commences with a chapter by Kostas Kotsakis, whose contribution provides the theoretical framework for the volume, with a discussion of the use of space in the archaeological literature. The author nicely lays out the different theoretical approaches in current and past archaeological discourse, introducing the readers to diverse concepts about and understandings of space in archaeological thought, from cultural history and processualism with a positivist view of space as an objective and measurable frame of reference, to post-modern concepts of space as a dynamic social space, the phenomenology of Heidegger and meta-post-processualism. Multivocality in theoretical concepts of space has had an impact on archaeological practice, a flavour of which is given in the last part of the chapter.

A broad chronological scheme for the trans-regional Neolithic of the geographical area treated in this book has been set out by Agathe Reingruber in chapter 2. The author discusses the history and interpretation of ¹⁴C dates in south-east Europe, Greece and Anatolia, and points to some misconceptions and incorrect usage of radiocarbon dates from its early days in the 1960s through to the present. Radiocarbon dates for each of the regions of south-western Anatolia, the circum-Aegean, the Balkans and the middle Danube area are presented, covering all periods of the Neolithic. Clarification and documentation of the chronological scheme obtained in this way is then applied to reinterpret trans-regional narratives such as those of the Neolithisation of south-west Anatolia and the Aegean, the beginning of the Neolithic in the Balkans and the transition from the Middle to the Late Neolithic.

Gazmend Elezi, in chapter 3, presents the state of research in Albanian Neolithic archaeology and discusses the landscape preferences and social practices of early farmers, with an emphasis on the establishment of settlements in different habitats, such as river valleys and lake shores, but also on those located in mountainous landscapes. The author discusses the duration of habitation of the Neolithic settlements in Albania, which varies from short-lived ones (e.g. a few generations), to remarkably long-lived ones, inhabited without interruption, to those which were re-inhabited long after being abandoned. The distribution and density of the settlements and settlement types and the diversity of houses are also discussed.

Intensive fieldwork undertaken in northern Greece over the last two decades or so, as a result of developmental works and systematic projects, has brought to light a considerable number of Neolithic sites, a few of which are presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Georgia Stratouli and Dimitris Kloukinas, in chapter 4, use the abundance of new findings to analyse and discuss the transformation of settlement space at the Middle and Late Neolithic site of Avgi in western Macedonia (Greece). Over the course of the three phases attested at the site, the differential segregation of space, the visibility of spatial demarcations, the relationship between indoor and outdoor space, and the management of waste suggest changes in the organisation of the community throughout the settlement's lifespan.

The following two chapters present an example of the transformation of space into a communal place outside the settlement, which was used for a variety of activities, including ritual. Similar sites have also been discovered in recent years in some other regions of the Balkans (see chapter 15 in this volume), all dated to the same broad period, pointing to certain changes in the ideological and social sphere of the Late Neolithic inhabitants in this area.

Areti Chondroyianni-Metoki presents in chapter 5 an exceptionally rare example for Neolithic Greece of an off-settlement site at Toumba Kremastis Koiladas, which offers some of the best evidence of structured deposition in the Neolithic period in the wider region of northern Greece and the Balkan hinterland. The Neolithic settlement at Kremasti is characterised by continuity in the location of the houses on the tell and diversity in the use of space on the margins of the residential area. The author presents the finds from the area outside the settlement, which are related to a variety of activities, including ritual. Chondroyianni-Metoki's contextual analysis has taken into account correlations of different categories of archaeological materials related to burials of humans, animals and houses, and to contexts with remains of more mundane activities, such as rubbish disposal.

Presenting four different but well-defined contexts from the Late Neolithic off-settlement site of Toumba Kremastis Koiladas, Teresa Silva and her colleagues offer in chapter 6 an insight into the variety of activities that took place outside the residential area, with many of them seemingly exhibiting a ceremonial or ritual character. After a brief theoretical discussion of what ritual represents, the authors discuss the archaeological materials from four distinct contexts: cremation burial, single-use pits with remains of various ritualistic/ceremonial activities, and multiple-use context with less obvious structure. The stratigraphy and all the finds are taken into account, but special emphasis is placed on pottery, to show how the interplay of ritual and mundane domestic aspects of life may be entangled in an assemblage.

Chapter 7, by Dushka Urem-Kotsou and Stavros Kotsos, provides an up-to-date synthesis of the results

of archaeological investigations in the area of central Macedonia (Greece), including excavations of Neolithic settlements and interdisciplinary research on associated materials. The authors discuss the settlement types, architecture and burial practices of the region. The evidence for Neolithic food that comes from archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological investigations, analysis of food remains in pottery and human bones is also presented. These data reveal details of the diachronic engagement of the inhabitants of central Macedonia with their environment, creating a social space through daily practices related to the production, preparation and consumption of food. Interaction among the settlements within the area, as well as with other regions, whether close or distant ones, is briefly discussed on the basis of petrographic analysis of pottery and lithics, aDNA and isotopic analysis of human and animal bones.

Stavros Kotsos, in chapter 8, focuses on the geographical area extending from the North Aegean to the Danube, which is drained by two of the major rivers of the southern and central Balkans, the Axios (Vardar) and Morava, and their numerous tributaries. Using the evidence from 191 excavated Neolithic settlements from this area, the author examines the geographical distribution of settlements, their environmental setting, intra-site organisation, architecture, economy and the interaction between them, as evidenced in material culture. Taking into account available data from old and recently excavated sites, the author offers new insights into the rich and diverse *cosmos* of early farming societies settled in this vast area, not only between but also within its regions and sub-regions, which is indicated by a great variety in organisation of living space, including both settlements and houses.

Goce Naumov presents in chapter 9 the diversity of Neolithic settlements in sub-regions of the south-western part of the Republic of North Macedonia, with a focus on wetland sites in the area of Lake Ohrid and their relation to the settlements in the neighbouring region of Pelagonia. In addition to well-known tell-type settlements, the author draws attention to the existence of pile-dwelling settlements and distinguishes three basic categories of wetland sites: those on riverbanks, those on lakeshores and those in marshes. He also discusses the accompanying archaeological material and possible routes of communication, and finds some Late Neolithic Anatolian stylistic traits that had reached Pelagonia and the Ohrid region by the 5th millennium BC.

Several chapters present results of investigations in the central Balkans. In chapter 10, Boban Tripković discusses small settlement mounds, specific to the wetland region of Mačva in north-western Serbia, that are attested by a series of surveying campaigns. These sites, known as Obrovac-type sites, appear to be Late Neolithic/Early Eneolithic adaptations to marshlands of the Mačva region. Based on the results of extensive sediment borehole coring on several sites and their surrounding area, field surveys and magnetometer prospection, which show the presence of the

enclosing ditches that are a distinctive feature of these sites, the author examines the origin of the mounds, sedimentation processes and the settlements' function and structure.

New results on the spatial organisation of the settlement of Vinča Belo-brdo, the type site of the Late Neolithic culture of the Central Balkan region, located on the banks of the Danube, which is also a yardstick for the chronology of the Central Balkans, are presented by Kristina Penezić in chapter 11. The author aims to estimate the original size of the site, the total surface area of which has been unknown since its discovery, by calculating the total surface of the still intact part of the settlement and the thickness of *in situ* archaeological remains. A fresh estimation of the settlement size in various phases of the occupation and possible changes in size during the settlement's lifespan is based on new geophysical and archaeological research, performed recently. These new data are expected to provide firmer ground for the estimation of the size of the population that inhabited the Vinča site.

Chapter 12 is also dedicated to the Vinča Belo-brdo settlement. One well-preserved house, dubbed house 01/06, has been utilised to obtain insight into spatial organisation at a household level in the time of the Neolithic/Eneolithic transition. Ksenija Borojević and her colleagues have used a multidisciplinary approach and applied forensic technology, as performed during the 2006 excavations at the site, putting the data together into a narrative account of the last days of house 01/06's history. Based on the contextual analysis of all the finds uncovered from the building, the authors offer a new interpretation of the practices that took place within the structure, implying that some of the buildings at the Vinča-culture sites were used for specific activities, such as daily food preparation and storage, while other buildings must have served for sleeping and other indoor activities. The authors propose that the building may represent one of several buildings in a household compound used by an extended family.

Chapter 13 in this volume focuses on the site of Drenovac in central Serbia, a large and long-lived settlement inhabited in the Early and Late Neolithic periods, with thick cultural deposits and complex stratigraphy. Comparing different lines of evidence obtained through recent systematic excavations, reconnaissance and geophysical surveying, Slaviša Perić and his team have pointed out the complex history of the settlement and its internal dynamics, and have addressed the data on the macro (settlement) and micro (house) scale. The authors discuss the settlement's layout, size and intra-site organisation during different phases of occupation. Based on the abundant evidence from four well-preserved Late Neolithic houses, they suggest that more than one nuclear family may have lived in a single house in a late phase of the settlement's occupation. Although it is architecturally organised in a different way than the example from Vinča Belo-brdo, the data from the late LN houses at Drenovac echo the extended-family form of household suggested by the authors of chapter 12 for the late phase of the Vinča culture.

Single-layered sites, which have often been regarded as short-lived, represent the key feature in the settlement pattern of the Early and Middle Neolithic periods in the Central Balkans, known as the Starčevo culture. Pit-dwellings, a hallmark of these settlements, and their horizontal distribution do not form stratigraphy that would help in the estimation of settlement lifespan. In chapter 14, Sofija Stefanović and her colleagues explore data linked to funerary practices and relevant radiocarbon evidence in the context of the occupation continuity and duration of those sites throughout the region. The results presented imply that Starčevo-culture settlements were used/reused for much longer periods of time than previously assumed, sometimes even centuries, although it is not possible to say at present whether their occupation was intermittent or continuous.

Krum Bacvarov and John Gorczyk offer chapter 15, on the patterns of deposition at the late 6th-millennium BC site of Sarnevo in Upper Thrace in Bulgaria, where numerous pits located at some distance from the settlement have recently been discovered and excavated. Detailed analysis shows that over a relatively short period of time these pits were used by a nearby Neolithic community for ritual purposes. The authors have identified some features of ritual deposition, which they interpret as 'ritual packages', and use this as a starting point for a larger discussion about ritual practices and their role in shaping later Neolithic society. They also note that several other off-settlement pit-fields similar to that at Sarnevo, all dating to the Late Neolithic, have been uncovered in this part of Bulgaria. It appears that such activities were not restricted to this region of the Balkans, as indicated by similar finds showing a variety of ritual activities discovered at Late Neolithic Toumba Kremastis Koiladas in northern Greece, dating to the same period according to the radiocarbon dates (see chapters 5 and 6 in this volume).

The volume closes with two chapters dealing with two important Neolithic settlements from the north and south sides of the Sea of Marmara in north-west Turkey. Recent research on these sites uncovered rich evidence for the organisation and the use of space, which show some common trends in the late phases of the Neolithic in this area. Perhaps most importantly, these two chapters further enrich the striking diversity in the organisation of living space encountered in the geographical area discussed in this book, across which early farmers settled in broadly the same chronological period.

In chapter 16, by Eylem Özdoğan and Heiner Schwarzberg, the houses and the settlement structure of Aşağı Pınar are evaluated and contextualised within a generalised concept of the Neolithic way of life. This important site in Eastern Thrace was established by the end of the 7th millennium BC and was inhabited until the first quarter of the 5th millennium BC. For the purposes of this volume, the authors have contributed an analysis of the main architectural features of the dwellings and of the broader relationships between the houses and both the settlement

layout and the open spaces. One of the remarkable features of the Aşağı Pınar is related to the stratigraphic distribution of burnt habitation horizons, alternating with unburnt layers, which is discussed in the light of the phenomenon of burnt settlements that appears across the Balkans during the Neolithic, especially in the later phases of the period in some regions.

Necmi Karul, in chapter 17, brings forward some thought-provoking features from the tell settlement of Aktopraklık, located in north-west Anatolia and dated to the first half of the 6th millennium BC. The author focuses on the specific habitation phases of the settlement, which have a characteristic settlement plan comprised of an enclosure system, houses and courtyards, which are remarkably well organised. A similar settlement layout is attested at Aşağı Pınar (chapter 16 in this volume), but also at some other settlements in this area, including Ilıpınar and Barcın Höyük, indicating that this characteristic settlement organisation may be a regional trait, in a specific chronological period. Through the analysis of architectural remains and other finds, including burials, the author directs our attention to the pre-planned nature of the settlement, implying the determination and continuity of Aktopraklık's complex social organisation.

This book by no means tackles all issues related to the life of the Neolithic farmers that settled in this geographical area that were woven into their living space. The growing body of data, significantly enlarged by new investigations, would certainly exceed the scope of one volume. We hope, however, that the chapters, considered as a whole, provide a good insight into the rich variety in social organisation of early farmers, as evidenced in diverse forms of intra-site organisation, architecture, settlement distribution and interaction. The authors also hope that the results presented in this volume will pique further interest in this area and encourage even more local researchers to apply to their own excavations the new sets of questions raised here.

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