A SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NEOLITHIC GREECE

The study of households and everyday life is increasingly recognised as fundamental in social archaeological analysis. This volume is the first to address the household as a process and as a conceptual and analytical means through which we can interpret social organisation from the bottom up. In detailed case studies from Neolithic Greece, Stella Souvatzi examines how the household is defined socially, culturally, and historically: household and community, variability, production and reproduction, individual and collective agency, identity, change, complexity, and integration. Her study is enriched by an in-depth discussion of the framework for the household in the social sciences and the synthesis of many anthropological, historical, and sociological examples. It reverses the view of the household as passive, ahistorical, and stable, showing it instead to be active, dynamic, and continually shifting.

Stella G. Souvatzi received her Ph.D. from Cambridge University and teaches in the School of Humanities, Greek Culture Studies, Hellenic Open University. She has conducted archaeological fieldwork on prehistoric sites in Greece and has lectured on archaeological theory and the European Neolithic in Britain and Greece. She has published widely on Greek Neolithic households, architecture, material culture, and social organisation.
A SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NEOLITHIC GREECE

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

STELLA G. SOUVATZI

Hellenic Open University
For my father,

GEORGIOS EMM. SOUVATZIS,

who made the difference
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PREFACE

This book shows how the social context of household, with its wealth of cultural and empirical information, its rich variability, and the multitude of ways in which it interacts with the wider society, can provide a very meaningful framework from which to conduct a social archaeology. The chapters rearticulate the notion of household at and between different scales of space and time and through key issues, such as the definition of household and its relationship with community, autonomy and interdependence, diversity and homogeneity, individual and collective agency, domestic and public ritual, intrasettlement burials, architecture and symbolic representation, and production and consumption, as well as social reproduction, change, complexity, and integration, in order to capture some of the many dimensions of household and to show how many theoretical issues and areas of common interest intersect.

In recent years, the archaeological literature has been undergoing a change and has been obliged to reconsider its traditional epistemological focus on large scales of space and time, towards an inclusion of smaller scales. There are now a growing number of works on individuals, houses, households, communities, and other social categories and the conduct of everyday life. However, this has not resulted in the emergence of a truly alternative and coherent approach to households as dynamic social entities, which have instead continued largely to be viewed as passive responses to wider and longer-term changes and through old, top-down perspectives and traditional assumptions. In addition, the boundaries between theoretical traditions and research agendas (and sometimes between Anglo-American and ‘other’ archaeological-sociological perspectives) result in a compartmentalisation in these studies. At the same time, the interaction between anthropology, history, and sociology has led to a clearer conceptual and analytical framework for household in a variety of past and present social contexts.

This book has grown out of (a) the desire to provide an integrative theoretical and methodological approach to household as a social process and (b) a concern with how archaeology, rather than merely borrowing theories, models, and concepts from other disciplines, can evaluate them against its own concerns, data, and experience and make genuine and influential contributions to wider social research. The origins of the book lie in 1993, when
as a doctoral researcher at the Cambridge Department of Archaeology I first encountered, and decided to face up to, the challenge of the household. It is based on continued research carried out since and presents significant analysis of primary unpublished data and of much new material that has emerged in the last few years, as well as reinterpretations of older material. Although the case studies are from Greece, I have tried to make clear the implications for archaeologists and anthropologists in other areas and periods. Likewise, I have synthesised a rich wealth of often little-known discussion and examples of the idea of household in anthropology and the social sciences.

The present volume is offered as one step in the path towards a more interpretative understanding of household, and, from that, of social organisation, as a dialectical, historical, and dynamic process. As such, I wish to relate it to the recovery of difference and varying social realities underneath the bigger picture, as a critical part of archaeology’s sociological and intellectual practice and of its position and relevance in the contemporary world. In this way I aim to add my voice to those wishing to take a new look at the body of knowledge and the set of theories we have built up concerning social units. The result is, I hope, interesting and challenging to the reader, but, above all, I hope that it will stimulate dialogue and exchange.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume owes much to the support and kindness, of numerous friends, colleagues, and institutions, whom I am pleased to thank here.

I have benefited greatly from the stimulating ideas and intellectual support of many people, most of those who have commented on all or parts of the book at various stages. I am very grateful to Ian Hodder for his unfailing support in reading and for helping me to develop the work that has led to this volume. He has been a constant inspiration, especially during those times when I have found this subject frustratingly difficult and have felt my determination failing. I am indebted to Anthony Snodgrass for his constructive advice on earlier versions, his encouragement with the publication project, and his many kindnesses. Bob Chapman, John Chapman, and Alasdair Whittle have read more or less all of the chapter drafts and the final version faithfully and enthusiastically; I thank them for the many discussions, comments, and suggestions that have helped me to sharpen my approach and opened up new intellectual challenges.

I am grateful to Giorgos Hourmouziadis for granting me permission to study the ceramic material, small find records, daybooks, and all of the archive of his excavation of Dimini and for sharing with me his deep insight into the Neolithic world. Vassiliki Adrymi-Sismani enabled access to all these materials and shared with me valuable information from her participation in that excavation and her continued work in the vicinity. Special thanks to Evangelia Skafida, who variously assisted me with my fieldwork and collection of illustrations, showed me materials from the Volos Museum, discussed figurines, sent publications, and obliged me with her hospitality in Volos.

I am indebted to Maria Theochari for her kindness, for pointing out to me the directions of Dimitris Theocharis’ research and ideas on Sesklo and other sites, and for allowing me to use illustrations from his celebrated volume. I owe a further debt to Kostas Kotsakis for many discussions about the Greek Neolithic and for providing me with his work on the stratigraphy and architecture of Sesklo.

The late Professor Robert Cook, Colin Renfrew, and Judith and Robert Rodden warmly encouraged me to include Nea Nikomedeia as a special section in this book and provided me with the first volume of the final publication while this was still in press, as well as bringing to my attention Gillian Pyke’s
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and Paraskevi Youni’s unpublished dissertations on the site. For this and for our discussions about Nea Nikomedeia in the memorable dinner parties at Professor Cook’s in Cambridge I owe them my sincere thanks. I also thank the British School at Athens for allowing me to use illustrations from the Nea Nikomedeia publications.

I am grateful to a number of friends and colleagues for their hospitality on their excavations, for providing information concerning their research, for allowing me to use illustrations from their work, and for sending references, publications, and photographs. Special mention must be made of Giorgos Toufexis for his warmest welcome to his excavations in Thessaly, for his generosity with his data, papers, and photographs from Palioskala, Mandra, Makrychori 1, and Galene, and for many enthusiastic conversations about the Neolithic and other things; to Katerina Skourtopoulou for introducing me to the excitement of lithic technologies and for many discussions and ideas about Makriyalos and flat sites in general; to Dimitris Grammenos and Stavrros Kotsos for the tour of Stavroupolis and for sending publications and illustrations; to Chaido Koukouli-Chrysanthaki for the many photographs from Dikili Tash and Promachonas-Topolnica; to Vasiliki Adrymi-Sismani for the aerial photographs of Sesklo and Dimini; to Nikos Efstratiou for photographs from Makri; to Kostas Gallis for the photograph of the house model from Platia Magoula Zarkou; to Lia Karimali for her thesis and articles on lithic production and exchange patterns; and to Nina Kyparissi-Apostolika, with thanks for her books on the prehistoric ornaments from Thessaly. Last, but not least, I wish to thank Vania Tloupa for her kind and immediate response to my request for the cover image.

I am also happy to recognise the contribution of a number of university departments and archaeological and anthropological societies that gave me the opportunity to try out several of the ideas and arguments presented in this book through teaching, presentations, conferences, and seminars. These include the universities of Cambridge (which also granted me a visiting scholarship in 2004), Cardiff, Manchester, Oxford, Athens, Thessaloniki, and the Aegean; the National Polytechnic School of Greece; the British School at Athens; the McDonald Institute “Socialising Complexity” conference; the Cardiff “(un)settling the Neolithic” and “Building Communities” conferences, the European Science Foundation conference on “Early Symbolic Systems for Communication” at Karlovo; and the meetings of TAG at Bournemouth, SOMA at Edinburgh, and EAA at Thessaloniki and at Zadar. In all these I have enjoyed discussions with Radian Andreescu, Douglas Bailey, Bob Chapman, John Chapman, Pavlos Chrysostomou, Carole Crumley, Ian Hodder, the late John G. Evans (who also sent me his stimulating book on environmental archaeology), Bernard Knapp, Jonathan Last, Magda and Ghitca Lazarovici, Dan Monah, Vassil Nikolov, Lolita Nikolova, Colin Renfrew, Colin Richards,
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Catherine Perlès, Mirel Popovici (with thanks for posting me the volumes on the Cucuteni and Parta settlements), Christian Schuster (who also presented me with his book on the archaeology of fire), Katherine Spielmann (with thanks for the many references on the prehispanic North America), Ruth Tringham, and Alasdair Whittle. I also thank James Whitley and Christina Hatzimichael-Whittle for their hospitality in Cardiff and for our cooperation in the Praisos project in Crete.

Funding for this and related research was obtained from several agencies. These include the A. G. Leventis Foundation, the Hellenic State Scholarship Foundation, Clare Hall (Bursary), the Department of Archaeology at Cambridge (Garrod Fund Award), and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (New Research Grant).

I am happy to thank Cambridge University Press, and especially Simon Whitmore (Cambridge) and Beatrice Rehl (New York), for placing their faith in my book in the way they did and for their understanding through difficult stages. Thanks as well to Peter Katsirubas, of Aptara, Inc., for managing the production and for our many discussions during this process.

The contribution of my long-term friends in Britain and Greece has been multifaceted and invaluable. My deepest links are with Maxine Clarke, David Clifford, and Stamatia Marketou, who have dispensed much valuable advice and never failed to give me unconditional support. I also thank Doreen Thompson for her generous hospitality in Milton. To the anthropologist Sotiris Dimitriou I owe my original acquaintance with anthropology, philosophy, and methodology many years ago. For this, but particularly for his invaluable friendship, I owe him my deepest thanks. My warmest note of appreciation is offered to Makis Plageras for being incredibly patient and for never allowing me to lose perspective. I also thank him, as well as my brother Manolis Souvatzi, for their help and suggestions concerning the appearance of the book’s illustrations and for bringing order to a wide variety of originals.

None of this research or writing would have been realised without the unconditional love and unflawed support of my family, foremost of my parents Georgios and Anastasia, who have been the driving force behind every productive stage of my life. My last word is for my father, who was suddenly and violently taken from us before this book was completed. Nothing is the same without him, but his open mind, kindness, and exemplary life attitude were the guiding light for the book’s completion, and more.