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978-0-521-83689-0 - A Social Archaeology of Households in Neolithic Greece: An Anthropological Approach

Stella G. Souvatzi

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## 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.

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APPROACH

STELLA G. SOUVATZI

Hellenic Open University



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*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

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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.

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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.

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